The Holy Night (Greek)

All the people lined up behind the solemn goddesses represented by two veiled, mourn­ing matrons. On the bridge approaching the city, they met another goddess, Baubo, the jester. She tried to make the goddesses laugh and draw them out of their sadness. At this time, they drank kykeon, a hallucinogenic brew the women brought with them. The comic old woman lifted her skirts and exposed her sex to make Demeter laugh. It worked, the goddesses rested, and all were bidden to take a refreshing drink.

Don’t believe it? Here is Orpheus's poem about it:

She drew aside Ha' robes and showed Ha' body all unveiled. Child Iaccus was there and laughingly plunged his hands below Her breasts. Then smiled the Goddess, in Her heart She smiled and drank the draught from the shining cup.\*

There was a second bridge to cross the salty Rheitoi, and here the Mystai (the puri­fied ones) had to identify themselves with the traditional words. These passwords were required for admission into the sacred place Epoteia:

I have fasted, drunk the kykeon, and taken things out of the big basket. After performing certain rites, I put them into the little basket whence I put them back into the big basket.

•Orpheus’s poem quoted by Clement of Alexandria. Pro- trept. 22.19, in Carl Kerenyi, Elcusis (London: Ron Hedge & Kegan Paul, 1967). 62.

tjane Ellen Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek ■Religion (New York: Meridian. 1955). 569.

The people thronged toward the place where the great fire was built. The hierophant invoked Kore, and her real presence was felt. Painted in dark colors, she was seen enthroned as the Queen of Hell. The Mystai bowed at her feet in the temple. Her image was the vision of the feminine source of life. The corn, which is the eucharist of the God­dess, was silently reaped. Barley and wheat have very close resemblances to female gen­itals, and their display evokes veneration of the female. Men who went through these rites gained a deep understanding of their part in nature. They were “regenerated” men who received Demeter’s life-giving powers. For women to behold the real presence of Kore and to venerate things female reinforced their sense of self and promoted self-esteem, responsibility for the world and her affairs, and a kinship to the deity of life.

Holy Night was a most important time; people confronted the idea of death as they watched Kore, the Divine Maiden, turn into the Crone and then turn back into the Young Queen of the underworld. The presence of the Goddess gave people a chance to see their own death as part of their lives and to remove fears about the afterlife.

On the seventh day of the mysteries (Sep­tember 29), there were sports, games, and footraces. The winners were crowned with laurels and measures of grain were given to them.

On the eighth day (September 30), ini­tiations were performed again, this time in the deep caves of the sacred temple. One fresco shows us a scene with three women: one dressed in dark colors, one naked, while the third is having her hair cut off. Cutting the hair was often a symbol of spiritual rebirth.

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September 21

Feast of the Divine Trinity:

Rites of Eleusis (Greek)

This is the beginning of the celebration of life, beauty, death, and rebirth—the Feast of the Divine Trinity—Demeter, Kore, and Iacchos. On this day, the altars are decorated with flowers, golden apples, cider, and seed cakes. Divine life, as experienced by us all, becomes the mystery of the life cycle. We celebrate the essence of life, the abundant outpouring of the spirit of the Goddess who creates and sustains everything.

September 23

Sun Enters Libra;

Autumn Equinox;

Eleusian Mysteries (Greek)

The sign of Libra is the scales, signifying bal­ance. Mother Nature establishes, once again, equality between the forces of light and dark­ness. From now on, the days will shorten and the nights get longer. The Goddess descends into the underworld, the world of darkness, where she tends to her dead souls. This act of going down into the underworld and defeating death is celebrated by the many rituals and processions of the Eleusian mysteries.

The Eleusian rites were the most famous goddess festival in all of Europe. Men and women came from all over the continent to participate, because it was believed that those who went through the mysteries gained good luck and insights; they became sanctified by the goddesses.

From the time of the Autumn Equinox until the end of the month of September, a different ritual, a different theme of the pro­ceedings. was observed every day. The fes­tival started with processions from Athens to Eleusis. Participants deposited sacred objects at the feet of the Goddess Demeter, then went to bathe in the sea, put on new linen, and poured libations on the Earth. The women and some men gathered together for Torch Day, when processions began to form again, going through the temples and the town in the search for Persephone, Kore.

For the celebration, matrons carried bas­kets filled with the goddess’s belongings, such as a comb, a symbol of Aphrodite, a mirror, a snake figure or live snake (for rebirth), wheat, and barley. The women came, in oxen-drawn carriages, and they called to each other, using “loose” language. One can just imagine it: “Hey matron Althea! Your ox looks weak as a lamb, and your baskets have holes in them!”

September 24 was the second day, the day of the grand purification ritual—a bath in the sea! The initiates washed away igno­rance and assumed new grace. On September 25, the people built an altar around a tree. They burned incense and poured libations of wine and juices on the good earth, symbol­izing the reverence they felt for our planet. A big procession took place on September 26, celebrating the goddess of the earth, Deme­ter. Her representative was carried around on a cart, while people shouted enthusiastically, “Hail, Demeter!” Everybody dressed up in their best finery; the day was raucous and filled with dancing.

On September 27 people marched day and night, carrying lit torches. This marked the true start of the mysteries.

