

# Woman in Roman Criminal Law

## Abstract

This thesis deals with several topics of Roman Criminal Law that pertain mainly to women, such as the criminal prosecution of adultery or the crimes of the Roman Vestal Virgins. Its main focus is on crimes where women were the only, or predominant perpetrators. Another field of interest in this study are crimes for which women used to receive different or worse punishments than men. In a wider context, this thesis focuses on the life of women in the Ancient Rome, on the many ways their status and roles in the society changed with the passing centuries, and on the ways how this was all reflected in the Roman Criminal Law.

The main topics of interest include *adulterium* (adultery), *abortus* (abortion), *lenocinium* (pandering), *stuprum* (debauchery) and *crimen incestum* (crimes of the Vestal Virgins).

Chapter One, **The Changing Status of Women in Roman Society**, serves as a general introduction to the main topic of this thesis. It shows the changing position of women in Roman society, with a focus on the transformation of the meek, obedient Republican matron into the wild, openly sexual creature that was the woman of the Late Republic and Early Principate.

Chapter Two, **Extramarital Relations**, deals mainly with the topic of adultery and its punishment. Its main focus is on the double standard between men and women, and on the evolution of adultery as a crime. Apart from adultery, this chapter also contains a commentary on the crimes of *stuprum* (debauchery) and *lenocinium* (pandering). A portion of this chapter is devoted to famous cases of adultery trials in the Imperial Period.

Chapter Three, **Abortions and Abortionists**, deals with the topic of history of abortions in Ancient Rome. It shows, how the mentality of the Roman Society slowly changed, how abortions went from a common and necessary evil to a crime that punished women who attempted it with banishment.

The last chapter, **Vestal Virgins**, focuses on the status and function of the Vestal Priestesses in the Ancient Rome. It mainly deals with the topic of *crimen incestum* and its punishments, as well as political implications that some of the accusations carried. A large part of this chapter is devoted to the topic of Vestals on trial and their fates.

As a whole this thesis aims to present a comprehensive look at the topic of crimes and punishment of women in the Ancient Rome. Apart from the legal side of things, it also focuses on the wider social and historical context, in which the events described within these chapters took place.