

A close-up, profile view of a marble bust of a woman's head, facing right. She has thick, wavy hair and is wearing a large, circular, multi-petaled floral earring. The background is a solid teal color.

BRONZE AGE ELEUSIS  
AND THE ORIGINS  
OF THE ELEUSINIAN  
MYSTERIES

**Michael B. Cosmopoulos**



## 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.



BRONZE AGE ELEUSIS  
AND THE ORIGINS OF  
THE ELEUSINIAN  
MYSTERIES

MICHAEL B. COSMOPOULOS

University of Missouri, St. Louis



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107010994](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107010994)

© Michael B. Cosmopoulos 2015

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Cosmopoulos, Michael B., 1963–

Bronze Age Eleusis and the origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries / Michael B. Cosmopoulos (University of Missouri, St. Louis).

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01099-4 (hardback)

1. Bronze age – Greece – Eleusis. 2. Eleusis (Greece) – Antiquities. 3. Eleusinian mysteries. 4. Sacred space – Greece – Eleusis. 5. Eleusis (Greece) – Religion.

6. Demeter (Greek deity) I. Title.

GN778.22.G8C67 2016

938 – dc23 2015005776

ISBN 978-1-107-01099-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

*For Debbie*

---

ὦς ἔφατ'. οὐδ' ἀπίθησεν ἑυστέφανος Δημήτηρ:  
αἶψα δὲ καρπὸν ἀνήκεν ἀρουράων ἐριβώλων:  
πᾶσα δὲ φύλλοισίν τε καὶ ἄνθεσιν εὐρεῖα χθῶν  
ἔβρισ': ἦ δὲ κιοῦσα θεμιστοπόλοισ βασιλεῦσι  
δεῖξεν Τριπτολέμῳ τε Διοκλεῖ τε πληξίππῳ  
Εὐμόλπου τε βίη Κελεῶ θ' ἡγήτορι λαῶν  
δρημοσύνην θ' ἱερῶν καὶ ἐπέφραδεν ὄργια πᾶσι,  
Τριπτολέμῳ τε Πολυξείνῳ, 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' ἀτελῆς ἱερῶν ὅς 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)



# 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

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