

Rites of the February Feast and the Anthesteria

3 Days of Solitary Rituals

February Feast, 2008

by Brandon Newberg

Day One: Jar-opening, or Pithoigia

Historical Note:

One of the interesting things about being solitary is you can do multi-day rituals if your schedule allows. The Anthesteria was a three-day festival, and each day had a different character. This ritual script provides for all three days. If doing only one day of rites, select one of these three. Pithoigia may be the most recommendable.

The Anthesteria were a time of miasma, or pollution, when spirits of the dead (the keres) roamed free. Temples were shut, except for a special shrine called the Sanctuary of the Marshes. You may choose to make a special altar, and veil your other altars, for this series of rites.

The first day is called Pithoigia, or “Jar-opening.” It celebrates the opening of the new jars of wine, done at nightfall. In contrast to the days to come, this is a jubilant and festive ritual. Chants and songs abound in this ritual script, where they are absent in those to come.

The ritual is best performed at dusk.

Audio files of original chants are available [here](#).

NOTE--"we" vs. "I": This is a solitary rite, but the plural "we" is used throughout. This is meant to include all the local land spirits, ancestors, spirit guides, patron deities, and so forth that may also take part in the ritual. It's my feeling that in this sense a solitary is never truly alone.

Also, I'd like to acknowledge that these rites were partly inspired by [Sannion's Sanctuary](#).

Special Preparations:

Sanctuary of the Marshes (special altar); Burkert explains:

A small sanctuary of Dionysos in the marshes, en limnais, was opened only once a year especially for this festival.... No marsh or swamp was to be found within the city bounds of Athens, and so the name must have arrived as a cult name along with this Dionysos. (Burkert, Greek Religion, p. 237)

Dionysos mask with scarf, to be the centerpiece of worship, affixed to a pole if possible

Veil all altars other than the Sanctuary in the Marshes

1. Initiating the Rite (and 4. Statement of Purpose)

(Processional Chant)

Chant: We Approach the Sacred Grove (Words by Sean Miller, music "an Old English plainsong" traditional)

We approach the Sacred Grove

With hearts and minds and flesh and bone

Join us now in ways of old

We have come home (x3)

(Musical Signal)

(3 sets of 3 claps)

(Opening Prayer)

To all Kindreds, this ritual at the Sanctuary in the Marshes, at the time of the Spring Equinox, celebrates the first day of the Anthesteria. This is a time of license, revelry, death, and hope. The altars have been veiled, for this is a journey of pollution, of miasma. Disorder and death cannot be avoided but can be used wisely for the greater joy of life. May all those beings who do not wish to partake of these rites turn away, and for those who do partake: may Dionysos in the Marshes inspire us, and may he lead us through these rites in wisdom!

Chant: Give Us Wine, Give Us Wine, Dionysos (original)

Of the earth, of the vine, Dionysos!

Of the grape, of the press, Dionysos!

Of the jars, of the bowls, Dionysos!

Give us wine, give us wine, Dionysos!

Of the feast, of the flesh, Dionysos!

Of the muse, of the song, Dionysos!

Of the mad, Bacchic cry, Dionysos!

Give us wine, give us wine, Dionysos!

Let the wine show our hearts, Dionysos!

Let the truth be revealed, Dionysos!

Let the dark come to light, Dionysos!

Give us wine, give us wine, Dionysos!

Bring out the truth in us

Bring out the truth in us.

Praise! O Bacchos!

Bring out the truth in us.

2. Purification

(Offering to the Outsiders)

To all who stand against this rite,

Take this and make no trouble tonight!

Outsiders, this is for you. (offer)

At this time we also set aside those parts of ourselves that may work against this rite.

3. Honoring the Earth Mother

Chant: Earth Mother, We Honor Your Body (Author Unknown)

Earth Mother, we honor your body

Earth Mother, we honor your bones

Earth Mother, we sing to your spirit

Earth Mother, we sing to your stones (x1)

May the first and final honors of all rites,

Be always for the Earth.

Offerings be to Gaia

Khaire, Gaia! Khaire! (Khaire = hail, singular; plural, khairere)

4. Statement of Purpose – (accomplished in opening prayer)

5. (Re)Creating the Cosmos

(Establishing the Grove in Ground and Center)

Roots reaching down

To the Waters of Earth below,

Water flowing up to the Sacred Center;

Branches reaching up

To the Fires of Heaven above,

Fire flowing down to the Sacred Center.

May this Grove be well-established

In the world beheld in three:

The Land beneath, the Sky above,

And all around the Sea.

Behold the Sacred Center!

(Establishing the Grove in the Gates of Fire, Well, and Tree)

Portal Song (words and music by Ian Corrigan ©Stonecreed Grove, ADF)

CHORUS

By Fire and by Water, between the Earth and Sky

We stand like the World-Tree rooted deep, crowned high.

Come we now to the Well, the eye and the mouth of Earth,

Come we now to the Well, and silver we bring,

Come we now to the Well, the waters of rebirth,

Come we now to the Well, together we sing:

CHORUS

We will kindle a Fire, Bless all, and with harm to none,

We will kindle a Fire, and offering pour,

We will kindle a Fire, A light 'neath the Moon & Sun,

We will kindle a fire, our spirits will soar.

CHORUS

Gather we at the Tree, the root & the crown of all,

Gather we at the Tree, Below & above,

Gather we at the Tree, Together we make our call,

Gather we at the Tree, In wisdom & love.

CHORUS (with gusto)

Sacred Fire, carry this rite to the worlds above!

Sacred Well, carry this rite to the world below!

Sacred Tree, bear witness to this rite in all the worlds!

6. Opening the Gate(s)

(Inviting the Gatekeeper)

Offerings be to Hermes.

Khaire, Hermes! Khaire!

Hermes, O Guide,

With this prayer,

We ask but that you remember us,

For now we need your help.

Be with us in this Grove.

(Opening the Gates)

Gatekeeper Hermes,

May you join your might with ours,

In the work of opening the Gates.

Let the Gate of the Fire be opened!

Let the Gate of the Well be opened!

Let the Gate of the Tree be opened!

And as they open,

Let our eyes and ears and hearts be opened evermore!

Gatekeeper Hermes,

May you guard these Gates for us,

As we give honor to the Kindreds,

7. Inviting the Three Kindreds

Offerings be to the Nature Spirits.

Khairete, Nature Spirits! Khairete! (offer)

Offerings be to the Ancestors.

Khairere, Ancestors! Khairere! (offer)

Offerings be to the Gods and Goddesses.

Khairere, Gods and Goddesses! Khairere! (offer)

8. Key Offerings

(Inviting the Beings of the Occasion)

O Dionysos, you delight in music and poetry,

So come to us on the rhyming words of this ancient hymn.

Orphic Hymn 49 to Lysius Lenaeus (adapted from Taylor translation)

Hear me, son of Zeus, blessed Bacchus, god of wine,

Born of two mothers, honored and divine;

Lysian, Euion Bacchus, many-named,

Of gods the offspring secret, holy, famed:

Fertile and nourishing, whose liberal care

Earth's fruits increases, flourishing and fair;

Sounding, magnanimous, Lenaean power,

O many-formed, medicinal, holy flower:

Mortals in you repose from labor find,

Delightful charm, desired by all mankind:

To these our rites, benevolent power incline,

When favoring men, or when on gods you shine;

Be present to your mystic's suppliant prayer,

Rejoicing come, and fruits abundant bear.

Offerings be to Dionysos!

Khaire, Dionysos! Khaire! (offer)

Dionysos in the Marshes,

With this prayer,

We ask but that you remember us,

For now we need your help.

Be with us now.

O Dionysos, riding in on your leopard,

Dionysos the Fair-flowering,

The Dithyrambos, the Reveller, the Stormer,

We have invited you here

On this first day of the Anthesteria

To be our guest in these rites in your honor.

Today is the day of Jar-opening,

Called Pithoigia by the ancient Athenians,

Who opened the new jars of wine on this day,

Offered to you, and drank with you.

Today, we too offer gifts and drink with you.

Lead us, Dionysos, in this joyful celebration,

And enjoy the gifts we offer!

(present key offerings; wine or grape juice is most appropriate)

9. Prayer of Sacrifice

O Kindreds, these are our sacrifices.

We offer them up to you now.

Offering Song (words by Anthony R. Thompson, music by Ian Corrigan)

Let our voices arise on the Fire,

Let our voices resound in the Deep,

May the spirits accept what we offer,

As we honor the old ways we keep. (x3)

By Land, Sky, and Sea,

By Fire, Well, and Tree,

And by the Kindreds Three:

Accept our Sacrifice,
And give us a sign of your acceptance!

10. Omen

(take omen)

11. Calling (asking) for the Blessings.

We've given our gifts, O Kindreds,
Now let your blessings strengthen us.
Hear our prayers and give us:
Health, Wealth, and Wisdom!
Grant us also these blessings we ask in our hearts.

(take a moment for silent prayer)

12. Hallowing the Blessing

Power of the Spirits (words and music by Ian Corrigan, ©StoneCreed Grove 1998)

Power of the Spirits... Flowing through me...

Power of the Spirits... Shining in me...

Power of the Spirits... Growing with me... (x3)

O Kindreds,

Your blessings are upon us!

Let them come into these waters,

That we may drink them down.

Behold the Waters of Life! (drink)

13. Affirmation of the Blessing

Chant of the Blessed (original)

Khaire, Kindreds, strong in me!

Thanks be to the Kindreds Three!

Whether on Land, in Sky or Sea,

I'm blessed by their will, so may it be! (x3)

(drink wine, sing, dance, or enjoy in any way until ready to end the rite)

14. Workings (if any)

15. Thanking the Beings

(Thanking and Bidding Farewell to the Kindred of the High Holy Day)

Dionysos in the Marshes,

With this prayer,

We ask but that you remember us,

When next we need your help.

Thank you for being with us in this Grove.

Stay if you will, go if you must.

Thanks be to Dionysos.

(Thanking the Three Kindreds)

Let us give thanks to the Nature Spirits.

Thanks be to the Nature Spirits!

Let us give thanks to the Ancestors.

Thanks be to the Ancestors!

Let us give thanks to the Gods and Goddesses!

Thanks be to the Gods and Goddesses!

16. Closing the Gate(s)

(Closing the Gates of the Sacred Center)

Gatekeeper Hermes,

You have guarded these Gates for us,

But now the rite is over.

May you join your might with ours,

In the work of closing the Gates.

Gatekeeper Hermes,

Let the Gate of the Fire be closed.

Let the Gate of the Well be closed.

Let the Gate of the Tree be closed.

And as they close,

Let our eyes and ears and hearts be opened evermore.

(Thanking and Bidding Farewell to the Gatekeeper)

Hermes, O Guide,

With this prayer,

We ask but that you remember us

When next we need your help.

Stay if you will, go if you must.

Thanks be to Hermes.

(Renewing the Grove in Ground and Center)

Before we leave,

Let us once more establish our Grove

For going out into the world.

Roots reaching down

To the Waters of Earth below,

Water flowing up to the Sacred Center;

Branches reaching up

To the Fires of Heaven above,

Fire flowing down to the Sacred Center.

May this Grove go well-established

In the world beheld in three:

The Land beneath, the Sky above,

And all around the Sea.

Go in the peace of the Sacred Center!

17. Thanking the Earth Mother

Honoring the Earth Mother and Formal Ending of the Rite

O Earth Mother,

One day we shall we return unto you.

Even so today does this portion of your bounty.

May the first and final honors of all rites,

Be always for the Earth.

Offerings be to Gaia

Khaire, Gaia! Khaire! (offer)

18. Closing the Rite

The rite is ended.

Go in peace.

Thanks be to all.

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Day Two: Wine Jugs, or Khoes

Historical Note:

The second day of the Anthesteria, Khoes or “Wine Jugs,” is more mystical in character. A special feast was held in which participants each sat at separate tables and drank in silence. This recalled how Orestes the matricide was entertained in Athens, so that his presence would not pollute the rest of the participants. Participants in Khoes were thus likened to persons defiled by murder. In this arrangement, a drinking contest was held, in which all participants started at a trumpet call and the first to finish their jug was the winner. Slaves and children could also take part in the drinking. Young ones who had reached the age of three were allowed to participate using much smaller juglets. This participation was considered one of the “milestones in life” (Burkert, Greek Religion, p. 237).

Also on this night a sacred marriage was celebrated between Dionysos and the wife of the Archon Basileus, thought to represent Ariadne. This took place at the Boukolion, the ox-herd’s house in the marketplace.

This ritual script honors both. It is a silent rite, performed entirely through gesture.

The ritual is best performed in the dark of night.

Preparations:

Place cards with names of each of the beings of the rite, set on separate tables, stones, or mounds of earth, along with their cups. Offerings to these beings are made into their cups. (beings: Orestes, Dionysos, Ariadne, Hermes as gatekeeper, and each of the Three Kindreds; also, the same for Gaia if not able to pour on the ground)

Garland (to be worn on the head like a crown)

Sanctuary of the Marshes

Dionysos mask with scarf

(Note that in these rites of miasma, the Kindreds are warned to stay away if they do not wish to partake. Only those that wish to partake need come. To express this, you may speak aloud a warning before the rite, but not during.)

1. Initiating the Rite

Processional

(move to or circle round the altar in slow, steady, and rhythmic steps, x3)

Musical Signal (3 knells on a bell, 3 raps on the ground, or 3 claps)

2. Purification

Offering to the Outsiders (turn away from altar and offer wine to ground)

3. Honoring the Earth Mother

(turn toward altar and offer wine to ground)

4. Statement of Purpose

First Calling of Purpose and Precedent

5. (Re)Creating the Cosmos

Establishing the Grove in Ground and Center

(kiss fingers and gesture to sky and earth to attune to the two powers)

(to re-create the triple cosmos, trace in the air first a circle, then a triangle within it, and finally a point at the center, concentrating on entering Sacred Space)

Establishing the Grove in the Gates of Fire, Well, and Tree

(offer oil to the fire)

(offer silver to the well)

(offer incense to the tree)

6. Opening the Gate(s)

Inviting the Gatekeeper

(offer wine into Hermes' cup)

Opening the Gates

(trace a triskel or spiral in front of the gates)

7. Inviting the Three Kindreds

Honoring the Three Kindreds

(offer wine into the ancestors' cup)

(offer wine into the nature spirits' cup)

(offer wine into the gods' and goddesses' cup)

8. Key Offerings

Inviting the Beings of the Occasion

(offer wine into Orestes' cup)

(offer wine into Dionysos' cup)

(offer wine into Ariadne's cup)

9. Prayer of Sacrifice

(bring hands together at your chest and gather in all the energies of the sacrifice, then, throw hands outward, letting the energies flow out to their intended recipients)

10. Omen

(take omen)

11. Calling (asking) for the Blessings.

(holding the Blessing cup, silently pray for the desired blessings)

12. Hallowing the Blessing

(pour the Waters of Life, and raise them in reverence)

(drink, put cup down right-side up)

(starting with Orestes, working in circle and finishing with Dionysos and Ariadne, pour out each kindred's cup of wine and leave cup upside down)

(last turn your cup upside down, and lay your garland around it)

13. Affirmation of the Blessing

(bow in recognition of the somber joy of the occasion)

14. Workings

The Sacred Marriage of Dionysos and Ariadne

(pray for the joyful marriage of the couple)

(visualize their sacred union in a humble cowshed)

(place Ariadne cup and Dionysos cup together)

(take flowers lying sideways on the altar, and stand them upright between or near the cups of Ariadne and Dionysos)

(bask in the beauty of the upright flowers)

15. Thanking the Beings

Thanking and Bidding Farewell to the Kindred of the High Holy Day

(Bring your hands together for each while facing their cup: Orestes, Ikarios, the keres, Dionysos, Ariadne)

Thanking the Three Kindreds

(do the same for each Kindred)

16. Closing the Gate(s)

Closing the Gates of the Sacred Center

(trace triskel or spiral, reversing the direction used to open)

Thanking and Bidding Farewell to the Gatekeeper

(thank in the same manner as the Kindreds, facing the cup of Hermes)

Renewing the Grove in Ground and Center

(once more gesture to the sky and earth, and trace the circle, triangle, and center, this time concentrating on your place in the world at large)

17. Thanking the Earth Mother

Honoring the Earth Mother and Formal Ending of the Rite

(pour out any remaining offerings)

18. Closing the Rite

Musical Signal

(one knell on a bell, one rap on the ground, or one clap)

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Day Three: Pots, or Khytroi

Historical Note: After the jubilant Pithoigia and the mystical Khoes, the third day of the Anthesteria is decidedly sober. It is called Khytroi, or "Pots." Offerings were made to Hermes Cthonios and to the Ancestors. The latter received a pottage made from grains of all kinds boiled together with honey. This recalls the flood myth. "The survivors threw everything they could find into a pot and cooked it as their first meal after the cataclysm, an occasion for summoning up new courage and yet in memory of the dead" (Bukert, Greek Religion, p. 240).

This ritual script, in order to contrast with the previous rites and bring out the sober character of the days, advises replacing all alcoholic offerings with coffee or a similarly "sober" drink. Also, nothing is chanted or sung. All parts are spoken.

The rite is best performed in the stark light of dawn or morning.

NOTE--"we" vs. "I": This is a solitary rite, but the plural "we" is used throughout. This is meant to include all the local land spirits, ancestors, spirit guides, patron deities, and so forth that may also take part in the ritual. It's my feeling that in this sense a solitary is never truly alone.

Preparations: Ancestors offering: traditionally, a pottage made from grains of all kinds boiled together with honey Offerings: coffee makes an excellent counterpoint to the revelry of the first day's wine

1. Initiating the Rite

(rather than any bell, clap, or other musical signal, solemnly recite this verse)

O Earth,

One day

We shall return to you,

As all things

In time

Surely do (x3)

(Opening Prayer)

We gather once more at the Sanctuary of the Marshes, at the time of the Spring Equinox, for the final day of the Anthesteria. The jars have been opened, the jugs drained, and the celebrations done. As all life flourishes for but a moment before its end, so too do these rites. May Hermes Cthonios lead us through the certainty of death to the joy of life.

2. Purification

Offering to the Outsiders

To all who stand against this way,

Take this and make no trouble today.

Outsiders, this is for you. (offer)

At this time we also set aside those parts of ourselves that may work against this rite.

3. Honoring the Earth Mother

May the first and final honors of all rites,

Be always for the Earth.

Offerings be to Gaia.

Khaire, Gaia. Khaire. (khaire = hail; plural is khairete)

4. Statement of Purpose (accomplished in opening prayer)

5. (Re)Creating the Cosmos

(Establishing the Grove in Ground and Center)

Roots reaching down

To the Waters of Earth below,

Water flowing up to the Sacred Center;

Branches reaching up

To the Fires of Heaven above,

Fire flowing down to the Sacred Center.

May this Grove be well-established

In the world beheld in three:

The Land beneath, the Sky above,

And all around the Sea.

Behold the Sacred Center.

(Establishing the Grove in the Gates of Fire, Well, and Tree)

Sacred Fire, carry this rite to the worlds above.

Sacred Well, carry this rite to the world below.

Sacred Tree, bear witness to this rite in all the worlds.

6. Opening the Gate(s)

(Inviting the Gatekeeper)

Offerings be to Hermes.

Khaire, Hermes! Khaire!

Hermes, O Guide,

With this prayer,

We ask but that you remember us,

For now we need your help.

Be with us in this Grove.

(Opening the Gates)

Gatekeeper Hermes,

May you join your might with ours,

In the work of opening the Gates.

Let the Gate of the Fire be opened.

Let the Gate of the Well be opened.

Let the Gate of the Tree be opened.

And as they open,

Let our eyes and ears and hearts be opened evermore.

Gatekeeper Hermes,

May you guard these Gates for us,

As we give honor to the Kindreds.

7. Inviting the Three Kindreds

Offerings be to the Nature Spirits.

Khaire, Nature Spirits. Khaire.

Offerings be to the Ancestors.

Khaire, Ancestors. Khaire.

Offerings be to the Gods and Goddesses.

Khaire, Gods and Goddesses. Khaire.

8. Key Offerings

(Inviting the Beings of the Occasion)

Offerings be to Hermes Cthonios.

Khaire, Hermes. Khaire.

May you preside in high honor over this rite.

(offer to Hermes)

O Hermes Cthonios, guide of the dead,

We invite you on this final day of the Anthesteria

To be our guide in this last rite.

Today is the day of Pots,

Called Khytroi by the ancient Athenians,

Who gave honeyed grain to the ancestors on this day.

Today, we too offer this pottage.

Guide us, Hermes Cthonios, in this sober affair,

And help us to see our ancestors,

As they arrive in this Grove.

(visualize ancestors arriving, including any in particular that you wish to invite; allow time for the crowd to swell, or to communicate with any particular ancestors)

(alternatively, take this time to tell stories of ancestors you wish to remember)

(finally, offer the pottage to the Ancestors)

9. Prayer of Sacrifice

O Kindreds, these are our sacrifices.
We offer them up to you now.
By Land, Sky, and Sea,
By Fire, Well, and Tree,
And by the Kindreds Three:
Accept our Sacrifice,
And give us a sign of your acceptance.

10. Omen

(take omen)

11. Calling (asking) for the Blessings.

We've given our gifts, O Kindreds,
Now let your blessings strengthen us.
Hear our prayers and give us:
Health, Wealth, and Wisdom,
And give guidance and ease to the dead.
Grant us also these blessings we ask in our hearts.

(take a moment for silent prayer)

12. Hallowing the Blessing

O Kindreds,
Your blessings are upon us.
Let them come into these waters,
That we may drink them down.
Behold the Waters of Life.

(drink)

13. Affirmation of the Blessing

Khaire, Kindreds, strong in me.
Thanks be to the Kindreds Three.

Peace to all beings, so may it be.

14. Workings (if any)

15. Thanking the Beings

Thanks be to the Nature Spirits.

Thanks be to the Ancestors.

Thanks be to the Gods and Goddesses.

16. Closing the Gate(s)

Hermes Cthonios,

You have been the patron of this rite.

We give you thanks.

Hermes, Gatekeeper,

You have guarded these Gates for us,

But now the rite is over.

May you join your might with ours,

In the work of closing the Gates.

Gatekeeper Hermes,

Let the Gate of the Fire be closed.

Let the Gate of the Well be closed.

Let the Gate of the Tree be closed.

And as they close,

Let our eyes and ears and hearts be opened evermore.

Hermes, O Guide,

With this prayer,

We ask but that you remember us

When next we need your help.

Stay if you will, go if you must.

Thanks be to Hermes.

(Renewing the Grove in Ground and Center)

Before we leave,

Let us once more establish our Grove

For going out into the world.

Roots reaching down

To the Waters of Earth below,

Water flowing up to the Sacred Center;

Branches reaching up

To the Fires of Heaven above,

Fire flowing down to the Sacred Center.

May this Grove go well-established

In the world beheld in three:

The Land beneath, the Sky above,

And all around the Sea.

Go in the peace of the Sacred Center.

17. Thanking the Earth Mother

O Earth Mother,

One day we shall we return unto you.

Even so, today does this portion of your bounty.

May the first and final honors of all rites,

Be always for the Earth.

Offerings be to Gaia

Khaire, Gaia. Khaire. (offer)

18. Closing the Rite

The rite is ended.

Go in peace.

(traditional shout to conclude the rites)

Out you Keres! The Anthesteria are over!

(afterward, unveil any altars that were veiled for the Anthesteria, after purifying the house or area and yourself)