

THE JEWISH POPULATION OF GREECE: NUTRITION HABITS AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract: Based on my doctoral thesis, this article explores the culinary heritage of the Jews of Greece from the historical perspective, religious temperament, and cultural background. The study of traditional Jewish cuisine in Greece explores how these gastronomic practices have been integrated into everyday Greek culinary life while preserving the identity of the religious background of their cultural heritage.

The methodology used is qualitative research based on data from archives, literature reviews, and interviews with members of the Jewish community of Chalkida and Athens.

Jewish cuisine in Greece is researched through the study of historical documents, cookbooks, and personal narratives, to highlight the broader changes in the community's diet over time and the religious significance of everyday food. In addition, interviews with individuals from the Jewish community of Chalkida helped to understand religious and cultural practices, such as adherence to dietary restrictions and celebration of holidays, and how pre-existing Greek cuisine influenced Jewish cuisine.

Early findings indicate that Greek-Jewish cuisine is a mixed canvas, resulting from the use of a wide range of ingredients, flavors, and cooking techniques which contribute to its unique and varied taste. The study also took into account the importance of food in Jewish religious and cultural traditions, such as the observance of kashrut (dietary laws) or holiday rituals.

Finally, the study fills an important gap in Jewish gastronomy, as it focuses exclusively on Jews living in Greece, thus offering a broader perspective on the coupling of Jewish and Greek identity concerning their gastronomic heritage, taking into account its historical and cultural parameters. The results provide a perspective through which to understand aspects of the survival and transformation of Jewish food culture in an immigrant context while filling gaps in the broader comprehension of how food contributes to cultural heritage

Keywords: Jewish cuisine, Greece, culinary tradition, multiculturalism, cultural heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to give a short presentation of the culinary history of Greek- Jewish communities, emphasizing both their historical contribution and the blending of cultures that has influenced the country's present cuisine.

The historical context of Jewish immigration to Greece, starting with the influx of Sephardic Jews in the late 15th century and the subsequent arrival of Ashkenazi Jews, provides information about the culinary contributions of the Jewish tribes. This migration created a unique blend of flavors and cooking techniques.

It is also argued that the diversity of foods found in Greek-Jewish cuisine symbolizes the cultural exchange and coexistence between Greeks and Jews. This underscores the importance of preserving these customs and promoting a deeper appreciation of the Greek culinary heritage because of its influence on existing Greek cuisine.

It is also worth mentioned that the Jewish presence in Greece has historically been an integral part of the larger culinary narrative, contributing significantly to the implantation of new dishes that are emblematic of this unique heritage. This culinary fusion not only reflects the efforts of this religious group to maintain its traditional ties but also serves as a tribute to the Greek Jewish community, demonstrating its ability to preserve its culinary traditions while protecting its uniqueness.

In conclusion, cultural preservation and community identity through nutrition and Jewish culinary practices in Greece form a dynamic and complex dimension of the local gastronomic landscape.

This heritage can be the basis for further documentation and in-depth research of the Greek-Jewish gastronomic tradition, its preservation and influence of the modern Greek cuisine

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the Jewish culinary heritage in Greece, as a part of both Greek and Jewish culture is an integral topic, further investigation is required into history, society and religious traditions

While research has been done on the Jewish diaspora more broadly in terms of food, there is less attention was given to Jews and their food tradition in Greece , even if Greece's history and location allows for a great spectrum of cultural influences from the aforementioned immigrants.

This paper is an attempt to fill in the research gap that exists, and hence this topic indeed holds significant value for understanding Jewish cooking in Greece as it relates with the cultural identity and uniting of the community.

Hence, based on my research, the most interesting aspect of Greek Jewish heritage is in its gastronomy form. Future research should focus on the oral history documentation, culinary studies and an investigation into what social and cultural elements have impacted these practices over centuries.

Based on the outcomes of my research, I discovered that Jewish culture has a storied past presence in Greece, and many of our favorite flavors or dishes originate from this diasporic influence.

Well, this food connection between Jewish and Greek tradition is not only historic but also symbolic of the rich culture within which both communities have existed over time.

Jews have lived in the Yavud and Roman communities for centuries before establishing communities as prominent inhabitants, such as in Athens ("Athens") or Syracuse. These early Jewish communities were influenced by the broader Greek culture, yet they remained in their own right a sub-sect of Jews when it came to cuisine.

Many Sephardic Jews who fled from Spain returned to the Ottoman Empire with some settling in Greece, following after the expulsion of 1492, taking their Mediterranean-based culinary traditions with them. The flavors and food culture of the Sephardic tradition — with its comely brews, united spices and striking results like chorba shorva (tomato soup) -has survived decades of harassment to leave an inerasable impression on Greek cuisine.

But Greece had Jewish communities that dated back prior to the arrival of Sephardic Jews.

Ashkenazi Jew, who are the descendants of their European ancestors have also immigrated to Greece.

So Jews of both traditions coexist in Greece, and remaining here constitute a palpable testament to the long history — as well as variety — presence among Jewish communities across this land.

Drawing on everything from Sephardic specialties to humble Ashkenazi dishes, Greek Jewish cooking illustrates the melding of all these culinary traditions better than most. These culinary traditions can be kept alive to honor the foods onto which Greek Jews have imprinted their ancestral memories, but they also offer a glimpse into how patterns of food and eating amongst this small population are indicative of larger changes happening within traditional Greek cuisine.

Having said that, are the Jewish eating habits in Greece just a distinctive combination of hand-me-downs and repetitions from an assorted treasure trove of cultural exchanges over time? Over the course of generations, Greek Jews have altered their eating habits to adhere with kosher laws while keeping native items and flavors as part of their nutrition.

And so, the melting pot of Jewish dietary laws meets Greek culinary flair to produce a traditional and contemporary flavor palate. With their traditional dishes such as spanakopita, moussaka made with kosher ingredients and modern variations

from the Mediterranean flavorings used in Greek Jewish cuisine are an example of reflexiveness and ingenuity to adapt within culture.

In the end, another question arises —Is Jewish Greek food a restrictive tradition or should it be accepted as part of the Greek cuisine?

For centuries Jews were essential workers in the Greek dining landscape, always bringing their unique taste and individuality to an already colorful canvas of Greek cuisine. This kind of culinary plurality not only reveals the historical presence of Jews and Greeks in the same regions, but also their resilience even the close co-existence. It is clear indication that Jewish cuisine in Greece since its inception has been evolving and changed dramatically over the years. However, due to waves of adversities and diasporas that plagued Greek-Jews for centuries their culinary tradition were certainly changed with each new event.

The preservation of these culinary traditions has been a key factor in the transmission when Jewish Greek descendants tell their grandsons what was once prepared at home

In conclusion the Jewish culinary journey in Greece, is a significant testimony of its long and complex ways across history from several geographical areas. A hybrid cuisine of the Jewish and Greek gastronomy genres that is an open book on all historical processes of reciprocity in Jews living above Greece. From Sephardic specialties to humble Ashkenazi offerings, Greek Jewish cuisine has more in common with the food of their tribes than we think—and many delicious goods and inspirations. By the exploration and archive of these traditions, we create not only a picture of Greek Jewry's long history but also paint a fresco by which to fit them into the outline of indigenous flavors

Next, I will present a brief overview of the Hebrew dietary Laws observe followed by an examination on how Greek culture has become essential to Jewish culinary history and tradition.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE JEWISH DIETARY LAWS (Kashrut)

The rules concerning the preservation of religious tradition, specifically kashrut, have an impact on the culinary practices of Jews in Greece. : In this regard, certain foods, if prepared in a certain way and eaten at certain times, are considered acceptable.

An example is the basic kashrut practice of separating animal proteins from dairy products, which many Jewish families in Greece retain.

In this regard, adherence to these dietary practices has led to the development of some well-known Orthodox dishes associated with the Jewish religious calendar, such as those consisting of fish and vegetables on special festive occasions

Further on, will also be elaborated the importance of Jewish festive foods, particularly those associated with Passover and Hanukkah, in enhancing people's self-consciousness and the daily activities of communities through food habits.

THE INFLUENCE OF GREEK CUISINE ON JEWISH EATING HABITS

The influence of Greek cooking techniques on Jewish dietary rules is evident in the use of ingredients and preparation. The fresh fruits, vegetables and olive oil that characterize Greek cuisine appeared to be basic imperatives of Jewish dietary habits in Greece.

The centuries of settlement and living with the local population have contributed to the Jewish community also the incorporation of Greek ingredients and cooking techniques into their cuisine. As a result, elements usually associated with Greek cuisine, such as fresh fruits and vegetables or olive oil, have become key components of the Jewish diet in Greece. For example, a delicious side dish is a Greek salad with feta cheese and also tzatziki sauce -being popular in the Jewish community in Greece and serves as evidence that Jewish culinary traditions occasionally overlapped with those of their neighbors.

In addition, Jewish cooking habits incorporate Greek cooking methods such as grilling and frying. By adopting these ingredients and techniques, Greek Jews developed a unique blend of flavors and recipes influenced by the coexistence of the two cultural groups. The ancient history and cultural bonds between their people have rooted this gastronomic fusion and influenced the gastronomy of the Greek Jews, slowly but steadily until the present day.

THE IMPACT OF GREEK CULINARY TRADITION ON JEWISH FOOD CHOICES

In every way, Greek Food influences what Jews eat after their installation in the same land. There is plenty of detail to the implementation of kosher dietary laws in Greece and it affects many aspects of daily life as members in this community. This includes considerations of separating milk and meat products, cooking in a kitchen that is kosher-certified by the religious standards (the ones who certify for Kashrut) ensuring the functioning with no constraints or following specific rules set up to keep the status of food eatable under religious laws. To keep kashrut you are required to eat at specific locations that cook Kosher, when eating out or else cannot dine socially. This commitment to the law of kashrut indeed creates a powerful system for our oneness and strong social fabric within Jewish families. These laws serve not only the defining characteristics of being Jewish but a cultural pride among Jews which transcends generations, and further solidifies an anchor to history while acquiescing against external pressure or changing societal norms. Kashrut is much more than a list of what not to eat; it is celebrated as an expression of faith, camaraderie and devotion that enables members of the community to bond through adhering together in spirit. Blending of Greek food traditions and Jewish dietary requirements not only enhances the gastronomic discoveries but also shows how adaptable our culinary roots are to different cultural norms. Combining components of tradition and religious observance, the culinary merging or Greek flavors method is a testament to how food refusal can be amended while still maintaining valuable Jewish techniques. This incorporation of Greek into Jewish cuisine serves not only as a proof to the adaptability and inclusiveness of foodways but also how culture can blend different traditions, creating something even richer in flavor that foster cultural connections and belonging around the world.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION

The examination of the material gathered, in religious and social dimensions as framed in terms of food practices sheds light on multiple distinctions between Jewish dietetics: what function these diets serve and how Jews conceptualize cuisine relative to broader socio-cultural orders. Seeing examples of creativity in using local ingredients elsewhere — and the rise in its own food culture, especially in recent years it's being a challenging time for Jews to retain their cultural and religious identity, encouraging also them to feature Greece as an "exchange" spot.

They identify themselves through these traditions — their history, migration from one part of the land to another over centuries, and occasionally even political developments that allowed the community to endure while still retaining their identity.

Reference to Greek Jewish cuisine acts as a demonstration of the integration in foreign land between two faiths (with resulting evidence that the culinary transmutation... from local raw materials into Kosher food...) and supports an opinion that diet preferences indeed stand at cultural-crosspoint for new-comers integration per se.

Finally, which is utmost important further research should be contacted, since the gap in knowledge need to be covered. The acquisition for more knowledge about the Jewish Food habits in Greece because it helps us relatable that food can be synonymous with cultural consciousnesses and how this culinary past acting as an identity formation attaches together the preserved memory from the step away far motherland.

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Design: Historical and Sociocultural Analysis: In this article, history and sociology/anthropology are joined to religious studies in order to come up with a better understanding of the Jewish community within Greece.

Primary data collection was mainly ethnographic fieldwork in areas of large Jewish populations like Thessaloniki, Athens, and Chalkis. This approach led to in-depth insights into the cultural significance of Jewish daily life and nutrition practices. Through field visits and participant observation, their cooking methods, ingredients, and culinary rituals were learned. I attended weddings and funerals, several religious events, and family gatherings as well as communal feasts, meanwhile engaging with local people to observe their ways of life.

In addition to participant observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants such as community leaders (e.g., the leader of Jewish community of Chalkis), home cooks, and local historians. Participants were purposefully sampled as individuals who are knowledgeable about Jewish food practices and their historical context.

A review of historical texts, cookbooks, and current literature on Jewish cuisine was conducted to support the qualitative subjects. Adding to that, this review came to give us the background in order for all people who don't know anything or only a little about the journey of Jews and the Mediterranean cuisine acquisition.

During my research, I looked at historical documents, community records and personal tales to track the genesis and evolution of certain dishes and ways or processes strongly connected with the Mediterranean kitchen's influence and acquisition of newly used local raw materials

Finally, in respect of Greece, this involved a discussion about how globalization and migration have impacted Jewish food practices. Food was approached as a pliant arena of ethnic self-reevaluation, and Jewish cuisine emerged not intractable but, on the contrary, endowed with malleability; it had adapted to outside influences while retaining distinct features. It looked at the tension of tradition versus evolution and also food as a means by which to bond people together in community, their roots or origins.

During the research, ethical issues were very important to me. All participants gave informed consent concerning the purpose of the study and confidentiality, as well as being allowed to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used, and all data was safely stored in order to secure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

This broad range of methodologies provides for an in-depth exploration and interpretation of how these culinary traditions evolved within the Jewish community over time, shedding further light on their relationship to food, cultural assimilation, as well as identity. The findings of the study extend current arguments about culinary heritage to encompass a defense against cultural uniformity as well as community identity.

KEY FINDING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING JEWISH CULINARY LEGACY

In the case of Jewish food patterns, this influence is more complex and cannot be reduced to eating Greek. Greek food has a tremendous impact on the way Jews consume food. As many of you know, Kashrut laws are very strictly followed by Jewish people even in their day-to-day lives. Strict adherence to halacha allows them, among other things: to perform a process that meets the highest standards of Kashrut in the food industry – from separating dairy products and meat dishes, using only kosher-certified ingredients from reputable producers, up until complying with specific cooking and cleaning rules recognized by Jewish religious laws, which are especially strict while maintaining their kitchen. It demands its adherence in the home and when they dine out, whether alone or with others. In this case, a person should constantly pay attention to observing kashrut in all food accepted and consumed. Through this standard of adherence to kosher, Jews find mutual understanding and a bond in following similar beliefs. Also, adherence to these laws helps identify what it means to be Jewish and serves as a legacy for generations of cultural pride that bond them with their people over the centuries while creating continuity in an otherwise traumatic experience with persecution through exile. Instead of prohibitions that have to be followed, kashrut is viewed as a way to connect all who observe these laws – through faith practice, community, and cultural continuity. Its incorporation of Greek elements into Jewish cuisine is an excellent example of how certain characteristics in food culture can be adapted over time. A fusion of flavors and cooking techniques that expose the diversity and complexity inherent to Jewish heritage, this culinary tradition continually highlights how cultures can endure and coexist within a community, sharing influences but each taking ownership or identity as their own.

5. CONCLUSION

Jewish culinary activity in Greece reflects society's history, culture, and religion altogether. It is the connection of the Jewish foods with the local ones and the ways of preparing them that tells, so to say, the breadth of the Jewish story. A good influence in what one ought to eat and how food is prepared is also that which comes from the Jewish laws pertaining to food. This incorporation led to the making of foods such as "borekas" and "kugel" which had the taste and techniques of the locals. The agitation that reduced the populations of Jews through events such as the Holocaust also contributed to the disintegration of these ancient practices, which have since then painted the need for these modern Jewish communities to carry out successful activities such as these for their association and identity. The food tradition also helps address broader themes such as cultural hybridization and integration with all its wrinkles and subtleties. By understanding and interpreting these experiences through food history and religious memories, obstacles of interaction between modern Greek society and its history and culture are broken down.

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