

GRADES IN THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

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Quels degrés comportaient les mystères d'Eleusis ? Il convient de distinguer — ce qu'on ne faisait pas autrefois —, d'une part entre « petits mystères » et « grands mystères », d'autre part entre « mystes » et « époptes ». La critique moderne est toujours peu disposée à séparer l'initiation (mûēsis) de la cérémonie (teletē) du premier degré, malgré les précisions fournies par Pringsheim (1905). En effet, ni l'initiation n'est « préalable », ni la cérémonie n'est « l'initiation proprement dite ». De plus, l'examen des mots et racines grecs indique que : mûēsis n'est pas analogue à epopteia (le degré de l'époplè) ; tel- s'applique aux rites et non à l'initiation (et, par conséquent, telēō ne veut pas dire « initier », ni telestērion « salle d'initiation ») ; teletē ne désigne pas la cérémonie du premier degré.

On peut ainsi comprendre plus exactement le sens de divers passages d'auteurs anciens, notamment celui de Plutarque sur l'initiation précipitée de Démétrios de Phalère. Il ressort d'autres passages que les auteurs tardifs ignoraient les vrais « petits mystères » (qui, selon nous, n'existaient plus à l'époque) et, comme la critique la plus ancienne, confondaient la cérémonie du premier degré avec les « petits mystères ». Cette confusion se révèle très utile pour notre enquête, car elle aide à interpréter le premier degré, lié à Perséphone.

Si le telestērion ne pouvait pas contenir ensemble tous les initiés, il est permis de penser que les époptes seuls devaient y avoir accès. Les mystes, dans ce cas, devaient prendre part au drame « sacré » et chercher Perséphone à l'extérieur du telestērion. A l'intérieur, c'est aux seuls époptes que l'hierophante devait exhiber le grand secret.

A grade is defined as "a step or stage in a process" and in this case I am considering the process of advancement of an individual from the profane to the sacred as it was institutionalised in the Eleusinian mysteries. The subject is not new: it has been discussed since there has been scholarship on Eleusis. But it has been beset by confusions of which there are still traces even in modern scholarship. It is my object in this article to explain and at least partially to clear up such confusions and in addition to make some suggestions on the differences between the grades.

#### A) *Scholarship on the Grades*

The soundest evidence for the existence of grades is the constant distinction, in inscriptions and elsewhere, of initiates into two classes, called *mystai* and *epoplai*. In the older scholarship, and as I shall suggest later in some ancient authors, this distinction was confounded with another, that between two festivals, the *Lesser Mysteries* and the *Greater Mysteries*. Thus Meursius (1619) claimed that "In the Lesser Mysteries they were called *mystai*, but in the Greater they were called *epoplai*". This neat view, which was repeated as late as 1817 in de Sainte-Croix's posthumous second edition, ultimately foundered on a passage of Plutarch which stated, unless emended, that there were three (not two) stages: (i) Lesser Mysteries in Anthesterion (Spring); (ii) Greater Mysteries in the month Boedromion (Autumn); (iii) at least a year later than the previous stage, *epopteia*. Once the true order of the Athenian months had been rediscovered, the confusion of the two distinctions no longer worked so well: (ii) and (iii) could not be steam-rolled together because "a year later" did not correspond to the difference between Spring and Autumn. It had now to be explained what it was to attend the Great Mysteries as a *mystes* (stage (ii)).<sup>1</sup>

1. To avoid an excess of footnotes mainly consisting of references, I have gathered together all such information at the end of a paragraph. The two

With this recognition of three stages rather than two, an additional name was needed: if the first stage was the Lesser Mysteries and the third *Epopteia*, what was the second? Neatness again plays its part so that, just as *epoptai* attend *epopteia*, now *mystai* are made to attend *myesis*. So Saumaise (1661) wrote that "There was an interval of at least a year between *myesis* and *epopteia*, both of which were in the Great Mysteries". And Foucart even in 1914 wrote that "Il y avait deux degrés dans l'initiation : les mots *myesis* et *mystai* s'appliquaient au premier, *epopteia* et *epoptai* au second" and speaks of "l'intervalle d'un an au moins entre l'initiation simple et l'époptie".<sup>2</sup>

But Foucart was, it seems, unhappy with the *mystes-epoptes* distinction: in 1896 he treated it very fleetingly. In 1904, realising that *myesis* already had a meaning and one which did not fit into the scheme above, he closed the *myesis* at Athens before the procession reached Eleusis (in a passage omitted from his 1914 book) and yet unbelievably claimed that it was the revelations of the Great Mysteries which constituted "l'initiation proprement dite". This phrase has had an unhappy influence on later authors: as an immediate example I cite Picard (1958): "C'est l'acte d'Eleusis, ne l'oublions pas, qui conférait seul la qualité de *mystes*." I cannot see any other explanation for these positions than a desire that the first grade of the Great Mysteries should be called *myesis* or "initiation" whatever the evidence said.<sup>3</sup>

What the evidence did say was revealed with complete

distinctions are highlighted by W. BURKERT, *Homo Necans*, 1972, pp. 292-293. J. MEURSIUS, *Eleusinia* (1619, repr. 1699) cap. VIII; le baron de SAINTE-CROIX, *Recherches historiques et critiques sur les Mystères du Paganisme*, I<sup>2</sup>, 1817, pp. 308-309, cf. the note *ibid.*, pp. 309-310 by le baron Silvestre de SACY.

2. Saumaise cited by C. A. LOBECK, *Aglaophamus*, 1829, p. 35; P. FOU-CART, *Les Mystères d'Eleusis*, 1914, p. 432.

3. P. FOU-CART, Recherches sur l'Origine et la Nature des Mystères d'Eleusis, in *Mémoires de l'Institut national de France*, 33, part 2, 1896, p. 49; P. FOU-CART, Les Grands Mystères d'Eleusis: Personnel-Cérémonies in *Mémoires de l'Institut national de France*, 37, part 1, 1904, p. 115 (for the omission in 1914 see P. ROUSSEL, L'Initiation préalable et le Symbole éleusinien, *BCH*, 54, 1930, p. 52 and 95); Ch. PICARD, *RIIR*, 154, 1958, p. 141.

clarity by Pringsheim (1905). *Myesis* was a ceremony conducted individually, not a mass ceremony, and which occurred at any time of the year. It was not part of the calendrically fixed mass ceremonies, the Lesser Mysteries and Great Mysteries. This revelation was taken up properly by Stengel (1920) and also in an influential article by Roussel (1930). As a result, according to Roussel and most subsequent authorities, notably Nilsson in his standard reference work, there are three steps in addition to the Lesser Mysteries: (i) the *myesis* or "preliminary initiation", an individual once-for-all ceremony; (ii) the *telete* or "first grade initiation"; (iii) the *epopteia* or "second grade initiation".<sup>4</sup>

Careful examination shows that this description too is inadequate. *Myesis*, it is true, is abandoned for stage (ii), but only to leave a vacuum (what is this grade called, then?) which is filled by another inappropriate word, *telete*, on which more below. Worse, *myesis* leaves behind it like a dirty mark the word "initiation". "Initiation" is capable neither in French nor in English of describing, by convention or prescription, the ceremonies (ii) and (iii). "Initiation" means "formal introduction by preliminary instruction or initial ceremony into some office, society, etc.". It is therefore correctly used of the once-for-all introductory *myesis* and incorrectly of the annually repeated Eleusis ceremonies. Furthermore, the label "*preliminary* initiation" is a useless pleonasm: *myesis* is a preliminary ceremony not a preliminary initiation. I cannot see either that it helps clarify this distinction to observe, as Roussel and Clinton do, the similarity of the German words for "initiation" and "ceremony". "Einweihung" and "Weihe". Of course they use the same root, for initiation is a passport to participation in a ceremony; but that does not give a licence to describe any ceremony

4. H. G. PRINGSHEIM, *Archäologische Beiträge zur Geschichte des eleusinischen Kults*, 1905, pp. 38-41; P. STENGEL, *Die griechischen Kultusaltertümer*<sup>3</sup>, 1920, p. 180; ROUSSEL, *op. cit.*, in n. 3; M. P. NILSSON, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I<sup>2</sup>, 1955, pp. 655-656.

as an initiation. In addition to the historical ground which I have just outlined for this misuseage, there is a contributory factor: the word *Telesterion*, which describes the building in which the ceremonies—or some of them—took place, is often wrongly thought to mean “Initiation-Hall”, as though initiations took place there, on which again more below.<sup>5</sup>

The confusion between initiation and ceremony is a potent one, if we find Burkert in an unguarded moment claiming that the body of initiates is *principally* concerned to celebrate the introduction of new members to the cult. This really goes with Foucart and Picard on “l’initiation proprement dite”, the notion which Roussel was unable to shake off from his terminology. Indeed the most recent book on Eleusis, that of Mylonas, is similarly vitiated: the “three stages or degrees” are, according to him, “the preliminary initiation into the Lesser Mysteries [is this Mylonas’ *mysis*?], the initiation proper [cf. proprement dite] into the Greater Mysteries, known as [XB] the *telele*, and the *epopteia*, or highest degree of initiation”.<sup>6</sup>

## B) Vocabulary

As can be seen from the above, the relevant ancient vocabulary is not always perceived clearly or translated correctly. Only Kerényi attempts a proper description of the vocabulary and his results are strange. So in the following I will outline the formation and meaning of that vocabulary in what I hope will be a clear and accurate way. The details of the following derive mainly from the handbooks of Schwyzer, Chantraine and others, and from known philological rules.<sup>7</sup>

5. Definition : *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*. ROUSSEL, 1930, p. 52, n. 1 ; K. CLINTON, *The Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 1974, p. 13, col. 2 ; *Telesterion* = “Initiation-Hall” : FOU CART, 1914, p. 262 ; M. BRILLANT, *Les Mystères d’Eleusis*, 1920, p. 84, cf. pp. 89-90 on “les futurs initiés”.

6. BURKERT, 1972, p. 274 ; G. E. MYLONAS, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 1962, marked 1961, p. 239.

7. C. KERÉNYI, *Eleusis, Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, 1967, but first appeared in Dutch in 1960, pp. 46-47 ; E. SCHWYZER, *Griechische*

*myo* is the most basic word in Greek from the root *my-*. In origin (presumably Indo-European), the meaning of the word is given by the shape of the lips in forming it, namely pressed together.<sup>8</sup> It is used therefore of closing the lips and (more usually) the eyes. Which of these two possibilities has given rise to its derivatives is disputed. For our purposes it is only important for its derivatives.

*mystes* is derived from *myo* (and emphatically not from *myeo* below—in that case it would be *\*myetes* and mean “initiator”, or if it had to mean “an initiate” it would be *\*myelos*). It is formed by adding *-tes*, the regular ending of the agent, to the root *my-* and easing the pronunciation with an *-s-*, as happens in these circumstances by analogy with the many cases where the consonant ending a root is reduced before *-t-* to *-s-*. The word therefore means “he who performs the action *my-*” i.e. who keeps silence or closes the eyes.

*myeo* is a causative verb from *my-*, meaning “to make someone *my-*” but necessary only in the light of the word *mystes*: it is therefore restricted to the sense “to initiate someone” and is used especially in the context of the Eleusinian mysteries, to whose technical language it belongs, but also in the context of other solemn mysteries constructed either on the Eleusinian model or at least in the same way.

*myesis* is an abstract noun derived from *myeo* and means “initiation”. It therefore has a completely different relationship to *mystes* from that which *epopteia* has to *epoptes*. *Epoptes* derives from *epop-* “view” and means “viewer”; *epopteia* derives directly from this noun and means “viewing”. *Myesis*, on the other hand does not derive from *mystes* and does not mean “the act of being a *mystes*”, but, because it derives from a causative verb, means in effect “the making into a *mystes*”. If there were a parallel to the word *epopteia*, it

*Grammatik*, I, 1939, e.g. p. 500; P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* e.g. III (1974) s.v. *myo*; H. FRISK, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, II, 1970.

S. J. POKORNY, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I, 1959, p. 751.

would have to be *\*mysteia*. The fact there is no such word probably highlights that *epopteia* is an artificial word relatively recently introduced or that there is, as will be suggested below, no act of the *mystai* which is exclusive of the *epoptai*.

*telos* is the basic word to a second system. It is a noun and in addition to other meanings can mean "rite". It would not be difficult to suppose that its sense "performance" is the wider sense of which "rite" is a particular usage.

*teleo* is derived from *telos* by regular laws via *\*teles-yo*. It can mean "to fulfil or perform", including a technical sense "to perform rites". In addition it can be used with a person as its object, in which case it is said to mean "to initiate". It is the wrong word, however, to use of Eleusis and seems restricted in the alleged cases especially to offbeat practices from the books of Orpheus and the rites of the Corybants. This difference of vocabulary may be significant: these practices do not seem to have differentiated initiation, i.e. a preliminary stage (e.g. *myesis*), from celebratory rites. Indeed the Superstitious Man described by Theophrastos goes to the Orpheotelests to be *teleo*-ed once a month. *Teleo* must mean, when it has a person as an object, not "to initiate", but "to do the rites on" and maybe even with that colloquial tone.<sup>9</sup>

Here too we can arrive at a more exact understanding of a celebrated fragment of Aristotle. Boyancé, for instance, translates the fragment "Aristote est d'avis que *ceux que l'on initie* ne doivent pas apprendre quelque chose, mais éprouver des émotions et être mis dans certaines dispositions". This is fine except for the phrase which I have italicised and which in fact is a participle of *teleo*. It must mean "those who experience the rites", not only because otherwise a participle of the word *myeo* would be demanded, but also because

9. THEOPHR., *Char.*, 16.12, The idea that *teleo* can mean "to initiate" must have helped the discredited notion that there existed Orphic *Mysteries*, Even Zijderveld (*op. cit.*, *infra.*, n. 11), p. 20 holds that *telein tina* means "icmand inwijden".

Aristotle seems to be referring, as is agreed by those who discuss the passage, not to the initiation but to the group ceremony at Eleusis.<sup>10</sup>

*Teleslerion*, a derivative of *telos*--with *e*-ablaut and the regular *-lerion* ending--can scarcely then mean anything other than "place for the rites", *pace* Liddell and Scott and others who think it means "Initiation-Hall". If the building were to have been that, it is worth reflecting that it should have been a \**myelerion*. Zijderveld, who has made a study of the word *telele*, precisely defines the *teleslerion* as "het gebouw waar de heilige handeling plaats vindt".<sup>11</sup>

*telele* derives from the verb *teleo* in the same way that *melete* derives from *meleo*. It therefore means "performance", but in fact is restricted in usage to a "performed rite". In Pindar, as Zijderveld's thesis shows, it can cover the Panathenaea, the Olympic Games, the Theoxenia and ecstatic rites of Dionysos. After Pindar there is a narrowing of the term to refer especially to secret and esoteric rites. It is therefore not unnatural that authors constantly refer to the ceremonies at Eleusis as "the *telele*" (e.g. Pausanias 1.37.4: "Anyone who has seen the *telele* at Eleusis knows what I mean"). But it is a very far cry from this to state, as writers on Eleusis endlessly do, that the rite of the first grade (of the *mystai*, that is) was actually called, named, labelled *Telele*—an assertion that all too easily brings upon them an uncongenial footnote to the effect that "Le nom de *telele* s'applique d'ailleurs à l'ensemble des cérémonies célébrées à Eleusis, y compris l'*epopteia*". There is not a scrap of evidence to suggest that it was a proper name, other than two heartily confused Neoplatonists writing the century after the Eleusinian Mysteries had passed into history, who claim that *telele* came

10. Aristotle *fr.* 15 (Rose) : P. BOYANCÉ, *REG*, 75, 1962, p. 462; that the reference is to Eleusis appears from the Psellus parallel to this fragment discovered by Bidez—see BOYANCÉ, p. 462, n. 2. Discussion : MYLONAS, 1962, p. 228.

11. Cf. *supra*, n. 5; C. ZIJDERVELD JR., *Telele : Bijdrage tot de kennis der religieuze terminologie in het Grieksch*, 1934, p. 25.

first (= purificatory preparation), then *myesis*, then finally *epopleia*!<sup>12</sup>

The misuse of *telele* did not, it is true, originate with Roussel—it can, for instance, be found in de Sainte-Croix (1817): “l’initiation aux grands mystères, laquelle étoit nommée... téléte”.<sup>13</sup> But with the disappearance of *myesis* as the term for the *mystes*-grade ceremony it has been used very much more. The use is understandable: if an ancient author wants to refer to this part of the ceremony he can only talk of “the rite”. There was in fact no special name for this ceremony, presumably because in some sense it did not need one, as I will suggest below. A Celt, speaking to a Saxon invader of his land, was asked “What is that called?”. “River”, he replied—*a fon* in his native tongue. “That”, reported back the Saxon, “is the River Avon”.

### G) Some Passages Interpreted

With this vocabulary in mind, it is possible to interpret the relevant passages more precisely. “Who”, Theodoros asked the hierophant Eurykleides, “are those who are impious with regard to the mysteries?” “People who reveal them to the uninitiated (*a-myetoi*)”, he replied. “You too, then, are impious, as you explain them to the uninitiated.” As the ceremony is not the initiation, the reference is not to the hierophant’s role in the ceremony. Rather, we must recur to Hesychius’ definition of the hierophant, “*mystagogos* priest who displays the mysteries”. The hierophant is the highest-ranking *mystagogos*, “guide of the *mystes*”, and conducts initiation. We know from Dio that he “more than once advises those being initiated of each thing that is necessary”. Here, then, we are confronted with the hierophant’s initiation of the individual into the secrets. And when Apollonios of

12. Footnote : ROUSSEL, 1930, p. 51, n. 1 ; HERMIAS, in *Philr.* 250 b ; PROCLUS, *Plat. Theol.*, 4.26.

13. DE SAINTE-CROIX, 1817, I, p. 309.

Tyana is refused initiation by the hierophant, he retorts that he knows "more about the rite (*telele*) than you". The initiation is a guide to and explanation of the rite. "Good *mystagogoi* for *mystai* men", as Himerius quaintly puts it, "are all those who are experienced in the *telele*".<sup>14</sup>

Another case is the outrageous letter which Plutarch reports Demetrius wrote to the Athenian authorities, asking to have the ceremonies performed for him regardless of the time of year. The passage runs: "He wrote that he wished, as he was present, to be initiated (*myco*) immediately and receive the whole rite (*telele*) from the Small to the Epoptic." As initiation could take place at any time of the year, there was in this respect at least little wrong with Demetrius' request except its peremptoriness ("immediately"), any more than there was with the thought of the character of Aristophanes that he had better go off and be initiated before he died. "Receiving the rite", however, is not a question of conferment of status but of participating in a performed rite—as in "receiving communion". This is made clear by the sequel, in which the Athenians perform (*teleo*) the requisite ceremonies and Demetrius thereby *receives* the rite. "This was not lawful", continues Plutarch, "nor had it happened before. Rather, the Small were performed in Anthesterion and the Great in Boedromion; and they epopted leaving at least an interval of a year after the Great". The picture which emerges is not one of a neat series of grades (e.g. *myesis*, Small, *telele*, *epopteia*), but of something rather untidier which was clearly not designed from the beginning as a series of grades. There is initiation (*myesis*) which is a qualifier for the mysteries (the Great?). There are the Small Mysteries which become by historical accident associated with the Great Mysteries, run by the same personnel, and seen by Plato as a necessary preliminary to them, thus leading Mommsen and Kerényi

14. DIOG. LAERT., 3.101; DIO CHRYS., 17.273; PHILOSTRATUS, VA 4.18; HIMERIUS, *Or.*, LIV (XV) Columna 3.

into a tidy but false identification of them with *mysis*. Then, if we choose to regard the Great Mysteries, they have epopteia as a bonus; the ordinary stage before the bonus is unnamed; it is just the Great Mysteries or the rite (not The Rite).<sup>15</sup>

Scholarly tidying up of the untidy historical facts has occasionally been assisted on the path to perdition by a curious passage of Theon of Smyrna, a sort of Platonic mathematician of the second century AD. Following a well-worn tradition of comparing philosophy to initiation, he chooses to stretch out the process of initiation (*mysis*) into five stages so that it may provide a parallel to the five sciences of Plato, which are to be taught in the order: arithmetic, geometry, solid geometry, music, astronomy. The passage is as follows:

“Of initiation there are five parts : THE FIRST is purification. Not all who wish may partake in the mysteries, but some are publicly told to keep away from them, e.g. those not having pure hands or having unintelligible speech. And even the very people who are not excluded must first have some purification. After the purification, SECOND is the bestowing of the rite (*telete*). THIRD is what is called *epopteia* FOURTH --and this is the climax of *epopteia*--wreathing and laying on of garlands, so as to be able to bestow on others the rites one has received, getting the dadouchy or hierophancy or some other priesthood. FIFTH is the happiness that comes from them in the way of being loved by god and living with the gods.”<sup>16</sup>

Clearly recognisable in this series are the second and third items, the grades of *mystes* and *epoptes*. They are also where Theon has expended least words and therefore where he is being least controversial. In the other places he employs more ingenuity and is further from the usual view. The fifth place is not a “grade” in our sense and scarcely a “part of

15. PLET., *Demetrius*, 26 ; KERÉNYI, 1967, p. 45 ; A. MOMMSEN, *Feste der Stadt Athen*, 1898, based on a work of 1864, pp. 407 ff, cf. 27, n. 1 ; PLATO, *Gorgias*, 497 c & scholiast.

16. THEON, *De Util. Math.*, pp. 14-15 (Hiller).

initiation" in Theon's sense, even if nicely climactic. It may be—and is—disregarded. The fourth place assimilates priesthood to a grade of initiation and uses details well to evoke an initiation ceremony. But although in the Mithraic system the priesthood is viewed as the top grade of initiation ("Father"), the very efforts Theon goes to here and the view we gain from elsewhere restrict us from accepting this fourth "grade" except in a rather odd sense. Only the indiscriminate Magnien ever accepted it fully.<sup>17</sup>

Theon's first grade has usually been taken to refer to the purification conducted at the Lesser Mysteries. Yet this is not really supported by an examination of his words. He starts by considering the official Proclamation of the *Greater* Mysteries, which excluded those with blood on their hands and those foreigners who could not speak Greek. He then mentions that those who are not thereby excluded must still be purified "first". When is "first"? Before the Greater Mysteries (and their Proclamation) at the Lesser Mysteries? or before the rite (and after the Proclamation) when the *mystai* bathe in the sea? or does he refer to the *myesis*, to which he cannot refer correctly because he has already made the word *myesis* refer to the whole group of stages from first to fifth?

The answer would be readier to hand were it not for the apparent connection of the mythology of the Lesser Mysteries with the Proclamation. There are two stories concerning the invention of the Lesser Mysteries for Herakles: in the first, they are invented because he has the blood of the Centaurs on his hands; in the second, because he is a foreigner. In both cases, they, appear to be designed so that Herakles can satisfy the requirements of the Proclamation and we may here be seeing the ideology of the original connection of the Agra mysteries with the Eleusis mysteries. Notwithstanding

17. V. MAGNIEN, *Les Mystères d'Eleusis*<sup>3</sup>, 1950, chap. 10. Verdicts on Magnien: P. ROUSSEL, *REA*, 21, 1929, p. 260; H. J. ROSK, *YWCS*, 23, 1930, p. 55.

this, it is difficult to believe that Theon either is not proceeding simply in chronological order to the bathing in the sea or is not referring to something he cannot name properly. As we have seen, there is a clear sense in which the Lesser Mysteries might be considered a "grade" and yet here he refrains from naming them. This absence is astonishing and, I think, must lead us to the conclusion that Theon simply does not know about the Lesser Mysteries. This is an ignorance which we shall presently see repeated in imperial authors and which reinforces Burkert's suggestion that the Lesser Mysteries were defunct by these times.<sup>18</sup>

Further, Theon does not observe any distinction between initiation and rite, more generally between admission-ceremony and the activity of the grade. He purports to talk about admission (*mysis*) and his first and fourth grades are indeed such. But the second, the bestowing of the rite, as we saw from "receiving the rite" in Plutarch, is the activity, as is the third, *epopteia*, and the fifth, happiness. He seems to be imposing a framework like the Mithraic where there are many grades and an initiation ceremony into each; whereas at Eleusis, there is no evidence for more than one level of *initiation*—one simply *qualifies*, without ceremony, for the *epopt* grade (see below).<sup>19</sup> In short, Theon has very little to contribute to our discussion, except an omen about imperial authors' understanding of the Lesser Mysteries.

A case in point is Clement of Alexandria. According to an account of his, first come purificatory rites; "after this, there are the Small Mysteries with a sort of role of instruction and preparation for what is to come; but the Great Mysteries about the universe (?)—it no longer remains to learn but to *epopt* and embrace with the mind nature and matters". What

18. HERAKLES, *Diod.*, 4.14.3; scholiast on Aristoph., *Plut.*, 1013; BURKERT, 1972, p. 294, n. 7.

19. This is presumably what Guthrie means when in rather confused language he says: "This it was (sc. the ceremony in the Telesterion) that admitted a man to the highest grade of initiation, that of *Epoptes*", *Greeks and their Gods*, p. 289.

is immediately and strikingly clear is that Clement does not know about the Lesser Mysteries. His account is structured like Theon's for the latter's first three grades: purification, *mystes*, *epoptes*. He thinks that the Great Mysteries comprise only *epopteia* and that "Small Mysteries" is the term used to contrast *mystes* with *epoptes*. Now it may be, as Burkert suggests in the case of Hippolytus which we will presently consider, that this confusion originates in a conflation of Plato's simile of Great and Small Mysteries in the *Gorgias* with his simile of initiation and *epopteia* used to make a very similar point in the *Symposium*—although, myself, I should wish to stress just as much the absence of any Small Mysteries to apply the term to and the presence of an unnamed grade inferior to *epopteia*, the same causes which lead to the same mistake in the older scholarship on Eleusis. But what is perhaps more important in this case and in others similar is not to throw out the baby with the bath: having seen that Clement's evidence is inapplicable to the Lesser Mysteries, we apply it, taking account of his error in nomenclature, to the *mystes* grade of the Great Mysteries.<sup>20</sup>

When we do this, it looks very much as though Clement is talking about *myesis*: his account then matches with passages we have reviewed above concerning the hierophant's preparation of the initiate for the *telele*. The remainder of the passage is then somewhat telescoped—we hear nothing of the rite which the *mystes* attends—but, assuming the error in the manuscript (which I have noted with a question-mark) to be minor, Clement firmly makes an interesting point: the epopt is not taught—i.e. there is no initiation into the grade of epopt; all that is required is presence and vision.

The same confusion may underlie a note by a scholiast on Aristophanes on the subject of Great and Small Mysteries. Although a myth of Herakles, perhaps appropriate to the

20. CLEM., *Strom.*, 5.11.71.1, BURKERT, 1972, p. 293, n. 3, citing PLATO, *Gorgias*, 497 c and *Symp.* 209 e.

Lesser Mysteries is told, we are also informed that the Great and Small Mysteries were *both* celebrated at Eleusis and moreover that the Great Mysteries belonged to Demeter and the Small to Persephone. This latter could, as Burkert thinks, be a form of symmetrical guesswork, but the passage of Hippolytus which we will now look at indicates not. Rather, we should take this as some slight evidence that the grade *mystes* was particularly concerned with Persephone.<sup>21</sup>

Hippolytus (if this is the correct name for the author of the *Refutation of All Heresies* or *Philosophumena*) presents us with evidence on the Eleusinian ceremonies, but as interpreted by a Naasene (Ophite) Gnostic. This interpretative filter does not aid the presentation of what is in any case a confused picture, but again I think more sense can be made of the passage if one takes the author to understand by the "Small Mysteries" the ceremony of the lower grade at the (in fact) Great Mysteries. From his account we can excerpt the following statements in this order:

- (1) "The Athenians", when they "*myeo* the Eleusinia" (the usual imprecise language, this) show those who are epopting the great, wonderful, completest, epoptic mystery in silence—a reaped ear of corn.
- (2) "The hierophant, performing the great and unspeakable mysteries amidst much fire at night at Eleusis, screams out "Lady Brimo has born the sacred child Brimos" "
- (3) This is what people say who have been "inorgiated" in the ("Great", adds Reitzenstein and the principal editor. Wendland, follows him) Mysteries of the Eleusinians. But it is proper for those initiated (*myeo*) in the Little again to be initiated (*myeo*) in the Great.
- (4) The Small Mysteries are those of Persephone below, concerning which mysteries and the road that leads there... the poet says...<sup>22</sup>

21. Scholiast on ARISTOPH., *Plut.*, p. 845; BURKERT, 1972, p. 293, n. 3.

22. HIPPOL., *Ref.* 5.8.39 ff.

Of this we can say that (2) is a continuation of the description (1) and that in (1) the word "great" is tied to the word "epoptic". Hippolytus discusses first the great epoptic mystery concerned with Brimos and corn and secondly the small mystery concerned with Persephone and the underworld. (None of the uses of *myeo* is correct: in each case the reference is to the rite, not the initiation, and the word used should have been *teleo*. Only the word "inorgiated" (*kalorgiasmenoi*) could refer to the actual *myesis*.) The structure of his picture on the one hand seems to match that of the scholiast on Aristophanes and, more broadly, of Clement and Theon, because he knows of no Great Mysteries that are not epoptic and therefore seems to think of the Small Mysteries as the inferior grade at the Great Mysteries. And on the other hand his description of the Small Mysteries, whilst having nothing to do with what scholars understand by the Agra Mysteries, does come out resembling what is often hypothesised as the rite of the second grade, namely a replay of the loss of Persephone, the search for her, and her recovery. Hippolytus' alleged content for the grade of *epopteia*, however, cannot be verified, as one might expect of the most secret grade. The bishop Asterios' innuendo of a sexual encounter between hierophant and priestess is only the development of a commonplace of Clement's to the effect that since the ritual takes place by night it must be indecent. Nor does the cry "hyë, kyë" ("rain, conceive") reported by Hippolytus himself and also by Proclus convince us that it is the heart of the matter: an ear of corn can be "displayed" to the "viewers", a cry cannot.<sup>23</sup> To sum up, if, as there is reason to think, Hippolytus like other authors confuses the Small-Great distinction with the *mystes-epoptes* distinction, then he becomes the only source in any helpful way to distinguish the content of those

23. ASTERIOS, *On the Blessed Martyrs*, PG, 40.324 b; CLEM., *Protr.*, p. 19 P., cf. Gregory Naz., 39 (On the Holy Lights), 4; PROCLUS in *Tim.* 40 e, cf. HIPPOL., *Ref.* 5.7.34.

grades. And in addition the content he alleges has some confirmation for the *mystes* grade and does not seem unreasonable for the *epopt* grade.

#### D) *Mystai* and *Epoptai*

I have one final suggestion to make, on the mechanics of the separation of *epoptai* from the *mystai*. This has always been a great problem: were there two different ceremonies? were they on the same night or different nights? or did *epopt*s watch while *mystai* kept their eyes closed?

It is not often realised that there is a sheer physical problem in accommodating the initiates at Eleusis. Feaver (1957) constructed an argument, based on contributions to be made by initiates to officials and the amount those officials were allowed to keep as recorded in an inscription of c. 460 BC, to show that break-even point was only reached at a total of 3,000 initiates and that therefore the number attending was presumably much greater than 3,000. On the other hand, Foucart (1904) reports calculations that the steps of the Telesterion would accommodate only 3,000 and Stengel (1920) calculated that the Telesterion, as completed in the age of Demosthenes and allowing also for a gallery, could only take 4,000 spectators—and their view would be restricted by the many columns. It seems quite clear, as Stengel saw, that the Telesterion could not take all the initiates at once.<sup>24</sup>

One solution to this problem would be to suppose that only the *epoptai* entered the Telesterion. They are marked off from the *mystai* by their very name as "viewers", which may indicate that they and no others were the *spectators* in the Telesterion. What they were there shown will then have been ears of corn, aniconic images of Pelasgian mother-goddesses, or what you will. A consequence of this is that any

24. D. D. FEAVER, *YCS*, 15, 1957, pp. 139-140; FOUCCART, 1904, p. 136; STENDEL, 1920, p. 184; MYLONAS, 1962, p. 118 is hopelessly vague; STENDEL, 1920, p. 185.

mystic drama of the loss and recovery of Persephone for the benefit of *mystai* in general would have to be played outside. This possibility has, I think, not been considered, partly because it seemed a natural supposition that all the ceremonies took place inside the Telesterion, although a fragment of Aelian has an impious uninitiated man climb a rock to see what was happening in the precinct, and partly because we are still following in the wake of Foucart in our conception of the drama. He thought that, apart from the ritual connotation, it was quite literally a drama: actors and audience: "on jouait devant les mystes les légendes des divinités des mystères". The sources for the drama are essentially these:

*Clement* (a user of colourful language, e.g. "I will roll out (your mystic gods) on the stage of life for the audience of truth"): "And Deo and Kore have by now become a mystic drama. Eleusis holds torches to their wandering and seizure and mourning."

*Lactantius*: "The mystery of Demeter too is similar to (the rites of Isis). In it torches are lit, and through the night Persephone is searched for; and when she is found, the whole rite ends with celebration and shaking of torches."

The emphasis of these passages seems to me to be much more on participation. Surely every initiate had a torch, mourned, wandered, searched. Such a mass mime would be a hopeless mess in the Telesterion, but outside it would make very good sense. The *mystai* could mime around (like so many Stations of the Cross) the cave of Pluto and the well Kallikhoron "where first the Eleusinian women set up a dance and sang for the goddess" and the well where Demeter sat in sorrow searching for her daughter. And in the process the *mystai* would be deeply affected and something of the attraction of Eleusis might be understood.<sup>25</sup>

25. Aelian *fr.* 43 (Hercher)—of course the man fell off the rock and was killed. Foucart, 1896, p. 43; Clem., *Profr.*, 2, p. 11 P., 2, p. 12 P.; Lact., *Epil.*, 23; Wells: Paus., 1.38.6; *Hom. Hymn Dem.*, p. 98.

The *epoptai*, if they are only a class of *mystai* privileged in one respect, would presumably take part in these dances and mimes—which may explain why the activity of *mystai* (contrast *epopteia*) has no special name. But the *epopts*, when the moment came, would be allowed entrance to the vision in the Telesterion. For if numbers had to be restricted in the Telesterion, it would only be sensible that those who were not just attending for the first time should be the ones to be admitted, or in the words of Plutarch that “they *epopted* leaving at least an interval of a year after the Great Mysteries”.

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