A Most Spectacular Scandal: Changing Dynamics of Female Bodies, State, and Cult from the Late Roman Republic to the Early Principate

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Introduction

In 114 BCE, public unrest was quickly building in the streets of Rome.[1] The grand Roman army had just suffered a particularly disastrous defeat by the Scordisci in Thrace. These tensions were reaching a boiling point when the body of a young girl was found. Helvia, the daughter of a Roman knight, had been discovered partially nude with her tongue lolling out of her mouth.[2] Those who found her said she appeared as if she had been struck by lightning while riding her horse. Religious leaders acted fast, and soothsayers quickly declared that this sign from the gods was the result of Vestal Virgins breaking their vows of chastity. Three Vestals, Aemilia, Marcia, and Licinia were swiftly put on trial by the *pontifex maximus*, but only Aemilia was found guilty and subject to public execution.[3] But the unrest did not stop. The people demanded more accountability, so they appointed a politician to conduct a second trial for the remaining Vestals. They, alongside their alleged lovers, were executed, and the unrest subsided.

Stories such as these dot the history of the Late Roman Republic (133 BCE to 31 BCE). While the details differ, and not all end in death, the pattern remains similar. First, there was political or military unrest. Second, fault was found in women's religious practice within state cults. Third, the fault was very publicly and dramatically remedied by state actors. As a result, the unrest was briefly quelled.

While this correlation between political unrest and divine punishment may seem strange to modern audiences, the Romans saw little to no divide between the political and the religious spheres. The Romans believed that the scrupulous practice of religious rituals ensured that the

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[1] Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 136.
[2] Plutarch, "Roman Questions," *Moralia Volume IV*, Stephanus 284 A-C; Livy and Julius Obsequens, "Julius Obsequens," *History of Rome, Volume XIV: Summaries. Fragments. Julius Obsequens. General Index.*, trans. Alfred C. Schlesinger, Loeb Classical Library 404 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 37, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL404/1959/volume.xml.
[3] Asconius, *Commentaries on Five Speeches of Cicero*, trans. Simon Squires (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2006), 45-46.

gods would maintain the order of the cosmos.[4] Whenever the Roman state faced political troubles, the underlying cause was thought to be found in the religious sphere.[5] Women's state cults played a vital role in maintaining this relationship with the gods. While they were not the only ones responsible, they were tasked with some of the most important religious rituals for the Roman state.

Though the Romans of the Late Republic depended upon the proper practice of religious ritual, the deviation from proper practice also played a vital role in maintaining the state. This deviation almost always took the form of adultery. By punishing those implicated in violations of practice in the space of women's state cults, political leaders could soothe public unrest. These leaders would then have been seen by the public as responsible for mending the rupture between man and the divine while at the same time avoiding accountability for their own decisions, which may have actually been the route cause of the unrest. Of course, this was only one tool that political leaders used during the Late Republic in addition to a number of other methods, including more commonly recognized ones such as the raising of armies.

The Roman Republic did not last forever. In the Late Republic, the dominance of political violence and the emergence of unprecedented absolutist power to deal with the constant crises brought the Republic to a slow decay by 31 BCE.[6] Following the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, Rome was the center of a series of civil wars lasting nearly fifteen years. Julius Caesar's adopted son Octavian, renamed Augustus, emerged victorious following the defeat of Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. Within Rome, Augustus shrouded himself in both official and unofficial powers and built an autocratic regime, known as the

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[4] Lindsay J. Thompson, *The Role of the Vestal Virgins in Roman Civic Religion: A Structuralist Study of the Crimen Incesti* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 63.
[5] Sarolta A. Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), xxi.
[6]Matthew Dillon and Lynda Garland, *The Ancient Romans: History and Society from the Early Republic to the Death of Augustus* (London: Routledge, 2021), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315678498.482-590, 482-590.

Principate, that would last centuries.[7] This regime depended upon the appearance of divine favor for its survival.

The Principate could no longer scapegoat women's state cults for public unrest. To scapegoat women's state cults would be to acknowledge divine ire against the Principate, which would have been incredibly dangerous for the regime's survival. But political turmoil does not disappear because the regime wills it to be so. Since political unrest remained in Roman society, political leaders needed to find avenues to fill this void. This thesis seeks to answer the following question: how did the scapegoating of women to resolve state unrest change from the Late Republic (133 BCE to 31 BCE) to the early Principate (31 BCE to 37 CE) and why?

Within the early Principate, the state no longer blamed and persecuted women in state cults for improper practice in order to quell unrest. The state cults needed to show full support for the *princeps.* Instead, the regime turned to civil punishments against women, particularly for charges of adultery, and to persecuting foreign cults. While these punishments targeted a slightly different but overlapping group of women, the pattern remained largely the same as it had in the Late Republic: political unrest emerged; a woman was found to have committed adultery; she or a cult was publicly punished by the state; and political unrest dwindled.

Societal changes during the civil war period (44 BCE to 31 BCE) and the early Principate allowed for this shift. During the period of civil wars, women experienced greater wealth and social freedom as a result of wartime losses and preoccupation with the war effort.[8] This opened new opportunities for women in the political sphere. Foreign cults that empowered women became more popular in Rome during this time.[9] Once Augustus took power in Rome, he

[7] John Rich, "Making the Emergency Permanent : Auctoritas, Potestas and the Evolution of the Principate of Augustus," in *Des Réformes Augustéennes*, ed. Yann Rivière (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2012), 37–121, http://access.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/2525587.
[8] Leonardo Ambasciano, "The Goddess Who Failed? Competitive Networks (or the Lack Thereof), Gender Politics, and the Diffusion of the Roman Cult of Bona Dea," *Religio* 24, no. 2 (2016): 134.
[9] Ambasciano, "The Goddess Who Failed?," 111-165.

immersed himself in Roman religion, particularly surrounding himself with the support of female state cults. This ended any possibility for the scapegoating of women in Roman religious cults. Finally, once he had established power, Augustus passed a series of significant marriage and moral reforms that placed women from the domestic sphere directly into the public and civil sphere.

In exploring this question, I am building on a long tradition of Roman political history. Modern Roman political scholarship has rapidly accelerated since the publication of Ronald Syme's 1939 work *The Roman Revolution*. Literature relating to the political history of the Augustan regime has been remarkably influential for this thesis. John Rich's "Making the Emergency Permanent: Auctoritas, Potestas, and the Evolution of the Principate of Augustus" explores the delicate balance Augustus needed to maintain between republican ideals and autocratic powers in order to create his Principate throughout his lifetime.[10] A number of histories, including Paul Zanker's *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, demonstrate the importance of public messaging in the maintenance of the Augustan Principate.[11] In writing this thesis, I rely heavily on these works and those by other scholars on Augustan political history. I seek not to unravel the work done by these scholars, but rather to apply the political narrative to women.

Women's histories of the Romans became popular around the 1970s. Many of these histories, such as Sarah Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, build on the male-dominated political histories and offer perspectives of women's daily life in the ancient world.[12] Scholars like Pomeroy find that Roman women were relatively

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[10] Rich, "Making the Emergency Permanent," 37-81.
[11] Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).
[12] Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015).

integrated into Roman society as they were able to dine with their husbands and attend social and political gatherings.[13] Pomeroy argues that Roman women were involved in their culture and able to influence their society because they had access to money and power and that their fortunes were linked to the fortunes of the state. Due to the high visibility of imperial women and the more widely available sources of the Augustan era, most women's histories focus on women in Rome during the imperial period. Histories by those such as Susan Treggiari and Phyllis Culham show how Augustan reforms integrated women into public life.[14] Fewer histories are available on women's life during the Republic due to the lack of available sources. This forces the lives of women in the Late Republic to remain in relative obscurity. While many histories exist on the ramifications of political events in the Early Principate for women, the lack of histories on Late Republic may lead some to assume that women were not affected by the political ongoings of the period, when this was not the case. By writing a history of women's politicization in Rome across both the Late Republic and the Early Principate, I will build on these histories of women in the imperial period and shed light on women in the Late Republic.

While scholars may struggle to find evidence for how Roman women could influence politics without holding political office, they have found rich evidence for a strong religious history of Roman women. Because of the close association with official Roman cults and the state of Rome, religious histories are able to shed light on women's experiences that may otherwise be obscured in political histories, particularly during periods such as the Late Republic. Histories written by scholars such as Mary Beard and Celia Schultz explore the central

[13] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves,* 189.
[14] Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Phyllis Culham, "Did Roman Women Have an Empire?," in *Inventing Ancient Culture*, ed. Mark Golden and Peter Toohey (Routledge, 1997), 192–204.

role women played in the most sacred religious rituals.[15] In their work *Religions of Rome*, Beard, North, and Price demonstrate that both men and women played crucial roles in participating in Roman religious life. Schultz finds that in the Late Republic, women's roles were not limited to domestic worship, such as the worship of family or household gods, but included main roles in major state festivals.[16] In particular, cults such as the cult of the Vestal Virgins and later the cult of Isis have drawn scholarly attention due to both their great importance to the Roman populace and their subversion of traditional gender norms. Works by those such as Lindsay J. Thompson, Robin Wildfang, and Malcom Drew Donaldson have been strong influences for me in writing this thesis.[17] While this thesis is not entirely a religious history of Roman women, it heavily engages with this historiography by centering the politicization of women around the sacred.

Although the interconnection between Roman politics and Roman religion is acknowledged by scholars, the two are often addressed separately in practice. In exploring how women's religious and moral activity could be used to suit state purposes, including in resolving state unrest, I am actively situating my thesis in the middle of both historiographies. By looking at the religious and the political together, I am able to create an argument that is more reflective of Roman society. Not only is this interplay more interesting than examining religion and politics separately, it allows for a better understanding of religious changes that are shaped by politics and vice versa.

My first chapter will address the question of how women were blamed and punished for state unrest during the Late Republic. This chapter will address the period between 133 BCE, the

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[15] Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Celia E. Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
[16] Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity*.
[17] Thompson, *The Role of the Vestal Virgins in Roman Civic Religion*; Robin Lorsch Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins: A Study of Rome's Vestal Priestesses in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Malcom Drew Donaldson, *The Cult of Isis in the Roman Empire*, vol. 22, Studies in Classics (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

murder of Tiberius Gracchus and his supporters, and 44 BCE, the assassination of Julius Caesar. The Romans understood this as a period of great decay, both morally and politically, so it is ripe with examples of women's cults being punished to resolve state unrest. The case studies of the Vestal Virgins and the cult of Bona Dea will demonstrate this phenomenon.

In my second chapter, I will address both the civil war period and the foundation of the Augustan Principate. This chapter will cover the period between 44 BCE, the assassination of Julius Caesar, and 14 CE, the death of Augustus. In this chapter, I will first address the series of civil wars and how they brought greater freedom, wealth, and visibility to Roman women and increased the popularity of foreign, women-empowering cults. I will then explore the reforms brought about by Augustus, which changed the relationship between women and the state. First, I address how Augustus ingratiated himself into Roman religion, using women's cults and religious rituals to place himself at the center of Roman religious life, in order to centralize power. I then explore how Augustus's political reforms placed women into the public sphere.

For my third chapter, I will explore the ramifications of the changes brought about by the civil war period and the foundation of the Principate for the use of scapegoating women to resolve public unrest. Though thematically different, this chapter overlaps in time with the second chapter, covering the period between 31 BCE, Augustus's defeat over Mark Antony, and 37 CE, the death of Augustus's immediate successor Tiberius. I explore how civil adultery scandals were used to resolve public unrest that threatened the Augustan regime through the case study of Julia the Elder. I then demonstrate how the Principate punished foreign cults in place of state cults.

Chapter One: Women and Cult in the Late Roman Republic

"There are many indications, it seems, when a priestess is not performing her holy functions with purity, but the principal one is the extinction of the fire, which the Romans dread above all misfortunes, looking upon it, from whatever cause it proceeds, as an omen that portends the destruction of the city; and they bring fire again into the temple with many supplicatory rites, concerning which I shall speak on the proper occasion." Dionysius of Halicarnassus[18]

The religious rites of state cults conducted by women were considered crucial to the maintenance and prosperity of the Roman state during the Late Republic. Elite women would have participated in a number of priesthoods, including the *flaminicia* and the *regina sacrorum*, and state cults such as those of the Vestal Virgins, Ceres, and Bona Dea.[19] Women across all social classes would have been expected to participate in household rituals. The quality of women's religious practices was seen to directly impact the Romans' relationship with their gods, who in turn could determine the course of the state.[20]

Late Republican Rome was rife with political and social unrest that threatened state structures. With little separation between political and religious spheres in Rome, Romans found answers to political issues in the divine. One method that political actors within the Roman state resolved this public unrest was by finding faults within women's religious practices and taking very public action to correct them.

This chapter explores the use of punishment against women's cults to resolve public unrest through the case studies of the priestly college of the Vestal Virgins and the state cult of Bona Dea. These two institutions were foundational to Late Republican religious worship and demonstrated the importance of women in protecting the state. These cults were responsible for

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[18] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. Earnest Cary, Loeb Classical Library 319 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 2.67.5, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL319/1937/volume.xml.
[19] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves,* 210-214; Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity*, 81.
[20] Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome,* x.

maintaining a good relationship between the gods and the people of Rome. By publicly sacrificing the Vestal Virgins, Roman priests and politicians were able to maintain the appearance of restoring order. As demonstrated by the state cult of Bona Dea, women's cults wielded significant religious power, and therefore political power, which made it particularly threatening to the state when the cults deviated from proper practice.

The Vestal Virgins

The Vestal Virgins, see **figure 1**, were said to have originated prior to the foundation of Rome. In his *History of Rome*, Livy attributed the elevation of the a cult to a formal state cult to King Numa, who established the cult as a state cult to oversee the new temple of Vesta during Rome's regal period.[21] Through their responsibilities of tending the hearth of Vesta, as seen in **figure 2,** the Vestal Virgins ensured that Rome remained the most powerful city in the ancient world, and they embodied the core of Romaness.[22] Lindsay J. Thompson, in her study of the Vestal Virgins, suggests that the role of the hearth itself, which would have been the center of Roman family life, represented the Roman lifestyles that soldiers in the militaristic society were willing to give their lives to protect.[23] The Vestal Virgins occupied a unique space in Roman life, straddling the boundaries between men and women. Unlike most women, the Vestal Virgins held religious power and, though unmarried, remained free from male parental control.[24] Ariadne Staples argues that by being neither completely representative of either men or women, the Vestal Virgins were able to represent the whole of Rome.[25] This exclusion from gender roles was necessary for the Vestals' role in being seen as effective safeguarders of the state. For the

[21] Livy, *History of Rome, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. B.O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 114 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 1.20.4-6, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL114/1919/volume.xml.
[22] Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins: A Study of Rome's Vestal Priestesses in the Late Republic and Early Empire*., 1.
[23]Thompson, *The Role of the Vestal Virgins,*122.
[24] Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, 83.
[25] Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins*, 130.

Figure 1 (left): Portrait of a Vestal Virgin (Antonine) in the Museo Nationale, Rome, Italy[26]
Figure 2 (right): Vesta (seated) with the Vestal Virgins in Museo Archeologico Regionale, Palermo, Italy[27]

Romans, there was almost nothing more threatening than the failure of a Vestal to carry out her two duties: remaining chaste and ensuring the fire of Vesta was never extinguished.[28]

When a Vestal Virgin was perceived to have been unchaste, the very foundation of Rome was deemed to be at risk. Trials for Vestal unchastity tended to occur during times of state trouble. One of the more infamous trials of Vestal Virgins occurred between 114 BCE and 113 BCE, where not one but three were tried and executed.[29] These trials came shortly after the defeat of the Roman army by the Scordisci in Thrace, which sparked intense upheaval in Rome.[30] Shortly after the defeat, a prodigy, a sign of a ruptured relationship with the gods, was seen in

[26] Andrew B. Gallia, "The Vestal Habit," *Classical Philology* 109, no. 3 (2014): 224, https://doi.org/10.1086/676291.
[27] Meghan J. DiLuzio, "The Vestal Virgins in Roman Politics," in *A Place at the Altar: Priestesses in Republican Rome*, ed. Meghan J. DiLuzio (Princeton University Press, 2016), 159, fig. 5.3, https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691169576.003.0008.
[28] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities,* 2.67.5.
[29] Holt N. Parker, "Why Were the Vestals Virgins? Or the Chastity of Women and the Safety of the Roman State," *The American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 4 (2004): 594.
[30] Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins,* 136.

Rome. Helvia, the daughter of a Roman knight, was struck by lightning while on horseback and killed, and she was later found at least partially naked with her tongue protruding.[31] Soothsayers declared that the cause of the prodigy was the unchastity of Vestal Virgins with Roman knights.[32] The Vestals Aemilia, Marcia, and Licinia were tried for alleged unchastity in 114 BCE, but only Aemilia was found guilty and executed by the *pontifex maximus*.[33] Likely still facing turmoil in their daily lives, the people were not satisfied with this result, and the next year, the citizen body appointed Cassius, a Roman politician, to conduct a second trial for Marcia and Licinia, who, alongside their alleged lovers, were executed.[34]

At the core of any improper religious practice conducted by the Vestals was the issue of chastity. Plutarch wrote that Numa chose virgins to watch over the fire "either because he thought the nature of fire pure and uncorrupted, and therefore entrusted it to chaste and undefiled persons, or because he thought of it as unfruitful and barren, and therefore associated it with virginity."[35] While physical sex was naturally a violation of Vestal virginity, Seneca the Elder wrote that merely desiring marriage during one's time as a Vestal was enough to bring about an accusation of unchastity.[36] That it was necessary for the Vestals to be virgins was not questioned by any of the ancient sources. However, virginity was not stressed to this extent in any other area of Roman society. No one else in Roman society faced the punishment of death dealt to the Vestals upon the loss of virginity.[37] In a society with relatively high mortality rates, multiple

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[31] Plutarch, "Roman Questions," *Moralia Volume IV*, Stephanus 284 A-C; Livy and Julius Obsequens, "Julius Obsequens," *History of Rome, Volume XIV,* 37.
[32]Plutarch, "Roman Questions," *Moralia, Volume IV,* Stephanus 284 C; Livy and Obsequens, "Julius Obsequens," *History of Rome, Volume XIV,* 37.
[33] Asconius, "Pro Milone Commentary," *Commentaries on Five Speeches of Cicero*, 45-46.
[34]Asconius, "Pro Milone Commentary,"*Commentaries on Five Speeches of Cicero,* 45-46.
[35]Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives, Volume I: Theseus and Romulus. Lycurgus and Numa. Solon and Publicola.*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 46 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 9.5, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL046/1914/volume.xml.
[36] Seneca the Elder, *Declamations, Volume I: Controversiae, Books 1-6*, trans. Michael Winterbottom, Loeb Classical Library 463 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 6.8, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL463/1974/volume.xml.
[37]Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins,* 132.

marriages were common for both men and women. Further, the Roman army depended on manpower for its military victories, requiring a robust base of procreation. With such a need for procreation to maintain Roman society, it is striking that virgins were charged with maintaining the hearth of Vesta, in other words, what it meant to be Roman.[38]

Both a Vestal's virginity and loss of virginity contributed to the political role that Vestals played in Roman society. While the maintenance of Vestal virginity safeguarded the state, solutions to state crisis could be found by purging the state of unchaste Vestals through ritual murder. Though the cult of the Vestal Virgins existed in both the Principate as well as the Republic, this form of ritual murder was more of a Republican phenomenon with the last known execution before Augustus's death occurring in 113 BCE and the last known trial before Augustus's death occurring in 73 BCE.[39] The ritual murder of Vestal Virgins would not return to the Roman Principate until the rule of Emperor Domitian in 73 CE.

Plutarch wrote a detailed account of the ritual murder of a Vestal for the loss of virginity, illustrated in **figure 3**.[40] Outside the city, a small underground chamber was constructed, and inside were placed a couch, lamp, and small portions of bread, water, milk, and oil. He surmised that the reasons behind providing these mimicries of the "necessities of life" was that those responsible for conducting the ritual "would thereby absolve themselves from the charge of

[38] A number of scholars have speculated about why chastity was so important to the Romans. Plutarch suggests that virginity was important for its association with purity. Perhaps with corruption so rampant in Roman society, by maintaining such strict standards of purity for those tasked with safeguarding Rome, the Romans were able to rationalize their own impurity in relation to the divine. This would also have made the Vestals themselves more sacred and other than the Roman people. Wildfang suggests a more practical need for Vestal virginity. By maintaining their virginity, in her analysis, the Vestals remained part of the civic structure of the Roman state while remaining outside any one family cult, unlike any other women in Roman society. For more see Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives Volume I*, 9.5-10.7 and Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, 55.
[39] T. J. Cadoux, "Catiline and the Vestal Virgins," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 54, no. 2 (2005): 165.
[40] Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives Volume I,* 10.4-7.

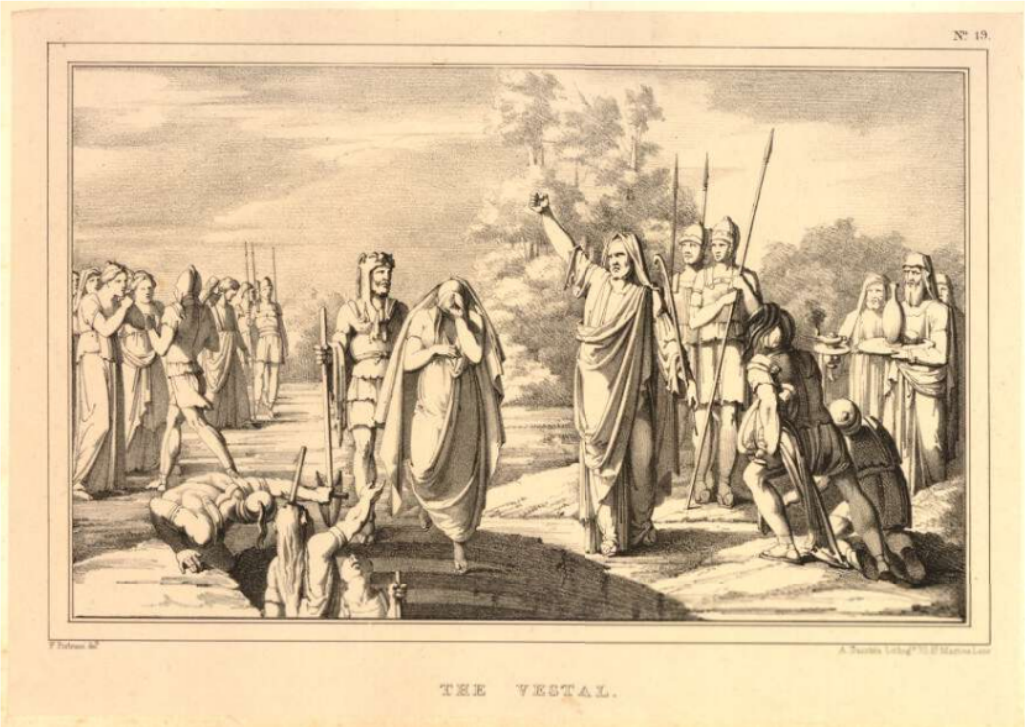

Figure 3: Lithograph print (1830-1835 CE) of Vestal Virgin being sent to her death by Filippo Pistrucci[41]

destroying by hunger a life which had been consecrated to the highest services of religion."[42]

Though death was the end result of the ritual, the ritual was seen as a purification rather than a murder. Plutarch described that the Vestal was carried through the Forum in a litter bound tightly with cloth so that the people could not see or hear her. The people followed the litter outside the city, and the high-priest offered prayers to the heavens. The Vestal, herself veiled, was led by the high priest to the stairs and descended into the room. The apparent lack of force offered the illusion that it was of the Vestal's choice, further absolving the priests. As she descended, the priests turned away their faces. Once she had entered the chambers, the steps were taken up, and the entrance was buried such that the ground was even with the earth around

[41]Filippo Pistrucci, *The Vestal,* 1830-1835 CE, lithograph print, 126 mm × 294 mm (5.0 in × 11.6 in), The British Museum, London, United Kingdom, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1891-1116-160.
[42] Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives Volume I,* 10.4-7.

it. Dionysius of Halicarnassus remarked that following their death, the former Vestals were "not given a monument or funeral rites or any other customary solemnities."[43]

The ritual murder involved the complete erasure of the Vestal. In the procession of the Vestal, resembling a funerary procession, the litter was designed to hide any sign of life.[44] The Vestal herself was covered in a veil, obscuring her identity. The priests faced away from the disgraced Vestal in denial of both her upcoming death and her real existence in that moment. As soon as the Vestal had descended, before she would have had the chance to starve to death, all traces of the ritual murder were erased through the burial of the entrance.[45] It was as if she never existed. The moment of the disgraced Vestal's physical death is ambiguous, but her social death occurred much earlier, at the moment of her unchastity. Instead of murder, the ritual could be seen as a purging of the fallen Vestal's impurity.

The execution of the Vestals was seen to be necessary to restore the state and public order. The ritual murder mended the relationship between the Romans and gods by restoring chastity to the Vestal order. Stressors to the Roman state, such as famine, war, or political unrest, would have likely brought about public unrest and uncertainty. Despite Plutarch's remarks that "no other day brought more gloom to the city than this," the public nature of the execution would have likely been soothing to the Roman people.[46] The Trial of the three Vestals demonstrated that in times of crisis, the people would demand further ritual murders until they believed the state had been restored. By transferring legitimate failures of state onto the violation of the Vestal's physical purity, those with real political power, such as the male politicians, were able to avoid

[43]Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities,* 2.67.4-5.
[44]Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives, Volume I*, 10.7.
[45]Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives, Volume I*, 10.7.
[46]Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives Volume, I,* 10.7.

responsibility for their failures. The people of Rome would see the state as restored with the completion of the ritual murder without the need to hold politicians accountable.

Both the Vestals as living beings and the Vestals as sacrificial victims were necessary to maintain the welfare of the Roman state. As living entities, the Vestals carried out the task of maintaining the hearth of Vesta. By performing this role, the Vestals were able to preserve the very core of Romanness and ensure the superiority of Rome's empire. During times of crisis, however, the Vestals became a convenient scapegoat. Through the very public ritual murder, Roman officials were able to pacify the public. When the Roman state faced turmoil, the death of the Vestal provided the means of restoring order.

The State Cult of Bona Dea

The cult of the Woman's Goddess, Bona Dea, also seen in **figure 4**, provided women the opportunity to more directly influence Roman political life. Its strong connection to Rome's preservation and morality also made it an effective tool to be weaponized in Late Republican politics. Worship of the goddess herself likely originated with the indigenous peoples of Latium, though it was later influenced by the Greeks, making the cult one of the oldest and quintessentially Roman cults at the time of the Late Republic.[47] Celebrations of Bona Dea within the State cult occurred twice a year, in May and in December.[48] Worship of Bona Dea was offered "*pro populo,*" for the people, meaning that proper worship was essential for the prosperity of both the Roman people and the Roman state.[49] Further stressing its importance, the

[47] Cicero attributes worship of the goddess to the time of the Roman kings. Marcus Tullius Cicero, "De Haruspicium Responsis," *Pro Archia. Post Reditum in Senatu. Post Reditum Ad Quirites. De Domo Sua. De Haruspicum Responsis. Pro Plancio.*, trans. N.H. Watts, Loeb Classical Library 158 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 37 https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL158/1923/volume.xml; H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Sources and a Description of the Cult* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 398-399.
[48]Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 358-359.
[49] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Letters to Atticus, Volume I*, ed. D. R. Schackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1.12.3, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL007/1999/volume.xml.

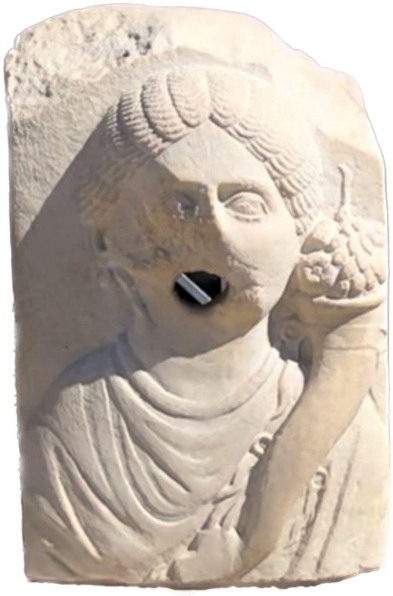

Figure 4: Fountain with relief of Bona Dea in Pompeii, 79 CE[50]

secret December rites were commonly referred to in some variation of "sacrifice which is offered up for the welfare of the Roman people," suggesting that it was one of the only sacrifices that had the explicit purpose of protecting the people and the state.[51] While less is known about other areas of cult worship, the December rites have drawn the interest of scholars for its mystery and reversal of traditional Roman gender norms.

This vital religious significance ultimately translated into real political significance for the Roman state. Unable to hold elected office, Roman women were prevented from many avenues of exerting political influence, so it was necessary that any official avenue for women to influence politics be carefully controlled. Because the rites of women had the ability to influence the political future of the Roman state, it was vital that the state was seen taking public action when the rites were practiced improperly. The cult of Bona Dea featured prominently in the Late Republic during two occasions in 63 BCE and again in 62 BCE. Knowledge of the December

[50] *Fountain with Relief of Bona Dea*, 79 CE, Pompeii, Italy, photograph by author, 2022.
[51]Cicero, "De Haruspicum Responsis," *Pro Archia,* 6.12.

rites primarily stems from these two incidents. During both the incident in 63 BCE and the incident in 62 BCE, the religious cult of Bona Dea became deeply intertwined with Late Republican politics.

The December rites of Bona Dea transgressed traditional Roman gender roles. Though the drinking of wine by women had been banned in the Late Republic due to concerns about its effects on morality and chastity, women participating in the December ritual would offer libations of sacrificial wine under the euphemism of "milk" for the wine itself and "honey jar" for the wine jar.[52] The night sacrifices of the December rites were the only ones of their kind to be sanctioned by the Roman state. Cults with similar practices, such as the cult of Bacchus, had been previously banned in Rome.[53] Cicero remarked in *De Legibus* that "no sacrifices shall be performed by women at night except those offered for the people in proper form."[54] Perhaps due to the goddess's association with fertility, proper cultic practices were seen as necessary to protect the welfare of the Roman state.[55] Due to the secrecy surrounding Bona Dea cult practices, some scholars have turned to similar cults in the Mediterranean to draw conclusions about its gendered and political nature. Versnel suggests that like the Greek Thesmophoria, the December rites involved a usurping of men's traditional political and cultural roles in order to fulfill a "beneficial and necessary" socio-biological need, fertility, despite being "wrong and undesirable" from a socio-cultural perspective.[56] Ambasciano argues that the rituals, by temporarily giving power to women in exceptional circumstances, satisfied women's urges to enact vengeance on

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[52] Paulina Komar, "Wine Taboo Regarding Women in Archaic Rome, Origins of Italian Viticulture, and the Taste of Ancient Wines," *Greece & Rome* 68, no. 2 (October 2021): 239–54, https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352100005X.
[53]Livy, *History of Rome, Volume XI: Books 38–40.*, trans. J.C. Yardley, Loeb Classical Library 313 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 39.11.1-39.15.10, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL313/2018/volume.xml.
[54] Marcus Tullius Cicero, "On the Laws," *On the Republic, On the Laws*, trans. Clinton W. Keyes, Loeb Classical Library 213 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 2.21, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL213/1928/volume.xml.
[55]Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 323.
[56] H. S. Versnel, "The Festival for Bona Dea and the Thesmophoria," *Greece & Rome* 39, no. 1 (1992): 31–55.

men for their own subjugation.[57] The precarious nature of allowing these exceptional transgressions of traditional Roman gender roles may have strengthened the Roman state's commitment to proper religious practice.

The Bona Dea incident of December 63 BCE demonstrates the ability of women to influence state politics through religious practice. Between 64 BCE and 63 BCE, Rome was on the brink of another political crisis. With the armies waging war outside of Italy, Catiline, a Roman politician and soldier, plotted to overthrow the government and seize power.[58] When Cicero and Gaius Antonious were elected consuls for the year 63 BCE instead of Catiline, Catiline was prevented from taking power through lawful methods, sparking him and his conspiracy into motion.[59] Within Rome, Catiline had "laid traps for the consuls, prepared arson, [and] blockaded strategic places with armed men."[60] Having been warned prior to the attack, Cicero took action to prevent it, and Catiline fled Rome to gather troops, leading the Senate to declare war.[61] Later in the year, Catiline sought once more to kill Cicero and set the city of Rome ablaze; however, Cicero again thwarted his plot by arresting his conspirators and presenting evidence to the Senate shortly before the December rites of Bona Dea.[62] Roman politicians were left wondering what to do about Catiline's conspirators.

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[57] Leonardo Ambasciano, "The Gendered Deep History of the Bona Dea Cult," *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 3, no. 1/2 (January 2016): 134–56, https://doi.org/10.1558/jch.30172.
[58] Sallust, "The War with Catiline," *The War with Catiline. The War with Jugurtha.*, ed. John T. Ramsey, trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 116 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 16.4-5, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL116/2013/volume.xml.
[59]Sallust, "The War with Catiline," *The War with Catiline,* 24.1-24.2.
[60]Sallust, "The War with Catiline," *The War with Catiline,* 27.2
[61]Sallust, "The War with Catiline," *The War with Catiline,* 29.1-29.3; Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, and Richard J. A. Talbert, *The Romans : From Village to Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press), accessed November 21, 2022, 222, https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzEyMTAzOV9fQU41?sid=e2a963f8-1ef7-43f7-b718-e54629f27b6d@redis&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1.
[62]Sallust, "The War with Catiline," *The War with Catiline,* 43.1-48.2; Plutarch, "Cicero," *Lives, Volume VII: Demosthenes and Cicero. Alexander and Caesar.*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 18.1-20.5, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL099/1919/volume.xml.

Surviving evidence of the 63 BCE incident is only recorded by sources from the imperial period, including Plutarch, Cassius Dio, and Servius.[63] While such removal in time from the incident calls into question the validity of these sources, it does appear that the authors were working with primary sources that no longer exist today. In particular, Servius referenced Cicero's epic poem *De Consulatu Meo* as a contemporaneous account of the event.[64] Plutarch described the incident as follows:

> While Cicero was in this perplexity, a sign was given to the women who were sacrificing. The altar, it seems, although the fire was already thought to have gone out, sent forth from the ashes and burnt bark upon it a great bright blaze. The rest of the women were terrified at this, but the sacred virgins bade Terentia the wife of Cicero go with all speed to her husband and tell him to carry out his resolutions in behalf of the country, since the goddess was giving him a great light on this path to safety and glory. So Terentia, who was generally of no mild spirit nor without natural courage, but an ambitious woman, and, as Cicero himself tells us, more inclined to make herself a partner in his political perplexities than to share with him her domestic concerns, gave him this message and incited him against the conspirators; so likewise did Quintus, his brother, and Publius Nigidius, one of his philosophical companions, of whom he made the most and greatest use in his political undertakings.[65]

Despite Cicero ultimately being the one to persecute the Catiline conspirators, the impetus for this action appears to be from the women. These are secondhand accounts of a poem written by Cicero, thus inherently biased to justify the illegal summary execution of the Catiline conspirators without trial ordered by the Senate under the influence of Cicero. Nonetheless, the presence of other respected witnesses who could have corroborated Cicero's account, including Quintus, Publius Nigidius, Terentia, the Vestal Virgins, and the other elite women, suggests that perhaps the women did intervene in this way.[66] Although Cicero's motivation is more explicit, the women would also have had cause for action. Terentia would have benefited from Cicero's

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[63] Plutarch, Cassius Dio, and Servius date back to the late first century and early second century CE, the late second century and early third century CE, and the late fourth-century and early third century CE respectively. Brower, *Bona Dea,* 361-362.
[64]Brouwer, *Bona Dea,* 362.
[65] Plutarch, "Cicero," *Lives, Volume VII,* 20.1-20.2; Cassius Dio's and Servius's accounts are very similar. Brower, *Bona Dea*, 362.
[66]Boatwright, Gargola, and Talbert, *The Romans,* 222.

swift action, which had the possibility of making him appear the savior of Rome and bolstering his political and social status. Terentia's upward social mobility would have depended on that of her husband's, which Plutarch hinted at by calling her "an ambitious woman."[67] The Vestal Virgins and the other women would also have cause to benefit. Through the swift and ruthless action of a summary execution, Catiline's conspiracy could have been completely unwound. These women may have seen this as an opportunity to prevent future bloodshed.

By interpreting signs from the goddess, the women were able to direct political action. Though Plutarch remarked that Terentia was "ambitious," he did not question the powerful role women played in directing the response to the signs.[68] Women's ability to interpret signs from the gods had long been established by the time of the Late Republic. Livy remarked positively on a number of occasions where women interpreted signs from the gods during Rome's regal period.[69] By interpreting these signs, women were able to shape how Roman statesmen acted without stepping into an overtly political role. Cassius Dio's account of the events, which include the divine sign of the high blaze of the fire at the Bona Dea rites, completely removed women from the narrative.[70] But Cicero could not have known about the sign at the women's only rites if the women had not interpreted the sign and gone to him. Through participating in their established religious roles, elite Roman women were therefore able to influence political life. In this specific instance, the women were able to influence Cicero's decision to illegally execute the five Roman citizens without trial.

The Bona Dea incident of the following year demonstrates the importance of swift public action in correcting mispractice. In 62 BCE, the rites were to be conducted at the house of

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[67]Plutarch, "Cicero," *Lives, Volume VII*, 20.2.
[68]Plutarch, "Cicero," *Lives, Volume VII,* 20.2.
[69]Livy, *History of Rome, Volume I,* 1.34.9-10, 1.39.3-4.
[70] Cassius Dio, *Roman History, Volume III: Books 36-40.*, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 53 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 35.35.3-4, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL053/1914/volume.xml.

Figure 5: The women hide the ritual items when Clodius is discovered inside the house of Caesar, dressed as a musician. Engraving by Silvestre David Mirys, 1799.[71]

praetor, the newly appointed *pontifex maximus*, Julius Caesar, by his wife Pompeia and his mother Aurelia.[72] The rites were abruptly stopped when it was revealed that Clodius Pulcher, a populist politician and an ally of Julius Caesar, had snuck into the house during the ceremonies allegedly to have an affair with Pompeia.[73] Although the ceremony was conducted again, the Senate declared Clodius Pulcher's actions sacrilegious and sentenced him to a trial. Armed men gathered to support the populist.[74] Whether it be because the jury was bribed or because they feared the response from his supporters, the jury acquitted Clodius on all accounts.[75] The only

[71] Silvestre David Mirys, "Clodius surpris déguisé en musicienne chez la femme de Cesar," *Figures de l'histoire de La République Romaine Accompagnées d'un Précis Historique Ou Tableau Philosophique et Politique de l'origine Des Progrès et de La Décadence de La Liberté Chez Les Romains* (Paris: Se trouve, 1799), No. 151, View 170, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b550033070/f170.item#.
[72]Plutarch, "Caesar," *Lives*, *Volume VII*, 9.2-10.7.
[73]Plutarch, "Caesar," *Lives, Volume VII*, 9.2-10.7; Luciano Canfora, Luciano Canfora, and Julian Stringer, eds., "An Inconvenient Ally: Clodius," in *Julius Caesar: The People's Dictator* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 84-87, https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748619368.003.0012.
[74]Cicero, *Letters to Atticus,* 1.13.
[75]Seneca the Younger, *Moral Essays, Volume III: De Beneficiis.*, trans. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library 310 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 97.2,

individual to actually suffer real consequences in these events was Pompeia, who was divorced by Julius Caesar during the trial, despite Julius Caesar's own insistence that the events never occurred.[76]

The public nature of the trial, feeding into the drama and scandal of the events, also served as a message to the Roman populace. Takás notes that on the same night Clodius intruded on the rituals, the Vestals repeated the ceremony in order to ensure the well-being of the Roman state, mending the brief rupture between man and the divine.[77] Although she speculates that the trial could have been designed to curb Clodius's political ambitions, it is also possible that such a public trial would have served a similar function to the ritual murder of the Vestal Virgins. The unfolding drama could have assured the public that the state would act to benefit the Roman world politically through correcting improper religious practice. That such a scandal unfolded specifically in the context of the women's rites of Bona Dea demonstrated the importance of women's rites for state security for the Romans. Transgressing the bounds of acceptable behavior in the rites, particularly in a manner that encouraged sexual liberation, was too great a risk.

What began as transgression in women's sacred space quickly became representative of the degradation of Roman society as a whole. The erasure of the role of the women from the scandal gave the impression that the scandal was directly between mankind and the divine. The use of women, human but lacking political power, in religious ritual could be seen as a way to create a more direct relationship with the divine. Because the elite women participating in these religious rites were meant to encapsulate Roman virtue, a violation of women was a violation against Romanness itself. While the sequence of events was certainly dramatic from a narrative

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https://www.loebclassics.com/view/seneca_younger-de_beneficiis/1935/pb_LCL310.3.xml?result=20&rskey=TZX8du.; Plutarch, "Caesar," *Lives, Volume VII,* 10.7.

[76] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus,* 1.13.3.

[77] Takás, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons,* 100.

perspective, involving sex, mysterious rituals, and the most senior members of Roman society, Clodius's intrusion on the December rites fit into a larger narrative of political and moral decay. The 62 BCE incident would likely have remained a salacious anecdote of the Late Republic, but it became an effective political tool for Cicero in his orations as Late Republican politics continued to collapse in the years following. Cicero's reinforcement of the incident demonstrated the significance of the perceived threat.

Conclusion

Roman women's religious rites played a crucial role for maintaining state security in the Late Republic. When these rituals were practiced properly, the Romans saw them as ensuring the welfare of the Roman state; however, improper practice also played an important role in preserving the state. Roman leaders used public, occasionally brutal, correctional methods when they deemed improper practice had occurred. The shock and scandal generated by these punishments would have been cathartic to the public and served to demonstrate that the politicians were actively protecting the state. Again, this is only one tool that politicians used to quell unrest. It further allowed politicians to avoid accountability for their political actions by blaming negative consequences on improperly practiced women's religious rites. The improper practice was consistently blamed on women's unchastity. These religious institutions, though state sanctioned, granted women more power than they had in other spheres. Adjustments to this precarious balance of power through sexual liberation were particularly threatening to the Roman social order.

Just eighteen years after the Bona Dea scandal of 62 BCE, the Roman world found itself enmeshed in civil war after the assassination of Julius Caesar. After nearly fifteen years of civil war, the decrepit Republic collapsed. Augustus's restructuring of the Roman Republic into the

Principate brought peace while simultaneously altering the relationship between state cults, the people, and the Roman state.

Chapter Two: Civil War and the Principate

"On the one side Augustus Caesar stands on the lofty stern, leading Italians to strife, with Senate and People, the Penates of the state, and all the mighty gods; his auspicious brows shoot forth a double flame, and on his head dawns his father's star." Virgil[78]

The crises that the Roman Republic faced by the mid 1st century BCE could not be stopped by any number of religious rituals. The accumulation of political tensions and violence that occurred during the Late Republic ultimately led to Julius Caesar declaring himself dictator for life and to his assassination.[79] In the aftermath of his assassination, Julius Caesar was deified, and conflict swiftly arose as Julius Caesar's would-be successors, Octavian, his adopted son, and Mark Antony, his second-in-command, fought civil wars against the assassins and then against each other.[80] Octavian won the war against Mark Antony in the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. The Roman Republic had been in tatters for nearly fifteen years at this point. Without a precise model, there were no clear steps to take in the aftermath of this period. With little desire to return to a true Republic, Octavian, under his new name of Augustus, worked to consolidate unitary authoritarian powers, resulting in a complete restructuring of the Roman state from a failing republic to an autocracy. To further stabilize his *Principate*, Augustus centered himself in Roman religious life, becoming a god-like figure during his life and officially divine after his death.[81]

The Rome of the late 1st century BCE and early 1st century CE would have been unrecognizable to Romans in the early 1st century BCE. The civil war period and the

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[78]Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 7-12. Appendix Vergiliana*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 64 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 8.677-681, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL064/1918/volume.xml. 8.67.
[79] Boatwright, Gargola, and Talbert, *The Romans,* 136.
[80] Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I: Julius. Augustus. Tiberius. Gaius. Caligula*, trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 31 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL031/1914/volume.xml, 88.
[81]Cassius Dio, *Roman History, Volume VII: Books 56-60.*, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 175 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 56.46, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL175/1924/volume.xml.

refashioning of the Roman Republic into the Roman Principate altered women's relationships with the state and the state's relationship with the divine. The civil war period, a time of continuous violence and institutional chaos, opened opportunities for women to enter public political life in new ways and encouraged the spread of foreign cults. To legitimize his centralization of political powers, Augustus entrenched himself in Roman state religion, particularly surrounding himself with female cults. Having successfully centralized powers, Augustus' political legislation placed women more directly into the public, civil sphere.

Civil War

The civil wars impacted every aspect of Roman life throughout the Roman Empire, which at the time spanned from the Iberian peninsula to Syria, see **figure 6**. Over 400,000 men were recruited for the wars.[82] Thousands of men——husbands, fathers, and brothers——died on the battlefield. To ensure victory against their enemies, Octavian, Mark Antony, and Lepidus, who were placed in charge of the Roman state and together made up the Second Triumvirate, wrote out proscription lists, orders for execution, that claimed the lives of several thousands by the end of the civil war period.[83] These lists included the assassins of Caesar, senators, knights, and innocent individuals with wealth. The significance of these losses cannot be understated and would have had a profound effect on the women in Roman society. Many men would have been absent from the home for a long period of time due to the fighting, and others would have never returned. This would have given women greater amounts of autonomy in the home.

As a result of the collapse of society, women were able to engage more in political activities and supported groups that empowered women. While it is difficult to compare this

[82]Josiah Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 402.
[83]Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy*, 63.

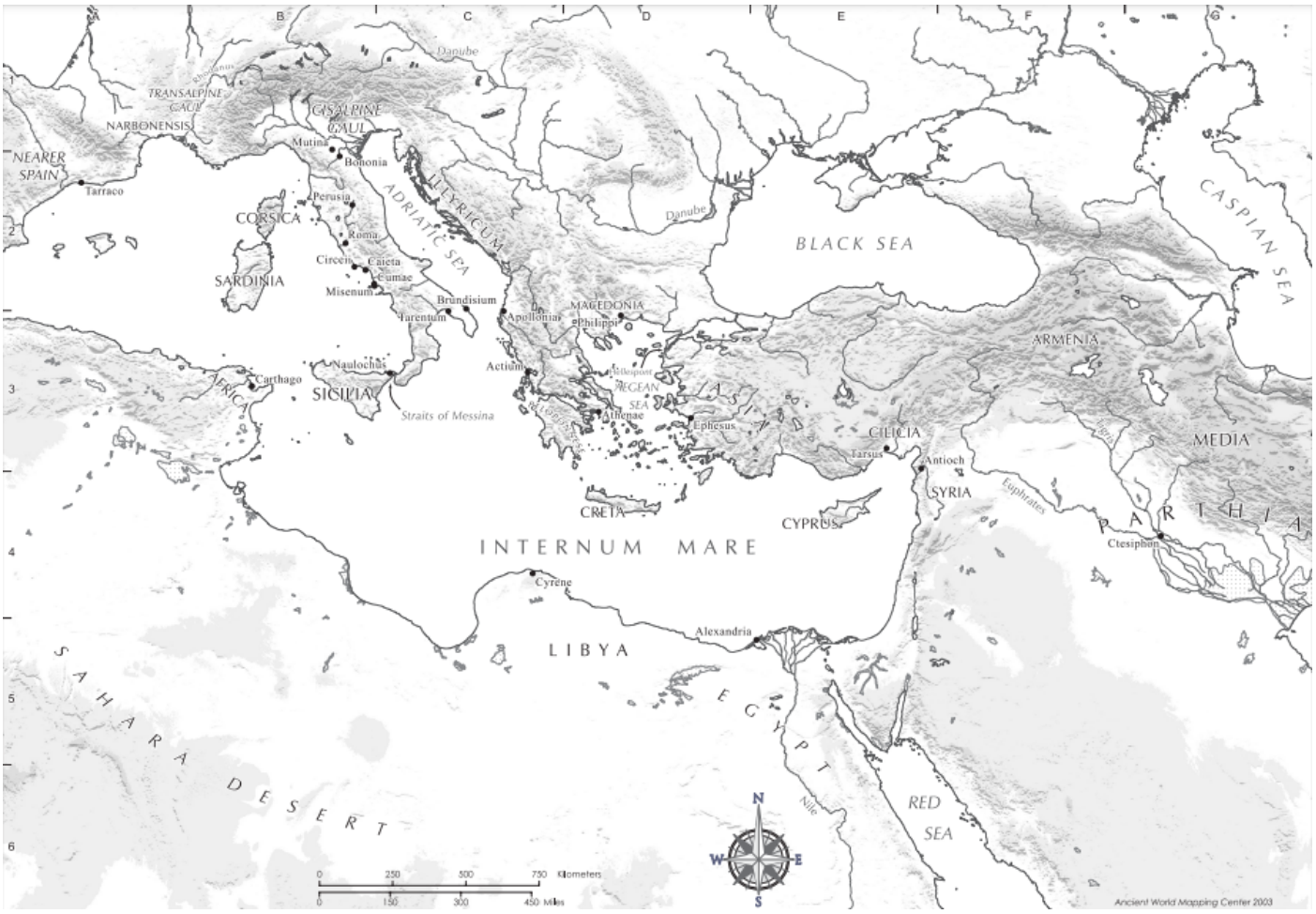

Figure 6: Map of Campaigns during the Civil War Period. The dots represent major battles.[84]

period to the Republic, particularly the Middle and Early Republic, since this period is significantly better documented, it does appear that women were likely more politically active than they had been previously. Ordinary women took on active political roles by protecting the property and lives of their husbands', who had been placed on proscription lists.[85] A funerary inscription, known as the Laudatio Turia, details one such instance where a woman, Turia, hid

[84] Ancient World Mapping Center, *Roman Campaigns, 44-30 BC* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, December 31, 2003), http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/free-maps/roman-empire/.
[85] Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy*, 84.

her husband until he was able to flee Rome. She supplied her husband with jewels, slaves, money and supplies, secured his clemency, and defended their home from gangs.[86] In these times of conflict, actions like those of Turia were likely done out of self-preservation rather than grander ideas about the relationship between women and politics. However, these actions were inherently political and would have influenced state security.

Within Rome, facing mounting war costs, wealthy women were taxed for the first time. In his *Civil Wars*, Appian described an instance where the triumvirs, Octavian, Mark Antony, and Lepidus, levied a tax on 1,400 wealthy women in order to raise 200,000,000 drachmas for the war.[87] This taxation was not taken positively by the women, who appealed to the wives and mothers of the triumvirs and marched on the magistrate's tribunal in the Roman Forum to plead their case. While women's voices were often disregarded in historical texts such as Appian's histories, Appian records the entirety of Hortensia's, a wealthy Roman noblewoman, speech to the magistrates, which criticized the men for taxing the women even though the women "have no access to the offices or the honors or the military commands or the entire political process" and had no involvement in the civil wars.[88] Their husbands would likely have been placed on the proscription lists for such open defiance of the triumvirs, but in this case, the triumvirs changed the policy to only assess 400 women for taxes and to tax any man with more than 100,000 drachmas.[89]

Just as Hortensia was prominently featured rather than remaining voiceless in Appian's account, individual women became visible political figures during the civil wars. Many of these

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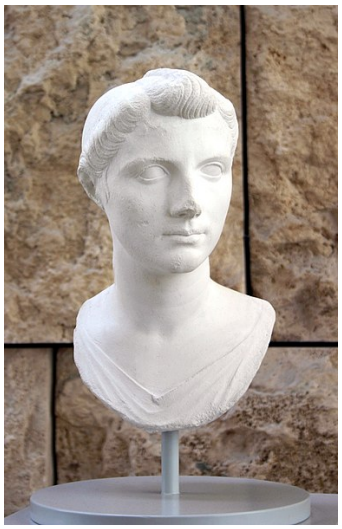
[86] *Laudatio Turia* (Funerary epigraph), 1st Century CE, in Josiah Osgood, *Turia: A Roman Woman's Civil War*, Women in Antiquity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 156-169.
[87] Appian, *Roman History, Volume V: Civil Wars, Books 3–4.*, trans. Brian McGing, Loeb Classical Library 543 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 4.32, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL543/2020/volume.xml.
[88] Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History*, 4.32-34.
[89] Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History*, 4.34.



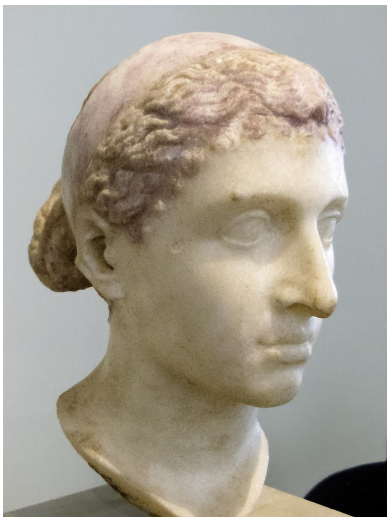


Figure 7 (left): Coin depicting Fulvia, wife of Marc Antony, as Nike 41-40 BCE[90]
Figure 8 (middle): Cast bust of Octavia, 13-9 BCE[91]
Figure 9 (right): Marble bust of Cleopatra wearing the royal diadem, 40-30 BCE[92]

women were known for their close relationships with the triumvirs, Octavian, Mark Antony, and Lepidus, the leaders of the civil war efforts. These women could be appealed to and had some influence over the triumvirs. The most famous of these women were Fulvia, Octavia, and Cleopatra, and they served as vital precursors to Livia as the first lady of Rome.

As the third wife of Mark Antony, Fulvia (**figure 7**) played an important role in the early years of the civil war period. Fulvia had risen to prominence as the wife of two Roman statesmen prior to her marriage to Mark Antony, including Clodius Pulcher, the man who invaded the Bona Dea rites of 62 BCE.[93] In the year following Julius Caesar's murder, she campaigned alongside Mark Antony's mother and son to convince the senate not to declare him a public enemy.[94]

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[90] *Fulvia Antonia RPC I 3139,* 41-40 BCE, coin, 18 mm (0.7 in), Classical Numismatic Group, https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=95418.
[91] *Ottavia Minore*, ca. 20-21st century CE, cast bust, Museo dell'Ara Pacis, Rome, Italy, photograph by Giovanni Dall'Orto, 2008, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:8106_-_Roma_-_Ara_Pacis_-_Ottavia_Minore_-_Foto_Giovanni_Dall%27Orto_-_30-Mar-2008.jpg.
[92] *Cleopatra VII*, 40-30 BCE, marble bust, Altes Museum Berlin, Berlin, Germany, photograph by Louis le Grand, 2007, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kleopatra-VII.-Altes-Museum-Berlin1.jpg.
[93] Celia E. Schultz, *Fulvia: Playing for Power at the End of the Roman Republic*, Women in Antiquity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[94]Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History,* 3.51.

Though her actions during the wars were likely exaggerated by her husband's enemies, Fulvia seems to have contributed to her husband's war efforts. She accompanied him on his military campaigns and paraded herself and her children fathered by Antony to bolster the morale of the soldiers.[95] Appian even suggested that she had a role in the proscription lists.[96] Fulvia died in 40 BCE shortly before the initial reconciliation between Octavian and Antony.

Like Fulvia, Octavia (**figure 8**), the sister of Octavian, helped to support her family during the wars. In an effort to unite Octavian and Mark Antony, Octavia became Mark Antony's fourth wife.[97] Torn between obligations of marriage and blood as the relationship between the triumvirs strained, Octavia acted as a political mediator between the two men.[98] Following Mark Antony's abandonment of Octavia for Cleopatra, Octavian bestowed a number of unprecedented honors in 35 BCE on both his sister and his wife, Livia. These included granting them *sacrosanctitas*, which made it a crime to speak ill of them, granting them immunity from the Roman custom of *tutela*, which prevented women from managing their own financial affairs, and commissioning public statues of the two women.[99] In his propaganda, Octavian stylized Octavia as the perfect Roman woman, in contrast to Antony's Egyptian lover, Queen Cleopatra.[100]

Cleopatra (**figure 9**), Queen of Egypt, served as a powerful precursor to Livia in the Mediterranean. Unlike Fulvia and Octavia, as the queen of Ptolemaic Egypt, Cleopatra ruled as head of state in her own right.[101] While a powerful female queen was not unusual in Egypt, in

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[95] Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History*, 5.14; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Philippics 7-14*, ed. D. R. Schackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 507 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 13.18, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL507/2010/volume.xml.
[96] Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History*, 4.29.
[97] Plutarch, "Antony," *Lives, Volume IX: Demetrius and Antony. Pyrrhus and Gaius Marius*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 101 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), 31.1-3, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL101/1920/volume.xml; Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History*, 5.64.
[98] Plutarch, "Antony," *Lives, Volume IX*, 35.1-5; Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History*, 5.93-95.
[99] Annelise Freisenbruch, *First Ladies of Rome: The Women Behind the Caesars* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 38.
[100] Freisenbruch, *First Ladies of Rome*, 38.
[101] Egyptian custom at the time dictated a system of monarchical co-rule, one man and one woman, but Cleopatra's co-ruler, her brother and also her husband, was too young to challenge the power she had managed to grasp,

Rome such power was unthinkable for a woman. From 46 BCE to 44 BCE, Cleopatra was a very visible figure in Rome during her affairs with Julius Caesar and later remained influential during her marriage to Mark Antony.[102] Her presence as a visible figure contributed to the expanding horizons for Roman women. Using her position, Cleopatra influenced the course of the civil war. In the infamous Battle of Actium, Cleopatra supported Mark Antony's troops with her own royal fleet.[103] Her political initiative undermined the image of her husband in Rome and his efforts on his side of the civil war. Propaganda put forth by Octavian depicted Mark Antony as completely subject to Cleopatra, describing him as "drugged" and "not even master of himself."[104] Following Cleopatra's death, Livia supplanted her as the most powerful woman in the ancient world as the wife of Augustus. Livia swiftly replaced the image of Cleopatra on Egyptian coinage.[105] As the first lady of Rome, Livia needed to be seen as the antithesis of the Egyptian queen, maintaining some power without being seen as a direct influence on her husband's politics. At the same time, as long as Livia's political influence was deemed as less than Cleopatra's, her influence could have been seen as acceptable or even expected, even if it was more influence than had been accepted in the Republic.

At the same time as women gained more political opportunities, the popularity of foreign cults that embraced the empowerment of women catapulted. The most popular among women was the Egyptian cult of Isis. The cult first became known to the Romans in Italy in the second century BCE, around the beginnings of the Late Republic.[106] During the Late Republic, the cult

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effectively making her the sole leader. Margaret M Miles, *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2011), 26.
[102]Miles, *Cleopatra*, 38.
[103] Miles, *Cleopatra*, 3.
[104] Plutarch, "Antony," *Lives, Volume IX*, 60.
[105] Diana E. E. Kleiner, "Livia Drusilla and the Remarkable Power of Elite Women in Imperial Rome: A Commentary on Recent Books on Rome's First Empress," ed. Elizabeth Bartman, Rolf Winkes, and Susan Wood, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 6, no. 4 (2000): 563–69.
[106] Sharon Kelly Heyob, *The Cult of Isis among Women in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 11.

Figure 10: Isis portrayed as Isis-Aphrodite, 2nd to 1st century BCE[107]

quickly rose in popularity, and repeated attempts by the Senate to subdue the cult were unsuccessful.[108] During the civil war period, the visibility of the Egyptian co-pharaoh Cleopatra may have encouraged this rise in popularity. Early in the civil wars in 43 BCE, the three triumvirs further promoted the cult of Isis by promising a temple to Serapis and Isis.[109]

The cult of Isis challenged traditional notions of gender and divinity. Isis held the traditional powers of male sky gods like Zeus or Jupiter, including control over lightning, thunder, and the winds.[110] She was the creator of all things in the universe and encompassed in her entirety many of the attributes of other Graeco-Roman goddesses.[111] As shown in **figure 10**, Isis was even portrayed as one of the Greek or Roman goddesses. Plutarch wrote, "her power is concerned with matter which becomes everything and receives everything, light and darkness,

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[107] *Isis-Aphrodite*, 1st century BCE, statue, Egyptian Museum, Leipzig, Germany, photograph by Einsamer Schütze, 2008, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%84gyptisches_Museum_Leipzig_206.jpg.
[108] Ambasciano, "The Goddess Who Failed?" 138.
[109] The promotion of the cult of Isis did not last long. By the time Mark Antony and Octavian had turned on each other, Octavian used the cult of Isis in his propaganda against Mark Antony and Cleopatra. Cassius Dio, *Roman History, Volume V: Books 46-50*, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 82 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 47.15.4, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL082/1917/volume.xml; Donaldson, *The Cult of Isis in the Roman Empire*, 124.
[110] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 218.
[111] Donaldson, *The Cult of Isis*, 10-11.

day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and end."[112] Describing her omnipotence, a Roman senator described her as "you who are one and all."[113] Unlike in Egypt, where Isis was worshiped alongside other male gods, the Romanized version of the cult emphasized Isis's superiority over all the male gods.[114]

Although worship of Isis was not limited to women, the cult, with a female goddess at its center, became particularly attractive for women. Given the power of Isis, the cult seemed to perpetuate an idea of equality between the sexes. Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian of the first century BCE, wrote that as a result of Isis's religious superiority over men, "it was ordained that the queen should have greater power and honour than the king and that among private persons the wife should enjoy authority over her husband."[115] While Diodorus Siculus likely overstates the extent to which traditional gender relationships had been subverted, the perceived increase in equality may have attracted many women. Isis's multiple identities allowed her to be related to by everyone. Pomeroy argues that stories of Isis as a wife and mother allowed respectable women to relate to her, while stories of Isis as a whore encouraged the cult's spread among prostitutes.[116] Eva Cantarella argues that the popularity of the cult led to the concrete rise in women's status in Egypt.[117] It is possible that the spread of the cult within Rome could have resulted in a similar rise in status.

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[112] Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," *Moralia, Volume V: Isis and Osiris. The E at Delphi. The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse. The Obsolescence of Oracles.*, trans. Frank Cole Babbit, Loeb Classical Library 306 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 382 C, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL306/1936/volume.xml.
[113] CIL 10.3800 in Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, 218.
[114] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 219.
[115] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History, Volume I: Books 1-2.34*, trans. C.H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library 279 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 1.27, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL279/1933/volume.xml.
[116] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 219.
[117] Eva Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 141-142.

By the time Octavian defeated Mark Antony in 31 BCE at the Battle of Actium, life had changed drastically for Roman women. While the conclusions drawn from this time period must be somewhat speculative due to a lack of sources in the periods prior, it does appear that during the civil wars, women gained new political powers and political relationships and became attracted to foreign cults that supported ideas of gender equality. Women like Fulvia, Octavia, and Cleopatra were powerful figures in the civil war efforts and set the stage for Livia as the wife of Augustus.

Augustan Religious Reforms

When Octavian returned to Rome and was renamed Augustus by the senate in honor of his military victories, he faced a difficult political situation.[118] Even as Augustus forged a new path as an autocratic *princeps*, he championed himself as the savior of Republican institutions.[119] The illusion of a return to the republic was crucial for Augustus. His adoptive father, Julius Caesar, had after all been murdered for tyranny. Having murdered his enemies either on the battlefield or through proscription lists, Augustus was the sole holder of real power in Rome, and he amalgamated a series of unprecedented official powers with the consent of the Senate.[120] To secure his position in Roman society, Augustus entrenched himself in Roman religion. Surrounding himself with the support of traditional Roman religious cults was a crucial part of Augustus's strategy to integrate himself in Roman religion.

As *princeps*, Augustus tied himself very closely with the divine. During his lifetime, he became the *pontifex maximus*, the head of the college of priests and the head of state religion in

[118] I switch here to referring to Octavian as Augustus. This is a common distinction made in Roman scholarship.
[119] The term *princeps* I use here comes from Augustus's position of *princeps senatus*, or first senator, Augustus's official position in Roman society. While retroactively, many refer to him as emperor, I find that that title is not really an accurate reflection of the political conditions of this time period. The system of imperial governance that followed Augustus was actively being created during and shortly after Augustus's own lifetime. For further discussion on Augustus's development of the principate, see J. W. Rich's "Making the Emergency Permanent," 37-121.
[120] Dillon and Garland, *The Ancient Romans,* 655-657.

Figure 11: Roman coin, likely from Asia Minor, printed in 28 BCE, depicting Augustus as *Divi Filius*[121]

Rome.[122] In his *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, a firsthand inscriptional account of Augustus's life, Augustus wrote that the people "agreed that [he] should be appointed supervisor of laws and morals."[123] Both Suetonius and Cassius Dio record that he accepted this honor.[124] Augustus further wrote that he "brought back into use many exemplary practices [of their] ancestors which were disappearing in [their] time."[125] Upon the deification of Julius Caesar, Augustus fashioned himself as *divi filius*, son of a god.[126] Coins with this imagery were distributed throughout the empire as seen in **figure 11**.

Augustus embarked on a number of rebuilding projects, including those that benefited female cults during his lifetime. In addition to the famous temple of Mars the Avenger, the shrine

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[121] *Gold Aureus Coin of Octavian,* 28 BCE, coin, 18 mm (0.7 in), 1995,0401.1, The British Museum, London, United Kingdom, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1995-0401-1.
[122] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus*, ed. Peter Astbury Brunt and J.M. Moore, Online Edition, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.3, https://doi.org/10.1093/oseo/instance.00100892.
[123] Augustus never explicitly states that he accepts the position, but both Suetonius and Cassius Dio record that he did, though the length of time for which he accepted the position varies. Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augustus*, 6.1.
[124] Dio*, Roman History, Volume V*, 54.30.1; Suetonius, "Augustus," *Lives of the Caesars*, *Volume I,* 27.5.
[125] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 8.4.
[126] *Gold Aureus Coin of Octavian*.

to Jupiter the Thunderer, and the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, which was erected next to Augustus's villa, Augustus further restored and built a series of temples to goddesses including the temple of Diana on the Aventine, the temple of Juventas, and the temple of Magna Mater.[127] With his support, Livia restored the temple of Bona Dea.[128] Livia was a relative of the same Clodius Pulcher implicated in the Bona Dea scandal of 62 BCE, who had violated the house of the *pontifex maximus*.[129] Geraldine Herbet-Brown suggests that by restoring the cult of Bona Dea, Livia re-established the reputation of the state cult of Bona Dea, the Claudian name, the office of *pontifex maximus*, and Livia's own persona. These restoration projects visibly tied Augustus to the divine he honored and reminded the people of what he had managed to accomplish with the support of the gods.

Augustus most strongly tied himself to the cult of the Vestal Virgins. When Augustus became *pontifex maximus* in 12 BCE, he moved the Vestal Virgins into the Domus Publica, the former residence of the *pontifex maximus*.[130] He further built a shrine to Vesta in his own villa on the Palatine.[131] Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price argue that this action fused the public state hearth with Augustus's own private hearth, allowing the *princeps*'s hearth to be a substitute for the state's.[132] The Vestal Virgins were now visibly more connected to Augustus than they had been to any other *pontifex maximus*.

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[127] While not specifically discussed in this thesis, the state cult of Magna Mater was a vital women's cult in Rome, featuring the participation of Roman matrons, dating back to the Republic. Frederick W. Shipley, "Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome from the Death of Caesar to the Death of Augustus," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 9 (1931): 7–60, https://doi.org/10.2307/4238552; Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. James G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library 253 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 5.155-158, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL253/1931/volume.xml.
[128] Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.155-158.
[129] Geraldine Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the Fasti: An Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 142-145.
[130] Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the Fasti*, 51.
[131] Ovid, *Fasti*, 4.949-954.
[132] Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 191.

Augustus used his close association with divinity to alter Roman religious practices in order to legitimize his political agenda. The restoration of the *Ludi Saeculares*, the secular games, in 17 BCE was just one example of this. The *Ludi Saeculares* was a religious rite that had fallen out of practice by the time of Augustus that celebrated the end to war. In this case, the end of the war was attributed to Augustus.[133] Augustus, even though he was not yet the *pontifex maximus*, played a main role in the rituals.[134] Given it had been so long since the rights had been celebrated, Augustus was able to significantly influence the celebrations. He moved the third day of the celebration from the Temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest to his own Temple of Apollo on the Palatine.[135] These rites included worship to gods and goddesses of childbirth and family and heavily featured images of birth and rebirth.[136] Women played a significant role in the celebration of these rites. These images were vital to Augustus's marriage and moral legislation, which sought to promote legitimate marriages and births. During the ceremony, the priests announced that the mourning period for widows would be shortened as it was "conductive both to the god's honour and to the memory of their worship."[137] By reducing the mourning period, women were eligible to remarry quicker. The sooner a woman remarried, the faster she could bear legitimate children. The edict, in line with the goals of increased childbirth present in Augustus's moral reform passed the year before the games, conflated the will of Augustus with the will of the gods.

Augustus's own connection with the divine was further legitimized by the Senate, which recognized him as divine during his lifetime. The senate declared that every five years vows and

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[133] Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, Late Fifth/Early Sixth Century CE, in M. G. L. Cooley and B. W. J. G. Wilson, *The Age of Augustus* (London: London Association of Classical Teachers Occasional Research Series, 2003), 268, L23.
[134] CIL VI 32323 (Inscription), 17 BCE, in *The Age of Augustus*, 273-275 L 27 j-q.
[135] Cooley and Wilson, *The Age of Augustus*, 266.
[136] Cooley and Wilson, *The Age of Augustus,* 266.
[137] CIL VI 32323 (Inscription), 17 BCE, in *The Age of Augustus*, 274, L 27 m.

Figure 12: The Ara Pacis, located in the Ara Pacis Museum, Rome[138]

games would be celebrated in honor of Augustus's health.[139] His name was placed in the hymn of the Salii, a prayer designed for the safekeeping of Rome, and he was made sacrosanct, making it an offense to the gods punishable by death to harm Augustus's person.[140] The senate consecrated an altar to Fortuna Redux in honor of Augustus's return to Rome and ordered the *pontifices* and the Vestal Virgins to make an annual sacrifice at the altar.[141] The senate further consecrated an altar to Augustan Peace, the Ara Pacis, as seen in **figure 12** and again required the *pontifices* and the Vestal Virgins to make an annual sacrifice, honoring the stability created by Augustus.[142] These honors treated Augustus, and to some extent his family, as divine. The well-being of the state became the well-being of Augustus: any threat to Augustus was a threat to the state.

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[138] *Ara Pacis Augusti*, January 30, 9 BCE, Carrara marble altar, 11.65 m x 10.62 m x 4.60 m (38.22 ft x 34.84 ft x 15.09 ft), Ara Pacis Museum, Rome, Italy, photograph by Rabax63, 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ara_Pacis_(SW).jpg.
[139] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 9.1.
[140] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 10.1
[141] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 11.
[142] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 12.2.

The treatment of any one individual as divine was a dramatic shift from the era of the Republic. In Republican Rome, venturing too close to the divine resulted in the death of Julius Caesar.[143] What is meant here by the treatment of Augustus as divine is not the establishment of emperor worship or the imperial cult, which had started to propagate in the provinces during Augustus's own lifetime.[144] Augustus himself is not officially recognized by the state as divine until his posthumous deification.[145] Instead, Augustus was slowly incorporated into Roman religious practices during his own life.

By cloaking himself in Roman religion, the appearance of divine support became even more vital for the continuation of the Augustan regime. Although the transition to the Augustan *principate* was relatively smooth, public unrest occasionally flared up in society. The Roman Republic had quelled this unrest through traditional religious means, such as by killing a Vestal Virgin or by attributing it to a failed religious ritual. For Augustus, these avenues were no longer an option. Women's cults needed to serve as pillars of the regime.

Augustan Political Reforms

As *princeps*, Augustus politically reshaped Rome to suit his needs. In addition to great religious power, Augustus also held concrete political power, Augustus held the position of consul, the highest magisterial position, fourteen times during his life, as well as tribunician powers, which allowed him to administer the requests of the senate.[146] These official powers were bolstered by Augustus's unofficial *auctoritas*, or influence. Augustus himself summarizes this in his *Res Gestae*: "After this time I excelled all in influence, although I possessed no more official power than others who were my colleagues in the several magistracies."[147] For the

[143]In his lifetime, Julius Caesar repeatedly called himself a demigod, which like his moves for unitary power, bolstered ill-will against him. Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 44.
[144] Gwynaeth McIntyre, *Imperial Cult* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 42.
[145]Dio, *Roman History, Volume VII,* 56.46.
[146] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti,* 4.4, 6.2.
[147] Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 34.3.

Romans, *auctoritas*, or influence, was power. Although Augustus did not officially hold legislative powers, the absence of those who would have opposed him ensured that his legislative agenda would pass through the Senate. The legislation passed by Augustus placed women more directly into the public, civil sphere.

As part of his legislative agenda, Augustus advanced a series of moral legislation regulating women's marriages and social behaviors. Augustus's marriage legislation detailed punishments for adultery, prohibitions for men from marrying women of ill-repute, prohibitions for senators and their descendants from marrying freed women, and rewards for those who had more than three children[148] The legislation also erased specific barriers to marriage: clauses in wills that were dependent on the inheritors not having children were nullified, and parents could not prevent or hinder their children from marrying and had to actively search for a husband for their daughters.[149] The political position of Roman men was also dependent upon the childbearing capabilities of his wife: whichever consul had more children was to be the senior consul.

This legislation reflected a very real need in Roman society for sexual reproduction. Rome's military prowess depended upon a constant supply of able bodied men for the army. The decade of civil war, which itself was preceded by unrest in the Republic, resulted in a shortage of manpower.[150] The army was composed of male citizens, who had an obligation to serve for at least sixteen years in the Roman army.[151] Illegitimate children were not citizens and therefore

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[148] Julius Paulus, *The Digest*, 3rd century, in Bonnie MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook*, Bloomsbury Sources in Ancient History (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, 125-126; Treggiari, *Roman Marriage,* 60-80; Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories: Books 4-5. Annals: Books 1-3.*, trans. Clifford H. Moore and John Jackson, Loeb Classical Library 249 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 2.85, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL249/1931/volume.xml.
[149] Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 60-80.
[150] Pliny, *Natural History, Volume II: Books 3-7*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 352 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 7.149, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL352/1942/volume.xml.
[151] Graham Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D*, 3rd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 24.

would have been ineligible to serve.[152] An increase of extramarital sexual activity at the time of Augustus meant fewer citizens for the Roman army.[153] Roman soldiers were also prevented from marrying during their time of service, ensuring that soldiers married and procreated with Roman women rather than local women.[154] Women were essential to the growth of this citizen body. Their marital and moral behaviors determined whether the population had enough eligible citizens to sustain the territorial extent of the Roman Empire. For these reasons, motherhood, particularly the motherhood of Roman citizens, received a special emphasis in the framework of the Roman state. By explicitly legislating women's extramarital activities and by incentivizing the birth of legitimate children, Augustus promoted the expansion of the Roman army. At the same time, Augustus moved issues of marriage and childbirth from the private domestic sphere to the public sphere.

This legislation also reflected the importance of women in raising children who would grow to become upstanding Roman citizens. Members of the senatorial class were prevented from marrying freed men, a lower class, and both members of the senatorial class and freed men were prevented from marrying women of ill-repute, including prostitutes, adulteresses, actresses, and women found guilty of crimes in court.[155] This legislation prevented women deemed immoral from procreating and raising legitimate Roman citizens. Procreation, particularly the procreation of the elite classes, was reserved for upstanding citizens. The legislation reflected a fear that women would pass on their immorality to their children. The responsibility of

[152] Marilyn Skinner, review of *Review of: Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life*, by Jane F. Gardner, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, accessed February 15, 2023, https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1999/1999.02.10/.
[153] MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Rome,* 125.
[154] Treggiari, *Roman Marriage,* 64.
[155] Treggiari, *Roman Marriage,* 61-62.

Figure 13: Livia appearing on an early imperial coin, *RIC* I 2, 46 p. 97[156]

motherhood was not just to create Roman citizens that could join the army but to create moral ones that would not bring disgrace to the state.

This legislation had the consequence of moving women from the private to the public sphere. Prior to this legislation, political classes, such as the senatorial class, were composed of men only; however, this legislation included regulations of women based on the class of her family, at once making formerly political classes into social classes and introducing women into the public sphere.[157] Women were now afforded privileges of these classes and were even able to use them in court.[158] Elite women were now expected to publicly demonstrate their status and to be seen in public as acting morally. Women further began to dedicate public works, including monuments, aqueducts, and public baths.[159]

The most public of women were the members of the imperial family. As Augustus centralized his power, he granted honors to members of his family, including his son-in-law and adopted sons.[160] Members of his family, both men and women, were expected to assist Augustus

[156] *Dupondius of Livia, Rome*, 14-37 BCE, coin, 1986.504.10, Harvard Art Museums, Boston, MA, https://hvrd.art/o/175786.
[157] Culham, "Did Roman Women Have an Empire?" 196.
[158] Culham, "Did Roman Women Have an Empire?" 196.
[159] Culham, "Did Roman Women Have an Empire?" 200-203.
[160] Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories*, 1.3.

in maintaining control. As a result, these women became public figures in their own right. Livia was featured on imperial coinage and statuary as seen in **figure 13.** Other members of the imperial family, including Julia the Elder, Augustus's daughter, and Antonia, Augustus's niece, also appeared on statues and temples, including the Ara Pacis.[161] Upon Livia's death in 29 BCE, the senate called for her to be deified, the first time a woman would have received such an honor, although she was not deified until her grandson, Claudius, was the emperor.[162]

Augustus's political reforms sought to stabilize the Roman Empire with him at its center. As part of his efforts, Augustus legislated women's marriages and behavior by their families' political class in order to promote childbirth and morality and moved women into the public sphere. These women were granted the privileges of these classes and took on a new public role in Roman society. Due to Augustus's effort to centralize power, the women of his own family became extremely visible public figures.

Conclusion

The civil wars and Augustus's political and religious reforms represented great shocks to Roman society. During the civil wars, women at home gained more freedoms due to the absence of men. While women still could not formally interact with Roman political power in the form of voting or magistrates, the civil wars and Augustus's political reform gave women more political privileges and altered the relationship between women and the state. Many of these women became more attracted to foreign cults. Using both religious and political means to secure unitary power, Augustus not only changed the relationship between the state and the people, but he changed the meaning of the state itself: Augustus became the state. This transitional period had

[161] *Ara Pacis Augusti*.
[162] Romulus, according to some accounts, Julius Caesar, and Augustus were the only Romans to have been deified at this point. Dio, *Roman History, Volume VII,* 58.2, 60.5.

profound effects on the way women could be used to soothe state unrest, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Scandal in the Imperial Principate

"The deified Augustus banished his daughter, who was shameless beyond the indictment of shamelessness, and made public the scandals of the imperial house—that she had been accessible to scores of paramours, that in nocturnal revels she had roamed about the city, that the very forum and the rostrum, from which her father had proposed a law against adultery, had been chosen by the daughter for her debaucheries, that she had daily resorted to the statue of Marsyas, and, laying aside the role of adulteress, there sold her favours, and sought the right to every indulgence with even an unknown paramour." Seneca the Younger[163]

Augustus's moral reforms greatly affected the relationship between women, religion, and the state. In the Late Republic, solutions to political unrest could be found in the religious world, particularly women's religious world. Political unrest was seen as divine retribution, so the purification of women's religious rituals was seen by the populace to restore the state. Divine retribution would have been incredibly dangerous for the Principate as it would have been seen as condemnation of Augustus and his successor Tiberius. The security of the Augustan regime became the security of the state, and regime survival triumphed over the security of the people at large.

Given the threat that divine retribution would have caused to regime survival, the relationship between state-cults, women, and the state needed to change. To maintain the appearance of divine approval, the Augustan regime needed to maintain the appearance that state cults were beyond reproach. Notably during this period, there were no known religious scandals that implicated state cults. Further, there were no ritual murders of any Vestal Virgins under Augustus or his immediate predecessors.[164] Through Augustus's literary and sculptural campaign, he sought to reform the image of the state cult.[165] The only mention of Vestal

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[163] Seneca the Younger, *Moral Essays, Volume III: De Beneficiis*, 6.32.1
[164] Cadoux, "Catiline and the Vestal Virgins," 165.
[165]For more on Augustus's use of rhetoric and images, see John Pollini, *From Republic to Empire: Rhetoric, Religion, and Power in the Visual Culture of Ancient Rome*, vol. 48, Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) and Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*.

unchastity by authors endorsed by Augustus occurred in a state-creating rather than a state-destroying context, when in Livy's *History of Rome*, the Vestal Rhea Silvia was "ravished" by Mars, resulting in the birth of Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome.[166]

Since the Romans could no longer attribute causes of unrest to women's state cults, the Principate forged new avenues to resolve unrest.[167] The state did so in two ways: through the punishment of women for the civil crime of adultery and for the punishment of foreign cults that involved women. This chapter explores this phenomenon through the adultery scandal of Julia the Elder and the 19 CE expulsion of the cult of Isis.

Civil Adultery Scandals

Augustus's marriage and moral legislation had drawn women into the public sphere in a new way. Though remedying unrest through the religious sphere was no longer an option for the Augustan regime, an avenue opened to resolve political unrest through civil adultery scandals. During this period, trials for adultery against women became much more frequent.[168] There was little that a woman could do to defend themselves against the charge of adultery: the women were almost always found guilty and subject to banishment, a sort of civil death. This civil

[166] It is difficult to make generalizations based on Livy's *History of Rome* because very little of it remains. Despite this, this instance of Rhea Silvia's loss of chastity contrasts sharply with instances of civil adultery in his work. Rhea Silvia's suicide was excluded from Livy's narrative, despite the legend existing during Livy's time. Livy does, however, provide instances of women being killed or committing suicide for instances of civil adultery. The exclusion likely has to do with the loss of Rhea Silvia's chastity being divinely sanctioned and by the god Mars, with whom the Romans strongly identified. Livy, *History of Rome, Volume I* 1.3-6, 1.57-58; Ovid, "Amores," *Heroides. Amores.*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. Grant Showerman, Loeb Classical Library 41 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 3.6, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL041/1914/volume.xml.

[167] Again, just as the usage of punishment of women's cults in the Late Republic was one method of quelling state unrest, civil punishment of women for adultery and the punishment of foreign cults were just two methods the state could use to deal with political turmoil. Military actions and alliances remained potential actions.

[168] Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 151-152.

Figure 14 (left): Bust of Julia the Elder[169]
Figure 15 (right): Denarius from 13 BC. Obserse: Augustus (DIVUS AUGUSTUS); Reverse: Julia flanked by her sons, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, both adopted by Augustus.[170]

purification may have acted similarly to the religious purifications of the Late Republic. As a result, the civil crime of adultery became transformed into a pseudo-religious crime, taking on the nature of "sacrilege."[171] Though the case of Julia the Elder is explored in depth here, it is vital to note that she was not alone in this civil treatment of adultery scandals to resolve political unrest. In addition to the numerous other women charged and sentenced with adultery during this time period, a similar set of circumstances arose for Julia the Younger, Julia the Elder's daughter, just ten years later.

Twenty-five years after the return of Augustus, the *princeps* and his family remained the elite benefactors of Roman society. Perhaps none was more popular than Julia the Elder, see

[169] *Musée Saint-Raymond, Ra 338*,12-11 BCE, marble bust, 37.3 cm x 18.5 cm x 22.5 cm (14.6 in x 7.2 in x 8.8 in), Musée d'Archéologie de Toulouse, photograph by Daniel Martin, 2021, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MSR-Ra338-DM_(9).jpg.
[170] Elaine Fantham, *Julia Augusti: The Emperor's Daughter*, Women of the Ancient World (New York: Routledge, 2006), 67.
[171] Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories,* 3.24.

figure 14. The only biological child of Augustus, Julia was described by Macrobius as exceptionally learned, kind, and empathetic.[172] Despite her charms, her luck in love was tragic. Augustus had first given her in marriage to her cousin, Marcellus, considered by some to have been the greatest hope for the Roman people, in 25 BCE when she was just fourteen, but he died merely two years later.[173] Augustus then married her to Marcus Agrippa, his second in command, in 18 BCE, who was old enough to be her father.[174] Julia bore their fifth child shortly after Agrippa's death in 12 BCE. Julia's third and final marriage was to Tiberius, Augustus's adoptive son and step-son by Livia, shortly after the death of Agrippa, despite being legally exempt from any coercion to remarry under Augustus's own legislation. The marriage was not a happy one. Augustus forced Tiberius to divorce his wife Agrippina, the daughter of Marcus Agrippa, while she was pregnant with their second child.[175] The marriage between Julia and Tiberius completely collapsed after the death of their child together, and Tiberius withdrew to Rhodes.[176]

As the eldest child of Augustus and the wife of his closest commanders, Julia would have been expected to represent the imperial family in a public manner. Historian Elain Fantham argues that Julia would have likely held a number of prominent positions in Augustus's public celebrations and religious festivals, much like an American First Lady.[177] During the secular

[172] Though Macrobius wrote this nearly four centuries after Julia's death, he based his account off a missing work of the Augustan writer Domitius Marius. Macrobius, *Saturnalia, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. Robert A. Kaster, Loeb Classical Library 510 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.5.2, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL510/2011/volume.xml.; Bonnie MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Rome*, 133.
[173] Suetonius, "Augustus," *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I,* 63; Virgil, "Aeneid," *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 6.860-6.886, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL063/1916/volume.xml.
[174] There continues to be much speculation as to the state of the marriage between the two. Tacitus and Macrobius implied that Julia had a number of affairs during this marriage; however, these accounts could be biased due to her later alleged infidelity. Agrippa seemed to have cared about his wife: he leveled an exorbitant fine of 100,000 drachmas against the people of Illium when Julia was nearly killed in a flash flood to visit him on a campaign, and there are no recorded incidents of ill-will between the couple. Suetonius, "Augustus," *Lives of the Caesars,* 63; Elaine Fantham, *Julia Augusti,* 66-79.
[175] Suetonius recorded a story of how when Tiberius saw her in public after the divorce "he followed her with such an intent and tearful gaze that care was taken that she should never again come before his eyes." Suetonius, "Tiberius," *Lives of the Caesars*, *Volume I,* 7.2-3.
[176] Suetonius, "Tiberius," *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I*, 7.3; Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories*, 1.53.
[177] Fantham, *Julia Augusti*, 61.

games, 110 married women made ritual offerings to the goddesses Juno and Diana, so it is not a stretch to assume that Julia was one of those chosen.[178] While Tiberius celebrated an *ovatio*, Julia alongside her stepmother Livia hosted a dinner for the women in the city of Rome.[179] Like Livia, Julia also appeared on imperial coinage. In a denarius from 13 BCE, seen in **figure 15**, Julia was featured alongside her two sons, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, both of whom were adopted by Augustus.[180] Augustus had hoped to groom the two sons as his successors.[181] Julia's positioning within the coin would have further legitimized her two sons as Augustus's heir by demonstrating not just an adoptive but a blood relationship between the two boys and Augustus.

Despite the need for Julia to serve Augustus's image, the father and daughter duo were constantly at odds with one another. Augustus preferred the women in his family to act in a way befitting his moral legislation. He ensured that the women were adept at the traditional activities of spinning and weaving and forbade them from meeting with strange men.[182] On the other hand, Julia preferred extravagant and suggestive clothing, surrounding herself with "a gaggle of youths of a decidedly dandified appearance."[183] Rather than being modest, Julia embraced her vanity, plunking her early gray hairs in secret to her father's dismay.[184] Her wittisms, particularly those at her father's expense, made her notoriously popular, at one point saying, "He forgets that he is Caesar, but I remember that I am Caesar's daughter."[185]

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[178] Fantham, *Julia Augusti*, 61.
[179] An *ovatio* was a grand celebration in honor of a great military victory, but it was smaller than the similar *triumphus*. Cassius Dio, *Roman History, Volume VI: Books 51-55*, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 83 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 55.2.4, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL083/1917/volume.xml.
[180] Fantham, *Julia Augusti*, 67.
[181] Dio, *Roman History, Volume VI*, 54.18.1.
[182] Suentonius, "Augustus," *Lives of Caesars***,** *Volume I,* 64.
[183] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2.5.1-6.
[184] Macrobius, *Saturnalia,* 2.5.7.
[185] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2.5.5-8.

Julia's alleged indiscretions were kept quiet until 2 BCE when she was charged with both adultery and a plot against her father's life.[186] Seneca the Younger termed her behavior "shameless beyond the indictment of shamelessness."[187] Both Seneca the Younger and Cassius Dio described Julia having many lovers and engaging in drunken escapades throughout the city, including within the Roman Forum and in the Rostra.[188] While other historians speculated that Julia's serial adultery dated back to her marriage with Agrippa, this instance pertained to five named men and others unknown: Quintius Crispinus, Appias Claudius, Sempronius Gracchus, Scipio, and, most damningly, Iulus Antonius, the son of Mark Antony.[189] Allegedly having been ignorant to the true nature of Julia's salacious behaviors, Augustus was incensed, supposedly even considering putting her to death.[190] He immediately banished Julia to the island of Pandateria and banished the men to other islands with the exception of Iulus Antonius, whom he had put to death by suicide for designs against the monarchy.[191]

Julia's alleged serial adultery was enough to destabilize the reign of her father Augustus. Augustus had built much of his time as *princeps* around his moral reform, of which Julia was in flagrant violation. By being charged with such public crimes of debauchery, Julia had been accused not just of adultery but of the blatant disregard of the will of the *princeps*. Augustus's swift banishment of Julia reinforced the strength of the *princeps*, demonstrating that no disobedience, not even from the *princeps*' own family, would be tolerated.

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[186] Pliny, *Natural History, Volume II,* 7.149.
[187] Seneca the Younger, *Moral Essays, Volume III,* 6.32.1.
[188] Seneca the Younger, *Moral Essays*, 6.32.1; Dio, *Roman History, Volume VI,* 55.10.12-13.
[189] Macrobius reported Julia as saying that she only had affairs during her marriage to Marcus Agrippa while she was pregnant in order for there to be no dispute to the parentage of her children: "I take on a passage only when the ship's hull is full"; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2.5.9; Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History. Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, trans. Frederick W. Shipley, Loeb Classical Library 152 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 2.100, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL152/1924/volume.xml.
[190] Seneca the Younger, *Moral Essays*, 6.32.2-3; Suetonius, "Augustus," *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I*, 65.
[191] Dio, *Roman History, Volume VI*, 55.10.14-15.

But Julia had been charged with treason alongside adultery, a far more serious crime. Further, the son of Augustus's old rival Mark Antony was conveniently the only one forced to commit suicide.[192] In the context of Roman history, charges of adultery were often used to discredit women who needed to be punished or silenced: none of the women accused of adultery under Augustus's moral legislation were acquitted, so it was a sure way to guarantee a conviction.[193] These charges were frequently brought alongside the political charge of treason.[194] This is not to say that Julia could not have committed adultery but that there was likely further political motivations behind these charges.

Modern historians debate the true nature of these charges. It is possible, as some of the contemporaneous sources suggest, that there was an elaborate plot against the life of Augustus. The charges of treason and adultery were, after all, two separate charges. Although Augustus had bestowed favors upon Ilus Antonius, including priesthoods, magistrates, and the marriage to Augustus's own niece, the murder of his father at the Battle of Actium would have likely remained prominent in Ilus Antonius's mind. Julia, too, had frequently come into conflict with her father and may not have taken to her forced and failed marriages at the hands of Augustus well. However, it is doubtful that these disputes would have turned to murder, particularly with her young sons in Augustus's care.

To fully understand why the charge of adultery was necessary for Augustus's daughter, historian W.K. Lacey argues that the context of the year 2 BCE is crucial. In 2 BCE, Augustus made a number of rather large claims for dynastic succession. Lucius Caesar, Julia's son and Augustus's son by adoption, had been proclaimed *princeps iuventutis*, later akin to the title of

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[192] Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.100; Dio, *Roman History, Volume VI*, 55.10.14-15.
[193] Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus*, 151-152.
[194] Milnor, *Gender*, *Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus,* 151-152.

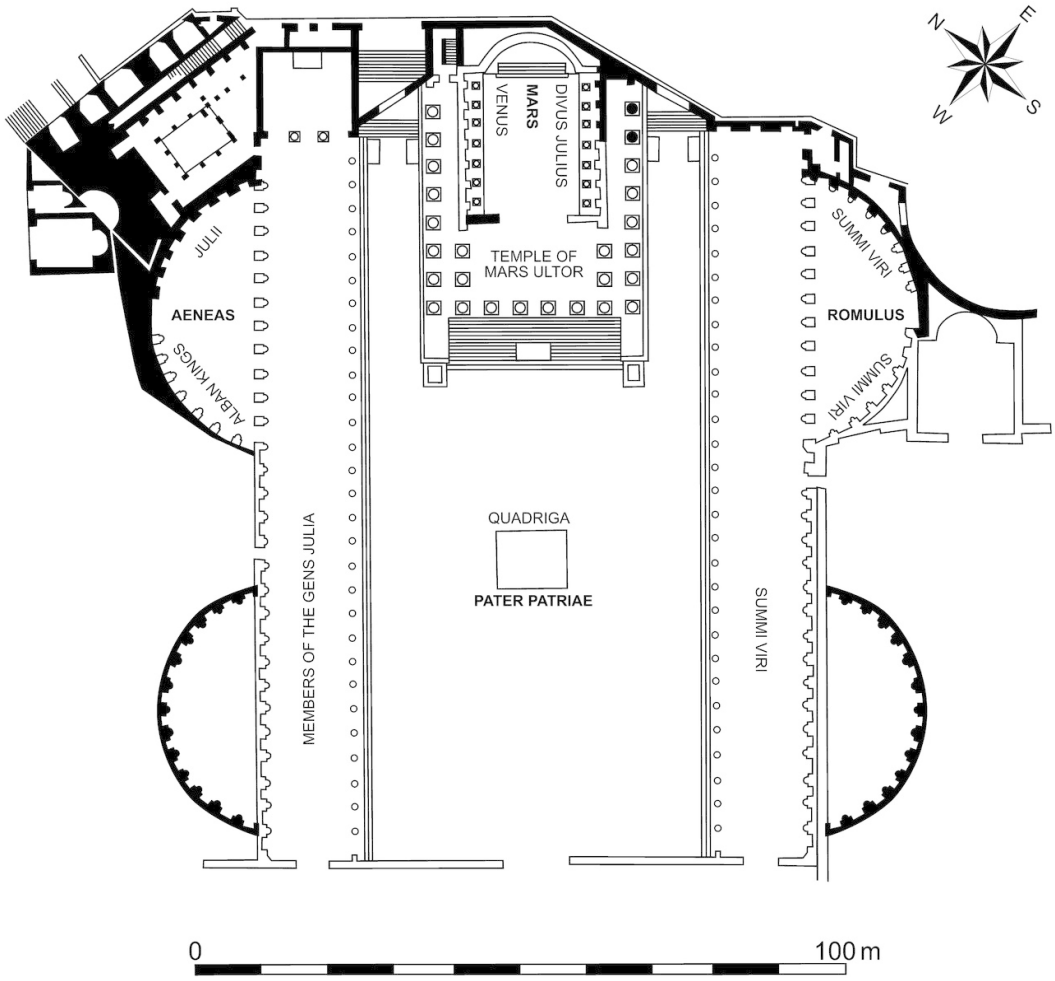

Figure 16: Plan of the Forum Augustum, redrawn by M. C. Bishop.[195]

crown prince.[196] The public would have been thrilled at the prospect of the opening of the Forum Augustum and by the hundreds of live animals arriving for the great celebrations, potentially putting pressure on the Senate to formally convey the title of *pater patriae* upon Augustus.[197] The Senate voted to confer the title in February of that year, a title which had only before been

[195]Nandini B. Pandey, "Remapping the Forum Augustum," in *The Poetics of Power in Augustan Rome: Latin Poetic Responses to Early Imperial Iconography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 159, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/poetics-of-power-in-augustan-rome/remapping-the-forum-augustum/75837A73B6C905C9237BA71573BBF31E#chapter.
[196] W. K. Lacey, "2 B.C. and Julia's Adultery," *Antichthon* 14 (January 1, 1980): 128; John Percy Vyvian Dacre Balsdon and Barbara M. Levick, "Princeps Iuventutis," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2005), https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198606413.001.0001/acref-9780198606413-e-5330.
[197] Lacey, "2 B.C.," 129-130.

bestowed upon Julius Caesar and Romulus. On the 12th of May, the Forum Augustum and the Temple of Mars Ultor were opened to the public with a celebratory naval battle, much like Julius Caesar had done forty years before. Impressive still today, the Forum would have been a splendor of marble and extravagance.[198] In the center of the Forum, see **figure 16**, the grand Temple of Mars Ultor, a nod to Augustus's military victories, would have commanded attention with its large statues of Mars, Venus, and Divus Julius, Augustus's father. On the left side of the Forum were members of Augustus's own *gens Julia*, with Aeneas positioned as the head of the Julian line and Alban kings included in the Julian line.[199] As one walked into the temple, one would have seen the name of Augustus in the stone above the temple.[200] In this Forum, Augustus made a clear claim to dynastic succession, heralding back to the very founding of Rome.

Lacey argues that these moves for dynastic succession would have been destabilizing for the Roman nobility.[201] Although Tacitus's history implies that the Romans were complacent in welcoming Augustus as an autocratic monarch, the reality at the time was far more complicated.[202] The nobles had previously pushed back against Augustus's moves to consolidate power in 23 BCE, when his dominance of Roman political magistrates prevented the advancement of members of the nobility.[203] The instability in 2 BCE took the form of an attack against Augustus's family, most notably the chastity of Julia, the mother of Augustus's two sons.[204]

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[198] Lacy, "2 B.C.," 132-134.
[199]Tacitus, *Annals: Books 4-6, 11-12*, trans. John Jackson, Loeb Classical Library 312 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 4.9, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL312/1937/volume.xml; Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.563-566.
[200] Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.567-568.
[201] Lacey, "2 B.C.," 127-142.
[202] Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories*, 1.7.
[203] Lacey, "2 B.C.," 136.
[204] Lacey puts forth the suggestion that the ludicrous details of Julia's adultery put forth in Augustus's letter to the Senate would have attracted attention to Julia while deflecting attention from the parentage of Gaius and Lucius Caesar. This is the one area where I find myself disagreeing with his argument. If Julia had been accused of rampant sexual misconduct during her marriage to Tiberius, the natural question to follow would be if she had been faithful to Marcus Agrippa. Lacey, "2 B.C.," 137-142.

The proceedings of the scandal demonstrated that Augustus engineered the fallout. As Fantham emphasizes, despite Augustus establishing a court procedure for adultery in his moral legislation, Julia had no trial.[205] Instead, Augustus notified the Senate in a letter and sentenced Julia to banishment himself.[206] The nature of the nocturnal escapades that Augustus wrote of ensured that no respectable Roman citizen would be able to speak in Julia's defense.[207] Julia was damned as soon as Augustus decided it was so.

It is worth investigating the nature of the threat against the state at this moment. The Roman peoples faced no divine threat. There had been no mention of famines, floods, or other disasters. The threat to the state was not to the state as the Roman people. Rather, if Lacey is correct, the nobles' unrest would have been a threat to the stability of the Augustan regime and Augustus himself. By sacrificing his daughter, Augustus ensured his continued autocracy. Julia herself, with her opposition to Augustan ideals, made the perfect victim.

In the Late Republic, unrest could have been quelled through religious purification, whether through the sacrifice of a Vestal Virgin or the repetition of a ritual. These were not options for Augustus. If Augustus had sought to quell the unrest through religious means, it would have been akin to acknowledging divine punishment for Augustus's regime. Augustus instead needed to gratify the public desire for purification through civil means. Adultery would have been the perfect candidate. Though not specifically religious, it had religious and moral connotes. In his damnation of Julia, Augustus highlighted the religious connection by calling it "sacrilege."[208] The civil death of Julia in her banishment would have likely served the same soothing effect as the physical death of a Vestal Virgin.

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[205] Fantham, *Julia Augusti*, 86.
[206] Suetonius, "Augustus," *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I,* 65.
[207] Fantham, *Julia Augusti*, 88.
[208] Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories*, 3.24.

The 19 CE Expulsion of the Cult of Isis

By the end of the civil period, the cult of Isis had a very hostile relationship with the state in Rome. Augustus heavily relied on propaganda that postulated Cleopatra as the new Isis and portrayed his war against her and Mark Antony as a battle of Roman gods against Egyptian ones.[209] While the Augustan regime avoided direct attacks on the goddess Isis, famous literaries such as Pliny the Younger and Tacitus participated in attacks against all things Egyptian. Despite the rather open disdain of the cult of Isis by the Principate, the cult of Isis and other similar cults gained popularity and attention at the expense of more traditionally Roman cults such as the state cult of Bona Dea.[210] While the Principate could no longer punish state cults to quell public unrest, the spread of foreign cults during the early Principate revealed a new path for the state to resolve unrest: the punishment of foreign cults.

The features of the cult of Isis made it particularly threatening to Augustus, and later his successor, Tiberius. This opened the cult to attack by the regime. As discussed in chapter 2, the cult of Isis encouraged a more equal balance of power between men and women. During the civil war, women had to take on more masculine roles in daily life. Augustus's moral reforms reinforced traditional gender roles by encouraging women to remain devoted wives and mothers. Although the cult of Isis welcomed members of all classes, particularly the lower classes, Augustus's legal reforms strengthened stark class divides. Within respectable Roman society, mystery behind the cult excited suspicions about violations of decency and the potential for secret societies.[211] The Romanized cult of Isis, with its emphasis on gender equality and its

[209] Donaldson, *The Cult of Isis*, 125-134.
[210] Ambasciano, "The Goddess Who Failed?" 139.
[211] Horst R. Moehring, "The Persecution of the Jews and the Adherents of the Isis Cult at Rome A.D. 19," *Novum Testamentum* 3, no. 4 (1959): 295, https://doi.org/10.2307/1559946.

historical associations with Cleopatra and Mark Antony, would have represented a particular danger for Augustus and Tiberius.

Although Augustus did not formally expel the cult of Isis, he discouraged worship of the goddess. Cassius Dio recorded that in 28 BCE, Augustus forbade "the Egyptian rites to be celebrated inside the pomerium," but this did not affect worship of the cult of Isis outside of this boundary.[212] Later in 21 BCE, Marcus Agrippa, Augustus's second in command, forbade the rites of Isis to be practiced within one mile of the city after a brief period of domestic unrest in Rome.[213] This reaction against the cult in response to political turmoil would not have been unfamiliar to the Romans, who would have perhaps found worship of the cult improper religious practice subject to divine political retribution. In practice, Heyob notes, these restrictions only impacted the outward life of Romans, and a blind eye was often turned to private domestic worship.[214]

By 19 CE, the politics in Rome significantly changed. While Augustus had struggled to blend republicanism and monarchy, there was little need by this point to hide the monarchical nature of the principate. In 14 CE, Augustus died an easy death in the company of his wife Livia.[215] The transition of power to Tiberius was relatively smooth.[216] By 19 CE, Tiberius was the undisputed power in Rome.

Notable in 19 CE was the expulsion of two cults: the cult of Isis and the Jews.[217] The formal expulsion of a religious cult was a serious matter. It had only happened once before in recorded Roman history with the expulsion of the cult of Bacchus in 186 BCE.[218] This expulsion

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[212] Dio, *Roman History, Volume VI,* 53.2.4.
[213] Dio, *Roman History, Volume VI*, 54.6.6.
[214] Heyob, *The Cult of Isis*, 131-132.
[215] Suetonius, "Augustus," *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I,* 99.
[216] Suetonius, "Tiberius," *Lives of the Caesars, Volume 1*, 23-24.
[217] Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories*, 2.85.
[218] *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus, ILLRP 2.511.10* (186 BCE) in Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 47.

Figure 17: Woodcut illustration of the story of Paulina and Decius Mundus from Josephus's Jewish Antiquities, 1474 CE[219]

had only occurred after reports of significant crime and debauchery, including the disappearance of men said to have been taken by the gods.[220] Though Augustus had been more hostile to foreign cults, the Romans were generally tolerant to the practice of other religions. The formal and extreme expulsion in 19 CE of the two cults suggested that something more serious had transpired than merely private practice.

Though the expulsion of the cult of Isis and the Jews occurred within the same timeframe and the two groups were given similar punishments, the reasons behind the expulsion were treated separately in the historical record.[221] While the true events behind the story may never be known, the narrative that endures was reported by Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*, as

[219]Johannes Zainer, *Woodcut Illustration of the Story of Paulina and Decius Mundus from Josephus's Jewish Antiquities,* 1473 CE, illustration, 80 mm x 110 mm (3.1 in x 4.3 in), Penn Libraries, Philadelphia, PA, photograph by Providence Online Project, 2011, https://www.flickr.com/photos/58558794@N07/6693298457/.
[220] Livy, *History of Rome, Volume XI,* 39.13.8-14.
[221] Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories*, 2.85; Suetonius, "Tiberius," *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I,* 36; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Volume VIII: Books 18-19.*, trans. Louis H. Feldman, Loeb Classical Library 433, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 18.65-80, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL433/1965/volume.xml.

illustrated in **figure 17**.[222] Decius Mundus, a Roman knight, fell in love with a virtuous married Roman woman, Paulina. Though Mundus had tried to bribe Paulina to lie with him, Paulina refused. A freedwoman, Ida, offered to help Mundus seduce Paulina, knowing that Paulina was a devotee of Isis, by bribing priests of the cult of Isis to tell Paulina that Mundus was actually the personification of the god Anubis. Paulina, with her husband's permission, laid with Mundus, under the guise of Anubis, inside the temple of Isis. Mundus bragged to her later about their affair, and her husband exposed the scandal to Tiberius. Tiberius reacted harshly, crucifying Ida and the priests of Isis, razing the temple of Isis, throwing the statue of Isis into the Tiber, and exiling Mundus. Suetonius reported that followers of the cult of Isis were ordered to burn their religious vestments and paraphernalia, and Tacitus claimed that four thousand followers of both the Egyptian and the Jewish rites were taken as slaves.[223]

Whether or not the story of Josephus was an accurate account behind the reason for the cult's expulsion, it was the story that was allowed to permeate throughout society. For this reason, the story can provide much information about what the regime of Tiberius viewed as threats to the state and how the regime dealt with these threats. At the center of the story was the figure of Paulina. Paulina had been a woman of the senatorial class, above that of Mundus.[224] In her virtues and descent, Paulina was emblematic of the ideal Roman matron, the backbone of Roman society. Through his deception, Mundus corrupted this ideal, posing not just a threat to Paulina but of all of Roman society. Mundus's deception goes deeper: Paulina had received permission from her husband to lay with Mundus under the guise of Anubis, beguiling not just a Roman matron but also a Roman senator. The class distinction between Paulina and her husband

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[222]What is notable about the expulsion of the Jews in the same year is that the reasoning behind the expulsion was also attributed to a similar case of adultery committed by a Roman matron, though the accounts otherwise differ. For more, see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.65-80.
[223] Suetonius, "Tiberius," *Lives of the Caesars*, *Volume I,* 36; Tacitus, "Annals," *Histories*, 2.85.
[224] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.66.

and Mundus is also crucial here. The reforms initiated by Augustus and upheld by Tiberius reinforced class divides in Roman society. The act of Mundus and Paulina's affair threatened this clear class divide, thereby threatening the politics of Tiberius.

But Mundus received the lightest punishment of all involved: Ida and the priests of Isis were crucified and many other followers were enslaved. The serious crime was not adultery but the seduction of a Roman matron to a threatening foreign religion. Paulina's status as a Roman noblewoman demonstrated the spread of the cult of Isis at the time of Tiberius. By drawing this attraction of great swaths of Roman women, it could have decreased the proper worship of traditional Roman gods. The Romans would then be subject to divine retribution. Although Augustus could not have sought to remedy civil unrest in 2 BCE by seeking answers in the Roman religious sphere, for Tiberius, retaliation against a foreign religious group for whatever crimes they may have caused would have been acceptable.

The punishment of the cult of Isis was both incredibly public and incredibly violent. The physical destruction of the temples and the crucified bodies of the followers of the cult would have been visible to all in Rome. The Principate would have been seen to have been correcting the threat of improper religious practice that could have jeapordized the entirety of Rome. Tiberius, as *princeps*, appeared as the savior of Rome. Like Augustus' banishment of Julia the Elder for adultery, Tiberius' punishment would have served a similar function to the punishments of state cults during the Late Republic. The brutal and graphic nature of the punishment would have shut down political unrest.

Although the Romans successfully integrated the worship of other non-Roman gods to varying degrees by this time period, the cult of Isis was not successfully integrated into the Roman cult until after Tiberius's death.[225] While the cult was very popular among the people, its

[225] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 225.

attitudes towards gender and hierarchy and its associations with Mark Antony and Cleopatra, though waning by 19 CE, made the cult threatening to the Tiberian regime. This practical threat to Tiberius was likely more important than the threat of divine retribution for the entirety of the Roman state. For these reasons, Tiberius sought extreme punishment against the cult.

Conclusion

The Augustan reforms significantly altered the relationship between women, the state, and religion. Unable to turn to the Roman religious sphere to resolve threats to the state, the *princeps* needed to turn to new modes of resolution. Women remained the cornerstone of Roman society, so punishment for the disgrace of a virtuous Roman matron was an apt substitute for the traditional protections for the state.

Julia the Elder's adultery scandal, resulting in her banishment from Rome, served to remedy political discontent in a civil manner. While Augustus could not sacrifice a Vestal Virgin as it would be seen as divine retribution against him, he could metaphorically sacrifice his daughter, Julia the Elder, to a civil death through banishment. Further, discontent against the state now represented discontent against Augustus, so the solution must have been found through the punishment of a representative of his family, such as his daughter. The case of Julia the Elder was not unique as many other women during this time period were also tried for adultery, and this would happen again merely eleven years later with Julia the Elder's own daughter, Julia the Younger.[226]

The punishment of the cult of Isis represented another solution to threats against the regime of the *princeps*: the punishment of foreign cults. Through the punishment of foreign cults, the *princeps* could claim a religious threat to the Roman state, risking divine retribution, without risking the interpretation that the gods' disfavored the regime. Instead, the *princeps* appeared as

[226]Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus,* 151-152.

the paragon of Roman religious virtue. These cults often featured ideas that were particularly threatening to the gender and social hierarchy promoted by Augustus and later Tiberius. At the center of these scandals was the disgrace of Roman matrons, seduced from the proper Roman ways to these foreign cults. As the producers of the next generation of Romans, such a threat was unacceptable.

Like in the Late Republic, accusations of adultery were central to ideas of state instability. Both Julia the Elder and Paulina were Roman matrons, married women. Their legitimate male children would have been expected to serve in the Roman army and, in Julia's case, potentially lead the entire Empire. Sexual liberation in the form of adultery represented a strong threat to the Roman social order, but it further compromised the security of the state.

Conclusion

In the Late Roman Republic, the Romans saw state unrest as rooted in divine retribution rather than in Roman politics.[227] The cause of divine retribution was to be found in improper religious practice rather than the political actions of any politician. The lack of accountability would have benefited the Roman statesmen, but it also would have allowed statesmen to avoid addressing the core issues causing the public unrest.

The Romans soothed this unrest by correcting religious practice. Women played a central role in this process. While women did not have political power in the Late Republic, they were active participants in religious practices. Cults such as the Vestal Virgins, Bona Dea, and Magna Mater allowed women in all stages of life to participate in some of the most important rituals of the Roman state religion.[228] Because women were involved in these important rituals, they were also seen as a potential cause for divine retribution.

By blaming and punishing women in the religious sphere, the Romans corrected what they believed to be the cause of divine punishment. This process was often very public and very dramatic. In the case of the Vestal Virgins, the college of priests, in a public ritual, murdered the woman accused of unchastity.[229] While this was the most extreme purification ritual, other rituals, such as those of Bona Dea, were the subjects of public trials and were reperformed if they were thought to have been performed improperly the first time.[230] By having these public rituals, the Romans were able to give the illusion that they had fixed the cause of the public unrest in order to quell the public.

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[227]Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, xxi.
[228] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves,* 210-214; Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity*, 81.
[229] Plutarch, "Numa," *Lives, Volume I,* 10.4-7.
[230] Takás, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons,* 100.

At the center of these scandals was adultery. In almost all cases of improper religious practice by women, the woman was accused of unchastity. For the Romans, adultery was one of the worst crimes a woman could commit. The sexual freedom of a woman subverted the gender norms that the Roman state was grounded upon. The threat of subversion was even more powerful in a religious setting, where women had some, if limited, power and influence.

By the time the Roman Republic collapsed in 31 BCE, Roman society had almost completely changed. Years of civil war granted women more freedoms in the home. With many of the Roman men fighting or dead, women needed to enter the political sphere in order to survive.[231] The Triumvirate leaders, Octavian, Marc Antony, and Lepidus, took advantage of this new relationship between women and the state by taxing women for the first time to fund their wars.[232] Women, such as Fulvia, Octavia, and Cleopatra, became visible political figures in military campaigns and served as powerful models for Livia as the wife of the *princeps*. These women became more attracted to foreign cults that supported their empowerment.[233] The chaos of civil wars allowed women to gain certain forms of political power for what appears to be the first time.

To further his credibility and to solidify his power as an autocratic ruler, Augustus ingratiated himself in religion. Divine endorsement was a central piece of Augustus's rule. Augustus maintained this appearance of divine endorsement through his involvement in women's state cults such as the Vestal Virgins and through his rebuilding program for religious temples such as those to Magna Mater and Bona Dea.[234] To ensure stability, it was vital that this endorsement continued. Women's state cults needed to appear as signs of divine favor towards

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[231] Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy,* 402.
[232] Appian, "Civil Wars," *Roman History*, 4.32-34.
[233] Ambasciono, "Goddess Who Failed?" 134.
[234] Shipley, "Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome," 7-60; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome,* 191.

Augustus. State unrest could no longer be solved through traditional religious rituals because that would mean that the gods disapproved of Augustus's regime. The use of traditional religious rituals to soothe public unrest would have demonstrated divine disapproval against Augustus. For Augustus, this was unacceptable.

Occurring concurrently with his religious reforms, Augustus's political and moral reforms reinforced women's role as the reproducers of the Roman state and army and placed women in the civil sphere. While this reproduction was vital in the Republic, the population loss as a result of the civil wars and overall population decline made this a new priority for Augustus's regime. Women were expected not just to produce children but to produce moral citizens that were eligible to repopulate the army and become statesmen. Policing women's marriage and morality, which could be passed onto their children was essential to ensure a steady male citizen population. This legislation pushed by Augustus explicitly codified women into the political classes of their families for the first time, further pushing women into the public sphere.[235] Women were expected to publicly act in a way that was befitting of their class. Due to Augustus's centralization, no women entered the public sphere more than the women of his own family, who took on increasingly visible roles and even acted on Augustus's behalf at public events.

As a result of these changes, the nature of scapegoating women for political turmoil needed to change. The punishment of women's state cults was no longer an option. Whereas in the Late Republic, those involved in state cults would be subject to very public scandal when it had been deemed that they had improperly practiced the state rites of the Roman religion, in the early principate, such scandals, if any occurred, were to be made unremarkable. No stories of scandals involving women's state cults during this period survive today.

[235] Culham, "Did Roman Women Have an Empire," 196-203.

Although the avenue of punishing women's state cults no longer existed for the Augustan regime, something needed to fill this void in order to resolve public unrest. Since women had entered the public sphere as a result of the civil wars and the changes by Augustus, they were more likely to be tried and punished for civil crimes.[236] In many ways, these civil rituals appeared like the religious rituals of the Late Republic. The stories were just as dramatic and salacious as those of improper practice in the Late Republic. The public banishment of Julia the Elder represented a form of social death as she could never return to Rome, similar to the death of an unchaste Vestal. Civil punishments were not reflective of divine punishment. Instead, the arbitrators of punishments for moral crimes could be seen as enforcing the will of the gods.

The punishment of foreign cults was another option. While foreign cults were associated with religion, they were not associated with the official state cults of Rome. The cults were portrayed as an attack on Romanness itself. Punishment of foreign cults shifted the blame for any divine disapproval to the followers of those cults. By punishing foreign cults, the punisher was protecting what it meant to Roman. These punishments, such as during the expulsion of the cult of Isis, were very public and very violent, so they would have had a profound effect on the Roman populace.

While the scapegoating of women needed to take a different shape than in the Late Republic, it remained an effective tool in the Roman principate. Adultery continued to be the crime that women were accused and punished for, but the changes brought about by Augustus altered the nature of this crime. Since the Augustan regime oversaw the revitalization of Roman morality, adultery was more than a private domestic crime; rather, it was an attack on the Augustan state itself. Children born of an adulterous relationship were not eligible to be Roman citizens and therefore could not benefit the state.

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[236] Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus,* 151-152.

By studying both religion and politics together, it is possible to see how the politics of Roman society shaped religious practice and how, in turn, these religious practices shaped politics. In both the Late Republic and the early Principate, the public punishment of women for moral crimes was used as an effective tool to subdue public unrest. Through public and, occasionally, brutally violent rituals of purification, the Romans sacrificed women for the overall security of the state. These episodes were highly dramatic, so much so that they are still depicted in many forms of media today. While pursuing this avenue of public pacification would have ignored the actual issues at the root of the unrest, it was an effective means to quell the public.

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