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## Greek Revival

I have a friend living in New York City who is Greek and owns an apartment in Athens. He graciously offered it to me and my fiancé for a week a few years ago and we jumped at the opportunity. Despite it being February and low season for tourism, we excitedly booked a flight within the month.

In the first hour of the eleven-hour flight, I managed to spill a carafe of red wine in my fiancé's lap. I tried to calm her, explaining that it really isn't an adventure until something goes wrong and we should just roll with these things. Still, I had to sit in airplane time-out for the remaining ten hours.

Athens is truly one of the world's great cities with a history, culture, and literary heritage second to none. There were so few people about at that time of year that we visited the Acropolis and Parthenon several times, as well as museums and libraires where I first discovered the writings of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, known as "Fragments" because that is all that remains of his work. Each fragment though a wealth of insight into human nature and the nature of being.

Just outside the Acropolis is Mars Hill, a small stone mound where St. Paul stood as a disciple to spread his faith to the Athenians, not an easy task considering their widespread Pagan beliefs. To modern day historians and journalists though, the spot is often referred to as "Freedom Hill" for being one of the earliest known places where religious tolerance and free speech thrived.

Over time, St. Paul built a small chapel on the site, the remains of which are still visible in the indentations and worn-out surfaces of the stone. We walked throughout the remains and sat for a time overlooking one of the most beautiful vistas in the world, one where the beauty of nature and the man-made Acropolis seem to coexist more harmoniously than cities of today. A good place to ponder history.

Being born a Catholic and having invested in multiple journalism degrees, the place holds even greater significance for me. But what impressed me most was how it made me think about history. I had always felt detached from history, it being the past and something to study in books alone. But after visiting Athens, it was not hard to see that we are a part of history, not separate from it. A progression that continues forward each second, connected to the past by remnants of our civilizations. History is not only the past, but also now. Now is the living part.

A recent book I found fascinating is "The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World" by Catherine Nixey. She leaves one to consider whether the world would not be far better off today if classical ideals had remained the dominant ethos. Others believe that we have done well enough to adopt many of those ideals that inform so much of the framework of our lives today.

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Our world today is fractionalized like never before, with often competing beliefs, ideologies, and messages. Understanding history through travel and reading can help provide an understanding that celebrates the very diversity that so many fear. Education needs to be more than vocational training and have a foundation rooted in the classics, and include the humanities, history, and the arts, providing the common ground that can unite us all.

Our modern-day Mars Hill is planet Earth, and we need to grant as much freedom and tolerance to each other as the Athenians afforded St. Paul. All to say that a visit to Athens and brushing up on classic Greek literature will surely get you thinking about history in a modern light. Even if you spill a little wine along the way.

Paul Basil