Cleansing the road to Eleusis:

The use of psychoactive substances and the role of altered states of consciousness within the religious practices of the ancient Greeks.

Master Thesis

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Contents

Introduction

The sanctuary at Eleusis was one of the oldest and most important sanctuaries of the ancient Greek world. Cultural activity has been attested at Eleusis during the Bronze age and continuing into the Mycenaean age. Although a period of probable abandonment has been attested due to the lack of material finds dated to the period starting around 1200 BC, the settlement continued its religious role in the Greek Dark Ages, from the eight century onwards until it was sacked and destroyed by Alaric the Goth in AD 395.[1] The sanctuary at Eleusis was dedicated to the Goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone or Kore. It was an integral part of Athenian *polis* religion but at the same time a part of the personal religious life of other believers who belonged to the Greco-Roman Pagan tradition and had the possibility of traveling there at least once in their lives.[2]

Demeter was the Greek goddess of fertility and agriculture, the goddess who had gifted humans with the knowledge of growing crops, and the mother of Persephone, the goddess that was abducted and brought into the underworld to be married to Hades.[3] Central to the worship of Demeter is the myth of the rape of Persephone. Many versions of this story would have been told among the ancient Greeks, but the earliest surviving literary account is the Homeric hymn to Demeter. This work, A hexameter poem directly associated with Eleusis, was written somewhere between 650 and 550 BC.[4] Although the hymn to Demeter details the nature of the Eleusinian Goddess and her daughters' rape and we know of the ancient and widespread importance of the Eleusinian sanctuary in the Greco-Roman world, we know surprisingly little about the nature of the rituals that were performed inside the Eleusinian Sanctuary. This lack of information is caused by the secrecy surrounding the rituals of worship at Eleusis. The worship of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis namely took the form of a yearly, eight day-long festival with a procession from Athens to Eleusis. This festival culminated in a secret ritual celebrating the return of Persephone which was performed inside the main building of the Eleusinian sanctuary, the Telesterion. The ritual was closed off to anyone but the initiated and to speak of what happened inside the temple was to transgress holy Athenian law.

Athenian law was abided for centuries and even today we can only guess at what exactly went on inside the great Telesterion. A lot of things however, have been written about the experience of the Eleusinian mysteries, the name most commonly given to the festival.

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[1] M.B. Cosmopoulos, 'Mycenaean religion at Eleusis: the architecture and stratigraphy of Megaron B' in: M.B. Cosmopoulos (ed.), *Greek Mysteries: the Archeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London 2003) 1-24; H. Bowden, *Mystery Cults in the Ancient World* (London 2010) 29.
[2] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 26; C. Sournivou-Inwood, 'Festival and Mysteries: Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult', in: Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries:* 26-27.
[3] M.W. Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries. A Sourcebook* (New York 1987) 17.
[4] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 26.

The Greeks simply referred to festival as ‘the mysteries’ only differing between ‘the greater mysteries’ (the ritual itself) and ‘the lesser mysteries’ (an initiation performed days before the festival). Today we call the festival the Eleusinian mysteries because certain other religious cults existed in the ancient world that resembled the one in Eleusis in certain aspects, most notably the secrecy. Alongside the sources describing the experience, these other cults can also prove to be helpful sources of information when studying the cult at Eleusis. In chapter 3 we will shed some more light on these other rituals and on mystery religions in general, but for now we will stick to the ritual at Eleusis.

Written accounts describing the Eleusinian mysteries and its meaning are scarce and vague about it, surely because of the law on secrecy, but in their vagueness they seem similar in what they describe. I will not try to quote all accounts in this introduction but the following fragments will show the resemblance of description:

> Blessed is he of men on earth who has beheld them, whereas he that is uninitiated in the rites, or he that has no part in them, never enjoys a similar lot down in the musty dark when he is dead.[5]

> The soul suffers an experience similar to those who celebrate great initiations (…) Wandering astray in the beginning, tiresome walkings in circles, some frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then immediately before the end all the terrible things, panic and shivering and sweat and bewilderment. And then some wonderful light comes to meet you, pure regions and meadows are there to greet you, with sounds and dances and solemn, sacred words and holy views; and there the initiate, perfect by now, set free and loose from all bondage, walks about crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people, and he looks down on the uninitiated, unpurified crowd in this world in mud and fog beneath his feet.[6]

[5] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 470-482, translated in: M.L. West (ed.), *Homeric Hymns*, *Homerica Apocrypha*, *Lives of Homer* (Cambridge 2003).
[6] Plutarch, *fragment* 168, translated in: W. Burkert, ‘Offerings in perspective: surrender, distribution, exchange’ in: T. Linders and G. Nordquist (ed.), *Gifts to the Gods* (Upsalla 1987).

> Blessed is he who has seen this and thus goes beneath the earth; he knows the end of life, he knows the beginning given by Zeus.[7]

> Thrice blessed are those mortals who have seen these rites and thus enter into Hades: for them alone is life, for the others all is misery.[8]

All of these accounts seem to point to a certain divine vision, something that was seen during the ritual and which would better the worshippers' existence in this world and the underworld.[9] Another known aspect of the Mysteries was the drinking of a special potion called *kykeon* that according to the Homeric hymn to Demeter consisted of barley, water and mint and was drunk at the end of a fast during the last day, leading up to the culminating ritual inside the Telesterion:

> Then Metaneira offered her [Demeter] a cup, having filled it with honey-sweet wine. But she refused, saying that it was divinely ordained that she not drink red wine. Then she [Demeter] ordered her [Metaneira] to mix some barley and water with delicate pennyroyal, and to give her [Demeter] that potion to drink.[10]

> I have fasted; I have drunk the *kykeon*; I have taken from the chest having done the work, I have placed in the basket and from the basket into the chest.[11]

The apparent importance of the Eleusinian mysteries to the ancient Greeks and Romans, the idea of a vision or some life-changing experience that the initiates witnessed inside the Telesterion and the esoteric character of the ritual has led many scholars to guess at what really went on during the ritual. For a long time the discussion was centered around the identification of certain holy objects, possible theatrical tricks used to create the vision or the

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[7] Pindar, *fragment* 137a, translated in: W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, (Oxford 1985).
[8] Sophocles, *fragment* 837 from *Triptolemos*, translated in: Burkert, *Greek Religion*.
[9] More on the eschatology of the ritual in chapter 4.
[10] *Homeric hymn to Demeter* 206-209, translated in: West, *Homeric Hymns.*
[11] Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 2.21, translated in: Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries*, 18.

way in which the ritual was performed, but in the late 1970's a radical new thesis was put forward in a book.

In this book, titled: 'The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secrets of the Mysteries',[12] R. Gordon Wasson, a banker and amateur mycologist, Albert Hofmann, the famous chemist that synthesized LSD and Carl A.P. Ruck, a notable classicist, claimed that they had solved the secret of the Eleusinian mysteries. They put forward the theory that the life-changing visions witnessed by the initiates of the mysteries were the result of a visionary, altered state of consciousness induced by a psychoactive substance. To be more precise, they argued that the *kykeon* that was drunk to end the fast on the last day was spiked with an extract of alkaloids derived from ergot, a fungus that grows on certain species of grain, including barley, the main ingredient for the *kykeon* potion.

'The Road to Eleusis' was poorly received when it was published and still receives heavy criticism if any reaction from historians.[13] P. Walcott in 1979 called the book 'as perverse as it is unconvincing.'[14] Also in 1979, N.J. Richardson wrote: 'There is no real evidence that the *cyceon* had such an effect as is claimed, and all the evidence for its use in other contexts points the other way. But those who believe that modern drugs offer a valid substitute for religion will no doubt welcome this essay in mystical myco-mania.'[15] Even a more nuanced review by M. J. Jameson concludes: 'In the end, since there can be no proof, acceptance of the thesis depends either on one's view of its plausibility, or on faith.'[16]

The criticism is not without basis. Moreover, the way the book is written seems quite biased. Except for a few small instances in the chapter written by Albert Hoffmann, the writers constantly portray their theory as the only option, without giving any other possible solutions or observations with regard to the seemingly farfetched nature of their theory.

However, the heavy criticism and moreover, the silence about the subject, seems to overcompensate the unfortunate presentation of this possibly revolutionary theory. The theory did indeed not rest upon a multitude of hard facts or unbreakable scientific theory, but what ancient historical theory does? On details and on the way in which it was presented there can be disagreement enough, but their theory itself seems very plausible. Moreover, their theory should have cleared the way to a more open view on the ecstatic aspects of ancient Greek religion. Whether or not drugs were used, their theory provokes the question whether other ways of attaining an altered state of mind, as such is reached through the consumption of

[12] A. Hoffmann, G. Wasson and C.A.P. Ruck, *'The Road to Eleusis, Unveiling the Secrets of the Mysteries* (San Diego 1978).
[13] Hugh Bowden does mention the theory, but ignores its potential: Bowden, Mystery Cults, 43.
[14] P. Walcott et al., 'Brief reviews', *Greece and Rome* 26 (1979) 104.
[15] N. J. Richardson, 'Review of: The Road to Eleusis. Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries by R. Gordon Wasson; Albert Hofmann; Carl A. P. Ruck', *The Classical Review* 29 (1979) 323.
[16] M. H. Jameson, 'Review of: The Road to Eleusis. Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries by Gordon R. Wasson; Albert Hofmann; Carl A. P. Ruck', *The Classical World* 73 (1979) 197-198.

psychedelic drugs, were used by ancient Greeks in their religious practices. The study of altered states of consciousness was a booming endeavor in the years surrounding the publication of 'The Road to Eleusis', why did no one make the connection?

Perhaps it was the idea that the book was a product of 70s hippie culture that made their theory so hard to believe and the academic response only negative. Some critics perhaps read the book as a continuation of the works by John M Allegro or Carlos Castenada which would very much account for their criticism.[17] Another possibility is the fact that hallucinatory substances like the one proposed were being prohibited by international law or maybe even the hard-to-die idea that all ancient Greeks were rational beings and would never degrade their religion to a drug induced ritual of visions.[18]

Anyhow, historical research on Greek religion went on, without paying too much attention to the book of Hoffmann et al. In recent decades however, research on many intense rituals of the Greek world has shown that although not per se drug-induced, but ecstatic or other altered states of consciousness played a vital role in Greek religion.[19] Besides that, research into shamanistic culture in the second half of the previous century has uncovered many still thriving cultures that use psychoactive substances to enhance their religious experiences. Also, was it not E.R. Dodds himself, who reminded us half a century ago, that Greek religion was essentially a superior form of shamanism? [20]

In short, the theory by Hoffmann et al. has had a lot of criticism, and rightfully so it seems. Their ideas, especially the ones put forward by Wasson and Ruck seem too eager to connect every aspect of ancient religion to the use of some psychoactive agent. Wasson seemed to be a victim of his zeitgeist; following writers like John M. Allegro (although they experienced heavy rivalries about the details of their theories) in their effort of trying to connect too much in one holy theory of mushrooms. However, the core of the theory in 'The Road to Eleusis' is not one that should have been cast aside so easily. As more recent research has shown, whether psychoactive substances and altered states of consciousness played a role in ancient religion is still very much a valid question. Therefore, the goal of this thesis will be to find out whether, after years of criticism, but also other developments in ancient historiography, anthropology and psychology, the theory put forward by Gordon Wasson, Albert Hoffmann and Carl Ruck can yet be made plausible and whether other ways of

[17] John M. Allegro and Carlos Castenada both published theories about the connection between psychedelic drugs and religion with Allegro even going as far as calling Christianity a mis-interpretation of an ancient mushroom cult. These books received heavy criticism and it seems very probable that predecessors like these helped to form the poor receival of 'The Road to Eleusis'.
[18] The idea famously refuted by E. R. Dodds in: E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951).
[19] See, for example: H. Versnel, *Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes: Three Studies in Henotheism.* Vol.1 of *Inconsistencies in Greek Religion* (Leiden 1990); W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (London 1987) 89-116; or: I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London 1971).
[20] Dodds, *The Greeks*, 135-156.

attaining altered states of consciousness were used by ancient Greeks and what that would mean for our view of ancient Greek religion in general.

To answer this question some light will first be shed on contemporary cultures that use psychoactive substances and other means to achieve an altered state of consciousness during their religious practices. This to show that the notion of these altered states and drugs as a way to achieve them in a religious context, is anything but an oddity. The second chapter will be an overview of the psychology of altered states of consciousness; some light will be shed on altered states of consciousness, on how we can define and compare them, on how they relate to religious experience and what role psychoactive substances and other activities can play in achieving these experiences. To apply these theories to the religion of the ancient Greeks, the third chapter will cover Greek religion in general, how religious experiences worked in ancient Greece and we will try to find some ancient Greek examples of rituals which made use of altered states of consciousness and possibly psychoactive substances to achieve them. The final chapter will be a review of the Eleusinian mysteries and the theory by Gordon Wasson, Albert Hoffmann and Carl Ruck. With regard to the previous chapters, ancient sources and the chemistry of the *kykeon*, I will try to give a final answer to the question whether their thirty-five year old theory now seems valid and whether this would have implications on how we should look on ancient Greek religion. However, firstly we will turn to the modern examples.

I: The modern examples

I would like to start this first chapter with some general remarks on religion. Although this is not the place for an extensive discussion of the origins of religion I think it is important for the readers of this thesis to note that Gods and religious belief were not simply invented as a convenient explanation of things we now call natural events. Naturally, the incomprehensibility and awesomeness of natural phenomena like lightning, earthquakes and human reproduction contributed to the formation of specific ideas about deities. However, anthropologists studying the role of evolution and cognition in religion have concluded that people also sometimes feel the presence of gods near them and respond emotionally to these feelings with fear or elation or simply the idea that something feels out of the ordinary.[21] As a result of evolution, humans have developed strong psychological reactions to certain situations such as potential presence of dangerous predators or corpses. These reactions originally evolved to help humans survive their natural environment. However, these feelings strengthen religious suggestions such as the existence of powerful but invisible supernatural beings and certain rituals such as cleansing rituals to ward off pollution by contact with the dead or diseased.[22] Modern western religious practice focusses mainly on morality and doctrine. Ancient and more rudimentary contemporary religious practices on the other hand seem to focus more on the emotional process of religion in which, without revealing to much already, practices involving altered states of consciousness and psychoactive substances seem to make more sense.

Now, as mentioned above, the theory put forward in 'The Road to Eleusis' was presented rather biased and the book was criticized accordingly. However, even if we were to accept their theory as false, the idea of some Greek rituals being based on experiences of altered states of consciousness, whether drug-induced or not, should be elaborated on because the idea is not an odd one at all. Altered states and psychoactive substances have played a major role in religions throughout world history. Moreover, anthropological research of the last century has uncovered many, still thriving cultures, spread around the world that use psychoactive substances to create or enhance religious experiences. Thus, to validate our problem, some examples of these practices will be put forward in this first chapter. More common practices will me mentioned shortly, but most attention will go to the more unknown examples of actual use of psychoactive substances in religious ritual.

It will soon become clear that the New World contains the lion's share of cultures that use psychoactive substances as means to change their state of mind in rituals. Richard E.

[21] P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: the Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York 2001)
[22] Boyer, *Religion Explained*; P. Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas* (London 1994); A. Knight and S. Smith (ed.), *The Religion of Fools: Superstition Past and Present* (Oxford 2008).

Schultes, a specialist on the subject, has pointed out that this is because the ecological environment of the New World supports many more hallucinogenic plants which would lead to more use.[23] However, the fact that these cultures took longer to be influenced by state religion that shunned these practices has undoubtedly also played a part in this uneven distribution.

The Peyote rituals of Mesoamerica

First on the list are practices concerning peyote. Peyote (*Lophora williamsii*) is a small, light green segmented cactus which grows single or in clusters close to the ground. If ingested, the plant can produce slight to heavy nausea, warm feelings, loss of the sense of time and space, feelings of insights, change in thought patterns and emotional responses, hallucinations, euphoria and paranoia among many smaller side effects.[24] The plant is indigenous to northern Mexico and the southern part of the U.S. state of Texas. The plant, its harvest and use in religious ritual were and are familiar to many cultures of the area.[25] This chapter however, will stick to a few contemporary tribes of which documentation on the subject is available, though many of these tribes are actually quite similar in cultural practices.

Indian tribes commonly have to travel great distances to gather the peyote used in their rituals and the gathering of the plant itself is considered a holy affaire.[26] When finding the peyote the place is marked with a holy symbol.[27] After the peyote is gathered and brought back to their homes, The Tarahumara tribe welcomes the plant with music and the sacrifice of an animal. Afterwards it is prepared for the ceremony, some tribes eat it fresh, others dry the plant for conservation and others dry it first to dissolve it in a potion consisting mainly of water.[28] Cult practice during the ritual differs among the tribes, but quite a few similarities can be pointed out. All of the rituals are performed at night and almost all last until dawn. The rituals are mostly held inside a special ceremonial tent (except for the ones by the Huichol who sometimes celebrate outside) and guided by a shaman or priest. Along with the consuming of the prepared peyote, the ritual is commonly accompanied by drumming, the use of holy water, the smoking of tobacco and a ceremonial fire in the center of the ceremonial area. Robert M. Zingg, a specialist on the Huichol tribe clarified the role of the fire in these rituals: ‘Grandfather Fire was the first and the greatest shaman who successfully led the first

[23] R.E. Schultes, ‘Botanical Sources of the New World Narcotics’ *Psychedelic Review* 1 (1963) 147.
[24] L. Grinspoon and J. B. Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (New York 1997) 20-21; for a full list of all the effects of the substances mentioned in this chapter; see: Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 10-21.
[25] An extensive list of cultures and tribes is provided in: O. C. Stewart, *Peyote Religion: a History* (Norman 1987) 17-19.
[26] It required Indians of the Mescalero Apache tribe a five-day journey on horseback to obtain the peyote: Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 49.
[27] Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 32.
[28] Ibidem 30-42.

peyote pilgrimage (…) Since all Huichol shamans derive their power from having hunted and eaten peyote, Grandfather Fire is considered the particular god of shamans. It was Grandfather Fire who established the peyote ceremonies.'[29] Participants circle the ceremonial fire and in some cases dance, sing, or simply sit still and concentrate on the fire. These actions are mostly instructed and directed by the priest or shaman who carries a special peyote dance-staff or wand that is sometimes passed around, placed in the centre of the ceremony or wielded by the shaman only.[30] In many cases the shaman also sings and dances to support the participants in the process.

The Indians of Mesoamerica regard the peyote itself and the search for it, as holy.[31] In some cases, as with the Huichol, they regard the peyote itself as a deity and from the moment the gatherers set out to find the plant the whole process is 'suffused with a sense of the sacred.'[32] Apart from consuming the peyote during rituals, they also treat wounds and diseases with it externally.[33] The most important aspect of their peyote-worship however, lies in the rituals. The rituals can have multiple purposes but are mostly performed for healing or divining purposes. Huichol Indians believe that the peyote experience heals them, that the hallucinations have divine meaning and that through the rituals they can get closer to the divine; as Peter Furst illustrates: 'When Huichols partake of the sacred plant in the rituals and feel its wondrous effects, the ordinary boundaries between past and present vanish, the gods, the ancestors, the events of Huichol mythic history, become physical and emotional reality.'[34] [35]

Banisteriopsis use in the Amazonian rainforest

Another, quite different group of hallucinogenic plants are used by various cultural groups living in the Amazonian rainforest.[36] These plants differ greatly and are prepared in various ways but can be categorized because of the resemblance of their psychoactive constituents.[37]

[29] Robert M. Zingg, 'The Huichols: Primitive Artists', *Denver University Contributions to Ethnography*, 1 (1938) 826.
[30] Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 30-42.
[31] R. S. de Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs' in: M. Eliade (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 12 (New York 1987) 46-57.
[32] De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 47
[33] Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 31.
[34] P. T. Furst and S. B. Schaefer, *People of the Peyote* (Albuquerque 1996) 136.
[35] J.S. Slotkin defined the religion of the Indians of Mesoamerica as Christianity adapted to traditional Indian beliefs. According to him, the belief centers on the deity of the Great Spirit who put part of his essence into the peyote. By eating the peyote, the participants think to incorporate some of the Great Spirit's power as Christians absorb the body of Christ through the holy sacrament. The experience of intoxication by the peyote is interpreted as a connection with the holy spirit that shared some of its religious truth, thus teaching the participant how to live rightly; see: J.S. Slotkin, *The Peyote Religion* (New York 1956).
[36] De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 50
[37] They contain: harmaline, various other harmala alkaloids en dimethyltryptamine (DMT); see: M. J. Harner (ed.), *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (Oxford 1973) 3-5; De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 50; Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 15.

Some of these plants are prepared in the form of snuffs called *cohoba* or *epena* which contain among others, the leaves and seeds of *Piptadenia peregrina* and *Virola callophylloidea*, two species of trees indigenous to the South American rainforest. Others are prepared as an intoxicating drink. These brews are commonly called *yagé* or *Yajé* in Colombia, *ayahuasca* in Ecuador and Peru, and *caapi* in Brazil, and always contain an extract from one of the several known species of *Banisteriopsis*, a genus of tree-climbing vines belonging to the *Malpighiaceae* family.[38] Distribution of usage by tribes at present is thought to be from northwestern Colombia to lowland Boliva, occurring east and west of the Andes and extending as far east as Pará, Brazil.[39] Both preparations induce heavy physical reactions, which include nausea, stomach aches, dizziness, sweating and vomiting. Psychological effects most commonly include a loss of sense of time and space, the feeling of dying and drastic visual hallucinations (most typical are visions of big cats, snakes and other jungle phenomena, and macropsia and micropsia) [40] but other sources also claim feelings of ecstacy, dread and exaggerated empathy or detachment.[41]

As with the use of peyote, these preparations are used by many different tribes, but unlike the rituals practiced in Mesoamerica that share so many characteristics, the rituals practiced in the Amazonian rainforest take many different forms, each depending on the religious beliefs of the tribe. All rituals however are performed at night, and all are used to provide contact with the spirit world.[42] Depending on each culture, the rituals are performed individually or in a group.[43]

The Peruvian *Cashinahua* may perform an *ayahuasca* ritual as often as once every two weeks and any initiated *Cashinahua* male is allowed to participate. The drinking of the brew and the following ritual are accompanied by repetitive chanting, shrieking, retching and vomiting and most participants agree that they look upon the ritual as a difficult and fearsome experience. However, they perceive the ritual as an extremely relevant part of their survival. They namely view the experience as a connection with the spirit world which can provide important information for the individual and the community. Upcoming events like hunger and famine, disease and war, but also abundance of food or favorable weather can be

[38] Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, 1.
[39] Ibidem 1-4.
[40] Discussion still rages on the specific visions seen: according to de Ropp, the visions include jungle animals, particularly the jaguar and the anaconda and both macropsia and micropsia (seeing everything on a giant or a dwarfed scale); see: De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 50. Kenneth Kensinger writes that frequent visions include: brightly colored, large snakes, jaguars and acelots, spirits, large and often falling trees, lakes filled with anacondas and alligators, indian villages and their gardens: K. M. Kensinger, 'Banisteriopsis Usage Among the Peeruvian Cashinahua' in: Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, 12; Grimspoon and Bakalar however write that these visions might sooner be the result of cultural circumstances than of chemical effects; see: Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 15.
[41] Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 15.
[42] De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 50.
[43] Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, 5.

predicted. With the help of a shaman even specific information like information on the cure for a particular disease can be sought after in the ritual.[44]

The Ecuadorian *Jivaro* tribe has a much more extreme view on life and the use of *ayahuasca*. They belief that the normal waking life is not real, that what we perceive as reality, is actually an illusion and that 'the true forces that determine daily events are supernatural and can only be seen and manipulated with the aid of hallucinogenic drugs.'[45] To deal with this viewpoint of reality, *Jivaro* believe that all disease and non-violent deaths are caused by shamans and can only be cured or prevented by shamans through the drinking of ayahuasca. Because of this high demand on shamanic practice, approximately one in four males in *Jivaro* society becomes a specialized shaman who, through the drinking of ayahuasca is able to determine and alter the 'true' reality.[46] Through teachings from an experienced shaman, celibacy and discipline can a young male become shaman and influence other people. This initiation ritual and the alteration of the *Jivaro's* 'true' reality works through an elaborate scheme of spirit interpretation too extensive to explain here. However, what is clear is that each shaman specializes and can therefore be only a bewitcher or a curer, supporting himself and their kin or attacking his enemies and rivals.[47] Because this alternate, 'true' reality is a constant factor, many *Jivaroan* shamans live under constant influence of ayahuasca.[48]

Janet Siskind, an anthropologist who has done fieldwork among these Amazonian tribes writes that, as with the extreme worldview of the Jivaro, the religious beliefs and mythical tradition of the *Sharanahua* influences, and is influenced by, their cult practice.[49] Sharanahua for example, share the Jivaro's ideas of affecting people through drug induced contact with the spirit world, but do not share their ideas of reality and shamanism. Therefore, their shamans are not so numerous and do not act individually. Their shamans mostly cure people by feeding them the brews instead of ingesting it themselves. The Jivaro and Cashinahua are two poles of the greatly differing religious beliefs among the tribes of the Amazonian rainforest that use these psychoactive substances. Although they share the use of substances, it does not determine their religious practices. Apart from the obvious connection between religious beliefs and religious practice, these differences in experience illustrate the importance of the context of a drug experience.[50]

Psilocybin mushrooms in the rituals of northern Latin-America

[44] Kensinger, 'Banisteriopsis Usage', 11-14.
[45] M. J. Harner, 'The Sound of Rushing Water' in: Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, 15-17.
[46] Harner, 'The Sound', 16-17.
[47] Ibidem 16-20.
[48] De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 50.
[49] J. Siskind, 'Visions and Cures Among the Sharanahua' in: Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism'*, 28-38.
[50] See chapter 2.

Another well-known hallucinogenic used in religious context are the psilocybin and psilocyn containing mushrooms used in rituals in Guatemala and Mexico. The species of mushroom used belong to the genera *Psilocybe Mexicana, P. zapotecorum, P. caerulescens, Paneolus and Stropharia* and produce physical and psychological effects similar to peyote.[51] The religious use of the fungus is centered on the state of Oaxaca in Mexico and practiced by the Mazatec, Chinantec, Chatino, Zapotec, Mixtec and Mixe tribes that inhabit the Oaxaca region. As with the rituals with the *Banisteriopsis* brews, the mushroom rituals differ from tribe to tribe. Sometimes they are used alone, sometimes as a group, with or without shamans or *curanderos* as they are called in the region. Among the Mazatec, the ritual is still so secret, that a *curandera* who revealed the cult to westerners who then published their experiences in *Life* magazine was punished for revealing tribe secrets.[52]

Many of the mushroom-rituals are accompanied by heavy clapping and chanting, the chanting in many cases being a translation by the shaman of the 'speech' of the mushrooms. Mazatec namely belief that the hallucinogenic experience conveys divining skills on the practicing shaman. Henry Munn writes that in general sense, the ritual of the mushroom has the purpose of a 'therapeutic catharsis'[53]. According to his research, the Indians of Oaxaca only call upon the usage of the mushrooms if something is wrong; in most cases, disease. The fungi are used chemically as a medicine for illnesses like syphilis, cancer, epilepsy and skin diseases, but its most important use is psychologically, through the help of a shaman. Together, shaman and patient consume the mushrooms and through the shaman's 'speech' he alters their consciousness. For the depressed he performs a cleansing of the spirit, for people with insecurities he provides a vision of 'their existential way,' but most importantly he communicates with the spirit world on behalf of the sick people to receive blessing and grief from the supernatural. [54]

The Amanita Muscaria use in the tribal religions of Siberia

On the other side of the globe, the Tribes of Siberia also use psychoactive mushrooms in their religious practices; however these tribes use a different kind of mushroom, the fly agaric or *Amanita muscaria*. Tribes using these mushrooms include the Kamchadals, Kerjaks, and Chukchees living on the Pacific coast, from Kamchatka to the northeastern tip of Siberia; the Yukaghirs, farther to the west; the Yenisei Ostjaks and the Samoyed Ostjaks, in the valley of the upper Ob.[55] Debate still rages on which of the alkaloids found in the fly agaric mushroom

[51] Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 10-21
[52] De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 49.
[53] H. Munn, 'The Mushrooms of Language' in: Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, 87.
[54] Munn, 'The Mushrooms', 91-92.
[55] R. Metzner, 'Mushrooms and the Mind' in: B. Aaronson and H. Osmond (ed.), *Psychedelics: The Uses and Implications of Hallucinogenic Drugs* (New York 1970) 91.

produce the desired effects. Some point to muscimole, ibotenic acid and muscazone.[56] Others seem to favor muscarine, atropine or bufotenine. The effects however, most seem to agree upon. The effects are clearly not as heavy as the psychological effects of the previous mentioned psychoactive substances, though not less potent as a means of changing someone's state of consciousness. [57] Grinspoon and Balakar describe the physical effects as muscle spasms, trembling, nausea, dizziness and numbness alongside a half-sleep trance-like state accompanied by a visionary state, lasting for two hours which is followed by elation, a feeling of lightness, physical strength and heightened perception.[58] Little is known of the cult practice of these tribes but as with the Indians of Mesoamerica, the Siberians believe that through the use of the mushroom they can find hidden truths. The 'spirit of the mushroom' would tell them the cause of their illness, explain a dream to him or reveal future events.[59]

Kava-rituals on the islands of the Pacific

Another less potent, thought certainly not less sacred substance is *kava*, a ritual brew used among the islanders of the south pacific on such islands as Samoa, Fiji, Tanna and Tongariki. The *kava* drink is prepared from the roots of *Piper methysticum*. Suffused with ritual importance, the preparation itself is considered holy, as it relates to a myth which tells of the original *kava* ceremony. According to Polynesian myth, the ritual was taught to the mortals by the first high chief Tagaloa Ui, the son of a god. The son of Pava, the first man to learn the ritual, misbehaved during the ritual and was cut in twain by the god, who forbade childish interference during the ritual. The ritual restarted, this time uninterrupted and 'When the new *kava* was ready, Tagaloa Ui poured some on the severed halves of the child and cried, "Soifua" ("may you live"). The two halves came together again, and the boy lived. (…) Tagaloa Ui said, "Pave, do not let children stand and talk while *kava* is being prepared for high chiefs, for the things belonging to the high chiefs are sacred.'[60] Women and children watching the *kava* ritual today still are vowed to stay silent in Polynesia and Melanesia. On the island of Fiji, in the past even small children were clubbed for making even the slightest noise during the ceremony. The exact purpose of the ritual is not clear, but it seems to resemble a holy sacrament, simply drinking in remembrance of the gods, to get closer to the divine. Drinking of the brew is namely accompanied by prayers referring to the myth of Tagalao with sentences such as: 'May God be with us today', or 'May God be our leader for

[56] Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 28-29; De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 50.
[57] Metzner, 'Mushrooms and the Mind', 92-93.
[58] Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs,*28-29.
[59] Metzner, 'Mushrooms and the Mind', 92-93.
[60] De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 51.

today.' As mentioned before, the substance is not nearly as potent as the previous ones mentioned. In the heaviest of cases the consumer feels a heaviness or weakness in the limbs or might fall into a sleep-like state.

Research has shown effective *kava* to be nothing more than a muscular relaxant.[61] This light psychoactive substance can hardly be compared to the ones mentioned above. However, the mildness of the effect caused by the substance does not have to lessen the importance of the effect the substance has on the individual within its religious context. Moreover, mystical experiences can also be achieved without substance use, but even the slightest effect may enforce other actions and religious beliefs to a point where one can experience religion more viscerally. The kava, though only slightly relaxing, might imbue the believer with a true feeling of the Divine taking over his body. The same counts for other substances as for example Cannabis. While smoking a 'spliff' a Rastafarian does not seem to be performing a religious duty, and to many people around the world, the smoking of Cannabis is anything but a meaningful religious experience, but because of his religious background, a true believer might experience it as true 'illumination' or 'divine inspiration'.

Other ways to an Altered state of Consciousness

Although some of the cultures mentioned above do consider the substance or the plant itself as holy and also use it for other purposes, the main purpose and the reason for its holy status, is its ability to alter the mind of the believer. The substance is a tool to achieve an altered state of consciousness; a state of mind in which the believer seems to come closer to the divine. More examples of substance-use in religious context can be provided; one only has to think of the drinking of wine in the Catholic Church or the smoking of tobacco by Indians, but these substances are merely symbolic, their (minor) psychoactive properties are less important. More relevant to this research are examples of modern religion where, not by taking psychoactive substances, but by performing certain specific actions, altered states of consciousness are induced to achieve a mystical experience. These examples however are not used by one culture only, they are techniques known to many and are often not at all used to achieve a mystical state (as drugs are too). Most common are meditation, repetitive noise in the form of loud music or recitations of prayers, movement techniques like repetitive dancing or yoga exercises. However, some of the more extreme techniques of (self) castigation and fasting should also not be overlooked as they are still common practice in some religious groups.

This chapter is far too small to describe the full details of all these practices. Within Meditation alone there are literally dozens of practices. Moreover, each different practice may evolve through several distinct stages and states. In the next chapter however, more light will

[61] De Ropp, 'Psychedelic Drugs', 51.

be shed on how these techniques alter our state of consciousness. Here, it will suffice to say that these practices are used in literally all of the major modern religions. These techniques are mostly used by certain smaller groups of devotees, but some of them are familiar to all believers: Meditation by Buddhist monks, self-castigation by radical Christians, dancing in Sufi-Islam, Loud music and dancing by Pentacostalist Christians, mantra-prayers by Hindus, fasting by Buddhist monks; the list could go on and on.

Naturally, the examples described in this chapter do not prove that rituals of drug-induced altered states are something that happened in ancient Greece.[62] They do illustrate however, that religious experience through altered states of consciousness, with or without psychoactive substances as their catalyst, are returning phenomena in religions around the world. Therefore, the idea to propose that ancient Greeks would have had similar customs is not farfetched at all, but a valid one and one that should be elaborated upon. Moreover, some classicists writing about some of the more esoteric cults of ancient Greece have already shown that ancient worshippers attained certain ecstatic or heightened states during cult practices. However, before we take a look at these cults, some light will first be shed on the nature of mystical experiences through the psychology behind altered states of consciousness, the ways in which these can be attained and the nature of ancient Greek religion itself.

[62] The first possible criticism should be the seeming anachronism of this comparison. However, it should be noted that many, if not all of these practices are a continuation of centuries, if not millennia-old traditions. See for example the ancient stones depicting mushroom rituals found in the same area as the contemporary practitioners of the mushroom ritual; see: De Ropp, ‘Psychedelic Drugs’, 49; The reason that I have selected these modern examples is because there can be no doubt as to their existence and authenticity.

II: The psychology of altered states of consciousness

Altered states of consciousness (ASC's) have been mentioned quite a few times in the previous chapter, but what exactly does the term mean and how does it relate to religious and mystical experience? In his book 'The Varieties of Religious Experience' William James in 1902 famously wrote: '(..) our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.'[63] A century later, leading psychologists on the subject wrote: 'Everyday conscious awareness is but the tip of an iceberg, underneath which there is a realm of relatively uncharted processes (…).'[64] Small difference it seems. However, the article that followed summarized the large number of modern psychobiological researches that can help us chart these processes.

Traditionally, the study of ASC's has been one of theoretical psychology based on such research as experience reports and questionnaires. Nowadays, research with newly developed methods and techniques in cognitive neuroscience, including multichannel electroencephalography (EEG) and magnetoencephalography (MEG), neuroelectric and neuromagnetic source imaging, positrion emission tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) provide a way to show physiological evidence for ASC's.[65] Still, these new types of research have not quite come so far as to prove or disprove all the existing theories. G. William Farthing, a specialist on the subject brightly illustrates that, although each alteration in subjective consciousness must involve some change in brain activity, we should not let our incapability of finding these alterations exclude those parts of our study of experiences of ASC of which no correlating physiological evidence has yet been found.[66]

Tart's system's approach

Charles T. Tart originally argued for a 'systems' approach towards ASC's. He wrote that during our waking life our actions and reactions are guided by a complex construction, a number of psychological tools which together form a specialized system which makes us

[63] W. James, *The varieties of religious experience : A Study in Human Nature, Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902* (London 1902) 497.
[64] D. Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States of Consciousness' *Psychological Bulletin* 131 (2005) 98-99.
[65] Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States', 99.
[66] G.W. Farthing, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (New Jersey 1992) 206-207. Because the underlying physiological alterations are not the focus of this chapter, I will stick to the theoretical way of describing ASC's and how they can be obtained. I will however, if possible, briefly note if, pertaining to the theoretical ASC-phenomenon in question, correlating physiological proof has been found. Because this is not the place for extensive psychobiological research, I will mostly refer to the article by Vaitl et al. which is in fact a summary article written by 13 leading researches that reviews and refers to an extensive number of other researches on the subject.

react to our environment and cope with the problems that concern us in everyday life.[67] This construction is a constant interaction between attention, awareness, emotion and psychological structures. These psychological structures can be defined as the culturally or naturally learned systems that transfer thoughts or input into actions or thought output. For example, normally, one can hear a simple mathematical problem and immediately think of the answer, someone could see a round red and yellow fruit and immediately identify it as an apple or the process between the thought of wanting to run and the actual appropriate muscle movement. The interaction between all these factors determines the state of consciousness of the individual.

Farthing writes about consciousness more conceptually; he writes that consciousness can be defined as 'the subjective state of being currently aware of something, either within oneself or outside oneself.'[68] That consciousness is the sum of several aspects of consciousness, namely: Sensory perception, mental imagery, inner speech, conceptual thought, remembering, emotional feeling, volition (i.e. the act of deciding upon and initiating a course of action) and self-awareness.

Geoffrey Samuel, following the ideas of Norman Zinberg explains that to speak of a normal state of consciousness is problematic. Our most common state of consciousness, for lack of a better term, is not separable from its cultural and physical environment.[69] Tart also writes that each individual's 'normal' state of consciousness is different from someone else's. Moreover, Lucy Huskinson, who defines an altered state of consciousness simply as a high degree of dissociation, argues that dissociation is a necessary and inevitable part of everyday life as the mechanism that splits off certain perception of experience to concentrate on a specific action (one can think of reading a book in a noisy, crowded area).[70] However, practically some normality can be defined among states of consciousness. To Tart, a normal state of consciousness is one that basically conforms to reality. If one's normal state of consciousness does not enable that person to sense imminent danger such as the edge of a cliff, that person is unlikely to survive very long.[71] It thus seems reasonable to assume that there are certain states that can be considered as a part of the usual range of functioning and ones that lie outside that range such as those induced by severe illness, psychoactive substances or extreme ascetic practices.[72]

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[67] C.T. Tart, *States of Consciousness* (New York 1975) 4-5.
[68] Farthing, *The Psychology of Consciousness*, 6.
[69] G. Samuel, 'Possession and Self-Possession: Towards and integrated Mind-Body Perspective, in: B.E. Schmidt and L. Huskinson (ed.), *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York 2010) 40.
[70] L. Huskinson, 'Analytical Psychology and Spirit possession: Towards a Non-Pathological Diagnosis of Spirit Possession' in: Schmidt and Huskinson, *Spirit Possession*, 72.
[71] Tart, *States of Consciousness*, 36-37.
[72] Samuel, 'Possession and Self-Possession', 40-41.

Defining altered states of consciousness and their religious interpretation

Other states than our normal state or: altered states of consciousness, (ASC's) can thus be defined as a change in the overall pattern of subjective experience and psychological functioning from certain general norms of our normal waking state of consciousness.[73] As with normal consciousness, Farthing writes of certain aspects of ASC's, an idea expressed not only by him; Ludwig and many others also list a number of aspects that can help define ASC's. These aspects hardly occur in all ASC's but they help form an image of all the possible changes an ASC can produce. They also help identify the similarities between different ASC's. The list I provide is mostly Farthing's although I have added some aspects from other authors that also form an important aspect of many ASC's: Changes in attention, Changes in perception, Changes in imagery and fantasy, Changes in Inner speech, Changes in memory, Change in higher level thought processes, Changing in the meaning or significance of experience, Changed time experience, Changes in emotional feelings and expression, Changes in level of arousal, Changes in self-control, Changes in suggestibility, Changed body image and a Changed sense of personal identity.[74]

These aspects also illustrate that the step from an ASC to a religious experience can be a small one. The individual experiencing an ASC would act strange, even incomprehensible, and without the knowledge we possess on ASC's, their induction and psychology in general, this behavior could very well be given a religious explanation. Erika Bourguignon wrote that in traditional societies (and in modern societies to a considerable extent too) the experience of ASC's is most often viewed at within a religious context. ASC's are often defined as a connection with 'supernatural entities'.[75] The one experiencing the ASC might be thought of as possessed by gods or spirits. Religious specialists, if not the person itself would interpret the experience as an answer to mysteries of existence or religion, as a prophecy about weather, fertility or other important matters. This religious interpretation accounts for the subjects altered behavior as well as his different subjective experience of himself and his environment.[76] Thus, someone within a strongly religious environment is bound to connect religious thoughts to such an experience. However, as the following will show, ASC's are not induced easily.

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[73] Farthing, *The Psychology of Consciousness*, 205; A.M. Ludwig, 'Altered States of Consciousness', in: C.T. Tart (ed.), *Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings* (New York 1969) 10; Tart, *States of*.

[74] Farthing, *The Pscyhology of Consciousness*, 207-212; Ludwig, 'Altered States', 13-17.

[75] E. Bourguignon, 'A Framework for the Comparative Study of Altered States of Consciousness', in: E. Bourguignon (ed.), *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change* (Columbus 1973) 3.

[76] Bourguignon, 'A Framework', 3-4.

Tart's stabilizing factors and inducement procedures

To keep someone from spontaneously entering an altered, possibly dangerous state of consciousness (such as falling asleep while driving), the normal state of consciousness is stabilized by what Tart calls 'loading stabilization', 'feedback stabilization' and 'limiting stabilization'. Loading stabilization keeps you in your current state through constant stabilizing input that conforms to your current state. For example, the hardness of the wooden desk you're sitting on, or the warmth of the sun: 'You can depend on the lawfulness of the spectrum of experience we call physical reality'.[77] The normal, constant thoughts people have, also stabilize the normal state through 'loading input'. Thus, sensing and thinking normally stabilizes our state of consciousness. Feedback stabilization works more internally: Negatively, when one psychological structure is functioning out of the stable spectrum, such as dreamy thoughts during a conversation, another structure pulls you back because of a stimulus, such as a loud or interesting word in the conversation. On the other hand, feedback can work positively when a psychological structure is functioning conforming to the normal state, for example when someone is having a discussion and making a good point, rewarding structures make him or her feel like a strong speaker. Limiting stabilization works the same way as loading, in that it prevents a structure from destabilizing the current state, but unlike loading stabilization it prevents the structure from destabilizing directly instead of indirectly through perception and thought processes. Limiting stabilization is typically an external factor; Tart gives the example of a tranquilizing drug that limits (possibly destabilizing) heavy emotional responses.[78]

According to Tart's system of states of consciousness, the transition from the 'normal' state to an altered state of consciousness consists of three stages : The normal state is effected by disruptive factors which destabilize the state of consciousness into a transitional phase after which patterning forces push psychological functioning into an altered state of consciousness. Our normal state of consciousness is thus spiked or 'destabilized' by surreal factors into a phase of uncertainty after which more surreal input adjusts or 'patterns' our state of consciousness into one that fits our current experience. These inputs have to be strong enough to disrupt multiple stabilizing processes. 'If, for example, someone were to clap his hands loudly right now, while you are reading, you would be somewhat startled. Your level of activation would be increased; you might even jump. I doubt, however, that you would enter an [altered state of consciousness].'[79]

[77] Tart, *States of Consciousness*, 67-68.
[78] Ibidem 63-69.
[79] Ibidem 71.

Different methods for inducing ASC's

The aforementioned disruptive factors can be many things. What follows is a list of categories after which factors that are of interest to this research will be looked at more carefully. First on the list are spontaneous natural factors such as fatigue, which induce sleep, a hypnagogic state or a state of drowsiness. Near-death experiences can also be categorized under spontaneously occurring induction. Secondly, they can be Physical or physiological factors such as extreme environmental conditions, starvation and dieting, self-mutilation, sexual activities, prolonged physical activity and respiratory manoeuvres. Third are the psychological factors such as sensory deprivation, homogenization or sensory overload, rhythmic dance and drumming, relaxation, meditation and concentration.[80] ASC's can also be triggered by a wide range of pathological factors and finally, also pharmacologically through the use of psychoactive substances.[81]

Spontaneously occurring ASC's such as Dreaming, hypnagogic states and altered states during drowsiness are probably the most common ASC's experienced by mankind and in strongly religious cultures they are often given a religious interpretation. They have also been studied extensively. However, because of their assured occurrence i.e. the fact that they are not deliberately induced, they are of lesser importance to this research. They would have been experienced in any case whether or not ASC's were part of religious ritual in the ancient Greek world.

ASC's induced by exposure to extreme environmental conditions seem a typical anecdotal thing to happen to mountaineers and it would very much account for religious experiences during ascetic practices such as certain pilgrimages to monasteries or sanctuaries on high places. Hallucinations and changes in body schema have been reported although these seem to be mostly consequences of hypoxia, social deprivation and acute stress conditions.[82] A number of the other physical factors can be categorized as ignoring physical feelings. Prolonged repetitive dance for example, causes feelings of fatigue and muscle pain and the natural reaction to these feelings are what Tart calls negative feedback, in this case, to stop dancing and start resting. However, the negative feedback is ignored and thus disrupts the normal state of consciousness. This ignoring of negative feedback is done in many ways: In extreme sports for example, people run, jump and swim etc. well past their limits. Sleep deprivation can also be seen as ignoring 'negative feedback', but most typically and most fanatically is it done in ascetic practices such as fasting,[83] pilgrimage, or self-mutilation. Repetitive dance is a typical aspect of Sufi Islam, the so-called 'whirling dervishes' But more

[80] Note that some of the psychological factors might also be considered physical. For example, sitting or lying still, thereby relaxing and depriving oneself of tactile sensations is a lack of physical action. However, the actual ASC-inducing factor is the deprivation and relaxation which are psychological.
[81] Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States', 100.
[82] These results were published as a result of structured interviews, neuropsychological test and electroencephalographic and MRI techniques; see Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States', 103.

importantly also an important aspect of some ancient Greek cults.[84] Fasting is a very common practice among ascetics of all world religions and is sometimes performed to extremes; the same is true for prolonged physical action; in pilgrimage for example.

Among the psychological factors, sensory alterations are very important. Deprivation through the blocking of eyesight, hearing or other senses, thus abolishing or minimizing sensory input to the brain affects all levels of human functioning. Laying or sitting absolutely still (relaxation itself should be considered as something else because sitting or lying still does not automatically cause psychological relaxation) also numbs your receptive qualities as it prevents tactile sensations (all human kinaesthetic senses only respond to change). Sensory deprivation restricts various inputs that would normally be sensed from your surroundings while it also keeps attention and awareness focussed inward. It thus disrupts Tarts 'stabilizing' factors, and has also been physiologically proven to alter brain functioning.[85]

Sensory homogenization, also called *ganzfeld,* works in the same way as deprivation. By experiencing the same sensory stimuli, the input to the brain is limited which disrupts stabilization. However, because physical stimulus levels are kept high, the brain is more likely to produce imagery thus resulting in an ASC.[86] Sensory overload seems not to be an ASC inducing factor. While mostly thought to be able to alter brain-functioning, only people suffering from mental illness seem to transform sensory stimulation into over-stimulation. Relaxation and concentration work more intrinsically. During both actions sensory deprivation or homogenization is in process, apart from that, passivity (the ability to refrain from goal-directed and analytic thoughts) and receptivity or suggestibility (the ability to accept unusual or paradoxical experiences or suggestions) seem to elicit a general relaxing state which in itself is not an ASC inducing factor, but helps inducement.[87]

Relaxation and concentration, though typically connected to meditation, are an important part of religious experience in general. Whether during an ancient sacrificial rite, a new-world mushroom ritual or during prayer in Christian masses, relaxation and concentration are a returning factor in all religious traditions. While Meditation plays a major role in (modern) religious traditions of the east and much can be elaborated about it, I would

[83] Stimuli towards food are greatly enhanced, the absence of nutritions can induce an extensive array of pathological ASC's and specifically differences in cerebral blood flow and EEG power has been measured, see Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States',103-104.
[84] More on the psychologically ASC-inducing properties of ritual dance and music below.
[85] It has been shown that restricted environmental stimulation significantly affects a number of physiological functions in humans which induce, among other things, hallucinatory percepts and disruption of time perception. See: Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States',105-106.
[86] Exposure to visual and auditory ganzfeld may induce an ASC characterized by episodes imagery ranging from simple sensory impressions to hallucinatory, dreamlike states. See: Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States',106.
[87] These aspects of relaxation consist of physiological changes that are evoked by decreased autonomic nervous sytem activity. Specifically, these effects are brought about by a reduces sympathoadrenergic reactivity. Neurophysiologically, the relaxation response is accompanied by changes in EEG indicating reduced cortical arousal.

like to focus our attention on rhythmic stimulation through music and dance because these are customs that are specifically attested in ancient Greek religion.

Theoretically, rhythmic music and dancing disrupts loading stabilization through deprivation of stimuli because of its repetitiveness. It also, as mentioned before, works as ignoring negative feedback. However, psychobiology in this case provides clearer answers: During rhythmic drumming and dancing, the movements of the body synchronize with the frequency of the music and eventually seem to happen without effort or voluntary control. Because the individual becomes increasingly absorbed by the rhythm of the action, self-reflective thinking ceases, time sense is distorted, unusual body sensations can be felt, and even vivid imagery or strong positive emotions can be experienced. Research even uncovered that repetitive drumming could directly influence brain wave frequency,[88] but beside that, the social setting and possible personal traits, rhythmic body movements may also play a vital role. The prolonged rhythmic movements cause respitory-cardiovascular synchronization that stimulate the baroreceptors (special nerves that provide the brain with information from the veins) reducing cortical arousal and excitability, thus reducing loading stabilization from the environment and enhancing passivity (as with relaxation). Although many factors seem to influence the result, and there is little certainty about what exactly causes rhythm-induced trance, research has proven that under the right circumstances, these actions can very well lead to an ASC.[89] In the first chapter we have seen that among the drug-induced rituals of the new-world, dancing and drumming was an important part of the ritual, Moreover, it was an essential and famous aspect of certain ancient Greek rituals such as those devoted to Dionysos and the Mother Goddess.[90]

Finally, we should consider ASC's induced by psychoactive substances. This thesis is much too small to cover all the effects of all known psychoactive substances and the ASC's that they can induce. What can be stated however is that particular drugs may affect the neurological bases of various psychological structures and thus attempt to disrupt the normal state of consciousness. As with the other inducement methods, they act both as Tart's disruptive and patterning forces. However, other structures might continue to stabilize. Thus, not every drug will induce an ASC, but some can induce an ASC all by itself. An example of an ASC-inducing substance is lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). LSD is a strong hallucinogenic first synthesized in 1938 by Albert Hoffmann (the same Albert Hoffmann that co-authored 'The Road to Eleusis') from alkaloids derived from the ergot fungus.

Oakley S. Ray wrote a description of the typical effects of LSD. Although each experience can be very different depending on dose, personal mood and expectations and

[88] Vaitl et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States', 107.
[89] Ibidem 107.
[90] See chapter 3.

situational factors, Ray, drawing on earlier descriptions,[91] wrote of a series of five stages of effects through which the user might pass with sufficient dose and the right personal factors (successively higher levels are obtained by fewer people). The first, *Autonomic* level shows only minor effects such as dizziness, unease, a hot or cold feeling and a dry mouth. The second, *Sensory* level is most typical of an LSD experience and accounts for altered body sensations, altered color and space and time perception, sensory synaesthesia's and visual hallucinations. Cognitive changes also occur, where things, people and experiences may be categorized differently because new similarities and relationships are noticed. During the third or *Recollective-analytical* level, the individual's personality and memories become the centre of focus and aspects of the self may be re-categorized and re-evaluated after which positive thoughts or paradoxically anxiety and panic may occur, depending on personal factors. The fourth, *symbolic* level imbues the user with an enhanced appreciation of our oneness with abstract concepts, such as concepts from myths or Jungian archetypes. The final or *Integral* stage accounts for mystical experiences, a feeling of unity with deities or the universe, differing greatly depending on the user's cultural background. [92]

As with LSD, one specific substance in many cases has a comparable effect on many different people. Moreover, large doses of strong psychoactive substances such as heroine or LSD will almost always induce an ASC which is comparable to the ones experienced by other who took the same substance, but even then there will be differences; while considering the different ways of induction and the different aspects of ASC's above, I have not tried to differentiate certain specific ASC's. Some lists have been made in the past, but to really differentiate, every experience itself should be viewed as a specific ASC.[93] An ASC is not simply the sum of an induction method and a blank brain ready to be amazed. The most important factors in determining what kind of ASC someone would experience are the environment, the individual's previous experiences, the cultural background and the expectations of the subject, if not more. On this subject Tart wrote: 'Serious misunderstandings occur when an external technique that *might* induce a[n] [ASC] is equated with that altered state itself. This error is particularly seductive in regard to psychoactive or psychedelic drugs, for we tend automatically to accept the pharmacological paradigm that the specific chemical nature of the drug interacts with the chemical and physical structure of the nervous system in a lawfully determined way, invariably producing certain results.' I fully agree that a substance can have a different effect on each individual. However, Tart argues thereafter that we should see the consciousness as separated from the brain. I agree that one

[91] Among others: J. Houston, 'Phenomenology of the psychedelic experience' in: R.E. Hicks and P.J. Fink (ed.) *Psychedelic Drugs.* (New York 1969) Ray's description is also used and supported by Farthing. See: Farthing, *The Psychology of Consciousness*, 485.
[92] O. Ray, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behavior* (St. Louis 1978).
[93] Attempts have been made, most notably by Ludwig, see: Ludwig, 'Altered States' 9-22.

cannot prophesize the outcome of a person's consciousness after taking a substance, but his personal differences (brought on by upbringing and cultural background etc.) are all part of the physiological processes in his brain that are affected by the substance. Thus, apart from external influences such as environment and setting, consuming a psychoactive substance is indeed a chemical effect interacting with the chemical and physical structure of the brain (and the rest of the body), but this chemical and physical structure is different for each individual as the result of genes and past experiences; nature ànd nurture (besides certain environmental factors).[94]

ASC's and mystical experiences

In contrast to the aforementioned tendency of writing about ASC's as different things because of different interpretation through background and environment (one I have not broken), stands the original tendency of many specialists on the subject of mystical experiences, to support the idea of the universality of those experiences.[95] Aspects of these phenomena, despite of different religious traditions, different environments and different individuals, when compared, often seem the same. Lists of these aspects have been compiled by many authors. Although some of these lists are clouded by somewhat vague religious terms, the following list will hopefully clarify the concept of a mystical experience. Firstly, all mystical experiences are seen as a connection with the divine. Not the simple, indirect 'talking to god' such as is experienced during prayer, but a direct closeness to a divine being. Secondly, people that experience them often try to describe a feeling of unity with god and all existence. Arthur J. Deikman even calls this 'the hallmark of the mystic experience.'[96] The experience is also often seen as objective; as an irrefutable reality. However, also suffused by a sense of ineffability; the experience is often described as being indescribable. Heavy, sometimes paradoxical, emotions are also a returning phenomenon. Subjects for example, experience immense fear, joy, peace or arousal. The unlocking of some higher universal truth is also accounted by many and finally the experience of outer-worldly sensations; people report all-encompassing light, loss of sense of time and space, infinite energy and ineffable visions of an outer-worldly reality.[97]

Robert M. Gimello later wrote that in the light of the experiences we often forget that a mystical experience is the product of a person's own experiences and his or her religious

[94] For an extensive explanation and discussion of the body/mind problem relating to ASC's see: S. Greenfield, 'Altered States of Consciousness', *Social Research* 68 (2001) 609-626.
[95] Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 32-33.
[96] A.J. Deikman, 'Deautomizatioin and the Mystic Experience' in: Tart, *Altered States*, 23-44.
[97] Deikman, 'Deatomization and the Mystic Experience', 23-44; Lewis 32-33; R. Gimello, 'Mysticism and meditation', in: S. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York 1978) 178; W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London 1961); N. Smart, 'Understanding Religious experience', in: Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*.

background.[98] Nowadays this idea finds support among many of its specialists. However, although individual factors should not be overlooked, as with ASC's, the universal characteristics of the experience in general can shed light on the psychology behind the experience. Even Gimello eventually admitted that the core of mysticism are the experiences themselves and although they are also the result of individual factors, the factors that are shared by many help us understand the nature of mysticism.[99] Moreover, mystical experiences are sometimes had by people with no religious background whatsoever; the experiences that Deikman dubs 'untrained-sensate' experiences.[100]

As already suggested above, it seems that ASC's are often interpreted within a religious context. Mystic experiences moreover, are ASC's experienced and interpreted within a religious context or by someone with a religious mind-set. The resemblance between the characteristics of ASC's and mystic experiences speak volumes, besides that, scholars like Ioan M. Lewis and Deikman wrote of induction methods very similar to those of ASC-induction. Methods that, according to them, can be used to attain a mystical experience include sensory deprivation, fasting, rhythmic stimulation, concentration, mediation and psychoactive substances like LSD. Naturally, not all ASC's are religious experiences and even some experienced within a religious context are not mystical, but when the exact right state of consciousness intersects with the right religious mind-set and/or environment, a mystical experience seems to be the result.

In this chapter we have seen that states of consciousness are not easily defined, that normal states are not always normal and that a lot of different practices can help induce an ASC. Whether induced by long-learned meditational practices, intense ascetic pursuits or a psychoactive substance, people have the ability to enter an ASC in which their mind seems more open to religious or transcendental thought. These states are not induced easily, but under the right circumstances a person's state of consciousness can change greatly. Different inducement methods and circumstances make for different ASC's but every ASC shares a sense of the unreal, which makes all of them an accessible starting point for religious experiences. It is therefore very probable that, along with the occasional fully fledged mystical experience, ASC's whether drug-induced or not, are experienced and interpreted as religious experiences by believers coming from many religious traditions. Moreover, we have already considered some of these religious traditions in the first chapter. However, this research concerns the ancient Greeks. Because we have seen that an ASC is not easily induced without a cultural environment or personal background that supports the experience, and despite the fact that certain ASC-inducing practices are attested in ancient Greek religious

[98] R.M. Gimello, 'Mysticism in its Contexts', in: S.T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticismn and Religious Traditions* (Oxford 1983) 61-88.
[99] Gimello, 'Mysticism in its Contexts', 84-85.
[100] Deikman, 'Deautomizatioin and' 24-26.

practices, the question still stands whether religion experienced through an ASC fitted into their ideas of religion.

III: Ancient Greek religion

As is well known, ancient Greek religion differed from modern European religion in many ways. It was a polytheistic religion with no surviving literary tradition like the Bible or Quran. Thus ancient Greek religion had no universal doctrine or a central authority of organized priests claiming authority over the interpretation of that religious doctrine. Instead, ancient Greek religion was a diverse religion with many facets of belief and worship, differing from place to place. Jan Bremmer, a Dutch specialist on the subject explained that 'Greek religion as a monolithic entity never existed.' [101] Emerging from the Greek Dark Ages, each community had developed socially, politically and economically in their own way, something that was reflected in local religious practice. Each community had their own pantheon, their own religious calendar and their own religious festivals. Thus, ancient Greeks worshipped an endless amount of gods whose origins were traced from ancient, widely known myths, local lineage or superstition about (local) natural phenomena. Next to the better known Olympian gods, local believers worshipped local heroes, forest nymphs, river gods and many other smaller deities which makes determining Greek religion in general quite difficult. However, because of constant contact between communities, a shared understanding of the world and the relationship between men and gods was created. Therefore, some major gods, characteristics of belief and religious practice were shared by all ancient Greeks. An important unifying factor were religious poets like Homer and Hesiod, who produced a kind of high, common religion by combining, inventing and systemizing local traditions and spreading them through performances in the Greek *poleis.*[102]

The most important forms of religious practice were prayers to the gods and festivals held in honor of the gods, both accompanied by a considerable amount of sacrifice. The festivals included public sacrifice, dancing and music, processions, games, theatre performances and specific services or practices for the deity in question. Prayers, sacrifices and other forms of worship were usually practiced at specific sanctuaries dedicated to one deity. Sanctuaries always consisted of a delimited area and an altar. In many cases the deity was represented by a cult statue and a temple containing it, however, these features differed greatly relating to the importance of the cult in question. Some sanctuaries had no temple and a small wooden cult statue if any, while some boasted temples the size of gothic cathedrals and cult statues made of gold and ivory of over 10 meters in height.[103]

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[101] J. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford 1994) 1.
[102] Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 1-2.
[103] J. D. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Oxford 2005) 1-30.

Gods and men

To the ancient worshippers gods were very powerful. A modern Christian would probably say the same of his god, but to the ancient Greeks, who did not have an extensive tradition of science and provable causal relations explaining all the aspects of life, gods determined everything; they were held responsible for diseases, earthquakes, storms, the outcome of wars and every other aspect of life that lay beyond the conscious control of humans. Accordingly, every individual and community concerned themselves with their relationship to the deities that determined the weather, the environment, their urges and instincts and everything else that influenced their lives. [104]

Thus, according to the Greeks, the gods decided everything. However, in contrast with the God of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, the Greek gods were anthropomorphic. This not only meant that ancient Greeks imagined and pictured their Gods in human form, but it also meant that Greek gods were not almighty, ever-present or all-knowing, neither were they devoid of human emotions and urges. They were angry, happy, jealous and sad just as any human can be. Their behavior towards humans was whimsical at best.[105] Because of this, prayer and sacrifice towards the gods was not an endless thanksgiving or showing of love (as Christian prayers are more often than not), but rather a transactional affaire. Naturally, prayers, sacrifices and festivals were made and held in honor of the Gods, but man expected something in return. On the other hand, if something bad happened it was often claimed to be result of too little or impious religious practice. This transactional attitude is beautifully illustrated by inscriptions of the following dedications to Apollo and Athena:

> Mantiklos dedicated me as a tithe to the Far-shooter with the silver bow: do you, Phoibos, give some favour in exchange.[106]

> Maiden, Telesinos of Kettos dedicated the statue on the acropolis. Please take pleasure in it, and grant me to dedicate another.[107]

Moreover, prayers usually followed a standard structure beginning with an invocation of the deity in question, followed by a claim for attention and after that a request was made. This transactional character had often been acclaimed because of the sacrificial character of Greek religion. Nearly every prayer, festival or procession was accompanied by the ritual sacrifice of animals, most commonly goats and sheep were offered, but sometimes and to certain gods,

[104] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 7.
[105] Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 11-12.
[106] P.A. Hansen, *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca* (Berlin 1983-9) 326.
[107] *Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin 1973-) I3 728.

oxen, pigs, birds, dogs and even fish were offered.[108] The fact that almost every approach towards the ancient Greek gods was accompanied by a ritual of giving and a request being made strongly supports the idea of a transactional relation between gods and men.

According to Bowden however, Greek religion should not be solely understood in these commercial terms.[109] Greek festivals can also be interpreted as a communal feast with the gods and sacrifices can be understood as a shared meal between gods and men.[110] A common example given for this idea is the central scene on the east side of the Parthenon frieze. There, men are shown performing an annual offering to Athena. The humans pictured on the frieze are flanked by twelve enthroned gods, joining the Athenians on the acropolis. [111] Another example is the way ancient Greeks performed animal sacrifices: according to Homer's account of Greek sacrifice, the bones and fat of the sacrificial animal were burnt for the gods, while the rest of the carcass was consumed by humans. The long lasting parts of the animal were gifted to the immortal gods and the meat which would rot quickly was eaten by the mortals.[112]

Figure 1: Athena's new robe is received by her attendants at the climax of the Panathenaic procession, whilst she and the other Olympians observe. Depicted on the frieze of the Parthenon, now in the British museum

However, these are only two of many interpretations that can be given to the rituals of the ancients. Meuli and Burkert for example, argued for a third theory: that ritual sacrifice was the result of feelings of guilt after killing animals in the hunter society that preceded the Greek world, that the gift to the gods is a way to remove the blame of killing animals.[113] There are clearly many theories and the ancient Greeks undoubtedly also had their own. It seems that the interpretation of sacrifice in different times and context could differ as much as the

[108] Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 38-41.
[109] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 11.
[110] W. Burkert, *Greek religion, Archaic and Classical* (Oxford 1985) 303.
[111] See figure 1
[112] J.P. Vernant, 'Sacrificial and Alimentary Codes in Hesiod's myth of Prometheus', in: R. Gordon (ed.), *Myth, Religion and Society* (Cambridge 1981) 57-79.
[113] K. Meuli, *Gesammelte Schriften* II (Basle 1975) 907-1021. On Meuli see especially: A. Heinrichs, 'Gott Mensch und Tier: Antike Daseinstruktur und religiöses Verhalten im Denken Karl Meulis', in F. Graf (ed.), *Klassische Antike und Neue Wege der Kulturwissenschaften. Symposium Karl Meuli* (Basle 1992) 129-167. For Burkert's views see: W. Burkert, 'The Problem of Ritual Killing' in R.G. Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Violent Origins* (Stanford 1987) 149-176.

gods because their true origin was long forgotten. Moreover, the exact meaning of religious rituals, except perhaps for their role as ways to communicate with the gods, was never exactly determined. This indetermination points to the notion that these rituals came into being because of an emotional or instinctive need rather than as a result of practical ideas.

Knowing about the gods

Ancient Greeks tried their best to maintain a good relationship with the gods. However, the gods were invisible and inaudible which posed a considerable problem. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood called this the unknowability of the gods.[114] When an event or experience was credited to the gods, there still remained the question which specific god was responsible. If the event occurred near a temple it was often credited to the god honored there, but this was often not the case. Therefore events were also credited according to the fields of influence of the gods. These fields of influence of the gods were unclear however, and to help differentiate, people often turned to the superior knowledge of poets. Poets like Hesiod and Homer categorized the gods and their fields of influence; they provided man with mental images of the gods and their characteristics and provided examples of how gods could influence the mortal world.[115]

Another way of knowing about the gods and moreover, to communicate with the gods in ancient Greece was divination. At each sacrifice, the entrails of the sacrificial victim would be examined and interpreted to determine whether the sacrifice would please the god and to receive any other information the god might convey upon the believer. Moreover, sacrifice became an everyday event for divination during perilous times such as war or during epidemics. Apart from this more mundane divination during sacrifice, some divination was done through astronomy or via oracles such as the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, or Zeus's at Dodona. At Delphi the ramblings or utterances of the *pythia* (a virgin priestess chosen to receive Apollo's prophecies and act as his mouth to the mortal world) were interpreted by specialist priests and at Dodona the rustling of the leaves of a sacred oak were interpreted as prophecies. Nonetheless, even when Apollo announced his prophecies, it was the *pythia* that was heard, not the god himself and the same holds true for Dodona and other oracles. The Greek gods themselves remained unseen and unheard. During sacrifices and other rituals cult statues would be near, but according to Bowden it was a basic understanding that the gods could only be known indirectly.[116] Bremmer even writes that 'the gap between gods and humans is unbridgeable'.[117]

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[114] C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'What is Polis Religion?', in: O. Murray and S. Price (ed.), *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander* (Oxford 1990) 303.
[115] Bremmer, *Greek Religion* 1-10.
[116] Bowden, *Mystery cults,* 14.
[117] Bremmer, *Greek Religion,* 12.

If you consider Greek religious practice and the relationship between men and gods according to the previously mentioned theories, this statement seems only logical. However, as mentioned before, these are only theories and the true origin of Greek ritual and religion is as mysterious as that of all religions. In the paragraphs above, numerous aspects of Greek religion have been mentioned that show its differences with modern religions, and clearly there are a lot of them: the gods, the rituals, the prayers, many things are done and thought differently. However, in many ways ancient Greek religion resembles modern religion as well. The practices can differ, but all religious thought turns on the idea that one or multiple divine beings influence the world that we live in. Bremmers 'gap' is not something specific to Greek religion, if you would for example, ask an average modern Christian whether he can communicate with his god or get close to him, I doubt that he will answer that he has regular two-way conversations with his deity or that he daily feels the presence of his god. All religions share this unknowability and the distance of the gods. However, every believer also shares the emotional urge to bridge that gap, to meet the divine face to face.

Voluntary contact with the Gods

In ancient Greek religion there were quite a few practices that offered the opportunity of meeting the gods face to face. With some exceptions such as the *pythia* in Delphi (Bowden might claim that there was no direct contact with the gods and the worshippers at Delphi, but there was definitely direct contact between the gods and the *pythia*) or certain personal encounters, these opportunities belong to a category of rituals that the Greeks referred to as *orgia*, *mysteria* or *teletai* (commonly translated as mystic rites, mysteries and initiations, but the Greek and English terms are used quite flexibly. I will hereafter simply refer to them as mystery cults).[118] These kinds of rituals were held in honor of many gods, most notably Demeter, Dionysos, and the Mother Goddess.[119]

The Mother Goddess

As mentioned above, ancient Greeks did not have a monolithic, clear view of their gods. The Mother Goddess might well be the best example of this characteristic of ancient Greek religion. The Greek cult of the mother goddess originated in Phrygia, where a mother goddess was worshipped as the most important (and also solely pictured) deity. In Phrygia she was traditionally worshipped as the goddess that guided man in the conquering of the wild; a goddess of the hunt, of the mountains, but also as a protective goddess of men and its cities.[120] However, in the Greek world, the Mother Goddess had an unclear and multidimensional

[118] Bowden, *Mystery Cults* 14.
[119] More on the cult of Demeter in chapter 4
[120] L. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley 1999) 63-118

character. Depicted according to a more or less fixed form by around 500 BC, she was pictured seated, wearing a *chiton* with a cloak draped about her lap and a mural crown on her head. She most often held a *phiale* in her right hand, a *tympanum* in her left and was accompanied by lions.[121] However, in contrast with this more or less homogenous image, The mother goddess was simultaneously identified with Ge or Gaea (the Greek earth goddess), Rhea (sister and wife of Kronos and mother of the Olympians), Demeter and most commonly, Meter Kybele, which can be translated as mother of the mountains and is a derivation from Matar Kubileya; an epitaph given to the mother goddess in Phrygia.[122] These inconsistencies seemed not to bother the Greeks however, as can be illustrated by the works of poets like Euripides who happily made different identifications in the same play.[123]

A modern observer would probably assume that before or during the rituals, the exact nature of the worship would be specified, but to be frank, the ancient believers cared less about this. It is very probable than one or more epitaphs or names were used in addition to 'The Mother (Goddess)'. However, clarity about the personification was not that important in the worship of a mystery deity. As mentioned above, religious practice surrounding the mystery cults probably stemmed from an emotional urge for religious experience rather than a curiosity about the hierarchy of the divine; the need to feel the divine up close overshadowed the problem of identification.

Many details about the worship of the Mother Goddess have been lost in time. However, a Homeric Hymn in honor of the Mother Goddess was written that can at least give us an idea of the character of the goddess and the rituals associated with her worship.

> Sing to me, clear toned Muse, daughter of great Zeus, of the Mother of all gods and all human beings; she takes pleasure in the resounding of castanets and tympana and the roar of flutes, the cry of wolves and bright eyed lions, the echoing mountains and the wooded glens. And so I salute you in song and all the goddesses together.[124]

Beside the original mountain shrines dedicated to the Mother Goddess in Anatolia, large temples dedicated to the mother goddess, which were called Metroön's were built in many Greek cities along the Ionian coastline and in mainland Greece. In Athens the Metroön stood in the Agora, at the heart of the complex of administrative buildings were it became the city

[121] For an extensive collection of the images of the Mother Goddess, see: M.J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque* I-III (Leiden 1986).
[122] Roller, *In search of God*, 44-71.
[123] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 85
[124] *Homeric hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, translated in: Roller, *In Search of God*.

archive, thus signifying its importance in *polis* religion. These sanctuaries, sources about festivals and dedications spread across the Aegean illustrate that the Mother Goddess enjoyed a lively public cult.[125] However, as the Homeric Hymn and the iconography of the Mother Goddess illustrate, she was also connected with the wild nature and loud rhythmic music which, according to most specialists on the subject, refer to aspects of her cult, more specifically; nighttime rituals of ecstatic dance and offering in honor of the goddess.[126]

According to Roller, these nighttime rituals were performed under the light of torches and accompanied by loud music from Tympanum, flute and cymbals, instruments that are often pictured as attributes of the goddess and her attendants. In the literary sources accounting the rituals, the music is often described as roaring and resounding which illustrates its heavy repetitive character. Most vividly described however, is the frenzied encircling dance that accompanied the ritual.[127] A most clarifying source for the details of the ritual is an Attic red-figured volute krater, now stored in Ferrara, dated to 440 BC.[128] On the vase we clearly see a seated Mother Goddess with a consort.[129] All around the gods human devotees are pictured honoring the two gods with ritual dance and music. Some of them are holding snakes and all of the dancers are pictured with their heads tossed backward, their legs kicked upwards and with open mouths.[130] According to Roller these accounts all communicate the emotional content of the rituals, 'for the individuals depicted are engaged in activities of deep personal intensity.' Moreover, she continues: 'This atmosphere goes far toward explaining the attraction of the Meter cult to her worshippers, for it responds to a need, felt by many individuals (not only in ancient Greece), to cut through the pomp and circumstances that normally surround the officially sanctioned religions of the state and seek direct contact with the divine.'[131]

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[125] Roller, *In Search of God*, 143-186.

[126] Roller writes that 'the rites of Meter were mystery rites, ceremonies that were not held openly for all to see and participate in, but celebrated privately, limited to those who had been initiated into the cult,' She also explains that it's nocturnal character can be identified by the torches that are pictured being carried by the godess' attendants. see: Roller, *In Search of God*, 149.

[127] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 64-169; Euripides, *Helen* 1308; Strabo 10.3.15-17; Plato, *Ion* 534a, 536c.

[128] See figure 2.

[129] The Mother goddess can be identified through the crown upon her head and the presence of lions. Speculation remains about the attending consort which clearly is a god as he is posed as an equal next to the goddess. Dionysos seems the most logical possibility, because he is also associated with ecstatic cult rituals and because of the snake fillet. However, Snakes were a returning attribute of Dionysos' *maenads*, but he never carried them himself and his other attributes, the *kantharos,* ivy and *thyrsos* are missing from the picture so his identification remains uncertain. See: Roller, *In Search of God,* 151-153.

[130] This vase offers us a quite illustrative view of the ritual and Roller points to a clear parallel with a fragment by Demosthenes which proves that the vase is not just some imagined picture but a characteristic description of an ecstatic ritual, even though the identification of the god in question is much more vague with Demosthenes. He might well be referring to a Bacchic ritual. See: Roller, *In Search of God*, 154; Demosthenes, *On the Crown*, 260.

[131] Roller, *In Search of God*, 155.

Figure 2: Attic red-figure krater from Ferrara, Early fifth century BC, displaying Mother Goddess with consort and devotees. The other side is filled with more representations of devotees, as is described.

Roller here, not only beautifully illustrates the trance-like character of the ritual, as is the main focus of this chapter, but also explains the reason for the rise of these rituals. This point is shared by Versnel, who stresses 'the eternal tension between the 'routinization' of religion and the craving for the immediate experience of god'. However, not only modern researchers have observed this departure from the normal sphere of religion to a transcendental meeting with the gods. Plato himself suggested that devotees of the Mother Goddess could find an inner peace in the state of consciousness that accompanied the dance.[132] Diogenes also illustrated that the roaring of the Mother Goddess' cymbals brings forth wisdom and healing.[133] Thus an altered state induced by the Mother Goddess could bring healing, wisdom and inner calm.

[132] Plato *Ion* 536c; Plato, *Phaedrus* 265b.
[133] Diogenes, *Athenaios*, 14.636.

In short, the Mother Goddess could be responsible for worldly matters such as the protection of a city and its government and was honored accordingly with public and private offerings and dedications. In Athens a festival in her name called the *Galaxia* was also celebrated. However, she was most renowned for her powers of madness and disease, but also for the opposites: healing and inner calm. Her devotees would go out into the night carrying torches and snakes and would drum and dance in honor of the Mother Goddess to achieve their state of closer connection with the Goddess.

Dionysos

The God that is probably the most associated with ecstatic worship is Dionysos, whose midnight rituals performed by maenads, satyrs and other cult followers became a popular image on ancient pottery and sculptures as well as a popular subject for poetry. Dionysos, as described by Christopher Faraone, is the inventor of wine and *symposia*, the god of uncontrollable madness and intoxication, the Athenian patron god of music and drama, a male fertility god and also a god of the wild, who rends victims with bare hands and eats raw meat. He is also described as a god that comes from a foreign land and one that comforts believers in the afterlife. [134] Burkert describes him as the god of wine and of intoxicated ecstacy.

As with the Mother Goddess, Dionysos seemed to be a god with many faces. However, first and foremost Dionysos was the god of wine, intoxication and (ritual) madness. Dionysos was worshipped in many ways; very common were festivals dedicated to Dionysos, in which sacrifice, processions and theatre performances were all dedicated to him.[135] Besides those larger festivities and everyday sacrifice and prayer, the most famous ways of worship to Dionysos were the *symposia* followed by a *komos*, and the so called 'Bacchic mysteries'.

Worship at *symposia* can be over simplified as simply men joining to drink together after which they often engaged in a *komos*, a drunken procession which raved through the city streets. In many aspects it was exactly that. However, as we have noted earlier, Gods were part of everyday existence and influenced every little part of it. Thus, when the ancients gathered to drink wine and became intoxicated they did not believe that this was some secular event with no importance, on the contrary, they thought that Dionysos himself provided the intoxicating qualities of the wine, that when they acted strange after drinking, it was the work

[134] This aspect of Dionysos was formerly thought to have been based on a late entering into the Greek pantheon. However, Dionysos' role as a Greek god has been attested on Linear B tablets found in Pylos, which date to around 1250 BC and are among our oldest written records from the Greek mainland, rebuking the old theory. See: C.A. Faraone 'Introduction' in: T.H. Carpenter and C.A. Faraone (ed.), *Masks of Dionysus* (New York 1993) 1-12; Burkert, *Greek religion*, 162-3.

[135] Such as the Anthesteria festival and the Lenaia festival in the Ionic-Attic area which were very directly concerned with wine-drinking. The Agionia festival in the Dorian and Aeolic area, which is a festival of dissolution and inversion and the Katagogia; the Great Dionysia which celebrated the advent of Dionysos from the sea, which were introduced in Athens in the sixth century BC. See: Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 163.

and whims of Dionysos that caused all of it. Accordingly, while drinking, men would honor Dionysos in order to ensure a joyous continuation of the feast. To the modern mind, it seems hard to imagine a drinking party as a religious event or defining alcohol intoxication as a religious ASC. However, to the Greeks that could very well be the case. Although we can imagine that (because of the nature of the ASC induced by alcohol intoxication and the relaxing atmosphere of a *symposium*) these forms of worship had a less mystic or revelatory character as the other rituals discussed in this thesis, we should not overlook the religious character of these activities.[136]

The Bachhic mysteries, as mentioned before, were a popular subject for ancient art and poetry. Although some changes of the ritual have been pointed out, at the start of the fifth century BC the iconography of the ritual had achieved a somewhat fixed form and the literary account of it events, firstly mentioned by Heraclitus, later described by Herodotus and many others and famously dramatized by Euripides, also assumed a somewhat fixed form.[137] The mysteries mainly consisted of a procession that led the devotees out of the polis and a frenzied dancing-ritual out in the wild. In the processions were carried containers which held the sacred objects that were to be revealed during the culminating ritual and during the procession public sacrifices were made to honor Dionysos. Thus, the normal sequence of events involved the public procession that led the followers outside of the *polis* and which anyone could witness and join in, followed by the culminating secret ritual out in the wild. Although these rituals were collective acts, they can rightfully be labeled as private group rituals as there was no strict time of the year for the ritual, no fixed sanctuary or sanctioned priests such as with the mysteries of Eleusis, but rather a private organization of devotees going into the wild to worship at their own leisure.[138]

[136] For an extensive work on the religious aspects of 'ordinary things' associated with Dionysos, see: Carpenter and Faraone, *Masks of Dionysus.*

[137] Heraclitus, VS 22 B 14; Herodotus, 4.78-80; Euripides, *Bacchae.* For typical iconography see figure 3; Dionysos himself is shown as a statue facing forward. Although the picturing of Dionysos himself ranged between an actual depiction of the god and a depiction of a statue or mask as shown here, his attributes and devotees were pictured in a more or less fixed form.

[138] Burkert also argues that the absence of sanctioned, local priests 'presupposes a new social phenomenon of wandering priests who lay claim to a tradition of *orgia* transmitted in private succession.' See: Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 291. This would support Dodds' claim that Greek religion included the practice of the traveling priest that, according to certain characteristics, can be identified with the modern concept of a shaman. See: Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 135-178.

Figure 3: Red-figured Stamnos from Naples, dated c. 420 BC. At the centre is the statue of a bearded Dionysus; behind him, branches of ivy; in front of the statue is a low table with offerings and two large kraters from which some maenads are drawing wine. Others are beating drums and holding torches whilst dancing.

According to Herodotus' account, the Hellenized Scythian king Skyles, while residing in Olbia, had himself initiated at his own wish, but was warned against it by a divine sign 'as he was on the point of taking upon himself the initiation.' Afterwards he still completed his initiation and raved through town with the rest of the *thiasos*.[139] Analyzing this account, we can conclude that admission rested on personal application, that there was a preparatory period, that a tradition of initiation rites existed and that finally the new member was accepted into the group of initiates.[140] According to an inscription from Miletus, describing similar cult practices, both men and women could be initiated, raw meat was eaten and the procession would also end with a ritual in the wild, specifically, on the nearby mountain.[141]

Besides these accounts, probably the most striking ancient account relating to the bacchic mysteries is Euripides' Bacchae. Euripides has Dionysos himself leading the procession and all the women of the town spontaneously joining the ritual which ends in the frenzied slaughter of the local ruler that went against worship of Dionysos.[142] These things and his characters naturally are dramatizations of the original myth. However, the aspects that do become clear from the play are the secret nature of the ritual and its nocturnal setting.

All of the sources seem to agree on the main activity of the ritual. Although specific details were held secret, it seems clear that the major experience of the ritual is the raving; the

[139] A *thiasos* is a Greek term that in antiquity was most frequently used to describe a group of cult followers who engaged in ecstatic activity.
[140] Herodotus, 4.78-80.
[141] A. Jaccottet, *Choisir Dionysos: les associations dionysiaques ou la face chachée du dionysisme* (Zurich 2003) 150.2.
[142] Euripides, *Bacchae.*

frenzied dancing or *baccheia* that lead to an ASC.[143] As with many of the other practices discussed, the ASC reached during the ritual is considered a blessing, as can still be illustrated by the entrance song of Euripides' bacchae: Earth is transformed into a paradise with milk, wine and honey springing from the ground. The culmination of the ritual however, seems to relate to more primitive urges: the frenzied dancers hunt man and animal and eat raw flesh. This transition seems a harsh ambiauity. However, Aristides Quintilianus explains that man, humbled and intimidated by normal everyday life, can free himself in these orgies from all that is oppressive and develop his true self.[144]

Rhythmic dance and music clearly played a major role in the bacchic mysteries as it did in the nighttime rituals of the Mother Goddess. However, the culmination of the bacchic rituals seems more extreme. This aspect can be related to the male character of the god or the violent myth about Dionysos, but it should also not be forgotten that wine played a major part in the cult of Dionysos and all of its rituals. The wine could very well be the cause of the violent nature of (the myth about) the Bacchic mysteries. As mentioned earlier however, the intoxicating and probably radicalizing nature of the alcohol intoxication should not cloud the modern eye into thinking that it made the ritual any less religious. Burkert rightly argues that the change in consciousness induced by alcohol intoxication was interpreted as divine presence. He then stresses that this experience goes beyond simple intoxication, the madness induced by Dionysos is an end in itself, an 'experience of intensified mental power.'[145] We've seen in chapter two that both rhythmic dance and music, and intoxication by a psychoactive substance can work as factors inducing an ASC.[146] Both actions in this case are two sides of the same coin when it comes to achieving 'madness induced by Dionysos'.

Other mysteries

Besides worship of Demeter, the Mother Goddess and Dionysos, a number of other religious practices were known as mystery-cults in the ancient Greek world. Next to the more notable cult of Isis and the cult of the Great Gods of Samothrace and the Kaberoi, mystery-cults are attested at Andania, Arcadia, Lycosura, Phlya, Pergamom, Ephesos, Cysicus and many other towns within the cultural sphere of the ancient Greeks.[147]

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[143] S.G. Cole, 'Finding Dionysos' in: D. Ogden (ed.), *A Companian to Greek Religion* (Oxford 2007) 332-333.
[144] Aristides Quintilianus, 3.25
[145] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 162.
[146] Cole even argues that the ancient Greeks themselves understood this and associated Dionysos with ASC's, which can be seen from the frontal way in which he is often pictured. She explains that Dionysos was associated with four of the six categories of transition to altered states, being responsible for trance and the release from it. See: Cole, 'Finding Dionysus', 332-333.
[147] M. Jost, 'Mystery Cults in Arcadia', in: Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries*, 143-168; F. Graf, 'Lesser Mysteries – Not Less Mysterious', in: Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries*, 241-262; Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 68-82.

About the cults of the great gods of Samothrace and Isis little is known except for the fact that these mystery-cults were bound to a specific sanctuary, although not bound to a specific date as with the Eleusinian mysteries. Of the great gods and the kaberoi is assumed that the initiates themselves were told very little of the nature of these gods. Identifications have been made, but quite contradictorily and of cult practice almost nothing is known except for the sacrifice of bulls and the use of wine in the rituals.[148]

The practices of the mystery cult dedicated to Isis are somewhat clearer because Isis was also worshipped outside of the mystery-cult and because her cult features in a well preserved Latin novel, 'Metamorphoses' by Apuleius. The description features a procession to the temple of Isis, initiation, fasting for ten days, and in contrast with the other cults, residing near the temple and working for the temple for a longer period, with followed up rituals providing advancing stages of initiation. Strikingly, Isis, in the story by Apuleius, is identified with Demeter, the Mother Goddess and Persephone. Many of the other, smaller mystery cults have also been identified as sanctuaries to Demeter However, some of this identification, including that of Isis and the contradicting identification of the great gods of Samothrace is very probable the result of carelessness by ancient authors.

Because we know so little about these other cults, it is hard to draw any conclusions from their existence. We know that they were secret cults only accessible for initiates, but the exact nature of many of the rituals has been lost or never revealed at all. However, we do know through terminology that the ancient Greeks themselves associated them with the rituals of the Eleusinian cult so there must have been some resemblances. In light of conclusions made by previous scholars, I think it is safe to conclude that these mysteries, like the ones earlier discussed were a way to experience religion in a deeper, secret way, a way to experience the divine up close.[149]

In General

Although all mystery-cults were of an esoteric nature, they were widespread in the ancient Greek world and rather than being closed off for anyone but the citizens of a local community, as many Greek rituals were, they were open to all, which would have made them anything but an oddity and something that many Greeks would have experienced. These rituals usually took place at night and in secret, some participants were blindfolded and little if anything of the experience would have been explained. More interesting to our point, we have seen that 'these rituals were frightening and disorienting, involving rapid movement between darkness

[148] This is assumed by the often recurring image of wine vessels and bull votives associated with the cult. See: Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 49-67; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 281-285; K. Clinton, 'Stages of initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries', in: Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries*, 50-78.
[149] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 89-116; Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 67.

and bright light, with loud music and other noise.'[150] The rituals also involved dancing and other wild activities and participants might reach a state of ecstasy, losing control and awareness. Walter Burkert goes even further in his characterization of mystery cults. He stresses the fact that many ancient writers refer to a special form of experience had during the rituals of the mystery cults: Aristotle writes that at the final stage of the mysteries there should be no more learning, but experiencing and a change in the state of mind. Burkert also explains Dio's words, stating that 'initial bewilderment is changed into wonder, and acceptance of sense.' He continues: 'In religious terms, mysteries provide an immediate encounter with the divine. Let us remember that Marcus Aurelius put mysteries between dream visions and miraculous healing as one of the forms in which we can be certain of the care of the gods. In psychological terms, there must have been an experience of the "other" in a change of consciousness, moving far beyond what could be found in everyday life.'[151]

Another account of a mystery cult experienced by an ancient believer is the account of Lucius, the main character from Apuleius' novel. In his description of the initiatory ritual of Isis he illustrates that which makes mystery cults important, that which explains their role in religion in general: 'I approached the gods below and the gods above face-to-face and worshipped them from nearby.'[152] It is this idea of direct unrestricted contact with the divine that lies at the foundation of ancient mystery cults.[153] As mentioned before, the gods of the ancient Greeks were often present in- and also influenced the mortal world but were invisible and inaudible; they could only be perceived indirectly. These concepts of (in)visibility and the power of the gods are well illustrated in the works of Homer, the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey.*

Normally, when gods in the Homeric poems speak to mortals they come in disguise. However, on one occasion in the *Illiad* Athena lifts the veil of Diomedes' eyes to make him see the gods that are fighting alongside the mortals. Suddenly, Diomedes sees Apollo, Ares and Aphrodite while they are invisible to the other humans. While beholding the gods, Diomedes suffers no harm.[154] However, on many other occasions the mere sight or presence of a god can have a very frightening if not lethal effect on mortals. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Selene, princess of Thebes, the mother of Dionysos and also a lover of Zeus is tricked by Hera into demanding him to see him in his true form: Zeus appears as a lightning bolt and destroys Selene.[155] Later on, when Dionysos reveals himself, his appearance is accompanied by an earthquake and thunder and lightning. Some appearances by gods were less dangerous but

[150] Bowden, *Mystery Cults* 15.
[151] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 89.
[152] Apuleus, *Metamorphoses*, 11.23.
[153] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 6-25.
[154] Homer, *Illiad*, 5.124-5.131.
[155] Bowden also connects the fact that Selene was the mother of Dionysos and her destruction by Zeus' appearance, to the possible dangerous nature of meeting a god face-to-face as was the intention of some of the rituals of worship surrounding Dionysos. Bowden, *Mystery Cults* 21, 105-136.

never less awe-inspiring: In the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, Demeter reveals herself to King Celeus and his court: 'Beauty spread round her and a lovely fragrance was wafted from her sweet-smelling robes, and from the divine body of the goddess a light shone afar, while golden tresses spread down over her shoulders, so that the strong house was filled with brightness as with lightning'[156]

Direct contact with the gods could thus be dangerous if not lethal, but was to be greatly desired. This sort of direct contact however, was quite different from the transactional attitude that was expressed in sacrificial rituals or the public rituals of honor during festivals. These activities were aimed at maintaining the goodwill of the gods: a formal and distant relationship, while the mystery cults provided a possibility of a relationship between gods and men that was intimate, personal and could not be easily shared.

Spontaneous contact with the Gods

Besides the more well-known mystery-cults in which ecstatic and revelatory experiences were deliberately sought after as religious practice, spontaneous altered states of mind were also often given a religious interpretation as Bourguignon suggested.[157] This is often overlooked or not mentioned at all when considering Greek religion because in our modern sense of religion it is often seen as superstitious and not part of real religion. Dodds, fifty years ago already asked the question: 'if we restrict the meaning of the word [religion] in this way, are we not in danger of undervaluing, or even overlooking altogether, certain types of experience which we no longer interpret in a religious sense, but which may nevertheless in their time have been quite heavily charged with religious significance?' These phenomena will be discussed here shortly because although they do not really help us answer the question whether ancient Greeks deliberately induced ASC's in religious context, they do illustrate that ancient Greeks indeed interpreted these states of mind as religious experiences.

Ancient Greek gods sometimes showed themselves to the world as we have noted from the Homeric poems. These epiphanies, as they are traditionally called, are not something specific to Homer, but a returning phenomenon in the ancient Greek world. These accounts are easily tossed aside as over-pious fantasies. However, when analyzed, these events seem quite in line with the subject of this thesis. The epiphanies mentioned in Homer seem quite clear: although the gods are extremely beautiful, large and awe inspiring, they appear in clear humanlike form. However, historical accounts of epiphanies often portrayed the god that appeared in an abstract or unclear form. Some appeared in disguise, in animal forms, as a ghostly apparition or in abstract form, such as a sudden bright light, an igniting fire or the

[156] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 276-80, translated in: West, *Homeric Hymns.*
[157] Bourguignon, 'A Framework', 1-5.

sudden appearance of water. Sometimes moreover, they could only be felt, or their presence could only be known by some 'miracle' happening such as a sudden lightning storm, large waves or a sudden onset of seizures. When a god was seen in a ghostly form, an abstract form or an unclear humanoid form, it was often between waking and sleeping or during ecstatic states. According to Henk Versnel, who wrote a clarifying essay on the nature of epiphanies in the Greco-Roman world, this would point to the idea that some of these epiphanies were simply hallucinations as a result of an altered state of mind.[158] Some 'miracles' and appearances in the form of animals were simply natural events that were given a religious interpretation. However, instances of spontaneous seizures, an onset of a disease or the feeling that a god was near can also be credited to an altered state of mind in which these religious interpretations of divine intervention were given to otherwise inexplicable feelings.[159]

We have seen before that Dionysos and the Mother Goddess were worshipped in mystery-cults involving ASC's. However, both gods were also known for their power of spontaneous intervention. Contact with the Mother Goddess could be an enlightening or a healing experience as mentioned above, but it could also be frightening. An unwilling victim could namely also be 'possessed' by the Mother Goddess. In Euripides' Kippolytos for example, when Phaedra acts strangely, her nurse wonders if 'the Mountain Mother has possessed her.[160] She was also one of the deities held responsible for the frenzied 'Sacred Disease,' (epilepsy).[161] Dionysos is also famous for his possession of mortals, through madness and intoxication. Not only during the *symposia*, the procession or the bacchic mysteries does Dionysos extend his influence, but also during other instances. Most notably Dionysos is credited for the effects of alcohol. However, the effects of alcohol; elation, ecstacy, disorientation, aggression and so on, could also be achieved by other means, and were still credited to Dionysos. Thus, someone in an aggressive or disoriented state of mind could very possible be viewed as being influenced by Dionysos

As it has clarified before, ancient poetry can illustrate here how this concept of possession or intervention by the gods had become embedded in ancient Greek culture. When analyzing the Greek poetical tradition, particularly the most famous and probably most religiously influential works; Homer's Illiad and Odyssey, the reader does not only find the earlier mentioned epiphanies, but is also flooded with instances of emotional intervention by the gods.[162] Specific attention by Dodds is given to certain Greek terms that refer to this divine psychological intervention. *Ate* for example, which is a certain infatuation to which

[158] H.S. Versnel, 'What did Ancient Man see when He saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany', in: D. van der Plas (ed.), *Effigies Dei, Essays on the History of Religion* (Leiden 1987) 42-55.
[159] Versnel, 'What did Ancient Man see', 48-52.
[160] Euripides, *Hippolytos*, 141-144.
[161] Hippocrates, *On the Sacred Disease*, 4.
[162] Homer, *Illiad;* Homer, *Odyssey*.

Agamemnon refers when he is explaining why he robbed Achilles of his mistress, is a returning phenomenon in the Homeric poems.[163] According to Dodds, *ate* is a state of mind, a temporary clouding or bewilderment of the normal consciousness. He also calls it a temporal insanity which accounts for the fact that it is credited to the gods instead of physiological or psychological causes. Another term widely used is *menos*, which means something like the spunk or the fighting-power put into a human by the Gods. As with *ate*, *menos* is an abnormal state induced by divine intervention. Someone can be overwhelmed with energy, making him simply eager for battle, or the feeling can fully overtake a person as when Hektor goes berserk and foams at his mouth with a fiery glint in his eyes.[164] These are only two examples of particular states, but there are many more, and they clearly show that in Homer, an ASC was the result of divine presence.

This concept moreover, is not something specific to Homer. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that our biggest blessings are the results of madness as long as the madness has a divine origin. He then proceeds to explain that there are four different kinds of this divine madness, namely Prophetic madness, whose patron god is Apollo, Telestic or ritual madness, whose patron is Dionysos, Poetic madness inspired by the muses and Erotic madness inspired by Aphrodite and Eros.[165] Although this is not the place for an extensive discussion of Plato's ideas of madness, this distinction signifies that even the most rational and intelligent of the ancient Greeks believed that altered states of mind could be the work of the Gods. Clearly Plato differentiates between divine madness and ordinary madness which, according to Dodds, is pathologically induced, a differentiation already made by Herodotus.[166] However, the statement by Plato and the Homeric Poems both illustrate that the supernatural origin of ASC's outside mystery-cult practice, whether they were caused by a (mental) disease or short moments of dissociation, were a commonplace of popular thought in ancient Greece. Moreover, insanity was even regarded with a certain respect or awesomeness because the insane were believed to be in contact with the supernatural world and could on occasion display powers denied to common men.[167]

At the end of the previous chapter the problem was put forward whether the occurrence of ASC's would find a home within the religious ideas of ancient Greeks, and receive a religious interpretation as Bourguignon claimed it would. Modern historians on the subject argue that because of the unknowability of the gods, the communication with the gods during regular religious practice was always indirect. However, ancient Greek poetical and

[163] Homer, *Illiad* 19.86 ff.
[164] Ibidem 15.605 ff; Dodds, *The Greeks* 8-12.
[165] Plato, *Phaedrus* 244 ff.
[166] Herodotus 6.84.
[167] Dodds, *The Greeks*, 68.

philosophical traditions illustrate that ancient Greeks believed their gods to be interwoven into every aspect of life, including their own minds. Besides that, ancient Greek religion shared with all religions the idea that although there is a wide gap between gods and mortals, it lies at the heart of religious thought to try and bridge that gap. Thus, when ancient Greeks experienced an altered state of consciousness they thought that a god was manifesting their mind and making direct contact with the mortal world. Mystery-cults and some of the oracle practices aimed at reaching an ASC to achieve this face-to-face contact with the gods. As mentioned in the first chapter, religious behavior stems not only from a practical explanation of unknown things that help form the ethics, values and behavioral guideline of the community, but is rather a result of natural emotions. Everyday religion in the form of sacrifice, prayer and festivals helped create a paradigm to define these feelings. However, mystery-cults and other more instinctive ways of religious practice, often experienced in an ASC, helped ancient believers in satisfying the need to experience the divine up-close.

Now that we have discussed the nature of Greek religion and especially the practices of two of the most important mystery-cults, we have seen that an altered state of consciousness induced by different methods,[168] but at least including one psychoactive substance, definitely played a part in the special experience offered by ancient Mystery cults. Therefore we shall now turn our attention to the mysteries of Eleusis, the most prominent of those cults to examine whether the 30 year old theory by Hoffmann et. al. could have some truth to it after all.

[168] Such as: sensory deprivation in dim lit areas, total darkness or by blindfolding, rhythmic dance and music in the form of ritual dances, physical factors such as fasting and exhaustion as a result of the procession leading up to the rituals, and the ingestion of psychoactive substances such as the wine during the Bacchic rituals.

IV: Eleusis

Much to my disappointment, but also according to my expectation, this last chapter will not be some long lost confirmation or revelation of the secret ritual of Eleusis. This chapter will, in the light of the results from the precious chapter, be a critical analysis of the old theory. However, to place the theory into context, some light will first be shed on what we do know about the Eleusinian mysteries besides the ideas of Hoffmann et al. To provide a clear overview of the facts and theories, firstly will follow a summary of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, after that, a day-to-day recapitulation of the festival as a whole, a review of the literary accounts, the archeological evidence and what we know about the stages of initiation. Fourth in line are the existing theories about the Eleusinian mysteries. Then, after a recapitulation of 'The Road to Eleusis', I will provide a review of the theories in light of my previous findings.

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter

As mentioned in the introduction, central to the Eleusinian mysteries is the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. This myth begins with the abduction of Persephone. While Persephone is plucking flowers in the company of some of the other maiden goddesses, Hades, with consent by Zeus appears on a horse-drawn chariot and takes Persephone with him into the underworld. Demeter hears Persephone's screams, but does not know of the abduction which is only witnessed by Helios en Hekate. Demeter thus spends nine days wandering the earth looking for her, fasting and carrying torches and stricken by grief for the loss of her Daughter before Hekate and Helios inform Demeter of her fate. Helios explains that the abduction is Zeus' work and Demeter is infuriated with him. She stands down as goddess, refuses to join the other gods and to return to Olympus and starts wondering the realms of men, disguised as an old crone.

After a while, she encounters a group of highborn girls, the daughters of king Keleos of Eleusis, whom she asks whether there is a household nearby where she could help as a maid, nurturing the children. One of the daughters of Keleos explains that she should be welcome in the house of her father and his spouse Metaneira and any other house for that matter because she looks like a god. Metaneira then offers to hire Demter to nurture her son Demophon. When Demeter enters the house, her divine presence fills the room and she is offered Metaneira's chair but refuses and seats herself on a fleece covered small stool offered by Iambe, a female attendant. Demeter remains silent, grieving on the stool without eating or speaking a word until Iambe manages to cheer her up and invites her to eat and drink which Demeter refuses. Instead she asks that barley, water and mint be mixed to create the kykeon.

After drinking, Demeter accepts Metaneira's offer to nurture her son, but instead of feeding him like a normal child, she nurses him with ambrosia and cleanses him in the fire of the hearth to raise him as an immortal in secret. However, one day Metaneira catches her in the act and cries out in anger: "My child! Demophon! The stranger, this woman, is making you disappear in a mass of flames! Demeter, infuriated with Metaneira's response curses: "heedless humans!" and swears by the styx that, was it not for the interruption, her son Demophon would have lived to rise up above all the other humans as an immortal. She calls out that she is the goddess Demeter and curses the Eleusinians with the promise of a yearly conflict. However, she also commands them to build her a temple, a great temple at the foot of the Akropolis and that she will teach them sacred, secret rites to be properly performed inside this temple. While uttering these words Demeter revealed herself in her true form (as mentioned in chapter 3). Afterwards, king Keleos heeded her command and instructed the people of Eleusis to build the temple to Demeter. After the construction and after all the people had left the finished building, Demeter lingered, still grieving for her lost daughter and caused all crops to wither, ceased the hatching of seeds or the fertilization of the land. The Grief of Demeter would have caused all humans to die from hunger and deprive the Gods of ritual sacrifice. However, Zeus, noticing this disaster called upon the other Olympians to end Demeter's grief. Eventually Hermes is sent to bring Persephone back from the underworld. Hermes finds Persephone also in deep distress for the loss of her mother and asks Hades whether they can be rejoined. Hades most easily approves, but before her departure, offers Persephone the seed of a pomegranate to eat. Unknowingly, she eats the seed which binds her to stay in the underworld for one-third of each year. After the goddesses are rejoined, Zeus commands them to let the fields grow again and Demeter complies, after which she once again orders the lords of Eleusis to celebrate the sacred rites. The rites 'which it is not at all possible to ignore, to find out about, or to speak out. The great awe of the gods holds back any speaking out.' Afterwards all the Gods return to Olympos leaving only Ploutos at the hearth of those men blessed by the mysteries. [169]

As with many Greek myths, this Homeric Hymn explains a lot about the origin of its subject. Not only does it describe the origin of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Temple complex dedicated to Demeter at Eleusis, it also gives a divine explanation for the seasonal withering of the crops which plagued ancient Greek agriculture during the dry summer period. However, we shall also see that it can be used to explain the more precise nature of the Eleusinian mystery-cult.

A day-by-day description of the festival

[169] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

We know very little of what exactly went on inside the Telesterion at the culmination of the Eleusinian Mysteries. However, enough has been written about the festival in general that we can provide a clear picture of what transpired before and after the culminating ritual. Although the Eleusinian mysteries underwent a few changes during the many centuries of its existence, it had reached a fairly fixed form by the end of the fifth century BC.[170] Therefore, an outline of these fixed day-by-day events during the festival should prove a helpful resource in providing a clear picture of the Eleusinian Mysteries as a whole.[171]

Boedromion 14 was the day before the festival, during which the *hiera* (the holy things) are transported from Eleusis to Athens. The transportation would be led by priests from the Eleusinian sanctuary. Priestesses would carry the containers and the whole procession would be guarded by young Athenian men called *ephebes.* The procession would be met by an Athenian welcoming party at the city gates and escorted into the *Eleusinion* temple on the slopes of the Athenian Acropolis.

Boedromion 15 was the first day of the Mysteries. The hierophant had the sacred herald make the announcement of *prorrhesis*, inviting all who wished to come to Eleusis, to join the festival.[172] This marked the ceremonial start of the festival. On this day, a public sacrifice was made.

Boedromion 16. On this day, all who were about to become initiated, accompanied by the call of '*Halade Mystai!*' (To the sea, initiates), took their sacrificial piglet, bathed in the sea and sacrificed the piglets as an act of purification. The sacrifice of the piglet, which was thrown into a special pit, is seen by some as a parallel with Kore taken down into the earth by Hades.[173]

Boedromion 17. This day was called the *Epidauria* because it commemorated the late arrival of Asclepius at the Mysteries. Asclepius is honoured on this day from 421 BC onwards because in that year a snake, sacred to Asclepius was brought by an embassy during the celebrations. This day would therefore, also be reserved for late arrivals. A procession and a second major public sacrifice in the city Eleusinian were performed and all-night celebrations were held in honour of Asclepius.[174]

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[170] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 30-31.

[171] This reconstruction of the events has mostly been based on the works of Kevin Clinton and George E. Mylonas, who both wrote a comparable reconstruction. However, where needed I have added or removed details according to my own findings and those of other Scholars. For Clinton's and Mylonas' reconstruction see: K. Clinton, 'The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis' in: N. Marinatos and R. Hägg (ed.), *Greek Sanctuaries, New approaches* (London 1993) 110-124; G.E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (1961) 243-285.

[172] The ritual was open to everyone who spoke Greek and had not committed murder. This also included women, slaves and other groups of the populous that normally occupied an inferior position in society. See: Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 247, referring to multiple primary sources.

[173] Burkert, *Greek* Religion, 286.

[174] Clinton, 'The Sanctuary of Demeter', 116; Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 31-35.

Boedromion 18 apparently was a day of rest on which all participants would all return to their homes in Athens and prepare themselves for the rituals to come, perhaps by fasting.[175]
Boedromion 19. On this day of the first procession, the ephebes, priests and magistrates escorted the *hiera* back to Eleusis.
Boedromion 20 was the day of the escort of Iacchus. On this day the great crowd of initiates set out from Athens to Eleusis shouting the name and carrying the statue of the Eleusinian god associated with initiates: Iacchus. The procession to Eleusis roughly covered 23 kilometres, a considerable effort. According to some scholars, the long walk was an effort comparable to the hardships of Demeter in her search for Persephone.[176] When the procession neared the outskirts of Eleusis, the initiates had to cross the bridge over the Cephisus River, after which they were ridiculed by a group of people standing on the other side. This ridicule was called the *gephyrismos* and is often compared with the joking and ridicule by Iambe that cheered up Demeter. When the procession arrived at the sanctuary, the ritual called the reception of Iacchus took place in which all initiates joined in a dance near the *Callichoron* Well at the entrance of the Eleusinian sanctuary.
Boedromion 21 was the date of the culminating ritual, or rather, the day that preceded the night of the culminating ritual. The day itself was probably spent in rest inside the Sanctuary complex as the initiates were fasting for the final ritual.[177] In the evening the kykeon was drunk and all the initiates entered the Telesterion to start the secret ritual (on which I will continue below).
Boedromion 22 The day after the culminating ritual was first and foremost a day of great celebrations. Outside of the Telesterion, bulls, pigs and other animals were sacrificed in abundance in honour of Demeter and Kore, and celebrations were held publicly so that everyone could join them for the joyeous return of Kore.
Boedromion 23 is the day of the return. On this day, called the *Plemochai*, two vessels, also called *plemochai* were poured out facing east and west accompanied by the proclamation '*hye! kye!'* (Which is translated as rain! conceive!). After this last ceremony of agricultural prosperity, all of the participants returned to Athens.

Wat we know about the ritual

[175] Burkert, Greek religion, 287.
[176] K. Clinton, 'The Sanctuary of Demeter', 116.
[177] It's not entirely clear how long the initiates had been fasting before the ritual or whether the fasting was absolute or a restriction of diet. Some scholars argue that the fasting started as early as after the *Epidauria* in reminiscence of Demeters fasting. However, the long walk from Athens to Eleusis and the celebrations and sacrifices celebrated in between point to the idea that fasting lasted only the final day. Mylonas explains that the fasting was part of a purification process rather than penitence and writes that it is very probable that only certain foodstuffs were avoided. See: Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 258-259

As we know, the exact events played out during the culminating ritual were never narrated. However, we do know quite something about the Eleusinian sanctuary thanks to archeological research. Besides that, some features of the secret ritual are recalled by ancient authors and can in all probability be assumed to be fixed aspects or characteristics of the ritual.

The accounts

Among these accounts, first is the experiential character of the ritual as described by Plutarch and Aristotle (as quoted in the introduction and third chapter).[178] Second are the visual aspect of the ritual (the rituals are often 'seen' by the sources and the high priest is called the *hierophant*, which is translated as 'he who shows the holy things').[179] Thirdly, there are also many accounts of details of the experience such as a great light that was seen (when the hierophant appeared and opened the Anakteron), or the fearfulness and confusing nature of the experience, or sudden contact with Demeter, Kore and their attendants, and most importantly, a new found relieving knowledge about life and death; promising a better life in the underworld.[180] As fourth can also be mentioned the rather vague statement of '*ta dromena, ta deiknumena* and *ta legomena*'; 'things done, things shown and things said'.[181] Finally, some later Christian writers went further and, to some extent, profaned the secrecy of the ritual by writing about certain details of the ritual: They write that the holy object that was shown was an ear of grain, that 'the password' was '*synthema'* and that at the end of the ritual a young boy was born. 'A child Brimos has been born to the mistress Brimo'[182] Besides these accounts, iconography from archeological finds found at the sanctuary clearly attests the dark setting of the ritual because of the returning image of torch-bearing devotees.

The building

The Telesterion was a large, closed square temple with six evenly spaced rows of zeven evenly spaced columns forming the inside of the structure. The temple could have been accessed through six entrances, two on the north-east side, two on the south-east side and two on the south-west side. On the inside, small stairs lead up from the ground level up against the wall, probably as a way to provide better vision for devotees standing at the back of the crowd. In the middle of the temple stood a smaller closed rectangular structure with a door,

[178] See the quotation in the introduction and chapter 3. Most notably, the words of Aristotle paraphrased in Burkert: 'Aristotle writes that at the final stage of the mysteries there should be no more learning, but experiencing and a change in the state of mind'.
[179] For an extensive research on the Priests of the Eleusinian sanctuaries, see: K. Clinton, *The Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Philadelphia 1974). For the accounts mentioning the visual aspects see the quotations in the introduction.
[180] See the quotations in the introduction.
[181] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 261-274
[182] Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, translated in: Bowden, *Mystery Cults.*

called the *Anakteron*.[183] Inside the Anakteron was a piece of unhewn natural rock and the top was probably used as a podium or a fireplace.[184] The inside was also used to store the *hiera.* The Anakteron was quite small, 12,50 in length and 3 in width. It had no windows and only one door, so it seems hard to imagine it playing any role in the ritual witnessed by hundreds, perhaps even thousands, except as storage and possibly as a podium.[185] The greater building would have supported thousands of devotees and in contrast with most other Greek temples where emphasis lies on the exterior façade and the inside merely houses the cult statue. The Telesterion was meant as a temple where the rituals were performed inside the building. However, during the ritual it would have been a dark place; a large closed hall in the middle of the night, only lit by the light of torches held by the initiates and perhaps, if the ritual lasted that long, the light of damn shining through the *opaion* (an opening in the ceiling which could let through smoke and daylight). As mentioned however, a great fire could have been lit on top of the Anakteron, suddenly lighting the great temple.

Stages of Initiation

Analyzing the Greek terminology about the subject and certain ancient sources relating to initiation, we can discern certain different stages of initiation that produced different kinds of participants in the ritual an thus each having a different role in the ritual. These different roles can help us to further uncover the actual events inside the Telesterion. In theory, three stages of initiation can be identified, namely *myesis, telete and epopteia.*[186] In practice however, these three stages are attained in two different rituals. The first stage is attained during a certain preparatory ritual which was undergone by some prospective initiates, most often referred to as 'the lesser mysteries' the second and third stages are the first and second experience of the 'Greater mysteries'(the name often given to the Eleusinian mysteries by ancient authors).

[183] For a plan of the sanctuary see figure 4.
[184] Burkert imagines the Anaktaron as the podium for a large fire see: Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 288; Clinton imagines the Anakteron as a podium for the performance of the ritual. On top of it, the priestesses would stand dresses as the goddesses. See: Clinton, 'The Sanctuary of Demeter' 118-119, see below for his reconstruction of the ritual.
[185] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 83 ff.
[186] Clinton, 'Stages of initiation', 50-52.

Figure 4: Model of the Telesterion, showing the frontal façade and the *opaion*

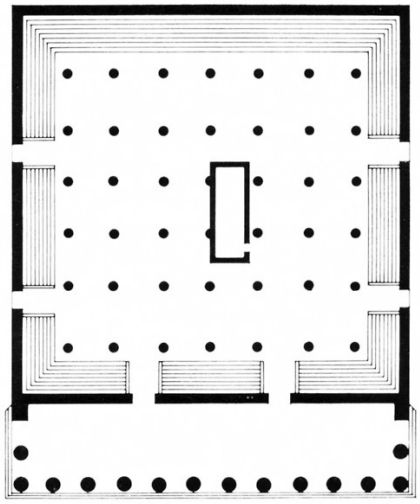

Figure 5: Flour plan of the Telesterion during the classical age, showing the inside with colonnades and the Anakteron.

Little is known of the lesser mysteries except that it was conducted by a member of the Kerykes or Eumolpidai families inside the Eleusinian sanctuary or inside the Athenian Eleusinion sometime before the 'Greater mysteries'. We also know that these lesser mysteries were conducted in the ancient Greek month of Anthesterion because Demetrius Poliorcetes, a Macedonian prince demanded to receive all three stages of initiation all at once and to achieve this, the Athenian rulers had to temporarily change the names of the months to let Demetrius experience them shortly after another.[187] However, in this text and many others for that matter, the word *telete* is used in a much broader context, meaning initiation in general. However, we can differentiate, because the first stage was an initiation through a preparatory ritual, the second was the first initiation into the 'greater mysteries' and the third was the second experience of the mysteries.[188] The meaning of the different stages becomes clearer when we consider the terms used for the people that underwent the initiations. People before the first experience of the 'greater mysteries' were called *mystai* and second-timers were called *epoptei* (People before the preparatory ritual were also called mystai because it was only a preparation, one that was not even mandatory to participate in the 'greater mysteries'). When translated, *mystes* means 'the one who keeps silence or closes the eyes'. In the context of the mysteries, this probably refers to the eyes because evidence from other mystery-cults has shown that it was common practice for an initiate to be blind(fold)ed and because the opposite; *epoptes* meant 'viewer'.[189] The first experience of the greater mysteries is thus

[187] Plutarch Demetr. 26.1
[188] Clinton, 'Stages of Initiation', 51.
[189] Clinton, 'Stages of Initiation', 50-55.

characterized by blindness and the second time by sight. These different characteristics show us that the large group of *mystai* were probably blinded during some parts of the ritual, or that some specific aspect of the ritual could only be seen (read: understood) the second time round. It has also been suggested that the *epoptai* personally guided the *mystai* through the process.[190]

Theories by modern scholars

A picture of the events inside the Telesterion has most often been drawn on the basis of parallels to the Homeric hymn. The traditional theory by George A. Mylonas, although some details are altered, lives on in the work of Kevin Clinton. They envision the 'things done' as an interactive theatrical performance with the initiates assuming the role of a sort of choir (as many ancient drama had; observing and being part of the story, without really influencing the events), while priests of the sanctuary assumed the role of the gods and humans from the Homeric hymn and played out parts of that story inside the closed temple complex of Eleusis.[191] The Telesterion in this case was simply part of the staging area. Following the account of Plutarch, when comparing a near-death experience to Eleusinian initiation, this account fits quite well.[192] The initiates would wonder in the outer sanctuary in darkness, paralleling Demeter's grieving search for Persephone, until she appears, rejoins her divine mother and when they enter the Telesterion, 'Suddenly the Anakteron opens, and the hierophant stands in the doorway, silhouetted against a brilliant light streaming from the interior. The initiates enter, passing from darkness into an immense space blazing with extraordinary light, coming from thousands of torches held by the *epoptai*.'[193] This explanation surely accounts for the experiential character of the ritual and for the light that was seen, but does it account for the life-changing aspects of the cult?

On the 'things said' we know very little. However, most scholars agree that it were no long sermons or long religious explanations, but rather, short ritual comments or invocations.[194] About the 'things shown' we seem to know more because of the later Christian sources. The ear of grain is a possibility, with no reason to doubt it according to some, and all reason to doubt it according to others.[195] Some scholars point to something obscene as a result

[190] The guides are called *mystagoges*. However, because one could only experience the mysteries two times, these people must also have been *epoptai*. In light of the large number of participants every year, it seems hard to believe that for every initiate they provided a special *mystagog* who was a priest of the sanctuary. In his chapter on the mystery religions, Burkert discusses these *mystagoges*: Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 276-304.
[191] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 261-272.
[192] See the quotation of Plutarch in the introduction.
[193] Clinton, 'The Santuary of Demeter', 118.
[194] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 272, Mylonas already established this agreement. I did not find any works refuting it.
[195] Burkert literally writes: 'There is no reason to doubt his testimony', see: Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 285; Mylonas calles the 'various suggestions and inferences made by scholars both during the Early

of another Christian account.[196] However, these and most other authors agree that we cannot truly know what they exactly were or what it exactly was but that it probably was some ancient artifact or another object pertaining to the meaning of the myth if it was an object at all.[197]

Mylonas and Clinton argue that for the *epoptai* another special part of the ritual was reserved, possibly the revealing of some higher *hiera*.[198] However, it seems more probable within their theory, that the *mystai* were simply blindfolded during some parts of the ritual and the *epoptai* were not. Another possibility is that the *epoptai* played a more important part during the ritual, such as holding the torches within the Telesterion as Clinton already described.

Burkert's treatment of the culminating ritual is by far not as fantastical, but through his carefulness also less helpful. He simply explains that those things that we do know were probably performed within the thematic background of the myth. He envisions the light that was seen as a result of a great fire, lit on top of the Anakteron, that a gong was sounded to herald Kore's return, and in contrast with Mylonas' rejection of the Christian accounts, Burkert envisions the enactment of the birth of a son and that an ear of grain was shown as *ta hiera.*[199] Burkert believes that the *epoptai*, as mentioned before, were simply not blindfolded during some parts of the ritual and thus were able to see more of the ritual, to understand more of the secrets of Eleusis than the *mystai*. Bowden (who wrote one of the most recent treatments of the Eleusinian mystery-cult) explains that the *epoptai* saw or understood more of the ritual, not because the second time they did not have to wear a blindfold, but simply because during the second experience of the ritual, the new perspective allowed the participant to understand more of the meaning of the ritual, to better 'see' the mystery that was revealed.

Bowden, like Burkert, Clinton and others before them, stresses that the Homeric hymn is important in understanding the mysteries. However, he rejects the reconstruction of events as proposed by Mylonas and Clinton. He stresses carefulness in trying to find too many parallels, because there seem to be a lot of inconsistencies between the myth and what we know about the ritual. For example, the myth does not mention Eubeleus who plays an

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Christian period and in modern times (…) certainly are unsuccessful, imaginative efforts to pierce the veil.' See: Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 273

[196] According to Burkert the statement by Clement of Alexandria quoted in the introduction points to the obscenity of the objecets because the early crhistian writer refrained from giving further details. See: Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 286 and the quotation in the introduction.

[197] Mylonas suggest they could have been ancient mycaenan artifacts, Clinton settles for the 'christian' ear of grain, Burkert suggest it might have been workman's tools like those of a farmer or the mortar and pestle used to make the *kykeon*. Bowden suggest it might have been a cult statue although I find it hard to believe that something public as the cult statues of the goddesses were the secret *hiera*. See: Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 273-274; Clinton, 'The Sanctuary of Demeter' 118-119; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 286; Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 31-32.

[198] Clinton, 'The Sanctuary of Demeter' 110-119.

[199] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 285-290.

important part in Clinton's reconstruction and his reconstruction also does not include the future return of Persephone into the underworld.[200] Bowden writes that the reconstruction was based on guesswork and he continues: 'the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* was not an 'official' Eleusinian document, so there is no reason to expect the two to correspond. More fundamentally, was there an 'official' Eleusinian doctrine at all, any agreed understanding of what the Mysteries represented? Or did initiates have to interpret the sequence of events for themselves?'[201]

Mylonas, Burkert and most other scholars generally conclude their examination of the Eleusinian mysteries with the admittance that we cannot yet be certain of anything that happened during the ritual because of its well sustained secrecy. However, the cyclical nature of agriculture and its importance for human society, immortality illustrated by Kore's return from the underworld and the first-hand, empathetic experience of all of this, in parallel with the grief and eventual joy of Demeter, which formed a bond between the participants and the gods, explain the life-changing and eschatological nature of the mysteries. Bowden rejects part of these ideas by arguing that the participants might not be so full aware of these concepts, but that the mysterious nature of the ritual ensures the same sense of ineffable importance that most initiates shared.

The 'Road to Eleusis' theory

Consisting of three parts, the first chapter of the book, by Wasson is mainly a review of why he started examining psychoactive fungi in the first place and a description of his own experience with psilocybin mushrooms during a south-American ritual. This experience of his appeared to him to be comparable to the accounts describing the experience of the Eleusinian mysteries. The resembling characteristics provoked his question whether a psychoactive agent also played a part in the Eleusinian mysteries. The second chapter compromises the core of the theory. It is Hoffmann's answer as a chemist to the question whether ancient Greeks would have been able to isolate a hallucinogenic substance from ergot. The third chapter by Ruck was intended as a confirmation that the *kykeon* indeed was a psychoactive agent and played an important role in the Eleusinian mysteries. Some interesting points are made, such as the profanation of the mysteries, the overemphasized visionary aspect present in almost every account of the experience, the idea that ancient Greeks considered intoxication as a genuine possession by the gods such as the wine-intoxication of Dionysos or the fact that the mysteries had a comparable effect on every participant for a period covering several centuries.[202] However, weaker points are also suggested as proof that a psychoactive agent

[200] Clinton, 'The Sanctuary of Demeter', 110-119.
[201] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 42.
[202] In 415 BC a number of leading Athenians were accused of profaning the mysteries by revealing the secrets to non-initiates in their own home. This profanation can surely be used as a refutation of

played a role in the cult, such as the idea that ancient Greeks would not be impressed or fooled by a 'theatrical trick'.[203] Moreover, even more disappointing is his urge to try and connect every possible part of ancient Greek culture that could have some connection with a psychoactive plant, to the idea that such a psychoactive substance was also used during the ritual. For example, he claims that ancient Greek wine would have been hallucinogenic, that the daffodil plucked by Kore in the myth is an analogue to a psychoactive plant or that Mycenae is a derivation of a pre-classical goddess of psychoactive fungi.

In the introduction I have noted the criticism that the book received and that much of it, in my opinion, is just. However, parallels that Wasson points out, do serve a purpose. Although they are too eagerly used, they do point to the comparability of certain experiences whose resemblance cannot be rejected as simple coincidence and should provoke research. However, the endless search for analogues and parallels provided by Ruck and the overconfidence expressed by Wasson's writing only helps to weaken their point.

To still provide a clear picture of their theory, I will recapitulate the chapter by Hoffmann which, to my mind, contains the core of their research. Hoffmann states that 'early man in ancient Greece' should have been able to isolate a hallucinogen from ergot. Ergot is the English name for the sclerotium (a fruiting fungal growth) of a fungus with the scientific name *claviceps purpurea*, which is a fungal parasite that grows on rye and other cereals such as wheat, barley and on certain species of wild grass. Most important to acknowledge is the fact that ergot does not have a uniform chemical composition. It occurs in a wide variety of species, differing mainly by the composition of their alkaloidal constituents (according to Hoffmann, alkaloids are defined by chemists as 'nitrogen-containing alkaline substances that represent the pharmacologically active principles of many plants'[204]). A different species grows on each different species of host-plant and each species differs according to the geographical location and climate in which it grows. Most interesting of all the variants is the ergot of rye. Because the dark ergot is hard to distinguish among the dark harvested rye, it has been consumed quite a lot in medieval Europe, causing northern European language and folklore to specifically point to the psychoactive properties of ergot.[205] However, when ergot

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Clinton's reconstruction, because a large play could not have been staged at the home of one of these men. However, we know little of the exact nature of this 'profanation'. It could have been simply partaking the *kykeon* as Ruck suggest. However, they might also have been explaining the secrets of the mysteries by word or action. Plutarch writing much later added that these men each played a specific role in the household ritual. However, one might ask why Plutarch writing much later would know of these details and whether the idea that these men performed it in a certain way would also mean that the actual mysteries were performed in a certain way. The 'profanation' definitely supports Ruck's claim and works against the theory by Mylonas and Clinton but is clearly no definite proof. Their crime could have had very little to do with the actual ritual. See: Andocides 1.11-1.12; Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 19.1; Hoffmann et al., *The Road to Eleusis*, 45-60

[203] Hoffmann et al., *The Road to Eleusis*, 47.

[204] Ibidem 35.

[205] Hoffmann tells us that the English name for ergot of rye derived from French. In France the ergot was called by names such as ergot de seigle, blé cornu, seigle ergoté and most interestingly seigle ivre,

of rye was consumed because of infected harvests it has also been proven to cause a disease known as 'ergotism' or 'Saint Anthony's fire', which plagued pre-industrial Europe and still plagues certain third world countries where rye is harvested in cold, damp years. However, in modern times and today still, ergot is mostly known as a rich source of pharmacologically useful alkaloids, of which some alkaloids produced the aforementioned disease and psychoactive effects. More than thirty different alkaloids have since been isolated from ergot and hundreds of chemical modifications of the naturally occurring alkaloids have been prepared and investigated pharmacologically. [206]

Lysergic acid is the nucleus common to most ergot alkaloids and is used as a common starting point in synthesizing ergot-based alkaloids or derivatives of these alkaloids. In 1938, as part of a large research program searching for medically useful ergot alkaloid derivatives, while aiming to synthesize an analeptic, Hoffmann synthesized LSD. Years later, inspired by his work with LSD, Hoffmann synthesized the psychoactive constituents of psilocybin mushrooms and *ololiuhqui* seeds (another psychoactive plant, also called 'morning glory', used by Mesoamerican indian tribes), and discovered that the main active components of the seeds were familiar ergot alkaloids, namely: ergonovine (the pharmacological name for the specific uterotonic water-soluble alkaloid of ergot), lysergic acid amide and lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide, 'both water-soluble alkaloids, closely related to lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)'[207]. Thus it seemed that many of the ergot-alkaloids had psychoactive properties. Most of these alkaloids, mainly ergonovine, lysergic acid amide and lysergic acid hydroxyethlamide, are soluble in water, in contrast to the non-hallucinogenic and possibly ergotism-inducing alkaloids of the ergotamine and ergotoxine type. Simple hydrolysis was most definitely a process that, with the techniques and equipment available in ancient Greece, was possible to execute. No rye grew in Ancient Greece, of that we can be sure, but, as mentioned before, ergot infects many grain species, including wheat and barley of which the *kykeon* was made. These species could have grown on the ancient Rarian plain near Eleusis in abundance and the alkaloids above are also constituents of the ergot growing on these grain species. However, as Hoffmann admits: 'We have no way to tell what the [exact] chemistry was of the ergot of barley or wheat raised on the Rarian plain in [ancient times]. But it is

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or: 'drunken rye'. In German there are even more names: Mutterkorn, Rockenmutter, Afterkorn, Todtenkorn, (deathgrain) and Tollkorn (madgrain) among others. In German folklore there even was belief that, 'when the corn waved in the wind, the corn mother (a demon) was passing though the field; her children were the rye wolves (ergot).' This folklore illustrates that knowledge of the lethal and psychoactive effects of ergot was something that preceded its pharmacological use, perhaps showing that it would have been plausible that ancient Greeks were also aware of these effects. See: Hoffmann et al., *The Road to Eleusis*, 35-37.

[206] Hoffmann et al., *The Road to Eleusis*, 37; G. Barger, *Ergot and Ergotism* (London 1931); A. Hoffmann, *Die Mutterkornalkaloide* (Stuttgart 1964).

[207] Hoffmann et al., *The Road to Eleusis*, 39

certainly not pulling a long bow to assume that the barley grown there was host to an ergot containing, perhaps among others, the soluble hallucinogenic alkaloids.'[208]

In recent years, some supporters of the theory have published new research which proposes to offer new insights after criticism of the original theory, most notably: 'Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess, Secrets of Eleusis' by Ruck and a more chemistry-oriented essay by Peter Webster, Daniel M Perrine and again Carl Ruck, called 'Mixing the Kykeon'.[209] However, instead of refining the old book, the new book by Ruck only continues and repeats his search for even more parallels of fungi and psychedelics in ancient Greece as a whole. As with his previous part in 'The Road to Eleusis' there are no notes or references and hardly any new findings to be found. As to the article by Peter Webster, Daniel M. Perrine and Ruck, it takes a much more scientific approach and should be credited for refuting certain criticism pointed towards the chemical part of the theory presented by Hoffmann. Especially Perrine writes a convincing account, explaining that the religious background and setting, the fasting and the long procession to Eleusis provided the stronger inducing factors for the visionary experience of the mysteries. He properly stresses that the possible psychoactive properties of the *kykeon* only worked as a catalyst to kick start the immersive experience of the ritual.[210]

My own considerations

In his chapter of 'The Road to Eleusis' Ruck states: 'The Greeks were sophisticated about drama and it is highly unlikely that they could have been duped by some theatrical trick, especially since it is people as intelligent as the poet Pindar and the tragedian Sophocles who have testified to the overwhelming value of what was seen at Eleusis.'[211] In the previous chapter some attention already went to the religious character that ancient Greeks attributed to activities that might seem very secular to the modern eye, such as a drinking party. To label the reconstruction of the ritual as suggested by Mylonas as a theatrical trick is certainly missing the point. Ancient Greek theatre was very much intertwined with religious importance. Theatre was on some occasions even the highlight of a religious festival. Moreover, even with this religious character assured, I think it is wrong to assume that a reconstruction as suggested by Mylonas was meant to fool the devotees in believing it was reality. I would rather suggest that it was meant as symbolism, as *mimesis* of the myth. At the same time it is important not to take the ancient accounts of the mysteries to literally.

[208] This because of the differentiation of the ergot species, so many different species of grass and grain could have been affected with different kinds of ergot that the chance of there being one that contained the water-soluble alkaloids can be considered quite high. Note that the original texts points to the 2nd millennium BC, an overestimated date for the Eleusinian mysteries.
[209] C.A.P. Ruck, *Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess* (Berkeley 2006); P. Webster, D.M. Perrine and C.A.P. Ruck, 'Mixing the Kykeon', *ELEUSIS: Journal of Psychoactive Plants and Compounds* 4 (2000). 1-25
[210] Webster et al., 'Mixing the Kykeon' 9-19.
[211] Hoffmann et al., *The Road to Eleusis*, 47.

Accounts describe seeing the goddess and a brilliant light. However, this does not have to mean that someone dressed as goddess was revealed or that a huge fire was lit. Recall for example, the experience of the Bacchic mysteries and the worship of the Mother Goddess. These rituals were also characterized by closeness to the divine, by a brilliant epiphany, but none of the researchers on these subjects have proposed the performance of a mythical play. In some cases a cult statue accompanied the devotees as a symbol of the presence of the deity, as I am sure that a cult statue, if not multiple statues, of Demeter and Kore decorated the sanctuary at Eleusis. However, the closeness to the divine was experienced as the result of an altered state of mind. The strange feelings and the peculiar experience were interpreted as the deity taking hold of the mortal devotees. This form of worship through an altered state of consciousness was characteristic for the ancient mystery cults and although I will not reject the idea that some religious pageant was performed inside the sanctuary, I would argue that the main cause for the imaginative and life-changing description of the Eleusinian mysteries was the experience of an ASC.

In the second chapter we have seen that many things can induce an ASC, with fasting and prolonged physical activity among others. Both methods are attested during the Eleusinian mysteries. Dancing can also be suggested, but the dancing during the festival seems to be of a purely celebratory nature. The dancing mostly takes place after an important part of the festival, such as after the long walk from Athens and after the culminating ritual. During Bacchic rituals in contrast, the dancing is constant and is one of the main causes of the ASC that is attained. Therefore, during the Eleusinian mysteries, we should search for inducement methods elsewhere. Prolonged physical activity can be noted; the long walk from Athens surely could have been ASC inducing. However, although participants might have experienced an ASC during the walk or afterwards, it would hardly have influenced the culminating ritual because that happened a day later.[212] Fasting seems a much more probable method of inducement. However, the exact time spent fasting during the festival has never really been established. As mentioned before, it seems most likely that the participants only fasted during the final day before the culminating ritual. Otherwise, for many of the devotees, the long walk from Athens to Eleusis would have been close to impossible to complete without proper food and drink. This would leave only one day of fasting before the fast was broken by the consuming of the *kykeon.*[213]

Would one day of fasting be enough to account for the altered state of mind reached by the participants? As mentioned in the second chapter, within the right circumstances, a minor inducing factor can surely cause an altered state of mind. However, neurophysiological

[212] Assuming that participants were able to sleep in or near the sanctuary. I expect the culminating ritual to have taken all night. I find it unlikely however, that the night before was also skipped.
[213] If the fast, as Mylonas suggested (see note 177), would only have been a restriction of diet, it seems probable that the fast lasted longer. However, in that case it would not even be slightly ASC-inducing.

research has proven short-duration fasting to have only minor psychological effects.[214] Naturally, we cannot be sure whether the ritual included other ASC inducing methods. Hoffmann however, has made it quite clear that it surely was one of the possibilities that the grain used to make the *kykeon* was infected with a certain species of ergot, and that priests of Eleusis mixed the ritual drink in such a way that the hallucinogenic alkaloids would have been separated from the other, possibly dangerous alkaloids. Moreover, we have seen with the Bacchic mysteries that the use of a psychoactive substance in religious ritual is not something peculiar in the ancient Greek world. Besides that, wine was not the only psychoactive substance used by the ancient Greeks. The use of poppy juice among others proves that the Greeks were well aware of the psychoactive properties of certain plants and how to prepare these for consumption.[215] Although these substances were not commonly used within religious rituals, the altered states that they induced, as we have seen with Dionysos, were credited as the work of the Gods. Therefore, the idea that the *kykeon* made by the priests of the sanctuary, contained a psychoactive substance isolated from ergot, is actually quite plausible. Furthermore, the altered state that it would have helped to induce would have been credited as divine presence and would help account for the intense nature of the ritual that was experienced by the devotees of the Eleusinian mysteries.

It should however, not be misunderstood that this psychoactive substance accounted for every aspect of the mysteries. Bowden rightly criticizes the writers of 'The Road to Eleusis' for claiming to have found 'the answer to the secret of Eleusis' by trying to explain the meaning of the cult through a psychoactive substance.[216] Just as the fasting, the psychoactive *kykeon* was simply one of the methods that helped produce the lively character of the experience, but would have meant close to nothing if it would have been used outside of the setting of the Eleusinian ritual.

The reconstruction of the ritual as proposed by Mylonas, although I would not go into as much detail, is a very plausible reconstruction of the ritual and in combination with the psychoactive *kykeon*, it can very well account for the meaning of the ritual, for the visionary experiences, the enthusiastic accounts and for the joy and fear that was experienced during the ritual. However, the problem that still remains is the issue of eschatology. We've discussed the concept of immortality suggested by the story of Kore's return, the cyclical life-and-death nature of agriculture and the closeness to the deities that presided over the mysteries. These concepts go a long way in explaining why participants of the mysteries would have had a better fate in the underworld. However, they are still quite vague. The question remains whether an initiate of the mysteries would have understood these abstract concepts and

[214] See chapter 2, more specifically: Vait et al., 'Psychobiology of Altered States' 98-127.
[215] M. Julyan and M. Dircksen, 'The Ancient Drug Opium', *Akroterion* 56 (2011) 75-90.
[216] Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 43.

whether he or she would have known more. Perhaps we should seek out this eschatology in a more literal sense.

While I was reading Mylonas and considering this question, an interesting thought struck me. Mylonas stresses the sincerity with which the ancient Greeks regarded the secrecy of the cult. Therefore, he states that we should be careful in trusting certain philosophical or artistic sources relating to the mysteries because they were probably not referring to the secret part of the ritual.[217] (Note that the following idea is not based on any source material. However, in light Mylonas' warning, I consider it a useful notion worthy of mentioning.) Most of our reconstructions of the secret ritual of Eleusis are based on the Homeric hymn to Demeter. However, in light of the sincere secrecy of the mysteries, would it not be very contradictory that the myth that everyone knew was the core concept of the secret cult? Consider the idea that part of that myth was never revealed. Part of the story might never have been written down, but was only shared orally during the secret Ritual as *ta legomena*. This part of the story might refer to the time that Persephone resided in the underworld. Perhaps the fact that the people of Eleusis built the temple and worshipped Demeter and her daughter there, like the initiates of the mysteries would have done, made Persephone thankful of these mortals and promised them a better life in the underworld, of which she has become the queen as the new consort of Hades.[218]

Naturally, this idea is solely based on speculation and should be regarded with the appropriate skepticism. However, we know so little of the secret ritual of Eleusis that some speculation might be in order. As many great scholars have done before me, I end this chapter by humbly acknowledging that we simply do not know enough of what transpired inside the sanctuary to provide a clear answer to the question of what exactly happened during the culminating ritual of the Eleusinian mysteries.

[217] Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 224-229.
[218] This hidden truth might also explain the duality of Persephone/Kore. In the context of Eleusis Persephone is always called Kore, a name more specifically used for her fertility aspects while Persephone was rather used as her name when referring to her role as queen of the underworld.

Concluding remarks

When I started this research I had not expected to find much literature on the subject. Naturally I knew about the extensive literature concerning the Eleusinian mysteries and I knew about some of the anthropological findings concerning psychoactive substances in religious practices of Middle- and Southern-America. However, I had never even seen an article about altered states of consciousness and had only limited knowledge of ecstatic rituals in the ancient Greek world. Therefore, I was surprised to find an extensive amount of research concerning altered states of consciousness, their role in religion, the connection with psychoactive substances and the idea that many scholars, ancient and modern, realized that these states of mind played an important part in the mystery-cults of the ancient world. My starting point simply was 'The Road to Eleusis'. However, although I found the theory, which I had already encountered in another book, quite astonishing, like many other readers I was quite disappointed by the read. Mostly because of the over-confidence that is expressed in the writing, the lack of notes and references, the lack of nuance and their urge to encompass too much, the book did not deliver what it could have.[219] Thus, I soon turned to other literature and found that many writers seemed to point in the same direction, namely the direction of the universality of mystical or visionary religious experiences and altered states of consciousness.

The more I read, the more I became convinced of this concept. Although Gimello stresses the diversity of the context of mystical experiences, this does not alter the fact that many facets of the overall experience appear the same.[220] The sense of ineffability and significance, the closeness to the divine, bright lights and heavy emotions; these aspects are shared by all who experience these moments of intense religious feelings and visions. Peruvian *Cashinua* for example, experience their *ayahuasca* rituals as fearsome and difficult undertakings, but interpret them as a connection with the divine which is essential to their existence. Compare the rites of Greek Dionysos, which were portrayed in art and literature as fearsome, even destructive rites, but also as indispensable in honoring the God; devotees undertaking the rites were considered mad and blessed by the god at the same time, madness being interpreted as closeness to the divine. Erika Bourguignon, while studying spirit possession in sub-Saharan Africa proposed that in traditional societies like those, many if not all altered states of consciousness were given a religious interpretation, a phenomenon which, as we have seen in chapter 3, was also common practice in ancient Greece. Many more parallels can be drawn as I hope has become clear from the previous chapters. Such a parallel has also been drawn by Gordon Wasson, and although his comparison between his own mushroom-experience in a sleeping bag might seem inappropriate and sound like an entirely

[219] For more on the criticism, see below.
[220] See chapter 2.

different thing than the visionary experiences had inside the Telesterion during the famous Eleusinian mysteries, in essence he is right to see the resemblance. Again I point towards Gimello. The context of the experience is entirely different and the visions and thoughts were probably very different too. However, both experiences were moments of an intense altered state of mind, which in religious context provoked the visionary state that was experienced by Wasson and was recollected by all the famous accounts of the Eleusinian ritual.

To try and understand a bit more of these religious experiences it might be helpful to once again consider Jan Bremmer's statement about the difference between Greek Gods and men. In the context of the anthropomorphism of the Greek Gods, Bremmer namely states that 'the gap between gods and humans is unbridgeable.'[221] In chapter three I hypothesized that this is not something specific to Greek religion (perhaps it is only interesting when considering Greek (or other) anthropomorphic gods because they resemble humans) because every religion imagines gods as superior, divine beings who, although they constantly influence human lives and the world around us, are far removed from human existence. Therefore, the gap seems unbridgeable. However, every religion also shares the concept of mystical experiences during which this 'gap' seems bridgeable after all and close contact with the divine seems possible.[222]

In the major modern religions these experiences account only for a small part of all religious practice. Compared to the huge number of masses, prayers and daily devotions performed, the mystical experiences of Christianity for example, are a very minute minority of practices. However, at the end of chapter three it became clear that the mystery-cults of the ancient Greeks were something very widespread. Although our literature only accounts for the few famous examples, and archeological finds provide little clarity about the details, these finds do illustrate that these practices were widespread and popular. In my opinion, this should provoke questions as to our common perceptions of ancient Greek religion as a 'down-to-earth' or even 'commercial' affaire. If these mystery cults, which clearly encompassed some form of closer religious contact with the gods, were so popular and widespread, should we not alter our views of Greek religion in general? Perhaps we should no longer view the mystery-cults as a small periphery phenomenon, but an intrinsic part of Greek religion. Perhaps we should acknowledge that Reaching the divine through these

[221] Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 12.

[222] How or why this seems to be part of many religions is a question intended for an entirely different study, although I think it might have something to do with the anthropological research mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter. The core of this anthropological research proposes that religion is not simply the result of a convenient explanation of things we now call natural events but rather the result of evolutionary emotions. This might explain the correlation between mystical experiences and altered states of consciousness. In a state of disorientation; an altered state of consciousness in which our normal waking state, as Tart described it (a state that basically conforms to reality and enables a person to sense imminent danger, such as the presence of dangerous predators or corpses), is disrupted, our mind might be even more subjected to the suggestion of religious thoughts, such as the presence of divine beings.

once-of-a-lifetime, ecstatic experiences was a very important part of ancient Greek religion in the same way as these kind of rituals are an important part of modern-day shamanistic traditions.

These are off course problems destined for another research. However, what has become clear is that altered states of consciousness played a major role in the mystery cults of the ancient Greeks and that these mystery cults, in turn played a major part in the religious ideas of the people that experienced them. However, one might ask what kind of role the psychoactive substances played in this matter. Moreover, why would we search for something as farfetched as the psychoactive *kykeon*? My answer would be that on one level this concerns Eleusis specifically. However, on another, this also has a lot to do with the openness of historical research. It is clear that the experience of the mysteries of Eleusis first and foremost provided the participants with feelings of fear, uncertainty and confusion, but also eventual joy, elation, and new vision of life and death. The participants clearly had a visionary experience, one that can hardly only be attributed to a symbolic religious play, ritual invocations or a procession. It seems safe to assume that the participants of the ritual experienced an ASC. However, except for the possible psychoactive properties of the *kykeon* and the possibility of some secret actions that were performed during the unknown part of the ritual, there is no method of inducement that would explain the experience. It is highly probable that in some cases an ASC was reached without proper inducement methods. However, the mysteries of Eleusis, as rightly pointed out by the writers of 'The Road to Eleusis', were performed again and again for centuries if not millennia, therefore some reliable inducement method should have been used. Quite some modern scholars write of the ecstatic dance, prolonged physical action and other inducement methods as genuine methods to attain an ecstatic state of mind. However, when a psychoactive substance like the possible *kykeon* is proposed, a method of induction just like any other (as we have seen in chapter 2), the theory receives heavy criticism or is even completely ignored. Why does this happen?

To provide an answer to this question and to test whether we have come any further since, what follows will be a critical review of the criticism mentioned in the introduction. The firstly mentioned criticism by Walcott is clearly overstated by calling the book 'perverse'. However, he explains that he finds the book unconvincing, which is certainly understandable, as he especially refers to Ruck's work of encompassing too much. N.J. Richardson, in turn wrote: 'There is no real evidence that the *cyceon* had such an effect as is claimed, and all the evidence for its use in other contexts points the other way. But those who believe that modern drugs offer a valid substitute for religion will no doubt welcome this essay in mystical myco-mania.' [223] In this criticism by Richardson we find the core of what I'm trying to argue against. Because our own modern culture is unfamiliar with the use of psychoactive

[223] Richardson, 'Review of: The Road to Eleusis', 323.

substances in religious practice, it is immediately assumed that the proposal is some nonsense coming from those who 'welcome this essay in mystical myco-mania'. I must admit to the overenthusiasm of Ruck and Wasson as I have mentioned before, but the attitude that is shown here clearly shows resentment towards the hippie-zeitgeist rather than a critical review. We have namely seen that the use of psychoactive substances in religious practice is not some peculiarity, but a returning phenomenon around the world. M.J. Jameson, a more accepting scholar did not fully reject the theory, but stigmatized it all the same, writing that 'In the end, since there can be no proof, acceptance of the thesis depends either on one's view of its plausibility, or on faith.'[224] Jameson rightly states that the theory is based on plausibility. However, the subject is the Eleusinian mysteries. Even Mylonas wrote a theory which in practice was based on plausibility. Moreover, by adding the word 'faith', even Jameson tries to dissociate himself from the controversial theory.

In the introduction we have already noted that this criticism, but also the short-sightedness of the writing itself were probably a product of the zeitgeist. That even more controversial and even less plausible people such as Carlos Castenada, John M. Allegro and Timothy Leary, and the drug-culture of the sixties and seventies inadvertently influenced both the book itself and the criticism that it received. However, after more than thirty years, is it not time to look past the errors of those years and see that some very interesting points were also made? In my opinion, it is our duty as historians of the twenty-first century, not to blindly follow the discourse of rejection that followed theories like this one, but provide a more critical and nuanced view of theories that at their core can still prove a valuable addition to modern historiography. A view at least shared by some, as illustrated by the following words of the recently deceased Georg Luck, a notable Swiss classicist, writing for the American Journal of Philology:

> I hope that, this time, the book will be read carefully and critically, but with an open mind, by classicists, historians, and anthropologists, because it could change our way of thinking about ancient religions. [225]

[224] Jameson, 'Review of: The Road to Eleusis', 197-198.
[225] G. Luck, 'The Road to Eleusis (review)', *American Journal of Philology* 122 (2001) 135-138.

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