The Modern Ancient Greeks

**CHARIOTS OF FEAR AT THE ATHENS FARMERS’ MARKETS**

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| ***BY ADRIAN VRETTOS & JANET MCGIFFIN****Adrian Vrettos is a field archaeologist whose work takes him to café-bars where he observes his fellow Athenians whom he calls “The Modern Ancient Greeks.”* *Janet McGiffin is author of the four-book historical fiction series about the 8th Century Byzantine Empress Irini of Athens who poisoned her way to the throne of Constantinople. Janet can be reached through her website at* [*janmcgiffin.com*](https://janmcgiffin.com/)*.* *This article appears in Matt Barrett’s* [*greecetravel.com “The Modern Ancients”*](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/articles/chariots.htm) |
| PICTURE the Coliseum in Rome, dust rising, whips cracking, pounding horses’ hooves under the roar of the crowd. Now picture a morning at your local neighbourhood outdoor market—your *laiki* reeking of melted fish ice flowing down the street, and hollering street vendors vying for the loudest eulogies about their "beautiful fresh red fragrant Thessalean strawberries," or "Home-grown organic Cretan avocados, and tomatoes." But look out! Hurtling towards you, steel-framed with rubber wheels spoked with freshly sharpened nails – it’s a Modern Ancient Greek granny with her chariot of fear!! Leap for your life!   The Romans didn't invent the war chariot. They copied the design from the *nikokires* (housewives) at the Greek open vegetable markets. These ordinarily sweet, spoiling Modern Ancient Greek grandmothers, with their high-pitched shrieks, turn into Gladiators from Hellas (the Greek word for ‘Greece’) on *laiki* mornings.  Greece has always had a blooming street-market economy, from pre-historic times. Hessiod, a farmer and historian who lived in the fifth century BC, wrote that whatever he couldn't sell in his village, he took to a city like Athens where he could get a fixed price. Today's travelling food fairs, called *laiki*, are peculiar to Athens, moving day by day to different neighbourhoods, feeding nearly three million Athenians out of the backs of small trucks which maze their way around the narrow lanes of central Athens and the greater Athens area. Their predecessors from ancient Greece were farmers selling their goods in the *agora* and other street markets. As ancient Athens grew into a commercial town, the very rich usually had farms outside the town, as well as Athens town houses, and their slaves brought them fresh food. However, the need grew to feed the growing artisan population who owned no land. These were the beginnings of the modern-day street *laiki*. *Laiki* means, "for the common folk". Almost by magic, these markets appear loudly at the crack of dawn and disappear just as loudly as the day gets hot. They are always followed by that nightmare, the garbage truck. Beware: don't park your car in a *laiki* street the night before the market. How do you know? When your car is gone. Like many things in Greece, you learn by experience. The *Agoranomos* in ancient Athens, was and still is, the official whose job it is to stop vendors from setting up their stalls whenever and wherever they want. In modern Athens, laiki food sellers are given set locations in different neighbourhoods. Gypsies are the exception. They drive around shouting nasally through the loudspeakers on their pickups which is not just done to disturb your afternoon nap but also to sell fruit or collect cast-off household items. Unfortunately, Gypsies usually are not granted permits to sell in the street markets. Which brings me back to the market where the bewildered foreign visitor to our beautiful shores is dazed and enchanted by the colourful commotion confronting them. At first, these bewitched voyeurs buy little, but not through lack of trying. It's more due to politeness, a misguided interpretation of the Greek word *politismenos,* which means "civilised". Our Modern Ancient Greek granny gladiators don’t concern themselves about *politismenos*. They engage in shoulder-barging, foot-stomping, ankle scraping, and queue-jumping with their chariots. But fear not, you will find that street sellers are grateful for the break from Gladiator Granny and will serve you with a smile, a joke, and a laugh.To find the laiki near you, check [here](https://www.greeceathensaegeaninfo.com/h-athens/cultural/farmers-markets.htm). And have your coins handy for those strawberries from Crete. And more in Matt Barrett’s [Athens Guide](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/index.htm)Link to [Adrian’s other articles:](https://muckrack.com/adrian-vrettos)  |