

## Chapter 5

---

# The cults of Demeter and Kore

*Lucia Nixon*

---

Greek religion is a bisexual polytheistic system, i.e. there are female and male gods, all of whom are powerful in some way. Such a system is probably more woman-friendly than unreconstructed male monotheism. But there is no doubt about who is meant to be in charge. Though females, whether human or divine, are not without importance, it is clear that males are in control, in heaven (Zeus) as on earth (mortal men). Thus this is not an egalitarian version of polytheism; gender asymmetry is built into the system.<sup>1</sup>

Why then is Demeter such a powerful deity? How could Greek society with all its inbuilt misogyny tolerate, much less celebrate, a she-god with power over fertility? After all, fertility, both human and agricultural, was a seriously dominant area of Greek life. Undergraduate students of Greek religion and myth are always quick to ask such questions, and generally remain unconvinced by theories stating that the story of Demeter and Kore and the founding of the Eleusinian Mysteries represent the incorporation of an admittedly powerful female element in a new stable world under male dominion.<sup>2</sup> Why then did a women-only cult like the Thesmophoria need to exist?

In this paper I look at the cults of Demeter and Kore with reference most often to the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria. These two cults are usually discussed and interpreted separately, and on the face of it they are very different. The Eleusinian Mysteries were held only in one location, though they were strongly linked with Athens. Women and slaves could participate, as well as men, after initiation. The culminating event took place inside a unique congregational structure, the Telesterion. The significance of the Mysteries is usually thought to be the cycle of growth through death and rebirth, both agricultural and spiritual.<sup>3</sup> Though different in many

ways from other festivals in Greek religion, the Eleusinian Mysteries are somehow seen as ‘safe’, if not actually ‘normal’.

By contrast the Thesmophoria were held everywhere in the Greek world, making them, in Nilsson’s classic dictum, ‘the most widespread cult in Greek religion’. Only citizen women could participate, and the festival apparently took place outside. The Thesmophoria are conventionally construed as an essential *polis* ritual in which citizen women of child-bearing age helped to ensure the survival of the *polis* through the production of food and the reproduction of legitimate heirs. Yet both ancient and modern discussions of this crucial cult convey considerable anxiety about it, from Aristophanes’ play to Detienne (contradictions between women as simultaneously marginal reproducers and central religious celebrants), Zeitlin (women correlate negatively with disorder) and Winkler (despite their central role in the Thesmophoria and other cults, women can express themselves only indirectly and covertly; there is at best ‘the possibility of a different consciousness’).<sup>4</sup>

Insofar as modern scholars have considered the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria together, they have described (to use the model first proposed by Edwin Ardener) the Eleusinian Mysteries as a dominant, male cult, unproblematic and neatly fitting in with various ideologies, while the Thesmophoria represent a muted, female one—strange, possibly obscene, uneasily aligned with *polis* priorities.<sup>5</sup> But these descriptions make inappropriate use of the model, precisely because the Thesmophoria was not an obscure cult, infrequently celebrated in some ancient backwater.

In fact, several important similarities link the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria. They constitute two of the most important and durable religious festivals in the ancient world, both lasting well into the imperial period. They both required secrecy and were therefore different from other mainstream cults. They were both connected with fertility. And finally, they are both part of the observance of the same deity, and should therefore be seen as two parts of the whole package of Demeter cults.<sup>6</sup> In the Greek bisexual, polytheistic system it is perfectly possible to have two ‘dominant’ festivals of the same female god, but it is always relevant that it is a goddess.

In this paper I first look briefly at the archaeological evidence for four sanctuaries, focusing on the pre-Roman period. The second section is botanical. I discuss four plants mentioned in ancient sources and their applications. In the third section I return to the story of

Demeter and Kore as told in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (HHD). I will then suggest another perspective and interpretation. Throughout the paper I include both the Mysteries and the Thesmophoria as part of the Demeter ‘package’, and use all three kinds of evidence without privileging texts outside the *Hymn*. In so doing I hope to contribute to the discussion of the larger questions raised above.

## SANCTUARIES

Brumfield’s evaluation of the epigraphic and textual evidence for Demeter cults in Attica has given us an idea of the cult calendar in this region and its close links with the agricultural year. On the basis of this evidence most Demeter and Kore cults fall into one of two categories: those that could be celebrated only in one particular sanctuary (notably Eleusis), and those that could be celebrated at many locations. The fourth-century BC Peiraieus decree makes it clear that a sanctuary could be used for more than one festival; in this case, the Thesmophoria. Plerosia, Kalamaia, Skira, and private occasions are mentioned, all of which were for women only.<sup>7</sup>

On the ground the distinction between unique and multiple locations still holds. Eleusis is obviously the best example of a unique Demeter sanctuary. Multiple Demeter sanctuaries are the focus of a study by Cole, who notes, like Rolley, that they are often to be identified on the basis of the finds, which usually reflect agricultural concerns: *hydriai* (for water) and *kernoi* (for grain); terracotta figurines of women carrying *hydriai*, plants, and animals (especially pigs); terracotta pigs; and pig bones. According to Cole, Demeter sanctuaries could be located within cities, just outside, and on the borders of the territory. Because of the need for secrecy, even sanctuaries within city walls could be relatively isolated. Proximity to a water source seems also to have been a factor in the location of Demeter sanctuaries.<sup>8</sup>

Cole notes on the basis of the evidence from Attica that most Demeter sanctuaries were probably not just for the Thesmophoria, though she does not discuss attaching different votives to different festivals. It would be difficult, because there are several cities with more than one Demeter sanctuary. Were individual sanctuaries used only for certain Demeter rituals, e.g. those for women? Or were they used for all Demeter cults by members of the same kin group or neighbourhood? Or was it some combination of these? It is thus inappropriate to describe a Demeter sanctuary simply as a

Thesmophorion, or even the Thesmophorion, of city X without further evidence.

In a short article it was not possible for Cole to indicate the wide local variation in votives (and their deposition), nor—more seriously—to address architecture. The votives at Demeter sanctuaries may be partially predictable, but the architecture never is. Here I look briefly at Eleusis, and then at three multiple Demeter and Kore sanctuaries, at Bitalemi/Gela, Acrocorinth, and Priene, to demonstrate links between Eleusis and other Demeter sanctuaries, and to show how far Demeter and Kore sanctuaries differ from the perceived norm of a *temenos* with peripteral temple, cult statue, and altar.

The sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis lies within the city wall, but was separated from the town by the acropolis (Figure 5.1). The first large-scale Telesterion was built in the sixth century BC, and the sanctuary continued in use until later antiquity. As mentioned earlier, the Telesterion is a large congregational structure. There was a well outside the north entrance to the sanctuary. The finds included *kernoi*; at least three terracotta figurines of women, and a marble pig dedicated in the sanctuary. A fourth-century marble relief found at Eleusis shows worshippers approaching Demeter (with phiale and sceptre) and Kore (with torches) with a piglet.<sup>9</sup>

The sanctuary at Bitalemi lies on a low hill across the river from the city (and its wall) (Figure 5.2). A graffito on a fifth-century Attic vase fragment, 'to the Thesmophoroi from the skanai of Dikaio', confirms that this was a sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. The sanctuary was in use from the mid-seventh century to the Carthaginian destruction of Gela in 405, but was not re-established when the city was rebuilt in the fourth century. No architecture from the earliest phase has been preserved; what survives is certainly not monumental, consisting of *naiskoi* or *sacelli*. The largest structure, G2, identified by the excavator as a *lesche* or meeting-place, measures only 4 by 11 metres. Deposits of ash, animal bones, especially pig, burnt cooking pots, and knives suggest that ritual meals were consumed in the sanctuary. One deposit includes a two-stone hearth with a pig mandible and some 20 pots, used in the ritual meal, placed on top.

Among the early offerings were agricultural tools (iron ploughshares, sickles, hoes, and axes, and querns), 'premonetary' bronzes (*aes signatum*), and bronze jewellery. Terracottas of women carrying piglets, poppy flowers, or children as well as female masks and *protomes* were common, especially in later phases. Lamps and loomweights were also found. Ninety per cent of all offerings,

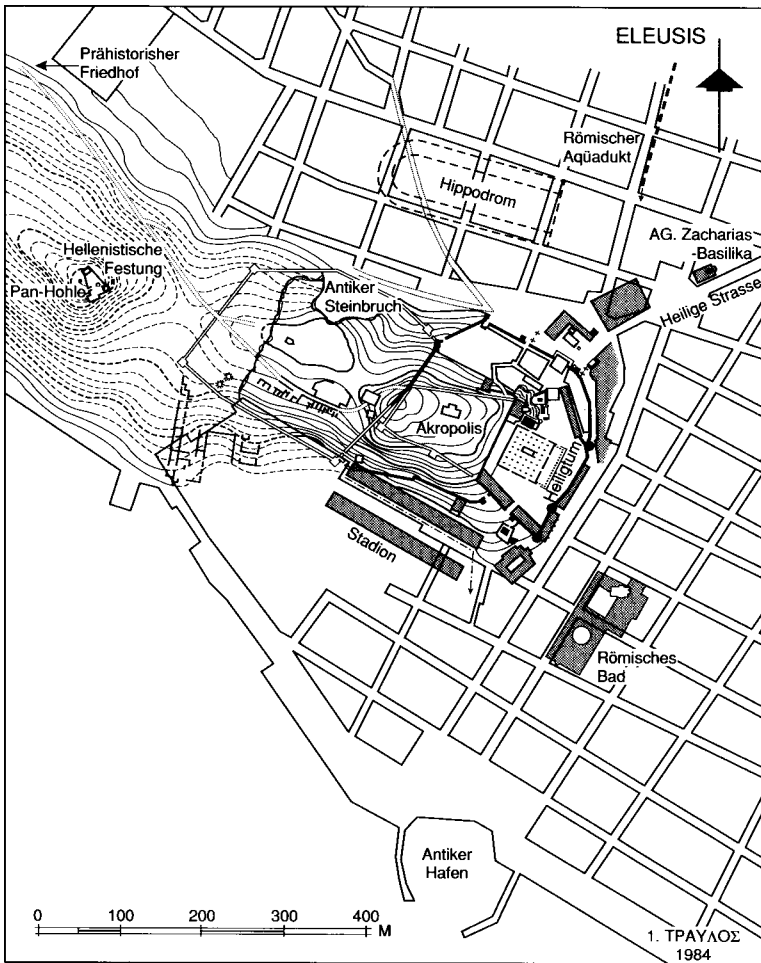


Figure 5.1 Eleusis, plan of the sanctuary and city

Source: Travlos 1988: fig. 105

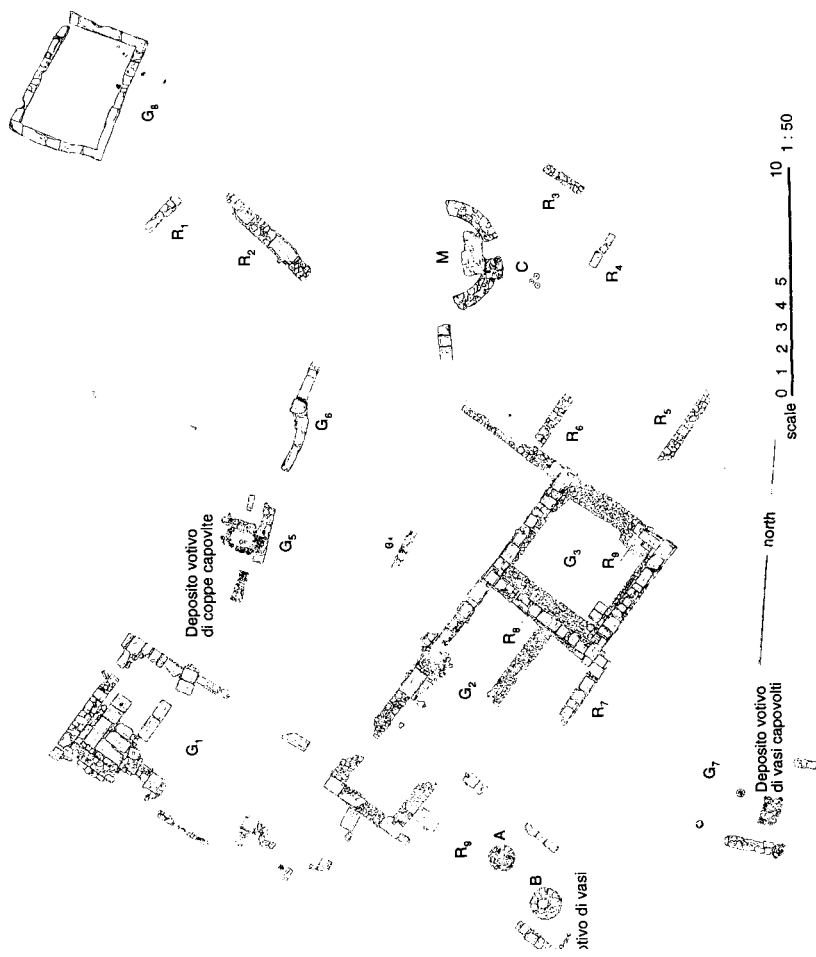


Figure 5.2 Bitalemi/Gela,  
plan of the sanctuary

Source: Orlandini, *Rivist*, new  
series 15 (1968), pl. 3



Figure 5.3 Corinth, plan of the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, c. 400 BC Source: With thanks to Nancy Bookidis; also published in Bookidis 1993:46

however, consisted of unpainted pots set upside down, either isolated or in groups; *kylikes* (drinking vessels), *oinochoai* (wine jugs), and small *hydriai* were the predominant shapes. In one instance, 100 fifth-century unpainted cups were placed upside down, more or less in a semi-circle, near an earlier structure. In one corner there was a terracotta figurine with a piglet and poppy flowers. Within the semi-circle stood an *oinochoe* and a cup, right side up.<sup>10</sup>

The Demeter and Kore sanctuary at Corinth lies within the city walls, about 15–20 minutes' walk south of the city centre, on the lower slopes of Acrocorinth (Figure 5.3). Cult activity began in the seventh century, reached its peak in the sixth to fourth centuries, and continued in the Hellenistic period until 146 BC. After 100 years of abandonment the cult was revived, and remained active until the fourth century AD. The identification of the sanctuary is confirmed by *graffiti* and *dipinti*.

The sanctuary is arranged on three terraces with three different functions. The lowest terrace, at the northern end, was used for dining. By the late fifth century, there were 30 dining-rooms with couches for 200 people (more than at any other Greek sanctuary), most with additional facilities for sitting, washing, and cooking. Very few bones were found in the dining-rooms, but one fifth-century example (Figure 5.3: N: 21–2) has pig and other bones on the floor. The number of querns found in the sanctuary suggests that grain may have been an important item on the menu.

The middle terrace was used for sacrifice and offerings. Seven miniature *kalathoi* (baskets) were set upright at the bottom of one stone-lined pit. At the eastern end of the terrace another, larger stone-lined pit dated to the Hellenistic period was full of ash and charred pig bones. Elsewhere on this terrace, some 50 pots, mostly classical *kalathoi*, were piled up in a 'pottery pocket' against one wall of a room.

On the upper terrace at the southern end of the sanctuary there were two rock-cut theatral areas with room for 85–90 spectators. Near the western theatral area was a rock-cut well.

Besides finds already mentioned there were some 23,000 terracotta figurines, including standing females with *polos* (archaic), jointed female figures, described as dolls (classical), standing females, often with *polos*, with a piglet and sometimes a torch as well (Hellenistic). Other terracotta dedications included miniature offering trays, some perhaps related to *kernoi*, others in the shape of *likna* (winnowing fans), containing small cakes, loaves, and fruit. Miniature vases—*kalathoi*, and later *hydriai*—were found in abundance, as were lamps



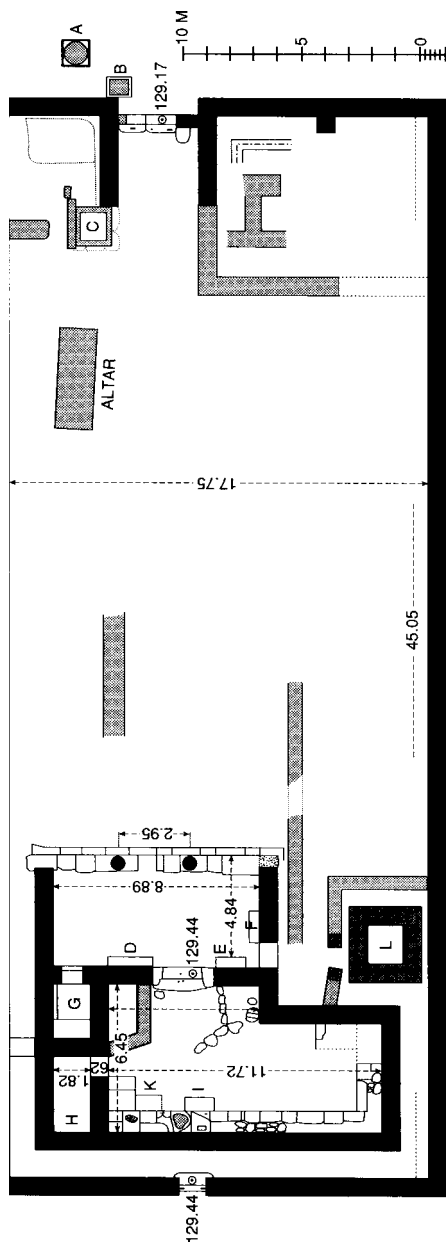


Figure 5.4 Pirience, plan of the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore

Source: Wiegand and Schrader 1904:148

and loomweights. Among the more expensive dedications were a scarab and a silver ring. Table, cooking, and storage vessels were also present; the only tools discovered were knives, probably used for sacrifice/butchery, rather than as votives.<sup>11</sup>

The sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Priene is again within the city wall, but on the west end of a terrace above the city centre, on the way to the acropolis (Figure 5.4). It was built in the mid-fourth century at the time of the relocation or expansion of the city, and remained in use at least until the first century BC. It was eventually destroyed by Christians. The identification of the sanctuary is confirmed by two inscribed bases of statues representing priestesses of Demeter and Kore just outside the entrance to the *temenos*, on the east. Just inside the entrance there was a water basin, and there may have been a spring near the *temenos*.

Within the *temenos* was a structure with its entrance—a porch with two Doric columns in antis—on the eastern side, but with its long axis oriented north-south. The walls were constructed of earth and rubble, faced in and out with marble plaster, incised to imply socle and orthostate blocks. The structure had three rooms, one large (11.7 by 6.5 metres) and two small, on the north side. The large room had a bench running along its back (west) wall which continued around the two corners; it (and the two marble tables set along it) may have provided space for offerings. In the north-east corner of the large room were found two marble heads of female statues. Outside the structure on the south-east was a stone-lined pit, empty except for rubbish and fallen stones. Between the structure and the later wall enclosing the pit was an accumulation of miniature *hydriai* and 212 terracotta figurines (third to first centuries). They include dancing and standing girls and women, female *hydrophoroi*, pigs, and the unique Baubo figurines (the oldest dated to the early second century): a female body without head or breasts, with the face represented on the stomach, carrying a *kithara*, a torch, or an offering tray with small cakes or fruit.<sup>12</sup>

I hope I have shown that there is good reason to consider all sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore as part of the ‘package’ of cults associated with them. Like other Demeter sanctuaries, the Telesterion at Eleusis has an isolated location (even within the city wall) with provision for water. Two of the four sanctuaries discussed have space for communal viewing (Eleusis, Acrocorinth); we cannot say what the two large rooms at Bitalemi and Priene were used for (though it is interesting that they are of comparable size). There are special

deposits of offerings at Bitalemi and Acrocorinth; we cannot be certain that the votive ‘accumulation’ at Priene was actually placed, and not enough information has been published about votives at Eleusis. Piglets link all four sanctuaries; women with torches connect three (Eleusis, Acrocorinth, Priene), as do miniature *hydriai* (as far as we know none were found at Eleusis).

Not enough work has been done on votives and the way they were deposited in sanctuaries to say whether the deposits in these sanctuaries are as unusual as they seem. But their architecture alone should serve to put all of them in a different category from that of sanctuaries with the conventional arrangement of temple with cult statue inside and altar outside. The two Doric columns and incised marble plaster at Priene serve only to remind us how unusual this and the other three sanctuaries actually were.

## PLANTS

The symbolic significance of plants in texts is frequently acknowledged; their pragmatic importance is not always fully explored. Here I look at four plants linked with Demeter and Kore: pennyroyal and pomegranate (from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter (HHD)*),<sup>13</sup> whose story is connected with the Eleusinian Mysteries; and pine and vitex (the chaste-tree) from later texts concerning the Thesmophoria. All four had a number of different medical applications; I focus on those connected with human reproduction.

In the *HHD*, Demeter requests a drink, *kykeon*, made of barley meal, water, and tender pennyroyal, *Mentha pulegium L.* The text is clear as to the species, and translators do no service by rendering it simply as mint. Aristophanes makes it clear that he and his audience knew of its use as an anti-fertility drug. In the Hippocratic Corpus, pennyroyal is recommended for opening the uterus for various reasons: preconceptual purgation, hysteria, emmenagogue, expulsion (of foetus/afterbirth), and stimulation of lochia. Dioscorides, Pliny, and Galen also recommend it as emmenagogue and abortifacient. Soranus mentions it as one of several aromatic restoratives in labour. Pennyroyal and its extract, the ketone pulegone, work by stimulating contractions of the uterus, hence its use in preventing or ending a pregnancy. It can also be used to strengthen contractions in labour, to help expel the placenta, and to assist the involution of the uterus after birth, though these uses are not specifically mentioned in ancient sources.<sup>14</sup>

Immediately after the *kykeon* episode in the *HHD*, Metaneira offers

Demeter the job of looking after her baby son and Demeter accepts, making it clear that she is a skilled practitioner of herbal medicine: she knows the right antidote (literally ‘anti-cutting’ of plant or root) for dangerous medicine, as well as a strong safeguard against bad magic. Demeter’s positive connection with plant lore is in striking contrast with the more common, negative associations of women and ‘root-cutting’ represented by Medea and Circe.<sup>15</sup>

Towards the end of the poem Persephone tells Demeter that Hades tricked her and forced her to eat a pomegranate seed. In so doing, Hades compelled Persephone to spend part of the year with him in the underworld, but he may also, presumably unwittingly, have caused Persephone to be sterile. In medical texts the value of pomegranate, *Punica granatum* L., as an anti-fertility drug is only gradually realised. In the Hippocratic Corpus it is an astringent cleanser, mostly for conditions affecting the uterus and female genitals, such as abnormal uterine discharge, thrush, prolapse, and hysteria. Like pennyroyal, pomegranate is used for expulsion (of foetus/afterbirth). Pomegranate seems not to be recommended as part of any treatment to promote fertility in the Hippocratic Corpus. Pliny says that it is ‘useful for doctors’; Dioscorides apparently makes an oblique reference to pomegranate as an abortifacient. But Soranus is very clear on the main use of pomegranate: he lists no fewer than five different prescriptions for contraceptive pessaries. Clement of Alexandria says that women at the Thesmophoria were not allowed to eat pomegranate seeds that had fallen on the ground. It is now known that the pomegranate contains female sex hormones, hence its effectiveness as a contraceptive.<sup>16</sup>

Two other plants are later connected with the cults of Demeter. The scholiast on Lucian, who gives the most complete account of the Thesmophoria, says that during the festival Greek women threw pine branches (*konou thallous*) into chasms along with piglets, and that both are symbolic of the *genesis* of crops and men and therefore a suitable offering to Demeter. Stephanos of Byzantium says in connection with Miletos that at the Thesmophoria there, pine branches (*pituos kladon*) were used in the temporary shelters, and that pine cones (*konon pituos*) were used as offerings, again because of their connection with *genesis*.

According to the Hippocratic Corpus, pine resin (from *Pinus brutia*, *laricio*, *halepensis*, *pinea*) is one of several emollient *pharmaka* that bring on strong *katharsin* (usually meaning cleaning of the uterus through menstruation); it could be used as an extract or as the resin

which is present in branches. Most of its applications are gynaecological: abnormal uterine discharge, thrush, prolapse, hysteria, amenorrhoea, preconceptual softening, cleansing, and opening of the womb, emmenagogue, expulsion of afterbirth, and stimulation of lochia. Pine bark was recommended for some of these applications and for fumigation in a difficult labour. Dioscorides says that pine products are abortifacient; Pliny names the ground pine (*Ajuga chia* Schreb. or *A. chamaepitys* Schreb.) as an emmenagogue. Soranus says that pine bark can prevent pregnancy and that it can improve breast milk. Recent research suggests that the Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.), like pomegranate, contains female sex hormones (and therefore can have contraceptive effects), and that pine needles can inhibit implantation and early pregnancy in rats.<sup>17</sup>

The earliest associations of vitex with the Thesmophoria, usually in Athens/Attica, occur in Dioscorides and Pliny, and are therefore relatively late: women are said to sit or lie on branches of vitex during the second day of the festival. In the Hippocratic Corpus vitex has various uses, mostly gynaecological: for abnormal uterine discharge, hysteria, conception, expulsion of afterbirth/foetus, speeding up labour, galactagogue. Its applications partially overlap with those of pennyroyal, pomegranate, and pine, but it is clearly not regarded as an opener or cleanser of the uterus. Dioscorides says that it brings on menstruation, birth, and milk, and that it was considered a purifier because of its association with the Thesmophoria; Pliny that vitex promotes menstruation, purges the uterus, encourages abundant milk, and preserves chastity by inhibiting sexual desire; he seems to be the first to mention vitex as an anaphrodisiac.

Modern research has produced ambivalent results on vitex as an anti-fertility drug—one study says that it has no contraceptive effect, others suggest that it is an abortifacient. Other recent studies have established, more plausibly, that vitex is not itself hormonal (unlike pomegranate and pine) but instead acts on the pituitary gland so that hormones are produced in the right order and in the right quantities. Thus vitex can be used for any gynaecological problem connected with hormonal imbalance, e.g. regulation of menstrual cycles; encouragement of conception, labour, and lactation; treatment of fibroids, ovarian cysts, and endometriosis; management of symptoms of menopause.<sup>18</sup>

The three plants identifiable by species (pennyroyal, pomegranate, vitex) are all easily recognisable and extremely common; nor were pines of various species difficult to find. The processes of making the

various medicines were not complicated. The references to pennyroyal in Aristophanes suggest that plant lore and the preparation were familiar subjects to ordinary women as well as to the male authors who wrote about them. The positive association between Demeter and herbal medicine has already been mentioned. Also important is the general agreement by ancient medical writers on the uses of these plants, nearly always confirmed by modern scientific research.

It is all the more striking, then, that both ancient and modern commentators on the cults of Demeter and Kore have assumed that known anti-fertility agents could have nothing to do with cults associated by them with fertility. Thus the use of pennyroyal as an abortifacient has often been considered irrelevant to cults at Eleusis; and the non-anaphrodisiac effects of vitex have been thought 'contradictory' for the Thesmophoria.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, ancient and modern commentators have clung to the symbolic fertility of pomegranates and pine cones, and have screened out their attested medical uses as anti-fertility drugs.

There is at least one other way of assessing the significance of these plants, which avoids all contradictions. Of course the cultic functions of (for example) pennyroyal and vitex were not transferable between the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria. The point is that together the plants could provide an easily accessible way for women to regulate every stage of their reproductive lives (menstruation, conception, abortion, delivery, lactation, and possibly menopause). The conventional assumption in most interpretations of the cults is that fertility, human as well as agricultural, was always to be promoted. The connection of the plants with the cults of Demeter and Kore suggests that control of human fertility—both promotion and suppression—might well have been in the hands of women. Kalligeneia, the third day of the Thesmophoria, may refer to births that were beautiful because they were chosen. It then becomes possible to suggest a truly polyvalent interpretation of the cults, as male and female desire for controlled fertility can have at least two meanings: men may have wanted to ensure legitimate heirs, but women knew that fertility was a matter of choice, and that they were only as fertile as they wanted to be.

## **THE STORY OF DEMETER AND KORE**

The *HHD* is a surprising poem. It tells an unusual kind of story and it has an unusual focus. In this section I discuss its departure from,

and subversion of, the usual Greek story told about girls. I then go on to look at the *HHD*'s focus, which is not on the father-son relationships that preoccupy much of Greek mythology, but instead on the relationship between a mother and a daughter.

In my introduction I noted that Greek religion could be described as a bisexual polytheistic system, in which males were nonetheless in charge, in heaven as on earth. In this asymmetrically gendered system, Greek gods and humans did come in both sexes, no matter how much this was deplored at the human level.<sup>20</sup> But there is one category in Greek religion that did not come in both sexes, namely heroes (epic rather than local). Epic heroes are always male, and their life-stories follow a general pattern elucidated by scholars such as Lord Raglan and Propp.<sup>21</sup> While heroes always manage to complete their heroic tasks, they are not always successfully fertile. Even if heroes do have sons, their offspring may not survive them, as in the case of Jason.

If females cannot be heroes, there can be no direct equivalent of the hero story for women. The only female story pattern to have emerged is Burkert's interestingly named 'girl's tragedy', with its sequence of departure, seclusion, rape, tribulation, and rescue after the birth of a male child, usually destined to be a hero; Danaë is a good example.<sup>22</sup> In this type of narrative, the girl's story usually ends as the boy's begins; indeed the whole point of the girl's 'tragedy' is the birth of a baby boy.

The story of Demeter and Kore in the *HHD* more or less follows this pattern to begin with, but there are some obvious differences: first, the rescue takes place not after birth, but after contraception (through Hades' administration of the pomegranate seeds; cf. discussion on p. 86), and there is no suggestion in the *HHD* that Kore will have children of either sex; and, second, the rescue is performed by the girl's own mother who also happens to be a god.<sup>23</sup>

The *HHD*, then, is the story of a mother using her own power on behalf of her daughter, in order to change the terms of a contract put together by the daughter's father and uncle, so that the daughter can have a different marriage and therefore a better future. Like the multiple girls' 'tragedies' and boys' heroic lives, the story is part of mainstream Greek mythology; unlike them, it seems to be unique. Indeed, for a time I wondered if the story were not unique, full stop, until I realised that it occurs, and more than once, in a more recent narrative tradition, the European fairy tale.

There are several fairy tales in which a mother, often transformed

or acting through an intermediary, helps her daughter to negotiate a better future, in the form of a good marriage, by rescuing her from an ordeal of some kind, often involving a drop in social status. For example, in the German versions of Cinderella, it was the tree growing on Cinderella's mother's grave (and the bird living in it) that worked the magic; in French versions it is the fairy godmother who waves a wand and rescues Cinderella from kitchen work so that she can marry the prince.<sup>24</sup> In fairy tales the daughter generally has centre stage (Kore does not speak until the end of the *HHD*, whose main character is really Demeter), but rescuing a daughter from tribulation and negotiating a better future through marriage are still crucial parts of the story.

Even more recently, the rescue of a female child has emerged as a theme in feminist science fiction in English. In these stories, outsiders, usually female and often multiple, but still recognisably maternal, intervene to rescue a girl from an oppressive society and therefore to provide her with a future that is both active and free; marriage is irrelevant.<sup>25</sup>

The Demeter and Kore story was both unique and important in its own time, no doubt because of its connection with contemporary cults. By contrast, both fairy tales and science fiction have produced more than one example of the story, but the connection of the female children to their biological mothers is progressively diluted as the ending of the story becomes increasingly radical, ultimately requiring the removal of the child from her natal society, while the link with mainstream religion was severed long before the time of the Brothers Grimm. Similarly, the circulation of these later stories has probably decreased over time—everyone presumably knew the story of Demeter and Kore, most people knew the stories of Cinderella and the Goose Girl, but relatively few people read science fiction.

The story of a daughter's rescue by a maternal figure is therefore an unusual but durable one in European culture. The *HHD* provides a unique and surprising Greek example, in that it subverts the more common stories of 'tragic' girls. It is now time to move from girls' stories to a discussion of the *HHD*'s equally unusual focus on mother-daughter relationships.

The connection between father and son is one of the most important relationships in Greek myth, as in Greek culture.<sup>26</sup> As stated earlier, the *HHD* is unusual in focusing on a mother-daughter relationship. This focus, moreover, is not simply a difference in gender, but also a difference in the kind of relationship between



parent and child. Fathers want sons, even though the succession from father to son may not be an orderly handing over of power from one generation to the next, but a source of conflict, often violent. The struggles of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus come to an end because of Kronos' defeat, followed by Zeus' marriage to Metis whom he swallowed rather than let her bear a second, male, powerful child.<sup>27</sup> The story of Laios and Oidipous provides an example at the human level; the story comes to an end because Polyneices and Eteocles kill each other over the succession. As for heroes, they are sometimes responsible for the death of a father or father-figure, as with Jason who killed his wicked uncle Pelias. The violence associated with the Greek father-son relationship may explain the ambivalence towards reproduction expressed as heroic infertility. Father-son violence does of course occur in other cultures, for example, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition where the stories of Abraham and Isaac, and God and Jesus are usually classified as 'sacrifice', with Mary as a 'tragic girl' *à la* Burkert.<sup>28</sup> The case of Demeter and Kore is therefore strikingly different from these stories, as the mother rescues the daughter without resorting to violence, and the daughter seems glad of the continuing link with her mother.

Any focus on parent-child relationships necessarily embodies a view of human fertility and can be used to explore ideas about it. The father-son relationship, though often difficult, was nonetheless extremely important in Greek culture. Thus the dominant Greek scientific theory of conception, that of Aristotle, is ideologically linked with non-scientific views in earlier texts, and is vehemently male monogenetic, i.e., humans are stuck with bisexual reproduction, but there is only one true creative principle involved and it is male; fathers therefore are primarily responsible for engendering sons.<sup>29</sup> Delaney has noticed a link between male monogenesis and male monotheism: 'the theory of conception and the conception of the deity are...two aspects of the same system'.<sup>30</sup> Her link is relevant to this discussion. The privileging of the father-son relationship in Greek culture and the Greek male monogenetic view of conception have already been mentioned. Zeus is only one of a number of gods, but he is definitely in charge; while not the sole creator of the world, he is frequently described as 'father'.<sup>31</sup>

Theories of male monogenesis and a latent male monotheism might well suggest that Greek women had no active role in any aspect of fertility. But the references to pennyroyal and pomegranate in the *HHD* (and to pine and vitex in allusions to the Thesmophoria)

imply that any woman with knowledge of these plants could regulate her own reproductive life as she chose. Demeter's control of agricultural fertility is made very clear in the *HHD*, and is all the more surprising for being couched in male monogenetic terms—the all-important (male) seed will not grow because Demeter hides it and the earth cannot send it back up (*aniemi*): there is no question of an equal, creative female contribution from Demeter or the earth.<sup>32</sup>

To conclude this section, the story of Demeter and Kore is unusual in several respects: it subverts the usual Greek girl's story, and it focuses on a harmonious mother-daughter relationship rather than a violent father-son dyad. Finally, it suggests that despite a male monogenetic view of conception and a male god-in-charge sort of polytheism, both human and agricultural fertility were subject to some degree of female control. Agricultural fertility is overtly restored when Demeter sends the hidden seed back up; human fertility is covertly prevented when ignorant Hades administered a known contraceptive to his wife, who might otherwise have borne him a child.<sup>33</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I hope I have shown the usefulness of considering the cults of Demeter and Kore as constituent parts of one system. The sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore have a number of shared peculiarities with respect to their location, architecture, and finds, making them unusual compared with most other sanctuaries. The Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria, are further linked by the four plants mentioned in connection with them, all of which have to do with the control of human fertility. The *HHD* has an unusual focus on a mother-daughter relationship nearly destroyed by a marriage arranged by others.

I conclude that there are at least two views of fertility in the cults of Demeter and Kore, depending, so to speak, on whom you might have talked to about them.<sup>34</sup>

The dominant male view would be the conventional view of ancient and modern male commentators, mentioned at the beginning of this paper—fathers want sons, women are necessary to produce legitimate heirs in order to perpetuate the *polis*, so let the women have their separate fertility cults as well as participating in the Mysteries. The not-so-muted female view could well have been different—women knew ways of controlling their own fertility and in

remembering the anger and power of Demeter negotiating on behalf of her daughter, they helped their own daughters manage their married lives by passing on that knowledge. If Demeter Thesmophoros was the bringer of order then perhaps it was an order in which women had some say.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of this article were given at the Women in Antiquity Seminar, Oxford (1991) and in classes (1991, 1993) at the University of New Brunswick at Saint John (as well as at the Women in Antiquity Conference, 1993). I thank the members of these audiences for their comments, as well as the editors of this volume. Special thanks to Jennifer Moody and Oliver Rackham who taught me to take plants seriously, and to Anne McIntyre, MNIMH for help with references on plant remedies. Thanks also to Simon Price, Robert Parker, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood who read the draught; and to Elizabeth and Miranda Nixon for providing support during the final writing-up. I am most grateful to librarians in Saint John (Science Fiction and Fantasy Collection) and Oxford (Ashmolean and Taylorian Libraries) for their help, and to Nancy Bookidis for providing a plan for the sanctuary at Corinth. I am, of course, responsible for the faults that remain.

## NOTES

- 1 Arthur 1982a on three stages in Hesiod, for a view of the building of that system.
- 2 Arthur 1994:241.
- 3 Foley 1994:65–71.
- 4 Nilsson 1906:313; Detienne 1989; Zeitlin 1982:129–47; Winkler 1990a; Foley 1994:71–4; cf. now Osborne 1993. For the timing of these and other Demeter cults, see Brumfield 1981; and Foxhall, Chapter 6.
- 5 E.Ardener 1975a and b.
- 6 Clinton's proposal that in Eleusis the Thesmophoria were held in the forecourt of the Telesterion suggests an important physical link between the two cults; Clinton 1988:72–3, 76, 79, and 1993:113.
- 7 Brumfield 1981; Foxhall, Chapter 6. Peiraieus decree *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1177=LSCG* 36. In addition there are the Eleusinion at Athens and a possible Eleusinion at Paiania (the latter's function is not known); and lesser mysteries not only at Agrai but also at Phlya and Phrearrhioi; Brumfield 1981:162, 177 n. 21, 142.
- 8 Cole 1994; Rolley 1965. Cities with more than one sanctuary of Demeter mentioned by Cole: Megara, Hermione, Gela, Selinous. Thasos may

- have had two Demeter sanctuaries: the excavated extramural sanctuary identified as a Thesmophorion (part of which was used for a local phratry cult); and a sanctuary of Demeter Eleusinia attested by an inscription mentioning its priestess, found in the agora; see also Rolley 1965.
- 9 Eleusis: Mylonas 1961; Travlos 1988 (both with plans); Clinton 1992 (who rightly remarks that it is wrong to think of Eleusis only in connection with the Eleusinian Mysteries, which may postdate the Thesmophoria, Clinton 1992:6–7, and cf. 28–37; cf. also Parker 1991. There is, alas, no complete publication of the site and its finds. Three archaic female terracottas, two seated and one standing, Mylonas and Kourouniotes *AJA* 37, 1933:282 and fig. 15. Marble relief, *LIMC* IV, s.v. Demeter no. 234.
  - 10 Bitalemi/Gela: Kron 1992 (with plan) usefully summarises the results of excavations by Orsi (1901) and Orlandini (1960s), with references. The combination of agricultural tools and *kourotrophos* figurines (though in different periods) underlines the significance of agricultural and human fertility: Sfameni Gasparro 1986:279–80. Some finds are not obviously connected with Demeter, e.g. the terracotta silenus figure, Orlandini, *Kokalos* 12, 1966:20 and plate X.1.
  - 11 Corinth: Bookidis 1993; Bookidis and Stroud 1987, both with plans. ‘Pottery pocket’, Stroud, *Hesp.* 37, 1968:304–5, plate 88a. Some of the finds were connected with Dionysos: Bookidis and Stroud 1987:27. Male names as dedicators suggest that men were somehow involved in the cult; cf. also the 40 large terracotta statues of youths: Bookidis 1993:50; Bookidis and Stroud 1987:14, fig. 12.
  - 12 Priene: (re)location of city, Demand 1986. Inscriptions naming Demeter and Kore, or Kore: von Gaertringen 1906: nos 171–3; note number 196 mentions Philios’ dream of the *thesmophorous...potnias*, not a Thesmophorion. Sanctuary and finds: Wiegand and Schrader 1904:147–63, with plan; Raeder 1983:26, 28, 38–9. Terracottas, Töpperwein-Hoffmann 1971. Once again, not all the terracottas have an obvious link with Demeter; e.g. Eros leaning on Hermes. Baubo figurines, *LIMC* III, s.v. Baubo, no. 1 and cf. esp. no. 2; S.Ardener 1987; Olender 1990; the Baubo figurines leave out the one part of a woman’s body generally thought of as good, i.e., the breasts, crucial for the nourishment and survival of babies. Cf. also Golden 1988 on piglets and obscenity
  - 13 I have focused on pennyroyal and pomegranate because they were actually consumed, but other plants are mentioned in the *HHD*, notably the flowers in the meadow (6–8, 425–9; cf. Richardson 1974). Two of these, narcissus and crocus, may have had some special connection with Demeter and Kore; cf. Soph. *OC* 681–5. Both are recommended as emmenagogues as well as for other treatments, mostly gynaecological, e.g. Hippocr. *Mul.* I.74 (Littré: 8.154.15, 16; 156.16). I present here a selection of references to Hippocr. as in notes 14, 16–18 below. Cf. other uses in Soranus, summarised in Temkin 1956, *Materia Medica*, s.v. narcissus and saffron, with references; Riddle 1992:105 (crocus).
  - 14 Pennyroyal: *HHD* 208–10. Aristoph. *Peace* 706–12, *Lys.* 87–9. Hippocr. *Mul.* I.37 (Littré: 8.92.7), I.74 (8.156.2), I.78 (8.178.18, 190.17, 194.5); *Mul.* II.134 (8.304.13); II.157 (8.334.12); *Nat. Mul.* 32 (7.364.2), 53 (7.396.6). Diosc. *MM* 3.31 (1.2). Pliny *NHLIV*.154, Galen, XI.867. Soranus

- II.2 (Temkin 1956). Discussion: Scarborough 1991:144–5; Riddle 1992:53–4, 59. Additional uses: McIntyre 1988:100–1, 107, 108; cf. Potterton 1983:142.
- 15 *HHD* 225–30. Richardson (1974) at I. 230 notes that another meaning for erusmon, safeguard, is ‘the name of a vegetable whose seed is said to relieve pain in childbirth’, Paus. Gr. fr. 182. Root-cutters, Scarborough 1991:144.
  - 16 Pomegranate: *HHD* 412. Hippocr. *Mul.* II.192 (Littré: 8.372.6, 15, 20); *Nat. Mul.* 60 (7.398.16), 5 (7.318.4); *Mul.* 1.90 (8.216.5); *Nat. Mul.* 32 (7.356.12). Pliny *NH* XII.23.113. Soranus I.62, cf. III.44. Clem. *Protr.* II.19.3. Riddle 1992:26, 33, 51–2 (Diosc.). Cf. Potterton 1983:148. In depictions of Demeter and Kore, the main emblem of fertility seems to be the grain stalk, *LIMC* IV 2, s.v. Demeter; and Peschlow-Bindokat 1994. Pomegranates do occur at Kore’s sanctuary at Locri but may not be emblems only of fertility: Sourvinou-Inwood 1978:107–9 (1991:157–60); and *Notice degli Scaui* 1911, 73.
  - 17 Pine: Schol. Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* (Rabe 1906:275–6); Steph. Byz. s.v. Miletos. Hippocr. *Superf.* 33 (Littré: 8.502.2); *Mul.* II.119 (8.260.3), 192 (8.372.3); *Mat. Mul.* 60 (7.398.17), 5 (7.318.6), 87 (7.408.8); *Mul.* 13 (8.22.11); *Steril.* 217 (8.420.7); *Mul.* 1.74 (8.516.4), 78 (8.180.19); *Steril.* 234 (8.448.9); *Mul.* 1.34 (8.80.19). Diosc. *MM* I. 69; Pliny *NH* XXIV 29–30; Soranus I.62, III.44. Riddle 1992:51–2, 81, 83–4, 94. No research seems to have been done on the other effects noted by ancient authors.
  - 18 Vitex: Hippocr. *Mul.* II.198 (Littré: 8.382.3), 201 (8.386.5); *Mul.* 1.75 (8.162.16), 78 (8.184.4), 77 (8.172.9), 44 (8.102.18). Diosc. (Thesmophoria generally; confusion of agnos, vitex and *hagnos*, pure), *MM* I.103. Pliny (Thesmophoria in Athens) *NH* XXIV 59–64; Cf. Galen (Athens) XI.807, 809; Aelian (*Attica*) *NA* IX.26. Contraceptive: Hippocr., Diosc. *MM* 1.103; Pliny *NH* 24.59–63. Anti-fertility effects: Riddle 1992:35. General regulation of female reproductive system: McIntyre 1988:57; Mabey 1988:124–5 and 282 (with references); Böhnert and Hahn 1990; Mills 1992. Vitex in the cults of Artemis: King 1993:122–3; of Hera at Samos: Kron 1988:138–41.
  - 19 Detienne 1972:153–58, 1979:105–6, 1989:147.
  - 20 Loraux 1978.
  - 21 Summarised in Dowden 1992:146–8.
  - 22 Burkert 1979:6–7. The stories associated with local cult heroines like Iphigeneia are different from the hero story and girl’s tragedy discussed here.
  - 23 The Greek story was influenced but not definitively shaped by Mesopotamian precedents: Penglase 1994:145–6, 157–8. In later myths Persephone was said to have had a child: Foley 1994:110–1; cf. also Le Guin 1992.
  - 24 Cinderella: Zipes 1987:86–92 (German); Opie and Opie 1974 (French); Bottigheimer 1987:44–5; cf. the role of Falada in *The Goose Girl*: Zipes 1987:322–7; and that of the good fairy at Sleeping Beauty’s christening, who commutes the death sentence to sleep: Opie and Opie 1974. For

- the reappearance of the fairy godmother in two recent works of popular fiction, see McCullough 1987; and Stewart 1988.
- 25 Russ 1981:79–80; to her list of examples should be added Le Guin 1990. The work of Brown and Gilligan 1992 suggests that girls still face difficulties ('the wall') as they approach sexual maturity.
  - 26 Strauss 1993.
  - 27 Hesiod, *Theog.* 886–93, 924–6; cf. Zeus' refusal to marry Thetis because of a similar prophecy: Aesch., *Prometheus Bound* 755–74, 907–15; Pindar, *Isthm.* 8.27–37.
  - 28 Cf. Delaney 1986:6–8, 298–303, who links the stories of Laios and Abraham with the Islamic Festival of Sacrifices.
  - 29 Dean-Jones 1994: esp. ch. 3; cf. Lloyd 1983a: 87–94 for 'alternative theories of the female seed'.
  - 30 Delaney 1991:11; Delaney 1986 for basic exposition.
  - 31 Zeus in charge in *HHD*: decision to marry Kore to Hades (I. 9); decision to bring Kore back from Hades and approve the one-third down/two-thirds up arrangement (II. 441–8); Zeus as father (II. 321, 347, 364).
  - 32 *Aniemi* and hiding in *HHD*: II. 306–7, 332, 353, 451–2, 471. The plants (pennyroyal, etc.) were perhaps thought to operate in a similar fashion, helping or rejecting the seed, rather than stimulating or preventing female contribution. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the possibility of some earlier stage in Greek religion when goddesses were perhaps more powerful and there might also have been a less male monogenetic view of human fertility. But cf. again Arthur's analysis of the *Theogony* (1982a); cf. the inverse relationship between Christian elements and powerful heroines like the Goose Girl in fairy tales: Bottigheimer 1987:46–7; and note in particular the effects of Christianity on matrilineal mythology in New Mexico: Gutiérrez 1991:162.
  - 33 Certainly marriage and children go together in the *HHD*; Kore was to have been a *thaleren...akoitin*, I. 79; Demeter as nurse wishes for husbands and children for Keleos' daughters, I. 136.
  - 34 Cf. Taggart 1990: esp. 219–24, where he suggests that versions of the same story will vary according to the gender of the story-teller.