



# Demeter as Thesmophoros: What Does She Bring Forth?

Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge

## ► To cite this version:

Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge. Demeter as Thesmophoros: What Does She Bring Forth?. Alaya Palamidis; Corine Bonnet. What's in a Divine Name?, De Gruyter, pp.185-204, 2024, 978-3-11-132651-1. <10.1515/9783111326511-011>. <hal-04799047>

**HAL Id: hal-04799047**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04799047v1>**

Submitted on 22 Nov 2024

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# What's in a Divine Name?

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Religious Systems and Human Agency  
in the Ancient Mediterranean

Edited by

Alaya Palamidis and Corinne Bonnet

with the collaboration of Julie Bernini,  
Enrique Nieto Izquierdo, and Lorena Pérez Yarza

**DE GRUYTER**

This publication is the final outcome of the ERC Advanced Grant “Mapping Ancient Polytheisms. Cult Epithets as an Interface Between Religious Systems and Human Agency” (2017–2023, grant agreement No 741182), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme.



ISBN 978-3-11-132627-6

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-132651-1

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-132756-3

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111326511>



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**Library of Congress Control Number: 2023950686**

#### **Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2024 the author(s), editing © 2024 Alaya Palamidis and Corinne Bonnet,  
published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston  
This book is published open access at [www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com).

Cover image: Stele from the tophet of El-Hofra (Constantine, Algeria; ancient Cirta), from A. Berthier & R. Charlier, *Le sanctuaire punique d'El-Hofra à Constantine*, Paris, 1955, stele 15 GR, with the so-called “Sign of Tanit” and a three-letter inscription NAN, referring to a divine or human unknown name. The letter A has small, raised arms, like the Sign of Tanit. III-I century BCE.

Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

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# Demeter as Thesmophoros: What Does She Bring Forth?

**Abstract:** The onomastic attribute *Thesmophoros* given to Demeter, and generally shared by her daughter, is set here against the background of her “onomastic landscape” in archaic and classical evidence. A chronological focus is applied in order to understand, without any risk of anachronism or unclear contexts, what the onomastic attributes of Demeter tell us about her competences in the archaic and classical periods and the relative weight of the title *Thesmophoros* in this group. This is the subject of the first part of the present paper, with a short evocation of Demeter’s archaic profile. The second part, rooted in the same chronological context, attempts to grasp the scope of the *thesmos*-compound in the name. For more than a century, a large number of authors have addressed the meaning of *thesmophoros* and *Thesmophoria*, as a brief overview of the scholarship shows. Without claiming to renew the understanding of the term from top to bottom, this paper tries to refine it by taking into account, more than others have done previously, the archaic anchoring of the term *thesmos*, in particular in comparison with *nomos*, another word for “law”.

## Introduction

As Nilsson stated more than a century ago,<sup>1</sup> the Thesmophoria was “by far the most widespread of all Greek festivals”.<sup>2</sup> In his time, he was able to provide a list of just over twenty places where the festival itself (sometimes hidden behind the corresponding month name<sup>3</sup>), the cult-title Thesmophoros or a Thesmophorion was evidenced. In 2005, a list of sanctuaries considered as Thesmophoria included over 70 places, identified with more or less certainty, in the whole Greek world.<sup>4</sup> Even if the list was probably too generous, it showed that archaeological excavations had considerably expanded the inventory of the sanctuaries of Demeter and her daughter. Unfortunately, our understanding of the worship itself has not expanded as far as the number of sacred places on the map. The textual material has hardly increased since Nilsson’s seminal work, but new methods of approaching Greek religion, in particular socio-political and anthropological

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1 I warmly thank Corinne Bonnet and her team for their invitation and the fruitful discussions at each step of the present analysis. My gratitude goes also to Jan-Mathieu Carbon for polishing my English with patience, as always: I am of course responsible for the final version.

2 Nilsson 1906, 313: “Die Thesmophorien sind das bei weitem verbreiteste aller griechischen Feste.”

3 Θεσμοφορίων / Θεσμοφόριος: Trümper 1997, index s.v.

4 Kozłowski 2005, Annexe 1.

analysis, as well as gender studies, have made it possible to multiply the points of view on a cult that was long confined to the primitivist and global vision of “fertility”.<sup>5</sup>

Here, this complex cult will be addressed to a limited extent and from a specific angle commanded by the MAP project: the onomastic attribute Thesmophoros given to Demeter, and generally shared by her daughter, set against the background of her “onomastic landscape” in archaic and classical evidence. Attestations that appear in texts after the end of the fourth century BCE have been deliberately excluded: this implies leaving aside the most important resources for onomastic attributes, namely Pausanias’ *Periegesis* and the Roman and Byzantine lexicons, as well as going without, e.g. Callimachus’ *Hymn to Demeter*, or the fragments of Philochorus. The over-representation of poetry in the literary corpus of this time is not a problem in the present perspective. The chronological focus is applied in order to understand, without any risk of anachronism or unclear contexts, first, what the onomastic attributes of Demeter tell us about her competences in the archaic and classical periods and, secondly, the relative weight of the title “Thesmophoros” in this group. This will be the subject of the first part of the present paper, with a short evocation of Demeter’s archaic profile. The second part, rooted in the same chronological context, tries to grasp the scope of the *thesmos*-compound in the name. For more than a century, a large number of authors have addressed the meaning of *thesmophoros* and *Thesmophoria*, as a brief overview of the scholarship will show. Without claiming to renew the understanding of the term from top to bottom, the following considerations try to refine it by taking into account, more than others have, the archaic anchoring of the term *thesmos*, in particular in comparison with *nomos*, another word for “law”.<sup>6</sup>

## 1 Onomastic Attributes: Thesmophoros Among the Others

Demeter does not belong to the top four of Greek deities with onomastic attributes, which are Zeus, Apollo, Artemis and Athena. She finds her place in the following

---

5 In a huge bibliography, I pinpoint the still useful inventory of Farnell 1907, 311–376, and his cautious remarks on nineteenth-century interpretations of Demeter’s cults; the seminal work of Brumfield 1981 (about Athens); the short synthesis of Burkert 1985, 242–246 (with a bibliographical update in the French translation: Burkert 2011). Some papers have deepened and broadened our perception of the festival, such as Detienne 1979, Versnel 1993, and Lowe 1998. See also the interesting insights of Nixon 1995, Foxhall 1995, and Chlup 2007. Parker 2005, 270–283, remains one of the best and most useful analyses of the Athenian dossier – as often, Athens has yielded the best evidenced version of the festival.

6 This paper is part of a broader reflection on the notion of ‘norm’ in archaic Greece, held in courses given at the Collège de France from 2020 to 2022 (URL: [https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/vinciane-pirenne-delforge/\\_course.htm](https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/vinciane-pirenne-delforge/_course.htm)).

group, with Aphrodite, Dionysos, Hera, Herakles, Hermes and Poseidon,<sup>7</sup> but not necessarily in the upper part of the list. As far as their semantic content is concerned (apart from honorific and anthropomorphic designations<sup>8</sup>), Demeter's onomastic attributes, whether they come from literary texts or inscriptions, are overwhelmingly tied to agricultural labour and its products.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.1 A Hexametric Profile Beyond the Epithets

Indeed, her most ancient profile in hexametric poetry<sup>10</sup> makes Demeter the goddess whose main power is to cover the earth with “long ears of corn” and make “its rich furrows loaded with grain upon the ground”.<sup>11</sup> Food provided by agriculture is at the core of her divine competence in the epics, as attested by the poetic formula the “grain of Demeter”<sup>12</sup> defining the human diet.<sup>13</sup> Since she is not one of the divine protagonists of the Trojan War, the *Iliad* does not provide other elements to build a comprehensive picture of the goddess. Stereotypical epic formulas or comparisons do little to refine the understanding of a deity.<sup>14</sup> The only narrative allusion provided by the poem is the presence of Demeter in the catalogue of Zeus' sexual escapades, which he recites to Hera in Book 14 in order to express his intense desire for her – higher than for all his previous partners, including . . . herself.<sup>15</sup>

In the *Odyssey*, we meet Demeter only once, when Calypso complains to Hermes that male gods cannot stand goddesses mating with mortal men.<sup>16</sup> One of her two examples is the union of Demeter and the hero Iasion “in the thrice-ploughed fallow land”. As soon as Zeus learns of it, he strikes the goddess' partner down. Unfortu-

7 Lebreton 2019, 143 n. 8.

8 See below.

9 The Attic dossier of the MAP database, the achievements of the BDEG (<https://epiclesesgrecques.univ-rennes1.fr/> consulted in May 2022), the inventory of Bruchmann in *Epitheta deorum* (1893), and the list in Farnell 1907, form the basis for a global approach to Demeter's epithets. The list provided by Nilsson in his book *Griechische Feste* (1906, 311–312) mixes (without references) all types of texts and all periods, as in Cole 2000, 136.

10 I do not address the question of an *Ur*-Demeter before our first textual evidence, *i.e.* the epic poems (Linear B tablets are mute in this respect: Rougemont 2005, 330 and n. 18). Much ink has already been spilled on the question of “origins” and the goddess is no exception.

11 *h.Cer.* 455–456 (trans. H.G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library).

12 Δημήτερος ἄκτιν: Hom. *Il.* 13.322, 21.76; Hes. *Op.* 466, 597, 805.

13 In *Il.* 13.321–323, the definition of a human involves mortality, fragility against attacks by bronze and by stones, and the fact of eating the “grain of Demeter”.

14 A comparison between the Achaean army on the battlefield and the winnowing of the corn on the sacred threshing floor, “when blond Demeter amid the driving blasts of wind separates the grain from the chaff” (Hom. *Il.* 5.499–502).

15 Hom. *Od.* 14.326.

16 Hom. *Od.* 5.125–128.

nately, the details of the story escape us, except the fact that Iasion is probably the brother of Dardanos, the founder of Troy.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the *Theogony*, Hesiod, singing the goddesses “who lay with mortal men and bore children like gods”, places the union of Demeter and Iasion first in his catalogue. The “thrice-ploughed fallow” comes back and, this time, is situated in the rich land of Crete. The goddess gives birth to Ploutos, a benevolent (but rather elusive) divine figure providing wealth and riches to whomever meets him, both over land and sea.<sup>18</sup> In the Hesiodic *Works and Days*, as expected in such a poem, the farmer must pray to Demeter and Zeus Chthonios at the appropriate times in order to avoid hunger and famine.<sup>19</sup>

The other child of Demeter is more consistent in our evidence: the goddess Persephone abducted by Hades with the blessing of Zeus, the girl’s father. The *Theogony* is the first testimony (for us) of the link between Demeter and Persephone;<sup>20</sup> this occurs in the catalogue of Zeus’ divine partners, after his victory over Typhon. In the genealogical perspective drawn by Hesiod, divine children and their competences are essential in the ordering of the cosmos over which Zeus now presides. Among them, the daughter of Demeter becomes the wife of Hades and the queen of the dead. This is also the role attributed to Persephone in the Homeric epic, without any link made with her mother in this context.<sup>21</sup> Closely and solely associated to Hades, once called “Zeus Katachthonios”,<sup>22</sup> Persephone here is the powerful and terrible mistress of the Underworld. In the *Dios Apate* episode in Book 14, to which I referred above, when Zeus provides a list of his previous partners to his wife Hera, Demeter appears alongside Leto (and Hera herself is mentioned at the end), but in neither case are the children of these unions mentioned, whereas the offspring of the five mortal women who open the list were.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, we can suspect that Persephone, along with Apollo and Artemis, are implied behind these verses. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the divine part of this Homeric catalogue and the succession of Zeus’ unions with goddesses of his own generation in the *Theogony*: in both passages Demeter,

17 Gantz 1993, 64, 215, and 560. A scholion on Apollonius Rhodius (*AD* 1.916) refers to the death by lightning of Eetion, “who they name Iasion”. The report claims that he was struck (by Zeus?) because he had “violated” an *agalma* of Demeter (φασὶ κεραυνωθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑβρίζοντα ἀγάλμα τῆς Δήμητρος). The scholion is generally considered as a fragment of Hellanikos (fr. 23 Fowler, with his commentary on the other traditions: Fowler 2013, 522–523).

18 Hes. *Th.* 969–974. According to Hesychius (ε 7077, s.v. εὐπλουτον κανοῦν), the word designated “abundance that comes from barley and wheat”.

19 Hes. *Op.* 465–466: εὖχεσθαι δὲ Διὶ χθονίῳ Δημήτερι θ’ ἀγνῇ | ἐκτελέα βρίθειν Δημήτερος ἱερὸν ἀκτῆν.

20 Hes. *Th.* 912–914.

21 Hom. *Il.* 9.457, 569 (curses of Meleager’s mother); *Od.* 10.491–494, 509, 534, 564; 11.47, 217, 226, 386, 635 (Odysseus’ *katabasis*).

22 Hom. *Il.* 9.457: Ζεὺς τε καταχθόνιος καὶ ἐπαινή Περσεφόνη.

23 Hom. *Il.* 14.317–328.

Leto, and finally Hera, the god's "ultimate spouse", are listed in this same order.<sup>24</sup> The presence of Demeter in both accounts attests to the importance of Zeus' union with his other sister, probably as the precondition of the birth of Hades' future wife, even though, as already mentioned, there is no explicit reference to Demeter's motherhood in the *Iliad*.

Nevertheless, Demeter's proper name makes her the divine mother *par excellence*. However, as Walter Burkert rightly said, "exactly what kind of mother remains a mystery", since the first two letters, δη/δα, are still puzzling despite all of the efforts to solve the riddle.<sup>25</sup> Whatever the original meaning of the goddess' full name, narratives and cults recurrently place her in close relationship with her daughter, sanctioning her status as "mother" of Persephone, who is the divine *kore par excellence* in the context of her cults.<sup>26</sup> In Homer and Hesiod, Hades' wife receives her proper name, as well as in the first preserved evidence telling the whole story, the famous *Homeric hymn to Demeter*. Dated to the seventh or sixth century BCE,<sup>27</sup> the poem has been extensively analysed and interpreted as the "charter-myth" of the Eleusinian mysteries or, less often, the Thesmophoria.<sup>28</sup> It can also be seen as an important piece of evidence regarding the establishment of the present order of the divine world, a kind of narrow focus against the background of broader theogonic processes.

The hymn tells of the rape and recovery of Kore-Persephone, of how her mother wandered the earth in search for her, and of how she settled in Eleusis, where, hired as a nurse, she failed to immortalise Demophon, the son of the local king and queen. Then, she commanded the construction of a temple where she retired and began a strike that threatened humanity with extinction and risked depriving the gods of their honours. Finally, a reconciliation with Zeus occurs and Kore-Persephone is ordered to "go down for the third part of the circling year to darkness and gloom, but for the two parts should live with her mother and the other immortal gods" (v. 445–447). In the same movement, the revelation of Demeter's mysteries takes place at Eleusis. Under the au-

<sup>24</sup> On these lists, see Pironti (forthcoming) and Pirenne-Delforge/Pironti 2022, 33 n. 92, and 241–242.

<sup>25</sup> Burkert 1985, 159 (and the update in Burkert 2011). See e.g. Farnell 1907, 29–30; Nilsson 1955<sup>2</sup>, 461–462; Simon 2021 [1969], 95; Petersmann 1987, 175–181.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the invocation of Lasos of Hermione (6th c. BCE), in close connection with the cult of divine mother and daughter in his city: "I sing Demeter, and Kore, the spouse of Klymenos", below, note 111. Compare in Attica, the close relationship between Demeter and her daughter, which is marked by the well-known use of the dual: e.g. *CGRN* 8, line 5 (early 5th c. BCE): Θεοῖν, "to the Two goddesses".

<sup>27</sup> Parker 1991, 6: "... probably somewhere between 650 and 550". Cf. Richardson 1974, 5–12.

<sup>28</sup> See the opposite positions of Clinton and Parker, both excellent connoisseurs of Eleusis and Athens: Clinton 1986 connects the hymn with the Thesmophoria; Parker 1991 argues for a connection with the Mysteries. See the reply of Clinton 1992, 28–37. Cf. Suter 2002 (with the review of André Motte in *L'Antiquité Classique* 74, 2005, 404–408) and Stallsmith 2008, 119, about Thesmophoria, and Bremmer 2014, 10, about Mysteries. As stated by Parker 2005, 274, n. 19: "The same myth provides the aetiological background to both *Thesmophoria* and *Eleusinian mysteries*, though the telling of it in *Hymn. Hom. Dem.* is much more closely directed to Mysteries than to *Thesmophoria*."

thority of Zeus, the prerogatives of the goddess and her daughter are defined for the latter (Queen of the Underworld), reiterated and extended for the former. The growth of cereals is a central element of Demeter's divine intervention in the world. However, if we extend the analysis in three directions, we can broaden the scope of its competences.

The notion of *trophos*, "nourishment", commands the first perspective. Demeter is the nurturer of humans *par excellence*: after humanity is supposed to have left the golden age or the remote times characterized by a form of animality or savagery, according to various conceptions, cereals form the basis of human food – cultivated and not spontaneously offered by nature.<sup>29</sup> Gods "do not eat grain", as Homer sings,<sup>30</sup> and Demeter's action is directly centred on mortals. This is why she fails to immortalise Demophon and rescue him from his condition.<sup>31</sup> However, Demeter's action on grain growth is essential to the gods too, since the latter need men's offerings to be fully gods. Introducing herself as a goddess in the hymn, she declares: "I am Demeter, holder of honour (*timaochos*), who provides the greatest help and delight to the undying gods and mortal men."<sup>32</sup> Both categories – gods and humans – are concerned by her gifts.

The second direction to be explored is the relationship "mother/daughter", which is a specific component of Demeter's profile. This strong link in an exclusive feminine sphere is an exception in divine genealogies, where the relationship "mother/son" is much more often emphasised. Just think about the other goddesses whom the *Theogony* describes as "mothers" in the narrative parts of the poem, namely Gaia and Rhea: both goddesses are intimately associated with the fate of a son, Kronos for the former, Zeus for the latter.<sup>33</sup> This is important when one considers that the Thesmophoria is an exclusively female event.

The third perspective to embrace for addressing Demeter's prerogatives is the specific quality of the black humus, the *χθών*, in which the gifts of Demeter are rooted. The materiality of the substance is self-evident, but it is also a symbolically powerful interface between the "epichthonian" world of human beings, who eat bread and die, and the "katachthonian" world of the dead. The *Homeric hymn to Demeter* precisely depicts the extension of Demeter's prerogatives in both directions: she remains the tutelary deity of agriculture but, through her daughter's experience, she receives powers over the "katachthonian", as well as the "epichthonian".<sup>34</sup> In the mysteries of Eleusis and other ceremonies where she is so often associated with Kore, the

29 On these contradictory visions of the past, see Bruit Zaidman 2001, 195–200. It is no coincidence that in Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*, the goddess punishes Erysichthon ("he who splits the earth") for his impiety with insatiable hunger.

30 Hom. *Il.* 5.341.

31 Jaillard 2005, 57: "le processus . . . est de lui-même voué à l'échec." Cf. Clay 1989, 225–226; Parker 1991, 9–11.

32 *h.Cer.* 268–269 (trans. H.G. Evelyn-White, slightly modified).

33 Hes. *Th.* 169–170 (Gaia), 460 (Rhea), 914 (Demeter). On this topic, see Pirenne-Delforge 2008.

34 Cf. Jaillard 2005, 62: "La terre n'est pas dans la pensée grecque archaïque une entité homogène." See also Georgoudi 2002.

ritualization of this link is, in one way or another, under the seal of secrecy, at the core of the celebration.<sup>35</sup>

## 1.2 A Landscape of Names

In the hexametric poetry from which we have started,<sup>36</sup> the epithets of Demeter are the following, mainly attested in the Homeric hymn in her honour:

- ἀγλαόδωρος ('giver of splendid gifts'),<sup>37</sup> exclusive of D. in hexametric poetry.
- ἀγλαόκαρπος ('with splendid fruits'),<sup>38</sup> exclusive of D. in hexametric poetry.
- ἀγνή ('pure'),<sup>39</sup> shared with Artemis and Persephone.<sup>40</sup>
- αἰδοίη ('grave', 'full of restraint'),<sup>41</sup> shared with mortals, and Thetis, Hera, Persephone.<sup>42</sup>
- ἄνασσα ('sovereign', 'lady'),<sup>43</sup> shared with mortals, and Athena, Hecate, the disguised Aphrodite.<sup>44</sup>
- δῖα θεάων ('divine among the goddesses'),<sup>45</sup> common for goddesses.
- ἐϋπλόκαμος ('with goodly locks'),<sup>46</sup> shared with mortals and many goddesses.<sup>47</sup>
- ἐϋστέφανος ('well-crowned'),<sup>48</sup> shared with mortals, and Artemis, Aphrodite, a Nereid.<sup>49</sup>
- ἡὔκομος ('lovely haired'),<sup>50</sup> shared with mortals,<sup>51</sup> and many goddesses.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The full justification of this statement will find place elsewhere.

<sup>36</sup> Regarding the Homeric hymns, I only take into account the "longer four".

<sup>37</sup> *h.Cer.* 54, 192 (in combination with ὠρηφόρος), 492 (in combination with πότνια, ὠρηφόρος and ἄνασσα).

<sup>38</sup> *h.Cer.* 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Hes. Op.* 465; *h.Cer.* 203, 439. Cf. *Archil. fr.* 322.1 West.

<sup>40</sup> Artemis: *Hom. Od.* 5.123; 18.202; 20.71; Persephone: *Hom. Od.* 11.386; *h.Cer.* 337.

<sup>41</sup> *h.Cer.* 374, 486.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. Hera: *Hom. Il.* 21.479 (χολωσαμένη Διὸς αἰδοίη παράκοιτις); Thetis: *Hom. Il.* 18.394 (δεινὴ τε καὶ αἰδοίη θεός); Persephone: *h.Cer.* 486.

<sup>43</sup> *Hom. Il.* 14.325; *h.Cer.* 75, 492.

<sup>44</sup> Athena: *Hom. Od.* 3.380; Hecate: *h.Cer.* 440; Aphrodite: *h.Ven.* 92.

<sup>45</sup> *Hes. Th.* 969.

<sup>46</sup> *Hom. Il.* 5.125.

<sup>47</sup> e.g. Athena: *Hom. Od.* 7.41; Eos: *Hom. Od.* 5.390; Calypso: *Hom. Od.* 7.246; Circe: *Hom. Od.* 10.136; Nymphs: *Hom. Od.* 12.132; Artemis: *Hom. Od.* 20.80; Charites: *h.Ap.* 194; Maia: *h.Merc.* 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Hes. Th.* 300; *Op.* 300; *h.Cer.* 224, 307, 384, 470.

<sup>49</sup> Artemis: *Hom. Il.* 21.511; ἐϋστέφανος Κυθήρεια: *Hom.; Od.* 8.267, 288; 18.193; *Hes. Th.* 196, 1008; *h.Ven.* 6, 175, 286; Nereid: *Hes. Th.* 255.

<sup>50</sup> *Hes. fr.* 208.20 Merkelbach/West; *h.Cer.* 1, 302, 315.

<sup>51</sup> Among whom Helen is so called in the formula designating Menelaos: Ἑλένης πόσις ἡὔκομοιο (e.g. *Hom. Il.* 7.355, 9.339, 13.766, etc.)

<sup>52</sup> e.g. Leto: *Hom. Il.* 1.36; Thetis: *Hom. Il.* 512; Athena: *Hom. Il.* 6.92; Hera: *Hom. Il.* 10.5; Niobe: *Hom. Il.* 24.602; Calypso: *Hom. Od.* 8.452; Rhea: *Hes. Th.* 625, 634; *h.Cer.* 60, 75, 442; Nereid: *Hes. Th.* 241; Harpies: *Hes. Th.* 267.



- καλλιπλόκαμος ('with beautiful locks'),<sup>53</sup> shared with Thetis, Ariane, Circe, Leto.<sup>54</sup>
- καλλιστέφανος ('with a beautiful crown'),<sup>55</sup> exclusive of D. in hexametric poetry.<sup>56</sup>
- καλλίσφυρος ('beautiful-ankled'),<sup>57</sup> shared with mortals, and nymphs, Hebe, Nike, an Oceanid.<sup>58</sup>
- κυανόπεπλος ('dark-cloaked'),<sup>59</sup> shared with Leto.<sup>60</sup>
- ξανθή ('golden-haired', 'blond'),<sup>61</sup> shared with mortals (in particular Menelaos) but no deities.<sup>62</sup>
- πολυφόρβη ('feeding many'),<sup>63</sup> shared with Γ/γαῖα.<sup>64</sup>
- πότνια ('mistress'),<sup>65</sup> shared with mortals (πότνια μήτηρ), and many goddesses.<sup>66</sup>
- σεμνή θεά ('venerable deity'),<sup>67</sup> shared with Persephone.<sup>68</sup>
- τιμάοχος ('who has share of honour'),<sup>69</sup> together with Hestia in *h.Ven.* 31.
- χρυσάορος ('with sword of gold'),<sup>70</sup> together with Apollo.<sup>71</sup>
- ὠρηφόρος ('bringer of seasons'),<sup>72</sup> exclusive of D. in hexametric poetry.<sup>73</sup>

We must not neglect the formulaic dimension in the usage of these terms and their applicability to other figures than Demeter. It is evident from the list that generic epithets

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<sup>53</sup> Hom. *Il.* 14.326.

<sup>54</sup> e.g. Thetis: Hom. *Il.* 18.407; Ariane: Hom. *Il.* 18.592; Circe: Hom. *Od.* 220; Leto: *h.Ap.* 101.

<sup>55</sup> *h.Cer.* 251, 295.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Tyrnt. fr. 2.12: αὐτὸς γὰρ Κρονίων καλλιστεφάνου πόσις Ἥρης.

<sup>57</sup> *h.Cer.* 453.

<sup>58</sup> e.g. Nymph: Hom. *Il.* 9.560; Hebe: Hom. *Od.* 11.603; Nike: Hes. *Th.* 384; Oceanid: Hes. *Th.* 507.

<sup>59</sup> *h.Cer.* 319, 360 and 442 (μητέρα κυανόπεπλον), 374.

<sup>60</sup> Hes. *Th.* 406.

<sup>61</sup> Hom. *Il.* 500; *h.Cer.* 301. We can consider that the colour of wheat is not unrelated to this quality of the goddess's hair: cf. Opp. *C.* 1.434.

<sup>62</sup> In Pindar (*N.* 5.54), the Charites are *xanthai*. In Euripides (*Med.* 834), Harmonia is *xanthe*. On the blond hair of Demeter and the golden hair of Apollo, see Grand-Clement 2021; *Agora* XIX, H10 = *IG* I<sup>3</sup> 1053 = *DB MAP* S#2368 (5th c. BCE) attests that Apollo can be "blond": *hόρο|ς η|ε|ρδ|Απ|όλλων|ος* *Ξαν|θῆ* (I thank S. Lebreton for this reference).

<sup>63</sup> Hes. *Th.* 912.

<sup>64</sup> Hom. *Il.* 9.568; 14.200, 301; *h.Ap.* 365.

<sup>65</sup> *h.Cer.* 39, 47, 54, 203, 492.

<sup>66</sup> e.g. Hera (βοῶπις πότνια Ἥρη): Hom. *Il.* 1.551, 568, etc.; *h.Ap.* 309, etc.; Hebe: Hom. *Il.* 4.2; Enyo: Hom. *Il.* 592; Athena: Hom. *Il.* 6.305; Artemis: Hom. *Il.* 21.470; Calypso: Hom. *Od.* 1.14; Circe: Hom. *Od.* 8.448; Leto: *h.Ap.* 12; Maia: *h.Mer.* 19; Hestia: *h.Ven.* 24; Eos: *h.Ven.* 223; Tethys: Hes. *Th.* 368; Peitho: Hes. *Op.* 73.

<sup>67</sup> *h.Cer.* 1, 486: the first occurrences of the adjective *semnos* in our corpus.

<sup>68</sup> *h.Cer.* 486: σεμναί τ' αἰδοῖαί τε.

<sup>69</sup> *h.Cer.* 268.

<sup>70</sup> *h.Cer.* 4 (in combination with ἀγλαόκαρπος).

<sup>71</sup> Hom. *Il.* 5.509; 15.256; *h.Ap.* 123, 395; Hes. *Th.* 771.

<sup>72</sup> In combination with ἀγλαόδωρος: *h.Cer.* 54, 192, 492.

<sup>73</sup> If the hexameter Orph. *Fr.* 302 Kern (= D.S. 1.12.4) is archaic, we can add πλουτοδοτεῖρα ('she who gives riches') to the list.



associated with hair, ankles, crown (with the exception of *kallistephanos*) or sovereign dignity are widely shared. This is no surprise at all. However, the list does bring out some exclusive epithets which could be thematic voluntary choices and not just interchangeable hexametric formulae.<sup>74</sup> This is the case for three exclusive onomastic attributes: *aglaodoros*, *aglaokarpos*, and *horephoros*. The first two are variations on the theme of giving cereals to men, and the third, in the *Hymn to Demeter*, refers very appropriately to the passage of the seasons that punctuate the vegetal cycle emphasised by Kore's journey to and from the Underworld.<sup>75</sup> To this group of three attributes, we can add *poluphorbe*, significantly shared with the earth, an epithet highlighting the alimentary dimension of her gifts, in their full application.<sup>76</sup>

In the literary evidence from other genres and periods, the range of onomastic attributes extends, but if we stop the inventory at the end of the classical period, the harvest is not so abundant, beyond a simple repetition of previous hexametric formulas:<sup>77</sup>

#### Exclusive epithets of Demeter in poetry

- ἀγνῶν ὀργίων ἄνασσα ('mistress of the pure secret ceremonies')<sup>78</sup>
- ἀζησία ('who dries up' [grains])<sup>79</sup>
- ἀχαία/ἀχαία ('grieving')<sup>80</sup>
- δέσποινα πολυτίμητος ('mistress highly honoured')<sup>81</sup>
- Ἐλευσινία ('of Eleusis')<sup>82</sup>
- ἔρινύς ('Erinys', 'avenger')<sup>83</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *Kuanopeplos* makes perfect sense in the *Hymn to Demeter*, where its recurrent use is closely related to grief and anger. The attribution of the same epithet to Leto in the *Theogony* remains puzzling. For a tentative explanation, see Deacy/Villing 2009, 117–118 and, more convincingly, Grand-Clément 2011, 128.

<sup>75</sup> The return of Kore-Persephone in spring corresponds to the return of vegetation after the winter months. She is not the "Corn-daughter", as intended by Nilsson 1955<sup>2</sup>, 466, who read Demeter's name as "Corn-mother". The relationship between seasons and Kore's journeys is looser than a strict agrarian calendar would imply.

<sup>76</sup> I would be tempted to add *chrusaoros* to this list. The instrument to which the epithet refers could be a "golden sickle" rather than a "golden sword". On this hypothesis, already raised by Preller and Welcker, see the discussion in Richardson 1974, 139–141.

<sup>77</sup> These few formulas are not reprised here.

<sup>78</sup> Ar. Ra. 385–386.

<sup>79</sup> Soph. fr. 981 Radt, quoted (i.a.) by Photios, α 435, s.v. Ἀζησία (οὕτως ἡ Δημήτηρ παρὰ Σοφοκλεῖ καλεῖται· οἱ δὲ τὴν εὐτραφῆ, i.e. 'the fact of being well-fed'). Cf. Hsch. α 1468, s.v. Ἀζησία (ἡ Δημήτηρ· ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀζαίνειν τοὺς καρπούς); Zenobius 4.20: . . . ἱστορεῖ Δίδυμος, ὅτι Ἀμαία μὲν ἡ Δημήτηρ παρὰ Τροιζηνίους προσαγορεύεται, Ἀζησία δὲ ἡ Κόρη . . .

<sup>80</sup> Ar. Ach. 709.

<sup>81</sup> Ar. Th. 286. Cf. Ra. 336: ὦ πότνια πολυτίμητε Δήμητρος κόρη.

<sup>82</sup> Antim. fr. 96 Kinkel, quoted by Str. 8.5.3.

<sup>83</sup> Antim. fr. 28 Kinkel, quoted by Pausanias (8.25.4) who attributes to Antimachos's verse a link with the goddess honoured in the Arcadian city of Thelpousa.

- εὐχλοος ('beautifully green')<sup>84</sup>
- θεσμοφόρος (see below for a tentative translation)<sup>85</sup>
- καρποποιός ('who makes fruits')<sup>86</sup>
- καρποφόρος ('who brings forth fruits')<sup>87</sup>
- χλόη ('green')<sup>88</sup>
- χρυσάνιος ('with reins of gold')<sup>89</sup>

#### In prose

- ἀμφικτυονίς ('amphictyonic')<sup>90</sup>
- ἀχαία/ἀχαιά ('grieving')<sup>91</sup>
- Ἐλευσινία ('of Eleusis')<sup>92</sup>
- θεσμοφόρος<sup>93</sup>
- καρποφόρος ('who brings forth fruits')<sup>94</sup>
- φυτοσπόρος ('planting')<sup>95</sup>

When the same type of inventory is made in epigraphy, until the end of the fourth century BCE, one finds:<sup>96</sup>

- ἀζησία ('who dries up' [grains])<sup>97</sup>
- Βοιωτάη ('Boiotian')<sup>98</sup>
- δημοτελής ('publicly funded')<sup>99</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Soph. *OC* 1600.

<sup>85</sup> Pind. fr. 37 Maehler, quoted by an anonymous life of Pindar (*Vitae Pindari et varia de Pindaro*, 2, 6–10 Drachmann) and, partially, by Eustathius (*Prooemium commentarii in Pindari opera*, 27.49 Kambylis); Ar. *Th.* 295 (dual: with her daughter).

<sup>86</sup> Eur. *Rh.* 964.

<sup>87</sup> Ar. *Ra.* 384–385. On this epithet and the gods so called, see Wallensten 2014 and Lebreton 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Eup. fr. 183 Kock, quoted by the scholia of Soph. *OC* 1600; Ar. *Lys.* 835 (Demeter's theonym not explicit).

<sup>89</sup> Pind. fr. 37 Maehler, see above n. 85.

<sup>90</sup> Hdt. 7.200 (sanctuary of Anthela, at the Thermopylai).

<sup>91</sup> Hdt. 5.61 (sanctuary of the Gephyreis in Attica).

<sup>92</sup> Hdt. 9.57 (sanctuary at Plataia), 9.97 (sanctuary close to Cape Mycale). Cf. 9.101.

<sup>93</sup> Hdt. 2.171 (festival brought to Greece by the Danaids); 6.16 (festival in Ephesos); 6.91 (temple at Aegina); 6.134 (sanctuary at Paros).

<sup>94</sup> Heraclid. Pont. fr. 51a.8 Wehrli.

<sup>95</sup> Xenocr. (phil.) fr. 213 Parente, quoted by Stob. 1.1.29b.

<sup>96</sup> Uncertain restorations are not taken into account and the completeness of the inventory is probably not absolute.

<sup>97</sup> *Hesperia* 4 (1935) 52–53 no. 14, with commentary = *Agora* XIX, H16 = *IG* II<sup>3</sup> 4, 1825 (*DB MAP* S#3307; Attica, second half of 4th c. BCE).

<sup>98</sup> Graf 1985, *I.Ch.* 13 (*DB MAP* S#4371; Chios, 4th c. BCE).

<sup>99</sup> *IG* XII.7, 4 = *LSCG* 102, lines 4–5 (*DB MAP* S#14591; Amorgos, Arkesine, 4th c. BCE).

- Ἐλευσίνια ('of Eleusis')<sup>100</sup>
- θεσμοφόρος<sup>101</sup>
- καρποφόρος ('who brings forth fruits')<sup>102</sup>
- κονία ('dusty')<sup>103</sup>
- [μαλοφόρος ('who brings forth fruits' or 'herds')<sup>104</sup>]
- πατρώια ('ancestral')<sup>105</sup>
- χθονία ('earthly')<sup>106</sup>
- χλόη ('green')<sup>107</sup>

Leaving aside four mentions which deserves to be closely contextualised to be understood (*amphiktionis*, *Boiotae*, *demoteles*, *patroia*),<sup>108</sup> the three lists show an unsurprising thematic convergence, first towards agrarian production. A second expected convergence is the recurring presence of Demeter Eleusinia and her mysteries, as well as the 'black' side of her profile met in the Homeric hymn:

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**100** CGRN 56, col. II, line 43 (*DB MAP* T#1298; Attica, Marathonian Tetrapolis, mid-4th c. BCE): Demeter's theonym is not explicit; CGRN 45, Face A, fr. 5, col. 1, line 14 (Athens, end of 5th c. BCE): not exactly an epithet but the locative Ἐλευσίνι; *Agora* XVI, 48, line 10 (*DB MAP* T#4121; Athens, 367/66 BC); *Salviat* 1979 (Thasos, 5th-4th c. BCE), associated with πατρώια (below, n. 105).

**101** *IPark* 20 = *LSCG Suppl.* 32 (Arcadia, ca. 525 BCE: ritual norm); *IGDS* I 155 = *IGASMG* II<sup>2</sup> 46a (*DB MAP* S#2250; Gela [Bitalemi], 6th-5th c. BCE: dedication on a vase); *IGASMG* II<sup>2</sup> 46b (Gela [Bitalemi], early 5th c. BCE; graffito on a vase); *SEG* 64, 854, 1–4 (Locri, 4th-3rd c. BCE: dedicated tiles); *IG* XII.5, 134, line 12 (*DB MAP* T#21562; Paros, 4th c. BCE, inventory of sacred properties): only the cult-title is readable, but Kore is mentioned two lines above (10); *LPriene B – M*, 195 (*DB MAP* S#8016; second half of the 4th c. BCE – dedicatory epigram referring to the *Thesmophoroi* seen in a dream: θεσμοφόρους τε ἀγνάς ποτνίας ἐμ φάρεσι λεοκοῖς, line 3).

**102** *IG* II<sup>3</sup>.4, 1569 line 3 (*DB MAP* S#3860; Athenian Acropolis, mid-4th c. BCE, if the restoration is correct: [— Δήμητρ]ος καρποφ[όρου] —); compare *SEG* 30.169: [ἀγρ]ὸς καρποφ[όρος] . . .]. Let us remark that this dedication (?) of a tithe is metrical: see *DB MAP* S#3860.

**103** *IOlympia Suppl.* 41 (*DB MAP* S#16489; Olympia, 475–450 BCE, dedication, perhaps made by a Megarian: cf. Zeus Konios on one of the two Megarian acropolis, *Paus.* 1.40.6).

**104** *IGDS* I, 54 (*DB MAP* S#1863; Selinous, 475–450 BCE), and *IGDS* I, 78, line 5 (*DB MAP* T#2416; ca. 450 BCE), refer to a goddess Malophoros without theonym. The identification with Demeter is made (for us) by Pausanias visiting Megara (the mother-city of Selinous), who emphasises the possible ambiguity of the name, between “bringer of herds” and “bringer of (tree)fruits” (1.44.3). The brackets around the epithet signal the uncertain identity of the Malophoros as Demeter in the archaic and classical periods. See Stallsmith 2019, with previous bibliography.

**105** *Salviat* 1979 (Thasos, 5th-4th c. BCE), associated with Ἐλευσινία.

**106** *IG* IV, 683–684 (*DB MAP* S#9641–9642; Hermione, 5th c. BCE).

**107** CGRN 56, col. II, line 49 (*DB MAP* T#1319; Attica, Marathonian Tetrapolis, mid-4th c. BCE): Demeter's theonym is not explicit; CGRN 57, line 16 (*DB MAP* T#146; Attica, deme of Aixone, early 4th c. BCE). By association, we can add CGRN 32, line 38 (Attica, deme of Thorikos, end of 5th or early 4th c. BCE), with the offering of a sacrifice called *chloia*.

**108** This will be done elsewhere. The last two cult-titles refer to Thesmophoric cults, respectively in Arkesine on the island of Amorgos, and in Thasos (see above, notes 99 and 105).

- *achaia*, probably ‘grieving’ and not the ethnic ‘Achaian’, in relationship with Kore’s descent to the Underworld;<sup>109</sup>
- *erinyes*, ‘avenger’, related to her anger and the terrible threat she is able to pose to humankind;
- *konía*, related to dust, in a Megarian dedication found in Olympia; this is exactly like the Zeus of the acropolis of Megara where, according to Pausanias, the *megaron* of Demeter was also located – probably in connection with local Thesmophoria;<sup>110</sup>
- *chthonia*, the goddess of the *χθών*, with all the ambiguity that the term conveys, at the interface between agricultural production and the world of the dead.<sup>111</sup>

In the middle of this landscape of words related to the two aspects of the *chthon* is the epithet Thesmophoros, which is absent from the hexametric poetry analysed above. Its first poetic usage occurs in a fragment of Pindar quoted by Eustathius. In a dream addressed to the poet, Demeter would have complained that she was the only deity to whom he had not yet addressed a hymn. Pindar hastened to obey, opening his hymn with the invocation “πότνια θεσμοφόρε, χρυσάνιον”.<sup>112</sup> The importance of the epithet is emphasised by Pindar’s choice of this invocation for a goddess expecting a hymn to her own glory. We know from Pausanias that a Thesmophorion was located somewhere in the vicinity of the acropolis and the agora of Thebes, in the so-called “house of Kadmos”.<sup>113</sup> Xenophon provides the opportunity to combine both pieces of evidence, despite the huge chronological gap between them: in 382 BCE, the Theban Council had to meet on the agora because the women were occupying the Kadmeia – the acropolis – “to celebrate the Thesmophoria” (θεσμοφοριάζειν).<sup>114</sup> All this attests to the importance and official capacities of the cult beyond Pindar’s particular initiative. A few decades after Pindar, Herodotus provides a narrative in prose for the cult: it finds root in Egypt, which is the usual pattern as far as religion is concerned in his investigation.<sup>115</sup> Then, in Athens, Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousai* brings the name to the fore in his famous comedy. Both authors, each in his own perspective, reveal the main trend of the Thesmophoric cult: a secret performance reserved to women. The terrible fate of men who have exceeded the requirement provides Herodotus two occasions to underline the specificity of the cult, in Aegina and Paros. The oldest attestations of the epithet belong

<sup>109</sup> See Suys 1994, 14–19, with a very well-informed discussion, even if I do not share her conclusions.

<sup>110</sup> On this Megarian dossier, see Bremmer 2014, 166–179.

<sup>111</sup> This “Chthonia” was Demeter honoured in Hermione (above n. 26) with Kore and Klymenos, a local figure of Hades (Lasos of Hermione, fr. 1 Page, 6th c. BCE). On this cult, with the festival Chthonia which could be connected with “Thesmophoric” practices, see Johnston 2012, especially 231–33, with note 50.

<sup>112</sup> See note 85. The epithet χρυσάνιος / χρυσήνιος, “of the golden reins”, is not attested for Demeter in the hexametric poetry, but for Artemis and Ares (respectively *Il.* 6.205, and *Od.* 8.285). Cf. Soph. *OC* 694, for Aphrodite.

<sup>113</sup> Paus. 9.16.5. On the location, see Moggi/Osanna 2010, 305–306.

<sup>114</sup> *X. Hell.* 5.2.29.

<sup>115</sup> *Hdt.* 2.171.

to epigraphy: an Arcadian ritual norm dated from the last quarter of the sixth century BCE and a Sicilian dedication on a vase.<sup>116</sup> If we add the name of a month associated with the Thesmophoria,<sup>117</sup> and the presence of the cult in Greek ‘colonies’,<sup>118</sup> the antiquity and the centrality of this dimension of Demeter’s cult can be fully reaffirmed.

The potential origin of the cult and the etymology of the name have been extensively questioned.<sup>119</sup> Our purpose, as stated above, is to situate the meaning of the term *thesmophoros* according to the perception that the Greeks of the archaic and classical periods may have had of it, in connection with the goddess’s profile sketched in archaic poetry. As has been well established in studying other Greek deities, narratives and cults are not separate or hermetic worlds but interconnected languages.<sup>120</sup> Such a methodological statement can contribute to the present perspective since it invites us to consider the meaning of the epiclesis in relation to the narrative profile of Demeter. From this point of view, a goddess as “bearer of laws” or “legislator” hardly makes sense in archaic times, even if the cult-title was in this way explained later.<sup>121</sup>

## 2 To What Does *Thesmos* Refer in Thesmophoros?

Various hypothesis and ingenious theories has been advanced for decades as to the meaning of the festival name and the cult-title of Demeter and her daughter.<sup>122</sup> Two main trends emerge from this bibliography. The first sees “laws” behind the term, whether it be the rules of agriculture, those of procreation, or even of marriage.<sup>123</sup> The second refutes the abstract dimension of the word because of the component *-phoros* (“who brings forth”, “who carries”, “who bears”) and favours a concrete meaning, related to objects that worshippers would carry up to the sanctuary or to the rotted remains of piglet and cakes, which were thrown into pits and collected during the festival by women designated for this purpose.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>116</sup> See above note 101.

<sup>117</sup> Trümper 1997, index s.v.

<sup>118</sup> e.g. Gela and Locri: see above, n. 101.

<sup>119</sup> e.g. Trümper 2004, with previous bibliography.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. the methodological introduction of Pirenne-Delforge/Pironti 2022, 1–6.

<sup>121</sup> Call. 6.18; D.S. 1.14.4; schol. Luc. *D.Meretr.* 2.1 Rabe (p. 276.25–28): “Demeter is named Thesmophoros because she established (τιθεῖσα) *nomoi* or *thesmoi* according to which men must work to get their food (τὴν τροφήν).” Cf. Ceres Legifera in Rome; see Levin 1991.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Stallsmith 2008, who gives a concise state of the art. Her paper, entitled “The Name of Demeter Thesmophoros”, would have dissuaded me from taking up the subject again if she had not projected onto the archaic period the meaning of *thesmos* attested later (p. 123–124). See below.

<sup>123</sup> Emphasised by Bachofen in his *Mutterrecht* (1948<sup>3</sup> [1861], 381–382). Recently Stallsmith 2008; a curious balance in Levin 1991.

<sup>124</sup> *Thesmoi* interpreted as “things laid down” (< τῆθημι), i.e. the rotted piglets and cakes: from J. G. Frazer in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (s.v. Thesmophoria), Nilsson 1906, 323–324, or Deubner 1932,

Abstract nouns composed with *-phoros* are occasionally attested as cult-titles or names of festivals – the main but almost only example is *Nikephoros*<sup>125</sup> – but such word composition is not attested in the archaic period. That argument is not definitive, but must be taken into account.<sup>126</sup> If the notion of “law” prevails then, “marriage laws” are probably not concerned as such. In Aristophanes’ comedy, Hera Teleia is invoked as the goddess of legitimate unions, not Demeter or Kore.<sup>127</sup> In the period under consideration, Demeter has little to do with marriage as such and is mainly related to agricultural products and the world of the dead, through her close link with her daughter.<sup>128</sup> Regarding the physical objects possibly used during the ritual, it has justifiably been remarked that the epithet Thesmophoros refers to the goddesses and not to the human ritual agents,<sup>129</sup> who are called *thesmophoriazousai*, the “women who act during the Thesmophoria”.<sup>130</sup>

Accordingly, the first precept of our investigation should be to avoid preconceived ideas. The second is not to project later data indiscriminately onto the oldest periods under consideration. Let us therefore revisit the facts for the archaic period.

*Thesmos* appears about ten times in the literature between Homer and Pindar. The word is used in the *Odyssey* – a *hapax* in hexametric poetry – when Penelope has finally agreed to recognise her husband. The couple return to their bedroom, as the poet sings: οἱ μὲν ἔπειτα | ἀσπάσιοι λέκτροιο παλαιοῦ θεσμὸν ἴκοντο, “they then gladly came to the *thesmos* of the couch that was theirs of old.”<sup>131</sup> In the famous recognition scene of Book 23, Odysseus recalls that he built their matrimonial bed around an olive tree trunk rooted in the palace floor, thus making it immovable unless the olive tree itself is cut down. The passage where *thesmos* is used invites us to understand it as something concrete: the woodworking as a coherent whole, a tightly fitted

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44–45, to Burkert 1985, 243 and 443 n. 25; another etymology is proposed by Trümper 2004, but the result is the same. According to Robertson 1998, 566, the *thesmoi* are “the large, round baskets that typify the festival; each woman carried one with the necessities for her sanctuary sojourn.” Detienne 1979, 199 n. 1, was particularly careful about the meaning of the word and did not decide on a specific interpretation.

<sup>125</sup> For Athena (e.g. in the Hellenistic period: *I.Knidos* 177 [Knidos]; *CGRN* 212 [DB MAP S#14400; Pergamon]), Artemis (*LSAM* 33B = *I.Magnesia* 100b [DB MAP S#9449; Magnesia-on-the-Maiander, ca. 150 BCE]) and Aphrodite (Argos: Paus. 2.19.6). As Sylvain Lebreton rightly points out to me, the epithet could also refer to an iconographic type where the goddess carries a statuette of Nike in her hand, such as the Pheidias statue of Athena in Athens.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Robertson 1983, 245–247.

<sup>127</sup> Ar. *Th.* 974–975, with Levin 1991, 4. Cf. also Stallsmith 2008, 129.

<sup>128</sup> Unlike later: for example, in his *Conjugal precepts*, Plutarch opens his treaty with a reference to a priestess of Demeter taking part in a wedding ceremony (Pl. *Mor.* 138b).

<sup>129</sup> Levin 1991, 2; Stallsmith 2008, 126.

<sup>130</sup> The women collecting the rotted remains from the *megara* are called *antletriai*: schol. Luc. *D.Meretr.* 2.1 Rabe (p. 276.3–6).

<sup>131</sup> Hom. *Od.* 23.296–297 (trans. A.T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library, except *thesmos*, which is translated by “place”). Cf. Trümper 2004, 20 n. 39.

realisation, which would have been destroyed if, as Penelope told Odysseus in order to trap him, the bed had been moved. The same concrete dimension is recognisable in a fragment of Anacreon quoted in a Homeric lexicon from the beginning of our era:<sup>132</sup>

θέσθαι ἐν τῇ Ν ῥαψωδίᾳ τῆς Ὀδυσσεύας· καὶ γὰρ ὁ θησαυρὸς θεσμός λέγεται, καθάπερ καὶ Ἀνακρέων λέγει “ἀπὸ δ’ ἐξεῖλετο θεσμὸν μέγαν.”

*thesthai*: in the 13th song of the *Odyssey*; because the *thesauros* is called *thesmos*, as says Anacreon: “He took (it) from his large *thesmos*.”

The explanation refers to the use of this form of τίθημι by Odysseus, who has just arrived in Ithaca and seeks to store the goods and riches given by the Phaeacians.<sup>133</sup> The *thesauros* is a secure container where “treasures” can be deposited. Odysseus’ bed in Book 23 is not a *thesauros* as such, but its association with a *thesmos* coheres with the meaning expected for *thesauros* in other contexts: a manufactured object that cannot be easily dismantled and keeps precious things. Metaphorically, the union of Odysseus and Penelope is the “treasure” kept by the bed rooted in the palace’s soil.<sup>134</sup>

A generation after Anacreon, Pindar employs *thesmos* (in the Doric form τεθμός) several times.<sup>135</sup> The idea of a “tightly adjusted whole” is still present in his poetry, when he refers to the “*tethmos* of his hymn” (*O.* 7.88; cf. *N.* 4.33), a “*tethmos* of praise made of wreaths” (*O.* 13.29), or when he designates the athletic games themselves as *tethmoi* (*O.* 13.40: ἀμφιάλοισι Ποτειδᾶνος τεθμοῖσιν, *i.e.* the games of Poseidon “among the waves”, in Isthmia; *N.* 10.33: ὑπατον δ’ ἔσχεν Πίσσα | Ἡρακλέος τεθμόν, *i.e.* the Olympic games founded by Heracles; cf. *O.* 6.69). Other occurrences can be translated as “established norm(s)”: a “*tethmos* of the Immortals” (*O.* 8.25), “the Dorians under the *tethmoi* of Aegimos” (*P.* 1.64).

Going back to the early sixth century in Athens, we find the famous *thesmoi* of Solon in his fragment 36: “And *thesmoi* alike for base and noble, fitting straight justice unto each man’s case, I wrote.”<sup>136</sup> These are generally considered as “laws”, which

132 Anacr. fr. 61 Page, quoted by Apollonius Soph., *Lexicon Homericum*, Bekker 1833, 87.21–23.

133 Hom. *Od.* 13.207–208.

134 Compare the oaths pronounced by Hera in the *Iliad* (e.g. 15.36–40): she swears by the Earth, the Heaven, Styx, her husband’s sacred head, “and the couch of us twain, couch of our wedded love” (trans. A.T. Murray).

135 Let us remark that the fragment of his hymn to Demeter and Persephone uses the Ionian form Thesmophoros and not an expected Doric form (Pindar’s dialect) \*Tethmophoros or \*Thethmophoros. According to Trümper 2004, 17, this is the sign that “unmissverständlich, . . . die Θεσμοφορία etymologisch von θεσμός/τεθμός ‘Satzung’, ‘Gesetz’ zu trennen sind”. She dissociates this *thesmos* from the family of τίθημι to which the ‘other’ *thesmos*, “law”, would be related. In our perspective, which is not “genetic”, it is difficult to consider that a Greek ear would have identified two different words already from the archaic period.

136 Solon, fr. 36.18–20 West<sup>2</sup>: θεσμούς δ’ ὁμοίως τῷ κακῷ τε κάγαθῷ | εὐθεῖαν εἰς ἕκαστον ἀρμόσας δίκην | ἔγραψα. Cf. also fr. 31 W.: πρῶτα μὲν εὐχόμεσθα Διὶ Κρονίδῃ βασιλῇ | θεσμοῖς τοῖσδε τύχην ἀγαθὴν καὶ κῦδος ὀπάσσαι.



were probably publicly displayed on a wooden structure on the Athenian acropolis. If we take into account the archaic meaning of the term in the *Odyssey*, it cannot be excluded that the (probably) wooden and well-fitting structure on which these instituted norms were exhibited played a role in the choice of the term designating them.<sup>137</sup> Pindar's poetry, dated a century later, could support the hypothesis, since the concrete dimension of the word is still activated in its verses, in parallel with the abstract meaning.

Inscriptions dated to the end of the sixth or early fifth century – Pindar's period of activity – deserve to be considered against this background. A written plaque, also called the “Pappadakis bronze”, comes from Aetolia or from the Naupactus region and records a “law concerning the land”.<sup>138</sup> The text, which designates itself as a *tethmos* (τεθμός ὁδε περὶ τᾶς γᾶς, line 1), establishes the conditions for the distribution of land in an unallocated area. At the end, the *tethmos* places itself under the divine protection of Apollo Pythios and his *sunnaoi theoi*, which should enforce the imprecations uttered against violation (ὁδε τεθμός ἱερὸς ἔστο τῷ Ἀπόλλωνος τῷ Πυθίῳ καὶ τῶν συνν[άων], lines 14–15). In the same inscription, another *tethmos* is mentioned in the context of the imprecations, which concerns homicide (τὸν ἀνδρεφονικὸν τεθμόν, lines 13–14); this was probably also a written “law”. Another famous inscription from Central Greece, dated to the early fifth century and preserving the “foundation law” of Naupactus, the Locrian colony, extensively uses the term *nomia* (neuter plural), as well as the verb *nomizein* (once) and the word *nomos* in the expression *hópos . . . νόμος ἐστί*, “in accordance with traditional practice”.<sup>139</sup> All these occurrences of the semantic field of *nomos* refers to existing practices and customs in the different communities concerned. However, when designating itself at the end, the text uses the term *thethmion*.<sup>140</sup> This vocabulary seems to be more a matter of contrast than of simple synonymy: *thesmos* is here a “marked term”, compared to *nomos* and its cognates. What *thethmion* – and hence *thesmos* – underlines in this case is a set of dispositions in the moment of their institution as a written production.

Writing, which is so common in our world, was a new skill in archaic times, for which a man like the scribe Spensithios had to be hired in a small Cretan city at the end of the sixth century.<sup>141</sup> A written bronze plaque, a worked stele, covered with let-

137 The display of these laws is a highly controversial topic. See Davis 2011, with previous bibliography, and Meyer 2016. Let us remark also that in line 16 of the same fragment, Solon sets out his method: adjusting force and justice closely to each other (βίην τε καὶ δίκην ξυναρμόσας), an abstract interpretation of what a concrete *thesmos* is supposed to do.

138 *Nomima* I, 44 = *IG* IX.1<sup>2</sup> 3, 609, lines 1, 13–16.

139 *Nomima* I, 43 = *IG* IX.1<sup>2</sup> 3, 718, lines 19 (νομίοις), 26–28 (νομίοις, νομίζει, ὑπὸ τῶν νομίον τῶν ἐπιφοίον, νομίοις), 29 (νόμος ἐστί), 45 (ἡόρρον : τὸν νόμιον).

140 *Ibid.*, lines 45–46: διομόσαι ἡόρρον : τὸν νόμιον, : ἐν ὕδριαν : τὰν ψάφιξιν εἶμεν. : καὶ τὸ θέθμιον : τοῖς ὑποκναμιδίοις Λορροῖς : ταὺ|τὰ τέλεον εἶμεν : Χαλειέοις : τοῖς σὺν Ἀντιφάται : ρουκεταῖς, “the traditional oath will be taken. The vote will be taken in a ballot box. The *thethmion* for the Hypocnemidian Locrians will also be valid for the Khaleians, the fellow colonists of Antiphatas”.

141 *Nomima* I, 22 = *SEG* 27, 631 (Lytos).



ters, or an inscribed wooden support, mainly when they display public decisions, were wonderful artefacts, which could also be seen as “tightly fitted realisations, containing something precious.” Perhaps the same rationale can be applied to Solon, who chose *thesmos* to designate his “laws” and emphatically used the verb *graphein* to designate their enactment (θεσμοὺς . . . ἔγραψα). If this line of reasoning is correct, it could explain, at least partly, the gradual shift from the concrete meaning of *thesmos* to the significance of “law”.<sup>142</sup> The intuitive relationship between *thesmos* and the archaic word *themis* has favoured the interpretation of the term as “divine law”, in contrast to the *nomoi*, considered as “traditional usages” or “laws enacted by men”.<sup>143</sup> But the concrete meaning of the word cannot be forgotten when reading its earliest occurrences and the abstract meaning cannot be projected without caution onto these earliest attestations.

Now, it is time to return to the *Thesmophoros* and conclude.

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The origin of the Thesmophoria is lost very far back in time, but the classical ritual – whose Athenian version is best evidenced – has something to do with<sup>144</sup> (1) the fertility of the fields (in close connection with the pigs thrown into holes, whose remains were mixed with the yearly seeds); (2) the fertility of women (as attested by the name *Kalligeneia* given to one of the festival days in Athens); (3) the status of citizen (Athenian) women (as Detienne showed in his seminal paper). More broadly, the festival has something to tell about the importance of women – of different generations, mothers and daughters – for the safety and vital balance of a community in its elementary forces: providing food, begetting children and helping them grow – seen as the different sides of the same process, called *trophos* in Greek – and confronting the dead. All these elements refer to Demeter’s competences, mainly when she is worshipped with her daughter as Thesmophoros. All these elements are essential – but not exhaustive – components of social life: “civilised” food, generational continuity, and care for the dead, namely what the classical period will progressively associate with the *thesmoi* of the gods (“what is *themis* to do”, in the hexametric tradition<sup>145</sup>). The evolution of the understanding of the term *thesmos* has led many to consider that Demeter Thesmophoros was the goddess bringing to human beings the “laws” of a life under the sign of civility, a meaning attested first – for us – by Callimachus. However,

<sup>142</sup> Let us remark that, on the island of Kos, around 240 BCE, the word could still be used (probably) for a coffin emerging accidentally from a tomb: *IG* XII 4, 72 / *CGRN* 148, line 64. This piece of the *thesmoi* dossier has been known since 1928, when Herzog published the inscriptions from the Asklepieion, where this one was found in 1903. Cf. e.g. Robertson 1983, 246 n. 15.

<sup>143</sup> For example, *X. Cyr.* 1.1.6. Unfortunately, for addressing these questions, the standard publication remains Ostwald 1969, whose undeniable qualities are undermined by this kind of teleological view.

<sup>144</sup> According to the three points rightly and efficiently emphasised by Parker 2005, 275–276 (the content of the brackets is mine). On all the levels of the festival, see Versnel 1993 and Chlup 2007.

<sup>145</sup> e.g. *Hom. Il.* 2.73, 9.276; *Hes. Th.* 396.

when the cult-title emerges in our evidence (*a fortiori* in earlier periods of this cult, which now escape us), *thesmos* means a “tightly fitted object, containing something precious.” This “treasure” is supposed to be a secret gift of Demeter to women, carefully concealed and protected from the curiosity of males. It is vain, then, to try to identify precisely both the type of container initially implied by the term, as well as its content, as so many brilliant and inventive minds have tried to do. We simply do not know and the guessing game has remained inconclusive for over a century. Nevertheless, this dossier attests to the fact that onomastic attributes also have a history.

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