PART THREE

ORIGIN OF DRAMA

DIONYSUS AND SATYRS
VII

INITIATION

In the primitive hunting tribe, besides the sexual division of labour already noted, the members of the community are graded according to age as children, adults and elders. The children assist the women in the work of food-gathering; the men hunt and fight; the elders are the councillors of the tribe. The transition from one grade to another is effected by rites of initiation. The most important of these is the initiation of boys at puberty, which is at once an introduction to full tribal status and a preparation for marriage. The initiation of girls is similar, but usually less elaborate. It is also less widely attested, because primitive women are naturally loth to reveal to male anthropologists secrets which they guard from their own men; and the status of women in our own society is such that few have the opportunity of becoming anthropologists.

The function of initiation—to admit the child to the status of adult—is expressed in primitive thought as a belief that the child dies and is born again. To understand this conception, we must discard modern notions of the nature of birth and death. In primitive society, the newborn child is regarded as one of its ancestors come to life again. That is why, in many parts of the world, including Greece, it is or has been the custom to name the child after one of its grandparents. At puberty the child dies as a child and is born again as a man or woman. The adult is transformed in the same way into an elder, and at death the elder enters the highest grade of all, that of the totemic ancestors, from which in due course he re-emerges to pass through the whole cycle again. Birth is death and death is birth. They are complementary and inseparable aspects of an eternal process of change, which includes not merely birth and death as we understand them but also the growth and decay of the power to beget and to give birth. As Cureau has remarked in his study of the African negro, "the
natives hold that every serious event in physical life is equivalent to death followed by resurrection.  

This mode of thought is expressed concretely in a universal feature of primitive initiation—the mimetic or symbolic death and resurrection of the novice. The ceremony takes various forms. Some are highly realistic, comprising both the act of killing him and his birth from a woman; in others he is supposed to be swallowed and disgorged by a god or spirit. This element is so fundamental that it can be readily recognised in the more attenuated forms characteristic of the higher stages of tribal society. Such is the magic sleep or dream, in which the novice is laid to rest as a child and, after being possessed of an ancestral spirit, awakes as a man. Such, too, it may be conjectured, is the custom, common to many initiation ceremonies, of dressing the boy as a girl or the girl as a boy, on the principle that in order to acquire a new identity the novice must first escape from the old. In many tribes, when the boys are taken away to be initiated, their mothers mourn for them as dead, and, when they return, they behave like infants, as though unable to speak or walk or recognise their friends. At the same time they receive a new name, which in primitive thought is equivalent to a new identity. Just as the naming of a newborn child after one of its forbears originally signified that it was the reincarnation of the man whose name it bore, so the assumption of a new name at initiation signifies that the novice has been born again.

Besides these dramatic representations of the death and resurrection, the novice is usually subjected to a surgical operation consisting in the amputation of some part of his body—the removal of the foreskin, if it is a boy, or of the clitoris, if it is a girl; the knocking out of a tooth; the amputation of a finger; the cutting of the hair or of a lock of hair. Of these operations, the most primitive are circumcision and tooth-extraction, both of which are found in Australia, but never in combination. This suggests that they were all originally different methods of achieving a common object. What that object was is a question that lies beyond our present purpose; but it may be observed that, since the amputated part is carefully preserved, there is a parallel between these rites and the burial of the dead, whose
bodies are preserved, in whole or in part, in order that they may be born again.

The remaining rites of initiation fall into two categories, which may be taken together because they cannot always be distinguished—purification and ordeals. The novices are washed in water or blood, they bathe in a stream or in the sea, or they are scorched in front of a fire; they run races, sometimes with painful handicaps; they engage in sham fights, often with fatal consequences; they are scourged until they are unconscious; their ears and noses are bored, their flesh gashed or tattooed. The physical pain incidental to most of these rites is universally explained as a trial of strength or test of endurance, in which failure means disqualification or disgrace; and there can be no doubt that the severity of these ordeals has been consciously accentuated by the elders in order to terrify the novice into a habit of permanent obedience. It is probable, however, that their original function was purification or mortification. Just as pollution is disease and disease is death, so purification is a renewal of life.

Finally, the novice receives instruction in the customs and traditions of the tribe. This is done by homilies and catechisms, by the performance of dramatic dances, and by the revelation of sacred objects, whose significance is at the same time explained. The whole ceremony is strictly secret. It is performed at a distance from the tribal settlement, usually on a specially prepared ceremonial ground, from which all members of the community except the elders and their initiated assistants have been warned away, often on pain of death. In many tribes the actual initiation is preceded by a period of seclusion, which may last for months, and when the novices return to the settlement they are strictly forbidden to reveal to the uninitiated anything that they have done or seen or heard.

Among most hunting tribes, initiation is followed immediately by marriage, which therefore is not marked by any ritual distinct from initiation itself. That explains why the marriage rite of many primitive peoples closely resembles initiation. This is especially true of the woman’s part in it, because in her case the postponement of marriage after puberty is rare. The men, on the other hand, are usually obliged, in
the higher grades of tribal society, to undergo a further period of probation before they can marry. This interval is spent in the Men's House, which has been described by Hutton Webster as follows:

The Men's House is usually the largest building in a tribal settlement. It belongs in common to the villagers; it serves as a council chamber or town hall, as a guest-house for strangers, and as the sleeping resort of the men. . . . When marriage and the exclusive possession of a woman do not follow immediately upon initiation into the tribe, the institution of the Men's House becomes an effective restraint upon the sexual proclivities of the unmarried youth. It then serves as a club-house for the bachelors. . . . An institution so firmly established and so widely spread may be expected to survive by devotion to other uses, as the earlier ideas which led to its foundation fade away. As guard posts where the young men are confined on military service and are exercised in the arts of war, these houses often become a serviceable means of defence. The religious worship of the community often centres in them. Often they form the theatre of dramatic representations. . . . The presence, then, in a primitive community of the Men's House in any one of its numerous forms points strongly to the existence, now or in the past, of secret initiation ceremonies.

In general, initiation is associated with the tribe as a whole, but the evidence of the lower hunting tribes in Australia and New Guinea points clearly to an antecedent stage in which it had been centred in the totemic clan. The transfer of these rites from clan to tribe corresponds to the consolidation of the tribal system; and, conversely, when that system begins to disintegrate, initiation loses its tribal character, either falling into decay, in which case the rites become perfunctory and disconnected, still generally practised, but domestic in character and often performed long before puberty, or else, retaining their original cohesion, they form the basis of the magical sodality or secret society, which is the old clan in a new and modified form. Moreover, as Webster has shown, the rise of these societies and the decline of the clan are both correlated with the development of social inequalities.
Initiation ceremonies, such as we have been studying, retain their democratic and tribal aspects only in societies which have not emerged from that primitive stage in which all social control is in the hands of the tribal elders. The presence of ceremonies of this character throughout Australia and New Guinea is to be associated with the absence of definite and permanent chieftainships in these islands. . . . In Melanesia and Africa, political centralisation has resulted to a large degree in the establishment of chieftainships powerful over a considerable area and often hereditary in nature, but this process has not continued so far as to make possible the entire surrender to the tribal chiefs of those functions of social control which in the earlier stages of society rest with the elders alone. . . . With developing political centralisation such functions tend to become obsolete and the religious and dramatic aspects of the societies assume the most important place. This last stage is reached both in Polynesia and in North America.

In the secret society the structure of the clan is perpetuated and transformed. It has a distinctive totem, a distinctive tradition, and a distinctive ritual; it derives its unity from the strong sense of solidarity which animates its members; and in many cases it has magico-economic functions to perform—the propagation of animals used for food, the making of rain, the promotion of the harvest. On the other hand, its membership is not based on consanguinity, but on community of religious experience, beginning with the rite of initiation. In other words, the qualification for admission is not birth, but re-birth. Accordingly, the totem is no longer hereditary, but acquired by initiation.

The candidate for admission, who is usually but not invariably an adolescent, goes out alone into the forest, where he spends many days or weeks or months in complete solitude, fasting, sleeping, and dreaming of the animal concerned, which thus becomes his individual totem or guardian spirit, the power that shapes his destiny and determines all the crucial issues of his life. When he returns home, he is an initiate and as such receives a new name. Among the Kwakiutl Indians the novices return in a state of temporary insanity, induced both by their physical privations and by the strength of their belief...
that the guardian spirit has actually entered their bodies and possessed them. The spirit is then exorcised by songs and dances performed by the society and designed to signify that the newly initiated member has died and been born again. The same idea underlies the ritual associated with what in North America has become the principal function of these societies—the healing of the sick. In the Ojibwa fraternities, the patient whose spirit has been exorcised becomes thereby an initiate, and in the Tsiahk fraternity of the Cape Flattery Indians the patient has to be initiated before he can be cured. He is restored to health by being born again.

The power of these sodalities is derived primarily, of course, from their monopoly of certain forms of magic; but at this stage of human society magic has become far more than a supplement to the technique of production. The privileges enjoyed by the initiated have lost their economic foundation and are exercised more or less consciously for the purpose of social exploitation. In Mexico and Peru, the most advanced areas of primitive America, this hypertrophy of magic, which is a constant tendency in the development of agriculture, reduced the people to a state of absolute subjection to a blood-thirsty theocracy, whose progressive refinement of human sacrifice was only terminated by the extinction of their culture in the even greater horrors of the Spanish conquest.

Finally, a universal feature of these sodalities, not only in America, but in Africa and Polynesia, is the periodical performance of some kind of ritual drama, in which the actors impersonate the tribal ancestors, often in their totemic form. Thus, the Katsina sodalities of the Hopi Indians perform a masked dance of the ancestors, who are regarded as still active members of the community and charged by means of the dance with the duty of sending rain and making the crops grow. Such ritual resembles mature drama in that it is performed before an audience and represents an action, while its association with the ancestral spirits and its economic function relate it no less clearly to the mimetic rite of the primitive hunting clan.

We saw in an earlier chapter how the mimetic dance of the totemic clan, which originated as part of the actual technique of production and represented the actions of the totem species,
passed into a dramatisation of the activities of the clan ancestors conceived as animals (p. 15). In this way the ritual gave rise to a myth, which reproduced all its features in a narrative form. It is often said in such cases that the myth is the explanation of the ritual; but, at least in its earlier phases, it is rather the spoken form of the ritual act—the collective expression of the unforgettable experience periodically shared by the participants in the rite itself. Later, when the clan system is in decay, the myth may detach itself from the rite and develop independent features of its own. Even these, however, are largely inspired by ritual, because in primitive society almost every experience assumes the form of some ritual act. Or else, maintaining their original relationship, both myth and ritual survive in the drama of the magical fraternity, which preserves, as we have seen, the structure of the clan. In these conditions, since the fraternity is secret, the myth becomes a mystery, which is revealed to the uninitiated only in its outward and visible form, its inner meaning being reserved for “those who understand.” Lastly, when the fraternity itself declines, its dramatic function is usually the most persistent. The society of mystics becomes a guild of actors, whose plays have lost their esoteric significance, but still retain to some extent the character of a mystery, which somehow renews life.

Our next task is to examine in the light of these conclusions the evidence relating to analogous institutions in ancient Greece. This consists principally in rites performed during adolescence or early manhood, in myths relating to the birth of Zeus and Dionysus, in the ritual origins of certain festivals, in the cults of mystical religion, and, finally, in the origins of drama.

The traditional education of the Spartan youth, which has become a byword for austerity, has been described at length by Plutarch.11

The newborn child was taken to the elders of the tribe, who decided whether it was to be reared or exposed. Boys remained in the care of their parents until they were seven, when they were enrolled in one of the agélai or “herds,” led by one of themselves. The members of the agéla lived a communal life strictly disciplined and constantly supervised by the elders.
They shaved their heads, wore coarse cloaks and walked bare-foot. They spent the day in athletic exercises, including meck fights. During the summer they slept on rushes which they gathered from the Eurotas and had to pluck by hand without using knives. In winter the rushes were replaced by leaves of the herb called wolf’s-bane. After their twelfth year they were allowed only a single cloak, which they wore summer and winter, and were forbidden to anoint themselves or bathe except on rare and specified occasions. Each of the more promising was assigned to a man called his “lover,” with whom he entered into an intimate relationship which lasted throughout life. At the age of seventeen they were promoted from the agēla to the boulα, or “herd of oxen,” under the leadership of an etren—that is, a man in his second year of adult status. The etren supervised their games, fights and preparations for meals, for which they had to steal fuel and food without being detected. After supper he remained with them, teaching them songs and questioning them about public affairs. The boy who gave a wrong answer had his thumb bitten by the etren. Among the songs they learnt was their part in a festival of three choirs, the first being supplied by themselves, the second by the men, and the third by the elders. The elders began, “Once we were young and brave and strong”; the men answered, “So are we now, so come and try”; the boys ended, “But we’ll be strongest by and by.” At eighteen the boy became a melletren, and at some time during the next two years he was subjected to the severest test of all—the public scourging of all the melletrenes at the altar of Artemis Orthia. Plutarch records that he had himself seen several boys die without a murmur during this barbarous ordeal.

At twenty the melletren became an etren and was admitted to the phedition or philtion, a club-house where the men partook of common meals provided by contributions from their kléroi and from the produce of the hunt. Boys were allowed to attend on these occasions after being warned by the oldest man present that “through this”—pointing to the door—“no words go out.” Marriage was not permitted immediately after the attainment of manhood, while those who remained unmarried beyond a certain period, the length of which is not stated, were
subject to various penalties and disabilities. Even after marriage, the men continued to eat and sleep at the club-house.

Of the training for girls we know less, but they too were organised in *agéléai* for practice in dancing and running for the public festivals, which were witnessed by the men and were the recognised occasion for proposals of marriage. The bride was carried off by her husband with a pretence of force. She was attended by an older woman, who cut her hair, dressed her in man’s clothes, and then left her in the dark. Later in the night she was visited by her husband, who lay with her and then returned to spend the rest of the night at the club-house. Plutarch says that the women did not marry for some time after puberty, and this accords with the evidence that their education, too, was strictly controlled by the state.

According to Aristotle, the institutions of Dorian Crete were more archaic than the Spartan, and in support of this contention he points out that the *andrēion*, or “men’s house,” which is what the Cretans called the place of the men’s common meals, was the old name of the Spartan *pheidition*. In Crete, too, the boys used to attend at these meals, wearing coarse cloaks, but they did not enter the *agēla* until seventeen, which was the age at which the Spartan boys entered the *bouía*. In the *agēla* they were inured to physical hardships, trained in hunting and running, also in mock fights, in which one *agēla* was set against another, and in the national war dance, traditionally ascribed to the Kouretes and representing a march into battle to the music of lyre and flute. The importance of foot-racing is indicated by the terms *dromēi* and *apodrápoi*, “runners” and “non-runners,” which were used to distinguish members of the *agéléai* from their juniors.

The Cretan boy, too, had his lover, whom he acquired in the following manner. Having given three days’ notice of his intention, the lover went with his boon companions to the boy’s home and with their assistance carried him off from his relatives, who pursued them as far as the Men’s House. After that he was free to take the boy with him into any part of the country he pleased. For two months the boy lived entirely with his new companions, spending most of the time in hunting. When the period of seclusion was over, he received
from his lover the gifts of a warrior’s costume, an ox and a drinking-cup, returned to his home, sacrificed the ox to Zeus, and entertained his comrades from the Men’s House to a feast.

We are informed by Strabo that “all those promoted from the agela were obliged to marry at the same time.” This means that marriage was a state-controlled and public ceremony comprising all those who belonged to the same age grade. Nothing of importance has been recorded of the Cretan training for girls, except that they married at puberty, but continued to live with their parents “until they were old enough to keep house.”

Some of the details in this evidence will acquire significance from subsequent stages of our enquiry, but the general character of the two systems is already clear. In both countries the crucial period in the transition from boyhood to manhood began at the age of seventeen. The transition itself seems to have been effected at Sparta by the ordeal of flagellation, in Crete by the two months of seclusion. One would like to know more of what happened during those months, but it is plain that the gifts which the boy received at the end of that period were intended to signify that he was now a man and as such entitled to eat with men.

That the Dorian discipline of Sparta and Crete was largely unique in the Greek world is clear from the unfailing interest which it excited among other Greeks. It is natural that such customs should have been better preserved by that branch of the Greek race which was the last to enter the Ægean, and especially by the Spartans, who, for the reasons given in an earlier chapter, were the most conservative aristocracy in Greece. Nevertheless, the existence of agelai among the Ionians is attested by inscriptions from Miletos and Smyrna, and the training of boys at Athens, though less austere than the Spartan, followed the same lines.

At the annual feast of the Apeatouria, the names of legitimate and adopted children born during the year were enrolled by the father on the register of the phratry to which he belonged, and on the third day of the festival ceremonies were performed on behalf of the children admitted in previous years—the dedication of a lock of their hair to Artemis, and for the
girls a sacrifice called the *gamelía* or “bridal sacrifice,” implying that its object was to get husbands for them. It was also customary at this festival for the boys to compete in recitations of poetry before the adult members of the phratry.\textsuperscript{16}

The Athenian educational system was reorganised in the latter part of the fourth century B.C. and the evidence relating to it is mostly late.\textsuperscript{16} It is probable, however, that its essential features go back to an earlier period, and in the oath of allegiance taken by the novices, which is one of the surviving documents, there are elements which must be archaic.\textsuperscript{17} The boys were trained in gymnastics under the supervision of a *gymnastarchos*, an officer whose tribal origin will appear in a later chapter.\textsuperscript{18} At the age of eighteen they became *épheboi*, corresponding to the Spartan *melletrenes*, and were sent away for two years’ military service on the frontiers. During this period they wore a distinctive cloak, originally black or dun in colour, later white. At the end of their military service they underwent an examination (*dokimasia*) and were admitted to full civic status. After the collapse of the city-state as an autonomous unit, their military duties were eventually abolished and superseded by training in athletics and philosophy, which attracted to Athens well-to-do young men from all parts of the Roman Empire. In this development of the Athenian discipline we discern the thread connecting the age grades of tribal initiation with the academic degrees of the modern university.

The rough cloaks of the Spartan and Cretan boys were doubtless explained as appropriate to their strenuous life, but the distinctive colours of the Athenian cloak suggest that all three had a ritual origin. Black or dun was the traditional colour of mourning in all parts of Greece except Argos, where it was white. It is possible therefore that we have here a vestige of the primitive belief in the death of the child at initiation.

The same belief seems to underlie the custom of cutting the hair.\textsuperscript{19} At Sparta, the boy’s head was close-cropped from the time he entered the *agóla* until he became an *éren*, and the girl’s hair was cut on the wedding night immediately before the coming of the bridegroom. At Athens, the hair was dedicated on the third day of the Apatouria, which was called the *koureóttis heméra*, perhaps in allusion to this rite. The custom is
not recorded in Crete, but that is almost certainly an accident, because there is abundant evidence, both literary and epigraphical, that in ancient Greece, as in many other parts of the world, the hair was cut on two distinct occasions—the attainment of puberty by a boy or the marriage of a girl and the death of a relative.\textsuperscript{20} It is true that the same rite was sometimes performed on other occasions, especially recovery from sickness or escape from danger; but we have already seen that in primitive society every crisis in life is apt to be regarded in the light of initiation. At Gytheion in Laconia there was a local tradition, evidently primitive, that, after the murder of his mother, Orestes recovered his sanity by biting off one of his fingers, and at the same time he shorn his hair as a thankoffering to the Erinyes.\textsuperscript{21} Here the cutting of the hair is associated with a still more primitive rite of the same nature. As we shall see in a later chapter, the idea that the restored Orestes had in some sense been born again can be traced in the \textit{Oresteia} of \textit{Æschylus} (p. 280).\textsuperscript{22} The crisis may be puberty, conversion, danger, disease or death, but in each case it is an occasion demanding the renewal of life.

Before examining the myths relating to the birth of Zeus and Dionysus, we must add to our account of primitive initiation a further detail. We saw that in one form of the rite it was pretended that the novice was killed and eaten by a spirit, who afterwards disgorged him as a man. In some tribes, it appears, this is or has been more than a pretence. One of the novices is really killed and his flesh eaten by the others.\textsuperscript{23} At the present day, this practice of cannibalism at initiation is exceptional, and so perhaps it has always been, because, of course, since the idea of a mimic death is inherent in initiation, we have no right to assume that a pretence of cannibalism is necessarily derived from the reality; but we have to admit the possibility, which must be judged in the light of the other evidence.

When Rhea gave birth to Zeus on Mount Ida in Crete, she concealed him from her father Kronos, who had been in the habit of devouring his offspring, and replaced him by a stone wrapped in swaddling-bands, which Kronos swallowed instead. She played the same trick when she gave birth to Poseidon, the substitute in his case being a foal.\textsuperscript{24} The horse
was one of the animal forms of Poseidon, and the stone substituted for Zeus is clearly the thunder-stone. This indicates that the legend has its roots in the lowest stratum of religion.

The infant Zeus was entrusted by Rhea to the Kouretes, who danced around it, beating their drums and clashing their spears on their shields in order that its cries might not reach the ears of Kronos. There is reason to believe, as Rendel Harris has shown, that this war dance of the Kouretes was originally a bee dance. The Kouretes were reputed to have invented the art of bee-keeping, and, while under their protection, the infant Zeus was fed by the daughters of Melisseus, the "bee-man"; but this element in the myth, though of great importance for the origin of the cult of Zeus, does not concern us now. To finish the story, when Zeus grew up, he forced his father to disgorge the stone, and also the other children, with whose aid he then overthrew him and hurled him into Tartarus.

This legend was associated with an actual cult at Palaikastro in Crete, where the mystery of the god's birth was enacted by a secret society called the Kouretes, and the rites included a hymn in which the god was invoked as "greatest kouros" to march and rejoice in dance and song for the incoming year. The word kouros means a boy or young man, and from it is derived the name of the Kouretes, which is used in the Homeric poems as a common noun synonymous with kouros.

From this evidence Jane Harrison concluded that "the Kouretes are young men who have been initiated themselves and will initiate others, will instruct them in tribal duties and tribal dances, steal them away from their mothers, make away with them by some pretended death, and, finally, bring them back as newborn, grown youths, full members of their tribe." In reaching this conclusion, Jane Harrison was apparently unaware that it was actually the custom in historical Crete for boys to be stolen from their homes and secluded in the wilds by initiated men, and that the Kouretes were the traditional inventors of the war dance practised by the boys in preparation for this event.

Objection might be raised to this interpretation on the ground that, when Zeus was committed to the care of the
Kouretes, he was not a boy approaching puberty, but an infant; but this discrepancy can, I think, be explained. In the first place, as we have already remarked, when the practice of initiation declines, the rites tend to be performed at an earlier age. An example close at hand is the Jewish rite of circumcision, which, originally performed in preparation for marriage, now takes place a few days after birth. If such displacements can occur in the ritual itself, it is clear that they would occur even more easily in myths that had lost contact with their ritual origin. Further, it appears that, like other divine children, such as Hermes in the Homeric hymn, the infant Zeus grew with prodigious rapidity. Kallimachos tells us that, after being entrusted to the Kouretes, the child soon became a youth, the down appearing swiftly on his chin, and that while still a child he had already imagined all things perfect; while Aratos goes even further and says that the infant grew up in the space of a year.

The Kouretes were closely associated, and indeed confused, with other analogous organisations—the Korybantes, who worshipped the mother goddess of western Asia Minor, and the Daktyloi of Ida, magicians who were credited with the discovery of iron. In some versions of the birth of Zeus, the Kouretes are displaced by the Korybantes, and both are connected with iron-working. The oldest piece of iron hitherto known in Greece was found in Crete among other objects dating from the second Middle Minoan period, and in Asia Minor iron was well-known to the Hittites at least as far back as the thirteenth century B.C. and probably long before. Like all new techniques, the working of iron must have been regarded in the first instance as a mystery, the function of a magical fraternity; and therefore this accords with the other evidence to the effect that the myths relating to the Kouretes, Korybantes, and Daktyloi, embody the folk-memory of primitive initiatory societies in prehistoric Crete and Asia Minor.

There are many versions of the birth of Dionysus, some derived from the Phrygian Sabazios, others from the Egyptian Osiris. For the present I shall confine myself to the two main centres of the Greek tradition—Thebes and Crete.

Zeus fell in love with Semele, the daughter of Kadmos, and
promised her anything she asked. Deluded by Hera, she asked him to woo her as he had wooed Hera; whereupon, appearing in a fiery chariot, he hurled his thunderbolt, and Semele died of fright. Snatching her unborn child from the flames, Zeus sewed it up in his thigh, and from there in due time Dionysus was born. So far the Theban myth. Enraged at the honours which Zeus was bestowing on the child, Hera suborned the Titans and persuaded them to destroy it. Accordingly, having provided themselves with attractive toys—a kônos or spinning-top, a rhômbos, and golden apples from the Hesperides—the Titans enticed the child from the Kouretes, in whose charge it had been placed, tore it in pieces, threw the limbs into a cauldron, boiled and ate them. This part of the myth was enacted in the Cretan ritual of Zagreus and in the Orphic mysteries. When Zeus discovered what had happened, he blasted the Titans with his thunderbolt, and in some way—the tradition varies at this point—the dead child was brought to life again.

The birth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus introduces a new complication. This part of the myth corresponds to Kronos’s treatment of his children and to the Orphic myth of Phanes, who was swallowed by Zeus and re-born as his son. The re-birth of Phanes is clearly a symbol of adoption. It is no doubt a hieratic construct, with no immediate foundation in ritual, but such mythography presupposes a traditional pattern, supplied in this case by the myth of Kronos, which we have just explained as a symbol of initiation. What, then, was there in common between initiation and adoption? The answer is that in primitive society they are virtually identical. Strangers are adopted into the clan by the act of being born again. Thus, the Jewish rite of circumcision, which was performed soon after birth on a legitimate child, was also performed on strangers of any age as a rite of adoption. In the Icelandic sagas, the adopted stranger is explicitly described as having been born again, and he receives a new name, as at initiation. When Herakles ascended to Olympus, Hera sat on a couch, took him to her bosom, and passed him through her clothes to the ground in imitation of childbirth. Diodoros, who records this myth, adds that similar rites were still practised
for the adoption of strangers by the barbarians, and numerous parallels might be cited, not only from primitive tribes, but from mediæval and modern Europe.

Even so, the treatment of Dionysus by Zeus cannot be regarded as a simple act of adoption, because Zeus was the acknowledged father. It was not an adoption, but a deification. In one version we are expressly told that the purpose of the thunderbolt was to make both mother and child immortal. As Cook has shown, the thunderbolt of Zeus was originally conceived as inflicting death in order to confer immortality.\(^{38}\) Similarly, when Demeter wished to immortalise the infant Demophon, she buried it in the fire—an act which the child's mother naturally resented as calculated to kill it.\(^{39}\) The child had to die in order that it might live for ever. "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die."\(^{40}\) Deification is a form of adoption, and adoption is a form of initiation.

The Titans who abducted Dionysus in order to eat him appear at first sight to have little in common with the Kouretes, who abducted Zeus in order to save him from being eaten; but it is a commonplace of mythology that such extreme antinomies are apt to conceal an underlying affinity, and in the present instance our suspicions are confirmed by a myth of the birth of Epaphos, in which the villains, whom Hera persuades to make away with the child, are the Kouretes.\(^{41}\) The contradiction is simply the mythical expression of the ambivalent nature of the rite itself.

The same conclusion is reached from an examination of the toys with which the child was lured away. The Golden Apples of the Hesperides are a folk-tale motive, but the kônos and rhômbos are derived from ritual. The kônos was probably a spinning top of the familiar type, the rhômbos was a piece of wood attached to a string by which it was spun in the air, and both were used in mystical rites to imitate thunder. In fact, as Andrew Lang pointed out long ago, the rhômbos is identical with the bull-roarer used by modern savages to produce rain and to terrify the novices at initiation.\(^{42}\) Thus, in the Wiradthuri tribe of Australia, only the initiated may actually see a bull-roarer, and the uninitiated believe that it is the voice of a spirit. At the crisis of initiation, which takes place in darkness,
the old men close round the novices, whirling their bull-roarers in the air. When the crisis is over, the instruments are revealed to them and their use explained. That is the anakálypsis, the revelation of the sacred objects; and that is the ceremony of which a faint memory lingers in the toys which the Titans displayed to Dionysus. And, if we ask why the bull-roarer should play so prominent a part in initiation, the answer may be given in the words of a Wiradthuri headman, who declared that the sound of the bull-roarer was the voice of a spirit calling on the rain to fall and everything to grow anew. 43

Finally, Dionysus was boiled and eaten. 44 He was not the only one. Medea told the daughters of Pelias that they could make their aged father young again by boiling him. Failing to carry conviction, she took an old ram, cut it up, threw the pieces into a cauldron of boiling water, and produced out of the cauldron a lamb. Ino, sister to Semele and foster-mother to Dionysus, whom she is said to have brought up as a girl, threw her own child, Melikertes, into a cauldron, then snatched up the cauldron with the dead child in it and leapt into the sea. By that means both became immortal, the mother being renamed as Leukothea, the child as Palaimon. Thetis boiled all her children regularly, until at the birth of Achilles the misguided father intervened. This story was told by Hesiod, and, according to the scholiast who records it, Thetis wanted to see whether the child was mortal, but we may suspect that her real motive was rather to ensure that it would be immortal. 45 Most famous of all, however, is the boiling of Pelops, and that brings us to the origin of the Olympian Games. In this part of my argument I shall follow the steps of Weniger and Cornford. 46

When Pelops was a child, his father Tantalos invited the gods to a feast, to be provided by contributions from each of the participants. Tantalos himself contributed the flesh of his son, whom he cut up, boiled in a cauldron, and served up as meat before his unsuspecting guests. When Zeus discovered the nature of the dish that had been laid before them, he directed that the child should be put back in the cauldron and so restored to life. This was done, and the child was lifted out of
the cauldron by Klotho, whom we have already met as a goddess of birth. Here she is a goddess of re-birth. Tantalos was blasted with the thunderbolt.

As for Pelops, as soon as the bloom of manhood appeared on his cheeks, he resolved to marry Hippodameia, daughter of Oinomaos, the King of Elis. Hippodameia had already had thirteen suitors, all of whom had perished in the ordeal which the father imposed on every candidate for his daughter’s hand. The ordeal was a chariot race. The suitor drove one chariot, with his prospective bride beside him; the father pursued him in another, overtook him, and killed him. Pelops, however, took the precaution of bribing the King’s charioteer to remove one of the linch-pins. The result was that the King’s chariot crashed, and the King himself was killed by Pelops with a thrust of his spear. So Pelops married Hippodameia and succeeded to her father’s kingdom.

In the historical period, the Olympian Games were celebrated in every fourth year at alternate intervals of forty-nine and fifty months. When one celebration fell in the month of Apollonios, the next would be held four years later in the ensuing month of Parthenios. This arrangement is clearly based on the bisection of an octennial cycle, which is the shortest period in which the Greek lunar year of 354 days could be made to coincide with the solar year of 365½ days. In eight years the difference between the two amounted to exactly ninety days, which were made up by intercalating three months of thirty days each. Translated into myth, this reconciliation of the solar and lunar reckonings appeared as a union of Sun and Moon, which, as Frazer has shown, is a common form of the sacred marriage. In this case the celestial pair were impersonated by Pelops and Hippodameia.

The race of Pelops was a chariot race, but we know from the local traditions of Olympia that in the earliest period the only contest had been a foot race. Moreover, the octennial cycle underlying the Olympian calendar presupposes a considerable knowledge of astronomy. It must have superseded an earlier cycle corresponding to the annual sequence of the seasons, which in the octennial reckoning is ignored. For these reasons Weniger conjectured that, prior to the introduction of that
reckoning, the festival was annual. This conjecture will receive further support when we have examined the women's festival at Olympia.

To return to the local tradition, it must be remembered, as Weniger and Cornford have pointed out, that the two priestly clans of Olympia, the Iamidai and the Klytiadai, who had administered the festival from time immemorial, were still in office at the time when Pausanias, who records the tradition, visited Olympia in the second century A.D. There is no reason therefore to question its authenticity on the ground that the form in which we have it is late. According to this tradition, when Rhea gave birth to Zeus, she entrusted the child "to the Daktylooi of Ida, or the Kouretes, as they were also called," who travelled from Crete to Olympia and there amused themselves by running a race, the winner being crowned with wild olive, which was so abundant "that they used to sleep on its leaves while they were still green."47

The leaves, we observe, had to be still green. In other words, the practice had a ritual significance, and the reader will already have recalled* the practice of the Spartan boys, who, after their day's racing, used to sleep on rushes from the Eurotas. That too had a ritual significance, because the use of a knife was prohibited. And here it may be added that, after being escorted to the prytaneion or town hall, the Olympian victor was pelted with leaves. This is usually interpreted as a fertility rite, and so in a sense it was, but that does not go to the heart of the matter. At Sparta, we are told, the custom was to place no offerings in the tomb of the dead, only the body itself wrapped in a purple soldier's cloak and laid on leaves of olive.48 The magical virtue of these leaves, for living and dead alike, was newness of life.

As we have already remarked, the Games were celebrated in the months of Apollonios and Parthenios alternately. This feature is unique. The Pythian Games, too, were held at alternate intervals of forty-nine and fifty months, but the intercalations were so arranged that the festival always fell in the same month of the year. The reason for the irregularity at Olympia is that, when the Games were reorganised on the octennial cycle, they collided with the women's festival of the
Hearia. This part of Weniger's argument may be given in the form in which it has been summarised by Cornford:

It is highly probable that these games of virgins (*parthénia*) gave its name to the month Parthenios, and were in honour of Hera Parthenos—Hera, whose virginity was perpetually renewed after her sacred marriage with Zeus. It is also probable that they were held at the new moon—that is, on the first day of Parthenios. Further, if these games gave that month its name, in that month they must always have fallen. Thus the octennial period of the Heraia is of the usual straightforward type, which keeps always to the same month. The natural inference is that the Heraia were first in the field, and that, when the men's games were fixed at the same season, it was necessary to avoid this older fixed festival. At the same time, if the games of Zeus were allowed to be established regularly in the middle of the preceding month, Apollonios, it was obvious that the Heraia would sink into a mere appendage. Zeus, on the other hand, was not inclined to yield permanent precedence to Hera. The deadlock was solved by a characteristic compromise. The octennial period for the Games of Zeus was so arranged that in alternate Olympiads they should fall fourteen days before, and fourteen days after, the Heraia (on Apollonios 14/15 and Parthenios 14/15). By this device of priestly ingenuity the honour of both divinities was satisfied, and so the inconvenient variation of the months for the Olympic festival is explained.

The hypothesis that the Heraia was originally annual and the older of the two is confirmed by a remarkable feature of the festival itself, which neither Weniger nor Cornford has explained. The festival was held every fourth year under the supervision of a sodality called the Sixteen Women, who wove a robe for Hera in honour of the occasion and provided two choirs, one for Hippodameia, the other for Physkoe, a local bride of Dionysus. This suggests that the festival goes back in part to a time when there was no Hera and no Hippodameia, only Physkoe, a girl who "made things grow." The main contest at the festival consisted in three foot races for girls. The winners were crowned with wild olive and received a share of the cow which was sacrificed to Hera. Now, these three foot
races were run in order of age, the youngest running first and the eldest last. The inference seems clear. When the festival was annual, there had been only one race, run by all the girls who had reached puberty during the current year. When it became quadrennial, provision had to be made for the girls who had reached puberty during the first two of the three full years which had elapsed since the last celebration of the festival, but priority was given to the third group as being pre-eminently the girls of the year.

To sum up our argument, the men's foot race, which was the nucleus of the Olympia, was an annual ordeal or agón to determine who should be the kotiros of the year. The women's foot race of the Heraia was an ordeal of precisely the same nature, the winner being the koure of the year. Both were ordeals of initiation, but for the winners they were more than that—initiation and deification as well. Accordingly, when the two festivals were co-ordinated, the winning pair became partners in the sacred marriage—the Pelops and Hippodameia of the year.

There still remains a further question. What became of the winning pair at the end of their year? We know what frequently happened in such cases from the evidence amassed by Frazer in his encyclopædic study of the sacred marriage in the Golden Bough. As he has demonstrated, the king was originally divine—he was regarded as god, or, it would be better to say, he was god, the idea of divinity being merely a projection of the magical powers with which he had been invested by the rite of coronation. That this rite was indistinguishable from what later came to be regarded as deification has been made still clearer by Hocart's study of the subject, from which it also emerges that coronation is only a specialised rite of initiation. Like the boy at the threshold of manhood, the candidate for divine honours has to die and be born again. Further, since the magical control of the crops, which it is his function to exercise, is a task of tremendous difficulty and importance, on which the life of the community depends, it is essential that the person to whom it is entrusted should himself be in the prime of life; and since that condition is transitory, his tenure of office is limited to a single cycle, from seed-time to
harvest. At the end of the year he is killed—or, rather, not killed, but sent to rejoin his fellow gods after accomplishing his task on earth. And, lastly, since these magical powers are dependent on physical strength, his successor is commonly chosen by ordeal of combat, in which he is challenged and overthrown by a younger and stronger man. This feature appears at Olympia in a tradition recorded by Plutarch. “In ancient times,” he says, “there was also held an ordeal of single combat, which ended only in the slaughter of the vanquished.”

The myth of Pelops may therefore be interpreted as a symbol of the specific form which primitive initiation had assumed in prehistoric Olympia. It consisted of two parts—initiation into manhood and initiation into kingship. The first was effected by a ceremony in which the novices were believed to be devoured by the gods as children and restored as men. The second was effected by a competitive ordeal (originally a foot race, later a chariot race), the winner being acclaimed as the god-king of the year. And, lastly, at the end of the year, the god-king was killed by his successor.

Even in historical times, the Olympian victor was regarded with superstitious veneration and invested with honours that might be described as either royal or divine. At Olympia itself he was crowned with olive and feasted in the prytaneion. On his return to his native city, he was dressed in purple and drawn by white horses in a triumphal procession through a breach in the walls. At Sparta, he marched by the side of the kings into battle, evidently in the belief that his proximity would carry them to victory. At Athens, he enjoyed the right of eating in the prytaneion at the public cost for the rest of his life, and after death he was worshipped as a hero, less mortal than divine. Unless we remember all this, we are not in a position to appreciate the anxious insistency with which in many odes Pindar warns the victor at the Games not to seek too much, not to peer too far into the future, not to aspire to become a god. Even in the Altis at Olympia, where, next to Delphi, the Greek aristocracy felt most at home, they were confronted with this strange contradiction, which was only accepted because it was ineradicable and because it could be piously cloaked in the trappings of ancient priestcraft.
The course of our argument has carried us a long way from the initiation ceremonies of the primitive tribe, but the same thread runs right through to the end. The *pytaneion* of the Greek city-state was not merely an eating-place at which distinguished citizens and strangers were publicly entertained; it was the sacred hearth of the community, which at Athens was kindled annually by the victors in the torch races of the *ēpheboi*. As Hutton Webster remarked, "an institution so firmly established and so widely spread" as the Men's House "may be expected to survive by devotion to other uses as the earlier ideas which led to its foundation fade away."

It may therefore be asserted with some confidence that Cornford was right in rejecting Ridgeway's view that the Olympian Games were originally a festival of the dead. It is true that the institution of athletic contests at the funerals of distinguished men is attested by the Homeric poems and by the actual practice of historical times; but Cornford's own view has now been amplified and extended in such a way that puberty and death appear as events of the same order, both fitting occasions for a ritual that brings newness of life.

Our knowledge of the Eleusinian Mysteries is derived largely from the Hellenistic period or later, but at a number of vital points the tradition can be traced through Plato, Aristophanes and *Æschylus* to the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, and it is carried still further, into the Mycenaean period, by the evidence of archeological remains.

On the other hand, it is clear that by the fifth century B.C. the primitive character of the cult had been radically altered by successive accretions and reorganisations. Originally, it appears, it was the property of a single clan, the Eumolpidai, which was joined at an early period by the Kerykes. The great service of Demeter to mankind, which the Mysteries were believed to commemorate, was the discovery of agriculture. The same service was commemorated at Athens itself in the festival of the Thesmophoria, which had much in common with the Mysteries of Eleusis and moreover was reserved to women. It is possible therefore that the cult of Eleusis was originally of the same type. Indeed, the myth of the Eleusinian Demeter, who revealed the art of agriculture herself, but
taught the use of the plough through the medium of her foster-
son, Triptolemos, seems to reflect a transition from matrilineal
to patrilineal descent, which, as we saw in an earlier chapter
(p. 16), is associated with the advance from garden tillage to
field tillage. One function of the Eumolpidai, undoubtedly
ancient, was the ceremonial ploughing of the Tharian plain,
which suggests that the clan had once been a royal one with
functions similar to those studied by Hooke and others in early
Babylonia and Egypt. Throughout the prehistoric period, the
cult was local, strangers being admitted only by adoption, but
in the sixth century, perhaps under Peisistratos, who rebuilt
the Hall of Initiation, it was taken over by the growing Attic
state and thrown open to all persons of Greek speech, even
including slaves. ⁵⁷ There can be no doubt that the tyrant's
interest in Eleusis was prompted by the same motives as his
patronage of the Orphic movement. Aristotle says that it was
characteristic of democracy to reduce the number and broaden
the basis of the old aristocratic cults. ⁵⁸ The evolution of the
Mysteries was therefore part and parcel of the evolution of the
Attic state. Beginning as a local cult in a small and primitive
tribal community, it reflected successively the early kingship,
based on agrarian magic, the religious exclusiveness of the
aristocracy, and, finally, under the impetus of the democratic
revolution, the intrusion of state control.

For these reasons we are compelled to make considerable
reservations before accepting the important hypothesis pro-
pounded by Foucart, that the Eleusinian Mysteries were
borrowed from Egypt. ⁵⁹ There is much to be said in its favour.
There was an Attic tradition that agriculture had been intro-
duced from Egypt; there are striking resemblances between the
myths of Demeter and Dionysus and the myths of Isis and
Osiris; and an Eleusinian tomb of the tenth or ninth century
B.C. has been found to contain an image of Isis, made of
Egyptian porcelain, together with other Egyptian objects
belonging to the same cult. This evidence proves that the cult
of Demeter had been subjected at one period to Egyptian
influence; but the precise extent of that influence can only be
determined after an investigation of the social origins of
mystical religion as such. It is this part of the problem that
Foucart neglects. The history of Egypt shows that the cult of Osiris originated in the needs of primitive agriculture, and that it was further developed in response to the social stresses set up by the struggle between the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the people, which came to a head under Ikhnaton. Indeed, the so-called “democratisation of Osiris,” which accompanied the rise of a middle-class bureaucracy under the anti-aristocratic kings of the eighteenth Dynasty, was a development of the same order as the process which broadened the basis of the Eleusinian Mysteries 1,000 years later. Religious ideas are borne by trade winds far afield, but they only take root in soils ready to receive them, and their subsequent growth is determined primarily by the conditions of their immediate environment. In order to assess the significance of the features common to the two cults, it is necessary to relate both to the general history of agriculture and to relate their points of divergence to the special history of the two areas. It is only when that has been done that we shall be in a position to treat the question of diffusion as a separable factor.

The Great Mysteries of Eleusis were celebrated annually in the month of Boedromion, which coincided approximately with our September and immediately preceded the month in which the crops were sown for the ensuing year. We are told by Plutarch that in primitive Attica the sowing had taken place earlier than it did in historical times, and so we may infer that the Mysteries were originally designed to synchronise with the beginning of the agricultural year.

The man or woman who wished to be admitted to the Great Mysteries had first of all to be initiated at the Little Mysteries of Agra, which were said to have been founded by Demeter for the benefit of Herakles. When Herakles was about to descend into Hades, he went to Eleusis and asked to be initiated, but was rejected on the ground that he was a stranger. Accordingly, he was adopted into the community by Demeter at Agra, and then his request was granted. The Little Mysteries were celebrated in the month of Anthesterion, corresponding to the latter part of February and the first part of March, when the last summer’s wine matured. After participating in these Mysteries, the candidate was not initiated at Eleusis in the
following autumn, but had to wait at least until the following year. This interval was evidently a period of probation, like the two years spent at Sparta in the melleitres and at Athens in the épheboi. We are also told that the cloak worn by the candidate during his initiation might not be changed, but had to be worn continuously until it fell off.63

On the fourteenth day of Boedromion the épheboi marched to Eleusis and on the next escorted the sacred objects, possibly images of Demeter and Persephone, from there to Athens. On the following day, the candidates assembled at Athens in the presence of the hieróphantes and the daidóuchos, the high priests of the Eumolpidai and the Kerykes, who issued a solemn proclamation in which they warned the unworthy to depart. Barbarians and unpurified homicides were explicitly disqualified.

Next followed purification. The candidate procured a pig, drove it down to the shore, and bathed with it in the sea. The pig was then slaughtered, and its blood spilt over the candidate, who sat on a low seat, his head veiled. On the analogy of primitive initiation, we may conjecture that the pig’s blood was a substitute for the candidate’s own, and the significance of the veil is explained when we find that it was worn by both parties at marriage, and that at death it was both placed over the head of the corpse and worn by the relatives as a sign of mourning. In the present instance it was perhaps associated with the myth of Demeter, who is described in the Homeric Hymn as sitting veiled in mourning for her daughter.64

The next stage in the proceedings is obscure. It consisted apparently of a sacrifice and an intrusive element from the cult of Asklepios at Epidaurus. The candidates are also described as “staying at home.” Then, on the nineteenth, singing and dancing through the fields, the great procession set out for Eleusis, escorting the image of Iakchos, which seems to be another intrusive element, derived from the cult of Dionysus. Various ceremonies were performed on the way, including the exchange of imprecations and obscene jests at the bridge over the Kephissos. This is a primitive fertility rite of world-wide distribution, but, not being specially connected with initiation, it need not detain us now. It appears that the procession included those who had only been initiated at Agra
in the preceding spring as well as those whose probation was now completed; and consequently, on their arrival at Eleusis, the pilgrims fell into two grades—the mystai, who had to wait another year before proceeding further, and the epóptai, who were admitted to the Hall of Initiation (telesterion), where the secrets of Eleusis were revealed to them.

What precisely it was that was “seen and heard” on this occasion is a matter of conjecture. It seems clear, however, that there was a sacred marriage enacted by the high priest and priestess, and a ritual drama symbolising the journey of the soul to the judgment seat. One of the most striking features of the ceremony, which can be traced as far back as Æschylus, was the sudden blaze of torchlight which illuminated the darkness and transformed the sorrow of the onlookers into joy. It is also stated that an ear of corn was revealed to them as a sign of their salvation. The other features, deduced from the symbolism of the Homeric Hymn, are too uncertain to be relied on.

The initiates were under a vow to divulge nothing of what they had heard or seen, and the silence thus imposed on them was expressed in the mystical symbol of “the golden key on the tongue.” Now, in the Egyptian ritual of the dead, after the body had been purified, the lips were touched by a sacred object called the Pesesh-Kef. This ceremony was called the Opening of the Mouth, and it ensured that the dead man would be born again in the Underworld. This certainly looks like a case of direct contact between the two cults, particularly when we find that another variant of the same symbol, “the great ox on the tongue,” was associated with Pythagoreanism, which also had connections with Egypt. Yet even here we had better reserve judgment, because we are informed by Spencer and Gillen that in Central Australia to this day the elders of the Arunta tribe release the young men from the ban of silence by touching their lips with a sacred object.

The main reason why our evidence for the actual content of the Eleusinian Mysteries is so slight is probably not that the secrets were so well kept, but that they were so well known. The habitual and casual familiarity with which such writers as Æschylus and Plato allude to these matters presupposes in
their public a general and intimate knowledge, and shows that many of the mystical formulæ had passed into the common currency of everyday Attic speech. These half-veiled allusions, of which Greek literature is full, can be made to reveal, if not the ritual itself, at least the subjective attitude of the mystic, which is almost equally significant.

The Eleusinian initiate differed from other men in that he had “brighter hopes” of the future—the hope of a “better lot” in the life hereafter, when, “delivered from the evils” of mortality, he would obtain the crown of glory and live in the blessed company of the gods. The impression left on his mind by his experience of the mystical rites is vividly described by Plutarch:48

At first wanderings and wearisome hurrying to and fro, and unfinished journeys half-seen as through a darkness; then before the consummation itself all the terrors, shuddering and trembling, sweat and wonder; after which they are confronted by a wonderful light, or received into pure regions and meadows, with singing and dancing and sanctities of holy voices and sacred revelations, wherein, made perfect at last, free and absolved, the initiate worships with crowned head in the company of those pure and undefiled, looking down on the impure, uninitiated multitude of the living as they trample one another under foot and are herded together in thick mire and mist.

It was the same experience that inspired the famous allegory in which Plato likened the soul of man to a charioteer.49 The chariot has wings, and is drawn by two horses, one good, the other bad, one drawing it aloft into the celestial heights, the other dragging it down to earth. The soul drives on, struggling and sweating. Chariots crash and collide, horses are crippled and wings broken, as competitors are trampled down and fall out of the race. But, when the race has been won, then the soul is admitted into the mystery of mysteries, perfect, delivered, blest, gazing in a clear light on the celestial vision. In later literature this image became a commonplace, and passed into Christianity. “Throughout life,” says Plutarch, “the soul is engaged in an athletic contest, and, when the contest is over, it meets with its reward.” “Come,” says Porphyry, “let us strip
and step into the racecourse for the Olympia of the soul!\(^{70}\)

"Know ye not," St. Paul asks the Corinthians, "that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run, that ye may attain. . . . Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible."\(^{71}\) Plutarch and Porphyry were no doubt drawing consciously on Plato; but it is important to observe that the image was not invented by Plato, being found in Æschylus and Sophokles.\(^{72}\) In fact, it was not a literary invention at all, but was firmly rooted in the mystic ritual. Thus, one of the sacred formulæ which the Orphics hoped to recite in the other world was, "With swift feet I have attained unto the crown desired."\(^{73}\) And the same idea underlies the terminology of Eleusis, which we must now examine.

The successive grades of initiation in the Eleusinian Mysteries are described by Theon of Smyrna as follows:\(^{74}\)

The parts of initiation are five. The first is purification. The mysteries are not open to anyone who wishes to partake of them, some being warned to keep away, such as those who have unclean hands, or unintelligible speech, and even those who are not debarred must first receive purification. Next after purification is the administration of the rite. The third is the so-called epoptēta. The fourth, which is also the end of the epoptēta, is the crowning and laying-on of the garland, which empowers him, after becoming a hierophāntes or daidouuchos or other official, to administer the rite to others. And the fifth and last is the blessedness which comes of enjoying the love of the gods and feasting with the gods.

The writer is concerned to show that there are five grades, because that number is necessary to his argument, but, as he admits himself, the third and fourth are really one, and in other writers the initial purification is not counted as a grade of initiation at all, but regarded as preliminary. The five grades of Theon may therefore be reduced to three: myēsis or initiation, epoptēta, and eudaimonē or spiritual bliss.

The rank of epōptēs was attained, as we have seen, in the second year after initiation at the Little Mysteries of Agra. The word epōptēs means both an "onlooker" and a "supervisor." As an onlooker, the epōptēs was permitted to behold the secret rites enacted in the Hall of Initiation. As a supervisor, he
administered those rites to others. He corresponds, therefore, to the Spartan etren, who, in his second year of manhood, was put in charge of the boys during the period immediately preceding their ordeal at the altar of Artemis.

Now, the same word was also used at Olympia to denote a steward or supervisor at the games. There is no need to suppose that the Eleusinian use of this term was derived from Olympia any more than the Olympian from Eleusis, because both have now been traced independently to their common origin in the primitive ritual of initiation. At both places, the epoptai were, or had been, like the kouretes of the Cretan myth, the men who, having been initiated themselves, superintended the initiation of others. At Olympia, the ordeal of initiation was a race; at Eleusis it had become a passion play in which the crisis of change was projected as a terrifying drama of the soul on its journey through death to salvation.

That the Greeks themselves were conscious of the significance underlying this double application of the term epoptes is clear from another passage in Plutarch, who is again expounding mystical doctrine in terms of an athletic contest:

According to Hesiod, the souls which have been delivered from birth and are at leisure thenceforward from the body, as it were free and fully absolved, are the guardian spirits (daimones epimeleis) of mankind. Athletes who have given up training on account of their age do not entirely forgo their old delight in bodily contests, but still enjoy watching others at their practices, running alongside and cheering them onward. So too those who have ceased from the contests of life and by virtue of soul become spirits (daimones) do not lose all interest in the affairs and discussions and studies of earthly life, but show their goodwill and sympathetic zeal to others engaged in exercising themselves for the same purpose, setting forth with them and shouting encouragement as they see them draw near and at last touch the hoped-for goal.

And again we are reminded of the New Testament:

Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience
the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author
and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before
him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down
at the right hand of the throne of God.

The cloud of witnesses are the ἐπόπται. So for that matter are
the Old Blues, now equipped with bicycles; for there can be
little doubt that further research would show that the organisation
of the modern university, for work and play alike, goes
back ultimately to the same source.

The third grade was εὐδαιμονία, and it is clear, both because
the Greeks counted it blasphemy to apply that word to worldly
prosperity, and because here it is expressly associated with
admission to the company of the gods, that this grade was only
attained after death. We recall the divine honours accorded
to the Olympian victor, and again we find that the analogy
was consciously worked out. This time it is Plato, protesting
against the idea that the reward of the righteous had anything
in common with the notorious revelry that followed a victory
at the games:78

Even more dashing are the blessings which Mousaios and
his son make the gods bestow on the righteous. They claim to
take them down to Hades, where they seat them on couches
and prepare a banquet of the saints, and there with crowned
heads they drink for all time, as though an eternity of
drunkenness were virtue's fairest reward.

The rite of initiation was called a teleté, and the preliminaries
to it were protéléia. The same terms were used to describe the
marriage rite. Marriage was constantly regarded as a mystery,
and the parties to it as initiates. The initiate was described as
téleios, complete or perfect, and the same term was applied to
those who had attained married status, also to Zeus and Hera
as patrons of matrimony.79 Both these connotations are
derivative. The primary meaning of téleios is “full-grown” or
“mature.” They are derived therefore from the time when
initiation and marriage had both taken place at puberty.

One of the formulæ recited at marriage was, “I have fled
the worse and found the better.” The same formula was used
in the Mysteries of Attis, which reached Athens from Asia
HISTORY OF INITIATION

LEITOURGIA

ATHENIAN EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

Pheidon

SPARTAN EDUCATION

TRAGEDY

DITHYRAMB

COMEDY

LENAIA

CRENAN EDUCATION

ANDREION

OLYMPIAN GAMES

DIONYSIAC THIASOS

Theostrion

ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

PURIFICATION FOR HOMICIDE

PRIMITIVE MEDICINE

SECRET SOCIETY

CULT OF EUMOLPIDAL

FUNERAL GAMES

MOURNING

MARmriage

ADOPTION

SUPPLICATION

DEIFICATION

MEN'S HOUSE

TRIBAL INITIATION

CLAN INITIATION.
Minor in the fourth century B.C. We are not told that it was employed at Eleusis, but it is evidently based on the idea of "deliverance or flight from evil." Its significance in the marriage rite is clearly connected with the notion, to which we referred in a previous chapter (p. 50), that marriage was the inauguration of a new moira or daimon; and in the same chapter we referred to the Attic custom relating to the deuterópotmos, the man who, having been mistakenly mourned as dead, was readmitted to the community by a mimetic birth, which conferred on him a second moira. Now, in the language of the Mysteries, the term tèleios is frequently combined with the word holókleros, which has precisely the same mystical significance, but means literally "endowed with a whole portion," kléros being a synonym of moira. We may say therefore that the function of both the rite of marriage and initiation into the Mysteries was originally to invest the child at puberty with a new moira. The child was born again.

Putting this evidence together, we conclude that the sense in which the mystic had been "made perfect" by initiation was that he had been invested with a new moira for the life after death. As we have already observed, the hope of the mystic was for a better lot, a better portion or moira, in the other world. The same idea is implicit in the word eudaimonia, applied to the state of bliss resulting from possession of a good daimon after the soul had been delivered from mortality. Thus, the mystical doctrine reproduces the pattern of tribal initiation at every point. At the same time, the old pattern has been charged with an entirely new meaning. In the Mysteries, a ritual which had been designed as a preparation for life has been transformed into a preparation for death. There lies the essence of all mystical religions. How this profound change in man's outlook on the world had been brought about is a question to which we shall address ourselves after we have tried to penetrate the mysteries of Dionysus.
THE myths of Greece form an infinite series, one running into another with little regard for the particular divinity to which they happen to be attached. The thread that unites them is ritual, which is older than the gods.

The gods of the Greek pantheon are each the product of an infinite complex of local cults, which only yielded a unified concept after the atomic structure of tribal society had been merged into the broad strata of economic classes. Even then the concept varied from class to class and from district to district. The Homeric Artemis is a graceful virgin huntress; yet at Ephesos, only a few miles from Smyrna, one of the main centres of the Homeric tradition, the same goddess was worshipped as a many-breasted mother not yet fully anthropomorphic. The Homeric pantheon was already, when it attained its final form, an abstraction with little validity outside the circle of a narrow ruling class. Four centuries later, when commercial intercourse had laid the basis for a new pantheon, modelled on the Homeric but different, Apollo and Dionysus stand at opposite poles, the one for the aristocratic ideal of static perfection—for Mass, as Nietzsche expressed it, the other for popular enthusiasm, for Uebermass. This differentiation belonged only to the last stage of their evolution, and the earlier stages still survived in ritual. At Delphi, the orgiastic cult of the Thyiades was devoted to Apollo as well as Dionysus; Dionysus as well as Apollo was a musician and a prophet; and such Apolline festivals as the Lampadaphoria at Thebes and the Staphylodromia at Sparta were Dionysiac in everything but name. Nor were the affinities of Dionysus restricted to Apollo. In Crete he was identified with Zeus; in Thrace he was a war-god like Ares; in the Argive myth of the daughters of Proitos the antiquarians were unable to agree whether it was Dionysus or Hera that drove the women mad. And where the
evidence permits us to press our analysis a step further back, these gods—Apollo, Dionysus, Hera—all disappear, leaving us with the mimetic ritual of the totemic clan. *Im Anfang war die Tat.*

In the present chapter, therefore, we shall reverse the method adopted by Farnell, who studied the cults of Greek religion by classifying them according to gods, and we shall only pursue the personality of Dionysus as far as the argument requires. After resuming our account of primitive initiation and extending it to parts of the world where it survives only in the seasonal festivals of a detribalised peasantry, we shall follow it into the ritual of the ancient Greek secret society, which was mainly but not exclusively Dionysiac.

The prize of victory at Olympia was a crown of wild olive. In the prehistoric past, when the games were still ordeals of initiation, this plant had been endowed with the magical virtue of communicating that newness of life without which the child could not be born again as man or woman. The human community had fertilised itself by a simple act of physical contact with the fertility of Nature. Conversely, it was necessary that the human community should propagate in order that nature might increase and multiply. The two beliefs were complementary and ultimately identical, both being inspired by an intense realisation of the interdependence of human society and its material environment.

The initiation ceremonies of Australia are the most primitive that have survived; yet their very elaboration proves that they are the outcome of a long process of evolution. As we remarked in the Introduction, the economic development of these tribes has been arrested, but their social institutions have continued to develop in directions in which they still have a functional value. The question therefore arises whether it is possible to penetrate behind these Australian ceremonies to a still more primitive form of initiation.

We have seen that the period of probation interposed in the more advanced tribes between initiation and marriage is not an original element, and that the content of the marriage rite indicates that it was once identical with initiation. From this it may be inferred that in the earliest phase of tribal society the
sexes mated at puberty, as they still do in Australia. At that stage initiation was simply initiation into sexual life—the first ritual act of physical union. We have also seen that the classificatory system of relationship is based on a principle which points to unrestricted intercourse within each generation between men and women belonging to different exogamous groups. To these considerations we may now add a third, to which Robertson Smith has drawn attention. The rudest communities of which we have direct knowledge live at an economic level so low that sexual intercourse tends to be restricted to that part of the year in which food is most plentiful; and if this restriction operates now, it must have operated far more forcibly in the earliest phase of all, when the tribe was still in process of evolving out of the primitive horde. This means that initiation was originally an annual summer celebration for a clearly-defined and comprehensive age group consisting of all those of both sexes who had just reached puberty. The rite of human death and rebirth is thus traced back to a form in which it is inseparable from the death and rebirth of vegetation. Human life moved in unison with Nature. The same pulse throbbed in both.

This aspect of initiation is not very prominent in the Australian ceremonies, perhaps because our knowledge of them is confined for the most part to objective descriptions of the actual rites; but it is brought out very clearly in the spring festivals of the ancient Chinese peasantry, which are of considerable importance for the interpretation of peasant customs in other parts of the globe. The account which follows is from Granet. It is especially valuable for its indication of the subjective attitude of the participants, deduced from their traditional songs.

For long centuries, initiations were celebrated in the rural assemblies at the same time as espousals to inaugurate the new season. Learned rituals still speak of the spring festivals when “girls and boys rejoiced in a crowd.” The gloss adds: “[then] majority is granted to the boys; [then] wives are taken.” Life can only awake by virtue of the combined forces of the two sexes. Only a festival of youth can arouse the spring.
Initiations and espousals were accomplished under the control of the whole community. They held their sittings in places set apart from domestic occupation and profane uses. In a wide untrammelled landscape, boys and girls, freed from customary restraints, learnt contact with nature. Waters flowed in the brooks set free by the melting of the ice; springs which had been bound by winter burst from the fountains which had once more come to life; the thawed ground opened to let the grass appear; the animals peopled it, all springing from their retreats. The time of seclusion was over and that of universal interpenetration was come. Earth and sky could commune, and the rainbow was the sign of their union. Closed groups could now enter into alliance, sexual corporations encounter each other. In a landscape which was at once venerable and new, where from time immemorial their ancestors had been at once initiated into social and sexual life, the young people were united....

One of the most important games of the spring festivals was the crossing of rivers, which was performed half-naked and immediately before the unions in the fields. Shivering from contact with the living waters, the women then felt themselves to be penetrated as it were with floating souls. The sacred fountains, long dried up, awoke anew as though the coming of spring had set free their waters from an underground prison where winter had enchainèd them.... By the act of crossing the rivers, their deliverance was celebrated, fertile rains were drawn down upon the land, and upon oneself the spring of fertilisation. The Chinese never ceased to pray at the same time and by the same rites for births to enrich their families and rain to make the seed to spring. Rains and reincarnations were at first obtained by the sexual games. But in the end it was believed that water possessed a female nature, and that women alone could retain the virtue by which it was possible to obtain rain. In the same way they imagined that virgins could become mothers by simple contact with the sacred rivers. It was in fact a time when births were acquired at the sole profit of the wives and when the only incarnations were those of maternal ancestors....

These festivals consisted of communions, orgies and games.... Gatherings, assemblies, hunts, became the opportunities for rivalry in dance and song. This may still be found in our own day amongst the backward populations of Kà...
southern China. Their greatest festivals are those in which
the boys and girls of neighbouring villages form a line
abreast and cut the fern, singing extempore songs. On these
jousts depend the prosperity of the year and the people’s
happiness. In the same way, in the ancient festivals of China,
the young people who gathered for the games believed that
they were obeying a command of Nature, and working
together with her. Their dances and songs correspond to the
cries of birds seeking a mate, the flight of insects as they
pursued each other. “The grasshopper in the meadow and
the one on the little hill hops. Until I have seen my lord—my
restless heart, ah, how it beats!—but as soon as I see him—
as soon as I am united to him—then my heart will be at
peace.”

The special importance of this ancient Chinese peasant
poetry lies in the fact that, whereas its ritual origin is abun-
dantly clear; so too is its affinity to the Natureingang poetry of
mediæval Europe—the love-songs of the Goliards and Vagantes,
poor clerks and wandering scholars, the German Minnesinger
and the Provençal troubadours.5

Letabundus reidiit avium concentus,
ver iocundum prodiit, gaudeat iuventus,
Nova ferens gaudia; modo vernant omnia.
Phebus serenatur,
redolens temperiem, novo flore faciem
Flora renovatur.6

That these songs too have their origin in agrarian ritual is
now generally recognised, and indeed the ritual itself still
survives in the decadent forms of the modern European May
and harvest festivals.7 This ritual is important for our present
purpose, because I believe that it throws light on certain
elements in the worship of Dionysus. It has, of course, been
thoroughly examined by Mannhardt and Frazer, and my only
reason for taking up the matter here is that one of its central
features—the idea of death and resurrection—has not been
adequately interpreted.

I shall concentrate on the two festivals, celebrated in the
spring or early summer, which are called “Carrying out
Death” and “Bringing in the Summer.” In many parts of Europe only one of these elements is represented, but elsewhere they are found in combination, and there is no doubt that they are both integral parts of a single celebration. After a brief summary of the essential elements in each, I shall call attention to some details, taken from particular examples, which illustrate their general significance.

A puppet called Death is carried out of the village by a party of young men or girls, while the onlookers praise it or curse it or pelt it with stones. It is then hung on a tree, or burnt, or thrown into a stream, or torn to pieces in the fields, the party scrambling for the remains. The puppet is always made to represent a human being, and is often dressed in women’s clothes. Sometimes the part of Death is played by one of the villagers, and then a pretence is made of killing him. Where the two ceremonies are combined, the party may spend the whole night in the woods, and then there is usually sexual licence. Next follows the bringing in of summer. Boughs are cut in the woods, or a whole tree is felled, and with these the party returns to the village and makes a house-to-house collection for food or money, blessing those who give and cursing those who refuse. The collection is sometimes followed by a feast. The boughs are eventually hung over the doors or set up in the cattle-stalls or in the fields, where they are believed to bring fertility to women, cattle and crops. The tree is frequently accompanied by a puppet representing a boy or girl, or by a real boy or girl dressed up in foliage. It is erected in the village as a maypole, around which are held dances, races and games of various sorts, the winners often being acclaimed as the king or queen of the year. In some places the king of the previous year is subjected to an ordeal or suffers a mock execution. The participants in the festival are usually the young people of the village—the boys or the girls or both; but there is a rather high proportion of instances in which the celebrations are reserved to women.

In parts of Transylvania, a willow is felled, garlanded and set up in the village. Old and sick persons spit on it and say, “You will soon die, but let us live.” Next morning, a young man dressed up in leaves and called the Green George is
carried to a stream as though to be drowned, but at the last moment a puppet made of branches is thrown into the stream in his stead. In Upper Lusatia the puppet is dressed in the veil worn by the last bride and a shirt from the house in which the last death occurred. In Bohemia it is burnt by children, who sing as it burns:

Now carry we Death out of the village,
The new Summer into the village.
Welcome, dear Summer, green little corn!

At Spachendorf in Silesia, the puppet is carried to a field, stripped, and torn to pieces by the crowd, everyone struggling to secure a wisp of the straw of which it is made. The wisps are brought home and placed in the mangers, where it is believed they make the cattle thrive.

Essentially similar to these spring festivals, though usually less elaborate, is the French and German custom of the Harvest May. A branch or tree, decorated with ears of corn, is brought home on the last waggon from the harvest field and fastened on to the farmhouse roof, where it remains for the rest of the year.

Frazer interprets these festivals as follows. Death and Summer are really identical, being different aspects of the vegetation spirit which year by year dies and is born again. Originally the vegetation spirit was embodied in a tree, but gradually it became anthropomorphic—first a puppet adorned with leaves and then a human being similarly adorned and associated with a tree. The mock execution which the human being sometimes undergoes is derived from an earlier custom of human sacrifice, in which the old king was actually killed by the new.

Of the essential identity of the two figures there can be no question. It is proved by many of the songs sung on the occasion, and it is brought out very clearly in some Russian forms of the festival. In Little Russia, a girl called the Kostrubonko lies down as though dead. Mourners move round her and sing:

Dead, dead is our Kostrubonko!
Dead, dead is our dear one!

Suddenly the girl springs to her feet, and the mourners rejoice:
Come to life, come to life is our Kostrubonko!
Come to life is our dear one!

Thus far, therefore, Frazer is certainly right, but the remainder of his interpretation is open to serious objections.

In the first place, it is surely over-simplified. The tree is undoubtedly a primitive element, going back to a remote past; but it is hardly probable on general grounds that the form of a pre-anthropomorphic cult should have been preserved almost intact, with the transition to anthropomorphism so neatly stratified, by the peasantry of modern Europe. Nor is there any independent reason to suppose that the versions in which the tree is replaced by a tree-man are less primitive than the others. Moreover, in certain respects, notwithstanding their underlying affinity, the two figures are very different. Summer is always a tree or a tree-man, and it has been plausibly suggested that the former was a phallic symbol. In that case the two elements are distinct and there is no reason to derive one from the other, the tree-man being the carrier of the phallus. Death, on the other hand, is almost invariably a puppet, which in most cases is not specially associated with trees at all, while in some it is clearly a substitute for a human being. There are really no grounds for believing that the puppet is pre-anthropomorphic.

Finally, in view of what was said in the last chapter, it is rash to assume that a rite of mimic death presupposes an antecedent stage in which the death was actual. In default of independent evidence, the feigned death, whether in myth or in ritual, is adequately explained on the hypothesis that it is derived from rites of initiation, in which, as we have seen, a mimic death—not a real death—is an essential element. Thus, the mock execution of the old king need be no more than a confused reminiscence of a forgotten initiatory ordeal; and this interpretation becomes almost necessary when we find that the mock death is often followed by a mock resurrection. The case of Kostrubonko has already been quoted. In Saxony, after being put to death, the king is restored to life by a doctor. On Frazer’s hypothesis, this feature must be explained as a mock sacrifice substituted for a real sacrifice; but the magic
doctor belongs to a very widespread tradition, which can be traced in Greek comedy and again in the drama of mediæval Europe, and it seems much simpler to suppose that it is nothing more than a folk memory of the mock death and resurrection inherent in the ritual of initiation.

I would suggest therefore an interpretation of these festivals, which, while less simple and obvious, is perhaps for that reason likely to be nearer the truth. At the beginning of spring, the boys and girls of the community go out in procession to the woods and meadows. Their departure is an occasion for mourning, because the boys will return as men and the girls will be maidens no more. Out in the woods they carry branches which they have torn from the trees, and crown their heads with leaves. By this means they assimilate the generative powers just reviving in field and forest, and in the course of the night they perform for the first time the act of sexual union. Next morning they return, carrying with them the emblems of their new status. There are games, contests and trials of strength, and the winning pair are venerated as bride and bridegroom in the sacred marriage of the year. The festival ends with a communal meal.

From one point of view, therefore, the purpose is to impregnate the rising generation by contact with the first spring blossoms; but at the same time the human community must fertilise itself in order to renew the fertility of Nature, and eventually, as the structure of society changes, this aspect becomes dominant. The rite is still performed by the young—a festival of youth is still needed to arouse the spring, but the special significance of their part in it, particularly their ritual death and resurrection, is no longer understood. One of their number suffers a mimic death and resurrection, or a puppet is killed in his stead; and the puppet becomes a symbol for the hunger and sickness of the winter that is past. Similarly, the virtues which they have assimilated by contact with the boughs are restricted to the boughs themselves and finally concentrated in the village maypole. And so the festival degenerates into a traditional pastime, the meaningless débris of a forgotten ritual.

The customs of Bringing in the Summer and the Harvest May can, of course, be traced, in a form almost equally decadent,
among the ancient Greek peasantry. In Samos, at the festival of Apollo, the children used to beg from door to door with a song of precisely the same type as those still used in central Europe, and they carried the eiresiône—a branch garlanded with wool.18 We are also told that throughout Greece the farmers used to honour Dionysus by setting up in their fields a tree-stump.18 On the other hand, the eiresiône was also carried at the Athenian festival of the Oschophoria, which was officially recognised by the state and administered by the clan of the Phytalidai. The principal events were races for the épheboi, a procession led by two young men disguised as women, and a communal feast. Moreover, in Greece as in Italy and elsewhere, the negative element in the primitive ritual, corresponding to the Carrying out of Death, acquired fresh vitality as a ceremony of public atonement. Thus, in Asiatic Greece, in time of plague or famine, a slave or criminal (pharmakós) was escorted out of the city; after being given a meal of cheese, figs and barley bread, he was whipped on the genital organs with branches of wild trees, burnt to death on a pile of timber taken from wild trees and his ashes scattered to the winds.14 Here the element of mortification has been developed along independent lines, but the idea of regeneration clearly underlies the manner of his whipping. Frazer says that “it was not unnatural to stimulate his reproductive powers in order that these might be transmitted in full activity to his successor”; but in the present instance there is no trace of a successor. His reproductive powers were stimulated in order to restore health and plenty.

We saw in the last chapter that initiation was an essential feature in the formation of all secret magical societies, and we have now seen that its origins are inseparable from the origins of agriculture. Our next task is to investigate the worship of Dionysus, which was largely in the hands of secret societies and largely concerned with agricultural magic. I shall begin with the myth of the death of Pentheus as it is presented in the Bacchants of Euripides.

It will be remembered that in punishment for his persecution of the worshippers of Dionysus, Pentheus was lured to his death by the god himself. Seized with a desire to see the
Bacchant at their secret rites, he disguises himself at the god's direction in women's clothes, and, thus attired, he is led through the streets of Thebes, the laughing-stock of the people. When they reach the pinewood where the Bacchants are resting before their celebrations, Pentheus asks for a point of vantage from which he can view the spectacle. The god bends down one of the trees, sets Pentheus on its top, and releases it. Then the god disappears, and a voice is heard summoning the Bacchants to punish the sinner who has violated their seclusion. Catching sight of Pentheus in the tree-top, they pelt him with sticks and stones; then, at the bidding of his own mother, Agaue, who with her sisters Ino and Autonoe is among the celebrants, they tear up the tree by the roots and bring it to the ground. Pentheus implores his mother to spare his life, but she does not even recognise him. "She is the priestess who inaugurates the slaughter." With superhuman strength, she wrenches off one of his shoulders. The other women close round. Ino seizes an elbow, Autonoe the feet. Eventually Agaue snatches the head, impales it on her thyrsus or ivy-wreathed wand, and races back in triumph to the city, where she sets it on the roof of the palace. "A wreath freshly plucked have we brought from the hills to the palace, a prey full of blessings." Agaue is the victor, because it was she who struck the first blow. She declares that her fellow-worshippers acclaim her as "blessed Agaue," calls on her father to rejoice in the daughter whom God has blessed, and finally summons her kinsfolk to a feast.

The death of Pentheus was interpreted many years ago by Bather, working on the materials collected by Mannhardt and Frazer. As he pointed out, the myth is founded on ritual, and the ritual on which it is founded belongs to the same type as the customs of Carrying out Death and Bringing in the Summer, the only difference being that here the puppet and the maypole are replaced by a single human victim. To Bather's able analysis, which should be studied in detail, I would merely add a few points that bring these Bacchants into closer relation with what was said in the last chapter concerning secret societies and mystical religion.

At the beginning of the play, having arrived at Thebes after their journey from the east, they open the choral part as follows:
Who is there? who approaches? Let him go hence, let him leave us, and let all lips be at rest, hushed in silence! We shall now praise Dionysus in accord with long custom.

Then they begin a hymn:

Blessèd are they that lead pure lives and have learned by God’s grace mysteries, sanctified, made clean, joined in a holy band which roams on the hills with fleet foot, filled with the breath of Bacchus. . . . And with wands high in the air, all heads crowned with the ivy, they adore him, Dionysus.

They spend the night in the woods, some stretched against the stems of pine trees, others with their heads pillowed on a bed of oak leaves. The death of Pentheus is described as an agón or ordeal, both from his own point of view and from that of the Bacchants. He leaves the town under the escort or pompé of the god. Agaue returns home in a triumphal procession or kômos, and she carries the prize of victory, in virtue of which she is acclaimed as mëkar or eudaimon, and her victory is celebrated by a feast.¹⁶

In the light of the preceding chapter, these details explain themselves. At the beginning of the celebrations the uninitiated are warned away; the reward of initiation is eudaimonta; the initiates sleep the sleep of initiation in contact with regenerating leaves; and the remainder follows the same ritual pattern that we have already traced in the Mysteries of Eleusis and the Olympian Games.

It cannot, of course, be doubted that behind the myth of Pentheus there lies a real death. The totemic sacrament of the primitive clan has been transformed from a simple act of magical communion into the bloody sacrifice of a secret society. Pentheus was torn to pieces by the Bacchants as an embodiment of Dionysus, who was torn to pieces by the Titans; or, rather, the death of Dionysus was a mythical projection of the actual death reflected in the myth of Pentheus. In the myth of Dionysus, the death is followed by a resurrection; but in the ritual itself, after the substitution of a human victim, this element was necessarily eliminated, except in so far as the victim’s death conferred newness of life on all in contact with
his flesh and blood. This in itself is an indication that human sacrifice is not an inherent element in ritual of this type; and a further indication is provided by the words in which Agaue describes the head of Pentheus after she has brought it home. It is, she says, a wreath freshly plucked for the palace—implying that the prize of victory had once been a bunch of foliage and nothing more. The incarnations of Dionysus took many forms in different parts of Greece. In Macedonia it was a snake that was torn to pieces, in Crete a bull, in other places a fawn; and at Orchomenos in Boiotia, only a few miles from Thebes, we are told that “the women possessed by the Bacchic frenzy fell upon the ivy, tearing it to pieces in their hands and devouring it.” This we learn from Plutarch, a native of Boiotia. For these reasons we shall refrain from the assumption that such ritual is in general founded on human sacrifice, but shall regard that element as a derivative one, which emerged sporadically, especially in theocratic communities such as Boiotia must have been in the Mycenaean period, when the priest kings of Orchomenos were among the most powerful in Greece.

It is strange that so little attention has been paid to Bather’s analysis of this myth. Nilsson mentions it, and was evidently impressed by it, because he discusses it incidentally in a footnote, but he concludes: “It seems to me bold to look for a cult practice behind every detail of a myth, especially one expounded in poetry.” This comment is not very helpful, because, since Nilsson acknowledges the validity of Bather’s general method, which indeed he has applied himself to other problems of Greek mythology with conspicuous success, the only criterion in limiting its application must be the strength of the evidence. As Bather pointed out, the same story is told in great detail by Nonnos, who was doubtless familiar with the plays of Euripides, but, although the essential elements are the same in both, the two versions are not identical and may be presumed therefore to derive from a common tradition. It is, of course, true that Euripides and Nonnos were poets, but so were Homer, Hesiod, Pherekydes, Stesichoros and the other writers to whom, directly or indirectly, we owe almost all we know about Greek myths; and the more one studies Greek poetry, the more intensely one realises how profoundly it differs from the modern poetry
of western Europe in being so firmly rooted in popular tradition.

We shall now pass in review other evidence relating to these societies or thiasoi of Dionysus, which, though fragmentary and confused, becomes at least clearer on the hypothesis we have suggested.

The rending of the ivy at Orchomenos took place during the festival of the Agronia, and Plutarch records other details of the same festival. “In our country,” he says, “at the feast of the Agronia, the women seek Dionysus as though he had run away; then they give up the search and say that he has fled to the Muses and is in hiding with them; and a little while afterwards, when the supper is at an end, they ask one another riddles and conundrums.” And again: “Every year, at the Agronia, the women called the Oleiai are pursued with a sword by the priest of Dionysus, who, if he catches the hindmost, is permitted to kill her, as was in fact done by the priest Zoilos within living memory.” This was written in the first century of our era. In the same passage Plutarch refers to the myth of the daughters of Minyas, king of Orchomenos. Seized with a mad desire for human flesh, they cast lots, and the sister on whom the lot fell gave her son to be torn in pieces. It is clear therefore that at Orchomenos the custom of human sacrifice not only existed in prehistoric times, but was revived occasionally throughout the historical period.

At Orchomenos, therefore, the god ran away and the women went in search of him. This implies that he was subsequently found and brought home. The women tore and devoured the ivy, which was presumably the god whom they had recovered. There was also a ritual pursuit, in which one of their number was killed. The significance of this feature will become clearer in the sequel, but it was evidently an initiatory ordeal, like the foot race run by the Dionysiades at Sparta, and the practice at Alea in Arcadia, where at the beginning of the festival of Dionysus the women were scourged “in the same manner as the Spartan ἐραστής.”

Further light is thrown on these details, and fresh details are brought to light, by several local myths which are admittedly based on ritual. They involve Hera as well as Dionysus, yet
they are all so closely interrelated that it will be best to give them in full before disentangling the details.

The first is from Tanagra in Boiotia, where it was told in explanation of the local cult of Dionysus. Before the celebrations began, the women went down to the sea in order to purify themselves, and while swimming they were assaulted by the sea god Triton. They cried out to Dionysus, who wrestled with Triton and overcame him.\textsuperscript{21}

The second is from Naxos. The nurses of Dionysus were attacked on Mount Drios in Thessaly by the Thracian Boutes (ox-man). They fled to the sea, but one of them, named Koronis, was caught and carried off by Boutes, who took her to Naxos and forced her to cohabit with him until he was driven mad by Dionysus and drowned himself in a well.\textsuperscript{22} The last detail reappears in Attica, where Dionysus was welcomed by Ikarios, who was then murdered and his body buried under a tree or thrown into a well; and at Argos, where the king Perseus threw Dionysus himself into the marshes of Lerna.\textsuperscript{23} We remember, too, that, when the Bacchants of Thrace had torn Orpheus to pieces, they threw his head into the sea.

The third is from Thrace, and is recorded in the \textit{Iliad}.\textsuperscript{24} Lykourgos was a king of the Edonoi and a son of Dryas (the oak-man). He pursued the nurses of Dionysus, who cast their wands to the ground and fled, smitten as they went by the murderous Lykourgos with his \textit{bouplex}. Terrified by his shouts, Dionysus himself sought refuge in the sea, where Thetis took him to her bosom. Lykourgos was blinded by the gods and died soon afterwards. The story is also told by Sophokles in a form which indicates that the shouting of Lykourgos consisted of ritual imprecations. It is uncertain whether his \textit{bouplex} was an ox-goad or a pole-axe, but, since he is described as “murderous” or “manslaying,” it was more probably the latter. In another version, after chasing Dionysus into the sea, he imprisoned the Bacchants (as Pentheus does in Euripides), but they were miraculously released. Lykourgos went mad and killed his own son with a blow from his axe, mistaking him for a vine. After mutilating his body, he recovered his senses, but some time afterwards he was torn to pieces on Mount Pangaion.\textsuperscript{25}

The flight of the women from Boutes and Lykourgos plainly
corresponds to the ritual pursuit in the feast of the Agronia at Ochomenos, but in both cases it is a flight to the sea. In the tradition from Tanagra the women purify themselves by bathing in the sea, while the legends of Orpheus and Ikarios, the fate of Boutes in Thessaly and of Dionysus himself at Argos, suggest that the head of the victim or a puppet was thrown into the water. In these myths the main emphasis is on the purificatory character of the rite—the carrying out of the god; but the myth of Perseus is probably to be connected with an actual rite known to have been practised in Argos, where the god was summoned out of a bottomless marsh by a blast of trumpets.

Immersion in water is a purification, but it is also a regeneration. In the same way, the scourging of the pharmakós was designed not merely to expel disease and death but to induce health and life. It is probable therefore that the immersion of these women worshippers of Dionysus was related to a more general practice of the same kind. Greek brides used to bathe before marriage in the river or in water brought from the river. This too was a purification, but at the same time it was believed to promote the bride’s fertility. The waters of the nuptial bath are expressly described as “life-giving,” and the same idea underlies the formula recited by the brides of the Troad when they bathed in the River Scamander—“Scamander, take my virginity!” This implies that at one time, in Greece as in China, it had been believed that the girl was actually impregnated by contact with the living waters. So long as sexual intercourse was collective and began at puberty, the physiological significance of paternity had been neither significant nor apparent. And, surely, these girls who, having bathed in the river, become brides are the prehistoric human originals of the nymphs of Greek mythology and folklore—the “brides” who are wedded to the river gods and bear heroic sons.

Thus, the bathing of the women in the cult of Dionysus might be a rite either of initiation or of marriage. Probably it was both. The initiates of the thiasos were brides of Dionysus.

The capture of Koronis on Mount Drios in Thessaly corresponds to the capture of the hindmost of Orchomenos, but in this case the captive was not killed, but ravished by her captor. Koronis was a native of Naxos, where she appears as one of the
god's nurses in the local legend of his birth; and, moreover, it was in Naxos, on another Mount Drios, that Dionysus disappeared with Ariadne after ravishing her from Theseus. This suggests that, at least in some cases, the purpose of the ritual pursuit was to choose a bride for the god. We know that Dionysus had a bride at Olympia (p. 116), and also at Athens, where, in a building called the Boukolion, or cattle-stall, he was united annually in a sacred marriage with the wife of the archon basileus, the priestly successor of the ancient Athenian kings.

Argos, as well as Orchomenos, had a festival called the Agrionia, which was there consecrated to one of the daughters of Proitos. As Bather observed, these three daughters of Proitos bear a remarkable resemblance to the three daughters of Minyas. When Dionysus came to Argos, the women refused to be initiated, whereupon they went mad, killed the babes at their breasts and devoured their flesh. The daughters of Proitos wandered in distraction all over the Peloponnese, pursued by the priest Melampous, who was a native of Orchomenos and a kinsman of Minyas; and during the pursuit one of the sisters died. The others were purified by Melampous, the off-scourings being thrown into the River Anigros, and then they recovered their senses.

In another version of the same myth, the deity whom the daughters of Proitos had offended was not Dionysus, but Hera, by whom, we are told, they were transformed into cows. This seems to show, as Nilsson has remarked, that they had something in common with Io. Io was a priestess of Hera at Argos. Zeus fell in love with her, whereupon she was transformed into a cow and put out to pasture in the meadows of Lerna under the keen eyes of an oxherd called Argos. Eventually, after a long pursuit, Zeus restored her to her right shape and mind by a touch of his hand, and by the same touch she conceived a child. According to Æschylus, her union with Zeus took place in Egypt, but this version betrays the influence of the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, and, according to local traditions, her child was born no further afield than Euboia, the isle of "fair oxen."

The myth of Io is clearly founded on a sacred marriage, the
bride being the priestess of Hera, the bridegroom apparently the priest of Zeus in the guise of a bull; for, as Cook points out, the oxherd Argos is *panóptes*, "all-seeing," which was a traditional epithet of Zeus and the sun, and he is described by Apollodoros as wearing a bull’s hide. Further, the keen eyes of Argos and the crescent horns of Io suggest that the marriage was also regarded as a union of sun and moon such as we have already encountered at Olympia. Lastly, an obscure but evidently ancient Argive tradition runs as follows.  

A herdsman named Haliakmon was tending his cattle on Mount Kokkygion when he chanced to see Zeus in the act of embracing Hera. The sight drove him mad, and he threw himself into the River Karmanor, which was thereafter called the Haliakmon. Later, when Zeus ravished Io, he was pursued by her father, Inachos, who struck him from behind and cursed him. For this offence Inachos was driven mad and threw himself into the Haliakmon, which was thereafter called the Inachos. It appears therefore that the marriage of Zeus with Hera or Io was in some way connected with a ritual pursuit and with immersion in the river.

If the sacred marriage underlying the myth of Io was regarded as a union of sun and moon, we may be sure that this aspect was not the original one, but rather a reflection of calendar reforms introduced by the priesthood with advancing astronomical knowledge. And behind this marriage of sun and moon there lies a marriage of bull and cow. What precisely does this mean? In the first place, as Cook has explained, the ceremony consisted of a dance in which, appropriately disguised, the priest and priestess simulated the copulation of cattle. But why did they act in this manner? The conventional answer to this question—that they did so because Zeus and Hera were respectively associated with the bull and the cow—explains nothing and inverts the true relation of myth and ritual. Zeus and Hera were associated with the bull and the cow because their human representatives were accustomed to act in this manner. If the partners in this dance pretended to be a bull and a cow, the reason must be that at a still earlier period they had actually been a bull and a cow. This is a hard saying, but it can be interpreted.
Behind the worship of Hera at Argos there lies the cult of a sacred cow. It is possible that the Hera seen by Haliakmon in the embrace of Zeus was really a cow in the herd he was tending at the time—one of the sacred cows, which was being mounted by the bull. In any case, a cult of this kind must be derived ultimately from the ritual of a totemic clan. These priestesses of Hera were descended from the women of a cow clan, who had expressed their sense of affinity to the sacred animal in the form of the belief that they were cows. As such, they performed a traditional dance in which they promoted the fertility of their herds by means of mimetic magic.

When we meet Hera at the beginning of written literature she is still “cow-faced” (boōpis) and has other vestigial connections with the sacred animal, but she has long assumed a human shape and, in consequence, acquired many new and independent characteristics. Her clan origin is naturally not attested directly; but we have already seen how, when the tribal system disintegrates, clan cults merge into tribal cults, and we are told by Plutarch that in ancient times, when it was still a country of village communities, the district of Megara, to the north of Argos, was inhabited by a people of which one section was called the Heraeis, which means the people of Hera. We may say therefore that our hypothesis is not only necessary in order to explain the internal evidence of myth and ritual, but is in accord with the conclusions to which we have been led by our study of primitive religion.

The same considerations can now be applied to the origins of Dionysus. The thiasoi which we have been studying were variously associated with the vine, the ivy, the fig, the bull, the goat, the snake, the fawn; and we know from the evidence of vase paintings that at least two of these, the ivy and the fawn, were employed as totemic emblems, being tattooed on the arms of the members of the thiasos. Moreover, we are informed by the lexicographer Photius that the verb nebrizo meant alternatively “to wear the fawn skin or to rend and devour the fawn, in imitation of the passion of Dionysus.” These bacchants, who tore and devoured the fawn, were clad in fawn skins and marked with the sign of the fawn. In other words they were fawns, they belonged to a fawn clan—not, it is true, a clan of
the most primitive type, a component unit of the tribe, but a secret society, which, like the secret societies of all primitive peoples, had evolved out of the clan and preserved many of its totemic, magico-economic and initiatory functions.

A remarkable feature of these thiasoi is that, excepting the priest at their head, their membership is confined to women. We hear of a male thiasos, the Meliastai, in Arcadia, and another, the Dionysiastai, in Rhodes, but nothing of consequence is known about them; and at Patrai, on the north coast of the Peloponnese, the god’s cult was in the charge of a sacred college consisting of nine men and nine women. In myth, Dionysus is frequently attended by satyrs as well as bacchants and mænads, but the appearance of satyrs in actual cult is confined to the dramatic festivals, and their association with Dionysus is comparatively late. It appears, therefore, that in the earliest period these Dionysiac cults were for the most part reserved to women. And so in many cases they remained. The Oleiai of Orchomenos were women, and so were the Thyiai of Delphi, the Dionysiades of Sparta, the Dysmainai of Mount Taygetos. Even where the thiasos had broken down and its cult merged in a popular festival, the celebrations seem to have been conducted mainly by women. These festivals are described by Diodoros, writing in the first century B.C.: "Every other year, in many Greek towns, it is the custom for women to gather together in companies of Bacchus, the girls carrying the thyrsus and worshipping the god with wild, ecstatic cries, while the married women sacrifice in groups, indulge in Bacchic revels, and in general sing hymns to Dionysus in imitation of the Mænads, his ancient ministers."

There were, of course, in many Greek states public cults of Dionysus, from which the men were in no way excluded; yet it is clear that one at least of these, and the most widely diffused, had in former times been confined to women. The Attic feast of the Lenaia fell in the month of Gamelion, which had formerly been called Lenaion, after the feast, and we know from inscriptions that there was a month called Lenaion in the calendars of several Ionian states—Smyrna, Ephesos, Lamp-sakos, Samos, Delos, Kyzikos. From this it may be inferred that the Lenaia was an ancient Ionian festival, and its name
is evidently related to Lenai, the "mad women," synonymous with Mainades, Thyiades, Dysmainai, all of which are characteristic designations of the Dionysiac thiasos. The festival itself is only known to us in the form which it had assumed in fifth-century Attica, where the men's part in it was at least as great as the women's. It is clear therefore that in Attica the worship of Dionysus had been modified in consequence of changes in the relations of the sexes. The nature of these changes will be examined when we resume our account of the democratic revolution, but before leaving the subject of Dionysus we must complete our enquiry into mystical religion.
IX

ORPHISM

The religious reforms introduced by Peisistratos were explained in the last chapter but one as an integral part of his general policy. In order to break down the political privileges of the old nobility, he had to weaken their control of religion, which they had used as an instrument of class domination; and this end he achieved by giving official encouragement and support to the cults of those sections of the people whose interests he represented—in particular, the worship of Dionysus. This of course implies that the cults of Dionysus were popular, non-aristocratic—an assumption which has now been confirmed by an examination of their content. They were very ancient—older, in fact, than the god to whose name they were attached—and they consisted of a primitive form of agricultural magic. It was natural that such cults should have survived among the peasantry, who continued to till the soil, rather than among the aristocracy, who had withdrawn from the productive labour of society.

Peisistratos was not the first tyrant to pursue a policy of this kind. Some seventy or eighty years before him, Periandros of Corinth had entertained at his court a poet, Arion, from Methymna in Lesbos, who under his patronage invented the dithyramb, a form of choral ode consecrated to Dionysus; and a generation later Kleisthenes, tyrant of Sikyon, had transferred to Dionysus the chief part of a cult which had previously belonged to the Argive hero Adrastos. At Sikyon, in addition to the three Dorian tribes, there was a fourth, drawn from the pre-Dorian elements which had been subjugated at the time of the Dorian conquest, and it was from this tribe that the tyranny derived its principal support. It is clear therefore that, in substituting Dionysus for the Argive hero of the Dorian aristocracy, Kleisthenes was actuated by the same motives as Peisistratos.
Under the tyranny, the worship of Dionysus was brought to town, and its agrarian character was consequently transformed. The new Athenian festival of the City Dionysia was a product of the urban revolution, in virtue of which it acquired a number of characteristics that mark it off sharply from its ultimate origins in the Attic countryside. These new characteristics will have to be carefully examined, but first of all it is necessary to enquire more closely into the religious aspect of the urban revolution.

During the sixth century B.C., a new cult of Dionysus, which may be conveniently described as Orphism, was disseminated with missionary ardour, not only on the mainland and in the islands, but in the colonies beyond the Adriatic. Before asking what it was and why it spread so far, let us consider where it came from and what route it followed.

The story of Arion is told by Herodotus. After spending a long time at the court of Periandros in Corinth, he emigrated to the west, where he made a lot of money. Desiring to return to Corinth, he hired a Corinthian ship and set sail from Taras in southern Italy. On the voyage the sailors plotted to take his life and steal his money. Arion discovered the plot and implored them to spare his life, but they replied that he must choose between killing himself outright, in which case they would bury him ashore, and leaping overboard. Eventually, anxious to hear a singer of such celebrity, they were prevailed upon to let him sing one last song. Attired in his ritual costume, Arion took up his lyre, sang his song, and then leapt into the sea, where he was carried on the back of a dolphin safe to shore at Cape Tainaron.

This is not history, but myth. Dionysus himself, on vase paintings of the period, is represented sailing the seas on board a ship escorted by dolphins. Orpheus, too, was a celebrated singer whose music charmed the creatures of the wild. Dionysus himself leapt into the sea, as we saw in the last chapter, and the head of Orpheus was thrown into the sea after he had been torn in pieces by the Bacchants. Cape Tainaron, where Arion reappeared after he had been reported dead, was one of the entrances to Hades, and it was there that Orpheus descended to the underworld.
Yet, despite its mythical character, the setting of the story has a historical significance. It is known that Corinth was the first city on the mainland to institute a tyranny, and it was an entrepôt for trade between the Ægean and the west; nor is there any reason to doubt that the dithyramb was introduced there by a poet from Lesbos, where the tyrant Pittakos was probably contemporary with Periandros. Moreover, it was at Lesbos that the head of Orpheus was said to have been thrown up by the sea, the head itself, we are told, being preserved there as a sacred relic; and it was at Methymna in Lesbos, Arion’s native town, that some fishermen were said to have hauled up in their nets a mask of olive wood representing the head of Dionysus. The conclusion to which this evidence points is that the Dionysiac revival originated in Thrace, whence it was carried by trade across the Ægean to Corinth and so to Italy and Sicily.

Its Thracian origin is hardly open to doubt. Thrace had always been a centre of Dionysiac worship. The name of Dionysus has been interpreted by Kretschmer as the Thraco-Phrygian equivalent of Dios kotros, and the myth of Orpheus is securely located in the country round Mount Pangaion in Thrace. It was on Mount Pangaion that both Orpheus and Lykourgos, the mythical king of the Edonoi, met their death. This mountain had other, more mundane, associations. It was equally famous for its gold and silver mines, which at this period were the richest accessible to the Greeks.

The Orphics were already established at Athens in the time of Peisistratos, whose patronage was enjoyed by their leader, Onomakritos, the author of a book called Initiations. The dithyramb was introduced during the same period by Lasos of Hermione, a town in Argos whose inhabitants were of pre-Dorian origin. As we have seen, the dithyramb had long been known at Corinth, and, since early Attic drama bears the marks of Peloponnesian influence, it is possible that Orphism reached Athens from the same quarter; but there was another route open to it, and more direct.

The relation of the Peisistratidai to the mining industry has been elucidated by Ure in his study of the tyranny. In the course of his struggle with Megakles and Lykourgos, Peisistratos
had organised the Hillmen, who were miners of Laurion, the mines being worked mainly at this period by free labour, and it was with their support that he made himself tyrant. As we have seen, he was driven out twice by his opponents before he succeeded in consolidating his position, and he spent his second exile collecting funds at Mount Pangaion in Thrace. After his second restoration he proceeded, in the words of Herodotus, “to root his tyranny with large numbers of mercenaries and with revenues of money gathered partly from the home country and partly from the River Strymon,” which flows under Mount Pangaion through the mining district.

The populations of mining districts in all parts of the world have always been mixed, because local labour is insufficient to meet the demands of an industry that requires so many hands. We know that the population of Laurion was mixed in the fifth century, and we may presume that it was so in the sixth. We also know that, in the time of Hipparchos, there was a large Greek element in the mining population of the Strymon, which doubtless included Attic miners from Laurion. Since the Peisistratidai were associated so closely with both centres, there must have been migration of workers in both directions. Finally, not only was Mount Pangaion and the surrounding district the cradle of Orphism, but not far from Laurion, in the heart of the Attic mining area, was the village of Semachidai, which had a shrine of Dionysus, called the Semacheion, and a local tradition of the coming of the god. Here, then, was an avenue leading straight to Athens from Thrace, and accordingly we may infer that this was at least one of the channels through which the Orphic movement entered Attica.

It would seem therefore that Orphism was carried to Attica, as it had been to Corinth and the west, in the wake of industry and trade. It was an outgrowth of the urban revolution. If so, we should be able to recognise in it the type of religion that these social conditions would naturally produce; but before examining the content of Orphism, we must see whether any more can be said about the composition of the working class in sixth-century Attica.

Down to this period, it is agreed, the slave population had been small. Under an agricultural economy, the demand for