

Luritta Whiting

Greco-Roman World

There is so much going on in a country like Greece, and so many different experiences to learn from that it is hard to pick out specific examples of what I liked the most or my favorite parts. I will just have to start at the beginning of the trip and work my way through. When people ask about my experience, I first answer with the main identifier of the trip; the food. Just the memory of the food that melts in your mouth, the olive oil that is unmatched, the warm bread at every meal, and the feta cheese used in any sauce to make the food delectable is enough to make your mouth water.

The grandness of the Parthenon left me in awe, and the simple fact that it survived a direct bomb as well as an entire history of people and wars is enough to leave a permanent impression. The Erechtheion has an interesting story of a battle over a temple between Zeus and Athena. The olive tree won over the lightning bolt and made Athens devoted to Athena. That is a pretty cool history or just one exciting building on our first stop of the great city. It is unbelievable that there are five million people in the current city of Athens, and there are buildings filled with action and excitement as far as the eye can see in every direction. My favorite part of the Acropolis of Athens is the Ancient Agora because your imagination is free to run wild. It is easy to picture the stoma crowned with oxen, sheep, slaves, merchants, and goods for sale trying to get relief from the scorching sun. (And believe me, the sun in Greece in the middle of the day is truly scorching). It is not surprising that a nap is built into the middle of the day to avoid such a sun, and the tourists that are out and about are laughed at. The vast marketplace of

Ancient Athens (as well as other cities such as Philippi and Thessaloniki) was a part of everyday living and an attempt to meld the needs of one's family with the wants of the gods (as the temples and statues oversee all of the business in the Agora). It is almost impossible not to imagine the hustle and bustle of the street and smell the sweat dripping off the hard-working merchants, while exploring the trails and remains of shops in the marketplace.

Religion is so intertwined in the life of the Greek culture that the everyday workings of the Agora are surrounded by symbols and tributes to varying gods. It is impossible to separate government and religion in ancient Greece because their lives are run by and devoted to both. The culture encourages the people to do business to feed families, in order to be part of the community in which they pay taxes, and remain on the good side of the gods by sacrificing and making promises to live well.

The Greeks (and possibly Europeans in general) seem more open with themselves and their world. Everywhere we go, we make new friends, and have no problem talking with strangers. They also show affection for a loved one, or an unknown child, or a good friend openly and without worry about other strangers staring. There is nothing like "public display of affection" to look down on in their culture, because they are proud of the fact that they love the people that they are close to, and are willing to be close to others. I like walking by a cafe and seeing every chair as close as possible, while the other half of the table is empty. This comfort with oneself is also exemplified at the beach where men of ten wear speedos and women walk around without a top. Several of the stores only sell bottoms to swimsuits for women. From my understanding, this is because

of an open comfort with one's culture, others, and self that is not often expressed in the United States.

The comfort with each other and one's culture may spur from the fact that Greeks have continuous tradition that they are confident in and believe in their background. Displays of open affection on a ferry, or sitting close to friends at dinner is a subconscious expression of carrying on traditions of flawless socialization. Americans do not know where they have been, and are not united as a country in the comfort of one culture, and therefore place an uncertain distance between themselves and others. This is a subconscious cultural norm that I believe to be caused by the basis of tradition.

The connectedness may also play a part in the basis of pleasing a customer even today. The familiarity that many Greeks feel likes in conjunction with their drive to be social as well as honorable. To make a bad deal or not please customers might be considered shameful towards the individual and their entire family. Therefore, most merchants are willing to bend over backwards to please their customers, and make the sale.

It is hard to find things that are tangible that I learned from my experience in Greece, but I found a culture with similarities and differences with my own, and am able to make comparisons and conscious decisions about what I accept in a culture. CWIL, thank you for making this trip possible!