Leitourgia and Related Terms

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The idea that the man of means is obligated to expend some of his wealth and time in service to the community is common in almost all periods of history. The services performed vary with era and area. So does the nature of the compulsion: sometimes it is a statutory obligation, sometimes a less formal (though not therefore necessarily less effective) social requirement or expectation.

In the ancient world it was the Greek city-state which extended the concept of compulsory public service beyond military duty and menial labor. The Roman Empire, in its turn, perpetuated this Greek institution, expanding it into a full-fledged system of local administration.

The generic Greek term for such compulsory public service was λειτουργία. Beginning in the fourth century B.C. (as we shall see below) the term was occasionally applied to religious service, and it is in that sense that the word survives in the modern languages of the Western world.

Leitourgia as an institution is discussed in the appropriate places in all the principal handbooks and encyclopedias of classical antiquity. But oddly enough, none of these customary reference works goes into very much detail on the semantic history of the term λειτουργία and its compounds and derivatives. The only recent study of that kind — and this must surely come as a surprise to most classicists and ancient historians — is that by H. Strathmann (with a section on rabbinical literature by R. Meyer) in G. Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* IV, 4 (1938) 221-38. While this excellent presentation includes representative citations from Greek literature, inscriptions, and papyri, its emphasis is naturally on the Bible and related writings. With Strathmann’s analysis as a base, the present article will examine the forms and semantic
history of the *leitourgia* word-group as it appears in secular Greek literature, inscriptions, and papyri of all periods; and will conclude with an inventory of all occurrences in the writers and inscriptions of the classical period, during which the semantic evolution began and was in essence completed.

I. The *Leitourgia* Word Group

The following terms are found:

\[ \text{άλειτουργητός} \]
leitourgéw and compounds with \( \text{ἀντι-}, \ \text{ἀπο-}, \ \text{κατα-}, \ \text{προσ-}, \ \text{συλ-} \), and perhaps \( \text{ἐκ} \)
leitourgémma
leitourgéssia and a compound with \( \text{ά-} \).
leitourgéssimos
leitourgia and a compound with \( \text{ά-} \).
leitourgiakós
leitourgiakós
leitourgioun
leitourgós and a compound with \( \text{ύπο-} \).

II. Etymology

The earliest pertinent text is Herodotus 7.197: \( \text{λήτουν δὲ καλέωσι τὸ πρυτανήμου οἱ Ἀχαιοῖ} \). There is nothing further on the subject in the ancient writers till we come to Plutarch, who connects Latin *lictor* with Greek *leitourgyós* (an erroneous but at the time apparently popular view), remarking \( \text{ὅτι γὰρ λήτουν ἄχρι νῦν τὸ δημόσιον ἐν πολλοῖς τῶν Ἑλλήνων νόμον γέγραπται οὐδένα, ἡς ἐπος εὐπείν, λέληθε} \). The same definition of \( \text{λήτουν} \) (\( \text{λη-, λη-} \)) is found in three *grammatici* of the imperial period — Ammonius, a contemporary of Plutarch, who cites Didymus (first century B.C.) as his source; the second-century lexicographer Moeris; and Ulpi-
anus, the third-century commentator on Demosthenes⁴—and it is recorded in the Byzantine lexicons,⁵ one of which incorporates in its definition also the term προυταείον, culled presumably from the Herodotus text cited above.⁶

In short, it was the established view in antiquity that the words of the λειτουργία group were compounded of the elements “public” + “work”, to signify “work for the people”, hence “service to the state”. Modern scholars find nothing to quarrel with in this. Most present-day etymologists, however, regard the origin of λῆσσ (λαός) itself as undetermined.⁷

⁴Ammonius, Peri δημοσίων καὶ διαφόρων λέξεων, s.v.: λητουργείς διὰ τοῦ η, καὶ λειτουργείς διὰ τοῦ ι, διαφέρειν φησι Δίδυμος εν ὑπομνήματι δευτέρας (L.-έρω) Πλάτων. τὸ μὲν γὰρ λητουργεῖ, τὸ τῷ δήμῳ ὑπηρετεῖν λήτων γὰρ φασι τὸ δημόσιον. λήτων ἄμφετετερον [this is obviously a quotation from epic poetry — cf. Homer Odyssey 15.467]. τὸ δὲ λητουργεῖν, κακὰ λέγειν (λείτ- is here not the iotaized spelling of λείτ-, but a different word: cf. λαοργός, λειοργός (λεύ-), λειτο(ν)ργός, λιωργός, on which see esp. Hesychius, s.v.).

Mocis, Lexic. s.v.: λητουργείς διὰ τοῦ η Ἀττικοῦ, διὰ δὲ τῆς εἰ διδοθέγγον "Ελλήνες λήτων γὰρ τὸ δημόσιον."

Ulpianus, Schol. in Demosth. 20, p. 512 Dindorf: λεῖτων δὲ ἐκάλουσον οἱ παλαιοὶ τὸ δημόσιον, οὗ τιν εὐπειραγεῖν τὸ εἰς τὸ δημόσιον ἐργάζεσθαι ἔλεγον.

Hesychius, s.v.: λητουργείς λητουργείς λήτων γὰρ δημόσιον.

λήτων δημόσιον.

Zonaras, s.v.: λειτουργείς τὸ ὑπηρετεῖν, παρὰ τὸ λήτων, δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ δημόσιον. ἀπὸ οὖν τοῦ ἐργον καὶ λήτων λητουργείς, καὶ κατὰ συστολὴν τοῦ η εἰς τι λητουργεῖν, καὶ κατὰ συναίρεσιν τοῦ η καὶ τι λητουργεῖν. Tittman (Leipzig 1808) brackets the last phrase: cf. n. 6.

Suidas: s.v.: λειτουργείς κυρίως ἡ δημοσία ὑπηρεσία: παρὰ τὸ λήτων καὶ τὸ ἐργον.

Thomas Magister p. 227, 17 Ritsch: οἱ μὲν λῃτ(ου)ργεῖς διὰ τοῦ η, ἣτοι δὲ τὰ λήτων ἐργον ἔχων λήτων γὰρ λέγεται τὰ δημόσια: οἱ δὲ διὰ διδοθέγγον.

Bekker, Anecd. gr. I, p. 277: λητουργεῖν οἱ παλαιοὶ Ἀθηναίοι διὰ τοῦ η ἔλεγον λητουργεῖν λητός (sic) γὰρ ἐστὶ δημοσίων ἀρχεῖον [this word is intrusive: cf. supra, n. 2]. οἱ οὖν ἐν τῷ λητῷ ἐργαζόμενοι οὕτω λειτουργοῦσι οὕτε ὅπερ ὅσον διὰ τῆς εἰ διδοθέγγον λέγεται, διδοθέγγον λέγεται.

Etym. Magnum, s.v.: λειτουργός, δὲ τοῖς διοικηταῖς ὑπουργῶν καὶ διακόησι. τὸ γὰρ προυταείον, ἥτοι τοῦ δημόσιον, λήτων ἐκαλεῖτο. ἐκ τοῦ λήτων οὖν καὶ τοῦ ἐργον γίνεται κατὰ συστολὴν λητουργεῖν καὶ κατὰ συναίρεσιν τοῦ η καὶ τοῦ εἰς ταῖς εἰ διδοθέγγον καὶ λητουργεῖν, τὸ ὑπηρετεῖν.

Thus E. Boisacq, Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque⁴ (Heidelberg 1950) and J. B. Hofmann, Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Griechischen (Munich 1949) s.v. λαός (so too L. Meyer, Handbuch der griechischen Etymologie IV [Leipzig 1902] 498). A.Juret, Dictionnaire étymologique grec et latin (Mâcon 1942) 178-79, associates λαός and λειτουργία with λέγειν and other Indo-European words constituting the semantic category “assembler, groupe social, tas, multitude,” reasserting herein an antiquated view that dates back at least to the eighteenth century (cf. e.g. J. D. van Lennep, Etymologicum linguæ graecæ [Utrecht 1790]).
III. Spelling

In koinē Greek the spelling was λαιτ-, which vulgar speech iotacized to λιτ-. But postclassical writers were aware that classical Athens wrote λητ-. When and how did the change take place?

Two views of the change are found in the ancient grammarians and lexicographers cited in notes 4-6. One view was that ηι shortened to ει, which was then amalgamated into the diphthong ευ. The other view appears to have been that the progression was ηι > η > ει.

In the light of epigraphical and papyrological evidence available to modern scholars, the processes of the vocalic and orthographic changes involved can be reconstructed more completely, viz.: presumably original disyllabic ηι > diphthong ηι, which came to be pronounced ει, then written η or ει, later pronounced ι and sometimes written τ (iotacism). Before dealing specifically with the λειτουργία word-group, it will be useful to summarize the evidence on these vowel changes in general.

ηι > η

Inscriptional evidence for the silencing of the iota in ηι begins, at least in Ionic, as early as the sixth century B.C. The change is in evidence in Attica in the fifth century, and in Thessaly in the fourth century. Subsequently it is visible also in inscriptions from Pergamum and Magnesia, and in papyri from Ptolemaic Egypt.

ηι > ει

Inscriptions from Athens and elsewhere (e.g. Amphipolis, Eretria, Olynthus, Oropus) show signs of this change from ca. 400

8Cf. supra, nn. 5 and 6. There was also minor dialectal variation in the vowel of the second syllable. IG VII, 3083 (Boeotia, third century B.C.) has ω. IG II2, 1140 and 1147 (Attica, fourth century B.C.) have ο, but omicron frequently represented ου in inscriptions of that period.

9For a brief summary on these transformations of ηι, cf. M. Lejeune, Traité de phonétique grecque2, (Paris 1955) 196. The essential evidence is cited below.

10Bibliography: E. Schwyzer, Griechische Grammatik (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft II.1) I (Munich 1939) 193, 200-2; E. Mayser, Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemaerzeit I (Berlin and Leipzig 1923) 74-80, 87-92, 122-28; L. R. Palmer, A Grammar of Post-Ptolemaic Papyri I (London 1946) 1-3. These standard works give summaries of the relevant data and bibliographies of earlier specialized studies; to the latter should be added B. Bondesson, De sonis et formis titulorum Milesiorum Didymaeorumque (Lund 1936), esp. pp. 55-59.

11Linguistic evidence points to the disappearance of the iota in "Inlaut" already in prehistoric times: cf. Schwyzer, op. cit. 200.
It is impossible to tell how much earlier the change actually began, because in the earlier period E represented both ε and η in most Greek inscriptions. The earliest clear case is IG II², 1414, which has κλήις in line 44 and κλέις in line 47.

η = ει

Inscriptions and papyri show the equivalence of these two sounds and the interchange of these spellings from the third century B.C. on.

ει = ι

Argive and Boeotian inscriptions show signs of iotacism as early as the fifth century B.C. Attic inscriptions and papyri show the tendency fully established in the third century B.C., as do inscriptions of the second century B.C. from Delphi, Magnesia, and Pergamum.

The above changes are well exemplified by the leitourgia word-group, as can be seen at a glance from the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPELLING</th>
<th>DOCUMENT</th>
<th>PLACE AND DATE</th>
<th>LATEST OCCURRENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ηητ-</td>
<td>IG II², 1140</td>
<td>Athens, 386 B.C.</td>
<td>PSI 435 Egypt, 258/7 B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ηητ-</td>
<td>SIG³, 344 = Tcos, 303 B.C.</td>
<td>Sardis VII, 2 Sardis, ca. 225/175 B.C.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ηητ-</td>
<td>Welles, Royal Corr. 3</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ηητ-</td>
<td>IG II², 305</td>
<td>Athens, before 336 B.C.</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ηητ-</td>
<td>PPetrie II, 4(9) Egypt, 255 B.C.</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** These spellings continued through antiquity to modern times.

In order to illustrate the spelling variations which took place in the living language, the chart above is compiled exclusively from contemporary documents — i.e. inscriptions and papyri. It is clear from these that λειτ- was the standard spelling from about 300 B.C. on, and that λητ- and λητ- disappeared from ordinary usage in the next hundred years or so. But copyists continued for a few centuries longer to reproduce the older spelling in works of literature. The latest such survivals¹² are found in the papyrus MS of Aristotle's

¹²Not counting, of course, the Byzantine lexicographers, who record these long-vanished forms as a matter of philological history.
Constitution of Athens, a copy made ca. 100 A.D., which has λητ- in all occurrences (once, in § 56, corrected from λειτ-); and in British Museum Papyrus 132, a first-century copy of Isocrates Or. 8, which has λητ-, 13 as well as λειτουργιών corrected from λειτουργεῖον, and probably λιτ- 14 A fragment of Hyperides written in the late second or early third century shows only λειτ-, 15 and an early-third-century copyist of Demosthenes Or. 21 consistently writes λιτ-. 16

An unfortunate by-product of recent times is worth noting. Ever since it became apparent that the older spelling persisted in Attic inscriptions through most of the fourth century, 17 modern editors of classical authors earlier than Aristotle have generally printed λητ- where the codices, being of late date, have λειτ-. Whether this is necessary or even justifiable in all cases is, to begin with, questionable, since (as we have seen) in the same body of Attic inscriptions the spelling λειτ- appears already in the mid-fourth century and other instances of ητ > ei go back at least to ca. 400 B.C. But, what is worse, some editors have not always been consistent in emending to λητ-. The result — most apparent in the Attic orators, who use the leitourgia terminology most frequently — has been to deposit a legacy of enormous confusion in the editions of the last seventy-five years. To cite but a few examples among many: In his Andocides, Blass prints λητουργεῖν in 1.132 (codd. λειτ-), but leaves λειτουργία in 4.42. In his Isocrates he has changed the spelling in some places and left λειτ- in others, without explanation; and Preuss' Index Isocrateus faithfully reproduces Blass' spellings. In his Demosthenes Blass consistently prints λητ- (but κλείς, not κλῆς!), but in only five of the more than one hundred occurrences does he indicate in the apparatus that the codices have λειτ-; the unwary or unwarned reader is thus left with the false impression

13Similarly, ληστας in a first-century copy of Hyperides (British Museum Papyrus 108 + 115), but ληστου in the second-century Didymus scholia (PBerol. 9780). Cf. the first- and second-century authors quoted in note 4, and Quintilian 1.7.17: [iota] quibusdam etiam interponunt, ut in ΔΗΣΤΗΙ, quia etymologia ex divisione in tris syllabes facta desideret eam litteram.

14Journal of Philology 30 (1907) 6, 11, 74.

15POxy 1607, line 20.

16POxy 1378, lines 8, 18, 19.

17The latest is IG II², 417, which dates from some time after 330 B.C.
that in the other instances the codices have λητ-. In the Budé edition of Isocrates, Mathieu and Brémond mostly printed λητ- in Volume I (1928), but in Volumes II (1938) and III (1942) they abandoned this practice, apparently deeming it unnecessary, and reverted to the λειτ- of the codices.

IV. Semantics

When the term leitourgia first appears in Greek literature it refers to specific state services required of wealthy citizens and residents. At Athens, to which most of the evidence of the classical period pertains, the major liturgies were equipping and manning a trireme of the fleet (trierarchia), and providing a chorus for a dramatic festival (choregia); less important — and less expensive — were a number of other functions, mainly in connection with religious ceremonies (e.g. gymnasiarchia, lampadarchia).

From this original use as a political terminus technicus (a),18 the term began, toward the end of the fifth century and increasingly in the fourth,19 to be used in the broadened sense (b) of any service to the community. The line of distinction between meanings a and b is sometimes difficult to discern, especially in the rhetorical language of the orators; examples will be noted below.

From meanings a and b leitourgia began in the fourth century to be used in a still more generalized sense (c), viz. to designate a service of any kind, for any beneficiary, not necessarily for the benefit of the community.20

Within the generalized sense c, there developed two important specializations of meaning:

1. Cultic service to divinity. This meaning, which also makes

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18The designations a-d used in this section correspond to those of Strathmann, loc. cit. 223-25.

19Strathmann's generally excellent analysis is defective on this point. Finding meaning b "ganz besonders . . . in den Papyri" (p. 224), he cites examples only from papyri, none earlier than the second century B.C.

20As Strathmann expresses it (ibid.), the λητ- element becomes "völlig verblasst" in popular usage. The verb χορηγέω underwent similar generalization: cf. Liddell-Scott-Jones, s.v.
its first appearance in fourth-century literature,\textsuperscript{21} was carried through the Septuagint into Christian usage, where it still remains today.

\textit{e}\textsuperscript{22} — engineer or sapper service in the military forces. The earliest extant examples of this meaning are in \textit{PCairo Zenon 59015 verso} (\textit{Sammelbuch 6782}) and \textit{PHibeh 96}, both of 259/8 B.C.

The following list shows the distribution of the different meanings in the extant occurrences of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.\textsuperscript{23} Under \textit{a} and \textit{b} the texts refer to Athens unless otherwise noted; instances of general language, specific to no particular city, are indicated by the symbol *. Passages which illustrate the broadening in sense from \textit{a} to \textit{b} are identified thus:

\textit{†} — The passage uses the term in sense \textit{a} with an overtone of \textit{b}, or vice versa.

\textit{‡} — The same passage uses the term once in sense \textit{a} and again in sense \textit{b}.

\textbf{Sense a}

\textbf{FIFTH CENTURY}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Antiphon 5.77† (Mytilene and Athens)
  \item Isocrates 18.58, 60, 64
  \item Lysias 20.23; 21.5, 12, 13, 16, 19‡, 23; 32.24
\end{itemize}

\textbf{FOURTH CENTURY}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Aeschines 1.97, 101
  \item Andocides 1.132†; 4.42
  \item Aristotle, \textit{Ath. Pol.} 27.3, 56.3; \textit{Oec.} 1347 a 12, 14, 1352 a 4(Caria); \textit{Pol.*} 1309 a 18, 1320 b 4†; \textit{Rhet.} 1399 a 34\textsuperscript{24}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{21}Here again as in \textit{b} (cf. \textit{supra} n. 19), Strathmann cites no occurrences earlier than the second century B.C. He appears to regard Aristotle, \textit{Politics} 7, 1330a8-13 as a mixture of meanings \textit{a} and \textit{d}. He ignores Demosthenes 21.56. There is also a clearcut case in \textit{PSI} 435 of 258/7 B.C., on which cf. A. Deissmann, \textit{Light from the Ancient East} (London 1927) 154-158 = \textit{Licht vom Osten}\textsuperscript{4}, pp. 123-125.

\textsuperscript{22}Strathmann does not make a separate category of this meaning, though he remarks (p. 224) that it, like \textit{d}, is a "Spezialfall" of \textit{c}.

\textsuperscript{23}The material of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, already collected, will be the subject of a separate article. In searching the sources I had the welcome assistance of Dr. M. Reinhold for the literature and Dr. R. K. Sherk for the inscriptions. Their assistance was made possible by a grant from the American Philosophical Society, which is here acknowledged with gratitude.

\textsuperscript{24}Cf. the anonymous commentator, Berlin ed. Vol. XXI (2), pp. 323 §15, 325 §17.
Demosthenes 5.8; 18.91 (Byantium, Perinthus), 104, 108, 267; 19.282; 20.1, 8, 18–23, 2825, 40, 126–130, 151; 21.11, 14, 5628, 61, 108, 126, 151–155, 158, 165, 167, 169, 171, 189, 225; 25.29, 76, 78; 27.64; 28.3, 17, 24; 29.24; 36.39–40, 42; 38.25–26; 39.9; 42.3, 21–23, 25; 45.66, 78; 47.48, 54; 50.9, 21, 31, 39–40, 58, 66; 51.7, 17; 52.26; 59.117; prooem. 48.327
Isaeus 3.80; 4.27; 5.29, 36, 39, 45; 6.38, 60–61, 64; 7.5, 38, 40, 42; 11.40, 48–50; fragg. 22 Thalheim (= 1 Sauppe), 29 Thalheim (= 34 Forster = 130 Sauppe)
Isocrates 8.13†, 20†, 128; 12.145; 15.5, 145–146, 150, 154, 158; 16.32, 35; 19.36 (Siphnus)
Lycurgus, Leocr. 139
Lysias 3.47†; 7.31; 18.7‡; 19.58; 25.12; 26.3–4; 29.4
Theophrastus, Char. 23.7; 26.6
Xenophon, Mem. 2.7.6
IG II2, 30528, 417, 1140, 1147

Sense b

FIFTH CENTURY

Lysias 21.19‡; 31.12, 15

FOURTH CENTURY29

Aeneas Tacticus 13*
Aristotle, Ath. Pol. 29.5†; Eth. Nicom. 1167 b 12; Eth. Eudem. 1242 b 30; Pol. 1272 a 2030 (Crete); Pol.* 1278 a 1231, 1279 a 11, 1291 a 33–3832, 1305 a 532, 1314 b 1432, 1321 a 33
Aristoxenus, frag. 35 Wehrli
Demosthenes 10.28†; 22.65; 24.172; prooem. 14.2
Isaeus 4.2932; frag. 30 (= 35 Forster = 131 Sauppe)
Isocrates 3.56; 7.25
Lysias 18.7‡
Plato, Laws 12, 949C*
FOURTH CENTURY

**Sense e**

Aristotle, \[^{33}\] *Animal. incessu* 711 b 30; *Eth. Nicom.* 1163 a 29; *Eth. Eudem.* 1242 b 17; *Luv. et senect.* 469 a 3; *Oec.* 1343 b 20; *Part. animal.* 650 a 9, 674 b 9, 20, 689 b 29; *Pol.* 1278 a 12\[^{81}\], 1335 b 28

[Demosthenes] 50.35\[^{34}\]

Hyperides, *Lycophr.* App. frag. 1 Colin = *POxy* 1607, lines 20–21

Isocrates 15.156

**Sense d**

FOURTH CENTURY

Aristotle, *Pol.* 1330 a 13\[^{85}\]

Demosthenes 21.56\[^{86}\]

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34Denouncing a well-paid and well-treated trireme crew as *eiswòs ... 'apteleias 'agei tòv voutoumà̂n ev tò vòi leitourgíà̂n*, the language (note especially the underlined words) has all the solemnity of sense a, but it is used here perhaps in sense b, more likely in sense c with possibly an overtone of b.

35Cf. note 30.

36Cf. note 26.