



**a brief account of travel in greece
three years later**

Frankfurt, Monday, April 15, 2013

Suffering from sleep deprivation, third night. Flights are becoming unfriendlier, more painful. Mine was to continue from Dallas by Berlin Air, but did not, a new flight number but still American, so my dear niece waited at the wrong terminal in Frankfurt, however, clever friends greeted me, having checked for departure and arrival times, not airlines. I had forgotten to write down my niece's cellphone number, so the day passed, till contact was established, and, after a bottle of red wine to calm my nerves, I was transported to my destination. Sunday was the birthday of the now ten years old, his seven years old sister insisted, since I would not also be present on her birthday, that I should at least sleep in her room. The young lady snores.

I now have the morning to myself, parents at work, children in school. I made some breakfast, will now read the newspaper while waiting for niece and children to pick me up at noon, take me to the bus at Frankfurt rail station, destination airport Hahn, to make sure I don't get lost.

Looking out of the bus, remembering another day, visiting the US military administration, hoping, unsuccessfully, to get to the USA on a high school exchange program and now looking at still familiar street names, an American in years visiting in Europe.

The hotel owner picking me up at Hahn airport informed immediately, the Euro has to go. He will join a newly established political party, AfD, to help accomplish this. At the only restaurant open in Büchenbeuren, Italian, I am served a pork steak with french fries, salad, and a beer, Kirner. Listening to three locals at the bar, I catch bits of the conversation, yes, the Euro has to go, also Ryanair tourists prefer to spend their money in Bernkastel - but so did the American military when Hahn still used to be an air base, only the ladies got paid locally - and some citizen by the name of J. seems to have earned much envy, most likely not my former teacher, same name, who was never envied but something other.

I hope to be able to sleep and tomorrow morning at 6:45 I will be off to Portugal.

Sunday, April 21.

Arrived last night in Athens. God knows why I bought a subway ticket for two, she was nowhere to be seen, the bright-eyed girl, daughter of Zeus. Besides getting on the wrong train at Syntagma, I managed to find the Elite hotel at Pireos street. It is not bad at all, 25 Euro, small but clean enough, just haven't found an inviting restaurant yet, may have to search around Omonia, but a kiosk across the street sells beer.

After finding my old breakfast cafeteria this morning, walking back to the hotel, a woman crossing the street aimed towards me, all the while talking, gesticulating, when I felt some fingers in my back pocket. Still turning around, I already had grabbed a wrist and looked into quite offended eyes, probably the woman's somewhat younger sister or maybe daughter. Squeezing her wrist, my wallet fell to the ground. I picked it up and continued on my way, while it was not clear for whose benefit a passing woman angrily expressed herself. Now, my wallet is secured to my belt by wire, and I will not assume any chance encounter to be just that.



Agra Nova - Portugal

After a short nap, I went to the archaeological museum, where I will continue tomorrow. It is 18:00, time to start looking for a place to eat, hoping to find a restaurant not so far away, that a long walk home with diminished reflexes would keep me from drinking wine, otherwise the kiosk across the street will have to do.

Portugal was quite exhausting, long talks about our past, the Slade, David filling in gaps in my memory, what I had missed or not been aware of at the time, policies, faculty, fellow students, intrigues, who with whom, all interesting, the wine being excellent.

His place close to Passo, is a piece of paradise, near a small, fast running mountain stream, most inviting to sit next to with a bottle of wine, others to be enjoyed upstairs in the house, nestled between trees and Christine's various garden plots. We climbed the mountain behind the house, spend a day in Coimbra, another in Lousa, driving to various sightseeing spots, enjoyed delicious home cooking, but despite a short night had to get up before 6:00 Saturday morning to be in time in Porto for David and Christine to catch a flight to London, while I struggled to stay awake for my flight later to Geneva and on to Athens.

After the laid-back, incredible friendly attitudes in Portugal, the cold Swiss kind of politeness in French at the airport seemed nothing other but rude.

Went to the Club Neon, the Taverna Neon Grill, my old hang out having closed a year ago, so the waiter explained after recognizing, welcoming me. Ordered fried sardines with oregano and lemon, an Alfa beer.

The evening light hits the leaves of potted greeneries across the passage, behind two rows of tables, between them the umbrellas with the logo Club Neon. I am the sole guest, four young women just left, leaving a lone mosquito behind. It had little trouble finding me. Asked for a carafe, half liter white wine, took the first sip, a strong, mouth full of flavor, deep color, soft aroma, dry aftertaste, how nice to be back.

The tree in front of me, a blackboard advertising Amstel beer nailed to the trunk listing the delights available at the Club Neon, is covered with creepers desperately reaching for more light, reaching into emptiness.

The light is turning into a dark, warm yellow, close to eight and still no tourists. The waiter keeps readjusting chairs, menus, salt and pepper shakers, tablecloths. Even the mosquito inside is getting edgy.

A lone black woman sits down in the passage, my waiter serves her a glass of red wine. She is on her cellphone, adjusts her makeup, the waiter jokes with her, not a tourist. The city around here, mostly run down, filthy, how ugly concrete can be, people too, still, I could live here. The Persians, I assume, wouldn't be interested anymore.

Monday, April 22.

Just finished my Mousaka, starting on the wine, sitting at the same table as yesterday. An elderly couple sat down in front of me, in the open door, he, very thin, talking, animated, paying the bill against her protest, patting her cheek, opened a book, page marked, started to read to her, interrupting to explain. She, head tilted, listened attentively. More explaining after he closed the book, in between he emptied his glass of red wine. Some friendly exchanges with the waiter, they got up and left.

A bearded older man, the other day he seemed drunk, sits down, same table as yesterday, outside. Gray, long-haired, reasonably well-dressed, red sweater over a dress shirt, gray flannel pants, a bit worn, he checked out the food display inside, ordered, now drinking water, nibbling on bread. He ordered chicken. The way he chews implies false teeth.



View from the Elite



I could not sleep at all last night. Had the usual breakfast, only a different roll and filling, vegan this time, went to the archaeological museum at 11:00, the opening being changed to 13:00, gave up and walked back to the Elite to battle with the Internet.

18:00. The light still unspectacular, gray. This is an isolated, peacefully quiet spot in a disturbingly noisy, dilapidated city, the fellows around the corner at Omonia equally rundown. Police, in groups of four or six, are checking papers, march off some unfortunates. What trickles down is misery, the fruits of economic gains never do.

The gray-haired does not seem to suffer, talking into the void, gesturing, the bottle he pulled out of a plastic bag is being refilled with red wine, he pays. Now he spills his thoughts into the air, still gesturing. The sun is setting, changing a colorless dreariness into gold, but the place is still empty.

The archaeological museum, Poseidon, breathtaking, the exquisite modeling, the gesture, light, elegant and still loaded with tension, muscles, little exaggeration, nothing overdone, but look out for that aim taking!

Tuesday, April 23.

Tried the red wine this time, prefer the white, overall richer in taste, the red is too dry, hard, also too cold. Leaving the hotel I take each time a different route, always getting lost, miscalculating distances, walking way too far but finding my breakfast place at the end, where I am now recognized and greeted.

Spent a second day in the archaeological museum after a full night's sleep. Hundreds of school children, noisy, spreading out, blocking any escape, but beautiful, expressive faces, theirs will be the world, its problems too. To be alone with the sculptures, contemplating who the artists were, how they saw the world, when all they did had meaning, the Kore from Delos (650 BC), the massive Kouros from Sounion (600 BC) and much earlier the Kykladik (3200 - 2800 BC) abstractions, as we see them now.

But how they are exhibited! Hardly any display properly lit, bulbs missing, others misdirected, some pieces only visible as dark silhouettes, come on! Mind you, in spite your lamentations, the British Museum does it better!

The gray-haired is not here tonight. Instead, a bold shaved customer sits in his place, studying a street map, a tourist? Russian? He starts with a beer, likes his spot, orders Mousaka, red wine, and smokes too. Everybody smokes, explaining those haggard, wrinkled faces. This one is still in its prime. The gray one just walked by without stopping, directs some words towards the intruder sitting at his table, who is quick to respond, in what language? The world is complex.

Wednesday, April 24.

Got lost again, walked halfway to Larissa, so it seemed, but now I recognize places, the routine of chairs being set up, tables decked. Not yet 8 o'clock when I find my destination and have the usual breakfast, only the rolls change, must try them all at least once.

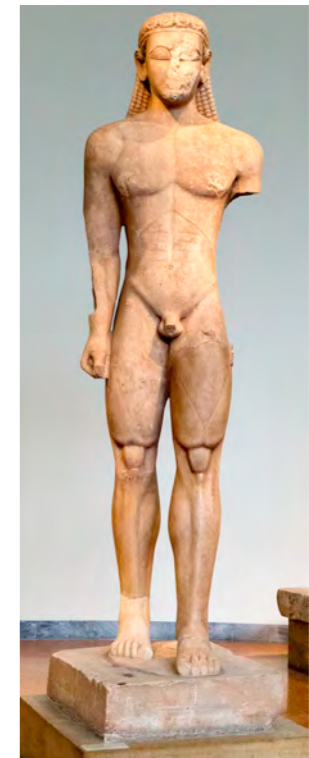


Poseidon - Zeus 460 - 450 BC

Kouros 540 BC



Kouros 600 BC from Sounion



After a short stop at the Hotel, I walk to Syntagma square and on to the Kykladik Museum, the Byzantine, try the National Gallery, it is under renovation so the young woman in uniform explains and even shows the sign in Greek at the door, but smiling.

The work on display in the museums is all stunning, worth many visits, if only it was that easy, not so distant. But the lighting! Overhead is not the only solution, leaving heads in a glare, the rest in shade, certainly not the way the Kykladik sculptors intended their work to be seen, nor the Byzantine, painting those life-denying ascetics, if only their faces were meant to be seen, they would have done so.

The young ladies in this different Athens of embassies and affluence, if not dressed in the international office style, seem eager to show how much in tune they are with what goes, torn jeans, tattoo, facial metal too. Different gods, same customs.

Passing a mansion with flying banners, signifying art, the Charakis Foundation (4 Euros for seniors), a stillife exhibition on loan from Boston, remarkable the small Cézanne, a Braque and a wonderful painting by Berthe Morisot, and near the exit a stunning Morandi.

The late sun is hitting the greeneries again, two ladies occupy my table, but the table behind does as well, I am not choosy. The gray one, sitting at his rightful spot, is also finishing his supper, drinking white wine too. A young man in a wheelchair roles by, the gray one knows him, shares a glass of wine.

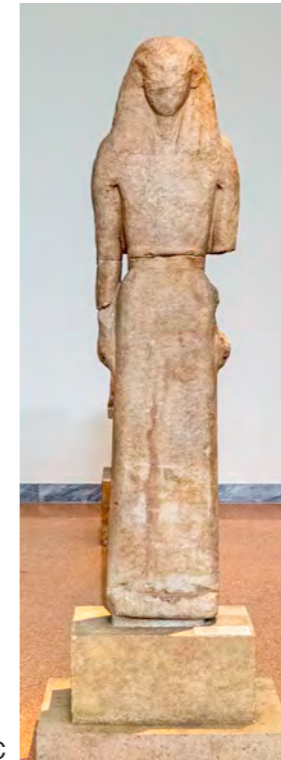
Thursday, April 25.

Three tables are already occupied in the passage, besides the one the gray one does. He just dropped a bit of food on his shirt, throws a Byzantine cross, so I assume, it takes him a bit longer than I remember the Romans need for theirs, for good measure he does it twice. He arranges his table at intervals, two carafes, two glasses, different sizes, salt and pepper shakers, a block of shapes, quite a Morandi. Alas, the composition does not last, he drinks his wine, also the water.

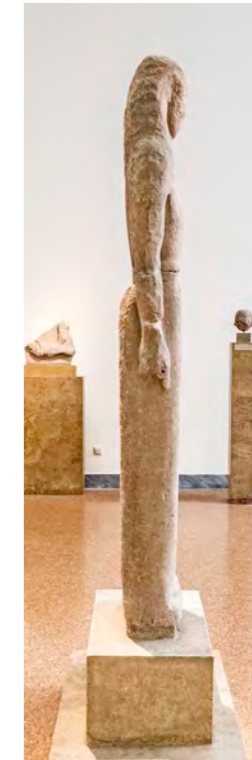
The black lady is here too, in conversation with a Greek, a business drink? Papers change hands, some with graphics, they are pointed at, discussed, some laughter, she seems in control, much golden jewelry glamorously set off against her dark skin. The conversation is in Greek, but when they get up to leave, she speaks American.

I did not feel well this morning, but had my breakfast, the usual, after an unusually long detour to the place, went back to the Elite, rested, then went off, duty-driven, down Athinas to Monastiraki. Starting with Hadrian's library, bloody Romans, I didn't come for your sake, went to the Agora, where the daily orange juice had its effect. True to its historic significance, the Agora has toilets.

Refreshed with energy and will to live, I decided to climb up to the Acropolis, a terrible mistake. Thousands of equally determined, if not motivated, goose-stepping, slipping, a sweating mass of flesh, waved on by overseers as if this were the silver mines of old. No escape possible, till the top was reached, with my only aim to get off the rock as fast as possible.



Kore 550 BC



Nike 550 BC from Delos

The theater below, how well the gray one would do here, addressing the marble seats, the same way he commands the waiter, his voice would triumph.

And now that light again, not yet price tagged by some tax evading bloodsuckers - why the effort? Doesn't Peter demand all earthly stuff remain on earth? - exploiters who never cross Omonia, never seem to notice those poor bastards sleeping in niches best known to them alone, encrusted with what has not even color. Go sleep down there, Syntagma, among the embassies and all that luxury, shame them, if that would be possible, but for the soldiers, the police.

A clergy too looks well rested, well-fed, of course, they always were, ever since placing themselves on top of ziggurats, between heaven and earth, setting up shop between gods and mortals.

But for the light, the setting sun. The gray one got up, packed up, this time a bottle of ouzo having been refilled, he pockets it into his jacket, he yells once more, a voice the waiter never neglects, it's to say good night.

Friday, April 26.

Took the direct route for breakfast, passing the KKE building, hammer and sickle flying high, wasn't it bad enough? Had my orange juice, fresh pressed, feeling courageous.

It is past six, waiting for the sun to hit the passage for a last glorious show before disappearing behind concrete walls.

Four tables are occupied, five with mine, having finished my pork in lemon sauce, tasting the bread, always fresh, starting on the wine. The gray one finished too, chicken again, he takes his shoes off.

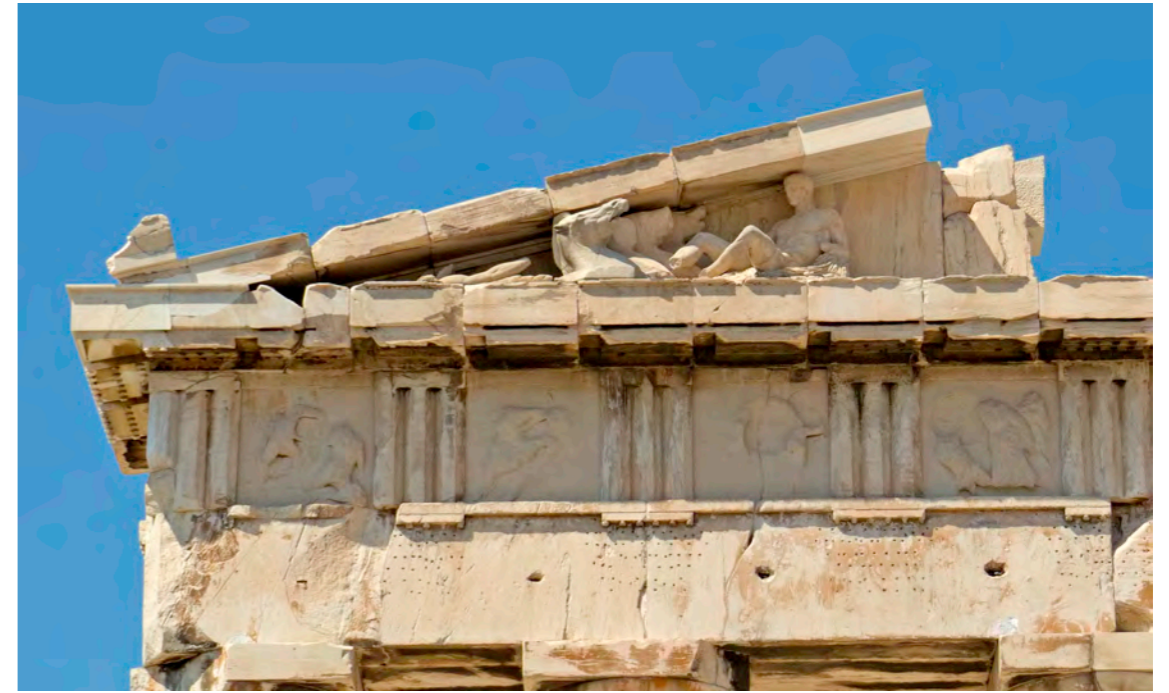
At the ticket machine this morning at the metro a young man, unshaven, a large suitcase at his side, explained the system to an English speaker when I joined, and still, I pressed the wrong button, spent 1.2 Euro, instead of the 70 cents to Pireas.

The young man too was going that way, so we went together. He had just arrived from Romania, heading for some island, I missed the name, but understood that surfers love it very much.

My friend, however, will be working in a hotel with restaurant, a six-month job. The owner, after years working in New York, had gone back home to start his business, and my friend, having worked already several seasons on the island, feels towards his employer like family.

We wished each other all the best when parting.

After asking for direction, I found the Anek office down the road and picked up my tickets to and from Heraklion, made sure I had booked a cabin, correct dates, and walked back along the harbor, the still familiar streets to the archaeological museum to pay my respect to Apollo. What a superb sculpture, now in the company of three more bronzes,



Acropolis

Temple of Hephaistos - Athens



all found 1959, ready for shipment to Rom no doubt, when Sulla attacked in 86, and so that shipment did not make it. Artemis (350 BC) seems much cleaned and patinated, a bit dark, nevertheless impressive, but the Apollo (530-520 BC), from Aigina, surpasses all. Please fix the lighting!

By now the evening light has arrived, the leaves reflecting it. The gray one talks and gestures again towards the unseen, sings too, quietly, his feet resting on top his shoes.

Saturday, April 27.

Slept well and late. Had breakfast before eight, the usual crew not yet at work, baked goods still cooling in their racks, the display still empty of rolls and sandwiches, only showing cold cuts and some lox, which the sole lady in charge arranged for me in a small baguette with salad, one pickle. The young man at the espresso machine was already working on my cappuccino, and the pastry lady had added an orange juice by the time I turned in that direction.

Sitting outside, the street scene is all weekend, few people, little traffic, pavement still wet and clean. They do their utmost every morning, sweeping, washing, by midday it is a battlefield, a carpet of cigarette butts, plastic wrappings, everything on sale at the all present kiosks ends up shedding its skin never far away, also of its content.

Walking too has its hazards, manholes, to whatever intestinal wonders underground, may be missing their covers, even sidewalks cannot be trusted, always looking a few feet ahead may warn in time of their having disappeared completely.

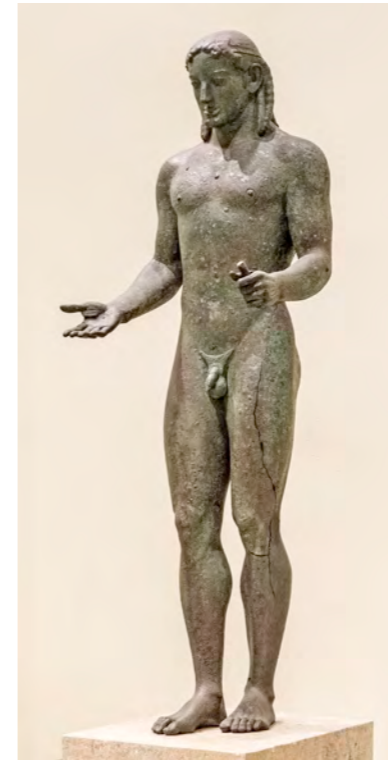
I spent most of the day at the Kerameikos, marveled at old Athens city walls, observed the monuments to the dead, the relief in memory of one Dexilios on his horse, 20 years old when killed by some Spartan in 394 BC. Not too far away I visited the Agora once more and back to Pireos street and to the Elite.

Yesterday in Pireas, on the way to the museum, my other knee threatened to give up, had to stand still for a while, but made it. It is set to be replaced August 15, till then it has to last. The ancient Greeks could only hope for a strong enough stick, if that. Still felt the effect today, walked slowly, watching where I stepped, carefully avoiding the invitations from the underworld, Odysseus, one of the very few who made it back.

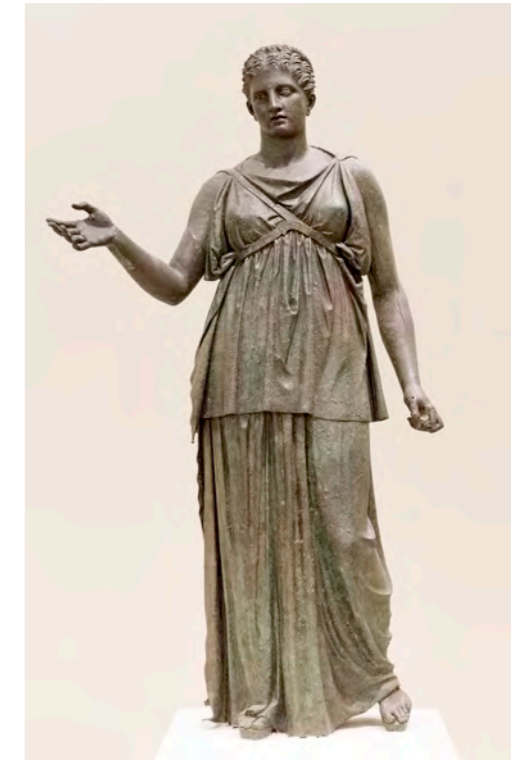
It is my last evening here, enjoying a last glass of wine. Tomorrow, after one more visit to the archaeological museum, I will be off to Pireas and on my way to Crete.

Sunday, April 28.

Shaking hands, I said goodbye to my waiter last night. He had been reluctant to talk about the economic situation, politics, only to say tourism was down, hard to believe when tempting to climb up to the Acropolis, neither could he provide information about the young, half her teeth missing lady, part of the ambiance at the Taverna Neon Grill three years ago, but claimed to remember her. Said also goodbye to Poseidon this morning in the museum, spend some time on the internet at the Elite hotel before taking the Metro to Pireas.

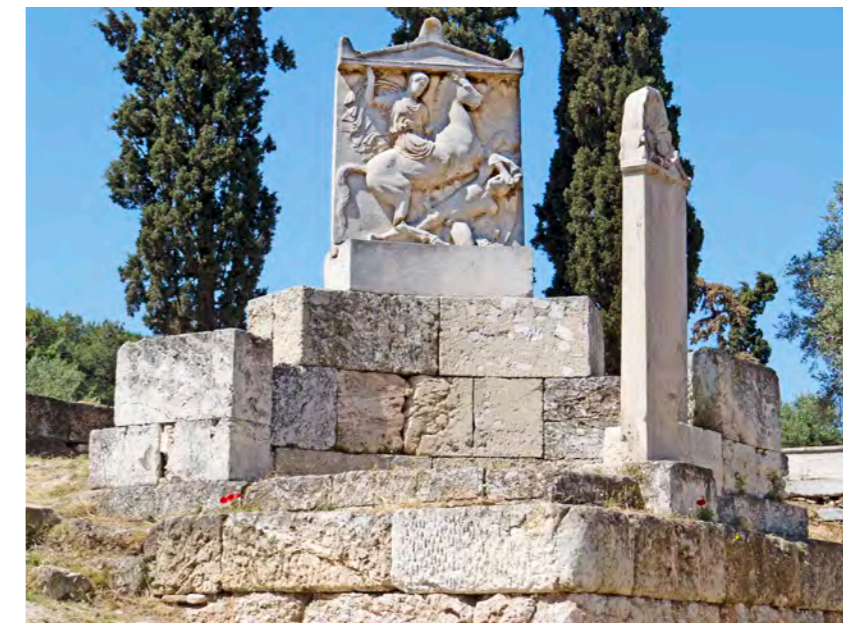


Apollo 530 - 520 BC



Artemis 350 BC

Dexilios





Kerameikos

I don't have luck with tickets. This time, to play it safe, I went to the ticket booth, asked the woman for a single ride to Pireas, paid 1.4 Euro and discovered on board of the Blue Star One, that she had sold me a return ticket. Greece needs the money!

18:00 sharp I got on board, took a shower. The cabin is quite comfortable and promises to only be occupied by one more passenger, judging from the number of towels in the bathroom. Waiting to get on the ship was exhausting, arriving nearly three hours too early and breathing air heavy with cigarette smoke wherever I looked for shade.

Never mind, I am sitting comfortably in the lounge, had a ham and cheese, salad and tomato baguette, the first food for today, due to a reoccurrence of the Agora syndrome. I should not have spoken disrespectfully of the Romans.

A glass of wine with a small dish of peanuts should prepare me for bed, departure 21:00. I am watching the embarkation of tourists, cars and trucks, which the trucks accomplish most artfully, the tourists most clumsily with ridiculous loads of luggage. The sun is setting, goodbye Athens.



Kerameikos

West of Milatou



Monday, April 29.

Luckily I took a shower early, the cabin filled up. Arrived 6:00 in Heraklion, searched for a taxi, none in sight, walked out of the harbor area and hailed one right away.

At the airport no sign of Olympic car rental, which nobody seemed to have heard of, however, a small sign a bit behind the entrance booth to a parking lot indicated where Olympic cars should be returned, and in due time a rather little white box opened its front panel, and a young man started conducting the rental business.

After discussing the Euro, banking scandals, bits of politics, he explained, that I will get a somewhat bigger car, due to none other being available, same price, 4-wheel drive, Japanese, tires not so good, as sharp breaking would soon prove.

Malia, of course, was closed, it being Monday. I drove on to explore the surroundings, hoping to have breakfast, got lost, but found Sokrates in Milatou on the coast. A couple was already having coffee sitting on the terrace in the company of Sokrates, and since all other establishments would not open till after 10 o'clock, I joined. The German couple knew of Sokrates through a neighbor in Frankfurt, buying olive oil from him.

About noon, we ended our breakfast to go our separate ways, mine to further explore the area, heading for Drepani, never getting there, but driving disorienting roads, which eventually forced me, on reaching their ends in front of a wall or a house, a cow, a fence, open fields, to turn around. Elouda, Plaka did not appeal to me, too much tourism already, and since Malia remained on my agenda, I decided to return to Sokrates for dinner and night, to shower and wash sweaty shirts and pants.

The fried fish, which was shown to me first in the raw, with salad was most delicious, then I joined my friends from Frankfurt for the rest of the evening, drinking wine, tasting yogurt with grapes in melted sugar for dessert, followed by small flasks of Raki, one for each, and shot glasses, compliment of Sokrates. I had to memorize the way to my room, through the restaurant, out the back, turn right, then left, up a flight of stairs, push hard to open the door, since it is freshly painted and still sticks to the frame, the bed will be right in front. And I only asked for fish!

Tuesday, April 30.

Had breakfast with two couples joining, the one from Frankfurt and a couple from Hanover. Packed my dry laundry into the car parked next to the terrace, retrieved my camera left at the breakfast table, held high by Sokrates. I said goodbye to everybody once more and went to Malia. Much is cordoned off, but it is obvious, the place must have been huge, the scale models in the little museum hint at luxury and style.

I drove on, still with a squeamish stomach, via Sitia, direction Vai, Palekastro, to spend the night in Kato Zakros. The internet connection is excellent, did my e-mails, had a swim first, the water fresh, not cold, two large draft beers, after all, you have to watch out not getting dehydrated.

It turned cold last night at Sokrates, there was no second blanket to be found, so I had



Milatou at Sokrates

Kato Zakros



difficulty sleeping in spite my fleece jacket. Sokrates charged \$30 per night, here it will be \$42, breakfast included.

It is the east coast of 'Kriti', the Greeks have no 'c' in their alphabet. You can't see Troy from here, but they sure managed to sail there too, not for the sake of Helen, their women being beautiful themselves. I haven't seen the one greeting me when arriving, but then she may have been brought up to keep a safe distance to foreign travelers.

How ugly Athens seems in comparison to here, was it that way back then too? If so, why all the non-citizens, migrants, disenfranchised? They came then and are coming now. They are not always welcome, not then, not now.

Wednesday, May 1.

After breakfast and paying my bill, all together came to 60 Euro, the young woman from yesterday did appear, took my money without hesitation. I packed up to leave right after visiting the archaeological zone, walked the short distance, only to find out May 1 the site is closed. My host was quite pleased to have me one more day. I reoccupied my room, went for a swim, deciding to honor the day of labor by doing nothing.

It is just after 16:00, sitting quietly at a shaded table. Further back three young men, two women, two children settled down twittering away, never a single voice, always all together, no intervals. Come on! Look, the sea, close to shore transparent, then shades of green turning blue, always changing, at the horizon a sharp, dark blue line. You can't see it if you keep yapping.

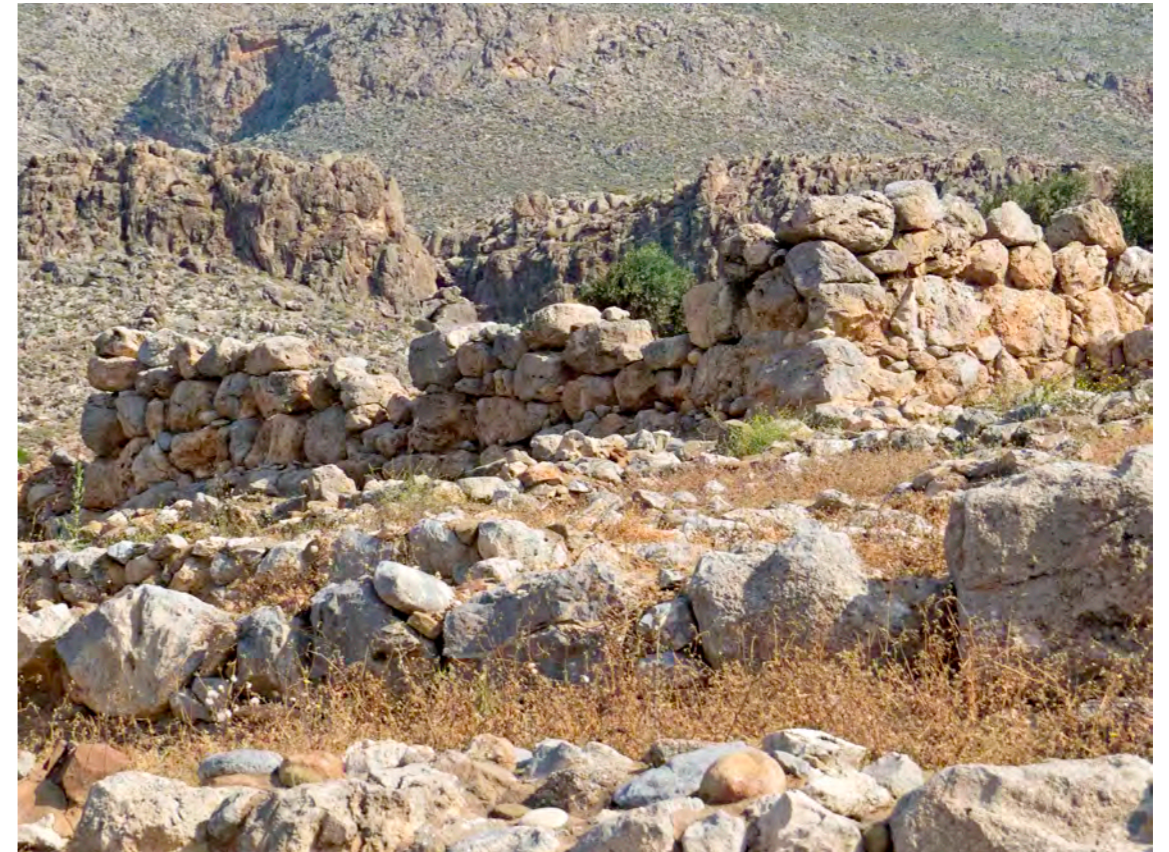
A strong North wind is blowing again, gusts like ghosts sweeping over the surface of the sea turning the green of the water instantly dark, nearly black, shadows racing towards the horizon, the beach still in a warm glow.

Suddenly silence, the twitterers are gone.

A young man seems to be asleep on a recliner at the beach, fully dressed. A woman, barefoot, walks towards him, yellow top, short, tight black skirt, it stretches as she kneels beside him, wakes him. She holds out both hands, a single object in each, he chooses one, gets up, and together they walk towards the stairs to the corral, as the row of five rooms is labeled, stables in earlier times, steps she had just come down. Climbing up, he in front, her back turns into the afternoon light, and for a moment her body becomes visible, well-formed, touchable. I am the only one sitting here, the wind died down, I can hear the waves, a rooster too.

Was there ever a paradise for the living? Lucy some 3 million years ago with her smaller brain? But she fell off a tree and died. Hunter-gatherer, Natufians further east from here across the water, agriculture, malaria, hookworms, snail fever, raids, and murder. Maybe the Minoans have a claim, but they invited the Mykenaeans, they came, took over. I will eat some fish now, watch the sunset.

The carafe with wine arrived and a small bowl of olives while the fish is being grilled. These olives must not travel well, at least not ever to my neighborhood store, tasting



Zakros



rich and pure, full-bodied. An insect, matte red and black, is examining my camera, does not come to rest, till it finds the olives.

When they noticed a spot on the horizon, approaching as wind and waves allowed, did they dress up, prepare a welcoming drink, or hide their women and sharpen their knives?

It is getting chilly, time to go to bed, nothing to be seen on the horizon.

Thursday, May 2.

Had another very good night, but a bad dream, staying with friends in London, lying on the edge of a cliff sloping ever so threateningly down towards some industrial wasteland, where I feared I would roll and fall into, once I was asleep. I could see a pool of greenish liquid, as from an abandoned copper mine, partly covered with a canvass, which a man lifted at one corner exposing five corpses floating on the surface. I asked my friends to let me sleep in the house, which they agreed to, understanding my concern, adding they had heard something about dead bodies down there.

Having survived and after breakfast, I walked to the archaeological zone. The site is supposedly the fourth-largest Minoan settlement on Kriti, after Knossos, Malia and Phaestos. Even if it is difficult to make sense of the layout, alone its placement in the landscape is impressive, rocky mountains in the back, the sea in sight, a few massive stones fitted on top of each other as corners to some important buildings, stepped passages, fountains, maybe baths?

By 10 o'clock, I am on the road. At Xerocambos I stop at a still familiar terrace for a small Greek salad and coffee. From Goudouras to Mirtos an endless display of greenhouses, along the road also many finished as well as unfinished concrete structures, faded graffiti testifying to collapsed dreams not just from yesterday.

With no signs in sight, I probably drove every street in Mirtos without finding my way out of town, till I saw and followed a small truck loaded with produce most likely not meant for local consumption.

Over a very dusty and rough road we reached Tertsas, and still following the truck I gave up finding a way along the coast, but turned into the mountains on asphalt towards Sikologos, Vianos, down to Keratokampos and along the coast to Tsoutsouros.

At Zobras the owner informed me, he had a heart bypass operation since my last visit. I informed him of one knee replacement, we compared scars, but no contest. While a room was being prepared, again I am the first guest this season, I had two beers, went for a swim followed by a shower, once the wife had finished with my room, had dinner and checked for e-mails.

Jean had sent a picture of Angela Merkel in natural, which I shared with my hosts. The wife wanted to know who the other two beauties were, I assured her most likely not any celebrities, Kosta asked to keep the picture. A ferocious wind is blowing sand into my wine, time to drink up and go to bed.



Tsoutsouros



Friday, May 3.

Starting around 4 in the morning my stomach rebelled again, sweating, heartbeat, must be the sun, the left arm looks cooked. Still, the stomach totally empty, I asked for my usual breakfast, to which Kosta's wife added some wonderful home-baked pastry.

We said goodbye after I took a picture of his vintage 250 BMW motorbike, still running, so he says, a war relic, desert camouflage. Wishing each other good health, like old warriors we shook hands, not knowing who would fall next.

My intention was to spend some time at Gortyna, but I passed the sign to Egyptian something, nearly passed the rest of Gortyna too, which is an enormous mass of stones, potsherds, plastic, even rusting tin cans. It seems since the Romans only debris accumulated. Whoever decided the town should go, did a bloody good job.

Feeling weak, exhausted, I decided not to drive back to the Egyptian whatever, nor Apollo's temple, we have a good understanding anyhow, and I intend again to pay my respect later in Delphi, instead I followed the sign to Lentas.

However, my Estonian Nausikaa did not greet me there, but one from Romania. The Estonian had a beautiful deep voice, this one is rather high, but her body is well articulated by a second, black skin. Some glitter woven into the fabric seems redundant.

When I arrived, my first beer she served with three sardines and three slices of a delicate bread, just right for my brutalized stomach. A long swim added to the recovery, so did some more of that bread with feta.

A Greek family occupied the beach. They are now having a meal, six women, two older men, two children. It could be one of the men's birthday. The matron of the clan has her right leg amputated, but with some help went swimming, the other women had no problem sunbathing topless under the eyes of a stranger, the youngest seems to be the mother of one of the children, a girl, nice body too, the mother. Where are the husbands? Could be bankers, too busy for such reveling. When I had the feta, I counted eight cats circling my table, not now while that feasting is going on.

The place has changed. The door to my room still does not lock, but the bar, the kitchen, a dining area seem more permanently roofed, a new grill fancies a stainless steel vent with a rotating head. I hope it works as well as it looks when I order grilled fish.

Saturday, May 4.

Carmen had her 8 o'clock morning coffee together with me, wearing a different outfit, blue jeans with fashionable cuts over her knees, a handmade white Romanian blouse, somewhat see-through, black bra. She is 33, looks 23, single, has a house in Romania, but can only earn enough money there to survive. Here she can save during the six-month season, with no expenses, except cigarettes. It is her third year, she came late in 2010, after the Estonian had left, no reason given. Even her mother works here now, as cook, it is she who bakes that bread. It is mostly a quiet place, at least now, some distance east of Lentas, guests are returning.



Gortyna

Lentas - Carmen



Carmen takes her work seriously, but always with a smile, always engaging the person she serves in a bit of conversation, speaks by now some Greek. America, the US, is her one big dream. I try to neuter it, talk about poverty, health care, different quality of life, the lack of much that Europeans take for granted, but it is New York that shapes her fantasies, so of course she has a point.

Again, instead of taking the road most traveled, I thought better and got lost. Everybody smiles when being asked for direction and help, except this priest, his eyes not at all welcoming, anguished. But he did point in the right direction, the one I asked for.

Phaistos, Agia Triada, Mount Ida in the background, the aesthetics in their planning, if we can at all interpret it, was much superior to what is done now to the environment with concrete and rebar.

To find Korakas beach took much time. I had driven too far, instead turning off in Kato Rodakino. Dead ends at fences, cliffs, sand, cows, and goats did not keep me from looking. Asking, when passing some hideouts only connoisseurs, mostly nude, could know about, did not help, till I run into a young man minding a drinking setup for sun and sea worshipers, mostly nude. Gushing with inspiration, I showed him a picture of the place on my laptop, which he recognized. A couple of beaches back east I would find the prize for my endurance, and I did, much changed, expanded, freshly painted, but the price was the same, 35 Euro. The beached sailor still in place, I joined him for a beer before jumping into the sea. A young daughter, graduate from Athens University in social studies, unemployed, showed me a room, the same I occupied before, much improved too, but internet only works down on the new restaurant terrace. The password 'paradise 1' caused me to question her about others, she agreed, there could only be one.

The owner, less hairy than I remembered, looking younger too, greeted me, his wife offered meatballs with rice, herbs, and grapes mixed into it.

Sunday, May 5.

Forgot to take some water to bed, and I suffered, but made up for it in the morning with coffee prepared by the master of the house, till the wife arrived to complete the breakfast, her piece of home-baked in chocolate sauce last night still in my memory. The invitation to stay another day, it being orthodox Easter, and the lamb already roasting, I declined and regretted. We parted with best wishes, handshakes, and I was off.

The traffic close to Hania became vicious. I decided to head for Sougia, taking a round-about route. With the memory of a good breakfast in 2010 intact, I asked the waitress at the Lotos restaurant for a room. She explained restaurant and hotel to be different entities in spite the same name but phoned the woman in charge of the Hotel Lotos, who arrived and showed me a room, 35 Euro, but this time that was it in Sougia.

The sea washed up some yellow muck, plenty of plastic floating in it, looked like sewage. Swimming further out did not help much, I did not dare to put my head underwater. The swim was short, the shower long. I cleaned my throat with a draft next door, had good internet connection, but no food.



Mount Ida from Phaistos

Koraka Beach - rooms at Paradise 1



Way down the road at the end of town, at the same restaurant from my last visit, I ordered spaghetti with shrimp, not anticipating a battle for the meat, getting rid of head, tale, and the armor in between, splashing around tomato sauce and some spaghetti. Let any observing German or French feel confirmed in their notion that Americans have no table manners. Show me or shut up, but the meat, once found, was tasty. The wine presented no problem.

Nowhere but here in Sougia have I observed obesity, all Greek it seems, an Easter rally of fat people? Foreigners look different, in hiking outfits with walking sticks, rucksacks filled with God knows what, ready to pay homage to nature.

One more night after this one before heading for Heraklion, but not here. I will return to Lentas.

Intending to walk back, have a beer, watch the night scene and scratch those seven mosquito bites on my left wrist, I forgot the Raki. The waiter brings that little flask, a shot glass, some sweets, and the change. Does he know how far I still have to walk?

The scratching has to wait.

Monday, May 6.

The breakfast did not come with those wonderful, little sausages I remembered, the mosquitoes did. Half past seven I am off, leaving money and key on the table in the room, no sight of the hostess.

Brilliant light, lots of blossoms, no haze yet, little traffic till close to Hania. Half past noon, I arrive in Lentas. Carmen, new outfit, purple pantsuit, very elegant, smiles in surprise, all rooms still occupied, but she promises to find some space. A group of Easter revelers may leave sometime in the afternoon.

Paradise comes in parts, here even with good jazz. The sea is transparent, inviting. After all those curves, never allowing to take eyes off the road, always expecting that one car zipping around that corner, maybe, maybe not with enough space to pass, it is soothing to watch the ever so regular, predictable waves.

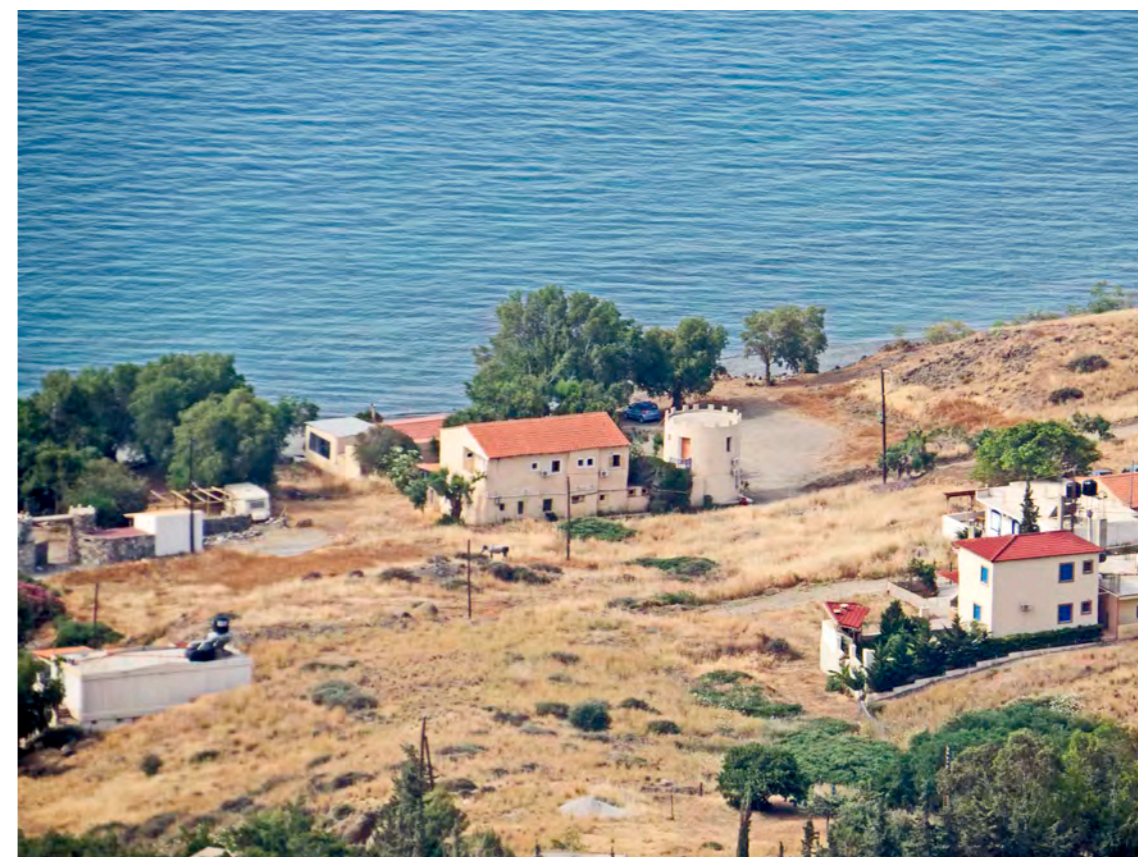
But Paradise has history. Two other guests I already met are still here, two German women. Just talked also to the other one. She asked if I did get a room. It seems she knows the place, the owner too, a frequently returning visitor.

The first wife! They met here but lived in Berlin, have a daughter there, already grown. In an earlier conversation Aris had mentioned his wife, the current one, their children, in Germany, they would be here next week. Carmen's story is, that her mother had been hired as cook and more. Wife #1 confided how hard former husband had to work to keep the place running, to look after the kitchen, his boat, his van, to keep the guests fed, drive them places, take them fishing, someone more permanent was needed to at least run the kitchen, maybe more.

I had spaghetti with lamb for dinner.



Lentas - Anatoli



Tuesday, May 7.

Again, a North wind hit in the evening, lasting all night. Keeping the bathroom door and window open in addition to the window facing the sea, a tunnel effect gave mosquitoes no chance, a relief for my hands and face already scratched raw. By 7:00 the wind had died down, making it possible to sit outside, in a cool breeze and the sound of the waves.

Around 8:00 Ares arrived in his van and trailer with supplies for the day and building stuff. Carmen opened up shop shortly after 9:00, having overslept, in a white dress, curly around the neck. She made us two large coffees, and I run by her some questions from last night.

The argument between an old man, accompanied by wife and daughter leaning against the dividing wall between the compound and a tree shaded area most preferred for parking, and Aris shouting from the kitchen area, was indeed about property use. Old man, wife, and daughter will not sell, nor use the plot, but keep keen eyes on who does. My car is parked on Carmen's suggestion behind the kitchen, with some shade, all others further up on land rightfully owned.

The cretin, owner of a single, blue car parked so thoughtlessly on this piece of forbidden land, was unknown to all.

Old man, wife, and daughter did not cross the stone wall, Aris approached on his side, lowering his voice by diminishing distance, and soon after he and old man retired to talk it over in a corner out of earshot. Nothing was served, not even water. When all was said, old man climbed back over the wall again and reported to wife and daughter, then they left.

Carmen brought new coffee, there was more, wife #1 still here over the weekend, wife #2 approaching. Carmen was discrete. The mother served fried eggs with her wonderful bread.

The car packed, I paid Carmen. She made one last Greek coffee for both of us when wife #1 came to say goodbye too. A short exchange about the charms of Berlin, in spite of which she visits here, a last eye contact with Carmen, and that was it.

Two hours later I returned the car, still running, to Olympic, assured the guy it had been a good trip, people most wonderful, but forgot to mention the tires, hailed a cab to the Athinaikon hotel, took a shower and went to the museum.

One hour left, enough for the admission-free section. Forget the Romans, the seventh century BC. frieze of horses and riders from a temple in Prinias was a surprise, also two other reliefs, fresh, naive - if that is a proper way to speak of artist's work.

Walking around town, shops, tourists, motorbikes, I got tired and hungry, had a small pizza, quite good, a beer and returned to my hotel. On the way the smell from a bakery around the corner made me buy desert, which I enjoyed afterwards in my room with two small bottles of wine from the hotel bar, sent up by elevator.



Temple of Prinias



Wednesday, May 8.

Went to visit the temporary collection in the museum basement, the main part still being renovated, as three years ago, but wonderful pieces nevertheless. The terracotta model of a house, interesting architecturally, charming as an example of daily living, the jewelry, the pottery, sophisticated taste and craftsmanship, and the mystery of the Phaistos disk.

Thursday, May 9.

One more visit to the Heraklion museum to look at the horses and riders, the Knossos frescoes, some more walking around town and some reading in the hotel lobby.

Had a talk with the desk clerk. His little daughter was in his care that day, the wife, German, a travel agent, picked her up later.

His idea, to impress on the government, if not the Troika, the unfairness of the deal, is for every working person to stay at home for one whole month except hospital workers and police, no demonstrations, no shouting slogans, just a silent demand for fairness. Where does the bailout money go anyway but from bank to bank, and the common people get taxed extra, all others get dividends from their stashed away riches.

18:30 I boarded the ferry, the Olympic Champion, a bit aged, under the weather, needs some steroids.

Friday, May 10.

I shared the cabin with a truck driver, and at 7:00 walked on land. The rental car arrived shortly after 8:00 and negotiating my way through parts of Piraeus, heading first towards Lamia, then Korinthos, I was off.

On the way I stopped at a restaurant, had breakfast and a long conversation with the waiter, who had left Greece when he was 15, traveled the world on ships, now in his sixties, helps out here in the restaurant when needed. Speaking of Europe, he admired Adenauer, Schuman, for their initiative, their vision, not so much current politicians. He complained about present ignorance, thereby letting those in power play their short-sighted games. People should read more, think, not watch the news on television.

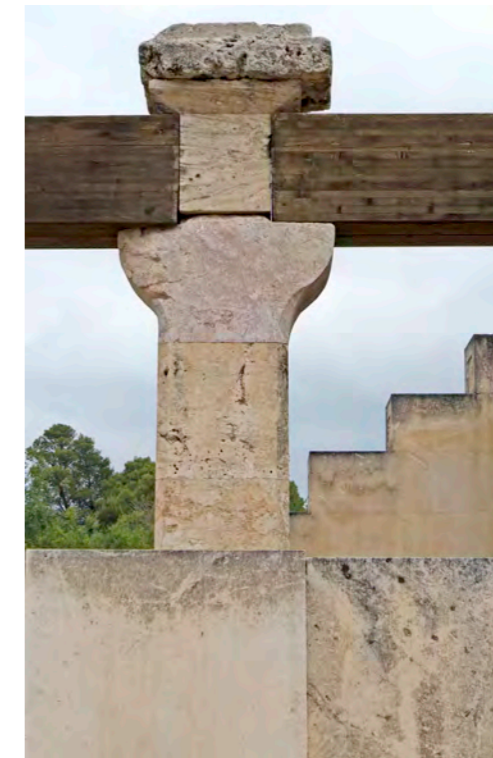
Epidavros, museum, ruins, and theater. It never stops to astonish, overwhelm. To have experienced Medea with Maria Callas, what about Mahalia Jackson?

Driving restlessly around that first finger of the Peloponnese, no place persuasive enough to stay, a nagging companion may have been of help, but nagging oneself doesn't work, so I drove on and on, ending up again in Palaia Epidavros, in spite of some breathtaking landscapes on the way.

My waiter, asking the usual questions where from, where to, had also traveled, Truth and Consequence, White Sands, Arizona, Mississippi, New Hampshire, working for the US military.



Epidavros





Saturday, May 11.

Tyrins

Had breakfast at seven and headed for Tyrins and Mikines, stopped in Lerna, an early Neolithic site, better to read about than see.

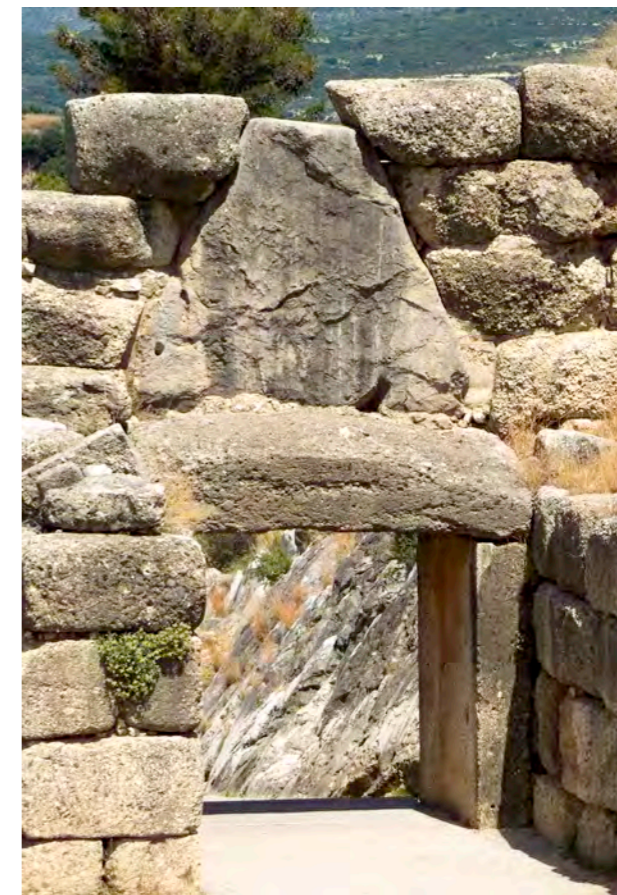
Tyrins is more restricted to visitors than I remember, partly due to conservation work, partly, I suppose, because ruthless, thoughtless, careless tourists, children as well as parents, in disregard of signs and common sense, take the site as an obstacle course, same in Mikines.

The museum itself is worth a visit, the ruins nearly impossible to contemplate, thanks partly to the human factor, no nationality spared, the noise, the crowds.

At the tomb of Atreus, I noticed the book just bought, I had left at the ticket booth, distraught and eager to get away. Back at the booth, the lady handed me my book with an understanding smile before I could explain. With some respect for the human species restored, I drove once more through Argos, did forgo any visits, having had my fill with human flesh and noise.



Mikines



Around 16:00 I had enough, looked for a place to stay in Tyros. Shower, washed some clothe, but this time had difficulty finding a place to eat. At the end of town, I was in luck. The Matron and two girls, 9 and 17, were eating themselves. The 9 years old did most of the translation. I had veal with spaghetti, ate the veal, left most spaghetti.

So many women, also some men, entered and left the kitchen, the business seems more dynasty than family.

Hearing what sounded like wind chimes, turned out to be the flute of the nine-year-old. She sat on a bench facing the beach, playing for her grandmother sitting next to her.

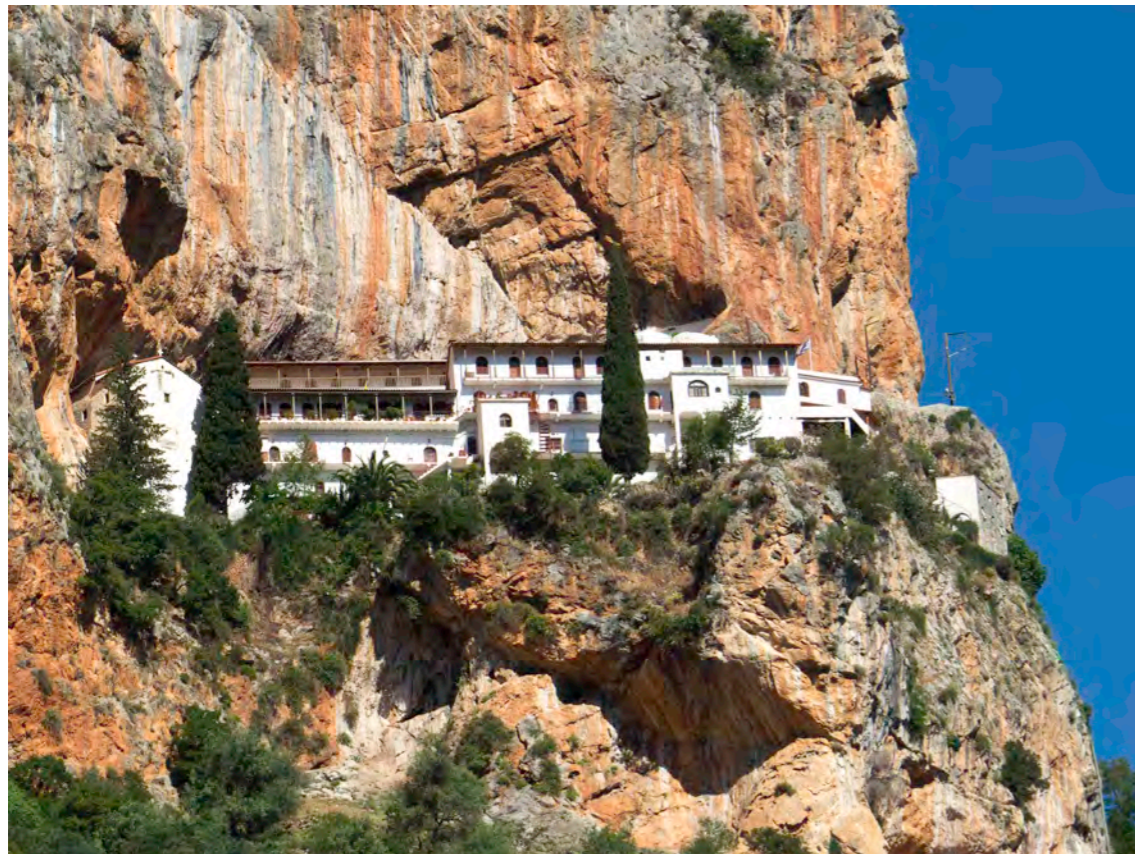
Sunday, May 12.

Leaving Tyros the air was clear, no haze, thanks to last night's rain.

A New Zealand couple too appreciated the landscape in that sharp light, taking some memory lasting pictures. We were traveling the same roads, at least for a while, passing each other, not always stopping for the same visual attractions.

With the Elona Monastery high up on a cliff, I pulled over, while they passed. I stayed, stunned by the sound effect the monks singing their Sunday ritual up there has down in the canon. Only when speech replaced song did I leave.

Elona Monastery



Tyros



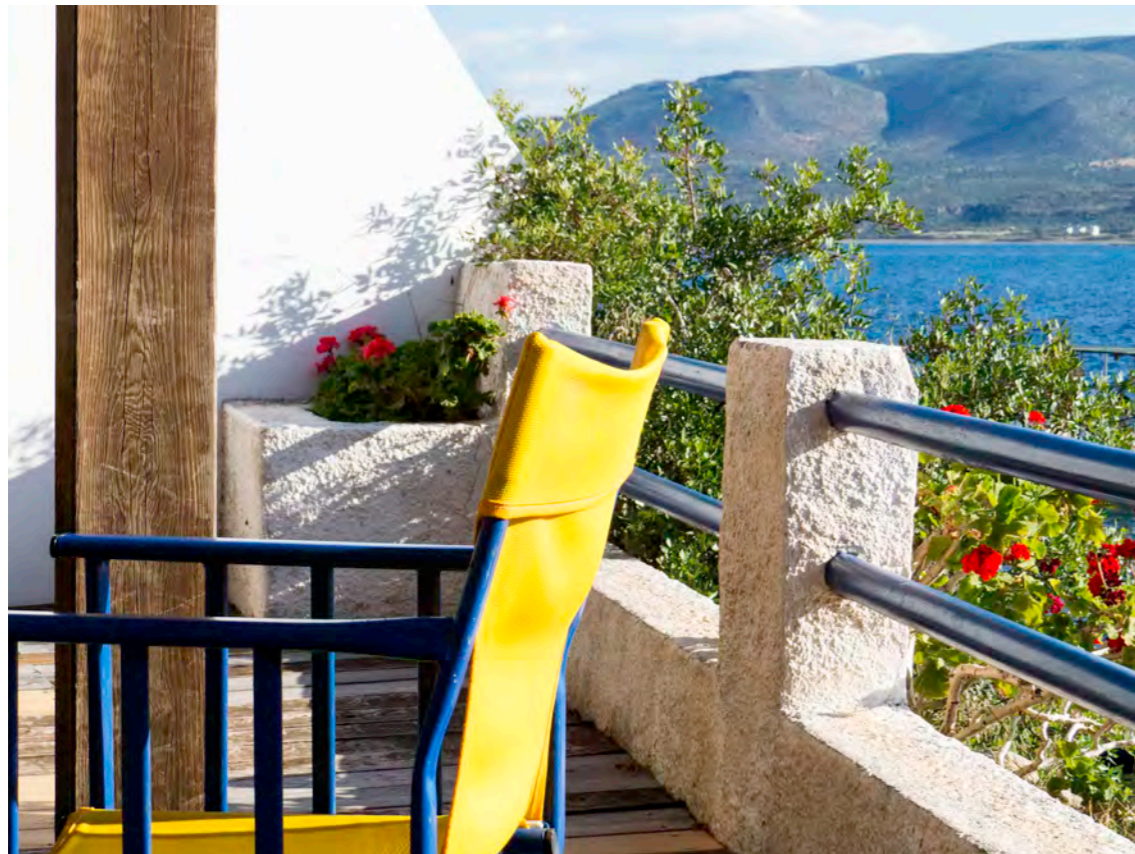
The archaeological museum in Sparta disappoints, so does the archaeological site, again. Three years ago it was at least possible to walk more unrestricted, now new plastic fences, red, makes it impossible to figure out what is and what is not to be accessible, and one finds oneself trapped inside or outside, by fence or vegetation. Either way, it is hardly worth a visit, no signs, no references, some new trenches, labels attached to stones, indicating something may be going on, except the Spartans are dead, at last. The landscape remains.

I am sitting on the terrace, in Archangelos, the Blue Palace, drinks yes, no food, but breakfast is promised for tomorrow. The only place to get some food in this not yet season, no directions necessary, is a stone throw away, the woman there a first cousin to the woman here, one would not suspect from their appearances, as the woman there referred to the one here as skinny. A pot with freshly cooked veggies was shown and agreed to, ground beef too, 12 Euro including beer and dessert. A German acquaintance of the establishment was introduced, from Hamburg. Some time ago he had ambition to build vacation homes, since shelved, but imports now olive oil and such back home. A business working mainly by word of mouth. He offered much information regarding the local what's up.

Born here, growing up here, it seems the young are lured to far away places, my hostess, the skinny one, to Pennsylvania, only later to return, look after things.

A strong wind from the West is driving waves on shore.

Archangelos



Sparta



Monday, May 13.

After fighting mosquitoes all night long, I enjoyed coffee and two fried eggs at eight, counting bites. Exploring Xilis Bay, driving again through Skala, avoiding roadblocks, hoping Spartans do not man them, not all may be informed, that it is over, those mountains always in sight, snow-covered, in former days unmistakable, threatening reminder of Sparta. I continued towards Mani, passing through Gythio and down that peninsula.

Extraordinary views whenever one dares to take eyes off the road or a sudden possibility allows to stop without inviting disaster. By the time I reached the end of land, turning towards Vathia, I decided to aim for Agios Nikolaos, to see if Xenios is home.

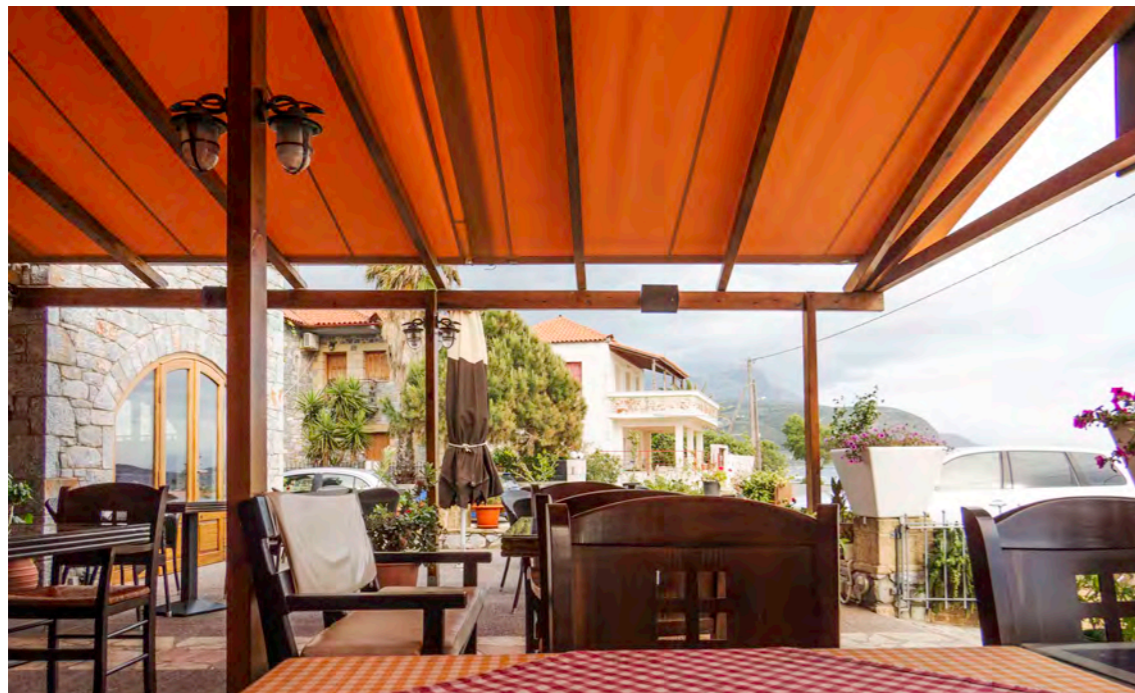
He takes his afternoon nap, his wife shows me a room, and now I am sitting on the familiar terrace, a Mythos beer on the table, watching, listening to the waves pounding the beach across the street. The wind is furious, supposed to stay that way for three more days, waves more like in Portugal, here, I expected to go swimming.

Tuesday, May 14.

It rained last night, forcing all mosquitoes into my room, doors having been left open for the sound of waves, not the beasts. Half the terrace is flooded, instead the 32 degrees Celsius two days ago, so the wife told me, now only with a jacket is it comfortable enough to watch the sky, sea, mountains, their tops in rain clouds.

Breakfast at Xenios is luxurious, fried eggs on toast, some cheese, cold cuts from a Bio firm, desert, kiwi, apple, pears, bananas, melon, topped with creamy yogurt and honey, a rush of different tastes, and a strong Greek coffee.

Xenios



Mani

Xenios



By nine o'clock I am on the road, Kardamili, Kalamata to Messini. My intention was to find a bank or cash machine. I tried three, always pressing 'credit' for credit card, always to be rejected. In frustration, I went on to the archaeological Messini, not checking how much cash I had.

The little museum doesn't show much, some Roman copies of now lost Greek statues, some costumes. Once they got rid of their bloodsucking Spartan oppressors, the town seems to have flourished, only later to adjust to the taste and influence of their imperialist Latin neighbors, sometimes maybe also the other way around. The town may have been quite large, the Asklepieion in the center an architectural climax. The landscape must have left impressions even then.

Back in Messini, I hoped to get to a bank in time and change at least some Dollars into Euros. Fat chance, the banks closed early. Are they not supposed to work harder to satisfy the Troika? Feeling desperate with 45 Euros left, I worked one machine with both credit cards, no money, trying everything, pressing also checking instead of credit, and there flows the money, all of 300 Euro, all one can withdraw at one time, so a National Bank official had informed me. Have to use the system more often than every three years to internalize its workings. Much relieved, knowing bed, shower, beer, wine, dinner guaranteed, I asked for direction towards Koroni. A young man leaves his company momentarily, starts his motorbike and guides me out of town.

Driving up and down the strip does not take much time, parking did. The custom is to park wherever, looking for authorizing signs is an alien concept.

Koroni



Messini

Where I am sitting, after a tasty 6 Euro meal of ground beef and fried potatoes, the way they should always and only be served, crisp, I am looking across to Mani, exactly across towards Xenios. It must be raining buckets there, no land visible. Here the sea is quiet, allowing a conversation with an English couple traveling with two dogs, good-looking ones, they are sisters, the dogs. Exchanging impressions, experiences, they travel in a mobile home, she driving. Back in Cornwall, she drives a school bus, so no adjustment to local roads necessary. Lucky devil he, to be able to watch all the time without fear of driving off a cliff or crashing into a truck.

It starts now to rain here too, but no wind, we are at the east side of this last or first finger, depending which way one counts. The money scare still echoes, sleeping in the car is planned only for Scandinavia. For the first time, my stomach feels good, and my room has a mosquito screen over the balcony door facing the sea. It should be a peaceful night.

Wednesday, May 15.

Best night so far, no blood-letting, but the room faces all the tavernas, left and right along the beach. The last conversation, they always take place at full vocal capacity, ended after one o'clock.

Scratching only old bites I headed for Pilos to see where in 425 BC the Athenians trapped those 292 warriors, including 120 Spartans on that island, allowing them no alternative but to surrender, a first in their fight to the death tradition. The strategists at home had concluded, honor alone was not worth 120 dead Spartan. For once and probably only time Lacedaemonians gave in to common sense, not so the Athenians, in the end, they blew it and lost the war.

Not finding a view worth the event, I headed for Nestor's cave, where he was supposed to have kept his cows. However, the path was not recommended by the Ministry for Education due to the chance of rock slides, the cows, who's ever, did not care and were grazing in the dunes. Nestor may have been a model host to young Telemakhos, not to me. His palace closed due to roof problems, a friendly young man with authority told me, apologizing for the long trip I had made. Three years it may take to put a new roof in place. No point waiting.

But the little museum in Khona, Hona - how many spellings can they come up with - is well worth the visit. Wonderful ceramics, enough to supply more than one household, simple technic, sophisticated style. The few fragments of frescoes indicate Nestor was no brute, forget Troy, war is war, his place must have been a charm. No wonder Telemakhos was dazzled.

After Kiparissia, at Memi, a sign points to the Tolon in Peristeria. Who were these guys to be so sumptuously put to rest? The architecture of these domes may seem simple, pure minimalism, but is aesthetically stunning.

The site includes fragments of two more graves.

Tolon in Peristeria



Khona Museum

Tolon in Peristeria



Not one inviting spot, hotel with restaurant, to spend the rest of the day as well as the night close to the sea was to be found. Beautiful beaches for sure, but not what this discriminating traveler was looking for. So I drove all the way to Olympia. How I ended up in front of the 'Posidon' where Jorge sat on his chair and asked what it was, that I was looking for, is a miracle. A room for the night, parking in front, restaurants close by, the museum in sight, Apollo is on my side.

Thursday, May 16.

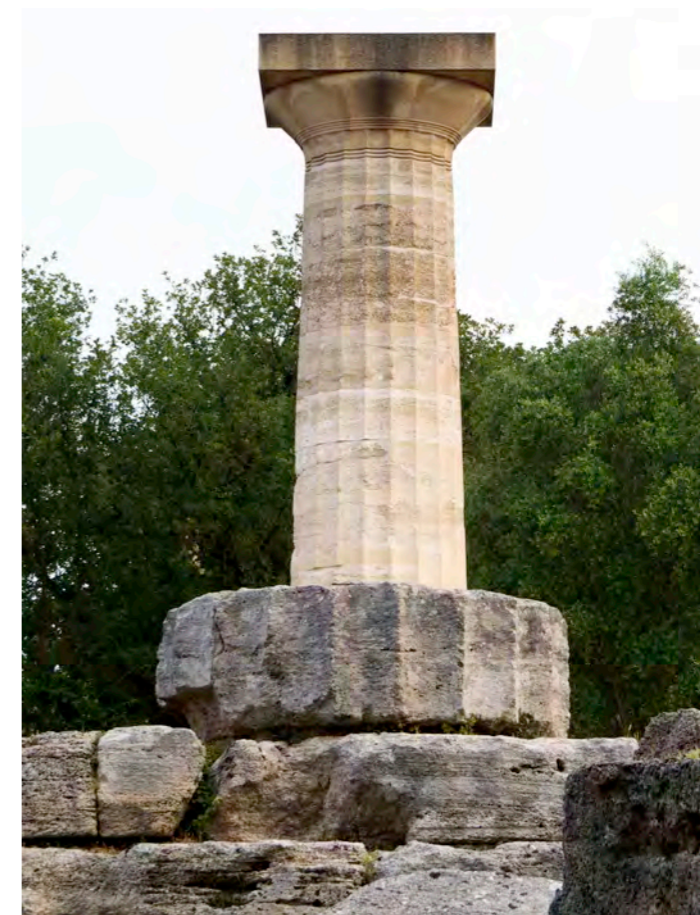
Olympia, the site, again, seems to be more restricted, understandably considering the crowds, but the boy has to stand on top the fragment of a column to be photographed, restrictions apply to others.

The sheer dimension of the place, the size of the columns, their sections, their diameters, at the Zeus temple, the Doric capitals, what extraordinary workmanship. The curvature of these capitals are subtle, strong, with plasticity, a sculptor can only envy. The museum too is a revelation. Whatever came before, leading to the Minoan, appreciation of it the Akhaians showed even at home, and it seems not all was lost to the latecomers either, whatever cultural dry season may have existed in between. If it all can be thought to have come together in one piece, it is in the Poseidon in Athens.

Two rows of tables occupied by Americans, students and teachers, all overweight, have emptied. They must have eaten well, judging from what little is left. Two brothers, their mother, two cooks, run this place in Delphi, a little boy, about five, is in training.



Olympia





Itea from Delphi



Delphi

Friday, May 17.

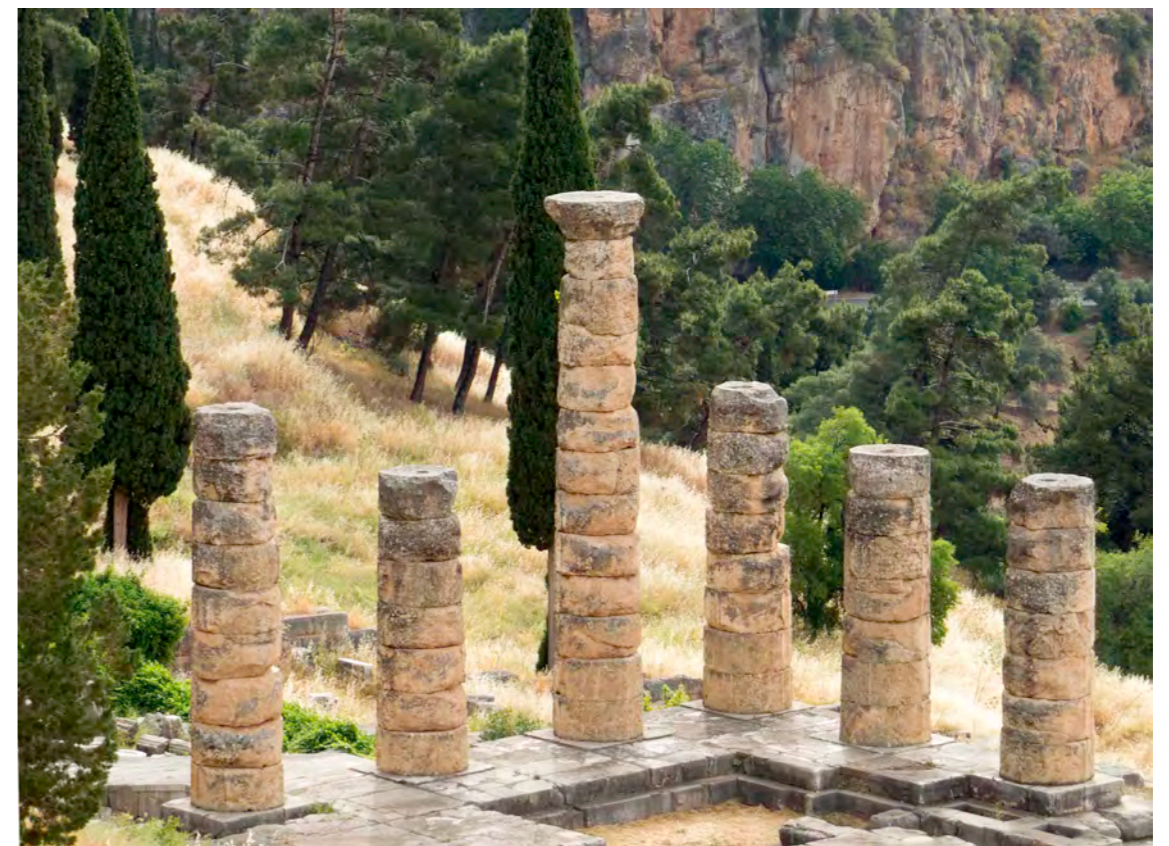
Delphi, what is left to see, cannot possibly satisfy the imagination, the landscape dominates, steep, raw, gigantic, there is so little room, so much architecture in that narrow space. The effect of the closeness of the buildings, how cramped the place must have been, even looking at the model in the museum, is hard to comprehend.

The fragments of sculptures in the museum only hint at the visual richness of the Apollo temple alone. To receive an answer from the oracle must have meant a lot, whichever way it was achieved, whichever way interpreted, it paid to donate, also to be known to have invested in that place.

The rest of the day, I left Delphi at noon, was not so satisfying.

I had intended to spend the night again in Kamena Vourla, but passed Thermopiles. The sight of half-naked, not well-aged bodies in and out of the sulfurous springs is not conducive to contemplating the historic significance of the place, nor are tour buses at the memorial and their tour guides screaming nonsense, scaring living and dead.

It seemed too early, and I drove on to Halkida, Evia, and after too many wrong turns, - signs please! put up signs - all the way to Aliveri.





Nea Stira

Big mistake. Finally, I had to ask if any hotels, rooms for rent could be found. The English-speaking woman at the Shell station was English and advised to turn back, at the entrance to Amarinthos would be a sign on the left, a friend from England, when visiting, stayed there.

So I did and found the place, quite nice, 35 Euro off season, but no food. In town, after waiting too long for service, I found something to eat at a fast food outfit, nothing to drink, except a bottle of red wine in a mini market next door to take back home, found also some dark chocolate to obliterate the memory of what I had eaten.

When I first arrived, the place seemed deserted, until I heard a faint voice from the garden, some distance away. An older woman and a young helper were planting something green. The young man spoke a very little English, but he understood, I wanted to stay the night.

Everybody carries a cellphone, except this traveler. A daughter had been contacted and arrived to show the room, take my passport, handed keys with explanations how to open and close the estate gate and also my room.

Sitting on the balcony, overlooking the sea separating Evia, Euboea, whichever, from the mainland, sipping my red wine, the frustrations of the day become irrelevant.



Delphi



A very strong wind blowing from the south agitates the sea, marvelous to watch. A Persian fleet would have shipwrecked. But the old lady is watering her flower beds, three sheep watching. The light is fading, the illumination of the flower beds just turned on, for my sake I presume. Exhausted, tired of driving, to sit close to the breaking waves, what a relief.

Saturday, May 18.

I left this morning around nine, heading for Karistos, the end of the main road south, turned off down to Nea Stira to have breakfast, best tomatoes so far, the place not bad, this traveler being spoiled of course. However, Karistos just isn't worth the drive. Turning back, heading for Kimi on the east side of Evia. There are not that many roads, just enough to get lost.

At first, following the signs, I arrived at a wonderful beach with hotel, but not yet Kimi. Following the sign a bit further, the road was blocked off by a rock slide, only Poseidon knows since when. Around here he may have also blown and smashed on rocks the 200 ships Xerxes had sent out to circumvent Evia, to attack the Greek fleet from behind. An hour later I arrived at the other side of the road disaster, after exploring asphalt, cobblestones and dirt roads, mountain villages not designed for motorized traffic, informants pointing in opposite directions, only to turn around disappointed in Kimi beach, drive back a short distance to Platana to check in at the Pelagos hotel, 30 Euro.

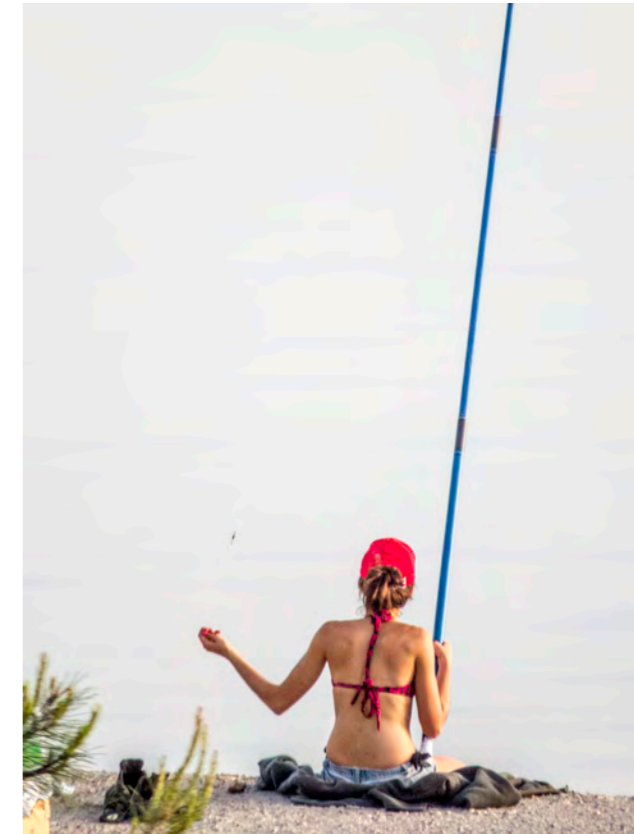
Skiros is out there, somewhere, only a couple of rocks visible on the horizon. They used to find their ways, the winds have not changed, nor the waves, at least not yet. Not many cars are passing, nowhere much to go.

Sunday, May 19.

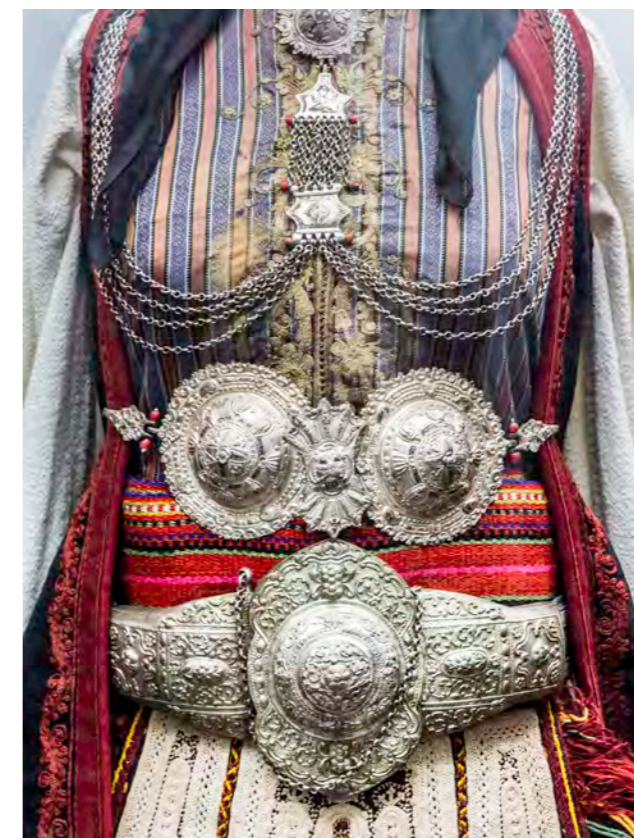
Had some fish last night with some vegetables, bought some dark chocolate and some digestive crackers in a mini market. Somewhat later my sinuses clogged, but nose running, headache, fast heartbeat, heavy breathing and finally diarrhea. When that was over, the stomach empty, the sinuses cleared, I could finally get some sleep.

I suspected fish poisoning, but when I checked in at a room for rent in Limni, 45 Euro, the daughter of the house, a doctor from Hanover on vacation, suggested a protein allergy, next time it could be worse, so no more fish for now I thought, but she suggested, it could more likely have been some vegetable, when I remembered a somewhat less intensive experience at Zobras in Tsoutsouros without fish but vegetable. She asked what it had been, but only color came to mind. Her advice, when back home, to be tested for allergies.

Had some beefsteak to be safe, went back to rest, 15:00, and fell asleep. Thirsty, I went out for one more beer. On returning I sat with my hosts, husband Greek, wife German, daughter and son visiting, both bilingual, having attended the German school in Athens, both living and working in Germany, had some red wine and a conversation about the economy, health system here and there, and the probable spot where the Greek fleet waited to escape the Persians in 480 BC.



Platana



Limni

Peris Collection

Monday, May 20.

Having an early coffee by the sea, still feeling weak. How pleasant it would be to do this every morning, breakfast at this hour would be more difficult, listening to a few fishing boats tuckering at a distance, to think things over, in a soft breeze, then go to work. Breakfast would have to be made at home, otherwise, before eight, no chance, after nine, maybe.

At the fourth place, which happened to be open, I asked. The waitress nodded affirmatively, two fried eggs on toast, please. What I got was an omelette with ham and cheese. The double Greek coffee, even I drink it now with sugar, came with two small, lovely, black, crunchy something, the omelette had too much cheese, another coffee should take care of that.

Eleven o'clock was the appointment with my host's brother, Andreas Peris at his little museum of traditional Greek costumes, an astonishing collection, but far too cramped, deserving much more space. After an intensive guided tour, we exchanged memories of New York in the 70s. Andreas had been a dancer, studied with Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, we may have run into each other, the world, even New York, not being that big after all.

Returning to my host, he showed me the impressive, by now five-volume publication of Hellenic Traditional Costumes, published by the Academy of Athens, representing also Andreas's collection in color, front, side and back view, but in his house Andreas had no visuals nor written material, the interested visitor could take away, so I suggested the talents of the nephew, a computer expert, the internet connection in his parents house being excellent, thanks to him. A CD to be purchased at the museum would be helpful.

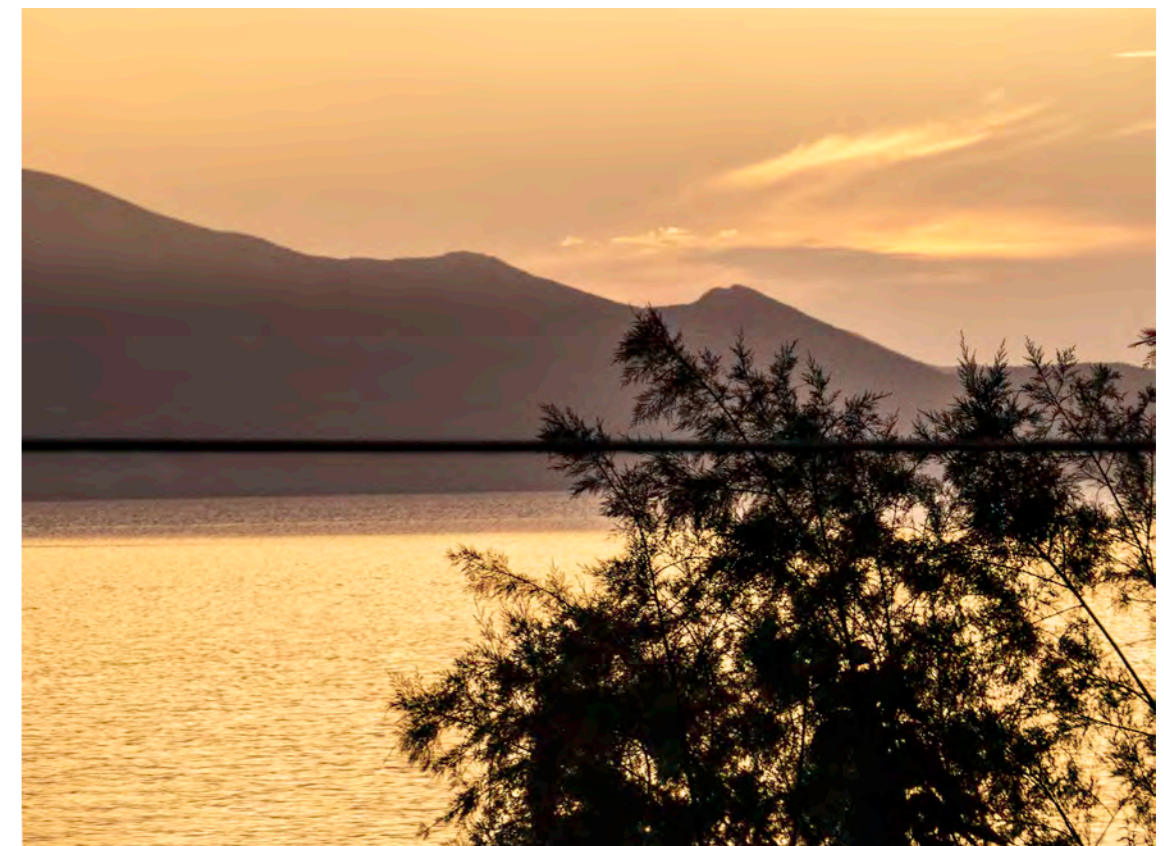
In Loutra Edispou I checked timetable and prices for the ferry. After a short visit to the home base of the Greek fleet during the battle of Artemisia, I thought of taking that shortcut to Arkitsa for a less complicated trip to Marathon, but I got lost in the mountains, of course, taking only one wrong turn in Istiea. I missed Artemisia but found to the beach in Pefki. By that time I was bathing in sweat, the atmosphere being sauna-like with little visibility. When I asked at a restaurant, few were operational, for a place to stay, I was walked some twenty meters to the Café Kerasioti, a room with beds for five available at 25 Euro, ten more days off season.

Sitting halfway to the beach, under a tree, a good draft - not beer, that comes here only in bottles - the hostess explained the haze as sand from Egypt, also pinpointing on my map the exact anchoring spot of the Greek fleet in 480 BC. The not-yet-season has one shortcoming, food, here only fried chicken or sausage, of course with french fries and bread. The bread is good, the sausage too salty and greasy, forget the french fries. Thank Apollo for the wine, one God should do.

I am contemplating staying a second night. The terrace is nearly empty here at the restaurant, just one young couple two tables down, Greek, she in profile, blondish, her short hair rubber-banded to spike up, a clear line from forehead over chin down her neck to where her breasts start, covered by whatever, I am not an expert in outfits.



Pefki



Beautiful smile too. Her seventh vertebra distinct, breaking the straight line from the skull down to between her shoulder blades, alas, she too smokes. He, seen only from the back, somewhat flabby, color printed T-shirt, could lose some weight. The two are getting up, he having paid, she in bleached, not too short cutoff jeans, slender body, her feet in flip-flops, he in fashionably sloppy, down over the knees knickers.

I don't understand.



Late Helladic 1600 - 1100 BC

Marathon Museum



Early Kykladik 3200 - 2000 BC



Marathon Museum

Tuesday, May 21.

I am tired, it has been an exciting trip, much to see. How wonderful to revisit at will, the ceramics, decorations, pattern, from the pre-historic onwards. Not to focus just on highlights, the Poseidon, the Apollo, the Kuroi, Korai, but also the clay models in Heraklion, the ceramics in Khona, Nestor's stuff, the temple friezes, victors, vanquished.

But all that killing, even if most efficiently done, Marathon, the run through the rain of arrows, driving those being overrun into swamp and sea for slaughter. Leonidas, dismissing the main body of defenders, self-sacrificing. Salamis, the mass drowning, and finally the folly of the Peloponnesian war, the endless betrayals, Greek screwing Greek.

Alkibiades, model of a Greek.

They are having a birthday party across the street, close to the beach, in the shade of a tree. The one who speaks English has been helping me find a room, tall, lanky, with friends from Loutra Edipsou, some females. They seem close, quiet, joyful, nothing boisterous.

The brother together with his small son is washing the gift from Egypt from an Alfa Romeo. A woman arrives, slender, her daughter twice the size of the boy, embraces, kisses. The little boy next to the so much taller girl, a ball in her hands, points somewhere, touches her arm for emphasis. They run off.



Last preparations before the season, weed cutters running on full power, sweepers in the rear cleaning up.

The haze is gone, a cool breeze from the sea, midnight. Beneath my balcony, under the canvas, the talking has not stopped since early evening, all locals, playing cards. In the morning I will take the ferry to the mainland, the thruway down to Marathon, look for a place to spend the night not too far from the airport, and Thursday I'll be off to Budapest.

Wednesday, May 22.

At 7:00 I left, arrived in Loutra Edipsou around 7:30, the ferry took off at 8:00 and arrived in Arkitsa a little before 9:00. The sign Kifissia made me aware, that I was entering Athens, so I turned off the road and asked. If people speak English, even if not, they try to be helpful. After some consultation with two others, my informant gave precise instruction, go back, second exit, turn right, then left. Good luck.

In Marathonas it became more complicated, till I turned into the parking lot in front of a bakery and asked inside. The answer came in German together with a crunchy stick, slight taste of cheese. In fact, the instructions were repeated several times, but without further crunchies.

I found the tomb of the 192 Athenians and after various attempts even the archaeological museum, why so difficult?

Three years ago I gave up, this time, after a first try, I drove back to the Athenian dead, and consulting with an equally confused Dutch couple, we tried to figure out the posted map at the parking lot.

I got there, experienced by now in guessing whether to turn left, right or continue straight. The museum is very much worth the effort, well lit, small, but rich in ceramics starting with the Neolithic around 4000 BC.

Finding a place to spend the night turned out to be difficult. That close to Athens there was no lack of fancy hotels, compounds promising all and everything. I already thought of turning back to Marathon Beach, when I asked some youngish locals sitting outside a cafeteria in Artemida, at the beach, again Apollo only knows, how I managed to get there. A place was pointed out just few parked car lengths down the road, the sign 'room for rent' in plain sight, 40 Euro, a bit run down, but a clean bed.

The host showed me two pots on the stove to choose from, calamari or meatballs. I chose the meatballs. The wife explained, she had made the bread from scratch, with her own hands and baked it this morning, so I had to eat a good portion of it. Some desert was served, on the house, while I ordered the wine.

It is quiet, just the wind and the sea some feet away. In a few days, the place may not be recognizable.



Artemida