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Introduction to Greek Genealogy

Genealogy Basics

- Get organized using pedigree charts and family group sheets. Sample copies are provided with this handout
- Begin with a ring binder with tabs and sheet protectors for old photos and documents
- Later download an inexpensive genealogy software program like LegacyFamilyTree.com or RootsMagic.com (both under \$35.)

Greek History and Culture

- During 400 years of Ottoman Turkish rule, Greeks maintained their language, culture and religion. The Dodecanese Islands remained under Turkish rule until 1912, and then Italian rule until 1947 when the islands were finally ceded to Greece.
- The Tarpon Springs Library has several books about the history of Tarpon Springs and the experiences of Greek sponge divers and their families who settled here.

Genealogy Resources

- Search U.S. records for clues such as federal census records and immigration records. Find these on [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) (available free at the Tarpon Library) or [familysearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)
- Family Search has a research wiki at [familysearch.org/wiki/en/Greece_Genealogy](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Greece_Genealogy).
- [GreekAncestry.net](https://www.greekancestry.net) is the premier website for Greek genealogy (Records for the Dodecanese Islands are coming soon)
- [MyHeritage.com](https://www.myheritage.com) has Electoral Rolls and Male Registers from 1856-1950 plus other records
- [Hellenicgenealogygeek.com](https://www.hellenicgenealogygeek.com) contains categorized links for Greek family history
- The State Archives of Greece at arxeiomnimon.gak.gr/ will require a Greek speaker
- The National Herald has a free digital archive at digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Ekirikas/#panel=home

DNA Technology - Four Types of DNA used for Genealogy – Three Different Tests:

Most every cell has 23 pairs of chromosomes. Half of each pair comes from dad, and half from mom. The 23rd pair are the sex chromosomes. Males receive Y from dad and X from mom; females receive X from both dad and mom.

- Autosomal (atDNA) covers chromosome pairs 1-22. Purchase from: Ancestry, Family Tree DNA, 23 and Me, My Heritage, or Living DNA (all under \$99.)
- X DNA matches are provided with atDNA results by Family Tree DNA and 23 and Me
- Y DNA: Only males can test. In many cultures, surnames follow Y DNA inheritance. Test at FamilyTreeDNA.com starting at \$119.
- Mitochondrial (mtDNA): Outside the cell nucleus. mtDNA mutates so slowly it is often not useful for genealogy. A shared ancestor could be hundreds of years in the past, long before a paper trail. Purchase at FamilyTreeDNA.com for \$169.

Additional Study

Greek Genealogy Conference – January 29-31, 2021. The entire conference was video recorded and is available on YouTube.

- Day 1: [youtube.com/watch?v=57wUhoukwEE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57wUhoukwEE)
- Day 2: [youtube.com/watch?v=neMnb8h6mbY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neMnb8h6mbY)
- Day 3: [youtube.com/watch?v=q4LyFRxAtvc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4LyFRxAtvc)

Follow Some Blogs:

- Hellenicgenealogygeek.blogspot.com
- Spartanroots.wordpress.com

Take Advantage of the Greek Genealogy Community on Facebook:

- [“Greek Ancestry”](#)
- [“Greek Ancestry & History”](#)
- [“Hellenic Genealogy Geek”](#)
- [“Hellenic Genealogy Resources”](#)

And, don't hesitate to contact Maria, Denise or Irene at the Tarpon Library with questions!

Greek Naming Traditions

SURNAMES (LAST NAMES)

Surnames developed from the following major sources:

1. **Patronymic** – Based on a parent’s given name, with an added suffix meaning “descendant of” or “little.” Also the possessive suffix (-ou) was often used, such as Grigoriou from Grigorios.
 - Importantly, the suffixes varied depending on the geographic location. For example, in the Peloponnese area, “John (Ioannis), the Son of Nicholas” would be “Ioannis Nikolopoulos.”
 - Here are some common suffixes. (This list is not exhaustive or absolute.)

<u>Patronymic Suffix</u>	<u>Geographic Location</u>
-opoulos	Peloponnese
-akis	Crete
-akos, -ias, -eas	Mani region of South Peloponnesus
-atos	Cephalonia
-elis	Lesvos
-ikis, -ikas, -akas	Thessalia/Thessaly
-oudis	Northern Greece
-idis	Asia Minor

2. **Occupational** – Often a person’s surname was based on his occupation, which was then carried through the generations.

- Commonly, you may see a name beginning with *Papa-* (which means priest). Greek Orthodox priests married and had families, so their children’s surnames often begin with *Papa-*. For example, the Papafaklis family had an ancestor that was a priest.
- In the examples below, note that the suffixes discussed above can be added.

<u>Surname</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Raptis	tailor
Papoutsis	shoemaker
Kaffetzis	coffee house owner
Kapetanidis (kapetan + idis)	son of ship captain (ship captain + son of)
Anagnostopoulos	son of the acolyte (assisitant priest)

3. **Geographical** – Based on one’s place of origin.

- Examples: Kriticos (from Crete) ; Thessalonikios (from Thessalonika).
- Again, these names can have the suffixes added. From a name such as Kypros (from Cyprus), can be formed several names: Kypraios, Kypraiou, Kypriadis, Kypriotis, Kypriotakis, etc.

4. Foreign Terms – Words from other languages could have been modified into Greek surnames. This may be a reference to the influence of surrounding cultures on the family or the village at the time.

- Examples: Karas (Turkish; black) ; Paras (Turkish: money) ; Katsakis (Turkish: fugitive or escapee) ; Delapatridis (Italian: of the homeland)

5. Descriptive Nicknames – Descriptive names based on a unique quality of that person, either a physical characteristic or personality trait. Again, at first these names only applied to specific individuals, but after a few generations, these names became hereditary. Examples:

<u>Surname</u>	<u>Description</u>
Mouros (black)	black hair, dark complexion, wears dark clothing
Kontos	short
Kokkinis	red
Spanos	beardless
Spanidis / Spanopoulos	son of the beardless one
Karapaulakis	son of dark-haired Paul
Leventis	brave, honorable
Katsoufis	never cheerful
Markogiannis	clever John

As you can see, the descriptive nature of Greek surnames can shed some light on your ancestors – perhaps their occupation, where they were from, who they were related to, or their characteristics.

Something that can cause some confusion when tracing your ancestors is that most surnames had different endings when the person is male or female. For example, a man has the surname Papaioannis. His wife or daughter would be Papaioannou.

Some of the most common male and female endings include:

<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
-os	-ou
-as	-a
-es	-e
-is	-i, -ou

MIDDLE NAMES

Greeks traditionally have middle names that are patronymic, or based on their father's name.

- In the most traditional custom, the middle name is formed from the father's given name with the possessive form (the -ou suffix).

- For example: Georgios, son of Nikolaos Kanakis, would have the full name “Georgios Nikolaou Kanakis.” His sister Maria would be “Maria Nikolaou Kanaki.
- This pattern can be helpful in tracing family lines and matching children with their immediate family group, but the suffixes can cause confusion when a researcher is unaware of the system.
- In some families this formula is simplified so that all of children, male and female, have the father’s given name as their middle name.

Either way, this is helpful when individuals have the same first and last names. The middle name will tell you who their father was so that they are placed in the correct nuclear family.

GIVEN NAMES

According to Greek tradition, there is a naming pattern for children in a family, which can be helpful in determining family groups and names of grandparents.

- The first male child was usually named for the father’s father (i.e., his paternal grandfather).
- The second boy was named for the mother’s father (his maternal grandfather).
- The first female child was named for the father’s mother (her paternal grandmother).
- The second girl was named for the mother’s mother (her maternal grandmother).
- Additional children were named for other relatives, friends, or saints.

Other customs include:

- A son is never named for his father unless the father died prior to the child’s birth.
- Likewise a daughter is never named after her mother unless the mother died in childbirth.
- If a child, especially the eldest son, died young, then another son, born later, would usually be given the same name.
- If it looked like a young son would die, he might be named Theoharis, meaning “God’s grace.”

NICKNAMES

Nicknames go hand-in-hand with both Surnames and Given Names. Among Greeks, it seems that everyone also has a casual nickname in addition to their formal names.

How it started: In the local village, a single given name was often all that was ever used, even after surnames were in use. The Greek custom of naming children after their grandparents soon led to many people in the same community with the same names, as the same group of names rolled through the generations. Thus casual nicknames were used to distinguish among people with the same name in the same family, and also as terms of endearment within the family.

These nicknames developed just like the surnames had started which we just talked about – from fathers' names, occupations, or descriptions.

For example, if the Pappas extended family had several individuals named Paulos, one could be called Karapoulos (black-haired Paulos), another might be Paulos Kontos (Paulos the short one), and another might be called Paulos Raptidis (Paulos the tailor's son).

The children of these men might take the original Pappas surname, or might take the nickname such as Karapoulos as a surname and carry it into future generations. In the next few generations, there may be so many individuals in the Karapoulos family with the name Michael (for example) that the whole process starts all over again with a new nickname that becomes a new surname.

CHANGING NAMES

Changing names was not uncommon, especially in the villages, until the mid-19th century when Greece won its independence from Turkey. Surnames became much more firmly fixed after that time for accurate recordkeeping, however nicknames were such a part of Greek social life that they sometimes appear in official records.

Today's family history researchers can hit a brick wall with name changes that occurred in Greece, and then hit more brick walls with name changes that occurred when our Greek ancestors immigrated to the United States:

- Some were so eager to assimilate to the American life that they dropped their Greek names altogether and adopted American names, both given names and surnames.
- Others just shortened or Anglicized their names.
- Sometimes only the spelling changed (Karydis to Caridis)
- Sometimes the name may have been translated, such as Raptis (tailor) to Taylor.