

Athens

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle**

Band (Jahr): **33 (1965)**

Heft 6

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-569603>

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ATHENS

as seen by Kim Kent

If you have never visited Greece before, this article will tell you all there is for a homosexual tourist to know in this delightful city where—though it doesn't boast of TV—men behave in the way we expect them to: a country where sex is not only taught in school but plays an important part in every-day life. In short—just follow Kim Kent on a round trip through Athens and you will learn all that is there to learn.

It is not at all by chance that the Greek word «xenos» means foreigner as well as well-received guest. In Greece every foreigner is a welcome guest, and there is no other country in Europe where one will meet with such a hearty welcome. In spite of the countless charter planes arriving in Athens night and day the city has as yet not commercialized her welcome, nor has she lost her natural warmth and kindness. Naturally Athens has also followed the trend of the times, and within recent years noisy juke boxes, American strip-tease and brilliant neonlights have changed the features of the city. But in the quiet side streets the old Greek spirit is still alive and where the neon-lights cannot infiltrate, the old patriarchic society, full of traditions, is still as lively as ever. Greece is more than any other European country a man's country: woman plays here only the modest part of bearing children and caring for the house. At night she has to stay at home while the men go out by themselves. And since the Greeks spend two thirds of their lives outdoors one sees, as a tourist, only four to five women to twenty-five men.

And *what* men they are . . . The two centrally located squares of Athens, Omonia and Syntagma, and the streets connecting them are swarming with men except for a couple of hours late at night. Athens is without doubt the city with the most handsome men in the world, and it is understandable that many tourists feel themselves transported into the seventh heaven of their sex-dreams.

It is also understandable that one forgets to visit the Acropolis or the Poseidon Temple at Cape Sunion when one has finally reached Athens—the delight in the sight of Greek men is so overwhelming that for that reason alone one stays at least a fortnight in Athens. During the first week one can strike up an acquaintance with modern (incidentally very lively) Greece: during the second week one can stagger exhaustedly from one famous historical monument to the other—provided one has managed somehow to survive the first week. However, it must be admitted here that these marvellous male creatures resemble very frequently the fruit in Aladdin's Cave, they look gorgeous but have no taste at all, and many of them are actually unpalatable. And certainly amongst the most handsome ones are sometimes those who are as glassy and rigid as Aladdin's fruit. Naturally they are willing to offer themselves to a homophile tourist and be of service to him erotically but the value of this readiness remains problematical if and when one is used to having at home something more than the mutual masturbation of long-past boy scout days. Sexual enlightenment isn't over-developed in Greece, and even the Greek, ready for sexual experimentation, often remains a prisoner of old prejudices. Homophile Greeks are very passive, and

it can be rightly assumed that the best-looking men are also the most passive ones. You will also have to make a decision whether you want a Greek friend with an exceptional good-looking exterior, or long for one impressively ready for anything. Nothing in the whole world can be more passive than a passive Greek—but—to level up—an active Greek will barely give you time to draw breath. For this reason we'll deal in this article not with the beautiful and half-dead Greeks but take a view of the less handsome ones. They deserve this consideration because they are, to the utmost, lively partners and good friends.

The countless taverns of Athens permit the tourist the gratification of even his most unusual tastes. Here you will find elegant bars with an international air, where well-dressed Greeks offer themselves to the admiring stares of the foreigner, their little fingers are crooked as they talk, and in the background is the well-tuned cocktail piano. In such places you will find what I'm tempted to call «English Sex»: chlorophyll-smelling distinction, elegance, well covered by cotton wool—and in such surroundings one avoids the possibility of any disagreeable surprises later on in bed. But if you are a Lucullus and aren't satisfied by such well-reglemented eroticism, including directions for use and agreements in advance—then you'd better visit the smaller taverns, where there are not even table-cloths nor any shrill itinerary-killing neon lights on the ceiling. In Athens all possibilities are possible, and a list of gay bars is really superfluous. The Greeks don't divide their sexual yearnings so strictly. For the Greek it doesn't matter greatly whether the object of his sex is a man or a woman—all he is interested in is whether or not he has a good time. Chances are everywhere, and a look alone is often enough to make contact. Whether you are young or old is of secondary importance—important is only that your eyes promise a genuine experience. And if you belong to those men able to let another man know by a single look that Athens is all yours—then you need only take what you like best. Everywhere admiring looks from coal-black eyes will follow you if you are suspected of exceptional virility, and these looks by young Greeks will nearly denude you.

If, however, you belong to the quiet, modest types whom I call—not too respectfully, I'm afraid—«potato-sacks» (they stretch out dead and passive like a sackful of potatoes and expect that everything will be given to them as a present without their having to move a single finger)—it may be difficult for you to meet someone. In no event must you sit there, with shy downcast eyes and wait until a 'wild' Greek falls upon you: because that is the one thing he will not do. Repressions beget repressions, even in Athens, and you will not get anything for which you have not paid. In case you want to experience the hot Greek nights (hot in a two-fold sense) you'd better leave your repressions at home. With regard to the age of your partner you will also have, willingly or unwillingly, to compromise. I'm sure you're acquainted with the fact from back home that a too young man lacks sexual fantasy or enterprise. The more delicate dealings, the 'raffinesse' of sexual intercourse, comes with age: and especially in Greece you will meet with this long established truth. To put it frankly: if you're an old customer in the haberdashery department, you must be ready to do all the work yourself, and if you

dream of at 17 or 18 year old Greek carrying an automatic steam hammer within himself—well, in that case you'd better stay at home and save yourself a disappointment.

Such steam hammers you will find only in the age groups around 25 and above. That's true of the whole world, not only Greece.

Though Athens hasn't got what we'd call a real homophile bar, the city is full of large and small green spaces where day in, day out there is a lively traffic in both sexes. But this doesn't mean that you will meet here only virile men. In Athens there are also a large number of feminine homophiles, and a considerable number of them are transvestites.

And where should you go when it is closing time in the taverns? Try the Kolonaki Square, only five blocks away from the Syntagma. Take a seat on a bench in the little park of the square. Perhaps your buttocks will get corns from the hard uncomfortable benches but you will see a considerable number of men strolling around. After the day's heat one enjoys the night's coolness—and over the roofs of the houses rises the Kykaritos mountain, flood-lit at night and on its summit the little Agios Georgas monastery. The view of the illuminated mountain-monastery over the corniced roofs is so beautiful and full of «Stimmung» that one becomes quite pious and devout if any one sits long enough in this small park.

If you haven't found on Kolonaki Square what you were looking for, just walk down Kanavis- and Academy Streets, past the university, to the small greenery lying at the end of the short street connecting with Stadion Street. This is Klafthmonos Square and consists of a number of trees and bushes grouped around the most hideous sculpture in the world. Here too, day and night, life flows vividly. You'll see a great number of handsome young sailors, hurrying past. But don't fall into the error of thinking that these sailors can be had for money, they're only on their way back to the barracks which happen to be situated at one end of the square. It's no use trying to talk to them, but no-one can deny you the right to sit there and enjoy the sight of them. All the same, some homophile or other usually seems to have been lucky. Near that square is a W.C., commonly called «Sailors' Hunting Lodge». In this important building, however, it is so dark that you can easily get something other than the handsome young sailor you were hankering after. The uniform of the Greek sailors is wash-powder white and can be detected even in the dark, but to give truth its due it must be mentioned here that the contents—similar to wash-powder—don't always conform to the beautiful outside packing. Let me be even more explicit and say that this is very like tooth-paste packets. You buy an over-large one, on which is printed GIANT SIZE, and when you open it you find only a small specimen tube, rattling anxiously in a corner.

Among the parks with a lively night traffic the Pedion Areos should be mentioned. You can reach it by a fifteen minutes' walk from the Omonia Square. Inside the park they have put up dreadful blue lamps which involuntarily remind you of American horror movies. The Pedion Areos Park serves as a *pièd à terre* for heterosexual couples—young people who have no place of their own. So be understanding if you happen to witness some such intercourse. It isn't very pleasant when a young man has found a nice and willing girl and hasn't got a place to go to, where

he can lead her to her natural rôle. In such cases the Pedion Areos Park fulfils an important social function and explains the already high birth-rates. But in this park you will naturally find as many homo couples as there are hetero ones mating in a similar way—and both sides show a good deal of tolerance towards each other.

It should be mentioned here that the Athenian authorities are no longer as lenient towards the park-traffic as they used to be years ago. In some parks blinding neon lights have been put up, for instance around the ruins of the Olympieion. There night-traffic used to be formerly so lively that—judging by what trustworthy witnesses report—the poor old columns with their chapiters shook from dusk right into morning. So they decided to fill the whole locality with flood lights. Should you find certain kinds of sport especially interesting if indulged within sight of temple ruins, you'll have to take flood lights into consideration as well.

But, of course, there are places other than the parks to enjoy yourself. Athens has a large number of bars, even if they are not strictly what we'd call «gay» bars. Only one of them—the CAPRI, Nikiassstr. 14/b near the Syntagma Square) is known as a meeting place for homophiles. Here the cosmopolitan tourists meet each other and hold well-conducted conversations about the wind and the weather (to mention any part of the anatomy below the waistline is taboo). It is of high importance to them to ask the barman to put a slice of lemon in their glass of Apollinaris to make it look as though they were drinking gin with tonic. Here, at the CAPRI, everything is super-elegant, exclusive—and unspeakably boring for all those who do not suffer from cultural neurosis. The walls and the ceiling are covered with imitation leather (quite by chance, since the leather mania hasn't reached Greece so far). The guests are well-to-do tourists who, with lifted eyebrows, make their cultural interests known. They smell from all pores of after-shave-lotion, and they discuss the latest novel by Truman Capote and the ideas of Vance Packard on the mental rape of mankind by propaganda. But if you don't care tuppence about either Capote or Packard and if you prefer rough and ready surroundings the CAPRI isn't your cup of tea at all.

Mention should be made here of the ARCHONDIKON at Stadionstr. 7. It is situated under an arcade and consists of two parts. Left of the entrance is an excellent restaurant with French and Greek cuisine. On the right is a bar. It is a very comfortable and amusing bar where one can meet homophiles from all over the world. The ARCHONDIKON serves you a really good dinner with suitable Kampa, one of the Greek wines, either white or red. Everything is reasonable in price and is excellently cooked.

In Plaka, the oldest part of Athens, half the streets consist of stairs. At the end of nearly all these streets you can see at night the flood-lit Acropolis—and here you will find a succession of taverns next to each other. In homophile circles the «Nine Muses» in Lysiousstreet are especially appreciated. The guests there will put you in mind of a bohemian type of meeting place, the kind you find in the Schwabing part of Munich. Young men, interested in the arts or trying to make a living out of them, meet the foreigners and tell them of novels and collected poems which will never see print, or of paintings never to be painted. The

«Nine Muses» have several rooms but it is best to sit on the open terrace. From there you get a lovely view of Athens. Wine is rather expensive at this place and you'd better take a look at the prices before ordering: but the view will compensate you sufficiently. You'll have to order something to eat there, something quite nominal to enable you to order a bottle of wine.

Most of the Athenian bars aren't bars at all but a type of cafeteria where you can sit on the pavement in front and enjoy the mild air of the early evening—in the company of your cup of coffee and the incredibly sweet things that pass here as pastries. Handsome Greeks pass along and one notices many admiring glances. At the corner of Syntagma and Ermou is situated the cafeteria Papaspyrou which is distinguished by the most impudent and the slowest service in the world: but it is ideally situated and the coffee is good, and it's always crowded. You may also cross over into the greenery of the square where you will find the City Restaurant. There you will see any amount of hustlers who, judging by what reliable witnesses tell, are not wholly trustworthy. A well-known English writer whom I met by chance at Delphoi told me of a tall, extremely handsome and well-dressed boy whom he had met at the Syntagma Square and taken back to his hotel room. The pleasure turned out to be very expensive, he lost his wrist watch, his wedding ring and his wallet containing some 400 dollars. Bitterly the man added, «And all he did was steal these things—nothing else happened.» But let it be admitted here that—apart from the Syntagma hustlers—honesty is one of the foremost characteristics of the Greeks. On my visits to Athens and on two trips all over the country I have never been cheated once, not even for half a Drachma. Only in Italy can it happen that the cream of your coffee and the gold from your teeth will be stolen. And it's only in Rome where you can bore yourself into oblivion.

Granted that Greek men are tall, strong and wild I trust you will not spend your entire Grecian holiday by lying under stormy lovers, thereby destroying good Athenian hotel beds. Athens offers so many entertainments, and when you are as satiated with Greek men as the apprentice in a sweet shop is with pastries you might for a change visit the National Museum in Patissionstreet. There you can admire all the marvellous riches from Greece's great past: especial mention should be made here of the mysterious gold masks of the Mycene epoch which can bewitch you for hours. And if you have a little imagination and understanding you can take a walk on a Sunday afternoon—better not during the height of the tourist season—to the ruins of Hadrian's Library at Plaka. Only rarely tourists find their way there and if you're lucky you'll sit by yourself in those two thousand year old ruins and be able to forget the times in which we are living. You may also cross the street and look at the octagonal Tower of the Winds where the reliefs show the winds in human shape. And if you don't belong to the category of people caring much for ruins («Lawd, all is kaputt here», a disappointed American once said) you will find just across from the Tower of the Winds a tavern where you can drink a glass of excellent Retsina wine and look at the relics of the past without exerting yourself. But, even if you don't care at all for ruins, the Poseidon Temple at Cape Sunion is definitely a 'must'.

It was built in the 5th century b.c. and is situated on a high steep cliff, surrounded on three sides by water. A sunset over the Aegean sea, watched through the columns of the temple will remain in our memory for years. Again and again you will recall the ruins of this temple and the slow change of colours when the sun is setting, from white to yellowish orange, from purple to lilac until finally all is covered by the velvety blue-black of the night. And during the night the white columns of the temple radiate eerily like a huge marble lost by some god and forgotten for countless centuries.

From Athens to the Poseidon Temple at Sunion is only 70 kilometers and, though two American travelling offices (Chat Tours and Key Tours) maintain a yearly bus service to Sunion, you can easily afford going by taxi. Taxis in Greece cost only one third of what we're used to at home. Athens is swarming with taxis, only half of them having taximeters—and most of them broken anyway. Therefore it's advisable, as most Greeks do, to ask for the price of the fare in advance. For some inexplicable reason there are only two kinds of taxi-drivers in Athens. Either old men who look at you as though they'll die any moment of old age; or young, unbelievably handsome young men driving large American cars. Arrange a sight-seeing tour along the coast with such a young man and you will have a black-haired muscular boy at the wheel—and a grand view from the window in case these muscles don't come up to your expectations.

Food in Greece is something of a small problem, for the menus consist as a rule of mutton which is served in 117 different ways. The taste however is everywhere equally suspect and it smells even worse than it tastes. But there are a few restaurants with French cuisine where you can walk into the kitchen and lift the lids of the pots to see what's boiling there. The restaurant Flora at University Street is—judged by Greek standards—horribly expensive—but for middle-european standards quite manageable. Here you will get the most delicious shrimp cocktail in the world for 15 Drachmas (slightly more than 50 cents), served to you as though you were royalty. (In Greece you get the idea that waiters are there for the sake of the patrons—not the other way round as is often the case in northern regions.) You might also try the speciality of the Floca—an Athenian fish menu, served cold with mayonnaise. Right next to the Floca is the Restaurant Zonar where you can get an equally exclusive menu at a reasonable price. «Bill and Jack» in Stadionstreet, near the Omonia, is the only Greek restaurant to offer grilled poultry, very modernly roasted on an infra grill and served with American barbecue sauce. You can eat there to your heart's delight, and the whole dinner will cost you no more than appr. two dollars.

Apart from your air-ticket, your holiday in Greece will burden your wallet less than a holiday in Northern Europe. Clothing and shoes etc. are as dear in Greece as everywhere else but food and accomodation cost considerably less. At the cost of middle-class living in any other country you can afford a luxury life in Athens. Granted, prices are rising in Greece fairly rapidly but you can still obtain an excellent hotel room including breakfast for 60 Drachmas, appr. \$ 2.50. To balance matters, you will have to tip in restaurants more heavily than you might be used to doing at home.

Maybe the beauty of the Greeks will play havoc with all your holiday plans. But whatever happens, you should spend at least one free evening, even if only for a change from so much erotic consumption, and best at full moon, to take a taxi to the Pnyx mountain, south of the Acropolis. Let your taxi driver drive you right to the summit of the Pnyx. Then you will find the whole of Athens spread out beneath your feet. As far as you can see the lights are glittering, as millions of dots. And right in the middle of it all rises the Acropolis mountain with the Parthenon lit by flood lights. Standing there like this I think you will agree with what I'd like to say finally:

Even if Athens should be cleaned by vacuum cleaners of all good-looking young men, even if everything were twice as expensive as it is at home, and even if you damned the rest of your holiday as a fiasco—this view of nightly Athens is so indescribably beautiful that it alone will have been worth the whole trip.

(This is an abbreviated version of two articles which appeared first in German in two issues of «amigo» and which have been translated by kind permission of the author.)

Translated by Ralph Forbes

SONNET

I give this world of water, earth and air,
Seas, mountains and the starry steeps of sky,
Wind, sun and rain and all things strong and fair:
All laughter and all loving fore and by.
The lightest touch of tenderness, the wide
Surge of this passion that must kiss and keep;
The perfect moment on a turning tide
That bears spent lovers to the bourne of sleep.

And I am grieved I cannot give you more—
Were I as rich as Croesus, still no gift
Eagerly given from his golden store
Could ever match your largess when you lift
Your head to look at me in sweet askance . . .
My heart bursts like a bubble, at your glance.

by JIM RAMP