

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF EUROPE



# *Culture and Customs of Greece*



Artemis Leontis

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ARTEMIS LEONTIS

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# Contents

Series Foreword	vii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Chronology	xiii
<b>1 The Land, People, and History</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Religion</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3 Society</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>4 Leisure, Holidays, and the Greek Table</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>5 Language and Literature</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>6 Music and Dance</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>7 Media, Theater, and Cinema</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>8 Architecture and Art</b>	<b>197</b>

Glossary	227
Selected Bibliography	233
Index	253

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## Series Foreword

THE OLD WORLD and the New World have maintained a fluid exchange of people, ideas, innovations, and styles. Even though the United States became the de facto world leader and economic superpower in the wake of a devastated Europe in World War II, Europe has remained for many the standard bearer of Western culture.

Millions of Americans can trace their ancestors to Europe. The United States as we know it was built on waves of European immigration, starting with the English who braved the seas to found the Jamestown Colony in 1607. Bosnian and Albanian immigrants are some of the latest new Americans.

In the Gilded Age of one of our great expatriates, the novelist Henry James, the Grand Tour of Europe was de rigueur for young American men of means, to prepare them for a life of refinement and taste. In a more recent democratic age, scores of American college students have Eurailed their way across Great Britain and the Continent, sampling the fabled capitals and bergs in a mad, great adventure, or have benefited from a semester abroad. For other American vacationers and culture vultures, Europe is the prime destination.

What is the New Europe post-Cold War, post Berlin Wall in a new millennium? Even with the different languages, rhythms, and rituals, Europeans have much in common: they are largely well educated, prosperous, and worldly. They also have similar goals and face common threats and form alliances. With the advent of the European Union, the open borders, and the Euro and considering globalization and the prospect of a homogenized Europe, an updated survey of the region is warranted.



Culture and Customs of Europe features individual volumes on the countries most studied and for which fresh information is in demand from students and other readers. The Series casts a wide net, inclusive of not only the expected countries, such as Spain, France, England, and Germany, but also countries such as Poland and Greece that lie outside Western Europe proper. Each volume is written by a country specialist, with intimate knowledge of the contemporary dynamics of a people and culture. Sustained narrative chapters cover the land, people, and brief history; religion; social customs; gender roles, family, and marriage; literature and media; performing arts and cinema; and art and architecture. The national character and ongoing popular traditions of each country are framed in an historical context and celebrated along with the latest trends and major cultural figures. A country map, chronology, glossary, and evocative photos enhance the text.

The historied and enlightened Europeans will continue to fascinate Americans. Our futures are strongly linked politically, economically, and culturally.

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## Preface

EVERY DAY THE SUN rises on the speakers of a language as fabled for its longevity as its difficulty. These people stand poised to do many things, but perhaps nothing with greater enthusiasm than speak Greek. A language with more than 3,200 years of documented history, Greek in their mouths takes the shape of broad vowels, staccato consonants, long words, and endless expressive possibilities. Although Greek users value their language's communicative power, they are also deeply aware, with each proud syllable they dispatch, that they are keeping an old language alive. Some even claim that Greece exists for this purpose, to preserve Greek: "Greek the language they gave me / ... My only care my language on Homer's shores."<sup>1</sup>

Greeks care deeply about their language. In the past they even sacrificed lives over language disagreements. Today's language debates don't reach quite that pitch, yet questions fly: Doesn't text messaging impoverish young people's communication skills? Must people translate older texts into today's Greek? Shouldn't children learn ancient Greek at a younger age? How threatening are foreign lexical imports such as *e-mail* or *debate* to the integrity of Greek? Will Greece's recent immigrants learn Greek or remain forever Greece's latest *varvaroi* (barbarians, speakers of *bar-bar*, or gibberish)? With each passing day, people feel the survival of their culture is on the line, and the least they can do is to argue about it in beautifully articulated Greek.

Greek culture presents many themes. Urbanization is one, with Athens taking center stage in the country's development and consequently in this book. Athens is home to almost half of Greece's population and is the administrative

and cultural center of the country. It's impossible to ignore. The performative side of Greek culture is another: the way people play their parts for one another, onstage and off. And the living relationship of inhabitants to the distant past is a third.

A key theme is that the Greek language is central to Greek culture. Greek defines the modern nation; anchors religion; relates Greeks to their ancient ancestors and to their Septuagint and New Testament religion; ties diasporic Greeks with their homeland; gives oral and visual order to poetry and prose; creates emotional ties through song; gives people weighty words for petitions, protests, slogans, and debate; and lies at the center of artistic expression. Knowledge of Greek is essential for entering Greek culture fully.

Even without Greek, it's possible to make inroads into the labyrinth of Greek culture simply by observing. Here people are arguing with equal intensity about how to buy a watermelon and whether illegal immigrants bring to Greece essential services. There a large crowd is noisily misdirecting a driver as she squeezes her car into an impossibly small parking space. It seems people in Greece can create a crisis out of nothing, then face real threats with equanimity. And they don't mean exactly what they say. They shake their head back in a gesture of *ohi!* (no) inviting the other person to share. Their downward nod of *nai!* (yes) can provoke an argument. Words of praise may signify envy, while criticism is a sign of affection. Promises are made to be broken and threats rarely carried out. Perhaps most illuminating, people of all ages, classes, and occupations take delight in deliberation: testing all sides of an argument, finding the most effective way to impose themselves on others.

In every dimension of culture, Greece is a country of paradox, politics, and pleasure in speaking, arguing, chanting, singing, cooking, and performing Greek.

#### NOTE

1. Odysseus Elytis, *The Axion Esti*, "The Passion II," trans. Edmund Keeley and George Savidis (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 18, lines 1 and 3.

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## Acknowledgments

THIRTY-SIX years ago on my first visit to Greece, I found myself on a precipice looking down into deep, mysterious waters. I would not have taken the plunge into Greek culture without the help of beloved family members and friends. This book owes its finer insights to them. *Efharisto*. I am grateful to colleagues from various institutions who shared syllabi for their courses and students who asked probing questions in my classes at the University of Michigan and Ohio State University. Yiorgos Anagnostou, Peter Jeffreys, Peggy McCracken, Panayiotis Pafilis, Yopie Prins, Yona Stamatis, and Liz Wingrove gave me detailed feedback on drafts. Stella Elena Acornicesei, Traianos Gagos, Van and Janet Gegas, Kimberly Johnson, Maria Kakavoulia, Neocles and Vassiliki Leontis, Bill and Daniel Loumpouridis, Despina Margomenou, Katerina Michaelidou, Carrie Romant, Stephen Snyder, Efi Spyropoulou, Fani Tufano-Mallouchou, Stratis Valakos, Vasileia and Yiannis Varvarigou, and Pavlos Vasileiou, offered images, information, sounds, ideas, flavors, museum visits, and excursions. Ben Acosta-Hughes, Mariette Baker, Bruce Frier, Richard Janko, and Ruth Scodel helped me find extra time to write. Stacie Harris, Perry Katsikas, Daphne Lambropoulos, Sophia Roumanis, and Laurie Talalay propped me up with intangibles. Editor Kaitlin Carmiello prodded me on. To Vassilis Lambropoulos, for the sheer joy of twenty-five years of exploring Greece together and for his terrific archives, I dedicate this book.



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# Chronology

## **STONE AGE (28,000–3000 B.C.)**

- c. 23,000–3000** Inhabitation of Franchthi Cave in Peloponnese.
- 6000–2500** Agrarian settlements centered in Thessaly spread to Macedonia, Boeotia, Attica, Argolis, and Messenia. Cretan settlements.
- 4300–3200** Aegean settlements.

## **BRONZE AGE (3000–1200 B.C.)**

- 3000** Beginnings of Minoan settlements in Crete.
- 2100–1650** Arrival of Mycenaean Greeks in Greece.
- 1850–1400** Inscriptions of hieroglyphic-derived Linear A for writing pre-Greek Minoan.
- c. 1600** Great volcanic eruption on Thera (Santorini).
- 1450** Inscriptions of Linear B script derived from Linear A for writing Greek.
- 1200–1150** Collapse of Mycenaean civilization. Writing disappears and material culture is in decline.

## **DARK AGE (1150–750 B.C.)**

- 1150–1100** Doric and Aeolic settlements in Greece.
- c. 1025** Iron replaces bronze for weapons.

**9th–8th century** Geometric period. Rise of first Greek city-states. Beginning of Delphic oracle.

### **ARCHAIC PERIOD (750–480 B.C.)**

**776** Traditional date for first Olympic Games.

**8th century** Composition of Homeric and Hesiodic poems.

**750** Greek inscriptions written in Greek alphabet.

**c. 600** Coin currency introduced.

**534** Thespis is first recorded winner of dramatic competition in Athens.

**508–507** Cleisthenes' democratic reforms in Athens.

**499–448** Persian wars.

**490** Greeks defeat Persian army at Marathon.

**480** Athenians defeat Persian fleet at Salamis.

### **CLASSICAL PERIOD (480–336 B.C.)**

**478** Founding of Delian League under leadership of Athenians.

**461–429** Age of Pericles inspires building of Parthenon, Propylaea, Erechtheion, and Temple of Nike on Athenian Acropolis, and other cultural programs.

**431–404** Peloponnesian wars between Athens and Sparta, ending in Sparta's victory over Athens.

**430** Plague in Athens.

**399** Trial and execution of Socrates.

**387** Founding of Plato's Academy.

**338** King Phillip II of Macedon defeats Theban and Athenian forces at Chaeronea. End of Greek cities' independence.

### **HELLENISTIC AGE (336–30 B.C.)**

**336** Death of Phillip II and accession of Alexander.

**335** Founding of Aristotle's Lyceum.

**334–326** Alexander conquers Persian Empire and reaches Bactria and India.

- 323** Death of Alexander. Division of his empire among his successors.
- 316** Founding of Thessaloniki by Kassandros.
- 148–31** Roman conquest of Greece. Octavian (Augustus) defeats Marc Antony and Cleopatra at Aktion and brings Greek world under Roman control (31).

#### **ROMAN PERIOD (31 B.C.–A.D. 330)**

- A.D. 117–138** Roman emperor Hadrian sponsors major building projects in Greece.
- 313** Constantine I issues edict of Milan, proclaiming religious toleration of Christianity.

#### **BYZANTINE PERIOD (A.D. 330–1453)**

- 330** Constantine rebuilds Byzantium, renames it Constantinople and Second Rome. This becomes center of Vasileia Romaion (Greek for Kingdom of Romans), the eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire.
- 5th–6th century** Emperor Theodosius II closes pagan temples in Greece (435); Emperor Justinian closes philosophical schools in Athens (529); Parthenon is converted into Christian church.
- 961–1000** Athanasios the Athonite builds Great Lavra on Mt. Athos and lays foundations of coenobitic monasticism on peninsula.
- 1054** Great Schism divides Eastern (Greek) Orthodox and Western (Roman) Catholic churches.
- 1204** Fourth Crusade captures Constantinople. Crusaders rule much of Greece for at least half a century.
- 1210–1645** Venetians occupy Crete.
- 1430–1456** Ottoman conquest of Thessaloniki (1430), Constantinople (1453), and Athens and Peloponnese (1456).

#### **OTTOMAN PERIOD (A.D. 1453–1821)**

- 1482–1797** Venetians occupy Zakynthos and other Ionian Islands until Napoleon conquers Venice (1797).
- 1492** Ottomans give asylum to Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain. Over time Thessaloniki becomes a predominantly Jewish city.
- 1687** Venetians besiege Athens and bombard Acropolis.



- 1770** Russian count Alexis Orloff attempts but fails to establish Greek principality.
- 1798** Rigas Feraios, advocate of revolution against Ottomans, is assassinated.
- 1814** Secret Filiki Etairia (Friendly Society) formed to organize Greek revolution against Ottomans.
- 1815** Ionian Islands placed under British protection.

### GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE (A.D. 1821–1832)

- 1821** Greek revolution against Ottoman rule breaks out (March). Ottomans hang Patriarch Gregory V of Constantinople in retaliation (April).
- 1822–1823** First constitution for an independent Greece. Ottoman massacre of civilians in Chios wins foreign sympathy for Greek revolution.
- 1822–1826** Ottoman siege of Messolonghi (1822, 1823, 1825–1826). Lord Byron's death there (1824) and Ottomans' harsh treatment following victory over Greeks inspires Eugène Delacroix's painting *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi* (1827) and stirs foreign sympathy for Greek cause.
- 1827** Combined British, French, and Russian fleet destroys joint Ottoman-Egyptian fleet at Navarino Bay (Pylos).
- 1828** Count Ioannis Kapodistrias becomes president of First Hellenic Republic in capital city of Nafplion.
- 1830** France, Britain, and Russia (Great Powers) recognize independent Greece.
- 1831** Kapodistrias is assassinated.

### KINGDOM OF GREECE (1832–1974)

- 1832** Great Powers offer Greek throne to 17-year-old Bavarian Prince Otto, who becomes the first King of the Hellenes.
- 1833–1834** Otto arrives in Nafplion. His regents declare the church of Greece autocephalous and name Athens the capital of Greece.
- 1843** Military coup and popular demonstration (September 3) forces Otto to give Greece a *syntagma* (constitution). Square in front of palace where people demonstrated becomes known as Syntagma.

- 1844** New constitution defines Greece as constitutional monarchy. Ioannis Kolettis articulates Megali Idea (great idea) challenging Greece to expand its borders to encompass historically Greek territories with large Greek populations.
- 1862** King Otto forced to abdicate.
- 1863–1864** Prince George of Denmark becomes King of the Hellenes. Ionian Islands are incorporated into Greek state as coronation gift to King George. New constitution defines Greece as crowned democracy.
- 1881** Province of Thessaly and region of Arta in Epirus incorporated into the Greek state.
- 1883–1893** Era of Harilaos Trikoupis's reforms, building of railway and Corinth Canal.
- 1893–1920** Greece declares bankruptcy (1893). Mass labor emigration of nearly five hundred thousand people from Greece to United States.
- 1896** First modern Olympic Games held in Athens.
- 1896–1897** Cretan rebellion leads to Greco-Turkish war and Greek defeat in Thessaly. Crete gains autonomy.
- 1901, 1903** Riots over vernacular Greek translation of New Testament (1901) and Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (1903).
- 1903** Beginning of Greek campaign for accession of Macedonia.
- 1909–1910** Military officers' revolt at Goudi topples government, imposes reforms, and brings Eleftherios Venizelos into national politics.
- 1911** Italian forces occupy Dodecanese Islands.
- 1912–1913** Greece gains Macedonia, Epirus, and Crete as a result of Balkan wars. King George is assassinated in Thessaloniki and succeeded by his son Constantine.
- 1915–1917** National schism: Venizelos and King Constantine clash over World War I: King advocates neutrality and Venizelos presses for alliance with Triple Entente. Venizelos establishes revolutionary government in Thessaloniki. Constantine forced to abdicate, succeeded by his son Alexander. Venizelos returns to Athens and declares war on Central Powers.
- 1917** Great fire of Thessaloniki devastates city (August 18–19).
- 1919–1920** Greece rewarded as victor in World War I with territory in Thrace and mandate to administer Smyrna.

- 1920** King Alexander dies from monkey bite. Venizelos loses elections. Constantine returns to throne.
- 1919–1922** Greco-Turkish war in Anatolia between Greek army and Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ends in Greek defeat, burning of Smyrna, and ravaging of Christian population in Asia Minor. King Constantine abdicates, replaced by his son George II. Venizelos returns to power.
- 1923** Treaty of Lausanne (July 24) establishes boundaries between Greece and Turkey and imposes mandatory population exchange of 1.3 million Greek Orthodox Christians in Turkey for more than 350,000 Muslims in Greece.
- 1924–1935** Second Greek Republic follows plebiscite rejecting monarchy (1924), until failed antiroyalist coup leads to return of King George II (1935).
- 1936** King George II endorses suspension of key articles of constitution (August 4), enabling caretaker Prime Minister General Ioannis Metaxas to assume dictatorship.
- 1940** Greek mobilization (October 28) against invading Italian forces drives Mussolini's army back into Albania, the first Allied victory in World War II.
- 1941–1944** Joint German, Italian, and Bulgarian occupation of Greece.
- 1941** Greece falls to Germany (April–May) as King George II and government retreat to Egypt. Two law students take down swastika flag from Acropolis (May 30) in first act of resistance to the occupation.
- 1941–1942** Estimated 250,000 Greeks perish in great famine (winter). International Red Cross distributes food (summer 1942).
- 1942–1944** Resistance to occupation by communist-led National Liberation Front (EAM) and National Republican Greek League (EDES). Internal strife between left- and right-wing resistance groups.
- 1943** Germans begin mass deportations of Jews from Thessaloniki and other areas of Greece. An estimated fifty-five thousand Greek Jews are exterminated.
- 1944–1945** German army evacuates and Greek government under Prime Minister George Papandreou repatriates (October 1944). EAM demonstration in Athens (December 3) leads to battle between EAM supporters, police, and British troops. Varkiza Agreement (February 1945) halts fighting.

- 1945–1949** Greek civil war between Communist Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) and Greek government with U.S. support ends in communist defeat.
- 1946** Royalist party wins elections. King George II returns to Greece following national referendum favoring constitutional monarchy.
- 1947** Dodecanese Islands ceded to Greece by Italians. King Paul succeeds his brother George. Truman Doctrine grants massive aid to Greece.
- 1950–1974** A second wave of about 1 million people leave Greece to find work in the United States, Canada, Germany, South Africa, and Australia.
- 1952** Women given right to vote. New constitution declares Greece parliamentary monarchy, bans Communist Party, and imposes restrictions on human rights. Greece joins NATO.
- 1955–1961** Constantine Karamanlis appointed prime minister after death of Prime Minister Papagos (1955). Radical Union Party under Karamanlis wins elections (1956, 1958, 1961).
- 1955–1965** After pogrom directed against Istanbul's Greek minority (1955), tens of thousands of ethnic Greeks from Istanbul immigrate to Greece.
- 1963** George Seferis wins Nobel Prize for Literature. Right-wing extremists assassinate Parliament deputy Grigoris Lambrakis. Karamanlis resigns after confrontation with King Paul. George Papandreou's Centre Union Party wins elections.
- 1964** Constantine II succeeds his father King Paul. Centre Union Party under Papandreou wins elections.
- 1965** King Constantine II clashes with Prime Minister George Papandreou over monarchy's intrusion in military and political affairs.
- 1967–1974** Dictatorship. Junta of colonels seizes power in military coup (April 21, 1967) and suspends elections indefinitely. Constantine flees country after abortive countercoup (December 1967). Colonel George Papadopoulos names himself prime minister. Hundreds of political activists arrested. Strict censorship imposed.
- 1973** Dictatorship sends tanks into Athens Polytechnio (November 17) to disband student-led demonstrations. Papadopoulos overthrown in bloodless coup by Brigadier-General Demetrios Ioannidis.

- 1974** Dictatorship collapses (July) after its failed attempt to topple Cyprus's President Makarios leads to Turkey's occupation of 37 percent of Cyprus. Constantine Karamanlis returns from exile to serve as prime minister in transition government. His center-right New Democracy Party wins landslide in November elections.

#### **HELLENIC PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC (1974–PRESENT)**

- 1974** Greece becomes republic following successful referendum (December) to abolish monarchy.
- 1975** New constitution declares Greece a parliamentary republic with some executive powers vested in the president.
- 1980** Odysseus Elytis wins Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1981** Greece joins European Economic Community. Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) led by Andreas Papandreu wins October elections.
- 1982–1983** Revision of Greece's family law section of the civil code liberalizes definition of family members' roles and relations.
- 1985** PASOK under Andreas Papandreu wins June elections.
- 1989–1990** Two deadlocked elections fail to produce government (1989). New Democracy forms government under Constantine Mitsotakis after securing majority (1990).
- 1991** Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declares independence. Greece objects to name and flag of republic on grounds that they imply territorial claims on Greek Macedonia.
- 1993** PASOK under Andreas Papandreu wins October elections.
- 1995** Greece normalizes relations with Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- 1996** Former Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu dies; Costas Simitis elected leader of PASOK and prime minister. Tensions flare between Greece and Turkey over disputed Aegean islet of Imia. PASOK wins September elections under Simitis.
- 1999** Greece and Turkey initiate "earthquake diplomacy" and achieve breakthrough in bilateral relations after earthquakes hit both countries (summer) and generate outpouring of mutual assistance. Greece supports Helsinki accords, acknowledging Turkey's eligibility for EU membership.

- 2000** PASOK wins April elections under Simitis. Church leaders organize mass demonstrations and petition against government decision to eliminate religious data from national identity cards. Government rejects petition.
- 2002** Greece joins Eurozone. Euro replaces drachma.
- 2002–2003** Suspected members of November 17 terror group responsible for bombings and twenty-two killings arrested (July 2002), tried, and convicted (December 2003).
- 2004** New Democracy under Kostas Karamanlis wins March elections over PASOK under Giorgos Papandreou, successor to Simitis. Karamanlis becomes prime minister. Athens hosts Olympic Games (August 13–29).
- 2006–2008** Regular mass demonstrations protesting government-proposed reforms of education and pension system.
- 2007** Summer wildfires ravage country, culminating in inferno in Euboea and Peloponnese (August–September) and leaving eighty-four people dead and 670,000 acres destroyed. Despite criticism of handling of fires, Prime Minister Karamanlis's New Democracy Party wins September 16 elections.
- 2008** Karamanlis becomes first prime minister to pay official visit to Turkey. Greece vetoes Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's bid to join NATO because of unresolved issues over republic's name and territorial aspirations. Police shooting death of 15-year-old boy in Athens (December 6, 2008) sparks country-wide demonstrations and riots.



## The Land, People, and History

### LAND AND WATER

RUINS DOT GREECE'S landscape. Whether revered relics of older eras or scorched remains from last summer's firestorms, they lie scattered everywhere: in densely populated cities, open fields, and the remotest places. Wherever one treads, the past seems eerily present. Lord Byron called the Greek earth "haunted, holy ground."<sup>1</sup> To the outside world, the cool, silent stones of the classical era (480 to 336 B.C.) represent a timeless Greece next to which later eras seem timeworn. Excavation frequently meant the destruction of newer histories to reach those older layers. Today's archaeologists are changing their approach, however, in order to create a more complete record of Greece's rich history from the Stone Age to the present. The Hellenic Ministry of Culture lists about five hundred archaeological sites it actively oversees.<sup>2</sup> There are twenty-five-thousand-year-old remains from inhabitation at Franchthi Cave; traces of a Neolithic lakeside settlement from 5000 B.C. in Dispilio; a volcano-buried Bronze Age town at Akrotiri; Minoan centers at Knossos and Phaistos; late Bronze Age Mycenaean citadels at Mycenae, Tiryns, Thebes, and Pylos; Bronze and Iron Age mounds in central Macedonia; ancient temples, theaters, wells, homes, shops, workshops, schools, shrines, altars, and baths everywhere; Venetian fortresses all around Greece's coastline; the best-preserved medieval European town in the Old Town of Rhodes; Ottoman bridges, mosques, and bazaars in Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace;



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