



John Kass's Odyssey: A Journey of Discovery in Greece and Turkey

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John Kass's Odyssey is a nine-article *Chicago Tribune* series from April 2012 that relates the economic and political transformations of Greece and Turkey from the always-honest perspective of an award-winning columnist. As a first-generation American born to Greek immigrants, Kass explores his family's history and his personal connections to these neighboring nations whose own relationship is often tumultuous.

While ancient Greece's traditions are at the heart of our American democracy, modern Greece has become notorious for making headlines as an economic harbinger of doom. Kass finds a desperate situation in Greece: the citizens are frustrated and in despair, due to government corruption and the inevitable fiscal disaster that follows (a situation not unfamiliar to the ready hypocrisies and injustices of Chicago that Kass regularly unearths in his daily column). In the same balanced style that has won him respect from readers and peers alike, Kass sojourns from Athens to his ancestral village of Rizis, finding moments of hope that are uplifting and poignant as well as interpersonal stories that are eminently memorable.

From Greece, Kass crosses the Aegean sea to neighboring Turkey—a country that may be Greece's inverse when it comes to both economics (Turkish GDP growth has boomed over the past decade) and democracy. Turkey is painted as a place of burgeoning democracy driven by Islamist reformers, which is a far cry from the republic's founding and unique status as a secular Islamist state. Traveling from Istanbul to Ankara, and then to the ancient city of Izmir with its rich shared Turkish-Greek history, Kass discovers not only the intimate intertwining of Greece and Turkey, but also his own deep, personal connections to the two lands. Kass brilliantly highlights the surprising circumstances these two countries share, not only with each other but with his hometown of Chicago and with Illinois and the United States as a whole.

John Kass's Odyssey is a unique mixture of personal travel story and up-to-the-minute political journalism. The up-close humanity evoked through Kass's journalistic voice creates stories that are relatable, near, and more urgent than any front-page headline could ever hope to be. For Chicagoans, who by and large live in ethnically diverse communities and identify their city as a hub of Greek culture, these stories take on even broader meanings. When Kass concludes his journey at Easter Mass in a Greek Orthodox church in the heart of Istanbul, readers will feel that this could be anywhere—taking place as much on South Halsted Street as it could be in the Hagia Sophia. It will surely appeal to those interested in international affairs, history, religion, and travel writing, in addition to the many readers who are consistently rapt by the writing of one of Chicago's finest journalists.

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