

THE GASTRONOMY OF AMORGOS

From one end of the Greek territory to the other, attempts are made to harness local products and local traditional recipes, so as to not only highlight the unique local recipes, but also that the visitors of each specific area "to fall in love" with them! Because only the appreciation and conscious selection of local recipes and products by visitors will guarantee that the traditional cuisine of each "particular homeland" will continue to live and through it the local primary production - a shield against "monoculture" of tourism- will prosper too.

In this context, many organizations have launched actions to strengthen local gastronomy and the production of local products through their connection with tourism. A typical example constitutes the Greek Breakfast, an initiative taken by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels which utilizes and connects the cultural-gastronomic wealth of the country with the Greek hotel business and whose aim is to enrich the breakfast offered in hotels with pure and unique Greek products as well as with traditional local dishes from every region of Greece. The Greek Breakfast of Amorgos was presented a year ago at the "Aegialis Hotel & Spa", initiated by Irene Giannakopoulos, who has long held a great interest in the promotion and exploitation of Amorgian gastronomy. A worthwhile effort is also the Aegean Cuisine initiative, which is a network of member-businesses in the southern Aegean islands whose aim is to offer visitors the Aegean experience. It was founded to utilize and exploit the wealth of Aegean oenogastronomy, highlighting local products and wines, and to promote thematic tourism in these islands.

And if all of the aforementioned are valid for every corner of Greece, imagine how much more applies to our islands, the Aegean islands, the Cyclades, where we are, of course, in Amorgos, which hosts us. Cycladic cuisine is almost identical with the famous Mediterranean Diet, which has been so glorified in recent years due to its miraculous effects on human health and longevity. Studies of studies have been carried out to prove what the Cycladians, the Amorgians and, of course, all the islanders knew for centuries and applied them as if they were recorded in their collective memory. They used only pure, local olive oil and, most of the time, raw foods. They ate minimum meat -

and even less red meat - while consuming plenty of bread and even black. Pulses and vegetables were the main ingredient of their daily diet, while fish were not consumed in large quantities, as we might expect from people literally living by the sea. Finally, the few fruit and the homemade wine were not missing from the Cycladic table, around which the anxieties and rush of the present era did not prevail, but a climate of joy and euphoria, primarily for the goods they had before them, and of course many times because they were eating with their beloved friends and their family members.

Amorgian cuisine was shaped by some common factors in all Cycladic islands, if not in the whole Aegean Sea. Austerity -not to say poverty- small and fruitless land, limited and difficult communication even with the neighboring islands, trade almost non-existent, and against them the fundamental need for self-sufficiency. The Amorgian housewife, a real heroine, had to use what the land, the sea, and even the air of her island offered to her, to enrich them with agricultural and livestock products that the family itself produced and to prepare simple but delicious and healthy food for her, usually, large family.

Of course the geomorphology of the place, the microclimate, the local products and the occupations of the inhabitants are the parameters that put the final touch on the gastronomical "tableau" of Amorgos. The protagonist in this colorful and aromatic "tableau" of Amorgian flavors is, of course, the famous "patatato", goat meat -or nanny goat meat- in the pot with potatoes. It is served in the restaurants and taverns of the island, but where it is actually consumed in huge quantities is at the feast of Agia Paraskevi in Kato Meria of Amorgos. At the same festival, as in all the rest which are organized on the island, is served also the "xydato", a kind of tripe soup with goat's intestines, which is also offered the "antigamos", one day after the amorgian wedding (gamos). An emblematic local recipe is also the "psito amorgiano tis Lampris", the roasted amorgian goat eaten at Easter, in other words goat stuffed with rice and goat liver, dill, fennel, fresh onions and rosemary, then baked in the oven (or even better in the wood oven). The "gialitikos pastroumas", a kind of pastrami, is a recipe that uses the meat of goat, which is cut into large pieces, salted, dried in the sun, washed with sea water and finally

dried again in the sun, before being stored in sachets. Pork is also used in many recipes, which ensures the winter self-sufficiency of the household in meat. For this reason, nothing from the pig is wasted, since even its intestines are turned into delicious "amathies", stuffed with rice, liver or spleen of the animal, plenty of fennel and mint and, of course, spices. An extraordinary flavor is also the Amorgian "kavourmas", with the pork cut into small pieces -in size of turkish delight- which are fried in their fat until they are browned and then stored in bowls, and covered with their fat. "Kavourmas" is eaten plain, with eggs or used to give spiciness to sauces and other hotpot meals.

A favorite fish for the Amorgians are "menoules", which are related to picarels, although they are almost double in size. They are kept either "pastes" (salted) or "liokaftes" (dried in the sun). In the first case, they are placed in layers with salt between them, where some water is added, while in the second case, dip them in brine for one hour and then spread them in the sun, threaded onto a string and sprinkled with vinegar to repel the insects. The sun dried "menoules" are eaten fried with batter. Fried fish are the also the protagonists in the recipe "savori", a thick sauce made with olive oil, flour, vinegar and rosemary, with which we baste the fish to make it more delicious and better preserved, which was very important for pre-refrigerated seasons! The other goodies of the sea, such as octopus and cuttlefish, are married with rice, pasta and vegetables or herbs, giving delicious and healthy dishes, such as octopus with tomatoes, pasta or onion stew and cuttlefish with chard or rice and their ink.

amorgian home is missing the "pitaridia", the local noodles, cooked in various ways, including with milk, but also the "pavli", the rusks made with "sitarokrithi", a mixture of wheat and barley flour. A very interesting local recipe is the "panada", in which pieces of rusks are boiled in a mixture of water, vinegar, oil and toasted onion! Equally original is the recipe for the so-called New Year's Eve recipe, the "kofto", made from broken wheat and mizithra (a local cheese) and served both in the morning and New Year's Eve, in order that the new year's crop will go well .

Don't leave Amorgos without trying cheese pie and greens pie with handmade leaves, with a little vinegar or wine, as well as "giaprakia me lachanides", a kind of dolma, stuffed with "chondros" (a kind of bulgur wheat) and rice, together with chopped onions, tomatoes, fennel and mint. A great protagonist of local cuisine is the famous "Amorgian fava or magirema", which comes from the endemic legume "katsouni" (*Pisum sativum*) which consumed either in the well known shape of the velvety ointment or as crisp "favatokeftes", with fennel and onion being added to the boiled pulp.

The walk in the world of amorgian confectionery will lead us to the paths of "rakomelo" and "psimeni raki" (baked raki), which have become synonymous with the island. Rakomelo is consumed hot and it is raki with honey and a little cloves, while baked raki is a kind of local homemade liqueur made from raki, honey and spices or aromatic herbs, in various variations. It is offered as an appetizer or as a digestive, but usually as a treat at celebrations along with "pasteli and xerotangana", the two most characteristic candies of the island, for both of which as well as for baked raki, every summer festivals are organized. It is not by chance that in these three emblematic amorgian products the protagonist is the local thyme honey, which is produced by bees, considered to belong to a local breed. Traditional amorgian "pasteli" (sesame and honey bar) contains a little cumin, while its distinctive feature is the special flavor given to it by the lemon leaf, on which each rhomboid piece of the pastry is placed. The "xerotigania" (fried pastry strips) are synonymous with the Christmas period in Amorgos, but they are also offered at weddings and christenings, along with "pasteli".

The guided tour to the Amorgos tastes obviously doesn't end here. There are a lot more that you have to discover yourself, walking in the mountains of the island, smelling the oregano and other local herbs, or strolling in the alleys of the amorgian villages and trying to guess, from the unique smells, whatever amorgian housewife is preparing for her beloved family!