



# Olive Press

Newsletter of the Kefi Club



Christmas Dinner



We had our Christmas Dinner on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December. Twenty people enjoyed a three-course meal prepared by Celia (rocket, leek and caper pie and beef youvetsi) and Sherod (walnut cake with Greek yogurt and raspberry coulis). The salads were made by Yvonne and David. Yvonne also proved to be an excellent Raffle master. Bob presented Celia, on behalf of all us, two decorated wine glasses, in accordance with the "people's vote".

**Mathematics in Ancient Greece by Tony Foxtton**



The first part of the talk centred on Pythagoras and his famous theorem. The theorem itself would have been known about, as a practical result, potentially for thousands of years prior to this, but it is Pythagoras who is credited with proving the result. The Pythagoreans had a strong mystical bent. They thought that number was the measure of all things. In their calculations, they would quickly have stumbled upon the square root of two. This would have been a cause of considerable concern to them as they would have realized that it was “unutterable”: what we would now call an irrational number, which cannot be perfectly expressed as a fraction. It has been suggested that they suppressed this discovery because it was so upsetting to their mystical worldview.

It has been suggested that they suppressed this discovery because it was so upsetting to their mystical worldview. Based on being able to double the area of a square (by building upon its diagonal), we then looked at The Delian Problem which concerned being able to double the volume of a cube using only ruler and compasses. This problem is not soluble. However, it is soluble if mechanical linkages are permitted. At this point it is the influence of Plato which is seen, because it is suggested he would have had less interest in an engineering type of solution to the problem. This artificial restriction proved to be very fruitful, stimulating a lot of mathematics in the future.

After the break it was the turn of an earlier mathematician: Thales. We started by looking at the proof of Thales’ Theorem: that the angle in a semi-circle is a right angle. This is among the very first deductive proofs which appears in mathematics. As such, Thales is often considered as the father of mathematics: heralding in the move from practical calculations to deductive proofs.

Ancient Greece can be credited with a huge contribution to mathematics: specifically, geometry. If it had a weakness it was that it largely relied on verbal reasoning and lacked the algebraic contribution which would come from the Arabs. These two threads, of algebra and geometry, would only get woven together towards the end of the sixteenth century by the French mathematician Vieta.

However, the light from Greek mathematics had been pretty well snuffed out over a millennium earlier than this. As we saw with the Pythagoreans, there were often mystical overtones with what we would consider mathematics. Beyond this, mathematicians might have offered divination through numerology. When Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire towards the end of the fourth century, the Emperor Theodosius I issued various decrees inhibiting Pagans from practising their religion.

### **Religion is key part of identity for most Greeks**



Greece has ranked fourth among 34 European countries in terms of the percentage of their populations that consider religion a key component of their national identity, according to a Pew Research Centre survey conducted in 2015-17 and published on Monday. More specifically, 76 percent of Greeks said that their nationality is defined by Christianity, behind Armenia (82 percent), Georgia (81 percent) and Serbia (78 percent). The contrast with Western Europe was sharp, with most people in France and the United Kingdom saying they don't feel that religion is a major part of their national identity. In France and the UK, for example, most (65 percent in both countries) said it is not important to be Christian to be truly French or truly British.

The poll also highlighted a marked difference between Eastern and Western Europe with regard to sentiments on religion, with Greek views coinciding more with those held in countries that were once behind the Iron Curtain. A staggering 92 percent of Greek believe in the existence of God, ahead of the Russians (75 percent). On the other end of the scale, only 36 percent of Swedes said they believe in God.

Greece and Latvia had the highest rate of those that believe in the "evil eye," with each on 66 percent – ahead of countries in Central and Eastern Europe such as Ukraine (60 percent), Armenia (59 percent), Moldova (57 percent), Russia (56 percent) and Bulgaria (55 percent). Only 9 percent of Swedes expressed the same belief. Another divide between East and West pertained to perception of cultural superiority over others, with Greece ranking first (89 percent), ahead of Armenia (84 percent) and Russia (69 percent). The survey showed that Western Europeans hold humbler views when it comes to cultural superiority – for example only 36 percent of the French and 45 percent of Germans believe so. Furthermore, only 31 percent Greeks would accept a Muslim as a member of their family while 35 percent would accept a Jew.

### **Greece's 'red gold': Saffron trade blooming in a wilted economy**



*Evangelia Patsioura pauses as she harvests saffron flowers at her family's field in the town of Krokos. [Alkis Konstantinidis/Reuters]*

- Every autumn, Zisis Kyrou is more often found plucking flowers in northern Greece's purple saffron fields than in his office as a civil engineer. Saffron – the spice so expensive it's called "red gold" – has brought jobs and money to a region better known for coal mines and unemployment. A year ago, its producers began exporting to the United States. Now they are looking to China. Most are young Greeks who were shut out of the job market during Greece's nine-year economic downturn. They returned to the countryside to make a living off the land. "It was hard to find work in your field during the crisis, particularly in civil engineering, because there was no construction," said Kyrou.

In 2012, he returned to Greece from London with two university degrees. He eventually opened an engineering office in his village of Krokos, but most of his income comes from his four acres of land, which he hopes to increase. "I didn't imagine I'd return," he said. "But it was a decision I don't regret." Greeks have been cultivating saffron for three centuries in the countryside surrounding Krokos, which takes its name from *Crocus*, the saffron flower. Alexander the Great is said to have used it to heal battle wounds. But until 2000, production was limited to 30 kilograms a year for domestic consumption, said Nikos Patsiouras, who heads Greece's Cooperative of Saffron. That changed in 2008, when the crisis hit. Greece now produces about four tons a year, 70 percent of which goes abroad. The cooperative has doubled its members from 494 to 1,000. It also has increased its land from 592 acres in 2008 to 1,349 acres. "A lot of young people found work in the fields – scientists," Patsiouras said. "I believe more will join."

Signs of the crisis are visible across Krokos, where shuttered shops line the streets. Unemployment in north-western Greece is 23.5 percent, three points higher than the national average. But the fields are abuzz. "We have God on our side, who gave us such a unique product," Patsiouras said. "We hold on to it like the apple of our eye." Saffron grows only in this region of Greece. Marketed as Krokos Kozanis, one gram costs about 4 euros in Greek shops. It takes 150,000 flowers to make a kilo of the spice, which sells for about 1,500 euros. Flowers are handpicked, and at the cooperative women in blue overalls weigh and package it. They are forbidden to wear make-up and perfume, to protect its flavour.

In the Patsiouras household, three generations have gathered after a day of harvesting to remove the saffron strands from the flowers and dry them. "If we don't transfer this tradition to the next generation, we will fail," said his daughter-in-law, Maria Patsioura.

## Merry Christmas and Happy New Year



"Carols" by Nikiforos Lytras

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