

**“WHY PERSEPHONE?” INVESTIGATING THE UNIQUE POSITION OF
PERSEPHONE AS A DYING GOD(DESS) OFFERING HOPE FOR THE
AFTERLIFE.**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS IN CLASSICS

Of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

By

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December 2014

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

Abstract

Persephone's myth is unique, as it was the central narrative of one of the most prominent ancient mystery religions, and remains one of the few (certainly the most prominent) ancient Greek myths to focus on the relationship of a mother and her daughter. This unique focus must have offered her worshippers something important that they perhaps could not find elsewhere, especially as a complex and elaborate cult grew around it, transforming the divine allegory of the changing seasons or the storage of the grain beneath the earth, into a narrative offering hope for a better place in the afterlife. To understand the appeal of this myth, two aspects of her worship and mythic significance require study: the expectations of her worshippers for their own lives, to which the goddess may have been seen as a forerunner; and the mythic frameworks operating which would characterise the goddess for her worshippers. The myth, as described in *The Hymn to Demeter*, is initially interpreted for its literary meaning, and then set within its cultural milieu to uncover what meaning it may have had for Persephone's worshippers, particularly in terms of marriage and death, which form the initial motivating action of the myth. From this socio-anthropological study we turn to the mythic patterns and motifs the story offers, particularly the figure of the goddess of the Underworld (primarily in the influential Mesopotamian literature), and the Dying-Rising God figure (similarly derived from the Near East). These figures, when compared to the Greek goddess, may both reveal her unique appeal, and highlight the common attractions that lie in the figures generally. By this two-part investigation, on the particular culture's expectations and the general mythic framework she exists in, Persephone's meaning in her native land may be uncovered and understood.

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To:

Aidan, who supported me through all this;

My supervisor, Daniel Malamis, who guided me through the whole thing;

My parents and family, for giving me everything to get this far;

Philippa, Lara and my friends, who would hear me rant and offer advice and sympathy;

Kanyabu, who made sure we'd dance our thesis-stress away.

Introduction

Persephone offers an intriguing insight into ancient Greek thought and belief. Although she was worshipped in various cults (Farnell, 1907: 119-26; Bräuninger, 1938: 960-6; Larson, 2007: 70-85), and was eventually incorporated into Roman religion as Proserpina, her persona rested on a single myth, her relationship with her mother, a relationship which is threatened when her uncle abducts her, (often) with her father's assistance. The story of these goddesses becomes one of a feminine revolt against a patriarchal system which cares little for them, but it resolves this tension with a compromise rather than a revolution, as opposed to Hera's attempted coup (*Iliad* XV.18-30; Stesichorus, Frag.239). As Demeter was the patroness of the field, and her daughter became the sovereign of the Land of the Dead, these goddesses dominated two vital areas of life (Persson, 1942: 152). Their relationship, envisioned as a mother-daughter dyad, created an important link between these two facets of life, but one which was marked by compassion and sympathy rather than competition or aggression, as many of the male gods might endorse, or even the wild Artemis or jealous Hera could resort to.

This relationship was more important than a compelling narrative favoured by a few poets, as it found a fervent following in cult. Eleusis was one of the most famous cult centres in Greece, expanding from a local family cult to a pan-Hellenic festival, eventually famous throughout the Roman empire (Mylonas, 1961: 7-8; Richardson, 1974: 17). This cult, whose rites remained secret, although probably similar to the other Mystery cults of the period, was dedicated to the mother-daughter pair, and appears to have offered its initiates hope for a better lot in the afterlife, which the joyous initiates appear to enjoy in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and the *Hymn to Demeter*¹ promises. These rites, originally part of the series of seasonal festivals marking the agricultural cycle (Larson, 2007: 72-3), appear to have used this myth to suggest that the cycle of life could be discerned in the annual growth and harvest of the grain, and hope could be built upon this vegetative pattern against the grim prospect of death (Nilsson, 1940: 59-60).

¹ All translations, translators, and ancient sources are detailed in the bibliography under primary sources.

To determine what allure Persephone held for her initiates, this thesis will undertake a two-tier investigation. After an initial analysis of her myth, as it is found in the *Hymn to Demeter*, and the cult this poem was closely associated with, this thesis will apply a sociological hermeneutic (Willis & Jost, 2007: 104) of the myth on two levels, marriage and death, followed by a comparative analysis of mythic parallels, which may uncover common and unique aspects of the myth. The analysis on these two tiers, each of which will be further divided into two parts, will aim to discern exactly what meaning Persephone's myth offered to the ancient Greeks, grounding this analysis in her original cultural context and against contemporary and earlier mythic frameworks.

Chapter One is an interpretation of the primary text, the *Hymn to Demeter*, which will be the point of departure for encapsulating the myth of Persephone's abduction, and her mother's grief and response. The variants of the myth will also be considered, to note potential omissions or exaggerations in the poem, and identify the *Hymn's* unique features. The cult of Eleusis, for which the *Hymn* offers an *aition*, will also be discussed to identify significant aspects of the myth which the narrative alone may not successfully emphasise to modern readers, and establish the poem within the religious framework to which it was related.

Chapter Two begins the sociological hermeneutic of this myth, by examining the marriage customs of the ancient Athenians, and the beliefs and attitudes evident from archaic and classical Athens regarding this social practice. The myth describes Persephone's abduction and marriage, and so it could operate as a divine precedent for young brides, preparing them for what they could expect for their own impending experiences. The myth also describes a revolt against this abduction, and thus may reveal a subversive response to the dominant patriarchal system. Persephone's marriage and her mother's compromise with Zeus operates on the divine level as well as the mortal plane of marriage, so the myth can also offer an insight into the establishment of the cosmological order. I argue that these two levels of symbolic meaning create a

sympathetic link with the goddesses, and that this link extends to their respective domains, promising prosperity and a better place in the Land of the Dead.

Chapter Three completes the sociological hermeneutic, focusing on the second figurative level of Persephone's rape: her death. Since Hades carries his unwilling bride to the Underworld, her abduction and marriage could be used as a metaphor for death, and the goddess could become a divine precedent for any mortal confronted by their own inevitable demise. This chapter will consider the beliefs and attitudes regarding death in the archaic and classical periods of Greece, during which they developed significantly, as this corresponds to the *Hymn*'s composition and reflects the cultural perspective of Persephone's early worshippers. The cult of Eleusis, expanding considerably in this period (Richardson, 1974: 7), was affected by these changing beliefs, and the interplay between cult and myth means that these changes would affect the reception and dissemination of the myth. Continuing the interpretation of the first chapter, the investigation of beliefs regarding death suggests that Persephone could offer her initiates an unexpectedly sympathetic figure in the very place they feared, the Underworld.

Chapter Four begins the second tier of analysis, the comparison of the mythic parallels to Persephone, found in other Near Eastern and Indo-European goddesses who rule or visit the Land of the Dead, and other feminine deities associated with the dead. The focus of the investigation is on the Mesopotamian figures of Ereshkigal, Inanna/ Ishtar and Geshtinanna, whose myths variously prefigure Persephone's. These mythic parallels reveal how Persephone may have otherwise been developed or characterised, and thus highlight her unique features while identifying aspects shared by these goddesses. The Mesopotamian material appears to have provided the narrative framework upon which the Greek myth added humanising concerns, developing the chthonic goddess into something more than a dreadful figure of death. To fully understand Persephone's ('final', as it appears in the *Hymn*) persona, it is necessary to trace the antecedents found in these mythic parallels, and evaluate the degree to which they influenced her development and characterisation.

Chapter Five completes the comparative analysis by considering the figure of the ‘Dying God’, described by Frazer (*The Golden Bough* Part III, 1912), and the possibility of the Return or Rising of this god. Incorporated into Frazer’s original discussion (Part V. Vol.I, 1912), Persephone finds significant correspondences in the other vegetative gods of Greece, the Near East and Egypt. Chapter Four considers Mesopotamian examples of this type, but this chapter examines Dionysus, Adonis and Osiris. The actual figure of the Dying-Rising God is considered, but the motif need not strictly apply to each of the figures under discussion. Their inclusion in Frazer’s study, and their association by the ancients through syncretism, indicates that they possess features that make them worthy of comparison. This analysis will consider whether this mythic pattern has influenced Persephone and her worshippers, and her adherence or deviation from this type will indicate which features she shares with them, and in what ways she is unique. These gods are all associated with the Land of the Dead, in their respective cultures, and so worshippers turned to them when they were confronted by death. The different promises these gods offer form an important comparison to Persephone’s myth and cult, and, I suggest, reveal a unique aspect to the maiden goddess that these other gods lack.

This two-tiered approach will explore the socio-anthropological significance of Persephone within the culture which heard and retold her myth (the sociological hermeneutic), and consider the models and origins of Persephone, revealing both the symbolic sources of her myth, and the manner in which it developed into a unique expression of the social and religious concerns identified in chapters two and three (comparative analysis). This dual-approach is intended to provide a thorough understanding of Persephone’s power and singular appeal, by marking the nexus of symbolic value and cultural significance. The maiden who is abducted, the goddess who becomes the centre of a new relationship between the upper- and lower-worlds, the child who dies, is also the (compassionate) infernal queen and the returning power of spring.

Chapter One – Demeter & Persephone: Myth & Cult

Introduction

This chapter will review the primary text for the analysis of this thesis, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The myth will be examined, initially through the version found in the *Hymn*, and then in relation to variant versions that exist beyond the *Hymn*, and finally the relationship to the cult at Eleusis will be explored. The cult itself may reveal important aspects of the myth that the poem may underplay or overlook, so its similarities and differences with the text will be considered. The myth gives emphasis to the relationship of a mother and her daughter, centred on the crisis of separation and the joy of reunion, and this pattern is a meaningful focus upon which the Eleusinian initiates, and the audience of the *Hymn*'s poet, may have constructed their own understandings of events like initiation, marriage and death (see chapters two and three). This analysis of the myth and cult will ground the discussion in the following chapters, operating as the point of comparison against socio-anthropological and parallel mythic features.

The Myth of Persephone

The *Hymn to Demeter* recounts one version of the story of Demeter and her daughter, in which Hades, lord of the Underworld, kidnaps Persephone to be his wife. Under Zeus' command, Gaia lures Persephone with a flower, as the girl plays in the meadows with her companions (all female), but when Persephone reaches to pluck the extraordinary narcissus, Hades emerges from the earth and abducts her. While her attendants flee, Hekate hears Persephone's cry, and seeks out Demeter, who also heard her daughter but does not know what caused her to cry out. They search for Persephone for nine days (46), until they turn to Helios, who, as the sun god, sees all. He tells them that Hades abducted Persephone to be his bride, and suggests that the union is not something to be ashamed of, or to be challenged. Demeter, in grief, abandons the sphere of the gods, takes on the appearance of an old (barren) woman, and retreats to a well at Eleusis, to sit in grief. There, the daughters of the local king, Keleus, find her, take pity on her, and invite her to work for their mother, nursing their younger brother. Their mother agrees, and Demeter is welcomed into their palace, briefly showing something of her glory but maintaining her disguise.

Demeter initially refuses offers of food and drink, continuing the fast she has maintained since her daughter's disappearance, but once Iambe, the maid, makes her laugh by telling jokes, she accepts a drink, the *kykeon*. Once she settles into the household, she anoints the child, Demophoön, with ambrosia and places him in a fire at night to make him immortal, until the mother, noticing her son's unusual growth, spies on the nurse and interrupts the rites. Angry at the frustration of her plans, which are never directly explained², Demeter throws the child aside (although promising a special destiny for him as her nursling), and orders the Eleusinians to make her a temple, as she reveals her real nature. Retreating into her temple, Demeter's absence causes a famine, and with the famine the suffering mortals cannot offer sacrifice to the gods, spurring the Olympians to try and appease her. She refuses all offers and gifts, and insists on the return of her daughter. Zeus finally sends Hermes with orders to Hades, to send Persephone back to her mother³. While in the Underworld, Hades has made Persephone eat some pomegranate seeds (it is uncertain whether he tricked her, or if she understood the consequences and willingly ate them), and so when she is returned to her mother, Demeter tells her that she must still spend a third of every year in the Underworld. With Persephone returned, Rhea meets them at Zeus' request, to call for an end to the famine and for them to return to Olympus. Demeter ends the famine, teaches the Eleusinians her rites, and then returns to Olympus, where Zeus allocates her new honours in the form of the Mysteries.

² Demeter rails against the folly of mortals, "which prevents the gods from helping them" (Richardson, 1974: 57), perhaps an indication that the rites she will establish are the best alternative available (though this innovation may be "more appropriate in Greece to a poet than to a priest" – Parker, 1991: 10), as the constraints of mortality and the divisions between humans and gods are too great to transcend, but humans themselves appear to play a role in this constraint. Parker does note that "in a 'theogonic' and aetiological poem, the reader can indeed make sense of the narrative, but in terms less of motives than of results" (1991: 11), so the foiling itself is not necessary to explain. What is important is what that frustration will lead to: the founding of the Mysteries.

³ "Zeus finally permits the Kore to return (here for the first time called Persephone)..." (Dobson, 1992: 44). It is interesting that this is the first time she is called by this name, at a stage when she has already been in the Underworld, and only as a result of the compromise, but not before the compromise is reached, when she was still Kore. In contrast, "neither the [Homeric poet; *Iliad* IX.456], whose date is uncertain, nor Hesiod [*Theogony* 912] employ the word [Kore] as a personal divine name, but only speak of Persephone; and in the longer poem this name is freely used, evidently without any association of evil omen, as the popular designation of the lovely and 'pure daughter of pure Demeter'" (Farnell, 1907: 118).

The *Hymn to Demeter*.

The *Hymn to Demeter* is the earliest (c.650-550 B.C)⁴ and longest single narrative version of the story of Persephone's abduction, and Demeter's resulting grief. Although the *Hymn* takes one specific version of the myth, coloured as it is by probable political and ideological motives⁵, it is an extensive literary piece that survived and remained influential for significant periods of literate antiquity (Richardson, 1974: 68-73).

Narratology does warn us, when considering such a text in the broader context of an entire range of myths, "to distinguish between the discourse at hand in the text under examination and the *fabula* or *story*, which is the chronological (causal) sequence into which the reader progressively and retrospectively reassembles the motifs, the reconstructed chronological sequence, without attachment to specific individuals or to time and place" (Mettinger, 2001: 50). The *Hymn* is a text with a specific aim and purpose, while the myth is larger and more nebulous, with multiple levels of meaning and interpretation available, even contradictory ones which could not be contained coherently within a text like the *Hymn*. It is necessary to make this distinction before the text can be successfully analysed and understood in the context of its composition.

The *Hymn* is a text associated with the Greeks' favoured author, Homer⁶, which was revisited by Classical, Hellenistic and Roman writers⁷, while other versions that did not survive, or could not claim the same authorial authority, could be easily altered or re-

⁴ Richardson, 1974: 6-11; Foley, 1994: 81. Homer and Hesiod composed their poems in the late eighth century or just afterwards (Richardson, 1974: 5), Homer mentions the goddesses (though their relationship is never described, Persephone as the wife of Hades: *Iliad* IX.456; 571; Demeter as goddess of the grain: *Iliad* V.500; XIII.321; XXI.76, though she is loved by Zeus, Persephone's father, *Iliad* XIV.325), and Hesiod offers a brief description of the abduction of Persephone (*Theogony* 911-4), but neither offer such an extended narrative.

⁵ As it will be discussed below, the *Hymn* was probably composed by an Eleusinian poet, who follows the epic tradition in his poem, but relies heavily on the local legend of Demeter's stay at Eleusis, "for recitation at a public festival, and perhaps for a traditional epic contest" (Richardson, 1974: 12).

⁶ Although in antiquity, the poem was also ascribed to Orpheus, marking the close association of the 'Orphic' poetry and the Eleusinian tradition from as early as the first century B.C. (Richardson, 1974: 12).

⁷ "The 'Hymn to Demeter' (II)... was frequently echoed or imitated, especially by the Hellenistic poets (in the third and second centuries BC)" (Richardson, 2003: xxiii).

imagined as each retelling required⁸. This *Hymn*, unlike the other Homeric Hymns, was only rediscovered in 1777, three centuries after the first edition of the other principal hymns in Florence emerged (Richardson, 2003: xxiv-xxix). Until this fairly recent discovery, “it was the versions [of the Rape of Persephone] of Ovid and Claudian⁹ which influenced modern literature” (*ibid.*: xxix). The combination of its length and age make the *Hymn to Demeter* the most valuable narrative to examine closely, to uncover the meaning it held for the people who would read or recite it, and their listeners. The text cannot stand alone, however, as the ancients were notorious for varying their tales and stories, often to fulfil specific agendas or suit their immediate audiences, while preserving the same core meaning, and frequently creating additional cursory meanings in each of these retellings. Even this ‘Homer’ can be seen to colour this poem with particular themes and motifs that must have held some significance at the time and to the context of its composition.

As the poem is closely related to the Eleusinian cult, but could not reveal its secrets to the uninitiated, there may be a tension within the text of competing interests. Parker suggests that there would be the “heroic poet” who incorporates epic motifs “to narrate the divine drama of the rape and recovery without any significant interaction between gods and men, any founding of cults, at all” (1991: 5). This poet, “full of imagination, empty of local piety” (*ibid*) would want to tell a compelling story, but he would compete with the ‘Eumolpid’, “the mouthpiece of local Eleusinian tradition... interested in the myth only so far as Eleusis enters it” (*ibid*), but restricted by the necessity to avoid revealing the cult’s secrets. The ‘heroic’ poet would use the ‘Eumolpid’s narrative structure, and colour it as he found to be the most emotionally compelling and captivating for his audience, perhaps recasting the secret details into coded or veiled forms, if he incorporates them at

⁸ Variants will be discussed below, but there appears to be three other major versions, the ‘Orphic’ version, a Sicilian/ Alexandrian version, and an Ovid/ Claudian version which appears to derive from the Sicilian/ Alexandrian one, a “Hellenistic intermediary”, while incorporating elements from the Eleusinian version described in the *Hymn*, such as the narcissus in Claudian (Richardson, 1974: 72).

⁹ The *De Raptu Proserpinae* – from the late fourth century A.D. Claudian also associates Iacchos with Dionysus, and his Hades rises up in anger against the existing order, because “he alone was unwed and had long wasted the years in childless state” (*De Raptu Proserpine* I.32). Claudian’s Hades can offer a new home where “a golden race has its home... Soft meads shall fail thee not, and ever-blooming flowers” (II.285-9).

all. A comparison with the alternate versions of the myth may highlight the *Hymn*'s unique features, and reveal which aspects were central to its narrative, and what may have been poetic innovation.

Orphic hymns, belonging to a varied group (who also revered Demeter) roughly contemporary to the Eleusinian cult¹⁰ and its attendant *Hymn*, describe the story with significant differences (Guthrie, 1952: 82-3, 133-5; Mylonas, 1961: 290-1; West, 1983: 95-8). These hymns and poems, mostly in fragments, seem to suggest at least two versions of the myth¹¹ (so no single version can really be claimed as 'Orphic'), while Kern detects four elements (Richardson, 1974: 79f.). The basic relationship of Demeter and Persephone as mother and daughter, and the abduction of one of the women by a male deity is the same as the *Hymn*, but the Orphic material assimilated various figures into an ambiguous network of family and lovers.

In the Orphic *Rhapsodies*¹², Demeter is associated or replaceable with Rhea (her mother in the *Hymn*, and Homeric and Hesiodic epic), or even Gaia (her grandmother), as the Mother Goddess figure. She is joined with Zeus (either as son, or brother, depending on whether she is identified with Rhea or Gaia), and bears Persephone. Persephone bears Dionysus to Zeus (her father, regardless of whichever identity Demeter has assumed), but as an infant this divine child is murdered, dismembered and devoured by the Titans, whom Zeus punishes, resulting in the creation of humans, a mix of wicked Titan and divine god (West, 1983: 95). This child's heart is used to make a potion fed to Semele,

¹⁰ There appears to be evidence of an Orphic sect in Olbia (Sardinia), in the fifth century B.C., and another in Tarentum in the late fourth century B.C., though these sects lacked a united doctrine and belief structure to designate anything like 'Orphic beliefs' or 'the Orphics' generally, beyond what is found in literature ascribed to Orpheus himself (West, 1983: 3).

¹¹ Both versions of the myth envision Persephone bearing a child to a chthonian god: "There are two distinct themes in Kore's story as the *Rhapsodies* had it. One is a development of the traditional myth of her abduction by Pluto, with the special features (*i*) that she bore him children, the Eumenides, (*ii*) that it was prophesied she would bear these children to Apollo, (*iii*) that she was guarded by the Kouretes, and (*iv*) that she was weaving a robe until she was carried off. The other continues the motif of Zeus mating as a snake. He mates in this guise with Kore, in Crete, and she gives birth to Dionysus, who after being killed by the Titans and restored to life becomes her partner in helping men to escape from the cycle of reincarnation" (West, 1983: 95).

¹² The *Rhapsodies*, part of the almost eclectic collection of hymns attributed to Orpheus, were compiled by about 100 B.C. (West, 1983: 247-8), though the Rape of Kore could have derived from a 'Pythagorean' version in the early fifth century (Richardson, 1974: 78).

Zeus' new lover. As in the Homeric and Hesiodic versions, Semele is killed by seeing Zeus in his true form, and Zeus saves the unborn child by sewing him into his own thigh, and bearing the child himself. This child is the new Dionysus, born a second time, who thus defeats death (Godwin, 1981: 132-2).

Another 'Orphic' fragment (Orph.frag.52 Kern) replaces the Eleusinian king and his daughters with Dysaules and his wife Baubo, and their three sons, Triptolemus (a cowherd), Eumolpus (a shepherd), and Eubouleus (a swineherd)¹³. Hades' return to the Underworld with his new bride creates a cavern which also swallows Eubouleus' pigs (Nilsson, 1940: 48-9; scholiast on Lucian¹⁴). A parallel to her fast and grief in the palace of Keleus, in which only the servant Iambe can break her grief with jokes, Baubo performs 'obscene' acts which elicit laughter from the goddess (Kerényi, 1967: 40)¹⁵. In memory of Eubouleus' loss, which Demeter compensates with the gift of agriculture because he helped her find her daughter, pigs were thrown into caverns before Demeter's other major festival, the Thesmophoria¹⁶.

Foley notes that "because the Thesmophoria is generally thought to be a very early Greek ritual, its proceedings and its related myths could have influenced Eleusinian rites and myths and explain in part the prominent role of women in both" (1994: 72). Having been thrown into the cave "perhaps at the festival of the threshing" (Nilsson, 1940: 49), the remains of the pigs would be collected "at the festival of the autumn sowing – the Thesmophoria" (*ibid.*), and sown with the seeds of the next crop, to encourage their growth. Eubouleus is certainly present, and significant, in a fifth century inscription in which he is one of the gods named to receive the sacrifices of the First Fruits Decree,

¹³ This version may be evident in the fourth century B.C., and Ovid may have recalled it in the *Fasti* 4.465-6, when he makes the Eleusinians 'poor rustics' (Richardson, 1974: 82). Eubouleus is a complex figure, and is dealt with further below, and in chapter six.

¹⁴ As part of a note on the Thesmophoria, in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 2.1.

¹⁵ This scenario appears to be paralleled in some later Christian stories about the Virgin Mary, in Scandanavian and Egyptian mythology, and this latter may have been the source of Baubo's exposure (Richardson, 1974: 216-7).

¹⁶ Pigs also play a role in Ovid's *Fasti*, in which their footprints scuff the kidnapped daughter's trail and delay Demeter's search: "Perhaps that day had been the last of her wanderings if swine had not foiled the trail she found" (IV.465-6).

alongside Demeter, Kore, Triptolemus, the God and the Goddess (Clinton, 2010: 347)¹⁷. Eubouleus appears in several Orphic hymns (see chapter five), but he does not appear in any early texts, although he is identified in images from the fourth, and perhaps even the fifth century B.C.¹⁸

Triptolemus features in other variants of the myth¹⁹, especially those which emphasise Demeter's role in the establishment of the seasonal cycle, and in teaching agriculture to humanity. While the mortals of the *Hymn* seem to live in cities and presumably know how to cultivate the grain (Demeter never has to teach it to them), other variants depict mortals living "at the mercy of nature, foraging for roots, acorns and berries"²⁰. After Demeter loses Persephone, she learns of her daughter's whereabouts... from mortals, who are then rewarded with agriculture and/or Mysteries²¹" (Foley, 1994: 99).

Triptolemus, mentioned in the *Hymn* as one of the Eleusinian leaders Demeter instructs in her rites, is an Attic hero in these agriculture-focused variants. He is claimed by the Athenians as being the first to receive the gift of agriculture, and teaching it to the world, travelling in the goddess' chariot, drawn by flying snakes (Richardson, 1974: 82). These variants associate Athens with Eleusis, and serve to mark "the growth of Athenian interest in the Mysteries" (Richardson, 1974: 9; Foley, 1994: 100), as artistic representations of Triptolemos date from about 540 (Schwarz, 1986: 66; Shapiro, 1989: 67-83).

¹⁷ Eubouleus may be connected to Zeus Bouleus, who also received sacrifices with Demeter and Kore, on Mykonos and the neighbouring islands (Persson, 1942: 138-9).

¹⁸ Zuntz follows Rhode (1925: 207-10) in arguing that Eubouleus may originally have been a version of Hades, "a, or the, god of the Netherworld" (1971: 311), noting the euphemistic tone of his name, and that "In the religion of the Classical Age Eubouleus is not Dionysos, and Dionysos is not Hades" (*ibid*), despite the syncretism of the Orphic hymns 29, 30, 41, 52, and 56.

¹⁹ Ovid's *Fasti*, IV.529f., where he is the sick child of the rustic Keleus (exchanged for Demophoön, the child of royal Keleus), after Persephone's rape is described (*Fasti* IV.443f.). In Hyginus' *Fabulae*, Triptolemus also replaces Demophoön as the child of the king of Eleusis, though he is Eleusinus not Keleus (147).

²⁰ Ovid's *Fasti* IV.393f.

²¹ This appears to relate to the 'Orphic' versions, as Clement cites Orpheus as the poet who described Eubouleus as the son of Dysaules (*Exhortations to the Greeks* II.14-7), and is noted in Pausanias 1.14.3 as a claim made by Musaeus.

In some versions, Demeter herself travels into the Underworld to reclaim her daughter (*O.H.*41; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 251; Virgil, *Georgics* 1.39²²; Ovid, *Fasti* 4.611f.²³). In contrast to the *Hymn*'s strong division between the upper and nether worlds, between which only a few special gods can travel, this version allows Demeter a more active role in her daughter's reclamation, but it reduces the significance of Persephone's new ability to traverse realms. Clinton suggests that "the most logical conclusion is that in Eleusinian myth it is Eubouleus who guides Kore back from the underworld"²⁴, possibly a parallel to Iacchos' role in leading the initiates to Demeter (2010: 351-2). The *Hymn* has Hermes, who can travel between the realms because he also acts as *psychopompos*, guiding the souls of the dead into the Underworld, go to Hades and insist that Persephone be returned. These different versions²⁵ give Persephone varying degrees of autonomy, but she is never the sole instigator of her own freedom, she is always subject to her elders' interests.

Inconsistencies between the *Hymn* and its Variants.

Despite the variety of details and characters in all the stories of Demeter and Persephone, Foley identifies four areas in which the *Hymn* deviates from the general pattern of the other versions. The first is the association of Demeter and her grief with the changing seasons, especially the onset of winter:

“...the narrative pattern of the *Hymn* does not link Persephone's descent and ascent explicitly with the cycle of the agricultural year or use the myth to explain

²² “...*nec repetita sequi curet Proserpina matrem*”.

²³ Although this is not really a journey into the Underworld, but a threat of one: “Her rueful parent grieved no less than if her daughter had just been reft from her, and it was long before she was herself again, and hardly then. And thus she spoke: “For me, too, heaven is no home; order that I too be admitted to the Taenarian vale.” And she would have done so, if Jupiter had not promised that Persephone should be in heaven for twice three months.” This suggests at least an approach to the entrance, but not necessarily an entrance into the infernal realm.

²⁴ This appears to be what happens in *O.H.*41, so perhaps the ‘official’ Eleusinian version described Eubouleus’ role as guide, but the poet of the *Hymn* leaves it out.

²⁵ Persephone does not appear in other myths (except a late role in Adonis’ myth, see chapter six), but a curious allusion appears in Hyginus, who describes a Cura (potentially a Latin transliteration of Koure, linked to Kore) creating mankind, by taking clay from the earth, and asking Zeus to give it the breath of life. Arguing over who should have the honour of bestowing their name on the new creation (Cura, Zeus or Earth), Saturn/ Cronos decides that at death, Zeus shall receive the breath again, Earth the body, and Cura “shall possess it so long as it lives” (*Fabulae* 220). This association with Persephone is not recalled elsewhere, but it does offer a very intriguing *aition* for Persephone’s responsibility for the dead and her intimate relationship with humanity.

the origin of the seasons²⁶. Demeter plays the famine as her last card in her conflict with Zeus... In the *Hymn* Persephone's return precedes the coming of spring, rather than explicitly causing it or coinciding with it²⁷. Demeter predicts that Persephone will in the future reappear annually with the spring flowers²⁸. This may indicate a promise of regularity in the seasonal cycle; yet we are not told when Persephone will depart each year for the world below. Seasonal motifs thus serve in the *Hymn* to enhance other more important themes, rather than acquiring a central importance."

(Foley, 1994: 98)

Although writers in antiquity would associate Demeter and Persephone with spring and the return of vegetative fertility, much like the Mediterranean seasonal gods (see chapter five), the *Hymn* itself does not emphasise this connection, only announcing that Persephone will return annually "[w]hen the earth is blooming with every sweet-scented flower of spring" (401). Thus the seasonal aspect is referred to, but is not the central concern. Instead it is used to highlight the Mysteries²⁹, by casting the founding of the rites and their blessing in the familiar framework of the seasonal vicissitudes.

The second discrepancy is in the motivation for the founding of Demeter's rites and gifts: "In other versions Demeter gives mortals the Mysteries (and/or agriculture) at once as a reward for their information, their hospitality, or both. In the *Hymn* Demeter does not, as she promised (273), instruct the Eleusinians in her rites until well after the founding of her temple... Demeter's cult at Eleusis seems at first (despite hints to the contrary) to

²⁶ This may also be due to the development of the myth away from an entirely agrarian context, as the urban centres distanced the poets and at least some of their audiences from the field: "it is difficult to believe that a married Athenian woman, born and reared within the shadow of the Akropolis, knew of the precise relationship between the rites practised at the Thesmophoria, the growth of the crops and the rhythm of the agricultural year" (Lambert, 1990: 51).

²⁷ This may, however, be a result of the paratactic style of narration that oral myth frequently utilises, in which logical connections are not directly expressed (Thury & Devinney, 2009: 18-9).

²⁸ Although even this point has been given some attention, albeit slight: "I suggest that line 401 of the *Hymn* refers to the season of the autumn planting and of the sprouting of fields, attended by the appearance of springlike flowers, as the time when Demeter's daughter returned from her captivity to gladden her mother and to gladden the earth" (Greene, 1946: 106).

²⁹ The famine, which results in and ends at Persephone's return, "does not appear to have had any direct counterpart in ritual, and one may note its apparent exclusion from the Orphic versions" (Richardson, 1974: 24), though it appears in Euripides' *Helen*, l.1322-33, which does conflate Demeter with Phrygian Cybele, l.1309-70. This conflation with the Near Eastern Goddess also appears in an Epidauran poem from the fourth or third century B.C., although this Mother of the Gods is directly in conflict with Zeus, who hurls thunderbolts at her (possibly an echo of Iasion, and this goddess does appear 'distracted' as if in mourning, although no daughter is mentioned), because she demands an equal share of the division of the earth, sea and sky (Furley & Bremmer, 2001: 214-224).

have been founded only to propitiate the angry goddess, not to open new opportunities for humankind” (Foley, 1994: 100). The *Hymn* envisions the Mysteries as something more than a passing gift from a benevolent deity to mortals who were generous and dutiful enough to fulfil their responsibilities as hosts to strangers. The *Hymn* raises the gift of the Mysteries to a higher sphere of importance, as Zeus himself orders their establishment, in order to avoid the destruction of the world and its inhabitants and deities. This is no kind gift to lucky, pious, random mortals, but “the result... of the entire set of experiences of the two goddesses and of the final compromise that reordered the universe and made the Mysteries possible” (*ibid.*: 102).

Variants on this myth present Eubouleus (Orph.frag. 51 Kern, in Paus.I.14.3), or other local mortals, telling the goddess what happened to her daughter, but Demeter never turns to mortals for information in the *Hymn*³⁰. It is Hekate and Helios who help her discover her daughter’s whereabouts, but this leaves the goddess “without a stated motive for her journey to earth” (Foley, 1994: 101). Her search for Persephone could have remained on the divine plane, and mortals would not have benefited from the eventual resolution, but the *Hymn* has a specific aim in mind. As an aetiology, Demeter must descend to earth to found the Mysteries, and although the *Hymn* neglects to logically establish her motives in retreating to the Eleusinians, her retreat and experiences in their palace are necessary for the outcome of the tale.

Oral myth could omit such details, relying on the audiences’ knowledge of other versions of the tale to supply their own explanations for these inconsistencies. This ability to skip over certain details allows the poet to focus on the more relevant details in the tale. It is not really important *why* Demeter chooses the Eleusinians, but it is important that she lives among the mortals. The very Mysteries she will establish will be influenced by her experiences among the Eleusinians, and Foley suggests that the sojourn humanises the experiences of the goddess (*ibid.*: 102). This humanising experience means that the

³⁰ This is an important distinction from other versions of the myth, and similar ‘Search’ myths, in which gods bless the mortals who assist them in their search. The *Hymn* also does not identify where Persephone is taken into the Underworld, despite a host of options available in the variants, generally connected to springs, between Syracuse and Greece (Richardson, 1974: 148-50).

Mysteries she creates are out of sympathetic feeling for the mortals she lived with, rather than just as a reward for kindness³¹.

The *Hymn* devotes significant narrative space to describe Demeter's attempt to immortalise Demophoön, although modern scholars sometimes disregard the event as being "based on an old folk-tale motif which has nothing to do with the Eleusinian cult" (Nilsson, 1940: 50)³². Structuralists have found the event to have an important function within the structure of the *Hymn* itself (Felson-Rubin & Deal, 1994: 190-7), but it may also follow the previous deviation Foley identifies. The event may feel like an unnecessary interpolation as "[i]n many later versions of the myth, Demeter never loses sight for a moment of her goal of rescuing Persephone. Yet in the *Hymn* Demeter, during her time on earth, is temporarily distracted from her pursuit of Persephone by the Demophoön incident" (Foley, 1994: 101).

If the Demophoön incident distracts Demeter from her search and grief for her daughter (she has already learnt from Helios that Persephone is unreachable, lost to Hades by Zeus' will), it serves an important function for the establishment of the Mysteries, which remains the *Hymn*'s prominent concern. This 'digression' is a necessary incident to allow for the goddess to be humanised, and "demonstrating the impossibility of immortalising humans and of breaking down the fundamental barriers between gods and mortals" (*ibid.*: 103). Demeter learns the limits of the mortals she lives with, and the limits of even divine power with regard to death, but these are important lessons to learn before she establishes a meaningful rite to assist them.

³¹ If the Orphic hymns reveal the 'official' Eleusinian tradition more than the poetic *Hymn* (Richardson, 1975), this sympathy for the mortals who helped her may have led her to immortalise one of them (as *O.H.* 41) suggests, and if this was the secret knowledge the initiates were to learn, the poet of the *Hymn* might have retained the emotional element of the humanising experience, but veiled it to avoid revealing the secret, by transplanting the story to Demophoön, though some variants have Demeter kill the child in her anger (Apollodorus 1.31). Parker warns against assuming there was "an agreed and semi-canonical Eleusinian version of the myth" (1991: 5).

³² This is a curious dismissal, as this motif recurs in other variants of the myth, Orphic Hymn 41, Ovid's *Fasti*, IV.529f.; Hyginus' *Fabulae*, 147. The role of the 'child from the hearth' in the cult also seems to support an interpretation of this scene as integral to the mythic narrative.

Although these omissions may make the *Hymn* a suspect text on which to base an exhaustive study on the story of Demeter and Persephone, it must also be remembered that no version is ‘the’ version, which successfully incorporates all the different elements and subplots. Even a poet at the time could colour his version anew, aware to some degree that “the probable existence of other versions of the myth that did offer a clearly motivated transition at these points in the story [Demeter’s distraction in her grief with Demophoön, her decision to retreat to earth, her delayed reward of the Mysteries]... could shape audience reaction and expectation even in the case of a traditional oral narrative” (*ibid.*: 101). The *Hymn*, as a single, coherent text with clear connections to Eleusis, remains the most useful text for this analysis, but the variants offer some important insights into the poem’s omissions, and elaborate the ways in which Persephone could be understood and received by her worshippers.

Date of the *Hymn* & its Relation to Cult

The *Hymn to Demeter* seems to have been composed between 650-550 B.C, as part of the tradition of the Homeric Hymns, which are devoted to the praise of specific deities, possibly as a prologue to another poetic recitation or at a ritual performance³³ (Richardson, 1974: viii; Foley, 1994: 81). In contrast, archaeological evidence suggests that the Mysteries were founded possibly as early as the late Geometric Period, in the eighth century B.C. (Foley, 1994: 65). Although the cult appears at least a century before the written version of the myth does, some form of the myth would have been in circulation at this time. The *Hymn* would have taken some of the main elements of the oral myth, and incorporated them into a new form, coloured by the political and social concerns of the time: “the poem represents an Eleusinian adaptation of a rhapsodic narrative of the Rape of Persephone³⁴... though the Hymn is deeply concerned with the

³³ The actual development of these hymns, and perhaps elaboration from prologues to independent narratives remains debated (Richardson, 1974: 4; Parker, 1991:1-2), but if they belonged to poetic competitions, they would have been adapted to poetic, rather than strictly theological, requirements, so the *Hymn*’s narrative may have been adjusted to suit the poet’s needs, which may explain the differences from its variants, although it appears that it may have been adopted as an Orphic poem and recited at initiation ceremonies by the first century B.C. (Richardson, 1974: 12).

³⁴ The *Hymn* is clearly related to Eleusis, but its relationship to the Orphic hymns and the reticence to reveal the cult’s secrets might rather mean that the poem is a rhapsodic adaptation of the ‘official’ Eleusinian narrative, which lies somewhere between the *Hymn* and the Orphic material.

aetiology of the festival and of some specific points of the ritual, it had itself no proper place in the celebration of the mysteries” (Walton, 1952: 109). Using the *Hymn* to uncover the secrets of the Mystery’s rites may be a dangerous exercise, even as “it remains striking how closely [the *Hymn*’s] narrative and cultic elements seem to be interwoven” (Richardson, 2011: 53), especially in comparison to the other Homeric Hymns.

Although the *Hymn* “contradicts or is inconsistent with facts about the cult which are attested in historical documentary sources” (Clinton, 2010: 344), especially as it ignores certain deities and rites, it is a text that was historically associated with the cult, and which would have contributed to an understanding of the religious rites, even if it does not describe the innermost secrets³⁵. The version of the myth described in the *Hymn* would have been popular knowledge to those contemplating initiation. This study intends to focus on the meaning found within the myth, and so shall not devote too much time on justifying the relationship between the cult and the myth, but it is sufficient that the cultic practice, as discovered through archaeological research, can shed light on what aspects of the myth may have been taken to be important or particularly significant by the worshippers at Eleusis. The myth is not being used to understand the cult, but the cult is being used to gauge the reception of the *Hymn* and the meaning derived from it by those who were most invested in the story and rites of Demeter and Persephone.

Judging from the expansion of the Eleusinian temple, Walton uses archaeological evidence to suggest that “the cult was clearly subject to Athenian control before 460, and presumably at least from the time of Pisistratus [c.561-527]” (1952: 112)³⁶. Despite this long, shared history, the conspicuous lack of any mention of Athens in the *Hymn* suggests

³⁵ Notably, the events within the *Hymn* which act as *aitia* for ritual actions all appear to belong to the Lesser Mysteries and the preparatory stages of the rites, rather than the Greater Mysteries’ secret rites, as far as we can discern these (Richardson, 1974: 22). The *Hymn* may accommodate for this division of rites as Demeter promises to give her blessing to the Eleusinians (1.273) long before she actually awards them (1.474), a sequence Parker suggests may be “equivalent to *myesis*, [and] the final revelation as *epopteia*” (1991: 13).

³⁶ This expansion of the temple also rotated the approach to the Telesterion, from the south, facing away from Athens, to the north, so that the Sacred Way used in the procession to Eleusis would lead the Athenian troupe straight to the temple itself (Richardson, 1974: 9-10).

that this version was either written before Athens' conquest of Eleusis, or as a conscious effort to remove Athens' interloping presence in the local mythos and cult. Walton sets the *Hymn* "after rather than before the political union" (*ibid.*: 113), because the motivation to completely erase Athens from the myth, despite being a physically close neighbour of Eleusis, suggests a conscious decision resulting from real tensions. Similarly, Walton notes that "in all Athenian literature, at least until Hellenistic times, there is no direct mention of the Homeric Hymn and scarcely anything which can reasonably be identified even as a reminiscence or echo of it" (*ibid.*: 105). These tensions may not have been as intense before a union or conquest, as they would have been afterwards.

Later legend also accounts for this conflict between Athens and Eleusis, recording a war between the cities (Apollodorus, *Library* 3.203-4). Athens' founding king, Athena's 'son' Erechtheus, defeats Eleusinian Eumolpos³⁷, but the cities come to an agreement: "The resulting settlement left financial control of the cult entirely in Athenian hands, while ritual responsibilities were shared between two aristocratic families, the Eumolpidai of Eleusis and the Kerykes of Athens" (Larson, 2007: 73-4). Outside of legend, these two families played a key role in the Mysteries, as the Hierophant was always a Eumolpid, and the Keryx, the Mysteries' herald, and the Dadouchos, the torchbearer, were from the Kerykes family (*ibid.*: 74). These literary tensions (reinforced by historical tensions) suggest that the *Hymn*'s poet may have been Eleusinian, although this writer offers no insight into the secret rites of the cult. The only actions that are described and are known to have happened in cultic performances belonged to the initiatory stages of the rites (which were performed in the Lesser Mysteries in Athens and in the procession to Eleusis), and not the final revelation.

³⁷ Not to be confused with Eubouleus and his pigs. Eumolpus was also identified as Musaeus' son, and thus related to the poems and hymns of Orpheus, which provide an alternate version of the myth (Richardson, 1974: 78-9). However, there was also a brother of Eubouleus called Eumolpus (Orph.frag.52; Richardson, 1974: 81-2).

The Cult of Eleusis

The Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone were divided into two stages, the Lesser and the Greater Mysteries. The Lesser Mysteries, held in Athens in early spring, “in the month of flowers, the Anthesterion” (Mylonas, 1961: 239), “originally a local Athenian cult” (Richardson, 1974: 21)³⁸, were preparatory rites for the Greater Mysteries. These rites seem to have been created to include Athens within the important rites of Eleusis, by relocating the ceremonies to Athens instead, but they were always just initiatory to the Greater Mysteries, and never gained their importance. The rites were explained as instituted to allow foreigners to be initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries, and heroic precedents in Herakles and the Dioskouri³⁹ were frequently mentioned. This may have been an attempt to make the Mysteries more accessible across the Hellenic world, only limiting initiation to those who could speak Greek. Athens could take advantage of a pan-Hellenic importance, and later would insist on receiving ‘First Fruits’ from other nations as the tithe to be devoted to the goddess to ensure her favour.

The Lesser Mysteries would include a ritual fast, a sacrifice of a piglet (Mylonas, 1961: 242), and initiates would bathe in the Ilissos, all under the guidance of each initiate’s *mystagogos* or spiritual sponsor. Vase paintings and sculpture show Herakles seated on a stool, which is covered by a sheep-skin, and he is veiled while the goddesses stand over him⁴⁰. His association with the Lesser Mysteries may connect these images to these early rites, rather than the Greater Mysteries, and may form part of the initial preparation, or as an additional rite to expunge blood-guilt, as Herakles also had to undergo an earlier purification for the murders he had committed⁴¹.

³⁸ The Lesser Mysteries may have originally been held at Agrai, and later absorbed by the Eleusinian ceremonies (Bräuninger, 1938: 16).

³⁹ These figures are curious choices. Herakles is clearly a pan-Hellenic hero, and can safely be appropriated without risking alienating any city, but the Dioskouri do not share quite the same status, as heroes of Sparta, the brothers of Helen (Hyginus 80). Perhaps these three were adopted as they all survived death in their myths, and ascended to the heavens through the gods’ will.

⁴⁰ Most famously, the sculpture on the sarcophagus from Torre Nova, Rome, Palazzo Spagna (Kerényi, 1967: 54).

⁴¹ “he was unable to see the mysteries because he had not been purified of the killing of the Centaurs, so Eumolpus purified him and then initiated him” (Apollodorus II.122). This is a secondary challenge, after being denied initiation as a foreigner, and requiring adoption by Pylios to be eligible (*ibid*).

The Greater Mysteries were held several months later, in the month of Boedromion, the third lunar month of the Athenian calendar, roughly our September or October. Situated about two and a half months after the new year celebrations, and a month before the Thesmophoria and the autumn sowing, these rites would have been held in the latter half of summer. Nilsson suggests that the Greater Mysteries were originally “a family cult [of the royal family] to which the head of the family admitted whom he pleased” (1940: 46)⁴², but with Athens’ intrusion it was appropriated into a pan-Hellenic rite, and a large part of the preparatory rites were located in Athens itself. A few weeks before the rites, the *Spondophoroi*, delegates from the Eumolpid and Kerykes families, would travel to other cities and announce the upcoming festival, inviting the cities to send official delegations, and individuals to come for their own personal initiation. They would also call for a holy truce, which would last fifty-five days.

Before the official rites began, the sacred *hiera* were transported from Eleusis along the processional way, with an escort of Athenian *ephebes* from the Rheitoi lakes (the old boundary between Athens and Eleusis). The *hiera* would be housed in Athens’ Eleusinion overnight, until the official ceremonies began on the 15th of Boedromion. The Athenian Archon Basileus would call worshippers to be initiated on this first day, and an initial inspection may have taken place (Mylonas, 1961: 247-8). The second day required initiates to cleanse themselves in the sea⁴³, and perform another sacrifice of piglets⁴⁴ (*ibid.*: 249). The third day may have been for sacrifices offered on behalf of cities by their official delegations, and Athens’ representatives. The fourth day, the *Asklepia*, was a

⁴² Burkert notes three types of organisation in ancient mysteries: “the itinerant practitioner or charismatic, the clergy attached to a sanctuary, and the association of worshippers in the form of a club, *thiasos*” (1987: 31). Eleusis, belonging to the second category, which was “more common in the Near East and Egypt than in Greece” (*ibid.*), was, like most other Greek sanctuaries, “not... independent economic units, but part of the administration of the *polis* or else family property” (*ibid.*).

⁴³ It is interesting that the sea is used here. It is taken to be a symbol of absolute cleansing, but it also means the inclusion of the third divinely divided sphere, Poseidon’s realm.

⁴⁴ Note that these sacrifices are taken out of the city, washed, as if to remove the pollution they bear, *outside* the city, and their sacrifice represents the initiate’s sacrifice or devotion. It is also significant that these sacrifices are personal, not held by a representative. Each initiate is undergoing a personal rite, albeit as part of a collective. This is not a communal rite in the same way as state ceremonies or sacrifices were.

day for late-comers to undergo purification, following a myth that Asklepios⁴⁵ once came late to be initiated (*ibid.*: 251).

The fifth day involved the fourteen mile procession to Eleusis, in which initiates generally walked the whole way (although carriages were sometimes used). The procession was led by the statue of Iacchos, and worshippers would cry out his name as they walked, calling him to wake and lead the way. At the bridge over the Rheitoi, saffron coloured ribbons would be tied to the right hands and left legs of initiates, a ceremony called the *krokosis* (*ibid.*: 256). This might allow for a delay during which the sun would set, and initiates could light their torches to illuminate the rest of the journey, as Demeter is often depicted in vase paintings⁴⁶. At the Eleusinian river Kephisos the initiates would undergo *aischrologia*, “ritual abuse, jesting, and ‘obscene’ language (language improper for use at other times)” (Foley, 1994: 73), a feature of the Thesmophoria as well.

The following day was spent fasting, resting, and on purification and sacrifice (Mylonas, 1961: 258). The fast would imitate Demeter’s fast as she searched for Persephone, and may have been broken by drinking the *kykeon*, the barley and mint drink Demeter requested when she first broke her fast. The real Mysteries could be held after nightfall, and were divided into three elements, the *dromena* (“that which was enacted”), the *deiknymena* (“sacred objects that were shown”), and the *legomena* (“words that were spoken”)⁴⁷. All three sections have been disputed and various theories put forward regarding what may have happened, but the cult remained secretive enough that speculation may be more dangerous than productive as a basis for the interpretation of the myth. Conversely, relying on the myth too heavily in uncovering the secret cult activity may be simply misleading. One reasonable claim from antiquity comes from Aristotle, who explains that “[i]nitiates do not need to understand anything; rather, they undergo an

⁴⁵ Another heroic figure with powers connected to the Underworld, raising the dead by his medicine until Zeus struck him with lightning (Apollodorus 3.121), which itself becomes an important motif, see chapter four.

⁴⁶ She appears frequently alongside Persephone bearing torches, (*Lexicon Iconographicum* VIII.2: 644-5). She is also called the “torch-bearing and pure one” (*O.H.*40).

⁴⁷ Mylonas, 1961: 261.

experience and a disposition – become, that is, deserving” (Aristotle, frag.15)⁴⁸.

Whatever may have been revealed or said was not intended to work as a secret code or password for a better life or afterlife, but was probably intended to change *how* initiates perceived their experiences.

Plutarch, whose *De Iside et Osiride* exhibits a syncretism between the rites of the Greek Demeter and the Egyptian Isis, offers a remarkable description of death as if it were an initiation into a mystery cult, which reveals something of the experience of this night at Eleusis:

“the soul suffers an experience similar to those who celebrate great initiations... Wanderings astray in the beginning, tiresome walkings in circles, some frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then immediately before the end all the terrible things, panic and shivering and sweat, and amazement. And then some wonderful light⁴⁹ comes to meet you, pure regions and meadows⁵⁰ are there to greet you, with sounds and dances and solemn, sacred words and holy views; and there the initiate, perfect by now, set free and loose from all bondage, walks about, crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people, and he looks down on the uninitiated, unpurified crowd in this world in mud and fog beneath his feet.”

(frag. 168)⁵¹

This night of confusion, fear and relief and joy would have been a striking experience that could clearly stay with initiates⁵², luring some to repeat the experience again, but sufficiently moving to make these rites a popular and important event. Part of the power of this experience was these contrasting sensations, “patterned by antithesis, by moving between the extremes of terror and happiness, darkness and light” (Burkert, 1987: 93).

⁴⁸ From Synesius, *Dio*, 10 (Rice & Stambaugh, 1979, 190).

⁴⁹ There appears to be “actual identification of the divine child [the Brimos or Ploutos] with the light itself” (Richardson, 1974: 28), which bears a curious relationship to the story of Demophoön in the fire.

⁵⁰ These meadows echo the Elysium fields (see chapter four), but this description highlights the association of initiation and the experience of death, in which terror is overcome to achieve peace, and the experience of this is more important than any secret code that might be explained. Rites of passage and initiation could be associated, through death, with the figure of ‘the Dying God’, like Dionysus (Roheim, 1929), see chapter five.

⁵¹ In Burkert, 1987: 91-2.

⁵² The rite of passage of initiation, much like marriage (see chapter three) could be experienced like a death and rebirth (see chapter four), so the Mysteries could unite the mythic narrative of the *Hymn* with an experience of mock-death and rebirth (West, 1983: 144), which would constitute an integration into the goddesses’ blessed favourites, but also prepare them for their own deaths and translation to Persephone’s Grove.

Despite the rumours by later sources⁵³ that the culmination of the ceremony was a ‘sacred marriage’ between the high priest and the high priestess, which may be met with serious scepticism, what remained more important for initiates would have been their own experiences, and the symbolism used to reveal the ‘sacred mysteries’: “It is symbolism that shapes the more durable forms of ritual, not the ‘real’ orgies” (*ibid.*: 106).

The day after these nocturnal rites was spent resting, and perhaps for the secondary rites for the *epoptai*⁵⁴, initiates who returned for a second, albeit not required, secret ritual. These secondary rites were not considered essential for initiates, and most would leave Eleusis and never return, as there was no obligation to return for additional rites. The eighth day was devoted to libations and rites for the dead, and the ninth would bring a return to Athens or the respective homes of initiates.

Sources

An important consideration before advancing in the interpretation and analysis of the myth, *Hymn* and cult, is the role of the sources in revealing the cultic activity. The sources, frequently assimilating the Eleusinian rites with those of other cults, and delivered from the perspective of Christian writers, may make claims that could seriously alter the discussion of Persephone and her cult. Before launching into discussing ‘cultic activities’ that may relate to the myth, it is important to determine whether these could reasonably be identified with the cult, in case attention is unnecessarily diverted by false claims and concerns. Thus, the sources must be briefly considered and evaluated, and potentially false claims identified, so that this discussion can continue without following a mistaken path, and claims that are frequently assumed about the cult, but which are not discussed in this thesis, are clearly identified and discounted with some reason.

⁵³ Tertullian *Ad Nationes*.II & Asterios, *Enkomion to the Saintly Martyrs*, although Clement, *Exhortations to the Greeks* II.18, also mentions a ‘bridal chamber’ into which the initiate claims they have crept.

⁵⁴ While the *mystes* were those ‘who keep silence or close the eyes’, and evidence from other mystery cults suggests that initiates were blinded (possibly part of the confused, darkened wanderings described by Plutarch), the *epoptes* were ‘viewers’, whose second initiation brought them deeper into the secrets of the Mysteries (Clinton, 2003: 50).

There are two, related, problems with uncovering the Eleusinian Mysteries and secrets. The first is that they were intended to be secret, and there were strict injunctions against revealing the central rites and words of the cult. There have been two responses to this historical problem, each with their own problems of application. The secret could have been kept successfully, and we can never know what really happened: “The secret of the Mysteries *was kept a secret* successfully and we shall perhaps never be able to fathom it or unravel it” (Mylonas, 1961: 281). This leaves us with nothing to work with since it assumes that anything we do find cannot have been part of the rites, and is thus inadmissible evidence, and speculation risks being both idle and misleading. This response therefore eliminates any evidence as ‘profane’ before it can engage with it.

On the other hand, others have argued that we can decipher something of the Mysteries, claiming that no great secret like the one offered in the Mysteries could have successfully been kept secret for a thousand years, by hundreds of thousands of initiates. Scholars who seek to uncover the secrets must turn to early Christian sources, who would not have been afraid to violate the cult’s injunction on secrecy. These Christian sources can be problematic, as their accounts only begin in the second century A.D., when Christianity was virulently anti-pagan, although it itself had not yet gained a stable foothold in the Roman empire. Later accounts are likely to be coloured by ever greater anti-pagan rhetoric, and less and less chance of being corrected by a practising initiate, as polytheism was fairly rapidly stamped out at the end of the fourth century⁵⁵. While Mylonas (1961) rejects the Christian authors for a biased and generalising view of the Mysteries, Kerényi cautions against such a move:

“It was a mistake, for example, to reject all Christian sources on the ground that their authors were not initiates (p.287). They could perfectly well have had pagan sources, who spoke to them of particulars without any intention of revealing or betraying secrets... The Christian adversaries of the Mysteries were assuredly careful to invent nothing which any initiated pagan reader would know to be a lie. Their literary technique was to quote from several sources, including, to be sure, some which did not in fact refer to the Eleusinian Mysteries. Some referred to the

⁵⁵ When Theodosius I decreed in 390-391 C.E. that pagan cults could not be celebrated, and many temples were destroyed.

happenings in the Eleusis of Alexandria. Thus confusion arose. The confusion is to be rejected, not the sources.”

(1967: 108)

This is clearly a difficult issue to resolve, and one must proceed with caution to avoid a misstep. Mylonas does recognise that none of the accounts were written by initiates, and that polemics against the Attic Eleusinian rites could have been confused with Egyptian Eleusis. Mylonas gives the most credit to Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-c.211), who actually lived near to one of the ‘Eleusinia’, so actual initiates could disagree if he made false claims⁵⁶. Clement was also well educated, having studied under both Christians and pagans, but his accounts seem to confuse Demeter with Rhea (Mylonas, 1961: 290), and incorporates Orphic elements (Orph.frag.52 Kern) that probably would not have been a part of the Eleusinian rites. In offering the *synthema* or password of the Eleusinians, Mylonas agrees with Nilsson that Clement is confusing the two different Eleusinian rites (1961: 301).

Hippolytus⁵⁷ suggested that the secret revelation in the rites was an ear of cut-wheat (*Philosophoumena*, V.8.39f.), and that part of the secret words spoken was an announcement that the *Brimo* had given birth to the *Brimos*⁵⁸, but Mylonas rejects these as the ear of cut-wheat was clearly visible in so much sculpture in the temple that it could not be part of the utmost secrets, and the *brimos* may belong to an Orphic corpus instead

⁵⁶ “The mysteries of Deo commemorate the aphrodisiac, violent attack by Zeus of his mother Demeter and the wrath of Demeter (I do not know what to call her really, mother or wife) on account of which she is said to have been called *Brimo*; also the supplications of Zeus, the drink of bile, the tearing out of the heart of the victims; and unspeakable obscenities. The same rites are performed in honor of Attis and Kybele and the Korybantes by the Phrygians. They (the Phrygians) have spread the myth how Zeus tore off the testicles of a ram and then brought and flung them into the bosom of Deo, thus paying a sham penalty for his violent attack by pretending that he had mutilated himself. If I go on further to quote the symbols of initiation into the mystery they will, I know, move you to laughter, even though you are in no laughing humour when your rites are being exposed. ‘I ate from a drum; I drank from the cymbal; I carried the sacred kernos; I stole into the bridal chamber’” (Clement, *Exhortations to the Greeks* II.18).

⁵⁷ Writing in Rome in the early third century A.D., the *Refutations of All Heresies*, or *Philosophoumena* were ascribed to Origen (Mylonas, 1961: 305).

⁵⁸ “Hippolytus... shows that he is drawing from Gnostic sources... we know that a Gnostic with his uncompromising syncretism would have no scruple in giving to Eleusis what belonged to Phrygia. Hence Hippolytus, in the same breath, goes on to speak of Attis and the story of his self-mutilation. And Clement, a far higher authority, associates *Brimo*, not with Eleusis, but with the Phrygian story of Attis” (Farnell, 1907: 177).

(Mylonas, 1961: 306), or echoed Attis and Dumuzi⁵⁹. The argument against the cut-wheat assumes that no part of the secret rites were visible outside of the night of initiation, and that the revelation and experience could not have simply been a way of looking at the world differently, so such imagery was meaningless without the rites. Tertullian, writing in 197 A.D., argues that Demeter must have also been raped if her priestess enacts such an event⁶⁰, but this could either confuse the roles the priestess actually takes (*ibid.*: 310), or again be a confusion with the Alexandrian Eleusis. He could also be interpreting their activities from a sceptical Christian perspective, disgusted by the frequent sordid affairs of the Greek and Roman gods.

Asterios, a bishop of Amaseia in Asia Minor in about 400 A.D., is responsible for the claim that a ‘sacred marriage’ was performed in the darkness of the central rites at Eleusis⁶¹, but this could be a confusion with the local Attis-Kybele cult, or the Orphic material Tertullian describes (*ibid.*: 313). Kerényi’s assertion that an initiate could protest such a claim seems unlikely, as Asterios was making these claims after pagan cult was virtually prohibited in the empire, and any defence of them could provoke the disfavour of the local authorities. Mylonas adds that Clement would hardly have called Christ a Hierophant, a clear allusion to the Mysteries, if such a figure could be implicated in a ‘sordid’ rite like a sacred marriage (1961: 313). Asterios did not have Clement’s knowledge of ancient sources or traditions, and his audience would hardly have been particularly discerning about which secret pagan cult was being declaimed (Mylonas, 1961: 311-2). Ultimately, even Kerényi admits that many of the claims made by Christian authors “are the echoes of the Eleusinian nights of Alexandria which Christian authors mistook for scenes from the Attic Mysteries. The Alexandrian celebration took place on

⁵⁹ Burkert notes the Gnostic origins of this claim, and the likelihood of influence from Attis’ mysteries (1972: 251), and that “[i]t is otherwise unattested at Eleusis, and it is even harder to say who the boy may have been” (289).

⁶⁰ Tertullian: “Why is the priestess of Demeter carried off, unless Demeter herself had suffered the same sort of thing?” (*Ad Nationes* II.7).

⁶¹ “The Eleusinian Mysteries, are they not the main part of your religion and the demos of Athens, yea the whole of Greece gathers to celebrate that vanity? Is not there [in the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis] the katabasion and the solemn meeting of the Hierophant and the priestess, each with the other alone; are not the torches then extinguished and the vast crowd believes that its salvation depends on what those two act in the darkness” (*Enkomion to the Saintly Martyrs*).

the 28th of the month of Epiphi, in our July⁶². In Alexandria the rites were not even protected by a rule of secrecy” (Kerényi, 1967: 118).

The assumption that any initiate could speak out against these writers may be qualified by recognising their increasing marginalisation as Christianity rose from a minority cult to the official religion, and as pagan religious practice was banned. Additionally, the very secrecy the Mysteries enforced on its initiates may make protesting a false claim by a Christian writer all the more difficult, in case the initiate were to accidentally reveal the real secrets. The confusion of sources, and the likely bias in Christian authors’ perspectives and descriptions of the Mysteries, make their testimony difficult to accept without a degree of scepticism. However, their testimony cannot be entirely disregarded, as they may in truth have something to offer in revealing the secrets of the Eleusinian rites, albeit not as directly as they might want us to believe. Fortunately for this thesis, this question is not of principal concern, and can be acknowledged without attempting to resolve the dilemma.

Similarities to the Myth.

Some elements of the Eleusinian cult practice can be identified in the *Hymn to Demeter*, and it may be useful to recall these before moving onto the problematic differences. It is necessary to note, however, that these differences may partly derive out of the different functions of the poem and the cult, as “certain dimension of the notions of god may be present in one genre but absent in another. It is therefore important to distinguish ritual and myth as two distinct genres of religious expression” (Mettinger, 2001: 47). The *Hymn* places a special emphasis on the role of women within the divine and mortal action, from Persephone’s initial flower-picking with her companions, to Demeter and Hekate’s search for the abducted girl, the daughters of Keleus and their mother inviting the disguised Demeter into their home, and finally Rhea’s intervention to recall Demeter to Olympus. In contrast, the Eleusinian Mysteries held no restriction on gender for initiates or in their priesthood, and were open to men and women, although the Thesmophoria did restrict access to women only.

⁶² Thus at least a month before the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis.

Demeter and Hekate's search for Persephone is lit by torches, and this image becomes especially significant as Demeter finally learns the truth from Helios, under whom the goddesses would not have needed torches to light their way. The procession from Athens to Eleusis imitates their search by lighting their way with torches, and the goddesses are frequently depicted in vase paintings with torches. Just as Demeter sits in grief, her head bowed or covered, the initiates would cover their heads and sit on a stool covered by a fleece, and refuse to eat until their fast is broken by drinking Demeter's special drink, the *kykeon*. The jokes Iambe (or even Baubo) is supposed to have told to make Demeter laugh may be replicated in the *aischrologia* performed on the bridge during the procession to Eleusis.

The child Demeter intends, but fails, to immortalise may find his parallel in the possible boy (and later sometimes a girl) 'from the hearth' "who belonged to one of the aristocratic and important families of Athens and was elected by vote annually to be initiated at the expense of the State. The boy evidently was assumed to proceed from the hearth of Athens – his title really meaning 'the boy who is initiated into the Mysteries from the hearth of Athens'⁶³ – to represent the hopes of the city. His participation guaranteed the favor of the Goddesses to the city and perhaps their especial favor to the younger generation" (Mylonas, 1961: 236-7). This child, recalling Demophoön and perhaps the divine child 'born' in the secret rites⁶⁴, may represent the state collectively as the fosterling of the goddesses, just as Demophoön was "the model for the initiates [individually], who were adopted as children by the divine nurses" (Richardson, 1974: 24)⁶⁵. The central celebration of the cult may have been for the reunion of the mother and

⁶³ '*pais aph'hestias myêtheis*' (Foley, 1994: 49). One interpretation would associate this child with an earlier stage in Greek religion, as an echo of human sacrifice, which would strongly connect these rites with death: "Rare though Human Sacrifice is, and rarer still its survivals, the mock slaying of a boy in initiation rites is so common as to be almost universal, and in a large number of instances it is the memory of this mock slaying, misunderstood, that survives" (Dowden, 1989: 36).

⁶⁴ A hero, Threptos, which means 'nursling', "received offerings at Eleusis, as we see from a sacrificial calendar" (Parker, 1991: 9), a title later connected with Triptolemus.

⁶⁵ The Chorus of *Oedipus at Colonus* (transl. Watling) considers the flight of Oedipus' daughters, expelled from Athens, and calls them "lost maidens" (l.1058) who may have sought relief: "Where the bright torches shine,/ Where at the breast of Earth's Mother her votaries/ Seek holy mysteries/ Locked in golden silence/ Under the seal of the singers/ Of sweet melody" (l.1048-53), as if seeking a protective mother. The mention

daughter, and perhaps this was re-enacted or recited to inspire initiates with the idea of a new hope in Persephone's return from the Underworld, and the establishment of the very rites that promise initiates a better hope for the afterlife. Curiously, pomegranates may have been especially forbidden to eat during the ritual fast (Bräuninger, 1938: 955; Mylonas, 1961: 258), recalling the seeds Persephone eats while she was in the Underworld.

Differences and Omissions between Cult and Myth

For all the connections between the myth and the archaeological evidence for the cult, it is striking that the *Hymn* "contradicts or is inconsistent with facts about the cult which are attested in historical documentary sources" (Clinton, 2010: 344). It is difficult to identify all the areas in which the myth diverges from cult practice, because of the problems of interpreting what actually took place in the secret rites. Although there are correlations between the events described in the myth and the preparatory rites, it would be more useful to consider which deities and figures are missing in the myth, although they appear in cultic imagery and art. Clinton focuses on the absence of Iacchos and Eubouleus, and the minimal role of Triptolemus in the myth (*ibid.*: 347-52), yet each of these figures can be accounted for in their absence.

The *Hymn* does not mention Iacchos, but his role in the cult is significant in explaining his absence. Clinton identifies Iacchos on an Eleusinian vase painting, as "relatively young, with long locks, a knee-length garment, and high boots; and he carries a torch" (*ibid.*: 350), a young god leading initiates to Eleusis and the goddesses, but that is exactly what he is: "he is no more than a personification of the procession from Athens to Eleusis" (Walton, 1952: 108). This role remains his entire identity and function, and no temple seems to have been established to house him (Farnell, 1907: 147). Iacchos' role seems to have become more important after the Persian invasion, as he was believed to have helped the Greeks win the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. (Herodotus, VIII.65). Nilsson notes that Iacchos may be the result of a confusion with Bacchus, for their similar

of her 'breast' does suggest an association with nursing, as if the 'orphaned' girls could be adopted by Demeter.

names, and points out that the baby Bacchus is represented in a winnowing basket (1940: 62), although this is not an Eleusinian, but a Thesmophorian symbol. Bacchus is also apparently depicted on one vase as “emerging from the ground like the Corn Maiden” (*ibid.*: 63)⁶⁶.

Late vase paintings also depict Bacchus among the other Eleusinian deities, but this could be a result of Hellenistic and Roman syncretism (though the Orphic hymns also associate him with Persephone, *O.H.* 29, 30, 53, 56). The Orphic literature did make more of an association between Dionysus and Persephone (see chapter five), but also envisioned a strange series of mother-son marriages between Rhea-Demeter and Zeus, who finally sires Dionysus by Persephone, his daughter, who is also associated with Semele, albeit as a prefigured consort of Zeus and mother to Dionysus (Guthrie, 1952: 82-3). This seems to be a later, and different cultic myth⁶⁷, although some mutual influence is probable. As the personification of the procession from Athens to Eleusis, Iacchos is not likely to have appeared in Eleusinian cult before Athens’ conquest of the city, and he would have been more closely identified with the Athenians than the Eleusinians. At the end of the procession to Eleusis, on the fifth day of the festival, he was “received at the court in a joyful and playful way and his mission and contribution were brought to an end” (Mylonas, 1961: 256-7). Clearly, if he had been a part of the secret rites, and those secrets were never divulged, he may have had a more prominent role in the cult itself, but this must remain speculation, as is any venture into what ‘could have been’ part of the secret rites.

The next major, absent figure is Eubouleus, an ambiguous figure who is hard to identify (see chapter five)⁶⁸, even in art. Set in parallel with Iacchos on the same vase, Clinton identifies Eubouleus as “a young male with longish hair (here in flowing locks), wearing a knee-length tunic and carrying a torch” (2010: 348), who may carry “torches to light the

⁶⁶ Tillyard, 1923: no. 163 (Plate 26), p97.

⁶⁷ The Orphic conflation of these gods, and duplication of mothers in Persephone and Semele appears in the *Rhapsodic Theogony*, which was probably in circulation around 100 B.C. (West, 1983: 229).

⁶⁸ Eubouleus is a more complex figure to untangle (see chapter five) than Eumolpos, who at least has a conflict with the Athenian Erechtheus (Hyg. *Fabulae* 46) to place him in Eleusis against Athens, but which also could have been left out in an attempt to ignore Athens entirely.

way up from the underworld” (351) for Persephone⁶⁹. Kerényi identifies the mysterious Eubouleus with Zeus, marking an epithet he received elsewhere, as “Zeus Eubouleus, the ‘well-counselled Zeus’” (1967: 170), though the name is used as an epithet for Dionysus in the Orphic hymns (Morand, 1997: 172). Kerényi goes on to suggest that Eubouleus is the manifestation of the very “*boule* – a plan and decision” (*ibid.*: 170) by which Zeus arranged Persephone’s marriage to Hades. Perhaps Eubouleus does not appear, because he is not connected to the Eleusinian rites, but with the Thesmophoria: “when Demeter’s daughter sank into the earth, the pigs of the swineherd Eubouleus were swallowed up as well. So Demeter on her search for her daughter instituted the Thesmophoria” (Burkert, 1985: 243). This ambiguity is always possible in pre-historical myth, and these two festivals were especially close, even in later periods: “...some of the ritual references of the Homeric Hymn apply to the Thesmophoria as well as, or even better than, to the Mysteries proper, which may suggest that the two festivals were not always so sharply differentiated as in classical times” (Walton, 1952: 111n20). This association with Demeter may have led to an identification with the Eleusinian Mysteries, so perhaps his absence from the *Hymn* is understandable⁷⁰.

The last significant figure who does not retain his cultic importance in the *Hymn* is Triptolemus⁷¹. In the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, Triptolemus is one of the Eleusinian leaders, “the doom-dealing kings” (73), to whom Demeter taught “the way to perform her rites” (75). He does not hold special place over the others, and is not given special tasks or duties. The real origin of Triptolemus is difficult to determine, but his rise to

⁶⁹ Notably, *O.H.*41 describes Eubouleus, the son of Dysaules, as Demeter’s guide to the Underworld to find her daughter.

⁷⁰ His role as guide to the Underworld in *O.H.*41, related to the pigs thrown into the caverns during the Thesmophoria, may have connected him to Iacchus, the initiate’s guide from Athens to Eleusis, so a conflation with the Eleusinian rites would certainly have been possible, at least once Athens incorporated the Mysteries and established the procession in which Iacchus appears.

⁷¹ Nilsson explains his name as meaning either ‘thrice warring’ or ‘thrice plowing’ (1940: 56), the latter of which encourages his association with Demeter and her cereal fields, especially in light of her dalliance with Iasion in the thrice-ploughed field (*Odyssey*. V.125; Hesiod’s *Theogony* 969). If both meanings were appropriate, Nilsson notes how significant it is that Triptolemus is taken by his worshippers to be primarily a bringer of agriculture, and therefore civilisation. Shifting away from the Homeric warring hero, possibly still just visible in this new hero’s name, Triptolemus takes on a new heroic position as a hero of peace, in which the crops can grow and farmers can reasonably expect to live to harvest and benefit from their labours, more like a Hesiodic hero: “Hesiod has abandoned the ideal of warring Homeric knights and embraced a new, quite contrasted ideal of peace and justice created by agriculture” (Nilsson, 1940: 57).

prominence, indicated by his beginning to appear “on black-figure vases in the late sixth century B.C” (Nilsson, 1940: 56; Walton, 1952: 112)⁷², suggests that his significance increased as Athens’ control over Eleusis increased, some time earlier than Walton’s timeline of Athenian conquest ‘some time before 460’ (1952: 112). Farnell supports this early date, noting that “[w]e may take it then that by 600 B.C. the mysteries admitted other Hellenes, and it is not rash to suppose that Eleusis by this time was part of the Athenian community” (Farnell, 1907: 154). He becomes an important figure for Athens in their relationship with Eleusis, as it is under the guise of his divine mission to teach agriculture (and thus civilisation) to the world that allowed the Athenians to “[invite] all Greeks to bring tithes to the Eleusinian goddesses according to old custom and an oracle from Delphi” (Nilsson, 1940: 56-7), in a decree in 418B.C.. Athens becomes “the cradle of civilisation” (*ibid.*: 56) under Triptolemus:

“Now, first of all, that which was the first necessity of man’s nature was provided by our city; for even though the story 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 Korê, 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, which have enabled us to rise above the life of the beasts, and the holy rite which inspires in those who partake of it sweeter hopes 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.”

(Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 28)

Isocrates was deliberately exaggerating Athens’ role in the mythical tale of Demeter’s two gifts to humanity, but this was not an isolated or unusual claim. Athens’ absorption of the Eleusinian cult meant a transfer, as far as the Athenians were concerned, of Eleusis’ primary position in Demeter’s favour to themselves.

⁷² Parker notes that by the fifth century B.C, “Triptolemus was already the nursling” in Demeter’s care (1991: 16n34), though perhaps this identification followed his incorporation into the Eleusinian tradition, where he had been one of the leaders Demeter blesses, alongside Eumolpos (153-4).

The late date of Triptolemus' appearance in vase painting, and fairly brief prominence⁷³, suggests a recent, probably political significance, so "the role of Triptolemos [within an Attic variant of the myth] could have been developed in the mid-sixth century, after the probable date of the composition of the *Hymn*" (Foley, 1994: 100). This is not to argue that Triptolemus did not have a role in Eleusis or in the mythical discovery of agriculture before the mid- to late-sixth century, but he seems to have been irrelevant for the *Hymn*'s version of the myth⁷⁴, which focussed on the establishment of the Mysteries and not the discovery of agriculture: "...there is no doubt that the myth of Triptolemos leads us back to early archaic times, preceding the existence of the Homeric hymn... [yet] Even at Eleusis [Demeter] bestowed the grain through Triptolemos *outside* the Great Mysteries (in respect of both place and time)" (Kerényi, 1967: 128-9). Triptolemus' role in teaching the world agriculture under Demeter's command could easily follow the story told in the myth, but the emphasis is on the Mysteries, so the hymn ends with extolling the blessings of initiates, and "[n]othing is said in the Hymn of the *discovery* of cereal agriculture, which was so important a part of Athenian cultural propaganda" (Walton, 1952: 112n23)⁷⁵.

Conclusion

The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* has received a significant amount of attention by scholars, partly for its own literary merit, and for its relation to the cult of Eleusis and what it may reveal of the secrets of the Mysteries. Richardson identified the five main areas of interpretation the *Hymn* has undergone: "the language and style of the *Hymn* and its place in the development of early hexameter poetry"; the relationship between the

⁷³ Nilsson notes that the last major monument of art to depict Triptolemus on his mission was sculpted "about 440 B.C. In [sic] later monuments Triptolemos often appears, but only as a member of the assembly of Eleusinian deities. He is no longer the central figure" (1940: 60).

⁷⁴ His presence, yet marginalisation, reveals that "the poet is aware of the form of the story in which agriculture was first given to men after Kore's rape and return, but only alludes to this obliquely" (Richardson, 2011: 56). This oblique reference means that the focus remains on the goddesses, and Demeter's (frustrated) encounter with Demophoön, rather than on the aspect of her teaching her rites.

⁷⁵ "The natural interpretation of ll.480-482 in the Homeric hymn suggests that by the time of its composition they had already been thrown open to the whole of Hellas; for we cannot suppose that the poet was composing the hymn for the benefit merely of a narrow clique of Eleusinian families, and we must read these words as an appeal to the Hellenic world to come and be initiated" (Farnell, 1907: 154). This would encourage the interpretation of the *Hymn* being composed after the union with Athens, rather than before it, as it is Athens who stresses the pan-Hellenic gift of Demeter.

poem and the various cults of the goddesses, especially at Eleusis; the definition of “the roles of the two goddess in the Olympian order of the world”; the gender conflict between the gods, and (as divine parallels to humanity) as an echo of Athenian marriage customs; and the structure of the poem itself, as a coherent unit (2011: 48). The hymn and cult at Eleusis were certainly linked, and each would have influenced or guided the interpretation of the other, but the exact nature of that relationship remains difficult to define. The poem describes events paralleling stages in the Lesser Mysteries, and might hint at the secret rites of the Greater Mysteries, or offer the basis of a ritual search for the daughter, and her ecstatic reunion with her mother, but these remain speculative claims. Fortunately for this project, the details are not necessary to establish, and the hymn’s relationship to the cult is sufficient to proceed to the next stages of analysis, linking the poem to a cult which was professed to offer a better hope for the dead in the Underworld.

Performed before members of ancient Greek communities of various city states, but with especial significance to Athens and Eleusis, this poem may have preceded a longer epic poem as a kind of prayer to the gods for assistance in the longer recitation (Parker, 1991: 1; Faulkner, 2011: 17-19)⁷⁶. The *Hymn to Demeter* is long enough that it may have been an independent unit in itself, while still maintaining the features of a *proemion*, but its relationship with the Homeric epics appears close (Richardson, 2011: 49). Gaining the authority of the immortal poet, this poem, possibly “originally composed for performance at an Eleusinian festival” (*ibid.*: 49), became intimately associated with the myth (and cults) of Persephone and her mother, although it appears to have been shaped by literary, rather than theological, concerns⁷⁷.

The *Hymn* is about as close to an authoritative version of their myth as we have today, although it had to compete in antiquity with rival Orphic literature, and Alexandrian

⁷⁶ The *Hymn* does end with an indication that it will continue to another poem (“...I will call to mind both you [the goddesses] and another song” 495), but this may be a vestigial feature, adhering to tradition rather than a real indication of a subsequent narrative.

⁷⁷ Both of these concerns, however, could have foregrounded the emotional engagement with the goddesses, such that the poet could transfer the religious narrative into his text without losing the core meaning (Parker, 1991: 13), even if he moderated characters and events to avoid revealing cultic secrets and to make the narrative compelling.

versions (Richardson, 1974: 69-75). The variants and cultic secrets do offer a complex picture of the myth, but the basic structure contained in the *Hymn* is the central concern: the experience of loss endured by mother and daughter, and the emotional response to this crisis. This loss and despair mirror the experiences of the initiate, the prospective bride and her mother, and the ordinary person confronted by death, and the *Hymn* (coupled with the Mysteries) promises some relief to follow these crises, an experience of joy and light to follow the darkness (Plutarch frag.168). Having here considered the poem's relationship to the cult at Eleusis, and the related problems of interpretation, the following chapters will consider its value as a "paradigm for human marriage" (*ibid.*: 48), and go on to consider the secondary level of meaning evident in the poem: the confrontation with and reality of death. From the basis of this textual interpretation, considering what meaning Persephone offered to her believers, or the poet's audience, in marriage and death, the analysis will go on to examine the possible antecedents for Persephone's myth that may have shaped it into its present form.

Chapter Two – Hermeneutics – Marriage

Introduction

This chapter will constitute the first half of the sociological hermeneutical investigation into Persephone and her myth. A sociological hermeneutic approach aims to investigate a text within the social and political context out of which it arose, to minimise anachronistic interpretation (Willis & Jost, 2007: 104). The myth describes a marriage (albeit an enforced one)⁷⁸, and the (eventual) reassertion of cosmic order, therefore it operates on two symbolic levels. The ‘mortal’ narrative, which describes Persephone’s abduction and her mother’s grief, will be analysed against Athenian marriage customs, and the beliefs which infused the relationships of fathers and mothers with their daughters. This analysis will verify whether Persephone offered her initiates an important divine precedent for their own experiences, and thus could operate as a reassuring figure amid the uncertainties of marriage and familial relationships. The ‘Theogonic’ narrative, which encompasses the goddess’ revolt against an unjust, divisive patriarchal power until a compromise can be achieved, offers a unique feminine perspective on the ordering of the universe, and assures its audience of Demeter’s power, Zeus’ adaptability and amenability, and the possibility of a better lot in the Land of the Dead, ruled by a benevolent queen.

Ancient Greek Marriage

Interpretations of the myth of Persephone’s abduction, and her mother’s grief, frequently focus on the cosmic level of the action, which sees the establishment of order and a cycle of seasonal change to parallel Persephone’s time in the Underworld or with her mother⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ A distinction between modern understandings and conceptualisation of rape, and the ancient understanding, needs to be made. A modern definition of rape understands it to be forcible and unwanted sexual assault, with severe psychological and physical consequences, and an infringement of a person’s rights and bodily integrity (Moses, 1993). The ancient world was not so nuanced or sensitive in its understanding, and frequently used the term interchangeably with ‘abduction’, to mark not just sexual violation, but also the appropriation of a woman to be a wife, against either her will, or that of her male guardians and kin, thereby distancing the woman’s autonomy and self-determination from the act and violation (Deacy, 1997). The significance of a god’s rape of a maiden could vary, as it generally marked divine favour (Lefkowitz, 2007), but also raised problems on the mortal plane between the woman and her guardians. Ancient ‘rape’ could also vary, according to its loose definition, between a single encounter (welcome or otherwise), like Zeus’ or Apollo’s many liaisons, or a formal process of gaining a wife, just as no additional ceremony is described to marry Persephone to Hades after he abducts her.

⁷⁹ Frazer, Part V, Vol.I, 1912: 131f; Kirk, 1974: 250-3; duBois, 1988: 52-4; Thury & Devinney, 2009: 387.

Although the ordering of the universe is the main focus of the myth, Persephone's story does touch on some important(ly)⁸⁰ human experiences, and one reason for its enduring popularity could very well have been this human aspect. The goddesses in the *Hymn* undergo a separation forced upon them by a father figure, the head of their household and community, and Persephone is married to a man she did not choose. This separation, enforced marriage, and the terrors for a girl marrying into a strange household, would have a particular resonance with the original audience. The original audiences of the *Hymn* would probably sympathise with the goddesses through shared experience and thus find a unique bond with the divinities.

Myth is frequently interpreted as an aetiology for social practice (Kirk, 1974: 53f.), but it is important to note that the *Hymn* does not explain why the institution of marriage is established, nor does it claim to be the first marriage (indeed, Metaneira is described as Keleus' wife, and Demeter, in disguise, prays for good marriages for their daughters), so the myth is not strictly acting as an aetiology. The myth is rather being coloured by social practice and the concerns arising from it. However, the myth and social practice may also have a reciprocal influence, and Persephone might have become a figure of reassurance to prospective brides, reflecting them⁸¹ but simultaneously allaying fears they may have had about their marriage.

To understand what meaning the *Hymn*'s original audience may have found in the myth of Demeter and her daughter, it is necessary to examine the cultural practices of the day, and what we know of contemporary values and attitudes towards marriage, death and the possibility of immortality. The primary event of the myth is Persephone's abduction, and this may hold meaning for young Athenian women⁸² expecting to be married:

⁸⁰ These experiences are both important human experiences, and important *because* they are human experiences.

⁸¹ Persephone also sympathetically suffers like them, so she does not appear as an unrealistic reflection.

⁸² Athenian women will be the centre of this focus, as Eleusis seems to have fallen under Athens' control by the time the *Hymn* was composed, and their long relationship, especially through the cult of Eleusis, means that their cultural practice and beliefs were probably quite closely related, especially in contrast to some of the other Greek city states, like Sparta, whose experiences may not be reflected in the *Hymn*.

“At one level, the Persephone of the myth is just Kore, ‘Maiden’ or ‘Daughter’: any maiden or daughter, that is to say, snatched away from her mother in marriage. The ugly complicity of the father, who arranges the marriage, might therefore appear bitterly appropriate.”

(Parker, 1991: 6-7).

Classical Athens attempted to restrict the movement and freedom of its women, although these attempts could only ever be limited, because necessity would always force some women to act on their own behalf⁸³. The ideal situation for an Athenian woman, as it appears from elite literature⁸⁴ and surviving laws, was to be obedient to her father, marry advantageously, and provide heirs for her husband, so that his family line might continue (Cox, 2011: 332-3). The Athenian woman shared her husband’s duty towards the state, but while he had to serve in the military and be an active voice in the democratic system, the woman’s duty was to marry and bear children⁸⁵, “the primary goals of every female citizen. The death of a young girl often elicited lamentations specifically over her failure to fulfil her intended role as a wife” (Pomeroy, 1975: 62).

Athenian women did not have the freedom of their Spartan contemporaries, and were “perpetually under the guardianship of a man, usually the father or, if he were dead, the male next-of-kin. Upon marriage a woman passed into the guardianship of her husband in most matters, with the important limitation that her father, or whoever else had given her

⁸³ “A woman outside her house with no business to be so was an object of male concern, but a woman accompanied by other women, slaves, or otherwise and carrying objects for ritual use not only may have escaped censure but may have even earned praise. The singing of lament at gravesides would have provided a meeting place for related women otherwise isolated in their respective *oikoi* and would have enabled them not only to become the focus of attention by lamenting but also to catch up on family news and to glean other information by observing comings and goings from the vantage point of the tomb, which was so helpfully placed in most conspicuous locations [roadsides, and outside city gates and walls]” (Stears, 2008: 150). These graveside gatherings mean that death was an important link for women separated by marriages.

⁸⁴ Elite literature encompasses most of what has survived from the ancient world: the writings of aristocrats and philosophers, generally wealthy and male members of the dominant society. This literature does not (easily) reveal the beliefs or attitudes of those groups who did not fit into this category, and might not have shared its beliefs, such as the poor, women, and the average people among whom the rules and ideals of womanhood (and society generally) would have been expressed and enacted just as much as among the elite who had the opportunity to write and be recorded for posterity.

⁸⁵ On the other hand, even if mortal women were required to marry and have children, the same was not quite true for the gods: “[Goddesses] mature to an age appropriate to their function (they may choose to remain virgins) and do not need marriage to procreate – as Demeter herself did not” (Foley, 1994: 109). Thus cultural system did not necessarily extend to the gods, but this means that its inclusion and emphasis in the Demeter-Persephone myth is all the more significant.

in marriage, retained the right to dissolve the marriage” (*ibid.*: 62). This guardianship ostensibly protected women from abuse, as they were considered minors by the state, and they could do little to protect themselves legally or physically. The father retained ultimate control over the daughter, however, with the right to dissolve the marriage if he chose, just as Zeus can offer a compromise in Persephone’s marriage to Hades, although he does not dissolve the marriage entirely. Among the Athenians, “[d]ivorce itself was an easy procedure: the husband merely dismissed his wife, while the woman, if initiating the divorce, had to present herself to the archon” (Cox, 2011: 232), but neither Persephone, nor even Demeter, can end the marriage and reverse their separation. They must turn to Zeus to overturn *his* agreement with Hades.

Marriages and betrothals, intended to create alliances between families, and frequently maintain a family’s wealth and resources, were too important to be organised by the girl herself, so although “[f]emales play a major part in these aspects of marriage ritual... their presence was not required for the betrothal (*engye*) of the bride and groom. Indeed, the bride herself did not have to be at this ceremony, which took the form of a legally binding agreement between her present legal guardian, her father if alive, and her future husband, who would become her new legal guardian” (Stears, 2008: 145). This system placed the arrangement of the girl’s marriage and future entirely in the hands of others, so her feelings on the matter could be entirely ignored, though it may be suggested that some fathers were likely to at least ask their daughter about their preferences. Marriages were part of the woman’s political duty for the state, and love was not a motivating factor: “Marriage arrangements were made by men on the basis of economic and political considerations, and girls were always obliged to marry the men their male relatives selected for them” (Pomeroy, 1975: 62-3).

Zeus agrees to allow Hades to marry his daughter, even though Persephone is related to her husband through both her mother and father. This incestuous union is not unusual for the gods, but even at Athens, many marriages were kept within the family to maintain the property:

“there were many marriages between first cousins or other relatives, who presumably would have seen each other at such family ceremonies as funerals. Marriage to relatives was attractive especially among the wealthier families in democratic Athens, when inroads were constantly made against the fortunes of the wealthy: such marriages provided a way of consolidating the resources of the family, facilitated agreement between parties who knew and trusted each other, [and] gave relatives preferential access to brides”

(*ibid.*: 62-3).

The importance of maintaining the family’s property by marrying potential heirs to each other can be seen in the *Hymn* as well, where Zeus deliberately tries to appease his brother by agreeing to the marriage, rather than risk Hades’ ire, a concern more prominent in other variants, such as Claudian’s *De Raptu Proserpina* (l.32). Zeus sides with his brother over his sister in the contest for Persephone, until Demeter can wreak real havoc to force her point.

The offspring to whom the property would pass were the ultimate goal of marriage, so a bride had to be fertile⁸⁶, and to ensure this, “[b]efore the groom joined her on their wedding day, the bride ate a fruit with many seeds, symbolizing fertility” (Pomeroy, 1975: 63). The association between fruit and fertility was frequently made in the ancient world (Bräuninger, 1938: 955), so it is interesting that Persephone eats a few seeds of the pomegranate during her stay in the Underworld. Known for its seeds, and its blood-red juice, the pomegranate worked conveniently to symbolise sexual fertility (Foley, 1994: 108) but also death (Arthur, 1994: 237), as blood flows to mark the beginning of a woman’s ability to bear children, or to mark the end of life from a fatal wound. This emphasis on childbearing marks the biggest contradiction with Persephone’s story as a ‘mythic precedent’ for marriage in Athens and Eleusis, because Persephone bears no child to Hades, by most accounts. The Orphic Hymns describe Dionysus as Persephone’s son by her father Zeus (*O.H.*29)⁸⁷, but their syncretisation of gods, and emphasis on

⁸⁶ This goal extended to the community as well, so a woman’s duty was to produce the next generation, but this made the analogy between the field and her body even closer, “a field to be ploughed by her legitimate husband. Her body, as a field for ploughing, is to produce a crop of children. This crop is ideologically equivalent to the grain that is the city’s most important agricultural product during the predemocratic age” (duBois, 1991: 28).

⁸⁷ Other Orphic material identifies her as the mother of the Furies (*O.H.*29; Orphic frags. 58, 153, 195, and 303, in West, 1983).

Dionysus as the conqueror of death, do not make their version of the myth useful in understanding the Homeric *Hymn* and Eleusinian conception of Persephone.

Little is said directly about Hades' love-life, except for his passion for his wife, but no child is ever indisputably mentioned⁸⁸, as it seems to be assumed that no life could be born in the darkness of the Underworld, the realm of death. One possible candidate, appearing in numerous vase paintings, is Ploutos, as he is depicted being lifted by a goddess of the earth, possibly Persephone or Gaia, to Demeter, along with a cornucopia, identifying the youth as the child of plenty and prosperity (Kerényi, 1967: 165). This child may correspond to the Brimos whom Hippolytus refers to in his *Philosophoumena*, the 'mighty one' born to the mighty, unnamed, goddess⁸⁹. These images may support Hippolytus' claim, but as he otherwise seems to confuse the beliefs of the Orphics with those of the Eleusinian mysteries (*ibid.*: 306-9), and no other mention is made of Persephone's child in surviving myth, and the fact that Ploutos is otherwise identified as Demeter's son by Iasion⁹⁰, it seems unlikely that Persephone bears Hades a child. Of course, she does not need to, as Hades does not require an heir, just as in numerous myths Zeus deliberately avoids producing a proper heir that could rival his power⁹¹.

This lack of a child and heir marks an important distinction between the myth and (ideal) Athenian lived reality, as the child would operate as the symbol of Persephone's

⁸⁸ "Nor does she in any extant version of the abduction myth (including the *Hymn*) explicitly fulfil the normal purpose of Greek marriage by producing a child with Hades (who does not, as eternal Lord of the Dead, need an offspring in any case)" (Foley, 1994: 110-111).

⁸⁹ "In the course of the night, the hierophant at Eleusis in the midst of a brilliant fire celebrating the Great and Unspoken Mysteries, cries and shouts aloud saying, 'Holy Brimo has borne a sacred child Brimos,' that is, the mighty gave birth to the mighty one" (*Philosophoumena* V.8.39). Both mother and child, in this description, remain unnamed (Richardson, 1974: 27). The ambiguity of this child suggests "two separate notions, of the divine child of the goddess herself, and the child who is born of the Earth and entrusted to the care of the goddess" (*ibid.*), just as Gaia entrusts Erechthonius (the Eleusinian Eumolpus' rival) to Athena.

⁹⁰ Even this potential brother for Persephone, perhaps more apt to be associated with the son-consorts of the typical Dying-Rising God schema, is considered to be a metaphor rather than a literal child, even among the gods who are generally symbols more than they are actual characters: "To Iasion and Demeter, according to the story the myths relate, was born Ploutos (Wealth), but the reference is, as a matter of fact, to the wealth of the grain, which was presented to Iasion because of Demeter's association with him at the time of the wedding of Harmonia [Iasion's sister in this account]" (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* V.49.4).

⁹¹ The most famous is his avoidance of Thetis, for fear of the prophecy that her son will excel his father (Apollodorus 3.168), and his swallowing of Metis lest she bear him a powerful rival (Apollodorus 1.20).

definitive translocation into the Underworld, her husband's 'household': "[a]t Athens what marked a woman's definitive passage into the husband's family was not the marriage but the birth of the first child. Only when she gave her husband a child, did a woman enter irreversibly into the new *oikos*" (Dowden, 1989: 44). Although Persephone can share the suffering of mortals through her abduction and enforced separation from her mother, she does not (possibly even cannot) bear a child like them, and therefore her marriage never matches the Athenian girl's experience entirely⁹².

Athenian marriage customs saw a significant age difference between bride and groom, just as Hades comes from an earlier generation than Persephone. This means that "the childbearing wife was really a child herself" (Pomeroy, 1975: 74), even in the eyes of the law, which never recognised a woman as coming of age, while her husband became recognised as a man at eighteen. This was not a marriage between equals, but a "connubial relationship... based on utility, in contrast to the equitable relationships between men which are the basis of social and political organisation. Man and wife need each other, Aristotle admitted, but their relationship was as a benefactor to beneficiary" (*ibid.*: 74).

Considering that Hades does not need an heir to follow him, and thus does not require this 'utility' of marriage his Athenian counterparts did, it is significant that the motivation for his abduction of the maiden is love or desire. She is not raped and abandoned, and she is not forced into a marriage of convenience to produce an heir. Her husband wants her for herself. Although she does not reciprocate his feelings, she is not treated like a Europa or a Danae, and is honoured by her infernal spouse more than the king of the gods honours his lovers. For all the horror of her abduction, and the terror of the translation to a new realm far from all she knew, perhaps Persephone's marriage suggested a very guarded promise of happiness in marriage for Athenian maidens.

⁹² Children played an important role in Mystery cults, such as the Eleusinian 'child from the hearth' (*IG* 6.C) and the *Hymn*'s Demophoön (219f.), and the initiates could hope to be adopted by the goddesses (see chapter three), but as queen in the land of the dead, Persephone can have no children (the vengeful, monstrous Furies are hardly ordinary offspring), suffering the sterility of death.

Separation: Mortal & Divine

Persephone's abduction mimics the assaults experienced by other divine and mortal maidens. She is out in the open, exposed to the eye of strange and possibly threatening men⁹³. The very reason for the Athenian's cloistering of their women is revealed in the other myths of rape and assault, as the maidens are far from the aid of their male protectors, often in an equally virginal space, a meadow or spring as fruitful and fertile as the girls themselves, but untouched by the yoke or axe (Ovid *Metamorphoses* III.154f.; Parry, 1964: 275f.). These stories could operate as a warning to young women to stay within their guardians' protective domains, but even within these spaces, those who could afford it would keep men and women separate: "While men spent most of their day in public areas such as the marketplace and the gymnasium, respectable women remained at home" (Pomeroy, 1975: 79). Not everyone could afford to keep their women secluded, as "poor women, lacking slaves, could not be kept in seclusion, and in fact women found pleasure in the company of other women" (*ibid.*: 79-80).

Such separation would affect the wealthier women more than it affected the poor, but this cultural 'ideal' would have crossed economic boundaries, and the tendency may have been towards secluding women when it was possible. This would severely limit the opportunities for women to interact, such that once a daughter was married into another household, especially if it was a distant one, a mother and daughter would experience something like the separation of Demeter and Persephone⁹⁴. This may have contributed to the especial popularity of the cults of Demeter, among women in particular, as her rites offered an opportunity for women to meet again, and although "[w]omen of all economic classes went out for festivals and funerals" (Pomeroy, 1975: 80), Demeter's often exclusively-female rites (Larson, 2007: 78-85) could offer a unique space for women to meet without the omnipresent vigilance of their male guardians.

⁹³ "Free women were usually secluded so that they could not be seen by men who were not close relatives" (Pomeroy, 1975:81).

⁹⁴ This form of separation distinguishes the divine from the mortal sphere, but "In the *Hymn* Zeus attempts to impose on Persephone a form of marriage new to Olympus, the divine equivalent of a mortal institution familiar in Homer: in modern terms we would categorize it as patriarchal and virilocal exogamy (a marriage between members of two different social groups arranged by the father of the bride in which the bride resides with her husband)" (Foley, 1994: 105).

Persephone's separation from her mother because of her marriage is unique among the Olympians, but it does bring the goddesses' experiences closer to those of their worshippers. No other goddess experiences a similar separation, and perhaps these goddesses therefore offered a uniquely relatable precedent for the ancient Greeks to turn to for guidance in their own situations. Other Olympian goddesses may marry without being relocated to their husband's household and separated from their families, because the Olympians all live on patrilocal Olympus, and can travel freely, unlike their frequently secluded Athenian counterparts⁹⁵. The gods' tendency towards incestuous marriages meant a goddess could remain with her family after her marriage, and by this measure, Persephone should be considered to have an (extremely) endogamous marriage, as she marries her uncle. Hades, however, does not live on Olympus, and Persephone is relocated beyond the reach of most of the gods. The Underworld is only accessible to a very few gods, such as the *psychopompos* Hermes. Even Zeus has to send another god to deal with his infernal brother.

Demeter cannot join her daughter, hence her grief, so functionally the marriage is no longer endogamous, and "Persephone is subjected to an extreme form of virilocal exogamy in which she is permanently denied access to her parents... this marriage, in which the bride undergoes a symbolic death in the transition from one household to another, brings Persephone closer to human experience" (Foley, 1994: 107). Her divine aunts, half-sisters and cousins can remain on Olympus, or, like Thetis, travel from their oceanic homes to the seat of the gods, but Persephone is trapped in the Underworld, until her mother forces Zeus to make a most exceptional compromise⁹⁶. This unique marriage is the only equivalent to the experiences of mortal girls undergoing their own marriage

⁹⁵ "In contrast to mortal marriage, neither divine marriages nor rapes required the same kind of change of residence to which the mortal bride was often subject; nor did they require the loss of independence on the part of the female Olympian, who continued to exercise her own prerogatives in the sphere allotted to her" (Foley, 1994: 106). Demeter's own liaison with Zeus seems to have required little of her, and Hera's marriage simply redoubles her position on Olympus.

⁹⁶ "Unlike the mortal daughter, Persephone will spend more time with her natal family than with her spouse (in this her marriage more closely resembles the status quo for goddesses on Olympus, although her time is distributed more systematically)" (Foley, 1994: 110-111). This difference from mortal marriage would be another challenge to interpreting the poem as an aetiology for the institution of marriage.

rites, and therefore it takes on a special meaning as a means of dealing with those experiences:

“The *Hymn* thus takes apart the benign cultural institution we see functioning apparently without tension on earth and shows the price paid by mother and daughter in accepting for the first time a marriage that requires a degree of separation and subordination to the male unfamiliar in the divine world.”
(*ibid.*: 109)

Persephone’s abduction, although it mimics so many other rapes, abductions and marriages in Greek myth, actually constitutes a new arrangement, which is closer to the mortal practice. The Athenians and Eleusinians could empathise with Demeter and Persephone in this moment of crisis much more than they could with Danae or Europa or Daphne, and perhaps develop this unique area of common ground into a particularly nuanced narrative.

Marriage as Abduction

Interpreting the myth of Persephone according to Athenian cultural practices, and especially trying to link the experiences of the goddess with those of her Athenian worshippers, may risk being little more than speculation, but Greek art and poetry did link the bride’s experiences with Persephone’s abduction (Jenkyns, 1983: 137f.). The rite itself could enact a feigned resistance to the marriage:

“...the doorkeeper who ‘roars at the women trying to rescue the bride’ (Pollux *Onomastikon* 3.42), the burning of the axle of the wagon that carries the bride to her house in Boeotia, etc. The lifting of the bride into the wedding chariot or wagon and the grasping of her wrist by the groom (a scene that also appears in abduction scenes) also introduce a mock-abduction motif into the wedding ceremony. Wedding songs include the bride’s resistance to marriage and her reluctance to lose her virginity or to leave her mother.”
(Foley, 1994: 81n8)

The transfer of the bride to her new home “was dramatized by a ritual of separation” (Hague, 1988: 34), accompanied by the mother’s ‘grieving’ and the groom’s companions calling for the bride’s abduction (*ibid.*). Persephone’s companion nymphs in the *Hymn*

flee when Hades appears, but in Claudian's *De Raptu*, Athene and Artemis try to save their half-sister (II.18-35), echoing the resistance of the bride's companions in the Athenian custom. Just as "[m]arriage... is represented as a violent wrenching from a previous manner of existence" (Deacy, 1997: 45), Persephone's abduction, like those of other virginal maidens in myth, could come to symbolise the experience of daughters taken from their homes, unwillingly. Persephone's abduction became a recurring feature in Attic representations of marriage, alongside the marriage of Thetis and Peleus⁹⁷. This resistance, even if usually feigned, would suggest a cultural interpretation of marriage as a 'rape' or 'abduction', even if in practice it was not, and had not been in historical memory.

Although it is tempting to read Persephone's story as an almost identical reflection of marriage customs in ancient Attica, her experiences relevant to the comparison with the Athenian maiden has to be limited to the psychological level, and the difficulty of the separation of mother and daughter. Unlike the virgins in ancient Attica, Persephone is physically (actually, not just ritually) abducted. Such an abduction may have existed as a ritual act in some regions of the Mediterranean, and possibly in the earliest history of the Greeks, but does not seem to have been continued, if it had existed, into the time of the *Hymn*'s composition and the Classical age⁹⁸. Similar ritual abductions may have existed in ancient Crete (Davidson, 2008: 300-15), and the *Hymn* alludes to Crete⁹⁹, but besides this distant connection to abduction rituals, the experience of most of the Athenians and Eleusinians encountering the myth would not entail forceful kidnapping.

If there had originally been abductions which were ritualised into the marriage ceremony, this transformation would have been to mitigate the divisive effect of these abductions: "a prearranged betrothal marriage generally reinforces familial and community structures,

⁹⁷ Another forced marriage as Thetis does not want to marry the mortal Peleus, but must obey Zeus' commands.

⁹⁸ "Marriage by abduction survived as a practice in Sparta, but not, for example, in historical Athens" (Foley, 1994: 107n85).

⁹⁹ Demeter lies to the daughters of Keleus, saying she comes from Crete. Her 'Cretan lie' here could simply be a false tale, but Keller suggests this adds to the theory that Demeter's worship originated in Crete (1988: 28f.).

while bridal theft can be more socially divisive in that it subverts the authority of those men who in a patriarchal society are responsible for marriage” (Faraone, 2001: 79). The *Hymn*, like Athenian marriage custom, firmly sets Hades’ abduction within Zeus’ will, and even Helios will encourage Demeter to accept the new arrangement, ensuring that no conflict breaks out between the male gods, but they all seem to underestimate the response of Persephone’s mother.

The abduction of Persephone and her marriage to Hades are depicted such that they deliberately mimic actual marriage rites, even if an actual abduction was not practiced. Even if the maiden was not forcefully or unexpectedly taken away, she was still brought to her new home in a chariot (Hague, 1988: 34) and like Persephone’s eating of the pomegranate seeds, which ensure her return to Hades and the Underworld, “the bride’s acceptance of food (*trophē*) was a form of acknowledging the groom’s authority (*kyreia*) over her” (Foley, 1994: 108)¹⁰⁰. The torches Demeter carries during her search for her daughter, and which her initiates carry during the Eleusinian Mysteries, ironically match those carried during the marriage rite by the bride’s mother (Hague, 1988: 34).¹⁰¹

Fathers and Daughters

The relationship between Persephone and Zeus is an interesting one within the *Hymn*. Although the poem deals primarily with her mother’s actions, especially the actions she takes to force Zeus to compromise, Persephone does call upon her father as she is being abducted. This may be a call to the chief god, the final arbiter, to intercede on her behalf, but like Daphne and other maidens who call upon their father’s help when threatened by a lustful suitor, Persephone may be turning to the head of her household, to the man who is meant to be her guardian, for protection. However, this help does not come. Zeus had already agreed to the marriage, and some variants describe his choosing Persephone to be

¹⁰⁰ “Persephone’s eating of the pomegranate seed may signal a shift to seduction, a careful preparation of the bride for sexuality rather than violence” (Foley, 1994: 109). Foods with many seeds were served at the wedding feast as a promoter of fertility (Hague, 1988: 33). If the *Hymn* reflects the fears of removal from the familiar household in marriage, Persephone’s at least partial acceptance of her marriage, and Hades’ love, do offer some hope for a happy marriage.

¹⁰¹ The *Hymn* is not alone in making this connection, as tragedy marks it as well: “Clytemnestra at Euripides’ *Iphigeneia at Aulis* 734-36 particularly stresses the importance, in her mind, of carrying the torch for her daughter’s wedding” (Foley, 1994: 108n91).

Hades' wife, with "ugly complicity" (Parker, 1991: 6), rather than Hades making a claim on her himself (Claudian I.117f.; Apollodorus I.29).

The way the father stands back and allows his daughter to be abducted appears to be a feature of some vase paintings of marriage abductions (Deacy, 1997: 52-3), so Zeus' betrayal of his daughter in favour of his brother is not unusual¹⁰². The daughter's passivity might have been required by the nature of the father-daughter relationship, in which the daughter had to be given away in marriage: "the daughter is the member of the family closest to the father, since she is not a potential replacement and competitor, like his son, nor a link to another lineage, like his wife." (J.Redfield, in Deacy, 1997: 46).

Although a daughter could be close to her father, as the offspring who cannot pose a threat to his position, as a son could, daughters in ancient Greece were still important commodities in societal relations, as a means of creating alliances and protecting and preserving property. Zeus is doing something quite ordinary in marrying his daughter to his brother, just as Hades demands Persephone out of quite ordinary, albeit selfish, reasons. For mortals, marriage ties are made to link families and groups, and ideally reduce tensions and aggression, but this appears to play out on the divine level as well: "Persephone's role in what has been called the 'traffic in women' creates a new relation between earth, Olympus (heaven), and Hades (the world of the dead below) by linking them for the first time in her own person" (Foley, 1994: 82). Persephone becomes a link between the upper world and the lower world, and a link between humans and the gods, through her abduction and suffering. Her role as a link between these realms also marks a special honour awarded to Persephone and Demeter.

Persephone is the child of Zeus, and if she can be understood within the same role as figures like Osiris, Dionysus or Adonis as a Dying-Rising god (see chapter five), it is remarkable that she is female. Zeus prevented other heirs from rising up against him as he

¹⁰² Rather, the poem is concerned about the relationship between the goddesses, and the violation and disruption of that relationship: "The opening scene of the *Hymn* hints strongly at Persephone's readiness for sexuality, yet it chooses to envision her marriage as a deceptive and cruel trick foisted by violence on an idyllic mother/daughter relationship" (Foley, 1994: 107).

had risen against his father (*Theogony* 390f.), and his father had risen against his grandfather, by swallowing Metis before she could bear him a powerful rival. This absorption of his wife secures a peaceful order for the cosmos, as the intergenerational violence comes to an end, and Zeus ends an otherwise natural cycle of sons succeeding fathers, which cannot safely play out on the divine level. In addition to establishing order by preventing the birth of an heir, Zeus may also hand over his daughter to his brother to prevent another (fraternal) rival from attempting to challenge him (as Hades threatens in *De Raptu* I.89-116). Zeus is willing to violate Demeter's dignity to appease his brother, although this backfires when Demeter launches the famine. Instead of producing sons to succeed him, he prevents their existence, and uses his daughter to similarly conciliate his powerful rival brother. Persephone could not have played this strategic role if she had been a son.

Persephone and Demeter are unusual in their role as popular fertility gods, especially in the light of the Dying-Rising god type: "In view of the multiple manifestations of the mother goddess and son-consort dyad throughout antiquity, especially in the Middle East, one may well be astounded at the appeal that a unique religion centering on a mother and daughter held for Athenians" (Pomeroy, 1975: 77). Where one might expect another son to appear and play the role of son-consort, we find Persephone, somehow supplanting her theoretical brother's position. From Iasion Demeter may have borne Ploutos, but we do not hear of Iasion's son in the *Hymn*¹⁰³, and he appears only later in the imagery of Eleusis, despite his appropriateness for a fertility cult. Persephone must then have offered something important to her worshippers, to have been set in a role otherwise neatly carved out for a male deity (see chapter five). Unlike her potential brothers, Persephone as a maiden offers an important opportunity: alliance. Rather than produce a second heir, and have both a restless brother and son, Zeus has a daughter who cannot act as a rival, and with whom he can form an alliance with his brother. Zeus establishes peace and stability in this myth by not producing a son, but he maintains it by having a daughter, and wedding her to his potential rival.

¹⁰³ Ploutos does appear (489), but he is rather an embodiment of wealth and prosperity awarded by the goddesses' benevolence, rather than an individual character and heir to one of the goddesses.

The abduction of Persephone, and her marriage to Hades, shares numerous elements with the marriages and experiences of her mortal counterparts in Attica and ancient Greece, but the *Hymn* “does not romanticize marriage” (Foley, 1994: 109). Demeter prays for good marriages for Keleus’ daughters, indicating that the institution itself was still valuable, and the ideal life for a young woman was still marriage and children. Strong distinctions are made between the mortal and divine sphere, such as the lack of a male heir, and a goddess’ real, albeit limited, power to challenge the patriarch, where a mortal mother could not force such a compromise upon her husband. Despite these distinctions, Persephone does suffer like any (wealthy) young and sheltered maiden, and her experience humanises her enough to make her approachable in a way figures like Aphrodite, Artemis or Athena may not have been. Demeter’s grief is reasonable considering the location of her daughter’s new ‘household’ and the impossibility of reaching her again, and her stay in Keleus’ palace teaches her something of another mother’s grief, and the limitations humans suffer. These lessons will allow for the establishment of the Mysteries, but the Mysteries themselves are awarded to the goddesses by Zeus, in compensation for his role in the daughter’s abduction. If Hades and Zeus are not interested in heirs, and Demeter and Persephone cannot win a complete reunion, the myth still offers an explanation of a new world-order, through the necessary alliance made between infernal lord and unwilling maid.

Mothers vs Fathers

The relationship between a father and a daughter (potentially intimate as it mitigates the fear of rivals, but necessarily exploitative as the father uses the daughter to secure alliances for the larger family) is important for the *Hymn*, as Persephone cries out to her father when she is kidnapped. On the other hand, her relationship with Demeter is far more central to the story. The mother-daughter relationship, at least compared to the Dying-Rising god type, is already unusual and unexpected, contrasting directly with the son-consort figure exhibited in Adonis or Attis, but the ancient Athenians seem to have viewed this relationship differently to modern families, albeit within two opposing schemas.

Some surviving texts suggest that the father could claim a closer relationship to his children, beyond his role as patriarch and head of the household. Aeschylus has Apollo claim that the father was, in addition, physically closer to his children than the mother, who:

“is no parent of a child, but nurturer of a newly seeded embryo; the parent is the one who mounts her, while she conserves the child like a stranger for a stranger, for those fathers not thwarted by god. I will show you proof of this argument: there can be a father without a mother; a witness is close at hand, the daughter of Olympian Zeus... [not] nurtured in the darkness of a womb, but the kind of child no goddess could give birth to.”

(Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 656-666).

Aeschylus turns to Athena as an example of a child born without a mother, to prove that the father's relationship with the child is more important. The final arbiter deciding on Orestes' guilt in this debate is Athena herself, and she decides in favour of Apollo and Orestes, overturning the claim of the Furies and the 'old order' they represent, so Athena seems to agree with this statement, set out by a male playwright, on behalf of the men of the city, and validating the “patrilineal democratic state” (Fagles et al., 1977: 80)¹⁰⁴. Even within the play, however, this idea is more a rhetorical ploy than a generally-held assumption. The audience, like Athena, do not find it absurd enough to throw out of the court, but this can hardly be seen as a definitive statement on Athenian attitudes to parenthood and the relationship between child and parent.

Although Apollo's argument may contradict his earlier claims, and although Athena may only agree with him because of her affiliation with the Olympians rather than believing his statement to be true, the idea of the mother as simply a holding vessel for the child does explain another ancient metaphor for sex and pregnancy. Demeter is the goddess of the field, and when she sleeps with Iasion in the thrice-ploughed field, they produce Ploutos, 'plenty' (Diodorus Siculus V.49.4), an obvious metaphor for fertility and

¹⁰⁴ Athena may do this, however, not to “fully espous[e] Apollo's male biology with its social, political extension” (Fagles et al., 1977: 81), but to assert her own affiliation with the other Olympians in the context of their conflict with the Titan-generation Furies. This new bid for Athena's favour “only undermines Apollo's earlier endorsements of marriage, especially his praise for the equality of the partners” (*ibid.*: 80).

agricultural prosperity. Like the field, women could be seen as simply the repository, the soil, in which the seed is stored and nurtured¹⁰⁵, but the real parent was the plant that gave out the seed: “This is why an agricultural society could use a metaphor such as ‘sowing’ for sexual intercourse: the (visible) male semen was held to be the seed, sown in what appeared to them to be a fertile field – but merely a field” (Pomeroy, 1975: 63-4)¹⁰⁶. Demeter, as a mother, and the Athenian woman, could be seen as the ‘field’ in which the man’s seed is planted and grows, so Demeter becomes intimately associated with the field, embodying it in her own persona more than other gods may be associated with their respective domains, such as Zeus with lightning.

The notion of the mother simply as field cannot have been entirely accepted by the ancient Greeks, however, because the mother’s relationship with her children, and the experience of pregnancy and childbirth, are strong intuitive arguments for their intimacy and connection. Although male-dominated legal and philosophical ideas may ignore these lived experiences, it is evident that even Athenian law recognised something important about the mother, rather than the father, and her connection with her children: “contemporary Athenian law... forbade marriage between siblings who had come from a single mother, while children of the same father by different mothers were permitted to marry” (*ibid.*: 63-4). This legal recognition of the closer bond of those related through the mother than through the father suggests an alternative understanding of motherhood was available to the ancient Athenians, even if the ‘field’ and ‘sowing’ metaphors existed simultaneously¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ A frequent association made in ancient Greece (duBois, 1991: 39-85), and continued through metaphors like ‘ploughing’ in modern discourse. The mother’s role as simply a receptacle for the child’s development was also envisioned in the metaphor of the womb as an oven (duBois, 1991: 110-129).

¹⁰⁶ This association could also be extended to provide a paradigm for how the husband might view his wife: “the body of the woman is not only the property of her husband but also the space in which he labours, a surface that he breaks open and cultivates, the terrain where his heirs are produced” (duBois, 1991:65). This view of the woman’s body as property and an object to be worked upon would have supported the symbolism of marriage as ‘abduction’, as the bride loses her agency and becomes a valuable prize for the groom to obtain and utilise.

¹⁰⁷ To balance this optimism, this legal injunction may be a way of allowing paternal half-siblings to marry and maintain property within a patrilineal system, whereas marriage to a maternal half-sibling might transfer property to the mother’s family.

The *Hymn* perhaps catches a moment of tension between these ideas, and ultimately finds favour with the mother's claim over her child¹⁰⁸. Zeus, the father and patriarch, ostensibly Persephone's only 'true' parent, arranges her future without her knowledge (acceptable, as she is a minor who has no real say), and her mother's knowledge. If Zeus' actions reflect the ideas expressed by Aeschylus' Apollo, and agreed to by Athena, then Demeter is nothing but a field for Zeus' alliance-building progeny to grow in, and he is justified in acting as he does. The course of the action, however, challenges this right of Zeus' to make these kinds of decisions without considering the interests of others, and Demeter forces him to recognise her power and her rights, by exhibiting her real strength. The famine she causes is a clear sign that the mother's power to defend her child is just as manifest in the *Hymn* as the mother's intimate bond with her child is.

The 'Theogonic' Level

While marriage operates on the mortal plane to secure alliances and mitigate conflict, the establishment of cosmic order is also envisioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* and the Homeric Hymns through alliances (frequently marriages) and compromises between conflicting figures. Thus, although the myth found in the *Hymn to Demeter* can touch its mortal audience in various ways, especially mothers and daughters experiencing the cultural and societal demands of marriage and gendered power-relations, the *Hymn* does focus on the divine sphere, in addition to that of mortals: "The gods of epic [like Homer's and Hesiod's] serve above all as a foil to mortal suffering and achievement: the *Hymns* portray a divine world to which mortals are admitted only as a kind of witnesses" (Parker, 1991: 2). The myth operates on two levels, but Parker asserts that the "universal-human level of the myth is not stressed in the rest of the poem; and we should link the theme of Zeus' connivance rather with the 'theogonic' aspect of the *Hymns*, their interest in how the present ordering of the divine world came about. Persephone was to be Queen of the Underworld for no other reason than because Zeus so willed it" (*ibid.*: 6-7). After dealing

¹⁰⁸ This poem cannot be simply a challenge to Greek custom regarding marriage in its entirety, because "[m]ortal women of the *Hymn* also accept marriage without question, and Demeter wishes for good marriages for the daughters of Keleos, even as she is resisting her own daughter's union with Hades" (Foley, 1994: 81). Even the goddesses accept the importance of marriage, but it seems the methods employed were the point of contention.

extensively with the human aspect of the *Hymn*, in which the experiences of Persephone and Demeter may offer significant parallels to the experiences of mothers and daughters in the mortal world, it is important to recognise that the parallels are neither neat nor exhaustive.

The meaning of the fundamental element of rape itself is different on the divine plane, such that it does “not have the social consequences that [it has] on earth, because both male and female children, as the children of mothers, could acquire divine honors without the legitimacy conferred by marriage” (Foley, 1994: 110). While the Athenians were worried about the dishonour brought by rape, which necessitated the divorce of a raped wife or reduced the prospects of an unmarried girl, the gods could bestow honour via rape, albeit a hard-won and violently wrought honour (Lefkowitz, 2007: 65-9). The degree to which Demeter’s grief is humanised clearly indicates that at least on one level the goddesses’ experiences were meant to be understood on human terms, but the *Hymn* also operates on another level, which looks at the establishment of cosmic order.

Zeus’ decision to marry his daughter to Hades is more than just a king making an alliance with a rival, or a father disposing his daughter in a valuable marriage, even if she was not consulted on the issue. Zeus is the chief god, and he is mediating between the different realms of the universe, and establishing part of the order of the universe as the *Hymn*’s audience, the Eleusinian Mysteries’ initiates, and the modern reader know it. The initial abduction and arrangement do not link the different realms, as Demeter’s grief and retaliation reveals:

“Demeter’s resistance to Persephone’s marriage gives it a pivotal place in the universe. A Persephone confined in an inaccessible underworld paradoxically reinforces the separation between the worlds above and below ruled, respectively, by her divine father and her husband, rather than joining them.”

(Foley, 1994: 111)

Demeter is crucial in establishing the new arrangement of the universe. Zeus’ plan, although it placates his brother, a potential rival, did not intend to create new sympathetic

links between the gods and mortals. Rather, this emerges as part of the compromise Demeter wins, as her daughter returns and her experiences among the mortals may have taught her a new sympathy for them¹⁰⁹.

The divine Zeus must reconcile the different (and sometimes conflicting) demands of other powerful gods and his elder siblings. Unless one can claim that an omniscient Zeus knew his sister would rebel, and force a compromise with Hades, it is unlikely that the myth conceives of Zeus foreseeing the final resolution. Zeus is not omniscient in the *Hymn*, which is not unusual in Greek myth¹¹⁰. The poet thus emphasises how important Demeter is in establishing the current order of the universe, especially in her response to the careless or selfish actions of her male counterparts. This additionally posits part of the cosmic structuring as the result of (maternal) compassion, rather than simply the patrimonial division of territory by male rulers.

This interpretation of the myth continues the gender conflict evident in other Greek myths (Thury & Devinney, 2009: 28-9), but sets it in the final stages of the ordering of the universe. Zeus, Hades, Demeter and Persephone all play an important role in establishing the relationship between the upper and lower realms, but their actions generally differ according to their respective gender, until the final resolution, such that the *Hymn* “develops its narrative on the divine level as a conflict between genders. Demeter, Hekate, and Persephone are aligned on one side; Zeus, Helios, and Hades on the other” (Foley, 1994: 104-5)¹¹¹. This gendered tension mimics some of the other Homeric *Hymns*, reflecting a persistent concern for the ancient poets and their audiences:

¹⁰⁹ This compromise is in stark contrast to the competition for power between the earlier generations, but the goddess is elsewhere depicted insisting on an equal share of the earth, sea and sky, risking Zeus’ thunderbolts to stake her claim (Furley & Bremmer, 2001: 214-5). Her Eleusinian manifestation resorts to a more subtle approach, although it is a strategy she would not have needed to resort to if her daughter was not abducted first.

¹¹⁰ He is tricked by Hera during the Trojan War (*Iliad* XIV.153-316), and even the myth of Prometheus reflects an ambiguity about this (Hesiod *Theogony* 511f.).

¹¹¹ Geographically speaking, the mother (Demeter) and daughter lie between the father (Zeus) and his male rival (Hades), such that the women mediate the male domains, just as they do in mortal marriage alliances. This finds its divine-cosmic counterpart in the three-part division of the universe between the three brothers, Zeus, Hades and Poseidon, which leaves the earth as common territory, although it is closely associated with (mother) goddess figures like Gaia and Demeter.

“to some extent at least, one might say that the feminine in these divine stories [Hymns to Aphrodite, Apollo, Dionysos and Athene] is associated with suffering and passion, the masculine with action and achievement” (Richardson, 2011: 48). Demeter and her daughter are maltreated by the patriarchal system, but the goddess of the field resorts to her own powers to fight back, and force her male counterparts into compromise.

The gendered division of the *Hymn* is not as marked on the mortal plane, although the goddess is welcomed into the women’s part of the palace when she becomes Demophoön’s nurse, and she only turns to the men once her attempt at immortalising Demophoön fails. The action within the *Hymn*, therefore, is divided according to the gender of the actors, but Foley notes that unlike Hesiod’s *Theogony*, in which the male-dominated action is primary¹¹², “[t]he (nevertheless critical) actions of the gods Zeus, Helios, and Hades occur at the periphery of the narrative and receive relatively little attention or sympathy” (1994: 80).

A Woman’s Story, but a Shared Opportunity

The *Hymn* makes the actions of the gods an important part of the plot, as Persephone’s abduction is the direct result of their male-dominated concerns, but once the maiden has been abducted, the story primarily turns to consider the female perspective and experience, and besides the brief instruction to the men of Eleusis to construct a temple to her, the male figures are not given attention until the final stages of the resolution of the action. Only Helios plays an advisory role for the goddess, but he appears more as an apologist for Zeus and the male deities generally, rather than being entirely sympathetic with the feminine experience, and his action is limited. This focus on the feminine is remarkably rare in ancient myth, even in other variants of the Persephone-Demeter myth, and clearly their relationship is given primacy, albeit from the elder goddess’ perspective: “...the *Hymn* concentrates on the mother’s story rather than the daughter’s... [but] the *Hymn* does not conceal the dynamics of this central female relationship in the dark

¹¹² The *Theogony* sees the major gods fight against their fathers in a succession of conflicts for patriarchal dominance, but it does recognise the role of the female in this conflict as each god relies, often heavily, on their mother to succeed against their father.

corners of a domestic world but makes it the center of a religious experience of major public importance” (Foley, 1994: 83).

This almost exclusive focus on the feminine within the *Hymn* raises a curious disparity with the rites at Eleusis. If the *Hymn* intends to depict the tensions between men and women, especially within the patriarchal system, it could be used to justify the exclusion of men from the women’s rites, but the Mysteries of Eleusis were importantly open to both sexes, while other rites of Demeter, such as the Thesmophoria, were exclusively female. This emphasis on the female experience might encourage an interpretation of an originally female-exclusive rite¹¹³, but as Foley argues, we should rather look for influence from these female-exclusive rites upon a more open festival:

“...if all-female cults of Demeter such as the Thesmophoria antedated the Mysteries, or coexisted with them from an early date, the nature of these cults and their myths could have influenced mythmaking at Eleusis.”

(*ibid.*: 103)

It appears more likely that the *Hymn* simply encourages a more sympathetic response to every member in the Eleusinian community generally, such that it admonishes male dominance and abuse, but also incorporates male worshippers as a necessary part of the community. Although the *Hymn* does focus on the goddesses, those goddesses do rejoin the rest of the divine company at the end of the poem.

If the *Hymn* gives emphasis to the feminine, there is no exclusion of men in the cult, which either marks another disparity between cultic practice and the agenda of the myth’s retelling in the *Hymn*, or suggests that the *Hymn* was part of a process of reclaiming the feminine, which did not simultaneously reject the male. Even the aspects of the cult that were closely associated with men in classical times are ignored, such as the role of Triptolemus, but this may have been a political, rather than a gender-oriented decision by

¹¹³ “Scholars have argued, on the basis of the ubiquity and antiquity of Demeter’s rite of the Thesmophoria in Greece, that the special emphasis on female experience in the *Hymn* represented the earliest and essential core of the myth and of the rituals developed in association with it” (Foley, 1994: 103).

the poet¹¹⁴. The *Hymn* depicts the goddesses searching for Persephone, with only the late help of Helios, and the mortals do nothing to find the maiden (because by the point in the story in which they appear, Demeter already knows where her daughter is), so the poem contrasts with the other versions in which Demeter rewards mortals for helping her find her daughter (see chapter one). Yet the exclusion of divine and mortal men does not necessitate the exclusion of men in Demeter's worship. Instead, men play an important part by building Demeter's temple, and she teaches men her secrets, even if the poem does not focus on this element. Men were not excluded from the Mysteries of Eleusis, even if their role is not given prominence in the myth, so the *Hymn* suits the Eleusinian rites more than it could the Thesmophoria, which was exclusively for women. The gods are also unified by the end of the poem, as the compromise over Persephone creates a resolution of what gender conflict we do see, but this resolution is importantly mediated by other, older goddesses, Gaia and Rhea (*Hymn* 442f.).

Order Re-established

The movement from an unbalanced patriarchal order to a new arrangement, which gives the goddesses new honours and recognises Demeter's power, marks the theogonic concern of the poem: "Demeter directly challenges the patriarchal reign of Zeus and comes within a hair of entire success. The poem closes with a reaffirmation of female bonds between Demeter, Persephone, Hekate, and Demeter's mother Rheia" (Foley, 1994: 80). Just as the mortals play no role in finding Persephone, because Demeter already knows where her daughter is before she descends to live among people, the concern of the *Hymn* seems to be less focussed on a gendered conflict, than it is on the ordering of the universe. As an aetiology for Demeter's power, and of course the Eleusinian rites themselves, the *Hymn* describes Zeus' granting new honours to the goddess, as he recognises her power. Persephone too is not just abducted and swept away. She also receives new honours in the course of the poem, even if at first both mother and daughter resist the method by which they are awarded.

¹¹⁴ Although associating a conqueror with the male, and the conquered with the female would not be unusual. Triptolemus also appears more closely related to the Athenians than the Eleusinians (see chapter one), so his role may have been reduced in favour of the goddesses' experiences, and Demeter's attempt to transgress the boundaries between mortals and gods through Demophoön.

Demeter must, however, wrest her new honours from Zeus, and it appears that he did not intend for the new rites to be established, or for Demeter to gain new powers: “The text gives no indication that Zeus anticipated Hades’ [trick with the pomegranate seed]. If Zeus had planned the marriage to link Olympus to the underworld, there would have been no need for secrecy, nor for Demeter’s initial ignorance and cruel separation from her daughter” (*ibid.*: 111). Demeter, Zeus’ sibling and one-time spouse, is eventually recognised as an equal in power, when she asserts her own, previously underestimated strength¹¹⁵ in the field. This recognition of the goddess’ power forces the compromise, and ensures human survival (although this is almost coincidental as far as the gods are concerned), but it also validates Zeus’ position as the chief of the gods, as he encounters another threat in the furious goddess, and conciliates her successfully to re-establish balance (a balance, Foley would argue, that he himself upset). Zeus finally reappropriates his position at the head of the family by ‘ratifying’ his daughter’s future, but the new *timai* awarded to Demeter is a new, compensatory arrangement (Scarpi, 1976: 121).

Demeter’s assertion of her powers brings about the distribution of new honours, but Persephone also wins new powers through her marriage. Although the *Hymn* focuses primarily on Demeter and her experiences, Persephone is not depicted as entirely willing to remain with Hades, and happily reunites with her mother once Zeus allows it¹¹⁶. Both goddesses “refuse to be more than partially bound within the confines of the original patriarchal and virilocal exogamous marriage... a human form of marriage. A

¹¹⁵ “In a fashion unparalleled in epic, Demeter initially ignores the will of Zeus and refuses to abandon the famine” (Foley, 1994: 111). Even Hera is threatened with further punishment when she threatens to disobey him, and his martial son and daughter fear acting against him (*Iliad* XV:9-33).

¹¹⁶ She presumably would also insist on the compromise her mother wins, but speculating on whether she would prefer to be entirely located in the upper world is troublesome, as some have read her ‘lie’ to her mother, and her voluntarily eating the pomegranate seeds, as a sign of her desire to be in the Underworld as Hades’ wife. This may allude to the variants in which she does not want to return home, and Demeter must descend to retrieve her herself (Virgil, *Georgics* 1. 36 ff). In reading Persephone’s retelling of her experience as a lie to pretend that she was entirely unwilling, this may be more human than divine deceit: “whether the kidnapped girl is willing or not, she usually pretends (like Persephone) to be unwilling and afterward maintains this story, for she must be careful to save face for herself (regarding her own chastity) and for her family” (Faraone, 2001: 80). Marriage rituals, even when fully endorsed by the family and participants, can maintain the symbolism of forced abduction (Hague, 1988: 34), replicating an ‘unwillingness’ despite this endorsement.

compromise takes place which locates all emotional satisfaction in the relation of mother and daughter, even though Persephone may be appeased by the honors she will receive as Hades' wife" (Foley, 1994: 110), thereby accentuating the (humanised) relationship over the cosmic tensions, but compensating their suffering with divine honours.

Persephone receives new honours both through her marriage, which makes her queen of the Underworld, and through her mother's defiance and her father's compromise¹¹⁷.

Unusually for a goddess or abducted maiden, she does not win new honours through her child¹¹⁸, as Leto or any hero's mother does¹¹⁹, and Foley notes that the *Hymn*'s emphasis is on "the divine adoption of human nurslings, not the birth of an immortal child" (*ibid.*: 111)¹²⁰. Persephone's role in the Mysteries, as the mediator between mortals and her infernal husband, is only possible after her mother's enforced compromise. Without Demeter's intervention, Persephone would have simply been trapped in the underworld, and could have offered mortals little hope, except perhaps as a fellow unwilling prisoner. The new honours Demeter wins for her daughter, linking Persephone "permanently through shared honors both to Hades and to her divine mother in the worlds of earth and Olympus can dynamically join the spheres of the universe and promise the Mysteries and their benefits to humankind" (*ibid.*: 111-112)¹²¹.

¹¹⁷ Foley notes that "it is through her relation to her parents and especially through her mother, not through her husband, that Persephone helps to guarantee fertility on earth" (1994: 111).

¹¹⁸ If Ploutos was imagined as the child of Persephone, and the images of a child being lifted up to Demeter on numerous vase paintings are more than symbolic of the wealth Persephone or Gaia offer the goddess of grain, this child was significantly ignored in most versions of the myth, and only half referred to in the *Hymn* (l.489) The *Hymn* itself does not allude to Ploutos' parentage, and could be either metaphorical, as some translators do not even capitalise his name, or as a supplementary being, and not the eminent and central child that would play such an important role in the Mysteries, as he does for the Orphics in the guise of Dionysus, see chapters one and five for further discussion.

¹¹⁹ This is significant, as most maidens abducted by gods to be lovers are honoured by the abduction, in a sense, but this honour mostly derives from the child they produce. Few women beloved by the gods are remembered, if there is no child. Some go so far as to suggest that "the consequences of the unions [of maidens and gods] usually bring glory to the families of the mortals involved, despite and even because of the suffering that individual members of the family may undergo" (Lefkowitz, 2007:54). This position takes a very utilitarian view of rape, and may differ significantly from the lived experience and perspective.

¹²⁰ "...although this could be for reasons of cult secrecy" (Foley, 1994: 111).

¹²¹ Perhaps this is best viewed as a tough compromise for the mother, but an unexpected but welcome victory for the goddess. The mother might want her daughter to never be parted from her, but the goddess can appreciate the importance of her daughter's liminal position.

Hades must still be appeased, so Persephone must remain partially in the Underworld, but she would not have had the same (compromised) honours if Demeter had successfully reversed Zeus' entire plan. The compromise is beneficial to Demeter as it (partially) returns her daughter and provides her with new power. Zeus mitigates his offence by establishing an even better system than that which could have existed otherwise¹²². Zeus' compromise was the only option in which all concerned could be honoured and appeased, and the order of the universe could be maintained (preserved against the competition and rivalry of angry gods). Perhaps he underestimated the bond of mother and daughter, and the power of the goddess, but he learns that lesson quickly, and his final arbitration reveals the chief god's wisdom.

Conclusion

This chapter considered the *Hymn*'s reflection of Athenian marriage rites and experiences, and the additional level of cosmic ordering which is described symbolically through the marriage of these gods. Persephone, as queen of the Underworld, is a figure of terror as she embodies the power of her kingdom, death itself, but the poem's depiction emphasises her role as Kore, the Maiden daughter of the goddess of the field. Persephone screams for her mother and father like any mortal child in a moment of terror (20-36), establishing a sympathy with the maiden goddess very quickly in the narrative. Her abduction, closely associated with marriage, creates a separation from her most intimate companion, her mother, and triggers a cycle of grief, destruction, restitution and blessing. The virgin goddess is snatched up and carried away into a new life, just as Athenian girls could expect to endure such a transformation, an experience which matrons could recall.

The myth mimics marriage custom and initiation rites through Persephone's abduction, terror and eventual happiness, and grounds these experiences in the especial favour of Demeter, won through compromise with the divine king, the patriarchal authority of the cosmos. This favour, and the sympathetic bond created with Persephone in her suffering,

¹²² Foley notes that "the *Hymn* makes Persephone's marriage necessary and inevitable, while its conclusion turns on an important modification of the institution originally planned by Zeus" (1994: 112).

offers their initiates hope for the blessings these goddesses could bestow. Demeter's attempt at adopting Demophoön, and the loss of both her daughter and this foster child, humanises an otherwise ordinary deity, and therefore creates a sympathetic link that can form the basis of the Eleusinian Mysteries, while Persephone's experiences, unique for a goddess, and significantly associated with death, may make her a more sympathetic figure to address when mortals confront their own death. She may become a sympathetic figure in the Underworld, softening the horrors of death, and soothing the fears the murky Underworld otherwise provokes.

Chapter Three – Hermeneutics – Death

Introduction

This chapter will address the relation of the myth of Persephone, as it is described in the Homeric *Hymn*, to the attitudes and beliefs regarding death in the archaic and classical periods of Greece, in which the poem was composed and initially received. This analysis will ground an interpretation of the myth in the socio-anthropological context of its composition and earliest reception, as it can be understood from the literature and funerary monuments that have survived. In recognising a development in the beliefs regarding death and the afterlife that lay beyond it, the *Hymn* may reflect the form of the hopes the Eleusinian cult may have offered its initiates, and what appeal the poem itself may have possessed as a comforting narrative more generally.

Marriage and Death

Just as the *Hymn* offers the audience the chance to identify their own mortal experiences, at least for mothers, daughters¹²³ and perhaps fathers, with the events, it also offers something for everyone through the goddess' unwilling journey to the Underworld. Swept away by a powerful force that cares not for pleas and tears, Persephone's experience echoes the encounter with death every mortal must confront. At the same time, just as the marriage rites of ancient Athens, and Greece generally, might mimic abduction rituals, even if abductions do not survive as a custom in the historical record, the rite of passage into the new state of marriage might be interpreted as constituting a 'death'¹²⁴ and 'rebirth' of sorts. The maiden metaphorically 'dies', just as the wife and

¹²³ The seclusion of Athenian women meant that once a girl was married, she could not easily see her mother again, as both were kept within the household, and could only interact or see each other at festivals and funerals. If the girl were lucky, she would live close to her father's house, and visiting would be easier, albeit still rare in comparison to her daily in-house interaction with her mother before her marriage. This loss might be experienced by the mother as the death of the daughter, and the daughter might relate to Persephone's fears during her abduction: "like Persephone, a young girl could be thought to undergo in her initiation into marriage a symbolic 'death' before emerging into a new life and fertility with a (generally) unknown husband in a strange household" (Foley, 1994: 82).

¹²⁴ In representations of the dead meeting Charon, young women are frequently depicted with objects that associate them with marriage, such as the "small chest... used as a container for jewellery, small textiles and writing materials... the alabastron... used as a perfume container... the elaborate perfume vase whose ancient name is not known with certainty... the basket... the sakkos" (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 332-3). Notably, these are used in these depictions "because it was closely associated with women's life and

matron appear, ‘born’ in a sense, but the wife cannot exist without the maiden’s ‘death’¹²⁵. This symbolic death is not unreasonably posited for the ancient world, as the connection was deliberately made even in ancient Greece: “Girls who died before marriage were called ‘brides of Hades.’ Ancient poets often exploited the similarity of the rituals of marriage and death as rites of transition from one phase of human existence to another” (Foley, 1994: 81). Virgins may be ‘married’ to Hades¹²⁶ if they died before marrying. This association would operate on two levels. The first is that the girls are intimately enjoined with death itself, and the personification of death in Hades¹²⁷ means the girl becomes married to Hades. On a second level, the importance of marriage in ancient Greek society, especially the expectation, almost obligation, for girls to marry and propagate the race, meant that although they failed to fulfil their duty of marrying in life, they achieve that goal in a sense by marrying Hades in death¹²⁸. The association was made to link the maiden with a spouse, to compensate for her failure to marry, and giving her the honours due to a girl, via her husband, which the dead maiden could not gain in

pursuits [and therefore] it could represent metonymically all that life and those pursuits, their social persona, and thus could function as their sign in death” (*ibid*: 332). These depictions therefore clearly associate features of the wedding with death, albeit with regards to the deceased’s persona *in* death. Ephebes, in contrast, were depicted with spears to identify their social persona, while children were often accompanied by toys.

¹²⁵ This death is both symbolic, as she would have to lay aside her ‘childish’ activities and assume control of a household, taking up a new ‘identity’, but also almost literally experienced, through absence and loss. This rite of passage, like initiation rites, could be conceived of in terms of a death and rebirth (West, 1983: 143-6). This death-like experience is not death itself, but neither is Persephone’s marriage. She “symbolically ‘dies’ by entering the world of Hades” (Foley, 1994: 81n7), but she will return to her mother annually (once Demeter has convinced Zeus to compromise). Thus both the goddess’ and the mortals’ experiences mimic death in marriage.

¹²⁶ There was a “bride of Hades” theme in tragedy (Rose 1925: 238f.), such as Antigone’s departure to “her bridal-bower of endless sleep” (*Antigone* 800), acknowledging that “[d]eath will be all my bridal dower” (806).

¹²⁷ This was not always entirely explicit, as Mors or Thanatos was envisioned as another manifestation of death itself, the experience, rather than how Hades is the ruler of the Underworld. It is Thanatos (and Hypnos) who bear away the dead (Sarpedon’s death is thrice described in this way, *Iliad* XVI.448, 672, 682), Hades does not rise up to claim the dead. Numerous depictions of this pair bearing away Sarpedon’s body (Bazant, 1986: 906-7) led to a recurring image of these gods bearing away the dead, but in these scenes Thanatos could be portrayed as gentle (c.5th century), but there were also depictions of the deceased fleeing Thanatos (c.4th century), possibly a more dreadful figure without his brother at hand (Bazant, 1986: 907; Garland, 1985: 58).

¹²⁸ “[Persephone’s] persona as bride of Hades...had generated a paradigmatic relationship between the goddess and marriageable girls and brides; this relationship had generated, among other things, the metaphor ‘bride of Hades’, which expresses the notion ‘instead of marriage she got death’, which, in the Greek representations meant also ‘she died unfulfilled’. For in Greek mentality marriage is a woman’s fulfilment, and dying unmarried means dying unfulfilled” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 250).

life¹²⁹. In contrast, the comparable notion of unmarried young men being described as the ‘groom of Persephone’, is not as common (Rose, 1925: 238). The dead were also called *Demetrioι*, the offspring of Demeter (Keller, 1988: 50), assimilating them with Persephone in another figure of speech, but not explicitly, so the maiden goddess may have been identified with the deceased to some degree. Her myth itself becomes important in identifying how the ancient Athenians and Eleusinians envisioned death and their expectations for that experience.

The rites of marriage and death were similar enough that, at some level, their participants may have felt the connection between the two events, and as both are rites of passage, or major transitions in life, they could be symbolically linked even if the expectations during both events differed significantly. The rites themselves shared certain features, such as “garlands, ritual ablutions, the cutting and dedication of hair, songs, a feast, the emphasis on the passage from house to grave or from parents’ house to new home, and so forth” (Foley, 1994: 81n8). Danforth (1982) suggests that as a rite of passage marking the transition from one stage in the life cycle to the next, the bride’s departure could be envisioned symbolically as a death, and her death as a wedding, as she finds intimate union with a new guardian, the king of the Underworld. Persephone’s marriage-death actualises this “symbolic death before a symbolic rebirth and reincorporation into a new household as wife and mother” (Foley, 1994: 104), and offers a divine precedent for those confronting the same experiences¹³⁰. Although the association of marriage with

¹²⁹ An interesting comparison may be made with the ‘Orphic gold tablets’: “The fact that so many of these tablets may have been found in the graves of women raises the question as to whether the religious circles from which these tablets came were exclusive to women or were particularly appealing to women marginalised in a male-dominated society. In the case of the gold tablets, it could be argued that the eschatological benefits promised by the religious groups that created the tablets appealed to women who were excluded from the benefits of the worldly society available to men. Women, who did not have the positive ideal of a glorious death in battle and everlasting fame that were held up in polis ideology as a counterbalance to the fear of death, may have sought reassurance in ways that the adult citizen males were less apt to need” (Edmonds, 2004: 67). Similarly Rohde (1925: 283) notes that women were the first to turn to Dionysus’ ecstatic worship, seeking something ‘new’ in their spiritual life.

¹³⁰ Of some statues of *korai* used as grave-markers, one may be Persephone herself, thereby dedicating the deceased to the goddess’ care: “[she] is wearing jewellery and a polos with highly elaborate rich relief decoration of lotus flowers and buds; her necklace is surely made of pomegranates. Her left arm is against her chest, holding a flower, her right is lightly pulling her skirt... Flowers and flower-gathering was associated with the *parthenos*, prenuptial rites and marriage, and also Persephone” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 249).

death offered a grim prospect for matrimony, on the other hand, the association of death with marriage might alleviate some of the pessimism of death.

What the Cult Offered

Although the exact rites of the Mystery cult remain a secret, and presumably the details of their blessings would also be restricted to initiates, there are numerous literary allusions to the blessings of the cult, vague though they be. The *Hymn to Demeter* itself concludes with the promise of the better place in the Land of the Dead for the goddesses' initiates:

“Blessed is he who has seen [the secret rites of Eleusis] of humans who walk on the earth;

But he who has not been enrolled in the rites, who is lacking a share,

In death has no matching portion down in the mouldy gloom.”

(*Hymn to Demeter* 1.480-2)

The initiates must also die, but something more hopeful awaits them than the murky Hades the uninitiated could expect. In Classical Athens, Aristophanes' play, the *Frogs*, has a Chorus of initiates. Their scene is set in the Underworld (as Dionysus journeys down to 'borrow' a poet to save the war-beleaguered city), so the conceit would be that these are initiates who are already dead and are journeying to their 'blessed portion' of the Land of the Dead. The conceit is expressed through the frame of the initiate's procession to Eleusis from Athens, which would have been safely outside of the secret rites, and thus eligible for presentation on stage without profaning the Mysteries, but which the Athenians themselves could all recognise, even if they had not been initiated, as the procession would leave their city annually. This mimicry of the annual procession suggests that the initiates could expect to continue in the Land of the Dead as they had in life, but in perpetual celebration of the goddesses and the figure leading the procession, presumably until they reach the 'meadow', but no mention is made of what joyful activities will continue there.

“Come, Iacchus, leave your temple,
Join your pious acolytes!

Come and dance across the meadows,
Lead us in your mystic rites!
Toss your head and swing the berries
On your myrtle crown so gay;
Stamp and prance with feet delirious,
Whirling all our qualms away¹³¹.
Here with dancing, songs and laughter –
All the best of all the arts –
We your worshippers await you:
Come, oh come! The revel starts!

...
Call upon him, call Iacchus!
Raise the torches, wake the flame!
See at once the darkness scatter
As we shout his sacred name.
See, the meadows blaze! Iacchus,
Lodestar of our secret rite,
Comes to wake the mystic knowledge
Born in us at dead of night,
Turning all to dance and movement,
Setting souls and bodies free;
Aged knees shake off their stiffness
In the rhythmic ecstasy.
Shine for us, and we will follow!
Lead us on, our strength renew:
Young and old shall dance together
‘Mid the flowers, moist with dew’. [l.324-53]

...
“To the sweet flowery meadow let’s march off with pride.
At distinguished bystanders
We’ll jest and we’ll jeer;
It’s the feast of the Goddess, we’ve nothing to fear.
The praises we’ll sing
Of the Princess of Spring,
Who returns at this season salvation to bring;
Though traitors endeavour
Her plans to frustrate,
We know she will save us before it’s too late¹³².

...
Queen Demeter stand before us,

¹³¹ This image of Iacchus echoes those of Dionysus, perhaps indicating an early date to popular conflation of the two gods.

¹³² This may be an allusion to the claim that a procession to Eleusis, crying ‘Iacchus’, was seen after the city had been evacuated, and which foretold Xerxes’ defeat at Salamis (Herodotus *History* 8.65), a reference to the Persian Wars which Aeschylus will suggest Athens look to in order that they might save their city in the Peloponnesian War (*Frogs* l.1463-6).

Smile upon your favourite chorus!
Grant that when we dance and play,
As befits your holy day,
Part in earnest, part in jest,
We may shine above the rest,
And our play in all men's eyes
Favour find, and win the prize.

...

[Men]: Iacchus, Iacchus, lead on to the shrine!
Our hearts are on fire with your music divine!
Come, teach us to dance over hedgerows and stiles,
And keep up the tempo for several miles.

[All]: Iacchus, Iacchus, dance on and we'll follow.

[Women]: Last night as we revelled from twilight till dawn
My clothes and my sandals were utterly torn –
The fault of the god, but perhaps his defence is
It raises a laugh and cuts down on expenses.

[All]: Iacchus, Iacchus, dance on and we'll follow.

(1.372-408; transl. Barrett, 1964)

The Chorus speak as if they were undertaking the procession to Eleusis in life, following Iacchus and carrying torches, as Demeter does in the myth and iconography, as if they marched at night rather than the darkness of the Underworld, although this parallel may be an original symbolic association the cult utilised. The Chorus looks forward to arriving at the “sweet flowery meadow” (1.372), presumably Persephone's subterranean ‘grove’ rather than the temple at Eleusis now that they are in the Underworld, but they promise to taunt the “distinguished bystanders” (1.373), just as they would have done on the route to Eleusis. This procession is marked by joyous celebration, singing and dancing and ecstatic revelry, perhaps reflecting the real procession between the cities, but also perhaps indicating the joy the rites promised the initiates in the afterlife.

In the fourth century, Isocrates alludes to the promise of the Eleusinian Mysteries, though he remains vague: “the initiation which gives its participants pleasant hopes about the consummation of life and eternity” (*Panegyricus* 28). His older contemporary Sophocles, on the other hand, makes a curious claim which might also allude to Triptolemus' role in the cult's mythology (as his name means ‘thrice-blessed’), and Demeter's affair with Iasion in the ‘thrice-ploughed field’: “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” (in Plutarch’s *How to Study Poetry* 21f). Although this does offer some interesting connections to other aspects of the cult’s mythology, it echoes the *Hymn*’s original promise. Pindar also notes the blessings offered to initiates, though he hints at the possibility of an insight into the cosmic order through the rites: “Blessed is he who goes under the earth after seeing these things. He knows the consummation of life; he knows its Zeus-given beginnings¹³³” (in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* III.3.17).

The mid-fifth century painting by Polygnotus for a Cnidian club-house in Delphi, depicting Odysseus’ journey to the Underworld, as described by Pausanias¹³⁴, may reflect the destiny of those considering initiation into the Eleusinian rites. One woman is depicted in Charon’s boat as “a maiden; she holds on her knees a chest of the sort they usually make for Demeter... they say that she [Kleoboia] introduced the rites of Demeter to Thasos” (X.28), which suggests that she is a devotee of Demeter whose fate is unclear, but not as anguished as her peers on the other side of the painting. Presumably her dedication to the goddess has prepared a smoother journey for her. The uninitiated are depicted like the Danaids, “carrying water pots. One still has a fresh appearance, but the other is already getting on in years. Individually these women have no inscription, but both together are identified as representatives of women who have not been initiated” (X.31). The image of the uninitiated as bearers of water jars extends to another scene below Sisyphus’ rock:

“[there is] an old man, a child, and a young woman under the rock, and another woman beside the old man, apparently the same age as he. The others are carrying water, but you can see that the old woman’s jug has broken, and the water that is left in the sherd she is pouring back into the jar. The evidence suggested to us that these also were among those who neglected the ceremonies at Eleusis. In earlier times the Greeks considered the Eleusinian initiates to be more honourable than any other, as much so as the gods are more eminent than heroes.”

(X.31)

¹³³ Although there is no overt connection between these ideas, it is interesting that “the comparison of the cosmos with a huge mystery hall goes back to the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes, who lived in Athens and in all probability was thinking of Eleusis” (Burkert, 1987: 91), and if the cosmos can be equated with the mystery hall, Demeter’s founding of her temple in Eleusis, described in the *Hymn to Demeter* (1.297-301) might correspond to this ‘beginning’.

¹³⁴ Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece* X.28-31.

Under this scene is Tantalus, so these uninitiated stand between two of the most infamous residents of the Underworld.

This scene also represents Orpheus, and unlike the marshy river Charon crosses, he sits beside a willow tree, and “[t]he grove is apparently that of Persephone, where black poplars and willows grow¹³⁵” (X.30), so Orpheus himself finds a comfortable seat in Persephone’s more familiar (albeit chthonic-toned) garden setting. Plato mentions a punishment for the “impious and unjust” (*Republic* II.363c-e) which echoes the Aristophanic chorus’ description, and Polygnotus’ painting: “the impious and unjust [Musaeus and his son] bury in the mud in the House of Hades and compel them to carry water in a sieve” (363c-e). Here Plato cites a poetic version of the afterlife he is aware of, but it also puts emphasis on the punishment of the unjust and the reward of the just (rather than the emphasis on initiation), but the punishments echo the Eleusinian descriptions. Either the Eleusinian descriptions have spread to influence the beliefs in the rewards or punishments to be expected in the Underworld, or they simply fell in line with the broader belief, such that the mud the uninitiated are destined for is not Eleusinian-specific, but a general grim destiny for the ‘unworthy’ (whether it be judged morally or by initiation), a degree milder than the punishments meted out for Tantalus or Sisyphus.

An epitaph from Rhodes in the second century B.C. suggests something of the ordinary man’s belief in what Persephone offered him through her Mysteries:

A secretary. This man taught for fifty years
And two more in addition. Now the plain of the Pious holds him,
For Plouton and Kore have given him a place to dwell;
Hermes and Hecate the torch-bearer have made him beloved
Of all, and supervisor of the mysteries,
Because of his faithfulness.

(*Inscriptiones Graecae* XII.1.411, 1.1-6)

¹³⁵ Also noted by Homer, *Odyssey* X.510.

In contrast to the dramatic, philosophical-poetic and artistic descriptions recounted, this epitaph includes most of the cast from the *Hymn to Demeter* and looks forward in hope to the reward he will receive in the Underworld for his faith and role in the Mysteries. Although this epitaph comes from the early Hellenistic period, it reflects a consistency with the Eleusinian hymn even in the Greek islands, and lacks any mention of figures from the competing mysteries or versions of the myth, like Triptolemus, Dionysus or Iacchus. The promise offered this secretary is a place among the ‘good’, presumably a ‘better’ place than what the impious endure, and although he has not escaped death, he has lived a long (and presumably rewarding) life, and now enjoys a special place in death, beloved of the very gods he might be expected to fear if death were a terrifying prospect to him. These mysteries did not offer some special charm against the suffering of death, or amulet against the unpleasant reality of the Underworld, but their references to “‘blessedness’...is taken to refer to the afterlife more than to anything else: the ‘other gift’ of Demeter, besides the bringing of grain, is the promise of a privileged life beyond the grave for those who have ‘seen’ the mysteries” (Burkert, 1987: 21).

The Nature of the Soul’s Immortality

Identifying ‘immortality’ in ancient Greek thought is a tricky procedure, as the term does not now mean quite what it did in the ancient Greek world, especially as this notion itself could change as beliefs about death and the afterlife changed. Part of the difficulty encountered in the discussion around Frazer’s theory for the Dying-Rising God is the very notion of mortality and death. The gods are generally assumed to be immortal, and free from death, while humans are not¹³⁶. Humans die, and the gods do not: “to the Homeric poets ‘god’ and ‘immortal’ are interchangeable terms, a man who is granted immortality (that is, whose psyche is never separated from his visible self) becomes for them a god” (Rohde, 1925: 57). This framework is not always necessarily the case, as the Mesopotamian Ut-napishtim was a human whom the gods rewarded with eternal life, while gods like Dionysus or Osiris undergo experiences very akin to death, even if they,

¹³⁶ Athena, disguised as Mentor, explains to Telemachus that “it is our common lot to die, and the gods themselves cannot rescue even one they love, when Death that stretches all men out lays its dread hand upon him” (*Odyssey* III.236-8).

unlike mortals, can overcome the experience and return to life¹³⁷. The ancient Greeks, however, maintained a fairly stable schema of human mortality and divine immortality, with only very few exceptions moving from one type to another. For the ancient Greeks, humans were by definition mortal, while the gods were ‘the immortal ones’, and “[e]verything that defined the way humans lived was simultaneously assuring that they did not escape their mortal nature” (Endsjø, 2009: 15). As far as the ancient Greeks were concerned, they could expect to die (and the nature of their death frequently became an important consideration in life’s decisions), and travel to the land of the dead.

While the souls of the dead are to be found wandering around witless in the earliest descriptions of the Underworld, they are not seen as ‘immortal’, in the same way that Christian writers promised immortality for the soul after death. The state of the soul is a continuation, but not one that had real presence or substance, as the material part of the body degrades while the soul continues: “during the union of psyche and the body all the faculties of living and acting lie within the empire of the body, of which they are functions” (Rohde, 1925: 5). The ancient Greeks saw immortality as linked to the survival of the material part of the person: “Immortality was the continuous union of body and soul... As immortality originally meant a continued physical existence, ‘the immortal gods’, ‘*hoi theoi athanatoi*’, as they were generally called, also accordingly had physical bodies” (Endsjø, 2009: 39). Therefore Demophoön, though the ‘mortal parts’ are burnt away or purified by Demeter in secret, still has a physical body for his mother to see and hold, and yet he is being made immortal, and Aphrodite can be wounded by Diomedes in the *Iliad* (V.297f.), and goddesses or gods can produce children with mortals.

This connection to the material body does mean that though the soul could ‘live on’ in the Underworld, it was not really alive, and so could not be called ‘immortal’ in the same way the gods were immortal: “Without its companion the body, the soul was quite simply dead. That most souls were considered to have some form of eternal existence did not

¹³⁷ Frazer, 1912, Vol.I, p2; ‘Prayers for Power in Re-Stau’ chII, *The Book of the Dead*, (p49-50). See chapter five.

change this. The soul was dead no matter where it was found and no matter what degree of consciousness it was considered to have” (Endsjø, 2009: 106). This is an important distinction to make from modern ideas about immortality. Living on after death, with any sense of consciousness or awareness, would generally be considered ‘immortality’, though the state of that existence can vary¹³⁸. The Greeks themselves distinguished the belief in the soul’s continuation, ghost-like, in the Underworld, and the concept of a properly ‘immortal’ soul: “[a]ccording to the ancients themselves, the belief in the immortal soul was first launched among the Greeks by Pherecydes of Syrus in the sixth century B.C., a pre-Socratic philosopher and the alleged teacher of Pythagoras, who also held the soul to be immortal” (*ibid.*: 106-7). Pythagorean thought became closely linked to the ‘immortal’ soul as it spoke of a return of the soul to another body after a period of ‘purification’ (Rohde, 1925: 344), so this ‘life’ beyond death constituted a return to this plane of existence in a new cycle of life: “When the idea of the immortal soul first appeared in the Greek world, it seems to have done so along with the belief in metempsychosis” (Endsjø, 2009: 107). Metempsychosis allows for the individual body to die and decompose, as the soul is disconnected from it, but the soul moves into a new body, and thereby lives on. This allows the soul to survive through its connection to the body, even if the bodies themselves are not the same, or survive alongside the soul.

This version of an ‘immortal soul’ was different from the picture of the shades wandering in the Underworld, devoid of substance and real essence, yet it never gained popular acceptance. The concept of an immortal soul only “gained a footing in isolated sects and influenced certain philosophical schools” (Rohde, 1925: 254), and was “little remarked by the religion of the people and by orthodox believers” (*ibid.*: 254). Christianity would offer this opportunity to its believers, which may have been some of the new cult’s appeal, but Christian heaven is not the same place as the Elysian Fields. Unless the body

¹³⁸ The modern debate seems to vacillate between continued existence after death, either in a religious ‘afterlife’ (which had to disregard the requirement of the body’s preservation, as it turned to cremation or witnessed physical decomposition, and could no longer insist on physical ‘survival’ for the soul to return to its ‘home’ eventually) or some cosmic ‘return’ to a pre-natal state, against a nihilistic view of a negation of sensation and being after death, against which *any* survival of identity or sensation may be read as ‘immortality’. Figures like ghosts, generally disregarded in academic circles, represent a view similar to that of the lingering souls of Greek epic, a shadowy presence or lingering trace of the deceased, but there is a lack of consistency or elaborate explanation for these figures.

could be maintained or replaced, and the soul's connection with the body remained intact, the soul 'died', so even in the Elysian Fields the dead are not immortal: "The change of destination for the disembodied souls, from Hades to Elysium, had for many not really transformed their nature, but only severely changed their lot for the better. But they were still experiencing everlasting death" (Endsjø, 2009: 113)¹³⁹. This schema did not relieve the Eleusinian initiates of the grim prospect of death, in the sense that their souls would 'survive' and they could gain immortality. Like Demophoön, the goddess cannot offer them that blessing. Yet their destination was a happier place, a better lot, in the afterlife¹⁴⁰. This might have saved the cult from becoming an aggressor on the religious scene, attempting to 'save' others from such a grim prospect as death itself. The Eleusinians knew that they too would die, and that they were not destined for a 'happy' afterlife, they could only count on the goddesses' blessing for a 'happier' afterlife, a somewhat lightened burden. The initiates, the *Hymn* explains, will be "blessed" (l.480), but they, like the uninitiated, are also destined for the "mouldy gloom" (l.481) of the Underworld, even if it is a better portion of it.

Greek Death (Body & Soul)

Death: Archaic & Homeric to Classical

Understanding ancient Greek attitudes towards death requires analysing their texts and funerary monuments to decipher their sentiments and conceptions of the Underworld and the experience of death itself. Such beliefs are highly susceptible to interpretive corruption as scholars import their own ideas onto the ancient psyche. Although it is impossible to fully grasp how the ancient Greeks understood or conceived of death, a conception that would have varied significantly from region to region, time to time, and between individuals, the surviving literature and archaeological records may shed some light on their beliefs. Although the concept of a hell or heaven like the modern ones did

¹³⁹ Rohde also carefully marks this distinction: "We are assured that only the initiated at Eleusis will have a real 'life' after death, that evil will be the fate of 'the others'. Not *that* the soul, relieved of the presence of the body, will live hereafter, but *how* it will live was what Eleusis taught men" (1925: 225).

¹⁴⁰ Curiously, therefore, the Eleusinians would not be a group that believed in the immortality of the soul, even though other fringe cults did. Perhaps they were too mainstream, especially as a state religion belonging to Eleusis, and eventually incorporated into Athens' religious beliefs: "That the disembodied soul according to some could go to the more fantastic places like Elysium or the Islands of the Blessed was... not necessarily connected with the idea of the immortality of the soul" (Endsjø, 2009: 114).

not exist in ancient Greece, there was certainly a ‘survival’ of sorts, a continuation of one’s existence, on another plane of being.

The experience of this afterlife varied according to different beliefs, and seems to have undergone a significant shift between the archaic and classical ages. Regardless of how the afterlife was to be perceived by the dead, the Greeks understood death as a separation of body and soul (Endsjø, 2009: 24), and with their inescapable mortality, “[h]uman nature meant a brief life followed by an eternity as a disembodied soul” (*ibid.*: 15)¹⁴¹. The nature of this soul was also subject to changing ideas and beliefs, but in comparison to the material body, it was weaker and less substantial, “airy and breathlike” (Rohde, 1925: 5), but it did continue to exist: “[d]eath did not equal absolute non-existence, but the frail existence of the soul without the body” (Endsjø, 2009: 24). Odysseus’ mother explains this when he fails to grasp her shadowy form: “It is the law of our mortal nature, when we come to die. We no longer have sinews keeping the bones and flesh together; once life has departed from our white bones, all is consumed by the fierce heat of the blazing fire, and the soul slips away like a dream and goes fluttering on its way” (*Odyssey* XI.218-21).

This brevity and unpleasant prospect meant that heroes like Achilles were portrayed as fighting for what glory they could achieve in life before death took them, and frequently warriors were glorified for their success, and death in battle was preferred over a long life (*Iliad* IX.497-505), but these ideas were not fixed, or unchallenged. Death itself may not have been greatly feared, simply because it was inescapable¹⁴², and such misery was simply another difficulty of life that had to be endured, “the soul passes away, unwilling and complaining of its fate, but, nevertheless, unresisting, to Hades” (Rohde, 1925: 8). This necessary part of the process of life may not inspire fear in the individual, whose greater concern was their community:

¹⁴¹ With the exception of the Pythagorean belief in reincarnation.

¹⁴² Simonides, quoted in Plutarch’s *Letter to Apollonius*, reflects this pessimistic but resigned notion: “Little is the strength of men, and his duties unavailing. Toil upon toil in a short life. Death hovers about nevertheless, a death that cannot be avoided. Both good and bad men take an equal share of it” (107b). Such a view of life and death must have made the tasks of Sisyphus in the Underworld an especially cruel punishment.

“the funerary attitudes and behaviour characterizing the Dark Ages and still dominant in the Homeric epics involved familiarity with death, which was hateful but not frightening, and was accepted as an inescapable evil, part of the life-cycle in which the generations succeed each other and the individual’s discontinuity contrasts with the continuity of the family, the community and the human species.”

(Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 299)

If death was inescapable and inevitable, the ancient Greeks looked to their role within the community, and a larger cycle of life and death, to make sense of the experience. Viewed from a communal perspective, death is necessary in life for the whole to survive, and thus might not carry the same dread that an individualistic perspective might bear.

The development of the role of the *psychompompos*, the guide to the underworld, may reflect the shift of beliefs regarding death, as such a guide is less appealing in a system which envisions death as an “undramatic and unelaborated transition” (*ibid.*: 63). The souls in the earliest evident conceptions of death did not require a guide to the Underworld, because they were not really aware of their presence in the Underworld at all. The ‘witless shades’ of the early Homeric conception of the Underworld may have had some kind of guide in a loose sense, but that guide’s role would have been irrelevant to the perception of a soul that was now witless since it had left its body.

The Underworld of Homer, already under the sovereignty of Hades and Persephone (*Iliad* IX.570-2), seems to be primarily the holding place of the souls of the dead, made witless by their separation from the physical material of their living bodies (Endsjø, 2009: 25). When Odysseus tries to communicate with Tiresias, he has to offer the shades blood to drink before they can actually speak to him, suggesting that the souls lack something fundamental to life, whether it be blood, or simply substantial, bodily material, and by lacking this, they lack consciousness. The souls that have not received such an offering appear to “[flutter] around ceaselessly as helpless shadows in the murky underworld without even a recollection of their previous lives. This was no immortality. This was human mortality in its final, most miserable, and never-ending phase” (*ibid.*: 25). This

continued existence is not really life, it is not the sort of experience later theologies promise their believers, offering hope for a happy experience after death. This conception of death was bleak and inescapably unpleasant, but already in Homer it appears that a shift is occurring, in which some might believe that the souls of the dead would not simply be witless, but would carry with them some of the consciousness they had had in life.

The blood-drinking rite is necessary for Tiresias and Anticlea, but Achilles and Agamemnon are not described as drinking the blood before they speak to Odysseus¹⁴³, and the punishments Odysseus witnesses speak of the continued awareness of some souls in the afterlife: “The way a few exceptional dead, such as Tantalus and Sisyphus, were eternally punished in Hades demonstrated that even Homer could operate with some form of consciousness of the dead – if not these punishments would make no sense” (*ibid.*: 26). The elaborate rites for Patroclus’ funeral may also reflect a belief in the soul’s awareness of activity on the surface even after death, as such rites would be fairly pointless without Patroclus’ awareness and acceptance of them (Rohde, 1925: 13). These punishments, like Patroclus’ elaborate funeral, are unique, however, and are not representative of every ‘sinner’s’ expectation for the afterlife: “neither their deeds nor their punishment can have anything typical or representative about them, they are sheer exceptions, and that is why the poet found them interesting” (*ibid.*: 41), yet these exceptions did linger in the minds of later audiences, and could contribute to a development of the image of the Underworld.

Even in Homer, there appears to be a movement away from the notion of an Underworld populated by witless shades, although this appears to be just beginning in the later additions to the poems ascribed to Homer. Near-contemporary literature also hints at something more than a shadowy, empty existence after death, and the early date of the *Hymn to Demeter* would suggest that the hope promised at the end of the poem (l.480-2)

¹⁴³ This may have been a later interpolation, marking some of the changes in beliefs regarding the afterlife and the dead after Homer, but it may also be a “fossilized” folk practice (Rohde, 1925: 37-8). Necromancy, however, does assume a consciousness of sorts after death, as the dead are summoned to provide information (Ogden, 2001).

was at least in part shared by members of the community by the time of its composition. Whether this was still a fairly unusual, fringe belief, or was slipping into the mainstream tradition, is difficult to ascertain, but hope for a happier afterlife was certainly beginning to be available if it had not been before. In contrast to the poetic motives and intentions of literature, the evidence gleaned from funerary monuments, which stand on the front line of the individual and the community's confrontation with death, is a valuable insight into how death and the afterlife was conceived, and what changes may have occurred.

The epitaphs on archaic grave monuments present "death as sad and the condition of being dead as pitiful" (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 173), such that even with the Mysteries offering their special hope, and the promise of a better lot in the *Hymn to Demeter*, there is little overt evidence for real optimism. However, this might not deny the blessing of the Mysteries:

"sadness at the loss of life need not be contradictory with the belief in a happy afterlife. For it is not necessarily the case that, at this time at least, the happier afterlife promised by the Eleusinian Mysteries was considered to be preferable to life itself."

(*ibid.*: 174)

Archaic funerary monuments continued to express the sadness of death, long after the appearance of mystery religions, and their promise of a blessed afterlife, and in fact "the attitudes reflected in the archaic Attic epitaphs give no hint of an influence of mystic beliefs [like the Eleusinian rites or Pythagorean metempsychosis] in a happy afterlife" (*ibid.*: 173). Instead of expressing hope, "most people continued to see the eternal existence of the dead soul without the body as nothing to look forward to. Even the Eleusinian mysteries could do nothing but alleviate the depressing conviction that the state as a dead and disembodied soul never was preferable to life" (Endsjø, 2009: 26-7).

The funerary monuments reflect "the established, socially sanctioned concerns with memory-survival and associated attitudes, which included the sadness of death" (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 174), which coincide with the dominant, lingering belief in the

soul's existence in the Underworld as a witless shade, but could also arise from new, individualistic beliefs, which were still weighed down by the grim prospect of death, regardless of their souls' level of awareness. As the individual could begin to expect a particular, conscious fate in the afterlife, the emphasis shifted to that individual's actions in life that would affect their position in the afterlife¹⁴⁴ (*ibid.*: 173). This shift, “elaborated with more detail in connection with Orphic doctrines, not, it seems, without Egyptian influence” (Burkert, 1985: 198), is evident by the fifth century, such as the Chorus-leader of the Initiates in Aristophanes' *Frogs* declaring that “traitors” and other unjust people must leave their blessed procession (1.355-66), and by this point in the play Dionysus has already seen “murderers and perjurers” (1.275) mired in the mud of Hades.

The change in the perception of the nature of the soul in the afterlife is, Sourvinou-Inwood suggests, related to the shift from the communal mentality of the archaic age, where one's place within a long line of a family meant that one belonged to something larger than oneself and therefore the individual was not pre-eminent, to the more individualistic values the Greeks adopted as they moved out of the archaic age and into the classical period (1996: 173). This emphasis on the individual can be marked by the shift in the focus of philosophy from the nature of the world, to the individual psyche, and the individual's place within the larger schema. As they adopted a more individualistic perspective from as early as the eighth century, the ancient Greeks saw death differently:

“there is more individual and anxious approach to one's death, now perceived as above all the end of one's (now more strongly felt) personal identity, a personal tragedy – rather than primarily as an unavoidable (if sad) episode in the species' life-cycle and the community's history. It is accepted with greater reluctance, and there is more anxiety about it, and a greater concern for the survival of one's memory, and also, in certain circles, for a happy afterlife.”

(*ibid.*: 299)

¹⁴⁴ As noted in the quote from Plato above (*Republic* II.363c-e), by this stage the fate of the dead in Hades was already considered by some to depend on their moral behaviour in life, and the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, which claimed a period of punishment for the impure, and demands that “even in the lifetime of the body the purification of the soul should be prepared by the denial and inhibition of the body and its impulses” (Rohde, 1925: 302), echoes this belief.

The only exception to the grim, murky Underworld was the Elysian Fields, a ‘blessed’ realm which may have originally been in the distant west, and not under the earth¹⁴⁵ (Burkert, 1985: 196). Mentioned by Menelaus in the *Odyssey* (IV.561f.) as his prophesied destination, as the son-in-law of Zeus¹⁴⁶, the Isles of the Blest, or Elysium, seems to have been originally reserved for the especially-beloved of the gods, preserving them from death but withdrawing them from the ordinary world of other mortals. This special realm was the preserve of Greek heroes, not ordinary people, and seems to have been primarily peopled by those of Hesiod’s Heroic Age (*Works & Days* 108f.), so ordinary Athenians and Eleusinians probably would not have expected to arrive there.

The name ‘Elysium’ has been interpreted as deriving from *enelysion* (‘the place struck by lightning’)¹⁴⁷, which also establishes a special association with heroes¹⁴⁸. A connection between lightning, the blessed afterlife, and immersion in fire may make sense of the Demophoön episode within the *Hymn*, as Demeter attempts to confer special status on the child, a form of immortality which could have been completed if his mother had not intervened¹⁴⁹. The material aspects of this interpretation could also indicate a time period in which the scene may have been meaningful, and thus composed: “the generation of the

¹⁴⁵ Odysseus encounters the ‘grove of Persephone’ in the far west (*Odyssey* IV.560ff.; Rohde, 1925: 35). Rohde does argue that this is a post-Homeric interpolation, and a development of the original depiction of the Underworld and the destiny for the dead, but it was nevertheless an influential scene (*ibid.*: 59-60).

¹⁴⁶ Therefore presumably also the destination of Helen, Zeus’ daughter, who brings such a glorious dowry with her. This is, as Sourvinou-Inwood (1996: 16) is careful to point out, framed in the narrative such that it is doubly-reported: this destination was revealed to Menelaus by Proteus, and repeated by Menelaus to Telemachus. This distancing of the poem’s narrator from the idea of a blessed afterlife may be to cope with a possibility that it was not fully accepted by his expected audience yet, but to counter Sourvinou-Inwood’s caution here, it is delivered alongside other news which *is* accurate, so the audience is not necessarily meant to doubt these degrees of framed narration.

¹⁴⁷ Burkert, 1985: 198; Rohde, 1925: 581.

¹⁴⁸ This connection offered a curious version of access to these special fields, perhaps as Semele offered an important example of a god’s favourite being struck by lightning: “the notion that death by lightning conferred special status – came to be seen as a vehicle for transmission to a paradise – because it effected direct communication between Zeus and this world. The generation of this belief would have been facilitated by the existence of a belief that immersion in fire can lead to immortality; but we do not know when the latter first emerged in Greece” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 51).

¹⁴⁹ A second derivation connects Elysium with Eleusis through Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth (Persson, 2001: 130). This association would be significant, as the maternal role of Eileithyia would be associated with the rebirth-like initiations of the Mystery cult, and the goddesses, Demeter and Persephone, who ‘adopt’ their initiates. Kerényi links the two words more directly, as variants within Greek vowel gradation, but by translating Eleusis as ‘the place of happy arrival’, thereby marking the appeal of the Mysteries to “the throngs of those who strove for a happy arrival and [the name] gave itself to be recognised as the goal of human life” (Kerényi, 1967: 23).

belief that death by lightning leads to immortality is more intelligible in a world in which cremation is the norm¹⁵⁰ – and therefore not Minoan Crete or the Bronze Age in general” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 51-2)¹⁵¹. Alongside the witless shades, Bronze Age Greece may have been less receptive to the notion of a special connection with the gods through fire or lightning, and the fire-immersion aspect of Demeter’s myth might have been less significant or meaningful, suggesting the development of the Demophoön episode (central to the *Hymn* and the theme of the link between the goddesses and mortals) only occurred after this period.

Once Elysium was conceived of, even as it was conflated with the Isles of the Blest (Rohde, 1925: 35), it still could not compare with life proper (*Odyssey* XI.490-1), and ultimately the ordinary Greek could not expect to achieve such a glorious afterlife: “a disembodied existence where one fared definitely better than most other dead, was never because of the efforts of the living but always due to some divine intervention” (Endsjø, 2009: 39). Unless an individual found the favour of a particularly powerful deity to effect their superior afterlife, they could not hope to attain it¹⁵². Perhaps it was within this loop-hole, a poetic rather than religious innovation (Rohde, 1925: 62), provided by the mythic evidence of some heroes achieving a blessed state after death, that the mystery religions could develop. If the souls in the Underworld were not witless, and some divine intervention was required to achieve a better position in that world, it would be important to worshippers to do what they could to gain that favour. In response to this need, the role of Demeter and her daughter, more sympathetic figures than the chief god or the Underworld powers, would arise, perhaps ‘adopting’ their initiates as Demeter tries to

¹⁵⁰ As Rohde notes, “Homer knows of no other kind of funeral than that of fire” (1925: 19). This may challenge Demeter’s close association with the dead in this period, as they are cremated rather than entrusted to her realm in a grave, but frequently the urn filled with the ashes would be buried, or covered in an earth mound (ibid, 20), so Demeter assumes guardianship of the dead once they have been burnt.

¹⁵¹ Cremation and inhumation varied in popularity, such that “archaeological evidence indicates that throughout Greece, and in Mycenae in particular, inhumation prevailed from ca.1650 to ca.1200 BC. At this point, cremation became popular, and was even preferred in Attica until ca.900, when it was replaced by pit burials. In the archaic period cremation grew more popular again, but evidence from the classical period seems to show no preference” (Felton, 2010: 87).

¹⁵² At this stage, virtue was not a necessary factor in accessing Elysium: “It was not virtue or merit that gave him a claim to blessedness after this life... translation into the ‘Land of Destiny’ remain[s] a privilege of a few special favourites of the gods” (Rohde, 1925: 61). This was also no Valhalla of great warriors, as even Achilles appears among the other ordinary souls, but a post-mortem nepotism on a divine scale.

adopt Demophoön (Rohde, 1925: 601-2; Richardson, 1974: 29). Already associated with the earth, Demeter might make a suitable intermediary, and her daughter, once she was married to the king of the Underworld, would be the relevant authority to appeal to.

It appears likely that there was a significant transformation in attitudes towards death, and the conception of existence in the Underworld, between the eighth and fifth centuries in Athens¹⁵³. This transformation opened up the way for new beliefs to emerge, and the possibility for a goddess to intercede on behalf of mortals to win them a better situation after death. This new version of death was not a preferable place; life was still superior, therefore “[t]he private epitaphs of the fifth century, Athenian and other, continue to express grief and sorrow at the death of the person they commemorate” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 193). Yet the transformation in eschatology meant that the cult at Eleusis could gain a new or stronger foothold in the religious beliefs of the ancient world. It did not dominate or even supplant all other beliefs regarding death and the afterlife, but it could offer something for those who sought it: “a particular version of an individual destiny after death, which became increasingly popular in the archaic and classical period, and which was absent from the Homeric poems” (*ibid.*: 425)¹⁵⁴.

Journey to the Underworld

A parallel to the changing perception of the nature of the soul after death is the journey that the soul undertakes to reach the land of the dead. The earliest depictions of the land of the dead ambiguously set it either at the end of the world, in the far west (*Odyssey* IV.

¹⁵³ These were the result of “[t]he increase in population, urbanization and the rise of the polis, and the sharp increase in communications inside and outside Greece and colonization [which] expanded drastically Greek physical and mental horizons, and dislocated or destroyed many of the structures on which the ‘familiar’ death attitudes had depended” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 417). Part of the expansion of ‘mental horizons’ could be the influence from Egyptian and Anatolian myth and culture, which is reflected in the influences evident in Greek myths like the Homeric *Hymns* (Penglase, 1994: 1-3).

¹⁵⁴ “...though there were, in those poems, the first seeds of the general category to which this happy afterlife belongs, the individual destiny of some shades after death, which contrasted with the dominant Homeric belief in the collective undifferentiated destiny of all shades” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 425). The original poetic innovation suggests rather that this specially blessed or cursed destiny belonged to the Age of Heroes, and was “now closed” (Rohde, 1925: 78), but it does provide the opening the Mystery cults could plant their own hopes into.

564)¹⁵⁵, but it also lay underground, where the dead were interred. The journey to this realm would clearly depend on where the destination lay, but as these two regions were assimilated (Rohde, 1925: 75-6) and the Elysian Fields were placed alongside Tartarus and Erebus¹⁵⁶, the journey became a more unified process. The river (originally the ‘swirling Ocean’) dividing the land of the dead from the land of the living seems to have been a constant barrier, and thus the journey to the land of the dead required some kind of transportation beyond simply walking, as the Suitors do after Odysseus has despatched them (*Odyssey* XXIV.10-11). The requirements for admittance into the land of the dead also seem to have altered over time, as the barriers and process itself changed. The journey to the ‘Underworld’ appears to be beginning to change in the Homeric epics, and the contradictory presentation of the land of the dead is a useful way to gauge the different beliefs (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 106).

The barriers between the land of the dead and the land of the living become firmer over time in ancient Greek thought. The earliest version of the journey seems to be simply the soul’s flight to the land of the dead, but eventually a ‘guide’ was incorporated¹⁵⁷, as the journey itself might have been seen as more harrowing. The wings of the souls of the dead seem to have lost their eminence as the river boundary gained importance, possibly as the far-west land of the dead, across the sea from the land of the living, became assimilated with the Underworld. This river could initially be flown over, just as the souls had flown over the sea, but soon a river-man appears to transport the dead souls, despite

¹⁵⁵ In XI.20ff., Odysseus travels across the Ocean’s stream to confront the dead, so ‘Persephone’s grove’ lies to the west, but the Suitors of XXIV.10-14 are guided *down* to the Land of the Dead, “the world below” (XXIV.99), “Hades’ Halls, under the secret places of the earth” (XXIV.204), by Hermes.

¹⁵⁶ Circe’s advice and directions explains that the Halls of Hades are across the River of Oceanus, where Odysseus will find “Persephone’s Grove, where the tall poplars grow, and the willows that quickly shed their seeds... there by Ocean’s swirling stream... go on into Hades’ Kingdom of Decay. There, at a rocky pinnacle, the River of Flaming Fire and the River of Lamentation, which is a branch of the Waters of Styx, meet and pour their thundering streams into Acheron” (X.510-516). This end-of-the-world Land of the Dead is connected with the subterranean realm, as the dead “came swarming up from Erebus” (XI.38).

¹⁵⁷ The Etruscans appear to have had a grim, demon-like Charon figure that was later assimilated with the Greek figure (Garland, 1985: 56; Krauskopf, 2006: 73-5), but Sumerian myth describes a ferryman transporting Gilgamesh across the furthest sea to find the ‘translated’ Ut-napishtim on the edge of the known world (*Epic of Gilgamesh* X.169-72), almost like the Elysium of the *Odyssey*, and the Egyptian tradition set Anubis as a guide to the Underworld (Griffiths, 1970: 517; Kinsley, 1989: 178).

some depictions of winged souls being ferried across the river¹⁵⁸. This river-crossing becomes an important leg of the journey as the river-man demands payment for his service (comically enacted in Aristophanes' *Frogs* 269-70), and the funeral rite of sending the dead to their tomb with a coin to pay the ferryman becomes more important¹⁵⁹.

The boundary itself between the lands of the living and the dead become increasingly well enforced, as the dead souls have to cross ever more difficult barriers¹⁶⁰. The enforcement of this barrier also changes over time:

“in the Homeric poems...the proper separation between the two worlds and the passage from one to the other was safeguarded...by the shades themselves, who prevented the unburied from crossing the river, and by the gates and Cerberus; in the fifth century the transition is effected under the guidance of a god and a divine/ demonic ferryman, with Cerberus still controlling the exit out of Hades, but now in conjunction with Charon. Thus the borders between the two worlds and their separation are now symbolically upgraded and more secure.”

(Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 310)

As the boundary between these worlds is solidified, and the journey to the Underworld is made more difficult, the role of the guide to the land of the dead becomes more important¹⁶¹. This transition seems to have occurred just as the Homeric epics took on their final form¹⁶², and the roles of Hermes and Charon become more important in ancient Greek thought:

¹⁵⁸ Depicted on the 'eschara Frankfurt, Liebighaus 560', noted by Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 303.

¹⁵⁹ This practice emerged "Once coinage became widespread, in the sixth century and later" (Felton, 2010: 87).

¹⁶⁰ Perhaps this tendency to increasingly difficult access to Hades encouraged the Mystery Religions, who could promise the secret, necessary information to enter Hades successfully. Gold tablets found in graves certainly offered 'secret information/ advice' to the deceased (Zuntz, 1971: 373-6; see chapter five).

¹⁶¹ "The other trend in that shift [to a greater fear of death out of increasingly individualistic attitudes] that is relevant to the emergence of Charon and Hermes Chthonios is the desire to separate death more sharply from life; for it corresponds to the firmer, sharper and more secure, separation of the two worlds, separation between the two worlds involved in the eschatology in which Hermes and Charon are guarantors of the border between Hades and the upper world" (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 354).

¹⁶² The Suitor's scene in *Odyssey* XXIV may have been an interpolation after most of the poem had already been composed, by "a later poet who, in giving the final touches to the *Odyssey*, introduced Hermes, the 'Guide of the Dead'" (Rohde, 1925: 8-9).

“some time before the composition of the Continuation [of the *Odyssey*, the Suitor’s descent into the Underworld], which may have taken place in the first half of the sixth century, the journey to Hades had begun to be elaborated, and Hermes had become a psychopompos; at a subsequent stage, and before 500 BC at the latest, Charon took over the function of taking the shades over the infernal water-frontier into Hades proper.”

(*ibid.*: 313-4)

If Hermes had guided the soul’s flight to the land of the dead, Charon could ferry them across the infernal river. In the most elaborate versions of this journey, both guides would have a role to play in ensuring the soul’s safe conduct into the land of the dead¹⁶³.

Sourvinou-Inwood asserts that although Charon, at least, was often depicted as a gaunt and disturbing figure in ancient Greek art, his role as guide to the Underworld may have also been a way of alleviating the fear of death: “The fact that the shades no longer have to face the journey to Hades alone as they do in Homer, but are guided by Hermes and Charon, is an especially reassuring element” (*ibid.*: 317). Although he works on behalf of a terrifying phenomenon, he is there to assist the dead¹⁶⁴, and some depictions of the ferryman mimic the comforting posture of mothers towards their children¹⁶⁵.

The journey to the Underworld would have been an unsettling prospect, as it remains to us today, yet Persephone and her mother, in their role as guarantors of a ‘happier’ afterlife, should similarly offer some relief from the fear of death. However, the *Hymn to Demeter* does not dwell on the journey, or even the description (or location) of the land of the dead. Hades lunges at the unsuspecting maiden when “the broad-pathed Earth gaped wide/ On the Nysion plain” (16-7), but we do not hear of his descent again until Helios describes the abduction, and explains that Hades took her “[d]own to the murky gloom” (81). When Demeter wins the compromise from Zeus, Persephone is brought back by Hermes from Hades’ halls “under the ground” (431), so the land of the dead is

¹⁶³ Several white lekythoi from Athens show Charon meeting the soul for collection, with Hermes near at hand, sometimes “holding” their wrist (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1986: 212-5).

¹⁶⁴ The Chorus in Euripides’ *Alcestris* join her funeral procession while entrusting her to Hermes and Hades, requesting a sympathetic reception: “Hermes and the dread King/ Give you kind welcome to the earthy shades!/ If there high place is kept/ For noble spirits, may you [Alcestris]/ Receive full honour, throned beside Persephone!” (1.436-44).

¹⁶⁵ A white lekythoi (#23) in the Nat. Mus. 1814 (CC 1662), from the late fifth century (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1986:214).

firmly located in the Underworld, but the location is less important for the narrative than the abduction, and the enforced separation of mother and daughter. Once Demeter learns where her daughter has been taken, she does not go to Hades to demand her return, or simply to live alongside her daughter, but she retreats into herself, descending into the mortal world and shunning the world of the gods. This suits the schema in which the Underworld was impenetrable except for the dead and those few unique figures who could traverse the barrier into the subterranean realm. Persephone is as unreachable as if she were really dead, and even Demeter, who is associated with the dead as they are buried in her soil, cannot descend to claim her child. The journey must be made by Hermes, in a role which either reflects his duty as *psychopompos*, or suits his identity¹⁶⁶.

The Underworld itself, besides the epithets ‘gloomy’ and ‘murky’, is hardly described at all, and the action primarily focuses on Demeter and the events on the surface. Even the infernal river, which is so important to classical depictions of the Underworld, is entirely absent from the narrative (though by no means necessarily not a fixture of the Underworld, it just does not earn mention in the *Hymn*)¹⁶⁷. This indicates that the action was not so concerned with the encounter with death itself, and the experience of the soul in the Underworld, as it was in explaining the process by which the blessing offered by the Eleusinian Mysteries came about. If Persephone is a Dying-Rising God(dess), the *Hymn* does not spend much time on her journey to the Underworld, and her experiences there¹⁶⁸. The poem focuses on Demeter’s experiences, and the events that lead to the establishment of the Mysteries, and the new opportunity for the dead offered by the goddesses. More attention is paid to the mortal world of Demophoön and his mother, than

¹⁶⁶ Hermes is a guide of the souls in the *Odyssey*, but in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* he may still operate as Zeus’ messenger, though the symbolic power of these roles are clearly connected. Iris also acts as a messenger capable of reaching the Underworld (in Hesiod she collects water from the Styx for the gods to swear on, *Theogony* 778f.). This might speak against the interpretation of the *Hymn* as having a gender conflict, as Iris would be a more suitable escort, another ‘female companion/ ally’ for Persephone, unless her ability to access the Underworld was not so well known or defined yet.

¹⁶⁷ Some versions of the myth do suggest there is a spring where Hades descends into the Underworld again, marking some watery passage (Bräuninger, 1938: 954), but this is more likely a link with some springs’ association with a route to the Underworld, rather than the barrier between the different realms.

¹⁶⁸ Just as in the myths of Adonis or Osiris (see chapter five), the myths give more emphasis to the goddesses’ actions than to the gods’ experiences. An interesting contrast might be the myth of Dumuzi (chapter four) in which the god-consort’s flight from the chthonic demons is given significant attention.

on Persephone's suffering in her new bridal suite. The *Hymn* does not reveal the secrets of the Underworld for the audience, and perhaps this would have been reserved for the secret rites of the cult, but it does explain why the cult was established, and the episode among the mortals may be intended to reach out to new believers, as a relatable experience through which they could sympathise with the goddesses.

Bilocation of Persephone & the Soul

An important characteristic of Persephone, which itself could be the result of a fusion of different elements and personifications over time (see chapter four), was her dual nature. She is both Spring Maiden, and Goddess of the Underworld¹⁶⁹. Although these two personas are combined in Demeter's daughter, they are still quite contradictory, and the representation of the goddess appears to reflect this split identity. She is on the one hand Kore, the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of flowers, and a pleasant figure to approach. Simultaneously, she is the "terrible Persephone" (*Iliad* IX.457), the goddess of the Underworld, whose name her worshippers would avoid calling if they could¹⁷⁰, calling her simply Thea, Goddess, instead¹⁷¹. These two personalities are difficult to reconcile, simply in characterisation, but equally difficult is locating the maiden. While Persephone should be enthroned in Hades, welcoming the dead alongside her husband, Kore should be with her mother, encouraging the growth of flowers and the natural world. The *Hymn to Demeter* does describe the scenario in which the two are united, when the Spring Goddess is taken into the Underworld to become queen, but this situation is described as only lasting for one third of the year. The Spring Goddess can then return to the surface, and escape the shadows of Hades. Yet, the Underworld goddess cannot simply disappear, and she is never described as being absent. Although heroes descend to visit the Underworld at various times throughout the year, they never find Persephone absent¹⁷².

¹⁶⁹ "the same divine persons appear in different roles and sometimes even simultaneously... Persephone, who appears as queen of the underworld and as the daughter of her mother, to whom she returns from the underworld" (Kerényi, 1967: 148).

¹⁷⁰ "There were secret or unutterable names, often of underworld divinities whom you might not want to alert by naming them" (Kearns, 2006:317).

¹⁷¹ "Kore and Thea are two different duplications of Persephone" (Kerényi, 1967: 155).

¹⁷² "The Homeric poet uses the story of the division of time to bridge the gap between the two roles and two stages. In the cult of the queen of the dead, to whom the dying repair at all seasons, the underworld can scarcely have remained without a queen for two thirds or – according to a later version – half of the year...

She is seen to exist in the Underworld, but simultaneously to return to the surface for two thirds of the year. This problem of location is solved by a possibility available to gods but not to material beings: bilocation (Smith, 1987: 522). Bilocation allows the two personas of the goddess to exist at the same time, even if they belong in different realms.

Just as Persephone is duplicated in persona, and therefore almost necessarily in location, her role as a female, understood from an ancient Greek perspective, meant another duality to her identity: as mother and daughter. The maiden was expected to marry, and bear children, so the maiden's future persona would be the mother, but she does not lose her identity as a daughter when she becomes a mother herself. This transformation into a mother would allow her to identify with her own mother more, and symbolically the two may become interchangeable¹⁷³. It is notable, in this regard, that much of the iconography depicting Persephone and Demeter make the two goddesses almost indistinguishable, as their identities are fused into interchangeable aspects (Farnell, 1907: 259). Persephone becomes identified with Demeter, and indeed some psychoanalysts argue that "in the psychoanalytic scheme... the roles of mother and daughter are structurally interchangeable" (Arthur, 1994: 223n16). As the daughter becomes assimilated with the mother, the daughter takes on her mother's symbolic meaning and experiences, and although she may not yet have borne children and proven her fertility, this duality in her nature endows her with added symbolic significance in her journey to the Underworld:

"This duality – the scission of the Mother into 'mother and daughter' – opened up a vision of the *feminine source of life*, of the common source of life for men and

But the return of the goddess from the subterranean realm had assuredly been required, even by the older religion, according to which she – like Mother Rhea or Hekate – had her share in the government of all three parts of the world, heaven, earth, and sea. Thus her person seems always to have admitted of a duplication" (Kerényi, 1967: 148-9). This may take a rather literal reading of the myth, but it would be a potential point of contention, which the poet might be forced to explain.

¹⁷³ This notion may be alluded to in the metaphor of the immortality of procreation (physical and intellectual) in Plato's *Symposium*, where Diotima speaks of the "love-mysteries" (210a): "There is something divine about the whole matter; in procreation and bringing to birth the mortal creature is endowed with a touch of immortality... The only way in which [the mortal nature] can achieve [immortality] is by procreation, which secures the perpetual replacement of an old member of the race by a new" (206c-208b). This immortality-by-replacement could be expressed in the figure of the annually sown and harvested grain, and would have been especially relevant to the archaic period's emphasis on the community over the individual.

women alike, just as the ear of grain had opened up a vision into the ‘abyss of the seed’.”

(Kerényi, 1967: 147)

The mother-daughter relationship allows their worshippers to believe themselves to also belong to a continuum in which they had a fundamental, if interdependent, role.

Orphic versions of Persephone’s myth associate her with Dionysus, who was also associated with the Iacchos of the procession between Eleusis and Athens. The timing of these associations are difficult to determine, but seem likely to have influenced each other’s development. In the Orphic version of Persephone’s myth, the maiden is impregnated by chthonic Zeus in the form of a snake (West, 1983: 220), and as neither encounter was voluntary, this therefore operates as a parallel to Hades’ abduction. This version makes Persephone the mother of Dionysus (see chapter five). Orphic Persephone is set in the place of Semele in other myths, and her identity is therefore split again, taking on the Theban princess¹⁷⁴ as well as her mother, just as she operates as Underworld queen and Spring Goddess. Persephone seems highly receptive to ambiguous identification, and becomes the centre of multiple identities.

This tendency to duality and ambiguity may have suited the ancient Greeks, especially with their attitudes to death. Although they sought a comforting figure of compassion in the afterlife, they also recognised the hatefulness of death. Just as they could envision a blessed garden in the otherwise gloomy Underworld, the realm of murky Hades, they could see in the Eleusinian goddess the combination of life and death, mother and daughter, virginal maiden and life-giver, abducted girl and dread queen. This ambiguity may parallel the ancient Greek attitudes towards death, and even their own souls. The ancient Greeks had the complex task of understanding the nature of their own souls, those entities which would survive the body’s death, but in an ambiguous condition in the

¹⁷⁴ Dionysus is also a figure of duality, both the young, sometimes violent god, and the lazy, decadent deity: “a duplication of the chthonian, mystical Dionysos is provided even by his own youthful aspect, which became classical and which was distinguished in mythology as the son of Semele from the son of Persephone, the basis of this duplication being that Semele, though not of Eleusinian origin, is also a double of Persephone” (Kerényi, 1967: 155).

Underworld. This condition became even more ambiguous as the belief regarding the nature of the soul was shifting between the archaic and classical period. The soul and its relation to the body risked splitting the identity of the deceased into two personas: “both the visible man (the body and its own faculties) *and* the indwelling psyche could be described as the man’s ‘self’” (Rohde, 1925: 6). However, just as Persephone, queen of the Underworld and Spring Goddess, could exist simultaneously in two places, perhaps their own identities could be split after death: “[a]lthough the body was considered the dead person, so was the soul. On the basis of this logic, we often find epitaphs stating how the dead person is in fact bilocated, considered to be simultaneously in the grave and in some other place” (Endsjø, 2009: 29). Although the body retains the deceased’s physical identity, the soul that has fled to Hades, and which may retain the memories and personality of the deceased, is also intrinsically *them*. If the attitudes to the deceased’s identity and Persephone’s duality and bilocation did not spring from the same line of thinking, they certainly may have encouraged each other to develop into what the epitaphs try to describe when they refer to the dead person existing in the tomb, but also elsewhere.

Demophoön’s preservation

Although Persephone’s experience in the Underworld is briefly dealt with in the *Hymn*, the poem spends considerable time on an episode which, contra Foley (1994: 113), Nilsson dubs “an old folk-tale motif which has nothing to do with the Eleusinian cult” (1940: 50). The descent to the Eleusinian palace, and the nursing of the infant Demophoön seems to be an attempt to replace the abducted daughter Demeter has lost, and in some readings, potentially raise a rival against the system which has deprived her¹⁷⁵. Whatever her motivations, when Metaneira interrupts Demeter’s attempts to immortalise Demophoön, she incurs the goddess’ anger, and her recriminations might suggest something of the expectations the Eleusinian initiates had for Demeter’s blessing:

¹⁷⁵ “In her anger at Zeus, Demeter defies the boundary between gods and mortals in trying to make the mortal Demophoön immortal. Is she also, like Hera, trying to produce an immortal male champion who will challenge Zeus?” (Foley, 1994: 113).

“Ignorant humans, who lack the discernment to know in advance
 Your portion of good or ill, as one or the other draws near!
 Woman, your folly’s misled you beyond all chance of a cure.
 For let the gods’ oath know this, the implacable water of Styx,
 That I would have made your dear boy ever free of death and age,
 And would have conferred upon him honour that does not fade;
 But he now has no means of escaping death and the spirits of fate.”
 (*Hymn to Demeter* 256-62)

Eve-like, Metaneira ruins her child’s opportunity for immortality and an ageless life through her curiosity and ignorance¹⁷⁶, and this interruption may have ruined the chance for all later generations to achieve such a blessing, but Demeter does promise a blessing, even if it cannot be immortality¹⁷⁷. This blessing on Demophoön, as Demeter’s nursling, appears to be extended by the establishing of the Eleusinian rites, as Demeter then orders the building of a temple for her (*Hymn* 270), but this significantly precedes the actual installation of new rites, which only follow Persephone’s return and Zeus’ capitulation and instruction to Rhea to ask Demeter to return to Olympus (443-4). Therefore it seems that Demophoön’s experiences are meant to act as a symbolic precedent to the later initiates, who would share the infant’s blessing by worshipping the goddess at the shrine she demanded (Foley, 1994: 83). Significantly, the later celebrants would include a “child of the hearth”, a seemingly direct reference to Demophoön within the *Hymn*¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁶ The *Hymn* does not explain why the mother’s interruption would ruin the goddess’ work, but it might be understood as an uninitiated person’s intrusion into the secret rites, which only the enlightened may witness (and understand). The rite itself, as magical rather than divine, may require secrecy to work (Richardson, 1974: 241).

¹⁷⁷ Rather than reading Metaneira’s intrusion as an Eve-like crime for which later generations suffer, it could simply be a mythical way of explaining why humans are mortal and cannot join the gods, despite the favour they might win. Thus the myth explains that even the gods cannot transcend the limitations of (ordinary) mortals, but “Demeter promises to teach men her solemn rites” (Richardson, 1974: 57), a blessing which need not extend beyond the child she nursed. Interestingly, the *Hymn* notes that Demophoön’s wailing could not be calmed by his sisters, “inferior nurses and nurturers” (*Hymn to Demeter* l.291), as if the infant also recognises his lost opportunity and the severed bond with the goddess. This echoes the pessimism of the Orphic myth which identifies human nature as a combination of wicked Titan and transcendent Dionysus (Rohde, 1925: 341; West, 1983: 75), recognising that humans have insuperable obstacles between them and immortality, but any attempt at overcoming these must be directed through the sympathetic gods they worship.

¹⁷⁸ This would also be the only child initiated at these rites, so their youth would be noticeable: “[The Eumolpidae and Heralds] are not to initiate any underage male or female initiate except for the one who was initiated at [the hearth?]” (*Inscriptiones Graecae* I²6.C).

The attempt to use fire to purge the mortal body of its mortality¹⁷⁹ is not unique to Demeter and Demophoön, but every other instance of attempting it had also failed¹⁸⁰. The story of Demeter's attempt at immortalising Demophoön is echoed in the story of Thetis attempting to immortalise Achilles, although this story does not appear in the *Iliad*, and develops later, possibly as a borrowing from the *Hymn to Demeter*¹⁸¹ (although Hyginus¹⁸² notes that Achilles' heel was 'said to be mortal' (*Fabulae* 107), perhaps a vague reference to the story of the river Styx, but it first clearly appears in Statius' *Achilleid* (I.131-4, in the first century A.D.). Fire was one method of purification for religious rites, a more extreme form than washing with water (though washing with blood seems to be rare, and extreme, as well¹⁸³), so Demophoön is being cleansed of his impure nature to gain immortality¹⁸⁴, and presumably be a child Demeter cannot lose. Like Thetis (Apollodorus 3.171), Demeter combines purification by fire with treatments of ambrosia, and though this may preserve the mortal body and sustain the gods, it needs more than a once-off application:

¹⁷⁹ This appears to be the aim of the goddesses described in Greek myth setting children in the fire (Apollodorus 3.171; Richardson, 1974: 231-3; Burkert, 1985: 78).

¹⁸⁰ Demeter is not the first goddess who tries to immortalise her son (albeit an adopted one here), though she is one of the few who resorts to fire. Eos pleads with Zeus to grant Memnon immortality (Endsjø, 2009: 55; probably a borrowing from the Sarpedon scene in the *Iliad*, West, 2003: 5-10), and Thetis similarly seeks the chief god's permission (Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 2.79-80). These mothers achieve a special exception by appealing to Zeus. Demeter does not (she has withdrawn from his sphere), and Thetis originally attempts to make Achilles immortal herself, either by fire (Apollodorus 3.171), or in the river Styx (Apollonius IV.869-79). Apollonius of Rhodes also describes Thetis' attempt to immortalise Achilles, though again the child survives after his father's interruption of the rites (*The Voyage of Argo* IV.869-79). Just like Demeter, Thetis "snatching up the child threw him screaming on the floor" (IV.875). Aphrodite "washes away Aeneas' mortality in the river Numicius, and then gives him ambrosia and nectar" (Richardson, 1974: 239; Ovid *Metamorphoses* XIV.600f.). These attempts fail, perhaps vindicating Zeus' ultimate superiority.

¹⁸¹ Either Apollonius imitates the *Hymn*, or they both follow an epic model, though Richardson discounts the latter on internal grounds (1974: 69-70; 237-8).

¹⁸² Circa second century A.D. (Scott Smith, R., & Trzaskoma, S.M., 2007: xliii).

¹⁸³ Burkert, 1985: 76.

¹⁸⁴ This suggests something about the nature of the difference between mortals and immortals. The gods are not burdened by the same material as humans, and this material humans possess must be what decays and dies, while their soul, on a plane more akin to the gods', survives, but without the material body it loses its force, and sometimes consciousness. Apollodorus explains that "[w]ishing to make [Demophoön] immortal, she placed the infant in the fire during the night and stripped away its mortal flesh" (1.31), though in this description the child dies, "destroyed by the fire" (1.31). Curiously, this operates in the opposite way normal cremation and funeral rites were intended to work, since "once the body is destroyed by fire, then is the psyche relegated to Hades, no return is permitted to it, and not a breath of this world can penetrate to it there" (Rohde, 1925: 19).

“Ambrosia can also be applied with a similar effect [preservation of flesh] externally on the physical body, as seen with how Demeter and Thetis anointed the infants Demophoön and Achilles to make them immortal. Neither Demophoön nor Achilles became, however, immortal as the application of ambrosia ceased. At least to someone who is originally mortal, the effect of ambrosia was clearly not permanent.”

(Endsjø, 2009: 44)

Similarly, the story of Isis and Osiris, as Plutarch retells it (*De Iside et Osiride* 15-7), is almost entirely borrowed from the Demeter-Demophoön story, though this seems to be a conflation of the different myths, rather than independent and similar narratives¹⁸⁵.

Isis, following Osiris’ coffin to Byblos, is welcomed by the queen’s maids and finds work as a nurse to the queen’s son. While nursing the child, she “burned the mortal parts of its body” (16), until the mother interrupts her and “so deprived it of immortality” (*ibid*). Isis reclaims the coffin (grown into a tree’s trunk which has been used as a pillar in the palace), and wails so loudly that “the younger of the king’s sons died” (*ibid*). She leaves the palace to return to Egypt, taking “the elder son” (*ibid*) with her, and when he witnesses her grief over the body of Osiris, she “gave him a terrible look” (17), such that he died, thereby annihilating this royal family’s heirs, unlike the benevolent Demeter. It is significant that the story of Isis and Osiris was receptive to such a borrowing, and the incorporation of the episode (albeit with different consequences for the child, and lacking the Eleusinians’ hopeful promise of blessings) reflects an attempt to assimilate the goddesses and their roles and meaning. Both variants repeat the role of the boy child under the goddess’ care, purification by fire, and the interruption which brings the rites to an end, and leaves the immortalisation unfinished. Isis is far more ruthless, and the child (and a sibling) die.

Thetis, Isis and Demeter all harm their respective nurselings (Demeter’s casting the child aside makes him cry, but is not as extreme as Isis’ punishment). Thetis’ child grows up to become famous, but she has already killed other children to try immortalise them, so if

¹⁸⁵ “In the first century A.D. Plutarch repeated this story, with the difference being that he connected the procedure to the Egyptian goddess Isis, who was often identified with Demeter, and another royal child” (Endsjø, 2009: 71).

she had failed with Achilles as well, she seems to have had no qualms in killing her offspring¹⁸⁶. In comparison to her divine peers, Demeter is the most restrained of frustrated goddesses, and perhaps her restraint is partially learnt from her previous suffering, when she loses Persephone, and this second loss is simply another force she, a mother, cannot control¹⁸⁷. This suffering and fruitless anger humanises the goddess, and she has to learn to cope with what she is given, and resorts to her own powers to make any headway against an adverse system: she retreats and withholds her maternal bounty, and through this strategy (partially) achieves her desires.

Immortality for the Child

The motivation behind the Demophoön episode in the *Hymn* appears to be an attempt to immortalise a human, and even though she fails, this attempt leads Demeter to offer new blessings on those mortals who worship her¹⁸⁸. If Demeter is attempting to immortalise Demophoön so that she, like Hera producing Typhoon in some cosmogonies, could raise a rival against the chief god, and bear a child without the god's involvement, her long-term plan is significantly ominous. This motivation is not clearly suggested by the text itself, and at best might be an ominous shadow of a possibility given Hera's precedent. In contrast to Hera, however, Demeter is noticeably compassionate as she adopts a child¹⁸⁹,

¹⁸⁶ "As Ptolemy [Ptolemy Hephaestion, *New History* 6, summarised in Photius, *Myriobiblon* 190] informs us, Thetis burned all their six other children to death. Lycophron [*Alexandra* 178ff] confirms this story, telling how Achilles 'out of seven children' was the only one 'who escaped the fiery ashes.' In a desperate attempt to make her mortal offspring immortal, the divine mother killed all of her other children, having them one by one succumbing in the flames, a dire accomplishment also documented by the scholiast to Aristophanes" (Endsjø, 2009: 71).

¹⁸⁷ In Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, the bereaved mothers turn to Demeter as another mother, seeking divine compassion through their shared role, and even remind her of her own lost child, although curiously they call this child a 'son' (1.42-70), which could refer to Demophoön or another Eleusinian fosterling.

¹⁸⁸ Specifically, Demophoön is blessed because Demeter had nursed him, and this maternal bond merits her especial favour. The Eleusinians generally benefit from the proximity of her temple, so Demophoön's people are blessed because of his relationship with the goddess, and the royal women's hospitality shown to the disguised deity. Presumably the initiates at Eleusis can appropriate this connection and therefore benefit from the blessing, one which is not available in the same way from other sites. Other cults of Demeter do not offer the same promise as Eleusis, so the cult centre must be intrinsically connected to the blessing, and this connection can only derive out of the action described in the *Hymn*.

¹⁸⁹ Psychologically speaking, instead of raising a rival against Zeus, it seems more likely that Demeter is attempting to replace her abducted child by creating a new one for herself, albeit in an unnatural and ineffectual way, the sort of confused logic a grieving person might pursue in coping with their loss. This may explain her anger when Demophoön's mother interrupts the process, as this interference in her unreasonable scheme re-enacts and confirms her earlier loss. A son would be a better choice of replacement, as he is less likely to be taken by the patriarchal system, without a say, like his sister. A

rather than recruiting one to wage war. This militant motivation for immortality seems unlikely, even if it has some proto-feminist rebellious undertones:

“If Demeter... is attempting to provide a male challenger to Zeus, she, unlike her predecessors, surprisingly flees from the gods instead of rebelling directly against Zeus and turns to humanity to acquire a male offspring. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that a child of entirely mortal heritage could, even when immortalized, challenge the mighty ruler of the universe.”

(Foley, 1994: 113)

To push this interpretation quite far, by trying to immortalise Demophoön, Demeter quietly rebels against the order of the universe Zeus maintains. This is not the rebellion of Typhon, but an attempt to challenge the system as a whole, at its fundamental and basic levels: the strict division of spheres. The spheres of the mortal and immortal, which keep them separate, are part of the same system which keeps the Underworld and the upper regions distinct, and perhaps by crossing one boundary, Demeter may be able to cross another. Demophoön may then be her experiment in trying to gain access to her daughter, as Demeter pushes the limits of the universe to test their authenticity. This pushing of boundaries becomes important for Demeter's initiates, as it is such a trans-boundary connection they hope to make with the goddess by undergoing her rites: they want to forge an unusually intimate bond with the goddess, to earn her compassion, and her daughter's sympathy and blessing, in the afterlife. This testing of boundaries allows for the sympathetic impulses of the maternal bond, or the compassionate deity, to survive the otherwise formidable realities of the universe, death and mortality: “Unlike Zeus, [Demeter] is not concerned with the separation of spheres and the transcendence of mother/child bonds, but with a preservation of such bonds and a breaking down of divisions among spheres” (Foley, 1994: 115).

mortal child might suggest a disdain for the immortals who make up the system that has robbed Demeter of her daughter in the first place. The choice of someone else's child might be to distance herself from the intimate process of pregnancy and nursing her own child, which forged the bond that was to be so painfully sundered later, but it also avoids the contact with a male which, for Demeter so far, has never ended happily, if we include Zeus' daughter's abduction, and the mortal Iasion, assassinated by Zeus' lightning. This has to remain speculation based on modern psychological interpretations, but it is interesting that the scenario lends itself to such interpretations.

Fear at the Prospect of Death

Persephone's loss and return bears a striking resemblance to the disappearances (often deaths) and returns of other gods, in both Greek and other mythologies. Frazer's original thesis on the Dying God (1911) appropriates the euhemerist interpretation of these gods as originally symbolic extensions of human and vegetative death, united into one divine figure. Although the *Hymn to Demeter* describes the marriage-death of Persephone, and the new establishment of honours for the goddesses, it alters the Dying-Rising God motif (see chapter five) by setting a goddess in place of the son-consort god, and therefore the pursuit of new honours and the defeat of death differs. The myth is unique by setting the outcome of the familiar story within a new gender-paradigm, and must adjust to the new demands of the heroine:

“Both sexes pursue honor and status, but in Demeter's case the recovery of her lost daughter plays an emphatically central role. The female quest is defined by issues relating to marriage and fertility, the male quest by war and kingship. The male quest ends with an acceptance of mortality mitigated by fame, the female quest with a cyclical reunion and separation that also mitigates ‘death’.”

(Foley, 1994: 104)

While the male gods may defeat death through their skills as warriors, they also succumb to an annual death, a yearly sacrifice which provokes the mourning that echoes through literary history from the Levant for Adonis, as the Adonis river (the Abraham River or Nahr Ibrahim in Lebanon) turns blood-red, or as Isis' tears for Osiris make the Nile flood. Persephone does not undergo quite the same sacrifice, although she must return to the Underworld every year. Demeter wins a compromise from Zeus, but it is a compromise only possible because the relationship is not like the male god's conflict. The connection between Persephone and Hades is not a battle, it is a marriage¹⁹⁰, and so Persephone's return to the Underworld lacks the Dying-Rising god's antagonism and violence (see chapter five). The son-consort god must defeat death, but the goddess of flowers and

¹⁹⁰ In place of the son-consort's violent death (which is frequently sexualised as the death arises out of his relationship with the goddess), this maiden is violently abducted and her marriage is experienced like a rape. The male gods are not raped as the maiden is (although Attis' gored thigh might symbolically connect the experiences), but suffer ‘a male death’ while the maiden ‘suffers as a woman does’ (a term used in the Roman period for men who took on the passive sexual role, *muliebria pati*, Walters, 1997: 30).

maidens brings a 'garden' with her, making the Halls of Hades a home, rather than a battlefield¹⁹¹.

Conclusion

This chapter considered the ancient Greek beliefs regarding death and the subsequent afterlife, and the relation of these beliefs to the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and potentially the cult of Eleusis. Noting a development in the belief of the Underworld, in which a community-centric culture, presuming little of the awareness of souls after death, gave way to a slightly more individualistic attitude which was marked by an elaboration on the journey to, and geography of, the Underworld. This development, which reflects an adjusted perception of the soul, may have given the cult, and its attendant poem, greater symbolic meaning and emotional appeal. The 'dread' Persephone of Homer's *Iliad* could become the sympathetic daughter of Demeter, whose grove in the Land of the Dead could be a place of happiness even in the inescapable gloom of Hades' realm.

¹⁹¹ So, like the potentially comforting presence of Hermes and Charon, "death itself is perceived as ambivalent. In so far as death is basically bad and frightening, the Greek images of death are negative. In so far as the Greek collective representations try to create reassuring images that allow the individuals to cope with death, and especially with the prospect of their own death, death also has a positive and kindly face" (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1996: 352).

Chapter Four – Mythic Parallels – Infernal Goddesses

Introduction

This chapter will be the first half of the investigation into the mythic parallels of Persephone, focusing on goddesses who belong to the Underworld, descend into that realm, or are closely associated with the dead. This study will focus on Indo-European and Near Eastern goddesses who may have influenced the characterisation of Persephone as an Underworld queen at a very early stage, rather than contemporary figures in Greece and Italy, such as Artemis or Athene. Contemporary goddesses' identities would be too closely tied to Persephone's to easily determine which aspects belonged to which goddess, and they all may have derived their shared aspects from these earlier goddesses. The emphasis shall remain on goddesses, rather than chthonic gods, because the primary relationship expressed in the *Hymn to Demeter* is that between mother and daughter, and male deities are rather intruders upon this relationship.

Persephone is a figure unique to Greek myth. She is not the only maiden goddess, and certainly not the only daughter, but her relationship with her mother is her central myth, around which a complex religious cult was based. No other Greek goddess seems to share the significance of this mother-daughter relationship, so it is significant that Demeter and Persephone's myth and cult gained such prominence. Their story apparently answered a need that no other myth in the Greek corpus could provide, but what then makes their story so appealing? To what extent was the story shaped by this need: by the cultural beliefs and tension outlined in the previous two chapters? Was Persephone a conglomeration or accretion of various goddess figures into the one that could perform this function, answer this need, of the ancient Greeks?

An investigation is required into the possible antecedents of Persephone, and her contemporaries and parallels, which will shed light on how much of Persephone's story is part of broader mythic patterns, and how much, conversely, has been shaped by the mythic need of the Greeks. Such an approach of comparative analysis will seek its answers in the similarities between narrative units of different myths, which Lévi-Strauss

calls mythemes¹⁹² (1955), or in relationships between characters in the narrative. This approach will not go so far as claiming Lévi-Strauss' Structuralist binaries, or Jungian archetypes (Thury & Devinney, 2009), but will consider the structural and psychological parallels between the myths as indications of a kind of genetic development of the narrative, albeit a development whose exact shape, form and timing cannot be firmly asserted due to the lack of surviving evidence and the gap in time and cultural understanding between those ages and our own.

Persephone is certainly not the only goddess of the dead, yet this seems to be her primary feature, as it is awarded or thrust upon her, within the narrative of the myth, which presents an aetiology of her position in the Underworld. If connections can be traced to the mythologies of Northern Europe (West, 2007: 6), Persephone might find echoes in the Valkyries and Hel, the goddess of the Underworld in Norse myth. These connections are difficult to establish, as similarities may lie in a joint origin that lies so far back that the connection must remain conjectural, or they may arise out of simultaneous but independent developments in their respective mythologies. A better candidate for connections with Persephone would be Ereshkigal, the Mesopotamian goddess of the Underworld, a queen in her own right, and a part of a larger collection of narratives that seems to have influenced ancient Greek thought and myth-making (West, 2003: 54f.). Unlike Ereshkigal, however, Persephone is more than the queen of the dead, and her role as her mother's daughter, in association with the spring and vegetative life, seems to echo the Corn Maiden Frazer identifies in European myth (Part V, Vol.I, 1912: 131f.), though again, this connection is difficult to trace. These comparisons do not assume a shared origin or direct influence between the cultures' myths, but attempts to note the similarities between these goddesses, similarities which are significant enough to raise the possibility of a shared origin, but that possibility can only remain speculative with the existing information we possess. To understand the persona Persephone finally adopted, I intend to trace these antecedents and evaluate to what degree they may have influenced her development, and led to her final characterisation and conceptualisation.

¹⁹² The narrative equivalent to a phoneme or morpheme in language.

The Uneasy Twin Personae

The origin of the Greek goddess has been variously pursued, looking to her neighbouring counterparts, and the possibilities of the development of the goddess within Greece itself. From Çatal Hüyük, whose depiction of a ‘mother goddess’ has been frequently described and interpreted (Mellaart, 1967: 82-3; Hodder, 2006: 213-4), it is noticeable that “[n]o traces of sacrifices have been found in the shrines but offerings of burnt grain: this indeed suggests that the goddess was regarded as fostering the fruits of the fields, and this much is confirmed by the fact that one specific image of hers was found in a grain-bin” (Zuntz, 1971: 16). This Anatolian forerunner (c.7000 B.C.) was certainly connected to the grain, and thus she may relate to Demeter more closely than to her daughter¹⁹³. The goddesses’ distinct names, Kore and Persephone¹⁹⁴, may be a combination of her real name with a title: “Persephone-Kore might well have been a very early cult-title, meaning simply the girl-Persephone” (Farnell, 1907: 120). The title’s uncertain designation to the goddess means the conflation of the goddesses, if there was one, is difficult to trace, because “if Persephone were already the daughter of Demeter before the separate name Kore arose, this latter when detached would give still more vivid expression to the relationship. Or if Persephone had not been already regarded, the name Kore, now detached and yet recognised as hers and meaning equally ‘girl’ or ‘daughter’, would speedily bring about her affiliation to Demeter” (*ibid.*: 120). Persephone’s relationship with Demeter would be solidified if the pre-existing Maiden-Daughter shared her title ‘Kore’, but if she was already related to Demeter (i.e. there was originally one, not two goddesses), this new title would give new emphasis to this relationship, reflecting the emphasis on their bond just as the *Hymn* does.

Turning to archaeological evidence, rather than supporting the claim that the chthonic and amenable aspects of the younger goddess were incompatible, Farnell argues rather

¹⁹³ Later syncretism with the Anatolian goddesses (see chapter five) would incorporate Gaia, Rhea and Demeter, as Mother Goddesses, and goddesses of the earth and field, rather than Persephone.

¹⁹⁴ Although, importantly, her name is not originally Greek (Zuntz, 1971: 75), though there is an Attic variation, *Pherrephatta* (Burkert, 1985: 159). Additionally, even the site of this worship is not ‘Greek’: Eleusis “is a ‘pre-Greek’ word recurring in the name of the goddess Eleithyia-Eleutho and, moreover, in places – particularly in Arkadia – where any ‘influence’ from (Attic) Eleusis is out of the question” (Zuntz, 1971: 79).

that the goddesses were always identified as the same being, corresponding “with all the facts of ritual, which bear strong evidence against Dr. Jevons’ view that ‘the daughter’ was once quite a distinct person, an Eleusinian corn-maiden who by some later contamination becomes confused with Persephone the queen of the shades. The ritual-testimony compels us to say that the young corn-maiden was always indistinguishable from the chthonian goddess, that at no period is Kore shown to be the former only and not also the latter” (*ibid.*: 121). This lack of an independent Kore is intriguing, unless we posit that the ancient worshippers could credit a daughter to their grain goddess without developing too elaborate an identity for her (leaving the mother-daughter relationship as their primary concern).

An opposing theory considers that the two Greek goddesses may have originally been a single goddess whose manifestations became slowly distinguished, and set in a mother-daughter relationship in recognition of their similarities (Kerényi, 1967: 147). In Sicily, for example, the archaeological record reveals an iconographic distinction being made after a long period of identical representation¹⁹⁵, albeit as the Daughter overtakes her mother’s eminence in Sicilian worship: “the representations of the *dea seduta* [the seated rustic goddess wearing a shawl], which were so frequent, and remarkably uniform, throughout the half century from about 530 to 480 B.C., cease after this (approximate) date; the date, roughly, of the representations of Persephone [as austere maiden]” (Zuntz, 1971: 114).

Zuntz actually suggests a triad of goddesses with their own functions (Mother, Maiden-Daughter, Underworld Goddess), in which the two younger goddesses were conflated into the double-named Daughter:

“this pair of Mother and Daughter... this unique pair actually comprises three persons, for the younger goddess is also Persephone, and this is not merely the name of the – otherwise unnamed – ‘Maiden’. This designation, ‘Maiden’ or ‘Daughter’, Kore, is itself her name; on the other hand it has long since been acknowledged that by its widely varying forms (Pherephatta, Pēriphonā,

¹⁹⁵ “Archaic sculpture is restricted in individualization, and this the more so the older the specimen” (Zuntz, 1971: 97).

Persephoneia, etc.) this alternative name is proved non-Greek, that is, non-Indo-European.”

(*ibid.*: 75)

This triple-identity may reflect a degree of conflation as the netherworld goddess becomes identified with the maiden-daughter, softening her infernal aspect with the ‘Nordic’ Corn-Maiden’s genial identity¹⁹⁶, but this interpretation assumes that her identities as chthonic goddess and spring maiden were originally separate. This conflation would have occurred as (and if¹⁹⁷) the Greek-speaking immigrants brought their own ‘Nordic’ goddess with them, and merged her with a goddess they found already resident: “In Greece, the immigrants found a goddess Persephone-Phersephatta worshipped by the native population which they gradually subjected, and with which they mingled” (*ibid.*: 76). Considering the high possibility of influence arising from the Near East, it is also reasonable that this ambiguous daughter goddess may have been developed at a fairly ‘late’ date, c.650 B.C. (exaggerating her constituent parts that may have been conflated), as shadowed-aspects she possessed were given new colour and force by the incoming material, which saw similarities with Inanna, Ereshkigal and Geshtinanna. This potential Mesopotamian influence will be the focus of most of this chapter.

Influence from Mesopotamia

The most prominent parallel for Persephone in the role of infernal queen is Ereshkigal, the Mesopotamian goddess who rules the underworld. The influence between the regions of Greece and the Near East at the time seems certain, as links have been traced to movements of people, goods and ideas across these regions, even during the Dark Ages

¹⁹⁶ Persephone “could not have been felt to be one with the ‘Maiden’, had she not been what she is in the oldest Greek testimonies (in Homer, that is; cf. Hesiod, *Th.*914) and for ever remained – the Queen of the Netherworld. Too great a goddess to be forgotten, she must in some essential aspects have been so like the Nordic ‘Maiden’ that the two could be felt to be one and the same. The ‘Maiden’ who every year brings fruitfulness and life on earth cannot have been conceived of as the queen of the unchanging infernal realm of death. Could her periodic absence, which caused life on earth to languish, have been thought of as her stay in the Netherworld, perhaps with some Hel (to use the Germanic name) or a similar godhead? Or, alternately, could the pre-Greek Phersephassa, beyond her rule over the dead, have been worshipped also as a bringer of fruitfulness?” (Zuntz, 1971: 6-77).

¹⁹⁷ The theory of a Doric invasion is certainly not universally accepted, but mythic ideas and figures need not travel only through actual migrations, but may be passed on to neighbouring communities, modifying existing figures and ideas, or introducing new ones. ‘Nordic’ will remain in quotes to acknowledge the tenuous claim of the link between Mediterranean and later, recorded, Nordic myths.

of Greece, when travel and contact with other cultures was limited (West, 1997: 8-9). Any transmission or contact seems to have been especially concentrated in two periods, as the “suitable historical condition for such an influence to occur would have existed before 1100 and again in the ninth and eighth centuries” (Burkert, 1988: 169), and it appears that Phoenician craftsmen settled “in several parts of Greece from the ninth century on” (West, 1997: 9), bringing Semitic names like ‘Salamis’ with them, a site very close to Athens, which Eleusis itself faced across the channel (Clinton, 2010: 342).

Either of these periods could have introduced the mythic material that might influence the depiction and conceptualisation of Persephone, but the second date is especially interesting as it precedes the suggested dating of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* by about a century (Richardson, 2011: 49), and could therefore be a likely candidate for transmitting Near Eastern ideas to Greece while being recent enough to minimise adaptations of the material within Greece. A related poem, the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*, written at about the same time, and of roughly the same length as the *Hymn to Demeter*, shares this probability of Mesopotamian and Near Eastern influence. The evidence for this lies in numerous motifs and structural patterns through the poem, that parallels hymns from Mesopotamia: “The poem appears... to have been composed during or at the end of the period of strong Near Eastern influence in Greece as evinced by the Orientalizing style of Greek art which was popular between approximately 750 and 650 BC” (Penglase, 1997: 96)¹⁹⁸.

Mesopotamian myths possess a recurring triad of divinities, which echoes triads in Greek myth, such as Demeter-Persephone-Kore¹⁹⁹, suggesting something more than just simultaneous but independent development, but a shared origin: “the motif of the trio of mother, sister and young rising god [is] represented in the Damu myths by Duttur,

¹⁹⁸ Just as this period of art follows the period of ‘transmission and contact’ by about a century, so too could the myths have developed after a similar duration. Noticeably other Homeric hymns show evidence of Mesopotamian influence. Significant events in the *Hymn to Apollo* that make up important symbolic motifs in the Mesopotamian material include the food of the gods, as Themis feeds the young god ambrosia, and the infant deity is washed and clothed, just as the ascending gods in the Near East would be washed and clothed in the raiment of their new powers.

¹⁹⁹ Or Demeter-Persephone-Hekate, or Demeter-Persephone-Demophoön.

Geshtinanna/ Gunura and Damu/ Dumuzi” (*ibid.*: 79)²⁰⁰. This pattern of divine triad extends to Greek art, such that:

“the triad of mother, sister, and male child – parallel to the group Duttur, Geshtinanna and Damu – is shown in Greece on pottery, where a standard tableau is the group of Demeter, Persephone and a male child, perhaps Ploutos, as the returning child of plenty. This triad is indicated at the end of the hymn, where Ploutos is mentioned in connection with the two goddesses: they send Ploutos into the house of the man whom they favour, taking wealth with him (lines 488-9).” (*ibid.*: 112)

Perhaps the influence of the Mesopotamian material encouraged the depiction of Ploutos on these vases, when he is almost entirely absent elsewhere, unless he is little more than an embodiment of wealth and prosperity, rather than a fully characterised figure. An interesting parallel to these (assisting) siblings might be uncovered in Hekate’s unexpected role in assisting Demeter in her search for Persephone, and if Geshtinanna descends to replace Damu in the Underworld for six months, Hekate’s later association with the Underworld may have derived from a similar version where she descends with Persephone as a companion (*Hymn to Demeter* 440)²⁰¹.

Inanna as a Descending-Rising Goddess

The Mesopotamian material which may have influenced the Greek myth conveniently falls within one narrative strand, even though it was spread over a number of hymns²⁰² and appeared in different versions over time. Inanna/ Ishtar, the goddess of love, fertility and war, descends to the land of the Underworld, ruled by her sister Ereshkigal, to win power over that realm in addition to all the other powers she has accumulated²⁰³.

²⁰⁰ Another Mesopotamian triad is found in “the dying god Lil: his mother is Ninhursag, his sister Egime” (Penglase, 1997: 30n59).

²⁰¹ Something like a sister descending, although not in substitution, unless a conflation of these two goddesses might give a solution to the problem of Persephone’s bilocation, as presumably the queen of the Underworld never leaves her realm, but Persephone is only present for a few months every year. There is no direct proof to this ‘similar version’, but the *Hymn*’s recognition that Hekate became Persephone’s “usher and helper” (440), and her later association with the Underworld (Apollonius Rhodius *Argonautica* 3.840; *OH*1; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10.403; Virgil *Aeneid* 6.257) does encourage such an interpretation.

²⁰² Those used in this study include *The Descent of Inanna to the Underworld*, *The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld*, and *Dumuzi’s Dream* (ed. Pritchard, 1969).

²⁰³ The Inanna of the earlier, Sumerian version of the myth desires the powers of the Underworld, but the gods judge this to be hubris: “Inanna craved the great heaven and she craved the great below as well. The

Ereshkigal, with the help of her ministers, overcomes her sister and hangs her like a corpse on a hook, until Inanna's contingency plan takes effect, and her own ministers persuade the gods to help Inanna escape²⁰⁴. Inanna is only allowed to escape if she furnishes a substitute in the Underworld, and she chooses her husband Dumuzi(d), who tries to flee the demons she sends. Taking shelter in his sister's sheepfold, the young prince cannot escape the demons and is dragged away. His sister, Geshtinanna, and mother undertake a search for Dumuzi, and eventually win a compromise in which the siblings spend half a year each in the underworld, while Inanna remains with her new powers in the world above. This myth, pieced together from several texts, offers some important similarities with Demeter and Persephone through the figures of Inanna and Geshtinanna, and prefigure the connection between Persephone and Dumuzi which will be part of the discussion in the following chapter.

Inanna descends to the Underworld to win power over death, but her descent requires that she be stripped of all honours and powers related to the upper world, and for her arrogance and ambition her sister has her killed. The Underworld is no normal realm to be conquered by any god. The Mesopotamians would frequently rewrite their mythic hierarchies according to terrestrial politics, such that newly powerful kingdoms would assert their god's dominance over the newly conquered cities' gods. Yet the Underworld could not be so easily overcome. However, no mortal king could conquer the land of the dead, and then claim his victory was due to his patron god's power over it. The ability to

divine powers of the Underworld are divine powers which should not be craved, for whoever gets them must remain in the Underworld. Who, having got to that place, could then expect to come up again?" (*The Descent of Inana to the Underworld* 190-4). In another major hymn about Inanna, she 'tricks' Enki into giving her immense powers, another scene of her ambition, so this descent to win the powers of the Underworld is not uncharacteristic of the powerful and cunning goddess.

²⁰⁴ This hymn makes no mention at her death that the forces she embodies, sexual desire and vegetative fertility, are brought to a halt, so Enki's intercession is out of compassion for his 'daughter', rather than concern for the welfare of the order of the universe. He responds to Ninsubura's plea not to "let your precious metal be alloyed there with the dirt of the Underworld. Don't let your precious lapis lazuli be split there with the mason's stone. Don't let your boxwood be chopped there with the carpenter's wood. Don't let young lady Inana be killed in the Underworld" (*The Descent of Inana* 209-16). This suggests a concern with the improper association of valuable things with worthless or ordinary things, a mismatch of values, such that things which do not belong together are being joined. Though this does challenge the notion of cosmic ordering and balance, this impropriety is not for fertility and life (except for life's incongruence in the land of the dead). It rather sounds like the minister wants Enki to protect his divine estate from an unworthy fate.

descend to the ‘land of no return’²⁰⁵, and then overcome that restriction and actually rise again, was rare and impressive, and only two myths describe such an accomplishment, the *Descent of Inanna* and the myth of Enlil and Ninlil’s descent: “both deal with the exceptional circumstances of gods who overcame the laws of nature by making a visit to the underworld from which they succeed in returning. In both cases this is only achieved by the provision of a substitute who takes their place or is left behind in the underworld so that they may return” (Black & Green, 1992: 181). Enlil and Ninlil create children on their journey to the Underworld who can stay on their behalf. Inanna’s substitute is a more intriguing subject, as she forces her husband into the Underworld for not mourning for her death, and he takes her place. This figure, either identified as Damu or Dumuzi²⁰⁶, is given prominence in *Dumuzi’s Dream*, in which his descent to the Underworld as Inanna’s substitute is given attention as he tries to evade his fate.

Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld follows the ‘Journey’ structure of the Mesopotamian myths identified as influencing some Greek myths (Penglase, 1997). The goddess ascends, after her initial descent, and gains power, though both Inanna and Persephone rely on others to help them escape. In a significant parallel, Persephone’s eventual ascent from the Underworld in the *Hymn to Demeter* is also marked with the new powers and honours awarded to her and her mother by Zeus: the new rites in Eleusis (see chapter two). If their story were to be interpreted according to this Mesopotamian pattern then Persephone’s abduction (resulting in Demeter’s anger) would be an ‘initial defeat’, characteristic of these narratives, emphasising how difficult the task is. This ‘initial defeat’ then, like the rest of the *Hymn’s* events, follow the usual pattern of the Mesopotamian ‘ascent strand’: “This pattern [in *Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld*] of initial defeat, help asked and received from the upperworld or the place of origin, and then victory, is a common and apparently important structure in the journey to acquire power” (Penglase, 1997: 17). If interpreting Persephone’s abduction as an ‘initial defeat’

²⁰⁵ “The Sumerians had quite a number of different names for this other world: *arali*, *irkalla*, *kukku*, *ekur*, *kigal*, *ganzir*, all of which were borrowed into Akkadian as well. Otherwise it was known simply as the ‘earth’ or ‘ground’... the ‘land of no return’ or, occasionally, the ‘desert’, or else the ‘lower world’” (Black & Green, 1992: 180). The term *kigal* may reveal that Ereshkigal’s name is a title for the Underworld deity.

²⁰⁶ “Damu, a ‘dying and returning’ deity... whose specific function is the fertility of vegetation, is identified with, or is an aspect of, Dumuzi” (Penglase, 1997: 26).

for the goddesses before they gain their power, the difference between Inanna's autonomy in her myth and Persephone's forced abduction might be reduced by recognising that Inanna is stripped of her powers as she descends to the Underworld.

Even if Inanna initially chooses to descend, therefore acting with more freedom than Persephone does²⁰⁷, Inanna's descent is marked by seven stages of being stripped of her clothes, symbols of her upper-world powers, until "Inanna... arrive[s] in the netherworld naked and 'subjugated'" (*ibid.*: 15). Both Inanna and Persephone therefore arrive in the Underworld stripped of power and divine strength, and just as Persephone cannot seem to escape her new husband and his realm, Inanna is killed by Ereshkigal, her corpse is hung from a hook, and she cannot escape until her friends in the upper-world send aid and release her²⁰⁸. This defeat is an important part of Inanna's quest to gain new powers, and precedes (though it provides the motivation for) the choice of Dumuzi as her substitute. Inanna's defeat is temporary, because the powerful goddess saw it coming, and left instructions with her servant Ninshubur. This preparation for her defeat is in marked contrast to Demeter and Persephone, who do not play any role in decision-making or planning of the new ordering of honours.

Inanna is saved when her vizier seeks help from the gods, and Enki sends sexless assistants to trick Ereshkigal into releasing her sister²⁰⁹. Inanna is therefore able to gain mastery over her sister's realm, and add them to her own terrestrial powers:

²⁰⁷ Interestingly, Ishtar threatens the doorkeeper to the Underworld with her anger if he does not let her through, but her threat includes a terrifying control over the dead: "I shall raise up the dead and they shall eat the living:/ The dead shall outnumber the living!" (*Descent of Ishtar* l.19-20). Ishtar evidently has power over the dead already, at least in the way she can control them, so she is not presuming upon Ereshkigal's power over the dead, but only intends to overcome the power of the Underworld to restrict egress.

²⁰⁸ Part of her release is secured through Enki's gift of the plant of life, which the emissaries feed Inanna's corpse to revive it, and enable her return to the surface. This plant may therefore be a shared motif with the Greek *Hymn*, if Persephone's pomegranate seed has been reinterpreted in her story.

²⁰⁹ In the Akkadian version, the figure sent to save Ishtar is Asushanamir, a figure with an abnormal sexuality (in contrast to the sexless figures Enki sends for Inanna), which is supposed to excite Ereshkigal, suggesting a sexual aspect to the action in the Underworld that might echo in Hades' abduction of a bride. Similarly, when Ishtar sends Dumuzi in her stead as substitute, "Ereshkigal also ordered that Dumuzi should be washed and anointed, and clothed in a red garment; he should play the flute and prostitutes should arouse his sexual desire" (Penglase, 1997: 24). These sexual elements may find some connection with the bawdy jokes Baubo/ Iambe tells Demeter in the Greek myths. The 'trick' of these emissaries is to

“Inanna’s victory lies in her ascent from the Land of No Return, and it is by means of the ascent that she gains netherworld powers. As she planned, she gains the power to rise again; she overcomes the netherworld and its central power, which is to hold all who descend to it; this was the power of death which belonged to the netherworld gods. It is the ascent that is the important thing; anyone can descend.”

(*ibid.*: 17-18).

Inanna’s ascent is what gives her the power she sought, though she does not linger to be queen of the dead. Ereshkigal maintains her position, and Inanna’s increased power does nothing to lessen Ereshkigal’s authority over the dead. This is not clarified in the texts, though in contrast, the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* assumes a measure of power will be given to Persephone when she becomes queen of the Underworld. Unlike Inanna, Persephone’s new powers partly derive from her control over the land of the dead, and her new honours when she resurfaces are in addition to her new kingdom. Inanna is not entirely free, however, just as Persephone is constrained to eventually return to the Underworld.

The Anunna gods refuse Inanna egress because no one had ever left the netherworld alive, and she needs a substitute²¹⁰. When she returns to the surface, dogged by these netherworld demons until she can find this substitute, she finds Dumuzi, happily indifferent to her sufferings, and not mourning her, so she chooses him to replace her in the netherworld. He is the fourth person she encounters, so it is not a simple case of proximity determining her choice: “The first three divine figures [Ninshubur, Shara, Lulal] show proper respect towards her, mourning and grovelling in the dust at her feet, and she spares them. Dumuzi, however, does not show proper respect, nor does he

sympathise with the goddess’ suffering in labour, and it is unusual, in comparison to Persephone, that Ereshkigal is called “the mother who gave birth” (l.254-62), and that she is made vulnerable to Enki’s tricks because of her weakness as a mother. This might associate her more with Demeter, the mother, than Persephone, the supposedly childless maid.

²¹⁰ Inanna’s choice of substitute may be of symbolic rather than practical importance for the hymn, so she chooses from among her loyal servants and her husband as significant figures in her myth, but the Anuna’s words here might be significant. The goddess cannot just find any unhappy soul she comes across to be her substitute, she has to choose someone who means something to her, she cannot be “unscathed” (l.284-9) after her visit to the Underworld. She must suffer a loss, even if she herself is to escape, so her husband was probably one of the few substitutes available to her. Although she is angry at his indifference to her and thus chooses him, she also laments for him once he is lost.

recognise her power. Instead of being found in mourning and falling into the dust at her approach, he is dressed in beautiful clothes and seated on a ‘magnificent throne’, so she consigns him to the netherworld” (*ibid.*: 19-20). He pleads with his brother-in-law Utu, the sun god, to help him escape, but he is eventually captured, and “Inanna, or Ereshkigal, ordained that Dumuzi must spend half of the year in the netherworld, alternating with his sister Geshtinanna” (*ibid.*: 16).

Although *Inanna’s Descent* does not explain this choice of Geshtinanna²¹¹, the supplementary myths about Damu (Dumuzi) focus on these siblings and their experiences when Inanna returns from the dead. In contrast to the remarkable lack of significant sisters in Greek myth (even the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* only mentions Artemis briefly)²¹², this myth establishes Dumuzi’s sister as an important and active character. Her place in this perpetual cycle of descent and return was not forced on her as it was forced on Dumuzi, because she volunteers to sacrifice herself to sooth her brother²¹³. She does not share her brother’s guilt in celebrating Inanna’s death, but in contrast to the fatally competitive divine sisters, Inanna and Ereshkigal, her sisterly devotion has her commit herself to half of every year in the underworld. This shares a fraternal devotion evident in the myth of Castor and Pollux’s alternation in the stars and underworld, and gives an interesting parallel to Persephone, as a maiden is annually forced to descend to the Underworld. An additional echo with the *Hymn to Demeter* is Dumuzi’s plea with Utu, the sun-god, for assistance. Dumuzi’s futile request for help from Utu might parallel Demeter’s questioning of Helios, though Demeter turns to the sun-god as a panoptic deity, rather than an intercessor with her divine antagonists.

²¹¹ Her name may connect the maiden to the primary goddess here, or identify her as an aspect of the goddess.

²¹² Notably, however, Persephone’s half-sisters Artemis and Athene are among her companions when she is abducted, and do try to help her (Claudian II.11; *Helen* 1301f.), and Hekate seems to gain a sisterly role in the *Hymn* (438-41).

²¹³ Her self-sacrifice here seems to be a substitute for a substitute (Dumuzi), so there is a curious triad of death-constrained figures, as each becomes obliged to remain in the Underworld unless a substitute takes their place. Even Inanna, though she has successfully overcome her sister’s power, is still obliged to obey the netherworld demons (Penglase, 1997: 20).

Inanna's descent and return does not in itself establish a recurring cycle of descent-and-return, as she intends for her return to be permanent, and refuses the compromise forced onto Persephone. She intends to send Dumuzi down in her place, and although this means that Inanna herself overcomes the power of the Underworld, the cycle of descent-and-return (which is important for the myth, and thus for mortals) is not established. It is only Geshtinanna's self-sacrifice that creates the recurring cycle. This recurring cycle, like Persephone's, is more attuned to giving hope to mortals that the boundaries of the land of the dead are not impermeable, transforming the original version of Inanna's victory over death into a potentially comforting narrative. This narrative of descent and return is, like that of Persephone and Demeter, associated with vegetative fertility, as much as it glorifies Inanna's powers generally: "Dumuzi's return, like that of Inanna, also has its application in fertility, both in sexual reproduction and in the renewal of vegetable life" (Penglase, 1997: 18). Dumuzi's identity as a shepherd may suggest that the breeding cycle of the flocks were more significant in his myth than the vegetation generally, as it is for Persephone: "Dumuzi's return from the netherworld to the earth in spring results in fertility of the flocks" (*ibid.*: 25-6). This vegetative aspect, embodied in Inanna and her consort Dumuzi, links these figures with the seasonal gods of the Near East and Greece (see chapter five).

Dumuzi's Dream

In a supplementary hymn to the *Descent* hymns, *The Dream of Dumuzi*²¹⁴ describes the response of Dumuzi and his sister Geshtinanna²¹⁵ to Inanna's command that he be sent to the Underworld in her place. Framed as a prophetic dream Dumuzi has before he is seized, this hymn elaborates one version of the events that follows Inanna's return from

²¹⁴ In Wolkstein and Kramer's *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 1983.

²¹⁵ Geshtinanna is recorded as Ereshkigal's scribe in the Underworld: "unlike that of the Egyptians, there was no judgement or evaluation of the moral qualities of the dead. They stood before Ereshkigal, who merely pronounced the sentence of death upon them while their names were recorded on a tablet by Geshinana, scribe of the underworld" (Black & Green, 1992: 180). The important role a scribe would play in the administration of Mesopotamian society could easily be extended to the necessity for proper administration in the Underworld, with its burgeoning population. Geshtinanna seems to gain an important role in the Underworld upon her descent, but whether she was conflated with a separate goddess to become Ereshkigal's scribe, or whether she was identified as a scribe before her descent and then became a useful assistant to the infernal queen, is difficult to ascertain.

Ereshkigal's kingdom, and exhibits Geshtinanna's loyalty to her brother, and their shared bond, which might justify their shared fate. Dumuzi fears that he will die soon, and he tells the countryside that his mother "will call to me, my mother, my Durtur, will call to me" (5-14). This prediction foretells the mother's search for her missing child, a child lost to the Underworld (though in contrast to Demeter, Duttur seeks her son)²¹⁶. This search seems to be a recurring element of several Mesopotamian myths, but the figures who undertake the search vary. In Apollo (a god with striking Mesopotamian parallels see p103) and Damu's cases, the figures undertaking the search are their respective mothers, though motivations differ. Leto seeks a place to give birth, and bring her powerful son into the world, while Damu's mother seeks her deceased son, to revive him and return him to the world of the living. Both entail a search²¹⁷, either for a son or for a place to bear the son, but both share the goal of (re)birthing a god. This story pattern, fulfilling the goddess-and-consort strand (see p134) of Mesopotamian myth, describes the god's ascent to power through the actions of a goddess, generally his mother or lover (or both).

Demeter's central role in the Greek myth is more than that of an angry goddess withdrawing her powers from the world (as Inanna's powers disappear when she 'dies'), and the cause of her wrath and withdrawal finds this important parallel in the Mesopotamian material:

"...the journey of Demeter closely parallels that of Duttur. She wanders despairingly over the earth in search of her lost child, ignorant of the fact that she has been carried off to Hades. No one can tell her the fate of the child. Like the Mesopotamian goddess, she is unwashed. Finally there is a point in her wandering journey where the goddess discovers her child's fate. The OB version speaks of her determination to descend to the netherworld, and she sets out to do so. Similarly, Demeter removes herself from Olympus and the Assembly of the gods and goes to earth, wandering through the cities and fields of men, determined on her child's release."

²¹⁶ Baldr's mother Frigg travels the world to make everything in it promise not to harm her son. If a connection can be made here with the Nordic material (see p126), it might be significant that Dumuzi describes his mother's search *before* he is actually seized and killed.

²¹⁷ A 'search', set on Mt. Ida, is also described in the Epidaurian hymn of the Mother of the Gods (Furley & Bremmer, 2001: 214-224), and the goddess of Euripides' *Helen* (l.1322-33), which both suggest a conflation of Demeter with Cybele.

Duttur searches for Dumuzi just as Demeter searches for Persephone, both mourning and lamenting their loss as if the child were dead, and eventually finding that their child has indeed been snatched into the infernal realm. Both mothers are willing to risk the powers of the Land of the Dead to retrieve their children, in touching examples of maternal devotion, and both successfully achieve their child's (partial) return. Admittedly, one mother is a mortal, while the other is divine, but the adoption of mythic motifs tends towards patterns and symbols, rather than individual characters. Duttur seeks to enter the netherworld to feed and resuscitate her son, but her journey starts on earth. Demeter's 'descent' is more developed and staggered, as she moves from the heavens to the earth, and then she retreats into her temple as she is unable to enter the Underworld²¹⁸.

Despite their determination to overcome the constraints of the Underworld for the sake of their children, neither mother fully confronts the infernal kingdom's true power. Neither Demeter nor Duttur can descend to Hades' realm in the *Hymn*, and they must rely on another to descend and return with their child (*ibid.*: 111). Demeter relies on Hermes, the messenger, to act as *psychopompos* and collect her daughter, and his role is curiously paralleled in Namtar, Ereshkigal's minister and messenger, who can travel between the upper- and lower-worlds even though his mistress cannot. Dumuzi, seeking escape from Inanna's dreadful doom, and Demeter, seeking news on her daughter, turn to their respective sun-gods for help, and both receive moderate assistance. Helios reveals to Demeter where Persephone has been taken, but he cannot help her retrieve her daughter, and tries to convince her that this marriage is beneficial. Utu manages to change Dumuzi's shape three times to evade the pursuing demons in *Dumuzi's Dream*, but this intercessor is unable to completely protect the young king.

A contrast between the Greek and Mesopotamian material lies in the gender of the missing children, as Duttur seeks her son, and Demeter her daughter, yet this distinction

²¹⁸ "Demeter's descent is from heaven to earth, whereas with Damu's mother it is from earth to the netherworld" (Penglase, 1997: 111).

is not an insurmountable shift in the way the myths can evolve to suit new circumstances, and the Mesopotamian material also provides a female child as Persephone's counterpart. Although Persephone is more readily identified with Ereshkigal, as queen of the Underworld, and even Inanna, as a goddess who gains power after an enforced stay in the land of the dead, the figure of Geshtinanna, or the young god's sister, is another parallel. The young god carried off to death, such as Dumuzi, is mourned by his mother and sister, and they conduct a search for the missing child, offering a more immediate parallel to Persephone. Even though she joins her mother's search for her missing brother, just as Hekate joins Demeter's search²¹⁹, Geshtinanna eventually finds herself spending half of the year in the Underworld, just as Persephone does.

Persephone (like Inanna in *Inanna's Descent*) descends to the Underworld and is powerless to return, but she also finds herself forced to return to that realm regularly, like Geshtinanna, who acts as a partial substitute for Inanna in the Land of the Dead. Geshtinanna also echoes Persephone's terrified scream, albeit in sympathy for her brother as he is abducted, rather than her own abduction (*ibid.*: 118). These screams, performed by girls who will descend to the Underworld, in the face of abduction, parallel the events of the abduction and the girls' roles in their myths. The hymn closes when the demons kill Dumuzi, so it does not directly describe the mother's grief and search, or the establishment of the recurring cycle of descent-and-return (but associated hymns²²⁰ reveal that Duttur's search for Dumuzi will lead to the eventual compromise, and in *Inanna's Descent*, Inanna has already predicted that he and his sister will alternate their place in the Underworld).

The Mesopotamian descent-and-return cycle was not devoid of symbolic association with terrestrial life and death, as the actors are associated with the fertility of the earth. Inanna

²¹⁹ "Hekate's presence in the scene may reflect her important mediating role, which she displays in Hesiod's *Theogony*, but it also parallels to some extent the role of the sister in the OB [Old Babylonian] version, who helps the mother goddess search for the lost child" (Penglase, 1997: 112).

²²⁰ In *The Liturgies of Damu*, a confusing shift in the text provides a significant development of Inanna's myth: "the introduction presents a lament of Inanna for her husband Dumuzi, but the tale which follows deals with Damu and his mother Duttur, with one section about Gunura, Damu's sister. At the end, the sister who joins Damu in the netherworld is named as Mother Geshtin, which seems to be a reference to Geshtinanna, who is specifically Dumuzi's sister" (Penglase, 1997: 27).

is the goddess of sexual love, and war, and therefore embodies both life and death, and her death in Ereshkigal's kingdom is followed by a decline in animal and human procreation: "No bull mounted a cow, [no donkey impregnated a jenny],/ No young man impregnated a girl in [the street(?)],/ The young man slept in his private room,/ The girl slept in the company of her friends" (*The Descent of Ishtar* 89-92). While Inanna is powerless and suspended like a corpse from a hook, her domain of sexual energy and love are absent. The relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi is characterised with fertility symbolism, even as the king of Uruk's supposed 'sacred marriage'²²¹ with the goddess was meant to ensure the fertility of his realm. The goddess, in anticipation of their consummation, uses "the metaphor of a plowman plowing a field ripe for planting" (Ruether, 2005: 51-2). Just as Homer describes the surge of vegetative abundance at the union of Zeus and Hera (*Iliad* XIV.348-50), the union of Inanna and Dumuzi is surrounded by sympathetic vegetative growth: " 'Plants grew high by their side. Grains grew high by their side. Gardens flourished luxuriantly.' Dumuzi is the fertilizing power that makes the plants burgeon, while Inanna is the field that pours out grain" (Ruether, 2005: 51-2).

Dumuzi, the shepherd god, is associated with the birth of the lambs upon his return, while his relationship with Geshtinanna is paralleled in terrestrial crops:

"Dumuzid [sic] is associated in a fertility context with the grain from which beer is made; and in a descent context to beer being stored underground. 'Geshtinana' means 'the leafy grape vine' – a symbol of abundance and fertility. The connection between grain and grape here is that grain is harvested in the spring, then brewed and stored, while grapes are harvested in the autumn²²². This corresponds to the six alternating months each sibling spends in the underworld." (Shushan, 2009: 77)

²²¹ The existence and role (to ensure the fertility and prosperity of the crops and community – Jacobsen, 1970: 28) of the Sacred Marriage is contested (Kramer, 1963: 140-1; Römer, 1969: 141; Baring & Cashford, 1991: 211-5; Black & Green, 1992: 156-7). Though the union of Inanna and the king is referred to in two very early texts from Uruk, this does not prove it was practiced later, or outside of Uruk (Black & Green, 1992: 72-3).

²²² This association with barley and grapes, though the barley is connected to beer rather than bread, makes a curious double of the connection between Persephone and Dionysus in their respective cults (especially within Orphic literature, which depict Persephone as Dionysus' mother).

This alternating cycle bears a striking resemblance to one of the major theories of the meaning behind Persephone's descent, as an allegorical description of the storage of the harvested grain in silos under the ground until the next harvest. This practice, evident in both cultures, may be the source of these myths, as practice becomes mythologised, and thus may be the source of these similarities. However, the development of these myths into complex narratives (especially with the important motif of the mother's search) indicates that even if they arose from these similar practices independently, their subsequent development and characterisation may have been related through the influence of the Near Eastern material on the Greek myths.

Besides the obvious connection between Persephone and Ereshkigal, as Underworld queens, these Mesopotamian myths suggest some important similarities between the Greek goddesses and their Near Eastern counterparts. Inanna parallels Demeter as a goddess who disappears, taking fertility with her, endangering the world until the gods intervene. Inanna, like Persephone, also descends into the Underworld, but if Geshtinanna is to be taken as a manifestation of Inanna (as their names may suggest), then the descent of the maiden and her association with the agricultural produce the myth-telling communities depended on (in contrast to the general force of fertility) marks the Mesopotamian goddesses as closely allied to the Eleusinian maiden. The duality of the Mesopotamian goddesses, if Inanna and Geshtinanna are related but distinct figures, may echo in the duality of the Greek goddesses, on one level as Mother and Daughter, and on another as the Kore and 'dread' Persephone.

Ereshkigal in Ishtar/Inanna's Descent

The Descent of Ishtar is an Akkadian version of *The Descent of Inanna*, uncovered in Babylonia, Assyria and Nineveh, but it is shorter than the earlier Sumerian version. First evident in the Late Bronze Age (c.1500), it appears to conclude with ritual instructions for the rites in the month of Tammuz²²³. This suggests it was closely tied to cultic practice, and repeated annually at the time of Dumuzi's return, the return of vegetative

²²³ Roughly June/July, marking spring and the lambing season, and named after Dumuzi (Black & Green, 1992: 73; Dalley, 2000: 154).

life, and the new birth of the flocks. Dumuzi is sent to the Underworld in exchange for Ishtar, and his sister (here called Belili²²⁴) mourns his death, insisting that “[y]ou shall not rob me (forever) of my only brother! On the day when Dumuzi comes back up... The dead shall come up and smell the smoke offering” (*The Descent of Ishtar*, transl. S.Dalley: 160). The cycle of descent-and-return is hinted at here, but it is not described in the degree of complexity seen in the myth of *The Liturgies of Damu*, though it may be assumed to follow, as the figure of the mourning sister is present, and she speaks of a return, perhaps alluding to the expanded myth. With this significant pattern evident within the text, its depiction of Ereshkigal may therefore be pertinent to the comparative study of the Mesopotamian mythic parallels to Persephone as Underworld Queen.

The Ereshkigal of this myth lives in the traditionally gloomy realm²²⁵, and does not seem content in her kingdom as she sarcastically suggests when Ishtar batters down her door:

“What brings her to me? What has incited her against me?
 Surely not because I drink water with the Anunnaki,
 I eat clay for bread, I drink muddy water for beer?
 I have to weep for young men forced to abandon sweethearts.
 I have to weep for girls wrenched from their lovers’ laps.
 For the infant child I have to weep, expelled before its time.”
 (*The Descent of Ishtar* 1.32-7)

This is not the ‘dread’ goddess, who hungers for more subjects in her infernal realm, but a sympathetic goddess who appears to be trapped alongside her subjects and mourns for their individual tragedies²²⁶. In *The Descent of Inanna*, Ereshkigal is overwhelmed by her

²²⁴ In the related hymn, *Dumuzid’s Dream*, Dumuzi’s third shelter from the pursuing demons is called “the house of Old Woman Belili” (1.200-5), but she seems to be different from his loyal sister, Geshtinanna, in this hymn.

²²⁵ Ereshkigal’s rule over the Underworld is explained in the myth, “Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld”, which offers a cosmology of divided realms, like the Greek division between Hades, Zeus and Poseidon. The Mesopotamian mythos, however, included Ereshkigal as one of these important beings, such that “While the male gods each carry off a share of the cosmos to rule, their unmarried sister receives a dowry that would transfer to the control of her husband upon marriage” (Walls, 2001: 133). Ereshkigal is awarded the realm in her own right, albeit with the expectation that it will transfer to her husband (*Bilgames and the Netherworld* 10-13), but this reflects a Mesopotamian acceptance of some inheritance through the line of the daughter (Bertman, 2003: 278-9), while Athenian inheritance at least was reluctant to leave such power in a daughter or sister’s hands (see chapter two).

²²⁶ Just as mourning was an important aspect of honouring the dead, and was believed to comfort the dead, at least as an expected response to their death, Ereshkigal’s weeping for the untimely dead may have been a

sister, who sits upon Ereshkigal's throne the moment the Underworld queen leaves it. Ereshkigal is "made" (l.164-6) to rise, so Inanna has the power to dominate her sister, but this hymn lacks Ereshkigal's trembling described in *Ishtar's Descent*. The infernal goddess may have risen in fear of her sister's power, or she may have chosen to allow her sister to believe herself dominant because she knew the infernal judges, the Anuna, would descend and lay their judgement upon the interloper, but nevertheless she is removed from her seat of power.

After Inanna is revived, she attempts to ascend to the surface again, but the Anuna surround her again, and enforce on her the obligation to find a substitute, because no one "has ever ascended from the Underworld, has ascended unscathed from the Underworld". Ereshkigal may again be relying on the greater laws of her Underworld kingdom to restrict Inanna's success²²⁷, but she does not make an overt move against her sister. She may be a powerful queen, but she abides by her promise to Enki's emissaries, and she never assaults her sister directly, or without justification. Her submission in this hymn may be required by the hymn for its praise of Inanna²²⁸, exhibiting the goddess' power and dominance, even in the Underworld, but the Ereshkigal seen here is not particularly malevolent or vindictive. This more sympathetic goddess of the underworld may have made the association of Demeter's gentle flower-goddess daughter with the Underworld goddess easier to make if these narratives made their way to Greece.

comforting feature of her role in the Underworld, so a voluntary confinement to the Underworld might be a beneficent act on her part, intended to help mortals rather than increase her own powers. Such an interpretation makes her dowry, this infernal kingdom, a heavy burden, a further parallel with Persephone.

²²⁷ We are made to assume that Inanna has been successful in her quest to the Underworld. She intended to gain its power, though those are not specified, but she is still subject to its power when she is forced to choose a substitute, so her power at returning to the surface is qualified by this restriction. Yet, the description of her rage against Dumuzi echoes exactly the judgement laid on her by the Anuna in the Underworld: "She looked at him, it was the look of death. She spoke to him (?), it was the speech of anger. She shouted at him (?), it was the shout of heavy guilt" (l.354-8). By echoing their infernal judgement, Inanna may be exercising her new power gained in the Underworld.

²²⁸ Importantly, though, the final lines of the hymn direct their praise to Ereshkigal, not Inanna, so it would appear that the hymn was meant to glorify the infernal goddess, not the interloper (hence Inanna's obligation to find a substitute? She is not entirely successful against her sister). Ereshkigal's submission and inaction in the hymn becomes strange then, for the goddess being praised.

Ereshkigal in *Ereshkigal and Nergal*

In addition to the mythic parallels of the mother's search and the descending goddess, the figure of the Underworld queen, and her rape, appear in a strikingly similar Mesopotamian myth, in the hymn *Ereshkigal and Nergal*²²⁹. Although there is no Sumerian version of this myth, the two versions that survive date from as early as the fifteenth or fourteenth centuries BCE (the shorter version), and the seventh century BCE in Uruk, from the Late Babylonian period (the much longer version). Both describe Nergal's disrespect for Ereshkigal's minister at a divine feast, and his subsequent journey to the Underworld to be punished by her. There, however, in a surprising shift in the power-dynamic, he dominates and marries her. Nergal, who can travel to the Underworld and back, might be related to the Phoenician Melqart²³⁰, also possibly a dying and rising god. This sequence of a god descending to the Underworld, forcing the Underworld ruler to marry, then being able to return to the surface regularly, is an interesting mirrored inversion of the Hades-Persephone myth.

Ereshkigal, like Persephone, is not able to travel to the surface to join the gods in their feast²³¹, so she sends her messenger in her place. Though Nergal's insult is missing in the fragmentary text, he receives advice from Ea to make a chair which will protect him from being trapped in the Underworld, and a litany of activities he must refrain from if he is to escape, including eating, drinking, and bathing in the Underworld. The risk of eating in the Underworld, which thereby traps the eater there, is fairly common in Underworld stories and fairytales (Silver, 2005: 103-6), and applies to Persephone through her pomegranate seed, and the advice about the chair may echo tales where sitting in the

²²⁹ In *Myths from Mesopotamia* (transl. S.Dalley), 1989.

²³⁰ The connection may lie in their names, as "the name of Melqart, chief god of Tyre, is a Phoenician translation of the Sumerian name Nergal" (Dalley, 1989: 164).

²³¹ The later Standard Babylonian Version explains that "[i]n your year you cannot come up to see us" and that "[i]n our month(s) we cannot go down to see you" (1.5-7), which suggests that there might be times when the gods could traverse the boundary between the Underworld and the surface, but there are certain temporal restrictions on this travel, although Ereshkigal's messenger, like the Greek Hermes or Iris, is able to travel between the regions. Other translations do not offer this temporal distinction, suggesting travel is impossible, but Walls suspects that Anu's words may not be necessarily trustworthy, and that because other myths describe deities descending, and Nergal will descend in this myth, the claim of restriction may be a false idea Ereshkigal complies with (unwittingly?), and that she is "confined to her palace much like a wife is restricted to domestic spaces of her husband's house in repressive patriarchal cultures" (2001: 167).

chair will make the seated person forget their quest and thereby sit forever, as happens to Theseus and Peirithous when they try to abduct Persephone (Apollodorus' *Library* II.124), and Hephaestus traps Hera in a chair (Pausanias 1.20.3; Hyginus 166). It is possible that making his own chair will save Nergal from this trick.

Nergal is allowed to enter the Underworld²³², despite the gatekeeper's disdain, because Ereshkigal insists on proper deference to the divine hierarchy. The Underworld's attempts to bind him to the realm, by feeding, watering or bathing him, fails, as he refrains from everything they offer. After a missing section, Nergal succumbs to his desire for Ereshkigal²³³, although Ea has warned him not to lie with her. After seven days together, Nergal tries to depart. This angers the goddess, but she seems to be powerless to stop him. He tricks her gatekeeper and escapes, but when Ereshkigal learns from her gatekeeper that he has left, she falls to the floor crying, foreshadowing her collapse under Nergal's power at the end of the hymn (Walls, 2001: 149). She sends her minister to pursue him and return him to the Underworld, though she orders this out of desire and love, while her minister describes his pursuit as an "arrest". She pleads with the upper gods for sympathy, based on her undesirable position in the Underworld: "ever since I was a child and a daughter,/ I have not known the playing of other girls,/ I have not known the romping of children" (Dalley: 173). This plea seems to echo the pitiable, benign goddess of *The Descent of Ishtar*, who also experiences discomfort in the Underworld, even as its queen, and who appears lonely and desires a companion or

²³² It may be that the instructions to "sit on the throne" are to Ereshkigal, not Nergal, because "Ereshkigal, in mortification or outrage, refuses to sit on her throne and rule the Netherworld... Her abdication throws the celestial gods into consternation and Nergal is required to descend to the Netherworld to appease the offended queen" (Walls, 2001: 135). If this interpretation is accurate, this sequence has a remarkable similarity to Demeter's withdrawal into the temple at Eleusis, where she refuses to exert her power of fertility, throwing the gods into similar consternation, and obliging the Underworld god to come to a compromise.

²³³ Although he resists the food and the chair, he cannot help himself, despite Ea's advice, when he sees Ereshkigal bathe seductively in front of him. "Ereshkigal's nudity also alludes to the nakedness of Inana during her descent to challenge her sister's rule of the dead. The erotic goddess is stripped of her clothes before her audience with Ereshkigal as a sign of her powerlessness... In contrast, Ereshkigal's voluntary and provocative nudity represents her power over Nergal" (Walls, 2001: 144). Ereshkigal may be seducing Nergal by using her body as a lure, but her ploy requires her to symbolically lose her power, if the Inanna comparison is to stand, and ultimately she does succumb to Nergal's dominance.

children²³⁴. She claims to have been impregnated by Nergal, and to be “unclean, and I am not pure enough to/ perform the judging of the great gods” (*ibid.*:173) in the Underworld. Her plea is like that of an honourable woman who has been taken advantage of by a lover, and who seeks marriage as a compensation of her lost honour²³⁵. She completes this plea for pity with a threat, revealing a power to the goddess that demands respect: she will raise the dead to attack the living, if Nergal is not sent down to her again.

Ereshkigal sends her minister twice to find Nergal, and the chief gods allow him to conduct his search, but with Ea’s help, Nergal has been disguised²³⁶. After the second futile search, the text breaks, and resumes when the minister has found the god, and Nergal allows himself to be brought down to the Underworld again, though he does not come submissively. He knocks down the doormen at each gate, and barges into Ereshkigal’s kingdom (Inanna similarly hammered upon the doors, but does not achieve this warrior-god’s success). Nergal laughs at the goddess on her throne, drags her by the hair off her throne, but then “[t]he two embraced each other/ And went passionately to bed” (*ibid.*:176), for seven days. The tone of Nergal’s arrival and abuse of the goddess may echo the rape described in the Greek myth, and Ereshkigal’s ‘passion’ might be a euphemism from a patriarchal perspective²³⁷. Anu sends his vizier to declare something

²³⁴ “As a goddess, Ereshkigal does not share the repulsive or fearsome characteristics of other underworld denizens. Rather than an angry devil who delights in the demise of others, Ereshkigal is a doleful figure in Mesopotamian myth, a benevolent goddess who rules over the realm of ghosts (*etemmu*) and demons (*gallū*)” (Walls, 2001: 134).

²³⁵ Like Biblical law (Exodus 22: 16-7; Deut.22:28-29), “[c]uneiform legal tradition requires a man who seduces or rapes an unattached woman to marry his victim” (Walls, 2001: 155).

²³⁶ The trickster god’s assistance in Nergal’s ‘wooing’ and conflict with Ereshkigal may be the basic play of the entire myth: “the entire myth is a play on words or trick of Ea, in that Ereshkigal summons Nergal to the Netherworld “for death” (*ana mūti*) but instead takes him “for a husband” (*ana muti*)” (Walls, 2001: 128).

²³⁷ If one reads Ereshkigal’s ‘passion’ positively, it operates in a curious contrast to her sister, the goddess of sexual love, and her failed seduction of Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*: “The dark goddess’s erotic subjectivity is reflected by her exclamation when she realises that her lover, Nergal or Erra, has escaped from her bed: “Erra, my delightful lover! I was not sated with his delights when he left me!”... Among other clues to her sexual agency, Ereshkigal is the mutual subject (*kilallan*) of verbs for embracing and going to bed... Yet even as a libidinal female seeking her own erotic pleasure, Ereshkigal does not attempt to seduce her lover through speaking words, bribing him with gifts, or approaching him to initiate sex. Ereshkigal simply allows him to see her nude body while bathing... thereby inciting his desire and provoking his initiation of sexual contact whereupon they go passionately off to bed for seven days” (Walls, 2001: 40). Even in her seduction, Ereshkigal takes on the passive position of being observed, so her final submission to Nergal may reflect a patriarchal expectation that the wife or lover wants to be

about Nergal's new position in the Underworld, presumably fixing his role there "forever" (*ibid.*:176), affirming the chief god's approval of the new arrangement, but we do not hear of Ereshkigal's feeling about this change of affairs. Although she asserts some force by threatening the living with the terror of the dead, and desires Nergal's return, he seems to possess most of the power within the hymn. He tricks her (and her minister) repeatedly, and eventually forces his way into her kingdom and throws her from her throne.

In the Amarna version, shorter and earlier than the Babylonian version, Ereshkigal responds quickly to the disrespect shown to her by Nergal, and plans to kill him, but Nergal again eludes the minister's search. Nergal, in fear, turns to his father, Ea, for help, and Ea sends him with several demons down to Ereshkigal's kingdom. He appears to use each demon to capture each of the doors of the Underworld, seals Ereshkigal in her palace, and seizes her, again pulling her from her throne by her hair²³⁸ and "intending to cut off her head" (*ibid.*:180). Ereshkigal saves herself by offering to marry Nergal, and offering him the power she holds, which he excitedly agrees to. This shorter version also describes Ereshkigal's assertion of her own power and dignity, which she quickly loses when the warrior-god assaults her palace and overcomes her: "Ereshkigal then becomes a dependent wife under the control of her husband" (Ruether, 2005: 48). In contrast to her encounter with her sister, Inanna, Ereshkigal is physically assaulted by Nergal, and forced to surrender into a compromise of power, rather than exacting a compromise, as she does by demanding a substitute to stand in Inanna's place.

Nergal's initial disrespect, which triggers the action of the hymns, is almost incomprehensible, considering the force he risks angering: "it may be chauvinistic pride, disrespect for the realm of the dead, or unthinking hubris" (Walls, 2001: 135). Perhaps through the hubris of believing himself above Death's power, Nergal refuses to honour the goddess of the Underworld's representative. This hubris might belong to a warrior-

subjugated. This may reflect a Mesopotamian "ideal of a dominating but restrained husband" (Walls, 2001: 162).

²³⁸ "Rather than kneel in homage to the Netherworld queen, Nergal forces her to bow before his superior power" (Walls, 2001: 130).

god, whose life is built upon a scorning of death. When Ereshkigal sends her minister, Namtar, after him, Nergal is forced to realise he cannot actually evade her, especially as the other gods allow the minister's search. Nergal's final assault on the goddess might therefore be a continuation of this, a last-ditch attempt to overcome death and the forces of the Underworld. He succeeds, and although he cannot in reality kill Death, or Ereshkigal as Death's ruler, he may be able to overcome it sufficiently by winning power over it, becoming the king of the Underworld, Ereshkigal's consort. This makes his descent and assault on Ereshkigal something like Inanna's descent: both exhibit a hubristic disrespect (Inanna seeks the powers of the Underworld, Nergal refuses to bow), then they suffer a temporary defeat (Inanna is 'killed', Nergal cowers and hides), but their eventual victory (Inanna re-ascends, Nergal marries Ereshkigal) shows a victory over death, in a sense. Both are constrained in this victory (Inanna's substitute, Nergal must stay in the Underworld for an unspecified amount of time as her husband), but ultimately they do escape death.

The antagonism described in *Ereshkigal and Nergal* reflects a male-female conflict, as well as one between the forces of the Underworld against those of the earth and heavens. Ereshkigal is the only female figure found in these hymns, and she is the primary representative of the Underworld, while her (male) minister acts on her behalf. Nergal, on the other hand, is just one among many gods belonging to the celestial assembly, and there are hints of an antagonism between the different realms, even if most of the gods respect Ereshkigal's power. The male deities cooperate to conceal Nergal from Ereshkigal's anger (if one can assume that they knew about Nergal's disguise), though they do not dare actively protect him, they simply allow her minister to fail to find him. Ereshkigal has no such alliance, and a feminist analysis, which recognises the power of collective resistance to a repressive patriarchy, finds this absence significant:

“...feminist solidarity and coalition-building [is an important] means to oppose oppressive power structures. This mode of power-relations (power-with) can affect change by collectively resisting the domination of patriarchal power and authority. Indeed, it appears that the ruling gods have purposely isolated Ereshkigal as part of a plan to more easily control her. Ereshkigal has no option

for feminine collectivity or solidarity and so must stand alone in opposition to the assembly of male gods.”

(Walls, 2001: 167)

If this reading of the power dynamic within the myth can be credited, then it is interesting that in a comparable way the Greek myth also offers a vision of female cooperation and isolation.

The goddesses of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* also seem to work as a collective, at least as Hekate joins Demeter in her search for her daughter. The gods might also be seen isolating a goddess from her feminine allies when Hades abducts Persephone from the meadow and her friends, and restricting her in the Underworld limits her access to other women, who might be allies, so that he can overpower her entirely. Hekate's choice to join Persephone in the Underworld at the conclusion of the *Hymn* may also be an attempt to give the goddess an ally in the foreign, male-dominated realm, until she can return to the surface and her mother's company. However, Gaia assists Zeus and Hades in their abduction of the goddess and the deprivation of the mother, and Rhea acts as Zeus' emissary to Demeter to reach a compromise, so the dichotomy of gender within this myth is not strictly maintained (as it rarely is in life). Similarly, Ereshkigal is not always cooperative with other goddesses, as the myths of Inanna's descent to the Underworld reveals. Female powers may not necessarily be cooperative, and may compete for powers, just as Helios may 'betray' the 'male conspiracy' of Persephone's abduction by revealing the plot, and how in some variants, Zeus marries Persephone to Hades to conciliate the infernal god, who threatens to rise up against his male peers (Claudian I.32).

Mesopotamian Influence on the *Hymn to Demeter*

After an overview of the Mesopotamian material that resembles Persephone's myth structurally or thematically, a direct comparison with the *Hymn to Demeter* is possible and productive. Undeniably, there are major differences between the various myths and hymns, as each arises out of a different cultural milieu, and is associated with different

forms of cult, but the similarities are likely to have arisen out of a shared and exchanged stock of retold myths, rather than a direct inheritance:

“[It] seems reasonable to conclude that it is not a case of textual influence, because the [Mesopotamian] literary works are quite different from the Greek hymn and its versions. It seems most likely that the stories or ideas travelled in an oral form, rather than by direct transmission of literary material.”

(Penglase, 1997: 122)

These similarities preserve or reveal basic patterns and themes that were shared between the cultures during various periods of social contact, merging the local Greek myths and goddess(es) with the Mesopotamian narrative framework, while adapting the Mesopotamian material to suit the new context (*ibid.*: 122).

The similarities appear in multiple motifs and patterns of the narrative, encouraging the interpretation that they are related. The Mesopotamian and Eleusinian myths are concerned with seasonal fertility, the destiny of the dead, and prosperity (‘Ploutos’) in life. Less grand but notable similarities are the goddess’ oath, her lie during her journey, the food in the netherworld, and the maiden’s scream (*ibid.*: 122). Perhaps the characters of the Underworld goddesses were fairly similar, such that some borrowing of familiar but novel motifs was easy²³⁹, and the journey-sequence which recurs in the Mesopotamian material could easily be incorporated into the adventures of the Greek gods. Whether the Greek ‘Dying-Rising’ goddess appropriated some of Inanna’s features and characteristics, or whether Inanna lent her ‘Dying-Rising’ experience and suffering to the Greek goddess(es), the degree of similarity and complex parallels do suggest influence occurred.

The motif of the disappearing god, related to fertility in some sense, is an important aspect of the Dying-Rising God, and will be closely dealt with in the following chapter, but it is significant that both Demeter’s withdrawal (because of Persephone’s abduction and ‘death’), and Inanna’s ‘death’ in the Underworld results in agricultural and animal

²³⁹ Persephone’s similarity to Inanna in some ways may have encouraged the adoption of the descent-and-return pattern, but Penglase suggests that “if she already had this function, this would have encouraged the adoption of the Mesopotamian myth” (1997: 126).

infertility. Such a mythic motif may not be local to Greece, as “the motif of drought appears to be inconsequential in the Greek context and inappropriate in a Greek myth in view of the Greek environmental background, but it is a typical motif for Mesopotamia, subject as that region is to occasional natural disasters such as flood and drought” (*ibid.*: 107). Although perhaps more relevant to a Mesopotamian context, this motif clearly offered something to the Greek audience who willingly adopted it and found meaning in it, loading Persephone’s abduction into the Underworld with a sympathetic ‘death’ in the normal world²⁴⁰. The disappearance of a god is an effective way to reveal the true extent of their power, as Zeus learns in the *Hymn to Demeter*, and the Mesopotamian gods are forced to admit when Inanna disappears in the Underworld. Demeter is thus associated with Inanna in the way their powers of fertility are withdrawn from the earth when a goddess descends into the Underworld, but as a more humanised figure suffering grief for a lost child, she echoes Duttur closely.

Inanna parallels Demeter, then, but also Persephone, as she too descends into the Land of the Dead, and achieves new powers upon her return. Inanna is set in opposition to the resident queen of the Underworld, Ereshkigal, but just as Persephone’s identity is split between the maiden Kore and the ‘dread’ queen of the Underworld, so too might Inanna and Ereshkigal be related parts of a complex figure, the feminine manifestation of fertility and death. These sisters, however appear as an inversion of the Persephone-Kore split (dread queen -versus- sympathetic maiden). Ereshkigal may be a more sympathetic goddess, who mourns the deaths she witnesses, and who is also overcome by stronger deities, while Inanna is renowned as the goddess of war for her aggression and ability to inspire terror and awe, and as the goddess of sexual love, she contrasts with the ‘maiden’ Kore. If perhaps Persephone, as dread queen of the Underworld, is a loose conflation of Inanna and Ereshkigal, then Kore may have more in common with Geshtinanna, and the child of the searching mother goddess.

²⁴⁰ If the original sequence derived from Mesopotamia and was concerned with drought, the Greeks were capable of adapting it to suit their own experiences, which may be the annual storage of the grain in subterranean silos after the harvest, and before the next sowing.

Northern Goddesses

Zuntz (1971: 76-7) suggests that a 'Nordic' Corn Maiden may have been brought with the Greek-speakers into Attica, and conflated with the local Phersephatta, who was associated with the Underworld. This Nordic maiden, and her conflation with a local goddess, remains a speculative assertion²⁴¹, but the Nordic myths (admittedly recorded very late in comparison to the Greek and Mesopotamian material, and coloured by early Christian reception) do offer some intriguing counterparts to the Greek goddesses. If Zuntz is correct to posit the importation of a 'Nordic' goddess with Greek-speaking peoples, during the 'Doric invasion' (a controversial historical event²⁴²), then the Greek and Nordic goddesses would mythic cousins, developing further in their separate cultures and environments, but sharing features or elements in common. Even if the Doric invasion is firmly refuted, the movement of ideas and motifs need not follow human migrations, but can spread through trade or smaller resettlements of people. From this perspective, it must be acknowledge that coincidences could be accidental, but the degree of coincidence and the level of complexity in the imaginative associations made by the Nordic and Greek myth-makers is worthy of remark, and comparison, even if a genetic link cannot be asserted with any certainty.

The goddess Freyja, the Valkyries, and the fearsome Hel are either connected with the fields, death, or both. Just as Baring and Cashford (1991: 168-9) argue that the Greek goddesses were relegated to inferior roles after they were supplanted by their male counterparts, it appears that the land of the dead in Nordic myth also witnessed a transferral of power:

“In Norse mythology the connection of the northern goddess with the land of the dead seems at first to have been obscured by the emphasis in the poetry on Odin’s reception of dead kings and heroes in his hall in the Otherworld. The power of the goddess seems to be limited to her liminal aspect, expressed by the valkyries who escort the distinguished dead to the hall of Odin after they fall on the battlefield or die a sacrificial death.”

(Davidson, 1998: 174)

²⁴¹ There is evidence of trade with northern Europe as early as the Mycenaean age, in the Shaft Graves in Mycenae itself (West, 1997: 5).

²⁴² Michell, 1964; Chadwick, 1976; Cartledge, 2002.

These bellicose figures bear a curious resemblance to Ereshkigal's infernal demons, who pursue Dumuzi in Inanna's place, and in later Greek myth, the Furies, who are relegated to the Underworld and hunt down those guilty of immense moral crimes (and whose vengeance for matricide is supplanted by Apollo's patrilineal argument²⁴³). The Greek and Mesopotamian figures, however, are hunters and punishers, not the reward-bearing Valkyries of the Norse myth. If there is a connection between these divine spheres, the Valkyries might echo something of Ereshkigal's (and perhaps Persephone's) sympathetic character, in their welcoming the dead to their new home. The evidence, however, makes this difficult to believe:

“In northern Europe the memory of terrible goddesses of slaughter active on the battlefield is found in both Celtic and Germanic tradition... There are indications that the dignified valkyries of tenth-century Norse literature were in earlier times fierce spirits of battle, devouring the slain; the word *waelcyrge*, ‘chooser of the slain’ in Anglo-Saxon glosses, is equated with the Latin word for Fury. The valkyries who were seen weaving on a ghastly loom composed of weapons, entrails and skulls... belong to a similar tradition.”

(*ibid.*: 178)

Whether these goddesses have suffered numerous levels of reinterpretation from Roman and Christian writers (such as the *Edda*'s Christian author, Snorri Sturluson), and have become more fearsome, or possessed nothing of the sympathetic aspect of Persephone, is difficult to ascertain. Their love of slaughter echoes Athene's warlike nature²⁴⁴, but their role in transporting the select dead to the blessed afterlife allies them more closely with the Greek *psychompomoi* and the Maiden-Daughter who also travels between the worlds of the living and the dead.

In contrast to the Valkyries, who were identified with the Furies (Persephone's offspring in *O.H.*70), the goddess Freyja may have shared Persephone's duality as goddess of the field and the dead. An aspect of this goddess, Gefion, is connected with a myth about ploughing, and “can be identified with Frigg or Freyja, her name being one of those

²⁴³ See chapter two.

²⁴⁴ Hector describes *Kéres*, spirits of death, hovering over the battlefield (*Iliad* 12.326-8).

describing the goddess as a giver. Snorri associates her with the land of the dead, stating that unmarried women serve her there (*Gylfaginning* 35)” (Davidson, 1998: 65). Freyja’s association with the land of the dead could be closer, almost on a par with Ereshkigal and Persephone as the queen of that realm: “There is some indication indeed that the powerful goddess Freyja herself was represented as a welcomer of the slain. In the *Edda* poem *Grimnismal* she is said to have had half of those who died in battle while the other half belonged to Odin. [It is possible] that Odin’s expanding role as a warrior god and the concept of Valhalla may have reduced the earlier role of Freyja as the goddess receiving the warrior dead” (*ibid.*: 176).

This possibility of welcoming half of the dead suggests a role shared with Ereshkigal and Persephone, though all three goddesses are connected to and dominated by a god. Ereshkigal’s depiction in the hymn, *Ereshkigal and Nergal*, actually reflects the suggested expansion of the god’s control over the goddess’ sphere of power. This commonality could simply reflect a tendency to envision a figure welcoming the dead into the afterlife, and this figure could be envisioned differently according to the preferences of the individuals imagining him or her. An equitable division, such as the ‘half and half’ the *Edda* describes, does at least suggest that the presence of a goddess welcoming the dead heroes to the afterlife was important for many, and Freyja’s otherwise benevolent characterisation suggests that hers was meant to be a compassionate welcome.

If Freyja is possibly (or at least partially) connected with the blessed realm reserved for the bravest warriors, another goddess rules the more terrifying land of the dead, though her identity is even more at risk of a Christian reinterpretation:

“Hel in the surviving literature is used as the name for the general abode of the dead, a shadowy realm which could serve as a term for the grave. The personification of this as a loathsome female figure symbolizing physical death, one of the children of the destructive power Loki, as found in *Gylfaginning* (33), hardly suggests a goddess. She is described here as ‘half black and half flesh-coloured, somewhat drooping and grim to look upon’, and is evidently a decaying corpse. Yet this is not the impression given in the account of Hermod’s ride to Hel

later in *Gylfaginning* (49). Hel, speaking with the authority as ruler of the underworld, decrees that all things must weep for Balder before he can be released from her realm²⁴⁵, and gifts are sent back to Frigg and Fulla by Balder's wife Nanna as from a friendly kingdom. Possibly Snorri earlier turned the goddess of death into an allegorical figure, just as he made Hel, the underworld of shades, a place 'where wicked men go', like the Christian Hell (*Gylfaginning* 3).” (*ibid.*: 178)

This confusion of Hel's depiction (as a developed character, and as simply an embodiment of death²⁴⁶) reflect the difficulty of interpreting a mythology already transplanted and reported via a different, and even hostile, belief system. However, the hints of a benevolent goddess of the Underworld are reasonable, if compared to the role of Freyja, Persephone's compassionate persona as Kore, and Ereshkigal's expressed pity for the dead living in her kingdom. The split body of Hel, half-dead and half-alive, might actualise this split persona of the goddesses of the Underworld, especially Persephone-Kore, half-infernal monster, half-welcoming, compassionate mother-figure.

The Nordic tradition does not lack infernal goddesses, but in contrast to the queen, Persephone, and perhaps her vengeful Furies, this tradition has three separate aspects of the 'goddess of death': "she foretells the coming of death so that she may be described as its messenger, like the Banshee. She helps to bring it about, as do the Valkyries in Norse tradition, and the Morrigan when she seeks the destruction of the hero Cu Chulainn. She acts as the conductor of the dead from this world to the next, another aspect of the valkyries and a possible role of Freyja as Great Goddess, while she welcomes the dead when they cross the threshold" (*ibid.*: 180). This distinction of roles and elaboration of the infernal goddess' powers is not directly reflected in Greek myth, but it does seem to have a few reasonable parallels with the Greek material²⁴⁷. Hermes is a messenger able to

²⁴⁵ A parallel to the demands set upon Inanna before she can return, and Persephone's compromised bilocation, as the Land of the Dead can never fully release its inhabitants.

²⁴⁶ Curiously, Hades is similarly assimilated with his kingdom, and, probably due to the lack of direct worship he received in cults or iconography, he remains a rather nondescript character, whose only memorable activity was the abduction of his much more lively and developed wife.

²⁴⁷ Persephone is described as 'snatching' a woman from her husband in an epitaph near Cyzicus, because she "set[s] the age that is doubtful for mortals" (Bräuninger, 1938: 967). She also 'determines' the time of death in Pindar *Ol. Ode* 14.20, and Euripides' *Suppliants* 1022 (*ibid.*), and "take [the dead by the] hand, [and] lead her to the place of the pious" (Kaibel 218, in Bräuninger, 1938: 967).

travel to the underworld, as is Iris, and perhaps even Dawn as the goddess who emerges from there and loses a son to the underworld (Davidson, 2008: 207-8; 538n42). The final aspect, of *psychopompos* and ruler, is perhaps Persephone as queen of the underworld, who journeys to the surface and down again annually, initially guided by Hermes. If Zuntz (1971: 76f.) is correct to claim a 'Nordic goddess' travelled south with the Greek-speakers and was conflated with a local chthonic goddess, it is noticeable that besides a Corn Maiden, the Nordic material also exhibits an infernal queen.

Although Frazer devoted a comparable amount of attention to the Corn Maiden (Part V, Vol.I-II, 1912) as he did to the Dying-Rising God (Part.V.Vol.1, 1912), and the Corn Maiden may have been important to the early Greek worshippers as an embodiment of their crops and survival, it is likely that the grain was really an allegory for more immediate lived experience: "Far more important than the death of a nebulous Corn Spirit seems to be the link between the sowing, growth and harvesting of the grain and the rites of passage for women: puberty, marriage, bearing children, and old age, reflected in the range of goddess figures. It is as though in the myths and customs connected with the grain we are seeing the growth process from a woman's standpoint" (Davidson, 1998: 90). This emphasis on the experience of women, as envisioned through the cycle of growth and harvest of the grain, could be similarly read into the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, which links the daunting experience of death with this cycle. These symbolic figures, the Corn Maiden who dies and her grieving mother, could offer an important (divine) paradigm for mortal women, and people generally, to understand their experiences and look forward to their own extinction.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the mythic parallels of infernal goddesses for Persephone, focussing on the Mesopotamian figures of Ereshkigal, Inanna/ Ishtar, and Geshtinanna (these last two also offer an important bridge to the following chapter, of gods who descend to the Underworld and return), but with some attention directed towards the 'Nordic' goddesses associated with death. These goddesses reveal the various ways in which a figure like Persephone could be characterised as ruler of the Underworld, and the

Mesopotamian material reveals a narrative framework upon which Persephone's myth seems to have been built. This structure, closely allied to the Dying-Rising God motif (see chapter five), albeit with an emphasis on the feminine, provides a prototype for Persephone's myth. This prototype is given new meaning in the hands of the Greek poet, as it becomes infused with human concerns, and begins to offer hope for a special bond with the goddesses it describes. The Mesopotamian material, possibly supplemented by the figures of 'Nordic goddesses', attains new force in the *Hymn* and the Eleusinian Mysteries, entrenching Persephone and her mother in a familiar narrative structure while simultaneously providing eschatological hope through humanised experiences.

Chapter Five – Mythic Parallels – The Dying-Rising Gods

Introduction

This chapter will compare the myth of the abduction of Persephone against the figure of the Dying-Rising God postulated by Frazer (Part III, 1912; Part IV. Vol.I, 1914:3-4). This comparison will endeavour to highlight what the mythic narrative structure of ‘Dying-Rising God’ could offer to its believers, and assess how these may be applicable to Persephone. Although there are several candidates for this motif (see below), three gods will be examined for their especial relevance to Persephone and the motif generally. Dionysus is also a Greek god, and can operate as a ‘local’ comparison to Persephone, subject to similar cultural beliefs and values. Adonis was imported to Greece, and was assimilated into the Greek pantheon and belief system, but he originated in the Levant and thus could show where some of the motifs of the Dying-Rising God arise (especially if the influence of Mesopotamian material, see chapter four, is acknowledged²⁴⁸). Finally, Osiris operates as an opposing example, as he arose in a culture that resisted external influence and contact, but eventually became syncretised with the Greek and Near Eastern gods. His development indicates the broader trends in the Dying-Rising God motif, while his assimilation with the Greek material ensures that he is not unsuitable to a comparison with Persephone and her mother. These comparisons will simultaneously indicate what hopes Persephone might offer, if she was understood in the same framework as these male gods (who are subject to death or disappearance, and return), and how Persephone, as a goddess, might offer something different within this mythological and eschatological framework.

The Dying-Rising God Motif

Although the category itself has come under significant criticism or outright rejection (Smith, 1987), Frazer’s postulated ‘Dying-Rising God’ remains an important figure in modern theories around the religious thought of the ancient Mediterranean, and may offer

²⁴⁸ West notes that in the earliest period of Eastern Mediterranean trade and contact, “Syria is the grand junction. These is where all the roads met, where Greek, Hittite, Hurrian, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian elements all came together” (1997: 4), so if it was not the source of the motif itself, it would have had considerable impact on its dissemination elsewhere.

some insight into the appeal of Persephone and her mother for their ancient Greek worshippers. The motif itself has undergone some severe vacillations in its reception, and the eligible gods have been hotly contested, so some discussion of the motif generally and its application to several Mediterranean deities is necessary. However, even if the motif itself were too problematic to comfortably apply to any deity, as J.Z. Smith (1987) argues, the gods Frazer grouped under this heading would still shed comparative light on Persephone as the leading goddess of a mystery cult, and help to identify what features of her myth were generally important, and which had idiosyncratic significance.

The figure of the Dying-Rising God found prominence in the theories of Sir James Frazer, as an integral part of his analysis of the religious customs of many societies, notably the Mediterranean civilisations²⁴⁹. To Frazer, early people saw the changing seasons and the shifting fertility of the earth, and “pictured to themselves the growth and decay of vegetation, the birth and death of living creatures, as effects of the waxing or waning strength of divine beings, of gods and goddesses, who were born and died, who married and begot children, on the pattern of human life” (1914, Part IV. Vol. I: 3). These gods, as elaborations of the priest-kings who must die and be replaced before their strength fails, to ensure that the community is never left vulnerable, are tied to the vegetative cycles of the environment the communities find themselves in, and thus “the Phrygian, Phoenician and Egyptian gods, together with their obvious companions, Dionysus (the wine spirit) and Core (the corn spirit), became embodiments of the omnipresent ‘vegetation spirit’ in its vicissitudes of ‘death and resurrection’” (Casadio, 2003: 233).

A development of this reading of divine tragedy in the natural world is the belief that this cycle reflects human experience, at a time when humanity was intimately connected with their environment, and could not but see themselves undergoing the same cycles.

²⁴⁹ Frazer devotes an entire volume of his expanded study to the study of gods who die, and the relationship of these gods to the kings who Frazer argued were killed before their strength, embodying the strength of the community, could wane, so they could be replaced (Part III, 3-6; 9-14). Following this Death, the replacement of the king, envisioned as the return of vegetative fertility (ibid. 263-5) or the god’s revival, constitutes a Rising. This Rising is dealt with in a two-part volume on his central figures, Attis, Osiris and Adonis (Part IV).

Therefore the cycle of nature inspired a way of understanding humanity's condition, and the god became a figure through which one could try to cope with that reality: "The dying god is one of those imaginative conceptions in which early man made his emotional and intellectual preoccupations explicit" (Frankfort, 1958: 143). Appropriating the natural world, and its representatives on the divine plane, humanity could express their own understanding of the world, and their fears, onto a broader stage which might offer comfort or simply insist on resignation to an inescapable reality:

"...everywhere the withering of vegetation is seen as an image of man's own transitoriness. Consequently the myth of the dying god reflects man's attitude towards death, and it gives form to his expectations: the resurrection of the god may be seen as a prefiguration of man's ultimate destiny; or man's mortality may be accepted as in bitter contrast with the perennial life of nature."

(*ibid.*: 143)

This deification of natural cycles of death and rebirth can offer a valuable insight into how different cultures felt about the prospect of death, and their hopes for the afterlife, as the characters they describe enacting this cycle on the divine plane are given sympathetic features and encounter the very fates the storytellers themselves expect to meet. This valuable level of analysis is only viable if the motif itself is authentic, and not an elaborate construction by modern scholars influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs. An assessment of the motif itself is therefore necessary before moving on to a god-by-god investigation.

As a motif, the Dying-Rising Gods have generally been categorised within the academic discussions following Frazer's *The Golden Bough* as "a group of male deities found in agrarian Mediterranean societies who serve as the focus of myths and rituals that allegedly narrate and annually represent their death and resurrection" (Smith, 1987: 521). These male gods share important female counterparts within their myths²⁵⁰, elevating them from simply representing the dying vegetation, to "young male figures of fertility; [because] the drama of their lives was often associated with mother or virgin goddesses"

²⁵⁰ This Mother Goddess and son-consort dyad might derive from a Cretan and Minoan goddess and her young consort (Persson, 1942: 123f.), but a Goddess associated with the grain, and accompanied by young god depicted as a bull, also appears in Çatal Hüyük (Zuntz, 1971: 14-23).

(*ibid.*: 521). Curiously, the motif has remained a ‘boy’s club’ even though Persephone was studied alongside Osiris and Adonis in Frazer’s original theory, as he points out that:

“Dionysus was not the only Greek deity whose tragic story and ritual appear to reflect the decay and revival of vegetation. In another form and with a different application the old tale reappears in the myth of Demeter and Persephone... only whereas the Oriental imagination figured the loved and lost one as a dead lover or a dead husband lamented by his leman or his wife, Greek fancy embodied the same idea in the tenderer and purer form of a dead daughter bewailed by her sorrowing mother.”

(Frazer, 1912: 35)

Even as further study has uncovered a striking series of parallels with Inanna/Ishtar in the Near East (see chapter four), these goddesses have rarely been included within the discussion of the Dying-Rising God, except to note that Inanna sends her spouse Dumuzi to the Underworld in her place, making him a candidate for the category, or that the Greeks are unusual for switching the expected son-consort with a daughter. This omission will require attention once the category and its normal applicants have been reviewed.

The similarities between the variously identified Dying-Rising Gods, Dionysus, Osiris, Tammuz/Dumuzi, Attis, Adonis, Baal, Melqart and a few less famous examples (Smith, 1987: 521f.), have suggested some direct line of influence from a single source for the myth, possibly in Anatolia²⁵¹, which spread the idea out across the Mediterranean. This supposition, along with the generalising term ‘Dying-Rising Gods’, which overlooks the different forms these gods took, may be simply a fallacious assumption, as the cultures could reasonably develop similar ideas independently from their shared environmental circumstances, or create a group of mutually-influencing deities, who *appear* to fit this category, but in practice do not. This is not to deny that some dispersal of the idea into various regions was not possible, but rather to avoid the search for a single ‘source’, as if such a pursuit could reasonably be fruitful, given the difficulty of tracing the beliefs as they existed several centuries after the period of ‘spread’ (Kirk, 1974: 255-7). An over-

²⁵¹ If deviance from the structure is an indication of the track of development, Anatolia possesses a number of versions of this god and his mythic pattern, while Egypt and Greece appear to deviate (through development or modification) this original structure, so probably ‘received’ it (Kirk, 1974: 255).

simplified category would ignore the culturally-specific nuance the different gods would have developed as their worshippers turned to them with their different eschatological, cosmological and spiritual needs. The complex and recurring motifs and patterns within these myths do in fact suggest some influence between these different cultures affecting the form of the stories and the beliefs they allow: “the terminology does not *per se* presuppose genetic relations... the various deities belong to different religious contexts... [and] Structural analogies may, however, occur, and these may be of the kind to indicate that we are, in specific cases, confronted with the results of contact and influence” (Mettinger, 2001: 41).

The role of cultic ritual underpinning the myth, the celebration of the god’s death and resurrection, and their connection to the vegetative life of the community’s immediate environment, have been of primary importance within the discussion, which has frequently led to challenges or the complete rejection of one or all gods from the category. J.Z. Smith relegates these gods to a small subset of more prominent motifs, although he makes his scepticism clear: “The putative category of dying and rising deities... takes its place within the larger category of dying gods and the even larger category of disappearing deities” (1987: 521). The challenges to the category as a whole lie in the various gods’ eligibility to belong to the category, and if no gods actually fit the category, the category itself falls apart. As Smith asserts, confident that the category should be subsumed into the ‘Disappearing Deities’ category:

“the majority of the gods so denoted [as dying-rising] appear to have died but not returned; there is death but no rebirth or resurrection. What evidence was relied on by previous scholarship for the putative resurrection can be shown... to be based on a misinterpretation of the documents, or on late texts from the Christian era (frequently by Christians) which reveal an *interpretatio Christiana* of another religion’s myths and rituals, or a borrowing of the Christian motif, at a late stage, by the religions themselves.”

(Smith, 1990: 101)

Rather than dismissing the class of gods outright as the collective misinterpretation by scholars studying ancient religions through the lens of Christianity, and especially eager

to find parallels in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures²⁵², it may be valuable to recognise that at the very least these gods were associated with a Christ-like death and resurrection later in their histories, and that their original myths would have at least been amenable to such interpretation, if they had not originally been formed with this pattern in mind.

A more reliable measure of the suitability of these gods as comparisons to Persephone is any ancient association or comparison made between her myth and these male gods, which indicates that as far as the ancients were concerned, similarities did exist. Beyond this tentative salvage-effort, Mettinger's study suggests that some of these gods are viable candidates for the category, and deserve further analysis. To give Smith and his camp reasonable ground within this discussion, it is worth noting that Smith prefers Bianchi's category of gods who experience 'vicissitudes', a category subdivided according to the "different soteriological structures and implications experienced by the cult members in relation to these vicissitudes" (Smith, 1990: 107n40). Bianchi's subcategories, Fertility cults, Mystery cults, Mysteriosophic traditions, and Gnostic traditions, are distinguished by the degrees of importance of the seasonal cycle against the kind of 'salvation' to be expected by the community or the individual (*ibid.*: 107n40). These subcategories recognise the role of the seasonal cycle in the formation of these myths, and the possibility of the deity's death and the related threat to cosmic order or personal 'salvation', thus they do not neutralise the Dying-Rising God category, but try to interpret them entirely through their cultic significance.

In response to Smith's critique (1987), Mettinger proposes establishing two major requisites for the category: "(a) that in the specific cult the figure in question is a real god [in contrast to a *heros* or simply a demi-god], whatever his previous history, and (b) that he is conceived of as dying (his death represented as a *descensus* to the Netherworld or in

²⁵² In contrast, there appears to be an equally strong counter-move to deny the possibility of the category because of its similarity to the Christian tradition: "One *sometimes* notes in the research certain evasive strategies designed to avoid the conclusion that the notion of dying and rising deities might be a pre-Christian phenomenon. Ancient Near Eastern gods are freely granted the privilege of rising or returning – as long as they behave like gentlemen and do not do so before Christ" (Mettinger, 2001: 217). It is difficult to extricate arguments within this discussion from either one of these positions.

some other way) and reappearing as alive after the experience of death” (2001: 42). In addition to these necessary requisites, he adds two subsidiary features which Frazer originally postulated but which do not necessarily need to characterise these deities: “(c) whether the fate of the deity is somehow related to the seasonal cycle, and, (d) whether there is a ritual celebration of the fate of the deity in question” (*ibid.*: 42). The third category restricts the variety of gods to those who are connected to vegetation, and plant and animal fertility, and excludes figures like storm-gods who may bring the rain which will inspire new growth, or solar deities whose daily (or annual) victory over the darkness may sometimes also be understood as a victory over death. The fourth feature acknowledges the myth-as-ritual tradition²⁵³, which has dominated the interpretation of myth since the Cambridge School, and their major influences, Frazer and William Robertson Smith (Ackerman, 2002: 43-4).

Following Mettinger’s moderated version of Frazer’s Dying-Rising Gods, the two important qualities to be found in the candidates are their divinity, and their death and return from death. The divinity of the various figures will be dealt with respectively, but the definition of dying and rising, or at least resurrection, does need to be clarified before the study commences. The initial problem lies in the nature of the gods that are supposed to die; gods are generally defined by their immortality, and yet this motif presumes that death is possible for a god. This ‘death’ need not be described as literally as the god actually succumbing to disease or a wound²⁵⁴, but can take on the euphemistic metaphor of a journey to the Land of the Dead, however that space may be conceived, so that the god does not technically die as a human might, but this journey operates on the level of symbolic language, so “[t]he *descensus* is... a metaphor for ‘dying’; [and]

²⁵³ This tradition posits the necessity for ritual activities to underlie mythic stories and patterns, although many myths never received ritual practice or belonged to cultic belief.

²⁵⁴ Death through bodily harm may generally contradict the nature of the gods, as they are believed to be made up of a more heavenly substance, which cannot be harmed and thus cannot die; yet the gods are envisioned in human terms, even if they exist on a higher plane. The anthropomorphism used to imagine them in myth leaves them vulnerable to a human-like ‘death’, even if it cannot occur just as humans might die: “the anthropomorphic concept of deity justifies this reference to the ‘body’ of the deity; even in transfigured shape this divine ‘body’ has corporeal associations” (Mettinger, 2001: 43). These anthropomorphised gods are necessary for the plots of their respective myths, as actors in the mythic action, but this need not reduce the god to this anthropomorphic form at all times and in all its conceptions for its worshippers (*ibid.*: 46).

correspondingly, the return from the Netherworld must be a metaphor for being restored to life again” (Mettinger, 2001: 42).

Despite their place in the cosmic hierarchy as the ‘undying ones’, immortal in cruel contrast to humanity’s mortality, the very fact the some gods undergo the vacillations of death and rebirth suggests that “immortality is not a prime characteristic of divinity: gods die” (Smith, 1987: 521). This assertion does vary according to the theological framework of each culture, but for the present discussion, which focuses on the Mediterranean gods who appear to die and rise (Frazer, Part III, 1912), it certainly seems necessary to recognise that within their mythological narratives, gods were susceptible to death.

Once the god is dead, he/she needs to return to full divine and active functioning on the same plane they belonged to before they died, or the ‘resurrection’ is incomplete²⁵⁵ (Mettinger, 2001: 42). This return is important, as an incomplete return might not signify a victory over death. This victory of death may be what inspires the popularity of these myths, as the worshippers seek some ‘precedent’ to allay their fears as they confront death. This is not to say they literally expect to rise again, like the god, but at least the god’s return proves that the boundaries of the Land of the Dead are not impermeable, and ‘new’ life of one form or another is to be anticipated (*ibid.*: 43). The immortal gods are not simply exempt from the rules of the Land of the Dead, as there is generally believed to be a barrier between the upper and nether worlds, which even the gods cannot usually cross²⁵⁶. This impassable barrier means that the gods are immortal because they exist in the upperworld, and are there free from the powers of the netherworld, not because the powers of the netherworld cannot affect them.

²⁵⁵ With regards to terminology, it may be safer to use ‘Dying and Rising’ than ‘resurrection’, due to the Christian connotations attached to the latter term.

²⁵⁶ The only figures that can freely cross this line are lesser spirits or messenger-gods, whose power lies in the ability to traverse boundaries and cross spaces. This freedom of movement is too easy to encourage the development of the same great significance to this transgression of the boundaries between the living and the dead, so messenger-gods do not appear as Dying-Rising Gods (Mettinger, 2001: 43n63), although gods like Hermes do adopt a role in the journey of the dead to the Underworld through their power to cross this boundary (see chapter three).

In terms of the additional features of these gods that are not requisite for their position in the Dying-Rising God category, it is interesting that so many of these gods are associated with vegetation and the natural cycles of growth and death. This association is marked through the timing of their rites and myths, which coincide with seasonal events: “The summer drought is the time when their death may be mourned ritually. The time after the winter rains and floodings may provide the occasion for the celebration of their return” (*ibid.*: 219). The death and return of vegetation itself does not necessitate the development of myths about gods who enact this cycle on a divine yet anthropomorphic plane, because “[t]he appearing and disappearing of vegetation were always felt, in the perspective of magico-religious experience, to be a *sign* of the periodic creation of the Universe” (Eliade, 1958: 425-6).

The creation of these gods and their sufferings and victories “disclose aspects of the nature of the cosmos which extend far beyond the sphere of plant life; it discloses on the one hand, the fundamental *unity* of life and death, and on the other, the hopes man draws, with good reason, from that fundamental unity, for his own life after death” (*ibid.*: 426), or at least they disclose the myth-maker’s²⁵⁷ understanding of this unity and hope. The vegetation the gods represent becomes a useful metaphor for the myth-maker to explain this unity and offer this hope, but the use of a metaphor creates a framework of meaning within which new meaning can be found, so the understanding of this unity and hope may be modified over time and in successive retellings, as different ideas or associations gain prominence. Therefore, just as some myths could describe a god’s death and rising through the process of the sun’s rising and falling, the different myths which use the metaphor of the cycle of natural growth and death of vegetation can offer different versions of the unity of life and death, and hope for life after death²⁵⁸, so the gods that embody them remain comparable, but possess their own unique character.

²⁵⁷ And the society that repeats these myths, although the reception of a text or mythic formulation can always involve meaning not originally intended.

²⁵⁸ For example, Plutarch explains how different interpretations of the myth of Typhon and Osiris sees the Nile’s inundation differently (*De Iside et Osiride* 32-3).

The Dying-Rising Candidates

The candidates for the Dying-Rising God motif are generally identified as Dionysus, Adonis, Attis, Osiris (Frazer's original quartet²⁵⁹), Baal, Marduk and Dumuzi/ Tammuz (Smith, 1987: 522-6), Cretan Zeus and Hyacinthus (Persson, 1942: 137f.), although Melqart (Mettinger, 2001: 81f.) and Asclepius, in his Near Eastern manifestation (*ibid*: 155f.), have also been included. Dionysus, Adonis and Osiris have been chosen for this study, because they offer the most useful and diverse comparisons with Persephone, and are neatly staggered between Greece, the Near East, and Egypt so that their respective cultures can be recognised in forming their myths. These three gods also became closely connected to the Greek goddesses, either through the assimilation of myths within Greece, or the appropriation of foreign gods into the local mythology during periods of syncretism. Attis bears remarkable resemblances to Adonis, and the effect of their cultures on their myth can be evident in the discussion of Adonis (although his Rising is less certain than Adonis'²⁶⁰). Baal, Melqart, and Marduk never gained the prominence across the Mediterranean that Osiris and Adonis achieved, and did not endure the same degree of syncretism²⁶¹, which may indicate irreconcilable differences between them and the Greek goddesses. Dummuzi/ Tammuz has been discussed in relation to the Mesopotamian goddesses in the previous chapter, and so should not require additional discussion.

Dionysus

Dionysus is identified by Frazer as a Dying-Rising God (Part V, Vol.I, 1912). He is Greek, like Persephone²⁶², so a comparison between the two is important, especially as

²⁵⁹ Adonis, Attis and Osiris: Part IV, Vol.I-II, 1914; Dionysus: Part V, Vol.I, 1912.

²⁶⁰ Smith (1987: 523) denies it outright, Casadio (2003: 237) suggests that suffering rather than death (and therefore no Rising is necessary) was more important, while Gasparro (1985: 104) notes the influence of the Eleusinian tradition on the cult of Phrygian Cybele, probably developing a motif of mourning for the lost god just as Demeter mourns for Persephone.

²⁶¹ Although Melqart was assimilated with Hercules, and perhaps even Nergal (Mettinger, 2001: 84-5). In his connection to Hercules and Baal, all three gods die in a fire (*ibid*: 109), a curious connection to the myth of Demophoön. Melqart-Hercules' resurrection is celebrated in both Greek and Phoenician rites (*ibid*: 110).

²⁶² It has already been discussed (see chapter four) whether Persephone herself is local to Attica, and although her full manifestation might not have been the earliest, some aspect of the goddess most likely existed very early on. Dionysus, although the ancients frequently claimed he was a Cretan or Thracian import (Rohde, 1925: 256f.), seems to have always been present in some form or another (his name appears

the Dionysiac tradition adopted some of her features and even the goddess herself into their ecstatic worship²⁶³. Just as Persephone seems to have taken on different meanings in different contexts, such that her Attic persona was more fundamentally bound to her mother, while her Sicilian version assimilated the mother and became something like the great Mother Goddess herself (Zuntz, 1971: 157), Dionysus manifested differently in different cultural contexts. On the scale of local tradition, he was partly an Olympian who belonged within respectable state worship, and partly a disruptive outsider, challenging the boundaries of the world and the divine and mortal order (Otto, 1933: 75-8). This ecstatic version, frequently shunned or repressed by the state it disrupted²⁶⁴, also took on two forms in Italy and Greece respectively²⁶⁵, so pinning down what exactly Dionysiac beliefs were, and what they promised, is challenging. This study will therefore focus specifically on the evidence for his death and rebirth, and what hope is expressed by his worshippers for existence after death.

Even in the state-sponsored festivals of the annual Dionysia in Athens, Dionysus represented a subversive and unsettling power. The patron of wine, his worship (especially the ecstatic forms) could liberate his believers from their usual constraints²⁶⁶ and moral codes (Seaford, 2006: 106-8), and the tragedies performed on his stage were intended to unsettle the audience with harsh truths and terrible realities (Aristotle *Ars*

on the Mycenaean Linear B tablets), not quite adhering to the usual form of the rest of the pantheon until his 'debut' in the late archaic and early classical periods (Burkert, 1985: 162; Larson, 2007: 126). The Cretan Zeus, who had a tomb and was also a Dying God, may have influenced the development of Dionysus, and the role of the Kouretes as guardians to both may indicate that one is a duplicate of the other (Persson, 1942: 137), and Cretan Zeus bears a striking resemblance to Dionysus in *A Cretan hymn to Zeus of Mt. Dikta* (Furley & Bremmer, 2001: 68f.).

²⁶³ Additionally, the Eleusinian Iacchos and Bacchus were conflated over time (see chapter one), and the *Hymn to Demeter* was claimed to be an Orphic text in the first century B.C. (Richardson, 1974: 12).

²⁶⁴ Such as the Italian suppression in 186 B.C. (Burkert, 1985: 292).

²⁶⁵ "Within the sphere of *Orphica*, two schools may perhaps be distinguished, an Athenian-Eleusinian school which concentrated on the bestowal of culture allegedly to be found in the Demeter myth and the Eleusinian mysteries, and an Italian, Pythagorean school which took a more original path with the doctrine of the transmigration of souls" (Burkert, 1985: 300).

²⁶⁶ Such breaking of boundaries, so that they can be reconstituted (and thus reaffirmed in the public eye) is noted in state festivals in which women could take part, thereby breaking the norm by leaving their homes (Morgan, 2010: 305), and it is noticeable that women constitute the most devout of Dionysus' followers. The Dorian and Boiotian festival of Agrania enacted this break from and return to ordinary life, as the women throw themselves into Dionysiac ecstasies, but the men, led by the priest of Dionysus, "oppose and check the women's ravings", so that this festival "enacted a dissolution of social order and gender norms followed by a return to stability" (Larson, 2007: 138-9).

Poetica 6), while the comedies taunted the powerful and challenged the traditional and respectable. These releases could cathartically divert tensions through safe avenues, like pressure releases in a taut system, ensuring the collective survival by these occasional excesses (Burkert, 1985: 293; Morgan, 2010: 305). This deviance from the norm established Dionysus as a boundary-crosser, and his worship could offer the space for individuals, frustrated with the constraints of their communities and duties, to rebel and find escape, even if only briefly: “Dionysos is the god of the exceptional. As the individual gains in independence, the Dionysos cult becomes a vehicle for the separation of private groups from the polis” (Burkert, 1985: 291). In contrast to public and state festivals for Dionysus, such as the Dionysia²⁶⁷, there were private, secret Dionysiac cults, in which gender divisions were eroded and the regular rules and regulations for behaviour gave way to ecstatic worship, frequently in caves or at night, in which worshippers underwent an initiation, which was “fulfilled in raving, *baccheia*. The initiate is turned into a *bacchos*. This state of frenzy is blessedness” (*ibid.*: 291-2). The initiation entailed union with the godhead, by undergoing similar trials and ‘dying’, in order to be reborn, like the god (West, 1983: 144-5).

Like his Olympian peers, Dionysus accrued a number of myths, and his authority over various areas of life, such as the vine, meant that he was worshiped at a number of temples in a number of guises, another god of the pantheon to be placated and revered. Having been sired upon Semele by Zeus, the Thebans could claim him as one of their own²⁶⁸, but her foolishness (and subsequent incineration) meant the infant god was transferred to a holier womb, his father’s thigh, such that he was born directly from his father, like Athena. This survival of mortal death, and his unusual approachability may have made the god of madness and the vine an appealing figure for worship. Certainly, a significant movement collected behind the writings of ‘Orpheus’, developing an elaborate and unique cosmology and eschatology through their Bacchic god and the mythical

²⁶⁷ Developing into a major, collective festival in the fifth century B.C, even moving from winter to spring for the audience’s convenience, this festival (like the Eleusinian Mysteries) had a preliminary torch-lit procession, bearing the god’s image from his temple to the theatre (Larson, 2007: 132).

²⁶⁸ They established a cult for her in the Kadmeia (the Theban acropolis) and the theatre, and they worshipped the ‘local’ version of her son, calling him Dionysos Kadmeios after his sanctuary on the acropolis (Larson, 2007: 140-1).

Orpheus. Orpheus was believed to have descended to the Underworld, and then returned (in a doomed quest to save his wife Eurydice), before he was torn apart by maenads (Ovid *Metamorphoses* XI.1-46), linking the musician with Dionysus, even if in an unsettlingly violent manner²⁶⁹. Through his journey, Orpheus could offer important insights into the world beyond death, and so various Orphic Hymns were composed, claiming his authorship, and an intriguing series of golden tablets inscribed with advice for the journey to the afterlife have been found and also connected to this group (Zuntz, 1971: 373-6)²⁷⁰.

These writings, called Orphic, do not reveal a unified belief system and a coherent group of worshippers who shared doctrine and practice²⁷¹, even if their myths and poems are relatable. West (1983:1) notes several theogonies claimed to be Orphic, of which the Rape of Core is an important variant of Persephone's myth (Guthrie 1952: 133)²⁷². Another major Orphic Theogony, the *Rhapsodic Theogony*²⁷³, is central to the myth of Dionysus' death and rebirth, through which his initiates could secure their hopes for life after death (West 1983:1). The doctrines claimed for Orpheus and Musaeus (his pupil) appear to have developed into an initiatory form of Dionysian worship, and even appropriated the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis²⁷⁴ at times, albeit with some

²⁶⁹ Like the *Rhapsodic Theogony*'s Dionysus (West, 1983: 160), Orpheus is torn apart, but he is torn apart by Dionysus' followers, the maenads, so the figures are linked by association and a kind of doubling.

²⁷⁰ Although identified as Orphic material, these tablets are 'addressed' to the rulers of the kingdom through which they guide the deceased, Persephone and Hades. The gold tablets try to offer advice against evils in the journey to the Underworld, though they give rather literal advice (such as which tree to turn at, which river to avoid). Whether this is to ensure reincarnation or to avoid the fate of a witless eternity, "or, at most... a twilight half-consciousness" (Rohde, 1925: 9), because they drank of the river Lethe, is difficult to determine. Like the Homeric tradition, the souls in the Underworld could be claimed to be witless, but the tablets suggest this could be the result of their drinking from the infernal waters of forgetting, and that such a fate could be avoided (Zuntz, 1971: 376-81).

²⁷¹ "Orphism was not a single unified Church, but is best understood as a collection of diverse counter-cultural religious movements whose major proponents were itinerant 'craftsmen' of purification who provided services for a wide variety of customers" (Edmonds, 1999: 37).

²⁷² See chapter one.

²⁷³ The *Rhapsodic Theogony* has been difficult to date, "variously dated to the sixth century BC, to the Hellenistic age, or even later" (West, 1983: 1), though the first century B.C may be the best guess (Richardson, 1974: 78), while "the extant Orphic Hymns were composed in the Imperial period" (West, 1983: 1).

²⁷⁴ This development appears fairly early: "the name of either Pythagoras or Orpheus [is] attached to [the transmigration of souls]" when it appears near the end of the sixth century BC (Burkert, 1987: 87), and their 'doctrines' were frequently associated (West, 1983: 14-20).

variation in its expression²⁷⁵. These initiatory cults, separate from the state-sanctioned worship of Dionysus and peddled by itinerant priests²⁷⁶ (Edmonds, 1999: 37), appears to have believed in a slightly different Dionysus than the one celebrated in the Attic Dionysia.

This Dionysus was ‘thrice-born’, through a series of vicissitudes which offer his worshippers the claim to shared suffering, and may be the *aition* for the three cycles of reincarnation in Pindar’s *Olympian Ode* II. Zeus fathers the god upon his daughter Persephone (his daughter by Rhea-Demeter) in the form of a snake²⁷⁷, and leaves him in the care of the Kouretes (a Cretan link Zeus shared²⁷⁸). After Dionysus’ earliest infancy, Zeus establishes his heir on the throne, but the Titans revolt against this, lure him from his throne with toys, and then dismember and consume him. Athena preserves his heart²⁷⁹, and so the divine child is reborn, and sired upon Semele, who dies when she is incinerated by Zeus’ thunderbolt²⁸⁰. The child is preserved and carried to term in Zeus’ thigh (West, 1983: 140), returning the myth to the mainstream version. A significant amount of attention has been directed at an interpretation of this myth, especially the Titanic slaughter and subsequent creation of mankind, as a doctrine of original sin, but such an interpretation is never made in the earliest, pre-Christian sources (it only appears

²⁷⁵ “What appears in the fifth century is not a complete and consistent doctrine of metempsychosis, but rather experimental speculations with contradictory principles of ritual and morality, and a groping for natural laws” (Burkert, 1985: 300).

²⁷⁶ Unlike Demeter at Eleusis, and the other gods centred at traditional shrines or temples, “these mysteries are no longer bound to a fixed sanctuary with priesthoods linked to resident families; they make their appearance wherever adherents can be found” (Burkert, 1985: 291).

²⁷⁷ This manifestation links Zeus with his brother Hades, Persephone’s spouse in most other versions of the myth, but Chthonic Zeus, euphemistically called Zeus Meilichios, did receive cult worship in Athens, at the Diasia, and rock inscriptions survive in Thera, Kos and Cyrene (Larson, 2007: 21-3).

²⁷⁸ The Kouretes are recalled in *O.H.*31. This belongs to the post-Hesiodic Cretan *Theogony* (Burkert, 1985: 127; Apollodorus 1.5) though Hesiod does mention a deep cave in Crete when Zeus is entrusted to his grandmother Gaia (*Theogony* 478-84). This tradition may be the source of the Grave of Zeus, the idiomatic proof of Cretan lies (Larson, 2007: 25).

²⁷⁹ The collection of pieces of the dismembered body to reunify it recalls the myth of Isis and Osiris, see below. This preservation intimately links the siblings, in addition to their shared gestation in their father. Persephone lacks such a loyal sibling (though Athene, her half-sister, is among her companions when she is abducted in some versions of her myth, such as *Hymn* 425, Hyginus 146, Claudian II.18-35, and Athene and Artemis try save Persephone from Hades in Claudian II.204f.). Persephone may gain such a ‘sibling’ in the devotion of Hekate, another female who helps the primary deity to save the lost, ‘dead’, child.

²⁸⁰ A death associated with Elysium, see chapter three. Zeus punishes the Titans by blasting them with a thunderbolt, and it is from these ashes, a mix of primordial Titan and the divine god they had consumed, that humans emerge (West, 1983: 140).

in the sixth century²⁸¹). Rather this myth was used by Neoplatonists to explain the One and the Many, an interpretation found already in Plutarch:

“As to the manner of his birth and *diakosmesis* into winds, water, earth, stars, plants and animals, they [wise men] describe this experience and transformation allegorically as ‘rending’ and ‘dismemberment.’ They name him Dionysus, Zagreus, Nyctelius, Isodaites, and they construct allegories and myths proper to the stories of death and destruction followed by life and rebirth.”

(Plutarch *De E* 9.388e²⁸²)

An interpretation which links Dionysus closely to the mythic models of Persephone, Dumuzi and Geshtinanna (see chapter four), might suggest a more immediate source of his destruction and return, locating him firmly, as Frazer describes him (Part V Vol.I, 1912), among the vegetative deities: “the myth of the *sparagmos* and rebirth of Dionysos... [was interpreted by Diodorus Siculus 3.62-5] as an allegory of the process of winemaking. Dionysos, who represents the grape and the vine²⁸³, is torn to pieces by the workers of the earth” (Edmonds, 1999: 51).

This vegetative aspect is an important consideration in setting Dionysus among the other candidates for the Dying-Rising God, as they frequently have vegetative associations (even if it is not a necessary feature). This vegetative association could be the common source of their myths, as the gods are envisioned as experiencing the same fluctuations as the vegetation they embody, be it the wilting growth in winter or a scorching summer, the grain being sown or stored in subterranean silos, or the flowers of spring flourishing in the new season. Dionysus’ connection to the vine finds an extensive parallel in the myth: “the dismemberment of Dionysus is the grape-harvest, his boiling is the boiling of the grapes, and his restoration to life is the reunion of the parts of the new wine, or the flourishing of the ravaged vine in the following summer” (West, 1983: 141). Such an

²⁸¹ Edmonds, 1999: 40-9.

²⁸² In Edmonds, 1999: 51-2.

²⁸³ An interpretation “given by Cornutus and by allegorizers known to Diodorus, [which] appears to have been adopted in the Rhapsodic Theogony itself, for in the account of Dionysus’ death and resurrection (and nowhere else so far as we know) the god was referred to by the name Oinos (Wine; or Vine [*oine*] masculinized” (West, 1983, 141-2). This interpretation may have been “a Hellenistic intrusion, not part of the original Eudemean narrative” (*ibid.*: 245-6), included into the *Rhapsodic Theogony* by its compiler.

interpretation would offer a considerable significance to the initiatory rites in which his worshippers drank the wine their god embodies.

In the Orphic material, Eubouleus plays a much more prominent role than in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, though he was found in the iconography of Eleusis (see chapter one), and the Demophoön episode may be replaced by the Euboulos who is described as being ‘made into a god’ in the *Orphic Hymn* 41. Eubouleus and Euboulos both appear in the Orphic Hymns²⁸⁴, though typically for the syncretism of these hymns, strictly differentiated identification is avoided and often their identities overlap. Euboulos is identified as Hades, who

“once took pure Demeter’s daughter as your bride
when you tore her away from the meadow and through the sea
upon your steeds you carried her to an Attic cave,
in the district of Eleusis²⁸⁵, where the gates to Hades are.”

(*O.H.* 18. 1.12-15)

Yet Euboulos is also a mortal made into a god by Demeter (*O.H.*41), but if this is to displace the Eleusinian Demophoön episode, he should be Eubouleus. Eubouleus is Triptolemos’ brother (Morand, 1997: 171) and the swineherd who lost his pigs to the earth when Hades descended with Persephone²⁸⁶, and later guided Demeter to the Underworld. This version differs from the Homeric *Hymn* in making the local Eleusinians peasants instead of royals, and describing Demeter’s descent to the Underworld. Eubouleus, however, is also generally identified with Dionysus, in his

²⁸⁴ Euboulos (an epithet, not a proper name) appears in Orphic Hymns 18 (as an epithet for Hades, just before it describes his abduction of Persephone), and 41 (the child of Dysaules, ‘made a god’). Eubouleus appears in Hymns 29 (as the otherwise nameless child of Persephone, the “loud-roaring, polymorph”), 30 (as an epithet for Dionysus), 42 (an epithet of Dionysus which also identifies him with Iacchos, but particularly syncretic as it calls upon the Phrygian Mother, Cythereia and Isis), 52 (an epithet for Dionysus), 56 (an epithet of Dionysus/ Adonis, and suggesting the bilocation of the god between Olympus and Tartaros), 72 (an unusual association of chthonic Zeus/ Dionysus with a syncretised Artemis/Tyche). All these poems use the name ‘Eubouleus’ as an epithet for the god listing his powers and attributes, and often reflect an assimilation with other Greek or even foreign gods (Morand, 1997: 172).

²⁸⁵ The Orphic hymns do associate themselves with the Eleusinian tradition by repeatedly locating the rape of Persephone, or Demeter’s grief, “in the sacred valley of Eleusis” (*O.H.*40 1.6; *O.H.*41 1.4), but Dionysus’ rites, conjoined with various syncretised Mother Goddesses, are found in Eleusis, Phrygia, Cyprus, and Egypt (*O.H.*42 1.5-10).

²⁸⁶ And therefore connected through an *aition* to the Thesmophoria’s rites of casting sacrificed piglets into caverns and collecting them a year later to sow into the field (Larson, 2007: 70-1).

various manifestations²⁸⁷. He is the child of Zeus and Persephone (*O.H.*30 1.6-7; *O.H.*56 1.3), and he is Misē-Dionysus-Iacchos (*O.H.*42 1.4), but Eubouleus is also identified with Chthonic Zeus-Dionysus (*O.H.* 72 1.2).

This irregular distinction means that identifying who exactly Eubouleus or Euboulos are is difficult, and probably entirely contextual. Both Eubouleus and Euboulos are used for Hades (Morand, 1997: 172), and both are used as epithets ('Good counsel') even if Eubouleus is a proper name, which is perhaps a deliberate ambiguity: "this intermediate position between name and epithet makes this word ideal for describing the unity of the divine" (*ibid.*: 172). The epithet/name could unify the different manifestations or aspects of the god²⁸⁸, resolving the Neoplatonist One and Many into a nebulous but connected web of gods and titles: "Eubouleus was chosen in the *Orphic Hymns* as a unifying qualification; a way to show the coherence, parallelisms, and identities between different gods" (*ibid.*: 173).

The conflation of Dionysus with Eubouleus in these hymns characterises Dionysus as a chthonic god, in contrast to his Olympian persona, making him a suitable deity to beseech in the confrontation with death. Like Persephone, the chthonic Dionysus has jurisdiction in the Land of the Dead, and he has suffered just as his initiates have (albeit through their initiations). This confusion of identities extends through syncretism²⁸⁹ to blur the

²⁸⁷ This identification with Dionysus, found in the *Orphic Hymns*, may be quite late, as "the extant Orphic Hymns were composed in the Imperial period" (West, 1983: 1), but the identification of Dionysus-Bacchus with Iacchus in Eleusis was as early as the fourth century B.C. (Nilsson, 1940: 62), so some early Eleusinian-Orphic conflation is possible.

²⁸⁸ "Eubouleus qualifies an Underworld Dionysos, Zeus Chthonios, or Pluto, and implies a connection between these deities in their Underworld functions" (Morand, 1997: 172). Eubouleus' euphemistic name might mean he was originally an early chthonic god and later associated with Dionysus (Zuntz, 1971: 311).

²⁸⁹ Syncretism may account for Orpheus' prominence in the tradition, though it has been suggested that Orpheus may have been "in origin an underworld god, consort of Eurydice the underworld queen" (Guthrie, 1952: 67n19). Although their story has echoes in that of Persephone and chthonic Zeus (especially the snake which sends Eurydice to the Underworld), it also echoes Persephone's forced removal to the Land of the Dead, but almost inverts the Mesopotamian story of Ereshkigal and Nergal, in which Nergal (Orpheus) *fails* to stay in the Underworld and rule beside the infernal queen. Syncretism was certainly recognised even in the ancient world, though Diodorus tries to ascribe these associations to their inheritance from Egypt: "Orpheus brought back from Egypt most of his mystic rituals, the orgiastic rites concerning his own journey and the mythic account of his adventures in Hades. The rite of Osiris is the same as that of Dionysus, that of Isis similar to that of Demeter; only the names were changed. The punishments of the wicked in Hades and the Fields of the Pious and the fantastic imaginings common to the

delineation of Dionysus, so he adopts the title of Demeter's processional leader, Iacchos, but also incorporates the Anatolian gods who bear striking resemblances to the Greek god of the vine, so Dionysus is identified with Adonis, in his aspect as bilocated between Persephone and Aphrodite (*O.H.*46 1.3-7; *O.H.*56 1.8-9).

Within the numerous forms of the worship of Dionysus, the Orphic hymns and gold tablets buried in graves suggests that there was at least a sub-group within Dionysus' worshippers who turned to Pythagorean or mystic ideas to develop their 'dying god' into a 'rising saviour' of sorts, whose intercession (once he has been approached through Orpheus²⁹⁰, that is), might offer a better hope for the arduous journey through the numerous life cycles the soul must traverse²⁹¹, and perhaps even a place in the Land of the Blessed once the triple cycle has been endured successfully. The god himself survives death, even in infancy or before it (by Titan, and the incineration of his mother), and his association with the vine (and ivy²⁹²) reflects an opportunity for a blessing, deriving from his suffering, while ensuring the renewed power of the god in the following year, as "his restoration to life is the reunion of the parts of the new wine, or the flourishing of the ravaged vine in the following summer" (West, 1983: 141). Interplayed with ivy, these vegetative associations offered a symbolism of duality appropriate to the god: "Light and dark, warmth and cold, the ecstasy of life and the sobering exhalation of death, the contrasting and yet related plurality of the Dionysiac state, are revealed here as plant life" (Otto, 1933: 156).

many, all were introduced by Orpheus in imitation of the funeral rites of Egypt" (Diodorus *Library of Histories* 1.96.4-5).

²⁹⁰ Orpheus' actual role, besides 'providing' the texts of the hymns and prayers, is unusual: Despite the myth of Orpheus' journey to the Underworld, there is no "close connection between him and the underworld gods, Pluto and Persephone... He intercedes and has influence with them, but there is no evidence for a belief that he was their priest or representative" (Guthrie, 1952: 43).

²⁹¹ Dionysus may have also been expected to absolve worshippers from ancestral guilt, if they could purge themselves through purifying rites, preparing them to 'ascend' to the Land of the Blessed free from (ancestral) stain: "His role in freeing the initiate, in this life or the next, from the penalties due for the crimes of ancestors is simply an extension of this essential aspect to eschatology" (Edmonds, 1999: 55).

²⁹² Dionysus is frequently connected to ivy, especially as it becomes the identifying feature of the god and his maenads in vase painting, but like the vine, ivy offers a significant symbol for a vegetative deity: "First it puts out the so-called shade-seeking shoots, the scandent tendrils with the wellknown lobed leaves. Later, however, a second kind of shoot appears which grows upright and turns toward the light. The leaves are formed completely differently, and now the plant produces flowers and berries. Like Dionysus, it could well be called the 'twice-born'" (Otto, 1933: 154). The ivy blooms in the autumn, as the vine's grapes are harvested, and remains one of the few green plants in winter (*ibid.*).

This vegetative god was also found to disappear and reappear in more formal cult, as his shared temple at Delphi commemorated the return of both gods: “Apollo came [back] in early spring, on the seventh of the month Bysios, as if returning from a stay abroad... Dionysus did not go abroad but was ‘roused up’²⁹³ as Dionysus Liknites by the Thyiades, the official Delphic maenads” (West, 1983: 150)²⁹⁴. His tomb, placed inside Apollo’s sanctuary beside the tripod and statue (*ibid.*: 151), sited the god of frenzied worship alongside Apollo, the god of music, poetry and prophecy, suggesting a counterbalance of the two forces. The myth of this union correlates with the Orphic version of Dionysus’ dismemberment, as Apollo, like his half-sister Athena, preserves the pieces until they can be reassembled by Rhea, perhaps imitating Isis’ reassemblage of Osiris²⁹⁵.

Dionysian Hopes for the Afterlife

There are therefore multiple interpretations available of Dionysus’ myth, in all its permutations, and thus pinning down a ‘central’ belief or doctrine for Dionysus’ worshippers, or the followers of Orpheus’ writings, is impossible²⁹⁶. This cycle of suffering and regeneration could offer his initiates hope that they too could be reborn, and the three cycles of reincarnation, before the final opportunity to enter the lands of the Blessed, might mimic this myth of the ‘thrice-born’ god. Pindar explains this hope while also marking some important differences with mainstream beliefs regarding death and the underworld (see chapter three):

²⁹³ Although Apollo ‘returns’ while Dionysus merely reawakens, the myth of Dionysus’ initial arrival at Delphi suggests a connection to Crete (West, 1983: 151), and the Cretan Zeus who also had a tomb (Larson, 2007: 25).

²⁹⁴ If West’s speculation that this rousing took place in the month Daidaphorios, in November/ December (West, 1983: 150), this would not be a spring festival, where his ‘rising’ would be evident in the vegetation, but it would fall close to the Thesmophoria and the autumn sowing, and about a month after the Eleusinian Greater Mysteries (Larson, 2007: 72-3). There is a *paian* on a stele from 340/339 which urges Dionysus to appear “in the holy season of spring” (Larson, 2007: 138).

²⁹⁵ Callimachus .fr.517/643, Euphorion, fr.13P, in West, 1983: 151.

²⁹⁶ And perhaps dangerous. Edmonds notes the appropriation of the *Rhapsodic Theogony* within a Catholic-Protestant schema in modern scholarship, which incorporated the Christian doctrine of Original Sin into these myths. Declaring that “the Zagreus myth should not be considered the central doctrine of Orphism” (Edmonds, 1999: 39), the Titanic element in mankind was not seen as ‘Original Sin’ until 1879, and the various versions rarely combine the creation of mankind with the punishment of the Titans and Dionysus’ dismemberment, and never include the concept of Original Sin (*ibid.*: 38).

“for those who have managed to endure three cycles in both places without making their souls partake of crime, they complete the way of Zeus and arrive at Kronos’ bastion, where the breezes, born of Ocean, blow over the island of the Blessed: the golden flowers blaze, both on shining trees on land, or nourished by the water; they entwine their arms with garlands and crowds, to the just designs of Rhadamanthys²⁹⁷ – he it is whom the great father, the spouse of Rhea who holds the highest seat of all, keeps ready in his place beside him. Peleus and Kadmos²⁹⁸ are among them, and Achilles²⁹⁹, whom his mother brought when she had persuaded Zeus with her supplications.”

(*Olympian Ode* II.70-88)

This version, built upon a belief in reincarnation, assumes a moral judgment for each soul, and promises the Land of the Blessed to the righteous, unlike the divinely-favoured destination of Homer, or the hopeful grove of Persephone’s initiates. Before this blessed eternity, however, each soul must navigate (at least) three cycles of life, and three cycles of death, in which they must safely and successfully traverse the Land of the Dead, so the golden tablets found in graves attempts to give advice, and directions, to the dead in their journey (Zuntz, 1971: 373-6).

The chorus in Euripides’ *Bacchae* echo the Eleusinian promise of a better hope for the afterlife when they explain what their Dionysus offers:

“Blest is the happy man
Who knows the mysteries the gods ordain,
And sanctifies his life,
Joins soul with soul in mystic unity,
And, by due ritual made pure,
Enters the ecstasy of mountain solitudes.”

(*Bacchae*: 72-7)

This eschatology was fundamentally different from that of Persephone’s Eleusinian Mysteries (as far as the surviving evidence can reveal), as it relies on mystic beliefs and

²⁹⁷ Already established in the Elysian Fields in *Odyssey* IV.564, whose role as judge of the dead would have followed the elaboration of the realm of the dead and consciousness of the souls (see chapter three), and suited the development of this realm into a destination for the morally pure, rather than wholesale entrance or for initiates alone.

²⁹⁸ Perhaps included like Menelaus, for his relation to a divinity through his wife Helen (see chapter three), as Cadmus is identified as the father of Semele, the deified mother of Dionysus (*O.H.*44).

²⁹⁹ Contra *Odyssey* XI.467-540; XXIV.15-97, where he is in Hades with the other shades, though Pindar may follow a subsequent tradition where Achilles is translated to Leuke, the White Isle (West, 2003: 2).

borrows Pythagorean reincarnation to describe a cycle of lives, to be lived purely and in devotion to the nebulous godhead. The ultimate goal remains the same, however, as both cults look forward to a special place in the Land of the Blessed, and an escape from the infernal mud of the common lot, but their conceptions of souls differ, and the gods to be given prominent devotion, though related, are importantly different and can offer slightly different promises.

Plato's description of Musaeus' poetic depiction of this blessed afterlife includes moral judgement. The virtuous appear to enjoy something like his own symposium, while the wicked suffer the eternal punishment portrayed in Polygnotus' painting³⁰⁰ (see chapter three):

“Still grander are the gifts of heaven which Mousaios and his son vouchsafe to the just; they take them down into the world below, where they have the saints lying on couches at a feast (*symposion*), everlastingly drunk, crowned with garlands; their idea seems to be that an immortality of drunkenness is the highest meed of virtue. Some extend their rewards yet further; the posterity, as they say, of the faithful and just shall survive to the third and fourth generation. This is the style in which they praise justice. But about the wicked there is another strain; they bury them in slough in Hades, and make them carry water in a sieve; also while they are yet living they bring them to infamy, and inflict upon them the punishments which Glaucon described as the portion of the just who are reputed to be unjust.”

(*Republic* 2.6; transl. Jowett 1987)

Plato describes an afterlife well suited to the god of wine, as his initiates enjoy an eternal symposium, while the wicked suffer, like the “murderers and perjurers” (274) in “the Great Mire of Filth and the Eternal Stream of Dung” (147) of Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

Dionysus therefore offers a complex and compelling symbolic force, a god who dies (repeatedly), reigns over ecstatic frenzy but is situated alongside the cool rationalism of the Olympian Apollo. His death, and survival, annually commemorated in rite and evident in the vegetative cycles (especially that of the ivy and the vine), offer his worshippers a sign of the regeneration they could experience through initiation into his mysteries, releasing them from the constraints of their mortal existence, but saving them

³⁰⁰ A much more elaborate and crueler fate for the wicked is described in Plato's *Phaedo* 113d-114c.

from the witless eternity that lay beyond the infernal rivers Charon navigates. The god's death and rebirth could be replicated in the devotees' 'death and rebirth' in initiation, and celebrated in the transformation of the vine into the wine he embodies. His myth and cult could be linked to that of Persephone, rather than her mother, recognising a common promise of hope for the afterlife and an unusually close bond with his mortal devotees. His Greek manifestation could assimilate easily into a variety of forms, according to what his worshippers required, from the ecstatic and frenzied to the stately and traditional, breaking and reforming boundaries just as his initiates could hope to see the prospect of death transformed into a promising experience.

Adonis

Adonis, a Hellenised import from the Near East, is a useful starting point in the analysis of these gods, as Frazer gives much attention to him in his study, and it is the 'Gardens of Adonis' which have been the centre of much debate. Adonis was a fairly late import into the Greek religious universe, an immigrant from the Levant, where his name simply translates into 'Lord', and so he may be borrowed from even further east, and some have identified him as a development of Tammuz or Baal³⁰¹ (Mettinger, 2001: 143-4). The evidence for what shape this Levantine god took is scarce, and heavily influenced by later Greek writings and descriptions, but it is important to note that the god undertook a transformation when he migrated to Greece, and so his Greek counterpart might not reasonably represent his 'original' form.

The Greek myth of Adonis starts with the incestuous desire of his mother, Smyrna, for her father (Apollodorus III.183)³⁰², but when the girl flees in shame, Astarte-Aphrodite³⁰³ pities her and transforms her into the myrrh tree, which receives her name. Aphrodite

³⁰¹ Baal means 'Master', and these gods may be variants of each other, through their relationship with the goddess Astarte (Persson, 1942: 113; Ringgren, 1969: 200). Melqart, another candidate for the Dying-Rising God motif, has a similarly royal title, since his name means 'the king of the city' (Ringgren, 1969: 205).

³⁰² Apollodorus admits to contesting versions of his parentage, attributing Phoinix and Alphebesiboia to Hesiod, and the Assyrian Theias to Panyassis (*Library* III.183), while Ovid calls him Cinyras, the son of Pygmalion and Galatea on Cyprus (*Metamorphoses* X.302f.)

³⁰³ Although this discussion will refer to this goddess as Aphrodite, as she was understood in the Greek myth, her original manifestation was as Astarte in the Levant (Persson, 1942: 113f.). Astarte and Ishtar were closely associated in Syria (Garstang, 1913: 1).

admires the beautiful child and “unbeknownst to the gods Aphrodite hid him in a chest while he was still an infant and gave him to Persephone for safekeeping” (Apollodorus III.184). Persephone opens this chest, and is similarly compelled to keep him for herself. When the goddesses take their dispute to Zeus, he decrees that the child shall spend a third of the year with Persephone, a third with Aphrodite, and shall have a third by himself. Adonis chooses to give his own part to Aphrodite, so he stays with Persephone (presumably in the Underworld) for a third of the year, and with Aphrodite for the rest of the year. Eventually, however, the youth is killed by a boar, and bleeds to death in Aphrodite’s arms³⁰⁴. This version of the myth derives from a rather late source³⁰⁵, but Theocritus’ *Idyll* XV in the third century BC repeats this idea of bilocation (see below).

The Greek Adonis arises from incest (Casadio, 2003: 248), a parallel to the cosmogonies of the Greek gods (exemplified in Hesiod’s *Theogony*) in which sibling deities produce new gods (just as Zeus and Demeter produce Persephone). Adonis does not bear such a close association with vegetation (until his death), as Dionysus, the god of the vine, but the myth does connect him to plant life through his mother’s transformation into the myrrh tree, and so he is born from a tree³⁰⁶. Connected to plants, Adonis’ bilocation may be understood as the plant’s annual death and flourishing under the changing seasons. Like the other candidates for this category, Adonis is understood primarily in relation to goddesses, in this case two (rather than the usual one): Persephone³⁰⁷ and Aphrodite, the embodiments of death and the Underworld, and life and fertility respectively, and a mirror of the Mesopotamian sisters, Ereshkigal and Inanna. The competition between the goddesses who find themselves enraptured by the beautiful boy echoes the rivalry for

³⁰⁴ Ovid’s later account does not mention this sharing between Persephone and Aphrodite, but it does directly associate the goddess of the Underworld with Adonis when Aphrodite explains that she will turn Adonis’ blood into a flower: “But now your blood shall change into a flower:/ Persephone of old was given grace/ To change a woman’s form to fragrant mint;/ And shall I then be grudged the right to change/ My prince?” (*Metam.* X.727f.). This allusion to Persephone does not reveal the same arrangement described in Theocritus or Apollodorus, but it does hint at the competition between the goddesses described in this myth of bilocation. This could, however, be the ‘competition’ between the living and the dead, rather than the goddesses in their anthropomorphic forms, as women fighting over a beautiful boy.

³⁰⁵ ‘Probably’ the first century AD (Scott Smith & Trzaskoma, 2007: xxx).

³⁰⁶ Attis’ rites were centered around an evergreen pine, which represented the youthful consort of Cybele (Godwin, 1981: 112).

³⁰⁷ Persephone appears to be a late addition to this myth (Bräuninger, 1938: 956), made suitable for inclusion because of her own bilocation.

power described in the Sumerian and Akkadian myths of the descent of Inanna/Ishtar to the Underworld, but the contested prize is here envisioned as a youth, who may embody a vegetative spirit.

On the most literal level of the myth, the anthropomorphised goddesses fight over a beautiful youth, while on the more symbolic level, the forces of life and death wage constant and recurring war over the natural world, and the cosmic balance (represented by Zeus' judgement) dictates that this spirit must live and die in succession, but in a never-ending cycle. Adonis is not described as dying when he stays with Persephone (Aphrodite's initial decision to hide him with her sister would otherwise seem cruel and unnecessary), but this 'arrangement' operates on the anthropomorphic level of the narrative. On the symbolic level, the plant emerges from its source (his mother Myrrha), and lives once it sprouts from the original seed (the chest the baby is hidden in), which is 'entrusted' to the soil. It extends partially into the earth (Persephone's realm), and it yearns for life (choosing to stay with Aphrodite in her Olympian upper-plane), but it cannot escape the power of winter and seasonal death (the third of the year with Persephone).

This cycle would continue forever, except that Adonis in this myth is envisioned as a mortal, born of mortals, and must die eventually. His death leads to the creation of a flower, like Hyacinthus³⁰⁸, but it is inextricably linked to the fertility goddess in his life:

“Both [Attis and Adonis] live out their short seasons seducing and being seduced by goddesses whose vitality is overpowering and in whose presence they play the colourless role of fading gigolos, of partners without clout. And in the end a violent death, with the spilling of much blood which generates attractive but unproductive flowers (respectively the violet and the anemone), strikes both of them down before they reach adulthood.”

(Casadio, 2003: 248)

Adonis is passive in his myth as it is the goddesses who contend over him, and take their dispute to Zeus, and he is eventually killed in a hunting encounter with a boar³⁰⁹. He is

³⁰⁸ Potentially another Dying God (Persson, 1942: 137f.), albeit one in competition with Apollo, rather than a goddess.

like the vegetation he represents, as he is subject to the forces of life and death, but cannot really act on a par with these forces or goddesses. He represents one half of the partnership between the reproductive impulse and the beings which enact that impulse (and rely on it to propagate), while Aphrodite represents the more dynamic and active power. Adonis is the subject of Aphrodite's power and the transitory member of their relationship, and so must pass away to make way for the next generation she inspires, represented in the flower she creates from his spilled blood. What is important is the conflict between these forces, and the inevitable death of the hero as part of the natural cycle of (vegetative) life and death. His fate after death is quietly ignored, as the flower grows from his blood, symbolically spilled from his gouged thigh, and the goddess of the reproductive impulse can no longer enjoy his presence. The youth dies, but Aphrodite (and all she represents) and life (in the flower) continue.

Theocritus' *Heros*

The myth as described by Apollodorus may reflect some of the Levantine Adonis' original myth, as Adonis could be identified as the seed³¹⁰, half the year with Persephone below the earth, half the year above it with Aphrodite³¹¹ (like Persephone's bilocation, and the alternating cycle of Dumuzi and Geshtinanna³¹²). The Greeks may have adapted

³⁰⁹ "Although the legend of Adonis' death in a boar hunt is certainly attested in literature only from the 3rd century BC, and in iconography only from the 2nd century BC, it soon became the official version and the only important one, so far as cult is concerned, on Cyprus no less than at Byblus" (Casadio, 2003: 249). Curiously, the myth does not mention the delight of Persephone, who can now claim Adonis' unadulterated presence and attention, as if the conclusion of the myth, with Adonis' death, has forgotten the rivalry between the goddesses for his affection during his life. This may, however, be an oversight in the conflation of the two different mythic strands, the bilocation version and the boar-goring version.

³¹⁰ Notably, "a scholion on Theocritus which identifies Adonis with the seeds of grain, spending six months in the earth with Persephone, and six on the earth with Aphrodite, may thus be fairly isolated in Greek tradition but certainly falls in line with what we know of the Levantine Adon(is)" (Mettinger, 2001: 131). This scholion repeats the idea of a bilocation between the surface and the underworld, and between the goddesses, although the exact division of time differs.

³¹¹ Persson's reading of the Ugaritic cuneiform texts from the ruins of Ras Shamrah (Syria) finds that in her grief, Astarte determines "to go down to the underworld and snatch Adonis from death" (1942: 116) herself, an intent found in the *Hymn to Demeter*, and the Mesopotamian material, although the different permeabilities of their Underworld boundaries affect the result of this search.

³¹² Although Penglase (1997) suggests a journey to the Land of the Dead by a god, and the division of the year, may be a feature of Near Eastern mythic narrative structure, we find them in Greece with Demeter and Persephone as well as Adonis here: "The myth of Adonis and his two different places of residence is probably due then to Semitic influence. However, the presence of a bilocation and a partition of the year also in the Demeter-Persephone myth means that this mytheme was not necessarily borrowed as part and parcel of the Levantine Adon(is) myth" (Mettinger, 2001: 151). The Greeks may have balked at a mortal's

this version as it may have matched a mythic framework they already possessed (founded on practices they may have shared, see chapter four), so the syncretism incorporated the familiar rather than importing entirely novel material. Theocritus' *Idyll*³¹³ describes the youth of Adonis as he lies in conjugal bliss with the goddess of fertility, before he is thrown into the sea (a curious inversion of Aphrodite's birth in *Theogony* 191-6) by mourning devotees:

“In Adonis' rosy arms the Cyprian lies, and he in hers. Of eighteen years or nineteen is the groom; the golden down is still upon his lip; his kisses are not rough. And now farewell to Cypris as she clasps her lover. But all together, at daybreak, with the dew, will we bear him out to the waves that plash upon the shore; and there with ungirt hair, breasts bared and raiment falling to the ankle, will we begin our clear song. Thou, dear Adonis, alone of demigods, as they tell, dost visit both earth and Acheron.”

(Theocritus *Idyll* XV.129-37)³¹⁴

Although the poet tells Aphrodite that “after a twelvemonth the Hours have brought thee back Adonis from Acheron's ever-flowing stream” (ll.103), which fixes this is an annual event, commemorated in annual rites, the time spent between the realms is not specified: “There is no hint whatsoever of true bilocation, that is, of Adonis spending a major part of the year on earth. Rather his visit to the light is a short ritual interlude in what seems to be a perennial sojourn with Persephone. As a corollary of this, Theocritus designates Adonis as a demigod... This formulation places Adonis squarely in the category of the *heros*” (Mettinger, 2001: 122).

bilocation, but it would not have been entirely foreign to their mythic imagination. Whether bilocation pre-existed Near Eastern influence, and was thus incorporated as familiar if newly expressed, or it entirely originated in the Near East, it must have transferred early enough to affect the seventh century composition of Persephone's myth, so Adonis' later arrival, and association with Persephone, was probably made easier by her mythic precedent.

³¹³ Theocritus also composed a *Lament* for Adonis, in which Aphrodite mourns for the youth, but there is no hint of a return or resurrection. Adonis' death is linked, like Apollodorus', to the boar goring his thigh, and Aphrodite dedicates him to Persephone, who has “far greater powers than I”, and whom she fears. The goddess “runs/, her cries the louder, the length of the glades, screaming for her Assyrian boy,/ forever calling on her lover's name” (*Lament for Adonis*), echoing the searches of the other goddesses, Demeter and Duttur. Aphrodite carries him to her bed, and Hymen, the god of marriage, joins the mourning rites, marking another conflation of marriage and death (see chapter three).

³¹⁴ Translated by Wells, 1988.

Theocritus' poem places Adonis' alternation between upper and lower worlds within the pattern of a hero's occasional relief from the power of death, while Apollodorus' version, which lacks the theological nuance of the Hellenistic poet, accepts this idea of bilocation (and quickly moves over his death by the boar), which might reflect the tensions of Adonis' early arrival in Greece, where the idea of a god's death (as the myth rather explicitly describes, without the relief of a symbolic 'journey' available to Persephone) simply does not fit in the cosmological framework:

“If Adon(is) were a dying and rising god in the Levant already prior to the turn of the era, then the notion of his resurrection would have had difficulties in finding a home in Greek religion: Greek gods are immortal (*athanatoi*). As a dying god, Adonis was linked with the category of the *heros*. Just as a *heros* is a person who has loved and died, so the focus of the Adonis rites was the death of Adonis and the funerary mourning.”

(*ibid.*: 149)

Rather than being a Dying-Rising God, Theocritus sets Adonis as a mortal demigod, a hero, and the Levantine god becomes transformed into something more suitable for his Greek literary context³¹⁵. This demotion from god to demigod made Adonis more acceptable to his new Greek worshippers, but it did mean that he also lost his status as a Dying-Rising God (if he was one in the Levant), and his rites shifted to a focus on his death, expressed in the rites of the Gardens of Adonis, rather than the resurrection he could not be envisioned as enjoying. Adonis, in the Greek religious system, became a figure in the underworld, another hero fatally loved by a goddess.

Adonis' bilocation was a problem in the Greek religious system, which necessitated his demotion to demigod, and perhaps inspired the final (and noticeably brief) part of Apollodorus' description of Adonis' death by boar. Bilocation in itself may, in its most

³¹⁵ With his transformation comes a shift in his worship, so that “[t]he celebrations became a women's affair and lost a great deal of the public status they enjoyed in the Levant. Above all, Adonis no longer seems to have preserved his status as a full god; rather, he assumes the character of a *heros*” (Mettinger, 2001: 149). As noted in the previous section, the Greeks could recognise the existence of a dead god, as Dionysus' tomb was claimed to lie in Delphi, and Zeus' in Crete, but this was contested, and the Cretan tomb was the source of the idiomatic notion of Cretan lies (Larson, 2007: 25).

literal sense, be completely devoid of the symbolism of life and death³¹⁶, but the mythic symbolism of the goddesses of death and fertility respectively does suggest that a contest between life and death is at play, and the Greeks' rejection of this element of Adonis' myth suggests that it did clash with some fundamental idea within the religious understanding of at least some of their poets: "the idea of bilocation is in tension with the Greek demarcation of the borderline between the realm of the gods and the realm of the dead; gods are immortal and the *heros* belongs to the Netherworld" (Mettinger, 2001: 150). However, religious belief is frequently not consistent, and the Greeks possessed numerous conflicting and overlapping beliefs, and rites performed annually by laymen would not necessarily share the finer theological speculations of a Theocritus or Plato, or the priests of the Mystery cults who held their position after numerous levels of initiation.

The symbolism of bilocation was rejected when Adonis entered the Greek literary imagination, but this does not mean that he was not a god earlier, and the fact that his bilocation, mirroring as it does the Mesopotamian material³¹⁷, does suggest that he belonged to that class of divine figures who divided their time between the upper and the lower worlds: "That Adonis is a mortal and not a god in the full and real sense of the word may be valid for the classical tradition, but cannot without further ado be claimed for the Levantine Adonis" (*ibid.*: 114). Later syncretism means that it is difficult to gauge whether Adonis was originally a Dying-Rising God, as his original myth must be pried apart from beliefs coloured by Christian interpretation, but it is an important qualification that "[i]n pre-Christian times, Adon(is) can but need not have been a dying and rising god. The reverse conclusion, that Adon(is) was not a dying and rising god in pre-Christian times, is certainly unprovable" (*ibid.*: 153).

³¹⁶ Smith takes a very literal approach to these symbolic motifs: "This tradition of bilocation (similar to that connected with Persephone and, perhaps, Dumuzi) has no suggestion of death and rebirth" (1987: 522).

³¹⁷ "The proximity of Adon(is), Damu and Dumuzi should alert us to the possibility that Byblos was a site where Adon(is) was part of a syncretistic development in which he adopted features originally connected with the Sumerian and Akkadian myths of journeys to the Netherworld" (Mettinger, 2001: 144). See chapter four.

The Gardens of Adonis

Frazer devoted a significant amount of attention to the annual rite³¹⁸ in which “baskets or pots [were] filled with earth, in which wheat, barley, lettuces, fennel, and various kinds of flowers were sown and tended for eight days, chiefly or exclusively by women” (1914, Part IV. Vol. I: 236). These ‘Gardens of Adonis’, Frazer claimed, “are most naturally interpreted as representatives of Adonis or as manifestations of his power; they represented him, true to his original nature, in vegetable form, while the images of him, with which they were carried out and cast into the water, portrayed him in his later human shape” (*ibid.*: 236). The planting and sprouting of these plants in their shallow pots, and their subsequent disposal in the river with an effigy of Adonis, appears to celebrate Adonis’ death, and Frazer interprets the growth of the plants as his resurrection.

As the rite was held annually, some like “Baudissin [stress] that the annual celebration of a mourning for a god presupposes the god’s ‘Wiederaufleben’, or ‘returning to life’: if the god is the focus of annual mourning rites, then he must have been thought to come back to life every year” (Mettinger, 2001: 21), echoing the bilocation of Adonis in the myth. This idea, which may apply to each of the gods who are candidates for the Dying-Rising God motif, is a false assumption, as an event can be commemorated, without it being believed to be enacted every time on the divine or cosmic sphere. What is more important to trace is whether the community celebrating the rite actually envisions the return of the deity, and if they do not seem to, then the figure’s death is more important in the rite (and possibly the myth³¹⁹) than their potential return. If the community focuses more on the god’s death than any resurrection (if it does exist), then even though they technically fit into the category of Dying-Rising God, the value derived from this god is different to those whose return is more celebrated³²⁰.

³¹⁸ In Alexandria in mid-summer, Byblos in spring or possibly summer, and in Attica in midsummer (Frazer 1914: IV. I 224-6). Sources: Origen, *Selecta in Ezechielem*; Jerome, *Commentaria in Ezechielem* viii 13, 14; Cyril of Alexandria, *In Isaiam* ii.3; Theocritus, xv; Lucian, *De Dea Syria* 6-8; Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 18, *Nicias* 13; Pausanias ii.20.6, but this mentions only the weeping, not the time of the year.

³¹⁹ Here it is important to remember that myth and cultic ritual do not always mirror each other perfectly (Kirk, 1974: 67-8; Burkert, 1972: 30f.).

³²⁰ The timing and language of these rites will affect this interpretation, as the death may be the focus, for example in the rites held in spring, as a way to contrast the symbolic ‘death’ which is *now* being overcome.

In response to Frazer's analysis, the Gardens of Adonis have come under close scrutiny, and have frequently been interpreted differently: "The 'gardens of Adonis'... to which Frazer devoted so much attention, were proverbial illustrations of the brief and transitory nature of life, and contain no hint of rebirth" (Smith, 1990: 101). Frazer associates Adonis, like Persephone, Osiris and Dionysus, with the cultivated vegetation the Mediterranean societies depended on, but "[t]he insistence on his youth, his re-emergence in the wild anemones and the emphasis on his death rather than on his resurrection suggest (but our sources are scanty) that Adonis was manifest, not in the crops, but in the enchanting vegetation of the short Syrian spring" (Frankfort, 1958: 148). This is a necessary distinction, because the meaning in the embodiment of these different kinds of vegetation would differ accordingly, especially as it pertains to humanity³²¹. Meaning is also derived from the timing of the flourishing of these plants, so it can be concluded that "Adonis is not a god of vegetation in general but of the spring vegetation that dies during the summer drought. The sequence is this: from life to death... the Adonis feast took place in the middle of summer, which was not the proper time for a celebration of a resurrection" (Mettinger, 2001: 28), as spring would be.

Frazer also focused on the growth of the plants as the sign of Adonis' rebirth, but later scholars have noted that the growth precedes the rite of throwing the pots into the river, with the Adonis-effigy. This suggests rather his original birth and short life, before his premature death. Although the plants certainly sprout quickly, a useful symbol for the power of growth and fertility, their swift death in their shallow pots would leave a more lasting impression of the inevitability of death behind the bright veneer of life. Ultimately, these Gardens, one of the centres of dispute regarding Frazer's theory, are clearly symbols "of death and fertility" (*ibid.*: 147-8). Although the Gardens of Adonis can be disregarded as a sign of Adonis' resurrection, it is important to note that "[t]here is almost no evidence for Adonis gardens in the Levant" (*ibid.*: 147-8), marking an important distinction from the Greek Adonis.

³²¹ Representing the crops, as Persephone and her mother do, associates the divine spirit with a concern for human welfare, whereas embodying the reproductive impulse generally may mean a deity can look beyond humans, and although humans are utterly dependent on it, as Mesopotamians believed, there is little to encourage a personal relationship or sympathy with that deity.

Christian Syncretism

After his transference from the Levant, Adonis later underwent another transformation, at least within the recorded evidence, as Christian writers such as Lucian and Origen became the primary voice (which has survived) on the various gods. This meant that Adonis was grouped together with a number of other gods, primarily the other candidates for the Dying-Rising God category, which suggests that they all did offer something at least comparable within their myths, but also that the distinctive meaning within each myth and cult became amalgamated into a general ‘pagan’ form. Evidence for this assimilation of gods can be seen in Lucian, who explains that “[t]here are some inhabitants of Byblos who say that the Egyptian Osiris is buried among them and that all the laments and the rites are performed not for Adonis but for Osiris” (Lucian 7).

This assimilation, which relies on the shared location of Byblos³²² in the different myths, means that the roles and stories of Adonis and Osiris become confused, and the meaning to be derived from this new understanding of the gods cannot be used as evidence for the meaning derived from their earlier manifestations. This syncretism did mean that, under the influence of the Christian tradition, Adonis may have reclaimed an aspect which the classical Greeks had rejected when he first arrived: “Only in *De Dea Syria* and later do we find evidence which makes it a *necessary* conclusion that Adonis was a *dying and rising* god. Prior to this, however, it seems necessary to conclude that the Adon(is) received on Greek soil was a *dying* god” (Mettinger, 2001: 149), although Apollodorus’ version of bilocation and a boar’s goring hint at this Dying-Rising sequence, but he appears as a mortal, at best a demi-god.

The development of Adonis into a Dying-Rising God may possibly have been an entirely new feature of the god, even from his Levantine origins, of which we have little firm

³²² Byblos, an important centre of Adonis’ Phoenician worship (Ringgren, 1969: 203), was also connected to Egypt through conquest and trade for long periods, and the myth of Osiris (see below) is also partially sited there. This area was an important centre for regional trade and influence, extending from Mesopotamia, to Greece and Egypt, and thus a fruitful site for syncretism (West, 1997: 8-9).

evidence. His development in Greece is more closely documented, and traces a movement towards a resurrection:

“In the older texts [such as Theocritus, third century B.C], one finds a sequence comprising *first* a celebration of the return of the god including his holy marriage and *then* a feast of mourning to celebrate his death, thus, first return and then death... It is only in the later group of texts (Lucian, Origen, Cyril) that we find evidence of a celebration of the resurrection of Adonis.”

(*ibid.*: 27)

This development into a Dying-Rising God³²³ “takes place no earlier than the second century C.E.” (*ibid.*: 27), so it appears that Adonis certainly belongs to the category of Dying-Rising God, but he did not always (necessarily) hold this position. Whether this development was the result of the lingering vestiges of his original status as a Dying-Rising God, or was independently achieved through syncretism and a vaguely viable myth, is difficult to ascertain, but he came to represent a spirit of resurrection, and his association with Aphrodite did give his worshippers an important symbolic motif to apply to their own lived experience, as it becomes evident they did in the sarcophagi carrying images of Adonis³²⁴.

Casadio succinctly summarises the development of Adonis’ position in the religious mindset of the ancient Greeks, when he notes that “Adonis, in the thousand-year long course of his cult, is essentially a ‘dying god’, or, in more sophisticated terms, a ‘god subject to vicissitude.’ And, in certain cultural contexts and at a certain moment in history, he is also a ‘rising god’” (Casadio, 2003: 250). This careful conclusion cannot speak for the original Levantine deity, which may have had more in common with the Mesopotamian god Dumuzi, or the Ugaritic Baal, but Adonis is certainly a meaningful

³²³ This ‘late’ development gives more emphasis to Adonis’ rising, envisioned as a full resurrection, whereas Theocritus’ *Idyll* admits Adonis’ twelve-month return, but this return is brief, establishing rather a ‘Rising-Dying God’, yet both admit of a return or Rising. The emphasis, and meaning to be derived from this, appears to shift with Christian syncretism.

³²⁴ Roman sarcophagi from the second century C.E reflect Adonis and the *Adonaia*, which “was enacted in the belief that it would bring about Adonis’s resurrection, if only momentarily and only in the fervent imaginations of those participating in the cult ritual” (Koortbojian, 1995: 49). This ‘Adonis redivivus’ motif “expresses the notion that Adonis was spared from the finality of death by Aphrodite’s love and implies that all three, Aeneas, Adonis, and the deceased were to share this experience” (Mettinger, 2001: 120).

figure who found favour in Greece, even if as a truncated demigod. His popularity among women does suggest that he appealed to them just as Persephone and her mother appealed to the celebrants of the Thesmophoria, in a way men usually did not find appealing, and the shared ‘vicissitudes’ may link these gods and the hope they inspired in their worshippers.

Osiris

The myth of Osiris is a difficult one to trace, as his presence in the religion of Egypt for at least three millennia means that his story develops and grows significantly from his original depiction, especially in the Hellenistic period and its attendant syncretism. An important source for his myth³²⁵, before the syncretism evident in Plutarch’s famous account (Lichtheim, 1975: 81)³²⁶, is ‘The Great Hymn to Osiris’, from the New Kingdom (c.1550-1080 BC). His myth focuses on his defeat by his brother Set, frequently described as a dismemberment and scattering of the parts, which his mourning wife Isis must collect and reassemble, to produce an heir, Horus, who will avenge his father. Osiris’ generative powers do not disappear with his death, so he fathers his avenger, but he becomes the ruler of the Land of the Dead, and his son takes up his authority once the battle with Set has been decided.

Osiris appears to have originally been a funerary god (Griffiths, 1970: 34-5); he “is not from beginning a genuine god of vegetation and never develops into one” (Mettinger, 2001: 169). Osiris’ later associations with the grain (which Frazer emphasised in his study of Osiris, alongside Attis and Adonis) were later developments (possibly inherited from the Levant, which had a strong influence across the rest of the region from an early

³²⁵ There appears to be no authoritative account of Osiris, and a lack of consistent texts from Egypt suggests “that the ancient Egyptians had no doctrine about Osiris, though they did have a mythic conception of his nature and import, which was capable of varying interpretation according to circumstances” (Bleeker, 1969: 62).

³²⁶ Osiris is also central to ‘A Hymn to Osiris and a Hymn to Min’ from the Middle Kingdom [c.2040-1650], and identified as “Ruler of the living, King of those beyond”, a god “mourned by multitudes” (Licht. Vol.1, p202-4). The Memphite Theology of the Old Kingdom [c.2650-2135] describes Osiris passing his power over to Horus, who eventually gains control of both Upper and Lower Egypt (*ibid.*, 51-5).

stage³²⁷), and never fully suited his character. His identification with Neper, already evident in *The Book of the Dead* (Mettinger, 2001: 170; Bleeker, 1969: 63), means a late addition within Egypt, but this was still early in the mythological developments of the region.

Isis, the important goddess who would usually figure as the Mother Goddess according to the traditional Dying-Rising God schema, did not originally have the prominence she later gained, but importantly she did undertake the search for her missing consort (Griffiths, 1970: 35) which seems to characterise the myths which most relate to that of Persephone and Demeter³²⁸. ‘The Great Hymn to Osiris’ describes Isis as the one:

“Who sought him without wearying,
Who roamed the land lamenting,
Not resting till she found him,
Who made a shade with her plumage,
Created breath with her wings,
Who jubilated, joined her brother,
Raised the weary one’s inertness,
Received the seed, bore the heir,
Raised the child in solitude,
His abode unknown...”

(Lichtheim, 1975: 83)

Isis operates here rather like Inanna’s servant, who pleads with the gods for his mistress’ release, or like Geshtinanna and her mother, who search for their missing Dumuzi, rather than like the powerful Cybele, who orchestrates Attis’ mutilation, or Aphrodite and Persephone, who argue over the passive Adonis³²⁹.

³²⁷ West, 1997: 2-9. There was also “an express identification of Osiris and Neper, a divine personification of the growing corn, in the *Book of the Dead*... As a corollary of this we find references to Osiris as the maker of corn” (Mettinger, 2001: 170). Neper was the original god associated with a rite in which wooden boxes “were filled with earth and planted with corn seeds” (Griffiths, 1970: 37), a curious echo of the Gardens of Adonis.

³²⁸ Even as early as the Papyrus of Ani, she and her sister Nephtys (a loose parallel to Inanna and Ereshkigal) are called “the Nursing-goddesses” (‘Coming Forth by Day’, Turin Papyrus 16, *The Book of the Dead*, 364), an interesting parallel to Demeter’s adoption of Demophoön and her initiates.

³²⁹ “Osiris is not dependent on Isis. Adonis, on the contrary, takes the role of ‘Prince Consort’ in relation to his spouse. In Byblos, the Adonia thus takes place in the great sanctuary of Aphrodite of Byblos” (Mettinger, 2001: 178).

This mytheme of the mournful search for the dead or disappeared god does not entirely correlate with the Dying-Rising God motif, and can appear outside of the myths involving vegetative spirits, but it was clearly suitable as a means of representing the loss and sought-for return of a natural force on the divine plane. Just as mortals might long for the absent rains in a drought, or the renewal of vegetation or their crops in winter or a scorching summer, so too could the gods be envisioned searching for the deity who embodied these forces, whose absence must be explained as a ‘death’ or withdrawal (not necessarily voluntary), so the natural cycle of the environment surrounding the myth-makers could shape the narrative of their gods. While the Mesopotamians might yearn for the vegetative force, embodied in Dumuzi/ Tammuz, in their scorching summers, and the Greeks might seek the powers of the seed represented by Persephone, the Egyptians did not have the same environment and regular uncertainty that their neighbours suffered. The Nile’s regular flooding³³⁰ meant that they were not dependant on the rains, and the abundance which grew from the fertile sediment left behind on their fields mitigated their fear for the vegetative principle, but the reality of death and the uncertainty of power, embodied in their dead king-god Osiris, murdered by his jealous brother, encouraged a similar myth of absence and a lover’s search.

Isis searches for her missing consort, and enacts the appropriate rites³³¹ to ensure that he is avenged, but she does not take revenge herself, and she cannot inspire her consort to full life again: “the relationship between Osiris and his partner Isis, at least originally, is not at all one of dependence like that between Attis, Adonis and their partners” (Casadio, 2003: 255). Isis is central as the mother of Osiris’ heir, who will avenge and replace his father, but this is not the same as the relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi, or Aphrodite and Adonis, where the goddess represents the eternal spirit of generation and

³³⁰ From July to October, until the waters recede in the autumn and the sowing can take place in November (Baring & Cashford, 1991: 227).

³³¹ These rites, including the reassembling and preservation of Osiris’ body, offer the hope for survival (of the soul after death, until its judgement at least) for the ordinary person: “In the resurrection of Osiris the Egyptians saw the pledge of a life everlasting for themselves beyond the grave. They believed that every man would live eternally in the other world if only his surviving friends did for his body what the gods had done for the body of Osiris” (Frazer Part IV. Vol.II, 1914: 15). The process of mummification therefore became vital in the burial rites of Egypt, but this would have imposed a financial constraint on those seeking a life after death.

reproduction, and the god or consort represents the successive beings subject to this power. In Egypt, more emphasis was devoted to the authoritative control of the king, both the divine king and the terrestrial king who embodies the divine king, than these powers of generation and fertility, although the pattern of this myth was easily subsumed into this concern when it left Egypt, especially in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

The divine hierarchy was reflected in, and validated, the terrestrial hierarchy³³², as “[k]ings succeeded one another on the throne, but in every one of them the same god was incarnate. This god was Horus, the son and avenger of Osiris; Osiris was the ruler’s dead father. By means of this perennially valid mythological formula the change in actual ruler was brought into harmony with the immutable order of creation” (Frankfort, 1958: 146). This meant that cosmic order was embodied in the figure of the pharaoh, whose predecessor ruled the afterlife, establishing a cycle that mimics, but differs significantly from, the recurring cycle of vegetative growth which follows the seasons. Thus, just as the vegetative Dying-Rising Gods are generally male gods with goddess consorts, or the pair of goddesses celebrated in Eleusis, the Egyptian mythology also envisions a pair, but they are distinguished on a generational level, comprising “two generations: Osiris rose to new life in his son, Horus; Osiris himself remained as the ‘dead father’ in the Netherworld” (Mettinger, 2001: 172).

Osiris’ death was commemorated annually, “as the decrease of the water in the Nile, and the sowing of the grain was celebrated as his death and burial” (Frankfort, 1958: 147), but it was not necessary to insist on his return to life, as his son and heir assumes his power and authority, and the world of the dead was suited to this funerary deity: “the realm of death is precisely the sphere of Osiris’ power, because it does not represent the antithesis of life but a phase through which all natural life passes to emerge reborn” (*ibid.*: 147). Life and death are different aspects of the whole experience of existence, so that like the other Mediterranean religions there was no question that there was an existence which followed death. The Egyptians envisioned this realm as much like the

³³² In the Memphite theology, Horus is called the King of both Upper and Lower Egypt, inheriting his father’s throne, rather than simply being the god of the land, as Zeus and the Olympians are (Licht. Vol.1: 51-6).

land of the living, “there is life for the dead, although it is of a different character than that of the living” (Smith, 1987: 525). Even in the Land of the Dead, there is the possibility of further annihilation after death, “dying a second time in the realm of the dead” (*Book of Going Forth by Day* 175-176)³³³, if the weighing of the heart was unfavourable and the deceased was handed over to the soul-devourer, Am-mit³³⁴. The dead god ruled over this realm just as his living son ruled over the living, and this balance of authority ensures that cosmic order is maintained.

A popular feature of Osiris’ myth is the question of his generative phallus, regularly depicted on temples and sarcophagi as a symbol of regeneration and life. Variants of his myth describe the loss of his phallus when his brother dismembers him, and his wife fails to find it when she reassembles him, although he is nevertheless able to impregnate her without it³³⁵. This story of his lost phallus, so important to the syncretic tradition which associates him with the other Dying-Rising Gods like Attis and Adonis, who are similarly castrated or mutilated, becomes a popular feature of his myth, but it only appears to have arisen later: “in the myth Osiris is indeed emasculated by his brother and enemy Seth, but this happens only after his death and only in Greek sources of the Ptolemaic and Roman age, where influence of other cultures may be suspected” (Casadio, 2003: 255). The emphasis on the phallus shifts the conflict between the brothers from a power-struggle to a sexual rivalry³³⁶, which suits the sexualised narrative of the relationship between the dying god and his goddess consort, but does not play a significant role in Osiris’ earlier myth.

Osiris as Dying, but not truly-Rising God

Osiris’ defeat, and death (and castration) is central to his myth, and although it was annually commemorated throughout Egypt, there is no celebration of his resurrection.

³³³ In Smith, 1987: 525.

³³⁴ ‘Papyrus of Ani’ Pl.III-IV. V ‘The Speech of the Gods’, in *The Book of the Dead* (1977: 373-5).

³³⁵ “...the removal of the genitals, involving the end of sexual life, is not *tout court* to be identified with a castration which brings about an impairment of the vital energy produced by the testicles” (Casadio, 2003: 258).

³³⁶ Like Attis’ adultery, because “[w]ith the cutting off and destruction of the phallus Seth takes revenge for Osiris’ adultery with his wife Nephtys” (Casadio, 2003: 256).

The emphasis lay in the celebration of Isis finding Osiris, rather than resurrecting him (Griffiths, 1970: 63). He was revived long enough (or at least part of him was revived long enough) to produce an avenging heir, but then he assumed his role as king of the dead: “he did not return to his former mode of existence but rather journeyed to the underworld, where he became the powerful lord of the dead. In no sense can Osiris be said to have ‘risen’ in the sense required by the dying and rising pattern” (Smith, 1987: 524). Osiris does not fit the (modified) category of Dying-Rising God (p135-6), as he never returns to the surface or the world of the living. He lives on, but in the land of the dead, just as Dumuzi/Tammuz or Adonis live with the goddesses of the Underworld in their myths of bilocation, rather than a complete annihilation or degradation in death. The Egyptian understanding of the Underworld allowed their dead god to live on just as if he had never died, but on a different plane, appearing “ ‘as a god who had passed through death, who survived in the sense that he was not utterly destroyed, but who did not return to life...’ Osiris, thus, was not a ‘dying god’ but a ‘dead god’” (Mettinger, 2001: 173).

Although he never rises, Osiris is not a retiring god who can be reasonably ignored by the Egyptians: “Osiris was a most active character in his Netherworld life. He was as little dead as the Mesopotamian Netherworld gods Nergal and Ereshkigal” (*ibid.*: 174). He remained a powerful deity whose benevolence had to be won, and whose help could be sought. His identification with the dead pharaoh would have also lent him a personality, and established an accessibility that does not seem to have been matched except in metaphor for Cybele’s *Galli* (Casadio, 2003: 237-8), or Adonis’ worshippers. As the opportunity to enter the blessed land of the dead ruled by Osiris became more widely available, extending beyond the pharaoh and his immediate family (Edwards, 1975: 32), the tradition of associating the god with the dead pharaoh seems to have extended to an association with the dead person generally³³⁷, and as such “[t]he ritual identification of the dead person with Osiris purported to make him an Osiris for his family, a source of life for his near family and kin” (Mettinger, 2001: 174). Osiris could take on a new

³³⁷ This appears to have been understood already in the Eighteenth Dynasty [c.1550-1305] (Griffiths, 1970: 36).

meaning for the bereaved as a symbol of their beloved deceased, enjoying the benefits of the blessed land of the dead he ruled, as the myths explained he did.

Dead, but Sought For

Although Osiris is not a Dying-Rising God, and does not return to the land of the living, like Persephone does, his myth becomes closely associated with hers. In Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 13-19), the evidence for a high degree of syncretism abounds, including assimilations with some of the Levantine gods, such as Adonis from Byblos, and the narrative parallels the myth of Persephone so closely that they “are aptly explained as resulting from the influence of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*” (Mettinger, 2001: 176). The similarities may not all be the result of syncretism, as some could have arisen out of similar cultural and environmental contexts, but the echoes are striking: “They [Osiris and Adonis] are both shepherd-gods³³⁸ and in both myths a main motif is the search of the Loved One for the dead god, whom she then bewails and ritually buries; in both, also, the continued life of the deceased in the earth shows itself in the sprouting vegetation” (Griffiths, 1980: 29).

Plutarch’s version of the myth structurally echoes Demeter’s search for Persephone, and her stay in Eleusis where she nurtures the mortal Demophoön, as Isis travels to Byblos, where the chest concealing Osiris’ body had drifted to shore, and a tree has grown up around it (echoing Adonis’ birth and Aphrodite’s hiding him in a chest), and this tree³³⁹ was used as a pillar in the king’s palace. There Isis nurses one of the king’s sons, although her aborted care of the child results in his death, unlike Demeter’s more compassionate, if angry, response. Isis cannot effect her beloved’s return, as Demeter does, but she does also reach a compromise by replacing her husband with a son who assumes his responsibility, just as Demeter partially wins her daughter’s return.

³³⁸ Additionally, both Adonis and Osiris are connected to rivers, Adonis in the reddening flooding river named after him in Byblos, originating in Aphaca in Lebanon, and Osiris with the Nile.

³³⁹ “Osiris becoming encased within the tree trunk at Byblos can be compared with the identification of Attis with the pine tree” (Meyer, 1987: 161).

The mytheme of the goddess' search for her loved one seems to have been the primary feature which would encourage the association of these myths, just as the search for Dumuzi might similarly have been incorporated into the Greek myth. Osiris does not rise again, but his consort's search and his sovereignty in the Underworld and association with the grain encouraged his comparison with the Greek maiden, and as the two separate cults spread (especially when a variant of Demeter's cult was established in the neighbourhood called Eleusis in Alexandria), they would have influenced each other's reception and popular understanding, even if they could not influence the fundamental rites and myths that underlay the cults.

Osiris' (and Isis') Promise

Unlike the vegetative gods of the Near East and Greece, Osiris was primarily a funerary god, and when he rose to prominence in the Egyptian pantheon, he operated as a divine parallel to the pharaoh: "Osiris is originally a funerary god who increases in importance and range of attributes because of his equation with the deceased King as well as for other reasons. A weighty result for the King was the promise of continued life on the pattern of Osiris" (Griffiths, 1970: 34-5). Osiris, like the pharaoh, preserved the order and balance of the cosmos, ensuring its continuation, and protecting it against the forces of disorder represented by his brother Set. This symbolic frame does not offer much of a personal relationship with his worshippers³⁴⁰, and the exclusive relationship with the pharaoh and Osiris ensured this separation from the ordinary worshipper.

When the 'democratisation of the afterlife' (Edwards, 1975: 32) occurred, it offered ever larger numbers from the community access to the Land of Reeds (Unas Pyramid Incantations, Utterance 253), but this relationship with Osiris became an association through the recently deceased, not through the living worshippers themselves. Once he had become the god of the Land of the Dead, he "proffered not only life after death but justification in the tribunal which awaited all men in the afterworld, a tribunal commonly

³⁴⁰ The sun-god, rather than Osiris, was more closely associated with the belief of a revival after death (Bleeker, 1969: 106), as the daily death and rebirth of the sun offered a more sympathetic pattern for the Egyptians to base this association on, yet "the hope of revival after death was nourished mainly by the Osiris myth" (*ibid.*).

depicted as a weighing of the soul” (Griffiths, 1970: 72). This prospect of judgement, which entailed the possibility of failure and subsequent evisceration by infernal demons³⁴¹, meant Osiris guarantees an uncertain afterlife, which may provoke fear. The morality and judgement of Osiris’ myth marks an important distinction from Persephone’s worshippers, who could hope for the blessings and compassion of Demeter and her daughter.

If the mytheme of the search for the deceased god (who may represent the life force, vegetative vitality, or cosmic power) was spread across the Mediterranean in the Bronze Age, and then perhaps again in the heightened period of contact known as the Orientalising Period (West, 1997: 5-9), it was expressed differently in Egypt than it developed in Anatolia, the Levant, Greece, and distant Italy. Only with the syncretism of the Hellenistic and Roman periods (especially as the Ptolemies tried to assert their connection to their new kingdom) does the language of Osiris and Isis’ cult begin to echo the promises of the Greek Demeter and Dionysus (Griffiths, 1970: 43). Plutarch suggests that worshippers would turn to Isis in order to reach Osiris: “[leading] the initiate to *gnosis* of the supreme being, Osiris, who is described as ‘the First and the Lord, whom only the mind can understand’ (2,352A). What are the blessings resulting from this knowledge? One is eternal life and immortality” (Griffiths, 1970: 71)³⁴². Through this syncretism, Isis actually gains prominence, appropriating Demeter’s power³⁴³, and Osiris is reduced to the son-consort figure of the other Mother Goddess, relegated to the Land of the Dead while her son Horus becomes the special hope for the living.

³⁴¹ The ‘dying a second time’ in the Land of the Dead Smith notes (1987:525).

³⁴² Plutarch admittedly adds the Greek dualism of body and soul to the traditional Egyptian view of immortality, which demanded the survival and preservation of the body for the soul’s continued existence.

³⁴³ A branch of Demeter’s Eleusinian cult was transferred to Alexandria, and located in a neighbourhood also called Eleusis, though it could not claim its origin’s especial authority, and did not maintain the secrecy Eleusis enforced (Kerényi, 1967: 108). It is notable that Osiris and his son do not gain Isis’ popularity in Greece: “Osiris (and Horus) are rarely mentioned in the inscriptions from Greek cult-centres; Osiris is mentioned only four times at Delos and Horus only twice, whereas Sarapis, Isis and Anubis are no fewer than fifty-seven times, and Harpocrates thirty-seven times. It transpires, then, that the sovereign role and general prominence assigned by Plutarch to Osiris is utterly at variance with the emphasis in Greek cult-centres. Nor does it correspond to the god’s position in the Roman cults, in which Isis is supreme” (Griffiths, 1970: 46).

Although little evidence is available for uncovering exactly what hope or blessing Isis offered her worshippers, scholars usually turn to Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. The hero of this text does become a devotee of the goddess after she appears to him and 'saves' him (XI.4f.), but the text is a consciously literary one, and belongs to a period of considerable syncretism, so its evidence must be used with caution. Isis is the eminent deity, and Osiris is only mentioned as her spouse, which may reflect her assimilation with Demeter (which she herself acknowledges, XI.4), marking a shift in the emphasis of the cult and its beliefs. Isis promises new life (*Golden Ass* XI.6), which "is described in authentic Egyptian sources as well as in the Greek versions of the cult. But it evidently means life in this world of ours. It must be a 'new life', since the old one has worn down and is about to break, and yet it is not of a different order but rather a replacement to keep things going" (Burkert, 1987: 18).

This new life is to be won through initiation into her cult and devotion to the goddess, but Lucius is also told that the goddess will continue her association with her initiate in the Land of the Dead:

"when you have completed your lifetime and go down to the underworld, you will find me in the subterranean vault, shining in the darkness of Acheron and reigning in the innermost quarters of Styx, while you yourself inhabit the Elysian fields, and you will adore me frequently, as I am well-disposed towards you"

(*The Golden Ass* XI.6)

The syncretism evident in this passage relies on Isis' identification with the moon³⁴⁴, but if her role as Mother Goddess assimilates with Demeter, her position in the Underworld equates her with Persephone as well, so the differentiation of the goddesses collapses into one figure, who like her husband, assures cosmic order rather than an intimate personal connection: "The main emphasis... is on the power of Isis ruling this cosmos" (Burkert, 1987: 27).

³⁴⁴ "The identification of Isis with the moon and with Persephone – and with Demeter as well – makes her shine as well as reign in the netherworld" (Burkert, 1987: 27). It is interesting to note that "[t]he Egyptians believed that the Sun travelled through the Underworld during the night, so that a person who entered the underworld could greet the Sun, as well as the other deities of the underworld, and worship them there" (Meyer, 1987: 158), so Isis' designation as 'shining' in the Underworld may have originated in Egypt, although with a different association at play.

The Influence of the Near Eastern Gods

Important distinctions lie in the different cosmological beliefs of the various cultures, which could imagine the boundaries between life and death, and the forces of Chaos or Order, differently. The Greeks called their gods “the immortals, *athanatoi*; [and] the epithet becomes a definition” (Burkert, 1985: 201), yet “[t]he ancient Near Eastern cultures in the West Semitic realm and Mesopotamia tend to present a less well-defined borderline between the realm of the dead and that of living humans and the gods” (Mettinger, 2001: 45), so more Dying-Rising God candidates are found in their religious myths than in Greece. This difference might reveal something of the origin of the motif, at least within the transmission across the Mediterranean, as “the putative category of dying and rising gods belongs more naturally in a context where the borderline between the dead and the living are less absolute than in the Greek culture” (*ibid.*: 46). This difference might make the transmission of the motif into Greek myth less likely, but as it seems to have taken place (and indeed, many of these gods eventually found followers in Greece), this means that these gods “may have undergone important changes” (*ibid.*: 46) when they entered the Greek mythic framework, or that they encouraged a change in the cosmological framework of the Greeks themselves, perhaps opening up a new opportunity for a cult like the Eleusinian Mysteries to develop.

The gods created by the different cultures of the Near East, the source of so many Dying-Rising God candidates, varied according to their different contexts, even as their cultures shared numerous features and occupied similar geographies. These gods were described and understood differently within each of these cultures (Frankfort, 1958: 142), but constitute an Asiatic prototype to the Persephone-Demeter myth, within their variations as disappearing gods, travelling to the Underworld, sometimes reappearing if the other gods can persuade them, or connive to assist them, to return, which frequently saves humanity from famine and destruction (Kirk, 1974: 252). These gods either suffer an assault, which overpowers them, or they undertake a voluntary retreat (or disappearance), like Telepinu the Hittite storm god, which either entails a journey to the Underworld, or a cessation of the powers of fertility and the onset of a death-like stasis.

This ‘Asiatic prototype’ appears to have infiltrated into the myth of Demeter and her daughter, and perhaps lent itself to their pre-existing symbolism in relation to the grain and the passing of the seasons, so that there is “a conversion of a Mesopotamian famine myth into a crude *aition* for seasonal agriculture [which]... then becomes the basis for a wider initiation ritual in early historical times, in which the rebirth of corn becomes the token of human renewal” (*ibid.*: 252). The mythic narrative of the Near Eastern disappearing or dying deities becomes assimilated with the cycle of disappearance and return of the Greek grain, and the grain’s patron goddesses, transforming the narrative to fit its new context, and in that transformation, it takes on new meaning. As the ‘Asiatic prototype’ crossed into the local Eleusinian tradition, the myths and the Attic cult may have played into each other, and developed from their combination³⁴⁵.

The Greek environment does not inspire the same fear of chaotic floods, or the ravaging heat of the Near East, especially Mesopotamia, though it does suffer a scorching summer. The effect of the seasonal cycle in Attica, especially, effected the interpretation of this ‘Asiatic prototype’ when it appeared in Greece, as the sowing is performed at the beginning of winter, and the seeds quickly sprout through the winter cold until the summer heat causes the growth to stop. This does not mirror the growing season of northern Europe, where so many interpretations of this myth as Persephone being the seed which is ‘sown’ were made, but it also does not quite adhere to the Mesopotamian model either. The mytheme of the goddess (either as mother or consort) searching for her missing god (or daughter) may have spread from Mesopotamia or the Near East, and influenced the Egyptian and Greek myths³⁴⁶, which took on their own shapes through their respective cultural values and beliefs. These myths retain the same structure, and

³⁴⁵ “Myth affects ritual, ritual affects myth. Originally, perhaps, each was independent: the prehistoric Eleusinian fertility cult before the imposition on it of the Mesopotamian myth pattern, the Mesopotamian myth as a self-contained means of averting or assimilating periodic droughts” (Kirk, 1974: 253).

³⁴⁶ It is reasonable that some version of a ‘search’ may have developed independently within each of these cultures, according to their respective environments and own interpretations of their experiences, such as the Nile’s retreat or the harsh scorching heat of summer withering the plants. If the ‘search’ developed independently, the more complex motifs of the characters involved, their motivations and actions, could have developed in a complex web of influences and counter-influences across the region.

their dissemination proves that the structure could be meaningful to each of these regions, but they become coloured by each community they enter and are replicated in.

Persephone's myth ignores the usual representation of the dying male god, and replaces him with his 'sister' (if the Dumuzi and Geshtinanna myth may be interpreted as an influencing factor in these myths), creating two goddesses in place of one: "Demeter stands in the place of the drought-causing deities, Inanna or Dumuzi or Telepinu, whereas Persephone is closer to the Asiatic Adonis, whose birth and death were celebrated each year and who more nearly represents the seasonal crops and vegetation" (*ibid.*: 254). By replacing the male god with his sister, the Greeks could depict a new kind of relationship, while also combining the different kinds of Dying-Rising God patterns inherited from the Near East. Instead of the tensions presented in the relationship of the mother goddess and her son-consort figure, this mother and daughter combination offer a new, sympathetic pair of deities.

Conclusion

This chapter has set the myth of Persephone and Demeter, as it is found in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, against the figure of the Dying-Rising God. The previous chapter compared the Greek goddesses to parallels in Mesopotamian myth, tracking their connections and identifying their similarities. These goddesses, Inanna/ Ishtar and Geshtinanna, are not listed in the discussion of Dying-Rising Gods, just as Persephone is excluded, usually because they are claimed not to have vegetative associations (as Inanna represents the procreative life force generally), or they are not gods (Geshtinanna, though her divinity depends on which text is analysed) or that their alternation between the upper and lower worlds "is not what is usually meant in the literature when speaking of a deity's 'rising'" (Smith, 1987: 526). This study has, however, argued that their alternation actually makes Persephone, and perhaps Dumuzi and Geshtinanna, more accommodating to their worshippers. There may be an implicit bias against these feminine examples³⁴⁷, evident in Smith's definition of the group as "young male figures of fertility", whose

³⁴⁷ This bias is unusual, as even Frazer includes Persephone in his discussion of Dionysus and the other Dying-Rising Gods (Part V, Vol.I, 1912: 35f.), although he does not include Inanna/ Ishtar.

primary symbolic relationship was with “mother or virgin goddesses” (*ibid.*: 521), excluding these goddesses despite their own relationships with their mothers and associations with fertility. Despite this exclusion in the scholarship, Persephone does find important parallels in the candidates for this motif, and her association with them, or even assimilation into their mythos, means a comparison is necessary to uncover her full symbolic value.

Although not all the candidates Frazer offered for this motif are eligible for this frame, each of the gods discussed bear some resemblance to the figures of Demeter and Persephone, and were frequently assimilated with them in a complex network of myths and hymns. Dionysus became a central uniting link between the Greek goddesses and their Near Eastern counterparts, as he himself gained a mystic, ecstatic subculture of worship within Greece (at least by the first century B.C.). Borrowing the rhetoric and imagery of the Eleusinian cult, Dionysus offered a blessed afterlife (albeit after a series of reincarnations and purifications, according to a judgement of the worshipper’s moral behaviour), and even more practically, he offered advice to navigate the multiple paths through the Land of the Dead. He could not offer Persephone’s comforting presence in the Underworld, but the author(s) of the Orphic ‘Theogony’ (probably fixed by the Imperial Period) appear to retain her as his mother to preserve this Eleusinian blessing. Adonis, frequently associated or identified with Dionysus in late syncretic myths, suffered and died (if not resurrected³⁴⁸, at least in Greece), like the initiates could expect to do, but his relationship with Aphrodite (as it is depicted on Roman sarcophagi in the second century A.D.) could encourage hope for a similar exceptional revival after death (Koortbojian, 1995: 49). Osiris was a guarantor of cosmic order and balance, rather than personal salvation or blessing in the afterlife, though as lord of the dead he received the attention of those confronted by death. Through Hellenistic and Roman syncretism, his consort supplanted his prominence and, appropriating Demeter’s role, she is seen to offer

³⁴⁸ Ambiguous in Theocritus (third century B.C.), where the emphasis lies on his brief return, while Apollodorus (c. first century A.D.) admits bilocation, but severs this cycle with a final death (III.183f.).

a promise of happiness and blessing in the Land of the Dead, even if she remains remote from her initiates³⁴⁹.

These different expressions of hope or blessing reflect the different ways these gods could appeal to their worshippers, and reveal that Persephone and Demeter may have claimed a special preference because they were more sympathetic figures to seek out in a moment of crisis. While the Greek goddesses could ‘adopt’ their initiates, and promise them a space in Persephone’s Grove (*Odyssey* X.510), Dionysus remained a mystic hope which often unsettled traditionalists, Adonis was rather a precedent than a figure of comfort, Osiris was firmly established in the Land of the Dead, and Isis remained too transcendent, a cosmic force representing everything (*The Golden Ass* XI.4), to offer the same relief.

³⁴⁹ Lucian is promised that he will see her in the Underworld, but she will be in “the innermost quarters of Styx” while he resides in Elysium (*The Golden Ass* XI.6).

Conclusion

This thesis undertook to explore what it was that made Persephone appealing to her worshippers, as her myth is unique in the Greek pantheon for focusing on the relationship between a mother and a daughter, and yet became inextricably tied to one of the most prominent Mystery cults in the ancient world. Applying a two-tiered analysis, which entailed a sociological hermeneutical study of ancient Greek beliefs and customs regarding marriage and death, and a comparative study of chthonic goddesses and the Dying-Rising God motif, this thesis found a consistent emphasis in Persephone's myth on her humanised experiences, her potential as a sympathetic goddess, and her mother's power and devotion: a pattern of emotion that devotees of the goddesses could readily share, and which formed the basis of the initiates' own experience at the Eleusinia.

The first chapter opened this study with an investigation of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* as the central text for analysis, and considered its similarities to and differences from the variant versions of the myth, and the cult of Eleusis. This analysis fixed the parameters of the subsequent discussion, by centering that discussion on a single version of the text, which itself offers valuable insight into the potential appeal Persephone offered. This chapter concluded that the *Hymn*, although closely associated with the cult at Eleusis, contained numerous deviations from the cult, either for the sake of poetic license or to maintain the secrecy of the Mysteries. The variants of the myth, and the correspondences with the Eleusinian rites, revealed a consistent emphasis on the pattern of separation and reunion, terror and joy, which could be elaborated by various poets (such as the *Hymn*'s) to reflect the experiences of initiates, or brides or those confronted by death. The mother-daughter relationship remained central in the variants and the cult, thereby securing the basis for the next stages of analysis, which focus on this relationship and what it could mean to the poem's audiences.

The second chapter applied the results of the literary analysis of chapter one to the cultural context of its composition and earliest reception, in terms of marriage customs and beliefs. Persephone is characterised in the *Hymn* primarily as a maiden and daughter,

rather than the ‘dread’ goddess of Homer’s *Iliad* (IX.456) and *Odyssey* (X.564). This characterisation accentuates her youth, vulnerability and maidenly anthropomorphic form, thereby establishing her narrative on a more human scale, and encouraging the audience to identify with her. Persephone’s experiences were found to correlate with the expectations of young, prospective brides in ancient Athens, and resonated with the relationships of mothers and fathers with their daughters, as far as we can discern this through the surviving literature and archaeology. Demeter, who is given the greatest narrative space in the *Hymn*, undergoes a search in her grief, which also encourages a sympathetic response from the audience as Demeter is manifested as an ordinary grieving mother rather than the transcendent Olympian goddess. Demeter’s attempt to adopt Demophoön, a complex and symbolic scene, results in a promise of her blessing to the mortals she lives among, thereby raising the anthropomorphic narrative to one of eschatological significance. Her failure pushes her into direct conflict with Zeus, which finally forces a compromise, operating as a very human vision of a married couple in conflict, but also as the final stages of cosmic structuring, which allows for a new link between gods and mortals that did not exist before. The *Hymn* therefore offers several important levels of meaning to its original audiences, through the symbolic performance of a divine abduction and marriage, and a mother’s revolt against unjust patriarchal dominance.

The third chapter extended this analysis into the cultural context of the poem, with a focus on death as it was experienced or understood in the Hellenic world of the archaic and classical periods. The *Hymn* appears to have been composed amidst a development in the beliefs of the ancient Greeks regarding death and the afterlife, as a dismal eternity is displaced by the opportunity for a decent continuation of existence, if divine favour could be won. The *Hymn*, and the Eleusinian Mysteries, appear to have developed within this growing transformation in beliefs, situated in the new possibility for a pleasant (if not ideal) afterlife. The Homeric Persephone, a terrifying prospect embodying the power of her kingdom, is modified into the Maiden goddess, and her relationship with her mother becomes her primary characterising feature. This shift in characterisation, marked by similar shifts in the depictions of the infernal ferryman, the journey to the Underworld,

and the increased access into Elysium, establishes Persephone as a sympathetic figure to appeal to in the confrontation with death, and her Grove (*Odyssey* X.510) becomes a haven and relief from the dreadful mire of the Homeric Underworld. The adoption of Demophoön in the *Hymn* therefore becomes an important episode, an *aition* for the bond between the Eleusinian goddesses and their initiates (Otto, 1939: 30), promising the favour and blessing which would provide their worshippers with their better lot in the Land of the Dead (*Hymn to Demeter* 480-2).

Chapter fourth follows the sociological hermeneutic study with the first part of a comparative study, focusing on other goddesses in or connected to the Land of the Dead or with the dead generally. These goddesses, drawn from foreign rather than local cultures³⁵⁰, were found to offer important parallels to Persephone as a chthonic goddess, but their differences were significant. The Mesopotamian goddesses, Inanna/ Ishtar, Ereshkigal and Geshtinanna, appear to have influenced the basic structure of Persephone's myth, and Ereshkigal and Geshtinanna may have encouraged the sympathetic portrayal of the Greek goddess. The Nordic goddesses briefly examined also exhibited an ambiguous duality between terrifying figures of death and comforting presences. The Mesopotamian and 'Nordic' influenced the Greek material by providing the outlines of the goddesses and the structure of their narrative, but this material never encouraged quite the same degree of humanised sympathy the Greek goddesses exhibit. The *Hymn*'s poet portrays two powerful, traditionally daunting goddesses in a newly human light, and encourages his audience to relate to them. This new relationship with the goddesses, marked by sympathy rather than simply awe, provides the space in which to trust their benevolence and future blessing, both in life and after death (*Hymn* 480-8).

The final section of analysis completed the comparative study, by turning to the motif of the Dying-Rising God. Although the motif itself was found to require modification and

³⁵⁰ The local goddesses (especially Athene, Artemis and Aphrodite) have frequently been compared (such as in Dowden, 1989; Kinsley, 1989; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Pomeroy, 1995; Blundell & Williamson, 1998; Ruether, 2005), but the basic structures and shapes of these goddesses could have been influenced by foreign prototypes or forerunners, especially from Mesopotamia and the Near East. These external comparisons, by being fairly distant from the Greek and Roman goddesses, can also provide new insights into common or distinct traits within the local tradition.

qualification in its application, the basic motif and the various candidates for it all offered important comparisons with Persephone. The Dying-Rising God was taken to be a deity who is understood to die or disappear as if dead into the Underworld, and then return, either by their own or their allies' or worshippers' efforts. This figure is frequently associated with vegetation, and as Persephone was identified with seed, as the daughter of Demeter, the candidates for this motif share significant similarities and differences to the goddess, despite the traditional insistence on male deities as candidates for this category. Three major figures were discussed. Dionysus as a local Greek god whose myth and rites were closely associated with Persephone's, and could offer a native comparison. In addition to the 'Dying' Dionysus inherited from Crete³⁵¹, his most promising rites remained within a subgroup of his worshippers, who incorporated mystic and Pythagorean ideas into his tradition, and as the god of madness and frenzy he was sometimes viewed as a dangerous element by state authorities, in contrast to the wholesome blessing of Persephone and Demeter.

Adonis was incorporated into Greek myth and ritual, and therefore could partially be taken as a local comparison, but he originated in the Levant, the site of the transmission of the very mythological material discussed in chapters four and five. Adonis therefore offers a potential 'source'-type for this vegetative, seasonal deity, and importantly is bilocated, like Persephone. The emphasis in Adonis' cult, however, is the power of his mother-consort, Astarte-Aphrodite, rather than in the god himself, and although he shares his initiates' vicissitudes, he is rather the precedent for their hopes rather than the guarantor of them. Osiris provides an 'external' comparison, as his cult was minimally 'contaminated' by other mythologies for a long period, and arose in different climatic conditions to the other candidates. His initial formulation was a guarantor of cosmic order and balance, and he acted as a precedent for post-mortem survival, as his mummification was the *aition* for their body's preservation in death³⁵². He, like Persephone, became sovereign of the dead, but his consort became more prominent in later, syncretic tradition,

³⁵¹ Persson, 1942: 136-9; West, 1983: 150-4, 166-8.

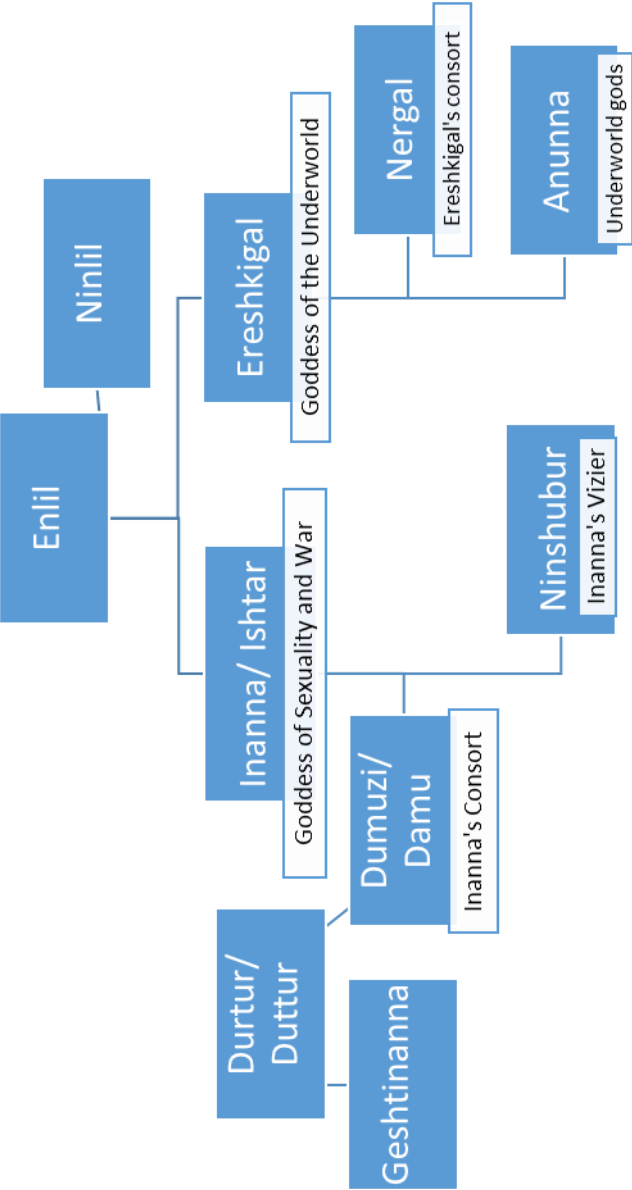
³⁵² Frazer Part IV, Vol.II, 1914: 15

and offered personal salvation like Persephone and Demeter did at Eleusis, although she maintained her distance from her initiates³⁵³.

This thesis has therefore uncovered a recurring feature in Persephone's myth and tradition, which gives her a unique quality in comparison to her mythic parallels, and which provided important resonances for her worshippers. Persephone and her mother are humanised through their suffering and experiences, but they are also situated in two vital cosmic spaces, the field and the Land of the Dead. Although they adopt the mythic frameworks of the other chthonic goddesses, and the candidates for the Dying-Rising God motif, Persephone and Demeter elaborate the human aspects of these gods, and expand their sympathetic links with the mortals who worship them. These links are most clearly evident in the important affairs of marriage and death. The *Hymn* provides a narrative of divine suffering and success to mirror human experiences, relating the ordinary (but simultaneously extraordinary) experiences of marriage and death to the vegetative (especially agrarian) cycles and cosmic structuring of the divine sphere, through the important process of initiation. The poem, closely allied to the Eleusinian Mysteries, exploited the recent development of the picture of the Underworld and the hopes of the dead therein, to proclaim the goddesses' benevolence and power. This benevolence, won through shared suffering and the nursing of a human child, promises the initiates a better place in the Land of the Dead, and a reassuring picture of a divine order marked by compassion and compromise, rather than aggression and competition.

³⁵³ *The Golden Ass* XI.6.

Appendix 1: Mesopotamian Gods



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