

THE LITERARY HAUNTS OF ATHENS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF GREECE

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present in a historical retrospective the literary haunts of the past as witnesses of the cultural heritage of ancient Athens. Some of them have been renewed and are preserved to this day, while some others no longer exist. However, to this day they are considered landmarks for the city of Athens and its cultural heritage. The importance of these literary haunts is great not only for the cultural heritage and tradition of Greece but for their utilization for the sustainable development of the city of Athens as places of historical and artistic importance. They are points that have historical significance since they highlight an older Athens, but at the same time they also express a literary path that can be used for the development of the city. In other words, they are important means that can be used with the aim of sustainable development. They can be used in the context of city tourism as well as literary tourism providing multiple resources that can be used in the economic, cultural, touristic and also urban development of Athens. The case of literary haunts is an example of how parts of big cities, as well as the history that accompanies them, can be used positively while also contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage. The writers who were members of these haunts, offered them a place in cultural history and tradition with a long history that is preserved to this day. Therefore, the revival of some of them and the preservation of the rest is of crucial importance.

Keywords: *literary haunts, cultural heritage, cities, development*



Figure 1. Cafe Panellinion

1. Introduction

With the establishment of Athens as the capital of the young Kingdom of Greece, together with neoclassicism, the fashion of coffeehouses will be introduced from Europe. European-style coffeehouses would soon replace Turkish coffeehouses and play an important role in recent Athenian history. The first European cafes will initially appear on Aiolou Street, where the "Beautiful Greece" coffee shop is also. During the interwar period and also after the war, the boulevards of Athens will take the baton, which will beautify with their presence cafes that will develop into secular and literary haunts. Few of these legendary haunts survive today, as most of them were closed and the buildings that housed them were demolished, but the works of their patrons continue to be an integral part of modern Greek culture. Those that have remained, however, as well as the memory of the rest, can function as souvenirs for both the city's residents and its visitors, allowing the preservation of cultural memory (Manola, 2020).

1.1. Secular cafes and pastry shops of panepistimiou street

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the boulevard of the Panepistimiou street hosted a number of restaurants, cafes and pastry shops such as "Panellinion", "United Voustasia" and the pastry shop of "Petritsi", which was immortalized in a painting by Pavlos Mathiopoulos. Both during the interwar period and during the 1950s and 1960s, secular Athens would continue to congregate in the Panepistimiou street luxurious restaurants and patisseries such as "Ideal", and "Piccadilly", whose red illuminated sign from neon had been fixed by the students in a demonstration for the Cypriot state, renaming it "Cyprus". Other well-known pastry shops were "Rosikon" in Panepistimiou street and "Petrograd" in Stadiou street which were opened during the interwar period by Russian refugees. Petrograd was opened in 1935 by the father of the famous composer and pianist Niki Yakovlev, and its walls were decorated with works by Greek and foreign painters. It closed in 1969 when the building where it was housed was demolished (Papageorgiou-Venetas, 2007).

1.2. Tsitas

Loukianos Kilaidonis in his song "The Fucking Fifties" (an excellent survey of the urban Panepistimiou street of the 1950s) mentions it together with "Rosikon" and "Tsita's pastry shop". "Tsitas" was founded in 1888 on Stadiou Street and in 1906 it moved to Panepistimiou street. Both during the interwar period and during the 1950s, "Tsitas" employed a total of 180 people, while the equipment it had (espresso machines, juicers, fermenters) was the latest technology. Among Tsitas's innovations were chips, which were sold in huge bags. "Tsitas" closed after its decline following the strong rumor of the Health Service finding a rodent in a pot of syrup. The fate of Tsita will be followed by most of the old Athenian cafes that will close one after the other in the late 60s, with many of the buildings that housed them being demolished (Skoumbourdi, 2001).

1.3. Café "Black Cat"

Black Cat cafe was located at the junction of Akadimia and Asklipiou streets, next to the house of Kostis Palamas, and in a semi-basement area. It was founded in 1917 by Ioannis Spatala from Corfu, brother of the poet Gerassimos Spatala (1887-1971) and was named after the corresponding literary cafe in Paris, "Chat Noir". The cafe reached its peak in the period 1918-1919 and was identified with Athenian bohemianism. Publications were designed there,

book presentations, artistic and political ferments took place. "Black Cat" began to be policed as the members of the political organization "Socialist Department of Athens" met there, ending up being permanently closed. Regular patrons were important literary artists such as T. Agras, D. Voutyras, F. Giofyllis, Cl. Paraschos, L. Porphyras, S. Skipis, Ger. Spatalas, D. Tagopoulos, R. Filyras, K. Paroritis, K. Varnalis and also K. Palamas (Skoumbourdi, 2001).

1.4. Loft of Loumidis

The Loumidis brothers opened the well-known loft in 1938 as a complement to their coffee roaster located on the ground floor. Soon the loft gathered the artistic, literary and journalistic world of Athens, since it was in a key position, close to newspaper offices, theaters and right next to the then "Hestia Bookstore". In the loft, the tables were arranged in a pi shape (on the left sat the actors, journalists and columnists, while the writers gathered in the background). Regular patrons were Mr. Elytis, N. Gatsos, M. Hadjidakis, M. Shaktouris, M. Katsaros, M. Theodorakis, G. Tsarouhis, G. Moralis, A. Empirikos, T. Sinopoulos et al. (Papakostas, 1988).

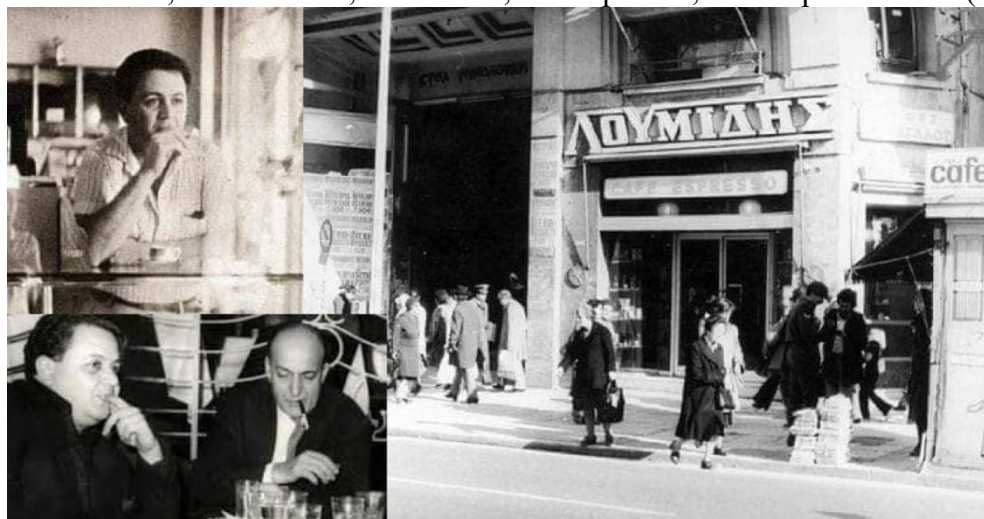


Figure 2. Kafe-Loumidi

1.5. "Zonar's" Cafe

"Zonar's" is housed in the Building of the Army Stock Fund, a work of architects Vassilis Kassandra and Leonidas Bonis that was completed in 1938 and combines Art Deco and classicist elements. As a result of the recent renovation of the Mansion, the reopening of Zonar's cafe, which had ceased operations at the beginning of 2000 (had already begun to lose its glamor after the death of the owner Karolos Zonaras in 1968). Zonaras, a Greek American, returns to Greece to open "Zonaras's" in 1934, which was originally housed at the corner of Panepistimiou and Kriezotou street, to be moved in 1940 to the ground floor of the MTS Building. "Zonar's", one of the capital's most luxurious cafes, was known for its sweets, such as the "Chicago" ice cream, said to have originated there. The building patrons were Od. Elytis, Ev. Averof, G. Rallis, M. Volanakis, Fr. Germanos et al. Famous personalities who visited Athens such as Anthony Quinn, Sophia Loren and Jorge Luis Borges did not fail to visit it (Yiohalas & Kafetzaki, 2012).

1.6. Pastry shop and café "Flokas"

The Flokas brothers from Thessaloniki, chocolate entrepreneurs, opened their first pastry shop in Athens in 1938 on Korai Street, in the National Insurance building, while in 1940 they

opened their second restaurant in the MTS building. Flokas, like the one next to it "Zonar's", will stop their operation during the Occupation and the Civil War, to reopen after the war, in 1952. Shortly before it suspends its operation, German soldiers are photographed drinking coffee on its tables. Soon Flokas opened branches in Fokionos Negri, Vas. Sofias and elsewhere, always addressing the upper class. The store in the mega store of MTS closed in 1987. Flokas was frequented by the then prime minister couple Konstantinos and Amalia Karamanlis, G. Seferis, who found the neighboring "Zonar's" vulgarly decorated, Od. Elytis, N. Gatsos, M. Hadjidakis et al. Especially the last two had their own, separate table in the loft (Papakostas, 1988).

1.7. Cafe "Brazilian"

Coffee connoisseur Evangelos Saravanos, after years in Brazil and Alexandria, decided to open a cafe in Athens as well. The "Brazilian" had as its trademark the excellent quality coffee (this is where the Athenians drank espresso for the first time), and the excellent sweets. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Brazilian gradually supplanted other literary haunts, such as the "Patari of Loumidis". Its proximity to the bookstore "Pirsos" also contributed to the establishment of "Brazilian" as a literary haunt. The Brazilian's heyday was cut short by the 1967 dictatorship, as many of its prominent patrons either moved abroad or simply stopped visiting. A frequent patron of the Brazilian was Kostas Tachtsis, whose poem *The Symphony of the Brazilian*, illustrated by Yiannis Tsarouchis, adorns the wall of the current Brazilian at number 10 Valaoritou Street, where it was moved in 2007. There, the 45 photographs by A. Fasianos, in which one can distinguish many of the writers and artists who frequented here, such as N. Gatsos, N. Valaoritis, M. Stakhtouris, M. Katrakis, M. Hadjidakis, M. Merkouri, etc. (Papakostas, 1988).

1.8. Ouzeri of "Apotsos"

The ouzeri began its operation in 1897 and was initially located at 5A Stadiou Street. In 1969 it was moved to Boucourestiou Street to end up in 1971 in the gallery at 10 Panepistimiou Street. Its walls were decorated with advertisements of European drinks. Its famous patrons included M. Malakasis, Z. Papantoniou, D. Voutiras, G. Katsimbalis, Od. Elytis, G. Seferis, Andr. Karantonis et al., while the philological magazine Tetradio was born in his bosom (Papakostas, 1988).

1.9. Zaharatou Cafe

In Megaro Giannopoulos, at the beginning of Karagiorgi Servias Street, until 1888 the cafe of the same name was housed, which was a hangout for writers such as Palamas, Drosinis and Roidis. Later, the mansion of Giannopoulos housed the first form of the legendary "Zacharatos". Zaharatos' cafe, however, was quickly moved to the opposite corner, in the Vouros house. Its owner was the businessman Spyros Zaharatos, who also ran a cafe in Omonia Square. The cafe was also visited daily by Constantinos Cavafis, during his first trip to Athens, in the summer of 1901. The Cafe of Zaharatos, due to its proximity to the Palace and the Parliament, quickly became a haunt of soldiers, politicians and journalists. Such was its importance in the political life of Athens, that George Papandreou is credited with the phrase that "the Kafeneion of Zaharatos is the second and perhaps freer parliament than the real one". Its definitive end will come in the 1960s, along with the demolition of the mansion that housed it (Papakostas, 1988).

1.10. Anatoli Cafe

The cafe "Anatoli", owned by Vassilis Vassiliou, was the only one that existed in the then "Garden of the Muses", today's Syntagma Square. A frequent patron of the "Cafe Anatoli" was a peddler, Giorgos Zavoritis. Both of them being dissatisfied with their jobs, Vassiliou and Zavoritis decide to change professions. Thus, Zavoritis opened his famous coffee and pastry shop, which was particularly luxurious and housed on the ground floor of the Koromilas house, with the characteristic gable, the work of the architect Panagis Kalkos. In 1897 the cafe was anglicized and renamed "High Life" and survived until the 1960s, when it closed due to the demolition of the building. As for Vassilis Vassiliou, the only thing that is known is that he died in old age, as a station master at the Thisios station. Both the Zavoritis Cafe, as well as the neighboring Zaharatos Cafe, filled Syntagma Square with tables during the summer months (Papakostas, 1988).

1.11. Giannakis Cafe and Pastry Shop and Maison Doree

The two cafes of "Giannakis", which opened in 1905 and the "Maison Dorée" that would follow two years later, were, according to Napoleon Lapathiotis, a meeting point for "all the Athenian snobs". Lapathiotis even claimed that passing by the two cafes he was forced to take off his hat to salute so often that it ended up fraying at the edges (Lapathiotis, 1986). As a result of this secularism, the intersection that hosted them was named "Dardanelia", a toponym that was preserved at least until the war. The competition between the two cafes will lead them to hunt for innovation, in this climate straws for soft drinks first appeared in "Giannakis". Haunt of Venizelos fans "Giannakis" was the victim of many vandalisms by royalists, and the Venizelos fans will retaliate, destroying the "Dore", where the supporters of the palace gathered. Regular patrons of the Dardanelia were the writers Napoleon Lapathiotis and Romos Filyras, who was a victim of the teasing of the patrons due to his eccentricity (Papageorgiou-Venetas, 2007).

1.12. Byzantion

The "Byzantion" of Kolonaki Square, began to attract writers during the second half of the 1950s, due to the gradual decline of other literary haunts, such as "Loumidis", and following the movement of the Athenian focus towards Syntagma Square and Kolonaki by those years. Among his patrons, in addition to Odysseus Elytis, Nikos Gatsos, the painters Fasianos and Akriothakis and Manos Hadzidakis, one met the circle of Greek surrealists, prominently Nano Valaoritis, but also Andre Breton himself, if he happened to found in Athens. The atmosphere of Byzantion, with its poor and austere hall and the four-legged waiter Babis, is reflected in the last poetry collection of Kostas Tachtsis, which was entitled "Kafeneion to Byzantion", but also in poems by Nanos Valaoritis (Papakostas, 1988).

1.13. The cafe of Dexameni

The Dexameni café, owned by Barbas Yiannis (mayor of Agistri) owes its fame mainly to Alexandros Papadiamantis, who was a regular patron during the last years of his stay in Athens, at the beginning of the 20th century. Papadiamantis, who avoided literary circles and preferred the popular cafes of Psyrris, met the cafe of Dexameni in 1906 from Giannis Vlachogiannis, and since then he visited it every day, and he used to sit isolated at the back of the cafe, writing, translating or daydreaming. The only two known photographs of Alexandros Papadiamantis, by Pavlos Nirvana, were taken in the Dexameni cafe. Other well-known

patrons, in later years, were Kostas Varnalis, Nikos Kazantzakis, Markos Augeris, but later also poets of the generation of Trianta, such as Odysseus Elytis, whose Hadrian, designed by Giannis Pappa, is located in Dexameni Square since 1997. The cafe is believed to have been located very close to the current Municipal Refreshment, which recently reopened after years of silence (Papakostas, 1988).

2. The importance of literary haunts for cultural heritage and city development

Literature is an important cultural field. But the environment in which writers work and interact is important because it is expressed through their works. It is not rare that readers want to take the same routes as the heroes of literary works and that also reflect the writers' environment (Manola, 2019). One such example can be found in the work of Chalkida, the city that Giannis Skarimbas lived in and depicted through his work (Manola et al., 2021).

- The haunts that the literary artists transformed through their presence and their depiction as part of Athens, into cultural heritage, can contribute to the development of Athens and in particular of the historical center around which most of them are located. These haunts can be an important cultural route. Cultural routes allow the highlighting of cultural heritage, including intangible ones (Manola, 2023). Through a cultural route to the literary haunts, the visitor can come into contact with the past of Athens as well as the literary atmosphere of its time.
- Points like these are important resources that can significantly contribute to the local development of Athens in general and its center in particular. Local development is understood as the process by which the promotion of all economic activities is sought, in which a place presents advantages, such as the exploitation and utilization of all its wealth-producing sources (Mitoula, 2006). In a few words, development has to do with evolution, but mainly with the best quality of life, which all people deserve and this can be achieved through the exploitation of literary haunts and the development of a sustainable, urban and literary tourism. Sustainability has other dimensions besides financial ones. Sustainability includes both environmental and social dimensions. In this context, the upgrading of the quality of life of the residents of an area is also included (Mitoula & Papavasileiou, 2023).
- Especially in cities, there are many problems that can be addressed through sustainable development infrastructure. Sustainable development does not only aim to attract tourists, but also to upgrade cities making them more attractive (Vardopoulos et al., 2023). This does not necessarily imply that these infrastructures should be new since the existing ones can also be utilized with the appropriate adjustments (Vardopoulos, 2022). For the center of Athens, where the literary haunts are located, this is an important perspective since it has suffered a major degradation that has worsened the quality of life of the few residents.

3. Conclusions

In the center of Athens throughout the ages there were cafes and pastry shops which gave life to the city. These were also the haunts of important people of letters, art and politics in Greece. Despite the fact that many of them do not exist today, their customers made them points of reference and attributed to them a timeless historical and cultural value. These can be an important opportunity and perspective for the urban and sustainable development of the center of Athens. Today, the center of Athens is degraded and does not attract a large number of people. It does have visitors, but it is usually a point of transition to another area of Athens and not a place to stay there. The literary haunts of Athens can be part of a cultural route that

can lead to the development of the historical center. Focusing on literary haunts can attract visitors who are lovers of literature and through reading literary works have memories of a different Athens and want to have a corresponding experience. To drink their coffee in the same places where the writers sat but also produced a large part of the intellectual activity of Greece. Attracting tourists in this way will be accompanied by the corresponding infrastructure that will facilitate their journey and tour of the city. They can therefore be, as an important part of the cultural heritage which they can preserve until today, a means for the touristic and sustainable development of Athens.

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