THE FUNCTION OF THE NIGHT IN ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION

an exploration of the ancient world between dusk and dawn

Jasper Verplanke

Cover: Illustration of the Eleusinian Mysteries

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Research Master Thesis

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Listen to the wind on the water
Listen to the waves upon the shore
Try to sleep, sleep won't come
Just as I begin to fade
Then I remember
When the moon was full and bright
I would take you in the darkness
And do the tango in the night

(Fleetwood Mac, *Tango in the Night,* 1987)

'Dus je zit helemaal alleen?' vroeg Frits. 'Niemand beneden, niemand boven. Niemand aan de ene kant, niemand aan de andere kant. En het is avond. Hoe, hoe, hoe. Mens mens. Kijk je wel goed, of de lichtpenning in de meter nog niet op is, tegen dat het donker wordt? Stel je voor, dat de gulden op is of de stop doorslaat. Alles donker. O, help, help.'

(*De Avonden*, Gerard Reve, 1947)

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Preface

What started as a project to study the concept of wellness in ancient Greece ended up being a study of the night in Greek religion. Although this dramatic shift cannot be attributed to one moment, it is without a doubt the inspirational lecture by professor Angelos Chaniotis titled *Ancient Greece after Sunset* that triggered me to abandon all previous work and embrace the night as the topic of my master thesis. Studying in Leiden has taught me that precisely these obscure or odd topics are usually the ones most worth pursuing. First and foremost I would like to take this opportunity to thank my thesis supervisor and mentor dr. Kim Beerden, for her patience, enthusiasm, and incessant feedback. I also want to thank dr. Frits Naerebout and prof. dr. Jürgen Zangenberg for the amazing opportunities which have made my time at Leiden University so much more valuable and interesting, as well as for their interest in this final project. To all students in The Office: thank you for putting up me with these last months and for drinking all my coffee. Lastly I want to thank Evi and Lili, for their continuous support, both day and night.

The Office, April 2017 Jasper Verplanke

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Concepts and definitions

The dissimilarity between night and day is apparently so evident, that an idiom that is used to indicate fundamental disparity is directly drawn from it: "as different as night and day." We may think of binary oppositions such as light and dark, activity and sleeping, hot and cold, safe and dangerous, all of which are characteristic of the diurnal and the nocturnal world respectively. The difference between day and night is, at first glance, unproblematic. However, when we try to define either concept on its own rather than by comparing it to the other, it becomes clear that it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly is meant by 'night'.

What is 'night', and what is not? There appear to be two answers to this question. The night is either a measurable and natural phenomenon, defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the time from dusk to dawn when no sunlight is visible", or a culturally-determined, human construct that is different all across the world (yet present everywhere).[1] This distinction between the "natural" night on the one hand and the "cultural" night on the other is certainly no strict dichotomy, as they always share the foremost quality of the night: darkness, or at least the absence of sunlight. However, demarcations such as when the night starts and when it ends, or may widely vary between the two.

Following the cultural night and natural night distinction, we may define the night in various ways. From the cultural viewpoint, it can be seen as an inversion of the day, or simply as the period between one day and the next. One may also say that night is the period between 00:00 and 06:00, or even between 18:00 and 00:00, following the evening and preceding the morning. Even the relationship between the night and the day is not fixed; is the night part of the day, or does it form the boundary of it? Are day and night perceived as equal halves of a

[1] "Night." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed February 22, 2016. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/night.

single period, a day, or both seen as periods that are wholly separate from each other? Furthermore, from the natural viewpoint, the night could be determined by the setting and the rising of the sun: from dusk till dawn, it is night.

In addition to natural and cultural elements, time holds an interesting position somewhere between the other two. The passing of time occurs naturally, while the measuring of it is decidedly human. Often elements from all three come together, and they sometimes turn out to be incommensurable. For instance, consider that the night in Greece is significantly longer in the winter than it is in the summer. This means that the time of night changes each day: up until the winter solstice, the day becomes shorter while the night becomes longer every diurnal cycle. At the same time, it is unlikely that humans change their behavior exactly in accordance to these minor daily changes: you wake up at 07:00 and go to bed at 23:15 all year round while calling the intermediate period "night" without hesitation. Human perception of the night, in this case, does not necessarily follow natural phenomena or measurements of time. This tension between natural phenomena, time, and human perception will surface frequently throughout this thesis.

1.2 The night in history

The darkness of the night is challenging to humans, who are by nature ill-equipped to deal with lightlessness. We have poor night vision, easily lose track of our bearings without visible landmarks, and the nocturnal drop of temperature that is common in most places on earth may even prove fatal. It is therefore not surprising that humans are active during the day and inactive at night and that, although this is only true on the most general level, would explain why most historic narratives are comprised of diurnal episodes rather than nocturnal ones. We might also speak of a source bias: we only know more about the day because we have more sources, but does this leads to the conclusion that we have more sources because there simply wasn't anything to be documented at night and more so during the day? Perhaps Solon, the famous Athenian politician, would lose much of his perceived historical significance if we only

knew about his nocturnal activities, while figures contemporary to him might suddenly seem much more important if their nighttime actions were handed down to us. This idea, certainly an absurd one, does raise some questions: what do we know about night and day in our historical sources? Not always is the moment made explicit, or it may remain ambiguous. At the same time, there are scores of examples of events that took place specifically at night, not to mention all the modes of human behavior particular to the night.

As an example of the significance given to the night in our most ancient sources, in the poems of Homer the night features prominently; one of the more well-known recurring phrases in the Odyssey is about the night changing into day: "As soon as early Dawn appeared, the rosy-fingered (...)".[2] This transition from night into day, or vice versa, is a particularly potent subject, although perhaps a little out of the scope of this thesis; if the night is black and day is white, dusk and dawn are grey areas that lie in between, and are not part of, night and day. When Penelope weaves her great shroud during the day and then unravels it at night to keep the oppressive suitors at bay, we see a complete inversion of activity between the day and night.[3] In the same scene, one of the foremost qualities of the night is put in the spotlight: darkness. Penelope requires the cover of night to work in secret while her handmaidens and the suitors sleep, yet she requires torches to do what she can do more easily during the day.

Thus we can already see that the night is prone to ambiguities, inversions, and reversals. In the Illiad, where the night is usually a ceasefire and a time of rest, some passages has most of the major characters in a state of insomnia, overcome by doubts and concerned with the plotting

[2] Homer, *Odyssey*, 2.1-2.

[3] Homer, *Odyssey*, 2.103-105.

of strategies and gaining intelligence on the enemy.[4] In the Odyssey, as well as in the Illiad, the night seems to be both a time of rest as it is a time of ceaseless activity and contemplation.[5]

Some activities were done exclusively at night, both out of practical necessity and ritual tradition. These activities can be categorized into various kinds: commercial, cultural, religious, and political. There are many accounts of fishing being done at night, with the help of torches.[6] Burglary, to mention another commercial activity that is best done under the cover of night, as well as other criminal activities, would have primarily occurred nocturnally.[7] Sexuality and the night are linked in a similar fashion as criminality and the night are, for it is usually done secretly (at least privately) and, in addition, sexuality is usually expressed in the bedroom where people would be at night. Prostitution and related forms of sexual commercial entertainment would certainly have been found at night as well. In the context of the symposium, also a nightly even, drinking, music, and sexuality all came together.[8] All of the above-mentioned cases, even they are widely diverse in the specifics, all have one element in common: they require darkness. Much like many activities are carried out during the day out of efficiency, which is something that is easily taken for granted without further contemplation, here we see a selection of those activities that occur nocturnally out of practical necessity. On the other hand, it should be noted that they are not wholly exclusive to the night; each of them could have (and would have) seen the light of day

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[4] This is most evident in Homer, *Illiad*, book 10.

[5] Resting, perhaps the most obvious "activity" of the night, occurs nocturnally oftentimes in both the Odyssey and the Iliad, see for instance Homer, *Odyssey,* 3.362-364 and *Iliad,* 2.386-387. As for activities, some are better suited for the night than others, such as travelling, standing guard, or contemplating and reflecting. See for instance *Odyssey,* 1.443-444; 2.344-347; 2.434, and *Iliad,* 2.1-4.

[6] Oppian, *Halieutica*, 4.634-643. For much more on (night)fishing, see Annalisa Marzano, *Harvesting the Sea: The Exploitation of Marine Resources in the Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford 2013).

[7] Christopher D. Stanley, "Who's Afraid of a Thief in the Night?," *New Testament Studies*, 48, 4 (2002) 468-486. Especially 472-478 centers around (nocturnal) burglary.

[8] Here I am referring to other services provided by the male and female dancers and musicians present at the symposia, see for instance Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution,* 50.2; here Aristotle describes rules surrounding the fees and services of "flute-girls and harp-girls and lyre-girls". In Aristophanes' *Wasps,* there is a lively description of the sexual services provided by a "girl piper" (lines 1335-1386).

as well, albeit in a different form. Interesting nocturnal affairs in the ancient world came in no short supply both in literature and in human behavior, it seems, and glossing over these cases in favor of a diurnal history would seriously inhibit our understanding of the past.

Fortunately, some scholars have already attempted to create a "history of the night". Many of them are solely focused on the early modern period, where they see marked changes in human behavior and perception in regards to the night. The 2005 publication of *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* by A. Roger Ekirch focuses on the night in the early modern period, specifically how the meaning of night changed in the period leading up to the Industrial Revolution, which marked a great overhaul of the nocturnal Western world.[9] In earlier years, more historians (as well as academics from other fields) wrote about similar topics, with a particular interest in technological development and parallel social changes. This "industrialization" of the night comes into fruition in the 19th century, which saw many ambitious building projects and urban planning relating to changing ideas about the night.

At the end of the 19th century, where belief in the endless powers of technological innovation were at their peak, the *Tour Soleil* of Jules Bourdais was one of the main contenders for the 1889 Paris Exposition, which was to be a tower standing 360 meters high, with a light source that would illuminate the entire city of Paris by itself.[10] This would be the final conclusion of the age-old project of "turning night into day", following a popular expression of the same period. Despite the fact that Bourdais' rival Gustav Eiffel would eventually see his project

[9] A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York 2005).

[10] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Night in the Nineteenth Century,* trans. Angela Davies (London 1988).

become reality, the initial enthusiasm for the *Tour Soleil* is telling: it would only be a matter of time before technology trumps the daily oppression of the dark night.[11]

The study of the night in antiquity is now quickly becoming an international 'hot topic' and has sparked many scholars to engage in various research projects and disciplines, such as narratology, epigraphy, poetry, archaeology, art, social history, and many others.[12] Some work has been done on the night in antiquity in earlier years, although not as focused as the histories on the (early) modern periods. Instead of technology or social dimensions, key themes here are dreams, poetry, and sleep.[13] A comprehensive and in-depth overview of the night in antiquity, however, is still lacking; nevertheless, hopes are high our understanding of the nocturnal world in ancient times will strongly develop in the coming years.

In what way will a more firm understanding of the night's place in (ancient) history be beneficial to our general grasp on this period? And how could we be establish such an understanding, of such an expansive and yet elusive topic? In this thesis, I will venture to widen and intensify the historical debate of the night, by going into its place in ancient Greek history. By studying various cases within Greek religion in which the night is prominently present or expressly absent, I aim to answer the question: what is the function of the night in Greek religion? The purpose of answering this question is both to look at Greek religion from another perspective and to go into this wider understanding of the night in the Greek world.

In the first chapter, the formal definition of night, the historiographical debate, and the earliest sources are discussed. Time and astronomy, or more general, natural phenomena, play a

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[11] The expelling of darkness by the rise of technological innovation, and the parallel development of a now way of enlightened thinking was not unique to the West: Avner Wishnitzer, "Into the Dark: Power, Life, and Nocturnal Life in 18th-century Istanbul," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46 (2014) 513-531.

[12] See for instance: Entretiens LXIV: The Night in Greek and Roman Culture, prepared by Angelos Chaniotis, August 21-25 2017 (forthcoming).

[13] A particularly widely oriented volume on the night in Greco-Roman culture, with an emphasis on dreams: Emma Scioli and Christine Walde (eds.), Sub Imagine Somni*; Nighttine Phenomena in Greco-Roman Culture* (Florence 2010).

large role in this first discussion, although it may be noted that it lies outside the scope of this thesis to go deeper into the more technical aspects of archaeoastronomy and ancient forms of timekeeping. After a clear view of the ancient temporal order has been established, the most evident traits of the night and their influences on human behavior are examined. Darkness, the most palpable quality of the night, is both a challenge as well as a convenient cover for various activities. Already in the archaic authors we find ample examples of nocturnal modes of behavior, many of which will be expanded upon throughout this thesis, such as sleeping, dreaming, copulating, stealing and sneaking, farming and contemplating. The main object of this first chapter, then, is to establish what we find and won't find during the night, so as to paint a picture of what the night looked like in ancient Greece. Lastly, the most conspicuous connectors between the night and religion are discussed, which will be dealt with more extensively in the following chapters.

In the following chapter, the religious sphere of the world after sunset is fully explored in the form case studies revolving around the question: how does this particular element of ancient religion relate to the night? The problematic topic of ancient Greek religion is introduced, moving from the general debate on polis religion to the three-fold division of religion that is maintained in this thesis: polis religion, mystery cults, and magic. The model of polis religion perceives religion as being embedded into the Greek polis, which suggests that what can be said about the night in relation to religion, also says something about Greek culture in general.[14] Each category, polis religion, mystery cults, and magic, will be discussed in their own right before moving on to the final chapter, where a synthesis of the respective outcomes of case studies is conferred. This systematic approach to Greek religion, from the mainstream polis cults to the more liminal uses of magic, allows me to not only give detailed insights into each category's

[14] Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Further Aspects of Polis Religion", AION (archeol), 10 (1988) 259-274.

relationship with the night, but finally also to give a coherent answer to the question of how the night is so significant in ancient Greek religion.

1.3 Periodization, geography, and setup

At this point, the matter of localization and periodization needs to be addressed. For a phenomenon so universal and all-encompassing as the night, in addition to the broad concept of Greek religion, what germane borders can be drawn, if such demarcations can be formed at all? The natural night itself hasn't changed, so no self-evident specification can be derived from there. Instead I will follow a more general periodization and geography: from the archaic Greek period of the 8th century BCE until the end of the Hellenistic period in the middle of the 2nd century BCE, where I understand Greece as the mainland, the islands, the Western coast of modern Turkey, and the overseas colonies which spring up around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea coast.

This period is particularly interesting, not only because of the richness of sources or the intensity of the historical debate, but because of the relative continuity of the period; all great cultural and social developments aside, many of the customs and institutions of the later Hellenistic period ae best understood when studied from their earlier forms of the archaic period. In his seminal work on the history of the night of the Greco-Roman world, Angelos Chaniotis (about whom more will follow in the coming chapter) argues that there is a striking discontinuity in nighttime behavior after the middle of the 4th century B.C.E.; a veritable "Entnachtung", where efforts are made to make the night "brighter, safer, more rational, more filled with life, more efficient."[15] For our current purposes, to develop a wider understanding of the ancient Greek nigh, it will be interesting to not only study this period of change, but also the period leading up to it. Even though Chaniotis argues for a long Hellenistic period, ending not at the

[15] From the text of his seminar delivered in Oxford titled *Ancient Greece after sunset: from night stories to a history of the night,* personal correspondence 21-10-2015.

battle of Actium but with the Antonines in the late 2nd century CE, for the sake of consistency and brevity I will limit myself to the pre-Roman periods of Greece. It is within these temporary and geographic limits that the thesis finds it focus, although I will occasionally move beyond these borders should they prove to be constraining beyond necessity: for instance, the writings of Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* are dated to the 2nd century CE, but since his topics include earlier periods of Greek history I will permit these kind of texts to be used as part of the corpus of source materials.[16]

[16] Pausanias, *Description of Greece.*

Chapter II: The Night in Ancient Greece

2.1 The historical debate: colonizing the night

Not until recent times has the night found its way into the historical debate as a subject in its own right. The 2005 publication of *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* by A. Roger Ekirch focuses on the night in the early modern period, specifically how the meaning of night changed in the period leading up to the Industrial Revolution, which marked a great overhaul of the nocturnal Western world.[17] This book, the first historical monograph of its kind dealing wholly with the night, inspired other scholars to conduct similar research.[18] Ekirch is well aware of the novelty of his topic:

> Notwithstanding major studies on crime and witchcraft, night, in its own right, has received scant attention, principally due to the longstanding presumption that little else of consequence transpired. "No occupation but sleepe, feed, and fart," to quote the Jacobean poet Thomas Middleton.[19]

Despite being the first to dedicate a whole book to it, Ekirch was not the first to focus to explicitly focus on the significance of the night in history. In 1987 Murray Melbin published his *Night as Frontier: Colonizing the World After Dark*, which is a sociological work rather than being strictly historical, but introduces the metaphor later used by Ekirch and Koslofsky of "colonizing the night".[20] In this work, Melbin advances the metaphor of perceiving the night as the (former) edge of civilization: the day is controlled, ingrained into our culture, and safe, whereas the night is wild, perilous, and unknown. By applying the Frontier Thesis of F.J. Turner, Melbin compares the introduction of advanced street lights, 'workdays' lasting into the night because of the

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[17] A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York 2005).

[18] Most notably Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge 2011).

[19] Ekirch, *At Day's Close,* xxv.

[20] Murray Melbin, *The Night as Frontier: Colonizing the World After Dark* (New York 1987). This volume is partly based on the earlier publication by Melbin, "Night as Frontier," *American Sociological Review,* 43, 1 (1978) 3-22.

incessant production of the Industrial Revolution, and other socio-cultural innovations, with the original pioneers of North-America, who slowly moved the frontier westward in their colonization of the continent.[21] Briefly put, through technological and social modernization, the night slowly became more part of our lived space, and less like the wilderness it was before: the night was colonized. Melbin paints the picture of the night as a frontier, a border than can be expanded and colonized by the historically diurnal humans to increase happiness and efficiency:

> Observing from a distance, we can recognize a parallel between what we accomplished over the terrain and over the hours. (..) Now, venturing into the night, we have the same motives as our predecessors who migrated geographically. The daytime is too crowded. Its carrying capacity is strained, and still it does not yield all that the community wants. (..) Using the same space more of the time is a way to multiply its capacity. Some people dislike the commotion of the day and crave the serenity of night. Others look to it to better themselves economically.[22]

The colonial language employed by Melbin completely encapsulates his work in the (post-) colonial debate, as he speaks of "daytimers" and "nighttimers", "settlers", and "frontier people", while formulating parallels such as: "(..) the attitudes of nighttimers toward daytimers resemble those of Westeners towards Easteners a century ago."[23] It is interesting that many of the already mentioned scholars have largely adopted this idea of a colonization of the night, although they do not adhere as strictly to the metaphor as Melbin does. In addition to these social approaches,

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[21] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York 1921).

[22] Melbin, *The Night as Frontier,* 70.

[23] Idem, 71; The volume by Koslofsky further elaborates on this idea of "colonizing the night": Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire,* 353.

scholars have been especially interested in the human experience of night and the connection with anxieties and the expression thereof in literature, the visual arts, and religion.[24]

It is striking, however, that these works deal almost exclusively with the early modern period and the effects of the industrial modernization of the Western world on the human experience of the night, almost completely ignoring earlier periods. Is this to say that before the introduction of permanent street lights in the late 17th century and the so-called colonization of the night, the night was unchanging for centuries, insignificant and above all, completely dark? It is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that this is certainly not the case and to consequently demonstrate how a similar focus, yet set some 2000 years earlier, is also possible for the ancient Greek night. Through a special focus on the proposed connections between Greek religion and the night a more general concept of the night will be established. As the focus of this thesis lies on religion and its place in the nocturnal world, the prevailing question remains: what is the function of the night in Greek religion?

Although the authors mentioned above did not busy themselves with this question, some work has been done on the matter. On the 10th of August, 2013, Angelos Chaniotis, professor of Ancient History and Classics at Princeton University and at that time visiting professor at the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens, gave a lecture titled: *Ancient Greece after Sunset: Histories, Archaeologies, and Perceptions of the Night.* This particular lecture has been filmed and can be accessed online.[25] This lecture was also given in Oxford, Tel Aviv, and Princeton, albeit in

[24] For the connection between Biblical imagery and fear of the night see Ekirch, *At Day's Close,* 7-30; on fears and anxieties concerning the nocturnal world, see P.R. Gleichmann, "Nacht en beschaving," *Groniek*, 139 (1997) 140-154; Melbin underlines the societal tensions arising in the initial colonization of the night and how the initial fear of the night was overcome: Melbin, *The Night as Frontier,* 67-81. Koslofsky dedicates much of his volume on the significance of nocturnal imagery and the rise of Protestantism, most notably in Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire,* 35-63; 63-110. For a more elaborate social approach to the night, see Norbert Schindler, *Rebellion, Community and Custom in Early Modern Germany,* trans. Pamela A. Selwyn (Cambridge 2002) 193-235.

[25] Angelos Chaniotis, "Ancient Greece after sunset by Professor Angelos Chaniotis" (20-08-2013, online video) < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQOFF9iRXMc>

slightly different forms with varying topics and fixations. In these lectures, the texts of which professor Chaniotis has graciously shared with me, a veritable treasure trove of ideas, concepts, topics, and concrete examples relating to the night and the ancient world is presented.[26] Among many other things, Chaniotis gives examples of the ancient dangers of the night, of how one shouldn't even go to dinner without making a will, but also of its pleasures, such as commensality or the symposia. Religious ceremonies, warfare, celebrations, magic; all of these things became increasingly more significant in and to the nocturnal world.[27] He ultimately sets out to establish that the night had never been as lively and full human interactions as it came to be in the Hellenistic age, with ample epigraphic, literary, and even archaeological sources which underline his argument. As this thesis progresses, I will come back to his seminal work on this topic on numerous occasions.[28]

2.2 The spatial debate

One of the primary reasons for the colonization of the night, according to Melbin, was to increase the number of active and productive hours in a day and consequently make our lives more efficient, in other words: "using the same space more of the time is a way to multiply its capacity."[29] Here, the night is not so much different from the day in itself, but simply a previously underused part of the temporal dimension of the day. The space is wherever our daily activities take us. Implicitly, however, Melbin's metaphor of the colonization of the night seems to let go of the night as a temporal concept, and regards it as a spatial one: the night is something

[26] Personal correspondence, 21-10-2015.

[27] Here Chaniotis cites Juvenal, the late 1st century CE Roman satirist: "Now consider the various other dangers of the night. What a long way it is from the high roofs for a tile to hit your skull! How often cracked and leaky pots tumble down from the windows! What a smash when they strike the pavement, marking and damaging it! You could be thought careless and unaware of what can suddenly befall if you go out to dinner without having made your will." Juvenal, *Satires,* 3.268-275.

[28] It should be noted that I am deeply indebted to prof. Chaniotis for sharing his (unpublished) work with me in our personal correspondence.

[29] Melbin, *The Night as Frontier,* 70.

that one can move into, explore, and ultimately inhabit. Is this only the result of overanalysis of the metaphor, or is there more to this spatial approach?

The "spatial turn" has sparked many attempts across a broad spectrum of disciplines to redefine spatiality and its underlying mechanics, such as the way it is produced and the way it is perceived and experienced. The field of human geography over the last two decades has gone from being perceived as "a trivial, purely empirical field with little analytical substance" to an interdisciplinary and widely developed analytical framework.[30] At the heart of this reevaluation of spatiality lies that space is a "social construction relevant to the understanding of the different histories of human subjects and to the production of cultural phenomena."[31] Space, then, is not a given, neutral thing, but it is created by humans who interact with their surroundings; it is not a mere background, but a socio-cultural construct.[32]

This newly developed way of 'thinking spatially' has already been adopted by many scholars in the social sciences and the humanities, and has given rise to a multitude of exciting new studies and frameworks through which we can think about social and cultural issues. One of these novel concepts is that of 'wilderness'. Originally found exclusively in other fields, such as ecological and theological studies, wilderness has found its way into religious studies. Sparking interest in researchers from many different disciplines, the understanding of the concept of wilderness has quickly grown and has now been subject to extensive theorizing, rendering it a viable framework in which to place particular elements of religion, myth, and ritual. Laura Feldt, who edited the first volume solely dedicated to this theorization of wilderness in religious studies, summarizes it as follows:

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[30] Barney Warf and Santa Arias, "Introduction: the reinsertion of space into the social sciences and humanities," in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London/New York 2009) 1.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Idem, 5-6. See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicolson-Smith (Oxford 1991) 1: "Not so many years ago, the word 'space' had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area. (..) To speak of 'social space', therefore, would have sounded strange."

> Wilderness is often understood as a place where humans have not fully "infected" nature, as uncontaminated by 'civilization'. Wilderness has been imagined as a part of the solution to humankind's problematic relationship with the non-human world, and as crucial to understandings of nature as alterity. (..) People go to the wilderness to meet themselves, their demons, and their gods; it is simultaneously framed as refuge, paradise, waste land, and hell; it is where you can be lead astray, into idolatry or death, or where you can discover a new subjectivity, where you may find the deepest wisdom or great ignorance.[33]

Wilderness is a space, either real or imagined. This space lies on the other side of a border, again a frontier, which separates civilization from the surrounding wilderness. Wilderness, then, is that which humans have not "contaminated" by inhabiting and directly influencing it.[34] As such, wilderness is characterized by being in strong opposition with human culture, either physically (dense cities versus empty plains, agricultural land versus rough terrain) or conceptually (ordered versus chaotic, contaminated versus pure). Wilderness is not always a negative or a positive alternative to civilization: it may be considered dangerous and confusing, but also inspiring and calm. The one constant, then, is its *otherness* from what is the regular living space. It might prove interesting to pursue this concept of wilderness for the purposes of this thesis: could the night be understood as a wilderness as well? This will be tested further on in the thesis.

Going back to the night: what does it mean to 'think spatially' about the night? And what advantages does this bring? Melbin and the later scholars following his colonization terminology in no way explicate on this, nor do we find other scholars who have attempted something similar: one might say that we are here the first colonizers of the spatiality of the night. The night has none of the characteristics of a 'real' space: it has no physical dimensions, cannot

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[33] Laura Feldt, "Wilderness in Mythology and Religion," in *Wilderness in Mythology and Religion Approaching Religious Spatialities, Cosmologies, and Ideas of Wild Nature*, Laura Feldt ed. (Berlin 2012) 1.

[34] Ibid.

be located on any map, and has neither a fixed nor a dynamic position in the phenomenal world. Our vocabulary and experience of the night, however, is permeated with spatial (and temporal) terminology: "do not go into the night", "the night is full of terrors", "I roam the night". All of these utterances betray how we conceive of the night as something that can be entered, explored, and filled, yet the night has none of the physical qualities usually necessary for such concepts. Clearly, we conceive of the night in spatial terms rather than empirically perceive it as such, and we must understand the spatiality of the night as 'imagined' as a result.

2.3 The temporal debate

> Have you ever stopped to think what life would be like without your alarm clock, without church bells ringing out the hour, without clocks in lecture rooms? How differently would you understand the world?[35]

The ever more accurate measurement of time, be it in years, days, or nanoseconds, is an ongoing project with a long history. Instruments to measure and document the passing of time have become increasingly complex and omnipresent: the idea, as cited above, that we would go through our lives without access to these instruments, has become almost inconceivable. Even though this anxiety was likely not as strong in ancient Greek society as it is on our contemporary one, both material and literal sources demonstrate us that time was a fundamental issue in antiquity as well.[36]

What precisely is the role of the temporal order in this study of the night? First of all, for the ancient Greeks time was, as the saying goes, of the essence. Already in Hesiod the

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[35] Danielle S. Allen, "A Schedule of Boundaries: An exploration, launched from the water-clock, of Athenian time," *Greece and Rome*, vol. 43, 2 (1996) 157-168.

[36] While some of these literary sources will be discussed below, discussion of the material record of time keeping will be limited. For a very extensive study on sundials, see Sharon L. Gibs, *Greek and Roman Sundials* (New Haven 1976); for a more general overview of ancient time keeping devices and methods, see Allen, "The Flux of Time in Ancient Greece," Daeadalus, vol. 132. 2 (2003) 62-73.

significance of the passing of time and the changing of the seasons becomes abundantly clear. In its descriptions of agricultural practices, Hesiod continually refers to various periods of the year in which certain work has to be done and gives accounts specific to the day on for how long some activities have to last.[37] Furthermore, he expresses anxieties related to the flux of time, which begins to show that our perception of time may far more rigid than it was in antiquity.[38]

Hesiod's work also gives some insight into the development of their understanding of how the length of day and night varies throughout the year: "(…) for that is when the star Sirius goes during the day only briefly above the heads of death-nurtured human beings and takes a greater share of the night (…)".[39] From this first source, some of the aforementioned factors of the night already become evident: the flux of time and the changing of seasons (and by that, the changing length of night and day). Without a doubt, measuring and understanding time was deeply importance in societies that relied on agriculture for nourishment, which is clearly expressed by Hesiod: the correct timing of agricultural activities is of great concern. Hesiod is not very explicit about the night, but what he does say does not sound appealing: "For now the race is indeed one of iron. And they will not cease from toil and distress by day, nor from being worn out by suffering at night, and the gods will give them grievous cares."[40] The hardship of working in during the day is clearly not alleviated by the sweet slumber of sleep according to Hesiod, as the night only promises more suffering. Even when it is not explicitly the night that Hesiod is concerned about, it certainly holds a place of prominence in his work that is, for a large part, about the passing time.

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[37] See for instance Hesiod, *Works and Days,* 609-617.

[38] "But Zeus will destroy this race of speech-endowed human beings too, when at their birth the hair on their temples will be quite gray." Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 180-182.

[39] Hesiod, *Works and Days,* 416-418.

[40] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 176-178.

Seasonability, one of the main themes in Hesiod's poem, implies a certain measuring of time, which in term requires a range of technical and intellectual efforts. We can distinguish roughly thee actions in human handling of time: telling time, measuring time, and marking time. Telling the time says something about that specific moment ("It is half past one"), measuring time says something about the passing of time in between different moments ("It was ninety minutes ago"), and marking time says something about that day in a greater sequence of days ("Today it is the 11th of February, 2016)". Modern wristwatches often have the functionality to give the needed information on all three domains, as long as they have a stopwatch and tell the date in addition to just giving the time, but in antiquity each domain was measured with particular instruments and often not in relation to each other. Marking and interpreting the movements of celestial bodies across the (night) sky was the main source of information about time. The rising and setting of the sun says something about the time of day, while its position on the horizon upon sunrise and sunset in relation to other days says something about the time of year. In addition to the sun, the Greeks were familiar with a range of other celestial bodies and their movements across the sky.[41] As also noted by Hesiod, the starts helped to determine the proper time for certain agricultural activities, while the moon was widely used in calendars and to plan festivals.[42] Interestingly, the supposed differences between the night and the day also play out on a cosmic scale: the solar year and lunar year, 365 days or twelve lunar cycles respectively, are not exactly the same length.[43]

The role and perception of time in antiquity has attracted many scholars from a multitude of disciplines. Recurring topics are the philosophical discussion on time, or the influence of the

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[42] Hannah, *Time in Antiquiy,* 27.

[43] Ibidem.

Greek philosophical debate on modern views on temporality, the use of time in narratives, and the history and archaeology of time keeping.[44]

Exceedingly interesting for our purposes is the relationship between religion and the night, as it appears that nocturnal expressions of religion are quite distinct from diurnal expressions. As for ritual practices carried out at night, there seems to be one great difference from those done during the day: most of the temples were closed at night. However, there are some notable exceptions to this rule, such as the asclepeion of Epidaurus, or the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries.[45] Incubation practices, such as those in the cult of Asclepius or Serapis, by definition required the sanctuary to be open by night. Certain significant cultural events, such as marriages and funerals, also (partially)occurred nocturnally. It is on the subject of religion that thesis will focus, approaching it as a case study of the wider research on the night.

2.4 Religious debate

"Polis religion", despite strong and certainly not unjustified critiques, still is a strong interpretative model for studying ancient Greek religion. Although the idea of an intimate connection between the structuring of the Greek city and the religion of its inhabitants has been around since the 60's, polis religion has gained momentum over the last years and cannot be

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[44] Giusepp Cambiano, "Greek Philosophy and Western History: A philosophy-centered temporality," in *The Western Time of Ancient History: Historiographical Encounters with the Greek and Roman Pasts,* Alexandra Lianeri ed. (Cambridge 2011). Cambiano gives a historiographical overview on both the inception and the reception of Greek ideas of temporality, contextualizing both ancient and contemporary ideas on the history of time within philosophy. On the way temporality is portrayed and structured in Greek narratives, especially in Homer, see Alex C. Purves ed., *Space and Time in Ancient Greek Narrative* (Cambridge 2010). For a history on the keeping and structuring of time and history in antiquity, albeit with a special focus on Roman time keeping, see Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley/London 2007).

[45] From the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus there is a great collection of inscriptions from pilgrims who tell of how they spend the night there and were healed or otherwise helped by Asclepius. See Lynn R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Atlanta 1995). As for the Eleusinian Mysteries, notable is detailed (yet dated) description of George E. Mylonas, "Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries", *The Classical Journal,* 43 (1947) 130-146.

ignored in any discussion in the field – which does not mean it cannot be approached critically or denounced outright. Perhaps the most coherently and strongly voiced critical reappraisals of polis religion was published only recently by Julia Kindt, who in her "Rethinking Greek Religion" examines the most fundamental premises and implications of the model and looks back on the development of "polis religion" before the influential articles by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood in the late 80's, and how these articles formed the basis for later debates.[46] One of the foremost points of criticism Kindt voices, is that exactly those forms of religious expressions that cannot be covered by the polis model, for instance personal and private religion, or magic, is mostly ignored or at least marginalized.[47]

Following Kindt, in this thesis I will refrain from rigidly holding on to the model of polis religion, and rather only following it when it is helpful in understanding certain phenomena.[48] In doing so, I will approach Greek religion divided up into various parts before I treat it as a whole, so as to deductively come to a satisfactory concept of Greek religion, rather than start from the polis religion model to inductively work my way down from the general to the specific. My point of departure will be that which is usually meant by polis religion, namely the public and well-known veneration of deities through various cults in the Greek city states. On the border of the spectrum of so-called "mainstream" religion lies the mystery cult, most notably Orphic or Bacchic cults, which are in some ways similar to the public religion of the polis, but distinguish themselves by their closed character and the special status of the associated initiates.[49] As a third case I will focus on magic, which is in many ways quite different from both public religion and

[46] Julia Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion* (Cambridge 2012).

[47] Kindt (2012), 23. See also Jan Bremmer, "*Manteis*, Magic, Mysteries, and Mythography: Messy Margins of *Polis* Religion?", *Kernos* 23 (2010), 13-35.

[48] As Kindt states: "For there are some areas which polis religion reveals rather well, and these need to be integrated into a more comprehensive conception of the religious." Kindt (2012), 6.

[49] Pausanias, *Description of Greece.*

mystery cults, but still within the sphere of the religious, and certainly widespread in the Greek world. [50]

This three-part division of Greek religion is in no way a strict categorization into which all religious expressions can be placed. There is certainly a grey area in between each group where a number of cases must , if they can be made to fit into this categorization at all. However, working in this way allows me to approach the majority of religious phenomena with equal attention to all different manifestations, while maintaining a coherent overview of the whole of Greek religion.

Then where does the night come in? In a similar manner as I will come to some general ideas on Greek religion through specific case studies, I will proceed from studying religious phenomena concerned with the night to be able to say something about the night in ancient Greece in general. The aim of this thesis then, is not so much to present a ”history of the night” but to come to an overview of what religious practices were part of the nocturnal world and to an understanding of the significance of the night in ancient religion. This will enable me to consider some broader positions from the field of religion on the night. Especially this last step could be problematic: what do, for instance, nocturnal ritual practices specifically say about the night in general? How can you even make relevant and concise statements about something as encompassing and intangible as the night? Why would you want to? Questions such as these will be posited and met head on in the course of this thesis.

[50] Bremmer (2010), 16-22.

Chapter III: Magic in the Night

3.1 Religion and magic

Religion is the perceived interaction between humans and supernatural; perceived, because from an etic viewpoint we are not concerned with wether the gods actually existed. From this perspective, there is in fact no interaction at all, as this implies the engagement of two parties where we in fact find only one. At the same time, this "one-sided interaction", religion, is the main object of our inquiry and it is the nature of a specific interaction that determines its position on the scale of various religious interactions, which may range from asking the divine for something, and forcing it. It is in on this latter extremity that we find magic.[51]

The distinguishing element between magic and religion is then mostly formulation, and not so much intention: asking the gods for prosperity or forcing them to bestow it upon you is the difference between common religious behavior and magical performance, even though the envisioned ends of the endeavors are identical. Although this distinction seems to suggest that certain practices can be labeled as magic per se, it at the same times means that each specific performance needs to be reviewed before being able to place it on the "sliding scale" of religious behavior. Important for this argument is that we might label *defixiones*, curse tablets, as something inherently "magical": their formulation is often demanding and not "asking nicely".[52] This is not to say that all *defixiones* are magical. A special group of *defixiones*, labeled by Versnel as "prayers

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[51] "Following up on this idea, I consider magic and religion to be part of one spectrum of human interaction with the supernatural. This can be visualized as a sliding scale. On the one pole we find 'acting religiously'—asking the supernatural—and on the other end we find 'performing magic'—forcing the supernatural to do or say something. On the basis of these considerations, I shall use 'interaction with the supernatural' (which could also be called 'religion' in the widest sense of the word) as the overarching category, with magic and religion (in a narrow sense) as the two poles on this sliding scale." Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs,* 30.

[52] That this is not always the case is to be expected from the wide variation *defixiones*, some of which may only list names, or describe a spell without explicitly invoking higher powers. It is not within the scope of this thesis to delve deeper into the religion-magic debate, so for our purposes it will suffice to say that *most* curse tablets would certainly be deemed magic in the definition established above.

for justice", demonstrate how objects that are certainly very similar in form to other *defixiones*, are radically different from them in their formulation and intention.[53] Clearly, the concept of magic and the corpus of *defixiones* are far from homogeneous and setting up a coherent study into the two may be problematic. Furthermore, neither the concept of magic nor the specific practice of creating *defixiones* have any straightforward connections to the night: then why bother? I aim to answer this question and others by going into the corpus of *defixiones*, trying to give them a suitable place on the religion-magic spectrum, and most importantly, to find out what the function of the night within the corpus is.

3.2 Curse tablets

In addition to the curse tablets that will be discussed below, the magical papyri form another large corpus of materials and texts often connected to, or containing, curses!.[54] For the purposes of this thesis I will however focus on the curse tablets: firstly, because they fit better into the chronological and geographical boundaries of this study, which is Classical and Hellenistic mainland Greece, and secondly, the sheer size and internal diversity of the papyri, any attempt at generalizing runs the risk of oversimplification.

Over 1600 curse tablets have been found all over the Greco-Roman world, dating from the 6th century BCE to the 8th century CE. From the middle of the fifth century we find them in Attica, while some hundred years later they are spreading around the Greco-Roman world. The curses are typically inscribed on thin sheets of lead (alloys), which were then folded, pierced with a nail, and deposited underground.[55] However, we see great variety in the objects now designated

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[53] H.S. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers", *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic & Religion*, C.A. Faraone & D. Obbink (eds.) (New York 1991). More on Versnel's thoughts on curses will be discussed in the following pages.

[54] Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks,* 141; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, 36; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World*, v.

[55] Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks,* 140-141.

as curse tablets, *katadesmoi* in Greek or *defixiones* in Latin. Sometimes the lead may be shaped in the form of an anthropomorphic figure, or such figured may be incised on the tablet. In the case of the former, we can hardly speak of a tablet, and even those we would call tablets were certainly not standardized: not all tablets were folded or pierced, and sometimes the curses were even found on ostraca, stone, or papyri, so even the material was not fixed.[56] As such, a curse tablet consists of two parts: the material of which it is made, of whatever substance and in whatever form, and the text that is inscribed or written on it. When referring to "curses", I mean to address the texts themselves, whereas "curse tablet" is used to refer to the entire object.[57] Let us now move beyond the material dimension and into those recondite texts incised on the tablets, the curse texts themselves.

3.3 The texts

Already in the early 20th century, vast corpora containing the then known *defixiones* were published, where the *Defixionum Tabellae* of A. Audollent (commonly abbreviated as DT) is the most inclusive and complete, at least for that period.[58] He suggests four categories into which the tablets may be placed, according to the purpose and social aim of the curse: judicial rivalry, theatrical rivalry, damages of any kind, and those having to do with love.[59] Later, Faraone replaced "damages" with the more apt "commercial curses", and Versnel added a fifth category, border-area curses, which combine prayer and curse formulae.[60]

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[56] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World,* 3. Also note that not all lead tablets were pure and that lead levels changed (3-4). Because of the chronological and geographical limitations of my study, I will exclusively focus on tablets, rather than the other forms.

[57] "Curse tablet" is, as we have seen, still problematic: not all objects that are related to curses were in fact tablets.

[58] A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (DT) (Paris 1904).

[59] These translated and abbreviated forms are generally used, for instance: Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks,* 154; H.S. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers", *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic & Religion*, C.A. Faraone & D. Obbink (eds.) (New York 1991), 62.

[60] Ibidem; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks,* 154.

Supposedly inscribing the lead tablets was not very difficult, owing to the softness of the metal. We do see major differences between scripts, ranging from crude and inconsistent letters to fluent and neat texts; and from short and simple formulaic texts to longer and more complex ones. In general terms, these elements are indicative of two situations: date and location, and context of creation. As for date and provenance, we see that the earliest texts (from Sicily and Attica) are also the simplest, whereas those from the Roman period are much longer, feature more special words and formulas, are more insistent on invocations of gods and spirits, and demonstrate a broadly diversified and above all international world in general, with unequivocal Semitic and Egyptian influences.[61] The other factor that determined the type and contents of the texts was the person who made the tablet. With the strong variations in quality of the writing of the texts, we may gather that some tablets were produced by professionals.[62] This is further evidenced by Plato:

> Or if he wishes to injure any enemy of his, for a small outlay he will be able to harm just and unjust alike with certain spells and incantations through which they can persuade the gods, they say, to serve their ends.[63]

3.4What do *defixiones* have to do with the night?

> The bed at night, or the rooftop nearby, is the imagined location of most agogai, their place of performance an d the goal of the rite, and it is in the fantasy world of half-sleep that the desperate, sometimes suicidal, passions grow strong.[64]

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[61] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World,* 5-8. By "special words" I am referring to the *ephesia grammata* and *charakteres,* which will both be discussed in more detail later.

[62] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World,* 4-5.

[63] Plato, *Rep.* 2.364B. It is interesting to note that Plato mentions this example of using spells to hurt ones enemies as an example of unjust actions against good people, which attaches negative connotations to both the use of magic and to the professionals who make a living out of it.

[64] John J. Winkler, "The Constraints of Eros", in: C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink ed., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic & Religion* (New York 1991) 216. Winkler goes deeply into the subject matter of love magic in his monograph

Agogai, attraction-spells, form a sizeable chunk of the corpus of curse tablets. Their aim is typically to force their victim to become drawn to the house, or more specifically, bed, of the performer.[65] What is interesting here, is John J. Winkler's attention to the evocative power of magic-related topics: we easily imagine these spells to be cast in dramatic settings, high passions, and especially in a moonlit night. The deposition of curses, be they *agogai* or other forms of *defixiones*, into wells, burials, or otherwise subterranean locations, is often thought to have been carried out at night by modern authors. Various, notably emic, reasons are given for this ritual by modern scholars: *defixiones* could be something shameful, socially condemned, or even illegal so the cover of night safeguards the anonymity of its author;[66] it may also be that they would be more potent at night because of the abundance of nocturnal spirit; [67] sometimes no argumentation is given at all for the imagined nightly setting. [68] In any case, although contemporary scholars come up with various reasons, we find no direct evidence of a (preference) for nocturnal handling of *defixiones*, at least not in Greece in the pre-Roman periods.[69] We also do not find many straightforward references to the night in Attic *defixiones*,

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on sex and gender: J.J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York/London 1990). The third chapter of this work is wholly devoted to erotic magical spells, and it is here that he substantiates the idea that such spells were usually cast at night (on a rooftop), see for instance 86-87. However, since he bases this idea either on papyri and later sources (that are not from mainland Greece), this is without the scope of this thesis.

[65] Ibidem.

[66] Versnel, "Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers", in: C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink ed., *Magika Hiera* (New York 1991) 62-63; note that Versnel here only underlines the social denunciation of (black) magic without referring to the nocturnal deposition of *defixiones*, for that see Robert Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford 2005) 132-133; Kathryn Jean Scheiding, "I consign her wretched walk, her words, deeds, and evil talk": Erotic Magic and Women in the Ancient Greco-Roman World," (MA thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2013) 61.

[67] Alicia Deadrick, "For all time: An Examination of Romantic Love Through Curse Tablets," (MA thesis, San José State University, 2011) 40.

[68] Gager,*Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 20; Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens,* 133.

[69] In Roman law we do find explicit connections between practicing magical rituals at night, see Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World,* 259; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London/New York 2001) 142-145. Both authors refer to Paulus, *Sentences* 5.23.15-18, which states: *"Whoever performs or commissions unlawful*

except for the odd indication of permanence, as for instance in the following 3rd century BCE tablet from Attica:

> I bind Menon . . . I bind . . . and . . . and Phanias and of Pamphilos . . . and . . . and . . .and words and deeds . . . and the . . . and . . . to me and tongue and spirit and deeds of that man and the spirit of that man both night and day.[70]

Here, it seems that "both night and day" is more of an expression that emphasizes the totality and absoluteness of the curse: its effect should last beyond a single moment in time. There isn't anything to suggest a special significance on the night here, as it receives exactly as much explication as the day.

It might be naïve to then assume no connection was present at all if we do perceive strong ties between the nocturnal and the magical in later periods and other regions, in either producing the *defixiones* or the contents of their texts; perhaps the evidence is just not visible from our sources. This absence of evidence is, however, just that: we simply have no solid basis on which to base a connection if we cannot find one in the sources. What is possible, on the other hand, is further interpreting our sources and to think about how the night might manifest itself, by for instance going into themes that do have this clear connection to the night. This is no straightforward exercise: we are looking for the night after we have established we do not see it. This approach requires the extra step of identifying those themes that are both present in the corpus of curse tablets and that are closely associated with the night. Should we then both trace and interpret these themes, we may learn something about the relationship between the night and magic after all.

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nocturnal rites, in order to cast a spell, to curse or to bind someone, will be crucified or thrown to the beasts." See also the earlier mentioned work by Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, 86-87.

[70] DTA 56 (chapter 10); Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk,* 360. We do find many more direct references and allusions to the night in later times, especially 3rd and 4th century Egypt: Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World*, tablet no. 27 (94-96), no. 28 (97-98), no. 30 (101-106).

Thus, the night as such is not evidently visible in the curse tablets of this region in the 5th century. In later times, and in a wider area that includes the whole of the Greek mainland, we find some more references to the nocturnal world, albeit indirectly: sleep and sex (or at least nocturnal encounters) become prevalent topics. Consider the following oft-cited *defixio* from Boeotia:

> I assign Zois, the Eretrian wife of Kabeira, to Earth and to Hermes. I bind her food and her drink, her sleep and her laughter, her meetings and her cithara playing, her entrance, her pleasure, her little buttocks, her thoughts, her eyes . . .[71]

Here we see clear references to two types of behavior often associated with the night: sleep and sexuality. The target of the curse, Zois, is most likely a sex-worker (*hetaira*) who is targeted either to be charmed, which would make this an attraction-spells, or cursed out of revenge, perhaps for ignoring the advances of whoever performed the curse.[72] Nevertheless, we still see no direct mention of the night, nor is any nocturnal setting directly implied. What we do see, is a combination of themes that at least have a particular significance in the night, or are often found in this setting: sleeping, sexuality, and the toils of *hetairai* in general.

In DT 68 we find another curse that is directed at what is likely another *hetaira,* Theodora.[73] The author wants to sabotage the relationship between Theodora and one man in particular, Charias, by making Charias to forget about sleeping with Theodora, and to make her "just as this man lies here, useless (..)", which would refer to the corpse the tablet was buried with.[74] We find a similar formulation in DT 44, where the 'uselessness' of a corpse is again used to serve as an example for the targets of the curse: "But just as you lie here useless and nothing,

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[71] DT 86; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk,* 401-402.

[72] Idem, 143; 217.

[73] For the discussion of this curse and its translation, see Eidinow*, Oracles, Curses, and Risk,* 218; 396-397.

[74] Idem, 397.

in the same way may Akestor and Timandridas be useless and nothing."[75] DT 69, although only fragments of the text remain legible, also clearly makes the equation of a corpse's enervation and the sexuality of the target.[76] Lastly, DT 85 does something very similar, where the dead Theonnastos is used as an example for the outcome of the curse, which seeks to prevent Zoilos and Antheira from having intercourse.[77] On the flip-side of the tablet, on which the text did not survive as completely as it did on the other side, we may read: "But may you not catch, O god, Antheira and Zoilos (..) on this night (..)". Although the text is too badly damaged to say much about this, the explicit mention of the night can be quickly linked to the supposed sexual intercourse of the targets, which is then expected to occur in the night.

In the above-mentioned *defixiones* we see a recurring theme: the targets are cursed so that they may become as useless as corpses. With the exception of DT 44, this inability to act is explicitly related to sexual performance.[78] Considering the references to sleep, *hetairai*, beds, and night, we get a selection of concepts all related to the nocturnal world, even if they are not explicitly placed in this context in the curse. Could we then establish the night as an overarching theme in these curses? Or would such a conclusion warrant more unequivocal references to the night? In order to substantiate this idea, we need to first go into in what ways the night present itself in *defixiones*. Are sleep and sex then related to each other in some way, and are they (necessarily) part of the night, if at all? It is on this last question that I will focus first, starting with sleep.

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[75] Idem, 391; for a discussion of the curse, see 149.

[76] Idem, 398: "*Just as this corpse lies useless, in the same way useless may be; (..) I bind; (..) in the presence of Persephone (..) of sex.*"

[77] Idem, 216; 220-221; 401-402.

[78] DT 44 is placed within the context of legal competition; idem, 149.

3.5 Sleep

Sleep, Hypnos, is born from Night, along with her brother Death; both are therefore forever shrouded by the dark of night and out of reach of the sun's rays.[79] The power of Hypnos extends even to his fellow gods, as he may lull even Zeus to sleep, allowing Hera to go behind his back.[80] Death, Thanatos, and Hypnos are frequently seen together and may even entreat unto each other's domain. In a famous scene, Sarpedon, after being slain by Patroclus, is seen being carried off by Thanatos and Hypnos to be buried in his homeland of Lycia.[81] Hesiod describes the deaths of the first race of humans to as if they were "overpowered by sleep"; the Trojan prince Rhesus is brutally killed in his sleep by Diomedes, while suffering from bad dreams.[82] As a deity, his role is certainly ambiguous: he may bring peace and rest, but can also deceitful and destructive. In any case, sleep held an undeniable place of prominence in the archaic sources.

Absence of sleep, however, can be just as versatile: insomnia may lend itself to a wakeful vigil, but is also a symptom of guilt and heartbreak.[83] Furthermore, both lack of sleep and an abundance of it were thought to be hazardous to your health. Throughout the Hippocratic corpus we find reference to the beneficial effect of sleep, as well as warnings against health risks connected to it.[84] We might therefore expect to find *defixiones* targeting precisely this: certainly, affecting the sleep of your target would have serious implications for their general well-being.[85]

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[79] Hesiod, *Theogony* 211-213; 755-766.

[80] Homer, *Iliad* 14. 224-360. See also Silvia Montiglio, *The Spell of Hypnos: Sleep and Sleeplessness in Ancient Greek Literature* (London/New York 2016) 5; 17-31; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World*, 78.

[81] Homer, *Iliad* 16.450-457; 666-683.

[82] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 113-116.

[83] Montiglio, *The Spell of Hypnos*, 3.

[84] For a thorough investigation of sleep (among other things) in the Hippocratic corpus, see Maithe Hulskamp, *Sleep and Dreams in Ancient Medical Diagnosis and Prognosis,* PhD dissertation (Newcastle 2008).

[85] E. Kagarow, *Griechische Fluchtafeln* (Leopoli 1929) 55-58; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World,* 21.

But in what way is sleep influenced by the *defixiones?* And in what way, if at all, is this found in Greek *defixiones*?

Despite it being a widely discussed topic that is mentioned in almost any study on *defixiones*, sleep seems to be only slightly more prevalent than night is in Greek mainland curses; which is, again, not directly prevalent at all. Why then do we happen upon this conjunction time and again? The first and foremost reason is that sleep does become a staple topic in later *defixiones*, especially outside of mainland Greece. Both Gager and Eidinow have included these tablets in their works, and both note sleep as a frequent target to which curses are directed.[86] Although neither reflect extensively on the function of sleep within *defixiones* in general, it is noted that it is found especially in *agogai*, again linking the erotic with sleep. Sleep, however, seems to not be perceived as something striking in itself, but it listed among the other common targets of *defixiones*, such as eating and moving around in general.[87] By binding the sleep of its target, along with their other abilities, the curse forces its will upon its victim by wearing them down or limiting their functioning: influencing sleep is not an end in itself, but instrumental in achieving something else. Similarly, (disruption of) sleeping may be a side effect rather than the intended outcome: having someone become 'sleepless with desire' is a regular find in the later *defixiones*. In both cases we may say that sleep itself is of secondary significance in the *defixiones*, and only very rarely the central element of a curse.[88] Ample *defixiones* and papyri featuring both

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[86] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 21; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk among the Ancient Greeks,* 207.

[87] Ibidem: "These seek to encourage the attraction of the target to the agent: the binding part of the curse can be seen either as an attempt to prevent the target from having sex with someone else or about tying down that individual's bodily functions, such as the ability to eat, sleep, move around, etc., thus causing unbearable suffering, until he/she succumbs."; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World*, 57 (note 45).

[88] The only example of a curse that only seeks to disrupt sleep that I could find is found in the *Sepher ha-Razim,* also known as the Jewish "Book of Mysteries", as it starts with: "If you wish to give your enemy trouble in sleeping (..)", after which it gives directions to a ritual involving a dog's head and an inscription in lead; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World*, 106; 211.

sleep as a means[89] or sleep(lessness) as a side effect[90] are found in particular in Egypt and other North-African regions, and range from the 2rd to the 5th centuries CE. As both the locations and the periods are out of the scope of this thesis, I will not go more deeply into them. For our present purposes it should however be clear in what ways sleep comes up in the *defixiones*, or rather, how it does not.

Judging from both apparent lack of sleep in *defixiones* of the Greek mainland, and the limited centrality of sleep in *defixiones* of later dates and other regions, we can certainly say that sleep, in any form, is not as ubiquitous or significant in *defixiones* as we may have thought it to be. Although sleep certainly plays a role, I find little evidence pointing to a special place of prominence of sleep in pre-Roman Greek curse tablets, let alone considering sleep to be an overarching theme within the *defixiones*.

3.6 The magical night: the function of the night in historical research

This section of binding curses has produced a negative answer to the question "how does the night function in Greek religion?" because for magic, we don't see the night prominently function at all. We do see the night function in the *study of* the night in Greek magic, with the way scholars have interpreted all the separate elements to be evidence for a nocturnal setting for the *defixiones*. What has pushed the debate on Greek magic in this direction?

Even if the curses themselves make no explicit mention of the night and other the evidence does not point to a nocturnal setting for the creating of the tablets, then it still is understandable why they are (now) imagined to have been nocturnal: the idea that they are secret,

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[89] Idem, 105: "(..) and do not allow her to eat, drink, sleep, or joke or laugh (..)"; 109: "(..) so that you may never be able to sleep with any other man, nor be screwed, nor be taken anally, nor fellate, nor find pleasure with any other man but me (..)".

[90] Idem, 103: "Let her not be able to sleep for the entire night, but lead her until she comes to his feet (..)"; 113: " (..) so that loving, frantic, and sleepless with love and desire for her, he may beg her to return to his house and become his wife."

covert, semi-legal, makes them "likely to have been done at night". Furthermore, we know that in later periods we see explicit reference to the night, both in magical texts as well as in legal texts.[91] One way of making sense of all of these loose interconnections could be by just assuming curses were written and cast at night, as we have seen many scholars do.

Gager notes that "roughly one-quarter of all surviving tablets concern "matters of the heart."[92] This being the case, it is not surprising we have already encountered numerous allusions to these "matters of the heart". Of course, we must keep in mind that perhaps many more curses were directed at (former) lovers than is directly evident from the texts: if no such intentions are explicitly mentioned, we can only speculate about the motivations behind some curses. Nevertheless, we do find quite a selection of "love tablets", even with the chronological and geographical limits of this study. The focus of this study is still the night however, so why move unto love and sex, which seems even another step further removed from the original subject than sleep was?

The passage from Winkler, who imagines the writers of the *agogai* on top of a roof at night, illustrates the spatial setting many modern scholars suppose that the curse tablets were a part of: not the "normal" space of everyday life, but a hidden, extraordinary space, both physically (upon the roof) and temporally (at night) from the regular social space.[93] The night then becomes not necessarily a temporal condition, but an integrated dimension of this spatiality of magic; it is not so much the time of day that matters, but the qualities of darkness and the removal from everyday life. Modern scholars have imagined the night to be part of this nocturnal space because it fits into all these other concepts associated with the night. Although further

[91] In later *defixiones* and other magical texts there is a marked increase in explicit references to the night, nocturnal themes such as sleep or the moon and stars, and deities connected to the night: see for instance DT 41. Particularly in Egypt many *defixiones* with nocturnal elements were found; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World,* 59-60.

[92] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells of the Ancient World,* 78.

[93] Winkler, "The Constraints of Eros", 216.

study is necessary to go even deeper into the supposed relationship between the night and the binding curses, perhaps zooming in on sleep and sexuality in the tablets, for the present purposes it is clear: we cannot assign a prominent function to the night in the ancient Greek practice of creating *defixiones*.

Chapter IV: Mystery Cults and the night

4.1 Defining mystery cults: secrecy and initiation

Mystery cults, sometimes also referred to as mystery religions, have been the object of intensive inquiry and fierce debate ever since they became an object of study, and the exact definition of what constitutes a mystery cult is still problematic.[94] Although this section will deal primarily with the presence, or absence, of night in mystery cults, it is still necessary to give a brief overview of the ongoing debate on the fundamental question: what exactly constitutes a mystery cult? This overview will serve as a basis from which to elucidate and argue for my own use of terms and concepts. In the endeavor to discover new insights into the nocturnal within mystery cults, we'll go through those cases that were either among the most prominent of mystery cults, or at least the best documented and handed down to us. As is to be expected when dealing with *mystery* cults, it is precisely this last factor that is the most challenging to us: where can we find reliable sources on practices that were purposefully kept secret? Jan Bremmer experiences the same precarious position in his work on secrecy in Classical antiquity:

> It is of course trivial to stress that by their nature secret acts in antiquity are often difficult to discover, let alone study. There are few records of interrogation left and few documents allow a more extended analysis. And the further we go back into Greco-Roman antiquity, the harder it becomes even to discover what was secret at all.[95]

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[94] Already in the early 20th century works solely dedicated to the understanding and description of mystery cults were being published, see Franz Cumont *Les Religions Orientales Dans le Paganisme Romain* (Paris 1907) and Richard Reitzenstein, *Die Hellenischen Mysterienreligionen nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Leipzig 1910). For a brief discussion of these first authors, and others, see Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge/London 1987) 1-11.

[95] Bremmer, "Religious secrets and secrecy in Classical Greece," in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religion*, Hans G. Kippengberg and Guy G. Strousma eds. (Leiden/New York 1995) 61.

What constitutes a mystery cult? Almost any modern definition fits in any or all of the following elements: there is a notion of initiation, *mystai,* which is a dramatic experience, usually connected to death or suffering, and accompanied by eschatological messages, typically referring to an afterlife.[96] Divulging secrets to the uninitiated was punished severely, even by death.[97] In Greece we find three major mystery cults, that of Demeter in Eleusis, of the Great Gods in Samothrace, and of Dionysos, the latter without one specific locale.[98] All of these cults are obscured to us by their insistence on secrecy of their proceedings by their initiates and the consequent rarity of (reliable) and elaborate descriptions.[99] Given the great internal variety of the Greek mystery cults, regardless of their possible interconnectedness, discussing all three of the greater mystery cults would be too extensive, let alone also going into more minor ones.[100] Without a doubt, analyzing and comparing nocturnal elements in all three would be interesting; for economical purposes, only the Eleusinian Mysteries will be discussed in this thesis. We may perceive the mysteries as a more personal form of religion, laying an emphasis on personal association with the deity and the conscious decision to belong to a special community with an exclusive organizational character.[101] This exclusiveness was maintained by shrouding the group's practices in secrecy, by

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[96] Kevin Clinton, *"Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Sanctuaries," Greek Mysteries: The Archaeological and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, Michael B. Cosmopoulos ed. (London/New York, 2003) 51; on this experience of death, see Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults, 91-93.

[97] A brief selection of notable breakers of the secrets and their punishments is given in George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton 1961) 224-227.

[98] Fritz Graf, "Lesser Mysteries – Not Less Mysterious," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeological and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, Michael B. Cosmopoulos ed. (London/New York, 2003), 241. Graf stresses that in addition to these larger and more well-known cults, the Greek religious landscape was also dotted with smaller cults with mysteric elements.

[99] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 7-8.

[100] Burkert argues that Dionysian mysteries may have been substitutes for the Eleusinian Mysteries for those far away from Athens: Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 37-38. At the same time, the cult of the Great Gods of Samothrace may have been modelled after the Eleusinian example: Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Sanctuaries", 61.

[101] Idem, 12-13; 30-31; 32-65. This is certainly not to say that there was a uniform organization found among all mystery cults, quite the contrary: many different types may be discerned. Some were connected very specifically to a

meeting in closed off or remote spaces and by vows of secrecy of the initiates, but also communicated through iconographic and ritualized elements. In the iconography of the *Mysteria*, we see a recurring theme in the *cista mystica*. Burkert describes this at length: "Der geschlossene Deckelkorb, die *cista mystica*; mann kann sie öffnen, etwas hereusnemen, zurücklegen; verbergen, zeigen, wieder verbergen."[102] The "hiddenness", exemplified by the closed basket, is what still seems to draw the modern mind to the mystery cult, where the "mystery" part is translated with the modern conception of mystery, meaning something along the lines of "profound, inexplicable, of secretive quality or character".[103]

4.2 Mystery cults within Greek religion

The first issue to tackle is where to position mystery cults within Greek religion. The earlier mentioned designation "mystery religions" seems to say that we are dealing with a different religion than when we speak of the religion of the polis, implying a separated and autonomous sphere of cultic practice and religiosity. Such a view would be incommensurable with the idea of an embedded polis religion, or would at least place the mystery religions completely outside of the polis model. Furthermore, more recently scholars have grouped the mystery cult within wider categories, such as "elective religion" or "unlicensed religion". Both categories refer to its relation to the established polis religion, albeit in a different tone: "elective religion" stresses how Greeks may choose to engage in other forms of cultic worship than was considered 'normal', whereas "unlicensed religion" suggests an underground, perhaps subversive (or even illegal) religiosity.[104] If we perceive polis religion to be at the center of Greek religion, then mystery cults

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location or a shrine, for instance Eleusis, while others were more dependent on special persons or on a group of individuals who together formed a club.

[102] Burkert, *Kleine Schriften III: Mystica, Orphica, Pythagorica* (Göttingen 2006) 21-36.

[103] "Mystery". Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed July 8, 2016. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mystery. See also Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 1.

[104] For elective religion, see Simon Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge 1999), 108-125; for (un)licensed religion, see Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens,* 116-135. [104] Both Bremmer and Kindt reflect particularly critically

were right there at the fringes: available to everyone, yet completely optional and innately hidden from those who were not part of them.[105]

Both the distinction between various mystery 'religions' as well as the strict demarcation between polis and mystery cult are not evident from the sources, although we do find a sharp distinction between those *initiated* into the mysteries and those who are not.[106] This is not to say the follower becomes completely devoted to this one deity or cult: one initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries would not renounce any other cultic practices, such as the major festivals or votive offerings to other deities and at other shrines.[107] Looking at the Eleusinian Mysteries, we see a major public festival coinciding with a mystery cult: the festival of the Greater Mysteries, taking place in Boedromion, was in part open to all citizens, who would form a procession to Eleusis and gathered there one the first day.[108] Those who were eligible for initiation (*mystai)*, or had already initiated (*epoptai*), would then enter the sanctuary and carry out the mysteric rituals, while those who were not initiated remained outside. As such, the mystery cults were not far removed from the public cults, certainly not a different religion in themselves, but without a doubt distinctly different because of their closed-off and personal character.

Yet the most pressing issue for our present purposes remains unaccounted for: what can we say about the night in mystery cults? The rest of this chapter will be devoted to studying the

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on the concept of licensed versus unlicensed religion: Bremmer, "*Manteis*, Magic, Mysteries, and Mythography: Messy Margins of *Polis* Religion?", 35: "(..) that suggests that there was a dichotomy in the *polis* between licensed and unlicensed religion. That introduces a distinction that is modern and not warranted by Athenian evidence." See also Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion*, 97-98.

[105] Idem, 8; 10.

[106] Idem, 3-4.

[107] Idem, 3-4; 12-13. Scholars have argued for a straight development from mystery cults centered on salvation, *Erlösungsreligion,* into the higher spirituality of the Christian faith. Although early Gnostic sects may have found inspiration in the pagan mysteries, the differences between the pagan mysteries and early Christianity far exceed the similarities: especially bearing in mind the mysteries were not a religion in themselves. For more on this debate, see Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 3-4.

[108] Idem, 10.

nocturnal elements of that mystery cult that has to this point already been the most prevalent within this thesis, and arguably in ancient history: the Greater Mysteries, the *Mysteria,* the festival celebrating Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. This mystery cult is especially suitable because of how thoroughly it has been studied and debated, and particularly, as we shall see, because of its recurring nocturnal settings and imagery. Focusing only on the nightly aspects of the Mysteries has the added advantage of being able to steer clear of the ongoing debates on almost anything Eleusis, and allows for an in-depth study of the function of the nocturnal within the cult.

With debate on the topic going back to the early seventeenth century, it is no wonder quite an abundance of material (inscriptions, drama, material culture and art, descriptions by (later) writers) regarding the Eleusinian Mysteries has been amassed, which has lifted the contemporary scholarly debate to a high level of complexity.[109] This being the case, I aim to base the remainder of this section on those areas where contention is minimal, so as to avoid being left stranded in an ongoing debate that exceeds the focus of this thesis. I will move on by briefly describing the practicalities and rituals concerning the *Mysteria*, before moving on to concentrate on the nocturnal aspects, which are abundant.

4.3 The Eleusinian Mysteries

> She went to the kings who administer law, Triptolemos and Diokles, driver of horses, mighty Eumolpos and Keleos, leader of the people, and revealed the conduct of her rites and taught her Mysteries to all of them, holy rites that are not to be transgressed, nor pried into, nor divulged. For a great awe of the gods stops the voice.[110]

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[109] For some historiographical notes on the Eleusis, see Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Berlin/Boston 2014) VIII-XIV.

[110] Homeric *Hymn to Demeter,* 473-479. Translated by Helene P. Foley in, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton 1994) 26.

Following the *Hymn to Demeter*, it was the goddess herself who established the Mysteries, a rare occurrence of divine revelation concerning initation ritual.[111] While it is important to bear in mind that we find no formal theological works in Greek religion, and that this is no example, it does indicate a great continuity in the celebration of the Mysteries: one is not quick to challenge the will of the gods.[112] Nevertheless, some distinct shifts within the celebrations have taken place, the most notable for our present purposes is its transformation from a public festival dating back to the Mycenaean period into a mystery cult in the early sixth century.[113] Ironically, it is on this later period that we have the most sources, despite its conversion into a mystery cult.[114]

The Mysteries were divided into two separate festivals, the Lesser Mysteries, which were held in early Spring, and the Greater Mysteries, the *Mysteria,* which took place in the late summer or early fall.[115] The Lesser Mysteries may have been the starting point of the sequence of rites participants went through in their initiation, and although we do not know much about the details of the festival, we know it encompassed rituals of purification and that they were not held in Eleusis, but in Athens.[116] The *Mysteria* are much more well-known, although most of our knowledge is limited to the public aspect of the festival.[117] The exact border between the public and the mysteric parts of the festival are blurry, but we know that it was on the sixth day that the initiates were separated from the other attendees and moved into the closed-off area of the

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111 Sourvinou-Inwood, "Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult", 28-29.

112 Idem, 28: "Because the Mysteries were believed to have been based on divine revelation, changes would have taken place only within certain parameters (..) though the associated beliefs and perceptions would have been changing through the centuries."

113 Idem, 25-28; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 11.

114 This is not to say that the prehistoric period of the site at Eleusis is unknown to us, as archaeological research has unveiled a lot of material, dating human occupation of the site back to the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE; Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries,* 23-54.

115 Idem, 239; 243.

116 Idem, 239-241; Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries", 52; 58.

117 The following itinerary of the festival is based for the most part on the day-to-day description of the *Mysteria* found in Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 243-285 and Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* 65-70; where other sources have been used, explicit annotations will be made.

sanctuary.[118] We may differentiate between the initiates by their level of initiation: the (*proto*)*mystai* and the *epoptai*, first-timers and returning initiates respectively.[119] During the *telete*, referring to the process of initiation in its entirety, the *mystai* (those who keep silent or close the eyes) and the *epoptai* (the viewers) were not separated spatially, but did have different functions and experiences in at least some of the rites.[120] This distinction in those who see and those who do not is already exceedingly interesting for our present purposes, as it introduces a central element of the Eleusinian Mysteries: darkness and light. This binary opposition will be further studied and discussed below, by closely examining an essential ritual of the *Mysteria*: the ritual searching for (and finding of) Persephone.[121]

4.4 The festival: a brief itinerary

It has proven impossible to reconstruct the entire festival and its rituals in full, despite many efforts over the past centuries, and it seems unlikely we will ever truly be able to capture what exactly the participants must have experienced in their initiation.[122] This is not to say any attempts at describing the rites are wholly conjecture or at best educated guesses, and while there are certainly gaps in our knowledge, some things can be said with some certainty; below is an attempt to do exactly this.

Before the arrival of the participants at Eleusis, a procession of priests and priestesses made their way from Eleusis to the Athenian Eleusinion, carrying with them holy objects. The hierophant and the *dadouchos*, from the Eumolpid and Kerykes families respectively, oversaw the

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[118] Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 258-259 q

[119] Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries", 50. Actually, the initiation started already in the Lesser Mysteries, which probably functioned as a form of preliminary initiation. Clinton discusses the various terms relating to either the Lesser or the Greater Mysteries, or those who refer to both.

[120] Idem, 66-70. The entire *telete* included the preliminary initiation of the Lesser Mysteries, the first initiation as a *mystes* and the second (and subsequent) attendance as an *epoptes* (p. 51-52).

[121] Concerning the searching for and finding of Persephone, also referred to as her advent ritual, I closely follow the article by Sourvinou-Inwood, *Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult*, 30-41.

[122] Bremmer, *Initiation in the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 1-2: ::

opening of the festival on the agora by the *archon basileus*. This was followed by a few days of various rituals in and around Athens, and involved purifying oneself in the sea, great sacrifices for the city at the Eleusinion, and a day in honor of Asclepius who, according to myth, was late for his initiation into the mysteries himself. The fifth day of the festival marked the return to Eleusis in a great procession, now also involving the participants in addition to the clergy.

The procession, called the *pompe*, moved past various religious landmarks involving certain rituals and would not reach Eleusis until nightfall, not surprising given the distance of about 20 kilometers separating Athens from the sanctuary. After arriving at the sanctuary at Eleusis, the night was spent with song and dance celebrating Demeter.[123] This concluded the initial part of the festival and the *mystai* were now purified and properly mentally prepared to undergo their initiation. This is also as far as the detailed descriptions from inscriptions and most reports by the ancient authors go; after the abundance of knowledge we have of this public first part of the festival, the limited extent of our grasp on the events taking place after the arrival at Eleusis feels especially meager. Interestingly, the night is both the scene of great celebration of when the participants finally reach their destination, and also as a demarcation between those who would be initiated and those who would not. Furthermore, what happened at night is related to us in much less detail, if visible at all, in the sources. In the next paragraphs, we will explore what we do know with some certainty: why did the initiates perform their secret rites and celebrations specifically at night?

[123] Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries,* 220; 256-257. This first all-night celebration (*pannychis*) may have been exclusive to women: Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* 67.

4.5 Nocturnal rites: the search for Persephone

> The mystery of Ceres also resembles these, in which torches are lighted, and Proserpina is sought for through the night; and when she has been found, the whole rite is finished with congratulations and the throwing about of torches.[124]

Lactantius explicitly mention this element of the mysteric cult when describing the rites of the cult of Isis where the attendants imitate Isis' lamenting and searching for Osiris.[125] Although Lactantius does not say more on the subject, we can deduct from his description that: i) the ritual was nocturnal, ii) it involves the lighting and throwing of torches and iii) it ends with the finding of the goddess. Modern scholars often distinguish this ritual search from the enacted sacred drama, the *dromena*, and it is seen as an imitation of Demeter's search for her daughter Persephone that formed the main part of the myth.[126] If this is indeed the case, as Sourvinou-Inwood convincingly argues, then the search is understood to have been a ritual search, where the initiates moved about the sanctuary before entering the Telesterion and finding the goddess, and the sacred drama was a representation by priestly personnel imitating Demeter's search (but not the finding of) Persephone.[127] Another late source gives some insight into what the search itself may have been like: Plutarch equates the movement of the soul to Hades after death with "an experience like that of men who are undergoing initiation into the great mysteries".[128] There is a "straying and wandering (..) nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal, and then immediately before the consummation every possible terror, shivering and trembling and

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[124] Lactantius, *Div. Inst. Epit.* 23. Translated by William Fletcher, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume VII: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century*, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A.C. Coxe (New York 2007) 9-224.

[125] Sourvinou-Inwood, *Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult*, 30. Following Sourvinou-Inwoods arguement that there was likely great continuity in the celebration of the Mysteries, Lactantius's comment is surely interesting for the present discussion, even though he lies outside of the chronological limits of this thesis. See note 18.

[126] Idem, 31.

[127] Idem, 29-31.

[128] Plutarch, *Moralia* vol. XV, 178. Translated by F.H. Sandbach. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1969) 317.

sweating and amazement."[129] We now reconstruct this passage as alluding to the sorry state of the *mystai*, who would be wandering the sanctuary grounds blindfolded, desperately looking for the goddess.[130] They would be relieved from this state when " (..) 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."[131] Like a soul finding its way into the light of the holy meadows of the blessed afterlife, the *mystai* eventually found Persephone in the Telesterion.[132] It now becomes clear from where the *epoptai* get their name: as the *mystai* removed their blindfolds, they would be overwhelmed by the perhaps thousands of *epoptai* who had overseen the search. These now witnessed how the *mystai* for the first time came into the great hall of the Telesterion, illuminated by the scores of torches being held by the *epoptai*, and witnessed the reunion of the goddesses, most likely depicted through statues that were by now carried inside.[133]

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[129] Ibidem.

[130] Clinton, *Stages of Initiation in the Mysteries*, 65-66; Sourvinou-Inwood, *Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult,* 33.

[131] Plutarch, *Moralia* vol. XV, 178.

[132] When the initiates would actually enter to Telesterion is the point of some contention: Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* makes no distinction between the search and the *dromena* at all and supposes that it happened within the Telesterion (p. 261-272); Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 68-69 questions the possibility of activity inside of the Telesterion due to spatial limitations; Sourvinou-Inwood, *Aspects of the Eleusinian Mystery Cult,* 33-34 and Clinton, *Stages of Initiation in the Mysteries*, 65-67, both firmly (and most likely rightly so) perceive the initiates searching outside of the Telesterion but moving inside in dramatic conclusion.

[133] Clinton, *Stages of Initiation in the Mysteries*, 66-67.

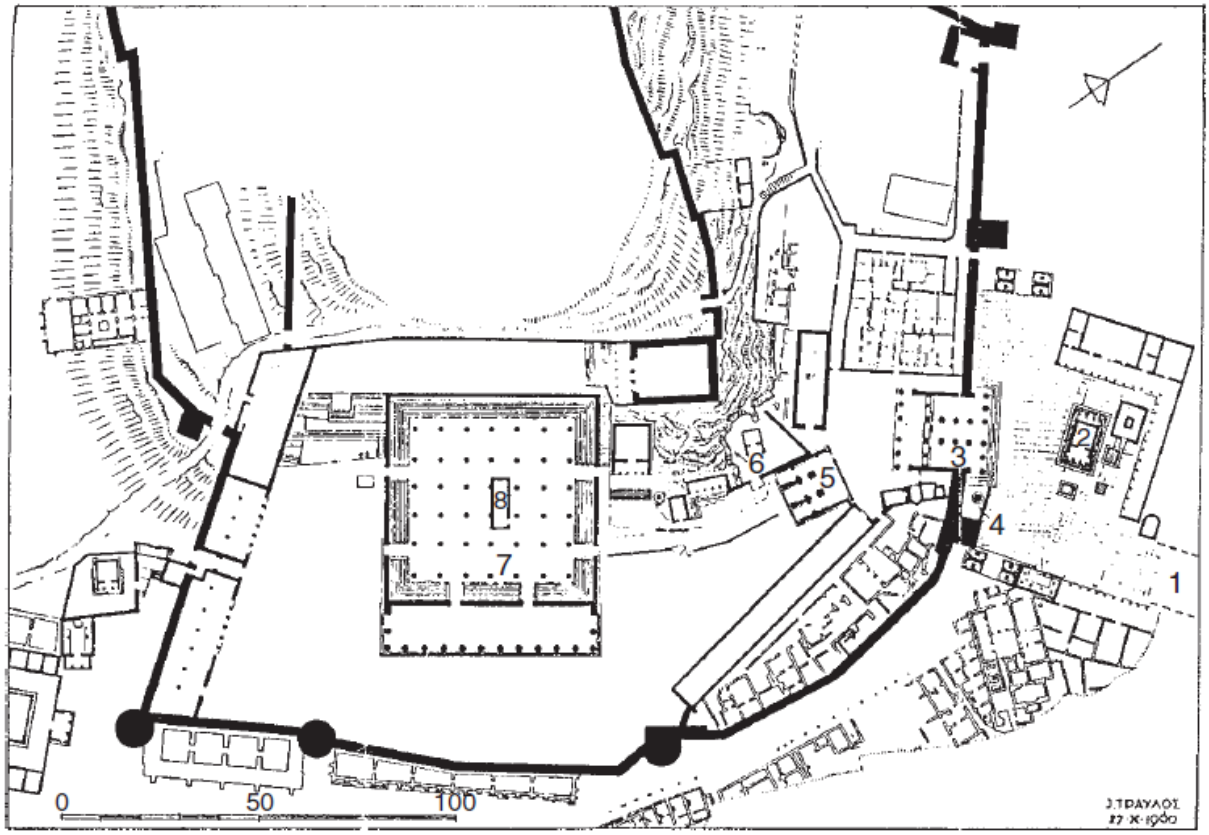

Figure 3.1 Plan of the sanctuary of Eleusis.[134]

1. Sacred Way. 2. Temple of Artemis and Poseidon. 3. Greater Propylaea. 4. Callichoron Well. 5. Lesser Propylaea. 6. Mirthless Rock. 7. Periclean Telesterion. 8. Periklean Anaktoron.

4.6 Architecture and archaeology

In addition to the natural darkness of the night, reconstructions of the archaeological site of Eleusis, and the Telesterion in particular, may also shed some light on the experiences of the initiates. The Telesterion was built in the early sixth century, the same period that the nature of the cult fundamentally changed into a mysteric cult. It destroyed and rebuilt many times over the centuries, until its final destruction in the late 4th century. The Telesterion was a large, roofed temple, characterized by rows of columns and a smaller structure inside of it, the Anaktoron. Its function was different from other Greek temples, as the *naos* primarily served as a gathering hall

[134] Reproduced from Clinton, *Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 60.

for the initiates rather than only sheltering the cultic statue.[135] The great hall with its many columns must have been quite a sight to behold, especially at night: if we imagine the search for Persephone to have occurred outside in the dark, entering the Telesterion would have been like a sudden dawn. Illuminated by torches and with impressive shadow play of the columns, the Telesterion was certainly the most evocative place for the dramatic reenactment of Demeter's search. The themes concerning seeing and not seeing, light and darkness, also culminate here: the *mystai* being removing there blindfolds, moving from the dark outside into the light, and moving from being uninitiated to now being part of the Mysteries. The night then functions in a special way: it is the temporal setting, a special sensory experience, and a metaphor for the life before initiation.

4.7 Darkness and light, seeing and not-seeing

The darkness of the night and the blindfold is paired with the disorientation and despair of the initiates looking for Persephone; the holy bliss of finding her is matched with the light of the torches and the fire in the Telesterion. Plutarch parallels the entire ritual with the soul of the dead that eventually finds rest and the initiate who experiences revelation, and then "(..) surveys the uninitiated, unpurified mob here on earth, the mob of living men who, herded together in mirk and deep mire, trample one another down and in their fear of death cling to their ills, since they disbelieve in the blessings of the other world."[136] Whether the search was primarily an imitation (*mimesis*) of Demeter's search for her daughter, or primarily *mimesis* of the shade's

[135] Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries,* 78-79.

[136] Plutarch, *Moralia* vol. XV, 178. See also the discussion of the function of 'light' in classical Greek poetry in Fraçoise Léboublon, "To See or Not See: Blind People and Blindness in Ancient Greek Myths," in *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion* M. Christopoulos, E.D. Karankantza & O. Levaniouk eds. (Lanham, Md. 2010) 167-180.

descent into the underworld, the symbolical function of the darkness of the night remains the same: it is disorientating, hostile, perilous, something to be endured and then overcome.[137]

Going back to the question on why these rites were specifically done at night, this symbolical function does not offer a satisfying explanation. The meanings expressed in the ritual may have been emphasized by its nocturnal setting, but the separate elements of which the ritual consists and that in some way relate to the night are still precisely that: isolated elements with little cohesion, other than a shared relation to the night. In pursuance of a more complete understanding of the function of the night, these elements need to be somehow connected within a single framework. Again, going back to the spatial approach may prove useful in doing so, because it offers a dais, so to say, on which we can conceive of all these separate elements in one framework: the space of the night.

4.8 Liminality, wilderness, and initiation

It is not so much that the initiation took part at night that is so significant, or that it featured the alteration of light and dark elements, but the totality of its setting that functions as an imagined space in which the initiation takes place. Spatial theory here helps us to understand the overarching experience of the night and why it was a fundamental factor throughout the initiation ritual. This "night-space" or nocturnal space is formed by that which is perceived as belonging to the sphere of the nocturnal, such as darkness, danger, disorientation, and a sense of *otherness* from the ordinary in this case all of which are described by Plutarch, also cited in full above, when he speaks of: "nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal and then immediately before the consummation every possible terror, shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement."[138] As the initiates complete their search for Persephone, move into

[137] The question what we see being imitated here is answered by Sourvinou-Inwood, *Aspects of the Eleusinian Mystery Cult,* 34.

[138] Plutarch, *Moralia* vol. XV, 178. See also note 33.

the Telesterion and remove their blindfolds, they move out of this space as well: their entire experience shifts dramatically in accordance with a change in the physical space. Does this mean that function of the night is limited to the search for Persephone, and that a metaphorical day breaks when the initiation is completed? And how can we then work with the incongruity between the natural night and the imagined night?

Both of the questioned posed above may be answered by going deeper into the actual function of the night-space in the *Mysteria*. A recurring theory in connection to initiation is the concept of liminality, indicating a "between" phase, that is part of any rite of passage. Ever since its formulation in the early 20th century by Arnold van Gennep and its later rediscovery by Victor Turner, liminality has had a continuous presence in our understanding of (religious) rituals and their structure.[139] A oft-used example is marriage: the period between engagement and marriage is a transitional phase where those involved are not yet married, but also not not-married. In the case of the initiation at Eleusis, we may identify different periods of liminality; the ending of the liminal phase, the conclusion of the initiation, is clear, yet the beginning of the liminal period is more difficult to ascertain.

Scholars have already extensively explored the concept of liminality in a spatial context within Greek religion and ritual, and even in Eleusis in particular.[140] Surely, the search of Persephone was only a liminal ritual to those who will be initiated in the end, as the *epopteia* and the priestly personnel do not (re-)experience this stage of liminality. As such, it is not so much the ritual that is inherently liminal, but its function within a broader process and the way it is experienced by its participants. This being the case, the entire process of initiation may be

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[139] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago 1960 (1909); Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca/London 1967).

[140] Dag Øistein Endsjø studied the special case of initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries, and how it fits into the theories of van Gennep and Turner: Dag Øistein Endsjø, "To Lock Up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space," *Numen* 47:351–386.

considered a liminal stage, but this does not make the totality of the Eleusinian Mysteries necessarily a celebration concerned with the crossing of boundaries; only the *mystai* experience this liminality, whereas the others are only witness to it. Thus referring to the either the entire festival or specific rituals of it as being liminal, implies a specific focus on only those participants who are actually receiving their initiations. Perhaps we may identify the beginning of the liminal phase already in the Lesser Mysteries, which would encompass a long time span but also encompasses the full array of rituals and processions of the Mysteries. The liminal stage might also be identified to only begin at the moment the *protomystai* and *epoptai* are separated from the rest of the crowd as they move into the sanctuary, marking the formal beginning of the rituals reserved only for the (soon to be) initiated. Wherever we place the boundaries of this stage, it certainly includes the final night before the initiation and therefore the search for Persephone.

Looking back at what has already been written about the ritual search for Persephone that was part of the initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries, the experience of the *mystai* seems to have much in common with what wilderness constitutes: a dangerous, disorienting wasteland, but also something that may bring great insights. It is on this last point that the understanding the night as a wilderness is different from the liminal spatial approach contrived earlier. As a liminal space, night-space is 'merely' a transition from one phase into another, and therefore not the setting of the completion of the initiation itself, which occurs in the illuminated Telesterion. If night is a wilderness, then perhaps its boundaries extend beyond separate nocturnal elements such as darkness, and instead becomes a complete world of otherness surrounding the diurnal world. Night-space is then not only transitional, but an alternate spatial realm that can be moved in. Understanding night-space as a transitional space has proven to be effective for the case of the initiation of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Let's return to the ritual search of Persephone: what if the function of the night is not understood as a liminal space, but as a wilderness?

4.9 *The truth is out there* – Night as a wilderness

Is the function of the night in the *mysteria* that of a transitional space, or is it a separate realm in which certain rituals take place, a distinctly 'other world' than the diurnal world, and can we see that world as a wilderness? The suggestion is then that the diurnal world is considered 'normal', the *status quo* of human life and the space of everyday life, and that the night is the inversion of this all, a space of 'otherness' which may be both hostile as well as enlightening. The idea that spirituality and wisdom was to be found in peripheral regions, *eschatia*, was deeply embedded in the Greek mind.[141] Wilderness theory precisely fits into this notion of a peripheral area: "(..) wisdom was considered to be found free from the restrictions of human community; (..) travelling in the uncultivated geography could somehow make you wise."[142]

The night-space is not a wilderness in the sense that it is physically outside of cultural geography; rather, it transforms that which is familiar into something strange. As has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the night was certainly more perilous, both in rural and urban environments. Does this mean that the entire world becomes a wilderness after nightfall, a complete transformation that lasts until sunrise? This seems quite absurd: certainly the foremost element of wilderness, a spatial 'otherness', is not so absolutely and tightly connected to the passing of night and day as that. Instead, the transformation is subjective, appealing to the personal experience of the spatial night. For example, while the blindfolded *mystai* would have experienced the wilderness of the night to the fullest, the other participants would not, or in a drastically different manner. This furthers the argument that the experience of

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[141] See David Frankfurter, "Introduction: Approaches to Coptic Pilgrimage," in David Frankfurter ed. *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden/Boston/Cologne 1998) 19. For a further discussion on this, see Dag Øistein Endsjø, " "The Truth is Out There": Primordial Lore and Ignorance in the Wilderness of Anthansius' *Vita Antonii*" in Laura Feldt ed. *Wilderness in Mythology and Religion: Approaching Religious Spatialities, Cosmologies, and Ideas of Wild Nature* (Berlin 2012), 115-116.

[142] Idem, 115.

the night is not so much a temporal one, as it is a personal, spatial one: the experience of space, both through emotional arousal and sensory experience, is what gives the ritual its potency.[143]

During the *mysteria*, in the ritual search for Persephone in particular, the *mystai* are blindfolded and sent into the dark to look for the missing daughter of Demeter. Even though they do not find her outside in the dark, the search is instrumental in their initiation: the ritual would likely lose much of its emotional and dramatic effect if they were lead straight into the well-lit Telesterion. Considering the wanderings in the dark of the initiates to be like those of the ancient Greek sages, who roamed the earth and found their wisdom only in the most remote and desolate areas, the night functions as a wilderness for the ritual as the periphery does for the Greek sages; an alienating space in which those who dwell there are lost, but then find their way.[144] The night does not function as barrier, separating the initiates from finding the goddess, but instead facilitates it: if the goddess was not lost, she would not be looked for and could not be found, rendering the Mysteries obsolete. Even though the goddess is not found in the night-space itself, the search will always start there, just like the road to wisdom starts at first knowing nothing. If "the truth is out there", one necessarily must go out to find it. The blindfolds and the torches heavily emphasize the conditions that the initiates go through, from not-seeing to seeing, and from wilderness back into the 'normal world'.

4.10 A liminal wilderness? The function of the night in mystery cults

So far, two functions of the night have been formulated in the case of the mystery cult: either it is a liminal space, a transition between two stages, or it is a wilderness, an unfamiliar landscape in which the path to initiation is obscured. Upon closer inspection, the two may be more closely

[143] Here I am referring to the earlier discussed difference in personal and emotional experience of the rituals between the *mystai* and the *epoptai*, as well as the difference in sensory experience from the former being blindfolded, while the latter carry torches.

[144] Figures such as Orpheus and Daedalus, who (are forced to) travel the world, and find wisdom along the way: Dag Øistein Endsjø, "The Truth is Out There", 115.

linked than is immediately evident: wilderness may be a spatial version of liminality, but a more nuanced concretization of it.[145] All of the liminal symbolism of the night in initiatory ritual, darkness passing into light, disorientation leading to divine knowledge, is even better understood in the specific spatial terms of wilderness. Liminal space and wilderness, it seems, are not mutually exclusive.[146] As Feldt argues:

> Similarly, it is now being acknowledged that spatial conceptualizations are rarely mutually exclusive and often coexist. (..) Cosmological concepts are often less coherent and structured than earlier approaches allowed for, and general developments in the study of religions point towards a greater focus on actors and contexts. This does, however, not mean that the analysis of spatiality should be abandoned, but it calls for critical re-evaluation of analytical categories in the study of religion.[147]

This case study has illustrated that which Feldt argues above, by exploring the spatial and liminal dimensions of a certain event, before concretizing it through the application of the wilderness model. As such, the spatial conceptualization of wilderness nuances our understanding of initiation rituals, such as that of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the function of the night within them.

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[145] Feldt, "Wilderness in Mythology and Religion", 9.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

Chapter V: Nocturnal elements in women's festivals

5.1 The public festival

As has already become evident from the previous chapter, festivals were of great importance in Greek religion, and as such, they were many. "A life without festival is (like) a long road without an inn" Democritus famously said, and fortunately for him there was little risk of going through any period without at least a few festivals. Whereas in the previous chapter the focus was on a mystery cult, the earlier phases of the Eleusinian Mysteries were certainly a prime example of a cardinal public festival. Traditionally, rigorous distinctions between (different types of) festivals were made in the study of Greek festivals, insisting on fixed dates, rituals, dedications to a single or a fixed group of deities, and defined participants (e.g. citizens, women, young men). In more recent times, this inflexible way of approaching Greek festivals has been challenged, insisting on less structuralistic explanations, emphasizing interconnectedness, dissimilarities, and diachronic developments, instead of focusing on descriptions of events and relating rituals to specific goals.[148] As far a definition of a festival, the following certainly captures the most distinctive features:

> A Greco-Roman festival can be defined as a socio-religious phenomenon, containing certain physical elements, such as a cyclic public celebration, held at a specific place, open to a defined group of community members (whether narrowly or widely delimited), with a ritual programme of sacred and secular character that customarily comprised sacrifice, prayer, banquet, display/treatment of cultobjects, procession and other pageants, shows or games.[149]

This public and accessible character of public festivals leads one to expect them to be mostly diurnal affairs, if only for practical considerations. Even though this seems to be largely the case,

[148] Most notable, see Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* 155-159.

[149] Iddeng, "What is a Graeco-Roman Festival?", 12.

a considerable number of festivals are at least in part celebrated after sundown: some even lasted well through the night. These *pannychis,* what we would now call "all-nighters", are now often linked to specifically women's festivals, or festivals in which women perform a significant role.[150] The purpose of this final case study will be to study and discuss these women's festivals with nocturnal elements and so come to an understanding of both the function of the night in public festivals in general, as well as the seemingly special relationship between the night and female religiosity.

In this fourth chapter of the thesis, after having treated topics either far removed from the polis, magic, or at the periphery of it, mystery cult, the aim is now to discuss the very center of polis religion, by first going into the most widespread and well attested festivals of the ancient Greek world: the Thesmophoria. Even though this festival is certainly a women's festival, it's broad scope, wide participation, and central importance, certainly places it at the heart of Greek religion as a whole.[151] Afterwards, other woman's festivals will be explored at length, with a special emphasis on *pannychides* and other nocturnal elements.

5.2 The myth and the festival

The *Thesmophoria* festival is yet another celebration of Demeter and part of the same mythological narrative as the Mysteries. The name is derived from *thesmoi*, the laws which dictate the way agricultural activities should be conducted.[152] It was celebrated throughout the entirety of the

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[150] Ludwig Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932), 24; Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 156, 166; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 233; Benedetto Bravo, *Feste Private Notturne di Donne e Uomini nei Testi Letterari e nel Culto* (Pisa/Rome 1997) 11-12; Versnel, *TER UNUS: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes: Three Studies in Henotheism* (Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion 1) (Leiden 1990) 104-105.

[151] Parker notes that even though there were some marked differences in religious experience and practice between Athenian men and Athenian women, it would be an exaggeration to say that the two had completely separate religions. That only women participated, then, makes the Thesmophoria not an exclusive festival in the way that mystery cults are, but in such a way that only women played a role in it, like men and women perform different roles in other festivals as well. See Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 270-272.

[152] Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens,* 273; 280.

Greek world, but only by (married) women.[153] The festival, which occurred yearly in the autumn (around October) in the month of *Pyanepsion*, lasted three days and required the participating women to camp out at specific locations in *skenai*, simple tents or huts.[154] The three days were distinguished with specific rituals for each day: the first was the *Anodos* (going-up), the second the *Nesteia* (fasting), the third the *Kalligeneia* (fair birth), and all three were held around the same location.[155] Even though it was stated this way a public festival, in contrast to the *Mysteria*, it was still a secret one: unmarried women and adult men were strictly barred from even witnessing the festival.[156] Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* illustrates this as it centers on an elaborate ploy which would allow the men to finally see what exactly transpired in the festival. That the comedy reveals virtually nothing about the rituals of the festival, is testament to the secrecy of it.[157] The scholion on Lucian, admittedly a much later source, describes one of the most striking rituals in some detail, but fails to convey on which of the three days it actually transpired:

> Therefore in honor of Eubouleus, piglets are today thrown into the chasms (χάσματα) of Demeter and Kore. The rotted remains (σαπέντα) of those things which have been thrown into the chambers (μέγαρα) below are brought up by women called 'bailers'

[153] Idem, 271; We know that in Attica all women were supposed to be married to be eligible for participation, although this, as well as other aspects of the festival, may have had regional differences. Unless explicitly stated, the Attic, specifically the Athenian, version of the *Thesmophoria* is discussed in this thesis.

[154] Ibid.; Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (New York 2002) 119.

[155] Ibid. For more on the specific location for Athens, at the foot of the Acropolis, see Kevin Clinton, "The Thesmophorion in Central Athens and the Celebration of the Thesmophoria in Attica," in: R. Hägg (ed.), *The Role of Religion in the Early Greek Polis* (Stockholm 1996) 111-125. Even though there will have been dozens of traditional sites for the *Thesmophoria* to be held, the festival site will typically have been situated on an elevated location, hence *Anodos, "*going-up*";* Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens,* 272.

[156] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 110-111.

[157] Idem, 110.

> (ἀντλήτριαι) who, after having purified themselves for three days, descend into the innermost sanctuaries (ἄδυτα), and carrying them up, lay them on the altars.[158]

This ritual, the *megarismos*, by Burkert dated to the first day of the festival, has been attested archeologically as well, with the finding of one such a subterranean chamber.[159] The rituals originated from the mythological narrative, according to the Lucian scholiast:

> It is celebrated in accordance with the more fabulous explanation (μυθωδέστερον λόγον) because Kore, while gathering flowers, was seized by Plouton, while in the same place a certain swineherd, Eubouleus, was tending his pigs, and they were all swallowed up in the chasm of Kore (χάσματι τῆς Κόρης).[160]

Even if the *megarismos* was the central part of the festival, it would have not occupied the participants for three days, but regrettably little is known about the other days. Before the festivals, the participating women abstained from sexual intercourse for several days, certainly two.[161] For the second day, *Nesteia*, they also abstained from food whilst sitting on a mats made of plants that were considered to have anti-aphrodisiac effects.[162] Only two days before the

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[158] Rabe, H. *Scholia in Lucianum* (Leipzig 1906) 275-276; English translation from Allaire Stallsmith, "Interpreting the Athenian Thesmophoria," *Classical Bulletin*, 84.1 (2009) 3-4; Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 273.

[159] Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. by Peter Bing (Berkely/LA/London 1983); Erika Simon, *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary* (Wisconsin/London 1983) 19.

[160] Stallsmith, "Interpreting the Athenian Thesmophoria", 3; Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, trans. by F.J. Fielden (Oxford 1949) 91: "A repulsive but instructive example of a charm to induce fertility (..). Living pigs were thrown into a subterranean chamber. After a while their corrupting remains were brought up, laid upon the altar, and mixed with the seed. The myth relates that when Hades carried off Persephone and the earth opened to receive him, the swineherd Eubouleus vanished with his herd into the abyss. This is an aetiological tale intended to explain the practice."

[161] This may seem surprising, given the fertility elements of the festival; Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 174; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 113.

[162] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 118.

Thesmophoria was the celebration of the *Stenia,* a two-day women-only festival held also in honor of Demeter and Kore, where women ritually abused and insulted each other into the night.[163]

Virtually all elements of the *Thesmophoria* are related to the concept of fertility and it is certainly no coincidence that it is celebrated shortly before the start of a new agrarian cycle, or that particularly women are its sole participants.[164] Demeter Thesmophoros, translated as "bringer of agriculture and its secret rituals", was to be appeased and celebrated to provide fertility in the fields as well as fertility of the women, to ensure the future of a new generation of citizens.[165] Its strict prohibition of both men and unwed or foreign women makes the focus of the festival very narrow, giving us a good opportunity to think about what the participants express exactly in their rituals. As Parker states: "Any ritual performed by all, and only, the members of a given group will say something about what it means to belong to that group; this is almost axiomatic."[166] The picture the *Thesmophoria* paints of its exclusive participants is sober, even abstemious:

> The Thesmophoriazousai are not only required to fast and sit on the ground; they are, above all, desexualized, required to sit, perhaps after a period of preliminary abstinence, on a kind of 'chastity mat', forced (but this detail is not attested for Athens) to leave at home their jewels and their most alluring clothes. (..) Good women, the right women to bear future citizens, are women without lust.[167]

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[163] Idem, 109; Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 272.

[164] Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, 91-92; Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 158-159.

[165] For the epithet Thesmophoros, see Stallsmith, "The Name of Demeter Thesmophoros," (2008) available online http://grbs.library.duke.edu/article/view/921 (accessed 03-01-2017); Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens,* 275-276*:* Parker gives three main propositions that are given for the *Thesmophoria*: it is related to fertility in the field, to the fertility of women, and to the status of citizen women.

[166] Idem, 277.

[167] Idem, 277-278.

It is interesting that for a festival that was held exclusively by women, such an austere image of them is conveyed; at the same time it does point out the cardinal importance of the role of women in the continuity of the polis. Nevertheless, quite a different image and role for women can be observed in the many other women's festivals.

5.3 *Pannychides* in women's festivals

> "Are you telling us that you don't know," Adeimantus added, "that there's to be a torch race on horseback this evening in honor of the goddess?" "On horseback?" I said; "that really is something new! Do you mean they pass torches on to each other as they race their horses? Or something else?" "Exactly that," said Polemarchus, "and besides, they're going to hold an all-night festival, which will be worth watching.[168]

The term *pannychis* itself is derived from the ancient sources, and came to be used from the 5th century onwards in the context of festivals.[169] Plato, in the fragment from the *Republic* also cited above, emphasizes Adimantus' anticipation for the nocturnal spectacle that is to come. Menander's description of a *pannychis* has the women keeping the male protagonist awake with the noise of them having fun and dancing on the rooftop.[170] In general, the *pannychis* seems to have been a merry, celebratory conclusion of an event, often reserved for but not always exclusive to, women.[171]

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[168] Plato, *Rep.* 1.328A

[169] Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford 1996), 78: Parker mentions notes the *pannychis* as a new phenomenon, coming into fashion along with the "urban religion" such as the *Bendideia.*

[170] Menander, *Samia* 35-46.

[171] The *pannychis* of the Panathenaia, as will be discussed below, surely involved young boys. Furthermore, it seems likely that events such as torch-races were held in conjunction with *pannychides*, see Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 257 (n.21).

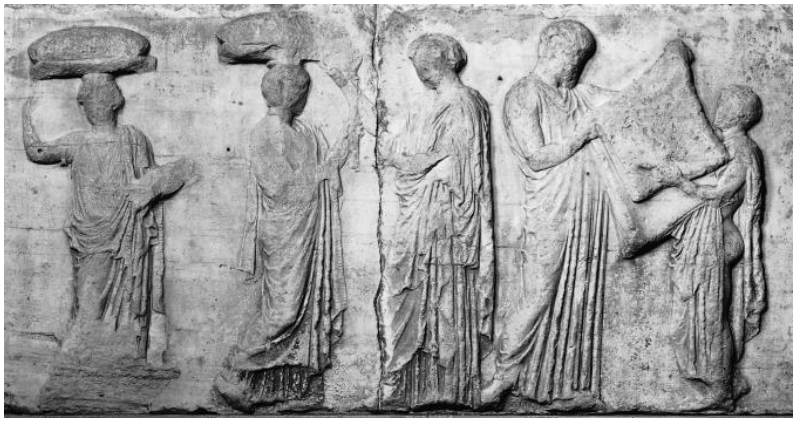

Figure 4.1 The woman priest of Athena Polias with the two arrephoroi and their secret bundles; a male figure, perhaps the king (basileus) archon, receiving the peplos from a girl.[172]

Parker lists eleven public (or in his words 'state') festivals in which *pannychides* took place, all of which had a leading role for women: *Panathenaea*, *Mysteria*, *Stenia*, *Haloa*, *Pyanopsia*, *Tauropolia*, *Bendidea*, *Epidauria*, *Asklepieia*, *Heroa,* and the *Brauronia.*[173] Dillon adds the Spartan *Hyakinthia*, emphasizes Dionysian maenadism in for instance the *Agrionia*, and explicitly mentions the *Arrephoria*, in which the *arrephoroi* (specially selected very young Athenian girls) served Athena and carried out nocturnal rites, as also seen in fig. 4.1, where the *arrephoroi* are depicted with a lit torch.[174] A quick survey of these festivals, specifically of the role of the women therein, show many recurring elements, such as dancing, singing or shouting, and dressing in special garments.[175] Given the amount of women's festivals already mentioned earlier that featured these

[172] Reproduced (including the description) from Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 46.

[173] Idem,166. He specifically excludes private festivals such as the *Adonia* or rituals concerning new-born children, which, given the focus of this chapter, fits our present purposes perfectly.

[174] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* for *Arrephoria*: 46-48; for *Hykinthia:* 214; for maenadism and *Agrionia*, 145, 147.

[175] Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 182-183: "Of the activities that filled the long hours on these occasions, much the most commonly mentioned is dancing." (182)

pannychis, we may certainly conclude that it became a popular practice in Greek festivals and imagery.[176]

Even though the *Thesmophoria* did involve the women camping outside, a *pannychis* is not the right term for this element: it was not so much an all-night vigil or celebration, and as such did not seem to include any of the aforementioned actions. This being the case, it will prove interesting to see whether we get a different image from women's festivals that did explicitly include these nocturnal celebrations than we did from the *Thesmophoria*. A number of festivals will be dealt with in more detail below, fixating on the *pannychis* and its female participants, before moving on to considering the implications for the function of the night and its link to women. Those festivals in which the *pannychis* is particularly obscure, typically by a lack of (explicit and reliable), will not be dealt with in detail below: fortunately, this is not the case for most of the festivals listed by Parker and Dillon.

5.4 *Panathenaea*

At the end of the *Hekatombaion,* the first month of the Attic calendar and the middle of summer, the *Panathenaea* (Panathenaia) were celebrated in their now most well-known form from the 6th century BCE onwards, and featured a procession from the Kerameikos, via the Agora, to the temple of Athena Polios on the Acropolis. In addition to the procession there was a *pannychis* involving choirs of both young boys and girls, the latter of which performed as *kanephoroi*, basket-carriers (see also figure 4.1 for the baskets on top of girls' heads). Later, the Greater Panathenaia were held every four years in addition to the (lesser) Panathenaia, in which the participants competed in sports and games. What happened exactly during the *pannychis* is

[176] Both in drama and visual art the *pannychis* is a recurring topic, see M. Christopoulos, E.D. Karankantza & O. Levaniouk eds. *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion* (Lanham, Md. 2010), especially 237-260.

uncertain at best, but it certainly included the dancing performance of women and young girls, and it may have been contemporary or directly following the torch-race of the festival.[177]

5.5 *Stenia*

Celebrated two days before the *Thesmophoria*, on the ninth day of *Pyanepsion* (autumn), *Stenia* is another festival exclusive to women and concerned with the promotion of agrarian and female fertility.[178] During the night, women would exchange insults and verbally abuse each other, something that we also see in other rites of Demeter, for instance in the journey to Eleusis from Athens.[179] Because of its exclusionary and secret nature, we know little more than this.[180]

5.6 *Haloa*

Long after the autumn harvest came in, the *Haloa* was celebrated at the end of *Posideion* (November-December).[181] It is, again, a celebration of Demeter and Persephone, but now with the inclusion of Dionysos. It shares with the *Stenia* the aischrologia among women, but this is preceded by a general celebration which would have also included men and featured games.[182] The women gathered at Eleusis to share in food and drink, while the men waited outside. In addition to the playful jibes and insults, the women roused each other with insinuations of adultery.[183] Phallic and yonic imagery as well as the drinking of wine is featured prominently in

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[177] Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 231.

[178] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*.

[179] Idem, 109: This is ritual of name calling is defined as 'aischrological' and it is (understandably) attributed a cathartic quality.

[180] See Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, Appendix I: 'Stenia' (480) for a brief discussion of the sources.

[181] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 120-121.

[182] Ibid.

[183] The attendance of *hetairai*, given the context, is not unexpected; their presence at the *Haloa*, as well as their professional rivalry, is attested in Alciphron 4.6.1-5: "Well, I thought she was doing nothing surprising in saying mean things about me. It happened at the Haloa; and at the all-night part of it we girls were all present, as was to be expected. But I confess I was surprised at Euxippê's overbearing manners: she showed her ill-will first by giggling with Megara and making fun of me; then she openly sang some verses on the lover who was no longer attentive to

the celebration, betraying the Dionysian influence on the festival: it is especially significant that it was the women who handled the phalloi and also drank wine.[184] The celebrations will have lasted into and throughout the night, as is evidenced by the letter of Alciphron.

5.7 *Tauropolia*

Celebrated in honor of Artemis Tauropolos, the *Tauropolia* is mostly known to us through Menander's *Epitrepontes*, which tells of a virgin was raped and consequently became pregnant during the *Tauropolia*, as she fell victim to a man who snuck into the women-only festival.[185] The *pannychis* featured singing and dancing exclusively by women, although not the entire festival will have been women-only.[186] Both young maidens and (married) women would attend the festival, which took place outside of the city, some thirty kilometers from Athens in the deme of Halai Araphenide, and apart from Menander, sources are scant for the *Tauropolia*, although there are some indications that games took place and that there was an established priesthood concerned with the cult.[187]

5.8 *Bendideia*

The passage from the start of Plato's *Republic*, also given at the beginning of this section, takes place during the *Bendideia*, taking place on the nineteenth and twentieth of *Thargelion* (spring). The festival was held in honor of the Thracian goddess Bendis, who by the Greeks was identified with Artemis, depicting her in a similar way as a hunting goddess. The *Bendideia* described by

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me." It is not immediately clear whether the behavior of the other *hetairai* towards the narrator is part of the *aischrologia*, or whether it was plain personal strife.

[184] Deuber, *Attische Festen,* 61: "Wir finden hier die gleiche Aischrologie und die gleiche Verwenung geschlechtlicher Symbole. Aber die geslechtlichen Dinge spiele hier eine viel größere Rolle, und der ganze Charakter des Festes ist dementsprechend viel zügelloster." Dillon convincingly argues that the women did not just pour wine ritually or only sampled it, but certainly drank enough to experience the inebriating effects of the alcohol: Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 121-122.

[185] Men. *Epitr.* 450-457; Deubner, *Attische Feste,* 208-209; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 127-128.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Deubner 208-209; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 128.

Socrates introduces the new concept of nocturnal torch-racing on horseback, instead of having them on foot.[188] When Bendis was accepted by the Greeks in the 5th century, her cult became popular particularly quickly for a foreign deity.[189] The festival would start in the morning with a procession to the sanctuary in Peiraeus, which coincided with a second procession of Thracians that arrived at the sanctuary at the same time.[190] After they had washed themselves and ate together, they would rest until nightfall for the torch-race. Unfortunately, we know little to nothing about the nocturnal festivities that followed the race, although it has been suggested they might have been similar to the ecstatic rites of Cotyty, another Thracian goddess who found her way into Greece, although not into Athens.[191] Plato suggests the *pannychis* is not exclusively for women, as he expects to meet a lot of young men there: however, it is certainly possible men and women were separated, as we have seen before.[192]

5.9 *Brauronia*

Few other festivals have been subjected to as much study as the *Brauronia* has over the last few decades: whereas Deubner only attributed a single page to discussing it, extensive research has yielded exhaustive bibliographies on the cult site at Brauron and the cult itself, resulting in a much more nuanced and magnified picture.[193] Brauron was the site of the cult of Artemis Brauronia, and it became so significant that by the late sixth century BCE a cult site to Artemis Brauronia was established on the Athenian acropolis.[194] Every four years the *Brauronia* was celebrated, we do not know when exactly, in which young girls performed an especially

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[188] H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London 1977) 150.

[189] On the introduction of Bendis in Athens, see Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods: The Politics of Athenian Religion* (London 1992) 111-112.

[190] Idem, 151-152.

[191] Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*, 151-152.

[192] Plato, *Rep.* 327-328; Deubner suggests the Athenian *Bendideia* may be similar to Thracian rites to Bendis, which consisted of particular rituals only performed by women, which is probably why Parker places the *cult itself.*

[193] Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 4-5.

[194] Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*, 139.

significant ritual – the *arkteia*: in contrast to the penteteric festival, this ritual was performed annually.[195] The girls behaved like *arktoi*, bears, following the myth of Artemis and her favored she-bear who slayed a small girl that had taunted it: when the animal was killed in retaliation by a crowd, Artemis was to be appeased with this rite in which her she-bear was honored.[196] The girls will have stayed and 'served' at the sanctuary for an unknown period of time, but it seems likely their service culminated in the *arkteia* performance at the penteteric *Brauronia*: the *pannychis* of the festival would certainly have supplied a perfect stage for the girls to perform.[197]

It has become evident that a *pannychis* is no standardized affair and we should approach each "all-nighter" that we encounter as a separate event; nevertheless, there are clearly some recurring elements. In the next and final section of this chapter, these elements will be summarized, before moving on to a discussion of what the function of the night exactly is in these women's festivals and rituals.

5.10 Women of the night

Recapitulating on what we have seen in the previous sections on the individual festivals, some general remarks pertaining *pannychides* and the role of women can be made.

Firstly, *pannychides* are celebrations in the festive sense of the word: in every instance, the *pannychides* consisted of dancing, singing, and/or drinking. This type of excessive or even ecstatic behavior is not commonly seen in (married) women or young girls other than during these festivals. In the majority of the festivals the women were wholly separated from the men, or at

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[195] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek* Religion, 94; Parker discusses the *arkteia* and its main actors, the *arktoi*, at length, emphasizing the universality of the ritual for pre-pubescent girls in Attica and its social function as a pre-marital rite; Dillon contests the universality to some extent, but concurs with its significance: Dillon, *Girls and Women In Classical Greek Religion*, 220-221.

[196] For a discussion of the depiction of this myth and the rites of the *arkteia*, see Simon*, Festivals of Attica,* 85-86. See also Sourvinou-Inwood, *Studies in Girls' Transitions: Aspects of the Arkteia and Age Representation in Attic Iconography* (Athens 1988).

[197] Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens,* 228-236.

least performed a very different role: Parker's "often men sacrificed meat by day and women danced by night" seems to be quite an apt summary indeed.[198] Even though we do not the specifics and the practicalities of the separation between the sexes at these festivals, we can gather from the sources that they were surely often expected to perform different roles at the same time, in different places.

Secondly, the *pannychides* have an air of secrecy about them, not unlike that of the mystery cults discussed in the previous chapter. The nocturnal rites of the *Tauropolia* are explicitly kept secret from men, and during the *Haloa* the men were expressly forbidden from mingling with the women. The secrecy does not revolve around the protecting of a divine secret or an initiation ritual, as was the case in the *mysteria*, but serves more as a boundary between the women and the men, so that the former can engage in behavior which would not be possible with the latter present.

Why would the women perform these rituals at night? In the previous chapter, we've seen that the night functioned as a liminal space in initiation context, forming a boundary between two states of being: uninitiated and initiated. This explanation would be unsatisfactory for the *pannychides* of the public festivals: it fails to take into account the specifics of the special status and role of women, as well as the celebratory nature of the rituals. What is similar, however, is the transformation also discussed in the chapter of mystery cults: the night is a space in which the common and the expected may change into the unexpected and the strange. Women ecstatically dancing, making lewd remarks, drinking, conspiring among themselves, even transforming into animals; these are all fundamentally different from what we've seen in the *Thesmophoria.* The night offers a space for women to behave differently. This is not unconditional however: even in this space, the women are often separated from the men. The night does not

[198] Idem, 169.

function as an equalizer, where anything goes. Nevertheless, going back to the austerity of the *Thesmophoria*, the difference is like night and day.

Conclusion

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, this exploration of the ancient world after sundown has left us mostly in the dark. What is clear beyond doubt, however, is that there *is* something to the night in ancient Greek religion. Throughout the polis religion model, from magic, to the periphery of the mystery cult, on to the public festivals; on all levels the night functions in a particular way. Furthermore, there are distinct differences in the way the night functions on each level, as well as poignant similarities. As an exploration of the night as a viable and genuinely interesting topic within ancient history, this thesis has demonstrated at least that; but what can we now truly say about the function of the night in Greek religion? In this final section of the paper I will briefly recapitulate on the results of each case study before coming to a general synthesis.

In the *defixiones* we encountered many elements which are often associated with the nocturnal world: secrecy, illegality, sexuality, and sleep. However, after going through the corpus of binding curses of Classical and Hellenistic Greece, it's become apparent these elements do not occupy a place of prominence in the curses from this period. Later curse tablets, especially those found in Egypt and Italy, feature these elements much more frequently and explicitly. This, in addition to the *a priori* association between magic and the night, is likely what led scholars to attribute a nocturnal context to *defixiones* as a whole, thus unfoundedly so.

The chapter on mystery cults offered more in the way of a case study of nocturnal religious practices. The Eleusinian Mysteries, in particular the ritual search for Persephone, requires us to think critically about how we can think about the night in religion: is it only about the time of day (in this case, of night) that matters when discussing nocturnal religion, or are other qualities such as darkness just as significant? The application of spatial concepts has allowed us to think about this in a language that suits the discussion better than temporal language; instead of a nighttime we can talk of a night-space. The nature of this space, however, is not straightforward. The concept of liminality, where the night would functional as a

transitional space in the ritual, and that of wilderness, where the night is a space of otherness that can offer wisdom, or it is a space of danger and disorientation.. Both theories helped to fathom the function of the night in initiation ritual, by offering a context in which to place all the metaphorical parts of initiation ritual: blindness turning to seeing and darkness passing into light.

The final case study, on women's festivals, has certainly demonstrated how widespread nocturnal rituals and celebrations were in ancient Greek religion. Additionally, it has laid bare the special relationship between women and the nocturnal world, as is evidenced by the prominent role of women in the *pannychides*, and the frequent recurrence of *pannychides* in women's festivals. A typical *pannychis* would be celebratory in nature, where women jested, danced, drank, and conspired away from peering male eyes. Here the night-space is one of role fluidity: women behave expressly different in these 'all-nighters' than they do in other religious festivals, or in life in general.

Concluding this exploration of the ancient Greek world between dusk and dawn, we must first conclude that the night in ancient Greece largely remains obscure. Further research could go into topics such as sleeping and dreaming, magic in a wider context including the magical papyri, other Greek nocturnal initiation rituals, and certainly also beyond religious topics. Pursuing and studying the night as a historical concept offers many exciting new approaches and insights, and this thesis has only scratched the surface of these possibilities; the study of the night is still young, so to say. While the study of the night remains as obscured by darkness as its subject matter, and although the first steps are only now being set, the colonization of the night is surely advancing and the break of dawn is closing in. Undoubtedly, nocturnal history will soon find itself a place under the sun.

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