

Eleusinion

also known as “City Eleusinion (Athens)”

Data source: Own research and secondary literature
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** Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

Entry tags: Archaeological monument, Religious Place, Greek Religions, Greek Cult, Mystery Religion, Religious Group, Greece, Temple, Temenos

The Eleusinion was the satellite sanctuary for the Eleusinian goddesses (Demeter and Kore) located in the city center of Athens on the north slope of the Akropolis just above the Athenian Agora. The sacred items used in the Eleusinian Mysteries were brought here at the beginning of the festival in order to be returned to Eleusis in a great procession. The remains of a temple to Triptolemos have been uncovered, but the full extent of the sanctuary is unable to be excavated.

Date Range: 650 BCE - 396 CE

Region: Eleusinion

Region tags: Greece, Attica

sanctuary to the Eleusinian goddesses in Athens

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

General Variables

Sources and Excavations

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

– Source 1: Miles, M.M. The City Eleusinion. The Athenian Agora 31. (Princeton 1998)

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <http://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/monument/eleusinion?q=&t=monument&v=list&sort=&s=22>

– Source 1 Description: Online database of the Athenian Agora Excavations (entry: monument, Eleusinion)

– Source 2 URL: <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/650003009>

– Source 2 Description: entry in Pleiades, a community-built gazetteer and graph of ancient places

– Source 3 URL: <https://www.atticinscriptions.com/search/?q=eleusinion>

– Source 3 Description: Attic Inscriptions Online, includes translations of several texts set up at the Eleusinion

– Source 1 URL: <https://topostext.org/place/380237SEle>

– Source 1 Description: entry in ToposText, an indexed collection of ancient texts and mapped places relevant the the history and mythology of the ancient Greeks

Has this place been the focus of excavation (pre-modern, illicit, or scientific):

Answer 'Yes' for each period or type of excavation.

– Yes

↳ Type of excavation:

– Scientific

↳ Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1930s, 1959-1960, 2000-2003

↳ Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Excavations of the Athenian Agora (American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

Topographical Context

Is the place associated with a feature in the landscape

– Elevation

↳ Type of elevation

– Hill

Notes: north slope of Akropolis

– Other [specify]: rocky outcropping

Does the place involve human-made features besides structure:

Other features might be ground clearing, terracing, other modifications of the local environment.

– Yes

↳ Type of feature

– Leveling of ground

- Terracing
- Water feature

Is the place situated in an urban or significantly urbanized area:

– Yes

↳ Is there a distinct boundary between the place and the urban fabric:
– Yes

↳ Is the place located significantly within the urban fabric:
Is the place centrally located, or at the crossroads of significant pathways?
– Yes

Notes: between Agora and Akropolis adjacent to Panathenaic Way

Is the place situated in a rural setting:

– No

Is the place situated far removed from non-religious places of habitation:

– No

Structures Present

Are there structures or features present:

Instructions: Answer once for each structure/feature or group that can be differentiated.

– Yes

Notes: temple of Triptolemos

↳ A single structure
– Yes

↳ The structure has a definite shape
– Rectangular

↳ A group of structures:
– No

↳ A group of features:

– No

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– Yes

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Worship

↳ Worship:

– Communal

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– Yes

↳ How was the structure/feature destroyed

– Burned

Notes: evidence of burning found in excavations, but details inconclusive

↳ Was it destroyed deliberately:

– Other [specify]: unknown, but probably pillage

↳ Was it destroyed by accident/natural phenomena:

– Other [specify]: unknown, but human-caused accident is possible

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– No

– Yes

Notes: propylon

↳ A single structure

– Yes

↳ The structure has a definite shape

– Rectangular

↳ A group of structures:

– No

↳ A group of features:

– No

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– Yes

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

–Other [specify]: ritual (monumentalized entrance marks transitional space)

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– Yes

↳ How was the structure/feature destroyed

–Other [specify]: unknown

↳ Was it destroyed deliberately:

– Other [specify]: unknown

↳ Was it destroyed by accident/natural phenomena:

– Other [specify]: unknown

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– No

– Yes

Notes: stoa

↳ A single structure

– Yes

↳ The structure has a definite shape

– Rectangular

↳ A group of structures:

– No

↳ A group of features:

– No

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– Yes

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Social

Notes: shaded gathering place

– Memorial

Notes: display of dedications and inscriptions

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:
– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:
– No

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:
– Yes

↳ How was the structure/feature destroyed
– Other [specify]: unknown (one context of "destruction debris")

↳ Was it destroyed deliberately:
– Other [specify]: unknown, but probable result of pillage

↳ Was it destroyed by accident/natural phenomena:
– Other [specify]: unknown: possible human-caused accident

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:
– No

– Yes

Notes: peribolos wall

↳ A single structure
– Yes

↳ The structure has a definite shape
– Rectangular

↳ A group of structures:
– No

↳ A group of features:
– No

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– Yes

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Other [specify]: demarcate space

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– Yes

↳ How was the structure/feature destroyed

– Other [specify]: unknown

↳ Was it destroyed deliberately:

– Other [specify]: unknown

↳ Was it destroyed by accident/natural phenomena:

– Other [specify]: unknown

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– No

Reasons for Creation/Construction/Consecration

Is the place used for the worship of/communication with non-human supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Dedicated to a supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: Demeter

↳ Dedicated to more than one supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: Demeter and Kore, Triptolemos also present

Is the place used for the worship of a semi-divine human being:

– No

Is the place used for the worship of non-divine ancestors:

– No

Was the place commissioned/built by an official political entity:

A political entity is a local power structure that leverages a workforce.

– Yes

↳ Specify

– Other [specify]: city of Athens

Were the Structures built by specific groups of people:

– Field doesn't know

Was the place thought to have originated as the result of divine intervention:

– Field doesn't know

Was the place created to mark or commemorate the birthplace of a supernatural or human being:

– No

Was the place created as the result of an event:

– Field doesn't know

Was the creation of the place sponsored by an external financial/material donation:

– Field doesn't know

Was the establishment of the place motivated by:

– Other [specify]: probably expected favor in return, but unknown

Was the place built specifically for housing scriptures/sacred texts:

– No

Design and Material Remains

Overall Structure

Is the place made up of multiple built structures:

– Yes

↳ Are any of the structures attached to or associated with a landscape feature:

– Yes

Notes: peribolos wall partly encloses rocky outcropping

↳ Are any of the structures attached to other structures:

– Yes

Notes: Hellenistic stoa replaces south part of peribolos wall

↳ Is there a hierarchy among the structures:

– Yes

Is monumental architecture present:

Monumental architecture is defined here as a built structure that surpasses average human proportions and in general is larger and more complex than is necessary to fulfill the structure's utilitarian function(s). Examples of monumental architecture include Mesopotamian Ziggurats, Egyptian Pyramids, Greek and Roman temples, Mesoamerican Pyramids, North American and Aegean burial mounds, etc.

– Yes

↳ In the average place, what percentage of area is taken up by built monuments:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: eastern portion of sanctuary unexcavated

↳ Footprint of largest single religious monument, square meters:

Please add dimensions in the comments, if known.

– Square meters: 197

Notes: platform for temple of Triptolemos: 11.065m x 17.813m [note: this is largest excavated monument, and there was likely another temple in this sanctuary (unexcavated)]

- ↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:
 - Field doesn't know
 - Notes: superstructure of temple of Triptolemos not preserved

- ↳ Size of average monument, square meters:
 - Field doesn't know

- ↳ Height of average monument, meters:
 - Field doesn't know

Is the structure/feature made out of natural materials:

Answer [Yes] for each material type

– Yes

- ↳ Earth
 - No

- ↳ Sand
 - No

- ↳ Clay
 - Yes

- ↳ Is this material sourced locally:
 - Yes

- ↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:
 - No

- ↳ Plaster
 - Yes

- ↳ Is this material sourced locally:
 - I don't know

- ↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Wood

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Grass

– No

↳ Stone

– Yes

Notes: limestone foundations

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

– Yes

Notes: island marble roof tiles

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– No

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

Is the structure/feature made out of human-made materials

– No

Decoration

Is decoration present:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration part of the building (permanent):

– No

↳ Is decoration attached to the building, i.e. movable reliefs or tapestries

– Yes

Notes: reliefs from propylon built into Little Metropolitan church in Athens (Byzantine)
[unknown whether temple was decorated]

↳ Is the decoration figural:

A figural representation is defined here as one that contains the depiction of discernible human, anthropomorphic, animal, or zoomorphic forms. In general, it differentiates between animate and inanimate beings, as well as between narrative compositions and still life, landscapes, abstraction, etc. Answer [Yes] for each type of figure depicted

– Yes

↳ Are there gods depicted:

– No

↳ Are there other supernatural beings depicted:

– No

↳ Are there humans depicted:

– No

↳ Are there animals depicted:

– Yes

Notes: boucrania

↳ Are there animal-human hybrids depicted:

– No

↳ Is the decoration non-figural:

– Yes

↳ Is it geometric/abstract

– No

↳ Floral motifs

– Yes

Notes: poppies

↳ Is it writing/caligraphy

– No

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: ritual vessels (plemochoe and patera) and torches

↳ Is the decoration hidden or restricted from view:

– No

↳ Are there statues present:

– Yes

Notes: statues set up throughout the sanctuary

↳ Cult statues:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Statues of gods/supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Statues of humans:

– Yes

↳ Are there reliefs present:

A relief as opposed to sculpture carved on the round is a work of sculpture in which the figures project from a background support, generally a flat surface. Reliefs can be carved out of stone, clay, or a similar material.

– Yes

– Yes

↳ Reliefs representing the god(s) worshipped at the place:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Reliefs representing mythological narratives:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Reliefs representing human/historical narratives:

– No

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: reliefs representing ritual implements and symbols

↳ Are there paintings present:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are there mosaics present:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are there inscriptions as part of the decoration:

– I don't know

Notes: inscriptions were set up here (decrees and dedications), but whether that counts as "decoration" is open to interpretation

↳ Other type of decoration:

– Field doesn't know

Iconography

Are there distinct features in the places iconography:

– Yes

↳ Eyes (stylized or not)

– Field doesn't know

Notes: eyes are associated with mysteries, but no examples are preserved here

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic)

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract)

– No

↳ Portrayals of afterlife

– Field doesn't know

Notes: this iconography is common with mysteries, but no example preserved here

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols)

– Yes

Notes: poppy, torches, plemochoe could be interpreted this way

↳ Humans

– Yes

↳ Supernatural narratives

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human narratives

– No

Beliefs and Practices

Funerary Associations

Is this place a tomb/burial:

– No

Is this a place for the worship of the dead:

– No

Is this a place for treatment of the corpse:

– No

Are formal burials present:

– No

Supernatural Beings

Is a supreme high god is present:

– No

Are previously human spirits present:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Triptolemos is a hero (deified human king), so possible

Do human spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are nonhuman supernatural beings present:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– I don't know

Do nonhuman spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Are mixed human-divine beings present:

– No

Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Is the supernatural being/high god present in the form of a cult statue(s):

– Field doesn't know

Supernatural Interactions

Is supernatural monitoring present:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural monitoring of norm adherence:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect offerings:

– Yes

↳ Libations:

– Yes [specify]: wine

↳ Offerings of food:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Animal sacrifice:

– Yes [specify]: variety

↳ Human sacrifice:

– No

↳ Sacred objects:

– Yes [specify]: secret objects are used; some could be considered offerings

↳ Daily life objects:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Other:

– Other [specify]: terracotta figurines

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:

– Yes

↳ Does the worship include sex acts/references:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect proper ritual observance:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect performance of rituals:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect maintenance of the place:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect personal hygiene:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about honoring oaths:

– Yes

Do visitors communicate with the gods or supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Do visitors communicate with gods:

– Yes

↳ Do visitors communicate with other supernatural beings:

– Field doesn't know

Ritual and Performance

Sacrifices, Offerings, and Maintenance

Are sacrifices performed at this place:

– Yes

↳ Are there animal sacrifices:

– Yes [specify]: variety

↳ Are there human sacrifices:

– No

Are there self-sacrifices present:

– No

Are material offerings present:

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings mandatory:

– No

↳ Are material offerings composed of valuable objects:

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings composed of daily-life objects:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are material offerings interred at this place (in caches):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: there are a few early votive pits that could reflect such a practice

Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory:

– No

Is maintenance of the place performed:

– Yes

↳ Is it required:

– Yes

↳ Is there cleansing (for the maintenance):

– Yes

↳ Are there periodic repairs/reconstructions:

– Yes

- ↳ Is the maintenance performed by permanent staff:
 - Field doesn't know

Pilgrimage and Festivals

- Are pilgrimages present:
 - Field doesn't know

- Is this place a venue for feasting:
 - Field doesn't know

- Are festivals present:
 - Yes

- ↳ Frequency of festivals
 - specify: 1-3 times per year
 - Notes: one yearly festival definitely used this site; at least two other yearly Demeter festivals probably took place here as well

- ↳ Do all members of the society participate in the festival(s):
 - Only initiates
 - Notes: the Eleusinian Mysteries
 - Other [specify in comments]
 - Notes: Thesmophoria festival restricted to women

- ↳ Are festivals a defining element in the construction/decoration of the place:
 - Field doesn't know

- ↳ On average, how many participants gather at this place:
 - number: field doesn't know

- ↳ Is feasting part of the festival(s):
 - Yes

- ↳ Is food consumption limited to certain members of the population:
 - Elites
 - Non-elites

Divination and Healing

Is divination present:

– No

Is healing present/practiced at this place:

– No

Do rituals occur at this place:

Rituals are visibly enacted behaviors by one or more people for the purposes of religious observance.

– Yes

↳ Do large-scale rituals take place:

– Yes

↳ Do small-scale rituals take place:

– Yes

↳ On average how many participants are present in large-scale rituals:

– specify: field doesn't know

↳ How often do these rituals take place:

– specify: field doesn't know

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks:

– No

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:

– Yes

↳ Are there synchronic practices:

– Yes

Notes: initiation

↳ Are there intoxicants used during the ritual:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: some scholars believe this for the Eleusinian Mysteries, but it's unlikely to have involved this site

Institutions and Scriptures

Religious Specialists

Are religious specialists present/in charge of this place:

Religious specialists are individuals whose primary duties within a population group are not concerned with subsistence or craft production but the maintenance of the religious landscape and culture of the group.

– Yes

↳ Present full time

– No

↳ Present part time

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific sex/gender:

– Yes

Notes: hierophant and dadouchos = male

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific ethnicity:

– I don't know

Notes: depends on how "ethnicity" is used here: must be Greek-speaking and Athenian

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific class/cast:

– Yes

↳ Are religious specialists dedicated to the place for life:

– Yes

↳ Are the religious specialists stratified in a hierarchical system:

– Yes

↳ Is access within the space segregated by this hierarchy:

– No

Does this place incorporate a living space for religious specialists:

– No

Is this place used for the training of religious specialists:

– No

Are there formal institutions for the maintenance of the place:

Institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders

– Yes

Bureaucracy

Is there a formal bureaucracy present at this place:

A bureaucracy consists of a hierarchical system of accounting and rule maintenance primarily concerned with material wealth.

– No

Does this place control economic resources (land, goods, tools):

– Field doesn't know

Public Works

Does this place serve as a location for services to the community:

– No

Writing/Scriptures

Is non-religious writing stored at this place:

Economic documents, records etc.

– Yes

Are there scriptures associated with this place:

– No

Bibliography

General References

Reference: Margaret Miles M. *The City Eleusinion (Agora 31)*. American School of Classical Studies at Athens. isbn: 0-87661-231-1.