

ANCIENT GREEK CULTS

A guide

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promontory of Sounion, where a temple was added *c.* 490 and rebuilt under Perikles. The Athenians held a quadrennial festival with boat races, and the vigor of the Archaic cult is attested by at least twelve *kouroi* (statues of idealized young men) found buried in a pit east of the temple.³² The earliest cult at Sounion, however, probably belonged to the hero Phrontis, the steersman of Menelaos buried there according to Homer (*Od.* 3.276–85). In spite of the apparent antiquity of his cult, Poseidon was not a significant presence in Attica compared with Zeus, Demeter, Apollo, Dionysos, and of course Athena.

Further reading

Gebhard 1993 and Morgan 1994 summarize the development of sacred space at Isthmia from the eleventh century. Robertson 1984 demonstrates Poseidon's role as a god of fructifying waters and partner of Demeter. Schumacher 1993 discusses the function of Poseidon's sanctuaries as places of asylum. Chapter 6 of Pache 2004 is devoted to Melikertes-Palaimon.

MISTRESSES OF GRAIN AND SOULS

Demeter and Kore/Persephone

Demeter's origins as a grain goddess must lie in the Neolithic period with the advent of agriculture. Her name contains the Greek word for "mother," but whether the initial syllable means "earth," "grain," or something else has long been debated. Homer had little interest in Demeter and none in her relationship with Kore (the Maiden), though Persephone appears in epic poetry as the bride of Hades. The queen of the dead (Attic *Pherephatta*) has a non-Greek name and must have been in origin a deity separate from Demeter's daughter. Even after the two were firmly and inextricably identified, they were often paradoxically represented in cult as two distinct personages. Eleusinian iconography and terminology, for example, juxtaposed *Thea*, the underworld goddess, with Kore, the daughter. The Greeks avoided pronouncing or inscribing the ominous name *Persephone* in cult contexts, replacing it with *Kore* or other euphemisms, though such caution was less often exercised by the poets. Demeter and Kore were frequently worshiped together under such names as the Two Goddesses, the *Thesmophoroi*, or the Great Goddesses.

Demeter sanctuaries tended to be scattered in neighborhoods rather than centralized, probably because they were used for local celebrations of the *Thesmophoria*, Demeter's main festival. In spite of their crucial role in the prosperity of the city, Demeter and Kore rarely functioned as civic gods. Exceptional were Thebes, where Demeter's sanctuary occupied prime civic space on the *Kadmeia*, and certain cities of Sicily and *Magna Graecia*, where the two goddesses were dominant presences in the pantheon. In the Greek West, Kore/Persephone herself was sometimes the more prominent partner of the two, and played an important role in the social construction of marriage and the rites leading to adulthood for women and men. In keeping with Kore's significance as the archetypal bride, the western colonies saw the core of the myth as the theogamy of Persephone/Kore and Hades, rather than the reunion of Demeter and Kore after the latter's abduction, which was the focus of the famous Eleusinian Mysteries.

Thesmophoria

The most widespread festival of Demeter and Kore, and one of the most popular of all Greek rites, was the women's festival known as the Thesmophoria. The term *thesmos* means "that which is laid down," hence laws, rites, or revered customs. As the presiding deities, the two goddesses were called Thesmophoroi (Bringers of the Divine Law) because the introduction of grain cultivation was considered the origin of civilized life. Some scholars believe that the "things laid down" are to be understood in a much more literal sense, as the dead piglets deposited during the central rite of the festival. Still, the epithet unquestionably conveys the respect in which the goddesses were held, as do other cult titles such as Megalai Theai (Great Goddesses) and Hagnai Theai (Pure Goddesses). Each year, normally in late summer or early fall, married Greek women gathered in the local Demeter sanctuary, often called the Thesmophorion. Although celebration of the festival was generally not centralized, one sanctuary might be more heavily frequented than the rest. Most had a few modest cult buildings or a simple shrine called a *megaron* rather than an elaborate temple, but they are relatively easy to identify as sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore by the objects left behind: ceramic tableware; water jars; terracottas of the goddesses or their votaries, often carrying a piglet; pig bones; numerous lamps for the nocturnal parts of the rites; and the remains of ritual meals.

Literary evidence for the exclusion of males is plentiful. Herodotus (6.134) tells how the Athenian general Miltiades attempted to enter a restricted building (*megaron*) in the sanctuary on Paros – perhaps to meddle with the "untouchable" things there – and as a result of divine anger was stricken with a fatal case of gangrene. Xenophon says (*Hell.* 5.2.29) that the men of Thebes kept clear of the Kadmeia while the women were performing the rites there, going so far as to hold the *boulē* (council) in the agora rather than its usual place on the akropolis. Men's dedications are often found at these sites, so we know that their exclusion was not complete. Demeter sanctuaries were apparently used for a number of different observances throughout the year, only some of which involved ritual gender segregation.¹

The sacred objects used and acts performed during the Thesmophoria were kept secret. We hear of ritual dances, processions, and special foods, particularly bread. The Delian celebration, held in the late summer month of Metageitnion, involved an event called the Megalartia (Large Loaves), and bread seems to have played an important role in the celebrations at Korinth (below).² Only one source, a scholiast on Lucian (*Dial. meret.* 2.1), describes the ritual in detail, and his version refers to Attic custom. He writes that piglets are cast into the "chasms of Demeter and Kore" in honor of Eubouleus, a herdsman whose swine were swallowed in the abyss when Hades abducted Kore (Eubouleus reappears as a deity in Eleusis). After an unspecified period, the rotted remains of the piglets are brought up from the chasms (also called

aduta, innermost chambers, and *megara*, chambers) by ritually pure women, laid on the altars, and mixed with the seed grain to ensure a good harvest. The scholiast says that pine branches and phallic shapes made of wheat dough are used the same way, all given as thank offerings for the generation of crops and the procreation of people.

The ritual deposition of piglets was probably widespread; piglets were cast into *megara* at Potniai in Boiotia, and excavations of Demeter and Kore sanctuaries at Knidos and Priene have uncovered such pits. At Eleusis, several deep shafts, which probably served this function, were found around the porch of the so-called Telesterion.³ Apparently, the story of Kore's rape was the mythic foundation for the ritual; the piglet is also symbolic of the female genitals, and the piglets falling into the earth to be resurrected with the grain repeat the descent and ascent of Kore. Thus the Thesmophoria and the Eleusinian Mysteries shared the same myth, interpreted in different ways. Kevin Clinton has suggested that the Homeric *Hymn* to Demeter, usually thought to recount the origin of the Mysteries, is primarily an aetiological account of the Thesmophoria.⁴

The Attic Thesmophoria was a three-day festival held a few weeks before the ploughing and sowing of the fields; we also hear of such festivals celebrated as early as midsummer (Thebes) and lasting as long as ten days (Sicily). Women gathered in the sanctuaries, bringing supplies of food and setting up tents as temporary accommodations. As part of the proceedings, the women engaged in sex-talk (*aischrologia*) and ritual mockery. This seems to have been a mainstay of the goddesses' segregated worship; its mythic explanation is that when Demeter was grieving for Kore, scurrilous jokes and gestures caused her to smile.⁵ The sex-talk was the verbal equivalent of the piglets, pine branches and phallic shapes handled by the participants; the women's heightened awareness of their own sexuality and reproductive ability was powerful (therefore it could be deployed to aid the growth of crops) yet dangerous to male prerogatives (therefore its unfettered expression was limited to the festival context).⁶

The first day of the Athenian festival was called Anodos (Ascent), perhaps with reference to the women's retrieval of material from the chasms. The second day was the Nesteia (Fasting), a day when no public business or sacrifice was conducted in the city. The last day was called Kalligeneia (Beautiful Offspring), making clear the connection between agricultural bounty and women's fertility. This was probably a feast day, presided over by leaders (*archousai*) elected from each deme. It is clear from Isaeus' speeches (3.80, 6.49–50, 8.19) that citizen matrons organized and attended the festival, but the sources conflict on the question of whether slaves and prostitutes could be present and in what capacities. Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* draws a vivid tableau of male suspicion and female revelry during the Thesmophoric ritual, which he sets on the Pnyx, in the same meeting place used by the Athenian assembly. Excavation in this area uncovered a few

terraccottas and lamps consistent with a sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, but not enough material to confirm the existence of a Thesmophorion.⁷

Demeter, Kore, and the agricultural year

As one might expect, many festivals of Demeter and Kore were tied to the annual cycle of grain cultivation. Barley and wheat were the staple crops, sown during the fall in most Mediterranean lands. Great anxiety surrounded the fateful question of when to plough and sow, for the farmer must plant late enough to coincide with the fall rains, yet early enough to allow the shoots to become established before the onset of winter cold.⁸ Therefore the most important festivals and rituals connected with grain cultivation are clustered around sowing time.

As usual, we are best informed about the Attic year. Early in Pyanopsion (October/November), the Proerosia or pre-ploughing sacrifices took place in the demes, including Eleusis. In conjunction with the Proerosia there were at least three sacred ploughings, one at Skiron, one in the Rharian plain of Eleusis, and one in Athens. The Thesmophoria, with its ritual preparation of the seed, followed soon after. During the next month, Poseideon (December/January), the grain sprouted and began to grow. By the time of the Haloa at the winter solstice, it became evident whether the farmers had chosen their sowing dates wisely. Epigraphic evidence from the fourth century (*IG* II² 1672.124, 144) shows that huge amounts of firewood were used, probably for the bonfires typical of solstice ritual. At this point in the year, the grain was quiescent because of the cold; only the returning heat of the sun could bring it to fruition. Ancient accounts of the Haloa are late and confused, but it is clear that like the Thesmophoria, the festival involved a link between human and vegetable fertility.⁹ Temporarily flouting the rules of behavior for respectable females, women gathered at Eleusis drank wine, engaged in sexual banter, and handled pastries shaped like male and female genitals.

In Anthesterion (February/March) the Lesser Mysteries took place just as the grain stalks entered their prime phase of growth, celebrated in the Chloaia (Greening festival). This was probably the main festival of Demeter Chloë, though she also received a sacrifice at the harvest. Perhaps surprisingly, the main harvest observance, known in Attica and some Ionian cities as the Thargelia and in other Greek lands as the Thalysia, had early ties to Apollo and Artemis rather than Demeter. Homer (*Il.* 9.533–35) thinks of *thalusia* as first fruit offerings to Artemis, and Apollo was the patron of the Thargelia, but by the Hellenistic period Theocritus (*Id.* 7.31–38) describes the Thalysia on Kos as a Demeter festival. On the other hand, we know that Demeter was an important figure in the harvest folklore of Greek peasants, who sang songs to her as they reaped. The Kalamaia (Straw festival), probably held in the mid-summer month of Skirophorion, was an Attic/Ionian celebration of the threshing and winnowing. This was also the month of the Skira, a poorly

understood festival celebrated by married women who temporarily abstained from sex. Like the Thesmophoria, it was celebrated at a number of sites in Attica.¹⁰ Finally, the Eleusinian Mysteries were held in Boedromion (September/October), about a month before the ploughing and sowing began once more, renewing the agricultural cycle.

The Eleusinian Mysteries

For a thousand years, people traveled to the small town of Eleusis in Attica in order to experience something profound, something that soothed their fears of death and enhanced their lives immeasurably. This most prestigious of mystery cults must have begun as a local rite open only to the people living nearby, but gradually it accommodated ever-larger numbers, including slaves and foreigners. Many secrets still surround the cult, for its hundreds of thousands of initiates kept their promise not to reveal what took place within the sanctuary. Still, a surprising amount is known from archaeological investigation of the once-inviolable precinct, the assertions of hostile Christian Fathers (which must be read with caution), and other scattered bits of information. The Eleusinian Mysteries had an important public component, and contemporary sources addressing this aspect of the rites, including inscriptions and vase paintings, are numerous.

In spite of the plentiful data (or perhaps because of it), many scholarly controversies surround the Mysteries. Debate centers on the date at which the Eleusinian cult was incorporated into Athenian religion (from the beginning, or not until the sixth century?), the relationship between the cult and the Homeric *Hymn* to Demeter (to what extent does the latter reflect an "Eleusinian" perspective?) and the significance of the Mycenaean remains found in the sanctuary (do they point to continuity of the cult from the Bronze Age?). The early Mycenaean Megaron B, located beneath the later Demeter temple or Telesterion, was distinguished from nearby houses by its stepped porch and the remains of frescoes within; Mycenaean figurines were found in the vicinity. Yet its function is not clearly established; it may have served as an elite residence, a cult building, or both. A curved Geometric wall outside Megaron B could be either the remains of a Geometric Demeter temple or a retaining wall added to the still-standing Bronze Age structure. In any case, the earliest unequivocal evidence of the cult are the massive eighth-century terrace and a wall enclosing the whole area, with a sacrificial pyre full of broken figurines, pottery, and ashes at the entrance.¹¹

Eleusis lies at the edge of the Thriasian plain, the "bread basket" of Attica; it was bound to be of interest to the emerging polis.¹² Legend tells of a war between the two towns when Erechtheus was king at Athens and Eumolpos, the first celebrant of the Mysteries, at Eleusis. The resulting settlement left financial control of the cult entirely in Athenian hands, while ritual responsibilities were shared between two aristocratic families, the Eumolpidae of

The sources give us only a glimpse of what took place in this room amid the forest of columns, the actual *teletē* (mystery rite). Certainly the initiates were guided on an emotional path from confusion and grief to confidence and joy, and this progression seems to have corresponded to the events in a ritual drama depicting Kore's return from the underworld and her reunion with Demeter. At a critical moment, the Hierophant appeared from the inner room in a blaze of torchlight to display the *hiera* to the onlookers. Those who had experienced the Mysteries in a previous year were permitted to remain in the Telesterion for a further revelation; such individuals were called *epoptai* (those who have seen). Following the climactic rites, bulls and pigs were sacrificed to the goddesses and other Eleusinian deities, while initiates used special vessels called *plēmochōai* to pour libations of water toward the east and west.

On the day after the Mysteries concluded, the Athenian Council met in the city Eleusinion to review the conduct of the festival and deal with any infractions of sacred law; this custom was attributed to a law of Solon. The earliest votive deposits in the Eleusinion date to the seventh century, and it received architectural elaboration in the sixth. It contained a temple of Demeter and Kore, altars, and many inscribed decrees relating to the conduct of the Mysteries, as well as a temple of Triptolemos, the Eleusinian hero who is said to have introduced the knowledge of grain cultivation to the world, flying about in his winged chariot.¹⁷

Particularly in the period of empire, Athens promoted the Mysteries, along with the knowledge imparted by Triptolemos, as its unique gifts to the world. Heralds were sent to other cities to declare a sacred truce of fifty-five days, which allowed time for pilgrims to travel to Athens, be initiated, and return home. The first fruits decree (IG I³ 78), issued c. 435, details the collection of an annual tithe of grain from every deme in Attica and the Athenian allies, and urges that every Greek city likewise join in the offering.¹⁸ We don't know how many Greek cities heeded this rather high-handed request, but Athens clearly succeeded in securing for Eleusis a Panhellenic reputation and status, which it maintained until the end of antiquity. Even as the cult gained renown across the Greek world, however, the "Eleusinian version" of the Demeter/Kore myth remained surprisingly localized. Other cities often had their own versions of the myth that failed to be displaced because they, like the traditions at Eleusis, were venerable tales tied to local landmarks (wells, caves, or rocky outcroppings). Even the Homeric *Hymn* to Demeter reflects a generic, Panhellenized version of the Attic cult: Eubouleus, the titles Theos and Thea, and the Mirthless Rock are omitted from the story, while Triptolemos is barely mentioned.

Demeter at Corinth

On a steep slope of the Akrokorinthos, some fifteen minutes' walk from the city center, Demeter's principal sanctuary at Corinth was constructed in a



Figure 6.1 Demeter and Kore or Hekate. Relief sculpture, fifth century. Archaeological Museum, Eleusis. Erich Lessing/Art Resource.

series of three terraces. Though there was continuous activity on the site from the Late Bronze Age, no evidence for a cult appears until a series of pins and rings deposited in the mid-eighth century. Even at this early date the offerings give the impression of a strong female presence at the site. In the seventh century a wider variety of offerings appears in the middle terrace, including bronze jewelry, miniature vases, and terracotta figurines. A small but substantial building, probably a temple, was already present in this period. The middle terrace, with its temple, sacrificial area, bone debris (primarily from pigs), and votive collections, served as the nucleus of the cult for its first hundred and fifty years, while the upper terrace contained a theatral area that was probably used for a mystery rite.

In the sixth century came a major architectural development: numerous dining rooms were constructed on the lower terrace. Ritual dining in this area was probably not new, but the Corinthians now expended considerable resources on dining facilities. Each room held from six to eight diners, who reclined on stone couches. By mid-century, the sanctuary could accommodate about one hundred diners at once. The ritual menu seems to have focused not on sacrificial meat, but on grain-based foods. One of the characteristic votive offerings at this site was the terracotta *liknon* (winnowing fan) filled with a

variety of model breads and cakes. The cooking vessels are the types used for boiling and stewing, so gruels or porridge may also have been an important menu item. Finally, numerous wine cups (*kantharoi* and *skuphoi*), mixing bowls and amphoras show that wine was consumed with the meal.

Who partook of these meals is a mystery. On the one hand, elaborate dining facilities, reclining posture, and wine consumption are associated with men's symposia. Yet the abundance of women's votive offerings, the emphasis on grain-based foods, and the fact that this was a Demeter sanctuary point toward a women's festival such as the Thesmophoria. In any case, the expansion of the dining facilities at Korinth continued through the fifth and fourth centuries. Eventually, more than two hundred diners at once could use the rooms, which were provided with extra spaces for food preparation and washing. To judge from the scarcity of imported offerings here (relative to a sanctuary like that of Hera at Perachora), the cult seems to have attracted few outsiders.¹⁹

The Two Goddesses are said to have played a role in the success of Timoleon, the Korinthian who was credited with the liberation of Syracuse from rule by Greek tyrants and Carthaginians. On the eve of Timoleon's expedition in 345/4, the priestesses of Demeter and Persephone reported a dream in which the goddesses appeared to them in traveling garb to announce that they would accompany Timoleon to Sicily. Much encouraged, the Korinthians dedicated a "sacred trireme" to the goddesses and set sail. On their journey, a great flame appeared in the night sky, and forming itself into a torch "like those used in the Mysteries," guided them to their destination.²⁰

Demeter Chthonia at Hermione

Pausanias (2.35.4–11) is our most detailed source for the famous cult of Demeter Chthonia (of the Underworld) at the remote town of Hermione in the Argolid. Hermione was not a Dorian town, but was settled by the aboriginal Dryopes when the Dorians expelled them from Thessaly. This cult is unusual in its emphasis on the role of Hades (who is given the euphemistic name of Klymenos, the Renowned One). Examination of the site has revealed a lengthy section of wall, which probably marked off the Classical sanctuary, a series of inscribed bronze cows (which relate to the ritual described below), and numerous late inscriptions. It is difficult to know from Pausanias' second-century CE account which elements of the ritual date back to the Classical period. He reports that the Chthonia festival took place in the summer and began with a procession of all the priests, magistrates, and townspeople, even the children. Dressed in white and crowned with wreaths made from a local summer wildflower, they led a heifer to the sanctuary, where it was allowed to roam about until it entered the open doors of the temple. Inside, four old women rose from their ceremonial thrones and

pursued the heifer until one of them cut its throat with a sickle. Three more cows were slaughtered for the goddess in the same way.

The indoor sacrifice is very unusual, but can be explained as the result of the strict gender segregation practiced in the cult. The cult statue of Chthonia was so sacred that only the old women were permitted to view it, and the exclusion of men seems to have extended to the sacrificial slaughter, usually a male prerogative. Although the whole city participated in the festival, its climactic ritual acts had to take place in seclusion, away from male eyes. Chthonia seems to have been an important Dryopian goddess, for the Dryopes of Asine, a neighboring town, sent a sacrificial cow and a delegation to walk in the procession even after they were forced to emigrate to Messenia (IG IV 679.1–2). Opposite Chthonia's sanctuary was that of Klymenos, and the area was famed for its entrance to the underworld, an opening in the earth from which Herakles once emerged, it was said, leading Kerberos. Although Kore plays no role in Pausanias' description of the cult, she appears with Demeter Chthonia and Klymenos in numerous dedicatory inscriptions from Hermione. A fragmentary hymn composed by the sixth-century poet Lasos of Hermione confirms that worship of the triad Demeter, Klymenos, and Kore was the norm in the late Archaic period as well.²¹

Demeter and Despoina in Arkadia

According to Herodotus (2.171), the *teletē* (secret rite) of Demeter which the Greeks call the Thesmophoria was mostly abandoned in the Peloponnese with the arrival of the Dorians, but was preserved among the Arkadians, whose lands were not penetrated by the invaders. Certainly the worship of Demeter was far more prominent in Arkadia than elsewhere in the Peloponnese. The Arkadia of the poets is a mountainous, wild land sparsely inhabited by goatherds and hunters, but the district also encompassed fertile lowlands where cereal crops were grown. Like so many other Arkadian cults, with their pronounced tendency toward theriomorphic (animal-shaped) gods, the worship of the Two Goddesses in this isolated district seems strange and primeval, the remnant of a very early syncretism of Greek and indigenous traditions.

The Arkadians worshiped an equine Demeter, consort of the horse-god Poseidon Hippios. They held in common with the other Greeks the belief that Demeter angrily withdrew to an earthly abode and caused a crisis in the natural world because of her rage at the abduction of her daughter. Demeter's anger was further attributed to her unwilling union with Poseidon. In order to escape his lustful pursuit, she transformed herself into a mare, but he saw through the trick and forced himself on her in the form of a stallion. Their offspring were the miraculous horse Areion and a daughter, the Arkadian equivalent of Kore, whose true name was revealed only to initiates. In public, their daughter was called Despoina (the Mistress). This story was attached to

Thelpousa, where Demeter had the title Erinys (the Wrathful One), and a similar myth about Erinys is attested for Telphousa/Tilphossa in Boiotia.²² Demeter also had the title of Lousia (of Washing) at Thelpousa, because she purified herself in the river Ladon after intercourse with Poseidon and let go of her anger. Demeter Erinys and Demeter Lousia thus form a complementary pair representing angry and appeased manifestations of the goddess.

The Thelpousan cult is closely related to that at Phigaleia, where Demeter's Archaic statue had the head of a horse and was housed in a cave on the rocky gorge of the river Neda, well outside the city. To this cave Demeter had withdrawn, causing a famine until her anger abated. She was known as Melaina (the Black) because she dressed all in black to express her mood; scholars generally interpret her blackness, which is a feature shared by the Erinyes, as a sign of her underworld nature. The statue was seated on a rock with serpents and other creatures emerging from its mane, and it held a dolphin in one hand and in the other a dove. This Demeter is a Mistress of Animals and has close affinities with the gorgon Medousa, who similarly sported snaky hair, mated with Poseidon, and gave birth to a miraculous horse (Pegasos). Kore/Despoina has little involvement in this cult, nor is Demeter primarily a grain goddess. Every year the people set upon an altar outside the cave samples of all the raw materials produced in their land, including grapes, honeycombs, and wool, and poured olive oil over these in an attempt to appease the disgruntled goddess. According to Pausanias (8.42.5–7), this was a revival of an Archaic cult that had fallen into disuse. The original theriomorphic statue was lost to a fire in the distant past. On the occasion of a blight, the people consulted Delphi and were told to replace the statue of "stallion-mated Deo," whose anger had been renewed by the people's neglect. Onatas of Aigina, a sculptor active in the fifth century, was given the commission, and inspired by a dream and perhaps an old copy of the image, he re-created it.²³

The Arkadian cults of Demeter resulted from a complex process combining the old Mycenaean goddess Erinys, who was early on linked to Poseidon Hippios and whose offspring was a horse, with the Panhellenic and Eleusinian Demeter who bore a daughter. The persona of the daughter seems to have been superimposed on an older Arkadian goddess, Despoina. The sanctuary of Despoina at Lykosoura was dramatically rebuilt in the Hellenistic period with sculptures by Damophon (c. 175–150), and most of the excavated remains are late. Only a few Archaic and Classical terracottas attest to the earlier life of the sanctuary, which the Arkadians considered very ancient. Pausanias' account (8.37.1–10) of Lykosoura mentions the worship of Despoina with her mother Demeter; certain mysteries (most likely derivative of the Eleusinian rites); and a platform called the *megaron* where an unusual form of sacrifice took place. Each participant sacrificed an animal, not only cutting its throat, but also chopping off a random limb for the goddess. Despoina clearly had a strong affinity with Artemis, who not coincidentally

maintained a cultic presence in the sanctuary. Another clue to the nature of the cult are the *theriomorphic* figures found in the *megaron* area and sculpted on the robe of Damophon's statue of Despoina, fragments of which were recovered in the excavations of Lykosoura. The border of the robe shows a line of dancing male and female figures with ram and horse heads. These belong to the Hellenistic period, yet likely reveal a very old custom of masked dances for the goddess.²⁴

The Two Goddesses in Sicily

The religious life of the colonists in the west developed differently from that of people in the mother cities for several reasons. First, the entire pantheon of major and minor deities could not be reproduced in a colony; the settlers were forced to focus on a limited number of cults selected from those they knew at home. As it happened, Demeter's cult was particularly well suited to the fertile soils of Sicily. Second, Greek religious assumptions required that the local gods be recognized (preferably as Greek deities in a new guise), and their cult places respected. The native Sikans and Sikels worshiped a number of goddesses, among them Hyblaia, Anna, and local water spirits, whose functions and personalities were easily assimilated to those of Demeter and Kore/Persephone. In particular, the dominance of Persephone, who was often worshiped quite independently of her mother in this part of the world, may be due to syncretism with local underworld goddesses.

During the Archaic period, much of Sicily was ruled by tyrants of the Deinomenid family including Gelon and Hieron. The Deinomenids played an important role in the dissemination of the cults of the Two Goddesses, for their ancestor Telines held a family priesthood of the *chthoniai theai* (earth goddesses, i.e., Demeter and Kore). When a group of Geloans seceded, Telines was able to win them back by displaying the sacred objects of the goddesses. In return for this service, he demanded a civic priesthood, which he passed to his descendants. The Deinomenids seem to have exported cults of Demeter and Kore/Persephone to Gela's daughter city Akragas and to several other sites in the hinterland.²⁵ Already in the sixth century, Pindar (*Pyth.* 12.1–2) described Akragas as the "seat of Persephone," and by the first century, Cicero (*Verr.* 2.4.106) could remark that all Sicily was sacred to Demeter and Persephone. The names of Sicilian festivals such as Anakalypteria (Unveiling of the Bride), Theogamia (Divine Marriage), and Koreia (Festival of the Maiden) suggest the importance of Kore/Persephone's cult and show that its principal focus was her marriage to Hades.²⁶

Founded on the south coast of Sicily by seventh-century colonists from Rhodes and Krete, Gela lies on a hill beside the mouth of the Gela river. While Athena and Hera were worshiped in the city proper, Demeter and Kore seem to have possessed at least three sanctuaries outside the walls, all quite modest in terms of architecture, yet rich in votive gifts. A pot graffito



Figure 6.2 Persephone opens a box containing an infant. Terracotta *pinax* from Lokroi Epizephyrioi, 470–50. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Reggio Calabria. Scala/Art Resource.

in the role of bride, seems to have held a higher status than in many other Greek cities. Furthermore, the idealized institution of marriage had an eschatological significance: just as marriage was a symbolic death, death was a symbolic marriage and the blessed afterlife state was assimilated to that of marital bliss.³²

The *pinakes* are the primary source for this picture of marriage as a Lokrian cultural ideal. About the size of a standard sheet of paper, they are pierced for suspension and originally hung in the sanctuary, probably on trees. The main types include scenes of Persephone's abduction by Hades; the abduction of a maiden by a youthful male which is thought to be a generic representation of the bride's "capture" by her groom; wedding libations and processions; women packing and unpacking wedding gifts; Persephone enthroned alone or with Hades, receiving divine visitors and mortal suppliants including children; and various scenes with Aphrodite and Hermes, who governed the sexual aspects of marriage. Fragments of similar *pinakes* have been found at

Medma and Hipponion, towns in the Lokrian orbit, as well as Francavilla in Sicily, though the Lokrian products do not appear to have been widely exported.³³

Further reading

Cole 1994 provides an excellent, brief review of Demeter's cults, with good use of archaeological evidence. For the Eleusinian Mysteries, Clinton's work is indispensable; Clinton 1992 develops his controversial theories about the relationship between the Thesmophoria and the Homeric *Hymn* to Demeter, and draws together visual as well as literary evidence for the Mysteries. For more on the *Hymn* and the Mysteries, see Foley 1994. Detienne 1989, to be read with Osborne 1993, argues that women's limited role in sacrificial ritual, even in the Thesmophoria, corresponds to their limited political rights. On the Athenian rites of Demeter and Persephone, see Parker 2005, Chapters 13 and 15.