

History of the Illuminati: Free Preview

The Eleusinian Mysteries

The first secret societies were the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries, which represented the spiritual life of ancient Greece. For over two thousand years, they were considered the designated means for uniting with the Divine Essence, and achieving regeneration. Later Grecian and Roman writers always treated the Eleusinian Mysteries with the deepest reverence.

The Eleusinian Mysteries were the most celebrated of all the sacred orgies.¹ Features of Eastern origin were apparent, but the Mysteries were evidently copied from the rites of Isis in Egypt (an idea which may be found in *The Metamorphoses* of Apulcius and *The Epicurean* by Thomas Moore). Every act, rite, and person engaged in them was symbolic. An individual who revealed these details to the uninitiated would be put to death without mercy. So also was an uninitiated person who happened to witness the ceremonies.

Persons of all ages and both sexes were initiated. Neglect in this respect, as in the case of Socrates, was regarded as impious and atheistical. It was required of all candidates that they should first be admitted at the *Mikra* or Lesser Mysteries of Agræ by a process of fasting called *purification*, after which they were styled *mystæ*, or initiates. A year later, they might enter the higher degree. In this they learned the *apporheta*, or secret meaning of the rites, and were thenceforth denominated as *ephorî*, or *epoptæ*.

To some of the interior mysteries, only a very select number obtained admission. From these were taken all the ministers of the holy rites. The Hierophant who presided was bound to celibacy, and required to devote his entire life to his sacred office. He had three assistants - the torchbearer, the *kerux* or crier, and the minister at the altar. There were also a *basileus* or king, who was an archon of Athens, four curators, elected by suffrage, and ten others to offer sacrifices.

The sacred Orgies were celebrated on every fifth year; and began on the 15th of the month Boëdromian or September. The first day was styled the *agurmos* or assembly, because the worshippers then convened. The second was the day of purification, also called the *aladé mystai*, from the proclamation: "To the sea, initiated ones!" The third day was the day of sacrifices; for which purpose were offered a mullet and barley from a field in Eleusis. The officiating persons were forbidden to taste of either; the offering was for *Achtheia* (the sorrowing one, Demeter) alone. On the fourth day was a solemn procession. The *kalathos* or sacred basket was borne, followed by women, *cistæ* or chests in which were sesamum, carded wool, salt, pomegranates, poppies. Also thrysi, a serpent, boughs of ivy, and cakes.

The fifth day was denominated the day of torches. Torchlight processions were held at night amid much tumult. The sixth day was a great occasion. The statue of Iacchus, the

¹ The peculiar rites of the Mysteries were indifferently termed Orgies or Labors, *teletai* or finishings, and initiations.

son of Zeus and Demeter, was brought from Athens, by the *Iacchogoroi*, all crowned with myrtle. In the way was heard only an uproar of singing and the beating of brazen kettles, as the votaries danced and ran along. The image was borne through the sacred Gate, along the sacred way, halting by the sacred fig-tree, where the procession rests, and then moves on to the bridge over the Cephissus, where again it rests. Expressions of wildest grief give place to the trifling farce; just as Demeter, in the midst of her grief, smiled at the levity of Iambé in the palace of Celeus. Through the 'mystical entrance' we enter Eleusis.

On the seventh day, games are celebrated. To the victor is given a measure of barley, as it were a gift direct from the hand of the goddess. The eighth is sacred to Æsculapius, the Divine Physician, who heals all diseases; and in the evening is performed the initiatory ritual. "Let us enter the mystic temple and be initiated; though it must be supposed that, a year ago, we were initiated into the Lesser Mysteries at Agræ. We must have been *mystæ* (veiled), before we can become *epoptæ* (seers); in plain English, we must have shut our eyes to all else before we can behold the Mysteries. Crowned with myrtle, we enter with the other initiates into the vestibule of the temple; blind as yet, but the Hierophant within will soon open our eyes.

"But first, - for here we must do nothing rashly, - first we must wash in this holy water; for it is with pure hands and a pure heart that we are bidden to enter the most sacred enclosure [*mustikos sekos*]. Then, led into the presence of the Hierophant,² he reads to us, from a book of stone [*petroma*], things which we must not divulge on pain of death. Let it suffice that they fit the place and the occasion; and though you might laugh at them, if they were spoken outside, still you seem very far from that mood now, as you hear the words of the old man (for old he always was), and look upon the revealed symbols.

"And very far, indeed, are you from ridicule, when Demeter seals, by her own peculiar utterance and signals, by vivid coruscations of light, and cloud piled upon cloud, all that we have seen and heard from her sacred priest; and then, finally, the light of a serene wonder fills the temple, and we see the pure fields of Elysium, and hear the chorus of the Blessed; - then, not merely by external seeming or philosophic interpretation, but in real fact, does the Hierophant become the Creator [*demiourgos*] and Revealer of all things; the Sun is but his torchbearer, the Moon his attendant at the altar, and Hermes his mystic herald [*kerux*]. But the final word has been uttered '*Conx Om pax.*' The rite is consummated, and we are *epoptæ* forever."

That this 'mystical drama' was considered profound is evident from the peculiar rites, and the obligations imposed on every initiated person. It was a reproach not to observe them. Socrates was accused of atheism, or disrespect to the gods, for having never been

2 In the Oriental countries the designation *Peter* (an interpreter), appears to have been the title of this personage; and the *petroma* consisted, notably enough, of two tablets of stone. There is in these facts some reminder of the peculiar circumstances of the Mosaic Law which was so preserved; and also of the claim of the Pope to be the successor of Peter, the hierophant or interpreter of the Christian religion.

initiated.³ Any person accidentally guilty of homicide, or of any crime, or convicted of witchcraft, was excluded. The secret doctrines, it is supposed, were the same as are expressed in the celebrated *Hymn* of Cleanthes. The philosopher Isocrates thus bears testimony: "She [Demeter] gave us two gifts that are the most excellent; fruits, that we might not live like beasts; and that initiation, - those who have part in which have sweeter hope, both as regards the close of life and for all eternity." In like manner Pindar also declares: "Happy is he who has beheld them, and descends into the Underworld: he knows the end, he knows the origin of life."

The first initiations of the Eleusinia were called *Teletæ* or terminations, as denoting that the imperfect and rudimentary period of generated life was ended and purged off; and the candidate was denominated a *mystæ*, a veiled or liberated person. The Greater Mysteries completed the work; the candidate was more fully instructed and disciplined, becoming an *epoptæ* or seer. He was now regarded as having received the arcane principles of life. This was also the end sought by philosophy.

The soul was believed to be of composite nature, linked on the one side to the eternal world, emanating from God, and so partaking of Divinity. On the other hand, it was also allied to the phenomenal or external world, and so liable to be subjected to passion, lust, and the bondage of evils. This condition is denominated *generation*; and is supposed to be a kind of death to the higher form of life. Evil is inherent in this condition - and the soul dwells in the body as in a prison or a grave.

In this state, and previous to the discipline of education and the mystical initiation, the rational or intellectual spirit is asleep. The earth-life is a dream rather than a reality. Yet it has longings for a higher and nobler form of life, and its affinities are on high. "All men yearn after God," says Homer. The object of Plato is to present the fact that there are in the soul certain innate *ideas* or principles anterior to all experience. These ideas are the most vital of all truths, and the purpose of instruction and discipline is to make the individual conscious of them, willing to be led and inspired by them. The soul is purified or separated from evils through knowledge, truth, expiations, sufferings, and prayers. Our life is a discipline and preparation for another state of being; and resemblance to God is the highest motive of action.⁴

3 *Ancient Symbol-Worship*, page 12, note. "Socrates was not initiated, yet after drinking the hemlock, he addressed Crito: 'We owe a cock to Æsculapius.' This was the peculiar offering made by initiates (now called *kerknophori*) on the eve of the last day, and he thus symbolically asserted that he was about to receive the great apocalypse." See, also, "*Progress of Religious Ideas*" by Lydia Maria Child, vol. ii. p. 308; and "*Discourses on the Worship of Priapus*," by Richard Payne Knight.

4 Many of the early Christian writers were deeply imbued with the Eclectic or Platonic doctrines. The very forms of speech were almost identical. One of the four Gospels, bearing the title "*according to John*" was the evident product of a Platonist, and hardly seems in a considerable degree Jewish or historical. The epistles ascribed to Paul evince a great familiarity with the Eclectic philosophy and the peculiar symbolism of the Mysteries, as well as with the Mithraic notions that had penetrated and permeated the religious ideas of the western countries.

Proclus does not hesitate to identify the theological doctrines with the mystical dogmas of the Orphic system. He says: "What Orpheus delivered in hidden allegories, Pythagoras learned when he was initiated into the Orphic Mysteries; and Plato next received a perfect knowledge of them from the Orphean and Pythagorean writings."

Many works from ancient Greece, such as the sixth book of Virgil's *Æneid*, represent a dramatic exhibition of Eleusinian Mystery schools. The Lesser Mysteries were designed by ancient theologians to represent the infernal regions. They signified, in an occult way, the condition of an unpurified soul invested with an earthly body, and enveloped in a material and physical nature. The soul, until purified by philosophy,⁵ would suffer death through its union with the body.

As he who in this life pursued realities, would, after death, enjoy the highest truth, so he who pursued deceptions would hereafter be tormented with fallacies and delusions. This important truth was hinted at by the Lesser Mysteries, yet we cannot assume it was generally known, even to the initiated persons themselves.

The Greater Mysteries were obscurely intimated by mystic and splendid visions. They explained the felicity of the soul both here and hereafter, when purified from the defilements of a material nature, and constantly elevated to the realities of intellectual [spiritual] vision. Hence, the ultimate design of the Mysteries, according to Plato, was to lead us back to the principles from which we descended: to a perfect enjoyment of intellectual [spiritual] good. The imparting of these principles was doubtless one part of the doctrine contained in the *aporrheta*.

The *aporrheta* were arcane or confidential disclosures made to the candidate undergoing initiation. In the Eleusinia, these were given by the Hierophant, and enforced by him from the Book of Interpretation, said to have consisted of two tablets of stone. This was the *petroma*, a name usually derived from *petra*, a rock.

The most sublime part of the *epopteia*, or final revealing, consisted in beholding the gods themselves invested with a resplendent light; and that this was symbolical of those transporting visions, which the virtuous soul will constantly enjoy in a future state; and of which it is able to grasp some ravishing glimpses even while connected with the body. The candidate was instructed by the hierophant, and permitted to look within the cista or chest, which contained the mystic serpent, the phallus, egg, and grains sacred to Demeter.

A curious Greek manuscript entitled "Of Psellus, Concerning Daemons, according to the opinion of the Greeks" describes the machinery of the Eleusinian Mysteries as follows:

"The Mysteries of these demons, such as the Eleusinia, consisted in representing the mythical narration of Jupiter mingling with Ceres and her daughter Prosperina (Phersephatté). But [since depictions of] venereal connections are in the initiation, a Venus is represented rising from the sea, from certain moving sexual parts: afterwards the

5 Philosophy here relates to the discipline of life.

celebrated marriage of Proserpina (with Pluto) takes place; and those who are initiated sing:

'Out of the drum I have eaten,
Out of the cymbal I have drank,
The mystic vase I have sustained,
The bed I have entered,'

The pregnant throes likewise of Ceres [Deo] are represented: hence the supplications of Deo are exhibited; the drinking of bile, and the heart-aches. After this, an effigy with the thighs of a goat makes its appearance, which is represented as suffering vehemently about the testicles: because Jupiter, as if to expiate the violence which he had offered to Ceres, is represented as cutting off the testicles of a goat, and placing them on her bosom, as if they were his own. But after all this, the rites of Bacchus succeed; the Cista, and the cakes with many bosses, like those of a shield. Likewise the mysteries of Sabazius, divinations, and the mimalons or Bacchants; a certain sound of the Thesprotian bason; the Dodonsean brass; another Corybas, and another Proserpina, - representations of Demons. After these succeed the uncovering of the thighs of Baubo, and a woman's comb (*kteis*) for thus, through a sense of shame, they denominate the sexual parts of a woman. And thus, with scandalous exhibitions, they finish the initiation."

The Bacchic Mysteries

Bacchic Orgies were said to have been instituted, or more probably reformed by Orpheus, a mythical personage, supposed to have flourished in Thrace.⁶ The Orphic associations dedicated themselves to the worship of Bacchus, in which they hoped to find the gratification of an ardent longing through the worthy and elevating influences of religious life. The worshippers did not indulge in unrestrained pleasure and frantic enthusiasm, but

6 Euripides: *Rhaesus*. "Orpheus showed forth the rites of the hidden Mysteries." Plato: *Protagoras*. "The art of a sophist or sage is ancient, but the men who proposed it in ancient times, fearing the odium attached to it, sought to conceal it, and veiled it over, some under the garb of poetry, as Homer, Hesiod and Simonides: and others under that of the Mysteries and prophetic manias, such as Orpheus, Musaeus, and their followers." Herodotus takes a different view—ii. 49. "Melampus, the son of Amytheon," he says, "introduced into Greece the name of Dionysus (Bacchus), the ceremonial of his worship, and the procession of the phallus. He did not, however, so completely apprehend the whole doctrine as to be able to communicate it entirely: but various sages, since his time, have carried out his teaching to greater perfection. Still it is certain that Melampus introduced the phallus, and that the Greeks learnt from him the ceremonies which they now practice. I therefore maintain that Melampus, who was a sage, and had acquired the art of divination, having become acquainted with the worship of Dionysus through knowledge derived from Egypt, introduced it into Greece, with a few slight changes, at the same time that he brought in various other practices. For I can by no means allow that it is by mere coincidence that the Bacchic ceremonies in Greece are so nearly the same as the Egyptian."

rather aimed at an ascetic purity of life and manners. The worship of Dionysus was the center of their ideas, and the starting-point of all their speculations upon the world and human nature. They believed that human souls were confined in the body as in a prison, a condition which was denominated *genesis* or generation; from which Dionysus would liberate them. Their sufferings, the stages by which they passed to a higher form of existence, their *katharsis* or purification, and their enlightenment constituted the themes of the Orphic writers. All this was represented in the legend which constituted the groundwork of the mystical rites.

Dionysus-Zagreus was the son of Zeus, whom he had begotten in the form of a dragon or serpent, upon the person of Kore or Persephoneia, considered by some to have been identical with Ceres or Demeter, and by others to have been her daughter. The former idea is probably the more correct. Ceres or Demeter was called Koré at Cnidos. She is called Phersephetta in a fragment by Psellus, and is also styled a Fury. The divine child, an *avatar* or incarnation of Zeus, was denominated Zagreus, or Chakra (Sanskrit) as being destined to universal dominion. But at the instigation of Hera⁷ the Titans conspired to murder him. Accordingly, one day while he was contemplating a mirror,⁸ they set upon him, disguised under a coating of plaster, and tore him into seven parts. Athena, however, rescued from them his heart which was swallowed by Zeus, and so returned into the paternal substance, to be generated anew. He was thus destined to be again born, to succeed to universal rule, establish the reign of happiness, and release all souls from the dominion of death.

Although the Dionysiacal sacred rites of Orpheus is asserted to have come from Egypt, internal evidence favors the opinion that it was derived from India, and that its basis is the Buddhist philosophy. The Orphic associations of Greece were ascetic, contrasting markedly with the frenzies, enthusiasm, and license of the popular rites.

7 Hera, generally regarded as the Greek title of Juno, is not the definite name of any goddess, but was used by ancient writers as a designation only. It signifies *domina* or lady, and appears to be of Sanscrit origin. It is applied to Ceres or Demeter, and other divinities.

8 The mirror was a part of the symbolism of the Thesmophoria, and was used in the search for Atmu, the Hidden One, evidently the same as Tammuz, Adonis, and Atys. See *Exodus* xxxviii. 8; *1 Samuel* ii. 22; and *Ezekiel* viii. 14. But despite the assertion of Herodotus and others that the Bacchic Mysteries were in reality Egyptian, there exists strong probability that they came originally from India, and were Sivaic or Buddhistical. Coré-Persephoneia was but the goddess Parasu-pani or Bhavani, the patroness of the Thugs, called also Goree; and Zagreus is from *Chakra*, a country extending from ocean to ocean. If this is a Turanian or Tartar Story, we can easily recognize the "Horns" as the crescent worn by lama-priests: and translating god-names as merely sacerdotal designations, assume the whole legend to be based on a tale of Lama Succession and transmigration. The Titans would then be the Daityas of India, who were opposed to the faith of the northern tribes; and the title Dionysus but signify the god or chief-priest of Nysa, or Mount Meru. The whole story of Orpheus, the instituter or rather the reformer of the Bacchic rites, has a Hindu ring all through.

The Thracians had numerous Hindu customs. The name Kore is Sanscrit: and Zeus may be the Dyaus of Hindu story. His visit to the chamber of Koré-Persephoneia (Parasu-pani) in the form of a dragon or *naga*, and the horns or crescent on the head of the child, are Tartar or Buddhistic. The name Zagreus is evidently *Chakra*, or ruler of the earth. The *Hera* who compassed his death is *Aira*, the wife of Buddha; and the Titans are the Daityas, or apostate tribes of India. The doctrine of metempsychosis is expressed by the swallowing of the heart of the murdered child, so as to re-absorb his soul, and bring him anew into existence as the son of Semele. Indeed, all the stories of Bacchus have Hindu characteristics; and his cultus is a part of the serpent worship of the ancients. The evidence appears unequivocal.

The Dionysiacs of Asia Minor were also an association of architects and engineers. They had an exclusive privilege to build temples, stadia, and theatres. Their work was guided by the mysterious tutelage of Bacchus, and distinguished from the uninitiated or profane inhabitants by the science which they possessed, and by many private signs and tokens which they used to recognize each other. This association came into Ionia from Syria, into which country it had come from Persia, along with that style of architecture that we call Grecian.

Esoteric Belief Systems of Christianity

Many early Christian writers were deeply imbued with the Eclectic or Platonic doctrines. The very forms of speech were almost identical. One of the four Gospels, bearing the title "*according to John*" was the evident product of a Platonist, and hardly seems in a considerable degree Jewish or historical. The epistles ascribed to Paul evince a great familiarity with the Eclectic philosophy and the peculiar symbolism of the Mysteries, as well as with the Mithraic notions that had penetrated and permeated the religious ideas of the western countries.

We observe in the *New Testament* a disposition on the part of Jesus and Paul to classify their doctrines as esoteric and exoteric: "the Mysteries of the kingdom of God" for the apostles, and "parables" for the multitude. "We speak wisdom," says Paul, "among them that are perfect" (or initiated) etc. 1 *Corinthians*, ii. Also Jesus declares: "It is given to you, to know the Mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given; therefore I speak to them in parables: because they seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand."—*Matthew* xiii., 11-13. He also justified the withholding of the higher and interior knowledge from the untaught and ill-disposed, in the memorable *Sermon on the Mount*.—*Matthew* vii.:

"Give ye not that which is sacred to the dogs,
Neither cast ye your pearls to the swine;
For the swine will tread them under their feet
And the dogs will turn and rend you."

This same division of the Christians into neophytes and perfect, appears to have been kept up for centuries, and maintained in the Roman Church.

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