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## Gender and Priesthood in the Ceres cult of Roman North Africa

Panel 16: Religion in Society  
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One of the limited ways in which women could act in the public life of their cities, was by acquiring a priesthood. Apart from the *flaminicae* of the imperial cult, the priestesses of the goddess Ceres are the group of *sacerdotes* that is best attested in the epigraphic record. About a hundred of these women are known; half of them originated from Italy – including Rome – while the other half lived in North Africa. In contrast to Italy, in North Africa also quite a few men can be found who served as priests in the Ceres cult.

Besides the existence of these male priests of Ceres, there is another special African characteristic related to the cult, i.e. the fact that in this area the *Cereres* were regularly worshipped. It has been argued that the *Cereres* were the same as the Greek Demeter and Persephone, and this brings up questions concerning the roots of the North African Ceres/*Cereres* cult and the role of Romanisation. I would like to suggest that three different roots – a Greek, a Punic and a Roman one – can be detected in the cult. This will be the first point of this paper.

The second main focus – gender – can be linked to Romanisation, and this leads to the following question: What was the role of gender with regard to the process of Romanisation? The social status of the *sacerdotes* is related to Romanisation and gender, and will therefore be analyzed as well.