



# Olive Press

Newsletter of the Kefi Club



## Christmas in the Pelion by Marion & Robert Bune

Christmas 2017 was always going to feel strange following the loss of our three remaining parents earlier in the year. So when our lovely friends, who split their time between Amsterdam and Greece, told us they would be in the Pelion for Christmas and that we would be welcome to join them, it seemed like the perfect antidote.

The Pelion is a mountainous hook shaped peninsula on the east coast of the Greek mainland between Athens and Thessaloniki. Spectacular natural beauty abounds. One side is wild and rugged, washed by the Aegean Sea. The other borders the Gulf of Pagasitikos, which is much calmer and appears more like a lake surrounded by mountains.

Of the parts of Greece we have visited, this is by far our favourite. Regulations ensure no building is taller than 3 storeys, so there are no huge hotels and many buildings are traditional Pelion style with stone tile roofs. There is no risk of encountering an "English Pub" or "Full English Breakfast"; it remains unspoilt and well....Greek!



This would be our 11<sup>th</sup> visit, but we were excited nonetheless as it was our first in winter. For many years we have been told by locals and those with houses out there: "You really MUST come and see it in winter".

We were due to fly from Bristol to Athens on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, but a BMI pilot inexplicably took an airliner for an excursion onto the grass at Bristol Airport, closing it for many hours. As a result our flight was delayed and we departed a day late.

In Athens we collected our hire car and headed north on the National Road over mountain passes towards Volos. As we climbed we could see snow piled beside the road. The conditions worsened; first rain, then driving sleet followed by huge flashes of lightning. Tired and relieved we eventually arrived at our friends' house in Koropi at 1:30am. You would imagine at this point that we collapsed into bed – but no. Our hosts produced welcome Tsipouro and snacks. We eventually went to bed at 3:30am. Needless to say, we were not up early the next day. We were greeted by blue skies and bright sunshine. We struggled to get our heads around the fact that it was Christmas Eve. Our friends went into the garden, picked numerous oranges from a heavily laden tree and squeezed us fresh juice – a ritual, which was repeated every morning of our stay.

We took a stunning drive along the peninsula to the town of Argalasti and went for a walk around. It was so peaceful and quiet – aside from a few children wandering door to door, following the Greek tradition of playing a triangle and singing Carols. The wonderful smell of log fires permeated the air, although by now we had tied our jumpers around our waists and were wandering around in t-shirts.

We drove back along the coast and stopped in the resort of Kala Nera. It was very quiet, only a couple of mini markets and Tavernas were open. We stopped for a meze and were greeted warmly. Everywhere we went taverna owners welcomed us

personally with a handshake and “Chronia Polla” – literally meaning “many years”; a universal greeting for birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, name days and most life events.

The evening was spent having dinner and drinks at home with our hosts and the next door’s neighbours Barbara and Yiannis. Barbara is a vet and spoke good English, but Yiannis only spoke Greek. Sadly our Greek is rusty, basic and we felt inadequate compared with our friends who provided translations. Lubo, a Slovak, speaks a variety of languages including English, Greek and Dutch. Jan, from Holland, speaks fluent Greek and English.

Christmas Day dawned bright and sunny. Overnight temperatures were dropping to around freezing, but the daytimes were a very pleasant 14-17°C, warm enough to sit outside in the sun and eat breakfast.

We started with a short walk through olive groves and beside a dry river bed to the local beach. This was in part to exercise their dog, which Lubo would occasionally place on a lead, which must amuse the locals who never walk their dogs or use a lead. In the afternoon a short drive led to another walk along a completely deserted beach, from which we climbed up into an olive grove for magnificent views along the coast. We could see activity in the water and birds on the surface where dolphins were fishing. This has to have been our most relaxing Christmas Day ever.

The evening was a rather livelier affair – there were 16 people for dinner! The atmosphere was great and it struck us what a sense of community there is out there. Everyone contributed to the Menu for the evening; beef stifado, seafood pasta, chicken & tomato with mozzarella, roast pork, quiche, rice, cauliflower & broccoli, salads galore, homemade Christmas Pudding and more! The nationalities present were as varied as the food, with 5 English, 5 Dutch, 3 Greeks, 1 Welsh, 1 Canadian and 1 Slovak! It was a truly wonderful and International evening.

On Boxing Day, to walk off all that lovely food, our friends suggested: “Let’s go off up the secret valley”. To our surprise and delight this was somewhere we had never been despite many previous visits. We started out along a flat valley and then began to climb. Eventually we made it to our destination; the Panagiotiko Dam and its beautifully tranquil lake, from which there were views back down the valley to the sea and snow-capped mountains beyond.



We descended via a different route which followed the river and led to some waterfalls, apparently a swimming spot on a hot day. Based on the water temperature a very hot day would be needed and even then it would be bracing to say the least. Our friends told us that even during the busiest times of year, they do this walk and rarely meet another soul, and yet it was stunning.

That evening’s treat was a trip into the mountains for dinner. One village, Millies was absolutely bustling and is apparently a “trendy” winter resort. The rich folk from Athens and Thessaloniki go there to see and be seen – especially to be seen! Every village Plateia twinkled with Christmas lights and decorations as did most tavernas, shops and hotels. We noticed that Christmas “Trees” were not actual fir trees as we would have, but lights strung over a conical structure to represent a tree. It was all very pretty.

The following day we headed south to see friends we've met through repeated visits to the Pelion. As we travelled through the coastal towns, which we imagined would be deserted, we noticed there was always at least one taverna open. In the town of Milina, there were even folks sitting outside on the waterfront enjoying lunch in the sun.

Many years ago our friends purchased a plot of land with olive trees and a small derelict building with a sizable outdoor oven and distant views of the sea, originally used by workers tending the trees or collecting the olive harvest. After many years, they began a sympathetic restoration using the original stone. This was completed a couple of years back, and we had been invited to see the finished article.

The cottage was just idyllic. The stonework was stunning, the outside oven had been retained and a beautiful terrace created. Inside was a revelation, a vaulted roof created a feeling of space and the finish was superb. Modern technology provided an ingenious heating and cooling system. In the cold weather it produced cosy underfloor heating, whereas in hot weather the process could be reversed to make the place cool. After a lovely afternoon together, including homemade Christmas cake, we all headed out for dinner in Argalasti.

Our last full day arrived all too soon. We decided to fill this with more walking. The weather had changed completely – the sky was moody and a stiff breeze had whipped up. We did a glorious walk along the coast from Afissos to Lefokastro. This was a real treat because the views were just as stunning only different. We enjoyed the fact that the sea was wild and lively. On arriving back in Afissos having walked for a couple of hours we stopped at a taverna for food.



On departure day, we went for a final walk along the beach and were joined by a rather cute local dog. We reflected on the marvellous time we'd had and felt glad that we'd made the effort to visit in winter. We saw new things and did some beautiful walks, something, which isn't comfortable to do in the heat of the summer. Winter in Greece; we'd wholeheartedly recommend it!

### **"Athenian Women" (of the distant past) by Leigh Canham**

On the 19<sup>th</sup> January an unusually large number of us gathered at the Kefi Club, in eager anticipation of a talk by our chairman and resident philosopher, Bob Stone. As Bob pointed out at the beginning of his talk, whilst having had the "odd" impromptu opportunity to learn about modern Athenian women, this talk was all about women in classical times, a topic he knows much more about! Although our knowledge of their lives has been gleaned from a variety of ancient sources, those sources of information, both literary and archaeological, were all created by men. Bob structured his talk in two parts: the "ideal" Athenian woman (roles created by men, for men); the "real" Athenian women (roles created by men and adapted by women for women). As Bob put it: "First the dream, then reality". In the middle of the presentation we had our usual Greek meze break and refreshments (supplied by women and men).

For Greek men, the ideal woman, apart from having great beauty, exclusively adored her husband, was gifted at bearing children and extremely competent at running the home. Her "education" from her mother reflected this. Given that women, we should say girls, were often married at age 14 to much older men, adoring your husband in a physical sense might often have

been a challenge! Indeed, that was a factor in some of the adaptations that women made to their everyday lives, as Bob deftly illustrated in part 2. But, first back to the Greek ideology. By never leaving the home, nor talking to any man who was not a relative, the ideal woman would clearly only have eyes for her husband. In wealthy families, the woman would order servants to interact with the outside world on her behalf. Many households had a front door with a lock on the *outside*. Respectable women kept completely out of the public eye.

Now the reality. Images on pottery illustrate that women did participate in public rituals like funerals. It was also not so easy for poor families to stick to the ideology. Imagine how much money we could save, dearest "*kurios*" (master), if I went to the market, instead of that stupid servant? Bob gave us a recorded example of where a bored and dissatisfied "*kuria*" took great advantage of her house security system! Surviving legal testimonies have been a good source of examples of behaviour outside the norm.

It was a really excellent talk, full of detailed insight, humour and crowd participation! We look forward to Bob's next instalment in 2019: "Athenian women of the present", and wish him all the best with the painstaking research he has already commenced.

## The Greek people have failed as a state

(A timely text of Odysseas Elytis (Greek poet, 1911-1996))

I am not interested in the formal term subservience. What I am interested in is substance; and what I know is that for one reason or another we have arrived at something you will allow me to call "fake appearance". We have, that is, the tendency constantly to appear different from what we really are. And there is no more certain road to failure, whether you are making a career for yourself as an individual or collectively, than a lack of authenticity. Harm goes a very long way. All our administrative systems, our social rules, our educational programmes, having originated from the Bavarians, were taken in an unplanned way from abroad and were somehow cut and stitched on to a body with other dimensions and other requirements for breathing.

And of course it is not about "bragging about our ancestors". Besides, it is I who am talking about these things, I who, in a field such as mine, have fanatically preached our need to communicate with the international spirit, and who today am counting with confidence on the formation of a unified European entity, where Greece can have its place - but with the difference that the mechanism for the assimilation of evidence of progress must work properly and be based on a healthy and normally developed education. Although for us, not only does it not work properly, but also there is not even the mechanism for it to work properly! And with the further difference that, with very few exceptions, our leading class, when it comes to Greek education, are completely in the dark! Look carefully at the papers they themselves publish or prefer to read, the apartments where they live, the entertainment they enjoy, their attitude to life. Not a drop of authenticity! So how do you expect the younger generation to be brought up properly? From the first things a child reads to the various elements he will meet in his daily environment, which will inform his taste, a continuous and constant forgery and nothing more!

You will say to me: you are a writer, a pen pusher, and you see things from where they are hurting you. No, not at all! And let me insist: all the other ills that I could denounce - the lack of any substantial decentralisation and self-government, the lack of planning for any wealth-producing development of the country, and in addition the way in which our foreign policy is carried out - are issues for a more in-depth Greek education! - From the point of view that only this can endow a leader with the necessary awareness he needs to embrace, and equally to represent, the ethos of the people. Because this people, the concept of which we have distorted to the point where we can no longer recognise it, has produced what good there is - if there is any good in this country! And the people, in times of danger, and despite the systematic defeatism of their leaders, thanks to an invisible and blessed mechanism are lifted to heights, which require a miracle!

This, then, I must say, even though it is sad: the Greek people, for the time being at least, have succeeded as a race but have failed as a state! And day and night I ask God and the future to prove me wrong.

(Translated by Judith Bates)

## Cambridge University archaeologists making exciting discoveries on Keros

Archaeologists digging on the remote Cycladic island of Keros in the central Aegean have revealed "unusually sophisticated prehistoric monuments," according to a press release from Cambridge University's Department of Archaeology. The report said that new work has revealed that the settlement of Daskalio – the site adjoining the prehistoric sanctuary on Keros – had a "more imposing and densely occupied series of structures than had previously been realized," making it "one of the most impressive sites of the Aegean during the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC)."



"[Daskalio] was almost entirely covered by remarkable monumental constructions built using stone brought painstakingly from Naxos, some 10 km distant," it said.  
(ekathimerini.com 17/01/2018)

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