

"Plaka is the oldest continually inhabited community in Europe. Of course, it is vital that we preserve it as a living entity." Lydia Carras, a London based Greek, spoke with all the conviction of a seasoned campaigner who have done much to help preserve what is best in Greece's cultural heritage.

A quiet, unassuming mother of two, she first became involved in 1970, when honeymooning at Nafplion. Both she and her husband, Costas, were interested in traditional architecture. As they strolled past the attractive old houses, they asked the owners if they might be allowed to see the interiors. In this way, they slowly discovered that if each dissatisfied owner had his way, Nafplion would soon become a faceless town of concrete blocks. "Perhaps you are a little mad when you are so much in love," she said laughingly, "but we carried out a sort of private opinion poll." It more than justified their fears.

Conservation was not on the ruling military junta's list of priorities. Back in London, the couple decided to take action. This resulted in the founding of "Elliniki Etairia" with the co-founders: Anthony Chandris, London; John Kulukundis, London; George Livanos, New York; and Georges Potamianos, Athens. A non-profit making organization, one of the leading in its field, it aims "to enhance the interest of Greeks in the values" of their cultural and environmental heritage. She and her husband also helped to found The National Trust for Greece (U.K.) and The Society for Preservation of the Greek Heritage (SPGH, U.S.). They were set up mainly to advise Greeks of the diaspora and to channel financial gifts into worthwhile projects. "For example, instead of donating money for a new village church, we persuade them to restore the Byzantine one the village already has."

Lydia Carras was therefore already an experienced conservationist when the family bought a house in Plaka ten years ago. They had no idea of the existing problems but it didn't take them long to find out that the area was under siege. During the military dictatorship the night clubs, bars and strip joints of the Piraeus red light district were forcibly closed down. Many moved to Plaka were the

existing residents were then offered large sums to leave their homes. If that failed, they were harrassed. When the Carras family went to live there only 4,000 of the original 15,000 inhabitants remained. Most of them having smaller incomes, showed fortitude and tenacity despite these incidents. "One woman, a resident and the owner of a modest shop, had megaphones put right up against her windows because she refused to sell out, even though she was offered substantial sums of money. She was then continually pestered and told she would move dead or alive." These people are the real heroes of Plaka.

The situation was desperate. Organized interests and bully-boy tactics were proving only too successful. Several small residents committees existed but lacked the coordination by which to maximize the effect of their efforts. "I decided to invite them all to my house for drinks," she said. "It was encouraging how quickly they became friendly with one another." This and other meetings gave birth to The Coordinating Committee for the Preservation of Plaka. She was then harrassed. "It was quite frightening," she remembered, "all our relatives wanted us to move as we had young children. But I couldn't desert them, it would have been the last straw if we had pulled out so easily."

existing residents were then offered large sums to leave their homes. If that failed, they were harrassed. When the Carras family went to live there only 4000 of the original 15,000 inhabitants remained. Most of them ^{having} smaller incomes, showed fortitude and tenacity despite these incidents. "One woman, a resident and the owner of a modest shop, had megaphones put right up against her windows because she refused to sell out, even though she was offered substantial sums of money. She was then continually pestered and told she would move dead of alive." These people are the real heroes of Plaka.

The situation was desperate. Organized interests and bully-boy tactics were proving only too successful. Several small residents committees existed but lacked the coordination by which to maximize the effect of their efforts. "I decided to invite them all to my house for drinks," she said. "It was encouraging how quickly they became friendly." ^{one another} This and other meetings gave birth to The Coordinating Committee for the Preservation of Plaka. She was then harrassed. "It was quite frightening," she remembered, "all our relatives wanted us to move as we had young children. But I couldn't desert them, it would have been the last straw if we had pulled out so easily."

Disco and bar owners said in their defence that they were offering tourists exactly what they wanted. They even planned to change the name of Plaka to Dionysopolis (The town of Dionysus/Bacchus) a place of unbridled pleasure. "Dionysus took his revenge," she said with a laugh. "His festivities were connected with religion and not commercialism." As the committee's overseas representative, Mrs. Carras contacted the heads of international tourist organizations who signed a letter saying that the despoilation of Plaka was not what tourists wanted. The letter was given wide coverage in the Greek press which helped the campaign immensely.

Professor Zivas of the Town Planning Department at Athens Polytechnic, with a dedicated team of assistants prepared a master plan of measures to save the area. The three main points were: one, pedestrianism; two, the prohibition of neon lights; and three, the removal of bars, discos and other unsuitable forms of entertainment.

The plan in its scope and thoroughness was revolutionary for Greece, and the whole project was of the best European standard. Many people helped and offered their services in different ways. At the government level she remembers Stephanos Manos of Nea Demokratia and Iannes Tritzis of Pasok as being particularly instrumental in the implementation of the restoration scheme.

Now that the points on the master plan have been implemented are there other outstanding problems waiting to be solved? "In response to the campaign of the residents of Plaka, the Plaka Office, a state run department was established in the area. Its main purpose is to assist and expedite the implementation of the new protective regulations for the area. It has been beneficial to the area, but its participation must be encouraged to be more active in supporting the residents' needs. After all, it was only three years ago that previous plans to destroy Plaka and make it into a park, were finally abandoned."

~~It was in this connection that~~ The Greek Archaeological Service, (Ministry of Culture) bought 183 houses back in the fifties, with the intention of demolishing them. The Ministry still owns these homes. The community would like to see them re-inhabited. Many, however, are in a bad state of repair. "There is a scheme in use in Scotland and other places in Europe," she pointed out, "where old houses are given to tenants rent-free for a number of years with the understanding that they will make them habitable. For longer periods of time, they pay rent which will be used by the state for the restoration of national monuments." "We would like to see this kind of scheme introduced in Plaka. We don't want a fossilized tourist attraction. We want a living community. No more museums and offices. Plaka, after all, forms a unique society where people of differing incomes all live together in the same locality, rich and poor, side by side."

She would also like to see protection extended to all the ^{historic} "hills" of Athens: Pnyx, Philopappas, Theseion, and the same financial help offered for restoration.

Lydia Carras has little to do now with the societies she helped to

found. "It is important that they attract new members with innovative plans," she said. Her creative ideas have ^{found} fertile ground in another medium. The award winning film, "Where God Walked on Earth: The Monastery of Mount Sinai," her first ~~see~~ production, was shown on Channel 4 Television (U.K.) last spring and carries a clear conservation message. The area surrounding the oldest surviving monastery in the world, is threatened by careless tourist development There is an urgent ~~campaign~~ ^{need} to create a zone protecting the beauty of this unique Biblical landscape.

After last season's proliferation of jerry-built cafe-bars, flashing neon lights and fast food restaurants in places of historical interest or scenic beauty, her message is an urgent one. The flotsam and jetsam of the tourist trade ~~are~~ ^{are} a sad inheritance for the future. As Lydia Carras said, "Greece's cultural and physical heritage must be valued and protected; it is the country's most precious asset." And, is after all, what thousands of foreigners cross continents each year to see and enjoy.



κ. Α. Μπάλκο

Υπουργόν Δημοσίας Τάξεως

Υπουργείον Δημοσίας Τάξεως

Κατεχάκη 1

Γουδί

Αθήνα, 20.4.1980

Αγαπητέ κύριε Υπουργέ,

Ευχαριστώ πολύ για τό ενδιαφέρον πού δείξατε για τό θέμα τής Πλάκας μετά τήν συζήτησή μας, καθώς καί για τήν πρόσκληση νά συμμετάσχουμε στην σύσκεψη για τήν περιοχή.

Σας στέλνω μία μελέτη μου, για τά προβλήματα τής Πλάκας πού περιελήφθη σέ μία Πανερωπαϊκή Τρίγλωσση Έκδοση τής UNESCO για τήν ζωή παλαιών πόλεων τής Ευρώπης.

Τό μεγαλύτερο πρόβλημα στην Πλάκα σήμερα για τούς κατοίκους αλλά καί τούς επισκέπτες είναι ό θόρυβος πού δημιουργείται από ένισχυτάς τών μουσικών όργάνων.

Η έξάλειψις αύτου τοῦ προβλήματος απαιτεῖ σθένος καί θάρρος. Σας εύχομαι λοιπόν καλή δύναμη.

Η Πανελληνία αλλά καί η διεθνής κοινή γνώμη θά είναι μαζί σας.

Μέ φιλικούς χαιρετισμούς

Λυδία Καρρά

ΠΡΟΣ ΤΗΝ
ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΤΥΠΙΑ
Πανεπιστημίου 57
Ε Ν Τ Α Υ Θ Α

Κύριε Διευθυντά,

Μέ κατάπληξη καί θλίψη διάβασα τό άρθρο τῆς 28ης Μαρτίου πού ἀναφέρεται στίς προθέσεις τῆς οἰκογενείας μου γιά τήν Πλάκα.

- Κατάπληξη, γιά τό θράσος ὠρισμένων θορυβοποιῶν πού καταγγέλλουν ὅτι κινδυνεύει ἡ περιοχή ἀπό τήν Οἰκογένεια Καρρά" πού ἔχει ἤδη ἀγοράσει 7 σπίτια καί 2 μαγαζιά καί συνεχίζει ν'ἀγοράζει γιά νά μετατρέψῃ τήν Πλάκα, σέ ἰδιωτική πολυεθνική ἐπιχείρηση".

- Θλίψη, πού τόσο σοβαρές κατηγορίες προβάλλονται ἀπό μιά ἔγκριτη ἐφημερίδα.

Καί οἱ μέν κάτοικοι τῆς Πλάκας οἱ ὁποῖοι μᾶς ἔχουν γνωρίσει χρόνια τώρα στούς κοινούς ἀγῶνες γιά τήν σωτηρία τῆς περιοχῆς, δέν χρειάζονται πλέον καμμιά διαβεβαίωση γιά τίς προθέσεις μας. Γνωρίζουν ἀπό πικρή πεῖρα πῶς οἱ θορυβοποιοί καί κακοποιοί τῆς Πλάκας μεταχειρίζονται κάθε θεμιτό καί ἀθέμιτο μέσον γιά νά διαιωνήσουν τήν ἐκπόρνευση τῆς περιοχῆς.

Ἀλλά ἄς μοῦ ἐπιτραπῇ γιά τήν ὑπόλοιπη κοινή γνώμη, νά δηλώσω κατηγορηματικά ὅτι ἐκτός ἀπό τό σπίτι μας καί ἓνα διπλανό μικρό σπίτι γιά τούς πιό στενοὺς θείους μας τά ὁποῖα ἀγοράστηκαν πρό ἐτῶν, κανένα ἄλλο κτίσμα δέν ἔχουμε ἀγοράσει.

Ὅχι μόνο λοιπόν δέν ἐπιβουλευόμαστε τήν Πλάκα, ἀλλά συμμετέχω καί ἐγώ προσωπικά στήν Συντονιστική Ἐπιτροπή τῶν Συνεργαζομένων Σωματείων γιά τήν Διάσωση τῆς Πλάκας. Ἐδῶ ἴσως θά ἐνδιέφερε νά γίνη γνωστό ὅτι μελέτη μου γιά τήν Πλάκα ἔχει περιληφθεῖ σέ ἔκδοση τῆς UNESCO πού ἀφορᾷ τήν διατήρηση παραδοσιακῶν πόλεων τῆς Εὐρώπης.

Εἶναι προφανές πῶς ὅσο ὁ ἀγῶνας τῶν κατοίκων ἐντείνεται τόσο οἱ θορυβοποιοί τῆς Πλάκας θά προσπαθοῦν νά δημιουργήσουν σύγχυση στήν κοινή γνώμη, χρησιμοποιώντας τό ὄνομά μας σάν τέχνασμα γιά νά ἀποπροσανατολήσουν τό ἐνδιάφερον τοῦ κοινοῦ ἀπό τίς δικές τους παράνομες δραστηριότητες.

Ἐάν ὅμως ἐλπίζουν ὅτι ὁ καθημερινός ἐκφοβισμός τόν ὁποῖον ὑφίστανται ὅσοι ἀγωνίζονται γιά τήν σωτηρία τῆς Πλάκας θά μᾶς ἀποτρέψῃ ἀπό τόν στόχο μας ματαιοπονοῦν. Οἱ κάτοικοι παραμερίζοντας κάθε τυχόν πολιτική ἰδεολογική καί κοινωνική διαφορά συνεχίζουν ὁμόψυχα τόν ἀγῶνα τους γιά νά ξανακατοικηθεῖ καί "ΝΑ ΖΗΣΗ Η ΠΛΑΚΑ".

1965

1965

G. Mitchell and EE

1965

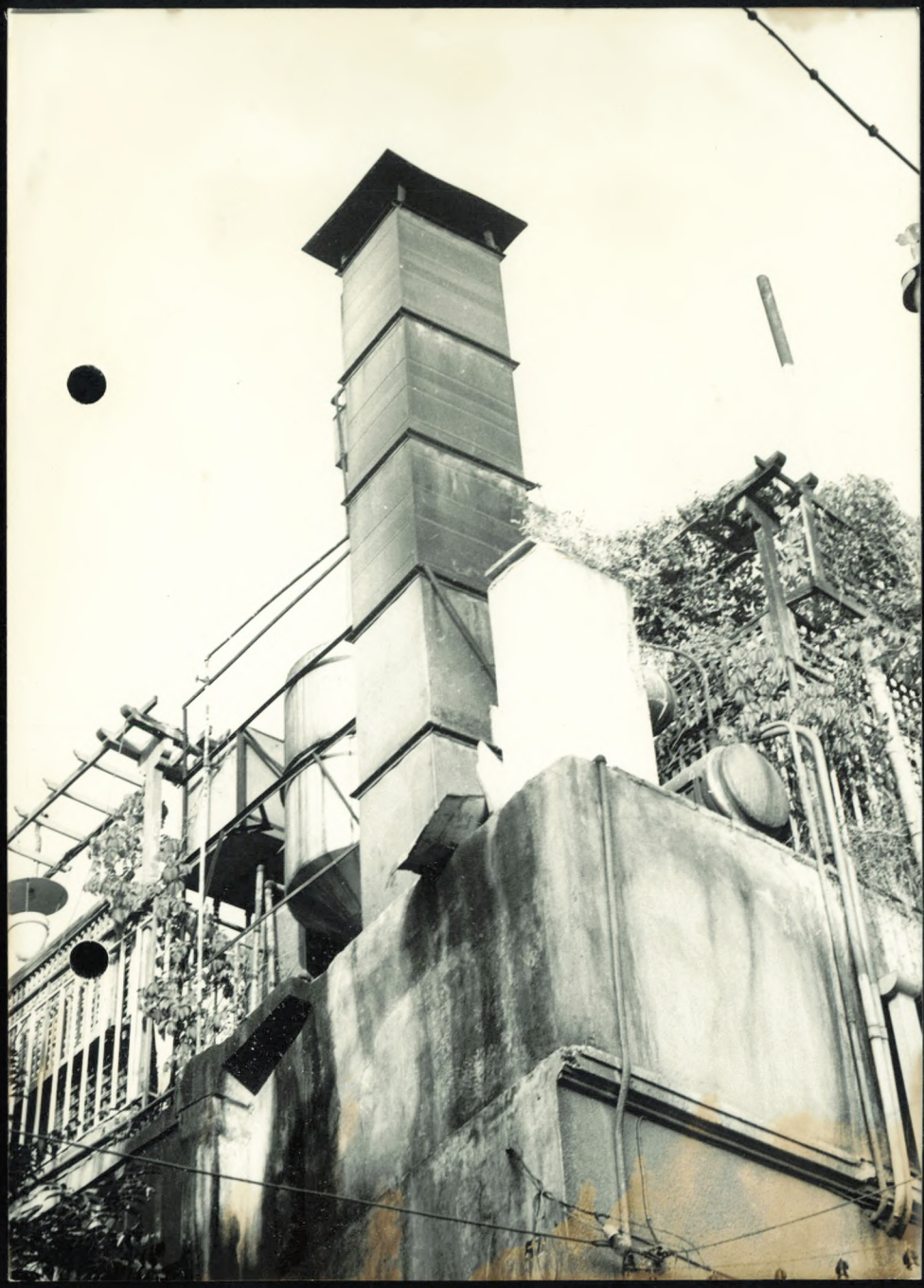
1965

BAR



NYXTEPIA







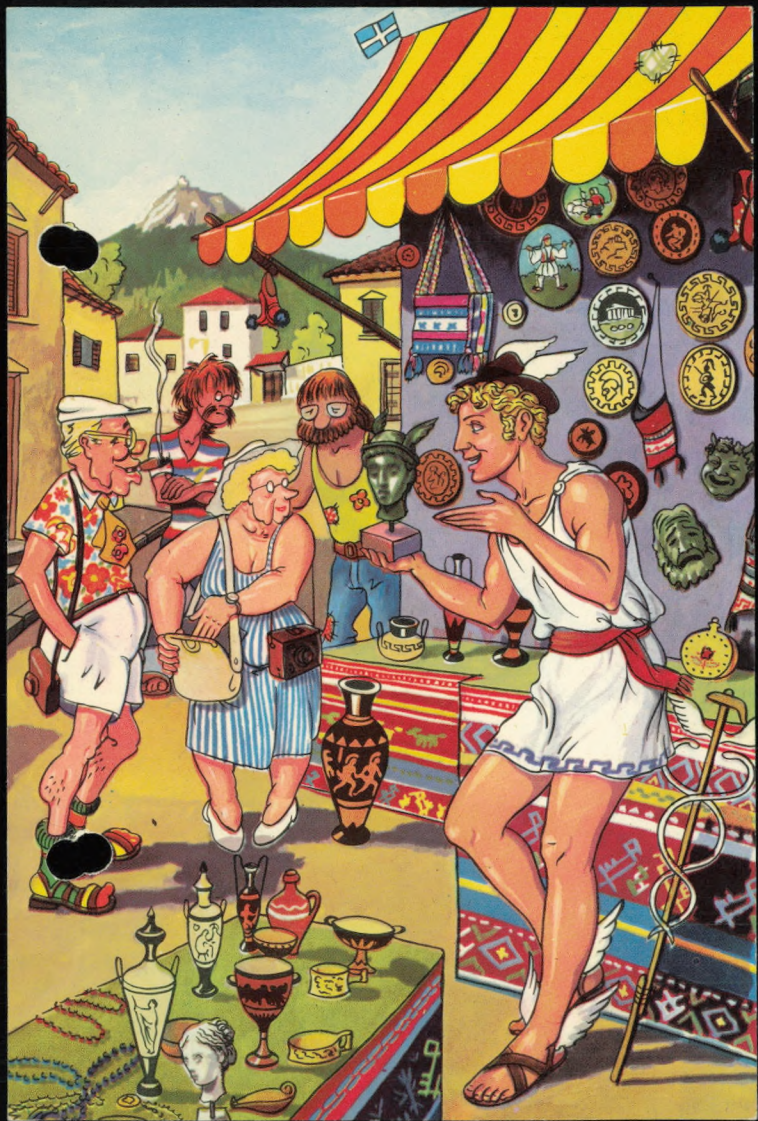




ΓΛΕΝΤΙ στην Πλάκα

FEAST in the Plaka







.....

.....

.....



44 Κρασί, συρτάκι και φαντασία
Wine, syrtaki and imagination
Vin, syrtaki et imagination
Vino, syrtaki è fantasia