



ERASMUS+ PROJECT
TODAY'S WRITERS, TOMORROW'S LEADERS
2017 - 2019

WHAT WE EAT FROM ANCIENT TIMES UNTIL NOWADAYS



Erasmus+



ABOUT OUR BOOKLET

Some time ago, in our Greek Language book, we read about an ancient Greek recipe based on fish.

This gave us the idea to start an interesting journey through centuries, studying about our eating habits and exploring the history of the Greek cuisine.

As one of Sparky's questions is "What do you eat?", we thought it would be nice to collect some information about what we have been eating from Ancient Times until Nowadays and write a small booklet.

We also invited Sparky and the Erasmus+ teachers from England, Finland, Turkey, Poland, Spain, Italy and Cyprus to taste some of these dishes, cooked by the mothers of our class.

We hope you will enjoy reading our booklet and try to cook some of our recipes.

Nea Smyrni, Athens, Greece
January 2018

The pupils of class 6b

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ANCIENT TIMES

Evidence about ancient Greek nutrition has already existed since Homer's age, with an emphasis given in his epic poems to the value of hospitality, including food, wine and accommodation. "It is always Zeus who sends to us all strangers and poor people", says Eumaeus to Odysseus who returns home like a beggar, unrecognizable by the hardships and the old age. He then offers him bread, wine, and the kidney of the lamb, which was considered to be a distinctive delicacy.

Generally, ancient Greeks' eating habits were characterized by frugality. They ate meat in special occasions. They mostly ate fruit and vegetables.

In Plato's Symposium, doctor Eryximachus says that the art of cooking can help people enjoy food without the risk of illness. In 320 B.C, the first cookery book was written by the athenian Archestratus.

Ancient Greeks drank, in the morning, a brew of boiled thyme with sesame or peppermint, milk or lukewarm water with honey. They ate bread dipped in non watered-down wine with olives and figs. Later, they ate bread, cheese and onions. At noon they had a light meal. Fruit and vegetables played an important part in their diet. These were fruit such as oranges, peaches, bananas, pears, pomegranates, apples, figs, cherries etc.

They ate mushrooms, turnips, bulbs, garlic and legumes. They loved nuts with which they made sweets with honey, molasses or must. They also ate various kinds of cheese that were used for pie fillings since then.



HELLENISTIC YEARS

The Hellenistic period is the age of the successors of Alexander the Great (323-30 B.C.).

His Macedonian state was divided into 4 kingdoms. Hellenism was sprawled during this period in an area which was created as a consequence of the Second Greek Colonization and which was expanded through Alexander's campaign. It was a renewal period during which the Greeks came into contact with the civilizations of the East (the Egyptian, the Mesopotamian, the Persian, the Indian, Phoenician, Syrian, and native Asia Minor civilizations). It was through their constant interaction that the Hellenistic civilization emerges.

As Alexander was accompanied during his campaign by scientists of all kinds, geographers, historians, doctors and even cooks, he helped develop relations between different civilizations. This established eating habits based on new products from the East.

This is how the Greeks came to know rice with which they made recipes. A typical one is rice pudding. Alexander brings ice cream to Europe from Persia. The Persians used to mix pulped fruit and sherbets¹with snow. That is how the first kind of fruit-based ice cream was invented.



ROMAN RULE

During the Roman era, there was a wealth of flavours that is due to the spread of the Roman Empire to different geographical locations with a variety of products.

The main ingredient of the ancient Romans' diet was wheat.

The poor ate mostly a legume pulp or a cheese spread mixed with herbs, garlic, nuts with a little bread. This meal was a snack but of good quality, as were most farmers' meals.

The rich ate more lavish meals, such as pork stuffed with figs, or "sausages", which were meatballs wrapped in the intestines or the membrane from the animal's abdomen.

The famous Roman banquets were a privilege of the upper social and economic classes. They would start with a lot of appetizers. The main meals were distinguished by their great variety, such as meat of all kinds, stuffed with fruit but also fish and shellfish.

Ancient Romans were not professional cooks, but after the wars, they began to take slaves and make them cooks, confectioners, etc.

For the simple inhabitant of the city, proper nutrition was difficult because the consumption of fresh food and vegetables, especially in the winter, was not possible, resulting in health problems due to lack of vitamins.



¹ [TN] Sherbet is a popular West and South Asian drink prepared from fruits or flower petals. It is sweet and usually served chilled, similar to syrup.

THE BYZANTINE YEARS

In 330 AD, Constantine the Great transferred the capital of the Roman Empire to the eastern part of the Empire and called it New Rome. The people, in his honour, called it, Constantinople (today's Istanbul).

The Byzantines had at their disposal the wealth of the Empire's products. However, since Christianity prevailed in the empire, Christian traditions gradually took the position of the prior ancient Greek ones.

For example, fasting, which is an important institution of Christianity, has its roots in the ancient Greek religion and more specifically in the Orphic mysteries. During the fasting period, the believer abstains from certain foods, such as meat and dairy products or, in some cases, oil, too.

The Byzantine diet was based on vegetables, legumes, bread and oil. The most common way of cooking was boiling. They ate poultry and eggs, making "sfougata" (sponges), a kind of an omelette. Their favourite kinds of cheese were the anthotyro,² the Vlach cheese and the kefalitzin.

They loved hunting which basically provided them with meat. They liked fish, fresh or salt-cured. They drank non watered-down wine or mixed with honey and pepper.



OTTOMAN EMPIRE

It is the period extending from the Fall of Istanbul in 1453 to the Ottoman Turks until 1830 when the Greek state was liberated.

A typical meal of this period was barley or wheat bread, onion, olives, cheese and boiled greens. Salt-cured meat or legumes and some wine. The favourite meal of Christians at that time was cuttlefish and caviar.

In the Istanbul market there were shops selling desserts from dairy products, as well as sherbets with ice.

Another category of shops sold soups, boiled lamb heads and tripe soup. Some shops sold boza, a kind of beer that people used to drink in the Galata taverns.

Roast meat (kebab) and roast chicken was the main food of the Ottomans.

The Christians had a particular preference for fish and shellfish.

They used to eat "garum", a sauce of Roman origin made from salt-cured intestines of small fish mixed with oil and wine or vinegar.

² A kind of cheese made with milk and whey from sheep or goats.

The Ottomans' favourite products were coffee and rice with which they made pilaf.³ The Ottomans did not eat pork and did not drink alcohol.

There were cases of interaction of peoples' customs, despite their differences.



MODERN GREECE

The history of Modern Greece covers the history of Greece from its establishment as a state in 1828 to the present day.

Bread and wheat products, as well as boiled greens and legumes, were the main meals of the people, while the consumption of meat was minimal.

Olive oil, dairy products, fruit and herbs played an important role in their diet.

It was during this period that potatoes were imported into Greece, which immediately gained ground in Greek gastronomy. New products such as courgettes, corn, cocoa, peppers and turkey entered the Greek cuisine.

In 1922, with the inflow of refugees from Asia Minor, the Greek diet was enriched with new dishes.



³ Rice cooked in a seasoned broth.

NOWADAYS

Due to our geographical location in between three continents and our contact with other civilisations during our long history, we have created a cuisine rich in dishes and ingredients.

Our diet is still based on olive oil, cereals and their products, on vegetables and fruit. We continue to love cheese and yoghurt.

Meat consumption is no longer just a privilege of the rich, while fish and seafood are still favourite tasty dishes.

Wine is still the drink which mainly accompanies meals.

Fast food has also been introduced in Greece, but the Mediterranean diet is still dominant, a diet which consists of simple and complex foods that have lower fat consumption.

Inevitably, at a time when communication has become easier, we, Greeks come into contact with foreign cuisines, even from faraway places, such as the Chinese, Mexican, Japanese cuisines.

There has been a great development in our diet and the tendency to make combinations of products, resulting in the creation of new dishes, has become dominant.

The delicious voyage continues and, as Homer says, "*Eat and enjoy yourself, and when you are satisfied, we will ask you who you are.*"



RECIPES

ANCIENT TIMES

Mushrooms, bulbs and turnips



Boil the bulbs twice with water and 125g of red wine. Peel 300g turnips, boil them in salted water until they get soft. Mix 500g mushrooms with 125g red wine in a baking pan, add olive oil and season them with salt and pepper. Bake them at 250° C for 20 minutes. Chop some cardamom. Put all ingredients in a bowl. Add olive oil, vinegar, honey, salt and pepper and mix well.

Mashed yellow split peas



Boil 500g of dry yellow split peas in 5 glasses of salted water until they become puree. Rub the bottom of a bowl with a clove of garlic. Put in the mashed yellow split peas and add olive oil, chopped onion, caper and olives.

Broad beans

(Odyssey, I 1232-3)

They are small Arabic black-eyed broad beans. It is believed that they were imported to Greece from Egypt. The Pythagoreans did not use to eat them.

Boil the broad beans and serve.
Add some olive oil.



“Mittotos”

Squash 2 boiled eggs. Mix with olive oil and white soft cheese. Add melted garlic and leek. “Mittotos” would be served with boiled tuna.



DRINKS

Honey water

Boil water until it is lukewarm and add some honey.

Watered wine

Mix 3 parts of water and 1 part of wine.

The Ancient Greeks often added thyme, mint, rosemary, honey and cinnamon. From the Minoan and the Mycenaean era they also added resin.

HELLENISTIC YEARS

Rice pudding



Bring 1 1/2 cups water to a boil in a saucepan; stir rice into boiling water. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes. In a clean saucepan, combine 1 1/2 cups cooked rice, 1 1/2 cups milk, sugar and salt. Cook over medium heat until thick and creamy, 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in remaining 1/2 cup milk, beaten egg, and raisins; cook additional 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in butter and vanilla.

ROMAN RULE

Etnos

Boil peas in a saucepan. Add some leek, dill and sauté with olive oil. Add salt and pepper and serve. Sprinkle with olive oil.

Meat balls (Isicia omentata)



Mix pork mince with bread soaked in wine. Add salt, pepper and grape must. Fry the meatballs or bake them in the oven.

Mixtura cum nucleis pineis

Mix various kinds of cheese, almonds, finely chopped parsley, olive oil, balsamic vinegar, dill, coriander, thyme, spearmint, pine cone, pepper and serve.

Mulsum

Add the water, wine and honey to a large container or pitcher and stir well. Add 1 whole cinnamon stick, 1 whole nutmeg and 1 tsp whole cloves.

THE BYZANTINE YEARS

Byzantine “Myttotos”

Finely chopped garlic mixed with olive oil and olive pulp.

Chicken “monthilefti”

Choose a tender chicken. Leave it to marinade in wine or vinegar and spices, pepper, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg, for a few hours. Then stuff it with bread crumbs, raisins, pine cones, finely chopped mushrooms and almonds. Let it simmer in wine.

Cooked hare

Cook the hare in red wine or vinegar, with the addition of pepper, cloves and valerian.

“Amanites”

Fry mushrooms and serve them warm, accompanied with pears or leeks and radishes.

Fish

Boiled fish with small pieces of various kinds of cheese, eggs, cabbage served in a sauce of olive oil, pepper and garlic.

Desserts

Pasteli (sesame and honey bar), mustalevria (grape must cooked with sugar and flour), lallagia, quince paste

OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Octopus with pligouri (groats)



Cut the octopus in pieces. Cook it in a saucepan until it is dry. Add olive oil, chopped onion, leek and garlic until lightly browned. Add “pligouri” and stir. Add wine, salt, pepper, oregano and nutmeg and 4-5 glasses of water. Boil until the water is absorbed. Cover with a clean towel for 10 minutes and serve.

Cuttlefish with spinach



Cut the spinach in big pieces and put it in boiling water. Let it simmer for 2-3 minutes. Heat some olive oil in a saucepan, add chopped onion and the cuttlefish and cook for a few minutes until it gets dry. Pour in a glass of wine and simmer for 40 minutes. Add the spinach, dill or fennel, some parsley, salt and pepper and let it simmer for 15-20 minutes. Add some pine cones and serve.

MODERN GREECE

“Soutzoukakia” with rice



Soak a slice of bread in water for a few minutes. Squeeze it dry, discarding the crust. Mix the bread 500g of minced beef, some olive oil, ½ a glass of wine, 2 cloves of crushed garlic, some cumin, salt and pepper. Knead the ingredients well and form long shaped meat balls and fry them. In a saucepan, put some olive oil, one onion, grated, 500g ripe tomatoes, puréed, some salt, pepper and a pinch of sugar. Cook until the sauce becomes thick and add the “soutzoukakia”. Serve with rice.

NOWADAYS

Tzatziki



In a bowl mix 500g strained Greek style yoghurt, a grated cucumber, 2 cloves of crushed garlic, some olive oil, salt and pepper. Serve cool.

Greek salad

In a large bowl, put pieces of cucumber, tomatoes, peppers, onion, feta cheese and olives. Whisk together oil, vinegar, oregano, salt and pepper to make a dressing. Add the dressing and toss gently to combine. Serve immediately.



Moussaka



Fry slices of eggplants and potatoes. In a saucepan put some olive oil, grated onion and 2 cloves of crushed garlic. Cook it until it gets lightly brown. Add 500g of minced beef, a glass of wine and 250g ripe tomatoes, puréed. Add salt, pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon, clove and a pinch of sugar. Cook for 30 minutes. Put the potatoes in a baking pan and add the minced meat mixture. Put the eggplants on top and then some béchamel cream. Bake in the oven for 1 hour. Serve hot.

Bon appetit!