

Visitors to Greek Thermal and Seaside Spas (Mid-19th Century–Early 20th Century)

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Thermal tourism is considered the first form of tourism in the 19th-century Greek state. At that time, patients decided to travel to Greek thermal baths to seek therapy and pain relief. The first thermal spas in Greece can be considered 'latecomers,' because they began to develop after their counterparts in other areas of Europe, and they had few and limited facilities. However, in the mid-19th century, the urban space of Greek thermal spas and seaside resorts began to transform architecturally due to measures taken according to state policy and the increasing number of visitors. In this paper, I will attempt to study the architectural transformation of Greek spas and the profile of visitors and patients in the two phases of their development. My research is based on 19th-century primary sources (laws and doctrines, patient registries, medical reports, advertisements, postcards, novels and memoirs). I will assert that in the first stage of their development (1833–1890) Greek resorts had minimal accommodation and leisure facilities. Their clientele consisted of patients and travellers from nearby locations who encountered the lack of proper medical care and accommodation establishments. In their next phase (1890–1930), the urban space of Greek spas was transformed to cater to the needs of a different clientele. Visitors to Greek spas were patients and holidaymakers who usually travelled with other family members. The square and the promenade of thermal spas and seaside resorts became centres of urban sociability. They stayed at luxury hotels, and they enjoyed the sociability of modern facilities (restaurants, theatres, and casinos).

Keywords: spas, seaside resorts, leisure, tourism, Greece

<https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.12.5-12>

Introduction

In the 21st century, travellers can plan a trip to any destination they wish easily and quickly thanks to technological and transport innovations. When they arrive at the tourism destination of their choice, several accommodation and leisure amenities can cater to all their needs. It could be claimed that modern travellers face few or no difficulties in comparison to the transport and accommodation problems that 19th-century travellers had to overcome. However, these problems did not seem to deter the first patients who travelled to Greek spas to seek thermal therapy. Although they

were aware of the transport difficulties and the lack of proper amenities, these patients and visitors sought the 'world of Greek baths.'

This paper presents the profile of these patients and visitors in the two periods of development of Greek spas. In the first period (1833–1890), patients travelled mainly alone, while in the next period (1890–1930) they took their families with them for vacations and they seemed to show a higher preference for seaside resorts that had entertainment facilities. Primary sources (patient registries, medical treatises, advertisements, travel guides, literary and autobiographical

texts were used to highlight the gender, interests, and diseases of patients and visitors (men and women of different classes) to Greek spas. The poor patients were also a particular but 'neglected' category of the public of Greek baths, as they also travelled to them and received proper care.

The First Patients and Visitors to Greek Spas (1833–1890)

The period 1833–1890 is considered a crucial point in the development of Greek spas, as in this period, their urban space began to transform, and their first clientele was formed (Dritsas, 2002). The spas that welcomed the first patients were Kythnos, followed by Edipsos, Hypati, Loutraki, Methana, Kyllini, and Faliro (Varella, 2001a; 2001b). These first resorts had two main advantages that favoured their gradual development: they were conveniently located, and patients could travel to them quite easily from Athens and from the nearby cities and islands. All of them (Hypati excluded) were seaside towns, and thus, they were accessible by sea. Apart from the fact that the sea facilitated relatively easy transportation, the seafront gradually became an integral part of the urban space of Greek spas. Taking sea baths, which were initially recommended to patients by their doctors, quickly became a fashionable trend. In contrast, the various accommodation and leisure facilities (hotels, restaurants, coffee shops) that were constructed on their seafront in this period facilitated the sociability among patients and their escorts.

The first patients who visited the Greek baths for cure were those of the Cycladic island of Kythnos. They travelled to this spa town in the 1830s seeking thermal therapy upon the recommendations of doctors and writers of medical treatises who praised the healing properties of the thermal waters (Landerer, 1850). Their number showed a remarkable increase, especially after the visits of the royal couple Otto and Amalia. Queen Amalia made use of the baths of Kythnos, because she was hoping to overcome her gynaecological problems and be able to conceive an heir. The first records of patients on Kythnos began immediately after the establishment of the bathing facilities (Kardamitsi-Adami, 2001). The caretakers and baths

doctors recorded with great care the gender, occupations, and diseases of patients as well as the effects that the hot water had on their health. Thus, these patient registries are critical archival sources that provide information on the profile of the first Kythnos patients.

In 1844, during the bathing season (June to October), 50 patients received care in the bathhouse of Kythnos. The patient registry of the year 1847 is extremely meticulous, since the name, occupation, and diseases of the 58 patients and the effects of the hot baths were recorded. The patients of 1849 totalled 101. The patient registry 1851, also written with great care and detail, shows 172 patients (men and women) who lived in various regions of Greece (Ministry of Interior 1845, 1848, 1851, 1861).

Eight years later Katakouzinis, the doctor of Kythnos baths wrote a medical report on the patients travelling to Kythnos. The 272 patients lived in Athens, or they were locals. Others came from the nearby Cycladic islands or large Greek city centres. More specifically, 56 patients lived in Athens, 47 lived on Syros, 40 were locals from Kythnos, 17 lived in Nafplio, and 11 in Patras, while three patients came from Smyrna and one from Istanbul (Ministry of Interior Archive, 1861).

Another essential primary source for the number and the diseases of Kythnos patients is the 1835 treatise on the baths of Kythnos, written by a Bavarian chemist Xavier Landerer. His treatise was based on the fieldwork and scientific observations of bath doctors Konstantinos Drosinis and Gregorius Despotopoulos. According to the chemist, the Kythnos bathhouse had 200–250 patients annually. During the 14 months of its operation, 500 patients received treatment. Only 84 could afford to stay in the baths of Kythnos for an extended period and receive medical care. Most of them suffered from rheumatism, arthritis, or venereal diseases, and they noticed that the mineral waters of Kythnos offered them some relief. The 80 female patients suffered from gynaecological problems. In the next decades, the number of patients showed a gradual increase due to the expansion of the royal bathhouse and the appointment of a spa doctor. According to the medical observations of the spa doctor Gregorius Despotopoulos, in 1847–1849, the number of Kythnos patients stood around 300–400 per year, and those

who had received hot water treatment for three consecutive years fully recovered (Kandylis, 1981).

For the patients, the trip to Kythnos was a real adventure, since in the first years no steamboat would facilitate the access to the island. Upon arrival, patients had to cope with inadequate accommodation facilities. It is worth noting that even in the first years of Kythnos, social segregation existed: The poor patients found accommodation in two other buildings and at a small church, and they were separated from those who stayed at the bathhouse. The price of a bath was half drachma and of a room was one and a half drachma. The Kythnos spa doctor, Gregorius Despotopoulos requested that there should be a room price adjustment according to the number of patients in each bathing season (Ministry of Interior, 1864). The bathing and accommodation facilities were improved when the doctor Aggelis Hantzaras rented the baths for twenty years in 1871 (*Efimeris tis Kyverniseos*, 23–24 March 1871).

The poorer patients of Kythnos baths are a 'neglected' and perhaps unknown category of their public. According to their request letters, these patients were eligible to free travel and free use of baths. They usually requested to be sent to the spa for therapy during the summer months, from April to July (when the thermal baths were open, and the number of patients was high). In their request letters, they stated that thermal therapy was a necessity to them, as they suffered from chronic pains, and they were unable to work and look after themselves. The surviving documents provide evidence about their gender, their residence, their health problem, and in some cases their occupation. According to their poverty certificates, they were mainly internal migrants: they lived in the Municipality of Athens (and one lived in the Municipality of Piraeus), but they were born in other different regions of Greece. The lack of reference to their occupation could imply that their disease prevented them from working. Their most common diseases were arthritis and rheumatism, and there was one case of a woman who suffered from a gynaecological problem (Ministry of Interior 1845, 1848, 1851, 1861, 1864).

The patients of Kythnos baths could be considered an interesting case study for a researcher of the his-

tory of medicine because they were the first public who trusted and used the thermal baths for healing. In the following decades, the growing interest on behalf of the public resulted in a gradual development of other spa resorts. These Greek spas were: Hypati, Edipsos, Methana and Loutraki. Although in their beginnings they had minimal accommodation facilities, and their patients faced the similar problems as those in Kythnos, the number of their visitors continued to grow and today these destinations are considered to be the oldest Greek hot springs spa towns. Another two early destinations were two seaside resorts, Kyllini and Faliro, where visitors could enjoy a combination of thermal and sea baths.

Nineteenth-century advertisements and announcements in the press (in magazines and newspapers) are essential primary sources for the development of these Greek resorts as well as the interests and habits of their visitors. The advertisements emphasised the low cost and suitable services that Greek spas were able to offer to their visitors. In press announcements, the renters of Greek baths and the managers of grand hotels competed with each other, as they all promised comfort and proper treatment. Advertisements also stated that hotel rooms and meals in the restaurants of Greek spas had the same price as those in Athens (*Empros*, 18 March 1899; *Efimeris*, 28 June 1890).

The advertisements frequently used phrases such as: 'rooms available for all classes and budgets' and 'the aristocracy and the people,' which promoted the inclusivity of Greek baths (*Efimeris*, 21 April 1884; 3 May 1884). Thus, it could be claimed that the accommodation, treatment, and entertainment in the urban space of Greek thermal and seaside resorts was not an exclusive privilege of the upper class. However, it can be concluded that the majority of visitors were middle-class people whose salary would have offered them the chance to travel to Greek spas for a few days with the family and combine their need for treatment with leisure.

The Patients-Tourists in the Second Period of Development of Greek Spas (1890–1930)

The second period of development of Greek resorts could be considered their 'heyday.' In the period of

1890–1930 Greek spas became popular tourist destinations due to legislation that favoured the operation of luxurious grand hotels and entertainment facilities. Elefterios Venizelos' government, in light of the geographical expansion of the Greek state following the Balkan Wars, passed a great number of laws about the exploitation of thermal springs that encouraged the development of spas. In 1915, the Ministry of National Economy set up a committee to 'study the measures to be taken for the scientific and deliberate exploitation of the thermal springs.' During 1915 and 1916, a chemist, Anastasios Damvergis, also a member of the committee, wrote a series of memoranda requesting the adoption of a special law that would regulate the exploitation of thermal waters. Eventually, these requests were accepted, and the laws 1292 (*Efimeris tis Kyverniseos*, 13–16 April 1918) and 2188 (*Efimeris tis Kyverniseos*, 17 June 1920) defined that the thermal springs were owned by the State and their exploitation was transferred to the Ministry of National Economy. The thermal springs that were not being exploited on January 1, 1920, were owned by the State regardless of the ownership of the land in which they were (Law 2188, article 2). This law gave to the state the right to supervise the operation of private thermal springs and to expropriate them when appropriate (Law 2188, Article 3).

In 1922, Law 2992 facilitated the concession agreements (for a period of up to 25 years) between the state and individuals or companies in exchange for the construction of accommodation and entertainment facilities. The renters of the thermal baths of Kaiafa, Smokovo, Platistomou, Sidirokastro, Lagkada, Neo Loutraki, and Kyllini had an obligation to construct facilities of European standards within the 25-year period of the contract. According to the law, the terms of exploitation of the thermal springs were specified in the contract that was signed by the contractors and the government. The decisions for the development of the Greek baths were taken by the Ministry of Economy. The contractors were obliged to act in accordance with the ministry's instructions, and the erected buildings (hydrotherapy facilities, hotels, and clubs) would have to comply with the hygiene regulations. In the 1930s, most mineral springs had been declared public, but there were still some which were owned by individu-

als, municipalities, and monasteries. However, in the late 1930s, there were some variations in the number of public and private thermal springs. Of the total of 160 registered thermal springs, only 44 were in use, and 32 of them belonged to the state, while only 12 belonged to individuals, municipalities, and monasteries (Lekkas, 1930).

During this 'heyday' period, visitors showed a particular preference for sea baths, they walked along the seafront, and they socialised in the square and at the leisure facilities (hotels, casinos, and restaurants) of Greek spas. Another important factor that increased the popularity of Greek thermal and seaside resorts was the improvement of transport. The difficult access to the baths in the previous period was a deterrent factor for Greeks and for incoming visitors. However, in the 1890–1930 period, visitors could travel quickly and comfortably to spas from Athens and other major cities by coach, by train, or by ship.

In the late 19th century, the seaside spas Edipsos and Loutraki began gaining popularity, because they offered sea and thermal baths and accommodation facilities that were affordable to visitors of all classes and incomes. The grand hotels Thermae Sylla, Avra, Pigai, Heraklion and Istiea in Edipsos and Palmyra, as well as Akti and Avra in Loutraki, offered comfortable and luxurious accommodation to upper-class visitors, but there were rooms available for visitors and lower-income families. The establishment of entertainment facilities also made these cosmopolitan spas an ideal destination for visitors and their families who were seeking sociability, relaxation, and rest. The members of a family who travelled to Edipsos enjoyed the sun and sea on the beaches of the spa town; they went on excursions to nearby areas, and they took walks in the countryside. They spent most of their day and night socialising in the casino which was built according to the architectural design of the casino of Berlin. The casino had separate rooms for meals, family gatherings, and dances. There was also a chat and billiard room and rooms that were suitably furnished for poker and bridge players. Apart from the relaxation and gambling that the casino offered, the public had the opportunity to watch performances and films in the cinema-theatre. There were drama and comedy

performances performed daily, and various famous Greek playwrights of this period presented their plays to the public of Edipsos for the first time.

'Greece's Monte Carlo,' Loutraki, developed due to railway transport that was established in the last decades of the 19th century and the aftermath of the earthquakes of 1924 and 1928. The ΑΟΣΚ (Autonomous Organisation of Earthquake – Victims of Corinth) chaired by the bishop of Corinth Damascus was established in 1930 to help the earthquake victims. In this period, the spa town was rebuilt, and a casino and hotels were constructed. Its urban space was significantly improved with the design of parks and squares. Thus, during the interwar period, Loutraki became a cosmopolitan destination, and famous personalities from Greece and abroad visited the seaside spa town throughout the year. The casino of Loutraki was the main attraction during the winter and summer season until its closure in 1936 (Koukoulas, 2001).

In this period the remarkable work of the Service of Foreigners and Exhibitions provides insight on the profile of Greek spas visitors. This service of the Ministry of National Economy had a special department responsible for the research and operation of thermal springs. The service played an essential role in the development of Greek spas, as it carefully recorded the number of their visitors. In 1920, the first statistical analysis was conducted, and the service recorded the number of bathers in order to detect any deficiencies and to proceed to the necessary construction improvements of baths. Since then, the service published an annual statistic of the people who frequented the spas (patients, their escorts and tourists), the number of baths they were taken and the revenues that were generated (*Efimeris tis Kyverniseos*, 30 August 1911, 19 February 1919).

Nicholaos Lekkas, the head of the service, attributed the increase in the number of spa visitors to two main factors: The visitors (who could be called holidaymakers) in this period came from various parts of Greece and from abroad (mainly from Egypt). They were attracted by the improved leisure and accommodation facilities that Greek spas offered to them. Another factor was the economic crisis of the years 1936–1938 that limited the currency capacity of upper-class

Table 1 A catalogue of Patients Who Used the Public Mineral Springs of Greece in the Years 1935–1937

Public thermal springs	Number of persons		
	1935	1936	1937
Edipsos	2443	1839	1622
Eleftheres	932	947	1123
Thermopylae	1040	1081	1631
Kamena Vourla	2286	1624	2428
Caiaphas	2434	2144	2260
Kythnos	367	379	460
Kyllini	964	918	1217
Lagadas	3699	2845	4256
Loutraki	750	750	800
Methana	2281	2677	4257
N. Apollonia	2605	2409	1310
N. Loutraki (Pozar)	1222	1182	1199
Smokovo	3654	3068	4983
Hypati	1943	1617	1849

Notes Adapted from Lekkas (1938, p. 245).

visitors who used to prefer the European spas in the previous period. The number of patients who used the private thermal springs of Greece for the years 1935, 1936 and 1937 were 24,667, 25,917, and 22,069, respectively. The public thermal springs had 36,495, 35,219 and 42,878 patients for the years 1935, 1936, and 1937, respectively (Table 1) (Lekkas, 1938).

According to the statistics of the year 1933, the spas that gathered the larger number of tourists from abroad were Loutraki and secondarily Edipsos. The continuous stream of people (local and foreigners) who visited the spas (mainly Edipsos and Loutraki) indicates that most of them were not patients but tourists who visited the Greek spas with their families for holidays. Apart from these two cosmopolitan resorts, Methana, Hypati, Smokovo, Lagadas, and Caiaphas had the appropriate infrastructure to host foreign tourists. The figures indicate a gradual increase in the number of visitors due to a large extent to concession agreements between the state and companies or entrepreneurs that improved that urban space of Greek thermal and seaside resorts, thereby mak-

ing them more appealing to visitors. A characteristic example is the Caiaphas baths, which managed to triple the number of their visitors during the concession period, which lasted for twenty years (1907–1927) (Lekkas, 1923).

The ‘Voices’ of the Public: Visitors to Greek Spas in Literary and Autobiographical Texts

The ‘voices’ of Greek spas visitors and patients were documented in thank you letters, memoirs, and autobiographical novels. These texts are essential sources of oral history as they reveal the preferences and experiences of the public of Greek resorts. In their thank-you letters, patients mentioned their name, their place of origin, the time they stayed in the baths and the effect that the thermal springs had on their health. These letters were also as a means of persuasion to ‘advertise’ the healing properties of the baths (Damvergis, 1905).

The Greek spa towns in the last decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century served as a source for inspiration for novelists who chose to depict the urban spaces of Greek spas and the profile of their visitors in literary texts. These texts (novels, short stories and memoirs) were often based on the experiences and the impressions that their writers had during their stay at the thermal and seaside Greek resorts. The main themes of these life-writing texts are the hope of patients for a cure, social discriminations, and the need of the public for entertainment and sociability in the leisure facilities of resorts.

The great novelist Penelope Delta met and later married by match-making her husband, Stefanos Deltas in Faliro, the popular seaside resort near Athens. She travelled with her family from Alexandria to Athens to meet Stephanos Deltas and consent (with few objections) to the marriage arranged by her family. Before their first meeting, her mother advised her to wear appropriate clothing for the occasion, which indicates the importance of public display in the public sphere of the Athenian resort (Delta, 1994). During her stay in Athens, Penelope Delta had the opportunity to dine several times in Faliro and experience herself the sociability that the bourgeois Athenians enjoyed in the resort. She met many members of the Athenian bourgeoisie in the restaurants located on the

seafront of Faliro. The pier offered Penelope Delta and her company the pleasure of walking along the seaside. In such a walk on the pier, the novelist discussed the matter of her marriage with her uncle, and she was persuaded to give her consent. The eve of their engagement ended with a family dinner in a restaurant on the Faliro seafront in which she received the wishes of her relatives.

In another walk on the pier with her future husband, she had the opportunity to make a personal ‘confessional’ conversation with him in an attempt to become better acquainted with him. While they were conversing, she avoided looking at him, and she focused her attention on the stormy sea, which reflected the lights of the seafront. During their conversation on the pier, the pair was keeping some distance from the crowd of walkers. At the end of the night, they returned to Athens together by train (Delta, 1994).

In contrast to Penelope Delta who experienced the sociability of the popular resort from the ‘privileged’ position of the visitor, another renowned Greek writer, Menelaos Lountemis, spent a summer working in another famous spa town. In his autobiographical novel *Kalinyxta Zoe* (Goodnight Zoe) Menelaos Lountemis describes his experiences as a waiter in Edipsos. The case of the author, who found seasonal employment in the resort, is perhaps indicative of the development of the spa and its architectural transformation from a small village to a popular tourist resort. M. Lountemis uses the term *tempeloupoli* (lazy town) to stress the touristic aspect of Edipsos in the late 1930s. According to the author, most visitors chose Edipsos for their holidays. They frequented the beaches, and they socialised and flirted in the restaurants, cinemas and hotels located along the seafront of the spa town. In contrast, restaurant and hotel managers wanted to make a profit, and they tended to economically exploit the patients and tourists who visited Edipsos (Lountemis, 2000).

Lountemis claims in his novel that the public of the spa consisted of men and women of different classes and social discriminations were evident. The ‘privileged’ visitors stayed at luxurious hotels, while the people of lower incomes bathed in the public baths (the price of a bath was only 10 drachmas) and they stayed

at smaller and cheaper hotels. The author states that in the late 1930s Edipsos was a cosmopolitan resort, since European tourists and Greeks from Alexandria spent their holidays there. Although in this period Edipsos was a destination for holidaymakers, there were still a large number of patients who hoped that the use of thermal springs of the spa town could offer them therapy. Unfortunately, their hope for a cure did not always come true. One such case was the one of an elderly patient in the novel, who hoped to walk without his crutch and he was deeply disappointed when he left the spa town holding two crutches instead of one (Lountemis, 2000)!

Another category of the public of Greek seaside and thermal resorts was the children who travelled to the baths with their family. Elias Papadimitrakopoulos (1995) describes the journey by train to the baths of Katakolo in Peloponnese from the point of view of a child in his autobiographical novel, *Therma Thalas-sia Loutra* (Hot Water Baths). When he was a child, the novelist travelled to the baths every summer with his aunt, who suffered from rheumatism. The trip to the baths was a matter of significant importance, and therefore, every year, she made all the proper arrangements. She wore her hat from Trieste (which she kept hidden the rest of the year), she cleaned her black scarf, and she put their snack in a straw basket. The sea baths were very popular in the pre-war period, as there was a special first-class ticket for the hot water baths. This ticket was granted to the ticketholders who could afford to travel in the special wagon for bathers. The first-class passengers could sit in the luxurious and comfortable straw seats. It should be noted that the novelist names the wagon 'a true sanctuary,' which implies the social distinction between the privileged and poorer bathers (Papadimitrakopoulos, 1995).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to present the world of Greek thermal and seaside resorts in the two phases of Greek baths. A corpus of different primary sources provided interesting facts about the profile of Greek spas' visitors. These patients and visitors were a diverse world that consisted of people of different origin and residence, income, education, and interests. However,

all of them had one goal in common: both the wealthy and the poor and the patients who visited the thermal springs of Greek resorts hoped to recover or at least find some relief. They were encouraged by their doctors to make use of the baths and, depending on their financial status; they resided for or longer periods in Greek resorts. It can be claimed that the public played a vital role in the architectural improvement of the urban space Greek spas, as the increasing demands for better medical, accommodation and entertainment facilities led to the construction of the necessary amenities, which were often of European standards.

In the first period, the public made limited use of thermal waters, and began to timidly trust the baths of Kythnos. As this 'relationship of trust' between the Greek baths and their public gradually grew stronger, other seaside and thermal spas developed. At the end of the first period, their urban space improved significantly due to the construction of luxury hotels and entertainment facilities. The first visitors came mainly from the middle strata and travelled alone or with family members. In the second period of development of Greek resorts, their heyday, a shift in the profile of visitors was observed. As statistics and patients testimonies revealed, the public of Greek spas was amounted to thousands and consisted mostly of vacationers. Thus, the sea and the thermal baths, the square, the pier, luxury hotels, casinos and restaurants attracted the interest of visitors and transformed the Greek spas to popular destinations of domestic and incoming tourism.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Tomi Brezovec and Mr Allan Brodie for their helpful comments on this paper. I would also like to thank Associate Professor Anna Matthaïou for her supervision and support of the thesis from which this material is drawn, and the Foundation for Education and European Culture (ΙΠΕΡ) for their financial assistance.

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