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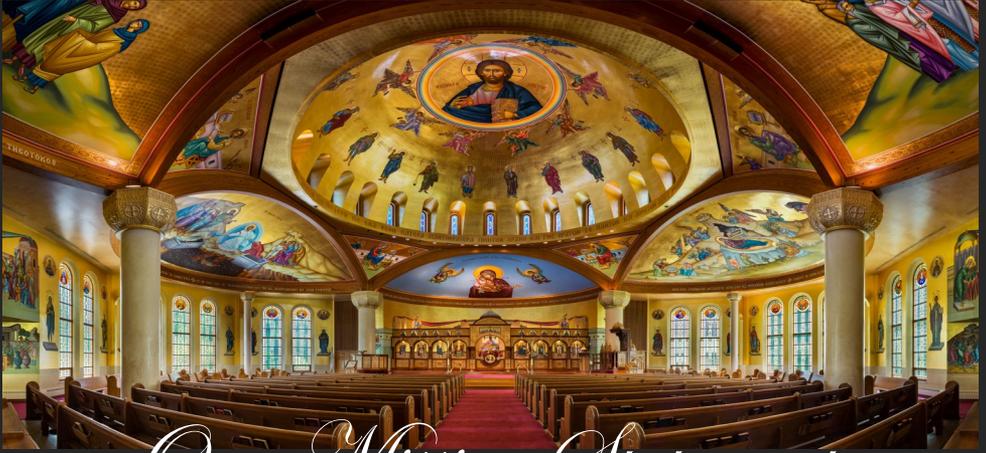
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## *Our Mission Statement*

The Mission of the Saint Luke Greek Orthodox Church is to worship and glorify God; to proclaim, practice and teach our Orthodox Christian faith and traditions; to support and sustain our Church through Stewardship; to bear witness to the Gospel of Christ by exemplifying faith, hope and charity through community outreach; and to act in fellowship with love towards one another.

## *Our Vision*

The Vision of the Saint Luke Greek Orthodox Church is to be a parish in which we actively:

- ◇ Connect and participate in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ and grow in faith through worship and education;
- ◇ Enrich the life of the parish family through fellowship and love for one another;
- ◇ Express our Faith and Christ's love through our obligation to offer our time, talent and treasure; and
- ◇ Impart, sustain and perpetuate our Christian values and traditions for our children's children

We invite you to come worship with us.

[www.st-luke.org](http://www.st-luke.org)



## FROM THE DESK OF FATHER CHRIST KONTOS



### GREEK AFFAIR 2023

“Καλή Συνέχεια – Kalie Synehia”

Friends,

During your visits to the Greek Affair over the years, hopefully you have picked up few Greek words or expressions. I want to introduce you to a meaningful phrase this year, which represents my prayer for you....  
Kalie Synehia!

Kalie synehia literally translates to, “good continuance,” but it means much more than that. If you are going on a journey, it means, have a good trip. If you are beginning a new job or business, it hopes you much success. If you are seeing a doctor to treat a disease, it wishes you good health and recovery. Kali synehia simply means that I pray for your well-being, progress in life and for good things to come your way wherever you find yourself in life’s journey.

So, as I welcome you to our 46th Annual Greek Affair, our St Luke team looks forward to treating you to our Greek hospitality. Enjoy the many delicious foods that will surely satisfy your palate. If your worried you ate too much, no problem, jump in the circle as our Greek Dance Troupe delights you by enjoying a few turns and twists moving to the sounds of traditional Greek music.

Together with our enthusiastic Chairs, George Migias, Andrea Papadopoulos, Tony Palmieri and Jimmy Angelakos, along with the countless men, women and children of all ages and leaders of numerous committees, WELCOME!

Sincerely, I wish you Καλή Συνέχεια – Kalie Synehia.

Rev. Father Christ Kontos, Protoperbyter



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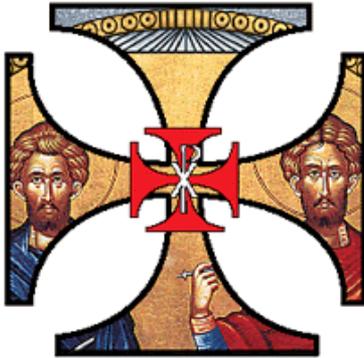
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# GREEK YOGURT

## On the Greek Table



### **The History of Yogurt (Greek: γιαούρτι, yee-ah-OOR-tee)**

The origins of yogurt are unknown, but it is thought to have been invented in [Mesopotamia](#) around 5000 B.C. This is a very ancient food. There are many references to yogurt and its place in various cultures. The cuisine of ancient Greece included a dairy product known as oxygala (οξύγαλα) which is believed to have been a form of yogurt. Galen (AD 129 – c.200/c.216) mentioned that oxygala was consumed with honey, similar to the way thickened Greek yogurt is eaten today. In ancient Indian records, the combination of yogurt and honey is called "the food of the gods". Persian traditions hold that "Abraham owed his fecundity and longevity to the regular ingestion of yogurt".

Greek yogurt has become one of the country's most successful exports for Greece, Fage being the most popular of the Greek Yogurts. It is renowned the world over for its thick creamy texture and deliciously sour flavor. Greek yogurt is a \$1.5 billion business in the U.S., accounting for one seventh of all yogurt sales. The rise of Greek yogurt in the U.S. reflects a larger change in the American culinary consciousness: a desire for foods that are considered purer, simpler, and more natural--in other words, not yogurts purporting to taste like key lime pie or strawberry cheesecake.

Traditionally, Greek yogurt was set in clay bowls and made from either sheep's or goat's milk. The modern Greek yogurt is made almost always with cow's milk. It was and is especially sharp, with a thick creamy "skin" on the surface. There are several basic types of Greek yogurt distinguished by the kind of milk with which they are produced (sheep's, goat's, and, today, cow's), and the thickness, which is determined by whether or not the yogurt has been strained, usually in muslin bags, until it is the consistency of sour cream. Greek strained yogurt is the ingredient that gives tzatziki, the famous cucumber yogurt dip, its tang. Greek yogurt or yogurt sauce is often served with spicy meats and savory pies. It is also used in lieu of béchamel in some baked meat dishes. But best of all it is the classic Greek breakfast item, mixed with Greek honey, or the traditional light evening meal, served plain with a little bread.

*Why to try it?* Yogurt promotes intestinal and vaginal health, improves lactose intolerance, builds stronger bones, enhances immunity, lowers blood pressure, and may even have anticancer and weight-loss effects. All yogurts are excellent sources of calcium, potassium, protein, zinc, and vitamins B6 and B12.

*Protein* Protein keeps you feeling full longer and may help your weight loss efforts, but protein shakes and bars are often high in sugar and flat in taste. Greek yogurt is a good alternative. A single 6-ounce serving has between 15 and 20 grams of protein compared to the 9 grams in a serving of regular yogurt. Make a smoothie with Greek yogurt and fruit for breakfast, and you should stay quite full until lunch.

*Sodium* Greek yogurt typically contains only half the sodium or salt as the regular variety. A high sodium diet can cause hy-

pertension and may increase your risk of developing heart disease. Greek yogurt has approximately 50 milligrams per 6-ounce serving. Therefore, Greek yogurt does not exceed the American Medical Association's recommended total daily limit of 1.5 grams per day. However, you should consult your health care provider if you are on a low-sodium diet to make sure yogurt is acceptable.

**Carbohydrates.** Greek yogurt is a low-carb dieter's dream with only 5 to 8 grams of carbohydrates per serving. Plain, regular yogurt has double or triple the number of carbohydrates. Keep in mind, however, that flavored yogurts have added sugar and fruit, which will increase the carb count significantly.

**Versatility.** Because of its thick, creamy texture, Greek yogurt can be substituted for other fats in baked goods. Swap cream cheese, oil, butter, sour cream or mayonnaise with yogurt to cut calories and boost the protein content of your favorite desserts. Greek yogurt can also be part of savory dishes. For instance, you might top a burrito with a dollop of yogurt instead of sour cream or mix it up with seasonings to make a vegetable dip.

## 6 Greek Yogurt Myths

1. *Greek yogurt is regulated.* First, a little yogurt making 101: Traditionally, Greek yogurt is made by straining the yogurt to remove the whey and the end

result is a more-solid yogurt with less sugar, fewer carbohydrates, and more protein compared to regular yogurt. That said, there are no rules about what can and cannot be called "Greek yogurt." The FDA only has regulations in place for regular yogurt. That's why companies can add additional ingredients or change up the process of how its made and still use the "Greek" label. To ensure you're eating a true Greek yogurt, read the ingredient label. The main ingredients should be milk and live active cultures. You'll want to steer clear of added protein like "whey concentrates" and added thickeners like "modified corn starch."

2. *They are all packed with protein.* Most Greek yogurt contains twice the protein of regular yogurt, but that doesn't mean that every brand contains the same amount. Why? This could be due to different straining processes companies use to make the yogurt. For example, some 5.3 oz containers pack 10 g, while others, like Olympus and Fage, offer 18 g of protein per 6 oz container. That's 50% more protein, even after you adjust for the slightly different serving sizes.

3. *All Greek yogurt is made the same way.* Greek yogurt gets its pleasingly thick consistency and higher protein count through the straining process. However, some brands skip the straining and add thickening agents (such as modified corn starch, carrageenan, or guar gum) as well as protein-enhancing ingredients (such as milk protein or whey concentrates), to mimic the rich texture and protein content. There's nothing inherently wrong with these ingredients, but they simply won't make yogurt Greek. It's easy to avoid yogurts made with cornstarch or milk protein concentrates—both will appear on the ingredients label. So look for these!



4. *Greek yogurt is vegetarian.* Not every brand! Gelatin may also be added to give the yogurt a more slippery texture. Gelatin usually comes from collagen obtained from various animal by-products. That's not a problem for people who eat meat, but it can be for lacto-vegetarians who still consume milk, cheese, and yogurt. Also, some brands use a substance called carmine to give strawberry-flavored yogurts a pink hue. Carmine is a natural dye derived from the body of beetles, and they make foods look like they contain more fruit than they really do. Both gelatin and carmine will be listed on the label if you wish to avoid these additives. Read the label!

5. *Flavored Greek yogurt is healthy, too.* Your first choice should be plain Greek yogurt. If you want to lightly sweeten it, opt for pieces of fresh fruit or a drizzle of honey. Flavored Greek yogurt tend to contain a lot of sugar—as much as 15 or 25 grams per serving. Beware, too, of sneaky sugars, such as “grape juice concentrate,” “evaporated cane juice” and others. If you're still going to eat flavored yogurt, make sure the first three ingredients remain milk, live and active cultures, and fruit. Sugar should come near the end of the list.

6. *Frozen Greek yogurt is the same as regular Greek yogurt.* Frozen Greek yogurt isn't just regular Greek yogurt thrown into the freezer. While they may have the same number of calories and fat per serving, frozen yogurt typically contains more sugar (17 g versus 12 g, for instance) and far less protein (6 g compared to 18 g, for example). The bottom line: Greek frozen yogurt is still dessert, not breakfast!

Enjoy Greek yogurt here at the Greek Affair. It is available in the Greek Affair Restaurants and in the Coffee House. Our Greek yogurt is topped with home-made preserves from the garden of our very own John Solomon.



**Tzatziki** is just one of the many things you can now make in a snap because of the availability of Greek yogurt. Click on the code above for Evan's recipe!

Greek yogurt has also become a healthy smart substitute for ingredients such as sour cream, butter and mayonnaise for cooking, baking and dips and sauces. Below are common substitutes and their dietary benefit:

**1 cup of oil = 3/4 cups of Greek yogurt.**

*Cuts fat up to 99%, adds 1000% more protein.*

**1 cup of sour cream = 1 cup of Greek yogurt**

*Cuts fat up to 98%, adds up to 36% more protein.*

**1 cup of cream cheese = 1 cup of Greek yogurt.**

*Cuts fat up to 99%, adds 60% more protein.*

**1 cup of butter = 1/2 cup of butter + 1/4 of Greek yogurt**

*Cuts fat up to 50%, adds 235% more protein.*





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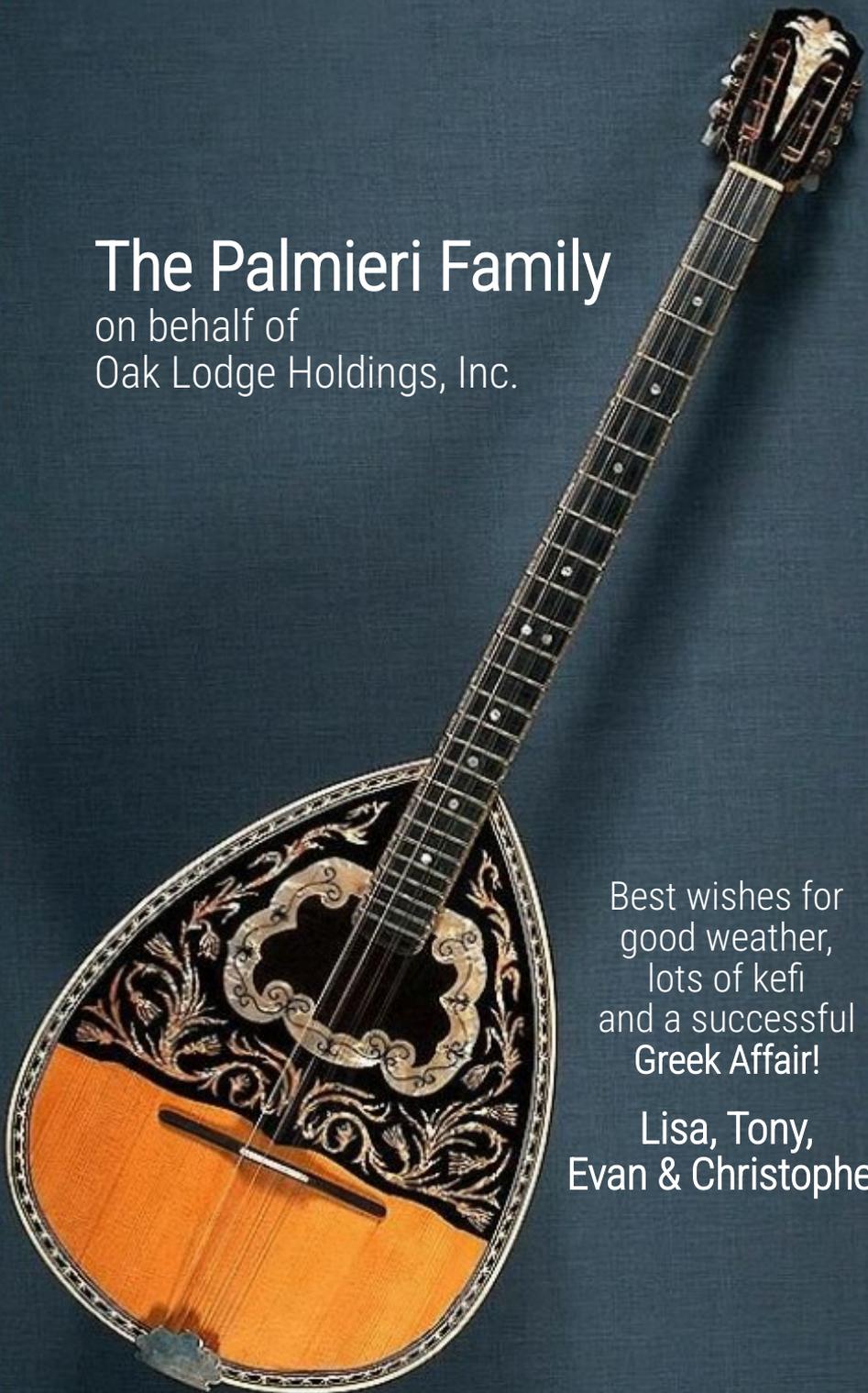
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**Lisa, Tony,  
Evan & Christopher**

On this occasion of the 46th annual Greek  
Affair, we celebrate generations of  
*Ελληνοαμερικάνοι* (*Greek-Americans*) who immi-  
grated to America and have worked tirelessly  
to preserve and promote the spirit of  
Family, Hellenism and the Orthodox faith.  
Their passion and efforts have made  
possible this celebrated festival of  
Grecian flavors and delights.

*bravo!* to the Saint Luke Community and  
Best Wishes for a Successful Greek Affair!

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George, Andrea, Eli, Nicolette & John



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# Growing up Greek

Hello and welcome to the 2023 St. Luke's Greek Affair! If this is your first time here, please try to eat as much food as you can, you will not regret it because everything is delicious. If you've been here before, welcome back and please do the same! That's exactly how my yiayiathes (grandmothers) would want it, and I'm sure yours' too.

Growing up in the St. Luke community, I participated in just about all the youth ministries and cultural activities that were offered. To my non-Greek friends at school these were the things Greek Eli did. I went to this extracurricular activity called Greek School where I sort of learned some Greek and recited Greek Poems. I went to Sunday School and was an alter boy. I was an active member of GOYA (Greek Orthodox Youth of America) so that I could play GOYA basketball. I marched in the Greek Independence Day parades up the Ben Franklin parway. Finally, for 11 years I dressed in costume and danced for the entertainment of the many visitors of the Greek Affair while also enjoying a good bit of pastitsio on those fun-filled weekends.

Now that I am older and wiser, it's evident that there is more to being Greek and growing up Greek in the USA than a pleasant pan of pastitsio or a scrumptious souvlaki platter; our worldwide community follows a philosophy that has been passed down generation to generation since the Golden Age of Athens. I didn't realize how closely aligned we are as Greeks with that philosophy no matter where you are until fairly recently.

The philosophy I am talking about is best described as *philotimo*, and a quick Wikipedia search will tell you that it "is difficult to translate as it describes a complex array of virtues". While I am no linguist, I can still decipher it's meaning in terms of how we as Greek-Americans operate in our day-to-day lives. *Philotimo* can be broken down by

root words; *philos* meaning "friend" and *timi* meaning "honor". However, it expands far greater than honoring your friend. It encompasses honoring self, family, community, and doing the right thing. Like many of my Greek friends, I was instilled with these values at a very young age, and I've carried those values to my adult life. What I didn't realize growing up, was that the meaning is the same for EVERYONE who's grown up in a Greek household, regardless of city or state. I was not enlightened with that point until now as an adult.

I graduated with B.S. in Materials Science and Engineering and a minor in Electronic and Photonic Materials from the Pennsylvania State University in May 2022. In pursuit of a meaningful career, I made the sacrifice of moving away from family and friends to the Boston area to work as a materials engineer at a Fortune 100 company. While this was a great career entry move, I stuck out like a sore thumb in my new home. I had no idea where I was, who anyone was, how to get a Massachusetts license plate (the PA one looks better anyway), or how to not mention that Eagles are 100x better than the Patriots to my Bostonian colleagues. You just have to see their faces when I say it, it's hilarious!

The one thing I could find common ground with people was my Greek roots. I quickly found a Greek Orthodox church in town where I met young adults like myself, which led me to joining the Sons of Pericles (SOP) Lowell, MA chapter. This group of young men gathered for meetings and meals and really enjoyed each other's company. Being a part of this group helped me feel grounded to my roots, while navigating the obstacles of living alone in a different part of the country and learning how to be an adult (yes – I mean TurboTax, 401ks, and working the 9-5).

Every year, my SOP chapter competes in a

# in the USA *is really ok!*



Spartan 5k race in Barre, MA. For those that don't know what a Spartan race is, it is a field race with various obstacles and is known for pushing the body and mind to their extremes; think lots of mud running, climbing, and too many pushups to count. Looking for an opportunity to challenge myself physically and mentally, I was one of the first to sign up for the race. Ten of us signed up to run together in August. I started training as the event came closer. The more I trained, the more confident I felt about the race. On a scale of 1 to 10, I was feeling like a 12!

The Sons of Pericles is an international brotherhood dedicated to the preservation of Hellenism. In addition, the Order espouses philanthropy, civic responsibility, athletics, education and individual excellence.

The big day came, and it was time to race. My confidence shrunk not too long after we started; three heaps of mud, two obstacles, and a laceration from a barbed wire crawl later, I was exhausted with two miles left. However, I wasn't going to quit. The brothers in the chapter saw that I was struggling, and they helped me every step of the way. They encouraged me to push through the race and wouldn't let me give up.

We finished the race together, and I realized while celebrating that our team's chemistry was only possible with *philotimo*. We had a collective sense of pride running the Spartan race as a group of young Greek men, as the preparation for the race and the race itself is to help you build the physical and mental toughness just like the ancient Spartans, who were seasoned warriors known for their battlefield prowess, exceptional willpower, and effective teamwork. Everyone on my team helped each other out with various obstacles, whether it was pushing someone up a 10' wall (where I discovered I do indeed have a fear of heights) or improving someone else's spear throwing

skills, we all were proud to be there together and wanted to see everyone succeed.

The Spartan race was when I realized that no matter where you are or who you know, *philotimo* is a universal philosophy lacking nuance. It has meant the same thing for thousands of years in the past, and will mean the same thing in thousands of years in the future. It is an excellent mindset for staying in touch with your Greek roots and basically living a good life. Once you learn it and practice it, it stays with you forever. If I have moved you with this piece, why not try practicing *philotimo* yourself? Is there anyone in your life, whether close or far, who is struggling with something? Support them with just the motive of seeing them succeed, with nothing expected in return. Who knows, maybe you'll end up in a Spartan race!

Enjoy your time at the Greek Affair!

Best Regards,

Eli Papadopoulos

St. Luke's Greek Orthodox Youth of America  
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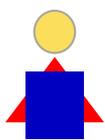
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# Τσουρέκι

# Tsoureki

Tsoureki (Greek: τσουρέκι) is a traditional sweet bread in Greece that holds cultural and religious significance, especially during certain holidays and celebrations. Here are some of the key aspects of its significance.

## **Easter Tradition**

Tsoureki is most commonly associated with Greek Orthodox Easter celebrations. It is an essential part of the Easter feast and is often prepared and enjoyed during the Holy Week leading up to Easter Sunday. The bread's braided shape is said to symbolize the Holy Trinity, and the red-dyed eggs that are sometimes nestled into the braids represent the blood of Christ. The red eggs symbolize new life, rebirth, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## **Symbolism**

The bread is rich in symbolism. The braided shape can represent various aspects of faith and tradition, including the Holy Trinity, family unity, and the interconnectedness of life.

## **Family and Community**

Tsoureki is often made in large quantities, bringing families and communities together for baking and celebrating. The preparation of Tsoureki can be a communal activity, fostering a sense of togetherness and shared traditions. The recipe presented here is rooted in that tradition. Share the loaves with your friends and family.

## **Holiday Delicacy**

Apart from Easter, Tsoureki is also enjoyed during other festive occasions such as Christmas and New

Year's. The bread's sweet and slightly spiced flavor makes it a treat to enjoy with loved ones.

### **Blessing and Sharing**

In some traditions, Tsoureki is blessed by the local priest during the Easter Midnight Liturgy or other religious ceremonies. Once blessed, the bread is distributed to family members and guests as a sign of goodwill and blessings.

### **Regional Variations**

While the basic recipe for Tsoureki involves ingredients like flour, milk, butter, eggs, sugar, and aromatic spices such as mahlab and mastiha, there can be regional variations in terms of flavors and ingredients. Some recipes might include additional elements like orange zest, vanilla, or even chocolate chips.

### **Ingredients:**

(Appr. 9 loaves)

2 cups of butter (1 lb)

12 eggs

4 cups of sugar

2 cup of milk

3 cups of water

5 table spoons of yeast

2-3 teaspoons of ground Mahlep

1-2 teaspoons of Mastic

Grated rind of 1 orange.

Approximately 5lb of flour

### **Preparation:**

1. Beat the eggs with the sugar
2. Mix the yeast in a bowl with warmed milk and water (warm not hot)
3. Mix the Mahlep, Mastic and Orange rind together.
4. Add the eggs, sugar and yeast mixture into the flour and knead generously. The dough should remain soft but bearly sticky, adjust the flour as needed.
5. Wrap the dough with folded tablecloth to keep the dough warm and store away in a warm place. Allow the dough to rise until it doubles. Knead it lightly again.
6. This recipe will make 10 loaves. Cut the batch of dough into 10 smaller loaves. Use a scale if available to make sure the loaves are approximately the same size. Then cut each dough ball into 3 smaller dough balls, roll out into 3 pieces and braid.
7. Set on parchment paper, brush with egg wash and sprinkle sesame or place almond slices (optional).
8. Cover loaves with a tea towel and allow to rise.
9. Preheat the oven at 325. Bake the loaves for approximately 30 minutes or until golden brown.

**Tsoureki is a favorite here at the Greek Affair. Pick up a loaf at the Pastry & Sweets booth—while supplies last!**



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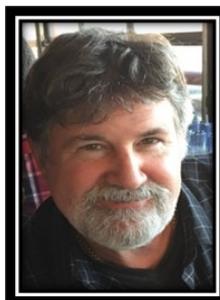
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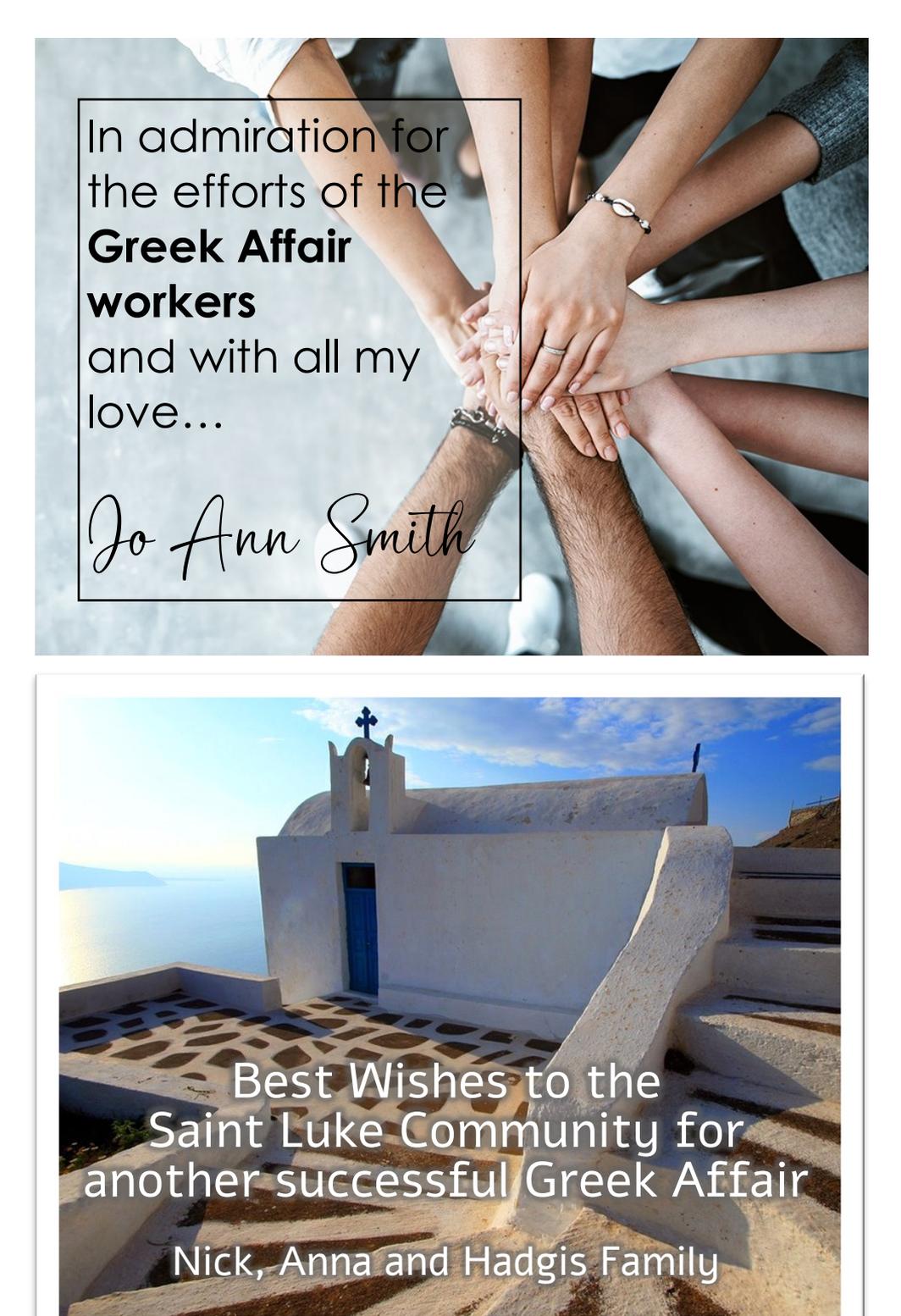
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# The Greek Coffee Culture

While staying with my in-laws a few years back, I asked my mother-in-law if she had any tea. “Are you feeling sick?” she asked me, with a worried expression. Greece might produce superb—even medicinal—herbal teas, but it is not a nation of tea-drinkers. Greeks are all about coffee, something which becomes obvious just by walking the streets of Athens: people linger over a single cup of coffee for hours, and every other hole-in-the-wall now sells coffee to go. Here’s what you need to know to pick the brew that appeals to you.

The *frappe*, a foamy cold coffee drink, is an easy-to-make beverage that’s wildly popular in Greece. It started by accident in 1957: A representative from the Nestlé food company couldn’t find any boiling water to make his coffee at an international trade fair in Thessaloniki, Greece. So he used cold. And thus was born the frappe, the foamy, caffeine-packed drink that became an icon of Greek pop culture.

Over fifty years later, while Americans guzzle innumerable fancy chilly copycats, Greeks remain loyal to their simple cool coffee, imbibing everywhere from the beaches to Athens’ numerous upscale cafes. In fact, the frappe has become its own industry. Supermarkets carry handheld electric foam beaters, while roadside kiosks keep frappe kits in their fridges. Tips are traded on the merits of thick froth,

While the drink itself is important, the expression “going for a coffee” doesn’t have much to do with the actual coffee consumption. Instead, it indicates meeting for a chat and a catch-up.

straw placement, and the best time to drop the ice into the mix.

“Frappe looks so thick, but it glides through the straw so easily,” said Daniel Young, an American food critic who teamed with his wife, Vivian Constantino-poulos, to write a coffee-table book on the subject. It may drink smooth, but it has a kick. Young says many frappes have four times the caffeine as an espresso. And it is fueled by something considered the dregs of the beverage world in many countries, *instant coffee*.

Frappe is a simple beverage. A couple of spoonfuls of instant coffee is combined with water, sugar and sometimes milk, then shaken vigorously in a cocktail mixer. When to add the ice, during or after shaking, is hotly debated. The resulting dark drink has a foamy head so large it resembles a half-pint of Guinness more than a coffee.

How the freeze-dried coffee drink became a national craze is hard to say, but supporters insist that it matches Greeks’



So serious is the coffee industry in Greece, especially in Athens, that there is an annual festival hosted in Athens. The Athens Coffee Festival invites both industry professionals, coffee aficionados and the general public. This year the festival is expected to be attended by more than **32,000 visitors**.

erratic lifestyle: laid-back Mediterranean with bursts of energy thrown in. Some believe that the Greeks' relationship with the drink is rooted in their centuries-old thirst for public dialogue and social interaction. "It doesn't have to do with quality or quantity, but it is more about the way people sit and enjoy," said Constantinopoulos, who says the average person takes 93 minutes to drink a frappe. In fact, coffee shop owners price their products accordingly, charging customers likely to keep their tables for a couple of hours as much as \$7.50 for a coffee. Much of frappe's appeal lies in its longevity. Even as the ice melts, the foam, which contains coffee granules, mixes with the ice, and the drink replenishes itself.

"If you time it perfectly, it will stay consistent throughout," Young said. "Greeks turned took something that is supposed to be instantaneous and made it a three-hour ordeal." "To Greeks, there is no such thing as instant coffee," Constantinopoulos said.

If you have visited Greece in the last 4 years, you probably are aware that there is a new coffee craze, the *freddo*. The Greeks have created two new brews to satisfy their fierce desire for iced coffee: *freddo espresso* and *freddo cappuccino*. The former consists of one or two shots of espresso, shaken in a mixer and served over ice. *Freddo cappuccino* is the same, but with a thick layer of cold, frothy milk on top.

The *freddo* coffee drinks is preferred by the younger coffee drinkers and is considered to be a more boujee drink, more European.

And finally, there is Greek Coffee. This is the sludgy little shot of caffeine. There is a similar version of this coffee throughout the Middle East and Balkans. In most of these countries, it's known as Turkish coffee. In fact, this is what it was called in Greece too, until Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, rekindling a surge of nationalism—and the birth of Greek coffee (*ellinikos kafes*).

The process of brewing a Greek coffee is simple: coffee beans (usually of the Arabica variety) are roasted and then ground to an almost dusty consistency. The coffee powder, water and (optional) sugar are then mixed over a low fire in a small copper pot, called a *briki*. When the mixture starts ris-

## Ordering your Frappé

Frappé is available in three degrees of sweetness which as you may have guessed is determined by the amount of sugar used. Ask for your frappe by these descriptions.

*glykós* (γλυκός, "sweet", 2 teaspoons of coffee and 4 teaspoons of sugar);

*métrios* (μέτριος, "medium", 2 teaspoons of coffee and 2 teaspoons of sugar);

*Skétos* (σκέτος, "plain", 2 teaspoons of coffee and no sugar).

All varieties may be served with evaporated or regular milk (με γάλα Greek pronunciation [me yala]).

ing, but before it starts bubbling or overflowing, the *briki* is taken off the heat. The thick, aromatic liquid is then served in a demitasse. The size and colour might resemble an espresso, but this is where the similarities end. Greek coffee is meant to be sipped leisurely, not downed in one gulp, as there is a thick gunk of residue at the bottom.

Frappé, along with traditional Greek and American coffee is served at the Greek Affair Coffee House. Stop by and stay a while.



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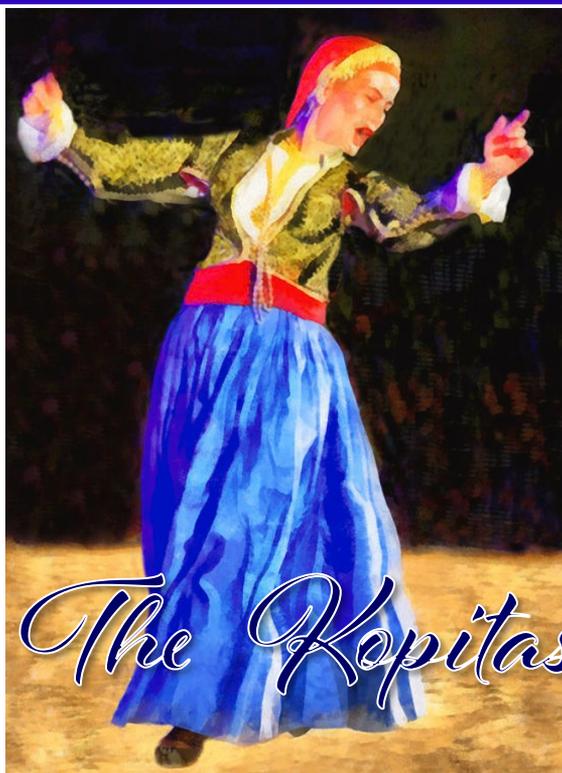
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# The Meteora Monasteries



The Meteora (Greek: Μετέωρα, pronounced [me-teora]) is a rock formation in the region of Trikala, in Thessaly, Greece. It hosts one of the largest and most precipitously built complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries, second in importance only to Mount Athos.

There are 6 Meteora monasteries perched on the huge cliffs people can visit today. Serene, spiritual, magical, mystical, extraordinary, breathtaking, immense, inspiring, impressive. These are only some of the words people very often use in an effort to describe the Meteora monasteries.

A visit to Meteora monasteries offers a unique perspective of nature's grandeur in conjunction with history, architecture, and man's everlasting desire to connect with the Divine. From the early Christian times, the cliffs of Meteora were regarded as a perfect place to achieve absolute isolation. A place for people to find peace and harmony and, thus, to support mankind's eternal struggle for spiritual ascension. Meteora today is the largest archaeological site of Greece in terms of the area that it covers. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1989 and an official holy place for Greece since 1995. This vast complex of giant rock pillars with monasteries built on the peaks of the sandstone cliffs centuries ago creates a truly surreal landscape found nowhere else in the world!

**The origins of Meteora Monasteries.** The first ones to use the cliffs of Meteora for spiritual reasons were Orthodox Christian hermit monks. They came to this place between the 9th and 10th century to find quiet and to isolate themselves in the many caves found scattered among the cliffs. For centuries those monks lived in complete isolation. Exposed to weather elements and to all sorts of dangers they relied heavily on the help of the locals. They would regularly receive donations of food, water, clothing, wood, essential things to allow them to survive. The locals saw them as holy men who came to dwell in the area, worthy of their support.

This early period is the first stage in the monastic development of Meteora, dominated by the ascetic figures of the first hermit monks, living unorganized and in isolation in the caves of the area. This first stage lasts for a couple of centuries, up until the 12th century, and the start of the second phase in the development of Meteora's monastic tradition. The development of the organized skete of Doupiani in the 12th century marks an important milestone in the long devel-



The Monastery of Great Meteoron (1340)



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The Monastery of Roussanou (1545)

opment of monasticism at Meteora.

Around the 12th century, a monk named **Nilos** decides to gather the scattered hermit monks of Meteora into a more organized monastic community. He set up rules and cannons for the hermit monks of Meteora to follow. Thus initiating the second phase of a more organized monastic development at Meteora. The focal point of this first organized monastic community became the **chappel of Doupiani**, still found today standing beneath the synonymous cliff on the northwest side of Kastraki village. The hermit monks of Meteora gathered every Sunday in the chapel of Doupiani to attend the Sunday service and to share provisions.

Two centuries later, in the 14th century, another monk named **Athanasios** climbed on the second-highest rock to establish the first of Meteora monasteries, the **Great Meteoron**. He is regarded today as one of the most important figures in the long history of Meteora monasteries being the founder of one of the most important monastic communities of the Orthodox Church, second only to Athos. By the 16th century, at the height of Meteora's monastic community, the number of monasteries existing in the site had reached a **total of 24**. Today, only six of them operate while the others are uninhabited.

### **The Monastery of Great Meteoron**

The Holy Monastery of Great Meteoron, located at Meteora-Greece, is the biggest and oldest one of all. It is called the monastery which remains "suspended in the air" (meteoro), because of the cliff formation of a gigantic rock on top of which it was built. The Great Meteoro Monastery or "Megalo Meteoron" was founded in the 14th century by a monk named Saint Athanasios the Meteorite.

### **The Monastery of Varlaam**

The Holy Monastery of Varlaam is the second biggest monastery of Meteora. Located very close to Great Meteoro Monastery, it was founded in the mid 14th century by a monk named Varlaam. Varlaam managed to climb on the cliff around 1350 and followed by a few other monks he was able to establish the monastery

### **The Monastery of Roussanou .**

The Holy Monastery of Roussanou, located at Meteora was first established in the 14th century. It received the name probably from the first hermit-monk who settled on the rock during that period. The main cathedral was founded at the end of the 16th century and was decorated thirty years later by a monk who lived at the monastery.

### **The Monastery of St. Stephen**

The beginning of monastic life on the rock of Agios Stephanos dates back to early in the 12th century. Hosios Antonios, in the first half of the 15th century, and Hosios Philotheos, who renovated or rather rebuilt from its foundations, the old small and elegant Catholicon, the present church of Agios Stephanos, in 1545 are mentioned as its founders.

### **The Monastery of Holy Trinity**

The Holy Trinity Monastery (Agia Triada) at Meteora is one of the most photographed monuments in the area. At the same time, it's the most difficult to reach. Those who will attempt to reach it will be rewarded with the panoramic view of the surroundings which is simply captivating!

### **The Monastery of St. Nikolaos**

The Holy Monastery of Saint Nicholas of Anapafsas or Agios Nikolaos is the first active Monastery you will encounter on our way to Meteora and was founded at the end of the 14th century. The frescoes decorating the little church of the monastery are considered among the most important sets of post-Byzantine painting, as it is the oldest known signed work of Theophanes. In the inscription above the entrance leading from the narthex to the nave preserved the signature of the artist "hand of the monk Theophanes of Crete Strelitzas.



The Monastery of St. Stephen (14th century )



The Monastery of Holy Trinity (1458 )



The Monastery of St. Nikolaos (14th Century)

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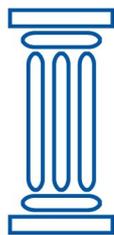
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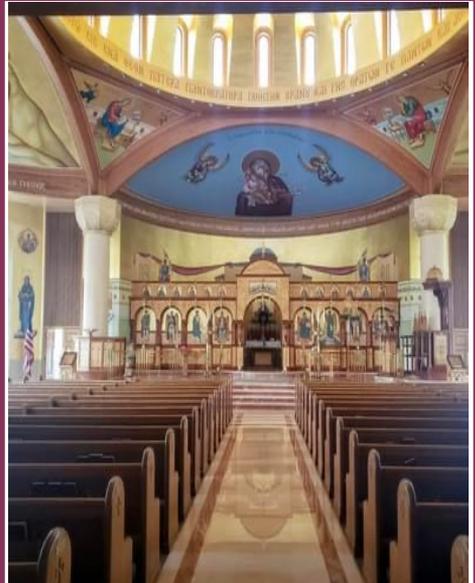
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