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‘ADMIT ME TO THE COMPANY OF INITIATES’: SUGGESTIONS ON THE TEXT OF
THE RECENTLY (RE-)DISCOVERED GOLD FUNERARY LAMELLA FROM PHERAI

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The first editors of the recently published gold funerary lamella from Magoula Mati near Pherai in Thesaly transcribe the two hexameters comprising the text as follows:¹

πέμπε με πρὸς μυστῶ<ν> θιάκου· ἔχω ὄργια []
Δήμητρος χθονία<ς> †τέλη καὶ Μητρὸς ὀρεΐ[α<ς>.

There are two main points of uncertainty in the text: the lamella breaks off before the end of line 1 and the second line is unmetrical: there appears to be a short syllable missing before τέλη. The end of the second line can be restored with considerable confidence, as the Mountain Mother (Μήτηρ ὀρεΐα) is a well known entity. As the first editors say, a solution to the end of line one is linked inextricably with the construction of the second line.² The first editors consider as supplement of the first line either (1) an adjective such as *κεμνά*, with ὄργια governed by ἔχω, or (2) an aorist participle after ἔχω giving the sense of a ‘transitive, resultative perfect’. They consider a suggestion by K. Bouraselis, <ἰδοῦσα>, assuming the owner of the lamella was a woman;³ they record in a footnote (no. 30) suggestions by P. J. Parsons ὄργια ἀ[νύσσας or ὄργια [κρήνας. Here the owner of the lamella is masculine.⁴ Assuming a supplement of the latter type (sc. ἰδοῦσα vel sim.) they then propose <τε> τέλη or, possibly, τελ<ετ>ή<ν> to restore metre in the second line. They translate this ‘I have seen rites, the initiations of Chthonian Demeter and Mountain Mother’ (p. 13). They admit that the apposition of ὄργια and τέλη or τελ<ετ>ή<ν> in this manner is ‘weak’.

Soon after the first publication of the lamella Ferrari–Pauscello (2007) proposed a different solution. They read τελέσαι in the second line, which they take with ἔχω in the previous line to mean ‘I am able to perform the [holy/beautiful] rites ...’ One might think, they concede, that such a formulation would best suit a priest, or *orpheotelestes*, as one who is competent to promulgate the secret rites,⁵ but they defend their solution by saying that someone initiated into the cult is then ‘in the know’, and hence equipped with the right credentials to gain admission to the society of the chosen in the afterlife (μυστῶν θιάκου).⁶ With this construction it is easy to supply an adjective such as *κεμνά* at the end of the first line. The main objection to their solution – apart from the palaeographical difficulty of their supplement, which departs quite markedly from the visible letters⁷ – is the unparalleled expression put into the mouth of the dead person requesting

¹ Parker–Stamatopoulou (2004).

² For this reason they reject a supplement such as Βάκχου, ‘[the secret rites] of Bakchos’, as this is hardly construable with the following lines (p. 11); one might imagine a list of ὄργια in which the deceased has participated – those of Dionysos, Demeter and the Mountain Mother – but then τέλη obtrudes, which can hardly be another object of ἔχω. Graf–Johnston (2007, no. 28), who saw the proofs of Parker–Stamatopoulou (2004) in time to include the text in their collection, retain [Βάκχου] and translate: ‘I possess the rituals of Bacchus and the rites ...’ but one wonders whether one can ‘possess rites’. They retain this supplement, rejected subsequently by Parker and Stamatopoulou, presumably because of their conviction that the gold lamellae are ‘Bacchic-Orphic’; but this example from Pherai seems to derive from different mystery rite(s).

³ Bernabé (2008, 54) dismisses this suggestion on the grounds that a ‘transitive, resultative perfect is never documented in gold tablets nor in archaic epic. As we shall see below, this claim is far from true.

⁴ Ferrari–Pauscello (2007) also cite a suggestion by Sonnino, ὀργιά[αα], ‘I have celebrated the secret rites’, without a reference. The sense of this is good but the aorist of ὀργιάζω is very rare (once in AR Arg. 2.907) and the periphrastic perfect seems particularly clumsy in this case.

⁵ Cf. Parker–Stamatopoulou (2004, 11 n. 29).

⁶ Bernabé (2008, 53) dismisses this reading because ‘we expect a statement about the actual celebration of the rites, rather than the capacity of the mystes to celebrate them.’

⁷ They assume corruption of (intended) ΤΕΛΕΣΑΙΚΑΙ into ΤΕΛΕΚΑΙ, then a second degree of corruption from ΤΕΛΕ to ΤΕΛΗ – but why?

admission to the company of *mystai*: ‘I can perform the secret rites’. Initiates usually state their credentials in the form ‘I have performed the secret rites [sc. so I am qualified for admission to the happy fields]’.⁸

The latest publication of, and commentary on, the text by Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal retains Graf–Johnston’s [Βάκχου] at the end of the first line and the first editors’ <τε> in the second.⁹ However, they take ὄργια in the sense of ‘sacred symbols’ which the initiate needs as ‘passport’ to join the *thiasos* of initiates in the Underworld.¹⁰ Whilst this sense appears possible (even at this somewhat earlier date) they do not consider the difficulty involved in the coupling of τέλη with ὄργια as joint objects of ἔχω, for τέλη clearly does not mean ‘sacred symbols’.¹¹ It does not seem possible to say ‘I have the sacred symbols of Bacchus and the rites of Demeter’.¹² At least, this is stretching the sense of ἔχω ... τέλη considerably.

Turning now to alternative solutions, we might first consider a construction of ἔχω with an adverb denoting the state or status of the petitioner. He/she might be claiming to possess a state of ritual purity through participation in holy rites. Something like ἀμώμως or – by analogy with another funeral lamella from Pherai¹³ – ἀποίνως. One might combine this with τελ<ετ>ῆι in the next line: ‘I am pure with respect to the holy rites [having participated] in the initiation of Chthonic Demeter and the Mountain Mother’. ἀποίνως is, however, unparalleled and the adjective ἀποινος occurs only in this one inscription from Pherai, as far as I can tell.¹⁴ Preserving a normal form of this word one might alternatively consider ἔχω ὄργι ἄ[ποινα], ‘I possess the holy secrets as atonement’ but here the construction breaks down again in the second line.

Returning to one of the approaches suggested by the first editors I wonder whether another verb, ῥέζω, does not supply a suitable participle to end the first line: ἔχω ὄργια ῥέζας, ‘I have performed the sacred rites’. This verb, common in epic diction, can mean generally ‘do, perform’, but it also bears the specialized meaning ‘perform sacred rites’ (usually sacrifices, see LSJ II). This supplement would make the petitioner, a man, claim to have performed sacred rites as his admission ticket to the Elysian fields in the underworld. In the second line he might append, by way of explanation of which ὄργια he means: Δήμητρος χθονίας <τε>τέλη καὶ Μητρὸς ὀρεί[ας], ‘the initiatory rites of Chthonic Demeter and the Mountain Mother’, or, perhaps better, Δήμητρος χθονίας τελ<ετ>ῆι καὶ Μητρὸς ὀρεί[ας], ‘through [participation in] the initiatory rite of [these goddesses]’ (see below).

As a term in religious vocabulary ῥέζω is commonly combined with ἱερά, holy rites, which are usually synonymous with sacrifice.¹⁵ The most interesting parallel for my proposal comes in *HHDemeter* 273–74, where Demeter says that she will introduce her *orgia* so that people in future can propitiate her by performing (ἔρδοντες) them.¹⁶ The verb ἔρδω is another form of ῥέζω.¹⁷ It seems, moreover, that ὄργια itself

⁸ See Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* ii 13ff.

⁹ See Bernabé–Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008), with additional remarks in Bernabé (2008), who (p. 55 with n. 18) collects other instances of the expression ὄργια Βάκχου. But the question is not whether this phrase exists, or is common, but whether it suits here.

¹⁰ Comparing ὄργια Βάκχῳ in Theocr. *Idyll* 26.13, they write ‘the word ὄργια achieves (sic) in Hellenistic times the meaning we find after in the Latin poets’.

¹¹ They take it as ‘mystic initiations’.

¹² Their translation. Bernabé (2008, 55) translates: ‘I have the sacred symbola and the rites of Demeter Chthonia and the Mountain Mother’. He does not consider the question what ‘I have the rites’ might mean.

¹³ Graf–Johnston (2007, no. 27), lines 4–5 ἄποινος γὰρ ὁ μύκτης. See also the ‘Orphic papyrus from Gurûb’ (J. Hordern, *ZPE* 129, 2000, 135) line 1]α τεμον ποινάς.

¹⁴ For parallels supporting the idea of ποινή in mystic initiation see Ferrari–Pauscello (2007, 201 with n. 67).

¹⁵ ἱερά ῥέζας *Il.* 1.147; 9.357; *Od.* 4.473; *HHAphrodite* 101 ῥέζω δέ τοι ἱερά καλά; a sheep *Od.* 9.553; *HHymn frag. Dion.* 12 ῥέζουσι τεληέσσας ἐκατόμβας. Cf. N. M. H. van den Burg, *Ἀπόρρητα, δρώμενα, ὄργια*, Diss. Utrecht 1939.

¹⁶ Ὀργια δ’ αὐτὴ ἐγὼν ὑποθήσομαι ὡς ἂν ἔπειτα / εὐαγέως ἔρδοντες ἐμὸν νόον ἰλάσκειθε.

¹⁷ See Chantraine (1968) s.v. Ἔργον (p. 365).

derives from the root ἔργ- or ὄργ- as other tenses of ἔρδω are formed from this root.¹⁸ ἔρδω ὄργια would, then, in fact be *figura etymologica*, and, by analogy, so would ῥέζω ὄργια.¹⁹

The construction itself – a ‘periphrastic’ perfect combining present ἔχω with aorist active participle is relatively common. LSJ list it under B IV (s.v. ἔχω ‘as auxiliary c. aor. part.’). The first instance they record is in Hesiod, *Works and Days* 42, κρύσαντες ἔχουσι, but Schwyzer, *Griech. Grammatik* I, 812 records *Il.* 1.356 ἐλὼν γὰρ ἔχει γέρας in addition.²⁰ A string of instances can be cited in 5th-century drama: Sophocles *Ai.* 22 (ἔχει περάνας), *OT* 699 (ετήσας ἔχει), *Ant.* 22 (τὸν μὲν προτίσας, τὸν δ’ ἀτιμάσας ἔχει), *OC* 1140 (θαυμάσας ἔχω); Euripides *Med.* 33 (ἀτιμάσας ἔχει). In prose, too, the construction occurs: Hdt. 1.37 (ἀποκλήσας ἔχει); 6.12 (ἐπιτρέσαντες ἡμέας αὐτοὺς ἔχομεν); Plato *Crat.* 404c1 (λέγεται ὁ Ζεὺς αὐτῆς ἐρασθεὶς ἔχειν); Demosthenes 9.12 (ἔχει καταλαβόν). It is true that I cannot parallel the construction from the Orphic lamellae themselves, but the text corpus is minimal so this is hardly surprising. Having combed the verse inscriptions in *CEG*, however, I have turned up two interesting instances. (1) *CEG* 2, 514 (c. 380–370 BC) Φαίδιμον Εὐθύ[γέν]ος ὄδ’ ἔχει τάφος ἀνφικαλύψας, which may be translated ‘this grave has covered over Phaidimos, son of Euthygenes’, rather than ‘... holds, having covered over’. A second instance, *CEG* 2, 897 (Selinus, c. 550–525 BC) is difficult to interpret certainly:

Ἀριστοκλείας ἐμὶ τὰς καλὰς καλά·
 ἡούτα δ’ ἐμά· Πίθακος αἰτέσας ἔχει.

The iambic couplet was scrawled on a lekythos. The first line seems to mean ‘I am the handsome [lekythos] of beautiful Aristokleia’.²¹ The second line is quite enigmatic; I suggest: ‘but she (sc. Aristokleia) is mine; Pithekos has asked (sc. for her hand in marriage)’. Admittedly, one might separate the verb forms to give the sense: ‘Pithekos has (sc. her as bride), having asked (sc. for her hand in marriage)’.²²

Turning now to the second line of the Pherai leaf, τελε<ετ>ῆι seems to me a reasonable solution palaeographically and linguistically.²³ A number of passages have the dative of τελετή or τελεταί indicating the time or occasion on which a sacred rite was performed: ‘at’ or ‘in the course of, the initiatory rite(s)’.²⁴ For this solution to be acceptable we need to posit a single cult combining worship of Chthonic Demeter and the Mountain Mother. Ferrari–Pauscello (2007, 198–201) have collected evidence in support of this proposition. They point to metroac elements in the worship of Despoina at Lykosoura,²⁵ and to the mention of Brimo (= Persephone) in the other gold lamella from Pherai, belonging, they say, to an initiate of the ‘bacchic/orphic mysteries’.²⁶ They then adduce evidence for the association of Brimo, ‘the one who roars’, with Demeter/Rhea/Cybele (p. 201 with n. 72) in order to make the cult connection (especially at Pherai) between Demeter and the Mountain Mother. It has to be said that this evidence, even taken cumulatively, is somewhat tenuous.

A better lead may be provided by the text of the Epidaurian Hymn to the Mother of the Gods.²⁷ It has long been recognized that the behaviour of the Mother in the hymn’s narrative appears analogous to that

¹⁸ See Frisk (1970) s.v. ὄργια: ‘Nach gewöhnlicher, wohl richtiger Annahme zu ἔργον, ἔρδω’; similarly Chantraine (1968) s.v.

¹⁹ For instances of the parallel expression ἔρδω ἱερά *vel sim.* see LSJ s.v. ἔρδω 2.

²⁰ So Bernabé’s remark that the construction is unknown in archaic epic is wrong (above).

²¹ Masson et Taillardat, see Hansen (1989) ad loc.

²² West, ap. Hansen, suggested (privatim) ‘and she is mine: Pithekos gets her by asking me’.

²³ TEΛH for TEΛETH can be explained by haplography; the omission of iota adscript is unproblematic. Although Parker–Stamatopoulou (2004) are no doubt right that τέλη can have an equivalent meaning to τελεταί, nevertheless the latter word is the *terminus technicus* for mystery rites and far more common.

²⁴ E.g. *Orphic Hymn* 54.10 ὄργια νυκτιφαῖη τελεταίς ἀγίαις ἀναφαίνων.

²⁵ Paus. 8.37.9: the Arcadian name of the daughter of Demeter and Poseidon.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 201. Cf. Graf–Johnston (2007, no. 27).

²⁷ This text is notoriously difficult to date. Suggestions vary from original Telesilla (Maas) to the second century AD. Page in *PMG* 935 advocates a dating in the fourth century BC. For the text see Wagman (1995, 107–46) and Furley–Bremer (2001, no. 6.2).

of the Mountain Mother in the second stasimon of Euripides' *Helen*, in which the goddess mourns the loss of her daughter (like Demeter) and is even called Deo at the end of the narrative.²⁸ Recent work on the Epidaurian hymn by Pizzocaro (1991) and Wagman (1995, 134) has explored the possibility that the text belongs within the context of mystery rites for the Mother of the Gods (= Mountain Mother) at Epidauros. A forthcoming contribution by myself seeks to link the hymn's narrative with Clement of Alexandria's account of mysteries for Demeter/Meter, as distinct from the Eleusinian cult.²⁹ Even without going into detail here, it is clear that the Epidaurian hymn is testimony to the syncretism of Demeter worship with that of the Mountain Mother at Epidauros. Both the *Helen* stasimon and this text are evidence of a profound compatibility of Demeter/Meter.³⁰ In view of this, I do not think we need recoil from the proposition that the funeral lamella under consideration refers to a joint *teletē* of these goddesses.³¹

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²⁸ Already in Maas (1933).

²⁹ *Protrepticus* 2.15. The paper was given at a conference on Greek hymns in Lyon, June 19–21, 2008; the proceedings are due to be published this year.

³⁰ As shown also by the Derveni Papyrus from the fourth century BC. I consider the relevant passages of this text in the paper mentioned in the previous note.

³¹ I take the point made by Ferrari–Prauscello (2007, 197–98) that the lamella refers specifically to Demeter Chthonia, who seems to have been at home particularly in the cult at Hermione.