

University of Minnesota

The Culinary Landscape of Greece

Thesis Paper
Submitted to Anna Tahinci,
Greece SPAN 2009 Advisor

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Abstract

This cookbook started out with the goal of investigation how Greece's outdoor food market influences and/or reflects perspectives on the physical environment, but it turned into a more general review of my food experiences in Greece. My culinary adventure took me from the street market and coffee shops of Athens, to the island of Evia, a sheep farm in Brallos, Central Greece, and finishing in the ancient Byzantine city of Thessaloniki. I gathered recipes from *tavernas*, a Greek nutritionist, a Brazilian-born Greek sheep farmer, a Greek restaurant manager and her girlfriends, two Greek gardeners, and an American-born owner of a Greek restaurant. The diverse recipes—which range from the cities to the mountains to the beaches, crossing the country from south to north—reflect both the modern and traditional dishes I encountered while living in Greece for ten weeks.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Venturing Into Culinary Greece.....	1
City Food	
Athens’s Coffee Shops and Bakeries.....	14
<i>Tavernas</i>	18
After a Night on the Town.....	26
Contributions of the Immigrants	
The Ottomans.....	32
Today’s Immigrants.....	35
The Bounteous Garden.....	53
Gifts of the Sea.....	75
Of the Orchards.....	81
The Sheep Farm.....	91
The Wild Mountainsides.....	111
Bringing it all Together: Special Celebrations	
Roasting a Lamb for Greek Orthodox Easter.....	122
Baptismal Dinner.....	128
Five Pounds Heavier & Two Months Later: Lessons I Have Learned.....	135
Appendix I: The Food Philosophy of Panagiotis Oikonomou.....	147
Appendix II: The Contents of a Greek Pantry and Refrigerator.....	153
Notes on Informants.....	155
Bibliography.....	159
Index.....	161

Venturing into Culinary Greece



Today for breakfast I opened a cardboard box and pulled apart an air-tight plastic bag to get at the cereal inside. I added milk from a disposal plastic container. For lunch I grabbed a free slice of greasy pizza from school and for dinner I had spaghetti with frozen broccoli and a pre-packaged salad greens on the side. What did you eat today? Did it come from a box? Was it instant? Was it shrink-wrapped? Do you know who made it or where it came from? Do you know what was in it? As for the foodstuffs in my meals, I don't have a clue where the raw ingredients came from (or, for that matter, what some of the ingredients are), where the products were manufactured, or who to thank for my full stomach.

We live in a land where most food is highly processed, pre-prepared, and packaged. There is a gaping disconnect with food which has produced highly detrimental,¹ yet largely unnoted, consequences. I think that for many Americans, food is something to be eaten, energy to be consumed, valued for its taste and convenience; food is not a product of the earth to be appreciated, savored, or shared in community with others. However, a growing number of Americans are choosing to "eat local," purchasing and consuming unprocessed and locally raised foods. Some reason that they want to support the local economy or the environment; others claim that local food is healthier and tastes better. Scores of new books, documentaries, magazine articles, farmers markets, and community supported agriculture farms are testament to the boom of interest in local and sustainable agriculture.

Perhaps just as baffling is why many Europeans, who could easily take advantage of the fast-food opportunities ubiquitous in America, have not transitioned to the quick-and-easy American diet. What is so important about the daily or weekly trip to the outdoor market to buy fresh produce and cook and serve a meal at home? How do outdoor markets, local food

¹ California Center for Public Health Advocacy. "The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes" California Center for Public Health Advocacy, April 29, 2008. <http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/designedfordisease.html>, accessed Feb 25, 2009.

production and distribution, and a home-cooked approach to consumption influence or reflect environmental stewardship? These are the questions I set out to explore when I traveled to Greece in the summer of 2009.

When I went to the land of olives, the Acropolis, beaches, Plato and feta to study Greek food culture and the manner in which outdoor food markets influence and reflect the Greek perspective on the environment, I expected to encounter not only delicious food and a culture of cooking from scratch and eating late, but also to find daily outdoor markets where shoppers chatted with farmers as they leisurely purchased their daily foodstuffs. In my vision, the vegetables were importantly dirty, so that the customer had a chance to brush off the earth's soil and realize that the food they were handling was not mass-produced in a factory but rather a gift from Mother Nature gathered by a neighborhood farmer. Familiar with my local farmers' markets and some of the people who shop there, I assumed that those who shopped at outdoor farmers' markets in Greece chose to do so because they appreciated their community farmers and/or wanted to support sustainable farming that treats the environment as a living organism to be nurtured and appreciated. My goal was to assess this hypothesis and analyze the foundations of the local food system in an effort to return to the U.S. with a better understanding of what constitutes a sustainable food system that promotes healthy communities.

I left my home in Falcon Heights, Minnesota on May 16, 2009, two days after I received my honors diploma from the University of Minnesota. For the past five years I had studied chemistry, biology, and physiology and was looking forward to a break from science while traveling in the ancient land of knowledge and democracy, togas, Olympics, and wonderful food.

The first leg of my journey took me across the Atlantic for my first step into Europe. My first time abroad was three years ago when I studied in Hong Kong during the 2006-2007 school

year. During my school holidays I had traveled in Southeast Asia and definitely caught the travel bug—I was enticed by the novel aromas, enthralled by the unfamiliar folk dances, awed by the landscapes and man-made achievements of grandeur: the Grand Palace of Bangkok, Malaysia’s Kota Kinabalu, Cambodia’s Angkor Wat, Indonesia’s Borobudur, Thailand’s wild elephant rainforests, the waterfalls of Laos, and the region’s wats, temples, and mosques. After two years of intensive study to finish up my three majors at the U of M, I was ready to get back on the road for a taste of Europe, the other half of my bi-racial heritage.



Traditional English Shepherd's pie

After bussing to Chicago and stopping over in Atlanta, I finally disembarked in London. I spent four whirlwind days in the capital of England exploring the city with the Teddy, boyfriend of a fellow Greece 2009 SPANner. We attended “Romeo & Juliet” in Shakespeare’s Globe Theater, checked out the local pubs near the Parliament building, visited the city’s fantastic museums, and walked along the Thames. My guide departed for a dentist appointment in his hometown some hours away and a day later I boarded a bus for Oxford, where I met a friend whom I had met in Hawaii on a University of Minnesota course on ethnobotany.

I had a fantastic time in Oxford, treated by my friend, Zevic, to a slice of Oxford University student life: rowing, neurology class, a tour of the campus, a run near the deer park, evening mass, and a formal dinner. The food at Zevic’s college, St. Katherine’s, was prepared by a Michelin three-star chef, who, aside from the art-deco architecture, is the top feature of the college. The food he prepared was fine, but rather familiar, nothing like the food I was introduced to in Greece.

Before landing in Athens, I had a short stop in Barcelona to visit some friends, drink a sip of very strong Absinth, and celebrate the city's football team win the European cup. I stayed in an apartment with Erasmus exchange students, so I was treated to international cuisine: shrimp-alfredo spaghetti, borscht, quiche, and gazpacho; the only Spanish food I had was *churros*, traditional Spanish fried dough coated in sugar. I'm glad I got some international flavors in before heading to Greece where the food to be found is Greek, Greek and more Greek. Greeks like their food and don't see a need to introduce foreign flavors, which are bound to be inferior.

I spent my first fifteen days in Athens, visiting the city's museums and historic sites, exploring the local Tuesday food market, attempting to learn basic Greek, inquiring at

Monastiraki and Plaka *tavernas*, and practicing my cooking as I got to better know my advisor, Anna Tahinci, and my fellow SPANners (pictured, from left to right): Anna Tahinci, Jacob Walls, Anna Burger, Beth Procopio, Andrew Knutson, Laura Kwong, Yeoryia Christoforides, Aili Emilia, and Mary Thrall.



SPANner Yeoryia Christoforides is half-Greek and has an uncle living in Athens. I was lucky to be invited to the family home on my second day in Athens, June 1, 2009. Yeoryia's uncle treated me to a reunion of old friends at a rooftop taverna, an unbelievable experience of feasting with local Greeks that I would not have had if not for Yeoryia.

Throughout the dinner, I directed my questions about Greek food culture to Yeoryia's mother, Anna. Anna Christoforides is a self-identified Greek. Although she has no Greek blood, she has married into a Greek family and, declares her daughter, Yeoryia, "My mom is more Greek than most Greeks. She speaks Greek, she cooks Greek, she dances Greek dances, and she

reads more Greek books than my dad (who really is Greek).” Ms. Christoforides and her husband, Lazaros, are the owners of *Gardens of Salonica*, a Greek restaurant in northeast Minneapolis, Minnesota. I am grateful for her help that night as well as her invitation to celebrate Greek Easter at her home with her friends and family in the spring of 2009.

I enjoyed dining with the other SPANners, visiting the tavernas, museums historic monuments of Athens but I was very displeased with the culture of tourism that pervaded the city. Athens seems almost completely dependent on tourism and the locals, so overwhelmed by tourists and yet dependent on tourists as they are, Athenians seem thoroughly sick of the situation. Although I did meet some kind merchants, I got the feeling that, unless I was going to purchase something, most people didn’t want to talk to me, especially as I don’t speak Greek.

By my second week in Greece, I was disappointed with myself and tired of spending so much time in Athens. There was a three-block-long market in my neighborhood and a daily market at the city center which I was happy to explore, but I was frustrated that I had not found an opportunity to get into a local Greek’s kitchen. With hopes to reinvigorate myself, I decided to take a bus out of town. I originally planned to go to Delphi, but at the last minute I realized that traveling to Delphi would just be getting myself into another tourist trap so instead I boarded a bus to the only other city on my Athens-and-surrounding-area map, Thebes.

I arrived in Thebes on June 16th to a hot, soporific city scene very much like the one I had left at the edge of Athens. In the name of research (and to console myself), I headed to the local bakery. It wasn’t long after that I spotted a group of teenagers snacking on sunflower seeds and orange pop, sitting on cardboard boxes in the shade outside a grocery store. I tried to get over the fact that I didn’t speak Greek and muster up the courage to speak to the boys in English without embarrassment, but one of the boys approached me first. He asked me my name and

then presented himself as Norachman, from Afghanistan. And so began my four days of living with ten Afghani refugees in their concrete hut on the edge of the stultifyingly hot city.

My new Afghani friends told me (in a mixture of Pashtun, English, Greek, pictures, and through English-speaking friends on their cell phones) about their hometowns in Afghanistan,



Sayed (right) and Norachman prepared potatoes to make fries.

their journey to Greece, the barriers they faced as refugees, finally in the EU, but without the refugee status that Greece refuses to grant, and their plans for the future. As an American with the power of literacy, the internet, and freedom of speech, I became an instant journalist, someone they hoped would hear their plight and share it with the world. I almost changed my project to the study of refugees living in Greece, but was dissuaded by my new friends, who reminded me that although they would never hurt me and be happy for me to live with

them for a month, other people, desperate as they were, may not treat me so kindly.

I am thankful for my Afghani friends (Ali, Adel, Rohalla, Izet, Muhammed, Saif, Sayed, and Norchaman) in that they made me aware of refugee issues for the three days I spent with them. I was privileged to sleep on their outdoor sleeping platform under the stars, watch them make stews for our meals, and try my hand at making *dordee*, Afghani flat bread. I will always remember my experience in Thebes and I hope, *Inshalla*, that my friends will stay safe and their health issues (ulcers, musculoskeletal problems, vitamin deficiencies etc.) will be resolved.

On June 19th I returned to Athens to have dinner with the artist Mihalis Manousakis (the focus of a fellow SPANner, Anna Burger) on the evening of the 20th atop his rooftop in central Athens. The dinner was most excellent; if such dinners are typical for Greek gatherings, I have no doubt why Greek life appears to be so good.

Still eager to get into a Greek kitchen, I checked on the Willing Workers On Organic Farms (WWOOF) website for families with organic farms who were willing to let volunteers live at the homes, tend their farms, and learn about organic farming techniques. I chose to contact Kerys and Takis Oikonomou because, unlike most of the other organic farmers listed, the family appears to be Greek. Tipped off by their non-Greek names, I found that most of the other families were, indeed, non-Greeks who had immigrated to Greece to follow their dreams of starting their own organic farms in the remote rural regions that can still be found in Greece. Kerys, the woman of the Oikonomou household, was happy to have me so I got on a bus to the island of Evia (one-and-a-half hours from Athens) and took a taxi to the Oikonomous's home (aka Sunshine House Thai Massage Retreat) in Bourtzi, Halkida on June 21st.

Although I contacted the family several times to set up my stay, it was only upon arrive that I found out the family was actually only half-Greek and that the Greek half (Panagiotis "Takis" Oikonomou) was in Spain for the next ten days teaching a massage course and that I would be primarily helping Kerys Williams (the English mother), care for her two young children, 3-year-old Gaia, and 18-month-old Dialou, as well as tend the vegetables. To my surprise, the "organic farm" which I had come to learn about tending, was nothing more than a small family garden in the backyard. The garden was indeed organic, but there was nothing different about tending to its cucumbers, zucchini, potatoes, beets, tomatoes, lettuce, squash, or herbs than there was to caring for my own family's garden when I was young.

I ended up staying with the family for two weeks so that I could spend some time in the kitchen of Takis's mother, Evanthia, and her friends, Dora (Takis's sister), Maria (a chef) and Nadia. I was also



Nadia, watering the large garden at Evanthia's house.

able to attend a baptism, go to the local market, and walk about the farms in the area. When Takis came home from Spain, I asked him about his food philosophy, which is included in this book's appendix. Takis, like his wife, is a yoga and massage teacher with a deep interest in food and healthy eating. He teaches Chinese medicine and cooking (according to ancient Chinese and Greek medical theory) at a school in Athens and taught me several "traditional" Greek dishes as well as laying out his theory on healthy eating. Kerys and Takis also compiled *The Sunshine House Cookbook*, a book of seasonal foods, "commonly used herbs in Greece," and recipes ranging from Greek Salad and Greek Potatoes to Miso-Orange Vinaigrette and Simple Curry Dal. The book, which reflects the couple's philosophy on health (strongly influenced by Greek, Chinese, Japanese, and Thai traditions), was sent to me electronically on September 4, 2009.

After four days (July 10-14) in Athens which I spent visiting the new Acropolis museum, patronizing the Mastihashop, and saying good-bye to my SPAN friends before I traveled north and ventured on to Istanbul, I caught the train to Bralios, in Central Greece. I debarked and got a lift to the farm of Andy Agouropoulos, another member of the WWOOFing organization who I heard about through Dolly, a girl I met at the home of Takis and Kerys in Evia.

At the time I worked at Andy's farm, he had 110 ewes, five rams, one cow, sixteen



The author (black shirt) watches the flock as they graze for their evening meal.

chickens, one turkey, seven dogs, and an

armload of cats. Andy was born in Brazil to parents who had fled Greece during WWII. He moved to England, where he obtained a degree in philosophy, married an Englishwoman and started a family. Andy's family moved to Greece

to start this farm fifteen years ago and every year

is a struggle to stay afloat—Andy is against the EU subsidies he receives, but admits they are

necessary to fight raising taxes and the unfair terms on loans that he has been forced to take out after a storm destroyed much of his barn in 2008. He struggles on, committed to raising clean meat (his sheep receive antibiotics but eat only the organic grain Andy and his son grow on the farm), supporting the local economy (Andy tries only to buy products produced in Greece), and living lightly on the land.

For help in his mission of raising organic grain, Andy relies on son Nick. Nick has chosen not to attend college but rather to continue helping his father on the farm, unlike his sisters who pursued higher degrees, married, and moved to England. Born in England but raised on his father's farm in Greece, Nick has had a passion for tractor driving since he was little. He has many chances to indulge—planting and harvesting the 100 acres of grain grown on the farm and taking trips to England and Australia to earn money reaping the fields after his father's fields have been cleared in Greece.

In addition to the grain and livestock, Andy has a large garden producing, among other vegetables, onion, garlic, beans, potatoes, watermelon, lettuce, and tomatoes. Andy uses several techniques of gardening: planting onions and garlic directly into the ground with no surface cover, planting potatoes and watermelon under mounds of straw to reduce evaporation under the hot Greek sun, and planting lettuce, tomatoes and other vegetables on mounds of dirt in between trenches that are filled with water to irrigate the garden. He has begun shifting to a new method of covering the ground with black tarp to prevent weeds and evaporation and cutting holes from which the desired garden plants emerge. With the ingredients from his garden, the meat of his sheep and milk of his cows and other staples like beans, chickpeas, pasta, rice, and feta, Andy produces absolutely delicious meals. I learned from his farming, gardening, and cooking methods, as well as his philosophy and humor. The two-and-a-half weeks I spent on Andy's farm were the happiest and most memorable of my time in Greece.

I pulled myself away from Andy's farm on July 30 and took the train to Thessaloniki to meet Yeoryia and her friend, Evi. I had an informative dinner at an ancient Byzantine-style restaurant with Evi and Yeoryia and the next day I spent a night walking along the ocean promenade, speaking to only the third Greek I had really gotten to know in the country, and the next day toured the city's fantastic Byzantine museum. I later connected with Maria, Kostas, and Michelangelo Katsigianni, my idea of the classic Greek family: gregarious, generous, and in-touch with the land. They would wake up in the morning and head to the nearby beach to play in the water for half-an-hour before returning home to a breakfast of homemade bread and jam. The day was filled with gardening, cooking, sitting around the dining room table or picnic table outside for long meals and good conversation with their guests, two Bulgarians, Milena and Niky, and myself, all of whom connected through couchsurfing, an online organization that links travelers with free couches to sleep on and interesting people to stay with. On couchsurfing's website, www.couchsurfing.com, Maria writes that her occupation is "music, gardening, helping," and that her education is "music, farmer, living." I couldn't have asked to meet a more genuine family, who rescued me when I was lost, showed me how to cook, shared family recipes, and made my last days in Greece some of the best.



Maria (above) and Kostas preparing peppers and tomato sauce, respectively.

After two months of exploring Greek food culture, I left the country August 5, 2009 on a bus bound for Constantinople. I enjoyed the aromas and tasty delights of Constantinople, but I will always remember the sheep and feta, tomatoes, eggplants, pitas, and olives of Greece. Thank you for joining me on this peek into the food culture of Greece in the pages that follow. Enjoy!



▲ Greek cities the author visited

City Food



Athens's Coffee Shops and Bakeries

Welcome to Delicious Athens

Monday, June 1, 2009

I'm in Greece and the food looks good! What a wonderful idea to come here to study food and food culture; now I only have to make sure I don't gain too much weight!

The food found in the shops of Greece's large cities is, unsurprisingly, different from that prepared at home. In Athens, the name of the game is coffee shops, bakeries, and *tavernas*. There seems to be at least one coffee shop per block, with two or three per block in tourist areas. Coffee shops sometimes sell spinach and cheese pies alongside their croissants and deli-style sandwiches, but these pies are much tastier and more economically priced when bought directly from the bakery. Unlike in Minnesota, where independent bakeries (not attached to grocery stores) are not very common, in Athens it seemed that there was always a bakery within ½ a mile of wherever I was. In addition to selling fresh bread for the day's meals, bakeries also offer fresh pies, hard breadsticks, cookies, baklava, croissants, cake, chocolate-dipped ice cream cones, and other delicious treats. Perhaps it is a good thing that we don't have more bakeries at home or we would all be carrying even more excess pounds than we are now!

When the weather is hot, as it also is in Greece, coffee shops are even more popular than bakeries, for all coffee shops sell ice-cold frappé.

Greek Frappé (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos²)



Goldy Gopher enjoying a frappe and a break from the hot Greek sun

Frappé is *the* drink in Greece. The coffee shops in every city don't serve the inane variety of caffeinated drinks served in American coffee shops; instead they serve, almost exclusively, iced frappé. This makes a lot of sense in a country where it is often 100°F in the summer, bright sun, and no rain for weeks. Luckily, you can also make this refreshing drink at home.

- 1 ½ T instant coffee
- 1 T sugar
- 4 ice cubes, divided
- ¼ c cool tap water
- 1-2 T milk, regular or condensed (opt)
- ¼ c cold water (from the fridge)

Combine the coffee, sugar, two ice cubes, and water and shake vigorously in a frappé shaker (a water bottle will do) for a least a minute. Add the milk and cold water and shake again. To serve, add two ice cubes to a glass, then pour in the frappé. Serve with a straw and a tall glass of cold water.

In addition to frappé, almost every coffee shop also sells Greek pies. Pies are an important part of Greek food culture, although the popular “pies” found in Greece are very different than the type of sweet fruit pies we are familiar with in America. In Greece “pie” either means a layer of filling (spinach, carrot and leek, rabbit, etc.) baked between two layers of phyllo dough or a mixture of grated or pureed vegetables or meat baked in a low, flat pan. The first type of pie, those consisting of vegetables and/cheese baked between sheets of phyllo, are commonly found in both the coffee shops and bakeries in Greek cities.

According to *Evia: Tradition & Diet*, pies are a traditional Greek dish that predate the café.

From the very old times pies were a very common dish in all households in Evia. The variety of products of the Evian fertile grounds, and the art of the traditional Evian housewife created the ideal conditions for the most delicious pies. The basic element of any pie is naturally the sheets.³

To make a decent pie, you need a quality recipe for both the filling and the phyllo sheets. *Evia: Tradition & Diet*, provided the following recipe, which it gathered from Evian housewives.

² Recipe observed July 26, 2009.

³ Kouki, Julia. *Evia: Tradition & Diet*. (Athens: Incentive Publications, 2004), page not noted.

Phyllo Sheets (recipe from *Evia: Tradition & Diet*⁴)

6 glasses flour
4 tablespoons vinegar
7 tablespoons olive oil
1 ½ glass tepid water (approx.)
1 ½ teaspoon salt

Put the flour in a bowl, open a hole in the center, and add in the water, the vinegar and the salt. Slowly mix the ingredients together working you hands from the centre to the sides. You should end up with a light dough, but, if necessary, add flour or water. In the end add in the oil and knead again until it is well absorbed. Then cut the dough in eleven pieces, which you shape into small balls. Cover completely and leave the dough to rest for around an hour. After one hour, start working on each ball to transform it in a sheet. In the end you will have 11 sheets.

Work the balls into sheets, using a rolling pin, and to prevent the dough from sticking or being punctured, dust with flour or starch for better results. The sheets of this recipe are suitable for all types of pies: cheese pies, veggie pies, pumpkin pies, meat pies etc.

You can use the above dough to make *spanakopita* or *tiropita*, the most common pies in Greece.

Spinach Pie *Spanakopita* (recipe from Anna Christoforides⁵)

Serves 8

Yesterday, wandering around in the warehouse district west of Omonia, I found a little pie shop and had my first bite of *spanakopita*. Rich with vegetables and oil, with delicate sheets of phyllo and bits of cheese—sooooo delicious!

1 bunch of green onions
1 kilo spinach
½ kilo feta
10 springs of dill, snipped
4-6 eggs
Home-made phyllo dough (recipe above)*



Wash and drain the spinach well. Sauté the chopped green onions in olive oil until soft then add the spinach and heat, with stirring, until wilted. Remove the spinach with a slotted spoon and boil down the juice (if there is any) before adding it back to the spinach. Beat the eggs and add to the spinach. Crumble the feta into the spinach and add the snipped dill.

Line a baking pan with two sheets of phyllo (cut to the size of the pan). Sprinkle or brush on oil. Add two more layers and more oil, continuing until there are eight to ten layers of phyllo. Spread half of the spinach mixture on this base, top with four more layers of phyllo, and the rest of the mixture. Finish off with six to eight layers of phyllo, again brushing with oil every other layer. Bake in medium oven until puffed and browned.

⁴ Kouki, Julia. *Evia: Tradition & Diet*. (Athens: Incentive Publications, 2004), page not noted.

⁵ Recipe received June 10, 2009 via email.

*Home-made phyllo dough tastes much better than store-bought dough and it is actually not that difficult to make. However, I'll admit that I was initially also intimidated by having to roll sheets so thin, so I used store-bought dough. You can start with the pre-made dough and work your way up to pie with hand-made phyllo.

Although *spanakopita* is good, it is more of a street snack than a meal. For a classic Greek meal, a most certainly sit-down affair that can last three or four hours, you must head to one of the city's scores of *tavernas*. Sharing a communal meal alfresco at a *taverna* or dining in the interior under ancient wood timbers is unlike any dining experience (limited as they are) that I've had in the United States. While some *tavernas* have menus, at others you select food not from a menu but by looking at the specialties the cooks have prepared that day. Consequently, there is only a short delay in which guests dine on appetizers and wine while the food is served up. You really have to duck out of the hot Greek sun for a light lunch or climb to a rooftop to eat under the stars to really understand the *taverna* food culture, but I will do my best to convey the experience in the following section.

Tavernas

First taste of Greece

Sunday, May 31, 2009

It is my first full day in Greece and it has been a good one. I spent the day wandering around the tourist quarter of the city, window shopping with four other girls who are also part of the SPAN program with which I have come to Greece. We are all very different but we get along great: Beth is a painter interested in becoming a museum curator; Aili is a college freshman interested in anthropology, Anna is an artist studying art and art history, and Mary is in Greece to study GLBT relations.

After strolling around the brick streets for several hours, passing shops selling all sorts of trinkets, bags, clothes, postcards, statues, olive oil soaps, shoes, and jewelry, we stopped at a *taverna* past the ruins of Hadrian library, near the Temple of the Winds.

Mary immediately ordered “Νερό, νερό, νερό, κρύο, κρύο, κρύο!” (“Water, water, water, cold, cold, cold!”) The sun had been beating down upon us all day so we were hot, sticky, and in great need some cold refreshment. Along with the water (which comes in liter bottles, as some think city water is unfit to drink), Anna, Aili, and Beth got glasses of *retsina* and Mary ordered a plate of *tzatziki* and bread for us to share.

I was glad to try *tzatziki*, a yogurt-cucumber dipping sauce that always falls into the category of traditional whenever I ask Greeks about their food. *Tzatziki* is available at every *taverna* and a staple starter.

Tzatziki (recipe from Yeoryia Christoforides⁶)

Enjoy this refreshing sauce with fresh bread or a hot vegetable dish.

Full-fat, strained Greek yogurt
Cucumber, grated
Olive oil
Salt and pepper
Oregano
Fresh garlic, crushed (opt)

Combine equal parts yogurt and grated cucumber. Season with salt and oregano and chopped fresh garlic, if desired. Drizzle with olive oil. Serve with fresh bread.

Taverna Day Two

Monday, June 1, 2009

Today all of the Greek SPANners (eight of us) went back to Monastiraki, the tourist district, and lunched at a tavern. We ordered the classics: Greek salad, *tzatziki*, and *pastichio*. As a special (unordered and gratis) dessert, the waiter brought us yogurt with honey.

Greek Salad⁷

Serves 2

This is a staple of the Greek diet. If it is not the first item on your restaurant's menu, you are not at a Greek *taverna*.

1 sm green bell pepper, sliced
4 med tomatoes, cut into eighths
10 olives (usually Kalamata olives), pits in
½ red onion, sliced
1 med cucumber, halved lengthwise and sliced
1 generous slice feta
Salt and pepper
Oregano
Olive oil



Toss the bell pepper, tomatoes, olives, onion, and cucumber with olive oil. Season with salt, pepper and oregano. Top with the feta, sprinkle with oregano, and drizzle with more olive oil. (Instead of a chunk of feta atop the salad, the feta is often coarsely crumbled and mixed with the other ingredients).

⁶ Recipe received May 31, 2009.

⁷ Recipe determined by author's personal observations.

Yogurt with Honey *Yaourti Me Meli*⁸



Yogurt with honey makes for an excellent dessert or breakfast, such as the one I enjoyed with Yeoryia at her uncle's home in Athens on my third day (June 2, 2009) in Greece.

Strained yogurt
Honey
Walnuts or pistachios, coarsely chopped (optional)

Spoon the yogurt onto a plate and smooth it out. Pour several tablespoons of honey in the middle and garnish with walnuts.

Midnight at a Rooftop *Taverna*

Monday, June 1, 2009

It is a good thing that I ate a light lunch because Yeoryia just invited me to attend dinner with her cousin, Father Dorotheos, and four of the Father's good friends for a reunion meal.

We didn't get to the rooftop tavern, *Taberna To Katsiki*, until almost 10 pm, very much in line with the Greek fashion to eat late, after the heat breaks. Father Dorotheos ordered and the food arrived soon thereafter. There were plates and plates of food, two of everything, one for each side of the table. Surrounded by warm plates of delicious food, I felt like the men at Athenian symposiums in 400 B.C. must have felt. Lounging on their sides in an *andrón* (the "dining room," appropriately named a "men's room" as only men were allowed to participate), men were served with an almost endless line of dishes beginning with *propómata* (appetizers), *sítos* (things to fill you up), and *ópson* (things to eat with bread).⁹

After the female proprietor covered the tablecloth with a napkin (to hasten clean-up), her husband brought out plates of feta doused with olive oil, round loaves of bread, fresh from the oven, and "lazy *tzatziki*" (simply yogurt and olive oil) for dipping. He followed this with a

⁸ Recipe determined by author's personal observations.

⁹ Milona, Marianthi, editor. *Culinaria Greece: Greek Specialties* (Cologne: Köneman, 2004), 14.

Greek salad and a dish of egg noodle pasta in a light sauce of pureed tomato and sprinkled with Parmesan. Next, he set before us a plate of baby onions stewed in a red sauce, the braised thigh of a goat, and potatoes cooked in the juices of the goat. After we were starting to feel full, he brought out a plate of beef, “a gift from his heart.” We ate, chatted (I listened amusedly since I don’t understand Greek), and drank *retsina* and white wine for nearly an hour and a half, stopping to digest at a quarter to midnight.

But the meal wasn’t over yet! At five minutes past twelve, when the moon was high in the sky, we were served a dessert of strawberry grapes; cantaloupe drizzled with honey and sprinkled with pine nuts and pistachios; and a julienned quince, stewed in sugar.

The meal reflected some basic traits of Greek food: keep it simple, serve hot with cold, eat mostly vegetables, always have feta, fresh bread and wine at the table, serve salad and pasta with plenty of olive oil, and a few bites of a dessert sweetened with honey. Rules of Greek dining were also apparent: smoking and talking on your cell phone (even if your voice is loud and your conversation lasts for an extended period of time) at the table are acceptable, forking food from a communal plate is allowed if you just want a nibble, and making somewhat of a mess by dropping an oily morsel on the table is expected (that’s why there are napkins over the tablecloth). But most importantly, and most apparent, is that Greek dining is about enjoying the food and the company you share it with.

A *Taverna* in Plaka

Sunday, June 7, 2009

Tonight we took our SPAN advisor, Anna Tahinci, and her mother out to a *taverna* in Plaka, an area for tourists (as apparently every area in Athens has become), but also one frequented by locals. I was happy to see that there was no menu at *Taverna Tou Psiri*; that seemed very authentic to me. Instead of looking at a list of words and prices, you simply go to

the kitchen, see what the cook has prepared and order what looks good. With ten people and eager to try new Greek foods, we asked for one of everything.



Following our appetizer of fresh, toasted bread drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with oregano, we were served pitchers of house red and white wines. Then came the dishes from the kitchen: veal with orzo, garbanzo beans soaking in oil, beef with mushrooms and potatoes over rice, eggplant with tomato puree and chunks of feta, *horta* (wild greens) with lemon and olive oil, lamb with baked potatoes, tomatoes and round zucchinis stuffed with rice and served with baked potatoes, cod with sliced onions, anchovies dripping with oil, and green beans in tomato sauce. I can hardly believe we ate it all, but somehow we did, all except for the anchovies.

As with my last experience at a *taverna*, even when you are stuffed there will be more delicious food brought to the table and you simply have to try a forkful or two...or three or four. For dessert we had halva served over green apples and sprinkled with cinnamon. *Then* two Swiss girls from a nearby table brought over their dessert because they simply couldn't eat it all. Well,

good friends, we will help you out, especially when the dessert you can't finish is ice cream with ribbons of mastic¹⁰ melting over warm apples; anytime, friend, anytime.



Potatoes are served with nearly every meal in Greece, as “chips” (fries), in vegetable dishes, cooked in the juices of meat as it is braised, or even stuffed into gyros. However, the potato is not a traditional Greek ingredient. *Evia: Tradition & Diet* gave a good introduction to “The potato in our life”:

The most famous worldwide vegetable and most common side order in almost all modern dishes, was completely unknown on the European tables 2-3 centuries ago. Clearly an American product, [the potato] reached Europe relatively late and was introduced in Greece, after the revolution (1821) with the personal intervention of Kapodistrias, because of the easy and cheap cultivation.

It becomes obvious that the potato is not related with the Greek tradition, including Evian. Nevertheless its deep integration in our cuisine, forces us to include it in this book, at least as a kind of vegetable related with the recent history of Evian cuisine.¹¹

You would never guess it by looking at the modern Greek plate, but Kapodistrias actually had trouble trying to get Greeks to adopt potatoes in their diet. It is said that he tried to give away potatoes but no one would take them so instead he placed a mound of potatoes in a prominent location and asked his soldiers to guard the starchy tubers. Seeing the guards, villagers assumed that potatoes must be a valuable and desirable and, therefore, began to steal them! Thus entered the potato into the history of Greek food. Potatoes are now found *everywhere*, especially as prepared in the recipe below.

¹⁰ For more on mastic, see this book's chapter titled “Of the Orchards”.

¹¹ Kouki, Julia. *Evia: Tradition & Diet* (Athens: Incentive Publications, 2004), p. 56

Baked Potatoes with Oregano *Patates Fournou Ryganates*¹²

The most common manifestation of the tuber at Greek *tavernas* was simply potatoes, cut into chunks, and baked with olive oil, salt, and oregano.

Potatoes, peeled and chopped into large chunks
Olive oil
Salt
Lemon juice
Oregano



Place the peeled chunks of potato into a baking dish. Mix the olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and oregano and pour the mixture over the potatoes. Bake in a moderate oven (350-400°F) until tender, approximately an hour.



Aili ready to eat, while Anna goes gaga over a Greek-style meal at our apartment in Athens.

¹² Recipe based on personal observation.

A Midnight Swim and Loukoumathes for Dessert!

Monday, June 8, 2009

Tonight Andreas, a Greek fellow from Athens, brought my friend Yeoryia and me to the sea for a moonlit swim. The honey balls were freshly deep-fried for us and served ten to a box drenched in sweet honey syrup. We also had some that were larger (non-traditional) *loukoumathes* filled with cream. Not surprisingly, people will also like to make this outrageously sweet dessert at home. I have seen some *loukoumathes* mixes at the grocery stores, but the recipe isn't difficult and you can easily make them from scratch at home.

Honey Puffs *Loukoumathes* (recipe from *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*¹³)

One dessert that may be enjoyed after a meal, or anytime as a snack, is *loukoumathes*. These deep-fried balls of dough are lighter than donut holes, but probably just as full of calories, considering that they are served drowning in honey. As with many Greek/Turkish desserts, they are so packed with sugar that the only flavor you can taste is sweet.

1 oz yeast	3 c white flour	Honey
Warm water	Salt	Cinnamon



In a medium bowl, dissolve the yeast in a little warm water. Add one cup of flour and some salt and mix well. Allow the mixture to stand until it doubles in volume (about 1 ½ hours). When doubled, gradually add the remaining two cups of flour and sufficient warm water to form soft dough. Knead well. Cover and allow the dough to stand in a warm place for 3-4 hours. When finished, pinch off a small ball of dough and deep fry it in smoking hot oil. Drain, drizzle with honey, sprinkle with cinnamon and serve piping hot. Enjoy!

ψ

Even after a late-night, two-hour dinner at a *taverna* with friends, there is still time to hit up the bars—most don't close until 5 am! But then there is always the morning after...

¹³ Kapsaskis, Angeline. *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1977), page not noted.

After a Night on the Town

A Late Night at the Club

Saturday, July 11, 2009

It is 8 am and Aili and I just got home from a club on the waterfront in Peirea. Ay. I have never been out this late/early before except for the one all-nighter I pulled finishing a lab report for inorganic chemistry—I'm a nerd, I know.

I didn't have anything to drink, but I'm still not feeling so great, probably because I haven't slept in 24 hours. I'm sure I don't feel as bad as Aili, or at least as bad as she will feel in the morning. I don't think she had *that* much to drink, but her stomach has already revolted once, throwing up the sausage she gave it to placate her munchies.

Greeks, at least young Athenians, really seem to enjoy the clubs. I don't know if there is more or less drinking or clubbing than there is at home, because neither are my type of scene, but I can attest that here the clubs are absolutely packed from midnight to 5:30 am, when public transportation starts up and the metal gates are pulled over the club doors. Compare that to Minnesota, where bars close at 2 am.

Here in Athens, alcohol flows as freely as I imagine it did in ancient times, although these days there is a greater variety than red wine, white wine and *retsina*. Drinks—you can order anything from red beer to *raki*, margaritas to shots—are always served with a salty compliment, usually mixed nuts or potato chips. My friend Yeoryia pointed this out as another example of how Greeks like to pair contrasts: they serve cold yogurt with hot vegetable dishes, tangy mustard with pungent meat, and salty foods with bitter alcohol.

Although I don't drink myself, I had several opportunities, such as tonight, to accompany my friends to the clubs and bars and check out the scene. I don't mind bars because I can still have a decent conversation, but, unlike Greeks, I can't handle clubs for too long because they

are too loud and contain too many sweaty bodies intentionally corralled into a small space. In Athens there are two clubbing districts, Gazi and the waterfront strip near Peireia, where we went tonight.

What do Greeks do with a GI tract that has been burned with alcohol, taste buds that are not “numb but...tingling”¹⁴ and the prospect of the hangover that is sure to come?

Fortunately I was sober enough to note (and remember) what happens after we left the clubs.



Thessaloniki souvlaki

In Athens the food of choice (at least in the encounters I observed) was an enormous, fatty, sausage sandwich purchased for an exorbitant price from street vendors waiting just across the street from the clubs. The oversized, foot-long sausage my friend had was stuffed into a bun along with a handful of French fries

(it is not an unusual occurrence to serve French fries inside sandwiches in Greece) and drizzled with ketchup and mustard.

The idea of this enormous packet of food is to sop up the alcohol in the body, although most of it has already been absorbed directly through the stomach into the blood stream. You have to have “something with a lot of taste,”¹⁵ Yeoryia told me, so that there is enough flavor to be noticed by drunken tastebuds.

Instead of a sausage, an inebriated Greek might go for a crepe, sweet or savory, to placate her munchies. There are dozens of creperies throughout Athens and some do business both day and night. When I asked if there was usually anything ordered to drink with post-drinking food (water seemed like a good idea to me), my friend Evi suggested that the snack

¹⁴ Yeoryia Christoforides, personal communication, August 1, 2009

¹⁵ Ibid.

would be accompanied, “maybe with a Coke.” I don’t know how fizzy carbonation is going to make one’s stomach feel better, but then again I’ve never been drunk and I don’t like soda in the first place.

I never witnessed a *souvlaki* consumed after a night on the town, but I wouldn’t be at all surprised if this greasy, but tasteful, sandwich of chicken or lamb, *tzatziki*, onions, and tomatoes is gobbled up by many on their way home from the clubs—*souvlaki* stands do brisk business in the wee hours of the morning serving inebriated students in Oxford, England!¹⁶



Yeoryia and Evi enjoying meat-on-a-stick-Thessaloniki-style *souvlaki* with fries and a salad.

Staying Up All Night in Thessaloniki

Saturday, August 1, 2009

I went out to a waterfront bar last night with Yeoryia, Evi, and their friend, Pascali. Although I didn’t join them at the club, I got the night’s story today.

Apparently in Thessaloniki, after-drinking food is not the same as it is in Athens. In Thessaloniki, it is not crepes, sausages, and souvlaki that are consumed but rather *patsa*, “*tost*”, and *bougatsa*.

Patsa is a thin soup of animal offal and tripe, thinly sliced and boiled with spices. Perhaps in the same way that tripe soup helps transition the stomach from the abstinence of Lent to the excess of Easter dinner, *patsa* eases the shift from the club to sleep and a more pleasant morning. I tried to get a taste of *patsa* but I wasn’t out late (or should I say “early”) enough to find any. *Pasta* is made at night from the leftovers of animals served at a restaurant during the day and is gone by the next morning.

¹⁶ This tidbit of local custom was shared with me by Zevic Mishor, a graduate student in neurobiology at Oxford, when I stayed with him May 24 in Oxford, England.

According to *The Glorious Foods of Greece*, *patsa*, “the pungent soup made with cow’s stomachs and feet...[has its origins in] the mysterious and as yet unrevealed ‘black broth’ that sustained the ancient Spartans and Dorians through all their military exploits.” It is said that *patsa*, from the Turkish word for foot, first arrived in Greece from a Greek refugee, Lefteris, from Constantinople, who opened the first *patsatzithika* in Thessaloniki in the 1920s.¹⁷

Patsa

The Glorious Foods of Greece provides a basic recipe for this “potent mix of simmered viscera, seasoned with garlic and vinegar.”¹⁸

The basic recipe calls for tying, then simmering the feet, large intestine, and stomachs together. The soup is skimmed, a process that takes about half an hour and determines its ultimate ‘whiteness’—the telltale sign of a master *patsa* chef. The fat is reserved separately, seasoned with pepper and added to the bowl upon serving.

Serving, too, has a ritual: The classic *patsa* is a concoction of broth and chopped feet; some people prefer just the stomachs, which in turn come in two versions: finely chopped or *douzlama*, which means “coarse.” There is the red version, too, which is flavored with paprika and rendered fat. The seasoning accoutrements are on every table: salt and pepper, *boukovo*—hot pepper flakes—and a bottle of *skordostoumbi*, which is garlic steeped in vinegar.¹⁹

Next time I have a whole cow on hand, waiting to be cooked, I’ll be sure to save the innards and feet for some delicious and refreshing *patsa*!

Tost is another popular breakfast after a night of drinking. I was surprised that a simple piece of toasted bread would sell for €3 (\$4.50), but I found out that *tost* is not American toast but rather a panini, which indeed sells for at least \$5 in New York City.²⁰ On her *tost*, Evi ordered two types of cheese, corn, and mayo. The sandwich was press-grilled like a Panini and served hot for a tasty early-morning snack. This is not something I could eat in the morning, but apparently it effectively pacifies many grumbling Greek stomachs.

¹⁷ Kochilas, Diane. *The Glorious Foods of Greece*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 224.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Personal experience in New York City, January 2008.

While *pasta* and *tost* are common breakfasts, the most popular snack in northern Greece after a night of drinking, or even for a regular morning's breakfast, is *bougatsa*. There are scores of "Μπουγάτσα" shops in Thessaloniki and the surrounding area. *Bougatsa* is buttery,



Cream (foreground) and cheese *bougatsa*

flaky pastry that is not found in Athens, although similar to the pies found in the bakeries of the capital city.

Bougatsa is either sweet, filled with cream and covered in powdered sugar and sprinkled with cinnamon, or savory, filled with white cheese. It is so rich that it is usually only eaten once a week, even if one goes out more often.²¹

Θ

It is obvious that Greece is heavily dependent on tourism, from Corfu to Athens to Crete. I have no statistics on how often Greeks go out to eat or what percentage of *taverna* customers are tourists, and many of the people I saw dining outdoors were most definitely tourists, but nonetheless I have no doubt that many urban Greeks (61% of the population²²) spend a considerable amount of time and money at *tavernas*, coffee shops, creperies, bakeries, specialty shops selling *bougatsa* and *pastas*, and "fast-food" joints like Everest that provide sandwiches, *pitas*, and baked goods. While much of this food is tasty, it appears from the waistlines of locals that the diet is not as healthy as the traditional "Mediterranean Diet" for which Greece is so famous. To get at the country food which was the primary filler of Greek stomach before mass urbanization after WWII, I had to wait several weeks until I got to the countryside.

²¹ Yeoryia Christoforides, personal communication, August 1, 2009.

²² CIA World Factbook. "Greece," CIA, 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gr.html> accessed January 24, 2010.

Contributions of the Immigrants



The Ottomans

A Taste of Spices from the East

Sunday, June 21, 2009

This afternoon I had the privilege of eating at Yiayia's house. Yiayia is the grandmother (Yiayia = "grandmother") of Gaia and Dialou, the little children I am help watch over during my stay here in Evia, Greece. I came here to learn about organic farming and stay with a Greek family, but I have ended up babysitting for a family that turns out to be only half Greek—and the Greek father is currently in Spain. Ay. But I'm not complaining because Yiayia lives right across the street and on the weekends she, her sister, Maria, her daughter, Dora, and her friend, Nadia, cook up a storm. As Kerys, Yiayia's daughter-in-law and the woman I am staying with, explained, time for these women revolves around food. "All day they cook, eat, then talk about what they cooked. They say 'I bought this at the market today...' 'I picked this fresh from the garden...' 'what a terrible oven...' 'what to cook now?'" From the body language and modicum of conversation that was translated for me, I agreed with Kerys's assertion. Cooking was an activity to fill the time, a result to be proud of (or not), and a gift (but mostly a duty) to share with friends and family. When I took a spoonful of *briam*, I was told "Good, good." Eating was encouraged, and I could tell from the size of these women that not only did they like to cook, but they liked to eat, too.

The first dish that was piled on my plate was *briam*. *Briam* is a mixed of vegetables, usually baked in the oven, and always includes onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and zucchini, but may incorporate any other vegetables that the garden has readied for eating. Greeks like to claim that they invented everything, so I was surprised that they admit *briam* is not a traditional Greek dish but rather traveled to Greece with the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman influence on modern Greek cuisine cannot be understated. The Ottomans occupied Greece for nearly than 400 years, from 1453, the fall of Constantinople, until 1821, the year of the Greek War of Independence. Despite Greek resistance to their conquerors, Ottoman flavors slowly made their way into traditional Greek food. The primary contribution the Ottomans brought from the east was a variety of spices: cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, saffron, graham masala, and curry.

Such spices are now available for purchase in Greece, but they are certainly more difficult to find than they are in Turkey, where they are sold by the kilo at dozens of shops at the open market in Istanbul. In contrast, in all of Athens’s large Central Market, I only encountered one spice shop; most spices must be obtained from the grocery store and are only sold in small quantities.



The spices of present-day Istanbul

As I learned in the movie “Touch of Spice”²³ about a Greek family living in Constantinople caught in the 1914 population exchange, the spirit of Politiki cooking (the cooking of Greeks from Constantinopoli) is spices. Spices are a reminder of both one’s familial and political roots. The smell and taste of cinnamon, cloves, allspice, cardamom, and mint entice, seduce, and daily reinforce one’s ties to land and family.

²³ Tassos Boulmetis, director. “Touch of Spice” [videorecording]. Capitol Films, 2003.

When the Poli migrated to Greece (most stayed in the north near Kavala and Thessaloniki), they brought with them the spices such as cinnamon, allspice, cloves, and mint, as well as several ingredients that are more important in modern Greek cooking than Ottoman spices: quinces, sautéed onions, eggplant, pine nuts, and eggplant,²⁴ which is a key component of the following dish.

Briam

Greeks are very proud of their traditional cuisine so I was surprised that although this dish is often considered traditional, the cook who prepared it for me admitted its Turkish origin.

Potatoes, chopped into large chunks
Onions
Garlic
Zucchini, sliced
Eggplant, sliced
Green bell pepper, sliced
Tomato
Parsley, chopped
Olive oil
Salt and pepper



Greek vegetable dishes are often very flexible on the ingredients and proportions. It seems that cooks often use whatever is ready in the garden or leftover in the fridge. Accordingly, use the ingredients in whatever proportions you like.

Boil the potatoes, but drain them before they are completely finished. Sauté the garlic and onions and, after several minutes, add the sliced zucchini, eggplant, potatoes and the tomato, which you have crushed with your hands. Simmer until the vegetables are half-done, then add the chopped parsley and continue to cook until all of the vegetables are tender, but not falling apart, and the flavors have melded. An alternative to cooking on the stove is to bake the vegetables for an hour in a moderate oven in a covered casserole dish.

²⁴ Milona, Marianthi, editor. *Culinaria Greece: Greek Specialties*. (Cologne: Köneman, 2004), 196.

Today's Immigrants

While Greeks emigrating from Asia Minor brought with them Ottoman flavors nearly 100 years ago, new flavors are now arriving with the current flood of immigrants from the Philippines, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Senegal and Mali. Many of these immigrants stick to their own traditional foods for both reasons of economy, taste, and cultural preservation. Judging by the lack of non-Greek restaurants in both the villages and big cities of Greece, Greek cuisine appears slow to incorporate (or even appreciate) the flavors of non-Greeks. Nonetheless, these immigrant flavors currently exist in both the cities and countryside of Greece and think them important to document.

I unexpectedly stumbled upon the immigrant communities here in Greece. Immigrants are hard to miss, but, at the same time, easy to ignore. Many immigrants work, if they can find work at all, in the poorly-paid service sector, cleaning hotel rooms or houses, gardening, performing construction, or hawking trinkets. Immigrants in Greece, as immigrants around the world, are often forced to take jobs no one else wants or pays attention to. Immigrants are visible everywhere but marginalized in both an economic and social sense. Many Greeks don't like immigrants. One of the farthest EU countries to the East, Greece is the most accessible nation for entry into the EU job market. Even if a worker can't enter other EU nations, the adoption of the Euro and slightly higher wages than in previous decades has made Greece a more attractive nation in which to work.

Filipino Halo-Halo

Sunday, May 31, 2009

Today I first bumped into Filipino immigrants at their Flores de Mayo Festival, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Every weekend from Easter until the last weekend in May, families give offering of flowers to the Mother and the festival is the culmination of the honorary month.

Various groups active in the Filipino community each host a couple, young children, teenagers, or adults, decked out in their finest traditional dress or prom gowns and suits, to march in the festival parade under banners of flowers. In addition to capping off a month of offerings to the Virgin, the festival raises money for both the local Women's Cooperative and the Filipino language and culture school.

A woman from the Kasapi Hellas organization who helped organize the event told me that there are some 45,000 Filipinos living and working in Greece. While the children are relatively well-integrated into Greek society, attending Greek school and even forgetting the language of their parents and grandparents, many of the parents remain on the outskirts of society, working as they do as housemaids or construction workers in Athens and Piraeus. In addition to the 45,000 Filipinos in the cities, there is an additional population of men working as deckhands on the many ships that dock in Piraeus. While my American friends thought it was cool to bump into an overseas community, in some ways the celebration made me sad because it means that there is a large enough population living thousands and thousands of miles from their homes. I'm glad they have gathered to celebrate the Virgin, and simultaneously reassert and reaffirm the culture and their identity in a country where immigrants are largely unwelcome.

At the festival I found a variety of Filipino foods: egg rolls, rice noodles, purple sticky rice



Purple sticky rice with coconut

topped with coconut, bao (a bun with meat and vegetables inside), skewers of meat, squid balls, potato starch noodles, white rice with pork, and halo-halo, a quintessential Filipino food sold at every food stand. The dessert drink is a mixture of



Making halo-halo

sweets such as sugar “worms”, corn, red beans, and coconut served in a cup with freshly hand-shaven ice and doused with sweetened and condensed milk.

I was surprised at the strength of the Filipino community, which has managed to keep their language, dance, religious traditions, and foods intact despite living far from home, isolated from the families, environment, churches and traditional ingredients.

Afghani Dordee

Tuesday, June 16, 2009

I got on a bus to Thebes yesterday for no other reason than it was cheaper and less touristy than Delphi and it was somewhere other than Athens, where I’ve spent the past two week venturing among the stone ruins, graffiti-ed streets, museums and bakeries, and staying inside to avoid the heat. I got off the bus at some random spot, somewhere in Thebes, I think... I figured it didn’t matter where I disembarked since I didn’t have a destination-tourist spot, lunch spot, hostel or otherwise. I was immediately disappointed with myself and my surroundings. I had paid €7.20 and traveled an hour and a half for what? I was in another city, with the same type of stores, and presumably food and people, as Athens. It was hot, dirty and not in the least exciting. What had I accomplished?

To make myself feel better, I promptly went in search of some food. I had come to research, after all. I found several bakeries and stopped in at the largest. I asked the baker if she had any Theban specialties, but she shook her head. She did tell me that she hand-made all of the cookies she sold and that she was the only baker in Thebes that produced the honey-sesame loaf I bought to munch on.



Honey-sesame loaf



Hand-made cookies

I immediately bit into the dry and sticky loaf as I walked across the street towards the local café where the baker had told me that I might find some ντοπια φαγητα (local food). It was too early for lunch (and I was already munching on bread), so I went to the grocery store first to do some shopping-habit observation. I really don't know how to do this food project because it has been much harder than I thought to get into local people's kitchens. One of my advisors suggested that I make more observations: how much time do people spend shopping at the supermarket? at the outdoor market? What kinds of foods do they buy and how do they decide? Do they read nutrition labels? I didn't find out much except that I am still afraid to talk to people



and that most packages don't have nutrition information except the number of calories, grams of fat, grams of carbohydrates, and grams of protein. There is no separation into saturation or unsaturated fat much less mono- or poly-unsaturation. There is no differentiation into carbohydrate calories from sugar versus non or grams of dietary fiber. There is also no information regarding vitamins or minerals. All of the information typically spotted on U.S. nutrition labels is only listed if the products is made in or exported to a country which has such labeling requirements. As far as observing the habits of an individual consumer, the grocery store was tiny and it was difficult to follow anyone discreetly, especially when there was a guard walking around, so I gave up.

I walked past the café next door but only saw the proprietors and another man so I didn't stop. It would have been good timing since they weren't busy but I didn't think of that until just now. Instead, I kept walking, looking for a shady spot where I could eat my bread and sit down to chide myself. I ended up at a "park" next to an old waterwheel.

As I sat on a stone wall in the sparse shade of a tree, I ate my bread and kicked my feet. Four young men crossed the street and sat down on a sheet of cardboard in front of a deserted store.

I watched the boys share a bottle of Fanta and munch on sunflower seeds. They looked at me, a little girl with a big purple backpack sitting by herself, gnawing on some bread, and I looked back at them. I looked at them and turned away; they looked at



An ancient water-wheel

me and turned away. Look, look. Come on Laura, how are you going to meet any Greeks if you won't even go up to a group of schoolboys and talk to them? I've never been this scared or hindered by English in other countries. I think I am having trouble here in Greece because I think that I should know Greek since all of my friends have studied Greek for a year and at least have rudimentary skills. I feel guilty that I don't speak Greek, but there's not much I can do about it now. I just have to proceed, in English, with confidence and a friendly smile, the way I usually do.

The boys and I exchanged a few more glances before one of them had the gall (or succumbed to the pressure of his friends) to approach me and use two of the four English phrases that may comprise all the English he knows. "What is your name? Where are you from?" I told him that my name is Laura and that I am from America. In retrospect I see that this later response may not have been so intelligent because it tells whoever I am speaking with that I have, and am probably carrying with me, an American passport. There I go, trusting humanity again. Fortunately, humanity has been good to me.

"And you? Where are you from?"

"I am Norachman. I am from Afghanistan."

Hm...I hadn't planned this. Good thing I don't plan anything.

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

I've been here for a few days and learned an unbelievable amount. I can't believe how ignorant I am about...a lot. I don't know anything about refugees and the challenges they face. I don't understand the politics or economics that have lead them to leave their country. I don't know how to help.

After sitting down with the four boys as they finished their sunflower seeds, we exchanged a few words and discovered that communication was going to be difficult. The guys all speak Pashtun, Urdu, Arabic, and a tiny bit of Greek, but only a few words of English. My language skills are limited to English, rudimentary Chinese, and about five words of Greek. Adel was the most confident of his English skills and asked me to follow them to their house to "see how we live. Προβλημα, ολα προβλημα (Problem, everything problem)." Intrigued, I followed them.

The four young men live with six others, the entire group hailing from the same village in Afghanistan and embarking on their escape from the country together. Whereas they used to



Sayed, Saif, and Rohalla in front of their house, hand-made of concrete bricks.

grow rice and tend the grapes that grew within the canal surrounding their multi-home complexes, they now share in a ten by fifteen, concrete-block walled room. There are clothes hung on nails wedged in the walls and

mattresses and blankets along the perimeter. In addition to the door, there are two openings for light, barricaded with rebar to keep out anyone who might want to sneak in, but unscreened and offering no protection from the mosquitoes and flies. Outside, there is an elevated platform where I slept under the stars next to Adel and Ali. We hid in the shade of the platform during the day and extracted onions and flour from under the platform's protection whenever it was time to cook.

Cooking is the main activity of the day. Every meal takes two hours to make and even when there are only two meals to make, no work means that cooking is the only planned activity to fill up the time. The food we had was simple, but I couldn't stop smiling when we sat down to eat. It wasn't just that the food was delicious but also that we were sitting down together, all ten of us, eating on the floor, with our hands, by candlelight. For me, it was magic.



Rohalla and Izet making potato chips

There is nothing better than simple, tasty food in good company, eaten with one's hands. Greek food is likewise very simple, and often consumed in good company, but there is something about a fork and knife that distances one from her food. The metal utensil that carries food to my mouth is hard and inedible. It separates me from the living earth that nurtured the food and detracts from both the taste and organic nature of the plant or animal in the dish. However, at the same time that I reveled in magic of the meals we shared, I felt ashamed that I enjoyed what my friends considered to be a problematic existence.

The first taste of Afghanistan the men shared with me was Afghani chai. Promptly after I arrived at their small concrete *spiti* (house), water was set to boil over a fire of wooden debris. When the aluminum tea pot was boiling hot, Ali threw in a handful of brown tea pellets “from Afghanistan.” I’m not sure how the men still have tea with them after walking across Iran, being smuggled through Turkey, and living for months in Greece, but I’ll take his word for it. In any case the tea, with a heaping spoonful of sugar, was flavorful and welcoming.

Afghani Chai

My friends in Thebes boiled their water over an open fire of cardboard and wooden debris, but I suppose that a stove would work just as well.

Afghani chai – tiny, spherical brown pellet
Sugar

Boil hot water and add half a palmful of tea to the pot. Let the tea steep for five minutes before serving. Each cup should receive four or five pellets of tea. Pass around the sugar; it is typical to add 1-2 T.

There weren’t enough cups for all of us, but, as the guest, I was given my own cup as well as a bucket to sit on. The others shared cups and squatted over the dirt. Unsurprisingly, I felt uncomfortable. Not only was I the honored guest, but I was completely out of place. I have lived an easy life and been privileged to an excellent education. I have pale skin and was raised singing Christian hymns.

Deciding that we’d probably be sitting in the shade of the house all afternoon, they laid down a big cardboard box and spread a white sheet over all of our laps, nominally to keep away the flies. This accomplished, Izet and Rohalla set to making potato chips (fries).

As we passed around the chips, the men conveyed (in English, Greek, movements, and pictures) their story. They fled Afghanistan to escape the violence between the Taliban and American soldiers. The soldiers used to be very careful about identifying Taliban fighters and their hideouts. They would shoot militants one by one. With President Bush’s “surge”, soldiers

apparently became much less circumspect and young civilian men became much more likely to be caught in the cross-fire. Fearing for their lives, young Afghani men began to leave the country. They walked across Iran, paid to be smuggled through Turkey, and hopped a boat to reach safety, and hopefully find work, in Greece. They assumed that Greece would serve as a gateway to employment and a better life in the EU.

Currently, they are residents of Thebes on temporary, five-year work visas issued by Greece. Unfortunately, jobs for unskilled laborers are few and far between. More disappointingly, the men cannot travel outside of Greece to find work. Legally, leaving Greece for other countries in the EU requires status as a refugee, status that Greece refuses to give to all but 0.5% of applicants, just a handful each year.

The young men I met can't go home and can't move forward, but they also can't stay here. They need to go to a country where they can make some money to support themselves instead of having to rely on Western Union checks from their parents still in Afghanistan. The goal is to find enough work in Greece to earn €4,000 so they can pay smugglers to reach Padua, Italy. From there they hope to go to France, Spain, Norway, the UK, Canada, and the U.S. But there is a problem: "Greece problem, police problem. Όλα πρόβλημα" – all problem: lamp – problem, room – problem, νερο (water) – problem. Imagine that one of the few words you can communicate to an English-speaker is "problem" and it describes most of your life.

Water is a problem because the men only have access to running water for a short period every evening. While the water is running, the boys fill up two twenty-liter containers and a bucket for rinsing potatoes. This sounds like a lot of water, but not when it has to serve the cooking, washing, and drinking needs of ten men when the temperature hovers around 90°F during the day. The water has always run out by the time it comes on again the next day.

As would be expected, food is also a problem for a group of men with no jobs. With no money, what do they eat? They eat as cheaply as possible, buying supplies with the money that Adel's parents send from Afghanistan. This is the reverse of the typical immigrant story, in which the immigrant sends remittances home to his family.

Sweet onions, enormous potatoes, store-bought tomato puree, and hand-made flat bread served as the basis of the meals I shared with my new Afghani friends. Sometimes we were lucky enough to have chicken, rice, or fresh vegetables, but we never had red meat, fruit, or dairy.

On the first day of my stay, after spending all afternoon lying around chatting, the guys started preparing for dinner at 8 pm. As I watched, they made fresh Afghani bread, potatoes with tomato sauce, and a side of raw onions.



Adel and his brother Rohala enjoying a meal of *dorjee* with potato-tomato stew, and raw, sugared onions.

Afghani Flat Bread *Dordee*

Makes 15 large pieces of bread (Serves 12-15)

Dordee is the staple of the Afghani diet, both for Afghanis at home and refugees far from their homeland. We ate this unleavened bread for every meal, and I watched intently every time, but it still took me three days to figure out all of the steps. There are six steps to bread making but only three ingredients, including water. Water is not usually included in a list of ingredients, but for the men I stayed with water was a limiting factor—there would be no bread, and no meal, if there was no water. Be thankful that you have ready access to clean, plentiful water.

5 platefuls of unbleached flour
1 palmful of salt
Water

Combine the flour, salt, and water, adding enough water to work the dough but not so much that it is sticky. To knead, punch your fist straight down into the dough and twist your palm inward. Turn the bowl and add more water as necessary. You are finished kneading when you can poke your finger into the dough and the hole made by your finger closes up. Pat down the dough, cover it, and let it rest and rise in a warm place until you are ready to cook it (at least 20 minutes).

To prepare the dough for baking, grab a handful of dough and form it into a ball, running the lateral (little-finger) side of your right hand along the bottom of your left-hand palm. Turn the ball so the seam stays at the bottom and the surface of the ball becomes smooth. When finished, sprinkle flour on a large circular table (two feet in diameter), and press the dough ball into a circle using the fingers of both hands. When you have lightly flattened the dough all the way around, flip over the patty of dough and flatten again. Flip and flatten two more times until you have a circle 8 inches in diameter. With a rolling pin, flatten the circle by rolling from the inside to the edges (but not off the edge), turning and flipping as necessary to form a smooth-edged oval at least 15 inches wide.



Left: Rohalla expertly kneading the dough

Above: The author trying her hand at flattening the dough before rolling

The bread should be cooked over a large, hot surface. This is not easy to do in the American kitchen so, perhaps for a change of pace you might consider cooking the bread the same way my Afghani friends did. First, stack two sets of concrete blocks side by side and two blocks high, about three feet apart. Lay across them a metal sheet and underneath the sheet build a wood fire. To cook the *dorjee*, light the fire and when the metal sheet is hot sprinkle it with a few drops of water before laying on the *dorjee*. I found that cooking the bread is not as easy as it looks because it gets HOT! If you don't have desensitized fingers from baking *dorjee* daily, use protective gloves (not tongs, as you will tear the bread) as you flip the *dorjee*, which you should do as soon as you see signs that it is starting to cook, about 10-20 seconds for the first pass on each side and less after that. Flip, toss, twist, and turn the *dorjee* so that all portions are cooked. The bread is ready when there are some dark brown spots – try not to burn too much of the surface. Stack the completed breads and cover them with a towel to keep them warm. Serve immediately after you have prepared one piece of bread for each person.



Baking the *dorjee* - be careful!

We used our *dorjee* to grab chunks of potato, zucchini, onions, or chicken which were in a soupy stew of tomato juice. To sop of the juice, you need to learn how to eat with your hands—this is more difficult than it sounds! Anyone can grab a chunk of food, but have you tried eating soup with flat bread? The trick is to tear off a piece of bread a bit larger than the size of your palm, rip this into four or five piece, stack the pieces and then fold them in half. This method provides a lot of “soaking up” area.



This is too big! I think that I am the responsible culprit for letting it hang and stretch too much before

Don't worry if you make a mess the first few times, just keep trying!

Tomato Stew

During each of the few days I stayed with the Afghanis, we ate variations on the same tomato stew. You can add any assortment of potatoes, onions, peas, zucchini, carrots, or chicken that you would like, although my meals were simple, with at most three ingredients.

Potatoes, in small chunks
Onions, coarsely chopped
Carrots, coarsely chopped
Zucchini, coarsely chopped
Peas
Chicken (bones-in, skin on), coarsely chopped
Tomato sauce

In a large pot, heat enough oil to cover the vegetables you have chosen to cook. After 3-5 minutes, add the vegetables and cook for another 3-5 minutes. Then add an equal volume of tomato sauce as vegetables, and one cup of water. Cover but stir frequently, and adjust the heat so that the dish will be finished at the same time all of the *dorjee* is ready to eat. Serve hot in communal dishes.



One day the onions were served as a side dish instead in the stew. Delicious!

Simple Onion Salad

White onions
Sugar

Chop the onion in eighths, sprinkle with sugar, and enjoy!

Tuesday, June 16, 2009

Today I spent all day at the little concrete σπίτι (house), to experience what it is like for these guys, who can either spend all day in this small space or aimlessly wander around town. I was surprised that I wasn't bored at all—how could I be after being plopped into a different world within a world. Maybe it is more amazing that these men live in the same world as I do and not a different one. They live in the same world as you and I do, but most of us have no idea what their part of the world looks like, much less understand what is happening there.

After a day of writing, observing, and attempting to communicate, all while hiding in the shade, I am somehow already tired at 11 pm. Muhammed is sitting on the other side of the sleeping platform trying to talk to me in English, but I am so tired...

Sometime later, after midnight

I have never been woken up at midnight to eat, but I've probably never had as good of a meal, either. I didn't know anyone was cooking (okay, even in my tired state I did hear someone tending to hot oil at 11 pm, but really didn't think he was cooking—an anthropologist must never sleep!), but I was awakened to hear:

“Φαγί, Φαγί.” (“Eat, eat.”)

“What? Now?”

I got down from the sleep platform, slipped on my shoes and walked over to the concrete house as instructed. By the light of the oil lamp inside I could see that the eating mat was laid out and that several men had already sat down. I joined them and watched Norchaman and Izet as they poured tea and dished up the rice that had been cooked.

When I say that we had rice for dinner, I don't mean that we just had rice for dinner. We had a most wonderful concoction of rice and chicken that I can imagine.

Magical Midnight Rice

Serves 10

2 c sunflower oil
14 pc. chicken (preferably with bones and skin), coarsely chopped
3 c white rice, uncooked
1 c tomato sauce
2 c water (approx.)

Heat the oil so it is hot enough to cook, but not deep fry, the chicken. After cooking the chicken for 5 minutes, add the rice and tomato sauce. Cover and stir occasionally so they rice does not burn. Simmer at least 1 hour so that the rice has absorbed all of the liquid (you are going to eat this with your fingers, without *dordee*, so you do not want a stew). Serve in communal dishes and enjoy at midnight by the light of an oil lamp. Nothing can be better.

Thursday, June 18, 2009

I'm on the bus back to Athens, a world away from the one I've been living in the past few days. It is amazing how fast the transition is. Just stepping on the bus was leaving behind the way of life that my friends are living—without electricity, without water, without money, security, or government aid. I have the money for my ticket, the luxury of air-conditioning, a bottle full of water in my bag, smooth roads to travel on, and the safety of knowing that the system is watching over me. If the bus crashes or the bus driver kidnaps me, I know that the government will help me; I'm not so sure they would help my Afghani friends.

The Greek government sure isn't helping my friends find work, decent housing, or access to clean water. It is also refusing to grant them refugee status, meaning that they can only stay in the country legally for five years, after that they risk deportation. The government isn't helping their medical or food situation either.

All of the guys appear healthy, but yesterday I found out that their external appearance does not reflect the internal pain several of them face every day. Adel suffers from a serious joint problem due to working in the rice fields back home in Baghlan, Afghanistan. He can move, with a little pain, in the summertime, but during some humid winter days he is bed-ridden. Ali, Adel, and Muhammed all also suffer from stomach ulcers. They were able to receive treatment in Iran, but are currently suffering without medication here in Greece, either due to the government, lack of money, or language barrier, I'm not sure which. I think Ali said that the ulcers are due to or exacerbated by or don't get better (remember, we were communicating with gestures and a combination of three languages) because of the lack of fruit.

In addition to the lack of dairy (which is common in Asian diets), I have noticed the lack of fruit. Ali told me that fruit is too expensive to spend their precious money on (although, cigarettes and Cola are allotted a share of the budget). Unfortunately, this is the same thing I

thought this morning when I went to the store so instead of bringing back much-needed fruit I brought back hand soap, a sponge, and sunflower oil. I wanted to get the guys something because they have shared so much with me, but I didn't want to get them something out of the ordinary (both because they might not use it and because it would be showing off my money), so that's why I bought everyday items. Now I realize that the men need fruit more than the other items I bought, because they would be willing to spend money on oil but not fruit, even if they had the money to spend.

Luckily, I had a chance to redeem myself when I went for a walk around after lunch with Saif and Sayed. We walked up to the unimpressive archeological ruins in the city center, then down to a nearby church. On the way home I stopped at the grocery store and bought a bag of oranges. Saif was unhappy with my purchase, as I expected, but there wasn't anything he could do about it except carry the bag for me, which he insisted upon.

When we got back to the little concrete house, the guys said that I was a "bad girl, bad girl," just as they had done earlier this morning when I brought back the soap and oil. To them I am a guest and they are happy to provide for me: "You stay *ενα μεσα* (one month), no problem," they told me. Still, I believe in leaving a place better than I found it and I want to help these guys out. I would pay for their plane tickets to the US if it would help. The least I can do is buy a bag of oranges.

To my surprise, when I finally got Ali to eat an orange, he cut in quarters, sucked out the juice, and threw out the rest. What?! The reason that I think fruit is so important is because of the fiber it provides! Yes, the juice also has calcium, potassium, etc. but the pulp is so good for you—and Ali just threw it out! If I had known he was only going to drink the juice I would have brought him fruit juice! ...I guess that is just the way some people eat oranges.

For our last meal together, there was no fruit but there as *chalpak* and *shidur* (fried *dordee* and sweet tea, respectively). I insisted on trying to help prepare the *dordee* and bumbled up the process because mine was far too big (I didn't know it had to fit in the pan!), but it turned out fine. The recipes for these simple but filling dishes are below.

Chalpak (Fried *Dordee*)

Dough for *dordee*

Oil

Prepare the *dordee* as described in the earlier recipe for this Afghani bread, but use less dough and only roll it as large as the size of your frying pan. Heat oil in the fan and fry the *dordee*. Serve with *shidur*.



Chalpak



A delicious lunch of *chalpak* and *shidur*.

Shidur (Sweet Afghani Tea)

- 1 handful of Afghani chai pellets
- 2 L goat milk
- 2-3 c sugar

Combine and boil all of the ingredients. Serve hot.

I will miss these guys. I will miss our comical communication, learning from them and recognizing my ignorance. I will miss their delicious food, eating together with our hands, sleeping under the stars, and their overwhelming kindness. Take care, brothers. *Inshallah*, you will live a happy life.



Rohalla kneading dough for *dordee*

The Bounteous Garden



The modern Greek diet is still very much centered around vegetables. Many Greeks who still live in the countryside or in the country's small villages and towns still have family gardens in which they grow tomatoes, potatoes, zucchinis, cucumbers, eggplant, onions, and garlic. Accordingly, meals are based on whatever vegetation the garden has ripened for consumption. I have found well-known and traditional Greek recipes in the modern Greek kitchen as well as new recipes that are traditional in that they are based on traditional ingredients, and novel dishes that have incorporated new convenience products.

Seasonal vegetable produce can also be found in the cities. There is a farmers' market every day in some neighborhood of Athens and Thessaloniki and a market at least once a week in the smaller cities, so fresh, in season produce is always available, even to urbanities. At a typical farmers' market you can find a variety of fruits, vegetables, and herbs including zucchini (with flowers), cucumbers, eggplant, bell peppers, leeks, carrots, tomatoes, *horta* (wild greens), lettuce, onions, garlic, scallions, beets, potatoes, lemons, nectarines, plums, apricots, strawberries, cherries, melons, fish, chickens (live) and, of course, olives.

Stuffed with Tradition

Saturday, June 20, 2009

I just arrived in Evia at the Sunshine House, a yoga-massage-organic farm that I discovered through WWOOFing. Willing Workers On Organic Farms, is an organization that links volunteers interested in working on and learning about organic farms with farmers all over the world. I expect that this experience will allow me to both learn more about organic farming and the perspective of a farmer as well as allow me to live (and eat) with a local Greek family.

...Well, at least half of the family is Greek. The woman of the household hails from England, but the father of the two little children here is Greek. He was born and raised in the very house that I am sleeping in. It will be good to meet and learn from a Greek who comes from

the village, rather than the city Greeks who only go to the village once in a while to see their grandparents.

...Except that the Greek father is in Spain for ten days, the entire length of my stay. Ay. Well, maybe I'll still be able to learn about organic farming...

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Tonight, to welcome me to Evia, Kerys, the English woman of the household, presented me with the “very traditional” dish of stuffed vegetables made by her Greek mother-in-law, who lives just across the street. (Kerys said I might be able to go over to her mother-in-law’s house and watch the women there cook. Great!)

In addition to *souvlaki* and *tzatziki*, stuffed vegetables (*yemista*) is *the* traditional Greek dish. When I asked waiters in Monastraki, new friends in Athens, or everyday Greeks in the countryside how they defined “traditional” Greek food, stuffed tomatoes almost always came up. Greeks stuff tomatoes, peppers, zucchinis (round and long), and eggplants with fillings made from spiced rice, pumpkin, and/or feta, among other fillings.

Stuffed Vegetables Yemista (recipe from *The Sunshine House Cookbook* ²⁵)

These stuffed vegetables are very filling, tasty hot or cold, and may be served with other dishes but one stuffed tomato makes a fine meal by itself.

12 large tomatoes or peppers, ripe but firm
6 c white rice, washed
3 large carrots
2 large onions, diced
5 cloves of garlic, minced
6 potatoes, peeled and cubed
1 ½ c mint, chopped
1 c sultanas
2 T oregano, dried
Salt and pepper
Olive oil



Mix the potatoes, oregano, and salt with a generous amount of olive oil and set aside. To prepare the tomatoes, cut the top of each tomato almost all the way off, leaving the lid attached by a flap of skin. Scoop out the inside of the tomato and place in bowl. Sauté the onions, garlic, carrots in olive oil until almost tender, then add the rice, reserved tomato interior, mint and 1 cup of water. Boil for about ten minutes, then use the mixture to stuff the tomatoes. Place the tomatoes in a deep baking dish and place around them the excess filling and the prepared potatoes. Bake at 400°F for about an hour until rice is cooked and the potatoes tender. “This dish may seem complicated, but it is in fact quite easy and tastes and looks amazing!”²⁶

²⁵ Williams, Kerys and Panagiotis Oikonomou. *The Sunshine House Cookbook*, p. 7

²⁶ Ibid.

From Flowers to Food

Sunday, July 5, 2009

The Greek head of the house, Takis, finally returned from Spain two days ago. He's been promising to teach me how to cook a "very traditional dish" and today he followed through. I was excited by the idea that I would finally get to learn a "traditional" recipe from a Greek who had grown up in the countryside, so I was at first disappointed when we were in the middle of cooking and Takis mentioned, "I have no idea what we are doing." *What?* How could we be cooking a traditional dish, let alone cooking it properly, if Takis had never made it before and was just making it up as we went?

"Traditional" for Takis does not mean he learned the recipe from his mother, who managed a restaurant for over a decade, but according to Takis, "doesn't know anything about food." Traditional does not mean that the ancient Greeks ate the food nor that it has been eaten in Greece for the past centuries. In Takis's vocabulary, a "traditional" dish is traditional because it uses fresh, "traditional" ingredients and is prepared in the traditional manner of minimal processing.

The following dish, stuffed squash flowers, indeed makes use of traditional ingredients that are minimally processed to create a fantastic meal.

Stuffed Squash Flowers (recipe from Takis Oikonomou²⁷)

Serves a crowd



30 squash flowers*
1 purple onion, minced
4 cloves of garlic, minced
1 bunch of fresh dill, minced
2 medium carrots, coarsely grated
1 handful of fresh basil, minced
½ kg white rice, uncooked
Juice of 1 lemon
1 T curry
Salt and pepper

With plenty of oil, sauté the purple onion for one minute and then add the garlic, basil, and dill. Continue to sauté while you grate the carrots. When you are finished grating, add the carrots and the white rice, salt, pepper or crushed peppercorns, curry, and the juice of one thoroughly squeezed lemon. Cook for 5 minutes and then turn off the burner. Leave the mixture on the hot burner while you prepare the squash flowers.



Make sure there are no bugs in the flowers but do not rinse them or you will wash away the delicious and nutritious pollen. Cut off the stems, being carefully not to make a hole in the bottom of the flower, and remove the sepals. Press the rice filling into the flower with the spoon, filling up to the petals. Fold the petals over each other to hold in the filling and place the flowers with the tops around the circumference of a large ceramic baking dish (the dish should be just large enough to hold all of the stuffed flowers). Place the

remaining flowers facing each other to keep in the filling. When finished, add enough water to half-cover the top layer of flowers. Ideally, the flowers will touch the cover; if not, cover the flowers with the plate and then cover the pot. Bake at 410°F for an hour. Serve with yogurt-cheese sauce.

*Pick the flowers in the early morning while they are still fully open.

Yogurt-cheese Sauce (recipe from Takis Oikonomou²⁸)

Strained yogurt	Dill, chopped
Feta	Mint, chopped

Combine equal parts yogurt and feta and as much basil and mint as you'd like. Use an emulsion blender to combine. Serve on top of stuffed zucchini flowers (or with any other warm dish; this sauce is delicious!).

²⁷ Recipe observed July 5, 2009.

²⁸ Recipe observed July 5, 2009.

Culling Bamboo

Monday, July 6, 2009

With good soil and plenty of watering, climbing beans grow well in Evia, where they are often supported by bamboo tripods. Takis didn't want to pay a euro per stalk, so today we went on a harvesting expedition and culled 60 or so bamboo stalks from the wild bamboo stand just minutes from his house. The stand had been significantly diminished by locals who, like Takis, looked to save money by harvesting their own bamboo rather than pay several a euro per stalk. However, unlike Takis, who took a few stalks from here and there, other farmers had de-bamboo-ed entire plots of land and used newly cleared land and freshly harvested stalks to plant a field of beans.

What remains of the wild bamboo stand is surrounded by debris from the age-old local dump. Scattered about were cars, paint cans, batteries, plastic bags, couches, and tires—the sort of dump that will be in existence for eternity. How the bamboo ended up here, I'm not sure. I also don't know which animals, if any depended on this bamboo for habitat. I came to Greece expecting harvest food from the land, but not destroying it any way. How could I forget that there is always a give and take at play in nature? Every drop of water that is used to support the zucchinis and cucumbers in the garden is one less drop that could be used by some other plant or animal. Of course we would utilize some natural resources, in this case wild bamboo, to achieve the goal of producing food. Farmers and consumers who want to live lightly on the land can only do their best to efficiently employ nature's resources, utilizing renewable resources whenever possible.

Takis shared the below recipe that he would make when the bamboo-support green beans and butter beans matured in late summer.

Greek Green Beans (recipe from *The Sunshine House Cookbook*²⁹)

6 potatoes, peeled and cubed	6 c tomato sauce	½ c parsley, chopped
6 c green beans, cleaned and snapped in half	2 c water	Salt and pepper
2 onions, thinly sliced	2 T oregano, dried	Olive oil
5 cloves of garlic, minced		

Sauté the garlic and onions. Add potatoes, green beans, tomato sauce, water, oregano, and a pinch of salt. Cover and let simmer for 1 hour until beans are tender, then season with salt, pepper and parsley.

Giant White Beans (recipe from *The Sunshine House Cookbook*³⁰)

3 cups of giant white beans (butter beans)
4 carrots, chopped
1 onion, diced
6 c tomato sauce
3 bell peppers, diced
4 cloves garlic, diced
1 c parsley, chopped
1 t dried oregano
1 t cinnamon
4 T olive oil
Salt and pepper



Soak the beans overnight and then cook them until tender (about 2 hours). Combine the rest of the ingredients, mix with the beans, and place in a shallow baking tray. Add enough water so that the beans are covered in liquid. Bake for 1 ½ hours at 400°F. Mash any leftovers to use as a dip.

²⁹ Williams, Kerys and Panagiotis Oikonomou. *The Sunshine House Cookbook*, (emailed to the author, 2009), 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

Today, my last full day in Evia, Takis taught me one more dish he considers traditional for its simple use of garden-supplied goods and inclusion of traditional Greek rusks.

Baked Layers of Potatoes, Basil, and Eggplant (recipe from Takis Oikonomou³¹)

Bagel-shaped Creten rusks (or any local rusk; use dry bread if necessary), crushed
5 medium potatoes, peeled
3 medium eggplants
10 fresh leaves of basil
Peppercorn, crushed or ground
Onions, thinly sliced
Olive oil
Oregano
Goat cheese
Sesame seeds



Tomato sauce:
1 onion, minced
3 medium tomatoes
2 t cinnamon
3 T sugar
Coarse sea salt

First make the tomato sauce. While you sauté the minced onion, place the tomatoes in a food processor and blending them until smooth but not pureed. With the heat on low, add tomatoes to the onion, and then season the mixture with cinnamon, sugar, and salt. After five minutes turn off the burner and remove from the heat.

Slice the potatoes and eggplant lengthwise into half-inch thick slices. In a large, rectangular dish sprinkle the crushed dry bread and then add, in layers, the potatoes, basil, crushed peppercorn, eggplant, and onion. Top with the tomato sauce you have prepared and douse with olive oil. Sprinkle with sesame seed and more bread crumbs and place in an oven at 425°F for 45 minutes. Then lower the temperature to 375°F and cook for another 30 minutes until the potatoes are tender. With five minutes left to bake, top the dish with hard goat cheese, oregano and more sesame seeds.

³¹ Recipe observed July 6, 2009.

Φ

Most of the dishes I encountered in Greece were not as complex as those made by Takis. Take, for example, Greek pies. The basic recipe for phyllo dough-type pie is provided in the section “City Food: Coffee Shops and Bakeries.” Here is discussed the second type of pie, those made of pureed vegetables. The pies I had were generally thin, about an inch thick, but I would prefer if they were an inch and a half or two inches thick so that they would hold more moisture.

Zucchini Pie Modified *Kolokthopitta* (recipe from Kyría Maria³²)

3 c zucchini, grated
2 c pumpkin, grated
1 c feta, finely crumbled
1 c milk
4 eggs, beaten
Dill, chopped
Olive oil
Salt and pepper

Combine all ingredients and bake at 350°F until golden brown (45-60 minutes, depending on the thickness of the pie).



³² Recipe observed June 29, 2009.

Mallow Pie *Korkoto* (made by Ala Saliuc³³)

I was lucky to taste this pie that Ala made, but I didn't see her make it, so I am unsure of the proportions she used. Try it out for yourself!



Zucchini, grated
Carrot, grated (just enough to add a fleck of color)
Milk
Eggs
Yeast
Flour
Oregano
Salt and pepper
Sesame seeds

Combine the yeast with some warm water and after a few minutes stir in the flour. Then add all the other ingredients and combine. Pour into a casserole dish, top with sesame seeds and bake in the oven at 350°F for an hour or until set and the top is golden brown.

Carrot Pie (recipe from Kyría Dora³⁴)

I'm unsure of the proportions that were used to make this pie so use your intuition and test it out yourself.

Potato, boiled and mashed
Carrot, grated
Feta, finely crumbled
Red bell pepper, finely chopped
Milk
Eggs
Salt and pepper



Combine all ingredients and bake at 350°F until golden brown (45-60 minutes, depending on the thickness of the pie; 1 ½ inch thick is preferred).

³³ Recipe received July 22, 2009.

³⁴ Recipe received June 29, 2009.

Ω

According to the Greek principles of simple and fresh, I tasted a variety of salad while traveling around the country. Several recipes are given below.

Beetroot-Yogurt Salad with Steamed Greens (recipe from Kerys Williams³⁵)

I learned this recipe from Kerys, at the Sunshine House. I'm not sure if it is a "traditional" Greek recipe, but Kerys learned it from her Greek in-laws, so at least it is a Greek recipe one generation-old. Perhaps this is a one of the local recipes that I've been searching for!

Beets with leaves
Strained yogurt
Walnuts, coarsely crushed
Dill (optional, not traditional)
Freshly squeezed lemon juice (optional, according to Kerys,
lemon juice is "not traditional" in this recipe)



Beetroot-Yogurt Salad (pink) with *yemistas* stuffing and lettuce-cucumber salad

To make the steamed greens, remove and wash the beetroot tops and steam them. Sprinkle with olive oil and freshly squeezed lemon juice and serve with the beetroot-yogurt salad.

To make the beetroot-yogurt salad, wash and peel the beetroots and steam them. When they are cool, slice them into strips, as thin or thick as you prefer. Combine the remaining ingredients, using an equal amount of yogurt and beets and any amount of walnuts, dill, and lemon juice. Yum!

³⁵ Recipe observed July 18, 2009.

Boiled Beetroot Salad (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos³⁶)

If you don't have yogurt to make the above salad, serve this more common beetroot salad that I tasted at Andy's farm.

Beets, raw and unpeeled
Olive oil
Vinegar
Salt and pepper

Boil the beets while still in their skins (according to Andy, the beets "boil better this way"). When they are cool enough to handle, remove the skins and halve or quarter the beets. Dress lightly with olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper. Serve warm.



Clockwise from top: Potato Salad, Belgian apple mousse, Wild Rice Salad, and Simple Beetroot Salad

You can also skip cooking the beets and use raw beets make the salad below, which I

learned from Maria in Thessaloniki.

Beet Salad (recipe from Maria Katsigianni³⁷)

Beets, raw and peeled	Garlic, pressed
Carrots, peeled	Olive oil
Apples, thinly sliced	Lemon juice

Grate the raw beets and carrots. Add the apples and garlic and dress with olive oil and lemon juice. Serve as a delicious summer salad.

Potato Salad (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos³⁸)

8 potatoes, boiled and cut into large chunks	Chili powder
2 carrots, grated	Salt and pepper
1 cucumber, quartered lengthwise and sliced	Olive oil
1 purple onion, finely chopped	Wine vinegar
1 handful of parsley, coarsely chopped	

Boil the potatoes until they are done, but still firm. Cut them into large chunks and add the carrot, cucumber, onion, and parsley. Season with salt, pepper, and chili, and dress with olive oil and wine vinegar.

³⁶ Recipe observed July 23, 2009.

³⁷ Recipe observed August 3, 2009.

³⁸ Recipe observed July 25, 2009.

Of course, beets and potatoes aren't the only vegetable used for salad. As written in *A*

Kitchen in Corfu:

The word *salata* embraces such a variety of foods that it is difficult to find an adequate definition for the term. It could be argued, however, that to call a dish a *salata* is to suggest that it has been prepared in the way most likely to exploit the natural virtues of the particular subject.³⁹

The classic Greek salad⁴⁰ "exploits" tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, and peppers. I was curious that sometimes I also saw this salad served with lettuce. I discovered from Litsa, the woman whose mother cooked the baptismal dinner I attended, and Andy, the sheep farmer I met in Bralos, that true Greek salad does not contain lettuce because, according to Litsa, "Lettuce is a salad on its own."⁴¹ Andy agreed and taught me how to make the Greek salad below.

Lettuce Salad *Maroulosalata* (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁴²)

Lettuce (similar to romaine), finely chopped

Spring onions, finely chopped

Salt

Olive oil

Vinegar

Chop the lettuce into very fine strips. According to Andy, "The thinner you cut it, the better." When the lettuce is in the salad bowl, squeeze it a few times with your hands. (Both the fine chopping and the squeezing bring out the flavor of the green.) Dress with olive oil, apple vinegar, and salt.

The lettuce salad I had at the baptism omitted the spring onion but included cherry tomatoes and chopped cucumbers.

³⁹ Chatto, James and W.L. Martin. *A Kitchen in Corfu*. (New York: James Chatto and W.L. Martin, 1987), 63.

⁴⁰ See this book's chapter "City Food: Tavernas" for recipe.

⁴¹ Litsa, personal communication, June 1, 2009

⁴² Recipe observed July 18, 2009.

Andy enjoys salad as much as I, so one day, nominally because it was Sunday (although on a farm there is no weekend break from chores), we had three salads for lunch: lettuce salad, Greek salad, and carrot-peach salad, the recipe for which is given below.



Clockwise from top: Potato Chips, Brazilian Beans & Rice, Carrot-Peach salad, Lettuce Salad, and Greek Salad.
What a meal!

Carrot-Peach Salad (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁴³)

Serves 5-6

4 carrots, coarsely grated
1 peach (or apple), coarsely grated
1 onion, thinly sliced
½ c raisins
Salt and pepper

Combine all of the ingredients and season with salt and pepper.

⁴³ Recipe observed July 29, 2009.

While vegetables were often served raw, as in the salads above, they were also regularly cooked, as in the popular dish of boiled green beans below.

Green Beans *Fasolakia* (recipe from Yeoryia Christoforides⁴⁴)

I learned this recipe from Yeoryia and I had a very similar dish at Yiayia's house in Evia.

2 lbs green beans, trimmed and cleaned
 2 tomatoes, chopped
 1 medium white onion, chopped
 3 cloves of garlic, minced
 2 medium carrots, cut into rounds
 2 bay leaves
 Oregano
 Salt and pepper



In a big pot, sauté the onion, garlic, carrots, and bay in tasty olive oil for a few minutes before adding the beans and tomatoes and spicing. Stir to get some oil on the beans. Add enough water to steam the vegetables. Cover and let steam for until beans are soft, about 20 minutes.

Boiled Mallow (Large Zucchini) (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁴⁵)

Serves 4



Chickpea burger, wild rice salad, Greek salad, and boiled mallow

When zucchinis are overgrown, they lose much of the flavor they have when they are smaller. One way to prepare these large zucchinis (mallows) is to boil them and serve them as a simple side for a summer lunch.

1 large zucchini (also known as a "mallow")
 Olive oil
 Lemon juice
 Salt and pepper

Quarter the mallow (keeping the seeds) and cut into large slices. Boil with olive oil, lemon juice, and salt and pepper. The mallow is finished when it is tender.

⁴⁴ Recipe observed June 4, 2009.

⁴⁵ Recipe observed July 22, 2009.

A Wood Fire and Loads of Tomatoes

Wednesday, August 5, 2009

When I visited Evia, I got a taste of the bountiful gardens of Greece, fostered by the productive Grecian soil and generous sunshine. The family garden I helped water and weed could produce two or three crops a year, unlike the one crop my family's garden could provide during our short summer. It seems that you can grow anything in a Greek family garden: eggplant, tomato, zucchini, cucumber, potato, squash, beans, onions, scallions, leek, garlic, peppers, lettuce, chard, radish, carrot, and beets. All of this dotted with sunflowers and surrounded by fruit trees: olives, pomegranates, persimmons, figs, apricots, plums, cherries, oranges, lemons, quinces, nectarines, and peaches. Every day during the weeks of June that I spent in Evia, I would harvest from the garden at least a few cherry tomatoes, lettuce, and enormous zucchinis and cucumbers.

I didn't realize that the garden I saw in Evia was small until I saw the bounty of the Maria and Kostas's garden in Thessaloniki. Have you ever picked tomatoes for an hour and still had tomatoes left to pick? After not harvesting for three days, Maria and I collected five crates of tomatoes! What to do with all these tomatoes? Make tomato salad, stuffed tomatoes, eat the delicious little cherry tomatoes plain...and then you still have four crates of tomatoes left over!



Tomato Sauce (recipe from Maria Katsigianni⁴⁶)

When you have five crates full of tomatoes fresh from the garden, you don't have too many options except to make tomato sauce. Luckily, I learned the recipe from a couple who often encounters this dilemma of abundance. They are well-practices tomato sauce makers, prepared for the tasks with an enormous metal pot and an outdoor woodstove (to save electricity).



Tomatoes
Onions, finely chopped
Green pepper, finely chopped
Bay leaves
Olive oil

Wash and core the soft tomatoes (save the firm tomatoes for salad) and then purée them using a food processor. Let the pureed mass rest for few hours and then strain, reserving the pulp and discarding the water. Then sauté the onions and peppers, adding the tomato puree and bay leaves after 3 minutes. Cover, leaving the lid slightly ajar, and simmer for 1.5 hours. Can the sauce, filling the jar almost, but not all the way, to the top, screwing on the cap tightly, and turning the jar upside-down. When you have finished filling all of the jars, go back and shake each jar, being careful not to burn yourself on the hot sauce inside and leaving the jar on its top. The sauce is now ready for cooking or spaghetti. Keep the extra sauce in a cool, dark place, such as a closet.

While the tomato sauce was cooking above on the wood-fired stove, Maria used the auxiliary heat and surplus sauce to cook two different pepper dishes in the attached oven.

Peppers with Home-made Tomato Sauce

(recipe from Maria Katsigianni⁴⁷)

Peppers (whole)
Home-made tomato sauce
Basil
Oil
Eggs (opt)
Cheese (opt)

Place the peppers in an oiled casserole dish and add enough tomato sauce partially cover the peppers. Tear in some basil and stir in a few beaten eggs, if you prefer. The dish is excellent topped with grated white cheese.



⁴⁶ Recipe observed August 5, 2009.

⁴⁷ Recipe observed August 5, 2009.

Grilled Green Peppers (recipe from Maria Katsigianni and Melina ⁴⁸)

Serves 8

As she made this dish, Maria told me, “This is a very traditional recipe. My mother made it, her mother made it and her grandma...They make [this dish of grilled peppers] in Serbia, Bulgaria...there’s no variation.” I actually learned this dish by assisting a Bulgarian with its preparation, but it uses the same ingredients and techniques that my Greek host mentioned.

- 14 Red, green, and yellow Florini peppers⁴⁹
- 5 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 c parsley, coarsely chopped
- 1 t salt
- 1 t sugar (opt)
- 2 t vinegar (balsamic or otherwise)
- 1/3 c olive oil



Grill the peppers over an open flame or in the oven. When the skin starts to char (don’t let the whole pepper burn!), remove the peppers from the heat and put them into a double-thick plastic bag. Tie the bag shut and let the peppers sweat. This allows you to peel the skin off much more easily when the peppers are cool.

Peel the peppers, trying not to break through the flesh. Slice off the tops, remove the seeds, and lay them in a serving dish. Pour over them the mixture of oil, sugar, salt, balsamic vinegar, minced the garlic and chopped parsley. Agitate the peppers to make sure they are all completely covered with sauce. Be prepared to smell like garlic!

⁴⁸ Recipe observed August 5, 2009.

⁴⁹ Kochilas, Diane. *The Glorious Foods of Greece*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 207.

“Peppers are to Macedonia what corn is to Kansas—ubiquitous, a long agricultural tradition that has worked its way into every aspect of the local cookery, in the form of both vegetable and spice. The Florini pepper used in this recipe is ‘one of the best-known, but newest, varieties in the region, having made its way across the former Yugoslav border in the middle of the twentieth century.’”

We also used some of the fresh tomato sauce and some of the other vegetables from the garden to make *yemista*. The recipe below is largely the same as the first recipe provided for *yemista* except for the use of garam masala.

Stuffed Vegetables with Masala Spice Modified *Yemista* (recipe from Maria Katsigianni⁵⁰)

In the Greek fashion of using what the garden supplies, Maria incorporates pumpkin when she has it on hand. An additional difference from the first recipe is the use of homemade tomato sauce, which provides delicious flavor and fewer calories than the plentiful olive oil of the first recipe.

6 tomatoes
10 small green bell peppers
1 zucchini, minced
1 eggplant, minced
1 onion, minced
1 small pumpkin, baked, seeds and skin removed (opt)
1 c homemade tomato sauce*
2 c white rice
1 handful raisins
2 t garam masala or masala
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 T mint
Salt and pepper
Olive oil



Filling for *yemitsas*

To prepare the vegetables for stuffing, slice the tops of the peppers almost all of the way off, leaving a hinge at one side. Remove and discard the seeds. Completely remove the tops of the tomatoes and scoop out most of the filling, placing it around the peppers and tomatoes that you have arranged in a deep pan.

To prepare the filing, mince the zucchini, eggplant, onion, and pumpkin. Fry the vegetables briefly and then add the tomato sauce. Simmer for several minutes before adding the raisins, rice, 4 t water, and spices. Simmer for five more minutes and then remove from the heat. Stuff the vegetables, replace the tops, and drizzle them lightly with olive oil. Bake at 250°C for 35 minutes or until the rice and vegetables are soft.

* If you don't have the tomatoes available to make your own sauce, use high-quality tomato sauce that is more like tomato puree or chunky spaghetti sauce than canned tomato sauce.

⁵⁰ Recipe observed August 3, 2009.

Fava Beans *Yigandes* (recipe from Maria Katsigianni⁵¹)

Serves 6-8



2 c fava beans
1 onion, chopped
1 c tomato sauce* (see note above)
Basil
Olive oil

Soak the fava beans overnight and then boil them until soft. Lightly fry the onion, using scallions if you don't have enough sweet white onion on hand. Add the tomato sauce, basil and softened beans. Add a cup of water and more water, as desired, reserved from the boiled beans. Bake at a low temperature until the dish is the desired consistency.



As the copious number of recipes in this section has made obvious, home-grown vegetables are the mainstay in the diet of rural Greeks who still have their own plot of land on which to garden. Vegetables of every shape and color are combined in a simple manner, dressed with tomato sauce, oregano, salt, and pepper, doused with olive oil and tucked into the oven until it is time to eat. Served with bread and wine, such dishes make for hearty meals packed with nutrition.

⁵¹ Recipe observed August 4, 2009.

Gifts of the Sea

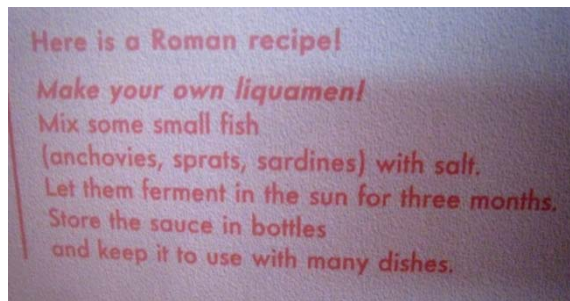


A people surrounded by sea, fish and other seafood have always been important foodstuff for Greeks. Fish of every variety, lobster, octopus, squid, and shellfish have long provided essential protein (especially during Lent), for Greeks of all stripes. The love of fish and all other seafood extends from ancient times to today.



A beach on the west coast of Evia

Courtesans & Fishcakes suggests that in Ancient Greece there were not a few opsophagos (fish lovers). The ancient passion for fish stemmed less from the flavor of the meat than its convenience during religious fasts. Fish is something of an everyday meat because it is free from the ritualized slaughter, offering, and distribution applied to many mammals. The lowly fish is not serious or venerable but could be argued or haggled over in the market, killed unceremoniously, and consumed for pure pleasure, as opposed to consumption as part of a religious act.⁵² Roman *liquamen*, recipe below,⁵³ was a common form of consumption.



⁵² Davidson, James. *Courtesans & Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 20.

⁵³ Third floor display of the Benaki museum in Athens, Greece.

Fish, which is often consumed on Fridays when practicing Orthodox Christians refrain from meat, is still an important part of the Greek diet. The seafood recipes I learned while in the country are presented below.

Preserved Small Fish *Gavros Xidatos* (recipe from Kerys Williams and Kyría Dora⁵⁴)

While some cultures use spices, peppers, pickling, canning or drying to preserve their food, Greeks often use the plentiful salt in their region. Salt is frequently used in preserving fish, as in the recipe below.



50 sardines or other small fish
Olive oil
Juice of 1 lemon
3 cloves of garlic, sliced
Green pepper, chopped (optional)

To prepare the fish, first remove the head and guts and rub off any remaining scales. Sprinkle them generously with coarse salt and leave them overnight. The next day, slice along the belly of the fish and slice off the tail. Flatten the fish with your thumbs and remove the backbone (it is okay if the smaller fish bones remain; they are edible). This process takes about one minute per fish. Layer the fillets in a container with enough room for the fish to move around when shaken. Cover the fillets with good olive oil and squeeze into the oil the juice of one lemon. Add the garlic and green pepper and let the fish rest for a day before consuming. Enjoy within a week.

Baked Small Fish (recipe from Maria Katsigianni⁵⁵)

Instead of eating the fish raw, Maria baked these sardines in the oven with pepper, tomato, and garlic.

20 sardines, cleaned, heads removed
2 cloves garlic, sliced
2 T oil
1 tomato, sliced into rounds
1 green pepper, thinly sliced into rounds
Mustard



Place the cleaned sardines in a low dish and drizzle them with oil. Sprinkle them with the pepper and garlic. Lay the tomato slices on top drizzling them with mustard. Bake at 450°F for 20 minutes. Serve hot.

⁵⁴ Recipe observed June 28, 2009.

⁵⁵ Recipe observed August 4, 2009.

Moonlit Dinner on the Evian Beach

Friday, June 26, 2009

Tonight I had my first taste of *calamarakia* while on a camping trip on a gorgeous beach in Evia. I was camping with a group of alternative Greeks, some self-described hippies, who had all brought their young children to the beach so we could easily travel to the baptism of one of the children the next morning. After the kids were in their tents and dreaming away, we had a local seaside tavern deliver dinner in small aluminum trays. We ate on a beach towels under the night sky as we laughed, talked, sipped on wine, and passed around a joint (I passed, but didn't smoke). Although we were eating by the light of a gas lantern, similar to the evening meals I



had eaten with my Afghani friends, I couldn't help think about that vast cultural and economic gulf separating these two dining experiences. Whereas I had eaten my Afghani meal of chicken and rice with my hands in a small concrete hut with men who had walked across countries fleeing the violence of their homeland, I was now dining on *calamari*, cheese pie, potato fries, and Greek salad that had been delivered by automobile to a group of young adults who had spacious houses and cars of their own. They had spouses and parents that lived only a few hours drive away, or perhaps just across the street. They had jobs. They had chosen to set up their tents, lounge outside all day, buy bottled water and wine, and eat by gas lantern—they weren't doing so because they didn't have money, running water, or electricity. I enjoyed the *taverna*-delivered meal under the stars, but I couldn't help but feel guilty that the cost of my serving of calamari and cheese pie would feed my ten Afghani friends for a day.

Fried Squid *Calamarakia Tyganita* (recipe from *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*⁵⁶) Serves 4

2 lb fresh squid	Flour	Garnish: parsley, chopped
Salt	Olive oil	1 lemon, cut into wedges
Milk (optional)		

Remove the squid intestines, head, tentacles, and transparent backbone, cutting the hood lengthwise, if necessary. Rub the hood with salt, wash in cold running water, and remove the skin. Slice the hood into thin rings. If the squid is large and the hood is tough, soak the rings in milk for 2-3 hours to tenderize. Dry the rings thoroughly, sprinkle them with salt, and roll them in flour. Fry the squid in hot oil until golden brown. Serve hot with parsley and lemon wedges.

Spotting an Octopus Hunter

Saturday, June 27, 2009

After a morning dive into the sea, helping to prepare breakfast, and more swimming, I set out for a small adventure in the kayak one of the men had brought along.

Before I pushed off, I was surprised to see an older man in a black wetsuit with what looked a trident in his hand. I found out later that he was diving for octopus!

Octopus is an important seafood in Greece. During Lent it is the most versatile permissible meat and for the rest of the year it enjoys a status somewhere between that of the ubiquitous squid and the rare extravagance of a lobster. Its flavor also lies between the two and properly prepared its legendary rubbery texture becomes as tender as a crawfish's tail.⁵⁷

The hunter I watched came up empty-handed, but I delighted in seeing his effort to collect his own food enjoy nature at the same time. He reassured me that some people still take pleasure in harvesting the gifts of the land.

⁵⁶ Kapsaskis, Angeline. *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1977), page not noted.

⁵⁷ Chatto, James and W.L. Martin. *A Kitchen in Corfu*. (New York: James Chatto and W.L. Martin, 1987), 73.

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As I spent most of my time inland, forgoing the chance to visit Greece's much-lauded islands, I didn't eat very much seafood. Nonetheless, I know from several of the Greek cookbooks that I read that ocean-food stuffs have long provided an important source of protein in Greece, a mountainous land where it is difficult to raise large quantities of cows. I hope that on my next trip to Greece I'll have a chance to taste more delights of the sea!

Of the Orchards



“Olives, like grapes, are essential to any life worth living.”⁵⁸

Any discussion about the orchards of Greece must begin with olives, for olives are symbolic of the nation and people; for many people, Greece *is* the Olympics, Acropolis, feta, and olives. My first day at a neighborhood market in Athens confirmed the importance of olives in Greek food culture. There were four or five vendors who only sold olives, fifteen to twenty types of olives, from black to green, tiny to jumbo, stuffed with peppers, almonds, anchovies, or garlic. Olives are consumed in a variety of fashions: fresh from the brine, as an essential component of Greek salad, and pitted and sliced into a variety of dishes. But the most important use of the fruit of the sacred olive trees, given to the Greeks by the goddess Athena, who defeated Poseidon (who gave the city horses for war) for naming rights of the city, is undoubtedly olive oil.

Homer called it "liquid gold." In ancient Greece, athletes ritually rubbed it all over their body. Its mystical glow illuminated history. Drops of it seeped into the bones of dead saints and martyrs through holes in their tombs. Olive oil has been more than mere food to the peoples of the Mediterranean: it has been medicinal, magical, an endless source of fascination and wonder and the fountain of great wealth and power. The olive tree, symbol of abundance, glory and peace, gave its leafy branches to crown the victorious in friendly games and bloody war, and the oil of its fruit has anointed the noblest of heads throughout history. Olive crowns and olive branches, emblems of benediction and purification, were ritually offered to deities and powerful figures: some were even found in Tutankhamen's tomb.⁵⁹

I was unable to locate the olive trees Athena is said to have planted around Athens, but there were no shortages of these ancient symbols of peace and prosperity in Central Greece, especially at the endless valley below Delphi. Encountering an olive tree up close, running my fingers along the deep furrowed bark and holding the small green fruits in my hand, I could almost feel the wisdom and (literal) life-giving substance Greeks have depended on since antiquity.

⁵⁸ Rosenblum, Mort. *Olives: The Life and Lore of a Noble Fruit*. (New York: North Point Press, 1996), 6.

⁵⁹ Forkmedia. "Olive Oil History," 2007. www.globalgourmet.com, accessed April 24, 2010.

There is no need to point out particular recipes that contain olive oil, because this staple of the Greek diet is found in nearly every dish, from salads, to stuffed vegetables, fried cheese, *pitas*, bread and cookies.

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Aside from olives, Greece has plenty of other fruits to delight the tongue: peaches, plums, apricots, oranges, nectarines, sour cherries, pomegranates, figs, quinces, apples, melons, berries...the list goes on and on! Fruit is often eaten as a snack or dessert, as described below.

When Philip was a boy he and his family would occasionally share a dish of melon or watermelon if they were still hungry after lunch or dinner, and in the winter roasted chestnuts were eaten with a post-prandial brandy, but not because it was thought necessary to finish the meal with something sweet. Fruit was a snack, eaten when and where a person decided he was hungry, whether plucked from a convenient tree or on rare occasions purchased. ...It is unnecessary to bottle or preserve when there is such a wide variety of fresh fruit available all year round.⁶⁰

Greece's climate supports fresh fruit for much of the year, so there is little need to preserve the sweet fruits. However, as this is a cookbook, I ought to include a few recipes for fruit besides "serve fresh"! Fortunately, I did observe some delicious uses of fruit while in Evia.



Apricot Jam *Marmelada verikoko* Makes 5L jam
(recipe from Takis Oikonomou⁶¹)

6L pot full of pitted apricots
1 2/3 raw sugar
Zest of 2 lemons
Handful of currants (optional)

Using your hands, break the apricots in two and remove the pits. Place apricots, sugar, and zest in a pot and bring to a boil. Simmer for several hours, stirring frequently, until the jam is reduced to the desired consistency. If desired, add the currants towards the end of the reduction. Store the jam in glass jars in the refrigerator; can the jam for a longer shelf-life.

⁶⁰ Chatto, James and W.L. Martin. *A Kitchen in Corfu*. (New York: James Chatto and W.L. Martin, 1987), 96.

⁶¹ Recipe observed July 6, 2009.

The bulk of Greek plums are collected specifically for the production of prunes and plum brandy⁶² but Takis and I found four crates of mountain plums at the local market and bought them from the incredibly low price of €10! The small (1½-2 in diameter), sweet plums had been collected by two elderly Greek who live in the mountains and collect wild fruits and herbs to sell at the weekly Sunday market. Watching these two wise elders, I sorely wished I spoke Greek and could have learned from their years of wisdom. At least I was privileged to the delicious plums they collected.

Plum Jam *Marmelada damaskino* (recipe from Takis Oikonomou⁶³)

Makes 5 L of jam

6L pot of full of plums
400 g raw sugar
1 cinnamon stick
2 bay leaves

Slice the plums around their circumference but not through the pit. Place all of the ingredients in the pot and bring to a boil. Simmer for several hours, stirring frequently, until the jam has reduced to the desired consistency. Remove the pits, cinnamon stick, and bay leaves with a slotted spoon. Store the jam in glass jars in the refrigerator; can the jam for a longer shelf-life.



Buying wild plums gathered from the mountainsides by the elders

⁶² Milona, Marianthi, editor. *Culinaria Greece: Greek Specialties*. (Cologne: Köneman, 2004), 184.

⁶³ Recipe observed July 5, 2009.

Plum Crumb (recipe from Kerys Williams⁶⁴)

Kerys made this delicious dessert out of the extra plums we had not used for the plum jam.

Plums	Topping:
Raisins	Flour
Raw sugar	Dried coconut flakes
Cinnamon	1 capsule of vanilla sugar
	Walnuts or almonds, chopped
	Butter

Remove the pits from the plums and boil with the raisins, sugar, and cinnamon until soft. To make the topping, mix all of the dry ingredients and cut in the butter to form pea-sized balls. Place the boiled plum mixture in a baking dish and top with the topping. Bake at 400°C for 30 minutes, until set. Serve with thick yogurt.

Soft Cheese-Walnut Cake (recipe from Kyría Nadia and Kyría Dora⁶⁵)

I learned this recipe Saturday, July 4, 2009 while accomplishing just what I had set out to when I came to Greece—watching women cook. I was privileged to visit the home of Takis’s mother, who invites her daughter and friends over every weekend to cook, eat, swim, and enjoy the Grecian summer in the typical lazy-Greek fashion.

500 g coarse-grain semolina	
1 kg soft Greek cheese (similar to ricotta), crumbled into pea-sized chunks	
1 c yogurt	
½ c whole (cow) milk	
4 eggs, beaten	
Honey	
Walnuts	
Sultanas (golden raisins)	Syrup:
1 t vanilla sugar	¾ c water
2 t baking powder	¾ c honey
2 t nutmeg	zest of 2 lemons or oranges
1 T cinnamon	



Walnuts on the tree

Mix all the ingredients together, using as much or as little of the honey, walnuts, and sultanas as you wish. Spread the mixture into a large pan and bake at 410°F until firm, approximately 45 minutes.

It is interesting to note that the first time I encountered a walnut tree was in Thebes, where I met the Afghani refugees. I was surprised to see Izet rubbing an unripe walnut fruit on his teeth, but he and Adel explained that the fruit is good for the teeth (I’m unclear whether

⁶⁴ Recipe received July 6, 2009.

⁶⁵ Recipe received July 4, 2009.

they were referring to the strength of enamel or external cleanliness). I tried the technique myself, but must say that I didn't find the fruit very tasty.

In addition to walnuts, almonds are also found in Greece and play an important part in the Greek ritual of marriage, as described in *A Kitchen in Corfu*:

Sugared almonds are obligatory gifts at weddings and christenings, and in the past they also played an important role in traditional Orthodox memorial services, as part of a sweet called *koliva*. Made principally from whole-wheat kernels, dried and fresh fruit and almonds, *koliva* was cooked at home by the relatives of the deceased and then brought to Church to be distributed amongst those at the service.⁶⁶

A variety of other gifts from the trees were also ritually important in Ancient and modern Greece, although many of the traditions have been forgotten or forsaken in the past few decades. For example, gifts placed at a tomb to honor the dead included pomegranates, myrtle wreaths, celery, and *lekythoi* with perfumed oil.⁶⁷ Additionally, honey, milk, oil, wine, and water were offered as libations.⁶⁸ While honey is not produced by trees directly, in the days before commercial production, honey bees relied solely on trees to shelter their honeycombs. Devoid of sugar beets and sugar cane, Ancient Greeks depended on honey to satisfy their sugar cravings. Modern Greek dishes, such as *galactoburiko*, *loukoumathes*, Yogurt with Honey, Soft cheese-walnut cake, and Traditional Toast (recipe below), still rely on honey as a natural and nutritious sweetener.

⁶⁶ Chatto, James and W.L. Martin. *A Kitchen in Corfu*. (New York: James Chatto and W.L. Martin, 1987), 101.

⁶⁷ Note from the display on the right side of entrance hall to the Acropolis Museum.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*



Traditional Toast (recipe from Maria Katsigianni⁶⁹)

Home-made bread (preferably whole wheat)
Honey
Tahini (sesame seed paste)
Pollen granules

Toast the bread and generously top with the honey and tahini. Sprinkle with pollen granules for a nutritious and filling breakfast or snack.

δ

Another tree gift which must be mentioned in any book about Greek food is mastic gum, for mastic is a Protected Product of Origin (the trees from which it is harvested only grow on the Greek island of Chios and nowhere else in the world) and it is central to the culture (food and otherwise) of the island.

A Visit to Mastihashop

Saturday, July 11, 2009

Mastiha (lentisk) trees are endemic to Chios, an island in the Aegean just 8 km from Turkey. From small incisions in the bark of the mastiha tree flows a teardrop of mastiha resin. Chios mastiha, which enjoys a Protected Designation of Origin classification, is harvested teardrop by teardrop, each drop individual scraped clean by the women of the Chios Gum Mastic Growers Association.



Women cleaning mastiha teardrops

⁶⁹ Recipe observed August 8, 2009.

After cleaning, the bitter but uniquely aromatic mastic is sold in a variety of forms from unadulterated teardrops for cooking, candles, face cream, essential oil, stomach powder, toothpaste, and chewing gum. A multitude of mastic-flavored foods, including halva, cookies, sauces, oils, ouzo, rusks, noodles, *lokum*, coffee, and chocolate are also produced.



Mastic-flavored products

I can understand adding a unique flavor to different foods, but why would mastic be added to face cream, stomach powders, and toothpaste? A pamphlet I obtained from mastihashop (the “Official shop of the Chios Mastiha Growers Association”) explains, stating, “According to scientific research, Chios mastiha has antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidant and healing properties with beneficial effects for the oral hygiene, the function of the gastrointestinal system and skin care.”

Scattered around the shop and presented on their high-quality website (www.mastihashop.com), were historical references to the amazing properties of mastic. The medicinal value of mastic was discovered by ancient physicians such as Hippocrates, Galinos, and Discourides. Discorides (1st century A.D.) mentioned mastiha as an ingredient in facial masks and breath-fresheners. Additionally, physicians who served Sultan Abdel Hamit the 2nd advised

him to keep “himself robust [with] to a springtime potion...which contained pimento, clove, nutmeg, bay leaves, aniseed, mastiha, and red sugar.”⁷⁰

The knowledge of the resin’s beneficial properties was apparently well-known, as in Italy “Roman women used to make tooth-picks out of hard sprouts of mastic tree in order to perfume their mouth and whiten their teeth⁷¹,” and “in Saudi

Arabia, they boil milk with mastiha grains and drink it as a tonic beverage, but also as a medicament for stomach ulcer⁷².” While many medicines repel our taste buds, beneficial mastiha was added to sweets and meats not to hide its flavor but add a unique and appealing taste

to the dish. For instance, “In Syria and Lebanon, light custard creams with milk and wheat starch flour always contain a small piece of mastiha⁷³,” as do “sweet sherbets and stewed fruits dipped in honey.”⁷⁴ Festive Iraqi pilaf and Southeast Egyptian chicken are also seasoned with mastiha.⁷⁵



A recipe for preparing a taste of healthful and tasty mastiha cuisine at home is given below.

Feta & Mastiha Spread (recipe from www.chiosnews.com)

Serve 4-6

3 oz feta	1-2 T Greek yogurt (full-fat)
3 oz chevre with or without herbs	White pepper
2 t minced onion	Country bread
¼ t Chios mastiha powder	

Blend the feta, chevre, onion, and mastiha powder until smooth. Add the yogurt until you have the desired consistency. Season with pepper and refrigerate for an hour to chill. Serve with bread.

⁷⁰Mastihashop. “Historical References,” Mastihashop. www.mastihashop.com, accessed July 11, 2009.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.



The trees of Greece provide sustenance in many forms: olive oil, figs, pomegranates, apricots, mastic, quinces, olives, nectarines, plums, sour cherries, apples, honey, walnuts, and oranges, just to name a few. In addition to supporting human life physically, many tree products were also used to support the ancient Greeks spiritually. They continue to line village gardens, fill the mountain valleys, and grow wild in the countryside, sweetening life and providing a spiritual and culinary grounding as they have for centuries.

The Sheep Farm



The Greece of My Dreams

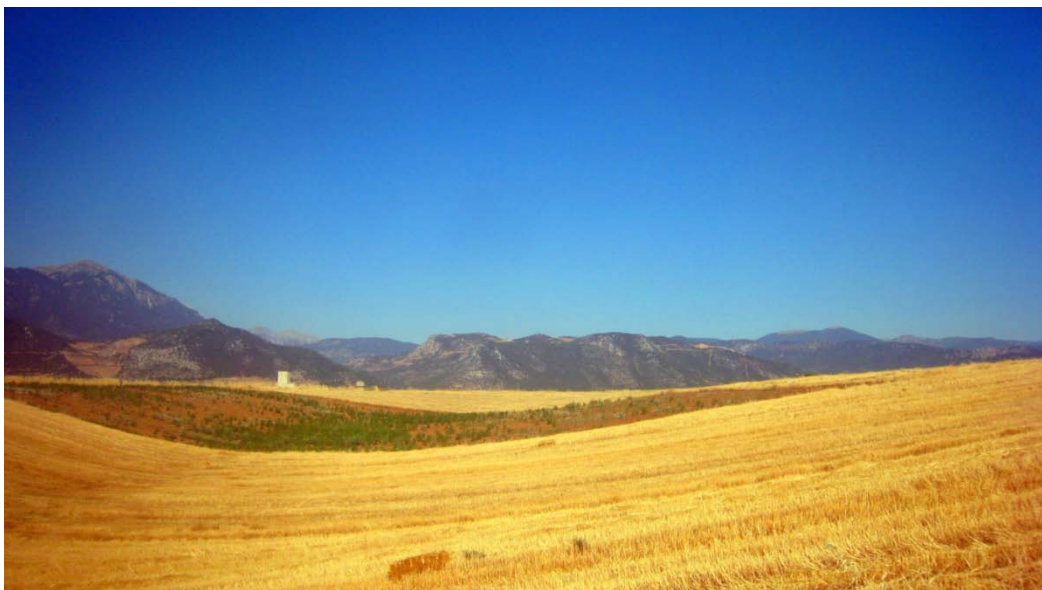
Tuesday, July 14, 2009

I am in a little slice of paradise. I have arrived at the farm of Andy Agouropoulos near the village of Bralos, in Central Greece. Andy has 110 sheep, two cows, sixteen chickens, one turkey, seven dogs, an armload of cats, 100 acres of land to graze the sheep, an overgrown garden, and a son to help him run the farm. He also has WWOOFers, like me, who come to experience the way of the farmer. A friend told



★ Bralos, Greece ▲ other cities the author visited

me about Andy's place and she said it was nice, but she didn't tell me it was like *this*. I feel so fortunate to be here. Tonight, I moved bales of hay from here to there and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I enjoyed the smell of the straw, the rolling slope of the land, the tans and greens of the neighboring fields, the mountainous backdrop, the setting sun...I even stopped trying to be efficient with my hay hauling so I could just enjoy the sweet smell of life instead of solving an optimization problem. I smiled as I worked. What a wonderful place to be.



Work isn't Work When in Paradise!

Saturday, July 18, 2009

This morning I moved bales of clover. I moved 450 bales an average of four meters. And at 10-15 kg each, that is a lot of work. I could figure out the number of Newtons if I care to draw the force diagrams, but let's just say that it took me three hours in the hot sun and even I took a break to lie in the shade on the clover.

When was the last time you laid in a pasture? And not just on the pretty green grass in your front yard (although that was probably a long time ago, too), but in a field of grasses with orange and white butterflies fluttering about, incessantly buzzing flies, crickets jumping from here to there, and birds chirping in the shady tree above you? I watched a ladybug climb up a blade of grass, over and around the top, and back down a few paces to rest. I thought, "What a head-rush she must be having, clinging to that blade of grass upside-down." Good thing ladybugs don't have blood and a circulation system like we do. Good thing they are not like us at all because if they were, not only would this little ladybug have a head-rush, but she also wouldn't be climbing on a piece of grass and her little feet wouldn't be perpendicular to the ground. As I watched, a little yellow aphid climbed up the same blade of grass and I thought for sure that I'd see the food chain in action. The aphid climbed up and around the top, and back down, right in front of the ladybug. Either she was blind or not hungry, because she let the little fella go.

I listened to the cicadas and tasted a few of the purple clover flowers that the sheep love so much. Sweet. With a salad of clover leaves, it was easy to see why the ruminants were always trying to escape to the clover pasture. They made one break-away attempt last night, but I dropped my rucksack and ran after them, routing the naughty four-leggeds just in time. It is always the big, white German sheep that lead the breakaways. Andy has three types of sheep, the big, white Germans, who have been domesticated so well that they grow better on milled

corn (a general term in Europe for any grain) than in the open pasture. The all-black sheep that are native to this area graze well, but Andy is shifting his flock over to the black-headed, black and white spotted sheep that graze better than the other two breeds. By “graze better”, I suppose he means that they are more efficient munchers, eating more quickly when they are taken out to the pastures every morning and evening, but perhaps it refers to their digestion—the black sheep digest their food more efficiently and are thus able to put on weight more quickly.



Being a farmer means long days. Andy typically gets up at 5 am and has a coffee before leading the sheep far down the road to one of his rented fields or a neighbor’s field of corn stubble. There’s a law in Greece that sheep may graze any field of corn that has already been harvested. Andy returns around 8 am, just when I am getting up. He has some “French toast” (several pieces of small, pre-toasted breads that are popular here in Greece) with butter, honey and/or cheese, as I eat my breakfast of toasted sandwich bread or yesterday’s leftovers. These past few mornings, after giving me instructions and showing me exactly what he wants me to do,

he's driven into town with his 21-year-old son Nick to get some paperwork done and pick up a bit of food to fill the empty refrigerator.

Andy seems so busy that I have a feeling that if I weren't here to do these morning jobs on the farm, they probably just wouldn't get done. So far I've weeded the garden, pulled up 600 onions, mucked out the cow stall, and hauled bales of hay and clover. I move the bales from the rows into which they were dropped by the baler into bunches of four or five so that when Andy and Nick collect the bales in the evening, the tractor doesn't have to stop as often and collection of the bundles is faster. I stop whatever I'm doing around noon or one and head inside for a cool shower to wash away the sweat and grime. Andy and Nick come home around this time and we all take an afternoon siesta inside to avoid the blazing heat.

It took me two days to figure out how meals work. The first day I was here I ate breakfast at eight, lunch around one and then a late dinner at nine thirty after bringing in the sheep. This was rather awkward because Andy had his coffee at 5 am, a toast at eight, then no food until 4:30 pm. This late afternoon meal served as both his lunch and dinner. The second day ran similarly. Then I figured out that, of course, Andy's eating schedule makes a lot more sense than mine. There is no reason to eat a meal and then sit around, which is what I was doing when I had a noontime lunch and late-night dinner. It is much better use of energy to eat just before you do the day's work. I can't understand how Andy goes all morning on only an espresso and a few pieces of dry bread, but I'm not a coffee drinker and I heard the liquid is some powerful stuff. Since I've learned when to eat, I've been eating Andy's fresh-cooked meals with him and having some good conversations.

Andy is an inventive cook who whips us some tasty concoctions. He was born in Brazil to Greek parents, and lived in England for a number of years before starting this farm in Greece 15 years ago, so his cooking has international influences. He told me that he has always liked to

cook but his mother got angry when she saw him in the kitchen or heard that he had cooked for his wife. "I'm not supposed to do this thing [cooking]," Andy told me, "...and when I wash the plates... [My mother] shouts, but afterwards she enjoys it." He was also scolded when he participated in rearing his three children, because that is apparently just not something Greek men should do. I asked him if Greeks still think this way and he said, "In Athens you have a lot of young couples, but in Greece, yes, the woman is supposed to raise the children and the man work and bring the money."⁷⁶ I was struck that this old-fashioned idea is still customary. When many women stayed home, it made sense for them to do more housework and child-rearing, but now that many are in the workplace alongside men, it is unreasonable to expect that when they are home they should be busy cooking, cleaning, and rearing the children, not taking a moment for themselves. In any case, I am lucky that Andy took an interest in cooking so I could benefit from his delicious meals, many of which would be considered traditional Greek, but always with a Brazilian flair (extra pepper and bananas on the side!).

The first night I arrived at the farm, I had spaghetti and tomato sauce with chunks of Andy's own sheep—*really good*.

⁷⁶ Andy Agouropoulos, personal communication, July 15, 2009.

Spaghetti with Tomato Sauce and Bits of Sheep (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁷⁷) Serves 4

- 2 c sheep meat, cut into small pieces
 - 1 onion, finely chopped
 - 3 sun-dried tomatoes, rehydrated
 - ½ c raisins
 - ½ medium carrot, sliced into thin rounds
 - 1 can/package of chopped tomato
 - 4 bay leaves
 - 1 cinnamon stick
 - Dill, oregano, and parsley
- Salt and pepper
Olive oil



Sauté the onions with the sheep meat. After several minutes, add the remaining ingredients, seasoning as desired. Let the sauce simmer for 15 minutes and serve over spaghetti.

The next day we had some leftover spaghetti to use up, so Andy made the following tuna spaghetti.

Tuna Spaghetti (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁷⁸) Serves 6



- 1 purple onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic, coarsely chopped
- ½ large tomato, coarsely chopped
- ½ medium carrot, quarter lengthwise & sliced into rounds
- 1 handful of parsley (conventional and French), chopped
- 2 cans of tuna, packed in salt water*
- ½ c butter
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 t anise powder
- 2 t oregano, dried
- 3 leaves of mint, chopped
- Salt and pepper
- 1 ½ t olive paste
- 2 t sugar
- 2 T curry powder, to flavor the spaghetti
- 1 ½ c Gouda or hard cheese, grated, for serving

Heat the butter and olive oil in a pan and add the chopped vegetables and tuna. After a minute, add the seasonings. When the mixture has almost finished cooking (about 7 minutes), add the sugar “to complement the pepper,” Andy told me. Serve with spaghetti boiled with salt and curry powder, a plate of grated cheese, and salt-and-peppered cucumbers.

⁷⁷ Recipe observed July 14, 2009.

⁷⁸ Recipe observed July 15, 2009.

* Andy told me that the oil in which the tuna is often packed “can carry all sorts of contaminants.”

Salt & Pepper Cucumbers (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁷⁹)

I have been served salted cucumbers before, but I didn't find them terribly impressive. However, when Andy drizzled the cucumbers with oil and sprinkled them with pepper, they were delicious!

1 large cucumber, peeled
Salt and pepper
Olive oil



Salt & Pepper Cucumbers with Tuna Spaghetti

Halve the cucumber cross-wise and each half cut into sixths lengthwise. Sprinkle generously with salt, pepper (chili pepper, if desired), and olive oil. Enjoy!

Andy has some fifteen hens and one turkey, from which he daily collects all the eggs that he finds before his dogs do. In the entryway of the house there are two silver buckets half-full with fresh brown eggs and in the fridge there are half-a-dozen more eggs. With these eggs Andy made the most interesting omelet I've ever seen.

Farmhouse Omelet Serves 4-6
(recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁸⁰)

Eggs:
6 eggs
1/3 c yogurt*
4 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 c parsley, chopped
1/4 c "hot ketchup"***
Chili pepper
Oregano, dried
Salt and pepper



Filling: Use a 1/4 c of as many or as few of the following ingredients as you wish
Purple onion, finely chopped Olives, meat chopped away from the pits
Tomato, finely chopped Pickle, chopped
Bacon, chopped Coconut, dried flakes
Sausage, chopped Pineapple, drained Raisins

For the egg mixture, beat the eggs and then beat in all of the other ingredients. For the filling, sauté the onions and then add the other ingredients you have chosen. Add 2 t salt. Cook for 5 minutes and then add the egg mixture. When the eggs pull away from the side of the pan, flip the omelet and cook for a few more minutes. Serve with potato "chips" (fries).

* Andy didn't have the yogurt so he used 2 T whole milk and 1/3 c whip cream from an aerosol can!
***Andy actually had a special ketchup called "hot ketchup;" use regular ketchup and a dash of chili pepper as a substitute.

⁷⁹ Recipe observed July 14, 2009.
⁸⁰ Recipe observed July 15, 2009.

Another recipe employing eggs is a traditional breakfast taught to me by Kyria Areti, a Greek social anthropologist-Thai massage teacher I met in Evia.

Traditional Greek Breakfast (recipe from Kyría Areti⁸¹)

Small, hard rusks (black Mana bread is preferred)
Soft-boiled egg
Salt and pepper (optional, not for small children)

Use two rusks and one egg per person. Briefly wet the rusks and wait for one minute for the water to soak in before crumbling them into a cup or bowl. Top with the soft-boiled egg. Mix, mash with your spoon and enjoy.



For the chicken whence came the egg, I didn't learn any recipes from Andy, since he was only cooking vegetarian food during the time I stayed with him because of his two Belgian guests. However, I did learn the recipe below for chicken pie while watching Greek women cook in their swimsuit at the summer house of Yiayia in Evia.

Chicken Pie Modified *Kotopitta* (recipe from Kyría Nadia and Kyría Dora⁸²)

Serves 10-12



1 whole chicken
2 c frozen, mixed peas and corn, thawed
3 c yogurt
1 T oil
3 small purple onions
3 medium carrots
1 red pepper
10 scallions
Leaves from 10 stems of spearmint
 $\frac{3}{4}$ c flour
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ c chicken stock
4-5 eggs, lightly beaten (divided)
Salt and pepper

Boil the chicken, reserving the broth. De-bone the meat and grind it in a food processor. Add the boiled and drained peas and corn, yogurt, and oil and mix into the meat with your hands. Use a food processor to individually chop each the onions, carrots, peppers, and 8 scallions into small bits. Sauté the onions for a few minutes before adding the remaining two scallions, coarsely chopped. Add this to the mixture with the flour, chicken stock, and three lightly beaten eggs, mixing thoroughly with your hands between each addition. Season with salt and pepper, then pour into a large baking pan and beat 1-2 eggs to pour over the top. Bake in an oven at 350°F until lightly browned (45-60 min).

⁸¹ Recipe observed June 22, 2009.

⁸² Recipe observed June 28, 2009.

Σ

Back to Andy the sheep farmer, the bales of hay and clover, the picturesque landscape, and the naughty four-leggeds...



A Refreshing Treat

Thursday, July 16, 2009

This morning Andy came back from town while I was still moving bales of clover under the blazing sun. He drove into the field with his big, black pickup to meet me—and brought me a cold sour cherry drink! What a guy. I never got a thank you at the last farm I worked at, and here Andy is bringing me a cold drink and telling me to come in if I get too hot. “Don’t worry about finishing now,” he says after asking me several times if I am okay. It is getting rather hot and I’ve been out all morning with no water, but I tell him I’m fine and that I’m almost done. Seeing that I’m determined to finish before heading in, Andy stops his truck and starts packing the bed with bales. I take a sip of the drink he brought me and revel in its sweet coldness and Andy’s kindness.



Sour Cherry Drink *Byssinada*

(recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁸³)

Andy is an old-fashioned sheep farmer dedicated to farming as organically as he can afford and protecting the land by buying local products. He tries to purchase only “made in Greece” and local goods both to lighten the load of gas emissions on the environment and because he feels that globalization has been only detrimental to economies and cultures everywhere. When he is in Greece, he is going to buy Greek goods. Sour cherry is a Greek specialty and it is served as both a spoon sweet and drink.

Sour cherry syrup	Ice cubes
Slice of lemon	Preserved sour cherries

Dilute the sour cherry syrup 1:4 with water; add a slice of lemon, ice cubes, and three or four preserved sour cherries. Serve with a straw, and don’t forget the umbrella!

Sour Cherry Spoon Sweet *Býssino Ypobryxio* (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁸⁴)

Spoon sweets, also called “submarines” in Greek, are eaten as a snack or dessert.

Preserved sour cherries
Glass of cold water

While Andy had his preserved sour cherries on top of whip cream, the traditional way to eat a spoon sweet is to take a teaspoon of the preserve and dip it in water (hence “submarine”) before eating. Take a few sips of water before the next spoonful of sweet. A spoon sweet is so sweet that a spoonful or two is satisfying.

A Plenty of Food for Hungry Farmers

Thursday, July 30, 2009

Hanis, Sophie, Dolly, Andy, and I work all morning, mucking out the barn, sweeping up sheep dung, hauling manure to the garden, digging out garlic, feeding sheep, repairing the fence, painting the barn, cleaning up the additional excrement that were freshly dropped for us, and doing whatever other odd jobs need to be done to keep the farm in good shape. By one o’clock we are tired, dirty, and hungry. Before our afternoon siesta or swim at the hot springs, Andy always makes a wonderful lunch. Some of the recipes are below.

⁸³ Recipe observed July 29, 2009.

⁸⁴ Observed July 29, 2009.

Meatless Paella (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁸⁵)

Since I was living with three vegetarian WWOOFers during my stay at Andy's, he only prepared vegetarian food. However, this meatless paella he made was much tastier than the traditional paella I tried in Barcelona!



White rice
Curry powder
Carrots, quartered lengthwise and sliced
Sun-dried tomatoes, halved
Green pepper, coarsely chopped
Parsley, coarsely chopped
Onion, coarsely chopped
Garlic, minced
Raisins
Eggs, beaten
Salt and pepper
Olive oil

Meatless Paella, Red Bean Sauce over Pasta, and salad

Boil the rice in water flavored with curry. (Andy leaves the top off of the pot when he boils rice so that the grains of rice don't stick to each other.) While the rice cooks, fry the eggs and when they are almost finished, break them into pieces with a spatula. Add the carrots, sun-dried tomatoes, green pepper, parsley, onion, garlic, and raisins, cooking for five minutes until the carrot pieces are tender. Mix in the prepared rice and season generously with salt and pepper.

⁸⁵ Recipe observed July 28, 2009.

Red Bean Sauce Over Pasta (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁸⁶)

Serves 8

1 lb kidney beans
2 cans tomato sauce
2 carrots, quartered lengthwise and sliced
1 onion, coarsely chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
Oregano, dried
Salt and pepper
2 T olive oil
Spiral pasta

Soak the kidney beans overnight and then boil them until they are half an hour from being done (tender but not falling apart). At this point, drain the beans, and add the remaining ingredients. Serve over the prepared pasta.

“Kastelia fry-up” Andy’s Wild Rice (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁸⁷)

Serves 6

1 ½ c white rice, uncooked
½ c wild rice, uncooked
2 eggs

Choose any or all of the following in whatever quantities you would like:
Carrots, quartered lengthwise and sliced thinly
Sultanas
Onions, minced
Tomato, minced
Celery, finely chopped
Parsley, finely chopped
Bacon, cooked, finely chopped (optional)



Combine the white and wild rices and cook. Andy lets the rice boil continuously, uncovered, so that the grains don't stick. While the rice boils, fry the egg, breaking the yolk but not scrambling it. When the egg has finished cooking, break it into chunks with the spatula. Then add the carrots, sultanas, onions, tomato, celery, parsley, and bacon (opt) and stir frequently until the vegetables are cooked.

⁸⁶ Recipe observed July 26, 2009.

⁸⁷ Recipe observed July 17, 2009.

Colored Bowties with White Sauce (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁸⁸)

Serves 6



- 1½ c flour
- ½ c olive oil
- 1-2 c 1% or 2% milk

- 1 green pepper, sliced into small strips
- 2 carrots, quartered lengthwise and sliced
- 1 onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 handful parsley, coarsely chopped
- 1 c mushrooms, sliced
- 1 green apple, finely chopped
- ½ c sultanas
- Salt and pepper
- Sesame seeds

Colored bowtie pasta

Combine the olive oil and 1 c milk. Incorporate the flour by quickly whisking to prevent lumps. Add more milk until the desired consistency is reached. Add the green pepper, carrot, onion, parsley, mushroom, and apple, season with salt and pepper, and steam “to get the taste of the vegetables,” as Andy says. When the vegetables are tender, remove the sauce from the heat, sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve over the prepared pasta.

“Bread, Education, Freedom!”

The rice and pasta of the dishes above are relatively recent additions to the Greek diet. As I read on the 3rd floor display of the Benaki museum in Athens (see below), in times past, grains for making bread were far more important to the diet than foreign sources of carbohydrates.

In winter in Macedonia, the farmers grew wheat and rye, in spring black-awned wheat, millet, oats, and pulses. Viticulture and stock-breeding were also widespread. The cultivated fruit trees produced pears, figs, walnuts, cherries, and almonds. The farmer’s enemies were drought, acts of God, wars, and robber bands.

Bread has long been the nutritional foundation of Greece. During the Athens Polytechnic Uprising from November 14-17, 1973, students organized a radio station, the only

⁸⁸ Recipe observed July 26, 2009.

free media under the then-junta-controlled country, from which they broadcasted the chants “Papadopoulos, you fascist, take your washerwoman wife, take Despina and go, the people don’t want you!” “People break your chains!” “U.S. Out!” “Down with the Junta!” “Today Fascism dies!” and “Bread, Education, Freedom!” The anger they incited caused the junta to step down on November 17, 1973 and returned democracy to Greece.⁸⁹

The call “Bread, Education, Freedom!” (“Ψωμί, παιδεία, ελευθερία!”) reflects the basics which the Greek people were deprived by the junta: nutrition, the opportunity for advancement, and fundamental liberties. Bread also symbolizes a step in human evolution. The leavening and baking of bread represent an exit from dependence on the animal kingdom, an outgrowth of knowledge (agriculture) and technology (baking). The transition to agriculture signifies a dramatic shift in the way humans relate to the land: the shift from mobile hunter-gatherers who feel dependent on the natural world to settled farmers who see themselves as rulers of the environment; they don’t adapt to nature but modify it; they create food that does not naturally exist in nature. Food became *unnatural*, a tamed, transformed, reinterpretation of nature.⁹⁰

Bread is a necessity for every Greek meal; if there is no bread, one has the feeling that the meal is incomplete, lacking a basic requirement. Bread has such weight on the Greek table that in ancient times food used to be classified into “bread” and “things to put on bread” and one was considered a glutton if he did not observe that bread, not the topping, should be the staple of the diet.⁹¹

In addition to bread, pulses including lentils and chickpeas and beans were also important in ancient diets and continue to sustain healthy bodies today. Below are several recipes of pulses made for me by Andy at the farm.

⁸⁹ ArtKreta.gr. “Polytechnic uprising 17 November 1973.” <http://www.greeceindex.com/history-mythology/Polytechnic-17-November-1973.html> accessed January 25, 2010.

⁹⁰ Montanari, Massimo. *Food Is Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), page not noted.

⁹¹ Davidson, James. *Courtesans & Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), page not noted.

Chickpea Soup

Serves 8

(recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁹²)

2 c chickpeas
1 stalk celery, coarsely chopped
¼ bunch parsley, coarsely chopped
1 carrot, coarsely chopped into rounds
4 cloves garlic, smashed
1 purple onion, finely chopped
¼ c butter
Salt and pepper



Soak the chickpeas overnight and drain them before cooking. Boil the chickpeas and let them simmer for an hour. Then add the other ingredients. Continue to simmer and just before the chickpeas are finished, mash them slightly in the pot to bring out the flavor.

Lentil Soup (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁹³)

Serves 8

This is another recipe for soup that I learned from Andy. What a great cook!

2 cups lentils
1 carrot, quartered lengthwise and thinly sliced
1 tomato, finely chopped
1 small zucchini, finely chopped
1 stalk of fresh oregano (you may use 1 t of dried oregano)
4 bay leaves
¼ c olive oil
Salt and pepper

Soak the lentils overnight and drain them before boiling. After the lentils have boiled for half an hour, add the rest of the ingredients and continue to boil for another hour until the lentils are soft.

⁹² Recipe observed July 21, 2009.

⁹³ Recipe observed July 23, 2009.

Brazilian Beans (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁹⁴)

Serves 6

1 c kidney beans
1 deli sausage, finely chopped except one 5-inch piece
¼ c bacon, raw, coarsely chopped
Celery, coarsely chopped
Parsley, coarsely chopped
4 bay leaves
Olive oil
Salt and pepper
Oregano
2 purple onions, minced
5 cloves of garlic, minced
Garnish: banana, sliced



Soak the kidney beans for 1 to 2 days, depending on their freshness. Change the water at least twice. Then rinse and boil the beans in plenty of water. After half an hour, add the sausage (the finely chopped portion and the large piece), bacon, celery, parsley, and spices.

For the special addition, “What makes it good”, in the words of the recipe’s inventor, fry the onions and garlic in ½ c of oil. Add a generous amount of salt, chili pepper, and black pepper to taste. After a minute, add two ladles of the hot bean broth to the onions, stir, and add the entire mixture into the beans. Serve with rice and top with slices of banana. (A product of Brazil, Andy eats just about everything with a banana.)

⁹⁴ Recipe observed July 17, 2009.

Lamb with Orzo Yuvetsi (recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁹⁵)

Serves 4

This is another recipe that Andy taught me but I never got a chance to taste because of our vegetarian regime. Andy's food was so good and I normally eat so little meat that I quite enjoyed the vegetarian diet, but I would have liked to try this classic Greek dish, especially after getting to know the farmer and all the work he has to put into raising the sheep featured in this dish.

4 medium chunks or one large leg of lamb	
2 cups of orzo, uncooked	½ c olive oil
1 tomato, pureed	1 c water
1 tomato, finely chopped	Salt and pepper

Place the lamb, orzo, and tomatoes in a large sauce pan with the olive oil and water; season with oregano, salt, and pepper. Cook on medium heat until the orzo is tender and the lamb is cooked through.

From sheep comes not only meat, but also wool and milk. Unfortunately, no one will buy Andy's wool because his flock is too small (110 sheep) to make it worth their while. Andy would give away the wool if he could find a taker, but as of now he is forced to burn the valuable material. The milk, however, he is able to sell to a cooperative which produces feta. This year he kept some of the milk and tried to make his own feta. I wish I was there to watch the process, but the milking season had passed and I had to settle for reading books on the subject. I read the following snippet in *A Kitchen in Corfu* about the traditional method of testing feta:

In the days before the *grado* a more rudimentary but equally foolproof method was used: a fresh egg was put into the must in the *skafi*. If it sank, it was necessary to add sugar; if it rose so that enough of its surface stuck out as to be visible beneath a two drachma piece all was well. The same experiment was used to test the brine in which *feta* cheese was to be kept. If the egg was not eclipsed by the coin then the brine was more than 13 per cent salt—an important reading in the days before refrigeration. At any lower level of salinity the cheese would spoil. The *grado* vindicates the egg: if the must contains less than 11 per cent sugar no shell protrudes beneath the two drachma piece.⁹⁶

Andy's cheese may have been of the proper salinity, but apparently the wrong type of bacteria landed on the cheese and it went bad. Nonetheless, there was always a block of feta in

⁹⁵ Recipe received July 26, 2009.

⁹⁶ Chatto, James and W.L. Martin. *A Kitchen in Corfu*. (New York: James Chatto and W.L. Martin, 1987), 109.

the fridge, a treat for my feta-loving Belgian friend, Sophie. We usually had feta as part of our salads, but on the last day of my stay, Andy made the feta dish described below.



Feta and Olive Oil with Pita Bread

(recipe from Andy Agouropoulos⁹⁷)

Olive oil
Feta
Oregano
Pita bread, toasted (and buttered, if desired)

Cover the bottom of a wide, shallow dish with high-quality olive oil. Add large chunks of feta and sprinkle with oregano. Use toasted pita to sop up the oil and scoop up the feta. Delicious!

Another cheese dish I had while in Greece was *saganaki*, which Kerys made for me in Evia.

Fried Cheese *Saganaki* (recipe from Kerys Williams⁹⁸)

Feta or *haloumi* cheese
Olive oil

In a small frying pan, heat the oil. When it is hot, add a thick slice of cheese. Fry both sides and serve immediately, with fresh bread or a fried egg

The third cheese dish I had employed cow milk, and was made for me by Maria in Thessaloniki.

Soft Cheese Spread (recipe from Maria Katsigianni⁹⁹)

2 c soft cow cheese – add salt if the cheese is unsalted
1 T balsamic vinegar
1 T olive oil
Oregano, dried
Hot green pepper, finely chopped

Blend the vinegar and olive oil into the cheese and season with oregano and pepper, being sure to mix in the hot pepper well. Serve with fresh bread.

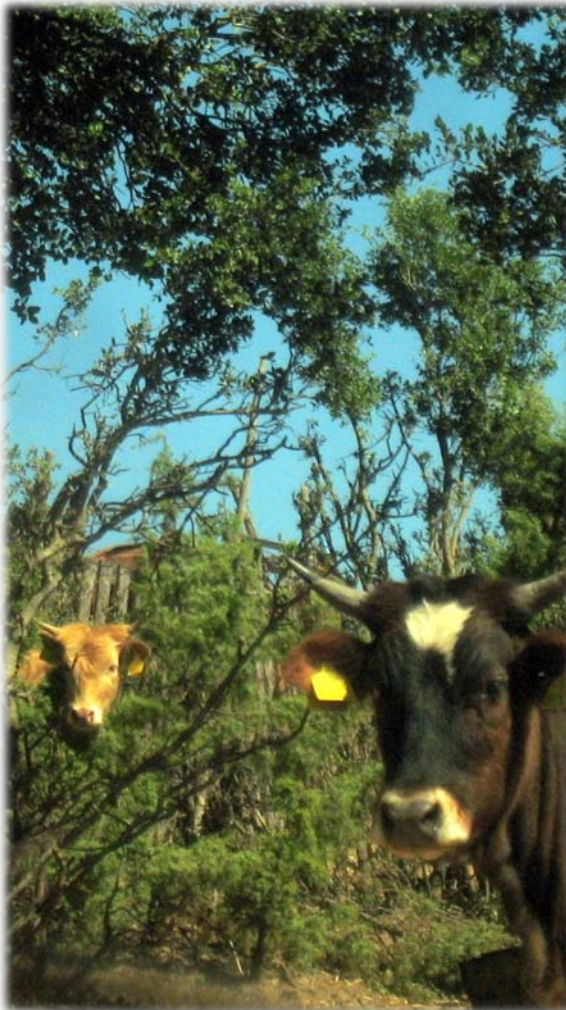
⁹⁷ Recipe observed July 30, 2009.

⁹⁸ Recipe observed June 29, 2009.

⁹⁹ Recipe received August 4, 2009.

My diet on the farm was wholesome, hearty, nutritious, and diverse. The combination of a Brazilian childhood, Greek ancestry, a philosophy of purchasing only local products, and the thrift of a farmer, made Andy's cuisine uniquely delicious. Despite the manual labor I did on the farm, I am sure I gained weight from the food at his table. Andy's fine dishes exemplify how delicious, nutritious meals can be prepared from scratch utilizing low-cost, low-impact products in many backyards in Greece—there is no need for McDonalds, fried chicken, candy bars, or soda when the fruitful Greek land provides so much. I can't thank Andy enough for opening my eyes and tantalizing my taste buds with the flavors of Greek-Brazilian fusion and the reassurance that some Greeks genuinely appreciate and take advantage of the bounty of their land.

The Wild Mountainsides



The mountains of Greece, 27.9%¹⁰⁰ of the mainland, are covered in subtropical and temperate forest¹⁰¹, including deciduous forest, stands of pines, and scrubby brush on the leeward sides. Mountain tea, oregano, basil, mint, marjoram, dill, parsley, rosemary, sage, thyme, wild celery, and a variety of other herbs are commonly found on the Greek slopes, as are small deer, bears, wolves, foxes, and feral pigs.¹⁰² As I observed, the mountains also provide habitat for cow, goat, and sheep. As such, the mountains have provided Greeks with foodstuffs throughout the centuries. They depended heavily on these foodstuffs before modern urbanization and especially during the Nazi occupation, when many Greeks sought refuge in the mountains and survived on partially on wild *horta*.

When I asked Greeks about traditional Greek food, *horta* is one dish that was always mentioned. *Horta*, greens that grow wild in the mountains, is still collected by locals and sold at the market to be prepared as a simple side dish, just as it has been for centuries. *Horta* is far more important to the Greek diet and Greek history than the pre-package bags of organic salad greens that can be found in supermarkets today. It is commonly known that as a wild, leafy, green vegetable packed with nutrients, *horta* sustained the Greek people during times of war, famine, and occupation. While Greeks today have an abundance of other foods to choose from, they continue the tradition of consuming *horta* as a nutritious part of their everyday diet. The importance of *horta* in both diet and the culture of Greek food is well-expressed in *A Kitchen in Corfu*:

Ask the villagers why they go out into the hills to look for asparagus or *horta* and they answer that it tastes so good—far better, one suspects, than if it had been picked by anyone else. Added to that is a predilection for freshness in the things they eat. But herb and *horta* gathering also exemplifies more subliminal attitudes. Part of the heritage of an impoverished past is a pride in living off the land and the villagers take pleasure in all activities that prove their self-sufficiency whether as farmers, fishermen or hunters. It is with hunter's faith in his instincts and experience that Leonidas set out for asparagus. *Horta*, on the other hand, is

¹⁰⁰ UN Food and Agriculture, "State of the World's Forests 2003 Table 2." UN FOA <http://www.fao.org/docrep/> (accessed January 4, 2010).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Andy Agouropoulos, personal communication July 19, 2009.

gathered in a spirit of opportunism, with the mind and the carrier-bag open for whatever may be available. This too illustrates something of the way that villagers think about food: an almost casual acceptance of whatever turns up. It is only when it reaches the kitchen table that the unconscious discipline of tradition takes over. A Loutsiot cook will welcome any unexpected bounty, but once it is in her kitchen she will prepare it exactly as she has always done.¹⁰³

Horta is more than just something to eat. *Horta* is a gift of from the land; *horta* is self-sufficiency and pride; *horta* is tradition.



Wild Greens Horta (recipe from Yeoryia Christoforides¹⁰⁴)

Use whatever greens you have on hand – at the local markets they sell pika, dandelion, red dandelion, endive, etc.

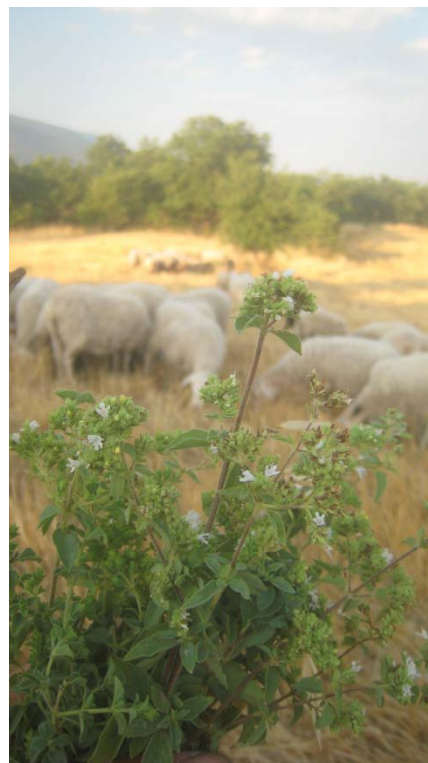
Clean the *horta* and boil. Flavor with salt, drizzle with olive oil, and serve with slices of lemon to squeeze over the *horta* at the table. That's it! Enjoy

Oregano?!

Sunday, July 19, 2009

Today I was more than surprised to find fresh oregano in the river valley where I took the sheep to graze. Being a city kid, I have never seen a wild herb. To me herbs, which are rarely used in my house, come in little pieces from old metal tins; they are dull green and rather flavorless.

But here it was, growing right before my eyes. Andy taught me to pull off some of the lower leaves and pick it rather far down the stem so it would be easy to tie and hang up to dry. After drying, Andy removes and stores the flowers in a glass container. The leaves are not as pungent and Andy uses them only if he is out of flowers or if he is cooking with the entire sprig. Although Ottoman



Wild oregano

¹⁰³ Chatto, James and W.L. Martin. *A Kitchen in Corfu*. (New York: James Chatto and W.L. Martin, 1987), 30.

¹⁰⁴ Recipe received June 8, 2009.

spices are known, herbs like oregano are far more important than Eastern spices when preparing Greek dishes. The herbs I found most common in modern Greek cuisine were oregano (included in practically every dish made by Andy), parsley, dill, and basil. Combined with onions, garlic, and olive oil, these ubiquitous herbs provide aromatic, tasty, and nutritious benefits.

Oregano, like many other herbs that grow in the mountains or in the valleys between the slopes, is used as a medicine as well as an herb. “Even in ancient times, powerful healing properties were attributed to the medicinal herbs growing wild in the Pílion mountains,”¹⁰⁵ not far from Andy’s farm.

Other commonly found herbs which are also used for medicine are listed below:¹⁰⁶

σ	Oregano	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	Relieves feverish colds and stomach upsets
σ	Centaury	<i>Centaurium erythraea</i>	Treats digestive ailments and fever
σ	Lemon balm	<i>Melissa officinalis</i>	Helps relieve nervous tension and insomnia
σ	Mint	<i>Mentha</i>	Mint tea helps relieve nausea
σ	Common yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Relieves fever and arthritis
σ	Sage	<i>Sage officinalis</i>	Relieves bloating and treats liver problems
σ	St. John’s Wort	<i>Hypericum</i>	Used externally for burns and wounds
σ	Wild mallow	<i>Malva silvestris</i>	Treats bronchitis and throat infections
σ	Camomille	<i>Matricaria recutia</i> <i>M. chamomilla</i>	Relieves stress-related digestive problems
σ	Scented geranium	<i>Pelargonium</i>	[Use not noted]
σ	Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Treats depression and nervous exhaustion
σ	Basilikum	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	Sooths fevers and relieves nausea
σ	Coriander	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	Used externally for hemorrhoids
σ	Lime blossom	<i>Tilia platyphyllos</i>	Treats colds and migraines
σ	Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	Soothes tickly coughs and inflamed gums
σ	Dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>	Stimulates appetite and aids digestive problems

*Dill is often added to *spanakopita*—no wonder the dish is so popular!

¹⁰⁵ Milona, Marianthi, editor. *Culinaria Greece: Greek Specialties*. (Cologne: Köneman, 2004), 166.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166-167

Free-Ranging Cows and Barren Slopes

Sunday, July 19, 2009

Today, after dropping off a few bales of clover in Kastilia, a small village near the farm that still has some 1920's houses mixed in with the newer edifices and where Greeks go about their daily lives without a concession to the hordes of tourists that have overwhelmed Athens, we drove up into the mountains to pick out the two cows that Andy bargained for yesterday. Andy exchanged some 200 bales of clover (€4 each) for the two cows, one of which will be pregnant when it is delivered in the fall.

The drive up the mountainside was absolutely gorgeous—except where strip mining had denuded the mountainsides and the iron-red dirt slipped down the steep slopes, unchecked by the forest roots that once held it in place. Deforestation by means of logging and arson, lucrative contracts and illegal government kickbacks are all helping destroy the mountains of Greece. And the destruction is on a grand scale.



A mountainside being mined to the point of destruction.

I was appalled by the extent of the devastation wrecked by the mining companies, and Andy shook his head but seemed otherwise resigned to the situation; there's not much private citizens can do when corrupt officials are willing to offer permits and look the other way as a nation's resources are being ripped out from underneath. This was another reminder to me that

even if people care about the environment, that doesn't always translate into active environmental protection.

Many of the mountainsides surrounding Andy's farm used to support cows that would roam wild and return to the farm only occasionally as they pleased, but now there are few farmers left willing to put in the work and with the knowledge to manage such a farm. I felt privileged to be meeting one such traditional farmer and his happy cows.

I have never seen cows in a pen big enough where they could actually turn around, much less cavort with twenty other playmates under the shade of small mountain trees. The mothers of many of the two and three year old calves I met roamed free on mountains, coming home only occasionally. This saves feed money for the farmer, but more importantly, this is how things should be. Just as Andy's sheep deserve to be feeding on horsetails along the river and munching on straw¹⁰⁷ left behind after bailing, the cows, domesticated as they are, deserve to be roaming and feeding freely. Even domesticated animals can't like living in a pen just large enough for them to fit inside.

The farmer we met was traditional not only in his practice of letting his mother cows roam free, but also in the building of his shed: Andy pointed out the style to me as traditional Greek—thrifty, resourceful, and inventive.

¹⁰⁷ Andy made clear that straw is the stalk leftover after grain has been harvested while hay is grass grown specifically to serve as feed.



Whatever works goes! Despite the barn's unusual appearance, I'm sure the cows it housed were just as warm and dry and ten times happier than cows on industrial farms.

Many Greeks told me that the current level of meat consumption in Greece is notably greater than it was in the past. *Evia: Tradition & Diet* points out, “In the old days, meat was eaten rarely and in smaller quantities, than we do today. Then there were not any mass-producing farming establishments; instead meat came from the animals, raised in each household. That meat had a delicious flavor that today tends to remain only in our memories.”¹⁰⁸ Meat was eaten less frequently, but, or perhaps therefore, it was more flavorful in the past when cows actually lived under the sun and ate plants that still had their roots in the ground.

Although Greeks are most famous for their consumption of entire lambs on Easter, cows are appreciated for both their contributions of milk and meat. As the two Belgian volunteers I worked with at Andy's were both vegetarian, I didn't try any beef at his house, but on separate occasions I did get a taste of what Andy's new cows may someday become—a terrible thought to think, but the reality of a farm.

¹⁰⁸ Kouki, Julia. *Evia: Tradition & Diet*. (Athens: Incentive Publications, 2004), page not noted.

Meatballs with Rice Modified *soutzoukakia* (modified from The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book¹⁰⁹)

Serves 4

Yiayia's lives just across the street from where I was staying in Evia and she often brings food that she and her friends make over to the house as a treat for the grandchildren. The meatballs she brought over one day were the size of a golf-ball and swimming in oily tomato sauce.



1 lb ground beef
2-3 cloves garlic, crushed
Pinch cumin
1 egg, lightly beaten
2 slices of stale white bread, crusts removed
½ c dry red wine
1 c white rice, cooked ½ t sugar
Flour Salt and pepper
1 onion, finely chopped Olive oil
2 c tomato juice

Soak the 2 slices of stale bread in red wine and add the ground beef, half of the garlic, cumin, egg, rice, salt, and pepper. Knead well. Shape into large ovals (slightly smaller than an egg). Flatten slightly and roll in flour. Fry until brown on both sides. Remove from pan and place on absorbent paper. To the remaining oil add the onion and leftover garlic. Fry until golden brown, then add the tomato juice, sugar, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook for about 15 minutes. Add the meatballs to the sauce, cover, and cook on low heat for 15 minutes. Serve with fried potatoes.

Below is an alternative recipe for *soutzoukakia*.

Meatballs (large) Soutzoukakia (recipe directly from *Evia: Tradition & Diet*¹¹⁰)

800 g beef mincemeat	Salt and pepper
150 g old bread (hard not moldy)	1 clove garlic, finely chopped
Some parsley	2 pinches grated pimento
1-2 eggs	A little flour
½ teaspoon cumin	

Soak the bread in water and thoroughly squeeze out the water before mixing with the mincemeat, finely chopped parsley, the whole eggs, the cumin, the salt, and the remaining spices. Knead well, until all the ingredients have blended into a uniform and smooth mixture.

With a spoon, take small portions of the mixture, and mold the *soutzoukakia* in the shape of dates, and cover them in flour. When they are all prepared, grease with oil the bottom of a baking tray, and spread the *soutzoukakia*. Cook in the oven at medium temperature, turning them on all sides, so that they are completely cooked.

Meanwhile prepare a tomato sauce, just like the one for the meatballs, with the addition of half glass non-resinated wine. Pour the sauce on the *soutzoukakia*, and return the pan in the oven. When they boil a couple of times, remove from the oven. On a serving plate, put rice in the middle, and spread around it the *soutzoukakia*.

¹⁰⁹ Kouki, Julia. *Evia: Tradition & Diet*. (Athens: Incentive Publications, 2004), page not noted.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.



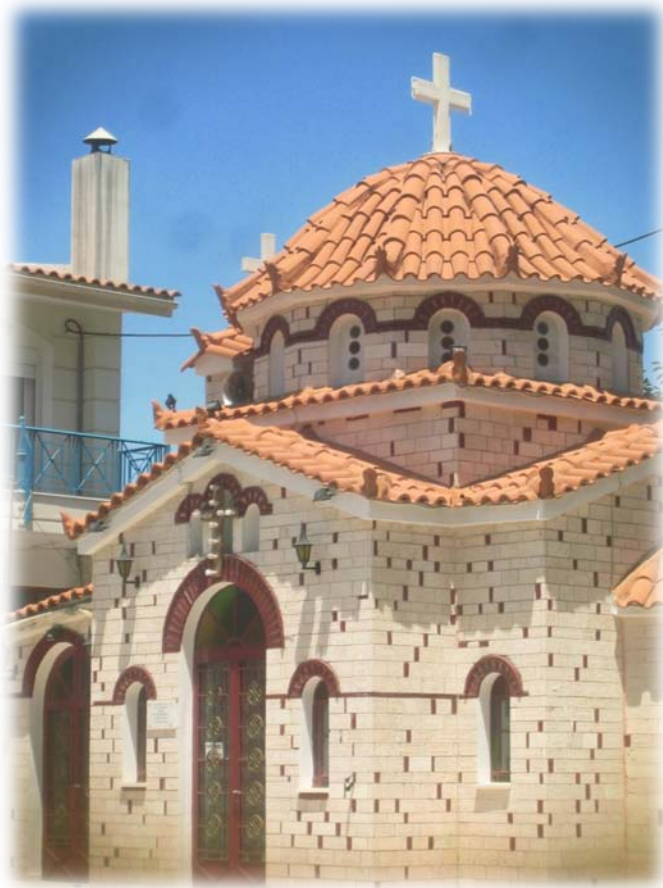
The high consumption of meat and fat, especially from fast food chains (few though they are) such as increasingly popular McDonald's, is having an obvious impact on the health of Greeks, especially on the younger generation of the cities, who have been distanced from backyard farms and the far healthier diet of the past that was based on legumes, olive oil, seafood, bread, and fresh vegetables. Greek adult men, along with those in Spain and Italy, have the highest rate of obesity in Europe. Based on 2003 self-reported data (which generally leads to an underestimate), 21.9% of adults are obese.¹¹¹

The vaunted Mediterranean diet, and the health benefits it is associated with, is disappearing from its homeland. While some city Greeks find a traditional *cafeteria* or purchase a *souvlaki* on the street for lunch, many more grab a *pita* or sandwich from a local fast-food chain called Everest or a crepe from one of the hundreds of creperies around the city instead of preparing their own meal at home. The reasons are abundant but boil down to the simple amount of time required to prepare a meal from scratch. Greek food is relatively simple to prepare, but still demands the time and energies of the home cook, and, to be truly traditional, the home gardener. Maintaining the healthy food culture of Greeks of ages past is a lifestyle that requires devotion many Greeks have, unfortunately, given up.

On the other hand, as this book is a testament, there are still at least a few Greeks out there who take the time and effort to grow their own fruits and vegetables (or at least buy fresh produce from the weekly market), bake their own bread, and prepare meals for their families from scratch using local ingredients that have been part of the Greek diet for centuries.

¹¹¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. "OECD Health Data 2006: How Does Greece Compare," OECD, 2006. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/31/3/36957914.pdf> accessed January 24, 2010.

Bringing it all together: Special Celebrations



Roasting a Lamb for Greek Orthodox Easter

Sunday, April 19, 2009

I began my exploration of Greek food in America when I was invited to a Greek Orthodox Easter celebration held at a nearby park by the Hellenic Association of the University of Minnesota. I was told that the gathering started at 11 am, but, already having learned that Greek time is somewhat different than atomic time, I arrived around 12:30. To my dismay, I didn't see anyone at the park. Peering into the park shelter, I saw some jackets and grocery bags, but nothing that looked like an Easter celebration. I sighed. After biking through the drizzle for an hour and a half I had found nothing except a few guys hanging out in a park shelter. They were probably just trying to stay warm. I brushed off my rain-soaked bicycle seat and was about to go...but then I decided that I may as well see what these young men were up to.

"Um...hi. Are you guys Greek?"

"Yes. Come in. Hello, who are you?"

And so began the day of roasting the lamb of Greek Easter. Apparently when they said the party would start at 11, the Greeks actually meant that the lamb would be killed at 11, taken to the butcher and then be brought to the party to be cooked. Roasting the lamb *was* the party. Excited to start my journey into ways of Greek food culture, I offered my two clean hands.

The skin and innards of the lamb had been removed and the men were busy placing the lamb on the spit. The spit was a long, square metal rod rammed through the lamb's mouth, along its vertebral column and out its tail end. After ensuring that neither the nose nor the legs would interfere with the turning of the spit, we secured the lamb to the rod with metal ties attached to the hind feet, front hooves, and laced along the spine.



I couldn't get over the lamb's huge eye! Note how the men pulled the lamb's tongue out, both for looks and for more efficient cooking.

Easter Lamb

Serves everyone

According to *Evia: Tradition & Diet*, “The innocent lamb [was] destined from a long time ago to nourish man”. Accordingly, a recipe for roasting this symbol of innocence (Jesus as the lamb of God) follows. Be prepared for a whole lot of lamb when you are finished—and yet with a group of Greeks hungry for meat after a forty day Lenten fast, the meat disappears in a flash. I can’t say anything about how to choose a lamb, since I wasn’t involved in the selection, but I can say that after working on an old-fashioned sheep farm, pastured sheep must taste a whole lot better than sheep force-fed in large-scale commercial operations. After the butcher has skinned and gutted the sheep, you will need to push it onto and secure it to the spit. This is not an easy job and requires some muscles as well as a large, easily washable surface. Traditionally, the lamb was placed on a wooden spit, soaked overnight, and hand-turned for hours over a fire built into the ground. Now many people use metal spits that rotate automatically. You will still have to tend the coals throughout the process. Enjoy this unique experience with a group of friends (the process requires at least four people) and appreciate all the work that went into raising the lamb when you are ready to consume it.

1 lamb, skinned and gutted
Lemons, sliced into four pieces
2 c butter
Salt and pepper

Basting sauce:
Water
Lemon juice
Olive oil
Oregano
Salt and pepper

Preparation time: 1 hour
Cooking time: 5-6 hours

Have one person start the coals in the basin of the roaster while the others work the lamb onto the spit, running the metal rod along the spine, in through the mouth and out through the hind end. Use wire to secure the backbone to the spit and tie the front and back feet together. Secure the feet to the spit by raising them up as high as they will go and tying them into place. Make sure the spit will be able to turn by checking that there is no interference along the horizontal or turning axes. Next, thoroughly rub the lamb with salt and pepper (this should take several handfuls of each). To the stomach cavity, add the butter, in several chunks, and the slices of lemon. Tie the cavity shut with wire and place the lamb on the turning mechanism.



The lamb should be basted every few minutes to moisten the meat, add flavor, and prevent the lamb from burning. To make the basting sauce, combine equal parts olive oil, water, and lemon juice (the water is necessary so the basting juice doesn’t start a fire when it drips onto the hot coals). Add a few teaspoons each of oregano, salt, and pepper. Apply the basting juice using a clean dish towel that has been tied onto a long, thick stick. Make sure every part of the lamb is basted and remember that the lamb must roast for at least 5 hours, so cooks should take turns basting.

The lamb is ready to eat when the meat starts pulling away from the bone. The ribs and cheeks will likely be done first. Those standing nearby will start to take pieces here and there—stop them before they eat the whole lamb before it is on the table! Cut into the thighs to make sure they are thoroughly cooked before serving.

Serving a whole lamb means covering a large table with aluminum foil and carrying the lamb, still on the spit, onto the table. Then, cut off the wires and remove the spit. By this time you are likely to be surrounded by hungry stomachs and hands grasping for the hot meat. Make sure to have plenty of towels on hand for de-greasing hands and undressed salad to placate stomachs and palates stultified with the richness of the meat.

I was surprised that at the Easter meal I attended, there seemed to be no etiquette—guests just grabbed whatever delectably greasy piece of meat they could get their hands on and started munching. I had expected, considering the ritualistic character of orthodox Christianity,



The author, enjoying every morsal of sheep after five hours of basting

that there would be a short sermon before the meal, but there wasn't even a moment of prayer before the lamb was ripped into bit-sized pieces. An entire sheep at one's fingertips after 40 days Easter fasting was too much to resist.

According to Kerys, the Englishwoman I met in Evia, on Greek Easter Greek hospitals are

filled with patients suffering from exploded stomachs, stomachs that have been overwhelmed by the quantity and richness of food found on a Greek Easter table. To avoid this uncomfortable disaster, Greeks help their stomachs prepare the night before the feast by eating *mayeritsa*, a soup of the entrails of the soon-to-be roasted lamb.



Yum! Delicious sheep brain!

Easter Saturday Soup *Mayeritsa* (recipe from *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*¹¹²) Serves 6-8

I tasted this soup on Easter Sunday, while waiting for the lamb to finish roasting, but I learned from Kerys that it is typically eaten after the family returns from Midnight Mass on the day before Easter. The soup is made from the entrails of the lamb that will be roasted the next day. After 40 days of abstaining from meat and dairy, this soup is somewhat of a preparation for the stomach for the next day of feasting.

Tripe, heart, liver and lung of a small lamb	Salt and pepper
4 oz butter	10 c hot water
5-6 spring onions, finely chopped	3 eggs
1 T parsley, chopped	Juice of 2 lemons
1 T dill, chopped	

Thoroughly wash the entrails and immerse in boiling water. Drain and cut into very small pieces. In a large (12 c) saucepan, heat the butter and sauté the spring onions. Add the entrails and fry until brown on all sides. Add the parsley, dill, salt and pepper and hot water. Cover and bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until tender. When finished, remove from heat. In a large bowl, beat the eggs, gradually add the lemon juice and then add, little by little, some of the broth. Pour the egg and lemon sauce into the soup, stirring continuously. Reheat slightly (do not boil) and serve immediately with freshly ground pepper.

¹¹² Kapsaskis, Angeline. *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*. (London: Angus and Robertson, 1977), page not noted.

I found another recipe in *Evia: Tradition & Diet* that included the excellent introduction below.

Tripe and Herb Soup (recipe directly from *Evia: Tradition & Diet*¹¹³)

The roasted lamb (mainly on the spit) is the basic gastronomic outbreak of the Greeks, who use this way in order to express the enthusiasm for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and for the triumph of life over the death. This custom has its roots in Greek and Hebrew tradition. More or less it is related to animal sacrifices of the past, despite the fact that Christ did not encourage it, on the contrary He discouraged such customs...

The tripe and herbs soup, the recipe of which will be mentioned later, is a very tedious and tiring food for the housewife to prepare. It is served on Holy Saturday and it is the main dish of the first feast for the Resurrection, after the ceremony in the first hours of Easter Sunday. It must be mentioned that after a long fasting period, the consumption of such a dish, may make our stomach and out (sic) whole body to protest initially.

1 lamb offal with the intestines
½ kg spring onions
1 small lettuce
1 packet dill 2-3 pimentos
Oil Salt and pepper
2 eggs Lemon juice

Wash the offal very well and especially the intestines, which you can turn inside out very carefully so that they are not torn or cut. In a saucepan with water, boil the offal and the intestines (woven in a braid), until tender. In the meantime clean and wash the spring onions, the lettuce, the dill, and finely chop them.

As soon as the offal become tender, withdraw from the fire and with a fork remove them from the saucepan and place them in a platter Using a sharp knife, cut in small pieces, and finely chop the intestines.

In another wide enough saucepan, sizzle slightly the onions. Then add the lettuce, the dill and the chopped offal. Add the water, in which you had boiled the offal, and add more water, if needed. Leave the food to boil, and add one tablespoon corn flour or flour and 2-3 pimentos. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

When you see that the liquids have reduced enough and all the ingredients are cooked, remove from the fire, and prepare the egg and lemon sauce as follows: beat the eggs and slowly add the lemon juice. Then, stirring continuously, add slowly some of the broth from the food. Empty the egg and lemon sauce in the food and shake the pan so that all the ingredients are blend in together and the food gets a creamy texture. Put the saucepan on the fire for a few seconds shaking it continuously.

Enjoy this rich re-introduction to the restricted animal foods of Lent.

¹¹³ Kouki, Julia. *Evia: Tradition & Diet*. (Athens: Incentive Publications, 2004), page not noted.

The feast of Greek Easter is not just lamb (although the richness of the meat should be enough to fill any stomach!); also served are salads, cheese pie, red Easter eggs (*pashaliatika avga*), Easter bread (*tsourekis*, a bread of three braids, to symbolize the trinity), Easter cookies (*koulourakia*), and baklava with honey and nuts.

Red Easter Eggs *Pashaliatika avga*

Easter eggs, symbolic of the new life of the Resurrection, are dyed red to symbolize the blood of Christ. It is traditional for each guest to tap each end of her egg with the eggs of her neighbors while saying, "Christo Arnésti" ("Christ has risen"). The other person responds, "Alithós Arésti" ("Truly He has risen") and both look to see whose egg has been cracked. The guest whose egg remains uncracked will have good luck for the year.

Eggs
Red dye or onion skins
Vinegar

Hard boil eggs with red dye or onion skins and vinegar added to the boiling water.

Easter Cookies in the Shape of Rings and Twists *Koulourakia* Serves a crowd (recipe directly from *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*¹¹⁴)

While I inquired, I was unable to find out about the history of symbolism of these traditional cookies. They are rich, like all of the other foods at the Easter table, so this recipe will go a long way.

½ c butter	6 c plain flour
1 ½ c sugar	Pinch salt
5 eggs	4 t baking powder
Vanilla	½ c milk

Combine the flour, salt, and baking powder. In a separate bowl, cream the butter until very light, adding the sugar gradually while beating. Add the 5 eggs and vanilla and continue beating. Gradually add the flour mixture to the creamed butter, alternating with the milk and stirring continuously. Knead the dough lightly with your hands and shape it into rings 2 in in diameter or twists 5 in long. Place the rings and twists on buttered and floured baking trays. Then, beat the remaining eggs with a little sugar, and brush the rings and twists with the egg and sugar glaze. Bake in a moderate oven (350-400°F) for about 20 minutes until golden brown.

Kaló Pásha! Happy Greek Easter!

¹¹⁴ Kouki, Julia. *Evia: Tradition & Diet*. (Athens: Incentive Publications, 2004), page not noted.

Baptismal Dinner

Saturday, June 27, 2009

Tonight I had the honor of attending a baptism and the following baptismal celebration. Whereas my own baptism was a relatively short and simple affair incorporated into a regular church service, a special hour-long gathering was set aside for this Greek Orthodox sacrament. As the ceremony was conducted in Greek, I couldn't understand what was being said, but I was able to ascertain the nature of the word by the actions of those involved. The elderly, white-haired priest conducted the ritual according to a baptismal manual from which he read the required prayers and chants. He blessed the godparents, the holy water, and naked baby girl, before dipping the screaming child in the water up to her chin and pouring handfuls of water over her head. After thrice dunked as such, the baby was handed to her godparents and helped to dress in her new clothes by her mother and grandmother. Once in her new dress, overcoat, bonnet, and sunhat, her godparents held her as they walked around the three-foot-tall baptismal chalice, accompanied by a young girl holding a four-foot-tall candle. Following this, the priest took three cuttings of the baby's hair and brushed her tear-covered face with oil. According to Greek Orthodox religion, the temporary trauma of baptism will allow the child to enter heaven provided she lives a righteous life.

Although this baptism had all of the trappings of the traditional rite of passage, I must say that the event was rather strange because the parents were not practicing Christians and didn't believe in the significance of the rite, they were performing the action primarily motivated by respect for Greek tradition and the fact that they had baptized their first son. If they did not now baptize their daughter, what would other people think? and what would their daughter think when she got older?¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ This information was shared with me by Kerys Williams, a long-time friend of the baptized child's parents.

After the ceremony and the passing of gifts of sunflowers, chocolate, and harmonicas¹¹⁶ to guests, we all piled back in our cars and drove down from the tiny chapel in the mountainside village back to the beach on the east side of Evia, Greece where we had camped the night before. The baptismal party was held at the home of the mother of a good friend, who lived in the village at the head of the beach. Two women, friends of the newly baptized baby's parents, had prepared a grand feast for the celebration.

The food was still being dished up and brought to the tables when I arrived. And it is no wonder, because the tables were absolutely *packed* with food. I thought about what Kerys told me about Greeks having everything in excess. This was a prime example. Covering the four tables were plates and platters of stuffed vegetables, Greek pies, oven-roasted potatoes, and bowls filled with salad and *tzatziki*. On the tea-plate of each guest was a packet of parchment paper containing a piece of lamb and three rounds of a tomato slice topped with green bell pepper and onion. There were forks and knives, Amstel beer glasses, green bottles of beer, and tall plastic water bottles filled with homemade *retsina* (Greece's traditional resin-flavored alcohol).

¹¹⁶ *Koufeta*, sugar-coated almonds, are traditionally also given out at baptisms, but I did not observe them at the baptism I attended.

Menu for a baptismal feast:

- σ Packets of lamb with tomato, green pepper, and onion
- σ Oven-roasted potatoes
- σ Zucchini stuffed with rice and pumpkin
- σ Red peppers stuffed with feta
- σ *Dolmathakia* (stuffed grape leaves)
- σ Greek salad
- σ Lettuce salad
- σ *Tyropita* (cheese pie)
- σ *Spanakopita* (spinach pie)
- σ *Keftethes* (meatballs)
- σ "Russian salad"
- σ Pasta salad
- σ Chunks of bread
- σ *Tatziki*
- σ Grilled sausages
- σ Grilled feta with tomatoes and green bell peppers

Dessert:

- σ Mixed fruit in whipped cream
- σ Ouzo drunk through straws from a hollowed-out watermelon

Many of the recipes for the dishes above have been included in other sections of this book as they serve as everyday foods as well as foods of celebration. Additional recipes are listed below.

Lamb Roasted in Paper *Arni Sto Harti* (recipe adapted from *The Common Sense Greek Cookery Book*¹¹⁷)

Chunks of lamb	Firm tomatoes, thinly sliced
Olive oil	Green bell pepper, thinly sliced
Lemon juice	Feta, thinly sliced
Oregano	
Salt and pepper	

Combine the oil, lemon juice, salt, pepper and oregano and rub the mixture on each piece of meat. Place the meat in the center of a doubled, butter sheet of parchment paper. Top with a slice of tomato, a slice of bell pepper, and a piece of feta. Wrap each piece of meat tightly and secure with a string. Butter the entire package and place in a well-buttered baking dish and place in a moderate oven 350-400°F until tender, about 3 hours. Do not add any liquid and do not turn. Serve hot, wrapped in the paper.

¹¹⁷ Kapsaskis, Angeline. *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*. (London: Angus and Robertson, 1977), page not noted.

Stuffed Vine Leaves *Dolmathakia*Makes 50 *dolmas*(recipe from *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*, modified to include beef¹¹⁸)

6 oz fresh vine leaves, trimmed of the thick main stalk
¾ c olive oil
3 onions, grated
1 c white rice, uncooked
2 ½ c hot water
Salt and pepper
1 c ground beef, cooked
3 T parsley, chopped
1 T dill, chopped
Juice of 1 lemon

Tenderize the vine leaves by plunging them into very hot water for several minutes. Fry the onions until golden brown and then add the rice. Add 1 c of hot water, season with salt and pepper and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until the water is absorbed. Add the ground beef, parsley, dill, and lemon juice. Stuff the leaves by placing a teaspoon of the rice mixture one-third of the way from the bottom of the leaf. Fold over the bottom, fold in the sides, and roll. Pack tightly into a pan or deep pot. Add the remaining 1½ c of hot water and simmer until the rice is cooked. Serve cold.

Meatballs (Small) *Keftethes* (modified from *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*¹¹⁹) Serves 4

These ping-pong ball-sized meatballs were almost lost among all the other dishes I had at the baptismal party I attended.

1 lb ground beef
1-1 ½ c moistened stale bread (crusts removed, torn into small chunks)
1 large onion, grated
5 stalks parsley, finely chopped
Salt
Pepper
1 egg, lightly beaten
Flour
Olive oil



Combine the ground beef, bread, onions, parsley, salt, pepper, and eggs. Knead well. Shape into small balls, about the size of a walnut (the ones I had were the size of a golf ball). Roll in flour. Pan fry until brown all over. Serve hot or cold with *horta*.

¹¹⁸ Kapsaskis, Angeline. *The Commonsense Greek Cookery Book*. (London: Angus and Robertson, 1977), page not noted.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Lentil Salad¹²⁰

Lentils
White rice
Green peppers, finely diced
Tomatoes, finely diced
Purple onion, finely diced
Parsley, finely diced
Olive oil
Salt and pepper

Soak the lentils overnight, drain them, and boil them until tender. Cook the rice in a separate pot. When both the rice and lentils are cool, add the vegetable, dress with olive oil, and season with salt and pepper.

“Russian” Salad¹²¹

Litsa, a friend of Kerys and the daughter of the woman who prepared this dish, described this salad as “new traditional”, meaning that it became popular in her mother’s generation and is now commonly found in Greece. I can’t confirm Litsa’s comment that this type of salad is widespread in Greece, but I thought her definition of “new traditional” was intriguing. It shows how cuisine and “tradition” are constantly evolving.

Potatoes, chopped into small cubes
Mixed frozen vegetables (peas, carrots, and corn), thawed
Mayonnaise
Mustard
Salt and pepper
Garnish: cherry tomatoes, halved
Cucumbers, peeled, sliced, and halved

Chop the potatoes and then boil them. Drain and combine with the mixed vegetables, and mayonnaise. Season, garnish, and chill before serving.

Pasta salad¹²²

Litsa’s mother also made this dish, which was definitely not “traditional” Greek, but rather seemed quite American to me. Perhaps it is another example of “new traditional”.

Penne, cooked	Olive oil
Turkey or chicken, cooked and shredded	Salt and pepper
Frozen peas, defrosted	

Mix all of the ingredients together and serve cold.

¹²⁰ Recipe determined by personal observation.

¹²¹ Recipe determined by personal observation.

¹²² Recipe determined by personal observation.

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In many ways, this baptismal feast is a culmination of the food ways I observed in Greece. There was a wide variety of ingredients, from garden-raised vegetables (zucchini, pumpkin, peppers, spinach, potatoes, and tomatoes) to store-bought grains (lentils, rice, and flour for home-made phyllo and bread) to feta purchased at the local market, and meat (lamb, beef, and sausage) from the butcher down the street. The meal also employed a handful of traditional preparation and cooking techniques: fresh vegetables were coarsely chopped for cold salad, stuffed vegetables were grilled or baked, lentils were boiled, lamb roasted in packets that resembled those shepherds used to take with them into the field, *pitas* baked, and feta grilled. The meal also reflected the influence of immigrants and the adoption of new foodstuffs and recipes, with grilled potatoes, *dolmathakia*, “Russian salad”, and pasta salad.

The relaxed, informal nature of Greek dining was also obvious. In Japan every meal starts with “*Itadakimasu*” and ends with “*Gochisousama*” (both which thank the cook and/or host) and in China there are proscribed rules to follow, such as serving the eldest and guests first, picking up only one mouthful of food at a time from the common bowls, and not filling a tea cup too full but pouring so much alcohol the cup is overflowing. But in Greece there seemed to be no rules except to make your heart, stomach, and tastebuds content. Greek food culture seems to be centered on freshness, flavor, long meals with plenty of alcohol to facilitate conversation, and simply being together. Meals are not fussy affairs with rules and restrictions—simply relax, eat, and converse, enjoying the food and company of friends.

Five Pounds Heavier
&
Two Months Later

Lessons I Have Learned

I left Greece with two months of delicious food woven into the fibers of my body and instructions for the dishes' preparation by home-grown chefs, a first-hand experience of working the land (and herding a flock of sheep), a glimpse into Greece's immigrant community, and a better idea of what it takes to do social anthropology research.

Contrary to my assumption before setting out, my research on the food culture of Greece and its link to environmental perspectives was by no means easy. I entered the field thinking that it would be a cinch to make local friends, watch old women cook, and interview farmers about their story with the land, only to find out that we were separated by a language barrier I was unprepared to hurdle; conducting the required interviews was impossible as my language skills were limited to English. Despite what I had been told before heading off to Greece, I discovered that English is not widely spoken. While much can be learned from observation, I found my research to be extremely difficult as I did not speak Greek and most of the Greeks I spoke to did not speak English beyond simple phrases. The problem of basing one's research on observation without being able to ask clarifying questions is that observations can be completely misconstrued and be taken to support one's hypothesis when no such support exists.

My goal in Greece was to see if and how the outdoor market culture influences or reflects how people think about the environment. However, I came to Greece with a series of assumptions that I didn't even realize I held until I had spent almost three weeks in the country. For example, I assumed that shoppers connect food with the wild environment when they buy their groceries. I had no way to verify such an assumption without a common tongue; even if I had been able to communicate verbally, I didn't know the appropriate questions to ask. Before traveling to Greece I had come up with a list of interview questions that I had planned to ask merchants, customers, and farmers, but I couldn't get away from leading questions. I have never

been trained in social science research methodology and, after arriving in Greece I realized that I was completely unprepared to do the sort of research I had imagined, especially not being able to speak Greek! I felt ashamed that I even thought I could go to a non-English speaking country and discover any more than superficial aspects of their culture, much less conduct academic research.

Despite my crippling fault of not speaking Greek, I was able to wiggle myself into a few kitchens, attend a baptismal celebration, work in a garden, herd sheep, and make 5 gallons of tomato sauce over a wood-burning stove. I can't speak authoritatively about Greek food, or even give a generalized picture of the nation's cuisine, but I can speak about what I saw and experienced:

The main ingredients of Greek cuisine are olive oil, tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, *horta*, bread, yogurt, feta, spinach, garlic, onion, oregano. There is also a vast amount of zucchini, lamb, lentils, green beans, chickpeas, olives, bell peppers, walnuts, honey, and fruits ranging from quinces to strawberries to apricots, as well as specialties such as tahini and mastic. These common ingredients reflect a Greek history of reliance on the land—many of the ingredients are native to Greece and all can be grown in its fertile Mediterranean soil. It is no surprise that the cuisine evolved as such, with the majority of the population still living in rural areas, sustained by their backyard gardens, before WWII.

Greek food carries particular economic and socio-cultural significance. Food produced in Greece, especially olives and olive oil, also has an economic impact. Agricultural exports of olive oil alone accounts for 6-6.5%¹²³ to 9.5%¹²⁴ of GDP and olive oil production accounts for a notable portion of total employment.¹²⁵

¹²³ Galanopoulos, Konstantinos, Konstadinos Mattas, and George Baourakis. "Market and Trade Policies for Mediterranean Agriculture: The case of fruit/vegetable and olive oil." *Agricultural Situation Report—Greece*, June 2006: 1.

Exporting Greek goods also exports Greek culture, enticing tens of thousands of visitors each year. While Greeks are happy to sell you a piece of Greece to take home (be that a replica of Ancient Greek pottery or a bigger belt to cinch up your pants), they don't seem very eager to adopt traditions of other cultures, especially when it comes to food. I found not more than a dozen foreign restaurants (excluding McDonald's) during my two months of venturing in Athens. Most Greeks are proud of their food, especially the locally-produced specialties such as cheeses, olives, and olive oil, and see no reason to frequent Chinese, Italian or Indian restaurants. Gathering at the olive press or the local oven for a taste of the neighbor's flavors and a time for socializing may be days long gone, but the pride and the sense of community instilled by producing and sharing food still has a foothold in the villages. As the centerpiece of leisurely meals and jovial celebrations, food acts as a form of social glue, just as it has for centuries. This socio-cultural significance is arguably more important than the economic impact of Greek food, for without export revenue Greeks would be poorer, but without their food, Greeks simply wouldn't be Greeks.

Culturally, food is the center of socialization. During my stay in Evia, the rule at Yiayia's house was "All food, all the time." Kerys said that if the women weren't tending the garden they were cooking and if they weren't cooking they were eating, and even as they ate and chatted they were thinking about the next dish to cook. There is no rush to finish the Greek meal and be dismissed from the table. With the richness and flavor of Greek dishes, this is no surprise. It is certainly easy to spend two or three hours at the table at the best time of day (after the sun has gone down), with a few bottles of *retsina* and friends to share it with.

¹²⁴ Karipidis, Philippos, Efthimia Tsakiridou, and Nikolaos Tabakis. "The Greek Olive Oil Market Structure," *Agricultural Economics Review*, 2005: 64.

¹²⁵ Galanopoulos, Konstantinos, et al. "Market and Trade Policies for Mediterranean Agriculture," *Agricultural Situation Report—Greece*, June 2006: 2.

The amount of time Greeks spend preparing, cooking, and savoring their food made it clear that food about far more than fuel for the day. For many people in America, eating seems to be a habit, the most important aspects of which are quantity, convenience, and flavor (primarily sweet, salty, and rich). It is difficult for me to speak to the social aspect of food in America as I almost always eat at home, but I can say that America's faster-paced lifestyle coupled with the convenience of fast-food restaurants, instant ramen noodles, pizza delivery, lead me to suspect that the percentage of Americans who eat alone is far greater than that of Greeks. In Greece, however, meals are anything but a perfunctory habit. A Greek's commitment to a meal (excluding *souvlaki* and sandwich shops) involves far more time than it takes to pull through a drive-thru or wait for the microwave to ding. As I observed, everyday Greeks are often involved in the growing (or at least walking to the market to purchase) the ingredient, spent a significant amount of time preparing the dishes, and while away another few hours enjoying the meal. "Fast" isn't part of the Greek culinary vocabulary; aside from *souvlaki*, *tost*, and *bougatsa*, traditional slow-cooked, oven-roasted Greek dishes and fresh salads are not appropriate for the fast-food model.

The strong Greek penchant for fresh has, for the most part, allowed Greece to escape the plague of highly processed, pre-prepared, triple-packed foodstuffs that have engulfed the U.S. In my parent's pantry at home, there are instant cake mixes, store-bought cookies, pop tarts, boxes of cereal, canned goods, a bag of instant red beans and rice, and ramen noodles. In the fridge there are bottles of pop, a semi-solid Americans refer to as yogurt, and a loaf of Wonderbread. In the freezer are more pre-processed, ready-to-eat food items: frozen vegetables, individual serving-size boxes of chicken pot pie, and cheese that is three years old.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ This food is in my house, but I surely don't eat it!

On the contrary, the pantry I surveyed in Evia¹²⁷ contained primarily non- or minimally-processed carbohydrates: beans, flour, pasta, hard rusks, crackers, and sugar. There were also capers, cereal bars, alcohol, condensed milk, vinegar, olive oil, rosemary and bay leaves, and chocolate bars, but there was nothing as chemically preserved as in my parent's pantry except perhaps a jar of alfredo sauce.

Trained in chemistry, I will not make the blanket statement, "Chemicals (in this case, food additives) are bad for your health." All of the chemicals used in food have been approved by the FDA, so they ought not to negatively impact one's health. However, from a spiritual point of view, I think that food that doesn't have chemical additives (color, flavor, binders, preservatives etc.), is more nourishing than food packed with such man-made "improvements". We don't need to improve on nature.

In Greece, strawberries spoiled in a day and tomatoes in four; bread went stale and molded after two days of sitting on the counter. This is as it should be. Adding chemicals or using mechanical means (canning, freezing etc.) to extend the shelf-life of a food does not necessarily mean that this is an improvement. The transience of berries is part of what makes them a treat. The seasonality of tomatoes and sweet corn require that one's diet is varied and diverse. There is no reason why we ought to eat broccoli in the winter—eat cabbage or squash instead. The weekly trips to the market¹²⁸ and dirge of preservatives I observed confirmed that Greeks value freshness and honor seasonality. In turn, they value local not necessarily because they are concerned about supporting a local farmer (if he is, indeed, local), but because local means fresh. Due to the stress placed on freshness and the habit of frequenting the local market, the "Go Local" movement has not reached the Greek shores. As Yeoryia pointed out in a

¹²⁷ See Appendix 2 for a full listing.

¹²⁸ On January 5, 2010, in a personal communication, Yeoryia pointed out that in Greece, "All people go to the farmers' market, the poor people, the immigrants; all people go to the market. It's not like here where only the hippies and the tree huggers go [to the farmers' market]." Greek markets are highly accessible in terms of both prices and location.

conversation we had on January 5, 2010, “They are already focused on the local, they have been focused the local their whole lives. They have never been away from it.” Similarly with COOPs: “They don’t have to set up and make a movement of COOPs because [informal] COOPs already existed.” The continuous existence of, and therefore lack of current emphasis, could also be said of the environmental movement in general. Greeks perhaps don’t feel the need for an environmental movement because they never reached to the scale of industrial farming (and the consequent environmental degradation).

Yeoryia also told me, “They [Greeks] have never had a sustainability movement because they didn’t need it. They are vegetable-centered because they are easier to grow [than effort it takes to raise meat]; the land supports [vegetables].”¹²⁹ The farmers’ focus has always been on food, and, until the competition and sky-rocketing demand following WWII, the richness of the Greek soil meant that he could produce an adequate amount of high-quality food without throwing too many chemicals onto their fields.¹³⁰

However, data shows that Greek farmers are now dumping an excess of fertilizer on their fields as they chase after higher yields.¹³¹ Do they really care about acting as stewards of the environment, or are they just as culpable as American farmers? Even though Greeks consume less highly-processed food, and produce less waste from fast-food wrappers and convenience-food containers, does this necessarily mean they are more environmentally conscious?

¹²⁹ Yeoryia Christoforides, January 5, 2010, personal communication.

¹³⁰ “Agriculture and Food—Greece,” *Earth Trends Country Profiles*. Earth Trends, 2003. www.earthtrends.wri.org, accessed January 5, 2010.

¹³¹ Galanopoulos, Konstantinos, et al. “Market and Trade Policies for Mediterranean Agriculture,” *Agricultural Situation Report—Greece*, June 2006: 8.

Ψ

Before I began my research, I made the assumption that farmers' markets are the opposite of supermarkets and thus their patrons would hold opposite viewpoints as well: Americans don't think about or care where their food comes from while Greeks do. As food comes from the land, Greeks appreciate the environment. Americans, some of whom don't even know where milk comes from, buy hyper-processed foodstuffs in triple-layer packages from sterile grocery stores and shop at supermarkets because low-cost and convenience are the primary values. Americans robotic consumers don't think of the earth as a productive organism that gives life to the fruits, vegetables, grains, and animals that nurture their bodies. Neglecting this most basic role of the environment, providing the basis of all life, they don't see the earth's natural spaces as worth protecting. However, as reflected by their outdoor market culture, I assumed that Greeks would hold a contrary viewpoint: those who chose to walk outside from stall to stall and talk with a variety of farmers would care more about the origins of their food, be conscious of the earth as a living, productive organism, and thus care more about protecting the natural environment.¹³²

"Protecting the environment" proved to be a concept much more complicated than I had imagined. First of all, desiring to protect the environment is far different than initiating effective programs to actually preserve the planet's remaining wild places. In assuming that outdoor-market shoppers would take action on their desire to help the environment, I assumed that people have both the means and knowledge to help protect nature.

¹³² It makes me uncomfortable to write that if people see the earth as a "productive organism" they are more likely to protect the environment. Why must we value the environment for its productive capacity rather than simply appreciating nature in and of itself? Why, when we try to rationalize why we should protect the environment, do we consider foodstuffs, biodiversity, and carbon sinks but rarely mention the spiritual aspect? Why aren't we thankful we have Nature, just for being nature? It seems silly that we have to rationalize why we should protect the core of all life and inspiration.



The means for protecting the environment include recycling systems and garbage disposal, the obvious need for which was starkly presented when I lived with Afghani refugees in Thebes for three days. The men lived in a small concrete-block building they had constructed, cooked over a wood fire outside, and had no running water, much less a place to deposit their trash where it would be collected and properly disposed. They threw all their trash, primarily used boxes of tomato sauce, plastic bottles that once contained cooking oil, and plastic wrappers from occasional store-bought snacks, over the concrete wall that separated their living area from field of the neighboring farmer. This was the same field they used as their toilet, and it was thus littered with liquid and solid waste and warning scraps of toilet paper. The waste, hidden by the tall grass, was, for the most part, out of sight and out of mind, although I did see one of the men gathering the waste into boxes, perhaps to later burn. With no system to properly dispose of their waste, they had no alternative than to chuck it over the wall to remove it from their living area. How were they supposed to take care of the environment, in this case keep man-made, non-biodegradable plastics out of their surrounding environment, without any infrastructure for “proper disposal”? And what exactly is “proper disposal”? Merely collecting mountains of waste in one place and burying it in a toxic wasteland is not all that much better than dispersing it in a fallow field.

The issue of environmental protection has far deeper roots than not knowing where to throw an empty carton of tomato sauce. The greatest deficit is the lack of political will to implement programs to cut emissions and develop “clean” energy (although what this means is

up for debate), support sustainable agriculture, fund park systems, and, most importantly, mandate conservation. Without reducing our consumption today, there will be nothing left for tomorrow. Conservation can be put off no longer.

However, politicians have little incentive to implement environmental protection programs, which require a large initial investment for results that are only acknowledged far in the future. As David Suzuki notes in his book, *Earth Time*, "Political reality is dictated by a horizon measured in months or a few years. However, in nature, time scales are on a different order of magnitude, which explains why it is difficult to mesh economic and political deadlines with nature's time needs."¹³³ The solution to force politicians into action, as suggested to Suzuki by former vice-president Al Gore, is to "take it to the people...convince them there's a problem. Explain the options so they demand action. Then...people like me will trip over ourselves to climb aboard the bandwagon."¹³⁴ Unfortunately, as of now, most people don't seem to understand the degree of the problem and thus they are willing to sacrifice the lives of millions of organisms and health of future generations for lower taxes, cheaper energy, and less expensive food. We need to stop focusing on the short-term and consider the long-term effects of our behavior.

¹³³ Suzuki, David. *Earth Time*. (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1998), 51.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

I had hoped to find in Greece that the culture of outdoor markets and valuing one's food translated into environmental consciousness, but I was unable to confirm any such link. Outdoor markets do not necessarily provide "green" produce,¹³⁵ and the fact that many people associate them as such may in fact be detrimental to the sustainable agriculture movement. Why would one actively support the sustainable agriculture movement when there are already so many outdoor markets which are supposedly part of the movement? This brings up the point that people must be educated about the environmental impacts of different food production and processing techniques so that they will be able to make informed decisions concerning which type of farming they wish to support. Unless people clearly understand the long-term effects of their behavior, they will certainly not sacrifice the short-term benefits they currently enjoy.

I went to Greece expecting to find daily outdoor markets where shoppers chatted with farmers as they leisurely purchased their daily foodstuffs. In my vision, the vegetables were importantly dirty, so that the customer had a chance to brush off the earth's soil and realize that the food they were handling was not mass-produced in a factory but rather a gift from Mother Nature gathered by a neighborhood farmer. I assumed that those who shopped at outdoor farmers' markets, which I assumed would be an overwhelming majority of the population, chose to do so because they appreciated their community farmers and/or wanted to support

¹³⁵ Some markets in Athens are officially green and others are not. It is unclear if customers are aware that the foodstuffs of vendors at non-green markets were grown with chemicals. When I asked the market vendors, in Greek, if their products were grown with chemicals, they all said no. When I reported this to my advisor and other Greeks I stayed with, they suggested that the vendors were probably not telling the truth. In either case, the vendors' responses tell me that they think growing food without chemicals is a good thing. To qualify this, I will say that I ran into a small grocery store in Monestiraki that proudly had a "βιολογικ" sign, hanging above the door, but when I asked the shop owner (who happened to speak quite a bit of English) what the sign meant, he couldn't explain at all. His non-response was perhaps due to a language barrier, but it may reflect that vendors themselves don't think that "biologic"/"organic" is important, they only label their products as such to please their customers.

sustainable farming that treats the environment as a living organism to be nurtured and appreciated.

Almost all of my expectations went unfulfilled and my assumptions proved groundless, but I didn't come away completely empty-handed. For reasons of an insurmountable language barrier, unfamiliarity with social anthropology research, and for any of a variety of other reasons, I discovered no link between market culture and environmental consciousness. However, I did gain five pounds on two months of delicious Greek cuisine for which I have recorded the recipes and surrounding food culture. I hope that this book has provided an insight into Greek food culture and that two or three of the included recipes become new family favorites.



Appendix I

The Food Philosophy of Panagiotis “Takis” Oikonomou

I met Panagiotis “Takis” Oikonomou at the Sunshine House Thai Massage Retreat in Evia, Greece. He has been trained in Chinese traditional medicine, massage, and yoga and teaches nutrition at a school in Athens. He shared his food philosophy with me on the afternoon of July 6, 2009; his philosophy is detailed below.

▲ Contemplate why you are eating.

Are you eating for physical, spiritual, or emotional reasons? If you are angry or stressed, don't eat, instead go to sleep, dance, scream, or breathe, but don't try to satisfy yourself with food.¹³⁶

▲ Consider your mental and emotional state when you are eating. How do you feel?

- If you are angry when you are eating, the food will bring anger; if you are sad, the food will bring sadness; if you are happy, the food will bring happiness. Be aware of your mood.

▲ Be aware of when you are eating.

- In the morning you need warmth (“this is why the Chinese eat soup”)—eat a light soup from 7-9 am by yourself to prepare the spleen to “enter the gate of digestion.” The food also provides wisdom, which is why one old couple in Japan would only speak after they had completed their breakfast. “Food itself and the act of eating give you wisdom.” The wisdom that is realized through food is that of “freedom” (as in “free of ego”) and the assurance that there is “no separation between self and God.”

¹³⁶ Takis said that people are often bulimic because they are depressed. To this he said, “If you don't study the 5 elements and the natural constitution of the food, then you don't know how to use it.”

- Lunch, from 11 am-1 pm should consist of a cold salad of raw food. This is the hottest time of day and cold food should be consumed with family. Don't snack between meals.
 - The evening meal, another light soup, should be from 5-7 pm in the company of friends or family and should be avoided by people with "liver issues."
- ▲ What are you eating?
- "Are you eating pizza?"¹³⁷ Are the carbohydrates you are consuming refined or unrefined? Don't just consider the whole food, but moreover what the food contains (nutrients).
- ▲ How much are you chewing?
- For optimal digestion, food should be chewed "until it is liquid in your mouth." One spoon of rice should be chewed 50 times; a small dish of rice salad may take five minutes to chew. A forkful of meat, on the other hand, should be chewed "maybe 100 times" meaning that a dish of "pig with vegetables" would take some 30 minutes just to chew.¹³⁸
- ▲ Be aware of how you combine food.¹³⁹
- For the health of your liver, kidneys, and whole body:
 - Don't combine two animal products¹⁴⁰
 - Don't eat fruits with proteins
 - Don't eat starches with protein
 - Don't eat sweets with anything.

¹³⁷ This comment was said with some disgust; pizza is obviously a food Takis would not encourage.

¹³⁸ As such, including time for talk and enjoying company, meals are necessarily lengthy affairs.

¹³⁹ It was unclear to me if Takis was referring to combining such foods in the same dish or simply consuming them during the same meal.

¹⁴⁰ Takis did not specify if he meant two different types of products from the same animal or if he was referring to any animal products from different animals or species.

- The best type of diet is a mono-diet in which only one type of food is consumed. A mono-diet reflects an ancient diet, as in ancient times there were no refrigerators and a forager would go out and “collect one thing,” which he would eat until it was gone. Mixing food often results in dishes with the “wrong combination” and the “wrong proportions for most people to digest”. If food must be mixed, such as a dish of “rice, meat, and vegetables”, it should be cooked slowly for 2-3 hours so it is “digested in the pot.”
- ▲ Use spices
 - “Mix spice [such as cardamom, cayenne, curry, cumin, and ginger] to move the energy.” The spices warm the food and “[help] the food to be digested” by aiding the “internal heat wind.”
- ▲ Never eat dairy in the winter.
 - Dairy is a cold food and should not be eaten in a cold season¹⁴¹.
- ▲ Marijuana is “a god-present for humanity” and is useful for contemplation by oneself.¹⁴²
 - “Marijuana is illegal because it makes people more lazy and compassionate (both of which are not acceptable in our societies based on productivity and competition). “With light clothes, just before bed is the time to smoke,” to aid one in contemplation and self-reflection. You should avoid smoking too much because smoking everyday makes you lethargic.

¹⁴¹ Takis believes that foods can be categorized as hot, warm, cool, and cold, as in traditional Chinese medicine.

¹⁴² Takis did not separate the use of marijuana from his discussion on rules for eating. In fact he talked about the use of marijuana directly after he mentioned red wine as the “Greek tip for longevity” and talked about “wisdom from food.” As such, the author has not segregated the point from the other rules.

- ⤴ Avoid consuming commodities (“things that contribute and work in the stock market”) such as wheat,¹⁴³ soy, corn, milk, coffee, and sugar.
 - Consuming commodities and listening to nutritionists is supporting “the system” run by the “Jewish people” of the “ghettos.”¹⁴⁴ For example, a nutritionist may tell you consume zero-calorie yogurt as part of your diet, not because it is necessarily good for you but because they need to support the milk companies. Similarly, they may tell you to eat a banana for its vitamin K while ignoring that you have a “cold disease”¹⁴⁵ and that bananas are a cold food.¹⁴⁶ Nutritionists often say a food is good for everyone, but as every person’s body is different, this clearly cannot be the case. The advice of a dietician is “no good” but it is “not their fault because they were taught by their teachers” (who are also part of the Jewish-directed system), “who need to keep the hospitals and the doctors going because they [Jewish people] want us to.”
- ⤴ Don’t drink liquids with your foods.
 - Liquids dilute the body’s digestive enzymes resulting in food products that “can’t assimilate properly”. Liquids may be had half-an-hour before or one hour after a meal, at which time it is best to drink wine, for its fermented qualities; 3-4 glasses of red wine per week is the “Greek tip for longevity”. Otherwise, drink a digestive tea consisting of fennel and cardamom, “to activate the enzymes,”

¹⁴³ Takis noted that wheat is now 60% of the Greek diet whereas it used to be 5%. (He didn’t mention the dates he was comparing or his source.)

¹⁴⁴ Takis explained that 60% of global business is owned by Jews. (He did not mention his source.)

¹⁴⁵ Takis told me that diseases are caused by, among other things, excess heat or cold in the body (as per traditional Chinese medicine), or too much humidity (“from grain, sugar, and dairy”). Additionally, Takis said, “Right nutrition comes through right diagnosis.” Consequently, Western-trained doctors and nutritionists will hit upon an appropriate dietary recommendation only by chance.

¹⁴⁶ See note 4.

steeped with ginger and licorice, “to help the body be ready to take the food and prepare the stomach.”

- ✦ Always cook with unrefined carbohydrates such as brown rice and whole grains.
 - If refined carbohydrates are to be consumed, the best form is dry rusks, traditional double-baked Greek bread. Hard, dry rusks are preferred because they are low in humidity. As excess humidity is a major source of illness (see note 8), Greek rusks are “the best” because they contain very little moisture (they have “the lowest humidity”), and must be chewed well before digestion can start; thorough chewing is assured as one “can’t swallow without good mastication”.



- ✦ Eat until you are 60% full.
 - A male’s energy is divided into use for ejaculation, digestion, and the renewal of cells. If too much energy is required for digestion, there will be insufficient energy for cell renewal and cancer will result.

- ▲ Eat organic and local for your health and for the environment
 - Organic food is raised with “no pesticides or chemicals,” and “natural manure” such as “shit and seaweed.” In addition, organic food should not be produced near inorganic farms.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, if food traveled “a long way” to reach your kitchen, “it is not really organic.” Organic food should be local, and preferably from “old, traditional seed grown in your area.” Local food is important because “food from your place contains DNA, the soul of the grandpa—the food here will give you more nourishment than food from 50 kilometers away.”
- ▲ “Bless your food, pray over your food.”
 - In addition to thanking your food because “food gives you power and strength to help other people,” you should also “give thanks for food and people who don’t have food.”

Takis concluded by saying, “If you eat light, eat right, [your food] is always giving you the right direction, the right mind.”

¹⁴⁷ Takis mentioned that in Australia food is not considered organic if it was produced within 3 km of a farm that does not have meet organic certification.

Appendix II

The Contents of a Greek Pantry and Refrigerator

Below is a list of ingredients I spotted the pantry and fridge of Evanthia “Yiayia” Oikonomou, who lives in Evia, Greece.

In the pantry:

Mana dry bread	Square pasta	Balsamic vinegar
Multigrain crackers	Egg noodle pasta	Olive oil
Rye crackers	White sugar	Bay leaves
Bran cereal		Rosemary
Spaghetti	Condensed milk	
Tortellini	Cadbury chocolate	
Croutons	90 calorie cereal bars	In the fridge:
Lentils	Sultanas	Three types of cheese
Broad beans	Capers	Individual yogurts
White rice	Tomato sauce	Brown eggs
Brown rice	Prepared alfredo sauce	Tomatoes
Oats		Watermelon
Cracked wheat	Jasmine tea	Bananas
White flour	5 bottles of wine	Non-fruit juice
Rye flour	Scotch whiskey	Coke
Semolina flour		

Additionally, available in the garden was a plentiful supply of:

- Tomatoes
- Eggplants
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Peppers
- Cucumbers
- Zucchini
- Squash

Notes on Informants

Afghani *filos*

I know Ali, Adel, Rohalla, Norchaman, Izet, Muhammed, Sayed, and Saif by first name only. At the time of our meeting, they lived on the outskirts of Thebes, Greece. I am unaware of their current situation or contact information

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Ms. Christoforides and her husband, Lazaros, are the owners of *Gardens of Salonica*, a Greek restaurant in northeast Minneapolis, Minnesota. I thank Ms. Christoforides for her help in this project, inviting me to a family dinner in Athens, an Easter celebration at her home, and discussing the elements of Greek food culture I encountered during the events.

Yeoryia Christoforides chri1885@umn.edu

Yeoryia, the daughter of Anna and Lazaros Christoforides, proved an invaluable source. Yeoryia has learned about Greek food from her 20 years growing up in the Greek community and being raised by two (nominally) Greek parents with a Greek restaurant. While we shared a flat in Athens, Yeoryia taught me how to prepare several dishes according to the Greek methods she has learned over the years.

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I met Kerys and Panagiotis (“Takis”) and their two children, 3-year-old Gaia and 18-month-old Dialou, through the WWOOFing website. Takis taught me several “traditional” Greek dishes and laid out his theory on healthy eating. Kerys and Takis also compiled *The Sunshine House Cookbook*, a book of recipes they often serve to their guests. Kerys sent me the book electronically on September 4, 2009.

Evanthia “Yiayia” Oikonomou

I knew Evanthia as Yiayia (“Grandmother”), the mother of Takis and grandmother of his and Kerys’s two young children, Gaia and LouLou. Kerys told me that her parents-in-law have been restaurant managers for forty years, but Takis declared that his mother

“doesn’t know anything about food.”¹⁴⁸ Yiayia herself admits that she is not that best of cooks but, or perhaps therefore, almost every summer weekend she invite her women friends and their children up to her second home in the country (she has another home in Athens) for long, leisurely days of cooking, eating, chatting, and swimming in the family’s pool.

Theodora “Dora” Oikonomou

Dora, Takis’s sister, was a frequent member of the relaxing Greek weekends at Yiayia’s house. She is a banker by trade,¹⁴⁹ but she often helped in the kitchen.

Kyría Maria

Maria is a family friend of the Oikonomou’s who I met as she cooked and picnicked at the home of Takis’s mother, Evanthia. Maria spoke hardly any English, so Kerys informed me that Maria is chef, although she didn’t provide any other details.¹⁵⁰

Kyría Nadia

Nadia was another family friend of the Oikonomou’s who often attended the weekend gatherings.

Andreas Agouropoulos celeryalien@yahoo.com and his son Nick Agouropoulos 0030-226-530-0404
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33507 Fokidas, Greece

Andy is a sheep farmer in central Greece who I found through the WWOOF website. At the time I worked at his farm, he had 110 ewes, five rams, one cow, sixteen chickens, one turkey, seven dogs, and an armload of cats. Andy was born in Brazil to Greek parents and moved back to Greece after completing a Ph.D. in philosophy at a university in England. Andy is committed to raising clean meat (his sheep receive antibiotics but eat only the organic grain Andy and his son grow on the farm), supporting the local economy (Andy tries only to buy products produced in Greece), and living lightly on the land.

Ala Saliuc

Ala is Andy’s Russian friend and the caretaker of the farmhouse across the field. I met her by way of tasting her delicious Russian pizza, Greek pitas, and wonderful desserts.

¹⁴⁸ Takis, personal communication, July 5, 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Kerys, e-mail communication, January 3, 2010.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Maria, Kostas, and Michelangelo Katsigianni 0030-239-205-7451
Agiou Dimitriou, Thessaloniki, Greece
Lat 40.64028 Lon 22.94389

Maria, Kostas and Michelangelo live a happy Greek life outside Thessaloniki with one horse, several chickens, and a garden that provides more tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant than anyone but a traditional Greek cook would know what to do with. I couldn't have asked to meet a more kind and helpful family, who rescued me when I was lost, showed me how to cook, shared family recipes, and made my last days in Greece some of the best.

Milena and Niky

Milena and Niky are two Bulgarians I met while staying with the Katsigianni's. They were on a road trip from their home in Sofia, Bulgaria and I was lucky to ask Milena about food culture in Bulgaria as she taught me to cook mashed potatoes and prepare a dish of grilled peppers. The Soviet's influence over Bulgaria significantly affected their food supply and Milena told me that she remembers waiting in long lines for bread and going to grocery stores with all but bare shelves. The picture has significantly improved and foodstuffs are now more readily available. While many of the dishes differ from "classic" Greek dishes, some Bulgarian dishes are very similar to those found in Greece's Thrace and Macedonia.

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Index

Afghani Chai	42	Magical Midnight Rice	48
Afghani Flat Bread	45	Mallow Pie	63
Apricot Jam	83	Meatballs (Large)	118
Baked Potatoes, Basil & Eggplant	61	Meatballs (Small)	131
Baked Potatoes with Oregano	24	Meatballs with Rice	118
Baked Small Fish	77	Meatless Paella	102
Beet Salad	65	Pasta Salad	132
Beetroot-Yorgurt Salad with Greens	64	<i>Patsa</i>	29
Boiled Beetroot Salad	65	Peppers with Tomato Sauce	70
Boiled Mallow	68	Phyllo Sheets	16
Brazilian Beans	107	Plum Crumb	85
<i>Briam</i>	34	Plum Jam	84
Carrot Pie	63	Potato Salad	65
Carrot-Peach Salad	67	Preserved Small Fish	77
<i>Chalpak</i>	51	Red Bean Sauce Over Pasta	103
Chicken Pie	99	Red Easter Eggs	127
Chickpea Soup	106	"Russian" Salad	132
Colored Bowties with White Sauce	104	<i>Shidur</i>	51
Easter Cookies in Rings and Twists	127	Simple Onion Salad	47
Easter Lamb	123	Soft Cheese Spread	109
Easter Saturday Soup	125	Soft Cheese-Walnut Cake	85
Farmhouse Omelet	98	Sour Cherry Drink	101
Fava Beans	73	Sour Cherry Spoon Sweet	101
Feta & Mastiha Spread	89	Spaghetti with Sheep	97
Feta and Olive Oil with Pita Bread	109	Spinach Pie	16
Fried Cheese	109	Stuffed Squash Flowers	58
Fried Squid	79	Stuffed Vegetables	56
Giant White Beans	60	Stuffed Vegetables with Masala	72
Greek Frappé	15	Stuffed Vine Leaves	131
Greek Green Beans	60	Tomato Sauce	70
Greek Salad	19	Tomato Stew	47
Green Beans	68	Traditional Greek Breakfast	99
Grilled Green Peppers	71	Traditional Toast	87
Honey Puffs	25	Tripe and Herb Soup	126
"Kastelia fry-up"	103	Tuna Spaghetti	97
Lamb Roasted in Paper	130	<i>Tzatziki</i>	19
Lamb with Orzo	108	Wild Greens	113
Lentil Salad	132	Yogurt with Honey	20
Lentil Soup	106	Yogurt-cheese Sauce	58
Lettuce Salad	66	Zucchini Pie	62

