

# Clio's Scroll



The Berkeley Undergraduate History Journal  
Vol. 22, No.1

Fall 2020

## Contents

3	Editorial Board
5	Note from the Editors
6	Contributors
7	The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire: The Tremblor That Shifted Chinese American Identity <i>Caitlin Cozine</i> University of California, Berkeley
38	Co-Stars, Cosmopolitans, and Comrades: A History of Tiki Bars in the 1930s and 1940s <i>Harris Miner</i> University of California, Berkeley
77	Uncorrupted, Undefined: Legacies of the Cult of Vesta in Early Christianity <i>Abigail Mullin</i> University of California, Berkeley
107	Arminius the Turbulator: Depicting Germanness and Combatting Foreigners in German Collective Memory <i>Conor O'Riordan</i> State University of New York at New Paltz
135	About <i>Clio's Scroll</i>

*Clio's Scroll*, the Berkeley Undergraduate History Journal, is published twice yearly by students of the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. The journal aims to provide undergraduates with the opportunity to publish historical works and to train staff members in the editorial process of an academic journal.

*Clio's Scroll* is produced by financial support from the Townsend Center for the Humanities, the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), and the Department of History. *Clio's Scroll* is not an official publication of the ASUC or UC Berkeley. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the journal, the editors, the university, or sponsors.

## Editorial Board

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**PETER ZHANG** is a junior majoring in History and Data Science from Beijing, China. His research involves Britain, China, and political literature. A former school journalist, and a current SLC writing tutor, he is passionate about all kinds of writings with poetry as his favorite). Aside from drowning in the readings and essays and sometimes computer codes, he loves to search for decent restaurants, practice his amateur Japanese with friends, and spend a lot of time on Football Manager.

### MANAGING EDITOR

**LEO ZLIMEN** is a senior majoring in History, Near Eastern Civilizations, and Arabic. His studies focus on modernity in the early twentieth century, Islamic civilization, and the late Ottoman Empire. For fun, Leo enjoys playing basketball and volleyball and watching the NBA.

### EDITORS

**DANE ANDERSON** is a fourth-year History major with minors in Latin and English. He is interested in intellectual history, with particular emphasis on the Scottish Enlightenment and British Romanticism. Other interests include the history of republicanism, the history of progress and theories of civil society. He plans to complete his thesis on the Scottish Enlightenment theorist Adam Ferguson. Outside of his studies, Dane likes to cook, to exercise and to read the comic fiction of P.G. Wodehouse.

**PARKER J. BOVÉE** is a junior from Sacramento, California majoring in History. Coming from a family with two other History majors, he has always been deeply interested in understanding the past. Parker hopes to focus his undergraduate work and beyond on the American West in exploring differing notions of American identity along ethnic and economic lines. Aside from worrying too much about exams, he is regularly disappointed by his hometown Sacramento Kings, overjoyed by Liverpool FC, and captivated by a wide array of music.

**MIRANDA JIANG** is a junior majoring in History and minoring in French. She is interested in the history of gender, sexuality, and race in Europe and the United States, particularly in quotidian experiences. She was a researcher in the URAP Summer Program, during which she worked at Berkeley's Oral History Center on an oral history performance about Chinese Americans in the Bay Area during World War II. She has conducted research on women in University of California history as an administrative assistant to the 150 Years of Women at Berkeley History Project in 2020. Recently, she's been exploring the intersection of creative and analytical writing. Outside of class, she corresponds with penpals, plays the carillon, and plays social deduction games with friends.

**KATIE JONCKHEER** is a senior studying History, and is considering a minor in Public Policy. She is interested in United States history, specifically the subjects of legal history and foreign policy, and World War II. When not writing papers, she enjoys watching cooking shows, tutoring at Berkeley elementary schools, playing with her

dog, and hiking. In the future, she hopes to combine her knowledge of history and interest in policy into a job as a lawyer or a judge.

**MICHAEL LIU** is a senior from Los Angeles, California, pursuing a major in history. His focus lies in the study of 20th century America, the Soviet Union, and East Asia. Outside of class, he enjoys playing golf and watching sports.

**TARA MADHAV** is a senior majoring in History and Political Science. She's currently writing her thesis on, broadly, the history of American school desegregation in the mid to late 20th century. In her spare time, she enjoys long conversations, reading fiction, and thinking about places she'd like to visit.

**LILLIAN MORGENTHALER** is a junior from Menlo Park, California majoring in History and Classical Civilizations. She is especially interested in the history of ancient religions, morality, and gender roles. In her spare time, she enjoys reading novels (and the occasional biography), baking, and watching historical dramas.

**SAFFRON SENER** is a fourth-year student at UC Berkeley majoring in History and minoring in Art History. She focuses her studies on Early American Colonial history and U.S. history preceding the Civil War, and her favorite subject is the Salem Witch Trials. Outside of class, she makes zines, roller skates, bakes, and tries not to drown in readings!

**ISABEL SHIAO** is a third-year History major at UC Berkeley, concentrating in the Early 20th Century. She is especially fascinated with the world wars and the Interwar era, and plans to write her senior thesis on the role of authoritarianism during that period. After graduation, Isabel hopes to attend law school. Isabel is also involved in Berkeley Model United Nations as a head chair and Deputy of Curriculum, and will be participating in the Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program this semester. Isabel loves cooking, exploring the city, and napping during her free time.

**DUNCAN WANLESS** is a senior studying Spanish Literature and History. He concentrates mostly on the history of Mexico and Latin America, though he also has an abiding passion for the history of Christianity. His senior thesis centers on the town of Yanga, Veracruz (the site of the first successful maroon revolt in the Americas) and its 20th-century memorializations of slavery. After graduation, he intends to teach high school in his hometown of Fresno, where he can enjoy the best raisins and summer stone fruit in the world. In his free time in Berkeley he enjoys reading William Saroyan and grocery shopping at Berkeley Bowl in hopes of someday running into Samin Nosrat.

## EDITOR EMERITUS

**SOPHIA BROWN-HEIDENREICH** is a senior history major from Berlin, Germany. Her research interests include late-19th century United States foreign policy and transatlantic history. In her free time, she enjoys watching movies, traveling and going on runs through the Berkeley hills

## Note from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Fall 2020 edition of Clio's Scroll. This semester, we feature four distinct articles with topics across historical timeline and interests. "The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire" by Caitlin Cozine examines the unprecedented natural disaster's impact on Chinese immigration to the United States. Harris Miner points to the Tiki bars and their fantasies in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War. "Uncorrupted, Undeified" by Abigail Mullin explores the idea of female virginity within Christianity in its early days. Finally, Conor O'Riordan informs us of the importance of Arminius the Turbulator and the role his image played in the formation of German identity.

In a year like 2020, the remembrance of history seems to have become both irrelevant and paramount. We have observed national leaders who have no respect for science nor facts; we have watched political parties accuse each other not with logic but with hate; we have lost almost two million lives due to the pandemic, a brutal reality which many choose to neglect when refusing to take measures to protect their communities. Yet at the same time, we have heard the stories of countries forging alliances to innovate vaccines against the coronavirus, and those of individuals fighting for their lives on their own terms - remembering the victims of police brutality and racial discrimination has become more than just a slogan; it is a movement. Whenever we feel nostalgia for the world before the chaos, we must also remember our present: this confusing and polarized reality in which we live. Just as our present is shaped by the ways in which we remember the past, so too does our tomorrow depend on how we ink down the present. Facts and rhetoric are not mere words on a paper or television or social media - they are also reflections of ourselves and our society. Each of the papers selected in this edition represent this very spirit of remembrance, recreating the lives of those whose stories preceded and shaped our own. We hope that by reading these papers, our audience will learn not only about the history of these topics, but also why we should care enough to remember our own histories. As the cover painting titled *Hope* by Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones suggests, we hope that this edition of Clio's Scroll will bring you a sense of stability and optimism for a better 2021.

The Editorial Board of Clio's Scroll would like to thank the Townsend Center for the Humanities and the Associated Students at the University of California (ASUC) for the generous funding that makes this publication and editorial process possible. As always, the Editors are indebted to Berkeley's Department of History for its endless support, guidance, and encouragement. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our contributors. Please, enjoy.

Sincerely,  
The Editors

“长风破浪会有时，直挂云帆济沧海。”-李白 Li Bai

“Expecting the time when I rode the wind and broke the waves,  
I would raise my sail to clouds to cross the broad sea, being brave.”

-Translated by Ying Ting, Wang Feng, and Ma Yan.

## Contributors

**CAITLIN COZINE** graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in May 2020 with a bachelor's degree in History. She is interested in the history of Chinese Americans, specifically in the San Francisco Bay Area during the Chinese Exclusion Era. She would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Robin Terry for her invaluable guidance and support throughout the in-person and virtual research and writing process.

**HARRIS MINER** recently graduated from the University of California, Berkeley as a double major in History and American Studies. His research interests include the history of food and alcoholic beverages as well as mid-century American culture. He would like to thank Professors Rebecca McLennan and Jennifer Robin Terry for their invaluable guidance and assistance in the completion of this paper.

**ABIGAIL MULLIN** graduated from UC Berkeley in the Spring of 2020 with a bachelor's degree in History and Global Studies and a minor in Theater and Performance Studies. Her research interests include the cultural and religious history of antiquity, particularly that of the Roman Empire. She wishes to thank Professor Diliaana Angelova for her assistance in choosing her topic, and Professor Emily Mackil for her invaluable support and guidance throughout the entire writing process.

**CONOR O'RIORDAN** graduated from the State University of New York at New Paltz in May of 2019 with a bachelor's degree in History and Mathematics with a minor in German Studies. His research interests include classical antiquity and modern German history, especially the intersection of cultural heritage with personal identity. He would like to thank Professor Gatzke for her guidance and Professor Plumly for introducing him to German studies.

# The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

*The Tremblor That Shifted Chinese American Identity*

Caitlin Cozine

Johnny Kan was not a typical American teenager. At nineteen, he toiled long hours at Sam Hing and Company in San Francisco Chinatown as a partner, assistant manager, and English secretary to support his family.<sup>1</sup> Through his business, Kan helped rebuild Chinatown after the 1906 earthquake and ensuing fire destroyed the old vice-ridden enclave.<sup>2</sup> His Americanized business approach included advertising Sam Hing and Company's peanuts in American magazines. Kan's first-generation partners, known as oldtimers, criticized his advertising expenditures, saying, “*Tow-gee jai mo no*” or “The American-born have no brains.”<sup>3</sup> However, Kan defended his marketing decisions by arguing that the oldtimers' refusal to depart from Chinese traditions isolated their business from mainstream American society. Eventually, Kan's Americanized publicity efforts paid off when the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey circus noticed his peanut advertisements in *Variety* magazine and began ordering peanuts in bulk.<sup>4</sup>

Kan's story demonstrated how, during the post-earthquake years, Chinese business owners, along with a new generation of Chinese Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area, led the way in dramatically changing both the public perception of Chinatown and the identity of Chinese Americans. This period marked the transition for Chinese

---

<sup>1</sup> Chinese names are traditionally written as a surname followed by a first name. For purposes of this paper, I will follow the naming practice from the source materials as follows: 1) an Americanized name, such as Johnny Kan, will be referenced by his full name during the first use and surname thereafter; and 2) a Chinese name will be referenced in its entirety to avoid confusion, except where a title is also used, such as Dr. Wong Him. A Chinese named with a title will be referenced in its entirety (e.g., Dr. Wong Him) during the first use and with the title and surname (e.g., Dr. Wong) for subsequent uses.

<sup>2</sup> Johnny Kan, *Longtime Californ': A documentary study of an American Chinatown*, interview by Victor G. and Brett De Bary Nee (New York City: Pantheon Books, 1972), 111.

<sup>3</sup> Victor G. and Brett De Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ'*, 112.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

Americans to see themselves as settlers rather than sojourners in the United States. Understanding how Chinatown merchants and second-generation Chinese Americans spearheaded the growth of Chinatown's economic development enhances our understanding of how the Chinese community became deeply rooted in America after disaster in 1906. This, in turn, altered the way Chinese Americans viewed themselves in the United States. When Kan broke off from Sam Hing and Company, he became a successful restaurant pioneer by popularizing authentic Chinese cuisine. He expanded beyond the oldtimers' solely local Chinese customer base to target Caucasian and Chinese tourists. The younger generation strengthened the economic and social connection to the San Francisco Bay Area, which helped transform the Chinese mentality away from identifying as sojourners in a foreign land and toward a determination to make America home. Kan's achievement with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey was just the beginning of his American success. He subsequently received praise from culinary expert James Beard and his celebrity customers included Frank Sinatra, Marilyn Monroe, and Walter Cronkite.<sup>5</sup> For second-generation Chinese Americans like Kan, the 1906 earthquake and fires accelerated their creation of a unique Chinese American identity. The younger Chinese distanced themselves from the sojourner stereotype and worked toward staking their claims and defending their rights in American society. By the 1920s, the American born Chinese were learning to incorporate their Chinese heritage with their American selves to carve out a unique American identity, which future generations inherited and continued to adapt.

### **San Francisco and Oakland Chinatown Origins**

Although the Chinese were initially perceived as beneficial for American trade and labor contributions, the onset of nationwide unemployment during the Panic of 1873 catalyzed the anti-Chinese movement in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the late 1860s, about 10,000 Chinese workers were discharged upon completion of the transcontinental railroad.<sup>6</sup> Many of them headed west, leading to a dramatic increase in the Chinese population in San Francisco.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Corral, “San Francisco Exhibit Showcases ‘Lost History’ of Famed Restaurant,” *CBS SF BayArea*, February 27, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Yong Chen, “China in America: A Cultural Study of Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943” (dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Helen Virginia Cather, “The History of San Francisco's Chinatown” (graduate thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1932), 27.



Manufacturers hired more Chinese workers because the Chinese were considered diligent and cheaper workers than their white counterparts. Californians increasingly viewed the Chinese as economic threats developing a monopoly over jobs by driving many American laborers out of multiple fields of work.<sup>8</sup> As the Chinese population swelled, the San Francisco Chinatown increased from two blocks holding a population of less than 1,000 to six blocks holding a population of about 30,000 to 60,000 people in the span of the two decades from 1850 to 1870.<sup>9</sup> White workers felt threatened by the dramatic increase in Chinese population, even though the early Chinese migrants had no intention of permanently staying in California. They strove to make money and return to their families in China.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese were physically enclosed in San Francisco Chinatown because they were banned from purchasing property outside of Chinatown and were limited to the boundaries from Kearny To Powell, and from California to Broadway.<sup>11</sup> In Oakland, the Chinese remained in Chinatown by residential segregation because the Chinese lacked the income or power to challenge the system.<sup>12</sup> This isolation further exacerbated the Chinese desire to return to China. The growing Chinese community was completely foreign to mainstream Americans and considered separate from the rest of the San Francisco Bay Area. As a result, the Chinese became easy targets for discrimination when the economy took a downturn. Chinese immigrants were attacked for being temporary laborers having no desire to contribute to the long-term development of American society.<sup>13</sup>

The anti-Chinese sentiment culminated in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The law prohibited Chinese immigration and halted the

---

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Hall Whitfield, "Public Opinion and the Chinese Question in San Francisco 1900-1947" (master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1935), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Whitfield, "Public Opinion and the Chinese Question in San Francisco 1900-1947," 13. Chen, "China in America: A Cultural Study of Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943," 41.; Mary Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 42. The stark growth was also due in part because no other lodging would take the Chinese.; Yong Chen, 39. Chinese also migrated from other states after the anti-Chinese violence in Rock Springs, Wyoming and Seattle, Washington.

<sup>10</sup> Cather, "The History of San Francisco's Chinatown," 3.

<sup>11</sup> David W. Haines and Carol A. Mortland, eds., *Manifest Destinies* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 113.; Nee, *Longtime Californ'*, 60.

<sup>12</sup> Willard T. Chow, *The Reemergence of an inner City: The Pivot of Chinese Settlement in the East Bay Region of the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco, California: R & E Associates, Inc., 1977), 54.

<sup>13</sup> Edwin K. Wong, "Working for a Better Future," interview by Deanna Wong (Asian American Studies 20A paper, University of California, Berkeley, April 28, 1988), 4.

influx of Chinese laborers. This was the first immigration act to exclude an entire ethnic group. It prevented the Chinese from immigrating to the United States and excluded Chinese nationals from qualifying for American citizenship. The Chinese laborers who were already in the United States could not bring their families to America, as wives and children were prohibited from immigration. Jobs became scarcer. Across the bay from San Francisco, Oakland's Chinatown dwindled to half of its 1875 population by the turn of the century.<sup>14</sup> San Francisco Chinatown remained, but the hostile environment reinforced Chinese immigrants' view of their identity as rooted in China, not America.

The two Chinatowns in the Bay Area, located in San Francisco and Oakland, were filled with corruption and vice. Comprised nearly entirely of male workers struggling to make money for their families in China, the Chinese bachelor society carried out notorious gambling, prostitution, opium, and tong wars in San Francisco's Chinatown.<sup>15</sup> Oakland's Chinatown also had brothels and opium; although it was on a much smaller scale than San Francisco due to Oakland Chinatown's dwindling population by the turn of the century. Gambling was the most prominent illicit activity and patrons practiced three different types of gambling in Oakland Chinatown.<sup>16</sup> In San Francisco, many of the stores kept a separate account book to operate a gambling house. Kwong Tai Wo Company was a grocery store that ran a gambling house called Wing Tai.<sup>17</sup> The brothels that emerged were a product of the imbalanced sex ratio due to the large number of men who migrated for work to support their families in China. Immigration policies prevented working Chinese men from bringing their wives into the country, so the ratio of men to women in 1880 was 20 to one.<sup>18</sup> Brothels with Chinese slave girls boosted the attraction of Chinatown as an exotic recreational center. Beginning in the 1870s, opium became a large money maker in Chinese stores, constituting more than one-third of the total trade in the San Francisco Chinatown stores.<sup>19</sup> Tongs arose to control the opium trade as well as gambling and prostitution in Chinese communities.

<sup>14</sup> L. Eve Armentrout Ma, *Hometown Chinatown: The History of Oakland's Chinese Community* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2003), 43.

<sup>15</sup> A tong was an organization founded by Chinese immigrants that were often tied to criminal activity. Estelle T. Lau, *Paper Families* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ma, *Hometown Chinatown*, 49-52.

<sup>17</sup> Erica Y. Z. Pan, *The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake on San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York: P. Lang, 1995), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 167.

<sup>19</sup> Pan, *The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake*, 17.

Tong wars sparked periods of violence in Chinatown when competing organizations fought over who would hold the most control over the illicit activities. Many of Chinatown's problems appeared to have risen from inside the community, which gave more reason for San Franciscans to make the Chinese the scapegoats of society.

By the 1950s, the perception of the Chinese as temporary, foreign workers was reinforced by Paul Siu's *Chinese Laundryman*. Considered a classic work in Chinese American history, it introduced the concept of the Chinese "sojourner." Siu defined the sojourner as a Chinese immigrant who refused to assimilate in the United States because his/her cultural allegiance remained with China.<sup>20</sup> Although he did not define a time period, Siu erroneously inferred that all Chinese in the United States had ties to China. He utilized a single example of someone named Mr. C who travelled back and forth between America and China between 1919 and 1994.<sup>21</sup> Siu then generalized from that one example and labelled all Chinese immigrants as sojourners. Siu never considered how Chinese immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area initially came to work temporarily in America but decided to stay after the 1906 earthquake and fire. Since the 1950s, the sojourner concept has applied specifically to Chinese immigrants and appeared in almost all major works on Chinese Americans. This concept has reinforced the permanently alien stereotype often attributed to Chinese Americans.

The perception of Chinese immigrants began to change in the 1960s when American born Chinese scholars wrote their own social history. In focusing on Chinese organizations (i.e., Chinese American Citizens Alliance), they exposed the social hardships of discrimination and assimilation from a Chinese perspective. Such works included Daniel Chu's *Passage to the Golden Gate*, Victor Nee's *Longtime Californ'*, and Rose Hum Lee's *The Chinese in the United States*. These scholars emphasized World War II as a watershed moment for the Chinese American community. However, the period between 1906 to 1924 is often overlooked as an era in the evolution of Chinese American identity. During these years, business leaders and second-generation Chinese Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area began to see America as home, thereby facilitating the formation of a unique Chinese American identity which fused Chinese heritage with American values. The 1970s brought about an increase in student research that involved oral interviews and archival material. Graduate students like Helen

---

<sup>20</sup> Paul Siu, *Chinese Laundrymen* (New York: NYU Press, 1953), 34.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Siu, "The Sojourner," *American Journal of Sociology* 58, no. 1 (1952), 41.

Cather, Pearl Ng, Yong Chen, Richard Dare, Eve Ma, and Ruth Whitfield explored the economic and social conditions of San Francisco's Chinatown in their theses. In the 1990s, greater emphasis was placed on the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire as these events related to Chinese Americans. This in-depth focus was provided by Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror* and research on Chinese American women conducted by Judy Yung and Erika Lee. To this day, however, Erica Y. Z. Pan's *The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake on San Francisco's Chinatown* is the only book-length study about Chinese Americans and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire.

Despite the increased scholarly attention on Chinese Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area, scholars have yet to focus on the community's transition from sojourner to settler after 1906. I contend that the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and its aftermath were the catalyst that drove San Francisco merchants and second-generation Chinese Americans to rebuild an improved Chinese community in the Bay Area. The growth of both the San Francisco and Oakland Chinatowns accelerated Chinese immigrant community's evolution from sojourners to settlers who were determined to make America their home. My research fills the gap in scholarship by focusing on the period between 1906 to 1924 as the period in which the Chinese transitioned to permanently settle in the San Francisco Bay Area. Although the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire are familiar subjects to historians, the existing scholarship on the subject as they relate to the Chinese is often discounted as a side story.<sup>22</sup> This thesis illustrates that the natural disaster, the destruction of official records, and the subsequent rebuilding of the community were the catalyst for Chinese Americans to transition from temporary workers to long-term settlers. As part of that process, they developed a new identity that merged Chinese

---

<sup>22</sup> Asian American History: Philip P. Choy, *San Francisco Chinatown* (San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore, 2012); Lillian Gong-Guy, *Chinese in San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley* (Bancroft Library: University of California, Berkeley), 2007.; Raymond W. Rast, "The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco's Chinatown," *Pacific Historical Review* 76 (1), February 2007.; Joyce Kuo, "Excluded, Segregated and Forgotten: A Historical View of the Discrimination of Chinese Americans in Public Schools," 5 *Asian Am. L.J.* 181 1998.; Immigration History: Wall text, *Unexpected Opportunity: Paper Sons*, Oakland Museum of California Oakland, California.; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown 1989); Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet* (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1999).; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).; Lucy E. Salyer, *Laws as Harsh as Tigers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

heritage with American values and developed a rising political awareness which would influence generations to come.

### **Earthquake, Rebuilding, and Paper Sons**

In the early twentieth century, crimes, vice, and filth increased within Chinatown, leading San Francisco officials to consider eliminating Chinatown in the Burnham Plan of 1905.<sup>23</sup> The removal of "old" Chinatown was a subject of intense interest among San Francisco's leaders.<sup>24</sup> Mayor James Phelan contracted famous architect Daniel Burnham to beautify San Francisco by widening the streets, which required the elimination of Chinatown. However, it was impossible to remove Chinatown due to the high cost and economic loss.<sup>25</sup> In attempting to destroy Chinatown, it was clear San Franciscan leaders were already trying to displace the Chinese from the city even before the earthquake. The Chinese were an easy target because they were perceived as sojourners with an allegiance to China that would negatively impact San Francisco's development.

The prevalence of anti-Chinese sentiments in San Francisco made Chinese immigrants feel unwelcome. Some of these immigrants began fighting against racial oppression by participating in the 1905 protest against Chinese Exclusion, which provided a period of hope that foreshadowed political activism within the Chinese community after the earthquake. The Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA) and other Chinese laymen in San Francisco helped organize the 1905 Chinese Boycott, a large-scale protest against American goods in China that responded to anti-Chinese events in the United States. The Chinese government played an important role in resisting anti-Chinese attitudes in the United States. Although the boycott did not have an effect on the Exclusion Act, it had a significant impact on the Chinese community in San Francisco as the act of defiance against racial discrimination and aligned Chinese immigrants more with China than America. Such alignment made the immigrants feel acutely that China, rather than America, was their real home.

---

<sup>23</sup> "Tells How to Please the Eye: Architect of San Francisco Beautiful Writes That He Has His Plans Formed," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 11, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>24</sup> "Chinatown Problem Should Be Solved, Say the Merchants," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 3, 1900, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. People like A. A. Watkins, president of the City Board of Trade, articulated the ideas held by most businessmen that the removal of Chinese was greatly desired.

<sup>25</sup> "Chinatown Problem Should Be Solved, Say the Merchants," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 3, 1900, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

The earthquake and fire that shaped the modern-day Chinese American community in San Francisco occurred on the chilly spring morning of April 18, 1906 at 5:13am. The inhabitants of San Francisco were startled awake by the earth violently shaking. In Chinatown, the water mains and gas pipes broke, power went out, and buildings toppled over, leaving concrete chunks and rubble on the ground. Chinatown resident Leland Chin recalled running to his window to see a big crack in the earth on California Street.<sup>26</sup> Hugh Liang, a Chinatown resident who lived in the basement of his store on Washington Street, recalled how the streets filled with people running and shouting, 'aih yah, dai loong jen, aih yah dai loong jen' ("the earth dragon is wriggling").<sup>27</sup> Chinatown residents ran out of their homes to find solace in Portsmouth Square, the city's first public square and civic center that was at the center of Chinatown. Seemingly out of nowhere, terrified cattle began running loose in every direction of town, causing panic among Chinese who considered the appearance of cattle an apocalyptic omen.<sup>28</sup> Hours later at Gough and Hayes Street, a woman was making breakfast when her broken stovepipe caught fire. By 4:00pm, the "ham and eggs" breakfast had led to a firestorm that erupted in Chinatown on lower Kearny Street.<sup>29</sup> The fires were even more damaging than the earthquake, resulting in the destruction of homes and businesses in Chinatown and displaced almost 10,000 Chinese by midnight. *The Overland Monthly* announced, "Fire has reclaimed to civilization and cleanliness the Chinese ghetto and no Chinatown will be permitted in the borders of the city."<sup>30</sup> San Francisco leaders welcomed the end of Chinatown.

After the 1906 earthquake and fire, Chinese immigrants were forced to stand up against efforts to re-implement a version of the Burnham Plan, which sought to displace Chinatown. San Franciscan leaders like Mayor Eugene Schmitz and architect James Phelan wanted to take advantage of this natural disaster as an easy excuse to relocate Chinatown to a less central area.<sup>31</sup> Their efforts pitted them directly

<sup>26</sup> Leland Chin, *Longtime Californ'*, interview by Victor G. and Brett De Bary Nee, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Hugh Liang, *Gum Sahn Yun: Gold Mountain Men* (Brisbane, California: Fong Brothers Printing, Inc., 1987), interview by H.K. Wong, 187.

<sup>28</sup> Gladys Hansen, *Denial of Disaster* (San Francisco: Cameron and Company, 1990), 54.

<sup>29</sup> Pan, *The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake on San Francisco's Chinatown*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre N. Beringer, "The Destruction of San Francisco," *The Overland Monthly*, 1906, 398.

<sup>31</sup> *San Francisco Call*, "No Hope Left for Safety of Any Buildings," April 19, 1906.; "Want to Keep Back Chinese," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 20, 1903, carton 20,

against the interest of Chinese residents, who wanted to rebuild Chinatown in the same location. The Chinese asserted themselves by adopting western ideas such as leveraging political and economic powers. Merchant leaders brought attention to the fact that the Chinese Consulate owned by the Chinese government was located in Chinatown, and the city could not make the arbitrary decision about its future. The Chinese also used their economic power to keep Chinatown in the same location because private landlords who charged the Chinese high rents sided with the Chinese in order to preserve rental incomes.<sup>32</sup>

Ng Poon Chew, editor of the first daily Chinese language newspaper printed outside of China, *Chung Sai Yat Po*, played a crucial role in the fight to rebuild San Francisco Chinatown in the same location. *Chung Sai Yat Po* explained to its readers that white Americans wanted Chinese people to move out of Chinatown even before the fire. The editor urged the local Chinese community to adapt to circumstances in their American homeland and remove visages of traditional Chinese practices, which he stated would help them avoid discrimination by westerners.<sup>33</sup> He specifically suggested that his fellow immigrants: 1) eliminate smoking and gambling; 2) reject the custom of foot-binding for women; and 3) abolish the queue hairstyle commonly worn by male Chinese of the era.<sup>34</sup> Ng Poon Chew stated that the change factors were within the control of the Chinese themselves. This editorial reflected the reformist view that took hold among the Chinese community in an effort to move from Chinese traditions and adapt to American ways. The newspaper unified the Chinese immigrants under the commonality that they were the only people who could read and understand the Chinese language contents. Ng Poon Chew was also a fluent English speaker and stated on behalf of the Chinese, "We intend to fight any attempt to move us, and will not be moved except by official action."<sup>35</sup> The *Chung Sai Yat Po* and its editor played a crucial role in the growing assertiveness of the Chinese and the Chinese knowledge of their rights.

---

folder 24, Him Mark Lai research files, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. Newspapers declared Chinatown "doomed" after its destruction.

<sup>32</sup> "Now Fear That the Chinese May Abandon City," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1906.

<sup>33</sup> Ng Poon Chew, *Chung Sai Yat Po* (Berkeley: C. V. Starr East Asian Library, May 5, 1906), microfiche.

<sup>34</sup> Chew, *Chung Sai Yat Po*, May 5, 1906.

<sup>35</sup> "To Resist Moving of Chinatown", *The San Francisco Call*, May 17, 1906.

The Chinese immigrants persevered in their struggles to keep San Francisco Chinatown in the same location. They refused to move to Hunters Point, or any other remote area, and threatened to leave the city and go to Oakland.<sup>36</sup> Gee Gum, a pastor of the First Chinese Congregational Church in Berkeley and interpreter for all the courts in Alameda county, declared attempts to move Chinatown to Hunters Point or another location a "downright oppression to his race, and the Chinese would never stand for this oppression."<sup>37</sup> In the end, the Chinese stood their ground and kept Chinatown in the same location. The Chinese efforts to retain the chosen location anchored the local Chinese community and marked the beginning of the Chinese transition from sojourners to settlers.

While the natural disasters of 1906 destroyed San Francisco's old Chinatown, it helped create another Chinese community in Oakland. Photographs taken after the earthquake and fire depict the fallen buildings, rubble, and ruins in San Francisco's Chinatown (figure 2 and 3). Businesses and homes were destroyed, forcing the majority of San Francisco's Chinese refugees to take a ferry to Oakland to find housing and work. This exodus was the first time the Chinese moved beyond San Francisco Chinatown in meaningful numbers. Prior to 1906, there were only about 1,000 Chinese in Oakland.<sup>38</sup> However, four days after the earthquake the *Oakland Tribune* reported that over 20,000 Chinese had escaped their burning city by catching the ferry to Oakland.<sup>39</sup> Within 48 hours of the earthquake, more than 4,000 Chinese had arrived needing food, clothing, and shelter.<sup>40</sup> The establishment of businesses and Chinese settlement in Oakland Chinatown, which became a distinct community after 1906, showed that Chinese Americans not only persisted in the post-quake years but also expanded their local community beyond San Francisco Chinatown. The cross-bay migration exemplified how Chinese American persevered against constant discrimination and even natural catastrophes. Chinese Americans further anchored themselves in the Bay Area by establishing ties to the local community in Oakland, in addition to San Francisco.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ralph Henn, "Chinatown in Hunters Point?", carton 20, folder 24, Him Mark Lai research files, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley, 33; Pan, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Pan, 72.; *The Oakland Tribune*, May 10, 1906.

<sup>38</sup> Ann Kellam Manuel, "Chinese in Oakland" (Sociology 191 Oakland Project preserved at the Asian American Studies Library at UC Berkeley, 1965), 1.

<sup>39</sup> "Over 20,000 Chinese Are Now in Oakland," *Oakland Tribune*, April 22, 1906.

<sup>40</sup> Eva Ma, *The Unsung Song: Chinese in Oakland* (Oakland: Oakland Historical Society, 1982), 29.



## Development of San Francisco and Oakland Chinatown Businesses

After the 1906 earthquake, Chinese immigrants began to see themselves no longer as sojourners, but settlers in America. They developed an awareness that identified their home country as the United States and not China. Such a transformation in attitude was reflected in Chinese efforts to replace the corruption that previously filled Chinatown with positive influences. Chinese community leaders collaborated with city officials to improve Chinatown's image. Examples of such collaboration included the Chinese participation in the 1909 San Francisco Portola Festival, which was the first celebration of the city's recovery from the earthquake and fire. The Chinese partook in the festivities with a lively and colorful dragon parade.<sup>41</sup> In addition, local Chinese worked with authorities to crack down on corruption, including burning \$25,000 worth of opium in Chinatown in 1912.<sup>42</sup> These incidents offered proof that the Chinese wanted to restore and deepen ties to the local community, which reflected their belief that they were no longer merely temporary residents passing through America.

Additional evidence of the expansion of Chinese ties to the local community included increased Chinese assertiveness in determining how they wanted post-quake Chinatown to look. The Chinese decided to visually transform their own old neighborhood in San Francisco through new architecture and building design. Before 1906, Chinatown lacked any distinctive cultural décor, paved streets, or modern amenities. The quake and fire destroyed everything, including opium dens, brothels, gambling establishments, and tong headquarters.<sup>43</sup> After the earthquake, the Chinese sought to rebuild Chinatown in a way that would dispel the reputation the community had gained for being overcrowded, disease-ridden den of illicit activities. Mendocino-born Chinese Look Tin Eli was a notable earthquake refugee who spearheaded the movement to rebuild San Francisco Chinatown as an ideal "Oriental City."<sup>44</sup> His plan was enthusiastically endorsed by the San Francisco Real Estate Board who recommended all property owners rebuild their property with Oriental and artistic facades.<sup>45</sup> The two

---

<sup>41</sup> Bob Bragman, "San Francisco's Mardi Gras? Historic photos capture the forgotten Portola Festival," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Judy Yung and the Chinese Historical Society of America, *San Francisco's Chinatown*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Howard Ah-Tye, *Resourceful Chinese* (San Jose, California: Matai Group, 1999), 52.

<sup>44</sup> Philip P. Choy, *San Francisco Chinatown* (San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore, 2012), 46.

<sup>45</sup> Choy, *San Francisco Chinatown*, 44.

blocks between California and Bush Street became the Oriental Bazaar of Chinatown for tourists. The American-born Chinese businessman created the Sing Chong Bazaar, which was decorated with red colors and Chinese motifs, including a pagoda tower at the top of the four-story building. Sing Chong catered to Chinatown tourists through a large assortment of "Oriental arts and antiques" and each customer received a souvenir postcard to promote Look Tin Eli's business and the tourist-friendly image of Chinatown.<sup>46</sup>

Look Tin Eli's design strategy was later replicated in Chinatowns across America, showing the extent to which San Francisco Chinatown influenced Chinese American settlement in other communities. The Orientalized architecture set the trend for other merchants such as Tong Bong, who created a similar pagoda tower at Sing Fat Bazaar, located across the street from Sing Chong, that served as gateways to the Oriental city.<sup>47</sup> Photographs of Dupont Street (now Grant Avenue) taken before, during and after 1906 provided visual evidence of how buildings in San Francisco Chinatown transformed from staid western architecture to the Orientalized design advocated by Look Tin Eli. Before the earthquake, constructions on the street were unremarkable and rectangular-shaped (figure 1). The 1906 earthquake and fire completely destroyed the buildings on the street, including the structures that housed both the Sing Fat and Sing Chong stores (figures 2 and 3). After the rebuilding efforts, the fusion of American and Chinese design elements was evident on the same street, especially in the Sing Chong and Sing Fat buildings. Whereas Chinese features such as pagoda towers with curved roofs topped the Sing Chong and Sing Fat buildings, American elements such as prominent English language signage, streetlamps and even a pole for flying the American flag were part of the newly constructed street (figure 4). In the evening, lights lit up the entire Sing Fat pagoda tower for locals and tourists to admire (figure 5). The photographs offered evidence of how Chinese leaders sought to make the reconstructed Chinatown more appealing. Such efforts reflected the hope of Chinese Americans that they could have a fresh start in their adopted homeland.

After the earthquake, the businesses and exotic designs of the new "Oriental Town" in San Francisco attracted notice from locals and tourists alike. Chinese-owned shops filled with Oriental curios replaced

<sup>46</sup> "Chinese Bazaars Are Radiant With New Goods" *OT*, September 11, 1910, carton 20, folder 24, Him Mark Lai research files.

<sup>47</sup> Judy Yung and the Chinese Historical Society of America, *San Francisco's Chinatown*, (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2016), 45.

opium dens. Although modern scholars may criticize the Orientalized, post-quake Chinatown as commodifying and denigrating Chinese culture, it is important to remember that Chinese Americans had little alternative but to develop creative tactics in order to survive in the United States. There was no safe zone for the Chinese outside of Chinatown's boundaries. The immigrants were refused housing outside of Chinatown and subject to stoning and physical assault.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the Chinese had no choice but to remain in Chinatown and respond to discrimination by establishing businesses, such as Chinese restaurants and laundromats, that did not pose an economic threat to mainstream American enterprises.<sup>49</sup> The Chinese Exclusion Act and Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1923 denied the Chinese citizenship and ownership of property, which further restricted any political, social, or economic mobility for the Chinese. Given these constraints, the Chinese sought to do what they could to establish a foothold in the Bay Area, which was to design a new tourist-oriented Chinatown that allowed them to earn both a livelihood and the goodwill of their local community.

For some Chinese immigrants, rebuilding efforts following the 1906 earthquake and fire helped improve their fortunes. Wong Foon Mon was a master carpenter who had learned his skills from his father, who owned a shop called Shang Git in China. When Wong Foon Mon came to the United States, he brought his carpentry tools with him. The young craftsman used those tools to help rebuild Chinatown stores and continue the Shang Git business in San Francisco. His business blossomed from word-of-mouth and he enlisted the help of both of his brothers, who arrived in America in 1908 and 1911.<sup>50</sup> To this day, Shang Git's carpentry Zork is evident in Chinatown stores with massive counters, heavy slicing tables, pill rolling benches, and storefronts protected by boards over windows and doors during off-business hours. As a result of his business success, Wong Foon Mon was able to have his entire family join him in the United States. This ordinary carpenter used his skills to develop ties to and thrive in his community, thereby becoming one of the first Chinese Americans to fully embrace America as his home.

In order to earn a living after the earthquake, Chinese

---

<sup>48</sup> Nee, *Longtime Californ'*, 60-61. Chinatown resident Wei Bat Liu recalled being chased by a whole gang of boys outside of Chinatown. He was also refused housing on Powell Street three separate times because no Chinese had ever lived there before.

<sup>49</sup> Haines and Mortland, *Manifest Destinies*, 113.

<sup>50</sup> Wong, *Gum Sahn Yung: Gold Mountain Men*, 158.

immigrants also employed American-style marketing to broaden their appeal demographically. Dr. Wong Him was an example of someone who built his herbal medicine business by using western-style marketing techniques to expand beyond a base of Chinese customers. Instead of relying on word-of-mouth references within the Chinese community, Dr. Wong employed testimonial marketing to advertise his services in a magazine with wide Caucasian readership. He posted advertisements in *The Wasp* magazine that entailed positive reviews from white customers.<sup>51</sup> In 1908, the doctor's advertisement in *The Wasp* announced "Success Recommends Dr. Wong Him" and contained testimonials from white customers, even including their names and addresses.<sup>52</sup> Dr. Wong's happy customers claimed that after suffering lengthy illnesses and failed treatments by multiple doctors, they were "permanently cured" by the Chinese doctor (figure 6).<sup>53</sup> In 1912, another one of Dr. Wong's advertisements in *The Wasp* proclaimed "Patients Speak for Themselves" and showed a testimony from R.E. Angle of Petaluma, who extolled the doctor as being responsible for a "miraculous recovery" from years-long illnesses (figure 7).<sup>54</sup> Dr. Wong's marketing approach exemplified the post-quake efforts by Chinese immigrants to broaden their appeal in the local community, which helped ease their transition from sojourners into settlers.

During the post-quake era, resourceful Chinese immigrants used their business acumen to expand their geographic reach beyond San Francisco and further developed another Chinatown across the bay. The growth of Oakland's Chinatown was epitomized by businessmen such as Lew Hing, who employed thousands of Chinese immigrants. Lew Hing was a cannery owner who moved to Oakland in 1907. After establishing his first cannery in San Francisco, the Chinese merchant opened another cannery in Oakland, which had space for a larger cannery.<sup>55</sup> Lew Hing's canned goods included products such as

---

<sup>51</sup> Nicolas Sean Hall, "WASP: Racism and Satire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," *FoundSF*; Dr. Wong Him, advertisement, *The Wasp* December Oct-Dec 1908, 16, Online Archive of California. *The Wasp's* audience was largely middle and working-class Anglo-American readers.

<sup>52</sup> *Dr. Wong Him*. 1908. Chinese in California, University of California, Berkeley Bancroft Library's Online Archive of California. *The Wasp*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Dr. Wong Him Herb Co*. 1912. Chinese in California, University of California, Berkeley Bancroft Library's Online Archive of California. *The Wasp* 57 (1), July - Dec. 1912, 26.

<sup>55</sup> Ma, *Hometown Oakland*, 67.

asparagus, cherries, apricots, peaches, pears, grapes, and tomatoes.<sup>56</sup> This cannery owner was a crucial figure for helping Chinese refugees after the earthquake because he offered employment to these refugees and opened his cannery to the homeless. Even by the 1920s, Lew Hing's cannery was still the largest Chinese owned business in the United States.<sup>57</sup> He also brought a professional aspect to the Chinese American community by serving as the president of Canton Bank which was founded in Oakland in 1907.<sup>58</sup> The initial purpose of Canton Bank was to help San Francisco's Chinese businessmen rebuild after the earthquake because white bankers were reluctant to lend to the Chinese.<sup>59</sup> Lew Hing's story illustrates how Chinese businessmen inspired the Chinese community to begin taking the initiative to establish local ties and settle in the Bay Area.

Another Chinese entrepreneur, Joe Shoong, founded the National Dollar Stores and surpassed Lew Hing to become the richest Chinese not only in Oakland but all of the United States.<sup>60</sup> In a bold and rare move for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shoong often hired Chinese Americans as managers of his National Dollar Stores and white women as clerks.<sup>61</sup> Skeptical observers may see the businessman's hiring decisions as appeasing the racist tendencies prevalent in American society by placing white women in customer-facing functions and Chinese employees in roles behind the scenes. Nevertheless, it was undeniable that the Chinese entrepreneur's business offered Chinese Americans leadership opportunities that may have never been presented to them in mainstream America. Shoong's exceptional success story contributed to the settlement of the Chinese in the Bay Area by providing jobs that offered financial stability, which in turn enabled the Chinese to anchor themselves in the local community.

After the 1906 earthquake, efforts by Chinese merchants helped expand the geographic presence of Chinese Americans in the Bay Area from San Francisco to Oakland. Prior to 1906, there were about 1,000 Chinese in Oakland who were mostly men.<sup>62</sup> Three months after the earthquake, Oakland Chinatown had about 7,000 Chinese residents.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Ma, 48.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>61</sup> Cather, "The History of San Francisco's Chinatown," 76.

<sup>62</sup> Ann Kellam Manuel, "Chinese in Oakland," (paper preserved at the Asian American Studies Library at UC Berkeley, 1965), 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, June 1, 1906.

The earthquake brought population, capital, and skills needed for Oakland to become one of the top three cities in California, comparable to San Francisco and Los Angeles. Less than a week after the earthquake, the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted that a boom was in progress for Oakland after the influx of Chinese refugees.<sup>64</sup> Lon Yoke Wong Fong, or Auntie Fong, as the locals called her, was part of the San Franciscan exodus to Oakland. While most Chinese immigrants founded businesses like grocery stores, laundromats, and restaurants, Auntie Fong established an authentic barbershop and became rooted in the Chinese community as the only female barber. In one interview, Auntie Fong recalled that it was not easy to run the business because, "Caucasian boys used to come down here and throw rocks at our shop."<sup>65</sup> Even when the Chinese remained within Chinatown's boundaries, they were still at risk for racial harassment. Nevertheless, Auntie Fong persevered in her local business, ultimately owning her barbershop on the corner of Eighth and Harrison streets for over 60 years. Her active engagement in the Oakland business community helped her achieve the financial security necessary to send her sons to college and become dentists. Auntie Fong's story demonstrated how Chinese immigrants like herself expanded from San Francisco to Oakland, developing businesses to provide for their families and fostering settlement in the community that helped the Chinese transition from sojourners to settlers in America.

Besides running local businesses, some Chinese immigrants became world-class innovators, as shown by the story of Fong Joe Guey. He became the first Chinese American aviator after the 1906 earthquake and even formed a company in Oakland to design and construct airplanes.<sup>66</sup> Although the earthquake interrupted Fong Joe Guey's aviation career, he persevered and founded an airplane manufacturing company (Guangdong Air Vehicle Company) in 1909 in Oakland.<sup>67</sup> He enlisted the assistance of other Chinese Americans like Oakland Chinese restaurant keeper Chung Doo Nam, who helped the aviator assemble the airplane.<sup>68</sup> Fong Joe Guey was the first person to fly an airplane, not only in Oakland, but all of the west. He was a rare example of a Chinese American who did not limit his career to running a local business catering to Chinese immigrants. His profession as a self-taught

<sup>64</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 24, 1906

<sup>65</sup> Howard Ah-Tye, *Resourceful Chinese*, 110.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>67</sup> Rebecca Maksel, "The Father of Chinese Aviation," *Airspace Mag*, August 12, 2008.

<sup>68</sup> "Chinese Aviator Makes Long Flight," *Oakland Enquirer*, September 23, 1909.

engineer and aviator showed the Chinese community that the Chinese could be innovators as well. Fong Joe Guey served as early inspiration for local Chinese Americans to take control of their own narrative to achieve success in America.

### **Growth of Second-Generation Chinese**

The fires that followed the 1906 earthquake destroyed records held at City Hall in San Francisco, offering the Chinese an unexpected opportunity to claim United States citizenship. A photograph taken after the fire showed the interior of the old Hall of Records, which maintained official city records, littered with burned documents (figure 8). The destruction of official records gave the Chinese an opportunity to create false documentation that allowed them to adopt “paper sons” and “paper daughters” from China.<sup>69</sup> Hay Ming Lee recalled how undocumented immigrants purchased forged certificates and coaching papers about their paper families so that they could go to China and bring back four or five paper sons.<sup>70</sup> The coaching papers included extensive background information about paper families that would-be immigrants memorized in preparation for questions from immigration officials. A sample page from such coaching papers showed detailed questions and answers about a family with the surname Chung, including information about the potential immigrant's age, number and ages of siblings, education level, home village, etc.<sup>71</sup> As a result of the proliferation of paper families, there was a dramatic jump in the number of Chinese who claimed United States citizenship, rising from 9,010 to 14,935 between the 1900 and 1910 census.<sup>72</sup> Before the 1906 earthquake and fire, most Chinese men believed that they would never be able to bring their wives to America. Some men like Lung On and Ing Hay missed their children so much that they saved pictures of children cut from calendar, advertisements, and newspapers.<sup>73</sup> The destruction of records from the massive fire gave these men the opportunity to create documentation that reunited them with their families and helped undocumented Chinese enter the United States as

---

<sup>69</sup> Erika Lee, *At America's Gates* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 189.

<sup>70</sup> Nee, *Longtime Californ'*, 63.

<sup>71</sup> Cowan, Alison Leigh, “A Chinese Immigrant's Coaching Document,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/documents/a-chinese-immigrant-s-coaching-document>; Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 85.

<sup>72</sup> Ma, *Hometown Chinatown*, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 233.

paper sons and paper daughters.

After 1906, the number of undocumented Chinese using falsified documents to enter the United States was so high that one estimate showed if every claim to natural-born citizenship was true, then every Chinese woman living in San Francisco before 1906 would have had to give birth to 800 children.<sup>74</sup> Chinese women also began arriving in the United States in unprecedented numbers. In 1910, 219 women arrived in San Francisco. By 1924, that number increased to 1,893 women.<sup>75</sup> Although the Chinese Exclusion Act delayed the formation of families by Chinese Americans, the destruction of records after the 1906 earthquake and fires created an opportunity for the Chinese to bring paper sons and paper daughters to the United States. This in turn balanced the gender ratio, increased the number of American-born Chinese, and allowed Chinese immigrants to finally form nuclear families in the Bay Area. The development of families changed the demographics of Chinatown from a bachelor society to one that contained women and children. Although some Chinese were born in the United States before 1906, there was no discernible growth in the number of second-generation Chinese Americans until after the earthquake. Ultimately, the increase of second-generation Chinese Americans and their deepening attachment to American society were major reasons for the transition of Chinese Americans from sojourners to settlers in the Bay Area.

Photographs taken before and after 1906 showed the difference in demographics before and after the earthquake. A pre-1906 photograph revealed a sparsely populated street in San Francisco Chinatown with small groups of male pedestrians in traditional Chinese clothing and sporting the queue hairstyle (figure 9). In contrast, a 1910 photograph showed a group of Chinese children dressed in American clothing, with short hair, playing in the streets of San Francisco Chinatown (figure 10). In addition to the group of three boys in the foreground, the 1910 photo also showed the blurry images of women and children in western dresses walking on the left-hand side of the street (figure 10). These images provided compelling visual evidence of how the population of the San Francisco Chinese community changed from a predominantly bachelor society to one that included women and children after the 1906 earthquake. The pictures also showed how the Chinese in San Francisco became more

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>75</sup> Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2008), 201.



Americanized in their hairstyle and clothing choices after 1906, offering further evidence of how the Chinese were adapting and developing deeper connections to their local American community.

The public education system offered second-generation Chinese Americans the chance to gain in-depth knowledge about American values that sometimes escaped the grasp of their immigrant parents. Such knowledge allowed second-generation Chinese Americans to fuse their Chinese heritage with American values, and they became experts at straddling both worlds. In San Francisco, most Chinese students attended the segregated Oriental Public School in Chinatown, which was later renamed Commodore Stockton School on April 1924.<sup>76</sup> Chinese students in Oakland attended Lincoln School on Tenth Street which went from first grade through junior high.<sup>77</sup> After attending American schools during the day, many second-generation Chinese American students went to Chinese-language schools at night at the behest of their parents.<sup>78</sup> Chinese immigrant parents wanted their children to supplement public American education with an understanding of Chinese heritage and language. Knowledge of both Chinese and English allowed American-born Chinese children to bridge the gap between the struggles of their immigrant parents and the trivialities of daily life in America. For example, one Chinatown resident who could read English helped his father with forms and business work as a teenager.<sup>79</sup>

Although many children of Chinese immigrants were sent to Chinese night schools, it was difficult for them to master the difficult Chinese language or develop strong feelings of connection to China, a country they had never seen and only heard about from their parents. Ann Kellam Manuel reported in her sociology project on the Chinese in Oakland that the newspapers like *Chung Sai Yat Po* were primarily read by first-generation Chinese while the second-generation Chinese could speak the language but not read it. One American-born Chinese said of Chinese newspapers, "[W]e like to look at the ads."<sup>80</sup> The American-born Chinese invented their own new language that was a combination of English and Chinese: Chinglish.<sup>81</sup> Due to their exposure to both

<sup>76</sup> Choy, *San Francisco Chinatown*, 169.

<sup>77</sup> Ma, *Hometown Oakland*, 76.

<sup>78</sup> "San Francisco's New Chinese City," carton 22, folder 2, Him Mark Lai research files, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>79</sup> Nee, *Longtime Californ'*, 150.

<sup>80</sup> Ann Kellam Manuel, "Chinese in Oakland," 5.

<sup>81</sup> Kim-Fong Tom, "Function of the Chinese Language School", 558 carton 22, folder

American and Chinese cultures, the American-educated children of Chinese immigrants became the first group of Chinese Americans to develop an identity that was uniquely bicultural.

Despite being the recipients of an American education, second-generation Chinese Americans faced the same racial discrimination as their parents. There was little opportunity for Chinese Americans to leave the confines of Chinatown, either to work or pursue higher education. One Chinatown resident who sought to enroll at San Francisco State College recalled that the registrar told her to not expect employment after four years because she was Chinese.<sup>82</sup> Another student, Alice Fong Yu, was outright refused enrollment at the San Francisco Teachers College until she gave the excuse that she would go to China to teach after she finished school.<sup>83</sup> Upon her graduation in 1926, the same student overcame the odds against her and became the first Chinese American ever hired as a public school teacher at the Commodore Stockton Elementary School in Chinatown.<sup>84</sup> Although she ended up teaching in Chinatown, Yu was actually a unique case because many other Chinese Americans of her generation ended up returning to work at their parents' businesses or other local Chinatown shops. Nevertheless, the new generation of Chinese Americans saw China as a distant land that held little attachment to them, and they were determined to make America home, even if the only means to do so was to make a living through the local ethnic economy.

Drawing upon the knowledge they have of both Chinese and American cultures, the new generation of Chinese Americans expressed their dual cultural identity in creative and unique ways. One manifestation of the fusion of Chinese heritage and American values was through food. For example, chop suey was a well-known Chinese dish that did not originate in China but was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Chinese Americans. This dish became popularized in mainstream America during the post-quake years to become perhaps the best-known menu item in Chinese restaurants.<sup>85</sup> A photograph taken in San Francisco Chinatown around 1910 showed how the famous dish was used to attract non-Chinese American customers via a large

---

2, Him Mark Lai research files, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>82</sup> Nee, *Longtime Californ'*, 154.

<sup>83</sup> K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan, eds., *Claiming America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), 155.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 175.

sign announcing "Chop Suey" in English (figure 10).<sup>86</sup> Other signs of the melding of Chinese and American cultures included an article in a 1923 issue of *Good Housekeeping* magazine, in which Jean Carol Evans taught America's housewives to make both chop suey and chow mein.<sup>87</sup> The growing popularity of Chinese dishes such as chop suey and chow mein boosted business for Chinese American restaurateurs. While such dishes were not authentically Chinese or American, they were representative of the efforts of second-generation Chinese Americans to bring into mainstream America food that blended the two cultures they knew so well. This was an important indicator that Chinese Americans were becoming settlers in the United States, because they were blending together elements of their Chinese and American cultures and introducing these features into their communities.

During the post-earthquake years, the second-generation Chinese Americans also led the way in increasing their community's collective political consciousness. They began to raise their own voices locally to battle injustice and eventually spread their influence beyond the San Francisco Bay Area. One example of their rising political awareness was the establishment of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA) to promote the political interests of Chinese Americans. CACA began as a group called Native Sons of the Golden State in 1895 but became inactive for seven years due to lack of interest. However, immigration issues prompted the revival of the organization under Walter U. Lum and it was renamed CACA in 1915.<sup>88</sup> CACA was not a successful organization until after the 1906 earthquake, when the Chinese in Oakland also wanted to join due to growing concerns about the civil rights of Chinese in America. CACA lodges in San Francisco and Oakland were opened in 1915 and 1917 respectively, with the national headquarters established at 1044 Stockton Street in San Francisco in the early 1920s. These Bay Area locations were important for serving as a political gathering ground for Chinese Americans. CACA became dedicated to defending American citizenship and promoting economic, political, and educational opportunities for Chinese Americans.<sup>89</sup> This organization was important to the Chinese

<sup>86</sup> *Architect of the Orient*, 1910, Online Archive of California.

<sup>87</sup> Jean Carol Evans, "As the Chinese Cook," *Good Housekeeping* March 1923: 67, Haithi Trust.

<sup>88</sup> *Chinese American Citizens Alliance 70th anniversary, May 15, 1912-May 15, 1982*, (Berkeley, California: Ethnic Studies Library), 9.

<sup>89</sup> Chinese American Citizens Alliance National Board, "About Us," accessed April 3, 2020, <http://www.cacanational.org/htmlPages/history.html>.

settlement process in America because it demonstrated how the Chinese Americans came together to claim their civil rights and fight against racial discrimination. In 1913, CACA successfully blocked a California state senate proposal that would have disenfranchised Chinese Americans.<sup>90</sup> What began as a gathering for a small group of Chinese American men in San Francisco became a national organization with lodges in other states like Texas, New Mexico, New York, and Arizona.<sup>91</sup> This showed the extent to which the second-generation Chinese settlement in San Francisco influenced Chinese in other parts of America. The organization also founded *The Chinese Times*, which was different from other Chinese newspapers like *Chung Sai Yat Po* because *The Chinese Times* was the first Chinese newspaper published by Chinese Americans.<sup>92</sup> CACA showed the Chinese community that it was possible to defend their civil rights while simultaneously making positive contributions to American society. For Chinese Americans, organizations such as CACA marked the beginning of increased political consciousness that eventually helped them to obtain the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act that ended the exclusion era.

### Conclusion

The Chinese initially came to California as sojourners, hoping to make money in the gold mines and share that wealth with families back in China. They were considered a cheap and diligent labor force until the economic troubles of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century cast them as an easy scapegoat targeted by white workers. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act began an era of anti-Chinese policies that slowed the Chinese settlement in America. By the time the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire struck, the Chinese had been in California for over 50 years without seriously considering America as home. The obliteration of much of San Francisco created an opportunity for Chinatown businesses and second-generation Chinese Americans to rethink their place in America. Chinese Americans helped build new and improved Chinatowns in both San Francisco and Oakland. In place of opium dens, brothels, and gambling organizations, there were curio shops and restaurants to attract locals and tourists. At the same time, Chinese Americans began to hope that there may be a place for them to call home in the reconstructed landscape.

---

<sup>90</sup> K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan, eds., *Claiming America*, 110.

<sup>91</sup> Chinese American Citizens Alliance National Board, “About Us,” accessed April 3, 2020, <http://www.cacanational.org/htmlPages/history.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Choy, 163.

The destruction of official records from the 1906 earthquake and fire created an unexpected opportunity for more Chinese immigrants to come to the United States. Men, and some women, migrated to America as paper sons and paper daughters. For the first time, the number of second-generation Chinese Americans showed a perceptible increase. Despite the continuation of racial discrimination that relegated Chinese Americans to live and work within Chinatown, the new generation became well versed in both Chinese and American cultures. These second-generation Chinese Americans became experts at navigating two cultures, ultimately creating a unique identity that melded their Chinese heritage and American values. Unlike the generation before them, there was little that linked second-generation Chinese Americans to China. They unapologetically saw America as their home, and they sought to stake a claim to their rights as American citizens through political organizations such as CACA. The rise in political awareness of second-generation Chinese Americans helped them forge a path as pioneers who proudly defended their civil rights while working to make positive contributions to their local communities. Ultimately, the 1906 earthquake and fire unleashed pivotal changes that accelerated the rate at which the Chinese transitioned from temporary sojourners to settlers who declared America as their home.

## APPENDIX



Figure 1. *Dupont Street in Chinatown (now Grant Avenue). 1870. Folder: S.F. Streets - Dupont, San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, AAB-3501.*



Figure 2. *Sing Fat & Co's \$700,000 Store, Chinatown. April 1906. San Francisco Subjects Photography Collection, PC-SF, California Historical Society, PC-SF\_00039.*



Figure 3. *Ruins along Dupont Street. The sign directs patrons of Sing Fat & Co to temporary offices in Oakland. 1906. California Historical Society, CHS2016\_2125.*



Figure 4. *"Dupont Gai" Dupont Street now Grant Ave, S.F. Chinese in California*, University of California, Berkeley Bancroft Library's Online Archive of California. BANC PIC 1905.11321-PIC.



Figure 5. *Sing Fat Co at night. 1913.* Chinese in California Virtual Collection: Selections from the California Historical Society, California Historical Society, North Baker Research Library. FN-32838.



Figure 6. Dr. Wong Him. 1908. Chinese in California, University of California, Berkeley Bancroft Library's Online Archive of California. *The Wasp*, 16.



Figure 7. Dr. Wong Him Herb Co. 1912. Chinese in California, University of California, Berkeley Bancroft Library's Online Archive of California. *The Wasp* 57 (1), July - Dec. 1912, 26.





Figure 8. *Interior on the old Hall of Records after the fire of April 18th, 1906. The white on floor are burned records.* 1906. Chinese in California, University of California, Berkeley Bancroft Library's Online Archive of California.



Figure 9. *Merchants in Chinatown, San Francisco, before 1906.* San Francisco Subjects Photography Collection, PC-SF, California Historical Society. PC-SF\_00034.



Figure 10. *Children playing with pile of sand, San Francisco Chinatown. After 1910.* San Francisco Subjects Photography Collection, PC-SF, California Historical Society. PC-SF\_00032

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### Archival Collections

California Historical Society.

"San Francisco Subjects Photography Collection."

Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley

Him Mark Lai Research Files, 1934-2009

Online Archive of California.

"Chinese in California."

"Guide to the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire Digital Collection."

San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection. "Folder: S.F. Streets - Dupont." Oral Histories

*Gum Sahn Yun: Gold Mountain Men*. Brisbane, California: Fong Brothers Printing, Inc., 1987. Liang, Hugh. Interview by H. K. Wong. 1982.

*Longtime Californ': A documentary study of an American Chinatown*. New York City: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Kan, Johnny. Interview by Victor G. and Brett

De Bary Nee. 1970/1971. Chin, Leland.

Interview by Victor G. and Brett De Bary Nee.

1970/1971.

*Resourceful Chinese*. San Jose, California: Matai Group, 1999.

Fong, Lon Yoke Wong. Interview by Howard Ah-Tye. undated.

"Working for a Better Future." Asian American Studies 20A paper, University of California, Berkeley. Wong, Edwin K. Interview by Deanna Wong. April 28, 1988.

#### Newspapers

*Chung Sai Yat Po* (San Francisco)

*New York Times*

*Oakland Enquirer*

*Oakland Tribune*  
*San Francisco Call*  
*San Francisco Chronicle*

Other Published Material

Ah-Tye, Howard. *Resourceful Chinese*. San Jose, California: Matai Group, 1999.

Beringer, Pierre N. "The Destruction of San Francisco." *The Overland Monthly*. 1906.

Cather, Helen Virginia. "The History of San Francisco's Chinatown." Graduate thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1932.

*Chinese American Citizens Alliance 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, May 15, 1912-May 15, 1982*. Berkeley, California: Ethnic Studies Library.

Evans, Jean Carol. "As the Chinese Cook." *Good Housekeeping* March 1923: 67. Haithi Trust.

Nee, Victor, and Brett De Bary Nee. Victor. *Longtime Californ': A documentary study of an American Chinatown*. New York City: Pantheon Books, 1972.

*San Francisco's Chinatown: An Aid to Tourists and Others in Visiting Chinatown*. Berkeley, California: Bancroft Library, October 1909.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Ambro, Richard and Smith, Nancy. "Chinese in Emeryville." *Emeryville Historical Society*.

Bragman, Bob. "San Francisco's Mardi Gras? Historic photos capture the forgotten Portola Festival." *San Francisco Chronicle*. April 29, 2016.

Chang, Iris. *The Chinese in America*. New York: Penguin Group, 2003.

Chen, Yong. "China in America: A Cultural Study of Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943." Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1993.

Chinese American Citizens Alliance National Board. "About Us." Accessed April 3, 2020.

Chow, Willard T. *The Reemergence of an inner City: The Pivot of Chinese Settlement in the East Bay Region of the San Francisco Bay Area*. San Francisco, California: R & E Associates, Inc., 1977.

Choy, Philip P. *San Francisco Chinatown*. San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore, 2012.

Coe, Andrew. *Chop Suey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Coolidge, Mary. *Chinese Immigration*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909.

Corral, Rebecca. "San Francisco Exhibit Showcases 'Lost History' of Famed Restaurant." *CBS SF Bay Area*. February 27, 2011.

Fletcher, John Dundas. "An Account of the Work of the Relief Organized in Berkeley in April and May, 1906, for the Refugees from San Francisco." Master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley April 1909. Haithi Trust.

Hall, Nicolas Sean Hall. "WASP: Racism and Satire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century." *FoundSF*.

Hansen, Gladys. *Denial of Disaster*. San Francisco: Cameron and Company, 1990.

David W. Haines and Carol A. Mortland, eds. *Manifest Destinies*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2001.

Lau, Estelle T. *Paper Families*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006.

- Lee, Erika. *At America's Gates*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press. 2005.
- Ma, Eva. *The Unsung Song: Chinese in Oakland*. Oakland: Oakland Historical Society, 1982.
- Ma, L. Eve Armentrout. *Hometown Chinatown: The History of Oakland's Chinese Community*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2003.
- Maksel, Rebecca. "The Father of Chinese Aviation." *Airspace Mag.* August 12, 2008.
- Manuel, Ann Kellam. "Chinese in Oakland," Sociology 191 Oakland Project, Asian American Studies Library at University of California, Berkeley.
- Pan, Erica Y. Z. *The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake on San Francisco's Chinatown*. New York: P. Lang, 1995.
- Siu, Paul. *Chinese Laundrymen*. New York: NYU Press, 1953.
- Siu, Paul. "The Sojourner." *American Journal of Sociology* 58, no. 1 (July 1952): 34-44.
- Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2008.
- Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1989.
- K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan, eds. *Claiming America*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998.
- Yung, Judy and the Chinese Historical Society of America. *San Francisco's Chinatown*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2016.
- Whitfield, Ruth Hall. "Public Opinion and the Chinese Question in San Francisco 1900-1947." Master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 193.

# Co-Stars, Cosmopolitans, and Comrades

## *A History of Tiki Bars in the 1930s and 1940s*

Harris Miner

The mystical island of Bali Ha'i, dotted with palm trees and sandy beaches, vibrant flower necklaces and pagan idols, all topped off with an abundance of rum and half-naked native girls—James Michener invented this imaginary island as a central part of his *Tales of the South Pacific* (1947), which loosely chronicled his service in the Pacific and became one of the best-selling musicals of all time just two years later.<sup>1</sup> While modern audiences typically find this fantasy problematic, imagining Polynesia in this way proved immensely popular in the United States from the early 1930s well into the 1970s. Polynesian-themed parties, dishes, and restaurants abounded, and this movement was dubbed “Tiki,” after its most identifiable motif.

But the roots of the Tiki movement, and of the imaginary Bali Ha'i, go back further than Michener, to a series of tropical night clubs that began in the late 1920s and early 1930s. These were the first Tiki bars, and they served as ambassadors of the fantasy Polynesia that became identifiably and inextricably linked to the popular culture of mid-twentieth century America.

American interest in Polynesia was not new in the early 1930s. Since the 1890s, travelling hula troupes had proven to be popular attractions, often performing alongside other so-called “primitive” groups that were common in the vaudeville theater of the period. Native Polynesians also participated in the live exhibitions of Indigenous peoples at the World's Fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where they were dressed in grass skirts and flower necklaces to pose for photographs to be distributed as souvenirs.<sup>2</sup> Starting in the 1910s, there was a Hawaiian music craze, which took traditional Hawaiian music and language and transferred them to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Jason Henderson and Adam Foshko, *California Tiki: A History of Polynesian Idols, Pineapple Cocktails and Coconut Palm Trees* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2018), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits Throughout the U.S. Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 60-61, 69-70, 78-81

stage and the phonograph.<sup>3</sup> By the late 1920s, Polynesia began to feature prominently as a setting for books and films such as *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1928).<sup>4</sup> The time was right for these fundamentally spectatorial experiences to be supplemented with the more interactive experience of a Polynesian-themed nightclub.

The first Tiki bar, Don the Beachcomber, was founded in Hollywood in 1934 by one Ernest Raymond Beaumont Gantt, who later legally changed his name to Donn Beach. Don the Beachcomber was distinct from the other tropical nightclubs of the day because whereas other clubs focused on the spectacle of Polynesian-themed floor shows, the Beachcomber employed no native Polynesians and did not center the experience around performances. Instead, the focus of the Beachcomber bar was the original, Caribbean-inspired rum drinks supplemented with Chinese-inspired dishes all served in rooms filled with dense, Pan-Polynesian decor. These characteristics defined a Tiki bar as opposed to tropically-themed nightclubs in general. Don the Beachcomber became popular with the Hollywood elite, and soon Beach was a minor celebrity himself. Victor Bergeron noticed Beach's success on a visit to Southern California, and when he returned to his own bar in Oakland he decided to imitate Don the Beachcomber. He transformed his bar from the hunting lodge-themed Hinky Dink's into the beachcomber-themed Trader Vic's in 1938. Beach's vision was imitated by many other bar owners over the years, especially in Southern California, but this essay focuses on these two chains because they were the original, most recognizable, and most commercially successful.

Tiki bars were well-known throughout California in the 1930s, but they only really began to spread nationwide in the 1940s, becoming ubiquitous across the country by the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> The combination of continued Hollywood patronage, the war in the Pacific, subsequent tourism in the region, and the push for Hawaiian statehood propelled Tiki bars to a commanding position in both the fine dining and chain restaurant establishments of the day. The chains—and the Tiki movement more broadly—peaked in the 1960s, and became tacky in the

<sup>3</sup> Sven Kirsten, *Tiki Pop: America Imagines its Own Polynesian Paradise* (Cologne: Taschen, 2015), 49-55.

<sup>4</sup> Kirsten, *Tiki Pop*, 258, 60.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50-51.

1970s and 1980s, when there came of age a more culturally sensitive generation that sought to distance themselves from the more problematic types of leisure enjoyed by their parents. By the 1990s, tropically-themed nightclubs were basically nonexistent, until twenty-first century bartenders obsessed with the retro chic brought Tiki drinks and aesthetic back to life.<sup>6</sup>

This paper focuses on the 1930s and 1940s because Tiki bars were seen as extremely trendy when they first debuted in 1934, and they were regularly frequented by some of the biggest names in Hollywood. Historians agree that Prohibition and its subsequent repeal made drinking alcohol more universally acceptable, and more visible, largely because of Hollywood movies. Catherine Murdock and Daniel Okrent both argue that Prohibition amplified and publicized drinking, especially amongst women, and its repeal paved the way for the mixed drink to become America's preferred imbibing method.<sup>7</sup> Andrew Barr builds on this argument by demonstrating that the movies and the expense of illicit liquor during the 1920s reversed alcohol's previous association with the immigrant poor and instead linked the substance to movie stars, fame, and wealth by the early 1930s.<sup>8</sup> Samantha Barbas argues that films underwent a similar process in this period, and by 1930, movies had gone from a working class institution to a mainstream form of leisure with movie stars at the peak of their influence.<sup>9</sup> While Lary May argues that movies in the 1920s established a precedent for instruction on appropriate consumption, Barbas dives deeper and argues that Hollywood purposefully directed enthusiasm for movie stars by pushing celebrity-endorsed products.<sup>10</sup> Tiki bars were both the beneficiaries and synthesis of these two trends, and this paper discusses

---

<sup>6</sup> Glenn R. Carroll and Dennis Ray Wheaton, "Donn, Vic and Tiki Bar Authenticity," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 22, no. 2 (2019): 161-168, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2018.1457528>.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 133-136; Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2010), 211-215.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Barr, *Drink: A Social History of America* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1999), 238-239.

<sup>9</sup> Samantha Sumi Barbas, "Movie Crazy: Stars, Fans, and the Cult of Celebrity, 1910-1950" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000), 86-88.

<sup>10</sup> Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 233-234; Barbas, "Movie Crazy," 22.



specifically how Tiki bar owners actively used this increased clientele and Hollywood's influence to popularize their restaurants.

Additionally, Tiki bars are particularly pertinent to the larger history of the political and cultural incorporation of Hawaii, which went from a fringe territory in the 1930s to the center of the American consciousness with the war in the Pacific in the 1940s. Daniel Immerwahr argues that even today American territory outside the mainland is often not considered to be fully a part of the United States, and Hawaii was only allowed to become a state because of its outsized role in the Pacific Theater.<sup>11</sup> However, Adria Imada points out that the cultural integration of Hawaii with the mainland United States began well before the Second World War, with a series of Hawaiian hula circuits and Hawaiian-themed nightclubs from the 1920s to the 1950s. As she argues, these performances utilized Indigenous Hawaiian bodies to create a sexualized "imagined intimacy" between the United States and Hawaii, which helped foster the cultural exchange necessary for Hawaiians to be identified as Americans.<sup>12</sup> This paper builds on Imada's argument by separating Tiki bars from other Polynesian-themed nightclubs, and demonstrating the ways in which they helped and hindered Hawaii's cultural integration.

Despite the wealth of knowledge on these larger trends, there has been little direct treatment of Tiki bar—this paper addresses that gap. Glenn Carroll and Dennis Wheaton partially address this history from a sociological perspective, and argue that Tiki bars crafted their own kind of authenticity—that is, while they are not authentically Polynesian, they can be perceived by fans as authentic or not to the genre of Tiki.<sup>13</sup> But their modern perspective fails to see that what were perceived as the tenets of the Tiki genre were not so cohesive at the beginning, rather they evolved as time went on. At the outset, Tiki bars' association with movie stars brought in customers by providing an authentic Hollywood experience. As they matured throughout the 1930s, Tiki bars were also perceived as offering an authentic sampling of the world's cuisine, particularly Chinese food and Caribbean cocktails. Finally, in the 1940s, Tiki bars offered American soldiers and their families a taste of the fantasy of the South Seas they had known

---

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York, NY: Vintage Publishing, 2019), 1-21.

<sup>12</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 188.

<sup>13</sup> Carroll and Wheaton, "Donn, Vic and Tiki," 175-176.

before the Second World War, but that was so often shattered by the brutal reality of the Pacific Theater. Thus, Tiki bars were always inauthentic and fanciful by any definition, but this was their greatest asset as it allowed them to adapt to customers who desired glamour, exploration, or nostalgia as Americans looked further into the South Pacific.

The examination of the rise of Tiki bars also provides additional insight into the larger history of America's drinking culture. The preceding thirteen years of Prohibition had established a series of conditions that made 1934 a prime year to open a bar. Though there is some scholarly debate on whether or not Prohibition actually increased alcohol consumption, there is evidence that consumption increased during the 1930s. In the late 1920s, alcohol consumption was somewhere between sixty and seventy percent of its pre-Prohibition level, and this figure changed little in the immediate aftermath of repeal. However, by the end of the 1930s, consumption levels became approximately the same as they had been before the 1920s. In other words, from circa 1934, alcohol consumption grew thirty to forty percent in the next five to six years.<sup>14</sup> Though it is difficult to measure how much of this consumption was in the home versus in public (i.e. at bars like Don the Beachcomber), it seems extremely likely that Beach's business would have benefitted from this trend back towards the previously high consumption levels, considering he opened his bar just as this trend began.

Though Prohibition and its repeal benefitted all bars generally as the public returned to their old drinking patterns, the cultural effect of those thirteen years was perhaps even more significant. Scholars such as Okrent and Murdock argue that Prohibition eroded at the previous stigma surrounding women drinking in public. This phenomenon is important because not only did it essentially double the clientele for bars after repeal, but it transformed the gendered nature of drinking. As Murdock points out, mixed drinks and wine were associated with improper ladies in the 19th century, with bars often having separate entrances for women that led to "wine rooms"—a term that became a

---

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey A. Miron and Jeffrey Zweibel, *Alcohol Consumption During Prohibition* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1991), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w3675.pdf>, 1-2. These conclusions were reached by measuring and comparing the death rate from liver cirrhosis, death rate from alcoholism, first-time admittance per capita to hospitals for alcohol psychosis, and the arrest rate for drunkenness before, during, and after Prohibition.

euphemism for brothels.<sup>15</sup> Working-class men drank beer or whiskey, and if a man ordered something else he might be kicked out of the tavern, or worse. Though wealthier men often enjoyed a variety of labor-intensive, communal punches, they were often prepared by women and thus maintained the association of mixed drinks with femininity.<sup>16</sup> As Okrent notes, the years of Prohibition paved the way for mixed drinks to become more broadly popular, as they became a key method to mask the taste of the poor-quality, adulterated spirits that abounded.<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to imagine that a bar whose sole focus was to serve fruity rum drinks in festive glasses would have been so successful without this crucial transformation in drinking culture.

Beach's choice to focus on rum was undoubtedly also influenced by Prohibition. Rum was the least expensive of the spirits, particularly when compared to other aged spirits such as whiskey, whose domestic production and stock had been largely annihilated by the dry years. During that time, rum also gained in popularity, as it was a convenient liquor to smuggle into the United States from its nearby production centers on the Caribbean islands.<sup>18</sup> Americans travelled to these islands, especially Cuba, extensively during the 1920s in order to enjoy a legal drink.<sup>19</sup> Bacardi and other distilleries gave away thousands of free drinks to American tourists in an attempt to improve rum's popularity, and they succeeded.<sup>20</sup> Basil Woon, a playwright and journalist, declared in 1928 that "Have one in Havana 'seems to be the winter slogan of the wealthy."<sup>21</sup> Business magnates, heiresses, and movie stars flocked to Cuba, associating the island—and its liquor—with fame and fortune.

While it is easy to take for granted the full importance of Hollywood's influence on Tiki bars, when one places these establishments in the grand scheme of film history, it is clear that Beach opened his bar in a particularly receptive context in the early 1930s. When movies were first made en masse, they became associated with

<sup>15</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Murdock, 106-108.

<sup>17</sup> Okrent, *Last Call*, 215.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Curtis, *And a Bottle of Rum: A History of the New World in Ten Cocktails* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 163.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick H. Smith, *Caribbean Rum: A Social and Economic History* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2005), 229.

<sup>20</sup> Curtis, *And a Bottle*, 169, 179.

<sup>21</sup> Basil Woon, *When It's Cocktail Time in Cuba* (New York, NY: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1928), 35-36.

the working-class and immigrants, and were marginalized as such.<sup>22</sup> As the new consumer economy began to crystallize at the turn of the twentieth century, urbanites began to engage in leisure activities that had previously been the domain of immigrants and minorities.<sup>23</sup> In an attempt to shed their association with the lower classes and attract this new class of consumers, studios engaged in a tacit adherence to conventional morality and a general avoidance of controversial politics on screen.<sup>24</sup> In the 1920s, the larger studios consolidated their power by censoring class conflict as well as any challenges to traditional gender and racial roles in their movies.<sup>25</sup> Movies were even seen to promote temperance in the 1910s, providing an alternative to the saloon as a space of leisure. The most ardent supporters of this view even claimed that movie theaters bankrupted saloons, or at least reduced their attendance by half.<sup>26</sup> Even despite frequent challenges from free-thinking actors and directors, the studios successfully removed the working-class stigma that stymied films previously by championing the cause of Victorian morality.<sup>27</sup>

However, despite their best efforts, this righteous regime began to crumble under the pressure of the 1920s, when Prohibition encouraged the dramatization of gangsters and illicit drinking.<sup>28</sup> The economic prosperity of the 1920s led to films that also featured extravagant consumption of both liquor and products, particularly amongst female characters, who would have been the stalwart vanguard of moral respectability in previous years.<sup>29</sup> These films, and the relative expense of speakeasies, began to associate the consumption of liquor with movie stars and wealth, reversing its previous associations with the immigrant poor. According to some estimates, as many as three-quarters of the films produced during Prohibition referred to liquor, and a majority of them featured a protagonist who drank alcohol.<sup>30</sup> Though the virtuous messages faded, the precedent of instruction remained.<sup>31</sup> Thus, when Beach opened his first bar in 1934,

---

<sup>22</sup> Barbas, "Movie Crazy," 86.

<sup>23</sup> Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>24</sup> May, *Screening Out the Past*, 200.

<sup>25</sup> May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 15-16.

<sup>26</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 82.

<sup>27</sup> May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Lary May, *Screening Out the Past*, 200.

<sup>29</sup> May, *Screening Out the Past*, 233-234.

<sup>30</sup> Barr, *Drink: A Social History*, 238.

<sup>31</sup> May, *Screening Out the Past*, 200.

he had a customer base that had been instructed on proper, chic consumption through films for years previously.

### **Tropical Nightclubs: Hollywood's Link to Polynesia**

Donn Beach loved to tell the story of the time he helped Marlene Dietrich out of her dress.<sup>32</sup> According to him, after a drunken patron spilled her drink down her gown, he rushed her to the bathroom to stand guard while she cleaned herself off. She invited him in, and he perched awkwardly over her in the one person bathroom while she dropped her bodice and had him wipe her off—to his *great* delight.<sup>33</sup> While it is difficult to determine the truth—memories blur after a few potent tropical cocktails—the veracity of this story is as unimportant as it is difficult to ascertain. What matters, for the history of Tiki bars, is that Beach ensured that tropical-themed bars and nightclubs became intensely associated with Hollywood during their inception in and around the 1930s. Tiki bars utilized this association particularly effectively, and by the end of the 1930s, Beach was himself a minor celebrity. He used his own fame and his Hollywood connections to cement the Tiki bar as a place where patrons went not only to escape to a tropical fantasyland, but to dine like movie stars.

Extensive worldly travel early in his life inspired both Beach's work in Hollywood as well as his bar.<sup>34</sup> As a child, he was captivated by visits to Jamaica, where he developed a love for sailing. When Beach was sixteen, a friend of his father's needed a representative to keep an eye on a yacht he built in Texas, on its journey to Australia. Jumping at the opportunity, Beach sailed through the Caribbean, the Panama Canal, up to Southern California, and down through the South Seas to Australia.<sup>35</sup> This was in 1929, and he funded his travels on the \$40,000 he made working at his mother's line of boarding houses for the previous four years. This was a surprisingly large sum, considering his father moved the family out to Texas in 1924-1925 to drill for oil, but out of seven wells he dug, six of them turned out to be dry.<sup>36</sup> The family

---

<sup>32</sup> Starr, *Golden Dreams*, 49-50.

<sup>33</sup> "Donn Beach," interview by Alice Sinesky, September 16, 1986, transcript, Watumull Foundation Oral History Project, Hawaii State Archives, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii and Cooke Library, Punahou School, 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> Donn Beach was born Ernest Raymond Beaumont Gantt, but he changed his name to Donn Beach after his restaurant became successful, and so this paper refers to him by his preferred name throughout.

<sup>35</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> Beach, 1.

may have been wealthy enough to sustain such a loss, but there have also long been rumors that Beach learned his rum concoctions during his time as a rum-runner in the Caribbean.<sup>37</sup> If either he or his father were involved in smuggling, it would explain Beach's familiarity with rum and the visits to Jamaica, as well as the impressive success of his mother's boarding houses.

Regardless of how he accumulated his wealth, after travelling for two years, mainly in French Polynesia, Beach met up with his brother Hugh in Hollywood, and that is where his star-studded connections began. His brother worked as a dress extra, and in the late 1920s and early 1930s films about the South Seas were just becoming popular.<sup>38</sup> Hugh introduced him to

Film producers, who were interested in his travels and the curios he brought back from overseas. He was hired as "technical director or technical advisor"—he could not remember—for several films, including *Moon of Manakura* and *The Hurricane*.<sup>39</sup> In a classic example of why one should take Beach's testimony with a grain of salt, "Moon of Manakura" is a song from the 1937 movie *The Hurricane*, and so the latter may be the only movie he did work on.<sup>40</sup> For its part, *The Hurricane* does not credit Beach (nor Gantt, as he would have been known at that time).<sup>41</sup> However, if he did actually do some work for films, then that could explain how he became ingratiated with the cinema elite early on in his career. At the very least, it shows his desire to become associated with film stars even before he opened the Don the Beachcomber in 1934, and the sets of these movies likely inspired the theme of this first Tiki bar.

Regardless of how Beach came to know Hollywood personalities personally, he and his restaurant quickly became associated with various stars by the end of the 1930s. When Beach reopened Don the Beachcomber in its new, larger Hollywood location in 1937, he dedicated a special portion of the backbar to chopstick cases.<sup>42</sup> These bamboo tubes were labelled with the names of established guests—discernable names included Ava Gardner and Fred Astaire—who

<sup>37</sup> Henderson and Foshko, *California Tiki*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Sven Kirsten, *Tiki Pop*, 30-40.

<sup>39</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 3.

<sup>40</sup> Beach, 3.

<sup>41</sup> *The Hurricane*, directed by John Ford (Samuel Goldwyn, 1937), 0:00:00 to 0:01:31, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hRiV1Rv87g>

<sup>42</sup> Starr, *Golden Dreams*, 50.

would have their own personal chopsticks kept in these well-displayed tubes when they were not actively patronizing the bar. Most of the subsequent Don the Beachcomber restaurants featured chopstick cases, always prominently located next to the numerous bottles of rum behind the bar.<sup>43</sup> If one is to believe Beach, "ninety percent of [the] reservations were motion picture people."<sup>44</sup> While it is difficult to verify just how often movie stars patronized Don the Beachcomber, Beach was able to present it in such a way that people believed it, especially in concert with the magazine articles that documented various stars with Beach or at his bar.

Beach became so successful by the late 1930s that he purchased a one acre property in Encino, California, next door to Clark Gable's ranch, where he immediately began to create a fantastical Polynesian "plantation" to host his movie star friends in style.<sup>45</sup> He planted banana trees, put in a pool, and constructed grass-roof huts to provide shade to partygoers. Beach even built a replica of an indigenous New Guinean thatched-roof tree house for guests to climb up into and look out over the party. Titans of the celebrity culture such as Bing Crosby and Reginald Gardiner flocked to these bacchanals, often bare-chested or in festive Hawaiian shirts.<sup>46</sup> Gary Cooper, flower lei around his neck, would chat with Beach while the pig was roasting and other stars and members of the press swam in the orchid-filled pool, picking tropical fruits off of a floating platter.<sup>47</sup> These parties were widely publicized by magazines, and so Beach became famous for his star-studded parties as well as creating a tropical fantasy world wherever he went.

Other, later Los Angeles Tiki bars also capitalized on this association with stardom, with the Luau and Sugie's Original Tropics (both operated in Beverly Hills starting in the 1940s) featuring menus with the names and even faces of movie stars next to their "favorite" tropical drinks. In these cases, the menu's drink section simply featured the name of the drink next to a picture of a star, with their endorsement just above the drink's name (e.g. "Lucille Ball suggests").<sup>48</sup> These drinks often had especially suggestive names, as what midcentury man would

---

<sup>43</sup> Kirsten, *Tiki Pop*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 5.

<sup>45</sup> Kirsten, *Tiki Pop*, 108.

<sup>46</sup> "Life Goes to a Hollywood South Seas Party," *Life*, September 23, 1946, 135.

<sup>47</sup> Kirsten, *Tiki Pop*, 108; "Life Goes to a Hollywood South Seas Party," 136.

<sup>48</sup> Kirsten, 111.

not want to take a sip of "Dorothy Lamour's 'Sarong'" or "Jane Wyman's 'Blonde Bombshell,'" or so the logic went.<sup>49</sup> Women may have also been tempted by these names,

and ordered a starlet's favorite cocktail as a way to demonstrate their own glamor and sophistication, but the sexual nature of the cocktail names suggests that they were created with male customers in mind.

Tiki bars, and especially the Don the Beachcomber chain, became host to myriad Hollywood stars, reinforcing their connection to the Polynesian settings of the movies of the day. Magazine articles pictured Joan Crawford munching on egg rolls, Rudy Vallee chatting with friends, and Franchot Tone inspecting the kitchen, all at the Hollywood Don the Beachcomber.<sup>50</sup> By the 1950s, the Don the Beachcomber chain had become so synonymous with Hollywood that it was featured in the title sequence of *Hollywood or Bust* (1956), starring Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin, where it was included alongside shots of such institutions as the Ambassador Hotel, Grauman's Chinese Theater, and the Beverly Hills Hotel.<sup>51</sup> The Beachcomber chain became not only a way to experience the fantasy of Polynesia across the continental United States, but also a way to experience the glamor of Hollywood across America. As Beach described it, his restaurants were so successful because it was "an era of escape" from the terrible reality of the Great Depression; an escape provided eagerly by both Hollywood and tropical nightclubs.<sup>52</sup> H

Hollywood also played an influential role in the rise of the related but distinct venues dubbed "Hawaiian rooms," after their first incarnation in the Lexington Hotel in New York City in 1937.<sup>53</sup> These rooms would become mainstays of swanky hotels across the nation, where they featured live performances by hula dancers who had been hired and flown in directly from Hawaii.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, examining the Hawaiian rooms provides a useful foil for examining just how vague and inauthentic the Polynesia presented by Tiki bars was by comparison. One outstanding difference between Tiki bars and Hawaiian rooms is that Hawaiian rooms were first tested in Hawaii.

---

<sup>49</sup> Kirsten, 111.

<sup>50</sup> Pete Martin, "Pago Pago in Hollywood," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 1, 1948, 69-70.

<sup>51</sup> *Hollywood or Bust*, directed by Frank Tashlin, featuring Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin (Paramount, 1956), 2:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTNFziyvOzM>.

<sup>52</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 6.

<sup>53</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 168.

<sup>54</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 176-177.



Native Hawaiians, along with other indigenous peoples from all over the globe, had long visited the continental United States to demonstrate their so-called primitive culture at the world's fairs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and pretty *hapa haole* (part-white, part-Hawaiian) women served pineapple at the Seattle (1909) and San Francisco (1915) World's Fairs.<sup>55</sup> By the 1920s, there were calls for hula dancers and musicians to go on tour and capitalize on the growing interest in the South Pacific.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the Hawaiian tourist industry began to boom. The Royal Hawaiian hotel was founded in 1927, and quickly became a popular vacation spot for movie stars such as Mary Pickford, Shirley Temple, and Bing Crosby by the mid-1930s.<sup>57</sup> Even still, the biggest boom of tourism was yet to come until after the Second World War, and there were "fewer than a dozen hotels in Waikiki in the 1930s."<sup>58</sup> Despite this, the 1930s were the first time the bulk of America was exposed to Hawaiian dancers, thanks largely to the motion picture industry.

Much as Beach branched off from his ties to Hollywood, the first Hawaiian dancers to perform in the Hawaiian rooms came from the sets of films. Movies like *The Kamaaina* (1929) and *Song of the Islands* (1934) were shot on location in Hawaii, and allowed everyday Americans to experience the Hawaii of their favorite Hollywood stars. These movies sold well and demonstrated a continental interest in native Hawaiian culture—or at least Hollywood's version of it.<sup>59</sup> In 1938, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios partnered with the Consolidated Amusement Company (based in the Islands) to host a hula queen competition, with the winner given the prize of a trip to Hollywood and a role in several films. One Alice Kealoha Pauole Holt was crowned, travelled to Hollywood, and spent twelve weeks performing in stage and film productions of the movie *Honolulu*.<sup>60</sup> As Imada argues, Hollywood's demand for Hawaiian dancers remained steady throughout the 1930s, and films largely relied on native Hawaiian actors and dancers to promote their home.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Imada, 157.

<sup>56</sup> Imada, 158.

<sup>57</sup> Imada, 156-157.

<sup>58</sup> Imada, 164.

<sup>59</sup> Imada, 163-164.

<sup>60</sup> Imada, 165.

<sup>61</sup> Imada, 165.

These Hawaiian performers, particularly the alluring dancers, were sought after not only for movies, but for live performances as well—most famously in the Hotel Lexington's Hawaiian Room.<sup>62</sup> Once they travelled to the United States, individual dancers were treated as small-scale celebrities, with local newspapers following their travels, identifying their new love interests, and trumpeting their childrens' births.<sup>63</sup> Seeking to capitalize on their popularity, Charles E. Rochester, president and managing director of New York City's Lexington Hotel, opened the Hawaiian Room in the hotel's basement in 1937. The Hawaiian Room was a "supper club," featuring a meal with dancing and a live performance by the native Hawaiian dancers.<sup>64</sup> Much like a Tiki bar, the Room was decorated with palm trees and bamboo chairs, but it differed in that it had a distinctly Hawaiian character, with murals of Diamondhead and Waikiki beach that guests would admire whilst wearing paper flower leis bestowed upon them by the Hawaiian hostess. In just the first few years, the venue had sold over a million dollars worth of dancing and dining, and serviced an estimated half a million customers. Its massive success inspired the opening of copycat Hawaiian rooms in at least ten different cities across the nation, including another in New York City, the St. Regis Hotel's Maisonette Hawaiian.<sup>65</sup> The Hawaiian Room operated until 1966, and remained the gold standard for live Hawaiian entertainment in the continental United States.<sup>66</sup>

However, the Hollywood connection goes back even deeper than either Don the Beachcomber or the Lexington Hotel Hawaiian Room. The Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel, most well-known as the site of Robert Kennedy's assassination in 1968, opened the Cocoanut Grove nightclub on April 21, 1921, three months after the opening of the hotel itself. The Cocoanut Grove featured Moroccan-style gold leaf and palm-etched doors that gave way to rows of white table clothed-tables, occasionally punctuated by papier-mâché palm trees (leftover props from the 1921 film *The Sheik*), complete with hanging coconuts and stuffed monkeys with

---

<sup>62</sup> "Hawaiian Room" refers to the Hotel Lexington venue, while "Hawaiian rooms" refers to this category of nightclubs in general.

<sup>63</sup> Imada, 174.

<sup>64</sup> Imada, 168.

<sup>65</sup> Imada, 176-177.

<sup>66</sup> Imada, 168.

electrified eyes, all under a ceiling crafted so that the lights looked like stars in the night sky. Thenightclub quickly became a favorite spot amongst the Hollywood elite.<sup>67</sup>

Though very little has been written about the day-to-day events at the Cocoanut Grove, at least three films were made about the nightclub in the 1930s, demonstrating the nightclub's considerable popularity and fame. Fred MacMurray starred in *Cocoanut Grove* (1938), a comedy surrounding a Chicago band leader's cross-country trip to fulfill his dream of performing at the legendary Los Angeles venue.<sup>68</sup> A Warner Brothers Merrie Melodies short, animated film titled *The Coo-Coo Nut Grove* (1936) was set in the famous nightclub, with caricatures of stars such as a horse named Miss Heartburn (Katherine Hepburn) and Tarzan (Johnny Weissmuller, who had played the character in the 1932 film *Tarzan the Ape Man*).<sup>69</sup> Within a span of less than seven minutes, twenty-one celebrities appear as caricatures<sup>70</sup>—and are thus implied to be regular guests of the Cocoanut Grove.

Yet the third, and earliest, film is the first time we evidence of real or imagined Polynesian performers at the club. *Star Night at the Cocoanut Grove* (1934), a twenty minute short film released the same year the original Don the Beachcomber opened, was shot inside the Cocoanut Grove nightclub, and highlighted various performers (including Bing Crosby) who sang and danced for various celebrities in the audience, such as Gary Cooper and Mary Pickford.<sup>71</sup> The film also featured a fashion show, with models dressed up in costumes stylized like certain eras, such as Ancient Egypt, the Middle Ages, and the Gay Nineties.<sup>72</sup> The last quarter of the film was dedicated to Polynesian dancing, with Ted Fiorito performing his new hit "King Kamehameha," accompanied by a hula dancer, in a fake grass skirt and wearing paper leis.<sup>73</sup> As the song progresses, the film cuts to a shot of the beach, with

<sup>67</sup> Margaret Burk, *Are the Stars Out Tonight?: The Story of the Famous Ambassador and Cocoanut Grove* (Santa Ana, CA: Forum Press, 2003), 39.

<sup>68</sup> *Cocoanut Grove*, directed by Alfred Santell (Paramount Pictures, 1938), VHS.

<sup>69</sup> *The Coo-Coo Nut Grove*, directed by Friz Freleng (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1936), <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x66qocw>.

<sup>70</sup> In order of appearance: Ben Bernie, Walter Winchell, Katharine Hepburn, Jean Harlow, Bette Davis, Ned Sparks, Hugh Herbert, W. C. Fields, Clark Gable, Groucho and Harpo Marx, Johnny Weissmuller, Lupe Vélez, Mae West, Lionel and John Barrymore, Laurel and Hardy, Edward G. Robinson, Fred Astaire, and George Raft.

<sup>71</sup> *Star Night at the Cocoanut Grove*, directed by Louis Lewyn (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1934), 0:3:30 to 0:12:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoMzQxPfcGk>.

<sup>72</sup> *Star Night*, 0:4:30 to 0:8:59.

<sup>73</sup> *Star Night*, 0:16:03 to 0:16:40.

palm trees swaying, and sarong-clad dancers fanning a singing puppeteer with palm fronds.<sup>74</sup> The song and the end of the film, featuring a final shot of the cigarette girl, dressed like a hula dancer, lighting a man's cigarette and smiling at the camera (she is briefly visible earlier in the film, as well).<sup>75</sup> This may well be the first time the connection between Hollywood and faux-Polynesian dancers was caught on screen.

Though it is unknown how commonly these pseudo-Polynesian dancers appeared, it seems likely that the shows at the Cocoanut Grove inspired the Hawaiian Rooms and perhaps even Tiki bars. While the aforementioned cigarette girl and dancers on the beach are clearly white, the hula dancer is identified as one Miss Raquel Torres.<sup>76</sup> Thus, it seems likely that none of the dancers were ethnically Polynesian, unlike the Hawaiian room performers that were brought over in the late 1930s.<sup>77</sup> However, the Cocoanut Grove's emphasis on live performance parallels the Hawaiian rooms. At least one former patron of the nightclub recalls going to a "Greek night" periodically, where the guests would dress up in togas—suggesting that theme nights not only existed, but would cycle back occasionally.<sup>78</sup> Considering the nightclub's sizeable fame, and the fact that it was located within the rival Ambassador Hotel, it is likely that Charles Rochester (the president and managing director of the Hotel Lexington) would have been at least aware of any Polynesian shows at the hotel, which could have inspired the original Hawaiian Room.<sup>79</sup> Considering the timeline and Beach's connections to the Hollywood frequenters of the nightclub, he may also have been inspired to create a lower-brow version of the nightclub for middle and lower class patrons, without the central feature of a nightly performance.

But the crucial aspect that both the Cocoanut Grove and Don the Beachcomber shared was the perception that they regularly hosted celebrities in person, as opposed to the less visible part Hollywood had played in popularizing the Hawaiian rooms. While the articles written

<sup>74</sup> *Star Night*, 0:17:48.

<sup>75</sup> *Star Night*, 0:19:00, 0:3:46.

<sup>76</sup> *Star Night*, 0:16:20.

<sup>77</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 168-169.

<sup>78</sup> Corky Hale Stoller, "Playing with the Cocoanut Grove Orchestra," Los Angeles Conservancy, last modified August 12, 2014, <https://www.laconservancy.org/stories/playing-cocoanut-grove-orchestra>.

<sup>79</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 168.

about their star-studded customers no doubt made these establishments famous, the idea that one could dine like their favorite stars was what brought people into the restaurant. As Samantha Barbas argues, fans in the 1920s and 1930s sought to make movies the basis of "lived experiences," through social events, fan clubs, and consumption.<sup>80</sup> Faced with a tidal wave of aspiring actors, movie studios in this period tried to redirect their energy into emulating their favorite stars through purchasing celebrity-endorsed products.<sup>81</sup> Beach recognized this desire, perhaps from his time working in Hollywood, and took full advantage by offering fans the ability to dine like their favorite star. Other Tiki bars took this further, allowing fans to specifically select their idol's favorite dish or drink—all reinforced by magazine articles filled with photographs of celebrities enjoying themselves in the exact same manner, oftentimes in the exact same spot. The Hawaiian rooms did not make this connection quite so explicit, and thus were unable to capitalize on this Hollywood connection to the same degree. The Cocoanut Grove and the Hawaiian rooms were also unable to expand independently of their hotels, allowing Tiki bars to overshadow them by latching onto the momentum behind Hollywood consumption in the 1930s.

### **Polynesia without the Polynesians**

The major purpose of the Hawaiian rooms was not however, to offer patrons a Hollywood experience, but rather to sell Hawaii to trepidatious Americans. As Imada argues, Hawaiian dancers went to the mainland hoping to change how most Americans viewed Hawaii. Because of labor conflicts throughout the 1930s and the sensationalized Thalia Massie rape trial of 1931—when several native Hawaiian men were acquitted on the charge of gangraping a white woman—many white Americans were distrustful of native Hawaiians.<sup>82</sup> Tutas Wilson, one of the Hawaiian performers, said that "...In those days the 1930s and 1940s [sic] they [Americans] thought we were gorillas...on the train they were checking to see if we were colored."<sup>83</sup> To combat this prejudice, the dancers viewed their Hawaiian room shows as "...selling Hawai'i in a nice way."<sup>84</sup> Wilson believed the dancers were instructing mainland

---

<sup>80</sup> Barbas, "Movie Crazy," 12.

<sup>81</sup> Barbas, 11-12

<sup>82</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 170-174.

<sup>83</sup> Imada, 175-176.

<sup>84</sup> Imada, 174.

Americans in Hawaiian culture and dispelling stereotypes. But Imada points out that in actuality, these dancers were utilizing these stereotypes to the political advantage of Hawaii—through their exposed bodies and sexualized movements, the dancers served as an allegory for a friendly Hawaii not yet present with in the mainstream American consciousness.<sup>85</sup>

Tiki bars, then, are necessarily a separate category because they featured neither native Hawaiian employees nor live performances. Don the Beachcomber featured no live music or performances—contrary to both the Coconut Grove and the Hawaiian rooms, where live music and exotic floor shows were the main draw for customers. When a journalist visited Don the Beachcomber in 1948, the current manager told him emphatically that “the Beachcomber has never had an orchestra.”<sup>86</sup> Beach considered “an orchestra tootling away [to be] a disturbing element,” preferring the gentle melodies of an unseen record player.<sup>87</sup> It is interesting that Beach was so opposed to live music and shows when they had proven to be profitable for both the Coconut Grove and the Hawaiian rooms, and when these were the very basis of the former’s connection to Hollywood stars. Perhaps the strength of his opposition had something to do with being unable to afford the expense of Hawaiian performers, who could earn sixty to one hundred dollars a week.<sup>88</sup> Beyond this, Beach’s opposition to live performance speaks to his presentation of his restaurant as an interactive escape where customers are immersed in Polynesian surroundings, rather than the spectatorial experience of watching the indigenous performers at the Hawaiian rooms or in prior World Fairs. While other Tiki bars may have featured more prominent displays of music or live performance, such details were not generally commented on in the sources that survive.

Still, Tiki bars also used the sexualization of native women to sell the idea of Polynesian Polynesian paradise. Contrary to popular belief, mugs or decor featuring Tikis did not appear until the early 1950s, and prior to this one of the most common motifs on Tiki mugs and paraphernalia was the *wahine*, a young woman who typically wore a grass skirt and lei over her bare breasts. This sensual motif decorated all sorts of Tiki bar paraphernalia, including advertisements, cocktail

---

<sup>85</sup> Imada, 174-176.

<sup>86</sup> Martin, “Pago Pago in Hollywood,” 79.

<sup>87</sup> Martin, 79.

<sup>88</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 174.

napkins, menu covers, and souvenir mugs.<sup>89</sup> Among the more popular souvenirs were matchbooks depicting a *wahine* from the waist up, with "embossed breasts" that were punched out of the otherwise flat surface so that they were tactile.<sup>90</sup> Rather than experience the exotic lady from afar, these objects allowed customers to reach out and touch her, and indeed even to own her. Though Hawaiian rooms no doubt objectified their dancers, the cultural forms they presented still involved actual Polynesians. The commodification of Polynesian culture created by Tiki bars removed living Polynesians from the equation entirely, replacing them with fantasized, sexualized caricatures that better fit within the narrative of the tropical wonderland.

The erasure of native Polynesians was not just limited to Tiki bars. A 1939 menu from the Cocoanut Grove served the continental cuisine typical of the day, with no cocktail list—implying that customers would simply ask for their typical drink of choice by name.<sup>91</sup> A Cocoanut Grove menu from 1957 features the same continental cuisine as it did twenty years prior, mentioning only that rather generic "cocktails" are part of the first course. However, this menu has a decidedly Middle Eastern theme, with a turban-clad sultan-esque figure standing in front of a dozen or so multi-colored minarets, no doubt hinting at the club decor's "Arabian" roots.<sup>92</sup> And so it seems that the multi-ethnic experience of the Cocoanut Grove did not extend to the menu beyond aesthetics, and certainly did not feature any Polynesian dishes, pretend or otherwise.

However, early descriptions of Hawaiian room menus tell a different story. In 1938, a New York Restaurant reviewer captured the allure of the Hawaiian room when he wrote this glowing review:

The Hawaiian Room...has all the tricks even down to swinging the Island's [sic] music for dancing. They have native dancers as part of the show and native dishes are on the menu. It's become very popular and well worth a visit, if you like to be taken out of yourself and

---

<sup>89</sup> Kirsten, *Tiki Pop*, 150-160.

<sup>90</sup> Kirsten, 156.

<sup>91</sup> "Cocoanut Grove, The Los Angeles Ambassador, Dinner Menu," August 31, 1939, Culinary Institute of America, <http://ciadigitalcollections.culinary.edu/digital/collection/p16940coll1/id/6038>.

<sup>92</sup> "Cocoanut Grove, The Ambassador, Menu," April 24, 1957, Culinary Institute of America, <http://ciadigitalcollections.culinary.edu/digital/collection/p16940coll1/id/4469>.

transported, by the aid of a few drinks, to the dreamy romantic beach at Waikiki. I can't vouch for the authenticity of the food and drinks, but their names are sweet to the ear: Okolehau Punch, (60¢), Kara Bowl, served with Champagne for four persons (\$4.50), Honolulu Collins...Io Kamanu Puleha Pakaai, Uwala Lili (really grilled salmon steak, parsley potatoes and poi 95¢), Moa Oma Me Leko Me Palaoa, Poached Young Chicken, Hawaiian manner.<sup>93</sup>

This menu featured a number of native Hawaiian ingredients as well as some Hawaiian-themed dishes, and thus was a blend of real and imagined Polynesian food.

However, this presentation of Hawaiian food was always featured alongside the continental cuisine typical of the period, and the most authentically Hawaiian aspects of the menu seem to have died out almost immediately. A 1940 menu from the Hotel Lexington Hawaiian Room featured none of dishes and only one of the drinks described by the aforementioned reviewer, and there were few "authentic" Hawaiian ingredients included. Fresh pineapple and Kona coffee made an appearance, but the only Hawaiian-themed entrée was the "Kupa-Moya-Royal Hawaiian," made with "breast of chicken sauté, cream sauce, cocoanut milk, green leafs [sic], fried banana."<sup>94</sup> Tropical cocktails were separated into "original, refreshing cocoanut drinks" and "Hawaiian" cocktails. The drink that survived from 1938, the "Okolehao Punch," a mixture of "gin, cocoanut milk, and ? ?" [sic], apparently became a single-serve drink, as it was listed between two other coconut cocktails with a single price (60¢) at the top.

*Okolehao* is an actual native Hawaiian spirit, made from ti root, and so the name of the punch makes one wonder if the original recipe used the spirit or had always substituted gin.<sup>95</sup> The Hawaiian cocktail section featured four drinks, three of which were apparently "Courtesy Royal Hawaiian Hotel, Honolulu," as marked by asterisks. The fourth,

<sup>93</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 168.

<sup>94</sup> "Hawaiian Room," September 1, 1940, New York Public Library, [http://menus.nypl.org/menu\\_pages/60283/explore](http://menus.nypl.org/menu_pages/60283/explore).

<sup>95</sup> Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Pacific Island Cookbook: With Side Trips to Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, Mexico, and Texas* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1968), 21.



the "Hellzapoppin Cocktail,"<sup>96</sup> was undoubtedly named after the Broadway musical of the same year, which even featured some of the Lexington Hotel Hawaiian Room dancers.<sup>97</sup> In short, when compared to Tiki bar menus of the same period, it is important to note that of the Hawaiian Room's two-page menu, with many dozens of items, only ten are even thematically Hawaiian or Polynesian.

Another contemporary Hawaiian room menu also features a surprising lack of Hawaiian dishes. The Hawaiian Blue Room, at the New Orleans Roosevelt Hotel, featured a 1939 menu with only two Polynesian-themed items: "Breast of Chicken Saute, [sic] Hawaiian," and "Hawaiian Cocoanut Delight."<sup>98</sup> These two dishes are only Hawaiian in the sense that they use tropical fruits—they even lack the Polynesian-language titles of the dishes featured at the Hotel Lexington Hawaiian Room.<sup>99</sup> Notably, neither menu offers the poi cited by the aforementioned restaurant reviewer, and the native Hawaiian dancers who performed in these shows often lamented the lack of this staple food throughout the 1930s and 1940s, even going so far as to create an imitation poi from fermented wheat flour.<sup>100</sup> Despite being a central theme to the décor and the show, Hawaiian food—authentic or imagined—is only a minor feature of the Hawaiian room menus that have survived.

This is particularly noteworthy when one considers that Hawaiian rooms were typically not the only restaurants within a hotel. The Roosevelt Hotel also had a "Coffee Shop," and one of its 1939 menus advertised dinner and cocktail options, but did not feature any Polynesian-themed items.<sup>101</sup> The Hotel Lexington also featured the Silver Grill, which served continental cuisine with nary a tropical dish nor cocktail in sight.<sup>102</sup> San Francisco's St. Francis hotel, also home to a

---

<sup>96</sup> "Hawaiian Room."

<sup>97</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 176.

<sup>98</sup> "Hawaiian Blue Room, Roosevelt Hotel, Dinner Menu," November 10, 1939, Culinary Institute of America, <http://ciadigitalcollections.culinary.edu/digital/collection/p16940coll1/id/2695>.

<sup>99</sup> "Hawaiian Room."

<sup>100</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 168, 205-206.

<sup>101</sup> "Coffee Shop, The Roosevelt, Dinner Menu," November 14, 1939, Culinary Institute of America, <http://ciadigitalcollections.culinary.edu/digital/collection/p16940coll1/id/12425>.

<sup>102</sup> "Hotel Lexington," December 20, 1934, New York Public Library, [http://menus.nypl.org/menu\\_pages/61672/explore](http://menus.nypl.org/menu_pages/61672/explore).

Hawaiian room, featured the Mural Room restaurant, which again served continental cuisine.<sup>103</sup> Thus, patrons seeking a less exotic experience already had an option for more familiar cuisine. This suggests that the appeal of the Hawaiian rooms was the performances, not the so-called Hawaiian dishes that were common in Tiki bars.

Even still, if there was poi on the menu once, the Hawaiian rooms were far closer to serving authentic Hawaiian fare than Tiki bars ever were. While no surviving Don the Beachcomber nor Trader Vic's menus from the 1930s have been found, both proprietors described their food as Chinese. Don the Beachcomber started as only a bar, with drinks inspired by Beach's travels in Jamaica, despite their Polynesian names.<sup>104</sup> When the new Hollywood location was opened in 1937, Beach readily admitted that the restaurant served "what we called Polynesian food or South Seas Island food, which is actually my interpretation of Chinese cooking."<sup>105</sup> This implicit double-meaning is key to understanding what components actually constitute Tiki cuisine: Caribbean-inspired rum drinks, Chinese-American food, and generic, Pan-Polynesian aesthetics. Perhaps the best, most concise summary of this oxymoronic cuisine was given by Beach himself, when he described the food he served at a special luau for the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in 1959: "I had a Polynesian menu. Mostly Chinese food. It was my rendition."<sup>106</sup>

A 1941 Don the Beachcomber menu reflects this assessment. The first noticeable difference is that the very first page of the menu is dedicated to over fifty original rum drinks, listed just by name and sometimes by picture with no ingredients. The drinks often have Polynesian-sounding names, such as the "Nui Nui," "Sumatra Kula," and "Puka Punch." The next page is a laundry list of Chinese-sounding dishes, such as "Shrimp Chow Dun" and "Chow Gai Pin," a far cry from the continental cuisine of the previous menus. The whole menu is wrapped in an elaborate graphic, with the front cover depicting the South Seas, with lines linking various islands in the Pacific to Hollywood, and thus to Don the Beachcomber. This is revealing,

---

<sup>103</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 176; "Mural Room, Hotel St. Francis, Dinner Menu," September 8, 1936, Culinary Institute of America, <http://ciadigitalcollections.culinary.edu/digital/collection/p16940coll1/id/5702>.

<sup>104</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 4.

<sup>105</sup> Beach, 6.

<sup>106</sup> Beach, 15.

because this menu is actually from the Chicago location of the chain, but the lines stop at Hollywood, reinforcing the chain's identity with the film industry. Moreover, the lines do not reach all the way to Asia, severing the connection between the sometimes explicitly stated Chinese food (i.e. "Chinese fried rice") and the actual country on the map. The back cover depicts the Caribbean sea, with a treasure chest filled with gold and rum alongside islands flying the flags of their colonizers. The argument here is clear: the foods and the drinks the customer is about to consume are foreign but friendly, connected to the glamour of Hollywood and vetted by European sensibility.<sup>107</sup>

Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron, whose Trader Vic's empire would eventually surpass Beach's, describes his early menu and thought process in similar terms to Beach. Bergeron operated a small, hunting lodge-themed bar called Hinky Dink's, in Oakland, California, in the 1930s. In the winter of 1937, he travelled to the Caribbean, where he sampled many tropical drinks, most notably the famous daiquiri at the La Florida Hotel in Havana, Cuba. This trip inspired him, in 1938, to transform his hunting lodge-themed bar Hinky Dink's into a Polynesian-themed bar, despite having never been to Polynesia, which he dubbed Trader Vic's.<sup>108</sup> Thus, Bergeron's drinks were also rum-based and Caribbean-inspired, and he began to serve Chinese food with the help of his employee Paul Wong, who introduced him to Chinese cooking methods and restaurants in San Francisco's Chinatown.<sup>109</sup> Thus, Beach's enterprise served as the aesthetic inspiration for the Trader Vic's chain, but the two both looked abroad, likely in the same places, to formulate Tiki cuisine.

Though Beach was open about the Caribbean inspiration for his cocktails, he was intensely secretive about his exact recipes.<sup>110</sup> At any given Don the Beachcomber location, there was only one bartender allowed to mix the signature Beachcomber drinks, and even this trusted employee was not privy to the full recipe. Instead, he assembled drinks from portions of coded bottles filled with premixed ingredients—a

---

<sup>107</sup> "Don The Beachcomber," 1941, New York Public Library, [http://menus.nypl.org/menu\\_pages/54806/explore](http://menus.nypl.org/menu_pages/54806/explore).

<sup>108</sup> Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron, *Frankly Speaking: Trader Vic's Own Story* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1973), 42-45.

<sup>109</sup> Bergeron, *Frankly Speaking*, 44-45.

<sup>110</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 4.

guarantee that Beach's signature drinks could only be had at a Don the Beachcomber bar.<sup>111</sup> Unlike Beach, Bergeron openly provided the recipes for his drinks in a series of cocktail guides he wrote from the 1940s-1970s, which reveal just how inspired Tiki cocktails were by the Caribbean. In some cases, the references to the Caribbean islands were overt, as in the case of drinks such as the "Barbados Red Rum Swizzle" or "Puerto Rico Swizzle."<sup>112</sup> Others were rebranded as Polynesian to fit within the Tiki theme, such as the "Tahitian Rhom Punch."<sup>113</sup> This particular recipe is nearly identical to that of the Ti Punch, the de facto national cocktail of Martinique.<sup>114</sup> Bergeron even called for Martinique rum by name in his recipe.<sup>115</sup> Not only were some Tiki cocktails inspired by the Caribbean, but others were copied wholesale and renamed to fit the Polynesian theme.

Interestingly, Bergeron was aware of native Hawaiian ingredients but refused to use them because he considered them to be worse quality. In the "Haote Pikia" cocktail, Bergeron called for *okolehao*, a Ti root spirit with origins in Hawaii.<sup>116</sup> But in his description of the cocktail, he derided the spirit, saying "it tastes like hell, but it has background and authenticity...I can't see a great deal of merit in it."<sup>117</sup> In one of his later books, Beach was similarly unimpressed with the rum produced in Hawaii, describing it as "tast[ing] like the inside of a Greek wrestler's hatband."<sup>118</sup> These two instances demonstrate Bergeron's

---

<sup>111</sup> Martin, "Pago Pago in Hollywood," 81.

<sup>112</sup> Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food and Drink* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1946) 50-51, 63.

<sup>113</sup> Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food*, 68. This cocktail consisted of a shot of Martinique rum, a squeeze of lime, a touch of sugar, and a grating of nutmeg.

<sup>114</sup> Noelle Chun, "Make the Perfect 'Ti Punch with Help From Bar Agricole's Thad Vogler," *San Jose Mercury News*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2016/08/12/make-the-perfect-ti-punch-with-help-from-bar-agricoles-thad-vogler/>. Despite the name, the drink has no relation to the Ti plant commonly cultivated in Polynesia.

<sup>115</sup> Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food*, 68.

<sup>116</sup> Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food*, 68. The cocktail consisted of equal parts *okolehao* and Puerto Rican rum with a dash of bitters, all topped off with lemon soda. The name is likely meaningless, Polynesian-sounding nonsense; Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Pacific Island*, 21.

<sup>117</sup> Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food*, 55.

<sup>118</sup> Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Rum Cookery and Drinkery* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1974), 13.

familiarity with Hawaiian-produced ingredients and his conscious decision to largely exclude them from his tropical fantasyland.

Bergeron was also more opinionated about food than Beach, whose focus centered more on his original rum cocktails. Bergeron considered so-called "primitive foods [including those from Polynesia]...charming," but thought that they needed to be adjusted for the American palette.<sup>119</sup> Bergeron saw nothing wrong with his tinkering, as he stated that "dishes have been changed to suit American tastes for the simple reason that my customers, for the most part, like good food, well cooked and seasoned, but their taste buds aren't educated enough to take foreign dishes first hand with appreciation."<sup>120</sup> He also saw himself as improving upon indigenous dishes, as their construction was often overly dependent on tradition and historical poverty.<sup>121</sup> Bergeron also saw these different islands as overly tied to their general Polynesian culture, so much so that he considered their dishes interchangeable. Bergeron articulated his views most clearly when he wrote:

The feasts of the Polynesian don't vary much from one group of islands to another. Individual characteristics may differ, the names of foods and vegetation and the varieties of food may vary, but basically they are the same. The *luau* of the Hawaiian Islands has been discussed and commercialized but a feast in Tahiti is not a custom of bygone days. It is still an active living thing.<sup>122</sup>

Bergeron saw himself as a part of that living Polynesian tradition, and so his use of Polynesian aesthetics was a way for him to diversify and elevate Polynesian cuisine to make it suitable for the American palette. His specific reference to Tahiti could also explain why his restaurants often had a more generic French Polynesian aesthetic than the explicitly Hawaiian theme of the Hawaiian rooms.

In order to elevate what he thought was South Seas island cuisine, Bergeron blended elements from cuisines all over the world, and some consider him to be "a pioneer of East-West fusion cuisine," though all under the guise of Polynesian names and motifs.<sup>123</sup> Only in a

---

<sup>119</sup> Bergeron, *Frankly Speaking*, 78.

<sup>120</sup> Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food*, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Bergeron, *Frankly Speaking*, 78.

<sup>122</sup> Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food*, 136.

<sup>123</sup> Carroll and Wheaton, "Donn, Vic and Tiki," 162.

Trader Vic's cookbook could one find a recipe for Tahitian fruit poi, Polish "piroshki," French canapés, and Tahitian fruit poi Peking Duck all in one volume—let alone find them served together at an actual restaurant.<sup>124</sup> Disjointed as this may seem, his method of fusing cuisines proved popular, and starting in 1964 he was able to open another chain made up of two Senior Pico's restaurants, which served "Mexican-slanted" food and spawned yet another cookbook.<sup>125</sup> Bergeron himself explained the success of these chains, by noting that they used "all familiar foods" to the American public but with ethnic "flavor tricks," such as reducing the quantity of hot peppers in traditional Mexican dishes.<sup>126</sup>

Despite this focus on fusion cuisine, and while Trader Vic's and other Tiki bars were first and foremost associated with so-called Polynesian cuisine, they were also often considered to be Chinese restaurants. Magazines presented them as not only ways to experience Polynesian cuisine, but as a safe gateway to Chinese cooking in America.<sup>127</sup> In one article, the various salads of Trader Vic's are pictured with Chinese dolls dressed in "authentic costumes" looking down approvingly at them as white patrons enjoy a meal in the Trader Vic's Garden Room.<sup>128</sup> While this may seem similar to erasure of actual Polynesians, both Don the Beachcomber and Trader Vic's both typically employed at least some Chinese staff.<sup>129</sup> But, according to one reporter, Don the Beachcomber improved upon typical Chinese restaurants in America by using more costly, imported ingredients and not padding their dishes with cheap filler vegetables such as celery or bean sprouts.<sup>130</sup> To further separate themselves from stereotypical Chinese restaurants, Don the Beachcomber featured windows into the kitchen, so customers could verify that it was kept clean. The chain also offered

<sup>124</sup> Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Food*, 155-156, 186, 187-188, 235.

<sup>125</sup> Bergeron, *Frankly Speaking*, 80; Victor "Trader Vic," Bergeron, *Trader Vic's Book of Mexican Cooking* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1973).

<sup>126</sup> Trader Vic, "Hawaiian Sunshine for Winter Meals," *Better Homes and Gardens*, February 1949, 63; "Trader Vic's Book of Mexican Cooking," *Journal Cookbook of the Month*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1973, 94-101.

<sup>127</sup> Pearl V. Metzelthin, "With an Oriental Flavor," *Town & Country*, December 1940, 113.

<sup>128</sup> "Famous Foods From Trader Vic's," *Better Homes and Gardens*, May 1958.

<sup>129</sup> Martin, "Pago Pago in Hollywood," 74; Bergeron, *Frankly Speaking*, 44.

<sup>130</sup> Martin, 74.

"behind-the-scenes" tours of the kitchen, so that they could inspect the kitchen and the chefs up close.<sup>131</sup> Both Chinese food and Chinese workers were presented as agreeable to White America, when carefully managed.

Therefore, Tiki bars were substantially different than other tropical nightclubs in that they were known for their exotic drinks and fusion foods, both presented in a safe, Americanized manner. By adopting the aesthetics of the South Seas, Tiki bars provided a shorthand for their multifaceted, complex offerings under the umbrella of what they called Polynesian cuisine, which was really closest to Chinese cuisine. By crafting these fantasy, vaguely Polynesian wonderscapes in their restaurants, Beach and Bergeron were in many ways working contrary to the efforts of the Hawaiian rooms. While Hawaiian rooms advertised an authentic and specific Hawaiian musical experience, Beach and Bergeron used tacky island aesthetics from all over Polynesia to expose customers to a fantasyland of food without borders. Whereas both the Cocoanut Grove and Hawaiian rooms were chiefly spectatorial in nature, hence their reliance on the more familiar continental cuisine, Tiki bars were fundamentally interactive by offering a worldly range of options in faux-tropical locale, at the cost of any sort of authenticity.

But if the importation of Hawaiian dancers was encouraged by the tourist industry to make the island feel less foreign and threatening, as Imada argues, then Tiki bars 'no doubt served to hinder that mission with their generalization, inaccurate portrayal, and erasure of actual Polynesians.<sup>132</sup> Despite this, the heyday of Tiki bar popularity coincides with the period when more Americans than ever visited Polynesia as part of the island-hopping campaign of the Second World War's Pacific Theater. Yet again, despite their overt inauthenticity, Tiki bars grew in popularity even as more Americans than ever were exposed to the real South Seas. In order to explain this paradox, one must examine how the allure of the Tiki bar changed and adapted to the 1940s by incorporating servicemens' experiences into the Tiki fantasy.

### **Paradise Lost: Tiki bars and the War in the Pacific**

One of the most traditional narratives explaining the popularity of Tiki bars states that soldiers came back from the war with the desire to experience the Pacific again, or to show their families what it was like,

<sup>131</sup> Martin, 81.

<sup>132</sup> Imada, 176-177.

and so they went to Tiki bars in droves.<sup>133</sup> While this paper has already pointed out that the root of Tiki bar popularity goes back well before the war to 1930s Hollywood, this traditional narrative is further problematic in that it fails to take into account the fact that both Beach and Bergeron actively promoted this association of themselves and their restaurants with that wartime experience. Tiki bars were not the passive recipients of the popularity that was to come, but active agents in its making.

The traditional narrative also fails to take into account the question of inauthenticity. Tiki bars were and are hardly an accurate depiction of Polynesian culture, which would have been obvious to any soldier who had actually fought in the South Pacific. This begs the question of why the soldiers never seemed bothered by this obvious inauthenticity. One could attribute this phenomenon to simple racism, but that explanation ignores the experiences and the trauma thrust upon millions of soldiers who served in the Pacific. Tiki bars provided an opportunity for soldiers to remember an alternate Polynesia, the paradise they had been promised but never found.

While it can be difficult to imagine after sixty years of Hawaiian statehood, America's South Pacific possessions still seemed remarkably foreign to Americans before the Second World War. In 1940, *Fortune* magazine asked its readers which countries the United States should help defend if war broke out, and Hawaii was on the list. Not only was Hawaii listed as a separate country (it was a U.S. territory at the time), but only 55% of those polled said that it should be protected, as opposed to 74% in favor of defending Canada.<sup>134</sup> Guam was even worse off, as the island was frequently referred to in the past tense in military circles, as it was assumed that it would be immediately captured if war broke out.<sup>135</sup> Even when the military began to look towards Japan with suspicion, the Pacific possessions were treated as fringe territories. While Hawaii had substantial defenses, they were incomplete when war broke out and they lacked in important strategic areas—the islands had only a dozen long-range bombers when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Guam's only defense was a military base so small it could not

---

<sup>133</sup> Wayne Curtis, "Tiki: How Sex, Rum, World War II, and the Brand-New State of Hawaii Ignited a Fad That Has Never Quite Ended," *American Heritage* 57, no. 4 (August/September 2006), <https://www.americanheritage.com/tiki#5>.

<sup>134</sup> Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 176.

<sup>135</sup> Immerwahr, 180.



accommodate those same long-range bombers that came to dominate the Pacific Theater.<sup>136</sup>

But as the war dragged on, Hawaii served as a crucial landing point for troops shipping out to the Pacific, and these troops descended upon the island in droves. As Imada argues, Hawaii became an important "staging ground" not only for campaigns, but for the entertainment of military personnel, with hula dancers at the forefront.<sup>137</sup> This influx of defense workers reversed the previous trend of native Hawaiian dancers who left the islands and performed for audiences in mainland big cities; now Hawaiian dancers travelled back to the islands, and even to remote posts only reachable on horseback, in order to perform.<sup>138</sup> The military organized hula shows for the troops and extensively documented the performers in film and photography, which they often sent back home and showed to the public. Thus, through sexuality and structured cultural exchange, Hawaii became associated with patriotism and the military, and so achieved the culmination of the "imagined intimacy" of the 1930s as Americans rallied to push the Japanese back across the Pacific.<sup>139</sup>

But native Hawaiian performers were not the only tropical nightclub employees to ship out, and Donn Beach's military service heralded the end of his tenure at the helm of the Don the Beachcomber empire. The Army Air Force commissioned Beach as an officer in February 1942, and quickly assigned him to open officers' clubs across the Southwest.<sup>140</sup> By May, he achieved the rank of Captain and commanded the officer's mess at Santa Ana Army Airbase in Orange County, California.<sup>141</sup> He oversaw various officer's clubs in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas before he was sent overseas to Europe. By 1944, he set up rest camps in France and Northern Italy, all the while advertising his restaurant back home.<sup>142</sup> Beach finally returned to Hollywood in 1946, only to find himself "disenchanted" with how the town had changed.<sup>143</sup> He promptly moved to Honolulu, where he

---

<sup>136</sup> Immerwahr, 180-184.

<sup>137</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 213.

<sup>138</sup> Imada, 214-215.

<sup>139</sup> Imada, 215-216.

<sup>140</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 8.

<sup>141</sup> "Cafe Man Turns Talents to War: Don Beach-Comber of Hollywood Producing His Meals at Air Base," *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1942.

<sup>142</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 8-15.

<sup>143</sup> Beach, 15.

opened a new Don the Beachcomber location as well as consulted for several companies and hotels in the area.<sup>144</sup>

During and after the war, Beach's ex-wife, Cora Irene "Sunny" Sund managed the Don the Beachcomber restaurant. The couple wed in 1937, and in the years after she was increasingly involved in the operations of the restaurant despite their divorce in 1940.<sup>145</sup> Beach returned home and found that she expanded the business to several new locations beyond California in his absence, and tension between the two may have prompted his move to Hawaii.<sup>146</sup> By 1948, Sund was the president of the Don the Beachcomber enterprise, although she apparently still shared some profits with Beach in exchange for new drink recipes.<sup>147</sup> Despite Beach's insistence that the Waikiki location was part of the same company, other accounts suggest that Beach moved to the territory of Hawaii to open a separate Beachcomber chain without violating Sund's trademark in the continental United States.<sup>148</sup> Regardless of the truth, Beach spent his remaining days in Hawaii and focused his efforts on consulting with films and other restaurants.<sup>149</sup>

As Beach joined the masses headed to Hawaii, California, too, saw a massive increase in population and military personnel during this period. By the end of the 1940s, California's population increased by about fifty-three percent, from just under seven million to about ten and a half million people.<sup>150</sup> Thirty percent of that growth—about two and a half million people—occurred in just five years, from 1940-1945. This massive influx of population was largely made up of defense workers as well as soldiers coming and going from the Pacific Theater.<sup>151</sup> Even after the war, California enjoyed a continuous influx of military personnel into the state. In 1953, California became the lead recipient of

<sup>144</sup> Beach, 15-20.

<sup>145</sup> Martin, "Pago Pago in Hollywood," 74.

<sup>146</sup> Caroll & Wheaton, "Don, Vic, and Tiki," 161.

<sup>147</sup> Martin, "Pago Pago in Hollywood," 71.

<sup>148</sup> Beach, "Donn Beach," 16-17; Caroll & Wheaton, "Don, Vic, and Tiki," 161.

<sup>149</sup> Beach, 15-32. Interestingly, Beach makes no mention of Sund anywhere in his interview, which further suggests unfriendly relations between the two owners.

<sup>150</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Population of California, Urban and Rural, 1850-1950" 1950 Census of Population: Volume 1. Number of Inhabitants, 5-7, table 1, accessed April 16, 2020,

<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/population-volume-1/vol-01-08.pdf>.

<sup>151</sup> California National Guard, "People and the War," California State Capitol Museum, <https://capitolmuseum.ca.gov/special/ww2/people-the-war>.

defense contract funds, a position it would maintain throughout the decade. By the early 1960s, California received more than double the amount of any other state, and the Golden State alone accounted for nearly a quarter of all the Federal defense funds distributed across the nation.<sup>152</sup> Much of these funds went to the payrolls of defense employees, and California was home to more military personnel than any other state in this period. These personnel provided a huge consumer base; by 1962, the expenditures of military personnel alone added one million dollars to San Diego's economy each day.<sup>153</sup> Defense workers and returning soldiers would go on to form the backbone of Tiki bar customers in the years during and following the war, and this massive influx of military personnel no doubt served to inextricably link Tiki bars to the postwar period, especially in the modern consciousness.

This new influx of soldiers inspired Hollywood stars to mobilize at home and abroad to support the war effort. In October 1942, the Hollywood Canteen opened as a volunteer-run establishment that offered food and entertainment to servicemen free of charge. The Canteen was largely established by its president, Bette Davis, and her fellow actor John Garfield, while other actors frequented the club to entertain or serve the troops.<sup>154</sup> The club was modeled on the Stage Door Canteen in Manhattan, which opened in Spring 1942 and featured Broadway stars as volunteer servers and performers.<sup>155</sup> The original Stage Door Canteen spawned a series of other Stage Door Canteens in cities across the nation, and they were in turn inspired by the charitable United Service Organizations (USO) clubs that appeared starting in 1941.<sup>156</sup> By early 1943, there were twenty-four such USO-clubs in the Los Angeles area alone.<sup>157</sup> However, both the Hollywood Canteen and Stage Door Canteens were opened independently in order to be outside of

---

<sup>152</sup> James L. Clayton, "Defense Spending: Key to California's Growth," *The Western Political Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (June 1962): 280-281, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/445307>.

<sup>153</sup> Clayton, "Defense Spending," 281.

<sup>154</sup> Kim Guise, "Hollywood Hospitality at the Hollywood Canteen," National WWII Museum, September 19, 2017, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/hollywood-hospitality-hollywood-canteen>.

<sup>155</sup> Guise, "Hollywood Hospitality;" Sherrie Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy: The Social Geography of Memory at the Hollywood Canteen* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 40.

<sup>156</sup> Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 40-41.

<sup>157</sup> Tucker, 35.

USO control, and the former was the only such club to be regularly associated with movie stars.<sup>158</sup> These clubs threatened Tiki bars in two important ways, by both offering a cheaper alternative for soldiers' nightly entertainment, and, at least in the case of the Hollywood Canteen and Stage Door Canteens, offering a credible chance for soldiers to actually meet their favorite stars rather than simply emulating them by going to a Tiki bar.

Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron was able to stave off this threat by ensuring that the Tiki bar became deeply entwined to the military experience of the Pacific campaign. Bergeron began as an emulator of Beach, but his Tiki bars dominated the 1940s, eventually opening more Trader Vic's restaurants than his inspiration. Bergeron himself was ineligible for the draft because his leg was amputated at a young age to combat bone tuberculosis, and so he believed that he did his part when he serviced the troops in his restaurant.<sup>159</sup> Trader Vic's in Emeryville was a popular spot amongst the Navy airmen stationed in Alameda, and the place became "a real officer's club" for the duration of the war.<sup>160</sup> Bergeron was sure that the soldiers were treated well, as he secured them steaks and a steady supply of liquor despite the rationing that tightened as the war dragged on.<sup>161</sup> Bergeron and other Tiki bars actively encouraged military families to patronize their establishments, and secured them special treats in order to do so. But more than that, soldiers came to Tiki bars because they wanted to get a sense of the places where they would soon be sent to fight. And so brought their families to Tiki bars, only to be greeted with a fantasy Polynesia, where life was "leisurely and lotos-like [sic]," that failed to prepare them for the savagery of the war that was to come.<sup>162</sup>

And so the Tiki bar Polynesia became central to Americans' conception of the real Polynesia where their servicemen fought. In one heart-wrenching anecdote, Bergeron described the power held by Tiki bars' association with the war-time experience on the home front. As the war in the Pacific raged, a young woman came into Trader Vic's and asked to be seated at a particular table. When she sat down, Bergeron asked why she had requested that table, and she explained, "The last

---

<sup>158</sup> Tucker, 40.

<sup>159</sup> Bergeron, *Frankly Speaking*, 4.

<sup>160</sup> Bergeron, 50.

<sup>161</sup> Bergeron, 51.

<sup>162</sup> Bergeron, 50; "As It Was in Hawaii," *Town & Country*, January 1942, 14.

time I saw my husband was at this table."<sup>163</sup> Throughout the war, women who had lost a husband or a boyfriend to the fighting came alone to Trader Vic's and asked Bergeron to have dinner with them, simply because they felt like talking to a man. Bergeron typically accepted these requests, and attributed them to loneliness, but he was also adamant that there "was never any horseplay of any kind;" he simply told them "lots of laughs and little stories to make them feel better."<sup>164</sup> These women did not choose just anywhere or anyone to mourn the loss of their loved ones. Counterintuitively and even morbidly, they specifically chose a restaurant that thematically but cartoonishly represented the places where their lost brothers, boyfriends, and husbands fought and died. They came to Tiki bars to feel a connection to those places, and thus to their loved ones. In this way, not only did Bergeron dining with them serve as a stand-in for the man they missed, but he was considered a kind of expert on and an emissary for those exotic South Seas islands these women so desperately needed to understand and experience to gain any solace.

However, Bergeron encouraged this intense, perceived connection between Tiki bars and the fighting in the Pacific Theater not just on the home front. In a particularly savvy business move, Bergeron donated large quantities of liquor and mixers to the troops. These care packages were filled with Trader Vic-brand rum, hot buttered rum batter, etc. and distributed all across the Pacific Theater, from Alaska to Okinawa.<sup>165</sup> He sent them in such quantities that the military set up persistent, themed officer's clubs to serve the liquor in military bases, expanding along with the American lines. Now, even servicemen who had never set foot in a Trader Vic's before the war indulged in some of that experience at the Trader Vic's Officer Club of Okinawa, of the Philippines, of Tarawa, of Saipan, or of Tinian. Though the liquor was typically served to commissioned officers, Bergeron occasionally received letters from enlisted men who thanked him for the packages—and therefore his influence spread beyond just the upper ranks.<sup>166</sup> When these men returned home on leave or after the war, they re-lived those happy times when they shared a bowl of rum punch with their

---

<sup>163</sup> Bergeron, 53-54.

<sup>164</sup> Bergeron, 54.

<sup>165</sup> Bergeron, 51-54.

<sup>166</sup> Bergeron, 53.

comrades at Trader Vic's and the other Tiki bars that spread to meet this new demand.<sup>167</sup>

For many of these men, their island-hopping campaigns were their first exposure to a substantially different culture, let alone a locale beyond their state or country. Despite this new experience's frequent brutality, their shared exposure to Polynesian culture provided a social common ground that would propel tropical nightclubs into the national mainstream consciousness in the 1940s.<sup>168</sup> However, as Imada points out, many of the personnel that travelled to Hawaii quickly lost their expectations of paradise. Honolulu was considered an "urban slum," with not nearly enough fair *wahines*, who the soldiers outnumbered by at least 100 to one.<sup>169</sup> Many of them referred to O'ahu as "the Rock," and equated it to "a camouflaged Alcatraz."<sup>170</sup> Moreover, the Pacific theater was an especially arduous fight for the United States military. When compared to their comrades who fought in Europe, American servicemen who served in the Pacific went missing at more than twice the rate, were wounded at more than thrice the rate, and were killed at nearly quintuple the rate of their counterparts.<sup>171</sup> The Trader Vic's packages helped reconstruct the tropical paradise they hoped to find but never did, and thus provided a welcome respite from the disillusionment and horrors many experienced during the war.

While patrons had visited Tiki bars before to dine like the stars or comfortably sample exotic foods, by the end of the 1940s returning soldiers and their families visited Tiki bars en masse either to relive their experiences fighting in the Pacific, or to escape them. Much as Tiki bars had provided movie fans the opportunity to pretend to be their favorite stars, or curious Americans the ability to pretend to travel the world through food, they now provided a common fantasy that all soldiers could engage in. Thus, the success of Tiki bars was always contingent on their lack of authenticity, rather than the reverse, because they allowed people to step into an alternate reality where they could be co-stars, cosmopolitans, or comrades. However, the establishment of the culture of camaraderie that grew to surround Tiki bars hindered their

<sup>167</sup> Robert O'Brien, "What's New in San Francisco," *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan*, May 1944, 21.

<sup>168</sup> Henderson and Foshko, *California Tiki*, 19.

<sup>169</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 222-223.

<sup>170</sup> Imada, 223.

<sup>171</sup> D. Ralph Young, *Forgotten Warriors: The Amphibious March Across the Pacific During World War II* (Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, LLC, 2016), xv.

success with the more culturally sensitive generation that matured after the war. Despite their star-studded past, their role in opening America to different ethnic cuisines, and the crucial comfort they provided during the war years, Tiki bars fell out of favor because of their failure to court the new generation, completing their cycle.

The recent revival of Tiki bars today speaks to their continued cultural recognition and value. Despite their myriad problems, Tiki bars represented America's first mainstream foray into ethnic cuisine and provided a cultural touchstone for an entire generation. The enduring power of studying popular culture and leisure is that they provide a way for modern scholars to examine the ways people tried to escape from the demands of their daily lives. The study of leisure provides a foil for the most socially pervasive problems, even when they would be difficult to articulate otherwise. If Tiki bars provided the fantasy of escape during the depths of the Great Depression or the horrors of the Second World War, then it is worth considering what societal needs have prompted the resurrection of Tiki bars and their escapist fantasy today. This paper leaves that question to the reader.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

"As It Was in Hawaii." *Town & Country*, January 1942.

Beach, Donn. "Donn Beach." Interview by Alice Sinesky. September 16, 1986. Transcript. Watumull Foundation Oral History Project. Hawaii State Archives, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii and Cooke Library, Punahou School.

Bergeron, Victor "Trader Vic." *Frankly Speaking: Trader Vic's Own Story*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1973.

Bergeron, Victor "Trader Vic." *Trader Vic's Book of Food and Drink*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1946.

Bergeron, Victor "Trader Vic." *Trader Vic's Book of Mexican Cooking*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1973.

Bergeron, Victor "Trader Vic." *Trader Vic's Pacific Island Cookbook: With Side Trips to Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, Mexico, and Texas*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1968.

Bergeron, Victor "Trader Vic." *Trader Vic's Rum Cookery and Drinkery*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1974.

"Cafe Man Turns Talents to War: Don Beach-Comber of Hollywood Producing His Meals at Air Base." *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1942.

*Cocoanut Grove*. Directed by Alfred Santell. Paramount Pictures, 1938. 1 hr., 25 min. VHS. "Cocoanut Grove, The Ambassador, Menu." April 24, 1957. Culinary Institute of America.

"Cocoanut Grove, The Los Angeles Ambassador, Dinner Menu." August 31, 1939. Culinary Institute of America.

"Coffee Shop, The Roosevelt, Dinner Menu." November 14, 1939. Culinary Institute of America.



*The Coo-Coo Nut Grove*. Directed by Friz Freleng. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1936. 6 min, 55 sec "Don The Beachcomber." 1941. New York Public Library.

"Famous Foods From Trader Vic's." *Better Homes and Gardens*, May 1958.

"Hawaiian Blue Room, Roosevelt Hotel, Dinner Menu." November 10, 1939. Culinary Institute of America.

"Hawaiian Room." September 1, 1940. New York Public Library.

*Hollywood or Bust*. Directed by Frank Tashlin. Featuring Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin Paramount Pictures, 1956. 1 hr., 34 min.

"Hotel Lexington." December 20, 1934. New York Public Library.

*The Hurricane*. Directed by John Ford. Samuel Goldwyn, 1937. 1 hr., 43 min.

"Life Goes to a Hollywood South Seas Party." *Life*, September 23, 1946.

Martin, Pete. "Pago Pago in Hollywood." *Saturday Evening Post*, May 1, 1948.

Metzelthin, Pearl V. "With an Oriental Flavor." *Town & Country*, December 1940.

"Mural Room, Hotel St. Francis, Dinner Menu." September 8, 1936. Culinary Institute of America.

O'Brien, Robert. "What's New in San Francisco." *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan*, May 1944.

Trader Vic. "Hawaiian Sunshine for Winter Meals." *Better Homes and Gardens*, February 1949.

"Trader Vic's Book of Mexican Cooking." Journal Cookbook of the Month. *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1973.

U.S. Census Bureau. "Population of California, Urban and Rural, 1850-1950." 1950 Census of Population: Volume 1. Number of Inhabitants 5-7, table 1. Accessed April 16, 2020.

*Star Night at the Cocoanut Grove*. Directed by Louis Lewyn. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1934. 19 min. 26 sec.

Stoller, Corky Hale. "Playing with the Cocoanut Grove Orchestra." Los Angeles Conservancy. Last modified August 12, 2014.

Woon, Basil. *When It's Cocktail Time in Cuba*. New York, NY: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1928.

### SECONDARY SOURCES

Barbas, Samantha Sumi. "Movie Crazy: Stars, Fans, and the Cult of Celebrity, 1910-1950." PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000.

Barr, Andrew. *Drink: A Social History of America*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 1999.

Burk, Margaret. *Are the Stars Out Tonight?: The Story of the Famous Ambassador and Cocoanut Grove*. Santa Ana, CA: Forum Press, 2003.

Carroll, Glenn R. and Dennis Ray Wheaton. "Donn, Vic and Tiki Bar Authenticity." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 22, no. 2 (2019): 157-182.

California National Guard. "People and the War." California State Capitol Museum.

Chun, Noelle. "Make the Perfect 'Ti Punch with Help From Bar Agricole's Thad Vogler." *San Jose Mercury News*, August 12, 2016.

Clayton, James L. "Defense Spending: Key to California's Growth." *The Western Political Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (June 1962): 280-293.

- Curtis, Wayne. *And a Bottle of Rum: A History of the New World in Ten Cocktails*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006.
- Curtis, Wayne. "Tiki: How Sex, Rum, World War II, and the Brand-New State of Hawaii Ignited a Fad That Has Never Quite Ended." *American Heritage* 57, no. 4 (August/September 2006).
- Guise, Kim. "Hollywood Hospitality at the Hollywood Canteen." National WWII Museum. September 19, 2017.
- Henderson, Jason and Adam Foshko. *California Tiki: A History of Polynesian Idols, Pineapple Cocktails and Coconut Palm Trees*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2018.
- Imada, Adria L. *Aloha America: Hula Circuits Throughout the U.S. Empire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Immerwahr, Daniel. *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*. New York, NY: Vintage Publishing, 2019.
- Kirsten, Sven. *Tiki Pop: America Imagines its Own Polynesian Paradise*. Cologne: Taschen, 2015.
- May, Lary. *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- May, Lary. *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Miron, Jeffrey A. and Jeffrey Zweibel. *Alcohol Consumption During Prohibition*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1991.
- Murdock, Catherine Gilbert. *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870- 1940*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
- Okrent, Daniel. *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2010.

- Tucker, Sherrie. *Dance Floor Democracy: The Social Geography of Memory at the Hollywood Canteen*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Smith, Frederick H. *Caribbean Rum: A Social and Economic History*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2005.
- Starr, Kevin. *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Young, D. Ralph. *Forgotten Warriors: The Amphibious March Across the Pacific During World War II*. Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, LLC, 2016.

# Uncorrupted, Undefined

*Legacies of the Cult of Vesta in Early Christianity*

Abigail Mullin

## Introduction

The importance of female virginity and sexuality has been part of the Christian church since its foundations. The virtues of virginity and chastity were fundamental to the understanding of women's place in early Christianity. The significance of the Virgin Mary in Christian rhetoric is ubiquitous, particularly when discussing the piety of famous Christian women. Early church fathers exalted women who chose the path of virginity before marriage or chastity after marriage. The dominating force of Christianity during late antiquity created a discourse about celibacy and self-sacrifice. Influential church fathers and writers, particularly Jerome, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine, praised virginity as a way for women to devote themselves to Christ. Christian conceptions of virginity were by no means static across the evolution of the early church. The formalized and lauded structures of virginity and asceticism in the fourth and fifth century had roots in earlier practices of the Christian church. According to Mary Fellman, "The practice of Christian men and women living in deliberate celibacy seems to have begun very shortly after the death of Jesus (c. 30 CE)."<sup>1</sup> As the church grew in numbers and importance, rhetorical works discussing virginity as a form of religious piety began to surface and proliferate over the course of the coming centuries. Tertullian, who lived in second-century Carthage, wrote his treaty "On the Veiling of Virgins" to examine the correctly modest dress of Christian virgins. Cyprian of Carthage's third-century treatise, "The Dress of Virgins," not only analyzes the dress of unmarried women, but also highly praises the virtue of chastity in women. He writes directly to Christian virgins: "you pass through the world without the pollution of the world; while you remain chaste and virgins, you are equal to the angels of God."<sup>2</sup> Cyprian's treatise is one of the first works that reflects the ascetic lives

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Fellman, "The Social Context of Tertullian's 'On The Veiling Of Virgins,'" (Master's Thesis, Cornell University, 2009), 15, <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/13596>.

<sup>2</sup> Cyprian, "The Dress of Virgins," trans. Angela Elizabeth Keenan. (Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 22.

of Christian women before and during the third century. Cyprian's work has a direct impact on the concepts of virginity and asceticism of Jerome and Augustine.

By the fourth and fifth centuries, especially following the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, consecrated virginity and asceticism evolved into widely accepted practices, partially due to the works of influential Christian writers. Ambrose of Milan, one of the most passionate proponents of female virginity, began writing treatises extolling the benefits of virginity in this Post-Nicene Christian world. Ambrose's letters and writings spread throughout the Roman world and impacted many important Christian writers who followed him. Ariel Laughton has argued that: "the works of Christian thinkers and writers such as Jerome ... and Augustine of Hippo demonstrate their familiarity with, and approbation of, Ambrose's writings on virginity ... Ambrose formed and reformed the meaning and position of virginity within Christianity in a number of significant, lasting ways."<sup>3</sup> Jerome's and Augustine's writings on the importance of religious virginity reflect the increasingly urgent desire during this period for consolidation of Christian ideas. Instead of remaining the practices of small numbers of far-flung hermits and zealots, sexual renunciation, virginity, and asceticism began to infiltrate every level of society. As Christianity and its doctrines became ever more powerful to the world order, Christian fathers' guidelines regarding correct belief and conduct came to shape the church. Lindsay Anne Williams contextualizes the importance of these Christian writers,

In the mid-late fourth century when Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine lived and were active, Roman society was in the most profound transitional period it had ever experienced. Roman society in the late fourth and early fifth centuries was turning from a fully ingrained Greco-Roman polytheistic religion and philosophical tradition to the philosophies and worldview of Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

Christian concepts of virginity and chastity evolved during the first centuries of its formation, particularly during the Patristic Age

---

<sup>3</sup> Ariel Bybee Laughton, "Virginity Discourse and Ascetic Politics in the Writings of Ambrose of Milan," (PhD diss., Duke University, 2010), 3-4, <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/2397>.

<sup>4</sup> Lindsay Anne Williams, "A Garden Locked, A Fountain Sealed: Female Virginity as a Model for Holiness in the Fourth Century," (Master's Thesis, The University of Southern Mississippi, 2015), 4, [https://aquila.usm.edu/masters\\_theses/133](https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses/133).

(from the Latin *pater*, meaning "father") beginning around 100 CE, when influential Christian fathers were able to construct concepts of female virginity that would become well-established within the developing Christian orthodoxy.

Christianity was not the first religion to consecrate female virginity. Christian concepts of virginity naturally evolved within a context already featuring the dominant state religion of the Roman Empire. The relationship between devotional virginity and the female body can be traced across thousands of years of world history, and forms of Christian chastity had roots in older religions. The sexualization and regulation of the female body in pre-Christian antiquity was based on an enduring and hierarchical system of gender roles. Of particular importance to the religious and social consciousness of this period were the Vestal Virgins of Rome. Numa, the legendary second king of Rome, is purported to have established the cult to watch over and tend to the sacred fire of the goddess Vesta. Six young girls were taken from their families in childhood and isolated within the temple of Vesta; they swore oaths to remain virgins for thirty years while they served the goddess, after which they were free to assume a normal life. The punishment for breaking their vow of chastity, Plutarch describes, was being buried alive.<sup>5</sup> In return for their service and sacrifice, they were given great privilege and social standing, including special status in public events and the ability to own property and make a will, escaping their father's traditional *patria potestas*.<sup>6</sup> The Vestal priestesses enjoyed political, social, and religious power in exchange for their virginity. Their cult lasted for nearly a thousand years, and their ritual purity and virginity were the core tenets of this enduring institution.

When Christianity began to develop throughout much of the Roman Empire, Christian women also began to take vows of chastity and asceticism. The influence of Roman religion is evident in aspects of Christian religious practice, including the practice of sacred virginity. Ariel Bybee notes the similarities between Vestal Virgins and early Christian ascetic women. She further suggests that "as a prominent and enduring institution within the Roman Empire, this cult helped to pave the way within Roman society for the practice of female Christian virginity."<sup>7</sup> Despite criticisms and repeated attempts by Christian

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch, *Parallel Lives: Numa*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Harvard University Press, 1914), 10.4, [https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.plutarch-lives\\_numa.1914](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.plutarch-lives_numa.1914).

<sup>6</sup> Plut., *Num.*, 10.3.

<sup>7</sup> Ariel Bybee, "From Vestal Virgin to Bride of Christ: Elements of a Roman Cult in

leaders to separate Roman virginity from Christian virginity, the cult of Vesta and the regulated purity of its priestesses loomed large in the psyche of the Roman Empire. As Christianity began to develop in this context, remnants of this legacy can be found in early Christian virgins and ascetics.

I propose to analyze the legacy of the Vestal Virgins in Christian communities, writings, and consciousness. There is extensive secondary scholarship on both the Vestal Virgins and Christian virgins. Yet there is a significant connection between the experiences of these two sects of religious women which historians have not expanded upon completely, and it is this connection that I explore in the pages that follow. Though Christian female virgins varied much more dramatically from one another than did the priestesses of Vesta, I plan to investigate the larger and broader cultural significance of these women and the ways in which they operated within their societies in antiquity. I propose to examine the legacy of the Vestals in Christian discourse on virginity by studying the similarities and differences between the structural systems in which each of the religious groups operated; their rhetorical representations in literature of antiquity; and the dichotomy that existed within both religions, between the sexualization of virgin bodies and the symbolic and material transformation of female virgins into male-like figures. I will argue that this dichotomy of how female virgins were treated and seen by men, as both hypersexual beings and as existing in a transitional state between femininity and masculinity, began in the cult of Vesta, which later influenced Christianity. In particular, I want to investigate how the Vestals and Christians lived within both male and female social spheres, and how this ambiguous gender line, as well as the vows of virginity in both religions, allowed these women to operate outside established gender norms.

### Historiography

Vestal Virgins and Christian ascetics have long been important topics of discussion for historians, and Christian historical writers have been chronicling virgins and martyrs for centuries. However, in the past forty years, scholars have begun to examine these women through a more gendered, feminist lens. Mary Beard's groundbreaking 1980 article about Vestal Virgins became hugely influential in this particular field.<sup>8</sup> Beard posited a three-fold gender identity for the Vestals: the

---

Early Christian Asceticism," *Studia Antiqua* 1 (2001): 3-19,  
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studiaantiqua/vol1/iss1/4>.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Beard, "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 70



virginal, the matronal, and the male. Beard hypothesizes that these priestesses existed and functioned as both virgins and matrons, as well as having privileges in Roman society ascribed only to men. This thesis would serve to influence much following scholarship about gender in antiquity. In my paper, I will build on previous scholarship and demonstrate the differences and connections in the lives and representations of Vestals and Christian virgins.

I propose to examine the differences and similarities between Christian and Vestal virginity, how these women interacted with their religious communities, the special privileges they were afforded by their religious status, and, more broadly, their roles within the societies in which they lived. Beard's hypothesis that Vestal Virgins were given advantages because of their unique religious significance can be applied to Christian women as well. Peter Brown, the creator of the field of "late antiquity," argues that though the world of antiquity was deeply patriarchal, Christianity nevertheless opened avenues for women to gain status within the church and society through sexual renunciation. Brown's book underscores the ways in which virginity, celibacy, and widowhood allowed women to become important figures in their religious communities. Some women, Brown argues, even "edged closer to the clergy; continence or widowhood set them free from the disqualifications associated with sexual activity."<sup>9</sup> Brown thus reveals how virginity could be used by women to bargain for or gain social capital and status. Deborah Sawyer also echoes Beard, stating that the explanation for the centrality of the Vestals in the Roman state can be understood as "male appropriation of female powers of regeneration to channel them for the regeneration of Rome and the Empire."<sup>10</sup> Like many other scholars, Sawyer invokes the complicated relationship that the cult of the Vestal Virgins had with male-dominated Roman society. She brings into question the complex role of gender in the cult of Vesta: the female sex of the priestesses was essential to the sect, yet their virginity also allowed these women privileges to which only men were privy during this period. Andrew Gallia in a recent article suggests that Vestal Virgins may have been able to use their religious authority to benefit their families, further cementing the concept that priestesses of Vesta were able to operate in ways within the Roman hierarchy that

---

(1980): 12–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/299553>.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988,) 146.

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Sawyer, *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1996,) 128.

were otherwise denied to people of the lower classes, and the female gender as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

I also plan to examine the transitional gender status of Vestal Virgins, and the representation of Christian virgins as paradoxically both unsexed and "manly," and as hypersexualized loci for male lust and eroticism. Beard's three-fold hypothesis serves as an important basis for this analysis. Ariel Bybee tracks the relationship between virginity in both Roman civic religion and early Christian ascetic communities.<sup>12</sup> In her dissertation, Bybee examines Ambrose of Milan's praise of Christian virginity and his condemnation of the Vestal Virgins.<sup>13</sup> She continues to expand upon previous historical thought of the transitional state between genders of the Vestals and Christian virgins.

Beard later explains that the Virgins were categorically men as much as they were daughters ... The order of the Vestal Virgins was created by a man and held in place within society through male initiative and interest ... Sawyer suggests that only in this circumstance, as "de-sexed" creatures, are they safe for men to grant power and privileges to.<sup>14</sup>

Many historians have explored the dynamics of gender and virginity within the Christian context as well. In her paper on gender transformation, Elizabeth Castelli delves into the myth of female virgins and martyrs' transformation into male bodies due to their extreme piety and sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> She argues that Christian authors needed to quantify and justify how female martyrs could be represented as brave and holy, while also maintaining the narrative of women as the weaker sex. She references Beard's thesis that Vestal Virgins attained higher social standing due to their ambiguous sexual and gender status, and then applies this same concept to Christian women. Additionally, in her article on virginity in early Christianity, Castelli examines the transformation of female virgins into male-like bodies and discusses the

<sup>11</sup> Andrew B. Gallia, "Vestal Virgins and Their Families," *Classical Antiquity* 34 (2015): 74-120, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2015.34.1.74>.

<sup>12</sup> Bybee, "From Vestal Virgin."

<sup>13</sup> Bybee Laughton, "Virginity Discourse."

<sup>14</sup> Bybee, "From Vestal Virgin", 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Castelli, "I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," *In Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, edited by Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 29-49.

effects of ascetic and virginal life on these women and how contemporary society viewed and consequently treated them.<sup>16</sup> Like Castelli, Susanna Elm identifies the trend within Christian literary traditions of women losing their femininity and gender when they achieve holiness: "If through asceticism a woman achieves 'male' virtue (aretē), and is thereby transformed into a 'manly woman', then she has not only achieved true equality with her male counterparts, but has been transformed into an ideal, complete human being."<sup>17</sup> This historical trope of women shedding their weak, female body and transforming into male or desexualized beings is expanded upon in other scholarship.

I will also discuss the paradoxical sexualization of these virginal bodies and the rhetoric around both the Vestal's relationship to Rome and the Christian virgin's relationship to Christ. The writings of early Christian fathers, as well as accounts of the Vestal priestesses, employed sexually charged rhetoric when discussing these religious virgins. Patricia Cox Miller and Virginia Burrus both analyze the sexualization of female virgins in Christian writings.<sup>18</sup> Miller examines the erotic language of Jerome's letter to Eustochium about the holiness of virginity. Burrus analyzes the language of another important proponent of Christian virginity, Ambrose of Milan, as well as Saint Jerome. She studies the rhetoric Ambrose uses to describe the virginal body, as well as the powerful male desire that exists for a body that is out of reach. One of the most recent historians to tackle these subjects is Sissel Undheim, who examines how Christian authors represented (and sexualized) Vestal and other non-Christian virgins.<sup>19</sup> Undheim chronicles the techniques that Christian fathers and writers utilized to make Vestal virgins the "other" in order to distance Christian virginity from that practiced in other religions. She writes that representations of

---

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2 (1986), 61–88, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002030>.

<sup>17</sup> Susanna K Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994,) ix.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, "The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 21–45, <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.0.0133>; Virginia Burrus, "Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 27–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002220>.

<sup>19</sup> Sissel Undheim, "The Wise and the Foolish Virgins: Representations of Vestal Virginity and Pagan Chastity by Christian Writers in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 25 (2017): 383–409, <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2017.0034>.

"pagan virgins" and "chaste pagans," particularly the Roman Vestals, played an important role in the construction of the concept of Christian virginity. She states: "By examining fourth century Christian authors' depictions of pagan virgins and chastity ideals, the implicit or explicit comparisons between Christian and pagan virgins that are embedded in many of these texts will become evident."<sup>20</sup> She expands on the legacy of the Vestals within Christian history and literature and demonstrates the manner in which Christian Fathers employed the Vestals as points of comparison and contrast against the sacred Christian virgins. Like Undheim, I plan to use a comparative lens when analyzing the unique lives of both Vestal priestesses and Christian virgins, as well as investigating their roles within the wider male-dominated society and how they were perceived and represented by the outside world.

### Differences between Vestals and Christians

Before analyzing the connections between the cult of the Vestals and Christian communities, it is important to examine the structural and ideological differences between the two groups. Vestals, unlike most Christian women, were chosen for their position when they were young girls. They often had no choice or consent in the life path dictated for them by their families and the *pontifex maximus*, the chief priest of the College of Pontiffs in Roman religion. The Roman author Aulus Gellius, writing in the first century CE, describes the requirements for a girl to be chosen as a Vestal Virgin. Gellius details that the girl chosen "must also have both father and mother living; she must be free too from any impediment in her speech, must not have impaired hearing, or be marked by any other bodily defect."<sup>21</sup> It was also required that her parents and family fall into certain categories: her mother and father could not be slaves, her father had to live in Italy, a girl from a family of three children could not be chosen and her sister could not also be a Vestal priestess. Most importantly, the girl had to be between the ages of six and ten. Once the girl had been chosen, she was immediately given by her parents to the *pontifex maximus* to begin her thirty years of service.

The most important requirement and characteristic of Vestal priestesses was their consecrated virginity. The continued chastity of the Vestals was integral to the Roman state and its relationship with the gods. Mary Beard asserts that: "Throughout all the ancient sources

<sup>20</sup> Undheim, "The Wise and the Foolish," 384.

<sup>21</sup> Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, (Harvard University Press, 1927), 1.12, [https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.gellius-attic\\_nights.1927](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.gellius-attic_nights.1927).

which deal with the priesthood, great stress is laid on the physical virginity of the women and their total abstinence from sexual intercourse during their thirty or more years in the college."<sup>22</sup> The emphasis here on *physical* virginity is significant, since the most important feature of the Vestals was their abstinence from sexual activity. Roman civic religion was based on orthopraxy—correct action and ritual. The historian Jacob Latham defines this concept, noting that "ancient Roman civic religion emphasized orthopraxy, the meticulously correct performance of ritual, at the expense of orthodoxy."<sup>23</sup> It follows that Vestals were required only to maintain their physical virginity, regardless of thoughts or spirit. The act of breaking the vow of virginity had important religious and political consequences. A Vestal breaking her oath was seen as an omen that Rome's relationship with the gods was not well, and that the *pax deorum* was being threatened. Sarolta A. Takács elaborates on the connection between virginity and the Roman state, writing that the two were inextricably linked, and that "the most atrocious crime a Vestal could be accused of was unchastity (*incestum*), in essence, having turned her attention toward a single man and thus away from the state and the duties that bound her to it."<sup>24</sup> This crime was larger than the single body of a Vestal priestess: it represented a serious threat to the sanctity of the Roman state. During times of political crisis and turmoil, the loss of a priestess's virginity resulted in a large public spectacle, and the priestess being buried alive, to restore the favor of the gods. The centrality of virginity within the cult of Vesta, and the importance of the cult within the Roman state, helps reveal why the Vestals were so closely regulated. The physical virginity of the priestesses was the core principle of the cult itself. Ariadne Staples writes that the physical virginity of the Vestal was "a signifier of the political stability of the state as well as the instrument which restored stability when crisis threatened."<sup>25</sup> The virginity of the Vestals was inherently tied to the welfare of the Roman state. Therefore, the actual act of remaining a virgin was the most integral component of the cult of Vesta. The religious rites of the priestesses, and the physical act of

<sup>22</sup> Beard, "Sexual Status", 16.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Latham, *Performance, Memory, and Processions in Ancient Rome: The Pompa Circensis from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 45.

<sup>24</sup> Sarolta A. Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in Roman Religion*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 80, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10245686>.

<sup>25</sup> Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 129.

remaining a virgin, were fundamental for the Roman pantheon and the Roman state.

Early Christianity, in contrast with Roman religion, was focused on and centered more heavily around orthodoxy, spiritual faithfulness, and piety. Rhetorical accounts typically depicted Christian female virgins as extremely pious for their choice to remain virgins or to practice chastity. Enthusiastic devotion and a strong desire to follow the path of virginity were common in stories of women choosing to remain chaste. One important figure who was praised widely for her piety was Melania the Younger. Melania was the granddaughter of the influential fourth-century ascetic Melania the Elder. Both women embraced asceticism and chose a life of chastity. Catherine Michael Chin and Caroline T. Schroeder describe both women as "startling, glittering, and disturbing figures in the early history of Christianity," noting also that "they were famous, or notorious, in their own lifetimes for dramatic acts of self-definition and self-denial."<sup>26</sup> These women were important in their own times because of their extreme acts of religious piety, such as founding monasteries and giving away much of their family's wealth. Their spiritual faithfulness became famous among Christian writers, and they represented the possibility of achieving religious chastity even after marriage. Before she and her husband took vows of chastity, Melania the Younger gave birth to a daughter who "was dedicated to God as a virgin at the time of her birth."<sup>27</sup> Despite this specific example of a path of virginity being predestined, the most common representation of virgins and ascetics in Christian literature is one of extreme devotion, love of God and devout and ecstatic service as a virgin.

In many Christian accounts, including St. Augustine's *Of Holy Virginity* (composed around 401 CE), a great deal of emphasis is placed on the duality of piety in both the flesh and the mind. Therefore, female virgins must be clean in their spirit as well as physically chaste to be considered holy virgins in the eyes of God. St. Augustine writes, in his treatise on virginity,

For neither is itself also honored because it is virginity, but because it has been dedicated to God, and, although it be kept in the flesh, yet is it kept by religion and devotion of

---

<sup>26</sup> Catherine M. Chin and Caroline T. Schroeder, eds. *Melania: Early Christianity through the Life of One Family. Christianity in Late Antiquity*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Yarbrough, "Christianization in the Fourth Century: The Example of Roman Women," *Church History* 45 (1976): 156. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3163714>.

the Spirit. And by this means even virginity of body is spiritual, which continence of piety vows and keeps ... so no one keeps modesty in the body, unless chastity have been before implanted in the spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike Vestal Virgins, physical chastity was not enough to be deemed a true Christian virgin, and therefore active consent, the spiritual and mental choice of the women to keep themselves chaste, is central to the Christian idea of virginity. Saint Jerome even condemns "evil virgins, virgins in the flesh, not in the spirit."<sup>29</sup> In contrast with the importance of the physical virginity of Vestals, the piety of the mind and spirit was more important to Christian Fathers. The body was considered weak and mortal, while the spirit was where devotion and piety resided. Ambrose contends that "it is preferable to have a virgin mind than a virgin body."<sup>30</sup> Peter Brown traces "the notion of an antithesis between the spirit and the flesh"<sup>31</sup> back to Paul and the Apostolic Age. Both Melania the Elder and the Younger were considered models of chastity by many Christian authors and especially by Palladius of Galatia, despite having children of their own. Their piety was not of the body, as they were both married and had children, but rather in their minds. This distinction between correct action, the physical act of Vestals remaining virgins until after their term of service was over, and correct belief, being chaste in spirit and mind as well as body, is a valuable insight into the most central divergence between Vestals and Christian virgins.

This conceptual difference in what constitutes virginity, the mortal and physical plane or the spiritual and infinite, is crucial to understanding what these religions considered true virginity. The differing definitions of chastity between Vestals and Christian virgins can be seen definitively in the length of their vows of virginity. Vestals were allowed to leave their isolation in the temple of Vesta, and even get married, after thirty years of service. Plutarch reports that after a woman has been a priestess for thirty years, she has the "liberty to marry and adopt a different mode of life," yet he also writes that "few

<sup>28</sup> Augustine. *De Bono Coniugali: De Sancta Uirginitate*, ed. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2001), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Jerome, "Letters," trans. F. A. Wright (Harvard University Press, 1933), 22.5, <https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.jerome-letters.1933>.

<sup>30</sup> Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 10*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1896), 2.4.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *The Body*, 47.

have welcomed the indulgence, and that those who did so were not happy," which inspired most other former Vestals to keep their vows of virginity for life out of "superstitious fears."<sup>32</sup> Christian female virgins, by contrast, took vows of virginity for life, and were focused on their salvation and their reward in heaven after their death. Ambrose lambasts the limited term on virginity in the cult of Vesta. In Book I of his treatise "Concerning Virgins," Ambrose writes that for "the virgins of Vesta ...What sort of chastity is that which is not of morals, but of years, which is appointed not for ever, but for a term! ... They teach their virgins ought not to persevere, and are unable to do so, who have set a term to virginity."<sup>33</sup> The broader Christian emphasis on life after death, in contrast with the Roman belief in status and social gain in life, is evident in the contrasting definitions of the concept of virginity itself.

Differences in social class and privilege also separate the Vestals and Christian virgins. Being chosen to serve as a Vestal brought with it a great deal of wealth and respect within Rome. Roman society was based on a rigid hierarchy that allowed very few avenues for women to gain power or autonomy. Being chosen as a Vestal priestess offered these women a unique opportunity and position. Vestals were taken out of their father's control and were allowed to earn money and create a will. Additionally, great honors were conferred upon the priestesses throughout their years of service. Plutarch writes that Numa Pompilius "bestowed great privileges upon them", including the "right to make a will."<sup>34</sup> Livy comments that "[Numa] designated virgins for Vesta's service ... he assigned them a stipend from the public treasury, and by the rule of virginity and other observances invested them with awe and sanctity."<sup>35</sup> The ancient authors Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Aulus Gellius also reinforce this traditional founding of the Vestals, as well as detailing the privileges and rites Numa bestowed upon the Vestals. Dionysius writes that "many high honours have been granted them," and Plutarch details the public deference that was paid to the Vestals when they appeared in the streets of Rome.<sup>36</sup> Suetonius recounts that Augustus "increased the number and importance of the priests, and also their allowances and privileges, in particular those of the Vestal

<sup>32</sup> Plut., *Num.*, 10.2.

<sup>33</sup> Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 1.4.15.

<sup>34</sup> Plut. *Num.*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. B. O. Foster (Harvard University Press, 1919), 1.20, [https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.livy-history\\_rome\\_1.1919.Livy](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.livy-history_rome_1.1919.Livy).

<sup>36</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, trans. Earnest Cary (Harvard University Press, 1937), 2.67, [https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.dionysius\\_halicarnassus-roman\\_antiquities.1937](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.dionysius_halicarnassus-roman_antiquities.1937).



virgins.”<sup>37</sup> Vestals had special seats at gladiatorial games, which signified their status to the broader public audience. Suetonius adds that Augustus “would not allow women to view even the gladiators ... only the Vestal virgins were assigned a place to themselves.”<sup>38</sup> In Roman culture, where status and social standing were demonstrated outwardly through formal and informal means, it is significant how many privileges and rituals were conferred upon the Vestals. Meghan DiLuzio writes that even the special dress of the Vestals made the priestesses “instantly recognizable in public and, in a society that emphasized rank and status by means of distinctive sartorial markers, must have granted the wearer a high degree of prestige.”<sup>39</sup> The centrality of the cult of Vesta within Roman religion provided a unique social status for the priestesses. Their ability to acquire wealth, and to create a will, allowed these women to become important agents within the Roman social structure from which other women were excluded. The small number of priestesses solidified the exclusivity of the cult, and the highly public privileges they received demonstrated the elite ranking of these women.

By contrast with the privileged and unique social rank of the Vestals, Christian ascetics came from all classes and their vows of virginity almost always included sacrifices of personal wealth and property. Some Christian virgins even sequestered themselves in ascetic, monastic-like communities, excluding themselves from traditional society and social hierarchies. Christian virgins were encouraged to renounce privileges and money, and instead to seek a humble and pious life away from lavish society. Joining the well-established monastic movement among men, these Christian women centered their lives around religious sacrifice, poverty, and asceticism. Unlike the Vestal Virgins, little to no financial or societal benefits corresponded with these vows of virginity. While remaining chaste might have allowed Christian women to gain limited power within their religious community, late antique society still thrived on a rigid hierarchy that did not include these ascetics. Ambrose criticized the social and financial privileges ascribed to the Vestals. Writing a rebuttal of a letter penned by Symmachus, a prefect of Rome, in 384, Ambrose inveighed

<sup>37</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars: Augustus*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), XXXI, [http://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.suetonius-lives-caesars\\_book\\_ii\\_deified\\_augustus.1914](http://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.suetonius-lives-caesars_book_ii_deified_augustus.1914).

<sup>38</sup> Suet., *Aug.*, XLIV.

<sup>39</sup> Meghan J. DiLuzio, *A Place at the Altar: Priestesses in Republican Rome*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 184.

against the benefits and wealth associated with the cult: "Let the Vestal Virgins, he says, retain their privileges ... who are unable to believe that virginity can exist without reward, let those who do not trust virtue, encourage by gain ... the fillets and chaplets for the head, the dye of the purple robes, the pomp of the litter surrounded by a company of attendants, the greatest privileges, immense profits."<sup>40</sup> Ambrose's condemnation of the wealth and privileges associated with the Vestals makes the distinction between this cult and ascetics in Christianity clear.

The Christian writer Palladius of Galatia in his *Lausiac History*, composed in 419-420 CE, describes a virgin in Alexandria of "humble exterior but haughty inward disposition," who was "exceedingly wealthy, but never giving an obol either to a stranger or a virgin or a church or a poor man."<sup>41</sup> Palladius demonstrates the importance of charity and humble living throughout his work. He writes that "in spite of the frequent exhortations of the fathers she was not weaning herself from material things."<sup>42</sup> Many Christian writers posited an inextricable relationship between virginity and modest living. A rich virgin was not considered to be completely devoted to God and a pious life. Stories of rich women selling their property and turning to asceticism were important in early Christian literature, perhaps the most famous example once again being Melania the Younger, who asked her husband to live chastely with her following the death of both their children.<sup>43</sup> The loss of both of her children, and the new vows of celibacy, allowed Melania to pursue an ascetic lifestyle. She was no longer a mother, nor a traditional wife in the Roman sense, and therefore she began to sacrifice her elegant lifestyle and live more humbly. After their transition to ascetic life, Melania and her husband began to "sell all their property so that they might undertake the ascetic life."<sup>44</sup> This new connection between spirituality and modest living represents a shift in cultural thinking. The centrality of wealth and status to Roman religion became contrasted with the Christian concepts of inner piety, asceticism, and, above all, the importance of life after death.

## Similarities between Vestals and Christians

<sup>40</sup> Ambrose, "Epistle XVIII" *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 10, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1986), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, trans. W.K. Lowther Clarke (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Maria Doerfler, *Melania: Early Christianity*, 74.

<sup>44</sup> Yarbrough, "Christianization in the Fourth Century", 156.

Despite clear differences between the two groups of women, Vestals and Christian women are linked by a number of important, common aspects. Connections between these groups exist both in explicit similarities, such as their gender and their consecrated chastity, but also in less obvious ways. Christian writers like Ambrose were quick to denounce any discussion of the similarities between Vestals and Christian women. However, the pervasiveness of the references to Vestals across many Christian works demonstrates the implicit connections between the two groups. Ambrose's condemnation of Vestal Virgins and other pagan sects reveals that comparisons between Vestals and Christian virgins were being made by his contemporaries. Bybee writes that for Ambrose the Vestal Virgins:

... represented an ideology of virginity that stood in competition with Christian virginity. His employment of certain language and imagery in relation ... to Christian virgins of certain virtuous qualities and characteristics ... paralleled older Roman claims on behalf of the Vestals. As the practices of Christian virgins grew in visible resemblance to those of the Vestal Virgins in the late fourth century, Ambrose was anxious to differentiate between the two groups as strongly as possible.<sup>45</sup>

Similarities between the Vestals and Christians reflect the enduring quality of the Vestal cult during many of the centuries during which Christianity was developing. Undheim remarks that "virgins who were perceived as and labelled sacred by both Christians and non-Christians coexisted in the Roman world for centuries,"<sup>46</sup> and naturally similarities between these two concurrent religious sects would develop. Ambrose's attack on Vestals demonstrates the very connections he wished to refute. He writes of virginity in other religions: "which ministry should be offered to the Lord with the service of an unstained body...I certainly have not this in common with the heathen...who will allege to me the virgins of Vesta ...?"<sup>47</sup> Ambrose's own critiques of other forms of religious virginity themselves reveal how the Vestals and other such cults influenced the ideology and rhetoric of the early Christian church. Practices of female virginity arose in both religions as a product of the patriarchal society in which they developed. Male conceptions of female gender, female weakness, and female sexuality resulted in

---

<sup>45</sup> Bybee Laughton, "Virginity Discourse", 13.

<sup>46</sup> Undheim, "The Wise and the Foolish", 385.

<sup>47</sup> Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 1.3-1.4.

notions of chastity and virginity that were especially similar in both the cult of Vesta and in Christianity.

The most visible and basic connection between Vestals and Christian virgins is their gender. Their roles as women in male-dominated worlds are integral to the identities of both groups of women, and to any comparison between the two groups. However, certain characteristics about their lives complicate the gender roles by which they are connected. Mary Beard's work investigated the relationship between Vestals and gender, specifically through the lens of their special status within society. Vestals were given certain financial and legal rights traditionally associated only with male society. Beard argues that "certain of their privileges are otherwise almost exclusively associated with men, so that it is at least arguable that the priestesses were regarded as playing a male role and were, in part, classified as masculine ... their privileges in this respect are treated as something specifically unfemale, and thus, most naturally, male."<sup>48</sup> To accept the analysis of Vestals being viewed as "men," we must accept the concept of a specific gender binary, whereby male and female are distinctive and opposites. It is then possible to see how the Vestals' crossing over between male and female roles was important to maintain the gender hierarchy. Ordinary women could not be given certain privileges, so for Vestals to achieve male-like status they needed to sacrifice the most standard aspects of their gender in Roman society: sex, marriage, and motherhood. By abstaining from these feminine roles, they became worthy to have men bestow privileges upon them that were otherwise reserved strictly for males. Paradoxically, however, the female nature of the Vestals is the central tenet of their sect. Vestals, in other words, contradictingly existed within both gender spheres. By not fulfilling their female duties as wives and mothers, the Vestals could be given privileges usually reserved for men. This blurring of gender roles, specifically to account for women achieving high status within religion and society, finds its way into early Christianity as well.

This existence in the space between typical gender roles, and the societal belief that to be given responsibility and rights one must be male, is also deeply important in early Christianity. Female Christian virgins, ascetics, and martyrs were often depicted in a transitional state between male and female. It was believed that Christian women could achieve such piety and strength that they could literally overcome their feminine "weakness" and transition to a male-like form. Castelli

---

<sup>48</sup> Beard, "Sexual Status", 17.

explains that many ascetic women whose stories are important to the early Christian canon are "considered laudable because they escaped the bonds of their feminine nature."<sup>49</sup> It was not just men who represented women in this manner: female Christians also wrote about their experiences as a gender transformation.

Vibia Perpetua, an elite woman believed to have been martyred for her Christian faith in 203 CE in Carthage, wrote a prison diary accounting the time before her death.<sup>50</sup> Brent Shaw notes that "Perpetua was privileged not just in her inherited social rank, but also because of her acquired skills, notably her literary education."<sup>51</sup> Her elite status in society, and therefore her literacy, allows her prison text to be one of the first accounts written by a Christian woman herself. Perpetua describes her time spent in prison for refusing to renounce her faith, despite having recently given birth to an infant. In one section of her diary, Perpetua reports that during the course of her imprisonment "as God willed, the baby no longer desired my breasts, nor did they ache and become inflamed, so that I might not be tormented by worry for my child or by the pain in my breasts."<sup>52</sup> This miracle effectively cut the physical tie between Perpetua and her child: taking the milk from her breasts. Her role as a mother became obsolete from this point forward in the diary. Her femininity is erased even further later in her story, when she writes of a vision she has while imprisoned. Perpetua describes her vision: "a certain Egyptian, foul in appearance and intending to fight with me, came out against me, surrounded by his helpers ... And I was stripped naked, and I became a man."<sup>53</sup> In Perpetua's own story, becoming a male was the ultimate show of devotion and faith, and triumph over the frailty of the female gender. When she is stripped naked in her dream of being martyred, her body transforms into that of a man through her strength, bravery, and absolute faith in the face of death. This concept of gender transformation and the blurring of the lines between male and female simply reinforces the male-dominated society of antiquity. In order for women to be viewed as great religious figures not only did they have to forswear sex, but they often had to lose their femininity as well. The

<sup>49</sup> Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning", 75.

<sup>50</sup> Brent D. Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua." *Past & Present*, no. 139 (1993): 3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/651089>.

<sup>51</sup> Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua", 12.

<sup>52</sup> Vibia Perpetua, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, trans. Thomas J. Heffernan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Perpetua, *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, 10.

transformation of women into men in Christian stories demonstrates the concept of feminine inferiority as inherent and obvious. It also shows the connection between the Vestals and Christian women. These women had to be policed and controlled by men to achieve religious positions, and they had to abstain from sex and marriage: the only options open to most women during this period.

Despite the apparent "de-sexualization" of Vestal and Christian virgins, their status as virginal women was plainly the most distinguishing and important aspect of these women to the outside world. Their categorization in society depended entirely on their sexual status, and therefore their bodies were highly sexualized. The virginity of Vestal priestesses was a prerogative of the state. This political celibacy, as well as the public punishments for breaking the virginity vow, ensured that the sexual standing of these women was common knowledge. Beard's article details the complicated role Vestals played within Rome, and their legacy as fulfilling a wife-like role to the Roman state. Beard compares the ritual of a young Vestal being taken by the *pontifex maximus* to one of Roman marriage, where the Vestal was also "addressed by the Pontifex as 'Amata' which (if translated as 'Beloved') may suggest a yet closer connection with the marriage ceremony."<sup>54</sup> The Pontifex's punishment of any transgressions of the Vestals again mirrors the relationship between a Roman husband and wife. This parallel is of course complicated by the ever-important virginity of the Vestals; yet the legacy of the priestesses as descended from the wives of the legendary Roman kings is apparent in some aspects of the cult of Vesta. Their highly publicized virginity contributed to the sexualization of the Vestals. Ambrose criticizes the role of the Vestals in the Roman public. He writes: "And so she is not chaste ... nor is that modesty which, exposed to the daily importunity of lascivious eyes, is attacked by disgraceful looks."<sup>55</sup> Ambrose attacks the sexualized manner in which Vestals are viewed in public, yet this very condemnation reinforces the concept of the virgins' bodies as something highly and intrinsically sexual.

The sexualization of the Vestals, and Ambrose's critique of the way that the public views them, is present as well in literature about Christian virgins. Virgins' bodies were made the objects of male desire in Christian literature. In the same way that Vestal Virgins could be viewed as fulfilling a spousal role to the Roman state, Christian virgins were often depicted as wives of Christ. The rhetoric surrounding the

<sup>54</sup> Beard, "Sexual Status", 18.

<sup>55</sup> Ambrose, *Concerning Virgins*, 1.4.15.

consecrated virgin and her "marriage" to Christ is explicitly clear in the works of many church Fathers. St. Jerome's letter to Eustochium, written in 384 CE, is one of the starkest examples of the sexualization of Christian virgins. Not only does Jerome repeatedly expound the virtues of female virginity, he also employs similar motifs of the marriage between a virgin and Christ. He exhorts his addressee: "Ever let the privacy of your chamber guard you; ever let the Bridegroom sport with you within... He will come behind and put His hand through the hole of the door, and your heart shall be moved for Him; and you will awake and rise up and say: 'I am sick of love.' Then He will reply: 'A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.'"<sup>56</sup> This intimate and erotic language regarding virgins and Christ is seemingly at odds with the sexual chastity that defines the consecrated virgin. Just as the public and political nature of the Vestals' virginity placed their sexual categorization at the forefront of their identity, so too were these women defined by the outside world according to their sexual status. "The metaphor of marriage," Castelli explains, "leads to a kind of spiritualized sexuality... This motif of eroticism and erotic substitution is present in the earliest narratives concerning women's asceticism... and it continues as an important theme, especially in the lives of holy women."<sup>57</sup> The rhetorical strategy of depicting virgins as the wives of Christ is present as early as the second century, in the writings of Tertullian.<sup>58</sup> This motif continues throughout centuries of Christianity.

The sexualization and eroticism present in Christian representations of virgins is also evident in many female martyr stories. The famous story of young virgin Agnes, a Roman woman killed around 305 CE during the great persecution of Diocletian, is one example.<sup>59</sup> Ambrose tells us she was just twelve years old when she died for her faith.<sup>60</sup> Agnes's story became popular amongst Christian fathers in the fourth century because of her devotion and piety, and her exemplary behavior at such a youthful age. Many of the retellings of

<sup>56</sup> Jer., *Ep.*, 22.25.

<sup>57</sup> Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning", 72.

<sup>58</sup> Tertullian, "On the Veiling of Virgins," *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905.)

<sup>59</sup> Eric Poché, "Agnes in Agony: Damasus, Ambrose, Prudentius, and the Construction of the Female Martyr Narrative," (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2015), 62,

[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/3991](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/3991).

<sup>60</sup> Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 1.2.7.

Agnes's death are steeped in textual eroticism. Prudentius, a Christian poet active in the fourth century, writes of Agnes in his *Crowns of Martyrdom*. He describes her death at the hands of her "savage persecutor," who threatened her with public humiliation and forcibly sending her to a brothel unless she asked the pardon of Minerva. When Agnes refuses, a soldier approaches her with a sword. Prudentius writes Agnes's final words before being martyred:

This butcher is the lover who pleases me:  
His bold advances I shall go forth to meet  
And will not try to hinder his ardent suit.  
I gladly bare my breast to his cruel steel  
And deep into my heart I will draw his blade.  
Thus as the bride of Christ I shall mount above  
... call Thy virgin spouse to Thyself, O Christ.<sup>61</sup>

The obvious sexual rhetoric of Agnes's killer as a lover is juxtaposed with the repeated imagery of Christ as a bridegroom. Ambrose's discussion of Agnes's death is similarly characterized, and his description of Agnes as a bride of Christ just as erotic. Ambrose and Prudentius' repeated references to the virginal body of Agnes, and the possible violation of that body (through sex or through sword), place the virginity and sexuality of Agnes to the forefront of the text. Virginia Burrus writes that in the stories of female martyrs like Agnes, virginal women are objectified and sexualized by the male authors:

women, even virginal women—indeed precisely virginal women—are represented as the objects of male sexual desire: Ambrose's text is replete with the tantalizing imagery of sexual penetration imagined, deferred, or displaced. But again and again, the threat of penetration is juxtaposed with the insistence on ultimate impenetrability.<sup>62</sup>

The sexualized language and themes that appear in both Prudentius's poem and Ambrose's treatise show the ways in which virginal bodies, especially of young women, became centrally important in their stories. Christian virgins were sexualized through language, their bodies and their nudity becoming focal points of their

<sup>61</sup> Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom*, trans. H. J. Thomson (Harvard University Press, 1953), XIV, [https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.prudentius-crowns\\_martyrdom.1953](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.prudentius-crowns_martyrdom.1953).

<sup>62</sup> Burrus, "Word and Flesh", 29.



representations by men. The erotic themes used to describe these Christian women, just like the Vestals, derives from the obsession with purity and chastity that emerged within religion during antiquity.

Because of the sexualized nature of the virgins' bodies, in both the cult of Vesta and in Christianity, great emphasis was placed on how virgins presented themselves. The ways in which all women dressed affected how they were seen and treated in public. Often, their age and relationship status came with correct conduct for presenting themselves. The Vestal virgins were no exception and their dress was extremely important to their status in society. Beard and Gallia's analysis of the Vestal's clothing reveals the detailed and complex ways in which it corresponded to their special status as virgins and priestesses,<sup>63</sup> and DiLuzio expands on the significance of the Vestal's habits.<sup>64</sup> The requirement for these Vestals to present themselves modestly in public derives from the male-dominated power structures which sexualized the virgins' bodies. For a Vestal to dress in an "immodest" way might lead to accusations of a broken vow of virginity, which could result in trial and death. Once again, the details and anachronisms within the way in which Vestals dressed brings into focus the unique position within society that these women held. By mixing aspects of the bridal and the matronal habit, the Vestals were set apart and distinguished from all other Roman women. Their carefully constructed and dictated clothing was intended not only to ensure that they were clothed modestly, but also to signify their unique status.

The importance of the dresses of virgins continues from Roman religion through Early Christianity. In his treatise "On the Veiling of Virgins," Tertullian uses the imperative to address the Christian virgins, [V]eil your head ... surround yourself with the stockade of bashfulness; rear a rampart for your sex, which must neither allow your own eyes egress nor ingress to other people's. Wear the full garb of woman, to preserve the standing of virgin ... And yet you do not belie yourself in appearing as a bride. For wedded you are to Christ: to Him you have surrendered your flesh<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Andrew B. Gallia, "The Vestal Habit," *Classical Philology* 109 (2014): 222–40, <https://doi.org/10.1086/676291>. Gallia.

<sup>64</sup> "Like modest *matronae*, the Vestals were expected to communicate their chastity and modesty through their clothing. Those who did not were subject to scrutiny and even, on occasion, to accusations of *incestum* ... The Vestal costume rendered visible a Vestal's unique position in Roman society," DiLuzio, *A Place at the Altar*, 184.

<sup>65</sup> Tert., "On the Veiling of Virgins," 16.

Just as Ambrose critiques the Vestals and the "lascivious eyes"<sup>66</sup> that gaze upon them, so too is Tertullian concerned about the way in which people might look upon the virgins. Tertullian explains the importance of the correct, chaste veils that the virgins must wear in order to preserve their modesty. In his rebuttal of Symmachus, Ambrose specifically criticizes the fine veils of the Vestals, praising the common and modest veils of Christian virgins over the lavish headgarments of the Vestals: "Let them lift up the eyes of soul and body, let them look upon a people of modesty, a people of purity, an assembly of virginity. Not fillets are the ornament of their heads, but a veil common in use but ennobled by chastity, the enticement of beauty not sought out but laid aside, none of those purple insignia, no delicious luxuries."<sup>67</sup> Tertullian and Ambrose's concerns over the proper modest veiling of virgins reemphasizes the fear of the sexuality and beauty of virgins, while also paradoxically emphasizing their bodies and faces. Ambrose also connects luxury and beauty with immodesty, which reinforces the important connotation in Christian thought between modesty and humility. The sexualization of virgins, and the idea that how a woman dresses directly reflects her sexual status, can be found in both the cult of Vesta and in Christianity.

Perhaps the most significant connection between Vestals and Christian virgins was the fact that in both cases the possibility of social mobility was granted to women via their chastity. Abstaining from marriage and motherhood enabled them to break from the traditional roles for women in antiquity. The role of the Vestals as priestesses placed them among the elites of Roman hierarchy and allowed them to enjoy the benefits of their special status. Brown notes that "the Vestal Virgins stood out as glaring anomalies. They were the exceptions that reinforced the rule ... Young girls, chosen by others to forgo marriage, heightened the awareness of contemporaries that marriage and childbirth were the unquestioned destiny of all other women."<sup>68</sup> The Vestals' status in public therefore reinforced the path of marriage and motherhood for all other Roman women. However, the Vestals did not choose to follow the oath of virginity themselves; rather it was chosen for them to emphasize traditional Roman gender roles. The Vestals thus acted as agents of patriarchy; their prescribed virginity afforded them elite status, yet they lacked all autonomy. The Vestals were chosen as

<sup>66</sup> Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," 1.4.15.

<sup>67</sup> Ambrose, "Epistle XVIII," 12.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, *The Body*, 9.

children by elite Roman men and the *Pontifex Maximus*. They lived separately from others in the *Atrium Vestalis*, shut away from the rest of Roman society other than their participation in specific events. Their enforced chastity was carefully patrolled and punishments for misconduct were severe. Though Vestal virgins were afforded great privileges via their chastity and their religious roles, they operated in society at the permission of elite Roman men. Unlike Christian virgins, who often chose the path of chastity for themselves, the privileged lives enjoyed by the Vestal priestesses were only available because they were permitted by men. While Christian virgins formed communities outside traditional society in antiquity, Vestal virgins operated within the Roman hierarchy and in effect supported the established gender dynamic.

The rise of Christianity in antiquity came with new concepts of femininity. For the most part, Christianity reinforced traditional gender roles within antiquity and placed an emphasis on motherhood and marriage. However, the reverence for virginity and chastity affirmed by early Christian fathers also allowed women some limited alternatives to becoming wives and mothers. Christian women who chose virginity were heralded as heroes by many male Christian authors. Their status as virgins, like the Vestals, afforded them acclaim by the male leaders of their religion. However, virginity also afforded some Christian women more autonomy than it did the Vestals. The distinction of consent and choice is obvious, and most Christian women chose their path of chastity, rather than having it imposed upon them in their childhood. Female Christian virgins were able to break with traditional gender roles just as Vestal virgins were; yet chastity within Christianity allowed women to operate outside the social hierarchy of antiquity. They formed ascetic communities in remote locations, some living in cohabitation with Christian men and some not. Sequestered from broader society, and sometimes even from men, the connection to the Vestal virgins and their secluded temple is evident.

These Christian virgins and ascetics were able to gain some influence within their small circles. Palladius wrote extensively about Christian ascetic women who lived in communities in deserts. Many of these women practiced their faith in secluded areas near male-dominated monasteries. He makes mention of "certain women with manly qualities, to whom God apportioned labours equal to those of men ... Now I have seen many such and met many distinguished virgins and widows. Among them was the Roman lady Paula ... she is

said to be very chaste, and she has a convent of fifty virgins."<sup>69</sup> It is possible to see, thanks to Palladius, that Christian women were praised (albeit still considered "manly") when they practiced chastity. Palladius specifically mentions "virgins and widows," therefore demonstrating the integral relationship of female chastity and piety. Chastity was an avenue through which women could become more laudable members of their religion. Their devotion, according to male Christian writers like Palladius, matched that of any male ascetics who preceded them or lived contemporaneously. These women operated outside the confines of society, motherhood, and marriage. They carved out a space for themselves away from traditional hierarchies and used their virginity to do so. Their religious devotion led to their chastity, which in turn became the mechanism that allowed their autonomy.

### Conclusion

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing around 7 BCE in his *Roman Antiquities*, states of the sacred flame of Vesta: "the custody of the fire was committed to virgins, rather than to men, because fire is incorrupt and a virgin is undeiled, and the most chaste of mortal things must be agreeable to the purest of those that are divine."<sup>70</sup> Over three hundred years later, Gregory of Nyssa, writing his very first treatise "On Virginity" in the 370's CE, states in his opening lines: "The holy look of virginity is precious ... Its praise is heard at once in the very name which goes with it; 'Uncorrupted' is the word commonly said of it, and this shows the kind of purity that is in it."<sup>71</sup> This conceptual thread, of female virgins as uncorrupted and pure, connects two vastly different religions during antiquity. In essence, the development and solidification of patriarchal views of women's bodies and virgins' unique place in society due to their "undeiled" status during the cult of Vesta affected the religious psyche of the Roman world. The evolution of Christianity within this context marked a number of sharp delineations from the thoughts and practices of Rome's civic religion. However, beliefs about women and their bodies, especially the cultivation and praising of young, female virgins within both religions, demonstrates the broader

<sup>69</sup> Palladius, *Lausiatic History*, 41.

<sup>70</sup> Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.*, 2.67.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896), 1.

similarities in the gender dynamics of antiquity. The differences between Vestals and Christian virgins are clear, yet it is also necessary to understand the continuity between the coextensive religious sects. Despite the cult of Vesta being disbanded in 394 CE due to the domination of Christianity,<sup>72</sup> the legacy of virginity practices established within Roman religion can still be found today. Though it is widely known that early Christianity valued chastity and virginity, and that the church still does today, the legacy of the Vestal cult in Rome and the inheritance of pre-Christian concepts of virginity is less frequently understood and discussed. The incorporation of aspects of Roman religion, including elements of the cult of Vesta, into the early church is just one small part of the synthesis of Roman and Christian beliefs and doctrine, a process that some scholars refer to as the Romanization of Christianity.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, despite differences between the two religions, both Vestal and early Christian virgins lived during times when fewer options were available to women during the course of their lives. Virginity afforded some of these women limited autonomy, or at least the ability to operate outside spheres of traditional marriage and motherhood. The representations of these women as “undefiled” and “uncorrupted” enabled these virgins to become legitimate and important agents within their religions. Yet, just as marriage and motherhood confined other women, so too did vows or prescriptions of virginity keep these religious women relegated and restrained. While chastity brought them some freedom and status, these women, like all women in antiquity, were trapped within their strict social confines. The religious beliefs about virginity shared by Roman state religion and Christianity reflect the broader social and gender hierarchy of Ancient Rome, and reveals the influence of the cult of Vesta on the early Christian church.

---

<sup>72</sup> Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2001), 163.

<sup>73</sup> Bybee, “From Vestal Virgin”, 16.

## Bibliography

### *Primary Sources*

- Ambrose. "Concerning Virgins." *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 10. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1896.
- Ambrose. "Epistle XVIII" *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 10. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1896.
- Augustine. *De Bono Coniugali: De Sancta Uirginitate*. Edited by P. G. Walsh. Oxford Early Christian Texts. Oxford: Clarendon Press 2001.
- Cyprian. "The Dress of Virgins." Translated by Angela Elizabeth Keenan. Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 1958.
- Dionysius of Halicarnassus. *Roman Antiquities*. Translated by Earnest Cary. Harvard University Press, 1937.  
[https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.dionysius\\_halicarnassus-roman\\_antiquities.1937](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.dionysius_halicarnassus-roman_antiquities.1937).
- Gellius, Aulus. *Attic Nights*. Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Harvard University Press, 1927. [https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.gellius-attic\\_nights.1927](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.gellius-attic_nights.1927).
- Gregory of Nyssa. "On Virginity." *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 5. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896.
- Jerome. "Letters." Translated by F. A. Wright. Harvard University Press, 1933. <https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.jerome-letters.1933>.
- Livy. *History of Rome*. Translated by B. O. Foster. Harvard University Press, 1919. [https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.livy-history\\_rome\\_1.1919](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.livy-history_rome_1.1919).

- Palladius. *Lausiac History*. Translated by W.K. Lowther Clarke. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918.
- Perpetua, Vibia. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*. Translated by Thomas J. Heffernan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Plutarch. *Parallel Lives* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Harvard University Press, 1914.  
[https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.plutarch-lives\\_numa.1914](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.plutarch-lives_numa.1914).
- Prudentius. *Crowns of Martyrdom*. Translated by H. J. Thomson. Harvard University Press, 1953.  
[https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.prudentius-crowns\\_martyrdom.1953](https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.prudentius-crowns_martyrdom.1953).
- Tertullian. "On the Veiling of Virgins." *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905.

### *Secondary Sources*

- Beard, Mary. "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 12–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/299553>.
- Brown, Peter Robert Lamont. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Burrus, Virginia. "Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 27–51.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002220>.
- Burrus, Virginia. "Reading Agnes: The Rhetoric of Gender in Ambrose and Prudentius." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1995): 25–46. doi:10.1353/earl.0.0031.

- Bybee, Ariel. "From Vestal Virgin to Bride of Christ: Elements of a Roman Cult in Early Christian Asceticism." *Studia Antiqua* 1 (2001): 3-19.  
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studiaantiqua/vol1/iss1/4>.
- Cadenhead, Raphael. *The Body and Desire: Gregory of Nyssa's Ascetical Theology*. Christianity in Late Antiquity, v. 4. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018.
- Castelli, Elizabeth. "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2 (1986): 61-88. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002030>.
- Castelli, Elizabeth. "'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity." In *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, edited by Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, 29-49. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Chin, Catherine M., and Caroline T. Schroeder, eds. *Melania: Early Christianity through the Life of One Family*. Christianity in Late Antiquity 2. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017.
- DiLuzio, Meghan J. *A Place at the Altar: Priestesses in Republican Rome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Elm, Susanna K. *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Fellman, Mary. "The Social Context of Tertullian's 'On The Veiling Of Virgins,'" Master's Thesis, Cornell University, 2009.  
<https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/13596>.
- Gallia, Andrew B. "Vestal Virgins and Their Families." *Classical Antiquity* 34 (2015): 74-120.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2015.34.1.74>.
- Gallia, Andrew B. "The Vestal Habit." *Classical Philology* 109 (2014): 222-40. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676291>.



- Laughton, Ariel Bybee. "Virginité Discourse and Ascetic Politics in the Writings of Ambrose of Milan." PhD diss., Duke University, 2010.  
<https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/2397>.
- Latham, Jacob A. *Performance, Memory, and Processions in Ancient Rome: The Pompa Circensis from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Miller, Patricia Cox. "The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 21–45. <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.0.0133>.
- Poché, Eric. "Agnes in Agony: Damasus, Ambrose, Prudentius, and the Construction of the Female Martyr Narrative." PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2015.  
[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/3991](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/3991).
- Sawyer, Deborah F. *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries. Religion in the First Christian Centuries*. London; New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Shaw, Brent D. "The Passion of Perpetua." *Past & Present*, no. 139 (1993): 3–45. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/651089>.
- Staples, Ariadne. *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion*. London; New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Takács, Sarolta A. *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons: Women in Roman Religion*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/id/10245686>.
- Turcan, Robert. *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times*. New York; London: Routledge, 2001.
- Undheim, Sissel. "The Wise and the Foolish Virgins: Representations of Vestal Virginité and Pagan Chastity by Christian Writers in Late Antiquity." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 25 (2017): 383–409. <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2017.0034>.

Williams, Lindsay Anne. "A Garden Locked, A Fountain Sealed: Female Virginitv as a Model for Holiness in the Fourth Century." Master's Thesis, The University of Southern Mississippi, 2015. [https://aquila.usm.edu/masters\\_theses/133](https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses/133)

Yarbrough, Anne. "Christianization in the Fourth Century: The Example of Roman Women." *Church History* 45 (1976): 149–65. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3163714>.

# Arminius the Turbulator

*Depicting Germanness and Combatting Foreigners in German Collective Memory*

Conor O’Riordan

In the autumn of AD 9, Arminius, a German chieftain, led an ambush against the Roman commander Publius Quinctilius Varus, Arminius’ own ally, and the three lower Rhine legions in the Teutoburg Forest. Depending on various ancient sources, the massacre lasted between one to four days with around 15,000 Romans killed or enslaved.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath, Emperor Augustus exclaimed the now famous line when news of the massacre reached Rome: “Quinctilius Varus, give me back my legions!”<sup>2</sup> The battle sent shockwaves across the known world, and the resulting Germanic Wars would last several years. For centuries after, the Roman Empire would fail to reclaim their former hegemony in Germania, the territories and clans beyond the Rhine River.

This battle, called the *clades Variana* (Varian disaster) in Latin, but known among German historians as the *Varusschlacht* (Varus’ battle) or the *Hermannsschlacht* (Hermann’s battle), ranks among the greatest defeats of Rome. Though the *Varusschlacht* is a topic unto itself, the man who orchestrated the battle is more fascinating. Arminius’ mythical exploits and legacy shaped popular notions of German identity, for Arminius embraced his Germanic traditions over his Roman upbringing - an act that resounded deeply with later Romanized Germans. Arminius also achieved the impossible by defeating three Roman legions at the height of the empire’s power which set him apart from other barbaric leaders. When German intellectuals rediscovered his story in the sixteenth century, Arminius, now known by the German name Hermann, quickly rose to near cult-like status as a national hero and gained the reputation of the ideal “German.”

This analysis examines the long-lasting impact of Arminius’ cultural legacy as a national figure and as an exemplar of German

---

<sup>1</sup> The following are several Roman historians who recounted the battle; Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.117.1 – 120.5; Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, 2.30.29-39; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 56.18.1 – 22.2; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.55.

<sup>2</sup> Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, 23.2, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914).

virtue. First, I will gauge the competing views of Arminius’ motivations from Roman and German perspectives. Many Roman historians considered Arminius as an opportunist rather than as a selfless liberator, but Tacitus occasionally portrayed Arminius in a positive light in his *Annals*. I will present Tacitus’ positive interpretation and then dismantle it by highlighting Tacitus’ often overlooked critiques of the chieftain – criticism ignored and dismissed by later Germans. Second, I will explore how Arminius came to embody the East-West divide by analyzing his later portrayal in popular imagery from the nineteenth-century onwards. The emphasis will not be on Arminius per se, but rather his opponents, for these Roman legionnaires morphed into French soldiers, German Catholics, or German Jews depending on the era. Finally, this analysis will examine the *Hermannsdenkmal* (Hermann’s Monument) located in Detmold, Germany to gauge its role in shifting public reception of Arminius. Monuments are physical manifestations of memories; by analyzing public sentiments towards Arminius and the *Hermannsdenkmal*, conclusions can be drawn about shifting attitudes towards German nationalism and German identity. For example, the weight and power of the *Varusschlacht* mythos is evident by the many different political groups that co-opted the monument and Arminius’ legacy to further their own agenda. This all cumulates in the modern era, as this paper contemplates whether the commercialization of the *Hermannsdenkmal* has dispelled the negative connotations associated with Arminius and German nationalism.

This research differs from existing scholarship in two important aspects. On the topic of German virtue, historian Christopher Krebs writes extensively about the influence of Tacitus’ *Germania* on later German writers in his work *A Most Dangerous Book*. Specifically, he explores the evolution of these Tacitean and German virtues into *völkisch* traits during the Third Reich. Though Krebs references Arminius, his focus is on Tacitus, not the progression of Arminius’ image in German collective memory. I argue that Arminius was the ideal role model of German virtue. Arminius not only embodies the dichotomy between western civilization and the “noble savage,” but he also chooses his German heritage over his Roman upbringing. I also diverge from other scholars in my treatment of the *Hermannsdenkmal*. Most historians only discuss the monument’s history during the Second and Third Reich; very few consider reception in the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup> Articles that do discuss the *Hermannsdenkmal* in a modern

---

<sup>3</sup> See Martin M. Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator: Myth and Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) chapters 1-5. Winkler offers one of the most definitive

context lack the necessary historiography on German identity to tackle the extensive legacy of Arminius.<sup>4</sup> Hence, this analysis will consider whether the nationalistic and ethnic connotations associated with Arminius have faded away in the modern age or whether those negative memories linger.

The theory of collective memory is central to understanding Roman and German reception. One of the quintessential components of the theory relies on the relationship between memory and identity. This applies to both the individual and the community, for memory "...captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, and constructed side of your relations to the past."<sup>5</sup> In the case of the *Varusschlacht*, many modern historians argue that the battle had little to no influence on long-term Roman foreign policy. German historian Dieter Timpe expresses this sentiment succinctly: "One cannot, with any seriousness, attribute to a German chieftain the idea that he could bring about the fall of the Roman Empire or even of Roman rule north of the Alps!"<sup>6</sup> Though the *Varusschlacht* may have been a minor event in the larger scheme of Roman history, the battle had a profound impact on German identity. Arminius inspired future generations of Germans who viewed the *Germani* as their ancestors. Historians Christopher Krebs and Herbert Benario both note that German humanists found their *patria* (Latin for "homeland") in the pages of Tacitus' *Germania*, a missing component of German identity long denied to them due to a lack of historical records. In essence, the study of collective memory relies on "a triad, a three-cornered relationship among highly resonant parts of a memory landscape, individuals, and groups" who struggle to find meaning in the world around them."<sup>7</sup> Arminius is not just a German chieftain; he is also a mirror for Germans to reflect and contemplate on what it means

---

documentation of the *Hermannsdenkmal* leading up to and during the Third Reich.

<sup>4</sup> Hans, Pohlsander, *National Monuments and Nationalism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008) is an excellent book for anyone interested in German monuments. Unfortunately, many monuments, including the *Hermannsdenkmal*, receive only a few pages before moving onto the next monument; this tends to lead to a surface-level analysis of German reception dominated by World War II history. A well-developed historiography should begin properly in the early modern period upon the rediscovery of Roman texts.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (New York: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Dieter Timpe, "Neue Gedanken zur Arminius-Geschichte," 239; cited in Martin M. Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Trace: Artifacts of German Memory 1870-1990* (London: University of California Press, 2000), 10.

to be German.

### Roman Reception – The Duality of Arminius

Before discussing German reception of Arminius and the *Hermannsdenkmal*, one should consider how Roman historians interpreted the chieftain’s legacy. Two primary fields of thought emerge from Roman writers. The first and most popular is that Arminius was merely an opportunist who exploited Varus’ incompetence.<sup>8</sup> The second is that Arminius was a brilliant warrior who revolted to preserve his peoples’ Germanic way of life from Roman influence. Early modern Germans preferred the later, but these positive depictions of Arminius falter under scrutiny.

The majority of Roman authors focus on the personal failures of Varus as a governor, and even fewer describe Arminius as an individual. Velleius Paterculus, a contemporary of the *Varusschlacht*, who was one of the few ancient historians who saw Arminius as possessing strong capabilities. Paterculus described him as “...a young man of noble birth, brave in action and alert in mind, possessing an intelligence quite beyond the ordinary barbarian...and he showed in his countenance and in his eyes the fire of the mind within.”<sup>9</sup> Even though Paterculus recognized Arminius’ abilities, he rested the blame for the *Varusschlacht* solely on Varus’ shoulders. Paterculus noted all of Varus’ flaws – his slow wit, his poor track record as the former governor of Syria, and his preference for litigating from the camp rather than engaging in combat.<sup>10</sup> Paterculus stated that the Germans, unbeknownst to even themselves, were slowly transitioning to Roman law and values under the watchful eye of the previous governors. Varus squandered the hard work of his predecessors, and his heavy hand bred contempt in his own ranks which led to the *Varusschlacht*.<sup>11</sup> Paterculus may have acknowledged Arminius’ fervor, but in his narrative, the chieftain served as an instrument of fortune to punish Varus. This was a common theme throughout accounts discussing the massacre; the poet Manilius associated what he viewed as the convulsion of the natural order with

<sup>8</sup> Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, 2.30.31-34; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 56.18. These two authors also depict Arminius as an opportunist and blame Varus for the *Varusschlacht*.

<sup>9</sup> Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.118.2, trans. Frederick Shipley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

<sup>10</sup> Paterculus, 2.117.1.

<sup>11</sup> Paterculus, 2.118.1.

the gods' disapproval of Rome:

...savage Germany carried off General Varus and drenched the fields with the blood of three legions. Then threatening lights were burning all over the firmament, and nature herself waged war by means of these fiery lights, opposed her powers to us, and threatened the end.<sup>12</sup>

While Paterculus recognized Arminius as an individual who distinguished himself among his Germanic brethren, the chieftain served as a pawn of fate to punish Rome for Varus' incompetence.

This leaves only Tacitus, who offered the most positive depiction of Arminius' humanity. Tacitus wrote extensively on the campaigns waged against Arminius by Germanicus in Book I and II of his *Annals*. Unlike other historians, Tacitus portrayed the chieftain as a fleshed-out character who was a loyal husband and a skilled warrior.<sup>13</sup> For example, Arminius flew into a fit of rage upon hearing that Germanicus captured his pregnant wife Thusenlda in AD 15, eliciting sympathy for the chieftain as he tussles with the possibility of never seeing his wife and unborn child ever again.<sup>14</sup> Tacitus, speaking through Arminius, justified the chieftain's revolt against Rome as a desperate attempt to preserve his Germanic virtues and traditions.

Other nations in their ignorance of Roman rule, have no experience of punishments, know nothing of tributes...If you [the *Germani* people] prefer your fatherland, your ancestors, your ancient life to tyrants and to new colonies, follow as your leader Arminius to glory and to freedom rather than Segestes [a Germanic Roman sympathizer] to ignominious servitude."<sup>15</sup>

Not only was Tacitus' Arminius a virtuous leader fighting a just cause, he was also a competent leader who combated Rome's superior numbers with brilliant tactics. Above all, Tacitus' Arminius possessed *virtus*, a concept usually reserved for Romans. Defined as exhibiting valor on the battlefield, Arminius proved his *virtus* in combat when

<sup>12</sup> Manilius, *Astronomica*, 1.893-903, ed. and trans. G.P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.88.2

<sup>14</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.59.

<sup>15</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.59, ed. Moses Hadas, trans. William Brodribb and Alfred Church (New York: The Modern Library, 1942).

Germanicus confronted Arminius' army: "[The] Cherusci were being pushed from the hills — among them the unmistakable figure of Arminius, striking, shouting, bleeding, in his effort to maintain the struggle."<sup>16</sup> Though Arminius opposed Rome, Tacitus portrayed him as both a worthy adversary and a virtuous warrior. When word reached Rome of Arminius' death, Tacitus offered an eulogy for the chieftain:

Undoubtedly the liberator of Germany; a man who, not in its infancy as captains and kings before him, but in the high noon of its sovereignty, threw down the challenge to the Roman nation, in battle with ambiguous results, in war without defeat... though he is an unknown being to Greek historians, who admire only the history of Greece, and receives less than his due from us of Rome, who glorify the ancient days and show little concern for our own.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike other ancient historians, Tacitus' sympathetic outlook toward Arminius was likely colored by his earlier works on the *Germani*. Tacitus wrote several histories before the *Annals*, one of which was the *Germania*, an ethnography of the territories beyond the Rhine. In the *Germania*, Tacitus praised the *Germani* for their fighting spirit and their morality. He went as far as equating German arms to the Roman toga, the quintessential symbol of manhood and citizenship - high praise for "barbarians."<sup>18</sup> In regards to morality, Tacitus discussed at length the marriage and social customs of the *Germani* and applauded their chastity and devotion. Though primarily a veiled criticism of the social decadence of his fellow Romans, Tacitus concluded that "good morality is more effective there than good laws elsewhere."<sup>19</sup>

With Tacitus' *Germania* in mind, his gleaming portrayal of Arminius in the *Annals* must be reevaluated, for many of Arminius' actions contradict his supposedly Germanic values as described in Tacitus' *Germania*. Rather than criticizing the chieftain directly, Tacitus portrayed Arminius as a self-contradictory character whose actions flew in the face of his Germanic values. Arminius unknowingly aired these contradictions in a speech to his soldiers in which he said "Before

---

<sup>16</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.17.

<sup>17</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.88, trans. John Jackson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937).

<sup>18</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* 19, trans. Anthony R. Birley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).



me, three legions, three commanders have fallen. Not by treachery, not against pregnant women, but openly against armed men do I wage war."<sup>20</sup> The paradox is obvious. Arminius did not defeat Varus in open combat. Instead, he betrayed Varus, and he led the legions into an ambush. Arminius facilitated his greatest achievement, the *Varusschlacht*, with cloaks and daggers rather than with swords and shields. Though later Germans would claim that Tacitus only presented Arminius in a favorable light, the impression that Tacitus greatly admired Arminius begins to fade.<sup>21</sup>

These contradictions appeared regularly throughout the *Annals*. According to the *Germania*, fleeing the battlefield is the greatest shame possible for a German warrior; however, Arminius evaded capture for twelve years by fleeing the battlefield, an otherwise shameful act.<sup>22</sup> Even his marriage with Thusnelda broke German tradition. Though Tacitus made clear their devotion to one another, she was originally betrothed to another, so their arrangement defied Germanic social norms.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, Arminius lost his life when he became what he most despised, a tyrannical king. His own clansmen murdered him in AD 21 in fear of Arminius' kingly ambitions straying too far from their Germanic values.<sup>24</sup>

The only remaining admirable traits that Tacitus praised, Arminius' military strategies and his *virtus*, were not German traits but rather Roman virtues. Arminius was a Romanized German in every sense of the word; he spoke Latin, fought in the legions, gained Roman citizenship, and ranked among the Equestrian class.<sup>25</sup> After Arminius' betrayal, Tacitus still admired Arminius' excellence in warfare, but once again, Arminius' time in the Roman legion fostered his fighting spirit and tactical mind. According to Tacitus, Arminius was head and shoulders above his Germanic brethren because Arminius resembled a Roman in practice rather than a German in heart. The once rosy depiction of Tacitus' Germanic hero Arminius continues to falter under scrutiny.

<sup>20</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.59, trans. William Brodribb and Alfred Church.

<sup>21</sup> See Richard Kuehnemund, *Arminius or the Rise of a National Symbol in Literature: From Hutten to Grabbe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953) for an introduction to early depictions of Arminius by German humanists of the late fifteenth-century. Christopher Krebs' *A Most Dangerous* offers a deep analysis of German intellectuals' obsession with Tacitus in particular.

<sup>22</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.58.

<sup>24</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 2.88.

<sup>25</sup> Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.118.2.

Tacitus' subsequent account of Germanicus stumbling upon the remnants of the fallen legions in Teutoburg Forest illustrated the monstrosity of Arminius. Tacitus claimed that "In the plain between were bleaching bones, scattered or in little heaps, as the men had fallen, fleeing or standing fast. Hard by lay splintered spears and limbs of horses, while human skulls were nailed prominently on the tree-trunks."<sup>26</sup> Not only is this a gruesome scene, but certain phrases, such as the "whitening bones," allude to Book IV and XII of Virgil's epic when the Roman hero Aeneas recounts the sack of Troy.<sup>27</sup> The vivid imagery and references to the sack of Troy testified to the depravity and cruelty of Arminius and his men. The chieftain slaughtered thousands of Romans, so it would be naïve to assume that Tacitus would hold anything but contempt towards Arminius. On the surface, it may seem that Tacitus' Arminius was different from other historians' accounts, but while Tacitus did occasionally praise the chieftain, he also critiqued him. As Tacitus aptly put, Arminius is both the "turbulator" ("disturber") and liberator of Germany – an ambitious man with many personal flaws.<sup>28</sup>

From the ancient sources alone, it is difficult to square away Germans' admiration for Arminius since the chieftain disregarded many Germanic traditions. However, the German Humanists of the sixteenth century looked past these personal flaws and focused solely on Arminius' positive attributes. Consider Ulrich von Hutten's *Arminius* dialogues published in 1529, a continuation of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* where Minos must decide who was the greatest general ever to live – Alexander, Scipio, or Hannibal. Hutten revised the trial by introducing Arminius into the competition, and he called Tacitus as a character witness. Tacitus quoted his own *Annals* verbatim to focus on how Arminius defeated Rome at the height of its power. Mercury verified Tacitus' assertions by claiming that Tacitus was the most trustworthy of historians.<sup>29</sup> In Hutten's iteration, Tacitus sincerely admired Arminius. By claiming Tacitus spoke the truth, Hutten dismissed all the other historians who were critical of Arminius.

When the other generals accused Arminius of betraying his Roman compatriots and succumbing to tyrannical tendencies,

<sup>26</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.61.

<sup>27</sup> A.J. Woodman, *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 1.55.2, 2.88.2.

<sup>29</sup> Richard E. Walker, *Ulrich von Hutten's Arminius: An English Translation with Analysis and Commentary* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 27.

Arminius defended himself. On the charge of treachery, Arminius argued,

But in my mind there was never a time when I felt subservient to anyone. The thought of being free was always with me, and my mind was devoted to this one ambition, to be prepared, should the occasion present itself, to free my fellow Germans who were bound by the yoke of servitude.<sup>30</sup>

On the accusation of tyranny, Arminius appealed to the *logos* of the audience by saying,

We all know from human experience that the person possessing the greatest virtues will also be the one to engender the most envy and jealousy... The higher one has been exalted, the greater the jealousy he attracts. He who attends to the highest matters of state must necessarily have more influence and power over the people he rules.<sup>31</sup>

Because Hutten's dialogues were set in the court of the underworld, everything that Arminius and Tacitus said must be true. Through this device, Hutten absolved Arminius of his two most glaring character flaws by establishing that he never truly served the Romans nor did he ever harbor kingly ambitions. Thus, Hutten whitewashed Tacitus' complicated version of Arminius, a nuanced character with human flaws but hopeful aspirations, into a flawless exemplar of German virtues.

Though Ulrich von Hutten's *Arminius* is only one example, it speaks to how malleable these ancient sources were in the hands of ideologues, who focused on Arminius' good characteristics and ignored his flaws.<sup>32</sup> Germans turned this once-nuanced character into a caricature. With each simplification, the story of Arminius and the *Varusschlacht* increasingly resembled myth more than history. Eventually, Arminius was nothing more than the exemplar of German virtue and the steadfast opponent of all things Roman - whether they be Italian, French, or Roman Catholic.

---

<sup>30</sup> Walker, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Walker, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Please see Christopher Krebs's *A Most Dangerous Book* chapters 1-3 for several more examples illustrating the ever-changing nature of ancient sources to both Germans and Italians alike.

## The Battle that Awoke the German Nation

The widespread recognition and celebration of Arminius in German collective memory came to fruition with the construction of the *Hermannsdenkmal* in 1875. Though Arminius had appeared in several play productions throughout the centuries prior to the monument's construction, he was not a recognizable figure to the majority of the Germanic people; only German intellectuals were aware of Arminius from their studies. However, following the Napoleonic Wars and the formation of the German nation, the political landscape of the nineteenth century guaranteed Arminius' place as a national hero in modern German identity.

Though inspired by the ancient stories of Arminius, the *Hermannsdenkmal* was very much a product of its time. The statue towers above the forest landscape at 24.82 meters; when taking the base into account, the whole monument is 53.44 meters tall.<sup>33</sup> Arminius wears Roman military attire, but that is the only Roman element. Donning a winged helmet and a full beard, Arminius raises a mighty sword skywards as if to issue a challenge towards his foes. Etched on the sword are these words: "German unity, my strength; my strength, Germany's might."<sup>34</sup> It is important to note that *Deutschland*, not *Germania*, is inscribed on the blade. The word *Deutschland* represents modern-day Germany as a nation-state – a word Arminius would never have known. Cess Nooteboom, a Dutch novelist travelling throughout Germany following German unification, noted "He [Arminius] did not know that Germany existed, so he could not know that he had liberated it...History, that old anachronistic liar, is up to its old tricks again."<sup>35</sup> The mingling of the mythical past with the present day is a key concept of collective memory, and the subtle alterations from *Germania* to *Deutschland* illustrated how these symbolic changes marked a fundamental shift in German identity.

Likewise, one would expect Arminius, Liberator of Germany, to face southward towards his archnemesis Rome, but the statue and his sword points westward towards France. This spatial consideration was a direct reference to the recent Wars for Liberation from 1812-1815 which were still in living memory for many Germans such as the *Hermannsdenkmal*'s architect. The Wars for Liberation was an era when

<sup>33</sup> Hermann Kesting, *Arminius*, trans. Elise Schnasse (Detmold: Hermann Bösmann, 1982), 30, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Cess Nooteboom, *Roads to Berlin*, trans. Laura Watkinson (London: MacLehose Press, 2012), 96-97; cited in Winkler, 70.

several European territories united under a single banner to banish Napoleon from central Europe. In particular, the Battle of Nations, also known as the Battle of Leipzig or the *Völkerschlacht*, would inspire many German nationalists for years to come.<sup>36</sup> This conflict marked the shifting of the tides, for Napoleon suffered his first major defeat on the battlefield against the opposing coalition consisting of Prussia, Austria, Russia, Sweden, and other Germanic states. Until this battle, Napoleon's only defeat had been a reluctant retreat from Russia the previous year. After several days of fighting, the coalition routed Napoleon from the city; the battle would be the largest conflict known to Europe until the World Wars.

Since the Battle of Leipzig was such a turning point in the war against France, many festivals celebrated the *Völkerschlacht* as a second *Varusschlacht*.<sup>37</sup> To the Germans, history had repeated itself, for the Germanic people had vanquished their Roman occupiers. Consider Karl Russ's 1818 drawing of Arminius rescuing the enchained Germania, the German nation personified, from the battlefield of Leipzig.<sup>38</sup> Not only does this drawing give credence to the importance of the *Varusschlacht* to a German audience, but it also makes clear the connection between Rome and France. Germania's former captors clutch Roman standards in their cold, dead hands.<sup>39</sup> Due to this parallel between the *Völkerschlacht* and the *Varusschlacht*, the Wars for Liberation ignited a nationalistic fervor. Arminius was no longer an obscure figure known to a few German intellectuals — ordinary people now recognized and invoked Arminius' legacy.<sup>40</sup>

Despite Arminius' increased presence in the public imagination, funding for the construction lagged. It was not until key political figures endorsed the *Hermannsdenkmal* as a national monument that it gained enough attention to complete construction. The cornerstone celebration

---

<sup>36</sup> Ernst Moritz Arndt, author of the song *Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?*, was one of the most infamous German nationalists and was deeply influenced by the Battle of Nations. See Hans, Pohlsander, *National Monuments and Nationalism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 47.

<sup>37</sup> Winkler, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Fansa von Mamoun, *Varusschlacht und Germanenmythos* (Oldenburg, Isensee, 2001), 48, Fig 5.

<sup>39</sup> French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte fully embraced the Roman analogy as evident by the dozens of Jacques-Louis David paintings depicting Napoleon as a Roman Emperor and his soldiers as legionaries.

<sup>40</sup> Though a few decades later, there was evidence that Arminius and the *Varusschlacht* was being taught in school according to Kesting, *Arminius*, 36. Kesting states that the architect of the *Hermannsdenkmal* appealed to the top students from 300 grammar schools to contribute and gather donations in their local communities.

for the monument occurred on September 8, 1841, but Ernst von Bandel, the architect of the *Hermannsdenkmal*, had to postpone the project and move to Hannover for more favorable work.<sup>41</sup> In 1868, Wilhelm I, king of Prussia and future Kaiser of Germany, visited Bandel's workshop and sparked renewed interest in the monument. The *Reichstag's* subsequent generous donation of 10,000 talers spurred further construction.<sup>42</sup> Though a large sum of money, that donation alone did not cover the monument's cost of 90,000 talers. Other notable figures such as King Ludwig I of Bavaria and Prince Leopold of Lippe also contributed, but it still was not enough.

Ultimately, Bandel turned to the public to fund the remaining costs, and the *Hermannsdenkmal* became one of several national monuments completed during the late nineteenth-century as part of Germany's national awakening. Historian Kirsten Belgum compellingly argues that even though many Germans never saw the *Hermannsdenkmal* in the flesh, popular magazines such as *Gartenlaube* exposed the budding German nation to these monuments and petitioned for funding. As Belgum points out, *Gartenlaube* enjoyed the largest circulation of any German-language publication at the time with 310,000 subscriptions by 1871 — raising the remaining funds to finish construction was feasible for such a large magazine.<sup>43</sup> This was certainly the case for the *Hermannsdenkmal*, for *Gartenlaube* printed an article in 1872 highlighting the monument, Bandel's inspiration for the monument, and a plea for funds.<sup>44</sup> Titled "A Creative Slap in the Face," Bandel's piece recounted a childhood encounter in 1806 with occupying French soldiers who slapped six-year-old Bandel when he resisted; "That feeling, the shame... He did not want a single other German boy's cheek to be dishonored by the hand of a foreign enemy; therefore, he wanted to show the German people their own strength through a tremendous display."<sup>45</sup> Clearly, his adolescence and the Battle of Nations in 1813 that occurred soon after left an impression on Bandel and lit a nationalistic fervor that resulted in his construction of the *Hermannsdenkmal*. The article ended with a call of action to its reader base:

---

<sup>41</sup> Kesting, *Arminius*, 30-35.

<sup>42</sup> Kesting, 36.

<sup>43</sup> Kirsten Belgum, "Displaying the Nation: A View of Nineteenth-Century Monuments through a Popular Magazine," *Central European History* 26, no. 4 (1993): 460.

<sup>44</sup> "Eine schöpferische Ohrfeige," *Gartenlaube* 27 (1872): 441-445.

<sup>45</sup> "Eine schöpferische Ohrfeige," *Gartenlaube* 27 (1872): 444, trans. by author.

Should I tell the *Gartenlaube* reader about the funds the labor and statue required and how those funds came together? I would prefer to avoid it. Though the tale is known far and wide, it is an unpleasant sight that forty million Germans over the course of forty years could not muster the forty thousand thalers to erect this noble national monument. Only in recent years have donations flowed more freely from schools and other educational establishments... If necessary, our boys and youngsters would have given as much as a German man along with all their emperors, kings, dukes, and high-class men.<sup>46</sup>

The article must have been a success. Fundraising for the monument was soon completed, and the *Hermannsdenkmal* was inaugurated in the presence of the new Kaiser and 20,000 to 30,000 attendees on August 16, 1875. Naturally, *Gartenlaube* printed a featurette on the festivities.<sup>47</sup>

The nationalistic fervor that brought funding to the Hermannsdenkmal was also embodied in the monument in the form of two plaques, both of which made direct associations between the *Varusschlacht* and the Battle of Nations. The inscriptions are etched in stone within several niches located at the monument's base. The first inscription reads as follows:

Only because the German people had become too French and powerless through disunity could Napoleon Bonaparte Emperor of the French subjugate Germany with the aid of Germans; then finally in 1813 all German tribes gathered around the sword raised high by Prussia, from disgrace victoriously fighting for their home country's freedom.<sup>48</sup>

The plaque asserts that Napoleon was only able to conquer Germany with the assistance of other Germans, which parallels how Rome ruled Germania with the assistance of other Germanic clans such as the Cherusci – Arminius' clan. Though it was easy to portray the Wars for Liberation as the tale of Europe against France, the ethnicity of the troops led by Napoleon was not as clear; there were many "Germans"

<sup>46</sup> "Eine schöpferische Ohrfeige," *Gartenlaube* 27 (1872): 445, trans. by author.

<sup>47</sup> Rudolf Scipio, "Der Ehrentag des Teutoburger Waldes," *Gartenlaube* 23 (1875): 637-41.

<sup>48</sup> Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator*, 72.

fighting alongside the French during the Wars for Liberation. For example, the Confederation of the Rhine aided Napoleon during the Battle of Nations.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the emphasis on German unity against foreign threats and internal enemies is reminiscent of the *Varusschlacht* myth.

The second inscription, which honors Kaiser Wilhelm I, directly ties his legacy to Arminius:

He who united long divided tribes by a strong hand, he who victoriously overcame 'Welsh' might and malice, he who takes long-lost sons home to the German empire, he is equal to Arminius the rescuer."<sup>50</sup>

The inscription stands below a relief of the Kaiser, which had been cast in bronze taken from French cannons captured during the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>51</sup> Just as Arminius stole three Roman standards from the fallen legions, the Kaiser pillaged and robbed France of its military might. Figuratively and literally, the passage draws an obvious parallel between the Kaiser and Arminius.

However, what truly makes this second inscription provoking is the use of the term *welsch* rather than *französisch*, the standard adjective for French. *Welsch* is synonymous with the adjective *römisch* (Roman) and was often used to describe foreigners, as seen in the words of the famous German historian Theodor Massmann:

The two adjectives *deutsch* and *welsch*, about which a biography of their own could be written, have meant, through all centuries, a significant, almost moral, antithesis. Specifically, the elevating use of the word *deutsch*, which stands for everything that is noble in man and a true power for peace, allows us to look into a mirror of a people's self-confidence as well as human equilibrium.<sup>52</sup>

The use of the term *welsch* here, combined with the message of

<sup>49</sup> See Michael Rowe, "France, Prussia, or Germany? The Napoleonic Wars and Shifting Allegiances in the Rhineland," *Central European History* 39, no. 4 (2006): 611-40 for a comprehensive introduction to the cultural complexities of the Rhineland.

<sup>50</sup> Hans A. Pohlsander, *National Monuments and Nationalism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 157.

<sup>51</sup> Pohlsander, 157; captured French cannons were also used to decorate the *Siegessäule* in Berlin.

<sup>52</sup> Theodor Massman, *Deutsch und Welsch, oder der Weltkampf der Germanen und Romanen*; cited in Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator*, 72.



the first inscription which faulted the German people for succumbing to foreign French power, provides a strong parallel with Arminius, who himself was a German living among Romans. But unlike the Francophile Germans, Arminius maintained his *deutsch* virtues. In the eyes of nineteenth century Germans, Arminius was their exemplar.

It is evident that the *welsch* connotation runs deeper in German collective memory than just the Wars for Liberation. Several German plays contrasted the figure of Arminius to the Francophile trends of early modern Germany. A prime example was Justus Georg Schottelius' play *The Victory of Peace*, written around 1642 during the Thirty Years' War. In the play, the character Arminius laments the fall of the German people when confronting Bolderian, a modern German. Krebs summarizes Bolderian's appearance as such: "Neat and groomed (with two plumes to his hat, puffy sleeves, knee-high boots, and a sword for ornament), he speaks the language of the day. German it seems, is the syntax, but French, mostly, the words." In contrast, Arminius possesses long hair, a bearded face, and a real sword – features Bolderian openly mocks him for.<sup>53</sup> The contrast between the *welsch* pretender and the superior *deutsch* warrior is obvious. Almost every major production featuring Arminius presented similar comparisons and manifestations of these *deutsch* versus *welsch* qualities; Grabbe labeled Varus as *der welsche Oberfeldherr* (the *welsch* commander-in-chief) in his *Hermannsschlacht* 1835 production, and Klopstock painted the Romans in an effeminate light during his Arminius trilogy around 1769.<sup>54</sup> The repeated use of the word *welsch* to criticize French norms underlines how Germans associated undesirable qualities with French and Roman values.

In this battle for civilization (in German, *Kulturkampf*) between *deutsch* and *welsch* society, the *welsch* are frequently associated with vipers. The earliest known mention of Roman vipers and Arminius in a German context first appeared in 1517. An artist by the name of Ambrosius Holbein produced a woodcut for the cover of Johannes Froben's 1520 edition of Velleius Paterculus's *Roman History*. Holbien clad Arminius in sixteenth-century armor as he confronted Varus on the battlefield alongside this quote: "*Tandem vipera sibilare desiste* – finally this viper must desist from hissing."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book*, 129-130.

<sup>54</sup> Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator*, 73; Cornelis van der Haven, "Germanic Myths and Gender Constructions in German and Dutch Theatre Texts 1660-1780," *Neophilologos* 95, (2011): 250.

<sup>55</sup> Smith W. Bradford, "Germanic Pagan Antiquity in Lutheran Historical Thought,"

The image of a snake originated from Roman historians, who had their German characters call Romans and their Germanic sympathizers "vipers." Florus describes the aftermath of the *Varusschlacht* and how the *Germani* tortured the remaining legionaries, whom they call "vipers":

They put out the eyes of some of them [the legionaries] and cut off the hands of others; they sewed up the mouth of one of them after first cutting out his tongue, exclaiming, 'At last, you viper, you have ceased to hiss.'<sup>56</sup>

Florus was not the only historian to use the term "viper" to describe Romans and their German allies. In Tacitus' account, Arminius and Maroboduus exchanged insults before a skirmish. Maroboduus was once an enemy of Rome, but he threw his lot in with the Romans against his Germanic brothers. Arminius described his rival as, "the fugitive who, without one stricken field, had lain safe in the coverts of the Hercynian Forest."<sup>57</sup> Though not an obvious reference to a snake, historian A.J. Woodman argues that Tacitus' description of Maroboduus' hiding place is a reference to Virgil's *Georgics*, in which Virgil described a skulking snake as *frustra defensa latebris uipera* (the viper vainly protected by its lair).<sup>58</sup> In a similar vein, Paterculus likened Maroboduus to a viper biding his time to strike.<sup>59</sup> Though Woodman cautions that the metaphor may be a coincidence, later Germans recognized and replicated these symbols and used these allusions to identify and defame their enemies.<sup>60</sup>

This metaphor resurfaced in the nineteenth century in

---

*Journal of the Historical Society* 4, no. 3, (2003): 360.

<sup>56</sup> Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, 2.30.37.

<sup>57</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.45.

<sup>58</sup> A.J. Woodman, *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1; Virgil, *Georgics*, 3.544-5.

<sup>59</sup> See Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 129.3 (trans. Frederick Shipley); "...he [Germanicus] force Maroboduus, who clung to the limits of the territories he had seized as a serpent to his hole, to come forth like the serpent under the spell of his salutary charms..."

<sup>60</sup> This viper reference gives credence to the argument that Siegfried is a reimagination of Arminius. Siegfried originates from Norse mythology and came prominent in Germanic culture through productions such as Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Siegfried slays a dragon which is a snake in some sense. See Roberta Frank, "Anselm Kiefer, Siegfried and Arminius: Scenes from a Marriage," in *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*, ed. Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012).

association with the *Hermannsdenkmal*, for Germans invoked Arminius against German Roman Catholics. The concept of *Kulturkampf* describes a period from 1872 to 1886 when the new German government, specifically Otto von Bismarck, was at odds with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1870 Pope Pius IX declared the Dogma of Papal Infallibility, binding the loyalty of German Catholics to the Vatican first and Germany second.<sup>61</sup> The May Laws of 1873 marked the German offence against Catholics by giving state governments the authority to veto Catholic appointments to public office.<sup>62</sup> These religious tensions were present at the inauguration ceremony for the *Hermannsdenkmal*, which occurred during the height of the *Kulturkampf*. At the ceremony, the Lippe regional government distributed the poem "The *Hermannsdenkmal* in Teutoburg Forest" by Leopold Böhmer.<sup>63</sup> The poem not only associated the Roman Empire with the Catholic Church, but the poem declared a call to arms against the internal Catholic enemies. Furthermore, the Lippe regional government included the following message in its event handout: "Here we find ourselves together in the shadow of ancient oaks and beeches and shake our hand within a small covenant of brothers under the leadership of our heroic Kaiser and his co-conspirators against Rome's vipers."<sup>64</sup> This contemporary religious conflict illustrated how quickly these cultural battlefields can shift. In addition to the external dangers that Germany had already extinguished, the *Hermannsdenkmal* also raised his blade against the Roman Catholic invaders who infiltrated Germany. Just as Arminius expelled his den of Germanic Roman sympathizers, the modern German nation would emerge victorious from this *Kulturkampf* against these internal enemies.

Despite the prominence of Arminius as a symbol of German nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, his utility as a national symbol faded during the Third Reich. Historian Martin Winkler offers an extensive analysis of the 1933 campaigns and the portrayal of Arminius and the *Hermannsdenkmal* in both propaganda and theatre productions. The national socialists campaigned heavily in the Lippe region during the 1933 elections, and many speeches

<sup>61</sup> Sebastian Knauer, "Das Hermannsdenkmal vor dem Hintergrund des Kulturkampfes," *Rosenland Zeitschrift für lippische Geschichte* 5, (2007): 7.

<sup>62</sup> Ronald J. Ross, "Enforcing the Kulturkampf in the Bismarckian State and the Limits of Coercion in Imperial Germany," *The Journal of Modern History* 56, no. 3 (1984): 460.

<sup>63</sup> Knauer, "Das Hermannsdenkmal vor dem Hintergrund des Kulturkampfes," 8.

<sup>64</sup> Trans. Vanessa Plumly; cited in Knauer, 9.

compared Hitler to Arminius.<sup>65</sup> However, as Winkler pointed out, the place of the Germanic chieftain in the national socialist movement of Nazi Germany should not be overstated.<sup>66</sup> The German chieftain contradicted Adolf Hitler's infatuation with classical antiquity. Winkler illustrates this with an amusing and ironic postcard featuring Arminius and Hitler. Arminius, while on horseback, strikes a victorious pose while his horse tramples a Roman legion standard. Beside him stands Hitler acting as a standard bearer – someone who champions Roman, and possibly *welsch*, attitudes.<sup>67</sup> Arminius was a useful tool in regional politics, but on a national scale, there were better national heroes to draw from.

Though the national socialists relegated Arminius to the forest of Detmold, the *Varusschlacht* was a wholly different matter. The Nazis shifted the label of the *welsch* internal enemies from Roman Catholics to German Jews, for there is another component of the *Varusschlacht* myth that was applicable to German Jews in the eyes of these anti-semites. Arminius' demise at the hands of his clansmen set the historical precedent for the *Dolchstosslegende*.<sup>68</sup> An anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, the *Dolchstosslegende*, claimed that Germany would have won World War I if the German Jews and leftwing politicians did not "stab" Germany in the back. As Arminius fell to the daggers of his fellow clansmen, the nation too lost the war due to treachery. Winkler even states that *verwelscht* and *verjudet* (ruined by Jews) became synonymous with one another during the late Weimar Republic and into the Third Reich.<sup>69</sup> As discussed beforehand when analyzing the symbolizing of *welsch* traitors and vipers, this may be why books published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries discussing the "Jewish Question" often depicted a snake.

### Arminius the Mascot

Though Arminius was not the national socialists' ideal hero, the taint of nationalism and fascism persisted around his monument in the postwar period. These negative connotations had always existed, but the atrocities of the Third Reich forced the German people to confront Arminius' past and his role in modern society. Changing public opinions on Arminius and physical changes to the *Hermannsdenkmal* in

<sup>65</sup> Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator*, 94.

<sup>66</sup> Winkler, 86.

<sup>67</sup> Winkler, 106-08

<sup>68</sup> Winkler, 82.

<sup>69</sup> Winkler, 73.

more recent decades point towards a society contemplating its past, for collective memory involves the intersection of the memory landscape, the individual, and the community. This internal struggle is clear in the postwar era as locals, artists, and politicians alike attempted to confront and untangle Arminius the historical figure from Hermann the national hero.

The seventy-fifth anniversary of the *Hermannsdenkmal* in 1950 provides an excellent case-study in shifting attitudes towards Arminius in the immediate postwar period. The *Hermannsdenkmal* emerged unscathed from the carnage of World War II thanks to its isolated location in the woods. Unlike the Kaiser who attended the inaugural ceremony, President Theodor Heuss of the Federal Republic of Germany did not attend.<sup>70</sup> The National Front, which represented the eastern political parties of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), refused to provide their city flags for the event.<sup>71</sup> Between the absence of President Heuss and the National Front, it was clear that the political figures and organizations wanted to distance themselves from Arminius' legacy.

The celebration was a somber one, and the ceremony ended with the installation of a plaque near the monument. The inscription reads: "German women and men unanimously profess on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the *Hermannsdenkmal* to the unification of the people through peace."<sup>72</sup> Though not a physical change to the monument, the installation of a memorial nearby served as a counter-monument to the *Hermannsdenkmal*; the plaque acknowledges Arminius' turbulent past and promises to transform this monument. What this transformation entailed was still up to debate.

Since political gain no longer drove the discourse, the vestiges of the *Varusschlacht* now resided in the cultural spheres, and many artists attempted to confront this past through their works. In 1985, art historian Wieland Schmied stated that, "Of all contemporary German painters Anselm Kiefer is regards (*sic*) as the most 'German.' And in fact

<sup>70</sup> "Hermannsdenkmal: Durchs Nasenloch gestürzt," *Der Spiegel*, August 8, 1950, 11.

<sup>71</sup> "Hermannsdenkmal: Durchs Nasenloch gestürzt." *Der Spiegel*, 12. Collective memory in an East German context is a topic unto itself. East Germans often centered themselves as the victims in collective memory. The *Trümmerfilme* of East German cinema are great examples of this mindset. See Robert Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in Shadow of 3rd Reich*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001). Likewise, East German officials altered many national monuments such as the Brandenburg Gate. See Willmuth Arenhövel and Rolf Bothe, *Das Brandenburger Tor: 1791-1991 Eine Monographie*, (Berlin: Willmuth Arenhövel, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Translation by author.

he is, more than any other artist, a painter of 'German' themes."<sup>73</sup> The German themes in question are his *Hermannsschlacht* series and his 1976 painting titled *Varus*. Born in 1945, Kiefer represented the next generation of West Germans grappling with the fascist past, a concept known as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. While describing the *Hermannsschlacht* series, Matthew Rampley noted that "In these paintings from the early 1970s one can...see how Kiefer is undertaking an interrogation of the intertwining of romanticism, nationalism and Nazism by highlighting common motifs and ideologemes."<sup>74</sup> The *Varus* painting illustrates the legacy of the *Varusschlacht* mythos and its dangers. A wooded path leads deeper into the forest; the blood in the foreground, which resembles bullet holes, is the only indicator of the battle in the distance out of frame. This ominous setting runs counter to the importance of the forest, the supposed origin of the Germanic people according to Tacitus.<sup>75</sup> Amongst the branches of the trees are names of German authors, politicians, and playwrights such as Hutten, Grabbe, and Martin Luther who elevated the *Varusschlacht* to its cult-like status. These historical figures set Arminius on a trajectory to become a fascist icon. By acknowledging this dangerous lineage, Kiefer's artistic works embody shifting western attitudes towards Arminius and this Teutonic tradition tainted by militarism.

Kiefer cleared the path for Germans to debate Arminius' legacy, and the plaque installed during the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary event indicated that the German people were willing to have these discussions. Yet, the role of Arminius or the *Hermannsdenkmal* in this new memory landscape was still ambiguous. Only in recent years has Arminius emerged from the woods with a reinvented significance. The discovery of the true battlefield of the *Varusschlacht* in Kalkriese, just an hour drive north of Detmold, in 1987 sparked renewed interest, but that alone does not explain the staying power of Arminius in recent memory. Today, Arminius is the regional mascot of the Lippe, drawing half a million annual visitors who make the trek to visit the *Hermannsdenkmal*.<sup>76</sup> Statues of Arminius now litter the streets of Detmold, standing guard by the doors of many tourist shops. If the life-sized model of Arminius

<sup>73</sup> Martin Brady, "Anselm Kiefer, Die Hermannsschlacht, and the Battle of Modernism," in *Germania Remembered*, ed. Lee and McLelland, 290-1.

<sup>74</sup> Matthew Rampley, "In Search of Cultural History: Anselm Kiefer and the Ambivalence of Modernism," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 84.

<sup>75</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* 9.

<sup>76</sup> Landesverband Lippe, "Infomaterial," *Das Hermannsdenkmal*, accessed on March 19, 2019, [www.hermannsdenkmal.de/hermann-erleben/infomaterial](http://www.hermannsdenkmal.de/hermann-erleben/infomaterial).

is too intimidating, gnome versions of the Liberator of Germania are available to protect the lawn from Roman intruders.<sup>77</sup> Maybe Arminius was correct to hold those kingly ambitions near the end of his life, for this modern era of consumerism has crowned him king. Despite his rise to prominence as a tourist attraction, the question of whether Arminius retains any of his anti-Roman or anti-French connotations in the modern age remains.

Arminia *Bielefeld*, the local soccer organization, was the driving force that sustained Arminius' positive image in the post World War II period. Advertisements for Arminia often depict the *Hermannsdenkmal* wearing the club's jersey. This was taken quite literally in 1999 when the Arminius statue was dressed for two weeks in the largest soccer jersey ever created, featuring the number nine in reference to the year the *Varusschlacht* took place.<sup>78</sup> This commercial stunt cemented Arminius' association with soccer, and may explain why the *Lippisches Landesmuseum* commissioned a recreation of Arminius' left foot as part of their advertisement campaign for their 2009 "Myth" exhibition in Detmold.<sup>79</sup>

Arminia fully embraces the figure of Arminius and all that he stood for. On their website, the organization likens the *Varusschlacht* to a soccer match where Rome is the visiting team while the *Germani* defend their home turf:

Team captain Arminius had home advantage. There was no umpire, cheating was permitted, and bad weather also favored the home team when they put an end to the invaders' attempts to conquer the boggy, marshy lands between the Rhine and Elbe River.<sup>80</sup>

As a local military hero, Arminius is a fitting mascot for a sports team. Though clearly in jest, the tone is eerily similar to the rhetoric employed by the fascists with references to foreign invaders and an almost idolization of Germanic wilderness. It should be noted that the soccer club adopted the name Arminia in 1905, so the club has been around for over a century. During that time, Arminia has likely dealt

---

<sup>77</sup> Magnus Brechtken, "Leaving the Forest: 'Hermann the German' as Cultural Representation from Nationalism to Post-Modern Consumerism," in *Germania Remembered*, ed. Lee and McLelland, 333.

<sup>78</sup> Brechtken, 329.

<sup>79</sup> Brechtken, 330.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Andreas Musolff, "The Global Westphalian: *Arminius/Hermann* as a Post-National Identification Figure," in *Germania Remembered*, ed. Lee and McLelland, 343.

with its past, and Andreas Musolff claims that the club uses the figure of Arminius in de-nationalized and de-militarized forms. As the quote above indicates, Arminia admits that cheating is allowed; Arminius did, after all, betray his Roman companions to emerge victorious. By acknowledging that Arminius is a cheater, it critiques the virtuous, national hero that earlier Germans revered.<sup>81</sup>

The 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Varusschlacht* in 2009 illustrated the rapid shift of Arminius' public persona in just a few decades. Chancellor Angela Merkel travelled to all three commemoration sites at Detmold, Kalkriese, and Haltern.<sup>82</sup> This is in direct contrast to President Heuss, who did not attend the 1950 anniversary event. The modern celebrations also lacked the trumpets and fanfare often associated with Arminius and the *Hermannsdenkmal* from prior ceremonies. Instead, the celebrations had a laid-back festive feeling to them with various activities ranging from concerts, lectures, and local events such as a "reconciliation banquet" sponsored by local Detmold German and Italian-style restaurants.<sup>83</sup> It seems that even local businesses could not resist capitalizing on the economic benefits of Arminius the Mascot.

Despite all the positive and newfound excitement surrounding Arminius, cultural tensions still bubble underneath the surface. Gisela Söger, a public relations staffer for the Kalkriese museum, spoke with *Der Spiegel* in the days leading up to the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, saying: "...the myth of Hermann has lost its power in modern Germany. The old nationalism has been replaced by an easy-going patriotism that mainly manifests itself at sporting events like the soccer World Cup."<sup>84</sup> However, a reenactment of the *Varusschlacht* at Kalkriese says otherwise. As *Der Spiegel* reported on the day of the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, "some 400 actors dressed as Romans or Germanic tribesmen gently reenacted scenes...Most actors wanted to be Romans, and there was such a shortage of Germanic warriors that some hirsute hobby Vikings had to be recruited to make up the numbers." These reenactors would rather be "slaughtered" as Romans than be associated with the Germanic

---

<sup>81</sup> Andreas Musolff, "From Teamchef Arminius to Hermann Junior: glocalised discourses about a national foundation myth, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 12 no. 1 (2012): 29.

<sup>82</sup> Musolff, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Musolff, 26.

<sup>84</sup> David Crossland, "Battle of Teutoburg Forest: Germany Recalls Myth that Created the Nation," *Der Spiegel* Online, August 28, 2009, [www.spiegel.de/international/germany/battle-of-the-teutoburg-forest-germany-recalls-myth-that-created-the-nation-a-644913.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/battle-of-the-teutoburg-forest-germany-recalls-myth-that-created-the-nation-a-644913.html).



victors.<sup>85</sup> On the same token, during the Detmold celebration, Angela Merkel was greeted by a friendly Roman cohort rather than by victorious German *Cherusci* warriors.<sup>86</sup> Though the commercialization of Arminius may have redeemed the chieftain in the eyes of the public, the *Varusschlacht* mythos has persisted; Arminius' mascot status has not severed his ties to German nationalism.

## Conclusion

Historian Michael Prince writes that nations often construct monuments to establish a visible connection to the nation's lineage and ideals as "...statements about who we were, who we are and who we wish to be."<sup>87</sup> All three statements are applicable to Arminius and the *Hermannsdenkmal*. First, the *Varusschlacht* myth embodies society's desire to understand one's origins. By the same token, the *Hermannsdenkmal* bears witness to the three moments in German history that are considered as the "birth of the nation" – the *Varusschlacht*, the Battle of Nations, and the formation of Germany in 1871. Second, Germans idolized Arminius as the ideal "German" and wished to emulate his supposedly *deutsch* persona. In order to identify *deutsch* virtues, less desirable, more *welsch* traits were necessary. The contrast between *deutsch* and *welsch* characteristics explains the consistent anti-Roman and anti-French sentiments present in literary narratives featuring Arminius. Likewise, the *Hermannsdenkmal* also embodied this clash between *deutsch* and *welsch* just as the historical figure of Arminius struggled with his Roman upbringing and his German heritage. The inscriptions at the base of the state speak to the failures of the *welsch* French against the superior *deutsch* people, and later Germans used the monument and the *Varusschlacht* myth to defame German Catholics and German Jews.

This leads us to the final point Michael Prince considers – what do the German people wish this monument represented? Even in the modern age, the *Hermannsdenkmal*'s place in German society is still vague. Despite the statue's popularity, the ethnic connotations of Arminius and the *Varusschlacht* persist to this day as evident by the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Based on the media coverage of the event, Germans are interested in and are aware of the general history

<sup>85</sup> Crossland, "Battle of Teutoburg Forest: Germany Recalls Myth that Created the Nation."

<sup>86</sup> Musolff, "From Teamchef Arminius to Hermann Junior," 26.

<sup>87</sup> Michael K. Prince, *War and German Memory: Excavating the Significance of the Second World War in German Cultural Consciousness* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 41.

surrounding Arminius.

Hopefully, Germans will find new and creative ways to incorporate Arminius into society once more. This does not mean in the German community per se; Arminius may find a home in a larger European context. In October 2008, Harald Schmidt, a late-night show host, produced a parody of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, a summary of German history. The *Hermannsdenkmal* was featured, but something was different. Instead of Arminius standing atop the mantle, Asterix the Gaul brandished his sword against the Roman invaders.<sup>88</sup> A Frenchman standing in lieu of the ideal “German” is not only funny, but it also marks German acknowledgment of the turbulent history of both Arminius and the *Hermannsdenkmal*. Anselm Kiefer set the trend with his *Hermannsschlacht* art series following WWII, but the appearance of the *Hermannsdenkmal* in a late-night comedy show means everyday Germans are aware of and are engaging with Arminius. Lastly, the inclusion of Asterix the Gaul may present another avenue for Arminius. Throughout history, Germans have placed Arminius into a class of his own, far away from the other barbarian leaders from antiquity. Today, there may be a home for Arminius amongst these ancient European chieftains.

---

<sup>88</sup> Brechtken, “Leaving the Forest: ‘Hermann the German’ as Cultural Representation from Nationalism to Post-Modern Consumerism,” 334.

## Bibliography

### *Primary Sources*

Crossland, David. "Battle of Teutoburg Forest: Germany Recalls Myth that Created the Nation." *Der Spiegel* Online, August 28, 2009. [www.spiegel.de/international/germany/battle-of-the-teutoburg-forest-germany-recalls-myth-that-created-the-nation-a-644913.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/battle-of-the-teutoburg-forest-germany-recalls-myth-that-created-the-nation-a-644913.html)

Dio Cassius. *Roman History, Volume I: Books 1-11*. Translated by Earnest Cary, Herbert B. Foster. Loeb Classical Library 32. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914.

"Eine schöpferische Ohrfeige." *Gartenlaube* 27 (1872): 441 - 445.

Florus. *Epitome of Roman History*. Translated by E. S. Forster. Loeb Classical Library 231. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929.

"Hermannsdenkmal: Durchs Nasenloch gestürzt." *Der Spiegel* Online, August 8, 1950. [www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-44448577.html](http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-44448577.html)

Manilius. *Astronomica*. Edited and translated by G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library 469. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Scipio, Rudolf. "Der Ehrentag des Teutoburger Waldes." *Gartenlaube* 23 (1875): 637-41.

Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I: Julius. Augustus. Tiberius. Gaius. Caligula*. Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Introduction by K. R. Bradley. Loeb Classical Library 31. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914.

Tacitus. *Agricola and Germany*. Translated by Anthony R. Birley. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Tacitus. *Completed Works of Tacitus*. Translated by Alfred Church, William Brodribb. Edited by Moses Hadas. New York: The Modern Library, 1942.
- Tacitus. *Histories: Books 4-5. Annals: Books 1-3*. Translated by Clifford H. Moore, John Jackson. Loeb Classical Library 249. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931.
- Velleius Paterculus. *Compendium of Roman History. Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Translated by Frederick W. Shipley. Loeb Classical Library 152. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924.
- Virgil. *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*. Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough. Revised by G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library 63. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916.
- Walker, E. Richard. *Ulrich von Hutten's Arminius: An English Translation with Analysis and Commentary*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008.
- 

### *Secondary Sources*

- Belgum, Kirsten. "Displaying the Nation: A View of Nineteenth-Century Monuments through a Popular Magazine." *Central European History* 26, no. 4 (1993): 457-74.
- Benario, Herbert W. "Arminius into Hermann: History into Legend." *Greece & Rome* 51, no. 1 (2004): 83-94.
- Bradford, W. Smith. "Germanic Pagan Antiquity in Lutheran Historical Thought." *Journal of the Historical Society* 4, no. 3, (2003): 351-360.
- Brady, Martin. "Anselm Kiefer, *Die Hermannsschlacht*, and the Battle of Modernism," in *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*. Edited by Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012.

- Frank, Roberta. "Anselm Kiefer, Siegfried and Arminius: Scenes from a Marriage," in *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*. Edited by Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012.
- van der Haven, Cornelis. "Germanic Myths and Gender Constructions in German and Dutch Theatre Texts 1660-1780." *Neophilologos* 95, no. 2 (2011): 249-265.
- Huismann, Frank. *Das Hermannsdenkmal - Daten, Fakten, Hintergründe*. Münster: Scriptorium, 2008.
- Kesting, Hermann. *Arminius*. Translated by Elise Schnasse. Detmold: Hermann Bösmann, 1982.
- Knauer, Sebastian. "Das Hermannsdenkmal vor dem Hintergrund des Kulturkampfes." *Rosenland Zeitschrift für lippische Geschichte* 5, (2007): 2-15.
- Koshar, Rudy. *From Monuments to Trace: Artifacts of German Memory 1870-1990*. London: University of California Press, 2000.
- Krebs, B. Christopher. *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011.
- Kuehnemund, Richard. *Arminius or the Rise of a National Symbol in Literature: From Hutten to Grabbe*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953.
- Landesverband Lippe. "Infomaterial." Das Hermannsdenkmal. Accessed on March 19, 2019.  
[www.hermannsdenkmal.de/hermann-erleben/infomaterial](http://www.hermannsdenkmal.de/hermann-erleben/infomaterial).
- von Mamoun, Fansa. *Varusschlacht und Germanenmythos*. Oldenburg, Isensee, 2001.
- Musolff, Andreas. "From Teamchef Arminius to Hermann Junior: glocalised discourses about a national foundation myth." *Language and Intercultural Communication* 12, no. 1 (2012): 25-30.

- Musolff, Andreas. "The Global Westphalian: Arminius/Hermann as a Post-National Identification Figure," in *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*. Edited by Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012.
- Nooteboom, Cess. *Roads to Berlin*. Translation by Laura Watkinson. London: MacLehose Press, 2012.
- Pagán, Victoria E. "Beyond Teutoburg: Transgression and Transformation in Tacitus Annales 1.61-62." *Classical Philology* 94, no. 3 (1999): 302-20.
- Pohlsander, A. Hans. *National Monuments and Nationalism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Rampley, Matthew. "In Search of Cultural History: Anselm Kiefer and the Ambivalence of Modernism." *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 75-96.
- Ross, Ronald J. "Enforcing the Kulturkampf in the Bismarckian State and the Limits of Coercion in Imperial Germany." *The Journal of Modern History* 56, no. 3 (1984): 456-82.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. New York: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Rowe, Micahel. "France, Prussia, or Germany? The Napoleonic Wars and Shifting Allegiances in the Rhineland." *Central European History* 39, no. 4 (2006): 611-40.
- Timpe, Dieter. "Neue Gedanken zur Arminius Geschichte." *Lippische Mitteilungen aus Geschichte und Landeskunde* 42 (1973) 5-30.
- Winkler, M. Martin. *Arminius the Liberator: Myth and Ideology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Woodman, A.J. *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

## About Clio's Scroll

*Clio's Scroll*, the Berkeley Undergraduate History Journal, is published twice yearly by students of the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. The journal aims to provide undergraduates with the opportunity to publish historical works and to train staff members in the editorial process of an academic journal.

*Clio's Scroll* is produced by financial support from the Townsend Center for the Humanities, the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), and the Department of History. *Clio's Scroll* is not an official publication of the ASUC or UC Berkeley. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the journal, the editors, the university, or sponsors.

If you are interested in submitting your article for publication in *Clio's Scroll*, please visit our website listed below for information on our calls for submissions. We also welcome feedback, suggestions, and general inquiries from our readers. Contact us at the email listed below.

Clio's Scroll  
Department of History University of  
California, Berkeley  
3229 Dwinelle Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720

clioscroll@gmail.com  
ocf.berkeley.edu/~clios/  
© 2021 by Clio's Scroll.

Front cover: *Hope*, by Edward Burne-Jones

## ARTICLES

The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire: The Tremblor That Shifted Chinese American Identity

CAITLIN COZINE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Co-Stars, Cosmopolitans, and Comrades: A History of Tiki Bars in the 1930s and 1940s

HARRIS MINER

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Uncorrupted, Undefined: Legacies of the Cult of Vesta in Early Christianity

ABIGAIL MULLIN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Arminius the Turbulator: Depicting Germanness and Combatting Foreigners in German Collective Memory

CONOR O'RIORDAN

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT NEW PALTZ

# Clio's Scroll

The Berkeley Undergraduate History Journal

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

[cliосcroll@gmail.com](mailto:cliосcroll@gmail.com) | [ocf.berkeley.edu/~cliос/](http://ocf.berkeley.edu/~cliос/)