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Ελληνιον Hellenic Marriage

*“Now let’s delight in drink and fine
talk. What will happen afterwards
is up to the Gods.”*

Theognis



Introduction

What follows is the result of research into the traditional form of a Hellenic wedding. For modern purposes, wedding couples will need to make modifications for modern realities and alternative lifestyles. While one of the historical duties of Hellenic priesthood was to officiate at weddings, our modern organization requires clergy only to fulfill an advisory position. On the other hand, they are allowed to officiate at a wedding as long as they meet local legal requirements.



Betrothal (ἡ Ἐγγύη)

The marriage ceremony starts with a public pledge, before witnesses, of the intention to marry. This is accompanied by a bride price, a dowry or an exchange of gifts.

Herodotos provides an example:

“Kleisthenes called for silence and then said to the gathering: ‘Suitors for the hand of my child...I pledge my pais Agariste to Megakles, son of Alkmaeon, according to the laws of the Athenians.’ When Megakles replied that he accepted the pledge, the marriage had been authorized for Kleisthenes.”

Clan Acceptance (τὰ Ἀπατούρια)

At the Apatouria celebration, the groom presents his bride to his relatives for their acknowledgement of her acceptability. In a modern ceremony, this could be an acknowledgement that the couple is

eligible to marry under the local laws. The form of this ritual is very similar to the groom’s coming-of-age ritual before the clan at a previous Apatouria.

Premarital Sacrifice (τὰ Προγάμια)

The bride and groom sacrifice things of childhood (toys, hair, clothing, etc.) as a symbol of the end of their previous lives in preparation for wedded life together. They then each take a prenuptial ritual bath in holy water carried in a loutrophoros from a sacred spring accompanied by hymns to Hymen for the birth of healthy children.



Bridal Blessing Feast (ὁ Μακαρισμός)

A feast is held at the bride’s house, attended only by the bride’s relations and friends. The bride remains veiled and only sits with the women. During the feast, a child offers bread (symbolic of the transition from the wilds to civilization) while saying "They have escaped evil. They have found the good."

Nuptial Procession

At nightfall, the groom conveys the bride, still veiled, on her nuptial cart from the house of her relatives to the new house she will share with her husband. The bride rides between the groom and his best friend and brings a sieve of barley as an offering to the new hearth. In the torchlight procession, more wedding songs are sung and the couple is showered with nuts and dried fruit, symbols of

fertility and wealth. Hermes leads the procession, followed by the nuptial cart, and the mother of the bride bringing torches lit at the hearth of the bride’s father.

Groom’s Feast

Upon reaching the grooms house, the bride is greeted by the groom’s mother who leads her to the hearth and officially hands over the house and places the bride under the protection of the household guardian spirits (Agathos Daemon).

The bride removes her veil and, at a smaller feast, she is offered sweetmeats and dried fruit from the hearth to greet her. Both the bride and the groom are given foods to promote fertility such as cakes of sesame and quinces.



Camping Out (τὰ Ἐπαύλια)

The bride and groom retire to the wedding chamber where they consummate the marriage while the best man guards the door and the wedding guests sing wedding songs (called epithalamia). Over the next two days, wedding gifts arrive while the bride and groom remain secluded. These wedding gifts belong to the couple unlike the bride price and the dowry, which belong to the children or are returned if there are no children and the marriage fails.