

Dear Friends and Family,

The second phase of this fall's travel was to Greece (which I had never visited), a couple of days in Istanbul and Ephesus. In total I had a little less than three weeks in Greece and only touched islands in the Crete and Aegean Seas plus Athens and the Sea of Marmara. Due to prior travels to Macedonia, Albania and Bulgaria I am aware of the sensitivity of their borders with Greece even before the current challenges of migration from war torn areas of the near east and Libya. In fact, due to overwhelming challenges of the more than 30,000 refugees on the island of Lesbos alone our cruise ship was re-routed to stop instead on Lemnos.

It was an excellent time to be in Greece. The agreement to restructure their international debt and avoid exiting the Euro-zone had just been completed, the stress of the required belt-tightening was not yet apparent and it was still summer vacation for Greek school children.

Most islands have a mythological story that links to their names as well as a modern history of domination by Genoans, Venetians and Ottoman Turks, all of which are reflected in the surviving architecture. However, in addition to destructive wars, this is also a very earthquake-prone region and many islands have recent as well as ancient experiences of volcanic destruction. The most extreme example of this is the island of Santorini, also known as Thera, which about 1600 BC exploded so violently it sent rocks 40 kilometers into the air, was heard in



France and Iran, and the ash circled the globe twice cooling the global climate by 1 degree C for two years, according to ancient Chinese chronicles.

Subsequent eruptions over the next 3500 years resulted in what we see today: five islands encircling a caldera (ocean-filled crater) 400 meters deep – thus boats can't

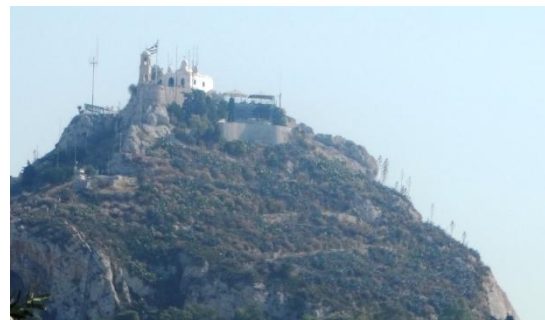
anchor but must use their engines to hold position when they visit.

I began my visit with three days in Athens which I thoroughly enjoyed – despite having been warned by friends that I might not. My hotel was in the Plaka at the foot of the Acropolis, centrally located to ancient ruins and public transportation. In September it was still peak tourist season and I felt the staff did the best they could trying to manage the crowds safely and

efficiently through the single stairway entrance to the top of the Acropolis. I had approached by a circuitous route from neighborhoods to the northeast so I entered by a less utilized gate, but in the end all roads lead to .... so to speak. The Parthenon itself is under restoration but it was great to be there and see the various temple structures.



My favorite Acropolis views, however were from above when I climbed Lycavittos Hill (which even with its funicular by comparison made the walk up Butte Montmartre seem like a small hill), and from below in early evening from the Agora (formerly the main square for public gathering and commerce). Lycavittos Hill had a tiny chapel on top plus a very nice restaurant where I rewarded myself with an excellent lunch.



I took advantage of the Big Red Bus Hop on Hop Off to visit a wide variety of neighborhoods. Pretty consistently there were buildings fully restored and many others badly in need.

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However, the 2004 Olympics resulted in two Grande Dame hotels, the Grande Bretagne and the King George being beautifully refurbished as well as the original marathon stadium. I found the marathon story very interesting as originally the distance of a marathon was 24.85 miles. However, when the summer Olympics were held in London in 1908, the King wanted to be able to view the finish line from the royal family's viewing box and so the race distance was adjusted to 26.2 miles and has remained so ever since.



Ermou Street starts with high end boutiques near Syntagma Plaza, and at the bottom has an antiques market district and a plaza where I could see red banners being posted announcing some event. The next day I discovered these were large rallies for KKE, the Greek Communist Party. Interestingly, most of the participants appeared to be young. Traditional markets are always one of my favorite parts of any city I visit.





When I happened upon the changing of the guard (Evzones) at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in front of the Parliament building I learned that their “skirts” have 400 pleats (which they have to iron themselves), one for every year of Ottoman Turkish occupation. Greece



achieved independence in 1822 .

The Hop on Hop Off bus offered a second day free and was to be my transport to the Port of Piraeus from which my cruise ship (Club Med 2 – CM2) would depart. I did a trial run to figure out the logistics: Piraeus is the largest port on the Mediterranean, stretches along 40 kilometers of coast to cover all its various activities and has two cruise ship portals. This also gave me the opportunity to see a couple of other Olympic stadium venues (football and indoor volleyball) and to walk a few kilometers among the various coastal towns/fishing ports along the Saronikos



Gulf southwest of Athens, including a fresh seafood lunch.

The first stop on the CM2 cruise was Nauplie, actually part of “mainland” Greece in the region called Peloponnese. In the future it would be nice to visit the islands west of here in the Ionian Sea. Nauplie was the second capital (1828-34) of free Greece, is dominated by a fort above and protected at its harbor entry by the Bourdzi Fort, since 1935 a hotel but previously the residence of prison executioners.



When walking the town I happened upon a baptismal celebration at St George Cathedral.



Our second stop was Milos, most famous as the island where the sculpture Venus de Milos was found by a farmer in 1820. A small 3-aisled church dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> C serves as an ecclesiastical museum and contains some very nice icons.



Its thermal springs, known since antiquity for dermatological cures, are still active today. The major economic activity of Milos has been mining, especially very high quality



obsidian. I don't think I have mentioned that there are also Roman Catholic churches on each island, in addition to Greek Orthodox. On Milos it is a small chapel. Also there are frequently nice mosaics at the exterior of the churches.





Santorini was the next stop. With its 225 meter high cliffs and white and blue buildings it is the image of Greek Islands and receives 3 million visitors per year. I also stopped here on the Celestyal Crystal cruise the following week. Fortunately now there is a cable car up to town rather than climbing 600 steps or taking the traditional donkeys.



Following the volcanic history there was also a major earthquake in 1956 which destroyed 50% of the structures (not all rebuilt) and only 500 people remained on the island. There are 400



churches and chapels, many only open one day per year.



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One of the islands in the caldera is clearly black lava. I bought a necklace of black lava beads to complement the earrings I had bought in Taormina, Sicily, in June. The artist pointed out that the necklace was from “old” lava versus earrings of “new” lava (Aetna)!

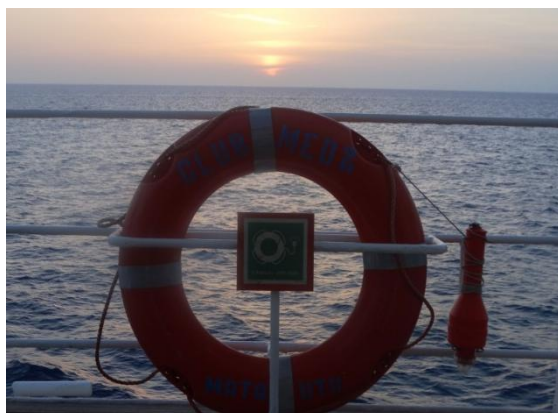
There is no water on Santorini so every building has a cistern on its roof to collect winter rains and it was only in the 1970’s that cars, electricity and a desalinization plant arrived. Due to the lack of water all local plant varieties are smaller and they grow the grapes on the ground with



the vines wound around the fruit as a protective basket from the wind – something I had never seen before.

Leaving Santorini CM2 raised her sails which she seems to do only about once a cruise

but I find very moving and impressive.





The next stop was Chios (also visited twice) which I enjoyed because its main town, also Chios, seemed like a normal town, not just tourists. Chios is only 8 km from the Turkish coast, quite a distance from other Greek islands, didn't become part of Greece until 1912, and Homer was born here. Seeing the many ferry lines in Greece I realized that if I came again I would probably



like to organize travel by ferry. The old city walls known as Kastle are largely intact or under



restoration and originally Genoese. The former Turkish Hammam has been beautifully restored complete with plumbing, I wished it was open for use! There is a small Turkish cemetery.

Here, too, an 1881 earthquake had destroyed much of the historic town. The Mecidiye Mosque has been restored and is being used as a Byzantine museum. At the cathedral there was huge activity polishing all metal surfaces, ironing linens and bunting flying outside for what



occasion I never figured out.

I am also noticing constant maintenance on the ship, today including hull painting since we are at dock instead of at anchor. I also noticed for the first time the boat's registration: Mata Utu, the capital of Wallis and Futuna which I never knew is an





overseas “collectivity” of France. This was our only stop at Quai and departure to the theme song from the film Christophe Colombe was fun with lots of people waving from the shore (there are only a handful of sail-masted cruise ships on the circuit so their visits are always a pleasurable novelty).

On the second visit to Chios I got to see the mastic (gum) trees for which the island is famous as it is the only place in the Mediterranean where they will grow. Their sap is harvested much like rubber or maple syrup and falls to the inert calcium carbonate spread below the trees during the months they are tapped. The importance of this crop preserved life in the surrounding so-called “Mastic” villages during the otherwise turbulent Ottoman occupation.



We visited two of these villages. Pyrgi is known for its grey and white mostly geometric designs on building facades which reminded me somewhat of the Ndbele tribe buildings in South Africa except those were in color. The technique is called sgraffito. Christopher Columbus also lived here for three years to study sailing and navigation before embarking on his new world exploration.



The 14h C village of Mesta is vehicle-free, has one entrance and narrow, labyrinthine streets. The buildings are all interlinked at roof level providing for free movement during attack or danger. There is only one central square which is dominated by the Church of Palaios (Old) Taxiarchis which was opened especially for our tour group to visit. Special features here are the silver Archangel Michael (30 kg of silver) whose eyes seem to follow you, called the Da Vinci

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technique (a la Mona Lisa).



As previously mentioned we had to skip Mytilene and instead stopped at Lemnos, an island that has only been receiving cruise ships for about three years. I wasn't sure all the inhabitants were happy about the influx. However, it has deserted beaches and mountainous villages which are gradually being discovered. I contented myself with the port and main town where I walked up to the medieval castle of Myrina, on a nice recently-upgraded access path.



When I took my first cruise five years ago I was puzzled by the navigation buoys. When we used to boat in the Pacific Northwest the rule was "red right returning" for the way the buoys guided you into the harbor. My experience elsewhere in the world was just the opposite and, in fact, it is! It turns out that in 1977 navigation markers were simplified to two systems from



the 30 that existed previously. So the USA is in sector B which includes the Americas, Japan, the Philippines and Korea. The rest of the world is the opposite. I love the jack-shaped concrete forms that are used to create breakwaters – we have the same ones in Agadir.



From here we passed through the Dardanelles and Sea of Marmara for a day in Istanbul before I switched ships to the Celestyal Crystal (CC), Malta registered, Greek owned, carrying 1200 passengers, my first non CM2 cruise. The immigration official at the port was a little surprised when he saw my passport stamped into Turkey just one hour before I was leaving (when entering countries from the cruise ship passports don't get stamped, all the paperwork is handled by the cruise ship).

I had only learned a couple of weeks previously that CC was involved in a collision in the Dardanelles back in June. So when we had our emergency drill I asked a couple of staff members if they had been on board at the time. They were and said the experience gave them confidence that they were prepared for a serious emergency.



This boat is a totally different experience than CM2 with 300 passengers, yet it is not a colossus. As stated in the welcoming talk we pretty quickly began to recognize one another and feel like a family. It was really fun having travelling companions from all over the world – very interesting conversations at all meals, during tours and on-board relaxation time.

After Santorini our next Greek stop was Eastern Crete – Agios Nikolaos with its tiny lake in the center of town. Tourism started here 40 years ago and didn't move to western Crete until 20 years ago. Tamarisk, carob and olive trees flourish but the former cypress forests are gone. We



started our visit in the small picturesque town of Elounda on the Bay of Mirabella off the Sea of Crete. There is a sheltered lagoon-like stretch of water abutting a former salt mining area and the sunken Minoan city of Olous.

The fort on Spinalonga island was built by the Venetians in 1579 and finally surrendered to the Turks in 1715, 30 years after the rest of Crete. The Turks used it as a base for smuggling and

after Crete joined Greece it became a leper colony until 1953 and has since remained uninhabited. We arrived very early in the morning so no one was around except fishermen mending nets.

At a nice home producing olive oil (the donkey who operates the press was on break) we were treated to Cretan dances (which are known for the high leaping of the men) and home-made dolmades. We then went on to Kritsa, a totally picturesque mountainside village known for its embroidery which is displayed everywhere. The women shop keepers sat outside with



constantly busy fingers. I saw one old woman shelling almonds with a hammer – almonds are also plentiful here. There is a sculpture of a woman resistance fighter against the Turks.



On board we had a wonderful lecture on the history of Greek music and performance of the traditional bouzouki (and other traditional Greek instruments) by one of the most famous



Greek bouzouki players and composers, Thanasis Polykandriotis.



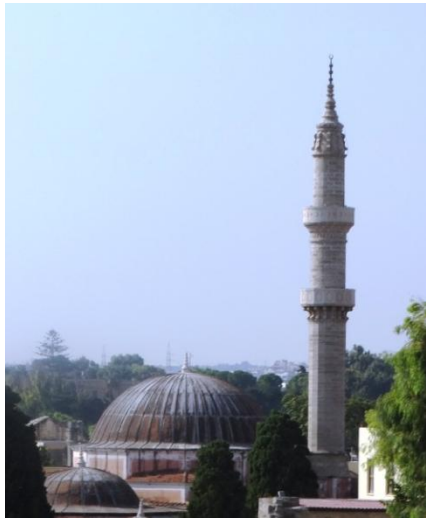
The next stop was Rhodes where I did a walking tour of the medieval city. Fortunately we started very early because both Celestyal ships were there totaling 2864 passengers plus Crystal Serenity and two Celebrity ships totalling an additional 7000 visitors. By the time we finished



our walk, around 11 am, you couldn't move in the streets.

Rhodes was founded in 408 BC when three cities merged. Until the earthquake of 226 BC the city was overlooked by a 30 meter high Colossus – a bronze statue to the sun god Helios. In 1309 the Knights Hospitalieres of St John from Jerusalem took Rhodes by force from the Byzantine Emperor and ruled the island until expelled by Sultan Sulieman the Magnificent in 1523 whose successors ruled until 1912 when the Italians captured it.

Several mosques are under restoration to become museums, one is active. The Knights (later



re-named the Knights of Malta) were organized into eight tongues (based on their country/region of origin) each with its own headquarters. The former French "tongue" building is still in use today as the French Consulate. The Knights built the Grand Master's House with three sets of walls and dry moats. It was destroyed by lightning striking an adjacent gun powder storage in 1856 and later rebuilt by the Italians to be the Emperor's summer home (although neither he nor Mussolini ever visited it). It is filled with antiquities from all over Europe and is a real hodgepodge, nothing hangs together. I did really like the copy of the Vatican sculpture

called Laocoon (A Trojan priest) and His Sons. There were also some very impressive mosaic floors, mostly relocated from the





island of Kos.

On one of the plazas there is also a very moving memorial to the 1600 Rhodes Jews who were deported to the death camps during WWII German Occupation.

Rhodes' current walls were built from 1481 to 1522 after the invention of gunpowder. Due to the active earthquake zone all the buildings are tied together by overhead arches to



provide



stability.



After Rhodes we made a brief evening stop at Symi. This was a wealthy ship building island (no longer as the forests are depleted) plus sponge and shrimp fishing which continue. In return for



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their services to the Ottomans they were unusually given farming rights on land on mainland Turkey.

They also milled a coarse grain for hard bread used on ships. The buildings are of a different architecture, a colorful neoclassical. The colors are regulated and the houses are typically five levels beginning with a cistern at the lowest level, then cool rooms at ground or lower ground and terminating in a triangular pedimented roof for ventilation. I splurged on a local dinner here (mostly Greek fish and shellfish dishes) and was entertained by dancers – we participated



also in the traditional Zorba the Greek dance.

Our final stop was an evening on Mykonos which was very windy. No wonder the streets are laid out in serpentine fashion to provide protection! Despite there being no water on the island (it is brought in by tankers and collected on roofs if it rains) the population of the main town Chora has tripled in 20 years to over 10,000.



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It is known for its nightlife, art galleries and international cuisine. Plus its windmills. There are literally hundreds of tiny chapels on the island. I had a lovely sunset view before returning to



the ship and heading off to Istanbul.



I had two days in Istanbul, which I had previously visited in 2007 and seen most of the old city, Sultanhamet, sites. So my first day I chose Topkapi which I had not previously seen and was, unfortunately quite a disappointment, especially the Treasury, probably because of my recent visit to Iran. But I did appreciate the fact that most of the site is a lovely public park and the décor of

the Harem was quite beautiful.



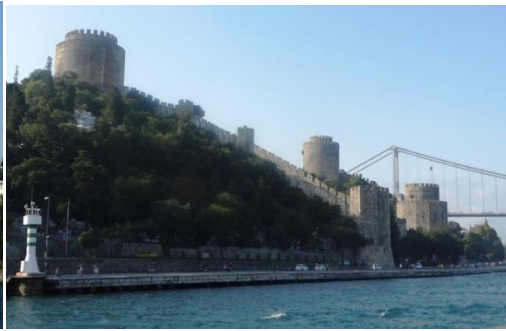
I thoroughly enjoyed a boat trip up the Bosphorus which connects the Sea of Marmara, and hence the Mediterranean, with the Black Sea, thus somewhat completing my circuit of Seas. I was totally surprised by the architecture along the Bosphorus with whole communities of houses built of wood. In some areas, except for the adjacent vegetation, one could imagine being in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. Apparently this is where many wealthy Turks



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prefer to have their summer homes. There are many tiny fishing villages interspersed among the forts and palaces of historical significance. A new giant mosque is under construction on the

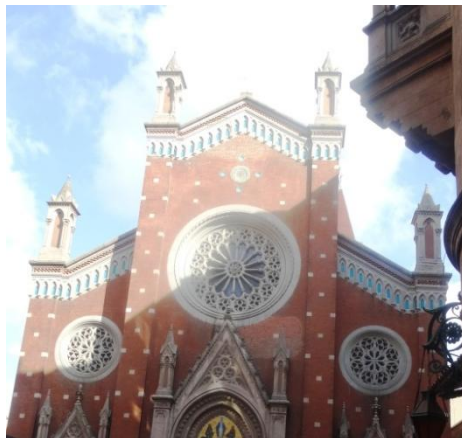


Asian side overlooking the Bosphorus sparking much controversy much as building of the Sacre Coeur in Paris did at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.



My other day I spent in Beyoglu, a steep hill across the “Golden Horn” from the old city. This is where the Embassies used to be before the Turkish capital was moved to Ankara in 1923. They remain as beautiful buildings mostly used as consulates. Beyoglu is dominated by Galata Tower, built in 1348 by the Venetians to monitor shipping, and also has several churches (at a minimum I saw Roman Catholic, Romanian Orthodox and Armenian) attesting to the

multinational nature of this district.



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I was there on what in France are the Journées de Patrimoine when many buildings not normally open to the public are opened. I had read in Turkish Airlines in flight magazine that the French Palace, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> C would be open that day. I stopped in at the famous historic Peri Palace Hotel to ask the concierge where I might find the French Palace. She very helpfully looked it up and gave me clear walking instructions. When I arrived at the gate I found it wasn't open to the general public but rather by invitation, or perhaps prior reservation. I presented my French Titre de Sejour and explained in my best French that I was visiting Istanbul just for the day and had read of the open house in Turkish Airlines magazine. The security guard took my card to the senior French security person at the front door and returned and added my name to the list. I was welcomed to tour just as if I were a dignitary and it is a lovely house and garden with especially beautiful carpets and tapestries.



I also looked at some of the suggested venues in this district on the Istanbul Art Biennial circuit which included buildings at 211 Istiklal Caddesi (the pedestrian street) with an excellent photography exhibit plus the Pera Museum in the former Bishop Hotel and the Galata Greek Private School.

There are also a couple of beautiful covered Passages, one of which is the former flower market now filled with small taverns. The current flower market is at the top of the street at Taksim Square, the former center of



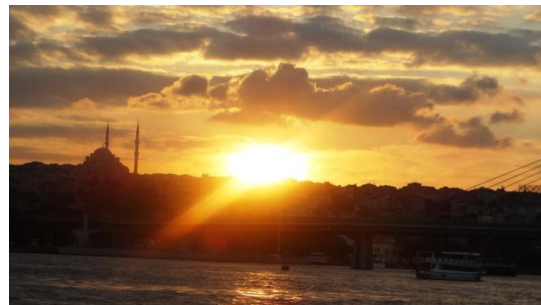


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water distribution for the city. I found Beyoglu with its alleys, pedestrian street and assorted shops and galleries to be very lively and stimulating.



I finished the day by just catching the sunset over the Golden Horn and dining on seafood at a restaurant below the Galata Bridge with fishermen's lines hanging from above reminding me just how fresh the seafood was. There was also a lovely view of Topkapi lighted at night.



I find the energy of Istanbul very invigorating, especially all of the water activities with ferries, water taxis, water commerce, cruise ships, pilot boats, coast guard and even the odd military ship constantly on the move. I did get to see Celestyal Crystal as she was arriving when I was still on CM2. Her hull damage is repaired but she is operating minus one of her engines.



The first stop of the CC cruise was in Kusadasi, Turkey for a quick visit to Ephesus. It seems fitting to end this story there since my year of seas began with ruins in Malta, Sicily and Pompeii back in June. It was late afternoon so it was cooler and most of the other tourists were gone which made for a very pleasant visit. First settled in 10,000 BC this was a major commercial port with a population of 250,000 and the capital of the Roman Empire's Asia province. Then it was partially destroyed by earthquake in 614 AD, and siltation filled in the harbor so it was no longer useful as a port for subsequent invaders. By the 15<sup>th</sup> C it was gone. We arrived at the uphill gate which is where overland merchants would have arrived and appreciated the fact that almost the first structure was the free public baths so the grime of travel could be removed



before entering the city. The lower, harbor, entrance led directly to an amphitheater seating 25,000, now again in use. The nearby library was one of the largest of its time with 12,000 manuscripts and the main street was covered and lined with fountains to keep it cool.



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The footprint pointed the way to the brothel (opposite the library) and it had the amenities of storm drainage and public toilets and baths.

The city is important to Christians as the Virgin Mary spent her last years in a house overlooking Ephesus and the Apostle St John preached and died here at the age of ~105.

I took a quick detour to Tallinn, Estonia on another sea – the Baltic - to meet up with U.S. friends traveling in Scandinavia before the final phase of this trip closer to home in southern France, Provence and Corsica, on the Med. That will be the final chapter of this fall's travel.