# ‘Blessed Is He, Who Has Seen’: The Power of Ritual Viewing and Ritual Framing in Eleusis*

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ὄλβιος ὃς τάδ᾽ ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων·
ὃς δ᾽ ἀτελὴς ἱερῶν, ὅς τ᾽ ἄμμορος, οὔ ποθ᾽ ὁμοίων
αἶσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ εὐρώεντι.
*Hom. Hymn. Cer.* 480–2

ὄλβιος ὅστις ἰδὼν κεῖν᾽ εἶσ᾽ ὑπὸ χθόν᾽·
οἶδε μὲν βίου τελευτάν,
οἶδεν δὲ διόσδοτον ἀρχάν.
Pindar, fr. 121 Bowra

ὡς τρισόλβιοι
κείνοι βροτῶν, οἳ ταῦτα δερχθέντες τέλη
μόλωσ᾽ ἐς Ἅιδου· τοῖσδε γὰρ μόνοις ἐκεῖ
ζῆν ἔστι, τοῖς δ᾽ ἄλλοισι πάντ᾽ ἔχειν κακά.
Sophocles, fr. 837 Pearson-Radt

“Blessed is he, who has seen these, among the mortal men who live on earth; but he who is not initiated in the sacred rites, who has had no share in them, he does not have a lot of similar things when he is dead under the vast darkness,” says the author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. These lines have traditionally been interpreted as referring to the spectacles offered to the initiates in the course of the secret initiation of the μεγάλα μυστήρια of Eleusis, often referred to as τελετή by our sources.[1] Analogous emphasis on the visual aspect of the spectacle is also given by several other sources, which are conventionally taken to refer to the secret initiation ceremony of the Greater Mysteries of Eleusis: Sophocles, fr. 837 Pearson-Radt (“Thrice-blessed among the mortals are those who having seen these sacred rites enter Hades: for them alone there is life, but for the others all is evil”); and Pindar, fr. 121 Bowra (“Blessed is he who having seen these things has gone under the earth; he knows the end of life; but he also knows the god-given beginning”).[2] None of these or any other of our sources gives us a detailed and reliable account of what the μύσται saw or, as a matter of fact, how the things seen conferred this

sense of blessedness, and in what ways this blessedness eased the pain (or was it the fear?) of entering the chambers of Hades, and made the after-death existence endurable. Scholarly speculation on the nature of the things seen (and undoubtedly heard too) by the initiates is abundant.[3] A collage of textual evidence (consisting primarily of testimonies from late Christian and, therefore biased, authors) and iconographical evidence (not necessarily any less ambiguous) has been constructed and reconstructed in almost every possible way; and yet no account can be privileged without the essential leap of faith. Although a summary of some of the most learned reconstructions will be given here, the primary focus of the present essay is not so much on the nature of the things seen, as on the possible ways they were perceived by the initiates and the culturally defined scopic regimes that informed that perception.[4]

## Vision, Visuality, and "Ritually-Centred Visuality"

A particular focus of this paper will be to introduce, and test the efficacy of, some recent and some more or less well-established developments in the disciplines of art history and visual culture in the study of the mysteric cults in general, and the study of the initiatory process (τελετή) in the μυστήρια of Eleusis in particular. Effectively, I argue that, when studying the sources that speak of the process of mystic initiation in Eleusis, more may be gained if we shift our focus from the idea of unqualified and unmediated visual experience (vision) onto the cultural construct that mediates between the eye of the beholder and the things seen (visuality). The point of this exercise is to show that even if we could actually *look at* what happened within the τελεστήριον, it is quite unlikely that we would be able to *see* what the initiates saw, as it is extremely difficult to reconstruct with any certainty the complex nexus of sociopolitical and cultural discourses that shaped their gaze, their ways of viewing. Furthermore, I examine Jaś Elsner's notion of "ritual-centred visuality," not as a possible conceptual framework for understanding the gaze of the pilgrim in the Imperial era, but for considering how ritual framing allows the μύσται in the Eleusinian τελεστήριον to see sacred visions beyond the constraints of secular visuality.

What exactly is "ritual-centred visuality"? Elsner (2007, 25) defines as follows:

> This ritual-centred visuality may be defined in many ways—as the putting aside of the normal identity and the acquisition of a temporary cult-generated identity, or as the surrendering of individuality to a more collective form of subjectivity constructed and controlled by the sacred site, or as the provision of a deity as a vessel into which individual pilgrims can pour their devotions and aspirations. But its positive definition (which is always open to contestation, depend-

> ing on how much of an insider's or an outsider's view one takes) is less important than what this kind of visuality negates. . . . It constructs a ritual barrier to the identification and objectification of a screen of discourse and posits a possibility for sacred vision, which is by definition more significant since it opens the viewer to confronting his or her god.[5]

This concept of "ritual-centred" or "ritual-sensitive" visuality is in harmony with the deep-seated Greek belief in a special sort of visual ability that can only be provided by the divine, usually in a highly charged spatiotemporal context of mortal-immortal communication such as that of sanctuary or sacred festival.[6] It is this much sought after god-sent and god-controlled vision that the initiates were given access to in the course of the initiatory process; it was these divinely inspired spectacles, restricted to a few privileged, which the μύσται took a solemn oath not to reveal to uninitiated (Gagné 2007). Notwithstanding the difficulty in determining the precise nature of what the μύσται saw, I have embraced the idea that divine epiphany must have taken place at some climactic point in the secret ceremony—an idea that has been put forward by many students of Eleusis, such as Walter Burkert, Kevin Clinton, George Mylonas, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood—and argue further that the initiates experienced visions of Demeter and Korê, the two principal deities in Eleusis, in the form of visually assimilated members of the priestly personnel. It is knowledge and power that they earn from this experience: the knowledge of what is in store for them in the afterlife, and the power that comes from being allowed to view and being viewed by the divine.

This essay is not simply an attempt to introduce the so-called pictorial turn in an area of research that has been primarily dominated by the 'linguistic turn' (note here the prevailing metaphor of 'reading' the iconographical along with the textual evidence).[7] Rather, I endeavor to respond to the emphasis laid by our primary evidence on the notions of 'spectacle' and 'experience' of the mysteric initiation in Eleusis,[8] while simultaneously being aware of the problematics and dynamics of different models of spectatorship and visuality—this awareness being the fruit of the pioneering work of scholars who have worked on ancient visuality, such as Elsner, Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, Simon Goldhill, Helen Morales, Verity Platt, and Ian Rutherford.[9]

Before advancing my argument any further, I need to examine briefly what is meant by 'visuality,' as opposed to 'vision,' and why I think being constantly aware of this antithesis may prove to be a useful heuristic tool in our quest for things seen in both the secret and the public segment of the Mysteries of Eleusis and their perception by the initiates. Norman Bryson, one of the leading art historians, has defined the difference between vision and visuality in the context of naturalistic art as follows:

> When I look, what I see is not simply light but intelligible form . . . For human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world. *Vision is socialized*, and therefore deviation from this social construction of visual reality can be measured and named, as hallucination, misconception, or 'visual disturbance'. Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality. (Bryson 1988, 91; my emphases)

'Cultural specific visuality' and 'culturally inflected visual practices' have displaced the notion of vision in an array of different scientific disciplines.[10] At the risk of oversimplifying a sophisticated and interdisciplinary dialogue that started with philosophy, psychology, and the visual arts—and has in the last twenty five years or so been grafted onto the historical research of the viewing processes in the fields of classics and ancient history—one may venture to say that the greatest benefit of this dialogue is the questioning of the unfounded belief in the universality of visual experience and the understanding of the ways culture informs both our perceptual and our conceptual cognition.

As an example let us take the male Athenian citizen of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, who was actively participating in τὰ κοινά. His gaze, his scopic regimes, would have been nuanced (undoubtedly in complex ways) by his presence and participation in the δικαστήριον, the ἐκκλησία, and the θέατρον—the three trademark institutions of Athenian democracy.[11] But, most importantly, as Goldhill (1996) has convincingly argued, the very act of viewing public debate and decision-making (the Athenians are called θεαταὶ λόγων in Thucydides 3.38), along with the act of viewing the glory of the polis in the course of eye-capturing religious festivals, like the ἐν ἄστει διονύσια and their complementary theatrical productions (a spectacle par excellence), constitute acts of active participation in the Athenian political practice. Similarly, the gaze of the female Athenian spectator may have been shaped in analogously intricate and hard to account for ways, not of course through their participation in public affairs, but through their active involvement partly in exclusively female festivals and ritual spectacles (such as the θεσμοφόρια), and partly in festivities and ritual displays common to both sexes.[12] However, it is of great significance that the Greek word "for official participatory attendance as spectator in the political and religious rites of the state" (Goldhill 2006, 6) is θεωρία,[13] preferably translated as 'contemplative viewing' or 'meditative spectatorship.'[14] In a sense, then, θεωρία was a model of spectatorship common to both sexes. More importantly, it was also common to non-Athenian Greek-speaking spectators, who would be thronging to visit and visually contemplate the great Panhellenic sanctuaries, such as that of Eleusis, during the specific dates defined as

sacred by the city's calendar. One can also consider that since initiation into the cult of the two goddesses was open to men, women, Athenians, foreigners, and even slaves, the question of unified visuality arose naturally: How was it possible to lead all these viewers (with their diverse gender, sociopolitical, cultural, and even diverse ethnic identity and, thus, diverse visuality) to *see* the same things? Were there any means or processes of unifying or homogenizing such varied scopic regimes? This is a question to which I shall return in due course.

When considering the complexity and the subtlety with which sociopolitical and cultural contexts define the gaze of their subjects in classical Athens and beyond, one must not forget that the connection between the realms of knowledge and viewing is built into the Greek language and culture (cf. ἰδεῖν/εἰδέναι and εἶδον/οἶδα), and how, as we saw above, it was a commonplace that visual data were, generally speaking, more trustworthy than auditory data.[15] Nonetheless, it is possible that this reliance on the powers of perceptual cognition would have been severely challenged by the current philosophical debate on the mechanics (as pioneered, e.g., by Democritus's εἴδωλα, the little images an object of viewing sends to the eye) and the accuracy of vision in particular and the validity of sensual data in general (as exemplified in the writings of Anaxagoras, Gorgias, Heraclitus, Plato, and Protagoras, among others).[16]

This debate was not limited to the circles of the philosophers. In a number of contemporary theatrical plays, physical vision and, consequently, the power to acquire information with one's eyes are compared to, and quite often are judged as inferior to, another kind of intellectual or mental vision: τυφλὸς τά τ᾽ ὦτα τόν τε νοῦν τά τ᾽ ὄμματ᾽ εἶ (You are blind in ears, in mind, in eyes), Sophocles' visually capable Oedipus taunts the blind Teiresias (*OT* 371).[17] Teiresias replies (esp. in lines 407–28) by reproaching his king, whose physical sight fails him in comprehending the fatal web of errors that has been built all around him: σὺ καὶ δέδορκας κοὐ βλέπεις ἵν᾽ εἶ κακοῦ, / οὐδ᾽ ἔνθα ναίεις, οὐδ᾽ ὅτων οἰκεῖς μέτα (You may be able to see, but you cannot see the calamity that has befallen you; neither can you see where you live, nor who you live with, *OT* 413–4). Elsewhere, physical blindness is paralleled to lack of knowledge, lack of understanding, madness, and even intellectual darkness and death.

One may think here of the triptych of mental darkness (madness), actual darkness (blindness), and intellectual darkness (ignorance) as one of the basic underlying ideas in Sophocles' *Ajax*.[18] The whole play, but especially the superb opening scene (1–133) with Athena as the προλογίζων θεός, demonstrates with sinister sincerity that, in the Greek conceptual universe, clear and impartial vision in particular, and sensory perception in general, are the privileges of the gods. Whether we think of Athena as onstage or offstage at this point, what we have here is an unparalleled piece of stagecraft, with bloodshed, and a deranged Ajax not being

able to see the sensible and orderly Odysseus, who in turn cannot see the, in all likelihood, invisible goddess. Ajax, on the other hand, whose perceptual cognition has been controlled by Athena, salutes the goddess, as if he was able to see her, but cannot see his human adversary, who stands next to him.[19] This piece of stagecraft creates a mental and visual focus on the partial vision and knowledge of the mortals, versus the complete and impartial vision and knowledge of the immortal.[20]

Only the gods and a limited number of those dear to the gods, who are often called θεοφιλεῖς, can see clearly. Athena allows Odysseus, her protégé, to see, but distorts the visual capacity of his enemy, whilst, in the process of doing so, she offers the play's viewers a spectacle they will never forget. Gods control sight and it is up to them to bestow or to withdraw it. This is an idea that goes back to Homer. For example, Athena raises the mist (ἀχλύς) from the eyes of Diomedes and allows him to perform his ἀριστεία (*Il.* 5.115ff.).[21] The goddess removes the mist that prevents him from distinguishing between mortal and immortal fighters: ὄφρ᾽ εὖ γιγνώσκῃς ἠμὲν θεὸν ἠδὲ καὶ ἄνδρα. Note here that Athena uses γιγνώσκειν, not ἰδεῖν. The gods can regulate both conceptual and perceptual cognition in humans by, among other things, casting or raising a thick mist before their eyes. The results range from slight misconception—Poseidon pours mist before Achilles' eyes, so that the latter can no longer discern Aeneas any more (αὐτίκα τῷ μὲν ἔπειτα κατ᾽ ὀφθαλμῶν χέεν ἀχλὺν, *Il.* 20.321)—to complete distortion and deception with rather dramatic consequences, as in Hector's case, who, deceived by Athena, expects to see his brother Deiphobus coming to his aid, but soon realizes his folly and meets his death (*Il.* 22.294).

True and clear sight, then, can only be granted by the gods either when they choose to manifest themselves out of their own volition, or when humans invoke their presence in a ritualized context. It is those mortal men who have seen the spectacles of the secret ceremony at Eleusis that become blessed, as stated in the first of our three epigraphs; and a couple of lines further on we read that the truly blessed (μέγ᾽ ὄλβιος) is he whom the two goddesses love most earnestly (προφρονέως φίλωνται, *Hom. Hymn. Cer.* 483–4). Participation in the sacred rites opens up a channel of intimate communication with the divine, which in the Iliadic world is a given for the heroes; by contrast, in the mundane world of the everyday man or woman, such a path of close interaction with the divine is only accessible through ritual and otherwise unattainable. Simultaneously, participation in the sacred rites opens up divine vistas that have the power to grant blessedness to their spectators, perhaps allowing them to see the gods as they really are: both very similar and very different to them.

It is with the privilege of allowing him to see sights restricted to the initiated and their ὄνησις (benefits, advantage) that Dionysus lures Pentheus to his perverted initiation and effectively to his own death.[22] Like Oedipus earlier on, Pen-

theus is able to see, but somehow his eyesight betrays him. Essentially, his error lies in mistaking sacred spectacles for secular ones, as Justina Gregory (1985, 27) has argued. Both Pentheus and the Chorus of Dionysus's devotees are looking at the same things, but end up seeing completely different things. The vision of the unbeliever is contrasted with the vision of the believer. The scopic regime of the religious outsider is contrasted with that of the ritually minded insider. Nowhere is this more apparent than the palace miracle scene: the sacred spectacle of thunder and lightning around Semele's tomb (589) is interpreted, on the one hand, by the ritually minded Chorus as signs of divine epiphany, while Pentheus, blind to the divine nature of the Stranger, thinks that this is a casual case of arson (624–6). Similarly, the pious Chorus looks at an earthquake, but sees signs of Dionysus's divine presence (591ff.), while Pentheus does not even acknowledge the physical damage. Later on, when the Stranger comes back onstage to calm the terror- and awe-stricken Chorus and to tell of all that happened in the prison-like stables of the Theban king, Pentheus is confronted with various epiphanies of the protean god. First he sees a bull (618), which he mistakes for his prisoner god, and tries, most unsuccessfully, to put back in chains. Later on, as soon as he rushes into the court, he is confronted with a φάσμα (630),[23] another of Bromius's prolific illusionary creations. Throughout Pentheus's psychosomatic ordeal, the god's priest, or rather the disguised god, has been standing nearby calmly observing the Theban prince's physical and mental effort to 'grasp'—literally and metaphorically—the divine essence of the being he is confronted with. Pentheus *looks at* Dionysus, but he *sees* an imposter. In lines 501–2 the mortal asks the immortal: "And where is he, then, that god of yours, eh?" The god answers: "Here by my side, but you can't even see him."[24] What the young Pentheus lacks is the knowledge to distinguish between secular and sacred vision; what his viewing lacks is the appropriate ritual framing.

What Pentheus's vision lacks is essentially what Elsner (2007, 25) calls "ritual-centered visuality"; this allows the viewer to put aside his normal identity and temporarily acquire a new cult-generated identity one whose aim is to undermine a culturally engendered secular visuality, and to prepare, usually through a process of physical and mental purification, the self for the possibility of a meeting with the divine. To be sure, by using Elsner's ritual-centered visuality to refer to the ritual-sensitive viewing and framing that allows the viewer to see the divine in the conceptual framework of mystery cult, we are taking it out of its original context—its conceptual birth place being the cultural milieu of the Second Sophistic and the scopic regimes of the pilgrim Pausanias in his periegetic travelling and of Lucian's viewer in *Dea Syria* (Elsner 2007, 1–26). But, as I will show in the next few pages, there is scope for introducing the same concept in the study of material that comes from much earlier times and is essentially related to the sacred sights seen by the

μύσται and the members of the priestly personnel in the course of the initiatory process at Eleusis.

## Ritual Viewing and Ritual Framing in Eleusis

Controlling sight and the interplay between vision and blindness seemed to have been of paramount importance in the course of initiation to some of the best attested mystery cults of the ancient world, e.g., the mysteries of Eleusis and the Kabeiric Mysteries of Samothrace.[25] At least this is what the evidence from key terminology attested in these two mystery cults suggests. Compare here the following terms: (1) μύστης (from μύω) is the one who closes his eyes or his lips (that is, the one who is ritually blindfolded or keeps ritual silence), as opposed to (2) ἐπόπτης, the one who sees;[26] and (3) τὰ ἱερά (the sacred objects), which were *shown* to the initiates by (4) the ἱεροφάντης, whose task is τὰ ἱερὰ φαίνειν, that is, revealing the sacred objects (or, possibly, making the divine beings appear).[27] Finally, the very word μυστήρια means the festival of the μύσται, that is, of those who have their eyes closed or walk around blindfolded led by the μυσταγωγοί.[28] Regardless of the obvious differences in terminology, one may be correct in claiming that the passage from ritual blindness to ritual sight, the transformation from being a μύστης (being sightless and blind to true knowledge) into being an ἐπόπτης (that is, an insightful and sensitive viewer), was the basic conceptual framework for a number of other cults of the Greco-Roman world, such as the mysteries of Dionysus (e.g., at Athens), the Andanian Mysteries of Messenia, the Mysteries of Hagna at Lycosura, and the Mysteries of Demeter Eleusinia in Pheneus in Arcadia.[29] Here, however, I focus primarily on the power of ritual viewing and framing in allowing the initiates to *see* in the μυστήρια of Eleusis.

A brief look at the literary sources containing either allusions or extensive references to the visual aspect of the initiatory experience supports this assertion about the centrality of seeing and its lack (whether we call it sightlessness or blindness) in the context of some of the best-known mystery cults of the Greek-speaking world. Dio Chrysostom (12.33–4), for instance, makes references to "mystic spectacles and mystic voices" (πολλὰ μὲν ὁρῶντα μυστικὰ θεάματα, πολλῶν δὲ ἀκούοντα τοιούτων φωνῶν), and some spectacular "alternation between darkness and light" (σκότους τε καὶ φωτὸς ἐναλλὰξ αὐτῷ φαινομένων) as being a major part of the initiatory experience.[30] In another of his orations (4.90), Dio speaks of "apparitions of great number and various nature" (φάσματα πολλὰ καὶ ποικίλα) apparently of a terrifying nature that the goddess Hecate sent to torment those who undergo an initiation or a purification ritual.[31] Proclus in his commentary on Plato's *Republic* (11; p.108, 17–30 Kroll) also mentions terrifying (visual?) experiences of divine origin (τοὺς μὲν τῶν τελουμένων καταπλήττεσθαι

δειμάτων θείων πλήρεις γιγνομένους) as an integral part of the initiatory experience. Analogous references to "holy apparitions" (φασμάτων ἁγιῶν) and "uncut, simple, non-trembling and blessed apparitions" (ὁλόκληρα δὲ καὶ ἀτρεμῆ καὶ εὐδαίμονα φάσματα μυούμενοί τε καὶ ἐποπτεύοντες ἐν αὐγῇ καθαρᾷ) are also made by Plutarch (fr. 178 = Stobaeus 4.52.49) and Plato (*Phdr.* 250C), respectively.[32] Notwithstanding the ambiguous and often late nature of these literary sources, which also strive to refrain from divulging the secret rites they refer to, they show amply that the juxtaposition between vision and blindness and between light and darkness was of paramount importance in the context of initiation ritual in some of the most well-known mystery cults.

More significantly, as Andrea Wilson-Nightingale has very convincingly argued, Plato's concept of philosophical θεωρία (contemplative viewing) is based on the notion of religious θεωρία at the festival of the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis.[33] This is especially evident in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*: the philosopher's viewing of the Forms is compared to the sacred spectacles of the secret initiation ceremony at Eleusis; *termini technici* from the Eleusinian cult are used (e.g., *Symp.* 209E–210A). There is an unmistakable focus on the movement from both literal and metaphorical darkness to both literal and metaphorical light; and, above all, the climactic viewing of the sacred visions carry both salvific and epistemic connotations.

Private religious θεωρία as a widespread Greek cultural practice involved travelling abroad to a Panhellenic sanctuary to witness an event or to see a spectacle (Rutherford 2001). The journey to the sacred location, along with the physical and mental preparation for it and along with its dangers, pleasures, and difficulties, was as significant as the sacred event or the spectacle that the θεωρός had set out to witness.[34] The *theôric* journey to a sacred πανήγυρις is essentially a journey to the unknown and the unfamiliar with a distinctively religious and ocularcentric dimension:

> *Theôria*, in short, brings an individual into contact with what is foreign and different: it is an encounter with otherness. In the case of festival *theôria*, in fact, the *theôros* not only encounters foreign peoples and places but also interacts with the god who presides over a given festival or shrine (by participating in the sacrifices, prayers, and rituals). Here the *theôros* approaches the ultimate and most distant 'Other', a divine being. (Wilson-Nightingale 2005, 163)

This last observation is extremely important for our purposes, because it shows clearly that the expectation of encountering the ultimate 'Other'—the deity or the deities that presided over the religious festival or the sanctuary—was embedded within the viewing modality of private θεωρία at a festival. Hopes and expectations

create focus, and focus creates reality. Effectively, this kind of culturally nuanced visuality of the sacred provides the right conceptual framework for the spectacle to come. Given the explicit eschatological preoccupations of the cult of the two goddesses in Eleusis (at least from the sixth century BCE onwards, if not before), it is likely that the θεωροί to Eleusis expected an encounter with the two goddesses, and perhaps even with other underworld deities, at some climactic point of the initiatory process.[35] Besides a direct encounter with the divine in one form or the other was the ultimate goal for some of the best-known mystery cults of the Greek-speaking world.[36]

A face-to-face encounter with the two goddesses presiding over the Mysteries of Eleusis features on what is often interpreted as the third and climactic scene of the Lovatelli urn (more on this artefact below): Heracles, the exemplary mythic initiate, approaches Demeter, who is seated on a *kistê* with an advancing Korê right behind her holding a large torch.[37] This scene in turn brings to mind the mythological tradition that has Heracles being initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis as part of his psychological and physical preparation for his visit to Hades to steal Cerberus.[38] This is what Heracles himself declares proudly to Amphitryon in Euripides' *Heracles* (610–3):

**Ἀμφιτρύων**
ἦλθες γὰρ ὄντως δώματ᾽ εἰς Ἅιδου, τέκνον;
**Ἡρακλῆς**
καὶ θῆρά γ᾽ ἐς φῶς τὸν τρίκρανον ἤγαγον.
**Ἀμφιτρύων**
μάχῃ κρατήσας ἢ θεᾶς δωρήμασιν;
**Ἡρακλῆς**
μάχῃ· τὰ μυστῶν δ᾽ ὄργι᾽ εὐτύχησ᾽ ἰδών.

Am. Did you really go down to the chambers of Hades, my son?
Her. Yes, indeed, and I brought back to the light the three-headed beast.
Am. Did you defeat him in a fight, or was your victory the gift of the goddess?
Her. In a fight. And I had the good fortune to witness the sacred rites of the mystae.

In another much-quoted extract from a rhetorical exercise of the Hadrianic period, Heracles argues with the *dadouchos* as follows:[39] ἀπόκλεισον τὴν Ἐλευσείνα καὶ τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἱερὸν, δαδοῦχε, . . . μυστήρια πολλῷ ἀληθέστερα μεμύημαι . . . τὴν Κόρην εἶδον (Lock up Eleusis and the sacred fire, *dadouchos*. I have experienced far truer mysteries . . . I have seen Korê).

Both passages imply that the μύσται saw during their initiation what they expected to see after their death, and that these visions may have included visions of underworld deities and especially visions of Persephone or Korê.[40] The underlying idea may have been that proper ritual behavior in the course of initiation determines afterlife experience and existence.[41] Passages from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (480–2) and Aristophanes' *Frogs* (154–7) support the idea that the initiation into the Great Mysteries may have prepared those initiated for the House of Persephone (Περσεφόνεια δώματα) by means of ritual rehearsal.

The following epigram by Antiphilus (*Anth. Pal.* 9.298) alludes to an initiation into mysteries presided by the two goddesses:[42]

> σκίπων με πρὸς νηὸν ἀνήγαγεν ὄντα βέβηλον
> οὐ μοῦνον τελετῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἠελίου·
> μύστην δ᾽ ἀμφοτέρων με Θεαὶ θέσαν· οἶδα δ᾽ ἐκείνῃ
> νυκτὶ καὶ ὀφθαλμῶν νύκτα καθηράμενος·
> ἀσκίπων δ᾽ εἰς ἄστυ κατέστιχον ὄργια Δηοῦς
> κηρύσσων γλώσσης ὄμμασι τρανότερον.
>
> My staff led me to the temple, uninitiated as I was,
> In both the secret ceremony and the light of the sun.
> The goddesses initiated me into both, and that very night I truly *saw*
> Having being purified from the darkness of my eyes.
> Without my staff I walked down to the city proclaiming the sacred rites
> Of Demeter more vividly with my eyes rather than my tongue.

Denys Page (Gow and Page 1968, 116) is right in remarking that in this particular epigram: "Great pains have been taken to tell a quite complicated story in about three dozen words."[43] On the night of the speaker's initiation into the mysteries of the two goddesses (most likely a reference to the Mysteries of Eleusis), he left behind both the actual darkness of his blindness and the metaphorical darkness of his ignorance of the Mysteries; the same night the initiand welcomed both the light of the sun and the light of knowledge. Note here the conspicuous position of the verb οἶδα in line 3, which oscillates between the semantic fields of 'vision' and 'knowledge.'[44] The cultural metaphor of 'purification' has been utilized here in a twofold way: initiation into the mysteries of Demeter and Korê offered the initiate not only purity from the actual darkness of his blindness, but also cleanness from his intellectual and ritual darkness. In this context, mystic enlightenment coincided with, and perhaps even facilitated, the acquisition of his physical vision. Could this image of purified vision be read as a rhetorical trope referring not simply to the new enhanced visual capacity, the new and clear vistas offered by an

initiation presided over by the two goddesses themselves, but also to the process of purifying the initiates' visuality from the secular side of it, the screen of signs from ordinary life, to put it in Elsner's words? But then again, if indeed the blindness itself is real, and not another metaphor for ordinary human (as opposed to divinely ordered) vision, how are we to imagine the process of shaping the visuality of a blind person? Was a vision of the two deities the first thing he (or is this the testimony of a female initiate?) saw right after he regained his sight, and what did they look like? Interesting questions with no definite answers.

Perhaps the most interesting feature in this epigram is that the speaker remains confident that he can proclaim the sacred rites of the goddess better with his eyes than with his tongue! "Seeing comes before words"—that is for sure (Berger 1985, 1). But what we have here is an intentionally ambiguous reference to both the religious prohibitions regarding the secret ceremony (the θεωρός is not allowed to speak about what he saw), as well as the difficulties of putting the unique visual experience of the secret segment of the mysteries into words (the author of the epigram makes a self-conscious and self-referential comment on the limitations of the linguistic dynamic as opposed to the visual dynamic of the spectacles he saw).[45] The word ἄρρητα could refer to both the things or experiences that one should not speak about, or the things or experiences that were impossible to speak about. A third possible interpretation of this cryptic statement could be that on his return to the city the speaker's newly found physical vision would act as the most reliable testimony to his newly acquired permanently illuminated vision through his participation in the mysteries. In this way his cured blindness (if indeed this is a case of physical disability) would be perceived as the most obvious confirmation of the goddesses' powers and the efficacy of their mysteries.

This juxtaposition between the true vision acquired in a mystery initiation and the physical and intellectual blindness of the uninitiated is also prominent in two of the best-known iconographical *exempla*, which depict initiation ceremonies traditionally discussed in relation to the Mysteries of Eleusis—namely, the Torre Nova sarcophagus and the Lovatelli urn, where the paradigmatic initiate (on the urn it is Heracles) is portrayed as temporarily deprived of his sight while seated on a stool with his head veiled.[46] In both cases a priestess approaches the neophyte from behind: on the Lovatelli urn she is holding a λίκνον (winnowing fan) over his head, while on the sarcophagus she is holding a large burning torch upside down and dangerously close to his hand.[47] Both the downturned torches and the winnowing fan symbolize purification, according to Clinton (2003, 59), who reminds us that both these images reflect Eleusinian imagery only "indirectly and imprecisely." It is possible that in covering themselves with a veil, the initiates follow the example of Demeter, who in the homonymous Homeric *Hymn* (lines 194–7) is said to have sat silent and sad on a stool given to her by Iambe while holding her veil

over her head.[48] This short-term sightlessness must have had a profound effect on the initiate's psyche, who sat there blind, helpless, and frightened, surrendered to the hands of his μυσταγωγοί.[49] This physical blindness simultaneously symbolizes the neophyte's intellectual blindness prior to his initiation and provides him with an essential visual and intellectual vacuum, which prepares him for the new and true vision that will be granted by the deities presiding over the ceremony and their sacred officials. Any spectacle that follows a period of extreme and terrifying sensory deprivation is bound to be perceived as outstanding and, indeed, as liberating, but that must have been especially true regarding light, which featured prominently in the secret ceremony and apparently accompanied the appearance of the hierophant to the μύσται in a truly epiphany-like manner.[50] Moreover, given the cultural equation of light to life and knowledge and of darkness to ignorance and death (on which see above), this externally imposed temporary blindness may also have been thought of as a kind of symbolic death of the initiate, which will be subsequently negated by his symbolic rebirth.[51] We do not know exactly at what point in the ceremony the blindfolds were removed from the initiates' eyes, but it is not unreasonable to assume that this may have taken place at some point before their entrance to the Anaktoron.[52]

Physical ability to see and illuminated mystic vision in the course of an initiation into the Mysteries of Demeter may also be closely connected in the case of a marble votive plaque found in the area of the Eleusinian *Telestêrion* (Fig. 1).[53] It depicts a pair of eyes with the nose and eyebrows and is accompanied by the following inscription: Δήμητρι Εὐκράτης (Eucrates [dedicates] to Demeter). One could say that this votive relief resembles those found in the famous healing sanctuaries,[54] if it were not for the remarkably beautiful image of a radiant Demeter with red rays springing out from her head, her hair, and her neck, and attached to the top of the plaque. This striking artefact is unique in having the paint almost intact on its surface of white marble. We can even see the red paint on the right eye, the lips, and the eyes of the goddess. Her hair, on the other hand, is painted in a red-brown color. The flat area that surrounds the nose and the eyes in the lower part of the relief must have also been painted in a bright red-orange color.

This vision of a light-emanating Demeter may very well allude to what Eucrates saw in the *Telestêrion*.[55] Demeter was perceived in a similar way, as emitting light and radiance that are compared to those of lightning, by Metaneira in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (lines 189–90); and then again in lines 277–9:

> . . . τῆλε δὲ φέγγος ἀπὸ χροὸς ἀθανάτοιο
> λάμπε θεᾶς, ξανθαὶ δὲ κόμαι κατενήνοθεν ὤμους,
> αὐγῆς δ᾽ ἐπλήσθη πυκινὸς δόμος ἀστεροπῆς ὥς.


Fig. 1 Marble votive plaque found in the area of the Eleusinian *Telestêrion* depicting a radiant Demeter (after Clinton 1992, 90, Fig. 78)

> . . . and a radiance shone afar from the immortal
> Body of the goddess; fair locks bestrewed her shoulders,
> And the well-built house was filled with radiance
> That resembled that of lightning.

In the extract from the Homeric *Hymn* the luminosity (φέγγος) comes from the body and hair of the goddess, not from anything she wears (clothes, jewelry, etc.). These lines could almost be read as a commentary on Eucrates' relief, where once again the main source of the vibrant glow (expressed artistically by both the painted rays and the vibrant color used) is the body of the goddess not her acces-

sories. Alternatively, this Demeter imbued with light may have been Eucrates' very first sight after his blindness was cured, hence the similarities with the healing *ex votos*. The connection between the Antiphilus epigram and the Eucrates relief is an easy one to make: they both seem to pose the same sort of questions; and they both paint the image of cured physical blindness as being the structural counterpart of cured intellectual and ritual blindness.

Although it is possible that this votive pair of eyes commemorated Eucrates' recovery from blindness in the course of his initiation or even independently, an equally plausible reading of the artefact would be to take it as an *ex voto* commemorating his initiation into the mysteries of the two goddesses. Both alternatives point in the same direction: the dedicant of this striking artefact saw Demeter in the form of a beautiful woman enfolded in light at some climactic point during the secret ceremony. His votive relief has captured beautifully a unique moment of visual intensity, when the mortal viewed the immortal, and commemorated it for both the eyes of the goddesses who preside in the sanctuary, and the eyes of the other θεωροί who would visit Eleusis in the future.[56] Folkert T. Van Straten (1981, 122) has suggested that Eucrates dedicated the artifact to the goddess to commemorate not his recovered ὄρασις, but his attaining of ἐποπτεία, which is essentially an intensified visual experience. An even more interesting reading of the artifact would be to take it as illustrating not the moment that the initiate sees the deity, but the moment the initiate was viewed by the deity, and thus as portraying Demeter's intense and commanding gaze. Whichever interpretation one adopts, the Eucrates relief seems to be a powerful testament to the centrality and intensity of the ocular-centric processes that informed the initiate's experience at Eleusis.

If there is, however, one artifact that exemplifies the reciprocal gaze between human and god, it would be the votive relief of Fig. 2. It was found by John Travlos in a series of excavations north of the Olympieion at Athens and published for the first time by Eugene Vanderpool in 1960. Found face-down in the area of one of the fourth-century CE houses, the artifact is dated by Evelyn Harrison (1965, 95) on the basis of its stylistic details as early Antonine.[57] Despite its late date, this artefact is extremely useful to us, because it copies fifth-century BCE models and contains the only positively identified portrait of an Attic ἱεροφάντης that has survived so far.[58] It is also of interest that the relief was made to order, was delivered to the house of the hierophant, but, for unknown reasons, never quite made it to a sanctuary of the two goddesses. It never met the eyes of either the two deities or the eyes of the other θεωροί.

The inscription at the bottom of the relief reads: Θεσμοφόροισι Θεαῖς· Ἀγνούσιος Ἱεροφάντης (To the Thesmophorois Goddesses [this is dedicated] by the hierophant from the deme of Hagnous).[59] The hierophant of our relief is a man of mature age clothed in his elaborate ceremonial outfit (στολή, σκευή, or ἐσθής)

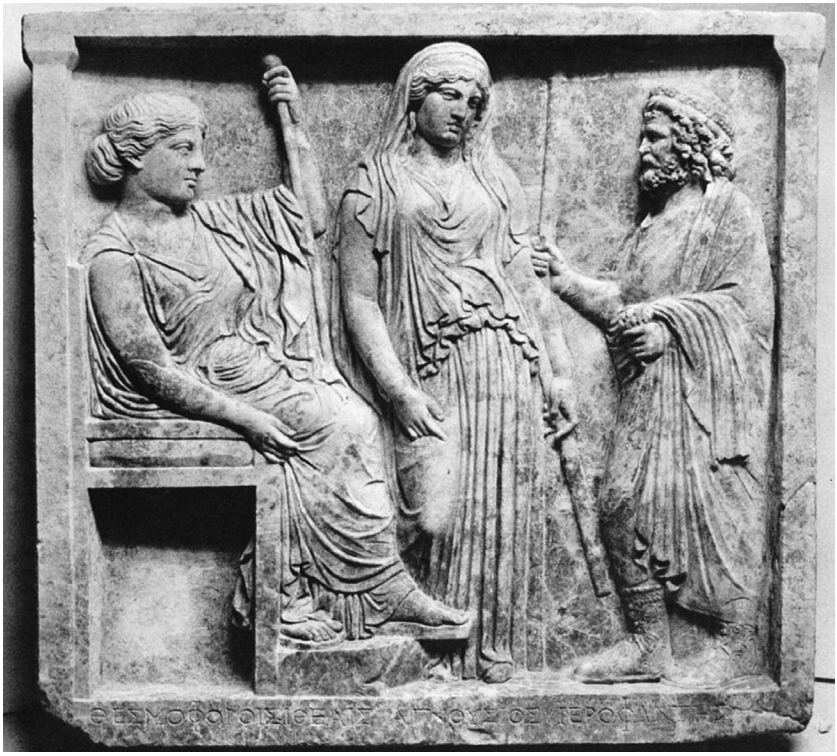

Fig. 2 Attic votive relief with a ἱεροφάντης from Hagnous (after Vanderpool 1960, 268, Fig. 17)

and hairstyle; he appears to be directly confronting, and perhaps even conversing with, the two deities.[60] Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the encounter is meant to take place in this life or in the afterlife, or perhaps in both, especially if we assume that the whole initiation ceremony was meant to prepare the participants for what they would have to face in the other world. Of the divine duo, the deity closest to the mortal is Korê, who usually looks like a youthful version of her mother Demeter. Demeter, on the other hand, is depicted enthroned on the far left of the relief. The modern viewer of the scene is constantly under the impression that if the seated goddess were to stand up, she would no longer be comfortably accommodated by the boundaries of the schematic *naiskos*. Her head would touch the roof quite likely in the way that Demeter's head reached the rafters when she first stepped onto Metaneira's threshold (*Hom. Hymn. Cer.* 188–9). Surprisingly enough, the human figure of the hierophant is only slightly smaller than the two divine ones. The iconographic norm in this sort of representation of mortals encountering the divine is that the human figures are usually of a much smaller scale.

We may compare the much smaller votaries depicted on the Triptolemus relief (Fig. 3). In this votive relief from Eleusis (dated to c. second half of the fourth century BCE), Demeter is also portrayed in her usual maternal attire, as an older—albeit heavier both physically and in terms of her clothing—version of the more youthful Persephone, who stands on the far left holding two large torches.[61] The two goddesses are simultaneously separated and linked by Triptolemus, who is enthroned on his winged snake-driven chariot and possibly holds ears of corn in his hands. This image does not necessarily mean that the three deities central to the ἱερὸς λόγος of Eleusis were viewed by the initiates in that order or in that same attire, but it does give us a reasonable idea of how they were visually conceptualized by their votaries and perhaps even how they were imagined as presiding over their initiation ceremony.

The goddess Demeter stands closest to a group of worshippers on a much smaller scale, depicted on the far right of the relief. Due to the fragmentary state of the goddess's head, it is hard to determine with any certainty whether the goddess engages with the worshippers' gaze. Judging from the remains of her neck, however, I would be inclined to agree with Van Straten (1993, 252), who thinks that Demeter does not address the presence of the votaries and is meant to look aloof. This notion of aloofness is further intensified by the uneven distribution of space in the schematic *naiskos*: the three larger-than-life divine figures occupy two-thirds of the surface of the relief, leaving the mortal figures to make a token appearance in the remaining space. They seem to be mostly interested in each other (Korê is looking at Triptolemus and Demeter's gaze is most likely meeting that of Triptolemus), wrapped up in a world of their own, quite distinct from the human votaries.

George Mylonas (1961) may be right in arguing that monuments like that depicting initiands in the presence of the goddess(es) are quite common from the fourth century BCE onwards, and that we should 'read' them with caution: not so much as depicting an initiation but more as a *mémoire* of the initiands' pilgrimage to Eleusis or even as "a devotional act of worship." But the differences between the Triptolemus relief and that of the hierophant from Hagnous are remarkable. The size of the hierophant, who is portrayed as being almost as big as the two deities, so unlike the miniscule votaries of the second relief, is only the most obvious. The most arresting difference is undoubtedly the superbly illustrated reciprocity between the gaze of the mortal and the immortal. If one were to draw a straight line starting from the eyes of the enthroned Demeter, the line would surely meet with the eyes of the standing hierophant. It seems as if both sides have made a conscious effort for this meeting to happen: the goddess has sat down to reduce her size and to line up her optical path with that of the hierophant, while the human devotee seems equally devoted to this supreme privileged moment of viewing the

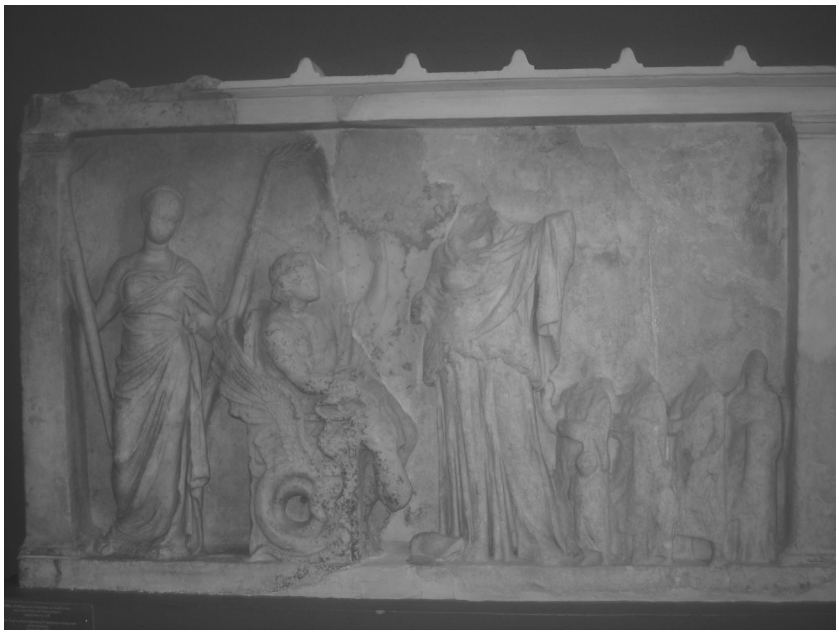

Fig. 3 Votive relief from Eleusis depicting Persephone, Triptolemus, and Demeter in the presence of worshippers

divine. This reciprocal process of viewing is so unlike the atmosphere in the Triptolemus relief, where the divine figures appear to be disconnected from their human votaries wrapped up in their own world. When looking at the relief from the Athenian Olympieion, one is constantly under the impression that one has been granted the same kind of privilege of looking at the two goddesses. Essentially, the external viewer of the relief has acquired along with the internal viewer an insider's visuality. He or she is able to see Demeter and Korê as they are seen by both the members of the priestly personnel and the initiates. On the other hand, the onlooker of the Triptolemus relief is offered more of an outsider's view of the divine. In my mind, the hierophant relief provides the clearest illustration of what ritual-sensitive visuality can offer to both the devotee and the deity honored:

> [I]n ritual-centered viewing, the grounds for a direct relationship have been prepared. The viewer enters a sacred space, a special place set apart from ordinary life, in which the god dwells. In this liminal site, the viewer enters the god's world and likewise the deity intrudes directly into the viewer's world in a highly ritualized context. The reciprocal gaze of this visuality is a kind of epiphanic fulfillment both of the viewer-pilgrim, who discovers his or her deepest identity

> in the presence of the god, and of the god himself, who receives the offerings and worship appropriate to his divinity in the process of pilgrimage rites. (Elsner 2007, 24)

Of course, we must remember that the hierophant of our relief is not a simple initiate; he is a sacred official who must have served the two deities for many years and perhaps anticipates a special treatment after he has left the world of the living behind. The fact that the priest from the deme of Hagnous is portrayed as being almost as big as Demeter and Korê may simply be an iconographical expression of his elevated ritual status. I wonder whether the same could be said about the fact that he appears to be directly confronting the divine. The hierophant from Hagnous has been granted the privilege of divinely-ordered vision; he has been allowed to view, and to be viewed by, the two goddesses. Then again, it is likewise possible that the female figures represented here are not the goddesses, but members of the priestly personnel who are made to look like the deities they serve—hence the unusual spectatorial intimacy between the hierophant and the two female figures, who could portray two female members of the priestly personnel, such as the two *hierophantides* (one was the *hierophantid* of Demeter and the other of Korê, who were known as ἱερόφαντις τῆς πρεσβυτέρας and ἱερόφαντις τῆς νεωτέρας.[62] However, as I will argue in the next section, the ritual practice of visually assimilating a member of the priestly personnel to the deity they served is a well-established cultic practice in the Greek-speaking world, and thus the demarcation line between the actual deities and their priestesses acting as such would have been much harder to draw in the eyes of the participants in the secret segment of the sacred rites of the two goddesses. It is the power of ritual viewing and ritual framing that allows the initiates to *see* beyond their (certainly beyond our) culturally imposed identifications and restrictions.

## The Power of "Ritual-Centered Visuality"

When thinking of the two *hierophantides* as possible candidates for the ritual impersonation of the two goddesses, I follow Clinton's (2004, 88–90) suggestion that the two aforementioned sacred officials played Demeter and Korê in the course of a δράμα μυστικόν, which some of our sources mention as having a pivotal role in the Eleusinian initiation process. To be sure, some of our late sources attest to a dramatic representation of the sacred myth of the cult which was meant to be viewed by the μύσται.[63] The phrase δράμα μυστικόν is usually translated as 'secret drama'; but perhaps more appropriate would be a more literal rendering such as 'dramatic performance appropriate for the μύσται.' Clement of Alexandria, in particular, tells us that the two goddesses, Demeter and Persephone, were the

subject matter of this δράμα μυστικόν, and by way of elucidation he adds, "And Eleusis celebrates with torches the wanderings, the abduction of the daughter, and the sorrow of the mother."[64] There are several theoretical reconstructions of the exact nature of the mythical events dramatized for the eyes of the μύσται, but, essentially, they can be summarized as follows: We can either assume with scholars like Nicholas J. Richardson that Demeter's sufferings were simply narrated to the initiates at some stage during the sacred rites, and that even if there was some sort of reenactment of the mythical events, it would have been more of a formal and symbolic nature;[65] or we can look at other students of the Eleusinian μυστήρια, like Burkert, Clinton, Mylonas, and Sourvinou-Inwood, who maintain that the reenactment of the divine sufferings was of a mimetic nature, and that both priestly personnel and initiates participated in that mimetic ritual. There is, of course, also the view of scholars like Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1931–1932, 473–4), who think of Clement's reference to the δράμα μυστικόν as purely metaphorical.

That the initiates must have viewed a reenactment of some aspects of ἱερὸς λόγος of Eleusis, and perhaps even actively participated in it, seems to be supported by the sources, which place extra emphasis on the role of the priestesses of Demeter and Korê in the acting out of the sacred myth of the abduction of Persephone, Demeter's quest for her daughter, and their final joyous reunion. Tertullian, in particular, reports that the priestess of Demeter was abducted during the sacred reenactment.[66] This (admittedly late) source, then, makes it possible, if not probable, that Demeter's priestess reenacted the sufferings of the goddess. The problem is, Which goddess? From all we know, it was not Demeter who was abducted, but Korê. Mylonas (1961, 310) made a reasonable and yet problematic suggestion: the priestess of Demeter was carried off while impersonating Persephone. Claude Bérard also thinks that the priestess impersonated Korê in her climactic epiphany and maintains that such an apparition would perfectly suit the Platonic description of the initiates' experiences as εὐδαίμονα φάσματα (blessed apparitions).[67] But if the priestess of Demeter impersonated both the mother and the daughter, it would not have been possible, as Clinton (1992, 131) and Sourvinou-Inwood (2003, 29) have rightly objected, to have the climactic scene of their reunion reenacted. More plausible solutions include the ἱερόφαντις of Demeter playing the goddess and Demeter's priestess impersonating Korê, or, as Clinton (1992, 131) has suggested and as mentioned above, both goddesses being impersonated by their ἱεροφάντιδες. The truth is that the lateness, the fragmentary state, and the cryptic character of our sources do not allow us to rise above the level of speculation. Nonetheless, Sourvinou-Inwood (2003, 40) is right in claiming that emotional involvement with the ritual and the deities was a sine qua non in the process of creating the strong emotional experiences of the μύσται and perhaps even the ἐπόπται. The minimum

that can be established from the above discussion is that Demeter and Korê's divine epiphanies were part of the sacred drama of Eleusis. We can only speculate about which of the sacred officials performed which part.[68] The question is, What made the initiates ready to believe that they were encountering two deities instead of two of their fellow human beings?

The easy way out is to claim that the representational strategy, whereby a human being is assimilated to the god or his statue as his facsimile and the living embodiment of his power, is attested in both Greek art and cult from Archaic times onwards. In a number of cults the members of the priestly personnel were intentionally made to resemble the deity's most popular anthropomorphic image, and enacted the part of the deity on festive occasions.[69] This view was further supported through the innovative work of scholars like Joan Connelly and Jeremy Tanner, who showed how throughout the Greek-speaking world this blurring of boundaries between the god and his human body is most clearly reflected in the prerequisites for becoming a priest or a priestess of a deity. The ritual practice of visually assimilating a priest or priestess to the deity he or she served is also recognizable in cases where a deity manifests herself or himself in the likeness of a member of her or his priestly personnel in the context of a theatrical play. Aeschylus, for instance, had Hera appearing on stage disguised as her own priestess;[70] and, as seen before, Euripides made his Dionysus manifest, in the eyes of both the characters and the audience, in the likeness of his priest.[71] Furthermore, in iconography this close visual link of the deity with her or his ritual servant is often denoted by portraying the latter as the mortal look-alike of the former.[72]

There is something missing, however, in this sort of interpretation. We are still not fully answering the question of why initiates would be ready to believe they were confronting the divine when all that stood before them was yet another human being. How were these performers different from the performers they may have seen in the theater? While it is important to acknowledge the longevity and the cardinality of the cultural *topos* of recognizing a deity in a member of the priestly personnel in a festive context, it does not answer the question, "How could the initiates *look at* mortals and *see* immortals?" A far more interesting question to ask would be, "How could they not?" How could they not see the two goddesses, when the quest of encountering the divine is firmly embedded in the very notion of a spectatorial model of private religious θεωρία (see previous section)? How could they not see the two goddesses and probably other deities related to the ἱερὸς λόγος of Eleusis, when in all likelihood they had been psychologically preconditioned from their early childhood for this kind of viewing by looking at artifacts with an Eleusinian thematography, and by listening to stories about the spectacles of Eleusis and the punishment of those who tried to divulge its secrets?[73] How could they not have encountered the divine when they had been preparing for this

spectacle at least since the fourteenth of Boêdromion (the initiation would have taken place on the night of the twentieth)—if not much earlier, from the month of Anthestêrion when the Little Mysteries at Agrae would have taken place? How could they not have laid eyes on Demeter and Korê, when they would have participated in the spectacular procession to Eleusis with joyful Iacchus leading the way; when they would have fasted for a day and prepared themselves through καθαρμοί, and purified their visual filters from the mundane visuality of the ordinary with ritually imposed blindness; when they would have entered the complex of sacred buildings in Eleusis with its unique architecture, specifically designed for purposes of viewing, with its numerous inscriptions, epigrams, and votive offerings (such those of Eucrates and the hierophant from Hagnous) which commemorated previously attested visions of the divine?[74] Finally, how could they not have encountered the divine when they would have laid eyes on the hierophant and the torchbearer's elaborate and visually arresting costumes, which were apparently very similar to the ones used in the theater; when they would have witnessed the dazzling light, both in the form of fire and the torches held by the ἐπόπται?[75]

These are only some of the conditions and factors that would have nuanced the initiates' visuality, would have provided the essential ritual framing, and unified their diverse (due to their different gender, ethnic and political identities, socioeconomic status, etc.) scopic regimes. These regimes, in turn, would have produced what we called earlier on "ritual-centred visuality" or "ritual-sensitive" visuality (which is essentially an insider's visuality) and would have enabled them to encounter the divine in Eleusis. In their majority, these visuality-shaping factors, these culturally determined conditions, are either at best partly known or at worst completely lost to us, who are trying to see what the initiates saw with the eyes of an outsider. It goes without saying that this list is by no means all exhaustive; it cannot be otherwise. After all, it is a list made by an outsider.

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## Notes

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1. On the names of the different initiatory steps in Eleusis, see Dowden 1980 and Clinton 2003 and 2007.

2. See, e.g., Clinton 2007, 72 and Wilson-Nightingale 2005, 175.

3. The emphasis on the visual rather than the auditory aspect of the secret segment of the μυστήρια of Eleusis is partly determined by the subject matter of this volume, and partly by the emphasis that Greeks as a culture laid on the value of autopsy and the superiority of visually obtained data. Cf. here Herodotus's much-quoted formulation (1.7.2): ὦτα . . . τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστοτέρα ὀφθαλμῶν. Similar ideas are found in Heraclitus B 101a DK; Aeschylus, *Pers*. 266; Sophocles, *OT* 6; Euripides, *Supp*. 684.

4. I have borrowed the term from Jay 1993, but I am using it to denote 'a way of seeing.'

5. On visuality in general, see Jay 1988, Bryson 1988, Warwick and Cavallaro 1998, and Harris and Fairchild Ruggles 2007.

6. More on this in Mylonopoulos 2006 and below.

7. On the "pictorial turn" as opposed to the "linguistic turn," see Mitchell 1987 and 1995 and Elsner 1998.

8. Spectacle: the three passages quoted and discussed on the opening page above are certainly telling, but quite a few more of those will also be discussed shortly; cf. Aristotle, fr. 15; Plutarch, *Mor.* 47A, 943C with Burkert 1987, 89–95, 109–10, 113–4 and Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 40.

9. See the entries in the Works Cited.

10. More on these fundamental theoretical issues in Jay's introductory chapter in Brennan and Jay 1996.

11. Godhill 1996, 18–20. On the dangers of over-politicizing θεωρία, see Wilson-Nightingale 2005, 158–9, esp. note 15.

12. It is a matter of debate whether any female viewers were admitted to the theater of classical times. See, e.g., Henderson 1997, Goldhill 1997, and Katz 1998 with primary and secondary bibliography.

13. I will shortly return to this term, for θεωρία at Panhellenic religious festivals is central to our discussion of the visual aspect of the secret segment of the μυστήρια of Eleusis.

14. On pilgrimage in the Greco-Roman world, see Rutherford 1995, 1999, 2000, 2001; Graf 2002; the introductory chapter in Coleman and Elsner 2003; Wilson-Nightingale 2004, chapters 3–4, and 2005; Elsner and Rutherford 2005; Scullion 2005.

15. Gregory 1985, 27. More on ocularcentric Greek literature and culture in Morales 2004, 8–9, with more examples from primary sources and secondary bibliography.

16. More on vision and viewing in Plato and the Presocratics in Hermann, this volume.

17. Cf. Buxton 1980 and Cairns 2009.

18. On *Ajax* and veiling, see Cairns 1993, 228ff.; 2001; 2006.

19. See the discussion in Garvie 1998 and Hesk 2003 ad loc., with bibliography; cf. also Pucci 1994, 22–3.

20. Athena's brief but decisive interaction with Ajax can be read as a miniature theatrical pro-

duction (a mini-play within our play) which has turned the deluded hero into the main spectacle and Odysseus into the internal spectator. Having ended her little play, the goddess invites Odysseus to comment on what he has just seen, introducing her question unsurprisingly enough with a verb that denotes not only vision but also knowledge—for now finally Odysseus is offered the clear, divine view of the events that preceded the opening of our drama: ὁρᾷς, Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὴν θεῶν ἰσχὺν ὅση/ (Do you *see*, Odysseus, the greatness of the strength of the gods?, 118). Athena has opened her protégé's eyes not only to a vista of true and utter horror, but a complex nexus of limited human perceptual and conceptual cognition and divine determinism. Surprisingly enough, Odysseus does not exult at the sight of his deluded enemy, for he expresses nothing but pity (121–6), and he says that he thinks of himself when he looks at the pitiable spectacle of Ajax having dealt with Athena's distortion of his visual capacity. This statement may indeed suggest that he now envisages himself not only as a possible victim of the vengeance of the gods, but also as spectacle for a spectator or an audience with larger vision and therefore knowledge than his own. Falkner (1994, 36) rightly argues that this produces a domino effect for the audience who may start thinking that they themselves may be watched by another spectator or audience with larger vision and therefore knowledge than their own: "That sudden self-consciousness we may have in the process of watching a dramatic representation: our awareness that other spectators are doing what we are doing, and with it the fear that we may ourselves be characters in another story . . . and so on in a kind of infinite regress."

21. When invoking Athena, the hero is careful to emphasize his patrimonial θεοφιλία. The goddess offered his father Tydeus constant assistance and protection on the battlefield, and, therefore, she is obliged to provide his son support and friendship. On the notion of θεοφιλία, see Dirlmeier 1935 and Konstan 1995.

22. Euripides, *Bacch.* 472–4. On viewing in the *Bacchae* see Scott 1975, Seaford 1981 and 1998, Gregory 1985, Graf 1993, Lada-Richards 1999, Cole 2003, and Thumiger in this volume.

23. The reading φάσμα is not certain in our text. It is Jacob's conjecture, adopted by Murray and Diggle, which makes sense in terms of both meter and content, and is supported by a passage from Suda (s.v. Μέλαν), where Dionysus appears to the daughters of Eleuther as a φάσμα holding a black shield. The young women failed to recognize the divinity of the god's φάσμα and were driven mad. The oracle advised their father to initiate the cult of Dionysus with the black shield as the antidote to their mental affliction. Contrast Seaford 1994, who adopts the reading in L and P and gives φῶς, although, as he maintains in one of his earlier papers (1981, 259), both the Dionysiac and the Eleusinian mysteries were associated with φάσματα. More on φάσμα in Petridou (2007, 55–61). On the similarities between the Dionysiac and the Eleusinian mysteries, see Seaford 1981. Clinton (2007), most surprisingly, thinks that we cannot refer to the Dionysiac cults as mysteries, despite the fact that, at least in my mind, they fit perfectly his definition of mystery cult. Cf. Clinton 2003, 55: "A mystery cult (1) presupposes *mystai* . . . , (2) normally requires that they undergo a death-like experience or at least an experience of suffering, and (3) holds a promise of prosperity in this life and usually also in the afterlife."

24. Dodds 1960, 140: "Vision demands not only an objective condition—the god's presence—but a subjective one—the percipient must himself be in a state of grace."

25. Nock 1941 and Clinton 2003.

26. More on the terminology of the stages of initiation in literary and inscriptional evidence in Dowden 1980 and Clinton 2003.

27. Clinton 2004, 85.

28. Clinton 1992, 86.

29. Graf 2003 with bibliography; cf. also Jost 2003 and Clinton 2004 and 2007.

30. It is unclear which mysteries Dio has in mind. It is possible that the reference is to the Mysteries of Eleusis, since he compares his more grandiose initiation of the whole human race into the μυστήρια of the cosmos with the smaller scale initiation that took place in the small building the Athenians built (*Telestêrion*?) for the reception of a small number of initiates (34). Contrast Edmonds 2006, 348–9, who quotes and comments on the whole passage, but, strangely enough, omits the reference to the Athenians. The ritual seating (θρονισμός) of the initiate mentioned in the same passage is attested for the Corybantic rites by Plato, *Euthphr*. 277D, while it has also been conjectured for the Kabeiric mysteries in Samothrace by Nock 1941, 577–8. A form of 'enthronement' (albeit functionally and structurally different) is also attested as a constituent ritual element in Eleusis, as argued by Burkert 1983, 268–9; Lada-Richards 1999, 249; and others. For recent informative discussion on the terms of θρόνωσις and θρονισμός and their meaning in the different cultic contexts, see Edmonds 2006.

31. Once again there is no clear indication exactly to which cultic context Dio refers. More on Dio and viewing the sacred in Betz 2004. Some commentators have suspected certain Platonic influences here.

32. Plato repeatedly uses the language of vision and visuality to refer to the Philosopher's quest for knowledge; cf. Plato, *Phdr*. 244E. On the use of mystery terminology in Plato, see Linforth 1946, de Vries 1973, Riedweg 1987, Morgan 1990, Wilson-Nightingale 2005, Evans 2006, Herrmann in this volume.

33. Wilson-Nightingale 2005, 173–80; see esp. 177: "Just as initiation at Eleusis transformed the individual so that he would achieve salvation in the afterworld, the initiation of the philosophic *theôros*, Plato claims, purifies and transforms the soul and guarantees it a blessed destiny. Plato's philosopher, then, has much in common with the initiate at the Mysteries: in both cases, the *theôros* 'sees' a divine revelation that transforms his soul"; cf. 2004, 14–22.

34. On the dangers of the theôric journey, see Rutherford 1995. On θεωρία and pilgrimage, their similarities and differences as cultural practices, see in general Rutherford 2000 and 2001; Graf 2002, in which he reviews Dillon 1997; Elsner and Rutherford's introduction in their 2005 volume; Scullion 2005. On the mental and physical preparatory regimes and its consequences on the visuality of the θεωρός, see Petsalis-Diomidis 2005.

35. Sourvinou-Inwood (1983, 45–8, followed by Cole 2003, 193ff.) rightly notes that in the world of the polis—unlike that of epic—death ceases to be a public affair; it becomes more of a private matter and the anxiety that surrounds it seems to have been intensified. Cf. also Parker 1981 and 2005, 354–5; Albinus 2000; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 40; 1981; 1983; 1995.

36. Cf. Burkert 1987, 90: "In religious terms, mysteries provide an immediate encounter with the divine"; and Graf 2003, 255: "But to prepare for and be allowed direct contact with a divinity is a function of most mystery cults." On the morphology of the divine in mysteric cult context, see Petridou 2007, 212–22.

37. Burkert 1983, 94, Fig. 4.

38. Cf. Diodorus Siculus 4.25 with Mylonas 1961, 205–6 and Richardson 1974, 211–3.

39. *P Milan.* (1937), no. 20, pp. 176–7.

40. Other narratives—such as a passage from Plato's *Phaedo* (69C) and Proclus's commentary on the *Republic* (*In R.*, vol. 2, p. 108, 17–30 Kroll) mentioned above—also contain allusions to the idea of the initiand being in the presence of the gods during their initiation as part of the preparation for their after-death encounter with the gods of the underworld. None of these, however, can be identified with any certainty as alluding to the Mysteries of Eleusis. Contrast Clinton 2003, 55, who thinks that the ἡμῖν in the *Phaedo* narrative "can, to an Athenian audience, hardly not refer to the Eleusinian Mysteria."

41. More on this in other mystic cults, and esp. Bacchic initiation, in Seaford 1996, 318–26 and 1997.

42. *GP* 39; see also Clinton 1992, 86 note 127. On viewing in the *Greek Anthology*, see Squire in this volume; on viewing the body of the goddess, see Haynes also in this volume.

43. Gow and Page 1968, 116.

44. Cf. the use of οἶδα in Pindar, fr. 121 Bowra, the second of my epigraphs.

45. On the difficulty of putting a religious experience into words, see the excellent study by Pernot 2006.

46. On Heracles as an archetypical initiate along with the Dioscuri, see Xenophon, *Hell*. 6.3.2–6.

47. Torre Nova Sarcophagus: Bianchi 1976, no. 47 (= *Lexicon Iconographicorum Mythologiae Classicae*, Ceres 146). Lovatelli urn with veiled initiate: Bianchi 1976, no. 50 (= *Lexicon Iconographicorum Mythologiae Classicae*, Ceres 145). Cf. Burkert 1987, Figs. 2–4.

48. Cf. Burkert 1983, 268. On veiling and its profound consequences on the human psyche, see Cairns 2009.

49. More on this in Cairns 2009, 53–4.

50. Sensory deprivation and visions: Ustinova 2009. Outstanding light or fire in Eleusis: *IG* II$^2$, 3811.1–2 (= Clinton 2005, no. 637.1–2): ὦ μύσται, τότε μ᾽ εἴδετ᾽ ἀνακτόρου ἐκ προφανέντα / νυξὶν ἐν ἀργεννᾶις; Plutarch, *De prof. virt*. 10: ὁ δ᾽ ἐντὸς γενόμενος καὶ φῶς ἰδῶν οἷον ἀνακτόρων ἀνοιγομένων; Hippolytus, *Haer*. 5.8.40 .Cf. also Clinton 2004, 95–6 and Seaford 2005.

51. Eliade 1968.

52. Clinton 1992, 86 and 2003, 50.

53. Dimensions: height 0.192m., width 0.17 m., thickness 0.18 m., now in the National Archaeological Museum; for the inscription see *IG* II$^2$ 4639 and Clinton 2005, 105 (plate 47) with bibliography. Demeter at Eleusis was not ordinarily a healing deity, but at times the blazing light of the climactic revelation had the power to cure even physical blindness in addition to the ritual blindness of the unitiated, as Clinton (2005, 110) argues. More on ritual blindness in Clinton 1992, 86–90. On Demeter as healing deity see Rubensohn 1895. Demeter's healing identity and her relationship to Asclepius is a topic I hope to revisit on a future occasion.

54. For a good example of the kind of votive plaques I have in mind, see the bronze plaque with eyes from the Asclepieion of Pergamum in Petsalis-Diomidis 2005, 215, Fig. 12.

55. Clinton 1992, 90.

56. On the visual dynamic of votive offerings in sanctuaries, see Petsalis-Diomidis 2005, 187–8 and Mylonopoulos 2006, 87.

57. The exact location of its discovery is indicated on Travlos's plan of area in Vanderpool 1960, 265.

58. Fifth-century BCE models: Vanderpool 1960, 268; Attic hierophant: Clinton 1974, 32.

59. Clinton 1974, 32: "The name is the hieronymous form of the name of a hierophant from Hagnous, with the demotic placed *metri causa* in front of the name of the hierophant instead of after it."

60. More on literary and iconographical evidence on the costume of the hierophant and the *dadouch* in Clinton 1974, 197.

61. Now in the Eleusis Museum Inventory, no. 5061. Cf. Süsserott 1938, 123f., plate 25.1; Mylonas 1961, 195, Fig. 74; Peschlow-Bindokat 1972, 152; Schwarz 1987, 201, Fig. 32.

62. Clinton 1974, 86. The exact title of the *hierophantid* of Demeter does not appear in the literary sources, but by the law of analogy it should read as above.

63. E.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 39.4: "Nor have we any abduction of some maiden nor does

Demeter wander, nor brings in addition [ἐπεισάγει] Keleous and Triptolemous and Dragons, and some she does while others she suffers [τὰ μὲν ποιεῖ, τὰ δὲ πάσχει]; Lactantius, *Div. Inst. Epit*. 23: *his etiam Cereris simile mysterium est, in quo facibus accensis per noctem Proserpina inquitur et ea inventua ritus omnis gratulatione et taedarum iactatione finitur*; Apollodorus *FGrHist* 244 F 110b: ἐπεὶ ὁ τοῦ χαλκοῦ ἦχος οἰκεῖος τοῖς κατοιχομένοις. φησὶν Ἀπολλόδωρος Ἀθήνησι τὸν ἱεροφάντην τῆς Κόρης ἐπικαλουμένης ἐπικρούειν τὸ λεγόμενον ἠχεῖον. καὶ παρὰ Λάκωσι, βασιλέως ἀποθανόντος, εἰώθασι κρούειν λέβητα. Sourvinou-Inwood (2003) offers a most informative discussion of these sources and a very plausible reconstruction of the spectacles the μύσται saw. For other very different, but equally learned reconstructions, see Clinton 1992, and with some differences Clinton 2004 and 2007. Burkert (1983, 287 note 63) lays extra emphasis on the fact that the majority of our sources for the violation of the mysteries in 415 BCE refer to a mock performance, not simply imitation. These sources not only testify to the performative character of Greek festive ritual, but also probably point towards a mimetic ritual taking place at some climactic point in the ceremony. Mylonas (1961, 260–312) offers an extremely respectful and sensible view on what Clement's δράμα μυστικόν, and remains an imperative reading.

64. Clement, *Protr.* 2.12: Δηὼ δὲ καὶ Κόρη δρᾶμα ἤδη ἐγενέσθην μυστικόν, καὶ τὴν ἁρπαγὴν καὶ τὴν πλάνην καὶ τὸ πένθος αὐταῖς Ἐλευσὶς δαδουχεῖ.

65. Richardson 1974, 24–5. This view is based on a passage from Isocrates, *Panygericus* (4.28), where we are told about Demeter's gifts to the Athenians. These are gifts "of which only the initiated may hear" (ἃς οὐχ οἷον τ᾽ ἄλλοις ἢ τοῖς μεμυημένοις ἀκούειν). The fact that the orator refers to things that only those initiated could hear does not necessarily mean that the μύσται were only listening to sacred words spoken. Isocrates simply makes a self-reference and reminds his initiated listeners why he does not go into depth about the mysteries; so he would not commit sacrilege by revealing anything to the non-initiates. He only speaks of listening because this is the only possible danger he faces: revealing the mysteries by uttering something inappropriate.

66. Tertullian, *Ad nat*. 2.7: *cur rapitur sacerdos Caereris, si non tale Caeres passa est*?

67. Bérard 1974, 97; Plato, *Phdr.* 250C.

68. In Clinton's (2003, 88–90) most intricate reconstruction, every sacred official has a different role: the two *hierophantides* would be impersonating the two goddesses, the hierophant would play the role of Triptolemus, and the *dadouch* would impersonate Eubouleus. It is quite surprising, however, that the most prestigious eponymous priestess of both Demeter and Korê has been left aside and is given no part.

69. Connelly 2007, 105–15. On "enacted epiphanies" in general, that is, on the representational practice whereby a human being is visually assimilated to a god or a goddess and is perceived as his facsimile and/or the living embodiment of her or his power in a cultic context, see Petridou 2007, 31–9. For iconographical parallels of the visual assimilation of the deity and their cult statue, see Van Straten 1995, Figs. 4, 13, 111.

70. Aeschylus, fr. 168 Radt (= Plato, *Resp*. 381D) attributed to his Χάντριαι. Cf. also the Schol. ad Aristophanes, *Ran*. 1344 (v. 16f.); Plato, *Resp*. 381D; Pausanias 8.6.6.

71. Euripides, *Bacch.* 465ff. Cf. also Callimachus 6.42–4 Pfeiffer: Callimachus's Demeter takes on the likeness of her priestess Nicippe in order to warn and chastise Dryops in the homonymous hymn.

72. Cf., e.g., the sacrificial scene from the black-figure *kalpis* by the Nikoxenos Painter, presently lost and known to us from a drawing, which can be seen in Kroll 1982, Fig. 11a and Shapiro 1989, Fig. 10c. Athena is dressed just like her priestess and attends a sacrifice in her honor while seated on a *diphros* holding a *phialê*. The helmet in her left hand, the spear that lies next to her, and

the large snake crawling in her feet differentiate the divine figure from her mortal facsimile. Athena reciprocates the sacrificial offer by manifesting herself.

73. More in Gagné 2009.

74. On the visual dynamic of the architecture of a sanctuary and its votive offerings, see Petsalis-Diomidis 2005. On the visual dynamic of the *Telestêrion*, see Clinton 2004 and 2007.

75. Athenaeus 1.21E. The ceremonial costume of the hierophant from Hagnous (Fig. 2) provides a good illustration of Athenaeus's point, with the possible exception of his boots, which do not look like the ones worn by actors. More on this in Clinton 1974, 33.