This course explores the Mysteries of the Greco-Roman world, namely, the secretive rituals and gatherings associated with the worship of deities like Demeter, Persephone, Orpheus, Dionysus, Isis, the Great Mother Cybele, and Mithras. We will travel geographically across the classical world, but even more, we will travel vertically from the depths of Gaia--exploring caves, where we have long sought our origins and salvation--to feeling the soil beneath our feet where the greatest mysteries lie, to straining at the furthest reaches of our sky-seeking fear-shaken imagination. We will look at literary and archeological evidences regarding the myths and rituals associated with these goddesses and gods, though we do so rudely, uninvited, since they tried to hide all this from us. We might nonetheless hope to get a sense of what initiations looked like, even if we can never know what it felt like to the women and men who participated in them. The course concludes by looking at the relevance of the mysteries for early Judaism and Christianity.

**Week 1. Introduction to the course.** We will talk about caves, what they have meant to mankind, from the very earliest to our own times, through reading some wonderful poems. We then will discuss the mysterious (literally) question: what is a mystery?

**Week 2. Cybele, and the Earth Mother legacy,** including related cults of Attis and Adonis.

**Week 3. Dionysian & Orphic cults,** Greek to Roman, vague, deep, mysterious in many ways, penetrating all other faiths, including strongly shaping Christianity. Also their troubled relationship to political authority.

**Week 4. Chthonic cults,** especially the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone.

**Week 5. Isis & Mithraic cults.** These traveled from the East--Persia & Egypt--to Rome, changed greatly, and became high fashion in certain circles, then spread across the Empire because a favorite cult of the Roman Army.

**Week 6. cults of Early Christianity & its bête noir, Gnosticism,** which evolved out of Neoplatonism & Eastern forms of mysticism.