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978-1-107-01099-4 - Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries

Michael B. Cosmopoulos

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## BRONZE AGE ELEUSIS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

For more than one thousand years, people from every corner of the Greco-Roman world sought the hope for a blessed afterlife through initiation into the Mysteries of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. In antiquity itself and in our memory of antiquity, the Eleusinian Mysteries stand out as the oldest and most venerable mystery cult.

Despite the tremendous popularity of the Eleusinian Mysteries, their origins are unknown. Because they are lost in an era without written records, they can only be reconstructed with the help of archaeology. This book provides a much-needed synthesis of the archaeology of Eleusis during the Bronze Age and reconstructs the formation and early development of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The discussion of the origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries is complemented with discussions of the theology of Demeter and an update on the state of research in the archaeology of Eleusis from the Bronze Age to the end of antiquity.

Michael B. Cosmopoulos is Professor of Archaeology and holder of the endowed Chair in Greek Studies at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. He has published fifteen books and more than one hundred scholarly papers on Greek archaeology, history, and religion. He has excavated at several sites in Greece, including Mycenae, Epidaurus, Corinth, Ithaca, Oropos, Pylos, and Eleusis. Currently he is the director of the excavations at Iklaina. He has received numerous research and teaching awards, including the Rh Award for Outstanding Contributions to Social Sciences and the Humanities and the Archaeological Institute of America Award for Excellence in Teaching. He is a National Geographic Society Explorer and a Fellow of the Academy of Science St. Louis.

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MICHAEL B. COSMOPOULOS

University of Missouri, St. Louis



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*For Debbie*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ὦς ἔφατ'. οὐδ' ἀπίθησεν εὐστέφανος Δημήτηρ:  
 αἶψα δὲ καρπὸν ἀνήκεν ἀρουράων ἐριβώλων:  
 πᾶσα δὲ φύλλοισίν τε καὶ ἄνθεσιν εὐρεῖα χθῶν  
 ἔβρισ': ἦ δὲ κιοῦσα θεμιστοπόλοισ βασιλεῦσι  
 δεῖξεν Τριπτολέμω τε Διοκλεῖ τε πληξίππῳ  
 Εὐμόλπου τε βίη Κελεῶ θ' ἡγήτορι λαῶν  
 δρημοσύνην θ' ἱερῶν καὶ ἐπέφραδεν ὄργια πᾶσι,  
 Τριπτολέμω τε Πολυξεῖνῳ, ἐπὶ τοῖς δὲ Διοκλεῖ  
 σεμνά, τά τ' οὐπῶς ἔστι παρεξίμεν οὔτε πυθέσθαι  
 οὔτ' ἀχέειν: μέγα γάρ τι θεῶν σέβας ἰσχάνει αὐδὴν.  
 ὄλβιος, ὃς τὰδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων:  
 ὃς δ' ἀτελής ἱερῶν ὃς τ' ἄμμορος, οὔποθ' ὁμοίων  
 αἴσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἠερόεντι

So [Rhea] spoke and beautifully crowned Demeter did not disobey;  
 Quickly she sprouted fruit from the fertile fields,  
 And filled the whole wide earth with foliage and flowers;  
 After she went, to the kings who administer justice,  
 Triptolemos and Diokles, the driver of horses,  
 and to mighty Eumolpos and Keleos, leader of the people,  
 she showed the performance of her holy rites and taught to them  
 all her secret rituals,  
 to Triptolemos and Polyxeinos and Diokles also –  
 awful rituals, which are impossible to breach or to learn  
 or to talk about: for deep awe of the gods checks the voice.  
 Happy is he among mortal men who has seen these rituals;  
 but he who has not been initiated and who has no part in them,  
 will never share such things  
 after he disappears under the murky darkness

(Homeric Hymn to Demeter, 470–482)

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Michael B. Cosmopoulos

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	page xi
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Abbreviations (Other than Bibliographic)</i>	xvii
INTRODUCTION	I
<b>PART I MYTH AND CULT</b>	
1 MYTHS AND LEGENDS	7
Foundation Myths	7
The Rape of Persephone and the Homeric Hymn	8
Wars with Athens and the Synoecism	10
The Seven against Thebes	11
2 THE THEOLOGY OF DEMETER AT ELEUSIS	12
Agricultural Fertility Festivals	12
The Eleusinian Mysteries	14
Definitions, 14 • Priests and Officials, 16 • Preliminary	
Initiation, 17 • The Greater Mysteries, 17 • The	
Kykeon, 19 • Telete and Epopeteia, 21	
<b>PART II THE SITE AND ITS EXPLORATION</b>	
3 LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENT	27
Topography and Geology	28
Water, Climate, Land Use	30
The Eleusinian Limestone	32
4 THE EXPLORATION OF ELEUSIS	34
Early Travelers	34
Later Travelers and the Dilettanti Expeditions, 1765–1860	35
Systematic Excavations, 1882–1997	37
Publication of Material from Eleusis	39

### PART III THE ARCHAEOLOGY AND MONUMENTS OF ELEUSIS

5	EARLY BRONZE AGE	43
6	MIDDLE BRONZE AGE	48
	Stratigraphy and Architecture	48
	Burials	51
	Pottery	58
	Figurines	67
	Metal, Stone, Bone Tools	68
	Economic Organization	69
	Subsistence, 69 • Trade, 69 • Production, 72	
	Social and Political Organization	74
	Religion and Ritual	75
	The Transition to Mycenaean	77
7	EARLY MYCENAEAN	78
	Stratigraphy and Architecture	78
	Burials	93
	Pottery	94
	Painted Plaster	102
	Economic Organization	103
	Social and Political Organization	104
	Religion	105
8	THE PERIOD OF THE PALACES	107
	Stratigraphy and Architecture	107
	Burials	116
	Pottery	117
	Figurines	120
	Spindle Whorls and Loomweights	120
	Metal	122
	Chipped and Stone Tools	122
	Economic Organization	122
	The Inscribed Stirrup Jar	123
	Social and Political Organization	123
	Religion	125
9	THE POST-PALATIAL PERIOD	127
	Stratigraphy and Architecture	127
	Burials	128
	Pottery	128



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01099-4 - Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries

Michael B. Cosmopoulos

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

ix

10	THE POST-BRONZE AGE HISTORY OF THE SANCTUARY	132
	The Protogeometric and Geometric Periods	132
	The Archaic Period	139
	The Classical Period	142
	The Hellenistic Period	147
	The Roman Period	147
	The End of the Sanctuary	151
	<b>PART IV THE ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES</b>	
11	THEORIES ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF THE MYSTERIES	155
	Diffusionist Theories	155
	Indigenous Development Theories	157
12	THE ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES	160
	Mycenaean Cult	160
	Protogeometric and Geometric Cults	161
	The Sanctification of Megaron B	162
	The Addition of the Soteriological Element	164
	Conclusion: Stages in the Formation of the Eleusinian Mysteries	165
	<i>Chronological Table</i>	167
	<i>Notes</i>	169
	<i>Bibliography</i>	195
	<i>Index</i>	223

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01099-4 - Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries

Michael B. Cosmopoulos

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## FIGURES

1. Map of Attica showing Eleusis and surrounding topographic features	<i>page</i> 29
2. Streams and torrents of the Thriassion Plain	30
3. General topographic plan of the site and the modern city of Eleusis	31
4. Sir William Gell, Demetrios Philios, Andreas Skias, Konstantinos Kourouniotes, and George Mylonas	37
5. General plan of Skias's trenches	39
6. EH pottery from Eleusis	44
7. The Neolithic and Cycladic figurines	45
8. General map of the area around Eleusis, showing the known EH sites	46
9. MH I–III deposits	49
10. Plans of Houses B, Γ, Δ, E, Z, and P and Building A	50
11. Plans of MH Simple Cist graves	51
12. Grave H.1	52
13. Section (top) and plan (bottom) of Complex Built Cist Grave Απ4 from the West Cemetery	53
14. The location of Grave E.III.7 in relation to Megaron B (left); plan of Grave E.III.7 based on Philios 1889b, 188 (right)	54
15. Finds from Grave E.III.7	55
16. Grave S.III.17	56
17. Plan of the south slope showing the location of graves between houses	57
18. Selection of Matt-painted sherds and vases	59
19. Matt-painted motifs and their associated shapes (left Gold Mica, right Dark Tempered)	60
20. Selection of Lustrous Decorated sherds	61
21. Selection of Grey Minyan pottery	62
22. Grey Minyan shapes	63
23. Dark Burnished shapes	64
24. Red Slipped and Burnished Shapes	65
25. Shapes of unpainted vases	65
26. Selection of “Adriatic” (left) and Cycladic (right) incised vases	66
27. MH bird-shaped and bull-shaped vases	67
28. Aeginetan imports	71

29. Potter's marks on Aeginetan pottery	72
30. Potter's marks on Grey Minyan sherds	73
31. MH III-LH I (top) and LH II-III A <sub>1</sub> (bottom) deposits	79
32. Early Mycenaean houses	80
33. Composite plan of the area of the Peisistrateian Telesterion with the Mycenaean walls	81
34. The east anta of Wall 6 and the thickened part of Wall 5 from the southeast	82
35. Three-dimensional reconstruction of the anta of Wall 6, the steps, drain D <sub>1</sub> , and the platform from the south	83
36. Anta of Wall 7 and anta of Wall 9a from the east	84
37. Plan of the east part of Wall 6 with the steps (α-ε), the platform (solid black), Wall 6 (grey), and the exit of Drain D <sub>1</sub>	85
38. The steps in front of Megaron B from the southeast and the southeast part of the platform	86
39. Plan of megaron B showing the preserved parts of the floor	87
40. Reconstruction of the façade of Megaron B	88
41. The floor of Megaron B with the base of its column (A) from the east	89
42. Fragments of painted plaster found on July 20, 1932, next to Wall 6	91
43. Section of the Megaron B and the walls to the south of the Peisistrateian Telesterion	91
44. Classification of Late Helladic I pottery	95
45. LH I Mycenaean-style shapes and motifs	96
46. Selection of Early Mycenaean pottery	97
47. LH IIA shape/motif combinations	99
48. Combination of LH IIB shapes and motifs	100
49. Combination of LH IIIA <sub>1</sub> shapes and motifs	101
50. Location of LH IIIA <sub>1</sub> /IIIA <sub>2</sub> , LH IIIB, LH IIIC, and SubMyc deposits	108
51. Schematic section of the join between walls 9a, 10a, and 7	109
52. Reconstruction of Megaron B, the peribolos, and the Extension B <sub>1</sub> /B <sub>2</sub> /B <sub>3</sub>	109
53. Plan of LH IIIA <sub>2</sub> /IIIB remains under the Telesterion; the peribolos and units C and D are shown reconstructed	110
54. The interior corner of walls 9b and 11a from the east	111
55. Walls 9b, 11a, and 15 from the southeast	112
56. The entrance of Room B <sub>1</sub> seen from the interior of the room (north), including walls 9a and 9b, stones from the foundation of the platform (γ), the base of the Peisistrateian column δ <sub>5</sub> (δ), and the Kimonian column κ <sub>6</sub> (ε)	112
57. Doorway to Room B <sub>3</sub> from Room B <sub>1</sub> seen from the east, showing the threshold (α), the foundation of Wall 11 (β), and the underlying MH floor (γ)	113
58. Plan of LH walls on the summit	115

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01099-4 - Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries

Michael B. Cosmopoulos

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## FIGURES

xiii

59. Plan of LH remains in front of the Stoa of Philo	116
60. Combination of LH IIIA <sub>2</sub> shapes and motifs	117
61. Combinations of LH IIIB <sub>1</sub> shapes and motifs	118
62. Combinations of LH IIIB <sub>2</sub> shapes and motifs	119
63. LH figurines	121
64. Metal, stone, and clay tools	121
65. The Inscribed Stirrup Jar	124
66. Drawing of <b>EL Z 1</b>	125
67. LH IIIC and SubMyc pottery	129
68. LH IIIC shape/motif combinations	129
69. SubMyc shape/motif combination	131
70. Distribution of EIA deposits	133
71. Curved Geometric wall E <sub>3</sub> on top of the Mycenaean Wall 5	134
72. The Geometric walls in the area of the Telesterion	135
73. Reconstruction of the small terrace by Travlos	135
74. Walls E <sub>1</sub> and E <sub>2</sub> from the west (left) and the south (right)	136
75. Plan of the Sacred House	137
76. Plan of the Sanctuary in the Archaic period	140
77. The Early Archaic (left) and Peisistrateian (right) Telesteria	141
78. Plan of the Sanctuary in the Classical period	143
79. The Kimonian (left) and Perikleian (right) Telesteria	145
80. Plan of the Sanctuary in the Hellenistic and Roman periods	149

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01099-4 - Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries

Michael B. Cosmopoulos

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## PREFACE

Exactly twenty-five years have passed since the day I set foot in the storeroom of the Eleusis museum and started this project. During these two and a half decades a lot has changed, both in my personal and in my professional life. Projects have begun and finished, new friends have been gained and old friends have been lost, family members have died and new ones have been born. Through all these ups and downs, one of the constants in my life has remained Eleusis.

My fascination with this site comes from its last excavator and my own mentor, George Mylonas. Soon after his death, the Athens Archaeological Society asked me to undertake the study and publication of the Bronze Age finds from the old excavations at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. That project led to a two-volume publication of the architecture, stratigraphy, and finds from the site, which was recently published by the Athens Archaeological Society. In the course of that work I became increasingly aware of the need for a synthesis of the history of Eleusis in the Bronze Age, above and beyond what the technical publication of the material record would allow. The purpose of the present book is twofold: to provide that synthesis and also to address the wider issue of the origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries, a problem that is tied to the Bronze Age origins of the site. The core of the book is a synthesis of the social, economic, and cultural history of Eleusis during the Bronze Age, especially the second millennium BC. Given, however, that more than seventy years have passed since the publication of Mylonas's *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (1961), I considered this an opportunity to place the Bronze Age within the wider historical framework of the archaeology of Eleusis by providing updates on the most important archaeological developments since Mylonas's book. In this respect, it is hoped that this book can prove useful also to scholars working on the later periods of the site.

It is a pleasure for me to acknowledge the support provided by the Ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἑταιρεία, the institution that launched, more than a century ago, the first systematic excavation at Eleusis. To the Board of the Society, especially the Secretary General Dr. Vassileios Petrakos, I am grateful for the many years of moral and financial support that allowed me to complete the project successfully. My work in the museum and at the site was made

possible thanks to the kindness and patience of the Epimelitria of Eleusis, Mrs. Kalliope Papangeli, whose own spade has patiently and meticulously unearthed a tremendous wealth of new information about ancient Eleusis. To Professor George S. Korres I am grateful for encouraging me to undertake work at this important site.

The Eleusis project has been made possible thanks to funding provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities (grant FB-54201-09), the Hellenic Government–Karakas Foundation Professorship in Greek Studies of the University of Missouri–St. Louis, the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, the University of Manitoba Department of Classics, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the Shelby White–Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications, the Mellon Foundation, the Michael Ventris Memorial Award, and the Mediterranean Trust. A special note of thanks is due to my colleagues, Rory Egan at the University of Manitoba, and Joel Glassman and Susan Brownell at the University of Missouri–St. Louis, who facilitated my long stays in Greece so that I could work in the Eleusis museum.

A tremendous debt is owed to the following friends and colleagues, who took time out of their own busy schedules to read and comment on parts of the book or to provide feedback, information, and counsel: Carla Antonaccio, Jan Bremmer, Susan Brownell, Kevin Clinton, Jennifer Glaubius, Joann Gulizio, Pigi Kalogerakou, Iro Mathioudaki, Nikolaos Papadimitriou, John Papadopoulos, Robert Parker, Vassilis Petrakis, Rebecca Worsham, and James Wright. Needless to say, I remain solely responsible for any errors or omissions the reader may find in the book. I should also be held responsible for the translations of the ancient Greek passages, in which I sought to render the meaning of the original text rather than a word-for-word translation. The map of Attica in Figure 1 was generously prepared by Dr. Sylvian Fachard, whereas the drawings of the potter's marks in Figure 29 and 30 are reproduced respectively with the kind permissions of Dr. Michael Lindblom and Prof. J. Crowel. At Cambridge University Press, I am indebted to Asya Graf and Isabella Vitti for their enthusiastic support of this book. For their effective production work and careful copyediting I am thankful, respectively, to Minaketan Dash of Aptara and Fred Goykhman of PETT Fox Inc.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family. For a quarter of a century my late father Vassilis and my mother Effie have provided endless support and practical help with many aspects of this project; it is a pity that my father did not live long enough to see this project completed. My children, Vassilis, Marilena, and Petros Alexandros, have been forgiving during the long hours that I disappeared behind the computer screen. Last but not least, Deborah, my supportive and motivating partner in life and in archaeology, has shared and sustained my love of Eleusis with humor, encouragement, and patience. The book is lovingly dedicated to her.



Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ABBREVIATIONS (OTHER THAN BIBLIOGRAPHIC)

CM:	centimeter
EG:	Early Geometric
EH:	Early Helladic
EIA:	Early Iron Age
FM:	Furumark motif
FS:	Furumark shape
LG:	Late Geometric
LH:	Late Helladic
M:	meter
MG:	Middle Geometric
MH:	Middle Helladic
PG:	Protogeometric
SubMyc:	Submycenaean