

ORGIA AND TELETE IN THE EPIGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE*

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1. Introduction

This article examines the uses of the words *orgia* and *telete* in the epigraphical evidence. Ὀργια and τελετή (hereinafter: *orgia* and *telete*) are two Greek lexemes that belong to the same semantic field; in certain contexts they are even synonymous. Both words occur in the context of mystery religion, but neither is limited to that context. The purpose of this article is twofold: to illustrate how the two terms are used in Greek inscriptions and to dispel the misconception that the word *telete* should always refer to the rite of a mystery cult.

The word *orgia* is derived from the Proto-Indo-European¹ root *uerǵ-* (with *o*-ablaut *uorǵ-*). It is therefore related to the noun ἔργον and the verbs ἔρδω (< *uerǵ-ioH*) and ῥέζω (< *ureǵ-ioH*, Schwebeablaut). The word *telete* is derived from the PIE root *tel-* and is thus related to τέλος and τελέω². *Orgia* and *teletai* are therefore in origin ‘things that are performed’; the terms are used for ritual acts or performances reserved for certain (religious) occasions, i.e. *rites*. In addition, *telete* can refer to the occasion at which a rite is performed, i.e. a *ceremony* or *festival*. Both words occur exclusively in a religious context, except where they are used in a metaphorical sense (e.g. ‘rites of love’).

One context in which *orgia* and *telete* often appear is mystery religion. Mystery cults were special cults of certain deities, in which a sacred truth was told or re-enacted at regular intervals³. One important characteristic held in common by all

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¹ Proto-Indo-European (hereinafter: PIE) is the reconstructed parent language of most European languages and of several languages in central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

² See also Waanders 1983.

³ There is a wealth of literature on mystery cults. See especially Burkert 1987. For the Greek mysteries, see Burkert 1985, 276-304; for the archaeology and ritual of Greek mystery cults, see Cosmopoulos (ed.) 2003; for the cult at Eleusis, see Burkert 1983, 248-297, Clinton 1974, Clinton 1992, Foucart 1914; for the archaeology of the Eleusinian sanctuary, see Mylonas 1961; for Dionysus, see Nilsson 1957. For the ‘oriental’ mystery cults, see Turcan 1996, with suggestions for further reading at pp. 383-385 (by T.J. Cornell).

mysteries is that they include a rite of initiation. In the Eleusinian mysteries, for example, the *mystai* must first stumble around in the dark in search of Kore, apparently blindfolded and guided by a mystagogue⁴. Only when they return the following year, they may view the ceremony as *epoptai*. The Samothracian mysteries included a preliminary initiation called the *thronosis* or *thronismos* ('enthronement ceremony') where the *myomenoi* witnessed a wild, corybantic dance⁵. The Mithraic mysteries knew seven grades of initiation, which corresponded to the seven heavenly bodies⁶. The cult of the Mother is known among other things for its remarkable baptism by blood: the *taurobolium*. In the Dionysiac mysteries, prevalent in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the emphasis seems to have been on revelling, but there is also frequent mention of *mystai*, initiates⁷. While it is true that the (initiation) rite of a mystery cult is often called *telete*, there is nothing to suggest that the word specifically means mystery rite or initiation. On the contrary, the consistent variety of contexts in which *telete* occurs implies that its neutral meaning of rite, ceremony, festival remained current throughout the ages.

2. History of scholarship

Before turning to the inscriptions, we shall have a brief look at the history of scholarship. The first serious attempts to study the terms *telete* and *orgia* in a systematic manner were undertaken by two Dutch scholars in the 1930s: Cornelis Zijderveld and Nicolaas van der Burg. They were both trained at the University of Utrecht and each wrote a doctoral dissertation on religious terminology in Greek⁸. These two dissertations still serve not merely as starting points but as standard works for the study of the words *telete* and *orgia* in Greek literature.

In spite of criticism that its analysis lacks depth, and despite the fact that it is outdated in several respects, Zijderveld's dissertation has remained the standard work on the term *telete*. It examines the use of *telete* before Alexander, after Alexander, and in Jewish and Christian authors. Zijderveld distinguishes between religious ceremonies in general, religious acts of a special character, symbolic acts (mysteries), religious sects, magic rites, and metaphorical uses⁹. In 1987 Giulia Sfameni Gasparro revisited several classical authors where the term appears¹⁰, thus reviving the discussion how *telete* is used and what the various uses have in common. She discussed several predominant contexts: Eleusinian

⁴ See Clinton 1993, 118.

⁵ See Plato, *Euthyd.* 277d; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12.33.

⁶ See e.g. Schuddeboom 1998.

⁷ See e.g. Jaccottet 2003, *passim*.

⁸ Zijderveld 1934; Van der Burg 1939.

⁹ Cf. also Waanders 1983, 156-159, who cites Zijderveld and lists several illustrative occurrences of the term *telete*. In addition to the uses cited above, Zijderveld mentions the use of *telete* in the title of treatises and personified as a goddess; since they do not pertain to religious rites, these two uses are irrelevant to our present enquiry.

¹⁰ Sfameni Gasparro 1987.

mysteries, Dionysiac rites, Thesmophoria, Corybantism, and Orphic rites, but was rightly cautious to reach any firm new conclusions about what exactly makes a rite a *telete*. Instead she emphasised again that *telete* is a rite of a special character.

Van der Burg's dissertation was conceived as a supplement to Zijderfeld's dissertation and follows more or less the same methodology. The third part of the dissertation examines the use of *orgia* and several cognates before and after Alexander (Jewish and Christian authors were left out of consideration). Van der Burg distinguished between religious ceremonies in general, ceremonies for certain gods, purification ceremonies, mysteries, and metaphorical uses¹¹. In 1992 André Motta and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforges again studied the word *orgia* and its cognates in the literary sources¹². They identified five different contexts: Demeter (mysteries and Thesmophoria), Dionysus, Megaloi Theoi of Samothrace, Aphrodite and the Muses, rites in a more general sense.

One thing the four aforementioned studies have in common is that they all have relied very heavily on the literary sources, largely ignoring the epigraphical evidence. Zijderfeld merely consulted the indices of Dittenberger's and Kaibel's selections of Greek inscriptions¹³ and included only two other inscriptions¹⁴. Van der Burg did not take the epigraphical evidence into account at all. Sfameni Gasparro limited her discussion to Greek literature of the classical period, while Motta and Pirenne-Delforges focused on the literary sources and referred to only a handful of the best-known inscriptions. This article by contrast will explore the different uses of the terms *orgia* and *telete* in the inscriptions¹⁵. We do not present all the Greek texts, or even an exhaustive list of the inscriptions, because for our current purposes this is unnecessary. For a collection of the inscriptions containing the terms *telete* and *orgia*, we refer the reader to our revised, English edition of Zijderfeld's seminal work¹⁶.

3. *Orgia*

The word *orgia* is used for the rites of different gods and goddesses. In the inscriptions the term is used predominantly for mystery rites and for rites of Dionysus. Before examining what other rites are called *orgia*, let us first look at the use of *orgia* for Dionysian rites.

¹¹ We should add magic rites to this list: see ps. Lucian, *Philopatris* 10.

¹² Motte/Pirenne-Delforge 1992.

¹³ Cf. O. Kern, *Gnomon* 1939, 198-202, 200, who criticises Zijderfeld for having limited himself to the inscriptions published by Dittenberger (*OGIS* and *Syll.*³) and Kaibel (*EG*).

¹⁴ *IG* III 713 and *IG* II² 1234; the fact that Zijderfeld uses the old reference to *IG* III indicates that he probably did not consult *IG* II² but copied these two inscriptions from unnamed sources.

¹⁵ I have consulted all the major corpora and *SEG* (through *SEG* LII 2002).

¹⁶ F.L. Schuddeboom (ed.), *Telete and Orgia. A Study in Greek Religious Terminology*. Forthcoming.

The special rites of Dionysus are called *orgia* in four documents from Asia Minor. A famous inscription from Magnesia, *IMagnesia* 215, instructs the people of Magnesia to bring maenads from Thebes (ll. 27-30): “They will give you rites (*orgia*) and noble customs and will establish *thiasoi* of Bacchus in the city”. These *orgia* are none other than the orgiastic rites of Dionysus, which are contrasted here with other customs and *thiasoi*. A sacred law from Miletus, *LSAM* 48, determines (ll. 14-16): “The priestess shall give the women . . . and supply the things needed for the ceremony to the women in all the rites (*orgia*)”. In these particular *orgia* apparently only women were allowed to participate.

A decree of a Dionysiac association from Teos, *SEG* IV 598, mentions (l. 19): “*orgia* of every sanctuary of Dionysus of the past year”. What *orgia* are intended here is unclear. Another inscription by a Dionysiac association from Halicarnassus, *SEG* XXVIII 841, refers to Dionysiac mysteries, when it says (ll. 5-6): “To be silent about what hidden thing you know and proclaim as much as is permitted, may you go having learnt those rites (*orgia*)”. That these *orgia* were mystery rites is apparent from the condition of remaining silent about the secret thing that one has learnt. Incidentally, the Dionysiac associations were composed of male and female members and one must assume that both genders were initiated into the mysteries.

Outside Asia Minor the mysteries of Dionysus are called *orgia* in a funerary epigram for a seven-year-old boy from Rome, *IGUR* III 1228 (ll. 6-10): “I lived only seven years and two months, of which I spent three (years) saying mysteries for Dionysus”. This is an interesting document, because it shows that a child, too, could participate in the Dionysiac mysteries in the Roman imperial period¹⁷. The combination *orgia bazein* is noteworthy.

A second context in which the word *orgia* occurs is that of the mysteries. At Eleusis the term invariably refers to the mystery rites, which are displayed to the *mystai* (*IG* II² 3639; *IG* II² 3661) and occasionally need to be saved from defilement by invading tribes (*IG* II² 3411)¹⁸. Philodamus’ Paeon to Dionysus from Delphi¹⁹ also talks about the rites of Eleusis (ll. 32-36): [ἔθνος ἐνθ’] ἅπαν Ἑλλάδος ἰ γὰρ ἀ[μφ’ ἐ]γναέταις [φίλοις] ἐπ[όπ]ταις ἰ ὀργίων ὄσι[ων] Ἰακχῶν [κλείει σ]ε, βροτοῖς πόνων ἰ ὠξ[ας δ’ ὄρ]μον [ἄμοχθον] (“There every people of Hellas’ land, around inhabitants dear to *epoptai* of the sacred rites (*orgia*), calls you Iacchus, and to mortals you revealed a haven from toils, free

¹⁷ Cf. also *IGUR* III 1169, discussed by Burkert 1987, 28.

¹⁸ *IG* II² 3639 and 3411 are discussed below, § 5; *IG* II² 3661 is a dedicatory epigram for the deceased hierophant Glaucus, who “for nine years displayed to all mortals the light-bringing mysteries of Demeter and in the tenth (year) went to the immortals” (ll. 3-4).

¹⁹ Ed.pr. H. Weil, *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique* 19 (1895) 393-418.

from troubles”). In the context of the Eleusinian mysteries, *orgia* is almost completely synonymous with *telete*, the sacred rite viewed by the *epoptai*.

While the mysteries of Eleusis were certainly the most renowned of all mysteries, there existed many other mystery rites in the ancient world and the word *orgia* is used for several of these. An inscription found near Miletus, *I.Didyma* 496, probably refers to a local imitation of the Eleusinian mysteries (ll. B.10-11): “For to them it is still a token of very divine nobility to perform the mysteries (*orgia*) of Demeter and Demeter’s daughter here”. The mysteries of Artemis at Didyma are called *orgia* in an inscription from Patmos, *SEG XXXIX* 855 (ll. 12-15): νῦν δ’ ἐρατὴ Βήρα, θυγάτηρ σοφοῦ ἰητήρος | Γλαυκίεω, βουλαῖς Ἀρτέμιδος Σκυθίης | Αἰγαίου πλώσασα ῥόου δυσχείμερον οἶδμα | ὄργια καὶ θαλίην, ἄως θέμις, ἠγλάισεν (“Now lovely Vera, daughter of the wise physician Glaucius, sailed the very wintry Aegean Sea at the behest of Scythian Artemis and made splendid the rites and the festival, as is fitting”).

Orgia can refer to the rites of the so-called oriental mystery cults. For example, the rites of the criobolium and taurobolium for Cybele are *orgia* on an altar from Rome, *IGUR I* 126²⁰. An inscription from the Serapeion at Thessalonike, *IG X 2.1* 259²¹, provides that (ll. 11-14): ὁμνύντων τῶν τε νῦν καὶ | τῶν ἐσομένων μυστῶν τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὰ ὄργ[κ]ια | καὶ τὸ μεσανύκτιον ἀὐτοῦ διαφυλάτειν τὴν | ἐπάνοθεν οἰκίαν κατὰ τὴν δόσιν (“The present and future initiates shall swear by the god and the rites (*orgia*) and the mid-night ceremony of bread that they shall observe the above religious worship in accordance with the donation”). The god in question is not Sarapis, but an otherwise unattested Zeus Dionysus Gongylus. The cult of this enigmatic deity was apparently connected to the mysteries of Sarapis at Thessalonike.

A sacred law from Erythrai, *I.Erythrai* 206 (*LSAM* 23), concerning the sale of priesthood of the Corybantes specifies (ll. 1-4) that “[h]e or she who buys the priesthood of the Corybantes shall also act as priest (or: assist) in the ritual (*orgion*) of Herse and --ore and Phanis”. The fact that the priest or priestess of the Corybantes must tend to the ritual of Herse c.s. suggests that this ritual was in one way or another connected with the cult of the Corybantes. The mysteries of the Corybantes are well known from other sources. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the *orgion* in question was probably a ritual performed in the context of a mystery cult.

Sometimes the nature of rites called *orgia* remains uncertain. For example, it is

²⁰ This inscription is discussed below, §5.

²¹ Corrected by G. Daux, ‘Trois inscriptions de la Grèce du Nord’, *Comptes Rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (1972), 478-487 (*SEG XXX* 622).

unclear what rites are meant in an inscription on an altar found near Tlos, *TAM* II 646, which mentions the *orgia* of the *makares*: “Very skilful and friend of all and having celebrated the solemn rites (*orgia semna*) of the blessed, I, wise-minded Gerasimos lie here, fifty years old”. In the absence of any corroborating evidence, one should not assume that these rites were mystery rites merely because they are called *orgia*. Occasionally the word *orgia* is used in a metaphorical sense. An inscription on a herm of Menander from Rome, *IGUR* IV 1526 (l. 3), reminds us that the playwright often performed “the delightful *orgia* of the god (sc. Eros)”, which presumably refers to his love comedies. In the fragmentary inscription on the front of the Sarapion monument from Athens, *SEG* XXVIII 225 (l. 22), *orgia* are the sacred duties of a physician.

A secondary use of the word for cult objects is found in an epigram from Miletus, Peek, *GV* 1344 (ll. 3-4): “She led you to the mountains and carried all *orgia* and sacred things, going for the sake of the whole city”. Since it is said that the *orgia* are carried, they must here be the mystic objects, not the rites of Dionysus. Compare Lucian, *Syr. D.* 16, who mentions a *Dionysou orgion*: a cult object of Dionysus. Finally, the word is used for cult regulations in a sacred law from Miletus containing the so-called *Orgia* of the Molpoi, *LSAM* 50 (ll. 4-5): “The Molpoi have decided to inscribe their *orgia* and set them up in the sanctuary and apply them”.

If we compare the use of *orgia* in the inscriptions to that in the literary sources, it becomes immediately apparent that the oldest meaning of religious rites in general, as found in Aeschylus, *Sept.* 179²², does not appear in the inscriptions. This should not come as a surprise, since our oldest inscription, the Paean to Dionysus from Delphi, only dates from 340/39 BC, i.e. the very end of the classical period, and the bulk of our material dates from after 200 BC. To date there are no epigraphical attestations of the term *orgiasmos*, which appears in Greek literature from the first century BC onwards²³.

In the epigraphical evidence the term *orgia* most often refers to mystery rites and to the special rites of Dionysus. In other words, where it refers to rites, the word always denotes rites of a special, but not necessarily *orgiastic* nature. Occasionally the word is used for mystic objects. The so-called *Orgia* of the Molpoi, finally, is the name of an ancient cult regulation.

4. *Telete*

There is a widespread misconception among classicists and historians of religion that the word *telete* should always refer to a rite celebrated in the context of a

²² “Please remember our city’s rites, performed with an abundance of sacrifices.”

²³ See Motte/Pirenne-Delforge 1992, 121.

mystery cult. As a result, Greek rites are sometimes identified as mystery rites or initiation rites merely because they are called *telete*. Certainly, the term *telete* was often used for the rite of the mysteries, but this does not imply that every *telete* was a mystery rite. Before discussing inscriptions where *telete* refers to the mysteries, let us therefore look first at some examples where the rites or ceremonies involved are clearly not mysteries.

Sometimes the word *telete* is used in the very general sense of ‘sacred rite’. A good example of this is found on a funerary altar from Nikaia (Bithynia), *SEG* LI 1709bis, where the word is used for funerary rites: “Epikrates and his wife Apphe set up this altar for their child Perseus, displaying it next to Zeus with prayers and sacred rites (*teletai*)”. Another example is a relief from Kynouria, *IG* IV 676²⁴, where the word refers to the rite of making an offering. The relief shows a seated goddess. Before her stands a woman holding a basket, presumably with offerings. At the centre of the scene we see the word *telete* (‘ceremony’), so here the word refers to the ceremony of making an offering. Avid readers of Aristophanes will remember that *telete* is also an offering at *Pax* 412: “O master, neighbour, Aguius, who stands before the gate of my entrance hall, accept this fresh offering, my lord, which we cut fresh for my father”²⁵.

A third example: in the sacred laws from the island of Cos the word *telete* is used several times for the consecration ceremony of new priests. *Inscr.Cos* ED 215, for example, determines in connection with the sale of the priesthood of Zeus Alseios (II. B.16-21): τὸ δὲ γ[ε]ινόμενον ἀνάλωμα [ἐς] τὰ[ς] θ]υσι.α[ς] τὰς συντε[λου]μένους ὑπὸ τῶν προστατῶν ἐπὶ τῶν π[ρ]όσ[τ]αι τῶν [ἐ]ρωσύνων καὶ τὰν τελετῶν καὶ τὰν [στ]άλων [καὶ] | [τ]ὰν ἀναγραφῶν τὰς δ[ι]αγραφ[α]ῶς ἀποτελεσ[ά]ν[τ]ω τοὶ προστάται. (“The *prostatatai* shall pay the sum required for the offerings performed by the *prostatatai* in connection with the sale of the priesthood, and for the ceremony (*telete*) and this stele and the inscription of this document”).

Finally, a fragmentary ephebic decree from Athens, *IG* II² 1042, mentions that the ephebes had participated “in all the traditional *teletai*” (C.14). As noted by Clinton, it is clear from this phrase that the *teletai* in question “ought to include non-initiatory cults, since the only initiation in which the [Athenian] ephebes took part occurred at the Eleusinian Mysteries”²⁶. So here *teletai* apparently refers to all the different rites of the polis in which the ephebes had participated.

²⁴ For a description, bibliography and photo of this relief, see Kaltsas 2001, no. 644.

²⁵ Cf. also *Vesp.* 875, where Trygaeos explains to Hermes that the Sun and the Moon would like to “receive the offerings of the gods”: the meaning of *teletai* there is clear from the preceding *thuomen*.

²⁶ Clinton 2003, 54.

It is clear from the foregoing examples that the use of *telete* is by no means confined to the narrow context of mystery religions. The word can be used among other things for funerary rites, an offering rite, consecration rites, and all the traditional rites performed by the ephebes. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the term *telete* can refer to rites of public or private religion. In the ephebic decree it referred to public rites, while on the other end of the spectrum we found the word used for very private funerary rites. It seems therefore that the term has a broad meaning that defies easy classification.

We now turn to instances where *telete* refers to a festival. The word can be used not only for a singular event, but also for a festival, i.e. a religious ceremony that recurs at regular intervals. When the word refers to a festival, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether the festival in question belongs to a mystery cult or not, especially when the information about the festival is meagre. In theory each of the following festivals could of course belong to an otherwise unknown mystery cult. It seems more prudent, however, to err on the safe side and not identify a festival as a mystery cult unless there is a reasonable basis for doing so. If the use of the word *telete* is insufficient to prove that a rite is a mystery rite, it cannot establish either that a festival is a mystery festival.

In *SEG XLVI 745*, a manumission record from Exochi (Macedonia), the festival of the goddess Enodia is called a *telete* (ll. 3-12): Δύ[υ]σιτροῦ δωδεκάτη, οὔσας τελετῆς καὶ συναγωγῆς Αὐρηλίαι Ἰουλεία ἢ ἢ προχορηματεῖσα Ἰαμύντου ἔχαρι[σ]άμην θεῷ Ἐνοδίᾳ ὀνόματι Ἑρμῆν ἢ δοῦλον (“On the twelfth of Dystros, being a festival (*telete*) and a day of assembly, I, Aurelia Julia the daughter of Amyntas have given willingly to the goddess Enodia my slave by the name of Hermes”). Here the word *telete* is clearly used to specify that this day is a holiday. Whether or not mystery rites may have been performed on this day seems irrelevant.

In a dedicatory epigram from Cyrene, *SEG XXXVIII 1898*, *teleta* refers to the festival of Artemis (ll. 1-6): μνάμα τόδ’ Ἑρμήσανδρος ἢ ὑπὲρ κράνας ὁ Φίλωνος ἢ θῆκε θεῷ θύσας ἢ Ἀρτέμιδος τελεταί, ἢ βούς ἑκατὸν κατάγων ἢ καὶ ἴκατι (“Hermesandros the son of Philo dedicated this monument past the fountain-house, having sacrificed to the goddess for the festival of Artemis, leading to the sanctuary 120 oxen”). To my knowledge there were no mysteries of Artemis at Cyrene.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a festival is a mystery festival. For example, a dedicatory epigram from the island of Tenos, *IG XII 5, 972*, honours a woman named Isia for financing the completion of a building between the temples of Bacchus and Demeter (?) (ll. 1-2): “Of this wild maenad of Bromios . . . at the festival (*en teletaisin*) of the Agenorids”. According to Hiller’s majuscule

copy in IG, nothing remained at the end of line 2 after the delta of Agenorid²⁷. The genitive plural ending was supplied by Kaibel, *EG* 871, without explanation. Nothing is known, however, about a festival or rites of Agenorids²⁸. I therefore prefer to read instead a genitive singular: of the Agenorid (sc. Bacchus)²⁹. Compare Statius, *Achil.* 1.593: *Lucus Agenorei sublimis ad orgia Bacchi | stabat*: “There stood a lofty forest for the rites of Agenor’s descendant Bacchus”. In the Roman imperial period, from which our inscription dates, Dionysiac associations had spread all over the Mediterranean³⁰. It is therefore possible that ‘ceremonies of the Agenorid’ refers to a Dionysiac mystery cult, but this is by no means certain.

There are many instances where *telete* is used for the central rite of a mystery cult, especially that of Demeter. It is said several times of the *teletai* that they are displayed by the hierophant or hierophantis: *IG* II² 3411; 3639; 3764³¹. One of the oldest examples, a dedicatory epigram originally set up in the vestibule of the City Eleusinion, *IG* I³ 953 (450 BC), specifies that the rite is secret (*arrhetos*): [ἀ]ρρήτο τελετής πρόπολος σῆς, πότνια Διοί, | καὶ θυγατρὸς προθύρο κόσμον ἄγαλαμα τόδε | ἔστησεν στεφάνω Λυσιστράτη (“As an attendant of the secret rite (*telete*) of you and your daughter, Mistress Demeter, Lysistrate set up this statue of two crowns as an ornament for your vestibule”). So here *telete* is the secret mystery rite of Demeter and Kore.

One should bear in mind, however, that while *telete* (‘rite’) is frequently used in the context of mystery cult, it does not specifically mean ‘mystery rite’. In a letter from Emperor Commodus to the Eumolpidae, *IG* II² 1110, published at Eleusis, the emperor accepts his appointment as archon of the Eumolpidae (ll. 8-10): “So that the secrets of the rite (*telete*) of the mysteries may be even more splendid and solemn”. So *telete* here is the ‘rite’ or the ‘performance’ of the mysteries. It cannot mean ‘mystery rite’, otherwise the addition ‘of the mysteries’ would be a most curious pleonasm.

The word is also used for the special rite of other mystery cults. The celebration of the mysteries at Megalopolis, which were an imitation of the Eleusinian mys-

²⁷ The inscription itself is lost.

²⁸ In a Dionysiac context the term Agenorids could in theory refer to Agenor’s granddaughters, Ino, Agaue and Autonoe, who had led the legendary thiasoi in Thebes (see Eur. *Bacch.* 680-82) or perhaps to his daughters, Cosco, Baubo and Thettale, who led the thiasoi in Magnesia (see *I. Magnesia* 215.a.33-36).

²⁹ I.e. Ἀγηνορίδ[αι]ο or Ἀγηνορίδ[ου], or perhaps Ἀγηνορίδ[εω].

³⁰ See e.g. Jaccottet 2003.

³¹ *IG* II² 3411 and 3639 are discussed below, § 5; *IG* II² 3764 is a dedicatory epigram for a certain Aelius Apollonius, whose mother “displayed the ceremonies for the two goddesses by the temple of Demeter.”

teries according to Pausanias³², is called *telete* in *IG V 2, 517*, which mentions (ll. 8-9) that the hierophant Saon was: “a descendant of those who first organized as hierophants the ceremony of the Great Goddesses in Arcadia”.

The rites of the mysteries connected to the oracle and cult of Apollo and Artemis at Didyma are *teletai* in *I.Didyma 352* (ll. 2-10): ὑδροφόρος Ἀρτεμίδος Πυθίης | Συμφέρουσα Ἀπελλᾶ πάσας τὰς κατὰ | νόμον ἐπιτελέσασα τῆ | θέῳ θυσίας | καὶ σπονδὰς καὶ τὰς | τῶν μυστηρίων τελετὰς εὐσεβῶς (“Hydrophoros of Artemis Pythia, Sympherousa daughter of Apellas, having performed all the prescribed sacrifices and libations and the rites (*teletai*) of the mysteries religiously for the goddess”). In other hydrophoros inscriptions these “rites of the mysteries” are simply called *ta mysteria*³³.

In the famous regulation of the Andanian mysteries, *IG V 1, 1390* (LSCG 65), the officials of the cult, the so-called *hieroi*, take an oath (ll. A.2-6): οἷς τὰ μυστήρια ἐπιτ[ε]||λε|ίται, ἐπιμέλειαν ἔξιν, ὅπως γίνηται τὰ κατὰ τὰν τελετὰν θεοπρεπῶς καὶ ἀπὸ παντὸς τοῦ δικαίου, καὶ μήτε αὐ|τ|ὸς μηθὲν ἄσχημον μηδὲ ἄδικον ποιήσιν ἐπὶ καταλύσει τῶν μυστηρίων μηδὲ ἄλλω ἐπιτρέψιν, ἀλλὰ κατακολουθήσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις, ἐξορκίσιν δὲ καὶ τὰς ἱερὰς καὶ τὸν ἱερεὴ κατὰ τὸ διάγραμμα (“To take care that the affairs of the ceremony (*telete*) are conducted devoutly and altogether justly, and not myself to do anything inappropriate or unlawful in the guest quarters of the mysteries or delegate to anyone else, but to obey the writings and administer the oath to the holy women and the priest according to the regulation”). The *telete* is the central ceremony of the mysteries, which requires no further specification. When the sacred men swore to guard the affairs of the ceremony, there could be no misunderstanding as to what ceremony was meant. A cult regulation for the cult of Magna Mater, *IG XII 7, 237* (LSCG 103), from Amorgos determines (ll. B.11 12): “When the priestess has performed the ritual, the offering given by those who undergo the ritual shall fall to the goddess.” Without further specification, *telete* here presumably refers to the ritual of the Metroac mysteries.

A statue of Mithras Tauroktonos from Sidon, *SEG LII 1591*, bears a dedicatory inscription from a pater nomimos of the rites (*teletai*) of Mithras, a clear reference to the Mithraic mysteries. The mysteries of Dionysus are probably meant in *SEG XXXV 1327*, a funerary epigram from Amastris (ll. 4-5): “I led the procession by the burnt sacrifices during the triennial festival for the god Euios (i.e. Dionysus) and led the ceremony (*telete*) like a *mystes*.”

In the epigraphical evidence *telete* is used in a variety of meanings. It usually

³² Pausanias 8.31.7.

³³ *I.Didyma* 312, 326, 327, 329, 333, 352, 360, 373, 381, 382.

denotes a sacred rite or a festival. It is often used for the central rite of a mystery cult. While it can be argued that *telete* generally refers to a rite of a special nature, the inscriptions have shown quite clearly that the use of *telete* is by no means confined to the context of mystery cults.

5. *Orgia* and *telete* compared

When we compare the uses of *orgia* and *telete*, the meaning of *orgia* shows less variation and lies at a lower level of abstraction. Whereas *telete* can denote a rite, a ceremony, or a festival, *orgia* always refers to the actual rite, never to the religious occasion at which it is performed. This is evident among other things from the fact that in Greek literature we find expressions like τὰ κατὰ τὰς τελετὰς ὄργια (Diodorus 3.65.6) and οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετὰς ὄργιασμοί (Strabo 7 fr. 18) but never αἱ κατὰ τὰ ὄργια τελεταί.

This distinction between *orgia* and *telete* is very clear in an epigram on an altar dedicated to the Mother of the gods, from Rome, *IGUR* I 126. The altar was dedicated by two priests, Crescens and Leontius (ll. 5-7): ὄργια συνῥέξαντε θεᾶι παμμύητορι Ῥεΐηι | κριοβόλου τελετῆς καὶ ταυροβόλοιο φερίστης | αἵμασι μυστιπύλοις βωμὸν ὑπερτίθεσαν (“(Who) having performed together for the goddess Rhea, mother of all, the rites (*orgia*) of the most excellent criobolium and taurobolium ceremony (*telete*), dedicated this altar where they shed the blood as initiates”).

This passage illustrates that the *orgia* are the actual rituals, while *telete* refers to the religious occasion at which they were performed. In the context of the Eleusinian mysteries, however, *telete* and *orgia* become almost synonymous. A marble block from Eleusis, *IG* II² 3639, praises the hierophant Julius (ll. 3-4): ὃς τελετὰς ἀνέφηνε καὶ ὄργια πάννουχα μύσταις | Εὐμόλπου προχέων ἱμερόεσαν ὄπα (“Who displayed the rites (*teletai*) and the all-night mysteries (*pannucha orgia*) to the *mystai*, pouring forth the charming voice of Eumolpus”). The same hierophant is honoured on a round base from Eleusis, *IG* II² 3411 (ll. 4-6): ὄργια καὶ ψυχὴν ἐξεσάωσε πατρί, | καὶ τελετὰς ἀπέφηνε καὶ ἤρατο κῦδος ὅμοιον | Εὐμόλπῳ πυντυῶ καὶ Κελεῶ ζαθέωι (“He saved the mysteries (*orgia*) and his life for the fatherland and displayed the rites (*teletai*) and elevated their glory like wise Eumolpus and very divine Celeus”). Here the words *teletai* and *orgia* seem to refer to the same rites of the mysteries. Perhaps we ought to interpret the *orgia* in the second inscription as mystic objects (“he saved the mystic objects”), but in the first inscription the addition of *pannucha* precludes us from doing so. In that inscription it seems impossible to find a distinction between *teletai* and *orgia*.

6. Conclusion

If we look briefly at the geographical distribution of the inscriptions, we find that the inscriptions with *orgia* appear mostly in Asia Minor and at Eleusis, whereas

telete is found in other places as well. The inscriptions with *orgia* range from the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD. The inscriptions with *telete* range from the mid-fifth century BC to the mid-fifth century AD. With both words the majority of extant inscriptions date from the Roman imperial period. *Orgia* appears in inscriptions from Attica (Eleusis), Delphi, Macedonia, Patmos, Ionia, Caria, Lycia, and Rome. *Telete* on the other hand appears in inscriptions from Attica (Athens and Eleusis), Messenia, Arcadia, Macedonia, Thrace, Bithynia, Pontus, Tenos, Amorgos, Cos, Pergamon, Ionia, Caria, Lycia, Pisidia, Commagene, Syria, Sinai, and Rome.

To summarize, we have seen that *orgia* and *telete* generally refer to rites of a special nature. Both words are used for mystery rites, but neither is limited to the context of mystery religion. While *orgia* is the perfect word for the special rites of Dionysus, not all *orgia* are orgiastic rites. Most notably, the solemn mysteries of Demeter are also *orgia*. Occasionally the word is used for mystic objects. The word *telete* can denote a sacred rite or a festival. To be sure, *telete* often refers to the rite at the heart of the mysteries, but its use is by no means confined to that context. When we compare the uses of *orgia* and *telete*, the use of *orgia* appears less varied and abstract than that of *telete*. Whereas *telete* can denote a rite, a ceremony, or a festival, *orgia* always refers to the actual rite, never to the religious occasion at which it is performed.

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