# Goddesses and Whores:

# The Relationship Between Prostitution and Religion in the Roman World

Fig. 1. (Erotic fresco. House of Centenary. IX. 8. 3. Pompeii, first century CE).


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***To my partner, for his unwavering support and love throughout the past few years. Sincerely, thank you.***

# Contents

1. Introduction 4-8

2. Chapter One: Eastern Reflections **8-35**

2.1. Capturing the Goddess of Love 8-12

2.2. The Origins of Civilisation: Introducing Inanna 12-16

2.3. Ishtar, The Harlot Queen of Heaven 16-20

2.4 Aphrodite 20-26

2.5 Venus, Mother of the Eternal City 26-33

2.6 The Holy Christian Mother 33-35

3. Chapter Two: Prostitution in the Roman World **35-70**

3.1 The Good Women of Rome 37-39

3.2 The Importance of Clothing 39-41

3.3 Marriage and Pregnancy: Wives and Husbands of the Upper Classes 41-43

3.4 Contraceptives 43-45

3.5 Protecting Virtue and Chastity 45-47

3.6 The Condemnation of Elite Women 47-54

3.7 Prostitution in the Roman World 54-56

3.8 The Prostitute Herself 56-61

3.9 Sympathy for the Prostitute 61-63

3.10 The Corruption of Sacred Spaces 63-64

3.11 The 'Good' Whore 64-68

4. Chapter Three: Prostitution and Religion **70-94**

4.1 Introducing Roman Religion and Women 70-72

4.2 The Vestal Virgins 72-75

4.3 The Vestal and the Prostitute 75-78

4.4 Origin Stories of Civilisations and their Whores 78-82

4.5 Seneca's Prostitute Priestess 82-86

4.6 Religious Revelry, Wild Women 86-94

5. Conclusion **94-97**

6. Bibliography **97-104**

6.1 Primary Sources 97-100

6.2 Secondary Sources 100-103

6.3 List of Illustrations 103-104

6.4 Online Resources 104

# 1. Introduction

‘Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity [...] Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem – those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply – you are yourselves the problem (Freud 1965: 112).

Often termed the world’s oldest profession prostitution has existed both within and beyond the law, holding little regard for hierarchy or societal boundaries. The status of the ancient prostitutes employed, or largely sold into, sex work hardly ever exceeded that of their clients. In Rome, prostitution was legal and indeed taxable. Levin-Richardson even identifies the occupation as an ‘essential function’ in retaining the honour of freeborn women and men, particularly as it prevented Roman men from imparting their sexual energy on ‘good’ Roman women and other men's wives (Levin-Richardson 2019: 2). Instead, it was those lowest in society, whose honour and image did not need preserving, that were objectified without objection.

Scholarship around women’s place in history has seen a steady increase in popularity over recent decades. In fact, the general omission, or rather conscious neglect, of the role of women in the history of humankind has been unapologetically challenged in academia. Bahrani notes in her work *Women of Babylon* that ‘the view that women are simply a minor element in what is in effect conceived of as “the real history of mankind” is by now more or less defunct in the academy’ (Bahrani 2001: 10). She also stresses the necessity to analyse each context subjectively, in order to find what *woman* means in each historical record. To correlate this manner of thinking to the topic at hand, the image of the prostitute in differing cultures will change and adapt accordingly; although the general job description remains the same, there are certain elements that do not. This is why, despite the title of this work grounding us firmly in the Roman world, comparisons with other cultures will be drawn in an attempt to deepen the exploration and understanding of prostitutes, prostitution and theology in the ancient Mediterranean and beyond.

Much of the study around women and objects of womanly association are neatly explained away with certain markers: ‘fertility’, ‘sex’, ‘childbirth’, ‘mother’. A prime example of this are the Venus statues of the Upper Palaeolithic period found throughout Europe. Since their discovery in 1880, they have been summarised as an ambiguous fertility tool, seemingly ending any necessity for further analysis. Some opposition has attempted to challenge this rhetoric, however the immediate assumption that they were somehow associated with fertility or sexuality and consequently the goddess Venus limits our scope and our potential to fully flesh out the lives of women living in these communities.

Ultimately, the core inspiration for this work is the fictional series written by British journalist, Elodie Harper, titled *The Wolf Den* trilogy. The story focuses on a young Greek woman sold into slavery, who, at the beginning of the series, becomes a prostitute in first century AD Pompeii. Throughout Harper's work, the protagonist is able to utilise the Roman world's accessible social mobility to her advantage and remove herself from the *lupanar*, ascending to heights level with the imperial class in Rome, enabling readers to ascertain a vast understanding of the lives of people living during the time of the Roman Empire. During interviews and public events, Harper has stated that people will go to the *lupanar* in Pompeii and laugh, and that she felt compelled to write a story where the women laugh back. Such a striking observation does ring true, as some visitors to Pompeii do indeed laugh and leer at the women depicted in the explicit frescos displayed above the cold rooms of the ancient brothel. Following Harper's train of thought, the intention of this thesis is to look deeper into the lives of prostitutes in the ancient world and observe whether any freedoms were granted to them, religious or not.

Thus, this thesis will be structured by first looking into the goddesses of love, sex and desire in Chapter One; from the first female divinities emerging from modern day Iraq to their journey West into Greece, and then finally arriving in Italy to discuss Venus and their later influence on the Christian Virgin Mary. In initially focusing on the goddesses who were allowed – indeed, *expected* to – be sexual, this will provide the groundwork for Chapter Two, which explores mortal women and their relationship to sexuality. Both prostitutes and women outside of the profession will feature, as the status of one will ultimately be the antithesis of the other, thus illuminating how sex work could affect women in antiquity. Following the structure of the first chapter, elements from the East and the West will be drawn from, however the primary interest will remain Rome. It is in Chapter Three that the prior chapters will be united to explore the relationship between prostitution and religion. Did religious practise afford common women and whores some form of freedom? Was Venus connected to the sex worker? Were there festivals that centred the prostitute? If so, was her status periodically elevated? Such questions will be explored in order to define how the sacred and the sexual could interact in antiquity.

Before delving any further, it would be pertinent to define certain terminology used in this thesis. Firstly, the words prostitute and prostitution refer to the profession of a person selling their body and affections for a sum of money or other goods, such as food or lodging. Someone entering prostitution may be there voluntarily due to the monetary gain, or involuntarily as a result of slavery or abduction into the trade. Therefore, some sensitivity of

the topic is required. The very nature of prostitution does not require one to have a high level of education, and so people of all academic background were present. Indeed, prostitutes in the Roman Empire comprised of men, women and children. The latter were either raised by mothers who were prostitutes themselves, or babies who were opportunistically extracted from rubbish heaps (the intent being exposure due to parents' desire to be rid of them for various reasons).

Although women were not the only demographic to make up the prostitute population of the Roman Empire, they will be the focus of this work, as it is the female sex workers and their connection to Venus which is of highest interest here. There were several kinds of prostitutes in Rome, from the high-end courtesans to those of most ill-repute: streetwalkers. It is the latter that shall be the focus of this thesis. Although covering the full spectrum of sex work and those employed into it would certainly capture the full landscape of prostitution in ancient Rome, it is those lowest in society that is of keen interest, as their access to opportunities and liberation would have been hindered the most. Thus, their relationship with religion would have been starkly different to more independent prostitutes. It is the dichotomy between lower class sex workers and the goddesses that will prove most effective in attempting to uncover whether worship provided them with a fleeting liberation from their circumstances.

Secondly, the terms religion and cult will be used, both referring to the socio-cultural worship of ancient deities in either a public or private expression of faith. In Rome, festivals featured abundantly in the Republican and Julian calendars; these events had a dual function in that they acknowledged the gods while simultaneously uniting the mortal populace. Some festivals were more so tailored to specific demographics, such as the Bona Dea, which was established for the *univera*, or women who had only been married to one man. On the other end of the social spectrum, the prostitute would not have experienced much liberty or privilege, and yet when participating in certain religious acts her status could be seemingly momentarily elevated.

Women's place in history has only recently become a topic of feverish interest, and the current wave of feminist retellings of mythological stories from female characters' perspectives is certainly representative of this. This work intends to contribute to this growing academic and leisurely fascination. It is imperative history and archaeology highlight women's contributions of the past, as without them there would have been no future. In our modern world, women's rights and freedom continue to be threatened, and so it is essential we do not forget the discrimination ancient women faced, particularly as such antiquated prejudices unfortunately remain present to this day. Therefore, 'Goddesses and Whores: The Relationship Between

Prostitution and Religion in the Roman World' serves as a reminder, as well as an exploration, of those who survived through objectionable circumstances in the hopes of a better life.

# 2. Chapter One: Eastern Reflections

## 2.1 Capturing the Goddess of Love

'She spoke, and as she turned, her neck shone with roselight. An immortal fragrance from her ambrosial locks perfumed the air, her robes flowed down to cover her feet, and every step revealed her divinity […] And then she was gone, aloft to Paphos, happy to see her temple again, where Arabian incense curls up from one hundred altars and fresh wreaths of flowers sweeten the air' (Virgil, *The Aeneid.* I. 494-514).

Venus-Aphrodite, the goddess of love, sexuality and feminine beauty surpasses all other deities as muse in the visual arts world. In fact, since 435 BCE her image has circulated,

presented in all manner of nudity or dress, ensuring no other Greco-Roman divinity is as easily recognisable as her. Upon entering the British Museum's Mediterranean collection, the Antonine sculpture of the Lely Venus, regarded as 'the finest statue of all' in seventeenth century England, crouches in the act of covering herself (Marcovich 1996: 44). As Marcovich notes, one of Venus's attributes is a certain shyness, thus lending her the name *Venus pudica*, or the bashful, shamefaced Aphrodite. The Lely Venus was not the first of its kind, however; the Colonna Venus, a replica of the famous Greek sculptor Praxiteles's lost Aphrodite of Cnidus (364-361 BCE), also indicates a slight hesitancy at her nudity being observed, which is rather at odds with what one might expect of the goddess of love and sexual desire (Ibid).

Certainly, Venuses that depict slightly more coquettish behaviour were portrayed and celebrated in antiquity. Indeed, so renowned for her physical beauty she was at times referred to as *callipygos*, or the one 'with a beautiful derrière', that subsequently lent its name to the *Venus callipyge* type (Ibid). One such example is currently housed in the Museo Archaeologico Nazionale di Napoli, a Roman imitation of a lost Greek original, sculpted between the first and second century BCE. This Venus truly emphasises her proclivity for beauty and desire, as she gazes behind and down, towards her own buttocks, a smile upturning her lips; certainly, the viewer is invited to join in and observe her body. Although, when first found in Rome, this statue was without a head, thus the expression and turning of the head was a creative interpretation that has ultimately become ubiquitous in the iconography of the goddess.

Fig. 2. (The Ludovisi Throne, Locri. 480 BCE. Museo Nazionale Romano).

Located tentatively in Locri, southern Italy, the Ludovisi Throne is a beautiful rendition of the moment Aphrodite emerges from the Aegean Sea following her birth. The intimate

moment between the goddess and the Horae both exposes this new deity in her feminine beauty while simultaneously obscuring much of her body. Although there is some debate whether the figure depicted on the throne is indeed Aphrodite – some scholars suggest Persephone or Hera Parthenos – the representation of a beautiful, curvaceous woman joining civilisation certainly aligns with the goddess of love. What is striking about this sculpture is its strong iconographical prescence of women; the two side panels of the sculpture depict a young woman, lounging whilst playing the *aulos*, and on the other a veiled, older woman burning incense. The reliefs all include intimate representations of women and goddesses interacting with each other or their own environments. As stated, the provenance of this artifact has been identified as Locri, thus situating it in Magna Grecia. Evidently, it stands to reason that, with the waves of the Greek populace that settled in the area from the eighth century BCE onwards, the goddess migrated alongside her worshippers. Thus, if we are to conclude that the woman on the central panel is indeed Aphrodite, it seems she was of particular importance to the women – both young and old – of Magna Grecia.

The intimate inclining of Venus's head is a visual motif that has appeared in more modern works, one such example being *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli (1480). The painting captures the moment of Venus's arrival on the island of Cyprus, her homeland, after having materialised, as Hesiod informs us, out of the sea foam produced by the sky god, Ouranos's, severed genitals. Her golden hair loosens from its ties in the breeze produced by Zephyr, and despite covering her nudity, she gazes shamelessly out at the viewer. A nymph rushes to cover her, perhaps a visual marker of indoctrinating her into moral society, highlighting how external forces may take issue with her immodesty, yet, unlike *Venus pudica*, this Venus remains relatively unconcerned with being caught unclothed.

Thus far, the goddess has been discussed via the various forms in which she has been artistically interpreted in antiquity and modernity. Evidently, it is difficult – or more accurately *impossible* – to define a one, true Venus-Aphrodite. The reasoning for her adaptable nature is the fact that, ultimately, she is an immigrant goddess who travelled West from the Near East and has therefore consistently experienced modifications to adapt to each new environment and culture. Her Eastern counterparts to feature in this discussion are the Mesopotamian Inanna and Ishtar, however they are not the sole deities of love and desire to hail from the East and inspire the Greeks and the Romans. Indeed, the Levantine Astarte is likely the goddess that inspired the Cypriot devotion to the goddess of love around 1200 BCE (Marcovich 1996: 46). The decision to focus on Ishtar specifically is born from her association with the great city of Babylon, as well as her renown for being a harlot goddess, which in turn likely granted Babylon

the Biblical reputation as 'the Great, the mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth... What city is like unto this great city!' (*The Holy Bible.* 'Book of Revelation'. 17:5; 18:18). We must acknowledge here, however, that this reference, although attributed to Babylon in name, actually alludes to Rome (Oates 2014: 32).

As stated, Venus-Aphrodite was imported from abroad. The likeness to the Eastern goddesses is well attested, and worship for the variously named divinities of love (Inanna, Ishtar, Astarte) spread during the second millennium BCE 'rapidly throughout the Middle East – from Mesopotamia to Canaan, Syria, Palestine, Phoenicia, and Arabia' (Marcovich 1996: 45). Following her introduction to Cyprus, this enigmatic goddess quickly gained popularity in the eastern Greek cities, continental Greece, the Cyclades and Magna Grecia in Southern Italy; her arrival in Rome, according to Marcovich, came north from Eryx, Sicily (Marcovich 1996: 46), which is a notion that this author agrees with. The goddess was often associated with water; her journey from Southern Iraq to the Mediterranean one example of this; another from her inception. Indeed, in his *Descriptions of Greece*, Pausanias addresses the goddess as such: 'Aphrodite Pontia, Aphrodite of the Deep Sea, / Aphrodite Limenia, Aphrodite of the Harbour' (2. 34. 11). From the time of the great Greek geographer, in the second century AD, Venus-Aphrodite was firmly connected to the sea. Many of the towns and cities bearing an association with the divine figure were indeed along the coast, port cities, such as Pompeii in Italy, Corinth in mainland Greece and Paphos on Cyprus. Indeed, so convincing was her birth at sea, her very name is explained, albeit to much contestation, as a Greek compound meaning 'the one walking on the sea foam' (from *aphros:* foam) (Marcovich 1996: 44).

Ancient sources inform us of Venus-Aphrodite's birth at sea, her conception the result of a violent act of son against father. According to Hesiod, Aphrodite was the product of Sky, Ouranos's, genitals being severed by his titan son Kronos at the behest of his mother, Earth or Gaia, in order to prevent her suffering and persistent state of pregnancy.

> 'And so soon as he had cut off the members with flint and cast them from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time: and a white foam spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden. First, she drew near holy Cythera, and from there, afterwards, she came to sea-girt Cyprus, and came forth an awful and lovely goddess, and grass grew up about her beneath her shapely feet. Her gods and men call Aphrodite' (Hesiod, *The Theogony.* 189-196).

Accompanying her emergence onto land was her son Eros and the Horae, goddesses who represented the seasons. The inclusion of Eros, and the description of vegetation flourishing at her touch illuminates her role as a mother and emphasises her fertility. Indeed, Hughes highlights how she is presented 'not just as the goddess of mortal love, but as the deity

of both the cycle of life and life itself' (Hughes 2019: 6), an impressive feat for one born out of the desperate desire to prevent further life from being conceived and subsequently abused.

Interestingly, despite her femininity and womanly ways, Venus-Aphrodite is not always described as having a mother. Certainly, some sources claim her as the child of Zeus and the sea nymph Dione, however this version of mythology will be acknowledged here but ultimately disregarded in this work. Despite this unusual conception, the goddess is often conflated with motherhood, her son Eros a frequent figure in mythological works as well as later artistic interpretations. Another prominent child is the Trojan Aeneas who fought against the Greeks, ultimately fleeing upon the fall of Troy, and endeavouring to fulfil the prophecy of his legendary founding of what was to become the eternal city: Rome. This notion of a female figure, one heavily associated with sexuality, acting as a bridge between man and civilisation is a theme that will be explored in Chapter Three.

Now that Venus-Aphrodite has received a proper introduction, it is imperative we look further East, to the equivalent goddesses of sexuality, love and fertility who predate the Mediterranean deity as she is known. In doing so, we shall observe how civilisation has consistently favoured and revered female divinities of more carnal pleasures, from the very first city in southern Mesopotamia, Uruk, through to bustling Greek and Roman port cities, Corinth and Pompeii, where the goddesses were able to reach both locals and non-residents alike.

### 2.2 The Origins of Civilisation: Introducing Inanna

If we are to consider it fact that Venus-Aphrodite was indeed an immigrant goddess, then was she truly born in the Aegean Sea, or did she instead travel by shell, or ram, from the shores of Phoenicia? (Marcovich 1996: 45). Certainly, if civilisation originated in southern Mesopotamia, then the Levantine Astarte cannot be the first goddess of love in an urban community? To the latter question, no, it can be stated with some certainty that Astarte functioned as a bridge between the Eastern and Western worlds; her influence having inspired the Greek Aphrodite on the island of Cyprus. Since man developed complex thought, it seems the sky has provided answers; the sky, of course, coincidentally providing part of the genetic make-up that created the titular goddess, according to Greek theology. Thus, coinciding with the first city, Uruk, established in fourth millennium BCE, a female divinity of love, war and

fertility acted as patron deity of this new, unified civilisation: Inanna. We simply cannot discuss the alternative goddesses of love without first acknowledging this figure who, ultimately, formed the groundwork with which they would all flourish.

For some feminist scholars, the worship of the goddess Inanna in Sumerian culture harks back to a time ‘when power was female and communal, when the processes of life, fertility and death were respected, when the fruitful integration of the powers of heaven and earth was celebrated’ (Wakeman 1985: 8). Early ancient Sumer, according to Wakeman, may have been an example of a society that promoted equality among the sexes, and afforded women power in politics, economics, and militaristic endeavours, significantly marking it as pre-patriarchal (Ibid). This vision of a strict autonomy at the hands of a matriarchal, feminine society presided over by a goddess is arguably an idealistic exaggeration, particularly when one considers the imbalance in the Sumerian pantheon; the ratio of female deities to male is, ultimately, rather stark. Time was not entirely kind to women, and whatever autonomy they initially held was eventually subverted in favour of a male-lead society.

Nevertheless, scholars have illuminated a connection between the worship of a female divinity, and the economic and political power of women in ancient Sumer. Evidence of early societies establishing some value – whether this be spiritual or no – to the female form is not limited to Mesopotamia, as small statuettes, the Venus figurines, have been found throughout Europe dating back to as far as 35-40,000 years ago. Their function or purpose has not yet been discovered, and perhaps never will be, but their presence indicates that women were regarded highly enough to necessitate the figurines’ transportation while early humans migrated across unforgiving terrain. Whether they represented a form of protection or a mysterious mother goddess they were significant to those that crafted and carried them.

A descendant of both Sky and Earth, the gods An and Ki respectively, Inanna was integral to the establishment of the Sumerian pantheon, grounding her firmly in the centre of every cultural development that succeeded the city of Uruk’s initial inception and the wider developing Sumerian culture. The religious doctrine that simultaneously constituted the community’s ability to provide for itself, the sacred marriage between the male ruler and the goddess, is evidenced as early as Uruk itself was formed (Ibid. 12). This tradition stems from a harvest celebration that represented the union between Inanna and her lover, the god Dumuzi, (or the literal manifestation of the power inherent in seasonal foods, such as grain, milk and dates); these items were then stored within the goddess's temple, perhaps an attempt to emulate a sexual act prior to any performance of physical actions in the name of the sacred marriage (Ibid). Inspired by mythology, it became tradition for Inanna and the ruler of Uruk to reside in

a quarter of her temple, the *gipar*, following the sacred marriage. Consequently, this allowed the ruler (or *en*) authority in the temple community, which was sanctioned by the goddess; thus, he would act as either her husband or servant, responsible for the managing of her estate: her temple. Evidently, the conflation of religion and power began very early on in developed communities.

Indeed, Sumerian marriage customs followed a rather straightforward formula: the groom was to bring gifts of food to the bride's home. If the family accepted him, and the bride was to open the door, then the marriage was valid and the following day, once the couple had copulated, a large feast would take place (Ibid). Certainly, elements of this union echo the sacred marriage, however in the case of the latter, it is evident that the roles are reversed, with the power remaining firmly with the female divinity.

However, by the end of Sumerian culture, around 2000 BCE, a shift had occurred in the practise of sacred marriage causing the authority in the relationship to change ownership. The status of the king had become so elevated he was in essence a god, and Inanna was now expected to serve him. Ultimately, this reorganisation of social stratification *had* to occur. As civilisation became more patriarchal, and thus female divinities had their status lowered, aligning with the values specifically of the Ur III period, which was distinctly chauvinist in nature, and so this new form of sacred marriage supported the roles men and women performed in this later period of Sumerian history (Ibid. 17). As Wakeman succinctly concludes, there had been a shift three ways: 'the centre of power in the community was the palace rather than the temple, a human being rather than a god, male rather than female' (Ibid. 7).

The moulding of the goddess to align with certain political or militaristic ideologies was certainly utilised to aid man's campaigns for power. Indeed, with urban revolution and social stratification came a disparity in wealth and access to necessities, leading to a rise in conflict with communities outside of walled, defended settlements. Evidence of this can be seen from the Early Dynastic Period (2900-2350 BCE) onwards with the appearance of city walls implying there was a need for protection from outside forces. The disparity between men and women was influenced by the increase in conflict from unsettled communities; men were centred in the discussion of defence, resulting in rising pressure for a male leader to assume control and establish order. During this period, and following the expansion of the nation of Sumer, differences between northern and southern Sumer became more apparent, particularly as the god Enlil held a prevalent role in political and religious life due to the increase in military activity, consequently leading to the simultaneous withdrawal of power from women (Wakeman 1985: 15). One such instance occurred in Lagash during the reign of the divinely

appointed Uru-inim-gina, who imposed monogamy on women, thus enforcing a patrilineal inheritance upon society; in addition, he reduced the control of his wife, Shashag, confiscating her property and reducing her status to that of consort (Ibid. 10). The curtailing of women's sexual freedom was evidently a concern for patriarchal societies, even in humanity's early development.

Regardless, the goddess Inanna was so synonymous with Sumerian society, male rulers and divinities alike could not entirely remove her from swaying socio-political life, despite her active role being lessened. Likely, her fixed position stems from what Jacobsen identifies as Inanna's adaptability, titling her the goddess of 'infinite variety' (Jacobsen 1978: 135). With the rise of the Akkadian Empire (2300-2150 BCE), Inanna was merged with the Semitic goddess Ishtar and presented as the female counterpart to the god An, which aided in furthering Sargon of Akkad's militaristic campaign as it applied a religious justification that aligned with the northern, agricultural workers who still associated her with fertility and its inherent power over land and the femaleness that is irremovable from it; indeed with Inanna's aid, Sargon successfully unified the Sumerian cities of Uruk and Ur, an improbable feat when considering the two cities' long history of competitive conflict (Ibid: 12). So significant was she, that upon her entering the Underworld, either by death or in pursuit of her lover Dumuzi, the Akkadian myth claims all sexual activity stopped. This infers, then, that for months no new life was created; certainly, as the goddess of love *and* war it stands to reason that perhaps life was taken during this period of absence. Inanna's importance evidently cannot be understated, as she holds authority over the boundaries of life and death.

With the rise of Akkadian power, Inanna's reach extended throughout Sumer and Akkad, with Sargon himself acting as her *en*. In *The Exaltation of Inanna*, credited to Sargon's daughter, the priestess Enheduanna, the goddess is presented as militaristic and dominant: 'Oh my lady, at the sound of you the lands bow down. When mankind comes before you in fear and trembling at your tempestuous radiance they receive from you their just desserts' (*The Exaltation of Inanna.* 20-23. 17). This was a deity fully aligned with the expansionist ideology of the first world empire, one who was sexually available and yet seperated from the hinderance of motherhood, which would only prevent her from sating her bloodlust. Interestingly, complete power of a male Sumerian ruler was consolidated by two female figures: Inanna of Uruk and the priestess of Nanna in Ur (Wakeman 1985: 17). Evidently, power was firmly in the hands of male rulers, however once more the importance of goddesses and priestesses is integral to the validation of this power.

Inanna, associated with life and death, may also be identified with the development of human civilisation – not only is she the deity selected as the divine representation of the first urban settlement, but she is also aligned with agriculture and herding communities (Wakeman 1985. 19). This dependence on the divine, however, seems to recede over time, and the king becomes a god among humanity. The evolution of this process occurred following the development of mortal-immortal relations: as the goddess has personally chosen the selected ruler, his reign is unquestionable. The depiction of Inanna in *The Herder Wedding* text, in which she questions 'my parts [...] who will be their ploughman?' removes her war-like qualities in favour of a deity dependent on a man to satisfy her urges (Jacobsen 1978: 46). On the other hand, Wakeman suggesting that Inanna's desire for sexual union is a reflection of society and the need for production, and consequent to this, hierarchy: 'so the tax collector periodically comes to strip them [the citizens] of their surplus!' (Wakeman 1985: 22).

The goddess of an Empire – the world's first – and the queen of Heaven, Inanna is a formidable figure, one adaptable enough to mould to varying ideologies. Nevertheless, by the Ur III period, she was reduced to the role of consort of Dumuzi, or rather the human king assuming his identity, and thus her demotion was fully realised (Ibid: 23). During Sargon's reign, he united the Semitic goddess Inanna with the Akkadian Ishtar, enabling him to symbolically forge a union between the Sumerian-Akkadian states via a theological justification. Simultaneously, this provided weight to Sargon's growing imperial power (Ibid: 24). Here, the vital connection drawn between religion and power is clearly visible; although that power was male rather than female, goddesses were necessary to legitimise a ruler's right to political potency. Although Inanna is stripped of any motherly attributes, 'the lady [...] is anything but a mother' (Jacobsen 1978: 141), she helps to fertilise the ruler's sovereignty, ensuring the outcome of their union is fruitful. It seems she is granted sexual freedom – this ultimately later develops into a reshaping of her image into that of a harlot – akin to that of a king, a man. Nevertheless, her status is reduced and by the latter half of the second millennium she is firmly characterised as the petulant daughter in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* who throws tantrums in order to get what she wants from her father, the sky god An (Wakeman 1985: 24).

### 2.3 Ishtar, The Harlot Queen of Heaven

'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk' (*The Holy Bible*, 'Book of Revelation'. 17:1-18).

The legacy of Ishtar extends throughout the history of the Near East, her occupation as primary deity was respected by the rulers of Akkad, Babylon, the Hurrians and the Hittites. Under the Assyrians, she underwent a further metamorphosis and shifted from a motherly figure of fertility to one more aligned with such a militaristic culture. Indeed, from circa 2400 BCE she shed her association with the earlier Sumerian goddess Inanna (often the two are simply referred to as Inanna-Ishtar), and she assumed sole title of goddess of love in the Assyrian pantheon. The name used to identify her underwent reformation, eventually becoming Esh-tar in Akkadian and Ishtar in Old Babylonian (Marcovich 1985: 45). Throughout the Near East, several variations of this name exist, illuminating the affinity and attraction local communities had towards this particular deity of love, sex, war and fertility. So important was she, even her lover experienced similar treatment, becoming Tammuz, Atunis and the rather well-known Adonis (Ibid).

Just as Inanna before her, Ishtar was the goddess of Heaven and of the astral planet Venus. Iconography highlights this connection, as she is often depicted with a star, the *nimbus* (or halo) and the heavenly crown, the *polos* (Ibid. 46). According to Herodotus, Ishtar was also referred to as Urania (heaven), like the later Greek Aphrodite. Indeed, the Greek poet informs us that the oldest temple to the goddess of love was located in Ashqelon (Ascalon); her journey further West is visible in the presence of a similar temple of Aphrodite Urania in Cyprus, which was supposedly influenced by the one in modern day Israel. The notion of different iterations of the same deity – Aphrodite Urania, Aphrodite Pandemos, Aphrodite Areia – within the same culture, is something that will be discussed later in this chapter under the Aphrodite subsection.

Stemming from a culture that prided itself on militaristic prowess, Ishtar was heavily associated with war; as the wife of the king, she evidently lent her divine support for political, expansionist campaigns. A broken glazed nineth century tile from the temple of Ishtar at Nineveh shows an armed female figure; although she is not explicitly named as the goddess, iconography often depicts her as primed for battle, and so one can safely assume this figure is Ishtar (Reade 2005: 351). Indeed, a poker-spear or spear-butt was located within the grounds of a temple to the goddess at Assur, alongside a sculpted head of a male in a state of disrepair. The identity of the head has yet to yield a conclusive answer – some have suggested Sargon of Akkad, Naram-Sin and Manishtushu; all are sound candidates – however, both artefacts were found in proximity and in the same stratigraphic layer. Therefore, one can infer that there is a connection between the two objects and the temple of Ishtar. The presence of (what is rather safely assumed to be) a ruler, a weapon and a goddess certainly corroborates Ishtar's identity

as a deity of war and the necessity of her role in legitimising military expansion of states. The temple at Nineveh was also subject to several phases of destruction such as the particularly brutal earthquake that occurred during the reign of Shalmaneser I (1263-1234 BCE), which he proudly claimed to have repaired from 'top to bottom' in an inscription on a wall-peg (Ibid. 371). In his rebuilding of the temple, Shalmaneser I had dedications to the goddess etched into the bricks, evidently ensuring appraisal and worship of her was engraved into the very structure of the building. Indeed, following the death of Shamshi-Adad, wars erupted in the area, providing ample excuse to ruin the temple (Ibid. 368).

Nevertheless, it persevered despite various types of destruction and restoration, remaining occupied until the Destruction of 612 BCE, truly showing how vital the goddess Ishtar had become to the people and places in Mesopotamia. Although there is no evidence the temple continued to be used following the catastrophic destruction in 612 BCE, evidence from the surrounding precinct suggests its sanctity survived the fire (Ibid. 386). To the south of the temple, a major shrine was operational post-destruction, although it was concluded that this was not Assyrian; erotic terracotta scenes and small statues that had a likeness to the goddess Ishtar were also located in surrounding area of the temple. These items have been contextualised as Greco-Parthian and as a shrine to Mullissu or Aphrodite, yet unlocated, existed in the area it seems the worship of Ishtar did not continue, even if the erotic nature of these terracotta share her likeness (Ibid).

Fig. 3. (Clay tablet, Library of Ashurbanipal. Seventh century BCE. The British Museum).

Indeed, just as her predecessor Inanna, Ishtar descends into the Underworld. Consequent to this the equilibrium of the mortal world is thrown out of balance, as no new life is created in her absence. Evidently, her importance in the Sumerian-Assyrian pantheon cannot be understated, as she had control over both life and death. The above clay tablet tells of her journey to the Underworld; according to mythology, she is denied entry as the gates do not open for her, and so she threatens to gain access by force. If this were to occur, then the dead would be unleashed and devour the living; it is this knowledge that ultimately persuades the Queen of the Underworld, Allatu, to permit her access. However, she is stripped and then tormented by the plague demon, while man and nature are forced to suffer in her absence. The myth concludes with the release of Ishtar, the return of her clothing and her subsequent return to the world of the living.

Although in this Neo-Assyrian myth Ishtar is portrayed as a figure of both nature and chaos, both humble (or rather *humbled*) and proud, her divine status does not seem to hold much weight with her fellow deities and other daemon – Allatu and the plague demon respectively. Indeed, her clothing is removed from her in stages the further she descends into the Underworld. Once her suffering has been deemed sufficient, she is re-clothed and granted her freedom. It seems that this myth is rather telling on the status of women in antiquity, and although Ishtar's humiliation and punishment is at the hands of another goddess, the message is transparent: should a female figure not align with societal expectations, then a consequence must be divvied out to her. Certainly, women living under the Assyrian Empire were subject to strict legislation that enforced how they presented themselves publicly.

The sexual regulation of women in antiquity was, often, quite restrictive. One profession, which has been widely debated as having been anything from salacious gossip to a very real occupation, was temple prostitution. During the Old Babylonian period, the belief that the gods resided in temples was widely held, and the various ranks of priests and priestesses attended to them as such; they cared for and fed the gods, entertained them with music, and provided every comfort (Lerner 1986: 238). Indeed, 'for those who considered fertility as sacred and essential to their own survival, the caring for the gods included, in some cases, offering them sexual services' (Ibid. 239). One Akkadian word used for this profession is *ishtaritum*, or 'the women of Ishtar', intrinsically correlating the sexual worship of female servants to the goddess. In a sense, the *ishtaritum* belonged to Ishtar, living in the temple that acted as her physical home. Similarly salacious, Ishtar refers to herself as a *harimtu*, a prostitute, on a clay tablet: 'When I sit in the entrance of the tavern, I, Ishtar, am a loving *harimtu*' (Ibid. 245). The significance of this cannot be overstated, as this is an instance in

which the goddess vocally aligns herself with the common sex worker; the association of Ishtar and taverns perhaps stems from writings such as this, further bringing the divine figure to the common folk.

As Ishtar was a goddess of love, sexuality certainly came under her domain. *The Holy Bible* provides a scathing criticism of her character, labelling her a goddess prostitute. As mentioned above, this notion of her as a harlot was not restricted to Christian sentiments, however the negative connotation does not seem as apparent, despite an Old Babylonian hymn describing how one hundred and twenty men could not satisfy her. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Ishtar propositions the hero, Gilgamesh, offering him a role at her side as her husband. Contrary to her expectations, he declines and is scathing in his rebuff; he lists her previous loves:

> 'Which of your lovers did you ever love forever? What shepherd of yours has pleased you for all time? [...] There was Tammuz, the lover of your youth, for him you decreed wailing, year after year. You loved the many coloured roller, but still you struck and broke his wing [...] You have loved the shepherd of the flock; he made meal-cake for you day after day, he killed kids for your sake. You struck and turned him into a wolf (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*. 23).

Evidently, despite her amorous character her equally present war-like qualities warp her intentions, consequently resulting in her lovers suffering. It is for this reason, and the copious examples of said reason, that Gilgamesh does not accept her offer. It seems that the inexorable relationship between life and death presents itself too thoroughly in Ishtar – she cannot prevent one from affecting the other, even when it comes to those she loves. Indeed, Wakeman notes how women were represented as men perceived them, associated with sex, death, nature and mortality, with forces that men feared and sought to control (Wakeman 1985: 9). In the poem, it is the men who reinstate order following the unleashing of the bull of Heaven, replacing the female chaos with male civility, the act of slaughtering the animal simultaneously signals Ishtar's minimised divine status before the mortals Gilgamesh and Enkidu, while also acting as a demonstration of what could be done to her. Similar to Ishtar withdrawing from the conflict with Gilgamesh to her father, the sky god Anu, Aphrodite flees the battlefield at Troy to find comfort in Zeus in Homer's *Iliad*. The presentation of the goddesses certainly elevates the male figures that feature in the same texts, supporting the hypothesis that civilisation and religion withdrew from the feminine in order to form society around the male perspective.

### 2.4 Aphrodite

'This is the incarnation of fear as well as love, of pain as well as pleasure, of the agony and ecstasy of desire' (Hughes 2019: xii).

When we envision a goddess of love, it is arguably the Greek Aphrodite who dominates thought and discussion. However, before she arrived onto Cypriot shores, there is evidence that the role was already occupied by another, local figure. In actuality, a plethora of unusual stone figurines have been found in abundance around the foothills of the island, ranging from 5000 to 6000 years old. One of the best-known examples of these sculptures is the Lady of Lemba; measuring thirty centimetres tall, the form is feminine with large breasts and hips, a pronounced vulva and belly, suggesting she was crafted to appear pregnant (Hughes 2019: 7). The similarities to the Venus figurines are evident, however one feature that is certainly at odds is the distinct phallus head and the rudimentary face that stares back at the viewer. The combining of female and male qualities here marks them as unique, but given they were located at sites that, during the Copper Age, functioned as prehistoric maternity wards their connection to fertility likely explains their intersex design (Ibid. 10). If they were associated with fertility and thus childbirth, then perhaps the prehistoric people of Cyprus felt the reflection of both female and male bodies best represented the miracle of conception.

There is some suggestion that these figurines may have functioned as amulets to be worn by priests or midwives during childbirth; equally they may have functioned as protectors of homes and shrines as opposed to individuals. Although a relative context can be formed, whether the Lady of Lemba and the other stone sculptures were goddesses of love is uncertain. And yet, Cyprus is renowned as the home of a beautiful goddess that rose from the Aegean to its shores. Perhaps there is a tangible correlation present between the Lady and Aphrodite; the former has a phallus in place of a head, and the latter was born from the severing of the titan, Ouranos's, genitals.

Following the waning popularity of these figurines, two other deities pre-dated Aphrodite's arrival to the island during the Iron Age circa eighth century BCE. The local priestess-goddess *wanassa* (Lady or Queen) seems to have been a sensual representation of cosmic nature as well as a lover of perfume. Then there is the emergence of the *kourotrophos*, goddess figurines that were often paired with a small child and intricately carved to highlight their rich clothing and jewellery. Almost as unusual as the older phallus-headed sculptures, the *kourotrophos* was depicted with a bird's head. Perhaps there is a correlation between this unique feature and Aphrodite's penchant for doves. It is common, after all, for Greek deities – and indeed those from Mesopotamia – to have animals associated with them. The significant connection between Aphrodite and birds may lend itself to Ishtar, as the Greek word for dove is *peristera*, which likely derives from the Semitic *perah Ishtar*, meaning the bird of Ishtar

(Hughes 2019: 44). Iconography frequently depicted Ishtar with doves, however she was also associated with more ferocious beasts: lions. The two animals captured the dual nature of the goddess of love and war well; she was able to be both predator and prey, a lion and a dove, to have an appetite for both gratuitous violence and sweet indulgences (perfume is yet another common thread among the goddesses of love).

Homer, too, perpetuated this notion that Aphrodite enjoyed perfume in Book Eight of *The Odyssey*: 'And Aphrodite who loves laughter and smiles, / [Went] to Paphos on Cyprus, and her precinct there / with its smoking altar. Here the Graces / Bathed her and rubbed her with the ambrosial oil / That glistens on the skin of the immortal gods, / and then they dressed her in beautiful clothes / a wonder to see' (Homer, *The Odyssey.* 8, 389-95). It was at Paphos, and certainly throughout Cyprus, that the mingling of Eastern and Western cultures was quite clearly seen. Indeed, according to the fifth century historian Herodotus the Babylonian custom of sacred prostitution was supposedly practised at Paphos in honour of Aphrodite.

An element of Aphrodite's character that sparks interest is her status as both mother and sexual being. One does not detract from the other, and she remained the most beautiful and desirable being; this quality was not adopted by the Virgin Mary, who assumed much of the goddess's likeness once Christianity grew in fervour. Indeed, so removed from sex and desire was Mary she was able to conceive her child without intercourse. On the other hand, the Eastern goddesses who preceeded the Greek deity and Christian icon, were incredibly sexually active but significantly bore no children. In the varying statuses of these female figures, it is possible to note how different societies and religions expected their deities and prominent idols to act.

According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Aphrodite was one of the earliest Olympians, predating Zeus and his siblings. Consequently, her importance is made evident as she symbolises that which is vital to human existence: love, and thus the assurance of a continued genealogy. The mid-fifth century BCE Presocratic philosopher Empedocles emphasises her integral function in the cosmos, adopting her name as a synonym for the ultimate unifying principle *philotēs*, or Love, noting how mortal men were 'inborn in their joints' with her influence (Empedocles. *Fr.* 17.15-29, cited from Larson 2012: 60).

In the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, her power over other immortals, mortals and the natural world is illuminated; in the poem, Zeus is aware of the inherent danger she poses, which subsequently prompts him to cause her to fall in love with a human man, the Trojan Anchises. She is presented to him 'resembling a virgin maiden in height and looks, / Lest he be alarmed and awed at the sight of her [...] take me, virgin and untested in love as I am' (Homeric *Hymn*

*to Aphrodite.* 82-133, cited from Larson 2012: 54-6). Certainly, the goddess of desire is no virgin, however Aphrodite seems to enjoy donning this act. Nevertheless, Anchises is not ignorant of her identity as an immortal, although he is not certain which goddess she is: 'From the moment my eyes first saw you, goddess, I knew you were a god' (Ibid. 184. 57). Similarly, Gilgamesh knew of Ishtar and her intentions in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and how interactions with the divine rarely culminated in a happy or healthy ending for the male mortal involved.

Their union proves fruitful as opposed to fatal, as Aphrodite informs Anchises that 'a son shall be yours, a ruler [...] His name shall be Aeneas' (Ibid. 196-8. 58). Significantly, this son later survives the Trojan War and becomes the founder of what would become the greatest power in the Mediterranean, and indeed beyond: Rome. This is not the goddess's sole connection to the eternal city. In a political manoeuvre to legitimise his reign, Julius Caesar claimed divine lineage from the goddess and dedicated an impressive temple to Venus Genetrix in 54 BCE in the centre of the city between the Capitoline and Quirinal Hills.

One of the earliest temples dedicated to the goddess was at Kythira, supposedly an island she passed as she emerged from the Aegean. Pausanias confirm this, the latter contextualising how the worship of Aphrodite reached Kythira's shores: 'the first men to establish her cult were the Assyrians, after the Assyrians the Paphians of Cyprus and the Phoenicians who live at Ascalon in Palestine; the Phoenicians taught her worship to the people of Cythera' (*Descriptions of Greece.* 1.14.7). It is important to note that the temple was specifically devoted to Aphrodite Urania, or the Heavenly Aphrodite, once more bringing us to the notion that the Greek gods were indeed adapted to fit the unique traditions and beliefs of each city state or geographical area. Indeed, some emphasis should be put on the idea of Greek temples being 'dedicated' to the gods. This is because, in the Greek world, the gods did not reside in their earthly temples. Whereas, according to the beliefs held in Mesopotamia, the gods very much occupied their sacred spaces and the humans that lived and worked within them were present to make the Eastern gods as comfortable as possible.

Despite the wooden statue of Aphrodite that was once inside the temple at Kythira perishing, likely due to the nature of its material, it seemingly encapsulated the mingling of Eastern and Western cultures. She is at once heavenly (Inanna and Ishtar were both the goddesses of the morning and the evening star, Venus, and thus were regarded as the queens of Heaven) and militaristic, fashioned as an armed warrior. As previously mentioned, there were several iterations of the goddess; this one figurine seems to have encapsulated two of these Aphrodite types. Although she is less prone to violence than Inanna-Ishtar, remnants of these qualities are evident in the Greek deity.

Furthermore, the cult of Aphrodite Areia, or warlike Aphrodite, was prominent throughout Greece, with particular prominence in Kythira, Sparta, Taras and Cyprus. Depicted in her usual beauty, the Ionian interpretation of the goddess often sees her holding a spear, hence the associated epithet Aphrodite Encheios (with a spear). The warlike characteristics were perhaps remnants from the Orientalising period, however her relationship with the war god Ares may provide further reasoning for the adoption of armour and weaponry.

Her potential for violence is most clear in her interactions with mortals. On the one hand, she is not adept on the battlefield, as is made clear in Homer's *Iliad* when she attempts to intervene to save Aeneas, and is subsequently wounded by Diomedes, sending her fleeing to Mount Olympus. And yet, when interacting with Helen she unabashedly threatens the woman until she accepts her newfound circumstances and consummates her marriage to the Trojan prince Paris. It could be argued that the cause for the Trojan War was not the most beautiful mortal woman, but a goddess who was intent on proving herself the fairest. Indeed, the true horror of Helen's situation does not seem to affect the goddess, as Aphrodite's sole concern in Book Three is for the two lovers to have intercourse, to a frightening degree: 'Wretch, do not anger me, lest I desert you [...] I would scheme dire hatred [...] and you would suffer an evil fate' (Homer, *Iliad.* 3. 414-17). The fact that Helen has been forcibly removed from her home and is suffering 'endless grief' because of her role in the war is not a concern for Aphrodite (Ibid. 3. 412). The stark difference and acceptable actions between mortals and immortals is highlighted here, especially as Helen receives the brunt of the blame, whereas Aphrodite is largely absolved of fault.

In contrast, the gods are afforded an indulgent flexibility with regards to their various impulses, intervening in the socio-political world of both humans and other divinities, taking lovers of any age and gender, all while retaining both power and status. When these mythologised forms of gender roles are applied to how women lived their lives in ancient Greece, it is evident that the goddesses occupied a fantasy, while human women were incredibly restricted in their day-to-day lives, with much of their time preoccupied with domesticity. The roles of women are neatly categorised by Pseudo-Demosthenes in an idealised fashion, as he notes 'we have mistresses for our enjoyment, concubines to serve our person, and wives for the bearing of legitimate offspring' (Pomeroy 1975: 8).

Indeed, throughout antiquity Greek women generally existed on the margins of society. Certainly, this differed depending on area and time period, however infanticide of female babies was consistent and during the Classical period an Athenian father would only raise a daughter if a future financial opportunity was feasible. This financial proposition of course

being marriage. A father would only raise as many daughters as he could provide dowries for, the intention here to ensure the dowries were large enough to attract wealthy and desirable suitors (Ibid: 62). In the sixth century BCE, the lawgiver Solon institutionalised new, extensive legislation that affected the lives of Athenian women; from the food that they ate, their access to the outside world and the personal belongings of brides. Indeed, he criminalised all forms of sale of persons, except the right for a male guardian to sell an unmarried woman who was no longer a virgin; he demarcated what differentiated a good Athenian woman from a whore who was exempt from autonomy (Ibid. 57-8). In fact, so irksome were women on male society, Solon restricted their influence by reducing their access to the world beyond the home.

Religion was one sphere where women were afforded some semblance of authority. The great poetess, Sappho, was supposedly involved in the cult of Aphrodite and promoted chaste worship of the goddess, however the validity of this is rightfully questioned. Love was a prominent theme in Sappho's poetry, with Aphrodite and the pain she could inflict featuring often: 'Aphrodite on your intricate throne, immortal [...] weaver of plots, I beg you, do not tame me with pain or my heart with anguish but come here, as once before when I asked you' (Sappho. 'To Aphrodite'. *Fr. 1. G*, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 2). The women of Lesbos were viewed as having an inherent eroticism, both homosexual and heterosexual, and in Athenian comedy the verbs *lezbiazein* and *lesbizein* (to play the lesbian) connoted sexual enthusiasm and general 'whorish behaviour' (Pomeroy 1975: 54). Homosexual relationships between women seemed to have been more so accepted and, perhaps, encouraged in places where women were valued, such as Sparta and Lesbos.

Once more cementing her connection to the Italian peninsula, the first mention of Aphrodite-Venus's name comes to us from the isle of Ischia in the Bay of Naples circa 740 BCE; a small terracotta cup reads: 'I am Nestor's cup, good for drinking. / Whoever drinks from this cup, immediately / Desire will seize him for beautiful-crowned Aphrodite' (Hughes 2019: 53). Originating from Rhodes, the presence of this artefact highlights the diffusion of Aphrodite's cult from Greece to Italy. The southern part of the latter country became so populated with Greeks during the eighth century BCE onwards it came to be called Magna Grecia, and thus the importance and influence of Greek culture and language in Italy was prevalent in antiquity and indeed the modern day.

As Aphrodite seems to have shed the more militaristic qualities of Inanna-Ishtar on her way West, much of her character became intrinsically tied to sex. Certainly, as the goddess of carnal pleasures, this is firmly within reason. In literature, she is often referred to as laughter-loving, the implication here points to both her jovial attitude as well as acting as a direct

reference to a woman's sex. Indeed, shells have long been associated with the goddess, and worshippers used them in their cult practises. Pierced at the top, they were worn. As Hughes notes in her book *Venus and Aphrodite*, the scallop shells appeared remarkably like female genitalia; so entrenched in sexuality was this association even the Demotic Greek word *ketis* can mean both a scallop-like sea creature and a woman's genitalia (Hughes 2019: 48).

Many deities related to sexuality and desire were female. Certainly prominent figures such as Eros, one of the first four primordial beings, was responsible for reproduction and desire. Although Hesiod documents his birth preceding that of Aphrodite, in later poetry and art his identity is reduced to that of son and mischievous infant. Therefore, it is intriguing that male writers from antiquity supply a very rigid view of female sexuality in surviving literature. Although perpetual virginity was regarded as odd for both sexes, religious observances could cause worshippers to abstain from sexual acts. In antiquity, sexual intercourse was perceived to leave a taint on those involved, thus it was necessary for one to cleanse themself, particularly before approaching the temples of the gods. Certainly, it seems here the social expectation for mortals varies radically from the immortal, as both partake in intercourse, with male deities' marital and extramarital affairs widely documented.

Comparitively, any enforcement of abstinence or virginity was a means to control the sexuality of unmarried women and girls; modesty was highly valued and protected in both Greece and Rome. For the latter, this was imperative to the respect and status of the entire family, as well as the woman herself. The vital preservation of virginity is most evident in the Vestal Virgins, a religious sect of women who were employed for thirty years as priestesses of the goddess Vesta. In fact, so integral was this image of purity to Rome itself a Vestal was subjected to harsh punishment should her chastity be compromised. Virgin goddesses such as Hestia-Vesta received much praise for their commitment to abstinence, as is made clear in the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*. The virginal Greek goddesses remain unaffected by Aphrodite's persuasions or tricks; the correlation posed in the hymn between sex and deception further stresses how Greeks of the Archaic period perceived sex as something potentially harmful to the body and soul. Therefore, Aphrodite is simultaneously marked as a powerful figure capable of manipulating even Zeus 'the greatest god with the greatest share of honour' (Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite.* 37), a force that holds sway over all the natural world, and a being capable of provoking acts that could cause turmoil in one's self and the natural world.

### 2.5 Venus, Mother of the Eternal City

Following our journey from the East further West, we now come to the question of who was the Roman goddess of love? It seems one could not describe Venus without first discussing the capital city that honoured her as patron deity and predecessor of the Julio-Claudean dynasty. Rome was a power unlike any other in the ancient world. Spanning from approximately 753 BCE to the 476 AD, it controlled much of Europe, North Africa and the Near East. At its height, the capital city alone was home to an estimated one million people. Thus, it certainly stands to reason that a deity capable of supporting and perpetuating its expansionist, imperialist regime was required, both in the political world and on the plebian streets. Venus, with her militaristic origins and choice of war god Mars as a lover, made her an appealing candidate. Indeed, the very existence of Rome had her to thank, as it was her offspring, the Trojan warrior Aeneas, who was fated to create an Empire without limits. One could certainly argue that the humble ancient city established by Aeneas – and later descendants Romulus and Remus – was indeed the nucleus of an Empire that exceeded all expectations.

Lucretius, a poet and philosopher of the first century BCE, wrote a beautiful invocation of the goddess that harked back to earlier Roman traditions. It is worth noting, however, that he was a critic of pagan religious beliefs. Before naming her, Lucretius titles her 'Mother of Romans, delight of gods and mortals, fruitful Venus' (Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things.* 1-2, cited from Larson 2012: 70). The flattery here is intrinsically tied to nature and fertility, most explicitly on lines four and five: 'it is through you that all are born and see the light of the sun' (Ibid. 4-5. 70). The implication here is rather blatant: through her will desire is born and thus procreation consequently occurs, in turn intrinsically making her the mother of all mankind; echoes of Inanna-Ishtar's descent into the Underworld, resulting in humanity's sudden onset of infertility, are evident as the goddess's frightening sway over life is made clear.

The speaker of the invocation requests the goddess be their ally and notes how she delivers peace in aid of humanity, her union with Mars a means to quell any turmoil or strife. The imagery is striking, however even within the text subtle hints at Venus's more sinister character belie the valiant attempt to craft a sanitised image of the goddess of love. Indeed, in Lucretius's invocation she appears as a divine mother and faithful lover to Mars, something which is depicted often in frescos. Some exquisite examples of their domesticity are scattered around the city of Pompeii.

Nevertheless, akin to Aphrodite, this notion of being manipulated or harmed by the powers of love and lust is palpable, albeit not the primary concern of the text. 'Under your spell

[...] Mars who rules those savage works is Love's eternal prey and flings himself defeated on your breast' (Ibid. 33-4. 71); choice and the capacity to freely experience amorous sensations is seemingly shaky when immortal Love is involved. Savagery and falling prey to the goddess is inherent, particularly if we consider her oriental ancestors.

As Venus was the goddess of desire, it seems she rather perfectly aligned with the Roman militaristic urge to expand and conquer. In fact, so present was she that her bust is often found on coinage. Consequently, this meant her image circulated throughout the Roman world, ensuring all recalled her power and how integral she was to Roman history and identity. One fine example comes from the end of the Roman Republic (46-45 BCE): a silver denarius minted in Spain under Julius Caesar weighing 4.05 grammes. It shows the goddess with a diadem on her head, a star in her hair with Cupid and a sceptre to the left and a *lituus* on her right. Here she appears both beautiful and authoritative; one might not suspect the obverse would present an image of striking militaristic power and brutality.

Fig. 4. (The British Museum. Roman denarius, 46-45 BCE).

Indeed, the obverse shows a trophy bordered by two shields, an oval one to the left and an oblong one to the right. Interestingly, a carnyx is depicted behind each shield, the wind instrument used by the Celts during battle to unnerve opponents. Continuing the unsettling imagery are the two figures beneath these items of war: a nude, bearded man who seems to be in motion – perhaps in an attempt to flee – despite his bound arms. He gazes upwards toward the militaristic parade. The other is a clothed woman who appears to be in despair, head bowed, and limbs drawn close to her body. The inscription stamped at the bottom of the denarius, CAESAR, clearly identifies the moneyer and, rather significantly, visually acts as a border, a cage, further entrapping the two captives above.

Venus's presence here stresses her intrinsic involvement in Rome's desire for conquest; she embodies the power and 'civilising' force that was Rome. One such method for circulating this message was coins; just as today, money was a necessity in daily life, and thus this image of Venus and Caesar conquering would have been widely consumed. Effective as this method

of perpetuating divine lineage and strength was, it is unsurprising that it continued to be utilised during the Empire. Below is another example of Venus appearing on a coin with a powerful man, the newly appointed emperor Augustus.

Fig. 5. (The British Museum. Roman denarius, 32-29 BCE).

Similarly depicted as the above coin from the Republic, Venus appears in profile, a *stephane* upon her head and a necklace around her neck. These items signify her status as a goddess of vast beauty and wealth, as such finery was typically reserved for affluent Roman ladies. In contrast to her appealing bust, the reverse presents Octavian, the successor of Julius Caesar, in military regalia. He stands in the *contraposto* pose – relaxed, with the weight primarily supported by one leg – and with his arm raised, poised to address his troops. Minted in Rome and dated around the time of the Battle of Actium, it is clear why the soon-to-be emperor of a blossoming Empire chose the goddess of the Julius *gens* to join him in the public domain. After all, what better way to confirm one's right to rule than to solidify one's familial connection to the divine; as Julius Caesar was deified posthumously, this only enhanced Octavian's stance as most fit to rule. Indeed, CAESAR DIVI. F, a title frequently used by Octavian (*Caesar Divi Filius*, or son of divine Julius Caesar) quite frankly frames him with his divine connection to his predecessor.

At this time a power struggle between Octavian and Mark Antony, the two with the strongest right to govern Rome, caused great tension in the Mediterranean. As the great nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar, Octavian certainly had the advantage. In addition to the pressure from Mark Antony, Octavian had to contend with Caesarion, the supposed biological son of Caesar and the Ptolemaic Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt, another great power within the Mediterranean basin. With this political context, it was imperative to circulate the message that Octavian was part of a shared collective memory of Roman history, divine and mortal. The Imperial denarius perpetuates the mighty image of Roman strength in the face of adversity.

In literature the goddess appears similarly to her Eastern counterparts: the root of much joy and suffering. Akin to Aphrodite, Ishtar and Inanna she had a lover named Adonis (in the

Near East the name can also be Tammuz or Dumuzi). However, in Ovid's account of the tale in his *Metamorphoses*, Venus falls victim to the same amorous affliction typically meted out by her and Cupid to others: 'While Cupid, wearing his quiver over his shoulder [...] unwittingly grazed her breast with the tip of an arrow' (Ovid, *Metamorphoses.* 10. 523-27). Consequent to this, she falls in love with the mortal Adonis. This is an intimate example of Cupid-Eros's great power, seemingly a remnant from Greek mythology, as Eros was a primordial deity who predated Aphrodite's birth, according to Hesiod's *Theogony*. For this love spell casts her from herself and she becomes a slave to impulse, desire, absent from her usual haunts on the island of Cyprus and absent from the sky (Ibid. 10. 530-35). Indeed, this passion causes a metamorphosis to occur, as Venus enters the wilderness in pursuit of her lover, a far cry from the pampering and perfume typical of her character.

The very nature that Venus holds sway over brings her misfortune, however, as Adonis is swiftly killed once she does eventually depart for Cyprus. Although she does warn him of the dangers wild beasts can pose, a boar attacks him once he is alone. In her distress she combines his blood with nectar, consequently creating the pomegranate, and declares he shall be remembered yearly: 'My grief, Adonis, shall have an enduring memorial. Every year your untimely death shall be re-enacted and so the tale of my sad lamentation shall last forever' (Ibid. 10. 724-28). The connection to the Greek festival of Adonia, where women gathered annually to mourn his death, is palpable.

In the same Book of the *Metamorphoses*, Venus recounts the tale of Atalanta and Hippomenes, in which the joy and suffering of Venus's influence is clearly contrasted. In the myth, Atalanta is informed by an Oracle that she has 'no need' for a husband, and so she devises a plan to thwart the many suitors that attempt to woo her: only the one who can best her – a truly exceptional runner – in a race would be worthy of her. The attending youth Hippomenes prays to Venus, and his emotional request for assistance touches the goddess, hence she agrees to aid in his victory over Atalanta. What initially seems a success story in love quickly devolves into one of misfortune, as Hippomenes neglects to pay proper tribute to Venus, and thus she strikes him with lust when they are nearby a temple of Cybele. The act causes great insult to the mother of gods, and so, as is the theme of Ovid's great work, she transforms them into beasts: 'their faces were mirrors of anger, their conversation was growls. Their marriage bed was the forest floor. They were lions' (Ibid. 10. 703-5). Evidently, to neglect any commitment towards the gods was a grievous mistake that necessitated swift judgement, even for a deity so imbued in one of life's greatest pleasures: love. Venus, then, was eager to facilitate budding

romances, but equally as resolved to mete out punishment when proper gratitude was not expressed.

Although, as we have seen, Venus could alos fall subject to her own amorous powers, she was frequently met with both praise and vitriol. The portside town of Pompeii, officially named *Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum* from 89 BCE, seemed to be an erotic haven, scenes of intimacy and phallic imagery can be found in abundance. Such a place would likely have been appraised by the goddess, and in turn she was revered by the people of Pompeii – her presence can be found in domestic homes, bakeries and of course brothels. Indeed, a marble temple to the goddess dominated the landscape, accessed via the forum; her sanctuary greeted those arriving at the harbour. Such structural and religious city planning certainly informed all who entered Pompeii that Venus was inexorably entangled with its people and identity. Nevertheless, desire and hatred stem from similar passionate sources, and despite the abundance of affection on display for the goddess, some felt it necessary to voice their dissatisfaction with her, as is evident in one Pompeiian graffito: 'I want to break Venus's ribs with sticks and smash her thighs. If she can pierce my tender heart why can't I smash her head?!' (Hughes 2019: 58).

Indeed, some sources also felt it necessary to reinterpret her divine origins. Perhaps, strong emotions such as love felt easier to handle if the goddess of it was reduced in some way. The Republican Ennius suggested that Venus, prior to her divine status, was a mortal prostitute who became so revered for her talents that she gained a cult following and was subsequently deified. This notion was also present in the Greek world, with Aphrodite receiving similar speculation. Prostitution did fall under both of their jurisdictions, with the profession and rough sex being associated with the goddesses, particularly Aphrodite Pandemos. Further East, Ishtar was quite clearly identified as a prostitute, with her list of lovers seemingly endless and she herself claiming to be a *harimtu*. There is an ever-present, persistent connection between sex workers and the goddess of love and desire. Perhaps there is some merit to the theory that the deity was once a prostitute, so skilled and revered she became worthy of worship and over time memory of her mortal life was forgotten. As the world's oldest profession, would this truly be so surprising?

Venus maintained her popularity in Rome, and unlike the Grecian Aphrodite who was primarily worshipped by women and girls, the Roman goddess was for both sexes. Throughout the year several festival days were celebrated in her honour: the Veneralia on April 1$^{st}$ was held in honour of Venus Venticordia, or the changer of hearts. Later, in the same month during the blossoming of spring, the Vinalia Urbana took place on April 22$^{nd}$. It was during this particular

festival that certain societal boundaries were blurred, as prostitutes were actively involved in the festivities, carrying garlands of mint, myrtle and roses in the goddess's honour (Ibid. 111). In the summer, on August 19th, a garden festival occurred. Finally, from 46 BCE, a fourth festival took place on September 26th which was in honour of Venus Genetrix, the goddess mother and progenitor of the Roman people (Ibid). Her popularity among the Roman populace is palpable: in the capital city as the mother of all Romans, and equally as integral in cities further afield.

September 26th 46 BCE was an important date, not solely as the day the festival of Venus Genetrix was conceived, but when Julius Caesar was pronounced dictator. In elevating his status, he simultaneously promoted the goddess. To further consolidate the divination of the Julian *gens*, he dedicated a spectacular temple to Venus Genetrix in the centre of the Roman forum, nestled between the Capitoline and Quirinal hills; only three columns have survived through to the modern day, however their design hints at its past beauty.

However, the most impressive temple of Venus was designed by emperor Hadrian, with construction beginning in 121 AD and finally opening for public use in 135 AD under emperor Antoninus Pius. Jointly dedicated to the goddesses Venus Felix and Roma Aeterna, the mother of Rome and the genius of the city itself, it was likely the largest in antiquity. Nestled on the Velia hill in the heart of the city between the Colosseum and the Roman Forum, the temple was unique in nature for several reasons. Principally, it was dedicated to two deities, and thus had two adjoining *cellae* in which a sacred cult statue was displayed; Roma Aeterna faced the Roman Forum, while Venus Felix looked towards the Colosseum. Such choice echoed what had, at the time, become a significant element of Roman history: Rome existed because of Venus, and this temple acted as a physical manifestation of this shared collective memory and heritage. Cassius Dio noted how, when Hadrian asked the great architect Apollodorus of Damascus for his thoughts on the temple, he replied 'if the goddesses wish to get up and go out, they will be unable to do so', the implication being that the structure was too low, consequently making the space too small for the grand statues of the deities housed inside (Cassius Dio, *Roman History.* LXIX.4). The assessment was not received well by Hadrian, and it seems Apollodorus's early death may have been correlated to this tense situation. As Roman religion was based on *mos maiorum*, perhaps such a critique was simply too much of an affront to both the goddess and the emperor.

Venus remained integral to Roman social and political identity until late into the Roman Empire. The shift that occurred during the reign of emperor Aurelian in 274 AD echoes a similar theological change in hierarchy that was discussed in the above section on the

Mesopotamian Inanna: the superior deity becomes male instead of female. emperor Aurelian favoured the solar deity Sol Invictus and brought him to the forefront of the Roman pantheon. Later with the ascension of emperor Constantine, the primary religion shifted again from the polytheistic traditional pagan religion to the monotheistic Christianity. These two great changes to the religion of the Empire followed the pattern that had been established in earlier civilisations, thus ensuring that female deities, in this case Venus, were demoted in power and relevance.

Regardless, for much of the Empire, and indeed the Republic before it, Venus was pivotal, existing in the beating heart of the Eternal City with the deified personification of Rome itself. Just as Aphrodite had several iterations, Venus's character was manipulated to the needs of man and was subject to worship from some of the most powerful men in the Roman world. Great generals were attracted to the goddess, with Sulla naming himself 'the beloved of Venus' and Pompey founding sanctuaries to her, naming her Venus Venetrix (victorious Venus) (Ibid. 111-2). Evidently, some of her militaristic qualities remained, making her attractive to those Roman men in the business of battle and conquering. As has been mentioned, it was Julius Caesar who claimed divine ancestry and thus proscribed and demanded her worship, the impact of this so profound successive emperors flocked to Paphos, particularly when the threat of conflict loomed (Ibid. 113).

Nevertheless, Venus was not limited to the upper echelon of society. When one wanders the streets of Pompeii, the various voices of the ancient Romans are ever-present. A proclamation of love from a slave girl, Methe, remains etched into the walls of the Corridoio dei Teatri in Insula VIII.7.20:

*Methe Cominiaes Atellana amat Chrestum corde [si]t utreis que (:utrisque) Venus Pompeiana propitia [e]t sem[per] concordes veivant (:vivant).*

*Methe, a slave of Cominia, from the town of Atella, loves Chrestus. May Pompeian Venus be propitious in her heart to them both and may they always live harmoniously*

(Statement about love. Pompeii, Corridoio dei Teatri, VIII. 7.20. The Ancient Graffiti Project).

If anything, this highlights how and why the deity of love and desire remained so relevant: she was accessible to all, even in a society that valued social hierarchy and status, tradition and propriety. Venus was truly a goddess for the people and power of Rome.

## 2.6 The Holy Christian Mother

The first Roman emperor to champion Christianity in the West was Constantine the Great (280-337 BCE), a skilled militarist who thoroughly changed the face of the Empire throughout his reign. With the decline of paganism, both due to legislation and within the culture itself, the pantheon of gods who had previously received worship throughout Rome faded. Sexuality, in this new cultural-religious world was subsequently scrutinised and stripped from the Christian deities. Indeed, the mother chosen to bear the Son of God was miraculously impregnated without any need for copulation. Henceforth, she was referred to as the Virgin Mary, her virginity and chastity the most noteworthy elements of her character, as it emphasised her extreme purity. In Luke 1:48 she proclaims that 'all generations will call me blessed' (*The Holy Bible.* Luke 1:48. 45).

Under Constantine, temples to Venus-Aphrodite were shut down in an effort to minimise the goddess of love's reach. Mortal women experienced similar discrimination for sexual activity during the Christian era, particularly in its infancy. Emperor Constantine was very conscious of female sexual freedom, especially that which was directed at the wrong source. Indeed, in a manoeuvre to curtail women mimicking the actions of men, he introduced capital punishment for any freewoman who was found to be having intercourse with slaves (Pomeroy 1975: 160).

During the transition from a pagan society to a Christian one, much of Venus's iconography was adapted to conform to this new cultural and religious landscape. Hughes notes how she was one of the only pagan gods to survive the transition into Christendom 'in no less a guise than the Virgin Mary herself' (2019: 142). Indeed, her temples were converted into churches, the dove (which had been a beloved by Ishtar, Aphrodite and Venus) was now a symbol of the Virgin's pious and pure nature, and Venus-Aphrodite's nurturing countenance was emblematic of Mary's relationship with her son, Jesus Christ, the saviour of humanity.

This notion, of humanity's urgent need for a saviour certainly seems to have been fuelled by acts that, under Christianity, were – and remain to be – considered sins. Aphrodite's unabashed sexuality, adultery and apparent lack of morality was damning from the Christian perspective. Hence, her image was representative of bad, transgressive women who required swift punishment. Statues of the goddess were irreparably damaged, and her transformation, or perhaps coalescence, with the Virgin Mary was necessary. At Baalbek in Lebanon, a temple to Aphrodite-Astarte (the Phoenician goddess of love) was stripped of its association with her, due to the potential sacred prostitution that occurred there. Eusebius reports: 'men and women

vie with one another to honour their shameless goddess; husbands and fathers let their wives and daughters publicly prostitute themselves to please Astarte!' (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*. 3. 55).

Evidently, a goddess that promoted such amoral behaviour could not survive this cultural-religious metamorphosis. Thus, Venus-Aphrodite became a paradoxical, divine figure. She was at once a mortal who could fall pregnant without contact with a man; a mother who had avoided all sexuality; one chosen by the ultimate divine being to bring forth the saviour of mankind. Although Venus-Aphrodite was also a mother, her sexuality was not diminished, and thus her holiness was incomparable to a literal virgin who had miraculously conceived. Alongside the pagan goddess, women's sexuality continued to be monitored and restricted.

On the island of Cyprus, the Virgin Mary is still invoked as Panagia Aphroditissa, or 'the most holy Aphrodite', highlighting how remnants of the pagan past have survived into modern Christianity (Marcovich 1996: 48). While the figure of Aphrodite Pandemos is the direct antithesis of the virginal mother of Jesus Christ, Aphrodite Urania certainly aligns more so with Mary's image. Ultimately, Venus-Aphrodite retained her power and autonomy despite the tumultuous cultural-religious transformations. In contrast, Mary merely acts as a saintly vessel for a divine figure. The two are inextricably linked, however their similarities are far outweighed by their various differences. Nonetheless, we can remain certain that Christendom found value in ensuring Venus-Aphrodite survived in some capacity.

## 3. Chapter Two: Prostitution in the Roman World

The early imperial period saw the severe distinction between 'good' and 'bad' Roman women grow, succinctly classifying the good wives as loyal, brave, hardworking matrons and the bad whores as greedy, selfish, promiscuous prostitutes who focused solely on their own salacious self-interests (Strong 2016: 2). The language surrounding these bad women, female sex workers, offers an interesting insight into how they were perceived by wider society. The more general title, *meretrix*, literally translates to female wage earner, however originally simply meant whore. Over time this definition changed and came to signify any woman who

was autonomous, overtly public or leading a sexually active lifestyle (Ibid. 4). The lexicon reserved for prostitutes will be further expanded upon in section 3.7.

While male prostitutes existed, their presence will not be focused on, as this work is intended to illuminate women's place in the Roman world. The period of history selected will be the beginning of the Roman Empire through to the end of the Julio-Claudean *gens* with the death of Nero in 68 CE. For the sake of comparison, certain examples may be taken from centuries before and after this time period to contrast the treatment of women. It is in this era that new legislation was introduced to the *Lex Julia* that aligned with the values of the newly established emperor Augustus, who promoted the *familia* and modesty, particularly among the female members of society. Some of this legislation caused personal matters to become outright crimes in the public arena, such as the newly formed laws against adultery. Thus, this chapter seeks to uncover what life was like for the good and the bad women of this blossoming Empire, under which women were both monitored and provided with a new sense of (relative) autonomy.

Morally respectable women and girls were unified by their loyalty to the male head of the family, the *pater familias*, and the state. Unlike Greek women, they led public lives and served a function in society; in short, they were valued and publicly applauded for their virtue. It was imperative for these two types of women – the respected and the disrespectable – and their public lives, to remain segregated, as there was much danger to a reputation should a good woman's image become tarnished. It seems, then, that the good and bad women of Rome existed parallel to one another; freedwomen were expected to be *femina bona* (a good woman), to assume *pudicitia* (explicitly public virtue), however she *must* maintain this throughout her life else her family and the state suffer damning consequences. Whereas, whilst the *meretrix* was tainted by her status she simultaneously occupied space outside of societal norms for Roman women: the prostitute was not typically tied to a family, nor did they have a permanent bond with a man, and their sexual and reproductive activity was, to an extent, unchecked. This prospect was particularly unnerving. Yet, the practise was beneficial to the economy due to the high demand for it, and so it came to be taxed during emperor Caligula's reign (37-41 BCE). It seems reasonable to assume that whilst Roman men felt threatened by an autonomous woman, the money lining their pockets was of greater concern.

Before delving any further into the lives of prostitutes, it would be beneficial to explore how the good women of Roman society were expected to lead their lives. What did they wear? How did they spend their time? What did the law outline to ensure they remained good women? For the Augustan period, these expectations and laws were rather clearly defined by the *Lex*

*Julia*, and it was evidently imperative for the emperor of this new Empire to establish a measure of control on the weaker sex. However, the extent to which this was successful was intimately fraught for the emperor, as his own daughter, Julia the Elder, was plagued by salacious rumours, ultimately resulting in her expulsion from Roman society and a sad, lonesome death.

### 3.1 The Good Women of Rome

‘Augustus declared adultery a public offence only in women’ (Pomeroy 1975: 159).

‘It is very unjust for a husband to require from a wife a level of morality that he does not himself achieve’ (Ulpian. *Digest,* 48. 5. 14.(13). 5. Ibid. 159).

Women’s place in Roman society was established rather early on, if we recall one of the primary afflictions that affected the city in its infancy: the paucity of women. The solution to this problem was rather simple, as Rome was surrounded by curious neighbours who were keen to see this burgeoning metropolis: violence for victory. Romulus, then the king of Rome, devised a plan that would ensure the future of his city by replenishing its female populace. First, he prepared the *consualia* (games) in honour of the god Neptunus Equestris in a manner so magnificent that its fame would ensure its survival, and then ordered them to be announced among his neighbours. Several of these neighbouring states attended, including the Cæninenses, Crustumini, and Antemnates as well as the entirety of the Sabines, and once they were fully preoccupied with the provided entertainment the Romans signalled and began their tumultuous attack. Livy describes in great detail how the women were abducted from their families, husbands and children; indeed, a hierarchy was quickly formed, allowing senators and men of higher standing to reserve the most beautiful of these virgins.

The soothing of this violation of trust and comradery proved ineffective in the immediate aftermath, despite Romulus’s call for Rome’s neighbours to ‘cheerfully surrender your affections’ and how ‘from injuries love and friendship often arise’ (Livy, *History of Rome.* 1. 9). Wars erupted between Rome and all of its formerly friendly neighbouring states, with the most formidable being the Sabines, likely as they had been dealt the worst of the blows. They were able to successfully commandeer the citadel while Rome was preoccupied with skirmishes against the Cæninenses, Crustumini, and Antemnates.

Interestingly, it was because of a woman that they were able to access the city. According to Livy, the Sabine king, Tatius, and his army encountered his daughter, who

remains unnamed, and thusly gained entry inside. There seem to be two possible variations as to how this was achieved: either the men were admitted inside the citadel without issue and crushed Tatius's daughter to death, or they bribed her with the abundance of gold jewellery commonly worn among the Sabines, and subsequently killed her. Nevertheless, for her treachery she was slain. Whether this treason was indirectly her fault (the abduction) or perhaps directly her fault (admitting the Sabine men inside her newly recognised home) is uncertain.

This justification of the killing of women for certain insurrections remains common throughout the history of Rome. One of the earliest tales of a husband 'justly' killing his wife comes to us from the time of Romulus. The Latin writer Valerius Maximus tells the tale of one Egnatius Metellus who supposedly 'took a cudgel and beat his wife to death because she had drank some wine. Not only did no one charge him with a crime, but no one even blamed him' (Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings.* 6.3.9). As women were regarded as the *infirmitas sexus* and *levitas animi*, it was integral that they be under the guardianship of a man; it was this principle that mandated legislation that controlled much of their lives. Indeed, Pomperoy highlights how 'the *pater familias* [...] held the power of life and death over his daughters' (Pomeroy 1975: 152). It was the *pater familias* who had unwavering authority over the entire family unit, however whilst sons may grow out from his reach of control, daughters were not afforded the same emancipation, in some instances even once they were married.

So, if a female child was accepted by the *pater familias* and grew to adulthood, how could she ensure she maintained the honour of her family and the state? Under the legislation of August, family became incredibly important and producing offspring was integral to the betterment of the state. Therefore, it was a freeborn woman's duty to bear three to four children, and a freedwoman's duty to bear four, for Rome. The *jus liberorum*, or the right to bear the necessary number of children, benefitted women in that it afforded them an exemption from male guardianship. In demonstrating this responsible behaviour by birthing the next generation, they had proven that they were capable of acting without the council of men. Perhaps this state mandated, and indeed monitored, regulation harks back to the anxieties of Romulus's Rome and the fear of there being no future generation. Rome, after all, was preoccupied with power and it was only legitimate Roman men who could wield it.

Should a woman of the upper class remain celibate then certain limitations were put upon her. *The Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* and *Lex Papia Poppaea* promoted marriage and the latter explicitly encouraged conception among wedded couples. Subsequently, it was inherently lawful to discriminate against those that chose to disregard this legislation.

Therefore, one could expect to be publicly, yet perhaps subtly, punished by way of exclusion from events such as attending the theatre.

The only other women who were truly *sui iuris* (independent of a tutor or guardian) were the Vestal Virgins, priestesses who worshipped the goddess Vesta and maintained the sacred hearth and eternal flame of Rome. All others were *alieni iuris* (under the power of a tutor or guardian). The Vestals were unique in their importance and their clergy had supposedly existed since the time of Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome (Livy, *History of Rome.* 4. 44). The role women partook in religion, and the potential freedom it granted, will be expanded upon in Chapter Three.

### 3.2 The Importance of Clothing

In Rome, women led relatively public lives, unlike their Greek counterparts who were largely secluded from men and confined to the home. Indeed, much of the paranoia that surrounded women's activities in Greece was not present in Roman culture, as good women were expected to be open, and although they were not directly active in business and politics, they were also not entirely excluded. Clothing played a rather important role in identifying a woman's status, while simultaneously ensuring she remained untroubled when interacting with society. The jurist Ulpian informs us that, whilst it was acceptable to harass a slave girl (an *ancillae)* or lowly *meretrix*, who were likely dressed inappropriately, if a *materfamilias* or a woman respectfully dressed was disturbed one could be punished by law (Strong 2016: 21, citing Ulpian, *Digest*. 47. 10. 10. 15).

Legislation concerning what women wore was most prevalent during the early first century BCE, and women had legal protection when wearing the *stola* and *palla*. They became markers of a woman's social status and morality, covering them completely from any potential onlookers. Their function, then, was to provide them with privacy whilst in public spaces. Strong notes how the heavy *stola* would not be necessary should women have remained within the confines of the home, and thus it can be deduced that matrons were very present in society. Perhaps, as it was unlikely that they adopted the *stola* as everyday attire, it served a more symbolic purpose, openly announcing the virtue of the wearer, if and when worn.

Fig. 6. (Messalina and her son Britannicus, ca. 45 CE. Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines, Louvre Museum).

In contrast, the prostitute wore the antithesis of respectable clothing, as is to be expected due to the nature of the profession. Although sources are limited – only six literary references survive from antiquity – female deviants supposedly wore the male garment of the *toga* which was coloured either saffron or orange (Strong 2016: 22). The striking hue and noticeable nature of a woman wearing male clothing would have marked prostitutes as 'available' and unrestricted from sexual advances from the populace. Certainly, matrons and sex workers both led public lives, but their accessibility differed greatly. If we assume that the prostitute's uniform was indeed a vibrantly coloured *toga*, then we must consider whether it was simply a signifier of profession or a punishment. Whether prostitutes wore togas at all remains unclear as iconographic sources simply are not present, and so we must adopt some scepticism when consulting sources written by men, particularly those who regarded prostitutes with contempt.

In Assyria, the distinction between good and bad women was also visually marked via public dress. However, punishment was unequivocally employed when deviations occurred, for example if a prostitute was to publicly don respectable clothing, such as the veil, then legislation dictated that she must be punished. This was both brutal and lasting, as the prostitute was left permanently disfigured should she be found guilty; the consequence this would have had on her livelihood would have likely been very damning. Nevertheless, in wearing a veil, she was not only being deceitful but, rather drastically, she was offending the state itself.

Middle Assyrian law 40 states:

> 'Neither (wives) of (seigniors) nor (widows) nor (Assyrian women) who go out on the street may have their heads uncovered. The daughters of a seignior ... whether it is a shawl or a robe or a mantle, must veil themselves... When they go out on the street alone, they must veil themselves. A concubine who goes out on the street with her mistress must veil herself. A sacred prostitute whom a man married must veil herself on the street, but one whom a man did not marry must have her head uncovered on the street; she must not veil herself. A harlot must not veil herself; her head must be uncovered' (Lerner 1986: 248).

In Rome as in Assyria, then, women were classified according to their sexual activity, whether they belonged to one man or several, as well as the clothing they wore. The latter was a visual representation of their status and virtue. Evidently, to flout the correct dress code was not only a poor reflection on themself, but could result in insult to their family and the state. Indeed, this was reflected in other areas of their personal lives, for example should a woman be faithful to one man and family then she was deemed moral and virtuous; should she not then her respectability was reduced, and perhaps, unnecessary.

### 3.3 Marriage and Pregnancy: Wives and Husbands of the Upper Classes

Under Augustus, the importance of marriage became interwoven into political as well as private life, evolving into a traditionalist expectation particularly of the upper classes. The minimum age of marriage was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys, however sometimes prepubescent arrangements did occur, despite the girls not having even experienced menarche; even in these circumstances it was not unusual for the marriage to be consummated (Pomeroy 1975: 164).

One reason for these early marriages was due to the necessity for women and girls to reproduce as frequently as was possible, although each birth was fraught with danger for both mother and child. Another was the supposed imbalanced ratio of women to men in these upper circles of Roman society. However, this may have been the result of other societal complications such as the frequent infanticide or exposure of female infants, due to the preference for boys. One could certainly view this imbalance as self-inflicted, as without female children the promise of a new generation would be severely limited. A first century BCE letter from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt details a husband directing his wife to dispose of their child should it be female:

‘Hilarion to Alis his sister, heartiest greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonarion. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all the others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and as soon as we receive wages I will send them to you. If – good luck to you! – you bear offspring, if it is a male, let it live; if it is female, expose it. You told Aphrodisias, “Do not forget me.” How can I forget you? I beg therefore not to worry’ (Oxyrhynchus papyrus 744. G., cited from Lefkowitz, Fant 1992: 187).

Immediately, this papyrus highlights how women’s fate could be controlled right from infancy. Not only was misoygny at play in this decision making, but also economic matters. With girls came the inherent issue of ensuring they had a dowry for future marriages. Evidently, a father could only produce a dowry for so many children, therefore it was necessary to dispose of those that could not be provided for. This then begs the question of how attached parents would become to their children, but evidence from inscriptions and tombstones of the unfortunate youths that did not survive into adulthood proves that parents were neither heartless nor cold. The loss of wanted children is palpable.

As stated above, pregnancy and childbirth were perilous obligations – and was the biggest killer of young women in Rome – so the disproportion of genders has yet another explanation. Indeed, thousands of these deaths are recorded throughout the Roman Empire indiscriminate of status, but the impact of this loss and the intimate relations between husband and wife can be gleaned in commemorative tombstones (Beard 2015: 314).

One emotional example comes from a man in Egypt whose wife passed during labour: she ‘lived for thirty-six years and forty days. It was her tenth delivery. On the third day she died’ (Ibid: 313). Evidently, despite the apparent danger, women’s lives were dominated by either the prospect of conceiving or the inability to. With our modern medicine, issues such as the inability to pass a child through the birth canal are, generally speaking, avoidable. For ancient women this unfortunately led to a painful and untimely death. If it appeared that the child may yet survive, then caesarean sections were performed, however this too was both invasive and fatal for the mother. Husbands must have had to accept that in childbirth they could lose their entire family.

Another epitaph on a tombstone, from the second century BCE, highlights the devastation death during childbirth caused, and how ancient marriages certainly could be unions based on love. Erected for a woman named Claudia, the inscription reads: ‘Here is the unlovely grave of a lovely woman [...] She loved her husband with her heart. She bore two sons. One of these she leaves on earth, the other under the earth. She was graceful in her speech and elegant in her step. She kept the home. She made wool. That’s what there is to say’ (Ibid:

304). This epitaph also provides an insight into how good women led their lives. This Claudia loved, and was seemingly faithful to, one man and provided him with a legitimate, surviving heir. This was an exceptional virtue – and perhaps difficult to achieve in a society that demanded women provide as many offspring as was possible – and women who died having been devoted to one man were given a unique title, the *univerae* (Pomeroy 1975: 161). So, too, was Claudia a beautiful, model wife, maintaining the home and wool working in order to contribute to the domestic economy (Beard 2015: 304). To any reading her tombstone, it seemed she could certainly be regarded as a near perfect woman by Roman standards, but the extent to which women truly did live up to such ideals remains shrouded in some mystery.

A task that was regarded as utterly feminine was weaving. Even the virginal, war-like Minerva-Athena was renowned for her skill upon the loom. For girls and women alike, the ability to weave was lauded even in death. A Roman child was lovingly commemorated for her talents in an epitaph: 'Viccentia, sweetest daughter, a weaver of gold, who lived nine years, nine months' (CIL VI. 9213 = ILS 7691. L., cited from Lefkowitz, Fant 1992: 219). Weaving would have provided the home with textile goods, however it was also representative of a woman's place: the activity situated her firmly within the home, while simultaneously enabling her to offer a means of financial support outside of it. If she sold her wares then this too meant she contributed to the domestic economy. Indeed, so integral to womanhood was weaving, emperor Augustus had his beloved wife, Livia, working the loom in the front hall of their home (Beard 2015: 305). Such a feminine hobby was not necessarily representative of class divides, meaning from the empress to those of a lower class, all women could partake in this traditional preoccupation.

A rather extreme marker of a truly good Roman woman was her willingness to place her life before her husband's. In certain circumstances it was indeed more honourable for women to die, either in her husband's stead or for any wrongdoing of her own. Indeed, should she survive him it was deemed improper for her to continue living; this also affected daughters. During the reign of Claudius, a man named A. Caecina Paetus was directed to commit suicide, but his wife Arria acted first, stabbing herself while jubilantly claiming 'It does not hurt, Paetus' (Pomeroy 1975: 161). Evidently, wives were regarded as subordinate to their husbands, and thus there was more honour in supporting a man, even in death, than to be a widow.

### 3.4 Contraceptives

Despite Augustus' best efforts, the birth rate in Rome remained rather low. Wives were encouraged to shun their former modesty and bed their husbands as per the *Lex Papia Poppaea*, however the expected population boom continued to wane. As has been established, childbirth was perilous for mother and child, so in order to prevent continuous conception and the risk of childbirth, contraceptives became quite popular.

There were several methods to prevent pregnancies, something that would have been detrimental to lower class women who could not afford another mouth to feed or a prostitute who relied on her body by trade. Lucian captures this inconvenience rather humorously in his *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, as the prostitute Myrtium says, 'All the good I've had from your love is that you've given me such an enormous belly, and I'll soon have to bring up a child, and that's a terrible nuisance for a woman of my kind' (Harmon 1921: 282).

Magical spells were an accessible and favoured form of contraceptive, involving all manner of unusual items. One such example instructs as follows: 'Take a pierced bean and attach it as an amulet after tying it up in a piece of mule hide' (*PGM* 63.26-8/Betz, cited from Knapp 2013: 262). So too were certain ointments, pessaries and potions employed, with ingredients ranging from oil, honey and frankincense. The effectiveness of spells and natural products was likely minimal, and yet they remained popular, perhaps because they were less intrusive than other methods of contraception. Sponges and other porous materials were inserted into the vagina to prevent the transmission of sperm. It was also suggested women smear 'the orifice of the uterus with old olive oil or honey or cedar resin or juice of the balsam tree' (Soranus, *Gynaecology.* 62). Although these methods were well used, as is supported by archaeological findings of the aforementioned contraceptive sponges, one wonders at how hygienic this would have been, particularly as the vagina is sensitive to foreign, potentially unclean instruments and substances. Thrush and bacterial vaginosis likely afflicted women – should references as early as the fifth century BCE by Hippocrates truly be about the same infections – which would have been hindering to the intimacy of a marriage or a prostitute's career.

Ancient physicians were aware of a fertility window in a woman's menstrual cycle and suggested sexual intercourse the week before menstruation in order to avoid potential pregnancy. Unfortunately for the Romans, this was not correct, in fact it is the exact opposite of ancient thinking, and thus would not have been a rather effective form of contraception. Physicians suggested women hold their breath and move away a little at the critical moment of coitus 'so that the seed not be hurled too deep into the cavity of the uterus' or to immediately

squat after and ‘induce sneezing and carefully wipe the vagina all around; she might even drink something cold’ (Ibid. 61).

The Greek physician Soranus offers a sympathetic perspective on women’s gynaecological health. In his work, *Gynaecology*, he provides documentation on menstruation, abortion, conception and contraceptives; he notes how it is safer to prevent pregnancy than to attempt to abort a foetus, an event which can be fraught with danger even in modern times should medical providers not be involved. He documented several methods of contraceptives women could prepare prior to intercourse, including:

> ‘Pine bark, tanning sumach, equal quantities of each, rub with wine and apply in due measure before coitus after wool has been wrapped around; and after two or three hours she, may remove it and have intercourse. Another: Of Cimolian earth, root of panax, equal quantities, rub with water separately and together, and when sticky apply in like manner. Or: Grind the inside of fresh pomegranate peel with water, and apply’ (Ibid. 62).

From the written evidence, it certainly seems that women were more so expected to be active in sourcing contraceptives. Should conception occur following intercourse, it would have been a greater issue for her due to the nature of pregnancy, particularly if she was prostitute, as was highlighted perfectly by Myrtium’s dissatisfaction at the prospect in *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. Still, Roman contraceptives seemed rather unpleasant to employ, either for their ineffectiveness or for the subsequent discomfort they likely could have caused. This is an instance of damned if you do or do not for Roman women.

### 3.5 Protecting Virtue and Chastity

Life expectancy certainly varied depending on status, however most women of childbearing age could generally anticipate surviving until their mid-thirties. Unlike is colloquially perceived, elderly people did make up a percentage of the Roman population. Cicero’s loyal slave, Tiro, who was regarded as a member of the *familia* (a relatively common occurrence among slaves and the households they worked within) lived until he was ninety-nine! (Beard 2015. 333). Such a mature age was unlikely to be common among the Romans, even of the upper classes, however as Tiro was regarded warmly in the *familia* Cicero, it is hardly surprising that his quality of life was good enough for him to live so long. Nevertheless, the confounding Roman thought on whether slaves were people or things continued.

Indeed, such a question becomes troubling when we consider the fact that women and slaves conducted much the same tasks, childbearing of course being the largest one to overlap their stations. This distinction between a free woman and a female slave is not as blurred as in Athens, but even so it existed. While Athenian women were relegated to the home where male and female members of the household were largely segregated, Roman women were afforded vast freedoms in comparison. It was acceptable for men and women to dine together, something regarded as an insidious merging of the sexes in Greece. So much so that in the 80s BCE a rather infamous story survives about the differences between Greek and Roman dining preferences. The notorious magistrate Gaius Verres was serving in Lampsacus, Asia Minor, where he somewhat sneakily orchestrated an invitation to dine with a Greek man, Philodamus, who was rumoured to have a daughter of stunning beauty and unquestionable virtue. After copious amounts of alcohol was consumed, a request for the host's daughter to join them was made. The host explained that respectable Greek women did not dine with men, but nevertheless the Roman guests set out to find her and violence soon erupted. Philodamus suffered a terrible fate in the ensuing brawl and was burned to death with boiling water. Fortunately for the daughter, she was not located by the Romans, and the towns people rallied in an assembly to decide the fate of these aggressors.

Cicero's account of such an awful tale does inform us on international relations between Rome and the regions under its control. Certainly, the Romans are presented as slaves to their greed and primal urges. Philodamus's daughter, it seems, is saved from savagery in part due to her virtue: 'But when Philodamus perceived that what was intended and being prepared was, that violence should be offered to his daughter, he calls his servants to him, he bids them disregard him and defend his daughter' (Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero.* Ver. 2. 1. 67). The entire household unites to offer her protection, the free and the enslaved. Evidently, her chastity is regarded as the highest priority in the face of violence, and ultimately Verres is punished in Utica, where he is burnt alive by an unrelated group of people. They had learned of his abhorrent actions in Lampsacus and sought vengeance on behalf of Philodamus and his daughter.

If a woman's virtue did become compromised what became of her status in society? As much of Roman literature that survives was written by men for men, in part due to the illiteracy of women, misogynistic attacks were frequent. One case that has survived well into the modern era is that of Messalina, empress of Rome in the first century CE and wife of emperor Claudius. As a figure of such standing, surely she should have been unaffected by such slander. However, her reputation as that of a wanton, insatiable, dangerous, prostitute-like woman that threatened

the stability of the Roman social system has permeated two millennia, perpetuating the notion that women in positions of power were at best unfit and at worst utterly dangerous.

### 3.6 The Condemnation of Elite Women

'So we have got to be slaves to a woman' (Tacitus, *The Annals.* 1.4. 34).

Shortly after her death in 48 CE Messalina was condemned to *damnatio memoriae*, or the erasure of a person's image and name, by order of the imperial cult. For such an extreme measure to be taken, one had to have committed an egregious act that necessitated it. During the reign of emperor Commodus, it became punishable by death to say his late brother's name. Geta's crime? Likely his title as former emperor of Rome and consistent threat to Commodus's reign; perhaps some lingering guilt for his hand in Geta's murder drove this descision to erase his brother's memory too. Evidently, *damnatio memoriae* was subject to much personal influence, as opposed to strict observation of the law.

What, then, was Messalina's crime? As we have established, attitudes towards women were readily affected by how their sexual behaviour reflected upon themselves and their male kin, consequently incurring shame on the entire family (Strong 2016: 98). This gendered model of shame, which likely kept most women compliant, assured the patriarchal system that female autonomy was restricted. Indeed, financial and sexual independence created much anxiety in Rome. It was the women who undermined patriarchal power structures that were accused of seeking power as part of their physical and sexual proclivities or in order to advance their personal relationships and status (Ibid: 100). Messalina, as both empress of Rome and notorious flouter of the expected gender norms, was thus a problem.

Fig. 7. (*Messalina in Lisisca's Booth*, Agostino Carracci. Late sixteenth century).

Upon the assassination of the wicked and debaucherous emperor Caligula, Claudius and his third wife Messalina were suddenly elevated in status to that of rulers of the Roman Empire. The former emperor was rumoured to have had brothels set up in the palace on the Palatine Hill, and these salacious stories of sexual misconduct lingered. Perhaps it was this established association with prostitution that enabled male writers to depict Messalina as a predatory nymphomaniac who manipulated Claudius and conducted herself in a manner that affiliated her with that of the lowly *scortum*, the streetwalking prostitute. Whilst it seems we can comfortably concur that Messalina likely had one extra-marital affair, the devious conduct ancient authors, such as Juvenal, describe cannot be regarded as historical evidence of factual events. She was, after all, the empress of Rome and therefore an incredibly prominent and identifiable figurehead of the state.

Nevertheless, Juvenal documents her supposed escapades, moonlighting as a prostitute:

'Hear how Claudius suffered. When his wife, Messalina, knew he was asleep, she would go about with no more than a maid for escort. The empress dared, at night, to wear the hood of a whore, and she preferred a mat to her bed in the Palatine Palace. Dressed in that way, with a blonde wig hiding her natural hair, she'd enter a brothel that stank of old soiled sheets, and make an empty cubicle, her own; then sell herself.'

(Juvenal, *The Satires.* VI. 114-135).

Certainly, Juvenal's intention was to shame Messalina, however it seems the primary victims in the text are the men surrounding the empress. Claudius suffers because of her deception and prostitution. Her son Brittanicus is directly addressed, 'Displaying the belly you

came from, noble Britannicus, / She'd flatter her clients on entry, and take their money' (Juvenal, *The Satires*. 4. 114-135). This harks back to how a woman's actions reflected on her entire family. Although we must recall that the prostitute did not necessarily have a family, and thus she threatened the social order in both her sexual autonomy, financial independence and detachment from a man. Juvenal touches on the issue of finances, noting how Messalina offers flattery to her clients before taking their money, a simple transaction that is presented in a very negative light, likely due to the unessential nature of it. As Strong succinctly states, '[Messalina] was not a prostitute out of financial necessity, like the other residents of the brothel, but out of her longing for immoral sex and to flaunt her disloyalty to her husband.' (Strong 2016: 107). Indeed, despite a night of working in the brothel Juvenal's empress reluctantly leaves unsatiated, returning to the emperor's bed.

The absurdity of Messalina's actions, according to Juvenal's account, is truly baffling, however it serves to illuminate how extreme her supposed corruption was. Tacitus also documented the more sordid aspects of Messalina's life, in particular her attempted coup and betrayal of Claudius, that ultimately led to her untimely death. During their marriage, Tacitus informs us, Messalina had been unfaithful to her husband and was having an affair with a man named Silius, who was willing to adopt her son Britannicus and marry her, regardless of this position already being occupied by the emperor. It was whilst Claudius was away in Ostia that this marriage supposedly took place and discussion of coup was had. Once more, Messalina's deceptive nature is highlighted.

The emperor is informed of his wife's betrayal by two concubines, Calpurnia and Cleopatra, however the inherent hypocrisy of this is not apparent as it was not illegal for husbands to find sexual fulfilment beyond the confines of their marriage. Tacitus does not refrain from condemning Messalina's actions, noting how 'honour had no place in that lust-corrupted soul' (Tacitus, *The Annals*. 9. 37). Indeed, to face her husband, Messalina travelled to him across Rome via foot and then a cart loaded with garbage. The message here is clear: the empress had disgraced herself so thoroughly, she was level with waste and was akin to a lowly street-walking *scortum*. Cicero captures this scathing ideology well: 'Is anyone ignorant that in a house of that kind, in which the mother of the family lives according to the customs of a prostitute [...] that in such a house their slaves are slaves no longer?' (Cicero, *Pro Caelio*. 23. 58).

Ultimately, Messalina was put to death. In order to preserve some dignity and honour, suicide was offered as an option, as was customary in Rome. However, she was unable to do so and was thus slain by an attending tribune. Tacitus offers Messalina no sympathy in *The*

*Annals*, and so the horror of her situation is disregarded. Nevertheless, her final moments, if we are to take Tacitus's words as truth, are quite lonely and tragic. Claudius was not present, and he was later informed of her death without mention of whether she was killed by her own hand or another; indeed, he continued to feast at a banquet following the news. Messalina's mother was in attendance at the execution, but it is noted how she had not associated with her daughter in adulthood, and thus her honour was maintained by detachment: 'her mother Lepida, who, estranged from her daughter during her prime, had been conquered to pity in her last necessity, and was now advising her not to await the slayer.' (Tacitus, *The Annals.* 9. 37). For her sexual crimes, adulterous actions and supposed murder plots, the empress of the Roman Empire could not continue to live.

Pliny the Elder describes Messalina in a manner that conflates her with the Eastern goddesses Inanna and Ishtar: she is utterly insatiable. In *The Natural History*, an encyclopaedia on various subjects such as botany, zoology and anthropology, Messalina is mentioned. Her sexuality is used to explain man's inability to be satiated: 'Messalina, the wife of Claudius Caesar, thinking this a palm quite worthy of an empress, selected, for the purpose of deciding the question, one of the most notorious of the women who followed the profession of a hired prostitute; and the empress outdid her, after continuous intercourse, night and day, at the twenty-fifth embrace' (Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*. 10. 83). This competition with a notorious, professional prostitute is yet another example of a male author exaggerating upon Messalina's sex life; the empress was able to outwork a sex worker at her own craft! If anything, attacking a woman's sexuality was an incredibly easy and effective tool to reduce her authority, including even the most elite of state.

Cleopatra VII was yet another figure whose image and memory suffered due to the influence of Roman men. Labelled a *meretrix reginae*, just as Messalina would later be titled, she was a target for much hostility as an Eastern queen ruling a desirable expanse of land. The vitriol aimed at her was partially the result of her being a female ruler, however her sway over two of Rome's most powerful men, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, was certainly a damning occurrence. Indeed, her affair with Caesar resulted in the birth of a legitimate heir, Caesarion, which would have only enhanced her reach of power; with Egypt and Rome under her control, she would have been an utterly formidible ruler. However, Caesarion was never publicly acknowledged as Caesar's biological son, and thus upon his assassination in 44 BCE a period of uncertainty rocked Rome.

Civil wars erupted between Octavian and Mark Antony for several years in the 30s BCE. It would have been counterintuitive for Octavian to wage war against a fellow Roman,

therefore much of the propaganda during this time was actually aimed at Cleopatra, the foreign queen who had corrupted these powerful men with either her beauty or her expert manipulation. Thus, the best course of action to invalidate her social standing was to present her as a hedonistic *meretrix* whom any man could conquer (Strong 2016: 107).

Cleopatra often appeared as the mortal embodiment of the goddesses Isis and Aphrodite, aligning herself with the divinities of sex and fertility. This was used against her favour, with male authors stressing her whoremongering. Indeed, her gender was utilised as a weapon and her status as an Egyptian queen was framed as a danger to Roman identity and liberty. Propertius is scathing in his conception of Cleopatra:

‘Why Cleopatra, who heaped insults on our army, a woman worn out by her own attendants, who demanded the walls of Rome and the Senate bound to her rule, as a reward from her obscene husband? [...] The city, high on its seven hills, that directs the whole Earth, was terrified of a woman’s power and fearful of her threats [...] Celebrate a triumph Rome, and saved by Augustus beg long life for him!’ (Propertius, *The Elegies*. III.11:1-72).

At once Cleopatra is presented as a threat and a ridicule, a true *meretrix regina*. Regardless of this woman’s tyranny upon Rome, Octavian successfully eliminated the menace and reinstated stability with himself as the rightful, humble leader of an emerging Empire. The troublesome, foreign queen was unfortunately not unique to Cleopatra, however the propaganda waged against her was certainly the most damning. For such a powerful, competent figure it is truly unfortunate her reign was infringed upon by the most formidable of Roman men.

In an ironic yet unfortunate turn of fate, Augustus’s legislation was undermined by his own daughter and granddaughter, Julia the Elder and Younger respectively. Suetonius vaguely explains them as ‘guilty of every form of vice’, consequently resulting in their exile from Rome and Augustus’s own admission of ‘Would that I ne'er had wedded and would I had died without offspring’ (Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars. Augustus.* 65. 1-2). So ashamed of Julia’s immoral actions, Augustus supposedly contemplated having her put to death. His fatherly affections for her prevented this sentencing, and yet so tormented was he, Augustus removed himself from society and had the senate informed via a letter of the sorry circumstances. To prevent any further damage to her reputation – and in turn the imperial family – Julia was subject to restrictions and her daily interactions were surveyed:

‘He denied her the use of wine and every form of luxury, and would not allow any man, bond or free, to come near her without his permission, and then not without being informed of his stature, complexion, and even of any marks or scars upon his body. It was not until five years later that he moved her from the island to the mainland and treated her with somewhat less rigour. But he could not by any means be prevailed on to recall her

altogether, and when the Roman people several times interceded for her and urgently pressed their suit, he in open assembly called upon the gods to curse them with like daughters and like wives' (Ibid. 65. 2).

Her popularity among the Roman people is worthy of note, especially as they demanded for her return several times. The crime of adultery was Julia's biggest sin, an act her father deemed one only punishable in women, and yet some argued against this notion. The jurist Ulpian sympathetically commented on the matter of extra-marital affairs, stating 'It is very unjust for a husband to require from a wife a level of morality that he does not himself achieve' (Ulpian. *Digest*, 48. 5. 14.(13). 5, cited from Pomeroy 1975: 159). Regardless, as she was the only legitimate offspring of Augustus, it was her lineage that was needed to produce the next heir, therefore her sexual liaisons could not be tolerated. History has been far kinder to Julia than the later empress Messalina despite their indiscretions being similar. This may be in part due to the constant observation she was subjected to, ensuring her vices did not go unchecked and thus her modesty was not wholly tarnished.

Sexual aggression, even against the most elite of women in Rome, was not uncommon, although it was more frowned upon than if the subjects were lower class women or slaves. Indeed, Mark Antony's wife Fulvia experienced threats of sexual aggression in 42 BCE whilst she was under siege in Perusia, modern day Perugia, with her husband's brother Lucius Antony during the brief Perusine War (41-40 BCE). At this time, the conflict with Octavian was well underway and both Fulvia and Lucius had commandeered control of Rome, until pressure from Octavian had them retreating to Perusia. Ancient authors, such as Appian, claim that she was the primary instigator of this war, as she was angered by her husband's affair with Cleopatra VII and caused this conflict to draw Mark Antony's attention away from the East. Women in positions of power were threatening and intolerable, hence it was pertinent for Octavian to minimise her influence; Martial recorded a crass poem supposedly written by Octavian with Fulvia as the subject matter:

*'Caesaris Augusti lascivos, livide, versus sex lege, qui tristis verba Latina legis: "Quod futuit Glaphyran Antonius, hanc mihi poenam Fulvia constituit, se quoque uti futuam. Fulviam ego ut futuam? Quod si me Manius oret pedicem? faciam? Non puto, si sapiam. 'Aut futue, aut pugnemus' ait. Quid quod mihi vita carior est ipsa mentula? Signa canant!"*

Spiteful censor of the Latin Language, read six insolent verses of Caesar Augustus: *"Because Antony fucks Glaphyra, Fulvia has arranged this punishment for me: that I fuck her too. That I fuck Fulvia? What if Manius begged me to bugger him? Would I? I don't think so, if I were sane. "Either fuck or fight", she says. Doesn't she know my prick is dearer to me than life itself? Let the trumpets blare!"*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Absolvis lepidos nimirum, Auguste, libellos, qui scis Romana simplicitate loqui.* | Augustus, you certainly grant my clever little books pardon,<br>since you are the expert at speaking with Roman frankness' (Martial, *Epigrams. II.* 20). |

'Either fuck or fight', Octavian quotes her; it is unlikely Fulvia was so forthright. Nevertheless, her actions certainly portray her as loyal and relentless. She campaigned on behalf of Mark Antony, despite rumours of his amorous affair in Egypt, travelling with her children to various military camps to ensure the men remained loyal to him. However, it was an easy insult to her character in attacking her virture via sexuality, hence the degrading poem. Indeed, she was subjected to direct threats against her personhood during the Perusine War when lead bullets were launched into the city, some having been found with clear motivations: 'I am going for Fulvia's clitoris' and 'Lucius Antonius, you baldy, and you too, Fulvia, open your asshole' (Beard 2015: 345).

In 40 BCE the two admitted defeat and Fulvia returned to Mark Antony in Greece, almost immediately dying after her arrival. As a prominent political player, she was an incredibly easy target for elite men, and likely one they were eager to eradicate. Cicero was a particularly vocal opponent to her marriage with Mark Antony, against whom she did get vengeance, however she was not so lucky against all other adversaries. Posthumously, she was blamed for the tension between Octavian and Mark Antony: 'It happened, too, that Fulvia, who was sailing to meet him, fell sick and died at Sicyon. There was even more opportunity for a reconciliation with Caesar. For when Antony reached Italy, and Caesar manifestly intended to make no charges against him, and Antony himself was ready to put upon Fulvia the blame for whatever was charged against himself' (Plutarch, *Antony.* 30. 3).

Livia, the third wife of emperor Augustus, was labelled the very essence of evil by male writers such as Tacitus. She is described as 'a feminine bully', as having 'stepmotherly malevolence', and rumours spread of her potential involvement in the death Caesar Augustus (Tacitus, *The Annals*. 1. 34-5). Similar to Fulvia, the anxiety lies in the notion of her manipulating the power of Rome to her own agenda via the men in her life, most notably the height of authority: the emperor. Despite the rumours, Octavian married Livia for attraction and love and their marriage seemed to have been a happy one. In fact, so perfect was she, he bequeathed her power and control over some businesses, and their lack of biological children was not an issue. Evidently, this defied the *Lex Julia* established by Augustus (the necessity to produce children, or the *jus liberorum*; the strenuous access women had to independent

finances). As his beloved, good wife Livia was seemingly exempt to an extent from these laws. Even with the protection offered her as empress of Rome, women of any status were vulnerable to attacks, both the verbal and the palpably threatening, due to their access to power.

The encroachment on women's liberty was simultaneously reduced and increased during Augustus's reign. Divorce was possible, a semblance of autonomy could be granted if *jus liberorum* was attained, and harassment against the *matrona* was punishable by law. This advancement was juxtaposed with strict observation of Roman women's fertility, the expectation that they remain loyal to one man irrespective of whether this was reciprocated, and to uphold a strict standard of virtue and modesty that retained respect for their entire *familia*, and more widely, Rome.

### 3.7 Prostitution in the Roman World

Modesty was not always attainable, however, if one's profession necessitated exposure and sordid acts for pay. Prostitution has been termed the world's oldest occupation, and the continued demand for it even in our modern world accentuates how profitable it would have been in antiquity and in modernity both. Indeed, in the earliest list of occupations to appear in recorded history, circa 2400 BCE, prostitution (or *Kar. Kid*, as it was called in Sumerian) entered the written stage. In Pompeii, excavations are still proving fruitful in sexual artefacts that help to further our understanding of what life was like for ordinary women as well as sex workers at all levels. Prostitution, then, is civilising – as humanity continued to develop in complexity, so too did our commercialisation and profit off of sexuality.

For some Romans, prostitutes were perceived as beneficial to society, providing a service that kept men satisfied and deterred them from corrupting the good women of society. Martial and Juvenal even extended praise to the lowest class of prostitutes for their more 'honest' work. Indeed, so interwoven into society was prostitution, it was actually adultery that was regarded as the more scandalous sexual act by both the Greeks and the Romans. It was only during the Empire's infancy when legislation began to appear, dividing women into different types; the most notable being the good, honest wife versus her direct opposite the trickster, greedy whore.

Under Tiberius, the law that absolved prostitutes from committing adultery was reformed. Husbands who could not control their lustful wives were the victims of invective, and the woman's punishment for this transgression was exile to a remote island. One such

example of this is the case of Vistilia and Titidius Labeo, a married couple who incurred the intervention of the emperor, due to the perceived abuse of this law. Vistilia's extramarital affairs were common knowledge amongst the senatorial class, however her husband, Titidius, refused to annul their marriage. Emperor Tiberius himself accused her of adultery, and in retaliation Vistilia registered as a prostitute, thus reducing the criminality of her actions and firmly placing them within the law. This was the catalyst for Tiberius to alter the legislation and ensure it was thus illegal for elite women to trade in prostitution, or else be permanently removed from the moral Roman world. Vistilia was ultimately spurned from society and exiled to the island of Seriphos, whilst her husband was forced to acknowledge her greedy, villainous proclivities or accept the offence of *lenocinium* (acting as her pimp).

Significantly, he requested an extra two months to decide, and although he eventually agreed with the emperor, his initial reluctance to condemn her actions suggests that he was not as scandalised by his wife's sexual liaisons as was to be expected. Strong proposes that perhaps their intimacy was not the primary factor of their marriage but the dowry that supported it, therefore Vistilia's extramarital affairs were not a concern for Titidius (Strong 2016: 2). This, however, was in direct opposition to the desired Roman marriage of the Augustan age, in which a wife was loyal to her husband and family. Hence, Vistilia, being a woman of standing, had to be made an example of to ensure other well-to-do Romen matrons did not veer down the same selfish path. As she was not the only one to have affairs and desire a man who was not her husband, it seems this legislation was imperative in Roman society. If anything, this was to ensure female sexuality was governed and controlled so the legitimacy of children could not be questioned.

Prostitution in ancient Rome appears rather paradoxical, being deemed a benefit to society so long as it was the right women (and men, of course) who donned the profession. This contradiction deepens further when one considers how meretrices were simultaneously subordinate in status to freeborn and freedwomen, while being economically independent, a position likely unattainable for the good women of Rome. In the early imperial period, statues of prominent, virtuous women were erected with aged faces and bodies that were youthful. This contrast of a *matrona*'s face (which may have been an accurate representation) and a Venus-like body (what would have been more than likely a fantasy) embodies the warring male desire for a virtuous woman and explicit sexual appeal.

Veneria, or Venus, was a name given to prostitutes in favour of their lacking familial name. The intention here was to evoke the nature of the goddess of love, sex and desire in order to attract customers. Indeed, a prostitute's name was often designed to intentionally align with

her profession or hint at a certain skill, such as Fortunata (Lucky) and Iucunda (Pleasant). There were several words used to describe sex workers, including *meretrix* which was the more general term for a prostitute, while *puella* (girl) and *amica* (girlfriend) offered a more discreet indication of employment. In contrast, *scortum* (literally: skin), *lupa* (she-wolf or wolf bitch) and *moecha* (Greek; adulteress) were considerably harsher monikers of a prostitute.

Wives also had a multitude of words used to describe them, however these descriptors were typically positive and indicative of their function in society or value within the family. *Carissima* (dearest), *optima* (the best), *pia* (dutiful) and *bene merens* (well deserving) all denoted the qualities most desirable of a good Roman woman, yet the personal traits of individuals were not often featured. As is evident, the language of wives is starkly different to that of the whore, ensuring the divide between the two types of women are so dissimilar they could not be confused. Even so, the actual identity of these women was disregarded, in favour of traits that would appeal to either men or wider society; in this, the wife and the whore were united.

Nevertheless, it was possible for prostitutes to remove themselves from the occupation. Unlike the Greeks, the Romans employed social mobility and it was taken advantage of to the benefit of those lower down the social hierarchy. It was not unheard of for female slaves to be freed and then married to their former master; certainly, one could suggest that she was simply elevated from one instance of servitude to another, but this does disregard the instances in which romance and love seemed to have been at play. It would have been necessary to remove the prostitute from her profession or release her from servitude as they were *probosae* (unable to marry freeborn men). With the right marriage, the stigma of prostitution could be diminished, however as sexual depravity was a well-endorsed attack against women it was ideal that former prostitutes concealed their past impropriety in order to assimilate properly into their new lives and shrug the taint of their pasts.

### 3.8 The Prostitute Herself

'Brothel-keepers [...] expose to shame the bodies of women and children, taken captive or purchased with money, and exhibit them in filthy booths before the entire city' (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations.* 7.133-9).

Ancient sources prove that people of all ages and genders were prostitutes, from women to men to children, satisfying all customer demands. There were several sources where one

could obtain a potential sex worker, the saddest among them being the rubbish heaps where unwanted babies were abandoned. These children were saved and raised by pimps or madams, and thus condemned to a life in the brothel. At the very least those that were victims of abduction or sale into slavery had the lingering memories of their prior lives. In Apuleius' novel *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius* (or, *The Golden Ass*) a young elite girl, Charite, is abducted by bandits. She attempts to escape several times, and just as the men discuss killing her for the inconvenience, one suggests taking her to the nearest port town and selling her for profit:

> 'But if you cruelly kill the girl, you will have done nothing more than vent your anger without gaining anything in return. Now what I think is this: we should take her to a nearby town and sell her. For such a sweet young thing will bring a pretty price, for sure, especially since I myself have pimps of long acquaintance there – one surely will be able to make a good offer for such a high-born lass. There, she must display herself in a brothel and won't be able to escape like she almost just did now. Seeing her service men in a whorehouse will be sweet revenge for you' (Apuleius, *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius.* 7. 9).

Although Charite's experience takes place within the confines of fiction, archaeology corroborates the fact that many women were displaced and sold into prostitution. In the comedy, the notion of forcing this girl into the sex trade proves fruitful in two regards; one, the sale will provide them with money, as opposed to the burden of a body; two, her humiliation and loss of virtue would be a source of revenge and satisfaction. Luckily for Charite, the man who suggests this is not just another bandit, but her lover, and so her fate is not so bleak. It is prudent to remember that life as a prostitute would not have been easy, and many who went into the profession did so involuntarily. Regardless, it was a lucrative occupation, especially for women who did not have any other means of income, and in Pompeii alone it has been estimated that one in every hundred people was a prostitute (Knapp 2013: 245-6).

In dire circumstances, some parents resorted to selling their children into the trade – there truly was no shortage of supply for prostitutes. A document from Alexandria in Egypt shows how a mother was so impoverished and desperate that she sold her daughter: 'It was for this reason that I gave my daughter to the brothel keeper, so that I should be able to have sustenance' (*BGU* 4. 1024, col. VI/Rowlandson, no. 208, cited from Knapp 2013: 245). Unfortunately for this mother, her child was murdered by a patron, and this document is her request for funding, as her daughter's death has also resulted in her loss of income. Diodemos, the man that murdered the old woman's daughter was a town councillor, and despite his social standing, he was brought to justice and killed for his actions. Even with the knowledge of the unfortunate manner in which she died, the unnamed prostitute is still stigmatised for her work: 'she was available to anyone who wanted her, just like a corpse. For the poverty of the mother's

fortune so overwhelmingly oppressed her that she sold her daughter for a shameful price so that she incurred the notoriety of a prostitute' (Ibid). Even in death, this woman cannot evade the shame of sexual corruption. Nevertheless, the magistrate evidently felt enough compassion for the mother and daughter that he was compelled to convict another elite, Diodemos. Crimes such as murder and rape were illegal in the Roman world, however the law was not necessarily as strictly upheld when it came to slaves and prostitutes, and thus this case is an instance in which some humanity is injected back into those lower down the social hierarchy.

The fourth century BCE Athenian playwright Philemon described in his comedy *The Brothers* how essential brothels were as an outlet for the male youth of the city:

> 'For they say that you, Solon, were first to see
>
> The need for this popular lifesaver, O Zeus!
>
> (It is right and fitting, Solon, that I speak.)
>
> Seeing the city packed full of young men,
>
> Who had certain needs of an urgent kind,
>
> Which led them astray to the wrong places,
>
> You bought women to place round the town,
>
> Equipped to serve the needs of one and all,
>
> And naked without deceit. Take a look!
>
> Come on in! No coy nonsense or resistance,
>
> Just what you want, and the way you want it.
>
> All done? Away with her, she is nothing to you!'
>
> (Philemon, *The Brothers PCG 7.* Fr. 3, cited from Larson 2012: 274-275).

Apuleius and Philemon both touch upon an issue that seemingly haunted Greek and Roman men both: deceit by women. The young, wealthy Charite attempts to evade her captors, and the women in *The Brothers* are displayed naked so as to avoid any trickery. The anxiety here is that, in one way or another, these women will cause them harm; whether financially, emotionally or otherwise it is hard to conclude. Certainly, this is rather peculiar, as Charite is the bandits' abductee, and the prostitutes are merely employed for their services and offer their

patrons no loyalty. Whilst, for example, the men benefit from the brothel it does not dissuade any from condemning the women who are employed there: ‘Away with her, she is nothing to you!’

Indeed, to some the prostitutes and slaves employed by them were utterly disposable. Human remains found with collars still looped around their necks are indicative of the deceased’s status. One such case from the Bulla Regia region of modern-day Tunisia highlights the miserable conditions some women experienced. The skeletal remains of a forty-year-old woman were unearthed in 1908; in death she kept the lead collar that she had worn in life, which read as follows: *Adultera meretrix tene quia fugivi de Bulla R(e)g(ia)* ([I am an] adulterous prostitute. Keep [me] because I have escaped from Bulla Regia) (Merlin 1908: 11).

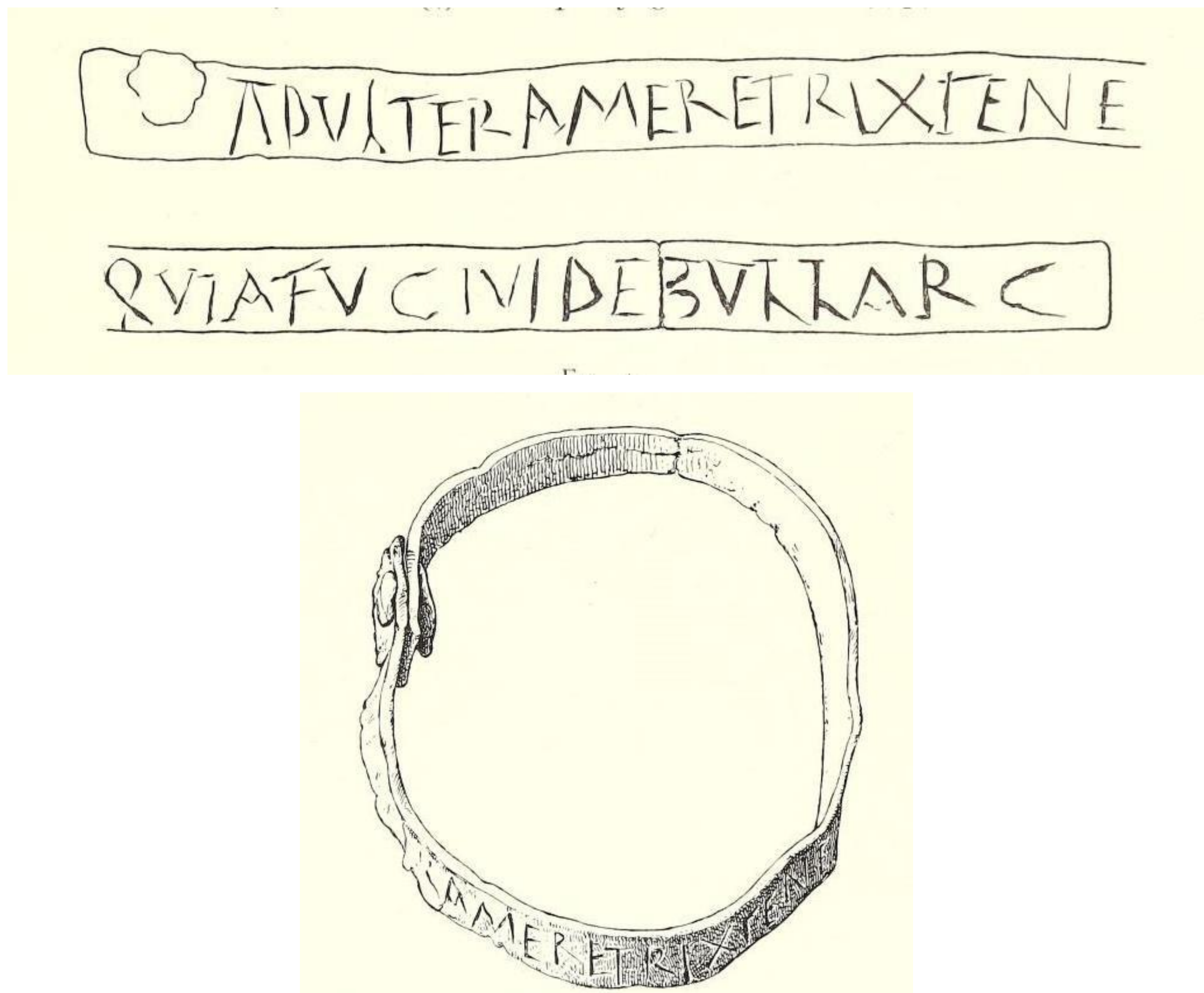


Fig. 8. (Slave collar and inscription. Bulla Regia, Tunisia).

How she came to be buried there, in the public space of the temple of Apollo with a statue of Minerva located nearby, remains a mystery. Perhaps her remains belonged to a different stratigraphic layer and were moved by running water, perhaps they were truly found *in situ*. Ultimately, what can be learnt from this woman's ill fate is that slavery and prostitution could be immortalised. She is now only known to us as a faceless *meretrix* who may have attempted to flee her owners on multiple occasions, and thus received a permanently cruel punishment.

Prostitution was regarded as normal, and as we have seen, a necessity by some male writers. As has been mentioned prior, the emperor Caligula, who was well known for his erratic and unusual countenance, had a brothel placed within the imperial palace, 'not wanting to neglect any source of income' (Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars. Gaius*. 40-1). He employed matrons and freeborn boys into his service and encouraged men of all ages to partake in the pleasure on offer. It is interesting that Suetonius specifically mentions that the sex workers are matrons and young boys, although perhaps the latter is not so curious. However, the matron was typically a respected figure in Roman society, so it seems relatively abnormal and subversive to have them working as prostitutes. On the other hand, this abnormality is perhaps fitting for an emperor recognized for his depraved behaviour, which consequently earned him the most damning of Roman punishments: *damnatio memoriae*.

It was also emperor Caligula who introduced taxation on prostitutes; this seems to have begun on a minimal scale with tax-collectors. However, the profitability became readily apparent and soon centurions and praetorian tributes were sent to collect the taxes instead. The prostitute was expected the pay the usual fee for one act of intercourse. This is certainly evidence enough of how alluring prostitution as a profession could be for those that were experiencing times of financial difficulty.

It is evident that certain prostitutes became renowned for their services, with graffiti acting as a form of free advertisement. In the servants' quarters of the House of Menander in Pompeii, one example reads: 'In Nuceria, near Porta Romana, in the district of Venus, ask for Novellia Primigenia' (Graffito about a woman, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1975: 213). The same prostitute features in a graffito on a tombstone outside of the Porta Nuceria: 'Health to Primigenia of Nuceria. For just one hour I'd like to be the stone of this ring, to give to you who moisten it with your mouth, the kisses I have impressed on it' (Ibid). Unlike the poor meretrix who was killed in Bulla Regia, it seems that women who worked within cities, in brothels, were at an advantage, as they could be offered more protection by their pimp than slaves and prostitutes who worked independently. Indeed, there was little protection for such women, and

it is likely that they fell victim to all manner of crime and abuse. The graffiti from Pompeii highlights how popular sex workers could become notorious; as they lived with *infamia* (the loss of legal and social standing) this notoriety would have furthered their works reach, thus enhancing their profit.

### 3.9 Sympathy for the Prostitute

Although prostitutes suffered *infamia*, were *prosbae*, and were considered tainted by the very nature of their profession, some ancient writers shifted the target of their condemnation. In a similar vein to the deceptive nature of prostitutes (and women more generally), pimps were considered insidious to the goodness of young girls and women. A fragment from fourth century Athens reads: ‘First of all, they care about making money and robbing their neighbours. Everything else has second priority. They string up traps for everyone. Once they start making money they take in new prostitutes who are getting their first start in the profession. They remodel these girls immediately and their manners and looks remain the same no longer’ (*Fr. 103 PCG. G.*, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 209).

So far, the prostitute and the pimp have been blamed for the corruption of the youth, and now too prostitution itself is acknowledged similarly. Girls entering into the occupation were subjected to a metamorphosis so complete that even their height and proportions were altered (artificially of course, using bustle and heightened shoes). The Athenian fragment stresses how these girls were groomed by older, more experienced prostitutes and forced to promote their features that were most appealing. The anonymous writer implies that a checklist of sorts would be consulted, for example if a girl had nice teeth then she was directed to smile frequently; if she lacked in any way it was imperative this be remedied swiftly; if she had a particularly appealing body part then expose it (Ibid).

In Dio Chrysostom *Orations* he insightfully notices the merciless life of the prostitute and how ‘brothel-keepers [...] expose to shame the bodies of women and children, taken captive or purchased with money, and exhibit them in filthy booths before the entire city’ (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations.* 7.133-9). The lack of dignity is staggeringly clear, so much so it is a wonder patrons frequented the brothels due to the dirty dwelling and the miserable circumstances of the prostitutes themselves. Dio Chrysostom presents the prostitute as not merely serving individuals, but the entire city, thus making them a whore for all of Rome.

The Christian emperor Justinian provides the greatest attack on pimps, stating that 'the name and calling of pimp was so odious both to the ancient laws and to those of the Empire that many legal enactments have been published against persons committing offences of this description [...] we have very recently been informed of the evil consequences such traffic has caused in this great city. We are aware that certain people live illicitly, that they find opportunity for themselves for dishonourable wealth by cruel and hateful means' (Justinian, *Novellae*. 14 pr. - 1, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1975: 211-12). Justinian's words imply it is the pimps who are the stain upon society, labelling their living as both cruel and hateful, as opposed to those that are employed by them. Evidently, the term 'employ' is used rather loosely here.

Indeed, Justinian laments how these evil pimps target young girls who were not yet ten years old, ransoming them for marriage. This is presented as an issue of growing corruption that was once on the very peripheries of the Empire, but has infested the city proper and its suburbs. He notes how it is the pimps who profit off prostitution, as opposed to the prostitutes themselves, their shameful income the result of the girls' bodies. Akin to Dio Chrysostom removing the person from their body, Justinian emphasises the nakedness and the lewdness of sex work. In other words, these were not normal people, simply bodies to profit off of. Hence, Justinian stresses the importance of living as chastely as possible, which will in turn profit the soul. Girls were supposedly enticed into the profession with promises of new clothing or shoes, and the emperor stresses that it is forbidden for any woman 'to be led by artifice, fraud, or compulsion to such debauchery; it is permitted to no one to support a prostitute or to prostitute them publicly, and to use the profits for any other business' (Ibid).

This is incredibly interesting, as Justinian is certainly advocating for the protection of girls and women to prevent them from becoming sex workers, however he is simultaneously ensuring women who are already working under such a title are cut off from their primary source of income. This, inherently, would have left them vulnerable and without work, particularly as prostitutes were often not attached to a *familia*. Whilst there was a valuable attempt to stop prostitution being made here, he provides no alternatives for the limited employment on offer to Roman women.

Further, the crime committed by the pimp is the compromising of the women's chastity. If a prostitute is no longer a virgin, then has a crime been committed? Likely, Justinian would agree, as such an occupation was the antithesis of Christian values. So, pimping became punishable by death. Regardless, prostitution and pimps have never truly been eradicated from society, despite interventions made by both religion and the law.

### 3.10 The Corruption of Sacred Spaces

During the Roman Empire, there was no restriction as to where a brothel could exist. Although the *lupanar* in Pompeii is the only confirmed locale exclusively intended for sex work, there were certainly many brothels throughout the Empire. Inns and baths could also cater to clients seeking such entertainment, with waitresses and bathhouse workers available to provide such services. Inn keepers were offered some level of respect, however waitresses were regarded as little more than whores: 'we say that it is not only the woman who openly sells herself in a brothel who earns a living from her body' so, too, if as is usual she does not spare her modesty in an inn or tavern, or other such place' (Ulpian, *Digest.* 23. 2. 43. 1-3. 7-9). At the baths, the senses were also titillated with erotic frescoes lining the walls, and plenty of food and drink on offer. Such an environment would have encouraged bathers to give in to other vices, and one graffito from Pompeii adds weight to this notion: 'Whoever sits here, read this above all: if you want to fuck, look for Attis – you can have her for a denarius' (*CIL*. 4. 1751, cited from Knapp 2013: 252).

Despite there being no single area for sex work or brothels, criticism of their presence still came abound. In his *Little Carthaginian*, Plautus writes cruelly about the whores who congregate around the temple of Venus. The plot revolves around three Carthaginian children who are stolen away to Rome. In adulthood, the two girls (Adelphasium and Anterastylis) are now prostitutes, working out of the temple. The boy (Agorastocles) who was abducted alongside them in their youth was raised in by a wealthy man who bequeathed his wealth unto him after his adopted father's death. Agorastocles falls in love with Adelphasium and intends to remove the women from their circumstances.

Adelphasium comments upon her work in an incredibly harsh manner, as is to be expected of an abductee sold into prostitution:

'**Anterastylis**

Do you ask me? Because our master is waiting for us at the Temple of Venus.

**Adelphasium**

Let him wait, i' faith. Do you stay; there's a crowd just now at the altar. Do you wish yourself to be pushed about among those common prostitutes, the doxies of bakers, the cast-offs of the spelt-bread sellers; wretched creatures, daubed over with grease, followers of poor slaves, who stink for you of their stable and stall, their seats and very

sheds; whom, in fact, not a single freeman has ever touched or taken home *with him,* the twopenny strumpets of dirty trumpery slaves?'

(Plautus, *The Little Carthaginian*. 1).

Adelphasium does not seem to hold neither her sister nor herself to the same standard as the other lowly prostitutes; they appear removed from them both physically and mentally. Even so, she equally acknowledges her status, noting how they are twopenny strumpets (a common insult to sex workers was to mock the low price they accepted for their services) who have never been with a freeman.

It is intriguing that prostitution took place inside palaces – as was rumoured with emperors Caligula, Commodus and Elagabalus – baths, inns, and seemingly even sacred temples. Prostitution permeated throughout the city and provinces, even the gods bore witness. This is certainly a far cry from the punishment certain Greek mythological characters, such as Medusa, received from the deities due to sexual acts occurring in their temples. This, however, was the temple of a goddess renowned for her amorous ways, and it is certainly feasible that pimps would have capitalised off promoting finding a great lover nourished by the presence of Venus.

During the Chrisitan era, the emperor Justinian was rather concerned that prostitution was taking places in sacred spaces, and declared that these girls could not be saved from their lifestyle even by marriage: '...houses of this kind exist in close proximity to holy places and religious establishments, and at the present time this wickedness is so prevalent that any persons who wish to withdraw these unhappy girls from the life that they are leading, and legally marry them, are not permitted to do so' (Justinian, *Novellae*. 14. pr. 1, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1975: 211-12). Although he acknowledges that these girls are there unwillingly, he does not permit them any chance at freedom. Likely, the insult to his religion furthered his resolve to prolong their suffering.

### 3.11 The 'Good' Whore

As paradoxical as it may appear, not all of Rome's prostitutes were regarded so negatively. From the ancient sources consulted thus far, two of the main concerns men had with prostitutes were their supposed proclivity for deception and their financial autonomy. One funerary inscription meets, yet also subverts, these issues completely:

‘Vibia Chresta erected this monument for herself and her family and for Caius Rustius Thalassus, son of Gaius, her son, and Vibia Calybenis, freedwoman of Gaia, a madam who earned her own money without cheating others’ (*CIL* IX, 2029, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 212-3).

As stated above, Vibia Chresta had this funerary monument erected for her family, including Vibia Calybenis, a *lena* or madam, who made her money *sine fraude* meaning she earned her living ethically. The focus is not on the implied sexual nature of her occupation, but the economic independence it gave her, which was typically regarded negatively in women but here is a positive quality. As Strong gleans from this inscription, one garned more respect in managing prostitutes than profiting from one’s own body (Strong 2016: 42). Indeed, Artemidorus corroborates this notion, as he believed that ‘a woman eating her own flesh means she will become a whore, and thus be fed from her own body’ (Artemidorus, *Dreams*. 3. 23). To be a whore is thus to be a cannibal, but to pimp one is to profit from this cannibalisation; ultimately, one was better than the other.

It is significant that Vibia Calybenis was included in this family monument, regardless of her title. This positive image of a women who has worked in the sex industry was likely due to the fact it was a woman who commissioned it! Whilst male authors wrote about prostitutes who ascended beyond the lowly stigma of their marring profession, these examples are somewhat tarnished by the men's fetishisation or condemnation of these same women.

As has been discussed, Roman women were divided into two opposing categories: either they were the good, repectable matron or the wicked, untrustworthy whore. However, these archetypes have already been complicated by the elite women who were expected to be *bene merens*, but did not fulfil their role as good wives. The antithesis to this bad wife can only be the good whore, and should she portray a virtuous, generous and selfless countenance then she was able to transcend her low status and become a wife-like figure in society. These *bonae meretrices* captured the appealing sexual experience of the prostitute, as opposed to the sexual repression of wives:

‘When the sensations named for Aphrodite are mounting to their peak, a woman goes frantic with pleasure; she kisses with mouth wide open and thrashes about like a mad woman. Tongues all the while overlap and caress, their touch like passionate kisses within kisses... when a woman reaches the very goal of Aphrodite’s actions, she instinctively gasps with that burning delight, and her gasp rises quickly to the lips with the love breath, and there it meets a lost kiss...’ (Knapp 2013: 257).

And to some they were even regarded as a sign of good luck, such as Artemidorus who states:

‘Thus in dream symbolism the prostitutes have nothing at all in common with the brothel itself. For the former portend positive things, the latter the opposite. To see in a dream street whores plying their trade profits a man. The same goes for prostitutes waiting for business in a brothel, selling something and receiving goods and being on view and having sex’ (Artemidorus, *Dreams*. 1. 78. 4-9).

Significantly, these good whores were absolved of any negative consequences to their reputation specifically because of their moral upholding of society’s values. In supporting Roman social order and appraising the *familia*, the prostitute does not pose a threat. Some male authors of romance and comedy absolve the women of their shameful work by emphasising the manner in which they became sex workers – via kidnapping or being found as abandoned children – and how they have somehow maintained their chastity (or refrained from sexual activity as much as was possible, profession permitting). The convenience of these circumstances was ideal for authors as it allowed the male heroes to be close to these heroines without irreparably ruining her honour.

Indeed, it was the *bonae meretrices* loyalty to her lover or family and her respect for hierarchy and societal structures that elevated her above other prostitutes. It is in her upholding of Roman values that she herself receives value in turn. In the texts that feature good whores, it is often she that rights the wrongs occurring within the story, whether she is encouraging a husband to return home to his wife or preventing a man from suffering an ill-fated end.

In his *History of Rome*, Livy captures this paradoxical figure in Hispala Faecenia, a witness who aids the state in banning the Bacchanalian mysteries in 189 BCE. It is somewhat unclear whether this event was based more on fact or fiction; evidence from Calabria, of the same year, seems to corroborate this outlawing of the rites, although Hispala and other characters featured in Livy’s work do not appear in the text. The cult was rumoured to involve the drinking of wine, mingling of the sexes, and even murder, thus making it a threat to the security of Rome.

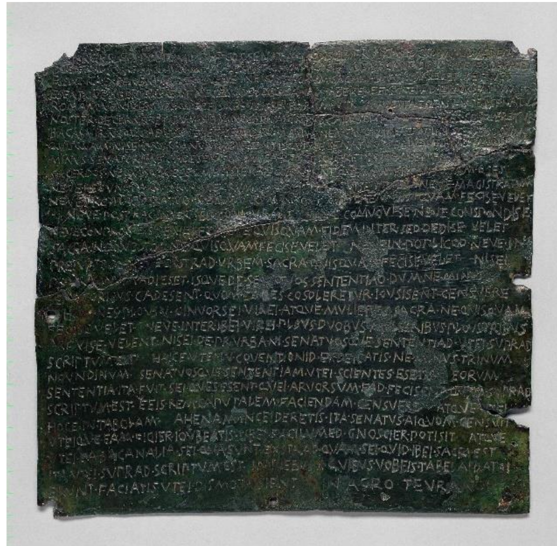

Fig. 9. (Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus. Bronze tablet, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Antikensammlung, museum number: III 168).[1]

Hispala was witness to a conspiracy involving the initiation into the Bacchic mysteries and potential murder of her lover, Publius Aebutius, at the hands of his mother and stepfather. The role of women in this text is unusual as not only are the typical roles of male and female characters reversed, but so too are the women's statuses: Hispala acts as Aebutius's protector, and the respected matrona and her husband are the antagonists of this scenario.

In Livy's account, he introduces Hispala as a 'scortum nobile libertina', a noble freedwoman who was once the lowest of prostitutes – a *scortum*, or a streetwalker. Hence, it is incredibly significant that she features centrally in the political proceedings. In the same sentence, he also identifies her as worthier than her trade and someone who had been trained whilst still a child, thus absolving her of an active role in entering the world of prostitution. It was during her previous employment that Hispala became privy to the dubious and concerning aspects of the Bacchanalian mysteries, and was ultimately compelled to dissuade Aebutius from initiating.

For her role in exposing the excess of the Bacchanalian rites, and consequently aiding in its suppression, Hispala was rewarded aplenty, particularly for a woman of her station. Indeed, she was elevated from her lowly position in the social hierarchy to that of a freeborn woman's equal. Most striking in the Senate's judgement was permitting Hispala to marry a

[1] Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus, museum number: III 168.
This bronze tablet from 186 BCE is the oldest senatorial decree. Concerns about the Bacchic cult had been growing, due to its popularity and supposed promotion of ecstatic excess, although much of this was rumour due to the fact this was a mystery cult, and thus the uninitiated were not privy to details. Hence, Hispala's testimony would have been prudent. This decree greatly restricted the cult, ensuring the Senate was involved and their approval required.

freeborn man; this is incredibly significant due to the fact prostitutes were *prosbae*, and therefore it was illegal for such a union to take place. Nevertheless, she is exempt for her moral actions, and ultimately was afforded the opportunity to marry her lover Aebutius, with both receiving legal protection and support from the Senate; Livy was not so bold to end his account with their wedding. A pseudo-freeborn woman she may have become, but Hispala could not evade the conventions of the time, and Livy reminds us that though she was noble, Hispala was still once a *scortum*, a woman who was *famosa* and condemned with *infamia*. The dichotomy of her good and bad qualities is striking, however her support (emotional and financial) of one man and evident moral virtue align her with the chaste and wise *matrona*.

> 'Hispala Faecenia should have the rights of bestowing and alienating property, of marriage outside her *gens,* and choice of a *tutor* just as if her husband had given it to her by his will; that she should be permitted to marry a man of free birth, nor should any fraud or disgrace on this account attach to a man who should have married her; that the consuls and praetors who were at this time in office and those who should follow them should have a care that no injury should be done to this woman and that she should be secure. The senate, they were to say, wished and judged it proper that this should be done' (Livy, *History of Rome.* 39. 19).

In his *Controversiae*, Seneca the Elder postulated about the ethics on adopting a child that was biologically his but was disinherited and whose mother was a prostitute. Seneca's response is rather psychoanalytic, in that he defends the raising of the child should its mother be an upstanding, matron-like figure. This hypothetical man should observe how moral she is; in turn the child will exhibit such behaviour. In this imaginary situation, the prostitute-mother is attending to her ailing lover, devoting herself to him alone:

> 'What a woman I saw! She was herself attending to all that needed to be done; attentive at the sick man's bedside she ran to do every service, her hair not merely dishevelled but torn out. Where then, I said, is the prostitute?' (Seneca, *Controversiae*. 2. 4. 1. 4).

This woman adopts several roles, dedicating her life and health (the evident stress is causing her hair loss) to the man, becoming a nurse, a servant, and a wife. Nevertheless, her arduous labour for this man is recognised and appraised by Seneca, likely as it aligns with conventional mores of Roman society: women were subservient to the man in their lives and in the greater community, providing for their family and husband in the home and producing legitimate offspring. Seneca's prostitute is so good, he too questions whether prostitution could truly be her profession. Her loyalty to the sick man is like a wife to a husband, her emotional distress evident and far beyond that of whore and client. Through her respectable behaviour, she is elevated just as Hispala was, from merely being a sex worker to that of the loyal and hardworking *matrona*.

To conclude, prostitution was simultaneously an easy yet unpleasant profession to join. On the one hand, it was easy work that was not dependent on any form of education or restrictive to one gender; profit was achievable for all who entered the trade. A certain percentage of that income may have taken by the *leno* or *lena*, but regardless women could earn a decent wage independent of a man and even go on to purchase their own freedom. On the other hand, the threat to their health and wellbeing (although certain modern diseases were not present in antiquity, clients could still harm these vulnerable women, particularly if the prostitute was an independent *scortum* who was not attached to the relative safety of a brothel. Gynaecological issues could also impact a prostitute's professional and private life, potentially imparing her ability to work; contraceptives may have exacerbated this issue, despite the beneficial effect it would have against pregnancy.

There were alternative options for the prostitute. She may have been able to earn her freedom; or, as occurs in *The Wolf Den* fictional series, women could gain the affections of well-to-do men and advance via their financial support. Just as Hispala was emancipated from her life as a *scortum* and given a fresh start in life, prostitutes could leave the profession. Some, however, remained even after they had gained their freedom; perhaps the idiom 'better the devil you know' rang true for some women in antiquity. Would they have been kinder to the prostitutes in their care once they transitioned from *meretrix* to *lena*? It is uncertain, however, their financial success and honest ways were celebrated in epitaphs, as has been observed in the case of Vibia Calybenis.

Prostitution was regarded as a societal necessity, as well as a stain on a prostitute's reputation; a tricky paradox that was difficult to balance for women. When the elite became too like a prostitute the salacious rumours were enough to ruin a woman's character. Messalina may have attempted a coup against her husband, but it is the stories of her moonlighting as a prostitute that survive. Emperor Caligula could establish a brothel within the palace itself, yet it is his uncle's wife who suffers the criticism. Issues of sexism, classism and stereotypes collide when exploring Roman prostitution. We shall further complicate the matter in Chapter Three, which will focus on the relationship between prostitution and religion to question whether cultic activity afforded sex workers any form of liberation, from both their literal work as well as the stigma of the profession.

# 4. Chapter Three: Prostitution and Religion

## 4.1 Introducing Roman Religion and Women

'Well known to all are the mysteries of the Good Goddess, when the flute stirs the loins and the Maenads of Priapus sweep along, frenzied alike by the horn-blowing and the wine, whirling their locks and howling' (Juvenal, *The Satires.* 6. 314-18. 109).

Religion in Rome could be both a duty and a joy. Culturally, it came twofold: there were the cults of the native deities that were supported by the state, and then there were those that were imported and adopted into Roman society. The latter were largely Oriental, with one of the most popular being the Egyptian goddess of love, Isis. Following the Orientalising period in the eighth century BCE, when Southern Italy began to be colonised by the Greeks, the Italian peninsula was introduced to a plethora of foreign deities. From Republic to Empire, the ancient Italic people became adept at absorbing foreign lands and thus foreign cultures. Unlike Greek societies, Rome was not so haughty and accepted influence from the various civilisations under their rule as opposed to condemning them, which certainly aided in their expansionism and success at cultivating power.

Some cults were certainly more enjoyable than others. The Bacchic mysteries, for example, provided space for all manner of people, elite or plebian, male or female, to revel and be jubilant. Although, as has been discussed in Chapter Two, this cult came to be heavily restricted and criticised for its indecency, and men's involvement saw a stark decrease. While some cults offered worshippers a pleasant experience, others were more so observed in order

to prevent any ill favour with the gods, and it was not uncommon for unusual practises to be involved, such as the abstinence from specific foods or sex (Pomeroy 1975: 206). Restriction and moderation seemed to be key in these specific religious environments.

Involvement in cultic practise was yet another way in which Romans could define their place in society. This was especially true for women. While they were indeed afforded their own sacred spaces secluded from men, the exclusive nature lent itself to paranoia and thus absurd tales were created by the male population. Regarding the cult of the mother goddess, Bona Dea, Juvenal wrote the following:

> 'Well known to all are the mysteries of the Good Goddess, when the flute stirs the loins and the Maenads of Priapus sweep along, frenzied alike by the horn-blowing and the wine, whirling their locks and howling. What foul longings burn within their breasts! What cries they utter as the passion palpitates within! How drenched their limbs in torrents of old wine! Saufeia challenges the slave-girls to a contest. Her agility wins the prize' (Juvenal, *The Satires*. 6. 314-22. 109).

The vulgarity of Juvenal's words hark back to the earlier discussion on the real-life impact literature and rumour could have on women, as was the case with empress Messalina, who it was claimed moonlighted as a common whore at a brothel, competing with other *scortum* until she was the victor. It seemed the heady combination of cultic secrecy, alcohol and music drove women to abandon their virtue; such was the fear of the Roman state and its men. The absurd competition between professional prostitutes and respectable women, and the culmination of the matrons winning, seemed a favoured insult against upper class women; if virtue was the most prized quality of a woman then attacking her sexuality was a quick and efficient way to minimise her status. As legislation and socio-cultural boundaries attempted to divide the good and bad women of Rome, it was incredibly obscene for Juvenal to write about them mingling and even more so in such a sexually transgressive context.

This division extended into religious settings, furthering the gap between the elite and the plebians. The cult of Mater Matuta (the good mother) was a prime example of this, as its members were only comprised of respectable *matronae*. In one rite, a slave woman would be brought into the temple and then violently removed, the matrons physically abusing her in the name of the good mother of Rome (Strong 2016: 193). Evidently, one could interpret this interaction as the matrons physically and metaphorically emphasising that the slave woman was impure, utterly subordinate, and thus could not even be present in the sacred space. In essence, the good matrons were superior to any other women, particularly during the Matralia.

Indeed, this religious superiority can be seen in the Vestal Virgins, a sect of six girls and women who worshipped the goddess Vesta and served the city of Rome. Although they

were women, their role in society was sacrosanct. Just as the lowly prostitute was a public figure, so too were the Vestals. Although their purposes were vastly different, there are some interesting parallels that can be drawn between them. They were women who had a function in society, and also women who could be punished should their indiscretions obstruct the perception others had of them, and more importantly, the goddess Vesta herself.

## 4.2 The Vestal Virgins

Who, then, were these virgins who served the goddess of the hearth and home? Selected at a young age, the Vestals were employed for a majority of their lives, leaving after thirty years of service. Their main duty was to tend the eternal flame in the temple of Vesta in Rome; the survival of this flame was paramount. Indeed, it would have been a grave matter, and was punishable by scourging, should it ever die. This is because the flame represented the continuity of the family and community. Thus, the Vestal Virgins symbolically and perhaps literally ensured the safety and future of Rome.

Pomeroy suggests that it was necessary for these priestesses to remain virgins during their service specifically because a virgin belongs to no one man, but the entire populace (Pomeroy 1975: 210). Hence her influence could be felt by all. Just as the prostitute was accessible to any paying customer, the Vestal was representative of Rome, and thus belonged to all Romans. After their thirty years in the collective had passed, these women were given dowries and allowed to marry, although not many of them did, likely as they were acclimated to a life of chastity and relative independence. Similarly, many emancipated prostitutes did not completely leave the sex industry, continuing to work as an independent prositute or *lena.* Again, this would have been consequent to their livelihood, identity and socialisation being tethered to prostitution, thus making it all they had ever known.

The cult of Vesta was established early on in Rome's long history, and Plutarch attributes its origin to the pious second king Numa Pompilius (715-673 BCE). The names of the first four Vestals survives, listed in chronological order of selection: Gegania, Verenia, Canuelia and Tarpeia (Plutarch, *Life of Numa Pompilius*. 9.5-10.7, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 288-9). Later, a final two were added to bring the number up to an even six. Plutarch informs us that these women enjoyed certain benefits that were not accessible to others, for example their

ability to write a will and live their lives *sui iuris*, or without a tutor. Numa Pompilius granted them various honours, some that elevated them to the same status as elite men:

'When they go out they are preceded by lictors with fasces, and if they accidentally happen to meet a criminal being led to execution, his life is spared' (Ibid: 289).

Evidently, they were regarded as piously elevated above the rest of society, their presence enough to spare convicted criminals. So, too, could one become a criminal if one was to wander beneath a Vestal's litter; such individuals faced capital punishment as a consequence. Whilst their status could be viewed as a blessing, these women were held to an incredibly high standard, and if they were to fail in any way then their punishment was unavoidable. For a minor offence then a Vestal was stripped nude and beaten, which was meted out by the Pontifex in a secluded, dark place. The only solace for the offender was that a curtain was placed between them, suggesting there was effort made to protect her dignity. The nudity seems intended to humiliate these virginal women; it was likely they would never experience such intimacy with a man, so the threat of this particular punishment must have been deterrent enough to not make mistakes. As Vestal Virgins were regarded differently than any other women in Roman society, even the very elite, this nude beating is perhaps one of the few instances in which they would be reminded of their sex; they were perhaps equal to men, but this equality was ultimately conditional.

Worse still was the penalty for the loss of virginity. Plutarch only mentions the seduction of a Vestal, which implies consensual intercourse between partners, however rape was treated in exactly the same manner: the Vestal was buried alive.

'Near what is known as the Colline gate [...] they prepare a small room, with an entrance from above. In it there is a bed with a cover, a lighted lamp, and some of the basic necessities of life, such as bread, water in a bucket, milk, oil, because they consider it impious to allow a body that is consecrated to the most holy rites to die of starvation' (Ibid: 289).

Interestingly, the city and its populace do not approve of this judgement, and the sight of a Vestal being carried in a confined litter to her burial room is described as *terrifying*. This may have been because they were regarded so highly, and therefore witnessing these revered virginal priestesses being so severely punished highlighted how fragile one's value was to the imperial power that was Rome. Moreover, the people may have felt some type of affection for these women and what they stood for (Rome, community, the family), and thus were emotionally affected by this public display of her litter being carried towards the Colline gate, and subsequent punishment which would knowingly result in death.

Before a young girl became a Vestal, how was she selected to join the small college? Daughters of elite families were gathered, and their names were drawn by a lot in the presence of the Pontifex Maximus. Once a girl had been chosen as the newest recruit, she was addressed as Amata and formally removed from her family and *patria potestas* (under the power of the father). She was then taken to the temple and when she had passed through the *atrium*, she officially became a priestess of the goddess Vesta and was under her protection. Some scholars have noted how this ceremony, particularly the naming of the girl as Amata (meaning beloved), resembles that of the Roman marriage. The removal of her from her *familia* by the high priest was akin to the capture or abduction of a bride (this process itself was literally called *captio*: capture), and the role male priests had in disciplining the Vestals – indeed, he may be the only man to ever view her nude in her life – draws parallels between that of husband and wife (Beard 1980: 13).

One element of this selection process that remained much the same throughout the history of Rome was that these elected girls were all of elite backgrounds. This created issues with population and succession, as if these upper-class girls were chosen to become Vestals, they could not marry and procreate until their late thirties or early forties, potentially causing the eradication of certain family lines. Hence, some parents attempted to prevent their daughters from entering the practice. Another reason that dissuaded families from wanting their daughters to become Vestal Virgins were the strict parameters these women had to live by, and the deadly punishments meted out to them.

As stated, they dedicated the majority of their lives to serving the goddess Vesta and the people of Rome. Indeed, throughout a Vestals service she would spend one decade learning all of her duties, the next performing them, and then finally she was to spend the last ten years educating the younger Vestals who were just entering the cult. The life cycle of these priestesses was thus student, practitioner and teacher.

Religion was paramount to the new Rome Augustus was building, and there is an argument to be made that in establishing the imperial cult an era of imperial peace coincided with it as well. His humble nature, as is presented by ancient bibliographers, places him on par with his peers. This is evident in his treatment of priests and the Vestal Virgins, more specifically his empathy regarding the selection of these priestesses. Suetonius notes how he addressed the issue openly:

> 'He increased the numbers and the dignities, and likewise the privileges of the priests, and especially of the Vestal Virgins. Once, when a Virgin died and had to be replaced and many parents tried to keep their daughters from being picked by the lot, he swore that if one of his granddaughters had been of the right age, he would have

offered her' (Suetonius. *Lives of the Twelve Caesars. Augustus*. 31. 4. L, cited from Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 291).

The Vestal Virgins were incredibly unique members of Roman society. From its earliest days when Rome was ruled by kings, the priestesses were integral to the eternal city's symbolic survival, and it was not until the beginning of the Christian era, when paganism was eventually abolished, that the Vestals saw the end of their service. It was emperor Theodosius who fully eradicated pagan practices in 391 CE, extinguishing the eternal flame in the temple of Vesta and disassembling the Vestals. Up until the persecution of paganism in the fourth century CE, these women were revered, yet had to live within strict parameters, they were symbolic of Rome and its legacy, yet wholly accountable should its safety be compromised. In the end, the Vestal Virgins were one of the most notable cultic figures of the state, both irrespective of their gender and simultaneously because of it, as they were pious women who upheld a perfect image of chastity and religious devotion to a goddess.

### 4.3 The Vestal and the Prostitute

To compare a virginal priestess and a literal whore who provides sex for money and other goods certainly seems the perfect oxymoron. However, these two figures did not live as separately as may seem upon first inspection. The lives that they led forced them to be public women and, in a sense, accessible to all. It would therefore be compelling to discuss the pious religious Vestals and their connection to prostitutes before any discussion of the relationship between prostitution and religion takes place.

Evidently, as perpetual chastity was vital to the role of being a Vestal, no similarity can be drawn here, unless we ponder on the semi-mythical virginal prostitute from the writings of male authors. It is the open way in which they lived that most united them; the Vestals were a figurehead of Rome, girls and women who were selected for the role without much consent or choice in the matter. Similarly, some prostitutes were unwillingly thrust into the profession, or sought it out due to dire circumstances, in order to provide for themselves and their family. The very nature of their occupations emancipated them from the supervision of a tutor, and the necessity to be supported by a *pater familias* or male relative was not strictly regulated by the state. However, whilst a Vestal was a *personae sui iuris*, who legally gained this exclusive right, the prostitute was in effect left unprotected to fend for herself, as ties to a family or tutor were usually severed one way or another upon becoming a sex worker. In essence, they existed

beyond what was typical for the Romans, even if one was revered and the other a subordinate class of women.

Their manner of dress emphasised their difference and was a subversion of their role in society. Good Roman women were expected to wear the *stola*, sometimes accompanied with the *palla*. For the Vestal Virgins, due to the nature of their occupation, it is hardly surprising to note that their chastity was broadcasted via clothing; somewhat unexpectedly, the modest costume of the Vestal aligned her with the wedded *matrona*. Beard notes the strange attire, which has been conflictingly deemed as either matronly or, quite unexpectedly, that of a bride by historians (Beard 1980: 13). The veil worn was not red, but white, yet the prefered hairstyle of these priestesses was the same as a woman on the day of her wedding. This unusual combination of virginal and matronly presentation suggests that the Vestals existed constantly on the brink between girlhood and womanhood, ensuring they maintained their unpolluted innocence whilst also presenting as the ideal Roman woman: the wise and virtuous *matrona*.

If we are to assume that prostitutes did indeed wear saffron coloured togas, then they certainly would have been identifiable, likely as a means to either unabashedly advertise their trade or to further stigmatise them. Simultaneous to this visual self-promotion, in donning the toga the prostitutes were adopting a style more frequently used by men. This somewhat blurred the line between genders, giving the prostitute male and female qualities. Moreover, her status as financially independent of a *pater familias* meant she was in control of the primary way in which she could be liberated from sexual servitude: money. As the prostitute existed on the peripheries of society (regarding status and identity politics, otherwise sex workers were quite prominent), it was possible for them to transcend the restrictive gendered expectations for women.

So too did this gendered ambiguity exist among the Vestal Virgins. As stated, the priestesses could make decisions without the influence of a male tutor; they were able to write wills and gift property (to other women no less, which was something even freedwomen struggled to do). Intriguingly, the Vestals were also allowed to serve as lictors, a right with specifically male associations, and 'it was only men who enjoyed such a privilege and so a lictor would tend to invest the virgins with elements of a masculine status. It seems that Vestals also had certain rights connected with giving evidence in court that were generally associated with men only' (Ibid: 17). Plutarch does inform us that the Vestal Virgins were regarded as *testabili*, meaning that they alone among womenkind could give evidence in trial. The propensity of female feeblemindedness is flipped on its head if we recall the case of Livy's

Hispala Faecenia, a former *scortum* who gave evidence against the Bacchanalian mysteries in 189 BCE, culminating in the grand receival of great honours and the generous elevation of her social standing.

As Beard notes in her article on the sexual status of the Vestal Virgins, the college of women constantly existed on the brink of various categories. They were at once the virgin, the bride and the *matrona*, and were representatives of a goddess that embodied both virginity and motherhood; she was formally referred to as *Vesta Mater*. The goddess was often associated with the sterility of the flame, hence the eternal fire in her temple at Rome, and yet also had ties to the ass, an animal humorously connected to overt sexuality. The juxtaposition of virginal and motherly (ergo, is fertile and has offspring) is not confounding when consulting mythological figures such as Vesta, however when put into the context of real-life virginal priestesses it forces one to question the virginal nature of the Vestals. Certainly, the Vestals were expected to remain chaste, but did that truly mean they remained sexually 'pure' throughout their service? Scholars have argued both sides of the issue, however it seems clear that maintaining virginity was imperative, whether symbolically or literally, upon consequence of death. If, however, the sexual behaviour of the Vestals was not strictly monitored, then it would result in a primary barrier between them and ordinary female sex workers becoming redundant.

Indeed, the Vestal Virgins were not entirely removed from male sexual symbols. The eternal flame was seen as an inherently male, phallic symbol, and should it ever extinguish then a Vestals virginity was regarded with swift suspicion. Their sexuality was thus intrinsically tied to this emblem of male fertility and eroticism.

> 'The former aspect is stressed, for example, by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who refers to the flame as 'incorrupt' and 'the purest of divine things'; the latter, strictly incompatible, side is attested in Varro, who states explicitly, '*mas ignis, quod ibi semen*', and in several myths concerning the conception and birth of early Roman heroes. Servius Tullius and, in some variants, Romulus' owed their parentage to a phallos that came out of the hearth, and the mother of Caeculus was directly impregnated by sparks of flame [...] a virgin should be made to have intercourse with the object and from her a most illustrious son would be born' (Beard 1980: 24).

In the myth of Romulus, the specific mention of requiring a virgin to have intercourse with this hearth-born phallus is telling, and ultimately connected to the Vestal Virgins. This also correlates the priestesses to the very origins of Rome itself, as shall be explored in the next section.

An unusual yet reoccurring feature in mythology includes the prostitute and an element of civilising religiousness. The legendary founders of Rome were suckled by the she-wolf, a figure who some have suggested is an animalistic representation of a *meretrix*, and thus we can infer that Romulus and Remus, the prophesised sons who were to found Rome, were weened by a whore. According to the Roman foundational myth, the two boys were conceived by a Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, and the god of war, Mars, and subsequently raised by the prostitute Acca Larentia, which significantly suggests that they were of divine origins, whilst simultaneously inheriting a wildness from the *lupa*, the she-wolf prostitute. This inclusion of a woman of such lowly status in prominent literature of ancient civilisations appears in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Upon the discovery of the wild man, Enkidu, a prostitute is used to entice him inside the walls of Uruk. According to ancient sources, it was in the Ancient Near East that sacred prostitution was practiced, with Herodotus claiming that all women and girls were to partake in the sacred act in Babylon, thus making every female resident a temporary prostitute in the name of a deity. In the following section, this topic will be explored further in an attempt to understand why sex workers were included, or permanently written into, the foundational history of ancient cultures.

### 4.4 Origin Stories of Civilisations and Their Whores

Foundational stories of a civilisation can encapsulate its culture and values succinctly, presenting them as stemming from the very beginning of its formulation. Looking to Rome, what, then, is willingly presented in the story of a virgin and a prostitute both acting as mother to its legendary founders? In this section, this question will be addressed, as it is rather unusual for such characters to mingle, let alone jointly raise children. It should be noted, however, that the two were not cohabiting parents, but rather one the biological mother (the Vestal Virgin), and the other a foster mother who nurtured and weened them (the she-wolf prostitute). In ensuring the children's survival, the she-wolf aids in their return to society, prompting the image of the civilising prostitute whilst removing the polluting sexual aspects of her profession. It was not her that birthed the two boys, and yet she still miraculously becomes a mother, just as the virginal priestess miraculously conceives.

It may seem scandalous, even by Roman standards, to involve prostitutes in a civilisation's origins, in particular with the conception and raising of Romulus and Remus, as

whores were largely stereotyped as infertile. However, the inclusion of such women is not unique to Roman legend. Indeed, further East the figure of the prostitute was invovled in the taming of wildness in favour of civilisation and moral behaviour. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the character Enkidu was a wild man who was discovered by a hunter whilst he was drinking at a watering hole. Enkidu is notable for his proclivity for living among animals, as opposed to humans, and for how hairy he was, thus aligning him with beasts more than his fellow man. Designed to be an equal to the hero Gilgamesh, Enkidu's very existence is predicated on his eventual meeting with the king of Uruk. Indeed, the wild man was intentionally created by Aruru, the goddess of creation, to challenge Gilgamesh as he had become too powerful, acting as both ruler of a city and an uncontrollable, amoral tyrant who tormented his own subjects.

Enkidu is shockingly feral, and tablets one and two of the poem detail his emergence from the natural world and entry into human society. How was this wild man civilised? A prostitute, Shamhat, is employed to spend several days with him, during which time they fornicate, and she offers him a piece of her clothing to hide his nudity, ergo slowly removing his animalistic mannerisms. This harlot seemingly has a reputation, as her name is immediately suggested by the hunter's father and Gilgamesh, when devising a plan to lure Enkidu into civilisation. In the text it is acknowledged that it is her body which will be the antidote that removes his animalistic characteristics, no other solution is suggested. Therefore, Shamhat – and perhaps female sexuality in general – is presented as a civilising force specifically because she is a woman and one who is adept at sexual services. She is aware of the influence she has on Enkidu, purposefully questioning his previous behaviour and encouraging him to join her in returning to Uruk, educating him on the city's gods and its ruler, Gilgamesh.

'He returned and sat down at the woman's feet, and listened intently to what she said.

You are wise, Enkidu, and now you have become like a god. Why do you want to run wild with the beasts in the hillside? Come with me. I will take you to strong-walled Uruk, to the blessed temple of Ishtar and of Anu, of love and of heaven: there Gilgamesh lives, who is very strong, and like a wild bull he lords it over men' (*The Epic of Gilgamesh.* 1. 5).

As has been discussed in Chapter One, one of the primary deities who presided over the city of Uruk was Ishtar, the goddess of love, sex and war. Prostitutes of ancient Sumer were called *ishtaritum*, or Ishtar's harlots, establishing a direct correlation between sex work (sacred or otherwise) and the goddess. Although it is not addressed in the poem, Shamhat mentions the goddess several times and is clearly stated to be a prostitute. One can certainly infer that, due to how well known her name is and the quick conclusion that it will be *her* that civilises Enkidu,

Shamhat is a sacred prostitute employed to work at Ishtar's temple in Uruk. While there may be no conclusive evidence, there is suggestion that she holds a form of influence in the city, and due to her success with Enkidu it seems that at the very least this can be confirmed. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that Shamhat was employed as a sacred prostitute in Uruk. The connection between whores and the divine is quite apparent in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, highlighting how such women could be prominent figures in society, known for both their profession as well as, in the case of Shamhat, their capacity to civilise.

Moving away from the Ancient Near East and back to Rome, it seems one cannot think of the city without conjuring the image of the she-wolf suckling the two young boys, Romulus and Remus. According to ancient sources, the twins were born by Rhea Silvia and the god of war Mars. Akin to Mary's miraculous conception in Christian theology, Rhea Silvia was a Vestal Virgin, and therefore should not have become a mother by virtue of her occupation. However, divine intervention resulted in the legendary young boys being born, and later Romulus alone would go on to found Rome. Their beginnings were rather unconventional, as not only were they born by divine right, but they were raised by neither Rhea Silvia nor Mars, but a she-wolf. Although some have accepted this quite literally, as is evidenced by the multitude of statues and artwork depicting the youths with their animal mother, other sources present the she-wolf as being a more metaphorical depiction of their second mother. Indeed, some sources claim this *lupa* was in actuality a prostitute by the name of Acca Larentia, who raised the children to adulthood with her husband Faustulus.

> 'The story persists that when the floating basket in which the children had been exposed was left high and dry by the receding water, a she-wolf, coming down out of the surrounding hills to slake her thirst, turned her steps towards the cry of the infants, and with her teats gave them suck so gently, that the keeper of the royal flock found her licking them with her tongue. Tradition assigns to this man the name of Faustulus, and adds that he carried the twins to his hut and gave them to his wife Larentia to rear. Some think that Larentia, having been free with her favours, had got the name of "she-wolf" among the shepherds, and that this gave rise to this marvellous story' (Livy, *History of Rome.* 1. 4).

Similar to the Mesopotamian prostitute Shamhat, Larentia offers human connection and civilisation to the young boys in her care. Although she is not openly labelled a harlot, she is referred to as a she-wolf, and thus there is an implication made within the text that hints at her profession. Another correlation between the two foundational stories is the association between sexuality, prostitution and shepherding. In Mesopotamian literature in particular, shepherds and shepherding camps are a symbol of the route to civilisation. Whilst journeying to the city of Uruk, Shamhat and Enkidu rest at one of these camps, and it is here that he truly shirks the

last of his former ways and embraces the human way of life: eating cooked food, washing and anointing himself with oils, and singing songs. Shamhat encourages this development, further highlighting the correlation between female sexuality and humanity.

'There all the shepherds crowded round to see him, they put down bread in front of him, but Enkidu could only suck the milk of wild animals. He fumbled and gaped, at a loss what to do [...] Then the woman said, "Enkidu, eat bread, it is the staff of life; drink the wine, it is the custom of the land. So he ate till he was full and drank strong wine, seven goblets. He became merry [...] He rubber down the matted hair of his body and anointed his body with oil. Enkidu had become a man' (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*. 1. 7).

Indeed, in the Roman foundational myth, an association between shepherding and civilisation is drawn, although perhaps in a less positive manner than the Mesopotamian text. Livy notes the unusual aspect of the story regarding a potential prostitute raising the future founders of Rome, specifically highlighting how the local shepherds would refer to Larentia as a she-wolf, a prostitute. Whether this is in a derogatory manner is not fully explained, neither is it confirmed to be factual or simply rumour. Nevertheless, sexuality, prostitution and shepherding are all connected here, the three used as a marker to represent advancing towards civilisation.

It is mentioned how Enkidu sustained himself on vegetation and suckling on wild animals prior to his introduction to human civilisation. Evidently, the parallel to Romulus and Remus is self-explanatory here, as Livy describes how the boys were weaned by a wolf before Faustulus discovered them. It is through contact with women that any residue wildness is removed, and they are able to enter society. As has been mentioned, in Rome prostitutes were stereotyped as being infertile, and in accordance with this, Larentia did not conceive her children naturally, but rather was provided with them via adoption. The fact that it is her husband that discovers them seemingly strengthens her virtue; she may be a she-wolf, but she remains one loyal to her husband. Similarly, Shamhat proves her societal value by performing the unique task of civilising a wild man and taking him to the king, Gilgamesh.

These women who feature in foundational mythologies serve a narrative purpose, as they are the impetus that propels the male characters into fulfilling their destiny, typically with civilising intent. While Shamhat uses her body and sexuality to sophisticate Enkidu, introducing him to human society, Larentia assumes a more motherly role in raising Romulus and Remus; her sexuality is quite literally removed from the story despite the potentiality that she was once a prostitute. Indeed, her character is thoroughly sanitised so that she may be the

honourable mother that the twin boys need, and thus she does not birth them, but the narrative does permit her to raise them.

Both Shamhat and Larentia are involved with sacred beings, although this is far more of a direct association for the former, due to the implication that she was a sacred prostitute for the goddess Ishtar. On the other hand, Larentia merely interacts with the offspring of the divine, with no implication whatsoever that her involvement in sex work included any form of worship. However, prostitution and religion were not entirely separate in the Roman world, and evidence of former prostitutes desiring roles in cultic spaces is present in ancient sources. Seneca the Elder presented such an example in Book One of his *Controversiae*, a fictional judicial account that focused on the case of a former prostitute who desired to become a priestess, rather literally titled 'The Prostitute Priestess.'

### 4.5 Seneca's Prostitute Priestess

The trial documented by Seneca in Book One of his *Controversiae* presents the controversial case of a young woman who was sold into prostitution and subsequently murdered a violent patron, the catalyst that resulted in the trial as well as her potential emancipation from the trade. It is also revealed that she wishes to become a priestess, evidedntly intending to distance herself from the sex industry. Arguments both for and against the girl are given, although it is evident the former are prioritised and those speaking in favour do so towards the end of the trial, albeit with brief yet compelling rebuttals.

This is a rather unique case, particularly as it begins with a note that stresses priestesses 'must be chaste of chaste parents, and pure and of pure parents', something which is not necessarily possible when the defendant is a former prostitute (1. 2). For the Greeks and Romans sexual activity was regarded as polluting, and thus it was imperative a woman remain loyal to one man to ensure the legitimacy of any offspring, and her virtue remain intact. Sissa terms it rather well, 'la malattia erotica', harking back to Plato's theory that Eros was a tyrant and sex could create 'un ibrido mostro' (Sissa 2010: 1. 9).

As has been observed with the Vestal Virgins, intercourse was punishable by death, emphasising how poorly an impure priestess was received. Certainly, Vestals were held to a uniquely high standard as they represented Rome itself, nevertheless Seneca emphasises the

necessity of purity among priestesses, including her familial bonds, at the beginning of this trial. The fact that this young woman was abducted and became a prostitute unwillingly is not of concern to those arguing against her, it is the knowledge that she worked in a brothel and served customers (although it is unclear to what extent she serviced them) that is the primary issue.

In extraordinary detail, Seneca recorded the names of the speakers as well as their arguments. To begin, Porcius Latro levies criticism against the girl, questioning why she did not kill her pimp if she was capable of murdering a customer.

> 'Let pimps and harlots keep away from this forum, lest anything unholy obtrude during the choice of a priestess. If nothing else, you were at least kissed by all those who believed you chaste. A marvellous defence of one's chastity: "I killed a soldier." But you didn't kill your pimp. You were led to the brothel, took your place; the price was fixed, the notice written [...] "Nobody took away my virginity." But everyone came intending to take it away' (Seneca, *Controversiae*. 1. 2. 59).

There is a lack of sympathy in Latro's reasoning, and he highlights the primary issues quickly: she has killed a man, and now she wishes to become a priestess despite being a former prostitute. Indeed, he indirectly yet blatantly refers to her as unholy, that which is the antithesis of a respectable woman responsible for religious duties. It is evident he does not believe her virginity remains intact, claiming a multitude of people engaged with her sexually. Moreover, there is an implication that she willingly entered the trade, allowing herself to be escorted to a brothel and sold without complaint. Any acknowledgement of her abduction by pirates is conveniently ignored by Latro. Unlike Charite, the fortunate girl in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* who was liberated from being sold into prostitution by bandits, the nameless defendant in Seneca's trial truly underwent this cruel fate.

Cornelius Hispanus notes how prayers for chastity must be made by priestesses, and with that knowledge could a prostitute truly enact these prayers in good faith? Certainly, this is a compelling argument, yet if this girl's virginity was not preserved then surely her ability to perform religious acts of worship would be compromised. Rather dramatically, Hispanus questions the virtue of future priestesses should this young woman be accepted into the role: 'All that was left for temples to receive women whom brothel and prison had rejected' (Seneca, *Controversiae*. 1. 2. 1-2. 61).

Indeed, as priestesses were regarded as representatives of the deities they worshipped it was necessary for them to maintain their honour and virtue. However, this did not deter impious characters from loitering near sacred places. In Plautus's play *The Little Carthaginian*,

the character Adelphasium comments upon the common prostitutes who congregate around the temple of Venus, noting how their presence corrupts the sacred space, even if the goddess in question is sexuality and desire incarnate. Herodotus further expanded upon this correlation between sexual services and religious spaces in his *The Histories*, providing one of the earliest documented examples of sacred sex in practise:

> 'There is one custom among these people which is wholly shameful: every woman who is native of the country must once in her life go and sit in the temple of Aphrodite and there give herself to a strange man. Many of the rich women, who are too proud to mix with the rest, drive to the temple in covered carriages with a whole host of servants following behind, and there wait; most, however, sit in the precinct of the temple with a band of plaited string around their heads [...] and through them all gangways are marked off running in every direction for the men to pass along and make their choice [...] Once a woman has taken her place there, she is not allowed to go home until a man has thrown a silver coin into her lap, and taken her outside to lie with her. As he throws the coin, the man has to say, 'In the name of the goddess Mylitta' - that being the Assyrian name for Aphrodite. The value of the coin is of no consequence; once thrown it becomes sacred, and the law forbids that it should ever be refused. The woman has no privilege of choice – she must go with the first man who throws her the money. When she has lain with him, her duty to the goddess is discharged and she may go home, after which it will be impossible to seduce her by any offer, however large. Tall, handsome women soon manage to get home, but the ugly ones stay a long time before they can fulfil the condition which the law demands [...] There is a custom similar to this in parts of Cyprus' (Herodotus, *The Histories*. 1. 199. 87-8).

Herodotus's work also highlights how interconnected the various goddesses and sacred practises are from the Near East to the Mediterranean. For although he refers to the deity with her Greek name, Aphrodite, he notes that she is referred to as Mylitta in Babylon; Herodotus does not identify them as two seperate goddesses, but one single deity recognised by both the Greek and Assyrian worlds. He furthers this cultural parallel by noting how similar practises of sacred prostitution take place in Cyprus, which was a stepping stone between Eastern and Western civilisations. Paphos is one location that purportedly adopted the custom on the island, coincidentally the very same location where Aphrodite first emerged onto land.

Corinth, a port city in northern Peloponnese, was renowned for the abundance of prostitutes that lined the road leading up to Acrocorinth, some five hundred metres above sea level, that housed a temple of Aphrodite at its summit. Strabo documented the wealth of the temple, stating 'the Temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned a thousand temple-slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess' (Strabo, *Geography*. 8. 6. 20). Due to the area's convenient location, travellers were able to access the city easily via port or land, and any pilgrims ascending to the temple would have been met with an abundance of prostitutes and courtesans who were available to provide alternative entertainment along their ascent.

In Seneca's trial, Publius Vinicus argues that prostitutes could never become priestesses, as the sexual pollution from the profession was irreversible, 'I should call you unfit for the priesthood if you had merely passed through a brothel' (Seneca, *Controversiae*. 1. 2. 3. 63). Although there is no abject proof that this girl had intercourse with any clients, and she consistently maintains her innocence, the fact that she entered a brothel at all compromised her virtue, and thus she is no longer a good woman by Roman standards. Vinicus further stresses this matter in his follow-up questioning: 'will the lictor ahead of her remove the crowd from this woman's path? [...] Will any practising whore have to flee your sight? A priestess would not be allowed to have a maid like you: should *you* become a priestess? [...] this woman has been kept apart, so as to avoid the other girls being polluted. Do you regard yourself as chaste just because you are an unwilling whore?' (Ibid: 1. 2. 3. 63).

From the arguments against the former prostitute, it seems one who has worked in the sex industry categorically cannot find vocation in the priesthood. However, those in support of the woman provide some compelling justifications for her entry into religious work. Indeed, she was acquitted of murder, thus implying that, to an extent, she was not regarded as a criminal. The issue of her chastity remains, however. Triarius draws attention to the difference between the woman's physical attributes and her assailant's; how was she able to survive this attack when women are the weaker sex? Triarius suggests divine intervention:

> 'A form taller than a human seemed to loom around me, raising my girlish muscles above a man's strength. Whoever you are, immortal gods, who wishes chastity to emerge miraculously untouched from that ill-fated spot the girl you helped is not ungrateful. She owes you her chastity – and vows it to you' (Seneca, *Controversiae*. 1. 2. 85).

This is a particularly poignant justification for her actions. Indeed, in stating that it was an immortal god that aided her, any controversy regarding murder and chastity are effectively halted. The woman in question does not have much of a voice throughout the fictitious trial, and so the men defending her state her wishes. Here, Triarius claims that she will vow her chastity to whomever saved her from the violent client. Thus, consolidating her innocence and dedication to the gods; if such a woman wished to become a priestess surely her devotion is manifest.

Although this would not make her a sacred prostitute, nor is that the intention of this author to argue as such, prostitution and sacred practise are unified in Seneca's case of 'The Prostitute Priestess'. Albucius perpetuates this notion by referring to the woman as holy, as 'one destined to be priestess' (Ibid. 1. 2. 17-18. 81). The language used is definitive, suggesting priesthood is inevitable; if the gods are willing to intervene on her behalf then perhaps she is

sacrosanct. To reiterate, it is highly unlikely that sacred prostitution did occur in Rome, and yet sexuality and religion were affiliated. Could this fictional trial have been influenced by real cases of similar circumstance? If so, then there may have been former prostitutes ascending to religious roles. The association the goddess Venus had to prostitutes may have been a contributing factor that compelled emperor Constantine to dismantle her temples and abolish her worship, 'having himself inspected them with characteristic forethought, and judging that such a temple was unfit for the light of heaven, gave orders that the building with its offerings should be utterly destroyed' (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*. 5).

Prior to the introduction and popularisation of Christianity into the Roman world, and the metamorphosis of amorous Venus's image into the virginal Mary, festivals involving prostitutes occurred annually. During these events, the women were momentarily elevated from their lowly status to being centrally included. One such example is the Floralia, which would take place April 27th in honour of the fertility goddess Flora, one of Rome's oldest deities. Now that the notion of a priestess prostitute has been explored, it is essential to examine the religious celebrations that permitted prostitutes to participate in, or indeed be a primary focus of, the proceedings. What was it about festivals such as the Floralia that granted the lowly *scortum*, the *meretrix*, the opportunity to be at the centre of the festivities? And was this truly a taste of elevated importance and status, or was it just another means to profit from their bodies?

### 4.6 Religious Revelry, Wild Women

'We have come to the fourth month in which thou art honoured above all others, and thou knowest, Venus that both the poet and the month are thine' (Ovid, *Fasti*. 4. 1).

Religion was an integral part of women's lives in ancient Rome, particularly during the time of August when it was promoted as a means to encourage virtuous and modest behaviour among the female populace. It is for this reason that the Republican era scandal of the Bacchanalian mysteries was such a prominent catalyst on women's place in Roman religion. It would not do to have respectable women cavorting about, performing unknown and mysterious acts, away from their husbands. For those lower down the social hierarchy, mystery cults were likely a form of release, hence their popularity. Certain festivals, however, offered this same revelry but publicly, allowing those of a lower class to be briefly centred.

In the introduction of this thesis, *The Wolf Den* series by English author Elodie Harper was named as the inspiration. The specific section that ignited the initial curiosity into prostitution and religion was in Chapter Fourteen, during the Vinalia, when two characters (who are prostitutes) are about to enter a dinner party with some male acquaintances who have bought them for the evening.

> '"It's the Vinalia! Girls are meant to be naked!" Quintus protests. He turns to Amara. "What do you think?"
>
> Both men are looking at her, waiting for an answer. Briefly, she considers the state of her and Dido's clothes. The colours are bright, but she knows the fabric marks them out instantly as cheap. There are few crimes as great in Pompeii as poverty. A naked entrance will trumpet their status as prostitutes, but perhaps not as objects of total contempt. She tilts her head towards Dido, a silent question, and gets a little shrug in answer. Amara smiles broadly at Quintus. "I say naked."' (Harper 2021: 14. 139).

This novel may be a work of fiction, yet the author drew from actual events that would take place in antiquity, such as the Vinalia. This festival was in honour of the gods Jupiter and Venus, and actually occurred on two separate dates, April 23rd and August 19th. In April the Vinalia prima (or the Vinalia Urbana) was celebrated, while the Vinalia rustica took place in August, both festivals of the harvest and wine, with fertility being a central theme to the frivolity.

The former, the Vinalia prima, is of interest as part of the festival's structure included the gathering of 'unsavoury' women at the goddess's temple. In his *Fasti*, Ovid notes that these common girls and prostitutes were compelled to celebrate Venus, 'Ye common wenches, celebrate the divinity of Venus: Venus favours the earnings of ladies of a liberal profession' (Ovid, *Fasti*. 4. 9. 863). From his writing, one can assume that there is an affinity between the divinity and the working women, indeed he claims that she favours them, thus implying that they were expected to participate in the Vinalia by both the state and the goddess herself. On the day, they were compelled to bring offerings to the temple and to give prayers in order to enhance their appearance and curry good fortune, likely in a bid to improve their livelihood:

> 'Offer incense and pray for beauty and popular favour; pray to be charming and witty; give to the Queen her own myrtle and the mint she loves, and bands or rushes hid in clustered roses. Now is the time to throng her temple next the Colline gate' (Ibid, 4. 9. 863).

Such a congregation of common women in the centre of Rome would not have gone unnoticed, and despite the *infamia* (and other sanctions against their person) they were involved in the festivities. Indeed, they were endorsed by Venus, their presence in a religious space desired and not regarded as inherently polluting due to the transgressive nature of their

profession. Nevertheless, during the festival respectable, good women were kept apart from commoners and prostitutes, suggesting that even with the merriment social status retained its importance.

Other evidence corroborates this affinity between prostitutes and the goddess. From the fifth century BCE, an epigram from Corinth has survived, created to inform visitors that several statues of women were dedicated to the temple of Aphrodite at Acrocorinth following the Persian War. Lefkowitz and Fant do clarify that it is uncertain whether those gifting the statues to the temple were actually prostitutes employed on Acrocorinth, or Corinthian wives, however this author will assume they are the former so as to further explore this prostitute-goddess relationship (Lefkowitz, Fant 1992: 285). As Aphrodite was love, and indeed the only goddess to be so amorous in her ways as to have an affair, it is clear why she was a patron and supporter of prostitutes.

This example of prostitutes providing an offering in the form of statues after the war also informs us of their socio-economic role in society. As a collective, they were able to afford abundant dedications to the temple of Aphrodite. This is particularly notable due to the timing, as post-war Corinth likely saw a downward swing of morale, and as it was thus the female population who procured profit following times of strife (as many men would have perished from the war), it is telling that they chose to fund these offerings. Indeed, the incentive behind having these statues created may have been to bolster optimism among the surviving populace, as well as encourage Aphrodite to continue favouring and protecting Corinth. Moreover, in providing an inscription, these women have ensured that their contribution to Hellenic society was never forgotten.

> 'These women stand here on behalf of the Hellenes and the courageous soldiers of their own city, after they made their sacred vows to the goddess Cypris. For divine Aphrodite contrived not to betray the acropolis of the Hellenes to the bow-carrying Medes.' (Dedication of statues of women. Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: 285).

Fig. 10 (Red figure Attic hydria. The Apollonia Group. 360BC-350BC. 1856,1001.16).

In Classical Athens, the Adonia was celebrated by women of all backgrounds, including those who were othered by society: prostitutes. Although it was not supported by state funding nor was it officially regulated, the Adonia was annually attended and celebrated to such a degree that it was an annoyance to the male population who were not permitted to partake in the festival. There is little evidence of an active cult existing in ancient Greece beyond the Adonia. One could speculate that the reason for this is that the attendees were female, and worse still, inclusive of female prostitutes and slaves. Knowledge of the festival survives from the writings of comedic playwrights, such as Aristophanes, who set the play *Lysistrata* during the religious event. Indeed, archaeology has consolidated the textual evidence. The above hydra is believed to depict the Adonia, with the women caught up in the revelry. The central figure descends a ladder, her body partially exposed, and attended by a woman holding a kylix. Indeed, the festival itself would take place on roof tops, hence the depiction of a ladder on the hydra, with riotous behaviour, drinking and roof-hopping being key features. Indeed, it seems to have been an opportunity for women to be unabashedly loud and disruptive. For some scholars, the Adonia has been attributed with giving ancient women of all classes a political voice.

The festival took place in honour of Adonis, the lover of Aphrodite. Following the mythological tale, the participants would lament his death. This comprised of imitating the typical mourning Athenian women would conduct, albeit in a rather disorganised and drunken fashion. There was a significance to this performance-mourning. Funerals were an incredibly female event, and it seems that the Adonia was an opportunity to gather and express emotion in a somewhat appropriate, female manner. During times of strife, every woman was affected by loss and death, thus Adonis was representative of husbands, fathers, brothers and sons who would have perished in times of war (Simms 1997-8:137). Ergo, religion provided a safe environment for women to gather and express themselves without the encroachment of men.

A Roman festival that that included prostitutes – to a further degree than the Vinalia – was the Floralia, in honour of the fertility goddess of the springtime Flora. Although the primary deity of this thesis is Venus, it would be remiss to not explore the role of prostitutes in this specific event. Historically, there have been parallels drawn between Flora and other goddesses, such as Fowler's comments upon a probable connection between Flora, Venus and Ceres, due to the plebian character of the attendees at their festivals (Fowler 1899: 92). Furthermore, the goddess of spring was also touted as being a harlot, much akin to the suggestion that Aphrodite (and her ancestors: Ishtar, Inanna) were mortal prostitutes who

became so revered for their craft that they were ultimately deified. The inclusion of licentious behaviour and sex workers at the Vinalia and Floralia certainly hint at an element of sympathy for the common prostitute that cults intended for the *matrona* and *univera* did not share.

Occurring on April 27th during the Republican era, and later on in Imperial Rome April 28th, the Floralia lasted for six days and consisted of much merriment, such as the *Ludi Florae*, or the Games of Flora. It is well documented that this festival encouraged excess; a prime example of this comes from Suetonius, who states that, when emperor Galba was *praetor*, he organised the most peculiar show: an elephant walking along a tightrope during the celebration of the games in honour of Flora (Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars. Galba*. 6).

Ovid notes, in his *Fasti*, the deceptive image of the goddess: she is not merely a sweet divinity of pretty flowers. Akin to Ceres, she brings forth the survival of humanity and the gods by way of crop fertility. Without her influence, nothing would bloom or grow and would consequently wither and die. It is because of Flora that the war god Mars was conceived; Juno, in her grief at Jupiter independently birthing Minerva, encounters the springtime goddess and, upon consuming a specific flower originating from the field of Olenus becomes pregnant: 'He who gave it me said, 'Touch also with this a barren heifer; she will be a mother.' I touched, and without delay she was a mother' (Ovid, *Fasti*. 5. 4).

The poet also stresses how she is unlike other goddesses, as she enjoys raunchy and riotous revelry, much like Bacchus: 'A rakish stage fits Flora well; she is not, believe me she is not, to be counted among your buskined goddesses' (Ibid. 5). Indeed, her character was also representative of the participants who attended her festivals. The common folk were invited to the Floralia as much as the elite, and the reason for the goddess's continuous popularity likely stems from the message behind the festivities; she encourages man to seek out life's pleasures. Using a rather beautiful metaphor, 'she warns us to use life's flower, while it still blooms: for the thorn, she reminds us, is flouted when the roses have fallen away' (Ibid. 5). Evidently, in a society such as Rome, which was structured on a strict hierarchical system, it is little wonder why cults that allowed for carousing excelled in the populace's favour.

Unusually, as has been hinted, the Floralia also included some subversive elements regarding women's roles. Juvenal, in *The Satires*, rather scathingly documents the mock gladiatorial fights among women at the festival, noting how they spurn their gender in favour of the thrill of the fight, 'The girl's fully trained, totally qualified, ready for the fanfare and fights at the Floralia' (Juvenal, *The Satires*. 4. 249-50). Nudity and performance were popular features on the itinerary, to the extent that it was uncomfortable for some celebrants. According

to Valerius Maximus, Cato the Younger excused himself from the theatre as the *mimae* disrobed, suggesting that such displays were not frequently observed in Roman religious practise (*Memorable Doings and Sayings.* 2. 10. 8).

Even so, it was no secret that debauchery occurred at the Floralia; if an event prominently features prostitutes, it is likely that promiscuous activity could occur. Indeed, 'the prostitutes of Rome hailed this as their feast-day, as well as the Vinalia on the 23rd' (Fowler 1899: 93). Their presence was perfectly acceptable among the crowd as the two festivals were, in a sense, intended for them and both goddesses were speculated to have begun their lives as harlots, ergo establishing an inherent connection between mortal and immortal prostitutes.

In the Imperial age, women would perform nude on stage for the crowd, a comedic show that was particularly favoured. One must question whether this was something that these women enjoyed as much as the attending masses. Certainly, they were prominent participants in the festival, which may suggest that they held some sway in the proceedings, a power that would not have been accessible to them outside of religious observances. Yet, they were entirely exposed before a horde of onlookers, who were likely unruly from the excitement of the festival. The safety of their position may have been somewhat precarious. Plautus states that there was the potential for monetary gain after the performances, 'as soon as the play is over, if anyone gives her silver, I bet she'll readily enter into matrimony with him' (*Casina*, 83-4). Any concerns prostitutes may have had about performing nude publicly could have been assuaged by the chance to earn a profit.

Certainly, whores were not religiously invisible and could partake in cult. There were scant few festivals that they were not privy to, however such examples were usually exclusive to the *matrona* or *univera*, such as the Bona Dea and Juno Lucina rites. It is difficult to conclude to what extent the good and bad women of Rome truly mingled whilst attending festivals. Coinciding with the plethora of religious events that occurred at the end of April and early May, was the cult of Venus Venticordia (Venus, Changer of Hearts), during which women of all classes celebrated together (Strong 2016: 185), which certainly suggests women of all classes would have had some contact with one another.

While it was Venus Erycina who was honoured during the Vinalia – the version of the goddess that stemmed from Eryx in Sicily, which prior to Roman conquest was incredibly influenced by Eastern religion, hence Venus Erycina is distinctly related to the Phoenician Astarte – Venus Venticordia was a radically different figure. Indeed, the cult of this goddess was established to prevent women from committing adultery (Ibid. 181). Unlike the unabashed revelry of the Floralia, or the wine consumption of the Vinalia, Venus Venticordia intended to

transform the wicked whore into the good wife and to ensure these wives did not stray into debauchery.

The cult of Venus Verticordia was founded after the Second Punic War (about 215 BCE) alongside a plethora of other female-centred religious rites. Following times of strife, it was imperative for the state to reform itself in order to have a successful future. Evidently, the creation of the next generation was integral to this, hence Venus Venticordia, a cult which encouraged virtuous morals among women was created. Coinciding with the festival day of this Venus's cult was that of Fortuna Virilis, Masculine Fortune, which focused on women making themselves more sexually attractive to men (Strong 2016: 185). The intention in organising the two festivals to occur on the same day was a form of propaganda, ensuring women's affections remained loyal to one man: her husband. As Strong states, the purpose of Fortuna Virilis was not to dampen women's sexual desire, but to direct it to the more appropriate source in an appropriately subordinate fashion (Ibid: 186). Sex was not an inherent sin that women could commit, however the Roman state was incredibly conscious of where their sexual affections were directed, as a wanton woman was a poor reflection upon Rome.

Nevertheless, as we have discovered 'bad' women were indeed invited into religious spaces. Roman prostitutes may not have assumed a sacred sexual role in honour of a deity, as supposedly occurred in the Near East and Cyprus, yet they could feature in cult festivals to quite a prominent degree. One such woman had a cult *dedicated* to her: Acca Larentia, the adopted mother of the twin boys Romulus and Remus.

On December 23rd the Larentalia was celebrated in honour of Acca Larentia. As she was regarded by some to have been a prostitute, it is hardly controversial that such women were speculated to have had a significant role in the day's proceedings. Such a festival must have been scandalous, after all Larentia was noted by Valerius Flaccus as having been a *scortum*, the lowest of prostitutes. Thus, one must question why she was honoured with a festival. Flaccus provides an answer here too: upon her death she bequeathed her immense wealth to the Roman people, a wealth which was generated through her trade (Flaccus, *Fasti Praenestini.* 1. 3. 27, cited from Strong 2016: 191). In raising Rome's founders, and providing an abundant financial donation, it would seem any *infamia* or issue with her social standing would be negated. As Strong powerfully states, the Larentalia honoured not only a prostitute but one with morally dubious earnings, uniquely celebrating a woman who was both benefactor and wage-earner (Strong 2016: 191). Although it is difficult to confirm the exact role of prostitutes in this festival, it is highly likely that they were a prominent feature, particularly as Larentia was such an important woman in the history and legendary founding of Rome. It

would have been a fitting way to honour such a complicated figure: she was a moral mother and yet simultaneously a (former) debaucherous whore; perhaps, through her, there was the potential for prostitutes to be humanised.

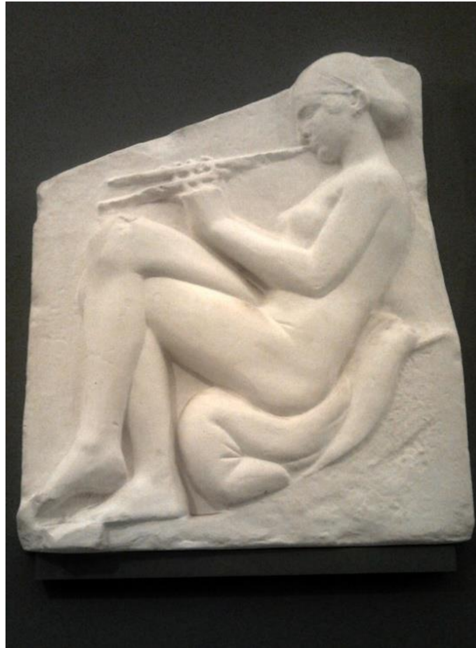

Fig. 11 (The Ludovisi Throne, Locri. Left panel. Nude woman reclining and playing the aulos).

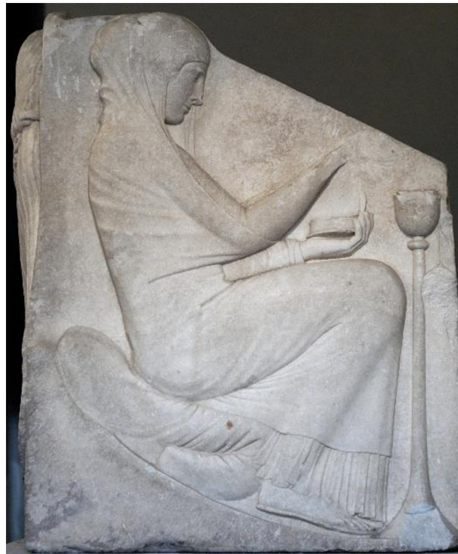

Fig. 12 (The Ludovisi Throne, Locri. Right panel. Fully covered woman burns incense).

The Ludovisi Throne, the marble relief which was discussed in Chapter One, acts as a perfect example of the dichotomy between the union of good and bad Roman women. On the front panel, the image of a goddess is depicted, with some scholars claiming it to be Aphrodite

and others Persephone. As has been stated previously, this author agrees with the former. Placing the goddess of love centrally is incredibly important; to her left and right two separate women are presented, with very little similarity between them, and yet both are seemingly there in worship of Aphrodite.

On the left, a young woman is depicted, seated nude and playing the *aulos*. She reclines on a cushion and appears to be very relaxed, one leg crossed over the other. Strong identifies this as the earliest depiction of a naked woman in monumental Greek art, and suggests that the figure may be a *hetaira*, a prostitute, due to the combination of the *aulos* and nudity (175). To the right is, what appears to be, an older woman who is dressed respectably, the antithesis to her counterpart on the left panel. She too is perched upon a cushion, but her posture is not relaxed. Indeed, she is focused on her task: burning incense. Both acts are linked to religious duties, and thus we can deduce that these two women are worshipping the goddess that emerges between them. In uniting them on one sculpture, it is possible to see that both the wife and the whore could be unified in religious worship. Their roles in cult may differ, as is suggested by their posture (one relaxed, likely without any serious tasks related to their worship, whereas the matron is shown to be very focused, highlighting how wives had certain expectations that they must fulfil) and yet they are both present.

Certainly, there were other festivals that involved common women and prostitutes in Rome, such as the worship of the popular, imported deity Isis. Indeed, the defined societal boundaries that attempted to categorise and segregate women was only maintained in certain cults, such as the aforementioned Bona Dea. Otherwise, it stands to reason that women of all classes may have been mingling in religious contexts. How they would have felt, sharing the same space, is uncertain, but considering some of these festivals survived from Republic to Empire, it stands to reason that there was no major friction. Prostitutes, those most troublesome of women, were not excluded from festival and cult worship, which suggests that they did not exist entirely on the peripheries of society. They celebrated the gods, they partook in the festivities, and at times they were elevated to be the focus of them. Whether this meant they were momentarily liberated from the social stigma of their profession is inconclusive.

## 5. Conclusion

‘The pagans who adorn their chambers with painted tablets hung on high ... regarding licentiousness as piety, and while lying on the bed, while still in the midst of their own embraces, ... they fix their gaze upon that naked Aphrodite who lies bound in her adultery ... [They] dedicate these monuments of shamelessness in [their] homes’ (Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptikos*. 4. 53P).

From the very beginning of the Empire, Roman women were divided into categories in an attempt to distinguish moral, respectable wives from the wicked, greedy prostitutes. In part, this was to ensure women remained loyal to one man whom they would produce legitimate offspring for, however misogyny certainly informed much of these early law reformations. Language was a reflection of this; much of the focus of this thesis has centred on the *meretrix* (whore), *scortum* (skin) and *lupa* (she-wolf or wolf-bitch), all derogatory terms used to refer to women employed in the sex trade. There were courtesans and other independent prostitutes who could afford to be more selective with their clientele, who were living in safer and cleaner conditions, however it is imperative we do not forget those lower down the social strata, hence they were the primary focus of this work.

While the *meretrix* may have been subordinate she was also economically independent, thus ironically making her a dominant figure as she was not wholly reliant upon a *pater familias* or husband. This was dependent on individual circumstances, as it was not unheard of for pimps to take a percentage of a prostitute's earnings. Prostitution was certainly profitable, however the social stigma that it generated meant both the law and wider society freely discriminated against those in the profession. These women were *palam* and *famosa*, meaning they lived openly and were notorious for their sexual promiscuity. While the Roman *matrona* was not expected to be invisible in society, as it was integral she publicly displayed her virtue, this could not be comparable to a whore's public persona.

Nonetheless, the two did not live entirely separate lives. Visually, the wife and the whore were united in early Imperial statues of virtuous women whose faces were aged, potentially true representations of the muse, whereas the bodies were frequently that of a young, Venus-like model (Strong 2016: 8). The virtuous, moral *matrona* and the sexual appeal of the promiscuous prostitute was thus represented in one, paradoxical figure. Good Roman women had statues, coins, inscriptions and public eulogies written commemorating their honour. In contrast, bad women were publicly ridiculed; prostitutes did receive artistic representation, however this was made to show customers the services they could provide and not a flattering gift. Inscriptions related to prostitution survive from antiquity, but many of these are crude graffiti that either mock them or detail their sexual performance (Ibid: 20).

In religion, both types of women were generally welcomed. Some cults were reserved for certain classes, such as the Bona Dea and the Mater Matuta, which were open to only those who had been married to one man, the *univera*. Some deities and festivals were more so catered

to common women and prostitutes, such as the Vinalia and Floralia. In these religious spaces, prostitutes were not rendered invisible, in fact there is evidence that suggests they featured quite prominently. The extent to which these celebrations may have offered some form of liberation remains unclear, however one can assume that in being centred, in being involved, they did experience a shift in perception. During these festivals, their *infamia* was perhaps not so hindering.

Indeed, festival and cult worship allowed for women to diverge from their typical routines. For prostitutes, this permitted them to be involved and relevant to the religious proceedings. Although they may not have been offered more respect, they were present not just for the profit their bodies could provide them, although this was another incentive to attend festivals. The mingling of women of different classes, all collecting to worship a goddess, suggests that these celebrations were opportunities for women to congregate, at times without the presence of men. Simms poignantly highlights how 'religious associations provided a space for female discourse, for the formation of female friendship, and at times, a platform for social reform' (Simms 1997-8: 138-9).

Venus, Flora, Aphrodite, Ishtar and Inanna were all deities of love and sexual desire. Some were claimed to have once been prostitutes themselves, suggesting sexuality can ultimately lead to deification; the male authors who postulated this notion were likely intending to reduce the goddesses status in making such claims. However, their relevance and popularity survived, with dynasties such as the Julio-Claudean claiming divine ancestry from Venus, making her the mother of the city of Rome as well as its later Empire, the greatest ancient power in the Mediterranean. Civilisations may have become ever increasingly patriarchal, yet the importance of these female divinities hardly waned. Goddesses, wives and whores were divided by status, and yet religion was a unifying socio-cultural feature that was ultimately more inclusive than it was discriminatory. For prostitutes, religion provided an opportunity to join wider society in celebration, removed from their unfavourable circumstances, and very present in the worship of a goddess who shared their sexual proclivities.

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### *6.3 List of Illustrations*

Fig. 1. Erotic fresco. House of Centenary. IX. 8. 6. Pompeii. 1st century CE. Photo: Fotografia Foglia, Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 2. The Ludovisi Throne, Locri. Museo Nazionale Romano. Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 3. Clay tablet. Library of Ashurbanipal, seventh century BCE. The British Museum. Museum number: K.162.

Fig. 4. Roman denarius, 46-45 BCE. The British Museum. Museum number: 1843,0116.646. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1843-0116-646.

Fig. 5. Roman denarius. 32-29 BCE. The British Museum. Museum number: R.6161. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_R-6161.

Fig. 6. Statue of Messalina and her son Britannicus, ca. 45 CE. Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines, Louvre Museum.

Fig. 7. Carracci, A. *Messalina in Lisisca's Booth*. Late sixteenth century. Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 8. Merlin, A. 1908. *Le temple d'Apollon à Bulla Regia.* Paris: Direction Des Antiquites et Arts. 10-11. Slave collar and inscription. Bulla Regia, Tunisia.

Fig. 9. Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus. Bronze tablet. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Antikensammlung. Museum number: III 168.

Fig. 10. Red figure Attic hydria. The Apollonia Group. 360BC-350BC. The British Museum. Museum Number: 1856,1001.16. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1856-1001-16.

Fig. 11. The Ludovisi Throne, Locri. Left panel. Nude woman reclining and playing the *aulos*. Photo: Fotografia Foglia, Art Resources, NY.

Fig. 12. The Ludovisi Throne, Locri. Right panel. Fully covered woman burns incense. Photo: Fotografia Foglia, Art Resources, NY.

### *6.4 Online Resources*

The Ancient Graffiti Project, ancientgraffiti.org. Statement about love. http://ancientgraffiti.org/Graffiti/graffito/AGP-EDR168048

British Museum. Roman denarius. Museum number: 1843,0116.646. britishmuseum.org. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1843-0116-646

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