

Observations on Greece in 1972

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I am dictating from notes some impressions on Greece this year, for friends and relations as well as for my own record. We made a four weeks tour from May 11 to June 8, which was thoroughly enjoyable. In addition to three 4-5 day stopovers in Athens, the tour included:

- 1) Drive-it-yourself trip (730 kms. in 2½ days) from Athens to Salonica with Mr. and Mrs. Hadjinicolau. There were stops at Thermopylae, Lamia, Ipati, Kalambaka (Metocra), Platymon on the coast, and Pella, ancient capital of Alexander, en route to Salonica.
- 2) A 5-day island cruise (s.s. Orpheus) to Delos, Mykonos, Crete (Knossos), Rhodes and Lindos, Ephesus in Asia Minor, and Patmos, and
- 3) A 4-day bus tour in the Peloponnesos - Corinth, Mycaene, Epidaurous, Sparta (Mistra), Olympia, and ferrying across the gulf to Delphi.

As for our Greek background, most of you know that the Balfours lived and worked in Greece from 1930 to 1939 and since then have visited Greece almost every year up to 1965. Seven years have elapsed since our last visit.

General developments.

The economic development of Greece has been remarkable and the present economic growth rate is reportedly 6-8 per cent. There is new building everywhere. A system of national roads begun under the previous government (Karamanlis) has continued under the present regime and the small rural roads are improving. Industrial development is noteworthy as observed in Athens-Piraeus, Salonica, and Patras. As an example, the road from Athens to Marathon, which was a small country road passing through two villages, has now 20-25 small industrial plants along a 25-mile widened highway. It is said that now 97 per cent of the Greek villages have electricity. Tourism has certainly become a major economic asset. In 1971 there were 2.1 million tourist visitors and more are expected in 1972. In 1967 the figure was 300,000 tourists. To encourage tourism there has been a great multiplication of hotels and other facilities.

The Government. I was particularly interested to form an independent opinion about the current government of the Colonels. Certainly there are divided opinions on the question of the efficacy and acceptance of the military regime. Cautiously one can explore local opinion and obtain a variety of judgments. For example, one professor and former colleague - "the best government Greece has ever had". Most of our contacts accept the benefits from the booming economy and improved levels of living, especially the rural population, and offer no criticism. Another professor remarked that general conditions

are better, though not much democracy is left. Many intellectuals and former liberals - mostly those whose livelihood does not depend on the national economy - are critical and restive about the absence of parliamentary democracy. My conclusion is that for five years Greece has had what I call a benevolent dictatorship, which the majority of the people accept. One might cite other examples of benevolent dictatorship, such as for certain periods in South Korea, the National Government of Taiwan, Pakistan, and to a less extent Burma. The rantings of the U.S. media, especially the New York Times, against the current government, do not help matters. The U.S. policy toward Greece is simply determined by the fact that we need Greece as a NATO partner. In general I would agree with C. W. Yost, who wrote in the Christian Science Monitor, July 6, 1972: "Business is booming, standards of living are rising. Most of the people are economically satisfied and politically apathetic. The old privileged class is being succeeded by a new and larger one coming mostly from the countryside - the officer corps and their business protégés. They may not be particularly astute, but for the moment the Greeks are tired of political astuteness. This situation may last for some time, but it will not last forever. The Greek is a political animal who sooner or later will grow bored with his exclusion from politics. The present silence is unnatural. The colonels will eventually have to adapt or quit. Such changes, however, should be exclusively the business of Greeks, not of Americans or other outsiders."

There is government control of prices: effective control of prices, at least in hotels and restaurants. The hotels are classified as A, B, and C. In our Class B hotel the twin bedroom price was 285 drachmas, or 320 dr. with A.C. - i.e. \$9-11 per day. It is easy for travellers to live in Athens and other cities at \$25 per day for two (excluding travel). Even the guide books which offer living on \$5 or \$10 per person per day are not unrealistic if one goes to the smallest hotels and hostels and the cheapest of restaurants. In Athens and other places one meets many of the hippie travellers: some are unclean and uncombed, but the majority are serious types who are interested in the history and sites which they visit with their packs. As for the local press, there is no formal censorship of newspapers, although the publishers know that any harsh criticism of government will get them in trouble. The police are friendly and helpful - no feeling of Big Brother listening or watching. No evidence was encountered to confirm or deny the accusations made about excessive political arrests and torturing. I believe there is less corruption and more law and order than formerly. Women, local and foreign, have no hesitation in walking alone at night - quite different than in most U.S. cities. The cleanliness of the streets in Athens and other cities is noticeable in comparison with most international centers.

Malaria. Since my work in the thirties (i.e. the pre-DDT era) concerned malaria, I enquired regarding the present situation with special interest. In the early thirties, it is recalled, there were about 2 million cases (attacks) of malaria among the 6 million inhabitants in most years, which is a higher endemo-epidemicity than I observed in the Orient. Now a malaria case is a rarity and not enough for study. In 1971, 50 cases were found, half of them imported and half indigenous. Undoubtedly the change is attributable to the reduction in anophelism (malaria vectors) and the government's successful anti-malaria campaign beginning in 1945-46. Up to the mid-fifties there were still 50,000 cases (positive bloods) reported per year, but now transmission is practically zero; DDT application ceased some years ago.

Anophelism still exists and is perhaps on the increase. With Hadji I observed moderate densities of *A. elutus* at Thermopylae. In the thirties rice cultivation was prohibited because of malaria, but is now permitted and Greece has enough rice for an export crop.

Several former colleagues, now retired, assert that the present government, central and local, maintain no anti-malarial services or surveillance. It was reported that not even a skeletal research or study group exists, except the private Benaki Institute. Since there are plenty of vectors, one may ask whether there is a risk of malaria returning to Greece, as has occurred in Asia (example, Ceylon had a recrudescence of one million cases a few years ago, and India is far from having achieved eradication of malaria). In Greece it seems unlikely, but possible. Tourism would suffer greatly if malaria returned. Surely the Greek Ministry of Health needs a small research body to watch for trouble. Later in my visit I discussed the matter with Dr. Belios, formerly director of the government's anti-malaria program. He maintains that in the present peripheral health services there are provisions for inspections, the detection and treatment of cases. He emphasized also that an important part of the Greek campaign and its success was due to intensive efforts to treat malaria cases and carriers.

If Greece has anophelism without malaria, the situation is different than in Italy, where it was a matter of races of *A. maculipennis*. In Greece there are the anopheles vectors. One may theorize or speculate that malaria transmission requires a threshold not only of the number of anopheles but also a threshold in the number of gametocyte carriers.

Rockfound Fellows. One of the satisfactions of the trip was seeing former R.F. fellows and their wives. These included: J. Kadjinicolau, G. Livadas, P. Issaris, A. Mandekos, G. Belios, and the family of D. Messinezy. Some time was spent in calls on old friends, several of whom are now in their 80's. One venerable lady is now 96 and alert though bedridden with arthritis.

Population. The birth rate in Greece is still low, in fact a little less than the low U.S. birth rate. This means a natural increase of 0.8% per year. Greece's population is now about 9 million compared with 6.5 million in the 1930's. Thus birth control and the small family have been normal for the past 40 years (without a government policy). Contrast the situation in Turkey where the birth rate is more than double that of Greece. Because of the absence of fellow V. Valaoras, on a U.N. assignment in Cairo, more demographic details were not elicited.

Finally, Greece can still be described as a pleasant place for a tour.

July 28, 1972

MCB/jlm