



# Olive Press

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Newsletter of the Kefi Club



## Christmas Meal

There is only 2 weeks to go before our festive feast is upon us. May I remind members that our Christmas meal will be held on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December at Ruswick Village Hall commencing at 7:00pm for 7:30pm slightly earlier than normal. The committee have decided to keep the cost of the ticket the same as with previous years at £20 for members and £25 for non-members. Those of you who are wishing to attend and have yet to buy tickets, need to inform our Club Secretary Nick Kontarines as soon as you can before Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December.

The menu is as follows. Starter is Pumpkin Tartlet with Spicy Skordalia and Olive Puree. The main is a more traditional meal of Kokkinisto-reddened beef. For dessert Greek yoghurt and honey mousse. There is an alternative to Kokkinisto, that of Panade of Leeks and Mixed Greens with Kefalotiri Cheese. Those who wish to have the alternative dish please inform our Club Secretary also by the date above.

## Macedonia Ancient & Modern – Malcolm Delingpole



For our November meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> we welcomed back Malcolm Delingpole as speaker who is getting quite a reputation for being controversial with the subjects he chooses to talk about this one being no exception. Although for the majority of the talk Malcolm spoke about the organised trip he took to the country.

Malcolm first of all pointed out on a map he had bought to accompany his talk where the present day borders of (here we go with the first bit of contention) the Republic of Macedonia. The name being disputed by Greece, and is referred to by them as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, sometimes abbreviated to FYROM. This is the name that it was admitted under into the United Nations, in 1993 because of their objections.

Malcolm then gave us a brief history of the country up to the present day. We started the tour in Sofia, Bulgaria as there are no direct flights to FYROM. We went round the country in an anti-clockwise direction stopping at places of interest on the way. One such place was the church of St. Spas in Skopje, the capital of FYROM. Here the church was built totally underground due to the 17<sup>th</sup> century edit of the Ottoman Sultan that prohibited Christian structures from being higher than mosques. The founder of the Macedonian Liberation Movement of 1903 and it's most prominent member, Goce Delcev, is buried in the courtyard of the church. Lake Ohrid was another picturesque place Malcolm stayed at. Lake Ohrid is one of the oldest and deepest lakes in Europe with its own indigenous flora and fauna. Then onto Heraclea famous for its dazzling mosaics, ancient theatre and Roman baths. It was built on the Via Egnatia and became one of the key stations on this important trading route. Of course no trip to the region would be complete without a visit to Vergina The city of Aigai, the ancient first capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia, The most important remains are the monumental palace, lavishly decorated with mosaics and painted stuccoes, and the burial ground with more than 300 tumuli, some of which date from the 11th century B.C. One of the royal tombs in the Great Tumulus is identified as that of Philip II, who conquered all the Greek cities, paving the way for his son Alexander and the expansion of the Hellenistic world.



Thank you Malcolm for a most enlightening talk.



Tw'as the night before Xristouyenna and all through the spiti,  
I could smell fasolatha & pasticho through my miti.  
Pandofles were hung on the fireplace quite low,  
Hoping Ayios Vasilis would bring some ouzo.

Patera in his krevati was snoring pretty hard,  
Tired from stealing the tree from our malaka neighbour's yard.  
Mama was in the basement cooking like a nikokira,  
adding just enough lemoni to her fresh made horta.

When the thorivo came from outside the porta,  
Baba yelled from his room "ela mesa re malaka".

The knocking on the door, such a rude, loud barage,  
I yelled through the window "It's a Greek house re malaka, come  
in through the garage!"

Then, standing in the garage right next to my car,  
was my drunk thio Mitso coming home from the bar.  
"Ainde kimisou methismene" I told him with might,  
"you'll ruin my chances of seeing Ayio Vasilis tonight".

About two hours later I heard a noise down the stair,  
I jumped from my krevati to see who was there.  
Standing by the tree eating leftover fakkes,  
Was Ayios Vasilis reeking of tsiporo no less.

He was all dressed in red and as big as an ox,  
Wearing brown "pandofles" along with black socks.

Smelling like a katsiki with a touch of "Old Spice",  
He'd been drinking for days and smelled not very nice.

He was putting the presents out under the tree,  
They were wrapped like skata, it was quite plain to see.

Vrakyia & 6 kaltses from Sears for me,  
and 12 for my brother coz he's only 3.

This Santa was paraxenos, nothing like the fable,  
Before leaving he stole my tsigara from the table.

I yelled "Eh, Ay' Vasili, ti kaneis ekie?"  
and he turned and he threw his "pandofla" at me.

The look in his eyes was nothing but fright,  
He said "ande fiye apo tho, re malaka" and dashed out of sight.

And he called to his reindeer, and called them by name  
I knew they were not the same animals from "Jingle Bell" fame.  
"Ela Mitso, Sotiri, ke Nektario,  
Yianni, kai Taki, Thanasi kai Yiorgo..."

"Ainde grigora na pao ya katourima",  
and he yelled as he went "KALA XRISTOUYENNA"

Sent to me by Haydn Ebbs a couple of years ago. I never seemed to have room before. A clever play on words I thought.



## Greek Christmas Traditions

Even though the Greek Christmas is regarded by many as less colourful than the Greek Easter, the Greeks really have some of the richest Christmas traditions in the world. The Advent period is often taken very seriously by Orthodox Christians and those wishing to take communion on Christmas morning will be expected to fast during the whole period (or at least for the last three days). Fasting means abstaining from meat, eggs and dairy products as well as oil in a strict fast. If one sees someone at the end of Advent the traditional wish is "Kala Christouyenna" or "Good Christmas" yet on Christmas Day the usual wish is not this but "Chronia polla" or "many years" (which is also the traditional wish for important feast days and name days).

Greeks will normally start decorating their homes comparatively late, ie. just a few days before Christmas when housewives will start making the traditional Christmas sweets such as "kourabiedhes" and "melomakarana". Christmas cards are not exchanged between members of the same family living together nor among friends who live near enough to be wished in person; instead cards are only sent to those friends and relatives who live far away. As elsewhere, the Christmas tree is a recent innovation and formerly (and indeed still on some islands today) a Christmas ship was decorated and had the place of the tree. This Christmas ship or "karavaki" (ie. little ship) is sometimes carried around by carol-singers on Christmas Eve, New year's Eve and on the Eve of Epiphany. It is usually little children who sing the "kalanda" or carols holding triangles very early on these mornings for a few coins.

It is really the 1st of January (St. Basil's Day) which is the most special day for children since this is when they receive their presents. This is because Father Christmas is not St. Nicholas/Santa Claus but Ayios Vasilis or St. Basil and so New Year's Day is also St. Basil's feast day (and the name day for anyone called Vasilis or for girls called Vasiliki - not to mention the day when the Orthodox Church celebrates the circumcision of Christ). Early in the morning on New Year's Day a child (invariably a boy) does the "podariko" or first-footing by bringing a strange plant called a "skylokremmyda" or "dog onion" to the house. This is a plant with a few thick green leaves and a bulb that is wrapped with aluminum foil. This plant has several names according to the locality e.g. in Cephallonia it is called "koutsouna" or "askinokara". The boy who brings this plant to the house will be given a "bonamas" or gift of money for the New Year.

Also on New Year's Day there is the interesting custom of breaking a pomegranate on the door for good luck (an action which is sometimes performed by the bride in some regions of Greece when she arrives at her new home after the wedding). A special cake is eaten on this day called the "Vasilopita" or St. Basil's Pie in which a "flouri" or lucky coin has been baked. Yet before this can be found the head of the house must

first cross the cake with his knife and then cut the first slice for God, then the next for the baby Christ, followed by the "Panayia" (or "All Holy" - as Mary is called), then the next slice for the house and after for each member of the family starting with the eldest. The

one who finds the "flouri" in their piece will have good luck all the forthcoming year. At the meal table there is also a special decorated round loaf called a "Vasilopsomo" or St. Basil's bread (which is really identical in form to the "Christopsomo" or "Christ bread" eaten on Christmas Day and the "Photitsa" or "Lights bread" that will be eaten on Epiphany).

Throughout the "Dodekaimera" or Twelve days of Christmas it is of interest to note that all houses are vulnerable to a malicious type of elf / pixy called the "kallikantzari" (sing. "kallikantzaros") who play tricks on housewives, put out the fire and urinate on the Christmas food if it is not covered at night. They also saw the root of a huge trunk on which rest the foundations of the world.

The Greek Christmas celebrations conclude with the festival of "Ta Phota" or "The Lights" as Epiphany is called. In the Orthodox Church this feast is important as the baptism of Christ. On the Eve of this day the priest will go round all houses and sprinkle holy water to bless the houses and all those who live there. It is believed that this visit by the priest will expel the "kallikantzari" who leave before they can finish sawing the world's foundations. It is customary to give a small donation to the priest by way of appreciation and the name for this service he performs is known as the "ayiasmos" - the word also refers to the holy water itself some of which is kept with the family icons and is believed to have healing properties. On the day of Epiphany there is the great "Ayiasmos" service in the church. In some larger churches such as at the church of St. Eleftherios in Patisia, Athens, a pair of doves are released from the "kampanario" or separate bell-tower. In the port of Pireus and in most islands the priest throws the cross into the sea and a few young men will dive in to retrieve it - the one who catches the cross is being blessed.

The "Lights Day" (i.e. Epiphany) also happens to be Christmas Day for those few Greek Orthodox Christians who (like the Russians and the Serbs etc.) still follow the Old Calendar. Epiphany can really be seen to be the culmination of the Christmas season. While companies and organizations who meet after the Christmas holidays may still be seen in the newspapers cutting the "Vasilopita" or St. Basil's Pie even as late as early February, with Epiphany the Christmas season essentially comes to a close. The next day is St. John's Day (i.e. 7th January). On this day everyone called Yiannis (John) has their name day and relatives and friends who visit will still see the Christmas decorations up in the home. The decorations will be taken down on 8th January. This is also the time when children go back to school - i.e. on the first weekday after St. John's Day.



## War of Independence- part 2

On the 27<sup>th</sup> January Les Roberts will be presenting part two of his talk about the struggles of Greece getting its independence at Rushwick Village Hall 7.30pm as normal.

## Forthcoming Events of Clubs in the Local Area

### Worcester Anglo-Hellenic Club



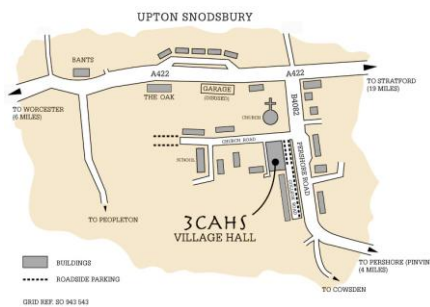
**9th January Vassilopitta Party** at Loretta & John Proctor's in Malvern. The *Vassilopitta* is a special cake made for the Greek New Year, a tradition which dates back to the 4th Century AD. A coin is baked in the cake with the ingredients, and the person receiving the portion containing the coin is considered blessed for the New Year.

### The Greek Club (Birmingham)

#### Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January- Vasilopitta and AGM

At the Staff Common Room, Faculty of Arts, Birmingham University. 7.30 pm. Contact: Jennie Marathas 0121 6240359.

## Three Counties Ancient History Society



**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February** – Prof. Bob Arnott will give a talk 'Crossing Continents- The relationship between Ancient Greece and India' at Upton Snodsbury Village Hall. 7.30 prompt. Contact: Sandra Clowes. Tel: 01789 763780

## Useful Contacts

**Club Secretary:** Nick Kontarines (01684 566323)  
Email: [nkontarines@btconnect.com](mailto:nkontarines@btconnect.com)

**Website Editor:** Jo Taylor  
Email: [jo.taylor@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jo.taylor@hotmail.co.uk)

**Club Treasurer:** Les Roberts (01684 591156)  
Email: [lesvroberts@hotmail.com](mailto:lesvroberts@hotmail.com)

**Newsletter Editor:** John Gatfield (01905 356431)  
Email: [John\\_Gatfield@hotmail.com](mailto:John_Gatfield@hotmail.com)

**Chair:** Ralph Eskenazi  
Email: [ralesk@metronet.co.uk](mailto:ralesk@metronet.co.uk)

**Committee Member:** Yvonne Taylor  
Email: [yvonnemtaylor2007@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:yvonnemtaylor2007@hotmail.co.uk)