

Cretan Family Names

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Greek family names are "patronyms", that is they derive from the father's name with the addition of a diminutive signifying "*little one*" or "*son of*". But in Greek names, the ending varies based on what part of Greece your ancestors came from. For example, the ending -poulos as in Antonopoulos indicates Peloponnesian origin, meaning the son of Antonis. The same meaning would be Antonides in Macedonia, Antonakos in Mani, Antonatos in Kefalonia, Antonides in Pontos, Antonakis in Crete, etc.

The "**-akis**" in the majority of the Cretan names has an interesting historical origin. According to Professor Hatzidakis, uncle of the celebrated composer Manos Hatzidakis of the "*Never on Sunday*" movie fame, when the Turks occupied Crete, they addressed the Cretan men [*as Muslims, they were forbidden to address women*] using the neuter diminutive "**-aki**" along with a neuter article in front. This was to insult them and belittle them. So the Turks would say "*To Antonaki*". They had a special animosity against the Cretans because of the frequent uprisings against the occupation.

The Cretans however decided to turn the "*insult*" to a badge of honor. They "**masculinized**" the name by adding an "s". Thus, it became "*O Antonakis*" instead of "*To Antonaki*". The spelling varied. Most spell it with an "eta" [*Αντωνακης*], but some insist on using "iota" [*Αντωνακις*]. A proof of professor Hatzidakis theory is the fact that in most mountainous villages of Crete, which were not occupied by the Turks, some of the names do not have the **-akis** ending. For example, in Anogia, [*a village up the slopes of Psiloritis, the highest mountain in Crete, and a hotbed of revolutionaries, even to this day*], one finds names like Skordlis, Kallergis, **Xylouris** [*the famous "lyraris" and folk singer Ξυλουρης, who popularized Cretan music in the 1970s*]. **Tzagournis** is a name from Ano Viano [*even in the 1940s the Germans could not subdue that region of the inaccessible mountain ranges in the South coasts of Crete*], and so on. Nowadays, Cretans are proud that their names have the **-akis** ending that distinguishes them from everyone else!

Of course, when Cretans started immigrating to America early last century, the Anglicized names they were given sometimes reflected more the ignorance of the immigration officials than the geographical area from which the immigrants came. For example, Michelakis became Meshel, which, fortuitously, proved useful for a Cretan who entered Ohio politics and rose to the top of the legislative ladder.