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# On Airs, Waters, and Places: The Construction of a Natural History of Healthcare in Twentieth-Century Greece

Lydia Xynogala

In the early twentieth century a mineral revolution took place in Greece. Healthcare, politics, science, and natural resources became entangled in Greek thermalism—a nationwide “taking the waters.” Geological knowledge and attitudes towards healing were coupled with a broader environmental and healthcare movement. During this period minerals found in waters and subsoils were extensively studied and the national territory remapped.

Sites of thermalism were typically located in areas of particular geomorphology, often near sites of mineral extraction of sulfur or magnesite. The state pursued an indirect and sustainable kind of extraction—a soft form of exploitation, so to speak—acquiring minerals through hydrotherapy and positherapy, bathing, and drinking. Private investment followed public money. This momentum was manifest in medical discourse and in the numerous hydrotherapy baths that were built in locations with thermal springs. The entire country was envisioned as an open-air clinic, where waters would treat a wide range of conditions from arthritis to infertility. <sup>fig. 1</sup> The Greek Ministry of Tourism promoted thermalism abroad through iconic posters, promoting Greece as a synthesis of modernity and antiquity.

The curative properties of springs were not a new discovery, and many of the locations for bathing had been known since antiquity.<sup>1</sup> In this particular historical context, however, the notions of healing, therapy, and the care of *demos* became inseparable from cultural, political, and social shifts in Greece. The prior existence of *hammams* (Turkish baths), however, was neglected in this narrative, part of a broader effort to erase Ottoman cultural traces in the newly established Greek nation. Ancient practices and pagan narratives became metaphors which were deployed in the service of geopolitical aspirations; architecture was the medium through which they unfolded.

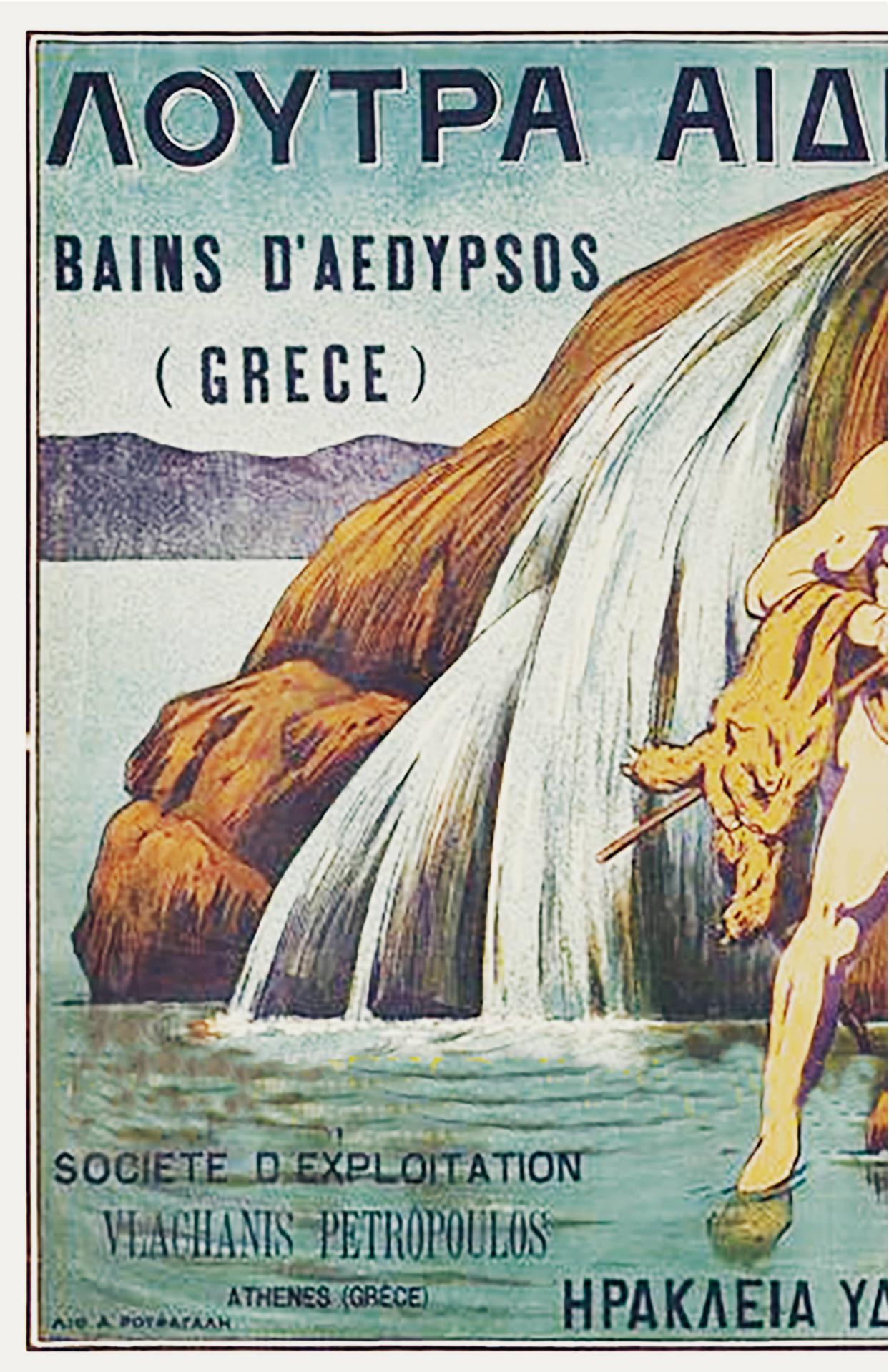
Let us begin with a single pair of islands. In the battle of the giants, during the pursuit of the giant Polyvotis, Zeus ordered Poseidon to snatch a part of the island of Kos with his trident. The giant was buried under the rock Poseidon speared, which became known as the island of Nisyros. The periodic volcanic vibrations on the island were believed to be the titan’s continuous chest movements as he laid buried underground. Both Strabo’s *Geography* and Pliny’s *Natural History*<sup>2</sup> believed the island to be a fragment of Kos. Nisyros, a round island with a volcano at its center, is pungent with the sulfuric gas often released through fumaroles. Hot air comes out of vents throughout the island,

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<sup>1</sup> Luigia Melillo, “Thermalism in Ancient World,” *Medicina nei secoli arte e scienza* 7, no. 3 (1995), 461–83.

<sup>2</sup> *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. W. Falconer (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854–1857), 10.5 §17, 213; *Pliny’s Natural History in Thirty-Seven Books*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: George Barclay, 1847–1848), 5.36, 91.

**fig.1** Poster advertising the baths of Aidipsos with the mythical figure of Hercules bathing in the waters to regain strength  
Source: Societe D' Exploitation Vlachanis Petropoulos





**3** The classical theory of the elements runs through Plato to Aristotle to Empedocles, and persisted until 1661, when Robert Boyle, in the *The Sceptical Chymist* (London: J. Cadwell, 1661), put an end to the millennia-old philosophy. See, for example, James Longrigg, "The 'Roots of All Things,'" *Isis* 67, no. 3 (1976), 420–38, esp. 420.

**4** From Ottoman rule, the island was transferred to Italy in 1911. In 1947, following the end of the Second World War, Nisyros was annexed to Greece.

**5** Curative water and volcanic terrains were known to be connected from antiquity. The geological features of the soil gave the water which passed through it its particular qualities and temperature. According to Seneca, Empedocles had already linked hot springs and volcanism, considering the two phenomena as manifestations of the same reality. See Seneca, *Natural Questions*, trans. Harry M. Hine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3.24 §1, 40.

**6** Born around 460 BCE into a family of physicians, Hippocrates developed four basic principles integral to medical practice today: etiology, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. Hippocrates' expertise was not solely tied to Kos but was gathered from his many travels around Greece. By observing patients from various geographies, he developed theories linking the environmental qualities of a place to their effect on bodily health.

**7** I refer to the ancient Greek word for science, *épistémè*, relative to Foucault's definition as the "strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterized as scientific." Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194–228, 197.

**8** Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 56.

emerging from nooks in its mountainous villages and even inside homes. Earth, water, air, and fire—the elements that dominated the natural sciences for centuries as the "roots of all things"—are found side by side in the island's environment. <sup>3</sup>

Located in the eastern Mediterranean, Nisyros is part of the Dodecanese group of islands near the Turkish shore. <sup>4</sup> Kos, a larger nearby island, is not volcanic but shares geologic features with its neighbor: *solfatara* (fumarole) fields and hot springs. Both islands have a long-standing healing culture spanning ancient and recent history. In antiquity, Kos was known for its Asclepeion sanctuary; its mineral springs were used in both ancient and modern times. On the remote island of Nisyros, thermal bath complexes flourished in the first half of the twentieth century, attracting visitors from Greece, Asia Minor, and other coastal cities in the Mediterranean, such as Marseilles, who arrived by steamboats to be cured, many returning yearly. <sup>5</sup>

Both islands claim to be the birthplace of Hippocrates, but Kos holds the official title. <sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Nisyrians still maintain that Hippocrates was born on their island. Hippocrates became a prominent representative of the Koan medical school, where he practiced according to his belief in the healing powers of nature. His treatments developed from close observation of patients and logical reasoning. Under his tenure, the school fostered a number of medical scholars who contributed to this "new science," <sup>7</sup> a body of knowledge that sought to understand physiology, record symptoms, and document the effect of treatments. "Hippocrates seems to be both the last witness and the most ambiguous representative" of the balance between seeing and knowing in medical experience. <sup>8</sup>

Hippocrates' initial reputation was as the one who saved Athens from an epidemic. When threatened by plague, Pericles invited Hippocrates to Athens to assist with the crisis. Indeed, practicing his medicine from the temple of Apollo, he managed to contain the epidemic and received great recognition for his methods.

As a practice, Hippocratic medicine integrated a holistic approach whereby the patient was treated

as a “psychosomatic whole ... and thus, the Hippocratic doctor treats the specific patient and not the illness.”<sup>9</sup> Emphasis at Kos was on the broader psycho-socio-somatic state of the patient rather than on a specific illness (in contrast to the medical tradition on the nearby peninsula of Knidos). The attributes of place and environment played a role in this approach. In his treatise *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, Hippocrates analyzes the beneficial and detrimental effects of different types of winds, orientations, and water sources.<sup>10</sup> He indicates three key factors for investigating medicine properly: seasons of the year, the winds, and the qualities of waters. These factors must be taken into consideration in the founding of cities, for by understanding the environmental features of a place, the physician could then anticipate illnesses that would affect its population. A similar epidemiological approach to climate resurfaced in the late nineteenth century: physicians directly linked various illnesses such as cholera to particular geographic and climatic characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

Besides winds and broader climatic features, Hippocrates wrote extensively on the different types of water found in a region. Thermal waters were for Hippocrates almost as bad as stagnant ones:

*“Next to them in badness are those which have their fountains in rocks ... they must necessarily be hard, or come from a soil which produces thermal waters, such as those having iron, copper, silver, gold, sulphur, alum, bitumen, or nitre (soda) in them; for all these are formed by the force of heat. Good waters cannot proceed from such a soil.”*<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, following the principles of the *pharmakon*, he recommended such waters for specific ailments.

Hippocrates rejected superstitious views, prevalent amongst his contemporaries, that illness was caused by evil spirits or vengeful gods—assertion that led to him become commonly referred to as the father of rational medicine. On Kos, however, these antithetical approaches, the traditions of ritual healing and rational Hippocratic practice, were not clearly separated. Their entanglement is manifest in the form of the Asclepeion sanctuary, simultaneously a religious center, hospital, bath complex, and medical school. <sup>fig.2</sup>

Asclepeions were the healing sanctuaries dedicated to the divinity Asclepios, son of the god Apollo.<sup>13</sup> Their locations were selected with great care: a natural setting with views of hills, forests, and the sea was of utmost importance. Most sanctuaries were close to natural springs. The Asclepeion of Kos was considered to be one of the greatest in the Hellenistic and Roman world.<sup>14</sup> In the sanctuary's architecture, curative water containing iron and

<sup>9</sup> Constantinos Trompoukis, Vasilios German, and Matthew E. Falagas, “From the Roots of Parasitology: Hippocrates' First Scientific Observations in Helminthology,” *Journal of Parasitology* 93, no. 4 (2007), 970–72, here 970.

<sup>10</sup> The Hippocratic Corpus was first printed in a Latin translation in 1525 in Rome, while the first English translation appeared in 1597. Several others followed in French and German during the nineteenth century. These publications, through their balance of healing and observation, were instrumental in the Western foundation of medical practice. For details of the Hippocratic Corpus' reception and interpretation see David Cantor, *Reinventing Hippocrates* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Amanda Sciampano, “Epidemics in a Mist: Medical Climatology and Cholera in Victorian Visual Culture,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 25, no. 4 (August 2020), 492–511.

<sup>12</sup> Hippocrates on *Airs, Waters, and Places*, trans. Emile Littré (London: Wyman and Sons, 1881), 3 §35, 27.

<sup>13</sup> In mythology, Asclepius, the god of medicine, was surrounded by his healing family. The names of his daughters summarize the various facets and stages of curing an illness, from treatment to good health: Hygeia (hygiene), Panacea (remedy of all disease), Aceso (healing process), Iaso (recuperation), and Aegle (good health).

<sup>14</sup> Built after the death of Hippocrates in the mid-fourth century BCE, it consisted of a terraced arrangement of buildings, offering visitors contemplative views amidst a scenic landscape. Other renowned Asclepeions were those of Trikke, Epidaurus, Athens, and Corinth.

sulfur minerals from the thermal springs on site was channeled into the building.<sup>15</sup> Later on, *thermae* (thermal bath complexes) were built by the Romans.

<sup>15</sup> A high retaining wall had fountains incorporated within it; inflow and outflow of water was used for the ritual purification of visitors and for therapeutic regimens. Marble conduits of water ran along the length of the stoa to refresh visitors. To the east of the complex, where the sacred thermal spring emerged, the water now flows from a Roman sculpture of Pan.

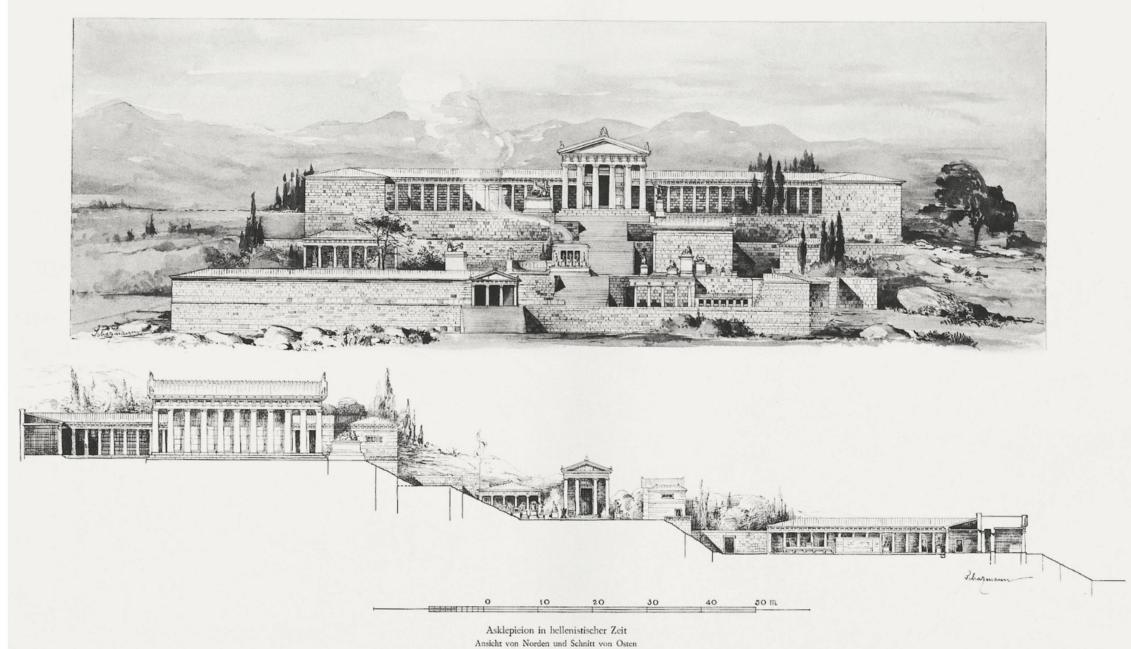
<sup>16</sup> A sacred law forbade felling cypress trees within the limits of the temples of Apollo and Asclepius. A marble epigraph located at the museum located in the Asclepeion site in Kos states "Lex Sacra prohibiting the felling of the cypresses in the sacred grove. Circa 300 BCE." Cypress trees outside the demarcated area could be cut and used by the timber trade, and all profits would be used for projects related to the sanctuary.

<sup>17</sup> H. Christopoulou-Aletra, A. Togia, and C. Varlamis, "The 'Smart' Asclepieion: A Total Healing Environment," *Archives of Hellenic Medicine* 27, no. 2 (2010), 259–63, here 259.

**fig. 2** Kos Asclepeion in the Hellenistic period, perspective from the north and a sectional view from the east, from Paul Schatzmann and Rudolf Herzog, *Asklepieion: Baubeschreibung und Baugeschichte*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Keller, 1932), plate 39

Temple and environment were linked through various laws,<sup>16</sup> an early form of environmental policy. Water played a central role in the healing practices: in order to be admitted to the sanctuary, patients had first to undergo *catharsis*, or purification. The ritual included baths and a cleansing diet. Purification of the body thus preceded any type of cure. Once completed, patients would undergo dream therapy or incubation, whereby in a hypnotic state they would be visited by Asclepius or one of his daughters for a prognosis—lying in animal skins, the divinities would tell them what they needed to do to be cured. (It was, in fact, the temple's priests whispering prescriptions for plants, exercise, fasting, and diet in their ears.) Upon waking, the patient would consult with the temple priest and recount the dream, after which treatment would follow.<sup>17</sup>

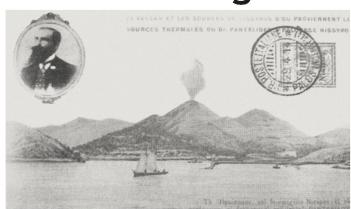
In the words of Charles Flegel, a Lithuanian traveler to the island of Nisyros in the late nineteenth century, "the hunter [and] the fisherman can rely purely on nature, but for the goals



of hygiene, therapy and leisure, nature is in need of help by science, the arts and artistry—in other words: bathhouses, hotels, coffee shops, doctors and pharmacies."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, three bath complexes developed with specialized in-house doctors to care for patients. **fig. 3** They flourished during the first half of the twentieth century. The various names, forms and interiors of these buildings, along with their promotional material, represented a mixture of pagan and modern elements, ancient wisdom and a "European" outlook. They were a modest state-run bath building

<sup>18</sup> Καρόλου Φλέγελ, *Η Νήσος Νίσυρος και αι θέρμαι αυτής Ανατύπωση [The Island of Nisyros and Its Thermae]* (Athens: Onnix Haleplian Galata, 2007[1899]), 8.

with in-house accommodation (Loutra), a vast private bath and hotel complex (Paloi), where the springs were discovered by Dr. Pantelidis in 1899, and a small makeshift community facility (Mandraki). These three buildings of different sizes, types of ownership, and clientele – but all solitary structures, set in the landscape – are exemplary types of twentieth-century thermalism in Greece.<sup>19</sup> As one local told me, “we don’t live in earth. We live in lava that’s been solidified. It’s good to learn that the heat gets released in the water, otherwise the volcano would explode again.” Geology and built tectonics are one here. The qualities of the various volcanic stones are manifest in the way they are carved to construct the island’s built environment. Softer stones produce sculptural forms, while harder ones create more rigid geometries and thinner, lighter masonry. All three bath buildings utilize local stones, and their properties translate into specific architectural expressions. The baths of Dr. Pandelidis in Paloi are built from dark, hard volcanic stone – rhyolitic obsidian lava domes and pumice deposits similar to those mined on the neighboring island of Yali.



Bathing in hot water springs became a civilized form of recreation in Northern Europe during the eighteenth century. Drawing on ancient Roman practices, spa towns became popular resorts. In Greece, the beginning of thermalism coincided with the founding of the new Greek

nation in 1833. Greece, in search of an identity following its independence from the Ottoman Empire, witnessed a scientific revolution of sorts. An influx of foreign scientists accompanied the Bavarian-instituted monarchy and contributed to the analysis of water and soil. Xaver Landerer, the Bavarian chemist who accompanied King Otto as his military pharmacist, became a pivotal character in the development of thermalism. As the first regular professor of chemistry and of botany at the University of Athens, he sparked interest in Greek natural resources and their potential. Landerer organized the first modestly equipped chemistry laboratory and performed chemistry experiments, not just for the students but all interested Athenians. An avid writer and traveler, he assembled a large mineral collection and wrote a number of chemical treatises. In his books on the hydrochemical properties of natural springs across Greece, he urged the state to build better infrastructure to welcome visitors. These texts became a reference point for other foreign authors who wrote guides about Greece, its landscapes, and its environmental resources.<sup>20</sup> Landerer started a larger movement that was not confined to scientific circles but rippled out into the wider political and social milieu: other

<sup>19</sup> While Nisyros was not part of the Greek state until after the Second World War, a similar phenomenon of documentation and exploitation of natural resources for healing took place there. The typologies of buildings, ownership, and investment that emerged were also identical to others found in numerous locations around Greece at the time.

**fig.3** Postcard showing boats from Alexandria bringing patients to the Loutra of Nisyros (n.d.)  
Source: Dr. Pandelidis, Author's collection

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Frederick Strong, *Greece as a Kingdom* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1842).

**fig. 4** C, K, Na, Mg, Ca: a periodic table of locations of terrains and waters. The ground was documented as a broad healing network. Source: Author's montage, selected crops from "Thermal Mineral Springs," produced by G. Orfanus, K. Stetsos, and G. Ghioni-Stavropoulou for the Institute of Geology and Mineral Exploration, Athens, 1995

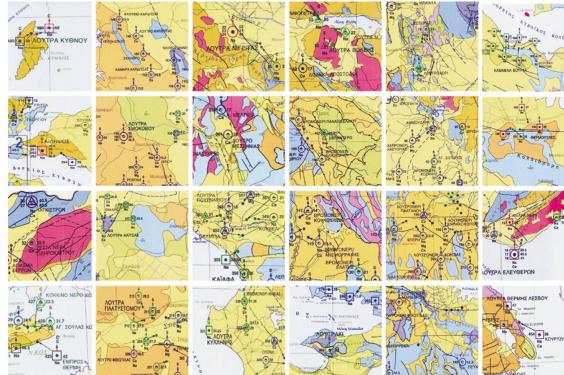
<sup>21</sup> For a detailed historical record of how the state, medical, social welfare, and legal apparatus were organized in regards to hydrotherapy benefits, see Melpomeni Kostidi, "Greek Spas (Mid Nineteenth–Early Twentieth Century): Therapy, Sociability and Vacation" (PhD diss., Thessaly University, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Αἱ 750 Μεταλλικά Πηγαί τῆς Ελλάδος [Nikolaos Lekkas, *The 750 Mineral Springs of Greece*] (Athens: A. Dialismas, 1938).

<sup>23</sup> Alexander More, et al. "The Impact of a Six-Year Climate Anomaly on the 'Spanish Flu' Pandemic and WWI," *GeoHealth* 4, no. 9 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1029/2020GH000277> (accessed May 15, 2021)

<sup>24</sup> "Thales ... says the principle is water (for which reason he declared that the earth rests on water), getting the notion perhaps from seeing that the nutriment of all things is moist, and that heat itself is generated from the moist and kept alive by it (and that from which they come to be is a principle of all things). He got his notion from this fact, and from the fact that the seeds of all things have a moist nature, and that water is the origin of the nature of moist things." Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 3. See also Jaap Mansfeld, "Aristotle and Others on Thales, or the Beginnings of Natural Philosophy (With Some Remarks on Xenophanes)," *Mnemosyne* 38, no. 1/2 (1985), 109–29.

Greek doctors and scientists educated abroad contributed to the research. This scientific community became a vocal advocate of the benefits of the waters and the need for state infrastructure for hydrotherapy. The healing qualities of numerous locations around Greece were now confirmed through laboratory mineral analysis. **fig. 4**



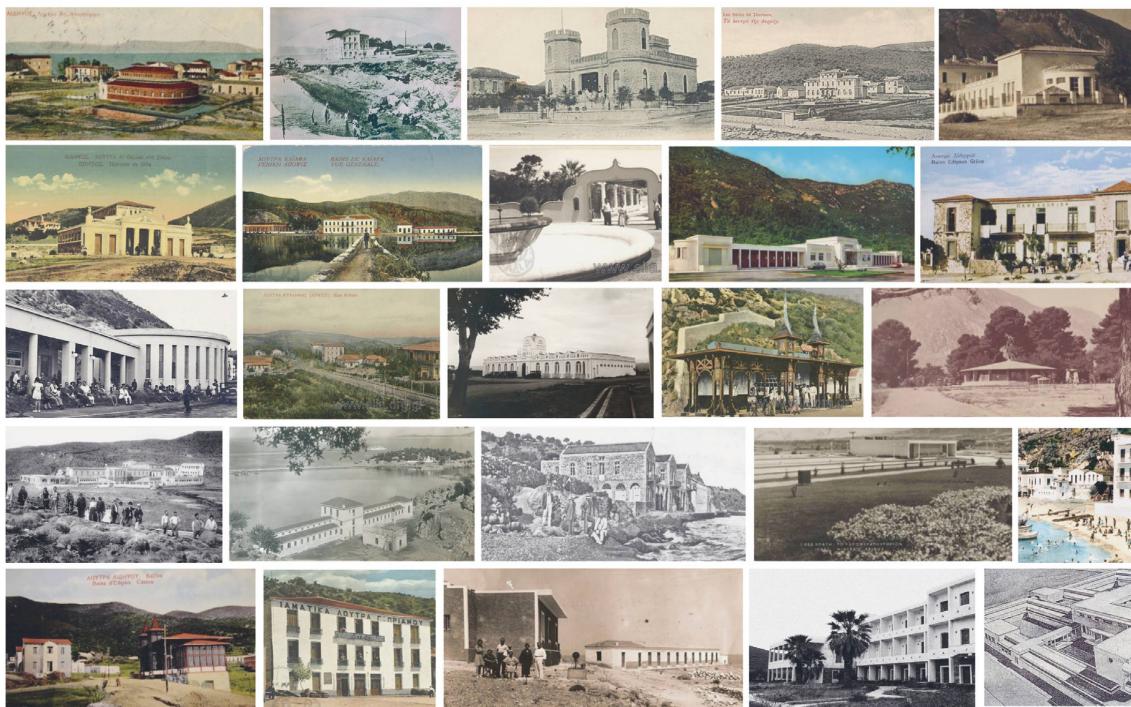
As urban centers began to grow, doctors prescribed specific waters and hydrotherapy treatments for illnesses and an escape from city life.<sup>21</sup> The centrality of thermalism to Greek modernization can be illustrated with a single publication, *The 750 Mineral Springs of Greece*, published in 1938 by the Greek Department of Healing Springs and Exhibitions.<sup>22</sup> This was a newly established department overseeing the function of state infrastructure at thermal springs across the country and also responsible for all fairs promoting Greece abroad. The book's author, Nikolaos Lekkas, was the department's director. Simultaneously a travel guide, geochemical cartography, and medical compendium, it addressed doctors, patients, (Greek-speaking) travelers, and politicians.

When the culture of thermalism began, its proponents, referencing popular thermal resorts, looked to the future with the aspiration of the new Greek state becoming "European." Building *Loutropoli* (bathing towns) was partly to achieve this desired identity. **fig. 5** A number of the bath buildings that began to crop up in thermal springs around Greece, including municipal hydrotherapy buildings in Ikaria, Kamares, and Platystomo, were named after Asclepius and Hippocrates, with Hercules appearing in advertisements for bath facilities. Medicine and the healing properties of place were once again intertwined. **fig. 6** Not least amongst the contemporary contributors to thermalism was the Spanish Flu pandemic, which ravaged the world between 1918 and 1920. It too was analysed in terms that gave weight to the description of the health of the *demos* in Hippocratic terms.<sup>23</sup>

The water-centric philosophy of Thales,<sup>24</sup> Hippocratic medicine, Asclepian pagan wisdom, the legacy of Roman baths and Turkish hammams, Bavarian science: these historical, scientific, and philosophical approaches to "taking the waters" were blended in the discourse of thermalism and popular rhetoric in Greece. The discourse of prevalent historiography of the new Greek Hellenic Nation in the nineteenth century was centered on continuity from antiquity: a "national rhetoric that

traced the continuous history of the Greek nation back to the first Olympiad in 776 BCE.”<sup>25</sup>

Maria Puig de La Bellacasa writes that “care contains a notion of doing that concern lacks.”<sup>26</sup> She points to the shared root of concern and care, coming from the Latin *cura* (cure). The



<sup>25</sup> Introduction to Roderick Beaton and David Ricks, eds., *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the Uses of the Past (1797–1896)* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1–20, here 5.

<sup>26</sup> Maria Puig de La Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 42.

**fig. 5** A panorama of bath buildings reflecting attitudes to healing and care  
Source: author's collection

Greek word for care, *φροντίς*, has its roots in *φρην* (frin);<sup>27</sup> a term denoting the mind, the heart, or the soul. *Φρονέω* (phronéō), which shares the same root as care, means “to think.” To care, to cure, to think, to do.

<sup>27</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (1909) (London: Simon Wallenberg Press, 2007).

Who cared, and for whom? And healing from what? In a new nation state, born amidst ruins both ancient and modern, “healing” had an unstable meaning. From state endeavor to private interests, and from nation building to international tourism, the meaning of care implicit in Greek thermalism constantly shifted. In the 1920s, Greece was dealing with the trauma of the destruction of Izmir at the end of the Greco-Turkish war. In the aftermath of the First World War, a Greek campaign bolstered by a British alliance embarked on capturing territories of the former Ottoman Empire. “Megali Idea” or “Great Idea” was a nationalist movement aspiring to the expansion of the Greek state following its independence from the Ottoman Empire. The war, which began in 1919, ended in 1922 when the Turkish army regained control of Izmir. The catastrophic fire and destruction of the city brought waves of immigrants to Greece. In Athens alone, the documented number of refugees had reached a million, and the entire port of Piraeus had become a makeshift camp.<sup>28</sup> While these mass population exchanges were being brokered between the two countries,<sup>29</sup> hydrotherapy clinics and a culture of healing

<sup>28</sup> “Μικρασιατική Καταστροφή, Πειραιάς 1922: Σπάνιο βίντεο με πρόσφυγες,” [Asia Minor catastrophe, Piraeus 1922: rare footage with refugees], video, 5:37 mins., uploaded September 13, 2019, <https://youtu.be/aeHj9xPGpaw>, esp. 0:31, 1:12–2:10. (accessed January 21, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Shields, “The Greek-Turkish Population Exchange: Internationally Administered Ethnic Cleansing,” in “Christians: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine,” special issue, *Middle East Report* 267 (Summer 2013), 2–6.

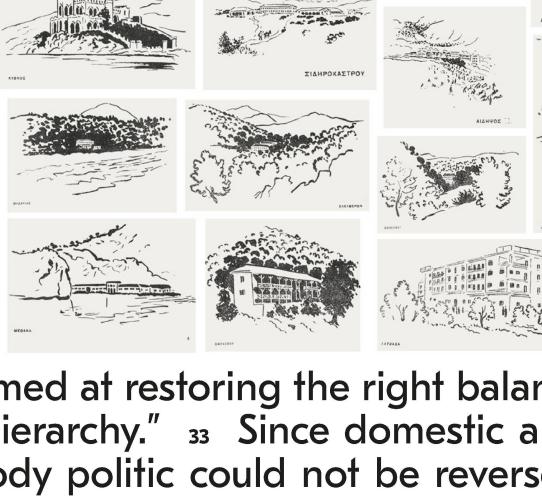
were being promoted around Greece. In the words of a medical doctor in 1926:

*"All the most civilized nations ... prominently demonstrate their bath towns ... Vichy, Baden-Baden, Carlsbad, aside from the therapeutic springs that they contain, also celebrate their projects, gardens, [and] tree-lined boulevards, which contribute to well-being and satisfaction. People draw inspiration from such physical contexts. [In] the matter of such natural beauty, Greece is unsurpassable. The laced coastline of Greece is intoxicating, endless, and sun-drenched. Along it can be found our alkaline springs, which are beyond compare."* <sup>30</sup>

Numerous descriptions in the same spirit are found in medical treatises of the time. One writer compared the excitement of the discovery of potentially therapeutic conjunctions of minerals to an El Dorado fever.<sup>31</sup> As Nikolaos Lekkas wrote:

*"With great interest the state apparatus is moving towards the implementation of road construction, telegraph and phone communication networks, remediation and beautification works and other related projects ... Correctly, they place importance in the clearly therapeutic and mineral resources as centers, whereby the country's rate of progress and its culture can be demonstrated."* <sup>32</sup>

Two parallel narratives thus unfolded: the disarray of Greek domestic and foreign policy on the one hand, and the nationally inflicted celebration of a mode of healing on the other. Disorder and illness relate to balance: “illness comes from imbalance. Treatment is aimed at restoring the right balance—in political terms, the right hierarchy.”<sup>33</sup> Since domestic and foreign disruptions to the body politic could not be reversed, the task of politics shifted to the balancing of individual and collective bodies. Greek politics became palliative.



Bathing, cleansing oneself from the past, and dreaming of a new European Greece. The figure of the bather slips from pragmatic activity to reflective metaphor, from fantasies of the glorious past to anxieties about an uncertain future, at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was not the sculpted marble of ruined temples and torsos of antiquity but a different raw matter that symbolically unified Modern and Ancient Greece: the ground.



**30** Athanasios Nikitas Sioris, *Αἱ Ιαματικαὶ Πηγαὶ τῆς Ελλάδας* [The Healing Springs of Greece] (Athens: Αδελφοί Α. Τουλά, 1926) author's translation.

31 Ioannis Palantzas, "Die Magnesitgewinnung und -verarbeitung in der griechischen Region Nord Euböa während des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts auf der Grundlage von Archivquellen" (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2007), 13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/refubium-5106> (accessed January 21, 2021).

**fig. 6** Building (in) nature: illustrations of bath buildings  
Source: Nikolaos Lekkas, *The 750 Mineral Springs of Greece* (Athens: A. Dialismas, 1938)

**32** Lekkas, 750 Mineral Springs, 37, author's translation.

**33** Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1978), 76.

Heat, water, and the minerals embedded in it reorganized society. In twentieth-century Greece, this notion of healing was both articulated and materialized in the hydrotherapy building.

On a hot summer's day, I walked through an empty square in Kos, noticing a sign pointing to the Hippocratic tree. I found a large, fenced-off tree under which, according to the story, Hippocrates wrote his treatises. Next to it is a Turkish fountain from the eighteenth century. Trees, treatises, fountains: from the Koan context of antiquity into twentieth-century Greece, it was healing that prevailed as the dominant metaphor, not illness. <sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*; Beatriz Colomina, "Illness as Metaphor in Modern Architecture," in Andrea Phillips and Markus Miessen, eds., *Caring Culture: Art, Architecture and the Politics of Public Health* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 73–90.