

Sunday, January 4, 2026 - Zoom Meeting - 12:30 PM - Topic: Lucretius Book Review - Book One Starting Line 102

Post by “Joshua” of January 4, 2026 at 1:27 PM

And on the the subject of the trickery employed by the priests of pagan antiquity, the following may be of interest:

Quote

The illusion might begin even before worshippers entered the building, in the form of a machine [[Hero of Alexandria](#)] describes in [Pneumatica](#):

Temple Doors opened by Fire on an Altar.

The construction of a small temple such that, on lighting a fire, the doors shall open spontaneously, and shut again when the fire is extinguished. Let the proposed temple stand on a pedestal, ABCD.

-Hero of Alexandria, *Pneumatica*, machine 37

As the priest and congregation approached they would be faced with the huge, closed doors of the temple. Stepping forward, a priest would light a fire on an altar and, as though the god were pleased with the offering, the doors would swing open of their own accord, accompanied by a fanfare of trumpets. Behind the scenes, where only Hero and the priests ever went, a complex series of air- and water-filled tubes connected the altar to large bucket counterweights attached to the temple doors by pulleys. As the fire heated the air it expanded, forcing water in another tube into the buckets, which would then open the doors when there was enough water to weigh them down and set the pulley train in motion. When the fire was extinguished, the air in the pipes cooled and sucked the water back out of the buckets. As the weight in the buckets lessened, so the doors slowly closed under their own weight. It was all just advanced hydraulics, a subject first studied by another Alexandrian, [Ctesibius](#), whose works Hero must have pored over in the library.

-The Rise and Fall of Alexandria; Birthplace of the Modern World

by Justin Pollard and Howard Reid

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