

Harmonizing the Divine: An Interdisciplinary  
Exploration of the Eleusinian Mysteries through  
Music, Dance, and Entheogens

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## Introduction

In 2024, the enigmatic Eleusinian Mysteries, rooted in ancient rituals dedicated to Demeter, continue to captivate scholars and historians alike. This religious cult remains an unsolved puzzle, as secrecy was forced onto these initiates and the Athenian government punished those who broke these rules harshly.<sup>1</sup> However, not all accounts are lost. Both ancient Greek and later Gnostic writers have recorded and provided us with fragmentary sources that we can attempt to piece together to solve these mysteries. While these ancient Greek writers wrote vaguely, there was a common theme in their descriptions of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the anonymous author describes how “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.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Sophocles stated “Thrice happy are those of the mortals who having seen those rites depart for Hades; for to them alone is it granted to have true life on the other side. To the rest all there is evil.”<sup>3</sup> The mysteries’ descriptions were even etched into stone, with an inscription at the sanctuary reading “Beautiful indeed is the Mystery given us by the blessed gods: death is for mortals no longer an evil, but a blessing.”<sup>4</sup> Even though it is unknown how these mysteries helped influence thousands of initiates each year for centuries, these descriptions provide us a glimpse of the incredible burden it is said to lift off the shoulders of the initiates. In an era when life was uncertain and death could come at any small sickness, the Eleusinian Mysteries were the proverbial light in the darkness that helped alleviate the fear of death for these individuals. As

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<sup>1</sup> Mylonas, George E. “The Eleusinian Mysteries.” In *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Princeton University Press, 1961: 224–286.

<sup>2</sup> *Homeric Hymns to Demeter*, 480-482. Trans. Martin L. West (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Mylonas, George E. “Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries.” *The Classical Journal* 43, no. 3 (1947): 143.

<sup>4</sup> Schwartz, Daniel L. 2013. *Paideia and Cult: Christian Initiation in Theodore of Mopsuestia*. Hellenic Studies Series 57. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies.

the walls that guard the secrets at Eleusis have long crumbled, it is time for the uninitiated to finally find out, without the fear of death looming over us, what may have truly led to this transformative experience.

In the 1970s, a bold hypothesis emerged from the interdisciplinary collaborative work of Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck, presented in their book, *The Road to Eleusis*. This book opened a new chapter in the study of ancient Greek rituals by proposing that the *kykeon*, a sacred potion used in the Eleusinian Mysteries, contained psychoactive substances.<sup>5</sup> This hypothesis was rooted in the recognition of the ancient Greeks' extensive botanical knowledge and their potential to harness the psychoactive properties of local flora. Furthermore, one line by Ruck stating, "I am sure that there was music, probably both vocal and instrumental, not loud but with authority, coming from hither and yon, now from the depths of the earth, now from outside, now a mere whisper infiltrating the ear, flitting from place to place unaccountably," inspired the basis of my thesis.<sup>6</sup>

This paper seeks to revisit and expand upon the Wasson-Hofmann-Ruck hypothesis, not only to rekindle academic interest in this theory but also to challenge the often rigid boundaries of scholarly thought. By integrating a study of music and the environmental context (set and setting) of the Eleusinian Mysteries, this research aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the rites. In doing so, it aspires to cultivate a more inclusive and open-minded academic community, encouraging scholars to consider possibilities beyond conventional boundaries.

Through this exploration, I also hope to engage you, the reader, in contemplating the plausibility

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<sup>5</sup> Wasson, R. Gordon, Hofmann, Albert and Ruck, Carl A. P., *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008), 58-60.

<sup>6</sup> Wasson, R. Gordon, Hofmann, Albert and Ruck, Carl A. P., *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008), 59.

of this once-dismissed theory, shedding light on how the Eleusinian Mysteries might have truly wielded their legendary power over the human psyche.

The Eleusinian Mysteries did not simply take place for one night. Instead, it was a long process where initiates began preparation for the final ritual months in advance. From the most famous statesmen such as Pericles to Marcus Aurelius to the names long forgotten by history, only two requirements needed to be fulfilled to become participants: the initiates understanding the Greek for the ceremonies, and that the participants were not impure from blood being on their hands.<sup>7</sup> For the initiates, to become purified for the ceremony, they not only had to offer sacrifices but also used flagellation to strip away the initiate's personality.<sup>8</sup> It was after this ritual purification and the initiates' fourteen-mile journey to the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis that the most important parts of the mysteries began. While some scholars suggest it was the fasting and the exhaustion that led to the ancient Greeks mystical explanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, this paper will seek to explore how both ancient and modern ideas regarding music, dance, and architecture alongside the effects of entheogens point to the mysterious ingredient inside the *kykeon* being entheogenic that allowed this timeless Mystery to remain effective and help alleviate the fear of death for so many centuries.

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<sup>7</sup> Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 157, in *Isocrates, Volume I*. Trans. George Norlin, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

<sup>8</sup> Ustinova, Yulia. "To Live in Joy and Die with Hope: Experiential Aspects of Ancient Greek Mystery Rites." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2013): 113.

## Chapter 1 - The Effect of Music According to Philosophers of the Ancient Greek World

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Music has often played a notable role in many religious ceremonies in various cultures in history. In a modern-day context, music could be heard in a Catholic Mass, where the priest, congregation, and sometimes, a choir, sing and profess their faith. In ancient Greece music was prevalent in many religious ceremonies and specific types of religious songs even had their own name. The Paeon, for example, was a song that was “sung to Apollo as the god by whose wrath the pestilence was caused, and as the god whose function it was to free from sickness and evil.”<sup>1</sup> While there is no single reason to explain the incorporation of music within these different cultures, this chapter will first present the ideas of various ancient philosophers to argue specifically that the ancient Greeks implemented musical elements and dance into the Eleusinian Mysteries to create a more immersive and mystical experience for the initiates. Music, by tapping into the emotional and psychological depths of the participants, not only intensified their communal bond but also elevated their spiritual experience, creating a profound sense of unity and transcendence that mirrored the harmonious order of the cosmos. Likewise, dance actively engaged participants in the enactment of sacred narratives, further deepening their immersion and connection to the divine, thereby complementing the mystical experience initiated by music. This integration of music and movement transformed the Mysteries into an immersive journey that fostered a profound connection with the divine and ingrained a lasting mystical aura within these timeless sacred rituals.

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Charles Edwin, and George Prentice Bristol, eds. “The Paeon: A Hymn Used to Avert Ills.” In *A Study of the Greek Paeon, with Appendixes Containing the Hymns Found at Delphi and the Other Extant Fragments of Paeans*, 12:14–17. Cornell University Press, 1900.

Song and dance were an integral part in the Eleusinian Mysteries, shaping the atmosphere and experience of both the secretive rituals and public celebrations, as demonstrated by historical records and literary references. The Eleusinian Mysteries took place over nine days and while the final rituals were secretive, days one to five, the days before the initiates arrived at Demeter's Sanctuary at Eleusis, are better known compared to those later days where the initiates were hidden from society within the walls surrounding the sanctuary. The first four days saw different purification rituals that prepared the initiates, day five saw the initiates' journey to Eleusis on foot, and the last three days were the days the initiates prepared and were finally initiated into the cult. The fifth day of the Eleusinian Mysteries was when the initiates were led to Eleusis. In Plutarch's *Lives*, specifically his life of Alcibiades, Plutarch describes an instance in 407 B.C.E where Alcibiades, with the help of his soldiers, led the procession to Eleusis. However, as "[the Spartans] commanded the approaches to Eleusis...the sacrifices, choral dances, and many of the sacred ceremonies usually held on the road... had of necessity been omitted."<sup>2</sup> Because of Plutarch's documentation, we learn that it was the norm during the procession to Eleusis to have both singing and dancing, which sets the tone for the immersive experience that awaits them at Eleusis. Aristophanes' *Frogs* also mentions similar activities. During this play, an exchange ensues between Dionysus and Hercules as follows:

Heracles: And next a breath of pipes will waft about you, and there'll be brilliant  
sunlight, just like ours, and myrtle groves, happy bands of men and  
women, and a great clapping of hands.

Dionysus: And who are those people?

Heracles: The initiates.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 34.4. Trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes, *Frogs* 154-158, in *Aristophanes, Vol. II*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Although the specific mystery cult to which these initiates belonged was not named, many historians speculate that Aristophanes was alluding to the Eleusinian Mysteries. This assumption is based on the inclusion of Dionysus, a deity closely linked with Iacchos, who played a prominent role at Eleusis and within its rituals.<sup>4</sup> Because the Eleusinian Mysteries were a closely guarded secret, Aristophanes could not directly describe the Mysteries without risking incurring the death penalty himself. As a result, Aristophanes' brief description of the Mysteries may be referring to the public portion of the celebration such as the procession that was well-known by Athenians rather than the more secretive segment of the festivities. From this instance, we further witness the central role of music and rhythmic movement in shaping the experience of the initiates.

The integration of sound within the Eleusinian Mysteries, as analyzed by scholars such as Kevin Clinton, was not merely decorative but served as a critical vehicle for deepening the spiritual immersion and emotional resonance of the rituals among the initiates. Kevin Clinton in particular illuminates the significance of the sounds that come from within the sacred confines of the *Telesterion* (which he equates to the *Anaktoron*.)<sup>5</sup> In the *Lives of the Sophists II*, Philostratus states how Apollonius of Athens “spoke the sacred words from the shrine. In beauty of enunciation he fell short of Heracleides and Logimus and Glaucus and other hierophants of that kind, but in dignity and magnificence and attire he appeared superior to many of his predecessors.”<sup>6</sup> In this instance the ancient Greek used by

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<sup>4</sup> Tierney, M. “The Parodos in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*.” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 42 (1934): 199.

<sup>5</sup> Contrary to historians such as Burkert, Clinton, in his “Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 29 (2004): 87-88, states that the *Telesterion* and the *Anaktoron* are the same. For the sake of this paper, I utilized Burkert’s definition and as such, the *Telesterion* refers to the whole structure, while the *Anaktoron* refers to the smaller rectangular building within the *Telesterion*.

<sup>6</sup> Philostratus and Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists, Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* 600-601. Ed. and trans. Graeme Miles and Han Baltussen, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023).

Philostratus, “ἀνακτόρον,” is translated as shrine, transliterated in English as *anaktoron*. This translation explains how the melodious and beautiful voice of an unseen hierophant inside the smaller shrine (*anaktoron*) within the larger *telesterion* was not just for aesthetic purposes but instead was required to create a sense of awe within the initiates.<sup>7</sup> This emphasis on the auditory aligns with the description of the Eleusinian Mysteries by Clement of Alexandria, a second-century Christian theologian. In Clement’s *Exhortation to the Greeks*, he stated that “Demeter and Persephone have come to be the subject of a mystic drama, and Eleusis celebrates with torches the rape of the daughter and the sorrowful wandering of the mother.”<sup>8</sup> While this drama may not seem to be a musical affair at first, the performance of dramas during Greece’s Classical period often saw the chorus singing and dancing.<sup>9</sup> If the drama performed at the Eleusinian Mystery was indeed in the same format as these other dramas, the usage of music may be even more extensive than previously understood. These auditory elements such as the choral dances of the procession, the Hierophant’s voice, and the song and dance that may have been present in the “mystic dramas,” created an immersive atmosphere that engaged the initiates on a profound emotional and spiritual level, enhancing their journey through the different rituals of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The contemporaries of Clement of Alexandria also corroborate his claims regarding performative arts being present within the Eleusinian Mysteries. In *The Dance* by Lucian of Samosata, Lucian states, “I forbear to say that not a single ancient mystery-cult can be found that is without dancing, since they were established, of course, by Orpheus and Musaeus, the

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<sup>7</sup> Clinton, Kevin. “Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries.” *Illinois Classical Studies* 29 (2004): 90.

<sup>8</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 2.12. Trans. G. W. Butterworth, Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, 1919.

<sup>9</sup> Ehrenreich, Barbara. “Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy.” New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006, 32.



best dancers of that time, who included it in their prescription as something exceptionally beautiful to be initiated with rhythm and dancing.”<sup>10</sup> If Lucian’s documentation is accurate, the widespread and central role of dance in the Eleusinian Mysteries may have been so well-known to contemporary historians that they saw no need to document this activity extensively. While Clinton asserts the presence of dance within the Eleusinian Mysteries, he remains skeptical about the type of music that is present during this ceremony.<sup>11</sup> However, despite it being difficult to ascertain whether the music is a chant or a type of hymn, the existence of dance in the context of the Eleusinian Mysteries logically suggests the presence of music, as these two concepts are historically and culturally intertwined, especially when viewed in the contexts of different ancient rituals both in and outside the Greek world.

Now that we have established the high likelihood of the existence of song and dance within the Eleusinian Mysteries, we can turn to the question of why music and dance were incorporated. Many modern music students know that the Greeks have had a major influence on our journey through music theory with one of the largest effects being the naming system of different musical modes. These musical modes are still important today when learning about the different sounds in music, but the effects of these modes have long been debated by ancient Greek philosophers. This discussion by different respectable Greek philosophers is especially relevant because the Eleusinian Mysteries were not only a visual experience, but, as seen from the examples above, one that was also highly auditory.

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<sup>10</sup> Lucian, *The Dance* 15, in *Lucian*. Trans. A.M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, University Press, 1936.

<sup>11</sup> Clinton, Kevin. “Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries.” *Illinois Classical Studies* 29 (2004): 100-101.

In the Aristoxenian tradition, the different Greek scales are: Mixolydian, Lydian, Phrygian, Dorian, Hypolydian, Hypophrygian, and Locrian.<sup>12</sup> The Greeks, who approached music with an almost scientific reverence, held that different musical modes were capable of inducing a wide array of emotional and behavioral states. In *The Republic*, for example, Plato, through the character of Socrates, describes his belief in the moral and psychological influence of music on individuals and society. While Plato does not touch on the topic of ecstasy induced by music, this work describes how the Greeks believed music to have power over the actions and behaviors of different individuals. Plato's detailed examination of various musical modes within this work highlights the profound effect of music on individuals. This concept can be connected to the role of why music was incorporated into the Eleusinian Mysteries and its influence on the participants' experiences and perceptions. The first two modes that Plato described were the Mixolydian and Syntonolydian (an offshoot of the Lydian mode) modes. Plato described them as "suitable for dirges,"<sup>13</sup> which is the lamentation of the dead. Plato did not believe the mournful qualities of these two types of music should be required for the guardians of his ideal city and thus, he quickly dismissed these two types of music. Next, Plato described some Ionian and some Lydian modes by stating how those that were "effeminate" caused "drunkenness... as well as softness and idleness."<sup>14</sup> Once again, Plato dismissed these two modes of music as he believed

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<sup>12</sup> Mathiesen, Thomas J. "Greek Music Theory." In *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, edited by Thomas Christensen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002:125. It should be noted that while these are the names derived from ancient Greek, these different modes translate differently to the modern naming system due to an error by Henricus Glareanus in his music treatise *Dodecachordon* (1547.) For this paper, this translational error will be ignored as the main point is regarding the effects of music in general rather than the effects of a specific mode of music. The discussion of the effects of the different modes will be based on the Greek names as the translated Greek sources do not acknowledge the difference between the classical and modern counterparts. Judd, Cristle Collins. "Renaissance Modal Theory: Theoretical, Compositional, and Editorial Perspectives." In *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, edited by Thomas Christensen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002: 383.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Republic* 398e. Edited by Chris Emlyn-Jones, William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Republic* 399a. Edited by Chris Emlyn-Jones, William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2013.

they were unsuitable for the guardians of his city. Finally, there is Plato's description of the Dorian and Phrygian modes. Plato stated that the Dorian mode was the mode that was "both in military action and every activity requiring forcefulness ...[and] represent[ed] the tones and modulation of the speech of a man who is truly brave."<sup>15</sup> The last mode that Plato mentioned is the Phrygian mode, a mode "a man uses in peaceful, voluntary activities that do not entail force when he is trying to persuade someone or plead with him: a god by prayer, or another man he is teaching or advising."<sup>16</sup> As *The Republic* describes Plato's utopian city, Plato clearly explained that the Dorian and Phrygian modes were best suited for positively influencing the behavior of the guardians within his imaginary city. Despite Plato's brief suggestion of the effect of the Phrygian mode on religious endeavors, the most important implication of this section regards how music has the power to influence the behavior of an individual. Applying Plato's reasoning to the Eleusinian Mysteries, one can infer that the ancient priests incorporated music composed in specific modes to further prepare an individual for the different ritual processes.

Plato was not the only Greek philosopher who believed in the power of music to influence the experience and perception of individuals. Another philosopher who espoused similar ideas was Sextus Empiricus, a Greek philosopher who lived around 400 years after Plato. In *Against the Musicians*, Empiricus stated: "Now if... we accept philosophy since it gives discretion to human life and restrains the spiritual passions, by much more do we accept music because it enjoins us not too violently, but with a certain enchanting persuasiveness prevail over the same effect as does philosophy."<sup>17</sup> Sextus Empiricus, in this instance, describes how music is

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<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Republic* 399b. Edited by Chris Emlyn-Jones, William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Republic* 399b. Edited by Chris Emlyn-Jones, William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Musicians* 6. Trans. and ed. Denise Davidson Greaves (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

similar to philosophy regarding its effect on influencing individuals while simultaneously being less forceful. Rather than an individual having to actively learn and consume information, music can have an effect on individuals without the individuals being aware of it. In the context of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Sextus Empiricus' reasoning explains that the music chosen for the different parts of the ritual was carefully chosen to elicit certain emotions that increase the initiates' immersion in the ritual.

While Sextus Empiricus does not describe the effect of music through the discussion of the different modes, he instead provides separate examples regarding the power of music. Similarly to Plato's belief that a mode of music allowed individuals to be brave in battle, Sextus Empiricus stated that "The Spartans, leaders of Hellas and famous for their manly spirit, would always do battle with music commanding them. And those who were subject to the exhortations of Solon drew up in battle order to the *aulos* and lyre, making the martial movements rhythmic."<sup>18</sup> Sextus Empiricus' reference to the Spartan practice of engaging in battle accompanied by music highlights the practical application of these philosophical ideas. The Spartans, renowned for their military prowess and discipline, utilized music to boost morale and maintain rhythm and unity in their movement during combat. This practice not only underscores the belief in the power of music to evoke the proper emotion for different occasions but also as Davidson Greaves, the translator, notes how even simple rhythmic patterns, such as from clapping, can contribute to evoking these emotions.<sup>19</sup> From the examples of Sextus Empiricus and Davidson Greaves, it is evident that these ideas were not only philosophical but had real-world implications.

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<sup>18</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Musicians* 8. Trans. and ed. Denise Davidson Greaves (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Greaves, Denise Davidson, trans. and ed. *Against the Musicians* by Sextus Empiricus. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986: 131, note.

Similarly to his teacher Plato, Aristotle also observed the emotional power of music and his description within his *Politics* sheds even further light on the explanation behind the effects of music on different individuals. Aristotle's insight offers a valuable perspective especially when considering the auditory experiences of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Within this work, Aristotle states that: "For any experience that occurs violently in some soul is found in all, though with different degrees of intensity—for example pity and fear, and also religious excitement; for some persons are very liable to this form of emotion, and under the influence of sacred music we see these people, when they use tunes that violently arouse the soul, being thrown in a state as if they had received medicinal treatment and taken a purge."<sup>20</sup> Aristotle's remark on music not only describes music's emotional potency but also its capacity to induce a state similar to religious fervor. The comparison of the effects of sacred music to a form of purgation further illuminates the possible transformative nature of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The belief that certain melodies could "violently arouse the soul" suggests that the choice of music in these rites was deliberate, as Clinton claims, aimed at evoking specific emotional responses that were integral to the spiritual journey of the participants. Furthermore, just as a physical purge aims to cleanse the body of toxins, the cathartic experience induced by music in the Mysteries could be seen as a purification of the soul, a crucial aspect of these ancient religious practices. This purification process, facilitated by music, may have helped the initiates transcend their ordinary states of consciousness, allowing them to engage more deeply within the mystical aspect of the ritual. Aristotle's reasoning could also suggest the presence of music in the earlier days of the festival, as the theme of these early days was purification and preparing these initiates for these secret rites.

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<sup>20</sup>Aristotle, *Politics* 1342a. Trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932).

The examination of the Eleusinian Mysteries mentioned above also underscores the pivotal role of dance within these ancient rituals, as ancient texts highlighted dance's ubiquity. Clinton first explains that once the initiates had entered the Telesterion and received a welcome from the torch-carrying *epoptai* (individuals who were previously initiated), they were free to roam the expansive area surrounded by fire, engaging in dance and possibly being guided in song by the *hymnagogoi*.<sup>21</sup> Building off Clinton's descriptions of the sequence of events during the ritual, it is also important to note that the ancient Greeks believed in the divine nature of dance and its effects on the human psyche. In *Timaeus*, Plato states "[H]armony, which has motion akin to the revolutions of the Soul within us, was given by the Muses to him who makes intelligent use of the Muses...to assist in restoring it to order and concord with itself... Rhythm also was bestowed upon us to be our helper by the same deities and for the same ends."<sup>22</sup> This assertion underscores the intrinsic connection between music and rhythm, both considered vital for harmonizing the internal states of being with the cosmic order. As a result, the integration of dance into the Eleusinian Mysteries can be understood as a practical application of these philosophical ideas, where the movement and rhythm of dance acted as a physical manifestation of the harmony and order conveyed by Plato. Another instance describing the power of dance comes from Athenaeus's *The Learned Banqueters*. In this work, Athenaeus mentioned Damon of Athens explaining how the:

"Grace and dignity in how a person dances and carries himself are in fact attractive, whereas clumsiness and low-class behavior are embarrassing. This is why poets from the very beginning designed their dances for free people and used the movements only to illustrate the words that were sung, making a consistent effort to preserve the nobility and manliness associated with them..."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Clinton, Kevin. "Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries." *Illinois Classical Studies* 29 (2004): 100-101.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* 47d-e. Trans. R.G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929).

<sup>23</sup> Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, 629 c-d. Trans. S. Douglas Olson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

From Damon's explanation, we witness how ancient Greek belief included how the effects of movements within dances affected and shaped the individual partaking in dancing. As the Eleusinian Mysteries helped the initiates overcome the fear of death, the lyrics and dance movements included must have illustrated this message in order to shape the initiates into individuals who were no longer afraid of death. While the specific movements remain unknown, the physicality of dance, paired with the auditory experience of music, created a multi-sensory environment that could facilitate a deeper spiritual immersion for the initiates, enabling them to experience a closer connection to the divine.

However, these ancient ideas do not simply exist in a vacuum and must be placed side by side with the modern, science-based understanding of music and dance to understand if there is truth in what the ancient Greeks believed. One such study on music, conducted by Swiss scientists Yoshija Walter and Andreas Altorfer, investigated the effects of different types of music on participants. They specifically aimed to understand the participants' sense of God's presence while religious music, secular music, and no music was played during their silent worship.<sup>24</sup> The data from this study showed that religious music chosen by the participants and the researchers, in that order, allowed the participants to best sense God's presence. This would be followed by the no music, non-secular music chosen by the participant, non-secular music chosen by the researchers, and then lastly a confusing 12-tone song chosen to distract the participants.<sup>25</sup> When comparing the views of these ancient philosophers on music to this modern study, all three philosophers are proved correct in their different assertions. First, relating to

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<sup>24</sup> Walter, Yoshija and Altorfer, Andreas, "The Psychological Role of Music and Attentional Control for Religious Experiences in Worship," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 75, no. 12 (2022): 2279.

<sup>25</sup> Walter, Yoshija and Altorfer, Andreas, "The Psychological Role of Music and Attentional Control for Religious Experiences in Worship," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 75, no. 12 (2022): 2279.

Plato, we learn that the different types of music do indeed allow an individual to become more immersed in what they are doing. As the name suggests, religious music does indeed allow an individual to feel closer to the divine compared to secular music. Second, Sextus Empiricus' observation that music can subconsciously affect an individual is corroborated by this study. As participants were instructed to remain still and focus solely on silent worship, the research was able to isolate the effects of music on the worship experience.<sup>26</sup> This setting meant that while the participants consciously concentrated on worship, their subconscious was either subtly distracted or enhanced, altering their focus on God. Finally, there is Aristotle who emphasized the deep emotional effects of music and a possible religious trance-like state being induced. While the study did not observe a trance-like state, it did detail the emotional ways participants normally experienced God during worship.<sup>27</sup> Considering the different types of music's effects on the participants' focus on God, it is logical to infer that the intensity of their emotions was closely linked to the nature of the music accompanying their worship. In light of these findings, it becomes clear that the incorporation of music into the Eleusinian Mysteries, similar to this study, likely served to deepen the emotional and spiritual engagement of the participants. The parallels drawn from ancient philosophies and contemporary scientific research underscore music's enduring power to enhance religious experiences, offering a compelling explanation for its pivotal role in such ancient rituals.

One similar case study by Eline Kieft, a dance guide and an anthropologist, provides support for the beliefs of the ancient Greeks on the power of dance. In this case study on Movement Medicine - a contemporary freestyle dance practice that facilitates deep interaction

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<sup>26</sup> Walter, Yoshija and Altorfer, Andreas, "The Psychological Role of Music and Attentional Control for Religious Experiences in Worship," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 75, no. 12 (2022): 2275.

<sup>27</sup> Walter, Yoshija and Altorfer, Andreas, "The Psychological Role of Music and Attentional Control for Religious Experiences in Worship," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 75, no. 12 (2022): 2277.



with the self, others, and the spiritual world - Kieft explores the practice of dance as a form of moving spirituality, contrasting it with more static forms of spiritual practice like meditation and contemplation. Kieft's conclusion states that dance is a unique medium for expressing spirituality in a tangible, experiential manner. This insight emerges from a comprehensive research approach, combining direct observation of participants, in-depth interviews, and the examination of Movement Medicine newsletters. Through these methods Kieft uncovers that dance, enables individuals to access different states of consciousness, engage with 'other' forms of knowledge, and experience direct connections with spiritual beings. This process facilitates significant personal and communal transformations, demonstrating dance's capacity to harmonize internal states with the cosmos and to facilitate deeper spiritual immersion through movement and rhythm.<sup>28</sup> Kieft's findings resonate deeply with the ancient Greek perception of dance, especially in the context of Eleusinian Mysteries, where dance was an essential method to deepen both emotional and spiritual engagement. Like the effects of music, the effects of dance on different individuals are similar to what was reported by the Greeks millennia ago.

From these modern experiments, we can see that not only have the ancient Greeks' beliefs regarding music and dance withstood the test of time but have been proved true through the scientific process. From the perspectives of these Greek philosophers across different eras, it becomes evident that the notion of music and dance influencing individuals is more than just a historical belief. It is a truth that has not only persisted but has also been substantiated in the modern era, confirming its timeless validity. While our exploration into the ancient Greeks' understanding of music and dance underscore their enduring impact and scientific validation, this merely scratches the surfaces of the intricate fabric of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Acknowledging

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<sup>28</sup> Kieft, Eline, "Dance as a Moving Spirituality: A Case Study of Movement Medicine," *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities* 1, no. 1 (2014): 36.

the multifaceted nature of these rituals, our next chapter ventures into the realm of entheogens, aiming to further unravel the complexities surrounding these ancient ceremonies.

## Chapter 2 - An Expansion of the Entheogen Hypothesis

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While the effects of music and dance are a fundamental truth that has withstood the test of time, the addition of the entheogenic hypothesis further helps explain the Eleusinian Mysteries. During the most important and final ritual, a potion, known as the *kykeon* (κυκεών), was consumed. The word *kykeon* stems from the Ancient Greek word, κυκάω, which means to mix or to stir. While Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann believed the *kykeon* to be at the center of the Eleusinian Mysteries, it is a potion that was also mentioned in several other ancient Greek texts. In the *Odyssey*, the *kykeon* is described as a potion brewed by Circe and Homer explains how “[Circe] brought [Odysseus’s men] in and made them all sit on chairs and seats, and made for them a potion (κυκειῶ) of cheese and barley meal and yellow honey with Pramanian wine... [and when Odysseus’ men] drunk it off... [Circe] struck them with her wand, [turning them into pigs,] and penned them in the pigsties.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly in the *Iliad*, before a battle, there is a scene where a “[w]oman, who was like the goddesses, mixed a potion (κυκειῶ) for [Patroclus and company] with Pramnian wine, and on this, she grated cheese of goat’s milk with a brazen grater and sprinkled white barley meal over it.”<sup>2</sup> In both texts, the ancient Greek word κυκειῶ is rendered as “potion” in translation, a choice that facilitates comprehension for contemporary readers by eliminating the necessity for additional historical or linguistic contexts. Furthermore, the word κυκειῶ is an inflection of the word κυκεών and as such, both mean the same thing.<sup>3</sup>

While the effects of the potion in both instances are drastically different, they both fundamentally affect the psyche of the individuals (the individuals transforming into pigs in the

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<sup>1</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 10.234-240. Trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Iliad* 11.638-643. Trans. A. T. Murray, rev. William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Thank you to Anika Sosa, a good friend of mine and a fellow enthusiast of the Eleusinian Mysteries for this brief linguistics explanation.

*Odyssey*, and the individuals being prepared to fight in the *Iliad*.) However, the description of the *kykeon* that best explains this drink in the context of the Eleusinian Mysteries can be found in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. In this hymn, the story of when Demeter reached the home of Celeus, the king of Eleusis, goes as follows:

“Mataneira filled a cup with honey-sweet wine and offered it to [Demeter.] But she declined, saying it was not proper for her to drink red wine; she told her to mix barley and water with the graceful pennyroyal and give it to her to drink. So she made the *kykeon* and gave it to the goddess, as she requested, and the lady Deo took it for custom’s sake...”<sup>4</sup>

Given that the *kykeon* requested by Demeter was fit for the divine, it is no surprise that it is part of the ritual within the cult of Demeter and Persephone, and why the initiates sought to partake in the drink, which even historians such as Walter Burkert describe as a sort of barley soup.<sup>5</sup>

Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann did not disagree with the basic composition of the *kykeon* but they believed that it was the presence of ergovine from ergot derived from wheat or barley within the *kykeon* that truly gave the Eleusinian Mystery its spark.<sup>6</sup> While proving this connection may take many more years of archaeological discoveries and scientific experiments, ergot being a part of the *kykeon* becomes increasingly believable with the discovery of traces of *Claviceps Purpurea*, a type of ergot, at a temple for Demeter and Persephone in the dig site at Mas Castellar, Spain. Samorini, in an article in the *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, translates a 2002 work by Juan-Stresserra and describes how “Ergot sclerotia fragments were found inside a vase along with remains of beer and yeast, and within the dental calculus in a jaw of a 25-year-old man, providing evidence of their being chewed.”<sup>7</sup> In *The Immortality Key*, Brian Muraresku

<sup>4</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, lines 206-211, in *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer*. Trans. by Martin L. West, 2003, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 110.

<sup>6</sup> Wasson, R. Gordon, Hofmann, Albert and Ruck, Carl A. P., *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008), 57.

<sup>7</sup> Samorini, Giorgio, “The Oldest Archeological Data Evidencing the Relationship of Homo Sapiens with Psychoactive Plants: A Worldwide Overview,” *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, vol. 3, issue 2 (2019): 70.

further describes the colony where this dig site is located, as a Greek colony, and how religion in these far-off colonies was much more flexible compared to Greece.<sup>8</sup> While the evidence in the ancient Eleusinian sanctuary may have been deliberately destroyed for the sake of secrecy, perhaps these distant spin-offs of the Eleusinian Mysteries located in places where the religious doctrine was loosely followed may hold further answers to the true nature of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Once again, while this discovery does not fully explain the Eleusinian Mysteries, it perhaps provides a hint that Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann were on track to decipher this ancient secret.

Building upon the exploration of the Eleusinian Mysteries and their potential connection to psychedelic experiences, it becomes evident that these ancient rituals hold significant parallels with modern scientific studies on consciousness-altering substances. The comparison of both psychedelic experiences and the Eleusinian Mysteries to near-death experiences underscores a profound connection between these two domains. This parallel draws attention to the transformative potential inherent in each, highlighting how both serve as conduits to profound insights and spiritual awakenings, akin to those reported in near-death experiences. One such individual who espoused such an ideology was Plutarch, a first-century Greek philosopher who lived in the Roman Empire. In *Moralia* “Fragment 178,” Plutarch describes his experience in the Eleusinian Mystery as such:

“In the beginning, there is straying and wandering, the weariness of running this way and that, and nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal, and then immediately before the consummation of every possible terror, shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement. But after this a marvelous light meets the wanderer, and open country and meadow lands welcome him, and in that place, there are voices and dancing and the solemn majesty of sacred music and holy visions.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Muraresku, Brian C., *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2020), 135.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia* fr.178. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, vol. 5, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1936.

To the unassuming reader of history, this detailed explanation may seem to be just an over-exaggeration of the Eleusinian Mysteries, but to those who believe in the theory proposed by Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann, this piece of text is a goldmine of supporting evidence.

Plutarch's explanation of his experience is extremely similar to modern medical documentation of the experience of individuals on lysergic acid diethylamide (hence referred to as LSD). In his first sentence, Plutarch described a polar opposite experience that may be full of either terror or amazement. In a medically reviewed article by Jennifer Berry, the experience of LSD is characterized as full of mood swings, where "a person may feel [an] intense feeling of connection... [or] may become fearful, paranoid, or angry at others."<sup>10</sup> Where Plutarch describes an experience full of "shivering and trembling and sweating,"<sup>11</sup> Berry describes physical changes where "[p]eople may have an increased heart rate, higher blood pressure, and profuse sweating."<sup>12</sup> Finally, in the last sentence, Plutarch describes his vision of a fictional setting full of voices and music. LSD is a substance most commonly known for its powerful hallucinations and Berry describes the experience as where "[a] person may see, hear, feel, taste or smell things, that are not really there. It can be difficult for a person to know what is a hallucination and what is reality."<sup>13</sup> In this instance, the potential psychoactive ingredient within the *kykeon*, most likely derived from ergot, is comparable to LSD as based on the research of Albert Hofmann. Ergot and LSD contain similar psychedelic alkaloids. As the original compound within the *kykeon* is still

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<sup>10</sup> Berry, Jennifer, "What Does Acid Feel Like," *Medical News Today*, medically reviewed by Alex Brewer, PharmD, MBA, May 15, 2020, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/what-does-acid-feel-like>.

<sup>11</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia* fr.178. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, vol. 5, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1936.

<sup>12</sup> Berry, Jennifer, "What Does Acid Feel Like," *Medical News Today*, medically reviewed by Alex Brewer, PharmD, MBA, May 15, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Berry, Jennifer, "What Does Acid Feel Like," *Medical News Today*, medically reviewed by Alex Brewer, PharmD, MBA, May 15, 2020.

lost to time, this chapter will compare documented experiences at the Eleusinian Mysteries to modern studies on LSD to strengthen the argument produced by Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck.

In Walter Burkert's seminal work, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, a particularly noteworthy narrative emerges regarding the Eleusinian Mysteries: the story, as told by a marble votive (Fig.1) of Eucrates, a blind man who miraculously perceives the sacred object unveiled during the ceremony. Burkert highlights the significance of visual perception within the Eleusinian Mysteries, mentioning Eucrates only briefly without delving into the specifics of his story.<sup>14</sup> Driven by a desire to unravel the layers behind this account, I embarked on further research, leading me to Georgia Petridou's insightful work, "Blessed is He, who has Seen." During the latter half of this work, Petridou describes the same marble votive plaque within the *Telesterion* at Eleusis inscribed with the Greek translated as "Eucrates [dedicates] to Demeter."<sup>15</sup> This marble plaque not only has Demeter on top, with light rays emanating from her head but also a pair of eyes and a nose beneath, most likely belonging to Eucrates, the blind man who saw. Petridou theorizes that Eucrates most likely saw the light being emitted by Demeter's body as the *Hymn to Demeter* also states the brilliance as coming from Demeter's hair and body, rather than her clothing or jewelry.<sup>16</sup> Building on this foundation, a scene from Athenaeus' *The Learned Banqueters* adds another layer to our understanding of the visual phenomenon experienced by initiates:

"As the drinking continued and the evening shadows began to spread, they opened up the room which had been entirely surrounded by white linen curtains. After these were pulled up and the lattice-work was withdrawn in some mysterious way, Naiads appeared, along with Erotes, Artemises, Pans, Hermes, and many figures of this type holding torches in silver lampstands."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Petridou, Georgia, "Blessed is He Who Has Seen," *Helios* 40, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2013): 321-322.

<sup>16</sup> Petridou, Georgia, "Blessed is He Who Has Seen," *Helios* 40, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2013): 321-322.

<sup>17</sup> Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, 4.130B. Trans. S. Douglas Olson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

While this banquet was seemingly unrelated to the Eleusinian Mysteries, Clinton suggests that the similarities between the mention of light here and a section within *Phaedrus*, describing the Eleusinian Mysteries, may explain what the initiates saw. In *Phaedrus*, Plato vividly described the experience of witnessing divine beauty, emphasizing the luminous quality of the sacred object: “It was possible to see beauty gleaming brightly, when we, with the happy band following Zeus, and others with other gods, saw the blessed sight and vision and were initiated into the mysteries which it is right to call the most blessed...”<sup>18</sup> Similar to the description by Athenaeus, both instances described sacred objects either emanating light from within or light being shone onto them, suggesting how illuminated objects may have been central to ancient Greek rituals and be what the initiates saw.<sup>19</sup> However, if Eucrates was truly blind and did see or thought he saw flashing lights during this secretive ritual, a 1963 scientific study on LSD may hold the answers that prove the existence of an entheogenic substance within the *kykeon*.

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 250c. Trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Clinton, Kevin. “Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries.” *Illinois Classical Studies* 29 (2004): 97-98.





Figure 1. The Eucrates Votive, from Georgia Petridou, “Blessed is He Who Has Seen,” *Helios* 40 (2013): 322.

In a scientific study titled “Effects of a Hallucinogenic Agent in Totally Blind Subjects,” researchers Krill, Alpert, and Ostfeld gave 24 completely blind individuals LSD. While the researchers were studying the retina in this experiment, they also found that 14 of their 24 subjects within this experiment saw visuals, with 12 individuals seeing simple visuals such as light spots and flickering and two individuals seeing complex visuals such as faces and furniture. These researchers also reported that the drug “increased the frequency of visual events such as spots, lights, dots, and flickers.”<sup>20</sup> These researchers also found out that individuals blind since birth saw no visuals and those blinded after birth were the only ones who saw visuals. This experiment may have taken place over half a century ago, but this data may provide some clarifications to the hypothesis asked by Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck. This study serves as an explanation of how blind Eucrates saw. However, as there are no records of Eucrates that have

<sup>20</sup> Krill, A. E., Alpert, H. J., and Ostfeld, A. M.. “Effects of a Hallucinogenic Agent in Totally Blind Subjects,” *Archives of Ophthalmology* 69, no. 2 (1963): 183.

been found other than this plaque, this connection is speculative and would require further evidence to be fully proven.

The findings of this 1963 scientific study by Krill, Alpert, and Ostfeld are also supported by a scientific case study titled “Synesthetic hallucinations induced by psychedelic drugs in a congenitally blind man.” In this scientific interview, Blue Pentagon, an anonymous former rock star, stated when describing his hallucinations “I never had any visual images come to me. I experience so much through my hearing, touch, and emotion that [these experiences and sensations were] already enough for me to take.”<sup>21</sup> As Blue Pentagon (BP) was blind since birth, the 1963 study helps explain why BP never had hallucinations of any sort. Despite the lack of visions, BP still explains how music acted upon him differently when he was on LSD. BP describes how “LSD gave everything ‘height.’ The sounds coming from songs I would normally listen to became three-dimensional, deep, and delayed. It seemed that music began coming apart and unraveling... This led me to look within and I became more aware of myself and the understanding of life, of people, and the music I was listening to.”<sup>22</sup> The accounts provided by BP present a compelling insight into the role of song and dance, along with the environmental context (set and setting), in understanding the Eleusinian Mysteries. Despite lacking visual experiences, BP’s encounter with LSD transformed his perception of music, rendering it multi-dimensional and profound, echoing the profound impact of music within the Eleusinian Mysteries, where sound also played a crucial role in facilitating transformative experiences. By drawing parallels between BP’s experience and the role of music in the Eleusinian mysteries, we

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<sup>21</sup> Dell’Erba, Sara, Brown, David J. and Proulx, Michael J.. “Synesthetic Hallucinations Induced by Psychedelic Drugs in a Congenitally Blind Man,” *Consciousness and Cognition* 60 (2018): 128,

<sup>22</sup> Dell’Erba, Sara, Brown, David J. and Proulx, Michael J.. “Synesthetic Hallucinations Induced by Psychedelic Drugs in a Congenitally Blind Man,” *Consciousness and Cognition* 60 (2018): 129.

further underscore the universal aspects of entheogenic experiences and their potential to catalyze profound shifts in consciousness and perception.

A more recent scientific study applies the positive effects caused when entheogens are used in conjunction with music for individuals who are not blind. In 2017, Mendel Kaelen, a researcher in neuroscience, published his Ph.D. thesis “The Psychological and Human Brain Effects of Music in Combination with Psychedelic Drug” which sought to explore the effects of entheogens on human emotion when listening to music. Within his work, Kaelen defines a peak experience as one that is “characterized by a sense of dissolving or transcending one’s sense of usual self, culminating into a sense of union, and feeling of bliss and spirituality.”<sup>23</sup> Kaelen, a staunch advocate of psychedelic therapy, explains that its main goal is to “facilitate a ‘peak experience’ that would result in enduring changes in personality, mood, and behavior.”<sup>24</sup> While the potential dosage of entheogens within the *kykeon* is unclear, the description of the Eleusinian Mysteries in Plutarch’s *Moralia* demonstrates momentary transcendence in the initiates that culminates into a spiritual revelation. Rather than suggesting that the ancient Greeks were hippies who enjoyed using drugs regularly, I would like to suggest that the Eleusinian Mysteries saw the priest administering a psychedelic therapy session where the main goal was to help the ancient Greeks overcome their fear of death. Kaelen mentioned two 2016 studies that demonstrate the application of psychedelic therapy in end-of-life care to “improve quality of life in patients diagnosed with a terminal illness, by treating co-morbid diagnosis of anxiety disorders and distress.”<sup>25</sup> Griffith et al. and Ross et al. (the two 2016 studies), within their results, both

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<sup>23</sup> Kaelen, Mendel, “The Psychological and Human Brain Effects of Music in Combination with Psychedelic Drugs” (PhD diss., University College London, 2017), 28.

<sup>24</sup> Kaelen, Mendel, “The Psychological and Human Brain Effects of Music in Combination with Psychedelic Drugs” (PhD diss., University College London, 2017), 30.

<sup>25</sup> Kaelen, Mendel, “The Psychological and Human Brain Effects of Music in Combination with Psychedelic Drugs” (PhD diss., University College London, 2017), 44.

demonstrate the effectiveness of psilocybin, another classic psychedelic, in decreasing anxiety and depression in their patients six months after their experiment.<sup>26</sup> If entheogens were used within the Eleusinian Mysteries, their usage would be aligned with psychedelic therapy for individuals with terminal illnesses. Other than the descriptions mentioned in the introduction, the Athenian orator Isocrates beautifully describes the effects of the Eleusinian Mysteries, stating:

“When Demeter came to our land, in her wandering after the rape of Korê, and, being moved to kindness towards our ancestors by services which may not be told save to her initiates, gave these two gifts, the greatest in the world – the fruits of the earth... and the holy rite which inspires in those who partake of it sweeter hopes regarding both the end of life and all eternity...”<sup>27</sup>

Once again, the description by Isocrates aligns with the other descriptions mentioned in the introduction of this thesis and explains how the Eleusinian Mystery allowed its initiates to come to terms with their existence. Even though the Eleusinian Mysteries were distinct from modern end-of-life care, their use of entheogens and the effects described by Isocrates demonstrates a profound therapeutic intention aimed at reconciling individuals with the nature of their existence and the inevitability of death.

Kaelen’s experiment, focusing on the heightened emotional response to music under LSD, provides a compelling framework for examining the ancient practices in a new light. Kaelen’s procedure for his experiment was to provide a placebo of a saline injection and an intravenous injection of LSD for his participants on two separate days. What he found was that the “average scores for all music stimuli to the question ‘how emotionally affected were you by

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<sup>26</sup> Kumar, Sukhbinder et al., “A Brain System for Auditory Working Memory,” *The Journal of Neuroscience* 36, no. 16 (2016): 4492-4505; Stephen Ross et al., “Rapid and Sustained Symptom Reduction Following Psilocybin Treatment for Anxiety and Depression in Patients with Life-Threatening Cancer: A Randomized Controlled Trial,” *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 30, no. 12 (2016): 1165-1180.

<sup>27</sup> Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 28-29, in *Isocrates, Volume I*. Trans. George Norlin, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

the music?’ were significantly higher for the LSD condition than for placebo.”<sup>28</sup> Relating the results of this experiment to the experiment Walter and Altorfer mentioned in the first chapter, if music helps individuals feel closer to their god, these individuals, with the assistance of a psychoactive substance that enhances their emotional connection with music, should theoretically have an even stronger connection to their god.

To effectively counter the skepticism against the entheogenic hypothesis of the Eleusinian Mysteries, particularly criticisms offered by scholars such as Walter Burkert, it is essential to directly refute these detractors. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the ancient rites but also bridges the gap between historical interpretations and modern psychedelic research, shedding light on the complexities of ancient spiritual practices and their communal implications. In the closing pages of Walter Burkert’s *Ancient Mystery Cults*, Burkert acknowledges the theory by Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann but states that “ergot poison is normally described as quite an unpleasant and not at all a euphoric state” as well as how “the use of drugs... does not create a true sense of community but rather leads to isolation.”<sup>29</sup> Burkert’s reference to ergot poisoning is also known as Saint Anthony’s fire, a disease caused by the consumption of contaminated rye. Of course, with a modern understanding, this would not cause a euphoric state, but the ancient Greeks’ understanding of botany was not the same as our understanding today. One example could be seen in pennyroyal. According to Scarborough *Pharmacy and Drug Lore in Antiquity*, “[p]ennyroyal’s reputation as a female contraceptive and abortifacient is verified in the Hippocratic writers, Dioscorides and Galen,” yet “contrasted to the ‘pennyroyal potion’ of Greek antiquity, with its nontoxic action, the modern extract of

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<sup>28</sup> Kaelen, Mendel, “The Psychological and Human Brain Effects of Music in Combination with Psychedelic Drugs” (PhD diss., University College London, 2017), 79.

<sup>29</sup> Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987), 108-109.

pennyroyal oil exhibits very poisonous effects. Convulsion results from as little as four milliliters.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, within *De Materia Medica*, Dioscorides writes about the effects of pennyroyal, describing how “[if it is] taken as a drink it expels the menstrual flow and the afterbirth, and is an abortifacient. Taken as a drink with salt and honey it brings up stuff out of the lungs and helps with the convulsed. Taken as a drink with *posca* [hot drinks] it soothes nausea and gnawing of the stomach...”<sup>31</sup> Dioscorides’ writing reveals the ancient Greeks’ profound understanding of nature, illustrating how a single plant could address multiple ailments. This perspective contrasts sharply with contemporary views, as exemplified by the U.S. Poison Control’s classification of pennyroyal as toxic.<sup>32</sup> Poison Control also notes the absence of an antidote for penny oil, emphasizing its danger for human consumption.<sup>33</sup> Because of these differences, the case of pennyroyal highlights how modern interpretation may not always align with ancient knowledge, suggesting caution when applying contemporary scholarship to historical botanical insights.

Next, there is Burkert’s point regarding how the usage of entheogens within the Eleusinian Mysteries would lead to isolation. From the first-hand description by the ancient Greeks of the Eleusinian Mysteries by credible writers such as Sophocles to the description etched in stone at Eleusis, one key takeaway of these rituals is that death was not to be feared. Death itself is not only an individual concept but instead a universal and communal concept, as individuals must also come to terms with the death of other people around them. In another 2016 scientific study, a team of researchers from Switzerland discovered that LSD enhances emotional

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<sup>30</sup> Scarborough, John, “The pharmacology of sacred plants, herbs, and roots,” in *Pharmacy and Drug Lore in Antiquity: Greece, Rome, Byzantium*, (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2010), 145.

<sup>31</sup>Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica: Being an Herbal with Many Other Medicinal Materials*, 3-36. Translated by Tess Anne Osbaldeston and R.P.A. Wood, editorial preface by Tess Anne Osbaldeston. Johannesburg: Ibis Press, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> “Plants,” Poison Control, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.poison.org/articles/plant>.

<sup>33</sup> “Pennyroyal Oil,” Poison Control, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.poison.org/articles/pennyroyal-oil>.

empathy and prosocial behavior. This suggests that LSD could potentially support psychedelic therapy by promoting positive emotional and social responses, making individuals more empathetic and socially connected.<sup>34</sup> Instead of creating a divided group of initiates, the usage of a psychoactive ingredient may have helped foster a closer community of initiates all learning to accept death.

In conclusion, our exploration of the Eleusinian Mysteries has unveiled not only their historical significance but also the likelihood of entheogenic substance use. This discovery prompts us to reflect on the profound effects that music, dance, and entheogens collectively had on these venerable ceremonies. By considering the skepticism of scholars like Walter Burkert, we gain a more nuanced understanding of these ancient practices. This chapter's goal is not to argue the broad therapeutic benefits of entheogens but to highlight their potential to profoundly change consciousness and encourage a deep sense of unity and spiritual insight. This combination of entheogenic substances with ritualistic practices provides insights into how such ceremonies might have been designed to facilitate deeply meaningful experiences. Thus, the Eleusinian Mysteries present a compelling case of ancient peoples' pursuit of spiritual enlightenment and mental fortitude, inviting us to examine the intricate relationship between the mind, the sacred, and the community in our ongoing quest to comprehend the breadth of human experience.

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<sup>34</sup> Dolder, P. C. et al., "LSD Acutely Impairs Fear Recognition and Enhances Emotional Empathy and Sociality," *Neuropsychopharmacology: Official Publication of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology* 41, no. 11 (2016): 2645.

Chapter 3 - The Set and Setting of Eleusis

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The preceding chapter hinted at, without fully addressing, the necessity of delving deeper into the environment surrounding the Eleusinian Mysteries. This chapter will explore how in addition to music and entheogens, the Greeks utilized architectural choices as well as light to create the set and setting of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In the context of psychedelic experiences, the term set and setting refers to the psychological mindset (set) and the physical and social environment (setting) in which a person uses psychedelic substances. The term was popularized in the 1960s by Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary, who argued the outcome of a psychedelic experience is heavily dependent on these factors, shaping the safety and efficacy of the experience.<sup>1</sup> Through an analysis of the elements that shaped the set and setting of the sanctuary at Eleusis, we may find further evidence supporting the usage of psychedelics at the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The first important feature when describing elements of the sanctuary at Eleusis that shaped its setting is its surrounding wall as it not only separates Eleusis from the outside world physically, but it turns the initiates' focus to inside Eleusis and heightens their awareness of their surrounding (Fig.2) In ancient Greece, each sacred site often had its *temenos*, the boundary marking the outer edges of the sacred space. While these borders may take the form of closely grouped trees or shorter walls made of stone, the sanctuary at Eleusis was surrounded by taller walls instead.<sup>2</sup> We know of this from Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, where he stated, "My

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<sup>1</sup> Hartogsohn, I. "Constructing drug effects: A history of set and setting." *Drug Science, Policy and Law* 3 (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Scott, Michael. "Walls and the Ancient Greek Ritual Experience: The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis," in *Embodied Rituals and Ritualized Bodies: Tracing Ritual Practices in Late Mesolithic Burials*, edited by L. Nilsson Stutz and F. Tarlow (Lund: Lund University, 2009), 193.



dream forbade the description of the things within the wall of the sanctuary, and the uninitiated are of course not permitted to learn that which they are prevented from seeing.”<sup>3</sup>

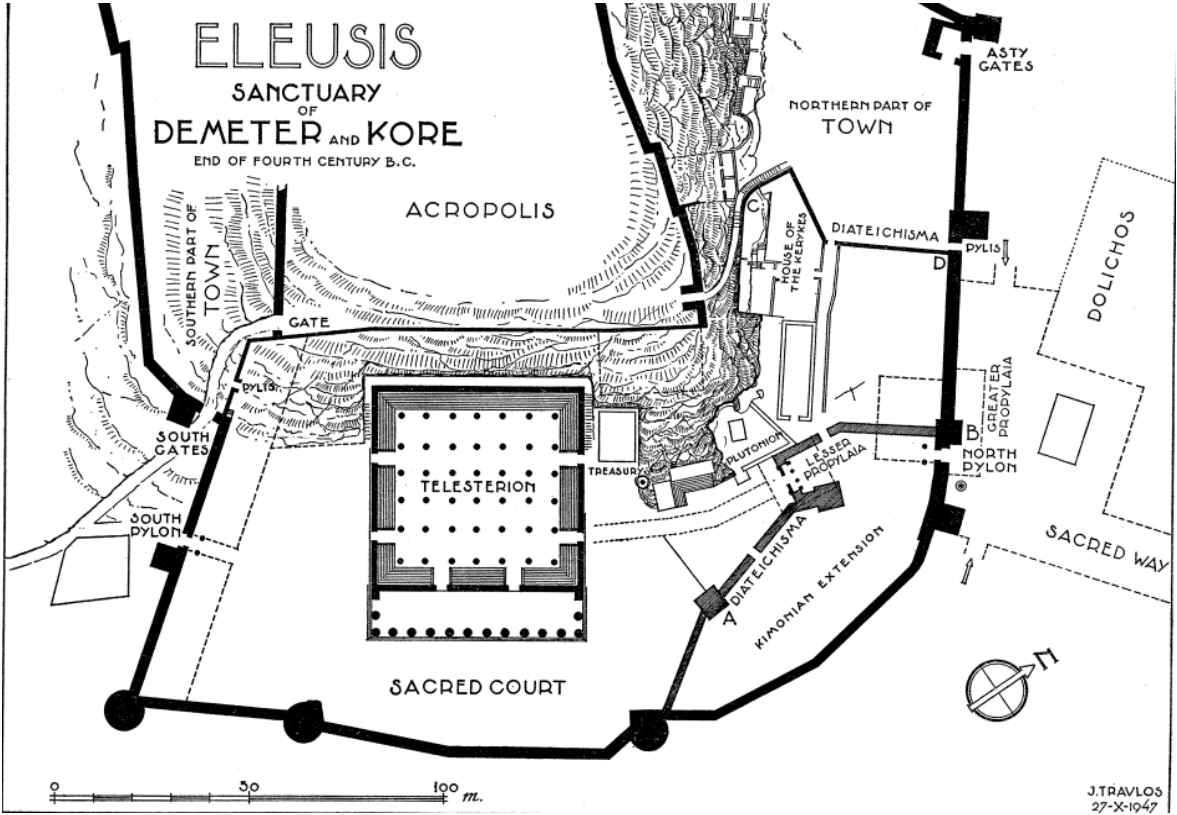


Figure 2. The Layout at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore from J. Travlos’ “The Topography of Eleusis” *Hesperia* 18, No 1(1949): 138-147.

While the height of the wall remains unknown, Nancy Evans argues that the many simultaneous expansions of the *telesterion*, courtyard, and outer walls signifies a desire of the ancient architects to obscure the buildings within from outside view.<sup>4</sup> This design would effectively leverage perspective to shield the sacred ceremonies from the uninitiated. For the initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries, it would not be until nighttime that they reached the sanctuary. When

<sup>3</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.38.7, in *Pausanias’s Description of Greece*, vol. 1. Translated by W.H.S. Jones, Litt.D., and H.A. Ormerod, M.A., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1918).

<sup>4</sup> Evans, Nancy A. “Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries.” *Numen* 49, no. 3 (2002): 226-237.

describing the procession, Aristophanes states “Awake, for it has come tossing torches in hand... Now the Meadow brightly burns... Beaming with your torch, /lead forth to the flowering stretch of marsh.”<sup>5</sup> From Aristophanes’ description, the sun had already set on the procession and as a result, the procession held up thousands of torches to light the way to the sanctuary. Even before entering the Greater Propylaea, the larger gate to the sanctuary, the dim glow of the procession’s torches against the looming walls created a mysterious mood, shaping the initiates’ mindset to one of excitement and curiosity. Michael Scott further elaborates that the commitment of the initiates, through their investment of time and their physical and mental sacrifices, aligns with theories of embodied cognition and predictive processing.<sup>6</sup> The deep level of commitment shown by these initiates may have led them to further imagine what was ahead of them in the next steps of the ritual, contributing to a sense of longing for what is to be revealed within the participant’s mindset.

In addition to keeping the secret from those who were uninitiated, the *Temenos* wall also shaped the experience of the different initiates. Placing oneself in the sandals of the ancient Greeks, being in an area enclosed by a high wall surrounded by darkness in preparation for a religious ritual was drastically different compared to both urban and rural life. Blocked off from the outside world by this barrier, the initiates’ senses are focused inward on the world within the walls and away from the outside world’s distractions. With the walls reducing outside noises and the darkness, the senses other than sight are heightened and the effects from the usage of sound and music within these mysteries are amplified, allowing these initiates to be further immersed in

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<sup>5</sup> Aristophanes, *Frogs* 340, in *Aristophanes’ Frogs*. Edited by Matthew Dillon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 340.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Scott, “Walls and the Ancient Greek Ritual Experience: The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis,” in *Embodied Rituals and Ritualized Bodies: Tracing Ritual Practices in Late Mesolithic Burials*, edited by L. Nilsson Stutz and F. Tarlow (Lund: Lund University, 2009): 202.

the Mysteries.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the *Temenos* wall not only served as a physical boundary but also as a crucial element in transforming the initiates' perception.

If the entheogen hypothesis mentioned earlier is correct, another basic function of a wall that cannot be ignored is its ability to keep individuals inside. From the analysis of the Eleusinian Mysteries by Clinton, the number of important religious officials running the ceremony appears to be much fewer compared to the number of participants.<sup>8</sup> As there may have been hundreds up to thousands of individuals in an altered state of mind within the sanctuary at Eleusis at the same time it would be difficult for the drastically outnumbered religious officials to keep the initiates safe. To prevent harm from befalling the initiates, the tall wall prevented them from wandering into the Greek countryside, where they may encounter wild beasts or dangerous terrain. If the Greeks' understanding of psychedelics is as comprehensive as their understanding of music, this theory is plausible.

Shifting the focus to the *Telesterion* itself, this structure's choices and design also played a significant role in immersing the participants in the Eleusinian Mysteries through the set and setting it created. When viewing ancient Greek monuments, often, the most spectacular aspect is in the outer facade of the temple, with detailed friezes and monumental columns. In the case of the Eleusinian Mysteries, however, Burkert argues that the *Telesterion*'s most spectacular aspect was holding up to several thousand people at a time rather than simply being a glorified dark storage space for a cult's sacred relic.<sup>9</sup> This reimagining of sacred space, emphasizing the communal experience within over the observation from without, not only highlights the unique

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<sup>7</sup> Scott, Michael, "Walls and the Ancient Greek Ritual Experience: The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis," in *Embodied Rituals and Ritualized Bodies: Tracing Ritual Practices in Late Mesolithic Burials*, edited by L. Nilsson Stutz and F. Tarlow (Lund: Lund University, 2009), 203.

<sup>8</sup> Clinton, Kevin. "Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries." *Illinois Classical Studies* 29 (2004): 85–109.

<sup>9</sup> Burkert, Walter, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 287.

nature of the Eleusinian Mysteries but also sets the stage for understanding the profound psychological impact such a setting could have on its initiates.

To further create a sense of mystery for the initiates, I would like to suggest the orientation of the *Telesterion* was purposely offset and its entrance was purposely not in line with the Sacred Way, the road connecting the Eleusinian Sanctuary and Athens taken by the initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries. On the southeastern side of the *Telesterion*, there is a porch surrounded by 14 pillars with 5 pits on the outside, believed to be *megara* (Fig. 3) Evans suggests that before entering the *Telesterion* on the night of the ceremony, the initiates must have deposited their sacrificial offerings, piglets, into one of these five pits.<sup>10</sup> As a result, even though there are multiple entrances, it is likely that the initiates would enter the *Telesterion* from the southeast side rather than from the right and left as it is the most accessible entrance. Even if the initiates were able to see a glance of the *Telesterion* over the *Temenos* wall during their journey to the sanctuary, the front of the building and the main entrance being out of sight until the night of the ceremony may have created a sense of the unknown for the participants, once again, contributing to a mysterious atmosphere.

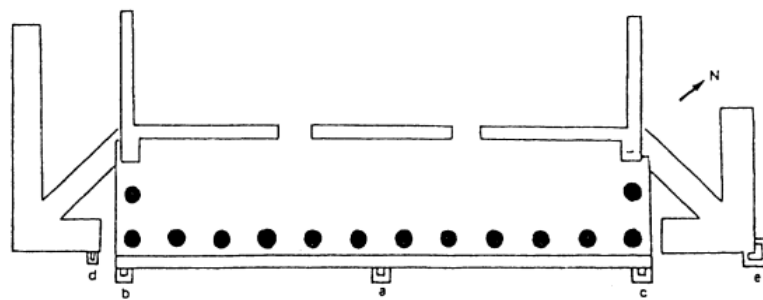


Figure 3. Main porch of the Telesterion showing Megara (a-e), from Nancy Evan's "Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries." In *Numen* 49, No.3(2002): 241.

<sup>10</sup> Evans, Nancy A. "Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries." *Numen* 49, no. 3 (2002): 248.

Upon entering the *Telesterion*, the environment further amplified the initiates' experiences. After the excited initiates pushed and shoved their way into the quiet *Telesterion*, each individual chose a seat on the eight rows of stepped seats surrounding the interior.<sup>11</sup> Similarly to the effects of the *Temenos* walls mentioned above, Scott further explains how the *Telesterion*, a structure with not only walls, but a roof held up by forty-two columns created a darker environment that further narrowed the initiates' vision and forced them to increase focus on what they were still able to see and amplified the sounds of the ritual.<sup>12</sup> Scholars have also speculated that the torches inside the room might have been extinguished, plunging the initiates into darkness and further concentrating their attention on any remaining sources of light or visual clues.<sup>13</sup> This deliberate manipulation of light and space within the *Telesterion* served to heighten the initiates' sensory experiences, drawing them deeper into the mystery and anticipation of the sacred rites that lay ahead.

The subtle manipulation of sensory input within the *Telesterion* closely mirrors the sensory alteration experienced under the influence of LSD, a connection highlighted by Albert Hofmann's first encounter with the substance in 1943. Hofmann vividly described an acute sensitivity to light, with daylight becoming "unpleasantly glaring," a sentiment echoing through modern studies on LSD's visual effects.<sup>14</sup> These studies describe a spectrum of visual phenomena induced by LSD, such as "brightened, vivid colors, blurred vision, distorted shapes and color of objects and faces, and halos of light," indicating a profound alteration in visual

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<sup>11</sup> Bremmer, Jan N., "Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries: A 'Thin' Description," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices*, (2012): 8.

<sup>12</sup> Scott, Michael, "Walls and the Ancient Greek Ritual Experience: The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis," in *Embodied Rituals and Ritualized Bodies: Tracing Ritual Practices in Late Mesolithic Burials*, edited by L. Nilsson Stutz and F. Tarlow (Lund: Lund University, 2009), 208.

<sup>13</sup> Bremmer, Jan N., "Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries: A 'Thin' Description," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices*, (2012): 8.

<sup>14</sup> Hofmann, Albert. "Foreword." In *LSD - My Problem Child*, ix-xii. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.

perception.<sup>15</sup> These documented LSD effects offer insights parallel to the sensory environment crafted within the *Telesterion*, where the contrast between the darkness enveloping the space and any lit objects could have dramatically enhanced visual experiences of the initiates. Clinton's theory posits that the design might have employed objects that were illuminated from within or illuminated by strategically positioned lights, likely magnifying the mystical aura surrounding the sacred objects.<sup>16</sup> This approach could have offered the initiates a visually transcendent experience, akin to the heightened and altered states of perception described by Hofmann, further enriching the ritual's profound impact. The use of artificial light sources, in comparison to the harshness of sunlight, might also resonate with Plutarch's reference to a "marvelous light," rather than one that was intolerable.<sup>17</sup> The halo-like illumination around Demeter's depiction in the Eucrates' votive further underscores the potential use of darkness to highlight the induced visual effects similar to those observed in LSD experiences, suggesting an ancient understanding of sensory manipulation to evoke spiritual or transcendental experiences.<sup>18</sup>

Building upon this foundation, the architectural arrangement within the *Telesterion*, particularly the dense seating configuration, might have fostered a collective emotional resonance among the initiates. Scott's observations highlighted how the physical setting could amplify shared sensory and emotional experiences, serving as a catalyst for communal bonding and transformation.<sup>19</sup> This convergence of individual perceptions into a collective experience

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<sup>15</sup> Davis, Kathleen, FNP, "The Effects and Hazards of LSD," *Medical News Today*, medically reviewed by Alyssa Peckham, PharmD, BCPP, May 24, 2023, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/295966>.

<sup>16</sup> Clinton, Kevin. "Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries." *Illinois Classical Studies* 29 (2004): 97-98.

<sup>17</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia* fr. 178. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, vol. 5, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1936.

<sup>18</sup> As Eucrates was blind, the artist must have taken inspiration, perhaps from what they saw when they were inducted into the Eleusinian Mysteries.

<sup>19</sup> Scott, Michael, "Walls and the Ancient Greek Ritual Experience: The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis," in *Embodied Rituals and Ritualized Bodies: Tracing Ritual Practices in Late Mesolithic Burials*, edited by L. Nilsson Stutz and F. Tarlow (Lund: Lund University, 2009), 208.

underscores the *Telesterion*'s role not just as a physical space, but a catalyst for deep psychological and spiritual transformation among those present. The deliberate design elements of the *Telesterion* - manipulating light, shadow, and space - thus emerge as sophisticated tools to shape the initiates' journeys and to be deeply embedded within the collective consciousness of those who partook in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Exiting the *Telesterion*, its spacious paved courtyard may explain how the Mysteries were something that was learned rather than implicitly taught. Albert Hofmann's self-experimentation with ergovine in 1976, which resulted in a prolonged experience lasting nearly ten hours, provides a modern parallel to the ancient mystery experience.<sup>20</sup> Although the duration of the ceremony involving the *Kykeon* remains unclear, it is plausible that the participants departed the *Telesterion* feeling both exhausted and fulfilled.<sup>21</sup> A recent study by Gandy et al. suggests that a controlled environment in nature where the participants in an altered state of mind could process their experiences allows for the potential mitigation of anxiety as well as fostering a state of mindfulness and transcendence.<sup>22</sup> If the effects of the *kykeon* were still present when the initiates exited the *Telesterion*, the spacious courtyard outside may have provided exactly this, a space to reflect on what was seen and felt throughout the night.

Furthermore, in secondhand accounts of Aristotle describing how the Mysteries functioned, he underscored the importance of experiential learning, a concept that resonates deeply with the transformative experiences often associated with psychedelic substances. In Synesius' account explaining Aristotle's beliefs regarding the mysteries, Synesius states how

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<sup>20</sup> Wasson, R. Gordon, Hofmann, Albert and Ruck, Carl A. P., *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008),41.

<sup>21</sup> Bremmer, Jan N., "Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries: A 'Thin' Description," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices*, (2012): 14.

<sup>22</sup> Gandy, Sam et al., "The potential synergistic effects between psychedelic administration and nature contact for the improvement of mental health," *Health Psychology Open* 7, no. 2 (2020): 10.

“Aristotle claims that those who are being initiated into the mysteries are to be expected not to learn anything but to suffer some change, to be put into a certain condition, i.e. to be fitted for some purpose.”<sup>23</sup> This philosophical stance, as Burkert articulates, emphasizes the significance of being affected, suffering, or experiencing (*pathein*) over traditional learning (*mathin*).<sup>24</sup> Such a focus on experiential transformation, paralleling the effects of psychedelics, underscores the intentional design of the *Telesterion*’s courtyard as a space for initiates to process and integrate their profound experience within a natural setting. The emphasis on experiential understanding over conventional education suggests that the mysteries were designed to facilitate a deep, transformative experience, akin to modern psychedelic exploration.

This chapter has delved into the sophisticated manner in which the Greeks employed architecture, light, and the natural landscape to meticulously craft the set and setting for the Eleusinian mysteries, potentially enhancing the psychedelic experiences within this ancient ritual. The sanctuary’s towering walls acted not just as physical barriers but as psychological thresholds as well, delineating a sacred space that separated the initiates from their everyday lives and concentrated their focus inward, thus intensifying their sensory perceptions. Furthermore, the deliberate orientation and design of the *Telesterion*, together with its associated elements such as the open courtyard, were strategically orchestrated to augment the mystery and anticipation, thereby magnifying the emotional and psychological impact of the ceremonies conducted therein. This thoughtful integration of architectural and environmental design to influence the set and setting resonates with contemporary understandings of psychedelic experiences, highlighting the importance of context in determining the nature and quality of

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<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, fr. 15, in *Synesius, Dio* 10. Edited by W. D. Ross and J. A. Smith, vol. 12, *The Works of Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-52.

<sup>24</sup> Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987), 20.



these experiences. By paying close attention to setting and psychological preparation (set), the Eleusinian Mysteries were evidently conceived to facilitate a safe, controlled, and deeply transformative experience for participants, indicating an early, intentional use of psychedelics as conduits for spiritual enlightenment and personal metamorphosis.

## Conclusion

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In this thesis, we have ventured deep into the enigmatic realm of the Eleusinian Mysteries, exploring the multifaceted components that contributed to its profound impact on initiates across centuries. By examining the role of music, dance,entheogens, and the meticulously crafted set and setting, we have pieced together a narrative that underscores the complex and sophisticated nature of these ancient rituals. Through a blend of historical analysis, philosophical inquiry, and modern scientific research, this work has aimed to shed light on how the Eleusinian mysteries might have harnessed the transformative power of psychedelic experiences to facilitate a profound engagement with the divine, the community, and the self.

The exploration began with an understanding of the historical and cultural backdrop of the Eleusinian Mysteries. While Greek writers from living under the height of Athenian power offered little explanation for the mysteries, later writers, especially Christian writers, offered more substantial explanations and descriptions of these mysteries. The pieced together evidence set the stage for a deeper investigation into the ritualistic use of music and dance. These elements, deeply embedded in the essence of the ceremonies, were shown to be integral to creating an immersive, emotional, and unifying experience for the participants. The hypothesis surrounding the use of entheogens, specifically through the *kykeon*, further expanded our understanding of the Mysteries, suggesting a possible chemical underpinning for the transformative experiences reported by initiates.

By critically engaging with both ancient texts and contemporary studies on psychedelics, this thesis has argued for a holistic understanding of the Eleusinian Mysteries, one that encompasses the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human experience. The discussion on set and setting, drawing from the grand architect of the Eleusinian sanctuary and

the natural environment, highlighted the importance of context in shaping the initiates' journey towards enlightenment and transcendence.

The Eleusinian Mysteries, as explored in this thesis, emerge not merely as religious rites of antiquity but as a sophisticated and intentional design for inducing and navigating transformative experiences. This ancient practice, characterized by a deep respect for the power of psychedelics, music, and communal engagement, offers valuable insight into the human quest for meaning, belonging, and understanding of the afterlife.

In conclusion, this thesis not only demonstrates the rekindling of academic interest with the entheogenic hypothesis began by Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann but also challenges us to reconsider the boundaries of scholarly thought and the potential of ancient wisdom in informing contemporary debates on consciousness, spirituality, and the therapeutic use of psychedelics. By bridging the gap between the ancient and the modern, it invites a more inclusive and open-minded exploration of human experiences that transcends the ordinary, urging us to contemplate the timeless human pursuit of understanding the mysteries of life, death, and the divine.

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