

Resounding mysteries: sound and silence in the Eleusinian soundscape

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Abstract

The term 'soundscape', as coined by the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer at the end of the 1960s, refers to the part of the acoustic environment that is perceivable by humans. This study attempts to reconstruct roughly the Eleusinian 'soundscape' (the words and the sounds made and heard, and those others who remained unheard) as participants in the Great Mysteries of the two Goddesses may have perceived it in the Classical and post-Classical periods. Unlike other mystery cults (e.g. the Cult of Cybele and Attis) whose soundscapes have been meticulously investigated, the soundscape of Eleusis has received relatively little attention, since the visual aspect of the Megala Mysteria of Demeter and Kore has for decades monopolised the scholarly attention. This study aims at putting things right on this front, and simultaneously look closely at the relational dynamic of the acoustic segment of Eleusis as it can be surmised from the work of well-known orators and philosophers of the first and second centuries CE.

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Sound, like breath, is experienced as a movement of coming and going, inspiration and expiration. If that is so, then we should say of the body, as it sings, hums, whistles or speaks, that it is *ensounded*. It is like setting sail, launching the body into sound like a boat on the waves or, perhaps more appropriately, like a kite in the sky. (Ingold 2007:12, emphasis in original)

Tim Ingold's description of the materiality of sound brings to mind lines 154–8 from the *parodos* (i.e. the entry song the chorus would sing) of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, where a breath (*pnoē*) of *aulos*¹ music and the rhythmic clapping of hands is described as the standard acoustic accompaniment of the jubilant bands of the initiates (*memyemenoī*) into the Eleusinian Mysteries:

Heracles: There a breath of *aulos* music will surround you and you will see a miraculous light, like here, and myrtle-groves and the happy *thiasoi* of men and woman and much clapping of the hands.

Dionysus: Who are these people?

Heracles: The initiates ...

Albeit refracted through the lenses of Athenian comedy, the *parodos*² of the *Frogs* gives us a snapshot of the spirited auditory experience the public segment of the Eleusinian Mysteries must have been for those partaking. Yet for centuries Eleusis, situated about fourteen miles to the west of Athens, was far better known for the proverbial silence that shrouded the two levels of initiation into the Mysteries of the Goddesses: the *mysis* (usually translated in Latin as *initio* and in English as 'initiation') and the next stage, the *epopteia*.³ There is no real contradiction here. Both sound and silence, and the stark antithesis between them, are testaments to the polyvalent acoustic landscape, or soundscape, of Eleusis.⁴ However, unlike other mystery cults (e.g. the cult of Cybele and Attis) whose soundscapes have been meticulously investigated (Pavolini 2015), the soundscape of Eleusis has received relatively little attention.⁵ This is partly due to an emic emphasis on the visual aspect of the Great Mysteries (*Megala Mysteria*) of Demeter and Kore and partly because it is precisely the visual facet of the Mysteries that has for decades monopolised scholarly attention (e.g. Petridou 2013). The present study is an attempt to put things right on this front and, simultaneously, to look closely at the relational dynamic of the acoustic aspect of Eleusis as it can be surmised from the epigraphic, literary and iconographical evidence. The ultimate aim of this article is to join forces with the editors of the volume in unravelling the sensorial richness and diversity of religious practices by focusing on the sonorous setting of Classical and post-Classical Eleusis as a case study.

The term ‘soundscape,’ as coined by the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer at the end of the 1960s, refers to the part of the acoustic environment that is perceivable by humans. The concept is not entirely unproblematic. Tim Ingold (2007), for instance, believes the term was initially useful as a rhetorical schema that drew attention to a sensory register that had been thus far neglected, but has since then ‘outlived its usefulness.’ Ingold’s main objection to the use of the concept of soundscape is that sound, just like light, is not the object but the medium of our perception: ‘it [sic sound] is what we hear *in* (emphasis in the original).’⁶ However, I use ‘soundscape’ here with a distinctly anthropological sense⁷ to denote the sonic equivalent of landscape, or else to encompass everything to which the ears of those partaking in the public and the secret segments of the Great Mysteries would have been exposed. Most of my analysis will be focused on the natural components of the soundscape, as the cultural components are sadly lost to us. Like landscape, soundscape is both a natural and a cultural construct embracing both the spontaneous and the meticulously composed, the improvised and the carefully directed sonic setting. It encompasses ideologies and practices of producing and listening to sounds that were extremely culture-specific.⁸

After a few general remarks about the sonic richness of the Greek cultic scene in general, and Eleusis in particular, the first section of this article attempts to roughly reconstruct the Eleusinian ‘soundscape’ (the words and the sounds made and heard in the public and private segments of the Eleusinian festival, as well as those others which remained unheard) as participants in the Great Mysteries of the Two Goddesses may have perceived it in the Classical and post-Classical periods. Due to space restrictions, the following sections provide a mere snippet of some of the key sonic settings from both the public segment of the festival (as attested in primary sources) and the secret segment (as can be surmised largely from literary allusions and scholarly speculation).⁹

The final part of the article draws on the concept of synchronic and diachronic resonance (Rosa 2012; 2014; 2016) as well as earlier scholarly work on the significance of silence in Greek religion and philosophy (Kippenberg and Stroumsa 1995; Montiglio 2000) and argues that through the centuries Eleusis came to be identified more closely with the proverbial silence that shrouds the rites that were accessible to the initiates. It was Plato’s influential reception of Eleusinian language and imagery that led a huge number of post-Classical authors, especially of the Hadrianic and Antonine eras (e.g. Plutarch, Dio and Aelius Aristides), to identify the truth the initiates acquired in the course of the initiatory rites with the primordial philosophical truth and knowledge (van Nuffelen 2007; 2011).

The Greek festivals and their sonorous culture

When I suggest that audio-based religious experiences in Eleusis is an under-researched scholarly topic, I do not overstate my case. The majority of students of Greek Religion, and I am no exception to this rule, have opted for discussions that focus on the visual aspect of the initiatory rites.¹⁰ This tendency can only partly be explained by the emic emphasis on the visual segment of the Mysteries (Petridou 2013; 2015:ch. 6 on ‘ritual viewing’). The ephemeral nature of sound in general, and the rather limited evidence regarding the sonic settings of the Greek festivals in particular, have both had an influence in shaping scholarly tendencies. Nonetheless, the late Martin West (1992:14) cannot have been far from the truth in thinking that, in the Greek-speaking world, music is ‘constantly associated with the idea of celebration’. No greater celebration ever existed than that of establishing close proximity and communication with the divine, and, as I have argued elsewhere (Petridou 2015:ch. 6), mysteries (*orgia*, *mystēria*, *teletai*, etc. in the original) did indeed provide their participants with an epiphany, that is a close encounter with the divine in all sorts of different forms.¹¹ Although we do not possess sound recordings and musical scores for these festivals, we have solid epigraphic, literary and iconographical evidence about musical instruments, singing, dancing, clapping of the hands, raising loud voices and cries (human and animal alike) all being conspicuously present in Greek religious festivals (Calame 2001; Kubatzki 2016).

At the heart of the majority of these festivals were (a) a joyous procession (quite often a chariot procession) transporting the visual symbol of the presence of the deity, and (b) sacrifice(s) performed in honour of the deity, and often the subsequent communal ritual dining.¹² The phrase ‘procession and sacrifice’ (*pompē kai thysia*) becomes almost formulaic in the epigraphic evidence.¹³ The procession, with the visual symbol of the divine parading through the streets of a village or a city and thus rendering the whole community co-witnesses of the deity’s arrival or departure and participants in the festive occasion, may precede or follow the sacrifice(s) offered to the deity (Graf 1996). Neither the sacrificial procession nor the sacrificial feast could be conceived of as taking place in a sonic void. They were all hugely popular, densely populated, and therefore rather boisterous affairs.

Eleusinian soundscape: the public segment

Participation in the Eleusinian Great Mysteries in the Attic month of Boedromion (the third month of the Attic calendar corresponding roughly to our September/October) could not have been very different from

participation in other festivals in terms of structural organisation, distribution of human, animal and material resources, and more importantly, sonorous culture. Despite scholarly interest being monopolised by what the initiated saw, participation in the Eleusinian initiatory rites was also, from start to finish, a high-octane auditory affair.

On the fifteenth day of Boedromion, in the Poikile Stoa of Athens, the great priest of Eleusis, the Hierophant, read the proclamation (*prorrhesis*), an event that marked the beginning of the festival (*teletē*). ‘Everyone who has clean hands and intelligible (Greek) speech, ‘he who is pure from all pollution and whose soul is conscious of no evil and who has lived well and justly’, the proclamation specified, could proceed with the initiation; the rest of the people should abstain (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.59; Libanius, *Declamations* 13.19, 52; Julian, *Orations* 7.25; with Dickie 2004). The next day was marked by lustrations and purifications in the sea. The famous cry of ‘To the sea, initiands!’ (*Halade Mystae*) became synonymous with the Eleusinian rites. One can only imagine the deafening cries of the suckling pig, which was purified and subsequently sacrificed, interrupting the ever-present singing of the cicadas and competing with the exuberant voices and cheerful clamour of the initiates. The culmination of this sonic extravaganza must have been the procession of the nineteenth day of Boedromion (see below), one of the most remarkable religious events of the ancient world. Dressed in festal clothes,¹⁴ crowned with wreaths, and holding great torches, the initiates, led by the youthful sonic god Iacchus and the members of the Eleusinian priestly personnel and sacred families (*genē*) of Kerykes and Eumolpidae, left Athens and, following the Sacred Way (*Hiera Hodos*), marched to Eleusis singing and rejoicing. Iacchus was the personification of the shouting and the enthusiasm which characterised the procession from Athens to Eleusis (Deubner 1932:73). The name of the god derives from the Greek verb *iaccheō* or *iacchō* meaning ‘to shout, to raise a cry, to mourn, to bewail’ and it is used in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (20) to describe Persephone’s sonic reaction to her abduction by Hades.

The outer court of the sanctuary at Eleusis was not reached until midnight because many stops had to be made on the way before the altars, shrines and sanctuaries which flanked the *Hiera Hodos*. In fact, festive music, singing and joyous human exclamations were so closely identified with the festive processions from and to Eleusis that quite often they went unnoted in our primary evidence. By contrast, the absence of these jubilant sonic settings is often remarked upon and interpreted as a major sign of disruption in the order of the Greek cultic cosmos.

Take the procession of 407 BCE, for example, which, according to Plutarch (*Alcibiades* 34.3–7), was led by Alcibiades, the well-known fifth century BCE Athenian statesman, who also faced accusations of profaning the Mysteries of Eleusis during a drinking party (*symposium*). As Spartan garrisons had been placed on the way to Eleusis right after the fortification of Deceleia, ‘the festivities conducted by the sea lacked splendour’. This effectively meant that sacrifices (*thysiae*), choral dances (*choreiae*) and many of the sacred ceremonies (*polla tōn drōmenōn*) usually held on the road, when the Iacchus procession was conducted forth from Athens to Eleusis, had out of necessity been omitted. Regardless, Alcibiades, along with the infantry, decided to escort the procession headed by the god Iacchus past the enemy by land in a decorous and silent way (*en kosmō kai meta siōpēs*). Not only did Agis, the Spartan king, keep quiet out of respect for the silent solemn spectacle (*thema semnon kai theoprepes*) but Alcibiades himself was heralded by his friends as a Hierophant and Mystagogue, two of the most prominent sacred officials of the festival who, respectively, revealed the sacred things (*hiera*) to the initiands (*mystae*) and led them to their initiation.

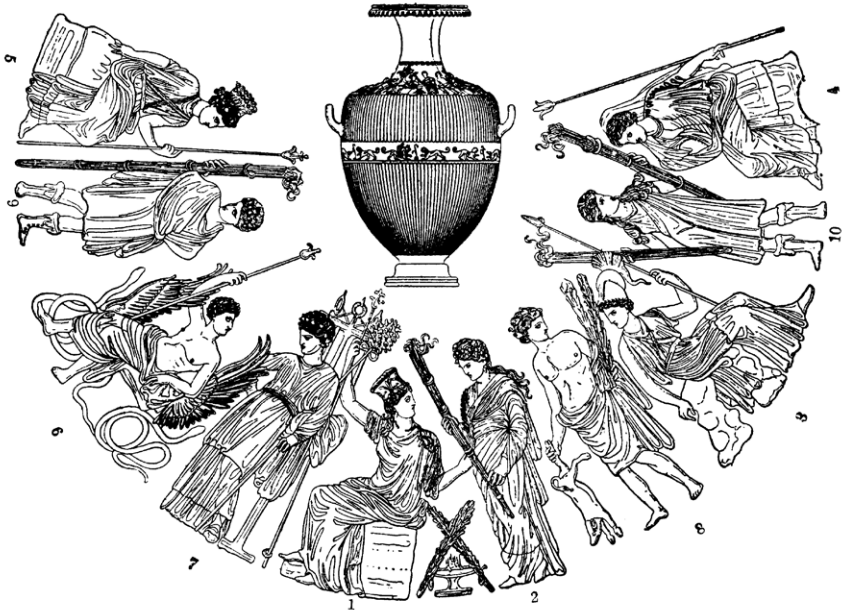


Figure 1: Drawing of a hydria (the ‘Regina Vasorum’) from Cumae, now in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg. The hydria portrays Iacchus (no. 9) and other Eleusinian deities and members of the priestly personnel. Drawing by author after Baumeister 1885:474, Fig. 520.

In that instance it was silence that is marked as out of the ordinary, since it has replaced the vociferous Iacchus song (see below), the joyous choral dances (*choriaie*) and many of the communal happenings that were normally at the heart of the auditory aesthetics of the Eleusinian procession. By conducting the Iacchus procession in a shroud of stillness, Alcibiades altered the semantics of the superimposed festive frugality, extending the mystique of the things that were not allowed to be seen, heard and done (*arrhêta* or *aporrhêta*) as part of the secret segment of initiatory rites (which should not be divulged or else could not be communicated) to the public part of the ceremony. The solemn substitution of sound with silence transformed a ritual and therefore repetitive event into an extraordinarily politically charged protest. However, in order to properly appreciate the



Figure 2: The Ninnion Tablet dated to approximately 370 BCE, now in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens. The votive tablet is made of clay and depicts, on the bottom left, a figure usually identified (by his ceremonial attire) as Iacchus leading a procession of initiates. The group of initiates and leading deities is received by the presiding deities of the Mysteries, Demeter and Kore, who are portrayed seated on the right-hand side of the relief. After Andreas N. Skias *Archaïologike Ephemeris* 1901: pinax 1.

ingenuity of this substitution, we need to remind ourselves of how loud and festive the Iacchus procession would have been under normal political circumstances.

The Iacchus procession

On the day of the Mysteries known as *eikas*, that is ‘the twentieth day’,¹⁵ an elaborate procession, with the priestesses of Eleusis in the lead, would escort the *hiera* from the Athenian Eleusinion, through the Agora, to the Dipylon and the temple of Iacchus, the Iaccheion, and then back to Eleusis (Plutarch, *Aristides* 27). In the Iaccheion, they would find Iacchus in the form of his wooden statue. The youthful god, often depicted holding torches and wearing hunting boots (Figures 1 and 2), would lead the *mystae* to their final destination, the Eleusinian Telesterion (the Eleusinian initiation chamber, Figure 3).¹⁶ According to Pausanias’ *Description of Greece* (1.2.4, 1.37.4), the statue was made by the Athenian sculptor Praxiteles. That Iacchus’ statue was perceived as the earthly manifestation of the god is evident from the kind of treatment it received: it was crowned with a wreath of myrtle and was carried in a carriage, an honour denied to the *mystae* and reserved only for the priestly personnel and the god himself. The *Iacchagōgos*, the god’s priest, would take his place with the god’s image at the head of the procession, which followed Demeter on the road to Eleusis (*Hiera Hodos*) amidst much sacred exhilaration and festive singing.¹⁷ Judging from epigraphic evidence and the comic version of the song found in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (314–413), while on their way, the *mystae* would sing the Iacchus-song, which would invoke the god to accompany them. They would often stop briefly to get some rest from the wearisome journey and perform sacrifices, choral songs and various *drōmena* (Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 34, 3–5; *Inscriptiones Graecae* II²1078, 29).

In historical times, it was believed that Iacchus’ epiphany was perceived by both Greeks and Persians in the course of the naval battle of Salamis (480 BCE). The story is preserved by both Herodotus (*Histories* 8.65) and Plutarch (*Themistocles* 15.1). In Herodotus’ longer and more detailed account, Iacchus’ epiphany is perceived by two exiles in the court of the Persian king: the Spartan Demaratus and the Athenian Dicaeus. Both witnesses are familiar with the cultural conventions of the Great Mysteries and Iacchus’ procession as one of its main sonic highlights. In other words, both men were able to recognise not only the natural sonic component of the procession but also its cultural significance. It is no surprise, then, that they are the ones who are able to disambiguate a ‘cloud of dust, such as might have been raised by an army of thirty thousand men on the march, coming from

the direction of Eleusis', and interpret it as part of that procession. Dicaeus even thought he recognised the Iacchus song and, given that there were no men left in Athens after the evacuation, he concluded that the voice they heard was clearly not human but divine. Shortly afterwards, we are told, this cloud of dust rose high into the air and drifted away towards Salamis, something that Dicaeus explains as a divine sign of the destruction of the Persian fleet.

In Plutarch's shorter version, 'a great light flashed out (*phōs eklamp-sai mega*) from Eleusis, and a sound and a voice (*ēchon de kai phōnēn*) filled the Thracian field right down to the sea, as though coming from a large body of men escorting the mystic Iacchus (*ton mystikon eksagōnton Iacchon*) in a procession. Then, out of the shouting throng, a cloud (*nephos*) seemed slowly to rise up from the land and then to come down'. It is as if, in 480 BCE, the gods decided to take part themselves in the festival that the Athenians had cancelled because of the Persian Wars. Iacchus manifested himself by an auditory epiphany, a reverberating sound alluding to the god's true acoustic nature.¹⁸

More than a century later, when Athens had yielded to the all-conquering Macedon, a Macedonian garrison happened to be instituted in Athens on the *eikas*, the day of the boisterous Iacchus' procession (*eksagōgē*). According to Plutarch's *Phocion* (28.1–3), the Athenians found this coincidence particularly painful. Looking back at previous glamorous celebrations of the Mysteries with nostalgia, they lamented the substitution of the jubilant clamour of the procession of the initiates with the Macedonian marching, and interpreted it as a sign of divine indifference and neglect. Unlike what happened in Salamis, the gods had now allowed for the profanation of the Mysteries:

For of old the mystic visions (*mysticas opseis*) and voices (*phōnas*) were granted to them in the midst of their most glorious successes, and brought amazement (*ekplēksis*) and awe (*thambos*) upon their enemies; but now, while in the same sacred ceremonies, the gods looked down with indifference upon the most grievous woes of Greece, and the profanation of the season which had been most sweet and holy in their eyes. (Plutarch, *Phocion* 28.2)

Dio Chrysostom (*Oration* 12.33) refers also to 'mystic visions and mystic voices' (*polla men horōnta mystica theamata, pollōn de akouonta toioutōn phōnōn*) but it is unclear which mysteries he has in mind. The ritual seating (*thronismos*) of the initiate mentioned in the same passage is attested for the Corybantic rites (Plato, *Euthydemus* 277d), while it has also been conjectured for the Kabeiric mysteries in Samothrace by Nock (1941:577–8). A form of *thronismos* is also attested in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 11 and

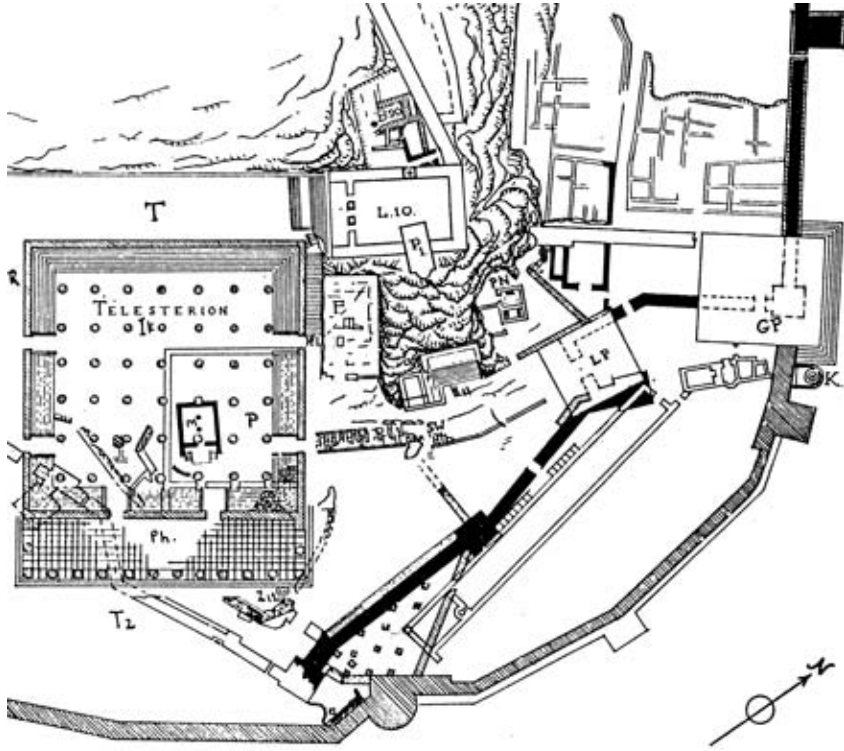


Figure 3: Map of the Eleusinian sanctuary. After Mylonas (1947).

may have been a constituent ritual element in Eleusis, if we are to read lines 250–5 from Aristophanes’ *Clouds* as a parody of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Eleusinian soundscape: the secret segment

Mystic visions and voices are placed on an equal footing in Plutarch’s passage quoted above. Neither is deemed more important than the other; instead, they are both situated in the centre of the multisensory initiatory experience in Eleusis. However, testimonies that report the extraordinary acoustic environs of Eleusis are, at best, commented on *en passant* in the scholarly literature and, at worst, are completely ignored. I have already mentioned the ephemerality of, and the limited amount of evidence regarding, the sonic settings of the part of the festival that took place in the Telesterion as possible causes of the scholarly disinterest in the sonorous aspect of the Eleusinian rites. Nonetheless, the scholarly reluctance to see the Eleusinian initiatory rites as a multisensory event may also be the result

of a projection of Christian ideas about the pre-eminence of intellectual stimulation over the sensory back onto the ancient world. Michael Cosmopoulos, for example, in his recent book on Bronze Age Eleusis, interprets Aristotle's laying of emphasis on the initiatory experience and using the infinitive *pathein*, that is 'suffering' (Fr. 15 Rose),¹⁹ as follows: 'This would suggest that the experience of the initiates was spiritual and did not rely on the world of the senses.' However, to my mind Aristotle's privileging of *pathein* (i.e. acquiring knowledge via suffering) over *mathein* (i.e. acquiring knowledge via cognitive processes) equates with an emphasis on the embodied and ensounded experience of the initiates rather than their intellectual processing of the auditory and visual stimuli to which they were exposed in the process of the initiation.

As I have argued before (Petridou 2013), there are numerous theoretical reconstructions of the exact nature of the mythical events dramatised for the eyes and the ears of the *mystae*, but, essentially, they can be summarised as follows: we can either assume with scholars like Nicolas Richardson (1974) that Demeter's sufferings *were simply narrated to the initiates at some stage during the sacred rites*, and that even if there was some sort of re-enactment of the mythical events, it would have been of a more formal and symbolic nature; or we can look at other students of the Eleusinian *mystêria*, such as George Mylonas, Kevin Clinton, Walter Burkert and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, who maintain that the re-enactment of the divine sufferings was of a mimetic nature, and that both priestly personnel and initiates participated in the ritual. Richardson (1974:24–5) builds his main argument around the following passage from Isocrates' *Panygericus* (28–9), in which we are told about Demeter's gifts to the Athenians, gifts 'of which only the initiated may hear':

Now, first of all, that which was the first necessity of man's nature was provided by our city; for even though the story has taken the form of a myth, yet it deserves to be told again. When Demeter came to our land, in her wandering after the rape of Kore, and, being moved to kindness towards our ancestors by services which may not be told save to her initiates, gave these two gifts, the greatest in the world – the fruits of the earth, which have enabled us to rise above the life of the beasts, and the holy rite which inspires in those who partake of it sweeter hopes regarding both the end of life and all eternity, our city was not only so beloved of the gods but also so devoted to mankind that, having been endowed with these great blessings, she did not begrudge them to the rest of the world, but shared with all men what she had received. The mystic rite we continue even now, each year, to reveal to the initiates; and as for the fruits of the earth, our city has, in a word, instructed the world in their uses, their cultivation, and the benefits derived from them. (trans. George Norlin, Loeb Classical Library)

The passage implies that Demeter's wanderings across the earth during her search for her daughter, and the benefactions the Athenians received from the goddess pertaining to both agriculture and afterlife, were part of the Sacred Discourse (*hieros logos*) of the cult (Bremmer 2014; Henrichs 2003). It is indeed possible that the initiates heard an elaboration, and/or an exegesis, of the story of the suffering goddesses as part of their initiation. Although this article aims at raising awareness of the richness of the Eleusinian soundscape by focusing on sound and hearing, we ought to be careful and not attempt to reduce a multisensory experience to one or the other sensory register. The fact that the orator refers to things that only those initiated could hear does not necessarily mean that the *mystae* were only listening to sacred words spoken. Isocrates simply makes a self-reference and reminds his initiated listeners why he does not go into depth about the Mysteries: so he would not commit sacrilege by revealing anything to non-initiates. He only speaks of listening because this is the only possible danger he faces: revealing the Mysteries by uttering something inappropriate. As expected, not much is known about what constituted the things that should not be divulged or else cannot be communicated (*arrhēta* or *aporrhēta*) of the Mysteries, what percentage of those forbidden things pertained to hearing and what to vision. Yet, we can, with some degree of certainty, assume that those who divulged the Mysteries in 415, according to Pseudo-Lysias (6.51), 'not only did they parody the rites, they also spoke the secrets.'²⁰

However, there are other sources which may suggest that the secret segment of the initiation was also an opulent audial setting. The Stoic Cleanthes (*Stoicorum Veterum Frangmenta* 1.538), for example, implies that a special kind of sacred semiology and an exegetical exposition of the secret names of the presiding deities may have been employed in the initiatory chambers of Eleusinian Telesterion, when he speaks of gods as mystic shapes (*mystica schēmata*) and sacred invocations (*klēseis hieras*) in the context of mystic rites of Eleusis (Scade 2017:208). Moreover, Clement of Alexandria (*Protrepticos* 2.12), who was born a pagan and then converted to Christianity, speaks of mournful sounds as being part of the *drama mystikon*: 'Demeter and Persephone have come to be the subject of a mystic drama, and Eleusis celebrates with torches the rape of the daughter and the sorrowful wandering of the mother.'

If indeed a ritual search was conducted to find Demeter's lost offspring, we can safely assume that acoustically it would have been accompanied by loud ritual lamentations for the lost Kore. Julius Firmicus Maternus (*De Errore Profanarum Religionum* 22.1), who wrote in the reign of Constantine I (306 to 337 CE), if indeed he refers to the initiatory rites of Eleusis,

may be providing us with a sonic snippet of the initiatory ceremony, when he maintains that:

On a certain night an image is placed supine on a bed, and is rhythmically and profusely lamented. Then, when they have satiated themselves with feigned lamentation, light is brought in. The priest anoints the throats of all who were weeping. And the priest murmurs slowly: 'take courage, initiates, for the god is saved, and you will have out of suffering salvation.'²¹

It is not clear though, whether these lamentations were produced by the initiates or members of the priestly personnel who may have enacted the ritual search of the mother for her daughter. A fragment of Apollodorus of Athens (*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 244F 110b) also supports this idea of boisterous and sonically charged ritual search being in the centre of the *drama mystikon*. In particular, Apollodorus thinks that a gong-like sound and solemn invocations were heard at some point of the ritual search for Kore in Eleusis: 'When Kore is being called up the hierophant strikes the bronze gong. They also strike the cymbal, when a Laconian king dies'. Sourvinou-Inwood (2003:33) rightly thinks that such a solemn invocation would have been most appropriate at some climactic point in the search:

a solemn invocation of Kore alone would make excellent ritual sense as part of the search: after it had run its course, and before the deity was 'found', the invocation would have taken place, with the hierophant sounding the gong. Solemn invocations, though common and by no means limited to advent festivals – nevertheless had a special place in both, since both focused on the deity's arrival, which was the objective of an invocation.

On the other hand, Hippolytus of Rome (*Refutation of all Heresies* 5.8.40) quotes a Naassenian, a Gnostic who identifies all the mysteries with Gnostic Christianity and claims that he knew of the exact content of the secret invocations that were heard during the first stage of initiation, the *myēsis*: 'At night in Eleusis the hierophant with much fire performing the great and unmistakable mysteries shouts out loud, saying: "the mistress has given birth to a sacred boy, Brimo to Brimos"'. Nonetheless, the same author (*Refutation of all Heresies* 5.8.39) postulates a much more modest affair for the culmination of the second and higher stage of the initiation, the *epopteia*: '... the Athenians performing the Eleusinian initiations and displaying to the *epoptai* the great and marvellous and perfect epoptic mystery, in silence, a reaped ear of corn'.

Lactantius (*Divine Institutes* 23) supports the idea of a raucous ritual search being at the heart of the Eleusinian sacred drama and focuses again

on its climax. He postulates that the ritual search ended with the throwing away of the torches in an atmosphere of sonic exultation, with the initiates (and perhaps also the members of the priestly personnel) congratulating one another.²² A passage from Stobaeus (in which he quotes Plutarch; Stobaeus IV.52.49 = Plut. Fr. 178) sheds light on the emotive responses of those partaking in the ritual search and adds mystic choruses (*choreias*), voices (*phōnas*) and solemn utterances (*semnōtētas akousmatōn hierōn*) to the acoustic gamut of the secret segment of Eleusis.

In a recently published article (2013), Richard Seaford has made an appealing suggestion: 'the chorus of mystic initiates, in imagining themselves as coexistent with the cosmos as they prefigured their eternal solidarity, provided both for Platonic philosophy and (differently) for the polis a transcendent model of happy cohesion.' In the same article, Seaford discusses the singing and dancing of the initiates in the course of the Iacchus procession, as well as the dancing at Eleusis around the Kallichoron well mentioned by Pausanias (1.38.6.). He rightly claims that the happy chorus of initiates in Aristophanes' *Frogs* alludes to 'the exhilarated solidarity of the processional singing and dancing initiates', which 'can be publicly displayed without revealing what was revealed only in the rite of passage'. It is this happy mystic chorus of initiates that provides the bridge between the secret and the public segments of the festival, since, as Seaford reminds us, the phrase 'to dance out the mysteries (*eksorcheisthai ta mystēria*)' is used quite frequently to describe the Eleusinian initiatory rites (e.g.: Lucian, *De saltatione* 15; Alciphron 3.72; Achilles Tatius 4.8; *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 411.25). This image of the mystic chorus dancing in exultation takes us back to Ingold's idea about the ensounded body, the body that, although firmly grounded, is launched into the sound like a kite in the sky, and makes us lament even more the lack of additional concrete evidence about Eleusis' sonorous culture.

Simultaneously, it raises the following question: if indeed sound was so multifaceted and prominent in Eleusis, why were the Eleusinian Mysteries so closely identified with the proverbial silence that shrouded the *arrhēta* or *aporrhēta*? Bremmer (2014:1–20), in his recent description of the Eleusinian Mysteries, shows amply enough that the answer lies with the Platonic reception of the Eleusinian imagery and terminology, and the subsequent adoption of Plato's Eleusis by the Christian authors and the literati of the so-called second sophistic. To take the famous second century CE orator Aelius Aristides as an example, he, like many of his contemporaries, made use of mysteric silence and *aposiōpēsis* as a discursive tool, which allowed him to make claims of possessing the ultimate truth in both religious and medical matters without having to go the extra mile of actually providing

any proof for his claims (van Nuffelen 2007:21 and 2011).²³ Nonetheless, it is extremely important to clarify here that using mysteric silence as a rhetorical tool is not an act of irreverence, nor does it preclude a simultaneous expression of genuine religious fervour. Plutarch uses the same technique in his *De defectu oraculorum*, *De facie*, *De Iside*, certain parts of the *Questions Conviviales*, and elsewhere (Montiglio 1984; van Nuffelen 2007). And here we return to the idea of how resonant the Eleusinian Mysteries were with both contemporaries and posterity. Instead of lamenting the lost natural and cultural components of the Eleusinian soundscape, we should focus on its resounding nature. Through thousands of years and through hundreds of authors, both ancient and modern, Eleusis still rings a bell.

About the author

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Notes

- 1 There were different kinds of *aulos*, a wind instrument, which according to West (1992:84) looked and sounded more like an oboe and less like a flute.
- 2 In the *Frogs*, the chorus consists of initiates into the Eleusinian Mysteries. Some scholars have doubted that the initiatory rites referred to are the Great Mysteries of Eleusis and have instead proposed several other alternatives, such as the Lesser Mysteries at Agrae (Guarducci 1982; Hooker 1960); and Lenaea (Tierney 1934/5). Nonetheless, there are several good arguments against these suggestions. Most of them can be found in Graf (1974:40–50) and Dover (1993:62, n.13).
- 3 On the terms primary sources use to describe the various degrees of initiation, see Mylonas (1961:239), Dowden (1980) and Simms (1990).
- 4 More on the concept of ‘soundscape’ can be found in the Introduction to Emerit, Perrot and Vincent (2015).
- 5 There are a couple of notable exceptions that confirm the rule, such as Athanassakis (1976) and, more recently, Seaford (2013).
- 6 On the close correlation between light and sound as media of perception, see Ingold (2000).
- 7 As in Samuels *et al.* (2010:330).
- 8 For an excellent discussion of these culture-specific components of modern religious experience, see Byron Dueck’s contribution in the next issue of this journal. Dueck discusses drum and gospel singing in the sonic setting of North American Indigenous sacred observance with a focus on the Canadian city of Winnipeg.

- 9 More information about what the individual days of celebration involved in terms of *dromena* (things done), *dykneimena* (things shown) and *legomena* (things said) can be found in Bowden 2010:ch. 1; Bremmer 2014:ch. 1; Burkert 1983:248–99; Burkert 1987:ch. 4; Cosmopoulos 2003; Cosmopoulos 2015:22–3; and Mylonas 1961:ch. IX).
- 10 A notable exception to this rule is Seaford (2013). See the discussion in the last section of this article.
- 11 Cf. Burkert (1987:90): ‘In religious terms, mysteries provide an immediate encounter with the divine’; and Graf (2003:255): ‘But to prepare for and be allowed direct contact with a divinity is a function of most mystery cults’. See also Bowden (2010:213), who singles out the establishing of a closer relationship with the divine as one of the major aims of initiation rites, along with gaining a new status.
- 12 By visual symbol of the presence of the deity I mean any visual representation – from the god’s figural statue to his or her aniconic representation – that within a specific cultural and festive context could be interpreted as denoting divine presence. On aniconism, see Gaifmann (2012).
- 13 The term *thysia* can denote both ‘sacrifice’ and ‘festival’. Compare here Plato’s *Timaeus* 26e, where *thysia* describes the festival of Panathenaea. On sacrifice and music, see Ekroth (2002; 2007; 2008); Naiden (2013); and the essays in Hitch and Rutherford (2013).
- 14 Contra Bremmer (2014:17), who thinks that the initiates would wear less glamorous clothing if they were to dedicate them to the temple at the end of the initiatory rites.
- 15 The nineteenth of Boedromion was called εικάς (= twentieth) because Greeks used to count the beginning of a day from sunset onwards. The procession would reach Eleusis towards the evening of the nineteenth; i.e. at the start of the twentieth day. This is at least the explanation given by Mylonas (1961:256, n.151). Clinton (1986:70) and Mansfield (1985:434–7) argue in favour of two separate ephebic processions, one that would escort the *hiera* back to Eleusis on the nineteenth of Boedromion, and one other that would escort Iacchus’ statue and the *mystae* to Eleusis the next day, that is on the twentieth of Boedromion. Graf (1996:62–3) argues convincingly enough that such a hypothesis presents some serious logistic and textual problems. Mylonas’ thesis is not discussed by Graf. More on the debate in Parker (2005:348).
- 16 On Iacchus’ iconographical physiognomy see for instance the relief hydria from Cumae (Figure 1), known otherwise as Regina Vasorum (Clinton 1992:79, fig. III. 9; now in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg) and the Niinion pinax from Eleusis (Figure 2, now in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens 11036); Mylonas (1961:fig. 88, and 213–21). Cf. also Graf (1974:46–50) and Clinton (1992:90–5) and Clinton (2007:349–50, figs 22.3 and 22.2 respectively). Cf. also Jiménez San Cristóbal (2012):125–35.
- 17 Pausanias (1.24) mentions a statue of Iacchus by Praxiteles. Evidence that the procession to Eleusis is following the steps of Demeter, or else that Demeter was imagined to accompany the chorus to their pilgrimage is provided in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, 384ff.: the chorus invokes Demeter to stand by their side (συμπαραστάται) and in 399–400 they point out that Iacchus is following Demeter: δεῦρο συνακολύθει πρὸς τὴν θεόν.

- 18 Deubner (1932:73), who compares *Iacchus* to another personification of a song, that of *Hymenaios*.
- 19 Cosmopoulos (2015:15). Aristotle Fr. 15 Rose: 'thus, Aristotle has it that the initiants must not learn something in particular, but suffer and being psychologically predisposed', as quoted by Synesius Dion. 10.271 Krab. (cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 12.33f).
- 20 Pseudo-Lysias 6 is a prosecution speech against Andocides IV, accusing him of both mutilating herms and parodying in the mysteries. MacDowell argues that the speech is genuine, not a later pamphlet, but spoken by Meletus II, Epichares or Agyrrhius – and most likely by Meletus II. Cf. also Marr (1971).
- 21 This is, of course, only if we assume that this specific part of *On the Errors of the Profane Religion* refers to the Great Mysteries of Eleusis.
- 22 *His etiam Cereris simile mysterium est, in quo facibus accensis per noctem Proserpina inquitur et ea inventua ritus omnis gratulatione et taedarum iactatione finitur.*
- 23 I am indebted to Peter Van Nuffelen for sharing with me a copy of the article and his thoughts on the subject. On silence in general as a powerful rhetorical tool, see Montiglio (2000:esp. 116–37). On secrecy and concealment in the religious history of the Mediterranean, see Kippenberg and Stroumsa (1995).

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