

Greek and Roman Gods, Temples, and Festivals: Alike Yet Different

by Rose Williams

The following discussions are samples from an overall study which is used in my book 'Gods and Other Odd Creatures.' Drawings "Gate of Janus Geminus" and "Aedes Vestae" are from the book and may be copied, as may all other drawings in the book.

Since the Romans were both polytheistic and tidy, they tended to organize the deities they encountered and to equate them to Roman gods if possible. Thus when they conquered, and were in turn influenced by, the Greeks, they called Greek gods by the names of their Roman counterparts. This process was helped by the fact that fourteen major gods who made up the Twelve Great Olympians of the Greeks and the twelve Di Consentes of the Romans (plus a couple of major extras in each case) were similar in function. But they differed in many ways.

Greek Major Pantheon

Twelve Great Olympians: Zeus, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, Hestia, Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, Hephaestus Athena, Ares and Aphrodite.

Two Great Gods: Demeter and Dionysus

Roman Major Pantheon

Di Consentes: Iuppiter, Iuno, Minerva, Vesta, Ceres, Diana, Venus, Mars, Mercurius, Neptunus, Volcanus, and Apollo. (Listed by the Poet Ennius about the 3rd Century, B.C.E.)

Two Great Gods: Liber (Bacchus) and Pluto

While in function similar, in personality Greek and Roman deities were very different. The Greeks' Twelve Great Olympians and their two great Earth Gods, Demeter and Dionysus, were all members of one family, being direct descendants of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaea (Earth).

Greek Gods

The following are excerpts from the Homeric hymns of the 7th century BC

The one Orphic Hymn excerpt is ca. 1st century BC

Study Question I:

a) List references to family ties, personal appearance, and direct personal prayers.

b) Do the underlined passages, or any other passages, seem strange to your idea of the gods? Explain how.

Zeus Homeric Hymn 11 to Dionysus

(13-16) *The Son of Cronos spoke and nodded, dark-browed.
The divine locks flowed forward from his immortal head, and
great Olympus reeled. So wise Zeus ordained it with a nod.*

Hera Homeric Hymn 12 To Hera

*I sing of she whom Rhea bore, Hera of the golden throne.
Queen of the immortals is she, all-surpassing in beauty; sister and the wife of loud-thundering Zeus, she is the glorious one whom
all the blessed throughout Olympus reverence and honor.*

Athena Homeric Hymn 11 To Athena

I sing of Pallas Athena, dread guardian of the city. With Ares she loves deeds of war, the sack of cities and the shouting and the battle. She guards the people as they go out to war and come back. Hail, goddess, and bring us good fortune and happiness!

Demeter Homeric Hymn 2 To Demeter

(. 1-3) I sing of rich-haired Demeter, awful goddess

-- of her and her trim-ankled daughter whom Aidoneus stole, given to him by all-seeing Zeus the loud-thunderer.

(4-18) Demeter, lady of the golden sword and glorious fruits...

(54-58) Queenly Demeter, bringer of seasons and giver of good gifts

Homeric Hymn 26 To Dionysus

I sing of ivy-crowned Dionysus, the loud-crying god, Zeus and Semele's splendid son. When the rich-haired Nymphs had brought him up, he began to wander the woody groves wreathed with ivy and laurel. And the Nymphs followed him as leader; and the endless forest echoed with their cries. Hail to you, Dionysus, god of abundant clusters! Give us rejoicing for this season and for many a year.

Orphic Hymn 29 To Persephone

Blessed Persephone, Daughter of Zeus,

Only begotten, gracious and honored Goddess, receive this good offering, overpowered by Pluto, beloved and lifegiving,

You hold the doors of Hades under the depths of the earth;

Dispenser of Justice, your beloved hair the sacred olive branch of the enemy

Mother of the Eumenides, Queen of the Underworld

Homeric Hymn 22 To Poseidon

I sing of Poseidon, mover of earth and barren sea, god of the deep, lord on Helicon and wide Aegae. The gods gave you a two-fold office, O Shaker of the Earth: to be a tamer of horses and a savior of ships! Hail, Poseidon, dark-haired holder of the earth! Blessed one, be kind of heart and help those who voyage in ships!

Homeric Hymn 6 To Aphrodite

I sing of tall Aphrodite, gold-crowned and beautiful, whose dominion is Cyprus of the walled cities. There the moist west wind Zephyr wafted her in foam over the waves of the moaning sea, and there the golden-crowned Hours welcomed her in joy. On her head they put a well-wrought crown of gold, and in her ears they hung ornaments of precious gold; they adorned her with golden necklaces over her soft neck. When they had fully clothed her, they took her to the gods, each of whom prayed that he might have her as his wedded wife, so greatly were they moved by the beauty of violet-crowned Cytherea.

Homeric Hymn 8 To Ares

Ares, golden-helmed chariot-rider strong in arm and heart, shield-bearer and bronze-harnessed Saviour of cities, mighty and unwearied with the spear. Defence of Olympus, father of Victory, ally of Themis, stern governor of the rebellious, leader of righteous men, sceptred King of manliness ... shed down a kindly ray from above with strength of war, that I may drive away bitter cowardice from my head and crush down the deceitful impulses of my soul. Restrain also the keen fury of my heart which provokes me to tread the ways of blood-curdling strife. Rather, O blessed one, give me boldness to abide within the harmless laws of peace, avoiding strife and hatred and the violent fields of death.

Homeric Hymn 27 To Artemis

I sing of Artemis, the pure maiden, own sister to Apollo of the golden sword. Over the shadowy hills and windy peaks she draws her golden bow, rejoicing in the chase, sending out grievous shafts. The goddess turns every way destroying the race of wild beasts: and when she is satisfied and has cheered her heart, she slackens her supple bow and goes to the great house of her dear brother Phoebus Apollo in rich Delphi. There she hangs up her curved bow and her arrows and leads the dances of the Muses and Graces.,

gracefully arrayed, while they sing how neat-ankled Leto bore two children supreme among the immortals both in thought and indeed.

Roman Gods

Roman gods had begun as **numina**, spirits or forces, mysterious, faceless, but powerful. The priests took the gods' auspices, or signs, from the flight of birds or other phenomena.

Study Question II

- a) *How important were signs from the gods to the Romans?*
- b) *What happened if well-known signs were ignored?*
- c) *What results did they expect if they used their information correctly?*

Livy History of Rome VI.41

auspiciis hanc urbem conditam esse, auspiciis bello ac pace domi militiaeque omnia geri, quis est qui ignoret?

Who does not know this city to have been founded under auspices, under auspices all things in war and peace at home and military to be carried out?

Cicero De Natura Deorum II.7

Nihil nos P. Clodi bello Punico primo temeritas movebit, qui etiam per iocum deos inridens, cum cavea liberati pulli non pascerentur, mergi eos in aquam iussit, ut biberent, quoniam esse nollent? Qui risus classe devicta multas ipsi lacrimas, magnam populo Romano cladem attulit.

Will not the rashness of P. Clodius in the First Punic War disturb us, he who, when the sacred chickens freed from their enclosure would not eat, mocking the gods for a joke ordered that they be thrown into the water that they might drink? He who laughed brought many tears to himself and great calamity to the Roman people when his fleet was brutally conquered.

Cato De Agricultura 139

Lucum conlucare Romano more sic oportet: porco piaculo facito, sic verba concipito: "Si deus, si dea es, quouium illud sacrum est, uti tibi ius est porco piaculo facere illiusce sacri coercendi ergo harumque rerum ergo, sive ego sive quis iussu meo fecerit, uti id recte factum siet."

It is proper to clear a grove with this Roman ritual: after a pig is sacrificed, the following prayer is uttered: "If you are a god, if you are a goddess, to whom this grove is sacred, as it is right for you, having received a sacrificed pig, to make way for the thinning of this sacred grove, therefore for this purpose, whether I or someone on my order may do it, may it be rightly done.

Roman Beginnings

Below is an example of Ovid's attempt to explain the greatest gods' slow development into anthropomorphic figures and tie up the loose ends of Greek and Roman mythology, which take quite a bit of tying.

Study Question III

- a) *How does Ovid explain the fact that the Roman year began with the month of March, but it now starts with January?*
- b) *Describe Janus.*
- c) *How has Ovid tied Greek ideas to Janus, whom even Ovid says has no Greek counterpart?*
- d) *How great are the powers of Janus?*
- e) *To whom does Ovid says Janus gives orders?*

Janus

Ovid Fasti Book I

Introduction 39-42

Martis erat primus mensis, Venerisque secundus;
haec generis princeps, ipsius ille pater: ... 40
at Numa nec Ianum nec avitas praeterit umbras,
mensibus antiquis praeposuitque duos.

*First was the month of Mars, and Venus' April second:
As she was mother of the race, and he its father...
King Numa did not forget Janus and the ancestral shades;
He added two to the ancient months.*

January 1: Kalends 95-118

tum sacer ancipiti mirandus imagine Ianus 95
bina repens oculis obtulit ora meis.
extimui sensique metu riguisse capillos,
et gelidum subito frigore pectus erat.
ille tenens baculum dextra clavemque sinistra
edidit hos nobis ore priore sonos: 100
'disce metu posito, vates operose dierum,
quod petis, et voces percipe mente meas.
me Chaos antiqui (nam sum res prisca) vocabant:
aspice quam longi temporis acta canam.
lucidus hic aer et quae tria corpora restant, 105
ignis, aquae, tellus, unus acervus erat.
ut semel haec rerum secessit lite suarum
inque novas abiit massa soluta domos,
flamma petit altum, propior locus aera cepit,
sederunt medio terra fretumque solo. 110
tunc ego, qui fueram globus et sine imagine moles,
in faciem redii dignaque membra deo.
nunc quoque, confusae quondam nota parva figurae,
ante quod est in me postque videtur idem.
accipe quaesitae quae causa sit altera formae, 115
hanc simul ut noris officiumque meum.
quicquid ubique vides, caelum, mare, nubila, terras,
omnia sunt nostra clausa patentque manu.
me penes est unum vasti custodia mundi,
et ius vertendi cardinis omne meum est. 120
cum libuit Pacem placidis emittere tectis,
libera perpetuas ambulat illa vias:
sanguine letifero totus miscebitur orbis,
ni teneant rigidae condita Bella serae.
praesideo foribus caeli cum mitibus Horis 125
(it, redit officio Iuppiter ipse meo):

*Then sacred Janus with his double image
Displayed twin faces to my frightened eyes.
I felt my very hair stiffen with fear*

*And my heart was frozen with sudden cold.
 Holding his staff in his right hand, his key in the left,
 He spoke these words to me from his forward looking face:
 'Lay aside fear and learn what you seek poet who works
 With the days; remember my words.
 The ancients called me Chaos, for I am a prehistoric thing
 Look what deeds of long ago I shall tell.
 The clear air, and the three other essences,
 Fire, water, earth, were lumped together as one.
 But, through the dispute of its components,
 The mass dissolved, and sought new homes,
 Flame took the heights: air took a lower place,
 While earth and sea sank to the furthest depth.
 Then I, who was a shapeless mass, a ball,
 Took a shape and limbs worthy of a god.
 Even now, a small sign of my once confused state,
 My front and back appear to be the same.
 Hear the other reason for the shape you question,
 So you will know it, and know of my duties.
 What you see on all sides: sky, sea, clouds, earth,
 All things are begun and ended by my hand.
 Care of the vast world is mine alone,
 The control of the turning pole is also mine.
 When I choose to send Peace, from quiet houses,
 Freely she walks the roads and does not flee:
 The whole world would be flooded with death-bearing blood,
 If rigid barriers failed to hold war in check.
 I preside at the gate of the sky with the gentle Hours
 Jupiter himself comes and goes at my command.*

Comparative Gods

Anthropomorphic divine development was hastened by the Romans' contact with the Greeks, as they often incorporated the stories of the Greek gods into their own mythology. Thus were established, at least for literary purposes, family relationships among the Roman Di Consentes which had not necessarily been there in earlier days.

Study question IV

- a) A triad was worshipped in a single temple; there was nothing comparable in Greek mythology. What three Roman gods compose the Capitoline Triad?**
- b) In the Aeneid passage below, how has Vergil employed a Grecian approach to the gods?**
- c) Does the Ovid passage about Juno below seem more Greek or Roman? Why do you say so?**
- d) In the passages concerning Minerva, what two concepts of her are shown? Do they involve her personal looks? With what aspects of the goddess do the Romans seem most concerned?**

suppliciter posito procubuere genu:
 cum subito motae tremuere cacumina silvae,
 et dea per lucos mira locuta suos. 440
 'Italidas matres' inquit 'sacer hircus inito.'
 obstipuit dubio territa turba sono.
 augur erat, nomen longis intercidit annis:
 nuper ab Etrusca venerat exul humo;
 ille caprum mactat: iussae sua terga puellae 445
 pellibus exsectis percutienda dabant.
 luna resumebat decimo nova cornua motu,
 virque pater subito nuptaque mater erat.

*Below the Esquiline Hill was a grove unchanged
 For many years, called the grove of great Juno.
 Here had gathered husbands and wives together
 Bowed in supplication with bended knee:
 When suddenly the tree tops of the forest trembled,
 And the goddess spoke strange words through her grove:
 'Let the sacred he-goat pierce the Italian wives'.
 The terrified crowd were awed by the doubtful words.
 There was an augur whose name is lost in the long years
 Lately arrived as an Etruscan exile,
 who killed a he-goat and, at his command, the wives
 Offered their backs, to be beaten by thongs from its hide.
 When the moon renewed her horns in her tenth orbit,
 The husband was made a father, the wife a mother.*

Minerva

Ovid Fasti Book III: 811-834

sanguine prima vacat, nec fas concurrere ferro:
 causa, quod est illa nata Minerva die.
 altera tresque super rasa celebrantur harena:
 ensibus exsertis bellica laeta dea est.
 Pallada nunc pueri teneraeque orate puellae; 815
 qui bene placarit Pallada, doctus erit.
 Pallade placata lanam mollire puellae...
 hanc cole, qui maculas laesis de vestibus aufers: 821
 hanc cole, velleribus quisquis aena paras.

 vos quoque, Phoebea morbos qui pellitis arte, 827
 munera de vestris pauca referte deae.
 nec vos, turba fere censu fraudata, magistri,
 spernite (discipulos attrahit illa novos), 830
 quique moves caelum, tabulamque coloribus uris,
 quique facis docta mollia saxa manu.
 mille dea est operum: certe dea carminis illa est;
 si mereor, studiis adsit amica meis.

The Quinquatrus

*The first day is free of blood; sword fights are forbidden,
Because Minerva was born on that very day.
Three others are celebrated with the beaten arena,
The warlike goddess delights in naked swords.
Pray now you boys and tender girls to Pallas:
Whoever well pleases Pallas will be learned.
Pleasing Pallas, let girls learn to card wool,*

*Worship her, you who remove stains from damaged clothes,
Worship her, you who ready bronze cauldrons for fleeces.*

*You also who drive away ills with Apollo's art,
Bring a few of your gifts for the goddess:
And don't scorn her, schoolmasters, you crowd
So often cheated of your pay: she attracts new pupils:
Nor you who move chisels, and painters with colors,
Nor you who make stone pliant with skillful hand.
She's the goddess of a thousand works: and certainly song:
If I am deserving, may she be a friend to my works.*

Aventine Triad: Ceres, Liber and Libera

The Aventine Triad is plebeian as the Capitoline Triad is patrician. The Capitoline Triad is worshipped on the Capitoline Hill; the Aventine Triad has its temple on the Aventine Hill.

Study Question V

- a) *With what aspects of life is Ceres associated?*
- b) *What Roman officials are in charge of Ceres' offerings?*
- c) *How do they buy things for her?*
- d) *From the passages below, create a description of Ceres.*

Ceres

Livy 10.23.13

Et ab aedilibus plebeiis L. Aelio Paeto et C. Fulvio Curuo ex multatitia item pecunia, quam exegerunt pecuariis damnatis, ludi facti pateraeque aureae ad Cereris positae.

"And likewise golden paterae placed at the temple of Ceres by the plebeian aediles L. Aelius Paetus and C Fulvius Curvus with the money from fines that they had collected from those convicted of [illegally] using public pasture."

Ovid Metamorphoses V, 341-344

*"Prima Ceres unco glaebam dimovit aratro...
prima dedit leges; Cereris sunt omnia munus;
illa canenda mihi est.*

*"Ceres was the first to turn the sod with the hooked plow-share;
she first gave laws. All things are the gift of Ceres; she must be the subject of my song."*

Horace, Carmen Saeculare 29- 32

*fertilis frugum pecorisque Tellus
spicea donet Cererem corona;*

nutriant fetus et aquae salubres
et Iovis aurae.

“Let Tellus, fertile in fruits and herds, give Ceres a crown of wheat stalks; let the healthy waters and breezes of Jupiter nourish the offspring.”

Fasti Book I 703-704

sub iuga bos veniat, sub terras semen aratas:

Pax Cererem nutrit, Pacis alumna Ceres.

Let the ox come under the yoke, the seed under the plowed soil:

Peace nourishes Ceres; Ceres is the foster child of Peace

Fasti Book IV: 401-410

prima Ceres homine ad meliora alimenta vocato 401

mutavit glandes utiliore cibo.

illa iugo tauros collum praebere coegit:

tum primum soles eruta vidit humus.

aes erat in pretio, Chalybeia massa latebat: 405

eheu, perpetuo debuit illa tegi.

pace Ceres laeta est; et vos orate, coloni,

perpetuam pacem pacificumque ducem.

valle sub umbrosa locus est aspergine multa

uvidus ex alto desilientis aquae

*Ceres was first to summon men to a better diet,
Replacing their acorns with more nourishing food.*

She forced bulls to bow their necks to the yoke:

So the deep-ploughed soil first saw the light.

Copper was prized then, iron was still hidden:

Ah! If only it could have been hidden forever.

Ceres delights in peace: pray, you farmers,

Pray for endless peace and a peace-loving leader.

Liber and Libera

Libera the grain maid is the consort of Liber the wine god. Poets attempted to fit her into the Greek model, but the whole matter was awkward. As we shall see, Ovid attaches her to the story of Bacchus and Ariadne; others insist she is Persephone. The problem with that is that Persephone is married to Hades, not to Dionysus.

Study Question VI

a) With what part of Roman life are all three Aventine gods associated?

b) What did Liber discover for man?

c) What picture is presented below of Liber (Bacchus – Bacchus is always the “evil twin” of both Dionysus and Liber). Does it surprise you, and why?

d) Discuss possible reasons why the Aventine Triad would be connected with plebeians while the Capitoline Triad is connected with Patricians.

Cicero De Natura Deorum 2. 62

nostri maiores auguste sancteque Liberum cum Cerere et Libera consecraverunt

Our ancestors reverently and solemnly consecrated Liber with Ceres and Libera.

Ovid Fasti Book I 403-404

vina dabat Liber, tulerat sibi quisque coronam,
miscendas parce rivus agebat aquas.

*Liber offered wine, each had brought a garland,
A stream supplied ample water for the mixing.*

Ovid Fasti Book III 727-736

ante tuos ortus arae sine honore fuerunt,

Liber, et in gelidis herba reperta focus...

nomine ab auctoris ducunt libamina nomen

libaque, quod sanctis pars datur inde focus;

liba deo fiunt, sucis quia dulcibus idem

735

gaudet, et a Baccho mella reperta ferunt.

*Before your birth the altars were without offerings,
Liber, and grass grew on the cold hearthstones...*

*Food-offerings get their name from their originator
And cakes of which a part is offered on the holy hearth.
Sweet cakes are baked for the god, because he delights in sweet
Things, and they say that Bacchus discovered honey.*

Fasti Book III: 505-512 Libera to Liber

nec, quod nos uris, mirum facis: ortus in igne

503

diceris, et patria raptus ab igne manu.

illa ego sum cui tu solitus promittere caelum.

505

ei mihi, pro caelo qualia dona fero!

dixerat; audibat iam dudum verba querentis

Liber, ut a tergo forte secutus erat.

occupat amplexu lacrimasque per oscula siccant,

et 'pariter caeli summa petamus' ait:

510

'tu mihi iuncta toro mihi iuncta vocabula sumes,

nam tibi mutatae Libera nomen erit,

*No wonder you make me burn: you are said to arise
From a fire, and were snatched from the flames by your father.*

I am she to whom you used to promise the heavens.

Ah me, I endure such gifts in place of heaven!

She spoke: Liber had been listening a long while

To her complaint, since he listened closely.

He embraced her, and dried her tears with kisses,

And said: 'Together, let us seek the heights of the sky!

You'll share my name just as you've shared my bed,

Since, your name will be changed to Libera:

Neptune

Study Question VII

Compare the picture below with Poseidon, page 2

Aeneid I. 124-127, 142-143

Interea magno misceri murmure pontum,
emissamque hiemem sensit Neptunus, et imis 125

stagna refusa vadis, graviter commotus; et alto
prospiciens, summa placidum caput extulit unda ...

Sic ait, et dicto citius tumida aequora placat, 142
collectasque fugat nubes, solemque reducit.

*Meanwhile Neptune sensed by the great rumbling
that the sea was troubled and a storm sent forth
And that the still waters were forced up from the depths,
Greatly provoked, he raised his calm head above the waves...*

*So he spoke and quickly quieted the swollen waters
He put the collected clouds to flight and brought back the sun.*

Shrines

Gate of Janus Geminus

Procopius and various coins tell us that Janus had a small rectangular structure of bronze, with two side walls and double doors at each end. The walls had grating on top and there was no roof. The ancient bronze statue of the two-faced god stood in the centre of what was evidently no temple in the ordinary sense but a passage (*ianus*).

Study Question VIII

a) How does this differ from our idea of a shrine to a god?

b) Why would closing the gates of Janus mean so much?



Ovid, Fasti (I.257-258)

cum tot sint iani, cur stas sacratus in uno,
hic ubi iuncta foris templa duobus habes?'

*When there are so many archways, why do you stand in one
Here where you have shrines joining two forums?"*

Porticus Deorum Consentium

The gilt statues of the Di Consentes, the twelve major gods and goddesses of Rome, stood in the Porticus Deorum Consentium. It is located on the slope of the Capitoline Hill towards the Forum Romanum on the Clivus Capitolinus between the Temple of Saturn and the Temple of Vespasian and Titus. First found in 1834, it consists of eight open rooms behind a portico of Corinthian marble columns.



6) Give suggestions as to how this material might be used to heighten cultural understanding in the Latin classroom.

Capitoline Temple in the time of Augustus

1] Temple of Vesta: 2] Regia, residence of pontifex maximus, formerly home of the kings: 3] Rostra (speakers' platform): 4] Curia (senate house): 5] Temple of Julius Caesar: 6] Temple of Castor and Pollux (rebuilt by Augustus): 7] Basilica Julia (built by Julius Caesar as an exchange and for judicial tribunals): 8] Temple of Juno Moneta: 9] Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill: 10] Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus: 11] Forum.



The Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, or Jupiter Optimus Maximus, was the home of the Capitoline Triad, The large square in front of the temple (the Area Capitolina) featured a number of temples dedicated to minor divinities, in addition to other religious buildings, statues and trophies. This was not only the most important sanctuary in Rome; it was also the center of political life. Here official offerings were made, treaties were signed and wars were declared, and here the triumphant generals of the Roman army came to give their thanks. The temple had three cellae. The middle one was Jupiter's, the one on the right side Minerva's, and the one on the left Juno's.

Livy VII. 3: 5-7

Lex vetusta est, priscis litteris verbisque scripta, ut qui praetor maximus sit idibus Septembribus clavum pangat; fixa fuit dextro lateri aedis Iouis optimi maximi, ex qua parte Mineruae templum est. Eum clavum, quia rarae per ea tempora litterae erant, notam numeri annorum fuisse ferunt eoque Mineruae templo dicatam legem quia numerus Mineruae inventum sit

There is an ancient law, written in antique words and letters, that the chief magistrate on the Ides of September shall drive a nail; the tablet was fixed in the right side chamber of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, where the shrine of Minerva is. This nail, because writing was rare in those days, was said to have been a mark for counting the number of the years, and the law was placed in the temple of Minerva because numbering was invented by Minerva.

Aedes Vestae



The Aedes Vestae was a type of tholus, a round structure probably imitating an ancient Italic hut. It contained the sacred fire, the Palladium brought by Aeneas from Troy and other sacra which were kept in a secret recess called the penus Vestae (Festus Epitome 250: *penus vocatur intumus in aede Vestae tegetibus saeptus*); but no statue of the goddess herself. There is a statue of Vesta in my book “Gods and Other Odd Creatures,” but it is medieval, not ancient.

Study Question IX

- Compare this shrine and the gate of Janus to the usual concept of a pagan temple as to structure and purpose.*
- Of what was the Aedes Vestae originally made?*
- How does it carry on the numina tradition?*
- What great treasure did the Aedes Vestae house?*

Ovid Fasti Book VI: 257-268

dena quater memorant habuisse Parilia* Romam,
cum flammae custos aede recepta dea est,
regis opus placidi, quo non metuentius ullum
numinis ingenium terra Sabina tulit. 260
quae nunc aere vides, stipula tum tecta videres,
et paries lento vimine textus erat...

forma tamen templi, quae nunc manet, ante fuisse 265
dicitur, et formae causa probanda subest.
Vesta eadem est et terra: subest vigil ignis utrique:
significant sedem terra focusque suam.

*ancient festival April 21

*They say Rome had celebrated the Parilia forty times,
When the goddess-guardian of the flame was received
In the shrine, made by the peace-loving king,
(None more god-fearing was ever born in Sabine lands.)
The brazen roof you see was made of straw,
And its walls were woven of pliant reeds...
Yet the form of the temple which now stands, they say,
was the same before, and for a worthy reason
Vesta is also Earth: in them both is unsleeping fire:
Earth and the fireplace are both symbols of home.*

Ovid Fasti VI 296-298

*esse diu stultus Vestae simulacra putavi, 295
mox didici curvo nulla subesse tholo.
ignis inextinctus templo celatur in illo:
effigiem nullam Vesta nec ignis habet.
Being foolish I long thought that there were statues
Of Vesta, later I learnt there were none in her curved home:
An undying fire is concealed with the shrine,
But neither Vesta nor fire has an image.*

Fasti VI 423-436

*creditur armiferae signum caeleste Minervae 424
urbis in Iliacae desiluisse iuga...
Apollo dicit
'aetheriam servate deam, servabitis urbem:
imperium secum transferet illa loci..*

*seu gener Adrasti, seu furtis aptus Ulixes,
seu fuit Aeneas, eripuisse ferunt;
auctor in incerto, res est Romana: tuetur 435
Vesta, quod assiduo lumine cuncta videt.*

*A heavenly image of armed Minerva was said
To have fallen on the hillside near to Troy...
Apollo said
'Preserve the celestial goddess, and preserve
The City: she carries with her the seat of power.'...
They say it was stolen, whether by Diomedes,
Or cunning Ulysses, or perhaps by Aeneas
The agent is uncertain, but the artifact is in Rome:
Vesta guards it: because she sees all by her unfailing light.*

References

Ancient works cited above

Gods and Other Odd Creatures by Rose Williams
Lacus Curtius website by Bill Thayer