

Gamelia A Festival Celebrating the Marriage of Hera and Zeus

The Gamelia (also known as the Theogamia) is an ancient ritual celebrating the marriage of Hera and Zeus. Other than including a great feast and being held towards the end of winter in Athens, we know very little about how ancient Greeks celebrated this festival. As we re-imagine this historic festival today, we will both honor the sacred union of these most beloved Olympians and celebrate the beauty of commitment in partnership.

Glossary

thea: Ancient Greek word for “goddess”

theos: Ancient Greek word for “god”

temenos: ritual area

khernips: spring water and sea salt

nator: baking soda and salt

Supplies for this ritual

khernips

nator

charcoal, matches, & lighter fluid for the fire

grill or fire pit

drinking goblets for each participant

drink for libations

basket of barley

loose incense or aromatic herbs

celebratory feast

eating utensils

Possible objects for the altar

Candles, which play such a large role in Greek marriage ceremonies, are very appropriate. Other items include golden apples, myrtle leaves, peacock feathers, and honey. Statues or images of Hera and Zeus, or any of the animals they are associated with, are also appropriate.

Procession & Purification of People

Participants first process to the edge of the temenos. Here each person says, “Far off, far off, even to the profane!” while khernips (spring water and sea salt) is poured over their hands. They then may enter.

Purification of the Temenos

After calling for solemn silence, a participant walks around the temenos, sprinkling it with nator to cleanse the space. After this, the fire tender lights the fire, saying, “I conjure you sacred fire whose mother is Hestia and whose Father is Hephaestos.”

First libation

The herald says, "Sponde! Hestia, guardian of hearth's fire, yours is always the first and the last." Everyone pours a libation to Hestia and then drinks.

First Hymnodia

A participant will again request solemn silence.

Poem to Zeus written by George Chapman is read aloud by a participant.

"Zeus now I sing, the greatest and the best
Of all these Powers that are with Deity blest,
That far off doth his dreadful Voice diffuse,
And (being King of All) doth all conduce
To all their ends."

Libation to Zeus:

The herald says, "Sponde! Gentle Zeus, Zeus Gamelios (of marriage), Zeus Heraios (of Hera). When Rhea, Your glorious Titan mother, forbade you to wed, you would not give up this privilege. Most handsome, glorious groom, you brought freedom to your future bride, liberating her from the belly of Chronos, your divine father. Later, you seduced her in the shape of a rain-soaked cuckoo on Mount Kokkux. On your wedding day, you joyously are joined with the Queen of Heaven, your partner and sister, and jointly found your married home. King Zeus, theos of oaths, you understand this union you enter. We praise you, bountiful groom."

Everyone pours a libation to Zeus and then drinks.

Now each person is invited to offer their own personal libation to this aspect of Zeus.

Second Hymnodia

A participant will again request solemn silence.

Homeric Hymn to Hera is read aloud by a volunteer:

"I sing of golden-throned Hera whom Rhea bore. Queen of the immortals is she, surpassing all in beauty: she is the sister and the wife of loud-thundering Zeus, the glorious one whom all the blessed throughout high Olympus reverence and honor even as Zeus who delights in thunder."

Libation to Hera

The herald says, "Sponde! Beautiful Hera Numfeuomenh (betrothed bride), Hera Gamelia (of marriage), Hera Wife. On your sacred wedding day over which Eros presided, you were 'joined in love with the king of gods and men' (Hesiod, Theogony 921). Gaia gave you an orchard of golden apples, guarded by the Hesperides. Your ecstatic honeymoon lasted 300 nights. Ageless, deathless thea raised by the Horai (Seasons), you are girl, woman, bride, wife, and widow. With each step, marriage and its equality and dignity are your gift and your domain. Hera Zygia (Uniter), you understand this union you enter. We praise you, blessed queen."

Everyone pours a libation to Hera and then drinks.

Now each person is invited to offer their own personal libation to this aspect of Hera.

Libation to the Olympians as a group

Begin each toast with “Sponde!”

- * Laughter-loving Aphrodite, whose gregarious delight brings merriment to our households
- * Renowned Hephaistos, who rewards our hardworking families’ labors with beauty
- * Far Shooting Artemis, protector of our youngest and most vulnerable progeny
- * Apollon of Sound Health, whose blessed balm heals us even when we have hurt one another
- * Victorious Athena, whose wisdom and strategy stand forefront as we plans goals for our future together
- * Hermes the Messenger, whose blessing of communication and understanding we seek so ardently
- * Demeter Bearers of Fruit, who bestows the bountiful harvest we’ve earned through our physical labors together
- * Persephone Of the Earth, who teaches us that all marriage, if through no other means, must ends in death
- * Hades of the Underworld, provider of the wealth and riches we obtain to make our home together comfortable
- * Poseidon Quencher of Thirst, who brings forth the water needed for our very survival
- * Mighty Ares, whose gift of courage stands tall beside us as we embrace our family commitments
- * Twice-Born Dionysus, whose wild abandon drums in our souls as we reach with our partners for the ecstasy in being human

Sacrifice

At the conclusion of the libations, barley is passed from person to person. Everyone takes a small handful and tosses it into the fire. Putting a pinch of incense or aromatic herbs on the fire, a participant says, “We begin with You, Hestia.” Other participants repeat this phrase. Placing another pinch on the fire, a participant says, “And for You, Zeus Gamelios.” Other participants repeat this phrase. And putting a final pinch on the fire, a participant says, “And for You, Hera Gamelia.” Participants repeat this phrase. Individual participants may come forward, offering a pinch of incense or aromatic herbs, and say a personal prayer to Zeus and Hera at this time, asking for blessings for and/or thanking them for their own committed relationships.

Activities

This festival should include a sumptuous feast. Before eating, a portion of the food is set aside to be burned for the Gods.

Participants may consider reading aloud myths, hymns, or essays concerning the wedding or marriage of Zeus and Hera, or perhaps weddings and marriages in general (such as from *The Iliad* or Kerenyi’s *Gods of the Greeks*). They may also, as they feel moved, talk about their own hopes, desires, and experiences in committed romantic relationships.

Feast

Menu suggestions:

Beef
Marinated olives
Feta cheese
Apples

Closing Libations

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The herald leads participants in saying, “Be brave, for all good things have come to pass!”

Participants clean the area so it’s as clean as (or cleaner than) when they arrived.