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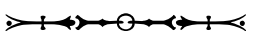
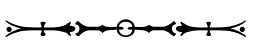
ELEUSIS

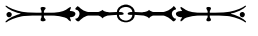
Each issue of the *Rosicrucian Digest* provides members and all interested readers with a compendium of materials regarding the ongoing flow of the Rosicrucian Timeline. The articles, historical excerpts, art, and literature included in this *Digest* span the ages, and are not only interesting in themselves, but also seek to provide a lasting reference shelf to stimulate continuing study of all of those factors which make up Rosicrucian history and thought. Therefore, we present classical background, historical development, and modern reflections on each of our subjects, using the many forms of primary sources, reflective commentaries, the arts, creative fiction, and poetry.



This magazine is dedicated to all the women and men throughout the ages who have contributed to and perpetuated the wisdom of the Rosicrucian, Western esoteric, tradition.



May we ever be worthy of the light with which we have been entrusted.



In this issue, we explore the Eleusinian Mysteries which were celebrated outside Athens for 2,000 years. Combining the mysteries of life, death, fertility, immortality, transcendence, and divine union, they were the very soul of Hellenistic civilization. Today we can glimpse their glory, still calling to us across the millennia.

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Ἐλευσίνια Μυστήρια

What We Can Learn about the Eleusinian Mysteries

George Mylonas, Ph.D.

Dr. George Mylonas (1898-1988) was a Greek archaeologist and scholar renowned worldwide for his expertise, erudition, and wit. Having received his doctorate from the University of Athens in 1927, he continued his study at Johns Hopkins University, where he earned a second Ph.D. He later taught at Washington University in St. Louis from 1933-1968, founded the Department of Art History and Archaeology there, and directed the university's archaeological digs at Mycenae. After retirement, he returned to Greece to serve as Secretary General of the Archaeological Society and oversaw the dig at Mycenae until his death. Mylonas was in the forefront of efforts to protect the Acropolis in Athens from air and water pollution.

For Dr. Mylonas, archaeology and history were far from dry or dead. In a 1985 interview with Michael Wood on his series In Search of the Trojan War, *Mylonas chuckled when he told the interviewer that he converses with Agamemnon "all the time." His definition of the work of an archaeologist is to "infer from withered flowers the hour of their bloom."*[1]

In this selection from his work on Eleusis, Dr. Mylonas explores the nature of what we can know about the ancient Mysteries.

What we can learn about the Eleusinian Mysteries is certainly very limited. We know of certain rites that were not, however, part of the secret celebration; we can figure out certain acts that were part of the Mysteries, such as the enactment of the sacred pageant; we know nothing of the substance of the Mysteries, of the meaning derived even from the sacred drama which was performed. Explanations suggested by scholars thus far, and philosophic conceptions and parallels, are based upon assumptions and the wish to establish the basis on which the Mysteries rested. These accounts do not seem to correspond to the facts. The secret of the Mysteries was kept a secret successfully and we shall perhaps never be able to fathom it or unravel it.

For years, since my early youth, I have tried to find out what the facts were. Hope against hope was spent against the lack of monumental evidence; the belief that inscriptions would be found on which the Hierophants had recorded their ritual and its meaning has faded completely; the discovery of a subterranean room filled with the archives of the cult, which dominated my being in my days of youth, is proved an unattainable dream since neither subterranean rooms nor archives for the cult exist at Eleusis; the last Hierophant carried with him to the grave the secrets which had been transmitted orally for untold generations, from the one high priest to the next. A thick, impenetrable veil indeed still covers securely the rites of Demeter

and protects them from the curious eyes of modern students. How many nights and days have been spent over books, inscriptions, and works of art by eminent scholars in their effort to lift the veil! How many wild and ingenious theories have been advanced in superhuman effort to explain the Mysteries! How many nights I have spent standing on the steps of the Telesterion, flooded with the magic silver light of a Mediterranean moon, hoping to catch the mood of the initiates, hoping that the human soul might get a glimpse of what the rational mind could not investigate! All in vain—the ancient world has kept its secret well and the Mysteries of Eleusis remain unrevealed.

What We Know

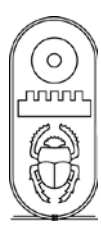
The few details that we know are inadequate to give us a complete understanding of the substance of the rites. What do we know about those rites? We know that different degrees of initiation existed, the most advanced of which was known as the *epopteia*.

We know that all people of Hellenic speech and untainted by human blood, with the exception of barbarians, were eligible to be initiated into the Mysteries—men, women, children, and even slaves. We know that the main initiation, the *telete*, included at least three elements: the *dromena*, the things which were enacted; the *deiknymena*, the things which were shown; and the *legomena*, the words which were spoken. The spoken words and the sacred objects revealed by the Hierophant remain unknown.

We may assume that the pageant of the wanderings of Demeter, the story of Persephone, and the reunion of mother and daughter formed part of the dromena; that it was a passion play which aimed not only to unfold the myth of the Goddesses to the initiates but also to make these initiates partake of the experiences of the Goddesses to share with them the distress, the travail, the exultation, and the joy which attended the loss of Persephone and her reunion with the mother. Certainly the story of the Mater Dolorosa of antiquity contains elements that appeal to the human heart and imagination. "With burning torches Persephone is sought, and when she is found the rite is closed with general thanksgiving and a waving of torches." We may assume that the fortunes of Demeter and Persephone symbolized the vegetation cycle—life, death, and life again: "the sprouting of the new crop is a symbol of the eternity of life"; that they gave the initiates confidence to face death and a promise of bliss in the dark domain of Hades whose rulers became his protectors and friends through initiation. But can we go beyond this point and imagine more fully the substance of the Mysteries?

The main initiation, the *telete*, included at least three elements: the things which were enacted, the things which were shown; and the words which were spoken. Things enacted were the drama of Demeter and Persphone. The spoken words and the sacred objects revealed by the Hierophant remain unknown.

There are a good many scholars who believe that there was no more to the Mysteries than the few facts and surmises we have summarized; there are others who believe that their substance was so simple that it escapes us just because of its simplicity. There are even a few who maintain that the secret was kept because actually there was no secret worth keeping. The testimonies of



the ancient world would prove untenable the suggestion of the agnostics. I believe that nearer the mark are the scholars who are trying to suggest a meaning which could have appealed to so many people for so long. Of the variety of suggestions made we shall quote but three because they seem to us that they take us as far towards a solution of the mystery as we can hope to go with the available evidence.

Nilsson suggests that the Mysteries based "on the foundation of the old agrarian cult a hope of immortality and a belief in the eternity of life, not for the individual but for the generations which spring one from another. Thus, also, there was developed on the same foundation a morality of peace and good will, which strove to embrace humanity in a brotherhood without respect to state allegiance and civil standing. The hope and the belief and the morality were those of the end of the archaic age."[2]

First excavations by the Greek Archaeological Society of Athens, began in 1882, under rubble. In 1931, the Temple of Demeter was found, fifty years later!

Existence in the Hereafter

Guthrie has suggested that the Eleusinian cult was based upon the Homeric (and I would add also Mycenaean) conception of the hereafter and of an existence after death somewhat altered to benefit the initiates."[3] "In Homer," he states, voicing the generally accepted ideas, "dead exist indeed, but they are strengthless, witless wraiths, uttering thin bodiless shrieks as they flit to and fro in the shadowy house of Hades." And we may recall in this regard Achilles' words, "I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, of some portionless man whose livelihood was but small, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished," whom he described as "the unheeding dead, the phantoms of men outworn."[4]

But Homer also has an Elysium, a very pleasant place indeed, to which went special people for special reasons; Menelaos was destined to go there because he "had Helen as his wife and in the eyes of the Gods he was the son-in-law of Zeus." Guthrie suggests that perhaps this Elysium was promised to the initiates of the Eleusinian cult, and that promise of course filled them with bliss and joy. The suggestion seems plausible, especially since its inception could go back to the Mycenaean age when the Mysteries were established at Eleusis. It holds no punishment for the uninitiated and only the promise of good things for the *mystai*; the two correspond to the prospects held out by the Hymn. It is simple, but does not seem to have any relation to the Goddesses of Eleusis, whose role was not that of assigning dead to different categories.

"Are we left quite in the dark as to the secret of salvation that Eleusis cherished and imported," asks Farnell, and we may well join him in his answer. "When we have weighed all the evidence and remember the extraordinary fascination a spectacle exercised upon the Greek temperament, the solution of the problem is not so remote or so perplexing. The solemn fast and preparation, the mystic food eaten and drunk, the moving passion-play, the extreme sanctity of the *iepa* revealed, all these influences could induce in the worshiper, not indeed the sense of absolute union with the divine nature such as the Christian sacrament ... but at least the feeling of intimacy and friendship with the deities, and a strong current of sympathy was established by the mystic contact."

Since those deities ruled over the lower world, people would feel that "those who won their friendship by initiation in this life would by the simple logic of faith regard themselves as certain to win blessings at their hands in the next. And this," suggests Farnell, "as far as we can discern, was the ground on which flourished the Eleusinian hope."[5]

Was this conception sufficient to justify the enthusiasm of the ancient world? What was the role and significance of Demeter who was the major deity of the Mysteries and who was not the mistress of the lower world? Plouton the master of that world had from all appearances a very secondary role and Persephone would emerge as the dominant power if the suggestion is accepted. Both Farnell and Guthrie reason well what can be obtained from the available evidence, and give us perhaps a portion of the significance of the Mysteries. I agree with them since I had reached similar conclusions; but I cannot help feeling that there is much more to the cult of Eleusis that has remained a secret; that there is meaning and significance that escapes us.

Appeal to Heart and Soul

Whatever the substance and meaning of the Mysteries was, the fact remains that the cult of Eleusis satisfied the most sincere yearnings and the deepest longings of the human heart. The initiates returned from their pilgrimage to Eleusis full of joy and happiness, with the fear of death diminished and the strengthened hope of a better life in the world of shadows: "Thrice happy are those of mortals, who having seen those rites depart for Hades; for to them alone is it granted to have true life there; to the rest all there is evil," Sophokles cries out exultantly. And to this Pindar with equal exultation answers: "Happy is he who, having seen these rites goes below the hollow earth; for he knows the end of life and he knows its god-sent beginning."[6]

When we read these and other similar statements written by the great or nearly great of the ancient world, by the dramatists and the thinkers, when we picture the magnificent buildings and monuments constructed at Eleusis by great political figures like Peisistratos, Kimon, Perikles, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius and others, we cannot help but believe that the Mysteries of Eleusis were not an empty, childish affair devised by shrewd priests to fool the peasant and the ignorant, but a philosophy of life that possessed substance and meaning and imparted a modicum of truth to the yearning human soul. That belief is strengthened when we read in Cicero that Athens has given nothing to the world more excellent or divine than the Eleusinian Mysteries.[7]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Persephone*, 1874.

Let us recall again that the rites of Eleusis were held for some two thousand years; that

for two thousand years civilized humanity was sustained and ennobled by those rites. Then we shall be able to appreciate the meaning and importance of Eleusis and of the cult of Demeter in the pre-Christian era. When Christianity conquered the Mediterranean world, the rites of Demeter, having perhaps fulfilled their mission to humanity, came to an end. The "bubbling spring" of hope and inspiration that once existed by the Kallichoron well became dry and the world turned to other living sources for sustenance. The cult that inspired the world for so long was gradually forgotten, and its secrets were buried with its last Hierophant.

ENDNOTES

[1] "George E. Mylonas," at *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_E._Mylonas*.

[2] Martin P. Nilsson, *Greek Popular Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 63.

[3] W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.,1935), 149.

[4] *Odyssey*, 11, vv. 476 and 489-491.

[5] Lewis R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 197.

[6] Sophokles, Fragm., 719 (Dindorf); Pindar, Fragm., 102 (Oxford).

[7] Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2, 14, 36.

For years, since my early youth, I have tried to find out what the facts were. Hope against hope was spent against the lack of monumental evidence; the belief that inscriptions would be found on which the Hierophants had recorded their ritual and its meaning has faded completely; the discovery of a subterranean room filled with the archives of the cult, which dominated my being in my days of youth, is proved an unattainable dream since neither subterranean rooms nor archives for the cult exist at Eleusis; the last Hierophant carried with him to the grave the secrets which had been transmitted orally for untold generations, from the one high priest to the next. A thick, impenetrable veil indeed still covers securely the rites of Demeter and protects them from the curious eyes of modern students

—George Mylonas

Demeter and Persephone

Charlene Spretnak, M.A.

From *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths*

For thousands of years before the classical myths were recorded by Hesiod and Homer, the Goddess was the focus of religion and culture. Here, Charlene Spretnak re-creates the original, goddess-centered myths and illuminates the contemporary emergence of a spirituality based on our embeddedness in nature. The author begins by explaining the genesis of this project.

"The seeds for this book were planted in the early seventies when I began reading of certain archaeological and anthropological discoveries. In the summer of 1975, I attended a weekend gathering on Women and Mythology conducted by Hallie Iglehart. She showed slides of ancient Goddess statues and artifacts from the Mediterranean area and the Near East, and she talked about the numerous clues that indicate an earlier stratum of matrifocal mythology and culture preceded the patriarchal order we call 'ancient civilization.' I knew of the evidence from my reading, but Hallie's slides and art books brought the subject to life. The images stayed with me. The rest of the weekend was spent on explorations into our personal mythology, on recognizing recurring symbols and events, and on seeing in our lives the ancient mythic themes of transformation and rebirth.

"The impetus for the book came some three months later when I was riding in our car with my daughter, Lissa Merkel. Her eye was caught by the logo of an oil corporation and she cried, 'Look, Mama, a horse with wings!' She became very excited about the idea of a flying horse. I said, 'Yes, his name is Pegasus and he's part of a myth. Myths are very, very old stories. Maybe we can find a book of myths in the library and I'll read them to you.' Then I drove on farther and thought aloud, '...but the oldest ones have been changed.' A trip to the public library confirmed what I suspected from my readings in archaeology and anthropology: There were no collections of myths other than engaging editions of Hesiod's and Homer's revisionist works. I went home and took my high school edition of Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* from the shelf. I leafed through it and read that 'Zeus had punished men by giving them women'; that Pandora was 'that dangerous thing, a woman'; and that from Pandora 'comes the race of women, who are evil to men, with a nature to do evil.' In the interest of mental health and a positive self-concept, this did not seem the best way to introduce an impressionable, four-year-old girl to the riches of mythology. (Later, while researching the pre-Olympian myths, I discovered that my daughter's name, Lissa, is derived from the Greek *Melissa,* a title for the priestesses of Demeter.)"

Demeter is the Grain-Mother, the giver of crops. Her origins are Cretan, and she has been strongly connected to Gaia[1] and

Charlene Spretnak, a co-founder of the Green Party movement in the United States, is a professor of philosophy and religion at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS)—a graduate institute in San Francisco. In 2006 she was named by the U.K.'s Environment Agency as one of the "100 Eco-Heroes of All Time."

to Isis.[2] Demeter's daughter, Persephone, or Kore, is the Grain-Maiden, who embodies the new crop. Every autumn the women of early Greece observed a three-day, agricultural fertility ritual, the *Thesmophoria*, in honor of Demeter. The three days were called the *Kathodos* and *Anodos* (Down-going and Uprising), the *Nesteia* (Fasting), and the *Kalligeneia* (Fair-Born or Fair Birth).[3] The *Thesmophoria*, the *Arrephoria*, the *Skirophoria*, the *Stenia*, and the *Haloa* were rites practiced by women only and were of extremely early origin. They were preserved "in pristine purity down to the late days and were left almost uncontaminated by Olympian usage"; they emerged later in the most widely influential of all Greek rituals, the Eleusinian Mysteries.[4] Isocrates wrote that Demeter brought to Attica "twofold gifts": "crops" and the "Rite of Initiation"; "those who partake of the rite have fairer hopes concerning the end of life."[5]

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, assigned to the seventh century B.C., is a story written to explain the Eleusinian Mysteries, which honored Demeter.[6] The tale became famous as "The Rape of Persephone," who was carried off to the underworld and forced to become the bride of Hades. However, prior to the Olympian version of the myth at a rather late date, there was no mention of rape in the ancient cult of Demeter and her daughter, nor was there any rape in the two traditions antecedent to Demeter's mythology.

Archaeology has supported[7] what Diodorus wrote concerning the flow of Egyptian culture into Greece via Crete: "the whole mythology of Hades" was brought from Egypt into Greece and the mysteries of Isis are just like those of Demeter, "the names only being changed."[8] Isis was Queen of the Underworld, sister of Osiris, and passed freely to and from the netherworld. Demeter's other antecedent was Gaia,[9] the ancient Earth-Mother who had power

Alessandro and Francesco Sanguinetti, *Ceres (Demeter) with Torch and Corn Spike*, 1848-1859, Neues Palais, Potsdam, Germany. Photo © 2008 by Suse.

over the underworld because the earth is the abode of the dead.[10] At certain sites in Greece, Demeter was worshipped as "Demeter Chthonia,"[11] and in Athens the dead were called *Demetreioi*, "Demeter's People"; not only did she bring all things to life, but when they died, she received them back into her bosom.[12] That the maiden form (Kore) of the Goddess would share the functions of the mature form (Demeter), as giver of crops on the earth and ruler of the underworld, is a natural extension. The early Greeks often conceived of their Goddesses in maiden and mature form simultaneously; later the maiden was called "daughter."[13]

In addition to the connections with Isis and Gaia, another theory holds that Persephone (also called *Phesephatta*) was a very old Goddess of the underworld indigenous to Attica, who was assimilated by the first wave of invaders from the north; the myth of the abduction is believed to be an artificial link that merged Persephone with Demeter's daughter, Kore.[14] Whatever the impulse behind portraying Persephone as a rape victim, evidence indicates that this twist to the story was added after the societal shift from matrifocal to patriarchal, and that it was not part of the original mythology. In fact, it is likely that the story of the rape of the Goddess is a historical reference to the

invasion of the northern Zeus-worshippers, just as is the story of the stormy marriage of Hera, the native queen who will not yield to the conqueror Zeus.

Although the exact delineation of the pre-Olympian version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone has been lost, the following version seeks to approximate the original by employing the surviving clues and evidence. This extremely ancient and widely revered sacred story of mother and daughter long predates the Judeo-Christian deification of father and son.

The Myth of Demeter and Persephone

There once was no winter. Leaves and vines, flowers and grass grew into fullness and faded into decay, then began again in unceasing rhythms. Men joined with other men of their mother's clan and foraged in the evergreen woods for game. Women with their children or grandchildren toddling behind explored the thick growth of plants encircling their homes.

They learned eventually which bore fruits that sated hunger, which bore leaves and roots that chased illness and pain, and which worked magic on the eye, mouth, and head.

The Goddess Demeter watched fondly as the mortals learned more and more about Her plants. Seeing that their lives were difficult and their food supply sporadic, She was moved to give them the gift of wheat. She showed them how to plant the seed, cultivate, and finally harvest the wheat and grind it. Always the mortals entrusted the essential process of planting food to the women, in the hope that their fecundity of womb might be transferred to the fields they touched.

Demeter had a fair-born Daughter, Persephone, who watched over the crops with Her Mother. Persephone was drawn especially to the new sprouts of wheat that pushed their way through the soil in Her favorite shade of tender green. She loved to walk among the young plants, beckoning them upward and stroking the weaker shoots.

Later, when the plants approached maturity, Persephone would leave their care to Her Mother and wander over the hills, gathering narcissus, hyacinth, and garlands of myrtle for Demeter's hair. Persephone Herself favored the bold red poppies that sprang up among the wheat. It was not unusual to see Demeter and Persephone decked with flowers dancing together through open fields and gently sloping valleys. When Demeter felt especially fine, tiny shoots of barley or oats would spring up in the footprints She left.

One day They were sitting on the slope of a high hill looking out in many directions over Demeter's fields of grain. Persephone lay on Her back while Her Mother stroked Her long hair idly.

"Mother, sometimes in my wanderings I have met the spirits of the dead hovering around their earthly homes and sometimes the mortals, too, can see them in the dark of the moon by the light of their fires and torches."

"There are those spirits who drift about restlessly, but they mean no harm."

"I spoke to them, Mother. They seem confused and many do not even understand their own state. Is there no one in the netherworld who receives the newly dead?"

Karoly Brocky, *Ceres and Triptolemos*, ca. 1853.

Benno Elkan, *Persephone*. Grave statue, Ostfriedhof Cemetery, Munich, nineteenth century. Photo by Mathias Bigge.

Demeter sighed and answered softly, "It is I who has domain over the underworld. From beneath the surface of the earth I draw forth the crops and the wild plants. And in pits beneath the surface of the earth I have instructed the mortals to store My seed from harvest until sowing, in order that contact with the spirits of My underworld will fertilize the seed. Yes, I know very well the realm of the dead, but My most important work is here. I must feed the living."

Persephone rolled over and thought about the ghostly spirits She had seen, about their faces drawn with pain and bewilderment.

"The dead need us, Mother. I will go to them."

Demeter abruptly sat upright as a chill passed through Her and rustled the grass around Them. She was speechless for a moment, but then hurriedly began recounting all the pleasures they enjoyed in Their world of sunshine, warmth, and fragrant flowers. She told Her Daughter of the dark gloom of the underworld and begged Her to reconsider.

Persephone sat up and hugged Her Mother and rocked Her with silent tears. For a long while They held each other, radiating rainbow auras of love and protection. Yet Persephone's response was unchanged.

They stood and walked in silence down the slope toward the fields. Finally They stopped, surrounded by Demeter's grain, and shared weary smiles.

"Very well. You are loving and giving and We cannot give only to Ourselves. I understand why You must go. Still, You are My Daughter and for every day that You remain in the underworld, I will mourn Your absence."

Persephone gathered three poppies and three sheaves of wheat. Then Demeter led Her to a long, deep chasm and produced a torch for Her to carry. She stood and watched Her Daughter go down farther and farther into the cleft in the earth.

In the crook of Her arm Persephone held Her Mother's grain close to Her breast, while Her other arm held the torch aloft. She was startled by the chill as She descended, but She was not afraid. Deeper and deeper into the darkness She continued, picking Her way slowly along the rocky path. For many hours She was surrounded only by silence. Gradually She became aware of a low moaning sound. It grew in intensity until She rounded a corner and entered an enormous cavern, where thousands of spirits of the dead milled about aimlessly, hugging themselves, shaking their heads, and moaning in despair.

Persephone moved through the forms to a large, flat rock and ascended. She produced a stand for Her torch, a vase for Demeter's grain, and a large shallow bowl piled with pomegranate seeds, the food of the dead. As She stood before them, Her aura increased in brightness and in warmth.

"I am Persephone and I have come to be your Queen. Each of you has left your earthly body and now resides in the realm of the dead. If you come to Me, I will initiate you into your new world."

She beckoned those nearest to step up onto the rock and enter Her aura. As each spirit crossed before Her, Persephone embraced the form and then stepped back and gazed into the eyes. She reached for a

few of the pomegranate seeds, squeezing them between Her fingers. She painted the forehead with a broad swatch of the red juice and slowly pronounced:

"You have waxed into the fullness of life and waned into darkness; may you be renewed in tranquility and wisdom."

For months Persephone received and renewed the dead without ever resting or even growing weary. All the while Her Mother remained disconsolate. Demeter roamed the earth hoping to find Her Daughter emerging from one of the secret clefts. In Her sorrow She withdrew Her power from the crops, the trees, the plants. She forbade any new growth to blanket the earth. The mortals planted their seed, but the fields remained barren. Demeter was consumed with loneliness and finally settled on a bare hillside to gaze out at nothing from sunken eyes. For days and nights, weeks and months She sat waiting.

One morning a ring of purple crocus quietly pushed its way through the soil and surrounded Demeter. She looked with surprise at the new arrivals from below and thought what a shame it was that She was too weakened to feel rage at Her injunction being broken. Then she leaned forward and heard them whisper in the warm breeze, "Persephone returns! Persephone returns!"

Demeter leapt to Her feet and ran down the hill through the fields into the forests. She waved Her arms and cried, "Persephone returns!" Everywhere Her energy was stirring, pushing, bursting forth into tender greenery and pale young petals. Animals shed old fur and rolled in the fresh, clean grass while birds sang out, "Persephone returns! Persephone returns!"

When Persephone ascended from a dark chasm, there was Demeter with a cape of white crocus for Her Daughter. They ran to each other and hugged and cried and laughed and hugged and danced and danced and danced. The mortals saw everywhere the miracles of Demeter's bliss and rejoiced in the new life of spring. Each winter they join Demeter in waiting through the bleak season of Her Daughter's absence. Each spring they are renewed by the signs of Persephone's return.

Patricia Reis, *Drawing from Minoan and Mycenaean Gold Seal Ring*, ca. 1500 BCE. © 1984, Beacon Press.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Lewis R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 28, 48-50.

[2] Jane Ellen Harrison, *The Religion of Ancient Greece* (London: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd., 1905), 51-52.

[3] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 120-131; also R.F. Willetts, *Cretan Cults and Festivals*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 152.

[4] Ibid., Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 120.

[5] Harrison, *Religion of Ancient Greece*, 51.

[6] E.O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1959), 153.

[7] Sir Arthur Evans, *The Earlier Religion of Greece in the Light of Cretan Discoveries* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1931), 8.

[8] Harrison, *Religion of Ancient Greece*, 52.

[9] Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, 28, 48-50.

[10] Ibid., 8.

[11] Ibid., 48-50.

[12] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Myths of Greece and Rome*, (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1927), 73.

[13] Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 263, 274.

[14] Gunther Zuntz, *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 75-77.

The Wisdom of the Sages: On the Homeric Hymn and the Myth of Demeter

Nicholas P. Kephalas, F.R.C.

This article's original manuscript was written in Athens in Greek by Frater Nicholas P. Kephalas after a comprehensive study of the few remaining sources of information which have survived the religious prejudice of the past centuries. The work was accomplished during the 1940s despite the unfavorable conditions that prevailed during World War II and civil war in his own homeland with resultant poverty and destruction. His efforts are dedicated: "To the Imperator of AMORC, Ralph M. Lewis, and to the fratres and sorores of the International Jurisdiction of the Rosicrucian Order, as a token of profound respect and preeminent honor."

It is evident from the manuscript that it is a work of love—love of the achievements of his ancient forebears, and love of philosophy and the mystical teachings which so greatly influenced the thought of later times. It was necessary to translate the manuscript into English. This was a task that required an excellent knowledge of both Greek and English. The translation was a labor of love for the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, by Frater Peter G. Demos, who lives in the United States, and the manuscript has now been adapted for modern readers.

If age gives dignity, then we shall acquire a mantle of mental and spiritual poise by this study. It extends into remote antiquity the age of what we cherish and hold to be worthy of us. It is good to feel that our feet are in the soil of the past while at the same time we reach into the future. It prevents us from feeling that we are suspended in an unstable state.

The Ancient Mysteries

Mysteries are sometimes described as religious truths or secret rites. In the following definition, the word *sacra* refers to things which are sacred, whether these are utensils, objects, or temples. *Kore* means maiden. In her book called *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Jane Harrison discusses the mysteries.

"Mysteries were by no means confined to the religion of Demeter and Kore. There were mysteries of Hermes, of Iasion, of Ino, of Archemoros, of Agraulos, of Hecate. In general, mysteries seem to occur more usually in relation to the cult of women divinities, of heroines and earth-goddesses; from the worship of the Olympians in Homer they are markedly absent. In general, by a mystery is meant a rite in which certain sacra are exhibited, which cannot be safely seen by the worshipper till he [or she] has undergone certain purifications."

The religious mysteries of the ancient world were mystical and symbolic ceremonies. Their performance revealed occult and sublime philosophic dogmas to those fortunate enough to receive such initiation. The adjective *fortunate* is employed intentionally, since initiation into the mysteries was obtained only after lengthy trials. Initiation was considered a distinction and a token of priceless honor and accomplishment.

The most famous of all ancient religious mysteries, among which were the Kabeirian of Samothrace, the Dionysian, the Orphic,

the Cybeleian, the Adonideian, the Attican, the Damian, the Auxesian, and the Thracian, were those which took place at Eleusis of Attica in honor of Demeter, goddess of agriculture. The Eleusinian Mysteries stood far above the rest in spiritual content and ceremonial majesty.

The origin and generally the formation of the various mysteries of the ancient religions are hidden in the impenetrable darkness of the ages. Consequently, if ever their exact explanation can be discovered by the noble and ceaseless efforts of archeologists, the dark curtain of the past will be lifted for a better and more complete enlightenment of modern historical and religious science. It will provide a more thorough understanding of ancient Indian, Phoenician, and Egyptian beliefs, which are now so badly misunderstood. Moreover, such an explanation will throw light upon the national characteristics of the Greeks, whose most interesting prehistoric period, one that has inspired the noblest and most majestic ideals and sentiments of humanity, still remains covered by the phantasmagoric clouds of complex and paradoxical mythology.

The Eleusinian Mysteries engaged not only the attention of the ancient Greek and Roman authors, but also that of the early founders of the Christian church and later of scientists, archaeologists, historians, and philosophers. Some of these will be referred to later.

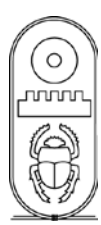
Certain things may be deduced about the Greek mysteries. First, the mysteries as practiced in Greece can be traced to at least three thousand years before Christ. Second, there is an immediate and mediate genetic relationship between divinities and beliefs of different people, which will be presently stated more explicitly. Third, at least some of the mysteries predated the Hellenic invasions, but the origin of the Eleusinian Mysteries is uncertain.

An exact explanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries is not an easy matter. The ancient authors, who for one reason or another touched on them, expressed themselves guardedly. Silence was imposed by a threatened punishment of death to anyone who dared to betray the sacredness of the mysteries. Pausanias, one of the best-known travelers of ancient times, who as an initiate had entered the inner part of the temple with the intention of describing whatever was to be seen, was prevented from doing so by a dream. "The dream forbade the description of everything viewed within the temple, affixed and performed, that might make clear what should never be told."

Strabo, on the other hand, who was not an initiate and, therefore, unable to enter the temple of Demeter or the buildings accessory to it, speaks only of what he could see while passing by the walls. He said that the temple had the capacity of a theater.

However, in spite of the enforced silence, the Eleusinian Mysteries no longer remain completely secret. Today, in addition to the information offered by the ancient authors, there are written remains preserved by the Theological School of Alexandria, and the varied information of the early leaders of the Christian church. From these the persistent inquirer can attain a rather good idea as to what the mysteries were.

The religious mysteries of the ancient world were mystical and symbolic ceremonies. Their performance revealed occult and sublime philosophic dogmas to those fortunate enough to receive such initiation.



A Karyatid from Eleusis. These were the capitols of huge pillars for the Temple. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

Clement of Alexandria who lived from about 150 to 215 CE wrote on the mysteries. However, the leaders of the church discussed the mysteries primarily to refute them as heresies. We glean some information from the Greek dramas and from philosophers such as Plato.

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter

The reason for the mysteries being established at Eleusis is related to the beautiful and dramatic myth concerning Demeter and her daughter Persephone. This is perhaps the most important myth in all Greek mythology. It is well presented in the Hymn to Demeter, composed probably in the seventh or sixth century before Christ. It was discovered in a Moscow library.

Paul Decharme (1839-1905), a member of the French archaeological school at Athens, states in his work, *Mythology of Ancient Greece*, published in 1879, that the hymn is so well executed that it makes the myth stand out from all the rest as the most beautiful and moving creation of the Greek imagination. The changes of the seasons, the life and death of nature are presented in so vivid and unforgettable a manner as to impress readers that they are observing a mystical tragedy.

The first act of this divine drama deals with the abduction of Persephone. The story opens with Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, playing with the nymphs, daughters of Oceanos, in the center of a green and flowery meadow of Sicily. She was a living picture of youth and beauty. The aromas of the rose, narcissus, lily, iris, hyacinth, and all the other flowers in bloom attracted her, and she ran joyfully about. But in the midst of all that beauty, she noticed suddenly a narcissus that surpassed all others in size, beauty, and fragrance. Fascinated, she extended her hands to pluck it. Then and there the earth opened abruptly, and the infernal and terrible god of Hades rose up out of its depths in a golden chariot. He seized her and immediately transported her to his gloomy kingdom. The young goddess cried out and begged for the help of Zeus, supreme master of all the gods, but in vain. No god and no person heard her plaintive cries.

A free translation from the original hymn states that so long as the goddess Persephone saw the land, the starry skies, the sea with its rushing waves wherein live all kinds of monsters, and the brilliant rays of the Sun, she never lost hope that she would soon see her beloved mother and the entire circle of the gods coming to her rescue. Despite her sorrow, this hope enlivened her imagination and provided entertainment, especially when she heard her voice re-echoed by the mountain peaks and the depths of the sea. When Demeter, her august mother, heard her daughter's plaintive cries, she tore her diadem from her hair, threw a dark shawl over her shoulders, and dived down over land and waves like a bird in search of its offspring.

Then follows the second act of the drama: a thrilling account of Demeter's wanderings in quest of her daughter. The pains and suffering of inconsolable maternal love are beautifully described: "The august goddess wandered for nine days over the

entire Earth with lighted torch in hand. Possessed by torment, she tasted neither ambrosia nor sweet nectar; she did not even have time for sleeping or bathing."

On the tenth day of her wanderings, Demeter met the goddess Hecate, who became interested in her misfortune. Hecate informed her that she had heard Persephone's cries but had failed to recognize the kidnapper. Demeter listened intently but remained silent. Then the goddess of vegetation resumed her search with the same persistence and anxiety.

Pity and compassion caused Hecate to accompany Demeter to assist in the search. Shortly the two goddesses came before Helios, the sun god. As the divine witness of all events, he had not failed to see the kidnapping of the virgin. Before Demeter had completed her question, Helios revealed the kidnapper's identity. He told her that he was none other than Hades, who had taken Persephone for his wife with the permission of Zeus.

Demeter Seeks Persephone amongst Humans

The sufferings of Demeter were augmented. Angered at Zeus, she departed from Olympus, the home of the gods, and even dropped her divine characteristics. Through metamorphosis, she became an aged woman. Thus transformed, she wandered from one human habitation to another, seeking her beloved daughter. Her wanderings finally led her to Eleusis.

Again, we quote: "Broken-hearted, she sat on the roadside by the well of Parthenian, where people were wont to obtain their water, in the shade of an olive tree which stood thereby. . . . She pulled down the hood which she had on her head and remained silent for a long time without showing the least interest in anything. There she stayed without food or drink, pining away because of her unending sorrow for her beautiful daughter."

When the daughters of Celeus, the first mythical king of Eleusis, came to the well of Parthenian to fill their copper amphoras with cool water, they found the old woman sitting there silent. They asked her all kinds of questions. Not wishing to reveal her identity, Demeter said that she had been kidnapped by pirates, who had let her off on the shores of Attica. She stated that she had started inland without knowing where she was going, that she was seeking refuge and would be willing to serve in any household as a nurse or maid. The maidens hastened home to tell their mother about the old woman. Queen Metaneira, their mother, having a baby to rear, told them to fetch the old woman to the palace. Gladdened by their mother's consent, the maidens announced the good news to Demeter and rushed back to the palace with her.

The legendary cave of Pluto (Hades) at Eleusis. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

As the goddess stepped across the threshold, a heavenly splendor shone through the mask covering her face. It lighted the entire hall and betrayed her divinity. Possessed by respect mixed with fear, Metaneira rose from her throne. But the bereaved goddess

let her veil fall over her face immediately and said not a word. All present looked at her and wondered, but she remained motionless and silent. Apparently, nothing could console her or free her from her misery. Only young Iambe, a slave woman, by her jests succeeded occasionally in bringing fleeting smiles to the lips of the embittered goddess. Nevertheless, Metaneira decided to entrust her son, Demophon, to the care of the divine nurse, ". . . and so the child grew as a god without ever being fed any cereal or any milk from his mother's breast."

Demeter regularly anointed the infant's body with nectar and steadily blew over his face as she held him close to her bosom. During the nighttime, without letting his parents know, she hid him in smoldering embers as women of old were wont to hide firebrands. Metaneira discovered this one evening and gave a loud cry, fearing that her baby would be burned. Thus confronted, the goddess withdrew the infant from the embers and scolded the wife of Celeus.

The embers into which Demeter had thrust Demophon were to purge him from all earthly elements and make him immortal. However, Metaneira feared the practice and put an end to it. Thus her son remained unprotected from the dangers of old age and death. Nevertheless, Demophon became a privileged individual, for he had sat on the knees and had slept in the bosom of the goddess.

With her divinity fully revealed, Demeter could no longer hide her identity from the royal circle. She told them: "I am the much honored goddess Demeter, the joy and the interest of gods and mortals. Then let the people build a temple on top of the hill above the Kallichoron (well) in my honor. Let them build it on the most advantageous ground and have them erect an altar underneath it. There I shall teach you how to perform my mysteries hereafter."

Cosmè Tura, *The Triumph of Demeter*, 1476-1484, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferarra.

A Terrible Year

But the suffering of Demeter still remained unsoothed, and her obstinate wrath brought about terrible events. "She destroyed every harvestable thing and brought unto humankind an awful year. No seed sprouted from the earth because divinely-crowned Demeter had them all well hidden. In vain did the oxen draw the plows over the land. The myriads of white oat seeds were sown for nothing."

The entire human race would have perished if Zeus had not taken a hand in the matter. He ordered Iris to intervene, but Demeter, the goddess of vegetation, spurned all pleas. She told Iris to inform Zeus that there would be no return to Olympus and that the earth would not produce fruit and grain until her daughter was returned to her. Unable to move her, Zeus was forced to assent. He ordered Hermes, messenger of the gods, to descend to Hades and persuade the ruler of the underworld to let Persephone depart from his realm of darkness.

Mindful of his brother's plea, Hades consented to let Persephone return to her mother. Because he loved her so much and

wanted her to return to his kingdom in the underworld, before she departed he forced her to eat some pomegranate seeds which prevented her from remaining on Earth all year. Escorted by Hermes, Persephone climbed into her husband's chariot drawn by four untamed horses. She was taken to her mother, and the two embraced each other.

When they stood joyfully apart looking at each other, the mother asked fearfully, "Tell me, my beloved child, did you eat anything before you left the nether world?" When her daughter nodded affirmatively, Demeter knew what had happened and told Persephone that thereafter she would have to return to the underworld for three months of the year.

During the other seasons, Persephone would be permitted to remain with the other immortals. "When the earth will be decorated during the sweet-scented season of spring with myriads of different flowers, you will always come back from the dense darkness to be a superb sight for gods and humans."

In the Homeric Hymn, this very dramatic myth ends with a reconciliation of Demeter and Zeus and the return of Demeter to her abode on Mount Olympus. The promise of Zeus to permit Persephone to return to her mother for part of the year soothed the wrath of the goddess. But Zeus left even this in the hands of Rhea, mother of the gods, to accomplish.

Rhea, approaching Demeter, said, "Come, my daughter, Zeus invites you to return to the circle of the immortals. He promises to grant you most of what you have asked and has consented to allow your child to leave the dreary depths of Hades for part of the year. Come then, my daughter, obey his will. Do not prolong your implacable hatred against Hades and Zeus and do make possible an early harvest for suffering mortals."

Demeter finally yielded to the pleas of Rhea, and the consequences of her wrath immediately disappeared. She again became a beneficent force, and the desolate lands once more bloomed with vegetation. The interrupted life of nature began again as a result of the agreement between heaven and Earth. But one of the great benefits to humanity was the teaching of her divine science to mortals while she stayed at Eleusis. She ordained that no one should neglect, disbelieve, or make public these teachings.

As the following quotation states, respect for the gods should restrain any tongue: "…and whatever we have thus revealed is no reason why we should fear and lament, for it is a great sin to obstruct speech." (The implication is that there is no reason to state what we are not supposed to reveal.)

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter ends with these important and epigrammatic words: "Blessed are the mortals, inhabitants of Earth, who have seen the great spectacles. But whoever remains uninitiated and never participates in the performance of the sacred ceremonies will be forever deprived of this blessing because they will not possess it even when death shall send them to the gloomy world below."

Frederic Leighton, *The Return of Persephone*, 1891.

The explanation of the religion of the ancient Greeks as provided by the Eleusinian Mysteries superseded the dogmas of polytheism and the superstition of the masses. It became the worthy and highly metaphysical religion of a wise and noble nation.

As practiced at Eleusis, religion presaged the growing eclectic spirit of the ancient world. The Eleusinian Mysteries embodied Greek mythology and a syncrasy of the Egyptian mysteries and religious doctrines, tempered by a philosophical argument for rational, moral living. Later, Christianity was to encounter these elements of fusion. Some of the precepts of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and others such as Neoplatonism which were inspired by them, were to leave their impression on Christianity.

Significance of the Mysteries

Beyond doubt the Eleusinian Mysteries were the apex of ancient Greek religion. According to Ernest Renan, they were the core of everything that was best in ancient religion. As such, they fascinated all antiquity. Their immeasurable value lay in the fact that the Greeks were taught through them to believe in one supreme and absolute God. Through them they came to understand the immortality of the soul and appreciate that eternal life depends on the exercise of piety, purity, and justice in the present life. It was because of these values that philosophers, historians, government leaders, and poets have had the profoundest respect for the mysteries. Every person of importance—Pindar no less than Plato, Socrates no less than Cicero—unequivocally recognized and appreciated the soul-saving and mind-elevating forces of the Eleusinian rites.

Pindar, who had respect and reverence for every god, wrote of the Eleusinian Mysteries: "Blessed is the individual who dies after seeing these things; for then such a person knows not only life's purpose, but also its divine origin as well."

What Isocrates says in the sixth chapter of his Panegyrics about the blessed life which the initiate lives is even more clear and emphatic:

"When Demeter at last arrived in the land in her wandering quest for her daughter and became well-disposed toward our ancestors because of the services they had rendered her—which only those initiated can hear about—she gave them two valuable gifts: grain and the ceremonies of the mysteries. With the former, she helped humans to live above the beasts; with the latter, she imbued the participants with the best of hopes for a life hereafter and for existence in general."

Between such hopes and their realization, which were privileges of the initiated, stood the ideas of suffering and tribulation in regard to life after death, which were dominant in the minds of the uninitiated. It was Triptolemos, the first initiate of Demeter in Eleusis, who, as one of the three judges of Hades, separated the initiated from the uninitiated and the impious and led them to their place of honor in Hades.

Those who were not initiated were deprived of all communion with the gods, of the privilege of seeing the vision of the ever-burning light, and were further compelled to suffer untold torments. Of the different scenes of the abode of Hades, depicted by Polygnotos on the walls of the clubhouse at Delphi, one showed two women "filling" two pitchers without bottoms. An epigram under it stated that they were not initiates.

Triptolemos and Kore, tondo of a red-figure Attic cup, ca. 470–460 BCE, found in Vulci, Italy. Louvre, Paris. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen.

This idea of punishment for the uninitiated is mentioned in the Hymn to Demeter, where Hades says to Persephone: "Here thou wilt be mistress of every living creature, of everything that crawls over the surface of the earth. Here thou wilt receive the greatest of honors. As for those humans who have lived in iniquity, there is in store for them here eternal punishment. Amongst them, of course, there will be those who did not appease thee with sacrifices by failing to fulfill obligations to thee as prescribed."

Plutarch in *The Soul's Immortality* says, "The perfect person is the initiate. The initiate walks freely and celebrates the mysteries undisturbedly, wearing a crown on his or her head. The initiate lives with the purified and the healthy while looking at the uninitiated masses on earth and at the unpurified beings submerged and lost in darkness and filth. The initiate also walks past the fear and malice of death to Hades' happiness."

The founders of the mysteries of antiquity, as well as the mystai, have surrounded death with an extraordinary veneration, for to them it was not one tremendous mystery but the continuation of life with new horizons and better conditions.

St. Augustine speaks favorably of the mysteries, saying they cleansed human beings of every sin and freed the human soul from the chains of ignorance and superstition. Cicero assures us that by means of the mysteries the Athenians spread concord and philanthropy. Socrates, Hippocrates, Aristotle, and a great number of other important sages of antiquity expressed themselves likewise about the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Plato, being an initiate, spoke of the mysteries with respect, calling their founders excellent spirits and divine individuals. In the *Phaedo* he says, "Virtue is the purification of the soul from pleasures, fears, and sorrows, and from all other similar conditions. Temperance as well as justice, bravery, and wisdom are, each in its own way, such purifications. Therefore, they who established for us these ceremonies (Eleusinian), evidently were not superficial people because the allusion has been made from time immemorial that those who arrive in Hades uninitiated or without having participated in the ceremonies will remain in mire; but those who have purified themselves and have taken part in the mysteries will, when they arrive there, dwell among the gods."

Persephone had annulled the unbridgeable distance between Hades and Olympus. Mediatrix between the two divine worlds, (Persephone) could thereafter intervene in the destiny of mortals.

– Mircea Eliade

At Eleusis

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, S.R.C.
From *Poems of Passion* (1883)

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, S.R.C., (1850-1919) was one of the best known authors and poets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here, Wilcox, a Rosicrucian, shares her vision of the mythic power of Eleusis.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, S.R.C. (1850–1919)

I, at Eleusis, saw the finest sight,
When early morning's banners were unfurled.
From high Olympus, gazing on the world,
The ancient gods once saw it with delight.
Sad Demeter had in a single night
Removed her sombre garments! and mine eyes
Beheld a 'broidered mantle in pale dyes
Thrown o'er her throbbing bosom. Sweet and clear
There fell the sound of music on mine ear.
And from the South came Hermes, he whose lyre
One time appeased the great Apollo's ire.
The rescued maid, Persephone, by the hand,
He led to waiting Demeter, and cheer
And light and beauty once more blessed the land.

Eleusis Museum with mountains in the background. From the Rosicrucian Archives.

The Lesser Mysteries of Eleusis

Stefanie Goodart, M.A., S.R.C

The town of Eleusis, twelve miles from Athens, was home to the famous Eleusinian Mysteries. People would come from all parts of Greece to be initiated into this cult of "The Two Goddesses," Demeter and Persephone. The Mysteries consisted of two parts, the Lesser Mysteries, which were conducted in the spring (Athenian month of Anthesterion), and the Greater Mysteries, which took place in the autumn (Athenian month of Boedromion).

The Lesser Mysteries can best be characterized as a preliminary purification that a candidate must undergo before taking part in the Greater Mysteries.[1] Even Socrates comments that one is not permitted to be initiated into the Greater Mysteries without having first been initiated into the Lesser.[2] Plutarch wrote that "in mystery initiations one should bear up to the first purifications and unsettling events and hope for something sweet and bright to come out of the present anxiety and confusion."[3] The ancient Greeks believed that participation in the Mysteries was of great importance, as it was the most popular cult of ancient Greece. Plato explains that "Whoever arrives in Haides as an uninitiate and non-participant in the initiation rites will lie in mud, but he or she who has been both purified and has participated in the initiation rites, upon arrival there, will dwell with the gods."[4]

Scholars have reason to believe that prior to the fifth century BCE, these purification rituals took place in the courtyard of the Eleusinian Telesterion.[5] However, there were also very similar purification rituals that were taking place in Athens, near the Ilissos River. Around the middle of the fifth century, the sacred officials from Eleusis decided that the Athenian purifications could serve as the necessary prerequisite to the Greater Mysteries.[6] Thus, a new tradition began, in which candidates underwent the initial purifications in Athens in the spring.[7] In the fall of the next year, they were eligible to participate in the Greater Mysteries in Eleusis. The only change to this tradition was in 215 BCE, when officials added an optional repetition of the Lesser Mysteries.[8] This repetition was held the month before the Greater Mysteries, and was open to anyone who had traveled to Athens, but

Johann Michael Wittmer, *View of Athens from the River Ilissos*, 1833, Benaki Museum, Athens.

missed the opportunity to attend the spring rites, or simply to accommodate the large number of people wishing to be initiated. This continued until the fourth century CE, when the Mysteries, and all other pagan practices, were outlawed by the Christian Emperor. However, a small temple, which was still standing in the mid-1700s, may have been one of the temples where the Lesser Mysteries were held.[9]

The word *myesis* means "to teach" and also "to initiate." *Epopteia* has a similar meaning, but with an important difference; it means "to witness" and "to be initiated."

The rituals of the Lesser Mysteries were often called the *myesis*, as opposed to the rites of the Greater, which were called *epopteia*.[10] The word *myesis* means "to teach" and also "to initiate."[11] *Epopteia* has a similar meaning, but with an important difference; it means "to witness" and "to be initiated." The slight differences in these two words explain a fundamental difference in what happened to the initiates during these two sets of rituals. In the Lesser Mysteries, candidates were taught the theology of the Two Goddesses, and the meaning of the rites of the Mysteries. However, in the Greater Mysteries, they could *experience* what they had learned, and near the end of the week-long festival, they would even *see* a vision of Persephone. Clement of Alexandria wrote: "The Mysteries of the Greeks begin with purification…. There are the Lesser Mysteries, which have a function of teaching and preparation for the Mysteries to come, and the Greater Mysteries concern everything, where it is no longer a matter of learning but contemplating and pondering nature and concrete realities."[12] As we all surely know, it is one thing to have something explained to you, but another thing entirely to experience it firsthand.

Surviving Artwork Offers Clues

What exactly was taught to the initiates we do not know. As was also the case with the Greater Mysteries, the initiates were required to keep a vow of silence in regards to what they heard and saw during the rituals. We are fortunate to have some surviving artwork that depicts some scenes from these purification rituals. This is most interesting, because depicted are mythological scenes in which Herakles is undergoing the rites of the Lesser Mysteries.

One may recall that of the Twelve Labors of Herakles, the final task was for him to go to the Underworld for the dreaded three-headed dog, Kerberos.[13] This was thought to be a most impossible task, as no mortal had ever before journeyed to the Underworld and returned. While making this journey, Herakles came face to face with the goddess Persephone. The only way that Herakles could have stood before the Queen of the Underworld, and yet be permitted to leave, was if he had previously been initiated into her Mysteries.[14] In a play by Euripides, Herakles says, "I have succeeded because I have seen the sacred actions in Eleusis."[15] According to myth, the purification rituals of the Lesser Mysteries were actually invented for the sake of Herakles.[16] As was standard for any religious ritual, one was not allowed to participate if stained with *míasma*, or ritual impurity. Among other things, murder was regarded as an act that brought *míasma* upon a person. Herakles certainly killed people as well as monsters. In order to rid him of the *míasma* certain purification rituals had to be performed. Thus the Lesser Mysteries were created, or so the story goes.

Lovatelli Urn, *The Purification of Herakles,* Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

We now return to this artwork that depicts the purification ritual. If we look at the Lovatelli urn we can clearly see three distinct ritual actions. The first scene shows Herakles holding a pig over a low altar. This altar is called an *eskhara*, and is used when making offerings to chthonic deities. From this we can infer that the offering was given to Persephone. In his other hand he holds a stack of round cakes, called *pelanoi*, which will be offered next.[17] The actual act of offering the *pelanoi*, however, is not depicted on the urn. We also see a priest pouring a libation, most likely of water, onto this same altar. He also is holding an offering tray. The items aren't clearly distinguishable, but Kerényi suggests they are poppies.[18] Poppies are a common symbol in images of Demeter and Persephone. Demeter is said to have used poppies in an effort to forget her grief of Persephone's abduction by Haides. The flower also is seen in connection with Persephone and other chthonic gods due to their potential lethal effects. However, the items on the priest's tray could also be pomegranates, spherical cakes, or cheese, which Clement of Alexandria says are offered during the Greater Mysteries.[19] We really don't know for sure. It was after these offerings that the initiate was told certain myths, which Socrates says are inappropriate to tell before children,[20] and the meanings of them were explained.

In the next action on the urn we see a veiled Herakles on a seat with a priestess holding something over his head. The seat is covered with a ram's fleece, sometimes referred to as the "fleece of Zeus." We know which animal it comes from as the horns of the ram's head are visible by Herakles' feet. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, she also sits on a ram's fleece while grieving the abduction of her daughter Persephone.[21] According to a general survey of Greek literature, a ram is the most often mentioned sacrificial animal presented to Persephone. Perhaps the ram was sacrificed just before the initiate sat on the animal's fleece. We cannot be sure, as the act of sacrificing the ram is not shown on the urn.

Herakles also has a cloth draped over his head and back, which covers his face, and prevents him from seeing. While the initiate is unable to see, he or she is led by a *mystagogue*.[22] This act of covering an initiate's eyes, whether with a cloth, blindfold, or by other means, is a common feature of initiation ceremonies throughout history and across cultures. Kerényi explains its importance in the following passage:

Herakles is seated with his head totally covered: the Mysteria begin for the mystes when, as sufferer of the event (muoúmenos)*, he closes his eyes, falls back as it were into his own darkness, enters into the darkness. The Romans use the term "going-into,"* in-itia *(in the plural), not only for this initiating*

Lovatelli Urn, *Veiled Herakles,* Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

action, the act of closing the eyes, the myesis, which is exactly rendered as initiatio, *but for the Mysteria themselves. A festival of entering into the darkness, regardless of what issue and ascent this initiation may lead to: that is what the Mysteria were, in the original sense of the word.*[23]

A few pages later he also writes, "It is in threefold darkness—the darkness of the veiling, that of the sacred nights in Agrae and Eleusis, and his own inner darkness—that the mystes find their way back to their own suffering, and conceiving motherliness."[24]

We also see the priestess holding a winnowing fan, or *liknon*, over Herakles' head. This is a type of basket used to separate the wheat from the chaff. Its connection to Demeter and Persephone, goddesses of the grain, is obvious. The action can also be described as a type of sympathetic magic. The wheat is purified, and so is the initiate. The *liknon* is also a common symbol in the cult of Dionysos. In such a context, separating the wheat from the chaff then becomes a metaphor for separating the soul from its outer casing, the body.[25] Although such a teaching is more Orphic than it is Eleusinian, it would seem that the metaphor is still applicable. One ancient author says that Musaeus, the son of Orpheus, was once one of the main priests in Eleusis.[26]

Purification by Water, Air, Fire

At this point the purification ritual is complete. According to one ancient author, the initiates were purified by the elements of water, air, and fire.[27] We have seen the water in the priest's libation, the air with the *liknon*, and the fire from the torches and on the altar. Now, in a state of purity, the initiate may approach the goddess. In the final scene on the urn, we see the initiate stepping toward the seated Demeter. She is sitting on the *kiste*, the basket which holds the ritual implements of the Greater Mysteries. The new initiate approaches and holds out his right hand to touch the snake. About this act, Burkert says, "A snake coils from the *kiste* to Demeter's lap, and the *mystes*, distinguished by his bundle of twigs, is seen touching this snake without fear—having transcended human anxiety, moving free and relaxed in a divine sphere."[28] The snake represents mysteries in general. In fact, it is such a common symbol associated with various mystery cults, that one is even featured on the cover of Burkert's book, *Ancient Mystery Cults*. Reaching out for the snake indicates that the initiate is ready to receive the Mysteries. Notice that Demeter is not handing the snake to him. She is, in fact, turning away from him, and looking behind her, at the approaching Persephone. Demeter remains sitting on the *kiste*, as these items will not be revealed until the Greater Mysteries. She also stands between the initiate and Persephone, another indication that the whole process of initiation is not yet completed.

The Purification of Herakles. Third century BCE Sarcophagus found at Torre Nova. Palazzo Spagna, Rome.

One can also see almost identical scenes depicted on a sarcophagus from Torre Nova. Represented are the pouring of libations over a low altar, offering trays, the veiled initiate on a chair, with priestess standing behind him, and Demeter sitting on the *kiste* with the snake in her lap. We can say with almost certainty that these actions, then, must have been performed during the Lesser Mysteries.

It might seem odd to some that there would be separate purification rituals that

one had to undergo before being admitted to the Greater Mysteries. However, almost all mystery religions have preliminary purification rituals that one must undergo before close contact with the Divine is permitted.[29] Furthermore, one should keep in mind that the goddess Persephone is always associated with purity. One of her epithets is *hagne* or "pure." The term "creates a field of forces that demands reverence and distance."[30] The opening line of one of the Orphic Gold Tablets from Thurii reads: "Pure I come from the pure, Queen of those below." For a goddess whose own purity is beyond measure, one must take extra precautions when preparing one's self.

ENDNOTES

[1] Sometimes the Greater Mysteries are simply called "The Mysteries." I will use the terms "Greater" and "Lesser" in this article to make a clear distinction between the two different sets of rituals.

[2] Plato, *Gorgias,* 467c.

[3] Plutarch, *De aud. poet.* 47a.

[4] Plato, *Phaedo,* 69c.

[5] *Inscriptiones Graecae* I^2 , ed. F. Hiller von Gaertringen (Berlin: G. de Gruyter, 1924), 6 125 (*IG* I^2 6 125).

[6] Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 48.

[7] It is the Athenian rituals which will be the focus of this article.

[8] *Inscriptiones Graecae* II^2, ed. J. Kirchner (Berlin: 1878-1882), 847 22 (*IG* II^2 847 22).

[9] A painting shows what the temple looked like during the "Turkish Period" and is reproduced in Kerényi, *Eleusis,* plate 8, 49.

[10] Kerényi, *Eleusis,* 45.

[11] There is some evidence that the Mysteries might have a precursor from Mycenaean times, as well as a word that is etymologically related to *myesis.* (G.E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961], 29-54; Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press], 1987, 8-9.)

[12] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.70.7-71.1.

[13] We have come to know Kerberos as a dog that has three heads. However, various ancient authors describe the creature differently. For example, Hesiod, in the *Theogony* (310) says the beast has 50 heads. Apollodoros says "Kerberos had three dog-heads, a serpent for a tail, and along his back the heads of all kinds of snakes." (*Bibliotheca* 2.122.) All sources do agree that it is a ferocious monster.

[14] Apollodoros, *Bibliotheca* II v 12.

[15] Euripides, *Madness of Herakles,* 613.

[16] Aristophanes Scholium, *Plutus* 845; 1013.

[17] The *pelanoi* are most likely made from barley meal and honey.

[18] Kerényi, *Eleusis,* 55.

[19] Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* II.22.

[20] Plato, *Republic,* 378a.

[21] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* 192-211.

[22] Kevin Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology of Ancient Greek Secret Cults,* ed. M. Cosmopoulos (New York: Routledge , 2003), 50.

[23] Carl Kerényi, "The Mysteries of the Kabeiroi," in *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks,* ed. J. Campbell (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), 39.

[24] Ibid., 41.

[25] For more information on the Orphic process of purifying the soul from the body, see previous issue of the *Rosicrucian Digest* (vol. 86, no. 1, 2008) on Orphism.

[26] Diodorus Siculus *Bibliotheca Historica,* IV, 25.

[27] Servius, *Aen.* 6.741.

[28] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults,* 94.

[29] Fritz Graf, "Lesser Mysteries—Not Less Mysterious," *Greek Mysteries,* Cosmopoulos, 244.

[30] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), 271.

Eleusis

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel [1]

The mystic philosopher Hegel dedicated this poem to his friend Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin in August 1796. The two had first met at the Tübingen Seminary in 1788, and had remained in contact. Rich in mystical symbolism, the poem expresses the importance of the ancient mystery schools to these eighteenth century philosophers and literary figures.

Oh! If the doors of your sanctuary should
crumble by themselves
O Ceres, you who reigned in Eleusis!
Drunk with enthusiasm, I would
shiver with your nearness,
I would understand your revelations,
I would interpret the lofty meaning of the
images, I would hear
the hymns at the gods' banquets,
the lofty maxims of their counsel.

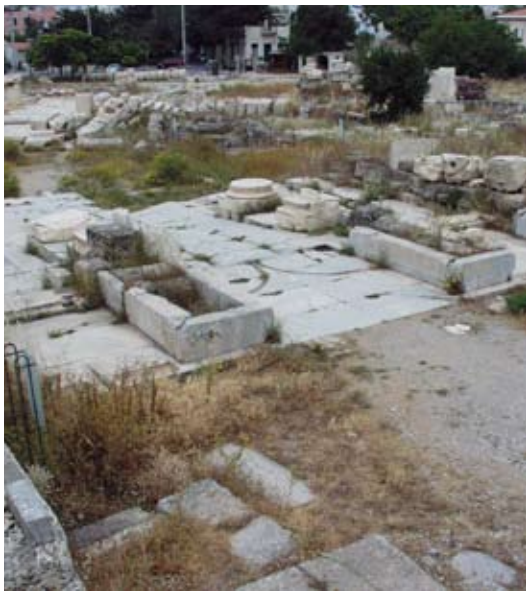
Even your hallways have ceased to echo,
Goddess!
The circle of the gods has fled back to
Olympus
from the consecrated altars;
fled from the tomb of profaned humanity,
the innocent genius who enchanted them
here! —
The wisdom of your priests is silent, not one
note of the sacred
initiations preserved for us—and in vain
strive
the scholars, their curiosity greater than their
love
of wisdom (the seekers possess this love and
they disdain you)—to master it they dig
for words,
in which your lofty meaning might be
engraved!
In vain! Only dust and ashes do they seize,

Statue of Hegel at the Rathaus in Stuttgart. Photo © 2009 by Ecelan, Wikimedia Commons.

where your life returns no more for them.
And yet, even rotting and lifeless they
congratulate themselves,
the eternally dead!—easily satisfied—in vain
—no sign
remains of your celebration, no trace of an
image.
For the son of the initiation the lofty
doctrine was too full,
the profundity of the ineffable sentiment was
too sacred,
for him to value the desiccated signs.
Now thought does not raise up the spirit,
sunken beyond time and space to purify
infinity,
it forgets itself, and now once again its
consciousness
is aroused. He who should want to speak
about it with others,
would have to speak the language of angels,
would have to experience the poverty of
words.
He is horrified of having thought so little of
the sacred,

of having made so little of it, that speech
seems to him a
sin, and though still alive, he closes his
mouth.
That which the initiate prohibits himself, a
sage
law also prohibits the poorest souls: to make
known
what he had seen, heard, felt during the
sacred night:
so that even the best part of his prayers
was not disturbed by the clamor of their
disorder,
and the empty chattering did not dispose
him toward the sacred,
and this was not dragged in the mud, but
was entrusted to memory—so that it did
not become
a plaything or the ware of some sophist,
who would have sold it like an obolus,
or the mantle of an eloquent hypocrite or
even
the rod of a joyful youth, or become so
empty
at the end, that only in the echo
of foreign tongues would it find its roots.
Your sons, Oh Goddess, miserly with your
honor, did not
carry it through the streets and markets, but
they cultivated it
in the breast's inner chambers.
And so you did not live on their lips.
Their life honored you. And you live still in
their acts.
Even tonight, sacred divinity, I heard you.
Often the life of your children reveals you,
and I introduce you as the soul of their acts!
You are the lofty meaning, the true faith,
which, divine when all else crumbles, does
not falter.

Translation from Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: the Place of Negativity,* translated by Karen Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 7-9, © 2006 University of Minnesota Press, *http://www.upress.umn.edu/Books/A/agamben_language.html.*



Remains of the main entrance to the Sanctuary at Eleusis. Note the grooves in the stone floor where the doors to the temple opened and closed thousands of times over the millennia. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

ENDNOTE

[1] Georg Hegel, *Eleusis,* in Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity,* translated by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 6-9. Available at *http://content2.wuala.com/contents/nappan/Documents/Agamben,%20Giorgio%20-%20Language%.*

Our origins are Egyptian, Brahmanic, issued of the Mysteries of Eleusis and Samothrace, the Mages of Persia, the Pythagoreans, and the Arabs."

– Michael Maier, seventeenth century physician and alchemist when speaking about the Rosicrucians

The Ritual Path of Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries

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The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone are the oldest of the Mysteries in Greece, sharing rituals and beliefs with Egypt, Crete, Anatolia, and Thrace, with roots deep in the Neolithic age and the agrarian revolution. The Mysteries at Eleusis, called *ta Mysteria*, lasted almost two thousand years, from approximately 1450 BCE to 392 CE. The Greater Mysteries were celebrated in the early fall at Athens and Eleusis, in the middle of the Greek month *Boedromion* (roughly equivalent to our September), near the time of the autumnal equinox.

The Greater Mysteries (as the Eleusinian Mysteries were also called) were presided over by the Mother Goddess,[1] but the story of both the Mother and Daughter constellates the center of the Greater Mysteries, serving as chrysalis and catalyst for the initiates' spiritual illumination and transformation. In these rites of initiation, initiates participated in a reenactment of the *mythos* or sacred story of Demeter and Persephone, their unwilling separation and joyful reunion.

The myth and the rites are closely intertwined. Since the *mythos* of the Greek Mother and Daughter Goddesses is relatively well known compared to the details of the rituals celebrated in their honor, I will focus here primarily on the details of the ritual. The ritual form was finely tuned over many centuries with the intent of manifesting an experience that itself was ineffable.

> The rites at Eleusis were considered essential to the survival of humanity, and it was said that "the life of the Greeks [would be] unlivable, if they were prevented from properly observing the most sacred Mysteries, which hold the whole human race together."

The rites at Eleusis were considered essential to the survival of humanity, and it was said that "the life of the Greeks [would be] unlivable, if they were prevented from properly observing the most sacred Mysteries, which hold the whole human race together."[2] Demeter's rites enshrined the natural laws of the birth, growth, death, and regeneration of humans, the crops, and all nature. As British classicist Jane Ellen Harrison explained it: "These two things…food and children, were what…[humans] chiefly sought to procure by the performance of magical rites for the regulation of the seasons."[3]

Ruins of the Temple at Eleusis. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

I first came to celebrate the Demeter-Persephone *mythos* by welcoming the arrival of spring in spiritual circles with women friends, and then later, too, with men. This myth also spoke to me powerfully of the loving bond shared by mother and daughter, a closeness that my own mother and I had enjoyed; and it also spoke to my sense of great loss when we were separated by her death. I wondered how the ancient Eleusinian Mysteries had honored this mother-daughter bond, and how the ritual might bring me closer to an understanding of the role of the Sacred Feminine powers of the cosmos. I began to research and reenact these rites. I know others are interested in traversing the ritual path of the Mysteries as well, which were open to all, young and old, male and female, slave and free.[4]

The Power of Experience

The power of a ritual is transmitted through a person's experiencing it. Classics scholar Carl Kerényi, guided by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, explained the experience of an initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries by contrasting it with the experience of a person who views a tragedy performed in a theatre:

> *Aristotle investigated both what happened in the minds of the audience at a tragedy and the experience offered by the annually recurring venture of Eleusis. The spectator at the tragedy had no need to build up a state of concentration by ritual preparations; he had no need to fast, to drink the* kykeon *[communion drink] and to march in a procession. He did not attain a state of* epopteia*, of "having seen" by his own inner resources. The poet, the chorus, the actors created a vision, the* theama *[spectacle], for him at the place designed for it, the teatron [theatre]. Without effort on his part, the spectator was transported into what he saw. What he saw and heard was made easy for him and became irresistibly his. He came to believe in it, but this belief was very different from that aroused by the epopteia [the vision of the Mysteries]. He [the spectator at the theatre] entered into other people's sufferings, forgot himself and—as Aristotle stressed— was purified. [But] in the Mysteries, a purification—* katharmos*—had to take effect long before the epopteia.*[5]

In contrast to the cathartic experience of watching a tragic drama whereby (according to Aristotle) the spectator is purged of the negative emotions of fear and pity, an initiate of the Mysteries would undergo physical, emotional, and spiritual cleansing in preparation for the main part of the ritual—a spiritual identification with the Mother and

Daughter in their separation and suffering and then joyful reunion, a transformation from death to rebirth. Through her or his own inner spiritual desires and participation in the rites, the initiate was prepared to receive a "seeing" into the deepest mysteries of life.

Initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries were forbidden by Athenian law, on penalty of death, from revealing the secrets of the Mysteries. It was feared that revealing the secret rites would profane the Mysteries. But these rites had originally been open to all. In the sixth century BCE, Herodotus, the father of Greek history, wrote:

> *Every year the Athenians celebrate a festival in honor of the Mother and the Maid, and anyone who wishes, from all Athens or elsewhere, may be initiated in the mysteries.*[6]

Aristotle also underscored the openness of the rites when he explained about the Greek tragic playwright Aeschylus (525-456 BCE), who lived in Eleusis:

> *"[he] did not know it was a secret," Aeschylus said of the Mysteries.*[7]

However, after the Persians attacked Greece in 490 and again in 480 BCE, foreigners who could not speak Greek were barred from the Eleusinian Mysteries.[8]

Aristotle Teaching, from a document in the British Library.

In the first century BCE, Greek-Sicilian historian and ethnographer Diodorus wrote of Demeter's Mysteries on the beautiful island of Krete (Crete), that these remained open to all.

> *Elsewhere such rites are communicated in secret, but in Krete, in Knossos, it had been the custom since time immemorial to speak of these ceremonies quite openly to all and, if anyone wished to learn of them, to conceal none of the things which elsewhere were imparted to the initiate under a vow of silence.*[9]

In keeping with the openness of Demeter's rites in Krete rather than the secretiveness required by fifth century BCE Athens, I have chosen to present my own vision of the path of initiation into the ancient Eleusinian Mysteries, based primarily on the ancient Greek sources. I understand that the rites changed over time,[10] and that no picture of the secret and ineffable rites can be definitive.

Rites Open to All

While the rites were open to young and old, male and female, slave and free, initiates had to prepare for half a year, or a year or more for initiation into the Greater Mysteries. Their instructions began with the rites of the Lesser Mysteries which celebrated the arrival of spring (in late February, in the Mediterranean climate). The Lesser Mysteries included a preparatory ceremony for the Greater Mysteries, consisting of rites of atonement, for no one with un-atoned bloodguilt on their hands could be initiated into the Greater Mysteries.[11]

In the middle of the month prior to the beginning of the Greater Mysteries (approximately mid-August), special messengers or heralds, called *Spondophoroi*, were sent from

Athens and Eleusis across Greece to invite Demeter's worshippers to attend the festival of the Eleusinian Mysteries.[12] At each city or village, the messengers would pour out libations of peace which proclaimed the cessation of warfare and signaled the beginning of the two-month long Sacred Truce, to which the diverse Hellenic populations consented, in order to provide for safe passage for pilgrims travelling to and from the Mysteries.

The sequence of the ritual is important to the realization of its overall influence. It is also important to remember that each "day" begins in the evening after sunset, at first starlight. Nighttime began the new "day," with the possibilities of refreshing rest and revelatory dreams.

The Day before Day One

The day before Day One, on the 14th of the month called *Boedromion* (in mid-September), the priestesses of Demeter and Persephone took the basket of Sacred Objects (*Hiera*) of the Goddess from her temple in Eleusis to Athens, and carried it on their heads along the Sacred Way (*Hieros Hodos*) that initiates themselves would soon traverse in their approach to the Two Goddesses.[13] Along the way they rested by a shrine of Demeter and Persephone near Demeter's sacred fig tree on the outskirts of Athens.[14]

The procession along the twelve miles of the Sacred Way, accompanied by an honor guard from Athens and villagers, would have arrived at Athens at the end of the day, no doubt being welcomed by celebrants already in the city. A priest of Demeter climbed up to the Akropolis to announce the arrival of Demeter's sacred objects and her entourage, to the priestess of Athena.[15] In this way, the relationship of these two Goddesses and of their two, once independent regions, were accorded mutual respect.

Day One: *Agyrmos*, the Gathering

According to the fifth century CE lexicographer Hesychios, the *Agyrmos* was

The Acropolis of Athens, at night. Photo © 2004 by Jannisch, Wikimedia Commons.

"…of the Mysteries the first day."[16] The initiates, dressed simply, assembled with their teachers in the Athenian *Agora* or marketplace, in front of the *Stoa Poikile*, the Painted Portico, together with thousands of celebrants who came from all around Greece, and beyond. Very likely the blessings of Zeus and Athena, as well as of Demeter and Persephone, were invoked for the beginning of the festival.

As part of the proclamation (*prorrhesis*) of the Mysteries, the initiates, called *mystai*, were given a warning to refrain from initiation if one had un-atoned killing on their hands.[17]

A vow of silence was required of the initiates, not to reveal the experiences of the rites.[18] I interpret the initiate's vow of silence also as a promise to remain silent during the days of initiation. Such a "fast" from speaking would have allowed the person to quiet the cognitive mind and to rest down into one's deeper mind and spiritual center. I experience this sacred silence as nourishing and spacious, an opportunity for deeper explorations into Spirit.

Initiates were also instructed to fast each day from dawn until sunset, following the example of Demeter who would neither eat nor drink while searching for her lost Daughter.[19] In the evenings initiates could eat and drink, except for the traditionally forbidden foods: meat, fowl, red mullet fish, red wine, apples, pomegranates, and beans.[20] Fasting, as we know, is a means of cleansing

the body, a time when the body's cells and tissues dispel impurities.

To conclude the first evening of ceremonies, the procession of priestesses, priests, initiates, and other celebrants would have paraded through the Agora up to the sacred precinct of Demeter in Athens, called the *Eleusinion*, between the Agora and the north slope of the Akropolis. There, Demeter's *Hiera*, her Sacred Things, would have been taken into her temple, with singing and dancing.

Day Two: *Alade! Mystai!*
"To the Sea, Initiates!"

On Day Two, initiates were heralded early in the morning with the call, *Alade! Mystai!* "To the Sea, Initiates!"[21] Initiates, with their teachers, families, and friends paraded the handful of miles to the seashore south of Athens, to the Bay of Phaleron. This day was also called the *Elasis*, a day for banishment or letting go.[22] Likely the initiates saw their immersion in the sea as returning to the womb-waters of Mother Earth. This process of physical cleansing and spiritual purification was further preparation for the initiates' pending experience of death and rebirth.

In Greece as elsewhere, the salt sea is believed to have healing properties. It was believed that, "The sea can wash clean all the foulness of mankind."[23]

Such a "fast" from speaking would have allowed the person to quiet the cognitive mind and to rest down into one's deeper mind and spiritual center.

Image of a sacrificial pig from Eleusis. Eleusis Museum. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

Day Three: *Heireia Deuro!*
"Bring Sacred Offerings!"

During Greece's Classical Age, Day Three was called *Heireia Deuro!* or "Bring Sacred Offerings!"[24] The official state ceremonies in Athens, on the evening following the day at the sea, included the sacrifice of a suckling pig by each initiate, as well as of other animals by officials, to be used for the evening's feast.[25] The meaning of this sacrifice is not clear. Was it a sacrifice made from gratitude for the abundant gifts of the Mother Goddess? A symbolic gesture of purification from one's moral mistakes and spiritual failures? A prayer for the success of a new harvest? Perhaps all that, and more.

Because there is evidence that in earlier times Demeter preferred "the gentler foods of fruit and grain"[26] to the blood sacrifice of animals, I expect there were also individual gift-offerings of grains and fruits, singing and dancing, and gratitude offered to "the Two Goddesses," as Demeter and Persephone were called.

In addition, tithes of the grain harvests were brought by official delegations from various city-states. In the latter part of the fifth century BCE, these offerings of first fruits—which at first were an offering of thanks to Demeter for the ending of famine—became required by the Athenian city-state during its war with Sparta, to

strengthen Athens' alliances and security.[27] Demeter's Priestess refused complicity with what in effect were war taxes.[28]

Day Four: *Asklepia/Epidauria*, Healing Dreams

Day Four was named *Asklepia* and *Epidauria* in honor of Asklepios and his healing center to the south at Epidauros.[29] It was said that on this day, the cult of Asklepios and Hygeia joined the Eleusinian Mysteries rites in Athens.[30] Evening rites of sacrifices were held at Demeter's Eleusinion temple in Athens to honor Asklepios, God of Healing; Hygeia, Goddess of Health; and Demeter and Persephone, who also were revered as healing deities.

Special blessings were invoked for doctors and healers, and perhaps healing practices were offered at Demeter's Eleusinion temple in Athens to all who came for them. Later that evening, initiates participated in a "night-watch."[31] I think that probably they spent an all-night visit at the Asklepion precinct on the south slope of the Akropolis, using this time to focus on the healing of physical ailments, emotional distress, and spiritual limitations. The temple of Asklepios was built near the enclosure of a sacred spring in a small cave.[32] There was a dormitory or *abaton* for sleeping.

Statue of Asclepius. Museum of Epidaurus Theatre. Photo © 2008 by Michael F. Mehnert, Wikimedia Commons.

Those seeking healing would prepare for a night of dreaming by inviting a visitation of divine presence and purpose into their lives.

As in the healing rites at the great healing center of Asklepios, Hygeia, and Apollo, on the Peloponnesos at Epidauros, where dream incubation played an important role,[33] this night too would have been a time for healing dreams. Since the ancients believed that illness stemmed from a person not being aligned with their divine destiny, those seeking healing would prepare for a night of dreaming by inviting a visitation of divine presence and purpose into their lives. Such a visitation in one's dreams could bring a healing of soul and body, providing the conditions for health and wealth, well-being and abundance.

After a night of dreaming, initiates would tell their dream to an attendant of Asklepios or Hygeia, called *therapeutes* (the source of our word for "therapist").[34] It was incumbent on the initiate to follow the divine guidance and to perform some action, as directed by the deity, in order for healing to be fulfilled.[35]

Day Five: *Pompe*, Grand Procession

On Day Five, many thousands of exuberant celebrants joined the *Pompe* or Grand Procession from Athens to Eleusis, led

by the priestesses of Demeter and Persephone carrying the basket of the Goddess's Sacred Things or *Hiera*. Celebrants left early in the morning from Athens' Sacred Gate (at the northeast corner of the Agora) and proceeded along the Sacred Way to Eleusis.

Inside Demeter's temple, fragrant with incense, there were things said (*logomena*), things enacted (*dromena*), and things seen (*deiknymena*).

The event places visited by the jubilant procession of celebrants were recorded by the second century CE Greek author Pausanias, himself an initiate of the Mysteries.[36] Just outside the Sacred Gate at Athens, celebrants stopped at the shrine of the Sacred Son, Iakchos, who joined in leading the exuberant crowds.[37] They paused at the River Kephisos, where youths offered a lock of hair (probably a coming of age ceremony).[38] The procession rested at Daphni at the temple precinct of Apollo, Demeter, Persephone, and Athena; and then visited the nearby sanctuary of Aphrodite, where votive offerings could be made to the Goddess of Love, Laughter, and Beauty.[39] At the boundary between Athens and Eleusis, beside the river and lakes called *Rheitoi,* initiates were met by descendents of Krokos (the first inhabitant there), who tied a saffron-yellow strand to the right wrist and left ankle of each initiate, which signaled their connection to the Mother Goddess.[40]

A high point of hilarity for the rites came just outside of Eleusis, when initiates crossed over the Bridge of Jests, mocked by masked jesters, led by a raucous old woman named Baubo or Iambe.[41] The procession finally arrived at Demeter's sanctuary, with torches, rejoicing.

Day Six: *Pannychis*, Nightlong Revelry

Day Six began in the evening with a Nightlong Revelry, the *Pannychis*, with torch-lit dancing by women around *Kallichoron*, the well "of beautiful dances" near Demeter's temple at Eleusis.[42] The revels included a *kernophoria*, a special dance led by women carrying First Fruits of the Harvest, using a ritual vessel worn on the head, called the *kernos*. They were joined in dancing by all the celebrants.[43]

Probably the offering of sacred bread, the *pelanos*, was celebrated in front of Demeter's temple at Eleusis, the *Telesterion*. It was baked from the first fruits of the grain harvest of wheat from Demeter's sacred fields on the Rharian plain, the most fertile land of Attika.[44]

After this nightlong revel, the following morning and afternoon allowed time for rest, and for further dedications or sacrifices for the Two Goddesses and other Deities in the family of the Greek pantheon. At Eleusis there were shrines just outside of Demeter's temple precinct for Artemis of the Portals and for Poseidon, Lord of the Sea; and perhaps also for Hekate, triple-aspected Goddess of Crossroads; and Triptolemos, the hero of Eleusis, said to have taken Demeter's gift of agriculture throughout the known world.[45]

Days Seven and Eight: *Mysteriotides Nychtes*, Nights of the Mysteries

Days Seven and Eight were called *Mysteriotides Nychtes*, the Mystical Nights or Nights of the Mysteries. Little is known with certainty of what happened during these culminating nights. The initiates, called *mystai*, together with their teachers, called *mystagogoi*, entered Demeter's temple, her earthly home. Perhaps, like the Orphics, initiates needed a password taught them by the teacher of the mysteries which allowed them entry to the Telesterion, the Hall of Completion.[46]

Inside Demeter's temple, fragrant with incense, there were things said (*logomena*), things enacted (*dromena*), and things seen (*deiknymena*).[47] Probably the Homeric *Hymn* to *Demeter* (or a similar hymn) was chanted by the Priestess of Demeter and the Hierophant, who was said to have a most sweet voice.[48] The priestesses and priests, along with initiates, reenacted portions of the sacred drama of the Mother and Daughter.[49] A communion drink called *kykeon*, made of boiled barley water and mint, was shared.[50] A brass gong sounded.[51] A great fire blazed forth inside the temple.[52] The highest stage of initiation—the *epopteia*, a vision, a special state of seeing—was received.[53]

The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* from the Archaic Age (ca. 700-600 BCE) is our primary source for the *mythos* which related the sacred drama of the Mother and Daughter's separation and reunion. It begins with the abduction of Demeter's Daughter by Hades, according to the plan of Zeus.

Lord Hades, with his deathless
horses… seized her,
Unwilling, lamenting, screaming,
calling for help from Her Father!
…
The peaks of the mountains echoed
and the depths of the oceans rang
With the immortal voice of the
Daughter—and Her Holy Mother
heard her! …
Anguish more bitter and cruel now
struck the great heart of Demeter,
Her rage against Zeus erupted, against
the storm-clouded Son of Kronos.
She abandoned the assembly of Gods
and heights of Mount Olympos
To live in human cities and fields,
hiding her beauty for a long time.[54]

When Demeter, desolate over the loss of her Daughter, withdrew her fertility from the Earth, humans were faced with famine. Zeus, having lost the gift offerings from humans, suffered the diminishment of half his powers.

According to the myth, after Demeter came to Eleusis, she was invited to the home of Keleus and Metaneira, where she was asked to nurse their new son, Demophoon. The following key passage from the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* can be read as indicating ritual actions which Demeter taught by her own example.

The Rape of Proserpine, sixteenth century, Louvre, Paris.

And Demeter, Bestower of Seasons and
Bright Gifts, would not sit down on
The glistening chair, but waited
unwilling, her beautiful
eyes downcast,
'til thoughtful Iambe brought Her
a low bench and threw a silvery
fleece over it.
Sitting down, Demeter drew Her
veil across Her lovely face with
Her hand,
And stayed there on the bench,
grieving silently, not speaking
to anyone
By a single word or gesture, unsmiling,
tasting neither food nor drink.
She sat longing, consumed by desire
for Her finely adorned Daughter,
Until thoughtful and wise Iambe
joked with the holy Lady,
With bawdy stories making Her
smile, and laugh, and have a
gracious heart.
And ever after, Iambe's ribald humor
brought delight to the Goddess's rites.

Metaneira brought Her honey-sweet
wine, but the Divine Lady
refused it,
For it does not accord with sacred
custom to drink such wine at this
time.
Demeter asked to be given instead,
barley and water freshly boiled,
Mixed with soft pennyroyal—a mint-
sweetened brew to end Her fast.
Metaneira made the kykeon *as asked,*
she gave it to the Lady to drink,
And the Great Goddess Deo
[Demeter] received it in
affirmation of Her rites.[55]

Reading this passage, we can also imagine the initiate sitting in the dark temple at Eleusis at the beginning of the Nights of the Mysteries, veiled, fasting, silent, identifying with Demeter in her grief and anger, missing her lost child, the loss of love and happiness, of life itself.

Demeter (with sceptre) and Kore (with torch), fragment of a votive relief, marble. ca. 420–410 BCE. From Rhamnus in Attica (probably from the Nemesis Temple). Photo by Bibi Saint-Pol, Wikimedia Commons.

After wise Iambe (Baubo) came to jest with the Goddess, and restored her to laughter and her generous nature, Demeter, her heart open again, agrees to care for the newborn son of Keleus and Metaneira. Probably the ceremony of the adoption of the "hearthchild" occurred at this point in the rite.[56] Perhaps it was then that initiates received the special potion, the *kykeon*, of boiled barley water, sweetened with pennyroyal mint—tasting like mother's milk.[57] Perhaps now, each initiate was crowned with a chaplet of flowers and ribbons in confirmation of Demeter's adoption of each one of them.

Finally, in order to regain the offerings of humans, Zeus ordered the return of Demeter's Daughter Persephone to her. The high point of the ritual was the joyful reunion of the Mother and Daughter, following the Daughter's sojourn and suffering in the Underworld. Persephone's return from the realm of the dead symbolized the rebirth of all life. Since initiates identified with the Two Goddesses, they too would experience the return of the suffering soul to its loving source.

The Homeric poet writes of the reunion of the Mother and Daughter with these words:

Then all day long, Their hearts
in communion, in this
blessed presence,
Embracing and full of love, finally
relinquishing sorrow,
Happy at long last together, held
close in each other's arms,
Each receives joy from the other,
each gives joy in return!
Hekate comes near to embrace, with
great love, Holy Deo's Daughter.
Now to Her, this elder Queen
will become priestess and
devoted companion.[58]

Demeter and Persephone reunited were then joined by the loving and devoted Grandmother, Hekate. This love among Mother, Daughter, and Grandmother has rarely been given its full place in our own mythic memories, our literature, or religious rites in the West.

Attributed to the Pourtalès Painter. Dionysus (sitting left, at the end of the couch) and Ploutos (sitting right, holding a cornucopia) surrounded by satyrs and maenads. Attic red-figured krater, ca. 370-360 BCE, possibly from S. Agata dei Goti (Campania).

Demeter then returned her fruitfulness to the world, and she went to the kings and princes of Eleusis and "revealed her rites for all."[59] In the fourth century BCE, the Athenian orator and initiate Isokrates wrote:

> *Demeter bestowed on us two gifts, the greatest gifts of all: first, the fruits of the earth, thanks to which we have ceased to live the life of beasts; and second, the mysteries; and they who are initiated thereto have brighter hopes both for the end of their life and for all eternity.*[60]

Demeter's agricultural rites included the laws or *thesmoi* by which crops were successfully cultivated. Demeter's bestowing the gift of grain to humanity was depicted in a great marble relief which must have stood inside the Telesterion temple, of Demeter placing a stalk of ripe wheat into the hand of young Triptolemos, a prince of Eleusis, the hero of the Goddess who spread her gift to the known world.

Two important ritual elements not mentioned in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* were a Sacred Marriage and the Birth of a Holy Son. These elements may have been added at a later point, perhaps during the early Christian era. However, these two sacred events would have been in keeping with the rites of the Mother-Daughter Goddesses in Greece, in ancient Crete, and elsewhere, which were enacted to magically induce the procreation of the crops and the Earth. Perhaps there was a *Hieros Gamos* (Sacred Marriage) of Demeter, embodied by her Priestess, and the Hierophant, inside the Anaktoron, the stone-enclosed shrine inside the temple, to invoke the fertility of all life. According to Homer, there was a Sacred Union of Demeter and the hero/god Iason in Crete:

> *So too fair-haired Demeter once in the spring did yield*
> *To love, and with Iason, lay in a new-ploughed field.*[61]

Perhaps this was when the great fire burned so brilliantly in the temple, atop the Anaktoron. Perhaps sometime after this, the birth of a Holy Son was announced. The Christian commentator Hippolytus (third century CE) wrote that the Hierophant proclaimed,

> *Potnia* [the Great Goddess] *gave birth to a sacred boy. Brimo, Brimos!*[62]

As initiates moved through a death-like experience to rebirth, they received a special vision. In the fifth century BCE, the Greek lyric poet Pindar wrote of this experience of the Eleusinian Mysteries and those initiated who pass on to the Elysian Fields:

> *…near them blossoms a flower of perfect joy.*
> *Perfumes always hover above …*
> *From the frankincense strewn in the deep-shining fire of the gods' altars.*[63]

> *Happy is he...having seen these rites...;*
> *for he knows the end of life*
> *and he knows its god-sent beginning.*[64]

In the fourth century BCE, Plato alluded to the culmination of the Eleusinian Mysteries in the *Symposium*, where one received a vision into the "vast sea of

beauty"[65] all around. Plato also alluded to the Eleusinian Mysteries in the *Phaedrus:*

> *But at that former time they saw beauty shining in brightness, when, with...a blessed company…they saw the blessed sight and vision and were initiated into that which is rightly called the most blessed of Mysteries, which we celebrated in a state of perfection, when we were without experience of the evils which awaited us in the time to come, being permitted as initiates to the sight of perfect and simple…and calm and happy apparitions, which we saw in the pure light....Beauty...shone in brilliance among those visions.*[66]

After the mysterious nighttime, daytime, and second nighttime within Demeter's Temple, celebrants probably emerged from the Temple at dawn and then walked to Demeter's fertile grain fields of the Rharian Plain, to invoke the rebirth of the crops and nature, reciting the ritual formula that invoked the fertility of Sky and Earth: "*Hye!* Rain! Pour down! *Kye!* Conceive! Give birth!"[67]

What was the effect of these Mysteries? In the *Phaedo*, Plato (like Pindar a century earlier) indicated the shared belief that those who were initiated would experience a good life after death.

> *Those persons to whom we owe the institution of the mystery-rites are not to be despised, inasmuch as they have in fact long ago hinted at the truth by declaring that all such as arrive in Hades...purified and initiated shall dwell with Gods.*[68]

Cicero, the first century BCE Roman political leader and author (initiated at Eleusis while a young man of seventeen studying philosophy in Athens) also indicated that a shared belief in a better life on earth and hope for an afterlife was imparted to him during his initiation.

> *Among the many excellent and indeed divine institutions*
> *which...Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life,*
> *none, in my opinion, is better than... the Mysteries.*[69]
>
> *We have been given a reason not only to live in joy,*
> *but also to die with better hope.*[70]

Carved bust of Cicero, Lutheran cathedral of Ulm Münster in Ulm, Germany. Photo © 2006 by Joachim Köhler, Wikimedia Commons.

The Greek philosopher and public official Themistios, a pagan and probable initiate of Demeter's Mysteries during the fourth century CE, wrote an essay "On the Soul" which compared the experience of the soul at the moment of death to the experience of the Eleusinian Mysteries:

> *The soul* [at death] *has the same experience as those who are being initiated into great Mysteries... at first one wanders and wearily hurries to and fro, and journeys with suspicion through the dark as one uninitiated: then come all the terrors before the final initiation, shuddering, trembling, sweating, amazement: then*

one is struck with a marvelous light, one is received into pure regions and meadows, with voices and dances and the majesty of holy sounds and shapes: among these he who has fulfilled initiation wanders free, and released and bearing his crown joins in the divine communion, and consorts with pure and holy men.[71]

Day Nine: *Plemochoai*, Libations, and *Epistrophe*, Return

Day Nine was called both *Plemochoai*, Pourings of Plenty, and *Epistrophe*, Return. This day was a time for offering libations (to the deities? to the ancestors?), and it began the transition back to one's own home, family, community, and work—to the rest of one's life, with a new way of seeing.

Special ritual vessels called *plemochoai* were used for pouring libations.[72] Perhaps these were libations to the dead, libations for the ancestors. The Athenians called those who had died, *Demetrioi*, the People of Demeter.[73] For me, this is a time to remember the beloved dead, to pour libations to the memory of deceased family and friends. I revisit memories and feelings both positive and negative, recalling our relatedness, our truths, and love.

Epistrophe implies re-crossing the boundary between the liminal realm of sacred ritual to return to the more ordinary experiences of daily life. I also find this a good time to reflect upon what inside me has died and been left to the past; what new life has found rebirth inside; and on what the future can be, what will be my life's calling, how this can be brought more into harmony with divine purpose, more akin to the Two Goddesses and to the miraculous divinity of life. I ponder what it means to embody the teachings of the Mysteries—*Gnoothi sauton!* "Know Thyself!" and *Meden agan!* "Nothing in Excess!" [74]

In the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, a person could experience the renewal of his or her humanity and also the renewal of their connection to divinity, nature, community, and the cosmos. As the rites concluded, the initiates returned home with a new vision of life, blessed by the mysterious gifts of beauty and love.

Only once in its long history was the pompe suspended, although it had already started; when news of the destruction of Thebes by Alexander the Great reached Athens, the celebration was called off.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Douris of Samos, cited by the Scholiast on Aristophanes *Ploutos*, line 1031; see also Athenaios, VI 253D; Hippolytus, *Philosophoumena* V.8; Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (London: Merlin Press, [1903, 1907 2nd ed., 1962] 1980.), 559; George Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 240.

[2] Zosimos, *Historia Nova* IV.3.3, ed. Ludwig Mendelssohn (Leipzig, 1887); see Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1967] 1977), 11-12.

[3] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913), 50.

[4] Franciszek Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrées des Cités Grecques: Supplement* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1962) 13-18, inscription # 3; see Kevin Clinton, *The Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Association, 1974), 12; Margaret Miles, *The Athenian Agora: The City Eleusinion*, vol. XXXI (Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1998), 51; Helene P. Foley, ed. *The Homeric "Hymn to Demeter:" Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66.

[5] Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 113.

[6] Herodotus, *History* 8.65, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt, in *Herodotus: The Histories* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1954); see Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 31.

[7] Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea (Nichomachaean Ethics)*, 3.1111a 10-11, trans. W.D. Ross, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), 351.

[8] Isocrates, *Panegyrikos* 4, 157-158, trans. G. Norlin, in *Isocrates*, George Norlin and Larue Van Hook, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1928] 1980).

[9] Diodorus V, 77, 3; see Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 24. I also use the Greek spelling for Crete *(Krete)*.

[10] Mara Lynn Keller, "The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone: Fertility, Sexuality and Rebirth," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 27-54.

[11] Isokrates, *Panegyricus* IV.157-158; Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio rerum mathematicarum ad legendum Platonem utilium*, 14.23. Recension by E. Hiller (Leipzig, 1904); see also Lewis R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. III (Wayne, NJ: Caratzas Brothers, [1906] 1977), 344-345.

[12] *Inscriptiones Graecae/Greek Inscriptions* [3] 704E; see Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, 23.

[13] Plutarch *Lives: Phocion*, xxviii.2-4; *Inscriptiones Graecae/Greek Inscriptions* II[2] 1078; *Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum* III.5, see Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 151 and note. 2; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 245, 246; Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, 14, 69; H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 59; John Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (New York: Hacker, 1980), 198.

[14] Pausanias, *Guide to Greece, Central Greece*, vol.1, I.37.2, trans. Peter Levi (London: Penguin Books, [1971] 1978), 104; Philostratos, *Lives of the Sophists* II. 20; see Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, 40.

[15] *Sylloge*4 vol. 2, no. 885, l.16; see Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, 95; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 236 and note 113.

[16] Hesychios, see under *Agyrmos*; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 247-248.

[17] Isokrates, *Panegyricus* IV.157-158; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars: Nero* 34.4; Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio*, 14.23; Origen, Cels.3.59; Libanios, *Decl.* 13.19,52; see Farnell, *Cults*, 344-345; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 247-248; Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, 46 and note 263, 78 and notes 12, 13; Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 286, note 13; Foley, *Homeric Hymn*, 67.

[18] Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars: Nero* 34.4.

[19] Homeric "Hymn to Demeter," lines 200-201; Ovid *Fasti* 4.535.

[20] Porphyry, *De Abstentia/Abstinence from Animal Food*, IV.16.

[21] Hesychios, see under *alade mystai; Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum* IV No. 385d, line 20 p 103; *Sylloge*[4] vol. 2, no. 540; Polyaenus *Stratagems* III.11; Plutarch *Lives, Phocion*, 6.3; see Harrison, *Prolegomena* ([1903, 1907 2nd edn., 1962] 1980), 152 and note 3; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 249 and note 122.

[22] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon*. A new edition revised and augmented by Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1843] 1953), 528. *Elasis* is related to the English term "elastic."

[23] Euripides *Iphigenia in Tauris*, line 1193, in Euripides' *Three Plays: Alcestis: Hippolytus: Iphigenia in Tauris*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, and New York: Penguin Books, [1953] 1980).

[24] See Jon D. Mikalson, *The Sacred and Civil Calendar of the Athenian Year* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[25] Lysias VI, 4; *Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum* IV, 2, no. 385d; *Sylloge*[4] vol. II, no. 540; see Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 152-153; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 250 note 127.

[26] Porphyry, *Abstinence from Animal Food*, IV.16; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I.14.3, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Litt. D., vols. III, IV (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1935] 1975); Harrison, *Prolegomena* [1903, 1907 2nd edition, 1962] 1980), 147-149.

[27] *Inscriptiones Graecae/Greek Inscriptions* I[2], 76 (= SIG 83 = LSCg #5); see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 67-68.

[28] Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, 70; Ronald S. Stroud, *The Athenian Grain-Tax Law of 374/3 B.C.* (Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1998), 9.

[29] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, II.26.8, Philostratus *Vita Apollonii*, IV, 18, see Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asklepios* (1945), 316, #565; C.A. Meier,

Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy, trans. Monica Curtis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967),118.

[30] *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, xxv. 226, 10-12.

[31] Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, 56.1, 4;

[32] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I.21.4.

[33] Solinus *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium*, Cp. 7, 10; Strabo *Geographica* VIII.6.15; see Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asklepios*, #735, #738, 380, 381.

[34] Strabo, *Geographica* VIII. 6.15; see Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asklepios*, 380.

[35] Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asklepios*, #441, 254; Charitonidou, A[ngeliki]. "Epidaurus: The Sanctuary of Asclepius" in *Temples and Sanctuaries of Ancient Greece: A Companion Guide*, ed. Evi Melas. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 94, 89-99.

[36] Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, I.36.3-38.1

[37] Dikaios quoted by Herodotus VIII.65; Aristophanes, *Frogs*, lines 340-353, 395-396; 325-335, Scholium on Aristophanes' Frogs, 326. Plutarch *Phocis* 28.2, Plutarch *Kamil.* 191; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 254-255, 238; Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 8-9; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 287 note 13.

[38] Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, I. 37.2; Plutarch *Alkibiades* XXXIV.4; *Inscriptiones Graecae/Greek Inscriptions* II^2 1078.29); see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 252-258; Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, 102-113; Nanno Marinatos. *Art and Religion in Thera: Reconstructing a Bronze Age Society* (Athens: D. & I. Mathioulakis, 1984), chaps. 4 and 5.

[39] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I.37.6, 7.

[40] Ibid., I.38.1; Bekker *Anecdota* I, 373; see Paul Foucart, *Les Mysteres d'Eleusis* (Paris: Auguste Picard, Editeur, [1914] 1978), 337; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 256; Nanno Marinatos, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 141.

[41] Scholiast on Aristophanes *Plutus* 1014; see Allair Chandor Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year* (New York, Arno Press, 1985), 195 note 16; Kerenyi (1967), 65 note 6; Winifred Milius Lubell, *The Metamorphosis of Baubo: Myth of Women's Sexual Energy* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), 33.

[42] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I. xxxviii.6, trans. Jones; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 72-73, 97-99.

[43] Aristophanes *Frogs*, lines 327-352, trans. Rogers; in Aristophanes, *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*. ed. Moses Hadas. (New York: Bantam Books, 1962).

[44] *Inscriptiones Graecae/Greek Inscriptions* I 2nd ed. 76 line 35; *Inscriptiones Graecae/Greek Inscriptions* II 2nd ed. lines 280, 284; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I.38.7; see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 68.

[45] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I. xxxvii.6; *Inscriptiones Graecae/Greek Inscriptions* I^2 5; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 168-9; Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 70.

[46] Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus/Exhortations to the Greeks* II.18.

[47] Galen, *de Usu Partium* VII. 14 #469, emphasis in original; see Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 569 and note 2.

[48] Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonnus,* lines 1049-1053, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, in Sophocles, *Sophocles, I*: *Oedipus the King*, trans. David Grene; *Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald; *Antigone*, trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff, Edward Grene and Richmond Lattimore, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); Philostratus, *Apollonius* IV, 18; *Lives of the Sophists*, ii, 20. The first Hierophant, Eumolpos, who came from Thrace, defended Eleusis from conquest by Athens during the Bronze Age. His name means "good song" or "good music."

[49] Clement, *Protreptikos*, II. 18.

[50] Homeric "Hymn to Demeter," lines 208-209, 211; Ovid, *Fasti* IV, 531-548.

[51] Pindar—citation not given in Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 561; Apollodoros, *Fragment* 36; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 264 and note 170; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 288 note 29.

[52] Apollodorus, 42.2 F 110; see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 288, fn 20.

[53] Plato, *Symposium*, 210d, Plato, *Phaedrus* 250 B-D; Milan Papyrus no. 20.31, in *Papiri della R. Universita di Milano* I, 177; Hippolytos, *Refutatio* V.8.39; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 305-310; in Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 84 and note 20, 94 and note 50.

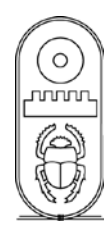
[54] Homeric "Hymn to Demeter," 2.90-94, trans. Mara Lynn Keller, in Mara Lynn Keller, "The Greater Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, Mother and Daughter Goddesses of Ancient Greece" (unpublished manuscript), 194.

[55] Homeric "Hymn to Demeter," lines 193-211, trans. Keller, in Keller, "Greater Mysteries," 200.

[56] See N.J. Richardson, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 231; Foley, *Homeric Hymn*, 50-51. Since the hearth-child was chosen for this occasion by Athens, this part of the rite was probably added after Athens gained hegemony over Eleusis, at some time during the seventh or sixth century BCE.

[57] This is how the *kykeon* tastes to me when I prepare it for reenacting the Mysteries.

[58] Homeric "Hymn to Demeter," lines 434-440, trans. Keller, in Keller, "Greater Mysteries," 218. See also



The Homeric Hymns: A Verse Translation by Thelma Sargent (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, [1973] 1975), 13.

[59] Homeric "Hymn to Demeter," 2.475-476, trans. Keller. See also Foley, *Homeric Hymn:* "…she revealed the conduct of her rites and taught her Mysteries."

[60] Isocrates, *Panegyrikos* 4. 28, in Norlin, *Isokrates*.

[61] Homer, *Odyssey* 5.125, trans. Harrison, in Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 564.

[62] Hippolytus, *Refutation omnium haeresium /Refutation of All Heresies*, 5.8.40; Clement, *Protreptikos*; see Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 561, 563; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, appendix; Kevin Clinton, *Myth and Cult: The Iconography of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Stockholm: Distributor Paul Åströms Förlag, 1992), 92.

[63] Pindar cited in Rodney Castledon, *Minoans: Life in Bronze Age Crete* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.

[64] Pindar, *Fragments 102* (Oxford); see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 285.

[65] Plato, *Symposium* 210D, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in Plato, *Symposium* (Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, [1948] 1977). Diotima taught Socrates about the lesser and greater mysteries of erotic and universal love (*Symposium* 207a-212a)

[66] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250 B-D, trans. William S. Cobb in Plato, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[67] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I.38.7; Athenaios, *Diepnosophistai/The Learned Banquet* XIII, 71, in *Ephemeris* 1885: 150; Hippolytos *Refutation of All Heresies*, V.7.34 Proklos, *In Timaios* 293 C. Kleidemos, fr. 27; (*Bulletin ee Correspondence Hellenique* 20, 1896: 79-80; see Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 161 and note 1; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 231, note 30, 270, notes 113-116, 186; Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 141-142.

[68] Plato *Phaedo* 69 in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, (New York: Bollingen Series LXXI, Pantheon Books, 1961); see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 266.

[69] Cicero, *De Res Publica de Legibus*, 2.14.36, trans. C.W. Keyes, (1928).

[70] Cicero, *The Laws*, 2.14.36, trans. Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: Penguin Group, 1969); see Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 15; Anthony Everitt, Cicero: *The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician* (New York: Random House, 2001), 65.

[71] Themistios fragment 168 (= Stobaeus *Anthologium* 4.52.49), trans. Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 91-92; see Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 264-265, note 171; Foley, *Homeric Hymn*, 70. Themistios' essay was preserved by the anthologer Stobaios in the fifth century CE.

[72] Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, translated in C. B. Gulick, *The Deipnosophists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-41. 7 vols.) vol. 1933: 211-213); see Miles, *Athenian Agora*, 95.

[73] Plutarch, *De facie in orbe Lunae*, 28; see Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 267, 599.

[74] Plato, *Protagoras* 343A, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Hamilton and Cairns; Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, X.24.1.

Not only was [Eleusis] a story of fertility and rebirth, it was also symbolic "of the human soul's return, after the death of the body to its universal origin or loving source." Its meaning touches the spiritual bond between humans, the bond between individuals and nature, and the bond between humanity and the divine.

– Mara Lynn Keller

The Eleusinian Mysteries and the Bee

Julie Sanchez-Parodi, S.R.C.

The fifth century BCE Greek historian Herodotus relates the importance of bees in ancient Greece, pointing out that the honey of neighboring countries was made using fruit, while the honey of the Greeks was produced by bees.[1] *The significance of this difference lies in that, to the Greeks of that time period, bees were considered to be divine insects, and were revered in their myths and rituals.*[2] *Among the most celebrated of these myths was the story of the fertility goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Demeter restores her gift of fruit and grain to the earth, but she also gives a greater gift to humans—the Mysteries.*[3]

The Eleusinian Mysteries were an initiatory tradition that played an important role in the lives of those who experienced it.[4] In these rites, the initiates, known as *mystai*, were led on a procession toward Eleusis by the priests and priestesses of Demeter.[5] This was a symbolic initiatic journey in which they purified themselves in preparation to ceremonially return Persephone from the underworld and take part in other sacred acts.[6] As in the wider Greek culture, the bee symbolized divine concepts of life and death, so in the Mysteries and other traditions it took on the connotation of initiatic death and rebirth: that is, of personal regeneration and transformation.[7]

Myth of Demeter

As a fertility goddess, Demeter brought life to plants and crops, just as bees do. Her mother was Rhea, the daughter of Gaia, goddess of earth.[8] In the myth, the underworld god Hades desires to marry Persephone. He seeks and is granted permission for the union from her father Zeus. Then, while Persephone wandered with her friends the nymphs in earthly fields gathering flowers, Hades arrives on a golden chariot, snatches her up, and rides back down with her into the underworld.

When Demeter cannot find her daughter, she discovers what has occurred—all without her permission—and becomes furious with the gods and goddesses for allowing it. After all, the ultimate implication of the marriage to Hades was that Persephone would dwell forever in the underworld. So Demeter disassociates herself from the divine world, and in her wrath and grief even stops nurturing the plants of the earth, with devastating effects for humanity.

In hopes of restoring the natural order of life, Zeus convinces Hades to release Persephone from the underworld. However, before Hades lets Persephone go, he feeds her a honeyed pomegranate seed, magically binding her to the underworld. Thus she would ever after return to the underworld

Rembrandt van Rijn, *Rape of Persephone*, ca. 1632, Berlin.

for one-third of the year—considered to be the winter and barren months.[9]

A Hittite Parallel

The myth of Demeter is similar to an older Indo-European myth about a mother goddess named Hannahanna and her bee. The myth is preserved in fragments of ancient Hittite texts and concerns a vegetation god, named Telepinu, who has disappeared and taken all of life with him. While he is missing fires are extinguished, grain is fallow, springs run dry, and humanity and the gods alike are doomed to perish. So the gods try to find Telepinu in hopes of restoring life.

The sun god sends out an eagle, but it cannot find Telepinu. Then the storm god fails in another attempt. Finally, the mother goddess Hannahanna sends out a bee. The bee finds Telepinu lying asleep in a meadow and stings him. Upon being awakened in this manner, Telepinu is furious, and in his rage he floods rivers and causes earthquakes. By doing so the bee caused Telepinu's presence to be felt on earth—again restoring life to a natural state.[10]

The agricultural aspect of the Eleusinian Mysteries can be found in the rebirth of newly sprouting seeds from the old grain that has been cast upon the earth for seeds.[11]

Golden Anatolian Bee.

Persephone is a symbol of the seed that must go into the earth, and with a seeming death give birth to new generation.

Eleusis is a site where it was said the first grain was planted, and the rites took place every year during the harvest months of September and early October.[12] In the Greek myth it is Rhea, the mother goddess, who convinces Demeter to cause seed to grow beneath the earth again, and restore life to earth.[13] "Persephone is a symbol of the seed that must go into the earth, and with a seeming death give birth to new generation."[14]

The Temple of Artemis and the Priestesses of Eleusis

Guarding the outer entrance of the sacred precinct of Eleusis stood the temple of the goddess Artemis. When the mystai arrived, they rested outside the temple walls and paid their reverence to the goddess.[15] Artemis is an Indo-European goddess of life and fertility, who survived in ancient Greek culture as a moon goddess. Artemis was highly associated with bees, as beekeeping and agriculture were very ancient and vital crafts in Western Asia and Crete. Many artifacts depicting small metal bees have been found in places where Artemis was worshiped.[16]

Phoenician historian Porphyry (234–305 CE) states that the ancient Greeks referred to Artemis by the name *Bee*, and that the soul was conceived as coming down from her in the form of bees.[17] Perhaps the connection between Artemis and the bee resulted in the adoption of bees as symbolic creatures of the underworld. Consistent with this, classicist A.B. Cook held that the metal bees were votive sacrifices symbolizing the divine soul.[18]

Persephone's nickname among the ancient Greeks was *Melitodes* or "the honeyed one," and the priestesses of Persephone and Demeter were known as *Melissai* or "bees."[19] There is evidence that an exalted priestess of Demeter lived at Eleusis in a dwelling known as "the sacred house." She served for life, and the years at Eleusis were dated by her name. In the sacred plays at Eleusis, the priestess of Demeter played the roles of Demeter and Persephone.[20]

There is an ancient myth from Corinth that tells of an elderly priestess of Demeter, named *Melissa*, or Bee, who was initiated into the mysteries by the goddess herself. Other women pressed her for secrets, but she steadfastly refused. These women became so infuriated by her secrecy that they murdered her. This enraged Demeter, who punished the women with plagues and caused bees to fly out of Melissa's body, symbolizing the soul.[21]

Beside the temple of Artemis there was found a sacrificial hearth, where initiates would leave presents for the *chthonian* deities, "the gods and goddess of the underworld."[22] There were other priestesses at Eleusis, whose duties are not completely known. However, a document has survived from one of them, and describes her duty as a torchbearer who stood guard near the doors of Demeter and Persephone. There were also priestesses known as *Panageis*, or "all holy ones," who were allowed to touch the sacred temple objects, known as the *hiera*, and likely traveled with them during the procession.[23]

The Temple of Hades and the Underworld

The next action of the initiates was to cross through the pylon and enter the temple complex. The mystai would explore the grounds where they would discover a temple to Hades erected inside a cave.[24] To the ancient Greeks, a cave was seen as a gateway into the divine world.[25] They dedicated their caves to the gods and goddesses long before temples were erected to them.[26] Caves were also commonly dedicated to nymphs, especially to the water nymphs, such as the nymphs Persephone was with when she was abducted into the underworld. It was thought that the home of these water nymphs was in the primordial waters of the cave, and that they watched over the death and regeneration of souls.[27]

Minoan golden bee. Photo © 2001by Andree Stephan.

The water nymphs are sometimes called *bees*, since bees were seen as fresh incarnations of the soul.[28] Wild bees live mostly under stones, in the clefts of rocks and caves, and within hollowed-out trees.[29] Porphyry states:

> *All souls, however, proceeding into generation, are not simply called bees, but those who will live justly, and who, after having preformed such things as are acceptable to the gods, will again return [to their kindred stars]. For this insect loves to return to the place from whence it first came, and is eminently just and sober…therefore we must admit that honeycombs and bees are appropriate and common symbols of the aquatic nymphs, and of souls that are married [as it were] to [the humid and fluctuating nature of] generation.*[30]

Bees of Malia, two bees heraldically arranged around a honeycomb (or a honeycake). Minoan artwork, 1700–1550 BCE. Gold pendant with appliqué decoration and granulation. Excavated by the French from the Chrysolakkos necropolis in Mallia, Crete, now in the Archaeological Museum of Herakleion. Photo © 2009 by Wolfgang Sauber.

The fact that the ancient Greeks used honey in their rituals most likely is a survival from primitive society when wine was unknown. Honey was a constant ingredient in libations and rituals to the dead.[31] Porphyry states that honey was a symbol of death, and for that reason it was usual to offer libations of honey to the divinities of the underworld.[32] In ancient Greek ritual a tradition of using honey can be found that dates back to prehistoric times when the only intoxicating drink was mead (fermented honey). The Greek historian Plutarch (46-120 CE) writes, "Mead was used as a libation before the cultivation of the vine, and even now those…who do not drink wine have a honey drink."[33]

Porphyry also states that "Ancient sacrifices were for the most part performed with sobriety…in which libations were made with water. Afterwards, however, libations were made with honey, for we first received this liquid prepared for us by the bees." Sober offerings were called *nephalia.* These nephalia continued to be performed after prehistoric times and even after wine was cultivated.[34]

Pausanias (ca. 2 CE) writes, "Once a month [people] offered to the gods; they sacrifice after an ancient fashion, for they burn on the altar frankincense together with the wheat which has been kneaded with honey...only to the nymphs and the mistresses do they not pour wine."[35] It is noted that the pitchers that were carried in the procession to Eleusis did not hold wine.[36] In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter also refuses to take wine, and creates her own drink called *kykeon*, which means "the concoction" or "mixture." After drinking the kykeon, the mystai soon felt the profound effects of the Eleusinian Mysteries as they made their way into the main temple, which was called the *Telesterion*, or "place of initiation."[37]

The Greater Mysteries in the Telesterion

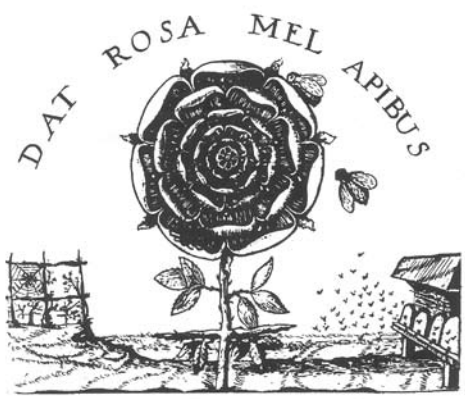
At the Telesterion the mystai would become true initiates into the secret ceremony of the Greater Mysteries.[38] In the center of the temple there was a rectangular-shaped stone construction known as the *anaktoron*, which represented a symbolic door to the underworld. Although there is no direct evidence of what these rites entailed, scholars suggest that during the initiation rite, the temple would be shrouded in darkness except for a fire burning on the anaktoron and some torches carried by the priests and priestesses. In a blinding flash of light the door on the anaktoron would open, revealing the high priest of Eleusis, known as the hierophant, literally "the one who displays divine things."[39] To the sound of a gong, he would begin summoning Persephone from the underworld. Demeter and Persephone are ritually reunited, and then the hierophant announces the birth of Persephone's son, Brimos (considered by most scholars to be Dionysus).[40]

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the mystai would perform a libation to the dead. It is said that each initiate filled two vessels known as *plemochoai*; facing one to the east and one to the west, they would turn them upside down, pouring the libations into the earth.[41] During this libation it is probable

that the initiate gained a different outlook or perspective concerning the underworld. During the Eleusinian Mysteries the mystai learned about the mysteries of rebirth.[42] The Eleusinian Mysteries removed the feeling of terror concerning death and promised a happier fate in the underworld.[43] It is said in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* that the initiates were blessed to have seen what they have seen, and that anyone who dies without being initiated into the mysteries will have no blessings in the afterlife.[44]

The mysteries never promised the mystai immortality. However, after being initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, death would be reborn and would no longer be a dark thing.[45] In the Eleusinian mysteries, as Porphyry taught, "[Wrath] is considered as a symbol of life, that the life of the soul dies through pleasure, but through bitterness the soul resumes its life, whence also, [bitterness] is sacrificed to the gods, or whether it is, because death liberates from molestation, but the present life is laborious and bitter." That is, after the initiation there was an understanding that all the suffering and trials we go through in life can be transformed into something good, something greater.[46]

The fifth century CE Greek writer Zosimos called the Eleusinian Mysteries "sacred mysteries, which hold the whole human race together."[47] Cicero wrote about the important lessons that come from the Eleusinian Mysteries. In his treatise, *On the Laws*, he wrote: "We have been given a reason, not only to live in joy, but also to die with better hope."



Robert Fludd, *Rose and Cross* from *Summum Bonum*, 1629. "The Rose gives Honey to the Bees."

Conclusion

Whether we consider the gathering of pollen by bees and the subsequent production of honey within a hive, or the communal gathering of initiatic wisdom by the ancients at Eleusis, we observe a powerful symbol for the distillation of spiritual energy. Partaking of this energy is transformative, leading to psychological and spiritual regeneration. The goddess, the priestess, and their sister the bee unite as emblems for this vital human activity—one that leaves us pure, ever-new, and reborn.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem each year wears Eleusinian robes to light candles in the Holy Sepulchre at Easter, with no normal source of fire. This is the Divine Service of Fire in Jerusalem.

ENDNOTES

[1] Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.193, 4.194, 7.31.

[2] A.B. Cook, "The Bee in Greek Mythology," *The Journal for Hellenistic Studies* 15 (1985), 23.

[3] Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis, Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 13; cf. the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

[4] Ibid., 4, 16.

[5] George Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 245.

[6] Ibid., 247–258.

[7] For an extensive critical treatment detailing these Greek traditions, see Cook, "Bee in Greek Mythology". For a worldwide treatment see Hilda M. Ransome, *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

[8] Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 29; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 287.

[9] Kerényi, *Eleusis*., 13; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

[10] Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 123, 124, 126.

[11] M.P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 211.

[12] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 243; R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A.P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (Los Angeles: Hermes Book Press, 1998), 85.

[13] Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 44.

[14] Ibid., 160.

[15] Ibid., 70; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 167-169.

[16] Cook, "Bee in Greek Mythology," 11-13.

[17] Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. Thomas Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1991), 41.

[18] Cook, "Bee in Greek Mythology," 13, 19.

[19] Porphyry, *Cave of Nymphs*, 41; Melissae are Priestesses of Persephone and Demeter; see Cook, "Bee in Greek Mythology," 15.

[20] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 171, 231-232, 310; Burkert, Greek Religion, 285, 286.

[21] Servius in commenting on Virgil (Pausanius *Serv. Verg., Aeneid* 1.43); Cook, "Bee in Greek Mythology," 14, 10, 19.

[22] Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 70.

[23] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 231-232.

[24] Ibid., 99, 146.

[25] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 24; Porphyry, *Cave of Nymphs*, 27, 31.

[26] Porphyry, *Cave of Nymphs*, 42.

[27] Ibid., 32.

[28] Cook, "Bee in Greek Mythology," 11.

[29] Ibid., 17-18.

[30] Porphyry, *Cave of Nymphs*, 42.

[31] Cook, "Bee in Greek Mythology," 21-22.

[32] Porphyry, *Cave of Nymphs*, 42.

[33] Plutarch, *Banquet of the Seven Wise Men*, 106.

[34] Porphyry, *De Abstinentia*, 2.20.

[35] Pausanias 5.15, 10.

[36] Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 65.

[37] H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1770.

[38] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 225-226.

[39] Ibid., 228.

[40] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 287-288.

[41] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 279.

[42] Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck; *Road to Eleusis*; 85.

[43] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 289.

[44] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* 480–84.

[45] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 289.

[46] Porphyry, *Cave of Nymphs,* 42.

[47] Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 12.

Marcus Aurelius was initiated in 176 CE and received unprecedented honors. He was made a "Stone Bearer" and although he was not a Hierophant or even a member of the Eumopid family, he was allowed to enter the Anaktoron, the only lay person ever admitted in that sanctum in the long history of Eleusis.

– George Mylonas

Eleusis: The Card Game

***Robert Abbott, John Golden and the Staff of the* Rosicrucian Digest**

The Mysteries of Eleusis have inspired women and men throughout the centuries in many and diverse ways. One of the most unusual, fun, and challenging is the card game, Eleusis, *and its "light" version,* Eleusis Express. *The creator of Eleusis, Robert Abbott, explains the inspiration and logic of this card game enjoyed by mathematicians, logicians, and game enthusiasts around the world.*

Robert Abbott was born in 1933, and is best known as an inventor of games. An early computer programmer in IBM 360 assembly language, he began designing games from 1962 onward. Among the games he has designed are the variation on chess, known as Baroque chess or *Ultima;* the card game *Eleusis;* and the games *Crossings* and *Epaminondas.* Recently, Abbott has begun to invent what he calls "Logic Mazes" or "Mazes with Rules."

Abbott describes the invention of Eleusis and its inspiration:

"I invented Eleusis in 1956. The original version was fairly simple. The dealer devised a secret rule, and the players attempted to get rid of their cards by adding them to a line of correct cards. Figuring out the secret rule would help a player get rid of cards, but that was all it did. Only in later versions of the game could a player make a guess about the rule or declare him- or herself Prophet.[1]

"When I named this game I had seen an analogy of the players being like initiates at the Eleusinian Mysteries—each in turn becomes a member of the cult as each in turn discovers the secret rule. Curiously, this analogy is not so different from the analogy of player-as-scientist. Long before science, probably even before language, the mystery religions were the method of transmitting knowledge, even technical knowledge. In the early form of the mystery at Eleusis, it's probable that the initiate learned not only how Demeter went to the underworld in search of Persephone but also learned how to grow wheat, and this second idea was somehow intertwined with the first."[2]

Portion of the Sanctuary at Eleusis. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

In the June 1959 *Scientific American,* Martin Gardner described *Eleusis* as one of the few games that call for inductive reasoning: "It should be of special interest to mathematicians and other scientists because of its striking analogy with scientific method and its exercise of precisely those psychological abilities in concept formation that seem to underlie the 'hunches' of creative thinkers."

In 1973 Abbott started a rather long project to improve Eleusis. This resulted in a better layout—with sidelines that showed where mistake cards were played. He also added the Prophet. If a player thinks he or she knows the rule, the player can declare

him- or herself Prophet and make the calls for the dealer. [3]

"In 2006, John Golden, a professor of mathematics at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, invented a simplified version of Eleusis called Eleusis Express. He intended it as a way for elementary school teachers to present the scientific method. The teacher could divide the class into small groups to play the game, then later the teacher can show how the students were using scientific method as they played the game.

"Abbott considers Eleusis Express to be a great game, quite apart from any use in the classroom. It's also a fun social game."[4]

How to Play Eleusis Express

John Golden, the inventor of Eleusis Express, explains how it is played, in this excerpt adapted from the Eleusis Website:

The idea: One player has a secret rule for which cards can be played. A very easy example: each card has to be a different color from the card before it. Other players lay down cards they think fit the pattern. If a player lays down a card that works, he or she can try to guess the rule.

Number of players: Eleusis Express is for three to eight players, but is probably best played with four or five.

The stock: Shuffle together two decks to form the stock. If the stock runs out, you can (a) shuffle in another deck or (b) declare the round is over at that point.

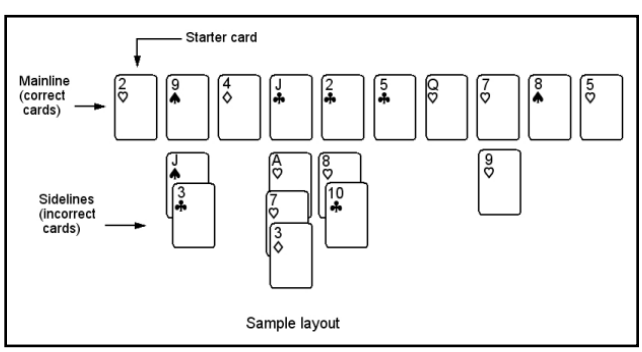
Object: A game consists of one or more rounds (hands of play). A different player is chosen as dealer of each new round, and it is the dealer who chooses the secret rule. The dealer does not play a hand that round. The dealer's score is based on the scores of the other players.

All plays are made to a central layout that grows as the round progresses. An example is shown below. A layout consists of a horizontal mainline of correct cards, those that follow the secret rule. Below the mainline are vertical sidelines of mistake cards, those that did not follow the rule. These sideline cards can be overlapped to save space.

The secret rule: If your group is playing this game for the first time, the dealer should pick a rule from the section *Samples of easy secret rules.* Or the dealer could make a slight variation on one of those rules. Eventually you'll want to create new rules. Here are some guidelines: A rule should allow for several cards to be played at any given time, but not too many. "The next card must be one higher" is far too restrictive. "The next card must be a different suit" is far too permissive. Avoid exceptions or wild cards, like "face cards are always right" or "an ace can be high or low." And remember: Whatever rule you come up with, it will always be harder than you think it will be.

Set up: The dealer writes down the secret rule, then deals twelve cards to each player. The dealer turns over the top card and puts it on the table. This will be the start of the mainline. Before play starts, the dealer may give a hint about the rule. The player to the left of the dealer goes first, then the play continues around to the left.

Play: In each turn, a player puts one card on the table. The dealer says whether it's correct or not. If correct, it goes to the right of the last card on the mainline. If incorrect, it goes below the last card (it either starts a



Layout for Eleusis Express

sideline or it adds to a sideline). The player who makes an incorrect play must draw one card from the deck. Thus the hand remains the same size. The player making a correct play does not draw a card, so his or her hand is reduced by one.

Declaring No Play: Players have the option of declaring that they have no correct card to play. The player shows the hand (to everyone) and the dealer says whether the player is right or not.

If the player is wrong—a card could have been played—the dealer chooses one correct card from the hand and puts it on the layout to the right of the last mainline card. The player keeps that hand and must draw one card from the stock.

If the player is right—no card really could have been played—and the hand is down to one card, that card is put in the stock and the round is over. If there is more than one card, the dealer counts the cards and puts them on the bottom of the stock. The dealer then deals the player a new hand, but with one less card.

Guessing the rule: Whenever a player makes a correct play, or makes a correct declaration of no-play, the player is given the right to guess the rule. Everyone must hear the guess. The dealer then says whether the player is right or wrong. If the player is wrong, the game continues. If the player is right, the round ends.

Scoring: If a player correctly guesses the rule, or if one player gets rid of all his/her cards, the hand comes to an end. The scores are now recorded. A player scores 12 points, minus 1 point for each card left in the hand. If a player correctly guessed the rule, he or she is given a 6-point bonus. If any players got rid of all their cards, they are given a 3-point bonus. The dealer scores the same as the highest-scoring player in the round.

However…you probably should not worry too much about scoring. It is more important to put together an enjoyable game, one where players are able to discover the rules. For example, if it's halfway through a hand and the dealer realizes that no one can figure out the rule, the dealer could start giving out hints. That might technically be considered cheating and it would increase the dealer's score, but it is okay. It will make the game much more enjoyable. And the players shouldn't worry about discussing the rule with each other, even if they are supposed to be competing.

Ending the game: The game should last until everyone has had a chance to be dealer. Usually there's not enough time for that, so if time runs out, that is where the game ends. Then, add up the scores for the hands and declare the winner.

Sample of easy secret rules:

- If the last card was a spade, play a heart; if last card was a heart, play a diamond; if last was diamond, play club; and if last was club, play a spade.

Sample of hard secret rules:

- If the last card is an odd-numbered card, play a red card. If the last card is even, play a black card.

ENDNOTES

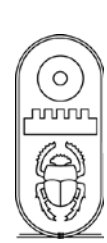
[1] Adapted from Robert Abbott, "Eleusis and Eleusis Express" at *http://www.logicmazes.com/games/eleusis/index.html.*

[2] Adapted from Robert Abbott, Auction 2002 and Eleusis, (self-published, 2002). See *http://www.logicmazes.com/games/booklet.html* for more information.

[3] Adapted from Robert Abbott, "Eleusis–Publication History," at *http://www.logicmazes.com/games/eleusis/eleusis2.html.* The full rules of Eleusis can be found at Abbott's Website, *http://www.logicmazes.com/games/eleusis/index.html.*

[4] Adapted from Abbott, "Eleusis and Eleusis Express."

[5] Adapted from John Golden, "Eleusis Express" at *http://www.logicmazes.com/games/eleusis/express.html,* where more sample rules are available.



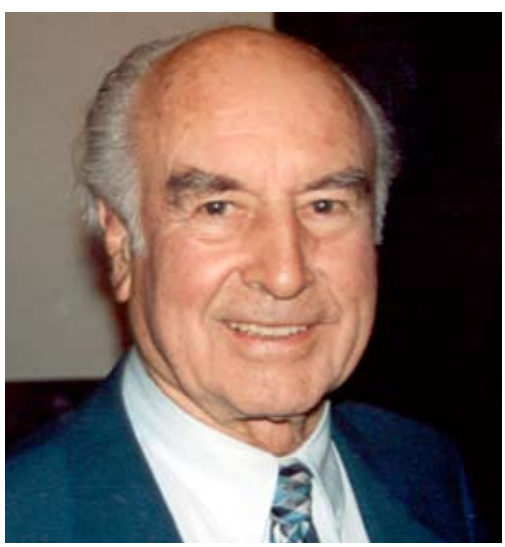
The Message of the Eleusinian Mysteries for Today's World

Albert Hofmann, Ph.D.

From Robert Forte, ed., ***Entheogens and the Future of Religion,*** and ***The Road to Eleusis.***[1]

Albert Hofmann (1906 – 2008) was a Swiss chemist best known for having been the first to synthesize, and learn of the psychedelic effects of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). Never an advocate of the recreational use of such drugs, throughout his life, he worked to discover how such substances (Entheogens) were used ritualistically in many cultures, and also for use in psychology. We present this seminal article as another perspective on the impact of the Mysteries on our world, and on the legacy bequeathed to us, today achieved by spiritual and mystical means in the Order.

The Mystery of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis, which was initially only of local significance, soon became an important part of Athenian citizenship, and it eventually developed into a pan-Hellenic institution, becoming of universal importance at the time of the Roman Empire. Its pan-Hellenic character was signaled in 760 BCE, at the time of the fifth Olympiad, when the Oracle of Delphi called upon all Greeks to make communal sacrifice in honor of Demeter of Eleusis in order to banish a famine which was then affecting all of Greece.



Albert Hofmann, Lugano, Switzerland. Photo © 1993 by Philip H. Bailey.

What was the message conveyed at Eleusis, a message which transformed the cult into the most influential and spiritually significant Mystery of antiquity? This question cannot be answered in detail, for the veil of mystery, maintained by a severe commandment of secrecy, was never lifted through the millennia. It is only by examining the testimony of great initiates that we may gain an idea of the fundamentals and the spiritual significance which the teachings of Eleusis had for the individual. There is no question of any new religion having been promulgated in Eleusis; this can be ruled out because the initiates, when they returned to their homelands after the Mysteries, remained faithful to their autochthonous religions.

Instead, revelations about the essence of human existence and about the meaning of life and death must have been imparted to the initiates. Prayers are known from the Mysteries, offered by initiates to Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, imploring her to awaken and vividly maintain the memory of the holy initiation, [and] that the initiation might persist as an experience illuminating all of life and transforming existence.

Remains of the Telesterion of Eleusis. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

Participating in the Mysteries was an experience which cannot be understood by examining only their external appearance, for it evoked alterations in the soul of the initiate. This is evident from the testimony of the most famous initiates. Thus wrote Pindar of the Eleusinian blessing:

> *Blessed is he who, having seen these rites, undertakes the way beneath the Earth. He knows the end of life, as well as its divinely granted beginning.*

Cicero also attested to the splendor which illuminated his life from Eleusis:

> *Though Athens brought forth numerous divine things, yet she never created anything nobler than those sublime Mysteries through which we became gentler and have advanced from a barbarous and rustic life to a more civilized one, so that we not only live more joyfully but also die with a better hope.*

The initiates often experienced in vision the congruity of the beginning and the end, of birth and death, the totality and the eternal generative ground of being. It must have been an encounter with the ineffable, an encounter with the divine, that could only be described through metaphor. It is striking that the Eleusinian experience is described again and again in antitheses: darkness and light; terror and beatitude. This ambivalence is also evident in other descriptions, such as that of Aelius Aristides, who stated that Eleusis was:

> *Both the most awesome and the most luminous of all the divine things that exist among men.*
>
> *Emperor Marcus Aurelius counted the Mysteries among those endowments which manifest the solicitude of the gods for humankind.*

This brings us to a problem of our own time. This involves the question—much discussed today—of whether it is ethically and religiously defensible to use consciousness-altering drugs under specific circumstances to gain new insights into the spiritual world.

If the hypothesis that an LSD-like consciousness-altering drug was present in the kykeon is correct—and there are good arguments in its favor—then the Eleusinian Mysteries have a relevance for our time not only in a spiritual-existential sense, but also with respect to the question of the controversial use of consciousness-altering compounds to attain mystical insights into the riddle of life.

Separation of Individual and Environment

The great importance and long duration of the Mysteries indicate that they answered a profound spiritual necessity, a yearning

Bust (possibly of Emperor Marcus Aurelius) from the north section of the pediment of the Greater Propylaea at Eleusis.

Simone Pignoni, *The Rape of Proserpine*. ca. 1650. Museum of the Art schools of Nancy. Photo © 2008 by Vassil, Wikimedia Commons

of the soul. If we adopt the viewpoint of Nietzsche, the Greek spirit was characterized by a consciousness of reality divided from its origin. Greece was the cradle of an experience of reality in which the ego felt itself separated from the exterior world. Here, the conscious separation of the individual from the environment developed earlier than in other cultures. This dualistic world view, which the German physician and writer Gottfried Benn has characterized as the European destiny neurosis, has figured decisively in the course of European spiritual history, and is still fully operative in the Western world.

An ego that is capable of confronting the exterior world and of regarding the world objectively as matter—a spirit capable of objectivizing the external world—was a precondition for the appearance of Western scientific research. This objective world view is evident even in the earliest documents of scientific thought, in the cosmological theories of the Greek pre-Socratic philosophers. The perspective of man in opposition to nature, which has made possible a vigorous domination of nature, was given its first clear philosophical formulation by Descartes in the seventeenth century. Thus, in Europe, a wholly objective, quantitative scientific investigation of nature has developed which has made it possible to explain the physical and chemical laws of the composition of the material world. Its findings also made possible a hitherto non-existent exploitation of nature and her forces.

It has led to the industrialization and technification of nearly all aspects of modern life. It has brought a small portion of humankind a level of comfort and material well-being hitherto scarcely imaginable. It has also resulted in the catastrophic destruction of the natural environment, and now has produced a global ecological crisis.

Even more serious than the material consequences is the spiritual damage of this evolution, which has led to a materialistic world view. The individual has lost the connection with the spiritual, divine ground of all being. Unprotected, without shelter, and alone with oneself, the human individual confronts in solitude a soulless, chaotic, materialistic, and menacing universe. The seeds of this dualistic world view, which has manifested itself so catastrophically in our time, were, as previously mentioned, already evident in Greek antiquity. The Greek genius sought the cure, so that the external, material world, under Apollo's protection, could be seen in its sublime beauty. The colorful, joyous, sensual, but also painful Apollonian world was complemented by the Dionysian world of experience, in which the subject/object cleavage was dissolved in ecstatic inebriation.

Nietzsche wrote of the Dionysian world view in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> *It is either through the influence of narcotic potions, of which all primitive peoples and races speak in hymns, or through the powerful approach of spring, penetrating all of nature with joy, that those Dionysian stirrings arise, which in their intensification lead the individual to forget himself completely.... Not only does the bond between person and person come to be forged once again by the magic of the Dionysian rite, but alienated, hostile, or subjugated nature again celebrates her reconciliation with her prodigal son, mankind.*

The Eleusinian Mysteries were closely connected with the rites and festivities in honor of the god Dionysus. They led essentially to healing, to the transcendence of the division between humankind and nature—one might say to the abolition of the separation between creator and creation. This was the real, greater proposition of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Their historical, cultural significance, their influence on European spiritual history, can scarcely be overestimated. Here, suffering humanity, split by its rational, objective spirit, found healing in a mystical experience of totality that made it possible for the individual to believe in the immortality of an eternal being.

This belief persisted in early Christianity, albeit with different symbols. It is found as a promise in certain passages of the Gospels, most clearly in the Gospel of John, Chapter 14:16-20. There, Jesus addresses his disciples as he takes leave of them:

> *And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another comforter, that He may abide with you forever in the Truth.… At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*

But ecclesiastical Christianity, defined by the duality of creation and with a religiosity estranged from Nature, has completely obliterated the Eleusinian-Dionysian heritage of antiquity. In the Christian sphere of belief, only specially blessed people testify to a timeless, comforting reality attained in spontaneous visionary experience; an experience which untold numbers of people could attain in antiquity through the Eleusinian Initiation. The *unio mystica* of the Catholic saints and the visionary ecstasy described in the writings of Jakob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, Angelius Silesius, Teresa of Avila, Juan de la Cruz, Thomas Traherne, William Blake, and others are obviously closely related to the "enlightenment" attained by the initiates to the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of St Teresa*, 1652, Cornaro chapel, Santa Maria Della Vittoria church, Rome.

Transcending the Dualistic World View

Today the fundamental importance which a mystical experience of totality can have for healing a humanity afflicted by a one-sided, rational, materialistic world view is emphasized not only by adherents to such Eastern religious currents as Zen Buddhism, but also by leading representatives of psychology and psychiatry. Even more significant is that not just in medicine, but in ever-wider circles of our society, even ecclesiastical circles, overcoming the dualistic world view is considered to be a pre-requisite and fundamental step in the healing and spiritual renewal of Occidental civilization and culture.

The official Christian churches, whose dogmas correspond to an expressly dualistic conception of the world, offer no room for such a renewal. Rather, it is private groups and associations who are attempting to satisfy the need and the longing for an all-encompassing experience of the world appropriate to our present level of knowledge and consciousness. Great numbers of all sorts of workshops and courses in yoga, meditation, and self-discovery are being offered, all with the goal of an alteration or

expansion of consciousness. A new direction, transpersonal psychology, has branched off from academic psychiatry and psychology, which are based on a dualistic conception of reality. In this new discipline, various means are sought to aid the individual to attain a healing experience of totality. More and more, individuals seek security and shelter through meditation, pressing onward into deeper levels of experience of reality.

It is no accident that drugs are employed by some of these groups and in the private sphere as pharmacological aids in the production of altered states of consciousness. And, of course, this involves the same sort of drugs hypothesized at Eleusis and still used by certain Indian tribes. These are the *psychopharmaka* of the hallucinogenic class, which have also been described as psychedelics or entheogens, whose most important modern representative is LSD. The Greeks used the term *pharmacotheon*, or "divine drug." This sort of psychotropic compound differs from the opiates, such as morphine and heroin, and from such stimulants as cocaine, in that it does not produce addiction and acts specifically on human consciousness.

Yamamoto Jakurin, *Leaders of Zen Buddhism*. Edo period, seventeenth century, Kofukuji-ji Temple, Nagasaki Prefecture. Photo by Yamamoto Jakurin, Wikimedia Commons.

Psychedelics and Expansion of Consciousness

LSD in particular played an important role in the sixties movement, which addressed war and materialism, and whose adherents sought to expand consciousness. As a matter of fact, under specific internal and external conditions, this class of drugs, whether called hallucinogens, psychedelics, or entheogens, is capable of producing a totality experience, the unio mystica. Before the use of these substances was prohibited worldwide, this effect was applied in academic psychiatry to assist psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic treatment from the pharmacological side.

A prerequisite for meaningful use and a propitious psychic experience of these compounds—which can be described as Sacred Drugs—is the external environment and the spiritual preparation of those experimenting with them. The Mexican Indians believe that were the LSD-like *ololiuhqui* taken by an impure person, that is, anybody who had not prepared for the ceremony with fasts and prayers, then the drug might provoke insanity or even death. This wise and prudent manner of use, based on millennia of experience, was regrettably not heeded when many members of our society began to use psychedelics. Accordingly, the results sometimes took the form of psychotic breakdowns and severe accidents. In the 1960s, this led to the prohibition of any use of this type of drug, even in formal psychiatry.

In Eleusis, where the preparations and the associated ceremonies were optimal (as is still the case among some Indian groups in Mexico where their use is still in the control of shamans), this sort of drug has found a meaningful and propitious application. From

this perspective, Eleusis and these Indian groups can indeed serve as a model for our society.

Persephone purifying a candidate, Archaeological Museum of Eleusis, Greece. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

In conclusion, I wish once more to raise the fundamental question: why were such drugs probably used in Eleusis, and why are they still used by certain Indian tribes even today in the course of religious ceremonies? And why is such use scarcely conceivable in the Christian liturgy, as though it were not significant? The answer is that the Christian liturgy worships a godly power enthroned in heaven, that is a power outside of the individual. At Eleusis, on the contrary, an alteration in the innermost being of the individual was striven for, a visionary experience of the ground of being which converted the subjects into Mystai, Epotetai, Initiates.

Eleusis as Model for Today

Alteration within the individual is again underway today. The requisite transformations in the direction of an all-encompassing consciousness, as a precondition for overcoming materialism and for a renewed relationship with Nature, cannot be relegated to society or to the state. The change must and can only take place in each individual person.

Only a few blessed people spontaneously attain the mystical vision which can affect this transformation. As a result, mankind has repeatedly sought paths and evolved methods to evoke deeper perception and experience. First among these are the different techniques of meditation. Meditation can be assisted by such external means as isolation and solitude, a path the hermits and desert saints followed; and by such physical practices as fasting and breath control. An especially important aid in the induction of mystical-ecstatic states of consciousness, discovered in the earliest times, is decidedly the use of certain plant drugs. In the preceding discussion, I have made it quite clear that their use must proceed within the scope of religious ceremony.

The fact that extraordinary states of awareness can be induced with various means and in various ways shows us that capacity for mystical experience is innate to every person. It is part of the essence of human spirituality. It is unrelated to the external, social status of the individual. Thus, in Eleusis, both free men and women, as well as slaves, could be initiated.

Eleusis can be a model for today. Eleusis-like centers could unite and strengthen the many spiritual currents of our time, all of which have the same goal—the goal of creating, by transforming consciousness in individual people, the conditions for a better world, a world without war and without environmental damage, a world of happy people.

ENDNOTE

[1] Previously published in Robert Forte, ed., *Entheogens and the Future of Religion* (San Francisco: Committee on Spiritual Practices, 1997. www.csp.org/EFR; *The Road to Eleusis* (Twentieth Anniversary Edition) (Los Angeles: William Dailey Rare Books Ltd, 1998), 141-149; *The Road to Eleusis* (Thirtieth Anniversary Edition) (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008).

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