

THE NEW LAMELLA FROM PHERAE

A gold lamella of ca. 300 B. C., discovered in a grave at Pherae in Thessaly, has been published with learned and astute commentary by Parker and Stamatoπούλου:

πέμπε με πρὸς μυστῶ(ν) θιάσους· ἔχω ὄργια [- -]
Δήμητρος χθονίας †τέλη καὶ Μητρὸς ὀρεί[ας].

The text visibly was ill-written, and already has been much discussed.¹ A good deal depends on the restoration of the first line. I offer here a further suggestion.

Line 1: ΜΥΣΤΩΧ lam. ὄργια [σεμνά?] eds., or [καλά] or [ἔσθλά] Ferrari and Prauscello; [Βάκχου] Graf and Johnston, Bernabé, rejected by eds. (11, 24) and Ferrari and Prauscello (194); [ἰδοῦσα] Buraselis,² [ἀνύσσα] or [κρήνας] Parsons ap. eds.; ὀργιά[σασα] Sonnino, [τελέσας] Battezzato, D’Alessio ap. Ferrari and Prauscello; [ρέξας] Furley; [φαίνειν] or [φράζειν] Fowler ap. eds.

Line 2: <τε> τέλη or τελ(ετ)ῆ(ν) or τελ(ετ)ῆ(ς) eds., the first preferred by Graf and Johnston (citing also Burkert); τελ(έσαι) καὶ Ferrari and Prauscello; τελ(ετ)ῆ(ι) “at the initiatory rite(s)” Furley.

In line 2 the easiest correction is <τε> τέλη, as failure to duplicate a syllable is probably the most common error found in inscriptions. This makes a good line of Greek in both meter and

1) R. Parker and M. Stamatoπούλου, A New Funerary Gold Leaf from Pherai, ArchEph 143, 2004 [2007], 1–32 (F. Graf and S. I. Johnston, Ritual Texts for the Afterlife [London 2007] no. 28; A. Bernabé, Poetae epici graeci [Berlin 1987–2007: = PEG] II.3 p. 456; F. Ferrari and L. Prauscello, Demeter Chthonia and the Mountain Mother, ZPE 162 [2007] 193–202; A. Bernabé and A. I. Jiménez San Cristóbal, Instructions for the Netherworld [Leiden 2008] no. L 13A; D. W. Furley, ‘Admit me to the Company of the Initiates’, ZPE 170 [2009] 31–34). Cited hereafter by authors’ names.

2) The concept “seeing” is attractive: e.g. Pind. fr. 137 ἄλβιος ὅστις ἰδὼν κείν’ εἶσ’ ὑπὸ χθόν’; Eur. Bacch. 73 τελετάς θεῶν εἰδώς; Callim. fr. 63,10 ἰδέ[σ]θαι ... Δηοῦς ὄργια Θεσμοφόρου; IG II² 1352.7 ἀρρήτου τελ[ετῆς ὄργια] δερκομένη; Paus. 1,37,4 ὅστις δὲ ἦδη τελετὴν Ἐλευσίνοι εἶδεν; the negative at LSAM 20,41 μηδὲ ὄρᾶν ἐπιτελούμ[ενα τὰ μυστήρια]. But the restoration would be unmetrical, as ὄργια ἰδοῦσα does not elide.

sense, “ceremonies of Demeter Chthonia and the Mountain Mother”. The weakness is that without a connective in line 1, we must take τέλη as apposition with ὄργια.³

Only one cult is in question, as most readers have agreed.⁴ The editors envisage a private and probably portable cult. The literary syncretism of Demeter and the Mother is well known.⁵ The locus classicus is Euripides’ Helen 1301 ff., and an ancient reader discerned the same equation in a poem of Melanippides (PMG 764). We need not seek a single or “official” name for the goddess honored by this private cult, which will have drawn its ideas and utterances from diverse celebratory precedents. That is, in a trope familiar in ancient religious utterance, the logic of the second line is: Demeter Chthonia and the Mountain Mother (and however she is called).⁶ The cult was particular, but the goddess was many-named.

What then of line 1? Naming a god here, as the editors observed (10–11), would render grammar difficult, lacking a connective. And the bare expression “to have rites” would be odd in itself, perhaps meaning that the speaker was a priest rather than an initiate. Furley has defended the construction ἔχω + participle, but here it seems not strictly logical (“I am one who has seen / performed the rites and still do so”). Those who have restored an infinitive are convincing: this is the far more common complement of ἔχω, and more appropriate: “I can [...]”, asserting some ability. What ability was an initiate likely to assert?

Restoration of this line has proceeded on the quite reasonable assumption that the bearer of the lamella is identifying himself to the guardians of the underworld. With an infinitive, this goal might be expressed as ὄργια [ποιεῖν / τελεῖν], as in I. Didyma 360 ποιήσασα τὰ μυστήρια (also 382), 459 μυστήρια πάντα ἐπετέλεσεν. Or “show” the rites,⁷ as a priest does in IG II² 3639 τελετάς ἀνέφηνε καὶ ὄργια πάννουχα μύσταις, 3661 ὄργια πᾶσιν ἔφαινε (both

3) As Parker and Stamatopoulou (13) finally preferred; criticized by Ferrari and Prauscello (194).

4) Despite τε... καὶ and the plural θιάσους (the poet could as well have written θιάσον μυστῶν). See Parker and Stamatopoulou 12; Ferrari and Prauscello 198–201; Furley 33.

5) See in detail Ferrari and Prauscello.

6) E. g. Aesch. Ag. 160 Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ’ ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ’ αὐτῷ φίλον κεκλημένω.

7) Considered but not accepted by Parker and Stamatopoulou: φαίνειν or φράζειν or δεῖξαι.

Eleusinian); in Meleager (quoted below), ἐκφαίνειν. But the implication, as the editors saw, would again be that the owner of the lamella was a priest or with some lesser degree of authority (Ferrari and Prauscello), and not a mere initiate. Initiates ordinarily “share in” a rite rather than celebrate it.⁸

When compared with the other lamellae, the crucial novelties of this brief text, as the editors stressed (24–27), are the absence of instructions to the initiate, the explicit identification of the gods of these mysteries, and the address to a single unnamed figure (rather than the guardians or the gods of the underworld). The editors suspect that the unnamed addressee is Persephone.⁹ This is supported by the common picture of the judgment of the dead, and by two of the lamellae from Thurii that conclude “now I come as a suppliant to chaste Persephone, so that she, favorable, send me to the seats of the blessed”, ὡς με πρόφρων πέμψηι ἔδρας ἐς εὐαγέων.¹⁰ But in all these the underworld setting is made explicit. The anonymity of the addressee in the new lamella opens another possibility.

What I suggest for line 1 is ἔχω ὄργια [κρύπτειν], “I am able to keep the rites secret”. That was the fundamental expectation for any initiate.¹¹ This phrase, and in this metrical position, is used in an epigram of Meleager addressed to Bacchus:¹²

ἦ προδότας κάπιστος ἔφυς, τεὰ δ' ὄργια κρύπτειν
αὐδῶν ἐκφαίνειν τὰμὰ σὺ νῦν ἐθέλεις.

You are truly a betrayer and faithless: you who command me to keep
your rites secret now want me to expose my own.

The same sentiment begins an oracle of Apollo of Claros quoted by Macrobius (1,18,20): ὄργια μὲν δεδαῶτας ἐχρῆν νηπευθεῖα

8) E. g. IG V.1 1390.45 μὴ μετεχέτω τῶν μυστηρίων, Plut. Mor. 761F τῆς ἐν Ἐλευσίνοι τελετῆς μετασχεῖν. But contrast Hdt. 4,79,2, someone being initiated ἐπετέλεσε τὴν τελετήν.

9) So too Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 151, cf. 158; Ferrari and Prauscello 193. Parker and Stamatopoulou (7) note that only two lamellae have a singular addressee; but in both texts, they are named – Persephone and Despotes.

10) PEG II nos. 489, 490. For the sending of souls compare Od. 4,564 ἀθάνατοι πέμψουσιν ὅθι ξανθὸς Ῥαδάμανθυς, echoed at GVI 1983,17 ψυχὰς προὔπεμπε ὅθι ξανθὸς Ῥαδάμανθυς (Damascus, III A. D.).

11) E. g. ὄργια ... ἄρρητα (Eur. Bacch. 470–472), ἡ κρύψις ἡ μυστική (Strab. 10,3,9), γνῶσιν τὴν ἐπικεκρυμμένην μυστικῶν (Clem. Alex. Strom. 5,10, PG 9 97B), etc.

12) Anth.Gr. 12,119,5–6 (Gow / Page, Hellenistic Epigrams: Meleager 20).

κεύθειν, “those who have learned the not-to-be-inquired-into rites must keep them concealed”; the restoration [κεύθειν] also would be possible in the new lamella. In the Dionysiac epigram from Halicarnassus we have:¹³

καὶ σιγᾶν ὅ τι κρυπτόν ἐπιστάμενος καὶ ἀυτεῖν
ὅσσα θέμις, στείχης ὄργια ταῦτα μαθών.

Knowing how to be silent about what is secret and to speak out what is permitted, go your way, having learned these rites.

But a restoration of this sense calls into question the function of this lamella. Does it belong with the others? The poem that they present, in eight to sixteen verses, tells the initiate what to say to the guardians of the better afterlife. This one is complete – there is empty space above and below: the text in effect claims to be sufficient for its purpose.¹⁴ The texts intended to guide the dead, at their fullest, instruct the initiate where to go and stipulate two things to be said to the guardians: entitlement by virtue of initiation (I am child of earth, etc.) and need (I am thirsty). The statement “I have seen / performed the rites” would be consistent with the first of these two, though rather prosaic. If κρύπτειν is right, the sentiment in the new lamella is unparalleled in the others: I can keep the secret. More important, such a declaration, a promise for the future rather than a claim of past experience, does not seem pertinent to the dead and the guardians of access. The implication is that this lamella is not funerary at all, but a living initiate’s token of admission to a celebration of mysteries.

The plural *θιάσους* may speak against this interpretation (the word does not occur in other lamellae).¹⁵ But plural of this collective noun appears sometimes to serve for singular, in particular at Eur. Bacch. 530–532 (με ... θιάσους ἔχουσαν). The plural at Ar. Ran. 156–157 (θιάσους εὐδαίμονας / ἀνδρῶν γυναικῶν) may imply distinct *θίασοι* of males and females; in the lamella the plural perhaps reflects such a division at a ceremony of the living.

13) Merkelbach / Stauber, *Steinepigramme I* 01/12/09; PEG II 581.

14) Parker and Stamatopoulou (26) consider the possibility that the text is an extract from an unknown version of the funerary poem. PEG II nos. 478–484 are brief (3–4 lines) extracts from the Orphic poem, stating need and identity – lines which, unlike ours, are attested in the fuller versions of the poem.

15) Parker and Stamatopoulou (27) remarked “an interesting ‘congregational’ vision (μυστῶν θιάσους) of the initiate’s future in the afterlife”.

If this token served the living rather than the dead, the restoration ὄργια [ποιεῖν] (vel sim.) should again be considered: for the lamella might serve to identify and certify a provider of mysteries. The Ptolemaic government was moved to insist upon certification of those who performed initiation.¹⁶ But this seems less likely, if only for statistical reasons, as initiates far outnumbered initiators. The officiating initiator would likely be known to the doorkeeper, and perhaps would not be expected to bow to a doorkeeper's authority.

If we restore ὄργια [κρύπτειν], the lamella can be reckoned a σύμβολον or σύνθημα,¹⁷ shown or read aloud at the door.¹⁸ Throughout history, secret societies have had various means of identifying their proper members – a password, an article of clothing, a secret handshake. This is a necessary feature for preserving the integrity of the group.

We have occasional testimony to proofs required in order to attend a celebration of mysteries. Plautus may take the evidence for a password back to his source in probably the fourth century B. C. (Mil. Glor. 1016): *cedo signum, si harunc Baccharum es*. Firmicus Maternus makes a more general claim: *habent enim propria signa propria responsa, quae illis in istorum sacrilegiorum coetibus diaboli tradidit disciplina*.¹⁹ These *signa* and *responsa* evidently were oral, and he quotes one example: ἐκ τυμπάνου βέβρωκα, ἐκ κυμβάλου πέπωκα, γέγονα μύστης Ἄττεως. A variant is known from Greek sources: ἐκ τυμπάνου ἔφαγον, ἐκ κυμβάλου ἔπιον, ἐκερνοφόρησα· ὑπὸ τὸν παστὸν ὑπέδυν.²⁰ These first-person assertions are of about

16) Lenger, *Corpus des ordonnances des Ptolémées* 29.

17) On these see Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 151–160; W. Müri, *Griechische Studien* (Basel 1976) 37–42. From Pherae comes a short lamella listing symbola – but these are unambiguously for the dead (PEG II no. 493): σύμβολα ἀνδρικοκεαιδόθυρσον, ἀνδρικοκεαιδόθυρσον· Βριμῶ, Βριμῶ· εἰσιθ(ι) ἱερὸν λειμώνα· ἀποινος γὰρ ὁ μύστης. Cf. PMG IV 945, quoting σύμβολα μυστικά φράζω. On an altar in late ancient Athens, the dedicator “inscribed secret symbols of the rite of taurobolium”, τελετῆς συνθήματα κρυπτά χαραξας ταυροβόλου (IG II² 4841 = Vermaseren, *CCCA* II 389 with photographs). The two words occur in PEG II no. 578,23,26 (context largely lost).

18) The poetic injunction θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε, βέβηλοι opens several versions of a cosmogony poem: PEG II nos. 1, 3, 377, 378.

19) De err. prof. rel. 18,1; commentary: G. Heuten (Brussels 1938) 177–178, A. Pastarino (Florence 1956) 183–190.

20) Schol. Pl. Gorg. 497c; Clem. Alex. Protr. 2,15,3; Eus. Praep. Evang. 2,3,18 (PEG II no. 589).

the same length as ours, though not metrical. Apuleius (Apol. 55) seems to know physical tokens: *sacrorum pleraque initia in Graecia participavi. eorum quaedam signa et monumenta tradita mihi a sacerdotibus sedulo conseruo.*²¹

I suggest therefore that the new lamella was meant to be shown and read aloud by the initiate upon arrival at the ritual site. Heuten urged that the utterance cited by Firmicus was to be used both in life, to identify oneself for a ritual event, and in death, to gain entrance to the blessed realm. The same ambiguity can be urged for this lamella – hence its eventual inclusion among grave goods.

This function, admission to a ceremony, helps to explain the most striking feature of the lamella. The “Orphic” funerary poem does not identify the cult into which the bearer was initiated; this is why the lamellae have occasioned so much debate about whose mysteries they reflect. That poem, in its several varieties and widely distributed, seems to have been generic – any initiate to any cult might readily make use of it, hence its wide dissemination.²² By contrast, the declaration quoted by Firmicus suggests use by a living initiate in that it specifies the cult. The new lamella, by naming the cult into which the initiate had been admitted, certifies more than the fact of initiation: if a text was to serve to admit a living initiate to a particular rite, the proper cult had to be identified.

Thus I propose for the lamella:

πέμπε με πρὸς μυστῶ(ν) θιάσους· ἔχω ὄργια [κρύπτειν,]
Δήμητρος χθονίας (τε) τέλη καὶ Μητρὸς Ὀρεί[ας].

Send me to the congregations of the initiates. I can keep the rites secret,
the ceremonies of Demeter Chthonia and the Mountain Mother.

The rites occurred in an intimate space, whether a temple or a private house.²³ If as I suggest the new lamella was first intended to

21) A. Dumont, *De plumbeis apud Graecos tesseris* (Paris 1870) 96–97, argued that some lead tesseræ from Attica were entrance tokens for Eleusinian epoptai, the higher level of initiates; one has ἔποψ(ις), three others δα or δαδ(οὔχος). This is doubtful; ἔποψις is not ἔποπτεία, and δαιδούχος needs its iota.

22) Cf. Parker and Stamatopoulou’s “no unified movement” (24). Several other lamellae, not from the Orphic poem, specify a Bacchic context: εὐαγής ἱερὰ Διονύσου Βακχίου εἰμὶ Ἀρχεβού[λ]η Ἀντιδώρου (PEG II no. 496n; cf. 474, 485–486).

23) In IG XII, 7 75, [ιε]ρή Μητρὸς Ὀρέης ἡ οἰκίη (IV B. C.?).

serve a living initiate, the first word might mean not “send” but “escort”, as was common.²⁴ A ceremonious entry would be implied, as the initiate was led to join those who had already arrived. Certainly the participants did not arrive at the place of the rites all at once. As each did arrive, a solemn gesture of escort may then have served to bring him or her to join the gathering group. If this is correct, the new text offers a precious testimony about one moment of a mystery celebration.²⁵

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24) See LSJ s.v. πέμπω III; J. Diggle, ICS 2 (1977) 112.

25) My best thanks to Professor B. Manuwald for several improvements.