Modern Ancient Greeks

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| ***THE FLEECE MARKET***  ***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/)*.*  *An earlier version of this article appears in Matt Barrett’s* |
| I USED to own, manage, and run an antique store on Asklipiou Street in Exarhia. For those of you who don't know about Exarhia, it's now a fashionable student hangout between the Lykavittos and Strefi hills but it used to be where the Anarchists hung out. For those who don't know about the Anarchists, they were 5th century BC Athenians who would sit philosophising, often drunk, about the wrongs of the world and eventually would be drawn into another traditional ancient Greek pastime which is writing on walls. Graffiti comes from the Greek word grafos, which means to write.  Which brings us back to my antique store, the walls of which had cracks which I covered with prints of ancient Greece and sold for a nice profit, thank you very much. But let me tell you a thing or two about buying antiques. It's the same advice that Asklepius would have told his friends if he had owned an antique store and not been a healer:  Go to Monastiraki! That's from Athinas Street to Thission train station. This has been the hub of fleecing foreigners seeking antiques since Asklepius came hunting for herbal remedies. In fact, the Fleece Market runs parallel to the ancient Agora below the Acropolis.  If you want upscale, go to Kolonaki and various alleys dotted around town but I avoid these high-priced clip joints except for comparing the price of something I just picked up in Monastiraki.  But back to Balkan-style buying where East meets West just like it was when Asklepius was dispensing foot-blister salve. The crowded flea market stalls sell everything from mobile phones to army surplus, records to old postcards, metal piping to Indonesian wood carvings.  This is the place where "real" antiques can be bought. Can you get them cheap? Some good Victorian pieces from 1870-1905 can be acquired off the back of pick-up trucks parked at Avyssinias Sq in the heart of the flea market. These are usually in need of restoring. I helped a friend barter for a Skyrosisland chair. The ornate griffin carving and style hasn't changed much over the past couple of millenniums.  Indeed, if you look around the slightly overpriced shops, some real bargains can be had. I bought an overstuffed carved Victorian armchair that needed upholstering and stripping but was worth the work. But beware of Egyptian imitations.  You can also find lovely crystal glass sets or finely etched glass aged 20 to 120. Again, the best bargains are those you blow off the dust and give the sales shark a disapproving look.  **Tips on bargaining**  Do it. Don't be shy. Don't be discouraged if they laugh in your face. If they don't drop to your suggested price - which should be at least a third off the asked price - walk away. Seven times out of ten, they will call you back and add a bit onto your original barter price. For those of you who don't speak ancient barter Greek, all you will not understand is: "It was bought for that price; I'm making no profit; my sick mother is waiting for an operation; my 10 children all need..." etc. If you have any real desire to buy things, it's worth going with a Greek friend and buying lunch in exchange for their innate haggling skills.  Ancient artifacts can be found for a stiff price in that same buzzing market, such as small ceramic pots used by Asklepius for his love elixirs. If you're not an expert, it's tough to check authenticity so better avoid this and enjoy your photos from the museums. If you're really interested in buying, go to the antiquity auctions at Sotheby's et al in New York .  The modern Agora is still a fashionable Sunday pastime for the modern ancient Greeks. Then go for a wander in the ancient Agora which is probably all you can afford, having wandered through the modern ancient Fleece Market.  Link to [Adrian’s other articles:](https://muckrack.com/adrian-vrettos)  And more in Matt Barrett’s [Athens Guide](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/index.htm) |