Unveiling the Queen of the Underworld:
Images of Persephone in Greece and Southern Italy

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Abstract

During antiquity, Persephone, the storied “Queen of the Underworld,” assumed multiple forms throughout the Greek world. The most famed myth involving Persephone details the goddess’ abduction by Hades and her later reunification with her mother, Demeter. For the inhabitants of mainland Greece, Persephone was known simply as Kore, the “maiden”; her significance as a goddess relied heavily on her familial connection to Demeter and the role that she played in the Eleusinian Mysteries. However, within certain Greek settlements in Southern Italy (often referred to as Magna Graecia or “Great Greece” due to the number of its Greek sites), Persephone had a distinct identity separate from that of Demeter, and she was more commonly associated with marriage and the salvation of the deceased. This contrast in the beliefs held about Persephone can be observed in visual depictions of the goddess from sites in Greece and Southern Italy. The goal of this paper is to explore the multivalent nature of Persephone by examining her representation in objects from various areas around mainland Greece and Magna Graecia. This paper will focus on material evidence in varying media from four different locations, two in Greece (Eleusis and Corinth) and two in Southern Italy (Locri Epizephyrii and Sicily) Through this study, I hope to discover how geography and differing religious beliefs can inform the way in which a particular deity is represented in art.

Keywords:
Art History, History, Archaeology, Greek Mythology, Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, Kore, Demeter, Hades, Ancient Greece, Eleusis, Eleusinian Mysteries, Corinth, Acrocorinth, Southern Italy, Locri Epizephyrii, Francavilla di Sicilia, Sicily
Introduction

Religion, often in the form of mythological narratives, served to unite various regions throughout the broad, geographical expanse of the ancient Greek world. Although subject to local modifications, the general plot of many Greek myths remained consistent regardless of the location in which they were told. The abduction of Persephone is a prime example of a myth that successfully transcended the physical boundaries of ancient Greece. In this mythical narrative, Hades, the god of the Underworld, falls in love with and abducts Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and Zeus. As the goddess of agriculture, Demeter decides to suspend the growth of grain in an effort to punish mortals for her loss and subsequently spur Zeus’ intervention. Ultimately, Zeus is able to negotiate Persephone’s release, but not before her captor offers her some pomegranate seeds as food. By consuming the seeds, Persephone unknowingly commits to spending a third of each year in the Underworld as the wife of Hades. When Demeter finally reunites with Persephone aboveground, she immediately restores the earth to its former state of fertility. However, during the portion of the year that Persephone must return to the Underworld, the crops once again cease to grow as a result of Demeter’s sorrow for her missing daughter. In antiquity, this myth served as an explanation for Greece’s agricultural cycle.¹

Despite the universality of this particular myth, the reality of Persephone’s worship within ancient Greece was far from coherent. On the Greek mainland, Persephone’s significance derived solely from her association with her mother, Demeter. Although worshipped together as the “Two Goddesses,” especially within the context of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Demeter still took precedence over Persephone who was more commonly known as Kore or the “maiden.”² However, in the Greek settlements of Magna Graecia and Sicily, Persephone’s divine identity was in no way contingent upon her relation to Demeter. The Italic iteration of the goddess
deviated from the role of divine daughter and instead assumed the dignified title of “Queen of the Underworld.” Due to her status as the wife of Hades, the inhabitants of Magna Graecia and Sicily typically worshipped Persephone as a protective goddess of marriage or as an intercessor for the recently deceased. This distinct contrast in the beliefs held about Persephone can also be observed in ancient visual images of the goddess.

Although scholars have thoroughly researched Persephone’s differing, geographically based, personalities, there has been little to no comprehensive comparison made between the goddess’ Greek and South Italian representations. The purpose of this study is to analyze the multivalent nature of Persephone by surveying her representation in objects from four specific sites within mainland Greece and Magna Graecia. These sites, which were integral to the cult of Persephone, include Eleusis, the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Corinth, the Manella Sanctuary in Locri Epizephyrii, and Sicily. The material evidence that will be examined encompasses a diverse array of media; it consists of red-figure pottery, marble reliefs, terracotta figurines, inscribed tablets, terracotta pinakes, and coins. Overall, these ancient depictions of Persephone tend to reflect the religious beliefs of the geographical region in which they originated. There are, however, some unusual instances of overlap among the goddess’ various forms in mainland Greece and Magna Graecia.

**Mainland Greece: Persephone at Eleusis**

**Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries**

The Greek site of Eleusis is located approximately twelve miles outside the city of Athens. During antiquity, Eleusis famously served as the setting for the Eleusinian Mysteries, an annual religious initiation that centered around beliefs concerning Demeter and Persephone. The connection between Eleusis and this divine, mother-daughter pair can be traced back to the
Homeric Hymn to Demeter; the Homeric Hymns are a set of poems from around 650 to 550 BCE that each focus on a particular Greek deity. Although the term “Homeric” suggests that the poems were composed by Homer, it is more likely that they were written by multiple poets over a period of years. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, which is set in Eleusis, begins with Persephone’s abduction by the infatuated Hades:

As [Persephone] joyously plucked [flowers], the ground gaped from beneath,
and the mighty lord, Host-to-Many [Hades], rose from it
and carried [her] off beneath the earth in his golden chariot
much against [her] will.

After Demeter discovers that Hades took Persephone to be his bride, she descends from Mount Olympus in anguish. As the grieving Demeter wanders the earth in disguise, she meets the ruler of Eleusis, Keleus, and his family; the goddess then volunteers to nurse Keleus’ newborn son, Demophoön. One night, Metaneira, the wife of Keleus, finds Demeter attempting to make Demophoön immortal by placing him into a fire. Demeter immediately reveals her true identity to Metaneira and demands that the people of Eleusis build a temple in her name. In an additional expression of her grief and anger at the loss of her daughter, Demeter decides to plague Eleusis with a terrible famine. Following her eventual reunion with Persephone, Demeter returns the land to its normal state and then establishes the practice of the Eleusinian Mysteries:

She [Demeter] went to the kings [of Eleusis] who administer law,
Triptolemos and Diokles, driver of horses, mighty
Eumolpos and Keleus, leader of the people, and revealed
the conduct of her rites and taught her Mysteries to all of them.
While the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is far from exhaustive in its explanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, it does present Eleusis as an important, sacred site that is worthy of recognition.

Cult activity at Eleusis began long before the creation of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; in fact, the earliest structures located at the site can be attributed to the Bronze Age civilization of the Mycenaeans. By the Classical period, the Mysteries at Eleusis were a fully developed set of religious rites based around the cult of Demeter and Persephone. Over the course of nine days, the mystai or initiates would participate in a series of activities including grand processions, fasting, and sacrifices. The climax of the Eleusinian Mysteries took place within a building known as the Telesterion; within this great hall, the mystai had to partake in a reenactment of Demeter’s search for Persephone and a high priest would reveal the sacred objects of Demeter. The ultimate goal of the Mysteries was to impart those who were initiated with an overwhelming sense of hope in regards to their eventual death and journey to the Underworld. Although the Eleusinian Mysteries were an integral part of religious life for the citizens of Eleusis and nearby Athens, they appealed to ancient civilizations outside of mainland Greece as well. For example, when Athens came under the control of the Romans in 88 BCE, the site of Eleusis remained virtually unscathed. Many Romans, particularly Roman rulers, had a deep respect for Eleusis and its significance as a cult site; the emperors Augustus, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius all made a point to travel to Eleusis and participate in the Mysteries themselves. In 395 CE, the practice of the Eleusinian Mysteries came to an end with the invasion of Eleusis by the Goths.

The relationship between Demeter and Persephone is a crucial aspect of the Eleusinian Mysteries. However, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, as well as the initiation process for the Mysteries, focus on the experiences and grief of Demeter rather than the journey of Persephone. In addition, Persephone is exclusively referred to as Kore (“maiden”) in the
Homeric Hymn and other Eleusinian inscriptions, and this title highlights Persephone’s initial identity as a young, unmarried woman. This emphasis on Persephone’s role as the daughter and pride of Demeter, rather than the consort of Hades or the Queen of the Underworld, can be observed in various objects from the site of Eleusis and the broader Attica region.

**Description of Objects from Eleusis**

Due to the great acclaim and traffic that Eleusis received from individuals throughout the ancient world, there are numerous types of dedications found at the site. Unfortunately, a large quantity of these dedicatory objects were either plundered or destroyed during the invasion of 395 CE. That being said, there are still a few key works that survive and can aid in interpreting Persephone’s portrayal at Eleusis. One such work is an Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis, which dates to around 500 BCE (Fig. 1). This seemingly insignificant piece of pottery can be viewed as a precursor to later representations of Demeter and Persephone from Eleusis. On one side of the stand, Persephone, who holds a branch of myrtle, approaches the enthroned Demeter, who grasps a wreath of garland. Both goddesses wear a polos, a cylindrical crown, on their heads as an indication of their divine status. On the other side of the stand, three worshippers or initiates carry cult related objects and trail behind Persephone. The decoration of the Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis is reflected in the slightly later Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches from around 460 BCE (Fig. 2). This rectangular, votive relief features two female figures that are most likely meant to represent Demeter and Persephone. The figure on the left, who can securely be identified as Demeter, sits atop a throne and wears a polos; in one hand she has a staff and in the other she holds a few stalks of grain. The figure on the right, Persephone, advances toward the seated goddess with bare feet and a torch in each hand. The composition of this relief very much mimics the arrangement of Demeter and Persephone on the Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis.
While there is good reason to assume that the figure on the right is Persephone returning to her mother, some scholars believe that this figure is actually the torch bearing goddess Hekate who plays a substantial role in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Another significant votive relief from Eleusis is the *Great Eleusinian Relief* which can be dated to around 440 or 430 BCE (Fig. 3). Although this object was originally from the Sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis, there are multiple Roman copies of this particular, marble relief that have been found; this demonstrates the extent to which the cult of Demeter and Persephone spread beyond Eleusis and the Greek world. The relief depicts two, female figures on either side of a nude youth with fabric draped over his shoulder. The female figure on the left, with her hair worn loose, reaches one hand towards the youth and holds a staff in the other. The female figure on the right, who wears her hair in a coiffure, holds a torch and places her free hand on the head of the youth. Unlike some objects from Eleusis, there is consensus in regards to the identification of the female figures on the *Great Eleusinian Relief*; the figure to the left of the youth represents Demeter and the figure on the right is Persephone. Despite this certainty, there is still some indecision about the identity of the youth as he could represent a number of male figures related to the cult of Demeter and Persephone. Some scholars have suggested that Demeter may have once held an ear of grain in her free hand. As a result, the nude youth has often been identified as Triptolemos, a royal figure from Eleusis who was chosen by Demeter to teach humankind how to grow crops. However, grain is a symbol that can also be seen in representations of Ploutos, the Greek god of wealth and Demeter’s son. One final object is the famed *Ninion Pinax*, named after the devotee who originally dedicated it, from around 370 BCE (Fig. 4). This red-figure terracotta pinax, or plaque, is square in shape with a pediment that is adorned by a botanical form. The main decorative field contains a scene with a multitude of figures; on the left, male and female figures bearing torches,
vessels, and myrtle, approach two female figures seated at the far right. The woman in the lower right corner holds a staff and a phiale (a bowl for liquid offerings), while the woman in the upper right corner grasps a staff and reaches out to a female figure who stands before her with torches. Although this scene definitely seems to be connected to the sacred rites involved in the Eleusinian Mysteries, there is some disagreement amongst scholars over the exact identification of the figures represented. According to Carl Kerényi, the seated women on the pinax are meant to represent Demeter, in the upper right corner, and Persephone, in the lower right corner. Additionally, the female figure who stands before Demeter is the goddess Hekate and the male figure in front of Persephone is Iacchos, a minor god associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The remaining figures on the pinax are mystai who are led by Hekate and Iacchos towards Demeter and Persephone. However, Kevin Clinton argues that the central field of the *Ninio Pinax* should be read as two registers, which subsequently alters Kerényi’s original identifications. In the lower register, a male figure, Iacchos, leads the mystai to the seated female figure who, in Clinton’s opinion, represents Demeter; in addition, Clinton claims that there is an empty space next to Demeter reserved for the recently abducted Persephone. In the upper register, the second seated figure is meant to represent Demeter as well and the standing female figure with torches is Persephone returning from the Underworld.

**Description of Objects from Attica Region**

Although Eleusis has many valuable objects that feature Persephone, works of art that depict Demeter and Persephone or aspects of the Eleusinian Mysteries can also be found just outside the site in the region of Attica, the countryside surrounding the city of Athens. For instance, many Attic vase painters looked to Eleusinian myth as a source of subject matter for their red-figure vase paintings. One example of this particular type of decoration can be seen on
a terracotta bell-krater attributed to the Persephone Painter from around 440 BCE (Fig. 5). The obverse side of this bell-krater features a scene that seems to come directly from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. On the left, Persephone rises from the Underworld with Hermes, the messenger god who aided in the young goddess’ return, by her side. This pair of deities is guided by Hekate who stands in the center of the composition and lights the way with torches. On the right, Demeter holds out a staff and awaits the imminent reunion with her daughter. The reverse side of the bell-krater shows a typical libation scene.

Another example of Eleusinian related decoration can be observed on a hydria by the Painter of London E 183 that dates to around 430 BCE (Fig. 6). Similar to the *Great Eleusinian Relief*, this hydria depicts Demeter and Persephone on either side of Triptolemos, who sits in a winged chariot as Demeter fills a phiale in his hand with a libation. Persephone looks back at a mortal woman, possibly a native of Eleusis, and reaches for the torches in her hands. A mature, bearded man, who can be identified as Hades, stands behind this mortal woman. To the right of Demeter stands Hekate, her arms outstretched with a torch in each hand, and another mortal woman who runs with a basket.

**Analysis of Persephone’s Representation in Eleusis and Attica Region**

There are several reoccurring themes that can be discerned from Persephone’s representation in Eleusis and Attica. One striking characteristic, which can be observed in all of the objects under consideration, is that Persephone is never explicitly presented as the Queen of the Underworld. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone officially becomes Queen of the Underworld and Hades’ wife when he tricks her into eating some pomegranate seeds. Hades then informs Persephone of the benefits of her queenship:

> You will have power over all that lives and moves,

and you will possess the greatest honors among the gods.
There will be punishment forevermore for those wrongdoers

Who fail to appease your power with sacrifices.\textsuperscript{31}

However, there is no allusion to Persephone’s “power” or status as a queen in any of her Eleusinian or Attic depictions. In ancient art, one might expect to see a royal figure seated on a throne, but Persephone receives no such treatment in these particular images. Instead, it is her mother, Demeter, who is typically shown enthroned and in a position of power in comparison to other figures within the composition; the \textit{Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis} and \textit{Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches} are two concrete examples of this trend. The one exception to this observation is Carl Kerényi’s unique interpretation of the \textit{Ninion Pinax} in which the enthroned woman in the bottom right corner is meant to represent Persephone rather than Demeter.\textsuperscript{32} In addition to this lack of a throne, Persephone is never positioned besides Hades who tends to be absent from Eleusinian and Attic scenes. Without, the presence of Hades to highlight Persephone’s connection to the Underworld, it is difficult to identify her as the Queen of the infernal realm. Although Hades does appear on the untitled hydria by the Painter of London, he does not directly interact with Persephone. The mortal woman holding torches stands between the two deities and as a result, there is no personal connection between the married couple. Considering that the ultimate goal of the Eleusinian Mysteries was to align oneself with the divine in the hopes of a better afterlife, this lack of recognition for Persephone’s role as the Queen of the Underworld is odd but not unexpected.

Another characteristic of Persephone’s representation in Eleusinian and Attic objects is her intimate, and somewhat subservient, relationship with Demeter. With every object under discussion, Persephone is consistently placed next to or near her mother. These objects featuring Demeter and Persephone can be divided into two types: scenes in which Persephone returns to
Demeter from the Underworld and scenes in which the goddesses act together for some ritual purpose related to the Eleusinian Mysteries. This former type can be found in the *Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches* and the untitled, terracotta bell-krater by the Persephone Painter. It can also be seen in Kevin Clinton’s interpretation of the *Ninion Pinax* in which the seated figure in the upper right corner represents Demeter and the figure in white before her is Persephone. On all of these objects, Persephone always approaches Demeter who tends to either stand her ground or remain seated. This contrast between the movement of Persephone and the static, regal stance of Demeter seems to underline their mother-daughter relationship and accentuates Demeter’s importance. There are other details that can inform the viewer of this skewed dynamic between Demeter and Persephone as well. For example, in *Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches*, Persephone is significantly smaller than Demeter. Although this difference may simply be a stylistic choice, there is a possibility that it is a form of hierarchal scale meant to diminish the importance of Persephone in comparison to Demeter. The objects on which Demeter and Persephone participate in ritual activities include the *Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis*, the *Great Eleusinian Relief*, and the hydria by the Painter of London E 183. On the *Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis*, Persephone leads a group of initiates toward Demeter. On the *Great Eleusinian Relief* and the hydria, Demeter and Persephone perform separate actions on either side of Triptolemos. With all three of these examples, Persephone is shown either directly helping Demeter in the execution of some ritual task or, as is the case with the *Great Eleusinian Relief*, standing by in a show of support. Either way, it is important to note that Demeter once again takes precedence over Persephone in these scenes; Demeter is responsible for receiving initiates and taking the lead in their interactions with Triptolemos. In contrast, Persephone
assumes the role of the supportive daughter. In general, Persephone’s image at Eleusis is very much dependent on the presence of Demeter.

One final characteristic of Persephone’s representation at Eleusis and in Attica is that she is often depicted with torches in her hands. The goddess carries torches in the *Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches* and the *Ninion Pinax*, at least according to Clinton’s interpretation. In addition, Persephone reaches for a set of torches that are held by a mortal woman on the Attic hydria. There is no mention of torches in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, but they did play a considerable role in the practice of the Eleusinian Mysteries. During the climax of the Mysteries, the initiates utilized torches in their reenactment of Demeter’s search for her daughter. The torches would light the dark interior of the Telesterion and help initiates to locate the abducted Persephone. However, there are other figures, such as Hekate and Iacchos, who are also represented with torches on Eleusinian and Attic art. Although torches do not pertain specifically to Persephone or her story, their frequent presence in the hands of Persephone and others indicates the importance of torches to the completion of the Eleusinian Mysteries. It is interesting to note that in Athens, torches were a critical aspect of wedding processions. The Eleusinian depiction of Persephone has no ties to her role as a bride in Greek myth, but marriage is a major theme in the goddess’ representation outside of Eleusis.

**Mainland Greece: Persephone at Corinth**

**Acrocorinth and the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore**

Corinth is another site in mainland Greece that functioned as a major cult center. The Acrocorinth, an imposing citadel located on a hill above the ancient city-state of Corinth, was used as a protective fortress until the end of the Middle Ages. As the acropolis of Corinth, the Acrocorinth also served as the setting for multiple temples and religious shrines, the most
important of which was the Temple of Aphrodite, the remains of which can be found on the
topmost peak of the Acrocorinth. Additional sanctuaries, including the Sanctuary of Demeter and
Kore, were positioned on the slopes of the hill’s northern side. 37 The Sanctuary of Demeter and
Kore first began as a site of worship for Demeter and Persephone during Greece’s Classical
period. 38 When invading Romans destroyed Corinth in 146 BCE, cult activity at the Sanctuary of
Demeter and Kore ceased for a period of time. Once Corinth officially became a Roman city in
44 BCE under the direction of Julius Caesar, the worship of the “Two Goddesses” resumed.
Although religious practices were once again interrupted with the invasion of the Herulians in
267 CE, the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore remained in operation through the end of the 4th
century CE. 39

Information regarding the ritual activities that took place at the Sanctuary of Demeter and
Kore in Corinth is relatively scarce, due in part to the lack of inscriptions from the site itself and
because minimal references were made to the site in extant ancient literature. 40 Most of what we
know in regards to Demeter and Persephone’s following at Corinth comes from the
archaeological excavations of the Sanctuary. 41 The votive offerings found at the sanctuary
include terracotta figurines, loom weights, miniature vases, and baskets. Other, more lavish
offerings, such as jewelry and gem stones, have also been found at the site. 42 Despite the
variation in object types, female terracotta figurines unmistakably predominate as the offering of
choice. A number of the female figurines are thought to represent various female deities; some of
the most frequent representations are those of Demeter, Persephone, and Aphrodite. 43 While
Persephone’s exact role at Corinth is somewhat ambiguous, it can be more thoroughly
understood through the examination of her representation in terracotta figurines, as well as other
terracotta objects from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore.
Description of Terracotta Figurines and Objects from Corinth

The terracotta figurines and objects that will be discussed were all excavated at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore by the American School of Classical Studies between 1961 and 1975. One object that most likely depicts Persephone is a seated female figurine. This Classical figurine, labeled as MF-1 by the American School, sits in a throne-like chair and wears a polos on her head. Although her legs do not survive, she does hold a spherical object with a pointed top in each of her hands and on her lap (Fig. 7). This particular figure’s identification as Persephone is due to the tear-drop shaped objects, which presumably represent pomegranates. Another seated female figurine from the Sanctuary, dated to the 4th century BCE, could be a representation Persephone as well (Fig. 8). This terracotta figurine, labeled as C78, holds a single, spherical object close to her chest and places her other hand on the “throne” that she perches on. Unlike the first figurine, she does not wear a polos and her body has not been damaged. Additionally, the spherical object in her hand is thought to be a ball rather than a pomegranate. A third portrayal of Persephone made around 480–470 BCE comes from a fragment of a terracotta kotyle (Fig. 9). A kotyle, or kantharos, is an ancient Greek vessel that was typically used for drinking or ritual offerings. This kotyle fragment from Corinth depicts the upper part of a female deity’s face, hair, and a crown next to a fragmentary inscription that reads “Phers”; due to its location next to a crowned, female figure, it can be inferred that the complete inscription was once “Phersephatta,” a variation of Persephone’s name. A separate fragment from the same kotyle depicts two, unidentified youths running, perhaps towards Persephone. Based on this secondary fragment, Gloria Merker believed that the undamaged kotyle might have depicted an actual race held in Corinth to honor Persephone. Terracotta dolls were another popular object type uncovered at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Corinth,
numbering over 800 examples dating to the Classical period (Fig. 10). Generally the terracotta dolls consist of a female torso, neck, and head; the limbs of the dolls were modeled separately and attached to the torso via cords so as to allow for movement. Although these dolls do not directly represent Persephone, there is a possibility that they were dedicated to the goddess as a part of some ritual concerning marriage.

The American School of Classical Studies also unearthed numerous terracotta figurines from the Sanctuary’s Hellenistic period. There are two figurine fragments that can be definitively identified as representations of Persephone. One fragment, labeled as H80, only depicts the shoulder, breast, and partial arm of a female figure (Fig. 11). However, the way in which the figure’s mantle is wrapped tight around the breast and arm is characteristic of earlier, 4th century depictions of Persephone in sculpture and votive reliefs. In addition, the outstretched arm seems to indicate that this figure originally held a sceptre or a torch which solidifies its identification as Persephone. The second figurine fragment, labeled as H420, is made up of a neck, shoulder, and a raised arm, again draped in the fabric of a mantle (Fig. 12). Although this particular figurine fragment seems to offer up less information than the previous one, the outstretched arm once again indicates that the figure once held a torch; for this reason, it is very likely that the figurine was meant to be Persephone.

Analysis of Persephone’s Representation in Corinth

There are some clear similarities between Persephone’s representation in Corinth and Eleusis. Firstly, Persephone is rarely represented as an individual entity. At Eleusis, Demeter and Persephone are either placed together as parent and child or as partners in a ritual activity, as is the case with the Great Eleusinian Relief. While the Corinthian versions of Demeter and Persephone are never shown as a pair, especially in the form of terracotta figurines, the
goddesses are still very much inseparable. There are two key features of the terracotta figurines from Corinth that allow for this contradiction: their lack of narrative detail and the prevalence of certain attributes that relate to more than one deity. Unlike the objects from Eleusis, the terracotta figurines, such as MF-1 and C78, are single figures; there is no background or additional figures that might make reference to a particular myth or deity. Also, many of the figurines hold attributes that could be associated with either Demeter or Persephone. Due to the important role that pomegranates play in the myth of Persephone’s abduction, it seems extremely likely that MF-1, the enthroned female figurine with pomegranates, represents the goddess as the Queen of the Underworld. However, in addition to making an appearance in Persephone’s most famed myth, pomegranates are symbols of abundance and fertility. As a result, they could be a symbol that applies to Demeter and her role as the goddess of agriculture. Additionally, pomegranates were also associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of romantic and sexual love; due to the proximity of Temple of Aphrodite to the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, there is chance that MF-1 could be a representation of her as well. Whether a figurine was meant to represent Demeter, Persephone, Aphrodite, or all three deities simultaneously was ultimately up to the discretion of the worshipper. Due to this interchangeability between the identities of terracotta figurines with particular attributes, Persephone’s individual role within Corinth can be difficult to distinguish from that of Demeter or Aphrodite.

A second similarity between Persephone’s Eleusinian and Corinthian representation is the presence, or supposed presence, of torches. This can be seen in the figurine fragments, H80 and H420, which have outstretched arms that seem to indicate they once held something up, most likely a torch. Although certain attributes were more fluid in their associations, the torch is one that had a definite connection to Persephone. As previously mentioned, torches played a
significant role during the Eleusinian Mysteries when they were used by initiates in their “search” for the abducted Persephone. Furthermore, there are many depictions of Persephone from Eleusis, such as the *Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches*, that depict Persephone holding one or more torches. While the exact rituals that took place at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore remain unconfirmed, Corinthians were aware of the sacred site of Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries. In fact, Corinth, as well as many other ancient Greek cities, would send grain to Eleusis on an annual basis as an offering to Demeter. Therefore, it can be inferred that this particular image of Persephone as a torchbearer was disseminated to Corinth as well and was a key characteristic of her depiction in mainland Greece.

One significant characteristic that separates Persephone’s Corinthian identity from her Eleusinian identity is the probable connection that she has to marriage and maturation rites. This can best be observed in C78, the seated terracotta figurine that holds a ball in her hand. In ancient Greece, balls and other toys were often dedicated to various goddesses by young girls prior to their marriage. At Locri Epizephyrii in Southern Italy, balls were specifically dedicated to Persephone within a marital context. Based on its location in the Sanctuary of the Demeter and Kore and supporting evidence from Locri, C78 could very well be a depiction of Persephone. While the terracotta dolls from Corinth do not act as representations of Persephone, they serve a similar function to figurines such C78 in that they draw a connection between the goddess and marriage. These “dolls” may have also been dedicated to Persephone by Greek girls of marrying age; in addition to their presumed purpose as a symbol of childhood, the nude body of the doll might also make a reference to the physical maturity of the devotee. If the terracotta figurines with balls and terracotta dolls can be associated with Persephone, then it is clear that the goddess’ role as the bride and wife of Hades was at least partially acknowledged at Corinth. It
further demonstrates that there may not have been a complete disconnect between Greek and South Italian beliefs about Persephone’s purpose as a deity.

Further differences between Persephone’s representation in Corinth and Eleusis can be seen in the kotyle fragment with a partial depiction of Persephone. Based on Gloria Merker’s interpretation of the second fragment from this kotyle, Persephone is being honored by Corinthians via a foot race.\(^59\) This scene seems to be a uniquely Corinthian representation of Persephone; the goddess is never shown without Demeter or within the context of an athletic contest at Eleusis. Secondly, this kotyle refers to the goddess as “Phersephatta” or Persephone rather than Kore. Although Kore was still the more predominant title for Persephone on the mainland, it proves once again that the goddess’ Greek identity is not entirely removed from her South Italian identity.

**Magna Graecia: Persephone in the Orphic Gold Tablets**

**Orphism and Orphic Gold Tablets**

Before examining Persephone’s visual representation at Locri Epizephyrii, it seems pertinent to touch on the epigraphical references made to the goddess in the so-called Orphic tablets, an object type found primarily in Southern Italy and Sicily. Orphism, named after the mythical hero Orpheus, was a fringe mystery religion within the ancient Greek world; the followers of Orphism primarily concerned themselves with securing a favorable afterlife. The Orphic belief system stemmed from a myth that involved a dire conflict between Dionysos and the Titans. In the central Orphic myth, Zeus rapes Persephone and she gives birth to Dionysos, the god of wine and merriment. When Zeus grants Dionysos complete authority over all other divinities, the envious Titans decide to murder and consume him. As punishment for this heinous deed, Zeus strikes down the Titans with lightning and resurrects Dionysos from his surviving
heart; humankind then arises from the ashes of the fallen Titans.\(^6^0\) The Orphic tablets are thin sheets of gold with Greek inscriptions that allude to this myth and provide instructions on how to successfully navigate through the Underworld (Fig. 13). There are less than twenty examples of these gold sheets that survive and most of them have been excavated from the graves of women.\(^6^1\) Based on the inscriptions, the tablets seem to have functioned as a means for deceased mortals to affiliate themselves with the divine in the hopes that they could earn priority treatment in the afterlife.\(^6^2\)

**Description of Orphic Gold Tablets from Thurii**

In many of the Thurii tablets, found at the ancient site of Thurii in Southern Italy, Persephone is addressed as a principal deity and assumes two distinct roles.\(^6^3\) These roles are best exhibited in a tablet inscription from the Timpone Grande tumulus at Thurii:

\[
\text{I come pure from pure, Queen of the Chthonian Ones,}
\]

\[
\text{Eucles and Euboleus and other gods – as many daimones (as do exist).}
\]

\[
\text{For I also claim to be of your happy race.}
\]

\[
\text{I have paid the penalty for unrighteous deeds.}
\]

\[
\text{Either Moira overcame me or the star-flinger with lightning.}
\]

\[
\text{Now I come as a suppliant to Persephone,}
\]

\[
\text{so that she may kindly send me to the seats of the pure.}\(^6^4\)
\]

In this particular inscription, Persephone functions primarily as a confidant and pardoner of the recently deceased. In the Orphic tradition, all mortals were thought to have inherited the guilt of the Titans who intended to murder Dionysos. As a result, the Thurii tablets tend to contain phrases of atonement that are meant to appease Persephone, Dionysos’ mother: “I [the deceased] have paid the penalty for unrighteous deeds.” In order to further this relationship with
Persephone, the tablets also feature phrases in which the deceased claim to be of divine origin: “I [the deceased] come pure from pure…For I also claim to be of your happy race.”\(^{65}\) This claim to divinity was founded on the belief that the Titans’ ashes, which supposedly gave rise to humanity, contained the partially devoured Dionysos.\(^{66}\) Persephone’s second role within this inscription is as the judge of dead souls. This tablet, and others like it, insinuate that only Persephone has the power to allow the deceased into a paradisiacal afterlife: “Now I come as a suppliant to Persephone, so that she may kindly send me to the seats of the pure.” If the deceased failed to convince the goddess of their worthiness, she denied them, and their soul would then be caught in a cycle of reincarnations.\(^{67}\)

**Analysis of Persephone’s Representation within the Orphic Gold Tablets**

There is a definite divide between the references made to Persephone in the Orphic tablets and her visual representation on the Greek mainland. Demeter is never mentioned in any Orphic tablet inscriptions, noticeably different from Persephone’s Eleusinian representation in which her mother is always nearby or even at Corinth where she and Demeter seem to be interchangeable deities. Some scholars have drawn a connection between the ultimate purpose of the Orphic tablets and the chthonic elements present in the Eleusinian Mysteries, but Demeter’s complete absence from the tablets confirms that the two mystery cults were far from identical.\(^{68}\) Secondly, the tablets clearly make reference to Persephone’s role as the Queen of the Underworld and address her with epithets such as “Queen of the Chthonian Ones”; this is a direct challenge to the goddess’ more popular, and somewhat diminishing, title of “Kore” in mainland Greece. This specific difference may be due to the distinct, Italic variant of the abduction of Persephone. In this version of the myth, unlike the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone refuses to return to her mother and willingly assumes her new role as Queen of the
Underworld. This independent and powerful version of Persephone is a theme that can be seen throughout her visual depiction in Magna Graecia.

**Magna Graecia: Persephone at Locri Epizephyrii**

**Greek Colony of Locri Epizephyrii and Manella Sanctuary**

Outside of mainland Greece, one of the most important cult sites dedicated to Persephone’s worship was at Locri Epizephyrii, a Greek colony located in the ancient region of Lucania, not far from Reggio Calabria in Southern Italy. During the 7th century BCE, a number of women of Locri in mainland Greece and their slaves supposedly founded the original colony of Locri Epizephyrii. The story follows that, while their husbands were away at war, a group of women had affairs with their male slaves. Rather than confronting these men when they ultimately returned, the women and slaves decided to leave and establish a new home in Southern Italy. Although this story is considered to be a myth, women are still thought to have played some part in the colony’s founding due to the female centered rituals that transpired at the Manella Sanctuary, Locri’s most frequented religious site.

The Manella Sanctuary, also founded during the 7th century BCE, was dedicated solely to Persephone. This dedication can be confirmed by a lone inscription discovered in the Sanctuary’s remains. Despite the lack of significant temple structures and monuments at this particular precinct, Persephone’s preeminence is evident in the plethora of material evidence that directly concerns her cult. Between 1908 and 1909, Paolo Orsi, a renowned Italian archaeologist, excavated approximately 6000 pinakes from a votive deposit within the perimeter of the Manella Sanctuary. During antiquity, artisans produced pinakes, terracotta plaques with low-relief decoration, in large batches using molds; once complete, the pinakes were typically tied to strings and hung in sanctuaries, either on walls or from trees, where they functioned as votive...
offerings. The Locrian pinakes, which can be dated to the 5th century BCE, primarily contain reliefs that depict either mythological or ritual scenes featuring Persephone.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{Description of Terracotta Pinakes from Locri Epizephyrii}

Out of the 6000 pinakes from Locri’s Manella Sanctuary, 400 have reliefs that depict a young female figure being abducted by a male figure. These abduction scenes can ultimately be separated into two distinct types: one in which the abductor is a bearded mature man and the other in which the abductor is a clean-shaven youth.\textsuperscript{72} In one example of the former type, a male figure stands in a chariot that is drawn by four winged horses. The man grasps the horses’ reins in one hand and wraps his free arm around a startled young woman (Fig. 14). Scholars predominantly agree that this pinax type is meant to represent Hades, who is typically depicted as a bearded man in Greek art, abducting Persephone.\textsuperscript{73} An example of the latter type of abduction scene features a young, beardless nude male who lifts a woman into a chariot that is harnessed to two horses (Fig. 15). The so-called “young abductor” pinax type has confounded many scholars and created doubts about the exact identification of the male and female figures. Some think that the youthful male figure is simply a younger version of Hades and therefore, the female figure can still be identified as Persephone. Mock abductions were a known, marital ritual throughout various Greek cities, particularly Sparta. In the ritual, which tended to take place during the wedding ceremony, a bride would be “abducted” from her home by the groom. This tradition most likely derived from mythological abductions, such as the abduction of Persephone by Hades.\textsuperscript{74} Based on this information, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood proposed that the “young abductor” type from Locri represented a general abduction scene in which the male figure symbolized a groom and the female figure represented a bride. Sourvinou-Inwood further argued that young Locrian girls dedicated this pinax type to Persephone when they were on the verge of
Although it is unknown whether actual mock abductions took place at Locri, it does seem that Locrian brides wanted to model their bridal experience on that of Persephone in order to receive the goddess’ blessing.

Another prevalent subject among the Locrian pinakes were homage scenes, which can be divided into several key types like the abduction scenes. The first variation shows Persephone seated on a throne beside Hades, and fellow deities present the couple with wedding gifts. On one example of this type, Persephone and Hades share a throne and rest their feet on a pedestal. The couple is depicted in profile, and as a result, Persephone’s body overlaps and obscures the body of Hades; only Hades’ characteristic, bearded face peeks out from behind the veiled Persephone (Fig. 16). While no additional deities appear on this particular pinax, Persephone and Hades are shown with several attributes. Persephone holds several stalks of grain, a universal symbol of Demeter, in one hand and a rooster, an attribute with both chthonic and nuptial implications, in the other. A second rooster sits underneath the couple’s throne as well. Hades holds a phiale and a bunch of flowers; the flowers could be a symbol of marriage or refer to the flowers that Persephone gathered shortly before her abduction. A second type of homage scene involves a mortal girl presenting Persephone with offerings prior to her marriage. In one example of this type, a small altar separates Persephone, who sits alone on a throne, and the girl, who stands before the goddess (Fig. 17). The girl offers Persephone a rooster and a ball, a toy symbolic of her former childhood. On the altar, a small chest sits on top of a folded piece of fabric; the fabric most likely represents the bridal peplos (dress) and the small chest possibly makes reference to the bride’s grooming for the upcoming wedding. Persephone reaches out to bless these items with one hand and holds in the other a kalathos, a basket often used to contain wool, which the goddess is often associated with in the Locrian homage scenes. This latter type
of homage scene seems to once again insinuate that Persephone was a key deity in marriage rituals at Locri.

Another popular pinax subject involved Persephone interacting with children. These particular scenes can be categorized into two types that only slightly differ in their content. In one type, Persephone sits enthroned by herself and opens a box resting on a decorative table in front of her; an infant with shoulder-length hair and a blanket sits inside of the box (Fig. 18). In the second type, Persephone is similarly enthroned, but rather than sitting in a chest, the infant sits directly on the goddess’ lap. Sourvinou-Inwood postulated that these pinakes might have been dedicated to Persephone by Locrian parents who desired their children to be protected by the goddess. This particular pinax type, like the “young abductor” scenes and the homage scenes with mortal girls, is probably symbolic of a real-life ritual in which the parents would present their children to the priestess of Persephone, who stood in for the goddess herself, in order for them to be blessed. 82

**Analysis of Persephone’s Representation at Locri Epizephyrii**

Despite the contrasting religious beliefs held by the inhabitants of Greece and Magna Graecia, Persephone’s visual representation at Locri does share a few qualities with her depiction on the Greek mainland. The first similarity can be seen in her visual connection to marriage rites. Based on the abduction and homage pinakes, both of which place the goddess near Hades or girls of marrying age, there is good reason to believe that Persephone was a patron goddess of marriage at Locri. 83 Although Persephone’s abduction and husband are missing from most of her mainland Greek depictions, a comparison can be drawn between the homage scenes from Locri that feature female offerants and two objects from Corinth. As stated previously, the C78 figurine from Corinth, which presumably represents Persephone, holds a ball that may make
reference to the ritual in which mortal girls offered their old toys to a goddess before marriage.84 This exact ritual is depicted in its entirety in the Locrian pinakes where female offerants present balls, and other items, to the enthroned Persephone; although the Corinthian figurine represents Persephone alone, the association between the two representations is clear. The terracotta “dolls” from Corinth also share a connection with the homage pinakes that depict mortal girls on the precipice of marriage. There are no examples of the homage pinakes in which the girls present Persephone with dolls; however, the dolls from Corinth possessed the same function as the balls from Locri in that they were symbols of childhood that were dedicated to Persephone as a part of a marital ritual.

A second similarity between Persephone’s Locrian and Corinthian representation is her affiliation with Aphrodite. The terracotta figurines from Corinth have ambiguous identities; for example, figures such as MF-1, the female figurine with pomegranates, could represent Persephone or Aphrodite. A similar issue seems to arise at Locri as Aphrodite was worshipped alongside Persephone within the Manella Sanctuary. This fact can be inferred from several Locrian pinax types that only pertain to the cult of Aphrodite.85 These types include: Aphrodite standing beside Hermes and her son Eros, Aphrodite standing in a chariot that is drawn by Eros, the birth of Aphrodite, and a temple that contains cult statues of both Aphrodite and Hermes.86 Despite these distinct types that clearly distinguish Aphrodite’s pinakes from those of Persephone, there are certain attributes that appear in the pinax scenes of both goddesses. For example, flowers, phiales, mirrors, geese, and alabastra (elongated perfume vessels) are not exclusive to either goddess.87 Sourvinou-Inwood suggested that this conflation between Aphrodite and Persephone at Locri can be attributed to the fact that both divinities functioned as goddesses of love; Persephone served as a source of guidance for all things related to marital
love while Aphrodite, who is often pictured with her lover Hermes at Locri, had more influence over sexual love and pleasure.\textsuperscript{88} This overlap of attributes at Locri is reminiscent of the shared attributes of the Corinthian figurines which sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish Persephone’s representation from that of other goddesses.

That being said, there are still a number of recognizable differences between Persephone’s visual representation in mainland Greece and her imagery at Locri. For instance, instead of solely taking the form of a young maiden, the Locrian variant of Persephone is depicted at different stages in her life. On the abduction pinakes in which the male figure can definitely be identified as Hades, Persephone is shown as a frightened, young girl who has suddenly been seized by a powerful god; this image of Persephone aligns with the goddess’ mainland Greek association with maidenhood. It is true that at Eleusis, Persephone almost always assumes the form of a young girl. However, despite the importance of Persephone’s abduction to the establishment of the Eleusinian Mysteries, this aspect of the goddess’ story is rarely stressed in the art of Eleusis. Similarly, Persephone’s abduction does not seem to be an important feature of her worship at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Corinth; this can be deduced from the singular nature of the terracotta figurines and the scarcity of male figurines at the site. Furthermore, the vague facial features of the Corinthian figurines create challenges when it comes to determining their youth or maturity. In addition to being represented as a young girl in the throes of an abduction, Persephone is shown as both the wife of Hades and the Queen of the Underworld at Locri, which is most apparent in the homage scenes whereupon Persephone sits beside Hades. Instead of emphasizing her youth and uncertainty, she is a mature and self-assured woman. In the homage scenes that feature mortal girls, the goddess emits a regal aura as she sits upright in her throne and meets the gaze of the offerant that stands before her. At Eleusis,
the act of sitting upon a throne is a privilege primarily reserved for Demeter, seen on the *Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis* and the *Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches*. Although there are multiple enthroned and crowned female figurines from Corinth, it is difficult to ascertain whether these particular figurines are meant to represent Persephone or another goddess.

Another difference between Persephone’s mainland Greek and Locrian representation is her identity as a protectress of children. While this aspect of Persephone’s Locrian appearance may seem unexpected, there is in fact a mythical precedent for Persephone’s connection to motherhood. In Greek mythology, Aphrodite presents Persephone with a basket that secretly contains the infant Adonis; Aphrodite leaves the child because she wants Persephone to raise him.\(^8^9\) Despite the existence of this myth, there are no visual scenes or objects from either Eleusis or Corinth that show Persephone interacting with children. Perhaps this fact is due to Demeter’s prominence over Persephone; in mainland Greece, specifically Eleusis, the experiences of Demeter were considered much more important than those of Persephone and it is Demeter who is idealized as a maternal figure.\(^9^0\) Consequently, it seems right to assume that Persephone’s role as the child of Demeter outweighed her own brief experience as a mother.

Persephone assumes the characteristics of protectress in the Orphic tablet inscriptions. However, in these texts, she guards the deceased rather than children. Still, it reinforces Persephone’s role as a protective deity only within Southern Italy.

One final difference between Persephone’s depiction at Locri and mainland Greece is the overall absence of Demeter. In fact, Persephone seems to have replaced her mother’s mainland role as the lead deity participating in ritual activities. Rather than simply aiding her mother, as she does in almost every Eleusinian ritual representation in which she partakes, Persephone is the
one approached and revered by deities and offerants at Locri. Additionally, the mortal female offerants on the Locrian pinakes look to Persephone alone for guidance and blessings. Although Demeter never makes a corporeal appearance in the Locrian pinakes, she does turn up symbolically in the stalks of grain, a known attribute of the goddess in mainland Greece, held by Persephone in certain pinax scenes. The grain may seem like a trivial detail, but it ultimately forges a connection, however small, between Persephone’s representation in Southern Italy and her representation in mainland Greece.

**Magna Graecia: Persephone in Sicily- Part I**

**Terracotta Pinakes from the Sanctuary of Persephone at Francavilla di Sicilia**

Before examining the history of Persephone’s presence within ancient Sicily, it is important to note the uncanny similarities in style and subject matter between the terracotta pinakes from the Manella Sanctuary in Locri Epizephyrii and those found at the Sanctuary of Persephone in Francavilla di Sicilia, also dated to the 5th century BCE. Francavilla is a Sicilian town that, during antiquity, was located near the Greek city of Naxos.91

**Analysis of Persephone’s Representation at Francavilla di Sicilia**

As at Locri, a number of the Francavilla pinakes depict the abduction of Persephone. In one example, Persephone stands next to Hades in a chariot that is drawn by two, trotting horses (Fig. 19). This particular depiction may seem unusual because Persephone does scream out nor resist Hades; in fact, she seems to ride willingly beside the god of the Underworld. However, there are several abduction pinakes from Locri in which the female figures have calm expressions and even cooperate with their abductors. In addition, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood proposed that the fear seen in the body language of the abducted women, particularly in the case of the “young abductor” pinax type from Locri, might actually be a false display of shock or fear.
that was integral to the mock abduction ritual. Persephone’s cool disposition on this particular pinax from Francavilla reflects the South Italian version of the goddess’ abduction myth in which she chooses to stay with Hades of her own free will. The homage scene is another pinax type found at Francavilla – those in which Persephone is seated alone and those in which Persephone is enthroned with Hades. In one example of a homage scene from Francavilla, Persephone sits alone on a throne while Hermes approaches and presents her with a ram (Fig. 20). In this pinax, attributes associated with Persephone at Locri, such as the rooster and a phiale, are clearly visible. Hermes’ presence on this pinax might be related to the god’s mythological role as a guide for deceased souls on their way to the Underworld. In another Francavilla homage scene, Persephone, whose body no longer survives, sits alongside Hades on a throne. Hermes, once again, approaches the divine couple with a ram as an offering (Fig. 21). One final pinax type occurring at Locri and Francavilla are the scenes in which children sit in boxes before Persephone. This pinax type at Francavilla is essentially identical to the one from Locri; Persephone sits enthroned and lifts the lid of the chest to reveal a child inside (Fig. 22). The only difference is that the children in these scenes are meant to represent Adonis rather than an unknown, mortal child whose parents seek the blessing of Persephone.

The most important conclusion that can be drawn from examining the terracotta pinakes of Francavilla di Sicilia is that Persephone’s representation at Locri was not unique to that site. At both locations, Persephone is represented as a bride to be in the abduction scenes and as a wife and queen in the homage scenes. Additionally, Persephone is depicted as a kourotrophic figure, but her own mother, Demeter, never makes an explicit appearance. Based on this evidence, it can be assumed that the themes and motifs present in the Locrian pinakes seem to be
ubiquitous throughout Magna Graecia. Moreover, these visual themes largely mirror South Italian religious beliefs concerning Persephone.

**Magna Graecia: Persephone in Sicily - Part II**

**The Two Goddesses in Sicily and Sicilian Coins**

The cult of the “Two Goddesses” within Sicily can be traced back to Greece’s Archaic period; it was during this period that Greek colonies were first established in Sicily. According to the Roman statesman Cicero, the inhabitants of Sicily’s Greek colonies had a special affinity for Demeter and Persephone. This can most likely be attributed to their belief that Sicily was the birthplace of Demeter and was the site where the goddess of agriculture first created grain.

Another prevalent religious belief was that Persephone’s abduction took place at Enna, the geographical center of Sicily, rather than on the Greek mainland as is expressed in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. According to the Sicilian variant of the goddess’ abduction, a crack opened up in the earth’s surface and formed the Spring of Kyane when Hades pulled Persephone down into the Underworld.

Due to the goddesses’ perceived connection to Sicily, Demeter and Persephone were often utilized as symbols by the island’s political tyrants in order to further their own power. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus states that the worship of Demeter and Persephone was said to have started in the city of Gela and later spread to Syracuse. Ancient sources also imply that Gelon, the tyrant who ruled over Gela and Syracuse during the 5th century BCE, played a key role in disseminating the cult and reinforcing the belief that that the “Two Goddesses” were the protectresses of Sicily. In 344 BCE, the Corinthian general Timoleon planned to sail to Sicily with a fleet in order to help alleviate internal conflict within Syracuse. However, the night before his journey, the priestess of Persephone in Corinth supposedly had a vision related to the “Two
Goddesses.” As a result, the Corinthians decided to add an additional ship to Timoleon’s fleet
and name it after Demeter and Kore.\textsuperscript{99} During Timoleon’s years as a ruler of Syracuse, the cult
of the “Two Goddesses” continued to gain momentum throughout Sicily; it was during this time
that monumental sanctuaries began to be constructed and Persephone’s cult began to eclipse that
of Demeter’s in terms of popularity.\textsuperscript{100} Towards the end of the 4\textsuperscript{th} century BCE, Agathocles, the
tyrant who succeeded Timoleon at Syracuse, intentionally placed Persephone’s image on coins.
Later in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BCE, Pyrrhus, another Sicilian tyrant, followed Agathocles’ lead, and the
use of Persephone’s image on coinage transformed the goddess into a political symbol that was
meant to be representative of a unified Sicily. During the Roman conquest of Sicily, Demeter
and Persephone were still considered the guardians of the island; for example, the sanctuaries
dedicated to the goddesses often served as sites of refuge for those fleeing from the Romans.
Even after the Romans successfully conquered Sicily, the cult of the “Two Goddesses” was still
respected among the island’s inhabitants.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{Description of Sicilian Coins with Persephone’s Image}

The use of Persephone and Demeter’s image on Sicilian coins began in the early 4\textsuperscript{th}
century BCE and continued through Sicily’s Roman period.\textsuperscript{102} Starting in 344 BCE, many
Sicilian towns and cities that Timoleon emancipated, such as Entella, began to issue coins
depicting the goddesses.\textsuperscript{103} The obverse of an Entella coin bears the head of Persephone and the
reverse depicts the winged horse Pegasus (Fig. 23). There are several recurring characteristics of
Sicilian coins that contain the image of either Persephone or Demeter, one of which is that they
tend to show each goddess as single head in profile rather than as a full figure.\textsuperscript{104} Another feature
of these Sicilian coins, particularly those produced during Timoleon’s rule, is that they tend to
show the goddesses with either short or tied up hairstyles, such as the elaborate coiffure on the
Entella coin.105 Due to its youthful nature, the female head on this specific coin has been identified as Persephone.106 A second example of a coin with Persephone’s likeness comes from a mint in Syracuse and is dated to 305 or 295 BCE, issued during Agathocles’ rule as the tyrant of Syracuse.107 Persephone’s head is depicted on the obverse of this coin as well; the head’s identification as Persephone can be confirmed by a nearby inscription. Unlike the coin from Entella, this coin depicts the goddess with long, flowing hair and a wreath of grain on top of her head (Fig. 24). The presence of grain and grain ears is a third common characteristic of Persephone and Demeter’s representation on Sicilian coins. On the reverse of this coin, the goddess Nike erects a typical ancient Greek trophy, a type of memorial made of enemy armor that was meant to acknowledge a victory in battle.108

Analysis of Persephone’s Representation on Sicilian Coins

There are similarities to be found between Persephone’s visual representation on Sicilian coins and her overall representation within mainland Greece. One similarity is that it is often a challenge to differentiate between representations of Persephone and representations of Demeter on Sicilian coins. Since both goddesses were highly revered within Sicily, it is sometimes difficult to know whether the female heads represent Demeter or Persephone, especially if they lack an identifying inscription. There are even instances during Sicily’s Roman period in which a female head is represented on both the obverse and the reverse of coins. With this particular coin type from the Roman period, it is probable that one side was meant to represent Demeter and the other Persephone.109 This inherent connection and interchangeability between Demeter and Persephone on Sicilian coins also occurs in the goddesses’ representation at both Eleusis and Corinth. During the Roman period, a new coin type developed in Sicily that depicted a full-
length female figure grasping a torch, an attribute that may identify her as Persephone, likewise seen in her representation at Eleusis and Corinth.¹¹⁰

The Sicilian coins with definite representations of Persephone are extremely unique in that their function as objects completely differs from all the previously discussed items from mainland Greece and Magna Graecia. Persephone’s image was specifically utilized as propaganda by both Agathocles and Pyrrhus in order to legitimize their rule. These rulers wanted to associate their names with the goddess because they realized how important she was to their subjects, the inhabitants of Sicily.¹¹¹ This association between Persephone and political power never occurred in other parts of the Greek world.

**Conclusion**

Within the Greek pantheon, Persephone stands out as a complex and multifaceted female deity, perhaps due to her portrayal in mythology. Her narrative begins with her status as an innocent maiden but then, through the trauma of abduction, she transforms into a formidable “Queen of the Dead.” On the surface, the duality of Persephone’s personality is underscored by her disparate visual representations in mainland Greece, Magna Graecia, and Sicily. These Greek and South Italian depictions of the goddess superficially seem to be at odds, but on closer inspection, points of unity can be identified. For example, Persephone’s connection to marriage and her association with Aphrodite are themes that occur in the goddess’ iconography at both Corinth and Locri. Additionally, grain and torches, motifs traditionally tied to Demeter and the Eleusinian Mysteries, can be observed in images of Persephone from Eleusis, Corinth, Locri, and Sicily. These undeniable similarities in Persephone’s imagery across the Greek world cast a light on the way in which ancient objects should be analyzed. When studying an ancient civilization, especially one as vast as ancient Greece, it is easy to divide up visual and material culture based
on geography. However, when doing so, there is a danger that important iconological interconnections that permit greater understanding of Classical antiquity are overlooked. Rather than allowing generalizations about a particular region to completely inform our interpretation of the archaeological record, ancient works of art deserve to be examined in their own right before conclusions are made. It is only through the careful examination of artifacts, as well as the consideration of the civilizations that produced them as a whole, that the nuanced cultures of the ancient world can be understood.
Illustrations

Fig. 1
*Attic Clay Stand from Eleusis*, ca. 500 BCE, Archaeological Museum of Eleusis

Fig. 2
*Marble Relief of Demeter and Kore with Torches*, ca. 460 BCE, Archaeological Museum of Eleusis
Fig. 3
*Great Eleusinian Relief*, ca. 440-430 BCE, National Archaeological Museum of Athens

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*Ninion Pinax*, ca. 370 BCE, National Archaeological Museum of Athens
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Locrian Pinake with the Abduction of Persephone, National Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria
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Locrian Pinake with a Young Abductor, Museo Nazionale di Locri

Fig. 16
Locrian Pinake with Persephone Enthroned Besides Hades, National Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria
Fig. 17
Locrian Pinake with Girl Presenting Offering to Persephone, National Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria

Fig. 18
Locrian Pinake with Persephone Opening a Basket that Contains a Child, Museo Nazionale di Locri
**Fig. 19**
Pinake with Abduction of Persephone from Francavilla, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi

**Fig. 20**
Pinake with Hermes Paying Homage to Persephone from Francavilla, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi
Fig. 21
Pinake with Hermes Paying Homage to Persephone and Hades from Francavilla, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi

Fig. 22
Pinake with Persephone Opening a Basket that Contains a Child, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi
Fig. 23
Coin with Persephone’s Head from Entella, ca. 344 BCE

Fig. 24
Coin with Persephone’s Head from Syracuse, ca. 305-295 BCE
Notes


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