

**On Harald Bergmann's film  
„VORZEIT – In Praise of Greece“**

This movie was, is overdue! As a tribute to a country that seems to be mentioned only in connection with the word crisis. „VORZEIT – In Praise of Greece“ is the title that filmmaker Harald Bergmann gives to the first part of his project about Greece, Crete and the much older Minoan culture. About a country between myth and myths: myth both in the sense of the ancient story the movie begins with the – the Zeus story – as well as in that other sense, which understands myth as distortion of the truth, deformation, lie – all the clichés, attributions, resentment and prejudices that some groups, communities and nations make about others, the natives about strangers, the Germans, the good Europeans about the indebted, insubordinate Greeks.

Accordingly, in 2015, the year of the great „crisis“, no support could be found for the project (only later could the film be realized thanks to a German BKM and Medienbord grant) and Harald Bergmann set off with nothing but a pocket camera (he went through four such cameras) to the origins of the Greek-Cretan myth in its dual meanings. As always with this director who defies all cinematic and commercial conformism, a highly impressive work was created, which presents these two aspects of the myth in an artistic web of pictures, voices, sounds, in breathtaking images that often literally vibrate from the camera hand: from the Idaean Zeus grotto, from the sea, the light, the city of Athens (including documentary fade-ins from Berlin), sometimes also in rapid flickering, which survives as a remembrance film in the memory. And also in the voices of criticism, which condemn „cultural racism“ and the defence mechanisms, which were frighteningly expressed not only in 2015 and not only here in Germany. But also and above all in the voices from the country itself, the true voices of people from different milieus, from the taxi driver to the intellectual to the always cheerful windbag with the nickname Pipinelli, who in the middle of the landscape enjoys the „luxury“ of an outhouse with a fantastic sea view. A shrewd master of life, a modern Diogenes, to whom sun, sea and his daily bowel movements are the great blessings of life.

And not least in the voices of the women, the „Muses“, two Greek and one German, the most haunting of which comes from the 80-year-old Greek Olga, who offers a manifesto of humanity in a simple, calm speech, as an expression of concrete, lived utopia. A unique document – and timely – in the face of the impending division of Europe. And with them all the voices that trace the causes of envy, resentment, otherness, and try to fashion their counter-image, supplemented by the quiet statements of the director, who with his cautious questions loosens people's tongues, makes them tell stories, in Greek, English or German, and presents, as if in an interior monologue, the viewer with the question of whether the so-called crisis is not to be found with us rather than with the

Greeks ...

The memory that he contributes from his youth of a hike when an old, simple man on a plateau took him in and entertained him, is followed by a passage that is painful for German ears and is one of the almost silent highlights of the film, which penetrates deep into the ear and the heart. And just as penetrating are the questions he raises through the references to the winter of starvation in 1941/42, when the National Socialists occupied the country and exploited it economically, literally bleeding it dry. There were over one hundred thousand dead, „smugglers, thieves, work-shy“, as the Greeks were called at that time – like today.

But this is not a thesis film. His method is to question, feel his way, full of respect and empathy for his counterpart and not least for the beauty of the country, its people, its music, its old myths, its light. As someone who has become involved with the subject, he concludes with the thoughtful question, how „this way of thinking grew up in this light“, a question which is also about the source of the strength of these ancient people with its ancient civilization, which shaped Western thinking like no other. The director will continue his pursuit in the next part of the project. An almost slapstick-like scene expresses this in a different way, when the windbag Pipinelli presents a pistol that bends in the shot at the other and is then directed against the shooter himself. A biting ironic commentary on the worldwide weapons mania and a cheerful, emphatic no to the omnipresent threat of suicide. Pathos, a quiet scepticism and at times flickering humour are the ingredients of this film – rhythmically and melodically framed, interspersed with the singing of Psarantonis, the famous Cretan lyre player who, sitting in the grandiose Cave of Zeus, praises music and nature as God, as the pulse of all life and existence. Get out of my sun! The legendary call – it is as if it also resounds with him. He who has ears, listen – and see this film.

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