



# وستا

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"Vesta" means simply "hearth," and comes from the same root meaning "to shine" as the Greek "Hestia," with Whom She was identified.

<http://www.thaliatook.com/AMGG/vesta.php>

# Vesta

Definition from Wiktionary, the free dictionary

*See also:* **vesta**

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## English

### Etymology

From Latin *Vesta*, related to Ancient Greek ἥστια (*hestía*, “to dwell”) and Ἑστία (*Hestía*, “Hestia”), all from Proto-Indo-European *\*h<sub>2</sub>wes-*; see also Old High German and Old English *wesan* (“to be”), Gothic *wisan* (*wisan*), Sanskrit वसति (*vasati*, “abide dwell”).

*Vesta* itself came to mean chaste, pure, or virgin, based from this goddess.

### Proper noun

#### Vesta



Vesta  
astronomical  
symbol

- (Roman mythology)* The virgin goddess of the hearth, fire, and the household, and therefore a deity of domestic life. The Roman counterpart of Hestia.
- A female given name* in occasional use.
- (astronomy)* Short for 4 Vesta, the fourth asteroid discovered.

### Coordinate terms

- (Eternal Virgin Goddesses)*: Hestia, Artemis/Diana, Athena/Minerva

### Synonyms

- (astronomy)*: 4 Vesta , ♃

### Derived terms

- vestal virgin
- Vestan
- Vestian
- vestal
- vestoid

### Translations

<b>Roman goddess</b>	[show ▼]
<b>asteroid</b>	[show ▼]

### Anagrams

- stave
- vates

### See also

- (mythology)*: 🌐 **Vesta (mythology)** on Wikipedia.
- (astronomy)*: 🌐 **4 Vesta** on Wikipedia.

## French

### Proper noun

#### Vesta

- (Roman mythology)* Vesta
- (astronomy)* Vesta



Vesta  
astronomical  
symbol  
(alternate)





Vesta  
astronomical  
symbol  
(2nd  
alternate)

## Synonyms

- *(astronomy)*: (4) Vesta , ☾

## See also

-  **Vesta (mythologie)** on the French Wikipedia.
-  **(4) Vesta** on the French Wikipedia.

## Anagrams

- vaste

# Portuguese

## Proper noun

### Vesta *f*

1. *(Roman mythology)* Vesta (Roman goddess)

## Related terms

- Héstia

# Serbo-Croatian

## Pronunciation

- IPA<sup>(key)</sup>: /vêsta/
- Homophones: vèsta
- Hyphenation: Ves·ta

## Proper noun

### Vèsta *f* (Cyrillic spelling Вѣста)

1. *(Roman mythology)* Vesta (Roman goddess)

## Declension

<b>Declension of <i>Vesta</i></b>	[show ▼]
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| fr:Astronomy | Portuguese lemmas | Portuguese proper nouns | pt:Roman deities | Serbo-Croatian lemmas  
| Serbo-Croatian proper nouns | sh:Roman deities

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# Vesta (mythology)



*Vesta holding a patera and scepter on the reverse of an antoninianus (ca. 253 AD)*

**Vesta** (Latin pronunciation: [ˈwesta]) is the virgin goddess of the hearth, home, and family in Roman religion. Vesta's presence is symbolized by the sacred fire that burned at her hearth and temples. Her closest Greek equivalent is Hestia.<sup>[1]</sup>

The importance of Vesta to Roman religion is indicated by the prominence of the priesthood devoted to her, the Vestal Virgins, Rome's only college of full-time priests.

## 1 Etymology

Georges Dumézil (1898–1986), a French comparative philologist, surmised that<sup>[2][3]</sup> the name of the goddess derives from Indo-European root *\*h<sub>2</sub>eu-*, via the derivative form *\*h<sub>2</sub>eu-s-* which alternates with *\*h<sub>2</sub>w-es-*. The former is found in Greek εὔειν *heuein*, Latin *urit*, *ustio* and Vedic *osathi* all conveying 'burning' and the second is found in *Vesta*. (Greek goddess-name Ἑστία *Hestia* is probably unrelated<sup>[4]</sup>). See also Gallic Celtic *visc* "fire."

## 2 Theology

Vesta is the goddess of the hearth of the city of Rome.

Dumézil<sup>[5]</sup> draws a comparison between Roman religious conceptions and rituals and the relevant aspects of Vedic religion. Sacrificial ritual in Vedic India, required the presence of three fires, two of them being essential.<sup>[6]</sup>

The so-called *gārapathya*, *hearth of the landlord* marks the connection to the Earth of the offerer; it is the marker of the origin of the whole ritual act. In Vedic ritual such kind of fire must be round as Earth itself was believed to

be round and also because on Earth there is no distinction in direction without reference to Heaven.

The *āhavanīya*, *sacrificial fire*, or *fire of the offers* on the contrary must be quadrangular as it is intended to convey the sacrificial offer to Heaven in the form of smoke.

These two fires are laid on a West-East line.

The third *dakṣinagni*, *fire of the right side* has the function of protecting the offerers from attacks of evil spirits and is placed to the South, believed to be a dangerous direction.

Dumézil elaborates that in Rome the whole site of the city itself was considered as an extended sacrificial ground,<sup>[7]</sup> with the temple of Vesta performing the function of *hearth of the landlord* and other temples that of *sacrificial fires*. He remarks that the temple of Vesta was the only ancient temple in Rome to be built in a round shape and covered with a dome to protect the sacred fire from rain, other temples being quadrangular. Ancient Romans as well as other Indoeuropean peoples believed the Earth is a sphere. Every temple though had to have two fires of which one was a *hearth* (Latin *focus*), representing the *fire* (Latin *foculus*) of Vesta as the *Hearth of the city*, and the main was the sacrificial *ara*.

In this conception the function of *defensive fire* was performed by the temple of the god Vulcanus that was situated to the South of the pomerium, sacred city wall, this location being in accord with what could be expected from the homology with the Vedic situation.

The *Aedes Vestae* and the *Ignis Vestae* being the *Hearth* of the city of Rome guaranteed its connexion to Earth and its permanence in history. It did not need to be inaugurated as other temples since it was an *aedes*, not a *templum*, its power and function being limited to Earth exclusively and bearing no relationship to Heaven and its directions, but implying stability and lasting over time for the city.

It is noteworthy that the sacred fire of Vesta, as standing for and representing the terrestrial origin of the community, could be lit only by the friction of two pieces of wood, one of them being necessarily from an *arbor felix*, auspicious tree, (probably an oak)<sup>[8]</sup> and cave in shape. Water was not allowed into the inner *aedes* nor could stay longer than the indispensable time on the nearby premises. It was carried by the Vestales in vessels called *futiles* which had a tiny foot that made them unstable.<sup>[9]</sup> Similarly in Vedic ritual the lotus leaf representing water was placed on the fire of the offers representing Heaven, the true site of waters, and not on the fire of the landlord, representing the Earth, site of true fire.



Temple of Vesta in a 2009 photo

Quite a number of rules of the *aedes Vestae* we know about can be explained by the interpretation of the significance of homologous rules in Vedic rituals concerning the *hearth of the landlord*.

In conclusion, Vesta is a symbol and a protector of Rome and its site, the *Hearth of the great Roman family*.

According to Ovid and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Vesta is the Earth itself, the sacred sphere (*orbs*) that makes life possible as we know it: “Vesta is the Earth itself, both have the perennial fire, the Earth and the sacred Fire show their see.”<sup>[10][11]</sup>

The space within which men lived had to be marked and protected by a sacred fire. The sacrality of fire is related to the belief that it is the element that originates from the Earth, origin of every life on Earth and that connects our world with the divine one.

The sacral function of fire is reflected by the peculiar relationship of the Vestals with the *rex* whom they ritually apostrophated once a year with the phrase: “*Vigilasne rex? Vigila!*”<sup>[12]</sup> and their accompanying the Pontifex Maximus in various rites.<sup>[13]</sup> The *atrium Vestae* too is frequently called *regal*.

The sacred flames of the hearth were believed to be indispensable for the preservation and continuity of the Roman State: Cicero states it explicitly. The purity of the flames symbolised the vital force that is the root of the

life of the community. It was also because the virgins’ ritual concern extended to the agricultural cycle and ensured a good harvest that Vesta enjoyed the title of *Mater Mother*.<sup>[14]</sup>

This connection between the sacred fire, Earth and life on it is also the reason why the Vestals guilty of unchastity were condemned to be buried alive, an expiation conceived to be a token of their belonging to Earth and of reparation towards it. Chastity as unspent power to give birth, owing to a concentration of vital energy, was in ritual use transferred to flocks and fields: the purity of fire was a symbol of such a concentration of vital energy.<sup>[15][16]</sup> Parallelism between the Vedic sacrificial ritual and the Roman situation include the sweeping of the site of the *garhapatya* in order to free it from all the impure dwellers, since it is the place in which the sacrificant takes his seat. After the sweeping the officiant sprinkles the place thoroughly with salt, because salt is cattle. A third prescription concerns putting a lotus leaf, symbol of water, on the sacrificial fire and not on the *garhapatya*, in order to put the waters in their true seat, Heaven. The *Aedes* was solemnly swept once a year, on June 15, the last day of the *Vestalia*. That day was named *Q(uando) S(tercum) D(elatum) F(as)*: since the temple site in historic times was obviously kept clean, this expression is an heritage of high antiquity, an archaic fossil ritual, reminiscent of a time when really the sweeping implied the removal of animal droppings.

In the light of this theology it is noteworthy that Vesta is always invoked the last in all ritual formulas concerning one or more gods (*Vesta extrema*), while Janus, the god of beginnings and passages, associated with Heaven, is always invoked at the beginning. This use is comparable to that concerning Agni in the *Rig Veda*: Agni is invoked first or last or at both places. In Iranian rituals *Atar* is always invoked at the end.

### 3 Comparative mythology and legends of fire

Dumézil hints to the significance of fire as the origin and bearer of life in connection to Vesta. Its talismanic value was the reason that caused the accumulation of *signa fatalia* or *pignora* harboured in the innermost part of the *penus*. Servius gives a list of seven, three of which from Troy.<sup>[17]</sup> The earliest collection was limited and kept secret, though according to Pliny<sup>[18]</sup> the function of fertility was represented by the image of a male sex organ.

The correspondence of Vesta with Vedic god Agni was noted long ago.<sup>[19]</sup> Dumézil recalls that in the Indian epic poem *Mahabharata* the episodes of *Karttikeya*, god of war and son of Agni<sup>[20]</sup> and of Agni and the daughters of *Nila*<sup>[21]</sup> bear the same theme of the flames as the sex organ of the god.





*Temple of Vesta on the reverse of a denarius issued in 55 BC by Quintus Cassius Longinus.*



*Coin issued under Nero: the reverse depicts the cult statue of Vesta, holding a patera and scepter, within her hexastyle temple.*

The fecundating power of sacred fire is testified in Latin mythology in one version of the birth of Romulus,<sup>[22]</sup> that of the birth of king Servius Tullius<sup>[23]</sup> (in which his mother Ocesia becomes pregnant after sitting upon a phallus that appeared among the ashes of the ara of god Vulcanus, by order of Tanaquil wife of king Tarquinius Priscus) and that of the birth of Caeculus, the founder of Praeneste.<sup>[24]</sup>

All these mythical or semilegendary characters show a mystical mastership of fire. E.g. Servius's hair was kindled by his father without hurting him, his statue in the temple of Fortuna Primigenia was unharmed by fire after his assassination.<sup>[25]</sup> Caeculus kindled and extinguished fires at will.

In Vedic India the same complex appears as a quality of the divine twins, the Nasatya: they allowed a hero to survive in a basin of fire into which he had been thrown and enjoy the bathing as pleasant.

A much later episode of Roman history has been detected as a revised replication of the same early mythologem. In the fire of the temple of Vesta of the year 241 BC Lucius Caecilius Metellus, and at the time Pontifex Maximus, saved the palladium, to which men were not allowed, and according to tradition was blinded in the incident.<sup>[26]</sup>

Modern scholars have speculated that it would be impossible to cover offices as pontifex and consul for a blind man for more than twenty years. It has been suggested that this episode should be interpreted in the light of the connexion of the gens Caecilia with Caeculus, the founder of Praeneste.<sup>[27]</sup> The use of the story of this incident is paradigmatic of how archaic mythologems common to Indo European heritage were reused over time grafted onto history.

## 4 Vestals

Main article: [Vestals](#)

Vesta's (in some versions she is called Vestia) fire was



*The Virgo Vestalis Maxima depicted in a Roman statue*

guarded at her Temples by her priestesses, the Vestales. Every March 1 the fire was renewed. It burned until 391, when the Emperor Theodosius I forbade public pagan worship. One of the Vestales mentioned in mythology is Rhea Silvia, who with the God Mars conceived Romulus and Remus (see founding of Rome).

The Vestales were one of the few full-time clergy positions in Roman religion. They were drawn from the patrician class and had to observe absolute chastity for 30 years. It was from this that the Vestales were named the Vestal virgins. They could not show excessive care

of their person, and they were not allowed to let the fire go out. The Vestal Virgins lived together in a house near the Forum (*Atrium Vestae*), supervised by the **Pontifex Maximus**. On becoming a priestess, a Vestal Virgin was legally emancipated from her father's authority<sup>[28]</sup> and swore a vow of chastity for 30 years.<sup>[29][30]</sup> This vow was so sacred that if it were broken, the Vestal was buried alive in the *Campus Sceleris* ('Field of Wickedness'). It is likely that this is what happened to **Rhea Silvia**. They were also very independent and had many privileges that normal women did not have. They could move around the city but had to be in a carriage.<sup>[31][32][33]</sup>

The Vestales had a strict relationship with the *rex sacrorum* and *flamen dialis* as is shown in the verses of Ovid about their taking the *februae* (*lanas*: woolen threads) from the king and the *flamen*.<sup>[34]</sup> Their relationship with the king is also apparent in the ritual phrase: "Vigilans rex, vigila!" by which they apostrophated him once a year on an unknown occasion. The sacrality of their functions is well compounded by Cicero's opinion that without them Rome could not exist as it would not be able to keep in contact with the gods.<sup>[35]</sup>

A peculiar duty of the Vestals was the preparation and conservation of the sacred *salamoia muries* used for the savouring of the *mola salsa*, a salted flour mixture to be sprinkled on sacrificial victims (hence the Latin verb *immolare*, "to put on the *mola*, to sacrifice"). This dough too was prepared by them on fixed days. Theirs also the task of preparing the *suffimen* for the *Parilia*.

## 5 Vestalia

Vesta was celebrated at the Vestalia which took place from June 7 to June 15. On the first day of the festivities the *penus Vestae* (the curtained *sanctum sanctorum* of her temple) was opened, for the only time during the year, at which women offered sacrifices.

## 6 Household worship

Vesta is the goddess of the hearth at the centre of *atrium* and home. It was in the house and home that Vesta was most important because she was the goddess of the hearth and of fire. Vesta is particularly important to women of the household as the hearth was the place where food was prepared and next to it the meal was eaten with offerings being thrown into the fire to seek the future from the way it burned. The degree of the importance of Vesta and the hearth in Roman times carries on into modern English, where the word *focus* (Latin for *hearth*) continues to be used in a variety of ways, both scientifically and metaphorically, that although differing from the original meaning, still carry a sense of *focussing* or concentration on something of importance.

## 7 Vesta outside Rome

Vesta's cult is attested at Bovillae, Lavinium and Tibur. At Bovillae were located the Alban Vestals (Albae Longanae Bovillenses), supposed to be continuing the Alban Vestals. Lavinium had the Vestals of the *Laurentes Lavinates*. The two orders were rooted in the most ancient tradition predating Rome. Tibur too had his own vestals who are attested epigraphically.

Vestals might have been present in the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis near Aricia.<sup>[36]</sup>

## 8 References

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- [3] E. Benveniste *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* Paris, 1969 (glottologist Émile Benveniste speaks on Georges Dumézil's theory)
- [4] Robert Beekes: *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Leiden-Boston, 2010, p. 471-2
- [5] G. Dumézil *La religion Romaine archaïque* Paris Payot 1974 part 2 chap. 2; It. tr. Milano Rizzoli 1977 p. 287 ff.
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- [7] A. Magdelain *Recherches sur l'imperium, la loi curiate et les auspices d'investiture* Paris 1968 pp. 57-67.
- [8] J. G. Frazer *The golden bough* abridged version 1913.
- [9] G. Dumézil above p. 284.
- [10] Ovid *Fasti* VI 269.
- [11] Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* II 66, 3: "And they regard the fire as consecrated to Vesta because that goddess, being the Earth and occupying the central position in the universe, kindles the celestial fires from herself".
- [12] Servius *Ad Aeneidem* X 228.
- [13] e.g. Horace *Carmina* 3, 30, 8; the rites of the *Opiconsivia* in the *Regia*.
- [14] A. Brelich "Vesta" *Albae Vigiliae* n. s. 7 (Zurich 1949) p. 48-66 as cited by D. P. Harmon "Religion in Latin Elegists" *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römische Welt* 1986 p. 1971.
- [15] A. Brelich above p. 259-277. Harmon above.
- [16] Ovid *Fasti* VI, 458-460.
- [17] Servius *Aeneis* VII 188.

- [18] Pliny the Elder *Naturalis Historia* XXVIII 39.
- [19] Numa-Denis Fustel de Coulange *La cité antique* 1864.
- [20] Mahabh. 14, 291-292.
- [21] Mahabh. 2, 1124-1163.
- [22] Plutarch *Rom.* 2, 7.
- [23] Dionysius of Halicarnassus IV 2, 1-4; Ovid *Fasti* VI, 633-636.
- [24] Serv. *Ad Aen.* VII 678; Angelo Brelich *Vesta* 1949, pp.70, 97-98.
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- [28] Gaius 1,145
- [29] Plut. *Numa* 10,2
- [30] Dion. Hal. 2,67,2
- [31] Gaius 1,145
- [32] Plut. *Numa* 10, 4
- [33] Gell. *Noct. Att.* 1, 12,9; 7,2
- [34] Ovid *Fas.* 2, 21
- [35] Cicero *Font.* 48.
- [36] M. G. Granino Cecere “Vestali non di Roma” in *Studi di Epigrafia Latina* **20** 2003 p. 67-80.

## 9 External links

- *Vesta* at Encyclopædia Britannica.

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