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**ASSOCIATION OF DANCE WITH SACRED RITUALS IN ANCIENT GREECE:
THE CASE OF ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES**

Key words: dance, cult, Eleusinian mysteries, classical antiquity.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to investigate the role of dance in ancient Greek mysteries, particularly, in the Eleusinian mysteries. In classical antiquity, the religious sentiment served as a signal for dancing. The ancient Greeks tried to praise the gods as well as to express their personal sensibility to the Divine through dancing. The dance ritual was essential during the mysteries and it was far from a simple movement of the feet, hands and body. It was an outpouring of mental impulses – a psychic answer to a variety of religious sentiments. Hence, dance served as a means of expressing mental conditions and as a sign of religious faith and devotion through rhythmic movements. In particular, honor and reverence to the gods were expressed with joyful dances, while believers thought that they possessed therapeutic attributes through a sacred mania, lawlessness and extirpation of their inhibitions. The basic principle of the Eleusinian mysteries' ritual was a circle of initiates in the form of a dance. It was a sacred dance leading to perfection and spiritual freedom, which played a very significant role in the believers' initiation in the Eleusinian mysteries and in the process of their reaching mental elevation as well as spiritual freedom.

According to numerous modern scholars, dance is the oldest form of art as well as the oldest way of expressing human sentiments¹. Since the earliest days of man, various forms of dancing have offered the human body the ability to express itself, on the one hand, through movements and gestures; and on the other hand, offered the soul a way to achieve euphoria and jubilation. Across the times and nations, dance was used to express what people

could not tell with words. Thus, through dance the human body was able to communicate messages directly associated with people's life, related to political, social, cultural and religious aspects. Dance, therefore, seems to be an ecumenical and diachronic phenomenon, the history of which is being "intertwined" with the history of mankind².

The reasons that led man to invent dance cannot be accurately specified. They are connected

¹ Bejart M., *Historie de la danse*, Paris 1973, p. 10, in
Udine J., *Qu'est-ce que la danse*, Paris 1921, p. 5.

² Tyrovola V., *The Greek Dance, a different approach*,
Athens 2001, p. 5.

however with man's need to express religious and other sentiments, with the pursuit of beauty, with the mood for entertainment and with man's desire to give rhythm to the movements of his labor³. According to Roubis, "Dance is an expression of the individual's mental condition through rhythmic movements; in other words, dance is the speech of the soul, the result of the harmonious cooperation of physical movements, mental world and rhythmic combinations"⁴. The existence of dance and its evolution over time obey internal impulses and aesthetic requirements born from dance itself⁵.

Walter argues that dance was originally a self-introduction of man and that the so-called cult dances were not held in favour of the gods, but were meant to elevate man to a divine being⁶. "On the one hand, the dancer symbolized man at the disposal of the divine breath, and on the other hand, the spectator who attended the dance was mentally linked with the Divine"⁷. In contrast, Thomson argues that man through dance tried to propitiate all natural phenomena that were above his strength and which he could not understand⁸. Finally, according to Harrison, a very important feature of dance was its imitative nature. Imitation in this case expressed the desire for repetition of the archetypal sacred act⁹.

In general, dances in ancient Greece had a worshiping value; they were directly related to the Dodekathion, and by extension, to all religious rituals¹⁰. The ancient Greeks believed that dance was created by the gods – that is why they associated it with every religious and cultic event¹¹, treating it as a kind of spiritual, divine substance, a gift of immortals to humans as a means of communication with them. Vernant argues that the metaphysical anguish of the Greeks in antiquity

"was healed" through religion which was manifested through the hymns, cultic dances and rituals¹². Indeed, across all the ancient Greek literature, the genesis of dance is identified with the creation of the universe, while its authorship lies with the gods. According to Euripides, "the whole earth dances an interminable dance"¹³, while for Lucian the movements of the stars and the order and harmony between them constitute the sources of inspiration for dance¹⁴. Thus dance was considered a divine and mystic occupation. People honoured their gods by dancing, to their own delight and benefit¹⁵. It is notable that – according to Lucian – "there is no ritual without dance, since Orpheus and Museus, who were the best dancers then, sanctified them (the rituals) and decided by law that the best way for someone to be initiated is by rhythm and dance"¹⁶. These two dancers used to say that they *εξορχούνται*¹⁷ (i.e. dance to the end, imply, indirectly declare) instead of saying that they reveal the mysteries. Furthermore, according to Plato, every human "is a toy excogitated by god"¹⁸ and he must "live by playing, sacrificing, singing and dancing in order to prepossess the gods in his favor"¹⁹.

As for the ritual dance in (classical) antiquity, it must be considered a form of imitation that had religious and moral purposes: The ancient Greeks did not separate their daily life from spiritual life, effort from singing, song from god (or goddess) and god from dance²⁰. This explains the fact that both major and minor deities during this period were honored by some kind of ritual dance²¹. In general, the ancient Greeks had a strong sense of the sacred and the Divine, and their religious perception was full of fear of the gods²². Therefore they sought good relations with them – something that justifies the conduct of both public and simple

³ Tsilimigra K., *The Dance*, Athens 1983, p. 23.

⁴ Roubis G.A., *Greek Dances*, Athens 1933, p. 13.

⁵ Prudhommenau G., *Dance in History*, Athens 1965, p. 20.

⁶ Walter F.O., *Menschengestalt und Tanz*, Munchen 1956, p. 16.

⁷ Lambropoulou V., *On the Nature: Dance & Harmony*, Athens 1999, p. 24.

⁸ Thomson G., *Die Ersten Philosophen*, Berlin 1980, p. 12.

⁹ Harrison J.H., *Sacred Rites & Ancient Art*, Athens 1995, p. 83.

¹⁰ Mouratidou K. et al., *Dance as a basic feature of culture and as a means of education in ancient Greece*, *Studies of Physical Culture & Tourism*, 2003, p. 29.

¹¹ Bousiotis A., *The Dance*, Athens 1983, p. 14.

¹² Vernant J.P., *The Greeks*, Chicago 1995, pp. 254-283.

¹³ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 114.

¹⁴ Lucian, *Peri Orchiseos*, 1-21.

¹⁵ Lucian, *Peri Orchiseos*, 23.

¹⁶ Lucian, *Peri Orchiseos*, 167.

¹⁷ Lucian, *Peri Orchiseos*, 15-16.

¹⁸ Plato, *Laws*, 803c.

¹⁹ Plato, *Laws*, 803e.

²⁰ Lambropoulou V., *On the Nature: Dance & Harmony*, Athens 1999, p. 56.

²¹ Lawrel L.B., *Dance in Ancient Greece*, Athens 1984, pp. 45-48.

²² Maffre J.J., *Life in Classical Greece*, Athens, p. 107.

personal rites²³. Under these rites – and together with the sacrifices, processions and games – the Greeks also included dances believing that in this way they come closer to the gods. Furthermore, this convention explains the *αἰδήμων* (*pudic*) fear caused by the approach of any force and supernatural being²⁴.

The ritual-religious dance was performed in mysteries and in various rites and helped eminently in the initiation of believers to the secrets of the gods and to the mental and physical contact with the Divine²⁵. The ancient Greek mystics learned the tradition and the religious rituals of the tribe through dancing²⁶. One such rite which had a strong social appeal to the Greeks was that of accession to manhood²⁷. This particular rite took place in adolescence and had a mystic character, as it initiated young individuals to the sacred principles of the tribe²⁸. It was essentially a high form of collective worship, which is chronologically placed in the age of Theogony²⁹.

According to Douka, the believers' initiation to the mysteries and rituals was carried out through rhythm and dance. Douka includes in her work literary evidence regarding the conduct of sacrifices accompanied by dancing and music. This close relationship of dance with the mysteries and the gods provides a justification to those who accused dance to be hubristic. Moreover, it was commonplace to combine cultic dances with nature and with the invocation to increase fertility³⁰.

Once people became able to conceptualize the mighty gods and their transcendental world, they sought their help through the mysteries. Thus,

the conceptualization of gods, spirits and the transcendent world beyond man's sensory capabilities formed the precondition for the existence of the mysteries³¹. Probably for this reason, the mysteries occur in highly developed cultures. In particular, the ancient Greeks seem to be those who – in the entire period of their history – showed a great interest in mystic religious rites, introducing the believers in the so-called "mysteries" with the aid of dance. Some of these mysteries dealt with fertility, while others communicated secret information to the initiates on how to ensure a happy life after death³². The mysteries in general were probably the highest form of spiritual heritage of ancient Greece. They were mainly secret cults, in which one should perform a particular ritual in order to be initiated. During the rites, a particular emphasis was placed on man's mental elevation, the aim of which was man's spiritual fulfillment and perfection through lustration and purification to possess – through man's soul – love and spiritual freedom³³. A determinative role in this process was played, as mentioned above, by dance and music. Specifically, the mysteries consisted of four elements: the secret, the sacrifice, mimetic representations, and announcements of sacred orations about immortality. A basic principle in performing the mysteries was the circle of the initiates³⁴.

The word *μυστήριον*³⁵ (*musterio* = mystery) meant the private, secret and unspoken part of a ritual or worship, which was not open to uninitiated individuals. As shown etymologically, the word derives from the verb *μυεῖν*³⁶ (*muen* = initiate), which meant *close*, and refers mainly to the eyes and lips. Those who were initiated in the mysteries of the transcendent were forbidden to communicate them to other uninitiated people. In this sense, they kept – on a symbolic level – their eyes and mouth closed; in other words, when they were asked what they saw and what they heard, they behaved like mute and blind men. The chorus in *Bacchae* says:

²³ Ibid., p. 108.

²⁴ Flaceliere R., *Public & Private Life of the Ancient Greeks*, Athens 1990, p. 235.

²⁵ Mouratidou K. et al., *Dance as a basic feature of Culture and as a means of education in Ancient Greece*, *Studies of Physical Culture & Tourism*, 2003, p. 29.

²⁶ Calame C., *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece*, London 1977, p. 13.

²⁷ Harrison J.H., *Sacred Rites & Ancient Art*, Athens 1995, p. 83.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Yannakis Th., *Prehistory of Gymnastics*, Athens 1977, p. 22.

³⁰ Duka S., Kaimakamis D., *The art of Dance in Ancient Greece through the ancient philosophers' and historians' testimony*, *Sports History and Philosophy*, *Annual Scientific Magazine*, v. B, Thessaloniki 2006, p. 79-94.

³¹ Flaceliere R., *Public and Private Life of the Ancient Greeks*, Athens 1990, p. 235.

³² Lawler L.B., *Dance in Ancient Greece*, Athens 1984, p. 98.

³³ Burkert W., *Ancient Greek Religion*, Athens 1993, pp. 562-565.

³⁴ Harrison J.E., *Sacred Rites and Ancient Art*, Athens 1995, pp. 25-35.

³⁵ Lidell & Scott, headword. *Μυστήριον* (*mystery*).

³⁶ Ibid., headword. *Μυώ* (*initiate*).

“Seal your lips, holy silence everywhere, I will sing the hymn to Dionysus, the hymn of the ancient ritual”³⁷. Man was becoming perfect through mysteries: he could access the divine wisdom.

The initiation rites in Greek antiquity consisted of preliminary purification rites and public preparatory sacrifices, which were followed by songs, dances and processions, and finally the initiation itself. In the procedure of initiation into the mysteries the ancient Greeks used a kind of divine drama, “enrolling” simulated images of the deity, trying to place man in touch with his divine authority³⁸. With the help of these rituals, believers were moving to a higher level of perception, were spiritually and mentally elevated, and communicated with the divine spark hidden inside them, the so-called “δαμόνιο”³⁹ (daemon). The whole process was the initiation, namely the broadening of consciousness and the approach of the divine aspect that man hides inside⁴⁰. A follower of this cult was called *Μύστης* (Mystic) and a person who was introducing him to the cult was called *Μυσταγωγός* (Initiator)⁴¹. It should be noted here that every mystic community featured common meals, dances and rituals, where those who joined the same dance and participated in the same proceedings felt united forever⁴².

It seems therefore that dance was an integral part of the mysteries. The mystic dance was sacred; it was a prayer and a ritual; it was perfection. A “τετέλεσται” (tetelestai) called out the mystic that had been initiated and performed the dance and through it the gods had been revealed to him. The space around the altar was being purified by symbolic steps and movements performed by a circle of dancers. Characteristic are the words of the heroine in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, who says: “near the altar, we will set up a dance around”⁴³. The dance was a way for someone to pray, to unite with the

Divine and to be purified. Through dance people were completed as well as mentally and physically perfected in order to purify themselves and be united with the Divine, conquering spiritual freedom⁴⁴.

In ancient times there were several local mysteries in Greece, but also mysteries that gained nationwide coverage, in which dance played an important role in believers’ initiation. The most important ones included the Cretan, the mysteries of the great goddess Rhea, the Corybantic and the Labyrinthic. The last ones took place in prehistoric Greece, but had a significant impact on the mysteries of classical antiquity including the Eleusinian mysteries.

In our days, the mysteries of Eleusis – despite their secrecy – constitute the best documented Greek worship. For nearly a millennium, this cult gave consolation and happiness and revolved around a female deity, who very early attracted popular attention⁴⁵, i.e. ancient *Γαία* (Gaia), who over the centuries was named *Δήμητρα* (Demeter), which probably means *Γημήτηρ* (Earth-mother). Demeter herself as the goddess of agriculture and thus related to the turnover from sowing to harvest, was worshipped by all agricultural Hellenist populations⁴⁶. Moreover, Demeter was the one who gave people two great gifts: wheat for food and the Mysteries for hope of eternal life⁴⁷.

According to Euripides⁴⁸, apart from Demeter, a leading figure in the Eleusinian mysteries was her daughter *Περσεφόνη* (Persephone) who eminently represented the spirit of vegetation by disappearing from the earth’s surface and returning to it after a specified time spent in the Underworld⁴⁹. A relief from the classical period (Fig. 1) depicts the two great goddesses of Eleusis in a mystical rite. Demeter is standing on the left, staid, with the heavy Doric veil, holding a scepter in her left hand. She is holding gold wheatears in her right hand, delivering

³⁷ Euripides, *Bacchae*, p. 69-72.

³⁸ Fraceliere R., *Public and Private Life of the Ancient Greeks*, Athens 1990, p. 241.

³⁹ Jeanmaire H., *Dionysus, The History of Bacchus’ Cult*, Athens 1985, p. 244.

⁴⁰ Burkert W., *Ancient Greek Religion*, Athens 1993, pp. 533-536.

⁴¹ Lidell & Scott. headword. *μύστης, μυσταγωγός* (mystic, initiator), Burkert W., *Ancient Greek Religion*, Athens 1993, p. 562.

⁴² Harrison J.E., *Sacred Rites and Ancient Art*, Athens 1995, pp. 115-116.

⁴³ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 676.

⁴⁴ Lambroulou V., *On the Nature: Dance & Harmony*, Athens 1999, p. 80.

⁴⁵ Burkert W., *Ancient Greek Religion*, Athens 1993, p. 581.

⁴⁶ Lawler L.B., *Dance in Ancient Greece*, Athens 1984, pp. 100-101.

⁴⁷ Nilsson M.P., *Greek Folk Religion*, Athens 1979, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Euripides, *Iketides*, 173.

⁴⁹ Fraceliere R., *Public and Private Life of the Ancient Greeks*, Athens 1990, p. 260.

them to young Τριπτόλεμο (Triptolemus) – an example of mystic to spread their cultivation in the world. On the right, Persephone, cute, with a gentle Ionic chiton and a cloak, is probably also holding wheatears over the head of Triptolemus in the one hand, a large lit torch in the other⁵⁰.



Figure 1. Demeter, Triptolemus and Persephone. Relief. c. 440-430 B.C., Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 126

As mentioned above, Demeter and Persephone were the deities of vegetation and were considered goddesses of the fruit and of the dead, respectively. As such, they enjoyed corresponding rites with dances and songs regarding birth and death⁵¹.

There were many feasts in honor of Demeter and Persephone. Some were held in the spring – a time when believers thought that the daughter was ascending from Hades – and others in the autumn,

⁵⁰ Kakrides I.Th., *Greek Mythology*, v. B, Athens 1986, p. 131.

⁵¹ Kakrides I.Th., *Greek Mythology*, v. B, Athens 1986, p. 130.

and were related to the travel of the seed into the ground, where it lived and grew up until next spring when it came to light – like Persephone who left Demeter to live in the underworld and rejoin her every spring⁵². In those feasts a special feature was the performance of dances by female dancers who through their movements were representing the various phases of the mother's quest for her daughter.

Furthermore, the women taking part in Θεσμοφορία (Thesmophoria)⁵³, which was the most popular festival in honor of Demeter, danced lively dances in the countryside as a form of invocation to the goddess for fertility of nature and mankind⁵⁴. Such a rite is described by Aristophanes in his work Θεσμοφοριάζουσες (*Thesmophoriazousae*). He calls the dances όργια (orgies), a word implying secrecy and mysticism. Their rhythm was alternant as they are originally described as lively and fast in a circular shape and then as quiet and sedate. The slow rhythm of the dances was associated with the dancers' invocation of various deities. Once this invocation ended the dances acquired their fast rhythm again, as the dancers were dancing in a double line⁵⁵.

Major religious rites in honor of Demeter and her daughter were, however, the Eleusinian mysteries. Although – as shown in the *Hymn to Demeter* – the goddess forbade the transmission of her secrets to the rest of the world⁵⁶, several bibliographic references about the ritual of the mysteries have survived. Today we know that the Eleusinian mysteries were eminently a rite held every September, about one month before the Thesmophoria, to honor the emergence of the daughter from Hades. They lasted for nine days⁵⁷, aiming at the communication of the believers with Demeter and Persephone and the initiation of the mystics to the 4 “ultimate secret of eternal life4”⁵⁸. The Eleusinian mysteries were open to all Greeks, even to slaves if they spoke the Greek language.

⁵² Lawler L.B., *Dance in Ancient Greece*, Athens 1984, pp. 99-100.

⁵³ Simon, E., *The gods of the Ancient Greeks*, Thessaloniki 1996, p. 97.

⁵⁴ Hesychius, *Lexicon*, p. 38.

⁵⁵ Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae*, p. 947-1000.

⁵⁶ Homer, *Hymn to Demeter*, v. 460ff.

⁵⁷ Plutarch, *Demosthenes*, 26, Homer, *Hymn to Demeter*, 1282, Pausanias, I, 36.

⁵⁸ Raftis A., *Dance and Ancient Greece*, Athens 1992, p. 64.

Barbarians and those who committed various crimes and sacrilegious acts were excluded⁵⁹. The schedule of the ritual provided the transition of the priests of Eleusis to Athens, a blessing of the city by the priestesses of Demeter and the return of the priests on the Sacred Way to Eleusis again, with an entourage of mystics, who walked throughout the entire course⁶⁰.

More specifically, during the Eleusinian mysteries, the initiated sacrificed a *δέλφακα* (pig) and with the waters of the river *Ἰλισσός* (Ilissus) were cleaned of the impurities by a special priest called *Υδρανός*⁶¹ (Hydranos, the Baptist). Then a great oath of the newly-initiated followed in front of the holy Eumolpides “Hierophant” of the Eleusinian Demeter, as well as their indoctrination by the latter, necessary for the preparation of the mystics for the so-called Great Eleusinian (*Ἐποπτεία-Ἐροπτεία* = supervision). In the end, the initiated were enthroned and the priests were performing a ritual dance around them, as a mark of acceptance to the first initiation circle⁶².

The first day of the initiation was called *Ἀγυρμός* (*Agyrmos*), i.e. the gathering, and it was completed by the arrival of candidate initiates to the Sanctum of Eleusis. The second day was called *Ἀλαδαί Μύσται* (*to the sea mystics*) and ended with the procession to the sea and purification in its waters. On the third day, there was absolute fasting and the administration of the famous drink of *κυκεώνα* (*kikeona*) began. The fasting ended that same night with some “sacred food” given to the initiates through a “Secret Cyst”⁶³. On the fourth day, offerings were given to the deities of Eleusis and hieratic circular dances were performed. On the fifth day, the “*Λαμπαδηφορία*” (torch race), the initiates with torches⁶⁴ in hand, formed a silent procession led by the *Δαδούχο* (torch bearer) priest and entered the temple of Demeter. With the entrance of the procession into the Eleusinian territory, the religious enthusiasm of the mystics

increased, but they were filled with inner fear of what would follow thereafter⁶⁵.

On the sixth day, a great procession was held called *Ἰακχος* (*Iacchus*) devoted to cultic acts in honor of the theopaida (son of god) Iacchus with carrying his statue (wreathed with myrtle as a sign of mourning) and sacred objects (Likmos, Kalathos, Phallus) from Cerameicus to Eleusis along the “Sacred Way”. Strabo mentions that “*Iacchus* was called Dionysus and was the spirit (daemon) leading the mysteries of Demeter”⁶⁶. Dance was also an integral part in this rite, given the fact that the number of the mystics holding the torches were dancing and singing⁶⁷. During the course, the procession stopped to make sacrifices, give offerings, sing hymns and dance in front of temples associated with Demeter. The movements of the believers were repeated in order to reach ecstasy, while the constant invocation of the name of Iacchus gave rhythm to them⁶⁸.

The night on the seventh day was called *Ἱερά Νυξ* (Holy Night) and launched the Great Initiation. It is supposed that the mystics spent the night in the outer courtyard of the temple, dancing and rendering glorifying hymns in honor of the goddess. Aristophanes calls this night *παννυχίδα*⁶⁹ (*pannychis* – something that lasts all night), since the religious rite was an all-night festive vigil accompanied with dancing and singing⁷⁰. Awe and admiration prevailed in all the mystics before the closed gates of revelation of the divine vision⁷¹. As they danced, they begged the goddess to make them able to open those gates and penetrate into other levels of existence; to experience the divine presence and identify with it. Aristophanes referring to a beautiful dance performed in the evening in the plains of the world of the dead by mystics initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, writes: “The mystics are dancing and celebrating on a meadow full of flowers”⁷².

The initiation was completed on the ninth day with the divine revelation providing the mystics

⁵⁹ Kourtidou K., *Ancient Greek Mysteries*, Athens 1998, p. 157, Burkert W., *Ancient Greek Religion*, Athens 1993, p. 581.

⁶⁰ Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 22.

⁶¹ Homer, *Hymn to Demeter*, 476ff

⁶² Sietos G., *The Eleusinian Mysteries*, Athens 1995, p. 4.

⁶³ Fraceliere R., *Public and Private Life of the Ancient Greeks*, Athens 1990, p. 262.

⁶⁴ Aristophanes, *Frogs*, pp. 313-314.

⁶⁵ Raftis A., *Dance and Ancient Greece*, Athens 1992, p. 61.

⁶⁶ Strabo, 3, 11.

⁶⁷ Kourtidou K., *Ancient Greek Mysteries*, Athens 1998, p. 135.

⁶⁸ Burkert W., *Ancient Greek Religion*, Athens 1993, p. 583.

⁶⁹ Lidell & Scott, headword: *παννυχίδα*.

⁷⁰ Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 371.

⁷¹ Raftis A., *Dance and Ancient*, Athens 1992, p. 65.

⁷² Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 440-459, 753.

with a pass to eternal life⁷³. Then, they entered the Telesterion (initiation hall), led by the hierophant and the torch bearer, with endless courses in the darkness, without any specific direction⁷⁴. At the end of the celebrations, the initiates were enthroned and the priests performed a ritual dance around them. The next day of the Epopeteia and final day of the Mysteries, libations were made inside the holy shrine to honor the dead, followed by events with songs and dances and then the statue of Iacchus was returned to Athens, again accompanied by a procession⁷⁵.

From the few testimonies that can be considered reliable and from some art figures, all modern researchers have concluded that what was happening in the Eleusinian mysteries were events which were dramatic depictions of the myth of Demeter and Daughter⁷⁶. During the rite there was an intense succession of darkness and light. Thus, the mystics were able to see gloomy Hades, with the sufferings and tribulations of those who were not initiated into the mysteries and suddenly they were illuminated, and in front of their eyes appeared the Champs Elysees ablaze, with the initiates dancing in the Mysteries of the Goddess⁷⁷. Others believe that the events were not a drama in the normal sense of the term, but simple elements of drama, in fact, devoid of dialogues and performed as pantomimes⁷⁸. Lucian claims that the initiation “with rhythm and dance”, was an impressive experience⁷⁹, so during the initiation, some of “the secrets were inevitably revealed in the form of a choreodrama”⁸⁰.

But what was really happening inside the Telesterium under the light of torches, what was the symbolism of the various happenings, events and utterances, how was the initiation accomplished, in which way they communicated the belief that a better life awaited the initiates in Hades⁸¹ are

questions put under much discussion that have not been definitely concluded. The content of the rites remains to this day an unsolved mystery, as the participants maintained absolute secrecy. However, the mere attendance in the ritual of the Eleusinian mysteries (as well as other ones) highlights the important role of dance in the initiation, purification and spiritual elevation of the believers.

In conclusion, as shown by the evidence, dance became an integral part of the mystic process in all the rites of ancient Greece. Especially in the Eleusinian mysteries, which were the benchmark in religious beliefs like no other mystery of classical Hellenism. Dance was used in them as a form of ritual and direct communication with the gods – on the one hand, by acting in the ethos of the people, by moderating passions and desires – and on the other hand, by influencing the illogical part of the soul, when it was subjected to disturbances, i.e. as a therapy.

⁷³ Raftis A., *Dance and Ancient Greece*, Athens 1992, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁴ Plutarch, *On the Soul*, 6, 4.

⁷⁵ Kourtidou K., *Ancient Greek Mysteries*, Athens 1998, pp. 136-137.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-148.

⁷⁷ Foucart P., *Les Mystères de Eleusis*, Paris 1914, p. 77.

⁷⁸ Burkert W., *Ancient Greek Religion*, Athens 1993, pp. 585-587.

⁷⁹ Lucian, *Peri Orchiseos*, 10.

⁸⁰ Lawler L.B., *Dance in Ancient Greece*, Athens 1984, p. 101.

⁸¹ Homer, *Hymn to Demeter*, 480 ff, Plato, *Phaidon*, 69c.