

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE USE OF ΤΕΛΕΤΗ IN INSCRIPTIONS

A complete overview of the use of the word τελετή in inscriptions has long been a desideratum. In his review of Zijderveld's dissertation, Otto Kern already expressed his regret that this important work did not provide a systematic review of all the epigraphical evidence.¹ Subsequent studies have also focused almost exclusively on the literary evidence.² This chapter, therefore, gives an overview of where and how τελετή is used in inscriptions. The next chapter will do the same for the term ὄργια.

It will not come as a surprise that τελετή in inscriptions, as in literary testimonia, often refers to mysteries. As seen in Part One, however, the word τελετή was also used in a variety of other meanings. While the distinction between the different shades of meaning of τελετή is not always clear-cut, I believe it is safe to arrange the epigraphical attestations into the following six categories:³

- A. Religious ritual or ceremony
- B. Religious festival
- C. Eleusinian mysteries
- D. Other mysteries
- E. Taurobolium
- F. The goddess Telete

Within these categories, I have arranged the inscriptions geographically according to their place of origin.

¹ O. Kern, *Gnomon* 15 (1939) 198–202, 200.

² See especially G. Sfameni Gasparro, Ancora sul termine telete: osservazioni storico-religiose, in: *Filologia e Forme Letterarie: Studi offerti a Francesco della Corte*, ed. C. Quarta, vol. 5 (1987) 137–152; F.M.J. Waanders, *The History of τέλος and τελέω in Ancient Greek* (1983) 156–158 §§ 153–155; K. Dowden, Grades in the Eleusinian Mysteries, *RHR* 197 (1980) 409–427.

³ My primary aim is not so much to achieve a logically pure and consistent classification as to present the material in a clear and orderly manner, grouping together inscriptions where the term refers to the same (or similar) religious phenomenon.

A. Religious ritual or ceremony

- 1 Fragmentary cult regulation, found in the so-called Theseum at the edge of the Athenian Agora. *IG II² 1234*. End of the fourth century BC. Lines 3–5; 8–10:

[-----]ειν κατὰ τὰ π[άτρια -----] |⁴ [. τὴν τελε]τὴν ποεῖν ἐν
τ[-----] | [-----]ας τὸ διαγεγραμ[μένον -----].

(to perform/sacrifice vel sim.) according to the traditions ... and to perform the *telete* in the ... this document ...

[----- ἔ]καστος αὐτῶν [δραχμὰς-----] | [-- ἐὰν δ]ὲ τὴν
τελετὴν μ[ὴ ποιήσωσι -----] |¹⁰ [-----]τεισάτω ἕκασ[τος
αὐτῶν -- δραχμὰς --]

Each of them (shall pay X drachmas ... and if they will not perform) the *telete* ... each of them shall pay (X drachmas).

For the expression τελετὴν πο(ι)εῖν, cf. *LSCG* 103.B.11. Cf. also θυσίαν ποιεῖν (e.g. *LSCG* 59.15; 6.10?; 38.8?; *LSAM* 2.10; 36.22?; *LSS* 85.24–25?), παννυχίδα ποεῖν (e.g. *LSCG* 33.B.32; *LSS* 6.13).

From Koehler's identification of the document as a decision of a *pagus* or *gens*, Zijderveld inferred that we may have a clan cult here;⁴ he recalls that the special ritual of a separate clan is indeed called τελετή, cf. *Dem. Neaer.* 104. The wording of the document, however, suggests that it is just an ordinary cult regulation; if it was indeed set up by a gens, this would, in my opinion, be significant only insofar as it would confirm that cult practice at clan level could be called τελετή. It would not necessarily shed much light on the nature of the rituals involved.

- 2 Fragmentary ephebic decree from Athens. *IG II² 1042*. Ca. 41/0 BC (archonship of Nikandros).

In line c.14, the decree mentions that the ephebes had participated (?) [τ]ῶν τε τελετῶν ἀπασ[ῶν ὧ]ν πάτριον ἦν (“in all the traditional religious ceremonies”). Clinton accurately observed that these *teletai* “ought to include non-initiatory cults, since the only initiation in which the ephebes took part occurred at the Eleusinian Mysteries.”⁵

⁴ Zijderveld, *Τελετή* (1934) 36.

⁵ K. Clinton, Stages of initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries, in: M.B. Cosmopoulos (ed.), *Greek Mysteries* (2003) 54.