

The Process of Identification in the Initiatic Schools.

Based on what has emerged so far from our attempt to define and identify the ‘ideal type’ which represents the cornerstone of this study, the human ‘figure’ or type who averts the need to understand or be a part of a Sapiential School is represented by individuals situated *a priori* in an advanced state of the Self-awareness process and who, through the initiatic experience, progress towards the completion of their pathway towards ‘wholeness’, i.e. towards ‘integral personalities’.

Although *Active Imagination* is the specific method that Jung identified in alchemical practices, which recalled the ‘individuation process’, the doctrines and rituals of other Initiatic Schools likewise revealed the presence of specific experiences which, as mentioned previously, were largely manifested in times of social and moral crisis when the individual, in a state of *disorientation*, perceived a need to regain an inner balance in order to achieve the *reintegration* of his no longer integrated personality, to *reacquire* his ‘Centre’, as illustrated by Jung: “*Under certain conditions the unconscious spontaneously brings forth an archetypal symbol of wholeness. From this we must conclude that that some such archetype occurs universally and is endowed with a certain numinosity.*”¹

In several of his studies Jung developed an interest in the dynamics pertaining to the Sapiential Schools (Mysteric or Gnostic) and analysed these dynamics from both a biological and genetic viewpoint, as well as in terms of the cerebral structure, representing them in a *metaphysical* or *mystic* sense as something which followed the experiences of the old Eleusinian Mysteries; to this regard one of the greatest experts in Jungian theories, Prof. Sonu Shamdasani, wrote that: “*A distinctive feature of Jung’s work was its attempt to provide psychological understanding of*

¹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Aion*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 1997, p.66.

the processes of personality transformation which he claimed underlay religious, hermetic, gnostic and alchemical practices”².

The Eleusinian Mystai

Mystery cults have always been particularly thriving in times of crisis and social uprising, when individuals started to develop a certain dissatisfaction with traditional forms of life and thought, and started asking themselves new existential questions to which they could not find an answer within the traditional institutions. Mystery Societies clearly distinguished themselves from official Religions and Cults; at a time in which the official cult, the gods who made up the Olympus of Greek mythology, did not fully satisfy the religious needs of men of the time, a new system was therefore created in which the dynamics for the approach of the “sacred” presented a different emotional and spiritual involvement. The relationship of a Mystery “Initiate” with its relative deity is of a different nature to that of a man of the ancient world with the god of an official cult, a relationship of a deeper nature, almost “metaphysical” as initiates are left the ‘freedom’ to experiment with the sacred, an element which is non-existent in the official cult.³ To this regard, in her *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World*, Marion Giebel stresses that: “*At the time of initiation, mystery disciples are delivered a secret knowledge that allows them to deepen their understanding of the divine and human thus reaching a special relationship with their mystery deity, which promises them support and protection. Although showing similar characteristics, the development of mysteries cannot be attributed to a direct descent from tribal initiation or fertility rites. The Eleusinian Mysteries, for instance, present similarities and differences, but a certain aspect never varies: initiation always grants access to a more noble existence,*

² Sonu Shamdasani, *Cult Fictions*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.120.

³ Fabio Venzi, *Introduzione alla Massoneria*, Atanòr, Rome, 2012, p.110.

*extending beyond human life and portraying man as the link on a chain connecting divine to human life.”*⁴

The *Myth* narrated in the *Hymn to Demeter* represented the foundation on which the ritual was structured, in which two classes of participants to the ceremony were present, the initiands, called *mystai*, and those who had already undergone initiation, the *epòptai*. The mystagogue was the person that guided the initiate to the sanctuary in Eleusis and assisted him during the ceremony, much of which saw the *mystai* blindfolded.

The *Eleusinian Mysteries* were divided into ‘Lesser’ and ‘Greater’ Mysteries: the former were celebrated once a year in Kheria, a suburb of Athens, during the month of Anthesterion in the Spring. The ceremonies comprised a series of rituals, fastings, purifications and sacrifices, all regulated by a mystagogue. The Greater Mysteries were also celebrated once yearly, from the 7th to the 13th of the month of Boedromion (September-October); the ceremony lasted for eight days, the first seven of which were taken up by preparations for the ceremony.

We do not know many of the rituals which took place during the ‘Greater Mysteries’, and we may therefore only *deduce* what happened inside the sanctuary; we may hypothesize that the initiates, *remodernizing* the legend of Demeter, were placed mystically in the condition to receive the revelation that was transmitted by the *dromena*, the *legomena* and the *deinkymena*.

The *dromena*, in substance, were the dramas, with the hall in which the Initiation took place being arranged as an actual theatre, a square atrium with steps at each side.

The *dromena* were accompanied by a verbal revelation, the *legomena*. These consisted probably in *secret formulas* (*aporrheta*) for recognition, actual “laisser-passers” (*symbola*). The *legomena* however had a rather limited importance, indeed, in the words of Aristotle “*Initiates do not need to understand anything;*

⁴ Marion Giebel, *I Culti Misterici nel mondo antico*, ECIG, 1993, Genoa, p.10-12.

rather they undergo an experience and a disposition – become, that is, deserving.”

Indeed, all ancient authors agree in stating that the essential moment of the revelation consisted in a “Vision” or “Illumination”.

The apex of the *epòpteia*, the *deinkymena*, is reached when the *mystai*, on having their blindfolds removed and under a blinding light, were “shown” the “secret” object, purportedly a cut *ear of wheat* representing the complete life cycle. The *epòpteia*, which could be translated by the term “contemplation”, and consequently denote the *epòpts* as “contemplators”, corresponds therefore to the *revealing* of the secret concealed in the ritual.

The dynamics applied in the Eleusinian rite underline therefore how the purpose of the “Initiation” to the ‘Mysteries’ did not have a soteriological aim; on the contrary, the ceremony resulted in an actual ‘ontological change’, a mutation of “state”, a *psychological* change elicited by an *active-realizatory* metaphysical dynamic rather than a quiescent and quietist one, an actual ‘transformation of personality’ which closely resembled Jung’s individuation process.

Many scholars of the *Eleusinian Mysteries* are still astounded by how the secrets of Eleusis, with the exception of the few references made by Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus of Rome, have been so well preserved throughout the centuries, a fact which is easily and logically explained by the possibility that there may have never been a ‘secret’ to be revealed, and that, as explained by Sabbatucci: “*the true secret was represented by a subjective mystic experience that would not have been deemed credible, nor even communicable by others. This experience maintained its validity, as a secret to be guarded, as long as one believed in it*”⁵. The same dynamics can be observed in Masonic rituals and fit perfectly with the *personal* experience of a Freemason, whose wholly inner *secret*, and for this reason

⁵ Dario Sabbatucci, *Saggio sul Misticismo Greco*, Edizioni dell’Ateneo, Rome, 1965, p.143.

incommunicable, may be discovered solely by means of a *spiritual realization* and a subsequent transformation of his personality.

Thus, the ‘secret’ referred to in the *Eleusinian Mysteries* are comprised in a *personal* and *spiritual* dynamics which is prevalently, as already stated, *incommunicable*; it can thus be concluded that the vision evoked in the *epopt*, which caused his frame of mind to be *modified* by the initiatic experience, consequently brought him closer to a state of *awareness* of the existence of a deep, purely rational *Self*, differing from the conscious Ego, with which he undertook his initiatic journey.

In conclusion, by observing the ritual dynamics of the *Mysteries*, and other later Initiatic Schools, it can be deduced that those who prepared themselves for the complex ritual underwent an actual ‘individuation process’, an experience which, as we will see again centuries later with the Masonic rituals, aspired to a ‘*Brotherhood*’ beyond which, by giving up one’s own individuality, or rather one’s own Ego, we could identify a search for wholeness, for psychic totality: “*We are therefore in the midst of a mystic phenomenology: in Eleusis there was no catechization and neither was the initiate exalted in the name of an ideal human brotherhood, but this brotherhood was achieved involuntarily when he accepted to undergo a rite in which he would be asked to give up his individuality*”⁶.

⁶ Dario Sabbatucci, *ibidem*, p.129.