The Heorte of Heortology

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Most heortological studies, including my own, treat as ‘festivals’ religious activities as diverse as the Arrephoria, the Panathenaia, and occasionally even simple sacrifices to deities of the state cult. But such ‘festivals’ often differed markedly from one another in ritual, ambience, purpose, and in the number and rôle of the participants. It is time, I think, to direct attention to the Greek terminology for these religious activities and to consider whether ‘festival’ is the appropriate designation for all of them. In particular I wish to investigate the special character and form of religious activities which the Athenians called heortai.

We must first distinguish between heorte and thysia. There was a thysia, a sacrifice, of some type in each heorte, but each thysia was not a heorte. And there is no evidence to indicate that if a thysia was part of state cult, i.e. if it was financed by the state or performed by state officials, it was therefore a heorte. A thysia might be very large, as that to Zeus Soter in 334/3, the skins of the victims of which were sold for 1050 drachmae, but this alone should not induce us to label


2 This study is limited to Athens because only for Athens is there evidence on sufficient heortai to allow reliable conclusions.

3 On thysia, its cognates, and its relationship to heorte see J. Casabona, Recherches sur le vocabulaire des sacrifices en grec (Aix-en-Provence 1966) 69–154, esp. 132–34. The examples, particularly Hdt. 2.60 and 62, which Casabona cites to show that thysia may on occasion simply mean heorte are not convincing.

4 IG II² 1496.88–89. One notices in this inscription a distinction between religious activities that have proper names (e.g. Panathenaia, Eleusinia, and Asklepieia) and those that are simply termed sacrifices (e.g. thysia to Eirene, thysia to Agathe Tyche, and thysia to Democratia). Only activities of the first group—the Panathenaia, Eleusinia, City Dionysia, and Bendideia—are termed heortai by the sources (see infra). The Asklepieia was imported from Epidaurus in 419 B.C. and the Bendideia from Thrace at approximately the same time, but, apart from these, the group with proper names in this inscription contains only old and well-established Athenian religious activities, whereas several of the thysiai, as to Eirene, Ammon, Democratia, and Agathe Tyche (see Deubner, index s.v.) are demonstrably or probably of late fifth- or fourth-century origin. It is probably heortai like the Asklepieia and Bendideia that Isocrates (7.29) terms “added” (emhêrous) when he complains of their grand celebrations and banquets.
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it a heorte.\(^6\) A heorte had a character apart from and beyond that of a thysia, and it is this special character to which I wish to draw attention.

Athenian authors and sources of the classical period designate the following religious activities as heortai: the Anthesteria (Ar. Ach. 1079);\(^6\) Apatouria (Hdt. 1.147, Pl. Ti. 218); Bendideia (Pl. Resp. 327\(\alpha\)); Brauronia (Hdt. 6.138.1); Diasia (Thuc. 1.126); City Dionysia (Dem. 4.35); Eleusinia (IG I\(\text{a}\) 5.5); Haloa (Philochorus FGrHist 328\(\text{F}\) 83); Eleusinian Mysteries (Hdt. 8.65.4, Lys. 6 passim); Panathenaia (Dem. 4.35); Proerosia (IG II\(\text{a}\) 1363.4–6); Pyanopsia (Lycurgus in Harp. s.v.); Skira and Stenia (Ar. Thesm. 834–35); Synoikia (Thuc. 2.15.2); Tauropolia (Eur. IT 1456–61); Thargelia (Arist. Ath. Pol. 56.28); Thesmophoria at Piraeus (IG II\(\text{a}\) 1177.8); a celebration for Asclepius in the Piraeus (IG II\(\text{a}\) 47.32–39); and the theoria to Apollo on Delos (Pl. Phd. 61\(\alpha\), Thuc. 3.104). If we give to the Eleusinian Mysteries, to the pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Delian Apollo, and to Asclepius’ celebration in the Piraeus their proper names, viz. τα μυστήρια, Delia, and Asklepieia,\(^7\) then the names of all the heortai end in the same letter, as Herodotus (1.148) tells us they will.

Thucydides (2.15.2) speaks of the Synoikia as a έορτή δημοτέλεις, i.e. a heorte ‘paid for at state expense’. Jacoby\(^8\) treats έορταί δημοτέλεις as one category of heortai and infers from lexicographers’ treatments of ιερεία δημοτέλη other categories of heortai, e.g. those of demes, of orgeones, and of the clans. One might add to these categories ‘private’ heortai, however paradoxical this may seem, because we have an example in the annual heorte of Artemis of Eph-
Jesus which Xenophon, in exceptional circumstances, presented, and administered for his friends and neighbors in Scillus (An. 5.3.4–13). Such categories may be instructive in delineating the historical development of heortai because in earlier periods many heortai like the Eleusinia, Mysteries, Haloa, and Brauronia were under the control of demes or clans. But by the fifth century virtually all Athenian heortai had some administrative control and financial support from the state and were therefore δημοτελεῖς. By his use of δημοτελεῖς in 2.15.2 Thucydides points to the uniqueness of the Synoikia as the first heorte celebrated, paid for, and administered by the newly formed Athenian state.

In Plato’s ideal state of the Laws the lawgiver and law-guardian are to establish twelve heortai¹⁰ for the twelve gods after whom the tribes are named. These heortai are to consist of sacrifices, choruses, and musical and athletic contests. The lawgiver also advises to distinguish between women’s heortai that allow the presence of men and those that do not.¹¹ In the Laws (653b) Plato has the Athenian speculate on why gods established heortai: “The gods, because they pitied the race of men which is born to hard labor, assigned to them the recompense of heortai¹² as relaxations from their labors [cf. Thuc. 2.38]. They gave to men as fellow-participants in the heortai the Muses, Apollo Musegetes, and Dionysus so that men might be set again on the proper course.¹³ The gods also gave the nourishment which occurs in the heortai.” Plato recognizes that sacrifices and heortai are

¹⁰ Although the wording of Leg. 828AB is somewhat imprecise, one can distinguish between thysiai and heortai. There are to be 365 sacrifices (not the ‘feasts’ of Bury’s translation in the Loeb), one each day; there are to be only twelve heortai, one each month. Plato’s discussion of choruses and contests in this passage concerns only the heortai.

¹¹ Of the Athenian heortai listed above, the Thesmophoria, Stenia, and Haloa were celebrated primarily or exclusively by women.

¹² τὰς τῶν ἑορτῶν ἀμοιβὰς τῶι θεῶι. I follow (with Ast, Schanz, and England) Clement of Alexandria in omitting τῶι θεῶι. The remaining phrase cannot mean ‘the feasts of thanksgiving’ (Bury), nor, I think, does it mean ‘changes consisting of festivals’ (England). The heortai are intended rather as ‘recompense’ for the labors of one’s life. The presence of the Muses, Apollo Musegetes, and Dionysus may have induced a literal-minded interpolator to append crudely τῶι θεῶι here and μετά τῶι θεῶι at the end of the sentence. The resulting image of the golden age, a time in which the gods literally participated with men in heortai (see M. L. West, Hesiod, Works and Days [Oxford 1978] 285–92) is inappropriate to the context.

¹³ ἦνα επανορθῶνται. Plato uses heortai in his ideal state for educational purposes. He opens this discussion (653d) of heortai with the observation that the education of one’s childhood often breaks down in adulthood. ἦνα επανορθῶνται, I would argue, refers to the need of adults to be re-educated by means of the μοντική (Muses, Apollo Musegetes, and Dionysus) of heortai. επανορθῶνται is thus passive, with ἑπόθρωποι as its understood subject. For a quite different interpretation see England ad loc.
occasions for “paying due honor to the gods” (Leg. 809D), but throughout his writings the primary stress is upon the musical, athletic, social, and culinary aspects of heortai. Simply put, a heorte is an enjoyable occasion of sacrificing, feasting, dancing, and play (παιδια). Plato, ever the pedagogue, employs these elements of the heortai to instill or revive military and ethical training, but he does it in such a way that this does not distract from the joyful experience of the participants.

Aristotle, like Plato, puts heortai in the context of play (παιδια), laughter, prosperity, success, and satiety (Rh. 1380b3). These descriptions of heortai as joyful and entertaining opportunities to sing, dance, participate in or watch contests, feast, and sacrifice clearly reflect the attitude which Athenians of the fifth and fourth century had towards this element of their religious life. The chorus of blessed initiates in Aristophanes’ Frogs (386–395) spends eternity in celebrating a heorte of play and dance (παισαι τε και χορευσαι). The unique feature of their heorte was not so much its character as its duration. In Peace the chorus bids the Muse to “play the heorte along with me” (μετ᾽ ἑμῶν σύμπατες τὴν ἐορτήν, 816). And in Clouds (615–19) the gods are angry because the Athenians so muddle their calendar that the gods often arrive on the wrong day and thus are cheated of their ‘dinners’ in heortai. Aristophanes could expect his audience to commiserate, in comic fashion, with these cheated and hungry gods. The association of heorte and banquet was so close in Athens that Plato in colloquial language can treat the two as virtually synonymous (Resp. 5.458Α, Grg. 447Α). And in Clouds Strepsiades (408–09) associates the Diasia with cooking while Socrates (386–87) describes the fierce indigestion linked with the Panathenaia.

There was, in addition to the pleasures of the palate, the delight in spectacle. One went to a heorte to ‘see it’, and also, no doubt, to be seen. Prosperous men and women had special garments which they wore only for heortai and which, if their household organization met

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14 Heortai are celebrated ‘for a god’, e.g. for Dionysus. See Casabona (supra n.3) 132–33.

15 Thuc. 3.104; Xen. An. 5.3.10–12, Cyr. 1.5.1; Ar. Ran. 370–71, 386–95, 444–46, Nub. 615–19, Pax 816; Isoc. 4.158, 19.40. Herodotus reveals his understanding of heortai in his descriptions of Egyptian and Babylonian heortai (1.191.6, 2.60, 3.27.3). Cf. Homer Od. 20.156, 21.258.


17 Cf. [Xen.] Ath.Pol. 2.9. At Xenophon’s heorte in Scillus even the pack animals enjoyed a feast (An. 5.3.12).

18 θεομαχία and cognates: Thuc. 3.104, Soph. OT 1490–91, Isae. 8.15–16, Pl. Leg. 657D.

19 Xen. Oec. 9.6 and 10, Pl. Ion 535D; cf. Hdt. 9.92.3.
Ischomachaeans, they kept stored separately. Among the indignities which Demosthenes claimed to have suffered from Medias was the attempted destruction of the garment that he intended to wear at the City Dionysia. Demosthenes waxes hyperbolic in labeling this garment ‘holy’ because it had been prepared for the heorte (21.16). Heortai were major social occasions, particularly in the sheltered and home-bound lives of young women. The inability to enjoy or participate in heortai ranks high, like the loss of marriage, among the deprivations which young tragic heroines such as Electra (Eur. El. 310), Antigone (Soph. OT 1490–91), and Cassandra (Eur. Tro. 452) could suffer.

A survey of the religious activities specifically termed heortai in the classical period indicates to what extent processions, banqueting, and musical or athletic competitions were common to them. Processions are attested for the Bendideia (Pl. Resp. 327α), Brauronia (Philo-chorus FGrHist 328f101), City Dionysia, Choes,20 Delia (I. Délos IV 1869), Eleusinia (IG II2 930.8), Eleusinian Mysteries,21 Haloa (Anecd. Bekker I 384.31), Panathenaia (Parthenon frieze), Pyanopsia (Harp. s. v. Πυανόψια), Skira (Harp. s. v. Σκύρον), Thesmophoria (Isae. 6.50), and Thargelia (Arist. Ath. Pol. 56.26). Banquets or distributions of meat are attested elements of the Apatouria (schol. Ar. Ach. 146), Asklepieia in Piraeeus (IG II2 47.32–39), Bendideia (Pl. Resp. 354α, IG II2 1255.5–6), Brauronia (dining couches at sanctuary), City Dionysia,22 Diasia (Ar. Nub. 408–09, Lucian Tim. 7), Eleusinia (IG II2 847.24–26), Mysteries,23 Haloa (IG II2 1299.11–14), Panathenaia (IG I2 188.18–21, II2 334), Proerosia (IG II2 1183.32–34), Pyanopsia (Plut. Thes. 22), Synoikia (IG I2 188.60–63), and Thesmophoria (Isae. 3.80). Performances or contests of μουσική or γυμνική occurred at the Apatouria (Pl. Ti. 21β), Bendideia (Resp. 328α), Brauronia (Hesych. s. v.), City Dionysia,24 Chytroi ([Plut.] X orat. 841F), Delia (Thuc. 3.104), Diasia ([Lucian] Charid. 1), Eleusinia (IG II2 1672.258–62), Haloa (IG II2 1299.29 and 77), Panathenaia (IG II2 2311–17), Pyanopsia (Suda s. v. εἰρετικώνη), Skira,25 Tauropolia (Men. Épit. 476–79

22 Pickard-Cambridge (supra n.20) 89. In addition to the banquet provided by the choregos there was also probably a large public banquet after the sacrifices and before the komos on Elaphebolion 10.
23 Mylonas (supra n.21) 271–72.
24 Pickard-Cambridge (supra n.20) 57–125.
The fragmentary nature of the evidence does not allow us to prove that all heortai included processions, banquets, and musical or athletic performances and contests. Clearly most did, and in general terms we may say that heortai are of a homogeneous character to the extent that they included most or all of these elements. They were joyful, pleasant, playful, and entertaining occasions for participants and spectators. Heortai are, properly, ‘festivals’.

The two most striking metaphorical uses of heorte also center upon this understanding of the word. In each the heorte is that which the subject could most enjoy doing, but in each the author adds the twist that this activity is either repugnant or surprising to the observer. In Aeschylus’ Eumenides, after the parodos, Apollo attempts to chase the Furies from his sanctuary. He chastizes them, claiming that their proper interests are condemnations to beheadings and eye-gougings, slaughters, emasculations of children, amputations, stonings, and the moans of impaled men. “Do you,” he continues, “hear what kind of heorte you love (οἵας ἐορτῆς ... στέργηθρ’ έχουσαι) and why therefore you are hateful to the gods?” (186–92). Those gougings and emasculations and impalings which are to others such a horror are to the Furies their heorte. Thucydides puts an image of similar form but different tone into the mouths of the Corinthians (1.70) in their famous description of the Athenians: “(The Athenians) consider doing what has to be done nothing other than a heorte,” καὶ μήτε ἐορτὴν ἄλου τι ἡγεῖσθαι ἢ τὰ δέοντα πράξαι (cf. Plut. Mor. 9c). The Athenians’ exasperated enemies who claim to prefer moments of peace and quiet note with some surprise and admiration the sheer pleasure the Athenians derive from πολυπραγμοσύνη. Both these images point to heortai as paradigms of pleasure and enjoyment, and upon this understanding of heortai both images depend.

In view of all that has been said of the nature and atmosphere of heortai, the concept of a ἐορτή πένθμος, a ‘lugubrious heorte’, seems paradoxical and anomalous. ἐορταὶ πένθμοι may be, I suspect, little more than a mistake of post-classical and modern scholars. The two

26 I owe to Professor Zeph Stewart two quotations which capture nicely ancient attitudes towards heortai: Democritus (DK 68F230), βίος ἄνεορτας τοις μακρὶ ὅδος ἀπαι- δόκειτος; and Antiphon (DK 87F57), νόσος δειλοίς ἐορτῆ, with the explanation οὐ γὰρ ἐκποιεῖται ἐπὶ πράξεως.
The only evidence for the lugubrious character of the Genesia 27 is Hesychius s. v. Гενέσια: ἐορτή πάνθιμος Ἀθηναῖος. Hesychius' meaningless πάνθιμος appears as πενθήμερος in Anecd.Bekker I 231.19 but has been emended by modern scholars to give πένθιμος. Accordingly, the Genesia has become a ἐορτή πένθιμος only by the emendation of a very late lexicographical citation. There is no doubt that the Genesia involved rites for or in memory of the dead, but its lugubrious character is not established by ancient evidence. We cannot even be certain that it was a ἑορτῆ. The only indication, apart from Hesychius, is Anecd.Bekker I 86.20: οὕτης τε ἐορτής δημοτελοὺς Ἀθηναῖος, Βοιθρομώνος πέμπτης, γενέσια καλουμένης, καθότι φησὶ Φιλόχορος (FGrHist 328F28) καὶ Σόλων ἐν τοῖς ἄξοσιν. Jacoby in his discussion of this passage attributes all the heortological information to Philochorus, and thus there would be good evidence that the Genesia was a ἑορτῆ. But if Philochorus is responsible for only the date, or for only the name and the date, 28 then the only source that the Genesia was a ἑορτῆ is the lexicographical tradition, and, we must remember, the lexicographers were rather cavalier in their use of this term. 29 Although one cannot be certain because of the scantiness of the evidence, the Genesia apparently had none of the characteristic elements of a ἑορτῆ. And, in short, if the Genesia were a ἑορτῆ, which is open to question, there is virtually nothing to indicate that it was a ἐορτή πένθιμος.

The case is different for the Hydrophoria, which consisted of offerings to the victims of the great flood of Deucalion's time. These offerings most probably occurred as part of the Chytroi. 30 Photius, Hesychius, and the Suda (s. v. 'Υδροφόρῳα) term the Hydrophoria a

27 For the testimonia and discussion of the Genesia see Deubner 229–30 and Jacoby (supra n.8) 65–75.
28 As, for example, Jacoby claims for 328F84.
29 Lexicographers and scholiasts made heortai into one of their major categories of classification and extended its usage to include virtually all religious activities (see Jacoby ad 328F84). In the Suda, for example, even private birthday celebrations (s. v. γενέθλια) are labeled heortai. There are traces, in the Roman period, of this development also outside or on the periphery of the scholarly tradition. E.g. Pausanias once calls the Arrephoria (1.27.3) a heorte. Athenaios (437B) erroneously designates the Choes a heorte (see supra n.6). And in Athens the Iobacchoi, somewhat before A.D. 180, had a πρόσκαιρος ἐορτή, an 'occasional heorte' (IG II2 1368.44). Such a concept is unparalleled in the classical period. Plutarch, as we might expect, uses heore in the classical way, often distinguishing heortai from other types of religious activities (e.g. Thes. 20.5, Mor. 169D).
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εορτή πένθιμος, and we know from other sources that the Chytroi was part of a heorte. Photius and the Suda cite as their authority an Athenian, Apollonius of Acharnai (130–100 B.C.), whose book was entitled Περὶ εορτῶν. If one takes into account the highly abbreviated nature of lexicographical citations, the evidence would suggest that the Hydrophoria was a ritual which formed part of the Chytroi which was, itself, part of the heorte called Anthesteria. The rites of the Hydrophoria were possibly πένθιμα, but the whole heorte need not have been. The offerings on this day to Hermes Chthonius and the puzzling cry Θύραζε Κήρες, “Spirits of the Dead (?) out of the door,” may have been, like the Hydrophoria itself, part of the cult of the dead. But the day of the Chytroi was not ἀποφράς.31 In fact the best evidence we have for the day suggests quite the opposite. In the fourth century Lycurgus introduced a proposal to restore the contest of comic actors held on this day, the άγώνες χύτρινοι (schol. Ar. Ran. 218, [Plut.] Mor. 841F). Such a contest is hardly compatible with the gloomy character generally attributed to this day. The Chytroi may have had some lugubrious elements like the Hydrophoria, but it is highly improbable that either the Chytroi or Hydrophoria was a heorte (see supra n.6), to say nothing of a εορτή πένθιμος.

Much the same explanation may serve for the remaining possibly gloomy heorte, the Diasia.32 This was celebrated for Zeus Meilichios μετὰ τινος στυγνότητος, “with some repugnance” (Hesychius s.v. Διάσια, schol. Lucian Tim. 43, Icar. 24). To Aristophanes’ Strep-siades, however, the thought of this heorte brings to mind the pleasures of the banquet (Nub. 408–09, cf. Lucian Tim. 7). The dual character of this heorte which apparently incorporated some lugubrious elements but was ultimately joyful is nicely symbolized in the offering of the demesmen of Erchia. Their sacrifice at this heorte was to be “wineless until the vital organs were consumed.”33 After that the wine could flow.

The Chytroi and Diasia and, perhaps, the Genesia indicate that, exceptionally, heortai might include in their structure some gloomy or lugubrious elements. But these few exceptions should not distract attention from the otherwise consistent classical tradition, from sources both on the nature of a heorte and on specific heortai.34 This tradition

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33 Jameson (supra n.32) 159.
34 Although the lexicographers and the scholiasts to Aristophanes are not reliable sources for identifying heortai, it should be noted that they describe the following as Athenian heortai: Adonia (schol. Lys. 389), Aianteia (Hesych.), Aiora (Hesych.), As-
portrays *heortai* as pleasant and joyful religious experiences with an abundance of good food, good company, and good entertainment. In our attempts to describe and characterize Greek religious attitudes we must not neglect these emotions and expectations that Athenians of the classical period had regarding this major element of their religious life.

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kolia (scol. Plut. 1129), Boedromia (Harp., Suda), Bosphonia (Harp., Hesych., Suda, schol. Pax 419 and Nub. 985), Chalkeia (Harp., Suda), Charmosyna (Hesych.), Epikleidia (Hesych.), Galaxia (Hesych.), Hephaistia (Harp., Suda s.v. λαμπτάς), Kronia (Hesych., Suda, schol. Nub. 397), Lenaia (Suda, schol. Eq. 547), Oschophoria (Hesych. s.v. δεσπρωπος, Suda), Pandia (Harp., Hesych.), Paonia (scol. Ach. 1213), Pithoigia (Hesych.), Plynteria (Harp., Hesych.), Prometheia (Harp., Suda s.v. λαμπτάς), Proschaireteria (Harp., Suda), Pyanopsia (Hesych., Suda, schol. Eq. 729), and Theseia (Hesych., Suda, schol. Plut. 627). Of these the Pithoigia was part of the Anthesteria. Some, *e.g.* the Aianteia, Chalkeia, Hephaistia, Kronia, Lenaia, Oschophoria, Prometheia, Pyanopsia, and Theseia, were quite probably *heortai*. Plutarch, who understands his terminology, labels the Kybernesia (Thes. 17.6) and the Oschophoria (Thes. 23.2) *heortai*. The others on the list, so far as they are known, lacked the characteristic elements of *heortai*. Some are probably rituals and offerings, *e.g.* the Aiora, Askolia, Bosphonia, Galaxia, Plynteria, and Proschaireteria.