



The Hellenic Society Prometheas

Newsletter 47

October 2005

Mark your Calendar

Upcoming Activities

<u>Event</u>	<u>Theme/Speakers</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Notes/Contact</u>
Prometheas Election	Elections	Oct 13	St. George	See separate announcement
Poetry: Poetry of Chris Agritellis	John Anton and Chris Argitellis	Oct 28	St. George	
Greek movie	Oi Nyfes	Nov 26	TBA	Not Final Yet

TBA: To be announced

For final confirmation, please look for related announcements to be circulated prior to the date of each event.

Misc. News

Kafeneio: The traditional Prometheas' Kafeneio was held, as scheduled, on Friday, September 30th at St. Katherine's community hall with great success. About 125 people of all ages attended, had fun and left with very favorable comments. There were plenty of food and drinks and Achilleas with his company entertained the attendants continuously, well passed 11 P.M. In this very friendly and relaxed environment people danced and sang to the tune of Greek music. It was a memorable event of fun and entertainment.

Professor John P. Anton, who was the keynote speaker at last year's Greek Independence Day celebration, shared with us his recent paper with title: WE AND THE ANCIENTS: THE TIMELINESS OF THE GREEK POLITICAL WISDOM ([see attachment](#))

From The National Herald of 7/10-11/04
“THE TRUE MEANING OF HELLAS
Harry Mark Petrakis

The following commencement speech was delivered to the graduating class of 2004 at the American College of Greece.

The American College of Greece - Deree College President Bailey, honored guests, parents of the graduates, graduates and friends.

I have journeyed across the ocean from the United States to speak to you today and to accept this honor the college has bestowed upon me. I am humbled and grateful.

I come from a vast land with a population of almost 300 million people. A great land mass stretch-ing from one ocean to another. The part in which I live has frigid winters with heavy snow and sub-zero temperatures so cold a man's fingers can freeze in seconds. The part of the country where one of my sons lives has warm temperatures year around and tropical heat in summer. In addition to its size America is a land made up of so many diverse peoples that when one travels from one part of the country into another, it is like journeying into a foreign land.

That diversity in population is reflected in the politicians we elect to high office. In our history we have been led by presidents with vision and a compassionate understanding of the world and also, unfortunately, by presidents who are deceived by false prophets and spurious dreams. The agony of Vietnam came closer to tearing our nation apart than any struggle since our Civil War. Now we find ourselves in the agony of Iraq, our people once more divided.

To properly understand the United States as a nation, one must encompass how it exists as a dream of freedom which millions of immigrants from hundreds of countries have kept before them. Sometimes that dream is battered to death on the harsh reality of life in a city with a population of millions. Sometimes the dream flourishes and bursts into flower.

My own parents and four of my older brothers and sisters were a part of that dream. They immigrated to the U.S. from the island of Kriti, in 1916. In the early 1900s, thousands of young Cretans were brought to the U.S. to work the dangerous coal mines of Utah and Colorado. They came without wives or sisters, without sweethearts or children, liv-ing and often dying in mine disasters. I have a photo-graph in my home of a hundred young 'palikaria' of that period. Within a month after that photograph was taken, fifty of those young men died in a mine ex-plosion.

In the small mining town of Price, Utah, the young Cretans had built a church but had no priest. They petitioned the Bishop of Crete who asked my father if he would go to serve

those young men. But it was 1916, Europe was aflame in war, and my parents feared for their children. But the young Cretans kept writing and the Bishop kept pleading and eventually my parents agreed.

They made the hazardous journey by ship to America, and then traveled by train from New York City west to Salt Lake City. They did not know that a thousand young Cretan miners had gathered in the Salt Lake City station to greet them. Now, this was still the wild west and men carried guns and shot them off to celebrate. So when the train arrived in Salt Lake City and my mother heard the thunder of gunfire she was terrified they had entered a war zone. But when she descended from the train with my two sisters dressed in white lace dresses, a silence fell over the gathering of men. In later years my mother often told the story of their arrival and how men cried and prayed in thanks to God. And some of the young miners, my mother said, knelt and kissed the hem of her dress as she passed, so grateful were they for the sight of a Cretan mother and Cretan children, reminding them, of the beloved 'patrida' they had left behind.

From Utah my family moved to Savannah, Georgia, and then to St. Louis where I was born, and then to a parish in Chicago.

So it was in Chicago that I grew up, in the community around my father's church, occupied by Greek immigrants so it resembled a Greek village within a great city.

The life of our community centered around the ethnic holidays and celebrations. We attended the parochial school and we prepared zealously for the March 25 events, practicing the heroic poems for weeks, on that great day, dressed in our "fustanelles" and "vlahika", we stumbled onto the stage, and cried out the heroic poems.. Remember?

"O Kolokotronis fonaxe kai oTurkos Tromaxe." ,, (Kolokotronis cried out and the Turk trembled!) Or that other lovely verse which I remember to this day, "Gia des kairo pou dialexe, ? Charos na me pari, Tora pou anthizoun ta kladia kai bgazi ee gee hortari. "

(How strange that death should come for me now, the hero Diakos said, now when all the earth is bursting into flowers.)

In the parochial school we studied English half a day and Greek half a day. Now it is true that part of our curriculum were the daily beatings which came from East and West, from North and South, from Greek teachers .and from English teachers and from principals who were Gorgons.

There is a lovely Greek word hard to translate into any language. It is *Nostal!ghia....that* pain and longing for a land or a dream somehow lost. For those of us born in America, thousands of miles from the *patrida* of our parents, that vision of my father and mother's island burned through my childhood. I knew the history, and I read the plays and poetry

of Greece. I used those myths and stories when I began to write.

Thirty-five years ago my wife and two of our sons traveled to Greece and Kriti for the first time. Seeing the beloved *patrida* was the greatest experience of my life. But stepping on Greek soil also made me aware of another reality, how much the Greek past haunts the present. The great Nobel poet Gorgios Seferiades wrote that in Greece, even the stones seem to speak.

To travel to Mycenae on a day when black clouds hang low over the Lion Gate, and to imagine that it was on such a day that Agamemnon returned to be murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus.

To watch a performance of Oedipus at Epidaurus, under torchlight, the actors wearing masks and to comprehend that this was the way it must have looked when Oedipus was performed thousands of years earlier.

To go to Delphi and in the twilight, to hear the wind rising from the gorges, and in the wind to hear the voices of the old oracles. What did they say? Go to Delphi and listen. Every man and woman must hear the oracles for themselves.

To journey to my father's village in the mountains of Kriti. To sleep for the first time in the bed he was born in, to hear the rain on the roof, to stand on the terrace in the dewy morning, gazing across the lovely snow-crowned mountains and to understand those were the mountains he must have looked upon as a boy never realizing the journeys across the world he would someday make.

Yet there was also, for me, still another lesson in the true meaning of Hellas. As I read the great poets of both antiquity and modern Greece, Aeschylus and Euripides, Seferiades and Elytis, Kazantzakis and Prevelakis, I grasped in them a vision of the meaning of Hellenism extending beyond the geographic boundaries of Greece.

At the end of the 19th Century, Kostas Patamas, wrote, "The Greek poet who has before him the example of his immortal ancestors must be first of all a human being and must understand that true national poetry is poetry without a country and poetry in its highest intensity."

And Gorgios Seferiades, wrote,

"The free man, the just man, the man who is the measure of life. If there is one basic idea in Hellenism, it is this one."

And perhaps nowhere else in literature is the vision of the humanity, the brotherhood and sisterhood of all mankind, more clearly illustrated than in words written by the oldest and perhaps greatest of all storytellers, the blind poet, Homeros, when he wrote,

"Like leaves upon the earth are the generations of man. Old leaves blown to the ground

by wind, young leaves the greening forest bears as spring .comes in. So mortals pass, one generation flowers, as another generation dies away."

When I contemplate my 'rizes", my roots, I never say that who I am is better than anyone else. That arrogance leads to Fascism and to war. But I am overwhelmingly grateful for my Cretan heritage. And I would not trade being the son of a poor priest and his *Presbytera* from a village in Kriti, who followed a dream to America so many years ago, I would not trade my family and my heritage to have been born a prince in some royal house.

That is the message I carry **to you**, from Xenitia, on this day of your graduation.

Harry Mark Petrakis was the keynote speaker at the celebration of the Greek Independence Day in 2003 organized by PROMETHEAS. He is a prominent Greek American author living in Chicago. His latest book is "The Orchards of Ithaka"

How Greek Cooking Lost Its Way, Then Found It

By Judith Weinraub
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, August 11, 2004; Page F01

Sports fans headed to the Olympics this week in Athens are undoubtedly looking forward to what Americans think of as classic Greek cooking -- things such as shish kebab, Greek salads, grilled fish, stuffed grape leaves, roast chicken with egg and lemon sauce, spinach and feta cheese pie. These basic foods celebrate the quality of the primary ingredients.

But wind the videotape back to 1896, when Athens hosted the first modern-day Olympic Games, and you won't find those dishes on the menus.

Back then, the food on the very best Athenian tables was French -- chicken in a red wine sauce or a white sauce thick with Gruyere cheese, and boned poached fish with mayonnaise. More traditional regional dishes such as eggplant caviar or the caper, potato and garlic dip known as skordalia or braised wild greens were shunted aside as lower-class.

"The fashionable food of the time was completely French," says Aglaia Kremezi, a Greek culinary historian and cookbook author. "The chefs were French-trained. The menus were written in French, with all French specialties."

Kremezi, whose new book, "The Foods of the Greek Islands" (Houghton Mifflin, 2004), celebrates regional foods, thinks that's a shame. "At the end of the 19th century, they wouldn't have been interested in these [regional] dishes," she says. "They weren't considered fashionable. Even up until the 1970s, no one would imagine cooking these foods at dinner parties or serving them in restaurants. They were considered foods of the poor."

Greek society was still in flux when the modern-day Olympics started. Until its War of Independence, and the emergence of Greece as a sovereign state in 1832, the country had been part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. "Athens was a very small city then," says Kremezi. "Like a village. The country was not only poor but out of touch with European culture, food and society."

As wealthy Greek families returned from self-imposed exiles in cosmopolitan cities all over Europe, they brought the latest food trends with them. "They knew what the rest of the world was doing," says Kremezi. "They knew that French was the 'in' cuisine. This is what they tried to imitate and cook for guests in their homes. And they were setting the scene in the newly formed city [Athens]."

Enter Nicholas Tselementes, a Greek chef who trained in Europe and who wrote what is considered the first comprehensive cookbook in modern Greek. Published in 1910, it became an important resource for fashionable Greek women and sold more than 100,000 copies in 10 editions by the time Tselementes died in 1958.

Although he pointed with pride to the ancient origins of the Greek culinary arts, Tselementes had a cooking style that was unabashedly European, and his influence was pervasive. In his kitchen, traditional regional dishes languished: No garlic for Tselementes -- or as little as possible. No affection for the spicy dishes of the Turks and Slavs either. And no particular pride in highlighting the bounty of the countryside or the sea.

"Traditional Greek cooking is just taking an ingredient and doing the least possible to it," says Kremezi. "And French cooking is exactly the opposite. Tselementes tried to conform Greek cooking to the classic French.

"He really changed Greek cooking -- he destroyed it," says Kremezi, who has been studying his work and its impact for a decade. Instead of olive oil, Tselementes preferred butter. Instead of presenting foods naturally, he preferred them covered with precisely made French sauces, like bechamel.

In fact, his affection for the classic white sauce made with flour, milk and butter transformed two of the most internationally famous Greek dishes, moussaka (usually made with eggplant and ground meat) and pastitsio

(pasta and ground meat). Before Tselementes, the casseroles came to the table without their familiar creamy topping. Ever since, they are rarely served in their original naked state.

The many reprints of his popular 500-page cookbook, "Odigos Mageirikis" ("Cooking Instructions") -- even after his death -- extended his reach to several generations. (It is no longer in print.)

"His book made the trend official," says Kremezi, "so people who were preparing the traditional foods were made to feel inferior."

"Greek Cookery," a 1956 cookbook Tselementes wrote in English commemorating his stint as chef in the restaurant in New York's then-fashionable St. Moritz Hotel, reflects that same attitude. Although recipes for classic Greek dishes such as baklava and many kinds of lamb are included, the emphasis is on distinctly un-Greek recipes for canapes, bouillabaisse, onion soup, a cheese omelet, hollandaise and bechamel sauces, cauliflower au gratin, meatloaf, chipped beef in cream and raisin bread.

Traditional cooking, with its emphasis on fresh, flavorful local ingredients, is back in favor in Greece just as it is in other countries. Meze restaurants, which feature small plates of traditional and regional dishes as well as olives, cheeses, sardines, pickled peppers or eggplants and fried fish, are increasingly popular. "The publicity the Mediterranean Diet has received and the success of upscale Greek restaurants abroad has helped enormously," says Kremezi, "making people look back at foods their parents have dismissed."

For her current book, Kremezi spent eight years collecting such regional recipes and culinary lore from home cooks, fishermen and bakers throughout the Greek islands. She found foods inspired by both availability and necessity. "Each cook went to the garden for seasonal ingredients -- sometimes three months' worth -- and had to find ways to use what was in abundance," she says. People had to be frugal and economic, says Kremezi: "They had to find ingenious ways of using up things." So there are many recipes for the fruits and vegetables that are plentiful: the zucchini, lemons and tomatoes of summer; the wild greens, pickled vegetables and dried fruits of winter.

Although many of the dishes in "The Foods of the Greek Islands" have been in family repertoires for generations, including foods often prepared by Kremezi's mother, grandmother and aunt, overall the selection is geared toward contemporary tastes and kitchens. From meats to meze to savory pies and pitas to seafood to all kinds of sweets and breads, in this book there is no reflection of the foods popularized by Tselementes.

Kremezi's approach is a testament to changing times -- and pride in her Greek legacy. "It started with Crete, where they didn't abandon the old ways," she says. "Then, when tourists started coming, they appreciated the old dishes. And now there are very interesting local restaurants, and co-ops where people produce homemade pastas and savory biscotti. And other islands have started to follow."

Regional foods are increasingly appreciated. Young chefs have started to experiment with traditional recipes and do dishes inspired by them. "We're ready to start redoing the old things," says Kremezi.

Wouldn't Tselementes be surprised.

Find more information about traditional Greek foods in "Little Foods of the Mediterranean," by Clifford Wright (Harvard Common Press, 2003) and in "The Olive and the Caper," by Susanna Hoffman (Workman, 2004).

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New Books etc.

Odysseus Unbound by Robert Bittlestone, Cambridge publishing

Into the land of bones/Alexander the Great in Afghanistan by Frank L. Holt, University of California Press

"Greece In Print" Literary and Cultural Journal

The July-August, issue 194/195, of the English language Greek literary and cultural journal has been issued. The issue has been posted in www.greeceinprint.com for downloading.

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