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National Archaeological Museum Parma Goddesses and women in the Museum



National Archaeological Museum, Parma, . statues from Veleia

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The Goddess of Neolithic Vicofertile

Vicofertile

A rescue excavation in Vicofertile, a city near Parma, revealed some structures from a Neolithic settlement (from the second phase of the culture of "Square-Mouthed Vases," in the second half of the fifth millennium B.C.E.) It also revealed six burials crouched on the left side of the excavation with their heads to the east and their faces to the south. One child was isolated; the other five were grouped together.

The only female tomb was for a woman who was 40 years old at her death. It was located at the center of the group and it contained grave-goods including a small vase with a squared mouth called "Serra d'Alto," and a female figurine that was placed before the face of the deceased. The two tombs that were located side by side were those of a young boy, of 7-8 years old with two polished stone axes (signifying he was treated as an adult) and a young man of 20-30 years with an obsidian knife and an ax. The two men located further away were also approximately the same age, 20-30 years old, at their death. The centrality of the woman's tomb among the four male tombs, demonstrates the social role played by this woman. Her social role is further demonstrated by the fact that she had an unordinary grave-good and her tomb contained a ritual object.

The analysis of the grave-goods in the "Square-Mouthed Vases" cemeteries has shown a clear separation of male and female roles. It has also demonstrated the position of respect women held because they were destined to have valuable artifacts: the vases "Serra d'Alto" of exotic tradition in their tombs.

The presence of female figurines in tombs can be found in some European countries, but in Italy, the only comparison is in the contemporary tombs of the Sardinian culture Bonuighinu. In Sardinian tombs, however, the figurines are very different from ours. Also, in Sardegna, there are numerous tombs of men, women and children with the figurines, while in the culture of "Square-Mouthed Vases" the case of Vicofertile is unique.

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The Figurine

The figurine, like the vase of “Square-Mouthed Vases,” is made of badly baked pottery that was used for burial-goods. It represents a seated woman with an oval face, prominent nose, and an open mouth. The hair is indicated by rows of triangular excision and she has a slender bust. Her thin arms are folded under her breast plates and separated by a hollow triangle. The bottom of the figurine seems to be molded against a seat, probably made of wood, which has not been preserved. The legs are chipped below the knees and there are traces of the color white evident in several areas.

The figure represents an image of the goddess of the throne. However, the connotations of “mother,” “mother-earth,” or goddess of fertility are not relevant. Instead, the thinness of the chest, breast plates, and the very prominent sexual characteristics correspond to the chthonic aspects of the goddess. To be more precise they correspond to the goddess of the dead and of rebirth, also called “Lady Rigid” or “White Lady,” which is also related to her prominent nose and the names “bird goddess” or “vulture goddess.”

Although *unique*, the figurine stems from the type of figurines created in the culture of “Square-Mouthed Vases.” This style is a culmination of a series of confrontations between the Balkan and Aegean worlds. That confirms the hypothesis that it was put in the tomb to protect the body of a woman who was connected to the sacred sphere when she was alive.

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THE CULT OF ISIS

The Myth of Isis

*As wife and sister of Osiris, Isis is recognized as a passionate wife, an affectionate mother, and the patron goddess and protector of the family. She is responsible for teaching women how to weave. According to Egyptian Isis's and Osiris's evil brother, Seth, creates a plot to capture Osiris. Seth prepares an elaborate sarcophagus and promises to give it as a gift to the person who is able to fit perfectly inside. Unbeknownst to Osiris, the casket was carefully constructed with his exact measurements. Osiris fell for the trap and entered the sarcophagus where he was trapped inside and then thrown into the Nile. Isis diligently searches for her husband's corpse and after wandering for a long time she finds the casket. She attempts in every way to give life back to her husband including transforming herself into a hawk and flapping her wings on the body of Osiris. In this frantic and passionate attempt to bring Osiris back to life, Isis becomes pregnant with their son Horus. However, Seth also finds the casket with the body of his brother and he rips the corpse into 14 pieces to prevent Isis from bringing him back to life. After wandering for many more years, Isis is able to recover the pieces of her husband's body except for the penis, which was eaten by an *Oxyrhynchus* (a type of fish in the Nile.) Once more Isis attempts to reassemble her husband's body and to give it new life. Eventually, Osiris comes back to life but is only able to live in "the place that is beyond the west," or the world of the dead, where he reigns with Isis and his son Horus.*

Isis the Funerary Goddess

Isis was originally called Aset, that means "the throne", and she was represented by a hieroglyphic, that depicted a throne. Her cult was connected with the cult of the Pharaoh. The first evidence of the cult dates back to the third millennium B.C.E., in the funerary rituals of the Old Kingdom. However, the first priestly cult dedicated to her is documented in the VI Dynasty. In the second millennium, in the Middle Kingdom, the goddess is represented in anthropomorphic form, standing or sitting holding a scepter in her hand and with the hieroglyphic *ankh*. In this period she is honored as a funerary goddess in a divine triad with her husband Osiris and her son Horus. She is depicted with her arms stretched out, often winged, while protecting her husband Osiris. She is also recognizable by her headdress which is a throne or a solar disc that is placed in between the horns of a bull, with the skin of a vulture, and a Uraeus (an upright Egyptian spitting cobra) on her forehead. This connects her with the cult of Hathor.

Isis the Mother

From the XIX Dynasty and especially in the first millennium B.C.E., a separate cult began to develop, in addition to the funerary cult, for the Mother Goddess Isis who was the protector of her son Horus from the fury of Seth. Unlike the other parts, this aspect of the cult is connected to life. The name of the Goddess is found as a component of the name of the children that she protects in life. In this aspect of the cult, Isis is depicted sitting, with her headgear of bull horns that surround the solar disk, and breastfeeding her son Horus. The cult of Isis, although born in the Egyptian sphere, continued throughout the eras of Egyptian Civilization. With the invention of the Ptolemaic dynasty, (323 B.C.E.) the cult spread throughout the Mediterranean.

The Cult of Isis in the Collection of the Museum of Parma

In the museum's collection there are examples of both aspects of the cult of Isis. **The Funerary Goddess** is visible in the stele of Pijai, from the XVIII Dynasty. Isis is depicted standing with her complex headdress of vulture skin, Uraeus, bull horns surrounding the solar disk, and holding the *Ankh* in her hands. Additionally, she is depicted on stelae and on funerary papyrus of the late era with the throne headdress and sometimes with wings. The knot of Isis, the hieroglyphic *Tie*, it is painted on the *cartonage* of the mummy of

Osoroeris. Some small bronze statues from the Greek-Roman period document the cult of **Isis the Mother, seated while breastfeeding her son Horus**. In one scarab seal in the collection of Magnarini (n. 10.50) you can see a beautiful depiction of **Isis breastfeeding**. In a small statue she is also depicted as a queen.

The guard of the door of the Golden House in the Temple of Isis

In his funerary papyrus we know that the deceased **Harimutes** was a priest of the cult of Isis, specifically **he was the guard of the door of the golden house in the temple of Isis**, That means he was the treasurer of the temple in the Ptolemaic Era. As in other funerary iconography of Isis in the Ptolemaic Era, in this papyrus the goddess is wearing a headdress shaped like a throne.



Funerary cult of Isis with Osiris, stele of Pijai XVIII Dynasty

Small bronze statues of Isis breastfeeding Horus and of Isis the Queen

Winged Isis with her Throne Headdress, the stele of Tausirdjnesnakht, before the domination of Persia

Scarab seal that depicts Isis breastfeeding Horus (n. 10.50)

Papyrus of Harimuthes, Caretaker of the Golden House of the Temple of Isis, Ptolemaic Era



Knot of Isis, cartonnage of the mummy of Osoroeris, Ptolemaic Era

The woman in the Roman era has played an important role not only focused on aspects of private life. In imperial times especially, some very powerful women have strongly influenced the fate of public life.

In Veleia there were found the commemorative statues of some of these imperial matrons, and the bust of a young girl, less famous than the imperial women, but important to his city, *Baebia Bassilla*.

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The Imperial Women of Veleia

During the eighteenth century excavations of Veleia, twelve Luni marble statues were found representing the members of the Julio-Claudian imperial family. The statues were originally lined up on the podium along the wall of the basilica, accompanied by limestone inscribed stelae. Today, only five of these stelae remain and they are exhibited at the National Archaeological Museum of Parma. These statues were erected to celebrate Veleia's political loyalty to the imperial family and to document the spread of the Julio-Claudian family cult in northern Italy. Veleia's relationship with the court was intensified through L. Calpurnius Piso, the patron of Veleia and the brother of Julius Caesar's wife, Calpurnia. These statues characterize the cult of the imperial family as people of high religious offices. This status is demonstrated by the number of figures wearing togas or veiling their heads.

The statues were created in three stages. The first group was created during the reign of Tiberius and included a headless figure of Tiberius accompanied by realistic portraits of Augustus and his wife Livia, Tiberius' mother. Additionally, statues of the two Druze, the Elder and the Younger (brother and sister of the emperor), were constructed, as well as a realistic representation of Lucius Calpurnius Piso, the pontiff, patron of Veleia, and relative of Caesar who probably commissioned the statues. The headless statues of Augustus and **Livia** are identified only by their style and their dedication plaques.

The second group of statues includes figures of Caligula, whose head was replaced by Claudio, and his sister Drusilla. **Drusilla** is also known as **Agrippina the Elder**, mother of the emperor and wife of Germanicus.

A third group of statues includes the image of Claudio (placed on the statue of Caligula), **Agrippina the Younger** (the last wife of Claudius), and the latter's infant son, Nero.

Livia Drusilla Claudia was the wife of the emperor Augustus. She was the mother of Tiberius, grandmother of Germanicus and Claudio, and great-grandmother of Nero. She was deified by Claudio.

She met Octavian in Rome in 39 B.C.E. At the time of their meeting, Livia was married with a son, Tiberius. Nevertheless, Octavian Augustus chose to divorce his wife and to marry Livia. It is possible that their rapid marriage was because of political conveniences: Octavian made it convenient for the descendants of Claudius to support his rule. Livia and Octavian remained married for 51 years without having children together. She was held in high esteem by her husband who presented his petitions to her and consulted her for advice on his policies. Therefore, Livia was portrayed as the mind that pulled the strings of the imperial policy. She was behind every death or misfortune of the Julio-Claudian dynasty until the end of her life.

Livia and Octavian Augustus lived modestly. Livia, a model of Roman marriage, did not wear expensive jewelry or sparkling clothing. She personally took care of the house and her husband even sewing her own clothes. She was always loyal and caring towards Octavian Augustus despite the rumors of his amorous adventures. Already in 35 B.C.E. Octavian had given her the honor of managing his personal finances and he had dedicated a public statue to her. Livia also had her own circle of *clientes*.

The couple did not have children of their own. Livia put in place a policy that guaranteed her children a political future. Tiberius was adopted by the emperor in 4 C.E. and he became the heir to the throne. The will of Augustus, who died in 14 C.E., contained the provisions for the adoption of Livia. That means he allowed Livia in the Julio family. Additionally, the will guaranteed her a third of Augustus' estate (the other two thirds went to Tiberius), and she received the title of "Augusta."

Agrippina the Elder (14 B.C.E. - 33 C.E.)

Agrippina was born by Marcus Agrippina and his third wife Julia, the daughter of Augustus. She married Germanicus, heir to the imperial throne. Together they had nine children that included Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus (the future "Caligula"), Julia Agrippina the Younger (mother of Nero), Julia Livella and Julia Drusilla. In 14 B.C.E. Agrippina the Elder traveled with her children to the Rhine in Germany and in 18 B.C.E. she arrived in Syria. When her husband, Germanicus, was poisoned by the proconsul, Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, it was suspected that he had been helped by

his wife, Placina. Placina was a friend of Livia Drusilla that she defended throughout the process. Agrippina returned to Rome with the urn of her husband's ashes and from then removed herself from political life. Fearing her popularity, the emperor Tiberius began to oppose her and he exiled her to Ventotene. In 33 B.C.E., she, the granddaughter of Octavius Augustus, let herself die at 47 years old from starvation. A feminine statue was discovered in Veleia on June 17, 1761, near the limestone stele, that identified it as her.

Agrippina the Younger, (15 B.C.E. – 59 C.E.)

Daughter of Agrippina the Elder and Germanicus, Agrippina was forced by Tiberius to get married, at a very young age, to a man much older than her. With this man she gave birth to her son Nero (37 C.E.). After the death of her first husband, she was forced by the court to marry the emperor Claudio, despite their familial relationship. Her life at court is characterized by intrigues aimed to affirm her power and the future position of her son Nero. To reach this goal she arranges a marriage that creates a tie to the imperial family and she manages to convince Claudio to designate her son, Nero, as the heir to the throne (although he is not the legitimate son of Claudio). At the death of Claudio in 54 C.E., she began to rule the empire in place of her very young son. His jealousy and lust for power culminated in the death of a mother that was too strong and powerful in 59 C.E.

Drusilla (18 B.C.E. - 38 C.E.)

Drusilla is the youngest daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. Therefore, she belonged to the Julio-Claudian imperial family. Orphaned of her father, she was married at a very young age. However, she was soon widowed. Her mother and her two brothers, Nero Caesar (6-31) and Drusus Caesar (8-33) were banished by Tiberius. They died in obscure circumstances. In 33 C.E. Drusilla married Claudio Longino. However, their marriage was short and they were divorced in 37 C.E. She has a second husband, Marco Emilio Lepido. The emperor Tiberius died in 37 C.E. and was succeeded by Drusilla's brother Caligula. Some authors, as Tacitus and Svetonius, have given reports of incest between Drusilla and her brother. There are doubts about these allegations, which were probably motivated by the clash of power of the Senate and the prince, developed in the first decades of the empire. Caligula was very affectionate of his sister. Therefore, he deified her at her death as "Diva Julia." The first statue found in the basilica of Veleia was a female figure on June 18, 1761. The dedicatory inscription identifies it as the statue of Drusilla.

In the statues found in Veleia, the female figures are represented with the typical clothing of the Roman matrons, wearing a stola, a draped robe with a *cingulum*, a girdle, and palla, a cloak that in this case also covers the head. At the foot they fit the *alutae*.

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Livia



Drusilla



Agrippina
The Elder



Agrippina
the younger

***Baebia Bassilla* from Veleia : a woman – a city**

The Portrait of a Young Woman



Portrait of a young woman from Veleia

The portrait was found in Veleia on April 28, 1760, near the stairs of the western entrance of the basilica, a short distance from where a limestone inscribed stele was found.

It represents a young woman with her head slightly tilted to the right and extremely powerful facial features. Her eyes were formed by bulbs of chalcedony of which only one has been preserved. Her special hairstyle of short hair combed back and fastened on the forehead with a band was a fashion of the late first century B.C.E. However, the small holes on the top of her head indicate that there was probably another headpiece originally attached. The particular short hairstyle could also signify that she played a religious role, perhaps that of a priestess.

The bronze sculpture is a product of the end of the first century B.C.E. from local workshops, in the area west of Emilia.

The portrait is considered an example of roman "provincial" art, with physiognomic and natural features. This is a style traditionally used in central Italy, with Cisalpine influence, especially in the expressive realism, which has its roots Hellenistic art. The face of the young woman has been linked to the figure of Baebia Bassilla, a woman mentioned in an

inscription on a large marble slab that was found broken into four parts. This slab was found in 1760 in the area of Veleia near the basilica.

Baebia Bassilla* and the Gift of *Calcidicum

Baebia T. [iti] f.[ilia] Ba[silla] calchidicum municipibus suis dedit

The inscription mentions the private Evergetism acts of a woman from *gens Baebia*, *gens* cited in the *limestone inscribed relief*. This *gens* is known and documented in the region VIII and in Parma. *Baebia Basilla* was a noble and wealthy woman with a liberal largesse and the ability to finance the renovation of public buildings. She gave *calcidicum* to her community, a portico room of the basilica. It is an important gesture towards the city, remembered by the impressive inscriptions on the precious white marble.

The figure of *Baebia Basilla*, may have been erected in the hole as an honorific portrait to celebrate her generosity towards the city. However, today, there is no archaeological evidence allowing us to certainly connect the inscription of *Baebia Basilla* and the portrait of the young woman.

Evergetism: A Commitment to the City

Evergetism is the practice of giving private goods to the community to improve the lives of the poor or for the construction or renovation of public works (roads, theaters). This practice was widespread in the Roman world and from this idea emerged the concept of republican cities which aimed to improve the conditions of your *family* and the overall *population*. Over time, this type of action aimed at the improvement of your city became a sort of moral and social obligation for wealthy Romans. By participating in the betterment of your city you received prestige and honor and you were remembered by commemorative inscriptions or statues. Typically, women gave gifts to improve the lives of the poor. Therefore, the realization of the *calcidicum* of Veleia emphasizes the unique decision of a woman to give a public work intended to beautify and enrich the forum. Notably this donation signifies the woman's strong relationship with Veleia. An example of Imperial Evergetism is the *institution of taxes* of Neva and Trajan, recorded on the great *bronze Tabula alimentaria* that was found in Veleia.

National Archaeological Museum

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