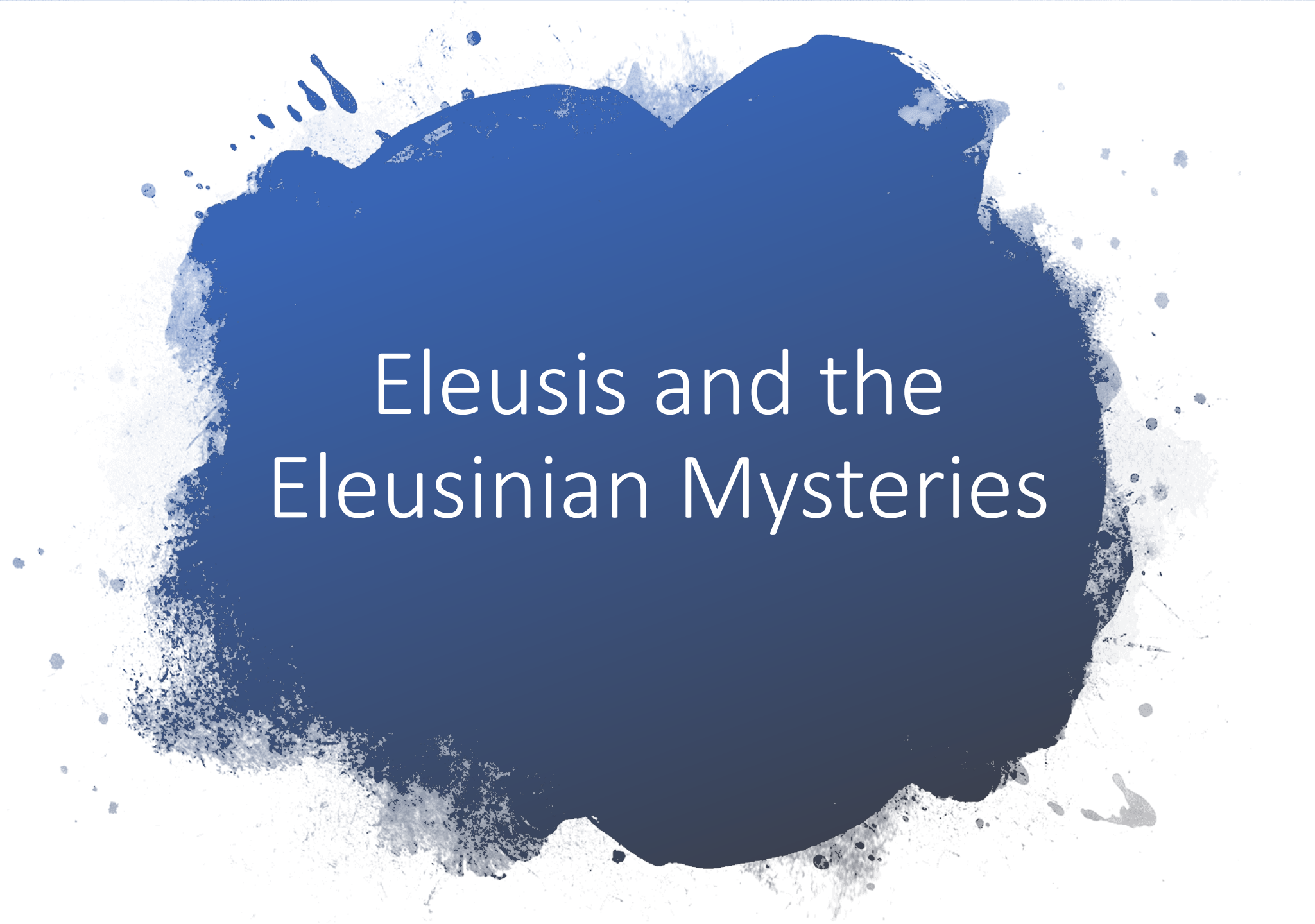




Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries

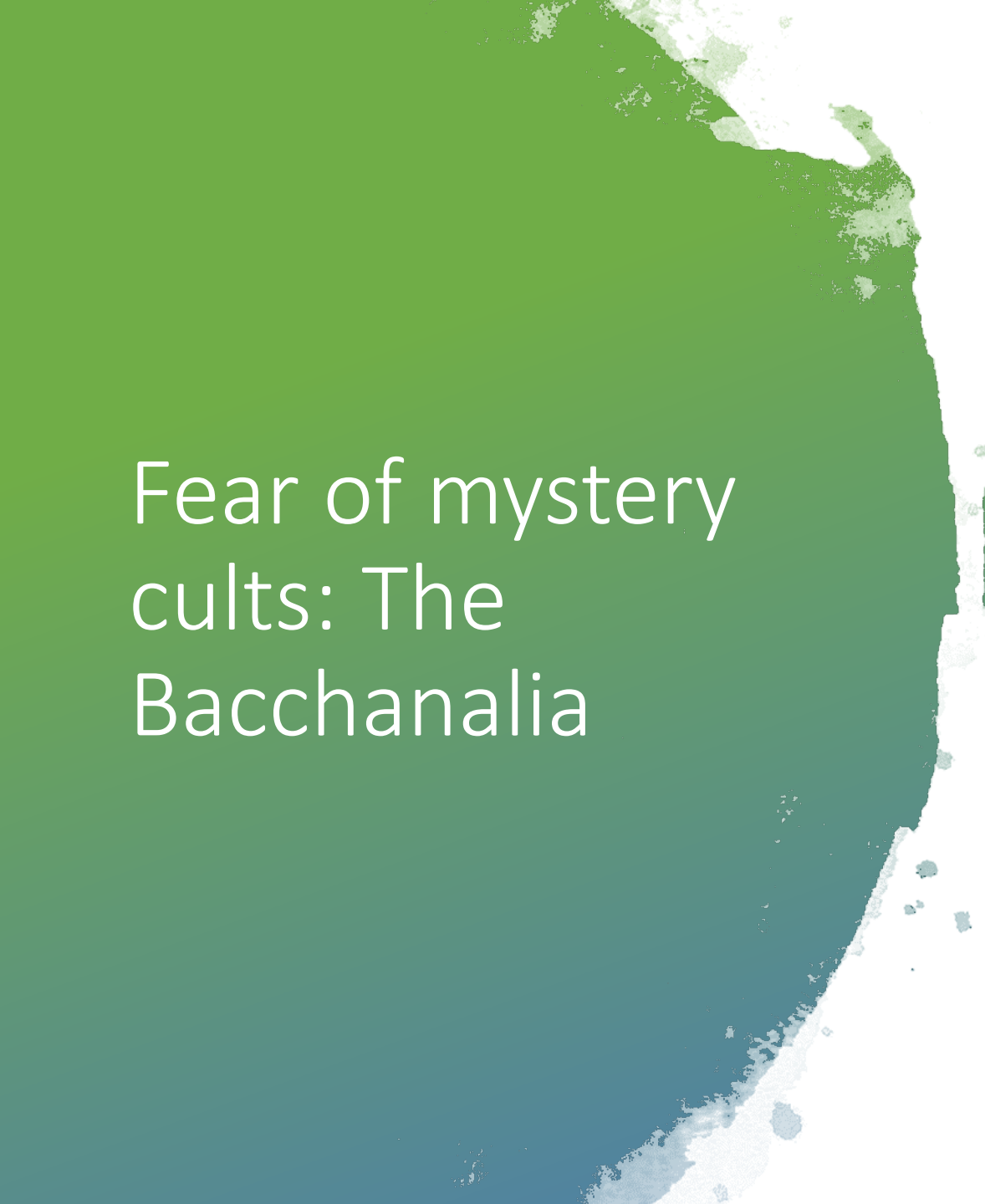


Mystery cults

- Mysteria = originally the name of the Eleusinian Mysteries
- In scholarship all cults with an initiation requirement
- CAREFUL – they are “mysterious” to us but NOT to their initiates
- 2 types:
 1. Connected to a cult centre (like Eleusis)
 2. Local but not localised cults (such as mysteries of Dionysus)
- Known cults:
 - Eleusis
 - Samothrace
 - Dionysaic
 - Cybele
 - Isis

Mystery cults: Characteristics

1. Secrecy
 - Of sorts – some aspects are visible
 - Parts cannot be revealed to non-initiates:
 - “Alcibiades denied the charge at great length; so the Prytanes decided to clear the meeting of non-initiates and themselves fetch the lad indicated by Pythonicus.” Andoc. 1. 12
2. Initiation
 - Specific rituals to become an initiate
 - Access to aspects of cult unavailable to outsiders
 - “Just as persons who are being initiated into the Mysteries throng together at the outset amid tumult and shouting, and jostle against one another, but when the holy rites are being performed and disclosed the people are immediately attentive in awe and silence” Plut. Mor. 81d
3. Not “polis” religion (i.e. not public/open to all)



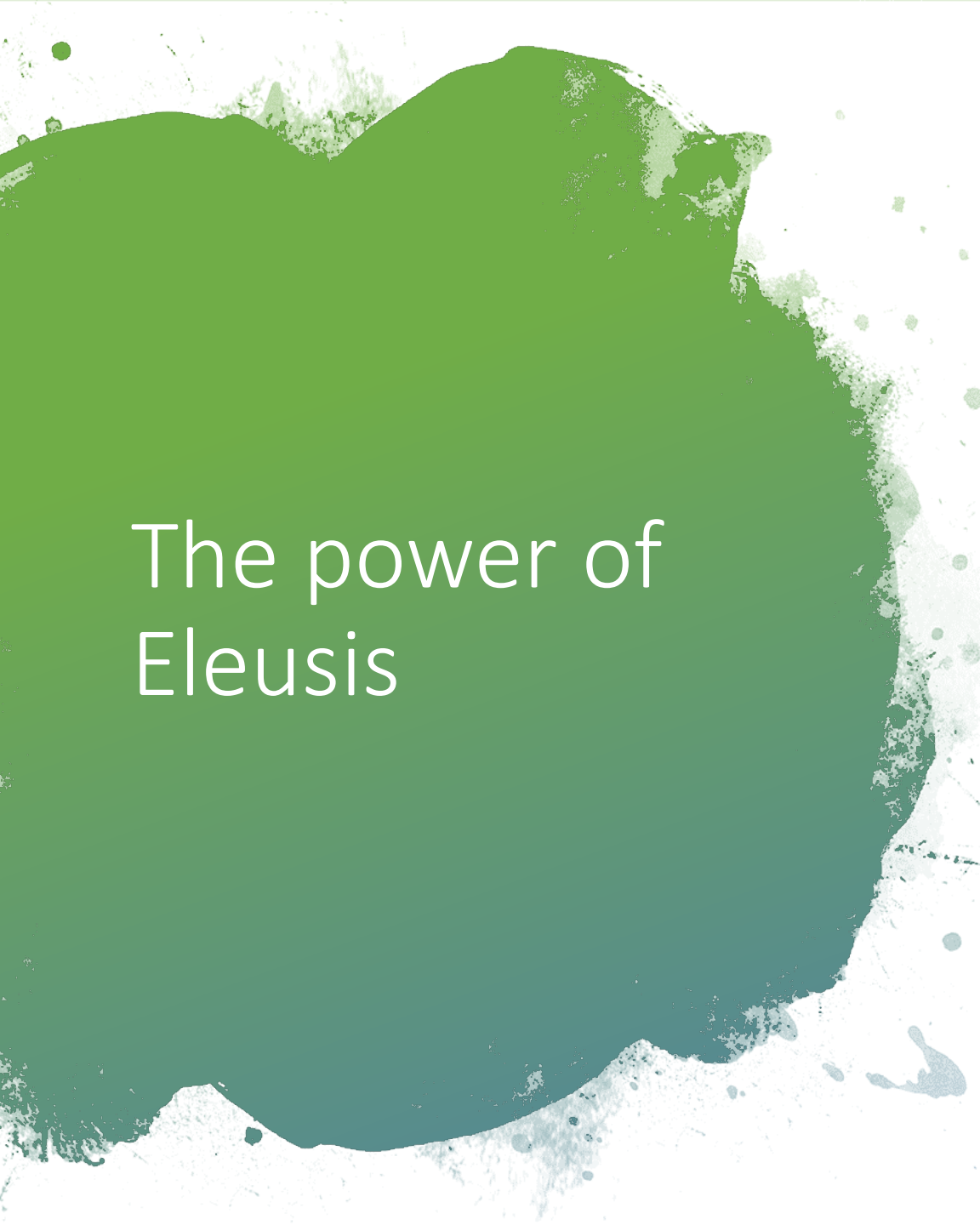
Fear of mystery cults: The Bacchanalia

- Since there were these bonds of affection between them, and neither had any secrets from the other, the young man jestingly told her not to be surprised if he were away from her for several nights: as a matter of religious duty, he said, to free himself from a vow made for the sake of his health, he intended to be initiated in the Bacchic rites. [2] When the woman heard this she exclaimed in great distress, “The gods forbid!” She said that it would be much better both for him and for her to die rather than do that; and she called down curses and vengeance upon the heads of those persons who had given him this counsel. [3] Wondering both at her language and at her so manifest distress, the young man bade her spare her curses: it was his mother, he said, with the approval of his stepfather, who had ordered it. [4] [p. 247] “Your stepfather, then,” she replied, “is making¹ haste —for perhaps it is not right to accuse your mother —to destroy in this way your virtue, your reputation and your life.” [5] As he marvelled the more and asked her what she meant, beseeching gods and goddesses for peace and forgiveness if, compelled by her love for him, she had declared what should be concealed, she told him that while she was a slave she had attended her mistress to that shrine, but that as a free woman she had never visited it. [6] She knew, she said, that it was the factory of all sorts of corruptions; and it was known that for two years now no one had been initiated who had passed the age of twenty years. [7] As each was introduced, he became a sort of victim for the priests. They, she continued, would lead him to a place which would ring with howls and the song of a choir and the beating of cymbals and drums, that the voice of the sufferer, when his virtue was violently attacked, might not be heard. [8] Then she begged and besought him to put an end to this matter in any way he could and not to plunge into a situation where all disgraceful practices would have first to be endured and then performed. [9] Nor would she let him go until the young man gave her his promise that he would have nothing to do with those mysteries. Liv. 39.10#



Localised vs non-localised cults

- Issues with mystery cults tended to be with non-localised cults (i.e. where there was no sanctuary).
- “With regard to the religious ceremonies of foreign nations, he was a strict observer of those which had been established by ancient custom; but others he held in no esteem. For, having been initiated at Athens, and coming afterwards to hear a cause at Rome, relative to the privileges of the priests of the Attic Ceres, when some of the mysteries of the sacred rites were to be introduced in the pleadings, he dismissed those who sat upon the bench as judges with him, as well as the by-standers, and heard the argument upon those points himself. But, on the other hand, he not only declined, in his progress through Egypt, to go out of his way to pay a visit to Apis, but he likewise commended his grandson Caius for not paying his devotions at Jerusalem in his passage through Judea.” Suet. Aug. 91



The power of Eleusis

- “For among the many excellent and indeed divine institutions which your Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life, none, in my opinion, is better than those mysteries. For by their means we have been brought out of our barbarous and savage mode of life and educated and refined to a state of civilization; and as the rites are called "initiations," so in very truth we have learned from them the beginnings of life, and have gained the power not only to live happily, but also to die with a better hope.” Cic. Leg.



What do we know
about Eleusis?

Eleusis

- Originally independent
- Became part of Athens during the synoikismos (but possibly through conquest)
- Major extra-urban sanctuary throughout classical-Hellenistic-roman
- “Now when [Julian's] studies with them were prospering, he heard that there was a higher wisdom in Greek, possessed by the hierophant of the Goddesses, and hastened to him with all speed. The name of him who was at that time hierophant it is not lawful for me to tell, for he initiated the author of this narrative. By birth he was descended from the Eumolpidae. It was he who, in the presence of the author of this book, foretold the overthrow of the temples and the ruin of the whole of Greece, and he clearly testified that after his death there would be a hierophant who would have no right to touch the hierophant's throne, because he had been consecrated to the service of other gods and had sworn oaths of the uttermost sanctity that he would not preside over temples other than theirs. Nevertheless, he foretold that this man would so preside, though he was not even an Athenian. To such prophetic power did he attain that he prophesied that in his own lifetime the sacred temples would be razed to the ground and laid waste, and that that other man would live to see their ruin and would be despised for his overweening ambition; and that the worship of the Two Goddesses would come to an end before his own death, and that, deprived of his honor, his life would no longer be that of a hierophant, and that he would not reach old age. Thus indeed it came to pass. For no sooner was the citizen of Thespieae made hierophant, he who was a *pater* in the ritual of Mithras, then without delay many inexplicable disasters came on in a flood. Some of these have been described in the more detailed narrative of my *History*, others, if it be permitted by the Divine, I shall relate. It was the time when Alaric with his barbarians invaded Greece by the Pass of Thermopylae [A. D. 395], as easily as though he were traversing an open stadium or a plain suitable for cavalry. For this gateway of Greece was thrown open to him by the impiety of the men clad in black *himatia*, who entered Greece unhindered along with him, and by the fact that the laws and restrictions of the hierophantic ordinances had been rescinded. But all this happened in later days, and my narrative digressed because I mentioned the prophecy.” Eunapius *Lives of the Philosophers* 475-476:

Athens and the Mysteries

- Now, first of all, that which was the first necessity of man's nature was provided by our city; for even though the story¹ has taken the form of a myth, yet it deserves to be told again. When Demeter came to our land, in her wandering after the rape of Kore, and, being moved to kindness towards our ancestors by services which may not be told save to her initiates, gave these two gifts, the greatest in the world—the fruits of the earth,² which have enabled us to rise above the life of the beasts, and the holy rite³ which inspires in those who partake of it sweeter hopes⁴ regarding both the end of life and all eternity, —our city was not only so beloved of the gods but also so devoted to mankind that, having been endowed with these great blessings, she did not begrudge them to the rest of the world, but shared with all men what she had received.¹ The mystic rite we continue even now, each year,² to reveal to the initiates; and as for the fruits of the earth, our city has, in a word, instructed the world in their uses, their cultivation, and the benefits derived from them.” Isoc. 4.28-9

Eleusis and the Athenian Empire

- “Timoteles of Acharnai was secretary. The Council and the People decided. Kekropis VII was the prytany; Timoteles was secretary; Kykneas was chairman.[1] The draftsmen drafted the following: **the Athenians shall give first-fruits of the harvest to the two Goddesses according to ancestral custom and the 5 oracle from Delphi**, at a rate of not less than a sixth of a medimnos per hundred medimnoi of barley and not less than half a sixth per hundred medimnoi of wheat; and if someone produces a greater harvest than this, or a smaller, he shall give first-fruits at the same ratio; and the demarchs shall collect the first-fruits by demes and hand them over to the sacred officials 10 from Eleusis at Eleusis; and they shall build three granaries[2] at Eleusis, according to ancestral custom, wherever seems to the sacred officials and the architect to be suitable, from the money of the two Goddesses; and they shall deposit there the crops that they receive from the demarchs; **and the allies too shall contribute first-fruits in the same way;[3] and the cities shall choose 15 collectors of the crops in whatever way it seems to them that the crops will be best collected; and when they have been collected they shall send them to Athens**; and those who bring them shall hand them over to the sacred officials from Eleusis at Eleusis;” IG I3 78a (excerpts)

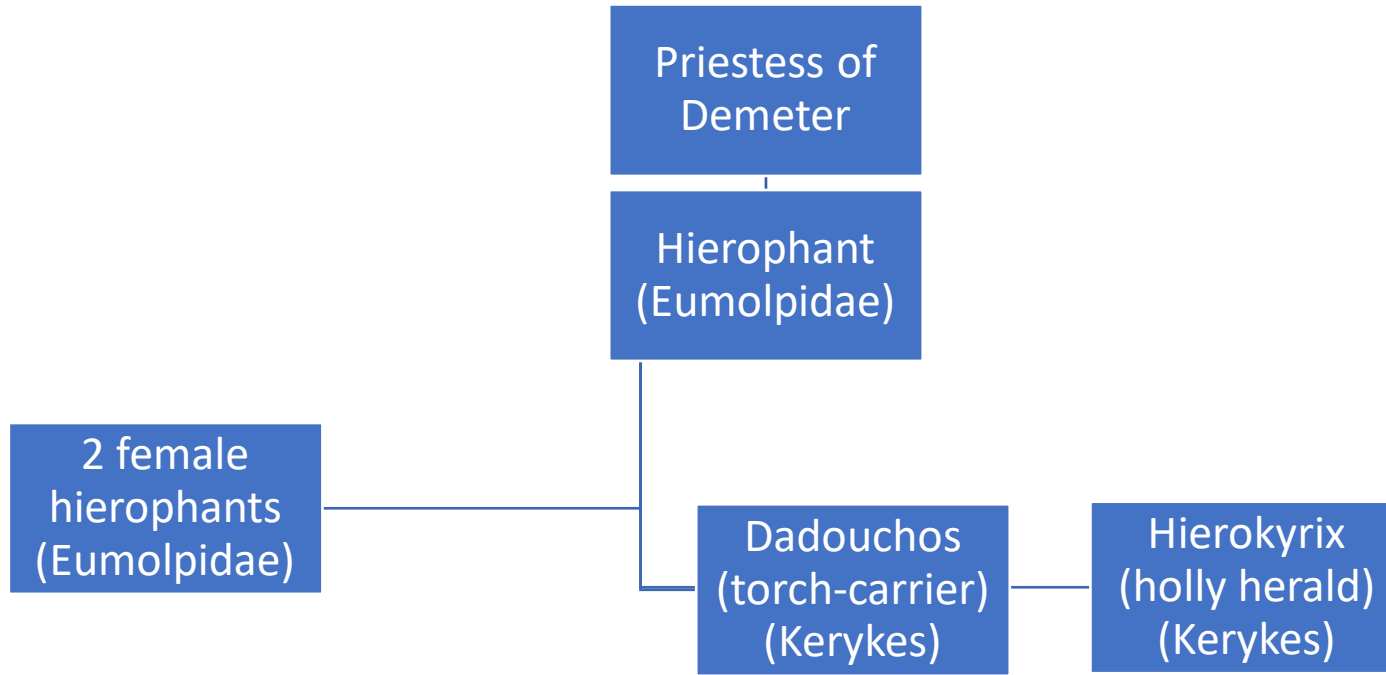


The polis and the Mysteries



- “But the Archon Basileus superintends, first, the mysteries, in co-operation with Superintendents elected by show of hands by the People, two from the whole body of the citizens, one from the Eumolpidae and one from the Heralds.” [Arist.] AthPol 57
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The priesthood





Initiate vs non-initiate knowledge

- Hippolytus Refutatio omnium haeresium Book 5
 - Problem of Christian polemic – uncertain what is correct, and what is Eleusinian.
 - Full text: [CHURCH FATHERS: Refutation of All Heresies, Book V \(Hippolytus\)](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0405.htm)
 - Cult practice information from Inscriptions, such as IG I3 6 ([AIUK42 no. 1 Regulations concerning the Eleusinian Mysteries](http://www.atticinscriptions.com/aiuk42-no-1-regulations-concerning-the-eleusinian-mysteries))
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2 stages of initiation

- Myesis
- Epopteia
- 1 year apart



The Great Mysteria

- Annual Festival: 15 to 21 Boedromion.
- 14 Boedromion: sacred vessels to City Eleusinion
- 15 Boedromion: Announcement of mysteries in Agora by Hierokeryx Exclusion of murderers, and non-Greek speakers.
- 16 Boedromion: To be initiates bathe in Phaleron with piglet sacrifice
- 17 & 18 Boedromion: Fasting



Ασκληπιείο
Sanctuary of
Asklepios

Ελευσινιακός
Eleusinian Kephissos



Ελευσίνα, αναπαράσταση
του Ιερού, 2ος αι. μ.Χ.
Eleusis, model of the
sanctuary, 2nd c AD

The Great Procession

- 19 Boedromion

Λίμνη Ρειτών
Lakadamon Lake

Ιερό Αφροδίτης
Sanctuary of Aphrodite

Σπήλαιο Πανός
Cave of Pan

Μνημείο Πυθιονίκης
Monument of
Pythionike

Ιερά Οδός
Sacred Way

Ιερά Πύλη
Sacred Gate

Αθήνα
Athens

Κηφισός Kephissos

Σαλαμίνα
Salamis

Iacchus

- Dicaeus son of Theocydes, an Athenian exile who had become important among the Medes, said that at the time when the land of Attica was being laid waste by Xerxes' army and there were no Athenians in the country, he was with Demaratus the Lacedaemonian on the Thriasian plain and saw advancing from Eleusis a cloud of dust as if raised by the feet of about thirty thousand men. They marvelled at what men might be raising such a cloud of dust and immediately heard a cry. The cry seemed to be the “Iacchus” of the mysteries, [2] and when Demaratus, ignorant of the rites of Eleusis, asked him what was making this sound, Dicaeus said, “Demaratus, there is no way that some great disaster will not befall the king's army. Since Attica is deserted, it is obvious that this voice is divine and comes from Eleusis to help the Athenians and their allies. [3] If it descends upon the Peloponnese, the king himself and his army on the mainland will be endangered. If, however, it turns towards the ships at Salamis, the king will be in danger of losing his fleet. [4] Every year the Athenians observe this festival for the Mother and the Maiden, and any Athenian or other Hellene who wishes is initiated. The voice which you hear is the ‘Iacchus’ they cry at this festival.” Hdt 8.65

The procession (excerpts Pausanias)

- As you go to Eleusis from Athens along what the Athenians call the Sacred Way you see the tomb of Anthemocritus... There is also an altar of Zephyrus and a sanctuary of Demeter and her daughter. With them Athena and Poseidon are worshipped. There is a legend that in this place Phytalus welcomed Demeter in his home, for which act the goddess gave him the fig tree. This story is borne out by the inscription on the grave of Phytalus:—"Hero and king, Phytalus here welcome gave to Demeter, August goddess, when first she created fruit of the harvest; Sacred fig is the name which mortal men have assigned it. Whence Phytalus and his race have gotten honours immortal." Before you cross the Cephissus you come to the tomb of Theodorus... On the road stands a small temple called that of Cyamites.⁵ I cannot state for certain whether he was the first to sow beans, or whether they gave this name to a hero because they may not attribute to Demeter the discovery of beans. Whoever has been initiated at Eleusis or has read what are called the Orphica⁶ knows what I mean... There is a sanctuary in which are set statues of Demeter, her daughter, Athena, and Apollo. At the first it was built in honor of Apollo only. ... The streams called Rheiti are rivers only in so far as they are currents, for their water is sea water. It is a reasonable belief that they flow beneath the ground from the Euripus of the Chalcidians, and fall into a sea of a lower level. They are said to be sacred to the Maid and to Demeter, and only the priests of these goddesses are permitted to catch the fish in them. Anciently, I learn, these streams were the boundaries between the land of the Eleusinians and that of the other Athenians, c... [5] At Eleusis flows a Cephissus which is more violent than the Cephissus I mentioned above, and by the side of it is the place they call Erineus, saying that Pluto descended there to the lower world after carrying off the Maid. ... [6] The Eleusinians have a temple of Triptolemus, of Artemis of the Portal, and of Poseidon Father, and a well called Callichorum (Lovely dance), where first the women of the Eleusinians danced and sang in praise of the goddess. They say that the plain called Rharium was the first to be sown and the first to grow crops, and for this reason it is the custom to use sacrificial barley and to make cakes for the sacrifices from its produce. Here there is shown a threshing-floor called that of Triptolemus and an altar.
- [7] My dream forbade the description of the things within the wall of the sanctuary, and the uninitiated are of course not permitted to learn that which they are prevented from seeing. The hero Eleusis, after whom the city is named, some assert to be a son of Hermes and of Daeira, daughter of Ocean; there are poets, however, who have made Ogygus father of Eleusis. Ancient legends, deprived of the help of poetry, have given rise to many fictions, especially concerning the pedigrees of heroes.

The Kykeon

- At the end of the procession, the fasting ends, with the initiates being given the KYKEON drink.
- “Metaneira filled a cup with honey-sweet wine and offered it to her. But she declined, saying that it was not proper for her to drink red wine; she told her to mix barley and water with the graceful pennyroyal and give it to her to drink. So she made the kykeon and gave it to the goddess, as she requested, and the lady Deo took it for custom’s sake” HHD 205-211

In Eleusis: Nocturnal and Sacred rites

- Just as persons who are being initiated into the Mysteries throng together at the outset amid tumult and shouting, and jostle against one another, but when the holy rites are being performed and disclosed the people are immediately attentive in awe and silence, so too at the beginning of philosophy: about its portals also you will see great tumult and talking and boldness, as some boorishly and violently try to jostle their way towards the repute it bestows: but he who has succeeded in getting inside, and has seen a great light, as though a shrine were opened, adopts another bearing of silence and amazement, and “humble and orderly attends upon” reason as upon a god. Plut. Mor. 81