The Cult of Bona Dea in Relation to the Augustan Moral Agenda on Female Behavior

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Abstract

` This thesis analyzes the cult of Bona Dea in relation to the Augustan moral movement, looking specifically into how the emperor used the cult of Bona Dea to assimilate the traditional feminine morality of chastity, purity, and virtuousness into the behavior of Roman women. I begin the thesis with an examination of the Augustan legislation, discussing elements of the moral movement he desired to usher into the Roman empire. Following the chapter on the Augustan legislation is a thorough analysis of the cult of Bona Dea, deliberating on how the character of the goddess and the rituals of her cult's festivals assist in the assimilation of the moral movement to the Roman female population. In the subsequent chapters, I discuss examples (Livia) and counter examples (the cult of Bacchus and Julia) of the Roman feminine ideals of virtuousness exemplified by the Augustan moral movement and the cults he promoted, specifically the cult of Bona Dea.

The initial research question was "How do the values inherent in the rituals and festivals of the cult of Bona Dea relate to the Augustan values during the regime of Augustus?" After further research, a decision was made to evaluate how both the character of the goddess Bona Dea and her cult's activities assisted, along with state legislation, in influencing Roman women (specifically elite women) to align with the Augustan moral movement. The method of investigation was primarily reading books and articles on either Bona Dea or the Augustan imperial family and the marriage legislation of 18 BC, making connections between the two for the topic of this thesis. Through these books and articles, I was able to identify primary sources, being ancient Roman authors discussing the topic, to include in the discussion.

By the end of the research and writing process, I concluded the Augustan moral movement used the cult of Bona Dea to assist in the legislative and societal push for Roman women to maintain the character of the traditional *matronae.* The cult encouraged to women to display behavior of chastity, purity, and loyalty. However, the case of Julia and her banishment permitted a conclusion of Roman women were expected to create and maintain a *public* image of traditional virtuousness, with these moral behavioral expectations being seen as secondary in the private sphere.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my loved ones. Thank you for helping me get to where I am today.

CONTENTS

1 THE AUGUSTAN MORAL MOVEMENT THROUGH ROMAN LEGISLATION

1.1 *LEX JULIA DE MARITANDIS ORDINIBUS*

Augustus, at the beginning and throughout his regime, had an agenda of bringing prosperity and morality to the lives of Roman citizens through the return of traditionalism. The emperor without an official title used cult involvement and legislation to assimilate the ideals of his regime – traditional roman behavior of moral excellence. Fortunately, and very likely purposely, the legislation pushed and passed by Augustus fell in line with the ideals of the Roman cults he "revived" in the empire, such as the cult of Bona Dea. Both Augustan marriage legislation and the rituals of Bona Dea encouraged women to epitomize the ideal chaste, virtuous Roman woman, one who fulfilled her moral obligations as a married woman and consequently assisted in the repopulation efforts through lawful marital reproduction.

In 18 BC, Augustus began to push forward new legislation, laws with the purpose of legally encouraging Romans to put into practice traditional Roman ideology. Augustus himself, in his own official list of works accomplished (his *Res Gestae*), described his marriage legislation as "bringing back into use the many exemplary practices of our ancestors which were disappearing in (his) time."[1] The laws in question were the *Lex Julia de maritandis orinibus* and the *Lex Julia de adulteriis*, which were designed to reform the *mores* of the Roman people through a fertility agenda that conveniently assisted in increasing the declining birth rate of the upper classes.[2] The *lex Julia de maritandis orinibus*, introduced in 18 BC, encouraged married couples to have more children through a system of rewards and penalties. Although incentive

[1] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti,* 8.5.
[2] Kristina Milnor, *Augustus, History, and the Landscape of the Law* (The John Hopkins University Press: 2007), 9.

was provided for men to have children through political and economic rewards, such as having precedence in office,[3] the legislation extended the benefits of childbearing to women as well by providing revolutionary rights to mothers. Before the legislation, women could not inherit from their husbands more than 100,000 sesterces, as enforced by the *lex Vocania* law. Gaius, in *Gai Institutiones,* confirms the limitations of the law when explaining how a woman could acquire a trust:

> A woman who cannot by the *lex Vocania* be instituted heiress by a testator registered in census as owning a hundred thousand sesterces, can nevertheless take an inheritance bequeathed to her by way of trust.[4]

The *lex Vocania* only allowed a woman to be instituted as a legatee, meaning she could not receive from her husband's will property of higher value than what was given to the heir or joint heirs.[5] With the legislation emplaced by Augustus, both the husband and wife could inherit the entirety of the other's property through their wills, but only after meeting specific requirements dependent on the number of children the couple had.[6] As we are informed by Ulpian, women were granted revolutionary benefits regarding inheritance if they either had a living child, one child lost after they reached puberty, two children who survived until they were at least three years old, or three children who survived after their naming day (around nine days after birth).[7]

Further incentive to have an abundance of children was provided to women through being granted *ius liberorum.* The addition of *ius liberorum* to the Augustan marriage legislation

[3] P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower: 225 B.C.-A.D.14* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 563.
[4] Gaius, *Gai Institutiones,* 2.274.
[5] P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower,* 563.
[6] P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower,* 564.
[7] See note 6.

allowed women who served the state through child bearing to be freed from the legal restraints of *tutela mulierum* (guardianship).[8] *Tutela mulierum* was a legal requirement of classical Roman law stating that a woman must be protected by a chosen guardian (usually her paternal uncle) for the purpose of ensuring her inherited property and general welfare.[9] If a woman was given *ius liberorum*, and therefore released from the restraints of *tutela mulierum*, her legal and business activities, such as making a will[10] or selling property (including a dowry), did not require the consent of her guardian.[11] Additionally, if a woman was granted *ius liberorum*, she could receive more than one tenth of her husband's property through his will. In his *Institutes*, Gaius explains the requirements for a woman to be granted this specific legal privilege:

> Moreover, freeborn women are freed from *tutela* by the right of three children (*ius trium liberorum)*, but freedwomen [only if they have] four, if they are in the *tutela legitima* of their patrons or his sons. Certainly, the other, who have tutors of other kinds, such as Atilian or *fiduciarii*, are free by the law of three children.[12]
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> Gaius, *Institutes*, *1.196.*

Essentially, women were rewarded for the utilization of their fertility with legal benefits. The enactment of progressive legislation involving female rights implies the importance Romans placed on child-bearing reproduction, further illuminating the gravity of fertility-based goddesses such as Bona Dea, whose followers were encouraged to be the ideal Roman wife with characteristics of fruitfulness and loyalty.

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[8] Gaius, *Institutes,* I.144.
[9] Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A sourcebook on marriage, divorce, and widowhood* (London: Routledge, 2002), 23.
[10] Gaius, *Institutes,* 2.118.
[11] See note 9.
[12] Gaius, *Institutes,* 1.194.

1.2 *LEX JULIA DE ADULTERIIS*

To legally reinforce female chastity he expected, Augustus enacted the *Lex Julia de Adulteriis Coercendis*in 18 or 17 BC. [13] It was an act designed to bring Roman citizens in line with his moral re-alignment Rome; a part of his *tribunicia potestas*. The legislation was designed to prevent sexual acts outside the marriage bed, particularly adultery.[14] For the first time, adultery was punished by the state, specifically as tried in the criminal court called the *quaestio perpetua de adulteriis.* The law, however, only applied to adulterous female spouses and their lovers.[15] Previously, the punishment of female sexual misbehavior was conceded to the private sphere, and the husband had the right to kill adulterous parties on the spot.[16] By creating legislation on the matter, Augustus made certain that the sexual misconduct of women would be publicly addressed - and not only as a threat to the private family, but also the state. David Cohen, in fact, argues that adultery became punishable in court because the act was seen as a threat to society; a misconduct that was "symptomatic of, and [contributed] to, the degeneracy of an elite who are perceived as failing adequately to reproduce themselves as a social group."[17] Through the enactment of the adultery legislation, Augustus provided legal incentive to *matronae* to display the chaste behavior expected of Roman women in his established moral program -- a chastity in their behavior which would further ensure the repopulation of elite Roman citizens.

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[13] Ulpian, *Digest*, 48.5.1.
[14] Thomas A.J. McGinn, "Concubinage and the Lex Iulia on Adultery," in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 340.
[15] Thomas A.J. McGinn, "Concubinage and the Lex Iulia on Adultery," 340-341.
[16] Thomas A.J. McGinn, "Concubinage and the Lex Iulia on Adultery," 341.
[17] David Cohen, "The Augustan Law on Adultery: The Social and Cultural Context" in *The Family in Italy: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 124.

The Augustan adultery law defined the sexual acts prohibited by a married woman and her lover as either *struprum* or *adulterium,* both of which were determined by the requirement of a *mens rea.* The law failed, however, to provide a distinction between the sexual terms.[18] Ulpian, in a discussion of *Les Julia de Adulteriis*, explains the lack of distinction in stating "the words of the statute 'let no one hereafter knowingly and with malicious intent commit *struprum* or adultery' apply to him who counsels *struprum* or adultery and him who brings it about."[19] Nevertheless, in terms of the law, *struprum* meant fornication with an unmarried woman who was not exempt from the penalties of the statute (prostitutes, slaves, etc.), while *adulterium* was the sexual violation committed with a non-exempt married woman, primarily a *matronae.* Although the male pronoun is used by Ulpian when discussing the decree, the use of "he" was directed towards a male who fornicated with a *matrona.* In this sense, the law was specifically designed to prevent the sexual immorality of *matronae* whose behavior was deemed as crucial towards the continuation of Roman society, as they were freeborn, fertile, married women.

Female spouses found guilty of adultery faced severe punishment under the law, including the confiscation of one third of their property and one half of their dowries.[20] Additionally, punishments were imposed on the male lover; one half of his property was confiscated.[21] This punishment was added as incentive for men to resist acting on a desire to go to bed with married women. Furthermore, if a woman was found guilty of adultery, the law also essentially stripped her of the public honor of being a *matrona* (in the literal sense)*:* the husband was required to divorce his guilty wife, or otherwise risk being prosecuted for the *lenocinium* (pimping) of his

[18] Thomas A. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome,* 144.
[19] Ulpian, *Digest,* 48.5. 13(12).
[20] Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire,* 84
[21] see note 20.

spouse.[22] The convicted adulteress was also forbidden from ever remarrying again, thus permanently removed from the ranks of the *matrona*.[23] The legislation thus indirectly implied that if a Roman woman were to maintain the most honorific level granted to women in society, sexual loyalty to her husband had to be maintained.

For a woman raised in a culture that taught that a woman's primary purpose in life was to be married and raise children, the idea of becoming perpetually unmarriable would have been a severe enough threat to ensure (a public display of) chastity. Moreover, if the threat of social ostracization was not enough of a motivation, banishment from Roman society -- a complete isolation from a previous way of life -- was a penalty for adultery as well. For when convicted of adultery, a woman was also sentenced to *relegation in insulum*. She was banished from the city of Rome, and being forced to live on an island.[24] Augustus' daughter Julia, as will be discussed below, is an example of the seriousness of the Augustan legislation and the substantial punishment for women, regardless of their social standing. The risk was real, and was great, for those who did not maintain the desired public image of traditional morality expected of them by Augustus, and inherent in the cults he promoted.

A state induced, judicial punishment of infidelity provided Roman *matronae* with a legal incentive for virtuous behavior, expressly marital loyalty. Consequently, Roman women were directed towards publicly embodying the moral ideals pushed by Augustus' regime: the chastity, loyalty, and virtuousness traditional to Roman women going back as far as the origin story of Bona Dea.

[22] Ulpian. *Digest*, 48.5.30(29).
[23] Ulpian, *Digest,* 48.5.30(29).1.
[24] Thomas A. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome,* 143.

2 BONA DEA – AN EXEMPLAR GODDESS FOR THE AUGUSTAN MORAL AGENDA?

2.1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE GOOD GODDESS AND HER CULT

Through a promotion of the mystery cult of Bona Dea by Livia's active involvement in the cult's ongoings, Augustus utilized the power of religious influence (in addition to legislation) to encourage Roman women of his time to behave in a chaste manner of traditional virtuousness. Bona Dea, locative to Rome and referred to by Romans as the "Good Goddess", was the perfect moral exemplar to help push his moral movement into the daily lives of elite Roman women. The goddess' mythology accentuated her as quintessential of female morality. With such an image attached to her character, naturally an implication of chastity, purity, and virtuousness was inherent in the rituals of her cult's December and May festivals. By agency of knowledge of the Good Goddess' character and active involvement in her cult, Roman Women, especially elite Roman *matronae*, were reminded of their moral obligation to maintain an appearance of traditional demureness expected to be displayed by their sex during the Augustan regime.

2.2 THE LOCATIVE ORIGIN OF BONA DEA AND CULT

One of the most obscure cults in the city of Rome was the cult of Bona Dea, a goddess whose festivals were, and still are, cloaked in the unknown. Because men were strictly prohibited from attending any ceremony related to the goddess, there is little written testimony about the festival of Bona Dea by the ancient historians. As Cicero stated, Bona Dea is "that goddess

whose name must not even be known my men, and whom this person therefore calls the 'Good Goddess.'"[25]

The cult of Bona Dea is identified as a locative cult, her home located in the city of Rome. To be a locative cult, the cult's set of beliefs must be tied to a specific place, and "concerned primarily with the cosmic and social issues of keeping one's place and reinforcing boundaries," originating from a need to "maintain the 'appropriate order' of things following a series of purification and repairing acts."[26] Although the specific hearth location of the cult is unknown, Bona Dea's mythography was fixed in the Latin region.[27] The temple of Bona Dea Subsaxana was built on Aventine hill,[28] in the area where Remus had taken his foundation augury according to Roman legend.[29] With origins believed to be in Latium, Bona Dea was pointedly tied to Rome and the regions surrounding the city, a connection potentially useful for Augustus when promoting Roman traditionalism.[30]With a connection to the heritage of the Roman region, the moral code of conduct taught within her cult was associated with the expected behavior of female Roman citizens, specifically elite women. As emphasized by Greg Woolf, "local sanctuaries were always embroiled in the construction of civic ideologies,"[31] a fact exemplified during the Augustan regime in his promotion of the cult, considering the ideology

[25] Cicero, *De Haruspicum Responsis,* 17.37-18.38.
[26] Leonardo Ambasiano, *The Goddess Who Failed? Competitive Networks (or Lack Thereof), Gender Politics, and the Diffusion of the Roman Cult of Bona Dea* (Religio: Revue Pro Religionistiku, 2016), 123-124.
[27] Ambasiano, *The Goddess Who Failed?,* 139.
[28] Ambasiano, *The Goddess Who Failed?, 122*.
[29] Sarolta A. Takacs, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in the Roman Religion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 101.
[30] H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Source and Description of the Cult* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 323.
[31] Greg Woolf, "Isis and the Evolution of Religion," in *Power, Politics and the Cults of Isis: Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Isis Studies* (Boston: Brill 2014), 62-92.

aligned well with his moral agenda. The importance of the connection between Bona Dea and Augustan moral reform and ideology will be discussed in a later chapter.

The cult of Bona Dea was a state cult, shown by the expressions used to define the worship of the goddess in literary sources such as, "*publicis religionibus," "popular sacrum publica,"* and "*publicas caerimonias."*[32] Indeed, the nature of these descriptions suggests that the Romans believed that the cult of Bona Dea and its rituals ensured the well-being of the state. This conclusion is further upheld by the fact that Bona Dea's feasts were listed in the Roman calendar (and mentioned in Ovid's Fasti),[33] as well as the use of the terms *pro populo* and *pro salute populi Romani* in literature discussing the purpose of the celebrations.[34] Considering the importance Romans placed on state religion (of Roman heritage) to ensure the prosperous continuation of the state, Bona Dea and her cult must have been crucial to the well-being of Rome.

2.3 THE GOOD GODDESS MYTHOLOGY – A COMMON THEME OF VIOLENCE

Though there are multiple versions of the goddess' origin story, the two most in-depth descriptions of her mythology are provided by the ancient historians Macrobius (writing in the fifth century AD) and Plutarch (wiring in the first century AD) who nevertheless wrote their accounts with hundreds of years separating them. However, despite general differences, both stories incorporate the common themes of sexuality and violence towards a mortal Bona Dea (commonly referred to as "Fauna"), as well as the involvement of both wine and myrtle in her impending doom.

[32] H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 254.
[33] Ovid, *Fasti* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 271*,* 5.147-158.
[34] H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 254.

The difference in perspectives of the two historians is centered on sexual violence, as one account involves rape (Macrobius' version), while the other lacks any mention of the subject (Plutarch's version). According to Macrobius, Fauna was the daughter of the Latin king Faunus, who lusted after his unmarried and chaste daughter to such a degree that it led to deception and rape. In *Saturnalia I.12.20-29,* dated to the early 5th century AD, Macrobius describes his theories on the worship and mythology of Bona Dea, and provides a description of her background:

> It is said too that she was the daughter of Fanunus, and that she resisted the amorous advances of her father who had fallen in love with her, so that he even beat with myrtle twigs because she did not yield to his desires though she had been made drunk by him on wine. It is believed that the father then changed himself into a serpent, however, and under this guise had intercourse with his daughter.[35]
>
> Macrobius, *Saturnalia,* 1.12.20-29.

Plutarch told a different tale of law breaking and the ultimate punishment, beginning with a contradiction to Macrobius' statement of Bona Dea being the daughter of Faunus by arguing she was instead the wife of the Latin king. In *Roman Quaestiones Romanae,* he briefly mentions the mythology of Bona Dea when contemplating the religious purpose of excluding myrtle in festivals for the goddess. He references the experts on mythology in his account, stating, "as the mythologists relate, this goddess was the daughter of Faunus, and after having been found drinking wine in secret was beaten by her husband with myrtle twigs."[36] Being beaten for such

[35] Macrobius, *Saturnalia,* 1.12.20-29.
[36] Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae* XX.

an offense would have been seen as just, in archaic times: a law originating at the time of Romulus forbade the consumption of wine by women, with consequences of severe physical punishment. In other words, according to this story, Bona Dea was punished in accordance to the historic law.[37]

Despite the differing versions of the tale told by the two historians, both accounts do contain the common aspects that Fauna drank wine and was then beaten by her male superior (whether it be her father or her husband). The Macrobius interpretation depicts Bona Dea as a victim, a chaste woman who was tricked into defilement because of the uncontainable desire of the more powerful sex. Indeed, she was so modest a woman that even the supposed erotic effects of wine on her gender had no influence on her own sexual behavior. As explained by Valerius Maximus, "in the olden days the use of wine was unknown to women, for fear that they might lapse into some disgraceful act. For it is only a step from the intemperance of Liber pater to the forbidden things of Venus."[38] The Romans believed that wine caused sexual promiscuousness in women, and that, once intoxicated, women could not fight this urge because of their generally weak nature.[39] Thus when she resisted sexual advances in spite of the power of wine, Fauna became among Romans an exceptional woman of outstanding willpower. Her moral character intensified with her virginity remaining stubbornly intact, even in the face of violence. Neither the powerful effects of alcohol nor the influence of violence could break her fortitude.

Plutarch's version of the mythology does not include the persistent resistance to sexual advances. Instead, Fauna was severely punished for rebelling against laws placed on women

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[37] Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 48.
[38] H.S. Versnel, "The Festival for Bona Dea and Thesmophoria," in *Women in Antiquity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 195.
[39] Gaius, *Institutes I.190.*

regarding the consumption of wine. Her (supposed) father associated the condumption with sexual misconduct, since wine was linked to supposed aphrodisiac effects especially influential on female erotic lust.[40] Wine was within the realm of Venus, and with it came the possibility of threatening sexual acts seen as dangerous for the well-being of the Roman state, such as women committing adultery.[41] As a consequence, for a risk of sexual misbehavior, she was whipped with myrtle branches. Thus Faunus violently forced Fauna to repent for her sexual desires, and made her submit to the chastity expected of a proper Latin woman.[42] However, the choice of myrtle as a whipping stick seems to contradict the purpose of such a form of punishment, considering the plant was believed to be an erotic sexual stimulant. In the same passage where Plutarch questions the ban of myrtle in the Bona Dea festival, he mentions how the plant was "sacred to Venus."[43]

2.3.1 Bona Dea as the Exemplar of Female Purity

Despite the implications of sexual immorality within Plutarch's story, Bona Dea was the exemplar of chastity in Roman society, an idea commonly agreed upon by ancient authors and utilized in the Augustan efforts to promote morality. In fact, Romans saw her as a woman who modeled a nearly unobtainable level of *pudicitia.* Tertullian, around 197 AD, claimed, "Faunus' daughter excelled in chastity to such a degree that she refused to be in the company of men, whether from barbarism, from being conscious of her plainness, or for shame of her father's insanity."[44]Arnobius, who wrote in approximately 300 AD, references a description of Fauna by Varro, who claimed she "also displayed such modesty that no man, except her own husband, has

[40] H.S. Versnel, *The Festival for Bona Dea and Thesmophoria, 195.*
[41] Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess*, 48.
[42] Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess,* 29.
[43] Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae,* 20.1.
[44] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes ,* 2.9.22.

ever seen her during her lifetime or has ever heard her name."[45] The sentiment was further recognized by Macrobius when he discussed the Good Goddess in relation to Varro's teachings, for Varro allegedly said that "she was the daughter of Fauna, and so modest that she never left the women's quarters, that her name was never heard in public, and that she never saw a man nor was seen by a man."[46] Through being identified with extreme morality and purity, Fauna became for the Romans the protectress of female chastity and an example of a paragon woman for elite *matronae* (such as Livia), as the goddess Bona Dea. An inscription dating to the first century AD in Dalmatia identifies Bona Dea as "protectress," possibly referring to the fact that she was thought to preserve the chastity of Roman women:

> B(onae) D(eae) Dom(inae) Heiae A[ug(ustae)] / Triumphali terrae / marisq(ue) Dominatric[i] / Conservatrici / mentiumque bo[n]aru, / ac remediorum Potenti / Deae Bene Iudicanti / [C]alpurnia L(uci) Pisonis aug(uris) f(ilia) / Cn(aei) Pisonis neptis / d(onum) d(edit)
>
> *Calpurnia, daughter of the augur Lucius Piso and Granddaughter of Gnaeus Piso, has given this (altar) as a present to Bona Dea Domina Heia Augusta Triumphalis, the Mistress of the land and sea, the Protectress, the Mistress of wisdom and medicine, the Goddess of right judgment.*[47]

In the inscription, Bona Dea is related to wisdom, correct judgment, and protection, all of which can be tied to the mythological accounts of her willpower and can furthermore illuminate on the role of her worship within Roman society. Through a resistance to her father's (or husband's)

[45] Arnobius, *Divinae Institutiones,* I.22.9-11.
[46] Macrobius, *Saturnalia,* 1.12.20-29.
[47] H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 128.

advances until forced, she proved her superior judgment in terms of moral sexual conduct. As a goddess, she protected and ensured the chastity of women, since her nonconsensual defilement made her unable to maintain her own purity.

3 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND CULT FESTIVALS OF BONA DEA

There are few straightforward interpretations of the festivals of Bona Dea. Since no men were allowed to attend, male historians were not interested (inevitably so, due to restrictions) in investigating and explaining the rituals in depth. When discussing the innerworkings of the festivals for this cult, then, it is necessary to consider the many different puzzle pieces provided by multiple ancient authors – selectivity for "accurate" information is a luxury one cannot afford with such an obscure cult.

The event that sparked an abundance of curiosity and inquiry regarding Bona Dea was the Clodius scandal of 62 BC, when the Roman nobleman infiltrated the December festival and caused a massive scandal. Subsequent to the event, multiple ancient authors wrote about the cult of Bona Dea, which means that details regarding the cult and it's religious festivals were provided most extensively in relation to the scandal.

3.1 THE DECEMBER FESTIVAL

Cicero, in his *De Legibus* claimed, "nocturnal ceremonies shall not be celebrated by women except those which take place for the people according to religious usage."[48] Considering that the December festival for the cult of Bona Dea occurred at night and was celebrated solely

[48] Cicero, *De Legibus,* 2.9.21.50.

by women, the cult and its rituals thus should be understood as being considered crucial to the wellbeing of the Roman state. As Plutarch points out, "the most important part of the ceremonial rites (of Bona Dea) is performed by night, when revelry attends the all-night celebrations and much music is heard."[49] The "importance" of this portion of the ritual might lie in the example Bona Dea set for female morality and sexual behavior, specifically terms of chastity and fertility. Indeed, reminders of what the goddess stood for are referenced throughout the known rituals of the December festival, beginning with a ban on anything identified as male.

3.1.1 The Systematic Exclusion of Everything Male

There is one aspect of the rituals of Bona Dea that ancient authors altogether focus on more than any other: the taboo of anything male. We may see this as early as the literature on the festival provided by Cicero when deliberating on the scandal of 62 BC. Cicero remarked on the event in a meeting of the Senate on May 15, 61 BC, through an oration against Clodius and his action, which was then published in 58 BC.[50] In the oration, Cicero recounts that men were strictly forbidden from attending the December festival:

> For he was suspected of having committed adultery in the house of C. Caesar, both High Pontiff and Praetor, with the latter's wife Pompeia, and at this time when the secret rites of Bona Dea – to which no men had admittance – were being celebrated by the Vestal Virgins and the most high-born women.[51]
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> Cicero, *Frgm. XXXVII*, 28.

[49] Plutarch, *Life of Caesar, IX-X.*
[50] H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 150.
[51] Cicero, Frgm. XXVIII, 28.

Not only did Cicero show the nocturnal nature of the ritual, but he also illuminated other elements of the festival, such as the fact that the Vestal Virgins were in attendance, and that solely elite women were the attendees. Seneca, nearly a century later, elaborated on the strictness of such an exclusion, when discussing the Clodius scandal as well, in his *Ad Lucilium XVI 97 2.*

> …this violating the rites of the sacrifice which is alleged to be performed for the people, all men so rigorously being kept outside the enclosure that even representations of male animals are covered.[52]
>
> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium,* 16.97.2.

Seneca provided another element of information about the secret rites. The high-born women taking part in the festival could not view anything of the male sexuality during the night of rituals and celebration, therefore, not only were men excluded, but also anything of male sexual nature. This was done either by covering it, or by removing it from the house. Plutarch further confirmed the taboo in his *Life of Caesar,* writing, *"*Now, when the day of the festival comes around, a Consul's or Praetor's wife takes over and arranged everything, after her husband, with anything male, has left the house."[53]

The specific information regarding the ritual was discussed in relation to the Clodius scandal, showing how interest in the cult rose with the forbidden involvement of the opposite sex. Plutarch's account confirms the fact that the festival was celebrated at night, but it also relates another otherwise unknown fact: the wife of the highest magistrate presided over the

[52] Seneca, *Ad Lucilium,* 16.97.2.
[53] Plutarch, *Life of Caesar IX-X.*

festival. Thus this account, combined with Cicero's description, reveals that the festival was held at night in the house of the highest magistrate, and was led by the wife of said magistrate.

A possible reason for male exclusion from the festival of Bona Dea relates to the goddess' role as protector of traditional female morality and chastity, for with the exclusion of male sexuality came the elimination of the temptation, thus safeguarding female sexual behavior. It is important to remember that it was particularly Roman elite women who were the participants in Bona Dea's rites. Thus, it must be inferred that the ideology of the Good Goddess reinforced traditional Roman morals expected of elite Roman women in the Augustan era, such as exhibiting virtuousness and purity, both of which were seen as necessary for a wife's loyalty to her husband. The Romans believed that an elite Roman woman's faithfulness to her husband was necessary for the growth of the citizen population, and the success of Rome.[54] In Augustus' time, when the senatorial class population was declining, goddesses who promoted characteristics of the traditional *matronae*, which happened to additionally advocate for the bearing of citizen children, were seen as an essential addition to an elite woman's dogma. Bona Dea was, in a sense, the embodiment of ideal female sexuality, and worked in tandem with societally placed moral expectations for elite Roman women, making her a favorable Goddess for Augustus' moral agenda. Not only did she protect Roman *matronae* from the threats posed by their own desires, but also from the dominating and controlling lust of men. Her powerful nature as a goddess enabled her to protect Roman women from the deceit of men,[55] helping them stay on the path proposed by society. Such ideology is further emphasized in the other elements of the ritual, such as the exclusion of myrtle, the inclusion of wine, and the iconography of the snake,

[54] P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower,* 559.
[55] Attilio Mastrocinque, *Bona Dea and the cults of Roman Women* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), 182.

as will be discussed. The elements of the ritual, including food, drink, symbols, colors, dances, and clothing, all showed the female participants how to behave modestly and in accordance with societal expectations.[56]

3.1.2 The Sacrificial Drinking of Wine – An Anomaly

An interesting contradiction within the ritual was the inclusion of sacrificial wine (*temetum* wine),[57] and the exclusion of myrtle. In Macrobius' discussion of the cult and the goddess' mythology, he writes, "it is customary to bring wine into her temple not under its own name, but the vessel containing the wine is called honey-jar, and the wine, milk."[58] The practice was also mentioned by Plutarch, who wrote, "in [Bona Dea's] honor (they) pour libations of wine, which they call milk, however."[59] A different name for a substance whose consumption is banned for women in normal circumstances is important when considering the symbolic meaning of the various aspects of the ritual. To begin with, the Roman traditions revolving around wine and milk dated back to the time of Romulus, and were indeed ingrained in the rituals of Roman cult practice. In his *Naturalis Historia,* Pliny the Elder pointed out that Romulus poured libations of milk, not wine.[60] With this information, the description "milk" for wine in Bona Dea's rites could be a reference to tradition and an association of Bona Dea with Rome's history, emphasizing the goddess' role as a native deity who specifically assists Roman women.[61]

Despite alluding to Roman history, the consumption of wine was an anomaly for women in Roman society. Under the disguise of the title "milk," Roman women were allowed to drink

[56] Mastrocinque, *Bona Dea,* 190.
[57] Versnal, *Festival for Bona Dea,* 195.
[58] Macrobius, *Saturnalia,* 1.12.20-29.
[59] Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae,* 20.34.
[60] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia,* 16.88.
[61] Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 329.

sacrificial wine, an act which had been banned for women since the time of Rome's founding.[62] Dating back to the beginning of Rome's history, wine had been associated with the heightening of moral weakness in women and was believed to result in sexual misbehavior.[63] Considering the importance placed on the *matronae* sexual loyalty (for female adultery did not lead to citizen children), the use of sacrificial wine by women violated fundamental social codes in Roman society.[64] However, the inclusion instead of the titles "milk" and "honeypot" within the ritual, changed everything. In antiquity, one of the associations with honey was sexual life in marital affairs. The honey pot, in particular, was connected to bees, who were associated with ideas of strict chastity in marriage within the mythological context. Using mythology as a reference, the Romans believed that bees specifically attacked those guilty of illicit sexual relationships.[65] In the cult of Ceres, another fertility goddess who was specifically seen as being concerned with sexual activity within the marriage realm, a mixture of wine and honey was one of the traditional offerings.[66] Additionally, milk, a substance produced only by the female sex when and after being pregnant, obviously had connotations of fertility. In the context of the Bona Dea ritual, by calling wine "milk", and its container a "honey-jar," female fertility is specifically referenced, remembered, and celebrated. Additionally, the two substances' affiliation to Roman history made them markers of the "par excellence of utopian golden times."[67] Those new terms turned what

[62] Eventually, by the time of the Republic, women were allowed to drink a sort of watered down sweet wine, however, the ban on sacrificial wine, called *temetum* wine, remained in place. The purpose of such an exclusion could be many things, such as ensuring the stark contrast between male and female religious practice and their level of importance or possibly sacrificial wine was believed to have more erotic effects.
[63] Versnel, *The Festival for Bona,* 195
[64] Versnal, *Festival for Bona Dea,* 194.
[65] Staples, *From Good Goddess,* 51.
[66] Staples, From *Good Goddess,* 51.
[67] Versnel, *Festival for Bona Dea*, 195.

was otherwise seen as a threat to the well-being of Roman society into a fertility act which ensured the continuation of the state.

With these associations in mind, a purpose for such an anomaly of the inclusion of wine in Bona Dea's rites can be proposed. In being allowed the consumption of a banned substance, women, at surface level, were temporarily released from the strict expectations of Roman society. They were granted a night of freedom. However, their roles in society were never truly forgotten, for they were involved in a ritual in honor of a goddess who protects female purity. By changing the title of wine in the ritual, the usage of the substance instead reminded the elite Roman *matronae* of their own fertility, and of the importance of maintaining their traditional roles as loyal, citizen-bearing wives - a role which had been their duty since the time of Romulus and Fauna. As explained by Sarolta Takacs, "Rome's elite matrons were allowed to enjoy this sacrificial wine during the festival because they were in a cultic position of being symbolic conduits, guarantors or fecundity and continuation of life, just as the Vestals were throughout their tenure."[68] The consumption of wine was permitted in the special circumstance of the festival for Bona Dea because the rituals, including the consumption of wine, assisted in the fertility of Roman *matronae*.

3.1.3 The Taboo on the Myrtle Branch

The exclusion of myrtle further illuminates the idea of fertility over sexuality in the Bona Dea ritual. An obvious explanation to the exclusion of the plant was that it was a symbolic gesture of respect to the goddess, since she had been brutally whipped with myrtle by her father/husband. Plutarch contemplated the topic when he asked, "why is it that women when they

[68] Takacs, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrona,* 109.

put up in their houses a shrine to the Women's goddess, bring in no myrtle, though they take pride in making use of all kinds of growing and blooming plants?"[69] The inclusion of blooming plants most likely had to do with the festival's theme of fertility and birth, as flowers bloom and grow a woman's womb. Additionally, an exclusion of myrtle may have served the purpose of expressing sexual loyalty and fruitfulness as well. As later explained by Plutarch in his contemplation, myrtle was a well-known sacred plant of Venus.[70] As Bona Dea is the opposite of Venus (a goddess of chastity versus a goddess of desire), the exclusion of a plant attributed to the latter served the purpose of eliminating any dangerous sexual desires such a goddess could illicit.[71] Wine in a festival without any sexual stimulants, such as myrtle or any object of male sexuality, could reasonably promote lawful, marital fertility, especially under the guise of milk and honey. However, the incorporation of myrtle, a plant associated with eroticism and carnal appetite, would contradict the championing of fertility over sexuality otherwise present in the ritual consumption of sacrificial wine. Such an exclusion made sense for a festival which was, at the core, about sexual purity and reproduction of citizen children.

3.2 THE MAY FESTIVAL

While there is some information about Bona Dea's December festival, the same is not true for her May festival - the ancient authors paid even less attention to the May festival than they did to the December. Indeed, a near complete absence of information on the former renders difficult any investigation into its inner workings. It is known the festival was celebrated on May 1st, at the Bona Dea *Subsaxana* temple, and that it involved with a public feast to the goddess.

[69] Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae,* 20.34.
[70] See note 45.
[71] Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 337.

The festival itself was held for the purpose of celebrating the anniversary of the foundation of the temple on the Aventine hill. The temple stood in the same area where Remus took his foundation augury,[72] providing a connection between Bona Dea and the founding history of Rome. Ovid explains the foundation myth of the temple in his *Fasti:*

> Meantime the Good Goddess must be the theme of my song. There is a natural knoll, which gives its name to the place: they call it the Rock; it forms a good part of the hill. On it Remus took his stand in vain, what tome, birds of the Palatine, ye did vouchsafe the first omens to his brother. There, on the gentle slope of the ridge, the Senate founded a temple which abhors the eyes of males.[73]
>
> Ovid, *Fasti*, 271.

Through Ovid's poetical description, one discovers that men were not just forbidden from the festivals, but also from the temple of Bona Dea itself. Since the May festival date was on the calendar and mentioned in Ovid's *Fasti*, it is probable that the festival itself was seen as necessary for the continuation of the state.

The only literary information we have about the May festival itself involves the feast and is told by Macrobius. He recounts (on the authority of information provided by Cornelius) how the cult had the sacrifice of a pregnant cow and the performance of "obscure rites."[74] However, the additional details provided by Macrobius are extremely similar to those provided by other ancient authors about the December ritual, so it is possible that Macrobius confused the May and December feasts.[75] Despite the possible confusion, there is a nevertheless a strong probability the

[72] Takacs, *Vestal Virgins,* 101.
[73] Ovid, *Fasti,* 271.
[74] Macrobius, *Saturnalia,* 1.12.20-29.
[75] Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 370.

two feasts were in fact similar to each other in nature, except, one was celebrated at night.[76] The exclusion of myrtle and the rare inclusions of sacrificial wine were most likely a part of the May feast as well. Macrobius in fact states, "the presence of a myrtle twig in her temple is sacrilege" and "it is the custom to bring wine into her temple," under the title of "milk," and in a honey jar.[77] He also provides information about tamed serpents living in the temple, and describes a statue of the goddess with vines over her head,[78] which both would have logically been present during the feast as well. Other than this select information provided by Macrobius (hundreds of years after the time of Augustus), there is no other literary information about the May festival, with no knowledge of who exactly performed the rituals, at what time the rituals took place, the nature of the rituals themselves, and the type of participants. A solid conclusion about the festival is therefore impossible, due to a lack of information. With the known similarities in mind, however, one can presume that the May ritual, like the December, also reinforced ideas of fertility, sexual purity, and the continuation of the Roman state through the birth of citizen children, all of which were essential elements of the Augustan moral agenda.

3.3 A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CULT OF BONA DEA AND THE AUGUSTAN MORAL LEGISLATION

As discussed in previous chapters, Augustus centered the lives of Roman women on fertility and chastity by implementing legislation designed to inspire women to have more children, and by publicly favoring cults that aided in such moral behavior. During this period, a woman's duty to reproduce citizen children became the forefront of her moral obligations,

[76] See note 75.
[77] Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.12.20-29, 57-59.
[78] See note 77.

emphasized through the public element of legislation and the more private elements of religious activity. The cult of and rituals associated with Bona Dea supported the obvious child-bearing agenda of Augustus, as the rituals provoked the followers into embodying the perfect Roman wife: one who adheres to her moral obligations by remaining sexually chaste, mentally pure, and endeavoring towards vast motherhood.

In book 56 of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, the ancient historian underscores Augustus' concern in the diminishing number of citizen children in the empire, as he recalls a speech given by the ruler in the Forum. Although directed toward men, Augustus' speech was charged with parturient propaganda: a call for men to fulfil their Roman duty of "replenishing the fatherland."[79] Considering that wives played a substantial role in ensuring that such a duty was fulfilled, one can assume that the message extended to Roman women, as well. In fact, in his speech Augustus specifically provided his expectations for an elite Roman *matrona* by describing the ideal Roman woman as "a wife who is chaste, domestic, a good house-keeper, (and) rearer of children."[80] Encouraging women to participate in cults like Bona Dea, which were centered around the traditional Roman female ideals of fertility and chastity, subtly encouraged women towards becoming the moral beings he envisioned for his reign.

Considering that Augustus was unable to promote the cult of Bona Dea himself, as he was a member of the taboo sex for the goddess, he instead employed the persuasive image of his wife Livia as an example for women to follow. According to Ovid's account, it was Livia who restored the temple of Bona Dea; a move that aligned her with the female morality agenda of her husband, and the chastity of the Good Goddess. He states:

[79] Dio, *Roman History,* 56.2.1.
[80] Dio, *Roman History,* 56.3.2.

> There on the gentle slope of the ridge, the Senate founded a temple which abhors the eyes of males. It was dedicated by an heiress of the ancient name of the Clausi, who in her virgin body had never known a man: Livia restored it, that she might imitate her husband and follow him in everything.[81]
>
> Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.132-158.

In restoring the temple of Bona Dea, Livia identified her own moral values as conforming with those of both the chaste goddess Bona Dea and the first dedicant of the temple. As Augustus' wife and therefore an influential figure on the female population, Livia became one of the primary instruments in spreading his moral agenda to the world of Roman women: she was a mortal and contemporary role model of "correct" female conduct embodied by the goddess Bona Dea. Essentially, Livia became living proof that becoming the ideal, moral Roman woman was possible for women of her age, and that those qualities were not restricted to an immortal and mythological ideal.

4 LIVIA: A MORTAL ROLE MODEL FIGURE OF THE IMMORTAL CHASTITY OF BONA DEA

A key element of the Augustan return of traditionalism was the reestablishment of Roman women as the bastion of integrity (as it helped repair the ethical damage brought to Rome in the civil war period), since women were perceived as the "moral agents" of ensuring sexual morality.[82] As the wife of a ruler who presented himself to the Roman public as a man on an ethical calling of restoring traditional morality, Livia had to present herself as the definition of

[81] Ovid, *Fasti, 5.*132-158.
[82] Guy De La Bedoyere, *Domina: the women who made Imperial Rome* (Yale University Press, 2018), 58.

the female virtues so lauded in Augustus' Golden Age. By becoming the ideal Roman matron, she set an example for the wives of the upper classes to follow, promulgating Augustus' moral agenda from an ambition to a reality. The female values Augustus encouraged for women of the Roman empire centered around the concepts of *matronae* and *pudicitia*, essentially motherhood and a purity in behavior, which both focused on chastity.[83] As the female figurehead of his family -- a family of influence who set the ideal for Roman households to follow -- Livia was obliged to encapsulate an image of marital fidelity and pure virtue.[84] Her primary means of characterizing herself according to the Augustan moral image of demureness was through portraiture and public activities, such as the restoration of the temple of Bona Dea.

4.1 THE EMPRESSES' PORTRAITURE – ICONOGRAPHY TO FIT AN IMAGE OF CHASTITY

One efficient technique for spreading the moral expectations of the Augustan regime and Livia's virtues to the general public was through the iconography of the empress' portraiture. The well-known portrait of Livia that spread throughout the Roman empire during the Augustan regime, developed between 27 and 17 BC, is referred to as the Fayum type.[85] With the inclusion of the time-honored Roman nodus hairstyle, enlarged eyes, and the shrunken mouth, the Fayum type portraiture presented Livia as a superlative model Roman woman with elegant, modest beauty and a dignified, peaceful demeanor.[86] A nodus was a pronounced Roman hairstyle which sat over the forehead, specifically accompanied by a braid leading back to a simple bun and

[83] Anthony A. Barrett, *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 124.
[84] Anthony A. Barrett, *Livia,* 123.
[85] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia: Imagining the Imperial Woman in Augustan Rome* (Cambrridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999),74.
[86] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia,* 74.

small waves of hair framing the face.[87] As the specific hair style was traditionally Roman, the choice in the hair design depicted on the Fayum portrait sent a message of Italic nativism.[88] Compared to her earlier portrait types, the Fayum shows Livia's eyes rendered large and wide open, a detail that invokes the sense of peace and purity known in the chastity of virginal nature.[89] Evidently, Livia was a married women with children and therefore not virginal, but through adopting the iconography of an pure and innocent woman, she is associated with the traditional *pudicitia* of Roman characters such as Fauna. A downplayed mouth further suggests a woman's sublime chastity, since an emphasized mouth had connotations of eroticism.[90] Additionally, the fact that Livia was depicted as agesless and timeless, within her portraiture, also placed her between the realm of a mortal Roman matron and the immortal goddesses, such as Bona Dea. Through the displayed agelessness and motifs of both modesty and chastity, Livia thus became a human parallel to the Good Goddess; a woman who publicly proved that the virtues taught by Bona Dea and the Augustan regime were not an unattainable ideal reserved for the legends and the immortal.

The style of dress that Livia wears in her portraits further communicates the message that she was a woman who embodied the virtues of traditional Roman women. She is often depicted wearing the classical Roman dress, which for Roman matrons included three separate, body-enveloping levels: a *tunica* (sleeved dress) and a *palla* (mantle), to which a *stola* was often added. The Roman *stola* as a covering, concealing outer garment made a frequent sculptural appearance in the Augustan period, due to the garment's old-fashioned connotations of chastity,

[87] See note 86.
[88] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia,* 32.
[89] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia,* 40.
[90] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia,* 40.

modesty, and obedience.[91] Appearance wise, a stola is identified as a woolen shawl, being added to the *palla* of a Roman matrona as a symbol of her marriage to a Roman citizen and respectableness as a wife.[92] As soon as a Roman woman got married, she assumed this third, and fully covering, item of clothing, that spoke to the world of her modesty, and the fact that she was a model wife. The chastity associated with the stola arose not only through the virtue of the wearer, but also because of the of the thick nature of the piece. As it was placed on top of a *palla* (a tunic of more finely spun material), the addition of a *stola* "deflected the male gaze and thus protected the woman's body,"[93] from the dangers of male desire and therefore ensured the maintenance of her chastity. An association between wifely virtue and the *stola* was so strong that Ovid referred to the piece as an *insigne pudoris,* meaning a "badge of chastity."[94] With the incorporation of the *stola* into her iconography came, Livia visualy became the chaste Roman woman idealized in the Augustan regime, having the impeccable moral conduct of Bona Dea. Through wearing a "badge of chastity," Livia built a character of the same unbreakable virtues of the goddess she publicly followed and supported, Bona Dea.

4.2 Livia's Involvement with the Cult of Bona Dea and Embodiment of its Goddess' Moral Ideology

According to Anthony A. Barrett, Livia decided to focus on the cult of Bona Dea because it related "especially to the centrality of the family," which helped "reinforce (her) image of moral probity."[95] However, considering the association between the Good Goddess and chastity,

[91] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia,* 42.
[92] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia,* 42.
[93] See note 92.
[94] See note 92.
[95] Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia*, 125.

a public focus on the cult of Bona Dea likely had the underlying intention of reinforcing Livia's appearance as representing the "scrupulously chaste."[96] In restoring the temple of a goddess known in Roman historical mythology to possess unshakable *pudicitia*, she publicly reminded the populace of the characteristics she shared with the goddess; both were the exemplary traditional Roman woman. Livia's active involvement in the cult provided a great reminder to Roman women of the female duties suggested throughout the rituals for the Good Goddess. By associating herself with Bona Dea, Livia showed Roman women they too could embody the chaste ideology of Bona Dea, while simultaneously existing as the sexual beings required of motherhood. As a clear follower of the Good Goddess, through the way she presented her public image and her overt support of the cult, she became an example for other elite women to follow. Together, the public promotion of Livia's chaste character and her elevation of a fertility cult centered around feminine morality encouraged Roman women -- most importantly of the elite class -- to operate in a manner of traditional female virtue.

Roman historians such as Cassius Dio affirmed Livia's chaste nature through brief historical retellings regarding events which displayed her virtue at astonishing levels. In *Roman History,* Book 58, Dio describes Livia's argument to spare a few men she accidentally saw naked, in which she claimed that her character of maternal chastity and purity prevented her from seeing them as sexual objects. Therefore, the offense did not threaten her image as a virtuous *matrona*:

> Among many the excellent utterances of [Livia's] that are reported are the following. Once, when some naked men met her and were put to death in

[96] Dio, *Roman History,* 58.2.4.

> consequence, she saved their lives by saying that to a chaste woman such men are no different from statues.[97]
>
> Dio, *Roman History*, 57.2.4.

Her chastity became an undeniable element of her public identity, with the result that normally spiteful historians such as Tacitus celebrated her natural inclination towards traditional virtuousness.[98] In Book Five of his *Annals*, Tacitus, in an obituary notice for Livia, could not deny the moral propriety of the empress (in terms of sexual behavior), establishing that "in domestic virtue she was of the old school,"[99] meaning that the virtuousness she displayed imitated that traditionally expected of *matronae.*

The combination of public activity, specifically being the patroness for the cult of the Good Goddess, and the written approval by acclaimed historians regarding her virtuous behavior, provide ample confirmation of Livia's moral character. Indeed, she displayed to the public a matronly chastity that was comparable to the immortal goddess she followed, proving to the Augustan Roman woman that divine virtue was possible for a mortal being. Livia represented an attainable ideal for Roman women of the Augustan period, an example to follow in their own behavior -- encouraging them to also conduct themselves in accordance to the Augustan moral agenda. She became the model of a virtuous Roman woman and defined the path that other elite women should follow.

[97] Dio, *Roman History,* 57.2.4
[98] Anthony A. Barrett, *Livia,* 124.
[99] Tacitus, *Annals,* 5.1.

5 THE ROMAN MORAL IDEAL IN CULT ACTIVITY – BONA DEA IN, BACCHUS OUT

Cults with rituals that encouraged the acceptance of the moral behavioral expectations in the Augustan regime were supported and revived by the emperor during his rule, as involvement within them served as a means to an end (for his moral agenda). On the contrary, religious activity which seemed to defy the traditionalism inherent in the Augustan moral movement remained in a state of suppression. A difference in support can be found between the cult of Bona Dea and the cult of Bacchus, with one representing an improvement of traditional morality and the other foreign unorthodoxy.

5.1 RITUAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CULT OF BACCHUS AND THE CULT OF BONA DEA

The cult of Bona Dea contained similarities to the cult of Bacchus, as the ceremonies and rituals were Dionysiac in style.[100] However, despite their similarities, the cult of Bona Dea was advocated by Augustus during his reign. while the cult of Bacchus remained in a state of oppression; a systematic subdual of their "out of hand" rituals and cult activity enforced since 186 BC.[101] Promoting one cult and suppressing the other suggests that the promoted cult fell in line with the Roman ideology of the times, while the suppressed somehow contravened that ideology. Regardless of the similarities of these two cults, the cult of Bona Dea must have assisted in propagating the moral agenda of Augustus, while the cult of Bacchus remained a threat to the ideals of traditional morality.

[100] Mastrocinque, *Bona Dea,* 15.
[101] Takacs, *Vestal Virgins,* 91.

Similar to the cult of Bacchus, the rituals for Bona Dea involved female attendees who wore decorative hair pieces, an element of secrecy, and festivities of dancing, music, and wine.[102] The Greek cult of Bacchus was known for wild, hypersexual, fertility dances, complete with masks, and savage sacrifices of animals.[103] And while the focus of the rituals of the cult of Bacchus, at first glance, appears to be a night of release from societal constraints closer analysis of its known rituals provides evidence of an emphasis on the feminine realm of fertility, as is also the case with the cult of Bona Dea.[104]

Indeed, the festivals for both of these cults involved mystery rituals consisting of three parts, the *legomena* (uttered prayers), the *deiknumena* (the displaying of something with sacred significance), and the *dromena* (extremely secret activities of the ritual).[105] Besides both cults being mystery cults with an aura of secrecy, there seems to be an additional connection in the ritualistic elements of each festival, with both *dromena* parts involving music, dancing, and wine. For the cult of Bacchus, the *dromena* element of the ritual was called the *orgia,* including wine but more importantly wild dancing that led to *extasis.*[106] During the condition of *extasis*, called *enthousiasmos,* Bacchus was believed to possess the cult member and satisfy his needs. [107] However, by possessing the female participants he simultaneously activated the fertility within them. Although the cult of Bona Dea did not directly involve the god Bacchus, the domain he reigned over was involved in the Bona Dea ritual under the guise of milk: wine. However, one

[102] Patrick Faas, *Around the Roman Table: Food and Feasting in Ancient Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005)*,* 108.
[103] Patrick Faas, *Around the Roman Table,* 104.
[104] Katharine Bradway, *The Villa of Mysteries, Pompeii Initiation Rites of Women, (*The C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco: 1982*),* 11.
[105] Faas, *Around the Roman Table,* 109-110.
[106] Faas, *Around the Roman Table,* 106.
[107] See note 104.

could claim the wine is more related to the Roman god of wine, Pater Liber.[108] The connection seems more probable, considering the wine container was referred to as "honeypot," and Liber was credited with the discovery of honey inn Roman mythology.[109] Despite such an observance, other connections between the rituals of the two cults exist, such as the women in the Bona Dea December ritual putting ribbons in their hair, which was also done in the rituals of the cult of Bacchus. [110] [111]

More importantly, both cults were also orphic in nature, as dancing and music were a core element of the festivals. According to Ovid, Orpheus was the poet of the Bacchic rituals, connecting the cult of Bacchus and the ceremonial elements of music and dancing with the famous musician of mythology.[112] Similarly, Plutarch mentions that during the religious service of the December festival of Bona Dea, "the women are rumored to do many things among themselves that resemble the Orphic mysteries," with the "most important part of the ceremonies (being) performed at night, when revelry attends the all-night celebrations and much music too is heard."[113] He linked the cult of the Good Goddess with Orpheus by claiming the rituals were Orphic in nature, proven by the heard (but never seen) music and supposed dancing of the nighttime rituals. According to the modern scholar Attilio Mastrocinque, Roman Dionysism is a form of an Orphic path to eternal beatitude, as shown in Roman art, making Orphism a point of connection between the cult of Bacchus and the cult of Bona Dea through both their rituals being seen as Orphic in nature. [114]

[108] Faas, *Around the Roman Table,* 107.
[109] See note 105.
[110] Mastrocinque, *Bona Dea,* 72.
[111] Faas, *Around the Roman Table,* 108.
[112] Ovid., *Metamorphosis.* 11.67-68.
[113] Plutarch, *Life of Caesar,* 9-10.372-374.
[114] Mastrocinque, *Bona Dea,* 141.

5.2 THE BACCHANALIAN AFFAIR OF 186 BC

Regardless of the many similarities (from selective gathered information) between the cults of Bona Dea and Bacchus, only the cult of Bacchus was suppressed by the senate in 186 BC. Livy told the tale of the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 through the story of a young man escaping the grasps of the orgiastic cult. According to Livy, the beginning of the end of the cult's freedom in Rome began when the head priestess, Paculla Annia, changed the composition of the rituals from consisting solely of women to allowing the initiation of young men.[115] She also made the rituals held at night rather than during daylight.[116] Livy writes about the reason for the suppression in *Roman History* XXXIX.13.7-14:[117]

> From the time that the rites were performed in common, men mingling with women and the freedom of darkness added, no form of crime, no sort of wrongdoing, was left untried. There were more lustful practices among men with one another than among women. If any of them were disinclined to endure abuse or reluctant to commit crime, they were sacrificed as victims. To consider nothing wrong, she continued, was the highest form of religious devotion among them. Men, as if insane, with fanatical tossings of their bodies, would utter prophecies. Matrons in the dress of Bacchants, with dishevelled hair and carrying blazing torches, would run down to the Tiber, and plunging their torches in the water (because they contained live sulphur mixed with calcium) would bring them out still burning. Men were alleged to have been carried off by the gods who had been bound to a machine and borne away out of sight to hidden caves: they were those

[115] Mastrocinque, *Bona Dea,* 63.
[116] Plutarch, *Life of Caesar,* 9-10.372-374.
[117] Livy, Roman History *XXXXIX.13.7-14.*

> who had refused either to conspire or to join in the crimes or to suffer abuse. Their number, she said, was very great, almost constituting a second state; among them were certain men and women of high rank. Within the last two years it had been ordained that no one beyond the age of twenty years should be initiated: boys of such age were sought for as admitted both vice and corruption.
>
> Livy, *Roman History XXXXIX*, 13.7-14.

The Roman senate cracked down on the cult of Bacchus after determining the religious group did not safely ensure the continuation of traditional Roman society. As shown by the *senatus consultum,* rather than forbid the cult, the senate instead harshly suppressed the activity through a series of declarations on the cult's permitted proceedings. Four aspects of the cult activity became forbidden, with exceptions only being permitted if the urban praetor gave permission after approval from a full Senate:[118]

I. the maintenance of any place of Bacchic worship
II. male citizens, including those with Italian rights and allies, attending meetings of Bacchic women
III. conduct of worship in public or in secrecy
IV. a group larger than five people gathering for the cult

Additionally, the senate decreed five more declarations on the proceedings of the cult of Bacchus which could not be waived or altered under any circumstance. Aspects of the cult indefinitely forbidden were:[119]

[118] Sarolota A. Takacs, *Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 B.C.E* (Department of the Classics, Harvard University), 308.
[119] Plutarch, *Life of Caesar,* 9-10.372-374.

I. a man becoming a priest of Bacchus

II. a man or woman becoming a *magister* (chief administrator of the cult)

III. a common fund for the cult

IV. a man or woman being made *magister* or *pro magister*

V. Bacchants exchanging oaths, pledges, vows, or pledges, as well as pledging faith to each other.

Essentially, the cult of Bacchus was stripped of nearly all aspects of cult practice, consequentially losing all power as a cult in Roman society. From a technical point of view, the cult was still allowed to practice however, the restrictions were to such an extent that the cult was reduced from an influential religious group to an extremely small and insignificant gathering of likeminded people. An action of such rigid nature implies the senate viewed the cult of Bacchus as a substantial threat to the conservation of Roman society.

5.3 A Difference in Implications: The Cult of Bona Dea Versus the Cult of Bacchus

Contrary to an initial first assumption, the danger of the cult of Bacchus in the eyes of the Roman senate was not the switch to rituals being performed at night, nor the fanatic dancing of women in a religious setting. John Scheid argues that the initiation of men below 20 was the casual factor of the senate fundamentally banning the cult from practicing, claiming the act alarmed them because "very young men were initiated by their mothers … In short, women were taking the place of both the father and the city."[120] However, when contemplating the fact that

[120] John Scheid, "The Religious Role of Roman Women," in: *A History of Women: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 398.

the December ritual of Bona Dea was allowed, while Bacchant cult activity was not, it becomes clear that the threat came less from a switching of parental roles, and more from the possibility of secret and unlawful sexual misdemeanor. The hazardous component of the cult of Bacchus was the inclusion of young men from many different classes intermingling with women in fertility rituals of intense sexual undertones and implications. Considering the erotic connotations of wine in Roman society and the emphasis on fertility (made successful through sexual activity), the inclusion of men in festivals and rituals of sexual nature provides an irresistible temptation of unlawful fornication. With the cult of Bona Dea, on the other hand, the threat of sexual misbehavior with the inclusion of sexual stimulants was avoided through the exhaustive exclusion of anything identified as sexually male. Unlike the cult of Bacchus, the secret rituals for the cult of Bona Dea ensured prosperous fertility for the female attendants, which benefitted the Roman agenda by resulting in a growing number of citizen children.

An additional purpose for the official preference of Bona Dea over Bacchus is possibly rooted in the Augustan-Roman desire for traditionalism, a culture undeniably connected with their history. Unlike the cult of Bacchus, the cult of Bona Dea was a locative cult, with a heritage tied to the Latin region and the city of Rome itself. Considering locative cults were intertwined with civic ideologies[121], the cult of Bona Dea would have served as a medium to assimilate the Augustan moral agenda revolving around an androcentric mindset of female fertility and sexual modesty. With Augustus' ideologies in mind, the cult of Bacchus could not have served the same purpose.

[121] Ambasiano, *The Goddess Who Failed?,* 124.

Bona Dea and her ritual teachings were utilized by Augustus and the imperial family to spread traditional ideology through the impactful force of religion. Comparatively, as a foreign entity, the cult of Bacchus would not have been seen as a tool to assist bringing a Golden Age of Roman traditionalism to the city. Augustus' use of the cult of Bona Dea, specifically through the imperial women surrounding him, will be discussed in depth throughout the next chapters.

6 THE CAUTIONARY EXAMPLE OF JULIA FOR ROMAN WOMEN

Not only were cults punished for a behavioral misalignment with the traditional moral ideals, but women as well. In accordance with the Augustan *Lex Julia de Adulteriis* legislation, women were banished if they were found guilty of the ultimate denial of virtuousness -- adultery. To display the seriousness of his expectations for elite Roman women regarding their public display of traditional chasteness, Augustus made an example of his own daughter, Julia. through her adultery conviction.

As a female member of the Julio-Claudian family and the daughter of a man leading a moral reform, Augustus' daughter Julia was expected to display the same level of chastity modeled by her stepmother, Livia. Augustus wanted the women of his family to set a behavioral example for women of the Roman empire, requiring them to embody the traditional purity of the chaste goddesses he directed women to follow. Thus, the imperial woman would demonstrate that such model behavior was not a theme of the past, but possible in the modern present. From the time she was a child, Julia was raised with traditional ideals embedded in her upbringing. Spinning and weaving, for example, were a core element of her education. Both of these activities were prized by the Romans as those of a dutiful daughter or wife; adhering to tradition,

Julia herself actually made some of Augustus' clothing.[122] After marrying Agrippa and having many children with him, Julia seemed to have fulfilled the duties expected of a Roman woman.[123] Indeed, she was a chaste wife and dutiful mother to the extent that she was rewarded with the *ius liberorum.*[124] Behind the seemingly perfect and traditional image, however, was a woman who disregarded the teachings of Bona Dea through a dismissal of the moral dogma of her father. For beginning at the time of her marriage to Agrippa, Julia had multiple adulterous affairs (her affair with senator Sempronius Gracchus even lasted ten years) before the sexual behavior was brought to the public's attention.

Thus, while Livia became the ideal example for chaste women to follow, Julia soon evolved into the example of a woman who rejected the traditional framework in her private behavior. In one account, Macrobius speaks of a Julia who was unfavorably famous for her shameless remarks about her improper and transgressive sexual behavior.[125] Macrobius wrote long after the lifespan of Julia, however, so there is the possibility that he exaggerated Julia's ribald behavior. Nevertheless, one can conclude that Julia's sexual conduct was considered as societally unfavorable. According to historians such as Cassio Dio, her affair with Gracchus continued into her marriage to Tiberius, which was the reason that Tiberius ultimately left Rome.[126] Seneca, when providing a description of Julia, paid specific attention to her sexual life, claiming that she enjoyed the attention of "a whole crowd of adulterers," and participated in

[122] Guy De La Bedoyere, *Domina,* 84.
[123] Seutonius, *The Deified Augustus,* 64.
[124] Guy De La Bedoyere, *Domina,* 98.
[125] Judith P. Hallett, "Women in Augustan Rome," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 376.
[126] Guy De La Bedoyere, *Domina,* 99.

"nocturnal revels."[127] These accounts confirm that Julia was seen as the anti-wife, an archetype for the danger and misery that an unchecked woman could bring to a man.

6.1 THE EMPEROR'S DAUGHTER FOUND GUILTY OF ADULTERY

The transgressions of Julia were not punished until 2 BC, when her illicit sexual behavior as an elite Roman wife came to light and threatened the credibility of Augustus' moral agenda.[128] Her affairs with several men from the senatorial and equestrian orders became public knowledge, warranting prosecution under the adultery legislation due to her sexual misconduct. Velleius Paterculus describes her misdemeanor as having "left no untried disgraceful deed,[129]" emphasizing Julia's complete and purposeful lack of traditional virtuousness encouraged for Roman women to display. As explained by Bedoyere, the strong societal push towards unconditional perfect virtuousness to the extent of "being denied any personal autonomy [had] left (her) no choice other than mute compliance or frustrated rebelliousness;" after the death of Agrippa, she chose the latter.[130]

Suetonius in *The Deified Augustus* explains how Augustus, "at the height of his happiness and his confidence in his family and its training," ended up finding his daughter Julia "guilty of every form of vice and banished (her)."[131] After found guilty of adultery, Julia was forced to divorce Tiberius and banished to an exile island off the coast of Campania, Pandateria (today, the island of Ventotene). The emperor's daughter was never allowed to return to Rome and spent the rest of her life in exile, being denied any form of luxury, including the consumption of wine.[132]

[127] Seneca, *On Benefit,* 6.1.
[128] Guy De La Bedoyere, *Domina,* 101.
[129] Velleius Patereculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.100.3.
[130] Guy De La Bedoyere, *Domina,* 101.
[131] Suetonius, *The Deified Augustus,* 65.1.
[132] Suetonius, *The Deified Augustus,* 65.2.

In a display of control over her romantic affairs and consequently the honor of his family, no man of any class was permitted to visit his daughter without Augustus' explicit permission and thorough knowledge.[133] She was also banished from the Julio-Claudian family, for, as explained by Dio, Augustus "did not restore his daughter from exile," and also "commanded that she should not be buried in his own tomb."[134] Through this punishment, Augustus displayed the seriousness of his expectations for female sexual behavior, indeed showing that no woman, not even his own daughter, was above conforming to his, and Rome's ideals – the ideals of virtue, as modeled by Bona Dea and her followers, such as Livia. Augustus asserted the importance of the cult of Bona Dea by having his own wife be an influential member. Through her religious involvement in the cult, he encouraged women to follow her lead and become involved in the cult themselves, hence providing them with a means to comprehend the tenant of virtuousness exemplified by the goddess. As followers, the elite women were consequently expected to embody the goddess' morality in their own public behavior.

With the cult of Bona Dea, a city-wide model was set, and expectations were socially clarified, through religious examples. As a result of her public and private behavior, Julia went from an imperial woman with a role of female merit, to becoming the ultimate lesson for elite Roman women, for even the daughter of the most powerful man in Rome was punished for disregarding behavioral expectations. Julia represented the social and legal consequences of a woman who disregarded the example of Bona Dea uplifted by Augustus and sauntered away from their teachings of traditionality. A subsequent harsh punishment to the full extent of the law demonstrated the importance of a public display of behavior taught to women through cult

[133] See note 131.
[134] Dio, *Roman History,* 56.32.4.

involvement, such as the cult of Bona Dea and the goddess' model of virtuousness and sexual purity.

Yet, why such collective emphasis on "correct" female behavior? The answer may lie in the connection between a Roman man and the sexual purity of the women within his family. In Roman society, a man's failure to ensure the purity of the women surrounding him was seen as a humiliating deficiency in masculinity, meaning that a woman's sexual conduct had to be strictly regulated, if a man's reputation was to remain intact.[135] Therefore, the danger of family and personal shame was lessened, perhaps, by Augustus's actions. For by promoting goddesses such as Bona Dea, who were centered around ideas of female virtuousness, sexual purity, women were encouraged to maintain the faithful feminine role expected of them by Roman society. And, by creating a law that punished rebellious women and their lovers, Romans were further encouraged to act well, according to tradition.

7 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MORAL CHARACTER BOUND ONLY TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE? – THE QUESTION OF PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

Although Julia was severely punished for displaying a lack of female morality, the length of time between her first affair and her punishment for immoral actions, as discussed below, suggests the following questions. Were Roman women really expected to entirely embody the chastity and purity of their Roman role models? Or was the true importance in maintaining a public *image* of the ideal traditional woman?

[135] David Cohen, "The Augustan Law on Adultery," 112.

The extended period without authoritative action regarding her illicit behavior suggests that the moral movements of Augustus outlined above were limited primarily to the public sphere, having little to no influence in the private. Julia was exiled ten years *after* Agrippa's death, meaning that her illicit sexual conduct, which began during her marriage to Agrippa, had lasted well over a decade, before she was punished for her actions.[136] With this information, one can infer that a woman's sexual behavior was only considered to be dangerous when knowledge of her actions spread from the private sphere to the public sphere, becoming a threat to her male relations' (public) credibility and masculinity. In reality, the *public* image a woman displayed was of primary importance, since the politics of reputation – which also affected their husbands -- revolved around maintaining appearances.[137] The elite served as the example for the lower classes in Roman civilization; they were individuals at the top of the peak, to whom the rest of society looked to for guidance. Roman elite women were therefore a prototype of the ideal Roman *matronae*, and there was thus more pressure on them to publicly display the feminine ethical standards of their society. In fact, exemplary moral women of the Augustan family, particularly Livia, had a crucial understanding of the importance of their societal image. Indeed, Livia deliberately heighten her image of embodying modesty and chastity, and she did via her public acts such as supporting Bona Dea as a means to illuminate her own traditional character.

For a woman to maintain an image of embodying the old-fashioned female modesty socially expected of (and religiously taught to) her, she had to avoid publicly displaying behavior that warranted gossip.[138] Cultivating and preserving a public perception of one's character, revolving around traditional virtue, was thus fundamentally important for a woman's success. As

[136] Judith P. Hallett, "Women in Augustan Rome," 376.
[137] David Cohen, "The Augustan Law on Adultery," 114.
[138] David Cohen, "The Augustan Law on Adultery," 114.

elucidated by David Cohen, a Roman woman ensured social prosperity through never being the cause of gossip, and by being "*believed* to be chaste."[139] In other words, it was the *image* of being chaste, as religiously emphasized in the cult of Bona Dea, that was more important than making the image a genuine reality. If a woman was publicly recognized as a devotee to Bona Dea, being therefore assumed as an active participant in the rituals of both festivals for the Good Goddess, the community would view her as the archetype of the cult's traditional values.

The cult of Bona Dea worked in tandem with the feminine virtuousness emphasized and encouraged in the Augustan regime. It was a religious "guide" that women could follow in order to understand how to publicly conduct themselves in a manner that was in accordance with Augustan Roman societal expectations. By reviving the cult of the Good Goddess through the public involvement of his wife, Augustus provided Roman women with a religious instrument to follow specifically, the image of time-honored morality he envisioned for Roman *matronae.* A promotion of religious activity of such nature subsequently favored the moral movement of the Augustan regime. As more elite women followed the lead of Livia, and actively participated in the rituals of Bona Dea, Augustus' subtle encouragement of cultivating the purity and chastity of a traditional *matronae* became more influential, and more successful, on at least the cultivated public *appearance* of Roman women.

8 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Augustus utilized religion as an additional force to his legislation as a means to assimilate his moral movement into the lives of the Roman people. The cult of Bona Dea became the primary religious tool of Augustus in emboldening elite Roman women to conform with the traditional,

[139] David Cohen, "The Augustan Law on Adultery," 116

virtuous *matronae* expected of them in his regime. His own wife Livia encouraged an association between the ideal Roman woman of the Augustan period and the cult of Bona Dea, both of which involved the characteristics of chastity, purity, and loyalty found within the traditional *matronae* archetype. As a role model herself, Livia's participation in the cult of Bona Dea served as inspiration for other elite women to follow her lead, creating for themselves an image of feminine morality. With an active participation in the rituals of the cults, the female followers learned the importance of being the traditional *matronae* expected of them in the Augustan moral movement. The maintenance of the traditional *matronae* ideals was essential in time the time of Augustus, as the population of the upper class had been declining and marital fertility became a fundamental element of a woman's contribution to society. Cults which did not inspire a conformity to traditional feminine values remained suppressed, as observed in the case of the cult of Bacchus.

However, a look into the life and behavior of Julia allows for a further conclusion. The virtuous character of the *matranae* was expected to be displayed by elite women in public, meaning the *image* of virtuousness was more essential to the Augustan moral movement than its private embodiment. State cults, such as Bona Dea, where attendance (to a certain degree) was known to the public, affirmed a elite woman's character in association with this goddess. Essentially, not only did she learn the virtuousness of the goddess, but as a devotee her image became connected with the ideals of the Good Goddess herself.

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