Silencing the Revelry:
An Examination of the Moral Panic in 186 BCE and the Political Implications
Accompanying the Persecution of the Bacchic Cult in the Roman Republic

A thesis submitted
To Kent State University in partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

by

Heather Moser

May, 2014
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE  MORAL PANIC STUDIES AND BACKGROUND OF THE BACCHIC CULT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bacchic Cult Before 186 BCE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were the Bacchants Violent Criminals?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO  CLASSIFICATION OF A MORAL PANIC</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disproportionality</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volatility</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Dimension/Symptomatic of a Larger Problem</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Panic Status</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE  ITALY PRIOR TO PERSECUTION</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Leading to 186</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of the Damage</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of Creating a Moral Panic</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR  EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE OF THE PERSECUTION</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakdown of the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power of the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of the Decree for the Condemned</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE  EVOLUTION OF LEGAL POLICY</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Jennifer Larson as she has been nothing short of wonderful throughout this entire process. Through her patience and guidance, she has helped me to mold this thesis into a work that I feel is the perfect capstone to my master’s degree. I am truly proud of this thesis and every minute of work I have put into creating and perfecting it. Of course, I would also like to thank the other members of my defense committee, Dr. Harvey and Dr. Ehrman, for teaching me so many valuable lessons over the years and helping me become the classicist I am today. I would also like to thank my dear friend, Amanda Kelley, for pushing me to present elements of this thesis at my first conference at the University of Florida in October 2013 and offering support during the times I felt overwhelmed with the task at hand. I would also like to thank my husband, Corwin. Without his unconditional support and love I would not have been able to embark on this journey. Finally, I must reserve my deepest gratitude for my children, Aria and Jensen. They have been the driving force behind the completion of this degree and my reason for wanting to excel in every aspect of my life, even through the most challenging of days. I want to set a positive example for them by showing them the rewards that result from hard work. Ultimately, I will always want to give them a reason to be proud of their mommy, and I hope this thesis does exactly that!
INTRODUCTION

In 186 BCE, the Roman Senate took the unprecedented step of executing hundreds or even thousands of people because of their involvement in the worship of Bacchus. Livy claims that thousands were convicted of being involved in the Bacchic conspiracy, with over half of those convicted being executed. *Coniurasse supra sepm ilia uiorum ac mulierum dicebantur....plures necati quam in uincula coniecti sunt. It is said that over seven thousand men and women were conspiring....More (of the convicted) were slaughtered than held in chains.*¹ This type of targeted persecution was unmatched until the beginnings of Christian maltreatment hundreds of years later in Rome.

In the 39th book of his *Ab Urbe Condita*, Livy describes in detail the reasons behind the sudden persecution of the Bacchic cult. Setting the stage with a sense of urgency, he prefaces the events of 186 with his own summary explaining that the consuls had to ignore their duties in war and provincial matters due to the unexpected formation of a domestic conspiracy. He explains that the cult, first brought to Italy by an unnamed Greek man, spread swiftly from Etruria to Rome. As the cult’s popularity increased, so did introduction of unsavory behavior that he portrays as a *contagio morbi*, a

¹Livy 39.17.6-18.5. The Latin text is taken from P.G. Walsh’s edition of *ab Urbe Condita* from the Aris and Phillips Classical Text series (1994). Please note that, unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. Other ancient authors agree that the reaction of the Senate toward the Bacchants was severe, although none give explicit numbers. *Cic. Leg. 2.37; Val. Max. 1.3.1 and 6.3.7* (citation of Val. Max. is from Shackleton Bailey's translation for the Loeb Classical Library.) The bulk of modern scholarship regarding the Bacchanalian Affair focuses on the validity of Livy as a whole rather than outright disagreement with numbers. For the purposes of this thesis, Livy’s account of seven thousand will be the number used.
contamination of plague. This *contagio* was so vile and threatening to the state that Livy labels it a *coniuratio* (conspiracy).²

Livy spends the next several chapters of book 39 telling the dramatic story of a freedwoman, Hispala Fecenia, and how her concern for her lover, Publius Aebutius, who was soon to be initiated into the Bacchic cult, helped to unravel a conspiracy. Hispala warns Aebutius of the horrors she has seen in the cult when she accompanied her former *domina*. After her warnings reach the ears of the consul, Postumius, she very reluctantly tells him of every horrid detail she knows about the cult, and she and Aebutius are later richly rewarded for exposing these horrors. Postumius takes the disturbing and supposedly previously unknown details to the Senate. The Senate then orders the consuls to handle the situation by any means necessary, a decision that ultimately results in the execution of thousands of people according to Livy. The consuls, after inciting widespread panic, scour the countryside to find all transgressors. Livy also outlines the major points of the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, the official order sent out to all of Italy by order of the Senate which outlines all the required steps that must be taken regarding the cult.³

Livy adopts a dramatic tone at times, especially when recounting the moral decline that was happening in Rome under the influence of the Bacchants. One interpretation, suggested by Walsh, is that the dramatic tradition of authors such as Plautus influenced the earlier historians who recounted this scenario before Livy put stylus to papyrus. For example, Walsh observes that some of the first annalists of Rome

---
³ Livy 39.9-19.
were writing within the century of the Bacchic scandal. One of those annalists was Aulus Postumius Albinus, a kinsman of one of the consuls of 186 BCE. This historian, who wrote in Greek, could have relied upon a mixture of family records, the *senatus consultum*, and perhaps a staged version of the event in order to write about the Bacchanalia. Walsh states that the account was most likely passed on to another historian, Piso, who rendered the story into Latin, and then to yet another annalist before Livy wrote about the scandal. This, Walsh suggests, would mean that Livy's account has passed through three historians before him, "gathering accretions at each stage of its progress."

This is not to say that Livy or the previous historians should be discredited as mere dramatic re-tellers of this account. In fact, it is quite the opposite, as the speech given by the consuls on the rostra warning the public of the dangers of the Bacchanalia would have been based on the records of the family. This could explain why in *Ab Urbe Condita* the other consul is not specifically mentioned. Furthermore, the *senatus consultum* is correctly summarized within Livy's work. Walsh believes that the first historians, or in this case Aulus Postumius Albinus, utilized access to familial records and senatorial decrees while adding dramatic elements from staged performances of specific events. In this situation, it is possible that *ludi scaenici* during the Liberalia would have included a mimic performance of the Bacchanalia. Walsh explains that Albinus would have written his history of Rome in Greek to impress his audience. "Using the senatorial

---

decrees and family records as a basis, they wove round them a dramatic version which would titillate a Greek audience reared on the conventions of New Comedy."\(^5\)

Even if a drama of the Bacchanalia did not exist, Walsh hypothesizes that Plautus and other comic poets could have still influenced the dramatic elements.\(^6\) Walsh states that at a minimum eight Plautine plays involve Bacchic imagery, with the *Casina* and *Bacchides* alluding specifically to the scandal of 186.\(^7\) This suggests that at least two of his plays were influenced by the events directly related to contemporary events at Rome. Plautus and his influence on the general public will be discussed in more detail below, but for now we are able to see how Livy's account may have been influenced by others, and why it retains a claim to historical accuracy in spite of the influence of drama. Livy, writing more than a century after this happened, undoubtedly used other historians' accounts who predated him. Walsh states that it is likely that the drama of Livy's account and presumably that of his predecessors can be attributed to the fact that "...the exploitation of the Bacchanalia in the Plautine plays helped them to develop the scene dramatically."\(^8\) On the other hand, by combining a bit of Walsh's theory with additions from scholars such as Gruen, MacDonald, and Pagán among others who will be referenced shortly, it can be concluded that although Livy’s words may appear to be outlandish, there is historical accuracy in his account. The claims made against the Bacchants were as horrible as they could possibly be, and the government of 186 acted as

\(^5\) Walsh 1996.200-201.
\(^6\) Walsh 1996.196. Walsh questions the entire story of how the Senate found out about the cult and suggests that this element of the story is borrowed from drama. That is, a freedwoman with a heart of gold warns her lover that the plans his mother put forth (via the insistence of his step-father) to have him initiated into the Bacchic cult would end in his moral decline and possible death.
\(^7\) Walsh 1996.192.
\(^8\) Walsh 1996.201.
it did in order to justify the mass suppression of the Bacchic cult. The horrid claims were believable because the authority of the Senate was promoting the fear, and the people of Rome had been predisposed to agree the Bacchants were dangerous because they were well aware of the comedies of Plautus and his predecessors. Livy’s work reflects the claims that the Senate forcefully pushed along with Plautine comedic elements with which the Roman crowd would have been familiar.

In this thesis, I will examine the fall of the Bacchic cult, the reasons behind its sudden decline, and subsequent disappearance through the sociological lens of a moral panic. Sifting through several modern day scholarly views on the subject in concurrence with primary sources, I will determine how a popular cult, facing the sudden ire of the Senate, became the victim of a massive persecution. Specifically, this thesis will add another chapter to the sociological study of moral panics throughout history while also adding a deeper understanding of this violent period in Roman history. Through a side-by-side comparison of the Bacchic persecutions with the witch hunts during the 14th-17th centuries in Europe, I will demonstrate how powerful institutions, if threatened, will justify forceful repression of a group through manipulation of the public in order to reinforce their authority.
"Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself."

---

9 Cohen 1990.1
The term 'moral panic' was coined fairly recently by sociologist Stanley Cohen and refers to a recurrent historical phenomenon that involves groups of people being misidentified and demonized as a threat to societal morals in order to bring about fear and panic to the population. After setting forth the argument that the Bacchanalian affair was a moral panic, one can then delve deeper into the purposes for inciting such a panic. Also included in this chapter will be an introduction to the events leading up to 186 BCE, which will help to clarify why such a massive loss of lives would have been of political benefit to the Roman Senate at the time. Although moral panics such as the European witch hunts and satanic ritual abuse have been studied, moral panics have yet to be looked at in detail in ancient terms, specifically the persecution and near elimination of the Bacchic cult by the Roman Senate in 186 BCE.

Modern scholarship delves into moral panics with the goal of better understanding the motives of people, the situations that arise as a result of not only personal behaviors of participants in the moral panic but also societal backlash of perceived threats to morality, and what, exactly, must occur for a moral panic to come to fruition. Showalter's study on epidemics that are exacerbated by the coverage of mass media treats many topics including satanic ritual abuse. In Showalter's words, "These sensational cases exemplify individual hysterias connecting with modern social movements to produce psychological epidemics." She evaluates the cultural and religious precedents that allow for the hysterias to develop, and investigates pop culture's influence on the spread of hysteria.

---

While Showalter's approach is more psychological in nature, Victor examines satanic ritual abuse from a more sociological perspective. He identifies five key features of moral panics. Victor applies those features to the satanic ritual abuse scare of the 1990s, in which fears developed that a secret criminal group was ritually torturing and sexually abusing children in order to brainwash the youth into satanic worship. These satanic groups were supposedly involved in the sacrifice of infants and cannibalism among other crimes. The accusations began from adults recalling memories of child exposure to these horrors and children making accusations against their caregivers. According to Victor, nearly 3,000 cases were reported during this time.11

In terms of the witch-hunts that permeated Europe in the 14th-17th centuries, Ben-Yehuda considers the political and religious transformations that were taking place in Europe when the persecutions thrived. He shows how the religious authorities’ fear of losing power was a driving force at the time and goes on to explain how the public was persuaded to believe through exaggerated claims that a moral threat to society existed in the form of witchcraft. In his study, he also shows how brutal killings were permitted in the name of saving morality.12 The behavior of the powers in charge during witch-hunts, as will be seen throughout this thesis, was reminiscent of the behavior of the Roman government during the Bacchanalia affair. In second-century BCE Rome, a panic over the worship of Bacchus developed because of the supposed threat to the moral fabric of Roman life. This moral panic was so forceful that once the Senate set forth its orders

12 See Ben-Yehuda (1986) for a look at the European witch craze as a moral panic. Ben-Yehuda has done work with moral panics in more modern contexts as well, as I will discuss later with respect to the Israeli drug moral panic (see footnote 124).
limiting the influence of the cult, virtually nothing was written about the cult for over a century.

*The Bacchic Cult Before 186 BCE*

Before entering into a detailed discussion of moral panic over Bacchic worshipers, it is important to establish that the cult of Bacchus was far from a new phenomenon. Perhaps the most compelling evidence that the cult was well established prior to the persecution described in Livy lies within the works of Plautus. He alludes the cult many times throughout his plays in a manner that indicates the audience was familiar with it. In *Amphitryo* (703-705), the slave Sosia refers to Alcmena as a Bacchant due to her apparently irrational behavior. He fears that he will provoke further erratic and dangerous behavior from her if he does not agree to her story. In the *Aulularia* (408-411a), the cook Congrio complains of the beatings he received, comparing his scenario of abuse to having to cook for an entire group of Bacchants. Once again physical abuse at the hands of a Bacchic follower is not only familiar, but also it is presumably expected. In *Miles Gloriosus* (854-858), the role that wine and excessive drinking play in Bacchic ritual is referenced when a slave overindulges in drink. Later in the play (1016), Plautus certainly expects his audience to understand the Bacchants' ability to recognize one another by the use of a secret sign as the character Milphidippa asks Palaestrio to give her some sort of signal that she is the person to address. In the *Bacchides* (53), Pistoclerus is wary of the sisters' intentions, as he equates their mischief to that of the Bacchants and

---

the behaviors that are present during the Bacchanals. This concern is further clarified later in the play when Lydus says that the sisters are not just prostitutes with the name Bacchis but indeed are the most enthused Bacchants, known to drink the blood of men (371-372). Finally, in the *Casina* (978-982), Lysidamus feigns fear by exclaiming that the Bacchants are out reveling, evidently knowing the audience would have an understanding of why Bacchic revelry should be feared.

These examples of Bacchic carousing were nothing new to theater. Plautus drew heavily from the themes previously established by works such as the *Bacchae* of Euripides. Individuals, particularly women, were notorious for losing their minds while in Bacchic frenzy. Within the *Bacchae* of Euripides, the maenads were so blindly enthused that they would rip animals limb from limb (734-746). Mothers could kill their own children, as was the case with Agave being in such a state of delusion that she dismembered and beheaded her son without being aware of his identity (1110-1144). The concern for Bacchus taking over the consciousness of his followers, allowing them to be abusive, violent, and bloodthirsty, was long established before the persecution of 186.

In addition to Plautus, there is archaeological evidence to support the claim that the Bacchic cult was not far from new to the Romans. A fragmented Dionysiac throne was found in a subterranean chamber in modern day Bolsena, Italy, dating from the 3rd century BCE. It appears to have been deliberately destroyed, one could presume during

---

14 By calling them Bacchants and referring to their home as a Bacchanalian lair, he is playing off of their names, Bacchis, because the women were named after Bacchus. See Berg and Parker’s Introduction to *The Wild, Wild Women* (1999.186-188).

15 T.A. Buckley translation, 1892.
the persecutions of 186 BCE.\textsuperscript{16} This is rather significant, as Livy describes the cult in Italy having originated in Etruria and spreading to Rome where it infected the city.\textsuperscript{17} This throne shows that cult did exist and that ritual was established as early as a century before the persecution. In fact, the cult had been established long enough that the senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus had to include language prohibiting a hierarchy and a central treasury, which would hardly have needed to be stated if the cult had not been developed sufficiently to involve these features.\textsuperscript{18}

Another argument that the cult had long been established and subsequently became a "folk devil" targeted by a moral panic lies within Livy's own account of the persecution. Hispala, the freedwoman who gave information that sparked the ire of the Roman Senate, stated that there were so many people within the cult, both of high and lowborn status, that the number of Bacchants rivaled that of a second state.\textsuperscript{19} When the consuls began their investigations, Livy tells us, people fled from the city in large numbers:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ceterum tanta fuga ex urbe facta erat, ut, quia multis actiones et res peribant, cogerentur praetores T. Maenius et M. Licinius per senatum res in diem tricesimum differre, donec quaestiones a consulibus perficerentur.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Beard, North, and Price. 94.1998; see figure 2.4.
\textsuperscript{17} Livy 39.8.3-39.9.1.
\textsuperscript{18} See Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus (henceforth abbreviated as SC in these footnotes) in index, lines 10-14.
\textsuperscript{19} Livy 39.13.14 multitudinem ingentem, alterum iam prope populum esse; in his nobilis quosdam viros feminasque. The number was so great, it was almost another state; among them were certain men and women of noble rank. Hispala's account is suspect as she claims that she has not been involved with the cult for quite a while since becoming a freedwoman; yet, she knows of such great numbers of the Bacchants and knows of the newest changes, which are said to have happened within the previous two years.
So many of the rest fled from the city that, because in many cases lawsuits and court actions were ruined, the praetors Titus Maenius and Marcus Licinius were forced, by action of the Senate to delay for 30 days, until the investigations were completed by the consuls.20

Finally, the cult had permeated the Italian peninsula by the time of the persecutions. We will examine the evidence for this below, but the use of the term foederati in the senatus consultum indicates that this was not a phenomenon specific to Rome.21

**Were the Bacchants Violent Criminals?**

Before launching into the story of how the persecution unfolded, Livy begins his discussion of the Bacchanalian Affair with a personal disclaimer that includes the criminal acts in which the Bacchants chose to participate.22 Livy chose to begin his narrative with the list of atrocities committed by the cult members such as sexual excess, false witness, forging of seals and testaments, poisonings, murders, and rape. When Livy recounts the accusations hurled by Hispala and, later, the consul Postumius' speech before the public, the same criminal acts are mentioned.23 Gruen argues rather convincingly that these repetitive charges "...reek of rhetoric." To further discredit some of the claims made against the Bacchants, Gruen compares sections of the account to "...a

---

20 Livy 39.18.1.
21 This claim will be investigated below, but it can be easily understood by noting that the SC uses the term foederati, indicating the SC was a sweeping edict, not just for the citizens of Rome.
22 Livy 39.8-9.1.
romantic novel—or, better, Hellenistic and Roman New Comedy....”

It must be re-emphasized, however, that regardless of any rhetorical flourishes that Livy may have added to the account, the persecution did happen, the wild charges against the Bacchants did exist, and a panic did spread that allowed for the murder of thousands of individuals. Gruen's main argument is that the consul Postumius and his friends were the ones that set into motion this moral panic, having set up an entire back story (the family drama we see in Livy) to help it appear that the government was blindsided by this Bacchic information. Gruen explains, "The narrative needs to be taken seriously---not as accurate characterization of the Bacchic cult, but as a campaign to justify its suppression." In other words, the staged operation of the consuls included exaggerated claims in order to substantiate their actions in 186.

Gruen first notes that the senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus does not mention any of the horrid acts described in Livy. Instead, it merely states the limitations within which the cult is henceforth permitted to function. He further suggests that rather innocuous rituals of Bacchic cult behavior are behind the horrors mentioned by Livy. It is no surprise, however, that those not directly involved in the cult could easily believe such misrepresentations, as they were already predisposed to believe the worst about the secretive cult. As discussed previously, Plautus was certainly helpful in perpetuating a fear that was already, apparently, present in the minds of non-Bacchants, and he was not the first playwright to take such liberties. Gruen asserts that, although it may appear

---

25 Gruen 1990.64-65.
26 See translation of SC in Appendix C for specific restrictions.
27 Gruen 1990.63. These wild accusations and the actual behavior behind them will be discussed in detail under the section titled 'Disproportionality.'
Livy’s work is full of exaggeration, “Livy would hardly have invented it, nor is there any reason for his sources to have done so.”\textsuperscript{28} Indeed, Gruen suggests that the claims the consuls railed against the Bacchants in 186 and narrative of Livy, influenced by his predecessors, were not so much accurate representations of the cult but rather part of a larger operation: "...a campaign to justify its suppression."\textsuperscript{29} This claim will be revisited later, but it is due to these exaggerated fabrications that so many people were condemned and murdered without trial.

For comparing similar behavior during a moral panic that took place much later in history, the question of violence is an important one regarding the witches of Europe in the 14th-17th centuries as well. Ben-Yehuda clearly states that before the witch hunts began, witches and witchcraft were not perceived as violent entities. It was quite the opposite, really, as witches were employed to help with societal problems such as drought or personal issues regarding love or wealth. Even when they were employed for evil ends, the witches were not themselves evil. Ben-Yehuda, citing sociologist Max Weber, argues that prior to the massive hunts, the attitude toward witchcraft was \textit{ad hoc}; a witch could be the executor of the technology of witchcraft to achieve a goal so long as the witch used the correct formula. He goes on to explain that the role of the witch was to perform spells correctly in order to compel supernatural powers to execute certain

\textsuperscript{28}Gruen 1990.64; Some scholars doubt elements of Livy’s tale. Nilsson explains that Livy's story was “...influenced by the traditional picture of the Bacchic \textit{orgia} and cannot be trusted for the details.” He uses the term 'dramatic' when describing this section of Livy. Nilsson 1975.14. Rousselle takes a slightly different approach, explaining that Livy's account of the violence of Bacchic worship "...probably reflected the rumors and fears of 186." He adds that, aside from the concern generated from Euripides and Plautus, Livy would have been influenced by authors such as Pindar and his contemporary, Ovid. See Rousselle, \textit{Liber-Dionysus in Early Roman Drama}, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{29}Gruen 1990.64.
actions.\textsuperscript{30} Regarding the attitude toward witches prior to the 14\textsuperscript{th}-17\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Ben-Yehuda states, "There did not yet exist a developed, systematic conceptualization of a negative supernatural world, diametrically opposed to this world and at war with it." Ben-Yehuda explains that in Europe, prior to the witch craze, religion was defined as "...the manipulation of non-empirical or supra-empirical means for non-empirical, or supra-empirical, ends." Witchcraft, in opposition, was defined as "...the manipulation of non-empirical or supra-empirical means for empirical ends."\textsuperscript{31}

This does not mean that there were not witches in history who were threatening, and there is no denying that witches were employed for a range of spells, evil ones included. However, once the witch craze spread throughout Europe, witchcraft "...was transformed into a completely evil entity which created problems instead of solving them." It was at this point in time that the witch's ability to communicate with a variety of supernatural powers and, through the performance of spells, convince them to comply with her wishes was "...replaced by a total subordination to the devil. In short, the witch became Satan's puppet." The key point here is that, until the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, "...witches were

\textsuperscript{30} Ben-Yehuda 1980.2-3; Ben-Yehuda uses Weber (1964) in his discussion of the attitudinal shift toward witchcraft.

\textsuperscript{31} Ben-Yehuda 1980.2-3; Ben-Yehuda draws his definition of religion and witchcraft from O'Dea 1966. Thomas 1971.30 emphasizes that the difference between religion and magic was, at one point, difficult to discern. “Theologians held that there was no superstition about wearing a piece of paper or medal...provided no non-Christian symbols were also employed.” Clark 1990.535, quotes an oration given by a theology professor, Thomas Stapleton, in 1594 in which he explained that magic and heresy were intertwined: “Just as the wonderful effects of the magic art cannot themselves be attributed either to the magicians’ own intelligence or the artefacts they use, such as figures, images, and incantations, but are produced...by the devil himself....today the leading astray of the people by heretics does not happen because of the learning, eloquence, cunning, or wickedness of the heretics themselves, but through that same Satan whose servants they are and who works through them.” Later in his work, p. 596, Clark explains that the sense of dualism and moral polarity in Europe was so strong due to the fact that “the efficacy of magisterial authority was as much ‘on trial’ as the power of the witch. In turn, the prosecuting of witches may very well have contributed to the general process whereby early modern forms of authority were recognized as valid by those who were subject to them.”
classified as good or bad, depending on the objective of their magic." This shift in attitude to the belief that, through witchcraft, satanic influence could infiltrate Christian Europe resulted in the execution of thousands of witches.

The attitudinal shift began in the early 14th century when Europe faced several "...rumor-panics. Some malign conspiracy (Jews and lepers, Moslems, or Jews and witches) was attempting to destroy the Christian kingdoms through magick and poison. After the terrible devastation caused by the Black Death...these rumors...focused on witches and 'plague-spreaders.'" Gibbons explains:

All pre-modern European societies believed in magick....all [of these societies] passed laws prohibiting magickal crimes....many of the stereotypes about witches have been with us from pre-Christian times. From the Mediterranean to Ireland, witches were said to fly about at night, drinking blood, killing babies, and devouring human corpses. 

In other words, there was already a predisposition to believe something malevolent was responsible for the massive amount of death and stress that was afflicting Europe beginning in the 14th century. Witches existed, and with their ability to manipulate nature for a desired end, they became an easy target once the accusations of satanic involvement started to be hurled against them. Perhaps the best explanation comes from Matteoni:

---

32 Ben-Yehuda 1980.3.
The witch itself was not an original invention of the early modern period. Witches...had been operated in the known world since antiquity, but the presence of such people did not imply their persecution. It is during the late medieval period, that the witch started to be seen as the personification of the theological evil, becoming not just a single malevolent person, but the member of a sect of devil worshippers, which through and beyond the physical body of society, attempted to destroy its spiritual order.\textsuperscript{34}

Often the accused were older widowed women who had developed negative reputations over time, and, particularly in the case of Essex County, many of these women were accused after being denied assistance from a younger female neighbor. While walking away visibly upset, the widow would allegedly curse under her breath, and the suspicion of the community that the elderly woman was a concern was finally validated.\textsuperscript{35} Other issues were, naturally, a factor in the idea that witches were evil, included among these factors was the impression that women were particularly susceptible to satanic influence, but that will be covered in more depth below.

As you can see with both the European witch hunts and the Bacchic cult persecution, groups of people were demonized through the use of exaggerated claims against them. These embellishments allowed for these groups to be seen as threatening, thereby allowing for powers in charge to aggressively suppress them. The accused

\textsuperscript{34} Matteoni 2009.34.  
\textsuperscript{35} Garrett 1977.462.
witches of Europe and Bacchic cult members of Rome were not violent but rather were easily seen as suspicious due to the fact that society was predisposed to believe such falsities. This will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

CLASSIFICATION OF A MORAL PANIC

So, then, how can one positively classify the persecution of 186 as a moral panic? David Garland, whose study critically evaluates the sociological use of the label "moral panic" and the impact of such a label, explains that five key features, as were presented by Ben-Yehuda and Goode after examination of Stanley Cohen's model, are present during a moral panic: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. He further states that there are two additional elements necessary to properly label an event as a moral panic: a moral dimension and evidence that the panic is symptomatic of a larger problem.36 In this thesis, I will show that each of these features was present in Roman Italy during the second century BCE. This will be done by detailing elements of this time period in juxtaposition with studies of the European witch hunts of the 14th-17th centuries to help provide a point of reference and mirror the similar behaviors of the two moral panics. Then, I will explore the factors that created a proper scenario for a moral panic to develop. Finally, I will examine the political benefits of the panic for the Roman governing class.

---

36 Garland 2008.10-11. For an in-depth analysis of how satanic ritual abuse falls into each of these categories, see Victor 1998.
Concern

Concern occurs when an event or behavior generates anxiety.\textsuperscript{37} During the time of the European witch hunts, witchcraft was seen as the negative aspect in a dualistic society which the powers in charge at the time saw as the direct opposite of the good godly behavior that should have permeated society. To Christian orders of the time, witchcraft had "...transcended mere magic, assuming the form of a religion....It possessed a coherent, unified, rationalized system of beliefs, assumptions, rituals, sacred texts, and the like."\textsuperscript{38} Witchcraft was labeled as a form of heresy during this time and, as a result, lost its previously established neutrality to slide into the realm of the ultimate source of anti-religion.\textsuperscript{39} Gibbons states that the places of the worst panics were areas in which rival Christian factions were fighting for the ability to impose their beliefs on one another. The majority of the persecutions happened after the Reformation, when the Christian Church splintered into the Protestant and Catholic sects. "Persecutions did not reach epidemic levels until after the Reformation, when the Catholic Church had lost its position as Europe's indisputable moral authority."\textsuperscript{40}

Unfortunately for those accused of witchcraft during this period, the hunters were not limited to religious authorities. The majority of the courts responsible for the large number of deaths were secular. The worst offenders were local, community courts

\textsuperscript{37} Garland 2008.11.
\textsuperscript{38} Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1975.174.
\textsuperscript{39} Ben-Yehuda 1980.4-6; "...it is possible to date the first textual accounts of witchcraft as a devil-worshipping cult with remarkable precision to the 1430s." Clark 2002.122.
\textsuperscript{40} Gibbons 1998.8-9.
because the officials involved during these trials were in the center of the local panics and more willing to hastily condemn the accused. Gibbons estimates that the number of the accused killed by local courts is as high as 90%, whereas national courts, having professional officials who were removed from the local panics, condemned only 30%.41 These numbers help verify Schoeneman's account that "witch hunts are radical actions in the cause of conservatism and self-preservation of power structures...."42 In fact, Gibbons claims that the legal procedures in the famous witch hunters’ guide, *Malleus Maleficarum*, were referred to more by the secular courts than by church courts.43

In regard to the Bacchic cult, according to Livy, the spark that started the inferno came from Hispala's account of the debauchery and horrors taking place in secret. Hispala explained that the once tame Bacchic cult turned to depravity when a Campanian priestess, Paculla Annia, made three key changes. First, she initiated men for the first time, allowing inter-mingling of the sexes during rituals.44 She also increased the number of initiations from three times annually to five times monthly, increasing the number of cult members exponentially. Finally, she moved what had previously been daytime activities to nighttime rituals, allowing for depravity to be veiled by nightfall. Hispala also explains that within the last two years, another problematic change came to pass: No one over the age of twenty was to be initiated, allowing for the role of the *pater familias*

---

41 Gibbons 1998.10.
42 Schoeneman 1975.535.
44 This should, technically, have been of no consequence as Livy 39.8.3 states the cult was brought over from Greece into Etruria via a priest: *Graecus ignobilis...sacrificulus et vates*. Also, see Gruen (p. 52-53) who discusses the introduction of men into the Dionysiac cult of Greece as early as the 4th century. He questions whether the Romans would have bothered to alter this long established trend. See also, Rousselle 1982.28-32, who hypothesizes that male and female participants may have worshiped Bacchus but did so separately until Paculla Annia.
to be undermined as well as the safety of the state to be called into question, both threats which will be covered in depth shortly.\textsuperscript{45} The information given by the freedwoman incited such concern that the consul, Postumius, immediately consulted the Senate with his findings. As a result, the Senate gave power to the consuls to begin a widespread investigation, to publicly explain to the Roman people the concern while asking for their cooperation during investigation, and to punish those found guilty of any offense in the appropriate manner.\textsuperscript{46} With the authority of the Senate and consuls dictating that the Bacchants were something to be feared, the public, already inclined to be suspicious of the cult as reflected in literature from playwrights such as Plautus, were easily worked into a state of heightened concern that allowed for the punishment and murder of thousands of Bacchants to occur on the pretext of safeguarding the Roman state.\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{Hostility}

The next feature, hostility, occurs when the offenders in a moral panic are often portrayed as folk devils, making their persecution reasonable in the public eye.\textsuperscript{48} In this case, the entire group of Bacchants was portrayed as such as the supposed moral transgressions of the cult members were seen as threatening to the stability of Roman

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] Livy 39.13.9-14.
\item[46] Livy 39.14.6-17.3.
\item[47] Other plays of the time period discussing the behavior of Bacchants include Pacuvius’ \textit{Pentheus} and Accius’ \textit{Bacchae}.
\item[48] Garland 2008.11. “Folk devil” is the sociological term used for an individual or group deemed a threat to the moral standard of a society. See Cohen 2002.2, in which he develops the term folk devil to refer to a group of people whose behavior is seen as dangerous and deviant: "In the gallery of types that society erects to show its members which roles should be avoided and which should be emulated, these groups have occupied a constant position as folk devils: visible reminders of what we should not be."
\end{footnotes}
society and completely offensive to their conservative religious sensibilities. The hostility was both state-sanctioned through the punishments decreed by the state and general as citizens were turning on their neighbors out of fear of being punished themselves and fear for the safety of the public. The question seemed to be not so much whether or not a Bacchic follower was a threat but rather to what degree. Livy tells us that over seven thousand individuals were involved. Of those seven thousand who took the oath of the cult, the punishment for those merely initiated and innocent of any other criminal acts beyond that initiation was to be thrown into prison. Those believed to have participated in acts such as murder or fraud were sentenced to death, as their presence in the populace threatened the core values of Roman society. Although Livy never explicitly states how or if trials were conducted, it appears that those believed to be involved in the cult were to answer directly to the consuls regarding their charges. If they failed to appear before the consuls after their name had been denounced, they were condemned in absentia. If anyone was already out of town prior to suspicion, a date would be set in the future by which they would need to come before the consuls to discuss their fate.

The hostility toward the witches in Europe is equally as aggressive as that toward the Bacchants. In this situation, the most intense persecutions happened in areas of Europe in which the Catholic Church was weakest. Where its religious authority was in a state of flux between warring Christian denominations is where the most panic took place and the slaughter was most intense. The folk devils during the 14th-17th centuries were

---

49 Livy 39.17.6.
50 Livy 39.18.4.
51 So many had fled upon their names being suspect, however, that Livy says the consuls had to venture throughout Italy for at least a month in order to hunt down the guilty. 39.18.1.
52 Livy 39.17.2.
mainly women, in some places constituting 90% of the victims.\textsuperscript{53} Secular courts were eager to condemn and execute witches as well, especially in regions that bordered other countries and local authorities felt threatened by their neighbors. Gibbons explains that Italy’s worst persecutions were on the northern border while France’s hunts were mainly on the Spanish and eastern borders.\textsuperscript{54}

The \textit{Malleus Maleficarum}, a book which was often resorted to as a guide on witch hunting and persecution, clearly outlines a number of scenarios when dealing with condemnation of the accused, ranging from first-time offenders who repented to those who have been accused numerous times and admitted to working with the Devil. In all of these cases, the punishments vary in degree from recognized forms of penance (standing in front of a church in special clothing) to banishment. In all cases, the book states that the secular court will also have a chance to punish the accused as it deems appropriate. However, in order to determine whether an accused person was telling the truth or not, torture was used. In fact, in certain cases, the only way to stop the torture, the accused would have to confess to witchcraft, true or not, and again confess at the stake “...in order to receive the favor of being strangled before burning.”\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} Ben-Yehuda 1980.6-7; Gibbons claims that women made up 75-80\% of the accused, varying by region dramatically. Other scholars estimated that 10,000 female witches were accused for every male witch. However, the percentage of women killed is so high because Central Europe killed the most witches, and, of those witches, the majority killed were women. Gibbons 1998.13.
\textsuperscript{54} Gibbons 1998.8; Dashu claims that some of the secular courts may have felt added pressure from the Catholic Church to execute witches as well. While turning over the accused to the secular courts, the Church would be able to appear to show mercy; however, when the Venetian government refused to burn any more witches in 1521, the pope was furious that the capital punishment was not carried out. Dashu 1999.37.
\textsuperscript{55} Dashu 1999.38.
Consensus

During a moral panic, the negative reaction of the populace is widespread, and the people panicking agree that the threat is real and must be addressed thereby creating a consensus.\textsuperscript{56} Clearly, within the Roman government, a consensus was seemingly easily reached. In fact, upon the revelation put forth by Postumius to the senators, the Senate swiftly reached a consensus to place power into the hands of the consuls to get the debauchery under control.\textsuperscript{57} The threat seemed immediate, as the senators feared their own friends and families might be involved.\textsuperscript{58} Livy claims that seven thousand people were involved in the cult, so it is safe to postulate that a large number of these people were turned in by their fellow Romans out of concern, especially as a reward was posted for any information leading to an arrest.\textsuperscript{59} The stipulation of a reward is noteworthy, as it would certainly give opportunity for profit for anyone financially driven to do so. However, as in today's society, governmental offering of a reward for a perpetrator helps perpetuate a feeling of immediacy and expedites concern while creating a feeling of solidarity amongst the general public against the outsider(s).

In the case of the European witch hunts, the consensus eventually became widespread and engulfed the continent. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda, the first

\textsuperscript{56} Garland 2008.11.
\textsuperscript{57} Gruen 1990.57.
\textsuperscript{58} Livy 39.14.4-39.14.5. \emph{patres pauor ingens cepit, cum publico nomine, ne quid eae contiurationes coetusque nocturni fraudis occultae aut periculi importarent, tum priuatum suorum cuitusque uicem, ne quis adfinis ei noxae esset.} Great fear seized the fathers, not only for the sake of the public, lest these conspiracies and meetings by night might bring about something of hidden fraud and danger, but also in turn privately each for himself, lest any relative might be a part of the crime.
\textsuperscript{59} Livy 39.17.1.
moral panic involving witches was in 1427 in Switzerland and resulted in a secular trial.\textsuperscript{60} In order for the panic to reach as widely as it did, however, it took the express concerns of the warring Christian sects trying to gain power, secular authorities particularly on borders trying to establish dominance, and the distribution of written works to the public by way of many books, such as the \textit{Malleus Maleficarum}, to solidify the new evil role of the witch.\textsuperscript{61} Ben-Yehuda states that by the 15th century dualistic theories were widely accepted. These theories discussed witchcraft as the tool of the enemy in a battle “between godly sons of light and the satanic sons of darkness.” \textsuperscript{62}

\textit{Disproportionality}

In 186 BCE, as with other moral panics, disproportionality was present. That is, the threat to society was no doubt exaggerated.\textsuperscript{63} The aforementioned changes to the cult were used by the Senate to spread widespread panic and concern. Many factors were involved in misrepresentation of the cult's activities. Rousselle argues that the movement of daytime activities into the veil of darkness would have caused concern that debauchery would run rampant, especially if men and women were involved simultaneously. He further claims that following Bacchus would surely indicate the consumption of wine and subsequent loss of inhibitions. An additional fear was that Bacchus, who was often

\textsuperscript{60} Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009.176.
\textsuperscript{61} Ben-Yehuda 1980.10.
\textsuperscript{62} Ben-Yehuda 1980.5.
\textsuperscript{63} Garland 2008.11.
portrayed as an effeminate god, would project his lack of masculinity upon his male devotees.\textsuperscript{64}

The consuls certainly magnified suspicions when they addressed the Roman public from the rostra in the Forum. Postumius must have stricken fear into the hearts of his audience when he attributed nightly commotions within the city to criminal activity of the Bacchants. He further stated that the lowest dregs of society, most notably women and effeminate men, were gathering under the veil of darkness to commit hideous acts such as raping young men. These nightly Bacchic revelries were full of anything but good moral intentions. Thus, these Bacchants were putting the very safety of Rome at risk. After all, these effeminate men, having allowed their persons to be violated, were hardly capable of making dependable, strong soldiers. Without doubt any horrid crimes recently perpetrated in Rome were placed squarely on the shoulders of the Bacchic revelers.\textsuperscript{65} If all of these warnings were not enough to send the public into frenzy, the consul added that if the public did not quickly help stop the madness, the cult would soon consume the state and the madness would no longer be shadowed in secret but would run rampant in broad daylight with full governmental support.\textsuperscript{66} The public was assured that

\textsuperscript{64} Rousselle 1987.197-198. Rousselle argues that all of these concerns, including Hispala's fear of bodily harm, come from the public's preconceived notion of how Bacchants behaved as evidenced by authors such as Plautus and Euripides.

\textsuperscript{65} Livy 39.16.2; The public is told, among many other horrible things previously unmentioned, \textit{quidquid hisannis libidine, quidquid fraude, quidquid scelere peccatum est, ex illo uno sacrario scitote ortum esse}. Know that whatever moral offenses of lust, fraud, or crime have occurred in this year, have arisen from this one shrine.

\textsuperscript{66} Livy 39.16.4. \textit{nisi praecavetis, Quirites, iam huic diurnae, legitime ab consule vocatae, par nocturna contio esse poterit. Unless you beware, Quirites, a nocturnal assembly may become the equivalent to this daytime meeting, now legitimately convened by the consul.}
the very gods were angered by such acts and would hold no ill will toward those exposing Bacchants for the deviants they were.\textsuperscript{67}

Why were such claims portrayed as so disproportionate to the actual behavior? In order for such a mass execution and imprisonment of citizens to take place without the public rebelling, citizens had to be worked into a state of fear that made such rash actions seem warranted. In Victor's study of satanic ritual abuse, he explains: "In order for a moral panic to take hold among a large number of people, it is necessary for some people to be publicly identified with the perceived threat, even if the deviance of which they are accused is purely imaginary."\textsuperscript{68} Some scholars suggest that it was the consul and Senate who acted as conspirators rather than the Bacchants. That is, the consul Postumius and other governmental officials intentionally set up this entire situation in order to "...suspend normal judicial processes, to cross the legal boundaries between Roman and Italian jurisdiction, and to display their authority in Italy."\textsuperscript{69} Gruen offers examples of the disproportionality that was rampant during the persecution. Hispala's claim that drums and cymbals were used to drown out the rape of new initiates and Livy's explanation that such noise concealed other violence and murder are exaggerations of rituals central to the Bacchic cult.\textsuperscript{70} The singing and drumming was known to be a common practice in Dionysiac worship.\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Livy 39.16.11.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Victor 1998.549.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Gruen 1990.64-65.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Livy 39.10.6-39.10.9. gives Hispala's account; Livy 39.8.3-39.9.1 is Livy's personal description. Recall, also, that the cacophony of noises accompanying the cult was used by the consuls to strike fear into the hearts of the populace. Livy 39.15.6.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Gruen 1990.63.
\end{itemize}
Romans were well aware that drumming accompanied foreign, ecstatic cults. They even understood that, although such activity was 'un-Roman' and therefore undesirable, it was not alarming, nor did it mean that murders were being concealed by the beating of drums. Just a couple decades prior, in 204 BCE, the cult of Magna Mater had been imported from Phrygia. This cult contained ecstatic elements similar to those of the Bacchic cult such as dancing and wild music. These elements were new and disconcerting to the Romans and these elements were forbidden to be exercised by any 'native-born Roman.'72 Regardless of whether or not this governmentally controlled cult allowed Roman citizens to practice the ecstatic elements, the exposure to drumming and dancing in a previously established cult would not be surprising to the Romans. The screams and drumming recounted by Hispala could also be a reenactment of the dismemberment of Dionysus at the hands of the Titans.73 Another possibility suggested by Gruen, and one that that need not exclude the reenactment of Bacchus' death, is that this was a form of a puberty ritual, explaining why a change had been made to ensure no one over the age of twenty be initiated.74

Hispala also describes women plunging flaming torches into the Tiber and pulling them out of the water, fully lit.75 This need not be interpreted as intentional fraud, but may have been intended as a symbolic display of Bacchus' power and presence during the

---

74 Gruen 1990.63.
75 Livy 39.13.12. matronas Baccharum habitu crinibus sparsi cum ardentibus facibus decurrere ad Tiberim, demissasque in aquam faces, quia vivum sulphur cum calce insit, integra flamma effere.-The matrons in the costume of the Bacchants, with their hair strewn about ran down to the Tiber with burning torches, and having sent them into the water, brought them out with flame still blazing, because fresh sulfur mixed with lime was on them.
ceremony. Another aspect of the ritual that Hispala apparently dramatized is men being carried off by machines into caves, presumably for torture of some sort for refusing to be a part of the criminal acts of the cult. Gruen, however, explains that the "machines" and "caves" can be interpreted harmlessly as props supporting various ritual goals:

"Suggestions about the true meaning of the rite see it as an initiation ordeal, a dramatization of the punishment of Dionysius' enemies, a foreshadowing of heavenly bliss of the initiate, the representation of a descent into Hades, a form of possession by the deity, or a theatrical recreation of the triumph of faith over the unbelievers."  

Hispala's fears of the nocturnal rites and the involvement of men alongside women are evidently embellished. Nocturnal rites were far from new to the Dionysiac cult, as this aspect dates back to 5th century Greece, and men were a part of the cult as far back as the 4th century in Greece. Livy's statement that the rites had previously been gender-segregated is probably incorrect, as men had been included in Bacchic worship since at least the fourth century BCE. There is no reason why this custom would have been

---

76 Gruen 1990.63.
78 Gruen 1990.63
79 Gruen 1990.52-53. Regarding the nocturnal rites, Gruen cites various authors, ancient and modern, specifically Sophocles' Antigone lines 1151-1152. For our purposes, I cite the translations of Jebb 1902. Antigone lines 1150-1153: ...son begotten of Zeus, appear, my king, with your attendant Thyiads, who in night-long frenzy dance and sing you as Iacchus the Giver! Compare Euripides' Bacchae, line 469: Pentheus: (talking to Dionysus about Zeus' order to bring Bacchic rites to Hellas) Did he compel you at night, or in your sight? Lines 485-486: Pentheus: Do you perform the rites by night or by day? Dionysus: Mostly by night; darkness conveys awe. In regards to the introduction of men in fourth-century Greece, Gruen cites Nilsson (p. 4-12), who gives an account of men being involved in the cult in areas including, but not limited to, Greece. See also: Kraemer, Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus (p. 69-70) which discusses the episode of the Bacchae in which Cadmus and Teiresias are dressed in Bacchic garb with a plan to participate in the rites. In that scene, it is expressed that although Cadmus and Teiresias may be the only participants in their right minds, the god desires participants from both genders. (referring to lines 195-208 of Euripides) Also, Kraemer explains (p. 71) that within the Bacchae, "...there is a clear suggestion of identification of the male celebrant ἔξαρχος with Dionysus, which in turn suggests that groups of Bacchic women were led by an actual male celebrant or leader..."
changed when the cult reached Italian soil. Livy himself mentions that the cult had been introduced to Etruria by a man.\textsuperscript{80} It had not become a state-sanctioned cult like that of Magna Mater in Rome, and, even if it had, many of the original elements would have been permitted to remain, even if only to be performed by non-Roman cult members.

It is through the amplification of such factors that Livy aims to convince his audience that persecution was correct and necessary.\textsuperscript{81} Recall that some scholars, as previously discussed, believe all of the horrors explained by Hispala were part of an elaborate scheme formulated by the consuls and other men of high rank.\textsuperscript{82} Regardless of whether this was the case, the actions of the Bacchants were certainly sensationalized and perverted to help set in motion a moral panic.

Disproportionate accusations were also present during the witch craze in Europe. As the behavior of witches was supposed to be the opposite of everything holy, the accusations were extreme. For example, in opposition to Jesus' holy birth, tales were told of perverse sexual behavior with the devil either as a succubus or incubus, the body of which was at times reported to be a revived corpse that would return to its \textit{post mortem} state if it was discovered. Instead of prayer on Sunday, the devil's legions met on Friday night into Saturday morning. Christians met in church and worshiped holy images of Christ and Mary while witches met in cemeteries and worshiped wicked imagery. The imagery the witches preferred was purportedly that of toads, goats, and other stinking animals. Witches ate the flesh of unbaptized babies instead of the sacred wafers and wine

\textsuperscript{80} Gruen 1990.52-53; see footnote 44.
\textsuperscript{81} Gruen 1990.64.
\textsuperscript{82} Gruen (p. 64-65) for more in depth discussion.
the Christians served in the church. Music played in the church was acceptable, but in
their sinister meetings, the witches used morbid instruments such as human bones, animal
skulls, and logs. In opposition to the baptism, witches were given a mark by the devil and
sprinkled with putrid water by the very toads they worshiped.83

Regardless of what these supposed behaviors of witches included, the main fear
was that men and women had made a pact with the Devil and were walking around
amongst the Christians freely and polluting societal morals.84 Populations experiencing
religious and political instability were permeated by fears that women and men were
killing infants and eating the corpses, cursing others to become ill, causing natural
disasters or plagues, and attempting to destroy Christian society.85 A woman who
expressed anger for any number of reasons was seen as a threat, and “if she defended
herself against verbal attacks...her defiance could be blamed for male impotence, or a
death horse, or a hailstorm.”86 “Cursing and bewitching were identified as the female
counterpart to the physical violence of the male world.”87 Any misfortune that occurred
could be blamed on a witch during this time period.

83 Ben-Yehuda 1980.5-6.
84 Wet nurses, lying-in-maids, elderly neighbors, widows, really anyone who had been nearby when an
illness or disaster took place could be a witch. Any relative of a witch could be a threat. Dashu explains
also that risk factors included age, disability, and deformation. For more discussion on the role of the male
witch during this time period, as male witches tend to be largely ignored in witch hunt studies, see Apps
and Gow, Male Witches in Early Modern Europe (2003).
85 Dashu 1999.38; Malleus Maleficarum outlines a number of outlandish dangers of witches throughout the
corpus; Ankarloo 2002.70; Stuart 2002.122.
86 Dashu 1999.40.
87 Ankarloo 2002.70.
Volatility

The final characteristic of a moral panic outlined by Garland is the volatile nature of the event. Panic emerges quickly, allowing for the frenzy to spread through the populace in a rapid fashion.\textsuperscript{88} In the case of the Bacchanalian affair, the Senate was alerted and prompted the consuls to take measures against the cult in 186 BCE. The largest part of the persecution happened without delay, with those within the city being notified publicly of the decision and letters sent out across Italy. In fact, the night the public had been notified, Livy explains that guards were posted at all gates to apprehend those trying to flee. Immediately, the city was in panic and, as a result, many men and women killed themselves out of fear of the punishment the government intended.\textsuperscript{89} The only surviving piece of epigraphic evidence shows that the persecution was widespread. This epigraphic piece is an actual copy of the \textit{senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus} that was found in the province of Bruttium, modern day Tiriolo, in southern Italy. The process was executed rapidly, probably within a month's time. Livy tells us that the praetors had no choice but to suspend the courts for a month because too many law-suits were being lost by default because so many fled Rome, refusing to return for any reason.\textsuperscript{90} Surely two consuls would not have been able to traverse every town in Italy within a month's time they most certainly had assistance from the local authorities in apprehending

\textsuperscript{88} Garland 2008.11.
\textsuperscript{89} Livy 39.17.5.
\textsuperscript{90} Livy 39.18.1.
hundreds if not thousands of those suspected of involvement. The Bacchic shrines in Rome were destroyed promptly, as were virtually all the shrines in the whole of Italy.\footnote{Livy 39.18.7; Some images were spared if they could be proven to be ancient or sacred.}

The panic of the witch hunts did not spread as quickly as that of the Bacchic cult, but the most violent and volatile part of the hunts did spread rapidly. There is evidence of some trials in 1245 and 1275, but the executions did not reach a peak until a couple of centuries later, after Pope Innocent recognized the existence of witchcraft as a threatening evil and gave approval to the Inquisition to set forth and persecute witches as needed in 1484. The \textit{Malleus Maleficarum}, perhaps the most influential work on the dangers of witchcraft, was published shortly after, by 1489.\footnote{Ben-Yehuda 1982.10 argues that the influence of this work in creating the frenzy cannot be overestimated.} By 1490, the panic had spread throughout Europe because the masses not only had the head of the Catholic church giving validity to the claims that the inquisitors had been pushing since the mid 13th century, but also they were inundated with the new ideology of witchcraft in the form of the written word. Many books were published on the subject, and through them, witchcraft became known as a form of heresy that, up to this point, had been dismissed by the Catholic church as mere fantasies of those whom had lost their faith.\footnote{Ben-Yehuda 1980.10-11.} Overall, the witch craze started slowly, but once the Catholic Church decided that witchcraft was a threat, fighting began between the Catholics and the Protestants, secular authorities began trying to assert authority within their respective areas, and the panic spread quickly.
Moral Dimension/Symptomatic of a Larger Problem

Now that all of the qualifications of a moral panic according to Ben-Yehuda and Goode’s classification have been examined, we turn our attention to outlining two additional features of a moral panic which Garland asserts are essential to Cohen's original meaning of a moral panic: a moral dimension of the social reaction and the idea that the panic is symptomatic of a larger problem. Both of these factors are essential to understanding the true reason behind the panic:

Namely, the anxious concern on the part of certain social actors that an established value system is being threatened. This fear that a cherished way of life is in jeopardy is central to...moral panics, their nature and their genesis. At bottom, the sociology of moral panics discovers the displaced politics of group relations and status competition.94

Throughout Europe during the witch hunts, society was in a constant flux due to plagues, war, and diseases that allowed wealth to change hands quickly, upsetting the social order. The birthrate went down for reasons which will be discussed shortly, and, as a result, the role of women and the typical family dynamic changed.95 A rise in scientific exploration also threatened the previously established theological power (the value

94 Garland 2008.11.
system in danger), and, as a result, a scapegoat was needed to re-establish moral and societal boundaries that benefitted the religious authorities (the social actors).\textsuperscript{96}

In the case of the European witch craze, the fear is evident and the actors are rather clear. At first, the Inquisition needed a new set group of people to persecute in order to maintain their importance in certain parts of Europe. For example, in the Iberian Peninsula, there were far fewer incidents of witch hunts because they could concentrate their efforts on the Jews and Moors. The inquisitors demanded to extend their authority to witches as early as the 13th century, and they were granted this ability in the 14th century under Pope John XXII.\textsuperscript{97}

In regard to the Bacchic persecution, the social actors were the senators of Rome who felt they needed to re-establish their waning authority. At Rome, traditional values held that the Senate had supreme authority in political and religious matter; now this primacy was being threatened for a variety of reasons. As we will investigate in more depth below, a number of factors led the senators to feel as if its power was being threatened, and, as a result, they created a moral panic by working the public into a frenzy and passing legislation against aspects of the cult.

\textit{Moral Panic Status}

A latent concern for deviant behavior among Bacchants already existed among the populace, as was evidenced by authors such as Plautus, and this concern was stoked

\textsuperscript{96} Ben-Yehuda 1980.2.  
\textsuperscript{97} Ben-Yehuda 1980.10-11.
into a full blown panic by the consuls which resulted in the cult members being treated with hostility. The consuls, upon issuing the edict in Rome, were forced to visit towns throughout the countryside, as many of the people thought to be involved in the scandal fled.\textsuperscript{98} The negative reaction engulfed not only those within the city but also throughout all of Italy, creating a consensus of fear. This fear was intensified by disproportional representations of what the cult members actually did. The reaction to this fear was volatile, spreading rather quickly until thousands of those supposedly involved either killed themselves, or were killed by the state, or were thrown into prison.\textsuperscript{99} The cult of Bacchus was the center of the moral panic, but it is imperative to look at what events, specifically, allowed the moral panic to thrive. Elements of the Bacchic rites were easy to misrepresent as criminal or deviant activity, and the misrepresentations were highly successful. The questions that must be investigated are the following: what was happening in Rome that would allow for this moral panic to develop at all, and what were the political advantages, if any, of creating such a panic?

\textsuperscript{98} Livy 39.18.1-39.18.2.
CHAPTER THREE

ITALY PRIOR TO PERSECUTION

Events Leading to 186

Rome was establishing its power in the Mediterranean in the decades prior to the persecution. By 188, the Romans had significant power in the east, having defeated the Aetolian Confederacy, Antiochus III, and the Galatians. An alliance was formed with the Achaean League, and Rome felt stable enough to withdraw from the region without fear of further war. Antiochus had become "an associate in the maintenance of stability in the eastern Mediterranean." Many pacts had been established in the region, and Rome was ready to move forward in handling domestic affairs.

The Second Punic War had ended in 201, and the focus was now on controlling the entirety of the Italian peninsula. The Romans fought many tribes for control of Cisalpine Gaul. Despite constant fighting with the Ligurians, Rome founded colonies in the peninsula, created many settlements to help solidify its dominance in the area, and eventually overtook the Ligurians in the mid 2nd century BCE. Roads were built in northern Italy in 187 to help ensure that the Romans could keep the power they had

---

100 Gruen 1990.66.
101 For a more in depth discussion of Rome's dealings in the east, see Gruen 1990.65-66.
gained and expand their influence as needed. They also during this time of expansion that suffrage was given to colonies previously considered under Roman control but without the full benefits of citizenship, thus allowing them to become full Roman citizens.

In addition to handling affairs in the east and settling a large part of northern Italy, Rome was experiencing a relatively new phenomenon of victorious generals holding elaborate triumphs while gaining support of the people and the soldiers. In 194, after defeating the king of Macedon, the general Titus Flaminius sailed to Brundisium and paraded through Italy and into Rome. Livy states that the amount of spoils brought with the army rivaled the number of soldiers and was so impressive that it was as if the entire march home from Brundisium was a triumphal procession. Flaminius gained favor amongst the Roman populace due to his spoils from Greece. 190, 189, and 187 saw similarly lavish and impressive triumphs of conquering generals. These triumphs, which were symbolic of Rome's power over foreign lands, also gave returning generals wealth in the form of social and political *fama* as well as money. The power and wealth gained by these individuals was sudden and of great concern to the Senate as a whole.

Too much power was beginning to fall into the hands of unelected officials and the influence of the old aristocracy was suddenly under threat. Gruen concludes that the

---

102 See Gruen, p. 66-68 for a far more detailed explanation of the settlements and colonies established. It should be noted that many of these colonies were Roman, not Latin, allowing the number of Roman citizens to drastically increase.

103 Gruen 1990.68.

104 Livy 34.52.1-52.2; Gruen 1990.68.

105 Livy 34.50.3-50.4.

106 Livy 37.46.2-46.6, 37.59.4-59.6, 39.5.6-5.17, respectively. Gruen, again, goes into more detail regarding triumphal grandeur than needed here; Gruen 1990.69-70.

107 Gruen 1990.69-70.
returning generals' newfound popularity led to a sense of urgency amongst the Senate, "But the more conspicuous their success, the greater the urgency for the combined leadership to hold them in check." This led to the aristocracy's desire to institute their "...firm control of policy and politics."  

With an increased interaction between Rome and foreign nations, the behaviors of these foreign lands undoubtedly influenced the Italians. The Romans were generally welcoming, albeit suspicious of, foreign religious practices. A couple of decades prior to the persecution, Rome had imported the cult of Magna Mater from Asia Minor in 204 BCE. The cult was brought over as directed by the Sibylline Books and confirmed by the Delphic oracle as a way to finally defeat Hannibal during the Second Punic War. Although the cult was arguably more exotic and ecstatic than its Bacchic counterpart, it was embraced and a temple was erected to Magna Mater directly on the Palatine. In general, such ecstatic worship was not novel to the Romans. If elements within a cult were offensive to Roman sensibilities, the state altered worship to fit its moral code. For some reason, however, the state saw no need to regulate the worship of Bacchus until the sudden persecution of 186 BCE. The years leading up to 186 saw the introduction of new religious ideas, even if those ideas were faced with governmental restriction.

---

108 Gruen 1990.69.
110 Toynbee 1965.385-386; Beard, North, and Price 1998.96-98; There was, notably, a delay between Magna Mater arriving in Ostia in 204 BCE and the official dedication of the temple in Rome between 194-191 BCE. This was, according to scholarly opinion, due to Rome's attempt at making the cult less exotic. In fact, laws dictated that the orgiastic element be removed and no Roman citizen could participate in the ecstatic elements of worship or become a priest.
111 There was an outbreak of concern in 213 BCE due to an increase of worship to an unnamed foreign deity by all members of society, men and women alike, all the while ignoring common Roman practice. (Livy 25.1.6-1.12) This has been hypothesized to be an early showing of the Bacchic cult, but it was quickly handled by the praetor. (Beard, North, and Price 1998.91; Warde-Fowler 1911.324-325) I,
It must be stated, however, that although the Roman government was generally accepting of foreign cults, which it altered when necessary, some scholars argue that the suspicion of all things un-Roman led to a fear of the foreign that could be classified as xenophobia. "As the Roman 'establishment' saw it, Magna Graecia was subverting Roman Italy."\textsuperscript{112} The subversion was on the brink of swallowing the long established ways of Rome.\textsuperscript{113} During the Hannibalic War, Toynbee believes that "...the massive movements, during this war, of refugees and prisoners of war and the enslaved civilian populations of re-subdued secessionist South-East Italian states will have set in motion a converging movement of Dionysus-worshippers...."\textsuperscript{114} These very movements, according to Toynbee, allowed for the appeal of the Bacchic cult to seep into the displaced masses, offering a savior figure to those who desperately needed a more personal approach to religion. This appeal was something the Roman government feared, as officials could not control it like the other public state-sanctioned religions. This led to an atmosphere of xenophobia in the direction of the Hellenic practices of the cult. Scholarly opinion differs here, Pagán argues that the connection with the introduction of foreign people is weak at best; although, she does acknowledge that it would add to an 'atmosphere of xenophobia.'\textsuperscript{115}

Rousselle is able to provide evidence to further this argument of a divided Italy as he details the punishments that awaited the Italian colonies that defected to Hannibal and

\textsuperscript{112} Toynbee 1965.390-391.
\textsuperscript{113} Toynbee 1965.391.
\textsuperscript{114} Toynbee 1965.390.
\textsuperscript{115} Pagán 2004.54.
the effects of the misplacement of others by Hannibal during the war.\textsuperscript{116} The numbers of those moved to places away from their homes either by means of slavery or punishment may be exaggerated by Livy, but, as Rousselle argues, the psychological damage would be very real.\textsuperscript{117} It is due to these psychological factors that many would be drawn to a cult that promised a happy afterlife that, for many, would be significantly better than the mortal life they had led.

The cult would also offer these suffering people a momentary escape from the hardships of their daily lives.\textsuperscript{118} Regardless of the status of the people involved in the cult, a cult such as that of Bacchus may attract followers by allowing people to temporarily ignore their normal societal roles. Kraemer, in her study of Dionysiac worship, is of the opinion that these scenarios serve as "mechanisms for the expression of aggression and hostility by the powerless against the powerful, combined with some measure of at least temporary redress, confined within the limits of socially nondestructive activities."\textsuperscript{119} Even without suffering, this idea could be alluring to anyone, and it probably was, since the Bacchic cult was thriving prior to the persecution and certainly was present in Italy prior to the Hannibalic War.

\textit{Extent of the Damage}

What, then, was the degree of the destruction of peninsular Italy prior to 186? Rousselle carefully sifts through Livy, Appian, and Polybius to help piece together what

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{116} Rousselle 1982.40-47.  \\
\textsuperscript{117} Rousselle 1982.40-47.  \\
\textsuperscript{118} Rousselle 1982.39-40.  \\
\textsuperscript{119} Kraemer 2011.75. 
\end{flushleft}
Italy looked like in the decades before the persecution. The final years of the Second Punic War absolutely shattered Italy. During his invasion, Hannibal captured and executed many men of the senatorial class and the municipal aristocracy, a vital part of the economy, became impoverished in his wake. Hannibal moved entire populations at times, leaving them displaced and allowing large numbers of people to attempt return to their homes after he left. Hannibal's destruction was so complete that some figures place the number of towns he destroyed at 400; however, despite the damage at the hands of the enemy, Rousselle argues that the greatest devastation to Italy came from the Romans. Those colonies and settlements that defected to Hannibal were punished for their transgressions. For example, Capua was first put under total Roman control, their autonomy stripped. In fact, the Romans even threatened to force the Campanians to evacuate their region altogether, although that was never enforced.120 Hannibal's allies in Italy were also subjected to large-scale confiscations. Rousselle notes: "In fact, of all the areas where the Bacchic cult became popular, Etruria was the only area besides Rome itself, where there were no known confiscations following the Hannibalic War."121 The punishment was so thorough for the defectors that even if a colony had refused to revolt in Hannibal's presence, sympathizers of the enemy within the colony were still punished.122

So, defectors and sympathizers of Hannibal were punished by the Roman government. Places such as Campania and Tarentum lost most of the aristocratic class as

120 Rousselle 1982.40-42.
121 Rousselle 1982.43.
122 Rousselle 1982.43.
a result. Inhabitants of post-war Italy were at the mercy of Rome as new settlements and colonies were established to help solidify Rome's power in the peninsula. General Scipio Africanus' veterans were given land in southern Italy that likely had been taken from the local population, displacing even more people. Romans and allies captured during the war sometimes took years to be rescued, coming home to a life devoid of any sense of familiarity. The damage to the original social structure due to loss of aristocratic wealth, loss of life, the inability of individuals to hold any type of political office as a punishment, or long-term absence as a result of being a prisoner of war or soldier in the military created a fractured Italian peninsula, with Rome attempting to institute solidarity.\textsuperscript{123} This chaos left people desperate for a structure in which they could actively participate, making conditions perfect for a personal and more intimate cult like that of Bacchus to thrive.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Benefits of Creating a Moral Panic}

If a moral panic is set in motion under such circumstances, who benefits? What is the political upside of creating a moral panic? Garland explains that there are precipitous causes that deal directly with "transitions in the social, economic or moral order of the society. Threats to hierarchies; status competition; the impact of social change upon established ways of life; and the breakdown of previously existing structures of control-

\textsuperscript{123} Rousselle 1982.43-48.
\textsuperscript{124} Rousselle 1982.49-50.
these are the deep sources of surface panics most often identified."\(^{125}\) Conditions could not have been better for the Roman government to react to the Bacchic cult.

Still, though, what was the benefit of creating the panic? For one, moral panics are productive, meaning they "create effects and leave a legacy."\(^{126}\) Moral panics often last momentarily; however, Garland warns that "...over time their cumulative effect can be to create social divisions and redistribute social status as well as building infrastructures of regulation and control that persist long after the initial episode has run its course."\(^{127}\)

Ben-Yehuda suggests that governments may have specific political and economic interests in moral panics. In his study of the Israeli drug moral panic of 1982, he notes that the police had two reasons to create the panic: One, to press legislators into increasing funding for the public war on drugs. Two, to distract public attention away from an incident two years prior in which the primary witness in a large-scale drug arrest claimed he did so only because the police forced him into fabricated accusations.\(^{128}\)

Did the Roman Senate and/or the consuls have any type of political or economic interests that would benefit from the persecution of 186? In short, yes. Yes, the benefit was great. In a time that saw the mingling of religion and politics, the Senate would greatly benefit by reining in the Bacchic cult. Takács postulates that the Senate, through this persecution, was able to re-establish its dominance within Rome and amongst its

---


\(^{126}\) Garland 2008.15.

\(^{127}\) Garland 2008.16; This will be of more importance later when the long-term effects are discussed.

\(^{128}\) Ben-Yehuda 1986.500; 506.
allies.\textsuperscript{129} Italy, recently ransacked by Hannibal, in near constant warfare with Gallic tribes, full of misplaced populations, and haunted by memories of various defections needed something against which to unify. The Senate was feeling threatened not only by the actual weaknesses made evident by the splintering of Italy, but also the threat of victorious generals gaining public favor. They needed a scapegoat, and one large enough to be publicly sacrificed as a reminder that they were the supreme authority in Rome, that religion was under their jurisdiction, and, if necessary, they could give the consuls enough power to begin a persecution that could and would result in the deaths of thousands of people. For the Senate as a whole, starting this moral panic had no downside.\textsuperscript{130} This was also true for individual senators who may have wished to further their political career and increase prestige among the populace. After all, the personal benefit was great if a senator could eliminate his rival(s) by attaching their name to the disreputable Bacchic cult. This cult was easy to target due to its secret aspects and distinctive rituals, and it was the perfect time to exploit it.\textsuperscript{131}

Before delving into the long-term implications of the moral panic, some time ought to be dedicated to the scholarly discussion of the role of women in relation to this matter. Rousselle takes time to acknowledge the work of previous scholars such as Kraemer who evaluated the appeal of Dionysiac worship to women. The consensus is that women were drawn to the worship of this god as an escape from the chains of patriarchal

\textsuperscript{129} Takács 2001.310. Note that the SC is addressed to the \textit{foederati}.
\textsuperscript{130} Gruen 1990.77-78 postulates this theory as well, the leaders of Rome started the persecution as “a demonstration.”
\textsuperscript{131} Riedl 2012.122 states that the Senate “defended itself against an enemy which was, as \textit{religio externa}, an external aggressor and, as \textit{intestina coniuratio}, a threat from within...the Bacchanalia questioned the meaning of the Roman cosmion [world of order].” The Senators set out to become the saviors of the Roman state in order to preserve the power and order which they once had, even if that meant extreme violence.
life. As a result, they could freely worship within the cult while not publicly upsetting the social norm.\textsuperscript{132} This becomes more of an issue, however, as, during this time in history, women were just beginning to gain a larger role in society. During the Punic Wars, with such a large loss of men, women appear to merit more frequent recognition by ancient historians.\textsuperscript{133} Petrocelli notes that this recognition came in waves of positivity and negativity, citing Busa receiving honors by the Senate for her willingness to help troops seeking refuge after the battle at Cannae. Another account from the same time period discusses Vestal Virgins accused of incest and their subsequent demise.\textsuperscript{134} The very fact that women were mentioned at all, and at this frequency, in historical writings highlights their increased importance, and thus the increased threat women that women represented to the patriarchal society of Rome.\textsuperscript{135}

Women were excluded from major governmental roles; yet, within the cult of Bacchus, the women were leaders with the power to initiate anyone, even men. This act allowed women a power never afforded to them by the state while simultaneously threatening the masculinity of male initiates. Petrocelli summarizes: "In the rites of Bacchus, women had the power to initiate men, mainly young men, thereby stealing them from both family and the state." This was a threat that needed immediate attention. As powerful feminine roles developed within religious contexts, the number of cults in which women could play a leading role declined.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{132} Rousselle 1982.49-50.
\textsuperscript{133} Petrocelli 2001.43.
\textsuperscript{134} Petrocelli 2001.43-44. See Livy 22.52.7 for Busa; 22.57.1 for the Vestal Virgins.
\textsuperscript{135} Beard, North, and Price 1998.91.
\textsuperscript{136} Petrocelli 2001.45.
Undoubtedly, it was not simply feminine positions of power that threatened the moral fabric of Roman society. The Senate and consuls seemed to be most concerned about the fact that men and women worshiped together under the cloak of darkness.\(^\text{137}\) Pagán writes: "Rome was a state where only citizen men were elected or appointed to the public offices of priesthods; the indiscriminate mix of men and women as priests in this mystery cult ran counter to Roman religious sensitivity."\(^\text{138}\) Kraemer brings up an excellent point that Livy's words regarding the punishment of the convicted reveal the depth of Rome's concern in regards to men participating within the cult. Livy states that both men and women were found guilty of conspiracy. Both sexes were sentenced to death. The women were handed over to their relatives to be punished behind closed doors.\(^\text{139}\) The men, on the other hand, we condemned to public execution.\(^\text{140}\) "Despite their participation in the same illicit rites, male offenders deserved public censure, implying the public weight of their offense."\(^\text{141}\)

Returning to a comparison of these behaviors with that of the European witch hunts, it is notable that women were the primary targets of the 14th-17th century because their societal roles were in a constant state of change. Perhaps the pivotal point at which it appears that there was an increase in accusations toward women as witches was after the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which declared that witchcraft was mainly

---

\(^\text{137}\) Livy 39.13.10; Cicero (*Leg.* 2.37) re-enforces this concern, explaining that the Senate reacted as harshly as it did to preserve the chastity of women, as that was surely endangered during secret nocturnal meetings. Dyck 2004.354-355.

\(^\text{138}\) Pagán 2004.55.

\(^\text{139}\) Kraemer also asserts that the punishment of women in private could be “…construed as a rebuke in itself: women’s private punishment returns them to the private sphere and reinscribes on them the code of gender their Bacchic rites have challenged.” Kraemer 2011.32.

\(^\text{140}\) Livy 39.18.4-39.18.5.

\(^\text{141}\) Kraemer 2011.32.
connected to women since they were weak minded and had insatiable sex drives. The authors of the text "blamed witchcraft largely on unbridled feminine sexuality." Societal changes were the real root of the issue, however, as marriage patterns had shifted due to the increasing economic opportunities for women, creating a larger group of women to be unmarried even into their late 20s and allowing some women to never marry at all. Women, due to urban industry, were permitted to "...step out of the traditional role of the housewife..." and "...into this competitive market characterized by lack of manpower." In addition, the role of mother was evolving because contraception and infanticide were on the rise. Both of these actions were severely detested by the church and the blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of women, particularly witches. Wet nurses were among the primary suspects regarding the use of witchcraft due to their expertise in these matters. Wet nurses were often poor women who had lost their babies shortly after birth by natural means or, more often, murder and were hired by rich women wishing to give their children breast milk without breastfeeding themselves. Other scholars add to the discussion, explaining that other wet nurses were easy targets for accusations as the

142 Ben-Yehuda 1980.11.
143 Briggs 1998.259. Briggs summarizes the Spanish theorist, Jean Bodin, who explained that women were, purportedly, able to withstand torture for a greater length of time than their male counterparts, but this only served to prove that they have a savage, bestial nature with smaller brains.
144 Ben-Yehuda 1980.20-21; Ankarloo 2002.70 also discusses a study by Erik Midelfort who noticed that a high number of unmarried women occupied south-western Germany. Most women were in their late twenties or early thirties before they could marry due to economic constraints and military demands on the young men. All the young women without husbands within the villages became targets of "ridicule, parental concern and sexual suspicion."
145 Contraception at the time included prolonged breast-feeding, coitus interruptus, abstinence, late marriage, amulets, vaginal inserts of various roots, douches designed to cool the womb, and barrier methods. Earliest signs of condoms appear in 1564, but this was primarily to protect men from venereal disease. Women would often conceal pregnancy and abandon or kill the newborn. Robin, Larsen, Levin 2007.91.
wet nurse could be seen as contaminating the children with her lower-class lifestyle but also be the target of jealousy when she did leave her upper-class nurse children to tend to her own, if she had any. This could play into the "village-level idea of the witch as the nurse of rival children."146

Persecution often befell the lying-in-maid as well if a child or mother were injured during the first six weeks after birth when a new mother was to stay in a separate room and rest. During the first few weeks after birth, a mother is extremely susceptible to post-partum depression and high levels of anxiety; however, rather than blaming the new emotions on internal issues that could be resolved, mothers during this time period would often blame the lying-in-maid, accusing her of witchcraft:

The lying-in-maid was almost over-determined to be the culprit, should witchcraft be suspected. Old, no longer capable of bearing a child herself and widowed....privy to the most intimate physical secrets of the bodies of those she tended....[she] undermined the settled hierarchies of the household.147

---

146 Willis 1995.94; Willis adds that, based on trial records from England, a number of quarrels resulted from "competition and conflict" in female networks of shared mothering. For example, the case of Cicely Celles, a wet nurse who, after learning she was potentially being replaced, verbally attacked the wet nurse who was going to replace her. After her biting words, the child Cicely had been nursing died. In another incident, she supposedly predicted the death of a newborn along with the news that the mother would never give birth again. Once that child died, the husband of the wet nurse she had previously chided came forth and accused her of witchcraft. She, along with her husband, was convicted. She was sentenced to death. Willis 37.1995. There is also evidence of midwives testifying against accused witches, suggesting that their words were considered highly reliable. Monter 2002.5. Ehrenreich and English explain in their second edition that the medical profession provided the courts with expert testimony during these times. p. 14-15

147 Roper 1991.31. It should be noted that there was a common misconception that midwives were often persecuted as witches, but this has largely been disproven. Ehrenreich and English (1973) began this theory, having pointed to a number of trials known at the time of publication, relying on the features of
Although women's roles were changing and they were becoming more independent, they were still defenseless when it came to religious and secular law:

In penal law she was gradually recognized as responsible for her own acts.

At the same time, a number of female deviations such as adultery, prostitution and infanticide were criminalized. As a result, women’s behaviour in situations of conflict was perceived as a public concern.\textsuperscript{148}

This allowed for men to punish them more readily than other males for reasons ranging from infanticide to stealing semen from men whom they had bewitched. Ben-Yehuda further states,

The fantasies about the unlimited sexual powers and depravity of women may have been a reflection of the fear engendered by the large number of unmarried women not subject to the authority of fathers or husbands, as, according to prevailing views, they ought to have been.\textsuperscript{149}

---

\textsuperscript{148} Ankarloo 2002.70.

\textsuperscript{149} Ben-Yehuda 1980.22.
There was also a concern of wives that the increasing number of unmarried women would seduce their husbands and sons.

Just as in Europe during the witch hunts, many factors were involved during the persecution of the Bacchic cult in 186. The Senate as a whole was threatened by the idea of losing power, but individual senators were feeling pressure to outperform their peers as well, because generals were bringing home spoils and garnering public support. Perhaps the most famous example of this divide within the government during this time are the trials of the Scipios, which included the conservative Cato the Censor and the triumphant and famous general, a man known for his Philhellenism, Scipio Africanus.\textsuperscript{150} The disagreement between these two politically important men serve as a perfect example of how fragmented the Senate was at this time.

Although, the Senate, regardless of how divided it may have been, was able to unite against a common scapegoat, the Bacchants. While examining Plautus’ \textit{Casina}, the scholar Thomas MacCary summarizes elements of Cato’s as well as the entire Senate’s behavior through Livy’s words, emphasizing the justification of the attack on the Bacchic cult:

\begin{quote}
What we cannot doubt is that Livy, along with others working in the moralizing tradition for which Cato was the standard-bearer at the time of the suppression of the Bacchae, has treated the affair as a foreign invasion, an insidious attack launched from Greece and making its way up through
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{150} Ruebel 1977.172.
southern Italy to Rome. There the infiltration reached threatening proportions and the most frightening aspect of the whole business was the inversion of the sexual instincts of Roman men. This was the propagandized version of the suppression of the Bacchae and this is the popular opinion on which Plautus has made his joke.\textsuperscript{151}

Certainly, the concerns about women's role and influence in the Bacchic cult were also factored into the decision of the Senate to ultimately lash out when it did, just as was the case with the witch hunts in later Europe. It was, however, a small piece added to the many already discussed in a much larger puzzle of political and cultural ramifications which will be discussed in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{151} MacCary 1975.462.
CHAPTER FOUR

EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE OF THE PERSECUTION

Breakdown of the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus

What did the Senate ultimately decide to do about the cult? Upon agreement that the Bacchanalia was a threat, flight from the city or assistance of flight was forbidden, and a reward was offered to those willing to help convict any guilty party. The consuls were given extraordinary powers to proceed with subsequent hearings and condemnations. An address was made on the rostra by the consuls to alert the public of these decisions and incite panic. The consuls destroyed Bacchic shrines first in Rome then throughout all of Italy unless they were deemed ancient or sacred. Copies of the senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus were sent to all areas of Italy to inform the colonies of the Senate's decision. Fortunately, one of these copies of the consultum survives which has allowed scholars not only to verify Livy's description of the decree but also discover more intricate details that Livy omitted from his account.

---

154 Livy 39.15.2-16.9.
155 Livy 39.18.7.
157 For a full Latin text and translation of the senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus, see Appendices. Livy (39.18.8-39.18.9) gives a broad overview of the consultum: there were to be no more Bacchanalian rites in any part of Italy unless the celebrants declared their intention before the city praetor. The praetor would
The senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus was sent throughout Italy and was addressed to the foederati, those in allegiance with and bound to treaty with Rome. The main part of decree dealing with the function of the Bacchic cult can easily be broken down into two categories: unwavering stipulations and flexible stipulations. The flexible stipulations were able to be adapted for any individual or group wishing to do so if an appeal was made to the praetor urbanus, who would then seek approval from the Senate with no fewer than a hundred senators present. Any attempt to entirely disregard these stipulations would be considered a capital offense.

The unwavering stipulations include:

1. No common treasury
2. No male or female magister
3. No one is to appoint a male or female magister or to act as a magister
4. No male priest of Bacchus
5. No exchange of oaths, vows, pledges, or promises to the cult or each other

Flexible stipulations include:

---

then consult the Senate, which was to decide during a meeting of no fewer than hundred senators. If permission was granted, no more than five people could be involved in the rites, no common fund could be developed, and there could never be a priest or conductor in the rites.

158 Line 2 SC.

159 Takács 2000.308; McDonald (1944) breaks this part of the decree into two categories as well: 1. prohibitions related to the cult unless the praetor urbanus petitions the Senate and 2. the "regulation of the cult as far as it is allowed to carry on its functions." Although McDonald uses different phraseology here, the categories are the same as Takács 2000.28-29.
1. No groups larger than five people, including no more than two men and three women
2. No public or private rites within the city and no rites outside of the city allowed
3. No one can possess a place for the Bacchanalia
4. No man whether he is a citizen, of Latin name, or ally is to participate as a Bacchant (a woman's role)

Power of the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus

The Senate was careful not to completely ban the cult, an action that would have risked angering the god. People were still permitted to worship Bacchus, even in small groups; however, the Senate wanted to monitor the ability of the cult to organize on a large scale. By requiring the approval of the Senate, the legitimacy of the cult rested solely on the decision of a hundred male senators.

The nocturnal rites "endangered the reputation of women." These rites, however, would henceforth no longer be a threat to women's reputation and Roman morals as the consultum banned men and women from worshiping together under the veil.

---

160 Riedl (2012.119) argues that, based on the words of the consul Postumius (Livy 39.15.2-4), he wanted to ban not only aspects of the Bacchic cult but also the god himself, as his influence only served to undermine the safety of Rome. Surely the consular speech was merely a ploy to induce panic because the cult was never altogether banned, as is evidenced by the senatus consultum. Also, the public had to be assured that the gods would not be angered by the destruction. In fact, Postumius states that the acts of crime and lust are what angered the gods, not Bacchus himself. Livy 39.16.11. Recall that the Roman government had no qualms with foreign cults, so long as they were conservative in nature (even if that meant the cult was altered from its original state). See footnote 106.

161 Pagán 2004.55.

162 Bauman 1990.346, citing Cicero, de Leg. 2.37.
of darkness. As interpreted from the decree, both sexes were forbidden to serve as priests/priestesses simultaneously for this "...indiscriminate mix...ran counter to Roman religious sensibility."¹⁶³ Women were permitted to have powerful roles within the cult but only because their roles within the Bacchic cult held no power within the government. The role of priest was permitted to a woman in this context purely because "...they were without active political power and their sacral activities did not siphon away state potency."¹⁶⁴ In this way, the pax deorum¹⁶⁵ was not threatened, since the worship of Bacchus, one of the recognized gods of the established pantheon, was still permitted under the proper circumstances. In addition, the concern over the power held by women was finally put to rest.

In that same vein of thought, the senatus consultum also served to protect and, ultimately, restore familial values, which were, purportedly, at risk. Beard, North, and Price state, "The Roman family was firmly based on the authority of the father over all his descendents, who formed a religious as well as a worldly community."¹⁶⁶ The Bacchic cult involved men and women, and if Livy is accurate, only those under the age of twenty were being initiated. In other words, the role of the pater familias was undermined when his family members swore oaths to someone or group other than him, taking away his

¹⁶³ Pagán 2004.55
¹⁶⁴ Takács 2000.308.
¹⁶⁵ pax deorum: peace of the gods. Rome needed to keep the bond of the pax deorum in good standing or face serious issues within the state. For example, between 205 and 204 BCE, in a time of great strife within the republic due to the Second Punic War, the Senate sent a "...a mission to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and, consequently, the invitation of the Magna Mater to Rome." Wells 2010.235. In times of great stress, anything could be seen as a strain on the pax deorum, especially if Rome was facing any sort of trouble. The state could not afford to upset the gods, and, as a result, threaten the safety of the republic. Maintenance of good standing with the pantheon was a highly serious matter. "The Senate took great care to maintain the pax deorum, and it was willing to entertain discussions about the behavior of Roman commanders when relations with the gods might be jeopardized." Wells 2010.241.
¹⁶⁶ Beard, North, and Price 2010.96.
authority while simultaneously effeminizing his sons and requiring his daughters (or wife) to sexually transgress.\textsuperscript{167} Once oaths of secrecy were forbidden, the threat of sexual violation was reduced, as well as the perceived threat of effeminized males due to the initiation which purportedly involved being submitted to \textit{stupra}. The physical abuse and sexual degradation implied by Livy's use of the word \textit{stuprum} was a threat to the social distinction between free and slave, for the Senate found it improper that free persons should be subjected to \textit{stupra}.\textsuperscript{168} Recall that Postumius, in his speech to the public assembly in reference to the male Bacchic initiates, warned with disgust that they should not be trusted to be proper soldiers. Certainly, effeminate men could not defend the chastity of women and children.\textsuperscript{169} After the edict of the Senate, however, the perceived threat to the masculinity of Roman soldiers was eliminated, for men were not permitted to voluntarily participate in acts deemed to violate their persons.\textsuperscript{170}

The previously private cult, consisting of many independent sects throughout Italy, was now only able to function under the watchful eye of the Senate.\textsuperscript{171} With such a

\textsuperscript{167} Livy, 39.13.14, specifically states that those under twenty were admitted, for they were the ones to be misled and defiled.
\textsuperscript{168} Pagán 2004.58-61. "...\textit{stuprum} is the violation of the sexual integrity of freeborn Romans of either sex." Pagán 2004.58.
\textsuperscript{170} It is worth noting, however, that men taking a passive role in a religious sense may not have been altogether out of the question. The \textit{pax deorum} needed to be maintained and Bacchus did intend for his cult to involve both men and women. (See Euripides' \textit{Bacchae} 208) The Senate may have, indeed, left an opening for men to be involved in the cult. By being involved in the cult in any capacity, men were opening themselves to concerns about unmasculine loss of control if they experienced religious ecstasy, which was perceived as a form of possession by the god. It could be debated, however, that possession was not open to all members of the group. It is curious that possession is not specifically mentioned within the \textit{consultum}, leaving it either open to both sexes or, perhaps, it was never open to men in the first place, subsequently not requiring specific prohibition in the decree.
\textsuperscript{171} It is important to clarify that all discussion of the Bacchic cult is actually not an analysis of one large group but several, usually independent, groups throughout Italy. These were referred to as \textit{thiasoi} in Greek and have seemingly always operated in this manner. Therefore, when the \textit{senatus consultum} discusses a common treasury, it is understood to be a treasury within the power of any individual sect, not a treasury
large number of people condemned, put to death, or committing suicide as a result of this affair, the Senate was able to re-establish its influence by acting swiftly and decisively. The scandal provided a timely opportunity, for the power of the Senate had been diluted; more specifically, as mentioned above, the Senate was fractured within itself, because senators felt threatened by the influence of other senators, while the people transferred their public support to triumphant generals. An influence that had waned in the years prior to the persecution due to adoration of triumphant generals was finally restored. The Senate as a whole benefitted from this well timed persecution. Perhaps Takács explains the situation best by stating, "The Senate wanted control over the cult and demonstrated its political power in Italy....Rome reigned supreme over her immediate neighbors and allies....those who were singled out for undermining the ruling authority...were executed not for their participation in a cult but so that political order could prevail."\textsuperscript{172} The Senate was, once again, the supreme power in Rome.

\textit{Effects of the Decree for the Condemned}

It is worth taking a moment to examine in more detail what happened to those found to be initiated into the cult. The published edict proclaims that those found in violation of the law were to be punished capitally.\textsuperscript{173} Livy goes into more detail here. He

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize
among the entirety of the Italian Bacchic worshipers. This would most likely have been understood at the time of the drafting of the \textit{consultum}; however, without clarification, it would help to instill fear in the ignorant that a large, organized second state was highly developed and certainly worthy of concern. For a more in depth discussion of the function and distribution of Dionysiac devotees and \textit{thiasoi} in an early Greek context in addition to promises to initiates in the afterlife, see Larson 2007.126-143.
\end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{172} Takács 2000.310.
\textsuperscript{173} SC lines 24-25.
explains that over seven thousand took the oath of initiation in the cult, with the state claiming more lives than not.\textsuperscript{174} More specifically, those admitted into the cult but who did not personally partake in nor force others to partake in any illegal activities were held in prison.\textsuperscript{175} It is important to note that being held \textit{in vinculis} was not a criminal sentence; it was "an administrative, or coercive, measure, not as a punishment" and was not, therefore, a holding place for execution.\textsuperscript{176} Livy never explicitly says how long those \textit{in vinculis} were held, but they were a distinct group separate from those destined for execution.\textsuperscript{177} Those found guilty of \textit{stuprum}, or forcible personal defilement, murder, bearing false witness, counterfeit seals, forged wills, or any other type of fraudulent activity, were condemned to death.\textsuperscript{178} Neither men nor women were spared, but Livy does note that women condemned were given to their family for punishment privately. However, if no one in the family was able to carry out the punishment, the state would carry out the punishment.\textsuperscript{179} The mass slaughter of its own citizens undoubtedly demonstrated the authority of the state. Public executions in Rome were "...intentionally degrading and humiliating to the victim....Roman law reserved them for true outsiders (bandits, war captives, slaves, murderers of low social status, etc.)."\textsuperscript{180} Punishment of

\textsuperscript{174} Livy 39.17.6; 39.18.5.  
\textsuperscript{175} Livy 39.18.3.  
\textsuperscript{176} Takács 2000.337.  
\textsuperscript{177} Livy 39.18.3-39.18.4. \textit{qui tantum initiati erant...in uinculis relinquebant: qui stupris aut caedibus uiolati erant,qui falsis testimoniiis, signis adulterinis, subiectione testamentorum, fraudibus aliis contaminati...eos capitali poena adficiebant}. Those who had been initiated...remained in prison: Those who violated themselves with illicit sex and murder, who contaminated themselves with false testimony, counterfeit seals, forging of wills, and by other frauds, were afflicted with capital punishment.  
\textsuperscript{178} Livy 39.18.4. \textit{qui stupris...eos capitali poena adficiebant}. (see above)  
\textsuperscript{179} Livy 39.18.5-39.18.6. Recall the discussion of the implications of private versus public punishment in regards to gender roles from chapter one.  
\textsuperscript{180} Fagan 2011.50. This, again, reinforces the feeling of disgust toward the men involved in the cult. Regardless of class, they were 'true outsiders' in this instance.
criminals was, for the most part, meant to be a spectacle, and it was probably well received as the consuls had the common public convinced the Bacchants were evil.\textsuperscript{181} It also helped that the works of ancient authors, like Plautus, painted a picture of suspicion surrounding the cult. "So in general...negative attitudes rooted in wildly held prejudices and reinforced by the known specifics of criminal infractions would have been the order of the day among spectators during executions."\textsuperscript{182} Those not in danger of execution were able to feel safer as the Senate was ridding Italy of such a horrible threat. In addition, the Senate was able to send a message to spectators "about the value of conformity...and society's solidarity in the face of threats to the established order."\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{181} Livy 39.15.1-16.13.
\textsuperscript{182} Fagan 2011.252; This quote comes from a section regarding public execution in the arena. Fagan's work studies the social psychology of the crowds in the arenas of ancient Rome, but his findings are relevant in all cases of public condemnation and across various cultures, as he aptly argues in his book.
\textsuperscript{183} Fagan 2011.50. Fagan adds that the executions in the arena reminded the crowd of the power of the emperor. In the case of the Bacchanalian affair, the crowd would surely be reminded of the power of the Senate, which was one of its ultimate goals during this time.
CHAPTER FIVE

EVOLUTION OF LEGAL POLICY

*Shift in Legal Policy and Expansion of Roman Power*

The shift in legal policy needs to be discussed, as the Bacchanalian affair set into motion a new exercise of power never before seen at Rome. A *quaestio extraordinaria* was given to the consuls once the Bacchants were deemed a menace. This terminology had been invoked before, but this was the first time the consuls were given absolute authority to act. The consuls were given unlimited command to investigate and punish perpetrators as they saw fit without "...hint of tribunician intervention, a *lex* of the people, *provocatio*, or trial before the assembly." In previous examples of the Senate giving the consuls the ability of *quaestio extraordinaria*, an assembly of the people had final jurisdiction, but that model was abandoned for the first time in 186. In other words, as Gruen explains, the Senate "...now seized responsibility for *ad hoc* judicial procedures to suppress offenses in the city and in Italy."184

McDonald emphasizes that language of the *consultum* solidified the power of Rome over all of the Italian confederation. During the Second Punic War, the office of

---

dictator, which could be assigned during states of emergency, fell under public control.\textsuperscript{185}

Once the Senate lost the ability to order a consul to give absolute authority to a dictator, it left the old system behind and had to develop a new method to circumvent the new system, which allowed for public appeal. In order to do this, it created special magisterial commissions to handle states of emergency in the newly unified Italian peninsula. These commissions were not subject to appeal by the people. If the Senate felt criminal activity needed to be suppressed, it would deem the activity a \textit{coniuratio} and wield "...an overriding authority equally over Roman citizens as over Latin and Italian allies."\textsuperscript{186} This change was ultimately manifested in the Senate giving the consuls the power of \textit{quaestio extraordinaria} and issuing the subsequent \textit{senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus}.

Not only did the persecution of the Bacchants allow for the Senate to exercise a new kind of control within Roman government, but also it allowed for the influence of Roman policies to fully infiltrate the peninsula. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rome punished defectors and Hannibalic sympathizers, but the decree to end the subversion of the Bacchic cult by means of capital punishment, if necessary, was another new role of the Roman government.\textsuperscript{187} Certainly, a decree of such severity was meant to set new expectations for the role Rome would play within Italy. It can be hypothesized that it also "...tested the loyalty of the allies to the very limit, since Roman authority and

\textsuperscript{185} McDonald 1944.16.
\textsuperscript{186} McDonald 1944.16-17.
\textsuperscript{187} Gruen 1990.42-46.
allied Italy rested, at least formally, on treaties with the individual cities and tribes...which gave the Romans no right to interfere in their internal affairs.\textsuperscript{188} It is also worth mentioning that due to the level of infiltration of similar Bacchic cults throughout Italy, cultural blending was occurring.\textsuperscript{189} This is an important point, perhaps too often overlooked. Mass adoption of a foreign ecstatic cult without some form of regulation by the Roman state implied an unacceptable degree of deviation from the\textit{mos patrius}.\textsuperscript{190} The decree of the Senate was designed to limit this cultural convergence, as the threatening elements of the cult were removed in order to preserve not only the\textit{pax deorum}, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, but also the\textit{mos patrius} of Roman religion. The Roman citizens would be persuaded to limit the worship of Bacchus because the Senate invoked the customs of their forefathers, making the Bacchic cult seem subversive and inauspicious. By convincing the citizens that the Bacchic followers were to be feared, the large number of lives taken in the name of safety would more tolerable as the\textit{pax deorum} needed to remain in tact.\textsuperscript{191} This cultural unification in relation to foreign religious influence, after the\textit{consultum} was issued, could be monitored and allowed to continue only under Roman authority.

\textsuperscript{188}Beard, North, and Price 1998.95.  
\textsuperscript{189}Beard, North, and Price 1998.95.  
\textsuperscript{190}\textit{mos patrius}: \textit{custom of the forefathers}. "This idiomatic expression normally refers not to the customary behaviors of the\textit{maiores} of the Roman people treated collectively, but to those of particular Roman\textit{gentes}." This term, although rather vague, was a way to create opposition to anything new or threatening as it differed from the customs inherited by important Roman men from their forefathers. Short 2007.127. Also, recall that the Senate was careful to remove the ecstatic elements of the cult of Magna Mater as much as possible while stipulating that their own citizens would not be able to take place in any other 'un-Roman' types of activity related to the cult before they brought the cult to Rome. See Chapter 1 for more in depth discussion.  
\textsuperscript{191}McDonald 1944.27, 31.
Intentional Wording of the Decree

One should also take note of the careful language present in the senatus consultum. There has been much discussion regarding the epigraphic evidence in regards to which sections of the text are directly from the Senate and which parts are from the consuls. McDonald suggests that the implementation of careful phrasing made it appear that it was the authority of the Senate, not the consuls, decreeing what actions needed to be taken regarding the Bacchanalia, and what steps, exactly, needed to be taken in order to not violate the consultum. McDonald takes aspects of his discussion from Fraenkel, who argues that the central section of the consultum, lines 3-21, is very clear in its language. That is, all of the verbs in the proclamation itself follow the appropriate sequence; specifically, the subjunctives fluctuate between imperfect and pluperfect subjunctives based on the perfect indicative censuere in line 3.\textsuperscript{192} In the postscript that includes the discussion on capital punishment (lines 22-30), however, the proper sequence of tense seems to be abandoned, indicating a more relaxed tone regarding the orders from the consuls, as the present subjunctive comes in alongside the imperfect subjunctive, both relying on the main verb, censuit.\textsuperscript{193} He gives the examples of: uti ... edicatis and joined with –que to this uti scientes essetis, then atque uti ... incideretis ...

\textsuperscript{192} Fraenkel 1932.372.
\textsuperscript{193} Omit lines 24-25 here as these lines follow the proper sequence of tense and are, according to McDonald, direct orders from the Senate regarding the penalty of capital punishment. McDonald 1944.29-30.
The consuls were able to "avoid allied resentment at what might otherwise appear at first to be magisterial interference." They did this by carefully constructing a consultum that followed perfect Latin form to indicate direct orders from the Senate while employing less regular syntax in the section pertaining to capital punishment. Previously such punishments had been left to the discretion of local authorities rather than being dictated from Rome. Through this construction of the consultum, the local governments were able to save face, even though the Senate gave the consuls the powers of quaestio extraordinaria, and the new role of "...central executive authority which should now have been provided by legislative reform."

By permitting the consuls to have the type of unchecked control that the quaestio extraordinaria allowed, the Roman Senate was able to assume powers previously reserved for dictators, which had been lessened as previously described, and wield the old power of absolute rule throughout Rome and all of Italy. This had, more than likely, not gone unnoticed by the Italian confederation. However, "...Roman hegemony in Italy rested upon the alliance of the Roman senatorial nobility within the Latin and Italian aristocracy...Roman and Italian nobility were of one mind in preserving the foundations

194 Fraenkel 1932.378; It should be noted that Perri, recounting the observation of Heilmann, asserts that this is not irregular behavior and hypothesizes that the interchange in mood, when looking at the meaning behind the verb, creates a chiasmus. That it is, an order of execution, followed by notifications of the Senate, followed by more orders of execution to form an ABCD DBCA construction. Heilman 1987.245ff.
195 McDonald 1944.29-30; Here is where McDonald diverges from the opinion of Fraenkel, as Fraenkel blames the carelessness of the final lines of the decree to a local official not overly familiar with the Latin language, perhaps a native Oscan or Greek speaker. Fraenkel 1932.392.
196 McDonald 1944.32.
of their power and authority.\textsuperscript{197} The Senate declared the Bacchic cult a threat that needed regulation as it disrupted, among other things, the social order. The wealthy Latins and Italians were, almost certainly, convinced that the cult was a symbol of instability that could, ultimately, threaten their status and power. As McDonald suggests, the local authority would not lightly take direct orders from consuls, as that would be a sign of weakness within their own jurisdiction. The Senate exploited this insecurity as they knew the wealthy would "...accept the Senate's guidance in measures of political and social co-ordination throughout Italy, even in the details of their local jurisdiction...." so long as it stabilized their position among the upper class.\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{197} McDonald 1944.33
\textsuperscript{198} McDonald 1944.33
CHAPTER SIX

REMNANTS OF THE BACCHIC CULT

A brief discussion now follows regarding the handling of Bacchic imagery after 186. The consultum is clear that after the decree was read to each town, within ten days revelries were to be disbanded, unless they were deemed sacred in nature. This, presumably, extended to the handling of Bacchic imagery, as we have evidence of both objects decorated with Bacchic images destroyed and preserved from that time period. This allows scholars to piece together what exactly may have qualified as sacred and why. Nilsson describes a temple dedicated to Bacchus and Ariadne discovered near Pompeii, contemporaneous with the Bacchanalian affair. This temple included an altar with the inscription *aedilis, Maras Atiniis* in the Oscan dialect. Neither the temple nor the altar suffered damage as a result of the decree. One could suspect this was because it was more civic in nature and more acceptable to Roman sensibilities. Perhaps destroying images related to a temple would have been a threat to the *pax deorum* as so many of the gods had public temples to accompany their respective public and government sanctioned cults. A terracotta throne from Volsinii, on the other hand, was almost completely obliterated, and therefore must not have been categorized as sacred. This throne was

---

199 SC lines 27-30.
200 Nilsson 1975.19, cites Bruhl (1953) as the source of his knowledge regarding this temple.
201 Beard, North, and Price 1998.94; Fig 2.4.
discovered in a cult-grotto in a public part of the city; the grotto was built in the 3rd century.\textsuperscript{202} The throne's decoration may have represented the god's early life.\textsuperscript{203} It appears to have been deliberately destroyed during the time of the persecution.\textsuperscript{204} Perhaps the grotto lent itself to more suspicious behavior and was more difficult to monitor; perhaps prejudice regarding this particular cult and grotto was too prevalent to ignore. After all, recall that Paculla described men being rushed away to hidden caves to be taken away by the gods as punishment for refusing to participate in any criminal activity or submit to \textit{stuprum}.\textsuperscript{205} Regardless of the reason why the throne was destroyed, by comparing the date of the establishment of the grotto in the 3rd century to that of the destruction of the throne around the time of the persecution, we can verify Livy's account of the swiftness of senatorial action.\textsuperscript{206}

The decree in 186 did not end the persecution of the Bacchic cult, and it does not mark the end of historical accounts during the republic. In fact, Livy mentions two other campaigns involving suppression of the Bacchic cult: one in 184 and another in 181.\textsuperscript{207} In 184, Lucius Postumius, praetor, made careful examinations of those in Tarentum associated with the Bacchic cult, for many who had fled Rome two years prior to escape the persecution relocated to this area. Some of the guilty discovered by Postumius were sent to Rome while he personally convicted others.\textsuperscript{208} Livy mentions that another

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Beard, North, and Price 1998.93.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Beard, North, and Price 1998.94; Fig 2.4.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Beard, North, and Price 1998.93-94.
\item \textsuperscript{205} Livy 39.13.13.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Beard, North, and Price 1998.93-94.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Livy 39.41.6-7; Livy 40.19.1-40.19.4, respectively.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Livy 39.41.6-39.41.7; It should be noted that Postumius put down a conspiracy of \textit{pastores} in Tarentum during this time as well. Nilsson notes that \textit{pastores} could come from the Greek βουκόλοι, which has been
uprising occurred in 181 when the praetor in charge of Apulia, Lucius Duronius, was told by the Senate to suppress the Bacchanals, which had begun to surface the year prior. This uprising is mentioned in the same chapter as other horrible omens such as images crying and rainfalls of blood. The Senate was so desperate that they ordered human sacrifices to be made to attempt to appease the gods. Livy mentions nothing further on the subject, leaving the impression that after the uprising in 181, the cult was no longer in existence, or it existed but did not operate in violation of the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*.

In short, the *consultum* along with the *quaestio extraordinaria* given to the consuls allowed the Senate to exercise new and unprecedented power, expanded the authority Rome had over a now socially unified Italy, and clarified the state's position in monitoring religion. It was now known that the government would be severe in dealing with religious activities that were seen as threats to societal or familial values. By the end of Livy's last account in 181, the Roman world seemed relatively stable and ready to expand and display its newly established dominance in the Italian peninsula.

There is a gap in the evidence for the practice of Bacchic worship in Italy until the late Republic, when Bacchus begins to appear as a patron of Marius and other politicians of the *popularis* faction. A passage in Servius attributes the re-establishment of the cult to Caesar, which is feasible given his *popularis* roots. Many scholars agree that Caesar may have very well revived the cult for political reasons and discuss his close connection noted to be used for Bacchic followers. Or, equally as possible, Postumius could have dealt with an uprising of regular herdsmen, as this area was largely pasture grounds. Nilsson 1975.20, note 39.

---

210 Valerius Maximus 3.6.6; Pliny HN 33.150; Rawson 1974.205 all discuss Marius' Bacchic connection. Coinage made by the moneyer Quintus Titius also shows the connection of Liber to Lucius Julius Caesar in 90 BCE. Raaflaub 2010.143; The thyrsus appears on the coinage under Cinna's consulship as well, a definitive anti-Sullan symbol. Rowland, Jr.1966.409.
to the festival of the Liberalia, a Bacchic triumphal procession after his victories in Gaul, his admiration of Alexander, a New Dionysus himself, and the number of similarities between Bacchus’ mythology and that of Caesar to help establish this connection. Other scholars dismiss this connection outright without second thought. However, the scholarly debate over this question is extensive and beyond the scope of this thesis.

Servius begins the debate in his *Vergilii Carmina Comentarii* from the 4th/early 5th century when he writes *hoc aperte ad Caesarem pertinet, quem constat primum sacra Liberi patris transtulisse Romam*. This clearly concerns Caesar, who first, it is agreed, brought back the sacred rites of father Liber. Servius is referring to the 29th-30th line in Vergil's 5th Eclogue: *Daphnis et Armenias curru subiungere tigris instituit.* Also *Daphnis decided to join together Armenian tigers to his chariot.*

Some scholars in favor of Servius' assessment include Bruhl (1953), Carotta-Eickenberg (2011), Drew (1922), and Turcan (1977). Other scholars wholeheartedly disagree with the idea that Caesar revived the cult, most poignantly Gruen (1990) and Nilsson (1975).
CONCLUSION

By the end of the 180s, a previously innocuous cult was either forced to dissipate entirely or forced underground, as thousands of lives were lost. The Bacchants were used as scapegoats during a time when Italy was fractured due to the destruction left behind at the end of the Second Punic War, significant changes in local aristocracies, discontent and competition among the senators, increased adoration amongst the public toward individual triumphant generals instead of the Senate as a whole, and a sense that women were gaining more power due to large loss of men during the Hannibalic War. The Senate needed to act swiftly in order to regain control that was slipping from its grasp.

We have seen how the Roman Senate was able to become the central authority in the whole of Italy by expanding its powers to limits not before tested. Through extremely careful wording of the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, the Roman government was able to administer its laws and overstep boundaries previously respected in local municipalities, stripping the local officials of their power ever so carefully. Local aristocrats who were now *novi homines* due to the ruin left in the wake of Hannibal were willing to surrender some of their power to the central powers of Rome in order to maintain their new status. The Senate granted the consuls the ability to carry out an unchallenged *quaestio extraordinaria* to disguise what, at this time, was a thinly veiled term for powers equal to that of a dictator, but they were clever enough to find a way to institute this without permission from the people.
In order for the waning power to be fully restored and also increased, the Senate decided the Bacchic cult would be an easy and widespread target. So many people were involved in the cult that there would be no shortage of examples to be made, and everyone else not considered a Bacchant would be predisposed to believe the dangerous nature of Bacchic followers due to literary influence at the time. All the Senate had to do was find a way to get the public to believe this large group of people was a threat.

The Senate was the social actor that felt a threat to its previously established way of life. Because of this, it set forth a moral panic by creating an atmosphere conducive to consensus, hostility, concern, disproportionality, and volatility. The accusations made against the Bacchants were outlandish and their behavior was misconstrued in order to create a moral panic. The creation of the panic played upon already deep-seated fears regarding sexual transgressions and violence of Bacchic followers. The accusations put forth by Hispala also implied threats to the very moral fabric of Rome for a number of reasons. In the minds of the Senators, women were becoming too powerful and taking on leadership roles previously reserved for men and using this power over the male initiates. Men were submitting themselves to *stuprum* during the initiation ceremony, making them virtually useless in defending the state of Rome. Men and women were intermingling at night, certainly in sexual manners, which was absolutely unacceptable to the Roman sense of morality. Initiates swearing oaths to one another, thereby weakening the family structure, threatened the rights of the *pater familias*. The Bacchants were willing to commit murder, fraud, forge wills, fake seals, and be violent toward others and amongst
themselves. Any number of horrid accusations was believable, as the secretive nature of this cult lent itself to suspicion.

The action of the Roman government was so swift and all encompassing that it did not take long before the Italian peninsula was engulfed in a panic. So many people fled the city out of fear for their lives that small remnants were not completely erased until 181. Nearly seven thousand people were condemned in this conspiracy, with more being killed than kept in prison.

While comparing the witch hunts in Europe, it is easy to see similar elements such as that fact that powerful ruling bodies were feeling equally threatened: Catholics, Protestants, and secular authorities were desperately trying to establish dominance throughout the land. As in the second-century BCE Rome, social changes were occurring due to wars and other factors. As had previously been the case in Roman Italy, women’s roles were evolving, too, allowing them to become more independent in some aspects but more restricted by the law in others. As a result of a number of extenuating circumstances, Europe was in chaos. In order to convince society which power should be hailed as a savior of morality, a moral panic was set into motion, driving people to believe that they could not trust their neighbor any longer, as they may be working hand in hand with the Devil. This fear and distrust allowed for thousands upon thousands of people to be murdered, just as it had centuries earlier in Roman Italy.

This thesis has added a new chapter to moral panic studies in the field of sociology. My goal has been to show how the Bacchic cult persecution of 186 BCE, as evidenced by the words of Livy and the remains of the senatus consultum, is no different
than other moral panics throughout history and into more modern times. By discussing this persecution through a sociological lens, the discipline of classical studies is also enriched, as we can now better understand exactly why the Senate behaved the way they did at the time, but, more importantly, we are able to see how relevant the Romans are to today's society. Powerful institutions will do what is necessary to maintain power, and they will stop at nothing to manipulate societal thought in order to justify taking repressive actions to reinforce that authority.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Original Transcription of the Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus

| 1 | [Q(VINTVS)] MARCVS L(VCI) F(ILIVS), S(PVRIVS) POSTVMIVS L(VCI) F(ILIVS) CO(N)S(VLES) SENATVM CONSOVERVNT N(ONIS) OCTOB(RIBVS), APVD AEDEM |
| 2 | DVELONAI. SC(RIVNDO) ARF(VERVNT) M(ARCVS) CLAVDI(VS) M(ARCI) F(ILIVS), L(VCIIVS) VALERI(VS) P(VBLI) F(ILIVS), Q(VINTVS) MINVCI(VS) C(AI) F(ILIVS) DE BACANALIBVS QVEI FOIDERATEI |
| 3 | ESENT, ITA EXDEICENDVM CENSVERE: NEIQVIS EORVM [B]ACANAL HABVISE VELET. SEIQVES |
| 4 | ESENT, QVEI SIBEI DEICERENT NECESVS ESE BACANAL HABERE, EEIS VTEI AD PR(AITOREM) VRBANVM |
| 6 | NOSTER DECERNERET, DVM NE MINVS SENATOR[I]BVS C ADESENT, [QVOM E]A RES COSOLERETVR. |
| 7 | BACAS VIR NEQVIS ADIESE VELET CEIVIS ROMANVS NEVE NOMINVS |

---

212 Archaic Latin Version of CIL I² 581; ILS 18 from Bibliotheca Augustana
LATINI NEVE SOCIVM

[8] QVISQVAM, NISEI PR(AITOREM) VRBANVM ADIESEN'T, ISQVE [D]E SENATVOS SENTENTIAD, DVM NE


[10] SACERDOS NEQVIS VIR ESET. MAGISTER NEQVE VIR NEQVE MVLIER QVISQVAM ESET.


[14] NEVE CONPROMESISE VELET, NEVE QVISQVAM FIDEM INTER SED DEDISE VELET.

[15] SACRA IN [O]QVOLTOD NE QVISQVAM FECISE VELET. NEVE IN POPLICOD NEVE IN

[16] PREIVATOD NEVE EXSTRAD VRBEM SACRA QVISQVAM FECISE VELET, NISEI

[17] PR(AITOREM) VRBANVM ADIESET, ISQVE DE SENATVOS SENTENTIAD, DVM NE MINVS

[18] SENATORIBVS C ADESEN'T, QVOM EA RES COSOLERETVR, IOVSISEN'T.
CENSVERE.

[19] HOMINES PLOVS V OINVORSEI VIREI ATQVE MVLIERES SACRA NE QVISQVAM

[20] FECISE VELET, NEVE INTER IBEI VIREI PLOVS DVOBVS, MVLIERIBVS PLOVS TRIBVS

[21] ARFVISE VELENT, NISEI DE PR(AITORIS) VRBANI SENATVOSQVE SENTENTIAD, VTEI SVPRAD

[22] SCRIPTVM EST. HAI CE VTEI IN COVENTIONID EXDEICATIS NE MINVS TRINVM

[23] NOVNDINVM, SENATVOSQVE SENTENTIAM VTEI SCIENTES ESETIS, EORVM

[24] SENTENTIA ITA FVIT: SEI QVES ESENT, QVEI ARVORSVM EAD FECISENT, QVAM SVPRAD

[25] SCRIPTVM EST, EEIS REM CAPVTALEM FACIENDAM CENSVERE. ATQVE VTEI

[26] HOCE IN TABOLAM AHENAM INCEIDERETIS, ITA SENATVS AIQVOM CENSVIT,

[27] VTEIQVE EAM FIGIER IOVBEATIS, VBEI FACILVMED GNOSCIER POTISIT. ATQVE

[28] VTEI EA BACANALIA, SEI QVA SVNT, EXSTRAD QVAM SEI QVID IBEI SACRI EST,

[29] ITA VTEI SVPRAD SCRIPTVM EST, IN DIEBVS X, QVIBVS VOBEIS
TABELAI DATAI

|30| ERVNT, FACIATIS VTEI DISMOTA SIENT. IN AGRO TEVRANO.
Appendix B: Classical Latin Version with Line Breaks Denoted

1. [Quīntus] Március L(ūciī) f(īlius), S(purius) Postumius L(ūciī) f(īlius)
cō(n)s(ulēs) senātum cōnsulērunt N(ōnīs) Octōb(ribus), apud aedem

2. Bellōnae. Sc(rībendō) adf(uērunt) M(ārcus) Claudi(us) M(ārcī) f(īlius), L(ūcius)
Valeri(us) P(ublii) f(īlius), Q(uīntus) Minuci(us) C (=Gaī) f(īlius). Dē
Bacchānālibus quī foederātī

quīs

4. essent, quī sībī dīcerent necesse esse Bacchānal habēre, eīs utī ad pr(aetōrem)
urbānum

5. Rōmam venīrent, dēque eīs rēbus, ubī eōrum v[e][r[b]a audītā essent, utī senātus

6. noster dēcerneret, dum nē minus senātōr[i]bus C adessent, [cum e]a rēs
cōnsulerētur.

7. Bacchās vir nēquis adiisse vellet cīvis Rōmānus nēve nōminis Latīnī nēve
sociōrum

8. quisquam, nisi pr(aetōrem) urbānum adiissent, isque [d]ē senātūs sententiā, dum
nē

9. minus senātōribus C adessent, cum ea rēs cōnsulerētur, iussissent. Cēnsuēre.

10. Sacerdōs nēquis vir esset; magister neque vir neque mulier quisquam esset.

---

213 A. Ernout 1916.58–68.
11. Nēve pecūniam quisquam eōrum commūne[m h]abuisse vellet; nēve magistrātum,
12. nēve prō magistrātū, neque virum [neque mul]ierem qui[s]quam fēcisse vellet,
13. nēve posthāc inter sē coniūrās[se nēv]e convōvisse nēve cōnspondisse
14. nēve comprōmīsisisse vellet, nēve quisquam fīdem inter sē dedisse vellet.
15. Sacra in occultō nē quisquam fēcisse vellet. Nēve in publicō nēve in
16. prīvātō nēve extrā urbem sacra quisquam fēcisse vellet, nisi
17. pr(aetōrem) urbānum adiisset, isque dē senātūs sententiā, dum nē minus
18. senatōribus C adissent, cum ea rēs cōnsulerētur, iussissent. Cēnsuēre.
19. Hominēs plūs V ūniversī virī atque mulierēs sacra nē quisquam
20. fēcisse vellet, nēve inter ibī virī plūs duōbus, mulieribus plūs tribus
21. adfuisse vellent, nisi dē pr(aetōris) urbānī senātūsque sententiā, utī suprā
22. scripτum est.» Haec utī in cōntiōne ēdīcātis nē minus trīnum
23. nūndinum, senātūsque sententiam utī scientēs essētis, eōrum
24. sententia ita fuit: «Sī quis essent, quī adversum ea fēcissent, quam suprā
25. scripτum est, eīs rem capitālem faciendam cēnsuēre». Atque utī
26. hoc in tabulam ahēnam inciderētis, ita senātus aequum cēnsuit,
27. utīque eam fīgī iubeātis, ubī facillimē nōscē possit; atque
28. utī ea Bacchānālia, sī quae sunt, extrā quam sī quid ibī sacrī est,
29. (ita utī suprā scripτum est)[5] in diēbus X, quibus vōbīs tabellae datae
   erunt, faciātis utī dīmōta sint. In agrō Teurānō.
Appendix C: Translation of Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus

The consuls Quintus Marcius, son of Lucius, and Spurius Postumius, son of Lucius, consulted the Senate on October 7th at the temple of Bellona. Marcus Claudius, son of Marcus, Lucius Valerius, son of Publius, and Quintus Minucius, son of Gaius, were the draftsmen. Concerning the Bacchanalia, it was declared to decree thus to those in alliance with us: No one of them is to be willing to hold a Bacchanal. If there are any who say that it is necessary to hold a Bacchanal, they are to come to Rome to the praetor urbanus, and our Senate is to hand down the sentence on those matters, when their pleas have been heard as long as not less than 100 senators are present when the matter is decided. No man is to wish to become a Bacchant, neither a Roman citizen, nor any of Latin name, nor any of our allies, unless they approach the praetor urbanus, and he according to the feelings of the Senate, when no less than 100 senators are present when the matter is decided, gives the command. Determined. No man is to be a priest; no one either man or woman is to be a magister. Nor is anyone to hold a common treasury. No one is to make either a man or woman a magister, nor behave as a magister. Hereafter they shall not conspire among themselves, nor vow oaths to one another, nor exchange pledges, nor utter loyalties to one another. No one shall perform the religious rites secretly. Nor is anyone to perform the religious rites in public or private or outside the city, unless they approach the praetor urbanus, and he according to the feelings of the Senate, when no less than 100 senators are present when the matter is decided, declares it.
Determined. No more than five people, men or women, shall take part in the sacred rites, nor among those more than two men or three women shall be present, unless with regard to the *praetor urbanus* and the senatorial decision as written above. You are to declare these things in an assembly in nor less than three market days, and that you may know the declaration of the Senate, this was its decree: If there is anyone who goes against this decree as is was written above, they are sentenced to capital punishment. And the fair Senate has ordered that you engrave this on a bronze tablet, and you should order it to be fixed where it can be examined most easily; you should provide that the revelries of Bacchus, if there are any, except if there is anything sacred, as was written above, be disbanded within ten days of this document being given to you. In the Teuranian field.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


