

THE SYMPOSION - Notes for an essay

For men only. Held in a special dining room (andron) (draw diagram). For usually 7 or 11 people. Often the couches were on a raised platform.

FURNITURE Couches, three-legged tables with animal feet, stools to mount the couches. The couches had backrests and bolsters (probably also blankets).

SLAVES to serve food and wine, **MUSIC, MUSICIANS, HETAIRAI** who were often dressed in a headdress called the **SAKKOS**, earrings, filmy clothing, sometimes naked.

FOOD is often depicted, especially meat and bread in bread baskets which hang on the wall.

Most of the equipment was for drinking. Wine was not drunk neat, but always mixed with water in varying proportions: Greeks considered it a mark of barbarism to drink neat wine. So we find **AMPHORAI** and **HYDRIAI** for wine and water, **KRATERS** for mixing - Bell kraters, Volute, Kalyx, Column, as well as the round bottom **DINOS** which required a stand. **OINOCHOAI** for dipping into the krater, and various cups for drinking - **KYLIX, KANTHAROS, SCYPHOS** are the most common, plus sometimes a **PSYKTER** (wine cooler). (Draw diagrams to illustrate the shapes of all pots).

THE SYMPOSIASTS: Young men, older men (with beards), wearing or almost wearing the **HIMATION** - a sort of cloak. Garlands of ivy round the head were a mark of the symposiast, in honour of Dionysos, the god of fertility and wine. The garlands were also supposedly a cure for a hangover. Sometimes the banqueters wear a **TAINIA** - a woollen headband, instead of an ivy wreath. Floral bands are often draped on the tables. Symposiasts often have sticks, which may have been to support them on the way home when they may have been somewhat drunk, or may have been for defence against possible mugging.

WHAT HAPPENED: eating, heavy drinking, the game of **KOTTABOS** (throwing wine dregs from your cup at a ?floating target), music, singing, dancing (instruments include the double flute, **AULOS**, the lyre, **BARBITON**, castanets) varying degrees of sexual behaviour, drunkenness, being sick. (Refer to Aristophanes Wasps).

SUMMARY: Drinking parties were a part of civilised life for men, and scenes from the symposion are perhaps the commonest form of decoration of Athenian pottery. Many of the shapes of decorated pottery are exclusively associated with drinking. How often they happened we don't know. Athens late at night must have been rowdy and possibly dangerous. Final reference to the vase illustrating a man going home to his anxious wife.

ILLUSTRATE AND REFER TO SPECIFIC VASES WHERE POSSIBLE.