

Bona Dea

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Bona Dea (the “Good Goddess”), a deity of ancient Italy, was especially associated with women. Within Rome, she had a temple on the Aventine hill that men were forbidden to enter (Festus p. 278M; Ovid *Fast.* 5.153–4; Macrobi. *Sat.* 1.12.26–7). Plutarch (e.g., *Quaest. Rom.* 20) and others refer to her as the “women’s goddess.” Bona Dea is commonly assigned attributions of fertility and linked with the earth; thus Macrobius (1.12.20–2) cites the religious antiquarian Cornelius Labeo (ca. third century CE) as identifying Bona Dea with the Roman goddess Maia, *id est Terra* (“that is, Earth”), the recipient of sacrifices of pregnant sows, and as further reporting that in the *Books of the Pontifices* (see *LIBRI PONTIFICALES*) she is identified with other fecund figures such as Ops. Festus (p. 68M) reports that she is called Damia and her priestess is called the *damiatrix*; Damia is otherwise known as a Greek goddess of fertility (Hdt. 5.82–3). In December, a secret rite of Bona Dea was

celebrated at the home of a Roman consul or praetor; only women were permitted to take part (Cass. Dio 37.45). At the celebration of 62 BCE, when the nocturnal rites were being conducted in the house of Julius Caesar, Publius Clodius disguised himself as a woman and infiltrated the gathering, intending to meet his lover Pompeia, Caesar’s wife, but was discovered (Cic. *Att.* 1.13.3; Plut. *Caes.* 9.3–10.7, *Cic.* 28). Bona Dea’s Aventine grove is made the setting of Herakles’ traumatic retreat following his slaying of Cacus (Woodard 2006:199–205).

SEE ALSO: Antiquarianism; Clodius Pulcher, Publius; Herakles (Hercules); Ops.

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