

The Name of Demeter Thesmophoros

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OF DEMETER'S TITLES one of the least understood is Θεσμοφόρος, an epithet related to her ancient Θεσμοφορία festival. Demeter shared the epithet with her daughter Kore-Persephone, who is frequently depicted in art as her youthful double; the two are shown holding identical attributes: grain sheaves, fruits, piglets, and/or torches.¹

The most complete version of the myth of the rape of Kore and the mourning of Demeter survives in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, although the story is known from other sources.² The *Hymn* concludes with Demeter's gifts to mankind, the knowledge of grain agriculture as well as *orgia*, secret rites, "solemn mysteries which one cannot depart from or enquire about or broadcast, for great awe of the gods restrains us from speaking."³

Demeter is characterized by many titles in cult inscriptions and mythological literature. According to Isocrates, "Demeter ... 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

¹ For examples, see T. Hadzisteliou Price, "Double and Multiple Representations in Greek Art and Religious Thought," *JHS* 91 (1971) 48–69, pls. II.3, VI.15–16, VII, VIII, IX; K. Kerényi, *Eleusis. Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (New York 1967) 27–29, 123–124, discusses their iconographic duality.

² Hes. *Theog.* 912–914; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.17.1–2; *Hymn. Orph.* 18, 29, 40, 41.7; Kern, *Orph. frag.* 49; Paus. 1.43.2 (Megara), 7.27.9 (Pellene), 8.15.4 (Pheneus), 8.42.1–4 (Phigalia); Diod. 5.4.3–6; Ov. *Met.* 5.477–485, 642–656 (Sicily). For other versions, especially those of Pamphos and Panyassis, see N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1976) 74–86.

³ *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 476–479: ὄργια ... σεμνά, τά τ' οὐ πως ἔστι παρεξι[μ]εν οὐ[τε] πυθέσθαι οὐτ' ἀχέειν· μέγα γάρ τι θεῶν σέβας ἰσχάνει αὐδήν (ed. and transl. M. L. West).

beasts, and the τελετή (initiation) which inspires in those who partake of it sweeter hopes regarding both the end of life and all eternity.”⁴ Most of Demeter’s cult epithets fall into one of these two categories: she is giver of mystic rites, whether the Eleusinian or more local *orgia*, and giver of the civilized way of life made possible by the knowledge of another kind of secret, the techniques of growing grain.

Greek divine epithets had a tendency to proliferate over time. In part this was due to the demands of poetry for name-epithet combinations in the proper meter, but epithets also apparently arose out of religious experience, as prayer and ritual called forth adjectives descriptive of the deity’s powers.⁵ Epithets also expressed the deity’s local connection, whether geographical or genealogical, and the aspect of his personality or function manifested in a particular cult.⁶ Descriptive epithets such as Athena *Glaukopis* (grey-eyed) or Demeter *Euplokamos* (fair-tressed) are to be found in literary rather than ritual contexts. Cult inscriptions employ such functional titles as Zeus *Georgos* (Farmer) or Ge *Kourotrophos* (Nurse) to make it clear what role the deity is filling in a particular ritual situation.⁷ That the divine epithet arises from the festival name is far from certain.⁸

The most common epithets of Demeter describe her as the goddess of grain agriculture and the giver of cereal plenty, in terms so plain as to be almost crude. She is *Amalophoros* (bringer of sheaves), *Anesidora* (bringer up of gifts), *Chloe* (the green shoot), *Drepanephoros* (sickle bearer), *Epogmios* (of the furrow),

⁴ *Paneg.* 28 (transl. G. Norlin): δούσης δωρεάς διττάς, αἶπερ μέγισται τυγχάνουσιν οὔσαι, τοὺς τε καρπούς, οἱ τοῦ μὴ θηριωδῶς ζῆν ἡμᾶς αἴτιοι γεγόνασι, καὶ τὴν τελετήν, ἣς οἱ μετασχόντες περὶ τε τῆς τοῦ βίου τελευτῆς καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος αἰῶνος ἠδίους τὰς ἐλπίδας ἔχουσιν.

⁵ *OCD*³ 548–549 s.v. “Epithets, divine”; R. Parker, “The Problem of the Greek Cult Epithet,” *OpAth* 28 (2003) 173–183; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 184 and n.14.

⁶ On the concept of divine personality, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, “Persephone and Aphrodite at Locri: A Model for Personality Definition,” *JHS* 98 (1978) 101–121.

⁷ *LSCG* 52.12; Paus.1.22.3.

⁸ J. G. Frazer, “Thesmophoria,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*¹¹ 26 (1911) 840; J. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Malden 2005) 144.

Eukarpos (of good crops), *Haloas* (of the threshing floor), *Himalis* (of abundance), *Ioulo* (of barley), *Karpophoros* (bringer of crops), *Likmaia* (the winnower), *Malophoros* (fruit bearer), *Megalartos* (of the big loaf), *Megalomazos* (of the big porridge), *Ompnia* (of grain), *Polysoros* (rich in grain-heaps), *Pyrphoros* (torch-bearing), *Sito* (grainy), and *Soritis* (of the grain-heap).⁹

She is called *Chthonia* and *Chamyne*, of the earth, as the goddess of the underground realm, from which crops spring up; the Underworld is also the abode of the dead, the kingdom of Hades. Demeter shares this double motif of death and fertility with her daughter Kore/Persephone, ὑποχθονίων βασίλεια (Queen of the Underworld).¹⁰

Demeter was known in Arcadia under two enigmatic titles, *Melaina* (black) and *Erinys* (angry). These names are associated with the Arcadian myth of Demeter's rape by Poseidon when both had assumed equine form. This encounter resulted in the birth of a daughter, *Despoina* (Mistress, a title of Kore-Persephone), as well as a horse, the legendary Arion.¹¹ The titles *Melaina* and *Erinys* are seen as relics of a very old form of Demeter cult, partly because of their location in Arcadia, that most archaic region, and partly because of their association with *xoana*, unimaginably ancient wooden statues. The incoherence of the myth has given rise to the notion that it derives from an old but ill-remembered rite.¹²

⁹ Demeter epithets are collected in K. F. H. Bruchmann, *Epitheta deorum quae apud poetas graecos leguntur* (Leipzig 1893) 75; L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States III* (Oxford 1906) 31–38, 311–325; M. P. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste von religiöser Bedeutung* (Leipzig 1906) 311–312; H. Usener, *Gotternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung*² (Bonn 1929) 242–247; M. H. Jameson, “The Hero Echelaeus,” *TAPA* 82 (1951) 49–61, at 59 n.24; S. G. Cole, “Demeter in the Ancient Greek City and its Countryside,” in S. Alcock and R. Osborne (eds.), *Placing the Gods: Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1994) 199–216, at 201–202.

¹⁰ Farnell, *Cults III* 48–49; *Hymn.Orph.* 29.6; F. Graf and S. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife* (London 2007) 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 38.

¹¹ Demeter Erinys in Thelpousa: Paus. 8.25.3–7; Demeter Melaina in Phigalia: Paus. 8.5.8, 8.37.1–9, 8.42.1–13.

¹² Cole, in *Placing the Gods* 202; M. Jost, “Mystery Cults in Arcadia,” in M. B. Cosmopoulos (ed.), *Greek Mysteries. The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London/New York 2003) 155–157.

Demeter's most famous epithet, *Eleusinia*, is often assumed to derive from Eleusis in Attica, site of the Eleusinian Mysteries. However, this does not explain its early use elsewhere, which implies Demeter's role as the patroness of *mysteria* without any geographic reference.¹³ The epithet *Eleusinia* has been interpreted as referring to a religious procession, derived from the stem ἐλευθ- (go/come).¹⁴ Demeter seems unlikely as a goddess of processions, and for one of her most important cults to receive its name from a mundane element characteristic of every deity's festivals would be surprising. Demeter Thesmophoros, like Demeter Eleusinia, is closely associated with τελετή (initiation) or μυστήρια (secret rites). I shall attempt to show in what follows that her title Thesmophoros describes Demeter as the revealer of the ritual laws of the mysteries as well as the revealer of the "laws" of cereal agriculture.¹⁵

Demeter and Kore-Persephone¹⁶ share the epithet Thesmophoros, which frequently appears in the dual without either of their names.¹⁷ "The Two Goddesses," in the dual, is an expression for Demeter and Kore; the dual is not standard for other divine pairs.¹⁸ "By the Two Goddesses" was apparently

¹³ N. D. Robertson, "New Light on Demeter's Mysteries: the Festival Proerosia," *GRBS* 37 (1996) 319–379, at 377–378 and n.158; in "The Two Processions to Eleusis and the Program of the Mysteries," *AJP* 119 (1998) 547–575, Robertson argues that the wide distribution of the title *Eleusinia* goes back at least "to the early Dark Age" (570).

¹⁴ Robertson, *AJP* 119 (1998) 571 and n.71. On *Eleuhunia* in Sparta, see R. Parker, "Demeter, Dionysus and the Spartan Pantheon," in R. Hägg, N. Marinatos, G. C. Nordquist (eds.), *Early Greek Cult Practice* (Stockholm 1988) 99–104, at 101–103.

¹⁵ Cf. Farnell, *Cults* III 75–83.

¹⁶ On the myth and cult of Kore-Persephone, see Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 98 (1978) 101–121, and A. Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate. An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Ann Arbor 2002).

¹⁷ Ar. *Thes.* 83 κἄν Θεσμοφόροιν, 282 ὦ Θεσμοφόρω, 295 ταῖν Θεσμοφόροιν; Bitalemi graffito, VII B.C., ἡαρά Θεσμοφόρο (dual), see U. Kron, "Frauenfeste in Demeterheiligtümern: das Thesmophorion von Bitalemi," *AA* (1992) 611–650, at 615.

¹⁸ Soph *OC* 683 μεγάλαιν θεαῖν; Andoc. 1.125 τῶ θεῷ; Ar. *Vesp.* 378 ταῖν θεαῖν; *IG* V.1 594 τοῖν ἀγιοτάτοιον θεοῖν; Callim. *Aet.* fr.1.10 θεσμοφόρο[ς· τοῖν δὲ] δυοῖν.

an oath particularly favored by women, to judge from its appearance in the speech of Aristophanes' female characters.¹⁹ The two are also referred to as "the Demeters"²⁰ or the "double-named goddesses."²¹

The dual number is a common feature of Indo-European grammar. In Homeric epic dialect the dual was used for heroic pairs such as the Moliones. The dual continued in Attic Greek until the fourth century B.C., although its use was limited to a few traditional expressions.²² Might not this use of the dual be an indication that the title Thesmophoros and the ritual of the Thesmophoria were at least as old as the conventions of epic diction?

The Thesmophoria was the most wide-spread festival of Demeter, attested in perhaps fifty cities in Greece, Sicily, Southern Italy, Asia Minor, and North Africa, which show remains of a Thesmophorion sanctuary or epigraphic evidence of Demeter's title Thesmophoros and of a priestess of Demeter Thesmophoros.²³ The universal spread of the festival name and the epithet in Greece is an argument for its existence before the founding of colonies in the eighth century B.C. or even the population movements of the eleventh century B.C.; its appearance in the literature of the archaic period is another. Kevin Clinton has argued convincingly that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, whose composition is usually dated in the sixth century B.C., refers to the institution of the Thesmophoria, not the Eleusinian Mysteries.²⁴

¹⁹ Ar. *Lys.* 112 νῆ τῶ θεῶ, *Eccl.* 155, 532 μὰ τῶ θεῶ.

²⁰ Nilsson, *GGR* I 463, Δημήτερες; *LSCG Suppl.* 95 Δαμάτερες.

²¹ Eur. *Phoen.* 683 διώνυμοι θεὰ Περσέφασσα καὶ φύλα Δαμάτηρ θεά.

²² *Il.* 11.709 Μολίονε. G. M. Bolling, "On the Dual in Homer," *Language* 9 (1933) 298–308, at 298.

²³ Thesmophorion sites are listed in Nilsson, *Griechische Feste* 313–316; Farnell, *Cults* III 328–332; for Attica see K. Clinton, "The Thesmophorion in Central Athens and the Celebration of the Thesmophoria in Attica," in R. Hägg (ed.), *The Role of Religion in the Early Greek Polis* (Stockholm 1996) 111–125. Many other Thesmophorion sites, too numerous to list here, are attested archaeologically from the evidence of votives, roof tiles, or inscriptions; see Kron, *AA* (1992) 615–620.

²⁴ K. Clinton, *Myth and Cult. The Iconography of the Eleusinian Mysteries*

The nature of the Thesmophoria festival is clear from ancient descriptions. The rituals were organized and performed by the women of the community within the sanctuary walls.²⁵ Men were forbidden to intrude on the secret rites.²⁶ The purpose of the ritual was essentially to guarantee the fertility of the earth and produce a good harvest. The secluded women fasted and observed purificatory customs, including food taboos and celibacy.²⁷ The obscene and abusive jesting called αἰσχρολογία, whose origin some would explain by Demeter's encounter with Iambe in the *Homeric Hymn* (203), has been interpreted as fertility magic, as it restores the mourning Demeter to her normal fecundating function.²⁸

The document which has gained a central place in all interpretations of the meaning of this festival is a tenth-century scholion that has dominated the discussion since its publication in 1870.²⁹ The probable author of the scholion, the learned Arethas, bishop of Caesarea, relied on Hellenistic sources to reveal what purports to be the closely-guarded secret ritual performed by the women inside the sanctuary.³⁰ According to

(Stockholm 1992) 28–36; but cf. Robertson, *GRBS* 37 (1996) 358–379.

²⁵ The sources are reproduced in Farnell, *Cults* III 83–97, and in L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) 50–60. See also R. Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford 2005) 270–275; M. Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London/New York 2002) 110–120. The virtual seclusion required by sanctuaries of Demeter Thesmophoros is demonstrated in Cole, in *Placing the Gods* 213.

²⁶ The rites were called ἄρορητα, ἀπορορήτα, and μυστήρια. See A. Brumfield, “Aporreta: Verbal and Ritual Obscenity in the Cults of Ancient Women,” in *Role of Religion* 67–74.

²⁷ Ar. *Thes.* 985, 1150; schol. Ar. *Thes.* 376; schol. Soph. *OC* 681; Plin. *HN* 24.59. See R. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983) 82–83.

²⁸ Phot. s.v. Σήνια; Hsch. s.vv. Στήνια, στηνωῖσαι; Diod. 5.4.7; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.21.1; Theodoret *Gr.aff.cur.* 3.84. Deubner, *Attische Feste* 53; Brumfield, in *Role of Religion* 67–74.

²⁹ E. Rohde, *RhM* N.S. 25 (1870) 548–560.

³⁰ Schol. Lucian *Dial.meret.* 2.1 (275–276 Rabe); N. J. Lowe, “Thesmophoria and Haloa. Myth, Physics and Mysteries,” in S. Blundell and M. Williamson (eds.), *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (New York/London 1998) 149–173, at 165–170.

the scholion, certain women called ἀντήτοραι (bailers) descended into certain sacred underground chasms or μέγαρα (rooms) from which they retrieved the decomposed remains of sacrificed piglets mixed with phallic cakes and pine shoots, all of which had been deposited underground at an unspecified earlier time. This mixture was deposited on the altars outside the sanctuary for general use. The farmers believed that mixing some of this “divine compost” with their seed before sowing guaranteed a good harvest.³¹

The ritual seems to be a fairly straightforward attempt to magically stimulate the fertility of the earth. Modern commentators on the ritual, as well as on the details known about the Thesmophoria from other cities,³² have usually followed Frazer’s view that the Thesmophoria was a sowing festival to stimulate fertility, even if few today fully embrace his theory of the death and revival of the vegetation god.³³

In Attica the Thesmophoria took place in the sowing month, Pyanopsion (October–November).³⁴ In most cities the Thesmophoria were held at this time, although a few were in summer. Since the purpose of the festival was to ensure the germination of the seed once the rains began, it would necessarily have been performed before plowing and sowing which, in the ancient Greek climate, usually began in late October and could easily last a month.³⁵

³¹ On the ritual see Lowe, in *The Sacred and the Feminine* 149–173; Parker, *Polytheism* 272–275. Robertson’s argument (*GRBS* 37 [1996] 319–379) that the remains were brought up at the Proerosia, the “before sowing festival,” of uncertain seasonal timing, is unconvincing. See J. Mikalson, *The Sacred and Civil Calendar of the Athenian Year* (Princeton 1975) 67–69, and A. Brumfield, *Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year* (New York 1981) 54–69.

³² E.g. Paus. 9.8.1: in a ritual for Demeter and Kore at Potniae in Boeotia, piglets were thrown alive into underground *megara*.

³³ Frazer, *Enc. Brit.* 26 (1911) 838–840. On Frazer, see J. Z. Smith, “When the Bough Breaks,” *History of Religions* 12 (1973) 342–371.

³⁴ Schol. Ar. *Thes.* 80, 834; *IG II²* 674; the Attic cult calendar for Demeter placed strong ritual emphasis on this time of year; see Brumfield, *Attic Festivals* 233–235.

³⁵ Hes. *Op.* 384, 615–616; Plut. *Mor.* 565B; Brumfield, *Attic Festivals* 19–24; on the sowing-time in Greece, see H. Forbes, *Strategies and Soils* (diss. U.

Modern explanations of the significance of the Thesmophoria have usually centered on its obvious connection to fertility. In addition to agricultural fertility, human and animal fertility undoubtedly played a role, although it can be overstated.³⁶ It seems unlikely that the Thesmophoriazousai attempted to control their reproductive powers by the ritual employment of contraceptive or abortifacient herbs.³⁷

Others have seen the Thesmophoria as a political event, a virtual assembly where the “city of women” performed masculine rites of blood-sacrifice: as Detienne expresses it, “the feminine character of the festival served to conceal the political dimension of the Thesmophoria ... where the city became the exclusive property of the women.”³⁸ The politically seditious aspect of the festival is not apparent; it does not seem to derive from the Thesmophorian ritual. Lewd joking and abuse may create a man-threatening atmosphere, but it is not political speech. Clearly, ideas about the empowerment of ancient women have been influential.³⁹ The evidence indicates that the women observed archaic customs, not that they enacted rebellious or murderous fantasies.⁴⁰

Penn. 1982) 230–289.

³⁶ S. Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge 1999) 99: “the principal fertility at stake was human.”

³⁷ L. Nixon, “The Cults of Demeter and Kore,” in R. Hawley and B. Levick (eds.), *Women in Antiquity* (London/New York 1995) 88: “Kalligenia may refer to births that were beautiful because they were chosen.”

³⁸ M. Detienne, “The Violence of Well-born Ladies: Women in the Thesmophoria,” in M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant (eds.), *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks* (Chicago 1989) 133, 145.

³⁹ The title of Winkler’s ch. 7 expresses it: “The Laughter of the Oppressed”: J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York 1989); according to J. N. Bremmer the Thesmophoria was “the great women’s festival, when men were excluded from sex and sometimes, if only symbolically, from power”: J. N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford 1994) 19.

⁴⁰ The bizarre episode when Battus, king of Cyrene, was unmanned by women wielding sacrificial knives records the punishment of a sacrilegious intruder, not a political revolution (*Suda* s.vv. θεσμοφόρος, σφάπτρια). It is a singular mythic event on which entirely too much theorizing depends. See Detienne, *Cuisine* 129–130.

Leaving aside extremes of interpretation, the most coherent and sensible arrangement of the basic elements of the Thesmophoria has been provided by Robert Parker, in the following order: “1. the Thesmophoria related to the fertility of the fields ... 2. the Thesmophoria related to the fertility of women ... 3. the Thesmophoria served to define the status of citizen women.”⁴¹

Whatever was the symbolic, expressive function of the Thesmophoria ritual, it also served a practical purpose for the community, which believed that the mixing of the rotted piglets and cakes with the wheat and barley seed would ensure a good harvest and that the grueling work of plowing and sowing, whose success or failure would not be apparent for months to come, would not go for naught. Female ritual activities ensured male agricultural success.⁴²

Demeter’s title Thesmophoros has been related to the festival name, or even derived from it.⁴³ The title therefore must relate to some aspect of the festival. The epithet begins with θεσμός. The word derives from τίθημι, to put or set down. *Thesmos* is therefore “that which is laid down,” a law or ordinance, as it appears in such compounds as θεσμοδότης (lawgiver), θεσμοθέτης (lawmaker, an Athenian official), θεσμοσύνη (justice), and θεσμοφύλαξ (guardian of the law). The more commonly used word for law was *nomos*, man-made conventional law which can be altered to accommodate new circumstances; *thesmos* is an ordinance revered for its divine origin and great antiquity.⁴⁴

Thesmos appears once in Homer, where it refers to the ancient law of the marriage-bed of Odysseus and Penelope (*Od.* 23.296). It is divine law, the law of fate, or even the law of the universe—what moderns might call “natural law.”⁴⁵ Such laws

⁴¹ Parker, *Polytheism* 275–276.

⁴² L. Foxhall, “Women’s Ritual and Men’s Work in Ancient Athens,” in R. Hawley and B. Levick (eds.), *Women in Antiquity* (London/New York 1995) 106.

⁴³ Parker, *OpAth* 28 (2003) 178; Robertson, *AJP* 119 (1998) 570.

⁴⁴ M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of the Athenian Democracy* (Oxford 1969) 3–19, esp. 3–6.

⁴⁵ Hdt. 3.31.3 πατρίων θεσμών; Pl. *Phdr.* 248C θεσμός τε ἄδραστίας.

were believed to be the oldest form of regulation, as they were instituted by divinities.⁴⁶ Philo of Alexandria makes frequent use of *thesmos* as a theological term: the divine unchangeable law of the universe.⁴⁷ The Church Fathers, beginning with Clement of Alexandria, continue this usage; *thesmoi* are the laws of God or the laws of the church (*Strom.* 7.3.16.5).

Thesmos can be used of human law, especially when it refers to older laws such as those of Draco or Solon.⁴⁸ Lexicographers and grammarians define *thesmos* as ancient or divine law.⁴⁹ In *leges sacrae* it seems to mean ritual law.⁵⁰ The adjective θέσμιος means lawful, customary, and θέσμια are laws or rites.⁵¹

Demeter's title Thesmophoros should therefore mean "law-giver" in some sense, and so it has been interpreted by ancient as well as modern authors.⁵² The Lucian scholion, which gives the most detailed information about the secret ritual, explicitly informs us that "Demeter is named Thesmophoros since she established laws or *thesmoi* according to which men must work to get their food."⁵³

Another view, popular in recent years, sees *thesmoi* as the laws

⁴⁶ Aesch. *Eum.* 391; Soph. *Ant.* 800; Ar. *Av.* 331; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.6; Alexis fr. 153.19 K.-A.; Chrysippus *SVF* III 337.

⁴⁷ Philo *Leg.* 68 θεσμός φύσεως ἀκίνητος; *De opif. mund.* 143, *De Abrah.* 276, *De spec. leg.* 2.13.

⁴⁸ Draco: *IG* I³ 104.20, Paus. 6.11.6, Andoc. 1.81, *Ath. Pol.* 4.1. Solon: Sol. 36.18, Plut. *Sol.* 19.5, *Ath. Pol.* 7.1.

⁴⁹ Hesych. s.v. θεσμόν· θεῖον νόμον, s.v. θεσμούς· νόμους θεῖους; Phot. s.v. θεσμός; *Suda* s.v. θεσμός; Herodian 56.14; Harp. 152.13.

⁵⁰ *LSCG* 53.29, 65.17.

⁵¹ Phot. s.v. θέσμιον· νόμιμον; Hesych. s.v. θέσμιον· δίκαιον; Hdt. 1.59.6; Eur. *Tro.* 267; Aesch. *Eum.* 491; Soph. *Aj.* 712; *Ath. Pol.* 16.10 θέσμια ... καὶ πάτρια; *IG* II² 3639 ἐσάωσεν ἄχραντα ἄρρητων θέσμια, memorial to an Eleusinian temple attendant who preserved undefiled the "laws of the secret rites" (?).

⁵² Callim. *Hymn.* 6.19 πολίεσιν ἐαδόντα τέθμια δώκεν; Diod. 5.5; Farnell, *Cults* III 78; Price, *Religions* 100.

⁵³ Schol. Luc. *Dial. meret.* 2.1 (Rabe 276): θεσμοφόρος ἢ Δημήτηρ κατονομάζεται τιθείσα νόμους ἦτοι θεσμούς, καθ' οὓς τὴν τροφήν πορίζεσθαι τε καὶ κατεργάζεσθαι ἀνθρώπους δέον.

of marriage and procreation,⁵⁴ and Demeter Thesmophoros as patroness of legitimate marriage and motherhood. According to Detienne, “the epithet refers to the precepts (*thesmoi*) relative to social life and female fecundity.”⁵⁵

An ingenious theory as to the meaning of the festival name and the title of the two goddesses was advanced by J. G. Frazer, who agreed that the *thesmoi* should be “things laid down,” from τίθημι, but argued that the things in question were not laws or abstract ideas, but were the rotted pieces of piglet and cake which the *antletriai* put underground at one time of year and then set down on the altars at the Thesmophoria.⁵⁶ He concluded that the epithet derived from the name of the festival, which derived in turn from certain striking ritual activities which characterized it.⁵⁷ By analogy with such festival names as Oschophoria, which refers to the carrying of grape-bunches, or the Arrephoria, which involved the carrying of secret objects, the name of the Thesmophoria is derived from the carrying of the holy compost, the decayed pigs, cakes, and pine shoots which have been “set down” in the underground rooms or *megara*. Frazer’s theory thus eliminates the possibility that Demeter’s title *Thesmophoros* is descriptive of her nature, that the *thesmoi* represent anything abstract. Instead *Thesmophoros* is a title derived from the ritual of her festival.

Another view which takes *thesmoi* to be concrete objects argues that the *Thesmophoria* took its name from the womens’ procession up to the sanctuary on the first day carrying baskets

⁵⁴ L. Bruit Zaidman and P. Schmitt Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City* (Cambridge 1992) 188; Parker, *Miasma* 82; Nixon, in *Women in Antiquity* 76; E. Simon, *Festivals of Attica* (Madison 1983) 21.

⁵⁵ M. Detienne, *Les Jardins d’Adonis* (Paris 1972) 156–158.

⁵⁶ Frazer, *Enc. Brit.* 26 (1911) 840.

⁵⁷ For ritual as the source of the names of festivals, shrines, and epithets: Robertson, *AJP* 119 (1998) 570, and his *Festivals and Legends* (Toronto 1992) xiii–xv; Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* 144. That ritual, sometimes misunderstood, was the origin of myths in ancient religions was a conviction shared by Frazer, J. E. Harrison, and other members of the early 20th century myth and ritual school. See H. S. Versnel “Myth and Ritual,” in L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore 1990) 30–31.

called *thesmoi*.⁵⁸ A number of names of sacred containers are preserved, such as *kalathoi*, *kistai*, or *kibotai*,⁵⁹ but there is no example of *thesmos* used of a container of any sort. *Thesmos* can have a concrete meaning in the sense of “location,”⁶⁰ but it is never used to mean a box or basket. A most ingenious etymology which also sees the *thesmoi* as concrete objects derives *thesmos* not from *τίθημι* but from an Indo-European root **dhes-* “heiligen.” The *thesmoi* are thus “die Reste der Ferkel und andere Opfertagen” as in Frazer’s theory.⁶¹

The great obstacle to the interpretation of *thesmoi* as physical objects employed in ritual is that the title *Thesmophoroi* refers to the two goddesses, not the human ritual performers. The women who bring up the rotted remains from the *megara* are called *antletriai*, a name that derives from their function as balers of liquid.⁶² The women who celebrate the ritual in the sanctuary are *thesmophoriazousai*, “women attending the *Thesmophoria*.” These women are not the *Thesmophoroi*, who are divinities.

A further problem is that festival names ending in *-phoria* rarely refer to the activities of divinities, nor do they often derive from divine epithets. The young men who carry bunches of grapes in procession in the *Oschophoria* are the *oschophoroi*;

⁵⁸ Robertson, *AJP* 119 (1998) 566, 570 and n.68 on *θεσμός* and *θήρη*.

⁵⁹ Ar. *Thes.* 284; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.21.2, the “password” of the mysteries: ἐνήστευσα, ἔπιον τὸν κυκεῶνα, ἔλαβον ἐκ κίστης, ἐργασάμενος ἀπεθέμην εἰς κάλαθον καὶ ἐκ καλάθου εἰς κίστην. Deubner identifies figure no. 4 on the Calendar frieze of Agios Eleutherios as a *thesmophoros* or *antletria* because she holds a sacred *kiste* on her head containing the fructifying materials from the *megara*: *Attische Feste* 250, pl. 35. Simon, *Festivals* 18, pl. 3.1, refers to the woman in the frieze as a *kistaphoros* and points out the employment of *kistai* as decorative elements in Eleusinian architecture. Paus. 10.28.3 describes the *κιβωτός* as a chest for holy *Demetriaka*; cf. *I.Délos* 442.A 2, 75.

⁶⁰ Discussed by Ostwald, *Nomos* 12–13. Also see Hesych. s.v. *θεσμός* for “bundles of sticks.”

⁶¹ C. Trümper, “Die Thesmophoria, Brimo, Deo und das Anaktoron: Beobachtungen zur Vorgeschichte des Demeterkults,” *Kernos* 17 (2004) 13–42, quotation at 19.

⁶² LSJ ἀντλέω: the verb denotes the pumping or baling of liquid, particularly foul liquid such as bilge-water.

the young girls who carry the secret objects (*arreta*) from Athena down to the sanctuary of Aphrodite in the Arrephoria are the *arrephoroi*. There is no Apollo Oschophoros or Athena Arrephoros.

Demeter's titles often combine a concrete object with the ending *-phoros*, as *Amalophoros*, *Pyrphoros*, *Drepanephoros*, *Malophoros*, or *Karpophoros*.⁶³ Yet the combination of an abstraction with *-phoros*, such as *Thesmophoros*, is not unheard of: Demeter is also *Horephoros* (bringing the season), Zeus is called *Dikephoros* (justice-bringer) and *Telesphoros* (all-powerful).⁶⁴ Athena at Pergamum is *Nikephoros* (bringer of victory), and a festival called *Nikephoria* was celebrated in her honor, a clear example of a festival name derived from a divine epithet.⁶⁵ To derive a divine epithet ending in *-phoros* from the carrying of objects in procession by the mortal worshippers of that divinity does not follow logically.

An additional problem is that the *thesmoi*, if they are the rotted piglets and cakes, are not carried in procession, but are "pumped" or "baled" from underground *megara* or chasms inside the sanctuary's walls, in a secret rite performed and witnessed by women alone. Is it likely that Demeter's common epithet Thesmophoros, her festival Thesmophoria, and her sanctuary Thesmophorion, all should refer to this obscure rite? It is hard to explain the popularity of Demeter's epithet Thesmophoros, in cultic and literary contexts, if it referred only to a ritual performed in secret inside the sanctuary.

Demeter's unusual title Θέσµια (lawful) also does not fit with denoting rotted pigflesh. At Pheneus in Arcadia Demeter Θέσµια received rites commemorating the local version of her search for her daughter (Paus. 8.15.1–4). Farnell points out that this epithet has nothing to do with objects carried in procession and offers no support for the interpretation of Thesmophoros as "compost-bearer."⁶⁶ Demeter's title (also an epithet of Apollo) should be related to θέσµιος and θεσµός in the sense of

⁶³ Bruchmann, *Epitheta* 75.

⁶⁴ Aesch. *Ag.* 525; *Hymn.Hom.* 23.2.

⁶⁵ *LSAM* 12.11, 19.

⁶⁶ Farnell, *Cults* III 76.

“fixed, settled, lawful.”

Demeter’s Thesmophorion sanctuary was the site for many of her festivals; in Piraeus the Thesmophorion hosted the Skira, Kalamaia, Plerosia, and “on whatever other day the women gather according to custom.”⁶⁷ The Thesmophorion was not reserved solely for rituals concerned with the fall sowing, but was used at numerous crucial moments of the agricultural year, when the sequestered women celebrated *mysteria* or secret rites. The Thesmophorion was often the primary Demeter sanctuary in a city and could not be reserved solely for the Thesmophoria festival, any more than the Eleusinion was reserved only for the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Eleusinion in Eleusis was the site of other Demeter festivals, such as the Haloa or Thesmophoria.⁶⁸ Local deme sanctuaries in Attica offered various rites and festivals in honor of Demeter.⁶⁹ Although local Thesmophoria were performed in the Attic demes, the City Eleusinion may have been the site of the “national” Athenian celebration.⁷⁰ It seems that any Demeter sanctuary was suitable for women’s Demeter mysteries, no matter what epithet the goddess bore.⁷¹

If, as seems most likely, the name of the festival derives from Demeter’s epithet *thesmophoros*, we need to examine other possible meanings besides “bearer of compost.” The title *thesmophoros* is frequently translated *legifera*, “law-giver,” a role unsuit-

⁶⁷ *LSCG* 36.10–12; J. Mikalson, “Religion in the Attic Demes,” *AJP* 98 (1977) 424–435, at 426, 428.

⁶⁸ Schol. Luc. *Dial. meret.* 7 (Rabe 280.12–13); *IG II²* 1672.124; *LSCG* 7.

⁶⁹ R. M. Simms, “The Phrearrhian *Lex Sacra*: An Interpretation,” *Hesperia* 67 (1998) 91–107, at 101; Dillon, *Girls and Women* 116–118.

⁷⁰ Ar. *Thes.* 278 refers to the site of the play’s action as the Thesmophorion. On the location of the Athenian Thesmophorion see O. Broneer, “The Thesmophorion in Athens,” *Hesperia* 11 (1942) 250–274; H. A. Thompson, “Pnyx and Thesmophorion,” *Hesperia* 5 (1936) 151–200; Clinton and Miles place the celebration of the “national” Thesmophoria in the Eleusinion at Athens: Clinton, in *Role of Religion* 124–125; M. M. Miles, *The City Eleusinion (Agora XXXI [1998])* 22–23.

⁷¹ On the relation of deme sacrifices to state celebrations see Mikalson, *AJP* 98 (1977) 424–435, and R. Parker, “Festivals of the Attic Demes,” *Boreas* 15 (1985) 137–147; on the function of the Thesmophorion, see Robertson, *Festivals* 20 and n.59.

able in the extreme for Demeter, most un-political of goddesses.⁷² Demeter does not appear in battle, either in epic tales or in a mystic vision, as do other gods and heroes, even tender Aphrodite.⁷³ She plays no role in the assemblies of men.⁷⁴

Demeter and Kore are not the bringers of the laws of marriage and civilized procreation. Marriage is not an institution which concerns Demeter; it is, rather, the domain of Hera, goddess of marriage and wife of Zeus, Father of gods and men. Hera is a sponsor of beauty contests for young girls and is associated with Aphrodite in promoting marital union. Hera's festival, the Theogamia, presents her union with Zeus as the ideal marriage.⁷⁵ Demeter, on the other hand, is violently opposed to the marriage arranged for her daughter by Zeus, who permits his brother Hades to abduct or rape her; according to the mythological accounts Demeter is not herself a member of a legitimate marital union, but suffers various sexual assaults by divine beings.⁷⁶ Zeus begets Persephone upon her,⁷⁷ Poseidon mates with her when she assumes the form of a mare to escape his advances,⁷⁸ and she yields to the Titan Iasion in the thrice-plowed field.⁷⁹

A *thesmothetes* was a human lawgiver, an official of the Athenian city-state. The title *thesmophoros* has nothing to do with the human political realm, but expresses the aspect of Demeter in which she fixed, once and for all time, the rules of the most important and oldest ritual known to humankind, the laws of

⁷² S. Levin, "Θεσμοφόρος = *legifera*? The Import of the Primeval Thesmophoria," *General Linguistics* 31 (1991) 1–12; cf. Farnell, *Cults* III 75, 79.

⁷³ Hom. *Il.* 16.788–792 (Aphrodite on the plain of Troy); Jameson, *TAPA* 82 (1951) 49–61 (the agricultural hero Echetlaeus at Marathon); Hdt. 8.66–67 (a mystical Iacchus procession in the Thriasian plain).

⁷⁴ J. S. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus* (Princeton 1989); Richardson, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 9.

⁷⁵ Deubner, *Attische Feste* 177–178.

⁷⁶ Serv. ad *Aen.* 4.58 on Ceres' opposition to the institution of marriage.

⁷⁷ Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.15.1: "Zeus's wanton embraces of his mother, and the wrath of Demeter."

⁷⁸ Paus 8.5.8, 8.25.4, 8.42.1–13.

⁷⁹ Hom. *Od.* 5.125.

agriculture and of the *telete* (initiation). These were the mysteries by which agricultural and human fertility were assured.

Demeter's title *thesmophoros* was not only associated with agriculture but also with mysteries and initiation. Herodotus (2.171) described the Thesmophoria as the *telete* of Demeter. At Pheneus in Arcadia a *telete* was held in the secluded temple of Demeter Θεσμία.⁸⁰ In the Attic deme Phrearrhioi a *telete* was celebrated for Demeter Thesmophoros.⁸¹ On Mykonos, only those women who had been initiated (τετέλ[η]νται) could join in Demeter's festival.⁸² Hesychius calls the Thesmophoria mysteries of Demeter.⁸³

The argument has been made here that both Demeter's ancient title Thesmophoros and the name of her festival Thesmophoria refer to her function as the goddess who reveals to mankind secret rites which produce abundant agricultural yields, a function which in ancient Greece, as elsewhere, was considered vital to the community's survival. In support of this conclusion as to the meaning of Thesmophoros, we have eliminated the meanings which the title cannot bear: Demeter cannot be a giver of human law, the goddess of marriage or the goddess who presides over childbirth; nor can she be seen as the goddess of family life. Neither can the Thesmophoroi be properly described as the bearers of cult objects of any sort, whether rotted piglets or baskets.

Demeter's myth makes clear her connection with grain cultivation and with secret rites, both of which she revealed to humankind.⁸⁴ The importance of these two revelations is highlighted by her festivals' close relation to the yearly cycle of cereal agriculture and by their emphasis on secluded women performing secret rituals.

⁸⁰ Paus. 8.15.1–5; cf. *IG II²* 3639.

⁸¹ E. Vanderpool, "A Lex Sacra of the Attic Deme Phrearrhioi," *Hesperia* 39 (1970) 47–53; Simms, *Hesperia* 67 (1998) 92–107.

⁸² *LSCG* 96.22 ὅσαι ἐπὶ Δήμητροα τετέλ[η]νται.

⁸³ Hesych. s.v. Θεσμοφόρια· τὰ μυστήρια τῆς Δημήτρος.

⁸⁴ Whether in Eleusis, Sicily, or Arcadia, the hospitality of humans is rewarded with the gift of the τελετή: *Hymn.Hom.Cer.* 476; Diod. 5.4.3; *Ov. Met.* 5.391; Paus. 8.15.1.

It would be anachronistic to regard Demeter's gift of the knowledge of grain cultivation as merely a technology transfer. By revealing the secrets of growing grain for bread—the staff of life—Demeter allowed man to become civilized, to become fully human; as Isocrates eloquently expressed it, she enabled him “to rise above the life of the beasts.” Or, according to the Lucian scholion: “she established laws or *thesmoi* according to which men must work to get their food.”⁸⁵

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of mystery rites is that, unlike all other Greek rituals, they were not public ceremonies attended by the entire citizen body of the polis, but were secret. Any revelation of this secret was severely punished by divine or human agency.⁸⁶

The timing of the secret rites performed by women to encourage the growth of the crops was co-ordinated with the various masculine labors of the agricultural year. The festival calendar recognized the strengths specific to each sex and the need to channel the powers of both into the production of bread.

Demeter Thesmophoros might therefore be translated as “bringer of agriculture and its secret rituals.” The antiquity of the name Thesmophoros is shown by the widespread occurrence of the epithet, the festival, the month name, and the sanctuary. It may be that this form of cult belongs to an earlier phase of Greek ritual development, before the rise of the polis and its religious institutions.⁸⁷

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⁸⁵ Isoc. *Paneg.* 28; schol. Luc. *Dial. meret.* 2.1 (Rabe 276.26–28).

⁸⁶ Plut. *Alc.* 22; Thuc. 6.18, Alcibiades and his confederates indicted by the Athenian court; *Suda* s.vv. Θεσμοφόρος, σφάπτριαι, Battus, king of Cyrene, attacked by the Thesmophoriazousai; Hdt. 6.134–137, Miltiades punished by gods and men for his invasion of the Thesmophorion of Paros.

⁸⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that Demeter, like Dionysus, is more often recognized at the level of the deme in Attica than in state celebrations. See Mikalson, *AJP* 98 (1977) 429; Dillon, *Girls and Women* 116–118.