

Sidelights on Greek Antiquity

Archaeological and Epigraphical Essays
in Honour of Vasileios Petrakos

Edited by
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Contents

Preface — V

List of Figures — XII

Tabula Gratulatoria — XIX

Konstantinos Kalogeropoulos

Vasileios Petrakos: A Life Dedicated to the Service of Greek Archaeology — XXIII

Part I: Epigraphy and Ancient History

Miltiades B. Hatzopoulos

Thucydides, Historical Geography and the ‘Lost Years’ of Perdikkas II — 3

Kevin Clinton

Athens, Samothrace, and the Mystéria of the Samothracian Great Gods — 17

Denis Knoepfler

De quelques épitaphes d'étrangers et d'étrangères au Musée d'Érétie — 45

Charalampos B. Kritzas

Φυτωναμικά τοπωνύμια Κωμών της Αργολίδος — 103

Dominique Mulliez

Le recours à l'arbitrage privé dans les actes d'affranchissement delphiques — 117

Nikolaos Kaltsas

Προξενικό ψήφισμα από την Αιτωλία — 137

Robert Parker

Women's Religion in Hellenistic Athens — 145

Michael J. Osborne

Notes on Athenian Decrees in the Later Hellenistic Period — 159

Angelos Chaniotis

“Those who Jointly Built the City”. Epigraphic Sources for the Urban Development of Aphrodisias — 179

Part II: Archaeology

Joseph Maran

Attica and the Origins of Silver Metallurgy in the Aegean and the Carpatho-Balkan Zone — 197

Konstantinos Kalogeropoulos

Cultural Variation in Mycenaean Attica. A Mesoregional Approach — 227

Emanuele Greco

Mythical and Historical Heroic Founders: The Archaeological Evidence — 299

Manolis Korres

Das Volutenkapitell aus Sykaminos — 321

Michalis Tiverios

Dionysos Lenaios at Rhamnous. Lenaia ἐν ἄποϊς and the “Lenaia vases” — 359

Theodosia Stefanidou-Tiveriou

Philoktet in Attika — 383

Part III: History of Greek Archaeology

John McK. Camp II

Peiraieus in 1805 — 411

Klaus Fittschen

Karl Otfried Müller in Marathon, Rhamnus und Oropos. Aus seinen Reiseaufzeichnungen von 1840 — 423

Jack L. Davis

Spyridon Marinatos and Carl Blegen at Pylos: A Happy Collaboration — 441

Pierre Ducrey

Vassilis Petrakos et les fouilles suisses d'Érétrie — 451

List of Contributors — 465

Index of Epigraphical Texts — 469

Index Locorum — 477

Index of Mythological Names — 483

Index of Geographic Names — 485

Index of Ancient Personal Names — 499

Index Rerum — 505

Index of Modern Personal Names — 515

Kevin Clinton

Athens, Samothrace, and the Mystera of the Samothracian Great Gods

The Samothracians are proud of their sacred rites, which are the most renowned of all except for the Eleusinian.¹

Abstract: Since at least the mid fifth century B.C. Athenians were sufficiently familiar with the Samothracian Mystera that they would have understood an allusion to a public or even secret aspect of this well-known festival, as indicated in passages in Herodotus and Aristophanes and by close religious and cultural connections between Samothrace and Athens down to at least the fourth quarter of the fourth century. Thus Athenians were probably participating with some regularity in the Samothracian cult. Its known formal structure is identical to the Eleusinian (πρόρρησις, μύσται, ἐπόπται), and most likely also included, as at Eleusis, a preliminary initiation of purification.

In Plato's *Euthydemus* (277d–e) Socrates employs the metaphor of *thronosis* ἐν τῇ τελετῇ τῶν Κορυβάντων, a rite preliminary to initiation, to illustrate what the sophists Euthydemus and Dionysodoros are doing to Kleinias. This preliminary rite belonged to a cult in which it would have been perfectly natural for a member of the Athenian aristocracy to have participated, even for Socrates himself. Analysis of the passage and Plato's positions on public and private cults suggests that it was neither a state nor a private cult in Athens. According to a hypothesis proposed by Arthur D. Nock, such a preliminary *telete* could have occurred in the Mystera at Samothrace.

The role of *thronosis* as a metaphor used by Socrates allows us to draw inferences about the possible role of a Korybantic ritual as a preliminary initiation in actual cult, which in turn allows us to determine whether it could have played a role in the Samothracian Mystera. τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα, the therapeutic cure described in Pl. *Leg.* 790c–791b as a psychic purification, best suits the type of purificatory rite alluded to at *Euthyd.* 277d–e and the pre-requisites for initiation in the Samothracian Mystera. The long-standing association of Korybantēs with Samothrace and their overwhelming presence in the Samothracian landscape, as limned by Nonnus, strongly suggest a significant role in the island's famous mystery cult, most appropriately played in a preliminary stage.

¹ Aristid. *Panathenaicus* 363.

1 Athens and the Samothracian Kabeiroi

The earliest evidence concerning the Mystéria of the Samothracian Great Gods comes from fifth-century Athens: Herodotus in the third quarter of the century;² Aristophanes, *Peace*, in 421; and Stesimbrotus, teaching in Athens around this time. Herodotus' statement (2.51–52) is especially informative:

Fashioning statues of Hermes to have erect phalli they (the Greeks) did not learn from the Egyptians. But it was from the Pelasgians that the Athenians were the first of the Greeks to receive this practice, and the others received it from them. Already at that time the Athenians were reckoned as Greeks when the Pelasgians got to live with them in their land, and consequently began to be regarded also as Greeks. Whoever has been initiated (μεμύηται) in the rites of the Kabeiroi (τὰ Καβείρων ὄργια), which the Samothracians celebrate, having received them from Pelasgians, knows what I mean. These Pelasgians who got to live together with the Athenians were previously living in Samothrace, and it is from them that the Samothracians inherit the rites (ὄργια). Thus the Athenians, as the first Greeks to fashion ithyphallic statues of Hermes, learned this from Pelasgians. The Pelasgians told a certain sacred story (ἰρὸν τινα λόγον) about it, which has been revealed in the Mystéria in Samothrace (τὰ ἐν τοῖσι ἐν Σαμοθρῆικῃ μυστηρίοισι δεδῆλωται).

The sentence, “Whoever has been initiated into the rites of the Kabeiroi, which the Samothracians celebrate, having received them from Pelasgians, knows what I mean,” implies that many members of his audience, including Athenians, do know what he means because they were initiated in the Samothracian Mystéria.³ He goes on to say that both the Athenians and Samothracians received religious traditions from the Pelasgians: the Athenians, the practice of making ithyphallic statues of Hermes; the Samothracians, secret rites (*orgia*), involving *mystai* (“Ὅστις ... μεμύηται), called μυστήρια.⁴ Clearly Herodotus was an initiate,⁵ and the emphasis in his discussion on ithyphallicism and Hermes suggests that this ithyphallic god played a role in the Mystéria, which is indeed corroborated by other testimonia.⁶ Finally, it is noteworthy

² Perhaps narrating to an Athenian audience; on the question of Herodotus' sojourn in Athens, Asheri *et al.* 2007, 3–5; cf. Marincola 2001, 20–22.

³ Cf. Burkert 1993, 181: “Herodotus presupposes that Samothracian Mysteries, in the form of secret rites connected with a ‘sacred tale’ (*hieros logos*), are not only in existence by his time, are well known to his public, and that many of them have had their ‘initiation into the rites,’ while, of course, the secret has to be kept.” On Herodotus' audience cf. Fowler 2013, 18.

⁴ Herodotus' reference to “Pelasgians” and their “Sacred Story” undoubtedly was based on the non-Greek language (most likely Thracian) spoken by the pre-Greek inhabitants of Samothrace, still in use in the Mystéria in his time, at least to some extent. On the use of “Pelasgian” to refer to pre-Greeks or non-Greek speakers cf. Lloyd 1994, 232–234, 240–242; Fowler 2013a, 84–96. On the non-Greek language used in the Samothracian Mystéria, Diodorus 5.47.2–3; Hemberg 1950, 120–126; Lehmann 1955, 93–100; Bonfante 1955, 101–109; Lehmann 1960; Brixhe 2006.

⁵ Cf. Graham 2002, 234.

⁶ Hemberg 1950, 92–96, 308f.; Burkert 1993, 181–183; Clinton 2003, 68f.

that he refers to the gods as Kabeiroi, a name not used in any of the preserved inscriptions from Samothrace, where they are always called Θεοὶ Μεγάλοι; and this has led some scholars to deny that they were called Kabeiroi.⁷ But there is no reason to doubt that the name was in use when Herodotus was initiated.

The name Kabeiroi is corroborated by another contemporary witness, Stesimbrotus of Thasos (*FGrH* 107 F 20 = Strabo 3.19–20):

But others say that the Corybantes were sons of Zeus and Calliope, and that they were identical with the Cabeiri, and that these went off for Samothrace, which formerly was called Melite, and that their rites were secret (μυστικός). But though the Scepsian, who compiled these myths, does not accept this, on the ground that no mystical story about the Cabeiri is told in Samothrace (ὡς μηδενὸς ἐν Σαμοθράκῃ μυστικοῦ λόγου περὶ Καβείρων λεγομένου), still he cites the opinion of Stesimbrotus of Thasos, that the sacred rites in Samothrace were performed in honor of the Cabeiri (τὰ ἐν Σαμοθράκῃ ἱερά τοῖς Καβείροις ἐπιτελοῖτο); and (the Scepsian) also says that they were called Cabeiri after the mountain Cabeirus in Berecynthia.⁸

Since it would be quite unreasonable to deny that Herodotus as an initiate witnessed a sacred *logos*, it is tempting to infer that Demetrius of Scepsis was not an initiate. As Stesimbrotus was from neighboring Thasos, it is entirely plausible that he, like Herodotus, witnessed the Mysteries.⁹

That the Kabeiroi were central deities in the Samothracian Mysteries and they were two in number is confirmed in a grave epigram for an Athenian by the name of Isidoros, who was initiated in both the Samothracian and Eleusinian Mysteries in approximately the 1st century BC:¹⁰

ἦν δὲ φίλοις ἐρατός, δίκαιος, πρὸς πάντας ἀληθής,
 εὐσεβὲς ἐν ψυχῇ κύδος ἔχ[ων] ἀρετῆς·^V
 μύστης μὲν Σαμόθραξι·^V Καβίρου διχ' ἱερὸν φῶς,
 ἄγνὰ δ' Ἐλευσίνος Διοῦς μεγάθυ[μο]ς ἴδεν·^V
 οὐνεκεν εὐγῆρωσ [όκ]τῶ δεκάδας λυκαβάντων
 [ῆ]λυσ' ἀπημάντως Ἰσιόδωρος [ἄ]νη·^V

He was loved by his friends, | a just man, truthful to all, | with reverent renown | for the virtue in his soul. | As an initiate, great-hearted, | he saw the doubly sacred light | of Kabiros in Samothrace |¹⁵ and the pure rites of Eleusinian Demeter. | Because of this, bearing his old age well, | Isidoros completed eighty years | without pain and trouble.

7 Hemberg 1950, 73–81, followed by others; correction provided by Graham 2002, 249f.

8 Transl. H.L. Jones (Loeb), with modifications.

9 Cf. Burkert 1993, 181.

10 Karadima-Matsa/Dimitrova 2003; Dimitrova (2008, 83–90, no. 29), an improved edition.

The duality of the Kabeiroi is, in addition, symbolized by their two *piloi* on Archaic coins of Samothrace,¹¹ like the representations of Kabeiroi on Lemnian coins.¹² Coins of Syros, too, of ca. 200 BC depict two naked gods leaning on their spears with a star over each of their heads, labeled KABEIPΩN ΘEΩN ΣΥΡΙΩΝ.¹³ Hemberg remarked: “Hätte nicht die Münze von Syros durch ihre Beischrift die Götter als Kabiren bezeichnet, würden wir sie eher Dioskuren genannt haben...”.¹⁴ Augustan coins of Imbros show a caduceus flanked by two *piloi* surmounted by stars,¹⁵ mistakenly interpreted by numismatists as symbolizing Dioskouroi, even though for the Imbrians the Kabeiroi were among their major gods.¹⁶ On these four islands the iconography of the Kabeiroi was essentially identical to that of the Dioskouroi.

Varro’s discussion (*Ling.* 5.57–58) of the Samothracian Great Gods also corroborates their duality, although his conception of the actual *dei magni* (as Earth and Sky) reflects a personal theology:¹⁷

Terra enim et Caelum, ut <Sa>mothracum initia docent, sunt dei magni, et hi quos dixi multis nominibus, non quas Samothracia ante portas statuit duas uirilil species aeneas dei magni, neque ut uolgu putat, hi Samot<h>races dii, qui Castor et Pollux, sed hi mas et femina et hi quos augurum libri scriptos habent sic, *divi potes*, pro illo quod Samot<h>races θεοὶ δυνατοί.¹⁸

For Earth and Sky, as the mysteries of the Samothracians teach, are great gods, and the ones whom I have called by many names, are not the great gods whom Samothrace has set up before the city gates as two male figures of bronze, nor are those the Samothracian gods, as is commonly thought, who are Castor and Pollux; but these are male and female, and they are the ones whom the books of the augurs have written down as *divi potes* “potent deities,” for what the Samothracians call θεοὶ δυνατοί “powerful gods”.¹⁹

The prominent position of these two male images “before the city gates”, which Varro would have seen if he visited Samothrace in 67 BC when he was commanding fleets in the Aegean,²⁰ suggests that they are the divine pair emblematic of Samothrace and its great sanctuary, the pair most well known to the Greek world—the two Kabeiroi,

¹¹ Schwabacher 1938.

¹² Lemnos: Beschi 1998, 50f., Pl. VI 1–3.

¹³ *LIMC* VIII s.v. Megaloi Theoi, 560, no. 21; Savo 2004, 409f.; Cruccas 2014, 162.

¹⁴ Hemberg 1950, 182f.

¹⁵ *Corpus Nummorum Imbros* 3627–3633.

¹⁶ Correctly interpreted by Ruhl (2018, 27. 282) and Kroll (1993, 111).

¹⁷ Treatment of his personal theology would stray too far from the present investigation to warrant discussion here.

¹⁸ Text and translation (except *ut volgu putat*): Melo 2019, 286f.

¹⁹ R.G. Kent (Loeb) translated *portas* as “city-gates”, J. Collart (CUF) “ses portes”, i.e. Samothrace’s *portes*, not “doors”, as Lewis (1959, 80f. no. 175) mistakenly translated it, followed by Bremmer 2014, 27.

²⁰ *Rust. 2 praef.* 6: in the military operation against piracy under Pompey.

protectors of mariners in danger, often in the popular mind equated with the Dioskouroi (“as is commonly thought ... the Samothracian gods who are Castor and Pollux”), “the twofold light of Kabiros” as in the epitaph of Isidoros.

Ovid too requested from the Dioskouroi/Kabeiroi (and evidently received) their help at sea. While briefly sojourning on Samothrace, he wrote *Tristia* I.10, the account of his sea voyage from Cencreae to Samothrace on a ship called Minerva. At Samothrace, instead of continuing his journey with the Minerva, he decided to take a boat to the mainland and proceed on foot through Thrace, while the Minerva sailed on to the Black Sea and finally to Tomis. At the end of the poem he addressed the gods “whom this island worships” as “Tyndaridae ... fratres” (whose images flanked the gates of the city), in order to gain their help for both sea voyages (lines 45–50).²¹ He did not call upon them as Great Gods (Magni Di), or Θεοὶ Μεγάλοι as in all preserved Hellenistic and later inscriptions of Samothrace, or Σαμόθρακες Θεοὶ (or simply Σαμόθρακες) as in literature and filial cults in other cities. Instead, writing in the shadow of the sanctuary of the Θεοὶ Μεγάλοι, he addressed the central deities of Samothrace by the ancient name of the Dioskouroi, Τυνδαρίδαι.²²

While often called upon to provide safety to sea voyagers, the efficacy of the Samothracian Gods was actually felt to be much broader,²³ not limited to maritime dangers, as is made clear by the grave epigram of Isidoros (quoted *supra*) and by Diodorus 5.49.5–6:

But the fame has travelled wide of how these gods appear to mankind and bring unexpected aid to those initiates of theirs who call upon them in the midst of perils. The claim is also made that men who have taken part in the Mystera (τῆς τελετῆς) become both more pious and more just and better in every respect than they were before. And this is the reason, we are told, why the most famous both of the ancient heroes and of the demi-gods were eagerly desirous of taking part in the initiatory rite (τῆς τελετῆς); and in fact Jason and the Dioscuri, and Heracles and Orpheus as well, after their initiation (μνηθέντας) attained success in all the campaigns they undertook, because these gods appeared to them.²⁴

In the 5th century, in Aristophanes’ *Peace* (276–286), Trygaios is worried about the imminent danger posed by Polemos, namely that he will use a pestle to “mash the cities with it” (266). Polemos sends Kydoimos to Athens to fetch one, but he returns

21 vos quoque, Tyndaridae, quos haec colit insula, fratres, | mite precor duplici numen adesse viae! | altera namque parat Symplegadas ire per artas, | scindere Bistonias altera puppis aquas. | vos facite ut ventos, loca cum diversa petamus, | illa suos habeat, nec minus illa suos.

22 The most publicized actions of the Samothracian Gods took place at sea, carried out by the two Kabeiroi/Dioskouroi, who were the focus in the cult at a climactic moment, as the gravestone of Isidoros suggests. Therefore, it was natural that the *orgia* could be called *orgia* of the (two) Kabeiroi. The Samothracians, at least eventually, preferred the appellation Θεοὶ Μεγάλοι, perhaps in part because it more accurately reflected the multiplicity of the gods of the Mystera.

23 Hemberg (1950, 116f.) assumed they also promised a better lot in the afterlife.

24 Transl. C.H. Oldfather (Loeb) = Lewis 1959, 66 no. 142.

empty-handed. He then sends him to fetch one from Sparta, at which Trygaios exclaims:

Trygaios: Gentlemen, what's to become of us? Now is our great test. And if by chance there's anyone out there who's been initiated at Samothrace, now's a good time to pray that our fetcher sprains both ankles! (ἀλλ' εἴ τις ὑμῶν ἐν Σαμοθράκη τυγχάνει μεμνημένος, νῦν ἐστὶν εὖξασθαι καλὸν ἀποστραφῆναι τοῦ μετιόντος τῷ πόδε.)

Kyd: Oh me oh my! Oh me oh my again!

Polemos: What is it? Don't tell me you don't have it!

Kyd: I don't because the Spartans have lost their pestle too!

Pol: What do you mean, you rascal?

Kyd: They lent it to some people to use at the Thracian front, and they lost it.

Tryg: Well done, well done, O Dioscuri! Perhaps it may turn out well; courage, mortals!²⁵ (εὖ γ' εὖ γε ποιήσαντες, ὦ Διοσκόρω. ἴσως ἂν εὖ γένοιτο· θαρρεῖτ', ὦ βροτοί).

Trygaios asks for anyone who has been initiated in Samothrace to pray for the danger from the fetcher's trip to be averted, asking the Samothracian Gods, in good humor, to help with a journey by producing a negative outcome.²⁶ Upon learning that the request was fulfilled, he exclaims: εὖ γ', εὖ γε ποιήσαντες, ὦ Διοσκόρω. Instead of thanking the *Samothracian Gods*, as we expect, he congratulates, ironically, the *Dioskouroi*, the divine patrons of the Spartans. To the audience, though, it will have been immediately clear that he does indeed thank the Samothracian Gods, slyly taking advantage of their well-known identification with the *Dioskouroi*. Diodorus 4.43.1–2 illustrates the same process: one prays to the Samothracian Gods, and they appear as *Dioskouroi*:

But there came on a great storm and the chieftains had given up hope of being saved, when Orpheus, they say, who was the only one on ship-board who had ever been initiated in the mysteries (τελετή) of the deities of Samothrace, offered to these deities the prayers for their salvation. And immediately the wind died down and two stars fell over the heads of the Dioscuri, and the whole company was amazed at the marvel which had taken place and concluded that they had been rescued from their perils by an act of providence of the gods. For this reason, the story of this reversal of fortune for the Argonauts having been handed down to succeeding generations, sailors when caught in storms always utter prayers to the gods of Samothrace (τοῖς Σαμόθραξι) and attribute the appearance of the two stars to the epiphany of the Dioscuri.²⁷

²⁵ Transl. J. Henderson (Loeb), except the last two lines, by Lewis 1959, 103 no. 226. The audience has been waiting to learn the answer to the presumed prayer to the Samothracian Gods (277–9), but the answer is now attributed in comic irony to the *Dioskouroi*. Taking ποιήσαντες sarcastically with the Spartans, as Henderson does, maintains the basic sense but loses the expected connection between prayer and divine response.

²⁶ Faraone (2005) points out that the language of line 279 is that of a ritual binding spell.

²⁷ Transl. C.H. Oldfather (Loeb).

In both Diodorus and Aristophanes prayers are offered to the Gods of Samothrace (τοῖς Σαμοθράξι in Diodorus; [the gods] ἐν Σαμοθράκη in Aristophanes), and the successful outcome is attributed to the appearance of the Dioskouroi.

In two fragments of Middle and New Comedy characters invoke the help of the Samothracian gods to calm storms, real and metaphorical. In the *Parasitos* of Alexis (ca. 350 BC), a glutton is compared to a hurricane that required intervention by the Samothracian gods: the glutton's host "utters the Samothracian (prayers), that he may stop his blowing, and that calm weather may come sometime again. That laddie is a hurricane to his friends."²⁸ By this time, the help that the Samothracian gods can provide to sailors has become such a commonplace that one just needed to pray τὰ Σαμοθράκια, "the Samothracian (prayers)". In a fragment of New Comedy by an unknown author the protagonist describes sailors being struck by a storm: "Another prays to the Samothracian (gods) to help the captain, he draws the sheets."²⁹ In the last quarter of the 4th century, the importance of initiation in Samothrace for safety at sea comes up in Theophrastus, *Char.* 25.2, "Cowardice": "When a wave hits, he (the coward) asks whether anyone on board has not been initiated."³⁰

Among fifth-century testimonia, those of Herodotus, Stesimbrotus, and Aristophanes imply that the Samothracian Mysteries were already well known at Athens, Aristophanes taking advantage of the fact that the audience in the theater would know that prayers to the Samothracian Gods are fulfilled by deities who look like the Dioskouroi. Thus from the mid 5th century onwards it seems reasonable to assume that many Athenians who could afford to travel to Samothrace (or were passing by) were initiated there.

2 Samothracian Engagement with Athens, Fifth to Fourth Century

Along with the lively interest shown by Athenians in the Samothracian cult, Samothrace itself was developing over time an extraordinary relationship with Athens. Although most of the Greek population of the island originally came from Samos in the

²⁸ *PCG* 2.183 = Ath. 10.421d. Trans. C.B. Gulick (Loeb) with Arnott (1996, 546). αὐτὸν ὁ κεκληκὼς τὰ Σαμοθράκι' εὐχεται | λῆξαι πνέοντα καὶ γαληνίασι ποτέ. | χεμῶν ὁ μεираκίσκος ἐστὶ τοῖς φίλοις. On the date, Arnott 1996, 542f.

²⁹ Austin, *CGFP* 255.10–16 = *PCG* 8.1063. ἕτερος τοῖς Σαμοθραξίν εὐχεται [ι τῷ κυβερνή]τη βοη[θειν], τοὺς πόδας προσέλλεται.

³⁰ Trans. J. Rusten (Loeb). καὶ κλυδωνίου γενομένου ἐρωτᾶν, εἴ τις μὴ μεμύηται τῶν πλεόντων.

early 6th century,³¹ the only preserved month names they adopted for the Samothracian calendar were not Samian but Athenian.³² It is impossible to determine exactly when this adoption occurred, but a plausible time (at the latest) would be the first couple of decades of the fifth century, when Athens, by inserting Athenian colonists on Lemnos and Imbros, increased its presence in the northeastern Aegean—or a bit later, after 478, when Samothrace joined the Delian League.³³

In 425, when the Athenians demanded from their allies, including Samothrace, a drastically increased annual tribute, Samothracians were sufficiently conversant with Athenian affairs that they were able to draw upon the help of an outstanding Athenian orator—Antiphon—to compose a speech for their appeal to the assembly authorized to reduce levied tributes.³⁴ The speech pled extenuating circumstances—the small size of the island, its mountainous terrain, and its largely infertile soil (Antiph. frgs. 49–50 Thalheim).

Although we cannot know the full extent, throughout the Classical period, of the cultural ties between the two cities, the strength of those ties is powerfully illustrated in a remarkable monument that Samothrace placed at the entrance to its famous sanctuary, a monument that stands as a legacy of its admiration for Athens: a marble hexastyle prostyle Doric building, dedicated by Kings Philip III and Alexander IV (323 to 317). The most striking aspect of the building was its façade of Pentelic marble (Thasian was used for the sides and back). On the choice of Pentelic Professor Bonna Wescoat had this to say:

No one would go to the trouble of transporting expensive material over long distances, not to mention employing two sets of masons [for Thasian and Pentelic respectively], without intending a dramatic statement commensurate with the effort. A façade was a lavish display, as Herodotus makes clear concerning the Alkmaeonid donation of a marble east façade for the Temple of Apollo at Delphi (Hdt. 5.62). Like that gift the difference in the stone on the Dedication must have been legible.

A premier material, Pentelic marble was admired for its ability to take intricate detail. But more importantly, it carried powerful associations with Athens. It was the material of the Peri-

31 Graham 2002.

32 The preserved names are Mounychion (Dimitrova 2008, 189–193 no. 104) and Maimakterion (Frazer 1960, 25–33 no. 5). Mounychion occurs only in Attica according to Trümpy (1997, 293); Maimakterion occurs in Attica and also in Keos and Siphnos; Maimakter in Ephesos, Phocaia, Mytilene, and Kyme (Trümpy 1997, 55. 97. 107. 118. 248). For the Samian months, see now *IG XII 6*, 182. According to our sources (*FGrH* 548 F 5a. 5b = Antiphon, frg. 49; Heraclides, *Politeiai* 21), the Samian colonists were expelled from Samos by tyrants and presumably had little reason for maintaining the traditional Samian months.

33 At the Battle of Salamis, the presence of a Samothracian ship among the Ionian naval contingent (Hdt. 8.90; cf. Graham 2002, 234) reflects Persian control of the island at that time, but that should not have hindered them from adopting the Athenian system of months then or earlier.

34 *IG I³ 71*, its effect on Samothrace discussed by Meiggs 1972, 240f. 327.

klean city. The few monuments outside Attica built in Pentelic marble are chiefly Athenian dedications. Philip III and Alexander's pavilion on Samothrace is not, but by emulating Athenian forms in Attic material, the building stakes a claim to the Athenian legacy.³⁵

In the religious sphere, the Samothracians were so deeply taken by the Eleusinian Mysteries that they named stages of their own Mysteries after the Eleusinian: first-time initiates were called μύσται, initiates at the next stage ἐπόπται.³⁶ The Eleusinian and the Samothracian were the only Greek mystery cults, on present evidence, that had a stage of initiation called *epopteia*.³⁷ The Eleusinian term for announcing the festival, πρὸρρησις μυστηρίων also occurs in Samothrace, attested in Latin, *praeformatio sacrorum*.³⁸

Certain other Eleusinian features seem to recur at Samothrace. Light played a major role as at Eleusis, and is attested for Samothrace by the grave epigram of Isidoros (*supra*, p. 19).³⁹ The Eleusinian Search for Kore (Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 23) reappears, it seems, in a Search for Harmonia, after she was abducted by Cadmos, according to Ephorus: “And even now they seek her in their festivals (ἐορταῖς).”⁴⁰ The multiplicity of festivals can be explained by the fact that the Samothracian Mysteries, like the Eleusinian, functioned as a festival (ἐορτή), but they differed from the Eleusinian in being held many times during the year.⁴¹ Although this ritual Search for Harmonia, conducted during the many performances of the Mysteries, parallels the Search for

35 Wescoat 2017, 180f. She goes on to point out Macedonian interest in a Pentelic façade, “serving as an emphatic visual antidote to the Athenian-based claims of Demosthenes and others against the ‘Greekness’ of the Macedonians”. An additional connection with Athens was discovered in sealed contexts on the floor of the Dedication’s predecessor, the Fieldstone Building, and in a foundation trench of the Dedication: very early examples of Attic figurines in the Tanagra style, this group nicknamed “Green Girls”; Dillon 2017, 396.

36 The stage of μύσται was in use when Herodotus was initiated; we do not know when the term ἐπόπται began to be used, but the simplest assumption is that it happened when the pre-Greek cult metamorphosed into Mysteries.

37 Even the Mysteries at Andania, which Pausanias (4.33.5) regarded as “second only to the Eleusinian in sanctity” and derived from Eleusis, did not have a stage called *epopteia* (Paus. 4.1.5–9, 4.14.1, 4.15.7, 4.26.6–8); it is not mentioned in the lengthy sacred law of Andania; updated text by Gawlinski 2012.

38 Livy 45.5.4 = Lewis 1959, 48 no. 116: et, cum omnis praeformatio sacrorum eos, quibus non sint purae manus, sacris arceat, vos penetralia vestra contaminari cruento latronis corpore sinetis? Eleusinian Prothesis: Schol. Ar. Ran. 369: Παρὰ τὴν τοῦ ἱεροφάντου καὶ δαδούχου πρὸρρησιν τὴν ἐν τῇ ποικίλῃ στοῦ. Isoc. Paneg. 157: Εὐμολπίδα δὲ καὶ Κήρυκες ἐν τῇ τελετῇ τῶν μυστηρίων ... καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις βαρβάροις εἶργεσθαι τῶν ἱερῶν ὡσπερ τοῖς ἀνδροφόνοις προαγορευούσιν. Cf. Clinton 1974, 46.

39 Of course it is possible that light played a role already in the pre-Greek cult.

40 *FGrH* 70 F 120 = Lewis 1959, 35 no. 75: Ἐφορος δὲ Ἥλεκτρας τῆς Ἄτλαντος αὐτὴν εἶναι λέγει, Κάδμου δὲ παραπλέοντος τὴν Σαμοθράκην ἀρπάσαι αὐτήν· τὴν δὲ εἰς τιμὴν τῆς μητρὸς ὀνομάσαι τὰς Ἥλεκτρας πύλας. καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἐν τῇ Σαμοθράκῃ ζητοῦσιν αὐτὴν ἐν ταῖς ἐορταῖς. For *heorte* used for the Eleusinian Mysteries: *IEleusis* 52.A.III.36 and (most probably) 13.5.

41 For the most recent compilation of dates, Dimitrova 2008, 245f.

Kore at Eleusis, it may have originated locally in a feature of the pre-Greek cult. Hellenization of the pre-Greek cult through adoption of Eleusinian features may well have been motivated in part by a desire to attract especially Athenians but also other Greeks.

In addition, the Eleusinian Mysteries required a preliminary initiation, called *myesis*, a ritual of purification, which is well attested.⁴² It seems quite unlikely that the Samothracians would have adopted two stages of the Eleusinian Mysteries without adopting the preliminary stage of *myesis*, which qualified a candidate to participate in the first main stage of the Mysteries. Inscriptions, set up evidently at boundaries of the Samothracian sanctuary,⁴³ prohibiting the ἀμύητον from entering, imply, quite precisely, that preliminary *myesis* was obligatory for a candidate to be admitted to the main initiation. As I wrote several years ago, “What sense, then, does it make to say that one cannot enter the sanctuary if one is not already initiated? The whole purpose of entering the sanctuary was to become initiated. The solution, therefore, would seem to be that the term ‘uninitiated,’ ἀμύητος, meant that the candidate had not taken part in some rite that qualified him or her for initiation.”⁴⁴ This rite should be the preliminary initiation of μύησις, involving purification.⁴⁵ Having undergone preliminary μύησις, the candidate has already begun the process of initiation; he is μουόμενος, no longer ἀμύητος.

At Athens this stage could take place either in a court (αὐλή) at the sanctuary in Eleusis or in the City Eleusinion.⁴⁶ Unlike the situation at Athens, where the Eleusinian sanctuary was situated ca. 21 kilometers from the center of the city (*Asty*), in Samothrace there was no significant separation between sanctuary and city, hence no need for more than a single venue for preliminary *myesis*, which presumably took place somewhere in close proximity to the sanctuary.

Nearly eighty years ago, Arthur D. Nock surmised that the Korybantes’ association with the Mysteries at Samothrace was relevant to a circular structure within an apparently sacred building recently excavated in the sanctuary, and proposed that

⁴² Clinton 2008; 1992, 137f.; 2003, 59f. The verb μυεῖν can pertain to preliminary initiation or, especially in the Roman period, to initiation in the first main stage, that of the μύσται, the precise meaning depending on the context (Clinton 2008, 33f.).

⁴³ 1) ἀμύητον | μὴ εἰσέναι | εἰς τὸ ἱερόν (Fraser 1960, 117f. no. 62.2) *deorum sacra | qui non acceperunt non intrant*. | ἀμύητον | μὴ εἰσέναι (Frazer 1960, 118–121 no. 63). On no. 1 see now Clinton (2017, 336), pointing out that this inscription cannot be definitively tied to the building called “Hieron” (named after the inscription). *Pace* Bremmer (2014, 30), there is no evidence that it was “part of the walls of that building”.

⁴⁴ Clinton 2008, 17.

⁴⁵ On the purificatory aspect of the rite, Clinton (2003, 59f.; 2008, 33), with citation of previous studies.

⁴⁶ Clinton 2008, 27–31; IEleusis 19.43–46: [τ]ὸς μύστας τὸς Ἐλε[υσίνοι] μου[μ]ένο[ς] ἐν τῷ αὐλῆι [ἐντὸς τὸ ἡ|]ερό, τὸς δὲ ἐν ἄστει [μουμένο]ς ἐν τοῖ Ἐλευσινίοι. The restoration ἐν τῷ αὐλῆι [ἐκτὸς τὸ ἡ|]ερό seems more likely.

the preliminary *myesis* at Samothrace might be the Korybantic ritual of θρόνωσις (“enthronement”), described by Plato (*Euthydemus* 277d–e) as preliminary to initiation:⁴⁷

Ἔτι δὴ ἐπὶ τὸ τρίτον καταβαλῶν ὥσπερ πάλαισμα ὄρμα ὁ Εὐθύδημος τὸν νεανίσκον· καὶ ἐγὼ γνοὺς βαπτίζομενον τὸ μειράκιον, βουλόμενος ἀναπαῦσαι αὐτό, μὴ ἡμῖν ἀποδειλιάσειε, παραμυθούμενος εἶπον· Ὡ Κλεινία, μὴ θαύμαζε εἴ σοι φαίνονται ἀήθεις οἱ λόγοι. Ἴσως γὰρ οὐκ αἰσθάνη οἷον ποιεῖτον τῷ ξένῳ περὶ σέ· ποιεῖτον δὲ ταῦτόν ὅπερ οἱ ἐν τῇ τελετῇ τῶν Κορυβάντων, ὅταν τὴν θρόνωσιν ποιῶσιν περὶ τοῦτον ὃν ἂν μέλλωσι τελεῖν. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ χορεία τίς ἐστὶ καὶ παιδιὰ, εἰ ἄρα καὶ τετέλεσαι· καὶ νῦν τοῦτω οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ χορεύετον περὶ σέ καὶ οἷον ὀρχεῖσθον παίζοντε, ὡς μετὰ τοῦτο τελοῦντε. νῦν οὖν νόμισον τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ἱερῶν ἀκούειν τῶν σοφιστικῶν.

Now as Euthydemus was starting to go for the third throw-down of the young man as in wrestling, and I, recognizing that the youth was going under water and wishing to give him a breather, lest he lose heart on us, said, “Kleinias, do not be surprised if their arguments seem strange to you. Perhaps you do not perceive what sort of thing the two guests are doing around you. They are doing the same thing that those at the *telete* of the Korybantes do when they perform the *thronosis* around the person whom they are going to initiate. For indeed there is dancing and entertainment there (i.e. in the *thronosis*), as you know if in fact you too have been initiated. And now these two are just performing a choral dance about you and, as it were, dancing playfully in order to initiate you afterwards. So reckon that now you have been hearing the preliminaries (τὰ πρῶτα) of the Sophistic Rites.”⁴⁸

3 The Preliminary Initiation at Samothrace

The circular structure where Nock surmised that the Korybantes performed their encircling dance was revealed by later excavation not to be a wooden platform but the remains of a modern limekiln,⁴⁹ and further investigation concluded that the building was most likely not the sacred building originally imagined.⁵⁰

In order to evaluate whether Plato’s Korybantic *thronosis* might be a ritual serving the religious purpose of the Mystera, it is essential, first, to ascertain what can be learned about the nature of this ritual from its use as metaphor in the *Euthydemus*. Other than Plato’s use of it as a metaphor, hardly anything is known about it.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Nock 1941.

⁴⁸ Cf. the translation by Erler (2017, 19. 136f.), who translates “sophistische Mysterien”; Hawtrey (1981, 68) refers to them as “sophistic mysteries”.

⁴⁹ Remains of a lime kiln according to excavation director J.R. McCredie; Burkert 1993, 186; Clinton 2003, 73 n. 41; Wescoat 2017, 61 n. 66.

⁵⁰ Clinton 2008, 26 n. 3; 2017, 325.

⁵¹ An apparent exception, Dio Chrysostom 12.33–34, is believed to be derived from Plato; see discussion *infra*, pp. 36f. Pretini (1999, 293) points out the complete lack of information in ancient authors about the position of *thronosis* in the ritual of the Korybantes.

Plato describes the ritual as (part of) the τελετὴ τῶν Κορυβάντων, preliminary to initiation proper (ὅταν τὴν θρόνωσιν ποιῶσιν περὶ τοῦτον ὃν ἂν μέλλωσι τελεῖν). (In this formal respect it is similar to the Eleusinian preliminary μύησις, itself a τελετή, leading to the τελετὴ of the first stage, that of the μύσται.)⁵² The two sophists perform, as it were, a choral dance around the initiate prior to his initiation (ὡς μετὰ τοῦτο τελοῦντε). Modern discussion of this passage on *thronosis* has often overlooked the fact that it was a *preliminary* ritual, and that Plato does not disclose the deities involved in the main initiation;⁵³ therefore it would be hazardous to assume they were identical to those in the preliminary stage. If the entire ritual, preliminary and main, were the *telete* of the Korybantēs, it would not have been necessary to specify that it was the *preliminary* ritual that was performed by the Korybantēs; Plato need only have stated “ἐν τῇ τελετῇ τῶν Κορυβάντων” or “ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς τῶν Κορυβάντων” *without mentioning a preliminary initiation*; instead, he goes to some length to *emphasize* that it preceded the main initiation, by stating that fact twice (περὶ τοῦτον ὃν ἂν μέλλωσι τελεῖν/ὡς μετὰ τοῦτο τελοῦντε), thus differentiating the preliminary from the main ritual, leaving no doubt in his readers’ minds that these were distinct rituals. In fact, the metaphor goes on to mention (figuratively) the name of the entire τελετή, both preliminary and main: τὰ ἱερά τὰ σοφιστικά. If the metaphor parallels reality, as it is surely meant to do, the main initiation of τὰ ἱερά τὰ σοφιστικά should be of a different character from the preliminary one. In the metaphor, dancing and entertainment take up the first part; then, it is implied, serious revelation of sophistic practice (τὰ σοφιστικά) will begin; thus, in the actual cult, the *thronosis* ought to be followed not by ecstatic dancing (of which Plato disapproved, *infra*, n. 64) but by revelation.

Plato’s text has been taken to indicate that this rite was well known to Athenians, and there is no reason to doubt it. But the question of where it took place, in Athens or elsewhere, is not immediately clear. It was most probably not a state cult; for there is no mention of Korybantēs in the very extensive evidence that we have pertaining to state cults in Athens, whereas some testimonia have been understood to imply that Korybantic rites were administered privately.⁵⁴ Linforth and other scholars therefore

52 Cf. Clinton 2003, 58–60. At Clinton (2003, 72 n. 32) the statement that the preliminary *myesis* was not a *telete* is not accurate. Although the ancient testimonia distinguish it, as purification, from the main Eleusinian *telete*, it does fit Plato’s use of the term *telete* (*Symp.* 202c–203a; Clinton 2003, 53f.).

53 In his reconstruction of Korybantic initiation in Plato, Linforth (1946, 156), followed largely by Schöpsdau (2003, 510f.), takes references from various contexts in Plato and puts them together to reconstruct an entire ritual. He places *thronosis* “at some point” before “the “telete proper, in which, we may suppose, the candidate threw himself into the dance with the rest and yielded to the intoxication of the rhythm”. This reconstruction assumes *thronosis* was part of every Korybantic initiation, an assumption not supported by evidence (cf. *infra*, pp. 30f.), including Pl. *Euthyd.* 277d–e. Pretini (1999, 290f.) notes the difficulties in attempting to produce from Plato’s references a coherent and accurate reconstruction.

54 On a private cult in Thessalonica, see Voutiras 1996.

assumed that Plato had a private cult in mind.⁵⁵ However, the assumption that Plato was referring to a private cult is difficult to maintain in light of the fact that he disdained private cults (ἰδιωτικά) and favored public ones (δημόσια). In *Laws* 910b–c he prescribed:

Shrines of the gods no one must possess in a private house (θεῶν ἐν ἰδίαις οἰκίαις ἱερά); and if anyone is proved to possess and worship at any shrine other than the public shrines (κεκτημένον ἕτερα καὶ ὀργιάζοντα πλὴν τὰ δημόσια)—be the possessor man or woman—and if he is guilty of no serious act of impiety, he that notices the fact shall inform the Law-wardens, and they shall give orders for the private shrines to be removed to the public ones (εἰς τὰ δημόσια ἀποφέρειν ἱερά τὰ ἴδια), and if the owner disobeys the order, they shall punish him until he removes them.⁵⁶

In the case of the *telete* of the Korybantes, Socrates implies that it was perfectly natural for a member of an aristocratic Athenian family, such as Kleinias, Alcibiades' cousin, to have participated in such a cult; and Socrates' full knowledge of it suggests that he too experienced it.⁵⁷ We can also infer that it was not a secret rite, since Plato had no qualms about describing its main elements. From what can be gathered so far from Plato, it is clear that he was most likely referring to a public rite in a public cult.

Precisely what sort of an initiation it was preliminary to, we are not told, except that, as noted above, the metaphorical name of the cult, Sophistic Rites, implies the main initiation was of a different sort from the preliminary one. Socrates explains how in this preliminary rite (τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ἱερῶν τῶν σοφιστικῶν) the two foreigners have been playing with Kleinias, by taking advantage of his ignorance of the correct use of words. Then, in lieu of the strangers' Sophistic Rites, which in the main initiation would have followed along the same lines as the preliminary one and revealed to Kleinias, in more depth, methods of sophistic argumentation, Socrates, now interrupting this progression, begins his own protreptic (278e), and assumes control, as guide in a proper search for truth.

Leading up to the metaphor of the τελετή τῶν Κορυβάντων, the two preceding metaphors deployed by Socrates—from wrestling and drowning—depict a person, in the first image, about to succumb to his opponent and, in the second, underwater, about to lose consciousness. Following these images of decreasing self-control, the next image, of an initiand approaching the end of a τελετή τῶν Κορυβάντων, ought to illustrate that Kleinias' psychic situation is so dire that it necessitates Socrates' immediate intervention. What sort of an actual preliminary initiation would correspond to such a situation?

⁵⁵ Linforth 1946, 158; so also Parker 2005, 373; Graf 2010, 308; Bremmer 2014, 48f.

⁵⁶ Transl. R.G. Bury (Loeb), with minor modification. See also Pl. *Leg.* 908d: among the impious are those who “plot with their private *teletai*,” τελεταῖς δὲ ἰδίαις ἐπιβεβουλευκότες.

⁵⁷ Dodds 1951, 99 n. 104: “It seems to me that the appeal to the experience of the τετελεσμένος is hardly natural save on the lips of one who is τετελεσμένος himself.” Cf. Linforth 1946, 124f. 161f.

The only scholar (to my knowledge) to address substantively the question of a *preliminary* initiation of Korybantes is Nock,⁵⁸ who noted the inclusion of washing in the Korybantic ritual in *IErythrai* 206, a fourth-century sacred law on the sale of priest-hoods of the Korybantes. However, this law implies that washing took place, from nearly all indications in the text, *after* the initiation: the rites are listed in the order τελεῖν, κρητηρίζειν, λούειν (lines 1–10), which is corroborated by *SEG* XLVII 1628, an additional fragment of this law, in which those who have undergone the rituals are called τελεσθέντες, κρητηρισθέντες, λουθέντες (lines 19–22). Thus there were three related rituals: initiation, drinking and/or pouring libations from a krater, and washing.⁵⁹ There is no mention of a preliminary rite or *thronosis*, even though Plato’s description implies that this rite was *public* (*supra*, p. 29). In any case, general Korybantic ritual, as at Erythrai, could involve purification, and Nock opined that purification was the right sort of ritual to have been a preliminary one in Samothrace.⁶⁰

In Classical authors the verb κορυβαντίζειν occurs only in Aristophanes, *Wasps* 119–120, when Xanthias describes Bdelykleon’s failed attempt to Korybantize his father, in the hope of making him forget about his mania for serving as a juror:

After this he was korybantizing (him), but he, rushing off with tambourine and all (μετὰ τοῦτ’ ἐκορυβάντιζ’, ὁ δ’ αὐτῷ τυμπάνῳ), burst into the New Court and started serving as juror. As he was not succeeding with these teletai, he took his father to Aegina.

Three inferences worthy of note can be drawn from this comic episode of κορυβαντίζειν: 1) no mention of a preliminary ritual, just as in the *leges sacrae* of Erythrae;⁶¹ 2)

⁵⁸ Nock 1941, 579.

⁵⁹ Graf (2010, 303f.) presents the order as τελεῖν, λούειν, κρητηρίζειν, which occurs once in this document (*SEG* XLVII 1628.12–13), otherwise (twice) λούειν is last. Although this position for λούειν runs counter to many cults in which cleansing comes first, late cleansing in κορυβαντίζειν may have served an appropriate function, as in the (apparently) Sabazian cult briefly described by Demosthenes, *Or.* 18, 259: καθαίρων τοὺς τελουμένους καὶ ἀπομάττων τῷ πηλῷ καὶ τοῖς πιτύροις comes after κρητηρίζων. In *IErythrai* 206.8–9 the restoration of Dignas (2002, 29), [βουλομέν]ους instead of [τελευμέν]ους, seems to fit the sense better, as the *kreterismos* and *loutron* can be understood to be optional. In a later (fragmentary) sacred law from Erythrae (*JG* XII.6.2 1197) concerning apparently the same rites, the verbs κορυβαντίζειν and κρητηρίζειν occur in sequence (lines 10–11), followed by a lacuna (in which λούειν could have occurred), thus the same sequence as in *IErythrai* 206, except that for the first ritual, κορυβαντίζειν is used instead of τελεῖν (the initiates are called κορυβαντιζόμενοι, κορυβαντισθέντες, or κεκορυβαντισμένοι); the verb τελεῖν in this document seems to be used for all three processes (lines 4–6).

⁶⁰ Nock 1941, 579: “The Corybantic ritual ... belongs to the fairly extensive category of rituals of purification—proceedings which were, so to speak, medical, as well as sacramental.”

⁶¹ Graf (2010, 308) notes the absence of any mention in the epigraphic record of such a ritual: “If it was performed at Erythrae at all, it might hide under the verb τελεῖν, ‘to initiate’ that can comprise a complex set of rites which the text has no need to describe; but we cannot be certain.” The epigraphic record of the Eleusinian Mysteries, on the other hand, contains several references to the preliminary initiation (*supra*, n. 42).

the ritual aimed at such manic enthusiasm (Philokleon still clutching his tambourine) that it was hoped he would forget about what most interested him; and 3) Bdelykleon attempts to perform κορυβαντίζειν by himself (no hint is given that the verb could be causative), which is perhaps part of the joke about its failure. This episode indicates that Korybantic initiation was well known (cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 120–134), but it does not provide authoritative evidence for the existence of private cults of this sort in Athens.

The relatively frequent use by Plato of Korybantic terminology would seem to offer the best hope for learning details of the ritual if it was current at Athens. However, his references to the ritual do not mention the term used elsewhere for it, namely κορυβαντισμός or κορυβαντίζειν (as in the sacred laws of Erythrai, *supra* p. 30).⁶² Except for the preliminary τελετή τῶν Κορυβάντων and the ἰάματα τῶν Κορυβάντων (*Leg.* 790–791), he only uses forms of κορυβαντιᾶν, “to be in a state of manic (Korybantic) enthusiasm”, in which the person is possessed (κατεχόμενος) by a god (ἔνθεος) and out of his mind (ἔκφρων). In *Ion* 533c–534a κορυβαντιᾶν (equivalent to βακχεύειν) is used figuratively to characterize the creative power of epic and melic poets:

πάντες γὰρ οἱ τε τῶν ἐπῶν ποιηταὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ οὐκ ἐκ τέχνης ἀλλ’ ἐνθεοὶ ὄντες καὶ κατεχόμενοι πάντα ταῦτα τὰ καλὰ λέγουσι ποιήματα, καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ὡσαύτως, ὥσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες ὀρχοῦνται, οὕτω καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες τὰ καλὰ μέλη ταῦτα ποιοῦσιν, ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴν ἐμβῶσιν εἰς τὴν ἁρμονίαν καὶ εἰς τὸν ῥυθμόν, βακχεύουσι καὶ κατεχόμενοι, ὥσπερ αἱ βάρηται ἀρῶνται ἐκ τῶν ποταμῶν μέλι καὶ γάλα κατεχόμενα, ἔμφρονες δὲ οὔσαι οὐ, καὶ τῶν μελοποιῶν ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦτο ἐργάζεται, ὅπερ αὐτοὶ λέγουσι.

The passage makes clear that participants dancing in the Korybantic cult attained an extraordinary state of enthusiasm; they were possessed, no longer in control of their minds, κορυβαντιῶντες—a state of extreme enthusiasm with which great poets are endowed. In *Phaedrus* 228b, Socrates refers to himself as the συγκορυβαντιῶν of Phaedrus, in sharing a wildly enthusiastic passion for rhetoric.⁶³ In these dialogs κορυβαντιᾶν is used figuratively to illustrate the passion that drives poetic creativity and the passion of admirers of great rhetoric to listen to extraordinary speeches. In each case their enthusiasm contributes to creativity or passionate appreciation, but of course these personal enthusiasms were not attained by taking part in Korybantic rites, and Plato offers no words of advocacy for such participation. In fact, the type of dancing alluded to in *Ion*, namely Bacchic (in Plato’s description equivalent to

⁶² Pretini (1999, 290) also notes Plato’s lack of interest in describing Korybantic or similar rites: “In nessuna delle pagine che abbiamo letto, infatti, l’intento principale di Platone è descrivere questi riti o altre cerimonie affini.”

⁶³ ἀπαντήσας δὲ τῷ νοσοῦντι περὶ λόγων ἀκοήν, ἰδὼν μὲν, ἰδὼν, ἦσθη ὅτι ἔξει τὸν συγκορυβαντιῶντα.

Korybantic), he regarded as “unbefitting our citizens”,⁶⁴ and so it is quite understandable that he would not advocate for this well-known Korybantic initiation involving frenzied (Bacchic) dancing. (Nor, as we have seen seen [*supra*, p. 29], would he recommend it if it were a private cult).

In *Symposium* 215c–e Plato uses κορυβαντιᾶν in similar fashion, to portray the effect that Socrates has on Alcibiades and others:

But when someone hears you or your words being spoken by another, even if a rather poor speaker, whether a woman, man, or boy hears him, we are stunned and become possessed... When I hear him, far more than those possessed by Korybantic frenzy (πολύ μοι μάλλον ἢ τῶν κορυβαντιῶντων) my heart pounds and tears pour forth at the sound of his words. And I see many others experiencing the same thing.

Here too, Plato gives no details of the process of Korybantic initiation. In comparing Socrates’ power of entrancement to that of Marsyas, Alcibiades points out that its effect is greater on him than what κορυβαντιῶντες experience. Here Plato uses the image of κορυβαντιῶντες in a figurative way, to demonstrate the power of Socrates’ charm. Nothing in what he says suggests that he is advocating that his audience be initiated so that they can experience their hearts pounding and their tears flowing. He does of course suggest that to be under the spell of a person like Socrates would be an extraordinary experience. About the process of Korybantic initiation, we learn from the *Symposium* only that it involved music of the *aulos*; from the *Ion*, Bacchic/Korybantic dancing.⁶⁵

64 *Leg.* 815c–d, regarding Bacchic dancing as “questionable”: “All the dancing that is of a Bacchic kind ... when performing certain rites of expiation and initiation (περικαθαρούς τε καὶ τελετάς τινας ἀποτελούντων),—all this class of dancing cannot easily be defined either as pacific or as warlike, or as of any one distinct kind. The most correct way of defining it seems to me to be this—to separate it off both from pacific and from warlike dancing, and to pronounce that this kind of dancing is unfitted for our citizens (οὐκ ἔστι πολιτικὸν τοῦτο τῆς ὀρχήσεως τὸ γένος); and having thus disposed of it and dismissed it, we will now return to the warlike and pacific kinds which do beyond question belong to us”, transl. R.G. Bury (Loeb). Linforth (1946, 161) translates οὐκ ἔστι πολιτικὸν as “not a matter of civic interest”, implying that Plato left the question as to the propriety of this type of dancing “unsettled”. He rejects the translation of England (1921, 302), “not fit for a civilized community”, claiming “there is no warrant for giving the adjective this turn of condemnation.” However, cf. Bury’s translation *supra*; *LSJ* s.v. πολιτικός, I.2 “befitting a citizen”. In support of his argument Linforth points out that here “nothing is said about Corybantic rites”, but this is irrelevant, since Plato equates orgiastic Korybantic rites with Bacchic ones as in *Ion* (*supra*).

65 In *Crito* 54d, Socrates says that he hears the voices of the laws, “just as those in Korybantic frenzy (οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες) believe they are hearing the flutes, and the sound of these arguments rings in my head and makes me unable to hear any other ones.” Here too, Plato is employing a metaphor to illustrate Socrates’ devotion to the laws; he is not suggesting that imagining to hear the sound of *auloi* while in a state of frenzy is necessarily a desirable state. *Contra*, Linforth (1946, 162) infers that this, as in all other instances of Plato’s description of the activities of those in the state of κορυβαντιᾶν, “impl[ies] something admirable in [the rites].”

In *Euthydemus*, however, Kleinias does not appear to exhibit signs of incipient Korybantian mania as he experiences the “*thronosis*,” nor does it seem likely that his final state of mind would have been *manic enthusiasm* if Socrates had not intervened and allowed the Sophistic Rites to proceed unchecked. Metaphorically, after the preceding metaphors from wrestling and drowning, the *thronosis* should represent a further stage toward loss of self-control—coming completely under the control of the two “Korybantes” (*supra*, p. 29). But this does not resemble the result of the common Korybantian ritual as described by Plato in the *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*—manic enthusiasm.

3.1 The Cures of the Korybantes

A passage in the *Laws* shows that certain practices associated with Korybantes aimed not at manic enthusiasm but at satisfying therapeutic needs. *Laws* 790c–791b describes how mothers and nurses lull sleepless infants to sleep by rocking them and singing lullabies, and the women who perform the cures of the Korybantes (αἱ περὶ τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα τελοῦσαι) use the same technique on victims of Bacchic frenzy:

The evidence necessarily derives also from the fact that from experience nurses of small children and the women who officiate in the cures of the Korybantes (αἱ τε τροφοὶ τῶν μικρῶν καὶ αἱ περὶ τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα τελοῦσαι)⁶⁶ have adopted and recognized that it is useful; for whenever mothers wish to put to sleep those children who are having difficulty going to sleep, they do not apply quiet but the opposite, motion, constantly rocking them in their arms, and not silence but a lullaby and in this way simply charm the children, just as (those who charm) those affected by Bacchic frenzy, by employing this cure of motion with dancing and music (τινα μελωδίαν, καὶ ἀτεχνῶς οἷον καταλοῦσαι τῶν παιδίων, καθάπερ αἱ τῶν ἐκφρόνων βακχείων, ἰάσει ταύτη τῇ τῆς κινήσεως ἅμα χορεῖα καὶ μούση χρώμεναι).⁶⁷

Kl: So what, Stranger, is the principal cause of this?

Ath: It is not difficult to recognize.

Kl: How so?

Ath: Both these afflictions involve being frightened, and frights occur because of a poor mental condition. So whenever one applies externally a shaking motion (σεισμόν) to such afflictions, the external motion being applied overpowers the internally fearful and manic motion, and having taken control, clearly brings about a calmness and a rest from pounding of the heart that became so disturbing for each group (τῆς περὶ τὰ τῆς καρδίας χαλεπῆς γενομένης ἐκάστων πηδύσεως)—a matter altogether desirable: it causes some to attain sleep, but to others, who are passionately excited, it brings about, in place of manic dispositions, sane states of mind (ἀντὶ

⁶⁶ On the sense and translation of αἱ περὶ τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα τελοῦσαι see Linforth 1946, 130f.

⁶⁷ The text is that of R.G. Bury (Loeb) and A. Diès (CUF).

μανικῶν ἡμῖν διαθέσεων ἕξεις ἔμφονας ἔχειν), by dancing to the sound of the *aulos*, with the help of gods to whom each group offers propitious sacrifice.⁶⁸

At first this discourse focuses on two specific groups that can benefit from motion therapy, sleepless infants and frenzied adults; the former can be cured by rocking and lullabies, the latter by τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα (obviously not meant for infants) involving dancing and music. It then describes the cause of these maladies—a frightened state of mind—and its cure. But at this point the therapeutic process is described as applicable to all whose minds are beset by fright (but presumably not infants, judging by the sacrificial ritual, not likely to be performed by mothers rocking and singing their children to sleep), divided in two groups (implied by the plural ἐκάστων): 1) some (τοὺς μὲν) the external motion puts to sleep (those afflicted by sleeplessness), and others in a hyperexcited state (τοὺς δ' ἐγρηγορότας) it brings to a sound state of mind, by dancing to the music of the *aulos*, with the help of the gods to whom each group (ἐκαστοι) offers propitious sacrifice. Thus there are two groups suffering from a frightened state of mind, one group unable to sleep, the other in a manic state, but through (charming) music and dance both groups are cured. There is no reason to assume that the same type of music and dance was used for each group. That a single therapy should suffice for people suffering from diverse psychological conditions makes little sense, and Plato signaled his awareness of this by beginning with two disparate groups and their distinct therapies (infants and victims of Bacchic frenzy).

Unlike Korybantic initiation (κορυβαντίζεσθαι), which Plato never mentions, he not only mentions τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα (which he does not call a *telete*) but commends them for their therapeutic benefits. After referring to them as an example of a successful cure, he goes on to extract from them not an initiation that leads to κορυβαντιᾶν, a state of frenzy, but a general outline of a therapy, accompanied by sacrifice to appropriate gods, to cure a person of a nervous mental state.⁶⁹ In *Euthydemus*, as we have seen (*supra*, p. 29) he also gives implicit approval to the preliminary “*telete* of the Korybantes”; but that preliminary rite is, again, not the same as κορυβαντίζεσθαι, “to undergo korybantic initiation”, which is a main initiation (as the sacred laws of Erythrae witness, *supra*, p. 30), nor is it a private *telete* (*supra*, p.

⁶⁸ τοὺς μὲν ὕπνου λαγχάνειν ποιεῖ, τοὺς δ' ἐγρηγορότας ὀρχουμένους τε καὶ αὐλουμένους, μετὰ θεῶν οἷς ἂν καλλιεροῦντες ἕκαστοι θύωσι, κατηργάσατο ἀντί μανικῶν ἡμῖν διαθέσεων ἕξεις ἔμφονας ἔχειν.

⁶⁹ It is probably not correct to refer to this therapy as τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα, since Plato does not give it a name or associate it with specific divinities. He refers earlier to τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα, administered by certain women, as a specific example of a useful therapy, from which he derives a medical procedure, preceded by an appeal to appropriate gods.

29); and there is no indication that it included ecstatic dancing, consistent with Plato's strong disapproval of that type of dancing (*supra*, n. 64).⁷⁰

In *Euthydemus*, as Socrates notices that Euthydemus has brought Kleinias to the brink of desperation, he suddenly intervenes, explaining to the young man that he is undergoing a process similar to *thronosis*. How, then (to return to the question posed earlier [*supra*, p. 29]), does a preliminary initiation by *thronosis* involve losing psychic self-control?

In the metaphor of the “*telete* of the Korybantēs”, the two strangers are bringing to completion the preliminary initiation into the Sophistic Rites (τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ἱερῶν τῶν σοφιστικῶν). In order for Kleinias, who is verging on complete despair (277d, μὴ ἡμῖν ἀποδειλιάσειε), to receive these Rites, he needs to rid his mind of the confusion and despair that has been brought about in large part by his former mode of thinking, and so be ready to embrace wholeheartedly the supposedly brilliant techniques to be shown in the next stage of the Sophistic Rites.

A ritual suited to this purpose would be one similar to the Korybantic ἰάματα of employing music and dance to calm or put to sleep persons in a frightened state, as in *Laws* 790c–791b.⁷¹ (Possibly relevant is Pliny's reference to “... hares and many human beings, who the Greeks say are possessed by the Korybantēs (κορυβαντιᾶν) sleep with their eyes open”, interpreted by Dodds as indicating “a kind of trance” or in the words of Rohde “a condition related to hypnosis”).⁷² At any rate, a calm or trance-like condition is more likely to occur in seated, passive candidates as in *thronosis* than in active, aroused dancers. Such a condition could well cause a person to forget his troubled state of mind and face what is to come with a mind that is a *tabula rasa*, fresh, ready to accept a new, potentially mind-changing experience—to Socrates, of course, a most disturbing prospect for Kleinias—as they proceed to the initiation proper.

70 Linforth (1946, 161f.) argues that Plato in his references to Korybantic rites indicated his “approval” (see also *supra*, nn. 64–65): “But he is so far from disapproving that he speaks in a tone which implies recognition of their worth. Socrates would not have suggested that Cleinias might have taken part in the rites if there was anything discreditable in doing so.” But his suggestion about Kleinias concerned a particular *preliminary* rite; it is precipitous to assume that Socrates is implying that the initiation that follows this preliminary rite was the usual Korybantic type leading to Korybantic frenzy (κορυβαντιᾶν).

71 Hawtrey (1981, 71) also finds this passage important for the understanding of the preliminary rite of *thronosis*.

72 *HN* 11.147: Quin et patentibus (oculis) dormiunt lepores multique hominum, quos κορυβαντιᾶν Graeci dicunt. Dodds 1951, 78. 96–97 n. 94; Rohde 1903, 47 n. 3. If it is relevant, the term κορυβαντιᾶν, “to be in a state of Korybantic frenzy”, seems inappropriate, perhaps the result of confusion with τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἰάματα. Linforth (1946, 156) may be right in assuming that the candidate in *thronosis* “gradually lost consciousness of all but the whirling rhythm of the dance”; but his assumption that in “the *telete* proper, ... we may suppose, the candidate threw himself into the dance with the rest and yielded to the intoxication of the rhythm” does not seem an appropriate inference from a metaphor illustrating induction into sophistry.

The particular sense of the *Thronosis of the Korybantes* in Kleinias' case seems, therefore, to be that any confusions and doubts that Kleinias was experiencing were about to be wiped away, as he succumbs to a trance-like state and becomes a truly malleable soul in the hands of the two sophists as they proceed to the initiation proper. In this sense the preliminary ritual can be regarded as a psychic cleansing.⁷³ Such a purification would be appropriate for a mystery cult like the Samothracian Mysteria. In general, Mysteria were known, despite their great benefits, to be frightening experiences.⁷⁴ An initiand had to be psychically prepared, cleansed of fears, to encounter them bravely—μεγάθυμος, like Isidoros the initiate of the Samothracian and Eleusinian Mysteria (*supra*, p. 19).

3.2 Dio Chrysostom

Dio Chrysostom in his *Olympikos* (*Or.* 12.33–34) puts the metaphor of *thronosis* to a very different use—to illustrate the divine administration of the universe. His use of it seems, at first sight, not to offer any new information about the ritual. However, his placement of it in a new religious context offers significant perspective:⁷⁵

So it is almost as though (*σχεδὸν ὅμοιον ὥσπερ εἶ*) anyone were to offer a man, a Greek or a barbarian, to be initiated (*μυεῖσθαι*) and <lead him> into some mystic chamber (*μυστικὸν τινα μυχὸν*) of extraordinary beauty and size where he would see many mystic sights and hear many mystic voices, where light and darkness would appear to him alternately, and a thousand other things would occur; and further, if as (*ἔτι δὲ εἰ καθάπερ*) they are accustomed to do, in the rite called enthronement (*ἐν τῷ καλουμένῳ θρονισμῷ*), the initiators (*οἱ τελούντες*) sitting down

73 Ustinova (1992–1998, 511–515) discusses possession trance in other cultures as a cure for mental disorders. Often the rites need to be repeated for the same person; in the case of *thronosis*, however, the ritual is preliminary to another, main initiation, and presumably is not repeated.

74 Plutarch, *De Anima*, frg. 178 Sandbach. Cf. Burkert 1987, 91–93.

75 σχεδὸν οὖν ὅμοιον ὥσπερ εἶ τις ἄνδρα Ἑλληνα ἢ βάρβαρον μυεῖσθαι παραδούς εἰς μυστικὸν τινα μυχὸν (εἰσάγοι) ὑπερφυῆ κάλλει καὶ μεγέθει, πολλὰ μὲν ὀρώντα μυστικά θεάματα, πολλῶν δὲ ἀκούοντα τοιούτων φωνῶν, σκότους τε καὶ φωτὸς ἐναλλάξ αὐτῷ φαινομένων, ἄλλων τε μυρίων γιγνομένων, ἔτι δὲ εἰ καθάπερ εἰώθασιν ἐν τῷ καλουμένῳ θρονισμῷ καθίσαντες τοὺς μουμένους οἱ τελούντες κύκλῳ περιχορεύουεν· ἄρα γε τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦτον μηδὲν παθεῖν εἰκὸς τῇ ψυχῇ μηδ' ὑπονοῆσαι τὰ γινόμενα, ὡς μετὰ γνώμης καὶ παρασκευῆς πράττεται σοφωτέρας, εἰ καὶ πάνυ τις εἶη τῶν μακρόθεν καὶ ἀνυνύμων βαρβάρων, μηδενὸς ἐξηγητοῦ μηδὲ ἐρμηνέως παρόντος, ἀνθρωπίνην ψυχὴν ἔχων; ἢ τοῦτο μὲν οὐκ ἀνυστόν, κοινῇ δὲ ξύμπαν τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος τὴν ὀλόκληρον καὶ τῷ ὄντι τελείαν τελετὴν μουόμενον, οὐκ ἐν οἰκίῳ μικρῷ παρασκευασθέντι πρὸς ὑποδοχὴν ὄχλου βραχείος ὑπὸ Ἀθηναίων, ἀλλὰ ἐν τῷδε τῷ κόσμῳ, ποικίλῳ καὶ σοφῷ δημιουργήματι, μυρίων ἐκάστοτε θαυμάτων φαινομένων, ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ὁμοίων τοῖς τελουμένοις, ἀλλὰ θεῶν ἀθανάτων θνητοὺς τελούντων, νυκτὶ τε καὶ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ φωτὶ καὶ ἄστροις, εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν, ἀτεχνῶς περιχορεύοντων ἀεὶ, τούτων ξυμπάντων μηδεμίαν αἴσθησιν μηδὲ ὑποψίαν λαβεῖν μάλιστα δὲ τοῦ κορυφαίου (τοῦ) προεστῶτος τῶν ὄλων καὶ κατευθύνοντος τὸν ἅπαντα οὐρανὸν καὶ κόσμον, οἷον σοφοῦ κυβερνήτου νεὼς ἄρχοντος πάνυ καλῶς τε καὶ ἀνευδεῶς παρεσκευασμένης; On the text see Russell 1992, 183.

those being initiated (τους μουμένους), were to dance round and round them (κύκλω περιχορεύοιεν)—pray, is it likely that the man in this situation would be in no way moved in his mind and would not suspect that all which was taking place was the result of a more than wise intention and preparation, even if he belonged to the most remote and nameless barbarians and had no guide and interpreter at his side—so long as he had the mind of a human being? Or, is this not impossible? Impossible that the whole human race, which is being initiated (μουμένον) in the complete and truly perfect *telete*, not in a little building erected by the Athenians for the reception of a small company (οὐκ ἐν οἰκίματι μικρῷ παρασκευασθέντι πρὸς ὑποδοχὴν ὄχλου βραχέος ὑπὸ Ἀθηναίων), but in this universe, a varied and cunningly wrought creation, in which countless marvels appear at every moment, and where, furthermore, initiators (τελούντων) are not human beings who are of no higher order than the initiates (τοῖς τελουμένοις), but immortal gods who are initiating mortal men, and night and day both in sunlight and under the stars are—if we may dare to use the term—literally dancing around (περιχορευόντων) them forever—is it possible to suppose, I repeat, that of all these things his senses told him nothing, or that he gained no faintest inkling of them, and especially of the leader of the chorus, who pessesides over the universe and directs the entire heaven and ordered world, just as a skillful pilot commands a ship, that has been perfectly furnished and lacks nothing?⁷⁶

Dio presented here not one but two *teletai*—the Eleusinian Mysteria in the first conditional clause (ὥσπερ εἶ), and *thronismos* in the second (ἔτι δὲ εἰ καθάπερ). They are separate *teletai* grammatically and factually; the Eleusinian is explicitly identified below (ἐν οἰκίματι μικρῷ παρασκευασθέντι πρὸς ὑποδοχὴν ὄχλου βραχέος ὑπὸ Ἀθηναίων) in order to belittle it, whereas *thronismos* is given no geographical reference (it was not part of Eleusinian ritual).⁷⁷ Plato's text may well have inspired Dio to include *thronismos* with its circling dance.⁷⁸ According to Nock, Dio adds nothing to Plato's account;⁷⁹ yet there are innovations: 1) Plato classified it as a ritual preliminary to the initiation proper; Dio has elevated it, seemingly, to the main initiation, by aligning it with the Eleusinian *telete* in the Telesterion; 2) Dio refers to the participants as μουμένους, a term that can indicate *mystai* in the main initiation in μυστήρια or those taking part in the preliminary one.⁸⁰ The first innovation, if Plato is the sole source, seems at first sight to be a misinterpretation. The second innovation could be correct, if derived from an authoritative source, but Dio does not provide a local reference. Doubts about his accuracy, however, can be put to rest by the fact that he made this presentation in an oration to a Panhellenic audience at Olympia. Such an audience, he surely knew, would not be unfamiliar with the cults to which he alludes. By placing *thronismos* side by side with the Eleusinian Mysteria, he implies that it was a well-known public rite. It would not fit his grand purpose of relating the experience

⁷⁶ Transl. J.W. Cohoon (Loeb), with minor modifications, some from Russell 1992, 183f.

⁷⁷ Edmonds 2006. Since size was not a characteristic of *thronosis*, there was nothing about it to belittle, consequently no need of a local reference.

⁷⁸ Cf. Russell 1992, 183.

⁷⁹ Nock 1941, 579 n. 13.

⁸⁰ See *supra*, p. 26; Clinton 2003, 58–60; 2008, 33f.

of *thronismos* to the act of viewing the cosmos by alluding to a private cult in a little known private shrine in Athens, nowhere attested in our sources.

The fact that Dio simply used two *teletai* figuratively to illustrate the workings of the divine cosmos obviates the charge that he misinterpreted Plato. In *Euthydemus* Socrates described *thronosis* as part of a *telete*, the *telete* of the Korybantes; here, Dio presented it as a *telete* occurring in a mystery cult, without specifying in which stage of the cult it was performed, as that was irrelevant to the picture he was creating. Thus, what he adds to Plato's account is confirmation that the *telete* of *thronismos* belongs to a public cult involving *μουσμένουσ*—that is, *Μυστήρια*.

Since no state (i.e. public) cult at Athens is attested for the Korybantes nor a preliminary ritual involving the Korybantes, and as we have seen (*supra*, pp. 28–29), it is very unlikely to have been a private cult at Athens, and, furthermore, Dio's account implies that it is a public cult, it is hard to draw any other conclusion but that it was a public cult held most probably elsewhere than Athens, one that would be known to Athenian and Panhellenic audiences.⁸¹

4 The Korybantes in Samothrace

As discussed *supra* (pp. 26–27), Nock, in associating a *telete* of the Korybantes with the Samothracian Kabeiroi, put forward the hypothesis that it was performed in a circular structure that came to light early in the American excavations; much later, however, it was found to be unsuitable. As it happened, in 1965–67, an ideal venue for a circular dance was excavated on the Eastern Hill just inside the later Propylon (fig. 1, plan, no. 25): a circular area of ca. nine meters in diameter, paved with flagstones. The complex has the shape of a dancing space, an orchestra, and it is surrounded by five steps, which must have accommodated spectators.⁸² This complex was created apparently in the 5th century BC, and, until the Propylon of Ptolemy II was erected in 285–281, it would have been the first significant structure that the initiand encountered just inside the Propylon.

⁸¹ Though as a preliminary rite probably not known officially by the name *τελετή τῶν Κορυβάντων*, but perhaps *μῦσις* as at Eleusis (*supra*, p. 26).

⁸² The structure and its date: McCredie 1968, 216–234; 1979, 6–8; *apud* Lehmann 1998, 96f. See now Wescoat 2017, 31–62. Whatever stood in the center of the circle has long since disappeared, as well as the pavement in this central area. McCredie (1968, 219) explained that the pavement was “removed and the fill beneath it excavated by robbers who hoped to find treasure under whatever object stood there”. On the possibility that an altar stood here see Clinton 2003, 65 n. 49; Wescoat 2017, 52f.

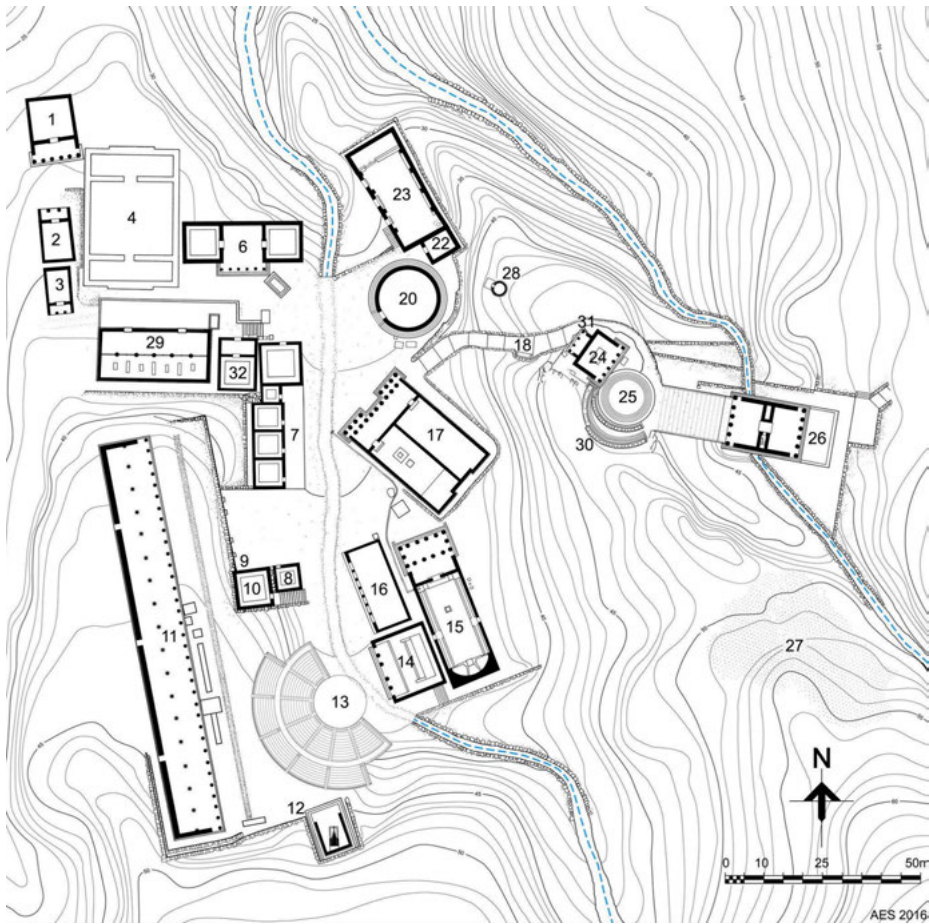


Fig. 1: Restored Sketch Plan of the Sanctuary of the Great Gods in the First Century A.D. as of 2016. Drawing American Excavations, Samothrace.

Any event that took place here would have been preliminary, open to public view, occurring at some moment (not necessarily immediately) in advance of the secret initiation, which took place below in the center of the sanctuary.⁸³ Spatially, it parallels the location of preliminary initiation at Eleusis, held in the court just inside or outside the Propylaia; there the rite was performed on each initiand individually.⁸⁴ In Samothrace, ministrants of *thronosis*, dressed as Korybantes, can readily be imagined

⁸³ In the Telesterion, the building currently called Hall of Choral Dancers; Clinton 2017, 323–335.

⁸⁴ *IEleusis* 19.C.43–45, discussed *supra*, n. 46. The court (αὐλή) could be restored in this document as either inside or outside the sanctuary, but outside seems preferable.

dancing in a circle around a seated initiate, to the accompaniment of the *aulos*, while spectators (among them perhaps *epoptai*) looked on.⁸⁵

Korybantēs in Samothrace are well attested since the 5th century. Pherecydes of Athens (*FGrH* 3 F 48) is cited by Strabo (10.3.21) as stating that nine Korybantēs were born of Apollo and Rhetia, and they dwelled in Samothrace. In Lycophron (*Alex.* 77–80), Cassandra describes Dardanos' flight from Samothrace to Troy: "... he left Zerynthos, the cave of the goddess to whom dogs are sacrificed, when Saos [i.e. Samothrace], the mighty citadel of the Kyrbantēs was destroyed by the foaming deluge of Zeus as it rained down on the whole earth."⁸⁶ According to Diodorus' account (3.55.9), attributed to Dionysius Scytobrachion (*FGrHist* 32 F 7), the Mother of the Gods thought well of the island and settled on it her sons the Korybantēs (κατοικίσαι καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτῆς υἱοὺς τοὺς ὀνομαζομένους Κορύβαντας), "whose father's name is handed down in secret in the course of the *telete* (ἔξ οὗ δ' εἰσὶ πατρὸς ἐν ἀπορρήτῳ κατὰ τὴν τελετὴν παραδίδοσθαι)" and instituted (καταδείξαι) the Mysteria.⁸⁷ This must reflect local accounts, as the Mother of the Gods was a major goddess of the polis and one of the Theoi Megaloi.⁸⁸ It is hardly likely, just on this evidence, that the Korybantēs did not play a significant role in the Samothracian Mysteria.⁸⁹

The one ancient work in which the Samothracian Korybantēs loom largest is the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus. Although information provided by Nonnus sometimes is not

85 Wescoat 2017, 61: "Situating *thronosis* within the Theatral Circle is attractive from several vantages, including the early (for this Sanctuary) articulation of the Theatral Circle as a cultic station, the coincidence of the circular shape of the theatral space, and the indication (in Plato's description) that *thronosis* precedes initiation." She raised some questions: 1) The prohibition from entering the sanctuary without having undergone *thronosis* "would pose a significant impediment for the annual festival, which we assume was celebrated in the Sanctuary and whose attendees may not all of them have been expected to become *myst[ai]*." The "annual festival" was the Dionysia (Dimitrova/Clinton 2015). No polis, to our knowledge, placed a theater of Dionysos within a sanctuary with restricted access, and so attendees, including theoroi, would not be affected by a preliminary initiation within the Theatral Circle. If the nearby theater is determined to be within the Sanctuary of the Great Gods, then the Theater of Dionysos should be elsewhere, presumably in an unexcavated area within the Polis of Samothrace. 2) "A key question is whether the rite would have been performed in such a publicly visible place." Pl. *Euthyd.* 277d–e implies that the rite was not secret (*supra*, p. 29). 3) "The exposed position of the theatral complex does not meet Dio's description of an 'innermost place' (μυστικόν τινα μυχόν) as tangibly as does the secluded central sanctuary." The syntax of Dio's sentence and the broader passage show that by "innermost place" he had the Eleusinian Telesterion in mind, and that the venue of *thronismos* was elsewhere (*supra*, pp. 37–38).

86 Transl. Hornblower (2015, 141) with commentary *ad loc.*

87 Hemberg (1950, 304) and Wescoat (2017, 61 n. 66) provide extensive lists of ancient references to Korybantēs in Samothrace.

88 She appears under many names (Hemberg 1950, 82–92; Nock 1941, 579f.); on Samothracian coins she has the iconography of the Mother of the Gods (Gadsbury 2017, 409–411).

89 *Contra*, Bremmer (2014, 21–54) apparently assigns no role to the Korybantēs in the Samothracian Mysteria.

given much credence, since he is “very late,” recent scholarship has demonstrated that his work contains information of great value on local customs and institutions. Louis Robert pointed out that in general he faithfully reflects local traditions.⁹⁰ Pierre Chuvin and Susan Cole noted his familiarity with Samothracian realities, namely a round building (Arsinoeion) and the two-branched stream.⁹¹

The *Dionysiaca* describes the landing of Cadmos and his sailors on Samothrace, their overnight stay on the beach, and Cadmos’ walk to the town (*Dion.* 3.40–83). As their ship approaches the city in the evening, they are delighted to see “the sleepless flame of the Samian torch” (40–44). They enter the harbor, tie up the hawsers through a hole that had been drilled through a rock, and go to sleep on the beach (45–54). At dawn they awake to the music and dancing of the Korybantes (“priests of the Kabeiroi”, μυστιπόλων ... Καβείρων), the pipes ringing out “a tune in honor of Hecate, divine friend of dogs” (3.61–78):

Already the bird of morning was cutting the air with loud cries; already the helmeted bands of desert-haunting Corybantes were beating on their shields in the Cnossian dance, and leaping with rhythmic steps, and the oxhides thudded under the blows of the iron as they whirled them about in rivalry, while the double pipe made music, and quickened the dancers with its rollicking tune in time to the bounding steps. Aye, and the trees whispered, the rocks boomed, the forests held jubilee with their intelligent movings and shakings, and the Dryads did sing. Packs of bears joined the dance, skipping and wheeling face to face; lions with a roar from emulous throats mimicked the triumphant cry of the priests of the Cabeiroi (μυστιπόλων ἀλαλαγμὸν ἐμμήσαντο Καβείρων), sane in their madness (ἔμφρονα λύσσαν ἔχοντα); the revelling pipes rang out a tune in honour of Hecate, divine friend of dogs, those single pipes, which the horn-polisher’s art invented in Cronos’s days. The noisy Corybantes with their ringing din awoke Cadmos early in the morning.⁹²

In its own extravagant way the poetry of this scene limns the Korybantes and their wild (but sane) dancing and music as a dominant feature of the Samothracian landscape, starting at the break of dawn. Though extravagant, there is no reason to believe that it does not reflect the striking reality of Korybantic music and dancing, especially the music of *auloi* coming from within the Theatral Complex on the sanctuary’s Eastern Hill, the sound reverberating within the sanctuary and beyond, up to the wall of the city and the “Korybantic cliffs”.⁹³ And it is easy to imagine that the music of the Korybantes could last all day, in order to accommodate the preliminary initiation of

⁹⁰ Robert 1975, 168–174, 180–188. Bowersock 1994, 386: “Robert recognized that the sources available to the poet preserved traditions that could be well illustrated from the inscriptions and especially the coins of the regions described.” See also Robert 1962; 1977, 13f.; 1987, 113. Robert’s work on Nonnus as a conservator of local traditions has been continued and enlarged upon by Chuvin (1991) and (1994, a shorter version). Cf. already Hemberg 1950, 117f.

⁹¹ On Nonnus and Samothracian realities, Cole 1984, 115, n. 233 and Chuvin 1991, 84f.

⁹² Transl. W.H.D. Rouse (Loeb).

⁹³ σκοπταὶ Κορυβαντίδες, 4.184, saluted in Harmonia’s farewell to Samothrace.

a boatload of initiands as they received this rite one by one, as at Eleusis (*IEleusis* 19.C.16–30); the entire process could easily last from early morning to evening.⁹⁴

As Nock aptly remarked, “From Pherecydes onwards ancient writers often assimilate Cabiri and Corybantes, and Strabo makes it clear that there was no little resemblance between the emotional ceremonies of Cabiri, Curetes, and Corybantes, as well as between popular concepts of Corybantes, Curetes, and Cabiri as identified with Dioscuri. ... They were all concerned with deliverance, in one way or another, and Cabiri, Dioscuri, and Curetes alike became more widely prominent in the Hellenistic age: we can imagine Cabiri or Curetes absorbing Corybantic rites.”⁹⁵ In Samothrace, the Korybantes, called μυστιπόλοι Καβείρων by Nonnus, were eminently suited, with their wild but “sane” (ἔμφρονα) dancing, to perform the preliminary rite in the Mystera of the Kabeiroi and the other Great Gods.

If the Korybantic preliminary initiation was part of the Samothracian Mystera, why, then, did Plato not refer explicitly to Samothrace? It seems safe to say that the context of the ritual was so well known to Athenians that he did not need to make it explicit; but more importantly, the focus of Socrates’ metaphor was specifically on comparing the actions of the two strangers to the actions of Korybantes; thus reference to the main initiation of the Samothracian *mystai*, a different experience, would be not only irrelevant but would have attenuated Plato’s focus on the comparison.

Nevertheless, the notion that Plato’s τελετή τῶν Κορυβάντων was a description of the preliminary ritual of the Samothracian Mystera remains a hypothesis (the evidence does not definitively preclude that Plato had a different venue in mind), but the case for a venue outside of Athens is highly probable, and Samothrace is the most obvious candidate, given its close religious relationship with Athens.⁹⁶ If it is correct, we can better understand why Dio Chrysostom includes in his *Olympikos* scenes from two mystery cults as reflections of a divinely ordered cosmos, scenes that were well known to his Panhellenic audience: to make his point most powerfully, he chose scenes from the two most famous Hellenic mystery cults, the Eleusinian and the Samothracian.

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⁹⁴ One incomplete list of initiates (Dimitrova 2008, 148–150, no. 63) contains over 60 names.

⁹⁵ Nock 1941, 580.

⁹⁶ The state and private cults of Erythrae do not seem to have included a preliminary initiation (*supra*, p. 30). Korybantic cult is not attested for Lemnos or Imbros.

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