



# Olive Press

Newsletter of the Kefi Club



## A Hellenic Idyll

### Eleven days in Greece October 2017

It meant earmarking the dates a year ahead, but finally we managed to sort out a time when both Carol and I could free ourselves of other commitments long enough to have nearly two weeks in Greece. It was my third visit, Carol's second. I had been first in 1954, in a summer vacation during my Classics degree studies, and can still remember vividly the welcome I was given in Delphi, then an isolated village with no made up road, when the young people thronged round me as I walked in having hitch-hiked from Athens, and later treated me to an evening of Greek dancing in the square followed by songs sitting on a wall overlooking Mount Helicon and Mount Parnassus. Twenty years later I returned for a package holiday near Marathon, during the rule of the Colonels, but do not remember much about it. Carol had been briefly hauled round Piraeus and Athens as part of a school cruise in the sixties. Now it was 2017, we were older and wiser, and I had been trying to improve my Greek under Nick's capable tutelage for a few years.

It almost began disastrously, since the train from Worcester to Reading was cancelled and we feared we would not make our flight. Luckily the replacement bus landed us at Oxford station just in time, and we reached Gatwick train station a couple of hours before the flight. Courtesy of Easyjet and a following wind we landed at Athens Airport around 8.30 p.m. We then followed dozens of Exodos signs, noting on the way words which might be useful like Plirofories (Information), and finally found the metro station. Buying tickets, finding the platform and the time of the next train were a little fraught, but around 10 p.m. we finally found ourselves in Syntagma Square dragging our suitcases behind us. Our hotel was in Hippokratous, and we had worked out a walking route - right from Syntagma, left up Akademias, then right into Hippokratous. Miraculously it worked and we booked into the hotel by 10.30. The "welcoming drink on arrival" promised by Opodo did not materialise, but the hotel was comfortable and the staff very helpful.

We then had two wonderful days in Athens. We walked everywhere, and loved the atmosphere of the streets, exploring and getting lost, coming upon surprising shops, places to eat, or ancient sites. We found the Agora by accident, but having found it went in and booked joint tickets for a number of archaeological sites (being very old I was only half price). We then found the Acropolis by design, the Acropolis museum by asking directions several times, and a wonderful restaurant in the Plaka by passing it on the way to somewhere else. The museum was very impressive, with its main gallery exactly the size of the Parthenon and only waiting for the Elgin marbles, and we were left not only a bit footsore but very admiring of how Athens monuments were easy to get to and friendly to tourists. We ended our first day by eating Greek salad, kleftiko and baklava, chatting with the waiters in Greek, and being given free ouzo at the end of the meal as a reward.

Next morning we did Aristotle's Lyceum, arriving there a little later than intended since we came across an Evzone doing his funny walk outside the Presidential palace. I found it very moving to sit and feel the atmosphere of the place where Aristotle had taught and worked. Then a drink in the National Garden, and off to the Temple of Olympian Zeus, passing the magnificent Zappeion exhibition and conference centre on the way. Our route back to the hotel passed the front of parliament, where we arrived by chance just as the changing of the guard was about to take place. We watched this for twenty minutes, and I tried (but completely failed) at the same time to interpret what was written on the walls in front of the parliament building - partly since the police did not allow us too close and my eyesight is poor, partly because it seems to be in strange Greek.

On Monday we had a taxi to Kifissou bus station and took the bus for Pyrgos then another one on to Archaea Olympia (having booked an apartment in Olympia for five days). The bus journey was along the north coast of the Peloponnese and passed by the new bridge. The driver spent most of the journey on his mobile phone - he seemed to be running a business on the side - but he did drive safely and well. We arrived in Olympia in the early evening and were shown round our apartment, which was interesting in that the kitchen and dining room were outside and the bathroom and loo were in a (very) small stone oubliette at the side. Nevertheless we were comfortable there and had a great few days.

When we spoke to Thanos, the owner of the apartment, he said "Don't miss tomorrow." By a wonderful piece of good fortune our arrival at Olympia coincided with the lighting of the flame for the winter Olympics in South Korea. So the following morning we trooped along to the ancient site, were marshalled by the police onto a bank overlooking the stadium, and enjoyed the

wonderful experience of seeing the ceremony, with speeches by the President of Greece and the President of the Olympics, local schoolchildren making human Olympic rings, singing the Greek national anthem and the Olympic hymn and finally the blue-clad maidens carrying the flame which had been lit on the Temple of Hera, releasing a dove of peace, and then lighting the torch being carried by the first runner, who set off to much cheering down the ancient stadium and then presumably onto the road for South Korea. It was a deeply moving experience and a real privilege to be there and see it.

We visited all the sites and museums in Olympia over the next few days, and spent one day at the sea at Katakolo, where we walked miles down the most wonderful beach, mainly to get away from the myriads of tourists disembarking from enormous cruise ships and sending the whole local population into a frenzy trying to sell food, souvenirs and coach trips as fast as they could. We made friends in a couple of restaurants in Olympia, in one of which a guitarist played Greek songs for us and tried to work out the chords to Xekina mia sarapoula, so that I could join in.

Finally back to Athens, this time by the express bus via Tripoli and the southern route. This way included Arkadia, which was indeed very beautiful, though not peopled by Dresden-type shepherdesses nowadays so far as I could see. We were in Athens by early afternoon and found our second hotel, this time in Sokratous. They recommended "Neon", a great restaurant just round the corner, and we ate there three times, while most of the diners were glued to football matches on the TV. Again the food was entirely Greek but rather cheaper than in Olympia - we tried moussaka, gigantes, lamb with lemon, and even something called kolokithokeftedes, which turned out to be courgette patties. We kept to a policy of only eating once a day but having a good meal then.

During our last few days in Athens we explored a whole lot more, and we got to regard the parallel streets of Athinas, Stadiou, Panepistimiou and Akademias as a familiar stamping ground. We spent a whole day in the wonderful but exhausting National Archaeological Museum, with its impressive collection of statues, vases and other artefacts from long ago Greece. The whole place was deeply impressive, and again wonderfully organised and presented. I was pleased to see the name of my old university tutor, John Chadwick, highlighted for his role in deciphering the Linear B script, and was amazed to see a large and beautiful vase, looking as if it could have been made in the last five years, but in fact dating from as long before Socrates as Socrates is before us. The bronze of Zeus (or is it Poseidon?) hurling his thunderbolt dominated the central gallery, and to have seen that, as well as Praxiteles' Hermes and the golden "mask of Agamemnon", was on its own worth all we had paid to be there. At other times we found a quirky museum of Greek folk instruments near Hadrian's Arch, took the cable car to the top of Lycabettus Hill, admired the dustmen emptying the bins with the words DEMOS ATHENAION on their yellow jackets (words which were exactly the same and meant exactly the same in 500 b.c), and went back to the restaurant where we had eaten our first night. Our friendly waiters greeted us like long-lost friends. One decided I looked like his grandfather, and insisted on having a photo taken of us arm in arm, with him saying "yia sou, pappou".

Then it was over. Up at 4.30, trundled our cases down to Syntagma, back on the metro, last moments in Greece at the airport, and then a lovely flight back to Gatwick with Aegean Airways, on which we were considerably more comfortable and better fed than with Easyjet. Before we knew it we were back to autumnal Malvern, and Greece seemed very far away.

And what to pick out from the welter of impressions and memories we are left with? Some sadness at seeing so many beggars on the streets, some buildings falling into disrepair, and evidence of a country going through difficult times. Admiration at the efforts to make visitors really welcome and to show off the massive heritage Greek people are rightly so proud of. Admiration too for people's great spirit, smiles and determination to protect their country. It was interesting to see all the "euro equals swastika" signs on the streets, the political graffiti and the heavy presence of police with riot shields at various times in Syntagma and Omonia. It was inspiring to hear the schoolchildren belting out "Xaire o xaire eleftheria" in the Olympic stadium and to see the young people of Athens enjoying life. But above all for me, who has studied and admired Greek language and culture from an early age, the whole experience was a brilliant confirmation of what a special place Greece is. Under the blue skies of Athens and of the Peloponnese, I felt quite sure that whatever German bankers, greedy billionaires and critical northern Europeans throw at them the wonderful people of Greece will continue to stand for all that makes human beings civilised, inventive, thoughtful and truly alive. Pate, Ellines. (Chris Green)

### **A Cretan Village**



The small village of Patsos, whose name derives from the ancient Byzantine Patsi family and is situated at the head of the Amari Valley is regularly described in contemporary guidebooks as one of the more remote parts of the island. If measured from the coast, this may seem to be the case. But it was not until after the Venetians had taken ownership of the island in 1211 that the ports and coastal settlements became dominant. Prior during to that the inland areas were of far greater importance. Lying below the Psiloritis Mountains, the Amari valley provided a natural line of communication between the northern coast at Rethymno to the ancient capital Gortyn, the fertile Messara Valley and Chandax, the latter day capital better known as Candia and Heraklion. By the end of the Second Byzantine Period (965-1204) large powerful Cretan families such as the Skordyles, Vatsos and most importantly the Kallergis families were in control. They claimed authority directly from imperial Byzantium and all were violently opposed to the Venetian attempts to redistribute their landholdings. Despite never working in unison, their opposition denied effective control to the Venetians throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> Century who had to be content with coexistence.

Equally implacable was opposition from the Orthodox Church. The Venetians regarded Orthodoxy as synonymous with loyalty to Constantinople and they rigorously circumscribed it in the newly invigorated ports of Chania, Rethymno and Candia. In mountainous rural Crete, so different to urban Venice, this was not feasible and domination by the Roman Catholic Church simply did not happen. In many parts the ancient parishes and bishoprics were used by the great Cretan families to reinforce their authority. One such was the Bishopric of Sivritos at Thronos close to Patsos. it was integral both to the authority of the church and the Kallergis family.

The landscape partly tells the story. At a time of low domestic buildings, the uncomplicated barrel vaulted churches scattered across the countryside were in themselves architecturally significant; even more so were the cathedral buildings. The Byzantine Cathedral Church of the Holy Virgin at Patsos was one of the most spectacular in the surrounding area.



Reached now by a narrow path that winds down off the main platea, it occupies a commanding position overlooking the valley. It has recently been partially excavated by the local Archaeological Ephorate and the ruins give a clear idea of the imposing original structure. From behind the high altar the enthroned Bishop would have projected the not only the ecclesiastical authority of Constantinople but also a particular social order. Probably damaged in 1303 by a massive Richter 8 earthquake that shook the entire island, the building collapsed. As with many churches it was subsequently rebuilt and redecorated during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly Venetian names regularly appear in contemporary church inscriptions churches giving the names of donors contributing for these refurbishments. They are evidence of an evolving rural Cretan Venetian society.

700 years later Patsos had a very contrasting role, this time during World War 2. The extraordinary abduction of General Kreipe by the Cretan resistance forces fighting under the leadership of Patrick Leigh Fermor and Bill Stanley Moss is well known. So too is the epic smuggling of their captive across the Psiloritis Mountains to the southern coast to rendezvous with a submarine and a journey to Cairo. Less well known is that they brought Kreipe to a hideout directly above Patsos. Still used by shepherds for cheese making, the secluded overhang shelter is very difficult to find. The party were so secure in its invisibility and in the trust worthiness of the village that, uncharacteristically, they opted to spend two nights there. At the time the island was being combed by the Wehrmacht and betrayals not uncommon.



Barely 500m from the hideout is the small church of Agios Constantinos and Eleni, the Horokopos family church. Beneath a tree is a plaque recalling how young Ephthimios Horokopos refused the gold sovereigns offered by Leigh Fermour in gratitude for his help and the selfless family generosity at a time of great privation. Recently officers from the same Intelligence Corps unit as Leigh Fermour visited the hideaway. Appropriately they were taken there by Vassilis Psiharakis a retired Lt Colonel from Greek Special Forces. They had already visited the 1941 Battlefield of Crete at Mallame, and Souda to visit the grave of the legendary archaeologist John Pendlbury, Serious consideration was given by the visit to the still vexed question of the abduction's evident propaganda value as set against the appalling reprisals meted out to the civilian population

Vassilis is a native of Patsos and owner of the village taverna. Working alongside other local cultural groups and in partnership with organisations such as the Patrick Leigh Fermor Society and the Intelligence Corps Association, he has plans next May to commemorate the abduction at the Church of Agios Constantinos and Eleni.

Nowadays Patsos is much smaller village with a current population of 70 but it has a big history. Vassilis Psiharakis and his colleagues deserve every success as they bring together its history with the cultural and natural environment of an area rich in gorges, flora, fauna.

(Peter Rogers visited Patsos as part of his research into Venetian Crete for the University of Birmingham November 2017).

### **Christmas Dinner**

This year Christmas Dinner was on the 15<sup>th</sup> December and coincided with Bob's birthday. All those present enthusiastically sang "Happy birthday" to Bob. The hall was decorated for Christmas.

The starter was baked feta. This was followed by an authentic Greek dish of beef and hylopittes prepared by Celia and it was totally delicious. Five kilos of hylopittes had travelled from Greece in Celia's hand luggage. Bowls of Greek salad provided by Yvonne, David and Nick, and crusty bread completed the main course. Judith was responsible for the dessert: a magnificent

chocolate cake. This was followed by the raffle and thanks must go to all who contributed the prizes. A very enjoyable evening; thank you Celia and Judith.

### News from Spain

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year Nick,

Thanks for sending me the newsletter every month. Glad to see you still have a regular attendance.

We are now getting ready for our third Christmas here in Spain. With the coldest December so far, the wood-burning stove is really coming into its own.

Nothing much happens in our tiny village but that's why we like so much.

It has taken awhile for us to get to grips with the language but we are getting there. Learning Greek helped as I was able to understand more of the grammar. For this coming year I am on the Village Fiesta committee that should improve my Spanish no end.

In the summer we held a Greek themed garden party. Fortunately Lidl's had just had their Greek food week so I was able to pick up a few things as well as Mythos of course. My many Greek cookbooks helped us prepare the food. The Spanish use filo pastry so I was able to make spanakopita and galaktoboureko, which went down a treat. It was for a few ex-pats as the Spanish in our village seem not to be too adventurous when it comes to food they are unaccustomed to.

I hope you and Lindsay are keeping well. Please send my best wishes to those members who still remember me.

Regards

John

P.S. As you are aware I have reopened my Facebook account if anyone is interested.

### Useful Contacts

**Chair:** Bob Stone

Email: stonebob@talk21.com

**Website Editor:** Sally Rees

**Club Secretary:** Nick Kontarines (07837288887)

Email: nkontarines@btconnect.com

**Newsletter Editor:** Nick Kontarines

**Club Treasurer:** Sherod Williams

Email: Sherod.williams@walkerthompson.co.uk

**Committee Member:**

Yvonne Taylor: yvonnetaylor2007@hotmail.co.uk

Celia Canham : celiacanham@tiscali.co.uk

Judith Bates : batesjudithm@gmail.com



We're on the web. [www.kefi-club.org.uk](http://www.kefi-club.org.uk)