

Mysteries and interactivity: the relationship between Demeter Kore at Eleusis and Demeter Despoina at Lykosura

von SOTIRIA DIMOPOULOU, SCHWELM

1. Introductory framework¹

Despite the extensive scholarly research that has been devoted to the Eleusinian cult, the present study is an attempt to examine the interactive relationship between the Eleusinian and Arcadian mysteries of Lykosura through a multifaceted approach. The aim is not to identify the two cults, but rather to examine the panhellenic cult of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis and its influence on the local cult of Despoina Kore and Demeter at Lykosura in southwestern Arcadia, in the context of an archaeological, religious, architectural and social study. The enigmatic and mysterious character of the cult at Lykosura gives rise to further multidimensional research, combining archaeological evidence with Pausanias' description of both the cult statues and their attributes in the temple of Despoina.

This paper also examines the ways in which these religious phenomena are expressions of collective human emotions based on religious ideologies and customs and evaluates the two cults in relation to the anthropological and social background of the beliefs of ancient Greek religion. In addition, it aims to shed light on other parameters that contribute to a broader study of the cults and their connection in Eleusis and Lykosura, such as the architectural structures as an important factor in religious practices, as well as the attributes that accompanied the worshipped goddesses in both cults, mostly depicted in sculpture and vase painting.

In the context of research into religious phenomena, the ritual practices and secret ceremonies observed in these mystery cults are also subject to investigation. How can these practices be defined as religious phenomena? How can the human need to maintain secrecy be interpreted? To what extent did the community influence such religious aspects, and how can we discuss the interactive

¹ I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Madeleine Jost, Prof. Dr. Vasilis Tsiolis and Dr. Elli Papazoi, who studied the Sanctuaries and Cults of Female Goddesses in Ancient Arcadia (University of Graz), for their insightful comments on the manuscript. For the Female Cults and the cult topography in Arcadia, see Papazoi (forthcoming).

relationship between Eleusis² and Lykosura?³ Moreover, the research aims to offer a new perspective on the analysis of such phenomena in the ancient Greek world, examining various parameters.

2. The cult and its origin

The central section of Homer's Hymn to Demeter reveals that the veneration of the Eleusinian Demeter and her daughter Persephone, also known as Kore, is inextricably linked to the mythical tradition of Persephone's abduction by the god of the underworld, Hades. While Demeter was searching for Persephone, the earth was transformed into a landscape of frozen desolation, and the goddess wandered around in a state of hunger and dishevelment, carrying torches.⁴ There are numerous variations of the myth associated with the cult of Demeter and Kore. However, the most well-established version is that of Eleusis. Demeter was reunited with her daughter in the underworld, and her return to the world of the living was celebrated with the regrowth of the land and the holding of festivals. The return of Persephone from the underworld is associated with certain regulations pertaining to her sojourn in the realm of the living. During her sojourn in the underworld, Persephone consumed seeds of the pomegranate, thereby establishing a connection with the realm of the dead. It was decreed that she should remain in the underworld for a third of the year and that the remainder of her time should be spent with Demeter.⁵ The return, ascent, and anodos of Persephone from the underworld and her subsequent reunion with her mother were imbued with symbolic significance and were closely connected to the fertility and regrowth of the land. Moreover, the interpretation of the

² The name of Eleusis is likely derived from the Greek word *éleusis* (arrival, coming), indicating that the goddess Demeter arrived at this location and selected it for her cult, as referenced in the Homeric Hymn for Demeter (Richardson 1974). Nevertheless, Pausanias states that the name of Eleusis was given by the mythical hero Eleusis (Paus. 1,38,8). The Eleusinian deme or demos of the Hippothontis phyle is situated 21 km west of Athens (IG I-III (Attica). According to Strabo, Eleusis was one of the twelve cities that was founded by the mythical king of Athens, Kekrops, and subsequently incorporated into the polis of Athens by Theseus (Strab. Geog. Θ 1,20).

³ The existence of ancient Lykosura is referenced by Pausanias in his eighth book of *Periegesis in Peloponnese*. Pausanias recounts the history of Arcadia, including the mention of Lykosura as the oldest polis in the ancient world. In accordance with the mythological tradition, Lykosura was constructed by Lykaon, son of Pelasgos (Paus. 8,2,2; 8,38,1). It was situated within the region of ancient Parrhasia, approximately 7 km west of Megalopolis. The region was renowned for the sanctuary of the goddess Despoina, situated to the east side of Mount Lykaion and located on a hill adjacent to the walls of the polis of Lykosura (Paus. 8,38,1).

⁴ In sculpture, vase or wall painting artworks, Demeter is often depicted with torches.

⁵ Burkert 1993, 338–340.

myth was closely connected to the role of Demeter as a goddess of nature, as the mother of the land and agriculture.

The cult of the Eleusinian Demeter and Persephone is likely to have originated from an ancient agrarian cult related to Thesmophoria, a festival dedicated to Demeter.⁶ Sacrifices were a central feature of this festival, with pigs being thrown into deep underground pits only by women who had been initiated into the cult of Demeter Thesmophoria. These sacrificial pits symbolised the underground chasm of Demeter and Kore. The rite of Thesmophoria was connected to the fertility of the land and the beginning of the autumn sowing.⁷ The Eleusinian cult can also be seen in the same context, namely as an agrarian cult whose sacred ritual before the initiation into the Mysteries had the same characteristics as Thesmophoria. The antiquity of the cult in Eleusis is proven by the archaeological findings. The earliest known structure for ritual practices is dated to the Mycenaean Period, before 1200 BC. It may have been a Megaron, where cult and ritual practices took place; this structure was the precursor of Telesterion.⁸ The function of Telesterion and its role in the ritual practices in Eleusis will be analysed in a subsequent section.

The worship of the goddess Despoina at Lykosura probably reflects an ancient Arcadian tradition, although this cannot be established with certainty, as we shall see below.⁹ In the cella of the Temple of Despoina, the renowned sculptor Damophon from Messene crafted a colossal marble statue group (measuring approximately 5.80–5.90 m in height), which the majority of scholars have dated to the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BC.¹⁰ The cult statues of Lykosura illustrate a female group comprising four figures: the goddesses Artemis, Demeter,¹¹ Despoina, and Anytos. Artemis is depicted as the goddess of hunting, accompanied by a dog and a quiver. Furthermore, Artemis can be identified with Hekate, as both goddesses were depicted with a torch and snakes, and Artemis was also the sister of Despoina and daughter of Demeter according to the local Arcadian tradition.¹² In this representation, Demeter is

⁶ Burkert 1993, 496–502.

⁷ Nilsson 1940, 49.

⁸ Gruben 1966, 215, fig. 166 A.

⁹ LIMC III (1986) 384 s.v. Despoina Nr. 1, 2 (G. Steinhauer).

¹⁰ For the sculptor and his works, see Themelis 1993, 99–109; Themelis 1996, 154–185; Tsiolis 2002, 7–32; Melfi 2016, 82–105. For a new reconstruction of the cult group, see Dimopoulou 2022a. For previous reconstructions of the group, see Dickins 1906/07, pls. 12–14; Lévy / Marcadé 1972, 967–1003; Stewart 1990, 94–96, figs. 788–792. For the unique monetary depiction of the group, see LIMC I 1 1981, 874 s. v. Anytos (A. Stavridi).

¹¹ LIMC IV (1988) 880 s.v. Demeter Nr. 436 (L. Beschi).

¹² Paus. 8,37,6. About the multidimensional character of Artemis at Lykosura, see Dimopoulou 2022a, 182–186.

depicted holding a torch in her right hand while her left rests on Despoina's right shoulder. She was depicted as a seated statue positioned alongside Despoina. Despoina, the Mistress, was depicted holding a scepter in her left hand and a *mystiké kiste*¹³ on her lap with her right. According to Pausanias description: "Demeter holds a torch in her right hand, while the other lays upon Despoina. Despoina holds a sceptre and the *kiste* on her knees, which she holds with her right hand. On both sides of the throne: by the side of Demeter stands Artemis clad in a deerskin; she has a quiver on her shoulders, and she holds a torch in the one hand while in the other holds two snakes; beside Artemis lies a hunting dog. By the statue of Despoina stands Anytos, as an armed figure. The priests of the sanctuary say (maintain) that Despoina was brought up by Anytos, who was one of the called Titans. (.....) The legend about Anytos is based on an arcadian tradition".¹⁴

The myth about Despoina's birth is also based on a local arcadian tradition. Despoina was born after the secret coitus of Demeter and Poseidon. While Demeter was searching for her daughter Persephone, Poseidon pursued her. The god transformed into a horse, thus enabling him to rape the goddess. According to this tradition, another daughter was born through this coitus, whose name was forbidden to be revealed to those who were not initiated to the Mysteries of her mother Demeter.¹⁵ The cult of Despoina in Lykosura is related to this religious tradition, as evidenced by Pausanias's account of his visit to Lykosura, in which he states that: "The Arcadians venerate this goddess among the most gods, namely Despoina. They say (maintain) that she was the daughter of Poseidon and Demeter. Most of them use the name Despoina, which is a byname of the goddess, just like the other daughter of Demeter and Zeus, who was called Kore, although her primary name is Persephone (.....). I was afraid to reveal the name of Despoina to those who were not initiated."¹⁶

It is challenging to determine with precision whether the origins of the cult at Lykosura can be attributed to a period preceding or contemporary to that of the worshipping cult group.¹⁷ However, there is evidence that indirectly speaks of

¹³ The *mystiké kiste* was usually a cylindrical box, a kind of basket which contained secret items (e.g., plant seeds or myrtle leaves) for ritual practices during, mostly, secret cult ceremonies.

¹⁴ Translated by the author; Paus. 8,37, 3–6. For the figure of Anytos, see also Dimopoulou 2024, 323–331.

¹⁵ Paus. 8,25, 5–7.

¹⁶ Translated by the author; Paus. 8,37, 9–10. About the fear of Pausanias, see Dimopoulou 2022b, 171–186.

¹⁷ See Palamidis 2018, 127–152. See also Jost / Palamidis 2020, 127–140. For more about the origin of the cult of Despoina at Lykosura, see also Dimopoulou 2022a, 177–182. See also

its antiquity. It can be reasonably inferred from the available sources that the sanctuary of Lykosura was the site of ancient cultic activities. The sacrificial rituals that Pausanias describes during his visit to the temple may have been the inheritors of an older tradition.¹⁸ Furthermore, the terracotta statuettes from the Archaic period,¹⁹ which were discovered at the Megaron in Despoina's sanctuary, offer valuable insight into the practice of older cult activities. The votive figures are both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, with most of them holding an animal in front of their torso or a basket over their head.

In addition, a bronze tablet from the late Archaic Period (c. 500 BC) that was found on Mount Lykaion is recent evidence about sacrifices and festivals sacred for Zeus Lykaios, who – according to a local myth – was born and brought up on it.²⁰ J. Heinrichs examined the tablet and postulates that the cult of Despoina may have originated in the 6th century BC. This is based on the connection he draws between the name of the goddess Despoina and Kachila, whose presence according to the scholar is evidenced by the appearance of a goddess on some coins from Arcadia dating to the 5th century BC.²¹ Furthermore, J. Heinrichs hypothesises that Kachila's name is also mentioned in the tablet and that she was Despoina in her youth who was venerated with Zeus Lykaios.²² It is not certain whether Despoina is to be identified with this deity during her youth. This is due to the fact that the inscription does not explicitly mention the name of Despoina/Kachila, and it is not possible to assert with absolute certainty that these two deities are identical. Perhaps a deity was worshipped in the context of an agrarian cult, but one cannot determine whether this was Despoina. In addition, the tablet was also examined by J.M. Carbon and J.P.T. Clackson, but there is no evidence from their research that a specific deity was worshipped on Mt. Lykaion.²³

Nevertheless, the oldest epigraphical source about Despoina's cult at Lykosura connected to religious and sacrifice regulations during the initiation is dated

the recent publication about the sacred landscape of the Ancient Peloponnese of Marantou 2024.

¹⁸ Paus. 8,37,8: "On the way up to the temple of Despoina, the Megaron is on the right. This is where the mysteries take place, and the Arcadians bring animal sacrifices to Despoina. Everyone brings what they want, but they don't cut the throats of the animals, unlike other sacrificial rituals". Transl. by the author.

¹⁹ While the majority of the statuettes are from the late Hellenistic period, a small number are likely to be from the Archaic period. See Kourouniotis 1912, 159–160, figs. 36–40. For the terracotta statuettes of Lykosura, see also Walcek-Averett 2019, 165–171.

²⁰ Paus. 8,38,2.

²¹ Heinrichs 2015, 76, pls. 2a–3b.

²² Heinrichs 2015, 36–37, pls. 1–7.

²³ Carbon / Clackson 2016, 119–158.

back to the 3rd century BC and not earlier.²⁴ This source references the existence of strict clothing regulations for women when entering the sanctuary of Despoina for initiation as well as some sacrificial rituals in honour of Despoina. It is important to emphasise the unbreakable bond between Despoina and Kore and their mother Demeter. Despite their origins in different myths, these two goddesses are linked to a common recipient. This recipient is the mother Demeter, who is present in both places of worship and is associated with the Kore Despoina. Moreover, the sacred nature of the cult leaves no doubt as to its origin and the process of initiation into the mysteries. The common mythical background of both cults, namely the passions of Demeter and the quest of the Kore Despoina, as well as their relationship with the underworld, links the mysteries on a common religious basis.

3. Eleusis versus Lykosura: an interaction or imitation?

3.1 The role of architecture in the materialisation of the cult

The sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Eleusis and its Mysteries were of great significance in the ancient world. The Eleusinian secret cult is also evidenced by the existence of numerous homonymous sanctuaries and temples, where similar structures, such as those in Eleusis, served equivalent religious purposes.²⁵ In his *Periegesis in Attica*, Pausanias provides an account of his observations of the Eleusinian temples, including the temple of Triptolemos and Artemis Propylaia, as well as the temple of Poseidon Patroos.²⁶ The most significant and impressive structure in Eleusis was the so-called Telesterion, derived from the ancient Greek word *teló*, meaning 'to initiate'.

The Telesterion was situated within a sanctuary complex, comprising a number of other temples, and was encircled by a fortification wall. The Telesterion was a construction with inner columns, a structure with a roof and a close interior space, which was used for the initiation of those who wished to participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries, in the ritual ceremony dedicated to the goddess Demeter. The structure was primarily constructed during the Mycenaean period as a Megaron with ritual use. In the 7th century BC, it was extended with a rectangular front facade, and in the 6th century BC, it was completed through

²⁴ IG V 2, 514; Voutiras 1999, 233–249.

²⁵ Some of the most important temples are e.g., of Demeter Malophoros in Selinus, of Demeter in Pergamon, of Demeter in Akragas and of Demeter in Dion. The Eleusinian cult is also testified in Lakonia, where, according to Pausanias, a sanctuary of the Eleusinian Demeter in Therai in Mount Taygetos was located. Paus. 3,20,5.

²⁶ Paus. 1,38,6.

the Anaktoron, a small temple located within Telesterion. This temple, known as the secret cella, housed the xoanon of Demeter. This modest temple served as the focal point for the religious ceremonies, where the epiphany of Persephone was likely visible to the participants.²⁷ The Telesterion was constructed with three walls, each with eight rows of seats. Stone steps were also incorporated into the design, intended for the initiators, the *mystai*.²⁸



Fig. 1: Telesterion

As previously stated, the Telesterion underwent various phases of construction. Following its devastation by the Persians (c. 480 BC), the reconstruction of the edifice commenced in the years of Kimon (470 BC). The structure was extended, and the Anaktoron was relocated from the southern edge to the centre of the temple.²⁹ During the period of political dominance exercised of Pericles

²⁷ The “appearance” of the goddess was probably a part of the ritual ceremony.

²⁸ Gruben 1966, 214; Serafini 2019, 132–134, figs. 2, 3. For the initiation stages in Eleusis, see Clinton 2003, 50–73. For the latest publication on Telesterion, see Kaoura 2024.

²⁹ Gruben 1966, 216, fig. 169 D.

(c. 450-440 BC), Iktinos, the architect of the Parthenon, initiated the renovation of the Telesterion. His objective was to expand the central chamber to accommodate a greater number of initiates, thereby facilitating their participation in the mysteries. The architectural differentiation between this structure and its predecessors was the construction of eight stone theater-like seats throughout the Anaktoron.³⁰ Iktinos did not manage to complete his work, and subsequent architects during the 4th century BC attempted to continue the renovation of the Telesterion. The next significant rebuilding of the temple is dated to the 2nd century AD, under Marcus Aurelius. This was after the destruction of Telesterion by the Costoboci in 170 AD (fig. 1).³¹

The sanctuary of Despoina in Lykosura was excavated in 1889 by V. Leonardos.³² During the excavations, the remains of the Peribolos, a Stoa, the Doric temple of Despoina with a cella, theatre-like stone seats south of the temple, three altars in front of it, and the ruins of a structure where the cult practices probably took place, the so-called Megaron, were uncovered.³³ Additionally, a square-shaped structure, which had been bricked up, was discovered west of Stoa. This structure is thought likely to have been used for cultic purposes, based on evidence from the Archaic Period (fig. 2).³⁴ The temple of Despoina comprised a Pronaos and a cella, where the colossal cult statues of Demeter, Despoina, Artemis and Anytos were located.³⁵ The cult room in relation to the temple was not particularly expansive. The cult group was depicted in a manner suggesting that it was situated behind bars. In front of it, a mosaic decorated with wild animals and ornaments was laid.³⁶ The temple underwent a series of

³⁰ Gruben 1966, 216, fig. 169 E; Serafini 2019, 135, fig. 4 a. It is estimated that the number of the participants should be up to 4000 for the seated and 6000 for the standing; see Izenour 1992, 26.

³¹ Serafini 2019, 135–136. Such a rebuilt of the Telesterion is a proof that the Mysteries survived, at least, until the last third of the 2nd century AD.

³² Leonardos 1896, 95–196.

³³ Paus. 8,37,7: “Near of the Temple of Despoina, if someone goes up, in the right side is located the so-called Megaron. In Megaron took place the Mysteries (...)”.

³⁴ A bronze statuette of the goddess Athena from the Archaic Period was also found there; see Leonardos 1896, 119; Jost 1975, 339–364; Rathmayr 2018, 156.

³⁵ For the Catalogue of the Lykosura Group, see Kourouniotis 1911; Kaltsas 2002, 279–281 Cat. nos. 584–591; Dimopoulou 2022a, 215–240.

³⁶ For the “isolation” of the statues behind bars, see Mattern 2007, 154–156; Mylonopoulos 2011, 278; For the Temple mosaic, see Salzmann 1982, 65. 123 no. 162, fig. 80; Guimier-Sorbets / Panagiotopoulou 2008, 191–200. For cult rooms in Hellenistic temples, see also Kobusch 2022.

construction phases between the 4th and 2nd century BC. Furthermore, renovations were carried out in the temple until the Roman period.³⁷

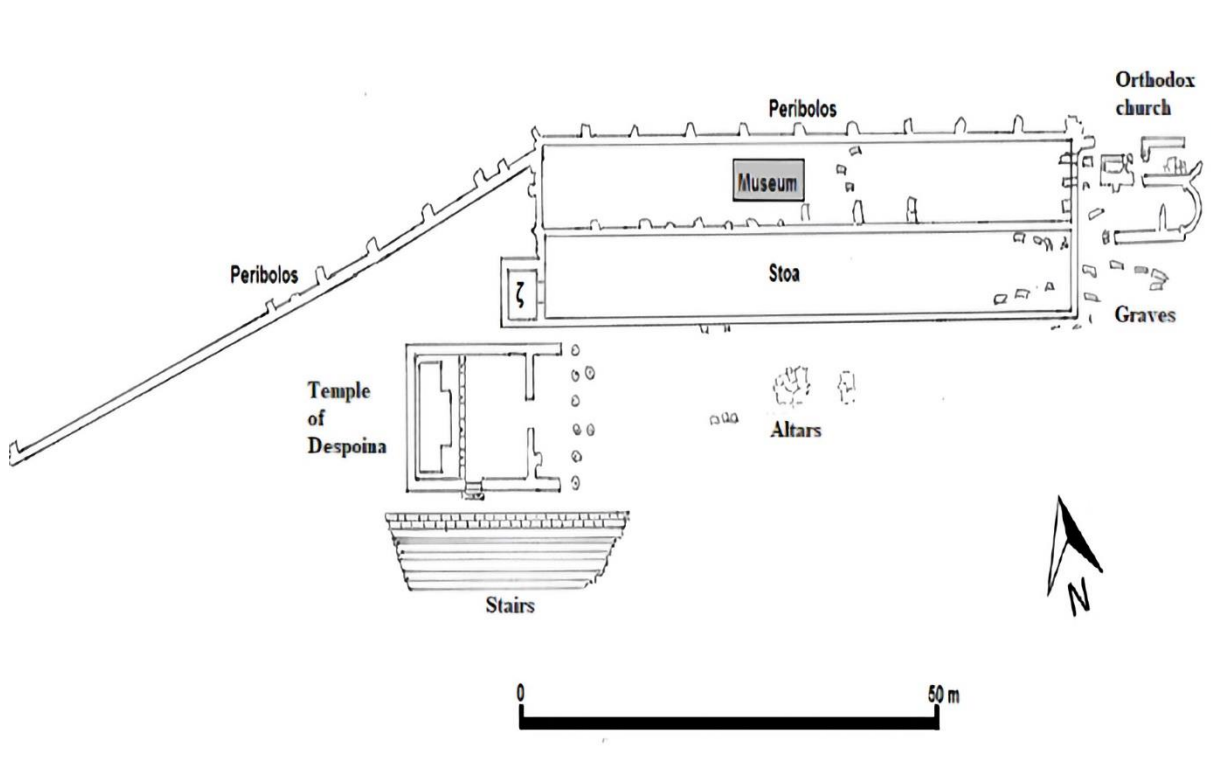


Fig. 2: Graphic reconstruction of Despoina's sanctuary at Lykosura

In considering the architectural construction of both cult sites and its role in the cult practice, despite the differences that can be identified, there are also common characteristics that can lead to certain conclusions about how the architectural character of a building influences the collective sense of the initiators and their religious aspects regarding the rituals in temples with secret cult elements. The architectural conception of the Telesterion and the temple of Despoina, including the external area, provide excellent examples of an interactive relationship between landscape and human, human and religious phenomena. The existence of the Anaktoron within the Telesterion as a secret, separate small temple where Persephone is said to have appeared during the mysteries, or *drómēna* (ritual activities), can be paralleled with the use of the Megaron in Lykosura as a large altar for the sacrifices of the goddesses Despoina and Demeter.

In accordance with the established ritual, Persephone was believed to have emerged from Hades, and the entrance to Anaktoron in Eleusis was reserved exclusively for the Hierophantes, the priest of Demeter.³⁸ It is noteworthy that

³⁷ Kourouniotis 1911, 12-18; Jost 1985, 174-175; Billot 2008, 135-180.

³⁸ Burkert 1993, 584.

the stone seats inside the building were arranged in a theatre-like configuration with the intention of facilitating the participation of as many initiands as possible in the initiation festival. Consequently, the secret nature of the religious regulations meant that the ritual *teleté* (ritual procession) was to be kept strictly confidential from those who were not initiated. The Telesterion was illuminated solely by torches, thereby creating an atmosphere of darkness that was integral to the secrecy of the ceremony. This darkness, which permeated the whole room, affected the participants and the religious expression was closely linked to the ritual, which represented the land rebirthing and life triumphing over death.

The excavations at Lykosura uncovered a temple with the cult room,³⁹ a Megaron, and stone theatre-like seats situated to the south of the temple. Although the content of Despoina's Mysteries is not currently known, it may be assumed that there was an interactive relationship with the Eleusinian Mysteries, and that Eleusis in some way affected Lykosura. The secret character of the cult is once again expressed through the various structures. The seats for the participants had the same function as in Eleusis: those undergoing the initiation process, which probably took place in the Megaron, were seated. The Megaron served a similar function to the Telesterion. Furthermore, it is likely that the secret regulations were not divulged to those who were not initiated.⁴⁰ The entrance to the temple was perhaps only permitted to the priests or the priestesses of Despoina and the presence of a south door provided additional illumination within the dark cella. The enigmatic nature of this local cult was accompanied by the use of lighted torches, while the myth about Despoina and Demeter embodied the religious ideals and needs of the local community (fig. 3).

A detailed examination of the architectural features of both sanctuaries reveals that the specific locations played a pivotal role in the theatrical and parallel mythical presentation of the initiation rituals of the mystery cult of Demeter Kore and Demeter Despoina Kore. The seats inside or outside of a temple were integral to the cult rituals and indicated active participation in the religious events, the so-called *drómena*. The combination of *drómena* and *deiknúmena*, that is to say, the acts that accompanied the ritual, aimed to reinvigorate the narration of the myths in front of the audience.⁴¹ In the temple of Lykosura, as described by Pausanias, a mirror was hung in the cella, which may have facilitated the recollection of the epiphany of Despoina, her appearance to the priesthood during the initiation ceremony. Although the seats for the initiates were

³⁹ The existence of the cult room in the ancient Greek temples - the so-called cella - did not necessarily mean that the cult had a secret character. The cult statues of Athena Parthenos at the Parthenon and Zeus Olympios at Olympia from the Classical period are typical examples.

⁴⁰ Hellmann 2008, 181–190.

⁴¹ Sporn 2015, 353–354.

outside the temple of Despoina, the aim was probably the same: to create a unified perspective, a shared understanding and active participation in the mythological narratives.



Fig. 3: Sanctuary of Despoina at Lykosura

In conclusion, the study of the Mysteries in Eleusis and Lykosura from an architectural perspective and the potential influence of the Eleusinian Mysteries on the Mysteries of Despoina in Lykosura permit the drawing of rather certain conclusions.⁴² In my estimation, both cult sites exhibit an exemplary integration of structure and religion. As mystery cults, they sought to align the needs of the human with the natural environment and the location of the cult. The construction of such buildings contributed to the development of religious consciousness. In Lykosura, the local Arcadian mystery cult was adapted to the needs of the local community. In Eleusis, a panhellenic cult centre that attracted a wide range of visitors, the aim was to cultivate a collective sense of belonging among the participants and to create a respect for the mystical and the unspoken. It can be argued that Eleusinian religious beliefs influenced the Lykosura and its ar-

⁴² A votive inscription by Philopappos from Lykosura refers to Despoina and Soteira. This suggests the cult of Kore Soteira in Megalopolis and is indirectly linked to the cult of the Eleusinian Kore. See IG, V, 2, 524.

chitectural concept of a worship practice appropriate to the circumstances. In this case, we cannot speak of Lykosura as an imitation, but rather as an interaction based primarily on the essence of worship, with adaptations to suit its architectural requirements. The sacrificial practices, the worship and the ritual traditions all point to the fact that Lykosura meets the needs of both initiates and visitors. The architectural configuration of these cult spaces is directly related to their function in the initiation process. In other words, the specific structures (e.g. the Megaron, the Telesterion, the temple with a cella or the Adyton) are viewed by visitors, who thereby gain a subconscious understanding of the subsequent process and are mentally prepared for the experience. Moreover, this was the purpose of their participation in these mysteries.⁴³

3.2 Divines, attributes and features

As previously stated, the Eleusinian cult venerates Demeter and Persephone as chthonian deities.⁴⁴ They were so intimately connected that the figures are already depicted as a divine pair in the red-figured vase painting from Eleusis of the 6th century BC. The attributes that accompanied the goddesses were initially a wreath and a branch, an indication of an agrarian festival. In later depictions from the 5th century BC, the figures hold ears of grain or wheat, as well as scepters, which symbolise their dominance in Eleusis. Furthermore, they are often depicted with a phiale, an offering vase, and torches. The goddesses are usually clad in a girded chiton and mantel, and rarely in a peplos.⁴⁵

The Eleusinian pair of Demeter and Kore also appears in multfigured scenes in the vase painting. For example, they can be seen in scenes with Triptolemos, who was involved in the myth of Eleusis,⁴⁶ or with Hercules, Hekate, Pluto, Hermes, and so on.⁴⁷ The goddesses can be distinguished from one another through their respective attributes, such as the scepter, which is held by Demeter as the mistress of the temple, and the torches. In addition to Demeter, Persephone is also depicted holding torches. In many instances, Demeter is de-

⁴³ Further about the relationship between cult spaces and initiates, see Dimopoulou (forthcoming). For common characteristics by both cult places, see also Rüdiger 2019, 74–76.

⁴⁴ Hesiod is the first author and poet who remarks upon the deep relationship between Demeter and Persephone and identifies them as agrarian goddesses in *Theogony*. Hes. theog. 913. See also, LIMC suppl. VIII (1997) 956–978 s.v. Persephone (G. Günther).

⁴⁵ Peschlow-Bindokat 1972, 76–89. For the iconography of the Eleusinian Goddesses, see also Clinton 1992.

⁴⁶ Burkert 1993, 586.

⁴⁷ Peschlow-Bindokat 1972, 92–102.

picted wearing a chiton and veil, while Persephone is attired in a chiton and mantel. The representation of the female figures as mother and daughter is also a common motif in sculpture. In addition to votive and grave reliefs, Demeter is depicted as an enthroned figure holding a scepter and torch in sculptures. Near to Demeter is Persephone, who is typically depicted holding torches. The relationship between mother and daughter is evident in the figures' postures and gestures. In some reliefs, the figures are looking at each other, while in sculptures they are depicted in a caring posture, such as Demeter leaning on Persephone. Alternatively, they are sculpted in an embracing gesture. The most well-known votive relief from Eleusis from the late classical period (c. 440/430 BC) depicts Demeter, Kore and Triptolemos accompanied by the usual attributes, such as the torch, the scepter and the grain. The positioning of the figures on the relief indicates their relationship: they are both standing, facing each other, as the principal deities of the Eleusinian Mysteries.⁴⁸

Two groups of votive statues from the 4th century BC are also noteworthy examples of art from Eleusis. They represent Demeter and Persephone as the exemplar figures of mother and daughter. In the first group, Demeter, depicted seated in the *kiste*, is touching Persephone with her right hand, while the latter leans with her left hand on the shoulder of her mother. The following group presents a strikingly unique representation of the deities associated with the Eleusinian mysteries. In the mythological narrative, Persephone is depicted seated on her mother's lap, with the latter embracing her daughter with her right hand.⁴⁹ As previously noted, the profound interconnection between the deities with or without attributes in Eleusis as religious representations is not solely attributable to their agrarian character as agrarian goddesses. They also represent a mystery figure who connects the world of the living to the underworld.

⁴⁸ National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. 126; Fuchs 1969, 515, fig. 603.

⁴⁹ Peschlow-Bindokat 1972, 138, figs. 47 and 48.

Furthermore, representations of the *kístai* can be observed in Eleusis in depictions of the Roman period. The so-called Kistophorai figures, which were discovered at the Propylaea in Eleusis, are female figures, similar to Korai, who carry the decorated *kiste* over their head. It is likely that these figures were priestesses of Demeter and Kore, and that they were responsible for the safe-keeping of the secret items and offerings for the initiation to the cult.⁵⁰ Despite the sacredness and the occult nature of the ceremonies, the multidimensional religious character of Eleusis is evident in the various artefacts, including vase paintings and sculpture (fig. 4).⁵¹



Fig. 4: Kistophoros Figure in Eleusis

⁵⁰ Klauser 2016, 143–158; Klauser 2018, 53–65.

⁵¹ The topic of the rape of Persephone from Hades and the mourning Demeter is also known from the wall paintings, e.g., in the Tomb of Persephone in Vergina from the 4th century BC; see Andronikos 1994.

In Arcadia, the cult of Demeter and Despoina at Lykosura, where the mysteries in honour of the goddess Despoina were held, was considered one of the most important mystery cults. The cult group of Lykosura, apart from Anytos, is accompanied by attributes related to the secret ceremony during the initiation process and the myth about Despoina in Arcadia. Considering the available descriptions by Pausanias and archaeological findings, it can be surmised that the attributes accompanying the goddesses were as follows: Artemis was depicted with a torch and snakes, Demeter with a torch and Despoina with a scepter and the *mystiké kiste*. The preserved head and part of the torso of Demeter and some garments, in particular the decorated garment of Despoina,⁵² contribute to our understanding of how the goddesses were dressed and they can also lead us to interpret the mystery cult in Lykosura. The secret character of the Lykosura cult is similarly corroborated by the Tritonesses, the marine figures that decorated the throne of Demeter and Despoina. The female figures are depicted carrying the *mystikaí kistai*, or secret baskets, over their heads, symbolising the religious regulations. These figures could be also characterised as “*Kistophorai*” in a way (fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Tritoness from the decoration of the throne of the Lykosura Cult Group

⁵² National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. 1734 and 1737.

The figure of Demeter, the mother of Despoina, is depicted as a seated woman, clad in a girded chiton, while a long-folded veil also covers her head. Demeter is depicted holding a long torch, a characteristic attribute of the goddess. With her left hand, she leans on Despoina's shoulder, while her head turns towards her daughter. The connection between mother and daughter is also evident in this cult group, as in Eleusis. The fact that the two deities are sharing the throne indicates the significance of their collective worship in Lykosura. Unfortunately, Despoina's head was not discovered during the excavations. However, the discovery of parts of her torso, her garments, and her attributes allows for the reconstruction of the figure.

The divine figure holds the scepter in her left hand and the *mystiké kiste* in her right. Despoina is responsible for maintaining the secrecy of the rituals, representing another aspect of Kore Persephone. The goddesses are not identical, but they share common characteristics. The attributes and the pantheism that pervades Lykosura also indicate the presence of Kore Persephone as Despoina Kore in Lykosura. It is also important to note the presence of Artemis as Despoina's sister, who, as another Hekate, is searching for her in the underworld.⁵³ Despoina is attired in a girded chiton and a long himation. The decorated garment rendered in relief has been extensively studied by scholars⁵⁴ as a symbol of the cult practices in the sanctuary (fig. 6). The various topics depicted in relief by the garment represent the multifaceted character of the cult, whose connection to the Arcadian religion will be analysed below.

It is particularly worth mentioning at this point the presence of Hermes in Lykosura and the god's direct connection with the abduction of Kore by Hades. His presence is attested to by some terracotta tablets found near Megaron depicting caduceus, the characteristic feature of Hermes, who could be considered here as a Psychopompos, an epithet of the god who leads souls to Hades. Other findings from the same area, such as terracotta snakes, also confirm the link between the Mysteries of Despoina and the underworld.⁵⁵

⁵³ The presence of Artemis is also obvious in Eleusis, because there was a temple of Artemis Propylaia.

⁵⁴ Indicative recent bibliography: Morizot 2008, 201–209; Tzachili 2016, 594–606; Tsiolis 2019, 65–83; Dimopoulou 2022a, 96–107.

⁵⁵ Lykosura Museum; Kourouniotis 1911, 68–71, figs. 70–74.



Fig. 6: Drawing reconstruction of Demeter and Despoina of the Lykosura Group with the preserved fragments

It is possible to posit an interactive relationship between the worshipped goddesses in Eleusis and Lykosura in terms of the conception of worship and its depiction. To some extent, the cult of Eleusis influenced Lykosura as a result of the needs of the local community of Megalopolis, which was responsible for the sanctuary of Despoina. In this manner, Megalopolis assumed control of the re-

ligious affairs of Lykosura with the intention of establishing a pan-Arcadian cult, which was manifested through the veneration of Despoina.⁵⁶

The characteristics of the deities associated with Demeter and Persephone, and Demeter and Despoina, are analogous. The same attributes represent the power of the symbols, thereby connecting the mythical tradition and giving both cults in parallel an agrarian and secret content. In Arcadia, the agrarian element is more pronounced due to the mountainous topography of the region, which facilitated the regrowth of the land. The existence of a female divine couple as daughter and mother, and the religious regulations pertaining to sacrifices and initiations ceremonies, have been integrated into the religion. For instance, in Lykosura, the dress code for women at the sanctuary was specified. According to the inscription from the 3rd century BC, dedicated to the goddess Despoina, purple, flower-coloured or black clothing was not permitted for dedication. Consequently, visitors to the sanctuary were prohibited from wearing these colours or garments with these decorations.⁵⁷

The character of the festival of teleté in Lykosura is not well documented due to the secrecy surrounding the ceremonies. According to the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Mysteries of Despoina might have also been celebrated in a similar way: as agrarian festivals with the revival of the myth of Despoina Kore through drómena and deiknúmena. The narration and revival of the Arcadian and Eleusinian myths in front of the initiands and the various sacrifices⁵⁸ to the goddesses Despoina and Persephone as well as the offerings for them indicate the ritual character between the two cults. Torches, kístai, fruits, and grains, which are depicted in sculptural art as instruments for specific religious practices, exemplify the specificity of this religious phenomenon. As fertility deities oversee the regeneration of the land, the triumph of life over death, and a life of blessed existence after death.

The preserved decorated marble garment from the Lykosura group, discovered in the cella of the temple of Despoina and depicted in relief, also suggests such a religious interpretation.⁵⁹ The fragment is exhibited in the Hellenic National Archaeological Museum of Athens, and it is 1.13 m high. It is divided into zones

⁵⁶ Megalopolis was already the administrative, political and financial center of Arcadia from the 4th century BC. The fees for the initiation to the cult of Despoina were probably an important financial source for the polis; see Jost 2003, 146.

⁵⁷ IG V 2, 514. See also Nilsson 1995, 345; Voutiras 1999, 233–248

⁵⁸ For example, in Eleusis, in the frame of the festivals belonged the sacrifice of a bull. According to the epigraphical evidence, in Lykosura the animals for the sacrifices must have been of white skin. Burkert 1993, 585; IG V 2, 514.

⁵⁹ For the first studies on the garment, see Guidi 1921/22, 97–115; Wace 1934, 107–111.

depicting figures and ornaments. The various zones illustrate different topics related to Despoina's cult and rituals in the sanctuary. Consequently, we observe ornaments, eagles and thunderbolts, olive leaves and fruits, Tritons, Nereids, dolphins and a *kétos* from the zone of the 'marine thiasos'. Furthermore, in the lower part of the garment, Nikai are depicted carrying censers.⁶⁰ At the bottom of the garment, we see the so-called 'Animal zone'. This zone features figures, some of whom are depicted on animal masks, and they are leading a dance ritual procession probably before the initiation to the mysteries.⁶¹

The iconographic interpretation of the garment zones has been shown to be related to the local Arcadian cult at Lykosura, as evidenced by the topics depicted on each zone, the depicted scenes and figurative illustrations, which are connected to various deities representing different aspects of the mystery cult at Lykosura. The distinct subject matter of each zone and its association with the cult of gods in Arcadia establishes a connection between the garment and a deity. By examining the details of the decorations, it is possible to gain insight into the various aspects of the cult of Despoina (fig. 7).

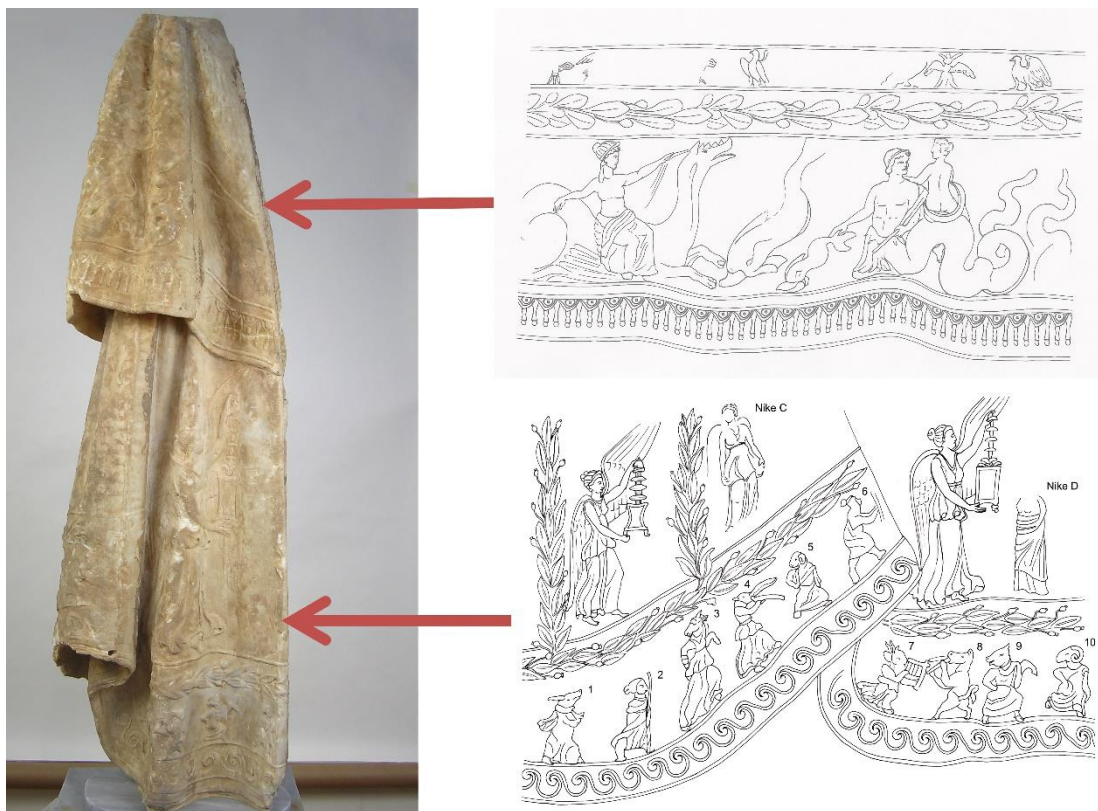


Fig. 7: Decorated garment of Despoina of the Lykosura Group

⁶⁰ For another interpretation on what Nikai are carrying, see Gasparini 2008, 39–47.

⁶¹ For the reconstruction of the garment, see Dimopoulou 2022a, 96–107.

The eagles and thunderbolts, for example, in the second zone of the upper part of the garment attest to the presence of Zeus in Arcadia. Zeus was the most venerated god on Mount Lykaion, and it is known from ancient sources that his cult was widespread in the Peloponnese.⁶² Kore Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter and in this way Despoina may be interpreted as another Kore, as previously mentioned, although the local tradition refers to her as the daughter of Poseidon and Demeter.⁶³ The hypothesis that mythical connections between Zeus Demeter Kore, and Poseidon Demeter Despoina, are reflected in the representation of Zeus's as well as Poseidon's symbols on the garment is also conceivable.

In the central zone, the figure of the Nikai, depicted as a flying figure holding censers as cult objects, can be related to the ritual procession during the *teleté* at Lykosura. The zone allows for a variety of iconographic interpretations, as it dominates the garment and emphasises its religious character. The Nikai, who also represent the victory of life, nature and its vegetation at Lykosura, are related to Demeter and Despoina as the goddesses of nature and fertility. A similar religious characterisation can be observed in Eleusis. Demeter and Persephone represent the power of nature and the happiness derived from its regrowth. If we accept that Despoina, the daughter of Poseidon and another Kore of Demeter, was also connected to the underworld as Persephone, then the presence of the Nikai on the garment symbolises the life and rebuilding of nature. As daughter and mother, whose relationship to Megale Meter was undoubtedly strong, they were responsible for the fertility of the land and its fruits.⁶⁴

The human beings depicted on the bottom of the garment, who accompanied the goddesses at Lykosura, depicted as animal-headed figures, can also be paralleled with the myth of Demeter and Despoina.⁶⁵ For example, the equine masks are closely connected to the cult of Poseidon Hippios at Lykosura.⁶⁶ It is important to note that a further shared characteristic of the two cults is the presence of the cult dance motif on the garment. Dance and music were of particular importance prior to the initiation process and the sacrifices made in honour of

⁶² Paus. 8,2,1.

⁶³ Paus. 8,37, 9-10.

⁶⁴ An altar of Megale Meter existed in front of the temple of Despoina, as well as altars of Demeter and Despoina.

⁶⁵ About the figures, see also Rathmayr 2018, 164; Walcek-Averett 2019, 168-177.

⁶⁶ Paus. 8,37,9. The *Perieget* mentions the existence of an altar to Poseidon Hippios at Lykosura as Despoina's father. About Poseidon's cult in Peloponnese, see Mylonopoulos 2003.

the deities in both Eleusis and Lykosura. The ritual dance contributed to a deeper connection to the divine, both mental and psychic.⁶⁷

It is evident that the various cult faces of Demeter were consistently linked to enigmatic and clandestine practices, as illustrated by the numerous bynames of the goddess. These bynames serve to demonstrate her profound connection to the realm of mystery cults and traditions. For example, Demeter Melaina was originally a Despoina (Mistress) of the underworld, representing the paired aspect of Poseidon. This later evolved into a chthonian divine of fertility.⁶⁸ Consequently, it can be posited that Demeter's role as an underworld deity can be identified with that of Persephone, and it is also conceivable that Demeter may have represented another aspect of Persephone in the past, which was worshipped under various epithets in various regions together or without Kore.

4. Religious phenomena in Eleusis and Lykosura under interdisciplinary aspects

In an effort to interpret religious phenomena through cult activities, it is necessary to consider a number of factors. These include the individual and collective religious psychology of the participants and the social, philosophical and theological background. In order to define the term 'mysteries' in relation to Eleusis and Lykosura, it would be beneficial to first elucidate the concepts of 'cult', 'religion' and 'ritual'. In the words of R. N. Orjiukwu, the term "cult" is used to describe ritual practices that are conducted by a specific public or a ritual object, such as a deity, spirit, or material object. These practices are carried out through formal rites.⁶⁹ M. Riesebrodt defines cult as the base for religious phenomena, while E. Durkheim defines religion as "beliefs, that are always held by a defined collectivity that professes them and practices the rites that go with them."⁷⁰ In her contribution, "Cult in the Study of Religion and Archaeology," L. B. Christensen discusses the term "cult" not only in the context of religion but also in archaeology. The author concludes that the term "cult" is not easily defined and that it is difficult to use as a term in classical archaeology and philology because it is often considered synonymous with "religion" and the worship of the gods. This association is based on the idea that cults are primarily actions rather than beliefs.⁷¹

⁶⁷ See also Dimopoulou 2022a, 192–198. For the meaning of the dresses in the Eleusinian Mysteries, see Rassia 2023, 107–118. For the meaning of music and dance in the Mysteries, see Papaioannou et. al. 2011; Erez - Yodfat 2021, 11.

⁶⁸ Papachatzis 2004, 371, note 5. Paus. 8,42, 1–2.

⁶⁹ Orjiukwu 2013, 121.

⁷⁰ Riesebrodt 2007, 136; Durkheim 2001, 163.

⁷¹ Christensen 2009, 13, 16.

Rituals are typically understood as acts with a distinctive character. They may include sacrifices, rites of passage such as birth, burial or wedding customs, festivals and traditions that are not necessarily connected to a religion or worship. It is evident that rituals can be integrated into cults or religions, yet they are not always a part of them. E. Kyriakidis's approach to the definition of 'ritual' enables discourses on how we can interpret the ritual practices in Eleusis and Lykosura within the context of a social and cognitive scale of a group or individual. In the author's view, "ritual is an etic category that refers to set activities with a special (non-normal) intention-in-action, and which are specific to a group or people." In this context, ritual is often associated with religion.⁷²

In order to ascertain whether one can speak of 'Cult Mysteries' with ritual practices in the context of a sacred cult, including religious beliefs in the case of Eleusis and Lykosura, it is necessary to examine the nature of the cult under various parameters. For example, W. Burkert defines 'Mysteries' as being "of a voluntary, personal and secret character that aimed at a change of mind through experience of the sacred".⁷³ The Greek word *mysterion* is derived from the verb *myó*, meaning to initiate in something secret that is unspoken and forbidden to be revealed. The secret character of the Eleusinian cult is evidenced by the regulations pertaining to the *myesis* stages. Unfortunately, there is no further evidence available regarding the initiation process and its actual content for Lykosura. It is challenging to elucidate the rationale behind the designation of specific cults as "secret." The religious phenomena in question can only be explained in terms of ideologies and aspects that have probably been created through mythical traditions and influences between the members of a community or polis.

The revival of a deity or divine being is mainly based on oral tradition, in which its representation is accompanied by certain attributes (such as the thunderbolt of Zeus, the quiver and dog of Artemis, etc.) that not only serve to recognise and identify it but also help us to understand the practice of the corresponding cult. The mythical tradition that accompanied this deity was mainly revived through festivals, sacrifices, or ceremonies with a religious and cultic character. The cult was integrated into the religion, and there was an interaction between them. While the cult was part of a religion in a more specific way, the rituals were not obligatory parts of a cult. The public cults were related to religious beliefs, but there were also cults with a secret character, the content of which was only familiar to a special group of people, the so-called *mystai*.⁷⁴

⁷² Kyriakidis 2007, 294.

⁷³ Burkert 1987, 11.

⁷⁴ Another representative example of *myesis* took place in the Kabeirian Mysteries in Samothrace.

While the absence of archaeological evidence for the ritual practices is regrettable, other forms of evidence allow us to gain insight into the nature of the cult. The terracotta animal-headed statuettes, as well as the ceramic snakes that were discovered in Megaron in Lykosura, provide evidence of a ritual activity within the sanctuary.⁷⁵ It can be observed that secret cults have historically been accompanied by rituals, the practice of which has been reserved for members of the group who have already been initiated or who wish to be initiated. The fact that anyone who wished to could participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries demonstrates the liberal character of the cult: regardless of religious beliefs, social classes, genders, demos or phyle, the Mysteries welcomed all. However, in Lykosura the cult had a local character and attracted people mostly from Peloponnese, and it was not as widespread as in Eleusis.

A further examination of the social and psychological background of both worships, from the perspectives of the individual and collective sense, reveals significant issues that warrant further study of mystery cults with an initiation stage. It is noteworthy that every citizen was permitted to participate in the myesis procedure in Eleusis, including those who were not Greek.⁷⁶ The cult of Demeter and Kore was practised beyond Greek boundaries, and initiands shared common visual experiences during the secret ceremony. This indirectly compelled them to keep the regulations of myesis secret, and somehow affirmed the common sense of responsibility against god. A variety of social groups participated in a festival that countered discriminatory and stereotypical attitudes towards political, religious, and philosophical matters. I concur with the viewpoint expressed by Kyriakidis that "the repeated performance of the rituals can strengthen the membership to an umbrella society."⁷⁷ The same objective has been attained by both the Eleusinian and Lykosurian cults: the sharing of collective experiences between the members through the common memory during the ritual practice could only unite rather than divide them. It seems reasonable to suggest that a psychic and mental connection was established as a result of a cognitive understanding of the rituals.

In order to interpret the cognitive procedure during myesis and its connection to the sensitive and rational power of the soul, it is necessary to consider the theories expressed by Aristotle in his work *Peri Psyches* (On the Soul/De Anima). In the philosopher's view, the soul is comprised of three parts: the vegetative, the sensitive and the rational. The sensitive soul is capable of experiencing sensations, while the rational soul is able to utilise *skepsis* to compare impres-

⁷⁵ Kourouniotis 1912, 156–159, figs. 23–35.

⁷⁶ Leventi 2010, 111–112.

⁷⁷ Kyriakidis 2007, 294.

sions. It can be argued that the soul does not exist without impressions.⁷⁸ The classification of impressions is significantly influenced by memory. The soul recalls the impressions of the past (phantasm) as mental images that have been constructed from sensations and transforms them into experiences in the present. This implies that the mind generates the immaterial impressions as a conduit for emotional states, such as joy or sadness. In this manner, knowledge is transmitted through the activation of sensation images by the mind and intellect.⁷⁹ The prevailing theories posit that active participation in the myesis stages and the collective impressions that have been taken up by the *mystai* engendered a sense of happiness and mental exaltation. The common impressions were transformed into common experiences, which led the initiands to a higher cognitive level and a mystical communion with the divine element. Furthermore, the collective experience led to an enhanced cognitive capacity, not only at the group level but also at the individual level. They were part of a secret and unspoken entity. The passions of Demeter were transformed into individual and collective passions among the members of this religious community.⁸⁰

It is my contention that the fear factor also played a significant role in this secret commitment between human and the divine. The rituals of the mysteries, as mentioned above, consisted of acts that were seen, done and said. The concealment of the content of these acts, not only in the Eleusinian but also in the Kabeirian Mysteries, was basically out of respect for the deities. The celebration of the mysteries usually took place at night, illuminated by torches or lamps. This atmosphere created an inner fear in the would-be initiates, who were mentally and spiritually affected and thus bound by an inner vow of silence about what they saw or heard. As Erez-Yodfat observes in his study on the senses of initiates in mystery cults: "Ritual silence and stillness are most notably associated with the Eleusinian rites, where the initiates imitated the acts of Demeter, and sat silently on a stool with their head covered",⁸¹ the total identification of the initiate with the passions of the Goddess served to validate the profound sense of fear experienced during the initiation rite and afterwards. This collective sentiment bound all participants to each other during ritual *drómena*.

In addition to the social and mental effects, the purification of the soul and the collateralisation of an afterlife death were key factors in determining the content of the Mysteries as a metaphysical phenomenon. The joy and happiness experienced by Persephone upon her ascent to the world of the living had a symbolic

⁷⁸ Aristot. *de anima*, 402b 14–16; Sarimichailidou 2013, 71–72.

⁷⁹ Aristot. *de anima*, 414b 4–5; 430a 11–20.

⁸⁰ About individuals in the Eleusinian Mysteries, see Patera 2019, 669–694.

⁸¹ Erez-Yodfat 2021, 9.

significance for the *mystai*. The soteriological character of the entire mystery process (salvation of the soul) is reflected in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter: “*holbios*, that is to say, he who has seen the Mysteries is blessed”.⁸² The eschatological content of the Mysteries proved to be a significant draw for visitors to Eleusis. A number of ancient Greek authors devoted their attention to the interpretation of *myesis* and the significance of this concept is reflected in their respective works. For instance, in *Panegyricus*, Isocrates posits that those initiated into the Mysteries can only hope for a better life after death.⁸³ Plato was also one of the most significant philosophers to be influenced by the Eleusinian Mysteries, as he was also initiated. For instance, in his *Phaedon* dialogue, the philosopher posits that *soteria*, or salvation, can only be achieved through *myesis*. This is the belief that those who die without being initiated will be punished in Hades.⁸⁴ A particularly intriguing theory put forth by Plato, which contributes to the eschatological interpretation of the Eleusinian cult, can be found in *Res publica*. In this work, the author compares the blissful existence of the *mystai* in Hades with that of the uninitiated.⁸⁵ In his work *Ranae* (Frogs), Aristophanes presents the initiates of Demeter and Persephone as dancing and singing figures, who are subsequently blessed in the underworld after the *myesis*.⁸⁶

The knowledge of the secret content of the Mysteries in the worship of Demeter Persephone Kore and Demeter Despoina Kore had a common goal: to imbue those who desired initiation with a sense of blessing and to simultaneously bestow upon them the material wealth and the euphoria that would be theirs in the afterlife. The mythological visualisation and the *teleté*, the ritual practices and religious activities collectively contributed to the sense of shared fate among all participants. The souls of the initiates were thus rescued and granted a fair place in the underworld. In this way, Hades was intended to represent another form of existence, a prospect of continuing life after death, in which the underworld was not the ultimate destination. Despite the apparent contradiction between the concepts of the underworld and death, it can be argued that life does not end. The concept of the *psyche* remains intact, and the names no longer elicit fear. Persephone is the personification of the regrowth, the revival of the landscape, the joy of life and immortality. The initiates equally venerate the *Despoinai*, the Mistresses of the Temples of Eleusis and Lykosura.⁸⁷

⁸² Hymn. Hom., 480–482.

⁸³ Isokr. Paneg. 28–29.

⁸⁴ Plat. Phaid. 69c.

⁸⁵ Plat. rep. 363C–363D.

⁸⁶ Aristoph. Ran. 448–459.

⁸⁷ For the Eleusinian Cult see also Rohde 2010, 279–300. For the meaning of the names of Hades and Persephone, see Plat. Krat. 403b–403d; 404d. The notion that Demeter and her

The festive atmosphere during the Mysteries is exemplified by the decorated garment of Despoina in Lykosura. As a medium of cult practices, the garment served to convey the visualisation of the religious and cult messages through the depicted topics. The figurative and various illustrated scenes reflect the local Arcadian religious tradition. It can be argued that the garment functions as an indirect communication with the divine element, invading the subconscious of the participants. In this way, the garment functioned as a narrative medium of the religious tradition in Lykosura, conveying a sense of euphoria to the initiands.⁸⁸ The initiation was a festival that united people under a common religious belief: the individual who has seen and continues to be blessed after his death is blessed. The promise of an eternal life was a verifiable fact.

5. Conclusions

The present work offers a synthetic and comparative study of the two sanctuaries and cults of Eleusis and Lykosura from a multifaceted perspective that contributes not only to the archaeological, but also to the philosophical and psychological study of mystery cults. Eleusis may monopolise the interest of researchers, but a comparative study with Lykosura can contribute to further reflection and research on whether there is ultimately an interactivity between the respective cults throughout Greece and beyond.

The architectural layout and specific structures at both sites indicate that the cult places influenced the collective sense of the initiands through the sharing of common religious experiences. The religious phenomena of Eleusis and Lykosura, as well as the cult of the divine pairs of Demeter Persephone Kore and Demeter Despoina Kore, have been established as 'mystery cults' through the ritual practices observed during teleté. The social, psychological and religious context of these cult practices leads us to the conclusion that there is an interactive relationship between human and divine elements. Lykosura can be indirectly considered as another Eleusis, albeit with a distinct local character that was adapted to meet the specific needs of the local Arcadian community. Regardless of whether we are discussing of the Eleusinian Demeter, the Eleusinian Persephone, or Demeter and Despoina of Lykosura, the objective was to

daughter were equally consecrated is obvious in Lykosura as mentioned above, because the goddesses shared the same throne and were depicted as a divine couple.

⁸⁸ A real garment was probably worn by a priestess during the Mysteries as a garment of hieratic character.

integrate the religious beliefs related to the mythical tradition into cults, thereby creating a secret and mysterious character (fig. 8).

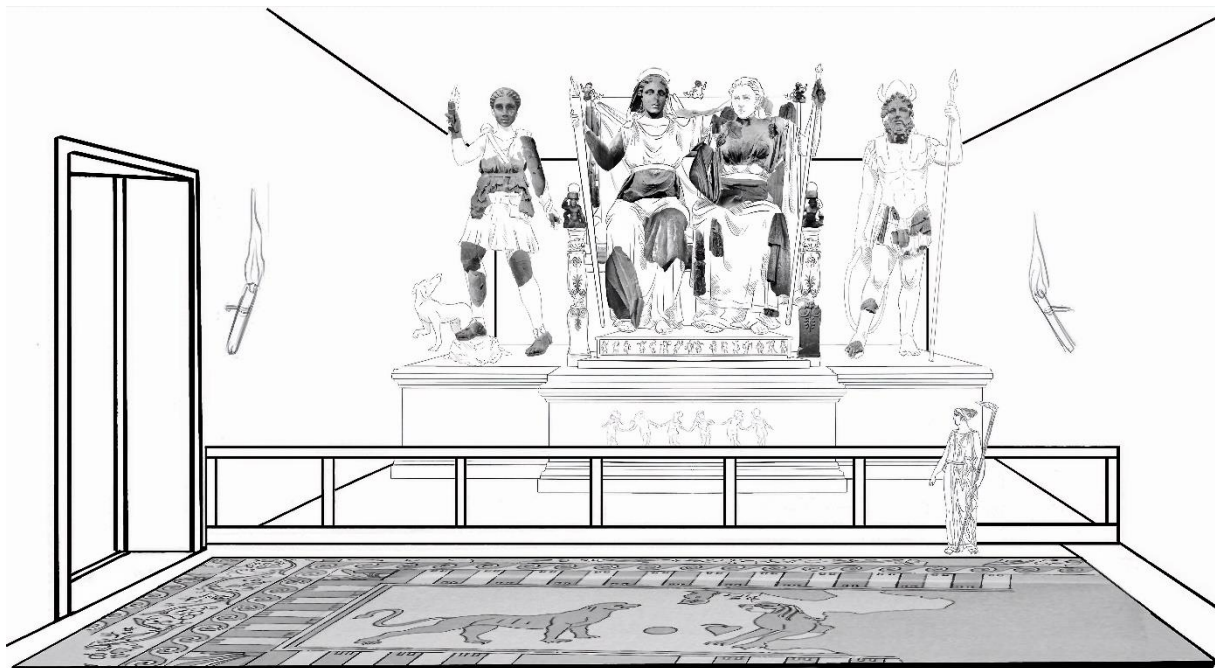


Fig. 8: Drawing reconstruction of the Cult Group in the cella of the Temple of Despoina

Bibliography

Andronikos, Manolis (1994), *VERGINA II. The 'Tomb of Persephone'* (Athens: Βιβλιοθήκη της εν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας, Bd. 142).

Billot, Marie Françoise (2008), *Le Temple de Despoina*, *Ktema* 33, 135–180.

Burkert, Walter (1987), *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge/Massachusetts/London: Harvard University Press).

Burkert, Walter (1993), *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer).

Carbon, Jan-Mathieu / Clackson, James P.T (2016), *Arms and the Boy: On the new Festival Calendar from Arkadia*, *Kernos* 29, 119–158.

Christensen, Lisbeth Bredholt (2009), "Cult" in the study of Religion and Archaeology": *Aspects of Ancient Greek Cult. Context, Ritual and Iconography* (eds. Jesper Tae Jensen / George Hinge / Peter Schultz / Bronwen Wickkiser; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press) 13–28.

Clinton, Kevin (1992), *Myth and Cult: The iconography of the Eleusinian mysteries: The Martin P. Nilsson Lectures on Greek Religion*, delivered 19–21 November 1990 at the Swedish Institute at Athens (Stockholm: Paul Astroms).

Clinton, Kevin (2003), *Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries: Greek Mysteries. The archeology and ritual of ancient Greek secret cults* (ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos; London: Routledge) 50–73.

Dickins, Guy (1906/07), *Damophon of Messene*, *BSA* 13, 357–404.

Dimopoulou, Sotiria (2022a), *Die Kultbildgruppe im Heiligtum der Despoina zu Lykosura*; PhD thesis, University of Münster (Baden-Baden: Ergon).

Dimopoulou, Sotiria (2022b), *Pausanias: traveller, pilgrim, journalist, or researcher of Antiquity? The case of Lykosura and the visit to the temple of Despoina in Arcadia: People on the move across the Greek World* (eds. Chiara Maria Mauro / Diego Chapinal-Heras / Miriam Valdés-Guía; Madrid: UAM Ediciones) 171–186.

Dimopoulou, Sotiria (2024), *Η μορφή του Ανύτου από την ομάδα της Λυκόσουρας: Archaeological Work in the Peloponnese 3 (AWOP 3). Proceedings of the 3rd International Scientific Meeting, Kalamata 2–5 June 2021* (eds. Maria Xanthopoulou / Eugenia Giannouli / Eleni Zumi / Aimilia Mpanou / Chrysanthi Papadopoulou; Kalamata: University of Peloponnese) 323–331.

Dimopoulou, Sotiria (forthcoming), *Religious mobility and the visualization of Myth: mystery cults, festivals and drómena as a means of religious dissemination*, *ARYS* 23.

Durkheim, Émile (2001), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Erez-Yodfat, Noga (2021), *Senses and the Embodied Mind of the Initiate in Ancient Mystery Cults*, *New Classicists* 5, 2–22.

Gasparini, Valentino (2008), *Altaria o candelabra? Aspetti materiali del culto die Iside illuminati dalla testimonianza di Apuleio: Bibliotheca Isiaca I* (ed. Laurent Bricault; Bordeaux: Ausonius) 39–47.

Gruben, Gottfried (1966), *Die Tempel der Griechen* (Munich: Hirmer).

Guidi, Giacomo (1921/22), La Decorazione del Manto di Despoina nel Gruppo di Damofonte di Messene, *ASAtene* 4/5, 97–115.

Guimier-Sorbets, Anne Marie / Panagiotopoulou, Anastasia (2008), La Mosaïque du temple de Despoina à Lykosura, *Ktema* 33, 191–200.

Fuchs, Werner (1969), *Die Skulptur der Griechen* (Munich: Hirmer).

Heinrichs, Johannes (2015), Military Integration in Late Archaic Arcadia: New Evidence from a Bronze Pinax (c. 500 BC) of the Lykaion: The Many Faces of War in the Ancient World (eds. Waldemar Heckel / Sabine Müller / Graham Wrightson; Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing) 1–89.

Hellmann, Marie Christine (2008), Le Mégaron de Lykosura, *Ktema* 33, 181–190.

Izenour, George C. (1992), *Roofed Theatres of Classical Antiquity* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press).

Jost, Madeleine (1975), Statuettes de Bronze de Lykosura, *BCH* 99,1, 339–364.

Jost, Madeleine (1985), *Sanctuaires et Cultes d'Arcadie* (Études péloponnésiques 9; Paris: Vrin).

Jost, Madeleine (2003), Mystery Cults in Arcadia: The Archeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Cults (ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos; London: Routledge) 143–168.

Jost, Madeleine / Palamidis, Alaya (2020), Points de vue sur Lykosoura. Retour sur le sanctuaire de Despoina, *Kernos* 33, 127–140.

(ed.) Kahil, Lilly (1981), *LIMC I 1*, Bd. 1 (Zurich/Munich: Artemis and Winkler).

Kaltsas, Nikolaos (2002), *Sculpture in the National Archaeological Museum* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications).

Kaoura, Iulia (2024), *Das Telesterion von Eleusis im Wandel. Erste Versuche zur Eroberung des überdachten Theaterraums*; PhD thesis, Humboldt University of Berlin (Rahden/Westf.: Tübinger Archäologischer Forschungen 41).

Klauser, Florian (2016), *Altbekanntes neu kombiniert. Die Kistophoren und die sog. Kleinen Propyläen in Eleusis: Im Schatten der Alten? Ideal und Lebens-*

wirklichkeit im römischen Griechenland (eds. Johannes Fouquet / Lydia Gaitanou; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz) 143–158.

Klauser, Florian (2018), *Altbekanntes neu kombiniert. Die Kistophoren und die sog. Kleinen Propyläen in Eleusis – Eine Neubewertung des archäologischen Befundes: Γλυπτική και κοινωνία στη Ρωμαϊκή Ελλάδα: καλλιτεχνικά προϊόντα, κοινωνικές προβολές* (eds. Pavlina Karanastasi / Theodosia Stefanidou-Tiveriou / Dimitris Damaskos; Thessaloniki: University Studio Press) 53–65.

Kobusch, Philipp (2022), *Der Innenraum hellenistischer Tempel. Ein Ort rituellen und sozialen Handels* (Wiesbaden: Reichert).

Kourouniotis, Konstantinos (1911), *Κατάλογος μουσείου Λυκόσουρας* (Athens: Η εν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογική Εταιρεία).

Kourouniotis, Konstantinos (1912), *Τὸ ἐν Λυκοσοῦρα Μέγαρον τῆς Δεσποίνης*, *AEphem* 1912, 142–161.

Kyriakidis, Evangelos (2007), *Archaeologies of Ritual: The Archaeology of Ritual* (ed. Evangelos Kyriakidis; Los Angeles: UCLA Publications) 289–308.

Leonardos, Vasilios (1896), *Ἀνασκαφαὶ τοῦ ἐν Λυκοσοῦρα ἱεροῦ τῆς Δεσποίνης*, *Prakt* 1896, 95–126.

Leventi, Iphigeneia (2010), *Η Ελευσινιακή λατρεία στην περιφέρεια του ελληνικού κόσμου: Το αναθηματικό ανάγλυφο από το Παντικάπαιο“: Ιερά και λατρείες της Δήμητρας στον αρχαίο ελληνικό κόσμο* (eds. Iphigeneia Leventi / Christina Mitsopoulou: Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συμποσίου, Βόλος, 4-5 Ιουνίου 2005; Volos: University of Thessaly) 111–136.

Lévy, Edmond / Marcadé, Jean (1972), *Au Musée de Lykosura*, *BCH* 96, 967–1003.

Marantou, Eleni (2024), *Exploring the Sacred Landscape of the Ancient Peloponnese* (Oxford: Archaeopress).

Mattern, Thorsten (2007), *Griechische Kultbildschranken*, *AM* 122, 139–159.

Melfi, Milena (2016), *Damophon of Messene in the Ionian Coast of Greece: Making, Re-making and Updating Cult Statues in the Second Century BC: Hellenistic Sanctuaries. Between Greece and Rome* (Milena Melfi / Olympia Bobou; Oxford: Oxford University Press) 82–105.

Morizot, Yvette (2008), *La draperie de Despoina*, *Ktema* 33, 201–209.

Mylonopoulos, Ioannis (2003), *Heiligtümer und Kulte des Poseidon auf der Peloponnes* (Liège: Kernos, suppl. 13).

Mylonopoulos, Ioannis (2011), *Divine Images behind Bars. The Semantic of Barriers in Greek Temples: Current approaches to religion in ancient Greece* (Matthew Haysom / Jenny Wallensten; Papers presented at a symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 17–19 April, 2008; Stockholm: Stockholm University) 269–291.

Nilsson, Martin Persson (1940), *Greek Popular Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press).

Nilsson, Martin Persson (1995), *Griechische Feste von religiöser Bedeutung* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner).

Orjiukwu, Remigius N. (2013), *Eine philosophische Anthropologie der Religion: zur Frage des Wesens der Religion und ihrer Wurzel in der Natur des Menschen*; PhD thesis, University of Würzburg (Würzburg: OPUS University of Würzburg).

Palamidis, Alaya (2018), *The Sanctuary of Despoina at Lykosoura: A Megalopolitan Creation?: Arkadien im Altertum. Geschichte und Kultur einer antiken Gebirgslandschaft* (ed. Klaus Tausend; Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums in Graz, Österreich, 11. bis 13. Februar; Graz: Unipress) 127–152.

Papachatzis, Nikolaos (2004), *Παυσανίου Ελλάδος Περιήγησις, Ἀχαικὰ - Ἀρκαδικὰ* (repr. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon).

Papaioannou, Christina / Mouratidou, Katerina / Mouratidis, Giannis / Douka, Stella (2011), *Association of dance with sacred rituals in ancient Greece. The case of Eleusinian Mysteries*, *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism*, 18, 3, 233–239.

Papazoi, Elli (forthcoming), *Heiligtümer und Kulte weiblicher Gottheiten im antiken Arkadien. Ein Beitrag zur Kulttopographie von der geometrischen bis zur hellenistischen Zeit*; PhD thesis, University of Graz.

Patera, Ioanna (2019), *Individuals in the Eleusinian Mysteries: choices and actions: Religious individualisation. Historical dimensions and comparative perspectives* (eds. Martin Fuchs / Antje Linkenbach / Martin Mulsow / Bernd Christian Otto / Rahul Bjørn Parson / Jörg Rüpke; Berlin: De Gruyter) 669–694.

Peschlow-Bindokat, Anneliese (1972), Demeter und Persephone in der attischen Kunst des 6. bis 4. Jahrhunderts, *JdI* 87, 60–157.

Rassia, Aikaterini Iliana (2023), Flowing white dresses for dancing initiates in the Mysteries of Eleusis: Textiles in Motion: Dress for Dance in the Ancient World (ed. Audrey Gouy; Ancient Textiles Series, 41; Oxford: Oxbow Books) 107–118.

Rathmayr, Elisabeth (2018), Mysterien und Kult der Despoina in Lykosura im Licht der archäologischen und epigraphischen Befunde und Funde: Geschichte und Kultur einer antiken Gebirgslandschaft (ed. Klaus Tausend; Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums in Graz, Österreich, 11. bis 13. Februar; Graz: Unipress) 153–173.

(ed.) Richardson, Nicolas James (1974), *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Riesebrodt, Martin (2007), *Cultus und Heilversprechen: Eine Theorie der Religionen* (Munich: C. H. Beck).

Rohde, Erwin (2010), *Psyche. Seelenkult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Rüdiger, Jens (2019), *Eleusis in topografischer und bauarchitektonischer Betrachtung*; Master-Thesis, University of Salzburg.

Salzmann, Dieter (1982), *Untersuchungen zu den antiken Kieselmosaiken. Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Tesseratechnik* (Archäologische Forschungen, Band 10; Berlin: Gebr. Mann).

Sarimichailidou, Fotini (2013), *Αριστοτελική Μεταφυσική. Οι γνωσιοθεωρητικές και ηθικοψυχολογικές προεκτάσεις της*; Master Thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Thessaloniki: OPUS Aristotle University).

Serafini, Tommaso (2019), Telesterion: Contributo alla Definizione di una Tipologia Architettónica e Funzionale, *ASAtene* 97, 130–156.

Sporn, Katja (2015), Rituale im griechischen Tempel. Überlegungen zur Funktion von Tempelrampen: Ein Minoer im Exil. *Festschrift für Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier* (eds. Diamantis Panagiotopoulos / Ivonne Kaiser / Ourania Kouka; Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie 270; Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt) 349–374.

Stewart, Andrew (1990), *Greek Sculpture. An Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Themelis, Petros (1993), *Ο Δαμοφών και η δραστηριότητά του στην Αρκαδία: Sculpture from Arcadia and Laconia* (eds. Olga Palaggia / William Coulson; Proceedings of an International Conference held at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, April 10-14; Oxford: Oxbow Books) 99–109.

Themelis, Petros (1996), *Damophon: Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture* (eds. Olga Palaggia / Jordan Jerome Pollitt; Cambridge; Cambridge University Press) 154–185.

Tsiolis, Vasilis (2002), *Damofón, Sosigénes, y la introducción de los Misterios Eleusinos en Megalópolis*, *Eutopia: Rivista di studi sull' Europa antica* 1, 7–32.

Tsiolis, Vasilis (2019), *La indumentaria divina como vehículo de propaganda política y social. Reflexiones desde Arcadia*, *ARYS* 17, 65–83.

Tzachili, Iris (2016), *Υφάσματα και σύμβολα στη Λυκόσουρα της Αρκαδίας τον 2^ο αι. π.Χ.: Τμητικός Τόμος για τη Στέλλα Δρούγου* (eds. Mimika Giannopoulou / Chrysanthi Kallini; *Ηχάδιν II*; Athens: Ταμείο Αρχαιολογικών Πόρων και Απαλλοτριώσεων) 594–606.

Voutiras, Emmanuel (1999), *Opfer für Despoina: Zur Kultsatzung des Heiligtums von Lykosura IG V 2, 514*, *Chiron* 29, 233–248.

Wace, Alan J. B. (1934), *The veil of Despoina*, *AJA* 38, 107–111.

Walcek-Averett, Erin (2019), *Theriomorphic Figures in Hellenistic and Roman Arcadia: Nostalgia and Ritual: Hellenistic and Roman Terracottas*: (eds. Giorgos Papantoniou / Demetrios Michaelides / Maria Dikomitou-Eliadou; *Monumenta Graeca et Romana Bd. 23*; Leiden/Boston: Brill) 165–179.

List of figures

Fig. 1: Telesterion. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development. Ephorate of Antiquities of West Attica. Photo: Ephorate of Antiquities of West Attica.

Fig. 2: Graphic reconstruction of Despoina's sanctuary at Lykosura. Graphic: I. Georgiadis after A. Likakis in: Leonardos 1896.

Fig. 3: Sanctuary of Despoina at Lykosura. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development. Ephorate of Antiquities of Arcadia. Photo: S. Dimopoulou.

Fig. 4: Kistophoros Figure in Eleusis. Photo adapted from Klauser 2016.

Fig. 5: Tritoness from the decoration of the throne of the Lykosura Cult Group. Athens, National Archaeological Museum inv. no. 2175. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development. Photo: S. Dimopoulou.

Fig. 6: Drawing reconstruction of Demeter and Despoina of the Lykosura Group with the preserved fragments. © S. Dimopoulou.

Fig. 7: Decorated garment of Despoina of the Lykosura Group. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 1737. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development. Photo: National Museum of Athens; Drawing reconstruction of the upper part of the garment of Despoina. © S. Dimopoulou. Drawing reconstruction of the lower part of the garment of Despoina. © S. Dimopoulou.

Fig. 8: Drawing reconstruction of the Cult Group in the cella of the Temple of Despoina. Mosaic adapted from Leonardos 1896. © S. Dimopoulou.

Dr. Sotiria Dimopoulou
Esperantoweg 8
58332 Schwelm
E-Mail: sotiriadimopoulou@yahoo.de