ATHENS

Collision with the Heart

George Esperidis Bezborodko

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Introduction

If you're holding this book, you're likely a seasoned traveler: someone who plans with thoroughness and seeks not only vivid experiences but also new, fascinating knowledge. In that case, my friend, this guidebook is exactly what you need.

My name is George Esperidis Bezborodko. I am an Athenian, a fundamentally educated person, a writer, a traveller, and a professional European. In my guidebook, we will embark on an enthralling journey through my hometown, one of the oldest cities in Europe. Together, we'll witness its origins in deep antiquity, its flourishing in classical times, its decline after the birth of Christ, and its rebirth in the 19th century. Beyond the captivating stories of Athens and its people, you'll find that this guide goes a step further.

Although some might say this topic is beyond my usual interests, I consider it a matter of honor and duty—a personal form of civil protest—to show you why Greece is no country for bad food. Despite the challenges, a vast array of excellent cafés, restaurants, and taverns continues to thrive, preserving the most wonderful gastronomic traditions. In this guide, I have personally selected and listed only the very best establishments, many of which are overlooked by other tourist guides.

My recommendations are more than just a list; they are an essential part of your journey, ensuring you experience the true Greek cuisine connected with our history and culture. You'll also find:

- The very best cafés, restaurants, taverns, and bars in the city, with the most up-to-date information.
- Practical advice on choosing neighborhoods to stay in, ensuring nothing hinders your ability to fully enjoy Athens!

- A three-day walking itinerary, designed to give you a true feel for the city without rushing your museum visits—that deeply personal matter, which I have left for you to plan.
- Tips on purchasing transport tickets and many other details often overlooked in other guides but vital for any traveller!
- I consider it my duty to state that all the information in this guidebook is accurate and intended for entertainment purposes, as well as an introduction to authentic Athens. It is my sincere hope that you, too, will come to regard these places as essential visits and discover why our history is as captivating as our food.

Thank you for choosing this guide. I wish you a delightful holiday in Athens!

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Yours sincerely,

George Esperidis Bezborodko.

A Brief History of Athens – a City of Myths

If we were to believe ancient myths (which, of course, we don't), Athens was founded by King Cecrops I—a creature born of the Earth herself (the goddess Gaia), with the torso of a man and two serpentine tails instead of legs. Cecrops was revered as the founder not only of Athens but of all Attica. According to myth, he ruled in those ancient times when people had not yet learned to make wine, so he performed ritual libations to the gods with water (hence his placement in the heavens as the zodiac sign Aquarius). Myths credit him with building the Athenian Acropolis, where a contest between the goddess Athena and the god Poseidon took place to determine the city's future patron.

Cecrops proposed that each deity offer the city a gift that would benefit its future inhabitants. Poseidon struck the rock with his trident, creating a spring of salty water unfit for drinking or irrigating the soil. Athena planted, in the rock, an olive seed that

King Cecrops I

sprouted into a tree offering shade, timber, and delicious fruit. The victory was awarded to Athena, after whom the city was later named. It was said that an embittered Poseidon "punished" Athens with annual droughts. Of course, this is merely a beautiful legend, but archaeological findings on the Acropolis indicate that the history of the first settlements in the area of modern Athens dates back to around 5,000 years ago, in the 4th millennium BC. By the 15th century BC (3,400 years ago), a large fortress linked to the advanced Mycenaean civilisation, famously associated with the Trojan War myth (in which Mycenaeans clashed with Trojans), stood on the Acropolis.

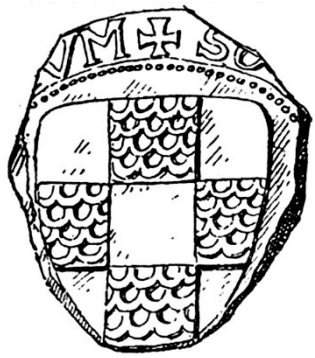
The Mycenaean civilisation was destroyed in the 13th century BC during the "Bronze Age Collapse"—an invasion by the barbarian Dorian tribes that razed most major Mycenaean cities and ushered in the so-called "Dark Ages" of antiquity. This 500-year period saw civilisation in what is now Greece regress to "ground zero," as the Dorians lacked knowledge of writing, metalworking, weaving, tool-making, and even pottery. Ancient Athenians insisted that, unlike the inhabitants of the Peloponnese (mainly the Lacedaemonian Spartans), they escaped "Dorianisation" and remained pure Ionians, though archaeological evidence suggests that Athens was in complete decline throughout the 13th and early 12th centuries BC. By the 10th century BC, Athens had re-emerged as a major trading centre. The impregnable fortress of the Athenian

Acropolis, combined with access to the sea, gave Athens a significant advantage over its chief rivals, Sparta and Thebes.

In those times, Athens was governed by ancient kings, from whom many aristocratic families later traced their lineage. For instance, the philosopher Plato and the renowned reformer Solon claimed descent from Codrus, the last King of Athens, who ruled from 1089 to 1068 BC. The Acropolis served as the residence of the Athenian kings—a fact that I recommend you keep in mind.

In the 9th and 8th centuries BC, Athens transitioned from a monarchical to an aristocratic form of government, in which power was concentrated in the hands of aristocrats—members of the city's most distinguished and influential families. Initially, they established a sort of parliament alongside the Athenian king, limiting his authority. (This parliament convened on the still-preserved Areopagus Hill near the Acropolis.) Later, they replaced the king with a lifelong archon, elected from among their own ranks. This system gradually led Athens into a profound social crisis in which wealth and power became concentrated in the hands of a minority, forming a closed elite class that admitted no new members.

The era of Athenian democracy began after Solon's reforms in the early 6th century BC. These reforms abolished barbaric practices like debt slavery. All citizens of the city-state were divided into four classes based on income. The poorest class, which constituted the majority of Athens' population, gained political rights and the ability to vote on critical issues at the people's assembly, the "Ecclesia," which met on Pnyx Hill near the Areopagus. The powers of the Areopagus were reduced, and the highest governing body became the Council of Four Hundred, comprising representatives from all classes except the poorest. Thus emerged the first democratic system in human history. Though tinged with oligarchy, it was a vast improvement over the preceding aristocracy. However, this democracy was short-lived.



Sael of Duke Otto de la Roche

During the rule of the House de la Roche, maritime piracy was a significant source of income for the Duchy of Athens. The port city of Nafplion in Argolis, owned by the de la Roches, served as the largest base for corsairs of that time. However, even the Byzantine Emperors were not averse to hiring pirates to hinder Franco-Venetian trade in the Mediterranean.

In the mid-6th century BC, under the tyrant Pisistratus (a relative of the Ancient Athenian kings who seized power through a military coup in 560 BC), the first major temple dedicated to Athena, the Hecatompedon or "Temple of a Hundred Feet," was built on the Acropolis, on the foundations of the ancient Mycenaean royal palace from the 14th century BC. During Pisistratus' rule, Athens also saw the construction of its first clay aqueduct, which drew water from underground springs in the Hymettus mountains, surrounding Athens to the east and northeast, and from the Ilissos River, now entirely channelled into an underground sewer and emerging only as a small stream in the park near the ruins of the Temple of Zeus Olympios.

After Pisistratus' death, his power was divided between his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus, who were soon overthrown by two popular uprisings. As a result, in 508 BC, under the leadership of the aristocrat Cleisthenes, Athens became a true democracy.

In 480 and 479 BC, during the Greco-Persian Wars, Athens was twice sacked and burned by the Persians. The Temple of Athena Hecatompedon was among the destroyed structures. Subsequently, construction of the current Parthenon took place on the Acropolis over approximately 30 years. This period marks the beginning of the so-called "Golden Age of Pericles," during which Athens was home to the sculptor Phidias, the historian Herodotus, the poets Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the satirist Aristophanes, and the philosopher Anaxagoras. At this time, Athens was the leading power of the Hellenistic world, establishing dominance at sea and heading the largest military alliance in Ancient Greece. This era ended with Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War against Sparta in 404 BC. In 338 BC, following a crushing defeat at the Battle of Chaeronea against the forces of King Philip II of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great), Athens was relegated to a secondary role in military and political terms, though it retained its wealth and status as a cultural centre of Ancient Greece.

In 88–85 BC, much of Athens was destroyed by the Roman general Sulla, who captured the city, marking the start of the Roman era in Athenian history. Unlike other Ancient Greek cities that Rome conquered, Athens was granted the status of a free city because its schools (Plato's Academy, Socrates' Academy, and others) were widely respected, and Romans studied there as well. Despite the bloody conquest, Athens remained an important cultural and intellectual centre for the next 500 years, enjoying particular patronage from Emperors Hadrian and Nero.

In AD 267 and 396, Athens was ravaged and burned by Germanic barbarians: the Heruli and Visigoths. These two events left a significant mark on the city's history. Remnants of fortifications that the Athenians hastily built in the 3rd century in anticipation of Germanic invasions can still be found in various parts of the old city. Despite the immense destruction and population decline following these raids, Athens maintained its status as the "mother of Greek culture" until the reign of Emperor Justinian I (527–565),

during which Neoplatonism—a revival of Plato's philosophical teachings—flourished. Christianity arrived in Athens in the early 5th century AD, and in 529, Emperor Justinian issued a decree closing all Athenian philosophical schools. This act was considered the final chapter in the history of Ancient Athens.

With the advent of Christianity, Athens lost its former status and, with it, the remnants of its past glory. Majestic temples dedicated to ancient gods, such as the Parthenon and Erechtheion on the Acropolis or the Temple of Hephaestus in the Athenian Agora, were converted into Christian churches, and many works of ancient art, including sculptures, were taken by the emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) to their new capital, Constantinople. In the following years, Athens increasingly became a provincial town, suffering from periodic raids by Slavs and Saracens. By the 11th century, its situation had stabilised, and the city thrived as a provincial centre, far removed from the political intrigues and wars assailing the Empire. During this period, the Ancient Athenian Agora, abandoned after the Heruli invasion, was rebuilt, and magnificent Byzantine churches, many of which survive almost unchanged to this day, were constructed in the city. However, in 1204, during the Fourth Crusade, the Byzantine Empire, which had plunged into a severe socio-political crisis, was conquered by Frankish Crusader knights and fragmented into numerous small feudal states. One of these was the Duchy of Athens, led by the Burgundian knight Otto de la Roche. Under his rule from 1204 to 1225, the Acropolis' fortifications were expanded, transforming it into something resembling a medieval European castle. A Gothic bell tower was added to the Parthenon, which had become the cathedral of the Catholic Archdiocese of Athens, and a large tower was built at the gates. This tower was later demolished along with other Crusader-era structures in the late 19th century "to clear the Acropolis of later buildings unrelated to the city's ancient history." This happened despite protests from the global community.

Moreover, the dukes of the de la Roche family introduced knightly tournaments to Athens, attracting many glory-seeking Europeans eager to join the duke's army. It's worth noting that in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Peloponnese—home to another Crusader state (the Principality of Achaea)—was considered the capital of European chivalry, with its ruler's court described as "one of the most splendid courts of the time." After the Greeks restored the Byzantine Empire by claiming Constantinople in 1261, the Athenian duke Guy I de la Roche became the most powerful lord in Frankish Greece.

From 1311 to 1388, the Duchy of Athens was under the control of the Crown of Aragon, having been conquered by mercenaries of the duke of Athens Gautier V de Brienne —soldiers of Aragonese, Catalan, and Balearic origin who had become uncontrollable. The city's history during this period is rather obscure. It is known only that Athens formed a vicarage—an administrative unit within the Kingdom of Aragon—that captains and castellans governed on behalf of the king.

Roman Agora in Athens in the 18th century

In 1388, the city was wrested from the Catalans and Aragonese by a wealthy Florentine, Nerio (Raniero) Acciaioli, nephew of the prominent Neapolitan politician, patron of Petrarch and Boccaccio, and Count of Melfi, Malta, and Gozo, baron of Korinthos Niccolò Acciaioli. Upon conquering Athens, Nerio founded the last dynasty of Athenian dukes, which ruled until 1458. Despite the duchy's declining economic state, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, upon entering Athens, was so struck by the beauty of its ancient monuments that he issued a decree forbidding his subjects from plundering or defacing any structures in the city under penalty of death. The Parthenon was converted into Athens' main mosque.

From then on, Athens fell into a final decline, coming to resemble a large village more than a city. Its population dwindled to 20,000 (compared to roughly 413,000 at the end of the 4th century BC). The Acropolis, once a ducal castle, was transformed into the residence of a Turkish pasha, complete with barracks and gunpowder stores, while the city's inhabitants faced religious persecution (particularly from the second half of the 16th century). A curious episode occurred in Athens in the early 17th century when Sultan Ahmed I granted the city's administration to his favourite concubine, a Greek woman named Vasiliki, born in Athens. For a brief period, persecution of Christians in the city eased, but after Vasiliki's death, Athens became a "revenue estate" managed by the kyzlar agha, the chief eunuch overseeing the Ottoman sultan's harem.

Throughout this time, the Venetian Republic—one of the greatest, if not the greatest, maritime powers of the era (at least in the Mediterranean)—made repeated attempts to reclaim former Crusader territories and major Greek port cities from the Ottomans. During one of the Venetian-Turkish wars, on 26 September 1687, Athens was bombarded by a Venetian fleet under the command of Doge Francesco Morosini. One of the cannonballs struck the Parthenon, where a gunpowder store was housed. The result was a massive explosion that left this symbol of the ancient world in the

state of ruin we see today. Shortly afterwards, Athens was captured by Venice for about two weeks—a time during which the Venetians managed to remove several treasures from the city, including the famous Piraeus Lion, which now adorns the square in front of the Venetian Arsenal.

During the first major anti-Turkish uprising in 1770, supported both militarily and financially by the Russian Empire, most Athenians chose to remain calm and miraculously avoided the massacre that followed the Ottoman authorities' suppression of the revolt. It should be noted that genocide was a common method of "punishment" that Turkish authorities meted out to the sultan's Christian subjects for disloyalty.

One of the bloodiest periods during Ottoman rule in Athens was the 20-year governorship of Pasha Hadji-Ali Haseki from 1775 to 1795. As the lover of Sultan Selim III's sister and backed by the city's aristocrats, Haseki secured his appointment as voivode, responsible for collecting taxes in Athens. Soon, wielding unchecked power, Haseki began arbitrarily imposing new taxes, increasing their amounts, and shortening payment deadlines. This allowed him to seize all property from "debtors." When nothing was left to take, he brutally targeted families. The situation worsened in 1789, with the outbreak of plague that Haseki did nothing to combat. Instead, he ordered the uprooting of orange and olive trees from the gardens of indebted Athenians and replanted them in a vast new garden in front of his residence. During his rule, the city's population shrank to just a few thousand. Those who were not executed or tortured by Haseki's men, or who did not die from plague or smallpox, fled the city without looking back. Eventually, after the death of his lover, the sultan's sister, the complaints that Athenians lodged year after year against their pasha reached the ruler of the Ottoman Empire. Haseki was removed from his post, exiled to the island of Kos, and beheaded.

Following the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence from 1821 to 1829, Athens changed hands several times. In 1822, it was

captured by Greek insurgents, but in 1826, it fell back under Turkish control, where it remained until 1832. During this period, many of Athens' historical monuments, primarily churches and temples, were burned and destroyed. By the time the city was declared the capital of the Greek Kingdom, its population numbered around 4,000 residents who lived in approximately 400 houses, most of them concentrated around the Acropolis in the area known as Plaka. From that moment to the present day, Athens has developed as the centre of the new Greek state.

In 1896, Athens hosted the first modern Olympic Games at the newly reconstructed ancient Kallimarmaro Stadium. During the post-war period (the 1950s and 1960s), the city experienced a surge of immigration from the islands and rural areas, which largely shaped its modern appearance. Today, the population of the Athens metropolitan area, including all its suburbs, is approximately four million (nearly half of Greece's total population), while the historic city of Athens itself is home to about 640,000 people.

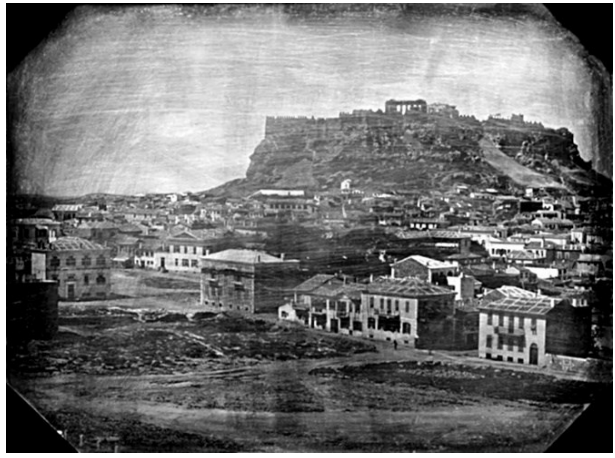
Day 1. Athens Center: The Face of the City

Syntagma Square

As you step onto the main square of the Greek capital (Syntagma or Syntagmatos, meaning "Constitution Square" in English), the first thing you'll notice is a large palace in a restrained Neoclassical style. In front of it stand the iconic honour guards, known to many for their distinctive uniforms. These soldiers are, arguably, one of the most recognisable "calling cards" of Athens. But let's take things one step at a time. The name of this square is no coincidence: The history of the Greek constitution began right here on 3 September 1843. At that time, Greece's first king, Otto, ruled without any legal constraints. He was free to dismiss the government and

Two photographs of Syndagma Square taken 174 years apart: March 8, 2024 (top) and May 8, 1850 (bottom).

dissolve the Greek parliament at will. Moreover, most of the king's courtiers and closest advisors were not Greeks but Bavarians. (Otto was the son of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, and upon his election to the throne in 1832, he arrived in Greece with a large Bavarian entourage.) These facts caused immense frustration among Greeks, particularly veterans of the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829) and young officers of the Royal Army. Nearly a decade of growing discontent with the king's autocratic rule and the impunity of his advisors, who didn't even attempt to learn Greek, culminated in an armed uprising on the night of 2–3 September 1843. As a result, King Otto introduced the first constitution in the history of the Greek Kingdom. However, His Majesty repeatedly violated it, which ultimately led to his overthrow in 1862. In commemoration of that pivotal date, marking the Greek state's first step towards



democracy, the square in front of the Royal Palace, where the uprising of 3 September 1843 took place, was named Constitution Square.

Finding Syntagma Square is quite simple. Just take the metro to the station of the same name—either on the blue or green line. Or, if you're staying nearby, here's a Google Maps link to help you get there.

Old Royal Palace (Hellenic Parliament)

Now, let us turn our attention to the Royal Palace itself. Today, it is known as the Palace of the Parliament or the Old Palace, as since 1935 it has housed Greece's highest legislative body, known by the Ancient Greek name "Vouli" (or "Boule," following Ancient Greek pronunciation): a unicameral parliament. The palace was constructed over 11 years, from 1836 to 1847, by order of King Otto, with funds personally loaned for the project by his father, King Ludwig I of Bavaria. Ludwig was a great admirer of antiquity and, in his small kingdom, had built

King Otto I of Greece, son of King Ludwig I of Bavaria

numerous notable architectural monuments, including an exact replica of the Athenian Temple of Hephaestus and a full-scale replica of the Parthenon. When his younger son, Prince Otto, was elected King of Greece, Ludwig, without exaggeration, was thrilled and ready to provide as much money as needed to properly reflect his son's royal status. And how should a king's status be reflected? With a palace, of course. To prepare the construction plans, King Ludwig sent some of Bavaria's finest architects to Athens: Eduard Schaubert, Leo von Klenze, and Karl Friedrich Schinkel. The latter, incidentally, proposed building the Royal Palace directly on the Acropolis—yes, that very Acropolis, as, in ancient times, it was the residence of the Basileus (King) of Ancient Athens. Fortunately, this plan was rejected (opposed by King Ludwig himself, who believed it would ruin the Acropolis' historical appearance), and on 6 February 1836, construction began on the site proposed by architect Friedrich von Gärtner. Nearly all the materials for the palace were sourced from the suburbs of Athens. If you look closely, at the end of Queen Sofia Avenue, to the left of the palace, you'll see a forested mountain ridge. That's Hymettus, from where timber, stone, and marble were brought for the palace's construction. Another source of material, mainly decorative stone, was Lycabettus Hill—the highest hill within the city, a 20-minute walk from Syntagma Square. Some materials were also imported from the Greek islands and Italy, and most of the workers who built the palace were Greeks from the islands of Naxos, Tinos, Paros,

and Anafi. Upon completion of construction, those from the latter island received permission from King Otto to claim any plot of land in Athens they fancied as a reward and to build homes using leftover construction materials. This is how another Athenian landmark came to be. We'll discuss it later when we reach the Acropolis.

According to von Gärtner's original design, the palace's façade was to be richly decorated in the Neoclassical style, with sculptures, pilasters, and ornate mouldings that naturally required significant time and expense. When King Ludwig I of Bavaria saw von Gärtner's plan, he took a red pencil and crossed out everything he deemed excessive—not only for reasons of economy but also because the Neoclassical decorative norms deviated from the strict traditions of antiquity. In the end, only the elements you can now see on the palace's façade remained. In response to King Ludwig's edits, the architect remarked:

"Well, Your Majesty… now it's nothing but a barracks."

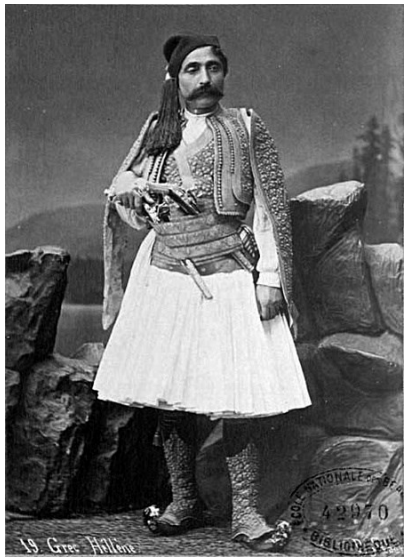
From its completion in 1847 until 1922, the palace served as the home of the Greek Royal Family. Until 1862, it housed King Otto I and his consort, Queen Amalia. After their overthrow and the election of Prince Christian of Denmark (who ruled as George I), which resulted in the founding of a new dynasty, his large family resided here. The last occupant of the palace was the Dowager Queen Olga, wife of George I, who left Greece following the 1922 coup. At that time, the Royal Palace was confiscated from the Royal Family and used to house Greek and Armenian refugees from Turkey who were fleeing the genocide perpetrated by Mustafa Kemal's forces in 1921–1922. After the abolition of the monarchy in 1924, the palace fell into disrepair due to a lack of maintenance. In 1929, the government of the Second Greek Republic decided to relocate the Greek parliament's chamber to the palace; the chamber had previously been housed in an older building on Stadiou Street (now home to the National Historical Museum of Greece). However, the palace was not suited for

parliamentary sessions, and its costly conversion was not completed until the summer of 1934. On 1 July 1935, the Fifth National Assembly convened there. Since then, the Greek parliament has continuously operated from this palace, despite the restoration of the monarchy later that year when King George II, grandson of George I and Olga, ascended the throne.

You'll find the Parliament building—also known as the Old Royal Palace—just across the underground passage from Syntagma Square. And if you'd prefer to head straight there, here's the link on Google Maps to guide you.

Evzon Honor Guard

Let us now approach the honour guard of the Evzones—the regiment of the presidential palace guard. Their role is similar to that of the famous Grenadiers of Buckingham Palace. The last time this regiment saw combat was in 1940–1944, when an elite partisan unit was formed from the Evzones and successfully operated against German, Italian, and Bulgarian forces in the mountains of Axis-occupied Greece, thus earning the nickname "Devil's Army" from their enemies. Today, the Evzones stand guard here, in front of the Old Royal Palace, where the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is located. The latter is a monument to all Greek soldiers who died for their homeland's freedom and independence. The central element of the composition depicts a dying hoplite, an Ancient Greek, or more precisely, an Ancient Athenian warrior. To the left and right of the figure, two phrases are carved in an ancient script. They can be translated as: "And one bed remains empty for the unknown," and "Any land is a tomb for renowned men." Below these



Evzon – from the Greek "Well girded"

Since its establishment in 1867, the Evzone regiment took part in the first Greco-Turkish War (1897), the first (1912-1913) and second (1913) Balkan Wars, the Greek intervention in Asia Minor (1919) and the Second Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), in World War II (1940-1944) and in the Greek civil war (1944-1947).

inscriptions are listed all the battles in which the Greek army participated, from 1912 (the start of the First Balkan War) to 1922 (the end of the Second Greco-Turkish War). Battles from the Second World War and subsequent conflicts in which the Greek army took part are not included, as the monument was unveiled in 1929.

Let us now examine the distinctive uniform of the honour guard soldiers. To begin, we should clarify the meaning of their name, "Evzones." In English, it translates to "well-girded" and refers to their traditional attire, which you can see on the Evzones during national holidays and Sundays. This attire includes, among other things, a wide sash, behind which, in times past, one could tuck several pistols and knives. Another distinctive feature of the Evzones is their bright red caps with long silk tassels, known as the "fareon." Today, it is commonly believed that the tassel symbolises the tear that Christ shed on the Cross, and the red colour represents His blood. In reality, the fareon is more likely derived from the classic Turkish headgear, the fez.

The white shirt with wide sleeves—part of the Evzones' ceremonial uniform worn every Sunday or on national holidays (such as 25 March or 28 October)—is paired with a white skirt called the "fustanella." According to old tales, this skirt has exactly 400 pleats, representing the number of years the Greek people lived under Turkish rule. Once again, my dear traveller, I must confess that this is merely a beautiful legend. The fustanella does indeed have many pleats, but they are usually far fewer than 400, and the Greek people did not spend exactly four centuries under Turkish rule. Athens, for instance, was conquered by the Ottomans in 1458, and the Greek state's flag was raised over the Acropolis in 1828—370 years later. That said, from 1204 to 1458, Athens was not under Greek control, as it served as the capital of the Duchy of Athens, which was ruled successively by the French, Spanish, and Italians. But let us return to our Evzones.

Unlike the fareon cap, the fustanella skirt has deeper Greek roots. It likely descends from the Dorian chiton, worn by Ancient Greeks in the Peloponnese during early antiquity. This chiton later inspired the Roman toga, a shortened version of which—the Byzantine apron-like "podea"—was worn in the 11th to 15th centuries by the akritai (from the Greek word "akri," meaning "border"), a class of peasant-warriors living on the eastern frontiers of the Byzantine Empire, guarding it against raids by nomadic barbarians from Central Asia. This apron became the direct predecessor of the fustanella.

The most intricate element of the Evzones' ceremonial uniform to craft is the richly embroidered vest called the "fermeli." Like the "fareon" cap, it likely has Eastern origins, yet one type of traditional embroidery on the fermeli incorporates the Greek letters "Χ" and "Ο," standing for "Χριστιανός" and "Ορθόδοξος"—"Christian" and "Orthodox."

Regardless of the weather, every Evzone wears two pairs of woollen stockings, held up by a wide leather belt hidden beneath the clothing. This belt provides additional back support, somewhat easing the strain of standing motionless for an hour during guard duty. The stockings are also adorned with silk tassels, similar to those on the fareon cap.

The most striking part of the Evzone's uniform is the bright red shoes with pom-poms, known as "tsarouchia" (singular: "tsarouchi"). Their name derives from the old Turkish word "çaruk," referring to leather-soled sandals. It should be noted that the Turks likely borrowed this term from Italian, as in Italy, footwear similar to the Greek tsarouchia is called "chiòchiera." These sturdy, rigid boots with wooden soles are made from four pieces of thick leather and were originally worn by Greek peasants in mainland Greece. In those times, tsarouchia were also worn by women and children, though their pom-poms, unlike those on men's shoes, were multicoloured. The Evzones' tsarouchia are quite substantial, with each shoe weighing around three kilograms

(6.6 pounds). The soles are studded with 50 steel nails, allowing the marching Evzones to create a striking sound on the pavement and avoid slipping on marble. You might have noticed the impressively muscular calves of the Evzones—now you know the reason behind them.

To join the Presidential Guard, Evzones must be at least 1.87 metres (6 feet 1 inch) tall and possess a robust physique. This makes them some of Greece's finest specimens. On the day commemorating the unification of Greece with Crete (1 December), the Evzones don a different uniform: the traditional attire of Cretan Greeks, featuring red breeches instead of the fustanella and a blue jacket in place of the shirt. On 19 May, the day of remembrance for the genocide of the Pontic Greeks (Pontus being a region on the Black Sea coast of modern Turkey, home to a large Greek community since antiquity), soldiers in the attire of Pontic partisans, dressed in black with tall leather boots and traditional headgear, join the Evzones in their standard uniform to stand guard. The changing of the guard occurs hourly. A word of caution: You must not approach the Evzones in front of the parliament building too closely. If you wish to take photographs from a closer distance, I recommend walking around the Old Royal Palace and turning onto Herodes Atticus Street, where the residences of the President and Prime Minister of Greece are located. Evzones also stand guard in front of the presidential palace, where you can get closer to them.

You'll find the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier right in front of the Parliament building. The ceremonial guard changes every hour, but on Sundays at 11 a.m., you can witness the grand parade: a full ceremonial changing of the guard with marching band and traditional military drill. It's worth arriving a bit early to get a good viewing spot. And for your convenience, here's the Google Maps link.

Hotel Grande Bretagne

Let us now move forward and turn our attention to the grand, elegant hotel situated at the intersection of Queen Sofia Avenue, King George I Street, and Panepistimiou Street (University Street). This is the Grande Bretagne—one of the oldest and most luxurious hotels in Athens, and indeed in all of Greece. Originally, a hotel by this name opened in 1866, a little farther down the street, at the corner of Stadiou and Karageorgi Servias Street. In 1874, it relocated to a building—previously known as the palace of Antonis Dimitriou—purchased from the French Archaeological School. This was a splendid Neoclassical mansion designed by Theophil von Hansen, an Austrian architect of Danish and Norwegian descent. (That name will crop up again in our journey, so keep it in mind.) Greek chef Efstathios Lampsas, who was the first owner of the Grande Bretagne after its relocation to the Dimitriou palace, made his establishment the finest hotel on the Balkan Peninsula and, at times, even the entire Near East (to which Greece was occasionally, and incorrectly, linked geographically). By 1888, the hotel had become

View of the hotel in the 19th century

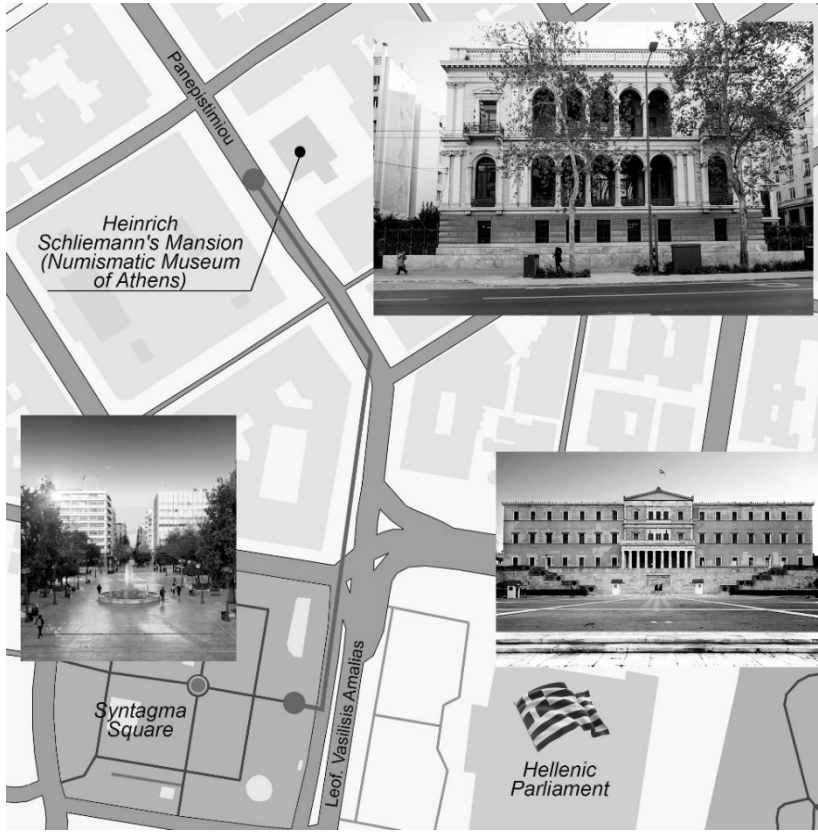
one of the first electrified buildings in Athens. Its worldwide fame likely arose after the first modern Olympic Games, held in Athens in 1896. The games drew thousands of distinguished European guests, many of whom stayed at the Grande Bretagne. The hotel gained further renown due to events between December 1944 and January 1945, when it hosted the legitimate government of King George II of the Hellenes, returned from exile. At that time, immediately after the end of the German-Italian-Bulgarian occupation of Greece, the country faced a precarious situation: Communist partisans who had fought the occupiers failed to find common ground with monarchist partisans—a situation that pushed the nation to the brink of civil war. Following the return of His Majesty's government to Athens, the city saw a series of fierce street battles. The Greek monarchists received support from the British Army under the command of General Ronald Scobie, whose headquarters were located at the Grande Bretagne. Greek

communists believed that the British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who arrived in Athens around the same time, would also be staying at the hotel, so they tried to plant explosives in the building's foundations to destroy it along with the Greek government, British command, and Churchill himself. Fortunately, the coordinated efforts of British intelligence services thwarted this terrorist act.

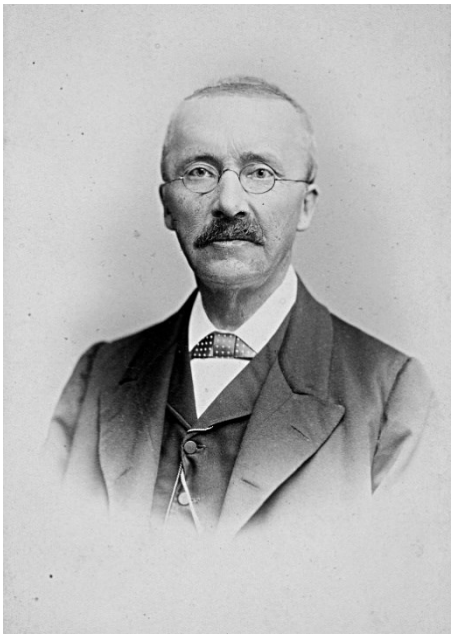
After the Second World War, the hotel quickly recovered and once again topped the list of the finest hotels in the Balkans. During the funeral of the last King of the Hellenes, Constantine II, in January 2023, it was here that his royal relatives stayed. These included the Prince and Princess of Wales, Princess Royal Anne, Tsar Simeon II of Bulgaria, the head of the Serbian Royal House, and many others.

The Grand Bretagne Hotel will be on your right if you're standing with your back to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.
And here's the Google Maps link, in case you'd like to start your walk from there.

Henry Schliemann's Mansion (Numismatic Museum of Athens)



Let us now leave this citadel of the world's rulers and set off along Panepistimiou Street, away from the bustling Syntagma Square. Soon, on your right, you'll notice a grand, three-storey mansion with elegant arcades, standing out distinctly from the surrounding buildings. This is none other than the Trojan Palace of Heinrich Schliemann—or rather, the Ilion Palace, as Ilion was the name that Ancient Greeks gave to ancient



Heinrich Schliemann

Troy. But who was Heinrich Schliemann, and what connection does he have to the city of Homeric epics? The most direct one, my dear traveller: Schliemann is the man who uncovered its ruins to the world and sparked an "archaeological fever" that earned him the title of "Father of Field Archaeology." He was the son of a modest Mecklenburg pastor, but from an early age, Schliemann displayed numerous talents. He quickly mastered languages, turned adversities to his advantage, and proved remarkably enterprising. Ultimately, his yearning for a better life and adventure led him first to the Netherlands, where he thrived as an employee of a trading company in Amsterdam, and then to Russia. In the latter, he achieved great success in commerce, amassing a substantial fortune that enabled him, in 1850, to travel to the United States to the goldfields of California. He returned to Russia with $60,000 in gold and continued managing a trading company, supplying the Russian Imperial Army during the Crimean War of 1853–1856. From early childhood (according to his own accounts, which are not entirely reliable), Schliemann was drawn to the ancient cities of the Near East and Greece, particularly those that Homer described: Troy and Mycenae. He spent years planning an expedition to search for these cities, even learning ancient and modern Greek in preparation. In 1868, Schliemann arrived in Athens, where he met another amateur archaeologist, the architect Ernst Ziller. (Keep his name in mind alongside that of Theophil von Hansen, as it will reappear in discussions of Athens' architectural heritage.) Ziller, who had already participated in

unsuccessful attempts to locate ancient Troy, inspired Schliemann to embark on his quest to the Troad—a region in western modern-day Turkey where, according to ancient historians and geographers, the Trojan Kingdom and its splendid capital, Pergamon, were located. Schliemann desperately sought to uncover it. In 1871, he began his large-scale excavations at Hisarlık Hill, where he believed the ruins of Troy's capital lay hidden, though these excavations bore little resemblance to professional archaeology.

Armed with shovels and pickaxes, the workers whom Schliemann hired were searching for gold, as that was surely the primary value of Troy's ruins, wasn't it? They had no concept of such crucial modern archaeological principles as cultural layers, so it's worth noting that Schliemann and his enthusiastic team inflicted colossal damage on the ruins of the city they uncovered. Nevertheless, the 8,833 gold artefacts he discovered, which he dubbed "Priam's Treasure" (without any evidence linking them to Priam, the Trojan king mentioned in ancient sources as ruling during the Trojan War), became a global sensation. This was despite the fact that the soil layers in which the gold items were found dated to far earlier times than those that Homer described. After Troy, Schliemann organised excavations at the site of ancient Mycenae on the Peloponnese, where he uncovered tombs he called "royal." In addition to human remains, these tombs contained gold jewellery and coins weighing a total of 13 kilograms.

Schliemann found golden burial masks that, without any basis for doing so, he associated with the Mycenaean king Agamemnon and his family, though, as with Troy, they dated to earlier periods than the events of the "Iliad." Nonetheless, these excavations allowed Schliemann to amass a considerable fortune, part of which he used in 1878 to build a lavish 28-room mansion near the Royal Palace in Athens. The architect was his friend Ernst Ziller, and the main decorations of the building's interiors were intended to be Schliemann's numerous archaeological finds (primarily Trojan, as

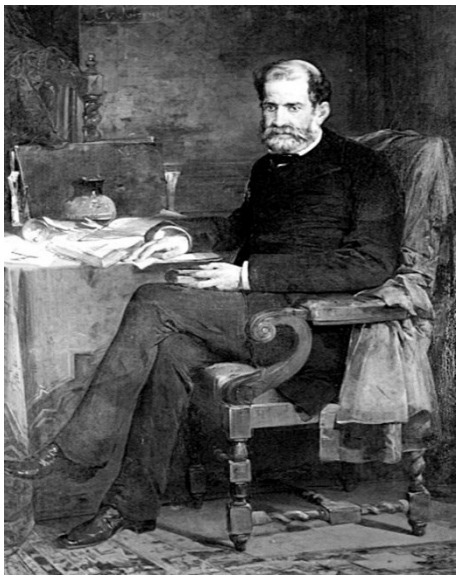
Frescoes on the vaults of the terrace of the Schliemann mansion

Mycenaean gold, by agreement with the Greek government, became national property immediately upon excavation). In this mansion, Schliemann lived with his second wife, Athenian Sophia Engastromenou, and their two children: daughter Andromache and son Agamemnon, the latter of whom became an ambassador of the Greek Kingdom to the United States and a member of the Greek parliament. To cover his debts, in 1926, Sophia Engastromenou, by then Schliemann's widow, sold the Ilion Palace to the Greek government, which established the Museum of Fine Arts there. However, the museum did not remain in the Schliemann mansion for long. In 1929, the Greek State Council moved in. It was followed in 1934 by the Supreme Court, which continued to convene in the palace until 1981. By that time, the building had fallen into disrepair and was closed. Not until 1998, following restoration work, was the Numismatic Museum's exhibition installed in the mansion, where it can still be seen today.

Here's the Google Maps link, in case you'd like to find this mansion separately from my route.

The Catholic Cathedral of St. Dionysius the Areopagite

The next notable building on this street won't keep you waiting. It's located on the same side as the Ilion Palace. This is the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite—the main Catholic church in Athens and the seat of the Catholic Archdiocese of Athens. Indeed, Greece is an Orthodox Christian country; moreover, the Greek Republic's constitution enshrines Orthodoxy as the state religion, and all Orthodox priests in the country are civil servants, paid from the national budget. Nevertheless, there is a small Catholic community among Greeks,



Portrait of Lysandros Kaftantzoglou (1811-1885) by Nikiforos Lytras. National Gallery of Athens

consisting primarily of families from the Ionian Islands (Corfu, Ithaca, Kefalonia, Lefkada, Zakynthos, and others). These islands were partially conquered by the Kingdom of Sicily in 1185 and subsequently ruled, in turn, by the Crusaders, the Genoese and Venetian Republics, Napoleon I's French Empire, and, ultimately, Britain until 1864, when the Ionian archipelago was ceded to the Greek Kingdom. Over nearly seven centuries, the island's native inhabitants—Greeks—were significantly "Italianised." They integrated into the Venetian aristocracy, adopted Catholicism, and developed a distinct dialect of Greek with numerous Italian loanwords. This is how the Greek Catholic community came to be. Today, alongside Albanian Catholics and immigrants from the Philippines and Poland, it forms the majority of the cathedral's congregation. The cathedral itself was founded in 1853 on a plot of land acquired through the collective efforts of Athens' Catholic community. The initial design was drawn up by the Bavarian architect Leo von Klenze, who took as his model the main church of Saint Boniface's Abbey in the Bavarian capital of Munich. Greek architect Lysandros Kaftantzoglou oversaw the construction. (Those of you who visit the Athens National Gallery can see a large portrait of Mr Kaftantzoglou by the Greek painter Nikiforos Lytras in the right wing of the building, on the ground floor.) The construction took 12 years, and in its final stages, at the behest of King Ludwig II of Bavaria (nephew of Greece's first king, Otto), the cathedral's

interior was adorned with stained glass windows by Carl de Bouché. These windows depict Saint Amalia and Popes Sixtus II, Telesphorus, and Athanasius the Great on the right side, and Saints Otto, Anteros, Cletus, and John Chrysostom on the left. Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria, who visited Athens in 1869, also donated a significant sum for the creation of two marble pulpits for the cathedral. These can be seen to the left and right of the altar if you happen to find the church open.

Here's the Google Maps link, in case you decide to start your walk from this spot.

Immediately beyond the Cathedral of Saint Dionysius, your eyes will be drawn to three other architectural masterpieces: the Athens Trilogy. I hope you haven't forgotten the name Theophil von Hansen, the architect behind the building that now houses the Grande Bretagne hotel. He also designed all three of these buildings, in collaboration with his elder brother, Hans Christian Hansen. The first of these masterpieces to be constructed was the one in the centre—the building of the National University of Athens (then known as the Royal University of Otto). The design was primarily the work of Hans Christian Hansen, with Theophil serving as his assistant during construction. Theophil's

star would rise later and eventually outshine that of his brother. The university was partly funded by personal contributions from King Otto of Greece (hence its original name) and became the first European-style higher education institution in the southern Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. Despite the economic challenges of recent decades, the National University of Athens remains one of the region's finest.

Building of the National University of Athens

If you approach the university building closely, you'll notice a large fresco in the colonnade. It depicts His Majesty Otto I surrounded by muses representing various academic disciplines: philosophy, history, archaeology, law, and others. The two marble statues in front of the university are monuments to Count Ioannis Kapodistrias (on the left), president of the First Greek Republic (1828–1831), whose name the National University of Athens now bears, and Adamantios Korais (on the right), one of the founders of modern literary Greek and the creator of katharevousa—a "purified" Greek language. This was a form of spoken Greek stripped entirely of Turkish and Arabic loanwords and

Baron Theophilus von Hansen

incorporating certain norms from Middle Greek (Byzantine) language. For much of the history of the independent Greek state (from 1828 to 1976), katharevousa served as the official literary language. Government decrees, books, school textbooks, and newspapers were published in it, and many members of Greece's upper class spoke it. However, the vast majority of Greeks never adopted katharevousa as their everyday language, resulting in a situation similar to the Norwegian dichotomy between bokmål and nynorsk. Ultimately, the artificial katharevousa was abolished in 1976, though government decrees continued to be published in it until 1985. Also, some Greeks still use certain archaic expressions and proverbs characteristic of this linguistic norm.

To the right of the university stands the palace of the National Academy, designed by Theophil von Hansen in 1859. This marked the beginning of its long construction history, largely funded by donations from Baron Georgios Simon von Sina, an Austrian banker of Greek descent, who later invited Hansen to Vienna. Bringing Hansen's design to life took a full 28 years, with interruptions in 1864–1868 and 1876. Our familiar acquaintance, Ernst Ziller, oversaw the construction, and the Academy's grand opening took place on 20 March 1887.

For some time, in addition to the Academy itself, this building housed collections from the Numismatic and Byzantine Museums. However, since 1926, it has been entirely dedicated to the needs of science and the fine arts. On the two columns standing before the

central pediment of the building, you can see sculptural depictions of the ancient goddess Athena, patroness of the city, and Apollo, the god of the sun and the arts. At the base of the staircase sit marble statues of the ancient philosophers Socrates and Plato, among the most famous Athenians of all time.

The building of the National Library of Greece. Monument to Panagis Vallianos right in front of the building

The final, and most recently constructed, building of the Athens Trilogy is the National Library of Greece. Theophil von Hansen was responsible for its design, with construction overseen by Ernst Ziller. Construction began on 16 March 1888—later than the other buildings of the Trilogy. This building was funded by the brothers Panagis, Marinos, and Andreas Vallianos, who were prominent merchants and shipowners from the island of Kefalonia. In their honour, the library building became known as the "Vallianeion." (The tradition of naming buildings after their benefactors was widespread in 19th-century Greece, which explains the names of many Athenian architectural landmarks, such as the Zappeion exhibition hall, built with funds from the Zappas brothers.)

Building of the National Academy of Greece

The collection of the National Library, previously housed in the National University building to the right, was transferred to this palace in 1903 and remained there until 2017. At that time, the bulk of its vastly expanded collection was moved to a new library building at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre. The most valuable books and manuscripts from the collection remain here, accessible only by special permission. The library holds 4,500 Greek manuscripts—the largest such collection in the world. Among them are the "Golden Bulls," decrees of Byzantine emperors bearing their personal signatures and seals, as well as extensive archives from the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829). In front of the library's staircase, you can

Ernst Ziller (1837-1923), court architect to His Majesty King George I of Greece

see a monument to Panagis Vallianos, the eldest of the Vallianos brothers and the "father of the Greek merchant navy," whose contribution to financing the building's construction was the most significant. Additionally, it's worth noting Vallianos' role in helping Greece overcome a severe influenza epidemic in 1896: His donation of £2,000 enabled the Greek government to purchase essential medicines and expand hospital capacity for patients. In 1900, he provided 200,000 Greek drachmas to farmers on the Greek islands whose livelihoods had been devastated by pest infestations.

Finding the Neoclassical Trilogy on its own is quite straightforward. Simply take the red metro line to the "Panepistimio" station — or use this Google Maps link for easy navigation.

Klafthmonos Square (Square of Tears)

If you cross to the other side of Panepistimiou Street from the National University of Athens and walk through the small pedestrian square adorned with glass pyramids (part of the decor of the Panepistimiou metro station), you'll notice an allegorical sculpture depicting three female figures that appear to merge into one. This is Klafthmonos Square, or "Square of Tears." Don't be alarmed—despite what the name suggests, no mass executions or terrorist attacks took place here. On the contrary, the history of this place is rather comical, though, in true Greek fashion, it's a comedy in the style of Sophocles, with a touch of tragic irony.

ΕΣΤΙΑ

ΟΡΟΙ ΕΓΓΡΑΦΩΝ

Ἐτησία: Ἑξαμηνιαῖ 20
Ἑξαμήνου τὸ ἥμισυ. — Πάντοτε προπληρωτέα.
Αἱ ἐγγραφαὶ ἀρχονται τὴν 1 καὶ 15 ἑκάστου μηνός.
ΤΟ ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΗΜΕΝΟΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟΝ ΔΙΔΕΤΑΙ ΔΩΡΕΑΝ

ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΣ ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ
ΜΕΤΑ ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΗΜΕΝΟΥ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟΥ
ΚΑΤΑ ΔΕΚΑΤΕΤΡΑΗΜΕΡΟΝ

ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΣΥΝΤΑΞΙΣ
Παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν Σταδίου.— Ὑπὸς Νομισματοκοπείον, 7.

ΔΗΜΟΣΙΕΥΣΕΙΣ

Κατὰ στίχον: 3η σελ. λεπτὰ 30, 4η σελ. λεπτὰ 40.
Μακραὶ διατριβαὶ καὶ ἐπανειλημμέναι ἀγγελίαι κατ' ἀπαραίτητον.—Μικραὶ ἀγγελίαι τῆς Κυριακῆς κατὰ στίχον (35 γράμματα) λεπτὰ 25.
ΤΑ ΧΕΙΡΟΓΡΑΦΑ ΤΩΝ ΙΑΤΡΙΚΩΝ ΔΕΝ ΔΗΜΟΣΙΕΥΟΝΤΑΙ

ΑΘΗΝΑΙ — ΕΤΟΣ Α' (10ον') — Ἀριθ. 1 ✠ ΤΟ ΦΥΛΛΟΝ 5 ΛΕΠΤΑ ✠ ΣΗΜΕΡΑ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗΣ 6 Μαρτίου 1894

Η ΕΣΤΙΑ

Μετ' ἀληθείας ἀκαίρως γεγονότος, ἐμφανίζεται ἐφθόμην τοῦ Πανελληνίου Ἔτους. Ἐπὶ τέλους ἐν σχεδίῳ πλόου ῥυθμοῦ ἐξ ἱδιοκτησίων περιοδικὸν μεταβάλλεται ταχὺν εἰς ἡμερησίαν φύλλον, τῆς γενικῆς ὕλης ταύτης προσκτηθείσης ἐπιφάσεις τῆς ἀναγκαίας, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ἐκτελέσει τοῦ ἔργου ἡμῶν ἐκπληρώσωμεν πάντας ἡμῖν ἐπιβληθέντας ὑπὸ τῆς περιστάσεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ ἀναγνωστικοῦ κοινοῦ.

Ἐν τῇ καινοτομίᾳ ταύτῃ ἐπὶ σειρὰν ἡμερησιογραφικὴ ὑπαγορεύματος, τῆς ἀναλόγου τούτοις ὑφισταμένης πρὸς ἣν σοβαρὰ καὶ ἀληθινὰ πολλάκις συναίσθησις καθήκοντα. Πολιτεία καὶ κοινωνία ἀγαπῶσι γυναῖς ἀργὰν εἰς νέας τρίβους περὶ ἡμᾶς. Τὸ τῶν παντοίων ἀποκτᾶν νέαν ἐργασίαν, νέαν ἔννοιαν, νέαν σχολήν. Ἴθικαὶ καὶ γραμματικὰ καθιστῶσι ὑποχρέων τὰς ἀλλοκότους τῶν ἀλογίστων νέμων τῆς πρώτου, καὶ ἐργασιμοὶ νῦν, εἰρηνοποιοῦσι κατὰ τὸ μᾶλλον ἢ ἧττον, ἐγκαθίστωσι τὴν περιφρόνησιν ταύτην, τὴν πολύτροπον καὶ πολυμόρφωσιν, ἣν ἔφερε σήμερον ἡ ἐπὶ τοῦ πολιτικοῦ καὶ κοινωνικοῦ πνεύματος ἀφανὴς ἐργάτης, τῶν ἀθανάτων παραδόσεων ἐγκαθιδρυτὴς ἐρπετοκατάπινος καὶ κατὰ τὸν περιφερικὸν ἀποστολέα, ἐπίφρικτον εἶναι ἐν χρόνῳ εὐθέως προθύτατον μενάλα εἰς τὸ ἀθρόσκημα τῶν σοβαρῶν καὶ περισπωμένων ἀθανῶν βιλλίων καὶ ἐν τῷ πρωτεύοντι τοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ κράτους ἐπὶ ῥητεύουσι μετὰ πρέπης προθύτητος καὶ ζήλου ἀκοπαβλήτου τὰ πολλαπλᾶ τῆς μεγάλης καὶ ἐνδόξου Πατρίδος συμφέροντα. Εἶναι φρόνιμος λόγος ὅτου γε βαθὺ, ὅτι ἡ ὑπὸ τὰς ἰδέας ἡμῶν, ὡς ἀτόμων, ὡς ἐν τῇ κοινωνικῇ ὅλῃ τοῦ συμπᾶ δημοσιογραφικοῦ

Greece saw 72 different governments (some of which resigned just a day after their appointment), this turnover of staff happened with remarkable frequency, leaving hundreds, if not thousands, of people jobless. Following their dismissal, these individuals would traditionally gather to protest in front of the Ministry of Economy, which was located on this very square (the building was demolished in 1940), while the new government, as per tradition, ignored them. Thus, in Kambouroglou's article, the square was dubbed the "Square of Tears." The name has endured to this day, as has the tradition of lower-ranking civil servants holding protest actions here (or rather, nearby, at the entrance to the Ministry of Labour) at least weekly.

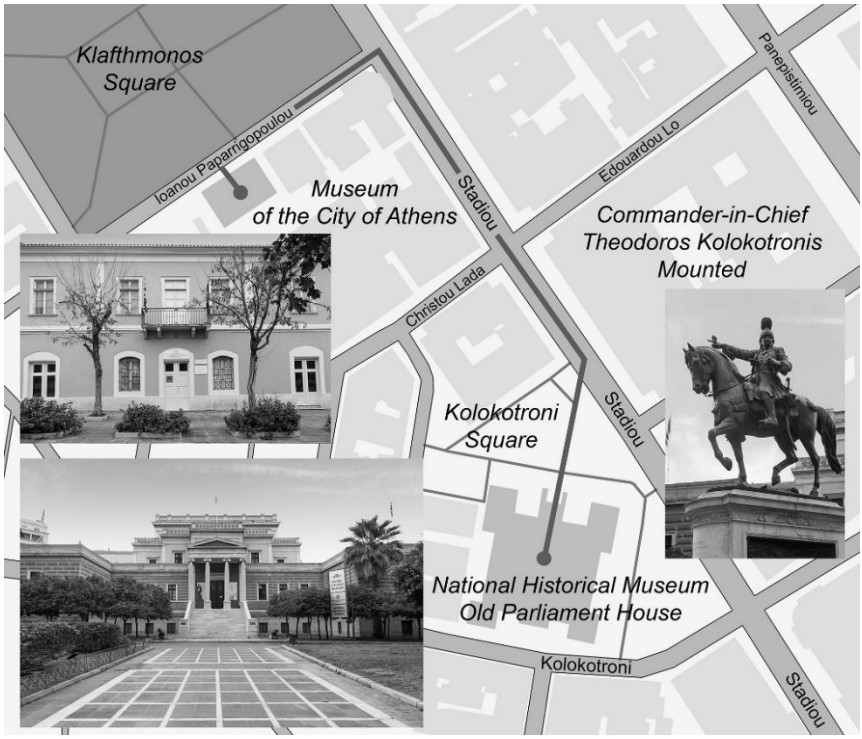
Museum of the City of Athens

If you walk down the left side of the square along Paparrigopoulou Street, you will see, on your left, an elegant, three-storey Neoclassical building adjoining a two-storey mansion of a gentle peach colour. Both buildings are part of the Museum of the City of Athens. In the second, smaller building, constructed in 1833-1834 by the German architects Leo von Klenze and Friedrich von Gärtner, the first King of Greece, Otto, and his consort, Queen Amalia, resided from 1836 to 1843. This mansion was originally built for a prominent Greek entrepreneur and patrician, Stamatis Dekozis Vouros, who offered it to the royal couple until the already-known Royal Palace on the future Constitution Square was completed. Because the royal family lived in this building for seven years, old Athenians often referred to the Vouros mansion as the "Old Palace." However, now this title belongs to the parliament building, and the mansion is home to a collection of furniture, accessories, and other everyday items of the Athenian aristocracy from the 19th century, acquired by Lambros

Eutaxias, the great-grandson of Stamatis Vouros. Among the notable items in this museum are a portrait of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, father of the Greek King Otto I, and one of the royal thrones used by the first Greek monarch. Additionally, children aged 10 to 14 can photograph themselves in exact replicas of King Otto and Queen Amalia's ceremonial garments.

National Historical Museum - Old Parliament House

If you return to Stadiou Street and proceed in the direction of the traffic, at the next intersection, you will find yourself in Kolokotronis Square, directly in front of the old Greek parliament building, which now houses the National Historical Museum of Greece. In front of this building stands a large equestrian statue of Theodoros Kolokotronis, one of Greece's national heroes and a leader in the Greek War of Independence from 1821 to 1829. Kolokotronis came from a family of klephts, a special class of Greek brigands that existed during the period of Ottoman rule over Greece. The klephts boldly attacked Turkish merchants, sometimes stormed the Sultan's garrisons, and often engaged in piracy, targeting Turkish and Egyptian ships.



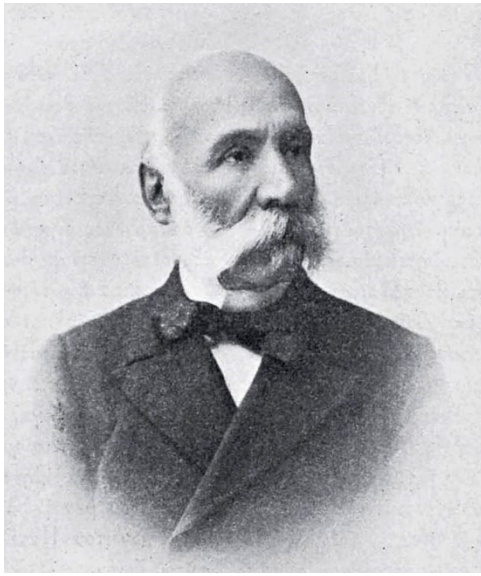
Queen Consort of Greece Amalia of Oldenburg, wife of King Otto I

Kolokotronis led his small band of klephts at the age of 15, and subsequently served in the Russian Imperial and British Royal navies. However, disillusioned by the prospects of foreign service, he returned to his native craft. In 1821, he led a major uprising against the Turks in the Peloponnese, while in 1823, in recognition of his outstanding victories against the enemy, he was unanimously elected leader of the not-yet-formed Greek state at the Greek National

Congress in Astros. Soon, however, his fiery temper and excessive vanity alienated Kolokotronis from other leaders of the Greek War of Independence. This led to his imprisonment on the island of Hydra, from which he was released after four months.

Theodoros Kolokotronis (1770-1843)

At the end of the war, Kolokotronis strongly supported Ioannis Kapodistrias for the position of head of the Greek state. After members of the influential Mavromichalis clan assassinated Kapodistrias in 1831, Kolokotronis became a member of the provisional Greek government until a king was selected for the country. As a politician, Kolokotronis was far less capable than he was as a military leader. His hot temper led to serious conflicts with other government members, and his constant disputes nearly plunged the country into civil war. After the selection of Prince Otto of Bavaria as King of Greece, Kolokotronis headed the opposition to the new government. For attempting a coup, Kolokotronis was sentenced in 1834 to 20 years in solitary confinement without windows in the fortress of Nafplio. A year later, however, Kolokotronis was pardoned by King Otto himself, restored to the rank of general, and honoured with the Grand Cross of the Order of the Redeemer, the highest Greek order. Only then did "the old man of Morea" (Morea being another name for the Peloponnese, Kolokotronis' homeland) reconcile with the government. He spent the last six years of his life serving on the State Council of the Kingdom of Greece. By chance, the statue erected to Kolokotronis in 1890 points its hand toward the former site of Athens' only prison. Because parliament



Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Greece Theodoros Deligiannis (1824-1905)

used the building behind the bronze Kolokotronis until 1932, old Athenians joked that "Theodoros is simply showing the parliamentarians where they belong."

As for the old parliament building, it was not constructed so long ago. The first session of the highest deliberative body of the Kingdom opened there in 1875. Originally, the site was occupied by the mansion of Alexandros Kondostavlos, a Greek banker and politician who was native to the island of Chios and belonged to an ancient aristocratic family with a lineage tracing back to the Byzantine Empire. From 1833 to 1835, the first King of Greece, Otto, resided in this mansion, having just arrived in Athens before departing to Bavaria to marry Princess Amalia of Oldenburg. She became the Queen Consort of Greece. Upon returning to Athens, they settled in the already-known mansion of Stamatis Vouros on Paparrigopoulou Street. Following the officers' uprising of the Greek army on 3 September 1843, when King Otto was forced to limit his powers with the first constitution of the Greek Kingdom, the Kondostavlos mansion housed the so-called National Representation, the precursor of the modern Greek parliament. The mansion's large hall was slightly modified to resemble a classical assembly hall. However, in October 1854, the old building was completely destroyed by fire. Four years later, under the guidance of Queen Consort Amalia, construction of a new Greek parliament building started, based on the design of French architect François Boulanger. In 1859, construction was

halted due to a lack of funds. In 1862, Otto I and Amalia were deposed and returned to Bavaria, where they lived out their days, continuing to use their royal titles and never acknowledging the coup.

When Prince Christian Wilhelm of Denmark was elected to the Greek throne in 1863, thus becoming King of the Hellenes under the name George I, a makeshift brick assembly hall was erected near the unfinished building. This served as the meeting place for the Greek Kingdom's parliament for the next 12 years until the construction of the building you now see before you. In the final stages, construction was overseen by Greek architect Panagis Kalkos, who was also known for designing the Athens City Hall.

During the time when the Greek parliament met in this building (from 1875 to 1932), it witnessed many significant events in the history of the Greek state. Among them were Greece's bankruptcy in 1893, the First Greco-Turkish War in 1897, and the assassination of Prime Minister Theodoros Deligiannis on these very marble steps on 31 May 1905. Deligiannis, who served as Prime Minister of His Majesty King George I five times (for a total of about five and a half years), was known for his fight against gambling clubs, which were a real scourge of that time. Greeks remain quite fond of gambling today; as you stroll through Athens, you will likely see numerous branches of "OPAP," the current monopoly in gambling and betting, where local pensioners and fortune-seekers can spend days on end. Back then, instead of OPAP, there were card clubs and semi-legal casinos, where many Athenians systematically lost entire fortunes. The assassins of Prime Minister Deligiannis were two men: an avid gambler named Maniatis and a former porter and bouncer of a gambling club, Antonis Gerakaris, who was the father of five. Shortly before his assassination, Deligiannis had initiated a law that significantly restricted gambling establishments' activities. Many such establishments closed, which led Maniatis to lose hope of regaining his losses and Gerakaris to lose his livelihood. Thus, they committed the murder as a form of revenge.

Deligiannis died on the spot. The murderers were caught, sentenced to death, and hanged at the Palamidi fortress in Nafplion on the Peloponnese Peninsula—the same place where the rebellious Kolokotronis was held in solitary confinement in 1833-1834.

Over the 202 years of the political history of modern Greece, the country has had 176 prime ministers (not counting the 13 heads of provisional governments). At the same time, during the 1981 year of the existence of the Holy See in Rome, there were 266 Popes.

In the same building, on 25 March 1924, the Prime Minister of the Greek Kingdom, Alexandros Papanastasiou, announced the overthrow of King George II and proclaimed the Second Greek Republic. This marked the final chapter in the history of this building as the venue for the Greek parliament's sessions. In 1932, the highest deliberative body relocated to the former Royal Palace in Constitution Square, and this building, following a proposal by Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, was handed over to the Historical and Ethnographic Organisation of Greece for the exhibition of the National Historical Museum.

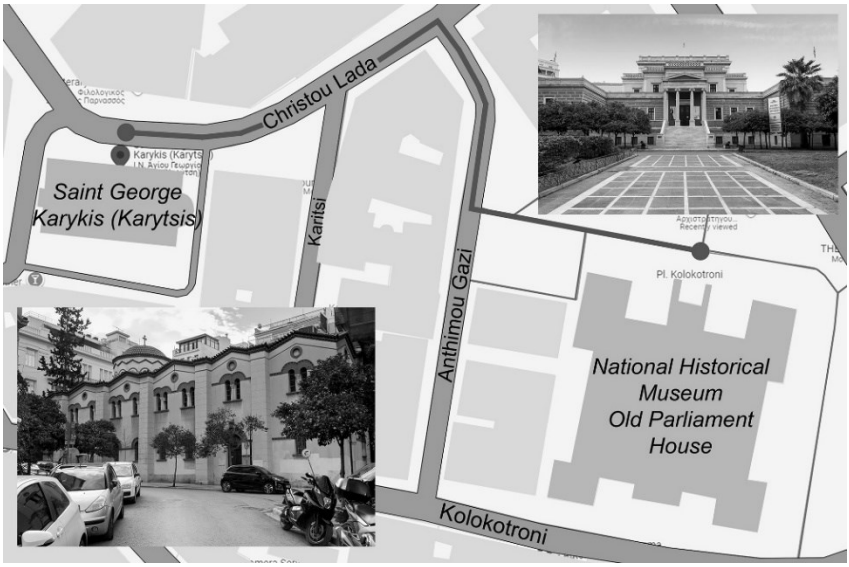
However, at that time, the Historical Organisation did not have the means to undertake significant work. Neither it nor Greece possessed the funds to transform the building into a full-fledged museum. In 1940, Greece entered into war with Italy. Though the conflict ended in a Greek victory, it was merely a prelude to the

full-scale invasion of the Axis powers into the small Kingdom in the south of the Balkan Peninsula. After the German occupation of Athens in 1941 and the coming to power of the collaborationist government of General Georgios Tsolakoglou (one of Greece's quisling leaders), the old parliament building temporarily housed the Ministry of Justice, which moved out in 1943. Afterwards, the building was transferred to the Historical and Ethnographic Organisation of Greece by a special decree of the prime minister, with the commitment that it would "keep the future Historical Museum open to the public at all times." Following Greece's liberation from occupation in 1944, this decree became one of the very few issued by the collaborationist government that was not subsequently revoked. Nevertheless, the museum was never established there, and in 1953, discussions arose within the city government about demolishing the building due to its structural instability and the desire to replace it with several administrative structures for secretariats and offices of the Ministries of Economy and Interior. However, a special commission of the Historical Organisation of Greece, tasked with assessing the historical significance of the old parliament building, concluded that it could not be demolished. In 1961, a full restoration was carried out, and on 21 June 1962, the National Historical Museum opened its doors. Its exhibits today include British cannons used to secure Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire during the war of 1821-1829; personal belongings of Kings Otto I and George I and their queens, Amalia and Olga; the writing desk and armchair of Greece's first leader of independence, Count Ioannis Kapodistrias; portraits of leaders of the Greek War of Independence; weapons and clothing of Theodoros Kolokotronis; and many more objects worth noticing.

Google Map National Historical Museum

Google Map Saint George Karykis (Karytsis)

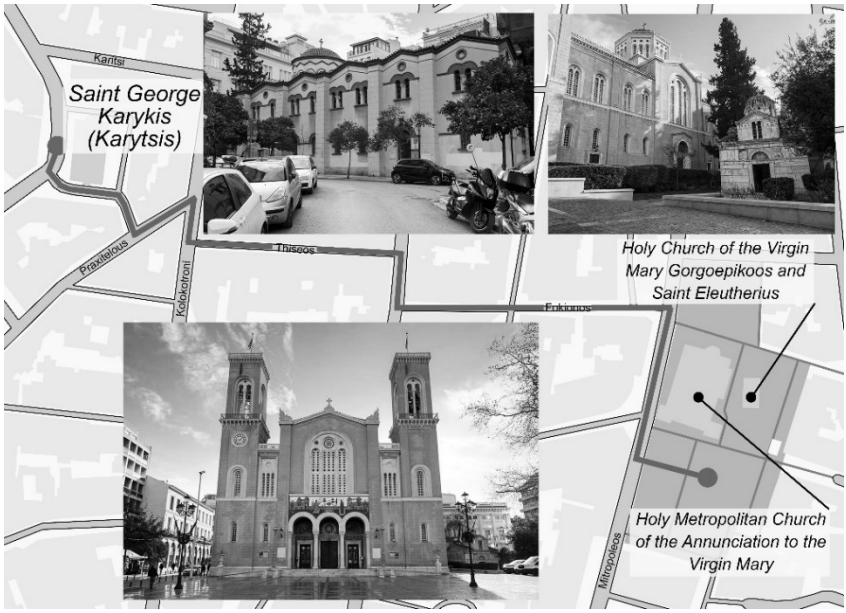
Saint George Karykis (Karytsis)



We continue our journey deeper into the old town, turning right from the old parliament building, past the monument to Theodoros Diliyanis, who was murdered on its steps, and emerge onto Antimiou Gazi Street. Here, again, we turn right and proceed to the intersection with Christou Lada Street, which we will follow left until we reach Karitsi Square. The square is decorated with the magnificent Church of Saint George at Karitsi, named after the noble Athenian family of Kritsis, who, during the Ottoman rule over the city, built a church dedicated to Saint George on this site. This church was destroyed during the Greek War of Independence of 1821-1829. The church you see now was constructed on the old foundation between 1845 and 1849 by the well-known Greek architect Lysandros Kaftanzoglou, who also led the building of the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Dionysius Areopagita. The church adheres to Byzantine architectural canons, deviating from them only in a few elements. It stands out from the overall rhythm through its protruding bell tower, made of grey

marble—a rather distinctive feature among Athens' Orthodox churches.

Holy Metropolitan Church of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary



Now, as you enter the labyrinth of narrow and sometimes inconvenient streets of the old city, twisting and intertwining like cracks diverging from the epicentre of shattered glass, the most important thing is not to get lost. Exit onto Praxitelus Street, and when it meets Kolokotronis Street, turn slightly to the right. In front of you will be the entrance to the narrow Tiseos Street. Walk along it without turning until you reach Perikleus Street, then veer slightly to the right and turn onto another narrow street, Fokionos. This will lead you to Mitropoleos Square (the Square of the Metropolis), where Greece's main

Orthodox church is located: the Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God. We Athenians simply call "Metropoli" because it is the centre of the Athens Metropolis and the place where the Archbishop of All Greece—the head of the Greek Orthodox Church—serves. This beautiful church was consecrated on Christmas Day, 25 December 1842, by King Otto I of Greece and his consort, Queen Amalia. The original project and its construction were overseen by the young and already well-known Theophil von Hansen. Based on his design, the church was built up to the height of the first row of windows, but work was halted in 1843 due to a lack of funds.

Wedding of Prince George of Greece and Denmark and Princess Marie Bonaparte in the Cathedral.

In 1862, the deposed and exiled King Otto I took with him all the Greek royal regalia (the crown, sceptre, orb, and sword). Therefore, no Greek monarch has been crowned since. Instead, the monarchs have participated in a special enthronement ceremony in this cathedral, similar to those performed today instead of

Saint Philothea of Athens

Below the Cathedral of Athens there is a small museum that displays Royal Thrones used during church ceremonies, ancient gospels and much more.

coronations in all other European monarchies, except for the United Kingdom.

The last royal wedding held here was that of Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark, the youngest son of King Constantine II. This event took place on 23 October 2021. The guests included many members of the ruling and former ruling royal houses of Europe. Soon after this wedding, the final royal funeral—that of His Majesty King Constantine II—took place in the cathedral. The funeral service was held on 15 January 2023. During it, the monarch's coffin was displayed for public view not inside the church itself but, instead, in the nearby Chapel of Saint Eleftherios. This was an apparent breach of protocol, as, according to the Greek constitution, the funeral of a former head of state should be a state occasion with a special ceremonial protocol.

Inside the cathedral are sarcophagi containing relics of two particularly venerated saints in modern Greece. On the right side lie the remains of His Holiness Archbishop Gregory V of

Gregory V (1746-1821), Patriarch of Constantinople

Constantinople, who was hanged in 1821 by order of the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II in response to news of the Greek uprising on the Peloponnese. Gregory V did not support the rebels, as he feared retribution from Turkish authorities against the Greek population of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), which had maintained a large Greek diaspora since Byzantine times. However, he could not avoid execution. According to legend, the patriarch's body hung on the gates of his residence in the Fanar district for three days before the Turks took it down, desecrated it, and threw it into the sea. The body was later found by sailors aboard a Greek merchant ship called the "Saint Nicholas," which transported it to Odessa, a city with a significant Greek population at the time. It was in Odessa that the first major Jewish pogrom in the Russian Empire (to which Odessa belonged at the time) took place. Among members of the Greek community of Odessa, rumours spread that Jews, and not Turks, had defiled the patriarch Gregory's body. This led the Greeks of Odessa to attack the Jewish quarter and kill 17 people. Eventually, Gregory V's relics were buried in the Trinity Church of the Greek Orthodox Church in Odessa. They were not moved to Athens until 1871.

In the left nave, also in a sarcophagus, lie the relics of Saint Philothei, the patroness of Athens. Philothei—born Parascheva (Revula) Binizelos—was the only daughter of the wealthy Athenian Angelos Binizelos, who came from an ancient patrician family, and his wife, Syrriga, who was related to the House of Palaiologos, the last dynasty of Byzantine Emperors. Parascheva was born in her father's house in Plaka, in the old centre of Athens, on 21 November 1522, almost 70 years after the Turks captured the city. (Incidentally, the Binizelos family house has been restored and is now open to visitors as a museum, which we will discuss shortly.) Because Parascheva was the sole heir, Angelos Binizelos dreamed of marrying her to a noble Athenian family so he could pass his estate to his grandchildren. However, her only marriage was an unsuccessful one: Her husband, the patrician Andreas Hilas, was much older than his 14-year-old bride and died only three years after their wedding, having never fathered children with Parascheva. Subsequently, contrary to her father's wishes, Parascheva took monastic vows and became a nun under the name Philothei. After her father's death, upon which she inherited all his wealth and his house in central Athens, Philothei used her resources and influence to help Christians fleeing Turkish tyranny. In her mansion, she sheltered Athens women who were to be taken into rich Muslim harems or sold into slavery for disobedience, as well as Greeks fleeing Cyprus when it was conquered by the Ottomans, who had committed a terrible massacre of the Christian population there. Moreover, Philothei founded a monastery in the northern suburb of Athens (today an area of the Greek capital called Psychiko), where those fleeing persecution—Athenians and other Greeks—found refuge. Her humanitarian activities were so extensive that, at one point, Philothei engaged in direct correspondence with the Great Council of the Venetian Republic, which had been at war with the Ottoman Empire throughout the 15th to 18th centuries. She discussed with the Great Council the possibility of Venice providing financial aid to Greeks escaping Ottoman persecution. Naturally, such activities could not go unnoticed by the Ottoman authorities. On the night of 2 to 3

Apostle Peter with keys. Detail of the carved ornament of the doors of the Cathedral of Athens

October 1588, Janissaries captured Philothei at the Church of Saint Andrew in Patisia (now an Athens district) and brutally beat her. She died from her injuries on 19 February 1589 in her monastery at Psychiko, where she had been taken by the sisters from the community she had founded. Shortly after her martyrdom, the Greek Orthodox Church canonised Philothei, and today she is venerated as the saint and patroness of Athens and the Athenians.

If you'd like to begin your walk at Metropolis Square, you can easily reach it from Syntagma Square by heading down Metropoleos Street — it'll be on your right if you're standing with your back to the fountain. Or, of course, you can simply follow this **Google Maps link.**

Holy Church of the Virgin Mary Gorgoepikoos and Saint Eleutherius

In the shadows of the cathedral, on the right side when one is facing its facade, lies a hidden elderly lady: a clock tower. The tiles on its dome have faded, and grass and moss have grown over them. No one seems to care about it. But do not trust your eyes. What you see is a unique example of Byzantine architecture, created almost entirely from remnants of ancient temples, shrines, and other old buildings, and probably (though not with absolute certainty) the last Orthodox church in Athens consecrated before Frankish Crusaders captured the city in 1204—namely, the Church of the Virgin Mary the Urgent and Saint Eleftherios.

This long and complex name was not chosen by accident: The church stands on the site where, in ancient times, there stood a shrine to the goddess Ilitía—one of Hera and Zeus' daughters and, therefore, sister to Athena, to whom pregnant women turned for help during childbirth. Quite likely, this shrine was destroyed in the 4th century AD, and on its site, an early Christian church

dedicated to the Virgin Mary was built. According to ancient memory, this was also where pregnant women came for help. In that case, the Virgin Mary of the Urgent, called upon in prayer, might be seen as an "adaptation" of the pagan goddess Ilitía—i.e., a protector of childbirth—integrated into Christian rituals.

Farewell to King Paul I in the Cathedral of Athens. March 7, 1964

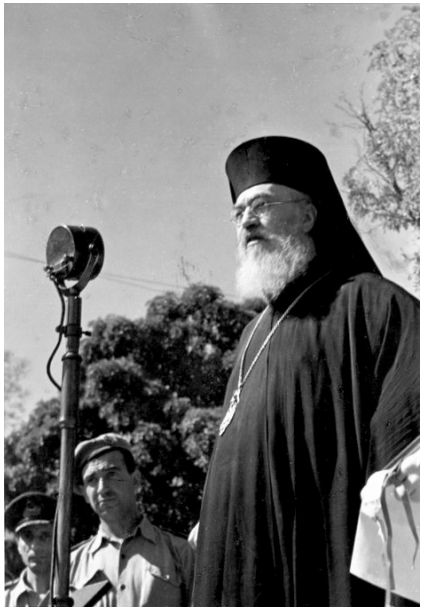
The origin of the dedication to Saint Eleftherios (an early Christian bishop from Illyria) probably also traces back to the pagan goddess Ilitía, whose name in Ancient Greek is related to the word "Eleftheria" (meaning "Freedom") and takes forms such as "Elefthus" and "Litiría." Given this close connection between the church's name and its former pagan shrine, some historians have suggested that the church was built as early as the 7th or 8th centuries AD. However, this supposition is probably false because, besides marble and limestone blocks taken from destroyed ancient buildings, construction materials from later structures—at least from the 11th or 12th centuries—were used. This allowed historians to speculate that the church was consecrated—probably by the Greek Metropolitan of Athens, Michael Choniates—shortly

before the Crusaders captured Athens in 1204. However, even this dating is challenged by an intriguing detail: If you walk around the church to the right, you will find, at the top of the opposite wall, a marble slab resting on its side and inscribed with Ancient Greek script. This slab is mentioned by the "father of archaeology" (the Italian humanist of the Renaissance, Ciriaco of Ancona [1391–1449]), whose travel records indicate that he saw it still in place on the Ancient Athenian Agora in 1436 when he visited the city.

Thus, it is quite possible that this church was built not just during the time of Catholic dominance over Athens but also during the period when the history of the Catholic Duchy of Athens was gradually drawing to a close.

The various elements that you can see if you closely examine the walls of Saint Eleftherios Church are called spolia—"reused fragments from the oldest constructions used as building materials." The most remarkable among them (apart from the aforementioned slab) is the long section of Attic meionologion (calendar) located above the church entrance. This marble frieze dates to approximately the 1st century BC and depicts a series of figures representing zodiac signs, harvest scenes, and elements of the Panathenaic Games (sporting-religious festivals held annually in Ancient Athens [the Small Panathenaia] and every four years [the Great Panathenaia] in honour of the city's patron goddess, Athena). You may also notice the scalloped crosses near the frieze. There is good reason to believe they depict the coat of arms of the de Villehardouin family, a Crusader family from Champagne that ruled the principality of Achaea (on the Peloponnese Peninsula) for almost a century.

Monument to Archbishop Damaskinos



Archbishop Damaskinos (1891-1949) during his tenure as regent of the Kingdom of Greece (1944- 1946)

Opposite the cathedral stands a bronze monument to Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens and All Greece, resting on a marble pedestal. This distinguished figure, like many notable Greeks of the 19th and 20th centuries, did not come from a noble or wealthy family. He was born in a mountain village in the region of Nafpaktia, west of Attica. His birth name was Dimitrios Papandreou (a surname shared by three Greek prime ministers, all belonging to the same political dynasty, but with no familial relation). For 10 years (from 1928 to 1938), Damaskinos' father led the Greek Orthodox Metropolis in America. Upon the German occupation of Athens in 1941 and the deposing of the Archbishop Chrysanthos, who refused to work with the collaborationist government, Damaskinos' father was elected the new head of the Greek Orthodox Church. However, one must not think that Damaskinos supported the Germans or

members of the Greek government who sided with them. The new archbishop openly declared that the racial theory of the German Nazis was contrary to the Orthodox worldview and offensive to any Christian, and he actively helped Greek Jews, who, from April 1941, were being mass-arrested and sent to death camps and forced labour camps by the occupation authorities. Under a secret order from Archbishop Damaskinos, parish priests of the Greek Orthodox Church began issuing false baptism certificates to Jews, thus de jure making them Greeks. In other parishes, after Damaskinos' call, priests hid Jews from the Gestapo in church cellars, their own homes, and the homes of Greek parishioners. Thanks to Damaskinos' actions, some 1500 people were saved from deportation to the death camps. In 1970, he was posthumously awarded the honour of Righteous Among the Nations by the Yad Vashem Institute of Israel. Alongside him, another 363 Greek citizens distinguished themselves in this effort. These included Princess Alice of Greece and Denmark, mother of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who sheltered the Cohen family in her Athens house, thereby saving them from Gestapo agents.

Monument to Emperor Constantine XI

A little farther, in the shaded depth of the square, stands a bronze monument to the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI Dragash Paleologos. His name is linked to one of the most tragic pages in Greek history—the fall of Constantinople and the complete conquest of Byzantium by the Ottoman Turks on 29 May 1453.

By that time, only the city of Constantinople remained within the walls of the Byzantine Empire, along with the Peloponnese peninsula, governed by Constantine XI's younger brother, Thomas Paleologos. However, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed the

Conqueror's decision to finally "resolve the Christian Question" by storming the last remnant of the Roman Empire (for it was the "Roman" Empire that Greeks living within it called their state—preferring also to call themselves not Greeks or Hellenes but Romans or "Romeis") was a catastrophic event, beginning four centuries of Islamic domination over most of the ancestral Greek lands. The established tradition in the world, cautious about Friday the 13th, has a particular nuance in Greece. Here, fears are often expressed about Tuesday the 13th. This peculiarity is also connected to the history of the fall of Constantinople. The date of 29 May 1453 was a Tuesday, and if you sum the digits of the year 1453 (1+4+5+3), the total is 13. As for Emperor Constantine XI, both he and his younger brother Thomas, as well as his older brother and predecessor on the imperial throne, John VIII, struggled desperately to defend what remained of their state, seeking support from the Pope in Rome and European powers. They particularly focused their effort on uniting the Orthodox and Catholic Churches into one universal, ecumenical Christian church. To that end, Emperor John VIII attended the 1438–1439 Ecumenical Council in Florence, where a special document—

Constantine XI is most often depicted as crowned, but he was not crowned in the traditional sense of the word: at the time of his accession to the throne, the empire was in such a dire state that instead of a golden crown, a priestly hood was placed on his head.

called the "Union of Florence"—was signed, concerning the union of the two largest Christian churches. (We will discuss or have already discussed these events in more detail during our journey through Florence and Tuscany.) According to this document, the Byzantine Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople recognised the supremacy of the Pope of Rome as the successor of the Apostle Peter over all other hierarchs of the unified church and pledged to adopt the Catholic liturgical tradition. However, this "union" was vehemently rejected by the Greek clergy and part of the Byzantine aristocracy after Emperor John VIII returned from Italy. The Supreme Admiral of the Imperial Fleet, Lucas Notaras, famously declared, "Better a Turkish turban than a papal tiara."

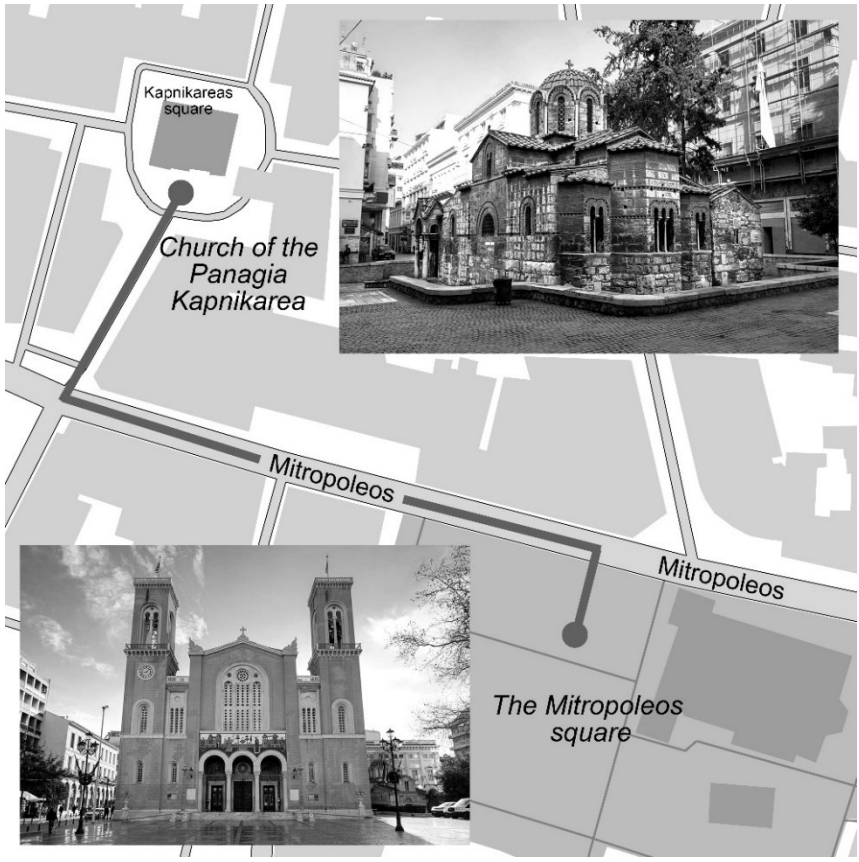
Thus, following the death of his elder brother, Constantine XI, there was nothing left for him to do but accept with honour the destiny he was fated to fulfil. On the day of the fall of Constantinople, the last Christian ruler took off the symbols of

Imperial authority and rushed into battle against the Ottoman Turks who had entered the city. There, he met his heroic death.

This monument is a replica, created by the artist Spiros Gogakis, of the sculpture erected in 1989 in Mystras—the last stronghold of Byzantium on the Peloponnese Peninsula, a major city-fortress perched on a rock near ancient Sparta (where we will, without a doubt, find ourselves during our most exciting Peloponnese adventure). Another exact copy of this monument can be seen in the port city of Piraeus, at the Church of the Holy Trinity, at the intersection of King George I Avenue and Ethnikis Antistaseos street. Additionally, in the Athens district of Palaio Faliro, along the wide promenade of the Aegean Sea, you can see an impressive equestrian statue of Constantine XI on a tall pedestal.

Church of the Virgin Kapnikarea

Now, if you return to Mitropoleos Street and walk in the direction of traffic until you reach the intersection with Kapnikareos Street, and then turn right, you will immediately see a large, dark, 11th-century Byzantine church: the Church of Panagia Kapnikareia. It is also known as the University Church because for several decades, this church has been part of the Greek National University of Athens (the same university that was once royal and built during the reign of Otto, with its main building designed by Hans Christian Hansen together with his talented brother, Theophilos). This church is one of the oldest in Athens. It was built in the mid-11th century, most likely during the reign of Emperor Constantine IX Monomakh (from 1042 to 1055). Its nickname, "Kapnikareia," probably derives from the Byzantine official title "Kapnikarios," who was the person responsible for collecting the so-called "smoke tax" (Greek: Kapnikos Foros) levied on extra chimneys in city houses. According to this version of the story, the church was founded thanks to donations from this



official. An alternative theory suggests that the moniker comes from the nickname ("Smoky") of the icon of the Virgin Mary ("Kapnos" in Greek means "smoke")—a reference to the miraculous survival of the Madonna icon from this church during its burning by the Turks in 1689.

The church was built on the site of an earlier church erected in the 5th century by Empress Eudoxia Augusta, wife of Emperor

Theodosius II of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Empress was born in Athens and was a talented poetess. Naturally, her church did not appear there by chance; before it, there was an ancient shrine dedicated to one of the pagan goddesses (either Athena or Demeter—this remains unclear), whom many Athenians continued to worship despite the destruction wrought by the Christians. Its construction on this site aimed to accustom the local population to worship the new, "true and single God." In memory of this shrine, numerous elements of the temple remain: pieces of marble columns, stairs, and friezes, as well as four columns of different orders located in the central part of the Church of Panagia. You can easily find these if you go inside. During the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829), when Athens repeatedly changed hands, this church was severely damaged, and in 1834, the city authorities wanted to demolish it. King Ludwig I of Bavaria, father of King Otto I of Greece, personally intervened in the fate of Kapnikareia by providing funds for its partial restoration. However, in 1863, there was once again a plan to demolish the church. The direct intervention of the Metropolitan of Athens, Theophilos, saved the church a second time. Subsequently, the

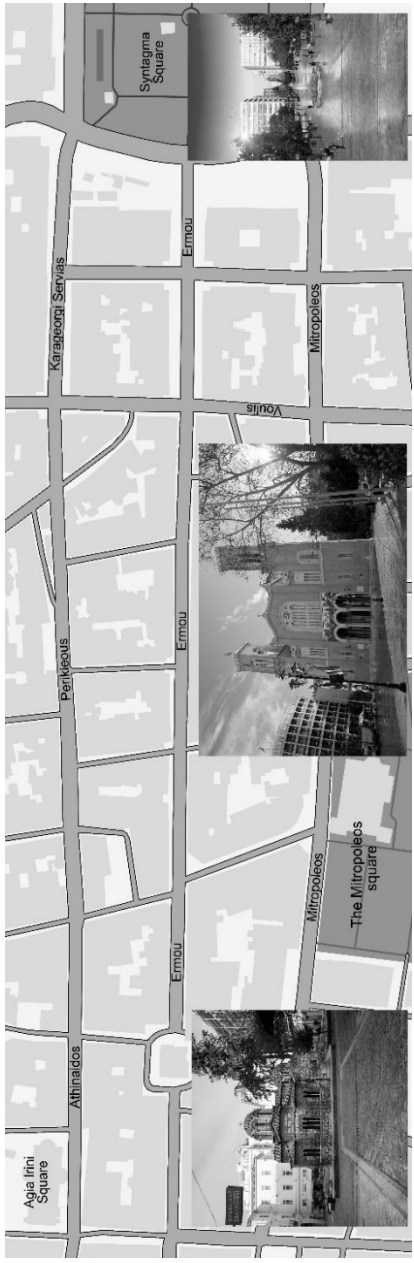
church was transferred to the care of the National and Athens University.

The beautiful mosaic of the Virgin Mary with the infant, crafted in the finest tradition of Byzantine art, adorns the entrance to the Church of Panagia. It was created in 1936 by the Greek artist Elli Vila. In 1942, the outstanding iconographer, Fotis Kondoglou, created a fresco of the Virgin Mary Praying (Oranta) in the conch of the church.

You'll also come across this church while strolling along the bustling shopping street of Ermou. And here's a Google Maps link for your convenience.

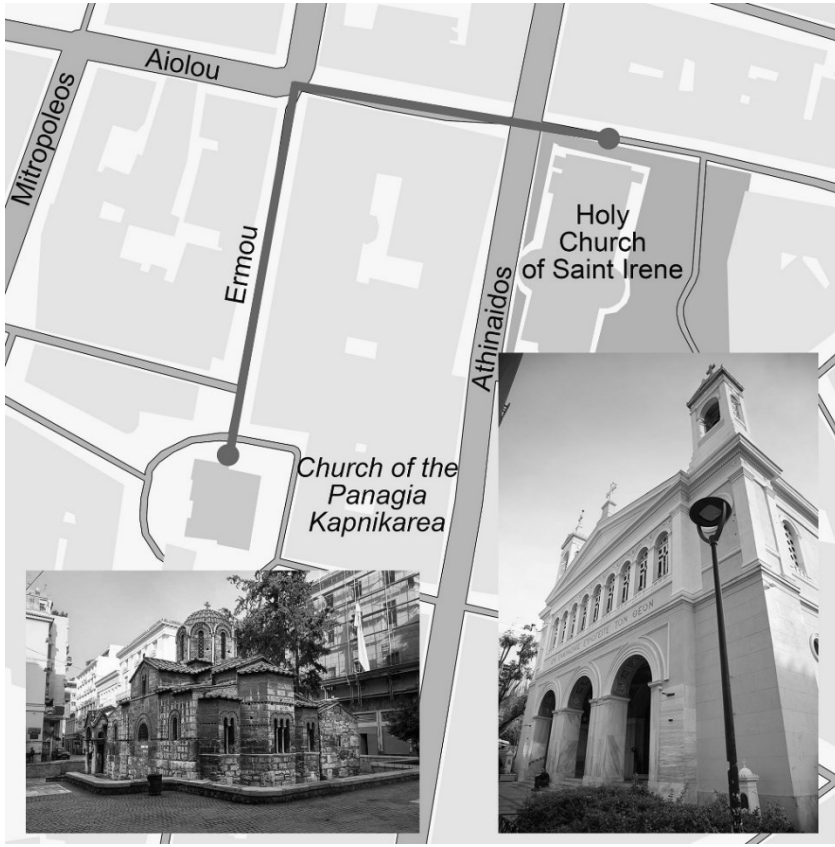
Ermou Street

The street on which this church is situated is called Ermou, a street of Hermes, and it is one of the most expensive streets in Athens in terms of commercial rent. However, this does not mean one cannot approach the shops and boutiques there without being listed in the Forbes "top" list. In fact, prices for clothing, shoes, and accessories are often lower here than in Athens' shopping malls, so many residents flock here during sales to update their wardrobes or purchase Christmas gifts.



You can also reach this street either from Syntagma Square — here's the Google Maps link or from Monastiraki Square — and here's that link as well.

Church of St. Irene



If you walk down this street (Ermou), towards the point where it intersects with Aiolou Street, and then turn right after passing several snack bars popular among Athens' youth, you will see, on your right, a large Neoclassical church dedicated to Saint Irene. This is another remarkable work by the well-known Lysandros Kaftanzoglou. At this very spot, in a hastily rebuilt ancient church of Saint Irene, which had suffered a destructive fire and dated back to medieval times, Athens was proclaimed the new capital of the Greek Kingdom. It replaced Nafplio, where the Greek government was based during the presidency of Count Kapodistrias (from 1828 to 1831). Following the assassination of

Count Kapodistrias in Nafplio by conspirators displeased with his firm stance against armed groups of klephts (former brigands) seeking power, the newly elected King Otto of Bavaria and his advisors (Bavarian politicians Joseph von Armansperg, Georg von Maurer, and Karl von Abel) decided to move the capital to another city, one that had not yet sullied its reputation. The choice fell on Athens—the heart of ancient civilisation.

After Athens was proclaimed the capital of Greece, in this church, in 1835, the solemn declaration of King Otto I's majority and full sovereignty took place. (He was only 17 when he ascended the throne, whereas in those times, kings typically came of age at 20.) Additionally, in this church, in 1843, the remains of the hero of the national liberation war, Theodoros Kolokotronis, were honoured with a funeral service, and a solemn prayer service was held to mark the adoption of the first constitution of the Greek Kingdom. In 1847, the decision was made to completely rebuild the historic church—a project executed over the next three years under the direction of Lysandros Kaftanzoglou. The resulting church combines not only obvious Neoclassical features but also elements of Byzantine and Renaissance architecture. The first celebration held in the reconstructed Church of Saint Irene was the declaration of the Greek Orthodox Church as autocephalous (self-governing) from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This took place in 1850.

Church of Panagia Chrysospiliotissa

Another impressive church (yes, Athens truly has a remarkable number of churches) is located a little farther along the same street, Aiolou, at number 60. It is the Church of the Virgin Mary Chryospiliotissa (Our Lady of the Golden Cave), a name derived from the original church that once stood on this site, built in memory of the monastery of the Great Cave. The latter was one of Greece's oldest Christian monasteries, founded in AD 362 in honour of a miraculous appearance of the Virgin Mary's face in a cave on the Peloponnese Peninsula near the town of Kalavrita. The old church was destroyed during the Greek War of Independence of 1821–1829; not until 1863 did construction begin on this church, under the leadership of the architect Panagis Kalkos, who is also well-known to us. After Kalkos' death in 1878, the project was completed by the renowned Ernst Ziller. Thanks to him, the church

has a fascinating eclectic style, blending Byzantine, Neoclassical, and neo-Gothic architecture. Nearby, slightly tucked away inside, stands a small chapel dedicated to Saint Paraskevi. This structure remarkably survived the Turkish occupation, although the exact date of its founding is, unfortunately, unknown.

Café "Krinos"

As we finish our first day, I want to introduce you to an establishment that no average guidebook will tell you about—and that, arguably, is what truly makes many Athenians authentic Athenians. This is Café Krinos, located a little farther down this street, past the intersection of Aiolou and Evripidou Streets. This wonderful café, which opened its doors more than a century ago, in 1923, stands out because, despite all the many years that have passed, almost nothing has changed there. Since the first doughnut was fried in Krinos, Greece has overthrown the monarchy, reinstated it, established a fascist dictatorship, repelled an Italian invasion, endured German occupation, been torn apart by civil war, returned to the monarchy, experienced a military dictatorship, and again become a republic. All this time, a simple Athenian could always come into this café,

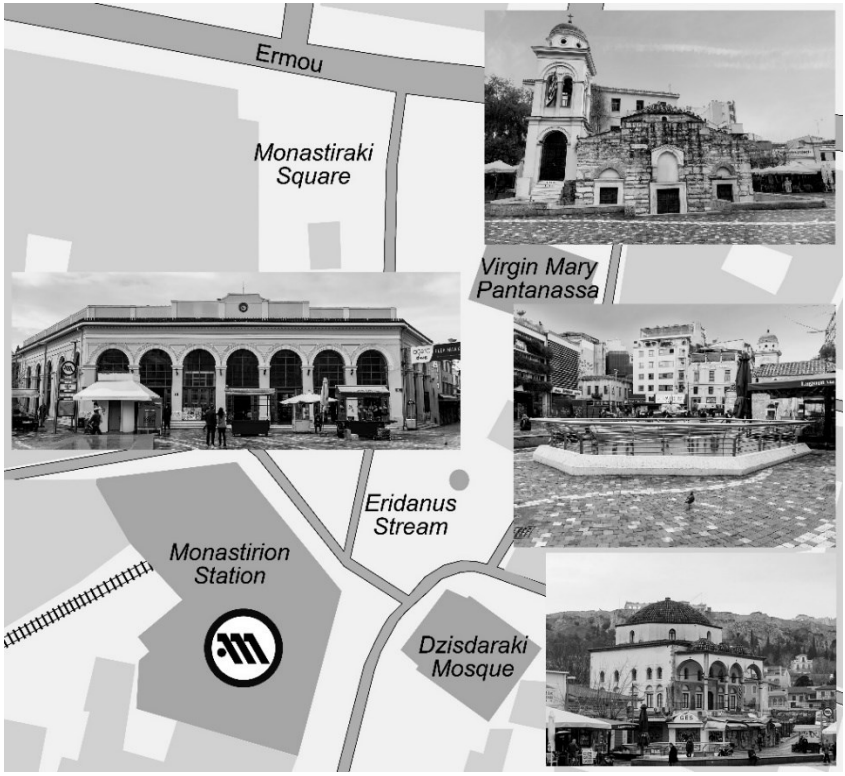
order a plate of traditional doughnuts (“loukoumades” with honey and the most delicious stretchy ice cream in the world) and a cup of fragrant Greek coffee with cinnamon and briefly forget about all the madness going on outside the large windows.

The café has no wait staff; you will need to take a tray yourself and place your order at the counter located at the back of the hall. My personal recommendation, of course, is “loukoumades” with honey, cinnamon, and ice cream (vanilla or chocolate, to your taste). This might be the most delicious Greek dessert you can try. You can get a glass of water for free by filling it from the tap to the right of the cashier, then sit at any free table downstairs or on the second floor and enjoy!

Google Map

Day 2. Old Athens – the soul of the city

Monastiraki Square



Monastiraki Square offers a rather stark contrast to the sluggishly functioning Constitution Square (Syndagma/Syntagmatos). Loud, chaotic, dirty—every time I step onto it, I am overwhelmed by the feeling that I have found myself in some Eastern bazaar. Yes, it's best to visit early in the morning when the souvenir stalls, which pull tourists in opposite directions, are just beginning to open, and the beggars and other marketplace tricksters, with bunches of laser pointers selling

for two euros each, won't be hanging around your neck every minute. There really is quite a lot to see in this square, and in the gentle hour of dawn, you can enjoy a quiet tête-à-tête with it.

More recently, cars drove freely around Monastiraki Square and there was even a bus route... (Photo from the mid-60s)

Now there is no roadway, but the bustle has not diminished. View of Monastiraki Square today: Dzistarakis Mosque (in the center of the frame), Monastirion Station (on the right side of the frame) and the Church of the All-Holy Virgin (on the left side of the frame)

Mosque of Tzistarakis

Arguably, the first thing that will catch your eye on this square is the building in the corner. It is almost a perfect cube in shape, with four columns and a large, tiled dome. You might think it's a mosque—and you would be quite right, my dear traveller. Indeed, this building once housed one of the five mosques in Athens from the Ottoman period of rule. It was built in 1759 by order of the Athens Pasha Cizderiyeli Mustafa Ağa, whom the Athenians called Dzistarakis, and after whom the mosque received its nickname, Dzistaraki. The lime for its construction was, according to legend, made from burning one of the columns of the Temple of Zeus Olympios (or, according to another version, of the ruins of Hadrian's Library, which are located immediately behind the mosque). The latter version seems more plausible, as the fact that some Athenians considered Mustafa Ağa's act to be sacrilegious—despite their own frequent use of ancient ruins for building houses and utility structures, and the countless times ancient sculptures and bas-reliefs were dismantled to make lime—is hard to deny. Nonetheless, news of Mustafa Ağa's vandalism

reached Sultan Mustafa III, who ordered his removal from the governorship of Athens.

The mosque served its original purpose until the start of the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829). During that short period when Greek rebels controlled Athens, the city council met inside the mosque. When Athens became the capital of the Greek Kingdom, the former mosque was used for organising dance evenings, housing soldiers, and storing food. After a minor reconstruction in 1915, it housed the exhibition of the Museum of Greek Crafts and Folk Art. The museum moved to a new building in 1975, after which the Dzistaraki Mosque became its branch. Until 2014, it hosted a collection of contemporary Greek ceramics. However, it has been 10 years since that exhibition was transferred from the historic building, and the former mosque has remained vacant ever since.

The Church of the All-Holy Virgin

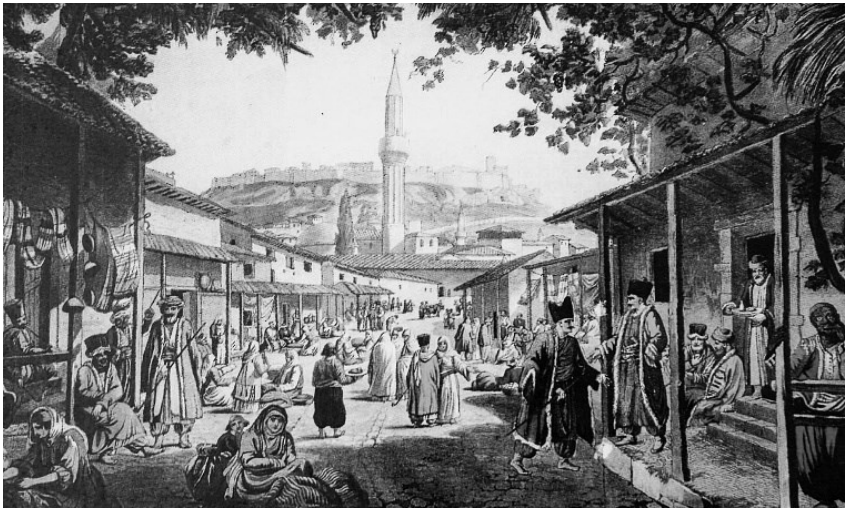
Sometime in the past, during Ottoman rule, this area was a true Eastern bazaar—large and typical of many major cities in the Ottoman Empire. It started about 100 metres (roughly 320 feet) from the square and ended here, beside the mosque. The square was filled with taverns serving distinctive liver snacks called “dzeri.” That is why the place was popularly known as “Dzierdzidika.” It was also home to hammams, residential houses, and nearby, the mansion of the chief tax collector, the “voyevoda.” Farther up the street were the ruins of a medrese, an Islamic theological school used during the Ottoman period. These ruins are still visible today. Another historical name for the square from those distant years was “Stis Karotses” (meaning “at the carters”)

because it bustled with horse-drawn carriage drivers waiting for clients.

It was indeed this square, not Syntagma (which became central only after the construction of King Otto I's Royal Palace), that served as Athens' main square and the heartbeat of the city for nearly four centuries. Its current name, "Monastiraki," is a diminutive form of "Monastirion" ("monastery") and references a time when a monastery occupied almost the entire area. During the era of Athens' dukedom, it was a male monastery and part of an old monastery complex called Kesariani, still located in the Imittos mountains northeast of Athens. The monastery's main church was the Church of the Virgin Mary the All-Queen, and you can still see it opposite the Dzistarakis mosque. This church is likely the oldest of Athens' surviving Orthodox churches. Some scholars date its construction to the 8th century AD, while more cautious estimates place it in the 10th century. Exact dating is difficult to achieve due to the numerous modifications and additions made mostly during the Ottoman period. These significantly altered the original appearance of the church. Additionally, by that time, the monastery

had become a female monastery, though how exactly that happened remains unknown.

But there is no doubt about the role played by the monks living within the monastery in transforming the area around it into the city's main market. The thick woollen fabrics they produced were sold by the nuns in small stalls built along the monastery walls. Over time, other stalls—pottery, cooperage, and so on—appeared nearby until a bustling market completely surrounded the monastery. As the market grew, the monastery's land was gradually taken by city authorities. Its cells were demolished, and eventually, the monastery was entirely disbanded. All that remains today is its former main church, which Athenians both jokingly and seriously call "the little monastery," or "Monastiraki" in Greek.



Bazaar on Monastiraki in the 18th century

River Eridanus

Now, stand between the Church of Panagia the All-Queen and the Dzistarakis mosque, and listen closely. If the square is relatively quiet, you will easily hear the roar of water underground. Notice the trapezoidal opening, fenced off on all sides. If you head closer and look down, you will see a true wonder. In a ceramic trough, partially covered by a brick dome, at a depth of about six metres, flows a river—a river that seems to have stepped straight out of the pages of Strabo and Pausanias. It is a thin stream of transparent water, like a thread, connecting everything you see above: the ruins, churches, hills, and mountains from that distant, almost fairy-tale-like antiquity, where playwrights, philosophers, brave warriors, and Olympian gods once reigned. This is the Eridanus River, which has flowed through that pipe buried beneath your feet for nearly 1,900 years, obeying the command of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, who wished to hide the river underground.

This section was inadvertently discovered by builders in 2008. Today, if you enter the Monastiraki station and descend to the Blue line of the Athens subway, you can get closer before stepping onto the platform and behold this marvel of Roman engineering at arm's length. If the Heridanus hadn't been enclosed in this pipe 19 centuries ago, it probably would have dried up and turned marshy long before now.

Behind this fence, below, is part of a Roman collector, opened during the construction of the metro, through which the Eridanus River flows.

Monastiraki Train Station

Given that we've mentioned the metro, it's worth paying attention to it. The station, officially called "Monastiraki" in the past and now simply "Monastiraki," was grandly opened on 17 May 1895 in the presence of King George I of Greece and his consort, Queen Olga. This station became an extension of the existing "Tisio-Pireevs" line, which had operated since 1869. It was a surface steam railway linking Athens with the port city of Piraeus, which today, de facto, can be considered part of the expanded Greek capital. The idea of connecting Athens with Piraeus first arose in the 1850s, but the project wasn't realised until 1867, under the leadership of English engineer Edward Perring. (Notably, the British were the first to equip their capital with a metro; London's underground opened in 1863.) At that time, only barren, rocky wasteland lay between Athens and Piraeus, so there was no need to hide the railway underground. This fact prevented Athens from claiming the world's second-oldest metro—this title perhaps belongs to the underground funicular in Constantinople,

Queen Olga
(1851-1926)
Born Grand Duchess Olga Konstantinovna of Russia was so beloved by the subjects of her husband George I (who reigned for almost 50 years) that to this day the Russian female name Olga is quite common among Greeks.

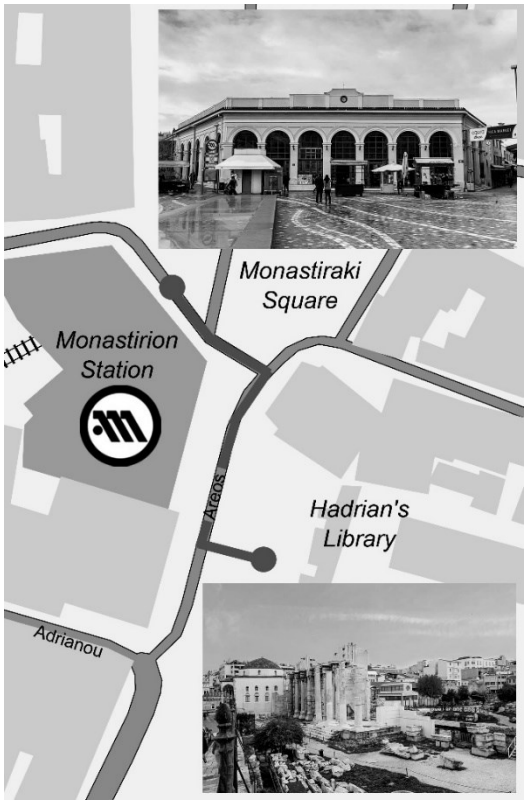
which opened in 1875. Athens' metro went underground in 1895, coinciding with the opening of the Monastiraki station, which was part of the new metro system. That same year, the Omonia station opened. It was located entirely beneath the square of the same name in the centre of Athens. The interior finishings of this station, like parts of Monastiraki station, have remained unchanged since then, although the entire metro was extensively reconstructed during the laying of two new, fully underground lines between 1990 and 2004. One of these lines—the Blue line—allows you to travel directly from Monastiraki Square to Athens International Airport by buying a special ticket for nine euros at ticket machines or the box office. The journey takes about 30-40 minutes, depending on the train schedule, as trains heading to the airport run at intervals of about 35 minutes.

In both directions from the station, Ifestou (Hephaestus) and Pandrosou Streets branch out. They are full of souvenir shops selling trinkets—something that still links Monastiraki Square to its bustling market past. Opposite the station, on the roof of a fairly tall building at the corner of Ermou and Athinas Streets, is the Roof Garden Café. Personally, I cannot recommend it, but if you want

to take some memorable photos of the square with a fantastic view of the Acropolis, I believe you will not be disappointed.

Hadrian's Library

Now, I invite you to walk past the Dzisdarakis mosque and ascend along Areos Street. Here, a magnificent view awaits of the only remaining part of the Roman Library of Hadrian, built in AD 132 and commissioned and personally financed by one of the greatest enthusiasts of Ancient Greece to ever sit on the Roman imperial throne: Publius Aelius Hadrianus, popularly known as Hadrian. This ruler was quite different from his predecessors and many of his successors. He was the only Roman emperor in history to personally visit most of his territories. During his reign, he travelled to Gaul, Germany, Britain, and the Middle East, but Athens, besides the library, was especially dear to him. Here, he constructed an entire Roman district named after himself: Hadrianopolis,



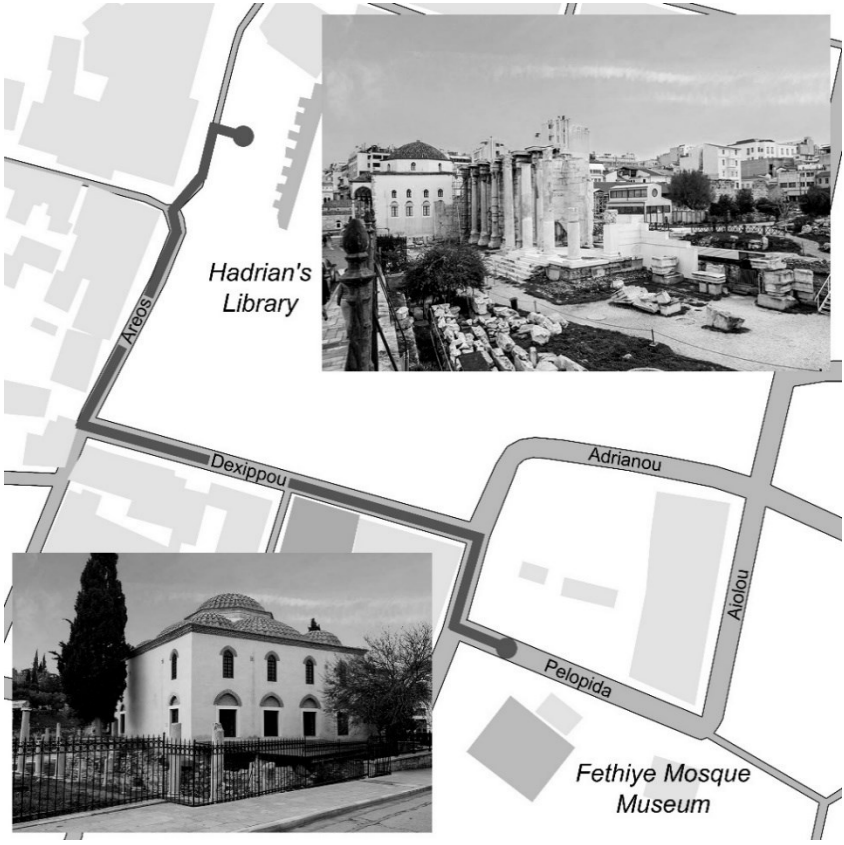
An early Christian church that existed near the wall of the former Hadrian Library, captured by daguerreotype in 1842

separated from Ancient Athens by a wall and an arch, both of which are still standing.

This same emperor helped the Athenians complete one of the city's longest-standing construction projects: the Temple of Olympian Zeus. It was begun by the tyrant Pisistratus in the mid-6th century BC, and only a few columns remain today. The library itself was a luxurious building measuring approximately 100 by 70 metres (320 by 230 feet), with a large atrium, reading rooms, a lecture hall, and, of course, a vast library that mainly housed scrolls. In total, it contained about 20,000 manuscripts, most of which were destroyed in AD 267 during the Germanic barbarian invasion of Athens (by the Heruli). Afterwards, the library lay in ruins. Some parts were repurposed to build a defensive wall intended to protect Athens from future invasions. Only between AD 407 and 412 was Hadrian's library partially restored under the order of the Athenian prefect Herulius. Soon after, Christian churches were built among its ruins. The first of these appeared in the 5th century, and its opening marked the transformation of the space once occupied by the library into a new marketplace—a centre of trade and,

simultaneously, a cultural hub for Christian Athens. Here, the first cathedral of the Athens metropolitan was later established before it was moved to the Parthenon. Only one of those early Christian churches—a cross-domed basilica built in the 6th century and slightly expanded and reconstructed in the 7th—survived into the 19th century. Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey depicted this church in one of his series of unique daguerreotypes of Athens, taken in 1842. The church burned down in 1884, and in the 20th century, the ruins of Hadrian's library were carefully cleared of all non-antique debris and studied in detail. Interestingly, the mansion of the Ottoman tax collector (the voyevoda) responsible for collecting taxes was situated on the ruins of the library.

Fethiye Mosque



We now continue along Areos Street. At the very first junction, we turn left onto Dexippou Street, then proceed along the fence of the Roman Agora. When we reach another junction, let's briefly glance to the right, where another mosque—also partially enclosed by a fence—stands. It is called Fethiye. In Turkish, its name means "Mosque of the Conqueror"—a nickname stemming from the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453 and ended the history of the Athens Duchy in 1458. Upon entering the city, he ordered the construction of Athens' first mosque, which received the victorious sultan's nickname. This is the mosque you can see before you now.

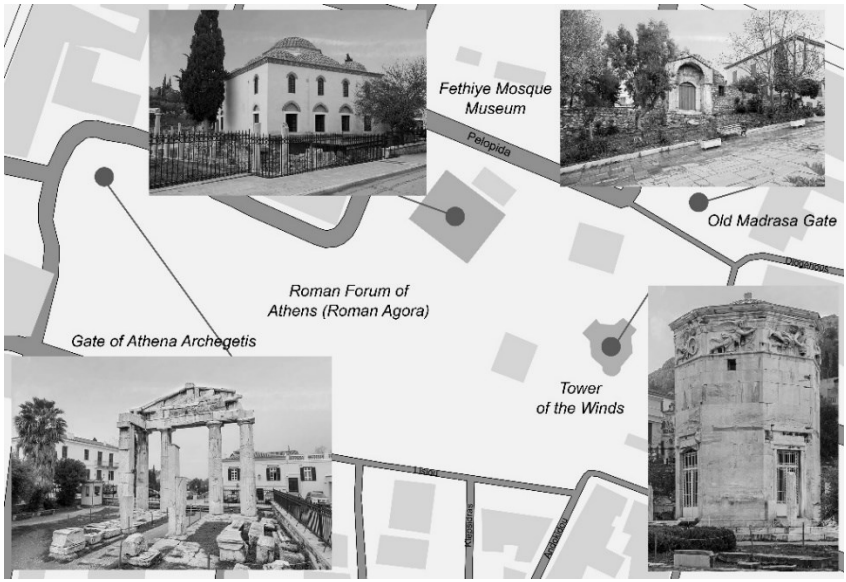
Portrait of Mehmed the Conqueror by Paolo Veronese.

As was customary, the mosque was built using the ruins of ancient buildings, which were plentiful on the site of the Ancient Roman Agora. The foundation on which it stands belonged to one of Athens' early Christian basilicas. (Its outline can still be discerned.) Since its opening, the mosque has been in almost continuous use, with only one exception: autumn 1687, when, for a little over two weeks, Athens was under the control of the Republic of Venice. The Catholics who occupied the city renamed Fethiye as the Church of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, but once the Turks retook the city, they restored the Islamic status quo.

Later, during the Greek War of Independence, when Greek rebels liberated Athens from the Turks in 1824–1826, a mutual skills exchange school was established in the Fethiye mosque. There, people could freely share their skills and knowledge in a system typical of education during the Ottoman period in Greece. When Athens became the capital of the Greek Kingdom, the former mosque was converted into a flour warehouse, and in 1890, a bakery was added. However, the bakery was dismantled in 1935. Until 2010, the former Fethiye mosque housed archaeological finds from the Roman Agora and the Acropolis. Then, the Ministry of Culture decided to convert it into an exhibition space following a comprehensive reconstruction that was completed in 2017. Today, not only can visitors enjoy a walk among the remains of the Roman

marketplace, but they can also view the interiors of Athens' first mosque in their original state.

The Roman Agora and the Tower of the Winds



The very site where the former Fetihiye mosque stands is called the Roman Market or the Roman Agora. It was the second major marketplace in Athens after the Ancient Athenian Agora, which the Romans established following the city's conquest in the 1st century BC. The decree for its construction was issued by the first Roman Emperor, Augustus, as evidenced by the inscription at the entrance. The site is located just a bit away from the mosque, at the junction of Pikili and Dioskouron Streets. Here, one can find a well-preserved arch dedicated to the goddess Athena. She was also venerated by the Romans, who called her Minerva.

At its height, during Emperor Hadrian's reign in the 2nd century AD, the Agora was a bustling hub, hosting numerous market stalls, shops, and workshops, as well as the traditional colonnaded stoa—a covered walkway where people could stroll or rest in the shade during scorching afternoons. Remarkably preserved are the remains of the Roman public toilets, the "Vespasianae." Their name derives from Emperor Vespasian, under whom (between AD 69 and 79) city latrines were taxed for the first time in the Roman Empire, making public facilities fee-based rather than free. According to legend, Vespasian's son, the future Emperor Titus, criticised his father for taxing even the "necessary" (literally, toilets). This prompted Vespasian to lift a coin from a chamber pot and hold it under Titus' nose, asking if it stank. When Titus answered, "Non olet" (Latin for "It does not smell"), Vespasian famously retorted, "And it's money earned from urine." This story gave rise to the popular saying, "Pecunia non olet" or "Money does not smell." Another notable structure in the Roman Agora is the Tower of the Winds, an ancient meteorological monument, one of the oldest in the world. It is an octagonal tower on a three-tiered pedestal, built entirely from Pentelic marble (as are most marble structures and sculptures in Athens). It stands just over 12.1 metres (39.8 feet) tall. Each side corresponds to a cardinal or intercardinal direction (north, north-west, west, etc.). On the frieze, you can see well-preserved allegorical images of the eight winds: Boreas (north), Keuakes (north-east), Apheliotes (east), Eurus (south-east), Notus (south), Lips (south-west), Zephyrus (west), and Skiron (north-west). Each has distinct symbols and attributes, and on windy days, Athenians could, by the direction of the wind, determine what weather to expect. Additionally, during its functional period, the top of the tower hosted a weathervane shaped like Triton blowing into a trumpet, which helped identify wind directions. Inside were water clocks—more precisely, water-based chronometers—powered by underground water sources from the Acropolis. The tower itself could also tell time. While today's surrounding buildings didn't exist in earlier times, it was one of the tallest structures in that part of Athens, and thanks to its missing

markings, it served as a kind of sundial. This engineering marvel was a gift to Athens from an astronomer named Andronikos of Cyrrhus (a city in Greek Macedonia), who lived in the 1st century BC. Little is known of his life, but the tower he gave to Athens remained a masterpiece studied by all art students across Europe. It inspired James Wyatt, creator of the Oxford Observatory Tower, and the British engineer John Upton, who designed a similar ventilation tower for the maritime library in Sevastopol (then part of the Russian Empire, now Ukraine).

Turkish Medrese

A little farther from the Roman Agora, directly opposite the Tower of the Winds, on the pedestrian section of Pelopida Street, amidst the bushes behind the benches, you can see the remains of a certain structure with boarded-up doors. If you don't know what it is, you might easily overlook it, especially against the backdrop of Roman ruins. Nonetheless, this monument of Islamic architecture deserves its "moment of fame." It is all that remains of a Turkish medrese, a religious Muslim school that appeared here in the 17th century and operated until Athens declared independence from the Ottoman Empire. After the city was proclaimed the capital of the Greek Kingdom by decree of King Otto I, the former medrese building became a prison, and condemned prisoners were hanged in the branches of an ancient plane tree in its courtyard. This practice continued under King George I until 1898, when, during archaeological excavations, most of the Ottoman architectural monument was demolished.

Now, let's turn onto Marcus Aurelius Street (a very grand name, isn't it?) and walk to its intersection with Lysiou Street (just before the pedestrian section of Marcus Aurelius Street that rises uphill). Yes, it's precisely Lysiou Street that we need. It neighbours the famous "Music Staircase" on Mnisiikleus Street—a place with its own unique spirit and special charm, filled with taverns where live Greek music is played in the evenings. This is not the tired, overplayed "Sirtaki" (which, incidentally, was dreamed up only in the 1960s). On this staircase, in clubs known as "bouat" (from the French word "boîte," meaning

Lisiou Street

"box"), the so-called "New Wave" of Greek urban music of the 1960s was born. Many young musicians, poets, singers, and composers—who lacked the funds to produce their records and had no show business connections—made a name for themselves in these clubs and later gained nationwide fame, for people from all walks of life came here for inspiration and new songs. Two of these clubs—Esperides (Hesperides) and Apanemia—are still active on this staircase. In total, there were once about 30 such clubs in central Athens, mainly in this area.

I cannot wholeheartedly recommend a single tavern here. Perhaps they have become too tourist-oriented for

me. When such a transformation happens to traditional phenomena like the Greek tavern, I feel they lose all their authenticity. Eating in them becomes just as much an act of fulfilling basic needs as grabbing a meal at McDonald's or a quick snack in an airport lounge. Moreover, the traditional Greek music played in these taverns has long been replaced by the familiar "Sirtaki" and two or three other tunes, repeated night after night from April to October. All tourists know them very well.

Let's walk farther along Lysiou Street. Besides this staircase, it is home to one of the most romantic cafés in Athens: Melina Mercouri. I recommend it to you without hesitation; you won't find better crepes (thin pancakes that Greek cuisine adopted from France) with orange jam and cream anywhere else. Moreover, the mountain herbal tea ("Vounou") served here might be the most fragrant in Athens.

Additionally, there's a whole story behind this café—a beautiful story of a Greek woman who loved her country and was loved in return. Melina Mercouri was one of the most famous Greek actresses of her time—arguably, the most renowned in the history of Greek cinema. Today, Greek cinema is essentially dead, so it is perhaps fair to call Mercouri its greatest actress of all time (on par, of course, with Irini Papa). She came from an influential, well-to-do family; her grandfather, Spyridon Mercouris, was the Mayor of Athens from 1899 to 1914 and again from 1929 to 1934, and her

Melina Mercouri in her youth

father, Stamatis Mercouris, was a member of the Greek parliament and Minister of Public Order.

Born in 1920, often said with "a silver spoon in her mouth," Melina (Amalia-Marina) Mercouri graduated from the Higher School of the National Theatre of Athens shortly before Greece's occupation by Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria in 1941. This period—from 1941 to 1944—was the most controversial in Mercouri's biography, as she lived in an apartment of approximately 400 square metres (4,305 square feet), very close to the Royal Palace in Syntagma Square. It was the same building that housed the SS command. Despite this, she felt a strong connection with Greek partisan anti-fascists and did her best to support the activities of the underground "Greek Liberation Front," coordinated by the Greek Communist Party. Through her brother, Spiros, who actively participated in the resistance, Melina donated large sums to partisan organisations. During the war, she closely allied herself with many Greek communists and socialists, which later affected her political career. It is also said that young Melina hid members of the communist underground in her apartment—right under the noses of the SS officers.

Following the end of the Second World War, particularly in the 1950s, Mercouri shone brightly both in film and on stage. Her most acclaimed and internationally recognised films include "Stella" (1955), "Never on Sunday" (1960), and "Topkapi" (1964), in which her co-star was the great Sir Peter Ustinov. The director of the last two films was Jules Dassin—a creator of classic film noir

and father of the famous French singer Joe Dassin. Jules Dassin was Mercouri's last life partner. They met at the Cannes Film Festival in 1955, and in the early 1960s, Dassin—now a renowned director with a global reputation—moved to Greece to live with her. He continued to create here, and each of his three films from this period ("Never on Sunday," "Topkapi," and "Electra") starred Mercouri and received prestigious international awards such as the Academy Award and the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or, among others.

After 1967, when the military junta of Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos usurped the power in the Greek Kingdom, resulting in King Constantine II being deposed and forced into exile with his family, a significant number of Greeks followed the monarch—not so much out of monarchical conviction but primarily due to opposition to the military dictatorship. During that period in Greece (1967–1974), strict censorship was enforced. All liberal

Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos (1919-1999) – head of the Black Colonels junta in 1967 - 1973.

The dictatorship of the "Black Colonels" in Greece lasted 7 years. To this day, it is not known for certain how exactly Papadopoulos and his associates managed to carry out a successful coup d'etat and gain a foothold in power, but the end of their regime was associated with the coup d'etat in Cyprus in 1974, the purpose

and leftist parties and movements were banned, and at times, bizarre bans were introduced. These included the prohibition on importing American popular music, which the Papadopoulos government believed "contradicted Orthodox Greek values."

Many Greeks who left the country in this forced exile banded together into strong opposition circles, openly criticising Papadopoulos' regime and calling it fascist. One of the most active figures among them was Mercouri, who was living in Paris with Jules Dassin. Her outspoken criticisms of the regime even led to an assassination attempt against her in Genoa. (Fortunately, it was unsuccessful.) Almost immediately after she began her activities in exile, one of Papadopoulos' government officials, Colonel Stylianos Pattakos, issued a decree stripping Mercouri of her Greek citizenship. During an interview about this, she famously declared, "I was born Greek and I will die Greek; Mr. Pattakos was born a fascist and he will die a fascist."

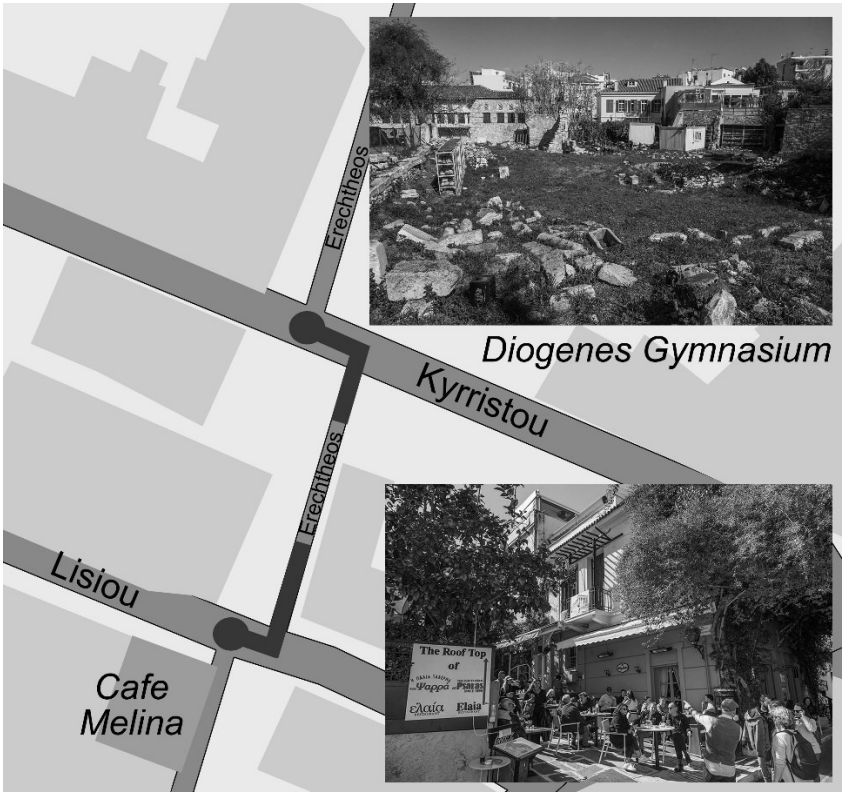
Ultimately, the "Black Colonels" military junta self-destructed. Its leaders "ate" each other in the struggle for power and failed to maintain their positions, suffering complete failure both domestically and internationally. After their fall, most political exiles (including Melina Mercouri and Jules Dassin) returned to Greece. By the late 1970s, Mercouri had ended her career in film and theatre. Her name then resonated much more loudly in the circles of former left-wing exiles. She joined the Panhellenic

Socialist Movement (PASOK) and served in the Greek Parliament for 17 years (1977–1994). During the governments of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou (1981–1989 and 1993–1994), she served as Minister of Culture and Science of the Third Hellenic Republic, becoming the first woman to hold this position in the country's history.

The café named after Mercouri was opened by her good acquaintance, Andreas Mardzaklis, who personally told me the story of this wonderful enterprise. During Mercouri's tenure as Minister of Culture, Mardzaklis worked at the prime minister's residence ("Megaron Maximos"), which was how he met Mercouri. Shortly before her death, when she was ill (though no one realised how serious it was), Mardzaklis asked her, "Mrs. Minister, may I open a café in your honour when you are no longer with us?" Startled by such frankness, and with the characteristic grace and eloquence only true Southern women possess, Mercouri advised Mardzaklis to hold back on his entrepreneurial initiative.

After Mercouri's death in 1994 from lung cancer, her brother, Spyros, granted Mardzaklis permission to open a café in memory of his sister and helped furnish it with photographs from the actress and minister's personal archive. In the corner of the salon, you will see a small display with a collection of porcelain that once stood in Mercouri's office in Piraeus. These tiny cups and saucers were especially dear to her heart, as she inherited some of these items from her beloved grandfather, Spyridon. On the walls, Salvador Dalí, Aristotle Onassis, Maria Callas, Jules Dassin, Robert Kennedy, and many others look down at us. These people were friends and close acquaintances of Melina Mercouri—a woman who was born Greek and who died Greek.

Diogenes Gymnasium



If you walk from Café Melina along Erehtheos Street, the pedestrian way, heading downhill, you will almost immediately find yourself near a site of archaeological excavations. It is quite possible that here once stood the Ancient Greek gymnasium of Diogenes—though not the Diogenes with the torch on the Athens Agora, who searched for a man in broad daylight and lived in a large wine jar. This is the Diogenes of Macedon, a major benefactor of Athens in the 3rd century BC. He funded the construction of this gymnasium. Very little is known about the gymnasium, but as usual, only boys studied there, and they celebrated an annual festival ("Diogeneia") in honour of its founder. During this festival, ritual libations were poured, and two bulls were slaughtered—a fairly typical program for ancient celebrations.

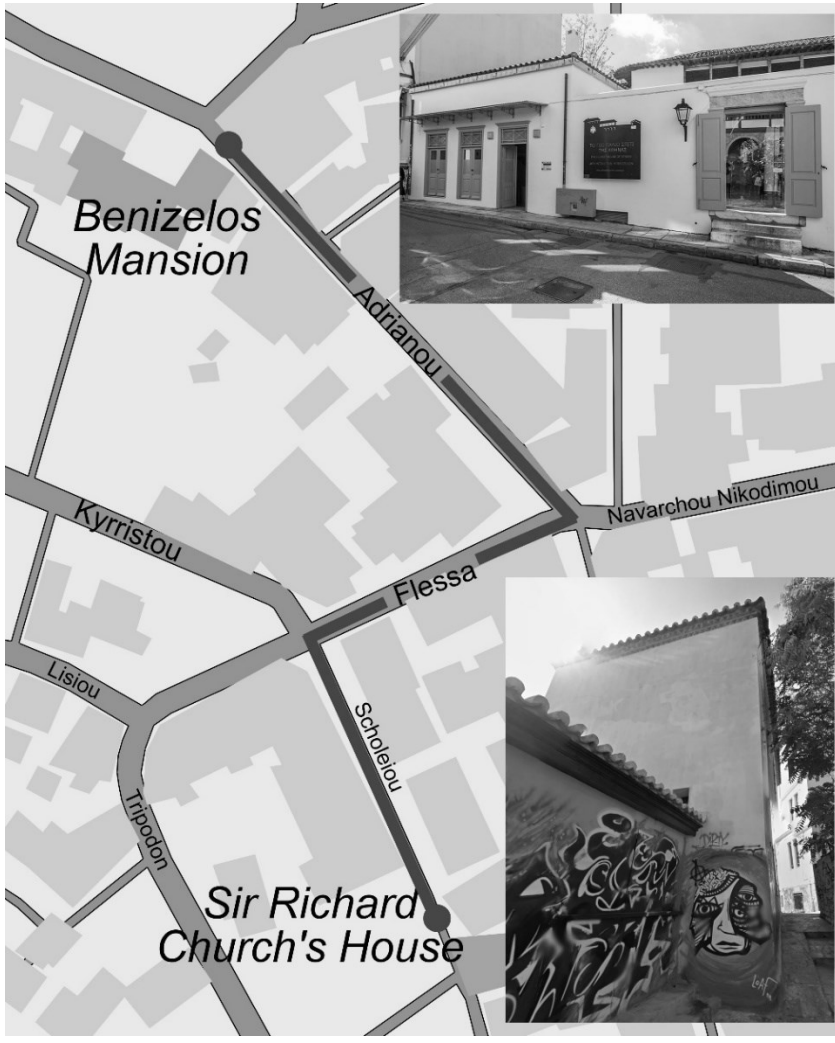
Benizelos Mansion

Immediately behind these excavations is an aristocratic mansion. You might think it was built in some Moorish–Middle Eastern style, but you would be mistaken. This style is entirely Byzantine, and the mansion itself—in the backyard of which are located the presumed ruins of the gymnasium—once belonged to the Benizelos family, whom we learned about in detail when we stood in front of the Cathedral of Athens in Mitropoli Square. It is here that Saint Philotheia of Athens—born Paraschevi Benizelos—was born, grew up, and spent most of her life sheltering runaway Athens women and Greeks fleeing the genocide in Cyprus. After her murder by the Turks, a distant relative inherited the mansion. It changed hands many times. By

the 19th century, it had been converted into a house divided into three apartments, leased to three families of far-from-high income. Such families comprised a significant part of the old city's population at that time. They kept small farms in their backyards, raised chickens, sheep, goats, and were often completely unaware of what lay beneath their feet. Unlike other houses from the Ottoman period, this mansion was bought, carefully and painstakingly restored, and, after being entrusted to the Greek Orthodox Church, now operates as a free museum with an entrance on Adrianou Street.

Interior of the Benizelos house: food storage on the ground floor

Sir Richard Church's House



Let's walk farther along Kirristou Street. (If you entered the Benizelos house earlier, continue until you reach the intersection of Adrianou and Flessa Streets and then turn right.) Keep moving until you see the pedestrianised and usually quite deserted street of Scholiou (Scholeiou). At its very end, cutting through with an empty corner, stands a large building

Sir Richard Church (1784-1873), commander-in-chief of the Greek land forces

whose lower part is ruthlessly covered in graffiti. This is one of the few remaining Ottoman-period buildings in Athens that has survived to our time in an unchanged state. However, for us, what's more interesting is that Sir Richard Church lived in this house. Church was a British officer, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, and the commander-in-chief of the Greek land forces during the final stages of the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829).

He was born in Cork, Ireland, then part of the United Kingdom, and began his military service at age 16, having run away from home in 1800. Under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Ralph Abercrombie, Church participated in the Battle of Abukir in 1801 and fought in the Sicily campaign and the invasion of Naples. Between 1811 and 1814, he formed and commanded the Greek regiment of the Duke of York, which fought against the French in the Ionian Islands. During this time, Church proved himself a philhellene—"a friend of the Greeks"—despite his insistence on maintaining the Ionian Islands under the British flag after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Throughout his service in the islands, he became close with Thodoros Kolokotronis, who played a role in his promotion to the position of commander of the Greek land forces in 1827, at a time when Greek military leaders had more or less established a government with actual authority.

Another Bonaparte

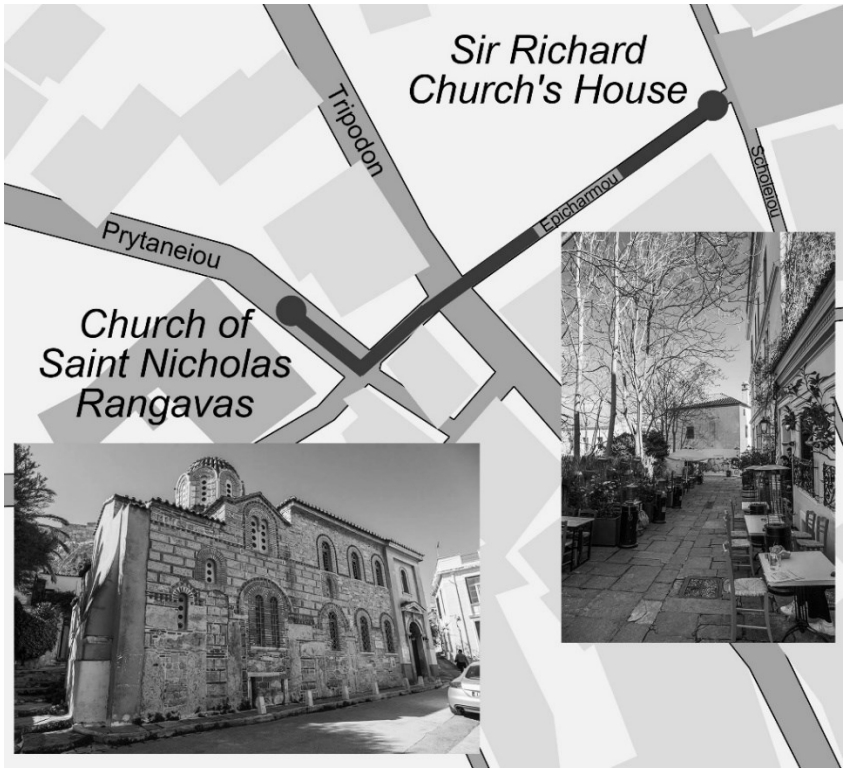
In addition to Irish officers and English poets, among the volunteers from Europe who decided to help the Greeks win independence for their ancient homeland from the Turks, there was also a place for Paul Marie Bonaparte, Napoleon's own nephew. Paul Marie fled his home in Italy, dropping out of university to volunteer for the British Navy and fight the Turks for Greece in 1827. However, this Bonaparte did not have to become a glorious successor to his dynasty: just four months after arriving in Greece, Paul Marie accidentally shot himself while cleaning his pistol.

Church's first major success in his new role was assisting Georgios Karaiskakis, one of the Greek military leaders, who was trying to break the Turkish siege of the Athens Acropolis from the military camp at Faliro, the current coastal district of Greater Athens. Although Karaiskakis was killed in this unsuccessful operation, Church managed to rally scattered Greeks along the coast and evacuate the forces to Salamis Island, which was already under rebel control. Two years later, thanks to Church's successful leadership and that of Admiral Francis Hastings, the Greek troops captured Messolonghi, Voinitsa, and Etoliko (three major centres in western Greece), allowing them to secure control over the Ambracian Gulf and thus establish the future north-west border of

Sir Richard Church's house (at the end of the street)

Greece. For his service to the young nation, Sir Richard Church (who had previously been awarded the Order of the Bath and the Royal Guelphic Order by the King of Britain) became a Grand Officer of the Greek Order of the Saviour. During King Otto I's reign, Church served as the royal army inspector-general with the rank of general and later became a lifetime member of the Greek State Council. In Athens, he initially lived in the residence of British Admiral Sir Pulteney Malcolm, who commanded the British fleet in the Mediterranean from 1828 to 1831. Subsequently, Church moved into a house that he bought from another Briton, the historian George Finley, in the centre of Athens in the Plaka district. This is the very house in front of us now. The Turks built it in the 17th century, and for some time, it housed a police prison, but later it was completely rebuilt. By the time Church acquired it, it was a lovely mansion where the brave Irishman lived for almost 40 years. The aged commander-in-chief received frequent visits from King George I, who last stayed with Church just a few days before his death, on 20 March 1873.

The Church of Saint Nicholas Rangavas



A short pedestrian street, Epicharmou, leads us from Sir Richard Church's house to the intersection with Tripodon Street. After crossing it and ascending a staircase, we find ourselves in front of yet another superb example of Byzantine church architecture: the Church of Saint Nicholas Rangava.

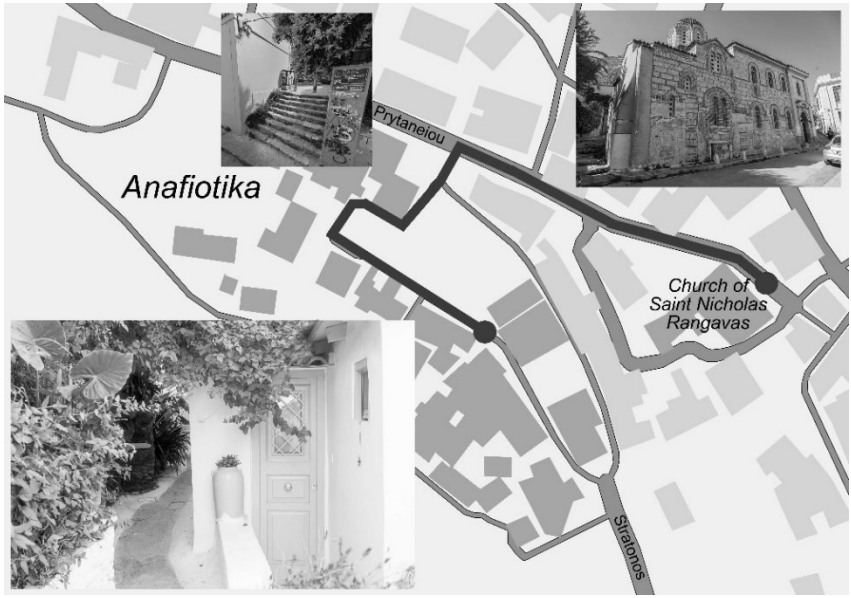
As with many other churches in Greece, the last part of its name—"Rangava"—has no relation to Saint Nicholas. Instead, it indicates the family who commissioned and funded the church's construction. The Rangavis family was one of the oldest noble houses of Byzantium; from it, Emperor Michael I (AD 770–844)

View of the Church of St. Nicholas Rangava

descended. According to one hypothesis, he was the client of this church, but this theory is probably incorrect. Architectural evidence indicates that the Church of Saint Nicholas could not have been built before the 11th century, so most likely, it was gifted to the city by a younger member of the dynasty, Leon Rangavis (Rangavas). During restoration work in the 1970s, a memorial inscription to Rangavis was discovered on the colonnade of the dome.

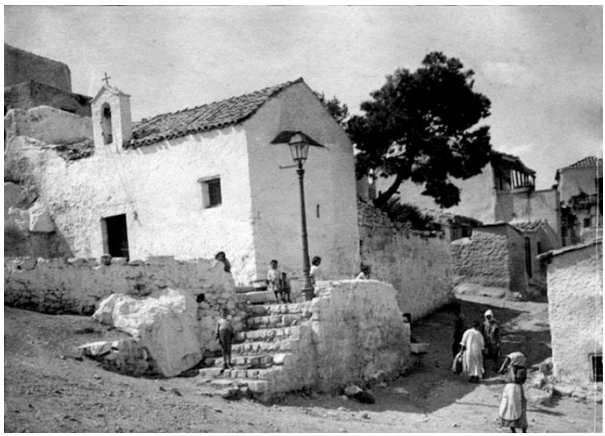
The church has an intriguing story. Initially, it was nearly a square-shaped cross-in-square basilica, and it suffered heavy damage (i.e., a collapsed wall) during the Venetian bombardments of Athens in September 1687. A clear boundary still separates the 11th-century structure from the more recent, eastern extension, ending in an even later, frankly Neoclassical addition of the 1830s. This last extension was created during the reign of King Otto I. The church's interior was repainted, but unfortunately, the original Byzantine frescoes did not survive Turkish rule.

This church is also notable because its bells were the first to herald to the Athenians, with a loud ringing, the end of 400 years of Ottoman rule on Greek land.



If you walk past this church along Prithaniou (Prithaneiou) Street, heading uphill, just after the staircase on your right, you will want to turn left into a small alleyway covered in graffiti. Pass through it, climbing higher and higher along the narrow steps, and you will find yourself in one of the old town's secret places. Despite its picturesque quality, its seclusion, and the magical coincidence of its existence, very few people know about this site. Not every Athenian can tell you where to find it. This place is a small island village called "Anafiotika," built by one of the groups of workers who, during the reign of King Otto I, were invited to Athens from the Cycladic Islands (Paros, Naxos, Milos, Anafi) to work on numerous construction projects, including the Royal Palace at Syntagma Square.

Construction of this village was illegal—almost pirate-like—and began under the cover of night. Originally, people from Anafi Island, like other labourers from the islands, were settled on the plain, in what is now the city centre, near the Church of the Life-



Church of St. Simeon in Anafiotika, 1917

Giving Spring, close to the modern Akadimias Street. There, they were given the chance to settle with their families, building their own houses on small plots of land allocated to them. Soon, however, land and house prices in the city soared, and the land that the king had given to the islanders was no longer sufficient. Thus, two builders among the Anafi immigrants (according to some sources, these were the carpenter Damigos and the stonemason Sigalas), along with a few helpers, built—without official approval—two traditional island-style cottages overnight on the northwest slope of the Acropolis. These homes suited them, as the Cycladic Islands are made up of bare rocks, just like the Acropolis.

When locals from nearby districts noticed these strange structures on the hillside, they filed a complaint with the Athens mayor's office, requesting an investigation. However, as the complaint made its way to the appropriate officials, the first two islanders' compatriots followed their example, and the spontaneous village of Anafi emigrants grew. Shortly thereafter, King Otto I was overthrown. In the ensuing chaos of the temporary lawless period, Anafi's residents quickly formalised their settlement, establishing a proper island village with a church and utility buildings on the slope of the Acropolis.

The new King of the Greeks, George I, turned a blind eye to this small yet charming piracy, so Anafiotika became a new attraction in Athens. In 1922, its demographic makeup was slightly diluted

Manolis Glezos (left) and Apostolos Santas

when, to the east of the village, an equally spontaneous refugee camp of Greeks fleeing Mustafa Kemal's genocide in Turkey appeared. Nevertheless, the 65 inhabitants living there today are mostly descendants of the original builders from Anafi Island. Their 45 houses (about three-fifths of the village's original size, as in the 1950s and 1980s, parts of it were demolished for archaeological excavations) range from 8 to 35 square metres (86.1 to 376.7 square feet). All are protected as cultural heritage monuments.

The history of Anafiotika is not limited to its anecdotal origins; it also contains a heroic chapter. From this village, on the night of 31 May 1941, two 19-year-olds began their ascent to the top of the Acropolis. They were Manolis Glezos and Apostolos Santas. Their aim was to remove the Nazi Germany flag that had been raised over Athens, which Greco-German forces had been occupying since April of the same year. The young men slipped past the guards and, employing a distraction manoeuvre, tore the swastika-laden flag into small pieces before descending into Anafiotika, almost unnoticed. The international media widely covered this symbolic act, and General Charles de Gaulle later called Manolis Glezos "the first partisan of the Second World War." Greek anti-fascists regarded the move as a call to action. Shortly afterwards, a full-scale partisan war erupted in Athens and other major cities, as well as in mountains and forests across Greece, against the German-Bulgarian-Italian occupiers. This war continued until the country was completely liberated in 1944.

Glezos and Santas were put on the wanted list by the Gestapo and the collaborationist Greek police, but Glezos was not captured until 1942. He was put in prison, where he was subjected to severe torture and contracted tuberculosis. He was eventually released and continued to fight in the communist underground, but Glezos was arrested again in April 1943 and spent another seven months in prison. At the same time, Manolis' younger brother, Nikos Glezos, who also participated in the communist underground, was captured and shot by the occupation authorities.

After the Second World War, Manolis Glezos was an active member of radical left movements, repeatedly arrested and even sentenced to prison on suspicion of espionage for Soviet Russia. However, his reputation as “the first partisan of the Second World War” always came to his rescue, rallying the Greek and international public to his defence. Eventually, the Greek government recognised his service to the country by elevating him to the rank of Grand Officer of the Order of the Phoenix in 1997. In March 2020, 97-year-old Glezos succumbed to his final battle, with heart failure, at Errikos Dynan Hospital in Athens.

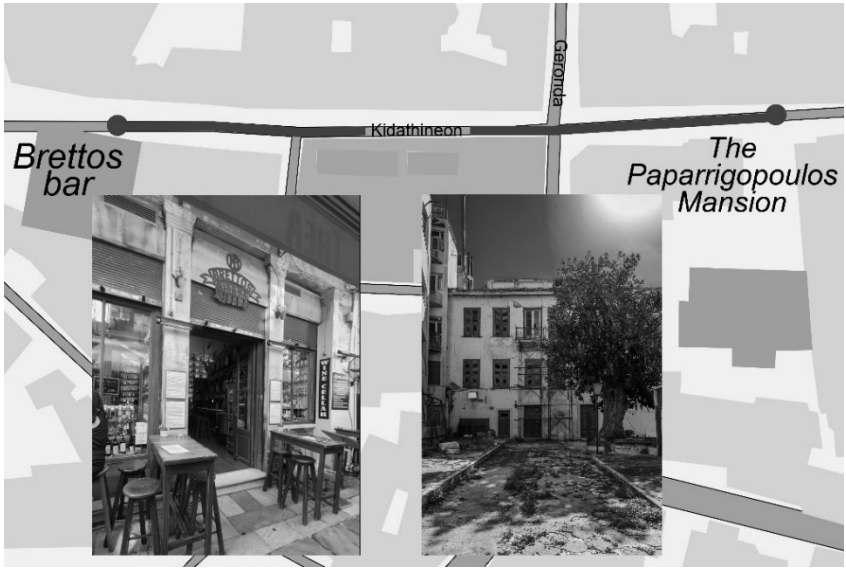
Bar "Vrettos" ("Brettos")

Now, having left Anafiotika, let's descend along Stratonos Street, where the famous Acropolis cats often roam in packs, begging visitors of the Acropolis Cave tavern for a piece of fried chicken or kebab. In front of this very tavern, let's turn left, but be careful; at the intersection, stay on the leftmost side, on Tespidos Street. Follow it downwards without turning, past old houses and gardens, along a wide staircase. Cross the intersection with Tripodon Street and then the next one with Adrianou Street. After this, Tespidos will become Kidathineon ("Brave Athenians") Street. At the very beginning, on the right, is the famous city-wide bar Vrettos, attracting attention with hundreds of bottles shimmering on shelves, forming a wall of dazzling colour.

Let's move on!...
(This is me in my student past)

Vrettos is part of one of the oldest distilleries in Athens, opened by Michail Vrettos in 1909 in this very building, on the first floor of a historic mansion in the old town. Here, Mr. Vrettos began experimenting with different liqueur flavours, offering Athenians both classical mint and cherry varieties, as well as citrus and mastich, which had never been seen before. He used old family recipes from the best distilleries in Smyrna (now Izmir), one of the wealthiest cities on the Mediterranean, destroyed by the Turks in 1922. As the demand for Vrettos' liqueurs grew, he had to expand and relocate his distillery outside the city. Since then, the premises have been entirely occupied by the bar. Besides traditional Greek drinks such as ouzo and tsipouro, you can try a variety of Greek wines, as well as the unique mastich liqueur and, of course, the authentic King of Greek brandies, "Metaxa." For those (like me) who do not drink alcohol, this bar also serves the most delicious non-alcoholic mojito—the best thing to wish for on a hot summer evening in Athens.

The Paparrigopoulos Mansion



If you walk a bit farther along Kidathineon Street, after the intersection with Geronta Street, just before a souvenir shop selling "Ancient Greek clothing," you will see, behind a rusted fence bound with a chain, a crooked, fading old house—the mansion of Ioannis Paparrigopoulos. The most attentive of you will remember this family name, as the City Museum of Athens is located on a street named after him. But who was Ioannis Paparrigopoulos? He was, as is proper, a very curious man; after all, this half-ruined mansion did catch our attention.

Its owner was born on Naxos Island, and his original surname was Linardos. However, after the wealthy merchant family of Paparrigopoulos adopted young Ioannis Linardos, he took their surname. Thanks to this family, he was able to study in Constantinople, where, at that time (the late 18th century), a large Greek community resided. Like most descendants of wealthy Greek families of that period, he continued his education in Russia, at the Moscow Imperial University, where he studied law and

Ioannis Paparrigopoulos (1780-1874)

Russian. Later, he lived in Rome, where he studied medicine. After completing his education, Paparrigopoulos entered diplomatic service, which was to be the defining feature of his life. At that time (the early 19th century), Greece as a state did not yet exist, so Paparrigopoulos was accepted as the secretary of the Russian Imperial consulate in Patras. Thus, he became a diplomat of a foreign country in his own homeland. In this city, he actively collaborated with agents of the secret Greek patriotic organisation "Filiki Eteria" (the "Friendly Society"). Based in Saint Petersburg, this organisation welcomed all Greeks and philhellenes sympathetic to Greece's liberation from Ottoman rule and capable of aiding the armed struggle. The organisation was led by the future first President of Greece, Count Ioannis Kapodistrias, who, between 1816 and 1822, served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire.

Paparrigopoulos was sent to Saint Petersburg with a message from the Greeks of the Peloponnese to coordinate the joint efforts of "Filiki Eteria" and the inhabitants of the most autonomous part of the Ottoman Empire—the Peloponnese, known as a haven for Greek pirates and klephts. It can be confidently stated that, thanks to Paparrigopoulos' actions, particularly his persuading of one of the key members of "Filiki Eteria," Alexandros Ipsilantis, to trigger a supposed "distraction" in Moldova to distract the Turks, the Greeks of the Peloponnese gained the advantage and caught the Turks off guard. The result was a full-scale uprising in March 1821.

Paparrigopoulos returned to Greece and actively participated in the war. After its conclusion, he became the first Imperial Russian consul in the Greek Kingdom, settling in this house in Athens. It was here, on 25 December 1843, that the first Christmas tree in Greek history was lit—something utterly unfamiliar to Greeks at the time, as they traditionally placed beautiful wooden sailing ships on tables and windowsills as a symbol of fishermen lost at sea, never to join their families at the festive table. The Protestant German custom, which was also unknown to King Otto I of Greece (a Bavarian Catholic accustomed to Christmas nativity scenes) might have been adopted as an interesting fashionable novelty from one of Paparrigopoulos' acquaintances in Saint Petersburg, Count Alexander Kushelev-Bezborodko. The latter, in turn, could have seen the first Christmas trees at the court of Tsar Nicholas I, whose wife, Alexandra, was the daughter of the Prussian King and is believed to be the first to bring the tradition of decorating Christmas trees to Russia. Interestingly, Count Alexander Kushelev-Bezborodko was a friend and pupil of Count Ioannis Kapodistrias.

Street of Tripodon and the Monument of Lysicrates

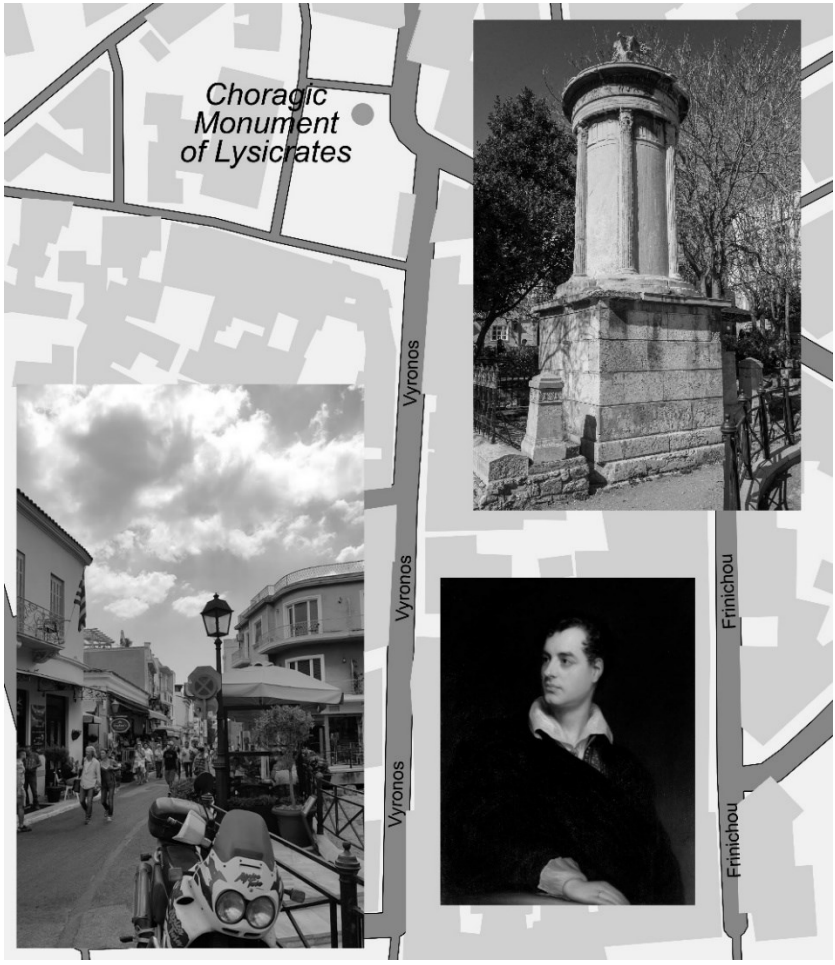
If you return to Tripodon Street (going back along Kidathineon Street, which we came here on) and walk farther down, past DaVinci, one of the best ice cream cafés in the city, you will immediately notice an ancient monument, resembling a tall, narrow rotunda made of columns and covered with a dome-shaped roof. This is the Lysikrates Monument—a masterpiece of Ancient Athens, alongside the well-known Tower of the Winds, which inspired many European sculptors and architects of the 18th and 19th centuries. It's important to note that Tripodon is one of the oldest streets in Athens whose direction has remained unchanged since at least the 4th century BC. Ancient buildings were torn down, and new ones (Roman) were built on their foundations, later to be replaced by Byzantine structures. These, in turn, were succeeded by Ottoman constructions until the street acquired its current appearance. However, how the Ancient Greek writer and

geographer Pausanias wandered along this road and saw the Lysikrates Monument—this is how we walk along Tripodon Street today and see this very monument ourselves. Captivating, isn't it?

As for the monument, it was erected in 334 BC in honour of a wealthy Athenian named Lysikrates. The monument was meant to remind Athenians that Lysikrates had sponsored the best and most beautiful theatrical performance of the season. This performance, which was held in the Dionysos Theatre on the Acropolis and took first place in a theatrical contest, was dedicated to the joyful god of wine and soul-enriching entertainments, whom the Romans called Bacchus. For victory in the theatrical competition, sponsors were awarded special symbolic prizes—bronze tripods. Lysikrates received one such prize, but he decided to immortalise his victory in a special way: He ordered a luxurious pedestal in the form of this marble-and-tuff rotunda, on top of which, on a stone acanthus flower, a bronze chain was attached. The very tripod was mounted there.

This beautifully preserved and unique rotunda inspired several British craftsmen to create similar monuments in Staffordshire, at Shugborough Garden and in Alton Towers Park. Another copy of the Lysikrates Monument crowns the tower of Saint Giles' Church in Elgin, Scotland. A copy of the Lysikrates rotunda also found a place in the United States, where it can be seen atop the Civil War Memorial in Connecticut.

Vironos Street



The street of Vyronos, where we now find ourselves, is, strangely enough, named in honour of George Gordon Byron, the 6th Baron Byron, a renowned British poet-romantic and one of the most famous philhellenes. “Vyron” is the result of a direct transliteration of the surname “Byron” into Greek, meaning the Greek letters that spell his English surname identically but not in pronunciation, while “Vyronos” is the genitive form of “Vyron.”

Lord Byron in Albanian (Greek) Dress, 1813

Byron's name appears frequently in Athens' toponymy. I myself live in the Vyron district, where two monuments and a square are named after Byron. Additionally, streets called "Vyronos" can be found in many suburban districts of Greater Athens. Moreover, I have two Greek acquaintances named Vyron—of course, named after Lord Byron.

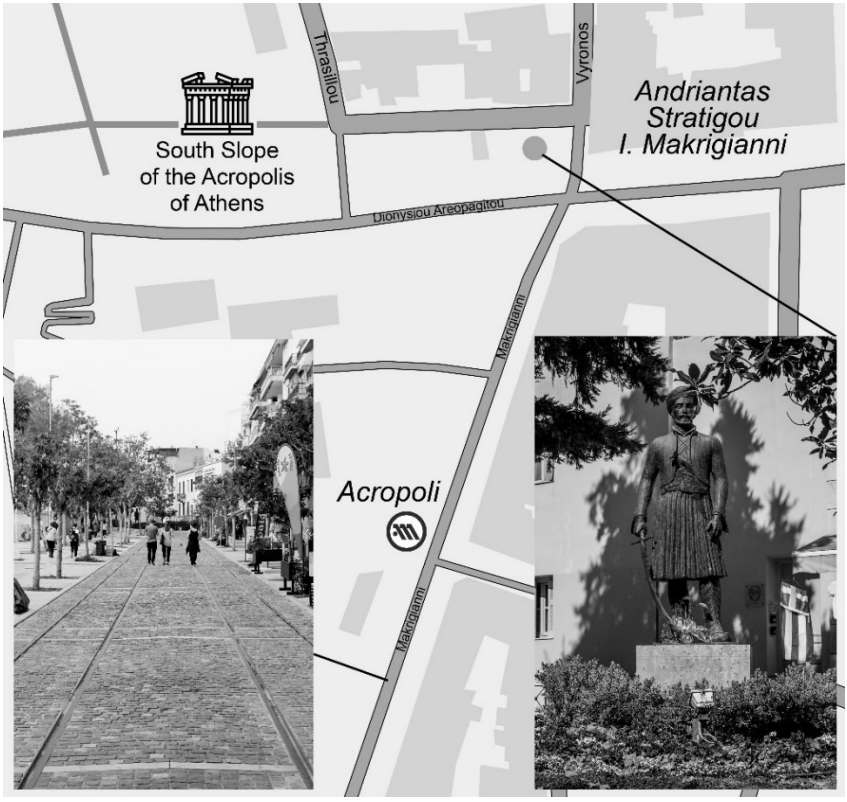
Such widespread popularity among Greeks did not happen by chance. In 1821, after negotiations with the British Committee of the Friends of Greece, Byron decided to move to Greece, which was fighting for its independence. By that time, he had grown tired of the fame that had fallen upon him after the publication of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," so he used his own funds to purchase and equip a whole brig with supplies and weapons. Byron hired 1,500 volunteer soldiers and arrived in the Greek town of Messolonghi in 1823.

What he saw on the land of Hellenes could not fail to depress him. More than fighting for his homeland's independence, Greek military leaders were busy biting each other's heads off for power in a state they themselves had not yet fully created. Byron decided to assume the role of "arbiter." He made considerable efforts to reconcile various Greek political factions and unify them into a single national movement. To garner greater support for their cause, Byron ordered the sale of his property in England. Meanwhile, he slept on a field bivouac, which is now exhibited on

the second floor of the National History Museum of Athens, in the old building of the parliament.

On 19 April 1824, Byron died in Messolonghi after a prolonged illness. He did not live to see the long-awaited moment of freedom for his beloved Greece, for which his last words were spoken: “My sister! My child!… Poor Greece!… I have given her my time, my wealth, my health!... Now I give her my life!”

The Monument to Ioannis Makriyannis



As you reach the end of this noisy street named after Byron, passing by souvenir stalls and cafés, you will find yourself beside a bronze monument to Ioannis Makriyannis—one of the leaders of the Greek War of Independence of 1821-1829 and perhaps the most honest of all Greek military leaders of that time.

Ioannis Makriyannis (1797-1864) was perhaps one of the most remarkable heroes of the Greek War of Independence, distinguished throughout his life for his honesty and integrity.

Makriyannis (whose original surname was Triandafyllou and who received the nickname "Makriyannis," meaning "Tall Yannis," because of his height) was left an orphan at an early age. He was given into the care of a wealthy family in Livadia, northwest of Athens. In this family, the boy faced bullying and physical punishments. He essentially became a servant, but harsh conditions did not break his spirit. In 1811, at the age of 14, he ran away from his foster home and entered service as an assistant to Mr. Lidoriakis, a Greek secretary to the Turkish regional ruler, Ali Pasha of Ioannina. Studying trade techniques under Lidoriakis, Makriyannis began earning a small fortune. Demonstrating business acumen, he had, by 1820, accumulated 40,000 piastres, thus becoming one of the wealthiest Greeks in Artas (the town where he then lived). In that year, he joined the secret patriotic organisation “Filiki Eteria” and, with the start of hostilities, led a small band of rebels who participated in the liberation of Artas from the Turks. After the liberation of Athens in 1822, he was tasked with maintaining public order in the city. Makriyannis

King Otto I shortly before his overthrow in 1862

quickly and effectively ended the looting and violence of Greek insurgents against locals, but his most heroic deed was a feat comparable to that of the Spartan King Leonidas at Thermopylae.

In June 1825, leading a detachment of 300 insurgents, he defended the mills near Argos during the advance of Ibrahim Pasha's 6,000-strong army. The Greeks repelled the attack and forced the Turks to retreat, but they could not save Argos from being burned by Muslims. Nonetheless, in that battle, Makriyannis and his soldiers showed the Turkish command that an easy victory in the Peloponnese was not to be expected.

After that battle, Makriyannis married the Athenian aristocrat Kateryna Skouze. They had 12 children. From that moment, his life was inextricably linked to Athens. In the final stages of the war, in 1827, he participated in the heroic defence of Piraeus against Turkish-Egyptian forces. Before the war concluded, in 1828, Makrygiannis was appointed the first President of Greece, under Count Ioannis Kapodistrias, as head of executive authority in the Peloponnese. Makriyannis' greatest flaw as a politician was his honesty and straightforwardness, which constantly made him a target of attacks and repression by various Greek rulers. His conflict with Count Kapodistrias began when the government demanded that all veterans of the national independence war sign a special act, pledging full loyalty to the Greek authorities—a

requirement Makriyannis considered humiliating. He strongly condemned Kapodistrias' assassination in 1831, but, unwavering in his principles, continued to oppose the government, demanding the introduction of a democratic constitution to limit bureaucratic arbitrariness. Similarly, in the early years of King Otto I's reign, Makriyannis remained in opposition. The new Royal Army had no place for the old veterans who, through their blood, had fought for Greece's independence but now found themselves without means of livelihood.

In 1843, Makriyannis was one of the leading figures in the military officers' uprising, demanding the introduction of a constitution and the limitation of royal power. His liberal views were well known at the court, which is why, on the eve of the officers' revolt, surveillance was placed outside Makriyannis' house. The uprising led to the adoption of the first democratic constitution in the Greek Kingdom, in which Makriyannis himself played an active role; he was elected to the constitutional assembly, representing Athens. (In honour of this, Makriyannis' portrait was placed on the reverse side of a 50-drachma coin issued in 1994.) However, shortly after the constitution was adopted, King Otto I began systematically violating it, and he was unable to pardon Makriyannis for his participation in the 1843 uprising. At one point, His Majesty demanded that the brave warrior appear at the palace and apologise to the king for his involvement in the rebellion. Makriyannis simply replied, "I am not a slave."

In 1852, Makriyannis was falsely accused of conspiracy to murder the king and overthrow the monarchy. He was sentenced to death, though this sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. The charges were based entirely on fabricated evidence, and the presiding judge was Makriyannis' personal enemy, Kitos Zavelas. Under his influence, five of the six judges voted for the death sentence, but King Otto I "leniently pardoned the offender." Fortunately, two years later, in 1854, Greece's Minister of War,

Dimitrios Kallergis, a friend of Makriyannis, used his influence to secure the latter's early release.

Makriyannis spent his last 12 years in Athens, suffering from a mental disorder that had developed during his imprisonment—possibly the result of severe wounds sustained during the war. Despite suffering from hallucinations, he was elected to the new constitutional assembly in 1862, after Otto I's expulsion from Greece.

He died on 27 April 1864 in his house in Athens, a week after he was awarded the honour of General for his service to his beloved homeland.

Incidentally, Ioannis Makriyannis was a friend and frequent guest of Ioannis Paparrigopoulos, and he was the first to see Greece's first Christmas tree in his house. "Very well, Mr. Ioannis," Makriyannis said at the time, "but I still do not allow trees to grow inside my rooms."

Makriyanni and Dionysiou Areopagitou Streets

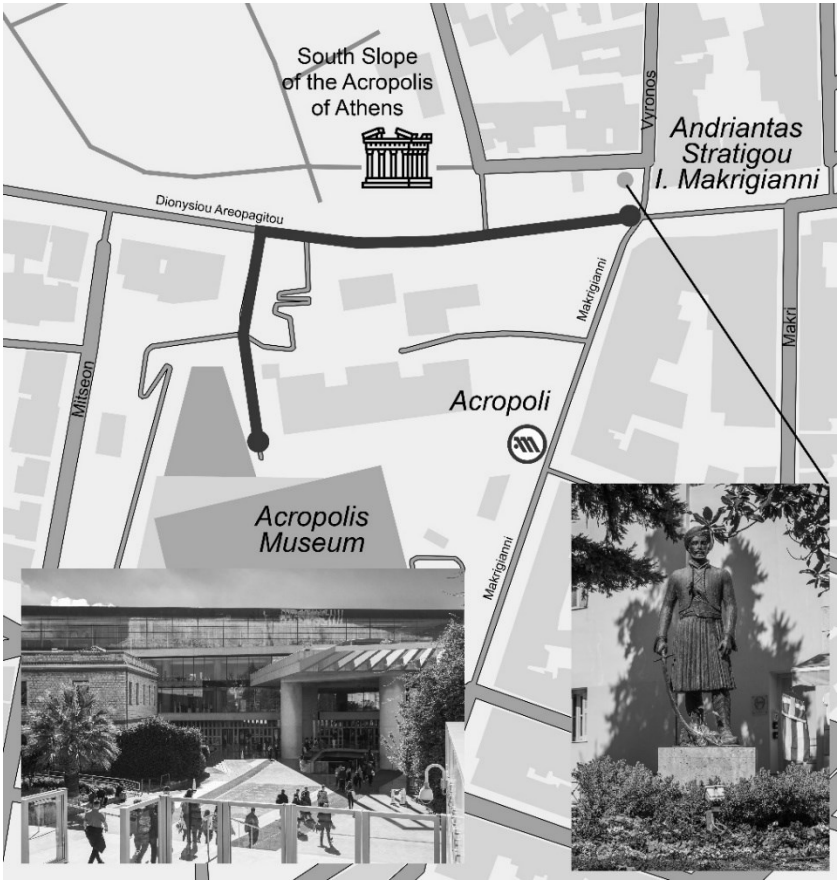
The street to which the bronze Ioannis Makriyannis' gaze is turned is named in his honour and leads into a district that also bears his name. Once, it was served by a tram line (until 1908, it was horse-drawn; afterwards, electric) connecting the district of Akadimia (home to the previously mentioned Neoclassical Hansen Trilogy of the University, Academy, and Library) with the seafront area of Faliro. Parts of the old tram tracks can still be seen embedded in the paving stones, along which lively cafés and restaurants are arranged in a flamboyant garland.

Perpendicular to Makriyanni Street runs the long pedestrian boulevard of Dionysiou Areopagitou, named after Saint Dionysius Areopagitos, the first Athenian to convert to Christianity following the Apostle Paul's preaching on Areopagus Hill, who is likely to have become the first bishop of Athens. Some also identify Dionysius Areopagitos with Saint Dionysius of Paris—one of the most venerated saints of France, who lived in the 3rd century AD (roughly 200 years after Dionysius the Areopagite), though this view remains highly debated.

Dionysiou Areopagitou Street

Let us continue our walk along this wonderful boulevard, amidst street musicians and singers, with a magnificent view of the Acropolis, whose entrance, incidentally, is also located here—on our right, just beyond the Makriyannis monument. For natural reasons, I shall not be telling you about the main monument of Athens on these pages. Ascending the "Sacred Rock," as the Athenians also call the Acropolis, requires an entire day, and even a brief account of this place deserves a separate chapter. Perhaps, one day I will write another book about Athens, where even the Acropolis—tired, exhausted, and majestic as it is—will have its own dedicated space.

The New Acropolis Museum



To our left, you'll see a vast, glass-and-concrete building. This is the new Acropolis Museum, standing on a multitude of piles driven with the utmost care between the ruins of Ancient Athens uncovered during the excavation—an all-too-common reason for delays, postponements, and construction setbacks in our city.

The first museum, designed to preserve archaeological finds from the Acropolis studied by professional researchers, opened as early as 1874 on the rock behind the Parthenon. However, as the

Thomas Bruce, 7th earl of Elgin

collection grew, more space was needed for storage and display. Additionally, the urgent need for a modern building to house the

Acropolis artefacts was driven by Greece's desire to reclaim the so-called Elgin Marbles. This story, which has periodically caused diplomatic tensions between Greece and the United Kingdom, dates back at least 30 years before Greece became a modern state. During Ottoman rule over Athens, city authorities used the Acropolis for various purposes. A mosque was established in the Parthenon, gunpowder stores were kept in the Erechtheion, and barracks and administrative offices resided in medieval buildings erected by the Dukes of Athens. For a time, a Turkish ruler of Athens lived there. Later, especially after 1687, when the Parthenon was blown up, the Acropolis was systematically looted, both by Ottoman officials, who no longer saw the ancient masterpieces as valuable, and by Athenians, who had no qualms about burning ancient columns and sculptures to make lime for building houses or using marble fragments from ancient temples for sheds or paving roads. By the beginning of the 19th century, much of the architectural heritage of the ancient Acropolis had been irretrievably lost, with no trace remaining today.

It was during this period, in 1799, that the new British ambassador in Constantinople, Thomas Bruce, the 7th Earl of Elgin and the 11th Earl of Kincardine (1766–1841), arrived. Lord Elgin, like many British aristocrats of the time, was obsessed with antiquity. Immediately upon his appointment, he intended to compile an

Constantine II of Greece (1940-2023) In fact, he ruled the country from 1964 to 1967. After a failed counter-coup and an attempt to re-gain power, the King was forced to leave Greece.

extensive album and collect plaster casts of various sculptures, bas-reliefs, and other "curious items" within the Ottoman Empire—of course, with the authorities' permission. Back then, Britain wielded significant influence over the sultan's policy, and legal matters were swiftly settled. The legendary Acropolis of Athens gave Lord Elgin permission to engage in any work involving copying or drawing the architectural and sculptural monuments on the "Sacred Rock" and to "take any stones with old inscriptions or drawings on them." To be fair, this document is known to us only in an Italian translation from Turkish, stored in the British Museum, and disputes about its authenticity continue to this day.

When Lord Elgin arrived in Athens, he found the Acropolis in a more than bleak state: The remnants of ancient monuments were being openly looted by all sorts of people, from amateur collectors to local shepherds, the latter of whom used these priceless treasures as building materials for their dwellings. Following a proposal from his chaplain, Philip Hunt, Lord Elgin (whose original plans did not include removing marble from Athens) decided, with the help of hired Greek labourers, to evacuate the most valuable parts of the Acropolis, including fragments of the blown-up Parthenon: half of the frieze, 15 metopes, and 17 fragmentary sculptures of the pediment. It took 10 years (from 1802 to 1812) for Lord Elgin to

ship 200 crates of ancient marbles out of Greece; one of the ships carrying the precious cargo sank in 1804 off the coast of Antikythera, and not until 1806, through great effort, was the cargo recovered from the seabed. For a time, the entire enormous collection of antiquities was displayed in Lord Elgin's house. Then, in 1817, it was transferred to the British Museum, for which Thomas Bruce received compensation of 75,000 pounds (although this sum did not cover the many expenses incurred from relocating all those artefacts to Britain).

Since that time, the "Elgin Marbles" have been exhibited in the British Museum in London. It can be confidently stated that at least some of these artefacts could have been irretrievably lost during Greece's War of Independence from 1821 to 1829—if, of course, the Athenians had not already ground them into building materials. Therefore, it is more appropriate to consider Thomas Bruce as a saviour of these ancient masterpieces rather than the "unscrupulous thief of Greek national property" as he is often portrayed today.

The new Acropolis Museum, opened in 2009, was intended to show Britain that the time had come to return these artefacts to Greece. Specially designed, notably empty plinths in the museum halls serve as unambiguous reminders to visitors of Britain's "debt" regarding the "Elgin Marbles." Nonetheless, any "return to their homeland" is now impossible; this issue was settled by the British Department for Culture after a series of diplomatic scandals. The first scandal involved the refusal of the Greek Prime Minister to organise a state funeral for King Constantine II of Greece, who was ousted in 1974. Constantine II was a cousin of the current King of the United Kingdom, Charles III, and also godfather of His Royal Highness Prince of Wales. Because Constantine II's funeral was held privately, King Charles III could not attend personally, which caused discontent within the British Foreign Office.

Ten months after this unfortunate incident, in November 2023, the same prime minister, in an interview with the BBC during a visit

to London, declared that the "Elgin Marbles" belonged to Greece and were "stolen." He compared the situation to "cutting half of the Mona Lisa's canvas." The Greek Prime Minister made this statement shortly before his meeting with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Subsequently, the latter's office cancelled his appointment with the Greek government leader.

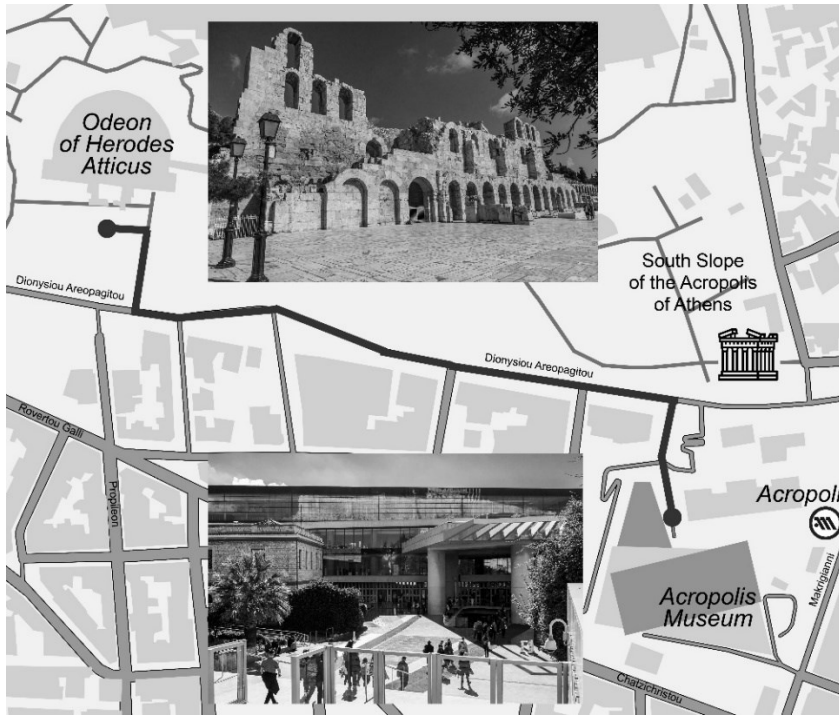
As a Greek and a patriot, I cannot support either side in this conflict. In my personal view, the governments of both countries are acting like children. If they ever mature enough to engage in responsible, balanced dialogue (and, as a result, come to some resolution of their mutual claims), it would be better for all of us. But hope for that is minimal.

Odeon of Herodes Atticus

Continuing along Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, you will soon see, on your right, the remains of a Roman water cistern and, immediately behind it, a broad marble staircase. By ascending this staircase, you will arrive at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus—one of two active ancient theatres of Greece still in use today. It was built in AD 165 by a man with a very long name: Lucius

Odeon of Herodes Atticus in the 1860s

Vibullius Hipparchus Tiberius Claudius Atticus Herodes from Marathon or, simply, Herodes Atticus.



Apart from being the first Roman consul of Greek descent and tracing his lineage to both the famous King Theseus (victor over the Minotaur) and Cecrops (founder of Athens), Herodes Atticus was fabulously wealthy. In addition to funding the construction of this musical theatre (the "Odeon," whose necessity arose after the collapse of the ceiling of Agrippa's old conservatory on the Athens Agora), Herodes Atticus financed the building of the stadium at Delphi, the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens (which, after restoration in the 19th century, hosted the first modern Olympic Games in 1896), and many other renowned ancient monuments. He dedicated this theatre to the memory of his wife, Rigilla, who had died just before construction began.

In AD 267–268, about a century after its opening, the theatre was severely damaged during the raids of the Heruli, who burned

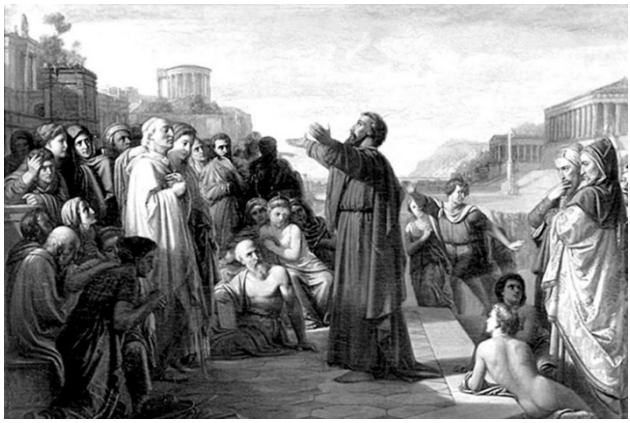
Athens. During Byzantine times, the remains of the Odeon were incorporated into the city's fortification system. By the 16th century, they had become so unrecognisable that European travellers visiting Athens took them for the Palace of Miltiades, an ancient bridge, or an Aristotle school. Only after Greece gained independence from the Ottoman Empire and archaeological excavations began at the ruins of the Odeon in 1849 did it become clear that, almost 1,700 years ago, this was a large ancient theatre.

In 1867, its stage hosted the first performance in many centuries—an event dedicated to Queen Consort Olga of Greece, daughter of the Russian Grand Duke Konstantin and granddaughter of Emperor Nicholas I of Russia. She married King George I of Greece, thus founding the modern Greek Royal House.

In 1920, shortly before his death, the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns gave a concert on that stage. In 1926, Richard Strauss performed three concerts there.

However, the Odeon truly reopened to the world after a major restoration in the 1950s. It gained new, complete stands and lighting and has since hosted world stars of the highest calibre. Her, performers such as Maria Callas, Frank Sinatra, Sting, Montserrat Caballé, Elton John, and many others have appeared. Maria Callas, incidentally, remains close to the Odeon of Herodes Atticus: She is honoured with a bronze monument opposite it, on Dionysiou Areopagitou Street.

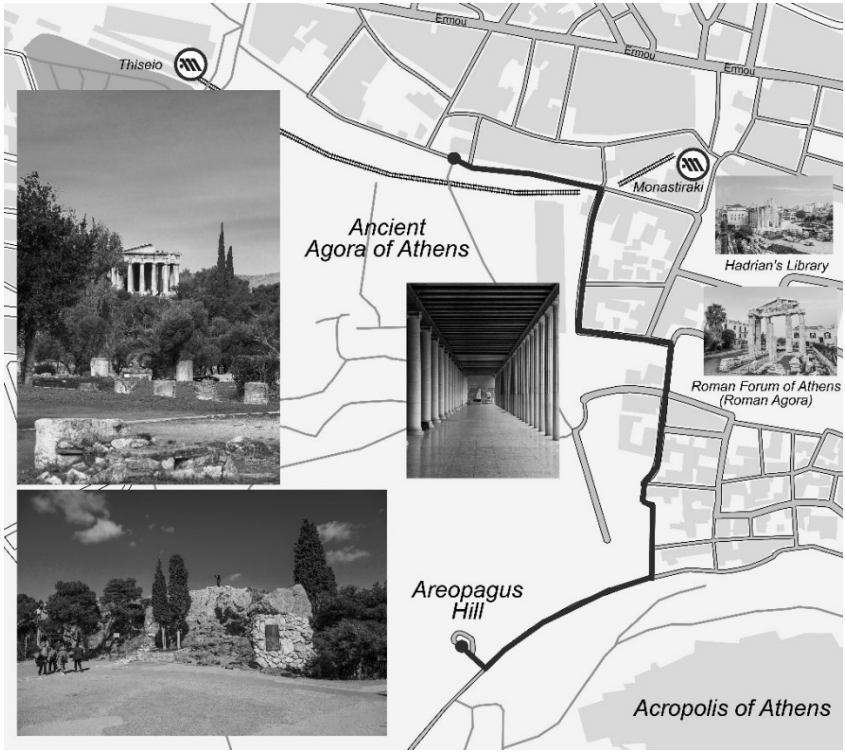
To conclude our day, let's walk along the winding paths leading upward from the Theatre of Herodes Atticus to the exit of the Acropolis, where the Areopagus is located. This is perhaps the place where Athenian democracy was born. Its name is directly translated from Ancient Greek as "Hill of Ares" because, according to legend, it was here where the Olympian gods judged Ares, the god of war, for the murder of Poseidon's son, Alirotius. From the earliest times, a council of elders met here. Its members were elected for life from among former archons. (Since the 7th century BC, archons—who were the highest officials of Ancient Athens—were appointed for only one year.)



Apostle Paul preaches on the Areopagus

Until 462 BC, the elders sitting on Ares Hill held extremely broad judicial, supervisory, and religious authority. It is precisely with the Areopagus that the period of the formation and development of the Athenian aristocracy is inseparably connected, as we discussed earlier. After a reform carried out in 462 BC by the Ancient Athenian politician Ephialtes (not to be confused with another Ephialtes, who betrayed the army of Spartan King Leonidas before the Battle of Thermopylae), the Areopagus' powers were limited to the role of the Supreme Court; it mainly oversaw criminal and religious offences. As the highest judicial body, the Areopagus functioned until the 5th century AD, after which it was disbanded and abolished. However, to this day, the Supreme Court of Greece is still referred to as the Areopagus.

A memorial plaque near the ancient and now closed staircase leading to the hilltop announces that Apostle Paul preached here in AD 51. However, this statement is disputed: most likely, at that time, the Areopagus, as a judicial body, met not on the eponymous hill, but rather in the Royal Stoa (basilica) on the Athens Agora. Speaking of which, this ancient marketplace will be visible from Areopagus Hill.



Almost a century ago, before 1931, the site of the Ancient Athens Agora was a densely populated area. Many residential buildings, utility structures, and shops were gradually built over the abandoned ancient marketplace, starting from the era of the Crusaders (13th century).

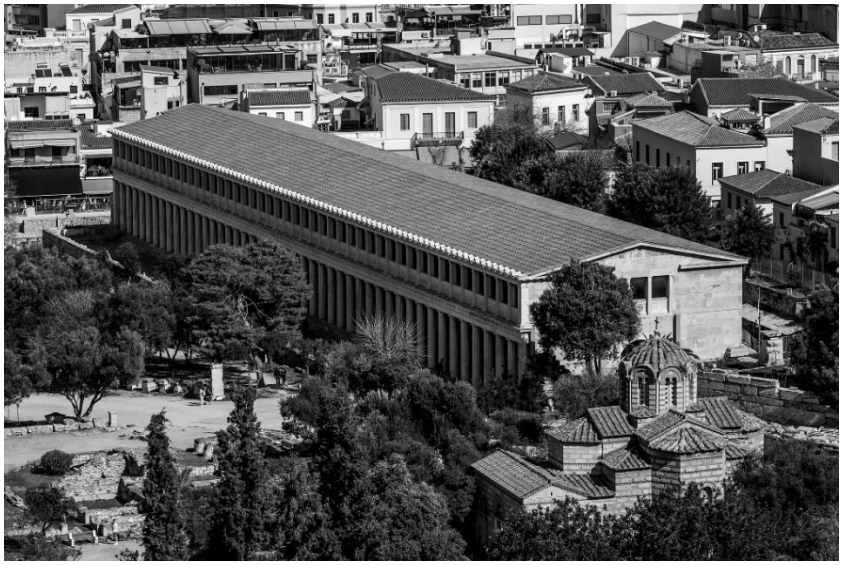
By the beginning of the 20th century, this large triangular piece of land had the same density of development as the old city (the one we explored earlier), and, of course, the families living in this area for generations had no concept of what lay beneath their old houses. The authorities of Athens, together with the American School of Classical Studies in Athens (ASCSA), which, it can be said, "won the tender" for excavations at the Athens Agora in 1925 in exchange for financial aid to the government of the Second

Greek Republic for accommodating tens of thousands of refugees from Asia Minor (the peninsula that the Turkish Republic now occupies), revealed what was hidden below. For the Americans, who considered their country the first modern democratic state, it was crucial to conduct excavations at the Athens Agora—the most important part of Ancient Athens and the first democracy in history. Greek officials (as usual), more preoccupied with the struggle for supreme power than with resolving issues involving the collapsing national economy, left in ruins after their defeat in the war against the Turks, needed funds to at least partially cover the population's needs.

"Vrisaki" is a district that grew up on the site of the Athens Agora in the Middle Ages and existed until the 1930s.

The task of the American archaeologists was complicated by a small but significant detail: Around 100,000 people lived on the site of the Athens Agora, occupying, according to various estimates, 5,000 to 10,000 houses. All these people had to be resettled, and the obstructing structures had to be destroyed. (I remind you that in 1925, about 1.2 million refugees of Greek and

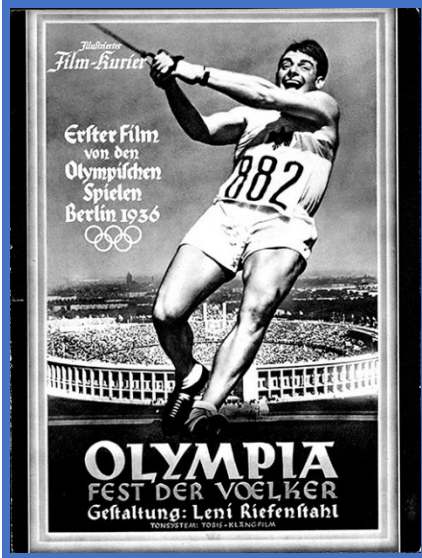
Armenian Christian origin arrived in Greece, fleeing the genocide of Christians in Turkey, and all these people needed shelter.) As you can imagine, the American School's plan was extraordinarily ambitious. The 1929 stock market crash and the subsequent Great Depression nearly prevented its realisation, but in 1931, an influential sponsor appeared for the excavations: John D. Rockefeller Jr., who allocated one million dollars for the project. Thanks to this substantial donation, over the eight remaining pre-war years, the inhabitants of 365 houses were resettled, and the houses subsequently destroyed, clearing an area of 160,000 square metres (1,722,226 square feet).



View of the Stoa of Attalus from the Areopagus Hill

Until 1940, under the leadership of Thomas Leslie Shaw and his wife, Josephine Platner Shaw, numerous important discoveries were made, including previously unknown types of Athenian coins from the 2nd century AD. However, with the beginning of the German occupation of Athens in 1940, excavations on the Agora, for obvious reasons, were halted. They resumed only in 1946, under the leadership of Canadian archaeologist Homer Armstrong Thompson. He initiated the reconstruction of the massive ancient

Stoa of Attalos, about whose original form archaeologists had already gathered sufficient information; the well-preserved original part of its wall provided an idea of the building's proper height. King Attalus II of Pergamon gifted this covered colonnade (or rather, its lost original) to Athens in AD 150 as a token of gratitude for the years he spent in Athens during his studies with the ancient philosopher Carneades. (Incidentally, Attalus II



The rights to conduct archaeological excavations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries were one of the Greek exports: the government sold the rights to conduct research in ancient ruins for grants, certain diplomatic benefits, and so on. Thus, in 1875, the Greek government reserved the right to conduct excavations in Ancient Olympia exclusively to German archaeologists. In 1936, on the eve of the Olympic Games in Berlin, the third stage of excavations at Olympia was carried out under the leadership of the Ahnenerbe (an organization under the SS involved in creating a mythical history of the Aryan race for propaganda purposes).

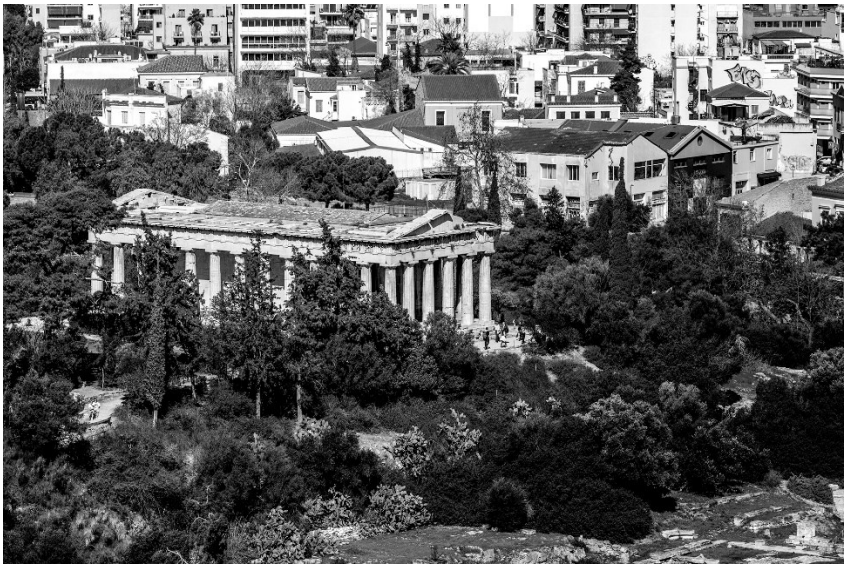
John D. Rockefeller with his son, John D. Rockefeller Jr.

founded and named the city of Antalya in his honour; it is now one of Turkey's largest cities.)

In AD 267, the barbarian Heruli destroyed the Stoa of Attalos, and its remains were used in the construction of the city wall. Now, following Thompson's proposal, all archaeological finds made during excavations of the Agora were to be displayed within the reconstructed Stoa. The colonnade was 115 metres long and 20 metres wide (about 377 by 60 feet), and the cost of its restoration was estimated at a staggering two million dollars. Once again, John D. Rockefeller Jr. came to the aid of the archaeologists, donating another two million dollars, and work proceeded without delay. What you see now is a relatively accurate replica of the ancient Stoa, slightly adapted for the needs of the archaeological museum, which was opened on 3 September 1956 in the presence of King Paul of Greece (grandson of George I and Olga), Queen Consort Frederica, and the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece.

Two years earlier, at the site of the completed archaeological works, trees were planted. The first two—an oak and an oleander—were, as tradition dictated, planted by His and Her Majesties. Afterwards, 654 trees and 2,800 bushes were planted on the excavated Agora. Today, these form the landscape of this wondrous place. Closest to us, sitting on Areopagus Hill, is the only non-ancient structure that has survived in this part of the city: the Byzantine Church of the Holy Apostles, built on the Agora in the 10th century on the foundation of the ancient "Nympheon," a sanctuary of nymphs. From this church, whose interior features

17th-century frescoes, the Athens style of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture began. This style would later be seen in the

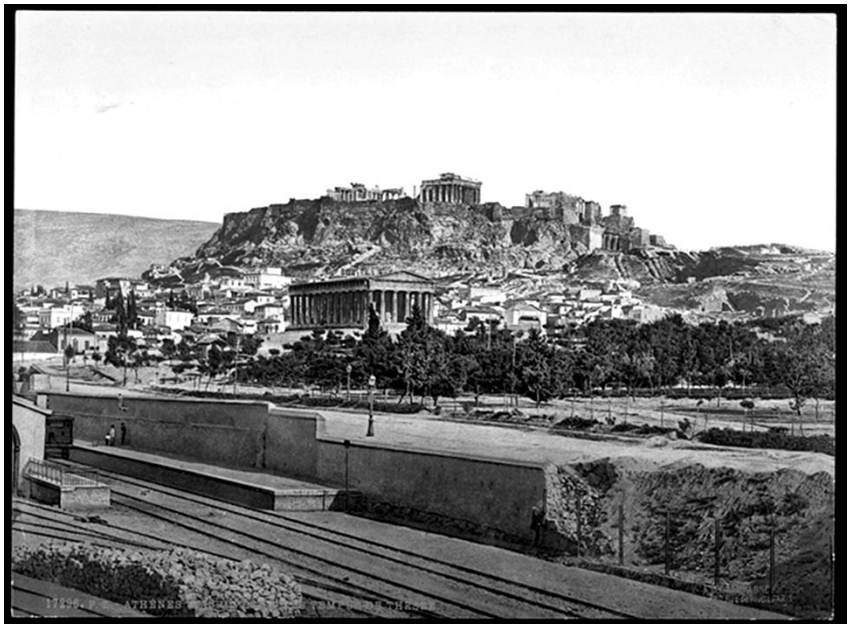


Temple of Hephaestus in 2024

familiar churches of Panagia Kapnikarea, Saint Nicholas Rangavas, and others.

On the left, you can see the remarkably well-preserved ancient Temple of Hephaestus—the god of blacksmiths. Before its excavation on the Agora, the common belief was that this temple was dedicated to Theseus, Ares, and Hercules. However, inscriptions discovered inside the temple refuted this belief, allowing scholars to precisely associate it with the cult of Hephaestus. It was built in the mid-5th century BC and is arguably one of the best-preserved ancient temples in the city. This is largely thanks to its transformation (most likely in the 7th century) into a Christian church dedicated to Saint George. Among Athenians, this church was known by the nickname “Akamatis”—an epithet whose origin remains uncertain. According to one intriguing hypothesis, the word derives from the Ancient Greek term “akamaton” in the phrase “akamaton piros” or “unquenchable

fire." This phrase often accompanied descriptions of Hephaestus, the god of the forge, who personified the element of fire.

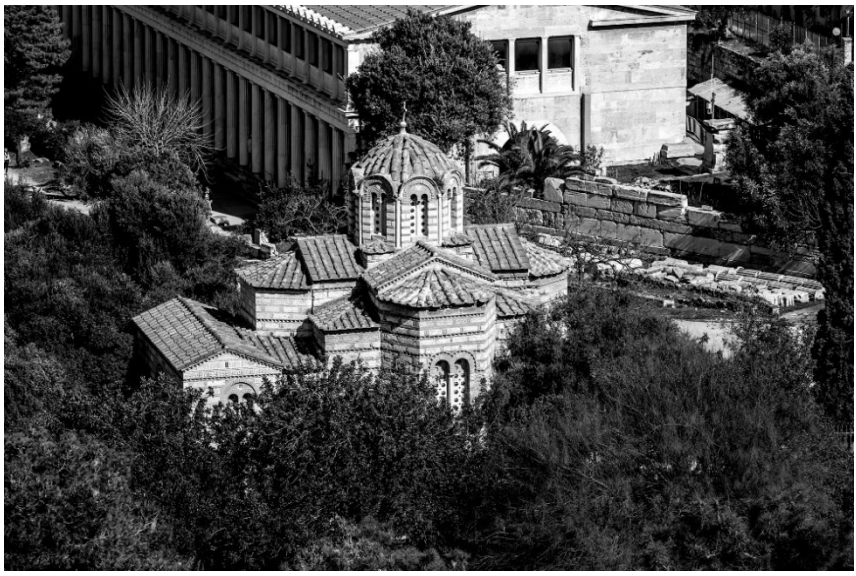


View of the Temple of Hephaestus and the Acropolis of Athens from the other side of the railway (green line of the Athens metro). This postcard was issued in 1890 and you can see the destroyed area of Vrisaki in the background

A somewhat humorous version suggests that the word "Akamatis" is a direct reference to the fact that the Church of Saint George in the ancient temple of Hephaestus was "lazy." ("Akamatis" is a synonym of the word "argosholos" or "lazy.") This may be related to the fact that during Ottoman rule, the Church of Saint George was open only one day a year: the day of commemoration of Saint George the Victory-Bearer.

In any case, even under the Turks, this temple functioned as a Christian church. The last liturgy was held there on 2 February 1833, on the day when King Otto I, the recently elected king of Greece, arrived in Athens. One of Otto's first decrees was to close the church of the ancient temple, and from 1835 to 1934, it housed

the Archaeological Museum. (Before 1874, the Temple of Hephaestus was the main building of the Central Archaeological Museum, now

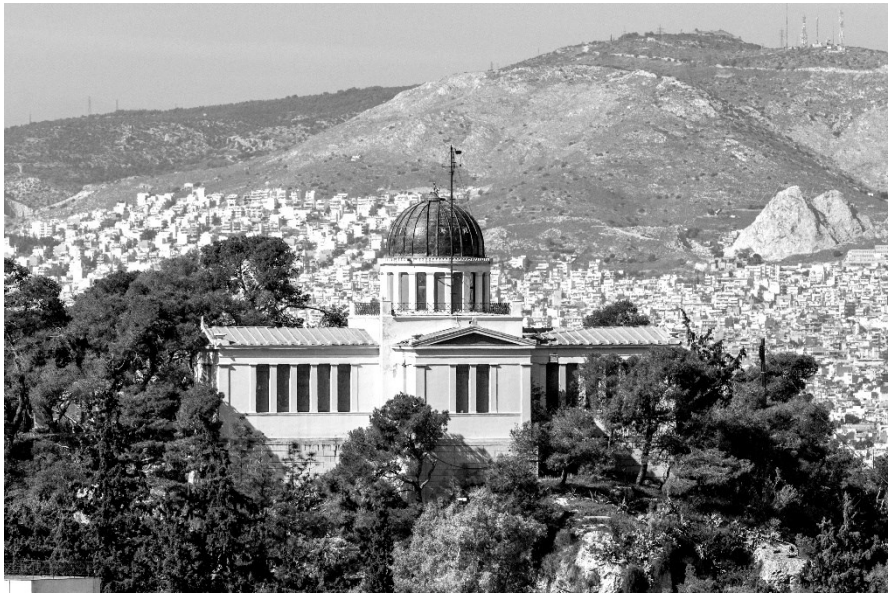


Church of the Holy Apostles (circa 10th century AD)

Stoa of Attalus

located on Patission Avenue.) Only after the excavations on the Athens Agora began was the Temple of Hephaestus officially recognised as an independent monument. It is now open to visitors in that capacity.

The Athens National Observatory



A little farther, beyond the Temple of Hephaestus, atop the hill of Nymphs, rises yet another creation of our friend Theophil von Hansen: the Athens National Observatory. It was constructed over four years and funded by the same familiar Austrian-Greek banker, Baron Georg Simon von Sina. He also supplied the observatory with the most advanced astronomical equipment available at the time (in 1846). Since then, this very observatory has remained the foundation of cartography for Greece.

It is also home to one of Greece's earliest telescopes—the "Doridi Telescope," which is 9 metres long and weighs 9 tonnes. It was installed in the meteorological building of the observatory in 1902.

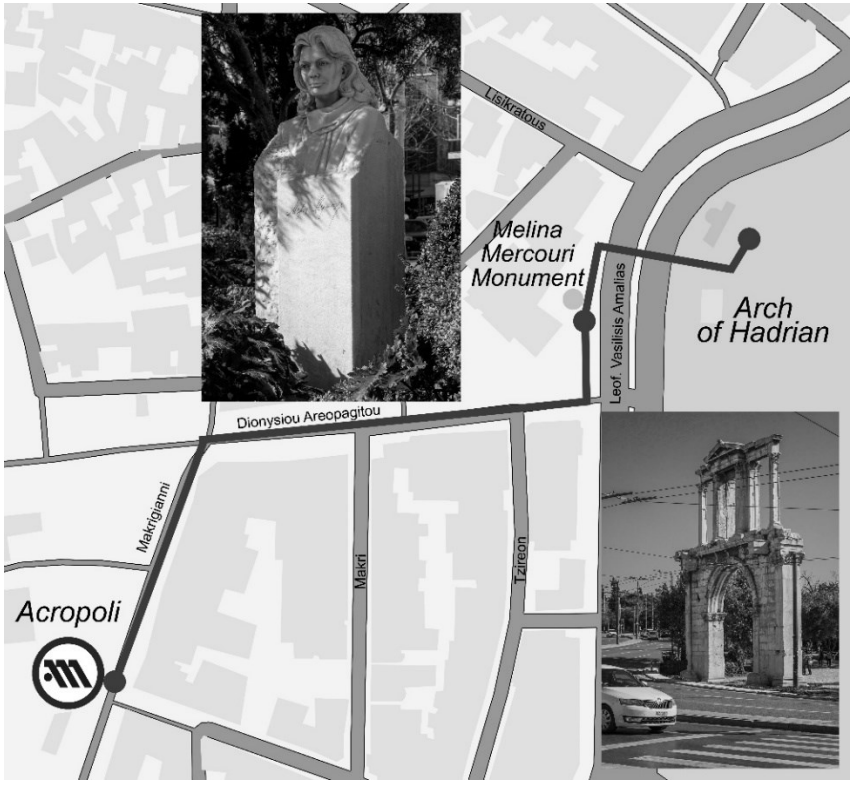
With that, we conclude our grand walk through the Old City—the heart of Athens. We will meet tomorrow, on our third day in the Greek capital.

Day 3. What's left behind us, and what's above us.

Melina Mercouri Monument

Here we are once again, meeting "by the riverbank" of Queen Amalia Avenue, at the marble bust of our acquaintance from yesterday, Melina Mercouri, in front of a café named after her—a café that serves such delicious pancakes. On the opposite side of the avenue stands a very alluring Roman arch. Let us not waste time; we'll cross the road to get a closer look.

Hadrian's Arch



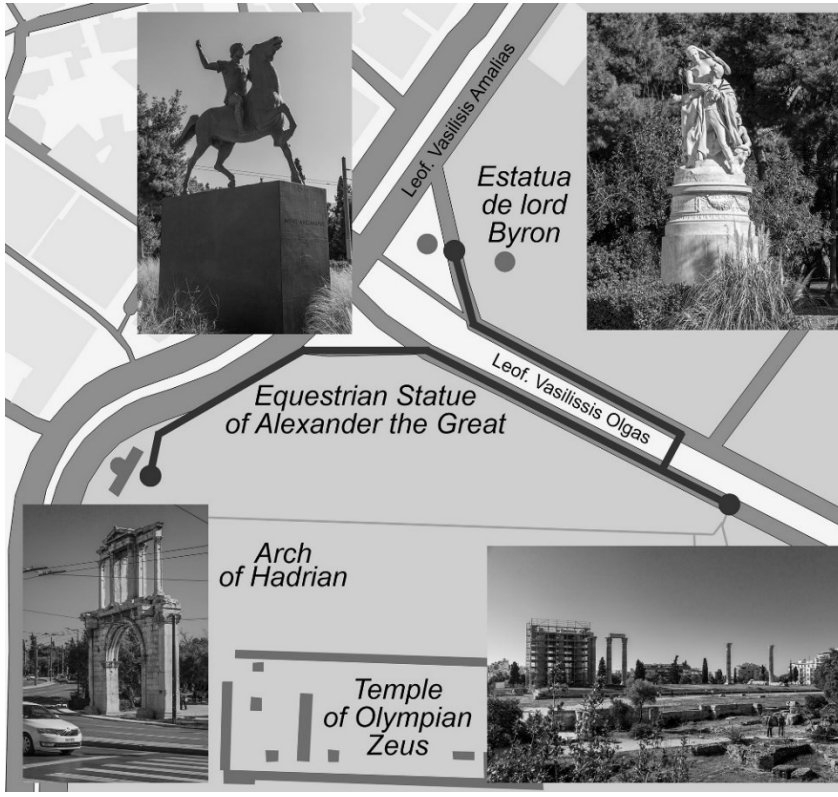
This arch was erected here in AD 131–132. Most likely, it was part of the wall that separated the Ancient Athenians from the Roman "new" district called Hadrianoupolis, built during the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian around the temple of Zeus Olympius (which he also completed).

Standing 18 metres (59 feet) tall, this arch contains inscriptions carved into the Greek frieze (above the archways). They are now quite difficult to read from the ground. Had you lived in Athens during the time of Emperor Hadrian, facing the Acropolis, you would have read, "This is the city of Hadrian, not that of Theseus." On the other side (where, due to the busy traffic of Queen Amalia

Inscription on the arch

Avenue, it is not very convenient to stand), you would have read the reverse: "This is Athens, the ancient city of Theseus." Somehow, this arch survived the invasion of the Heruli in AD 267 and the Visigothic raid in AD 396. It endured the next 15 centuries without significant damage, even after the ancient city wall was gone. Not until 1778, during the rule of the well-known (from the preface) "humanist," Hadji-Ali Haseki, did the Arch of Hadrian become part of a wall again—this time, a Turkish defensive wall built to protect Athens from Albanian brigands.

The events of 1821–1829 also passed by this Roman architecture without any damage. In the mid-20th century, the arch finally became self-sufficient after archaeological excavations cleared the surrounding area of debris from the Turkish wall. Recently, however, the arch has suffered greatly from air pollution: The marble colour has irreversibly darkened, and a patina hides the inscriptions. We can only hope that the Greek government will finally sort out these problems—perhaps by encouraging Athenians to switch to bicycles through additional fuel taxes and higher fuel prices (a joke).



Beyond the fence, you can see the iron-bound scaffolding—construction towers—surrounding the columns of the Temple of Zeus Olympios. An unfortunate temple, it was conceived as the largest cult building in the world (at least in Ancient Greece), and for a brief time, it indeed became so. Construction began during the rule of the tyrant Pisistratus, at the end of the 6th century BC. According to legend, before the temple stood this very place of the sanctuary of Deucalion—the mythic ancestor of the Greek people, associated with the "Deucalion Flood" (a story that closely parallels the Biblical "Great Flood," with the difference being that the main figures were not Jews, but Ancient Greeks and Olympian gods).

Ruins of the Temple of Olympian Zeus in the 1880s

However, almost immediately after the overthrow of Pisistratus' sons, the famous general Themistocles ordered parts of the unfinished temple of Zeus to be used for the construction of a defensive wall connecting Athens with the port city of Piraeus in the south.

The temple was not fully restored until 175 BC, when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, king of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire (in what is now Syria), considered it his privilege to complete the largest temple in honour of the Supreme God of Olympus. However, he did not finish the work; after Antiochus IV's death in 164 BC, the temple was again forgotten, this time for nearly 300 years—until the reign of Emperor Hadrian. The grand opening, in AD 132, of the completed Temple of Zeus Olympios marked the high point of Greek national celebrations. This took place 650 years after the start of its construction.

This grand structure exceeded the Parthenon in size, measuring 96 metres long and 40 metres wide (about 314 by 131 feet). However, it did not stand long. Already in AD 267, the Germanic Heruli barbarians, who had ravaged Athens, exerted superhuman efforts to destroy the Temple of Zeus. Although they did not completely level it, the Empire no longer had the funds for its full restoration. The sanctuary endured in this semi-destroyed state until the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century, when the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Theodosius, declared

Christianity the state religion within his realm. After that, for several centuries, the remnants of the Temple of Zeus were used to construct Christian churches and defensive structures.

In the end, we can see the final parts of this majestic temple (those that hadn't been used for building materials). Only the foundations of the once-surrounding Roman district of Hadrianoupolis remain today.

Monuments to Alexander the Great and Lord Byron

If we now proceed along Queen Amalia Avenue towards Syntagma (Constitution) Square, a monument to Alexander the Great will soon come into view. Yes, I dare to wager that many of you have been waiting for this—an artistic depiction of one of the most famous Greeks in history (possibly on equal footing with Plato and Leonidas).

It must be said, of course, that the ancient King of Macedonia, Alexander III, better known to us under the artistic pseudonym "the Great," has hardly any connection to Athens. His father, King Philip II, fought a brief war with this city, and the conqueror of worlds was more focused on other parts of the Oikoumene. Nevertheless, this monument has a curious and illustrative story. Its author is one of the best Greek sculptors of the 20th century, Yannis Papas, who first presented the monument at an exhibition at the National Gallery in 1992. At that exhibition, museum leadership proposed, to the Athens city council, the installation of

the monument in one of the city squares. The proposal was accepted, and a special commission began selecting the best location for its placement. Over the following 27 years, various officials—from secretaries at the Athens city hall to the Greek Minister of Culture—could not manage to install this single, unfortunate bronze monument. Athens saw six mayors and 10 prime ministers while Alexander the Great waited for his moment somewhere in museum storage rooms.

He does not randomly turn his gaze towards the ruins of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, whose construction lasted 650 years; traditions are traditions.

Monument to Lord Byron

A little farther, at the junction of Queen Amalia Avenue and Queen Olga Avenue, stands another, significantly more prominent and elegant, monument to Lord Byron, with whom we have become well acquainted after walking along the street named in his honour.

The client behind this grand marble composition was a prominent Greek banker and entrepreneur, born on the island of Chios: Dimitrios Stefanovik Skilitsis, who also served as head of the patriotic society "Vyron," named after the English poet and friend of Greece. Skilitsis himself lived and conducted business in London. In 1888, when he funded the creation of the Byron monument, he made this decision on the centenary of the poet's birth.

At the same time, at his suggestion, before the Fourth National Olympic Games (a prototype of the future Olympic Games, held in Greece in 1859, 1870, 1875, and 1888–1889), a competition was held to select a prototype for the future monument; the best sculptor would be tasked with immortalising Byron in marble.

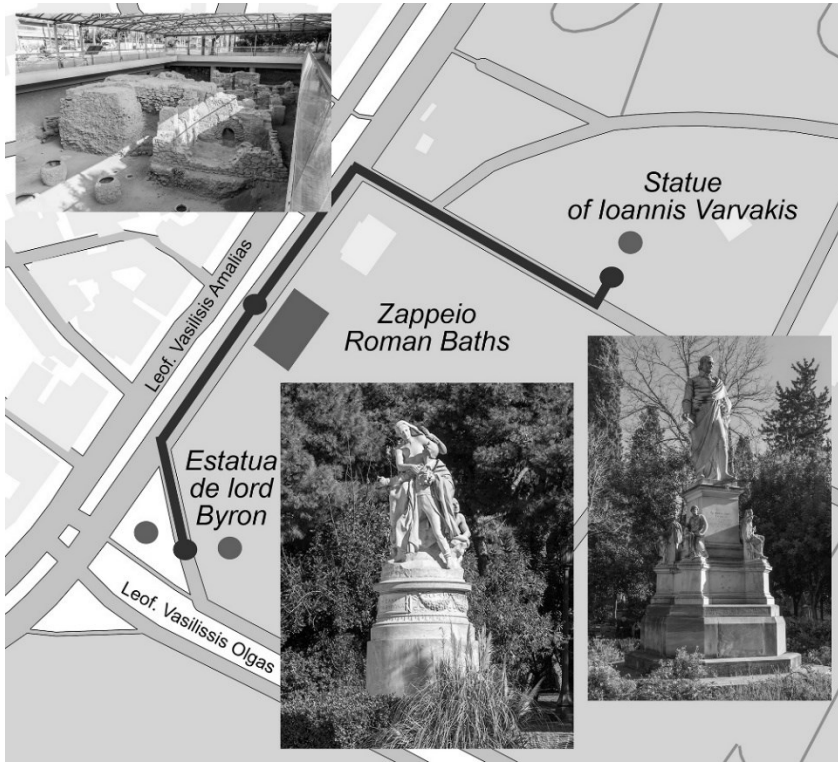
However, Skilitsis was dissatisfied with the results. The creator of the winning prototype, a Greek named Lazaros Sochos (famous for the majestic equestrian monument of the brave Theodoros Kolokotronis), received a prize of 2,000 drachmas but, for some reason, was not invited to bring his project to life. Ultimately, the task of creating the monument was handed over to the French sculptor Henri Michel Antoine Chapu, who was to begin work in 1891. His prototype fully satisfied Skilitsis, but as if in jest, Chapu died before he could touch the marble. Subsequently, the task of sculpting based on his design was assigned to another Frenchman: Jean Alexandre Joseph Falquiere, who needed four years to complete the project.

Skilitsis himself did not live to see the monument's installation, as he died in 1893. At the grand unveiling on 19 February 1896, he was represented by the Minister of the Interior. The composition was magnificent: The allegory of Hellas—a semi-naked woman in a semblance of a chitón, slightly taller than Byron's figure and seemingly mournful of the poet—crowns his brow with a palm branch, while the poet himself gazes at her as if he were a child leaving his homeland. There is a frozen, nostalgic sadness in the gaze of a youthful man turning to look at his mother. Behind these two figures is an allegorical image of Hellenism: a naked man still suffering under the yoke of Ottoman rule but ready to straighten and rise with full pride. The inscription on the pedestal is concise: "Hellas (Greece)—to Byron."

Strangely, after the unveiling, which took place shortly before the First Olympic Games, many Greeks were dissatisfied with the sculpture. The newspaper "Kairoi" ("Times") outright denounced Falquiere's work: "Instead of Byron, who resembled Apollo, we see some child of disproportionate height and an unnatural neck, and Hellas, with her hopelessly drooping, pathetic breasts, is completely wrapped in some kind of vulgar veil. And the naked Hellene,

located behind both and completing this complex, looks more like an African with his shamelessly naked body."

Roman Baths



Continuing along Queen Amalia Avenue, we come across the reason why, at one point, significant changes were made to the ventilation plan for the Blue line of the Athens metro—namely, the Roman public baths of the 3rd century AD, built here a few years after the devastating invasion by our friends, the Heruli, in 267 BC.

Ruins of Roman baths

These baths were located in the new, Roman districts of Athens, collectively known as Adrianoupolis, named after Emperor Hadrian. In the late 4th and early 5th centuries, the baths were slightly rebuilt and expanded, and they remained in use for quite a long time. The central and main part of the complex was a covered hall containing swimming pools, heated from below by coal-fuelled furnaces. Such "thermae" were known in Greece even before it was conquered by Rome. They existed in large houses (mainly aristocratic) and in gymnasiums (public educational institutions). Adopted by the Romans, "thermae" became widespread across the Roman Empire, which, at its peak, stretched from the Iberian Peninsula to present-day Romania, and from North Africa to Scotland. After the Turks' contact with Byzantium (more precisely, after the Ottomans had completely conquered Byzantium), these "thermae" were transformed into what Europeans today know as "hammams."

Among the ruins, you can see a room with what appear to be remains of columns. This is the "caldarium"—a room with hot water. On these supporting beams once lay a floor, beneath which circulated heated air generated by coal-fuelled fires. In front of the caldarium were two more rooms: the "tepidarium" (a "warm room," where the air was not heated above 40°C–45°C [104°F–113°F] and which was the central area of the thermal baths) and the "frigidarium" (a room for cooling).

Let's proceed farther. Directly opposite the Neo-Gothic Anglican Church of Saint Paul, we shall turn right onto a wonderful, wide, shaded alley. The Church of Saint Paul, incidentally, was built here between 1838 and 1843 of marble from Mount Imittos and porolith from the Corinthian isthmus, with financial support from the British government. Construction was overseen by Hans Christian Hansen, older brother of our friend Theophil.

Monument to Ioannis Varvakis

A little farther along, on the alleyway leading from Queen Amalia Avenue to Queen Olga Avenue, stands yet another grand monument, in the image of Ioannis Varvakis: pirate, millionaire, nobleman, philanthropist, and… no, he probably wasn't a playboy.

Varvakis, like the two previously known Ioannis (Makriyannis and Paparrigopoulos), did not bear this surname from birth. His father was named Andreas Leontidis (Leontis), and the word "varvaki" is derived from the local residents of Psara (his native island), who live in those parts, called falco eleonorae—falcon eagles. The same word was used as a nickname for Ioannis Leontidis in his youth due to his large, stern black eyes and "impetuous temper." When he became a pirate, he adopted "Varvakis" as his official surname.

Like many other Greek pirates in the Aegean Sea, he most often attacked Turkish, Egyptian, and French ships. For the latter, Greek privateers frequently hired British and Dutch fleets, aiming to prevent the rise of revolutionary France as a naval power in the eastern Mediterranean. With the start of the 1768–1774 Russo-Turkish War, in which many Greeks saw a chance for their people to achieve long-awaited independence, Varvakis sold most of his

property to outfit his “shabaka”-type ship and joined the Russian Imperial Fleet operating off the coasts of the Peloponnese. Through his acquaintance with Russian admirals Orloff and Spiridoff, as well as his participation in the Battle of Chesme, which ended in a decisive victory for the Russian-Greek squadron, a new chapter in Ioannis Varvakis’ life might have begun: By a special decree of Empress Catherine II, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in the Russian Imperial Navy.

A fellow countryman of Ioannis Varvakis (also a native of the island of Psara) was another famous Greek pirate and politician – Admiral Konstantinos Canaris (not a relative of the German admiral Wilhelm Canaris). Canaris became famous for his exploits during the national liberation war of 1821-1829, especially for the destruction of several Turkish admiral ships. Canaris subsequently became Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Greece six times.

However, after the war, Varvakis returned to piracy. The incident that prompted him to end his sailing career took place in Constantinople. There, his ship was seized during an attempt to sell it, despite his presence in the capital of the Ottoman Empire without fear of arrest. The seizure was quite unusual at the time. Naturally fearing arrest and the death penalty, Varvakis managed to escape from Constantinople into Odessa, then onto Saint Petersburg, where he received a warm welcome from Catherine II.

She put him in charge of the production and procurement of black caviar in the Caspian Sea, which meant Varvakis was the first-ever exporter of caviar to Europe.

Monument to Ioannis Varvakis

In 1789, he was granted Russian citizenship and elevated to hereditary nobility. By that time, the enterprising Varvakis had amassed a considerable fortune from the caviar trade and acquired his own small fleet. Nearly 30 years later, in 1821, at the age of 76, Varvakis entered into close relations with the organisers of the Greek underground patriotic organisation "Filiki Eteria," i.e., Count Ioannis Kapodistrias and Alexandros Ipsilantis. Until 1824, he supplied Greek insurgents with arms, purchasing them in his own name from Russian Imperial factories and, through the Constantinople Patriarchate, buying back compatriots taken prisoner by the Turks. However, after about 20,000 Greeks were killed during the Turkish massacre on his native island of Psara, the 78-year-old former pirate ordered his ship and personally set sail for Greece, where he was destined to stand before God. Early in the morning of 12 January 1825, Ioannis Varvakis died at the British hospital on the island of Zakynthos from the effects of a severe infectious disease.

In his will, Varvakis instructed that one million Russian roubles from his estate be used to establish a lyceum in the future free Greece and that the majority of his movable and immovable property be sold, with the proceeds handed over to the Greek government for other charitable purposes. That very million

continued to sit in a Russian bank account until 1857, when, under the leadership of Panagis Kalkos, the construction of the "Varvakis School" began. From 1886, it operated as a practical lyceum of natural sciences.

From another part of his donated funds, in 1886, the Central Covered Market of Athens, "Varvakios Agora," was opened.

This monument to Ioannis Varvakis was created by Professor Leonidas Drossis, by order of the Greek government, and was installed here in 1889. Its official unveiling took place the following year, timed to coincide with the grand reburial of Varvakis at the First Athens Cemetery. Behind the pedestal supporting the figure of the renowned Greek pirate-benefactor, the sculptor depicted four allegorical figures: Free Greece, Thought, Shipping, and History. These were the four main companions of Varvakis' life.

The Zappeion Exhibition Hall

A shady alley leads us to the large "Zappion" Exhibition Hall—another architectural masterpiece by Theophil von Hansen, constructed by order of, and fully financed by, Evangelos and Konstantinos Zappas. They were two other great benefactors of the Greek nation, and

their family history is connected to the revival of the Olympic Games.

ΟΛΥΜΠΙΑ ΤΟΥ 1859.

Αριθ.

ΕΙΣΙΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΙΚΟΝ.

Τοῖς ἐκθέταις καὶ λοιποῖς δι' ὑπηρεσίαν.

Ὁ Πρόεδρος τῆς ἐκτελ. Ἐπιτροπῆς

Ὑπογραφὴ τοῦ φέροντος.

Ticket to the first Greek Olympic Games in 1859

The ancient Olympic Games, held every four years for 1,170 years (from 776 BC until AD 394), were the most significant of the numerous Ancient Greek festivals dedicated to all the gods of Olympus. The classical competitions of the ancient Olympics included the pentathlon (running, long jump with weights in the hands, javelin throw, discus throw, and wrestling) and chariot racing. Like many other sports and mysteries held in honour of the various pagan gods of the Ancient Greek pantheon, the games were banned at the end of the 4th century by Roman Emperor Theodosius I, who initiated the extensive Christianisation of the Empire.

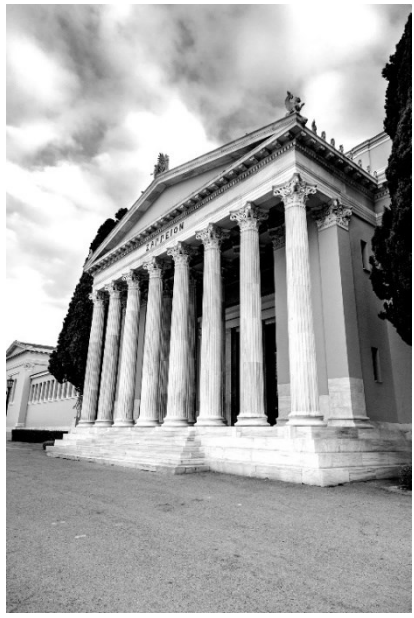
Evangelos Zappas (1800-1865)

Since then and until the mid-19th century, no sports events comparable in scale to the ancient Olympic Games had been held. Only in 1856 did Evangelos Zappas, a wealthy Greek entrepreneur from Wallachia (the territory of modern Romania), approach King Otto I of Greece with a proposal to revive the Olympic movement, primarily as a means of "resurrecting," or rather, creating, a new Greek national consciousness.

Constantinos Zappas (1814-1892)

Zappas was ready to bear all the costs of this ambitious project and also proposed involving other nations, thereby initiating the establishment of a kind of International Olympic Committee. The Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, was sceptical of Zappas' proposal, remarking that "today, nations are not distinguished by good athletes but rather by pioneers in industry and agriculture." Rangavis suggested that the entrepreneur fund a major industrial exhibition in Athens. However, Zappas did not give up. After lengthy negotiations with His Majesty and several publications in Greek newspapers defending the idea of reviving the Olympic Games, a dedicated group of supporters was formed. The King issued a decree to organize the first of these sports competitions at the national level.

The games took place in 1859, on Ludovikou Square (Ludwig's Square, now known as Omonia Square), and they involved individuals from diverse professions and social classes: farmers, gendarmes, and even a blind beggar who "miraculously regained sight and competed in running." The disciplines in which these first Greek Olympians competed after nearly 1,500 years were classical: Wrestling was the only event missing, and chariot racing was replaced by equestrian competitions.



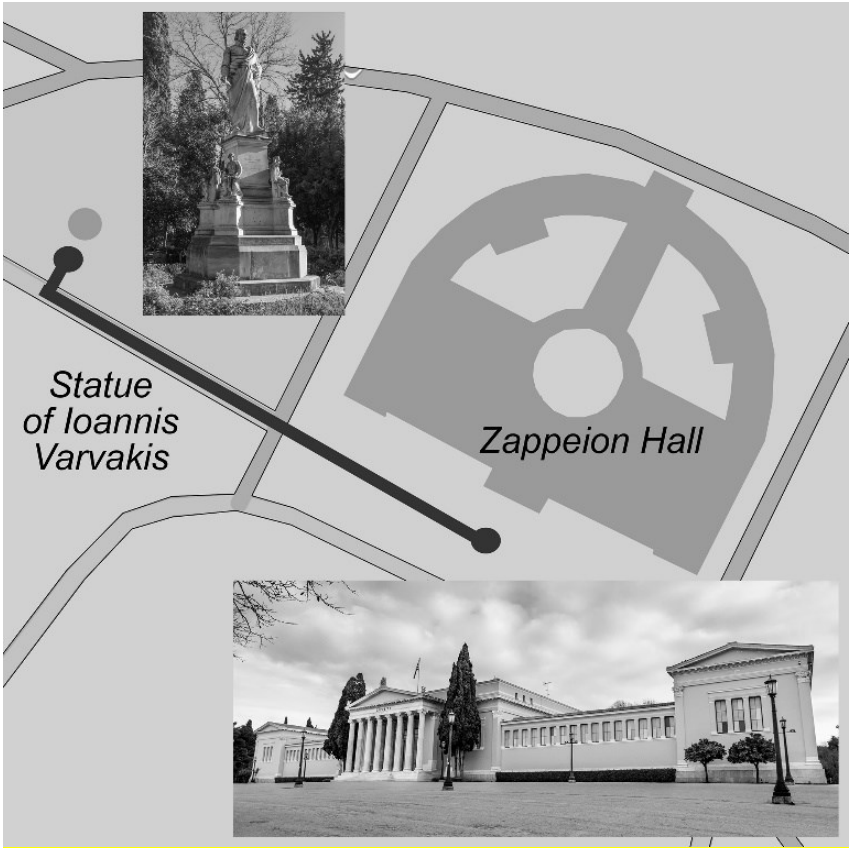
View of the monument to Evangelos Zappas through the colonnade and façade of the Zappion exhibition hall

Zappas was pleased with the lively interest that the sports competitions had aroused within society and was resolute in his determination to finance such Olympic games on a permanent basis. However, he died suddenly in 1865, leaving behind a colossal fortune that he bequeathed for the promotion and development of sports in Greece and worldwide.

The person responsible for executing Evangelos Zappas' last will was his cousin, Konstantinos Zappas. The latter approached the government of the Greek Kingdom with a proposal to construct a large exhibition hall where the "Olympic Exhibition" of industrial and agricultural achievements could be held every four years. In 1869, a plot measuring 80,000 square metres (861,112 square feet) between the Royal Palace and the ruins of the Temple of Zeus Olympios was allocated for its construction. After a series of delays caused by project development and the replacement of French architect François Boulanger with Theophil von Hansen as chief architect, the exhibition hall was laid down in 1874. It was

officially inaugurated on 20 October 1888. By that time, the first public sports complex in Greece—the "Gymnastirio"—had already been built with funds from the late Evangelos Zappas. It was situated opposite the Panathenaic Stadium (Kallimarmaro) on present-day King Constantine I Avenue.

That same year, 1888, saw the last, fourth national Olympic Games of Greece. Afterwards, the heir to the Greek throne, Constantine, proposed establishing a tradition of holding Olympic events on a fixed schedule every four years. The next games were scheduled for 1892 but were never held due to a lack of funds.



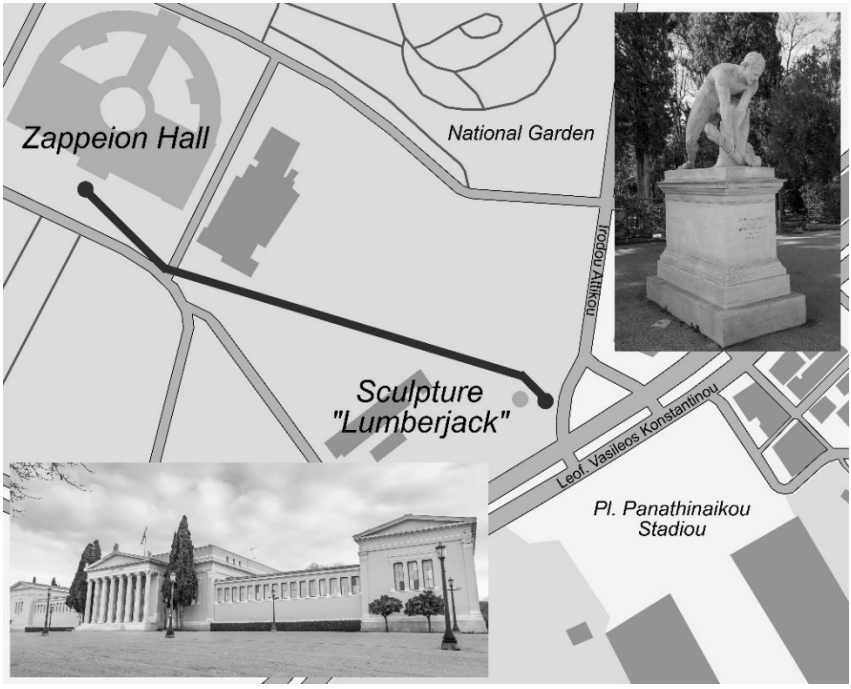
After the death of Konstantinos Zappas, monuments to both patrons of sports were erected at the entrance to the exhibition hall named in their honour: the "Zappion." During the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, competitions in fencing took place in this building. The Greeks won five medals: two golds (fencing among maestros and sabre), one silver (sabre), and two bronzes (fencing). During the extraordinary Olympic Games of 1906, also held in Athens, the "Zappion" served as the "Olympic Village," while during the 2004 Olympic Games, it housed the Information Centre. Additionally, on 1 January 1981, a treaty was signed here for the accession of the Third Greek Republic to the European Economic Community (the future European Union). To this day, the "Zappion" regularly hosts various exhibitions, concerts, and events. Additionally, its hall features a crypt containing the head of Evangelos Zappas; it is located in the wall and sealed with a beautiful marble plaque.

Sculpture "Lumberjack"

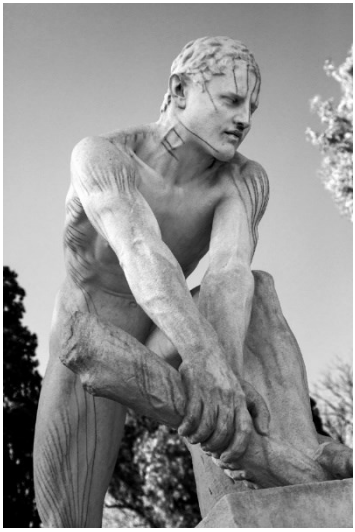
Now, let's continue farther, passing the "Zappion" along a dirt pathway that leads us across the park to the same stadium where the first international Olympic Games of 1896 took place: "Panathenaic Stadium" ("Panathenaic Oropédis"), which Athenians also call "Kalimarmaro" or "Beautiful Marble."

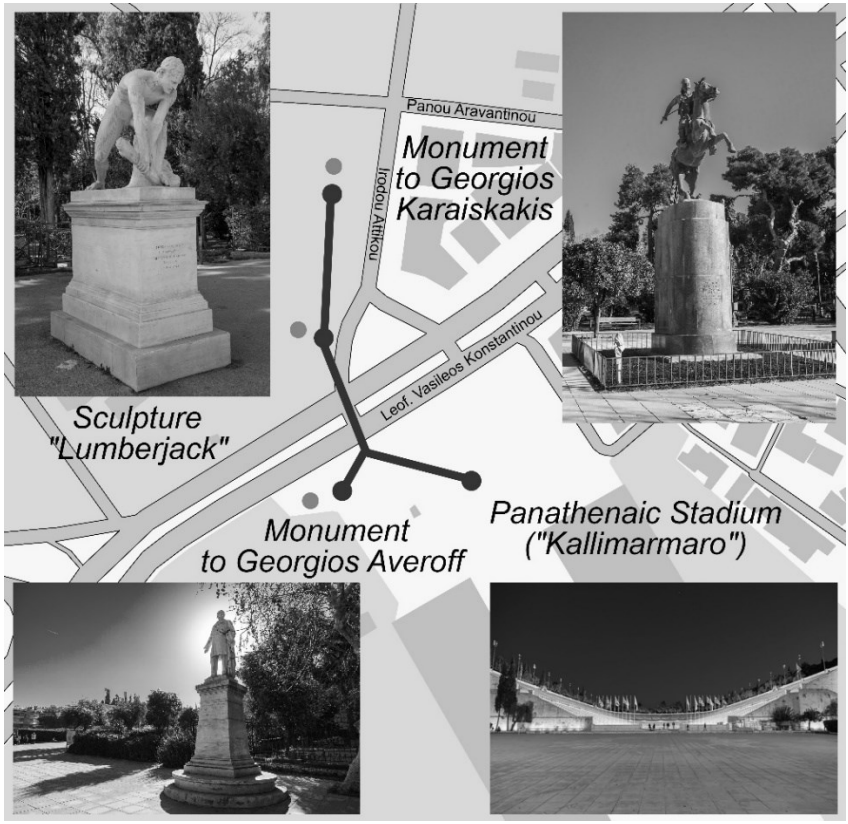
Before it appears before us, we will see a marble sculpture of a naked man at the exit of the alley. It is turned away from us on an unanticipated side. This is "The Lumberjack," created by the Greek sculptor Dimitris Philippotis (1839–1919). It was commissioned by Athens' mayor, Spyridon Merkouris—grandfather of the well-

known Melina Mercouri—to adorn Queen Amalia Avenue near the Byzantine Church of the Holy Trinity in 1908.



In 1910 and 1912, unknown vandals caused significant damage to the sculpture. The first vandal splashed red paint mixed with caustic chemicals onto the face of the marble lumberjack, while the second vandalized the sculpture's groin area. After restoration, the sculpture was returned to its place, but in 1960, a decision was made to install it here, opposite the stadium.





I won't dispute that "Kalimarmaro" is impressive: Fifty rows of marble benches can hold around 80,000 spectators. The stadium's uniqueness lies in the fact that it was built entirely from Pentelic marble—the same marble used for the ancient Parthenon. The only difference is that this stadium did not assume its present form until just before 1896.

Of course, it was not built on an empty site: The ancient "Panathenaic Stadium" was constructed here, between Ardittos Hill and the Ilisos River (which is now beneath you in the collector), back in the 4th century BC for purposes of hosting the Panathenaic Games—sports competitions dedicated to the goddess

Athena and held only in this city. The first events took place there in 330–329 BC. During the time of Herodes Atticus (AD 139–144), the stadium was significantly expanded; it took on a horseshoe shape and could seat up to 50,000 spectators.

View of Kalimarmaro Stadium in the evening

At the top of Ardittos Hill was also the sanctuary of the Ancient Greek goddess of luck, Tyche, adorned with ivory and gold. Several stones from the foundation of this shrine can still be seen at the very top if you decide to climb up there.

The ultimate fate of the stadium remains uncertain, but at some point, after Christianity arrived in Athens, it was almost entirely dismantled. Apparently, after the ban on pagan sports competitions, seen as pagan rituals incompatible with Christianity, the marble was repurposed to build Christian churches and residential houses.

In the 13th–14th centuries, the Frankish dukes ruling Athens converted the stadium into a site for knightly tournaments. However, by the early 19th century, only the remaining fragments

HRH Crown Prince Constantine, future King of the Hellines (Greeks) Constantine I

of its foundation and the "Cave of Destiny"—the sole part untouched since ancient times—testified to its existence there. This cave, 57 metres long and about 4 metres wide (177 by 13 feet), existed within Ardittos Hill long before the decision was made to build a sports facility there. According to popular legend, it was home to the Moirai, Ancient Greek goddesses of fate, weaving "the threads of our lives."

During the Roman Empire, the cave was converted into a tunnel through which gladiators entered the stadium, and wild animals were released into the arena for battles. After Greece gained independence from the Ottoman Empire, and until 1850, the cave housed a slaughterhouse. Today, the cave is part of a gallery leading into the stadium, where a small Olympic Museum and a souvenir shop are located.

Evangelos Zappas turned his attention to the remnants of the ancient stadium in 1856. At that time, he was ready to fund both its restoration and the construction of a new exhibition hall, later known as the "Zappion." However, these projects were not realised during his lifetime. The stadium's reconstruction began only in 1874, using funds that Zappas had bequeathed. At this point, the bridge over the still-flowing Ilisos River in front of the stadium was also rebuilt (part of that bridge is now located in the sewer), and the stadium, to a large extent, acquired its modern features.

In preparation for the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, the decision was made to enlarge and improve the stadium. The heir to the Greek throne, Constantine, who took charge of the Olympic

Games Commission (the future International Olympic Committee), approached George Averoff, another prominent Greek benefactor (yes, there were many in the 19th century), for funds. After Evangelos Zappas' death in 1865, Averoff was arguably the wealthiest subject of King George I of Greece and was fully prepared to finance all the required work. Moreover, he allocated a sum several times greater than that which Prince Constantine had initially requested: 1,000,000 drachmas.

Monument to Georgios Averoff in front of Kalimarmaro Stadium

With this money, the project (designed by Ernst Ziller and Greek architect Anastasius Metaxas) to transform the Panathenaic Stadium into the main venue for the Olympic Games was realised. Though the work was not completed by 1896, the first Olympic Games were held with great pomp. Ever since, this stadium has been an integral part of most Olympic ceremonies and other sporting events. It also hosts exhibitions and concerts and functions as a museum.

The public watches the opening ceremony of the first Olympic Games, 1896

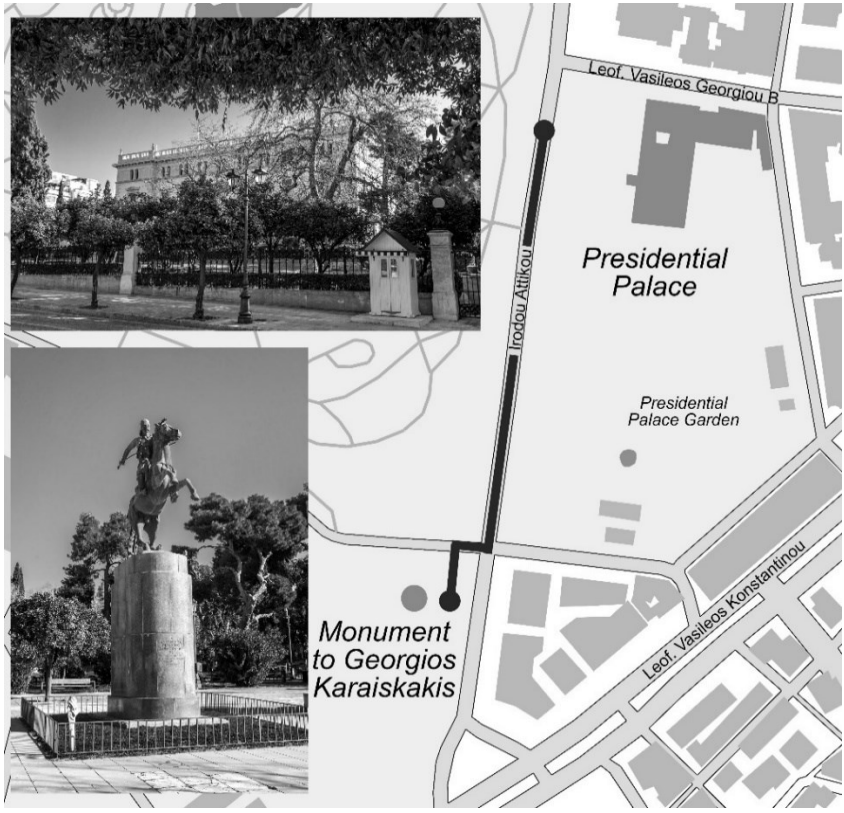
View from the top of Kalimarmaro Stadium, 2024

Monument to Georgios Karaiskakis

Following from the stadium towards the National Garden (again crossing King Constantine I Avenue) along Herodes Atticus Street (Iridou Attikou), you will see, on a small square to your left, an equestrian monument to Georgios Karaiskakis, who was one of the numerous leaders of the Greek War of Independence of 1821–1829. Under his command, Greek insurgents attempted to lift the Turkish siege of the Acropolis in 1827. (We discussed these events when recalling Sir Richard Church.)

If you remember how many years the Athens city hall and the Greek Ministry of Culture spent debating the question of where to install the monument to Alexander the Great, perhaps nothing will surprise you now: For almost 40 years (from 1929 to 1968), the authorities could not agree on a site for the equestrian statue of Karaiskakis. The designer of this monument was the Greek sculptor Michail Tombros, who led the Athens School of Fine Arts from 1957 to 1959. His personal pupil was Spyros (Spyridon) Goggas, author of the well-known monument to the last Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI. Comparing that sculpture with the monument to Karaiskakis, I am inclined to think the pupil surpassed his teacher. However, I may be mistaken.

The New Royal Palace (the residence of the President of Greece)



Next to Herodes Atticus Street, a fence surrounds the Royal Garden, now known as the National Garden. We will take a brief walk through it shortly, but for now, let us look carefully at the other side, where the New Royal Palace (currently called the Presidential Palace) is located. This splendid residence was designed by… yes, you probably guessed two names, and with one of them, of course, you hit the mark: Ernst Ziller, who was appointed the royal architect of His Majesty King George I of Greece and who designed, in total, around 700 buildings across Greece.

The king issued a decree allocating funds for the construction of the palace and for the project preparation in 1868, the year when Prince Constantine—his firstborn and heir—was born. Construction began in 1891 and was completed six years later. Notably, Théophile von Hansen indirectly contributed to this palace: While preparing his drawings, Ziller used an unrealised project by Hansen for the construction of a summer residence for the Royal Family.

Immediately after completion, the heir to the Greek throne, Constantine, moved into this residence with his wife, Princess Sophia (sister of the German Emperor Wilhelm II), and their young children: Prince George (the future King George II), Prince Alexander (the future King Alexander I), and Princess Helena (the future Queen Consort of Romania). After 1909, the entire Greek Royal Family also resided there for extended periods, as fire almost completely destroyed the Old Royal Palace on Syntagma Square on the eve of Christmas 1909.

New Royal Palace (residence of the President of Greece)

King Constantine and Queen Consort Sophia (sister of the German Kaiser Wilhelm) in their study in the New Royal Palace. February 1921

Until 1913, this palace was known as the Palace of the Heir Apparent. However, after a Greek anarchist assassinated King George I during a promenade along the waterfront in Thessaloniki in 1913, his son did not move into the Old Royal Palace on Syntagma Square. Instead, the Royal Palace moved here, and the widowed Queen Olga continued to live in the old palace. At Constantine I's request, Ziller added a large ballroom to this palace, which was also used for official ceremonies, such as awarding state honours.

Since then, the New Royal Palace has changed hands frequently. After King Constantine I abdicated during the military coup of 1917, his younger son, Prince Alexander, who had been installed on the throne by the usurper Venizelos, occupied the palace. Following Alexander's sudden death in 1920, the palace was once again taken over by Constantine I, who returned from exile. However, in 1922, he was forced to abdicate once more, this time in favour of his elder son, George II. George himself was deposed during the revolution in 1924, after which the New Royal Palace was proclaimed the residence of the President of the Second Hellenic Republic. During its 11 years of existence, three presidents alternated in office. Then, in 1935, the monarchy was restored, and King George II again took residence in the palace.

The next time he left it was 1941. Shortly before German troops occupied Athens, the king and his government were evacuated to

Crete, and from there to Alexandria in Egypt. Later, George II said that "the most necessary thing for a Greek monarch is a suitcase." He returned to Athens in September 1946. After his childless death on 1 April 1947, the new owner of this palace became his younger brother, King Paul I.

The last crowned inhabitant of this residence was Paul I's son, Constantine II, who was forced to flee Greece after the military coup in December 1967. Since then, and more precisely since the fall of the military junta of the "Black Colonels" in 1974 and the proclamation of the Third Hellenic Republic, this palace has again been the residence of the president. Officially, he is the head of state; however, Greece, like most former monarchies in Europe, is a parliamentary republic, with the actual head of state being the prime minister, who leads the government.

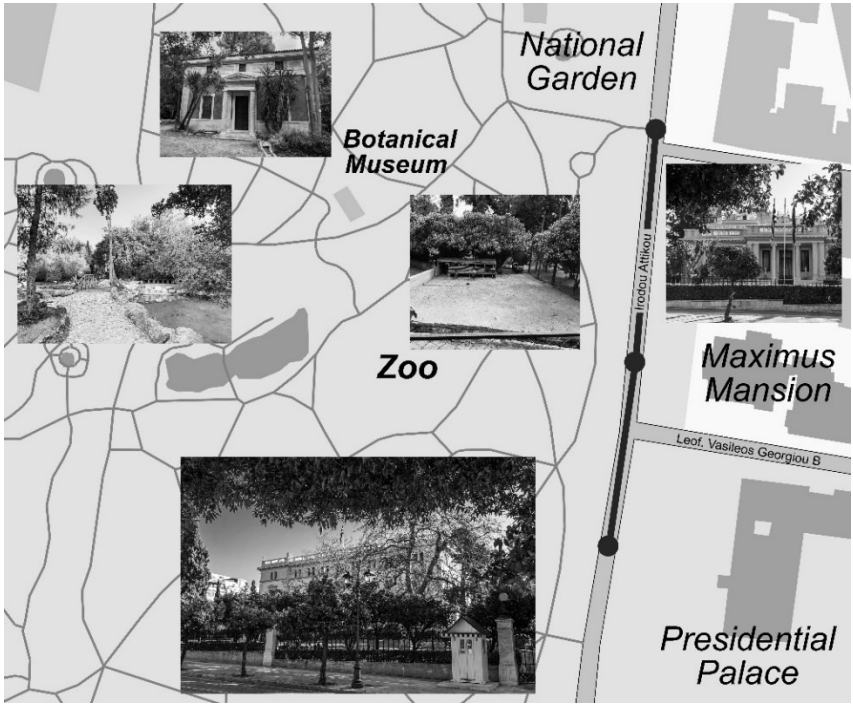
You can take photos with the Evzones guarding the palace gates, but only with the permission of the responsible officer, who is usually somewhere nearby, dressed in field uniform and beret.

Maximos Mansion (Residence of the Prime Minister of Greece)

The prime minister, incidentally, resides just across the road from the New Royal Palace, in the "Megaron Maximos," or "Maximos Palace"—an analogue to London's 10 Downing Street. Construction of this mansion began in 1912; prior to that, the site was an empty plot.

Anticipating your suspicions, I must disappoint you: Neither Ernst Ziller nor Théophile von Hansen had anything to do with the construction or architectural plans of this mansion. The master who

worked on it was the Greek architect Anastasius Helmis. (You might not bother to remember that name, as unlike Ziller and von Hansen, it will not cross our path again.) The client was… yes, you guessed correctly: the wealthy Greek shipowner and entrepreneur Alexandros Michalinos.



He, indeed, did not live to see its completion. After his death in 1916, his widow, Irini, remarried. Her new husband was the banker and economist Dimitrios Maximos, after whom the mansion was named. From 1916 to 1921, the unfinished residence was owned by Leonidas Embirikos, who completed the construction and later sold it back to the Maximos family. The couple resided there until 1952, when the Greek government approached Dimitrios Maximos with an offer to buy the mansion for 11 billion drachmas—a substantial sum at the time. However, Maximos, a great patriot (or perhaps more accurately, driven by his desire to make history), declared his willingness to give his house to the government for half the offered price, along with all the furniture and the collection

of paintings and sculptures housed within it, on one condition: that the mansion be used as a "government house" for hosting foreign heads of state. Thus, the Megaron Maximos became the property of Greece.

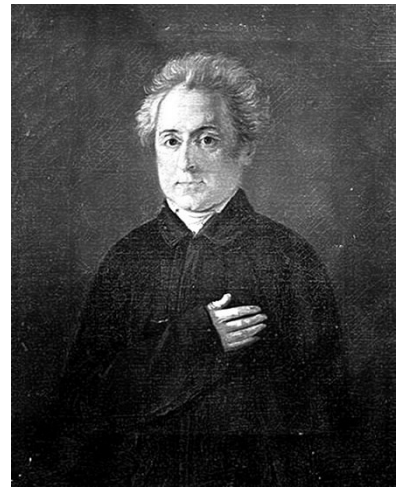
Since then, until 1982, the house accommodated heads of state who were in Athens on official visits. (For example, in 1980, Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, stayed here.)

Caricature of Dimitrios Maximos. 1947

A curious event took place in 1967. At that time, the family of Lieutenant General Georgios Zoitakis moved into the Megaron Maximos. Zoitakis was a former aide-de-camp to King Paul I of Greece and was appointed regent of the Greek Kingdom after the "Black Colonels" coup that ousted King Constantine II. Like most members of the junta, Zoitakis came from a peasant background, and his wife, Sofia, was a native of Euboea. Although she had studied philosophy, she was a pragmatic woman. When she became the "mistress" of the Maximos Palace, she often lamented that "there is no point in these palaces: you can't even put a henhouse in them." Arguing with her, of course, is quite difficult.

Royal (National) Garden

The former Royal Garden and the current National Garden can be accessed from Herodes Atticus Street through three entrances. However, because the garden is not very large, you will, one way or another, not get lost. There are several interesting sights within: monuments dedicated to Greek political and cultural figures, Roman ruins, beautiful alleys, and a lively corner featuring goats, geese, rabbits, ducks, and turtles.



Count Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857) – author of the poem, part of which is known today as the Greek anthem.

In summer, you might also come across Balkan turtles wandering along the paths. These are a subspecies of the Mediterranean turtle, and their shells reach 30, and sometimes even 40, centimetres in length (about 11 to 15 inches). Their average lifes pan is around 90 years.

The two most notable monuments in the garden are the busts of Greece's first president, Count Ioannis Kapodistrias, and the "friend of the Greeks," philanthropist and one of the pioneers of daguerreotype photography, Jean-Gabriel Eynard. The latter made Greece his story thanks to his support for Greek rebels from 1825 onwards. After the conclusion of the War of Independence, he donated 700,000 francs for the country's reconstruction (or, more precisely, the building of its future). In 1847, he helped pay off Greece's external debt from a 15-year-old loan by contributing an additional half a million francs. These two busts are located in the southern part of the park, near the Roman ruins, by the exit to the "Zappion" exhibition hall.

In the eastern part of the garden stands a bust of Count Dionysios Solomos—one of the great modern Greek poets and author of the lyrics to the Greek national anthem, the "Hymn to Liberty." There is a widespread misconception that the Greek anthem is the longest national anthem in the world, supposedly composed of 158 stanzas. In fact, the entire poem by Dionysios Solomos, written in 1823, consists of 158 stanzas, but only the first 24 were declared the national anthem of the Greek Kingdom in 1865. In practice, only the first two stanzas are usually performed:

I know you from the blade

Of the sword, the terrifying [blade],

I know you from the appearance,

Which, with force, measures the earth.

From the bones taken out,

The sacred ones of the Greeks,

And, as at first, again emboldened,

Rejoice, oh rejoice, liberty!

The garden was created by Amalia, Queen Consort of Greece and wife of King Otto I. Her grandfather, Peter Friedrich Ludwig, was the Grand Duke of Oldenburg. (Since 1918, the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg has been part of Germany.) The grand duke was fond of gardening and established a luxurious palace garden at his residence in Oldenburg. This garden was one of the first publicly accessible royal gardens in Europe. This family tradition played its part when Amalia became Queen of Greece through her marriage to Otto.

Amalia began working on her future palace garden even before the completion of the Royal Palace. For its design, she hired a German agronomist, Friedrich Schmidt, who brought with him over 500

Monuments to Jean-Gabriel Einard and Count Kapodistrias in the Royal Garden.

plant species. Unfortunately, most of these plants did not thrive, as the dry Mediterranean climate proved deadly. After Schmidt, the landscape was further developed by botanists Karl Nikolaus Fraas, Theodor von Heldreich, and the Greek Spyridon Miliarakis. Among the trees planted in the garden were North American Washingtonia palms (the first of which, near the central entrance, was planted and nurtured personally by Queen Amalia), almond trees, plane trees, cypresses, and South American agaves.

The latter plants proved so popular with Amalia's courtiers that agaves soon appeared in the private gardens of all wealthy Athenians, then spread throughout almost all of Greece. Keep an eye out for these plants as you ascend Lykavittos.

The Benaki Museum

Having thoroughly explored the Royal (or National) Garden, let us now step onto Queen Sofia Avenue. On the side of the avenue opposite the garden, at the intersection with Kumbari Street (which is a continuation of Herodes Atticus Street), stands the Neoclassical mansion of the Beneaki family. This mansion houses the stunning collection of the Beneaki Museum.

The founder of the museum, Antonis Beneakis, a member of one of Greece's wealthiest dynasties, began collecting items of ancient, medieval, Byzantine, and Islamic art at the end of the 19th century, during his travels in Egypt. In 1926, after 30 years of uninterrupted collection-building, he decided to give all the exhibits from his private museum to the Greek government, along with the mansion of his father, Emanuel Beneakis.

Today, most of the Beneakis collection is displayed across 36 halls in this building, with artefacts presented in chronological order—from Palaeolithic archaeological finds to the period of the Greek

War of Independence and the mid-19th century. The Beneaki Museum has several branches; one of them, in the Keramicos neighbourhood (Kerameicos), displays Islamic art spanning the period from the 7th century to the early 20th century.

Palace of the Officers' Club

Next, along Queen Sofia Avenue, you will see the Palace of the Officers' Club of the Greek Armed Forces, known as "Saroglion Megaron." It was named after General Petros Saroglou, who bequeathed a substantial sum for the construction of the club. Currently, this magnificent Baroque-style building hosts ceremonial dinners for officers and their families. It also houses a museum with limited access for visitors and a barbershop exclusively for club members.

Estate of the Duchess of Piacenza (Byzantine Museum)

Almost adjoining this building are the extensive gardens of the Duchess of Piacenza's estate, which today is home to the splendid Byzantine Christian Museum. This luxurious estate, built in Byzantine style, was commissioned by Sophie de Marbois-Lebrun (born Barbé-Marbois), who bore the title of Duchess of Piacenza through her marriage. The story of this flamboyant lady, born in Pennsylvania of half-French and half-American parentage, could very well be turned into a Quentin Tarantino film. The inspiration for a screenplay in the director's finest tradition is superb here.

At the age of 17, Sophie Barbé-Marbois, daughter of the French Consul General in the United States and granddaughter of the Governor of Pennsylvania (on her mother's side), married Jean-Charles Lebrun, son of the Imperial French Treasurer and one of the three (alongside Napoleon Bonaparte) former consuls of the French Republic, Charles-François Lebrun. For his work annexing the Italian region of Liguria, Charles-François received, from

Napoleon I, the title of Duke of Piacenza. (Previously, the duchy had belonged to a line of the House of Bourbon.) After Charles-François' death in 1809, his son, Jean-Charles, became the new Duke of Piacenza. Sophie, consequently, became the duchess.

However, Sophie's marriage to Lebrun was not very successful: Almost immediately after the birth of their only daughter, Élise, in 1804, the couple effectively separated but continued to maintain friendly relations through correspondence. Their formal divorce was finalised in 1831.

Not only the French became philhellenes, but the Greeks also became great «philofrancs». Few people know, but during the famous Egyptian campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte, 1,500 Greek volunteers served in his army, forming their Greek Legion under the command of a former military man in the service of the Ottoman Sultan Nikolaos Papazoglou. After the end of the Egyptian campaign, the remnants of the Greek Legion followed Bonaparte to France and remained loyal to him until his exile to the island of St. Helena.

In Paris, the duchess lived a lavish lifestyle, organising a luxurious literary salon that became one of the city's main centres of high society. In 1826, Sophie Lebrun met Count Ioannis Kapodistrias, former Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire and, later, the first

Sophie de Marbois, duchess of Piacenza (1785-1854)

President of Greece. Kapodistrias impressed the duchess with his education, refinement, and nobility, and after the count left Paris, a correspondence developed between them. Their next meeting in Rome in 1827, when Kapodistrias had already been elected provisional ruler of Greece and was preparing to leave for the Peloponnese, radically changed Sophie's life.

"The ancient homeland of arts, sciences, and philosophy, the homeland of Socrates, Plato, Pericles, and Homer, struggles for its independence from the 'foreign yoke' that has tormented the Hellenic people for four centuries"—surely, that sounds romantic.

Following this second meeting with Kapodistrias, Sophie became an active member of the French Philhellenic Committee. She sold her jewellery for 14,000 francs and added another 9,000 francs to this sum, which she then handed over to the provisional Greek government for the organisation of primary education in the future Greek state.

Soon, her daughter, Élise, joined in her endeavours. Almost immediately after the conclusion of hostilities, in December 1829, the Duchess of Piacenza, together with Élise, arrived in Nafplion—the first capital of Greece, a port town and former Venetian colony on the Peloponnese peninsula. It was there that Kapodistrias formed his first government, and Sophie found herself drawn into the political life of the young republic.

Hans Christian Hansen (1803-1883). Elder brother of Theophilus von Hansen, hired by the Duchess to carry out her ambitious projects.

According to some historians, the Duchess of Piacenza stepped in to defend the murderer, Constantinos Mavromichalis, who was lynched by a crowd at the crime scene.

Thus or otherwise, in 1833, Sophie and Élise returned to Greece and settled in its new capital, Athens, where the duchess purchased extensive plots of land in the empty fields far outside the city, along the route connecting Athens with the port of Piraeus. There, she established herself in a two-storey wooden house, the construction of which took two years. During this time, Sophie and Élise lived in the "Europe" Hotel (the first hotel in Athens). It is likely that the Duchess of Piacenza was overly protective of her daughter, as Élise was already 31 years old, yet no news of any engagement has reached us. It is quite probable that Sophie was deeply afraid of loneliness, as she had no one in her life besides her daughter, and thus she obstructed any opportunities for Élise to marry.

Another fact supports the theory of Sophie's "hyper-protection" of her daughter. In 1835, the duchess and her daughter undertook a journey through Ottoman Syria and Lebanon. During this trip, Élise contracted the plague and died in her mother's arms. The grief that befell Sophie was so severe that she ordered her daughter's body to be embalmed, paid for its transportation to Athens, and displayed it in an open coffin in the basement of her

house, where she arranged a makeshift chapel. Moreover, Sophie decided to buy land on Mount Pendeli to build a magnificent temple in memory of Élise and to bury her there. However, the idea was strongly opposed by monks from the Orthodox monastery of Pendeli, which had been in operation there since the 16th century. The matter was eventually taken up by Greece's Prime Minister, the Francophile Ioannis Kolettis, who persuaded the monks to sell part of the land on the mountain's summit in exchange for funding from the duchess for the construction of a bridge, roadworks, and the development of two marble quarries. Thus, in 1840, Sophie became the owner of 1,738 acres of land in the Pendeli mountain area, where, as per the project of Stamatis Kleanthis, under the supervision of Hans Christian Hansen, four houses were built: "Castello Rododafni," the duchess' main residence, from which she planned to oversee construction of her daughter's tomb; "Plaisance," named after her title (the city of Piacenza is called Plaisance in French); "Maisonette"; and "Tourelle" ("Little Tower").

Meanwhile, Kleanthis began constructing this very villa—"Ilisia"—on land purchased by the duchess in the scorched steppes at a sufficient distance from Athens. (Yes, today, this is nearly the city centre, but at that time, nothing surrounded the duchess' house except fields and boulders.)

Nearly seven years elapsed from the start of the construction of her estate. Just a year before its completion, the Duchess of Piacenza faced a new tragedy that shook her mental stability: The "temporary" wooden house in Piraeus—Sophie's residence—burned to the ground on the night of 19 December 1847, along with Élise's embalmed body.

The woman was utterly grief-stricken. Afterwards, she ceased to appear at the Royal Court and stopped replying to letters. After the finishing touches had been made to "Ilisia," she parted quite coldly from both Stratis Kleanthis and Christian Hansen. Sophie lived in this mansion for the remaining six years of her life, almost as a

recluse, indulging in the most bizarre oddities. For instance, she officially renounced Catholicism and underwent an Orthodox baptism, but shortly thereafter, she also renounced Orthodoxy and converted to Judaism, subsequently financing the construction of a synagogue in Halkida, on the island of Euboea.

In her house, Sophie gathered a diverse group of guests, including foreign travellers and Gypsy fortune-tellers, as well as a sort of "court," rewarding her friends with noble titles. The duchess also almost entirely supported the family of the Consul General of Portugal, David Bonifacio Pacifico, a Jew by origin, who lived in her house. He is associated with a long and ugly story that led to a diplomatic scandal between Greece and Great Britain. (We will probably not expand on this herein.)

Main house of the estate

Shortly before her move to "Ilisia," the Duchess of Piacenza was kidnapped by a band of Greek bandits led by Spiros Bibisis, who operated on the major roads near Athens during the first few decades after Greece's independence. The bandits seized her during a trip to the construction site of her daughter's tomb on

Pendeli, and Bibisis and his men held her for several days, during which time the attackers demanded a ransom from the Greek government. The story ended with the woman's rescue at the hands of furious residents of Chalandri, a suburb of Athens, for whom Sophie had previously done many favours.

The paradox of this story is that, after her rescue, the duchess actively supported her kidnapper and petitioned for his pardon. This led to rumours of a secret love affair and an orchestrated kidnapping.

In her last years, Sophie Lebrun, the Duchess of Piacenza, practically ceased to receive visitors. She kept in contact only with Fotini Mavromichali, the chambermaid of Queen Amalia and the niece of Captain Konstantinos Mavromichalis, who murdered Count Kapodistrias. Most of her architectural projects in the vicinity of Pendeli, built under the supervision of Hans Christian Hansen, were completed after her death in 1854. The villa "Ilisia," where we are now, was handed over to the Greek Ministry of Defence, which owned it until 1930, when the Byzantine Museum opened there.

The museum houses a rich collection of icons, religious utilitarian objects, coins, Roman and Byzantine sculptures, and a copy of the famous mosaic from San Vitale in Ravenna, depicting Emperor Justinian I with his courtiers.

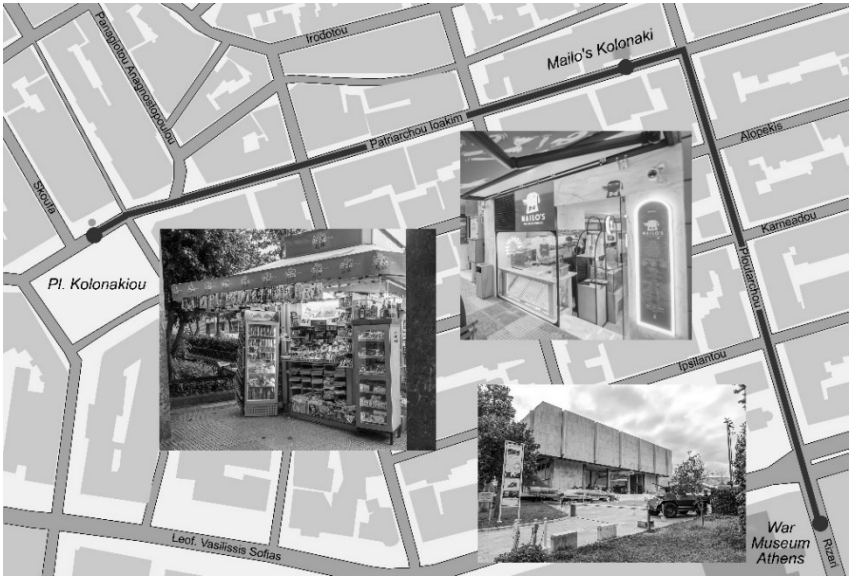
Despite her eccentricities, the Duchess of Piacenza entered Greek history as a benefactress who greatly aided Greek insurgents during their struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire. After moving to Athens, she regularly donated to various causes. Everything she promised to the monks in Pendeli was fulfilled: The duchess' bridge still stands and bears her name, as does the metro station on the Blue line, opened just before the 2004 Olympic Games.

Military History Museum

Immediately behind “Ilisia” is the vast Military-Historical Museum of the Ministry of Defence, which, alongside artefacts recounting Greece’s military history from the Bronze Age (before the 13th century BC) to the Cyprus conflict of 1974, hosts an impressive collection of weapons and armour belonging to General Petros Saroglou: medieval European, Japanese, Turkish, Arab weapons, and much more.

In a small garden near the main entrance, one will find a café inside a military truck; it prepares delicious Greek coffee.

Kolonaki district



If you cross Queen Sofia Avenue opposite the Military-Historical Museum and walk uphill along Plutarchou Street, you will find yourself in one of the most aristocratic and prestigious districts of contemporary Athens: Kolonaki. This neighbourhood developed at the foot of Lycabettus Hill—the highest point in the city—in the second half of the 19th century, thanks largely to the fact that the Royal Palace was built just a few steps from here. Since then, politicians, lawyers, actors, writers, artists, entrepreneurs, and bankers—some of the most noble and renowned representatives of the Greek nation—have lived in Kolonaki.

However, even during Ottoman rule, these lands were called "Katsikadika," from the word "katsika" ("goat"), because on the slopes of Lycabettus on this side, Athens' herdsmen grazed their dairy goats. Ironic, isn't it?

The district's current name derives from the familiar word "column" and means "little column." It is linked to a tradition even

Kolonaki, Patriarchou Joachim street, 1924

Kolonaki, Patriarchou Joachim street, 2024

older than goat grazing: The Ancient Athenians used to bring offerings of small animals to a grove on the slopes of Lycabettus for healing purposes. In place of such sacrifices, small marble columns were erected. One of them was found to be 2 metres (about 6.6 feet) high and 30 centimetres (about 12 inches) in diameter. This tradition is believed to have persisted even after the Christianisation of Athens. Among the old Athenians (mainly communists), another nickname for the district was "Skobia," after the British Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald

Street fighting in Athens in December 1944

Scobie, who commanded the III Corps of the British Army sent to Greece to assist local partisans in expelling the Germans, and who later played a key role in the outbreak of the Greek Civil War.

Britain supported the legitimate government of the Greek Kingdom (King George II and his exile government) and aligned itself with the monarchist partisans. Meanwhile, most participants in the Greek resistance against the German occupation were members of the communist underground, eager to overthrow the monarchy and transform Greece into a socialist republic.

Clashes between Greek communists and the British-supported royal government occurred on the streets of Athens, but only over the course of one month, one week, and one day (from 3 December 1944 to 11 January 1945). During these events, a British artillery unit was stationed on top of Lycabettus Hill and fired at districts where communist cells had barricaded themselves. At the same time, General Scobie established his headquarters in the very district of Kolonaki. Thus, the area earned the nickname "Skobia."

When Plutarchou Street reaches Patriarcou Ioakeim (Patriarch Joakim) Street, turn onto it (to the left) and walk along the odd side of the street until you see a red sign reading "Mailo's." Here, you'll find the most delicious, diverse, and affordable pasta in the city. This little restaurant is part of the quick-service chain you might

have noticed near Syntagma Square or somewhere in Pagkrati. The network expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I have repeatedly confirmed that during city walks, when your programme is packed with sights, there's no better place for a quick and pleasant satisfaction of your hunger.

When Patriarchou Ioakeim Street reaches the now-fenced and excavated square of Kolonaki (also called "Filikis Eterias Square" or "Friendship Society Square") for the construction of the fourth metro line, continue to the turn onto Skoufou Street and observe the selection in the local stalls—"periptero."

Kolonaki is one of the two districts in Athens I am familiar with where cigars are sold in small kiosks—so you know exactly the calibre of the prestigious and wealthy area you are in.

Orthodox Church of Saint Dionysius.

On Skoufa Street is the Orthodox Church of Saint Dionysius Areopagites, one of Athens' architectural masterpieces, often unjustly overlooked by many tour and travel guides. This massive church, combining elements of late Baroque and Neoclassicism, might seem quite old, but in reality, it is not even a hundred years old. It was founded in 1925 based on a project by Anastasius Orlandos and was consecrated by Archbishop Chrysostomos I of Athens and All Greece in 1931.

For some time, it served as the Cathedral of the Greek Orthodox Church. Then, the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos Church was closed for renovation.

Next to the cathedral is the cosy café Filiōn, which for 30 years has attracted residents with the aroma of coffee, fresh pastries, and exquisite desserts. I can't say I visit it frequently, but if you wish to admire the church and fully soak in the atmosphere of this neighbourhood, I won't

discourage you from having a cup of espresso, especially since we have a path to ascend: the Lycabettus.

Lycabettus Hill

The shortest route to it lies through Democritou Street (which crosses Herodes Atticus Street directly in front of the Church of Saint Dionysius). This street ends at a staircase leading into a dead end. If you turn right from there and ascend another staircase, you will find yourself on Stratiotikou Sindesmou Street. Walking along it,

Church of St. George on top of Lycabettus Hill

shaded by sprawling plane trees, take the first left and go uphill to the point where it merges with Cleomenous Street. When you reach the last junction, turn left at the first pedestrian street, Loukianou. (Yes, this entire street consists of stairs.) After taking one flight upwards, you will arrive at the very beginning of the shortest hiking route to the top of Lycabettus. If you feel unfit for amateur mountaineering (though the ascent is not as daunting as it might seem), you can take advantage of the funicular. Its station is located five minutes away on Aristippou Street. The carriages continuously run up and down, and a single ticket costs seven euros.

If, however, you decide to ascend Lycabettus on foot, you will find a pleasant surprise halfway up: a café with a terrace offering a decent view. However, the views are far better from the café at the very highest point of the city, just a few dozen metres away (mere trivialities). The first thing you'll see upon reaching the top is an incomparable panorama of Athens, Piraeus, and the suburbs. On a clear day, you can even see the islands of Egina and Salamina. The Greek capital will stretch out before you from the Aegean Sea to the surrounding mountains and will hold your attention for a long time—I have no doubt of that.

When you have gazed long enough at this beauty (though it's difficult to get enough of it), you will be able to see the Church of Saint George, a small and rather charming church built at the end of the 18th century on the site of an even older, possibly medieval

church, of which we have only a vague image. Opposite the church is a mechanised bell tower that strikes the correct number of tolls at precisely regulated times, as well as a flagpole flying the banner of the Greek Republic.

At dawn and sunset each day, three soldiers of the Greek army ascend Lycabettus and perform the ceremonial lowering (at sunset) and raising (at dawn) of the national flag, as prescribed by regulations. A similar, more elaborate ceremony, featuring the singing of the national anthem, is conducted daily by Evzones Regiment soldiers at the summit of the Acropolis. Slightly farther, past the church and opposite the exit of the funicular station, is the Sky Bar, which I cannot recommend. In my view, it has unreasonably high prices and, for the past five years, a quality of service that leaves much to be desired. However, if you ascend Lycabettus at a less crowded time (say, in the early morning on a weekday), you can enjoy a cup of coffee at a table with a view of the awakening Athens.

View of Athens from Lycabettus Hill

Lycabettus Hill Funicular Google Map

The beginning of the ascent on foot Google Map

Practical Tips and Best (in my humble opinion) Taverns, Cafés, and Bars

Where is the best place to stay in Athens?

This question is crucial when planning your trip. Formulating an answer to it, I concluded that recommending specific hotels would be rash, as they tend to close down, and many of us prefer short-term apartment rentals. So, I decided to compile a list of the best neighborhoods for short-term stays, equally close to Athens' main attractions and transportation hubs.

- **Koukaki and Makryanni**: These two small neighborhoods are between Andrea Siggrou Avenue and the hills of Filopappou and Acropolis. They offer a vast selection of apartments for short-term rentals and hotels of various levels. The abundance of cafés, bars, and restaurants, proximity to the Acropolis and the old town, as well as being just ten minutes away from the Sigrou-Fix metro station (red line) and bus and trolley stops, make these neighborhoods among the best for your temporary stay. However, if you decide to stay here, it's best to start searching for accommodation in advance, as the best apartments and hotel rooms in these areas are quickly taken.
- **Filopappou:** This neighbourhood is located behind the hill of the same name, opposite the Athens Acropolis. It differs from its neighbors Koukaki and Makryanni only in its slightly greater distance from the old city center, but otherwise, it's quite decent.
- **Mets:** One of the ideal neighborhoods, in my opinion. Within walking distance, you'll find such wonderful attractions as the Panathenaic Stadium (Kallimarmaro), the Temple of Olympian

Zeus (and right behind it, the old town), the First Athens Cemetery with its stunning open-air sculpture museum, and more. Several trolleybus and bus routes pass through this area, as well as a tram line connecting Mets to Syntagma Square and the coastal districts of Faliro and Glyfada, as well as the port of Piraeus (although I recommend getting to Piraeus by metro from Syntagma). If you decide to stay here, don't miss the jazz café "Mets" on Markou Mousourou Street, where live music is occasionally played.

- **Pagrati (Pangrati):** The neighboring district of Athens is also exceptional in terms of cleanliness and a variety of excellent taverns, cafés, and restaurants to suit every taste. Additionally, short-term rentals in this area should be slightly cheaper than in Mets, and due to Pagrati's size, there's more choice. This neighborhood is directly adjacent to the Panathenaic Stadium (Kallimarmaro) on one side and King George II Avenue, leading to the Royal Garden and the residence of the Greek Prime Minister on the other. Several trolleybuses and bus routes pass through it, but be careful: part of the road on their route is currently under construction, and the trolleybuses are being diverted.
- **Agios Nikolaos:** A neighborhood adjacent to Pagrati (considered by many Athenians as part of it). It's important not to confuse this Agios Nikolaos with another neighborhood in Athens on the Green metro line, which has turned into an immigrant ghetto in recent years and which I strongly advise against. The Agios Nikolaos we need is located between King Constantine I Avenue and Imitou and Ulofa Palme streets. It houses one of the best hotels in Athens, the five-star "Divani Caravel." This neighbourhood is near the National Art Gallery and the Evangelismos metro station (blue line). Several trolleybus and bus routes also pass through it.

- **Kolonaki:** One of Athens's most expensive and prestigious (if not the most expensive and prestigious) neighbourhoods. It is located near the Parliament building (Old Royal Palace) and the Syntagma metro station, as well as at the foot of Mount Lycabettus, the highest point in the city. In this neighborhood, there are many decent and sometimes not very expensive establishments, but be careful: in the center of Kolonaki, on Filikis Eterias Square, construction of the fourth metro line is underway, so I wouldn't recommend staying near this square.
- **Monastiraki and Psiri** are not the cleanest compared to the previous districts of the old city, but they are quite convenient if you plan on walking a lot and visiting the main attractions. Moreover, these areas offer a huge selection of hotels, hostels, and hotels to suit every taste and apartments for daily rent. In addition, Psiri has many excellent cafes and taverns (my recommendation is "Bougatsadiko Psirri" – a cafe with a pleasant atmosphere, where they prepare traditional Thessaloniki "bougatsa" with minced meat and many other masterpieces of Greek cuisine from various types of dough. These areas are connected to other parts of the city by two metro stations ("Monastiraki" green line and "Monastiraki" blue line), but buses and trolleys hardly pass through them.
- **Plaka** – a large part of the old city is in this district. It is almost entirely pedestrianized and, therefore, quite quiet. By staying in Plaka, you will be able to see the main attractions of the city without resorting to public transport, but because the district is adjacent to Monastiraki on one side and the Acropolis on the other, all three branches of the Athens metro will be at your service. I can't recommend any taverns in Plaka, but the bar "Vrettos" ("Brettos") and the ice cream cafe "DaVinci Gelato" will not leave you indifferent.
- **Thissio** – a district located on the north side of Filopappou Hill, is also quite pleasant to live: many taverns, bars, and cafes, the

Thissio metro station on the Green line, and all the main attractions of the old city within walking distance. So, this would be my rating of districts for short stays in Athens. In many guidebooks and tourist websites, you can find information about cheap and decent hotels and apartments in the Omonia, Metaxourgio, Polytechnio, Victoria, and Exarchia districts. Still, I implore you: don't fall for it! Unfortunately, these areas are far from the most pleasant, clean, and safe parts of the city, and a small saving on daily rent or hotel room hire will not be worth ruining your vacation.

How to use public transport?

The most convenient and never-failing mode of transport for me has been and remains the Athens metro. It consists of three lines:

- **No. 1 (Green):** Piraeus-Kifisia. It connects the port city of Piraeus with the northern suburb of Kifisia and passes through almost the entire old center (Thissio, Monastiraki, Omonia, Victoria). Along this line, you can easily reach the National Archaeological Museum of Athens (closest to Victoria station), but beware: it is inhabited by many unpleasant characters, and cases of pickpocketing are not uncommon.
- **No. 2 (Red):** Anthoupoli-Elliniko. It connects two Athenian suburbs (northwest and southeast) and passes through both the old center (Metaxourgio, Omonia) and Syntagma Square and the Acropolis (Acropolis station).
- **No. 3 (Blue):** Dimotiko Theatro – Doukissis Plakentias – Airport. It is the most interesting and longest line of the Athens metro. Its main part connects the northern suburb of Athens (Doukissis Plakentias station) with the port city of Piraeus (Piraeus and Dimotiko Theatro stations). However, every 34-35 minutes from Piraeus, trains depart to Athens International Airport "Eleftherios Venizelos," you can easily get there for 9 euros, saving on a taxi.

Metro tickets can be purchased both at the ticket office and at special machines, where you can also choose any of your preferred languages (English, French, German, Italian, Arabic, Greek, or Russian). Suppose you intend to travel around Athens beyond the mentioned pedestrian routes. In that case, you can buy so-called "tourist tickets" with unlimited trips on all types of public transport (bus, trolleybus, tram, metro), valid for 72 hours from purchase and

including one trip to the airport. Such a ticket will cost you 20 euros.

If you need to use the metro or other public transport no more than once, your choice is a single ticket valid for 90 minutes, during which you can make unlimited transfers. It will cost you 1.20 euros. You can also buy a ticket with unlimited rides on all types of transport, valid for 5 days, but it will not include trips on the metro to the airport or on bus X90, which goes to the airport from Syntagma Square. Such a ticket costs 8.20 euros.

Important! You cannot buy tickets from a bus, trolley bus, or tram driver, and ticket vending machines or active ticket offices are not available at every stop, so it's better to deal with tickets immediately at one of the metro stations.

IMPORTANT!

Holidays and other days when shops, some cafes, and bars may be closed, and the city center may be blocked off:

- **30 January** – Three Holy Hierarchs
- **March 25** – Independence Day
- **May 1st** – Labour Day (demonstrations and strikes may occur, disrupting public transport).
- **May 3rd** – Good Friday (a holiday of the Greek Orthodox Church).
- **May 4th** – Holy Saturday (a holiday of the Greek Orthodox Church).
- **One day in spring** – Easter (this date changes every year)
- **June 24th** – Feast of the Holy Spirit.
- **August 15th** – Assumption of the Virgin Mary.
- **October 28th** – "No" (Ohi) Day (start of the Greco-Italian War).
- **November 17th** – Polytechnic Uprising Day in Athens (this day sees demonstrations by left-wing radical activists in central areas near the University, often escalating into mass riots, so be cautious on this day).
- **December 6th** – On this day, left-wing radical activists also hold mass demonstrations in central areas of the city (Omonia, Exarchia, Victoria, Akadimias, Syntagma).
- **December 25th** – Christmas.
- **December 26th** – Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos.

Taverns, cafés, Street Food and Restaurants.

"Food is the materialisation of God's love."

— Archpriest Alexander Schmemann.

Types of Establishments

Taverna

"In taberna quando sumus,

Non curamus, quid sit humus…"

(Latin "When we are in the tavern,

We do not think how we will go to dust…")

— "Carmina Burana," XI-XIII centuries AD.

In Greece, the tavern is perhaps even more prevalent than the ruins. This phenomenon is widespread likely due to its simplicity: disposable tablecloths; tin or copper jugs filled with the most basic homemade wine, divided only into white, red, and, in rare cases, rosé; a modest menu dominated by grilled and baked dishes (those easiest to prepare, such as the famous gyros or moussaka); and, of course, traditional Greek music, which, like Greek wine retsina, can evoke only two feelings: utter love or profound disgust. The Greek tavern is uncompromisingly prosaic and ruthlessly straightforward: It doesn't pretend to anything and doesn't need to prove anything to anyone. And if, by chance, the lively noise and disarming simplicity don't appeal to you…well, that's entirely your problem.

Greek cuisine, being incredibly simple by nature, found its best expression in the family-run tavern. In the vast majority of cases,

you simply cannot leave such an establishment hungry or disappointed. The portions here are always generous and hearty.

However, the Greek tavern was not always a cosy and welcoming place. As far back as the early 20th century, most of what are now akin to traditional taverns were called "Kapileion," a term with the most ancient origins. It's enough to say that it appears in the writings of Herodotus himself, who lived in the fifth century BC. Nonetheless, the ancient origins of these establishments did not guarantee a good reputation. By the Byzantine era, the word "Kapileion" had become firmly associated with low-quality wine, street criminals, swindlers, and prostitution—a fact that led the Palaeologan Emperors to consistently try to restrict their operation. As such, from the 14th century, they were forbidden from opening during church holidays, and priests caught there were promptly excommunicated. This was a very harsh measure, considering how many priests must have lived in the Byzantine Empire.

Remarkably, these gloomy establishments proved to be much more resilient than one might expect. They survived the Palaeologus, the Byzantine Empire itself, and peacefully persisted until 1831, when Greece was officially recognised as an independent state free from the Ottoman Empire. The phenomenon of "Kapileion" was stamped out only towards the end of the reign of Greece's second king, George I (who ruled for a full 50 years). It was then, in the early part of the last century, that opening a food establishment required a license from the municipality, issued only after a thorough inspection of the tavern or café for compliance with legislative standards. This ended the era of bandit hideouts and ushered in the era of the taverns we know today.

Krasopouleio / Inopoleio (Κρασοπωλείο /οινοπωλείο)

Krasopouleio - from the colloquial Greek “κρασί” or “wine” or Inopoleio - from Greek “οινό” or “wine”

In ancient times, this term referred to places where wine was sold by the litre—Greece’s most important export commodity from antiquity until the fall of the Byzantine Empire. Subsequently, the Greeks stopped producing wine for a long period. Not until the 19th century did a sort of renaissance of Greek winemaking occur, though not without the help of France, Italy, and Germany. Today, the word is still heard in everyday speech and can even be seen in the names of some wine shops and tavernas, often as part of their titles.

Mezedopoleio (Μεζεδοπωλείο)

The word "mezes" (Greek “μεζές”) was borrowed from Turkish. The Turkish word, in turn, came from Persian, where it was literally translated as “appetiser.” In this sense, it is still used today by these three peoples. Traditionally, establishments of the Mezedopoleio type serve strong Greek drinks—ouzo and tsipouro—and, of course, always have spicy, hot snacks such as pastourmali (basturma baked in flaky dough) or saganaki cheese (Greek cheese fried in oil with herbs).

Bakalotaverna (Μπακαλοταβέρνα)

Almost an extinct type of establishment, once widespread, originating in the late 19th century, when some Athens and Piraeus grocers began setting up small snack bars in

their bakeries. These started operating after noon, once all the fresh bread was sold out. Such places certainly didn't have full kitchens, but they always fostered a friendly, welcoming atmosphere. I will tell you about the last of these establishments a little later.

Neotaverna (Νεοταβέρνα)

A term introduced by Greek cuisine theorists to describe new types of venues where traditional recipes are given a fresh and unexpected interpretation. It's suitable for those who are tired of the usual variety just as much as they are of the only two other available alternatives to Greek cuisine in Athens: Asian and Italian.

Oinomageireio

Oinomageireio - from the Greek words "οίνος"—"wine" and "μαγειρεύω"—"to cook"

Once, in such places, port workers, builders, railway staff, loaders, and the Greek proletariat in general would have their lunch breaks. Hence, the menu was cheap and hearty, and it invariably offered wine. Most dishes were cooked in clay pots and served directly in them instead of on plates. Today, however, the menu in these establishments is much closer to that of a classic tavern.

Ouzeri

The French language has a truly remarkable ability to lend a sense of lofty appeal to the name of any dish. This magic works even on something as hideous (in my opinion) as the

traditional Greek anise-flavoured spirit, ouzo. Establishments that traditionally served only ouzo, accompanied by the simplest and most modest snacks, have, quite unexpectedly, come to be called in the French manner, with the emphasis on the last syllable in this word.

Patsatzidiko (Πατσατζίδικο)

I can confidently say that I have extensive experience interacting with individuals from a wide range of nations and peoples, and almost all of them (except Muslims and those from certain East Asian nations) have tried to convince me that they are unrivalled when it comes to alcohol consumption. However, I, a person whose veins run with blood from Scots, Swedes, Danes, Germans, French, Greeks, Poles, and Russians, need the most convincing proof of your national alcoholism before I believe it. And in Athens, you can find it. The name of this evidence is Patsatzidiko.

These establishments are little more than ordinary taverns, but their name, derived from the word “patsas” (a soup made from veal or pig offal), immediately exposes their true nature. This soup is considered the best remedy for a hangover. Perhaps the emergence of this particular type of taverna—specialising in its preparation—could be your decisive argument in the debate about whether alcoholism is your national sport.

Of course, Greeks do not drink more than, or even perhaps less than, their Balkan neighbours. A much more important role of Patsatzidiko was to serve workers after long shifts: Port loaders, sometimes working past midnight, needed a hot, hearty meal—such as a Patsas soup—to restore their strength.

Psarotaverna (Ψαροταβέρνα)

Derived from the Greek word "psari" ("fish"), this name requires no lengthy explanation. Frequent "occupants" of the bustling quaysides of Piraeus and the southern suburbs of Athens, these tavernas offer the widest selection of the freshest seafood to suit every taste, size, and budget.

Psitopoleio (Ψητοπωλείο)

In establishments with such a sign, you will probably not be offered even a traditional Greek salad, as everything served here is, in one way or another, related to the grill. The very name of this type of taverna directly indicates its essence: the Greek word "pssito" means "grilled."

System of Four Hospitaller Crosses

To make my unbearably burdensome task of subjectively and most biasedly rating Athens' taverns, restaurants, cafés, and other eateries easier (and, of course, to help my readers better understand my texts), I have decided to introduce a system in this guide based on the Michelin guide—well-known to those of us who are avid gastronauts. However, because I am not a French tyre salesman, I will choose a different symbol for myself: the cross of the Knights Hospitaller ("✠"). As is well known, the main mission of the Knights Hospitaller was to escort and defend pilgrims travelling from all over Europe to venerate the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. I, of course, do not provide you with food or shelter, nor can I protect you from bandits or Muslims. However,

in a certain sense, I continue the tradition of the Hospitallers. And, after all, I must find some way to stand out...

Thus, my totally biased rating of an establishment will correspond to the number of crosses:

✠ — the place is mentioned in the guide almost by accident

✠✠ — a decent spot, but only if there are no better alternatives

✠✠✠ — a good establishment that I dare to recommend

✠✠✠✠ — excellent, brilliant, sincerely recommended

Taverns

Alexandrino Kebab

✠✠✠✠

This tavern, specialising in, among other things, recipes from Anatolian Greek cuisine (the traditional cuisine of Greeks who once lived within the borders of modern Turkey), has long been, and remains, a favourite spot for our family gatherings. The reasons for this include its proximity to my home, the fact that it uses the highest quality ingredients, and, of course, the most welcoming spirit that encourages long, convivial meals—all found in the Pagrati district, in the north-eastern part of Athens.

Personally, I have always especially valued the Constantinopolitan kebabs ("politiko kebap") prepared by local skewer and grill masters, as well as the traditional Cretan salad "Dakos." And for a digestive, there's nothing better than a shot of cold, sweet Masticha liqueur from the island of Chios—the ambrosia of the eastern Mediterranean.

Alexandrino Pagrati

You can reach it from the Evangelismos metro station by bus number 214 to the Poseidonas stop or by buses 203 and 211 to the Alsos stop.

90 Ymittou & Ifikratous, Athens 116 34

Phone: 21 0724 0599

Hours: Daily 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 a.m., Friday and Saturday 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 a.m.

Cost: 5€ – 15€ per person

Alexandrino Monastiraki

This “branch” of the tavern will be more convenient for you if you are staying in the city centre, but I would by no means recommend it to those who are unwilling to face an outright encounter with “Balkan spirit” in all its glory. The district of the central market, where this establishment is located, is extremely hard to call exemplary.

53-51 Athinas Street, Athens 105 52

Phone: 21 0323 7340

Hours: Daily 11:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Closed on Sundays

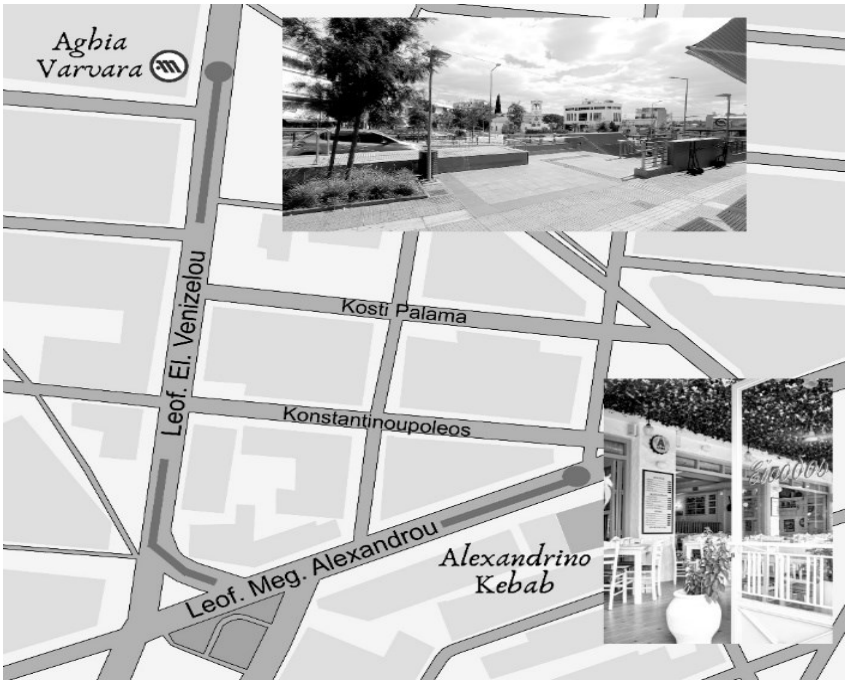
Alexandrino Agia Varvara

The third "outpost" of Alexandrino is situated near the Agia Varvara metro station on Athens' red line, in a nondescript residential area of the city.

M. Alexandrou 141-143, Agia Varvara, 12351

Phone: 21 0569 3480

Hours: Daily 12:30 p.m. – 1:00 a.m., Friday and Saturday 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 a.m.



Mavros Gatos

✠✠✠

This tavern, situated in the same, almost homey Pagkrati district for me, west of Athens' centre, first opened its doors in 1963. Many point to a kinship between this establishment and the famous Parisian brasserie "La Coupole." However, I find this comparison overly grandiose. The similarity between these two places begins and ends with the fact that academically trained artists, who studied in the French capital, contributed to the interior décor. Yet, while the columns of "La Coupole" were painted by 27 different masters of their craft, the walls of "Mavros Gatos" (Greek for "Black Cat") were the work of a single artist: Mikhail Papageorgiou, known by the pseudonym "Doris," which he adopted in honour of his origins in the ancient region of Doris in Phocis. This artist is notable, perhaps, only for

his friendship with Amedeo Modigliani and his ties to the Parisian creative bohemia of the 1920s. His paintings, exhibited, among other places, at the National Gallery of Alexandros Soutzos in Athens, are, in my subjective view, merely decent.

However, it must be acknowledged that for the Greek capital, such a tavern is a unique phenomenon: To operate for 60 years and still preserve the original wall frescoes, created by a fairly well-known Greek Fauvist, is a genuine achievement. It is no less remarkable, indeed, than the city-renowned lamb ribs, lemon veal, homemade pies, and liver prepared according to the "Black Cat" recipe—dishes rare for Athenian taverns and undoubtedly deserving the attention of my dear gastronome-reader.

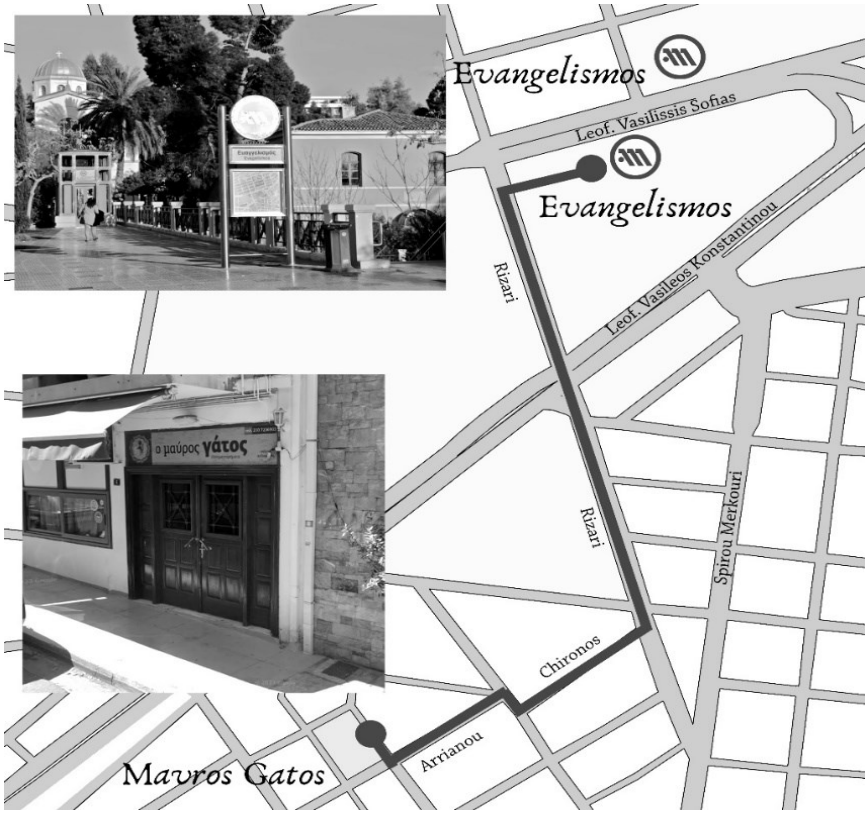
Polemonos 4, Pagrati

Phone: 21 0723 6903

Hours: Daily 1:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.

Cost: 15€ – 20€ per person, excluding drinks

The tavern is a 10-minute walk from the Evangelismos metro station.



The Silk Road

✠✠✠✠

The tavern with the poetic name of "Silk Road" was brought to me by two paths, as strange as that might sound. The first of these is my mother's descent from the Pontic Greeks, the indigenous people of the ancient region of Pontus, located in the north and northeast of modern-day Turkey along the Black Sea coast. These Greeks spoke their own distinct Pontic language, far more archaic than modern literary Greek and marked by numerous borrowings from Latin, Persian, Armenian, Arabic, and Turkish. (Meanwhile, modern Greek borrowings are predominantly Turkish

in origin.) For nearly eight centuries, this ethnic group lived in relative isolation and, as far as possible, coexisted and collaborated with the new masters of Anatolia (the Muslim Turks), who had fully conquered Pontus by the mid-15th century. However, by the dawn of the 20th century, the Turks had decided that the primary problem of their crumbling and hopelessly backward empire was its Christian subjects. Thus began one of the largest genocides in modern human history, one that claimed the lives of millions of Asia Minor Christians: Armenians and Greeks. This genocide, which can justly be compared to the Holocaust, remains unrecognised by much of the global community today. But I digress.

In the early 20th century, hundreds of thousands of Pontic Greeks, miraculously spared by Turkish persecutors, found themselves scattered across the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions. Those who managed to reach Greece proper were immediately ostracised by local authorities and the native population, who branded the destitute refugees as having “tainted blood” and abandoned them—starving women, children, and elderly, stripped of everything—to their fate and the mercy of individual philanthropists (the greatest of whom was, undoubtedly, Fridtjof Nansen). Rejected by their “Hellenic” brethren, these Greeks

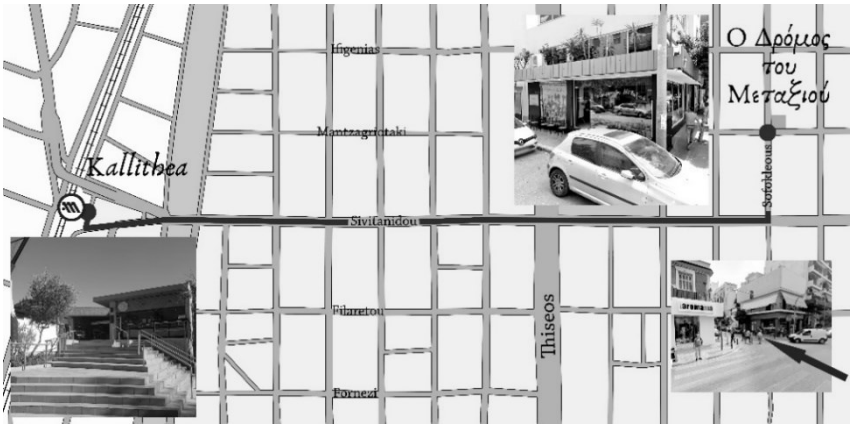
began forming their own communities, which eventually grew and transformed into cultural unions and societies of Pontic refugee descendants. Within these, Pontic traditions, culture, cuisine, language, and a national pride forged in blood and tears were carefully preserved and passed down to future generations. One of Athens' largest districts, once settled by refugees from Asia Minor and later receiving a second wave of Pontic migrants from the Black Sea region after the Soviet Union's collapse, is Kallithea, home to a station on the green line of the Athens metro. It is here that the "Silk Road" tavern is located.

The second path that led me to it was an old family friend and active member of one such Pontic union—a historian, publicist, and local municipal deputy (yet, despite this, an utterly honest and noble man). Through him, I met the tavern's owners, Kostas and Mirofora Alexandridis, who turned out to be the heart of a true cultural centre.

To best introduce Mr. Alexandridis, I will say only that his tireless efforts to revive and promote the ancient traditions of the Pontic people led to his designation as persona non grata by the Turkish Republic (which still denies the genocide of Greeks and Armenians). UNESCO, after much persistence, eventually granted his petition to recognise the ancient Pontic Christmas carolling ritual—dating back long before Christ's birth and once dedicated to the ancient Greek god of mockery and criticism, Momus—as intangible cultural heritage. Mr. Alexandridis' wife, Mrs. Mirofora Evstathiadi, is a doctor of folklore studies at the National University of Athens and specialises in the culture and ethnography of Pontic Greeks and Balkan peoples. Together, this remarkable couple leads a society dedicated to preserving and promoting Pontic cultural heritage while running this tavern, staffed exclusively by members of their large and close-knit Greek-Pontic family. Everything that Pontic grandmothers cooked for their grandchildren over the centuries, everything that Pontic women prepared for their husbands (sailors, merchants, and

herders), and everything carefully passed down through the generations despite catastrophes, wars, and losses is now presented here, on the "Silk Road" menu. It offers the most diverse and, without exception, delectable dishes of Asia Minor cuisine: soups, salads, pastries, teas, coffees, desserts, and much more.

Beyond this, on Fridays and weekends, the tavern hosts cultural evenings: readings of poetry and short stories in Greek and Pontic, performances of Pontic songs, and traditional dances of this proud and unyielding people, to whom your humble servant has the honour of partly belonging. All this awaits you here.



Sofokleous 129, Kallithea 176 72

Phone: 21 0959 3323

Hours: Wednesday to Friday 2:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m., Saturday 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 a.m., Sunday 12:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Cost: 10€ – 15€ per person, excluding drinks

The tavern is a 15-minute walk from the Kallithea metro station.

Fanis' Karamanlidika

✠✠✠✠

In addition to the Pontic Greeks and the Ionians (who lived primarily in the city of Smyrna, now known as Izmir, on the Turkish coast of the Aegean Sea), several large and ancient communities of ethnic Greeks resided in what is now modern Turkey. One such group was the Karamanlides, the indigenous inhabitants of the Cappadocia region. (Yes, the very place where one of the world's largest hot air balloon festivals occurs today and where Saint George was born.) Settling deep inland and having little contact with their fellow Greeks in Egypt, Hellas, or Pontus, the Karamanlides, over centuries of living under Turkic-speaking conquerors, forgot their native language. Remarkably, however, they never abandoned their script. Thus emerged a unique dialect of Ottoman Turkish, written in Greek letters, known as Karamanlidika.

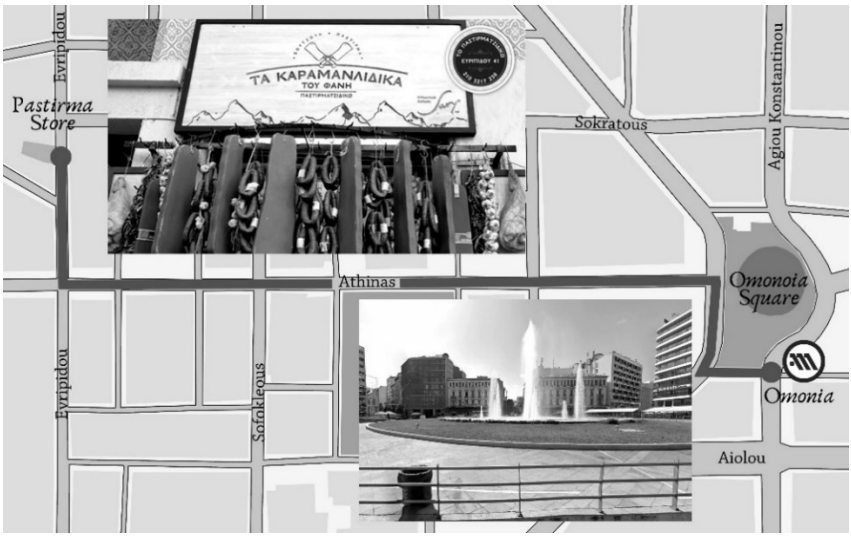
This, however, marked the extent of the Karamanlides' adaptation to life in the Islamic Caliphate. Throughout nearly eight centuries under foreign rule, these Greeks steadfastly adhered to Orthodox

Christianity. This very faith had put their existence at risk by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Ottoman authorities declared Christians the primary enemies of their state, thereby unleashing one of the bloodiest genocides in modern history. However, in 1922, the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist, and the League of Nations, through the colossal efforts of Fridtjof Nansen, persuaded the new Turkish authorities and the Greek government to engage in a mutual population exchange: Turkey handed over all Christians living in its territory to Greece and, in turn, received all Greek Muslims. Thus, the Karamanlides—knowing scarcely a word of Greek but, like most Greeks, being Orthodox—found themselves in Greece. It will not be difficult for you, dear reader, given what you already know of the Pontic settlers' story, to guess how the local population received the Karamanlides. Nor will it be hard to imagine what these unfortunate, destitute former farmers and herders did when they found themselves in a foreign land without means of survival and subjected to ostracism by the Greeks and their government. Naturally, they settled compactly as a large community in one of the densely built-up districts of the old city. Although more than a century has passed since then, and unlike the Pontic Greeks, no trace of the Karamanlides or their language remains, their cuisine has become an enduring part of Athenian gastronomic culture. The tavern Karamanlidika, more than any other establishment in the city, will introduce you to the full spectrum of flavours of this extraordinary culinary tradition.

Anatolian dumplings, spicy pastirma, cheeses, meat platters, cured camel meat(!), and much more await you here, near Athens' central market, in the first revived Karamanlidika cuisine restaurant. Opened in 2014, it continues the legacy of the Karamanlidika butcher shop run by the Theodoropoulos family since the 1960s. Additionally, since 2019, a second venue by the same family has been operating on Ermou Street. There, alongside notable Karamanlidika dishes, you can enjoy traditional desserts of the Anatolian Greeks.

Opposite the tavern is a shop that will gladly wrap up the finest piece of Karamanlidika-style cured meat of the highest quality as the perfect souvenir from old Athens.

Important! On Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, finding an available table at this restaurant is unlikely, so be sure to book in advance!

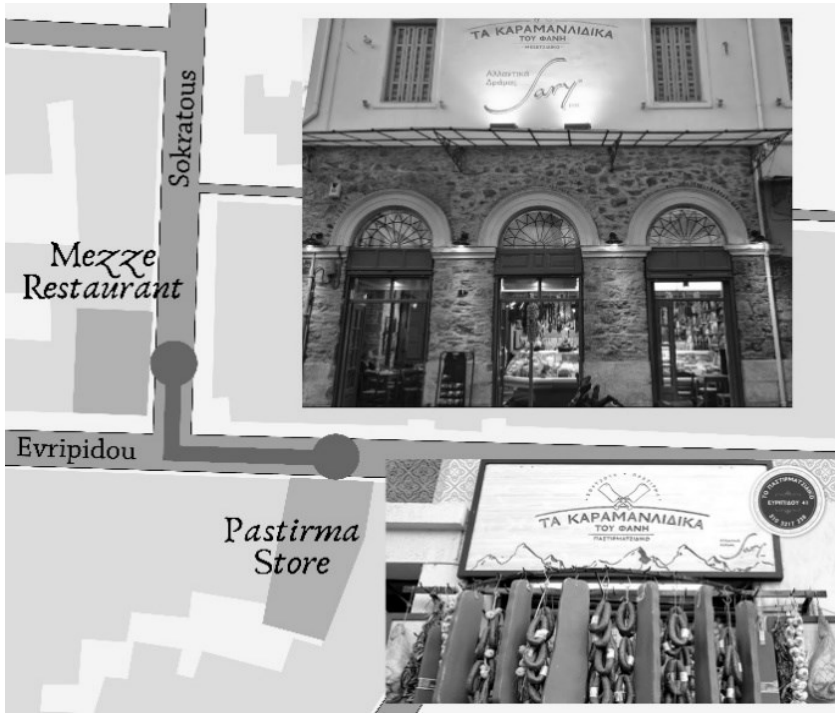


Karamanlidika Pastirma store: 41 Evripidou Street 10554, Athens

You can find this establishment quite easily. Head from Omonia Square along Athinas Street until you reach the intersection with Evripidou. This is the first major crossroads after the central market. Turn right at the intersection, and you will see the shop on your left, on the opposite side of the road.

Karamanlidika restaurant: 1 Socratous & Evripidou Street 10552, Athens

The eatery is a two-minute walk from the shop. Just continue a bit farther, and on the right, at the corner, you will see the sign.



Karamanlidika on Ermou Street: 119 Ermou Street 10555, Athens

Finding this restaurant is equally easy. Go to the Monastiraki metro station or walk to the namesake square if you're strolling in the city centre. The restaurant is on Ermou Street, which is pedestrianised from Syntagma Square to Monastiraki. You want the continuation of this street. Head left from Monastiraki. After about three to five minutes, you will see the restaurant on your left.

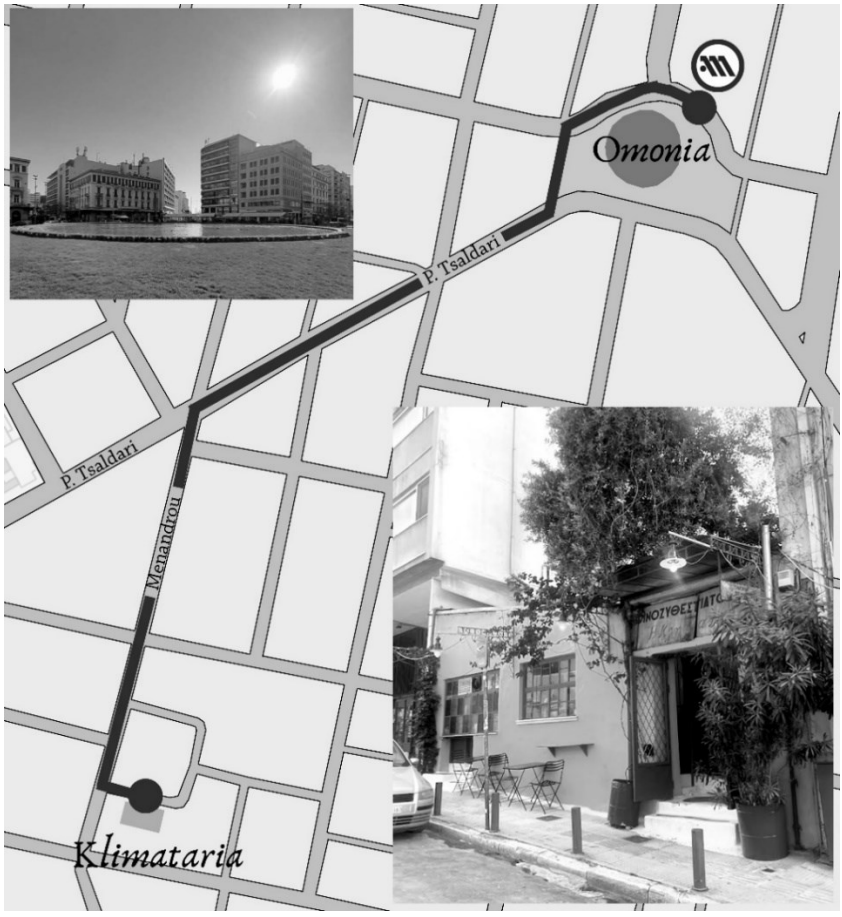
Klimataria

✠✠✠

More than one generation of Athenians has grown old in this tavern over a glass of homemade wine, accompanied by the indistinguishable melodies of traditional songs about love—requited, unrequited, eternal, fleeting, for life, for women, and, of course, for Greece. In the nearly one and a half centuries since Klimataria was established, its premises have become not just a hall for lively and joyful feasts but also a true temple of Athens' urban culture.

This place gained particular popularity in the post-war years, when the most renowned performers of Athenian urban lyricism of their time took to its stage. From then until the early 21st century, Klimataria proudly held the title of the "standard of the Athenian tavern." Even a fire that nearly destroyed the establishment in July 2005 could not bring its story to a close. With the support of the artist and iconographer Tasos Rigas, Klimataria was restored with great care and attention to detail. Today, it opens its doors to all who are ready to embrace the gastronomic culture of the Greek capital.

Among other things, they bake their own bread here and prepare remarkably delicious dolma, as well as, naturally, signature dishes of lamb and pork.



The tavern is located in the city centre, about a 10-minute walk from Omonia Square. Exercise caution if you plan to visit in the evening: These areas are a favoured haunt for the homeless, Roma, and other members of society's "underclass."

2 Theatre Square, Athens

Phone: 21 0321 6629

Hours: Daily 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 a.m.

Cost: 10€ – 15€ per person, excluding drinks

The Tavern of Themistocleous, Athenaikon
✠✠✠

Once upon a time, the Omonia Square district was Athens' Montparnasse. As recently as the 1950s, its numerous cafés, bars, taverns, and restaurants were the gathering places for the cream of the capital's society: poets, writers, artists, directors, theatre actors, and the like. Now, only small but still vibrant fragments remain of the former glamour and glory of this part of the city. One such example is the tavern Athenaikon, which opened its doors in the 1930s and, since then, has changed almost nothing, from its interiors, music, and style to its menu and impeccable service. Once a favoured lunch spot for local lawyers, politicians, and writers, it now welcomes all those whom the winding streets of Athens lead to Omonia Square.

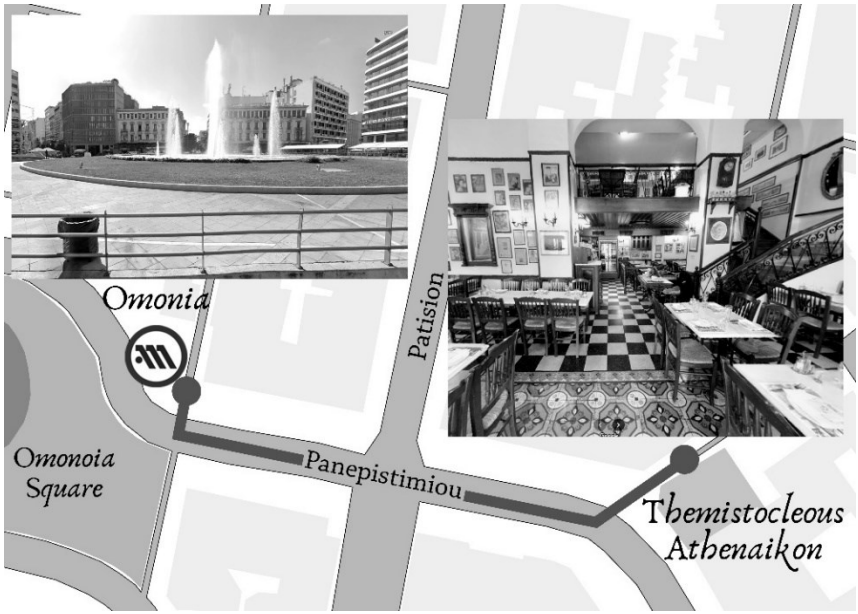
The tavern's chef with his regular patrons—journalists, poets, writers, and actors.

Themistokleous 2 (pedestrian street) and Panepistimiou Tables outside (Themistokleous Pedestrian Street)

Phone: 21 0383 8485

Hours: Monday to Friday 12:00 p.m. – 11:30 p.m., Saturday 12:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m., Sunday closed

Cost: 15€ – 25€ per person



Bairaktaris Syntagma Square

✠✠

I recommend this establishment solely as the only acceptable option if you find yourself at Syntagma Square and realise you're famished—so hungry that your legs refuse to carry you farther than across the road.

The first tavern of the Bairaktaris family—natives of Asia Minor—opened in Athens in 1879. For six generations, its members have run this business, which now operates two prominent venues in the city centre. One of them is located at the "mouth" of Ermou Street, where it flows into Syntagma Square. I wouldn't suggest this place if you're seeking rest or a tranquil end to your day, but you can eat

relatively cheaply, tastily, and heartily if you lack the energy to walk to any other establishment.

2 Ermou, Syntagma Square St, Athens

Phone: 21 0322 2190

Hours: Monday to Thursday, Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m., Friday, Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 a.m.

Cost: 10€ – 15€ per person

IDIKON
✠✠✠

The last true bacalotaverna in Greece bears a fitting name: Idikon (from the Greek for "special" or "professional"). It opened over 100 years ago, in 1920, and the only thing that has changed since then is the owner. The tavern passed from the father, Mr. Papakonstantinou Sr., to his son.

This is an absolute must-visit for anyone whose journey to or from the Greek capital passes through the port of Piraeus. It's a true

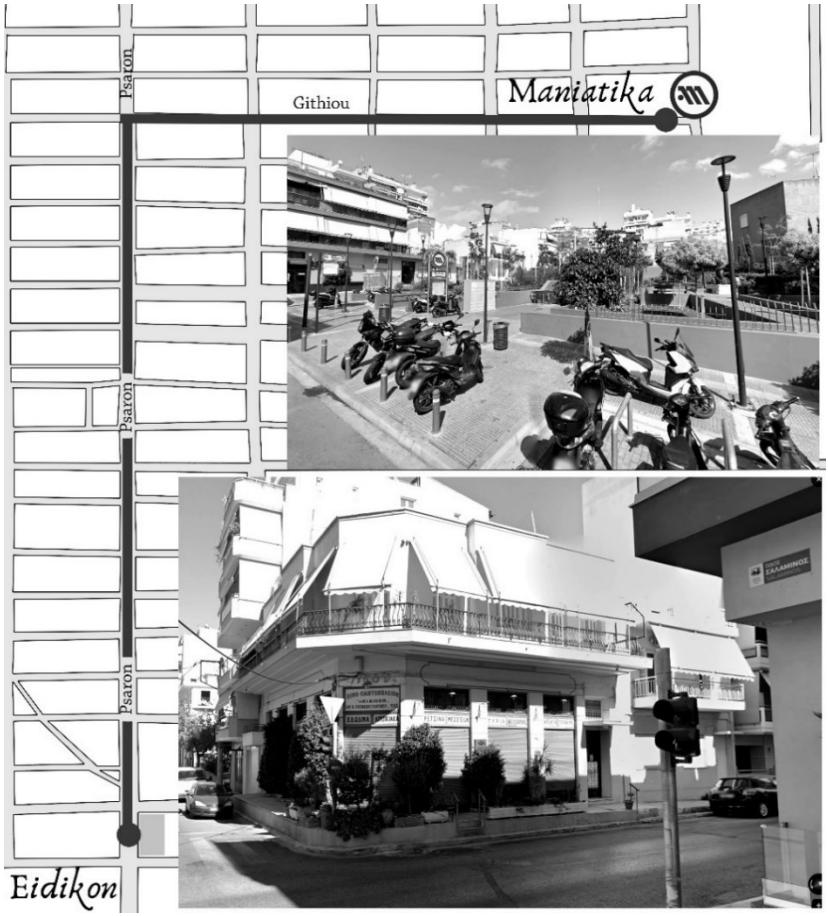
treasure trove of traditional gastronomy, just a few minutes' walk from the Maniatika metro station.

Psaron 38, Piraeus 185 46

Phone: 21 0461 2674

Hours: Monday to Saturday 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 p.m., Sunday closed

Cost: 5€ – 15€ per person



Remutsiko

✠✠✠

The word "Remoutsiko" in Greek colloquial speech means "free treat"—a phrase said to have often been heard from the lips of the tavern's founder, Panayotis Dimas, known in his time in this neighbourhood simply as "Grandpa Panayotis." Here, he ran a wine shop where neighbours frequently dropped by. Soon, snacks began to accompany the Dimas family's homemade wine. Thus began a local culinary tradition. The tavern is situated off the tourist trail, but the short journey is well worth it: The meat served here is exceptional.

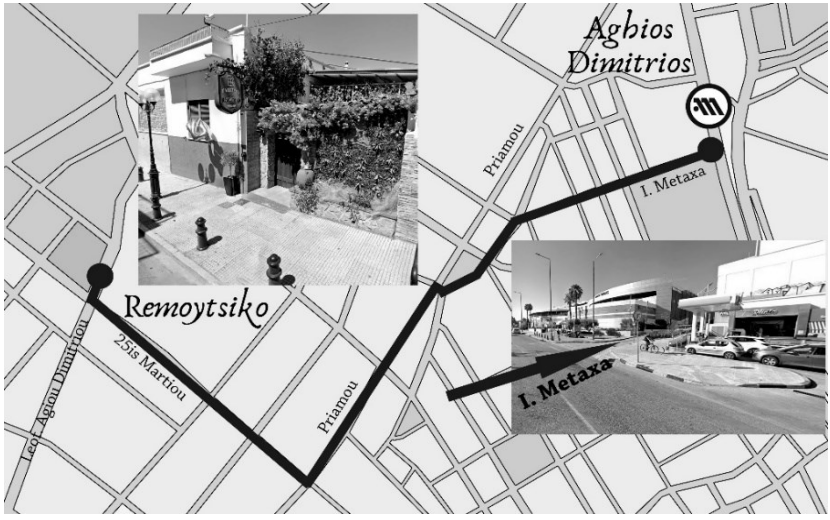
The tavern is a 15-minute walk from the Agios Dimitrios metro station.

Leof. Agiou Dimitriou 120, Agios Dimitrios 173 41

Phone: 21 0970 4515

Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 7:30 p.m. – 12:30 a.m., Sunday 12:30 p.m. – 5:00 a.m., Monday closed

Cost: 15€ – 20€ per person



Marathonitis

✠✠✠

This tavern, which does not have a sign, can be found only by native Pagkrati residents or those who have purchased my tavern guidebook. (That is you, my dear thrill-seeking reader.) It is located at the corner of Imittou Avenue, opposite the old, picturesque First Athens Cemetery.

The tavern was founded by Fotis Avgeropoulos, a native of the ancient city of Marathon—hence the name Marathonitis. Avgeropoulos received this land (on which the house with a tavern in its basement was built) as a dowry from his wife, Sofia, a born-and-bred Pagkrati local.

Much has changed since then. What was once a simple wine cellar offering only one type of wine—retsina—and the most basic homemade snacks has become a proper tavern. Nevertheless, it strictly adheres to the recipes passed down by Grandma Sofia for grilled ribs, giant beans, and tirokafteri—a spicy cheese dip that can be spread on bread or used as a sauce for meat.

This tavern is immensely popular with my neighbourhood locals, so be sure to book a table if you plan to visit. This is especially important if you're aiming for dinner on a Friday or over the

weekend, when concerts of traditional Athenian urban music take place.

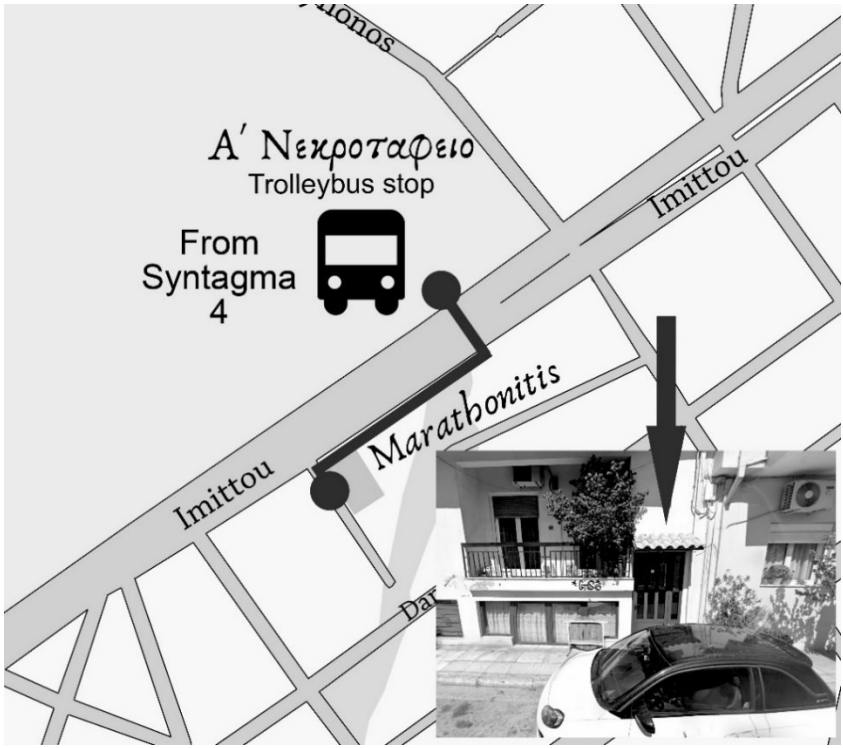
You can reach it from Syntagma Square by taking trolleybus number 4 to the first Nekrotafeio stop.

Imittou & Vinkelman 3, Athens 116 32

Phone: 21 0701 7404

Hours: Monday to Saturday 8:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m., Sunday 2:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

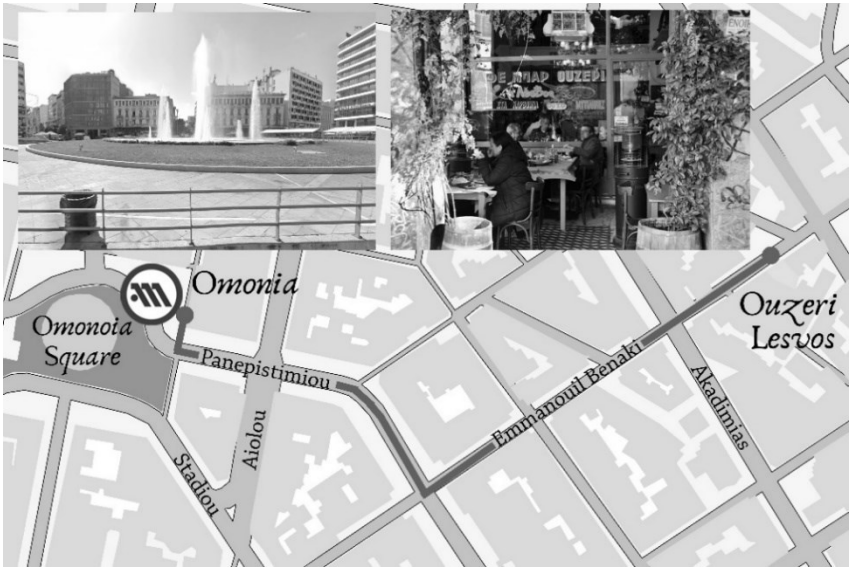
Cost: 15€ – 18€ per person, excluding drinks



Fish and Seafood Taverns

Ouzeri Lesvos

✠✠✠



Once upon a time, this "ouzeri," opened by two brothers from the island of Lesbos, was primarily a gathering place for their fellow islanders and, due to its low prices, mostly students. A reminder of that era in the history of Lesbos is a framed poem on the wall, written many years ago by two female students during a lunch at this tavern. Today, those women, if they are still alive, must be well into their eighties…

The prices here remain quite reasonable, and the menu has stayed unchanged for over 60 years. You will surely be charmed by the local squid, fried fish, and all the other treasures of the Aegean Sea, generously seasoned with fresh lemon juice.

You'll easily find this tavern. It's about a 10-minute walk from the Omonia metro station. From the square, head along Panepistimiou Street to the intersection with Benaki Street and turn right.

38 Emmanuel Benaki, Athens 106 78

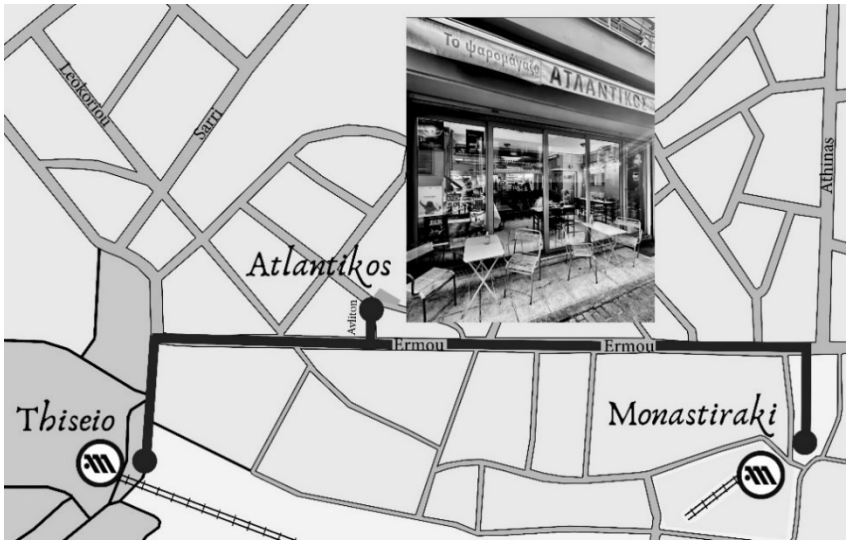
Phone: 21 0381 4525

Hours: Monday to Saturday 12:30 p.m. – 11:00 p.m., Sunday 12:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Cost: 15€ – 20€ per person, excluding drinks

ATLANTIKOS

✠✠✠



True beauty lies in simplicity, for simplicity is always natural and organic, and it is precisely these qualities that define genuine, innate beauty. Embracing one's simplicity is an art in itself. Here's a concise answer to the question, "Why, Mr. George, do you dislike many Greek fine-dining restaurants?" By their very nature, they stand in opposition to the natural simplicity inherent in Greek cuisine.

Establishments like the tavern Atlantikos in Psyrri are designed to feed you deliciously and heartily, not to stroke any bruised ego. It has just three or four tables near the kitchen and a couple more in

a tiny mezzanine for those who, like your humble servant, prefer a bit of seclusion.

The fried potatoes here are hand-cut—no frozen fare. The same goes for the fish, with my favourite being “gavros,” anchovies in batter. On the island of Mytilene, they’re traditionally paired with “white brandy” (tsipouro), but I prefer non-alcoholic drinks. However, if you’re not bound by a strict no-alcohol diet, you can fully immerse yourself in island gastronomic traditions at Atlantikos.

The tavern is open every day from 12:00 p.m. until 1:00 a.m., which can be quite convenient if you’ve lost track of time while wandering. (Isn’t that, after all, why we go on holiday?)

The tavern is located between the Monastiraki and Thiseio metro stations.

Avliton 7, Athens 105 54

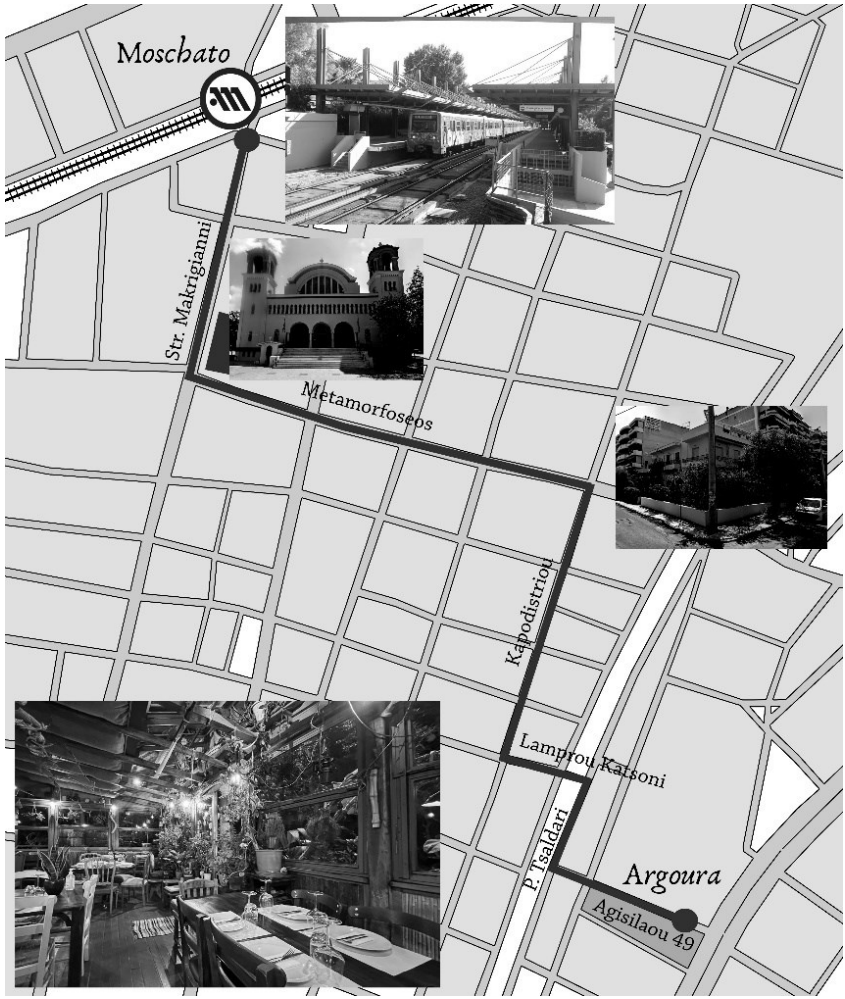
Phone: 21 3033 0850

Hours: Daily 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 a.m.

Cost: 15€ – 20€ per person, excluding drinks

Argoura

✠✠



A native of the island of Euboea, Mr. Nikos named his tavern after the village where he was born. His life has been inextricably linked to the sea from early childhood, making him a true expert when it comes to seafood. When I use the word "expert," I mean that Mr. Nikos personally visits the city's finest fish markets to procure the freshest and highest-quality ingredients and even takes part in preparing some of the dishes

himself. Be sure to ask him about the dish of the day—creativity thrives on constant improvisation.

The tavern is located near the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre. The nearest metro station is Moschato on the green line (Line 1).

49-51 Agissilaou Tzitzifies, Kallithea 176 75, Greece

Phone: 217 717 3200

Hours: Monday to Friday 7:30 p.m. – 12:00 a.m., Saturday 1:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m., Sunday 1:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Zachos

✠✠

In this tavern, once a simple homemade wine shop, fans and current and former players of one of Greece's largest football clubs, Olympiacos, now gather. Indeed, who else would come here, given that it's just steps away from the club's home stadium?

Almost concurrently with the opening of this tavern in 1960, the Oscar for Best Original Song was awarded to the Greek-filmed movie "Never on Sunday" by Jules Dassin, starring Melina Mercouri, one of Greece's most famous actresses. The song, "The Children of Piraeus" was written by the eminent Greek poet and composer Manos Hadzidakis, who lived on a street near my home:

"From my window, I send

One, two, three, and four kisses into the air.

They reach the port,

As the first, second, third, and fourth birds.

How I wished for one, and two,

And three, and four children,

Who would grow up to be

Fine lads, the pride of all Piraeus."

Hadzidakis was rather indifferent to this work. (In the early 1970s, his cleaner found Hadzidakis' Oscar statuette in a rubbish bin outside his house, alongside wastepaper and other debris.) However, this song became iconic for Greek cinema, which effectively died out in the 1970s, and for the urban culture of Athens and Piraeus. (And no wonder: It's the only Greek song to win an Oscar!) Thus, in this tavern, the song's lyrics are displayed in a place of honour, framed and adorned with an Olympiacos scarf, as a hymn to the port city of Piraeus, which begins here at Neon Faliro and stretches south to the Aegean Sea.

If you wish to immerse yourself in the atmosphere of Piraeus as Dassin, Mercouri, and Hadjidakis knew and loved it, be sure to check whether there's a football match that day. If there is, you'll find it impossible to squeeze into Zachos tavern.

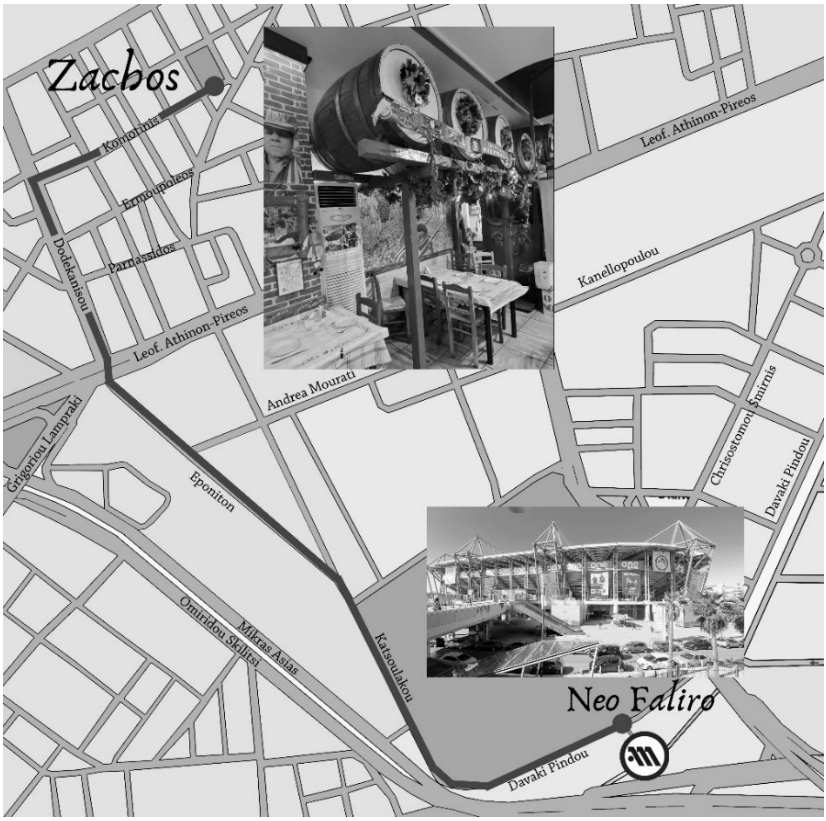
The tavern is a 20-minute walk from the Neo Faliro station on the green metro line. Alternatively, you can take a taxi from the city centre.

Komotinis 37 Kaminia, Piraeus 185 41, Greece

Phone: 210 481 3325

Hours: Tuesday to Sunday 12:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., Monday closed

Cost: 15€ – 20€ per person



Psarokastella

✠✠✠

The name of the Kastella district, where this tavern is located, has Italian roots, as one might easily guess, though these places have no connection to Italians. The word, meaning "castle with towers" in Italian, migrated into certain Greek dialects with the meaning "small turret." Such hastily erected fortifications appeared here when this area was occupied by the forces of Georgios Karaiskakis, a leader of the Greek anti-Turkish uprising of 1821-1829. These forces defended Athens against the troops of Reşid Mehmed Paşa—a man who was born to a Greek priest in Georgia and who converted to Islam in early youth (quite the irony). Since then, this part of Piraeus has been called Kastella. The name of the tavern to which we're heading translates, fittingly, as "fish turret."

As with many establishments in this guide, finding Psarokastella is a feat manageable only by locals, and even then, not all of them. The tavern opened in 1986 in a building that had belonged to the owners' family for 60 years. The recipes for many menu items are kept under the strictest secrecy, and dishes like Chios octopus in wine and Cretan vinegar can be savoured only here. Despite its modest size and the parking difficulties you'll likely encounter (if

you arrive by car), Psarikastella is entirely worth the time spent getting there.

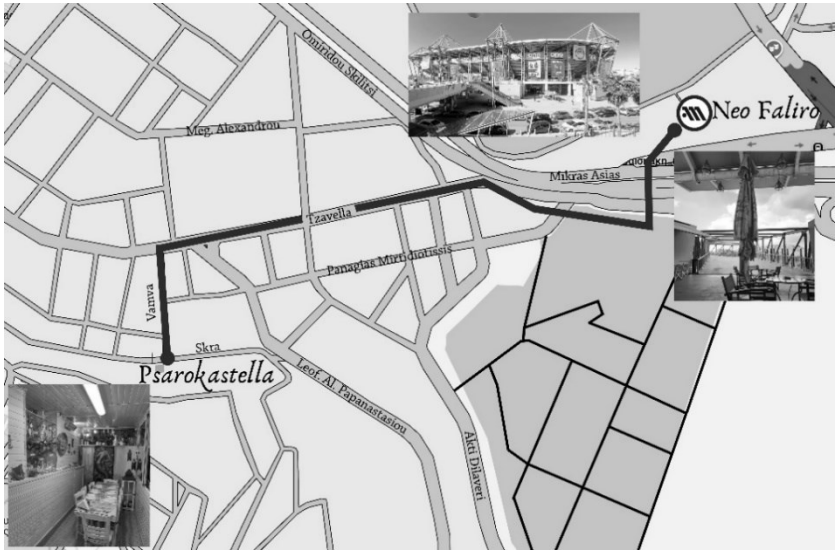
The nearest metro station is Neo Faliro, on the green line. The walk will take about 15 minutes.

Skra 19, Piraeus

Phone: 210-42.22.237

Hours: Tuesday to Friday 6:00 p.m. – 11:30 p.m., Saturday 1:00 p.m. – 11:30 p.m., Sunday 1:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., Monday closed

Cost: 25€ – 30€ per person



MARGARO

✠✠

In 1937, just three years before the Greek Kingdom entered the Second World War, Mykonos natives Margaro and Yannis Chaniotis opened a small snack bar for port workers in the basement of this poor working-class district, known as Hadzikiryaki (in honour of the famous benefactor Ioannis Hadzikiryakos, who once established the largest orphanage of its time there). Quietly, modestly, for a symbolic fee but with hearty and heartfelt food, Margaro fed her husband's colleagues—local loaders and sailors—throughout the occupation. After its end in 1944, she found a way to move her small business into the premises of a former grocery shop near the gates of the Merchant Marine Academy. It was then that the gradual transformation of the area began: from a gloomy, criminal, outlying neighbourhood into part of Piraeus' cultural centre. This change was facilitated by the proximity of the district to Piraeus Theatre – one of Greece's oldest theatrical theatres (of Greece as a state, of course).

Over nearly three decades, Margaro's fish tavern became a popular meeting place not only for workers but also for some local residents. Its fame spread even to the theatrical stage, and by the early 1970s, artists were frequenting the place, including figures legendary in Greek theatre and cinema, such as Aliki Vouyuklaki

(whose affair was persistently linked to Greece's last king, Constantine II), Yanis Alfiyeris, and Dimitris Papamihail.

After Margaro Chanioti died in 1974, her son ran the tavern. Today, it is managed by the grandmother's grandson, Kostas. Since 1978, they have been serving simple yet impressive fried dishes made with a special oil that creates a crispy crust and keeps the fish juicy.

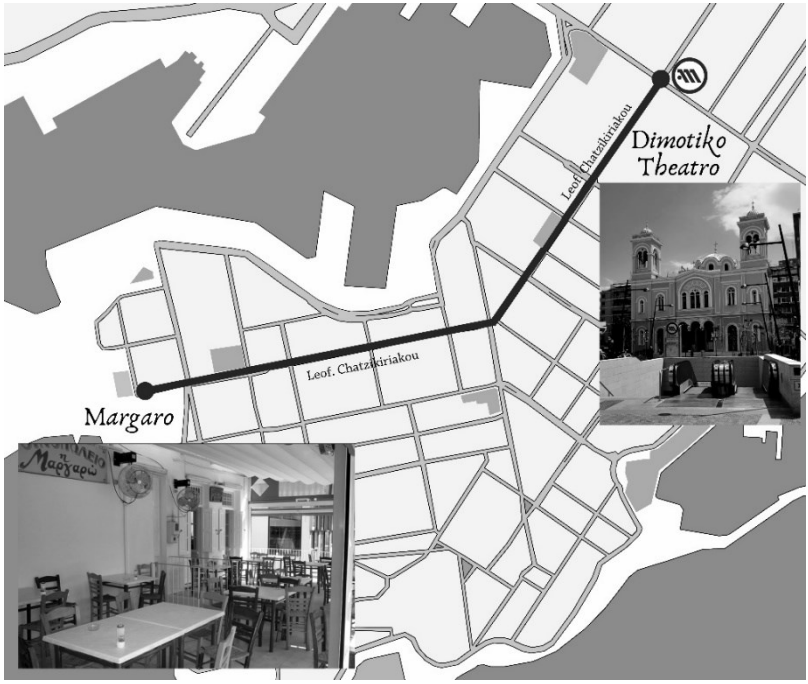
The tavern is located at the very edge of Piraeus, near the cargo port. You can reach it by taxi or via a half-hour walk from the Dimotiko Theatro metro station.

Leof. Chatzikiriakou 126, Piraeus 185 38

Phone: 210 451 4226

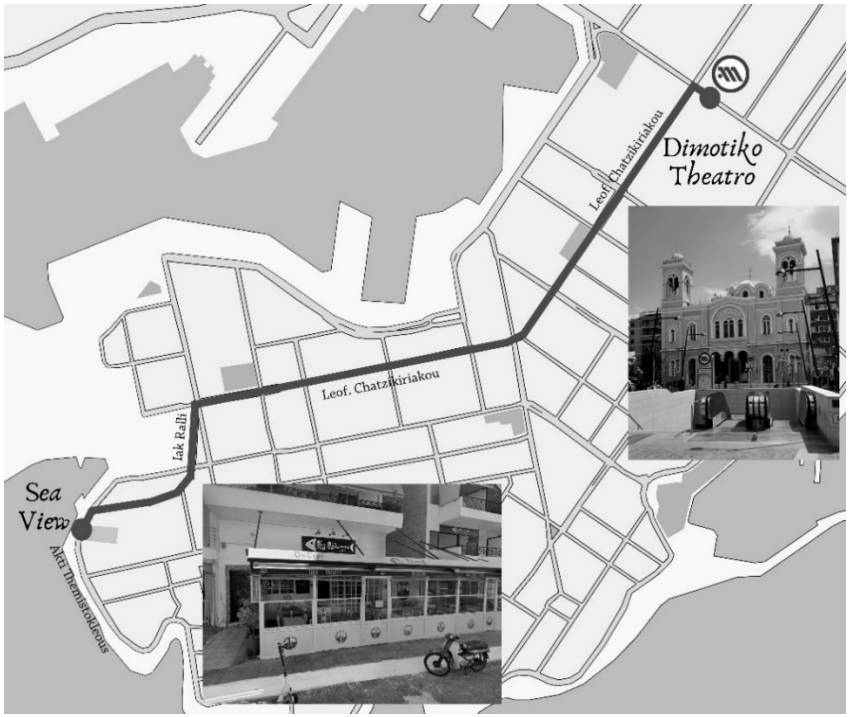
Hours: Monday to Saturday 12:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m., Sunday 12:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Cost: 25€ – 30€ per person



Sea View

✠✠✠



Close to Margaro is a charming promenade featuring remnants of an almost 2,500-year-old wall built on the orders of the Athenian general Themistokles to protect the port city of Piraeus from stormy seas and, primarily, enemy landings, as Athens was engaged in the legendary war with Persia at the time. It is here, almost on the ruins of Themistokles' walls, that the tavern Seaview is located. It serves fish dishes renowned in Greek cuisine, as well as "foreign" options such as ceviche. The secret to the quality and comparatively low prices of the dishes at this tavern is the fresh fish, which is bought from local farmers and shipowners.

The place is picturesque: a rugged seashore composed entirely of massive deposits of sandstone. (This material was quarried even in the times of the construction of the Zeus Olympios Temple.) Just

five minutes from the tavern is the charming Bay of Aphrodite, with the small church of Saint Nicholas, built in the traditional island style of Greek architecture.

Among the snacks served at Seaview, I particularly recommend the taramosalata (a fish roe mousse traditionally served here with hot, crispy pita) and anchovies in batter with fresh lemon.

The prices are affordable: around 45€ per person for a full dinner with wine or an aniseed aperitif.

The tavern is about a 30-minute walk from the Dimotiko Theatro metro station, or you can use taxi services.

Akti Themistokleous 344, Piraeus 185 39

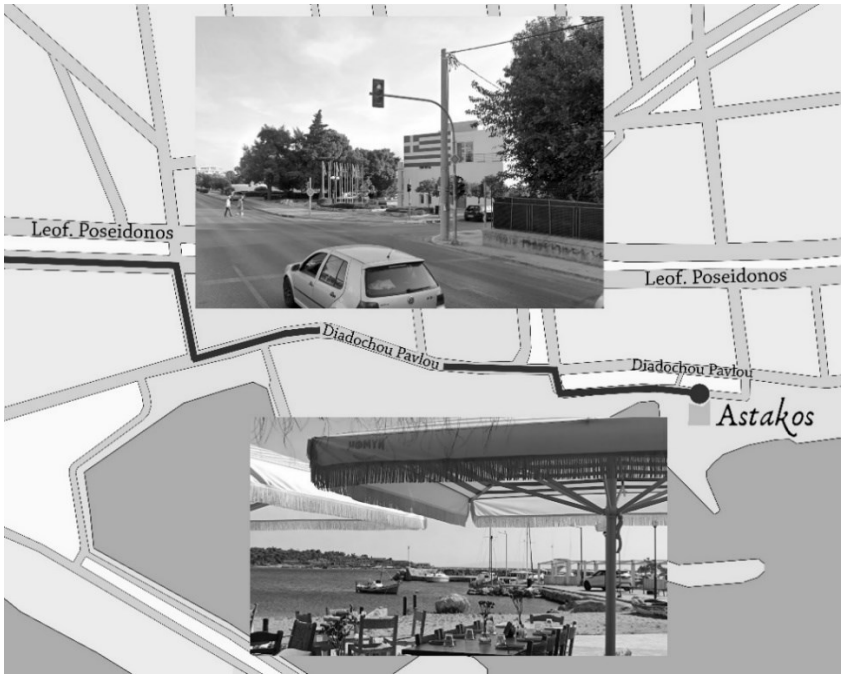
Phone: 210 413 2070

Hours: Daily 12:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m., Sunday 12:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Cost: 30€ – 50€ per person

Astakos

✠✠



Should you decide to hire a car and head east from Athens along the so-called "Athenian Riviera" and, upon reaching Glyfada, find yourself desperately hungry, I strongly recommend stopping by Astakos, situated right on the shore of the Aegean Sea, next to the local fish market.

The centrepiece of the local cuisine is the wood-fired oven, which is widely used by chefs to prepare seafood dishes renowned throughout Athens' eastern suburbs.

Based on recommendations from my fish-connoisseur friends, I suggest the baked dorado, local taramosalata, and silver carp with artichokes. Given that I'm a devoted lover of refined desserts, my attention was captured by the "scorched" milk pie, reminiscent of crème brûlée, served with bergamot syrup, fresh berries, and ice cream.

Diadouchou Pavlou 46, 2nd Marina Glyfada

Phone: 210 894 7342

Hours: Tuesday to Friday 1:00 – 12:00 p.m., Saturday to Sunday 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., Monday closed

Cost: 30€ – 40€ per person

Antigoni Tavern

✠✠

Continuing towards the famous Cape Sounion (a destination often sought by travellers visiting Athens and its suburbs for "unique" selfies against the backdrop of stunning sunsets and the ancient Temple of Poseidon), one must not forget the tavern Antigoni.

It is located near Old Fokea (Palea Fokea); a large billboard, notably devoid of Latin letters, marks the turnoff from the main road. This is a simple and comfortable place: an open courtyard with a canopy, along with a small menu featuring affordable yet tasty dishes prepared, of course, according to family recipes dating back, as you might have guessed, to Grandma Antigoni, who opened this tavern many years ago. Everything here is "classic," quintessentially Greek, and wonderfully charming in its sincere simplicity.

Most of the fish in Antigoni's dishes comes from local fishermen, with only small fish brought in from Lavrion. However, it's not all about fish: Fresh lamb and mutton are regularly delivered from the family's farm. They are well worth trying, as they just might be the most quintessentially Greek meats of all.

Makrodimitraion, Thimari

MWRV+8V Thimari

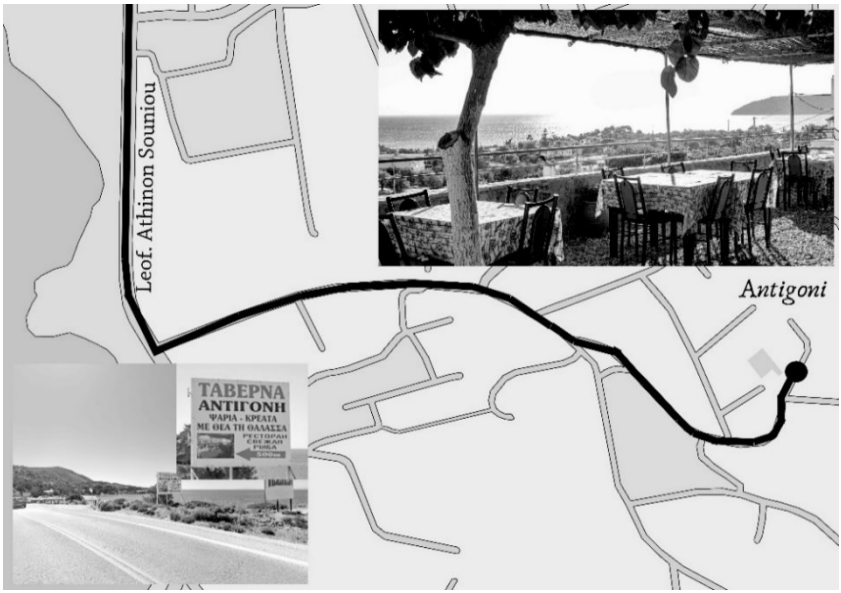
Coordinates for exit from the main road: 37°41'27.6"N 23°56'18.8"E

MWRQ+CC4 Palea Fokea

Phone: 22910-37.503

Hours: Daily from 12:00 p.m.

Cost: 25€ – 30€ per person for fish (with beers)



MARIDA

✠✠

On your return from Sounion, you might well choose to have lunch (or dinner) at Marida. Can you guess who founded it? That's right—the current owner's grandfather. And when did he establish it? Spot on again—many years ago, or more precisely, before 1956, when the settlement of Lagonisi, where the tavern is located, was connected to Athens by a road. Back then, the tavern was frequented only by locals or hopelessly lost shepherds wandering the Athenian "pampas" (a jest).

As is fitting, the menu has remained almost unchanged for 95 years. Boiled vegetables have always accompanied Greek peasant fish dishes, and they are the most common and successful side dish here. Yet, without a doubt, the star dish is the fried picarels, the Greek moniker for which is reflected in the tavern's name.

64.5 km. Athens-Sounio coastline, Legrena, Sounio 195 00

Phone: 229 205 1221

Hours: Daily 12:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.

Cost: 15€ – 30€ per person

Seafood Restaurants

As I begin this section of my guidebook, I wish to remind my readers that Greek cuisine—and I am deeply convinced of this—was never meant to be "haute" cuisine. It is rustic and simple, with dishes strikingly similar to those of the traditional cuisines of its Balkan neighbours: Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, and Turkey. The ingredients are unpretentious but unfailingly fresh. All attempts to transform the fare of shepherds and fishermen into something aristocratic and refined seem, in my amateur opinion, laughable at the least.

Because of this conviction, grounded in my extensive experience in the Greek restaurant and hotel business, no force on earth (save for rare and peculiar exceptions) could drag me into Athens' fine-dining restaurants. Nevertheless, the Greek capital has more than its fair share of such establishments, and to overlook them while compiling a food guide would be unfair. (After all, I'm not some disgruntled neo-Marxist resentful of the world.)

Piscis

✠✠

In Piraeus, two picturesque harbours have long served as ship moorings. The first and largest of these is Pasha's Harbour or Pasalimani. More precisely, this bay is officially called Zeas, as it was named by the ancient Greek historian Pausanias, who explained that the name derived from the port's role in exporting "zea"—a type of wheat that, according to Pausanias, was used to bake bread in Egypt, where ordinary wheat was disregarded. "Pasha's Harbour" became the name during the period of Turkish rule, as one might easily guess, but soon after Greece declared independence, Greek names replaced most "Turkish" ones.

However, I'm not young enough to retrain myself, so, like my peers (veterans of the First World War), I continue to call this harbour "Pasha's Harbour."

Likewise, for me and most of Piraeus' old-timers, there is no other name for the second bay in Piraeus but Tourkolimano (Turkish Harbour), even though, for many years and in all official sources, it has been called Mikrolimano (Small Harbour). It is precisely there that our journey now takes us.

Here, three of Tourkolimano's greatest seafood cuisine specialists—Panayotis Yakalis, Petros Fotinidis, and Manolis Mavridakis—opened their restaurant with the fitting name of Piscis (Latin for "Fish"). The first two are world-renowned chefs, while the third is a well-known restaurateur in Athens and Mykonos, owner of the Kursaros chain.

Though I've visited this establishment only once (at the invitation of friends), that single visit was enough to convince me that the atmosphere here is serene and conducive to reflection, especially at noon on any weekday, except public holidays, as local cafés and taverns enjoy unwavering popularity among residents of Piraeus. Despite the air of fine dining, the prices at Piscis are more than reasonable, and the dishes will satisfy even the most discerning

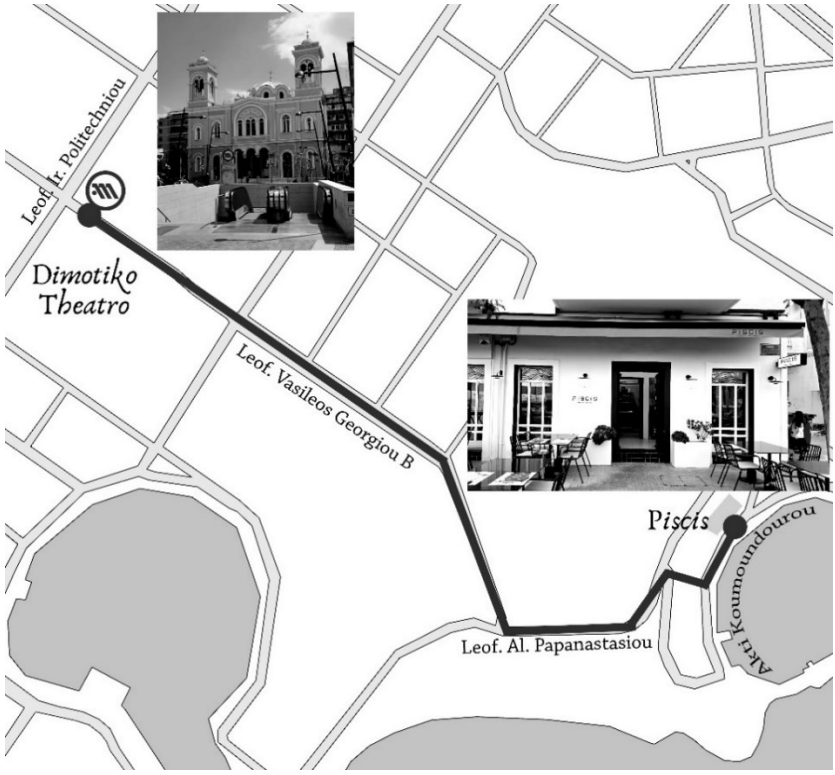
seafood aficionado. My personal discovery (despite my general indifference to such cuisine) was the lobster pasta—an utterly compelling dish at a surprisingly affordable price and, most importantly, one that managed to fill me up, which is no small feat in places like this.

Akti Koumoundourou 30, Mikrolimano, Piraeus

Phone: 210 417 0772

Hours: Daily 1:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.

Cost: 35€ – 50€ per person



Jimmy's Fish

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I've been to this place only once, at the invitation of an acquaintance, as I wouldn't have even glanced at Jimmy's Fish on my own. This restaurant managed to surprise me, though every exception to the rule only proves the rule.

The local octopus, slow-cooked in red wine and served with a sweet-and-sour sauce, was more than impressive, as was the tomato salad with capers. Also impressive was a rare guest in Athens: Volaki cheese from the island of Andros. Given how challenging it is to cook octopus and how tender it turned out at Jimmy's Fish, I take full responsibility for this recommendation.

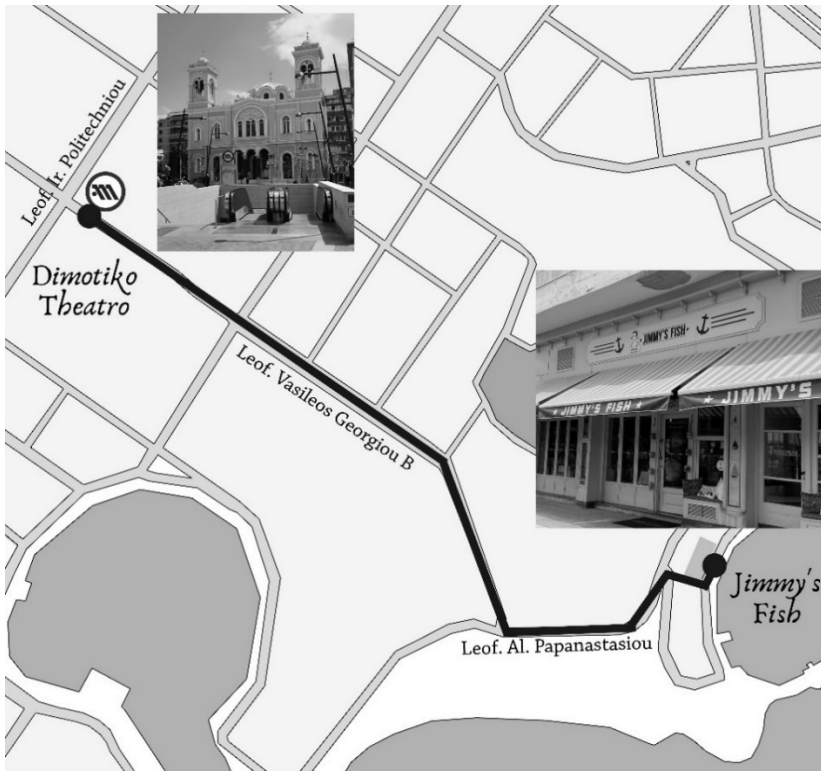
The tavern is about a 20-minute walk from the Dimotiko Theatro metro station, or you can take a taxi.

Akti Koumoundourou 46, Mikrolimano, Piraeus

Phone: 210-41.24.417

Hours: Daily 1:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.

Cost: 50+€ per person



Varoulko Seaside

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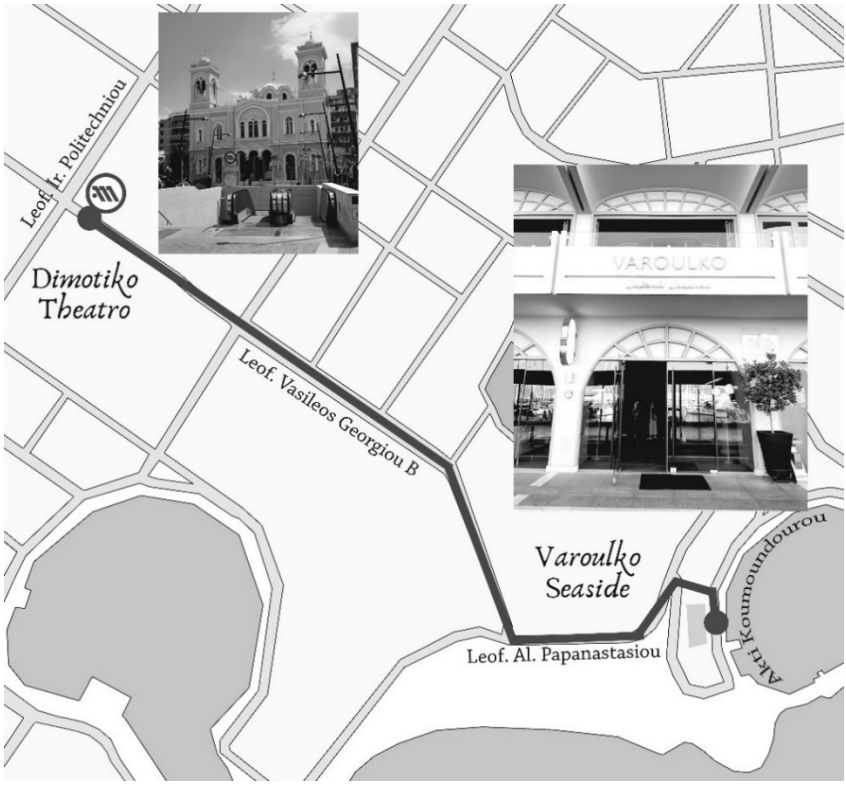
This restaurant is recommended for those who consider themselves gastronomes and, in particular, connoisseurs of fine wine. Among its accolades are a Michelin star and the Greek restaurant award known as the "Golden Chef's Hat" (essentially, a Greek equivalent of Michelin, established in the 1980s when local restaurateurs decided that they had to be "no less than Europeans"). In addition to other titles, Varoulko Seaside was named one of the 1000 best restaurants in the world by La Liste—an accolade that, unlike the Golden Chef's Hat, genuinely means something. (I'll never understand how one can objectively assess the taste of food, given the subjective perception by each individual diner; but then, I'm no restaurant critic.) Lobster, red shrimp, black caviar, and the devil himself from the sea (and that's no jest) will appear on your plate here in the most unusual and unexpected presentations.

Akti Koumoundourou 54, Pireas 185 33

Phone: 21 0522 8400

Hours: Daily 1:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.

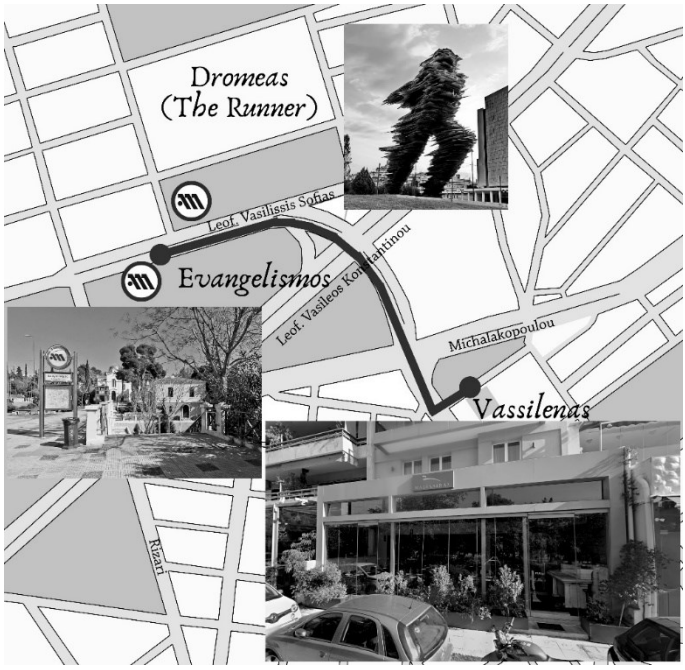
Cost: 50+€ per person



Vassilenas Athens

✠

Having opened in 1920 in Piraeus' poor, working-class district, Thanasis Vasilenas' tavern likely had little to do with the award-laden, star-studded, medal-festooned, trophy-filled, and certificate-adorned restaurant Vasilenas now located in Athens' Hilton district (a name that alone adds 15 euros to the price of any dish), though it is indeed its legal successor. Minimalism, muted golden lighting (which, as we all know, can transform even fish and chips into a gourmet dish, one that absolutely must be paired with a dry white wine of any variety but



never cheaper than 56 euros a bottle, because the fish you've eaten cares about what it swims in)—this isn't just the standard toolkit of any "unique" Greek cuisine restaurant with a renowned chef whose name means nothing to you; it's a mark of the highest quality. In this restaurant, the staff will effortlessly recite the lineage of the fish you're eating, naming its ancestors back 15 generations, and detail the technical specifications of the trawler that caught it, all with the most serious expression. Once you've spent your remarkable evening immersed in a world of exquisite, costly perfume, you might want to return to the "taverns" section of this guide and head somewhere to satisfy your hunger, as the portions here are unlikely to fill you up (though, of course, I'm judging based on my own appetite and the average Greek salary).

Vrasida 13, Athina 115 28
Phone: 210 721 0501
Opening hours: Open every day 6.30 – 11.30 PM
Cost: 50+ euros/person

Psarochori

✠✠✠

This is a charming spot with interiors reminiscent of an IKEA showroom, which immediately makes it inviting. Despite its status as a "restaurant," Psarohori (literally "Fish Village" in Greek) boasts a menu that follows a sensible logic: The dishes are designed not for Instagram photos but for satisfying and delighting your palate (though they don't lack visual appeal either). What would I absolutely recommend? Probably the pasta with prawns and mussels or one of the ultra-fresh whole fish grilled to perfection.

The restaurant is just a three-minute walk from the Ampelokipi station on the red metro line.

Tsocha 21, Athina 115 21
Phone: 21 0643 8691
Opening hours: Tuesday - Saturday: 12:00 PM - 12:00AM Sunday: 12:00 AM - 6:00 PM Monday: Closed
Cost: 15 - 30 euros/person

Balcony In Cyclades

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I share a special bond with Vyronas, a mountainous district bordering Pagkrati to the northeast of Athens. It's named after Lord Byron, the famous philhellene poet and romantic hero who seduced first the mother and later the wife of a British prime minister. (Yes, the Greeks simply read his surname, written in Latin script, as if it were in Greek letters and added a masculine ending, "-as"). I lived there long enough to consider it my second, smaller homeland in this world. Naturally, this guidebook could not omit a restaurant located not in neighbouring Pagkrati but in Vyronas itself,

especially because this restaurant truly deserves your attention if you love beautiful sunsets and panoramic views (and I know you do; don't ask how).

Here, on the terrace of the restaurant Balcony In Cyclades, you'll find breathtaking views, quite decent food, and equally commendable drinks, all at reasonable prices that are far from touristy. (After all, wasn't our goal to challenge tourist clichés?) Of course, the easiest way to reach this restaurant is by taxi, but trust me, it's worth the trip. From where else but this terrace can you take in not only all of Athens but also the Acropolis and Lycabettus—the highest hill in the city and home to restaurants that, frankly, deserve no attention whatsoever. (After all, from the top of Lycabettus, you can't see Lycabettus itself.)

P. Mela 13, Vironas 162 33
Phone: 21 0764 0240
Opening hours: Monday – Friday 3:00 PM – 12.00 AM Saturday – Sunday 1:00 PM – 12:00 AM
Cost: 35-45 euros/person

Meat Restaurants

MANÁRI

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The word that forms the name of this establishment comes from the Aromanian language (not to be confused with Romanian; though they are similar, they are distinct languages) and has two meanings. The first, now almost forgotten, referred to a shorn lamb ready for slaughter in the mountain villages of Greece, where many Aromanian shepherds lived. The second might seem surprising given the first: a young, attractive,

and good-natured person. Rough conversational equivalents in English might be “fellow,” “buddy,” or “mate.” As you can see, starting with its name, this restaurant aims to create a certain atmosphere, and for the most part, it succeeds. It might well become your favourite spot if you’re staying nearby. (In the surrounding neighbourhood, not a single local resident remains, and what hasn’t been turned into offices has become hotels or apartments.) I would classify Manári as a “transitional” type of establishment: It’s no longer a tavern but also not a restaurant in the full sense of the word. This is likely why it hasn’t entirely lost a certain natural charm.

The restaurant is located five minutes walk from Panepistimio metro station

3 Agios Theodoros Square, Athens
Phone: 21 5215 3804
Opening hours: Monday-Friday: 6:00 PM - 11:30 PM, Weekend: 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM & 7:00 PM - 11:30 PM
Cost: 25-40 euros/person

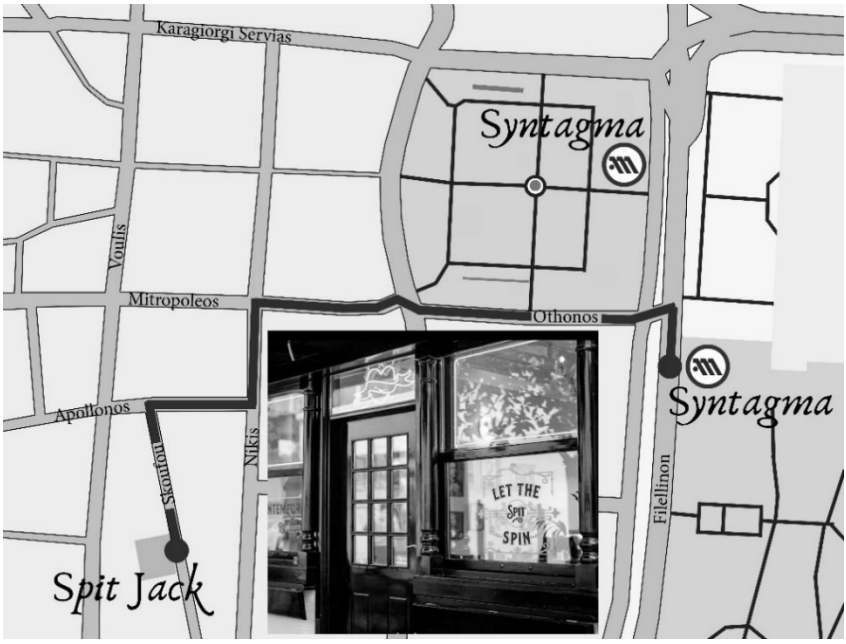
Spit Jack

✠

If you consider yourself a connoisseur of premium meat, this establishment is for you. I've never counted myself among such enthusiasts, and I've included this place in my guide solely because my good friends persistently—and, crucially, freely—urged me to do so. Here, you'll find a decent steak served on a chopping board (they'll suggest that you hack at it with a meat cleaver), oversized plates with minimal food on them, and, of course, signature cheesecakes and lemon pies. (It seems to me that no such place in Athens can do without these blasted cheesecakes.) It's the highest class of the most common type of uniqueness.

The restaurant is located 6 minutes walk from the Syntagma metro station

Skoufou 10, Athina 105 57
Phone: 21 0331 6003
Opening hours: Monday- Thursday & Sunday: 1:30 PM – 11:00 PM, Friday – Saturday: 1:30 PM – 12:00 AM
Cost: 25-30 euros/person



Restaurants

Places that combine seafood and meat cuisine

Grandma Cuckoo Athens

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Just steps away from the Church of Saint Irene (to which my Athens guidebook dedicates an entire chapter) lies perhaps the youngest establishment mentioned here: Grandma Cuckoo Athens. It opened in 2024 on the premises of a bankrupt textile shop and became the third in its chain, which now spans, in addition to Skouze Street, the Athens district of Peristeri and the charming but utterly indistinguishable-from-hundreds-of-its-neighbours Greek island of Kythnos.

Its interior is a testament to great attention to detail and the refined taste of the artist who designed the project: "granny-style" floral wallpaper, as if pilfered from a flea market, plates and cutlery that rarely match their tablemates, and chairs and armchairs in a predominantly neoclassical anarchy of colours, carvings, and materials. Painted and restored Viennese chairs line the bar counter (a table left behind by the previous "tenant" and once used for cutting, sewing, and shaping cloth), and, of course, decorative ivy cascades from the ceiling and columns. (As everyone knows, grannies love gardening.) Together, this creates an atmosphere perfectly in tune with the restaurant's name. Plus, the menu is a delight for the eyes, stomach, and, crucially, wallet: "slippers" of aubergine with cheese and lamb (likely the first thing a Greek think of when recalling their grandmother), marinated cockerel with orange, and, naturally, Greek pork cutlets with potatoes—all dear to the heart and essential for the cultural deep dive of true travellers.

The only reason I'm not awarding "Grandma" four Hospitaller crosses is its location in the very heart of Athens' tourist centre. Don't misunderstand me, dear reader, but I'm far too much of a misanthrope to enjoy anything in such noisy, crowded places.

Skouze 4, Athina 105 60

Phone: 21 0324 5901
Opening hours: daily 12:00 PM -12.00 AM
Cost: 35 -55 euros/person

Ella Greek Cooking

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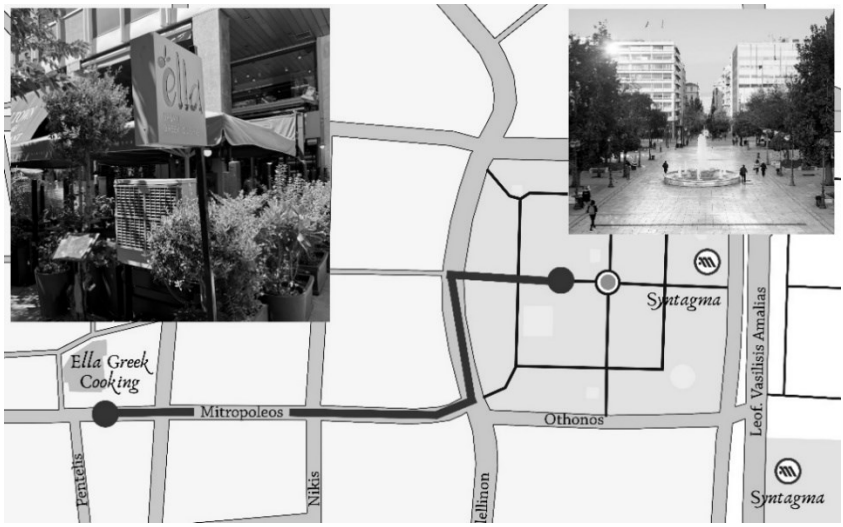

Almost opposite the Orthodox Cathedral of Athens lies a commendable restaurant serving what Greeks call "home cooking." Unlike the dishes served to tourists, "home cooking" is entirely unsuitable for the label of "fast food." Here, you can enjoy dolma (minced meat wrapped in grape leaves), hummus with fresh pita, chicken cutlets, peinirli (boat-shaped pastries filled with cheese and herbs, originating from Asia Minor), youvetsi with lamb (small pieces of lamb slow-cooked with orzo pasta—a guest from Ottoman cuisine, in which the dish is called "güveç"), and much more. At Ella Greek Cooking, everything that Greeks consider their cuisine will unfold before you in all its naturalness, simplicity, and elegance, at a reasonable price and in a cosy atmosphere.

Mitropoleos 26, Athens
Phone: 210-33.15.547
Opening hours: Open daily. Sunday-Thursday: 10.00-00.00, Friday-Saturday: 10.00-01.00.
Cost: €25–45/person, with wine.

Rooftops with a View: Restaurants and Bars That Overlook the City from Above

10 Urban Roof

✠✠✠

To be honest, I would never have imagined myself sincerely recommending a place like this. Rooftop hotel bars and restaurants are decidedly not to my taste, and I'd include them in my guidebook only for the sake of my dear reader, who, unlike me, hasn't yet grown weary of Athens' panoramic views. However, when I learned that opposite the Field of Mars Park, just two minutes from the Victoria metro station, there was a bar on the

roof of a hotel with a name as grand as “Radisson,” no force could hold me back.

Victoria Square and the station on the green line—the oldest branch of the Athens metro, opened in 1949—were named in honour of Queen Victoria of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India. The naming was a gesture of gratitude from the Greek people for the transfer of the Ionian Islands to the Greek Kingdom in 1865. The islands had been under British control since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. (It’s a long story, but essentially, the Ionian Islands—most notably Corfu, Ithaca, Zakynthos, and Kefalonia—hadn’t belonged to the Greeks since the 11th century.) Back in the mid-20th century, this district was considered prestigious and respectable—not on the level of Kolonaki (about which a still-popular song, “The People and Kolonaki,” was sung even then, highlighting the vast economic divide between its residents and everyone else) but still very decent. Many actors, singers, writers, and musicians who made their mark on Athens’ stages and street posters in the 1970s and 1980s were born and raised here. In this square and the nearby Field of Mars park, with its avenue of heroes from the Greek War of Independence and a splendid equestrian statue of King Constantine I by Francesco Parisi, many future cultural and political figures, as well as ordinary members of the Greek middle class, took their first steps and skinned their knees. However, in the 1990s, life in this district, as in all of Athens, began to undergo slow and, as it later became clear, fatal changes.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the communist dictatorships surrounding Greece to the north and northwest (Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria) fell one by one. With the opening of these countries’ borders, as they sought to join the Western world, a flood of immigrants poured into Greece, the nearest European Union country (in its modern form, established in 1993). Most of these immigrants were Albanians. By then, many local residents, as typical middle-class families, had acquired charming, spacious cottages or large apartments with wide balconies in the newly

developed coastal districts of Athens' eastern suburbs—now exorbitantly expensive Glyfada, quiet Varkiza, and resort-like Vouliagmeni—while renting out their parents' old apartments in the stuffy, cramped city centre. Naturally, these people were thrilled by the sudden surge in demand for their properties, and so, in less than a decade, Albanians had populated the Victoria district.

"They shot my father's friend in broad daylight as he was coming home from work. His new Albanian neighbour decided that the parking spot where my father's friend had parked his car belonged to him."

That was the response I got when I asked a good acquaintance, who has run a rock bar in the area for nearly 40 years, how life in central Athens changed in the 1990s. For her safety, I won't mention the name of her bar.

Of course, not all Albanians were like that. Among my close acquaintances are four second-generation Albanian immigrants, and they are some of the most honourable and kind-hearted people I've met in Athens. Nevertheless, I've heard countless stories like this, each more horrific than the last.

Later, many of those Albanian immigrants managed to buy their own properties, and they left Victoria. However, to the great relief of the Greek landlords now firmly settled far away in areas with long, clean promenades, in the 2000s, Albanian immigrants were replaced by refugees and "refugees" from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Libya, and beyond. Over the next 20 years, they completely and definitively displaced the Greek population from these districts. At the start of my student days, I lived here for two years, renting an apartment on what was once the highly prestigious Aristotelous Street (Aristotle Street), which leads directly to Victoria Square and is now considered one of the cleaner streets in the area. In particular, I remember a faded metal plaque hanging on the neighbouring building, next to the doorbell, inscribed with the name, surname, and academic title of a former

resident: “Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery, Doctor of Medicine.” Below this plaque, at the building’s entrance, the new occupants from the East would regularly sit and smoke marijuana.

The once-beloved, picturesque Field of Mars park turned into one of the city’s most frightening places. It became a haven for homeless drug addicts, whose numbers grew year by year, and small groups of Roma and illegal immigrants engaged in petty theft, whom the city police long treated as an inevitability. At some point, due to the grim associations (as unidentified bodies were regularly found in the park), the bus stop near the Field of Mars was renamed after the nearby University of Economics. Apparently, no other solution could be found.

Although the park has undergone a significant transformation since 2019 and is now regularly patrolled by police, the areas around the Victoria metro station remain incompatible with notions of “cleanliness” and “safety.” Even though the sprawling, nearly five-year-old makeshift tent camp of migrant criminals opposite the metro exit—a hub of drug trafficking and a refuge for rapists and thieves—has been dismantled, with its inhabitants scattering across the area or continuing their journey to Germany, an air of utter decay still dominates the square. The signs of this decline are plentiful: people of unknown nationality perched on the rusty fence of a trampled lawn, leering at passing women; filthy Roma children waiting for a chance to slip into your bag or pocket; Muslim women draped head-to-toe in burqas and niqabs, endlessly walking with a dozen children in tow; or the “house” made of cardboard and plastic sheets belonging to yet another homeless person rummaging through the nearest rubbish bin. And just three steps from the square, down any of its adjoining streets, you plunge into a cesspool of the most monstrous manifestations of human nature.

These days, the worst that might happen to you in these areas during the day (unless you’re a lone woman) is a pickpocketing, so compared to the time when your humble servant lived at 130 Aristotelous Street, Victoria has transformed considerably. For this

very reason, I strongly urge you to take this little journey: Hop on the metro at Monastiraki Square and head north towards Kifissia, passing through Omonia station. Get off at Victoria, step out onto the square, look around, and walk along Heyden Street (named after the Russian admiral who commanded the Imperial Navy in the famous Navarino Battle, which marked the beginning of Greece's full independence from the Ottoman Empire) until you reach Acharnon Avenue. There, at the corner by the Kabul restaurant, turn right and continue to Saint Panteleimon Square, which stretches out in front of the namesake Orthodox church—one of the largest in Greece. The square will be on your left. Here, immigrants from the surrounding area (mostly from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq) spend much of their day, and only God (which one, I wonder) knows who among them has papers or how they afford to idle away their days. The police pay them no mind, and one can only guess why. Further along Acharnon Avenue lies the headquarters of the Communist Party, and just beyond begins the African ghetto. Look closely. At the pigeons living on the crumbling balconies of abandoned apartments, at entire deserted apartment buildings with smashed windows and boarded-up entrances that, nonetheless, haven't stopped homeless people from settling somewhere inside in the dark. Look at the walls scrawled with anarchist graffiti. The police recently drove out these self-proclaimed "fighters for all that's good and against all that's bad" from a mid-19th-century architectural monument they had occupied for years, turning it into a drug den. It was later restored into a school thanks to donations from prominent figures in Greek culture. Look and absorb, and if that's not enough, wander the nearby streets: Michail Voda, Kalymnou, Ithakis, 3rd Septemvriou, Pipinou. Then, when you've seen enough, return to Patission Avenue, to the major junction with Alexandra Avenue. From there, along the even-numbered side, walk to the Radisson hotel, located almost opposite the main entrance to the Field of Mars park. Head up to its bar-restaurant, 10 Urban Roof and settle into a soft wicker chair with a fresh cushion at a clean table, bathed in dim, intimate light, with gentle music and the subtle aroma of unostentatious

luxury. Order a buffalo burrata from Kerkini with wild herb cream, grilled octopus, and a glass of Mantineia. As you watch the glow of the sunset on the upper floors of this district, reflect on what you've seen. I won't conclude this text with any reviews: Everyone must reach their own conclusions, especially given that the atmosphere at 10 Urban Roof is perfectly conducive to conversations about culture, history, economics, and social policy.

Leof. Alexandras 10, Athina 106 82

Phone: 21 0889 4550

Hours: Daily 10:30 a.m. – 1:00 a.m.; Restaurant: 7:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.

Cost: 50+€ per person without drinks

To Locali

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This is a quaint little establishment, aspiring to something and, in fairness, largely justifying those aspirations. The food is quite decent, as are the drinks. The music is unremarkable, and it can get a bit noisy in the evenings. Otherwise, I reckon you'll be thoroughly satisfied, far more so than with a visit to, say, the ghastly 360° or MS Roof Garden in Monastiraki.

Sarri 44, Athina 105 53

Phone: 6906103005

Hours: Sunday to Thursday 11:00 p.m. – 2:00 a.m., Friday and Saturday 11:00 p.m. – 3:00 a.m.

Cost: 20€ per person without drinks

The Rooftop Garden Foundry Suites Athens
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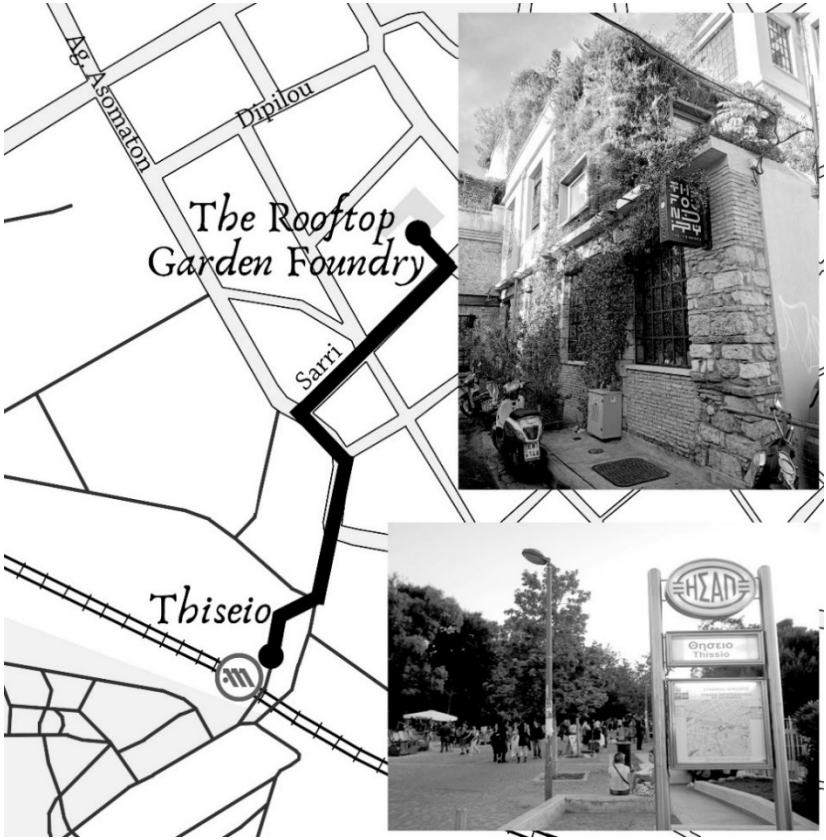

Unlike the vast majority of rooftop bars and restaurants, Foundry Suites Athens, located in the building next to the previous establishment, lets you truly relax in complete peace and quiet while enjoying a splendid view of the old city and, of course, the Acropolis. Any pizza from the homemade oven and any signature cocktail tastes a thousand times better when you're not surrounded by irritating, noisy, jostling, tipsy, fussy, intrusive, ill-mannered, and tiresome people.

Sarri 40, Athina 105 53

Phone: 21 1182 4604

Cost: 20€ per person without drinks

Merlin Café

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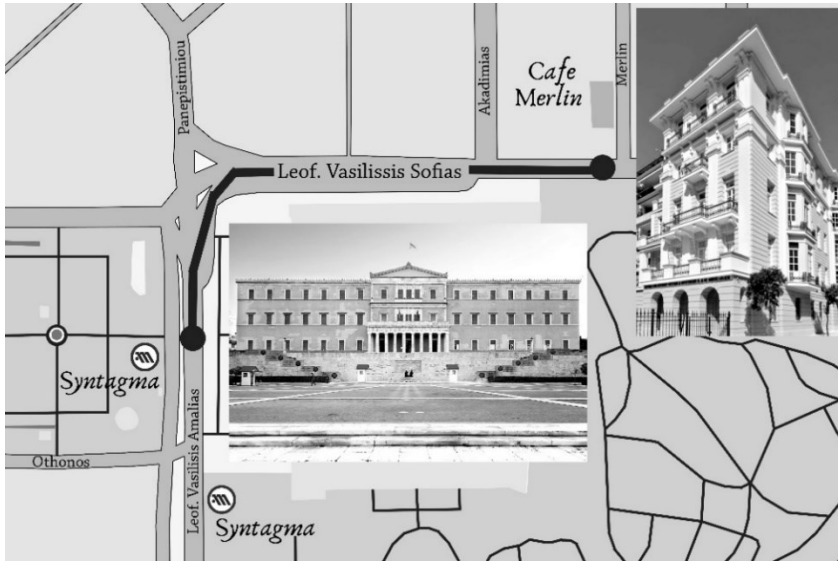


If I were a specialist in contemporary art, sporting pricey glasses with colourful frames, a garish neck scarf, cloying perfume, and a double chin, I'd give long and eloquent interviews to various popular publications right here—in the café on the second floor (first, if counting the Greek way) of the Theocharakis Foundation Gallery. Firstly, the building itself lends itself to lengthy, captivating, yet utterly empty conversations (much like contemporary art): a convincing, almost Parisian Art Deco structure with arches and pilasters, housing a gallery of modern Greek painting and sculpture—a small kingdom of postmodernism, directly opposite the Royal Palace, now occupied by the Greek Parliament. Secondly, the café serves criminally delicious pastries. What more could you need for complete happiness as an established art critic?

9 Vasilissis Sofias Avenue, Merlin 1, Athina 106 71

Phone: 21 03611 731

Hours: Monday to Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Cost: 20€ per person

Little Kook

✠

When I first found myself in the alley overtaken by the Little Kook café, at the intersection of Karaiskaki and Pittaki Streets, I realised I wasn't yet wise, self-sufficient, or seasoned enough by life's experiences to allow myself to sit at one of their tables and order one of their undoubtedly alluring pastries. Nearly seven years have passed since then—seven years filled with reflections on what I'd need to do to take that step. How deep an inner journey must I undertake? Perhaps buy a château in Aquitaine? Win the Booker Prize? Publish a hundred books? Or, at the very least, have a proper double-breasted, tailored suit? Only recently did the right answer dawn on me. All this time, I'd been searching for a sparrow in the sea. My thoroughly rotten soul craved material contentment, but what I truly lacked in order to

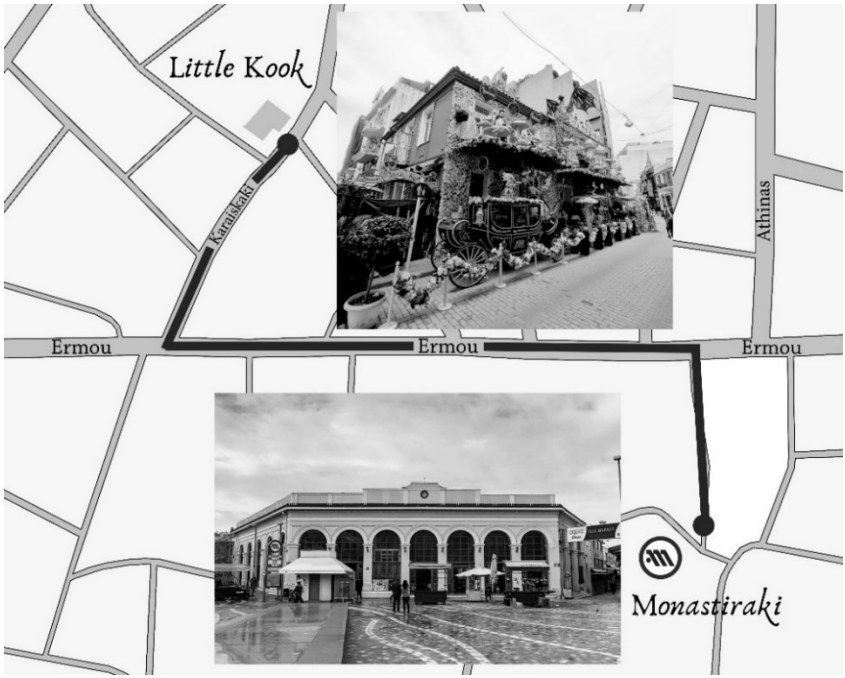
calmly sit at Little Kook and order a strawberry cocktail with whipped cream and a little cherry was children. They, more than anyone, would be utterly enchanted by this café, which occupies three buildings. The entire alley and the space in front of them are decorated according to the season and its associated holiday. At Christmas, the whole street is draped in garlands and tinsel, with giant Santa Clauses, reindeer, and snowmen on every corner, oversized lollipops hanging from ropes stretched between buildings, and waiters in green elf costumes weaving through crowds of tourists—resilient as the vanguard of a Scottish Highland regiment—while carrying trays laden with lavish desserts. The onlookers marvel at this electric splendour solely through their smartphone screens. A similar spectacle unfolds here before Halloween, on Valentine's Day, and during all other purely commercial festivities. I'm neither a husband nor a father yet and thus can't offer guarantees from personal experience. However, I can confidently state that, based on my subjective observations, if you're visiting Athens with children under 16, Little Kook must be on your itinerary (which, of course, you'll plan using my brilliant Athens guidebook).

Karaiskaki 17, Athina 105 54

Phone: 21 0321 4144

Hours: Friday and Sunday 9:00 a.m. – 12:30 a.m., Monday to Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.

Cost: 10€ – 15€ per person



Bougatsadiko Psirri

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"If you ask an old Constantinopolitan, 'How do I get to such-and-such street?' no matter the answer or their location, they'll look around in surprise, turn their head left, then right, and only then respond." So were the typical Constantinopolitan Greeks (native residents of the city known since 1930 as Istanbul) portrayed in perhaps the last truly good Greek film, "A Touch of Spice" (2003), directed by Tassos Boulmetis. It's a story imbued not so much with pain as with a lingering sensation like a faint tingling deep within when you press on an old burn scar—a story about how Constantinopolitan Greeks lost their homeland and how late we might realise that we forgot to add a touch of spice to our lives.

These thoughts have often visited me here at Bougatsadiko Psirri. The place has, for many years, baked the most delicious bougatsa (puff pastry tubes or "envelopes" with various fillings) in Athens following Thessalonian (read: Constantinopolitan, as Thessaloniki was the primary destination for Greek refugees from Asia Minor) recipes. It also served the city's finest salepi, a traditional invigorating and warming drink made from orchid root and known for its aphrodisiac properties.

Of this café, I can say one thing with certainty: When many years have passed, and if, God willing, both I and this bakery are still alive and thriving, I'll return here. Sitting on a Viennese chair at a marble table, I'll order that very Constantinopolitan-Thessalonian bougatsa with minced meat and a cup of salepi. Their taste will make my heart ache—for it will remain the only thing in this city that time has spared. And it will remind me of all the good and all the evil I've experienced here. Everything will feel vivid again, as it did on the first day.

Pl. Iroon 1, Athina 105 54
Phone: 21 0322 2088
Opening hours: Monday – Sunday 7:00 AM – 12:00 AM
Cost: 5-10 euros per person

Krinos

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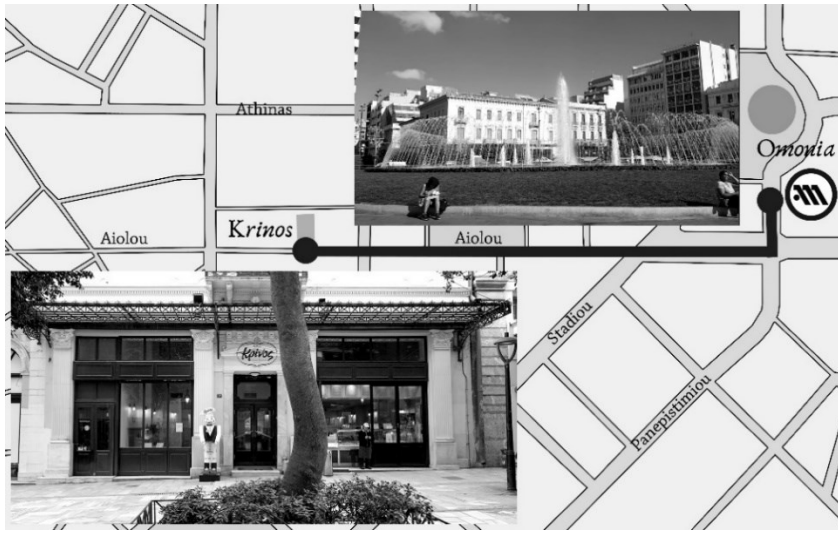

In 1837, just five years after the establishment of the Greek state, the Athens municipality granted Mr. Krinos a licence to open a pharmacy in a new building on Aiolou Street, which at the time ended not at Omonia Square but, instead, at a barren, rocky wasteland, unbuilt and unclaimed. Yes, back then, this was the city's outskirts, and the Krinos family pharmacy—likely the first official pharmacy in Athens—operated until the early 20th century. Today, documents related to it (mind you, the originals) hang in simple frames on the right side of the main hall, in a small nook with three tables. In 1923, the pharmacy's premises were purchased by a refugee from the city of Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey) named Minas Kasimatis—one of tens of thousands of native Greeks from that once-prosperous port city, stripped of everything overnight and, only by the grace of God, spared from the massacre that Mustafa Kemal's troops perpetrated. Having been a confectioner back in his homeland, Mr. Kasimatis decided to continue his trade in his new homeland. He introduced Athenians to perhaps the most "Smyrnan" of all desserts: deep-fried doughnuts served with honey, cinnamon, and, if desired, thick

ice cream. These treats are called “loukoumades,” and for over a century, they have been both the hallmark of the Krinos café and, if you will, the delicate gastronomic thread connecting generations of native Athenians (many of whom trace their roots to Smyrna’s refugees). The particular magic of this place lies in the fact that, over these hundred-plus years, nothing has changed: the same chairs, the same tables, the same time-honoured recipes, the same wall colour, the same self-service system, and, of course, the absence of music. After all, in 1923, there were no sound systems, and this isn’t a tavern to invite singers or musicians.

“The day Krinos closes, Athens will fall,” an elderly Greek acquaintance once told me. He was first brought to this café by his grandmother when he was barely four years old. That says it all.

Aiolou 87, Athina 105 51
Phone: 21 0321 6852
Opening hours: Monday, Wednesday, Saturday 7.00 AM - 5.00 PM, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 7.00 AM - 9.00 PM
Cost: 1 - 5 euros per person

SOKOLATA 56

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Perhaps due to my fondness for looking down on people, or an even greater love for silence and solitude, I fell head over heels for this small, inconspicuous café, impossible to find without a guide, where, as it turns out, they serve the finest hot chocolate in Athens. The secret is simple: a bar of the highest-quality chocolate melted down, love, and a small, homey kitchen. Thick, dark, bitter, with chili, with orange, with vanilla—it’s easier to say which kind of chocolate they don’t have. However, the true charm lies not so much in its flavour as in the sense of complete seclusion. The café is tucked away deep within a passage, its entrance on a narrow street linking Ermou with the square in front

of the old Parliament building—a building within a building. Could there be a better place to hide from the world?

Voulis 7, Athina 105 62
Phone: 21 0322 9919
Opening hours: Monday - Saturday 10:00 AM - 9.00 PM, Sunday 12.00 PM - 8.00 PM
Cost: 5 - 10 euros per person

Bars

Brettos Bar

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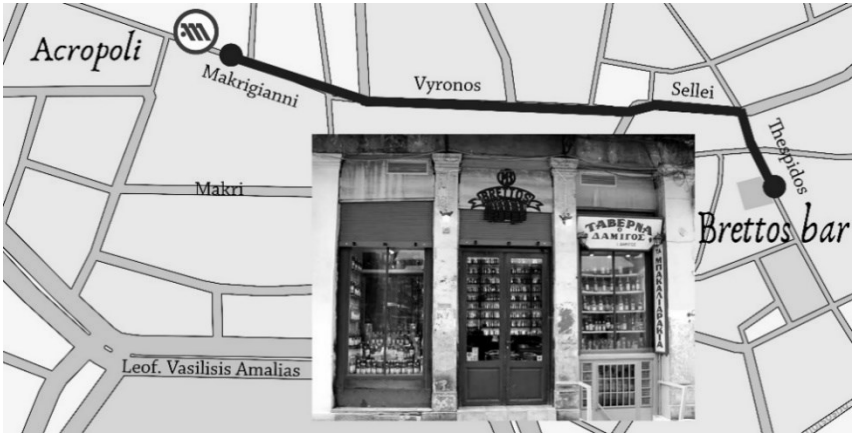

I wrote extensively about this bar in my Athens guidebook, so I'll try not to repeat myself here.

Mr. Vrettos, the founder of this bar, which was the first drinking establishment of its kind in the city, left his hometown of Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey)—also the birthplace of Adamantios Korais, the father of literary Greek, and Aristotle Onassis, the most famous Greek billionaire—in the early 20th century. Mr. Vrettos was a fortunate man and did not witness the destruction of his city in Turkish flames. Here, on Kidathenaeon Street, he opened his first distillery, where he produced traditional Smyrnan liqueurs made from orange, kumquat, pear, apple, mastic, bergamot, melon, watermelon, and dozens of other extraordinary ingredients. From that time to this day, his countless recipes have been carefully preserved, and the bar thrives without any need for George or his guidebooks. However, as is well known, George Esperidis Bezborodko wishes only the best for his reader. That is why he lists the Brettos Bar first in his guide, awarding it, without a shred of doubt, four Hospitaller crosses. However, be cautious, my dear

enthusiast of exotic liqueurs: There isn't much space in this bar, so it's best to visit on weekdays and no later than six in the evening for the finest digestif in Athens.

Kidathineon 41, Athina 105 58
Phone: 21 0323 2110
Opening hours: Monday - Sunday 10:00 AM – 2:00 AM
Cost: 10 - 15 euros per person

Galaxy Bar

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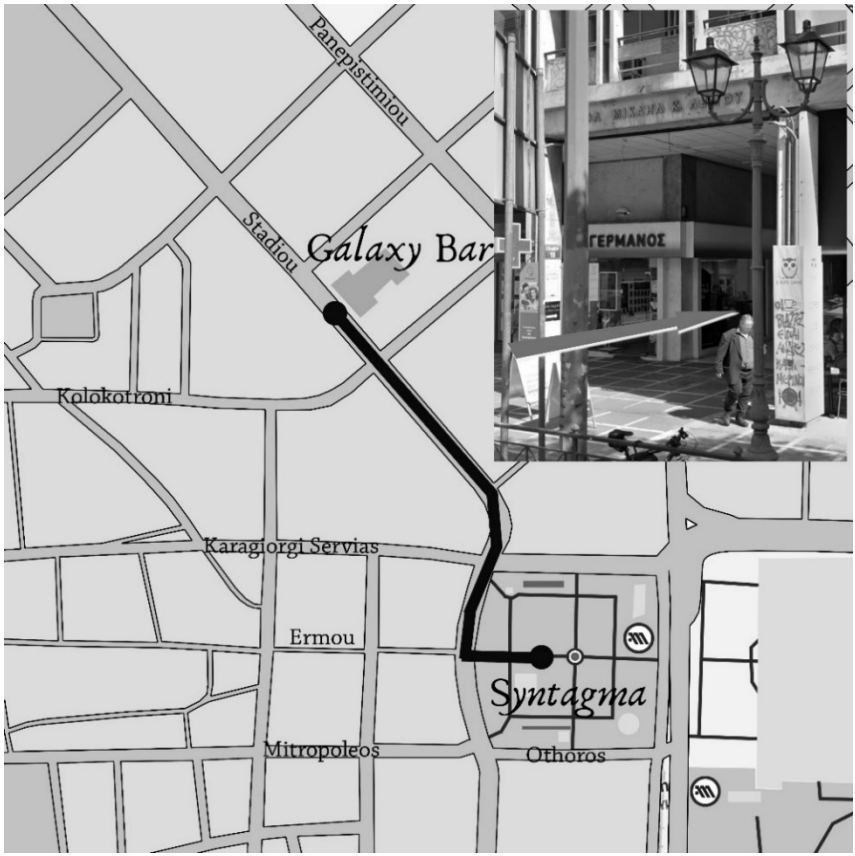
It was around eight in the evening. I had no desire to go home, nor any reason to, and continuing to do anything that day was impossible. The day had crushed me. No, not the day—the week. No, not the week. The entire month had run over me like a lorry. I thought it would end after three sets of wheels, but there was still a trailer ahead. It was raining, and I huddled in my coat. Passing by one of the many unremarkable passages on Stadiou Street, I recalled Galaxy Bar, which a friend—the greatest "barologist" I know—had told me about not long before.

There were hardly any people inside. The light from lamps placed in the corners was just right: perfect for the music and the weather. Old doors, photos on the walls, a worn bar counter—with a pedigree. It was the ideal place and the perfect time for a glass of Scotch whisky. Then I remembered that I don't drink. And I never break my rules, no matter the circumstances. Though resisting in this place was nearly impossible, for over fifty years, Galaxy Bar has been where Athens' greatest connoisseurs of drinking aesthetics—true gourmets of the world of masculine alcohol, the most discerning cocktail aficionados, and simply people who could

probably have found common ground with Serge Gainsbourg—have been earning their liver cirrhosis.



Stadiou 10, Athina 105 62
Phone: 21 0322 7733
Opening hours: Monday - Sunday 5:00 PM – 2:00 AM
Cost: 10 - 15 euros per person

Intriga

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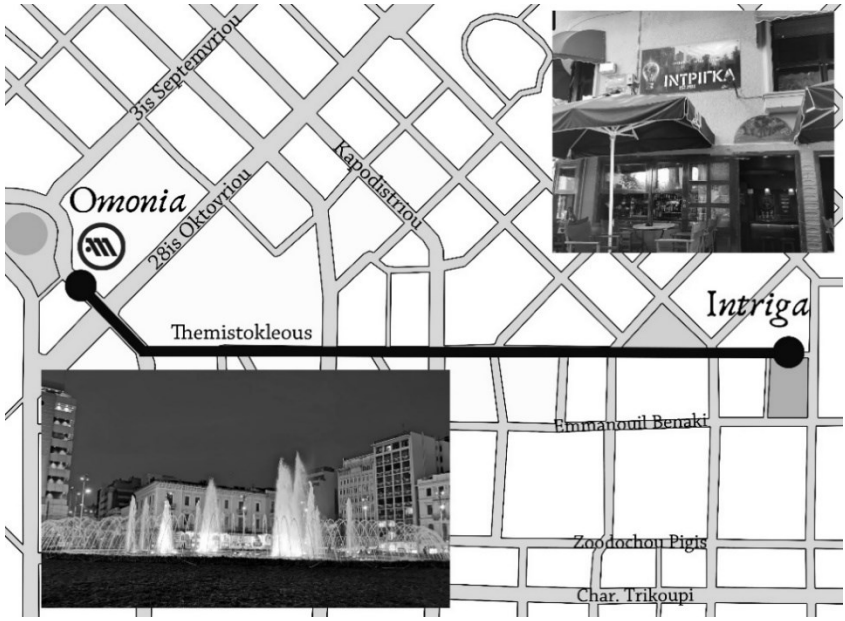

As a sensible person and a lover of cleanliness and order, I've always had mixed feelings about the Exarchia district. For many years, it was the main haunt of anarchists, drug dealers, prostitutes, homeless people, Marxists, and others who believe that, by foregoing personal hygiene and contraception, they're fighting an unjust and inhumane system. On the one hand, the streets of this part of the city—where even the police avoided venturing for years—were physically unpleasant to be in; they made you want to rush home and take a hot bath. On the other hand, only in Exarchia's bars could you find an authentic, sincere, and utterly raw spirit of wild, almost primal freedom. At least, that was how it seemed to me in my increasingly distant student youth.

I have a rather amusing story connected to Intriga, one of the oldest bars—and perhaps the only truly iconic one—in Exarchia. One evening, while sitting at the bar counter, I struck up a casual, easy

conversation with the female bartender. At some point, she inevitably asked what I did.

“I’m studying art history at the University of Athens,” I replied candidly, perhaps with a hint of pride.

“Really?!” she exclaimed, slamming her hand on the counter like Khrushchev at the UN. “I graduated from your faculty three years ago!”

Indeed, she turned out to be a qualified specialist in the Italian Renaissance, and her colleague, a waiter, was a graduate of the archaeology department. Later, it emerged that almost none of her former classmates had found work in their field. Among them were bartenders, waiters, tattoo artists, food delivery workers, electricians, and plumbers. Only one, who had specialised in modern Greek history, had become a schoolteacher, earning only slightly more than my new acquaintance behind the bar. That evening, serious doubts about the wisdom of my chosen path crept into your humble servant’s mind. Now, years later, he shares this story with you—unprompted and likely unexpected in what is arguably the finest guide to Athens’ taverns, restaurants, bars, and cafés.

Today, Exarchia has transformed from a haven for outcasts into a tourist attraction—a place where, out of habit, a handful of people with piercings in their eyebrows and ripped tights still linger among the Friday-night office workers and lawyers reeking of expensive perfume, perhaps genuinely enjoying death metal. However, Intriga hasn’t suffered for it. Quite the contrary. Would anyone consider it a downside that the square in front of the bar, once populated by comatose seekers of transcendental states, is now patrolled by police?

Dervenion 60, Athina 106 81
Phone: 21 0330 0936
Opening hours: Monday - Sunday 10:00 AM – 3:00 AM

Cost: 5 - 10 euros per person

Beertime

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This bar is particularly dear to me because it's where I'd usually meet one of my wonderful friends whenever he returned "from the season." This phenomenon, by the way, is quite common. "Going on the season" means heading to the Greek islands for work. Regardless of your education or preferences, as a resident of Greece, you need money—if only to cover rent, bills, and taxes, and, ideally, to eat occasionally. Unable to find work in Athens that meets all these needs, you take a job at

a hotel on an island, working, at best, six days a week for 1100–1200 euros a month (with the average rent for an apartment in Athens at 550 euros) throughout the six-month tourist season. Fully supported by your employer, you return home in November with a small sum of savings, enough to get by until February (assuming the rent doesn't go up again). But I digress.

Here, in this bar, you can sample beer from every (or nearly every) corner of Greece: major breweries with storied histories, tiny, recently opened microbreweries crafting unusual IPAs, classic "Mythos" and "Mamos," and quirky strawberry or spiced beers from Rhodes and Crete—all listed in the extensive menu of Beertime in the Psyrri district, one of the most significant tourist areas in the Greek capital. Just 120 years ago, this was Athens' equivalent of Whitechapel. Yes, much like Exarchia until recently, in the mid-to-late 19th century, Psyrri's narrow, winding streets, their cobblestones barely visible under layers of grime, and the leaning walls of local slums could have been the last sight you saw in your earthly life. The district was ruled by fear and total control by gangs of Roma, Albanian, and Greek origin. They held sway over this part of the city until 1893, when the head of the Athens gendarmerie, Dimitrios Bairaktaris, organised several major raids on Psyrri, arresting nearly all members of the local gangs and establishing around-the-clock control over these dark and gloomy streets. Since then, it's been perfectly safe and pleasant to be here, especially when there's something to sip in your glass and a bite to eat on your plate. Isn't that the true essence of bliss?

Pl. Iroon 1, Athina 105 54
Phone: 21 0322 8443
Opening hours: Monday - Sunday 5:00 PM – 1:00 AM
Cost: 5 - 15 euros per person

Afterword

Athens is an ancient, weary, sleepy city—worn out by crises, wars, and natural disasters. However, despite all this, it retains a certain magical charm. You will surely feel it somewhere on the narrow, winding streets of Plaka, or sense its gentle touch along with the wind on the summit of Lycabettus, or hear it buzzing with the chatter of shopkeepers on the bustling shopping streets. This city shrouds itself from those who arrive here thoughtlessly, but before those willing to listen to the quiet voice of its dusty ruins, it unfolds in all its ancient elegance. I want to believe my travel guide has helped you discover Athens in such a way that, upon returning home, when your acquaintances ask about your trip, you will reply, "It's a city with a soul." Indeed, it truly has one, and it is precisely to you travellers that—much more than any local resident—is given the ability to see and live through the 4,000-year history of Athens in just a few days. Isn't that the real magic?

See you on the next journey.
Yours sincerely,
George Esperidis Bezborodko.

P.S.: Dear Traveler, thank you so much for purchasing my book! If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me via email:

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georgeesperidis@gmail.com