

SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF GREEK RELIGION

Corrected Edition

by

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B. THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

THE HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER

The most prestigious of the mystery cults was at Eleusis, and it attracted Athenians and foreigners, kings (even Roman emperors, in time), and slaves to be initiated. Before Eleusis became a part of the Athenian city-state in the sixth century B.C., it was the site of a local agricultural cult which probably resembled the cult of the Lykomedai at Phlya. Certain secret rituals commemorated the annual rebirth of the grain and other fruits of the earth, and associated the annual vegetation cycle with the myth of the rape of Persephone (or Kore, "the daughter") by Hades (also called Aidoneus, "the unseen one" or Plouton, "the wealthy one") and the subsequent sorrow of the girl's mother, the goddess Demeter (or Deo). This sacred legend is preserved in the so-called Homeric Hymn to Demeter, composed probably in the first half of the sixth century. It is a sacred text of great importance, and we have included a translation of the whole hymn because it not only gives the official version of the founding of the mystery cult at Eleusis by Demeter herself, but also contains many allusions to the ritual and customs of the sanctuary. There is extensive scholarship on the shrine and its cult, but among important works in English we may note M.P. Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion* (New York, 1961), pp. 42–64; G. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, 1961); N.J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford, 1974); F.R. Walton, "Athens, Eleusis and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter," *Harvard Theological Review* 45 (1952) 105–114.

(*Homeric Hymn to Demeter.*)

I begin my song of the holy goddess, fair-haired Demeter, and of her slim-ankled daughter whom Aidoneus snatched away; and Zeus the loud-crashing, the wide-voiced one, granted it. She was playing with the deep-bosomed daughters of Ocean, away from Demeter of the golden weapon and glorious fruit, and she was gathering flowers throughout the luxuriant meadow—roses, saffron, violets, iris, hyacinth, and a narcissus which was a trap planted for the blossoming maiden by Earth in accord with Zeus's plans, a favor to Hades the receiver of many guests; it was radiantly wonderful, inspiring awe in all who saw it, whether immortal god or mortal man; a hundred stems grew from its root; and the whole wide heaven above, the whole earth, and the salt surge of the sea smiled for joy at its fragrance. The girl was charmed by it, and reached out both hands to pluck the pretty plaything—suddenly, the earth split open wide along the plain and from it the lord host of many, Kronos' son of many names, darted out on his immortal horses.

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(19) He grabbed her, resisting and screaming, and took her away in his golden chariot. She lifted her voice in a cry, calling upon father Zeus, the almighty and good. But no one, god or mortal, heard her voice, not even the glorious-fruited olive-trees, except the childish daughter of Perses, Hecate of the glistening veil, who—from her cave—heard, and so did Lord Helios the glorious son of Hyperion, as the maiden calling upon father Zeus, though he was sitting, removed from the other gods, in his much-besought temple, receiving fine sacrifices from mortal men.

(30) Her, all unwilling, with the approval of Zeus, he took away on his immortal horses, Kronos' son of many names, brother of her father, designator of many, host of many. As long as the goddess could see the earth and the starry sky, the flowing, fish-filled sea and the rays of the sun, she still had hope that her holy mother and the race of the immortal gods would see her, and there was still much hope in her heart in spite of her distress.... The peaks of the mountains and the depths of the sea echoed back the immortal voice, and her blessed mother heard her. (40) Then sharp grief seized the mother's heart; she tore the headdress upon her ambrosial hair, and threw her dark veil down from both her shoulders; and like a bird she darted over land and sea, searching. None of the gods or of mortal men would give her a true report, nor would any of the birds come to her as a true messenger.

(47) For nine days then lady Deo wandered the earth, holding blazing torches in her hands; in her grief she touched neither ambrosia nor the sweetness of nectar, nor did she bathe her body with water. (51) But when the tenth day dawned Hecate, bearing light in her hands, encountered her and spoke to her this message: (54) "Lady Demeter, bringer of seasons and glorious gifts, who of the gods of heaven or of mortal men has taken Persephone and pained your own heart? I heard her voice, but did not see who it was. I am telling you everything promptly, and accurately."

(59) So spoke Hecate. The daughter of fair-haired Rheia did not answer a word, but she immediately darted off with her, holding blazing torches in her hands, and they came to Helios, the viewer of gods and men. They stood before his horses and the divine goddess said, (64) "Helios, as a god, respect me, as a goddess, if ever in word or deed, I have warmed your heart. The maiden whom I bore—sweetest blossom—beautiful—I heard her voice, sobbing, as if she were being raped, but I did not see her. But you survey from the bright heaven all the earth and the sea with your rays; tell me accurately whether you have seen who of gods or mortal men has forced her and taken her away, all unwillingly, in my absence."

(74) So she spoke, and the son of Hyperion answered her: "Lady Demeter, daughter of fair-haired Rheia, you will know all: I have great respect for you and pity you in your grief for your slim-ankled child: none of the immortals is

responsible except Zeus the cloud-gatherer, who has granted to Hades his own brother that she be called his tender wife; and he has taken her, screaming a loud cry, away on his horses down into the misty darkness. (82) So, goddess, stop your loud lament; you should not rashly hold on to this boundless anger; Aidoneus, the designator of many, is after all not an unsuitable son-in-law for you, since you have the same mother and father; and his honor he gained when at the beginning a division into three parts was made; and he dwells with those over whom the lot made him king." When he had said this he called to his horses, and at his command they bore the swift chariot like broad-winged birds.

(90) Then grief still more horrible and oppressive came upon her heart, and in her anger at Zeus, shrouded in clouds, she deserted the gatherings of the gods and went far from Olympus to the cities and farms of men and for a long time disguised her appearance. No man, no woman who saw her recognized her, until she arrived at the home of clever Keleos, who was the king of fragrant Eleusis at the time. (98) At the Spring Parthenion where the citizens draw water in the shade of a towering olive tree she sat by the side of the road in the guise of an old woman, one who is beyond the age of childbearing and the gifts of Aphrodite who bears the garland of love, one who might be a nurse of royal children or governess of important households. The daughters of Keleos of Eleusis saw her as they came to draw water and carry it in bronze vessels to their father's house. There were four of them, like goddesses in youthful bloom—Kallidike, Klesidike, lovely Demo, and Kallithoe, the eldest of them all. They did not recognize her, for gods are hard for mortals to see. (112) They approached her and said, "Old woman, who are you? Why have you kept away from the city and not approached the settlement? There in the dusky houses there are women as old as you and younger, who would treat you kindly in word and deed."

(118) So they spoke, and the goddess mistress said in answer, "Dear children, daughters of womanly mothers, be of good cheer, and I will tell you, for it is right to tell you the truth. The name my lady mother gave to me is Doso. I have just come across the sea from Crete, forced by pirate men who abducted me against my will. They brought their swift ship to shore at Thorikos, and a crowd of women came on board from the land and they all prepared their dinner by the ship's stern-cables. But my heart had no desire for a pleasant supper; instead I got up secretly and escaped those arrogant overlords across the dark countryside, so that they might not enjoy any profit from selling me. I wandered about until I arrived here; but I do not know what land it is nor which people dwell here. May all the gods who dwell on Olympus grant you vigorous husbands and all the progeny they want; but pity me, maidens; dear children, help me come propitiously to some home of a man and woman where I may provide the services of an aged woman for them: I could hold their infant child in my arms and nurse it well, I could keep house, make the master's bed in the inmost chamber, and instruct the women in their tasks."

(145) So said the goddess, and the maiden Kallidike, most beautiful of Keleos' daughters, answered her, "Mother, we humans endure the gifts of the gods, even under grievous compulsion, for they are much mightier. I will explain it all to you clearly, and tell you the men who hold the power of authority here, and who stand out in the government and direct the defense of the city with their counsels and decisions. There are Triptolemos the clever, Dioklos, Polyxeinos, Eumolpos the blameless, Dolichos, and our father the manly one. Their wives manage everything in their households, and not one of them would dishonor you at first sight by making you depart from their houses. They will receive you, for you are god-like. If you wish, wait here while we go to our father's house and tell Metaneira our deep-belted mother all these things, and see whether she bids you come to our house and not search for another's. A favorite son, born to her late, is being nursed in the strongly built palace; she prayed much for him, and rejoiced in him. If you would nurse him and he would reach adolescence, any woman would envy the sight of you, for she [Metaneira] would give you so great a reward for nursing him."

(169) So she spoke, and she nodded her head, and then they filled their shining jugs with water and carried them proudly. Soon they reached their father's great house, and quickly told their mother what they had seen and heard. She told them to go quickly and bid her come, at a vast wage. As deer or heifers frolic across the meadow eating to their heart's content, so they darted along the road down the gulley, holding up the folds of their lovely gowns, and their hair streamed along their shoulders like saffron blossoms. They reached the spot near the road where they had left the glorious goddess, and they led her to their father's house. She, grieved at heart, walked behind them with her head veiled, and the dark robe trailed along around the slender feet of the goddess.

(184) Soon they reached the house of Zeus-descended Keleos, and went through the portico to the place where their lady mother was sitting beside a column of the carefully made chamber, holding her new baby in her lap. The girls ran to her, but Demeter trod upon the threshold, and her head reached the roof-beam, and she filled the doorway with a divine radiance. At this awe, reverence and pale fear seized the woman. She rose from her chair and urged her to be seated, but Demeter the bringer of seasons and glorious gifts did not wish to be seated on the gleaming chair, but silently cast down her beautiful eyes and waited until Iambe understood and set a jointed stool out for her, and threw a shining white fleece upon it. She sat down, holding her veil in front with her hands. For a long time she sat there on the stool sorrowfully, without speaking; and made no contact with anyone in word or gesture. Without smiling, without touching food or drink she sat, consumed with yearning for her daughter, until Iambe understood and made plenty of jokes and jests and made the holy Lady smile with kindly heart, and ever afterward she continues to delight her spirit. Then

Metaneira filled a cup of sweet wine and offered it to her, but she refused it, for she said it was not right for her to drink red wine. Instead, she asked her to give her barley groats and water mixed with crusted pennyroyal to drink. She made the compound, the *kykeon*, as she commanded, and offered it to the goddess. Deo the greatly revered accepted it for the sake of the ceremony. . . . (212) Fair-belted Metaneira begin with these words, "Be of good cheer, woman; I do not expect that you are sprung from base stock, but from good; dignity and grace are manifest in your eyes, like those of kings, stewards of the right. But we humans endure the gifts of the gods, even under grievous compulsion, for a yoke lies upon our neck. But now that you have come here, all that is mine shall be yours. Nurse this child for me, whom the immortals have given me, late-born and unexpected, but much prayed for. If you would nurse him and he would reach adolescence, any woman would envy the sight of you, for I would give you so great a reward for nursing him."

(224) Then Demeter of the fair crown said to her, "May you also be of good cheer, woman, and may the gods grant you all good things; I willingly accept the child, as you bid me. I will nurse him, and I do not expect that he will be injured by nurse's incompetence, supernatural attacks nor magical cuttings, for I know an antidote more mighty than the woodcutter, and I know a fine preventative against malignant attacks.

(231) When she had said this she received him with her immortal hands in her fragrant lap, and the mother's heart rejoiced. So she nursed the glorious son of clever Keleos, Demophon, whom fair-belted Metaneira bore, and he grew like a god, eating no food, being suckled on no milk, for Demeter would [feed and] anoint him with *ambrosia*, like the progeny of a god, and she breathed sweetly on him and held him in her lap. At night she would hide him like a fire-brand within the might of the flame, without his parents' knowledge. It made them wonder greatly how he was so precocious, and why his appearance was like the gods'. She would have made him ageless and deathless, if it had not been that fair-belted Metaneira foolishly kept watch one night and watched her from her fragrant bed-chamber. She screamed and struck both her thighs in fear for her child and in a frenzy of mindlessness. Wailing, she said, "My child Demophon, the stranger woman is hiding you in the blazing fire, and is making grief and bitter sorrow for me."

(250) So she spoke, lamenting, and the divine goddess heard her. Demeter of the beautiful crown was amazed at her; with her immortal hands she put from her the dear child whom [Metaneira] had borne, all unexpected, in the palace, and threw him at her feet, drawing him out of the fire, terribly angry at heart, and at the same time she said to fair-belted Metaneira, "Humans are short-sighted, stupid, ignorant of the share of good or evil which is coming to them. You by your foolishness have hurt him beyond curing. Let my witness be the oath of the

gods sworn by the intractable water of Styx, that I would have made your son deathless and ageless all his days, and given him imperishable honor. But now it is not possible to ward off death and destruction. Still he will have imperishable honor forever, since he stood on my knees and slept in my arms; in due season, as the years pass around, the children of the Eleusinians will conduct in his honor war (games) and the terrible battle-cry with each other for ever and ever. I am Demeter, the Venerable, ready as the greatest boon and joy for immortals and mortals. So now, let the whole people build me a great temple, and an altar beneath it, below the city and the towering wall, above Kallirhoe on the ridge which juts forth. I myself will establish rites so that henceforth you may celebrate them purely and propitiate my mind."

(275) With these words the goddess altered size and form and sloughed off old age; beauty wafted about her. A lovely fresh smell radiated from her lovely gown and the radiance from the skin of the immortal goddess shone afar. Her blonde hair flowed down over her shoulders, and the sturdy house was filled with light like a flash of lightning. She went out through the palace. As for the other, her knees gave way, and for a long time she was speechless. She did not even remember the child, her favorite, to pick him up from the floor. His sisters heard his piteous crying, and they leapt down from their well-covered beds. Then one of them took the child in her hands and put him in her lap, one kindled a fire, and another hurried on gentle feet to rouse her mother out of the fragrant chamber. Crowding around they washed him, covering him with love as he squirmed; his heart was not comforted, however, for less skillful nurse and nurse maids were holding him now.

(292) All night long the women, quaking with fear, propitiated the glorious goddess. As soon as dawn appeared they gave a full report to wide-ruling Keleos, as Demeter of the beautiful garlands commanded. He summoned the people from their many boundaries and ordered them to build an elaborate temple to fair-haired Demeter and an altar on the ridge which juts forth. They obeyed him straightway, and hearkened to him as he spoke, and started to build as he commanded. And it grew at the dispensation of the divinity. When they finished and ceased from their toil, each person went back to his home. Blonde Demeter stayed there, seated far from all the blessed gods, wasting with grief for her deep-belted daughter.

(305) She made the most terrible, most oppressive year for men upon the nourishing land, and the earth sent up no seed, as fair-garlanded Demeter hid it. Cattle drew the many curved plows in vain over the fields, and much white barley seed fell useless on the earth. By now she would have destroyed the entire race of men by grievous famine, and deprived those who dwell on Olympus of the glorious honor of offerings and sacrifices, if Zeus had not taken notice and taken counsel with his mind. First he roused gold-winged Iris to summon fair-haired

Demeter, of the very desirable beauty. So he spoke, and she obeyed Zeus wrapped in clouds, the son of Kronos. She rushed down the middle and arrived at the citadel of fragrant Eleusis. In the temple she found Demeter dark-clad, and addressed her with winged words. "Demeter, father Zeus who understands imperishable things summons you to come among the race of the immortal gods. So come, and let my message from Zeus not be fruitless."

(324) So she spoke in supplication, but Her heart was not persuaded. Therefore the Father sent out the blessed, ever-living gods one after another, and they went in turn and implored her, and offered her many fine gifts and whatever honors she might choose among the immortal gods. None, however, was able to persuade the heart and mind of the angry goddess. She rejected their speeches firmly, and claimed that she would never set foot upon fragrant Olympus, nor allow any fruit to grow on the earth, until she saw with her eyes the beautiful face of her daughter.

(334) When Zeus the loud-crashing, the wide-voiced one, heard this he sent Hermes the slayer of Argos with his golden wand to Erebos, to use smooth words on Hades and lead pure Persephone out of the misty darkness into the light to join the deities, in order that her mother might see her with her eyes and turn from her anger. Hermes obeyed, and eagerly rushed down under the recesses of the earth, leaving the seat of Olympus. He found the Lord inside his house, seated on couches with his modest and very unwilling wife, yearning for her mother.

(346) The mighty slayer of Argos came near and said, "Dark-haired Hades, ruler of the departed, Father Zeus has ordered me to lead glorious Persephone out of Erebos to join them, in order that her mother might see her with her eyes and cease from her anger and terrible wrath, since she is contriving a tremendous deed, to destroy the fragile race of earth-born men, hiding the seed under the earth and obliterating the honors of the immortals. Her anger is terrible, she has no contact with the gods, but sits apart inside her fragrant temple, holding the rocky citadel of Eleusis."

(357) So he spoke, and Aidoneus the lord of the underworld smiled with his brows, and did not disobey the injunctions of Zeus the king. Promptly he gave the command to diligent Persephone: "Go, Persephone, to your dark-clad mother, and, keep gentle the strength and heart in your breast. Do not be despondent to excess beyond all others. I shall not be an inappropriate husband for you among the immortals; I am a brother of Father Zeus. Being there, you will rule over all that lives and moves, enjoying the greatest honors among the immortals. And there shall be punishment forever on those who act unjustly and who do not propitiate your might with sacrifices, performing the pious acts and offering appropriate gifts."

(370) So he spoke, and Persephone the discreet was glad, and swiftly leapt up for joy. But he gave her a honey-sweet pomegranate seed to eat, having secretly

passed it around [himself?], so that she might not stay forever there by modest dark-clad Demeter. Aidoneus, designator of many, harnessed the immortal horses in front of the golden chariot, and she stepped on the chariot; beside her the mighty slayer of Argos took the reins and a whip in his hands and drove out of the palace. The pair of horses flew willingly. They finished the long journey quickly. Neither sea nor rivers nor grassy glens nor mountain peaks held back the rush of the immortal horses; they went above them, and cut through the high air. He drove them where Demeter of the fair crown waited in front of her fragrant temple, and he stopped them there. Seeing them, she darted up like a maenad in the woods on a thick-shaded mountain.

(387) Demeter asked Persephone if she had eaten anything in the underworld. If not, (395) "you will come up and dwell with me and Zeus of the dark clouds, and be honored by all the immortals. But if you have tasted anything, then you shall go back down and dwell there for the third part of the season, and for the other two, here with me and the other immortals. Whenever the earth blossoms with all the sweet-smelling flowers of spring, then you will come back up from the misty darkness, a great wonder to gods and to mortal men. But what trick did the powerful host of many use to deceive you?"

(405) Persephone, the exceedingly beautiful, gave her this response: "I will tell you, Mother, everything accurately. When the swift slayer of Argos came to me from Father Zeus and the others in heaven with the message to come out of Erebus, so that seeing me with your eyes you might cease from your anger and terrible wrath, I leapt up for joy. But he secretly insinuated a pomegranate seed, honey-sweet food, and though I was unwilling, he compelled me by force to taste it. How he snatched me away through the clever plan of Zeus and carried me off, down into the recesses of the earth, I will tell you and I will go through it all as you ask. We were all there in the lovely meadow—Leukippe, Phaino, Elektre, Ianthé, Melite, Iache, Rhodeia, Kallirhoe, Melobosis, Tyche, Okyrhoe of the flowering face, Chryseis, Ianeira, Akaste, Admete, Rhodope, Plouto, charming Kalypso, Styx, Ouranie, lovely Galaxaure, Pallas the inciter of battles, Artemis the shooter of arrows—playing and picking the lovely flowers, a profusion of gentle saffron blossoms, iris, hyacinth, rose birds, and lilies, a marvel to see, and narcissus, which the broad land grew like saffron. Full of joy, I was picking them, but the earth under me moved, and the powerful Lord, the host of many, leapt out. And he took me under the earth on his golden chariot, against my will, and I screamed loudly with my voice. Grieved though I am, I am telling you the whole truth."

(434) Then with minds in concord they spent the whole day warming their hearts and minds, showering much love on each other, and her mind found respite from its griefs, as they gave and received joys from each other. And there came near them Hecate of the glistening veil, and she also showered much love

on the daughter of holy Demeter, and ever since she has been her attendant and Lady-in-waiting.

(441) Zeus the land-crashing, the wide-voiced one, sent fair-haired Rheia as a messenger to them, to bring dark-gowned Demeter among the race of the gods; he promised to give her whatever honors she might choose among the immortal gods. He granted that her daughter should spend the third portion of the year in its cycle down in the misty darkness, but the other two with her mother and the other immortals.

(448) So he spoke, and the goddess obeyed the biddings of Zeus. Promptly she darted along the peaks of Olympus, and came to the Rarian plain, the life-bringing udder of plough-land formerly, but at that time not life-bringing at all, as it stood all barren and leafless. The white barley was concealed according to the plans of fair-ankled Demeter, but at this time it was about to grow shaggy with waves of grain as it became spring. In the field the rich furrows were to be loaded with the grain, and they were to be bound in sheaves. Here she first alighted from the boundless aether, and they saw each other gladly, and rejoiced in their hearts.

(459) Rheia of the glistening veil said to her, "Come here, child. Zeus the loud-crashing, the wide-voiced one, summons you to come among the race of the immortal gods, and he has promised to give whatever honors you might choose among the immortal gods. He has granted that your daughter will spend the third portion of the year in its cycle down in the misty darkness, but the other two with you and the other immortals. So has he promised, and nodded his head in affirmation. Go, now, my child, and obey; do not be obdurately angry at Zeus of the dark clouds but give prompt increase to the fruit, bringer of life to men."

(470) So she spoke, and Demeter of the fair crown Obeyed. Promptly she sent up fruit on the rich-soiled fields, and the whole broad land was loaded with leaves and flowers. She went to the royal stewards of the right and to Triptolemos, Diokles the driver of horses, mighty Eumolpos and Keleos the leader of the people. She showed the tendance of the holy things and explicated the rites to them all, to Triptolemos, to Polyxeinos and to Diokles—sacred rites, which it is forbidden to transgress, to inquire into, or to speak about, for great reverence of the gods constrains their voice. Blessed of earth-bound men is he who has seen these things, but he who dies without fulfilling the holy things, and he who is without a share of them, has no claim ever on such blessings, even when departed down to the moldy darkness.

(483) When the divine goddess had ordained all this, she went to Olympus among the assembly of the other gods. And there they dwell, sacred and reverent, with Zeus who revels in thunder. Greatly blessed of earthbound men is he whom they propitiously love: to him they promptly send to the hearth of his great house Ploutos [Wealth], who gives abundance to mortal men.

(490) Now, ye that hold the people of fragrant Eleusis, and sea-girt Paros and rocky Antron, Lady mistress Deo, bringer of seasons and glorious gifts, thou thyself

and Persephone, the exceedingly beautiful, do ye bestow a heart-warming livelihood in exchange for my song. Now I shall recall thee, and also another song.

CULT REGULATIONS

The Homeric Hymn provides the mythological framework of the Mysteries. The inscriptions quoted here give information about their administration in the fifth century. The first is dated about 460 B.C. Part A, not included because it is too fragmentary to translate, concerns penalties for impieties. Part B sets the timetable for the sacred truce which accompanied the celebration of the Greater Mysteries (which lasted from the 15th to the 23rd of the month Boedromion) and the preparatory Lesser Mysteries (in the month Anthesterion). The reference to other cities shows that by the fifth century the Eleusinian cult's appeal reached farther than Attica. Part C contains information about cult personnel (especially the Heralds [Kerykes] and Eumolpidae, the two noble families which had charge of the sanctuary and its mysteries and the *hieropoioi*, sacred agents), about financial arrangements, and about initiation procedures.

(IG I² 6, B and C.)

B. (5) There is to be a truce for the initiates, the *epoptai*, and the attendants and [possessions] of all the foreigners and Athenians. The period of the truce is to begin at the middle of the month Metageitnion and last through Boedromion until the 20th of Pyanepsion. The truce is to be in effect in all the cities which make use of the sanctuary, and also for the Athenians there in the same cities. For the Lesser Mysteries the truce is to last from the middle of the month of Gamelion and through Anthesterion until the 20th of Elaphebolion.

C. . . . The sacred herald receives a half obol each day from each initiate. The priestess of Demeter is to receive at the Lesser Mysteries an obol from each initiate and at the Greater Mysteries an obol from each initiate. All the obols are for the Two Goddesses except for 1600 drachmas. From this sum the priestess is to pay the expense as long as it lasts. The Eumolpidae and Heralds are to receive from each initiate all the parts from the sacrificial victims; they are not to initiate any underage male or female initiate except for one who was initiated a[t the hearth(?)]; the heralds are to initiate each of the initiates separately, and the same is true of the Eumolpidae; if they do several, they are to be liable for a thousand drachmas. Those of the Heralds and Eumolpidae who are chosen by lot are to perform the initiations.

It is allowed to the Athenians to control the expenditure of the sacred funds, as long as they wish, as they do the funds of Athena in the city. The *hieropoioi* are to be custodians of the funds in the shrine inside the city.

The Eumolpidae are to hold the [certification (?)] of the orphans, and the orphan children and the initiates are each to make a preliminary sacrifice, the initiates sacrificing at Eleusis in the courtyard and inside the sanctuary, and the others sacrificing in the Eleusinion in the city.

The priest stationed at the altar, th[e cleaner] of the Two Goddesses, and th[e sacrosanct] priest is to receive [as payment] from each of these [a half obol from] each initiate, sacr[ed to the Two Goddesses.]

The Athenian state controlled Eleusis in the fifth century, as shown in this document ordering the reorganization of the sanctuary and providing for a regular payment of grain to support the sanctuary. The date is in the second half of the century, though experts disagree as to the exact year (448, 422, and 418 have been suggested). The cities mentioned are the subject-allies of Athens, members of her empire.

(IG I² 76.1–46.)

Resolved by the council and the people. . . , on the proposal of the drafting committee: that the Athenians give first-fruits of the grain to the Two Goddesses according to ancestral custom and the oracle of Delphi—from every hundred *medimnoi* of barley, not less than 1/6 *medimnos*; from every hundred *medimnoi* of wheat, not less than 1/12 *medimnos*. If any produces more or less grain, he is to give first-fruits in the same proportion. The deme-leaders in each deme are to collect it and convey it to the *hieropoioi* from Eleusis at Eleusis. They are to construct from the funds of the Two Goddesses three silos according to ancestral custom at Eleusis wherever seems convenient to the *hieropoioi* and the builder. There they are to deposit the grain which they receive from the deme-leaders. (14) The allies are also to give first-fruits in the same way: the cities are to select collection agents for the grain that the grain may be collected in the best way. When it is collected, they are to send it to Athens, and they are to take it and convey it to the *hieropoioi* from Eleusis at Eleusis. If they do not receive it within five days after the proclamation is made, the *hieropoioi* are to be liable, for a thousand drachmas each, and they are to receive it from the deme-leaders in the same way. The council is to choose heralds and send them to the cities to announce the present vote of the people, in the present case immediately and for the future whenever the council decides; and the hierophant and the torch bearer are to order the Greeks to give first-fruits of the grain to the mysteries according to ancestral custom and the oracle of Delphi, and are to inscribe on a tablet the amount of grain from the deme leaders listed by each deme and that from the cities listed by each city and they are to place it in the Eleusinion at Eleusis and in the council chamber. (30) The council is also to make a proclamation to all the other Greek cities in

whatever way seems feasible to it, telling them how the Athenians and the allies are giving first-fruits and requesting, but not requiring, them, if they wish, to give first-fruits according to ancestral custom and the oracle of Delphi; and the *hieropoioi* are to receive them from the cities in the same way, if any makes a contribution. (36) The sacrifices: from the *pelanos*, as the family of the Eumolpidae explicates; a triple sacrifice, the first victim an ox with gilded horns, to each of the Two Goddesses some of the barley and the wheat, and a perfect victim each to Triptolemos, to the god [Plouton] and the goddess [Persephone] and to Euboulos; and to Athena an ox with gilded horns. The *hieropoioi* are to dedicate the rest of the donated barley and wheat to the Two Goddesses, in whatever form the people of the Athenians resolves, and they are to inscribe on the dedications that they were dedicated from the first-fruits of the grain, the offering of the Greeks. (44) May there be many good things and an abundance of grain of good quality to those who do this, whoever does not act unjustly toward the Athenians, the city of the Athenians, or the Two Goddesses...

THE MEANING AND BLESSINGS OF INITIATION

The happiness of Eleusinian initiates is the basis for the following selection from Aristophanes' *Frogs*. This is a comedy, and in general full of raucous name-calling, slapstick, and obscenity. Yet this choral, passage, which is sung by initiates in the underworld, celebrating their happiness amid the gloom, is remarkably (if not completely) free of vilification and comic trenchancy. The hymn is addressed primarily to Iakchos, the divine personification of the initiates' cry of enthusiasm (*iakche*).

(Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 324–336, 340–353, 369–413, 440–459.)

Chorus of initiates: O highly honored Iakchos, whose dwelling-place is here, Iakchos, O Iakchos, come and dance through this meadow to thy devout members of the *thiasos*, shaking the fruit-laden crown of myrtle swelling around thy head, and treading with bold foot the measure of the uninhibited, playful rite, with its full measure of the Graces, the dance which is pure, holy to the sacred initiates...

Raise the blazing torches in your hands. Come among us, Iakchos, O Iakchos, light-bringing star of the nocturnal initiations. The meadow is ablaze with flame, the old man's limbs are leaping, they shake off their griefs and the lengthy spans of their aged years through the holy rites. Do thou shine radiant with thy torch and lead us forth to the flowering, marshy field where, blessed one, dances and youthfulness bloom.

[To the doers of evil] I declare; and again I declare, and again the third time I declare, stand aside from our initiate choirs. But do ye waken your song and our nightlong revels which befit our festival.

Come now everyone bravely into the flowery breast of the meadows, stamping and jeering and playing and mocking. (There's been enough eating.)

But come that thou mayest raise thy voice in noble song to exalt the Savior-goddess, who doth claim to save this land for all seasons (even if Thorykion doesn't like it).

Come now, shout out another kind of hymn to the grain-bearing Queen, the goddess Demeter, adorning it with sacred song.

Demeter, Lady of pure rites, be present among us, and save thine own choir. Grant me in security to play and dance all the day.

And grant me to say many witty things, many serious and, having played a jester worthy of thy festival, to wear the victor's crown.

And now, with chants invoke hither the god of ripeness, the fellow-pilgrim of our choral dance.

Much-honored Iakchos, who hast discovered the sweetest part of the festival, accompany us toward the goddess and reveal how thou dost accomplish thy long journey without toil. Iakchos, who lovest the dance, be thou my escort and guide.

For thou (for a laugh and economy's sake) hast ripped my poor little sandal and these rags I wear, and hast found a way for us to play and dance cheaply. Iakchos, who lovest the dance, be thou my escort and guide.

Now have I caught sight of a young girl's—a beautiful playmate's—nipple peeking out through a burst seam in her dress. Iakchos, who lovest the dance, be thou my escort and guide.

Proceed now along the holy circle of the goddess, along the flowering grove, and play, ye who take part in the festival favored of the goddess. I with the maids and the women shall go where they celebrate the goddess all night long, and shall carry the holy blaze. Let us proceed to the flowering, rose-filled meadows, playing in our special way, with the most beautiful dancing, which the Fates, who bring prosperity, do lead.

The sun and its holy blaze exist for us alone, who have experienced initiation and have dealt in a respectful way with strangers and private individuals.

By the end of the classical period, the Mysteries had become famous throughout the Hellenic world. They were so prestigious in the fourth century that the orator Isocrates, speaking in extravagant praise of Athens' accomplishments, uses the presence of the Mysteries in Attica as evidence that Athens was the inventor of agriculture and all its attendant blessings.

(Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 28–29.)

That which in the first place our nature required was provided by our city. Even if the story is mythical, nevertheless it is appropriate for it to be told now again. When Demeter wandered about after the abduction of Kore she arrived in this country; she was well disposed toward our ancestors by reason of good deeds which may not be heard by anyone except the initiates, and she gave those twin gifts, the greatest which exist, the grains which caused us to live a life no longer bestial and the initiation which gives its participants pleasant hopes about the consummation of life and eternity. (29) Our city showed its love not only for the gods but also for our fellow men in that being in possession of such good things it did not begrudge them to others, but it gave to all of that which it had received. And even today each year we reveal the rites; it has also, in summary, taught the uses of grains, their cultivation and the benefits which come from them.

The following passage shows how, in the last decade of the fourth century, a foreign king was so eager to receive initiation (for whatever reasons) as to force the Athenians to accommodate him in spite of the calendar and ancestral custom. The passage also shows the weakened political standing of Athens at the time, as well as a clear statement of the schedule of the mysteries.

(Plutarch, *Life of Demetrius*, 26.)

At that time he was marching back to Athens, and he wrote that he wished, as soon as he arrived, to be initiated and to receive the whole set of ceremonies from the Lesser to the *epoptika*. But this was not proper, and had never been done before: the Lesser Mysteries were celebrated in the month of Anthesterion, and the Greater in the month of Boedromion, and they only conducted the *epoptika* after an interval of at least a year. When his letter was read, only Pythodoros the torch bearer dared to oppose it, but he accomplished nothing. Instead, Stratokies moved, and it was voted, to call Mounychion (the current month) Anthesterion and consider it as such. Then they held the initiation ceremonies at Agra for Demetrius. After this Mounychion became Boedromion in place of Anthesterion, and he received the rest of the initiation, including besides the *epopteia*.

The next four passages suggest the moral and spiritual impact of the Eleusinian cult. First is a paraphrase from Hermippos, an Athenian philosopher of the late-fourth century, which gives the three moral and ritual admonitions ascribed to Triptolemos, the legendary founder of the Eleusinian cult. Next is Aristotle's analysis of the value of the cult as a ceremony rather than a fixed

body of doctrine. This is followed by two short quotations from fifth-century authors singing of the rewards in the afterlife which initiates can expect.

(Porphyry, *On Abstinence* IV. 22.)

We understand that Triptolemos is the most ancient of the Athenian lawgivers. Hermippos, in his second book on lawgivers writes about him thus: "They say that Triptolemos gave laws to the Athenians, and Xenokrates the philosopher says that these three laws of his still survived at Eleusis—'Honor your parents; honor the gods with grain; do no harm to animals.'"

(Aristotle, in Synesius, *Dio*, 10; frag. 15 in V. Rose, *Aristotelis ... Fragmenta*, Leipzig, 1886.)

Initiates do not need to understand anything; rather, they undergo an experience and a disposition—become, that is, deserving.

(Sophocles, in Plutarch, *How to Study Poetry*, 21f; frag. 837 in A.C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, Cambridge, 1917.)

Thrice blessed of mortals are those who go to Hades after beholding these rites. To them alone is it given to live there; to others everything there is evil.

(Pindar, in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* III. 3.17; frag. 121 in C.M. Bowra, *Pindari Carmina*, Oxford, 1935; frag. 137 in B. Snell and H. Maehler, *Pindarus*, Leipzig, 1975.)

Blessed is he who goes under the earth after seeing these things. He knows the consummation of life; he knows its Zeus-given beginnings.

rites and Ceremonies

What went on in the Eleusinian mysteries, and what (if anything) was revealed as the climax of the initiation ceremony was never revealed by any initiate, and the mystery continues to puzzle scholars. Our only ancient sources are not very reliable. They are very late, and are nearly all Christian, polemical writings attacking the pagan cults. Several passages are included here, because modern interpretations of the Mysteries have been influenced by them. The Plato scholiast explicates the two sets of Lesser and Greater Mysteries, and preserves a ritual formula. Lactantius seems to be describing a feature of a sort of ceremonial passion play recalling the abduction of Persephone; his reference to lights is elaborated by Dio Chrysostom. Clement cites another ritual

formula and “reveals” the contents of the sacred, secret chests [*kistai*], and Tertullian and Hippolytus both triumphantly expose the content of the great beholding [*epopteia*], the apparent climax of the initiation ceremony. They do not agree, however, whether the great mystery is the phallus or an ear of grain. See Mylonas, *Eleusis*, pp. 258–278, and K. Clinton, *The Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 64, 3: Philadelphia, 1974).

(Scholiast on Plato, *Gorgias*, 497c.)

There were two sets of mysteries among the Athenians. One was called “Lesser,” celebrated inside the city. The other was the “Greater,” held at Eleusis. It was necessary to be initiated first into the Lesser, and then into the Greater; otherwise it was not proper to participate in the Greater. These were celebrated in honor of Deo and Kore, because Plouton carried off Kore, and Zeus slept with Deo. Many base things were done in them, and these words were spoken on the part of those being initiated: “I have eaten from the drum, I have drunk from the cymbal, I have carried the offering dish [*kernos*], I have gone down into the (bridal) chamber [*pastos*].”

(Lactantius, *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, 23.7.)

Similar to the other mysteries is that of Ceres [Demeter]; in it Proserpina [Persephone] is sought with lighted torches through the night, and when she has been found the whole rite ends with expressions of joy and brandishing of torches.

(Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* XII. 33.)

... It is as if someone would hand over a man, Greek or barbarian, to be initiated in some inner sanctum of exceptional beauty and size. He would see many mystical sights, and hear many mystical voices. Darkness and light would appear to him in alteration, and thousands of other things would happen. It is furthermore like the initiating personnel who, in the so-called “Enthronement,” seat the initiands and dance around them in a circle.

(Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* II. 21–22; pp. 16–17 in the edition of O. Stählin, Leipzig, 1905)

The sacred formula of the Eleusinian mysteries is “I have fasted, I have drunk the *kykeon*, I have taken from the chest, I have done my task and placed in the basket and from the basket into the chest.” ... The mystic chests are such

as these—for I must strip their sanctities naked and speak aloud their ineffabilities—: are their contents not sesame sweets, cakes shaped like pyramids and balls, or covered with navels, lumps of salt, and a serpent, the ritual sign of Dionysus Bassaros? And are there not pomegranates in addition, and sprigs of fig, fennel and ivy, and also cheese cakes and poppies? These are their sanctities!

(Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians*, 1.)

Even the famous Eleusinia, that heresy of Attic superstition, is a shameful thing about which they keep quiet, in fact they impose torture before they certify the admission [of an initiate]. They start the *epoptai* off five years before so that they may build up their expectation by withholding knowledge and so that they may seem to reveal something of a grandeur equivalent to the greed which they have heaped up. Following this there is an obligation of silence. This is kept assiduously because it is learned at a late stage. However, the entire godhead in the innermost sanctuary, the entire source of breathless adulation in the *epoptai*, the entire secret token of their tongues, is revealed to be an image of the male organ.

(Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* V. 8.39.)

The Athenians, when they conduct the Eleusinian mysteries, reveal in silence to the *epoptai* the great, wonderful, most perfect initiation mystery, the *epoptikon*, an ear of grain. This ear of grain is for the Athenians the great initiatory lightbringer from that which is unformed [*acharakteriston*], as when the hierophant himself ... at night in Eleusis beneath a huge fire, celebrating the great and unspeakable mysteries, cries aloud, “The Lady Brimo has brought forth a holy son, Brimos.”