CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS FOR THE CULT BASED ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS COMPARED WITH OTHER DATA

As to the temple of Bona Dea on the Aventine in Rome, which, in the literary sources, is described as the goddess’s most important sanctuary,\(^1\) there is a complete lack of archaeological and epigraphic data.\(^2\) Yet, because of the value attached to this temple by our other sources, a short discussion of it as an introduction to this chapter may be justified.

In addition to Ovid’s reference to the Saxum as the part of the Aventine where the temple stands,\(^3\) similar information is given by Cicero. In his De Domo Sua (LIII 136-137), he refers to an event in 123 B.C. as an example of strictness in religious affairs. It is the dedication by the Vestal Virgin Licinia, an ara, aedicula, and pulvinar, erected sub Saxo.\(^4\) Licinia’s dedication is annulled by the authorities on the advice of the Pontifex Maximus, speaking on behalf of the college of Pontiffs: “That, which Licinia, daughter of Caius, had consecrated on public ground without the people’s consent, did not seem a valid consecration to them”. Not only Cicero’s reference to the site of the temple as a locus publicus\(^5\) but also the whole purport of the passage make it clear that a sanctuary belonging to the State religion was involved and that such a sanctuary was to be protected from personal religious initiatives—even those of a noble Vestal Virgin.\(^6\)

Tibullus defines the sanctuary with the vague term sacra (neuter plural); he refers to the exclusion of men and to the punishment attached to the violation of the taboo (blindness). And he records that there are altars.\(^7\)

In Propertius’ description of the feast in honour of the “Women’s Goddess” some discrepancies are to be found concerning the locality of the occurrence. On the one hand, he speaks of a lucus,\(^8\) on the other hand there is mention of an aedes and there are more indications of a building standing on the

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1 The temple is still referred to by the name Subsaxana in the late Regionarii (cf. P. Graffunder, Regionarii in RE I A 1 (1914), coll. 477-480); see Platner-Ashby, p. 85; A. van Heck, Breviarium Urbis Romae Antiquae, Lugduni Batavorum—Romae, MCMLXXVII, p. 535.
2 Marucchi’s reference, Éléments, p. 173, to the find of ex-votos in the form of eyes in that place has no supporting evidence and seems to be a mere fiction.
3 Ch. II, No. 35.
4 Ch. II, No. 13.
7 Ch. II, No. 30; cf. the annotations in that place.
8 Ch. II, No. 32; a lucus of the goddess is to be found in the epigraphic sources as well, see ch. I, No. 95; cf. also Merlin, L’Aventin, p. 110.
site, such as the altar hidden in a remote shrine. It is possible that the poet intends to situate the temple in a lucus.

Ovid speaks of aedes Bonae Deae or of templae. He is the only one to refer explicitly to the site of the temple, the Saxum, where Remus took the auspices (the S.E. side of the Aventine).

In the reference in the Periochae of Livy’s history there is evident confusion in the description of the place of Clodius’ sacrilege as the goddess’s sacrarium (meaning the temple?). Festus refers to the aedes Bonae Deae merely in connection with the rule which refused men admittance, in his explanation of the word religiosus.

Aelius Spartanus, one of the Scriptores Historiae Augustae mentions an aedes Bonae Deae amongst Hadrian’s building activities. This information is not confirmed by any other writer, and it has been thought that a restoration of the known sanctuary rather than a new building may be involved.

Lactantius refers to the aedes Bonae Deae, besides those of Vesta and Ceres, in connection with the order that forbids the presence of men. He uses the word penetralia to define the three temples (under the influence of the term penus Vestae?).

Macrobius is the only one to give details when describing the temple: it is consecrated on 1 May to Maia under the name Bona Dea; the ritual is very mysterious (always supposing that the author does not refer to the December rites). One wonders whether Macrobius is referring to a cult statue in the temple when he records that Bona Dea, like Juno, is represented with a sceptre in her left hand. A vine spreads over her head (painted or sculptured over the statue in the temple?). In the temple live snakes which are completely tame. Further, there is a dispensary attached to the temple and it is tended by priestesses. The temple—or the whole of the temple domain—is taboo to men.

9 Vv. 27, 54 (limina); 28, 56 (casa); 29 (aem); 62 (ianua).
10 Ch. II, No. 33.
11 Ch. II, Nos. 34 and 35.
12 Though Cicero refers to this site in connection with Bona Dea, he does not explicitly mention a temple standing there; ch. II, No. 13.
13 Ch. II, No. 36; cf. the notes ch. II, 284-285.
14 Ch. II, No. 56.
15 Ch. II, No. 60.
17 Ch. II, No. 64; cf. Festus (Paulus ex Festo), s.v. Penus (Lindsay pp. 296-297); Wissowa, RKR, p. 159; Platner-Ashby, pp. 557-559.
18 Ch. II, No. 67 (21).
19 Ibidem (23); cf. the dedication from Aquincum, ch. I, No. 129: Bona Deae Iunoni; see also above, ch. III A.
20 Ibidem (25).
21 Ibidem; see above, ch. VI A 4.
22 Ibidem (26).
23 Ibidem (26, 27, 28).