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The Panhellenic Creed of the Eleusinian Priests

"Greek religion might almost be called a religion without priests: there is no...closed group with fixed tradition, education, initiation, and hierarchy, and even in the permanently established cults there is no *disciplina* but only *nomos*. ... In Greece the priesthood is not a way of life, but a part-time and honorary office" (Burkert 1985). This view of Greek priests as functionaries without a specific identity, creed, or *paideia* has long been standard. In an examination of the Eleusinian priests of Demeter and Core (and parallel examples of hierophantic service to the *thesmophoroi* goddesses elsewhere), I argue that it is inadequate. The priestly *gene* of the Eleusinian cult conserved and transmitted mythic and ritual traditions bearing the stamp of their *oikos*-centered predecessors, navigating political changes (including the origin of the *genos* itself) to maintain enduring beliefs and social attitudes with a degree of independence from the polis. The possibility of a distinct *bios* among mainstream cult officials, who operate through mainstream polis and international channels, raises a host of questions about socio-religious roles in Greek antiquity whose answers cannot be supplied from our understanding of such marginal groups as Orphics and Pythagoreans.

The Eleusinian priest's concern with religious content, its preservation, and the institutional logic of its diffusion is illuminated by the literary and archaeological record of cognate Demeter and Core traditions. Especially notable examples include Telines' post-*stasis* restoration of Geloan exiles with the goddesses' *hira* alone (Hdt. 7.153), and Heraclitus' remarkably similar gesture--the display of the Eleusinian ritual beverage to appeal for civic harmony in a time of *stasis* (Heraclitus 22A3b, cf. 22B125, Ar. *Pax* 704ff.).

Second, I call attention to the unappreciated fact that Xenophon in his *Hellenica* twice portrays Eleusinian priests *qua* Eleusinian priests, acting outside of their official duties and outside of the sanctuary walls, but in demonstrable accordance with the religious traditions to which they were devoted (Xen. *HG* 2.4.19-22, 6.3.3-6).

Finally, I turn to literary, epigraphical, and antiquarian sources for the traditions at Eleusis and their extraordinary continuity from the Atticization of Eleusis to late antiquity. The priestly *gene* took specific responsibility for maintaining their traditions *kata ta patria*, and the independence and conservatism of such traditions was intensely felt. The manner in which priests carried out their duties as conservators and executors of Eleusinian traditions is best explored through an analysis of their actual performances within the *oikos/xenia* logic of such practices as *spondophoria*, the First Fruits, and the Mysteries themselves. I give reasons for regarding Plato's thinking as quite natural when he places in parallel what indeed seem to have been three important forms of reciprocal, international social interaction in Classical Greece: *xenizein*, *muein*, *epopteuein* (*Epist.* VII.333e). Along the way, I keep in constant view our evidence for the role of knowledgeable priests in enacting these exchanges. The cumulative evidence for a priestly *bios* with a pronouncedly international outlook leads me to suggest how great the

rewards may be for research that pursues these themes into such fields as the study of the itinerant *homo religiosus*.

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