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The Participation of Slaves in Athenian Religion: Three Case Studies

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Abstract

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In this thesis, I investigate the interconnections between slavery and religion in Athens. Religion was deeply ingrained in Athenian society, as was slavery; the participation of slaves in religious rituals and festivals is therefore not surprising but yet often overlooked. I focus on three Athenian cults in which slaves participated and suggest that this participation adds to our understanding of the character of slavery and, to some extent, the slave experience in Athenian society. In his book *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Orlando Patterson argued that chattel slavery can be understood as a form of “social death,” the state of no longer belonging to a community and having “no social existence outside of [a] master.” Religion, however, is one area in which Patterson’s idea of “social death” can be critically engaged. I argue that slave participation in religious rituals and festivals challenges Patterson’s idea of “social death.” By participating in cult activities, the slaves were able to regain some of their lost personhood despite the dehumanization they experienced within a slave society. The affirmation of personhood and benefits the slaves gained from religious rituals suggest that slaves in ancient Athens were not necessarily in a full state of “social death.” I explore this topic through three cases studies: the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Thracian cult of Bendis, and the Kronia festival. The mysteries of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis initiated slaves and foreigners alongside male and female citizens. The Thracian cult of Bendis allowed anyone to participate as long as he or she could afford the membership fee. Bendis also had ethnic ties and attracted many people from the large population of Thracians, slave and free, in Athens. The Kronia was a festival in honor of the god Kronos, where slaves dined together with their masters, recalling the “golden age” during which all humans were equal and chattel slavery did not exist. Through these case studies, I hope to contribute to the historical understanding of not only ancient Athens as a slave society but also as a slave society in which slave and free participated together in religious events and festivals.

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The Participation of Slaves in Athenian Religion: Three Case Studies

Introduction

Ancient Athens was a slave society, one in which slavery was not only present but essential to its existence.¹ The effects of slavery can be seen in the economic, social, political, and religious life of Athens. In this thesis, I investigate the interconnections between slavery and religion in Athens. Religion was a part of the fabric of Athenian society as was slavery and therefore the participation of slaves in religious rituals and festivals is not surprising. Indeed, one of the few roles slaves had outside the Athenian *oikos* was in the religious sphere. Slaves played many different roles in ritual contexts. In some festivals, they were treated in ways similar to free men while other times they were assigned negative roles such as that of a *pharmakos* (scapegoat). Temples were places of asylum to slaves as well as free men, and slaves shared the same gods with their masters. If slaves were foreigners, as they often were, they often were allowed to continue to worship their native gods.²

In this work, I focus on three Athenian religious cults in which slaves participated and suggest that the participation of slaves adds to our understanding of the slave's personhood and the character of slavery in Athenian society. In his influential book *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Orlando Patterson argued that chattel slavery can be understood as a form of "social death." He defines the "social death" of a slave as the

¹ Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*. pp. 135-48.

² Burkert, *Greek Religion*. p. 259.

state of no longer belonging to a community and having “no social existence outside of his master.”³ Patterson’s work argued for an understanding of slavery that went beyond the analysis of economic structures and markets to include the social significance of a slave’s position. Religion, however, is one area in which Patterson’s idea of “social death” can be both engaged and challenged. Patterson himself says very little about slaves and religion except that the *polis* developed the institution of religion in order to reinforce the “social death” and marginalization of the slave from society. He lists three ways that religion “aided in the adjustment of the slave to his social death.”⁴ The first is that slaves were allowed to participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries; the second that festivals such as the Kronia and Saturnalia both “vented feelings of tension” and “reaffirmed the rightness of the established social order;” and the third being sacred manumission.⁵ However, there is much more to be said. In this thesis, I argue that slave participation in religious rituals and festivals challenges and undermines Patterson’s idea of “social death.” By participating in cult activities, the slave was able to regain some notion of his or her personhood despite the dehumanization he or she experienced within a slave society. Provided they had their masters’ permission, they could take part in cults related to their ethnicity or cults that offered specific benefits during their life or after death.⁶ The affirmation of personhood and benefits the slaves

³ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death a Comparative Study*. p. 38.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 66.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 66-7.

⁶ Garlan, *Slavery in Ancient Greece*. p. 198.

gained from religious rituals suggest that slaves in ancient Athens were not necessarily in a full state of “social death” as argued by Patterson.

I explore this topic through three cases studies: the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Thracian cult of Bendis, and the Kronia festival. The mysteries of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis were inclusive; slaves and foreigners were initiated alongside male and female citizens.⁷ It seems that slaves were initiated no differently than citizens; as long as they could pay the initiation fee, they were welcomed. The Thracian cult of Bendis operated in a similar fashion; if the slave could pay the membership fee to the *orgeones*, then he or she was allowed to participate fully. The cult of Bendis also had ethnic ties; Bendis was a Thracian goddess and thus attracted many people from the large population of Thracians, slave and free, in Athens. The Kronia was a festival in honor of the god Kronos, where slaves dined together with their masters, recalling the “golden age” during which all human beings were equal and chattel slavery did not exist.⁸

My evidence in support of this thesis is primarily epigraphic and literary. Epigraphical sources for both the Eleusinian Mysteries and the cult of Bendis provide proof that slaves participated. Iconography on vase paintings, stelai, and terracottas offers visual evidence of the importance of the cult of Bendis in Attica. Then, literary evidence adds additional information on the rituals and advantages of initiation or

⁷ Burkert, *Homo Necans*. p. 254.

⁸ Zelnick-Abramovitz, “Slaves and Role Reversal in Ancient Greek Cults.” p. 99.

membership and makes it clear that slaves were benefiting from these cults in the same manner as free people. For the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Kronia festival in particular, the ancient authors ventured to interpret the slave's reaction to participation, which in their mind was gratitude towards his or her master for allowing it. Whether or not this represents the slave's own experience is hard to know.

The sources documenting slave participation in these cults vary immensely. The overwhelming majority of the primary sources are written by the slave-owning class, and we therefore have a skewed perception of the slave experience. Slave participation in the Eleusinian cults is confirmed by inscriptions recording the cost of initiation of the slaves as well as by literary sources. The cult of Bendis has the most explicit evidence of slave participation. Slaves appear in inscriptions that list *orgeones* and accounts for sacrifices and other offerings at Bendis's sanctuary. A dedicatory inscription erected by a slave is also present. For the Kronia, I rely mostly on Roman era sources that discuss the Kronia in relation to the Saturnalia. As will be seen, this raises some important questions about the character of the historical Greek festival.

Modern scholarship has generally ignored the relationship between the slave experience and religion. Joseph Vogt, Yvon Garlan, and Orlando Patterson (as noted) offer the most insight on the connection but even they only devote a page to the

subject of slaves and religion.⁹ Robert Parker, Walter Burkert, and other scholars of Greek religion only briefly mention slaves in relation to their eligibility to participate in cult activities.¹⁰ Studies of the Kronia, such as that of Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz, offer insight on the slave experience but they do not provide evidence on the slave experience in cults that do not specifically focus on slaves, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries and the cult of Bendis. Through this thesis, I aim to critically examine the participation of slaves in religious activities in Athens in order to understand if religious participation contributed to or partially alleviated the “social death” of the slave.

⁹ Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*; Garland, *Slavery in Ancient Greece*; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death a Comparative Study*.

¹⁰ Parker, *Athenian Religion*; Burkert, *Homo Necans*; Burkert, *Greek Religion*; Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*; Sourvinou-Inwood, *Athenian Myths and Festivals*; Easterling and Muir, *Greek Religion and Society*.

Chapter 1: The Participation of Slaves in the Eleusinian Mysteries

ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων:

ὃς δ' ἀτελής ἱερῶν ὃς τ' ἀμμορος, οὔποθ' ὁμοίων

αἴσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἡρόεντι.

Blessed is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites,

but the uninitiated who has no share in them never

has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness.

*The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, lines 480-2.*¹¹

The mysteries at Eleusis offered initiates a blessed existence and, most notably, the hopes of a better afterlife than the one destined for non-initiates. Athenians and foreigners, of all social classes and status, flocked to be initiated at Eleusis and reap the benefits of practicing the rites of the goddess. Such a following gave the cult of Demeter tremendous political and religious power. All were eligible to be initiated into the mysteries – men, women, children, and slaves – so long as they spoke Greek and were untainted by human blood.¹²

Initiation into the mysteries provided slaves with a unique opportunity to experience their own identity as persons, within a society in which they were legally chattel. Slaves existed in a state of tension produced by what Orlando Patterson termed

¹¹ Translation: Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. All subsequent translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

¹² Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*. p. 282.

their “social death.” They were seen and used by society as chattel, dehumanized and cut off from any aspect of individual identity. Simultaneously however, slaves could have religious experiences in the same way as free people. This paradoxical tension of being an object versus being a human being plagued the slave experience. The rebirth as a human that slaves experienced in their initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries gave them an opportunity to enjoy their personhood. According to Patterson, participation in the cult at Eleusis aided the slave in the “adjustment” to his or her social death.¹³ I argue that it did not aid slaves in their adjustment but released them since it allowed slaves to retain their humanity in one aspect of life.

This ambiguous identity of a slave as both chattel and human is brought up in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. Aristotle says “there can be no friendship of a master for a slave as such, though there may be for him as a man” (II61a30-b6).¹⁴ The slave *qua* slave was not worth engaging with socially; the slave *qua* man, on the other hand, was worthy of a free man’s friendship. This idea not only represents the fundamental tension in the ancient slave’s existence, but Athenian society’s contradictory view of slaves as both “socially dead” pieces of property and active human beings.

In this chapter, I explore the evidence for the participation of slaves in the Eleusinian mysteries and the significance of this participation for Athenian society. First, I review the foundation of Demeter’s cult at Eleusis and the structure of the priesthood.

¹³ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death a Comparative Study*. p. 67.

¹⁴ Translation modified from Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*. p. 119.

Then, I discuss the process of initiation into the mysteries and the requirements for eligibility. Next, I examine the evidence for the initiation of slaves. Finally, I explore the effects of their initiation on slaves' personhood and the larger implications for Athenian society.

I draw from literary and epigraphic sources for this chapter. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* provides the earliest account of the establishment of the mysteries as well as the benefits that initiates could expect from the cult. The later writings of the second century C.E. geographer Pausanias provide important evidence of the strict secrecy kept by the initiates of the mysteries' rites. For evidence of the initiation of slaves, I use both literature and inscriptions. In [Demosthenes'] *Against Neaira*, Apollodoros recounts the initiation of a slave, Metaneira, into the mysteries. In addition, the comic poet Theopilos writes of a slave's gratitude to his master for initiating him. Finally, two inscriptions note the initiation of slaves into the mysteries and the prices of their initiation.

Establishment of the Mysteries

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* tells the story of the mythical founding of the Mysteries at Eleusis. After her daughter, Persephone, was kidnapped by Hades, Demeter became angry with Zeus and the other gods for not coming to her aid and left Olympus.

Τὴν δ' ἄχος αἰνότερον καὶ κύντερον ἵκετο θυμόν:
 χωσαμένη δὴ ἔπειτα κελαινεφέι Κρονίωνι
 νοσφισθεῖσα θεῶν ἀγορὴν καὶ μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον
 ὤχετ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων πόλιος καὶ πῖονα ἔργα
 εἶδος ἀμαλδύνουσα πολὺν χρόνον: οὐδέ τις ἀνδρῶν
 95εἰσορῶν γίγνωσκε βαθυζώνων τε γυναικῶν,
 πρὶν γ' ὅτε δὴ Κελεοῖο δαΐφρονος ἵκετο δῶμα,
 ὃς τότε Ἐλευσῖνος θυοέσσης κοίρανος ἦεν.

A more terrible and brutal grief seized the heart
 of Demeter, angry now at the son of Kronos with his dark clouds.
 Withdrawing from the assembly of the gods and high Olympus,
 she went among the cities and fertile fields of men,
 disguising her beauty for a long time. No one of men
 nor deep-girt women recognized her when they looked,
 until she came to the house of skillful Keleos,
 the man then ruler of fragrant Eleusis.¹⁵

So Demeter arrived in Eleusis and, when she encountered the king's daughters, she told them that she had been kidnapped from Crete to be sold into slavery and how she had escaped from the pirates.

¹⁵ Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Lines 90-7.

ἀλλ' ἔμοι οὐ δόρποιο μελίφρονος ἦρατο θυμός:
 130 λάθρη δ' ὄρμηθεῖσα δι' ἠπείροιο μελαίνης
 φεύγου ὑπερφιάλους σημάντορας, ὄφρα κε μή με
 ἀπριάτην περάσαντες ἐμῆς ἀποναίαιτο τιμῆς.

My heart did not crave a heartwarming dinner,
 but racing in secret across the dark mainland
 I escaped from my arrogant masters, lest
 they should sell me, as yet unbought, for a price overseas.¹⁶

Demeter then became the nurse of the king's children. Demeter's ties to slaves can be seen immediately since, according to her story, she almost was one until she escaped. The nurse also was frequently a slave occupation, although Demeter here does earn a wage. With Demeter in this subordinate position, the very founding of the Eleusinian Mysteries cuts against traditional hierarchy and political order. Many cults were founded to honor a great hero; in their stories, this figure is always at the top of the hierarchy in a position of honor and power, not a servant in a king's house. The fact that Demeter took on a lower-class role is also significant because of the large social range of the participants at Eleusis. The goddess showed that she did not favor the upper classes over the lower when she took the position of the nurse. Eventually, Demeter revealed her divinity to the royal family after becoming angry with the queen. She commanded

¹⁶ Ibid. Lines 129-32.

them to build a temple in her honor and she established the mysteries so that they may practice them to win back her good favor.

ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι νηόν τε μέγαν καὶ βωμὸν ὑπ' αὐτῷ
 τευχόντων πᾶς δῆμος ὑπαὶ πόλιν αἰπύ τε τεῖχος
 Καλλιχόρου καθύπερθεν ἐπὶ προὔχοντι κολωνῷ.
 ὄργια δ' αὐτῇ ἐγὼν ὑποθήσομαι, ὡς ἂν ἔπειτα
 εὐαγέως ἔρδοντες ἐμὸν νόον ἰλάσκοισθε.

But now let all the people build me a great temple
 with an altar beneath, under the sheer wall
 of the city on the rising hill above Kallichoron.
 I myself will lay down the rites so that hereafter
 performing due rites you may propitiate my spirit.¹⁷

Initiates benefitted in this life and the next from her favor by practicing the rites that Demeter set out for all in the hymn.

By the sixth century, Eleusis was part of the Athenian polis and its mysteries were under Athenian administration.¹⁸ In addition to the administration of Eleusis, Athens established a small sanctuary to Demeter, the Eleusinion, within the city near the Acropolis. While the chief priesthood (*hierophant*) was appointed from the genos of

¹⁷ Ibid. Lines 270-4.

¹⁸ Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. p. 57.

the Eumolpidai family¹⁹ who claimed to be descendants of the Eleusinian kings, the secondary office (*daduchos*) was held by priests drawn from the *genos* of the Kerykes who were native to Athens.²⁰ The priestess was provided by the Philleidai family and at least one other *genos*.²¹

Initiation into the Mysteries

Although the rites at Eleusis remain a well-kept secret, we know that the festival was held in early autumn during the month of Boedromion and lasted seven full days. In egalitarian fashion, men, women, foreigners, and slaves were all initiated in the temple of the Mysteries, the Telesterion.²² The requirement that one had to speak Greek and not have committed homicide in order to be initiated is stated by numerous modern authors, such as Mylonas and Evans, without any citations of specific evidence, as though the requirement was common knowledge. The inclusive nature of the cult is treated in the same manner in modern scholarship but Walter Burkert does cite Herodotus:

¹⁹ "She went to the kings who administer law, Triptolemos and Diokles, driver of horses, mighty Eumolpos and Keleos, leader of the people, and revealed the conduct of her rights and taught her Mysteries to all of them..." Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Lines 473-7.

²⁰ Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. p. 57.

²¹ Sourvinou-Inwood, *Athenian Myths and Festivals*. p. 342.

²² Evans, *Civic Rites*. p. 120.

τὴν δὲ ὀρθὴν ταύτην ἄγουσι Ἀθηναῖοι ἀνά πάντα ἔτεα τῇ Μητρὶ καὶ τῇ
Κούρῃ, καὶ αὐτῶν τε ὁ βουλόμενος καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Ἑλλήνων μυεῖται.

Every year the Athenians observe this festival for the Mother and the
Maiden, and any Athenian or other Hellene who wishes is initiated.²³

According to N.J. Richardson, the extreme secrecy under which the initiates
operated was not only to limit the benefits of the mysteries to the initiates but to
emphasize the awesome power of the honored deities and the benefits that they
offered.²⁴ The Homeric hymn also emphasizes secrecy:

ἦ δὲ κιοῦσα θεμιστοπόλοισ βασιλεῦσι
δειξεν Τριπτολέμω τε Διοκλεῖ τε πληξίππῳ
Εὐμόλπου τε βίῃ Κελεῶ θ' ἡγήτορι λαῶν
δρημοσύνην θ' ἱερῶν καὶ ἐπέφραδεν ὄργια πᾶσι,
Τριπτολέμω τε Πολυξείνω, ἐπὶ τοῖς δὲ Διοκλεῖ
σεμνά, τά τ' οὔπως ἔστι παρεξίμεν οὔτε πυθέσθαι
οὔτ' ἀχέειν: μέγα γάρ τι θεῶν σέβας ἰσχάνει αὐδήν.

She went to the kings who administer law,

Triptolemos and Diokles, driver of horses, mighty

Eumolpos and Keleos, leader of the people, and revealed

²³ *Histories* 8.65.4. Trans. Godley, *Herodotus with an English Translation*; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*. pp. 10-11.

²⁴ Richardson, "Early Greek Views About Life After Death." p. 58.

the conduct of her rites and taught her Mysteries to all of them,
 holy rites that are not to be transgressed, nor pried into,
 nor divulged. For a great awe of the gods stops the voice.²⁵

Initiation offered hopes for a blessed existence and sweet afterlife. In contrast with other cults that honored the highest levels of society, the Mysteries benefitted all peoples, regardless of their gender or social class.²⁶ The Homeric hymn proclaims:

ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων:
 ὃς δ' ἀτελής ἱερῶν ὃς τ' ἀμμορος, οὐποθ' ὁμοίων
 αἴσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἠερόεντι.

Blessed is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites,
 but the uninitiated who has no share in them never
 has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness.²⁷

The hymn also threatened eternal punishment to those who did wrong and failed to honor Demeter and Persephone as they ought to have done:

τῶν δ' ἀδικησάντων τίσις ἔσσεται ἤματα πάντα,
 οἳ κεν μὴ θυσίησι τεὸν μένος ἰλάσκωνται
 εὐαγέως ἔρδοντες, ἐναίσιμα δῶρα τελοῦντες.

²⁵ Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Lines 473-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Lines 480-2.

There will be a punishment forevermore for those wrongdoers
 who fail to appease your power with sacrifices,
 performing proper rites and making due offerings.²⁸

There were two parts to the Mysteries: one for general Athenian society and one for initiates only. The festival for the general public occurred in the open where both the initiated and uninitiated could bear witness. Everyone could be present to observe the procession of the *mystai* to Eleusis, their songs, and offerings.²⁹ While the public aspects of the festival are widely referenced in ancient literature, the secrecy of the cultic rites was very strictly enforced on the initiates. Both the Athenian government and the goddess herself meted out punishment to transgressors.³⁰ As noted earlier, Pausanias refused to share the secrets of Eleusis much later in his writings:

πρόσω δὲ ἰέναι με ὠρμημένον τοῦδε τοῦ λόγου καὶ ὅποσα ἐξήγησιν ἔχει
 τὸ Ἀθήνησιν ἱερὸν, καλούμενον δὲ Ἐλευσίνιον, ἐπέσχευ ὄψις ὄνειρατος:
 ἃ δὲ ἐς πάντας ὅσιον γράφειν, ἐς ταῦτα ἀποτρέψομαι (1.14.3)... τὰ δὲ
 ἐντὸς τοῦ τείχους τοῦ ἱεροῦ τό τε ὄνειρον ἀπεῖπε γράφειν, καὶ τοῖς οὐ
 τελεσθεῖσιν, ὁπόσων θεὰς εἴργονται, δῆλα δήπου μηδὲ πυθέσθαι
 μετεῖναί σφισιν. (1.38.7).

²⁸ Ibid. Lines 367-9.

²⁹ Simon, *Festivals of Attica*. p. 25.

³⁰ Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*. pp. 224-6.

After I had intended to go further into this story, and to describe the contents of the sanctuary at Athens, called the Eleusinion, I was stayed by a vision in a dream. I shall therefore turn to those things it is lawful to write of to all men (1.14.3)... My dream forbade the description of the things within the wall of the sanctuary, and the uninitiated are of course not permitted to learn that which they are prevented from seeing.

(1.38.7).³¹

Initiation (*myesis*) was completed by individuals at two levels: the *mystai* and the *epoptai*.³² Kevin Clinton suggests that there was also a preliminary initiation that was not always recognized as a distinct stage. After the preliminary initiation, the festival proper would take place at the sanctuary, the *mystai* being the main participants. A year later, these *mystai* could celebrate the Mysteries as *epoptai* with the current year's *mystai*.³³ The preliminary *myesis* could take place at certain times before the Lesser and Greater Mysteries either in Eleusis or in the City Eleusinion above the Agora of Athens.³⁴ It began with the sacrifice of a piglet followed by a ritual of purification by air and fire.³⁵ The annual celebration of the mysteries put all members of society on equal footing – only access to resources limited participation. Each initiate needed to buy a piglet for

³¹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*. Translated by W.H.S. Jones.

³² Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*. p. 237.

³³ Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries." p. 51.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 60.

³⁵ Burkert, *Greek Religion*. pp. 285-6.

sacrifice and pay the fifteen-drachma fee to cover his or her share of costs in the civic sacrifices on the first and last days of the festival.³⁶

After passing the gates of the sanctuary and a grotto dedicated to Hades, Lord of the Underworld, the celebration proper took place in the Telesterion. Unlike other Greek temples, the Telesterion was built to hold several thousand people at once who watched while the priest (*hierophant*) presented the sacred rites.³⁷

Slaves as Initiates

Regardless of their age or sex, both free and slave peoples could be initiated.³⁸ Paul Foucart, an early twentieth century epigrapher at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, worked extensively on the Eleusinian Mysteries and provides examples of the initiation of slaves. He argues that the city did not allow slaves to participate out of goodwill but because they had work to do in the interior of the sanctuary for which they needed to be initiated.³⁹ Although Foucart's point may hold for public slaves working in the sanctuary, it is not necessarily the case for all initiated slaves. The initiation of some was funded by their masters or other benefactors.

³⁶ Evans, "Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries." pp. 250-1.

³⁷ Burkert, *Greek Religion*. p. 287.

³⁸ Simon, *Festivals of Attica*. p. 29.

³⁹ Foucart, *Les mystères d'Éleusis*. p. 274.

Epigraphic Evidence

The initiation of public slaves is attested in inscriptions. One fragment of an inscription, dated to 329/8 B.C. found in the treasury at the sanctuary says:

μύησις δυοῖν τῶν δημοσίων: ΔΔΔ

Initiation of two public slaves, thirty drachmas.

This inscription records two fifteen-drachma initiation fees for two public slaves initiated into the mysteries. The temple treasury paid for their initiation in order for them to work in the inner sanctums of the sanctuary where only those who had been initiated were allowed to go.

Another inscription, dated to the administration of Lycurgos in the first half of the fourth century B.C., provides an account of construction expenses in the sacred precinct. Line fourteen of this inscription mentions the initiation of slaves who would clean up after the construction. It reads:

[τ]ῶν δημοσίων ἐμύησαμεν πέντε ἄνδρας τοὺς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ

ἀνακαθαίροντας, ἀνηλώσαμε[ν Π^Δ ΔΔΠ]

Of public slaves, we have initiated five men who clean thoroughly in the temple, we spent: 75 drachmas.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For further discussion of these inscription fragments, see Foucart, *Les mystères d'Éleusis*. p. 274; Jacob, *Les esclaves publics à Athènes*. p. 41.

Do these slaves then belong to the sanctuary and its goddesses? While this is not clear at Eleusis, there is evidence for slaves given to the gods of other sanctuaries. One interesting example is the title character of Euripides' *Ion*. Abandoned at the temple at birth, Ion was raised as a temple slave. In the opening of the play, he says, "I shall perform the tasks at which I have labored from childhood," cleaning and making the temple pure. He also declares that he is blessed by these tasks: "Glorious is my task; I tender the hand of service to the gods, not to mortals but to immortals." While not explicitly said to be a slave, Ion compares his service to the gods to that of service to mortals, indicating that he is enslaved to the god as other slaves are to mortal men.

Literary Evidence

The initiation of private slaves at Eleusis is attested in literature. In a fragment of his play *Abroad*, the comic poet Theophilos quotes a slave who is conflicted about leaving his master, who had him initiated into the mysteries.

καίτοι τί φημι καὶ τί δρᾶσα Βούλομαι; προδοῦς ἀπιέναι τὸν ἀγαπητὸν
δεσπότην, τὸν τροφέα, τὸν σωτήρα, δι' ὃν ἤδον νόμους Ἑλλήνας, ἔμαθόν
γράμματ', ἐμυήθην θεοῖς;

But what am I saying? What am I thinking about doing? Will I go,
betraying a cherished master, who fed me, who saved me, by whose

grace I know the laws of Greece, I learned to read, and I was initiated to the gods?⁴¹

If we can imagine that these are the genuine emotions of a slave, then being initiated was an act that merited a great amount of gratitude from the slaves towards their masters. This slave had a chance at freedom but felt guilty about abandoning a master who initiated him. This master, for all intents and purposes, saved the soul of his slave. He gave this slave an aspect of personhood that went beyond being an object as well as a better life on earth and a chance for a prosperous afterlife. However, we must take into account that the slave himself did not write this text and it is the projection of the slave-owning class's thoughts onto the slave. The slave owners may have thought that the slaves were grateful to them but this could just have been their perception of their intended philanthropy. It is very difficult to know the reality behind the text.

Similarly in his speech against Neaira ([Demosthenes] 59), Apollodoros relates the story of the initiation of one of Neaira's sisters, Metaneira, into the mysteries at Eleusis.

Λυσίας γὰρ ὁ σοφιστὴς Μεταναίρας ὦν ἐραστής, ἐβουλήθη πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀναλώμασιν οἷς ἀνήλισκεν εἰς αὐτὴν καὶ μυῆσαι, ἡγούμενος τὰ μὲν ἄλλα ἀναλώματα τὴν κεκτημένην αὐτὴν λαμβάνειν, ἃ δ' ἂν εἰς τὴν ἑορτὴν καὶ τὰ μυστήρια ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ἀναλώση, πρὸς αὐτὴν τὴν ἄνθρωπον

⁴¹ Edmonds, *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*, 1957. pp. 568-9.

χάριν καταθήσεσθαι. ἐδεήθη οὖν τῆς Νικαρέτης ἐλθεῖν εἰς τὰ μυστήρια ἄγουσαν τὴν Μετάνειραν, ἵνα μυηθῆ, καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπέσχετο μυήσειν.

Lysias, the sophist, being the lover of Metaneira, wished, in addition to the other expenditures which he lavished upon her, also to initiate her; for he considered that everything else which he expended upon her was being taken by the woman who owned her, but that from whatever he might spend on her behalf for the festival and the initiation the girl herself would profit and be grateful to him. So he asked Nicarete to come to the mysteries bringing with her Metaneira that she might be initiated, and he promised that he would himself initiate her.

*Demosthenes, Against Neaira 21*⁴²

Metaneira, although she was Nicarete's slave, could have apparently benefitted personally from initiation into the mysteries in ways that she could not from the other things that Lysias "lavished upon her." It seems that Lysias was trying to inspire the same gratitude in Metaneira as the slave apparently felt in the fragment of Theophilos. Her method of initiation seems to have been common: a slave *mystes* being sponsored by a *mystagogos*. The *mystagogoι* were guides for the initiates, accompanying them through the ceremonies and sometimes paying their initiation fee, as Lysias did for

⁴² DeWitt and DeWitt, *Demosthenes with an English Translation*.

Metaneira.⁴³ Again, we are told of the gratitude of slaves for their initiation from a member of the slave-owning upper class. Metaneira does not have her own voice in Demosthenes' account and Apollodorus only speaks of what Lysias thinks or hopes will be the effects of his patronage on her.

Initiation and the Slave Identity

While the male citizen often took precedence in Athenian religion (with notable exceptions such as the Thesmophoria and the Panathenaic festival), the mysteries treated everyone equally, putting no one in a position of privilege nor excluding anyone.⁴⁴ The initiation of the slave into the cult at Eleusis seems to have been relatively common; neither Theophilos nor Apollodoros imply that the initiation of a slave was unusual. Initiation was a significant honor that was not taken lightly by the initiates, or at least by their masters. Theophilos is sure that the slave he mentions felt enormous gratitude toward his master; Lysias, according to Apollodoros, thought that initiating Metaneira would place him in her good favor in a way unlike any of the other things he did for her. With the benefits of a blessed life and better afterlife that the Eleusinian Mysteries offered, it is plausible to imagine that the slaves wanted to participate to get ahead in the afterlife in a way they were not able to do on earth.

⁴³ Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. p. 62.

⁴⁴ Evans, "Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries." pp. 247-9.

The initiation of slaves at Eleusis also demonstrates the contradictory character of slavery in Athenian society. The slave was seen as human and object at the same time, pulling into question Aristotle's idea of natural slavery (*Politics* 1254a4-18, b21-24, b28-34, 1260a7-14).⁴⁵ Either the Athenian population ignored or did not realize these contradictions, which illustrates how accustomed they were to the concept of slavery and how essential it was for the function of society in Athens.

Orlando Patterson suggested that initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries helped slaves adjust to their "social death," by allowing the slave a small glimpse of personhood when it was denied to them in all other aspects of their life.⁴⁶ It served to soften the blow of their dehumanization, helping them come to terms with it as they accepted their social death. However, given the evidence discussed in this chapter, I argue that initiation in the Eleusinian Mysteries released slaves from a state of "social death" rather than aiding them in their adjustment to it. Not only did the mysteries offer slaves a sweeter afterlife, giving them hope for a life better than what they were living on earth, but initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries gave a slave a religious identity on par with any citizen even as they were less than human in the social class structure.

⁴⁵ For further discussion of Aristotle, see Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*. pp. 108-27.

⁴⁶ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death a Comparative Study*.

Chapter 2: Thrace and Athens: the Role of Slaves in the Cult of Bendis

ἔδοχσεν τῆι βολῆι καὶ [τῶι δέμοι·]... εὐχσασ[θαι]... τῆι

Βενδῖδι...

It seemed best to the boule and to the demos... to pray...

to Bendis... (IG I³ 136, lines 2-8)

In the second half of the fifth century, the Athenians made the unprecedented move to accept a foreign goddess into their state cult. The acceptance and celebration of a foreign goddess was a surprising development in Athenian public religion, and a number of motivations contributed to this decision. In an attempt to woo King Sitalces of Thrace into a military alliance early in the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians granted a small colony of Thracians living in the Piraeus permission to establish a sanctuary for their goddess Bendis.⁴⁷ Soon after the cult's establishment by the Thracian metics, Athenians began participating in her festival and Bendis was accepted by the state as part of the official city cult, most likely in 413 BCE. Whatever the political motivations of the Athenians who promoted her entry into Athens, Bendis herself welcomed all social classes, including the many Thracian slaves whose labor made up the base of Athenian society and economy. Thus, the cult of Bendis is uniquely important in understanding later fifth century Athens as it explicitly demonstrates the way in which slavery and religion provided a point of intersection for the disparate interests and parts of Athenian society.

⁴⁷ Parker, *Athenian Religion*. p. 173.

In this chapter, I explore the evidence for the foundations of Bendis's cult and argue for slave participation in the cult and how it challenges Patterson's concept of "social death." First, I discuss the political situation that existed between Athens and Thrace at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War that may have prompted the Athenians to first allow and then adopt the worship of the Thracian goddess. Next I delve into the economic relationship between Athens and Thrace, in particular the importance of Thracian slaves to the Athenian economy. Following these political and economic situations, I examine the evidence for the establishment of the cult of Bendis in three areas of Athens outside of the city center (*asty*): the Piraeus, the mines at Laurion, and the island of Salamis. It can be noted that Bendis did not enter the city of Athens itself. Finally, I investigate the relationship of slaves to the cult of Bendis and how their participation, although difficult to document, illustrates the importance of the interaction of slavery and religious cult in providing a venue for the intersection of disparate elements of the Athenian economy and society and releases them from a state of total "social death."

I draw from a range of sources, both material and textual. The historians, Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon provide a range of evidence, including descriptions of the Thracians and their role in the political alliances of the Peloponnesian War, and also the location of Bendis's sanctuary in the Piraeus. In the *Republic*, Plato contributes important evidence about the character and influences of Bendis. Numerous inscriptions, written by both the Athenian and Thracian followers of

Bendis (*orgeones*), found in Athens, Laurion, and Salamis attest to the presence of Bendis, her cultic activities, and her worshippers. Artistic representations of Bendis on pottery and stele also confirm Bendis's presence.

Thrace and Athenian Foreign Policy

According to Herodotus, the Thracians were the largest population in the world after the Indians and would have been the most powerful if they had been able to unite themselves:

Θρηίκων δὲ ἔθνος μέγιστον ἐστὶ μετὰ γε Ἰνδοῦς πάντων ἀνθρώπων:
εἰ δὲ ὑπ' ἐνὸς ἄρχοιτο ἢ φρονέοι κατὰ τώυτό, ἄμαχόν τ' ἂν εἴη καὶ
πολλῷ κράτιστον πάντων ἐθνέων κατὰ γνώμην τὴν ἐμήν. (*Histories*,
5.3)

The Thracians are the biggest nation in the world, next to the Indians. If they were under one ruler, or united, they would, in my judgment, be invincible and the strongest nation on earth.⁴⁸

Continuing Herodotus's interest in the area, Thucydides relates the way that the Thracians played sides between Sparta and Athens during the Peloponnesian War. For example, Nymphodorus, the Athenian representative in Thrace and brother to the wife of King Sitalces of Thrace, was recalled to Athens to help form a plan to secure the alliance of King Sitalces in the Peloponnesian War. Part of this alliance was fighting

⁴⁸ Godley, *Herodotus with an English Translation*.

Spartan allies in Thrace. Nymphodorus “promised to settle the war in Thrace by persuading Sitalces to send the Athenians a Thracian army of cavalry and peltasts” (2.29). Sparta also attempted to create alliances with Thrace. One Spartan embassy, on its way to Persia, endeavored to persuade King Sitalces to abandon his alliance with Athens and aid the Spartan forces besieged by the Athenians at Potidaea. The emissaries, however, were handed over to the Athenians by King Sitalces’s son Sadocus who had just become an Athenian citizen, and were killed (2.67). Later, Thrace also sent mercenaries to Athens (7.27) and relied on Athenian aid to end wars in their own area (2.95). However, Thracian mercenaries also fought with Spartans against Athens at Amphipolis (4.102, 5.6) and at the Battle of Mantinea (5.66).

On account of the potential alliance with King Sitalces as well as the large number of Thracian mercenaries employed by Athens, it was in the city’s best interest to keep their Thracian friends happy. This was probably one of the main reasons for the Athenians first allowing Thracians to worship Bendis in Athens and then adopting her themselves; *enktesis* (the right to establish a sanctuary) was given to the Thracians years before Athenians participated in the cult. Adopting a foreign god into their own pantheon was the highest diplomatic compliment that Athens could give to Thrace.⁴⁹ Athens likely also wanted to keep the population of Thracians already living in the Piraeus happy and loyal to them, particularly in light of the war with Sparta. Adopting Bendis was a shrewd move on the Athenians’ part and shows the influence that foreign

⁴⁹ Garland, *Introducing New Gods*. p. 113.

policy had on domestic worship. Unfortunately for the Athenians, this all-important alliance with the Thracians did not produce any tangible benefits, with the exception of supplies of mercenaries.⁵⁰ Even the mercenaries, however, did not turn the tide of war since the Thracians also supplied mercenaries to the Spartans.

Thracian Slaves and the Athenian Economy

Athens relied on Thrace for more than just military aid. She was dependent on Thrace for access to trade routes into the Black Sea and supplies of timber for shipbuilding.⁵¹ In addition, Thrace was a source of large quantities of silver before the discovery of the Laurion mines in Attica.⁵² Perhaps the most important economic role of Thrace for classical Athens, however, was as a source of slaves.⁵³ As a slave society, Athens relied heavily on slave labor and trade. Herodotus reported that Thracians had the practice of selling their children into slavery:

τῶν δὲ δὴ ἄλλων Θρηίκων ἐστὶ ὄδε νόμος: πωλεῦσι τὰ
τέκνα ἐπ' ἐξαγωγῆ... (*Histories*, 5.6)

Among the rest of the Thracians, it is the custom to sell their children for export.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 112.

⁵¹ Middleton, "Thrasyloulos' Thracian Support." p. 301.

⁵² Hopper, "The Mines and Miners of Ancient Athens." p. 141.

⁵³ Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*. p. 3.

Modern estimates suggest that Thracian slaves made up a large percentage, or even the majority, of private and public slaves in Athens.⁵⁴ Slaves operated within Athenian households (*oikoi*) as private slaves, mine workers, and craftsmen, making furniture, weapons, and other commodities.⁵⁵ Certain inscriptions found in Attica contain Thracian names that are paired with ethnic designations.⁵⁶ IG II² 8927 includes Φιλόνικος Βίθυος Θραῖξ, and two Thracians coming from Maroneia in Thrace are accounted for in IG II² 9288 (Θραῖ[ττ]α Ἀνδράβυδος Μ<α>ρωνίτις) and IG II² 9289. Thracians also appear in the naval inscription IG I³ 1032. The crews of almost eight triremes are recorded, among them the legible names of 146 slaves with their owner's name in the genitive case. Forty-five of the slave names bear ethnic inscriptions, and Thracians are one of the largest ethnic groups along with Phrygians, Syrians, and Carians.⁵⁷ Athenians may have disapproved of the enslavement of fellow Greeks but captive barbarians were by definition slaves and Thracians, being on the edge of the Greek world, certainly qualified as barbarians.⁵⁸ Many slaves were brought to work in the silver mines in Attica, particularly at Laurion.⁵⁹ Thracians slaves' presence in Laurion is corroborated by Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 2.5, *Poroi* 4.14), who notes that Nicias bought Sosias, a Thracian slave, to manage his silver mines. The concentration of Thracian slaves in the silver mines could reflect the fact that the Thracians already

⁵⁴ Sears, *Athens, Thrace, and the Shaping of Athenian Leadership*. p. 150.

⁵⁵ Humphreys, *The Family, Women and Death*. p. 10.

⁵⁶ Lewis, "Near Eastern Slaves in Classical Attica and the Slave Trade with Persian Territories." p. 98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 103.

⁵⁸ Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*. p. 13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 144.

possessed considerable skill in mining and working silver since it had been one of their major exports. Detailed analysis of tombstones from Laurion revealed that the majority of the slaves there (almost 30,000 in number at their peak) were non-Greek and a high proportion of them came from Thrace.⁶⁰ In addition, thirteen of the thirty-two slave names inscribed on the so-called “Attic stelai” (IG I³ 421-30) set up between 415 and 413 BCE are Thracian.⁶¹ These stelai contain now fragmentary lists of slaves confiscated and sold at public auction after the trials of the Hermokopidai (those who defaced the herms).⁶² One of the stelai from 414 BCE lists three Thracian women and two Thracian men with their prices.⁶³

The Establishment of the Cult of Bendis in the Piraeus

Thus, it seems that in order to secure Thrace’s political alliance and continued economic cooperation, the Athenian boule and demos gave Thracians permission to establish a sanctuary in Piraeus.⁶⁴ The sanctuary of Bendis was founded near the temple of Artemis on the hill of Mounychia after the Athenians received oracular approval for its establishment from the oracle of Zeus at Dodona.⁶⁵ Xenophon describes the location of her sanctuary, the Bendideion, in his account of the battle in the Piraeus between Thrasybulus and The Thirty in 404/3 BCE:

⁶⁰ Finley, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*. p. 169; See Lauffer “Die Bergwerkssklaven von Laureion” for more detailed analysis of the tombstones.

⁶¹ Morris, “Remaining Invisible: The Archaeology of the Excluded in Classical Athens.” p. 201.

⁶² Finley, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*. p. 168.

⁶³ Meiggs and Lewis, *Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* pp. 240-47.

⁶⁴ IG II² 1283; Nilsson, *Cults, Myths, Oracles, and Politics in Ancient Greece*. p. 45.

⁶⁵ Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. pp. 149-50.

οἱ δ' ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεως εἰς τὴν Ἴπποδάμειον ἀγορὰν ἐλθόντες
 πρῶτον μὲν συνετάξαντο, ὥστε ἐμπλήσαι τὴν ὁδὸν ἣ
 φέρει πρὸς τε τὸ ἱερόν τῆς Μουνιχίας Ἀρτέμιδος καὶ τὸ
 Βενδίδειον.

And the men from the city, when they came to the
 market-place of Hippodamus, first formed themselves in
 line of battle, so that they filled the road which leads to
 the temple of Artemis of Mounychia and the sanctuary of
 Bendis. (*Hellenica*, 2.4)

The date of the cult's establishment is contested. At issue is whether the cult was adopted by the Athenians at once or gradually, and whether the cult was adopted by the state at the time of the festival's introduction or later.⁶⁶ An inscription detailing the establishment of Bendis's cult (IG I³ 136) has been dated to around 413/2 BCE but a later inscription erected by Thracians (IG II² 1283) refers back to the original grant of *enktesis* which had been given earlier; 429 BCE has been proposed for the date of the original grant. Based on the dating of the epigraphic evidence in relation to the dates of the Peloponnesian War and the date of Plato's *Republic*, I concur with the view that the Thracians were granted *enktesis* around 429 BCE but Bendis was not officially adopted by Athenian state cult until circa 413 BCE.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Planeaux, "The Date of Bendis' Entry into Attica." p. 165.

⁶⁷ For further discussion of the date of the entry and adoption of Bendis, see Planeaux, "The Date of Bendis' Entry into Attica."

Herodotus says that the only gods the Thracians worship are “Ares, Dionysus, and Artemis” (5.7). By Artemis, he is most likely talking about Bendis, since he usually used the name of the foreign deity’s Greek counterpart if there was one. In Athenian representations, Bendis resembles Artemis. She is depicted as a huntress with a short dress, a cloak hanging from her shoulders, high fur-topped boots, and a Phrygian cap (see figure 1). The cap is a specifically Thracian symbol and it is worn by other Thracians



Figure 1. Bendis, Apollo, and Hermes on a red-figure bell krater by the Bendis Painter, fourth century BCE, Louvre Museum (G 515).

on fifth century vases.⁶⁸ It is worth noting that Bendis’s garb is very similar to the Thracian clothing described by Herodotus in his description of Xerxes’s army: “the

⁶⁸ Sears, *Athens, Thrace, and the Shaping of Athenian Leadership*. p. 205.

Thracian troops wore fox skins as a headdress, tunics with the Zeira, or long cloak, in this case brightly colored, thrown over them, and high fawn-skin boots; their weapons were the javelin, light shield, and small dagger” (7.74).

The main difference between the appearance of Bendis and that of Artemis is that Bendis carries a long spear in her right hand rather than Artemis’s bow and arrows.⁶⁹ Despite her clear association with the vengeful virgin huntress, Bendis offered general blessings and protection to her followers.⁷⁰

The sixth-century poet Hipponax is the first to mention Bendis as a Thracian goddess, along with Kybebe: καὶ Διὸς κούρη Κυβήβη καὶ Θραικίη Βενδῖς (fr. 127). According to the Alexandrian lexicographer Hesychius, the fifth-century comic poet Cratinus, in his play the *Thracian Women*, called Bendis “two-speared” (δίλογχον) because she “was allotted two sorts of worship, the heavenly and the internal” and she had “two lights, her own and the Sun’s” (Bendis was associated with the moon like Artemis). Bendis must have been a well-known figure to appear this way in poetry and plays of the time.

The Plague

Some scholars have argued that Bendis was adopted by the Athenians because of the plague that ravaged Athens in the first years of the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides 2.47-55). Others have attributed powers of healing to Bendis on the basis

⁶⁹ Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. p. 149

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 152.

of her association with the hero Deloptes, who may have been the Thracian equivalent of the healing god Asclepius (IG II² 1324 lines 13-17):⁷¹

ἀγαθεῖ τύχει δεδόχθαι τοῖς ὀργεῶσιν ἐπαινέσαι Στέφανον τῆς τε πρὸς τὴν
Βένδιν καὶ τὸν Δηλόπτην καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους θεοὺς εὐσεβείας ἕνεκεν...

With good fortune, it has been decided by the *orgeones* to commend
Stephanos on account of his piety toward Bendis and Deloptes and the
other gods...

Thucydides notes the outbreak of the plague in the Piraeus: “In the city of Athens it appeared suddenly, and the first cases were among the population of Piraeus, where there were no wells at the time, so that it was supposed by them that the Peloponnesians had poisoned the reservoirs” (2.48). It is possible that the cult of Bendis was established in the hope that she could provide relief to the plague-afflicted city. This connection, however, cannot provide a firm date for her entry into Athens since disease would have been a recurring problem.

⁷¹ Sears, *Athens, Thrace, and the Shaping of Athenian Leadership*. p. 154.



Figure 2. Votive relief from the Piraeus, 329/8 BCE, depicting Bendis and Deloptes/Asclepius with two worshippers, Hermes, Pan, and three nymphs. (Harland, *Association in the Greco-Roman World: A Companion to the Sourcebook*)

Structure of the Cult

Epigraphic evidence shows that the cult of Bendis in Athens was organized into two guilds, called *orgeones*, one made up of Athenian citizens and the other of Thracians. We have numerous inscriptions from the Athenian *orgeones* and the Thracians. Admittance to the *orgeones* was open to anyone so long as they paid the

entry fee.⁷² While privileged males probably controlled the cult, women played important roles too. Women chose, most likely by allotment, the priestess of the goddess who was in charge of the sacrifice of female animals.⁷³ The chorus of Cratinus's play *The Thracian Women* may have been worshippers of Bendis and perhaps also slaves (see further discussion below). In Aeschylus's play of the same name, the chorus consisted of captive Thracian women.⁷⁴ In the inscription that recounts the decree founding Bendis's cult (IG II³ 136; discussed in detail below), the word "Θραιττα[ι]" (Thracian women) appears in line 16, probably in the context of discussion of the procession or the position of the priestess. The priestly positions of the cult are mentioned multiple times in the inscription: "εἴτε χρὲ γυναῖκα ἱερεος" in line 30 with "ἀπὸ δέκα ἱερείων· τὰ δὲ ἄλλα δέρματα" and "τὸ λοιπὸν κληρῶν περὶ τούτων τὸς ἱεροποιός" following in line 35.

Epigraphic Evidence

Many other inscriptions attest to the presence of Bendis in Athens. Accounts of the Treasurers of the Other Gods (IG I³ 310), dated to 429/8 BCE, mention Bendis on line 208.⁷⁵ An inscription dated to 423/2 BCE notes the cult of Bendis as one of the money-lenders to the city of Athens (IG I² 324). There is also later inscription from 331/0 BCE

⁷² Ibid. p. 154.

⁷³ Ferguson, "Orgeonika." p. 152; Ferguson and Nock, "The Attic Orgeones and the Cult of Heroes." p. 103.

⁷⁴ Edmonds, *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*, 1957. pp. 45-9.

⁷⁵ Simms, "The Cult of the Thracian Goddess Bendis in Athens and Attica." p. 60.

that documents the money obtained from the sale of hides of animals sacrificed at the Bendideia festival (IG II² 1496, line 86: ἐγ Βενδιδέων παρὰ ἱεροποι[ῶν]).

An inscription (IG I³ 136) discovered on the southwest side of Mounychia Hill in 1930, where Xenophon places the Bendideion, details the permission given by the “boule and demos” to the Thracians to establish Bendis’s cult. The stele bearing the inscription consists of three fragments and dates to the second half of the fifth century. At the top of the stele is a relief preserving the bottom portion of a man and the name of the secretary ([Π]ασιφὸν Φρεάρ[ριος] is in large letters on the molding.⁷⁶ The stele was found badly broken; the relevant preserved text is below:

[Π]ασιφὸν Φρεάρ[ριος] ἐγραμμάτευε]

ἔδοχεν τῆι βολῆι καὶ [τῶι δέμοι· . . c.8. . . ἐπρυτάνευε, Πασιφὸν ἐγρα]μμάτευε, [. . .]

κλῆς ἐπεστάτε, Κλε[όκριτος] ἔρχε, . . c.8. . . εἶπε· c.15. . . .]σασθαι διαπομ-

παιον ἀπὸ τῆς πόλε[ος c.35 σ]τρατος. μετὰ δὲ

ταῦτα, εὔχασ[θαι c.37.] τῆς φυλῆς ἐκάστε-

ς [θ]ύσεν, ἐὰν [. c.40]ται τὸν πολεμίων κα-

[. . .]αυ[.]ρ[. c.40.] κα]ὶ τᾶλλα ἃ παραινεῖ

[. c.43.] τῆι Βενδι]ῖδι καὶ τὸ ἄγαλμα ε- 8

...

[. c.52.] τῆι Βενδι]ῖδι [. . .]

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 63.

- [. c.53.] αίει ἑκατερ[. . .] 15
- [. c.55.] Θραιπτα[. . .]
- ...
- [. c.21. ὅς κ]άλλιστα. θύεν δὲ ε[. c.29.] 26
- [. c.16. ἐ βο]λὲ καὶ ἄλλος ὅστις ἄν [. c.29.]
- [. c.16. τ]ὲν παννυχίδα ποῦν ὅς [κάλλιστα c.23.]
- [. c.16.]ς μενὸς τῆι ἑνδεκάτει [. c.31.]
- [. c.13.] εἴτε χρὲ γυναῖκα *ἱερεος* [. c.30.] 30
- [. . c.8. . . Ἀθena]ῖον ἀπάντον πεμφσάντον [. c.32.]
- [. c.13.] ὅς τάχιστα· ὅτι δ' ἄν ἀνέλε[ι c.31.]
- [. . . c.11. . . .] λαμβάνεν τὸν δεμοσῖαι θυο[μένον c.27.]
- [. . c.7. . . ἀπ]ὸ δέκα *ἱερείων*· τὰ δὲ ἄλλα δέρματ[α c.28.]
- [. c.5. τὸ λο]ιπὸν κληρὸν περὶ τούτον τὸς *ἱερο[ποιός c.23.] 35*
- [. . . c.9. . . ἐ]κάστοτε τῆι Βενδῖδι ἀπὸ πεντέκο[ντα c.25.]
- [. . c.8. . . πρ]υτανείας· οἱ δὲ κολακρέται διδόν[τον τὸ ἀργύριον c.15.]
- [. . . c.10. . .]α τὲν βολὲν αὐτοκράτορα ἔναι [. c.22. τὸ δὲ φσέφι]-
- [σμα τόδε ἀνα]γράφας ὁ γραμματεὺς ὁ τ[ῆς βολῆς ἐν στέλει λιθίνει καταθέτο ἐν τῷ]
- [Βενδιδέοι· οἱ δὲ πολεταὶ ἀπομισθοσ[άντον· οἱ δὲ κολακρέται δόντον τὸ ἀργύριον]. 40
- [. . c.8. . . εἶπ]ε· τὰ [μὲν ἄλλα καθάπερ c.37.]

The inscription is concerned with a prayer, finances, a procession, and an all-night rite (παννυχίδα). Bendis's name appears complete twice (lines 14 and 36) and has been restored once (line 40). The exact date of the inscription itself has been hotly debated. While the use of the word "πολεμίων" (of the enemies) in line 7 strongly implies a date after the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, either 429/8 or 413/12 BCE is possible. While scholars following Ferguson lean towards the earlier date, some have thrown their support behind the later date because the name of the secretary, Pasiphon of Phrearria, has been identified with the Athenian general of 410/9 BCE (IG I² 304) and the restored name of the archon in the inscription is Cleocritos (Κλεόκριτος ἐρχε), who was archon in 413/2 BCE.⁷⁷ This interpretation also corresponds with 411 as the dramatic date of the *Republic* in which the first festival of Bendis is described. Since this inscription only documents the official recognition of Bendis by Athens, Thracians could have been worshipping her in the Piraeus before this.

Enktesis (the right to establish a sanctuary) was in fact given to the Thracians before the cult of Bendis was officially established. In a later decree of 261/0 BCE, the Thracian *orgeones* quote the original grant (IG II² 1283):

Lines 4-6: ἐπειδὴ τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Ἀθηναίων δεδωκότος τοῖς Θραιξί μόνοις

τῶν ἄλλων ἔθνῶν τὴν ἔγκτησιν καὶ τὴν ἴδρυσιν τοῦ ἱεροῦ κατὰ

τὴν μ[α]ντεῖαν τὴν ἐν Δωδώνης...

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 66.

Since the demos of Athens have given to the Thracians alone
among all peoples *enktesis* and the right to found of a sanctuary
according to the oracle of Dodona...

Line 25: θυσίαι γίνωνται τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὅσα πρ[οσῆκει] κατὰ τε
τὰ πάτρια τῶν Θραικῶν...

Sacrifices should be made to the gods and whichever others are
present in their homeland of Thrace...

This right of *enktesis* (ἔγκτησις) was rarely given by Athens and was a great gesture on the part of the Athenians to please the Thracian population. It demonstrated the Athenian goodwill towards their potential ally, King Sitalces, in Thrace as well as ensured the loyalty of the Thracians living in the Piraeus. *Enktesis* was the first step in Bendis's entry into the Piraeus and it was followed by the adoption of the goddess by the Athenians a few years later.

The Bendideia

The Bendideia, the festival celebrating Bendis, occurred on the 19th of Thargalion (according to Aristokles of Rhodes).⁷⁸ The rites included two processions, one of Athenians and one of Thracians, a torch relay-race on horseback, and an "all-night rite." At the beginning of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates talks about attending part of the Bendideia:

⁷⁸ Sourvinou-Inwood, *Athenian Myths and Festivals*. p. 154.

I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon, son of Ariston. I wanted to say a prayer to the goddess and also to see what they would make of the festival, as this was the first time they were holding it. I must say that I thought that the local contribution to the procession was splendid, though the Thracians' contingent seemed to show up just as well. We had said our prayers and seen the show and were on our way back to town when Polemarchus, son of Cephalus, noticed us in the distance making our way home and sent his slave running on ahead to tell us to wait for him. (*Republic* 1.327a)

Socrates mentions the two processions of the Bendideia, one led by the local Athenians and the other by Thracians. These processions presumably were organized by the two *orgeones* of native Athenians (IG II² 1255, 1256, 1324, 1361) and Thracians (IG II² 1284) who appear in inscriptions relating to the cult. Our information about the equestrian torch relay race also comes from the same source:

“And don’t you know,” added Adeimantus, “that there is going to be a torch race in the evening on horseback, in honor of the goddess?” “On horseback?” said I; “that’s a novelty. Do you mean a relay race, in which they carry torches on horseback and hand them on to each other?”

“Yes,” answered Polemarchus, “and there’s to be an all-night carnival as well, which will be worth seeing...”

(*Republic* 1.328a)

While torch relays were relatively common in Athenian festivals, the equestrian aspect of the Bendideia’s may be a particular innovation of the Thracians due to their reputation for being excellent horsemen.⁷⁹ Since this torch race on horseback is noted as a novelty by Socrates, Plato must be referring to the first occurrence of the festival.

Artistic Representations of Bendis

Bendis is also a recurring figure in Athenian art. A relief currently in the British Museum depicts Bendis receiving the winners of the torch race during the Bendideia.⁸⁰ Another relief, on a stele with an inscription dated to 329/8 BCE (IG II² 1256) that currently belongs to the collection of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek in Copenhagen, depicts Bendis with a male figure, debated to be the god Asclepius or the Thracian hero Deloptes. The relief also includes several small figures that have been identified as Hermes, Pan, and the Nymphs (see Figure 2).⁸¹ The Copenhagen relief depicts a more Hellenized Bendis than previously seen, with her protective cloak thrown to one side and her hood pushed back to reveal her hair. This reflects a general trend in Athenian

⁷⁹ Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. p. 151.

⁸⁰ Simms, “The Cult of the Thracian Goddess Bendis in Athens and Attica.” p. 66.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 67.

art to make Bendis less barbaric and more like the Athenian Artemis.⁸² A Campanian krater in the British Museum does not represent Bendis herself but a torch race, which may be similar to the one that took place during the Bendideia. It depicts a youth on a white horse holding a torch in his right hand looking back at another youth also holding a torch. A third youth looks back at them holding a torch in his left hand.⁸³ A statue found in Laurion has been identified as Bendis because of the statue's similarity in dress and attitude to the reliefs in the British Museum and Copenhagen. This statue may have been a cult statue from a small shrine that served the Thracian slaves working in the mines at Laurion.⁸⁴



Figure 3. Votive relief in the British Museum (BM 2155), c. 400-350 BCE, depicting Bendis and a victorious team from the torch race on horseback.

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⁸² Ibid. p. 67.

⁸³ See Figure 16 in Walters, "Vases Recently Acquired by the British Museum."

⁸⁴ Simms, "The Cult of the Thracian Goddess Bendis in Athens and Attica." p. 68. Simms refers to Paul Hartwig, *Bendis: eine archaologische Untersuchung* (Leipzig, 1897) for her description of this statue. An image does not seem to be available and I have not been able to consult Hartwig.

Thracian Slaves and Bendis

Finally, we come to the participation of the lowest members of Athenians society. Athens was a slave society, and one of the main aspects of chattel slavery is the dehumanization of the slave. They were stripped of their culture and ethnic identity when they entered slavery and they were assimilated into the dominant culture. In theory, according to Orlando Patterson, slaves should be “socially dead” and have no social identity apart from their masters’.⁸⁵ Many slaves adopted Greek forms of self-representation, as evidenced by non-Greek tombstones. However, accompanying parallel inscriptions on Greek-style funeral monuments and epitaphs in both Greek and the slaves’ native languages demonstrate that the slaves were able to maintain some of their ethnic characteristics despite assimilation into their masters’ culture.⁸⁶ The maintenance of the slaves’ ethnic heritage is also demonstrated by the appearance of slaves in religious contexts. Foreign slaves participated in cults associated with their ethnic identity.⁸⁷ Most slaves were forced to take on the religion of their masters but in certain instances, slaves were able to hold their own beliefs as long as they did not interfere with the master’s.⁸⁸ Thracian slaves were able to preserve their ethnic identity through participation in the cult of Bendis. As the lowest members of the Athenian *oikos*, slaves had no formal place in public life besides their participation in religious

⁸⁵ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death a Comparative Study*. p. 67.

⁸⁶ Forsdyke, *Slaves Tell Tales*. p. 28.

⁸⁷ Andreau and Descat, *The Slave in Greece and Rome*. p. 114.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 115.

festivals.⁸⁹ Many slaves are found in religious contexts with freemen among the followers of foreign deities such as Bendis or the Syrian goddess Atargatis.⁹⁰ This preservation of their ethnic identity challenges Patterson's concept of "social death."

Bendis served as a focal point for both the free and slave Thracian populations of Athens. The presence of Thracian slaves in Athens is indicated by their names, such as Θραυττα (Thracian woman).⁹¹ More explicit associations with the goddess are found in names such as Bendiphanes in the late fifth century.⁹² An inscription (IG II² 10), dated to 401/0 BCE, names Bendiphanes as one of the metics being rewarded for their service to Athens during the battle in the Piraeus (the same battle Xenophon is discussing when he describes the location of the Bendideion). He is listed as a digger (σκαφη[—]) with other men of lower-class professions, such as farmers. An association between the goddess and Bendiphanes, or at least his parents, is implied by his name, as is the possible Thracian origin of his family. It is plausible to imagine that Bendiphanes was born in Athens after his family had been assimilated into society because the ending "-phanes" is typical of Greek names.

It is reasonable to suppose that the Thracian slaves employed at the Laurion silver mines worshipped Bendis, particularly since her sanctuary was not far away in the Piraeus.⁹³ The presence at Laurion of what appears to be a cult statue also

⁸⁹ Humphreys, *The Family, Women and Death*. p. 2.

⁹⁰ Garlan, *Slavery in Ancient Greece*. p. 198.

⁹¹ Forsdyke, *Slaves Tell Tales*. p. 29.

⁹² Middleton, "Thrasyboulos' Thracian Support." p. 300.

⁹³ Parker, *Athenian Religion*. p. 174.

demonstrates the likelihood of the worship of Bendis by Thracians in this area. In addition, epigraphic evidence for Bendis's presence in Laurion has also been found. A fourth century relief (SEG 39:210) from Laurion is inscribed with the phrase: λαμπάδι νικήσας Δᾶος Βενδίδι ἀνέθηκεν meaning "to Bendis by Daos, who has won in a torch-race." The relief depicts eight naked youths being led up to Bendis by two older men, one holding a torch.⁹⁴ The name "Daos" is a common slave name; he either participated in this torch race while still a slave or after he was manumitted. Since membership to the *orgeones* was only limited to those who could afford the membership fee, slaves who were able to obtain the funds could have belonged to the guilds. Thracian slave names seen in association with Bendis, such as Daos, support the idea that slaves belonged to these *orgeones* guilds and were active in the cult.

Later evidence shows that Bendis also had a presence on the island of Salamis in a club of *thiasotai* whose names are strikingly similar to those of slaves and ex-slaves.⁹⁵ Multiple inscriptions and a series of five decrees of the *thiasotai* of Bendis from the mid-third century have been found on Salamis.⁹⁶ One inscription (IG II² 1317b) dated to 274/3 BCE recounts the sacrifices at the temple of Bendis and other offerings.

Lines 4-9: ἐπειδὴ οἱ ἐπιμεληταὶ οἱ κατασταθέντες ἐπεμελήθησαν τῶν

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 172. There is a discrepancy about the location of this inscription. While Parker claims that it is on a relief, Pleket and Stroud, in their entry in Brill's online reference works say that it is inscribed on a statue base. Cf. Pleket, H.W.; Stroud, R.S.. "Laureion. Dedication to Bendis, ca. 300 B.C. (39-210)." *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 171.

⁹⁶ Chaniotis, A.; Corsten, T.; Stroud, R.S.; Tybout, R.A.. "Salamis. Five decrees of the thiasotai of Bendis, 272/1-243/2 BCE (59-150)."

τε θουσιῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων τῶν περὶ τὸ ἱερόν τῆς
 Βενδίδος,
 δεδόχθαι τῷ κοινῷ τῶν θιασωτῶν ἐπαινέσαι αὐτούς
 καὶ στεφανῶσαι ἕκαστον αὐτῶν, μερίσαι δὲ τὸν ταμίαν Δ
 δραχμάς. τοῦτο δὲ λαβόντες οἱ ἐπιμεληταὶ ἀνατέθωσαν
 εἰς τὸ ἱερόν τῆς Βενδίδος.

Since the managers, who had been appointed, had managed
 the sacrifices and all the other things relating to the sanctuary
 of Bendis, it seemed best to the association of Thiasos to praise
 them and to crown each of them, and the overseer to divide
 the drachmas. Having taken these things, let the managers
 dedicate them in the sanctuary of Bendis.

Some connections have been suggested between the islanders and the Athenian
orgeones. It is plausible that the Bendideia was celebrated on Salamis at the
 same time that it was celebrated in the Piraeus. Ferguson notes that there must
 have been a connection between the islanders and the Athenian, but not
 Thracian, *orgeones* in the Piraeus because the island association and the
 Athenian association met on the same day to pass decrees. He declares that the
 members of the *thiasotai* on Salamis were “obviously non-citizens, and doubtless

non-Thracians,” although he does not give specific evidence for why he excludes Thracians from this connection.⁹⁷

Although the primary motivation for the Athenians to allow the Thracians to establish a sanctuary to one of their gods was political, and the original permission they gave was in fact not for Bendis in particular but for any one of their gods (IG II² 1283 lines 4-6 and line 25), the citizens embraced the goddess. Bendis appealed to all classes of people: citizen, metic, male, female, free, and slave.

Together, Bendis and Thracian slaves illuminate a fundamental paradox in the Athenian social world. On the one hand, Bendis was embraced and celebrated by the Athenians citizens and the Thracians who were involved in the cult enjoyed some prominence. On the other, Thracians made up the majority of the slave population in Athens and constituted a backward and “savage” people who were looked down upon by free Athenian society.⁹⁸ The Athenian psyche embraced a double-edged relationship with Thracian peoples; on the one hand they saw slaves as nothing more than pieces of property to exploit in their economy and society but, on the other, joined with them in the worship of the Thracian goddess. Participation in the cult also helped Thracian slaves preserve a small aspect of their identity as Thracians. By the later fifth century, the slave was seen as “an animate piece of property,” as in Aristotle’s fourth-century definition of a slave, and this supported the widespread ideology of chattel slavery.⁹⁹ It

⁹⁷ Ferguson and Nock, “The Attic Orgeones and the Cult of Heroes.” p. 101, note 45.

⁹⁸ Sears, *Athens, Thrace, and the Shaping of Athenian Leadership*. p. 156.

⁹⁹ Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*. p. 5.

is precisely this double identity that illustrates the slave's role as a connection between economy and society. It also suggests that slaves experienced only a partial state of "social death" rather than a complete one.

Chapter 3: Imagining the Golden Age: the Festival of the Kronia in Athens

Philochorus says that Cecrops was the first to erect in Attica an altar to Saturn [Kronos]... and he ordained that as soon as the crops and the fruits had been gathered, the heads of families everywhere should eat together with their slaves... For the god is pleased that honor be paid to the slaves in consideration of their labor.

Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.10.22.

The Kronia was a different type of religious celebration than the festival of Bendis and the Eleusinian Mysteries. The evidence for the Athenian Kronia is also different than that for the Eleusinian Mysteries and the cult of Bendis. Compared to these two cults, the Kronia was relatively private festival and focused explicitly on the slave's relationship with the master rather than including the slave as a participant among other people. During the Kronia, all public business paused and, at the festival's feast, masters are said to have served their slaves (Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.7.36-7). Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz suggests that the Kronia was one of a few role reversal cults in antiquity (another more famous cult was the Saturnalia in Rome). She argues that such rites acted to decrease social tension by loosening social etiquette, and that the act of role reversal itself could have been employed to confuse evil spirits.¹⁰⁰ However, evidence for this aspect in the Athenian festival is lacking. According to Greek mythical

¹⁰⁰ Zelnick-Abramovitz, "Slaves and Role Reversal in Ancient Greek Cults." p. 99.

tradition, Kronos ruled during the Golden Age when everyone was equal; during the Kronia, it seems, the world temporarily reverted back to the Golden Age and slaves were released from their duties.¹⁰¹

A festival in which slaves enjoyed a position above or at least level with the free members of the household might seem startling since the slave was legally a piece of property at the service of his or her master. The fact that slaves were released in this was during the Kronia might seem to challenge Patterson's concept of "social death." Unlike the benefits given in the Eleusinian Mysteries or the cult of Bendis, in which slavery still existed, the festival of the Kronia created a world without slavery, even if only in ritual for a limited time. However, instead of inciting rebellion with a taste of privilege, the Kronia may have done the opposite and strengthened established social structures. By allowing social tensions to be released during the festival, their roles in society were reinforced once life returned to normal.

In this final chapter, I use the Kronia and its implications for Athenian slave society as a point of comparison with the Eleusinian Mysteries and the cult of Bendis. First, I explore the evidence for the Kronia in Athens along with similar festivals in other cities. Then, I look at the details of the activities during the Kronia. Finally, I discuss how the Kronia served to enforce social roles by temporarily reversing them and compare

¹⁰¹ Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*. p. 27.

the Kronia's effects on slave personhood to those of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the cult of Bendis.

There were no temples or sacred sites involved in the celebration of the Kronia; rather the festival seems to have been a mostly private event that took place in the home with a large feast as the main event. Thus, there was no public space for any dedications or dedicatory inscriptions. Further, the majority of the sources about the Kronia are from Roman writers either referencing earlier Greek writers or writing about the Kronia in relation to later festivals. For example, quoting the playwright Accius and the Attic historian Philochorus, the fifth century CE Roman antiquarian Macrobius writes that the Kronia was the basis for the festival of Saturnalia. In the late first century CE, Plutarch writes about the customs of the Kronia and in the third century CE, Athenaeus describes other role reversal festivals. It should be noted, however, that all these scholars were writing much later than the occurrence of the Kronia itself, and they could have been projecting characteristics of festivals familiar to them onto the earlier Athenian Kronia.

The Tradition of the Feast

The Kronia festival, according to the Roman sources, was very similar to the famed festival of the Saturnalia in Rome. During both festivals, social order was suspended as slaves and masters feasted together. In his *Saturnalia*, Macrobius credits

the Kronia as the model of the Saturnalia festival.¹⁰² He quotes Accius, the second-century BCE. Roman poet and playwright:

But for these reasons, which relate to the origin of this festival, it appears that the Saturnalia are of greater antiquity than the city of Rome, for in fact, Lucius Accius in his *Annals* says that this rite began in Greece before Rome was founded: "Many Greeks, and particularly in Athens, conduct for Saturn [Kronos] sacred rites, which they repeatedly say are called Kronia, and this is a public holiday for them; throughout the countryside and villages almost everyone passes that day in joyous feasts and each attends to his slaves (*famulos*). So it is with us; and from there has been handed down this very custom, namely that on this day the slaves (*famuli*) feast with their masters. *Saturnalia* 1.7.36-7.

Here in both the Saturnalia and the Kronia, the social order is loosened and even inverted as slaves feast with their masters. As noted earlier, Macrobius also cites the third century B.C. Athenian historian Philochorus for additional proof:

Philochorus says that Cecrops was the first to erect in Attica an altar to Saturn [Kronos] and Ops [Rhea], and worshipped these gods as Jupiter and Earth; and he ordained that as soon as the crops and the fruits had been gathered, the heads of families everywhere should eat together

¹⁰² Zelnick-Abramovitz, "Slaves and Role Reversal in Ancient Greek Cults." p. 96.

with their slaves (*servis*), because they had endured with them the labor of tilling the land. For the god is pleased that honor be paid to the slaves (*servorum*) in consideration of their labor. *Saturnalia* 1.10.22.

Philochorus suggests a concrete reason for why slaves dined with their masters. Since everyone took part in the harvest, slaves and masters alike, everyone feasted together to celebrate. His explanation supports the idea that the Kronia attempted to hearken back to the Golden Age of Kronos where everyone worked in harmony and slavery was unknown. Joseph Vogt espouses the view that the Kronia is the expression of the idea that all people had originally been equal during the Golden Age.¹⁰³

The Athenian festival should also be considered in relation to other possible role reversal festivals that occurred throughout the Mediterranean. The ritual was not only Greek or Roman. As Photeine Bourboulis shows, the Persians had a festival called Sacaea where slaves were lifted above their masters in a similar fashion.¹⁰⁴ Within Greece, the festival was as widespread as the presence of slavery. Sara Forsdyke discusses the ritual role reversal which took place in Megara and argues that it played a major role in releasing social tensions.¹⁰⁵ Athenaeus mentions two others, one at Crete and one at Troezen:

¹⁰³ Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*. pp. 27-8.

¹⁰⁴ Bourboulis, *Ancient Festivals of "Saturnalia" Type*. p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Forsdyke, "Revelry and Riot in Archaic Megara." p. 80.

At a festival of Hermes on Crete, the slaves feast while their masters act as servants. At Troezen, the slaves play knucklebones with the citizens and the masters host their slaves. (14.639)

We can also note that another Athenian festival, the Rural Dionysia, also inverted social roles, allowing both slaves and children to drink and dine with the master of the house.¹⁰⁶

The Kronia

The Kronia began on the 12th of the month Hecatombaion (mid-June to mid-July) and was dedicated to Kronos, the father of Zeus and ruler of the Golden Age, who was originally a god of the harvest whose symbol was the reaping hook. The feasting of slaves with their masters may have been the remnants of a festival initially intended to celebrate the end of the harvest in which all who worked the farm took part. The festival was essentially traditional and “old fashioned.” According to Parke, Aristophanes treats the festival as out of date in the *Clouds*, using Kronos’s name as a byword for Archaic times.¹⁰⁷ The festival does not seem to have had a political purpose yet it did stop business – at least in theory. Demosthenes, during his prosecution of the politician Timocrates, implies that Timocrates arranged for a meeting in the ekklesia on

¹⁰⁶ Evans, *Civic Rites*. p. 176.

¹⁰⁷ Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*. pp. 29-30; Aristophanes, *Clouds*. Translated by Peter Meineck. Line 398 of the *Clouds* reads: “You blithering, prehistoric, pre-cronian old fool!”

the first day of the Kronia in order to pass a piece of crooked legislation while the council was not in session because of the feast:

The assembly at which your vote was taken fell on the eleventh of Hecatombaion, and he introduced his law on the twelfth, the very next day although it was a feast of Kronos and the Council therefore stood adjourned...¹⁰⁸

During the festival, slaves joined their masters feasting at a banquet and were allowed to run shouting and rioting about the city.¹⁰⁹ While writing on the pleasures of an active life, Plutarch describes the Kronia in his *Moralia*:

καὶ γὰρ οἱ θεράποντες ὅταν Κρόνια δειπνῶσιν ἢ Διονύσια κατ' ἀγρὸν
ἄγωσι περιόντες, οὐκ ἂν αὐτῶν τὸν ὀλολυγμὸν ὑπομείναις καὶ τὸν
θόρυβον...

For the slaves¹¹⁰ too, whenever they feast at the Kronia or celebrate the Dionysia roaming the fields, you could not endure their joyous cries and din. *Moralia* 1098b

These accounts represent slaves as vigorously enjoying the freedom afforded to them during the Kronia, being released from their normal responsibilities and celebrating their

¹⁰⁸ Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates* 24.26. Trans. Murray, *Demosthenes with an English Translation*.

¹⁰⁹ Burkert, *Greek Religion*. p. 231.

¹¹⁰ According to the LSJ, the word θεράποντες differs from δοῦλοι in that it generally implies free service but in Chios, θεράποντες were slaves. Thus, this translation of Plutarch can be argued particularly given the context of slaves in the Kronia.

temporarily elevated status. Experiencing this raised status gave the slave back a small piece of their personhood and allowed them to taste a small amount of the privilege denied to them in real life. Therefore, the slave was not entirely in a state of “social death,” yet this personhood was taken away from them when the festival day ended. It does not appear, however, that these events were intentionally cruel; they may have provided slaves with enough personhood to remain complicit in their enslavement. Thus, we can see that one of the effects of this festival was to impress upon the slave the reality of his or her own inferiority in the social structure and preserve the existing hierarchy.

Escaping Social Death

The Kronia, as well as other saturnalia-type festivals, helped slaves to escape a state of “social death,” thus challenging Patterson’s concept and his interpretation of the ritual. According to Patterson, these role reversals “vented feelings of tension in conflict-ridden relationships and reaffirmed the rightness of the established order.” By briefly occupying a superior or equal position, the slave, in theory, could realize what it was to be a free man or woman and how truly low his or her own position was in reality. Patterson says that the master learned not only compassion for his slaves but how fortunate he was to be free.¹¹¹ The Kronia was also an opportunity for masters to

¹¹¹ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death a Comparative Study*. p. 67.

appear generous to their slaves after working them all year.¹¹² Temporary role reversal actually maintained order and reminded slaves of their place in society.¹¹³

However, the Kronia has a second role that Patterson does not consider. During the Kronia, the slave was able to rise above his status and attain a position on the same level as a citizen. Thus the slave became human for the duration of the festival and was released from his or her “social death.” Athenian society must have seen some humanity in their slaves in order for this tension to emerge between the slave as chattel and the slave as a human. The Kronia also suggests that slavery is not part of the natural world but a necessary part of the political order. In his *Politics*, Aristotle asserts that slavery is a natural state; nature made the bodies of free and slave peoples different (1254b28-34) as well as their minds (1254b21-24).¹¹⁴ However, slavery did not exist during the Golden Age of Kronos, which the Kronia seeks to temporarily recreate, demonstrating, it seems, that slavery is not a natural state.

The Kronia, unlike the Eleusinian Mysteries and the cult of Bendis, was very concerned with the slave’s social status. Slaves did not participate in the festival independent of their household; the Kronia by definition revolved around the slave’s relationship to his or her master and the festival simply created a momentary ritual space where slaves were released from their enslavement. While the Mysteries and

¹¹² Forsdyke, “Revelry and Riot in Archaic Megara.” p. 80.

¹¹³ Zelnick-Abramovitz, “Slaves and Role Reversal in Ancient Greek Cults.” p. 100.

¹¹⁴ See Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*. pp. 119, 124-7 for further discussion of Aristotle’s philosophy concerning slavery.

the cult of Bendis allowed slaves to participate as slaves but alongside the free, the Kronia allowed slaves to be honored and feast with the free members of the household. This again demonstrates the contradictory nature of slavery in Athens because it shows that the Athenians did not just view their slaves as economic assets but also as people with whom they could share a feast.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have investigated the evidence for slave participation in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the cult of Bendis and the Kronia festival. Through both epigraphic and literary sources, I have shown that slaves were part of these major cults and that their participation allowed them to maintain aspects of their personhood. Although establishing the details of the religious cults and the nature of slave participation has been my main focus, the results of my research offer a challenge to Orlando Patterson's concept of "social death." Through their participation in religious activities, slaves were able to retain notions of their personhood and humanity despite the dehumanization they experienced in a slave society. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, slaves were initiated in the same way as were free persons, and the rewards of initiation were the same as for the free: hopes for a better life on earth and, more importantly, a sweeter afterlife. The cult of Bendis allowed Thracian slaves to maintain their ethnic identity, even as both they and their native goddess may have become Hellenized. Finally, the Kronia permitted slaves a temporary release from their duties and gave them an opportunity to experience a taste of freedom, if only in a ritual moment.

The religious participation of slaves that I have demonstrated in my three case studies thus provides a critical perspective on Patterson's concept of "social death." Slaves participated in Athenian religion as persons with a social identity and social aspirations. The fact that slaves were allowed to participate suggests that both their

masters and the city acknowledged that slaves possessed at least a small amount of humanity. In both the concept of “social death” and Aristotle’s idea of natural slavery (*Politics* 1254-1260), the slave’s humanity is non-existent and he or she is only a piece of property. The evidence of the Athenian cults suggests otherwise.

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 Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*
 Xenophon, *Hellenica; Poroi*

Inscriptions

Slaves at Eleusis:

Foucart, *Les mystères d'Éleusis*, p. 274
 Jacob, *Les esclaves publics à Athènes*, p. 41.

Bendis in Athens and the Piraeus:

IG I² 310
 IG I³ 136
 IG I³ 421-30
 IG I³ 1032
 IG II² 10
 IG II² 1283
 IG II² 1496

Thracian *orgeones*:

IG II² 1284

Athenian *orgeones*:

IG II² 1255
 IG II² 1256

IG II² 1324

IG II² 1361

Bendis in Salamis:

IG II² 1317, 1317b

Images

Figure 1. Bendis, Apollo, and Hermes on a red-figure bell krater by the Bendis Painter, fourth century BCE, Louvre Museum (G 515).

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Artemis_Apollo_Hermes_Louvre_G515.jpg.

Figure 2. Votive relief from the Piraeus, 329/8 BCE, depicting Bendis and Deloptes/Asclepius with two worshippers, Hermes, Pan, and three nymphs. (Harland, *Association of the Greco-Roman World: A Companion to the Sourcebook* 2012)

<http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/12-decree-of-the-sacrificing-associates-of-bendis-honoring-supervisors/>

Figure 3. Votive relief in the British Museum (BM 2155), c. 400-350 BCE, depicting Bendis and a victorious team from the torch race on horseback. © Trustees of the British Museum

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