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# Eleusis and Enlightenment

*The Problem of the Mysteries in  
Eighteenth-Century Thought*

*By*

Ferdinand Saumarez Smith



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Cover illustration: Plaque of Ceres from Campania, Italy. Second half of the first century BC–first half of the first century AD. Location: Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo courtesy RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Stéphane Maréchal.

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# Acknowledgments

I first came across the Eleusinian mysteries as an impressionable teenager in Robert Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A.P. Ruck's cult book *The Road to Eleusis* (1977).<sup>1</sup> Since then, my own road to Eleusis has been a long one, but I am grateful to the subject for compelling me to the history of ideas and for the many people I have encountered along the way. The majority of the research for this book was undertaken during a London Arts and Humanities Partnership-funded PhD at King's College London, where I am thankful for the support of Clare Brant and Elizabeth Eger. Special thanks are due to my doctoral 'hierophants' Daniel Orrells and James Vigus, as well as to Sanja Perović, Miriam Leonard, and Katherine Harloe. I have also been fortunate to receive the expertise of James Campbell, Helen Dorey, Diane Clements, Martin Cherry, Susan Snell, and the sadly-deceased Ian Jenkins. In the process of turning the doctoral thesis into a book, I was given valuable advice by Florian Ebeling, Colin Kidd, Matthew Leigh, Han van Ruler, and Brill's anonymous reviewers. I have also greatly benefited from the close reading and suggestions of Lucian Robinson and Max Norman. Thanks too to Ivo Romein at Brill for his friendly guidance through the process of preparing the manuscript for publication. I would also like to thank the British Library, the Warburg Institute, the Bodleian Library, the Society of Antiquaries, the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, the Wellcome Collection, and above all the London Library, where the majority of this book was written. My perspective on the research for this book has been immeasurably enriched by my concurrent work with Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation: I have been able to think about Moses the Egyptian whilst in the Valley of the Kings; Joseph-François Lafitau in the Xingu Indigenous Territory in Brazil; and the Eleusinian mysteries alongside the Ékpè leopard society in Cross River State, Nigeria. For those experiences and the opportunity to work with wonderful people around the world, I am deeply indebted to Adam Lowe – and to Arthur Prior for the introduction. Finally, thank you to my family: now you know why I wanted to make a detour through the suburbs of Athens to Elefsina. This book is dedicated to Dani Trew.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann & Carl A.P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977).

# Figures

- 2.1 Engraving of the Bembine Tablet (with reverse orientation) copied from: Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, 5 vols (Paris, 1719), 2:332–333. Folded and pasted at the end of: William Stukeley, “Palaeographia Sacra or Discourses on Monuments of Antiquity that relate to Sacred History. Number II. A Dissertation on the Mysterys of the Antients, being an explanation of the Table of Isis, or Bembine Table” [1744], MS.4725, Wellcome Collection, London 68
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