

Xanthian Culture

People

Xanthe is a matriarchy, although gender roles are somewhat complex. Basically they are a continuation of the Stargazer era view that women are most suitable for engineering and leadership. Their linguistic and parallel-processing abilities make them suitable for professions ranging from scholarship to flight, and their inherently stronger build makes them suitable for long and hard travels as merchants, soldiers or rangers. Males are viewed as having a somewhat frail physical constitution (despite their slightly higher physical strength) and with less control over their emotions than women. On the other hand, they are good at mathematical and spatial thinking, making them very suitable as artists, accountants, traders and sailors. Their community building tendencies make them important in maintaining society. Males (especially from better families) are accepted in most professions, but will usually not rise as far as women. They are regarded as inherently specialized, and will often be judged just for their professional abilities rather than their overall person.



Matriarchy is not part of exnerism (but see below), but a holdover from original Xanthian culture. It is gradually diluted the further out in the provinces one gets (some males, unhappy with their lot, leave for the frontiers where their chances for advancement are much higher). While polygamy is allowed in Arabia for Arabian people, it is not legal for Xanthians. Xanthians are strictly polyandrous, with one or more husbands for a single wife. Among the middle class it is common for women to marry two husbands. One, the homehusband, remains at home, helping to run the household and rear the children. The other, the awayhusband, has a more well-paying but remote job, such as merchant, soldier or messenger flyer.

There is also some exnerist support of matriarchy as a tool. This idea was promoted by Zao Feng in *The Empire's Early Commoners* (2741) where she pointed out that due to the matriarchy and polyandry the birth rate would be lowered, since women would often choose a career over family and there would be an artificial scarcity of men. This would have a positive ecological impact by naturally avoiding a population boom as the high-tech demographic transitions approached. The labour shortage would stimulate technological innovation, reinforcing the progress of the empire. It would also stimulate an inflow of people from the outer regions of the empire to its core to act as labour, which would lead to these colonials becoming socialised to Xanthian culture and bring it with them once they moved back. While her theory has been widely criticised many still believe that matriarchy is a good thing for the empire.

The view on homosexuality is somewhat divided. It is not regarded as real sex, and male homosexual behaviour is mostly seen as a way of arousing women – especially a shared wife. Gay men are expected to marry women, and then keep their sex within the marriage. Lesbian pairs and gay men that do not marry are regarded as flawed – they undermine the spread of society. Such people are serious embarrassments for their families and communities.

Among the nobility “technogamy” is the preferred mode of reproduction. They make extensive use of genetic councillors and people knowledgeable in biotechnology to guarantee that their children will have the best start in life. Even if IVF is merely an expensive symbolic act it is performed; to be born “from heat” is tasteless. Most noble mothers employ surrogate mothers, and there has also been a gradual move away from “marriages of lust” – the husbands of a noblewoman are her advisors, political allies, decorations and platonic love interests, while for sexual gratification she goes to her lover(s).

Everyday Life

Women bear a braid for each of their husbands; by tradition the hair of the braid should not be cut for as long as the marriage lasts (having it shorn off accidentally signifies the imminent end of that marriage in one way or another – a bad sign). The braid is usually held in place with a piece of jewellery acting as a wedding ring (often the exact jewellery reveals something about who the husband is, by showing a sigil, significant gemstone or having a shape associated with his name). Sometimes women are referred to as “One-braided”, “Three-braided” etc to refer to their apparent wealth and influence. Married males wear just a single braid.

Pigmenting one’s fur is fairly common. While some perform full-body dying to become fashionably white or blond, others add elegant stripes of colour to the face, arms or neck.

A fashion that has become popular over the latest years is to shave body fur into patterns or symbols. Regarded as crude by the nobility it is still catching on widely in the lower classes, often as a badge of belonging. Patterns representing clutchball teams, neighbourhoods, religion and family affiliation are popular.

Xanthe citizens with some social class usually have documents. The most common document is the Gema Scroll, an often richly ornamented description of the person, their lineage and their genetic blessings created by a genetic councillor. It is often used as an identification document. Since travel is restricted travel documents have to be acquired at the local Magistrate or at a Guild, which are checked at road controls or customs offices. Nobility and quite a few professions also have charter documents, which are necessary to prove one’s rights in some situations.

Xanthians have a vague belief in reincarnation, not based on any particular religion or system. Dead people are believed to return again in new forms, often as relatives of themselves.

The number five (and to a lesser extent seven) is popular. It is not a lucky number per se, but all good things come in five. Six on the other hand is the “useless number” and signifies something worthless or bad. Being a “six fingered person” means being inadequate, while “living on the sixth floor” is a humorous way of saying that one is not doing anything important.

Prayer boxes are common in homes. They are shoebox-sized wooden frames with sides of paper, nacre or other translucent substances. Candles are lit inside as a simple act of devotion, often to signify the importance of a situation, give a sense of peace or to honour a visitor.

Xanthian art is cosmopolitan, with influences from many ages and cultures. In the major cities artists seek to outdo each other with new styles and fashions, especially in Anhu, the trend setting neighbourhood of New Chryse Upper City. Traditional imperial art tends to have one recurring theme, odd rotational symmetry. Patterns involving five-petal flowers, pentagons and heptagons are common, used in Penrose tilings, intricate quasiperiodic arabesques, rosette windows and other complex patterns where craftsmen can demonstrate their skill at handling these troublesome symmetries.

Clothing

Xanthian clothing is similar to most clothing on Mars that it has few undergarments; due to the fur everybody already has natural “undergarments” (with the exception of the earthling Infomerchants). For hygienic reasons underpants are commonly worn. Both sexes wear breeches (or pants in cold weather), but males often have breeches that link up with knee high soft boots. Shirts are uncommon, and viewed as something belonging to Arabia or the Northern provinces. Instead elaborate waistcoats are used, often with delicate patterning and elaborate collars. Rather than pockets most fine clothing has reticule, tiny tubular purses of mesh or fabric to replace pockets. On top of this a gown, coat or jerkin is worn.

Among accessories cauls (single nets worn in the hair) are the most popular. They are usually delicately made of gold or spider silk, decorated with coloured bands or pearls. Among less well-off people shimmering synthetics are used. Corsets are sometimes used to avoid looking old and fat, both among men and women.

Nobility is easily recognized by the feathers (synthetic or real) that are part of their clothing, either as mere symbols on the most severe suits or as extravagant plumes in festive gowns and hats. The colours and style form

a complex code subject to rapid fashion changes; at present feathers of predator birds are the thing to wear, but ideally they should be handcrafted replicas rather than the real thing.

Military uniforms have notable leather or plastic jackets opening diagonally. Plates of small rounded composite body armour on the arms, legs and chest are part even of dress uniforms, although they have a mostly decorative function.

The introduction of fairly cheap synthetic fibres and dyes have made Xanthians notably colourful in dress and cosmetics compared to most other Martians. Nacre coatings, moiré patterns, intense colours and waterproofing all help. Since they are relatively cheap and popular, the higher classes prefer more subdued colours and natural materials. The exception are some of the most subtle and high-priced synthetics such as Faoling nacre and Sfax celarex.

Food

While not as obsessed with food and eating as the Marinerians, Xanthians take great pride in cooking and culinary refinement.

Usually breakfast and dinner are the most extensive meals. Dinners are highly social affairs, and often last for a long time as multiple small courses are sampled. Complex traditions surround the proper way of passing around food and especially asking for spices (having an extensive spice rack on the table shows that the host shows concern for the experience of the guests, while being able to ask for the right spices is both a way of demonstrating refinement and complimenting the host). Breakfasts on the other hand are private, usually done only together with close family or as meetings with favoured contacts.

Traditional Xanthian cuisine is based on cereals and vegetables, with some pork, lamb, ostrich and chicken. Pasta and bread were staples and still provide the basis of most dishes. Modern Xanthian cooking includes much more seafood, ranging from algae and sea urchins (regarded as poor man's fare) to fish. Especially tuna is highly prized. Exotic meats such as mammoth and gazelle are also popular. Often dishes consist of a bread basis, topped with a pyramid of pasta, sauce, meat and vegetables crowned with some rare delicacy or elegantly cut candy.

Wine is the most common drink, and fairly cheap. Hence it is regarded as too common for finer dinners, and more exclusive drinks served. Cider is highly regarded, especially the expensive imported Isidian ciders. Beside the main drink water is commonly served as a thirst quencher and a way of clearing the palate. In hot weather this is often served in the form of ice, shaped into miniature sculptures. Otherwise sliced water is popular: water that has been jellied with agar and then sliced into thin transparent slices that can be picked up with special water forks. During festive occasions the water is often elegantly coloured and scented, placed on a very long platter in the middle of the table.

Xanthian cooking makes use of many additives – colourings, essences, vitamins, antioxidants, preservatives and texturizers. It is viewed as a status sign to be able to use many of the more expensive additives and they are often included in the spice rack just for show (a full high-class ornamental spice rack, an epergne, can weigh up to 20 kilograms). Among the upper classes a whole “language of spice” has emerged, with plenty of subtle nuances and possibilities of both giving offence and sending hidden signals by selecting just the right spices.

Games

Gambling

In general Xanthians enjoy gambling, and there is a thriving gambling business. People like to make bets on everything. While most gambling was originally independent of the Guilds, the Guild of Numbers has slowly moved in to control the bookmakers. It has made a discreet deal with the Infomerchants for fast remote communications to get information about odds across Xanthe quickly. Non-guild bookmakers exist but live a perilous life; while bookmaking is not on the guild charter is so lucrative that the Guild will be quite ruthless in enforcing its dues. Some people have worried that the Guild is getting corrupt by the gambling money, or that there should be some friction between the more traditional accounting side of the guild and the growing gambling section, but these fears are heartily dismissed by the Guild.

Lotteries

The Guilds often arrange lotteries, which is an easy and popular way (for them) to earn money. Often they are just local, but the big lotteries arranged from the high guild councils can have millions of participants and enormous prizes.

Matiao

A descendant of Mah-Jong. During the middle Red Era a project mystic interpretation of the traditional Mah-Jong tiles were developed, and the game was seen as a symbolic terraforming process. Each player represented one fraction seeking to create a terraformed ecosystem. Tiles represent energy flows (the dragons), geological cycles (the winds), plants (bamboos), animals (circles), humans (numbers) and technology (the flowers). A complete hand would represent one idea of a terraformed Mars. Over the years the old game was changed into a new form more closely mirroring this. This old form was in turn the basis for the modern Matiao played in Xanthe and Uzbai, which has a circular wall, four kinds of dragons (red, green, white and black), tools as a fourth suit and pictures of animals rather than circles on the animal tiles. It remains a popular gambling game, often in somewhat simplified forms.

Pengo

Played on a board of randomly arranged rhombi with black and white beads placed on their corners. Surrounded pieces are removed, and the winner is the first to lock the other player into a position where he can make no move. The score is set by the number of removed pieces, with special bonuses due to board configurations. This game is a favourite of sophisticated game players, who often bet (and lose) sizeable sums on it.

Fives

A popular poker-like card game with five suits (Clubs, Books, Hearts, Swords and Feathers). It has 65 cards ranging from zeros to nines, with the Child, Father and Mother. There are many scoring combinations such as rainbows (one from each suit) to five of a kind and families.

Dawn Card-Castles: the 65 playing cards of Fives are stacked up into a castle in a draught-free space: the player can determine the dreams of the next night if he awakens before the castle collapses. Those players who wish to dream of Romance build their castles with the five of hearts.

Anichu

Pinball/pachinko-like game, where the goal is to traverse a labyrinth with a metal bearing while various traps and blocks try to push it into holes. Anichu parlours are popular in most Xanthian cities.

Clutchball

Very popular team sport. Two numbered ten-person teams play with a small 10 cm ball of hard leather, trying to throw it to each other according to certain numerical patterns. If a pattern (such as "the great chain" 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 or "small alternation" 1-opposing-3-opposing-5) occurs the team scores, if it drops the ball it loses points. The opposing team tries to get the ball or disrupt the pattern. Clutchball can get rather violent as the players crowd below a descending ball, but that is nothing compared to the violence of the supporters. Over recent years the amount of clutchball-related violence has risen tremendously, taxing the best effort of Xanthian police.

Popular clutchball teams include: the Magdalene Skip, Sesto Wolves, Xanoteo, Crest Neutralizers, Lefthanded K and Timbuktu Nogi.

Xanthian names

Xanthian names consist of a surname and a family name.

Female

Kaliya, Beritaney, Kelesea, Dalia, Letana, Thairga, Gaelu, Kadasang, Ktiren, Iali, Kanika, Mari, Nalila, Obedeinse, Proma, Tserai

Male

Karenaude, Barenei, Xeris, Duere, Rgevan, Prode, Gerand, Thung, Vischabode, Ioe, Kasime, Levereth, Mareitus, Navarero, Toven, Berinse, Eretan