Abstract:
The ancient Mystery mythological tradition links northern mainland Greece and the islands of Samothrace and Lemnos with Troy, Persia, Boeotian Thebes, Egypt, Crete, Etruscan Italy, the Peloponnesus, Athens, and the sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at the Attic village of Eleusis. Common to this wide geographical matrix is the role of a psychoactive mushroom as a shamanic sacrament affording access to mystical experience. The Greek Homeric tradition knew of the plant as the Homeric moly, [h]omomi, and the haoma sacrament of the Zoroastrian Magi priests and the warrior brotherhood of Mithraism. This was expressed as a zoomorphic anthropomorphism in the figure of the Gorgon Queen Medusa, and the bovine and taurine metaphors for the Amanita muscaria mushroom. The role of Perseus, as the father of Perses, the eponymous ancestor of the Persians, and of Medea, as mother of Medos, the eponymous ancestor of the Persian tribal group of the Medes, is central to assimilation of the Persian sacrament into Hellenic traditions. Medea is an adjectival version of the same linguistic root that appears in the verbal participle Medusa and the noun Metis, signifying female empowerment though expertise in medicinal and sacred drugs, a wisdom assumed by the goddess Athena as a deification of Sophia. This fungal sacrament figured in the various Mystery cults of the Anatolian Goddess and her male attendant, and in the antithetical relationship of the gods Apollo and Dionysus.

KEY WORDS: Dionysus Cult, mushroom, Dionysus, haoma, Apollo, Medea, Perseus, ergot
The goddess Demeter absented herself from the marriage feast both at Thebes and Samothrace for her sexual liaison with Iasion, the elder brother of Dardanus. Although Iasion was destroyed by the thunderbolt of Zeus, their two or three sons became figures in the traditions of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In Homer, the Thracians are allies of Priam of Troy. The exclusion of the goddess Eris or ‘Discord’ from the marriage feast was the first cause of the Trojan War. She threw the Golden Apple into the midst of the celebration, marked ‘for the fairest,’ which led to the Judgment of Paris and the abduction of Helen. Eris is a name that puns on Eros (‘Love’) as its antonym. This ‘apple’ came from the tree in the Garden of the Hesperides, and was no ordinary apple. In addition, the Mystery creatures called the (African) Kabeiroi are found both in Samothrace and Boeotia, and elsewhere in Greece and the islands. The Thracian Orpheus was also a resident of Boeotian Thebes. (Fig-1)

![Thracian Lycurgus, with maenad and Erinys summoned by Dionysus (Apulian red-figure vase, ca. 330 BCE, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich).](source)

The Halcyon Lake Mystery was a version of the Demeter-Persephone Mystery, and one of the hereditary priesthoods of the great Eleusinian Mystery celebrated for the two holy goddesses just eleven miles west of Athens claimed descent from the Thracian Eumolpus, who founded the present Bulgarian city of Plodiv (Philippopolis) sometime around the latter second millennium BCE. Musaeus, the purported teacher (or son) of Orpheus, was called a citizen of Athens by Euripides and had a supposed tomb in the city on the Hill of the Muses.

Similarly, the traditions about Hermes and his role in the Mystery of Samothrace unite the central highlands of Peloponnesian Arcadia and the slopes of Mount Ida of the Trojan King Laomedon. Arcadia was claimed as the original homeland of the Samothracian Dardanus and his brother Iasion, who had the unfortunate liaison with Demeter. Troy and Arcadia are similarly linked in the traditions about the Etruscans, who passed through Samos and Samothrace en route to Etruria (Tuscany). Evander, who supposedly brought the alphabet to Italy, like the Phoenician Cadmus at Thebes, was originally from Arcadia, and the penates that the Trojan Aeneas brought with him from Argos; and Orpheus attempted to retrieve his bride Eurydice from the cave at Taenarum (Cape Matapan) at the southern tip of Peloponnesian Mount Taygetos, beside Sparta’s harbor at Gytheion. (Fig-2)

![Cadmus and the serpent at Thebes (calix-krater from Paestum, ca. 360-340 BCE, Louvre, Paris).](source)
the burning city for the founding of Rome were supposedly originally from Arcadia. Arcadia was the traditional homeland of Pan, a goat deity, like a satyr, who figured in the Roman Mystery of the Bona Dea. In Vergil, the ancestral homeland of Dardanus was Italy.

These events were assigned generally to the generation before the Trojan War, which would broadly be the latter second millennium BCE, which was dominated by the events supposedly following the re-inhabitation of the earth after the Great Flood of Deucalion. The major events of this period that occupied the heroes of the generation before the Trojan War were the great Calydonian Boar Hunt and the tale of Medea and Jason and the sailing of the Argonauts. The Arcadian maiden Atalanta played a major role in the Calydonian Boar Hunt, being the first, although a female, to wound the animal, and by some accounts she sailed as the only woman among the Argonauts. She lost the footrace with her intended suitor Hippomenes because of the ruse of the Golden Apples from the Hesperid Garden, and the voyage of the ship Argo involved the Golden Fleece as an analogue of these same magical apples. Medea healed Atalanta of a wound received in the battle at Colchis. Roughly in this generation also, Theseus of Athens confronted the Minotaur in the labyrinth of Cretan Knossos. Medea was also a figure in the events of that tale, being the niece of Pasiphaë, the mother (disguised as a cow) of the bull-man, the Minotaur, and the stepmother of Theseus. Thus, these traditions also involve Mycenaean Crete and correspond to the patriarchal imposition or assimilation of Mycenaean Greek traditions with the mother goddess worship of the pre-Greek people, encompassed by the term Pelasgians or other names. Thus, it was sometimes in Crete that Demeter had her liaison with Iasion, and the Trojan Mount Ida is homonymous with the Cretan Ida, where the cave of the goddess in Minoan times was rededicated as the birthplace of the Mycenaean Greek god Zeus. Both Crete and Troy were strongholds of the pre-Olympian persona of Apollo. Both the Cretan Idaean Cave and the one on Mount Dicte were sites for Mystery initiations. The mythical labors of Heracles represent the reorientation of the various sacred sites dedicated to the goddess, rededicating them to the deities of the patriarchal family of the Olympian deities. The same motif occurs with Apollo at Delphi, where the deity slew the Python and reoriented the prophetic shamanism practiced in the Corycian Wolf Cave on Mount Parnassos, above the later Temple complex of the Pythoness oracle.

Medea, Medusa, Metis, Kreousa

Medea was the prototypic sorceress of antiquity, and Jason (Iason) has the same name as Demeter’s Iasion (Iasos), formed from the homonymous root (ios) for ‘arrow’ and ‘toxin,’ which yields also the word for ‘doctor’ or ‘druggist’ (iatros). Medea is an adjectival version of the same name that occurs as the verbal adjective or participle Medusa and as the noun Metis, indicating ‘empowerment through knowledge,’ specifically pharmaceutical expertise, the origin of the word ‘medicine.’ Kreousa (Creusa), the Athenian mother of Apollo’s son Ion, the eponym of the Ionian Greeks, has the same meaning as Medusa (Medousa), similarly a verbal participle indicating a female ruler with a different, equivalent verb. In Plato’s Symposium, Metis is the mother of Poros, ‘creative ingenuity.’ The Medea mythical configuration is central to the transition to patriarchal dominance and was operative already two generations before Theseus, the mid second millennium BCE. Medea remained young throughout this whole period, and there is no tradition of her
ever aging or dying. (Fig-3)

Medea, who was a refugee from her native city of Peloponnesian Corinth, was the mother of Medos, the eponymous founder of the Persian tribe of the Medes, who were replaced by the Achaemenid dynasty of Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes. Similarly, Perseus of Peloponnesian Mycenae was cited as the father of the eponymous ancestor of the Persians, the generic name comprising their various tribal groups.

Perseus, a descendant of the cow maiden Io of Argos who was abducted to Africa eight generations earlier by Zeus (early second millennium BCE), was the hero who decapitated the Gorgon Medusa. The exploit was clearly the harvesting of a special fruit or plant. The implement employed was a pruning hook (harpe), not a sword or weapon of warfare, but an agricultural tool; and Perseus placed the harvested head in a fruit-picker’s sack, the kibisis, so depicted frequently in vase paintings, slung over his arm, with the top spread open, ready to catch the plucked fruits. The Medusa was pregnant at the time of her harvesting, and she birthed the flying horse Pegasus, named for the fountains of magically toxic waters that flowed wherever he touched earth. The cow maiden Io has a name derived from the same homonymous root for ‘arrow toxin,’ and as Perseus flew over Africa, the drops of blood that fell from the severed head of the Medusa were cited as the origin of all the toxic serpents of Africa. It was presumably on that flight that Perseus planted the first sacred Egyptian perse tree in Memphis in Lower Egypt at the upper mouth of the Nile delta, in commemoration of his African ancestry. Serpents and toxic plants are interchangeable as a motif, each thought to derive their toxicity from proximity or ingestion of the other. Thus, the Medusa, no less than her namesakes Metis and Medea, displays the motif of pharmaceutical expertise. Io’s African child, Epaphos, the ancestor of Perseus, was a dactyl, an analogue of the Kabeiroi creatures of the Mystery religion. (Fig-4)

The paramount drug in the pharmaceutical sorcery of Medea, with which she anointed Jason, named for this empowering anointment with the ‘arrow toxin’ was the herb of Prometheus, sprouting from the drops of divine fluid that fell from his divinatory liver, the organ that reflected the cosmos, as read or interpreted by the haruspex. The origin of the toxin that sprouted as the Promethean herb was the ‘fire’ that Prometheus stole as a plant
from the celestial gods and implanted as the spiritual force in the creatures he molded from earth as the primordial race of men.

Perseus' decapitation of the Medusa head is depicted on a fourth-century BCE vase as analogous to his harvest of a golden apple from the Tree tended by Prometheus' brother Atlas in the Garden of the Hesperides. These are the same 'apples' as the ones that figured in the marriage feast of Cadmus, the Judgment of Paris, and the footrace of Atalanta. The Gorgon head and the golden apple are annotated in the vase painting as mushrooms. This identification of the Medusa as a zoomorphism of the mushroom is further substantiated by the tradition that Perseus performed the task at Mycenae by plucking a mushroom, thereby renaming the citadel, punning from the Etruscan 'Mekonae ('Poppy-town') to Mykenae ('Mushroom-town'). Eta and upsilon are dialectal equivalents and became homonymous by the Hellenistic time. Similarly, Medea's Promethean herb was identified as a mushroom by the riddling metaphor of a plant with a double or twin stem, growing like a dumbbell with a stipe pushing in two directions, separating the fungal ovum from the cap. The twin stem is also a riddle identifying the Dioskouroi or Gemini as versions of the Kabeiroi creatures of the Mystery. The Promethean herb is identified by a metaphoric name of the mushroom as 'eagle's fare.' That the plant is a mushroom is further substantiated by the tradition that the first race of humans, which would be the creatures of Prometheus, sprouted from earth at Corinth as mushrooms after the fall of rain. The Dioskouroi could be depicted by the same aniconic dumbbell configuration. The Gorgon Medusa is a former identity of the Olympian goddess Athena. Again, a mushroom is implicated. For her conception, Zeus ingested her mother Metis (Medusa, Medea) when she metamorphosed into a fly.

In the Aeneid, Vergil was required to include an arcane item of historical lore. The sign that the Trojan Aeneas had reached the site for the new Roman nation would be the fulfillment of a curse, that his troop would be driven to such extreme of hunger that they would eat their tables. This foundational myth, probably Etruscan in origin, involves the folkloric metaphor of the mushroom as a table.

Haoma, [H]omomi, Moly

The role of Medea and Perseus as parents of eponymous ancestors of the Medes and Persians represents an assimilation of the Zoroastrian haoma cult of the Persians. The Greeks knew of this plant as [h]omomi, which appears in the Homeric tradition as the moly that Hermes entrusts to Odysseus to counter the grievous potion of the sorceress Circe, the aunt of Medea. Haoma is the Avestan Persian version of the Vedic Indian Soma. R. Gordon Wasson proposed that the original identity of this plant god was the Amanita muscaria or fly-agaric mushroom. This identity as its species is substantiated by the Classical evidence. Its association with flies occurs in the metamorphosis of Metis. The Amanita muscaria, moreover, grows in mycorrhizal symbiosis with the roots of its host tree like a fruit. Thus, its identification as the golden apple, melon. This word in Greek is homonymous with 'fleece.' Thus, it also occurs as the Golden Fleece hung on the tree in Medea’s garden in Colchis in the Caucasian kingdom of Iberia at the far eastern shore of the Black Sea, the object of Jason’s quest as a hero. (Fig-5)

It is significant that several Vedic deities throughout the orient are depicted with the Soma cup. This is always depicted as a skull cup (an inverted cranium), sometimes with a tree growing from it. Herodotus reported the use of such skull
cups among the Scythian tribes, the wealthier lining the interior with gold.

Traditionally, the skull cup of Soma was painted red on its interior, making it a likeness of the *Amanita muscaria* with its fully expanded red cap inverting into a cup or chalice, containing an exudate of honey dew. Inverted, the skull cup became the Christian clerical red skullcap called the zucchetto or ‘little pumpkin.’ In French *potiron* means both ‘pumpkin’ and any large mushroom, since mushrooms were considered akin to gourds. The Gorgon head that *Perseus* harvested was the original version of the skull cup. The skullcap symbolized the dome of heaven. Its Jewish version is the kippah (Yiddish yarmulke). Its analogue in Islam is the *taqiyyah*, which derives from the Persian word for ‘arch.’ The Greek god Hephaestus wore such a magical skullcap of the same symbolism, as the architect of the dome of heaven, forged in bronze by his Mystery rite henchmen in the alchemical caldera of his volcano. He also served the deifying drink of nectar at the feasts of the Olympians, being thus an analogue of Ganymede. The wearing of a head covering in sacred space by women was imposed by patriarchal tradition as an obscuring of their sexual allure and taken as a sign of their modesty, and this interpretation was extended to men as well, although the original symbolism of headgear for both men and women was its affinity to deity as a sign of empowerment. Thus, a crown as a solar circlet is hardly a sign of deference and modesty, and it is customary to doff one’s hat as a gesture of respect to a superior authority.

The Gorgons could be depicted with pumpkin pots for heads. In Vedic tradition, its analogue is the decapitated head of Makha, which was commemorated in the ceramic *mahavira* vessel. The clay for its ritual firing in the kiln contained the earliest surrogate for the Soma as a mushroom, not psychoactive, but symbolic of the transcendence from putrid corporeal decay to spiritual fragrance. The deities with the skull cup of Soma often hold a parasol, not operable, but miniscule as a symbol. As something sacred, the mushroom has no word designating it, only metaphors. ‘Parasol’ is one of its designations. In Greek lore, the mushroom was anthropomorphized as a tribe of eastern peoples, with a single broad foot that they used as a sunshade to rest after their vigorous dancing.

Although often seen as a foreigner to Greece, *Medea* was a refugee from her native city of Peloponnesian Corinth, where Jason abandoned her to marry the local princess Glauce. The name of the princess as ‘Owl’ obviously implicates Glaucopis Athena, the goddess with the manifestation as an owl (falsely interpreted as ‘grey-eyed,’ cognate with glaucoma), an aspect of her pre-Olympian identity, like the Medusa-Metis-**Medea** complex. Glauce was also called Kreousa (Creusa). Hence, she is analogous to the indigenous Corinthian Medea, whom the rite of marriage would subjugate under patriarchal dominance. Medea was never married; her union with Ægeus of Athens yielded a matrilineal son, not one named for his father. In destroying Glauce, the indige-
nous Medea as the granddaughter of the Sun Helios inflicted the burning solar toxin upon the maiden as a wedding gift, driving her into a bacchanalian frenzy, whose burning she sought to quench by plunging into the Corinthian well that became her namesake. It was probably the same toxin that she employed in her attempt to poison Theseus. He was saved when birds intervened and drank the lethal potion. This is the same scenario enacted in Kreousa’s attempt to murder her as yet unrecognized son Ion at Delphi. In the case of Kreousa, the toxin is specified as a drop of blood from the harvested head of the Gorgon Medusa, which she wore in a phial as a bracelet.

Among the trees that host the mushroom, is the olive tree in Greece, suggesting that the pruned olive tree of Athena is an analogue of the mushroom. The olive tree requires annual pruning to fruit, and hence it represents the triumph of cultivation over primitivism, functioning as the symbolic antithesis of its wild fungal symbiotic companion, like the olives equally a fruit of the tree. The Amanita muscaria is characterized by its golden red cap, splotched with the white scabs that adhere to its surface as the expanding cap shatters the enclosing universal veil of the fungal ovum. This configuration is represented in the dermatological affliction of the Proitids, the half-sisters of Perseus, who metamorphosed into cows, with red hides splotched with white scabs. Similarly, Vergil’s tale of the edible tables that would signal the site for Rome suggests that the specific mushroom was the Amanita muscaria, since in folklore, the scabby remnants on the golden disk of the mushroom’s cap are imagined as bits of food, of which it is forbidden to eat.

The Persian haoma cult as Zoroastrian Mithraism was imported into Rome in the first century BCE, and probably earlier into Greece. The initiate achieved the persona of the Persian Perses at the fifth grade, an analogue of the Greek hero Perseus. Nero was the first Emperor to be initiated, and the religion thrived among the soldiers and male bureaucrats who administered the Empire. The iconography and theology of the religion suggests that a mushroom figured in the sevenfold stages of its initiation. As late as the twentieth century CE, it was practiced with the Amanita muscaria among the Yazidi, a marginalized and persecuted Kurdish-speaking people indigenous to northern Mesopotamia. A woolen embroidered tapestry recovered from a Mongolian grave tumulus containing the wooden burial chamber of a noble woman, dated to the first century CE, depicts a Zoroastrian priest in Persian garb at a ritual fire ceremony presenting a mushroom, which the restorers identify as the psychoactive Stropharia cubensis or Psilocybe cubensis, although the fabric has discolored with age, and the mushroom depicted may be the Amanita muscaria. The cap appears too broad for the Psilocybe, which generally is about three inches, compared to four inches for the Amanita. The tapestry appears to be an item imported from Northwestern India and characteristic of Scythian workmanship.

Psilocybin mushrooms are characterized by a stipe that turns blue when bruised. They were apparently considered an equivalent or analogue of the Amanita. Several Vedic deities are blue or are characterized wielding a blue baton-stipe. The Soma cup is often ornamented with peacock feathers. The birds were noted for ingesting toxic plants, thereby becoming themselves an embodiment of the toxicity, and they are characterized with a blue throat. The symbolism of the peacock survived in the alchemical tradition, where the bird’s tail display is emblematic of the ultimate chemical transcendence produced in the alembic, yielding the divine elixir of
immortality. (Fig-6)

\[\text{Fig-6: Mithras with Phrygian cap (Louvre, Paris).}\]

**Lycanthropy**

One of the elite troops of Scythian warriors in the Persian forces of Darius was called the Saka Haomavarga, which means the “ScythianHaoma Wolves,’ apparently, warriors initiated into a cult of lycanthropy with the haoma sacrament. Such a rite of Scythian lycanthropic transmogrification on the battlefield was known to the Homeric epic tradition, as narrated in Odysseus’ encounter with the Thracian horseman Rhesus in book ten of the *Iliad*. The episode was also the subject of Euripides’ *Rhesus* tragedy, where the dead horseman is cited as involved in Thracian Mystery rites. Rhesus is probably a version of the Thracian god Sabazios or Zalmoxis.

Another defining attribute of the *Amanita muscaria* is its superior potentiated metabolite in urine. The Persian king Darius was witnessed, according to his Greek physician, to drink urine for ecstacy. In traditional Indian Ayurvedic medicine, the drinking of urine is supposed to have therapeutic benefits, and particularly prized is the urine of a cow, especially that of a pregnant cow. As the most copious effluent of the body, urine was inspected as a diagnostic procedure, and it often was an ingredient in medicinal preparations. Some verses of the *Rig Veda* seem to indicate the drinking of Soma as urine from the swollen penises of the priests or gurus. Among the indigenous North American tribe of Ojibway or Anishinaabe, the drinking of the urinous metabolite of *Amanita muscaria* is documented, corresponding to similar rites in Siberian shamanism and recreational intoxication. The conception of Perseus underground by the fall of golden rain from Zeus may indicate divine urine.

One the comic stage of Athens of the Classical period, this Persian warrior sacrament was well known and associated with Thracians. In Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, it was visionary, inducing clairvoyance, and described metaphorically as a herded bull, and a lethal potion of bull’s blood, in a scene enacted by two Thracian slaves in an obscene routine of mutual fellatio, with the mushroom identified by its common Greek metaphor as an erect penis whose ejaculate induced a Persian nodding sleep. It bellowed when strenuously erect, with a snotty discharge, punning upon mooing, mykes, and mucus.

The Nordic lycanthropic cult of the berserker warriors and their purported sacrament of the *Amanita muscaria* is suggested in the oral traditions of epic committed to writing in the eleventh century BCE, but the rite is recorded as early as the Emperor Trajan’s conquest of the Thracian Dacians, who are named as the ‘people of the wolf.’ A further argument for the identification of the mushroom as this species is the evidence from indigenous North American shamanism that the mushroom imparts supposedly super-human physical strength, a property not claimed for other mushrooms.
Hittites

The traditions of Danaus, Europa, Phineus (with the tables of food defiled by the harpies, like the edible tables of Vergil’s Aeneid), Cadmus, and Perseus, indicate a connection with Egypt and its religious rites. The Kabeiroi were depicted as dwarfish creatures of African ethnicity and characterized sexually as grossly ithyphallic males or, in the case of the sorceress Circe, a female abandoning the ‘comb’ (vulva) of her loom to present her potion. Circe is not otherwise noted for her weaving, but she is presented as the antithesis of Odysseus’ wife Penelope, weaving the shroud for Odysseus’ father Laertes, which she never completes, thus keeping him alive until his reunion with his long absent son. Other versions of the Kabeiroi were analogous as creatures of the Thracian Mysteries, such as the Kerkopes, the Cyclopes, the dactyls, and the Cretan Dioskouroi. All these mythical traditions incorporate chronological revisionism, but indicate a web of associations that spans the topographical area from Egyptian Africa through Anatolia and Thrace, with extension to the Italian peninsula through the Etruscan migration, supposedly from Lydia, although they may have been an indigenous Alpine tribe. In the Homeric tradition, Helen returned from the Trojan War with knowledge of drugs from her detour or sojourn in Egypt, the nepentes with which she doctored the wine for the visit of Odysseus’ son Telemachus to Sparta. The drug is presumably opium, but its name implicates Pentheus as the primitive antithesis to his cousin Dionysus and the wine. The Egyptian sojourn of Helen makes Egypt an analogue of Anatolian Troy. (Fig-7)

This was the region roughly controlled by the Hittite Empire in the mid second millennium BCE. The Hittites were an Indo-European people. Luwian, the oldest attested Indo-European language, was the probable tongue of Priam of Troy.

They must have been instrumental in the assimilation and transmission of Mesopotamian and Persian religious traditions. As another branch of the Indo-European migration, the Hittites might also be expected to have brought with them theological motifs common to the other branches of the linguistic family. The god Apollo had traditional connections both with the northeastern Hyperborea, the mythologized homeland of the Indo-Europeans in the central Asiatic steppes, and with Hittite Anatolia.

A secret offering of a first fruit, which was probably an Amanita muscaria, was ritually delivered to the sanctuary of Apollo on the island of Delos, where the deity and his twin sister Artemis were reborn in their new personae as Olympian children of Zeus, supposedly originating from Hyperborea along a carefully detailed route that commemorated the path of the Greek-speaking Mycenaean Indo-Europeans into the Mediterranean lands. The wandering Leto, however, was led to the site of Delos as the place for the parturition of her divine infants by a pack of wolves from the so-named ‘wolf-land’ of Hittite Lycia on the southern Anatolian coast. The Lycians, according to Herodotus, traced genealogical descent by the female line, and in mythical tradition, they
had originated from Minoan Crete. Similarly, the Corycian wolf cave on Mount Parnassus, above the later temple complex of Delphi, was discovered by a pack of wolves from Corycus, the port city of Lyctia, where there was a similar cave. A rock formation at the back of the first chamber of the Delphi cave bears a resemblance to a wolf. The Hittite religion was characterized by the worship of sacred huwasi stones, which were ritually fed, washed, and anointed as the embodiment of a deity. The stones were housed in temples, and were taken for ritual ceremonies back to their natural home in a forest grove. The sacred omphalos navel stone at Delphi was similarly anointed daily with olive oil. It is decorated with a woolen net and was covered with woolen cloth containing gemstones in the shape of Gorgon mermaids, supposedly the stone that Rhea gave to Cronos to ingest, wrapping it in swaddling clothes to disguise it as the infant Zeus. (Fig-8)
the lingam identifies it with the common metaphor of the *mushroom* as the penis.

A ‘stone’ is one of the commonest metaphors for the *mushroom*, providing its ordinary designation in Hebrew, persisting into the alchemical tradition as the ‘stone of the philosophers’ which would impart the totality of knowledge. Christ punned upon the Hebrew stone (*ptr*) in naming Peter the rock (Greek *petros, petra*) upon which he would build his church. Throughout Thrace, naturally occurring stone monuments resembling *mushrooms*, sometimes with the resemblance clarified by human intervention, show archaeological evidence of cultic religious activity. In addition, throughout Greece of all periods, tombstones occur in the shape of *mushrooms*, sometimes finely carved, as in the example of the tombstone of Lysandra from ancient Bithynia on the south shore of the Black Sea.

The Promethean herb of Medea’s sorcery was the color of the Corycian coccus, which was the ‘flower’ that Kreousa plucked in the cave below the Acropolis of Athens when she conceived Apollo’s son Ion, named with the word for the homonymous ‘arrow toxin.’ Korykia, the nymph of the Corycian Cave at Delphi, bore Apollo a son named Lykoros, the ‘mountain wolf.’ The silhouette of the cave’s entrance viewed from within presents the likeness of a *mushroom*. The name of the cave derives etymologically from the *korykos*, a ‘food sack,’ probably like the *kibisis* indicative of rituals of root cutting and the plucking of magical plants. In the Homeric epic tradition, Apollo is an ally of Troy, and the Trojan War is a mythological analogue of Theseus’ encounter with the Minotaur of the Cretan labyrinth of Knossos and the transition of Apollo into his Olympian persona. The Greek colonies of the seventh century BCE in Asia Minor were neighbors of Anatolian cultures, and mainland Greece came into direct contact with the Persian elite in the two invasions and their aftermath in the fifth century.

**Prehistoric Europe**

Although the *haoma* cult is culturally linked with the various branches of the Indo-European migration of the second millennium BCE, it arrived among indigenous peoples already acquainted with the use of psychoactive *mushrooms* for sacrificial purposes, as indicated by the Neolithic (eighth millennium BCE) rock shelter fresco at Selva Pascuala in south eastern Spain. Similarly, the Neolithic rock paintings in the desert high plateau of Algeria’s Tassili-n’ Ajjer in northern Africa depict shamans metamorphosing into *mushrooms*. The recently discovered Chauvet Cave in southern France was sealed by a rock fall and has remained undisturbed for 35,000 years. In addition to its remarkably preserved frescos, the stipes of *mushrooms* was found on the cave floor, obviously, the remains of *mushrooms* brought into the cave for ingestion. Werner Herzog, who filmed his documentary of the cave in 3D to “capture the intentions of the painters” as the hallucinogenic qualities of the art melded into the cave wall experience. Although Herzog discussed this in a German-language interview, the *mushrooms* have been ignored in the public information about the Chauvet Cave. Some of the stenciled hand prints on the cave’s walls are those of women, some those of children. The uneaten stipes are the remnants. The caps were eaten. In the species *Amanita muscaria*, the psychoactive agents are present only in the red rind of the caps, a property that entered the European folkloric tradition in tales like “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” where the initiating stepmother prepares the poisoned ‘apple,’ eating only the white and giving the red skin to the young princess. The dwarfs are miners, digging for alchemical gems, and
little creatures, seven of them, functioning as initiators of white princess into her blood-red menstrual puberty, as in the scene where she receives her name as white, contrasting with the blood upon the snow.

The Mountain Mother

The Phrygians of Thrace originated from Anatolia, and the Mystery traditions involve the Great Mountain Goddess, who is probably identifiable with the Phrygian mother goddess represented in figures from the Neolithic (sixth millennium BCE) site of Çatalhöyük. She was imported into Rome as Cybele in the form of a small aniconic black stone in 203 BCE on the advice of the Sibylline oracles as a Phrygian ally against the invasion of the Carthaginian Hannibal, and even earlier around 500 BCE, the Athenian Metroon was dedicated to her in the Agora, as the Temple of the Mother of the Gods. Cybele probably means ‘of the mountain,’ or ‘of the cave,’ and she was equated with the Minoan Cretan Rhea of the Idaean Cave. Her ecstatic rites were considered the origin of the bacchanalia, and she was said to have cured Dionysus of the madness inflicted upon him by the jealousy of Hera. In this persona, the Thracian Sabazios as son of Cybele is an analogue of Dionysus, probably the Orphic one who as Zagreus was son of Persephone and was dismembered by the Titans and then regenerated from his phallus-heart as the son of Semele. This is a tradition that equates Dionysus with the Osiris of Egyptian Isis.

Anthropomorphized, Cybele was traditionally represented as a stately matron, with a city’s defensive walls as a crown and a head scarf, a cornucopia as emblematic of agrarian abundance (indicating an assimilation of attributes of the goddesses Demeter and Persephone), or a tambourine drum as indication of her maddening rites, and seated upon a throne or chariot, sometimes attended by corybants, dancing with uplifted shields, and accompanied by two lions, which by mythological lore were condemned never to mate. She is almost never depicted standing, and the throne probably derives from the birthing throne of the goddess from Çatalhöyük.

Hermaphrodite

In mythological tradition, Cybele is closely linked or identical with Agdistis. Zeus unwittingly ejaculated upon a rock called Agdo as he tried to engage with the earth goddess Gaia. The rock is a cliff on Mount Pessinus, which rises above the modern city of Ankara in eastern Anatolia. From the rock sprouted a being called Agdistis, who was both male and female. This was the hermaphrodite, whom Aristophanes in Plato’s Symposium describes as a spherical creature, with two heads and eight limbs and it posed a powerful threat to the supremacy of the gods. For which reason, it was severed in half to diminish its strength and produce the first humans, the skin tightened like a drawstring on a purse to make what is now the navel, and the head, limbs, and genitals reoriented
toward the side of the missing other half. As a half creature, its original strength was halved. In the myth of Agdistis, it is Dionysus who severs the hermaphrodite. He poisoned the drink of Agdistos with a sleeping potion and then tied the penis of the creature to its own foot, so that when it awoke and stood erect, it yanked it off. The role of Dionysus and intoxication in the castration of Agdistis is an etiological myth identifying the severed phallic-mushroom as an analogue of the deity. The other half of the hermaphroditic Agdistis became Cybele, its female match. In this bizarre fashion, Cybele was considered the daughter of Agdistis.

In Classical myth, the motif of castration implies the severance of the entire male genitals, not the procedure as followed in actual practice of extracting the testes from the scrotum. Hence the severed member is a phallicus with its resemblance to its botanical analogue. The blood from the severance always unites the severed genitals with a sacred tree. When Kronos ‘harvested’ the genitals of Ouranos with a pruning hook or scythe, the drops of blood sprouted as the sisterhood of rowan or mountain ash trees, whose spherical clusters of red berries resemble droplets of blood. This tree was sacred in Nordic and Celtic lore. The nymphs of the tree were the sisterhood called Meliai, for the ‘honey’ (meli) of their sap, and they became the wet nurses of the infant Zeus, nourishing him with ambrosia. They were probably the wives of the Kabeiroi, hence female Kabeiroi, and thus also the wives of the dactyls and the dancing Kouretes who protected the infant. As the Hekaterides, they and their male counterparts were the personification of the hekateris, an acrobatic high-leaping country dance with hand gestures. Their name indicates the number one-hundred, five dactyl creatures of each sex, making a total of ten, each with five fingers on each hand, yielding a total of one-hundred, a hermaphroditic entity in the joining of hands or sexual union. They were considered the mothers of the first race of humans, destroyed in the Flood. Their name also implies the goddess Hecate, and they were involved in the Mystery as celebrated on the island of Samothrace. Along with the Meliai were born the Erinyes, who persecuted offenses to the right of motherhood and were often imagined in the entourage of Hecate.

Since Gaia gave birth to the natural world of herself without male counterpart until she birthed her opposite in the form of the sky or Ouranos, she must have been a hermaphroditic entity, and the castration of Ouranos represents the separation of that totality. The severance of Agdistis similarly resulted in a significant tree, the almond or the pomegranate.

Reunited to its hermaphroditic totality, the hermaphroditic being was depicted in Classical art as a female figure with male genitals, a form of Aphrodite, who was represented as a bearded goddess in Cycladic figurines. It thus was sometimes called Aphroditus, the grammatically masculine version of Aphrodite. In mythical terms, Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, bearing the name of both of his parents. He achieved his femaleness when the Anatolian water nymph Salmacis, the only nymphomaniac in the entourage of the virginal huntress Artemis, became so enamored with him that she merged her body with his. Hermaphroditus was a patron of marriage, symbolizing the sacred union of men and women.

Another myth of the creation of humans involves Prometheus. After he created the first man, the gods retaliated by commissioning Hephaestus to construct Pandora as the primordial female. From them were engendered the first race of humanoids destroyed in the great flood of Deucalion. Only Deucalion and his ma-
te Pyrrha survived, floating in a chest upon the waters. Deucalion is named as the ‘drunken sailor’ and his mate is named for her fiery redness. They created the new race of humans by tossing the bones of their mother, which they interpreted as stones, over their backs, from which sprouted men and women. An antiquarian scholar records that the stones were bits of the rock Agdo.

The journey in the floating chest bears comparison not only to the biblical ark of Noah, but also to the motif of the exposure of the unwanted child, like Moses in the basket drifting downstream of the Nile, or the Akkadian King Sargon floating down the Euphrates, or Perseus adrift with his mother Danae en route to the island of Seriphos. In one version of the Oedipus myth, he was not exposed to die on Mount Kithairon, but set adrift upon the sea. The ordeal probably derives from a ritual of initiation empowering the ruler, since the exposed child is often provided with tokens for survival. When the site of the infant’s exposure is the wildness of the mountainside, it identifies the child as something apt to be picked up and carried home from such an environment, consubstantial with the entheogen of its future empowerment as ruler. Thus, the botanical persona encoded in Oedipus as the ‘swollen’ single foot, which puns upon his prophetic knowledge in ‘knowing’ the riddle of the feet posed by the Sphinx. A ‘swollen foot’ that provides knowledge is the attribute of an entheogen.

The two versions of the tale of the hermaphrodite, as often in mythological traditions, are analogous stories, both involving drunkenness or altered consciousness and the motif of fungal anthropomorphism. Prometheus’ creatures, the first race of humanoids, are the ones who sprouted as mushrooms, swelling with moisture from the fall of rain, which was traditionally considered a heavenly ejaculation or its equivalent divine effluent as the rainfall of urination. Since Prometheus simultaneously stole spiritual fire as a magical herb from the alchemical crucible of the volcano, where Hephaestus presumably accomplished his commissioned task of molding the first female, endowed with traits from the celestial deities (hence her name as Pandora, the ‘all-gifted’), it is probable that the rainfall was a fiery thunderbolt, the traditional inseminator of mushrooms. It should be recalled that the thunderbolts of Zeus were forged in the alchemical caldera of Hephaestus’ volcano and that the one-eyed Cyclopes were his workmen assistants, as were the Kabeiroi.

Since Deucalion and Pyrrha supposedly first came ashore from the receding waters of the deluge on Mount Parnassos, Delphi is linked with Anatolia where, as the antiquarian discovered, they gathered the stones from the rock of Agdo. Hermaphroditism is characteristic of the mushroom, which sprouts first as the upward thrust of a penile erection that as the cap expands appears to penetrate its underside, the vulva at the center of the radiating gills of its ‘comb.’ A similar configuration occurs in the purse-string navel of the halved spherical wheel-like hermaphrodite.

By the other tale, drunkenness as indication of the mushroom’s toxicity is again involved. The foot of Agdistis and his penis are analogous appendages, and the male half of the creature was probably grossly ithyphallic like the Kabeiroi. Aristophanes in Plato’s Symposium as a comic playfully derived unseemly bisexual hyper-erotic libido from the severed hermaphrodite—yielding the pathological afflictions of satyriasis and nymphomania—whereas the other primordial spherical creatures, the one that were either totally male or totally female, seek to rejoin their severed other with modest decorum, unlike the over-sexed Kabeiric Circe with
her pig-potion, loom, and comb, or the grossly ithyphallic gnomish Odysseus.

**Castrati**

From the blood (and menses) of the primordial severance grew an almond tree, or sometimes a pomegranate tree. A dwarfish creature called Nana, so-named as the ‘Dwarf,’ the daughter of the river Sangarius, put one of its seeds in her private parts. The river is named for ‘blood,’ (Latin san-guis, Greek car, Hittite ēšar), from a Proto-European root that designates the juicy fluids, combined with the root that yields ‘unguent’ as for chrisms in anointment. The almond nut as the amygdala (or mandorla) defines the vulva as the gateway for mystical vision, and the bloody seeded matrix of the pomegranate is symbolic of the womb. Semen is named as ‘seed’ or nuts. Cybele, like Demeter, was depicted holding the pomegranate. From the seed, the dwarfish Nana became pregnant. Persephone similarly conceived the son of Hades from the seeds of the pomegranate. Nana’s son was Attis, a male of such extraordinary beauty that Cybele, the other remaining half of the former hermaphroditic Agdistis, understandably, in view of her immodest libido, madly desired to unite with him. Although Attis was born through the agency of the dwarf Nana, the union was considered incestuous; since Attis was really Cybele’s missing other half and technically her son. At the marriage feast, all the wedding guests were driven into a bacchanalian frenzy, the males castrating themselves, and the women amputating their breasts, reenacting the primordial severance of the hermaphroditic Agdistis-Cybele. Attis metamorphosed into the pine-tree sacred to Dionysus, his blood sprouted as violets, and his body, or more probably just his phallus was not allowed to decompose, but it was believed to survive incorruptible beneath the rock Agdo of Mount Pessinus. The entire mountain was named as something that had ‘fallen’ from the skies, like the sacred huwasi stones. The city at the base of the sacred mountain was the principal cult site of Cybele, ruled as a theocracy by her castrati priests. This was the legendary city of King Midas with the golden touch. (Fig-10)

![Fig-10: Agdistus/Attis.](image)

From here came the stone that was imported as the cult of Cybele and her orgiastic rites of self-afflicted castration into Rome in the second century BCE. The Festival of Blood was celebrated for several days in mid-March to assure an abundant agrarian season. A pine-tree was cut in the woods and brought into the sanctuary of the goddess in the city. It was considered the embodiment of Attis, swathed like a corpse and wreathed with violets, and the effigy of a youth tied to its trunk. Ecstatic dancing, in Asiatic garb, with trumpets, clashing cymbals, flutes, tambourines, and the droning of drums so incensed the Galli priests that they slashed their bodies with potsherds to draw blood, splashing it upon the altar and the sacred tree. At the height of the frenzy, some sac-
rificed their virility, offering themselves as eunuchs to the service of the goddess. At the culmination of the festival on the vernal equinox, the joyous news was spread that the tomb of Attis was opened and he had returned. This was followed by the laughing festival of the Hilaria, celebrated as a carnival, when all social norms of decorum were suspended and revelers roamed the streets in masquerade. The final day, the image of Cybele, silver displaying the black stone as her face, was taken in a wagon, preceded by nobles walking barefoot, to the Arno stream, a tributary of the Tiber outside the city, along with the sacred implements of the festival, where they were washed clean of the blood and strewn with fresh flowers.

These were the public ceremonies, but other secret rites of Mystery initiation involved the ingestion of a sacrament served on a drum and the drinking of a potion from a cymbal, and baptism with a torrent of blood in a pit on the Vatican Hill below a grating from a bull gelded and slaughtered above. To have eaten out of the drum and drunk from the cymbal were code words for the initiation, and clearly indicate a sacred Eucharist. The initiate was then dieted on milk for several days like a newborn infant, having died and been reborn.

Cotyttia

The Mountain Mother took on many other divine aspects as her cult migrated out of eastern Anatolia. The Thracians worshipped a great goddess of war and slaughter who led them in battle. She was the equivalent of Athena, whose involvement with the fungal sacrament is evident in the Perseus myth: the Medea, Medusa, Metis, Kreousa complex; her mermaid antecedents and involvement with the African Lake Triton; and the role of her olive tree as the emblematic prototypic cultivated transmutation of the wild and toxic plants encountered by the heroes in their engagement with the various monsters of the pre-Olympian world. As an Olympian, Athena’s name was given a false etymology deriving it from athana or ‘deathless, immortal.’ She may be the equivalent of the goddess that the Persians knew as Anahita, associated with moisture, waters, fertility, healing, and wisdom, and afforded the same epithets as haoma and involved in the investiture of kingship. She became conflated with the Assyrian Ishtar and the Sumerian Inanna.

Although the Persian Mithras had a miraculous birth, emerging from a stone or pinecone as a manifestation of his consubstantiality with the fungal sacrament, cutting himself free as an enactment of self-begotten harvesting, there was also a tradition that Anahita was his virgin mother. In Thrace, Athena was known as Kotys or Kotytto (cognate with Greek kotos ‘hatred,’ Irish cath ‘war, battle,’ Hittite kattu ‘spiteful’), and worshipped in ecstatic midnight drunken orgies on hilltops. The Greeks equated her with Persephone and she was interchangeable with the Thracian Bendis, the virgin mistress of the hunt, a version of Artemis, but associated with Dionysian bacchanalia. (Fig-11)

The Cotyttia festivals spread into Greece, and were known even in fifth-century Athens, Corinth, and southern Italy. Aeschylus in his Edonians tragedy
described the frenzied dancing on the mountaintop to the deep-sounded buzzing of wooden flutes and the clanging of bronze cymbals, the shrill twanging of strings, drumming like subterranean thunder, and the mimicking of bulls roaring, wonderful and horrifying. Horace mentions the Cotyttia in Rome in the first century BCE as involving secret rites, witchcraft, and drugs; and a poem in the Virgilian corpus describes a prostitute’s reveling in the debauchery of the festival. Juvenal knew that the secret ecstatic rite involved crossdressing men and drinking the toxic potion from obscenely shaped glasses in the form of erect penises.

Kotys empowered the Thracian kingship, validating the sovereign as her consort in an ecstatic shamanic rite of sacred marriage, enacted as the sexual union of the king with his wife. The fourth-century BCE King Kotys, named for the goddess, was derided in the Greek accounts of the ritual, as being so totally delusional from the intoxicating Eucharist that he ripped his poor wife apart with the violence of their sexual engagement.

**Bona Dea**

Under the name of the *Bona Dea*, the goddess had a name too sacred to utter, implying that the ‘Good Goddess’ might be a euphemism masking the terrible, dread power of its opposite. Her identity was a secret kept by women, who were her exclusive initiates. Heracles had supposedly intruded upon the rite, begging for a drink of water to quench his burning thirst and been denied, for which reason he retaliated, barring all women from the rites at his newly erected great altar to himself as ‘Invincible’ (Invictus) in what would become the future city’s cattle market of the *Forum Boarium*, commemorating his victory over the monstrous fire-breathing cattle thief Cacus. Heracles forcibly intruded and stole the water. The etiology for the bizarre male exclusivity of the rite at the Great Altar contrasts the heated dryness of the hero’s thirst and the cooling life-giving waters of the goddess’s fountain, mediated by the hero’s violent intrusion, ritualized as the sexual abduction enacted in the ceremony of marriage.

Roman sources thought that the Bona Dea had been imported from the Greek colonies in the southern tip of the Italian peninsula, although she ultimately was a version of the Mountain Mother, a conflation of Gaia, Rhea, Cybele, and Deme-ter. She was considered the wife, sister, and daughter of the indigenous Faunus, supposedly named for his ‘favor’ of fertility, although Faunus is cognate with Greek *thaunos*, an obsolete word for ‘bestial creature,’ especially the wolf, cognate with the Phrygian *daos*, which gave the Dacians their tribal name as the ‘Werewolves.’ The Bona Dea had rejected the sexual encounter with Faunus, but by a ruse he metamorphosed into a serpent, and in this toxic form impregnated the goddess, a tale that resembles Olympias’ conception of Alexander. It was cultic event that reputedly occurred also in the conception of Octavian, the future Caesar Augustus. His mother Atia fell into an entranced slumber during a midnight ritual for the god Apollo and saw a serpent slither toward her, leaving a blemish upon her body, colored the same as the snake. She believed that the god had been the inseminator of her son. Faunus was visualized as a goat, hence the goat-men hybrids of Greek mythology called fauns (cognate with English ‘fawns’), who were interchangeable with satyrs and silens in the bestial entourage that materialized in the bacchanalia.

The rite of the *Bona Dea* was held in the house of Rome’s leading magistrate. In 62 BCE, it was hosted in the house occupied by Julius Caesar as Pontifex Maximus and hosted by his wife Pompeia and his mother Aurelia, with the attendance of the
Vestal Virgins, who maintained the eternal fire of the city and symbolized the propitiated burning sexual thirst of the Heracles etiology. In a notorious scandal, Publius Clodius Pulcher attended, dressed as a woman, with the apparent intent of a sexual liaison with Caesar’s wife. Since cross-dressing was an element in the Cottytia Festival, his female disguise may not have been an anomaly. Alcibiades, who was of such ambiguous sexual orientation that the medieval times thought he was a woman, is reported to have attended the Cottytia in female dress. The Bona Dea as imported from Magna Graecia was a version of the Greek Thesmophoria. In Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae comedy, both Euripides’ father-in-law and the effeminate crossdressing Cleisthenes attend the ceremony.

The Thesmophoria was the new fire ritual, whose mythological etiology was the noxious Lemnian stench that caused the women to slaughter all the males of the island. The Lemnian women had refused to worship Aphrodite or otherwise offended the goddess, and they were punished with the overmastering scent of their sexual pheromone, with its connotations of sulfurous volcanic menses, causing all the males of the island to abandon their wives for prostitutes on the Thracian mainland. In Athens, the hearth fires throughout the city and the eternal flame tended by the priestesses of Athena in the Erechtheum were extinguished and the women sequestered themselves from the menfolk, bivouacking around the Temple of Demeter on the Pnyx hill adjacent to the Acropolis, drinking heavily and discussing obscenities with prostitutes, including the tricks and paraphernalia of their trade. The fire was then relit and the women returned to the household hearths and their husbands, fired with renewed libido. A secret ritual linked their heightened sexuality to the vitality of the seed crop and the fecundity of the plow field.

Juvenal described what happened at the Roman festival of the Bona Dea. The attendance included prostitutes and the women masturbated with dildos shaped like the goat horn of Faunus, smeared with psychoactive toxins for vaginal absorption and drank heavily for one singular purpose, to become maenads or bacchants, rolling their stunned heads, groaning and gyrating for the goddess, ‘so that undiluted sexual desire flowed down their medicated thighs.’ The etiology for the rite was the rape of the Bona Dea by Faunus, as an event that assured the fertility of the crops and the natural world.

**Vixens**

In the Dionysian revel of the Mountain Mother, the women became vixens, female werewolves, hunting hounds, since the Canidae are interchangeable in this motif. Thus, although the fox is a lone hunter, in the bacchanalian revel the vixen join in a pack for the hunt like wolves. The women were called Thracian Bassarids, named for their headgear, a cap formed from the entire pelt of a red fox (basara). The madness of the bacchant revel was described metaphorically as lycanthropy, led by the she-wolf Lyssa, the ‘wolf-madness’ or rabies, the madness that reverses the domestication of the dog from the wolf and turns humans into beasts. The pointed snout of the fox was stylized in red felt as the Phrygian cap, which became emblematic of those initiated into the Mysteries of religion. It is the cap worn by Perseus, Perses, Amazons, Trojans, Orpheus, and Mithras, but also by the Cyclopes as alchemical henchmen of Hephaestus. Persians in Greek art are depicted wearing it, although it was not apparently traditional Persian garb. It was stylized as the ecclesiastical mitre, symbolizing the meaning of Mithras as the ‘joiner’ or intercessory mediating with deity as the
messianic intermediary. It became confused with the conical pileus, the felt cap worn by emancipated slaves in Rome, and hence identified as the liberty cap of the Jacobite French revolutionists and of American independence from English colonial rule. Smaller versions made it indistinguishable from a skullcap.

The bacchant fox cap is the origin of the folkloric tradition of the anthropomorphism of the Amanita muscaria as a creature with a red cap, as in the tale of lycanthropy and sexual initiation known in German as Rotkäppchen (‘Little Red-cap’), and in English as ‘Little Red Riding Hood,’ where the hood is conical or Phrygian and worn by someone on a journey or ride of initiation. The association of the wolf with Amanita muscaria is transcultural, appearing independently in cultures without contact, and may derive from observation of canines eating it.

The Thracian Bassarids were the prototypic maenads or bacchants. Both Aeschylus and Euripides staged them as the chorus in tragedies in the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. The Bassarid maenads were engaged in honoring the deity in his botanical manifestations in the mountain wilderness, predating the cultivation of the grapevine in the plow lands below and the discovery of the art of fermentation. The ritualized fantasies of sexual encounter with satyrs, as frequently depicted in vase paintings, are evocations of the deity’s spiritual attendants as the women gathered the wild plants that were considered the primitive antecedents to the grapevine. The metaphor of sexual orgasm with deity commonly is enlisted to express the experience of transcendent mystical states and the visual engagement with the spiritual realm. (Fig-12)

The thyrsus that is the staff emblematic of the women’s activity was the receptacle employed by root cutters for the gathered plants. It consisted of the stalk of the giant fennel (Ferula communis), the plant depicted as the sacred tree on Minoan shaman or priestess rings, and identifiable, from similar depictions on the coinage of Cyrene, as the magical African plant known as silphium. It thus was emblematic of the Mountain Mother and the matriarchal Pelasgian religion, and its African connection that was assimilated and supplanted by the Olympian family of deities. As the container for the gathered herbs, silphium was variously identifiable and eventually became a culinary spice and the plant itself was thought to have become extinct from overuse. The thyrsus was also called the narthex, which has the obvious etymology as the ‘receptacle for the toxic or narcotic plant’ (narco-thex). This clearly indicates that the mystical state was accessed through the agency of the gathered intoxicating plants.

The wildest of all the plants was the mushroom, which is seedless and defied cultivation. It is classified as neither an animal (since it doesn’t move) nor a plant (since it doesn’t engage in photosynthesis), but in an intermediary class of its own, for which reason it functions universally in folkloric traditions as the ultimate
mediator between oppositional groups, easily anthropomorphized or assuming zoomorphic attributes. It was itself a miniature thrysus/narthex. In common culinary Latin, the stipe of the mushroom was termed the thyrsus, attesting to the survival of this metaphor for over a millennium. The botanical term of stipe (‘trunk’) makes it metaphorically into a tree. The cap (hat, pileus) represented the toxic plant stuffed into the receptacle, particularly appropriate in the case of the Amanita muscaria, where the psychoactive chemical is confined primarily in the red rind. The metaphoric botanical designation of the cap or pileus inevitably anthropomorphizes it as a little creature wearing it as headgear. The metaphor of the lamella or spore-bearing structure on the underside of the cap implausibly as gills in English inevitably suggests a zoomorphism as a fish. This is a metaphor in Celtic lore, identifying the sacred salmon in the pool at the base of the sacred tree, ingesting its haze and becoming imbued with divine knowledge.

The plant traditionally depicted stuffed atop the thyrsus is the ivy (Hedera helix), which was considered the primitive antecedent to the grape, its diminutive berries and leaves intoxicating in their natural state, whereas the leaves and fruits of the grapevine are edible, but with the controlled fungal growth of the yeasts of fermentation, the sugar of the juice can be converted to ethanol, commonly called alcohol, the intoxicant in wine. The other plants associated with the bacchant plant-gathering had a similar significance as toxic or mind-altering in their natural state and mimicking the appearance of the grapevine. Bryony (Echallium elaterrum) is the wild cucumber, a rampant vine. Its Greek name as bryony indicates that its fruit is ‘swollen’ with the fluids of life’s vitality. The fruit is a gourd, hence considered a kind of mushroom. When the phallic-shaped cucumber is ripe, it jerks, noticeably moving like an animal, and ejects a toxic ejaculation, like a penis, of semen or seeds. The anomalous movement of a plant makes it animate like an animal. Similarly, the likeness of smilax to the grapevine is reflected in its common name as prickly ivy. Smilax is the toxic wild morning glory or bindweed (Convolvulaceae species).

**Bovine Zoomorphism**

The commonest zoomorphism of the mushroom is bovine. They were thought to bellow like bulls or moo like cows as they fruited, bursting suddenly from the earth. The Gorgons as anthropomorphisms of the mushroom moo. As something sacred, there is a taboo against naming the mushroom. It is designated by metaphors. As the Greek mykes (as in ‘mycology’), it is cognate with mucus as something loathsome and ‘slimy,’ covered with ejaculates like semen or effluents like menses. ‘Mushroom’ in English is onomatopoetic (moo-shroom), ultimately derived from the ‘mooing’ sound (Greek myaein, Latin mussare, Late Latin mussarion for ‘mushroom’), introduced into English as early as the sixteenth century. The words for ‘mystery’ (mysterion) and ‘initiate’ (mystes) have the same mu syllable, which was written with the glyph for a bullhead in the Mycenaean syllabary. It represents the voiced nasal labial consonant, made with the lips pursed, emitting no sound, for a secret well kept, like the English ‘mum’s the word.’

The English ‘toadstool’ is a folkloric metaphor, connecting the toad that uses the mushroom for its stool with the psychoactive bufotenin secretion of the toad’s paratoid glands, a toxin like that of certain mushrooms. The Aztec god Xochipilli, who is analogous to Dionysus as a masked deity of ecstatic music and dance, sits upon a stool ornamented with the
glyphs for the **mushroom** cap, his body covered with glyphs of psychoactive flowers employed in shamanism.

![Fig-13: Gorgon (Getty Museum, Los Angeles).](image)

The Latin fungus, assimilated into English, is equally a metaphor, derived from the Greek *spongos* for ‘sponge.’ It describes the spongy texture of the **mushroom**, thirstily absorbing the moisture of the rainfall as it expands into the fruiting stage. Its affinity for water makes it an apt agency to entrap the descent of the fiery soul or the fall of the lightning bolt from the heavens. The blood from the severed neck of the harvested Medusa head became coral, which was spongy until it petrified when immersed in the sea. The shelf **mushroom** *Fomes fomentarius* was used as tinder for the making of fire. Its common name is hoof fungus, from its likeness to a horse’s hoof growing on the trunk of its host tree, suggesting a horse, like Medusa’s son Pegasus, as the steed affording transcendence, ascending the steps up the ladder of the tree’s trunk or soaring with wings in flight.

The bacchant ritual of the **sparagmos** in which an animal was supposedly wrenched limb from limb indicates the substitution of an animal offering for what was once a human victim, sacrificed in the persona of the primitive wild nature of the deity, as a debt paid to the disturbed prordial world and whose demise and appeasement liberated the arts of cultivation and the evolving civilized deity of the wine. These are the roles enacted by Penetheus and **Dionysus** in Euripides’ *Bacchae* tragedy. While it is implausible that women would have had the requisite strength to pull a man apart, they were not supposed to have visited such a fate also upon bulls, a physical impossibility, nor would the ferocious animal have been likely to acquiesce in such treatment. The bovine **sparagmos** is plausible only as a metaphor.

The sanctity of bovines in Hinduism probably derives from the cow as the embodiment of Soma, which was always mixed with milk to impart that metaphoric identity in the ritual preparation of the potion. Quite possibly as *Amanita muscaria* became more difficult to find as the Indo-Europeans migrated from the mountainous forests into the Indus Valley and replaced or merged with the indigenous Dravidian populace, a suitable substitute was discovered in the *Stropharia psilocybin* **mushrooms** like *Psilocybe cubensis*, which would be numerous in the plow fields. The *Stropharia* are adventitious growths, sprouting wherever the native ground has been disturbed by excavation, following the encroachment of human intervention upon the natural environment, commonly on the perimeters of cultivated land. They often are found growing upon cow pies, the dried excrement of bovines. Hence the taboo against eating **mushrooms** as growing from impurity, although this is probably a rationalization masking the taboo against the profane ingestion of something sacred. Soma, however, is to be sought in the mountains. Although bovines tend to avoid grazing near their excrement, they are intoxicated by various plants in their fodder, and in the forest or even in the plow fields include **mushrooms** in their diet, dancing or staggering from the ingestion. There may be two Somas, reflected in
the dumbbell shape of the Vajra, which may also be suggested in the riddle of the Promethean herb with the twin stem-stipe.

Rainwater for the Proto-Europeans was a symbol of heavenly Soma descending to the Earth from the sky-cows, which were identified as the clouds. The rain was also the seminal ejaculate effluent of the sky god, fertilizing the Earth. Ejaculation and the manipulation of the nipple of the cow’s udder for milking are similar masturbatory actions, and semen was commonly called male milk. The megalithic *mushroom* monuments of ancient Thrace have cup indentations for collecting rainfall, probably employed for the compounding of the *mushroom* sacrament, imparting the symbolism to the drink of a sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*), mixing semen and milk together and identifying the *mushroom* with its heavenly source.

**Cows in Estrus**

The Proitid half-sisters of *Perseus* with their red-skinned scabby dermatological affliction metamorphosed into cows behaving in a manner that all who observed them thought was obscenely lascivious, as they wrenched the hero who harvested the Gorgon head limb from limb in the ritual *sparagmos*. The cows in Greek mythology are always in estrus.

The etiology is the myth of Zeus and his sexual liaison with the cow maiden Io, whose name is derived from the homonymous arrow-toxin motif. To hide his affair from his jealous wife Hera, Zeus disguised Io as a cow and tethered her to an olive tree, the Mediterranean mycorrhizal host of the *Amanita muscaria*, the tree sacred to Athena and hence involved in the motif of the Gorgon Medusa. Zeus placed Argos as Io’s cow herder, a creature with a thousand eyes, hence called Panoptes, ‘all-seeing.’ Soma-Rudra similarly has the epithet of a ‘thousand eyes,’ perhaps referring to the scabby remnants on the red cap. When Hermes killed Argos and liberated Io, the cow herder became a cow fly (*Tabanus bovinus*, commonly called a horsefly) and now as the ghost of Argos, he prodded her with his maddening sting so that the two of them wandered the world until she reached Africa, where she gave birth to the ancestor of *Perseus*. This cow fly is usually translated as a gadfly, but it is a cow fly, and its name is *oistros*, which is the etymological cognate of estrus in English. The gadfly is also called *myops* in Greek, ‘squint-eye’ (cognate with English ‘myopic’), with the same *mu* syllable as ‘mystery’ and indicating an alteration in sight. The toxic sting of the cow fly sexually inflames the womb of Io and sends the cow into heat. This was alleviated finally in Africa in the land of the dwarfish Pigmies when Zeus with his ‘finger’ touched her, in a scenario that suggests the ithyphallic grotesquerie of a Kabeiric Zeus.

The sailing of the Argonauts with Jason on the ship Argo is an elaborated version of this same motif. The ship was built by its eponym Argos. He constructed the figurehead of the prow from an oaken timber from the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, and hence it could speak and deliver inspired prophecies. When it completed its voyage, it was transported to the stars as the constellation *Navis*. By some accounts, his father was the mate of Mycene, the eponym of Mycenae, and he was a supposed homonymous brother of Argos Panoptes. His grandfather was Iasos, named with the ‘arrow-toxin’ homonym, who was also perhaps the son of Io, hence interchangeable with the Kabeiric African son of Zeus. Argos also was credited with making the cult image of Hera for Tiryns, the citadel of the estrous bovine Proitid half-sisters of *Perseus* on the coast of the Mycenaean plain.

The cow pursued by the maddening fly suggests the involvement of the fly-agaric *mushroom*. Flies are attracted to the
mushroom and appear to die. Hence, the Amanita muscaria in folkloric tradition was thought to be effective as an insecticide. The flies, however, are intoxicated by the mushroom, swooning away and subsequently reviving, while they deposit their eggs. If the mushroom is not gathered quickly, it is infested with maggots, reinforcing its loathsomeness as a tabooed substance. The larvae belong to the motif of the butterfly, whose worm-like caterpillars emerge from the secreted golden exoskeleton of the chrysalis as the beautiful flying insect which was emblematic of the ‘soul,’ hence its name in Greek as Psyche. Souls are traditionally depicted in Greek art as swarms of little flying insect creatures. The stinging fly and the bee are probably an interchangeable entomological motif, gathering the toxin for their sting from the plants they visit. Hence the herb-gathering sisterhood can be depicted as a swarm of bees, and Melissa was a priestly title.

When Hermes killed the cow herder Argos, Hera placed his multiple eyes in the tail of the peacock, which made the peahen and its cock Hera’s animal attribute. The extravagant tail display of the peacock is sexually aroused by the presence of the peahen. Characteristic of the peacock and its hen is their blue neck. Several Hindu deities associated with Soma display such a blue neck and are linked with the peacock, which may be a reference to the neck or stipe of the Stropharia psilocybin mushrooms which bruise blue when touched or harvested. The etiological myth of the cow-maiden Io may thus unite the two Somas.

Ass’s Ears

Like the opposition of the ivy (and its analogues, bryony and smilax) and the grapevine, which involved the antithesis of the wild mushroom and its cultivation as the fungal yeasts of fermentation, the edible grains in Greek lore had a similar pattern, relating the barley as the major cultivar to its primitive antecedents in wild toxic grasses. The edible grains developed by selective hybridization. The most primitive of the edible grains was emmer wheat (Triticum spelta), which produces only a few kernels, either one, as indicated by its German name as Einkorn, or two, as indicated by English ‘spelt,’ meaning ‘split’ into two. Such hybridization as pursued in the Americas eventually yielded maize, and has continued to produce what is now the varieties of sweet corn, all fruiting with ever larger cobs of kernels. Annual intervention in natural seeding is required for the edible grasses not to revert to their more primitive antecedents, diminishing in size and productivity through overcrowding. (Figure-14)

Fig-14: Ergot.

A weedy inedible grass commonly grows amid the barley and other grain crops. It is called darnel (ryegrass) in English, botanically Lolium temulentum or ‘drunken Lolium,’ which spreads through the fields of grain and endangers the planted crop not only by competition for space, but also by contamination with its infestation of ergot (Claviceps purpurea). It owes its reputation as a sight-altering
agent (as recognized in antiquity) not to its actual self, which contains no psychoactive chemicals, but to its common infestation with the ergot fungus, which provides a wide and variable array of toxins, some of them deadly and responsible for the medical affliction of ergotism. In Germanic folklore, ergot was called the wolf children of the grain mother. From ergot, however, with proper human intervention can be extracted LSA (lysergic acid amide), a psychoactive analogue of LSD.

Ergot is a fungus whose red mycelium spreads through the seed kernel, enlarging it, reddening it as ‘rust’ (another name for the ergot in English, and its ancient Greek equivalent, erysibe, Latin, robigo) and enlarging it so that it sticks out from the sheaf like a ‘club’ (clava) ‘head’ (caput), or ‘cock’s spurs,’ called argot in Old French. Ergot poisoning, commonly called Saint Anthony’s fire, inflicts a convulsive twitching interpreted as a deadly dance (Saint Vitus dance) upon its victims, and the gangrenous swollen rash on the limbs mimics the grain kernels enlarged and reddened by the mycelium. Like any mycelium growth, however, it can fruit under appropriate conditions of moisture, producing red mushrooms, recognizable and visible to the naked eye. The ergots thus appear to be the seeds of the otherwise seedless mushroom.

There were two stages to the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Lesser Mystery, celebrated in February in Athens, commemorated the abduction of Persephone by Hades as she plucked the narcotic narkissos flower. This was a secret rite in which the titular Queen of Athens, the wife of the hereditary Archon Basileus (or ‘king’), attended by elderly priestesses, enacted a sexual liaison with Dionysus in a very ancient temple, opened only once a year for this event. The temple was called a bull stall, and presumably it was the bull sacrament, the Amanita muscaria, that she ingested for her mystical sacred marriage. For the Greater Mystery, celebrated in late September in the cavernous hall of initiation at the sanctuary of the two goddesses, Demeter and Persephone, in the village of Eleusis, eleven miles west of Athens along the Sacred Road, perhaps as many as a thousand initiates annually were afforded a vision of the goddess and her newly birthed Mystery child. To orchestrate this simultaneous alteration of consciousness for the entire congregation, a special potion was drunk, the kykeon or ‘mixed drink,’ whose ingredients were water, barley, and fleabane (Mentha pulegium, English pennyroyal, where ‘penny’ is a corruption of pulegium, and it is termed ‘royal’). The fleabane is not psychoactive. Its common name as ‘fleabane’ indicates that it kills fleas and flies. Its presence suggests the symbolism of the fly-agaric, the primitive mushroom (as enacted by the Queen in the Lesser Mystery). In the Greek Magical Papyri (Greco-Roman Egypt, second century BCE to fifth century CE), fleabane was identified as the semen of Hephaestus; this would probably be the semen that Athena wiped from her robe and tossed to the ground to abort conception, resulting in the birth of the autochthonous serpentine Erichthonios, who sprouted from the earth and became an element of her iconography as an Olympian. It was associated with the drops of Gorgon blood, and hence a fungal identity as Amanita muscaria.

The psychoactive agent of the Eleusinian potion was derived from the ergot and its role in the evolution of the arts of cultivation of the grains, a role symbolically like the fungal yeasts in fermentation. Fleabane is an abortifacient, whereas ergot induces labor and staunches postpartum bleeding in the pharmaceuticals of midwifery. A similar fungus is involved in the leavening of bread, which makes it spongy like a mushroom. The heaving up of the
sacred loaf is the origin of the ‘heavens.’ Prototypically, there were two primary foodstuffs, the wet and the dry, the wine of Dionysus and the bread of Demeter. The group experience of altered consciousness is determined by expectation or indoctrination (the so-called ‘set’) and the physical surroundings (the ‘setting’). In the Mystery ritual, a largely homogenous outcome was assured by a long period of preparation, mythical indoctrination, and the ritual enactment within the Telesterion Hall of Initiation as the potion was administered. Knowledge of the Greek language was the only required prerequisite, indicating that the myths and the liturgy were indispensable elements. (Fig-15)

The ergot-infested kernels were metaphorically identified with ass’s ears, which they resemble. In the myth of Midas, king of the city of the Mountain Mother’s prime sanctuary and home, he received the ears of an ass as punishment for judging in favor of the satyr in the musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas. The satyr had found his instrument where Athena had discarded it, after inventing it to imitate the hissing of the serpents on the harvested head of the Gorgon Medusa. Midas tried to hide his ass’s ears beneath his Phrygian cap, the Thracian fox-pelt cap. Only his barber knew the secret, but it proved more than he could manage. He went to the river bank, dug a hole and divulged the secret: Midas has the ears of an ass. On the spot, reedy grasses grew, like the ones that provided the reed-pipe that was the instrument that the satyr played in the contest, and as the wind blew through the reeds, they whispered the secret that Midas had the ears of an ass. The myth suggests that at some point the Persian haoma sacrament, perhaps in Mithraism, assimilated the ergot toxin.

A similar tale is told of the third-century BCE legendary Celtic Labraid, High King of Ireland and the ancestor of the Laigin, after whom the province of Leinster is named. He had the ears of a horse, which he endeavored to keep a secret. A barber was chosen annually by lot to cut his hair and immediately put to death. A widow’s only son received the honor, but she begged the king not to kill him if he kept the secret. The secret made him fall ill, and a druid advised him to divulge it to the first tree he came upon at the crossroads. This was a willow, a tree that grows on wet ground, with netherworld associations in both Celtic and Classical lore. In Ireland, the willow’s branches contained two red eggs laid by a sea serpent, from which the universe hatched as the Sun and the Earth. The king’s harpist replaced his broken instrument, by chance constructing one anew from the wood of this same willow, and whenever the harp was strummed it proclaimed that Ladraid had the ears of a horse. This ended the need for the annual sacrifice of a barber.

Orpheus and Apollo
As with the musical contest of the bacchanalian satyr and Apollo, Dionysus and his half-brother Apollo have a special agonistic relationship, as reflected in the tale of the Thracian king Lycurgus’ attack on the mountain maenads and the infant Dionysus. Lycurgus is named as the one who does the ‘Wolf-work.’ Apollo, with his double tradition of homelands among the northern Hyperboreans (presumably
the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans before their migrations) and his Lycian homeland of the Mountain Mother (the Indo-Europeans who became the Trojan Hittites), was in both cases as a god of prophecy associated with the Soma/haoma mushroom, probably the Amanita muscaria. In this manifestation, he was involved with lycanthy as metaphoric for the induced state of altered consciousness.

‘Apple’ as the fruit of the magical tree may be etymologically derived from the name of Apollo. He maintained the epithet of ‘fly-catcher’ (Myiagros) presumably driving away the flies that swarm about the carcasses of slaughtered bovines, but equally significant in terms of the bovine manifestation of Amanita muscaria. As he transitioned into his persona as a member of the Olympian family, Apollo’s identity as a wolf-god (lykos) was given a false etymology, not derived from ‘wolf,’ but from ‘light’ (Latin lux, for ‘light,’ Greek leukos, for ‘white’). Apollo’s epithet was explained as derived from the sun, shining and making everything white. As a solar deity, he is analogous to the Zoroastrian Mazda of Mithraism. The god’s tenuous claim to the light of day, however, is reflected in the word for the dangerous marginal time of the dawn and the twilight as the ‘wolf-light’ (lykophos). Similarly, the dangerous time when werewolves are abroad, the ‘wolf-walk’ (lykabas, as in the German name Wolfgang), is given an optimistic meaning as the ‘path of the sun’ and glossed as a period of time, perhaps a year. (Fig-16)

Apollo was considered a ‘herdsman’ (with his epithet Nomios). His name is plausibly derived from apella, which designates not only the flock of beasts, but the assemblage of the people, being the Dorian equivalent of the ecclesia in Athens (‘group summoned together,’ like synagogue).

The word for ‘pasturage’ and ‘law’ are homonymous in Greek (nomos), which provided the fundamental pun upon which Aristophanes constructed his Birds comedy. As such, Apollo in the persona of the wolf-god also played a beneficial role in overseeing puberty initiations (as the wolf-walk) into tribal brotherhoods organized as ‘packs’ of males. Nevertheless, it is the herdsman’s task to cull his flock. Apollo’s name was given the significant false etymology as derived from the Greek verb ‘to kill, destroy’ (apollu-esthai). In his pre-Olympian persona, Apollo and his former goddess, who became his Olympian twin sister Artemis, were the deities most involved in the taking of human victims, as mythologized in the tale of the bull-man, the Minotaur at the center of the Temple of the Goddess in the labyrinth of Minoan Knossos. Even in Classical times at moments of crisis, such offerings were still made at Delphi and elsewhere, and Artemis still accepted men as sacrificial victims, but at the last moment, the officiating priest mistakenly made only a slight cut on the neck, drawing blood. As the Thracian Bendis, Artemis shares her brother’s motif of lycanthropy in the hunt, a pattern reflected also in the myth of Actaeon, the Theban hunter and cousin of Pentheus, whose pack of hounds turned rabid and mistook their master for a stag.

In his Olympian solar purity,
Apollo requires someone else to assume the burden of his primitive persona. It is the same relationship played out between Euripides’ Pentheus and Dionysus in the Bacchae. Someone particularly close to the god is required, a son, a brother, a fervent devotee. Dionysus, with his analogous involvement with the mushroom, is the best recipient, since his invention of the wine and his ecstatic maenadic revels have already worked out the ritual mediation between the wilderness and civilization. Apollo and Dionysus developed into the traditional opposition of Apollonian and Dionysian modes of music and cognition. Dionysus plays a similar role to Hermes, another half-brother of Apollo. Hermes’ theft of Apollo’s estrous cows purifies his brother from the implications of the herder like Argos, prodding the bovines into estrus, and either he, as at the conclusion of the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, or Dionysus replaces Apollo as the deity presiding over the swarms of bacchant bees in the revels of the Wolf-Cave above Delphi.

The Thracian Orpheus has a name that designates him as an ‘orphan.’ He was a devout worshipper of his beloved Apollo in his solar manifestation, and it was his role to be another Pentheus, wrenched limb from limb in the ritual sparagmos of a bacchant revel in Thrace, ‘orphaned’ from the light, which is the etymology of his name. Although he was supposed to have lived in the generation before the Trojan War and was listed in the crew of Medea’s Jason in the sailing of the Argonauts, his existence was questioned in antiquity and there is little doubt that he was only a figure of myth. The Golden Fleece was eventually interpreted as the parchment (animal hide) on which was written the Orphic alchemical formula for the haoma sacrament affording transcendence by transmuting the metal of the soul to golden.

The myth of Orpheus and his intended bride Eurydice is a calque of the foundational myth of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the abduction of Demeter’s daughter by Hades, the lord of the underworld. Eurydice bears a name that is an attribute of Persephone as mistress of the netherworld. In a bacchant revel on her wedding day to Orpheus, Eurydice was bitten by a venomous serpent as she fled from a satyr (or Apollo or a son of Apollo, or perhaps even Orpheus, since he must have been taking part in the revel on his wedding day). There is no doubt that it was the bacchant revel of plant-gathering, and the serpent’s venom is an analogue of the toxicity of the plant, since serpents and plants are each the reciprocal source of their toxins. Hence the identity of the gathered plant must have been the same as that celebrated by the Athenian Queen’s sexual liaison with Dionysus in the bull stall of the Lesser Mystery. Although the two hereditary priestly families of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Eumolpidae and the Kerykes claimed descent from a Thracian ancestor, indicating the probable importation of the haoma sacrament for the Lesser Mystery, Orpheus, despite the cenotaph of his teacher or son Musaeus in Athens, doesn’t seem to have arrived on the scene until the sixth century. This tradition is confusing, however, and may indicate that Attica already had the haoma sacrament from its Indo-European Mycenaean Pisistradidae immigrants, since the common ancestor of the Thracian priesthoods claimed descent from the Athenian Oreithyia, who was abducted from Athens to Thrace by the north wind Boreas in a bacchant ritual of plant gathering with her companions, the sisterhood of the pharmakoς or ‘drug.’ Phármakos is the word for the pharmaceutical agent, whereas pharmakós designated the human victim offered as sacrifice to Apollo. Hence Oreithyia’s pharmaceutical sisterhood was interchangeable with the hyacinth-sisters, a plant sacred to Apollo and identified as
the daughters of Erechtheus, who were the etiology for the offering of human victims, as depicted in the Parthenon frieze, according to the recent reinterpretation of the scene, a tradition also recorded in Euripides’ Ion tragedy. Kreousa survived only because her father died before she reached puberty, and hence became impregnated by Apollo with her son Ion while gathering the Corycian crocus. The Thracian priesthoods probably mark the supplanting of other psychoactive agents employed at the Eleusinian sanctuary before its assimilation into the patriarchal dominance of the Olympian religion, such as the opium poppy, which still figures in the iconography of the site and is clearly depicted in images of the goddess from Minoan Crete. A similar transition occurs in Perseus’ renaming of Mycenae from its probable earlier name as Mekonae for the sisterhood of the poppy.

Orpheus supposedly entered the underworld to retrieve his abducted bride, charming the netherworld guardians with the harmony of his Apollonian lyre, but as he led her up through the wolf cave at Taenarum, he yielded to her pleas and turned to look at her. Hence, he failed to raise her from the dead. This was the same entrance to the netherworld that Heracles used, and he had prepared for his successful return by seeking purification and initiation at Eleusis. The failure to raise the goddess constitutes a revision and rejection of the Greater Mystery. The adherents of the tradition that he supposedly founded were the religion known as Orphism. It rejected the acquiescence to a blissful afterlife in the Elysian Fields of Persephone’s realm, striving instead through progressive purification and a special vegetarian diet over the course of many reincarnations to finally escape from her embrace, to divest the corporeal body of the sin of the soul’s incarnation, so that it would eventually achieve liberation and ascend as pure spirit for an eternal existence in the solar realm of Apollo. The scenario is described in the myth of Er as presented in Plato’s Republic.

Procreative sex, as in many Gnostic traditions, was the sin that perpetuated through the successive generations of mankind the incarnation or incarceration of an ever-dwindling source of seminal fiery spirit in the female wetness of matter. Thus, Orpheus was said have invented pederasty and to have so charmed the men of Thrace that they abandoned their wives. These are the women of the bacchanalia who like Agave and her Theban sisterhood wrested him limb from limb. His head, like a harvested mushroom, became an oracular voice, delivering prophecies from numerous caves throughout Thrace, read out of the bizarre writing of an arcane script on his Phrygian cap. There were no temples or sanctuaries of Orphism, leading some scholars to doubt that such a religion ever existed, despite abundant literary testimony and numerous archaeological artifacts. The caves were the sites where the secret Mystery of his initiation was celebrated. The fifth-century BCE Louvre bas-relief known as the ‘Exaltation of the Flowers’ from Pharsalos in northern Thessaly depicts the two goddesses blatantly displaying large mushrooms. It was not a grave marker and was probably not taken from the quite distant Eleusinian sanctuary. Its original site was probably a local cave of the nymphs, where it served as an altar for Orphic ceremonies. Some idea of the scenario for such rites can be glimpsed by analogues to Plato’s allegory of the cave in the Republic and from Mithraism. Orpheus was said to have studied in Egypt, and the influence of oriental mysticism as a philosophical theology are unmistakable. Pythagoras also spent time in Egypt, where the magus Zaratas initiated him into the secret Persian mysteries, which is probably a verbal corruption of
Zoroaster. Zoroaster (Zarathustra) was not a single historical person, but the hereditary title of a Persian magus priest as an astrologer.

The Thracian Wine of Maron

Greek wine was customarily drunk diluted with water, usually a ratio of three or four parts of water to wine, ceremoniously mixed in the krater urn at the host’s specification at the beginning of the drinking party, called a symposium. This might be expected to produce a drink of slight ethanol content since the fungal yeasts that convert the sugar of the juice to ethanol produce an alcoholic aqueous habitat that is too toxic for the further growth of the fungus at about twelve percent ethanol, depending on the sweetness of the grapes, and dilution with water would greatly reduce the drink’s inebriating potency. The Thracians, as less civilized than their southern neighbors, drank their wine straight and were noted as habitual drunkards or demented like King Kotys. The diluted wine, however, was very intoxicating, with only a few rounds of drink producing strongly altered states of consciousness, resulting in rowdiness and even death. Like the Eleusinian potion, however, wine was a sacred drink, mediating the wild and civilized personae of its entheogenic indwelling deity. Thus, it was a variable mixture, incorporating commemorations of the toxins not derived from viticulture. These included even deadly poisons like hemlock in sub-lethal dosages.

Nothing would be more appropriate than that the primitive mushroom be reunited with its civilized relative in the wine potion. A fifth-century red-figure hydria found in a cemetery of ancient Thracian Ainos (Adrianopolis) depicts a cultic scene of the mixing of wine in a partially buried pithos urn, the customary vessel for a fermentation cask as well as for a burial container or grave marker. A mushroom is being inspected by a priest for inclusion as an ingredient in the ferment, to which a vine, bryony or smilax, is already being added.

In the Homeric tradition, Maron was a Thracian priest of Apollo. By other accounts or as additional identifying information, Maron was a satyr or a son of Dionysus or a pupil of Silenus, who tended the infant Dionysus in Nysa, furthering the motif of the reciprocity of Dionysian-Apollonian antithesis. It was Maron who gave Odysseus the wine with which he intoxicated the Cyclops Polyphemus (Fig-17). It was of extraordinary heroic potency, requiring dilution with twenty parts water to be drunk safely. No wine could yield such a concentration of ethanol from natural fermentation. In the Roman period a wine was marketed as Maron’s wine, and on the personal experience of the Roman governor assigned to the province, it still required eight parts water.

The Great Gods of Samothrace

This was probably the wine exported from the island of Samothrace and
associated with the various caves throughout Thrace dedicated to the Apollo who had the epithet Zerynthian. One such cave of note was on the River Hebrus on the mainland, near Ainos, but the most famous was the cave opposite on the northern shore of the nearby looming island of Samothrace. The epithet belongs to the Pelasgian-Minoan language of the pre-Indo-European peoples, and Apollo’s twin sister there bore the Dacian wolf-people’s name of Bendis, a huntress like Artemis, but a Dionysian goddess, wearing the fox-pelt headgear and attended by satyrs and maenads, with certain similarities more characteristic of the Medusa-like Kotytto than her Olympian manifestation as Athena. The island of Samothrace is volcanic and heavily forested, with numerous caves issuing copious streams pouring from the plentiful subterranean aquifer of the sacred mountain, termed Saos. Samothrace is named as the Thracian Saos, to distinguish it from Samos. Samos also had its Mystery, and it is from its summit that Poseidon watched the progress of the Trojan War. The Samothacian volcanic mountain was sacred to the moon, and hence to the huntress Bendis, who like Artemis presided over the menstrual cycle, midwifery, and lactation, and the island had a strong tradition of matriarchal dominance, supposedly first settled by Amazons, wearing their Phrygian caps, although before then, it was thought to have been the base from which so-called pirates, the Sinites, attacked ships destined for the highly symbolic difficult passage through the Bosporus and the mythical crimson Clashing Rocks into the euphemistically named Hospitable Sea and its far eastern shore, where the Tree with the Golden Fleece was guarded by its serpent and its mistress, the maiden Medea, originally of Corinth, but the ancestor of the Persians.

The Zerynthian Cave on Samothrace most probably is the one with thermal waters above the later sanctuary of the Great Gods and it was the original site of the Cotyttia bacchanalia that later were enacted on more easily accessible terrain lower down on the slope in the so-called Hall of Choral Dancing and the cavernous Rotunda of Queen Arsinoe. The buildings were probably meant to house aspects of the Cotyttia revels, and the Initiation Hall, at the far western edge across from the eastern entrance Gate House to the sanctuary has an inner sanctum cut from the slope, making it a simulacrum of a cave. It was marked with an inscription stating that only an initiate was allowed to progress beyond its entrance. What has been identified as a Theater on the slope beneath the Winged Victory Fountain has no staging area and does not explain the tradition of the Dionysian rites at the sanctuary as theatrical performances, but it was probably the site for the rhapsodic recitation of poems, like the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, and for witnessing preparatory ceremonies and sacrifices of a ram, with its probable mythological referent being that of the Golden Fleece. The circular area just beyond the Gate House is surrounded by a perimeter of a couple of descending steps and was the probable site for the preliminary welcoming address and orientation for the arriving candidates for the initiation. The waters of the stream were channeled through the sanctuary, maintaining the symbolism of the original site.

The sanctuary profited greatly in architectural development from the generosity of the Hellenistic royal heirs to the conquest of Alexander the Great. His mother Olympias had been introduced as a teenager by her uncle at the Mystery celebration to Philip of Macedon as a possible replacement for his first wife, who had failed to provide him with a male heir, and the princess Olympias, a descendant of Achilles (from the Trojan Andromache,
Hector’s wife, and Achilles’ son Neoptolemus), apparently believed, and so told her son, that she had conceived him in a bacchanalia in one of these Zerynthian caves, as Zeus in the form of an Egyptian serpent inseminated her. Philip was said to have lost the sight of one of his eyes for witnessing the event. The outdoor bivouacking of the initiates in the area in front of the Stoa at the Samothracian sanctuary would have provided ample suspicion of sexual liaisons, apart from the mystical eroticism of the Cotyttia bacchanalia, with the maenads of Bendis consorting with satyrs. A fine statue of Pothos (‘Sexual Yearning’), a young son of Aphrodite, survives from the Hall of Choral Dancing.

Spiritual materializations of the netherworld goddess Hecate with her epithet of Perseis (daughter of Perse) were evoked originally from the Zerynthian Cave in the bacchanalia, dogs were sacrificed, indicating the motif of lycanthropy as metaphoric for the altered consciousness, and there were torch-lit processions of the initiates in honor of Persephone, and of the various creatures who danced for the birth of the divine son of the Mountain Mother. Euripides in his Hecuba (Greek Hekabe) tragedy explored the affinity of the Queen of Troy to her namesake Hekate (Hecate), foretelling her metamorphosis into a hound in the pack of the netherworld goddess. The Mystery was supposed to have provided assurance of safety for those sailing at sea. The sanctuary includes the dedication of an entire ship enclosed within a display building as a votive offering. Hence two of these dancing creatures who were patrons of the Mystery were identified as the Dioskouroi, the twin sons of Zeus who hatched with their sisters Helen and Clytemnestra from the eggs that resulted from the deity’s sexual engagement with Leda as a swan, a bird not otherwise ever associated with Zeus, but with Apollo and with the transition into death. In non-Hellenic religions, the swan was considered a soul bird, perhaps as migratory, and the swan neck was a common design, like the cow horns, for the arms of the Apollonian lyre. The song of the swan, a bird otherwise with only a rasping raucous hiss, is the swan’s first and last finest musical voice, and it is the prophetic bird’s beautiful description of the realm that lies beyond the threshold into the otherworld. Sailing was metaphoric, and the initiates were engaged in a voyage upon the sea of life. Other versions of these creatures of the Mystery initiation made more explicit the fungal identity of the Dioskouroi that was encoded in the riddle of the Promethean herb with the twin stem, bursting in half from the egg, whose twinned halves each of these sons of Zeus wore as their caps, one of the sons mortal, the other immortal, but sharing their antithetical natures together on alternating days. (Fig-18)

The corybants were also among the initiation creatures. They danced to hide the birth cries of the infant Zeus by banging upon their circular shields like drums, and hence the Zerynthian Cave was an analogue of the Minoan Cave of the Cre- tan Mount Ida. The corybants, like the primordial people of Corinth, sprang from the ground after a fall of rain from a thunderstorm. They were traditionally depicted, with cylindrical shields uplifted above their heads, standing upon a single foot. They have analogues in the annals of fan-
tactical creatures as the parasol people known as Shade-foots and the Caulomyctetes, the latter being a tribe of tiny warriors who wore their shields as their 
mushroom caps.

The remains from the sanctuary include a large stash of individual drinking vessels, marked property of the gods, and it is clear that drinking to the point of extreme intoxication was characteristic of the ceremony. Part of the liturgy was preserved in the pre-Indo-European language, and the deities bore names designating a Holy Lady (Axieros), her daughter (Axiokersa), and her consort abductor bearing her name (Axiokersos), and a divine son or acolyte as little Cadmus, who was also the mate of the Holy Lady. The African mother of Cadmus supposedly died on the island. The archaeological remains of the 
mushroom monuments in Thrace often include a major rock formation carved as a throne and an adjacent subservient throne, presumably for the initiate. The Samothracian initiation included a ritual enthronement, enacted with sexual harassment or hazing. What the initiates apparently experienced was a spiritual reuniting with the primordial human couple, which in terms of the Mystery probably represented the two complementary halves of the split hermaphrodisate. With this renewed covenant with the great Mountain Mother, they could expect fair sailing and calm seas through the journey of life.

The Great God Sabazios

The most prominent god of the Thracians was a horseman called Katabamos (perhaps cognate with Greek kata-ba-menos, the ‘man who goes down’), a hero god of the underworld, usually depicted slaying a beast with a spear, like the Christian tradition of Saint George and the Dragon, which is itself an assimilation of the 
Perseus and Andromeda myth.

Andromeda (Andro-meda/Metis/ Medusa/Medea) is a version of the Medusa motif. 
Perseus named his daughter by Andromeda Gorgophone with his heroic epithet as ‘Gorgon-killer.’ Their other child was the Persian Perses. As a dialectical reflex of the Indo-European Dyeus (which yielded the Greek god Zeus, and the Latin deus and Greek theos for ‘god,’ Katabamos was equated with the god Sabazios as a manifestation of Zeus (Saba-zios). Sabos is the Thracian equivalent of Dionysus-Bacchus. His ecstatic reveling devotees were called Saboi, instead of Bacchae or bacchants. Sabazios is thus the Dionysus-Zeus. As a god of the thunderbolt, he presided over immortality in the figure of Zalmoxis; a name derived from the Thracian zalmon for an animal pelt, hence the equivalent of the bassara lycanthropic fox pelt of the Thracian Bassarides maenads, named for the fox pelt. In the case of Zalmoxis. It was apparently the bear skin of the berserker bear-wolfs, since the etiology of his name was the tale that the mother of Zalmoxis wrapped him in a bear skin when he was born. Thus, he is similar to the Trojan prince Paris, who was suckled by a bear and taken home from the mountainside by a herdsman in a sack for gathered plants, the 
pera, which is the etiology of his name as Paris. The herdsman showed Priam the tongue of a dog (fox, wolf) as proof that he had killed the infant.

In Athens of the fifth-century, the cult of Sabazios was already established and recognizable on the comic stage as a Persian warrior Thracian mushroom cult, with a parody dance of the little creatures of the Samothracian Mystery. The Sabazios celebration was a secret Dionysian bacchanalian rite practiced not on the wild mountainside, but as a procession through the streets of the city itself, after a night-long Mystery rite in the private house of a priestess. In the next century, as we know
from Demosthenes’ oration On the Crown, the mother of the future tragedian and orator Aeschines engaged her young son in these revels, reciting the sacred liturgical texts, ecstatically ululating and purifying the initiates dressed in fawn-skins. He extracted the toxins from serpents by massaging their venom ducts, and mixed the intoxicating potion, which was apparently described metaphorically as a toxic drink of bull’s blood. The initiates mortified their bodies in muddy mire and confessed the sinfulness of their spiritual Incarnation. The rite was clearly similar or identical with what is known of Orphism.

Zalmoxis was also called Salmoxis and Gebeleizis, and he may be the same legendary prophet-deity who is known as Orpheus, the epithet of Apollo’s Dionysian antithesis as the ‘Orphan of the Light.’ Orpheus and Zalmoxis are linked in obscure references and inscriptions as members of a mystical priesthood of seven who founded the religion of Sabazios. Although these figures in oral traditions belong to the mid second millennium in the generations before the Trojan War, they surface into the historical record in the sixth century as an aspect of the Ionian Enlightenment and renewed contact with the Persian Empire as it encroached upon the Mediterranean Greeks. Thus although Zalmoxis was clearly a figure of the mid second millennium BCE, on the authority of Herodotus, he was considered a slave (or spiritual initiator) of Pythagoras, who experienced a vision of the mathematical perfection of the Cosmos from his incubation in cave rituals, the Zoroastrian transcendence of Mithraism, with its haoma sacrament. The Thracian accounts of Zalmoxis similarly suggest transcendence from a subterranean banqueting chamber. As an outcome of the initiation of Pythagoras by Zaratas, the philosopher was said to have had a bone of his body replaced with gold. This was his golden thigh, probably a euphemism for the boney erection between his thighs, like the second birth of Dionysus from (between) the thighs of Zeus. This golden thigh of Pythagoras was supposedly imprinted with the image of Apollo, and Pythagoras was said to have journeyed to the mythical homeland of the Indo-Europeans known as the Hyperboreans on the arrow-toxin of Apollo, where he displayed his thigh and it was bitten by serpent, hence ratifying its toxicity.

Sabazios was depicted as a bearded god on horseback, like the Dioskouroi with their four immortal steeds. His cult is responsible for the Macedonian royal name of Philip, the ‘Lover of Horses,’ and for the Amazon Hippolyta’s Orphic son Hippolytus. Dedication to Sabazios in Mithraea indicate that he was assimilated to Mitras, who could be depicted as a horseman engaged in the deer hunt, which is metaphoric for the hunt of the mushroom that renders the Cervidae the gateway to mystical vision. Sabazios was also assimilated to the Jewish Yahweh as Sabbaoth in the cult of the so-called Sabbathists in central Anatolia. In the second century CE, the Jews were expelled from Rome for corrupting the worship of Jupiter with Sabazios, and in the second century Christian writers identified Musaeus, the son of Orpheus, with Moses (Greek Moïsés). (Fig-19)

The most numerous artifacts surviving from the cult of Sabazios are the single bronze hands, mostly from the Roman period, perhaps imported with Thracian gladiators, or others the donations of wealthy Thracian patrons at prominent traditional sanctuaries, intended as the finial on a staff for processionals or enshrined for veneration. Some have a hinged door at the wrist to function as a ciborium or to house a figurine of the Mountain Mother Cybele and her nursling son. Saba is a version of Cybele’s name,
and her son was Sabos-Dionysus. Sabazios is hence Cybele’s Zeus.

The fingers of these sacred hands are positioned in the traditional gesture of benediction, and the fingers are ornamented with a variety of occult items, usually with a long, crested serpent rising above the ring finger, sometimes drinking a liquid from a tiny vase resting on the little finger, and a Mithraic-Dionysian pinecone at the tip of the thumb. Sometimes the bearded god himself resides in the palm of the hand, making the same gesture of benediction. He is obviously a little creature, no bigger than a finger, a dactyl, an anthropomorphism of the haoma mushroom.

A Roman relief from a Mithaeum of the first century CE, now in the National Museum of Copenhagen, depicts a full standing figure of Sabazios, bearded and dressed in baggy trousers, loose tunic, Mithraic cape, and Phrygian cap. He holds a thyrsus in one hand and extends a pinecone in the other. He is surrounded by a bewildering array of sacred items whose significance presumably would have been imparted in the course of the Mystery initiation. Among these is another disembodied Phrygian cap, this one sprouting bull horns, identifying it as the bovine metaphor for the mushroom, and topped by a cross meant to indicate the intersectional crossing of the celestial equator with the solar elliptic, as was marked on the sacramental loaf of Eucharistic bread, another metaphor for the heaving mushroom of heaven. The cross was branded on the forehead of the initiates, signifying the opening of the visionary eye for the burst of fiery illumination (Persian xarenah).

In the left upper corner of the relief next to the depiction of Luna, the moon, crowned with lunar crescent horns supported the balance scale for the weighing of souls, is a mushroom. Its species is identified as the Amanita muscaria by the cow-fly clearly depicted on the other side of the lunar bust, the mushroom beneath one pan of the balance scale, the fly beneath the other. The wingspread is characteristic of the fly; it is not a bee.

It is rare to find evidence so explicit. The Copenhagen relief ranks with the Ainos hydria and the Perseus amphora of the Golden Apples, but adds the identification of the species that was the haoma sacrament.
References:


Some pictures were taken from: www.theoi.com
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