With the Panathenaia coming barely a week after the Synoikia in the first month of the sacred calendar, the Athenian year always opened with a kind of extended ceremonial homage to the idea of pan-Attic communion: the official celebration of regionwide fellowship at the “festival of all the Athenians” followed a public commemoration of the act that made this fellowship possible. But these were not the only occasions in the calendar that brought to mind the political integrity of Attica.

Other major festivals addressed the issue in a somewhat different fashion. Whereas the unity of the region and its people was presupposed in the ritual of the Panathenaia, an established fact that needed only to be celebrated, other festivals explored the underpinnings of unity by drawing attention to relations between Athens and outlying areas of the periphery. Each year, in their respective rituals, they rearticulated the bonds between the center and particular locales in the Attic margins, underscoring, in the process, the unusually inclusive regional character of the Athenian polis. The best known of these festivals are the City Dionysia, the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the Brauronia, and they too show evidence of important discontinuity during the age of Cleisthenes.

CITY DIONYSIA

Along with the Panathenaia and the Eleusinian Mysteries, the celebration known as the Great Dionysia or City Dionysia was one of a small handful of
Athenian festivals that drew outsiders to classical Athens in significant numbers. It was held each year in the early spring, over several days in the middle of the month Elaphebolion, and its ostensible purpose was to commemorate the introduction of the cult of Dionysus to Athens by a certain Pegasus from Eleutherai, a settlement on the northwest border with Boeotia. Accordingly, the ritual component of the Dionysia included a ceremony of welcome for the xoanon of Dionysus Eleuthereus at the hearth altar (eskhara) in the Agora, as well as sacrifices at his sanctuary on the southeast flank of the Acropolis. But the primary reason for the festival’s popularity with locals and non-Athenians alike was the diverse array of spectacles that accompanied these rites: a colorful sacrificial procession (on a scale similar to the Panathenaic pompe) featuring, inter alia, the carrying of phalloi; contests in dithyrambic performance between choruses formed from the ten Cleisthenic tribes; a kómos, or “revel”; and, of course, tragedies and comedies. Though such opulence made the Dionysia the single most significant Dionysus festival in the Athenian calendar during the classical period, the ancients recognized, correctly, that its origins were relatively recent. Just how recent is a question we should now consider.1

The standard account of the evolution of the City Dionysia is easily summarized: The developed form of the festival, with its tragic contests, was an innovation of Peisistratus, established sometime in the mid-530s B.C. The tribal dithyrambic contests were added to the program not long after the fall of the Peisistratids. Then, just before the turn of the century, responsibility for producing tragedies was assigned for the first time to choregoi, wealthy sponsors who funded productions on the state’s behalf. The classical form of the program was finally rounded out in 487/6 B.C. with the addition of competitions in comedy.2

However, the earlier portion of this sequence has been challenged by Connor (1990), who makes a compelling case that the foundation of the festival should be downdated to the last decade of the sixth century.3 The view that the City Dionysia was established in the 530s depends largely on the authority of a statement on the Marmor Parium (FGrH 239 A43), an inscribed third-century chronicle from Paros, which appears to place the first tragic performance somewhere between 538 and 528 B.C.4 The text is usually taken to read as follows:


When Thespis the poet, who produced a play in the city, first acted and the goat was set up as a prize . . .
This is in fact the only item of testimony that connects the proverbial Thespis explicitly with the production or performance of drama in Athens itself. The key phrase in the statement, “a play in the city” [δραμ(α ἐν ὑ)στει], is apparently of questionable authenticity. It turns out to be merely a conjecture for a word group no longer legible on the original inscription, and it bears very little relation to accounts of the text given by early commentators who examined it when some letters were still visible.

Further evidence for dating the beginnings of tragedy at the City Dionysia toward the end of the sixth century comes from the so-called Fasti (IG II² 2318), a public document that records the details of dramatic and dithyrambic victories at the festival, along with the names of the winning choregoi. The first productions referred to in the extant portion of the inscription date only from 473/2 B.C. Even if we take into account the two or three columns that are missing from the beginning of the text, the list of victories would still commence only in ca. 500 B.C.⁷ Those who believe that tragedy was already a part of the festival before this date are forced to suppose that this was merely the year when the competitions were first organized on a choregic basis. But it would be far more straightforward to assume that the tragic competition itself was introduced only at this point.⁸

What of the festival as a whole? A tantalizingly incomplete reference in the heading of the Fasti suggests that there was a period, before tragedy was added, when the program of spectacles at the Dionysia was limited to “revels” [κο–μοι].⁹ Clearly, the festival was established at least a few years before the turn of the century. But when exactly?

Since the xoanon of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens appears to have been genuinely ancient and was presumably removed from the god’s precinct in Eleutherai with the consent of the locals, the festival cannot have been founded before Eleutherai was considered part of Attica, which clearly was not always the case. Pausanias (1.38.8) reports a decision made by the people of the town to seek Athenian citizenship as protection against the hated Thebans. He also mentions the translation of the xoanon from Eleutherai to Athens, surely the centerpiece event at the inaugural celebration of the City Dionysia. Unfortunately, Pausanias gives no hint of a date for either the annexation or the removal of the statue. But it seems reasonable to suppose that the latter came sometime after the former, and we can be almost certain that the annexation did not occur during the Peisistratid era. Any attempt at delivering Eleutherai from the Theban sphere of influence would surely have threatened the friendly relations that the family appears to have enjoyed with the Boeotians. And as
Connor argues, the absence of the town from the company of Attic demes seems to point to a date after 508/7 B.C. for its incorporation. We might add that there would have been something highly irregular about the inhabitants of a settlement located this far from Athens seeking or being offered Athenian citizenship en masse at any earlier time.10

The most appropriate context for the incorporation of Eleutherai would then be the series of border conflicts with the Boeotians and Chalcidians in 506 B.C., which clearly put an end to any earlier cordiality between Athens and Thebes. Allowing some time for the first phase of the festival, when spectacle events were limited to the “revels,” we can conclude that the Dionysia must have been founded in ca. 505. Dithyrambic choruses, introduced to Athens a few years earlier, were perhaps incorporated into the original program as part of the kōmos. Presumably, they were staged in a contest format from the start, with teams supplied by the ten new tribes. The tragedy competition was then added around 500 B.C., with comedy following in the 480s.11

There may be further support for this reconstruction in the associated archaeological evidence. Among the older remains in the sanctuary of Dionysus on the southeast slope of the Acropolis are the foundations of a structure that is generally thought to be the god’s earliest temple at this site. The remains are conventionally dated to the time of Peisistratus or his sons. However, the masonry and use of Z-clamps in the foundations resemble work done on the Stoa Basileios, which, as noted in chapter 3, was built around 500 B.C. A fragment of poros architectural sculpture (featuring a satyr and a maenad) that appears to belong to the temple could also fit this date.12

The original format of the City Dionysia might then be reconstructed as follows: The xoanon of Dionysus Eleuthereus was first translated from his sanctuary to a precinct in the area of the Academy. From there, it was carried in a procession to the Agora. Presumably, this ceremony recalled the god’s first arrival in Athens, symbolically retracing the last portion of his journey from Eleutherai to the city.13 In the Agora, the xoanon was given formal rites of welcome (xenismos) at the eskhara, the official hearth in the new civic center. These rites probably included sacrifices and choral singing.14 In the short period of time before the first theater of Dionysus was built in the early years of the fifth century, the tribal dithyrambic contest and, perhaps briefly, the tragedy competition would also have been held here, most likely in the area still known later as the orkestra.15

The festival then seems to have concluded with the return of the god by torchlight procession from the eskhara to his temple, a ceremony that continued to be observed long after the contests were transferred to the new theater.16
Connor’s case for downdating the creation of the City Dionysia to the late sixth century may be less than watertight—the nature of the testimony hardly allows otherwise. But his article raises serious problems for the conventional Peisistratid date, while also offering a persuasively coherent alternative.¹⁷

It remains to consider the rationale behind the new festival and its contribution to the transformation of public life in the years 508–490. Why did the Athenians suddenly feel the urge in ca. 505 B.C. to celebrate the first arrival of Dionysus in Attica? Why, for that matter, did they create a new festival of Dionysus at all? At least four such festivals (the Oschophoria, the Lenaia, the Anthesteria, and varieties of rural Dionysia) already existed, adequately covering the god’s traditional provinces. What did the City Dionysia add to the picture?

Connor (1990, 17–23; 1996) believes that the Dionysia was intended to serve, above all, as a “celebration of freedom” after the end of the tyranny. In view of the god’s associations with the idea of liberation, this suggestion is certainly worth considering. Even so, it seems a little too convenient that the Athenians happened to acquire control of a cult of a “god of liberation” at precisely the time when they might have wished to mark their deliverance from the Peisistratids with a new “freedom festival.” Besides, as Raaflaub (2000, esp. 255–60) emphasizes, there is no evidence that the Athenians actually had begun to associate Dionysus and the Dionysia with the concept of freedom before the classical period.

One suspects that the original rationale behind the Dionysia was probably a lot more straightforward. Given the contemporary preoccupation with territoriality (see especially chap. 5), the incorporation of Eleutherai was itself reason enough to create the new festival. The acquisition of this strategically significant possession from the Thebans must have been one of the more noteworthy and concrete gains from the recent border campaign. Since it seems that the town was originally named after the god and his cult and thus, in a sense, defined by them, the celebration of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens amounted to a ritual commemoration of the annexation. The god’s xoanon will have been greeted in the city as a kind of spoil of war, and the stylized annual reprise of the statue’s arrival in subsequent years will have functioned as a ceremonial equivalent of the equestrian victory monument discussed in chapter 6. Each, in their different ways, provided a compelling visual statement of the newfound strength and reach of the Athenian state.¹⁸

In other words, the original dedication of the festival to the god Dionysus was somewhat fortuitous. The impulse to create the new festival owed less to the peculiar power or appeal of this god than to the heady mood of triumph.
generated by the victories of the citizen army in 506. Had a different deity been prominent at Eleutherai, he or she would perhaps have found themselves the object of similar devotions. And if the genesis of the Dionysia was driven more by political circumstance than by any strictly religious sentiment, it certainly becomes easier to account for some of the festival’s more unconventional features.

To begin with, it helps us to explain why the persona of Dionysus Eleuthereus is so notoriously elusive. The festival’s ostensible purpose—the commemoration of the first arrival of the cult of Dionysus in Athens—had no organic connection to any of the god’s traditional provinces. Unlike older Dionysus festivals, such as the Anthesteria and Oschophoria, which were defined and constrained by such a connection, the Dionysia was free to embrace a more synoptic vision of the divinity. With its xenismos ceremony for the cult statue and its aetiology about Pegasus of Eleutherai, the festival was not so much a celebration of the god himself as a celebration of Athenian worship of the god, seen in all his different aspects at once. It was, in a sense, a ritual performance about ritual performance, a kind of “metafestival.” Dionysus Eleuthereus was thus less a persona than a convenient moniker, an umbrella term for the aggregate of the god’s multiple identities. In itself, the title said nothing about the nature of the god that was not already said at other Dionysus festivals.

At the same time, the rather diffuse identity of Dionysus Eleuthereus made possible, in large part, the rapid rise of the Dionysia to preeminence over these other festivals. Clearly the intention from the start was to construct a landmark festival like the Panathenaia, building on the xenismos ceremony, the ritual core, to produce a grand state occasion. And the somewhat open-ended character of the cult of Dionysus Eleuthereus made this a relatively easy task. All manner of popular Dionysiac practices could be grafted onto the festival to lend it the requisite ambience and the savor of authenticity. Some, like the kömos and the dithyrambs, seem generic; others, such as the phallic procession and, within a few years, the tragedies, were probably chosen for their prior association with the rural Dionysia of Attica. The result was perhaps the most synthetic festival in the Athenian calendar. But its spectacular content, however loosely related to the central ritual purpose, doubtless gave the Dionysia an instant mass appeal.

Finally, the specific historical circumstance that prompted the foundation of the festival may help us to account for certain features of the program that, at least at first sight, appear to have nothing to do with Dionysus whatsoever. I refer here to the multiple ways in which the political and military life of the state became implicated in the format of the Dionysia during the classical
period. One thinks especially of the various ceremonies held in the theater before the performance of the tragedies and comedies: the preliminary sacrifice by the board of ten generals, the parade of war orphans reared to manhood at public expense, the display of the imperial tribute on the stage, and the awards to public benefactors. One thinks also of the delegates from the subject states of the Athenian empire who were required to take part in the phallic procession, and the festival’s possible role in the preparation of ephebes for citizenship and military service. Then there are the dramas themselves, whose complex interplay with contemporary political culture has been the subject of such intense recent interest. It is hardly self-evident why a festival of Dionysus should have been chosen to bear the weight of so much political and military significance. But this was no ordinary festival of Dionysus. If, as mentioned above, the Dionysia was born in an atmosphere of martial triumphalism, its surprisingly intimate engagement with the political and military domains was probably fixed from the very beginning.20

To conclude, the City Dionysia is perhaps the most representative product of the Religionspolitik practiced in Athens in the period 508–490. With the possible exception of the Brauronia (discussed later in this chapter), it was the only major festival established ex nihilo during these years, and the distinctive style and priorities of the new order are readily visible in its character and content. We see, for example, the familiar concern with the political integrity of Attica, most obviously in the use of myth and ritual to historicize and perpetuate Athenian territorial claims along the sensitive border with Boeotia; together, the story about Pegasus and the xenismos ceremony conveniently suggested that the area around Eleutherai had really been part of Attica all along. We also see in the Dionysia the new order’s characteristic emphasis on corporate solidarity. As in the revamped Panathenaia, the sacrificial procession afforded an unusually inclusive vision of Athenian society. Here, too, there were tribal contests, and here, too, the attendance of non-Athenians was encouraged, a ready audience for the festival’s “advertisement of the wealth and power and public spirit of Athens.”21

Last but not least, we should again note the era’s preoccupation with tradition and continuity. None of the conventional Dionysiac features of the Dionysia would have looked out of place at older festivals. Even the new xenismos ceremony, with its accompanying aetiology and its primitive cult image, hardly smacked of novelty. Like so many other artifacts of the period, the real novelty of the City Dionysia lay not in the artifact per se but in the animating spirit that gave it life and meaning.
ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

A little less politically charged than the Panathenaia or Dionysia, the Athenian festival which held the most appeal for non-Athenians was probably the Eleusinian Mysteries, with its promise of a happy afterlife for all. By the classical period, its reach was genuinely Panhellenic, and one later observer, Pausanias (5.10.1), believed that only the Olympic Games offered a spectacle of comparable luster and prestige.

As in the Olympics, preliminaries for the Mysteries began with a declaration of a sacred truce, fifty-five days in duration, to allow Greek-speaking non-Athenians to attend and return in safety. Envoys (spondophoroi) dispatched to all parts of Greece invited individuals to come for initiation and requested that states send thank offerings of firstfruits to Demeter for the gift of grain. The festival proper began in early fall on 13 Boedromion, with the sending of a detachment of ephebes to Eleusis to escort “the sacred things,” the *hiera*, back to the city for storage in the adyton of the City Eleusinion, a sanctuary on the northwestern slopes of the Acropolis above the Agora. Further activities in Athens on subsequent days included the “gathering” (*agurmos*) of new initiates in front of the Stoa Basileios in the Agora, their ritual purification at Phaleron, a state sacrifice to Demeter and Kore at the Eleusinion, and a day of retirement indoors. The procession of initiates and officials then set off along the Sacred Way with the *hiera*, for three days of fasting and ritual in the sanctuary at Eleusis itself. There, climactic revelations about the afterlife were made in the *telestérion*, a large, roofed hall. Once all the rites had been completed, the new initiates were free to disperse or return in a more informal procession to Athens.22

With so many non-Athenians participating directly in the Mysteries, the festival must have had a more cosmopolitan ambience than any other event in the calendar. This is not to suggest that the festival was entirely politically disinterested. As Clinton (1994) has shown, its original Eleusinian identity is steadily discarded during the course of the classical period, just as its identification with Athens is increasingly emphasized. The Mysteries, after all, had important implications that the Athenian state will have been only too keen to exploit. Control of Demeter’s sanctuary at Eleusis allowed Athens to represent itself as the beneficent supplier of grain and agriculture to humanity and, thus, to assert its claims to cultural leadership in the Greek world. Meanwhile, on a more local level, the festival’s ritual links between Athens and Eleusis offered yet another ceremonial expression of the ties that bound
the center to the periphery and gave the Athenian polis its distinctive regional character.23

The Mysteries, like the Panathenaia, came into existence some years before the period that is the focus of this study. But, again, close examination of the evolution of the festival reveals signs of significant discontinuity during the years 508–490. Evidence of change is especially visible at the Eleusinion, the locus of the ritual activities held in Athens before the initiates departed for Eleusis.

Although the eastern portion of this site remains concealed beneath modern structures, a detailed account of the excavated western section, along with a reconstruction of its early history, has been provided by Miles (1998). The area was first cultivated as a sanctuary at least as far back as the seventh century, and seems to have been home to a cult of Demeter from the outset. Evidence for significant construction at the site begins around the second quarter of the sixth century, when a peribolos wall, executed with well-worked polygonal blocks, was built to enclose the sanctuary, marking it off within what seems to have been a relatively busy residential neighborhood. While the exact location of the east side of the wall has yet to be determined, the western section is around 22 meters long, and substantial portions of the north side (26 meters) and south side (28 meters) have been exposed. Whatever the original eastward extent of the peribolos, the development of the sanctuary indicates that the cult within for some reason came to enjoy a new level of importance in the years 575–550. And this importance continued to grow steadily in subsequent decades, since the site underwent significant expansion around 500 B.C.

At this point, an adjacent terrace downslope to the north was cleared of habitation and leveled to make way for a new temple, and the perimeter was extended (fig. 23). As far as can be discerned, the sanctuary was now more than double its previous size. Miles reconstructs the temple as a tetrastyle amphiiprostyle structure of the Ionic type; it measured roughly 11 m. by 18 m. and was oriented north-south. Primarily on the strength of a pair of passages in Pausanias (1.14.1–4, 38.6–7), she confirms earlier suggestions that the temple belonged to Triptolemos. It seems reasonable to suppose that a temple of Demeter and Kore, in whose adyton the hiera were stored during the preparation stage of the Mysteries, also existed by this time. Whatever remains of it must lie further east, in the unexcavated part of the sanctuary.24

To make sense of these changes, we should also consider the sanctuary at Eleusis itself, where there are interesting parallels with the development of the Eleusinion in Athens. The cult of Demeter at Eleusis appears to have been established some time in the eighth century, the date of the earliest votives and
of the slim remains of what may be the site’s first temple. Some time after 600 B.C., the appearance of the sanctuary changed considerably. The terrace on which the Geometric temple had stood was extended to the east and south and supported by new retaining walls of polygonal masonry. On this terrace was now built the first of a series of *telestèria*, the sacred halls in which the secrets at the heart of the Mysteries were revealed. A plain rectangular building whose walls featured mud bricks in the upper courses and polygonal stone courses below, the telesterion was approximately 24 m. long and 14 m. wide. Long considered “Solonian,” it now appears that the new temple and its terrace should be dated to the second quarter of the sixth century, making it roughly contemporary with the original peribolos wall at the Eleusinion in Athens. Given the marked resemblance in the polygonal style of masonry used at both sites, developments at the two sanctuaries are probably not unrelated.

Somewhat later in the century, the first telesterion at Eleusis was demolished and replaced by a far more imposing structure (fig. 24). Unlike its relatively unostentatious predecessor, the second telesterion was almost square in shape and was made entirely of stone. It consisted of a large hypostyle hall with a front portico built in the Doric order. With dimensions of 25.3 m. by 27.1 m. excluding the porch, it was over twice the size of the older building. No less impressive was the site’s new fortification wall, some 855 m. long, which dates to around the same time and now enclosed the entire sanctuary and much of the hill behind it. Clearly, Eleusis was no longer just a settlement of some religious significance. It was also seen as a key strong point in the defense of western Attica.

These and other contemporary embellishments have traditionally been assigned to the era of Peisistratus and interpreted as a key component in his program of *Religionspolitik*. But recent work has once more called this line of interpretation into question. Opinion now inclines toward downdating this phase of the sanctuary to the years immediately after 506, when the need for a fortification wall would have been more acute than before. Again, important changes at Eleusis coincide with important changes at the Eleusinion in Athens. How should we read this evidence?

About one thing we can be virtually certain: the mature, classical form of the festival, with its preliminaries in Athens and its procession to Eleusis, was firmly established by the early fifth century. The synchronized development of the two sanctuaries implies as much, and the implication is corroborated by the earliest documents to come from the Eleusinion in Athens. A pair of inscriptions from the site that date to the late sixth or early fifth century (*IG I³* 231, 232) contain sacred laws that pertain especially to the operations of the
sanctuary and the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries, confirming that the space now served as the festival’s ritual locus in Athens. And if, as is thought, these documents are republications of older texts, the Mysteries must have already existed for some time before the birth of the new order. To gauge the significance of the changes made during our period, then, we should first try to pinpoint the origins of the festival and get some sense of its earlier history.

Few scholars today would agree with those, such as Mylonas (1961, 40-54), who trace the genesis of the Mysteries back to the Mycenaean era. We saw above how solid evidence for cult activity at Eleusis begins only in the eighth century, and as Clinton (1992, 30-37; 1993) has stressed, the Mysteries were neither the only nor, most likely, the earliest festival associated with the sanctuary; the Thesmophoria, for one, was almost certainly older.

That said, Clinton himself is still comfortable with the idea that some form of the Mysteries, conducted from Athens, might have been founded as far back as the seventh or even the eighth century. However, his case rests on rather weak foundations, relying heavily on ancients’ perceptions of events and practices in their own distant past. And as Sourvinou-Inwood (1997, 136-40) has recently insisted, there is in fact no concrete testimony for the Mysteries before the construction of the first of the two archaic telesteria, distinctive cult buildings that seem to have been designed expressly with the peculiar needs of this festival in mind. For want of any comparable signs of discontinuity from earlier times, I would agree with her suggestion that the new structure represents our surest evidence for the genesis of the Mysteries at Eleusis.

The suspicion that the festival may have been instituted as late as the second quarter of the sixth century can only be encouraged by the contemporary evidence from Athens. Here, too, perhaps an existing sanctuary of Demeter was adapted to fit the needs of a new festival long after the cult of the goddess was first introduced. Such a date may also help to explain why the Mysteries play only a minor role in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. The body of the hymn serves to explain how a cult of Demeter came to be established at Eleusis, and Clinton (1992, 28-37; 1993, 112-15) argues persuasively that the ritual practices that correlate most closely with the mythical narrative are not those of the Mysteries, as was long supposed, but those of the Thesmophoria. The foundation of the former is in fact represented as a separate development and described only briefly toward the end of the hymn (473-82). As Clinton (1993, 115) puts it, the account of the creation of the Mysteries is “piously appended by the poet to a traditional story that reflects the ancient Thesmophoria.”

Assuming that the text was composed around 550 (perhaps the lowest acceptable date), it would then make sense that the passage that describes the
founding of the Mysteries reads like an afterthought, hastily added. The festival had probably been invented only a few years earlier; it had not yet had time to eclipse the Thesmophoria and make its own deep impression on Eleusinian lore.\textsuperscript{31}

It seems, then, that the Mysteries were an Athenian production from the start; there was no local Eleusinian prototype as such. But why was the festival created at this particular time? Here, we should look to the larger cultural environment in Greece and to an important shift that had been taking place since 600. Though no single factor can in itself account for such a complex innovation as the Mysteries, the growing interest in Panhellenism must have played a critical role in the decision to institute the new festival.\textsuperscript{32}

True, there is no incontrovertible evidence from either sanctuary that the Mysteries aspired in the early days to a Panhellenic reach. But from elsewhere in the Athenian landscape, there is evidence aplenty that the elite in the years 575–550 were keen to emulate their peers in other states and act on the new impulse toward Panhellenic cultural production. It was precisely at this moment that the Great Panathenaia was born; that Heracles, the Panhellenic hero par excellence, began to loom large in the pediments of the newly monumentalized Acropolis; and that the claims of Theseus to international celebrity were first voiced in Attic art. Surely the very same impulse lay behind the invention of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The innovation certainly conforms well to the pattern seen a few years earlier at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea and imitated at Athens in the Panathenaia, whereby existing cult practices and facilities were modified to provide the basis for a new kind of spectacle, one that was purposely designed to attract spectators and participants from all over the Greek world and, thus, bring a measure of reflected glory on the organizers and their city. And evidence from contemporary art seems to confirm the impression that the Mysteries did indeed have a distinctly Panhellenic thrust from the very beginning. Scenes with Eleusinian themes first appear on Attic vases soon after the middle of the sixth century, and among the earliest, we find allusions to a pair of myths that were plainly devised to promote both Eleusis and the Mysteries outside Attica.

The first myth centers on Triptolemos. As one of the local “lords” [basileis] whom Demeter first instructed in her secret rites, Triptolemos was only an incidental figure in the \textit{Homer Hymn to Demeter} (153, 474, 477), but he enjoyed an increasing visibility in Athenian culture thereafter. By the classical period, he was a full-fledged culture hero/god, with his own temple in the Eleusinion and a starring role alongside Demeter and Persephone in Eleusinian mythol-
ogy and iconography. The primary reason for this transformation, it seems, is the invention of a new tradition, the story that Triptolemos was dispatched by Demeter on a mission to bestow her gift of grain on a grateful humanity. There are no hints of this tradition in the *Hymn*, but unambiguous evidence for its existence can be found very soon afterwards.

Images inspired by the new story begin to surface on Attic vases right around 540 B.C., perhaps only ten or twenty years after the Mysteries themselves were instituted. A canonical scheme for representing the mission soon emerges: a mature, bearded Triptolemos is seen sitting on a curious, wheeled throne holding ears of wheat, while around him stand anonymous individuals who have either received or hope to receive the gift of grain. With some interesting adjustments and variations (discussed later in this section), scenes of the mission would remain popular until well into the fifth century. At all events, the original purpose of such a myth must have been to install Eleusis and its cult firmly at the center of Panhellenic consciousness. And since the myth looks to have been invented very soon after the creation of the Mysteries, it is not hard to equate this purpose with a general effort to publicize the festival abroad and draw non-Athenian initiates to the sanctuary.33

The very same can be said about another myth that makes its debut on Attic vases at around the same time, namely, the initiation of Heracles himself into the Mysteries. This rather preposterous new story even came with its own motivation: apparently, Heracles sought to ingratiate himself with Persephone before his storied journey to the Underworld to snatch Cerberus. The two legends are linked in a number of later literary sources, and as early as 540 B.C., they are juxtaposed on the same vase, as if to emphasize the connection.34 It seems that in their efforts to attract outsiders to Eleusis, Athenian mythmakers fabricated the most archetypal precedent imaginable and then artfully accommodated the new story to the body of established Heraclean myth in order to give it an instant credibility.35 Evidently, the organizers of the Mysteries were not content simply to wait and see if the new festival might be appealing to Greeks from other states; they took surprisingly aggressive and creative steps to ensure that it would be.

In trying to reconstruct other details of the early history of the Mysteries, plausible speculation is our only recourse. For example, we cannot know for sure which men were responsible for bringing the festival into existence, though it is not unreasonable to suppose that they must have included representatives of the Eumolpidae and the Kerykes, the families who directed the initiation process.36 Nor is it self-evident why, in particular, the cult of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis was deemed to afford promising foundations for a new
spectacle of Panhellenic proportions. Presumably, the sanctuary already possessed a special significance or prestige in the days before the Mysteries were established. Even if the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* was only composed around 550 B.C., its mythical claims regarding the unique place of Eleusis in the goddess’s affections must be somewhat older, making the cult and the sanctuary ripe for exploitation by those in Athens who were looking to tempt the gaze of all Greece with extravagant, eye-catching displays.  

Having established that the Mysteries were probably an artifact of the years 575–550, another product of that elite yearning for Panhellenic recognition that is so characteristic of the era, we can return finally to what now look like the first signs of real discontinuity in the history of the festival and consider the main questions at issue: why were the sanctuaries at Athens and Eleusis substantially aggrandized in ca. 500 B.C., and what significance are we to read into these developments?

It seems safe to assume that the new, more spacious facilities at the two sites were a response to an increased demand for initiation, whether real or anticipated. So who were all these prospective initiates? Clinton (1994) believes that they were non-Athenians. As he sees it, the expansion of the sanctuaries attests to a dramatic “acceleration” in the “process of Panhellenization” under “the early democracy” (170). In itself, the suggestion seems plausible enough, especially in view of the momentum that this process must have already acquired in earlier years. However, one or two circumstantial considerations should make us hesitate just a little before accepting this eminently straightforward explanation.

To begin with, there is some cause to think that the Mysteries might not have been promoted as heavily at the end of the sixth century as they had been in previous years. Relations with neighboring states at this point were unusually strained. And one wonders if the Athenians really would have been courting larger numbers of non-Athenian initiates at precisely the moment when they were turning Eleusis into a major defensive strong point. There is a certain incompatibility between these two objectives. One also wonders why Panhellenic demand for initiation should have suddenly increased at this particular time. Clinton gives no reason as such, and none is self-evident. We know of no contemporary occurrence comparable, say, to the famous apparition before the battle of Salamis (cf. Hdt. 8.65; Plut. *Them.* 15), an event that assured Eleusis a distinguished place in the mythology of the Persian Wars and, in so doing, probably helped generate the need for the colossal telesterion that was erected there later in the fifth century.  

It therefore seems worth considering the possibility that the new facilities of ca. 500 were not built primarily with non-Athenian initiates in mind.
Some—perhaps most—of the new demand must then have come from within Attica itself. And this conclusion makes good contextual sense. For reasons discussed in the first part of this study, there were probably significant numbers of people in the region (especially among the poor) who had taken little or no part in the public life of Athens before the reforms of Cleisthenes were enacted. We cannot assume that men and women of this background had been routinely initiated into the Mysteries since the very beginning. Perhaps only after 508 B.C., when all indigenous males in Attica were enfranchised as Athenian citizens and obliged to engage actively with the city’s political culture, were these people expected and encouraged to come to Athens and participate fully in the festival.

Be that as it may, it is likely that the Mysteries became more politically charged in other ways during this period. Though the festival revolved ultimately around the acts, needs, and hopes of individuals, it had probably always had a certain communal and civic dimension. The sacrifice to Demeter and Kore in Athens was a major public occasion, and state officials marched with the initiates in the grand procession to Eleusis, as did many Athenians who had been initiated in previous years. No doubt, this civic dimension will have received even greater emphasis under the new order. Moreover, the format of the Mysteries was obviously consonant with the political reorientation of the late sixth century. With its ritual links between Athens and the most significant settlement in western Attica, the festival now visibly underscored the new order’s efforts to affirm the political integrity of the region and build a sense of collective mission among its inhabitants.39

Since denizens of Eleusis were now citizens of Athens, it may also be at this point that the Athenians first recognized the great political capital to be gained by downplaying the Eleusinian identity of the Mysteries and emphasizing their own stewardship of the festival. Certainly, whatever distinctive local character the Mysteries may once have possessed was gradually discarded over time. Clinton (1994, 161) has shown that by the fourth century, Eleusis had become little more than “a special attribute of Athens.” Writing in the first quarter of that century, even a relatively well-informed Athenian like Isocrates (4.28) could blithely speak of how “our ancestors” performed services for a distressed Demeter and how “our state” subsequently administered the twin gifts of grain and the Mysteries to humankind, all without mentioning Eleusis at all.

Apparently, a similar elision occurs in Attic art. Down to the third quarter of the fifth century, scenes on vases represent the Mysteries as but one of a number of cult practices staged at Eleusis. Some of these scenes are even graced by personifications of Eleusis herself, as if to ensure the viewer’s recognition of the
locale. After something of a lull in the latter part of the fifth century, Athenian artists recovered their earlier interest in the Mysteries in the fourth. But as Clinton demonstrates, they now show very little interest in identifying the festival with any broader Eleusinian realm. Triptolemos, a mainstay of these scenes, is no longer depicted alongside a personified Eleusis; he is more liable to be seen in the company of Athena.

In the eyes of these fourth-century artists, it seems, Triptolemos was now “our ancestor” (cf. Xen. Hell. 6.3.6), and the Mysteries were no less characteristically Athenian than, say, the Panathenaia or the Dionysia. In other words, over the course of more than a century, as Athens gradually assumed the properties of Eleusis for itself and as the Mysteries acquired a prestige all their own, it looks like the festival was forced to discard the very local associations that had once given it life and meaning and that its founders had actively cultivated in their efforts to produce a compelling Panhellenic spectacle.40

It is not easy to pinpoint when this interesting shift in the representation of the Mysteries began, though it seems to have started a long time before the fourth century. Again, important clues are found in art. Several studies have drawn attention to the changing image of Triptolemos in the first quarter of the fifth century. Scenes of his mission are now suddenly more popular than before, and the central motif in these scenes has undergone some modification. Triptolemos himself is reimagined as an altogether younger, beardless individual, and his wheeled throne has grown wings, perhaps suggesting a more potent, more global figure. No less interesting, in ca. 480, a new variation on the theme appears, indicating that the purpose of his mission has been reconceived (fig. 25). These new images catch him at the moment of departure, engaged in a libation ceremony with Demeter and Kore. Most agree that there is here a deliberate allusion to the role of the spondophoroi (the “libation carriers” or “truce carriers” who traversed the Greek world summoning men and women for initiation) and thus a reference to what is seen in later literature (cf. Xen. Hell. 6.3.6) as the second purpose of Triptolemos’s mission: to publicize Demeter’s gift of the Mysteries.41

These scenes are our earliest evidence for the new version of the mission story, and the innovation is significant. Since the Mysteries had always been organized from Athens, and since the festival was now directly linked to the mission for the first time, making Triptolemos, in effect, an agent of the Athenian state, it appears that the Athenians were already beginning to think of him as “our ancestor” in the first quarter of the fifth century. And it cannot be a coincidence that the new mission tradition was invented perhaps in ca. 500 B.C., just as work was beginning on a new temple for the divine emissary in Athens.
itself. Clearly, with the history of Eleusis now no more than a strand in the larger story of Athens, Triptolemos, much like his fellow Eleusinian Hippothoon, was no longer defined only by his associations with a particular locality; he was embraced by all Attica. Reimagined thus, he would henceforth serve, in Miles’s words (1998, 54), as “a ‘national’ hero for the Athenians, a symbol of the city’s cultural leadership.”

From here, it was but a short step for the Athenians to assume for themselves a new and politically lucrative claim to be the mythical donor of grain to humankind. While it would be many more years before Eleusis was effectively airbrushed out of the picture, the process was clearly well under way by the early fifth century—the logical consequence of a new kind of political order in Attica.42

BRAURONIA

The festival of Brauronian Artemis did not have the Panhellenic significance of the other festivals discussed so far, and we know far less about it than we do about the Panathenaia, the Dionysia, or the Eleusinian Mysteries. That said, the Brauronia was still important enough to be staged in a special, expanded format every four years. As a festival that featured an important rite-of-passage for the females of Attica, the Brauronia could shed some much-needed light on the experience of women under the new order. It is especially regrettable, then, that the evidence for the festival from our period remains minimal. Nevertheless, this testimony is just sufficient to suggest that the Brauronia, like the other major festivals examined so far, was either modified or invented outright during the age of Cleisthenes.

The Brauronia was staged every spring in the month of Mounychion. In its expanded version, it was managed during the classical period by the board of hieropoioi (festival organizers) who were responsible for all of the state’s quadrennial celebrations except the Great Panathenaia. Like the Eleusinian Mysteries, the festival involved a long procession from a satellite precinct in the center of Athens to the cult’s principal sanctuary in the Attic periphery—in this case, from the Brauroneion on the Acropolis to the great sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron in eastern Attica. Though detailed evidence for what then took place at Brauron is scarce, the festival almost certainly included the arkтеia, alluded to above, a premarital initiation rite performed by ten-year-old girls dressed as she-bears.43

Turning to the history of the Brauronia, we again confront spectral traces of the hand of Peisistratus. Predictably, given his family’s associations with the
Brauron area and his supposed predilection for creating national festivals, Peisistratus is widely seen as the architect of the Brauronia. But, as often, the case rests on little more than wishful presupposition. To begin with, as we saw back in chapter 1, the exact nature of his family’s connections with the Brauron district is open to question. Even if the Peisistratids did hail originally from this locale, they were long established in Athens itself by the time of Peisistratus’s rise to political prominence. And it is hard to maintain the notion that a Peisistratean “party” from the “hill country” used Brauron as a kind of power base when it is highly unlikely that such a “party” ever existed. If Peisistratus ever did live in eastern Attica during his early career, it may have been only for a few years after 560, when the would-be tyrant left Athens to begin his first spell of exile.

Of course, none of this necessarily rules out the possibility that Peisistratus established the Brauronia later on in life when his circumstances were more favorable. An atavistic connection with the sanctuary at Brauron, perhaps further nourished during four or five years of exile in the area, may have stirred in him the idea to insert a festival for Artemis Brauronia into the Athenian calendar. Yet no evidence from the sanctuary itself suggests as much.

As at Eleusis and on the Acropolis, cult activity at Brauron seems to have begun in the later Geometric period, when the sanctuary of Artemis was probably established. It is possible that an early form of temple was erected at this time to house the xoanon of the goddess. But it would be many years before any further attempt was made to develop the site. If Peisistratus did build a major pan-Attic spectacle around the cult at Brauron, his efforts are archaeologically invisible.

As it happens, there are no indications of any significant change in the use of the sanctuary until the very end of the sixth century. By common consent, the first monumental stone temple for Brauronian Artemis dates from around 500 B.C., making it yet another item in the steadily growing inventory of major construction projects commissioned by the leaders of the new order. Does the new temple coincide, then, with the founding of the Brauronia? The idea is certainly not unthinkable. The festival can hardly have been founded much after 500, and there are no striking discontinuities in the development of the sanctuary that might point to an earlier time. But to confirm the date, we would at least need to see some signs of a corresponding rise or change in activity at the satellite sanctuary in Athens, much as we saw in the case of the Mysteries.

Sadly, evidence for the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia on the Acropolis is even harder to interpret. The site has been successfully traced to the southeast corner of the citadel, though the earliest remains are not easily datable. The
only firm conclusion one can draw here is that the sanctuary must have been in operation before the mid–fifth century, since its plan appears to have been modified to accommodate the Mnesiclean Propylaia. However, a modest number of artifacts found in and around the Acropolis area and seemingly associated with the cult may help to clarify the picture a little further.

First, we have a number of fragments of krateriskoi, cult vessels that were especially associated with the worship of Artemis. We cannot be certain that these particular examples were used in rites held at the Brauroneion, though their find-spots hint that they were. The later items in the series belong to the first half of the fifth century and were recovered from the Agora, while all the earliest fragments, which have been dated to the period 510–500 B.C., were found on the Acropolis itself. Then, there are the remains of the sculptures of two dogs, one of them extremely well preserved. Since both come from the Acropolis, it is very tempting to link them with the citadel’s Artemis sanctuary, and a number of scholars have done so. And since they are thought to have been produced sometime between 520 and 500 B.C., the two dogs, like the early krateriskoi, seem to attest to a rise in the level of interest in the cult toward the end of the sixth century. Whether this new interest was spurred by the actual foundation of the sanctuary or merely by a change in the sanctuary’s significance remains to be seen.

Either way, the chronological coincidence between the evidence from Athens and Brauron is certainly suggestive. At the very least, the investment in the new temple at Brauron confirms that the Athenian state was now actively involved in the cult, and this involvement presumably means that one or more state festivals were staged at the sanctuary by ca. 500 B.C. In the absence of any earlier signs of similar activity, we can tentatively assign the creation of the Brauronia—perhaps an Athenian amplification of an existing local festival—to the last decade of the sixth century. If this is correct, we would have a further illustration of how well-established cults in the Attic periphery were used at this time to develop festivals that both embodied and helped generate a new, regionwide sense of political community.