

ANTHESTERIA—JANUARY 27, 2002

Summary

Hellenotamiai held its first public festival on Sunday, January 27, 2002, in the home of Lisa and James Robson in Arlington, Virginia. In addition to the Robsons, in attendance were Dennis Dutton, Todd Jackson, Charles Roberts, Sarah Hoppe, and Angel Price. We began at approximately 1:15 p.m. using the ritual enclosed as Attachment 1, as written by Dennis and posted at <http://duttond.topcities.com/Hellenotamiai/html/anthesteria.html>.

Dennis Dutton served as the Priest of Dionysos; Todd Jackson was the Priest of Apollon; James Robson was the sacred herald; and Lisa Robson was the libation bearer.

We gathered outside in the yard to invite our ancestors, then processed up to the house for chernips. Todd then lit the hearth fire and we performed opening libations. James then explained the ritual as outlined under "Presentation."

We told stories of our ancestors, then played Pente while the feast was being prepared. The feast consisted of roast leg of lamb, cabbage with spinach and mint, chickpeas, homemade bread, and pita bread. A portion was set aside as a sacrifice, which was later burned. After the feast, we played a game of Jactus. After everyone had eaten their fill and the games were over, we performed closing libations.

Attachment 1—Ritual Outline

Description

The *Avθeστηρια* (An the steer eea) is a three-day, combination of two festivals held on the 11th through the 13th of the month of *Avθeστηριον* (An the steer eeon). As a small group, we cannot sponsor the full three-day event and ask that participants celebrate the first two days as explained below under "presentation". The ritual below represents the third day of the festival where ancestral spirits are invited in their polluted condition as *μιαροι* (meeare) and cleansed to change them into a purified and honored state as *καθαροι* (kath are). Greek terms are used where an adequate term in English with the same meaning, cannot be found. These are followed by their pronunciation and a glossary follows with full definitions.

Procedure

Gathering

The participants first make offerings (in a spot that's secluded from public view) to request the attendance of the spirits of any of their ancestors who are in a polluted state. Each participant places a cup of honey and water on the ground and turns their back on the chosen location. They then drop some mixed grain (birdseed?) over their shoulder and kick over the cup of honey water. They should then walk away without looking back. This offering is supervised by a priest(ess) of Dionysos, Hermes or Hekate as they have frequent dealings with spirits and will be less effected by what they might see. (They also gather up the empty offering cups.)

Lighting of the Hearth Fire and Purification of the Temenos

As with all rituals, this one starts with a preparation of the participants and the area so that the ritual can be accomplished without unwanted influences. The area should be one that you can have an open flame burning throughout the ritual. (Please, observe all rules of fire safety and ensure there is a means to put out the fire in case of an emergency.) If it isn't practical to have a full hearth fire burning during the whole festival, a symbolic hearth fire (such as a candle) can be substituted.

While the above offerings are being performed, a person acting as a priest(ess) of Απολλον Αλεξικακος (Apollon Alek seek akos) prepares the area by lighting the hearth fire and saying, “I conjure you sacred fire whose mother is Ιστια (Ees tee a) and whose father is Ηΐαιστος (Ee fes tos)”. Next, they define the boundary of the area by sprinkling natron (a mixture of salt and baking soda) in a circle around the area. Finally, they set up a bowl, a clean cloth and a pitcher of holy water at the entrance to the area. (These are for the purification of people as they enter the area.) Once the area is prepared, it is referred to as a τεμενος (temenos) or a sacred temple.

Purification of People (Chernips)

As each person enters the temenos, they wash their hands with the holy water and dry them with the towel provided. While washing their hands, they say in a firm voice, “Εκασ! Εκασ! Εστε βεβηλος!” (Ekas! Ekas! Este veveelos!), meaning “Far off! Far off! Even to the profane!”

Opening Libations

The libations are prepared and served by the οινοχοος (e no hoos), “cup bearer,” or σπονδοφοροι (spond fore), “libation bearer,” and consist of wine mixed with equal parts of water. (If alcohol consumption is a concern, unsweetened grape juice can be substituted for this part of the festival. However, for the first two days of the festival, this substitution makes the “celebration of the new vintage” a bit pointless.) When the libation is mixed, the cup bearer uses a soup ladle to serve each person an equal amount poured into their drinking bowls. The ιερος κηρυξ (ieros kee reeks), or “sacred herald,” leads each libation below and, for each Immortal, all participants pour a little of their libation onto the ground (or into a libation bowl to later be poured on the ground). After the last libation, the participants drink the rest of what is in their drinking bowl as a shared offering.

“Σπονδη (Spon dee) Ιστια (Ees tee a), guardian of hearth’s fire, yours is always the first and the last. Σπονδη (Spon dee) Ερμης Ξθονιος (Erm ees H thon ee os) and Εκητι Ξθονια (Ek ee tee H thon ee a) ψυχοπομποι (psee ho pomp e) since times past. Σπονδη (Spon dee) Απολλον Αλεξικακος (Apollon Alek seek akos) and Διωνυσος (Dee on ee sos) the γοης (go ees), Averter of evil and speaker to ghosts. Sponde Immortal Olympians Come join our hosts.”

Presentation and Activities

The sacred herald explains the ritual as follows, “The Ανθεστηρια (An the steer eea) is a three-day combination of two festivals. The first day, which is called πιθοιγια (peeth e geea) or “jar opening,” is a celebration of the new vintage of wine and of young people reaching the age where they can have their first wine (and make their first libations). The first of each jar of wine is offered as a first fruit offering to the αγαθος δαιμων (aga thos dea mon) or Good Spirit. The second day, which is named χοεις (ho ees) after a three quart wine jug, includes a ribald procession, drinking contests and a ιερος γαμος (eeros gamos) or sacred marriage performed by the organizer of the celebration and his wife (representing the god Διωνυσος (Dee on ee sos) and his wife Αριαδην (Aree ad nee)). The third day, called χυτρα (hee tra) or pots, is an honoring and placating of ancestral spirits. This third day is what we are recreating today.”

“The ancients believed that ancestral spirits were generally helpful to their descendants as long as those descendants were respectful and attended to the needs of their ancestors. When ancestors died with unresolved issues or if the descendants were disrespectful or neglectful, the ancestral spirits turned harmful to the family and those associated with the family. This ritual is a way to cleanse ancestral spirits changing them from μισοι (meeare) or polluted spirits to καθαροι (kath are) or pure spirits. We can tell that our ancestors are polluted or displeased when misfortunes in our lives don’t appear to be a result of things we have done (especially misfortunes related to fertility or that effect the whole family).”

While the μαγειρος (mag eer os) prepare the feast, the participants tell a story about their ancestor that is either humorous or noble. Divination can be performed (in private if necessary) to determine if there is anything the ancestors want their descendant to do to resolve any wrongdoings. After (or during) the storytelling, games are played that are both historical and suitable for the whole family. (This last statement should be given a loose interpretation. Games should be suitable for the whole family because

you're trying to welcome ancestral spirits back into the family. However, many of the games historically played during this ritual were erotic in nature to promote fertility. Use your own judgement.) Possible games include Tabula (a Hellenic form of backgammon), Ludus Latrunculorum (a Roman game similar to Go), Senet (an ancient Egyptian game), Knucklebones (a Greek and Roman version of Jacks), Pente (a modern version of an ancient Greek game) and Jactus (a Roman game of dice, dogs and Goddesses).

Announcement of Feast

When the feast is ready, the sacred herald announces it by saying, "When mirth reigns throughout the town and feasters about the house, sitting in order, listen to a minstrel; when the tables beside them are laden with bread and meat and a wine bearer draws sweet drink from the mixing bowl and fills cups; this I think in my heart to be the most delightsome."

Feast and Sacrifice

The meal consists of roast leg of lamb, pita bread, cabbage with spinach & mint, chickpeas and a sweet wine mixed with water. The wine and water mixture are served by the cup bearer to ensure that each person has the same amount. During the feast, two portions equal to what everyone else is having, are laid out, one for the Immortals (which includes skin, bones and other uneatable parts), the other for ancestral spirits. Afterwards, these portions are completely burned or, if that isn't practical, disposed of in some other manner.

Closing Libations

After the feast, closing libations are performed the same as the opening libations only in reverse order:

"Sponde Immortal Olympians, we thank you for joining our hosts.

Σπονδη (Spon dee) Απολλον Αλεξικακος (Apollon Alek seek akos) and Διωνυσος (Dee on ee sos) the γοης (go ees), Averter of evil and speaker to ghosts. Σπονδη (Spon dee) Ερμης Ξθονιος (Erm ees H thon ee os) and Εκητι Ξθονια (Ek ee tee H thon ee a) ψυχοπομποι (psee ho pomp e) since times past. Σπονδη (Spon dee) Ιστια (Ees tee a), guardian of hearth's fire, yours is always the first and the last."

The sacred herald or one of the clergy announces in a loud voice, "Out of the doors! Ye Kers; it is no longer Anthesteria."

Closing

After the closing libations, all participants help clean the festival area to be the same as it was when they arrived. After the cleanup, when everyone is ready to leave, the sacred herald leads everyone in saying, "Θαρρει παντ αγαθα πεπραγα μεν (Tharee pant agatha pepragamen)" meaning "be brave for all good things have come to pass".