The Mysteries of Eleusis; Our Ecstatic Journey - by Fred Adams, on the Solstice of June 21, 1966

We have completed our Purifications of the Lesser Mysteries. We bathed, danced, sang and prayed at Agrai on the sacred river Ilissos. All of our spiritual sponsors are members of the two venerable priestly families of Eleusis, the Eumolpids and the Kerykes. The mystagogues, sponsors of our initiations, instructed us and removed all taint and defilement of blood crime. We underwent these rites in the vernal month of flowers, Anthesteria. Through dream-ringed dances, beautiful, overflowing nymphs bore the Kernoi, panspermatic vessels of seeds and fruits. Now it is the holy month of Boedromion, the autumnal time of sowing in bright Attica — the moon is hasting to its fullness. Soon in the ensorcelled dark of the closing lunar eye, unknown passages between life and death will light up for us, in Holy Eleusis. This is the prospect of the greater Mysteries, the Secrets of First and Last. We will witness at the center of the world, Eleusis. The secrets of First and Last and their hidden clasp are the indefinable prospects of the Greater Mysteries. Here at the center of the Mystai, the initiates will witness in Eleusis the full circle (rather than the straight line) of the Beginning and the End. We will see a new holy event. We ourselves will cover these holies with our own flesh and feed their divine joints and ligaments with our own blood. In this exchange, we will receive into our bodies articulation of the everlasting. But the nature of these fusions is forever mute in the closed lips and lids of mystery.

The Spondophorai are special messengers. They were dispatched to all Greek city States from Eleusis, the sacred sanctuary of the Goddesses and the God. They proclaimed the truce that will last until the fifteenth day of the month following the time of festivities. From all the cities the Eumolpids and the Kerykes priests received tithes and delegations for Demeter the Great Mother, and for Persephone, Her Daughter the Queen of the Dead. Also they have received offerings of perennial sprouts of Life, and Ploutos, Husband to Persephone and Lord of the Dead — who forever mixes and sorts the generations in Earth’s rich seedling hush. Now it is the first day of that mystery festival which is the greatest of all Greece. Boedromion 15: AGHYRMOS! Yesterday the hiera of Demeter were brought from the Anaktoron in Eleusis to Athens by the majestic priestesses. We assemble before the Archon Basileus, supreme magistrate of the celebrations. He stands with his retinue in the Painted Stoa of our famous civic field, the AGORA. From the Stoa porch in the presence of the Supreme Hierophant of Eleusis and his priestly Torch Bearers, The Archon reads the proclamation (Prophesis) which begins the celebrations. We are admonished only those who are free of the taint of homicide, and who are conversant with the pure language of Hellas may seek the the final initiations. Our mystagogues examine and instruct us further concerning what the Goddesses expects of her initiates. We wash our hands in lustral basins and enter the Eleusinian where Hiera, the sacred objects rest unseen until the day they return with us to the Telesterion in Eleusis for the secret ceremonies. “To the sea, oh Mystai!” sings out the thrilling shout! It is the morning of ELASIS! In

a wild dusty press of carts and carriages we scramble laughing and jingling to the Pholeron Coast, on to the Isthmus of the Piraeus.

Here the sea waits eternally immaculate to cleanse us of all evil. Bearing squirming squealing little pigs, our noisy joyous drove plunges into the swirling waves to wash away the dirt of arid history and sundry errors. When we return to the city, we sacrifice the little pig. Thus we linked with the fertility festival of Thesmophoria, when women hurl innumerable pigs into the great brush-ringed vulva of the Earth Mother. This, the day following Elasis, is a time of dignified restraint. Each day serves up a select course in this great feast of the Gods and these days must alternate our moods to increase appetite for the mystic entreé. This Day in the Eleusioniam, the Archon Basileus offers up solemn sacrifice to the immortal Mother and Maid on behalf of the women and children of the commonwealth. The Forth Day of the Greater Mysteries we call Epidauria. It is said that at this time in the Sacred Cycle, the God Asklepios arrived from his therapeutic sanctuary in Epidaurous to be prepared for the Demetrian initiations. We Mystai (who have not yet experienced the Great Mystery) rest in seclusion. Deeply we dive into ourselves and pray the for the dawning of the Dark Moon's incomparable light. As latecomers, like the God, are prepared, each of us in seclusion receives further instruction from his own spiritual guide and sponsor. Thus might we sleep soundly because every limb is smoothed out with a marvelously relaxed readiness. The Fifth Day blooms a blithe vibrant sun. This is the day for which we have all waited, men, women and children, free and bound. Pompe!!! The journey to Eleusis from Athens. The distance is almost 14 miles. We will be on the road all day and arrive in precincts of Eleusis under the Hermetic lamp of the Evening Star. The first pale threads of dawn find us milling excitedly with our sponsors about the Pompeion near the Dipylon Gate. We glitter in festive outfits; we are crowned with mystic myrtle; we bear the Bacchos, branches of myrtle tied at intervals with wool. Some of us carry our supplies and new clothes for the rites of Eleusis in a sack tied at one end of a hefty staff called PHASKALOS. There is a last inspection of our lusty throng before we start. Yes, there is Iacchus in the lead. He is a wooden statue, also crowned with myrtle and he raises his torch. He sits jauntily upon this carriage guided by his priest. Verily, he is as the Morning Star, the spirit of shouting and jubilance that enkindles this brilliant Attic procession. How dearly he resembles the lovely young Lord of the Wild Root, Dionysos. The roaring, dusty sparkling parade shapes up into six general sections. First there is Iacchus, as we have said. Then comes the Priests and the sacred singers who herald the gorgeous holy Priestesses of Demeter. These dazzling irreproachable priestesses bear in gold gleaming baskets — tied with ribbons (Kistar) — the redoubtable Hiera, the most sacred objects of the Goddesses. These Hiera will transform us, because they have no history; they are before time. Through all time they are outside time. They shall fertilize the eggs of our eyes. Then follow the officials of our Athenian state, mingling with those of other Greek peoples. We Mystai on foot come next, with our wise sponsors. Following us we hear the rumble of carriages. Upon the Road to Eleusis wheels are not really approved. But when they get older, ladies sometimes lose the felicity of their own feet. Even now they shoot flirtatious glances from behind fluttering shades and this pleases us. But now the bridge over the Hadean mud lakes of the Rheitoi have been narrowed by statute to prevent these fine coaches from traversing the last stretch of the Sacred Way. Pack animals complete our entourage. Our journey follows The Way through the foothills of Pahnes, milestone by

milestone. Here and there groups of us pause to feast and make merry. As the worldly roads become Sacred Way, the milestones become monuments. Each one presents the finest whisper of the wild genius of its own immanent surrounding. At the top of the pass, we tarry at the Sanctuary of Apollo. From here, we drop through mountains which cradle glinting wedges of sea to the shrine of Aphrodite. Then over the hill behind the salt lakes of the Rheitoi and across the bridge to the sea.



The Sacred Way, by Fred Adams

Immediately upon crossing this bridge, we undergo Kroposis. Each of us receives two saffron ribbons of wool to protect us against evil spirits, who are always attracted to every great initiatory event. Perhaps they are our own unpurged dross of fear. One Krope is tied around the right wrist, another around the leg of each Mystai. Here we may rest and bathe again for the lakes border the sea in the womb-like Bays of Eleusis. Here the incomparable Phrene, model of Praxiteles, removes her cloak before all and dips like an untrammeled Goddess in the salt waters. Spellbound, we rest and prepare our torches for our eventide arrival at Eleusis. At eventide, the walls that divide worlds thin to glistening membranes and may dissolve altogether. This is particularly true of this evening of the holy year, the autumn time of sowing in Attica. But before we reach our destination, we cross the bridge over the river Kephisos. Here ominous men wait on the sides. Their heads are covered and of dreadful aspect. These are the Gephyrisman of the growing darkness who attack us strangely. They hurl nasty taunts and jocular insults at us as we pass, silent and unresponsive. Chiefly they direct their barbs against the important citizens in our midst. These murmurs again remind us of the terrors of every Sacred Threshold. And so humbled, the great of this life are protected against the jealousies of the grumbling wraiths. We are all equal in our differences before The Timeless Mother and Maid. Within the regions of the sacred, the profanity of presumption is fatal. At last, under wavering torch light, we arrive in the outer court of the Eleusinian sanctuary. Playfully, gay Iacchos is received and his mission completed. The incandescent embrace of the Morning and Evening Stars rouses the nuptial beacon of homecoming. This is the sleepless night of continual dancing, singing and feasting. The merry trek has raised our spirits to mighty surcharge for the

nightlong revels.

Our overflowing nymphs again bear the keryoki, those panspermatic many mouthed vessels for the earths' various fruits and seeds. The rhythmic jubilance of the moving maze launches torches amidst shouts and cries into the sparkling swirl of stars. Earthly flame and heavenly blaze become indistinguishable. Our entangling legs turn on the hub that is “the well of the beautiful dance,” where Persephone, the seed-corn maiden and Queen of the Dead disappeared. So turn the stars on the spindle of Polaris. The foaming daughters of the waves and the twinkling sons of the heavens, indeed, Selene, the Moon Herself, join our dance, as the divine Euripides intones. All mixes to midnight and then slowly unwinds to happy exhaustion in the morn’s faint light. We seek the shelter of hostels or the houses and villas of friends. Then, in somber singleness of dream, each of us joins Demeter, the Sorrowing Mother, to resume her search for the Lost Maid. This day, the 20th of Boedhomie we rest. We ply ourselves in purifications and sacrifices. No food or drink whatsoever passes our lips all this day. Our bodies must be immaculately crystalline on the Telete, or the supreme rite of making perfect which commences tonight. Just as our Mother Demeter fasted and abstained from wine after the abduction of her child, the Kore. Again we entrust ourselves to the instructions of our mystagogoi; deeply we meditate with them on the life of the soul, which nourishes the exhaustible and visible in the inexhaustible and invisible. Toward evening, our bodies clear and pure like the choppy surfaces of a lake after wind has lifted then dropped its waters. The murky cyclopean fist of our depths relaxes, revealing on its palm the everlasting stairways of heaven. Fiery profiles of root-threaded inferno and swarming celestial bouquet touch in the smoothed lake skin of our fallow bodies. We are ready for the Greater Entry. We don our new robes. After the night of the Telete they will never be worn again except by our newborn for whom they will serve as swaddling. The Archon Basileus and his retinue sacrifices on behalf of all the people. The Pelanos is offered up. It is a large cake of barley and wheat harvested from the sacred Rharian plain. Then we drink the Kykeon. This is the mystic potion which Demeter broke her fast at Eleusis. It is composed of meal mixed with water and soft mint. Forthwith we assemble at the outer gates, the Propylea. Again we are screened by the priests. Again our spiritual sponsors establish our fitness for what is to follow. We are admitted into the TEMENOS, the sacred precincts, which are so enclosed with high walls that none may spy upon these procedures. We are instructed not to enter the Telesterion. This building is the place of final revelations. Our names are recorded on wooden tablets for all time as those who with Mother and Maid have partaken of the secret communion of their suffering and joy. Our wreaths of myrtle, emblems of love and death, are replaced by ribboned ones; we are completely consecrated to the Goddesses and the Gods! Our torches are lit. It grows dark as we approach the steps of a terrace flanking the Sacred Way within these walls. It is as if we pass some terrible proscenium and enter into tragedy which we would rather watch comfortably from without. There is hesitation in our midst. The carefree singing of maidens at play fills our ears. Persephone and her friends gather the nosegays of spring. But in the hollow of that lay lurks a strange guttural rumbling. We crowd closer together as our hearts pound heavily. The rumbling grows to thunder and drowns out the thin maidenly voices. The wavefront of some titanic force crashes through our poor fluttering garments. From the terrified Persephone one last high squeal streaks miserably up and then dies away to the mechanical squeal of a dog crushed by

an oxcart in an alleyway. Giant hoof beats pound our senses away. We are wrenched and roped, like the helplessly writhing maidens down into the terrible pits of our own ancestral souls. What awful brutes crouch there with hovering, hungry hands. Hades, Lord of gluttonous death has raped away the shy tender shoot of life. Like a sprout in an avalanche, it is gone, Kore is gone, we are gone. Consternation scatters our ranks. One mystai drops his torch. But lovely choruses appear through the sulphurous clouds. Their voices are soothing, their movements mellifluous, and we recover ourselves. The great voice of the ancient gong wells up, and out of its intersecting bronze rings of echo, emerges the soft, ageless voice of Eumolpus, the Great Singing Swan of the Mysteries. He chants only a few simple words. There is no explanation, no sermon. He assures us somehow that by sweeping away our lovely Maid of all ephemeral tendencies, the irresistible rockbound underworld has unknowingly submitted forever to the metamorphic reign of Her even more irresistible sweetness. We relax under the soft touch of almost invisible hands and wander about. Now we are effortlessly enchanted by the soft kiss of our torches. From the dissolving caverns of shadow hollowed by our flames, a sobbing swells. The deep throat and bosom of the disconsolate Mother disgorges the anguish of loss. The brute, irrefutable fact of LOSS paralyzes us. In this grip, each of us is lost to all the others. Demeter the primordial Mother will not permit that contact of life with life which gives life, until Her Child is retuned. How great and how just is the resentment of the ruptured Creatrix. But these are the horrible catacombs fertility must unseal to the largesse of rebirth. Now we wander like unstrung macabre puppets entombed in some somnambulist pageant. We move dreadfully from tableau to tableau in forlorn search with The Mother. Her sobbing grows louder, and to escape the unbearable despair, we would rend these poor packages of flesh that wrinkle over our bones. Then silence. Utter silence. One by one, our torches are extinguished. The shadows wrap each of us in our own funerary bridal veil, and swallow each of us in our own suffocating darkness. We have forgotten that we ever trod the Sacred Way, as carelessly carefree fools. We forget we have passed through the Gates of the Sanctuary and that what has befallen us is divinely instituted mime. Singly and alone each of us is locked in the “atmospheric body” we ourselves have aggregated gesture by gesture. No longer do we think with our brains. We shuffle along without moving. It is a grinding mill we tread and so our steps take us nowhere. Somewhere in the dark, a hushed excited whisper passes. A truce, an agreement between the Gods and Our Goddess is struck. The Olympians capitulate. Neither can they endure the darkness forever. For only a season each year will Kore remain underground, with the waiting seed corn and the commingling ghosts. Again the great gong sounds. This time the breaking of sound is so heavy, under its shattering timbre we clap our ears with our hands and throw down our heads. The ravaging cyclone of sound lasts only a moment, but it is an interminable one of bright pain. In its surge scamper the twittering wraiths all about us. They scramble sickeningly over our contracting flesh. We raise our heads. But dumbly we discern the outlines of a huge black grizzly maw before us. It is the vestibule of a cave. The Ploutonion!!! The entrance to the underworld. Our eyes are assailed by the commotion of mattocks, flails and hoes beating some hardened crust of earth. Slowly a luminous mass rises from beneath the threshold of the Ploutonion. The phosphorescent figure of a woman condenses the glow. Her face is a livid mask of decay, the visage of the Gorgon, to look upon which spells death. We drop back in horrorified confusion. But as She steps upon the plinth, the wormy shell falls from Her face and reveals the lovely contour of the Holy Maiden, coronated Queen of the Two Ways. Our flesh is vindicated. She is the “Atmospheric Body” of all our souls, fused and released by the rite. Our torches are relit as the Kore rises and approaches us. We form a wide circle about Persephone

Anados who has married death into service of life. Through our midst the voluminous form of Demeter rushes in and enfolds the Daughter. It is hard for us to see them through the salt of rain of our tears. The warmth of their union has heated and curved the straight line of lust into the circle of immortality. The horizons of freedom rise out of the wash of our eyes. Mystai and pageant choruses and priests and priestesses bear the Holy Ones toward the Telesterion. It is impossible to convey such gladness. We hurl our torches like comets into the night.



The interior of the Telesterion is a dark forest of pillars. We take our places all along the walls of this awesome precinct: Demeter and Kore enter the Anaktoron, the Holy of Holies of this temple, along with their priests. The consummation of their union there conveys immortality to us. Finally in a blaze of unearthly light, the Eumalpid reappears before us bearing the sacred objects. They are unspeakably simple!!! The long-awaited Hiera from before history! Our breath blocked by our very throats, we behold them, the tokens of death's certain impregnation of life with everlasting joy. We may say no more. Weightless, we finally depart the Telesterion. Those who were initiated in previous years and who have returned to gain the highest degree of EPOPTEIA, complete vision, remain. Tonight they will undergo the preliminaries of the final, unutterable of unutterable revealings, which will they will receive tomorrow night, after we have completed our ceremonies. Some of resolve to return next year to receive the blessings of this 3rd degree. The day after Boedromion 21st, we fasted again and prepared for the final night in the Telesterion. But this time with an ease and buoyancy we had never in our whole lives known before. We will not blight the holy happenings of that night with poverty of words. On this the last day at Eleusis, we the initiated perform libations to the dead with whom we are now at peace, as with all nature. These rites are called PLEMOCHOAI, for from two vessels of this calling — placed on the ground facing east and west we decant potions into the earth. Tomorrow we all depart from Eleusis, secure in life because we have death as its very preservation. Back along the Sacred Way we will return to our homes and fields. In Athens, the day after our return, the Council of the Five Hundred will meet to review our conduct during the Sacred Proceedings. Our eyes, having beheld nothing notable during the last night, were opened to all and everything. And though our mouths were agape with awe, our lips were sealed in reverence forever. "Happy is he who, having seen these rites goes below the hollow

earth; for he knows the end of life and knows its God-sent beginning.” ~ Pindar