

# Encyclopædia Britannica, Ninth Edition, Volume II — Anthesteria



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**ANTHESTERIA**, an Athenian festival held annually in the month of Anthesterion, corresponding nearly to our February, at which time the wine stored at the previous vintage was considered fit for use. The object of the festival was to celebrate the arrival of that season, and the beginning of spring. It lasted three days, from the 11th to the 13th of the month. On the first day, called *Pithoigia*, or "jar opening," libations were offered from the newly-opened jars to the god of wine, all the household, including servants or slaves, joining in the festivity of the occasion. The rooms and the drinking vessels in them were adorned with spring flowers, as were also the children over three years of age. The second day, which was named *Choēs*, or "the pouring," was a time of merry-making. The people dressed themselves gaily, some in the disguise of the mythical personages in the suite of Bacchus, and paid a round of visits to their acquaintances. Drinking clubs met to drink off matches, the winner being he who drained his cup most rapidly. Others did not forget deceased relations, but poured libations on their tombs. On the part of the state this day was the occasion of a peculiarly solemn and secret ceremony in one of the temples of Bacchus, which for the rest of the year was closed. The Basilissa, or Basilinna, wife of the Archon Basileus for the time, went through a ceremony of marriage to the wine god, in which she was assisted by fourteen Athenian matrons, called *Geraræ*, chosen by the Basileus, and sworn to secrecy. The third day was named χύτροι or "jugs." Cooked fruit of all kinds was

offered to Mercury, in his capacity of a god of the lower world; rejoicings and games were held; and though no tragedy was allowed to be performed in the theatre, there was yet a sort of rehearsal, at which the players for the ensuing dramatic festival were selected.



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