

Shopping

A little later that morning we went to see Agiris just to buy some bread and eggs, yet another shopping adventure. There were six other people in the shop waiting to be served, all visitors to the island. As we entered they were ignored as if they didn't exist. We were welcomed like long lost friends and 'Raki, Raki?' was shouted at us as if it was some sort of informal greeting rather than rocket fuel. This locally produced clear liquor is about nine hundred percent proof and certainly not to be taken internally. Agiris had just taken delivery of a very large keg of the stuff which can be bought loose if you bring along your own bottle. It is recommended to use one that has been made for ICI to transport sulphuric acid. His wife manages their other shop in the next village and Agiris is using this guaranteed freedom from discovery to hold parties in and outside his shop with this keg of Raki as a source of leglessness and blurred vision. As the controller of supplies and as the FD, MD and chairman of the operation all rolled into one, his wife without doubt would have well and truly killed him if she knew what was going on. What looked like a British Rail plastic beaker was produced and half filled with the liquor. The tourists looked on contemplating the commercial opportunities for opening a drying out clinic on the island as I set to with the rocket fuel, my Greek improving considerably with every mouthful. Whilst I was trying to keep on an even keel and focus on the cup Henri selected a loaf from the top of the breadbasket on the counter. It was unceremoniously whipped from her hand and Agiris disappeared head first into a huge sack behind the counter and reappeared proffering an identical loaf. He thrust his index finger deep into the centre of it to demonstrate the freshness of said item and the offending original was replaced in the basket for the next unsuspecting foreigner. Trays of eggs were prominent on the counter but when 'avgá' were requested yet another disappearing act was called for as he delved deep into a large fridge at the back of the shop. 'These were laid this morning by my chickens and are the best on the island', we were told. The problem with most local produce is that some is not available on the open market, they are all part of the island wide barter system. No tally is kept as to who owes what to whom, you just give people what you can or help out when you can, the theory being that it all balances out in the end. Thus there was no charge for the eggs. We left the shop with slightly blurred vision, half a dozen eggs and one loaf resembling an enormous doughnut, all for the price of the bread.

Out of the Rat Race into the Fire