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**Reconstructing the Female Experience in Classical Attica Through A Close Analysis of The  
Homeric Hymn to Demeter**

An Honor Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Classical and Medieval Studies

Bates College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Nicholas P. Quill

Lewiston, Maine

May 5, 2021

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Ἐὰν ἦς φιλομαθής, ἔσαι πολυμαθής

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**A Note on the Text**

The text on which this thesis is based is Homer's *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, a sixth century epic that tells the story traditionally recognized as "The Rape of Persephone." Unless otherwise noted, the translations of the *Hymn* are those of Martin L. West from Loeb Classical Library.

## **Abstract**

The lives of ancient women are difficult to understand. Documentation is fragmented and often unreliable, given the polemic nature of the literary sources authored by men. Still, evidence from the fine arts, the objects used by women, and the festivals they attended are studied to reconstruct the private lives of females. There is a longstanding misconception that women of ancient Attica were sedentary victims of the patriarchy, incapable of self-governance or exerting influence. Modern scholarship, however, suggests that their lives were much more nuanced than is often portrayed in extant literature. A text that has proven uniquely helpful in the reconstruction of ancient female life is the sixth century poem the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. Often misunderstood as a story of female acquiescence, the Homeric Hymn is in reality a testament to the tremendous responsibility and power of women and of the female communities of ancient antiquity. Through a comprehensive examination of several Demeter festivals, of objects used by women, and of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, I argue that the poem can be used to reconstruct the female experience in ancient Attica.

## Introduction

The later decades of the twentieth century saw new interest in the study of ancient women. The discipline was unsurprisingly spearheaded by female academics, a notable undertaking considering classical studies has been regarded as “one of the most conservative, hierarchical and patriarchal”<sup>1</sup> academic areas of study. The decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and the 1990s bore several trailblazing publications which challenged popular notions as to the mundanity and restrictiveness of female life in classical antiquity (Pomeroy 1975, Brumfield 1981, Foley 1994.) The work of early, predominantly female, classicists paved the way for half a century of adjunct research.

Though academia has made considerable progress in understanding the agency of ancient women, there is more to do. Reconstructing the lives of women in ancient Attica is restricted by the nature of the materials available; aside from some excerpts of lyric poetry, very few literary works from classical antiquity are written by women. The majority of extant primary sources were composed by men whose personal biases and apprehensions frequently developed into polemics against the women being described. There are a few literary sources in which men speak for or about women in an attempt to illuminate the female experience, notably legal speeches and speeches from Greek drama,<sup>2</sup> but even these are tainted by misogyny. Thus, the analysis of literary evidence alone appears inadequate for the study of women in antiquity. To grasp a more complete picture of the private lives of women, evidence from the fine arts as well as from the objects or spaces used by women must be considered; among these include vase paintings, funerary monuments, torches, festivals, and the *oikos*. For centuries, the imagery and

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn B. Skinner, *Classical Studies, Patriarchy and Feminism: The View from 1986* (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd, Pergamon, 1987): 181.

<sup>2</sup> Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), xxiii.

language of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* have been studied to try and better understand the lives of women in ancient Attica.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* stands out among ancient literature for its foregrounding of the female experience. The sixth century epic panegyricizes the Greek goddess of harvest and fertility Demeter and her daughter Kore, often referred to as Persephone. The *Hymn* tells the story of Persephone's abduction by Hades, the chthonic deity of the underworld, and Demeter's subsequent grief, defiance, and negotiation that occupy the majority of the narrative. At the center of the *Hymn* is a curious and intimate gathering of immortal and mortal women at Eleusis. The interactions among the divine and their earthborn company are not only unparalleled in archaic literature, but also disclose aspects of the somewhat underrepresented experience of young women in ancient Attica.

Interpretations of the myth often suggest its representation of the vulnerability, distress, and depression that some believe women experienced in their transition to womanhood, which was traditionally made through marriage. Others point to "the powerful association of marriage with death, symbolic of the 'tragedy' of every girl who, like Persephone, would abandon her parents' home upon entering married life."<sup>3</sup> Both understandings view the story as one of female acquiescence and suffering, each of which is often an overemphasized aspect of ancient female life. The intense suffering of Persephone and the extreme grief of her mother are often misinterpreted to support this theory. Rather, I suggest that the intense suffering of Persephone and the extreme grief of Demeter are indicative of a problematic marriage arrangement. Through examining ancient festivals and reconstructing an image of ancient female life, it becomes clear that women were capable of tremendous influence.

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<sup>3</sup> Angeliki Tzanetou, "Ritual and Gender: Critical Perspectives," In *Finding Persephone: Women's Rituals in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Maryline G Parca and Angeliki Tzanetou (Bloomington (Ind.): Indiana University Pr, 2007), 3.

In Chapter One, I examine three Demeter festivals. I suggest that all three influenced the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Elements of the Thesmophoria, the Haloa, and the Eleusinian Mysteries are recognizable in the *Hymn* and help us explain the poem's underlying emphasis on transitions from ignorance to enlightenment. In Chapter Two, I first discuss the domestic lives of women in ancient Attica to show that their autonomy was greater than they are often given credit for. In the same chapter I explore the ways in which women bearing light were reflective of their autonomy. Finally, I look at the manipulation of light in the *Hymn* and discuss how its manipulation is suggestive of women's agency and of Demeter's progression from ignorance to enlightenment. In Chapter Three, I first explore marriage customs in ancient Greece to establish an understanding of traditional nuptial arrangements and to demonstrate that attitudes toward marriage varied. Then, I look at the perspective and experience of the *Hymn's* female characters and male characters to understand how each group interprets Persephone's abduction. I conclude by suggesting that the extent of Persephone's and Demeter's suffering is inconsistent with our understanding of traditional marriages. In Chapter Four, I explore the *Hymn's* leitmotifs of isolation, withdrawal and return, and feminine vigor. I suggest that the language of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* encourages us to identify with the female characters. Through these discussions, I discuss how the *Hymn* offers insight into the psychology of young women, and into the relations between mothers and daughters. To set the stage for understanding the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter's* insight into the experience of women in ancient Attica, I begin with a discussion of ancient festivals.

## Chapter One: The Attic Festivals of Demeter

The festivals of ancient Greece were multifaceted, complex, and perhaps the single most important aspect of Greek religion. Festivals were a period of sacred time during which members of a polis, *deme*, or specific community gathered to achieve the goodwill of a god or hero. The purpose and meaning of such festivals changed over time and could embrace many things. Assistance with political and social causes, help with fertility (be it human or agricultural), and general celebration were among the many reasons festivals were conducted. Festivals were also an occasion on which cities flaunted their wealth through grand parades, performances, and the use of sumptuously decorated sanctuaries.<sup>4</sup> Festive processions, which were often as significant as the rites themselves, extravagantly “wound their way through city to sanctuary or from city to sanctuary far away.”<sup>5</sup> The festivals of ancient Greece sometimes included everyone. Other festivals, however, belonged to a particular subset of the population: a community within the larger group.<sup>6</sup> At the crux of most ancient Greek religious festivals was the same aim: “to engage the good will of the gods.”<sup>7</sup> The specific reasons for which festival worshipers sought the divine help of the immortals, however, was highly varied.

Festivals based on the agrarian calendar were some of the most anticipated and meaningful occasions celebrated throughout the year. Often occurring at important periods of sowing or reaping, agrarian festivals were usually conducted to ensure favorable harvest;<sup>8</sup> the goddess most often propitiated at agricultural festivals was Demeter, the goddess of harvest and fertility. In this chapter, I will discuss the festivals of Demeter most important to the Greeks of

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<sup>4</sup> John Griffiths Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 78.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

ancient Attica - the Thesmophoria, the Haloa, and the Mysteries at Eleusis - in order to understand their influence on the *Hymn*. To understand the significance of these celebrations, a basic knowledge of ancient agrarian festivals is helpful.

### *Agriculture Festivals*

Ancient Greece was very much an agrarian society.<sup>9</sup> Several literary sources venerate the labor of agriculture and emphasize its importance to the growth of Greek society.<sup>10</sup> Hesiod's *Works and Days* proves important. The poem, traditionally dated to c. 700 BC,<sup>11</sup> provides an intimate, though largely incomplete, picture of peasant life, and the weight of the so-called agrarian calendar in the lives of peasants.<sup>12</sup> The writings of Xenophon supplement Hesiod's. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* paints a reasonably comprehensive picture of agriculture as it was then in the fourth century.<sup>13</sup> The Socratic dialogue, which was essentially a treatise on managing an agricultural household, shows how important was the relationship between the *oikos* and the agricultural environment.<sup>14</sup> The celebration of agriculture in various literary sources makes clear the labor's importance to the ancient Greeks. Even more revelatory of agriculture and the agrarian calendar's importance in ancient Attica are the prevalence and significance of agrarian festivals.

Our knowledge of ancient Greek agrarian festivals, much like our understanding of agricultural practices in general, is incomplete and imbalanced. In Greece, collaboration between the sexes was necessary for successful harvest. The periods of toil, namely the sowing and

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<sup>9</sup> Signe Isager and Jens Erik Skydsgaard, *Ancient Greek Agriculture: An Introduction* (London;New York;: Routledge, 1992), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Allaire Chandor Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year* (Salem, N.H: Ayer Co, 1981), 18.

<sup>11</sup> Isager, *Ancient Greek Agriculture: An Introduction*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

harvesting of crops, were remarkably important, and understandably “involved a considerable amount of physical, temporal, and psychological stress, where the successful engagement of labour over the harvesting period determined the level of security for the coming year.”<sup>15</sup> The arduous physical labor of both men and women was undoubtedly necessary. “Only a small fraction of all women experienced a level of affluence that would have allowed them to live”<sup>16</sup> well-sheltered lives inside the *oikos* and its immediate vicinity. It is likely that the overwhelming majority of agricultural households, at least at times, had “to rely on the labour of all its members,”<sup>17</sup> women included. Rural women surely spent a significant portion of their time “caring for the children and for the sick, storing and preparing food, washing, processing wool, looking after poultry and their own garden plots,”<sup>18</sup> but, their labor was also required outside the household.

The contribution of ancient women toward agriculture, however, extended beyond their labor and domestic chores. Women were thought to be more capable than men to perform fertility rituals, since they themselves bear children and hence understood fecundity beyond the scope that men are able.<sup>19</sup> It was primarily the responsibility of women to ensure the success of the harvest through ritual practices.

There existed a number of festivals at which women’s agricultural responsibilities occupy the center of the ritual’s cultic activity; of these, the Thesmophoria and the Haloa are most significant. The Thesmophoria, the Haloa, and the Mysteries were all significant in the lives of

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<sup>15</sup> Petropoulos, J. C. B, *Heat and Lust: Hesiod's Midsummer Festival Scene Revisited* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 19-20; as cited by McHugh (2019), 208.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Scheidel, “The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women’s Life in the Ancient World (I),” *Greece and Rome* 42, no. 2 (1995): 207.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>19</sup> Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 236.

ancient Atticans, and even more so, are significant to our understanding of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

### *The Thesmophoria*

Perhaps the most famous ancient festival restricted solely to female participation was the Thesmophoria, a pan-hellenic festival of Demeter and Persephone. The Thesmophoria occurred in late Autumn, a pivotal and crucial season of the agrarian calendar, for it “directly preceded cereal sowing, pruning, and trenching fruit trees and the olive harvest and pressing.”<sup>20</sup> The festival’s celebration is attested in at least thirty cities in mainland Greece, its islands, Asia Minor, North Africa, and Sicily, and is recognized as the most widespread and well known of Demeter’s festivals.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, however, the textual evidence is late and problematic.

The most detailed account of the Thesmophoria is derived from an extant scholion by Lucian. I borrow Nicholas J. Lowe’s translation of the scholion to the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*.

Thesmophoria: a festival of the Greeks encompassing mysteries, also known as Skirophoria. It was [or ‘they were’] held, according to the more mythological explanation, because [when] Kore, picking flowers, was being carried off by Pluto, one Eubouleus, a swineherd, was at the time grazing his pigs on that spot, and they were swallowed up together in Kore’s pit; wherefore, in honor of Eubouleus, piglets are thrown into the pits of Demeter and Kore. The rotten remains of what was thrown into the megara below are recovered by women called ‘dredgers’ who have spent three days in ritual purity and descend into the shrines and when they have recovered the remains deposit them on the altars. They believe that anyone who takes some and sows it with their seed will have a good crop. They say that there are also serpents below about the pits, which eat up the great part of the material thrown in; for which reason they also make a clatter whenever the women dredge and whenever they set those models down again, so that the serpents they believe to be guarding the shrines will withdraw. The same thing is also known as Arretophoria, and is held with the same explanation to do with vegetable fertility and human procreation. On that occasion too they bring

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<sup>20</sup> Laurie O’Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece* (New York;Cambridge, U.K.;: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20-21; citing Lowe (1998), passim, and Brumfield (1981), 70ff.

<sup>21</sup> O’Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece*, 21.

unnameable holy things fashioned out of wheat-dough: images of snakes and male members. And they take pine branches because of that plant's fertility. There are also thrown into the megara (so the shrines are called) those things, and piglets, as mentioned above - the latter because of their fecundity as a symbol of vegetable and human generation, for a thanksgiving offering to Demeter; because in providing the fruits of Demeter she civilized the race of humans. Thus the former reason for the festival is the mythological one, but the present one is physical. It is called Thesmophoria because Demeter is given the epithet 'Lawgiver' for having set down customs, which is to say laws, under which men have to acquire and work for their food.<sup>22</sup>

The Scholion, the veracity of which is discussed later, concludes in discussion of the Thesmophoria's name, a frequently debated aspect of the festival. The Thesmophoria is thought to derive its name from the goddesses' epithet, *Thesmophoros*,<sup>23</sup> traditionally understood as *the bringer of laws*. The epithet begins with *θεσμός*, meaning law or ordinance. In the language of ancient Greeks, human laws that govern a polis are typically expressed by the word *νομος* and ordinances of divine origin by the word *θεσμός*.<sup>24</sup> The second part of the epithet derives from the verb *φέρω*, meaning *to carry*. The appearance of *phoros* in an epithet is not uncommon, and though it typically refers to the bearing of an object rather than an abstract noun, the latter is not unparalleled.<sup>25</sup> Demeter is traditionally revered for the bringing of two gifts to humankind: agricultural knowledge and mystic rites;<sup>26</sup> the Thesmophoria stands apart from most of the goddesses' festivals in that it celebrates the latter. The Scholion's error concerning the origins of the festival's name is not the only erroneous account within the passage.

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<sup>22</sup> Nicholas John Lowe, "Thesmophoria and Haloa: Myth, Physics and Mysteries." In *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, eds. Margaret Williamson and Sue Blundell (149-173. London: Routledge, 1998), 165-6 cites Hugo Rabe, *Scholia in Lucianum* (Germany: B. G. Teubner, 1906), 274.23-57.

<sup>23</sup> Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of the Athenian Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969), 3-19; as cited by Allaire B. Stallsmith, "The Name of Demeter Thesmophoros," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 48, no. 2 (2010): 123.

<sup>25</sup> Zeus is called *Dikephoros* meaning "justice-bearing" in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (503), and Athena is called *Nikephoros* meaning "victory-bringer" in Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* (629.24); as cited by Brumfield (1981), 72-3.

<sup>26</sup> Isocrates' *Panegyricus* (28); as cited by Brumfield (1981), 73.

The chief difficulty of the passage is its apparent confusion of three separate festivals: the Thesmophoria, the Skirophoria, and the Arrhetophoria.<sup>27</sup> According to the Swedish Archaeologist Einar Gjerstad, the events described are those of the Thesmophoria, and the mention of the Skirophoria and the Arrhetophoria likely are unfortunate interpolations transcribed by an ignorant reader. In other respects, the Scholion, which traditionally is attributed to tenth century bishop Arethas of Caesarea,<sup>28</sup> is generally worthy of credence. It's discussion of the festival program is supported elsewhere.

The Thesmophoria occurred in the Attic month of Pyanopsion (October/November) and lasted from the eleventh to the thirteenth.<sup>29</sup> It is a frequently held opinion among scholars that the festival was particularly exclusive, being restricted almost entirely to married female citizens; other scholars have argued persuasively that the Thesmophoria was open to all Greeks, so long as they were female. In the writings of Menander, Alciphron and Lucian, there is discussion of prostitutes either attending or receiving encouragement to attend the Rites.<sup>30</sup> It is generally accepted that the participation of enslaved peoples was likely. A compelling piece of evidence exists in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, in which slaves are directed to strip Mnesilochos after he is caught intruding on the secretive rites.<sup>31</sup> Thus, it appears the only group prohibited were men, whose participation was limited to financial sponsorship at best.<sup>32</sup>

The location and organization of the celebration is also a commonly contested issue with state sponsorship at the forefront of debate. Some scholars argue for a polis-wide celebration of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 86-7.

<sup>31</sup> Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* (537); as cited by Brumfield (1981), 87.

<sup>32</sup> O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece*, 21.

the Thesmophoria at the Pnyx.<sup>33</sup> I don't. There is no archeological or epigraphical evidence that supports a citywide celebration atop the Pnyx.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the festival was celebrated by *deme*, as is suggested by the overwhelming literary and epigraphical evidence.<sup>35</sup> As for literary support of a polis-wide celebration, the most well known testament is Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, which should be read with caution.<sup>36</sup> The specific details of the cultic ritual, as modern academia sees it, are as follows.

The Athenian Thesmophoria proper was divided into three phases, one for each day: the Anodos, the Nesteia, and the Kalligeneia, or the Ascent, the Fasting or Middle Day, and the Feast of Fair Offspring, respectively.<sup>37</sup> It was the Anodos, occasionally referred to as the Kathodos,<sup>38</sup> on which the female participants are believed to have withdrawn to an individual place of worship with other members of their *deme*. In some cases they constructed *skennai* (huts) of pine branches and leaves,<sup>39</sup> which may indicate that women slept at their respective locations,<sup>40</sup> in Athens, however, there were buildings, *Thesmophoria*, designated for the celebration.<sup>41</sup>

The second day was called the Nesteia, and was accordingly the day on which fasting took place. On the second day, the women mourned, fasted, and placed a curse on those who exposed the secrets of the Rites, a scandal that forms the plot of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*.<sup>42</sup> No source specifically denotes the women's lamentation, but the posture itself is evocative of grieving, and the behavior appears mimetic of Demeter's state of mourning

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<sup>33</sup> MacDowell (1995) disputes the use of the Pnyx as a cite for celebration of the Thesmophoria. See also Henderson (1996), 92-3, who argues in favor of celebration of the Thesmophoria atop the Pnyx; as cited by O'Higgins (2003), 23.

<sup>34</sup> O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> L Deubner, *Attische Feste* (1932), 52; as cited by O'Higgins (2003), 23.

<sup>38</sup> John Skinner, "Ritual Matricide: A Study of the Origins of Sacrifice." *American Imago* 18, no. 1 (1961): 88.

<sup>39</sup> O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Erika Simon, *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 18.

<sup>41</sup> O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 24.

in the *Hymn* (197-201); the same aition is used to explain the women's fasting.<sup>43</sup> The women interspersed their lamenting with the familiar practice of *aischrologia*<sup>44</sup> and may have even beaten each other with a *morotton*, a ritual practice believed to enhance fertility.<sup>45</sup> The Thesmophorian jesting is reflective of an important turning point in the *Hymn* during which Iambe pulls Demeter from her sullen and mournful state and welcomes the goddess into the community of Eleusinian women. The ritual's banter, of which the subject may have been sexual in nature and hence a topic to which all women could relate, no matter their walk of life, facilitated the formation of a space in which discourse concerning female biological endowment was encouraged. At its roots, the cultic activity on the Nesteia served to form a mimetically supportive community,<sup>46</sup> for the goddess, but also for the women of the local community. At the conclusion of the Nesteia, it is likely that the women broke their fast by drinking the *cyceon*, a mixture of water, barley, and pennyroyal.<sup>47</sup>

The Kalligeneia was the final day of the festival and is thought to have included a feast and celebrated the birth of fair offspring or the return of Persephone to her mother.<sup>48</sup> There are also some elements of the festival whose place in the sequence is not clearly understood. At some point dredgers, women who had spent the three days preceding the festival abstaining from sexual intercourse, descended into caves or *megara* to retrieve the rotting remains of piglets, an animal sacred to the fertility goddess, which had been hurled into the cave sometime in

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<sup>43</sup> Eva M. Stehle, "Thesmophoria and Eleusinian Mysteries: The Fascination of Women's Secret Ritual," In *Finding Persephone: Women's Rituals in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Maryline G Parca and Angeliki Tzanetou (Bloomington (Ind.): Indiana University Pr, 2007), 170.

<sup>44</sup> O'Higgins (2003), 15-36; as cited by Stehle (2007), 171.

<sup>45</sup> Lisa Maurizio, *Classical Mythology in Context* (New York;Oxford;: Oxford University Press, 2016), 158.

<sup>46</sup> Stehle, "Thesmophoria and Eleusinian Mysteries," 174.

<sup>47</sup> Kevin Clinton, *Myth and Cult : The Iconography of the Eleusinian Mysteries : The Martin P. Nilsson Lectures on Greek Religion, Delivered 19-21 November 1990 at the Swedish Institute at Athens* (1992), 35; as cited by O'Higgins (2003), 24.

<sup>48</sup> Helene P. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), 73.

early-summer, likely at the aforementioned *Skirophoria*.<sup>49</sup> After the remains had been hoisted out of their cavernous depository, the dredgers added seed grain to the flesh and placed the mixture on altars.<sup>50</sup> Scholars differ as to the place of this part of the ritual in the overall sequence.<sup>51</sup> The exact temporal placement of the retrieval is not of much concern, rather it is the act itself which is of chief significance: “the women act with Demeter to transform contact with death into new energy”<sup>52</sup> that celebrates the uniquely feminine ability to conceive life, reflective of Persephone’s return to the mortal realm. The festival as a whole thus appears as a testament to the power of the female; it is women, of course, who ensure the continuity of family lineages, and “it was their unique role as mothers and guarantors of society that was celebrated.”<sup>53</sup>

The passage authored by Lucian is of interest for its detailed unveiling of the Rites’ secret customs, but also for its anomalous allegation that the Thesmophoria was not, as many scholars attest, a festival intended to invoke the goddesses’ human and agricultural fertility powers, but rather a celebration and thanksgiving of her gifts to humankind.<sup>54</sup> The Thesmophoria may have also functioned practically.<sup>55</sup> An ancient writer notes that in some celebrations of the Thesmophoria, the participants slept on *λύγος* - the *vitex castus*;<sup>56</sup> both ancient and modern testament suggest that the plant, along with pennyroyal in the *cyceon*, and the pine used in sacrifice and the construction of temporary structures, have an impact on the endocrine system

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<sup>49</sup> Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, (New York: Schocken, 1975), 77.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Pomeroy (1975), 77 and Pedley (2005), 88 posit that this retrieval occurred on the *Anodos*; Maurizio (2016), 158 believes the *Nesteia* was the day on which the dredgers acted; Eva Stehle (2007), 172 identifies the *Kalligeneia* as the day the remains was heaved from the caves.

<sup>52</sup> Stehle, “Thesmophoria and Eleusinian Mysteries,” 173.

<sup>53</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 88.

<sup>54</sup> O’Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece*, 22.

<sup>55</sup> Lucia Nixon, “The Cults of Demeter and Kore,” in *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*, ed. Richard Hawley, et al., Taylor & Francis Group, (1995. ProQuest Ebook Central), passim; as cited by O’Higgins (2003), 25.

<sup>56</sup> Scholia to Sophocles, *Oedipus Coloneus* (681) and Pliny’s *Natural History* (24.59); as cited by O’Higgins (2003), 24.

with implications for fertility.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the object of the festival may also have been to pass on empowering gynecological knowledge from older generation to younger,<sup>58</sup> in addition to the formerly discussed demonstration of appreciation for divine philanthropy thought to aid in the production of strong male heirs.

The Thesmophoria contributed to better harvests. Further, as a woman's festival, it had "the effect of reforming and strengthening bonds among women, bonds that marriage might otherwise attenuate. Mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, and cousins would find each other at this and other festivals, even if geography and other constraints of married life had made it difficult for them to see each other on a daily basis."<sup>59</sup> The sense of community created by the massing of women at their respective locations was palpable. The women attending, regardless of preexisting status, undeniably shared one thing in common: their experience as a female in ancient Greece. The gathering of women at each celebration and performative wailing demonstrated the scale of Demeter's grief,<sup>60</sup> but also the scale of the female civic identity. The women attendees elected their own officials that served in self-sufficient temporary governments, perhaps a mockery of the larger patriarchal hellenic institutions that ruled Attica.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the festival, as I envision it, functioned outwardly as a religious thanksgiving, but also existed as a means of upholding a distinctly female network of medical and social support.

I believe, following others, that the *Hymn to Demeter* refers to the Thesmophoria during the earlier part of its narrative account of Demeter's visit to Eleusis. Aspects of the cultic ritual are mimetic of Demeter's experience throughout the course of the poem: the attendees begin in

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<sup>57</sup> Nixon (1995), passim; as cited by O'Higgins (2003), 24.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>60</sup> Stehle, "Thesmophoria and Eleusinian Mysteries," 170.

<sup>61</sup> Marcel Detienne, "The Violence of Wellborn Ladies: Women in the Thesmophoria," in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, ed. M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, trans. P. Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 138-9; as cited by O'Higgins (2003), 23.

deep lamentation, then engage in jesting, and conclude through acknowledgement of the expansive and powerful Hellenic female community. Celebration of the Thesmophoria precedes the sixth century epic.<sup>62</sup> Thus the *Hymn* marks a supplement to an existing women's Demeter ritual, when it notes the introduction of the Eleusinian Mysteries, open to both women and men.

The Thesmophoria is the most famous of the Demeter festivals whose participation is, understandably, restricted solely to women. The festival itself served to earn the favor of its patron goddess through the celebration of Demeter's gift of mystic rites, but also to bring together a community of local women to exchange knowledge and discuss shared experiences. The Thesmophoria thus was not concerned with fertility alone, but with fertility "that women controlled and managed."<sup>63</sup> The women's assembly formed a powerful, far reaching, and self-sufficient network of female slaves, prostitutes, young girls, wives, and widows, whose significance was acknowledged by the region's release of prisoners and the suspension of law courts and council meetings.<sup>64</sup> The Thesmophoria, however, was not the only agrarian festival that panegyricized Demeter's gifts to humankind in which aspects of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* are recognizable. The Haloa is of chief interest to academia as well.

### *The Haloa*

The Haloa was another ancient Attic festival in honor of Demeter and Persephone that was hosted annually at Eleusis in the Attic month Poseideon (December/January).<sup>65</sup> The extant epigraphical and literary evidence of the festival is not sparse; in fact, the Haloa is referenced numerous times in the writings of ancient Atticists and Attidographers, nonetheless, we are not

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<sup>62</sup> Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, 19.

<sup>63</sup> O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece*, 25; citing Nixon (1995), passim.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> The month of Poseidon is the sixth month of the Attic calendar and falls in modern winter; see Brumfield (1981), xxi; Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 104.

clear about the festival's origins and program.<sup>66</sup> Scholarly confusion originates at its name, which was incorrectly derived from the verb ἄλωϝ, or threshing floor, by the fourth century B. C. Attidographer Philochoros,<sup>67</sup> and again by the later atticist Pausanias.<sup>68</sup> More recent scholarship has astutely identified the correct etymology for the Haloa: the name of the festival is derived ἄλωή, of which ἄλωϝ is the ionian form, which contemporary scholia and lexicographical evidence suggest was multivalent beyond its identification as threshing floor.<sup>69</sup> There is evidence of ἄλωή being used to mean a threshing floor, but also to indicate a cultivated field, orchard, or vineyard, all of which undergo sowing; the festival has thus been identified as a celebration concerning agricultural fertility, or, the gift of Demeter not celebrated in the Thesmophoria.<sup>70</sup>

Of the numerous ancient accounts that mention the Haloa, an excerpt from Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* is generally accepted as the most worthy of credence. Again, I borrow Lowe's translation:

A festival at Athens of Demeter and Kore and of Dionysus, encompassing mysteries, held among the Athenians at the cutting of the vine and the tasting of the wine previously laid in storage. In these, [*subject missing*] in the form of male privates are set out, which they explain as symbolic of the seed of men's generation, because Dionysus in making the gift of wine provided that stimulating drug as an incitement to sex. He gave it to Icarus, whom the shepherds having also [?] slain through their ignorance of the effects of wine-drinking, and subsequently being driven mad on account first of their blasphemous impulse towards Dionysus, and secondly having remained under the very aspect of shame [?] - an oracle commanded them to desist from their madness by fashioning clay genitals and dedicating them. This done, they were released from the curse, and the present festival commemorates the events. In it, there is also presented a women's *telete* at Eleusis, and many jokes and frivolities are uttered. The women go in alone, and may say what they wish; and indeed they do then say the most disgusting things to one another, and the priestesses approach the women secretly and into their ear urge them to commit adultery, as though it were some holy secret. All the women shout disgusting, blasphemous things at one another, handling the while indecent images of the body, male and female alike. Here there is a great deal of wine laid ready, and tables laden with all

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Citing Felix Jacoby on *Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker* (fr. 83), as cited by Brumfield (1981), 104.

<sup>68</sup> Citing Eustatius on the *Iliad* (722.25); as cited by Brumfield (1981), 104.

<sup>69</sup> Scholia on Oppian, *Haliutica* (I.797) and Scholion to Nicander *Theriaca* (II.4); as cited by Brumfield (1981), 105.

<sup>70</sup> Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 105.

the victuals of earth and sea save those forbidden in the mysteries: I mean pomegranate, apple, domestic fowl, eggs, and among fish the red mullet, erythinus, black-tail, crayfish and dogfish. The Archons prepare the tables and leave them inside for women, while they themselves depart and wait outside to show all visiting foreigners that civilized foods originated with them and were communicated to all mankind by them. Also laid on the table are private parts of both sexes fashion of cake. It is called Haloa after the fruit of Dionysus, for *aloai* are where vines are grown.<sup>71</sup>

The description of the Haloa is also attributed to Arethas of Caesarea, the author of the previously discussed scholion on the Thesmophoria,<sup>72</sup> and while its detail and concurrence with other well-understood Demeter cults is encouraging, there are recognizable biases in the passage that should be considered. Namely, the author or redactor of the scholion was a Christian, the effects of which are visible in his characterization of the women's emphatic utterances as shameful and disgusting.<sup>73</sup> The practice of *aischrologia* occurred in several rites. It was included in the Thesmophoria and the Eleusinian Mysteries discussed later. Greeks of the day would not have been as critical of the "disgusting" and "blasphemous" act.

The scholion makes clear that the Haloa incorporated an extravagant feast into the festival program, though its female participants abstained from specific foods.<sup>74</sup> The reasoning behind the participant's dietary abstention is unclear, though a number of modern scholars posit it may have been explained by the story of Persephone's rape, or may have served as some sort of purificatory enterprise.<sup>75</sup> An additional point of climax within the festival at Eleusis was the transferral of a holy secret from the festival's administration into the ears of the women. The subject of the whisper is similarly unclear, but it likely concerned the rape of Persephone by Hades, perhaps an account of the event revealed only at the festival.<sup>76</sup> The obscenities of the Haloa were unsurprisingly not limited to expletive verbalisms; on par with a number of other

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<sup>71</sup> Lowe (1998), 165-6 cites Hugo Rabe, *Scholia in Lucianum* (Germany: B. G. Teubner, 1906), 279.24-58.

<sup>72</sup> Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 109.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 112.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

festivals in honor of Demeter and Persephone, the Haloa involved the construction and brandishing of cakes in the shape of male and female sexual organs.<sup>77</sup> The pervasion of obscenity in Greek cultic ritual is thought to be an attempt to encourage fertility.<sup>78</sup>

Not much is understood of the role of men as it pertains to the Haloa; in comparison to the Thesmophoria, in which the participation of men was limited to financial support, the Haloa positions men similarly on the periphery of cultic activity. While the female participants engaged in cultic ritual within the walls of the sanctuary at Eleusis, the archons who funded the feast remained outside. There, it is presumed they displayed domestic foods, discoursed about the gift of the harvest with the populace, and may have even engaged in ritual sacrifice.<sup>79</sup>

Additional information regarding the festival can be found within extant inscriptions from 329/8 BC that report the purchase of sixty seven talents of firewood and kindling by Athenian officials for use in the Haloa.<sup>80</sup> The immense quantity of the purchase suggests that fires were constructed for reasons beyond warmth. Like the Thesmophoria, the Haloa may have included a night-long *pannychis*, which would explain the large purchase of firewood.<sup>81</sup> The Haloa is believed to have included a ritual sacrifice, though the specific details are not well understood. Unfortunately, whether the sacrifice was conducted inside the sanctuary or outside the sanctuary's walls, by the Eleusinian *Hierophant*, by the sanctuary's priestesses, or by the archons is unknown.<sup>82</sup>

The Haloa was a uniquely Eleusinian celebration.<sup>83</sup> Unlike the Thesmophoria, the Haloa appears to have been celebrated solely by the *deme* Eleusis; an inscription from the the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 115-6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 116.

*Thesmophorion in Piraeus* “which enumerates all the festivals on which the women gather together,”<sup>84</sup> names only the Thesmophoria, Plerosia, Kalamaia and Skira, and has no mention of the Haloa.<sup>85</sup> The festival’s primarily local celebration should not, however, be interpreted in correlation with its importance to the ancient Greek Attic calendar. Though the chief purpose of the Haloa remains uncertain, its temporal location in the winter months suggest the festival may have been performed to incite agricultural fecundity during a period in which the earth’s conditions rendered the soil mostly infertile.<sup>86</sup>

Should the Thesmophoria be identified as a festival conducted for the purpose of ensuring successful human fertility through the formation of a medical and social support network of women, then the Haloa may be explained as a festival conducted for the purpose of ensuring successful agricultural fertility through the propitiation of involved deities during a period in which the fertility magic of women and deities would prove most useful. Like the Thesmophoria, the cultic activities of the Haloan program demonstrate the value of women and their fertility in ancient Greece; women are called upon during a crucial season of the agricultural cycle to perform cultic activities thought to better the polis’ chances at a favorable harvest. The purpose of Demeter’s most famous cultic ritual, *The Eleusinian Mysteries*, however, is not as straightforward as the festivals already discussed; its aim does not concern fertility, be it human or agricultural, nor does the festival serve to praise the goddess for her divine gifts. The purpose of the Mysteries is far more nuanced.

### *The Mysteries at Eleusis*

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> *Inscriptiones Graecae*<sup>2</sup> (1177); as cited in Brumfield (1981), 116.

<sup>86</sup> Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 122.

The Mysteries at Eleusis were the most important and widespread mystery cultic rituals of Greek antiquity and occurred in the Attic month of Boedromion.<sup>87</sup> The city of Eleusis was located some twenty kilometers northwest of Athens' center at the intersection of the roads from Attica, Boeotia, and the Peloponnesos.<sup>88</sup> Located along one of the region's most popular trading routes, its geopolitical and religious significance was likely recognized by the Athenian polis, which brought Eleusis under its control in the seventh century.<sup>89</sup> Cultic activity at Eleusis, however, preceded its relationship with Athens; the site's earliest votives and Iron Age walls date to the eighth century.<sup>90</sup> Despite Athenian subjugation, Eleusinian families continued to provide the festival with its officials and oversee the maintenance of its sanctuary.<sup>91</sup> Our understanding of the Mysteries is both extensive and incomplete. A curious secrecy shrouds the intimate climax of the festival, whereas our knowledge concerning the cultic activities that precede and succeed its pinnacle is comprehensive. The sources from which information has been gathered include "archaeological evidence of the sanctuary buildings, inscriptions, representations on reliefs and vases, and references in literary sources."<sup>92</sup> The Panhellenic festival was performed annually; its program is discussed below.

By the Classical period, the Mysteries were open to all who spoke Greek, so long as they had not committed murder; the expense of about fifteen drachma (about ten days wages by the fourth century) additionally may have precluded some from participating.<sup>93</sup> At least by the fifth century, a preliminary initiation was required by all first-time participants; the Lesser Mysteries

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<sup>87</sup> The month of Boedromion is the third month of the Attic calendar and falls in modern Autumn; see Brumfield (1981), xxi; Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year*, 194.

<sup>88</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 65.

<sup>89</sup> Maurizio, *Classical Mythology in Context*, 159.

<sup>90</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reconstructing Change*, 133.

<sup>91</sup> Maurizio, *Classical Mythology in Context*, 159.

<sup>92</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 65.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

were held at Agrai (an Athenian suburb on the banks of the Ilissos River)<sup>94</sup> in the month of Anthesterion (February-March).<sup>95</sup> Several ancient sources attest that the Lesser Mysteries were conducted in honor of Persephone,<sup>96</sup> as opposed to Demeter, the benefactor of the Greater Mysteries. The preliminary initiation included a procession, sacrifice, and ritual purification in the Ilissos;<sup>97</sup> at the completion of the Lesser Mysteries, initiates were deemed worthy of witnessing the Greater Mysteries, which would be held the following Boedromion.

Much of the Greater Mysteries remain unclear. Although the festival persisted for nearly two millennia, not a single initiate is known to have left a descriptive record of what occurred inside the worship hall. The comprehensive accounts of christian polemicists are unreliable, despite the likelihood that they learned about the Mysteries. Instead, our understanding has been pieced together from a conglomerate of temporally-varied literary fragments referencing the Mysteries as well as architectural evidence at the site of Eleusis.<sup>98</sup> From the extant information available, modern scholars have concluded that the purpose of the Mysteries seems “to have been highly personal, with emphasis on individual revelation and salvation.”<sup>99</sup> This would have been highly unusual in archaic Greece, as cultic rituals traditionally led to a formal and public change in status.<sup>100</sup>

The Greater Mysteries were divided into two stages of initiation. The first was called *myesis* and concerned the festival’s *mystai* (sg. *mystes*), those who attended the Mysteries for the first time. A *mystes* is traditionally accepted as “One who closes his eyes and/or keeps his mouth

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> The month of Anthesterion is the eight month of the Attic calendar and falls in modern springtime; see Brumfield, (1981), xxi.

<sup>96</sup> Scholia on Aristophanes *Ploutos* (1013); Athenaios *Deipnosophistae* )6.253 D); Hippolytos *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (5.8); as cited by Foley (1994), 66.

<sup>97</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 94.

<sup>98</sup> Maurizio, *Classical Mythology in Context*, 160.

<sup>99</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 93.

<sup>100</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 66.

shut.”<sup>101</sup> The distinction may have referred “both to the ignorance of initiands (those being initiated for the first time), and the duty to keep the details of the ritual secret from others.”<sup>102</sup> The second and final stage at Eleusis was called the *epopteia* and concerned the festival’s *epoptai* (sg. *epoptes*), those who “had already been initiated in past years and returned to witness the rites again.”<sup>103</sup> An *epoptes* is “one who sees”. The titles of the officiants at Eleusis also emphasized the centrality of seeing in the cultic rite. Two Eleusinian families provided the priests who conducted the Mysteries: the *Eumolpidae* provided the chief priest, known as the *Hierophant*, and the *Kerykes* provided the *Dadouchos* and the sacred herald, the *Hierokeryx*.<sup>104</sup> *Hierophant* can be taken both as “he who shows holy things” or “makes them visible.”<sup>105</sup> The holy items to which the title refers were the *hiera*, whatever they may have been.

The preparation required for participation in the Greater Mysteries was not limited to attendance of the Lesser Mysteries. On the thirteenth of the month of Boedromion, Athenian *ephebes* left Athens for Eleusis and returned the next day in the company of *hiera* (holy objects), which were escorted by priests and priestesses of the Eleusinian cult.<sup>106</sup> The *hiera* were brought from Eleusis to the *Eleusinion* in Athens, the Athenian shrine of Demeter and Persephone located at the center of the Athenian polis.<sup>107</sup> No formal record of what objects belonged to the *hiera* exists, though many scholars posit it may have included symbolic sheaves of corn, iconography of the goddesses, tools, or terracotta representations of male and female pudenda.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Joseph Wood, "Recovering Heraclitus: Neglected Religious, Ethical and Political Themes in the Work of a Pre-Socratic Thinker," (2019): 62.

<sup>103</sup> Nancy Evans, "Diotima and Demeter as Mystagogues in Plato's Symposium," *Hypatia* 21, no. 2 (May 1, 2006): 6.

<sup>104</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 66.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reconstructing Change: Ideology and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (London: Routledge, 1997), 144.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>108</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 95.

The Greater Mysteries officially started on the fifteenth of the month at the Stoa Poikile in the Athenian Agora, where initiates gathered to hear the *Hierokyrex* lay out the eligibility for participation in the rites (they should speak Greek and have never committed murder).<sup>109</sup> On the second day of the festival proper, the *mystai* and their *mystagagoi*<sup>110</sup> marched to the sea in the bay of Phaleron, where they washed themselves and a piglet (the latter of which was immediately sacrificed upon the procession's regress to Athens).<sup>111</sup> On the seventeenth, the initiates participated in sacrificial rites to the Demeter and Persephone.<sup>112</sup> The eighteenth of the month Boedromion was reserved for the Epidauria, a festival of the god Aesklepios that required domestic confinement; it is thought that initiates of the Greater Mysteries fasted at this stage.<sup>113</sup>

On the nineteenth of the month, the *mystai* and their accompanying *mystagagoi* departed for Eleusis by way of the Panathenaic Way, the principal thoroughfare of Athens.<sup>114</sup> The fourteen-mile journey was led by priests who escorted a statue of Iakchos<sup>115</sup> and a cart of the *hiera*.<sup>116</sup> It is thought that priests and priestesses "of important Athenian central polis cults took part and walked together with the Aelesinian priesthood, most notably, the priestess of Athena seems to have walked side by side with the priestesses of Demeter and Kore".<sup>117</sup> Behind the priesthood were the initiates, who first engaged in curious ritual activity at their crossing of the Kephisos River, the boundary between Eleusis and Athens. On a bridge above the Kephisos,

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<sup>109</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

<sup>110</sup> First time initiands were assigned a sponsor known as a *mystagos* to direct the initiate throughout the Mysteries; the prevalence of *mystagagoi* suggests the festival was highly anticipated and allowed annual participation; see Foley (1994), 67.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reconstructing Change*, 144.

<sup>113</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> The identity of Iakchos is often disputed by scholars and is traditionally recognized as either a name for Dionysus used only within the context of the Eleusinian Mysteries or as the name of a minor deity associated with Dionysus; see Foley (1994), 67 and Pedley (2005), 94.

<sup>116</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 94.

<sup>117</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reconstructing Change*, 145.

“veiled or masked figures, a man or men and/or a prostitute”<sup>118</sup> approached and hurled insults and obscenities at the *mystai*. The identity of the molesters is unclear, though some scholars believe the responsibility was that of the previous year’s initiates.<sup>119</sup> The procession to Eleusis included additional stops for prayer, sacrifice, singing, and dancing,<sup>120</sup> and reached the sanctuary by the evening of the second day of travel.<sup>121</sup>

Once at Eleusis, the *mystai*, whom had abstained from food and drink since the start of the festival,<sup>122</sup> broke their fast; it was at this time that *Kernoï* (circular dishes holding grain and vegetables) may have been carried in honor of Demeter and Persephone.<sup>123</sup> The night of the twenty-first may have included an all-female *pannychis*, a long nocturnal ceremony or feast that included the familiar practice of *aischrologia*.<sup>124</sup> On the evening of the twenty-second, the *mystai* and the *epoptai* were divided and engaged in two separate ceremonies.<sup>125</sup> The *epoptai* were granted access to the Telesterion, whereas the *mystai* likely gathered outside on the Telesterion’s paved courtyard, where they participated in a dramatic reenactment of the loss and recovery of Persephone.<sup>126</sup> Wandering the sanctuary by torch-light, the first-time initiates searched for Persephone in lamentation, “and in the process the *mystai* would be deeply affected and something of the attraction of Eleusis might be understood.”<sup>127</sup> While the *mystai* mimed Demeter’s experience outside the Telesterion, the benefit of the *epoptai* began within.

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<sup>118</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

<sup>119</sup> Maurizio, *Classical Mythology in Context*, 160.

<sup>120</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

<sup>121</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 94.

<sup>122</sup> Arbesmann 1929 (75ff.) suggests there may have existed two degrees of fasting: partial abstinence, which included abstinence only from certain foods and likely lasted multiple days; and total abstinence, which probably was limited to one day and ended at nightfall; as cited by N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1974), 165.

<sup>123</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Ken Dowden, “Grades in the Eleusinian Mysteries,” *Revue De l’Histoire Des Religions* 197, no. 4 (1980): 425.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

The structure of the Telesterion differed from contemporary Greek temples.<sup>128</sup> The building was constructed to house around three thousand worshippers,<sup>129</sup> it was square in shape, and its interior walls were lined with eight benches intended for use as seating by the initiates.<sup>130</sup> In the building's center stood the Anaktoron, "a rectangular stone construction with a door at the end of one of its longer sides. The throne of the *Hierophant* stood there, and no one but he could pass into the Anaktoron. A fire burned on its top through an opening in the roof."<sup>131</sup> The lack of windows, the Anaktoron, and the forty-two pillars that supported the building probably made visibility difficult,<sup>132</sup> the ignorance of the initiates was likely intentional considering the Mysteries took place in darkness until the internally-illuminated Anaktoron was opened and the *Hierophant* appeared.<sup>133</sup> The specific happenings within the Telesterion remain shrouded in mystery, though as the whole ritual may have been a representation of Persephone's kidnapping and Demeter's subsequent actions, it is reasonable to assume that at some point particular episodes of the myth may have been reenacted in front of the *epoptai*.<sup>134</sup> The ceremony within the Telesterion, however, culminated when the *Hierophant* uncovered the *hiera*, though the identity of the objects are unknown. The final day of the festival "featured public rites and libations in honor of the dead, including rites that incorporated"<sup>135</sup> the overturning of two water vessels, one to the east and the other to the west, while both groups of initiates cried out "rain" to the sky and "conceive" to the earth,<sup>136</sup> likely a reference to Demeter's agricultural connotations. The festival's final day also included grand sacrifices at the sanctuary's altars and *escharai*, as

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<sup>128</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

<sup>129</sup> Dowden, "Grades in the Eleusinian Mysteries," 425.

<sup>130</sup> Maurizio, *Classical Mythology in Context*, 161.

<sup>131</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67-8.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 94.

<sup>135</sup> Nancy A Evans, "Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries," *Numen* 49, no. 3 (2002): 240.

<sup>136</sup> Stehle, "Thesmophoria and Eleusinian Mysteries," 176.

well as celebration and dance.<sup>137</sup> On the twenty-third of Boedromion, the initiates returned to Athens,<sup>138</sup> having secured for themselves a favorable afterlife.<sup>139</sup>

“Blessed is he of men on earth who has beheld them, whereas he that is uninitiated in the rites, or he that has had no part in them, never enjoys a similar lot down in the musty dark when he is dead,” (480-2)<sup>140</sup> says the author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* about the visual spectacle that was offered within the Telesterion.<sup>141</sup> Emphasis of the festival’s optical climax is echoed by other ancient testimonies. The Theban lyric poet Pindar claims that “blessed is he who has seen this and thus goes beneath the earth; he knows the end of life, he knows the beginning given by Zeus.”<sup>142</sup> The ancient Greek rhetorician Isocrates tells us the *mystai* “have better hopes for the end of life and for all eternity.”<sup>143</sup> A Roman orator and Eleusinian initiate by the name of Cicero (106 - 43 B.C.) emphasizes that initiates learned how to approach death with a certain equanimity; the experience taught participants “how to live in joy, and how to die with better hopes.”<sup>144</sup> A Sophoclean fragment says about the initiates: “Thrice blessed are those mortals who have seen these rites and thus enter into Hades: for them alone there is life, for the others all is misery.”<sup>145</sup> These analogous accounts are traditionally taken to refer to the secret activities within the Telesterion at Eleusis, yet they reveal nothing of what the *mystai* witnessed when inside. When considered in conjunction with the language of the festival’s program, worshippers, and

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<sup>137</sup> Evans, “Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries,” 241.

<sup>138</sup> The pilgrimage from Eleusis to Athens following the festival’s conclusion held no ritualized significance; see Evans (2002), 241.

<sup>139</sup> The duration of the Mysteries and the details of its program are ambiguous and often contested in academia; the events described are how I understand the festival’s program.

<sup>140</sup> *Homeric Hymns. Homeric Apocrypha. Lives of Homer*, ed. and trans. Martin L. West, Loeb Classical Library 496 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 71 (480-2); All further citations of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* will be from this edition.

<sup>141</sup> Georgia Petridou, “‘Blessed is He, Who has seen’: The Power of Ritual Viewing and Ritual Framing in Eleusis.” *Helios (Lubbock)* 40, no. 1 (2013): 309.

<sup>142</sup> Pindar’s *Fragment 137a*; as cited by Foley (1994), 70.

<sup>143</sup> Isocrates’ *Panegyricus* (4.28); as cited by Foley (1994), 70.

<sup>144</sup> Cicero’s *De Legibus* (2.13.36); as cited by Foley (1994), 71.

<sup>145</sup> Sophocles *Fragment 837 Radt*; as cited by Foley (1994), 70.

officiants, and our knowledge of the distressing period of darkness that preceded the illumination of the Anaktoron, the importance of ritual viewing in the celebration of the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis becomes undeniable.

Extant literary sources that reference the Mysteries suggest the climactic visual experience from within the Telesterion may have included reenactments of the *Hymn*, the seeing of a sacred marriage, alternations between blazing light and darkness contrived by the use of torches,<sup>146</sup> the use of a gong to signify the presentation of Kore, an announcement concerning the birth of a divine child, and the extinguishing of torches to celebrate Persephone's recovery.<sup>147</sup> The ocularcentric nature of the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis is explicit.

Examining a collage of textual evidence that contain “either allusions or extensive references to the visual aspect of the initiatory experience supports this assertion about the centrality of seeing”<sup>148</sup> in some of the best-known mystery cults of the ancient hellenic world.

Dio Chrysostom (12.33–4), for instance, makes references to ‘mystic spectacles and mystic voices’ (πολλὰ μὲν ὄρωντα μυστικά θεάματα, πολλῶν δὲ ἀκούοντα τοιούτων φωνῶν), and some spectacular ‘alternation between darkness and light’ (σκότους τε καὶ φωτὸς ἐναλλάξ αὐτῶ φαινομένων) as being a major part of the initiatory experience. 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. 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’ (ὀλόκληρα δὲ καὶ ἀτρεμῆ καὶ εὐδαίμονα φάσματα μούμενοί τε καὶ ἐποπτεύοντες ἐν αὐγῇ καθαρᾷ) are also made by Plutarch (fr. 178 = Stobaeus 4.52.49) and Plato (Phdr. 250C), respectively.<sup>149</sup>

The identity of the cults to which these accounts individually refer is unfortunately unknown, but it is clear that the deliberate opposition between vision and blindness was central

<sup>146</sup> Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World*, 95.

<sup>147</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 68-9.

<sup>148</sup> Petridou, “Blessed is He, Who has seen’,” 316.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-317.

to ancient rituals. If we consider the correlation between literal darkness and light with metaphorical darkness and light, the reasoning behind the trope's prevalence in initiatory rights becomes clear.

Light was often analogous with being informed in the context of ancient Greek literature and ritual. There exist numerous myths in which Helios assumes the role of Olympus' tale-bearer, for he sees all that sunlight touches.<sup>150</sup> The juxtaposition between vision and information, or in the following cases, between true blindness and ignorance, is supported by two Roman iconographic artifacts which depict initiation ceremonies traditionally associated with the Mysteries.<sup>151</sup> Both the Lovatelli urn and the Torre Nova sarcophagus feature a neophyte seated on a stool with his head veiled. On each iconographic example, a priestess approaches the initiates from behind with a lighting instrument (on the urn it is a winnowing fan and on the sarcophagus, a large burning torch).<sup>152</sup> The "downturned torches and the winnowing fan are emblematic of a rite of purification,"<sup>153</sup> and was perhaps an accentuation of Demeter's grief, who in the *Hymn* is said to have sat on a stool, veiled in a black garment (195-6).<sup>154</sup> This short-term sightlessness probably was meant to symbolize the initiate's intellectual blindness before his initiation.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, the temporary blindness was meant to provide the initiate with "an essential visual 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."<sup>156</sup> Any vision after a protracted, and perhaps frightening, period of blindness is bound to be viewed as extraordinary,

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<sup>150</sup> In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the story concerning the affair of Aphrodite and Ares, Helios plays a fundamental role as the chief witness of the problematic acts of gods.

<sup>151</sup> Petridou, "Blessed is He, Who has seen'," 320.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Kevin Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries," in *The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B Cosmopoulos (London: Routledge, 2003), 59.

<sup>154</sup> Petridou, "Blessed is He, Who has seen'," 320.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

especially considering the darkness was broken by an intense light from within the Anaktoron that was accompanied by the appearance of the *Hierophant*.<sup>157</sup>

The purpose of the Mysteries is difficult to comprehend, though from the literary, archeological, and epigraphical evidence available, the initiates' transition from ignorance to understanding seems the preeminent focus. It is unlikely that we will ever fully understand what went on inside the Telesterion or what the initiates witnessed that inspired their divine enlightenment, but the role the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* played in the ritual is clearly important. Like the Thesmophoria, parallels between the Mysteries and the *Hymn* pervade the festival's program.

As a whole, the Mysteries reflect the story of Demeter's progression from grief, to pain, to festivity. The initial days of the festival were reserved for preparation and the progression of initiates to the sanctuary at Eleusis. It is on the second day of the Greater Mysteries that the mimetic experience began. Much like the Thesmophoria's fasting and mourning, "blind, physically disoriented wandering puts the individual into the physical and mental state to experience Demeter's distress."<sup>158</sup> The darkness of the Telesterion was broken by the lighting of the Anaktoron, which "invited the initiates to enter and witness a secret revelation involving Demeter's recovery of joy."<sup>159</sup> It is possible that the activity within the Telesterion was followed by song and dance, further representations of Demeter's elation at her reunion with Persephone.<sup>160</sup> Finally, the "feasting and water-pouring that stimulated earth and sky to reproduce, transferred the experience to the agricultural realm."<sup>161</sup> At the end of the festival, the initiates returned to Athens.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Stehle, "Thesmophoria and Eleusinian Mysteries," 176.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 176-7.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 177.

### *Conclusion*

Cults of Demeter and their religious festivals were widespread in ancient Greece. Although the goals of each festival that motivated her propitiation were highly varied, at the center of each celebration were three shared motifs: secrecy, community, and the transformation from ignorance to enlightenment. I suggest that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* includes elements of several Demeter festivals. Further, the poem as a whole exhibits a kind of ritual transition from ignorance and darkness to enlightenment. The *Hymn* assigns agency for these changes primarily to females, although the implications reach across the world, including women and men, male divinities and female divinities. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, many elements of the three festivals are recognizable. The intense transitions between light and darkness at the Mysteries at Eleusis are evocative of Persephone's violent descent into the underworld (16-21) and later of her return (375-386); the elements of fasting at the Thesmophoria and at the Mysteries recall Demeter's fasting upon her arrival at Eleusis (49-50); the *aischrologia*, present in all three festivals, is likely derived from Iambe's jests that temporarily pull Demeter from her grief (202-205). The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the festivals of Demeter that inspired it are closely related.

Among the most prominent motifs emphasized in the festivals of Demeter and in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is the suffering of the female characters and the vigor of their resistance in response. On the Thesmophoria's *Nesteia*, the participants lamented and fasted, but ultimately celebrated the return of Persephone. The *Haloa* gives emphasis to the transformative role women play in the agricultural process and recalls Demeter's withdrawal from her agricultural responsibilities, a response to her exclusion from the betrothal process. The

Eleusinian Mysteries connote the suffering of Demeter and Persephone in the initiates' fasting, the concussive alternations between light and darkness, the searching of the *mystai* for Persephone, and the resistance of women in the reenactment of portions of the *Hymn* within the Telesterion, which may have emphasized imitations of Persephone's rebirth. The poet affords the suffering of the *Hymn's* female characters and their impressive agency considerable emphasis through manipulating images of sight and light.

## Chapter Two: Sight, Light, and Gender

The lives of women in ancient Attica are difficult to understand in their entirety, given very few extant sources are composed by female authors. The men that did write about women, however, often did so in an invective manner. Hesiod, in *Works and Days*, explains how “woman was given to man’s representative Epimetheus (‘Afterthinker’) as punishment for his brother Prometheus’ (‘Forethinker’) crimes against Zeus.”<sup>162</sup> In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, he suggests if marriage were not necessary to produce children for one’s care in old age, man would be better off avoiding “the race of female women” (590)<sup>163</sup> entirely.<sup>164</sup> Euripides makes similar claims in *Medea* and *Hippolytus*.<sup>165</sup> Emphasis in ancient literature is often given to the domestic responsibilities of women, the most prominent of which were child care and household management. The roles of women outside of the house, particularly those concerning agricultural festivals and marriage ceremonies, often went unacknowledged or, at the very least, were misrepresented.

Despite remaining largely invisible from those outside their immediate *oikos*, the influence of women in ancient Attica was far-reaching and unmistakable. This chapter will first explore the extent to which female life was moderated and restricted by men, focussing specifically on the conditions that bound many to a life spent primarily indoors. Then, I will examine the extent to which women were able to navigate and influence Greece’s androcentric

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<sup>162</sup> Lefkowitz, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, 23.

<sup>163</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* (590) from Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library 57 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>164</sup> Lefkowitz, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, 27.

<sup>165</sup> In *Medea*, Jason suggests, “Mortals ought to beget children from some other source, and there should be no female sex;” see Euripides, *Medea* (573-5) from Euripides, *Cyclops. Alceste. Medea*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 12 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 333. In *Hippolytus*, Hippolytus addresses Zeus, “If you wished to propagate the human race, it was not from women that you should have provided this. Rather, men should put down in the temples either bronze or iron or a mass of gold and buy offspring, each for a price appropriate to his means, and then dwell in houses free from the female sex;” see Euripides, *Hippolytus* (618-24) from Euripides, *Children of Heracles. Hippolytus. Andromache. Hecuba*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library 484 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 185.

society, and the role light played in that agency. Finally, I will look at the uses of light in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and discuss how its manipulation is suggestive of women's agency and of Demeter's progression from ignorance to enlightenment.

### *The Domestic Lives of Women*

The sixth century hymn came into being at a time of immense social change in Attica, particularly for women. In 594 B.C. the Athenian lawmaker Solon instituted a series of political and social reforms that impacted greatly the lives of women in Athens.<sup>166</sup> In response to a period of social unrest, largely a result of the aristocracy's hold on political power and landholding practices,<sup>167</sup> the statesman set in motion extensive legislative changes, many of which concerned the lives of Athenian citizen women. Solon "regulated the walks, the feasts, the mourning, the trousseaux, and the food and drink of citizen women."<sup>168</sup> Records of legislation aimed at curtailing the popularity of ostentatious funerals, many of which employed large numbers of women to performatively mourn the deceased, exist in a number of Greek city-states within the region. The legislator restricted self-sale and the sale of children into slavery, except for the sale of unmarried women who had lost their virginity.<sup>169</sup>

The changes instituted under Solon were meant to placate the region's strife.<sup>170</sup> Women's roles in funerals - a potential source of inter-familial competition and friction among elites - were limited. Solon's legislation overall contributed to a larger shared public space for men, with a

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<sup>166</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 57.

<sup>167</sup> Susan Lape, "Solon and the Institution of the 'democratic' Family Form." *The Classical Journal (Classical Association of the Middle West and South)* 98, no. 2 (2002): 117.

<sup>168</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 57.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Pomeroy attests "women are a perennial source of friction among men. Solon's solution to this problem was to keep them out of sight and to limit their influence" in the affairs of men. The new legislation institutionalized the women into two classes: respectable women and whores. Women of the latter distinction were generally free to move through cities as they pleased, at least in Athens; respectable or citizen women were not afforded the same privileges; see Pomeroy (1975), 57.

proportionately smaller private space for “respectable” women. Public notoriety thus became increasingly risky for elite women.

The lives of “respectable” women were kept private by Solon’s legislation as well as by the roles and spaces they occupied. The business of men operated in public spaces, such as gymnasiums, marketplaces, or law courts,<sup>171</sup> whereas women were largely domestically anchored by the responsibilities of child care and household management. The use of slave labor in the households of the wealthy rendered the women of the home even more secluded than their impoverished counterparts, who had to travel outside of the household to fetch water, do laundry, and borrow utensils.<sup>172</sup> There were, however, occasions on which women were encouraged to depart from the house; the fundamental role women played in the funerals and festivals of Attica was enough impetus to warrant a periodic abandonment of their domestic responsibilities, discussed later in detail. Furthermore, rural households comprised no fewer than two-thirds of the ancient population; the overwhelming majority of these households employed the labor of their female members in the fields and in the home.<sup>173</sup> Officially, however, women were considered sequestered from the outside world; even in the *oikos*, women were often kept secluded from the public eye. The invisibility of women in public life, however, did not correlate to a lack of autonomy. To understand the important role women played in public life, we can look to the various ways in which women of ancient Attica manipulated lighting devices.

### *Vision and Light in the Lives of Women*

A detailed account of traditional living arrangements in classical Greece comes from a passage from a law speech given by the fourth century Attic orator, Lysias. The speech is written

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>173</sup> Scheidel, “The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome,” 207.

on behalf of Euphiletus, who stands accused for the murder of a man he caught having an affair with his wife in his own home.

I must tell you, sirs (for I am obliged to give you these particulars), my dwelling is on two floors, the upper being equal in space to the lower, with the women's quarters above and the men's below. When the child was born to us, its mother suckled it; and in order that, each time that it had to be washed, she might avoid the risk of descending by the stairs, I used to live above, and the women below. By this time it had become such an habitual thing that my wife would often leave me and go down to sleep with the child, so as to be able to give it the breast and stop its crying. Things went on in this way for a long time, and I never suspected, but was simpleminded enough to suppose that my own was the chastest wife in the city. Time went on, sirs; I came home unexpectedly from the country, and after dinner the child started crying in a peevish way, as the servant-girl was annoying it on purpose to make it so behave; for the man was in the house,—I learnt it all later. So I bade my wife go and give the child her breast, to stop its howling. At first she refused, as though delighted to see me home again after so long; but when I began to be angry and bade her go,—“Yes, so that you,” she said, “may have a try here at the little maid. Once before, too, when you were drunk, you pulled her about.” At that I laughed, while she got up, went out of the room, and closed the door, feigning to make fun, and she turned the key in the lock. I, without giving a thought to the matter, or having any suspicion, went to sleep in all content after my return from the country. Towards daytime she came and opened the door. I asked why the doors made a noise in the night; she told me that the child's lamp had gone out, and she had lit it again at our neighbour's. I was silent and believed it was so. But it struck me, sirs, that she had powdered her face, as though her brother had died not thirty days before; even so, however, I made no remark on the fact, but left the house in silence.<sup>174</sup>

*On the Murder of Eratosthenes*, as a whole, is of interest primarily for its intimate illustration of the domestic lives of middle class Athenian women. The speech contributes largely to our understanding of Athenian domestic arrangements; however, passages nine through fourteen are particularly educative of the domestic restraints imposed on contemporary middle class Athenian wives. The domestic responsibilities of Euphiletus' wife are given emphasis in the text through Euphiletus' frequent references of his trips to the countryside while his wife remained at home with their child.

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<sup>174</sup> Lysias. *Lysias*. trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library 244 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 10-16.

The use of lamps and torches inside the *oikos* was commonplace, moreover, necessary for the fulfilment of certain domestic activities. Domestic female activity may not have been restricted solely to the *gynaikeion*, which was often located on the upper-floor of the classical Greek house, as attested to in the law speech (8).<sup>175</sup> Women's duties likely required temporary occupancy of the *oikos*' main-space, in which natural light may have been limited. Considering these realities, the use of lighting devices during the day was probably necessary.<sup>176</sup>

The verb *ψιμωθιόω* [to paint with white lead] symbolizes another element reflective of a woman's domestic ties. *Ψιμόθιον* [white lead] "was a cosmetic used to give women's skin a desirable whiteness"<sup>177</sup> reflective of a life primarily indoors. The use of white paint as a facial whitener is not often contested and is referenced in several other ancient texts, including Eubulus' *The Wreath-sellers* and Plutarch's *The Life of Alcibiades*.<sup>178</sup> White paint was also conventionally used to depict women's skin in contemporary vase paintings.<sup>179</sup>

The dark and squalid condition of women's quarters within Greek households suggests the analogy of light with privilege and freedom. Perhaps the earliest available iconographical evidence depicting the use of lamps inside the *oikos*, a red-figured chous from the third quarter of the fifth century, supports the associations of light and mobility.<sup>180</sup> The vase depicts a woman inside an *oikos* approaching its door with a lamp in her right hand; on the outside of the house, a man, presumably her husband, stands in loose-fitting clothing holding an extinguished torch and

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>176</sup> Eva Parisinou, "Lighting dark rooms: Some thoughts about the use of space in early greek domestic architecture," *British School at Athens Studies* 15, (2007): 20.

<sup>177</sup> Lysias and Ruth Scodel, *Lysias Orations I, III* (Bryn Mawr, Penn: Thomas Library, Bryn Mawr College, 1986), 4.

<sup>178</sup> Aynur-Michele-Sara Karatas, "Greek Cults and Their Sacred Laws on Dress-code: The Laws of Greek Sanctuaries for Hairstyles, Jewelry, Make-up, Belts, and Shoes," *The Classical World* 113, no. 2 (2020): 163.

<sup>179</sup> Frank Bigelow Tarbell, *A History of Greek Art, with an Introductory Chapter on Art in Egypt and Mesopotamia* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1896), 270.

<sup>180</sup> Parisinou, "Lighting dark rooms," 20.

lyre. The lighting devices may be understood as emphatic markings of the social roles of the respective sexes: “the torch of the man, along with his nudity and lyre, represents the outside ‘brighter’ world of men...the lamp combined with the woman’s gesture and the enclosed space of the *oikos* (marked by the door, the doorstep, and the roof-tiles), allude to her dependent and obedient status.”<sup>181</sup> The torch being extinguished emphasizes the privilege of men: vision in the absence of artificial light; the woman being inside the household emphasizes the woman’s domestic responsibilities. The iconography on a mid-fourth century Sicilian calyx-krater depicts a similar relationship between light and domestic women. The painted vase shows Tydeus and Polyneikes engaged in a battle in front of the Argive palace; to the left of the warriors, two daughters of Adastos, Argeia and Diepyle, are pictured at the interior boundaries of the *oikos* bearing a one-nozzled clay lamp.<sup>182</sup> The vase, like its fifth century predecessor, depicts women confined to their domestic space and portrays men as free. Light and the domestic lives of women are intertwined.

The use of artificial light too in the marriage arrangements of classical Greece was commonplace; beyond their practical function to aid in vision, torches were central to the ceremony. In every phase of ancient Greek wedding rituals, torch-bearing females were represented.<sup>183</sup> In a prenuptial context, torches functioned as a purificatory device in a similar manner that bathing did;<sup>184</sup> the pure flame of the torch was evocative of the “pure” virginity expected of a young bride. During the procession from the home of the bride’s father to that of the bride’s groom, two torches were held by the mother of the bride.<sup>185</sup> The mother, referred to as the *dadouchousa*, would have traditionally led or followed the procession and have been met at

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 31.

the house of the groom by the groom's mother, who received the flame of the *dadouchousa's* torches (either literally taking the torches of the *dadouchousa* or figuratively continuing the movement of the flame through use of her own torches) and would subsequently lead the couple to the bridal bed. The role of the *dadouchousa* and the mother of the groom represent the symbolic transfer of the bride from one household to another; the transfer of fire symbolized the unification of the two families. The movement of the flame from one hearth to another afforded the families a representative glance into the compatibility and future success of the couple; ergo, it becomes clear why marriages in which torches were absent were considered problematic.

While light-producing features could suggest the interior space as domestic imprisonment, in cases of marriage ceremonies, the torch is also symbolic of illumination and authority. The bearing of two torches by the *dadouchousa* and the mother of the groom is symbolic of the public acknowledgement of the bridal transition; the women's visible role in the arrangement is both figuratively and literally illuminated by the torches. The bearing of torches places the women in a position of controlled surveyance: the *dadouchousa* and mother of the groom are empowered by the unique ability to bring light into darkness. In successful marriage ceremonies, torches functioned as symbols of authority and oversight: the ingenious cultural response to darkness.

### *Vision and Light in the Hymn*

Light and its absence are emphasized equally in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the festivals that shaped the poem, the Thesmophoria, the Haloa, and the Eleusinian Mysteries. The language of the *Hymn* itself is particularly emphatic of the centrality of vision (and hearing) as a means of enlightenment: the verbs ἀκούω [to hear] , εἶδον [to see], and ὁράω [to look] appear

often. The linguistic implications of the *Hymn* are saved for the final chapter of this thesis. The most prominent visual experience in the *Hymn* begins at Eleusis.

Following Persephone's abduction, Demeter is said to have turned away from Olympus in grief and frustration and traveled the communities of men as a crone (101). Her voyage comes to an end, however, when the four daughters of Celeus the Eleusinid discover Demeter seated on the ground in the shade of an olive tree. Two details appear noteworthy: that Demeter is seated in shade and that the daughters of the king are unable to truly see Demeter. The author of the *Hymn* states "[the daughters] did not recognize [Demeter], for gods are hard for mortals to see" (110-111).<sup>186</sup> When interacting with mortals, Greek gods and goddesses rarely assume their true divine form, yet when they do, they almost always appear as light or fire.<sup>187</sup> In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter appears to Metaneira in her truest divine form: "a radiance shone afar from her immortal body; flaxen locks bestrewed her shoulders, and the sturdy house was filled with a brilliance as of lightning as she went out through the hall" (278-81).<sup>188</sup> The goddess' detachment from her divine identity, as I see it, is emphasized by Demeter's sojourn in the shade of an olive tree: light is absent from her body and from the space she occupies.

Much of the *Hymn* is concerned with dark spaces and the people who occupy them. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the worlds of women in ancient Greece were often dark. The absence of natural light in the spaces women inhabited, however, did not necessarily mean that the interior lighting connoted inferior status. Following Demeter's illumination in the halls of Celeus' home, she again withdraws her light from the outside world and hides it within her temple until the issue of Persephone's abduction is resolved. Demeter's manipulation of light

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<sup>186</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 110-11.

<sup>187</sup> In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Zeus appears to Semele as a "fire that none can escape."; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Volume I: Books 1-8, Trans. Frank Justus Miller. Rev. by G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 298-9.

<sup>188</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 278-81; Demeter's illumination is likely the aition for the illumination of the Anaktoron in the Mysteries.

and vision exemplifies the aforementioned equation of light, or the manipulation of light, with authority and oversight.

Demeter similarly engages artificial light to resist Zeus' patriarchal order when she wanders the Earth with Hekate in search of Persephone. The two goddesses are able to illuminate the world of men through their constant bearing of torches for nine days. Furthermore, the torches are used to discover what has been withheld from Demeter by Zeus and Hades. Just as women bearing lighting devices have the capacity to surveil and control certain types of knowledge, and illuminate what is hidden from many, Demeter uses light to move past ignorance into understanding. Again, the *Hymn's* connection to the Mysteries is clear.

### *Conclusion*

Although women of ancient Attica spent much of their lives indoors, anchored by the responsibilities of child care and house management, their withdrawal from the public eye did not necessarily connote a lack of agency. The influence of women in ancient Greek society was far-reaching and not to be ignored. Of considerable importance was the role of the bride's mother in ancient marriage ceremonies, in which her bearing of torches signified her compliance and approval. The use of light in the lives of women was of particular significance. In the domestic sphere, the use of lamps and torches was necessary for the fulfilment of women's duties. In marriage, too, the transfer of torches from the bride's mother to the mother of the groom was central to the arrangement's legitimacy. In ancient visual culture and extant literature, the manipulation of light and vision was often used to suggest agency, or its absence. In the two vases mentioned above, the lighting devices in the hands of the women give emphasis to the

privileges of men, but also to women's ability to navigate the androcentric space. Like in marriage ceremonies, the lamps and torches put women in a position of controlled surveyance.

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, light (and its absence) function similarly. The manipulation of light was consistently referenced throughout the course of the narrative, but is of particular importance in Demeter's torch-lit search for Persephone. The goddess engages artificial light to try and actively undo Zeus' plan, and in the process, moves from ignorance to understanding through her interaction with Helios. Hekate and Demeter carry torches in their search for Persephone. Bearing a light in this way and moving it purposefully through space signals their resistance to the machinations of Zeus and Hades. It also evokes crucial roles and gestures performed by women in the home, and in the transition ritual of marriage.

### Chapter Three: Competing Understandings of the Hymn

The voices of ordinary people, of women, and of children are largely unrepresented in the written history of ancient Greece. In common with the histories of many places, the extant literary record of Greece is primarily a record of male experiences, written by men, for a male audience.<sup>189</sup> Though male-generated texts were often highly critical of women, their invective nature did not render them useless in the effort to reconstruct an accurate picture of ancient feminine life. Especially critical texts sometimes “reflect anxieties and concerns experienced by at least some Greek males about the nature of their society.”<sup>190</sup> For example, consistent representations of unmarried women as dangerous in Greek mythology may suggest men of the time perceived autonomous women as a threat to society. Identifying patterns that recur in myth and other literary works, also known as leitmotifs, can often assist in the reconstruction of incomplete narratives.

Although the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is almost surely a male-generated text, the poet affords the female experience a surprising prepotency within the *Hymn* through recurring emphasis of intense female suffering. Through this device, the poet reveals aspects of female life that are difficult to recognize at first glance, namely the significance of a mother’s role in her daughter’s betrothal process and the apprehensive attitudes of young brides toward marriage. In this chapter, I first explain traditional marriages of custom in ancient Attica. Second, I will explore the aspects of the *Hymn* that give emphasis to the voices and experiences of the female characters. Finally, I will look at the aspects of the *Hymn* that align with an androcentric understanding of Persephone’s arrangement, and in doing so, demonstrate why a gynocentric understanding is more accurate.

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<sup>189</sup> Nanci DeBlois, “Rape, Marriage, Or Death? Gender Perspectives in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter,” *Philological Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (1997): 245.

<sup>190</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, xi.

### *Marriage in Ancient Greece*

In order to understand the perversity of the Hymn's version of marriage, I wish briefly to say something about routine marriage arrangements in Attica. In the lives of ancient Greek citizen women, marriage and motherhood were considered central. "The death of a young girl often elicited lamentations specifically over her failure to fulfill her intended role as a wife."<sup>191</sup> The purpose of marriage was childbirth, and the birth of a male was preferred to that of a female, for it ensured a legal heir to the father's estate.<sup>192</sup> This was particularly true under Pericles, who in 450/451 B.C. restricted Athenian citizenship to those whose parents, both mother and father, were born within the polis.<sup>193</sup> Then and always, the responsibility of women was primarily to bear a male child.

Girls of ancient Attica were married at a young age, traditionally fourteen or fifteen, to men who may have been in their thirties.<sup>194</sup> The necessity of the bride's virginity (unless divorced or widowed), "coupled with the ancient belief that young girls were lustful, made an early marriage desirable."<sup>195</sup> Hesiod in the eighth century *Works and Days* offers insight into the considerations of Greek men when choosing a wife.

The woman should have reached puberty four years earlier, and in the fifth she should marry. Marry a virgin so that you can teach her good habits: and above all marry one who lives near to you, after you have looked around carefully in all directions, lest your marriage cause your neighbors merriment. For a man acquires nothing better than a good wife, but nothing more chilling than a bad one, a dinner-ambusher, one who sings her husband without a torch, powerful though he be, and gives him over to a raw old age.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 62.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>193</sup> Edwin Carawan, "Pericles the Younger and the Citizenship Law," *The Classical Journal* 103, no. 4 (2008): 383.

<sup>194</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* (5) from Xenophon *Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology*, Trans. E. C. Marchant, O. J. Todd. Rev. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library 168 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 441.

<sup>195</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 64.

<sup>196</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days* (698-705) from Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*.

The betrothal agreement was usually conducted between the natural or legal guardian of the bride, typically the father, and the intended groom; it is likely that the mother of the bride may have been involved in conversation at some point during the marriage process, though her consultation, nor that of the bride, was not legally required.<sup>197</sup> Although marriages rooted in mutual affection had a place in Greek mythology,<sup>198</sup> nuptial agreements of the ancient Hellenic world were often arranged with strategic considerations, namely the consolidation of “power, property, and social ties.”<sup>199</sup> From birth until death, the lives of women were strictly overseen and managed by men. The deprivation of autonomy experienced by ancient Greek women was inescapable and carried out by men.

Citizen women were perpetually under the guardianship of a man, usually the father or, if he were dead, the male next of kin. Upon marriage a woman passed into the guardianship of her husband in most matters, with the important limitation that her father, or whoever else had given her hand in marriage, retained the right to dissolve the marriage. If the husband predeceased the wife, the guardianship of her dowry and perhaps of her person passed to her sons if they were of age, or to their guardians. If a widow had no children, she would return to the power of her original guardian or his heirs. A widow was protected by the archon, who could prosecute offenders in her behalf.<sup>200</sup>

It was the obligation of the bride’s guardian to arrange an appropriate marriage for his daughter; this included the provision to the groom of “a dowry commensurate with the father’s economic status”<sup>201</sup> to be used for the lifelong support of his bride. Should the marriage be later dissolved,<sup>202</sup> the dowry was to be returned to the guardian of the groom’s ex-wife.<sup>203</sup> The

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<sup>197</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 63-4.

<sup>198</sup> There are several stories in the ancient Greek mythological canon that feature marriages or relationships that appear a consequence of mutual love and affection between the bride and groom. These include the marriages of Dionysus and Ariadne, of Odysseus and Penelope, and of Pyramus and Thisbe; see Maurizio (2016), 207-8.

<sup>199</sup> Maurizio, *Classical Mythology in Context*, 208.

<sup>200</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 62.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Divorce in ancient Greece “was easily attainable, either by mutual consent or through action on behalf of either one of the spouses, and there was no stigma attached.” Of course, however, when a divorce was initiated by the wife, her father or another male citizen was required to bring the case before the archon; see Pomeroy (1975), 64.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

influential role of men in Greek nuptial engagements is unmistakable; the role of women in the same processes, however, is significantly more nuanced.

It was noted earlier that the inclusion of the mother in the considerations that accompanied nuptial arrangements was not visible, nor legally mandated. This is for the most part true, with the only apparent exception being the nuptial procession that traditionally preceded the marriage ceremony. In the celebratory parade from the home of the bride's father to that of the groom, the mother's role was both obvious and customary (on which see *Vision and Light in the Lives of Women*). The ritual's inclusion of the bride and groom's mothers in the nuptial process was visible affirmation of the women's consideration and consent.

The transition from maidenhood to marriage was undoubtedly complex. A young girl "had every reason to anticipate her wedding with a mixture of fear and not joy. She had been raised to anticipate marriage as the fulfillment of her existence,"<sup>204</sup> and expectedly may have had apprehensions about leaving her natal home and entering that of her husband, who may have been a stranger twice her age, and "for whose sake [she] must undertake the pains and risks of childbirth."<sup>205</sup> To understand the perspective of women concerning marriage to the best extent extant sources allow, we turn to Greek drama.

Though Classical tragedies and comedies are a somewhat problematic source for understanding the experience of women in Greece, as "the plays may simply represent what male poets (and, on stage, male actors) imagined about women,"<sup>206</sup> drama likely reflected contemporary "social and historical issues and tensions, even if in a somewhat indirect

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<sup>204</sup> Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 130.

<sup>205</sup> Sarah B. Pomeroy et al., *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1995;1994), 69.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

fashion.<sup>207</sup> Procne in Sophocles' *Tereus* speaks of the trauma that accompanies a girl's departure from maidenhood into womanhood.

In childhood in our father's house we live  
the happiest life, I think, of all mankind;  
for folly always rears children in happiness.  
But when we have understanding  
and have come to youthful vigour,  
we are pushed out and sold,  
away from our paternal gods and from our parents,  
some to foreign husbands, some to barbarians,  
some to joyless homes, and  
some to homes that are opprobrious.  
And this, once a single night has yoked us,  
we must approve and consider to be happiness.<sup>208</sup>

Should the bride have been so lucky to enjoy her groom, even then, a woman's life was subject to stress and anxiety. While the lives of women were primarily concerned with the happenings inside the home, men were concerned with what happened outside it.<sup>209</sup> During wartime, which frequented the ancient Hellenic city-states, men may have been absent from their homes for extended periods of time. Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*<sup>210</sup> and Deianeira in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* both illustrate the anxiety and tortures women experienced when their husbands were away at war. Deianeira's account is particularly illustrative.

For I clove to Heracles as the bride he had won, and always nourish one fear after another, in my anxiety for him; night brings trouble, and the succeeding night pushes it away. We had, indeed, children, whom he, like a farmer who has taken over a remote piece of ploughland, regards only when he sows and when he reaps. Such is the life that was always sending my husband home or away from home in servitude to a certain man.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Sophocles, *Fragments*, ed. trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 483 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), Frag. 583.

<sup>209</sup> Pomeroy et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 71.

<sup>210</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (855-913) from Aeschylus, *Oresteia: Agamemnon. Libation-Bearers. Eumenides*, ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library 146 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>211</sup> Sophocles, *Women of Trachis* (27-35) from Sophocles. *Antigone. The Women of Trachis. Philoctetes. Oedipus at Colonus*. ed. and trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 21 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

In stark contrast, there were, of course, depictions in drama of those who reveled in “subordinating themselves to their husband’s needs and wishes, as popular culture thought they should.”<sup>212</sup> The decision of Alcestis to die on behalf of Admetus, her husband, in Euripides’ *Alcestis* is recalled by a serving-woman; Alcestis’ dignity is professed several times.

Most assuredly the noblest! Who will say she is not? What should we call a woman so preeminent? How could any woman give greater proof that she gives her husband the place of honor than by being willing to die for him? This, of course, the whole city knows, but what she did within the house you will be amazed to hear. When she learned that the fated day had come, she bathed her fair skin in fresh water, and taking her finery from its chambers of cedar she dressed herself becomingly. And standing in front of the hearth goddess’ altar she made her prayer: “Lady, since I am going now beneath the earth, as my last entreaty I ask you to care for my orphaned children: marry my son to a loving wife and give my daughter a noble husband. And may they not, like their mother, perish untimely but live out their lives in happiness in their ancestral land!” . . . Then she entered the bedchamber. Here at last she wept and said, “O marriage bed, where I yielded up my virginity to my husband, the man for whose sake I am now dying, farewell! I do not hate you, although it is you alone that cause my death: it is because I shrank from abandoning you and my husband that I now die. Some other woman will possess you, luckier, perhaps, than I but not more virtuous.”<sup>213</sup>

Such passages make clear that there were two understandings of the nuptial process that dominated the ancient Greek narrative. On one hand, it appears many women approached their arranged marriage in fear and trepidation. A girl arrived as a relative stranger at her husband’s house, and might regard her first childbirth experience with apprehension.<sup>214</sup> On the other, there were also women who approached the fulfilment of their existence with excitement and vigor. The ambiguity of marriage in ancient Greek society explains why the abduction of Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is contested by the *Hymn’s* characters.

### *The Female Perspective*

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<sup>212</sup> Pomeroy et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 72

<sup>213</sup> Euripides, *Alcestis* (152-182) from Euripides, *Cyclops. Alcestis. Medea*, 171-173.

<sup>214</sup> Pomeroy et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 69.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* stands out among the other Homeric epics for its privileging of the female experience.<sup>215</sup> The *Hymn's* major characters “are female and are sympathetic and we, the reader, follow these female characters through the course of the hymn.”<sup>216</sup> The author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* emphasizes the suffering of both Persephone and Demeter. The images and language of their suffering (the latter of which is explored in depth in the final chapter of this thesis) are not evocative of a marriage according to custom, but rather of a violent abduction.

Persephone laments her seizure audibly and consistently through the course of the *Hymn*. In the first 39 lines of the poem, her anguish is repeatedly professed.<sup>217</sup> Persephone is described as being forcefully apprehended against her will at lines 19 and 30; later, at lines 20-21, Persephone lets forth a cry of indignant remonstrance.<sup>218</sup> These behaviors, in addition to the nature of Hades' seizure, described in line 17 as sudden and violent, are “not consistent with the usual picture of a wedding, even one pre-arranged without the bride's knowledge.”<sup>219</sup>

Persephone experienced marriage as a frightening abduction. Moreover, as the groom was Hades, this seizure was akin to death. Parallels between bridal and funerary imagery appear often in Greek art and literature.<sup>220</sup> In the former, deceased women were frequently depicted veiled or dressed in wedding attire.<sup>221</sup> Eventually, dead women as “brides of Hades” became a common trope in Greek literature and funerary imagery.<sup>222</sup> The recurring comparisons of the experiences of the dead and of young brides probably somewhat accurately reflected

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<sup>215</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 80.

<sup>216</sup> Tracy Ann Spencer, “The Chthonic Mother and Daughter: The Role of the Goddess in Challenging the Ouranic God in the ‘Homeric Hymn to Demeter,’” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (2003): 32.

<sup>217</sup> DeBloois, “Rape, Marriage, Or Death?,” 245.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, 132.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

contemporary attitudes toward the experience of women in Attica. Much in the same way that the deceased are unable to speak or move, women who marry lose their voice and much of their autonomy, however limited it may have been. Furthermore, the transition of the deceased passing into the underworld from the world of mortals is a tenet of Greek religion.<sup>223</sup> The dead's departure from the mortal realm resembles the nuptial procession in which the bride is cut off from her guardian's house and enters into the house of her groom. An examination of the *Hymn's* events makes clear the author's symbolic equation of Persephone's marriage to that of her death.

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone's marriage to Hades is equated to her symbolic death. Persephone's marriage to Hades violently rips her from the world of the living and "places her in a world which is inhabited only by [Hades] and the Dead, and which is inaccessible to her goddess mother."<sup>224</sup> In the *Hymn*, Persephone's voice is last heard at her descent to the underworld, during which she wails and screams (21); Persephone loses a means of communication with the mortal realm just as the Dead do upon their passing. Her disconnection is particularly significant considering divinities are rarely considered inaccessible in the manner Persephone is from Demeter; "though Persephone is immortal, she is as lost to her mother as any of the pitiful dead below. Demeter, like other divinities who lose their mortal children, is thus able to comprehend the pain suffered by humans who lose a child to death."<sup>225</sup> In the *Hymn*, Demeter's grief and recurring portrayal in mourning further attest to Persephone's abduction as a representation of her symbolic death.

When the author of the *Hymn* describes Demeter's reaction to her daughter's abduction, the goddess looks and behaves as a woman in mourning. In ancient Greek visual iconography,

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<sup>223</sup> In archaic poetry, the underworld was often referred to as "the bridal chamber of the earth." See Keuls (1985), 132.

<sup>224</sup> DeBloois, "Rape, Marriage, Or Death?," 245.

<sup>225</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 89.

women “mourn openly and emotionally, tearing their hair and cheeks with both hands,”<sup>226</sup> their arms frequently upraised in an expressive act of sorrow and valediction. Often dressed or veiled in black, funerary women were frequently represented holding torches, a staple of Greek funerary traditions.

When Demeter hears Persephone’s scream, the author says “a sharp pain seized her heart, and the veil over her ambrosial locks tore apart under her hands”<sup>227</sup> (41-42). Her gesticulation resembles that of Attic mourners on the famous Dipylon Amphora in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.<sup>228</sup> Next, Demeter is said to throw “a dark covering over her shoulders”<sup>229</sup> (42). Her portrayal in dark dress is attested six more times within the Hymn: “the dark robe fluttered about”<sup>230</sup> (182-83); “holding her veil before her face”<sup>231</sup> (197); “She found dark-robed Demeter in her temple”<sup>232</sup> (319); “Go, Persephone, to your dark-robed mother’s side”<sup>233</sup> (360); “Demeter of the dark robe”<sup>234</sup> (374); “to bring dark-robed Demeter...”<sup>235</sup> (442). When the poet describes Demeter’s sojourn at Eleusis, it is mentioned that the goddess has abstained from eating, drinking and bathing: “she did not once taste ambrosia and the nectar sweet to drink, nor did she splash her body with washing water”<sup>236</sup> (49-50). Finally, Demeter is described wandering the earth with a torch in hand: “For nine days then did the lady Deo roam

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<sup>226</sup> H. A. Shapiro, “The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 95, no. 4 (1991): 634.

<sup>227</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 41-2.

<sup>228</sup> DeBloois, “Rape, Marriage, Or Death?,” 245.

<sup>229</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 42.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-3.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

the Earth with burning torches in her hands”<sup>237</sup> (47-48). All these behaviors are those of women in mourning.<sup>238</sup>

The vocalized suffering and anguish of both Persephone and Demeter make clear their opinions regarding the former’s abduction. Though a bride’s wedding day may not have been approached with exuberance, the extent of Demeter’s grief emphasizes the unconventionality of the wedding, as does Demeter’s absence from the nuptial procession and other related rituals.<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, Persephone appears indignant in the house of Hades by her initial refusal to eat a pomegranate; others consider her abstention from food a rejection of Attic nuptial tradition: “in Attic marriage the bridal couple was showered with dried fruits and nuts (*katachysmata*) and presented with a basket of bread; the bride ate a quince (and probably a wedding cake made from sesame seeds) on arrival at the groom’s house; the bride’s acceptance of food (*trophe*) was a form of acknowledging the groom’s authority (*kyreia*) over her.”<sup>240</sup> Persephone at first abstains from eating, which may be another representation of her refusal to acknowledge Hades as her husband. The question of the marriage’s consummation is unknown, though Persephone is described in the bed of Hades as “full of resistance from longing for her mother”<sup>241</sup> (342). Finally, in normal divine marriages of Greek mythological canon, the female divinities, unlike their mortal counterparts, maintain their autonomy. The marriage between Hades and Persephone is unique in that Persephone is kept apart from Demeter, and from the rest of the world; her arrangement with Hades did not reflect a standard divine marriage.

In examining the language and behavior of the Hymn’s women, it is evident that, through their eyes, the violent seizure was more representative of an abduction than of a traditional

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 47-8.

<sup>238</sup> DeBloois, “Rape, Marriage, Or Death?,” 245.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 108.

<sup>241</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 342.

marriage. There are, however, aspects of the arrangement that appear consistent with Attic marriages according to custom. The men of the *Hymn* chose to emphasize these aspects, and hence understand the abduction as a just marriage.

### *The Male Perspective*

The perspective of the *Hymn*'s male characters oppose that of the *Hymn*'s women. Helios, Hermes, Hades and Zeus "use marriage vocabulary and images"<sup>242</sup> when referring to Persephone's seizure, and focus on the benefits of marriage rather than on the violence done to her.<sup>243</sup> First and foremost, the abduction of Persephone is arranged by Zeus in conversation with Hades; the poem references Zeus' involvement in the marriage several times: "by favor of heavy-booming, wide-sounding Zeus" (2-3);<sup>244</sup> "like buds by the will of Zeus, as a favor to the Hospitable One" (9-10);<sup>245</sup> "her father's brother was carrying her off by Zeus' design" (30-1);<sup>246</sup> and "No other of the immortals is to blame but the cloud-gatherer Zeus, who has given her to Hades... to be known as his buxom wife" (77-80).<sup>247</sup> Following Persephone's seizure, the actions of Zeus retreat from the *Hymn*'s focus; by contrast, the actions and opinions of Helios and Hades, though by no means the focus of the narrative, are referenced frequently.

When Helios informs Demeter of Persephone's abduction, he describes Persephone as Hades' "ἄκοιτιν" (79), meaning wife. Helios continues,

So goddess, end your loud lamenting;  
there is no call for you to rage forever like this to no purpose.  
Aidoneus, the Major General, is not an unsuitable son-in-law  
to have among the gods, your own brother, of the same seed.

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<sup>242</sup> DeBloois, "Rape, Marriage, Or Death?," 245.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 2-3.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 9-10

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 30-1.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 77-80.

As for privileges, he has the portion he was allotted originally in the threefold division; he dwells among those whose ruler he was allotted to be.<sup>248</sup>

Helios considers Persephone's seizure a rightful, moreover, a beneficial, marriage, as is clear in his language. Hades expresses the same understanding of Persephone's seizure in his attestation to the sensibility of their arrangement.

I shall not make you an unsuitable husband to have among the gods, own brother to your father Zeus; by being here, you will be mistress of everything that lives and moves, and have the greatest privileges among the immortals, while there will ever be punishment for those who act unrighteously and fail to propitiate your fury with sacrifices, in holy performance, making the due offerings.<sup>249</sup>

Hades, too, recognizes himself as a suitable husband for Persephone, and emphasizes the honors and offerings she would receive should she remain in the underworld. Before Persephone returns to her mother, Hades hands his apoplectic wife a pomegranate seed to eat, thereby ensuring her return.<sup>250</sup> Pomegranates in ancient Greek myth and iconography were widely recognized as marriage imagery, its many seeds a representation of female fertility. In the marriage's organization by Zeus, and its support by Helios and Hades, it is clear that the *Hymn's* men are unanimous in regarding the abduction as a marriage by custom. Their understanding is in part justified, as many aspects of the abduction reflect aspects of traditional marriages.

In an earlier passage, I referenced that traditional marriages were arranged by the guardian of the bride and the groom. Zeus' betrothal of Persephone to Hades may be understood as the performance of an expected nuptial responsibility. Hades' seizure of Persephone, too, could be considered customary. After Persephone is seized, she is taken to Hades' home in his golden chariot, as women were led to the home of their groom in a chariot or cart.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 79-87.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 363-9.

<sup>250</sup> DeBloois, "Rape, Marriage, Or Death?," 245.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, though she initially refuses, Persephone eventually eats the pomegranate seed given to her by Hades, which could be interpreted as either the marriage's consummation or Persephone's eating of the *katachysmata*.

Persephone's transition from her childhood home to the house of her groom, at which she remains inaccessible by her mother, somewhat accurately reflects the realities of marriage for mortal women. Marriage often separated women from their childhood homes and their families for extended periods and sometimes indefinitely. Furthermore, the stress and anxiety Persephone vocalizes throughout her abduction also in part reflects the apprehensions of young brides concerning marriage. These considerations, coupled with the betrothal of Persephone by her father and Hades' symbolic procession, demonstrate that Persephone's abduction could be understood as a customary marriage when these aspects are stressed.

### *Conclusion*

Marriage was a traumatic experience for young women of ancient Attica, who understood their betrothal to a man twice their age, perhaps a stranger, as the fulfillment of their existence. Although extant sources make clear that the perspectives of women regarding marriage were highly varied, as were the conditions of marriages themselves, the extent of Demeter and Persephone's suffering appears far beyond what was considered expected for nuptial arrangements of the time. It is through the poet's emphasis of their suffering that the arrangement first appears inconsistent with our understanding of traditional Attic marriage.

## Chapter Four: The Language of the Hymn

### *Introduction*

Studies of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* have emphasized the use of repetition as a major literary device.<sup>252</sup> Epic leitmotifs often appear “where a detail is emphasized which has ritual significance.”<sup>253</sup> For example, in the *Hymn*, the device is noticeable in recurring references to:

Demeter’s black veil and robe (42, 182 f., 197, 319, 360, 374), the torches of Demeter and Hecate (48 ~ 61, 52), her fasting (49 f., 200, 206ff.) and silence (59-60, 194, 198-9), and above all her sorrow (40 ff., and *passim*) and anger (83, 91, 251 ff., 305 ff., 330, 338-9, 349-50, 354, 467-8).<sup>254</sup>

Another example of repetition is the poem’s narrative of separation and reunion, which is initiated by Persephone’s picking of the narcissus (15-16) and ultimately ends when she returns from the underworld (375-386).<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, the tale of abduction and escape that Demeter tells the daughters of Celeus upon her arrival at Eleusis (98) parallels closely her daughter’s abduction (16-21) and return (375-386). Not specific to its contents, repeated terms hint at fundamental themes. A close examination of the *Hymn*’s diction reveals several leitmotifs: problematic withdrawals, female suffering, and the vigor of the female characters. Through the amplification of these motifs, the author suggests two things: that we sympathize with ancient women, but also recognize their immense agency.

### *Isolation*

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<sup>252</sup> Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 59.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Ann Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate: An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 25.

The theme of Withdrawal-and-Return that dominates the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is a popular narrative pattern that frequents ancient Greek epics.<sup>256</sup> Six elements recur in the motif: (1) a protagonist in an extended absence (often a withdrawal on their own initiative) caused by a quarrel or the loss of some beloved person; (2) the wandering protagonist disguises themselves during their absence and often tells a deceitful tale; (3) those who interact with the protagonist are hospitable; (4) a fuller recollection of the protagonist's identity; (5) disaster related to the protagonist's absence; (6) the full recognition of the protagonist and their return.<sup>257</sup> The pattern of withdrawal and return forms the basic plot in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: Demeter initially withdraws herself from Olympus (91-92) upon discovering the loss of her daughter (54-87); she disguises herself as an old crone (101) and tells of her fictitious escape from Crete (122-32); she is received hospitably in the house of Metaneira (187-223); Demeter reveals her identity to Metaneira (275-80); Demeter prohibits agricultural processes (351-56), which threatens the lives of mortals; Demeter eventually resumes the performance of her divine duties (470-73) and contact with immortals and mortals (483-84). Although the narrative pattern of a protagonist's withdrawal, compromise, and return is basic to the plot of other works,<sup>258</sup> none give emphasis to the withdrawal of deities as does the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

There are three instances in the *Hymn* in which a deity withdraws (either by her own accord or by another's): Persephone is withdrawn from the world of mortals (16-21); Demeter withdraws first from Olympus (77-87) and then into her temple at Eleusis (303).<sup>259</sup> We might add a fourth instance of withdrawal related to Demeter's reclusion in her Eleusinian temple: following the Demophoon incident, Demeter effectively withdraws herself from her divine

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<sup>256</sup>Marie Louise Lord, "Withdrawal and Return. an Epic Story Pattern in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter and in the Homeric Poems," *The Classical Journal* 62, no. 6 (1967): 241.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> The essential pattern of the *Hymn* is the same as that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; see Lord (1967), 241.

<sup>259</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 32.

functions of motherhood (as it relates to Demophoon’s childcare and her loss of Persephone) and agricultural fertility. Her occupancy of the temple is even more emphatic of the motif’s centrality to the *Hymn’s* narrative given that, in Greek tradition, temples were sites of communication and exchange between the immortal and mortal domains.<sup>260</sup> Demeter both isolates herself from the immortal and mortal worlds, and simultaneously isolates the aforementioned realms from each other. Demeter, and Demeter alone, creates a space in which communication among the immortals, the mortals, and with Demeter herself is challenging. Through her withdrawal, Demeter gives emphasis to the value of communication.

The very language of the *Hymn* similarly underscores withdrawal as a central theme of the poem. The spacial and communicative isolation of Demeter is emphasized by the Greek word, *νόσφιν*, conventionally meaning “apart from”. *Νόσφιν* appears five times within the *Hymn to Demeter* and varies in application. *Νόσφιν* is first used in the *Hymn’s* 4th line to indicate that Demeter was at a physical distance from Persephone at the time of her violent abduction, and that the agreement was considered without Demeter’s consent or knowledge: *νόσφιν Δήμητρος χρυσαόρου ἀγλαοκάρπου* [away from Demeter] (4).<sup>261</sup> We are reminded that, although the consultation of the mother in Attic marriage proposals was not legally required, it was likely considered. The use of *νόσφιν* to describe Demeter’s apartness, specifically the absence of her role in the marriage arrangement, appears appropriate. In considering the conjugal arrangement of Persephone, Demeter was wholly unconsidered, significantly more so than what was conventional.

*Νόσφιν* appears again in the 27th line of the *Hymn*: *κούρης κεκλομένης πατέρα Κρονίδην· ὃ δὲ νόσφιν* [was seated apart, away from the gods] (27).<sup>262</sup> The author’s use of *νόσφιν*

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<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>261</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 4.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

again implies a physical apartness, but additionally suggests that the deafness of Zeus is “a matter of convenience.”<sup>263</sup> It is established in Homer’s *Iliad* that deities can always hear their supplicants if they desire (*Il.* 16. 514-27). Thus, despite the physical distance of Zeus from Persephone’s abduction, it seems likely that he was able to hear her screams yet made the conscious decision to ignore them. Zeus is comprehensively involved in the arrangement and fulfilment of Persephone’s kidnapping despite his physical distance at the time of abduction. In this case, the use of *νόσφιν* emphasizes Zeus’ role in the abduction: despite hearing her screams, he remained apart from the scene.

In the 72nd line of the *Hymn*, *νόσφιν* reappears: ὅς τις νόσφιν ἐμεῖο λαβὼν ἀέκουσαν ἀνάγκη [who it is, of gods or mortals, that has taken her away from me by force against her will and gone off with her] (72).<sup>264</sup> The author’s use of *νόσφιν* gives additional emphasis to Demeter’s physical distance from the abduction as well as the absence of consultation with Demeter concerning Persephone’s marriage. Line 72, however, is chiefly of interest for its affirmation of the *Hymn*’s gender apartheid. Demeter, like Hekate in her initial address to Demeter (54-68), assumes the identity of the abductor is male: [who of gods or mortal men] (72)<sup>265</sup> and [who of the heavenly gods or of mortal men] (55),<sup>266</sup> respectively. The distinction is noteworthy for its emphasis of gender apartness.

In the 114th line of the *Hymn*, *νόσφι* appears again: τίπτε δὲ νόσφι πόλιος ἀπέστιχες, οὐδὲ δόμοισιν [and why have you walked so far from the town, instead of going to the houses] (114).<sup>267</sup> The passage features Demeter’s arrival at Eleusis and gives emphasis to Demeter’s double isolation (on which see above).<sup>268</sup> Line 113 of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* reads, “τίς

<sup>263</sup> Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 158.

<sup>264</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 72.

<sup>265</sup> Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 6.

<sup>266</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 55.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>268</sup> Demeter, in her self-imposed isolation, is withdrawn from immortals and mortals.

πόθεν ἐσσί, γρηῦ, παλαιγενέων ἀνθρώπων θηλυτεράων” [Who are you, old woman, of those born long ago?] (113).<sup>269</sup> The line features the initial interaction between Demeter and the daughters of Celeus, and though *νόσφι* does not appear, the line is successful in emphasizing Demeter’s generational isolation. Though the four daughters speak of Demeter’s age in reference to her guise as an elderly woman, the diction additionally suggests Demeter’s membership within a long-ago generation of deities, from which she effectively removes herself (77-87). The use of *νόσφι* within the 114th line of the *Hymn* emphasizes Demeter’s physical apartness from the city of Eleusis. Ergo, *νόσφι* carries a tripple meaning: Demeter is physically apart from Eleusis, she is isolated from the divinities, and she is isolated from others her age.

In the same scene, however, a comparable triple-welcome promptly rectifies the triple-isolation. Following the daughters’ brief consultation with Metaneira, Demeter is welcomed into the home of Celeus, in which there are ἔνθα γυναῖκες ἀνὰ μέγαρα σκιάοντα τηλίκαι ὡς σύ περ ὄδε καὶ ὀπλότεραι γεγάασιν [women of your age and others younger in the shady halls] (115-116).<sup>270</sup> Demeter’s physical migration into Eleusis, moreover, her amalgamation into a community in which other elderly women exist, rectifies all three aspects of Demeter’s apartness that *νόσφι* formerly introduced.

The final use of *νόσφι* within the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* appears in its 303rd line: βάν ῥ’ ἴμεν οἴκαδ’ ἕκαστος. ἀτὰρ ξανθὴ Δημήτηρ ἔνθα καθεζομένη μακάρων ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἀπάντων μίμνε πόθῳ μινύθουσα βαθυζώνοιο θυγατρὸς [but flaxen Demeter took her seat in it and remained there, apart from all the blessed gods, pining for her deep-girt daughter] (302-04).<sup>271</sup> Demeter, in indignant grief, withdraws herself to her newly constructed temple at Eleusis. In this example, Demeter’s isolation is only binary: the goddess continues her reclusion

<sup>269</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 313.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-6.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 302-4.

from the divine realm and contemporaneously inaugurates her withdrawal from her divine function of fertility. Demeter's withdrawal continues to isolate her from the other divinities, but also isolates the divine realm from its mortal counterpart. Her separation is, hence, twofold: Demeter remains physically apart from immortals (and mortals), and functionally apart from her divine responsibility.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* consistently affords the theme of withdrawal a primacy throughout the course of the narrative. Through the events and the language of the *Hymn*, Demeter's withdrawals in particular are given special emphasis. First, Demeter is withdrawn by Zeus from the betrothal process. Then she withdraws herself from the community of Olympians, and later from Eleusis. Finally, she withdraws herself from the performance of her divine function (fertility). We may consider all four of these withdrawals as inappropriate, or at the very least, uncustomary.

### *The Language of Suffering*

The author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* gives emphasis to the suffering of Persephone and Demeter. The *Hymn* additionally conveys the suffering of the female deities through the poem's language, which emphasizes Persephone's reluctance toward the marriage, her virginity, and affirms her symbolic death.

The participle *ἀεκαζόμενος*, meaning "against one's will, unwilling" appears six times within the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. It is always used to describe a scene in which a male subjugates a woman. Three of the six instances in which *ἀεκαζόμενος* appears within the *Hymn* pertain to the scene of Persephone's initial abduction: "So, despite her resistance, her father's brother was carrying her off by Zeus' design" (30-31);<sup>272</sup> "that has taken her away from me by

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 30-1.

force against her will and gone off with her” (72-3);<sup>273</sup> and “He went off below the earth with me in his golden chariot, for all my resistance, and I screamed aloud” (432-33).<sup>274</sup> The fourth appearance occurs in Demeter’s fictitious description of her seizure by Cretan pirates: “not from choice, but by force, against my will” (124).<sup>275</sup> The fifth use appears in a description delivered by the narrator of Persephone’s contempt concerning her presence in the underworld: “seated on his couch with his modest consort, who was full of resistance” (345).<sup>276</sup> The final instance in which a form of the verb *ἀέκων* appears in the text occurs in a description of Persephone’s forcible consumption of a pomegranate by Hades: “and made me taste it against my will” (413).<sup>277</sup>

The verb *ἀρπάζω* is used in a similar manner to that of *ἀεκαζόμενος*. *Ἀρπάζω*, meaning to snatch away or carry off, emphasizes the brutality of Persephone’s seizure. Within the *Hymn*, the verb is used four separate times: “whom Aïdoneus seized” (2-3);<sup>278</sup> “Seizing her by force” (19);<sup>279</sup> “who of the heavenly gods or of mortal men has seized Persephone” (55-56);<sup>280</sup> “He seized her...” (81).<sup>281</sup> Each use of *ἀρπάζω* denotes a violence that accompanies the seizure and suggests that Persephone was taken involuntarily. Within Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the verb *ἀρπάζω* is used in descriptions of violent and forcible arrogations: “when I first snatched you from lovely Lacedaemon” (Il. 3.444);<sup>282</sup> “Apollo who works from afar had snatched her child away” (Il. 9.564);<sup>283</sup> “Deïphobus tore from Ascalaphus his shining helmet” (Il. 13.527-8);<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 72-3.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 432-3.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 55-6.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>282</sup> Homer, *Iliad, Volume I: Books 1-12*, trans. A. T. Murray, Rev. William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library 170 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 3.444.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 9.564.

<sup>284</sup> Homer, *Iliad, Volume II: Books 13-24*, Trans. A. T. Murray, Rev. William F. Wyatt. Loeb Classical Library 171 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 12.527-8.

“Cleitus golden-throned Dawn snatched away because of his beauty” (Od. 15.251-52);<sup>285</sup> “But Taphian pirates seized me” (Od. 15.427).<sup>286</sup> In the same homeric canon, the verb is used to connote the violent seizure of prey: “and the two snatch cattle and noble sheep” (Il. 5.556);<sup>287</sup> “but either he leaps among the flock and seizes one” (Il. 12.305);<sup>288</sup> “and the wolves seeing this immediately snatch the young whose hearts are cowardly” (Il. 16.355);<sup>289</sup> “to seize a tender lamb or a cowering hare” (Il. 22.310);<sup>290</sup> “and snatched up the goose” (Od. 15.174).<sup>291</sup> The brutality of Persephone’s abduction is conveyed through the recurrent use of *ἀρπάζω*, and, like the author’s use of *ἀεκαζόμενος*, emphasizes elements of the arrangement not consistent with our picture of customary Attic marriages.

The author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* additionally utilizes blooming vocabulary to give emphasis to Persephone’s virginity, youth, and innocence. In doing so, the poet encourages us to sympathize with Persephone’s suffering. Descriptions of Persephone are evocative of vegetal growth. Persephone’s beauty is equated to that of a flower, *καλυκώπιδι* [the maiden with eyes like buds] (8);<sup>292</sup> she is referred to as *γλυκερὸν θάλος* [sweet sprig] (66);<sup>293</sup> and in discussing the arrangement of Persephone’s alternation between the mortal and chthonic realms, she is described as returning to her mother *ὀππότε δ’ ἄνθεσι γαῖ’ ἐνώδε[σιν] εἰαρινο[ῖσιν] παντοδαποῖς θάλλει* [when the earth blooms with sweet-smelling spring flowers of every kind] (401-2).<sup>294</sup> Persephone is likened to a flower through the *Hymn’s* repetitive use of the noun *θαῦμα* [wonder,

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<sup>285</sup> Homer, *Odyssey, Volume II: Books 13-24*, Trans. A. T. Murray. Rev. George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 105 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 15.251-52.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.427.

<sup>287</sup> Homer, *Iliad, Volume I: Books 1-12*, 5.556.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.305.

<sup>289</sup> Homer, *Iliad, Volume II: Books 13-24*, 16.355.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.310.

<sup>291</sup> Homer, *Odyssey Volume II: Books 13-24*, 15.174.

<sup>292</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 8.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 401-2.

marvel]: Persephone is called *μέγα θαῦμα* [great wonder] (403)<sup>295</sup> just as, in the opening lines of the poem, the narcissus is referred to as *θαυμαστόν γανόωντα* [shown wondrously] (10)<sup>296</sup> and the other flowers as *θαῦμα ιδέσθαι* [wondrous to behold] (427).<sup>297</sup>

Demophoon and the daughters of Celeus both receive similar vegetative descriptions: Demophoon is referred to as *νέον θάλος* [sprig of a child] (187);<sup>298</sup> and upon Persephone's reunification with Demeter, the word *καλυκῶπις* [with eyes like buds] (420)<sup>299</sup> is used again to describe Persephone's playmates. In the initial scenes of the poem, Demeter is referred to as *ἀγλαοκάρπου* [[of]resplendent fruit] (4)<sup>300</sup> and *ὠρηφόρε* [bringer of resplendent gifts in season] (54).<sup>301</sup> Later, when Demeter's actions threaten to inhibit the receipt of gifts at Olympus from its mortal supplicants, "the words used are based off the verb *φθίω*"<sup>302</sup> [to fade, to wilt]: *φθῖσαι* (352) and *καταφθινύθουσα* (354), the latter of which is often used in describing plants.<sup>303</sup> Within the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, adult males do not receive the same vegetal associations.<sup>304</sup> The author reserves blooming vocabulary for women and children to emphasize the fragility, organic life, and potential of both parties.<sup>305</sup>

Flowers, blossoms, and the very meadow<sup>306</sup> in which Persephone plays evoke feminine innocence and serve as symbols of Persephone's virginity; "their fragility is analogous to its vulnerability."<sup>307</sup> The use of flower vocabulary as a symbol of a young bride's innocence and

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 403

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>302</sup> Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate*, 26.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> In the *Iliad*, Achilles is described as *ἔρνεϊ* [sapling] (Il. 18.56) and Hector is described Hekate's *φίλον θάλος* [dear plant] (Il. 22.87).

<sup>305</sup> Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate*, 27.

<sup>306</sup> The ancient Greek word for meadow is *λειμών*, which is also a synonym for the female genitals. Furthermore, meadows are subject to penetrative sowing and the cultivation of life; see DeBlois (1997), 245.

<sup>307</sup> DeBlois, "Rape, Marriage, Or Death?," 245.

virginity is not unique to Homer. In a verse “thought to be from an epithalamium or wedding song, Sappho compares the bride, or her virginity, to a blossom.”<sup>308</sup> A comparison is made of a girl who loses her virginity before<sup>309</sup> or on<sup>310</sup> her wedding day to a flower being trampled:<sup>311</sup>

Like the hyacinth which shepherds tread underfoot in the mountains, and on the ground  
the purple flower . . .<sup>312</sup>

The flower that receives the most attention within the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, is the *νάρκισσόν* [narcissus], which often appears in conversation with chthonic sites.<sup>313</sup> Within the *Hymn*, the narcissus is used to emphasize Persephone’s youth: Persephone reaches to grab the *καλὸν ἄθურμα* [pretty plaything] (16)<sup>314</sup> and resultantly the meadow gapes. The term *καλὸν ἄθურμα* appears verbatim in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: *πόθεν τόδε καλὸν ἄθურμα* [Where did you get this fine plaything] (32)<sup>315</sup>; a conjugated form of *ἄθურμα* appears within the 34th Orphic fragment: *ἀπατήσαντες παιδαριώδεσιν ἀθύρμασιν* [and having beguiled him with childish toys] (orph. fr. 34).<sup>316</sup> The uses of *ἄθურμα* each suggest the child-like naivete of their subject. The narcissus in the *Hymn* underscores Persephone’s youth and innocence.

The poet also calls upon the narcissus’ chthonic associations to symbolize Persephone’s symbolic death. Within the *Hymn*, the flower functions as a “key” to the underworld. Both Persephone and the narcissus are plucked from the meadow, both are unconsulted victims of

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> H. Frainkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy: A History of Greek Epic, Lyric, and Prose to the Middle of the Fifth Century.*, trans. M. Hadas and J. Willis (Oxford 1975), 172.

<sup>310</sup> C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry from Alcman to Simonides* (Oxford 1961), 220.

<sup>311</sup> R. Drew Griffith, “In Praise of the Bride: Sappho Fr. 105(A) L-P, Voigt,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-2014) 119, (1989): 56.

<sup>312</sup> Alcaeus Sappho, *Greek Lyric, Volume I: Sappho and Alcaeus*, ed. and trans. David A. Campbell, Loeb Classical Library 142 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), Frag. 105c.

<sup>313</sup> Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 144.

<sup>314</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 16.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>316</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks. The Rich Man's Salvation. To the Newly Baptized*, Trans. G. W. Butterworth, (Loeb Classical Library 92. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), Frag. 34.

desire, and both approach death (though Persephone's remains metaphorical and only temporary). Outside of the narcissus, the flower episode is equally successful in emphasizing the metaphorical death of Persephone through the manipulation of the recurrent images of light and darkness. The most detailed description of Persephone's descent appears early: ὄφρα μὲν οὖν γαῖάν τε καὶ οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα λεῦσσε θεὰ καὶ πόντον ἀγάρροον ἰχθυόεντα αὐγὰς τ' ἡελίου [Now so long as the goddess could still see the earth and the starry sky and the strong-flowing fishy sea and the light of the sun] (33-35).<sup>317</sup> The author of the *Hymn* writes that Persephone remained hopeful so long as light was visible. Light and sight appear as symbols of life in the *Hymn* and other Homeric works;<sup>318</sup> the antipodal images of darkness and the absence of vision appear as symbols of death.<sup>319</sup> The diction used in the description of Persephone's descent within the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* suggests Persephone's marriage as her metaphorical death.

The author of the *Hymn* consistently gives emphasis to the suffering of Persephone through highlighting the aspects of the arrangement that appear inconsistent with Attic marriages of custom: Persephone is adamantly unwilling to marry her groom and the transfer of the bride from maidenhood to womanhood is brutally violent. The poet similarly underscores Persephone's innocence through calling upon the well-established cultural association of virginity and youth with blooming vocabulary, which appeared often throughout the *Hymn* in connection with Persephone, other youths, and Demeter. Finally, the poet again compares Persephone's marriage to her death through use of chthonic language and imagery. Her suffering, innocence, and metaphorical death encourage us to sympathize with Persephone.

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<sup>317</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 33-5.

<sup>318</sup> In Homer's *Iliad*, Thetis establishes seeing the light of the sun as a prerequisite to life (Il. 18.61-62).

<sup>319</sup> In Homer's *Odyssey*, after the death of Agamemnon, Menelaus states he no longer wishes to live and see the light of the sun (Od. 4.539-40); Within the *Iliad*, a variant of "and darkness enfolded his eyes" appears seven times, each used in the description of death (4.461, 503, 526: 13.575, 580; 14.438-39; 16.325); Hesiod frequently uses similar expressions in scenes concerning death (Hes. WD 154-155), (Hes. Th. 157-58), (Hes. Th. 651-53); see DeBlois (1997), 245.

*The Language of Resistance*

Although language that connotes suffering dominates the *Hymn's* narrative, the author of the Homeric epic additionally gives emphasis to the impressive resistance of women, particularly that of Demeter and Persephone, through recurring references to images of vigor and rebirth. The blooming vocabulary used in descriptions of Celeus' daughters suggest hope and youth, while the retrievals of Demeter and Persephone - initiated by women - emphasize female agency.

Excluding the meadow episode that inaugurates the *Hymn*, women of the poem are never portrayed as vulnerable. Although flower vocabulary can suggest fragility, impermanence, and innocence, it can also be evocative of the vigor that accompanies youth. The descriptions of the daughters of Celeus, for example, are consistently permeated with vegetative adjectives and metaphors. Celeus' daughters are described as, *κουρήιον ἄνθος ἔχουσαι* [in the flower of their girlhood] (110);<sup>320</sup> during their return from the house of Celeus, the girls' movement is likened to that of *ἔλαφοι ἢ πόρτιες εἶαρος ὥρηι ἄλλοντ' ἄν λειμῶνα κορεσσάμεναι φρένα φορβῆς* [deer or heifers in springtime who frisk over the meadow after feeding their fill] (174-75),<sup>321</sup> and *ἀμφὶ δὲ χαῖται ὤμοις ἀΐσσοντο κροκηῖωι ἄνθει ὁμοῖαι* [their saffron-yellow hair flying about their shoulders] (177-78).<sup>322</sup> Every aspect of their descriptions suggests vigor, hope, and youth (a considerable contrast from Demeter, who arrives at Eleusis somber and quiet, but steadfast in her resilience).

The women of the *Hymn* enact two notable rescues: the retrieval of Demeter from her lugubrious state by the daughters of Celeus and Iambe, and the retrieval of Persephone from the underworld by Demeter. In the former, the community of Eleusinian women, joined by Iambe,

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<sup>320</sup> *Hymn to Demeter*, 108.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-5.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-78.

pull Demeter from her sorrow when the efforts of Helios (74-87) fall short. Later, although the arrangement is only temporary, Demeter succeeds in initiating the retrieval of Persephone from the realm of Hades. The later retrieval is especially significant, as return from the underworld in Greek myth is rare, even for deities, and is usually organized by men.<sup>323</sup> In both examples, women exert tremendous agency to preserve the integrity of their community.

### *Conclusion*

The language of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* encourages us to identify with the female characters.<sup>324</sup> The poet gives emphasis to the aspects of Persephone's abduction that are inconsistent with ancient Attic marriages of custom in the portrayal of recurring problematic withdrawals and intense female suffering. In response to Demeter's exclusion in the discussion of Persephone's marriage, she initiates two, equally inappropriate, withdrawals: from Olympus, and from her fertility powers. The withdrawals by Demeter both illuminate the extent of her grief and her problematic absence in the betrothal process. The suffering, particularly that of Demeter and Persephone, is equally emphasized through the poem's language. Persephone's unwillingness to marry, her innocence and youth, and the symbolic associations between marriage and death all remain prominent motifs throughout the narrative's course.

Although the recurring withdrawals and consistent suffering encourage us to acknowledge the plight of women in ancient Greece, the poem also gives emphasis to the resistance of the female characters in the portrayal of their vigor and far-reaching agency. The poet's descriptions of Celeus' daughters use floral vocabulary that suggest youthful vitality.

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<sup>323</sup> Persephone joins Hermes, Heracles, Theseus, Dionysus, and Orpheus as the sole figures to enter and return from the underworld.

<sup>324</sup> Nicholas Richardson, "The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Some Central Questions Revisited," In *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays*, by Faulkner, Andrew, ed., edited by Andrew Faulkner, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47.

Furthermore, the withdrawals of Demeter from her lugubrious state and of Persephone from the underworld - each initiated by women - attest to their impressive mobility and the strength of female communities.

## Conclusion

“Thus for the woman it is more seemly to stay indoors than to be outside, but to the man it is unseemly rather to stay indoors than to tend to business outside” (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.30).<sup>325</sup> This fragment of a fifth century Athenian treatise concerning household management illustrates what has long been imagined as the traditional experience of females in Attica. The overwhelming majority of ancient texts that discussed the lives of women, like Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, did so in a critical and invective manner. Often men gave emphasis to the domestic responsibilities of daughters and wives, propagating an image of sedentary life withdrawn from the public eye. In reality, the number of women who remained entirely domestically confined (disregarding special occasions such as funerals or festivals) was low, limited only to an exclusive subset of wealthy urban families. Greece’s foundation as an agricultural society prevented the majority of women from living a life of public seclusion, despite men’s wishes. Still, many literary works were composed as if women were invisible to the outside world.

The question of women's lives in ancient Attica continues to be an important one. Modern scholarship has begun to take stock of the essential role that women played in classical antiquity. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is often called upon in efforts to reconstruct the lives of women for its foregrounding of the female experience; the actions of Persephone and Demeter, as well as the coalescence of Demeter and mortal women at Eleusis, are uniquely given emphasis. The early sixth century epic tells of Persephone’s abduction by Hades and of the tremendous influence Demeter exerts to undo the machination of Zeus. Interpretations of the *Hymn*, however, vary widely. Some readers understand the poem as a testament to the elegiac

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<sup>325</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology*, 451.

nature of female life in antiquity, interpreting the abduction and intense suffering of Persephone as representations of a traditional marriage arrangement. This understanding is based on the assumption that women consistently acquiesced to the patriarchy. They did not.

Women of ancient Greece were more valued and influential than ancient sources often suggest. Examinations into the festivals they attended and the objects they used are imperative in the construction of a more complete understanding. The festivals of Demeter had the effect of building and maintaining female communities. They brought women together, separated by the constraints of married life, and facilitated the exchange of important information. Lamps and torches, two items necessary for the domestic and nuptial responsibilities of women, were reflective of the influence and authority they held. In conjunction with a thorough reading of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the social roles of women are able to be uncovered.

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