

Glossary

Ἀγαθὸς Δαίμων – (agathos daimon)
the Good Genius to whom a toast was
drunk after dinner.

τὰ Ἄνθεστήρια – (ta Anthesteria) Feast of
Flowers, three days' festival of Dionysus at
Athens in the month Anthesterion

Ἄνθεστηριῶν – (Anthesterion) The name of
the eighth Attic month, answering to the end
of February and the beginning of March

Ἄρχων Βασιλεύς – (archon basileus) at
Athens, the second of the nine magistrates.

Βασίλινα - wife of the Archon Basileus

Γεραραί - priestesses of Dionysus

Διόνυσος - (Dionysos) the wine

Ἑρμῆς Χθόνιος – (Hermes Khthonios)
Hermes of the earth, guide of the
underworld

ἱερός γάμος – (hieros gamos) sacred
marriage/ritual sex, used to promote fertility

τὰ Λήναια – (ta Lenaia) an Athenian festival
held in the month Gamelion (approximately
January) in honor of Dionysos, at which
there were dramatic contests

πανσπερμία – (panspermia)
a mixture of legumes

τὰ Πιθοίγια – (ta Pithoigia) festival at the
opening of casks of new wine, held at the
second day of Anthesteria at Athens

Χοές – (khoes) The Pitcher-feast, from a
liquid measure nearly three quarts, the
second day of the Anthesteria at Athens

Χύτρα – (khytra) a small earthen pot
containing pulses offered to inferior deities
on the third day of the Anthesteria

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Ελληνιον Anthesteria

*“And so hail to you,
Dionysos with your many grapes!
Grant that we joyously reach
this season again
And then after this season
many more years...”*



Introduction

The Anthesteria (τὰ Ανθεστήρια), also called the Older Dionysia, is a three-day festival in the first month of spring (11th through 13th of the month of Anthesterion), rich in symbolism, concerned with fermentation of new wine and the return of Dionysus from the underworld.

It is also about the raising of the spirits of the dead as its name, Anthesteria or to raise by prayer, implies. Since spirits are not allowed in holy places, all sanctuaries remain closed (except for one for Dionysus of the Marshes which is only open on this one day) and all business that requires taking of an oath is suspended until after the third day.

The three days are Pithoigia (day of the opening of the pithoi), Khoes (day of wine pitchers) and Khytrai (day of the pots).



Jar Opening (τὰ Πιθοίγια)

The Pithoigia (sometimes called the day of the Agathos Daimon) is primarily focused on the return of Dionysos and first fruit offerings of wine. At this time, the people pray and make libations, asking Dionysos that the wine for this season not be harmful. Children are crowned with flowers and given gifts (such as toy carts, terracotta animals, and small pitchers of wine) in a solemn ceremony, giving them their first taste of the wine of the symposium and introducing them into society.

On this day, Dionysus returns from the underworld where he has been since the Lēnaia of the previous year. He is called forth by the Basilinna, actually the wife of the Archon Basileus, and her fourteen venerable women (gerarai). The Gerarai are sworn in by the Basilinna by saying, "I sanctify

myself and am pure and holy, from all things which are not purifying and particularly from intercourse with a man, and I shall act as Gerara at the Theoinia and Iobaccheia in the ancestral fashion and at the appropriate times". They call Dionysos forth by saying, "Come, Lord Dionysos, attended by the Graces, into the holy temple of Elis, rushing into the temple with your bull's hoof, venerable bull, venerable bull!"



Wine Jug (Χοές)

Khoes [ho-es], the second day, starts with a procession which includes participants shouting insults while riding on a wagon. In the procession is a wagon shaped like a boat which carries a figure of Dionysos. There are drinking contests where each person has their own two-liter wine jug, called a Khoē, and everyone starts drinking at the same time. The one to finish their jug first wins a cake. Unlike most festivals, nobody shares their food or drink and nobody speaks during the drinking contests.

This is symbolic of the story of a visit from Orestes after he had killed his mother. He must be given food and drink by the rules of hospitality but they could not be shared with one who was polluted by murder. At the end of the drinking contests, the garlands of ivy, worn by each of the participants, are placed around their khoē and given to a priestess as an offering to Dionysus.

At the end of the day, the wife of the king (or the wife of the festival organizer if there is no king) was given in sacred marriage to Dionysus to symbolize Dionysus first introduction of wine into society and to bless the marriages in the community. The actual act performed is unclear.

The wife may have been given to a herm, a priest of Dionysus, or to the king masked as Dionysus. It may have taken place in the marketplace or in the house of the ox-herd. While the "sacred marriage" is taking place, the revelers dance (sedately and elegantly) around a column of Dionysus. This symbol of the presence of Dionysus is created anew at each festival. It consists of a column with masks facing in opposite directions and cloth wrapped around the column to represent the body (in the same manner as modern-day scarecrows). A small table is placed before this column to receive cakes and wine as offerings.



Pots (Χύτραι)

Khytrai [hee-try], the third day, is focused on the spirits of the dead and is symbolic of the pruning away of old vines to make way for new ones. The name refers to natural pots, holes in the ground, used for graves and offerings to the dead. The day includes purification and offerings to the spirits of the dead and to Hermes Khthonios, guide to spirits of the dead. The usual offerings are the polluted water from purifications and a dish of mixed grain, seeds and honey called panspermia. This dish is symbolic of the first meal after the flood and is a traditional offering to the spirits of the dead and to Hermes as a reward for guiding the spirits back to the underworld. It is never shared with the Olympians, not even Dionysus, as it is considered dead man's food. Finally, the dead are told to go back where they came from by saying, "Out of the doors! You kēres; it is no longer Anthesteria".