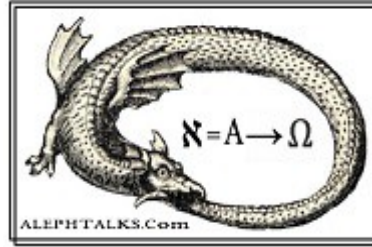


Mysticism: Where Science, Art and Religion Meet

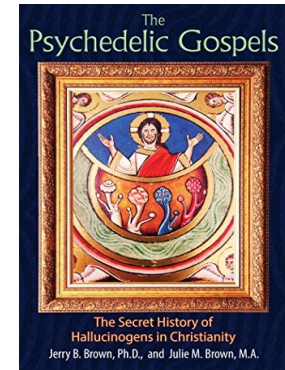
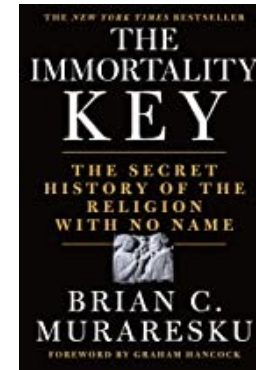
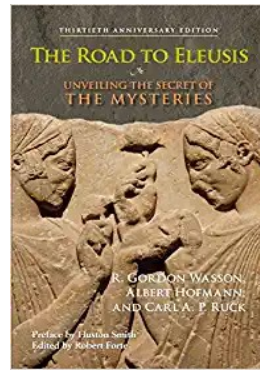


Subject Four
Mysticism East and West
The Eleusinian Mysteries
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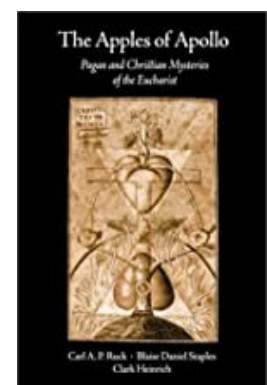
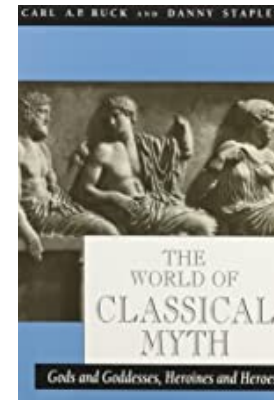
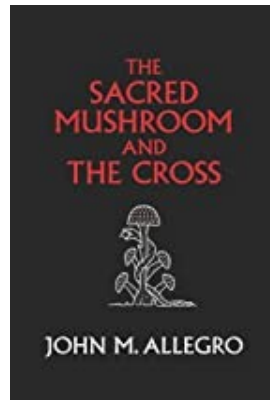
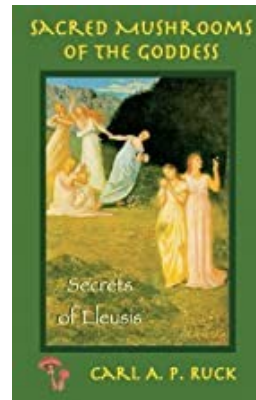
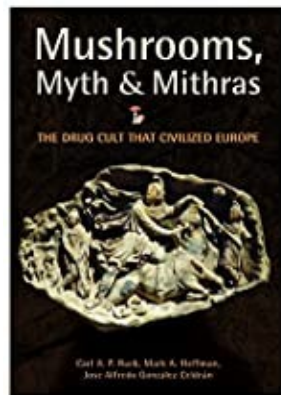
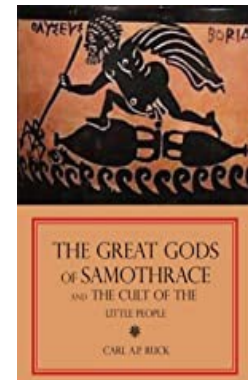
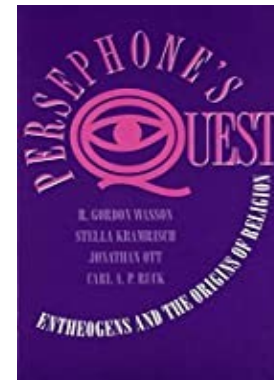
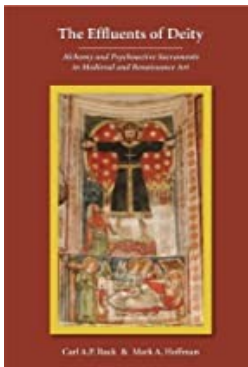
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What Are the Eleusinian Mysteries?



- The Eleusinian Mysteries (Greek: Ἐλευσίνια Μυστήρια, romanized: Eleusínia Mystḗria) were initiations held every year for the cult of Demeter and Persephone based at the Panhellenic Sanctuary of Eleusis in ancient Greece. They are the "most famous of the secret religious rites of ancient Greece".
- Their basis was an old agrarian cult, and there is some evidence that they were derived from the religious practices of the Mycenaean period

What Are the Eleusinian Mysteries?



- The Mysteries represented the myth of the abduction of Persephone from her mother Demeter by the king of the underworld Hades, in a cycle with three phases: the descent (loss), the search, and the ascent, with the main theme being the ascent (ἀνοδος) of Persephone and the reunion with her mother.
- It was a major festival during the Hellenic era, and later spread to Rome. Similar religious rites appear in the agricultural societies of Near East and in Minoan Crete.

What Are the Eleusinian Mysteries?



- The rites, ceremonies, and beliefs were kept secret and consistently preserved from antiquity. For the initiated, the rebirth of Persephone symbolized the eternity of life which flows from generation to generation, and they believed that they would have a reward in the afterlife.
- There are many paintings and pieces of pottery that depict various aspects of the Mysteries. Since the Mysteries involved visions and conjuring of an afterlife, some scholars believe that the power and longevity of the Eleusinian Mysteries, a consistent set of rites, ceremonies and experiences that spanned two millennia, came from psychedelic drugs.
- The name of the town, Eleusís, seems to be Pre-Greek, and is likely a counterpart with Elysium and the goddess Eileithyia.

Demeter and Persephone



- The Mysteries are related to a myth concerning Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility as recounted in one of the Homeric Hymns (c. 650 BC). According to the hymn, Demeter's daughter Persephone (also referred to as Kore, "maiden") was assigned the task of painting all the flowers of the earth.
- Before completion, she was seized by Hades, the god of the underworld, who took her to his underworld kingdom. Distraught, Demeter searched high and low for her daughter. Because of her distress, and in an effort to coerce Zeus to allow the return of her daughter, she caused a terrible drought in which the people suffered and starved, depriving the gods of sacrifice and worship. As a result, Zeus relented and allowed Persephone to return to her mother..

Demeter and Persephone



- According to the myth, during her search Demeter traveled long distances and had many minor adventures along the way. In one she taught the secrets of agriculture to Triptolemus.
- Finally, by consulting Zeus, Demeter reunited with her daughter and the earth returned to its former verdure and prosperity: the first spring.
- Zeus, pressed by the cries of the hungry people and by the other deities who also heard their anguish, forced Hades to return Persephone. However, it was a rule of the Fates that whoever consumed food or drink in the Underworld was doomed to spend eternity there.

Demeter and Persephone



- Before Persephone was released to Hermes, who had been sent to retrieve her, Hades tricked her into eating pomegranate seeds, (either six or four according to the telling) which forced her to return to the underworld for some months each year.
- She was obliged to remain with Hades for six or four months (one month per seed) and lived above ground with her mother for the rest of the year. This left a long period of time when Demeter was unhappy due to Persephone's absence, neglecting to cultivate the earth.
- When Persephone returned to the surface, Demeter became joyful and cared for the earth again.

The Mysteries



- The Eleusinian Mysteries are believed to be of considerable antiquity. Some findings in the temple Eleusinion in Attica suggest that their basis was an old agrarian cult. Some practices of the mysteries seem to have been influenced by the religious practices of the Mycenaean period and thus predating the Greek Dark Ages. Excavations showed that a private building existed under the Telesterion in the Mycenean period, and it seems that originally the cult of Demeter was private. In the Homeric Hymn is mentioned the palace of the king Keleos.
- One line of thought by modern scholars has been that the Mysteries were intended *to elevate man above the human sphere into the divine and to assure his redemption by making him a god and so conferring immortality upon him.*

The Mysteries



- Some scholars argued that the Eleusinian cult was a continuation of a Minoan cult, and that Demeter was a poppy goddess who brought the poppy from Crete to Eleusis. Some useful information from the Mycenaean period can be taken from the study of the cult of Despoina (the precursor goddess of Persephone), and the cult of Eileithyia who was the goddess of childbirth.
- The megaron of Despoina at Lycosura is quite similar to the Telesterion of Eleusis, and Demeter is united with the god Poseidon, bearing a daughter, the unnamable Despoina (the mistress).
- In the cave of Amnisos at Crete, the goddess Eileithyia is related with the annual birth of the divine child, and she is connected with Enesidaon (The Earth Shaker), who is the chthonic aspect of Poseidon.

The Mysteries



- At Eleusis inscriptions refer to **the Goddesses** accompanied by the agricultural god Triptolemus (probably son of Ge and Oceanus), and "the God and the Goddess" (Persephone and Plouton) accompanied by Eubuleus who probably led the way back from the underworld.
- The myth was represented in a cycle with three phases: the **descent**, the **search**, and the **ascent** (Greek "anodos") with contrasted emotions from sorrow to joy which roused the mystae to exultation. The main theme was the ascent of Persephone and the reunion with her mother Demeter.

The Mysteries



- At the beginning of the feast, the priests filled two special vessels and poured them out, the one towards the west, and the other towards the east.
- The people looking both to the sky and the earth shouted in a magical rhyme ***rain and conceive***. In a ritual, a child was initiated from the hearth (the divine fire). The name pais (child) appears in the Mycenaean inscriptions, it was the ritual of the ***divine child*** who originally was Ploutos. In the Homeric hymn the ritual is connected with the myth of the agricultural god Triptolemus.

The Mysteries



- The goddess of nature survived in the mysteries where the following words were uttered: ***Mighty Potnia bore a great son***. Potnia (Linear B po-ti-ni-ja : lady or mistress), is a Mycenaean title applied to goddesses. and probably the translation of a similar title of Pre-Greek origin.
- The high point of the celebration was ***an ear of grain cut in silence***, which represented the force of the new life.
- The idea of immortality didn't exist in the mysteries at the beginning, but the initiated believed that they would have a better fate in the underworld. Death remained a reality, but at the same time a new beginning like the plant which grows from the buried seed.
- A depiction from the old palace of Phaistos is very close to the image of the "anodos" of Persephone. An armless and legless deity grows out of the ground, and her head turns to a large flower.

The Mysteries



- According to Mylonas, the lesser mysteries were held "as a rule once a year in the early spring in the month of flowers, the Anthesterion," while "the Greater Mysteries were held once a year and every fourth year they were celebrated with special splendor in what was known as the penteteris.
- Kerenyi concurs with this assessment: "The Lesser Mysteries were held at Agrai in the month of Anthesterion, our February... The initiates were not even admitted to the epopteia [Greater Mysteries] in the same year, but only in September of the following year."
- This cycle continued for about two millennia. In the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, King Celeus is said to have been one of the first people to learn the secret rites and mysteries of her cult. He was also one of her original priests, along with Diocles, Eumolpos, Polyxeinus and Triptolemus, Celeus' son, who had supposedly learned agriculture from Demeter.

The Mysteries



- Under Peisistratos of Athens, the Eleusinian Mysteries became pan-Hellenic, and pilgrims flocked from Greece and beyond to participate.
- Around 300 BC, the state took over control of the Mysteries; they were controlled by two families, the Eumolpidae and the Kerykes. This led to a vast increase in the number of initiates.
- The only requirements for membership were freedom from "blood guilt", meaning never having committed murder, and not being a "barbarian" (being unable to speak Greek). Men, women and even slaves were allowed initiation.

The Participants



- To participate in these mysteries one had to swear a vow of secrecy.
- Four categories of people participated in the Eleusinian Mysteries:
 - Priests, priestesses, and hierophants.
 - Initiates, undergoing the ceremony for the first time.
 - Others who had already participated at least once. They were eligible for the fourth category.
 - Those who had attained *épopteia* (Greek: *ἐποπτεία*) (English: "contemplation"), who had learned the secrets of the greatest mysteries of Demeter..

The Priesthood



- The priesthood officiating at the Eleusinian Mysteries and in the sanctuary was divided into several offices with different tasks.
- Six categories of priests officiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries:
 - Hierophantes – male high priest, an office inherited within the Phileidae or Eumolpidae families.
 - High Priestess of Demeter or Priestess of Demeter and Kore – an office inherited within the Phileidae or Eumolpidae families, impersonate Demeter and Persephone
 - Dadouchos – men serving as torch bearers, the second-highest male role next to Hierophantes.
 - Dadouchousa Priestess – a female priestess who assisted the Dadouchos, an office inherited within the Phileidae or Eumolpidae families.
 - Hierophantides – two married priestesses, one serving Demeter, and the other Persephone.
 - Panageis ('the holy') or melissae ('bees') – a group of priestesses who lived a life secluded from men.

Lesser Mysteries



- According to Thomas Taylor, "the dramatic shows of the Lesser Mysteries occultly signified the miseries of the soul while in subjection to the body, so those of the Greater obscurely intimated, by mystic and splendid visions, the felicity of the soul both here and hereafter, when purified from the defilements of a material nature and constantly elevated to the realities of intellectual [spiritual] vision."
- According to Plato, "the ultimate design of the Mysteries ... was to lead us back to the principles from which we descended, ... a perfect enjoyment of intellectual [spiritual] good."
- The Lesser Mysteries took place in the month of Anthesteria – the eight month of the Attic calendar, falling in mid winter around February or March – under the direction of Athens' archon basileus. In order to qualify for initiation, participants would sacrifice a piglet to Demeter and Persephone, and then ritually purify themselves in the river Illisos. Upon completion of the Lesser Mysteries, participants were deemed mystai ("initiates") worthy of witnessing the Greater Mysteries.

Greater Mysteries



- The Greater Mysteries took place in Boedromion – the third month of the Attic calendar, falling in late summer around September or October – and lasted ten days.
- The first act (on the 14th of Boedromion) was the bringing of the sacred objects from Eleusis to the Eleusinion, a temple at the base of the Acropolis of Athens.
- On the 15th of Boedromion, a day called the Gathering (Agrymos), the priests (hierophantes, those who show the sacred ones) declared the start of the rites (prorrhesis), and carried out the sacrifice (hiereía deúro, hither the victims).
- The seawards initiates (halade mystai) started out in Athens on 16th Boedromion with the celebrants washing themselves in the sea at Phaleron.

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Greater Mysteries



- On the 17th, the participants began the Epidauria, a festival for Asklepios named after his main sanctuary at Epidauros.
- This "festival within a festival" celebrated the healer's arrival at Athens with his daughter Hygieia, and consisted of a procession leading to the Eleusinion, during which the mystai apparently stayed at home, a great sacrifice, and an all-night feast (pannykhís).

Greater Mysteries



- The procession to Eleusis began at Kerameikos (the Athenian cemetery) on the 18th, and from there the people walked to Eleusis, along the Sacred Way (Ἱερὰ Ὁδός, Hierá Hodós), swinging branches called bacchoi.
- At a certain spot along the way, they shouted obscenities in commemoration of Iambe (or Baubo), an old woman who, by cracking dirty jokes, had made Demeter smile as she mourned the loss of her daughter. The procession also shouted "Íakch', O Íakche!", possibly an epithet for Dionysus, or a separate deity Iacchus, son of Persephone or Demeter.

Greater Mysteries



- Upon reaching Eleusis, there was an all-night vigil (pannychis) according to Mylonas and Kerenyi, perhaps commemorating Demeter's search for Persephone.
- At some point, initiates had a special drink (kykeon), of barley and pennyroyal, which has led to speculation about its chemicals perhaps having psychotropic effects from ergot (a fungus that grows on barley, containing psychedelic alkaloids similar to LSD).
- Discovery of fragments of ergot in a temple dedicated to the two Eleusinian goddesses excavated at the Mas Castellar site (Girona, Spain) provided legitimacy for this theory. Ergot fragments were found inside a vase and within the dental calculus of a 25-year-old man, providing evidence of ergot being consumed (Juan-Stresserras, 2002). This finding seems to support the hypothesis of ergot as an ingredient of the Eleusinian kykeon.

Inside the Telesterion



- On the 19th of Boedromion, initiates entered a great hall called Telesterion; in the center stood the Palace (Anaktoron), which only the hierophants could enter, where sacred objects were stored. Before mystai could enter the Telesterion, they would recite, "I have fasted, I have drunk the kykeon, I have taken from the kiste (box) and after working it have put it back in the calathus (open basket)."
- The rites inside the Telesterion comprised three elements
 - **dromena** (things done), a dramatic reenactment of the Demeter/Persephone myth
 - **deiknumena** (things shown), displayed sacred objects, in which the hierophant played an essential role
 - **legomena** (things said), commentaries that accompanied the deiknumena.
- Combined, these three elements were known as the aporrheta ("unrepeatables"); the penalty for divulging them was death.

Climax



- As to the climax of the Mysteries, there are two modern theories.
 - Some hold that the priests were the ones to reveal the visions of the holy night, consisting of a fire that represented the possibility of life after death, and various sacred objects.
 - Others hold this explanation to be insufficient to account for the power and longevity of the Mysteries, and that the experiences must have been internal and mediated by a powerful psychoactive ingredient contained in the kykeon drink
- Following this section of the Mysteries was an all-night feast (Pannychis) accompanied by dancing and merriment. The dances took place in the Rharian Field, rumored to be the first spot where grain grew. A bull sacrifice also took place late that night or early the next morning. That day (22nd Boedromion), the initiates honored the dead by pouring libations from special vessels.
- On the 23rd of Boedromion, the Mysteries ended and everyone returned home.

Entheogenic Theories



- Numerous scholars have proposed that the power of the Eleusinian Mysteries came from the kykeon's functioning as an entheogen, or psychedelic agent. The use of potions or philtres for magical or religious purposes was relatively common in Greece and the ancient world.
- The initiates, sensitized by their fast and prepared by preceding ceremonies (see set and setting), may have been propelled by the effects of a powerful psychoactive potion into revelatory mind states with profound spiritual and intellectual ramifications.
- In opposition to this idea, other pointedly skeptical scholars note the lack of any solid evidence and stress the collective rather than individual character of initiation into the Mysteries. Indirect evidence in support of the entheogenic theory is that in 415 BC Athenian aristocrat Alcibiades was condemned partly because he took part in an "Eleusinian mystery" in a private house.

Entheogenic Theories



- Many psychoactive agents have been proposed as the significant element of kykeon, though without consensus or conclusive evidence. These include the ergot, a fungal parasite of the barley or rye grain, which contains the alkaloids ergotamine, a precursor to LSD, and ergonovine. However, modern attempts to prepare a kykeon using ergot-parasitized barley have yielded inconclusive results, though Alexander Shulgin and Ann Shulgin describe both ergonovine and LSA to be known to produce LSD-like effects.
- Discovery of fragments of Ergot (fungi containing LSD-like psychedelic alkaloids) in a temple dedicated to the two Eleusinian Goddesses excavated at the Mas Castellar site (Girona, Spain) provided legitimacy for this theory. Ergot fragments were found inside a vase and within the dental calculus of a 25-year-old man, providing evidence of Ergot being consumed. This finding seems to support the hypothesis of ergot as an ingredient of the Eleusinian kykeon.
- Psychoactive mushrooms are another candidate. Scholars such as Robert Graves and Terence McKenna, speculated that the mysteries were focused around a variety of Psilocybe. Other entheogenic fungi, such as Amanita muscaria, have also been suggested. A recent hypothesis suggests that the ancient Egyptians cultivated Psilocybe cubensis on barley and associated it with the deity Osiris.

Big Picture Speculations



- The transition from hunter gather to growing grain was driven by beer not agriculture
- Gobekli Tepe is an example where beer/halucinogenic beverages were drunk to achieve visions extraordinary
- This is a global phenomenon: this spread to the west where kukeon was drunk and to the east where soma was drunk, and independently in Americas with mushrooms and huasca
 - The Indo-European languages are a language family native to western and southern Eurasia. It comprises most of the languages of Europe together with those of the northern Indian subcontinent and the Iranian Plateau. Some European languages of this family, such as English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Danish, Dutch, and Spanish, have expanded through colonialism in the modern period and are now spoken across several continents. The Indo-European family is divided into several branches or sub-families, of which there are eight groups with languages still alive today: Albanian, Armenian, Balto-Slavic, Celtic, Germanic, Hellenic, Indo-Iranian, and Italic; and another six subdivisions which are now extinct.

Big Picture Speculations



- The Greek mythology (Zeus throwing thunderbolts, Poseidon ruling the waves, Hermes the messenger) was meant for the masses
- The elite of Greece went to Eleusis: Plato, Sophocles, Anaximeter, Socrates
- The elite of Rome went to Eleusis: Augustus Caesar, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius
- Two Greek colonies in Spain, Velia in Italy were separate Eleusian ceremonial cities
- The early Christian parishes in all likelihood spiked wine with kukeon
- Starting in 392CE the Roman Empire persecuted the pagans: the Library in Alexandria was burned to the ground and thousands of shrines destroyed
- Starting in the 1950s the Eleusian mysteries resurfaced: Life Magazine 1957 article on LSD read by ten million, and then it grew; Carl Ruck at Boston University has done significant work
- The story of Adam and Eve might point to the apple being like the pomegranate seed of Persephone: it was the Tree of Knowledge, eat the apple!
- The wine at the Last Supper might have been hallucinogenic!
- The counter argument is that there is very little real evidence!