



The Hellenic Society Prometheas

Newsletter 43

May 2005

Dear Friends: First of all, Χριστός Ανέστη. We hope you had a Happy Easter.

Mark your Calendar

Upcoming Activities

<u>Event</u>	<u>Theme/Speakers</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Notes/Contact</u>
Movie	A matter of dignity	May 13	St. Katherine	Dimitris Vasiliades (301) 838-9225

Prometheas presents the Classic Greek movie: “A matter of dignity” («Το Τελευταίο Ψέμα»). Click [here](#) for more info.

Events by Other Organizations:

- Friday, May 13; The Battle of Salamis: Ancient Lessons for Modern Statecraft Book event with Prof. Barry Strauss, Cornell University 1:00 - 2:00 p.m., 6th Floor Boardroom, Wilson Center Southeast Europe Project, Reservations: sep@wwic.si.edu
- ***May 28, 8:00 pm: Mario Fragoulis and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra*** celebrate the Centennial of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Annunciation at the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall in Baltimore. Info: www.goannun100.org

Misc. News

The Charioteer, an annual review of Modern Greek culture has been published recently. Click [here](#) for more info.

New Books

"North of Ithaka" by Eleni Gage provides a follow-up to her father's (Nicholas Gage) Eleni. The author spent ten months in the remote village of Lia (population 300) rebuilding her grandmother's house, stone by stone, and writing her book about the experience (St. Martin's Press, to be published in June 2005)

April 13, 2005

Greek Chefs Modernize the Classics

By **DIANE KOCHILAS**

Athens

ATHENS was a culinary backwater when Yiannis Baxevannis returned to Greece after years of training in France to be a chef. Escoffier was his muse back then. But in his new restaurant, Hytra, he has found inspiration in the foods of his homeland.

"I wanted to do haute French cuisine when I came back here 12 years ago," said Mr. Baxevannis, who grew up in Crete, "but Greek food just snuck up on me."

Christoforos Peskias grew up in Cyprus and spent most of his professional life in Athens, leaving for short stints with Ferran Adrià in Spain and Marc Meneau and Joël Robuchon in France. When he returned to Athens in 2003 to open "48", all the trendiest restaurants here were trying to recreate the menus that were popular in Paris and New York. But while his techniques reflect the avant-garde approach he learned in Catalonia and Paris, Mr. Peskias's menu includes riffs on Greek salad and spinach pie. "I look to the things I ate as a boy in Cyprus," he said.

Lefteris Lazarou's restaurant, Varoulko, is in one of the city's most fashionable neighborhoods, next to a boutique hotel, but tripe and goat have roles just as important as foie gras. "I have always believed that you need excellent quality ingredients but not necessarily gourmet ingredients to produce gourmet food," Mr. Lazarou said. "And here in Greece, one thing we have is great ingredients."

In the last 10 years or so, the Athens restaurant scene has followed the typical roller-coaster ride of every fast-changing society. For years, as the Greek economy took off, chefs scorned the old and traditional and embraced all that was new and foreign. Now, the economy is coming back to earth. And with an infusion of local pride from last year's summer Olympic Games, many chefs have returned, with a more seasoned eye, to take stock once again of tradition, to reinterpret and modernize it.

Since Mr. Baxevannis opened Hytra, which means cooking pot, in the industrial-turned-trendy area of Psirri, in the heart of Athens, he has applied classic techniques to aspects of the cuisine of his native Crete. He has also reinterpreted another Greek dining tradition: His tasting menu, which the restaurant promotes in favor of à la carte dining, is

really a fine selection of meze, the small dishes that are like Greek tapas. He serves about 15 small plates for 45 euros (about \$58), a good deal these days.

The meal begins with tiny green olives and raw baby wild greens from his native Crete, which accompany a shot glass of raki, the island's potent eau de vie. "The French use foie gras and truffles when they want to do something special," Mr. Baxevannis said. "We have dozens of exquisite wild herbs and greens here, and they are my idea of gourmet products."

The tasting menu starts with chickpeas braised with cumin and herbs. Mr. Baxevannis then serves the traditional fisherman's soup with a dollop of sea-green foam made with bitter wild chicory.

A platter of four seafood dishes vary depending on the market and weather. Two of the best are red snapper fillet served with chervil or spinach and black-eyed pea broth and octopus stewed with Greek island seaweed. The meal ends with one of several elegant takes on traditional meat dishes, like lamb braised with lettuce and served with creamy egg-lemon sauce. His desserts also take a cue from tradition. Caramelized dried fruit souvlaki are served with a tangy yogurt-and-coffee mousse and pineapple-filled kataifi - shredded-wheat pastries - are served with a spiced honey syrup.

One of the most innovative chefs in the city is Mr. Peskias, at the restaurant 48. "I like to play," Mr. Peskias said. Recalling his childhood in Cyprus, he said, "We all used to hunt rabbits back then and bring them home for our mothers to cook in a stew with plenty of onions. I do the same with rabbit stew, as well as slow-cooked rooster," another classic dish, except that he serves it with lemon-grass-scented orzo.

Mr. Peskias is Greece's kitchen deconstructionist. His Greek salad, arguably the most clichéd of all Greek dishes, is hardly recognizable. The tomato is a frozen sorbet; the peppers and feta are set in gelatin; the cucumber is foamed; the onions are fried into chips; and the Kalamata olives are puréed and drawn on the plate in the form of a thin black line.

He applies techniques learned during his year in France and Spain to traditional recipes. The rabbit and rooster stews are cooked sous vide - baked in airtight bags at low temperature for 72 hours, which helps the meat retain its juices. He serves an "air" of lemon juice frothed with lecithin along with house-smoked mackerel and gelatinized onions extruded as strands like tagliatelle.

Spinach pie comes in the form of a spinach-filled phyllo cone topped with feta ice cream; as a mille-feuille with the spinach set in gelatin and the cheese the texture of panna cotta; and as a more traditional packet with homemade pastry. "It gets people thinking," he says. "It's the game that is interesting."

Mr. Lazarou received a Michelin star at his restaurant, Varoulko, three years ago. He is known for his wizardly ways with seafood but a recent move from his old address in the boondocks of the seaport Piraeus to Athens, next to the Hotel Iridanos, has helped him break free of the constraints of doing only seafood. He honors his proximity to the Athens Central Meat Market with an unusual prix-fixe menu of offal and game. One new dish is

his patsathaki - tripe soup - a dish served in decidedly more elegant form than that found in the market's stalls and tavernas. His is a delicate potion perfumed with tomato and cinnamon and laced with hot pepper, a beloved spice in northern Greece, where tripe soup has flourished ever since Greek refugees brought it from Turkey in the 1920's.

"The food critics in Athens jumped down my throat when I put patsa on the menu," he said. "In France it's considered a delicacy. I have made it one here, too."

Another iconoclastic meat dish on the prix-fixe menu is his risotto with old goat (a traditional soup meat in Greece) that he seasons with bitter chocolate.

Mr. Lazarou doesn't foam a thing here, but more often than not he forges new creations from traditional ingredients rather than from traditional dishes. Two recent examples are a delicately sautéed dish of young baby squid served in an extremely light tahini sauce and a hot bowl of velvety pumpkin-saffron soup balanced with kiwi (instead of the more typical lemon) and enriched with chunks of melting bottarga. A few drops of Cretan olive oil are added just before the bowl leaves the kitchen. He was one of the first chefs to use less expensive fish like the ungainly monkfish and the long, lanky garfish, which he fillets and braids and serves in a caramelized Greek raisin-vinegar sauce.

Despite the deconstructionism and other haute culinary trends taking hold of Athenian restaurants these days, simple Greek food inspires a number of modern Greek restaurants. Aristera-Dexia opened seven years ago as one of the city's most expensive and trendiest restaurants. In the last two years it has scaled back, slashing prices nearly in half but still serving some of the most novel Greek food in town. "I like to research regional flavors and to use them as a jumping-off point," the chef, Chrisanthos Karamolengos, said. Stuffed sardines, a dish common in the eastern Aegean islands, especially on Lesbos, where they are filled with herbs and breadcrumbs, are stuffed with fennel, sheep's milk cheese and capers at Aristera-Dexia. Mr. Karamolengos garnishes fava, the yellow split-pea purée traditional to the Cyclades, with smoked fish and tomatoes. His shrimp saganaki, the staple of Greek restaurants the world over, is prepared with kasseri cheese, yogurt and saffron, a far cry from those flaming wedges of salty sheep's milk cheese ignited elsewhere with much fanfare and cheap brandy.

The taverna dies hard, even among trend-conscious Greeks, and in the past several years a new generation of them has also taken root. Krissa Gi in Maroussi, a suburb about 25 minutes from downtown Athens, is usually packed. It specializes in modern Cretan food. Its bleached wooden floors and stark white walls are offset by huge black-and-white photographs depicting scenes from the island's timeless agricultural life. The menu is prepared by female relatives of the two young owners and executed nightly by a young chef, Vassilis Kallidis.

He said the owner's aunt, Kyria Maro from Hania, "is 80 percent of the success of this place." He continued, "I was hung up on my mille-feuilles and my mousses. I have learned so much from her, but I add my school-taught techniques to the dishes. Now I am doing tiramisù with fresh Cretan sheep's milk cheese and the Cretan customers can't believe it."

Meze, the Greek appetizers, are getting a redesign too. Costas Tsingas, who owned Agrotikon on East 14th Street in New York City in the 1980's, returned to Greece in the mid 1990's, was an executive chef in charge of Greek dishes at the Olympic Village, and is also about to open a modern meze restaurant, in the seaside suburb of Glyfada. Among some of his more innovative dishes: taramosalata soufflé, sweetbread and quince souvlaki and a grain salad made with whole wheat kernels - something usually reserved for ritualistic memorial meals - tomatoes, lovage, cumin and Samothrace goat cheese.

Just a few years ago, such a diversion from tradition would have been incendiary. These days, diners barely blink an eye.

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http://news.independent.co.uk/world/science_technology/story.jsp?story=630165

Eureka! Extraordinary discovery unlocks secrets of the ancients

By David Keys and Nicholas Pyke

17 April 2005

Thousands of previously illegible manuscripts containing work by some of the greats of classical literature are being read for the first time using technology which experts believe will unlock the secrets of the ancient world.

Among treasures already discovered by a team from Oxford University are previously unseen writings by classical giants including Sophocles, Euripides and Hesiod. Invisible under ordinary light, the faded ink comes clearly into view when placed under infra-red light, using techniques developed from satellite imaging.

The Oxford documents form part of the great papyrus hoard salvaged from an ancient rubbish dump in the Graeco-Egyptian town of Oxyrhynchus more than a century ago. The thousands of remaining documents, which will be analysed over the next decade, are expected to include works by Ovid and Aeschylus, plus a series of Christian gospels which have been lost for up to 2,000 years.

Decoded at last: the 'classical holy grail' that may rewrite the history of the world
Scientists begin to unlock the secrets of papyrus scraps bearing long-lost words by the
literary giants of Greece and Rome
By David Keys and Nicholas Pyke

17 April 2005

For more than a century, it has caused excitement and frustration in equal measure - a collection of Greek and Roman writings so vast it could redraw the map of classical civilisation. If only it was legible.

Now, in a breakthrough described as the classical equivalent of finding the holy grail, Oxford University scientists have employed infra-red technology to open up the hoard, known as the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, and with it the prospect that hundreds of lost Greek comedies, tragedies and epic poems will soon be revealed.

In the past four days alone, Oxford's classicists have used it to make a series of astonishing discoveries, including writing by Sophocles, Euripides, Hesiod and other literary giants of the ancient world, lost for millennia. They even believe they are likely to find lost Christian gospels, the originals of which were written around the time of the earliest books of the New Testament.

The original papyrus documents, discovered in an ancient rubbish dump in central Egypt, are often meaningless to the naked eye - decayed, worm-eaten and blackened by the passage of time. But scientists using the new photographic technique, developed from satellite imaging, are bringing the original writing back into view. Academics have hailed it as a development which could lead to a 20 per cent increase in the number of great Greek and Roman works in existence. Some are even predicting a "second Renaissance".

Christopher Pelling, Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford, described the new works as "central texts which scholars have been speculating about for centuries".

Professor Richard Janko, a leading British scholar, formerly of University College London, now head of classics at the University of Michigan, said: "Normally we are lucky to get one such find per decade." One discovery in particular, a 30-line passage from the poet Archilochos, of whom only 500 lines survive in total, is described as "invaluable" by Dr Peter Jones, author and co-founder of the Friends of Classics campaign.

The papyrus fragments were discovered in historic dumps outside the Graeco-Egyptian town of Oxyrhynchus ("city of the sharp-nosed fish") in central Egypt at the end of the 19th century. Running to 400,000 fragments, stored in 800 boxes at Oxford's Sackler Library, it is the biggest hoard of classical manuscripts in the world.

The previously unknown texts, read for the first time last week, include parts of a long-lost tragedy - the Epigonoï ("Progeny") by the 5th-century BC Greek playwright Sophocles; part of a lost novel by the 2nd-century Greek writer Lucian; unknown material by Euripides; mythological poetry by the 1st-century BC Greek poet Parthenios;

work by the 7th-century BC poet Hesiod; and an epic poem by Archilochos, a 7th-century successor of Homer, describing events leading up to the Trojan War. Additional material from Hesiod, Euripides and Sophocles almost certainly await discovery.

Oxford academics have been working alongside infra-red specialists from Brigham Young University, Utah. Their operation is likely to increase the number of great literary works fully or partially surviving from the ancient Greek world by up to a fifth. It could easily double the surviving body of lesser work - the pulp fiction and sitcoms of the day.

"The Oxyrhynchus collection is of unparalleled importance - especially now that it can be read fully and relatively quickly," said the Oxford academic directing the research, Dr Dirk Obbink. "The material will shed light on virtually every aspect of life in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, and, by extension, in the classical world as a whole."

The breakthrough has also caught the imagination of cultural commentators. Melvyn Bragg, author and presenter, said: "It's the most fantastic news. There are two things here. The first is how enormously influential the Greeks were in science and the arts. The second is how little of their writing we have. The prospect of having more to look at is wonderful."

Bettany Hughes, historian and broadcaster, who has presented TV series including *Mysteries of the Ancients* and *The Spartans*, said: "Egyptian rubbish dumps were gold mines. The classical corpus is like a jigsaw puzzle picked up at a jumble sale - many more pieces missing than are there. Scholars have always mourned the loss of works of genius - plays by Sophocles, Sappho's other poems, epics. These discoveries promise to change the textual map of the golden ages of Greece and Rome."

When it has all been read - mainly in Greek, but sometimes in Latin, Hebrew, Coptic, Syriac, Aramaic, Arabic, Nubian and early Persian - the new material will probably add up to around five million words. Texts deciphered over the past few days will be published next month by the London-based Egypt Exploration Society, which financed the discovery and owns the collection.

A 21st-century technique reveals antiquity's secrets

Since it was unearthed more than a century ago, the hoard of documents known as the Oxyrhynchus Papyri has fascinated classical scholars. There are 400,000 fragments, many containing text from the great writers of antiquity. But only a small proportion have been read so far. Many were illegible.

Now scientists are using multi-spectral imaging techniques developed from satellite technology to read the papyri at Oxford University's Sackler Library. The fragments, preserved between sheets of glass, respond to the infra-red spectrum - ink invisible to the naked eye can be seen and photographed.

The fragments form part of a giant "jigsaw puzzle" to be reassembled. Missing "pieces" can be supplied from quotations by later authors, and grammatical analysis.

Key words from the master of Greek tragedy

Speaker A: . . . gobbling the whole, sharpening the flashing iron.

Speaker B: And the helmets are shaking their purple-dyed crests, and for the wearers of breast-plates the weavers are striking up the wise shuttle's songs, that wakes up those who are asleep.

Speaker A: And he is gluing together the chariot's rail.

These words were written by the Greek dramatist Sophocles, and are the only known fragment we have of his lost play *Epigonoï* (literally "The Progeny"), the story of the siege of Thebes. Until last week's hi-tech analysis of ancient scripts at Oxford University, no one knew of their existence, and this is the first time they have been published.

Sophocles (495-405 BC), was a giant of the golden age of Greek civilisation, a dramatist who work alongside and competed with Aeschylus, Euripides and Aristophanes.

His best-known work is *Oedipus Rex*, the play that later gave its name to the Freudian theory, in which the hero kills his father and marries his mother - in a doomed attempt to escape the curse he brings upon himself. His other masterpieces include *Antigone* and *Electra*.

Sophocles was the cultured son of a wealthy Greek merchant, living at the height of the Greek empire. An accomplished actor, he performed in many of his own plays. He also served as a priest and sat on the committee that administered Athens. A great dramatic innovator, he wrote more than 120 plays, but only seven survive in full.

Last week's remarkable finds also include work by Euripides, Hesiod and Lucian, plus a large and particularly significant paragraph of text from the *Elegies*, by Archilochos, a Greek poet of the 7th century BC.

A second renaissance?

17 April 2005

Like explorers mapping the globe in sailing ships, scholars are expanding the known world across the terra incognita of classical literature. As we report today, infra-red technology has enabled hundreds of ancient Greek comedies, tragedies and epic poems, composed by classical greats such as Sophocles, Euripides and Hesiod, to be deciphered for the first time in 2,000 years. The dramatic increase in great literary works surviving from the ancient Greek world is prompting experts to predict a "second renaissance". The documents, known as the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, discovered in an ancient rubbish dump in central Egypt, are also thought to include lost Christian gospels. Of course, this is exciting in its own right, but it could be the shot in the arm that teaching of the classics have needed for so long. Like genealogy, they could come to be more widely perceived as not only interesting but, good heavens, fashionable.

Article Length: 162 words (approx.)

OTHER LINKS:

<http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/>

<http://www.ees.ac.uk/the-society/furtherinfo.htm>

<http://www.ees.ac.uk/the-society/graeco-roman.htm>