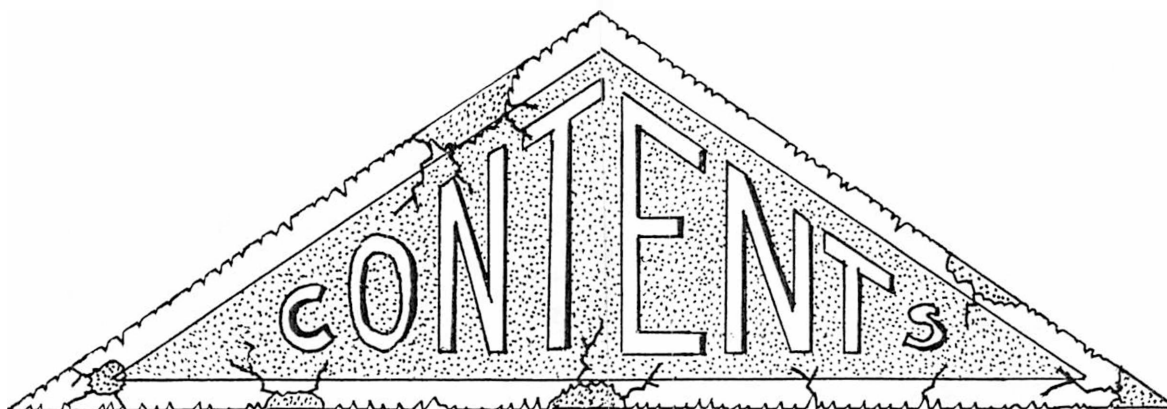




GRECIAN ODD ESSAYS

**JOHN BERRY
2001**





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All other artwork by John Berry.

Printed and published by John Berry, 4, Chilterns, S.Hatfield,
Hertfordshire AL10 8JU, Great Britain.

diane@berry11.freemove.co.uk.

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GRECIAN ODD ESSAYS was due for publication before the end of 2000, but on the 15th November I was rushed by siren-sounding ambulance to the Intensive Care Unit at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Welwyn Garden City, about three miles from Hatfield, having suffered heart palpitations during the night. During the first night in hospital, a severe rash which suddenly appeared on the left side of my body was diagnosed as Shingles. I can now proudly report that on my medical cv it states that within my first few hours in the hospital I was moved to the Isolation Ward of the Intensive Care Unit. I was later told that when I arrived at the hospital my heartbeat was under thirty per minute, and I was close to joining the other members of Irish Fandom in their celestial fanac den.

I was given PaceMaker a few days later...when I arrived home the PaceMaker fortunately performed as expected, but the Shingles, a dreadful sight, caused me irritation, and my sleep pattern was reversed. I felt highly alert during the night but somnolent during the day. Further frustration, I also succumbed to PHN. This affected the nerves on my body surrounding the Shingles area, causing further irritation when clothing touched my body.

These symptoms caused me to have no interest in anything, other than lying on the settee and sleeping all day. A foot-high pile of mail had accumulated, but it was not until after Xmas that I gradually will-powered myself to become active again, and after sorting out essentials I returned to fanac, hence the publication you are clutching - you are quite safe, PHN is not infectious.

It was always my intention to use my wife's iMac to retype the entire text, but I have reluctantly decided to merely use the pages I originally typed. There is some difference in contrast with the various typers I have used over the years, but it is my hope that the professional printer I have employed in Welwyn Garden City has presented a fairly uniform appearance.

My next project is the promised BEST OF POT POURRI 1958 - 1968, which I hope to issue later this year.

Cheers,

John Berry, April 2001.

TETRADRACHM - ATHENS, CIRCA 250 BC,
SHOWING HEAD OF ATHENA (x3)



1973 ROUND THE GRECIAN BEND

In the middle of July 1973, my wife Diane and my daughter Kathleen and I once more departed on our annual vacation abroad. We waited at Gatwick airport for the British Airways 707 flight to Athens. I was keenly looking forward to the Boeing 707 flight, because I had not flown in this ubiquitous aircraft before. The 707 even took off exactly on time, which was an exhilarating experience in itself. We sat at the tail end of the aircraft, and looking up the centre aisle towards the pilot's sanctum gave an ideal indication of the size of the 707, because a perspective viewpoint showed that the seats, the ceiling and the floor all met at a central point in the distance.

We quickly reached the English coastline and crossed the English Channel, and suddenly the aircraft jumped violently. A few people screamed, the most anguished scream coming from from my wife, who was white with fear. She had never been an enthusiastic air-traveller, although much experienced, her first flight being in a DC 3 in 1949, which took her to the Isle of Man for her honeymoon. I went as well.

The captain quickly apologised, stating that we had suddenly been hit by turbulence, and he thought that henceforth the flight would be less violent. Henceforth the word turbulence, when used in a flying context, had a traumatic effect on my wife. Quite frankly, I thought she was going to sob during the flight, and her hands were clenched tightly on the seat arms, her knuckles white with the pressure she was exerting.

We were flying into the darkness, which overtook us over the Alps. My wife was now somewhat composed, and appeared to be sleeping. Kathleen and I looked out of the window, and in the distance we saw lightning forking downwards, and at this juncture the hostesses commenced to serve dinner.

"Where are we?" panted Diane, waking as the hostess served our hot meal in the capsulated containers.

I was preparing to make a tactful comment, but Kathleen excitedly up-dated the situation.

"Over the Alps, and it's lightning all over the place."

I must state that another phobia from which my wife suffers is a great fear of thunder and lightning, and to be a witness of this phenomenon whilst negotiating the Alps would probably have been too much for her to bear, had not she commenced to sort out her meal, a chore, whilst airborne, which I've always thought resembled occupational therapy.

The flight to Athens took 3¼ hours...we landed at the airport with slightly too much reverse thrust, but Diane was so relieved to land that she ignored this high-decibel cacophany.

Our travel documents detailed that we would be met at the airport and taken to our hotel, the MARATHON-BEACH, which I knew from common Greek historical fact that the distance from Athens to Marathon was just over twenty six miles. However, the travel instructions did not detail our mode of transport to Marathon, and as I noted a large number of coaches to the right of the airport entrance, with travellers climbing into them, I naturally presumed that this would be our mode of transport. We lugged our suitcases, and we had a lot of them, to the coach terminus, but we couldn't find a coach going to our destination. After half an hour, all the coaches had departed, and the terminus was deserted except for us and our accoutrements.

What had gone wrong ?

It was after midnight. A taxi driver came across and asked us what was wrong, and where we wanted to go ? He offered to take us to Marathon for ten American dollars, which I worked out as being around 450 drachma. This was a lot of money, and would have made a big hole in our holiday finances, and, of course, the travel costs were part of the package deal, which we had already paid. I told the taxi driver I would think about it...possibly another 'plane of tourists was due, and our coach was late in order to cater for the later passengers. A short time later, two men approached us. They asked us what was wrong, in pretty good English. I noted they were looking keenly at my daughter, whom everyone stated was very beautiful, a fact with which she was known to concur. I told them of our plight, and they pointed to a car nearby, which they said was theirs, and they offered to take us the twenty six miles without charge, or, as they put it, 'to show visitors to our country how kind we are.'

"Don't accept their offer," hissed my wife, "we'll finish up somewhere behind a hedge." My wife's whisper is on a par with anyone else's normal conversational tone, and the men had started to pick up our suitcases, but I thanked them profusely for their kind offer, but said we would wait just in case the transport from our hotel had broken down and was late. They muttered darkly to themselves and walked away. I have often wondered whether or not this was a genuine offer, and I do not wish to denigrate their offer or motives, but possibly my wife's intuition had some substance to it.

Another hour passed by; my wife and Kathleen were fed up with standing about aimlessly, and were very tired, so I called a taxi over. The driver was lugubrious of face, which was heavily pock-marked and gave him a self-conscious feeling, but he broke into a delighted grin when I named our destination.

The two females got into the back seat, and the driver and I put our suitcases into the back of his taxi.

Then I opened the door, got in the car and sat down.

He came to my window and gesticulated wildly, saliva dripping from his lips.

I pulled the window down.

"No, it's O.K," I said, condescendingly. "I like sitting at the front with the driver."

He muttered to himself, giving me the benefit of a few gold fillings.

Suddenly he opened the door, grabbed my jacket lapels and pulled me out. His reasonable English had forsaken him, and he was giving vent to his feelings in a diatribe of Greek invective.

"You're sitting in the driving seat," my wife shouted. This was the case...I was so used to getting into office cars on the left side that I had completely forgotten that in most other countries in the world the driver's seat is on the left. He got in the seat I vacated, and I walked round the front of the taxi and got into the other front seat.

He threw me a terrible glance, and we hurtled away in a cloud of blue smoke. For about a quarter of an hour he spat out the odd word of distaste, and then suddenly he smiled as if he could see the humorous side of things...something to tell his unbelieving friends on the morrow. He gripped me just above the knee somewhat tightly and squeezed as though to suggest that all was forgiven and we were friends again.

The bright lights of the with-it centre of Athens blinded us, and the driver gave us the names of a few of the locations ...but he drove quickly and soon we were in the utter blackness of the countryside, occasionally disturbed by tavanias and petrol stations.

After an hour's drive it transpired that he didn't know where our hotel was, but he stopped and asked a few late-night prowlers for directions, and eventually we reached the hotel.

He asked for 400 drachma, and I gave him an extra 50 drachma, and asked him for a receipt, which he scribbled on the torn corner of an envelope.

We went into the hotel reception with our cases and pressed a button. It was almost 3 am...a man came in.

"The Berry's" I said, and showed him the travel document which confirmed this was our hotel. He scrutinised it, then gave us a mean look...my first impression of the country was that Greeks got angry very quickly.

"I sent a taxi for you, but you weren't there," he growled.

I didn't tell him we'd waited at the coach depot. I gave him one of my innocent gazes of bewilderment.

"Where the hell do you think we were?" I asked him. He saw the logic of this. He said something uncomplimentary about the taxi driver he'd sent, and gave us the keys for our room. He said it was too late for our cases to be taken up.

Kathleen's room was a single some distance from ours. We found her room first, and she made me look under the bed and in the wardrobe for potential 'nasty men'. The occupant next door knocked the wall and in a Germanic accent told us to be quiet. I told the disembodied voice to 'get stuffed'. I don't know what that means in German, but silence reigned once more...we tiptoed out.

We found our room, dumped our cases and I crawled into my single bed, leaving Diane to meticulously sort out our clothes and hang them in the wardrobes.

I opened my eyes...a blast of strong sunlight burst through

a vertical crack where the curtains almost joined. I wondered whether my fantastic holiday weather syndrome would continue ...always sunshine and blue sky, hardly ever clouds or rain. I got out of bed and looked out of the window. Our room overlooked the swimming pool, blue and unrippled. The dining room was the other side of the pool, and trees surrounded it. The sky was azure. I woke my wife up. She muttered something about 'turbulence' before gaining her composure.

It was half past eight.

I pulled on my trousers, traced Kathleen's room, and told her we were going for breakfast, and it was a smashing place.

Our day visit to the Acropolis was a splendid adventure.

First of all we walked to the nearby village of Nea Makri...a one-street centre, with a little cinema, a couple of shops, a garage and a village square. We caught the Athens 'bus.

The buses, especially designed to run the Provincials to Athens, held about twenty people...and were unique to me because venetian-type blinds were fitted to the windows to keep the sun at bay. The driver had a miscellany of religious ornaments in front of him, with here and there amongst the crosses photographs of footballers. The drivers drove fast but safely...or rather, they didn't hit anything, at least, not during the trips we made in them.

As we neared Athens, the roads were busier, and during our drive into the centre of Athens it was surprising how many soldiers and police were about. This visit was made during the reign of the Colonels, and although I did not see any signs of oppression, the ever-present military was an indication that a military junta was in power and was dependant upon troops for survival.

We got off the 'bus at Green Park, the terminus. It was incredibly hot. Diane and Kathleen said that the heat lifted off the pavement slabs and wafted up their dresses. The local populace were keeping carefully to the shadows of the large buildings in the centre of Athens, and only tourists, mainly the English ones, were boldly walking in the stifling rays of the boastful sun.

We decided to go to the Acropolis via the Athens underground...I was rather bewildered about the methods of purchasing tickets, and a moustached shirt-sleeved Greek man asked us in perfect English where we wanted to go, took my money, purchased our tickets, and told us which train to catch.

It was a long uphill walk from the station to the Acropolis. Frequently we stopped for drinks at little shops...we walked upwards along the cobbled road, and parked coaches showed that we were near the summit. We climbed marble steps, paid our 50 drachma admission fee, and there it was before us...the Parthenon on the Arcopolis.

The sun was behind us, and shone directly on the superb structure, which had stood intact for many centuries until a Turkish cretin had exploded a store of gunpowder inside the marbled wonder a couple of centuries ago.

The Parthenon was huge, that was my first observation. We walked towards it, the vertical pillars looking immense, like tree trunks in a forest. I took cine shots of my wife and daughter walking towards it. It was so hot that they both had to wear scarves over their heads. We stood at the base of the pillars, and I noted that uniformed attendants were strutting about, not permitting people to sit on the huge block steps around the structure. It was obvious that they didn't want tourists to start knocking off bits of the Parthenon for souvenirs...let's face it, there are several million visitors to the Acropolis every year, and if every selfish bastard

started to take bits of it, there'd be nothing left. That's what decided me that I'd have to have a bit of it. I could not leave this place without a little piece of marble that actually came off the Parthenon. Obviously I was too shrewd to bend down and pick up a chunk myself, so I took the other feasible alternative and asked my wife to do it. I told her that attendants were on the lookout for marble-pinchers, but I said that although I would be a suspect, she would be beyond reproach because of her shy and sensitive expression. I did not want to be in the vicinity when the crime took place, so I walked to a nearby lump of marble, leaned on it, and watched the expert at work. Her larceny was about as subtle as a total eclipse of the sun. First of all she pulled out a white handkerchief from her handbag and mopped her face with it. Then she dropped it. She bent down to pick it up, but instead of one deft upwards movement, she dabbled about as though trying to tickle a trout. Her self-satisfied expression indicated that she'd found a vagrant piece of marble, and she picked it up; unable to control her patience she opened the handkerchief to see what she'd caught. Just at that second half a dozen attendants converged on a group of Americans, roughly dressed in jeans, who refused to get up from the steps when ordered to do so. This undoubtedly saved Diane from being a guest of the Colonel's.

She walked across to me with a beaming smile.

My expression must have been frightening to behold. I gave a grin of pleasure, and contorted my lips to shape such a feature on my visage, but at the same time, like a ventriloquist, I scowled out of the corner of my mouth, "Put it in your handbag for goodness sake".

We walked around the various ruins, and I was most especially interested in the Caryatides, six carved women in the form of supports although iron bars have been fitted alongside them in case their necks cannot stand the strain. I tried hard to identify the concrete Caryatide...the one exchanged by the British...the original is of course in the British Museum.

After leaving the Acropolis, we walked back along the road and branched off to walk through Agora, and look at the superb Temple of Theseion, which is still mostly intact, looking rather like a miniature version of the Parthenon. The ruins of many buildings were scattered over this site, and I felt history enfold me like a cloak, especially when I noted new excavations taking place nearby.

A couple of days later we were sunning ourselves alongside the pool. I was fascinated by an ethnic confrontation. On my left in deck chairs were an English couple with a daughter aged about twelve years old. Although speaking in cultured accents, they were obviously Jewish, this was a facial certainty. On my right were a German couple, he was older than I, and they also had a daughter around the same age as the Jewish couple. These two girls were playing about happily in the pool, but the Germans would not under any circumstances countenance the Jewish presence. The German wasn't too happy with my presence, either, because in these situations the Germans are really arrogant. But he did make the odd guttural comment to me, such as when I stood up and my shadow fell across his browning body. But when the Jewish pair spoke to him about their daughters swimming in the pool, they were utterly ignored. He even ignored the Jewish girl when she

came over to him with their daughter. He did nothing to hinder the friendship of these girls, he merely decided the Jewish girl wasn't there...

I felt a tap on my shoulder and saw the hotel manager behind me.

"Mr. Berry," he said, "I hear you missed your taxi the other night."

I did not want to blame the taxi driver, because he probably had waited at the airport, although he should certainly have found us, knowing that if he missed us we wouldn't be able to get to Marathon at night without having to take another taxi.

"It was a mix-up," I said. "He missed us and we missed him".

He frowned.

"Alright," he said, "call at Reception and ask them for the full amount of your fare, say I sanctioned this transaction".

I strolled over to Reception later and got a full refund of my 450 drachma. I hoped it didn't come out of the taxi drivers pay packet.

The afternoon tour to the Temple of Poseidon at Sounion was highly recommended by people at the hotel who had been to it the previous week, so we three climbed into the luxurious coach at the appointed time.

The coach followed the main road to Athens which the provincial 'bus took and after passing through the capital we turned south along the coast of Attica for some twenty miles until we de-coached. We had tea at an hotel and spent a few moments on a small clean beach, and on a high cliff we saw the Temple of Poseidon against the skyline. The aspect of the tour which worried me was that it started to get dark as the sun crept towards the horizon, and it wasn't until this time that the coach took us the short distance to a turnstile, where, for 5 drachs each we received an orange ticket bearing the face of Solon, a name I'd met whilst studying for a Greek and Roman history examination in 1972, but I'd forgotten what he was famous for. We climbed to the temple. It was crowded with people...I would say there was at least two hundred and fifty there, mostly Americans, but with contingents of English and Germans. They all sat on the stone slabs, looking towards the sun setting in the west. The sky was vivid red as it sank towards the hills below it, and people sighed loudly "Ahhhh". I spoke to an American couple sitting next to us... they said that they could see I was rather agitated by their activities. She explained that Lord Byron had visited Sounion during his famous tour of Greece, and he had written a poem about the sunset at Sounion, and ever since that time fools have attempted to emulate his mystic rite. I made a witty comment to the effect that if he'd still been alive he'd have made a fortune if he'd put his money into haemorrhoid suppositories.

I thought the temple was impressive, considering that the Persians wrecked it two and a half thousand years previously. A German archaeologist had excavated the site in the middle of nineteenth century and reconstructed the temple. It is quite unfair to criticise this labour of love, but the pillars were built of sections about a yard high, but they didn't conform to the gradual decrease of width as they neared the top ...sections had been put in the wrong place, or so I thought, as though he had a few bigger sections left over and wanted to use them up. I hereby admit that my comments are facetious and unworthy.

The coach returned to Marathon diagonally across Attica. It was dark and difficult to make out details of the passing

countryside or the little towns and villages we passed through.

One day I was sun-bathing on the roof of the hotel, and upon looking northwards in the distance I saw a brown mound of earth, which was obviously very large when it was visible for several miles. My enquiries revealed that it was the burial mound of the Athenian Dead after the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. It was thrilling to realise that this famous battle took place such a short distance away. I recalled that an Athenian named Philippides had run all the way from Marathon to Athens with the news of the victory, and this immortalised the Marathon Race of just over twenty six miles. Nea Makri was on the route he must have taken, because the sea would have been on his left, and the high hills to his right. I resolved that next day I would walk from the hotel, via Nea Makri, to visit the burial ground, and in deference to Philippides I would walk back again...the distance being approximately nine or ten miles.

Next day was the hottest day of our entire holiday, over 'one hundred in the shade', to use a cliché. Everyone said I was mad to walk there and back, especially as a 'bus service frequently covered the area, but I had made up my mind.

I soon reached Nea Makri, and I turned northwards on the main road. I trudged along on the left side of the road for about three miles, with the high hills on my left where the Athenian army had camped for the night before the battle. Soon it was so hot that I took my shirt off and draped it through my camera strap. I wasn't worried about the sun on my body because after ten days of sun-bathing I had developed a nice bronze tan. After an hour I saw a sign pointing towards the sea with the mystic legend TIMVOS, which I knew indicated the mound, although, contrary to what I expected, I couldn't see it in the distance. I turned right and trudged along the minor road for about another mile, and suddenly I saw the mound, a sort of baked brown in colour...and across the road from it was a café. Sitting at a table I recognised a young couple from our hotel who most of us thought were on their honeymoon because they regularly missed breakfast and dinner and gobbled up their lunch. At their invitation I sat at their table and ordered a beer...it was ice-cold; I drank it slowly. It was gorgeous. They said they had visited the mound, and it was very nice, and that in half an hour's time the daily 'bus was due and would return us to the hotel. I said that I wanted to thoroughly examine and photograph it and this would take some time. They looked at each other for a few seconds, and the man very kindly gave me his soft white hat, which I jammed on my head. I left them, crossed the road and saw a little kiosk, where a man was selling postcards of the mound...there was also an entrance fee.

The mound had almost fifty wooden steps leading to the summit, which gives an indication of its height. Round the mound are concrete slabs with a couple of seats, and round the concrete are tall evergreen trees of a type unknown to me except they looked like European poplars but were as dark green as yew trees. I climbed up the mound and stood at the top. I looked all round...to the south I could see our hotel ...to the left was the sea and in the distance the hills of Chalkis...to the north the hills Agriliki and Kotroni where the Athenian troops were sited before charging down on the Persians whose fleet was anchored in the Bay of Marathon. It was superb to stand there and realise that twenty five centuries previously the great battle had taken place all around me. The 192 Athenian dead were buried under the mound,

which was excavated in 1890, and the ashes, charcoal bones and vases discovered were taken to the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

I scuffed the earth with my sandals and exposed a small brown stone which I lifted and have retained as a souvenir of this remarkable site.

I walked down the steps and took one more walk round the mound, and then I commenced my return walk to the hotel. It was after midday, and the sun was directly overhead, beating down unmercifully. I was really exhausted by the time I reached the main road to Athens, and even though I had willed myself to walk only to Nea Makri, sanity dictated that I should stop one of the many taxis driving past and get a cheap run to the hotel. But I had vowed that I would walk the distance, and I stubbornly refused to agree to the argument I suggested to myself. I walked along the side of the road and it got even hotter. I found it difficult to put one foot in front of the other. Vehicles coming towards me appeared out of the heat haze, and prior to their closeness they looked like Praying Mantis about to strike...this is how they appeared to me, whether it was the heat haze or my imagination I cannot state, save that the apparitions frightened me. It seemed ages staggering along the road...some taxi drivers sounded their horns and looked at me expectantly, or maybe they wanted me to note that they had observed this person who could only be an Englishman. My head was on my chest, and breathing was an effort, but I continued until, in the haze, I saw a taverna where I knew I'd get ice-cold beer. Very gradually the haze cleared, and I saw seats under overhanging trees. I collapsed into a seat, and I saw an aproned girl approach me warily, she spoke to me in Greek. I said 'beer' through cracked lips, and it was utter luxury...I sipped it slowly, each swallow seeming to encompass my whole being with a sensuous feeling.

My legs were stiff when I stood up again, and the mile to the hotel took a long time...lunch had been eaten, and I was starving with hunger, but I lay on my bed in the hotel and saw everything gradually disappear into the infinite...

We walked to Nea Makri the evening before we left to purchase a few souvenirs with our remaining drachs. I noted a shop selling Greek records, and I required one for my son, so the three of us went into the shop. I saw records made by persons I knew to be out of favour with the Greek Colonels, which I thought rather strange, because the whole village seemed to favour Papadopolous...his photograph even appearing on the sides of police cars, which appeared to be the ultimate in subtle persuasion. I chose my record and the clean-looking proprietor spoke to me in French, and he talked approvingly about 'Le Roi', the King. I knew there was potential danger in this discussion, because the King was out of favour, and I didn't want to become involved in a political tête-à-tête, especially as the man might have been an agent provocateur. He might inform the local fuzz that I was talking about the Greek king, and I didn't fancy a thumb-screw job, so I gave him my famous bewildered look, and tried to baffle him by telling him in German that I didn't understand French. His eyes were still trying to uncross themselves as he gave me the record and I gave him the exact money and we tiptoed out of the shop.

I thought our holiday had been wonderful...I liked

everything Grecian, especially the excitable demeanour of the populace. We were driven to the airport, and got our documents checked, the Greek ticket man said "the Berry's" several times, with various inflections, as though it was a funny surname for a family. To get to the International Lounge one had to go down steps, and looking upwards was like being in a museum case, with the faces of people looking downwards.

Exactly one week later, to the hour, terrorists of Arab persuasion opened fire with automatic weapons and tossed grenades into the International Lounge, from above, causing many deaths and casualties.



The British Airtours Boeing 707 landed at Corfu on 22nd July 1976 at 1.30 GMT (Greek Mean Time), without warning passengers that reverse-thrust would be used upon landing, resulting in many wide-eyed people looking at each other in horror, gripping the edges of their seats with white-knuckled fingers, wondering if this is what it was like when passing into the infinite. As we slowed down, everyone exhaled, and

one or two of the more frightened ones crossed themselves fervently; then the rush started to vacate the plane before the sun disappeared.

Waiting for the cases to emerge from a mysterious recess in the wall of the airport took a lot of patience. I had my jacket on because my hands would be full with luggage, and sweat flowed down my back, collecting at the waistband and seeping round to the front. It was almost as hot as it was at Hatfield prior to our departure the day before. Our cases were amongst the last to be ejected and Diane and I struggled through a gap between two desks, laughingly comprising Customs, hoping that our coach hadn't departed.

The coach only took a few moments to drive from Corfu Airport to the harbour, where the ship was to leave for Paxos. It was a scruffy-looking craft; it needed painting badly, and the grinning crew who watched us staggering aboard with our luggage looked like rejects from the 'Pirates of Penzance'. A rusty plaque on the upper deck announced that the ship was called 'CATERPILLAR'.

I was worried about the sea journey to Paxos...I still figured I was prone to mal de mer. This time I intended to fight it...I took up a shrewd position near the stern of the craft, prudently close to a lifeboat, and willed myself not to succumb to any of the various facets of the illness which normally afflicted me, such as headaches, stomach cramp, twitching lips and vomiting. We headed southwards, hugging the eastern Corfu coastline, with the mountainous Greek mainland to our left. It took about one and a half hours to travel to the southern tip of Corfu...a relatively easy journey even one with such a delicate perception of marine movement as myself. It got rougher, though, as we crossed the open sea to Paxos, but the hour's journey passed without my publicly evincing any sign of the physical or mental stress I was struggling to overcome. The ship stopped briefly at Lakka, a small port on the northern tip of Paxos, and then sailed the short distance to Gaïos, port and metropolis of swinging Paxos.

Gaïos was a little gem of a seaport, with small boats in orderly array along the quayside, riding in clear water, with a backdrop of colourful houses and shops.

We humped our suitcases to a taxi, which, in convoy with a minibus, took the dozen or so seekers of 'an idyllic get-away-from-it-all paradise' to the Paxos Beach Hotel, about one mile south of Gaïos, under the management of Demetrius, a man definitely not 'of infinite jest'.

The hotel was facing east, and patrons were domiciled in stone chalets, in step-like progression descending a steep hillside, amidst olive trees and probing cactii. One innovation was that sliding doors of the chalets were always left open, permitting cleaners and bed-makers to flit about with extraordinary ease, but also giving access to lizards, peculiar insects, and the manager's pet alsations, which, theoretically, knew you were a guest because they lined up and sniffed you at Reception on arrival.

The bar and dining room were at sea-level near the beach, and were reached by trekking southwards round and sometimes across the roofs of the chalets obstructing the direct route...

Meals, especially dinner, were delightful affairs. The servers were Greek, both male and female, and waiting between courses was kept to a minimum. Normally, at most first class hotels we have visited abroad, especially in hot climates, water has to be purchased in bottles, sometimes quite

expensively. At Paxos, ice-cold water directly from a spring was served by a young English schoolgirl called Jeannie, in earthenware jugs. The clever psychology here was that as you didn't have to purchase drinking water, you could afford to buy wine instead.

Jeannie was an engaging sixteen year old, rather shy and wistful, but bearing her jugs with aplomb, hastening to salve the parched throats of her guests, who were utterly reliant on her speed and dexterity. With her short fair curly hair and tall graceful figure she looked exactly like 'Aphrodite with Water-jug' as depicted on so many ancient Greek vases. She was so fleet of foot racing up and down the stone steps with jugs rampant that, one evening, in her ultra-keenness, she refrained from using the bottom three steps, vaulting to the fourth one so as to speed to a thirsting throat awaiting succour.

I didn't actually see the first fall, but I shall never forget that scream.

For aday or two, she carefully hobbled up and down the steps with commendable decorum, but two evenings later, her cut knee forgotten, she burst upwards to the dining room like a miniature super-nova. Once again I missed the cartwheel, although the thud of an earthenware jug full of water smashing onto a stone floor is rather a sickening sound. I turned round just in time to see Jeannie, with the hand of the jug in her hand, lips curled downwards in anguish as the rest of it shot shrapnel-like in various directions.

*** Paxos is about eight miles long and two and a half miles wide. It is very hilly, with olive trees in stone terraces covering every foot of space. An enticing booklet is available in local shops masquerading as a tourist guide, but don't buy it. The roads or tracks shown on it are mere figments of a frustrated cartographer's imagination. Because the island is so small, it is possible to explore it fully on foot. Diane and I decided to walk to Fanariotika, on the west coast. We followed the roads as depicted on the map, but gradually got more and more off the beaten track. The locals were very friendly, and looked at us in amazement as we tracked through the olive groves. We eventually reached a little shop and purchased two lemonades. We sat down, exhausted, to luxuriate in the drink's ice-coldness, when an old unshaven man in a sweat-stained trilby hat and baggy trousers entered the store. He peered at us closely, recognised us as aliens, and then commenced a most bizarre recitation.

"U.S.A...Washington.D.C...China...Peking...Iceland...Reykjavik...Portugal...Lisbon..." and so on, enumerating countries and their capitals in faultless English. Diane, feeling rather embarrassed, asked if he'd been to all those countries? His eyes suddenly crossed at this interruption, and his rapidly widening pupils indicated that he thought it was a damned stupid question. He knocked back a quick glass of retsina and re-commenced his exciting dialogue. The other people in the store began to look furtively in different directions, but I thought it polite to listen to his list in case he made an error. Eventually he sank back, exhausted, in a rickety chair, his eyelids draped over bleary eyes, and he seemed to have dehydrated with the effort. We reverently crept out of the store, and had gone about one hundred yards on tiptoe when we heard a shout behind us. Horror-struck, we turned around, and our worst fears were recognised. The old man stood in the doorway, raised his head to the sky and shouted "Venezuala...Caracas," and then collapsed in a heap like an empty sack.

We were lost, and tried to retrace our steps towards Gaios. I knew that eventually we'd meet the main track to the port. We came to a bar, with tables under the trees. An old woman in a black dress came out and took our order for lemonades. She brought the drinks and sat down beside us and conversed with us; a difficult task because she couldn't speak English, and her local dialect was all Greek to me.

After an animated sequence of mimes, she leaned forward and tapped Diane's stomach meaningfully, her eyes wide in anticipation.

My wife said, no, she didn't have indigestion, but I diagnosed she was asking if we had any children. I nodded sagely and held up two fingers.

"Ah," she crooned, and clapped her hands in delight. She staggered into the taverna and returned with a bottle of wine which she poured into our empty glasses. I was quite impressed at this gesture, but couldn't understand its significance, after all, we were grandparents. A local lorry driver stopped for a drink, and listened to her laughing and shouting with his head on one side. He spoke good English, and looked at me with admiration in his eyes.

"Is your wife expecting twins?" he asked.

"No," I said, a split second before my wife uttered her vehement denials.

"The old lady thinks she is," he said, pointing to the cackling old crone, who took a quick swig out of the bottle.

Once more we had to tiptoe away with as much dignity as we could muster.

Antipaxos is a small island about a mile long and half a mile wide. It is situated due south of Paxos, a few miles away.

Half a dozen of us at the hotel, supervised by Jeannie, booked a boat trip to it, lured by the descriptive 'azure sea gently lapping the pure white sand.'

It only took half an hour for the boat to get to the beach. The descriptive brochure of Antipaxos was entirely valid. Both islands of Paxos and Antipaxos were created by limestone strata rising up at a slight angle, and this special beach at Antipaxos is a 'raised beach', so that the small tidal effect merely laps the edge of the wide strip of sand which rises to a pebbled area. The sand is extremely fine, and being of limestone origin is completely white. Consequently, the sea, which is normally clear in this part of the Mediterranean, is weedless in proximity to the beach, and the sun's reflexions from the whitesandy bottom makes the water literally crystal-clear.

Of course, having this Paradise so adjacent meant that there had to be a disadvantage somewhere...in this instance the problem concerned actually getting to the beach. The boat tied-up onto a square of concrete on a rocky outlet, and we passenger's had to wade to the rocks and then continue to the beach by a series of hops and long strides on slippery rocks. The athletic ones amongst us were able to negotiate this miniature Commando Course with little difficulty, but for some reason quite a lot of elderly people had joined the boat at Gaios, and were anxious to prostrate themselves in the warm waters of Antipaxos beach. One cynic, regarding the slow progress of the aged and infirm, remarked that the scene resembled a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

We noted that boats were regularly plying to the island, which soon resembled Blackpool on Bank Holiday Monday.

However, the water was really warm and it was pleasurable to lie on one's back on the surface, hands behind the head, eyes closed, water covering the ears keeping away all mundane sounds, feeling as though one was in suspended animation.

But lunch time came too quickly, and Jeannie marshalled her party together and we returned to the boat via the assault course. Unfortunately, other travellers were leaving the boat for the beach, most of them were Germans, and their loud demands for 'lebensraum' met with typically British stoicism as we bustled past them, supporting our geriatrics.

The day trip to Parga, on the Greek mainland, was notable for me because it signified my final triumph over sea-sickness. The distance was about ten miles, which we negotiated in about two hours. The sea was extremely rough, and quite a number of people were ill, possibly because the ship was small and we were thrown about quite a lot. I sat by the rail, amidships, clutching it tightly, looking at the sea, and the spray showered me, but I willed myself not to be ill, and I wasn't, and the knowledge that I had finally beaten this jinx made my chest swell with pleasure and a great sense of achievement. It was just the same on the return journey, to which I attribute the fact that I'd discarded my packed lunch. Surely there should be a package tour written guarantee that packed lunches are forbidden.

My wife and I were told that a small island called Mogonissi was a couple of miles to the south and could be reached by a causeway. There was an elite club there with bar and restaurant, and it catered for the international yacht set.

I finally talked Diane into permitting me to take her on one of those pedalling seacraft, owned by the hotel, and we decided to go to Mogonissi by sea instead of via the long walk on rocky tracks.

We sat in the canvas seats and pedalled like mad, and the little craft shot forward quite quickly when in the sheltered bay protecting the private hotel beach, but it was more difficult to negotiate the little wavelets once we reached the open sea. Notwithstanding this minor frustration, the wind was going our way, and hugging the jutting limestone rocks (with magnificent examples of folded strata) we proceeded southwards. We passed a little secluded beach where several couples were sampling the delights of nude bathing. I tried to protect Diane from this awesome sight, but, alerted by the zig-zag course I inadvertantly initiated to see what sort of swimming strokes they were using, Diane spotted their uninhibited exhibitionism, and expressed the enigmatic comment that she 'didn't know Jews did that sort of thing.'

Before we reached the island, I saw the masts of ships silhouetted against the skyline. We pedalled like mad round the corner into Mogonissi Bay.

Three large schooners were anchored there, bearing West German, Canadian and Swiss flags. We pedalled between them and rammed our craft onto the sloping sand, and walked in our bathing costumes to the bar for afternoon tea.

The crews of the schooners were lounging at the tables, drinking beer; the men were young, bearded, and wore denims with the bottom of the legs frayed...the bikini clad girls sat with pouting lips, and in the odd power-packed moment one of them would run a red long-nailed finger down the nearest male cheek. A couple couldn't stand the strain any longer, and ran to the water's edge, dived in and swam like torpedo's

to the nearest schooner.

Meanwhile, Diane and I finished our tea, and went in the blue water for a swim. The sun was merciless, and after half an hour of exposure we decided to return to our hotel.

We sat in our craft, which I launched with difficulty, and pedalled across the bows of the waterside tables, beaming proudly at the yachtsmen. Their looks obviously indicated that they thought the pound sterling had sunk to an all-time low rate of exchange when the English had to visit this high-class establishment in a pedal boat.

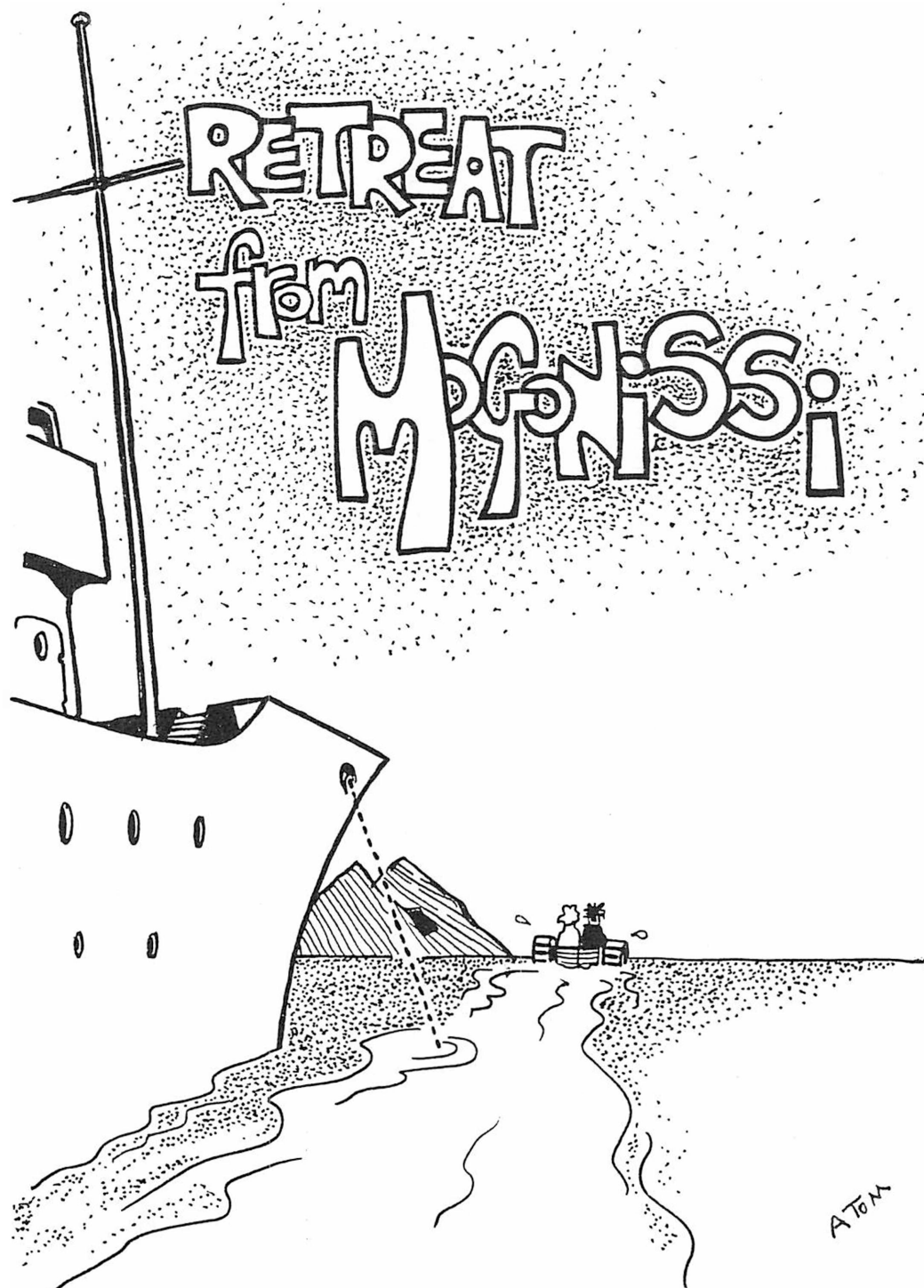
We curved in a wide arc to pedal northwards the couple of miles to our hotel, but I had forgotten the wind and the waves, which now raced towards us. Also, and much more seriously, we were both unused to this extreme physical exertion, and were both exhausted.

The couple who had energetically swum to the schooner were now hanging over the rails of their ship like wet rags, and they looked at us in awe as we pedalled between their ship and another anchored nearby. I was absolutely shattered, and Diane had suddenly become limp in her seat and whispered that she couldn't pedal any more. But I refused to suffer the embarrassment of allowing these rich schooner types see an Englishman give in. I gritted my teeth and although my knees had almost seized up I pedalled like fury until we cleared the bay and were out of sight. Trouble was, we were now in the open sea, even though close to the shore. I shall never quite work out how we got to our home base. As luck would have it, we were going at a snail's pace as we passed the nude bathers. This was entirely coincidental, because we were both almost dead with fatigue, but I'm sure the nudists thought we'd slowed down to look at them. Admittedly it was a week before I could turn my neck without making a grating noise, but I was really interested in the looping strata that was behind them, and that's why our pedal boat was so close to the shore. Diane suddenly started to pedal furiously, her eyes glazed with the effort, and I swear that it was with my last kick that we hit the sand at the hotel before falling inert into the soothing brine.

The week at Paxos passed all too quickly. Our two-centre holiday included a second week at a resort north of Corfu town. Early in the morning of 29th July 1976 we were woken early, because CATERPILLAR left Gaois for Corfu at 9 am.

(The usual sorry performance was acted through its inevitable stages...the financially limited Englishman wanting to tip his favourite waitress but she wasn't there, but the others were waiting expectantly, and he couldn't afford to tip them all because his money still had to last another week. He gave them all a hopeful smile, and when they took away the battered remnants of his Continental breakfast he sidled away surrepticiously, riddled with remorse, almost breaking into a trot to escape the scene of this all-too-common debacle.)

CATERPILLAR panted northwards, and I took up my judicious anti sea-sickness position, looking apprehensively at the white-topped waves approaching us...



1976 NOCTURNAL MISSION

I have developed an excellent sense of direction, and as the ship ploughed northwards in the rough blue sea, with Corfu on our left, it gradually veered to the right towards the Greek mainland, much to my chagrin. After an hour of

heading away from Corfu, we turned a headland and I saw a little Greek seaport, Igoumenitsa. Once again I had refrained from being seasick, using the time to attempt to will the ship to aim for Corfu harbour. A couple of times I almost succeeded; the Captain of CATERPILLAR seemed to be fighting the wheel, teeth gritted, pressing heavily towards his right. Finally, I gave up, because we had hit calm water and the sun emerged after its morning nap behind scudding clouds.

A couple of passengers disembarked and we swung round and headed for Corfu. The Captain was using maximum revs, but I had now directed my will power to attempt to force a button to burst from its straining thread on the blouse of a big German girl. In order to maximise my powers of concentration I had to direct my gaze at the target area, which gave me plenty of scope. I was rudely jarred from my inspiration by Diane's elbow. She told me I was embarrassing the girl, who looked like one of the Valkyries.

Brooding, but free from sickness, I landed at Corfu and we humped our cases to the coach which took us to the Kontakali Beach Hotel.

The hotel faced eastwards. A couple of miles away, or so it seemed, was the coastline of Albania. It was noticeable that on the Greek side of the frontier, to the south, the countryside was cultivated and flourishing, but to the north it looked barren and deserted.

The hotel, as befitted its four-star rating, was luxury personified, and we had a gorgeous room facing north, where extensive land-reclamation was taking place, although the pile-driving equipment could only be heard as a dull thud in the distance, subject only to seismic recording.

We spent the first afternoon inspecting the facilities, and we were very much impressed with everything.

Dinner in the restaurant was a posh affair; the wine waiter was a moody man who only permitted a grin to crease his frigid face if expensive wine was ordered. We, as with most other English tourists, requested a jug of iced water, which luckily didn't cost anything. He soon learned to delegate a minion to his English clientile.

Being in an expansive mood, I ordered several jugs of iced water for our table, which caused my bladder to swell somewhat.

After a walk in the night air, we returned to our room for an early-to-bed night, bearing in mind that we'd been called early that morning in Paxos for the Corfu boat, and we were very tired.

I got into bed, feeling really pleased with life, and Diane adjourned to the bathroom for her toilette. I suddenly heard her scream, and I raced to the bathroom, presuming she had underestimated the purpose or power of the bidet. She was having a shower, and she pointed to the tiled floor, where water was rushing up through a small grating. I turned off the shower, but the water, a nasty frothy liquid, smelling rather unpleasantly, continued to squelch into the bathroom. We took the thick towels off their hooks and built a dam near the door to stem the flood and try and retain it in the bathroom. We telephoned Reception and had considerable difficulties in describing our situation, but they finally intimated that a plumber would call at nine am next morning. I looked into the bathroom and saw that the brownish water had levelled off at a depth of a couple of inches and only a minimal amount had seeped through into the richly carpeted hallway to our room. We closed the door to encapsulate the smell, and retired to bed.

I awoke at 3 am. It was dark, and I couldn't see anything. I heard Diane breathing peacefully and I knew she was tired, but I had to visit the toilet...that blasted iced water. Being a man of above-average perception, even though I was also tired, I remembered that the bathroom was flooded. I didn't want to switch on the light in the bedroom and disturb Diane, so I groped my way to the bathroom and switched on the light. The next quarter of an hour constituted one of the most bizarre experiences I have ever undergone. I must now use my delicate command of English subtlety to describe my attempted usage of the toilet requisite.

I obviously could not paddle in that filthy water, but I had to get to the toilet quickly. I reached forward tentatively with my right foot and succeeded in getting it in the bidet. My other foot was behind the blanket dam in the hallway. I reached upwards, arched like a wishbone, and grabbed the towel hooks. I moved my hands along the hooks, gradually obtaining an upright position. I was now standing in the bidet. I decided that a quick long range shot was out of the question, although presenting an element of challenge. Once more I ranged forward with my right foot, by-passing the toilet and reaching the wash basin. I was racked, though tactically centred over the toilet bowl. I completed my mission without using a Sperry bomb-sight.

I prepared myself for the return journey when I heard a ghostly rustling noise coming from the doorway. I swivelled my eyes to the left and saw Diane's nightdressed arm reach forward and switch off the lights, and in the utter blackness I heard her muttering to herself as she returned to the bedroom..."selfish people leaving lights on and waking me up".

I find it hard to describe my feelings. I knew the easy way would have been to lower myself into the flood and paddle out, but this was crude, entirely alien to the sensitivity of my up-bringing. I am also stubborn...in the peculiar circumstances I found myself in, I would not capitulate. I commenced my eccentric circumnavigation of the bathroom. At one time I really did panic when I couldn't withdraw my left from the toilet bowl; the force of my sudden descent had rammed my ankle half way round the S-bend. I successfully withdrew it, but found that my concentrations in this direction had caused me to become disorientated. I didn't know if I was facing upwards or downwards, but, by a miracle, I found myself in the sanctuary of the bath. It was a warm night, after all, albeit it rather smelly, so I soon sorted myself into a semi-comfortable position, and rapidly fell asleep.

I awoke to see the plumber and Diane staring at me from the doorway. Diane had obviously over-slept and been awakened by the plumber hammering on the door.

I do not wish to dwell on the situation, save my lasting impression of those two pairs of bulging eyes looking at me ...it always seemed to be pairs of bulging eyes...

We decided to purchase a T-shirt with a Corfu motif for our son as a present, and to save travelling to Corfu town for it, we crossed an area undergoing land-reclamation to a shop half a mile from the hotel. It was a typical store, full of Greek wine bottles with primitive labels, suggesting an illegal brew in a bathtub, and also masses of cheap souvenirs, mostly of dubious quality...in other words, a tourist trap.

The proprietor beamed, rubbed his hands together and requested our pleasure. I should have mentioned that it was 100 degrees, and I was only attired in shorts, sandals and my sun-tanned torso, sticky with sweat. Diane pointed to a

T-shirt, and he whipped one from a pile and pressed it against her body, fingers attuned prior to a moulding job, in which Greek merchants specialise.

"No, no" shrilled Diane, who had been previously measured, "for son...for son."

He picked a T-shirt for a small child.

"Nunno," I said, stupidly getting into the act.

My son is almost twenty seven years old, and is a rugby player, bigger than myself and much broader. I tried to demonstrate this by sticking out my chest, rising on my heels and saying "big...very big".

His wide eyes scanned piles of T-shirts, and he selected the biggest one in the pile and produced it confidently. He held it up by the sleeves.

"Too small," said my wife.

He was indignant, and pulled and tugged the garment in every direction, suggesting elasticity.

Diane shook her head.

He looked at me...looked at the drooping shirt...looked at me again and leapt across to me and pulled it over my head.

"He'll never get it on me," I hissed to Diane, but she assisting the proprietor to force my arms into the sleeve holes.

They oozed it over my arms and head and pulled it like mad down my back and chest. It came to just about level with my navel, but what worried me was the way my arms slowly lifted and hung dejectedly in front of my face. I could jiggle my fingers about, that was all.

"Don't stand there laughing hysterically," I shouted to Diane, "get it off."

I couldn't breathe...the pseudo cotton fabric of the garment had absorbed my sweat and it had formed a second skin. And it was tight.

In retrospect I should have got a thrill from the resultant melee. The proprietor, a thick vein on his forehead throbbing angrily, screamed in Greek and his two daughters came rushing from the back of the shop. They were young, brown-eyed, beautiful, and had long finger nails. I hope the scars never heal...when people notice them when I'm strutting around the local swimming pool, and ask me what happened, I casually mention my wife has now stopped eating watercress sandwiches.

Eventually the offending garment was removed. The Greek held it distastefully at arm's length. It had shrunk considerably and was dripping with perspiration, some of it my own. He kicked it into the back of the store, and the grin he forced at me demoniacally made me think it might be circumspect to purchase a couple of bottles of Samos wine, to show him what fine sporting characters we English people are.

In Hertfordshire, where I have lived since April 1975, I have noticed a steady decline in the efficiency of public transport. The one-man buses have become more expensive, with fare increases every few months. This could be tolerated if the buses maintained scheduled times, but quite often buses don't arrive, and aggressive telephone calls to the transport office reveal the old excuse..."sorry, the 'bus broke down and we haven't any spares."

I've made these adverse comments regarding my local 'bus service because whoever runs the Curfu 'bus service has got the magic touch.

The buses run exactly on time...to the actual minute... I do not recall that one was ever late. They also have the efficient pairing of driver and conductor...they do not inhibit the number of standing passengers, either. The only limit to passengers being carried on Corfu buses is the human physical barrier, chosen by the people themselves. And I was fortunate enough to witness a nice example of their sportsmanship and enthusiasm.

Diane and I fought to get on the 'bus to Corfu town, 4½ drachma. Sweating bodies came into close physical contact...I held my wife's shopping bag in my hand at waist level and was jammed face to face with a beautiful Greek girl about twenty years of age. Her large brown eyes, a couple of inches from mine, grew wide as she realised where my hand was, but I was in a most delicate situation. If I moved my hand to avoid embarrassment to her, it could be construed as enjoyment on my part. If I had been prosecuted for indecent assault I could have pleaded insanity, because in those circumstances only an insane person would consider removing the offending hand when the initial contact had been innocently coincidental.

I bit my lips to avoid expressing a leer, when I heard the conductor say in good English, "Sit down, Madame". I turned my neck and saw the conductor usher my wife into his seat. She smiled and accepted, and some of the local people glowered at her, getting preferential treatment. Then the conductor began the perilous task of collecting fares in between the intimately-connected bodies. We stopped to pick up even more passengers, and I wish to state here and now that if that journey had lasted another few moments I would have to have got engaged to that girl.

"Push the lever down, Madame", the conductor shouted, and Diane fumbled about a moment and pressed a lever and the doors opened and closed. Until we de-bussed at the terminus in the centre of Corfu, my wife manipulated the doors at every stop, getting admiring glances from the conductor, who kissed her hand as we got off the 'bus.

Corfu is a beautiful town, with a castle over-looking it, producing an attractive aesthetic appeal.

The island has been ruled by Venetians, French, British... the Germans during WW II...and each culture has left its mark. Venetians plastered walls with wooden window slats look exactly as they do in present-day Venice, and French-style promenades and English Georgian houses are mingled indiscriminately, and as is to be expected, the English bequeathed cricket to the people of Corfu, and it is still their national sport.

We witnessed a cricket match that afternoon, seated round the ground under the trees, being refreshed by glasses of lemonade brought by smiling waiters from nearby shops.

The English, of course, took it seriously. Quite a number of well-spoken ladies with wide-brimmed hats sat round the tables, indulging in idle chatter. (I actually heard an awfully posh lady say..."So, darling, I said, well, the Ambassador danced with her at least three times.") The English team chose to bat first, and strutted up and down in full kit, gleaming white leg pads, as were their shirts and smartly-pressed trousers. The Corfu team were olive-coloured gentlemen of various sizes with heavy black moustaches...none of them wore the requisite whites.

Our opening pair strode out, bats under their arms, waving their pristine batting gloves about in an affected manner, looking disdainfully at the natives. The batsman to receive the first ball took time to put on his gloves, and then carefully surveyed the field placings. Eventually,

after prodding and shuffling on the cocoanut matting, he took up his stance for the first ball.

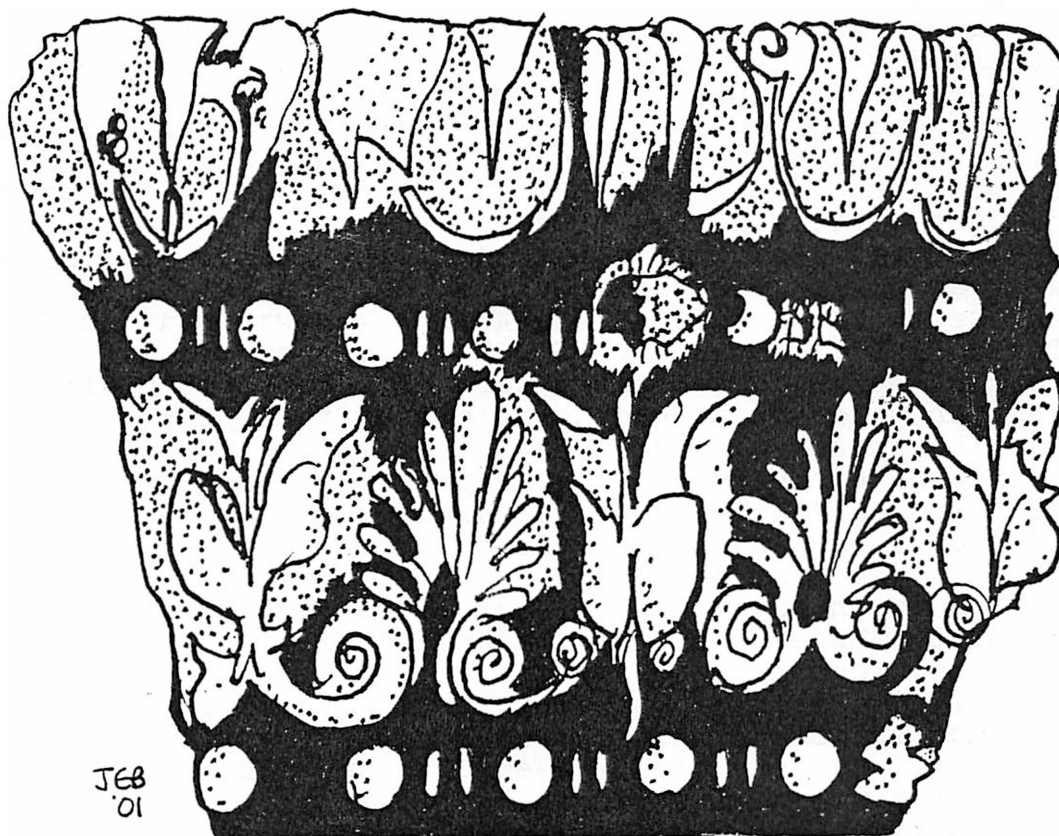
A grubby, cross-eyed little man in a blue shirt shambled to the wicket like a ruptured crab and bowled a speedy ball. My heart swelled with pride as the Englishman carefully blocked it. Twice more this happened, and then the batsman misjudged a ball which whipped off the matting and almost sent the wickets into orbit.

When the English score was none for three wickets we sidled away, beginning to finally accept the dreaded truth that our once proud nation was now the butt of the colonials.

The holiday passed quickly, and on a Thursday afternoon, in scorching sunlight, we took off in the British Airways 707 for the return flight to Gatwick.

The 'plane circled above Corfu town, giving us the rare opportunity to get a panoramic view of the enigmatic Albania, and we swung north up the Adriatic, and after half an hour flew over Venice.

The flight over the Alps was particularly beautiful... there weren't any clouds to hide this magnificent sight, and it was possible to note the major peaks of the Alps, assisted by discreet commentaries by the captain of the 'plane. The descent from the Alps to the flat land of northern France and thence to the English coast passed all so quickly, and soon we were buzzing over southern England looking for Gatwick, which we eventually found...



JEB
'01

CARVED FRIEZE OF LEAVES, BEAD AND REEL,
LOTUS AND PALMETTE - DELPHI 6th cent BC ,

1984 THE MACEDONIAN WAY

On 16th July 1984, Heathrow Airport, near London, obtained an almost perfect record of trouble-free take-offs, bearing in mind that it is one of the world's largest and busiest airports, with 'planes landing and taking-off every moment of the day.

Diane and I were having coffee in an upstairs restaurant in Terminal 2, quite excited about our 4.15 pm flight to Salonika. We had booked into the Hotel Capsis in Salonika for the night of the 16th, and the following morning we had a 200 kms drive through the Macedonian Mountains from which we would ferry from Keramoti to the Greek island of Thassos.

Above our heads the tv monitor showed pending departures ...up came 4.15 Thessalonika and underneath was the dreaded word CANCELLED.

CANCELLED ???

It transpired that our flight was the only one cancelled that day. The jinx had struck again. I sat surrounded by our luggage and sent Diane to reconnoitre the OLYMPIC AIRWAYS desk. She came back and reported complete chaos. I went over to investigate. Our holiday had been booked through OLYMPIC HOLIDAYS who used OLYMPIC AIRWAYS aircraft. Many Greek passengers who were booked on the flight had captured the foreground at the OLYMPIC desk, waving tickets and hurling abuse at the three Greek girls cowering behind the desk. Frantic enquiries from the large group of English travellers brought forth wide brown eyes, gesticulating hands, but no explanation. Suddenly a male official of the airline gathered a group of English passengers around him, including myself, and said that a BRITISH AIRWAYS flight was leaving from Terminal 1 in 45 minutes for Rome...if we caught it and got to Rome we would be 'taken care of'. Some of the frustrated English passengers were sceptical of this plan, and I admit I wasn't impressed myself, but at least it represented a firm decision. Of course, we had expected to saunter onto the 4.15 pm flight and had abandoned our trolleys, expecting only to hand over our luggage at the desk.

It was also a hot day.

A dozen angry holiday-makers in our group decided to catch the Rome flight and we staggered with our suitcases on the long journey to Terminal 1.

I have always protested to Diane that it is unnecessary to pack suitcases with clothing for a 'get away from it all holiday', but she always seemed to sub-consciously pay tribute to my virility and strength by packing heavy suitcases with the implication that I could manage to carry them. I had two of the damn things to carry to Terminal 1, but Diane did point out quite correctly that as they were both equally heavy they did provide excellent balance. I would have shouted a withering retort, but I had my camera strap in my mouth.

We sweated our spasmodic way to the busy terminal. We found the Rome Gate, but the personnel on duty there seemed bewildered at our presence.

"Oh no. This flight will only accept Olympic Airways passengers, not Olympic Holidays."

The dozen grim visages, red with perpiration, turned towards Terminal 2. Back to the desk. The minion who had issued the inaccurate edict about the Rome flight was careful not to reappear at the OLYMPIC AIRWAYS desk because we had put a contract on him.

Into this chaos and confusion strode a fair-haired Englishman, perhaps inadvisedly sporting an OLYMPIC HOLIDAYS vest. He had been 'called out' to deal with the situation... he collected our tickets, calmly smiling as if nothing had happened, and, well, if it had, he would sort it all out with typically English phlegm.

One or two hip flasks were being passed round, and we noted that the melee continued at the desk...and then our hero returned, beaming broadly and returning our tickets.

"I told you it would be alright. I've booked you all on a SABENA flight to Brussells at 9am tomorrow morning, and then on to Athens. You'll stay at a London hotel for tonight."

He was vague about the reason for the cancellation, but at least he had given us hope, except that the Hotel Capsis in Salonika suddenly seemed a distant dream.

We made a frontal attack on the OLYMPIC desk. The girls were still trying to organise flights for all the Greek nationals, and seemed reluctant to allow their eyes to meet ours. Once we made it clear we only required hotel reservations they quickly prepared papers permitting us to stay at the ARIEL HOTEL, near Heathrow, at their expence.

An early call, a timely coach to Terminal 2 and we duly boarded the SABENA 737 for the Brussells flight. Although at this time we should have been treading the white sand at Thassos, I wasn't unduly unhappy, because it was my first flight in a Boeing 737. The flight only took forty minutes, and during this time we were given a cup of coffee and a croissant. My first time in Belgium, but it merely consisted of an hour's wait for another 737 flight to Athens.

We were served a typical plastic encapsulated meal on this flight...I ate quite a lot, and later this was to serve me well.

It was a hot afternoon in Athens. Some forty of us congregated around the OLYMPIC HOLIDAYS desk, and we were assured a coach would take us to the OLYMPIC AIRWAYS section of Athens Airport. This promise was kept, and we duly humped our luggage into the airport building.

The frustrations of our delayed holiday took on a more serious note. The building was packed full of Greek people queueing up for flights...the handsome black moustachio'd men in their shirts, sweating profusely under their arms... their womenfolk, brown eyes flashing concern at their non-movement in the queues...beautiful little non-crying children looking up at them with furrowed brows. And forty exhausted suitcase-carrying English people squeezed into this homogeneous mass of anxious flesh.

I've seen this phenomenon happen before...once again adversity threw up a natural leader...a young Englishman wearing a black vest with a message on it revealing his alleged obsession with alcohol. He was with his wife and children, but he discovered that a room on the right, guarded by an uncompromising policeman, had to be penetrated in order

to obtain tickets for the flight from Athens to Salonika. We all realised that this wasn't just a normal Sunday afternoon at Athens Airport, and gradually the reason percolated through to us...it was voting day in the E.E.C. elections. We heard that voting was compulsory, and if a Greek lived within two hundred miles of his/her birthplace, they had to vote at that location...hence many flights by OLYMPIC AIRWAYS all over Greece. Hmmm.

The young man spoke to the policeman, indicating with polite gestures the necessity of entering the room...and suddenly the policeman permitted this, and he slipped inside the door with the dexterity of a ferret sliding into a rabbit hole. In a few moments he re-appeared in the doorway and asked for our tickets...an hour later he came out, triumphant but weary. He also bore green luggage labels which we appended to our suitcase handles. We piled our suitcases in an untidy mess in the corner of the premises, as indicated.

We followed him in single file through the sticky concourse, through a gate and boarded a coach. We drove across the airport to an OLYMPIC AIRWAYS 747 filled with agitated Greeks, biting their nails and dribbling prayer beads through their clutching fingers. We got some stern glances, which suggested that the Jumbo had been held up for some time to await our transit.

We found our seats, and were treated to a demonstration by the cabin staff on the correct manner in which to fasten the safety belt, the final click of application being regarded by the locals with open-mouthed amazement at the achievements of modern technology.

The captain made an announcement in Greek which caused much scowling and muttering amongst the Greeks, and the translation into English... 'a twenty minutes delay'...was somewhat drowned by the sudden loud shouting and ranting and raving coming from the front of the 747. The Greeks love such a performance, and were drawn like magnets to this screaming middle-aged male Greek. I joined them, jostling for a view. It didn't require too much intelligence to associate this classic example of the dreaded red mists with the announcement of the 'planes delay. I was also sure that the additional twenty minutes was to permit our recently-dumped luggage to be brought aboard.

Two male stewards approached the man and tried to reason with him...they didn't actually kiss him, but there was much fondling of shoulders, stroking of the grey hair and soothing 'tut tuts'. A grim-faced Greek who spoke English told me that the man had to compulsorily cast his E.E.C. vote in Salonika before the deadline which was rapidly approaching, and the constant delays had made him eventually snap.

This message seemed to have reached the captain who revved the 747 into action down the runway and headed NE to Salonika.. I feared sans luggage.

The flight was short, well under an hour, and we landed at Salonika around 7 pm. An OLYMPIC HOLIDAYS employee met us, the smiling Maria, who was delighted to see us, as she had no idea what had happened to us, and had been waiting for us for more than a day.

Surprise...surprise...our luggage did not appear on the ramp, Maria, her smile quickly evaporated, went away to make 'phone calls, and we waited another hour for a 737 to arrive, hoping our suitcases were on board.

The psychological barrier of frustration at the many delays had now left us...the sang-froid of the Anglo-Saxon

enabled the humour of the situation to assert itself, and we grinned inanely at each pathetic joke.

It was 8.10 pm, near to dusk, when our suitcases rattled along the conveyer belt. We grabbed them and Maria took us outside to a taxi which had been waiting for a considerable time. The taxi driver wanted to know if we were Germans. We shook our heads vigorously in denial, and he smiled. He drove through downtown Salonika and then turned eastwards. I tried vainly to converse with him, but to each of my promptings he carried out various minor activities, such as turning on the radio or closing the windows, but unfortunately our wave-lengths remained untuned.

It rapidly became jet black outside our encapsulation in the taxi, save for our probing headlights, dimmed only to accomodate approaching thin fingers of light. We passed through many Greek villages, where the populace crowded the long central roads, dancing to celebrate the conclusion of E.E.C. voting...quite a number of the villages showed red hammer and sickle motifs on the white-washed walls.

In two and a half hours we reached Kavala, and stopped at the Hotel Lucy and were accomodated in a comfortable air-conditioned room, which quickly accepted our tired bodies to its bosom.

Next morning we arose early and did a swift reconnaissance of the ancient city of Kavala, important even in the days of Alexander the Great. Masses of houses and hotels and shops completely covered the hillsides overlooking the sea, rather like an over-worked patchwork quilt. Exactly at 9 am the taxi arrived to take Diane and myself and the black-dressed Maria to the ferry at Keramoti, some 45 kms SE of Kavala.

As we drove through Kavala we saw it was much larger than we had originally thought; it had a busy commercial central area with many colourful shops. Suddenly, as we turned a corner on the eastern outskirts of Kavala we saw an aqueduct loom over us. It was obviously built by the Romans, and a quick flick through my Macedonian leaflets showed that it was built in A.D. 16 to bring water from the mountains to the old city. We drove under this massive stone structure straddling the eastern aspect of Kavala, marvelling at its excellent structure and design and its utter archaeological power.

As we drove along we noted that on the left side of the road, hills were being extensively quarried for marble, but the terrain became completely flat as we reached Keramoti.

The ferry was awaiting us at the little dusty port of Keramoti, a sturdy vessel, THASSOS II, its central area packed with empty lorries en route to Thassos to collect huge square blocks of marble.

A very few short miles away in the morning mist we could see the purple hills of Thassos and in between was the calm clear Mediterranean, awaiting the seduction of its lightly rippled surface.

The crossing took less than an hour, and the ferry beached expertly on the concrete apron of the port of Limenas.

Maria told us to wait whilst she sought a taxi to take us to our holiday centre, Makryammos Bungalows. I particularly noted an Englishman sitting on his battered suitcase, awaiting the ferry's return to Keramoti. It was so obvious that he was English...he wore a white linen jacket with a blue-spotted handkerchief drooping from a breast pocket. A straw hat brim covered his creased eyes, throwing them into shadow...he was quite definitely an experienced traveller.

I crossed to him.

"Good morning, sir," I said.

"Mornin'", he answered, with a nicely modulated accent, giving me a frown for disturbing his philosophical considerations.

"Er...any tips you can give me about holidaying in Thassos ?" I enquired politely.

He pondered.

"Yes," he said. I heard Diane shout that the taxi was ready, but I gave him my keen attention. "Buy bottles of water in Limenas...polish up your German...keep away from the dogs."

His head dropped signifying the conclusion of my intrusion into the private world of his contemplations.

Within a moment I was to witness confirmation of the utter sagacity of one of his comments.

Just as the taxi revved up, I glanced across the street and saw a young man place his rucksack on a step at a shop doorway and enter, and a brown dog appeared from nowhere and energetically mounted the rucksack.

It was a mere five minute drive up a couple of olive tree covered hillsides to reach Makryammos...a brief stop to get our key and the taxi descended seawards, passing the stone chalets, one of which was to be our abode for a couple of weeks.

As we drove parallel to the beach I saw about thirty structures on it, each consisting of four posts about seven feet high with material stretched between them, obviously forming sun-shades. I made a humorous quip:-

"I wonder how you climb up onto the trampolines ?"

Diane ignored this comment, but I saw Maria give me a worried look as the taxi stopped outside our chosen chalet.

We speedily settled down in our temporary home.

(THASSOS - A BRIEF HISTORY. A strong state developed in the 7th century B.C. Siezed by Persia in 494 B.C, and city walls destroyed. Wars with Sparta and Athens, eventually captured by Philip of Macedonia in 340 B.C. Became a Roman State in 196 B.C. Part of the Byzantine Empire in 330 A.D. Thassos finally became independant in 1912. In World War 1 under French rule. In World War 2 under German and then Bulgarian rule. Free once more in 1944.)

At dinner the first evening the full import of the sage's prognostications became fully assertive. We had noted many unmistakable German voices on the beach and had unsuccessfully sought an English accent amongst the sun worshippers, but in the restaurant the full impact of the German take-over became a reality.

The Head Waiter wished us a pleasant 'Guten Abend', my reposte being a firm 'Good Evening', and he blinked at this rare species.

The waiter appeared with rampant order book. He asked for our room number in German.

I said '242' in English.

He blinked a couple of times and his upper lip gave a warning spasm. I knew from experience that Greeks have hasty tempers, so I rapidly gave him the German numerals. He smiled in relief. We ordered easily enough, because choice was limited, but when he asked us to order our drinks I had to speedily resuscitate my brain cells, the dormant ones I used in Germany in the middle and late forties, and present a reasonable order in German for a beer and a small bottle of

white wine.

The diners spoke very loudly, and one or two of them shouted at the waiters, who refused to be dominated...they didn't become involved in verbal affront but clamped their jaws tightly, as they did next morning at breakfast when Diane asked for milk in her cup of tea.

We were on 'half-board' at Makryammos, breakfast and dinner, and every morning, when the sun was still working out its maximum temperature for the day, we strolled down the winding roads to Limenas. En route we passed a fenced area which contained part of the ancient wall, built 27 centuries ago. We later discovered a length of wall nearby over a couple of hundred yards long. This latter section had not been used for local building, and was in excellent condition. At the base were three rows of well-fitted grey granite, and at head height was a row of darker rock, and then five more rows of grey granite to a height of about eighteen feet.

There are several more important archaeological sites in the neighbourhood, and we explored all of them, and it is sad to report that there has been considerable lassitude in efforts to preserve the temples as they were circa 2,500 years ago. For example, in the middle of Limenas is a squared temple area surrounded by shops, where white columns are lying about like the contents of a child's fallen pencil case. I counted over a score of white marble columns of various lengths, and also noted that the marble bases were in place, giving the dimensions of the structure. I consider that it would be relatively simple to survey the site, take measurements, make assessments, and re-construct the site into some semblance of its former glory.

Limenas is a clean port, its inhabitants used to the seasonal invasion of holiday-makers. We purchased bottle of water, and cheese and bread and peaches for our lunch-time repast.

One lovely morning we decided to approach the ancient amphitheatre, sited on the eastern side of Limenas, from the south. We relied solely on my sense of direction, and turned right up a track just past the entrance to Makryammos. We speedily entered a leafy corridor of olive and pine trees, and the track became narrower...it suddenly turned right when every fibre of instinct in my brain knew we should have gone to the left. I asked Diane to tarry awhile whilst I investigated the path to the right...after walking about one hundred yards I was horrified to see a three-foot-long snake straddling the path horizontally to my progress. Its head swung in my direction. We looked at each other. It was light brown, with dark brown and tan diamond shapes on its back. I concluded that the path was definitely heading in the wrong direction so I hastily swung around and returned to Diane.

I advised that we should leave the path and strike across the boulder-strewn hillside, because I saw stone ruins on top of a hill. Large butterflies drifted about, transparent wings lazily flapping to just maintain equilibrium. Our progress was slow because there wasn't a path to guide us, but it was quiet and just wonderful to luxuriate in the subtle aroma of the trees, and note the purple hill peaks across the valley...a breeze blew in from the sea to negate excess perspiration, because the sun was a relentless hunter.

We climbed slowly, following dried sheep droppings, figuring they would select the easiest route. Eventually we

reached an area marked 'Acropolis' on the map, but except for a granite base, battered walls and carved lintels scattered about, it was unrecognisable as a monument to Greek culture.

We crested the hill, climbed downwards and found the amphitheatre.

Twenty five or more centuries earlier, the inhabitants of Thassos, highly cultured, selected an exquisite location to construct their amphitheatre for performances of their six-hour-long tragedies. I don't know if ordinance existed for compulsory attendance, but the long climb from the port to the site would ensure that the audience would require to be drama enthusiasts, besides being in excellent physical condition.

Unfortunately, many centuries of disinterest and deterioration have sadly left their stigma...I counted twenty large trees growing in the seating arena...I mean, that really is scandalous. Many of the seating slabs are missing, but wooden seats have been fitted to complete the rising semi-circular format, and hanging wires and rusted loudspeakers show that performances are still occasionally held, probably heavy metal concerts. The metal loops from canned drinks litter the place, and whilst we stood on the stage area white plastic bags scudded across it.

Diane and I were the only persons present, and I did intend to loudly recite a few lines from Plato, in Greek, which I had especially learned in anticipation of the visit, but I felt that would not be in keeping with the degradation of the present locale. I therefore gave a spirited rendition of 'It was the Good Ship Venus.'

The beach at Makryammos is composed entirely of soft white sand, with a hard edge where the sea reluctantly laps against it. The water is absolutely clear, and sometimes flaunts a white-topped wave if lashed by a sudden wind. As previously stated, some thirty four-poled sun covers are dotted along the entire length of the beach, and are definitely required items when the sun hits the nineties. The Germans daily ensure that their sun shelters are secure by sneaking down to the beach before breakfast and draping their towels over the chairs under the covers. Consequently, Diane and I, because we refused to demean ourselves by this early morning reservation system, usually didn't have any shelter from the sun if we wished to stay on the beach. The Germans called the shelters 'Federbretts', and I noted that they always seemed to grunt the word in my presence, usually with a guffaw, that's why I knew exactly where to look for the word in my English/German dictionary when I returned home, and my heart grew cold when I read its meaning.

On the afternoon of the second day we did manage to obtain a federbrett, the German occupants departed for lunch and forgot to drape a towel over their seat, which, according to International Law, meant that they had relinquished their right of possession of the territory which we accordingly siezed by dint of a swift pincer movement. We scattered our eccoutrements around and under the federbrett to announce our possession and then swam in the warm water for half an hour.

We dried swiftly under the hot sun, and I sat in a chair under the canvas cover, trying to coax my eyelids to zip up for a short siesta when I heard Diane alert me in a husky whisper:-

"Crikey, look at this !"

I opened my eyes...we were facing the sea, thus hoping to catch a snippet of breeze, and I saw this apparition pass

in front of me from left to right.

It was a young girl, about eighteen years old, thumping her bare heels on the hard sand at the water's edge, blonde hair tied in a bun behind her head, accentuating high cheekbones, and she was topless.

TOPLESS !!!

But one process has occupied my waking hours...the attempt to inflict my will subconsciously on other mortals. Quite frankly, my negative endeavours in this respect has always given me a blinding headache, and it was with some trepidation that I concentrated my mind into a ball of throbbing nerve endings and made a firm mental order in German..."Turn around and come back again".

It was just unbelievable...she dug her heels in the sand, swung round and walked towards me, her innocent face scanning the boggle-eyed spectators, seeking the hidden Svengali.

"She's flaunting herself," whispered Diane.

"She just cannot help it," I breathed...my eyes studying every inch of her lithe body, looking for an imperfection, but she was flawless.

"There's another one," hissed Diane.

Oh crikey. It was true.

Another well-proportioned German girl walked from the sea, gravity grappling with centrifugal force.

"They're all at it," gasped Diane.

It was all so wonderfully true...as soon as one girl had successfully discovered that exposure was accepted mutely, albiet with stunned admiration, bra-tops were nonchalantly cast aside, and nipples prinkled at the first blast of sun heat.

This was paradise...but we all knew only too well that pure bliss is transient...on our left were two aged French ladies, well in their seventies, and to my utter chagrin they giggled coyly to each other and, so help me, they stripped completely and lay back on their towels. They looked as though they had just fallen from a starling's nest.

Fortunately, the sky darkened and a sudden wind blew angrily, whipping white spray from excited wavelets.

Our chalet was near the beach and we reached the sanctuary with our bodies only slightly dappled with reconnaissance rain drops.

Ten days passed so swiftly...the morning's walk to Limenas, purchasing souvenirs at the well-stocked shops...the long afternoons on the beach, swimming, gradually broiling from deep red to a golden brown, topless girls, now completely uninhibited, casting vexed glances if they were not minutely perused.

A brown dog of indeterminate pedigree appeared to be officially attached to the site, but it usually sprawled under a tree, movement restricted to a casual peek at passers-by with its two different-coloured eyes.

I usually make friends with dogs, but the warning from the old gentleman had a salutary effect, and my urge to throw it my special doggy whistle was under rigid control.

On the last night, dressed for dinner, we walked along the tree-lined path to the restaurant complex, joining the Germans for their pre-dinner stroll. The dog lay on the grass, exhausted by its day-long attempts to avoid the sun. A young German couple detached themselves from the group and crossed over the grass to the dog. The man was tall, broad, fair-haired...the girl absolutely gorgeous, one of the topless

brigade, identified by a mole trying to hide under her corsage.

"Watch this," I breathed to Diane, as the man bent down and patted the dog. Its ears became rigid at this unaccustomed attention, but even then extreme lethargy seemed to make the dog quickly lose interest. The girl grabbed the man's hand and tried to drag him away, but he smiled, a dog-loving smile, and energetically stroked the animal from head to tail.

By this time we had edged forward...so close that I could see the dog's red and green eyes click towards each other, and a long tongue snaked out and licked the man's hand.

The dog struggled to its feet, but its eyes betrayed the sudden release from dormant pressure...without any preliminary love-play it gave a yelp of delight, leapt forward and locked its forelegs around the man's white-trousered left leg. Without going into intimate detail, the dog smoothly jerked into action.

The other erstwhile dandering Germans stopped and stood in a circle, mouths open wide, glancing at Diane and myself, not wishing foreigners to witness the utter embarrassment of a fellow Teuton.

The man kicked his seduced leg, trying to dislodge the frenzied dog, but it obviously took this movement as a sign of compatability, and soon reached its optimum stroke.

Blushing profusely, the girl pulled the man towards her... he was balanced precariously on one leg, and the dog, its eyes closed with passion, uttered a bark of pure celestial bliss as it sank to the grass and once more resumed its recumbent pose.

The young couple slunk away to their chalet, and I gave a broad grin of appreciation to the other witnesses who retired in silence to the restaurant.

'Goodbye' to Maria on the concrete apron of Limena and aboard THASSOS II for the calm crossing to Keramoti.

We disembarked with our luggage and joined the huddle of Germans surrounding half a dozen taxis. Maria had told Diane and myself that a taxi would await us at Keramoti, but the Germans appeared to have been given the same message. The taxi drivers could not or would not understand German, and the Germans became irate, as only they can, and they slung their luggage in and out of various vehicles.

Another taxi drew up, not so new as the others, and a short man got out. He had red-rimmed eyes and was unshaven.

"Hotel Capsis," he shouted and we handed him our luggage and leapt into the back of the vehicle with alacrity. He racked the suitcases and in a couple of seconds his cloud of dust obscured Keramoti and the gesticulating Germans.

The driver could not speak English but his German was excellent, and once more, until the stilted conversation ceased, I had to speak and think my cautious German.

We had a long haul in front of us, well over 200 kms... firstly through Kavala, under the aqueduct. It was only 10 am, and the sky was clear of clouds. After passing through Kavala we gradually gained height until we reached high hills overlooking a large valley on our left. We were traversing the hills of Macedonia, from where Philip and Alexander emerged in the fourth century B.C. New portions of the highway were under construction, bends were being straightened, etc, and whilst negotiating a twisty section, not yet landscaped, our driver looked over his shoulder and rattled off a sentence in German, with a malicious grin on his face, to the effect that during World War II the Germans didn't like travelling in military convoys in this area.

There are two long lakes en route to Salonika from the east, Volvi and Koronia...the road runs close to the southern edges, and after Koronia vanishes, Salonika is only half an hours drive to the west. Within three hours of leaving Keramoti we reached the outskirts of Salonika. Traffic built up quickly, and what traffic...aggressive Greeks blasted their horns to maximum decibel rating...screeches of brakes were the rule, but through it all our driver was placidity personified...a cool driver in the chaos. So careful was he that at a set of red traffic lights he was still moving and so had to make a split decision...do I ram on my brakes or sneak through? He chose the latter course and got very slightly entangled in oncoming traffic. A shrill whistle echoed above the traffic noise...a policeman, blasting whistle in mouth, eyes pulsating with annoyance, strode across the traffic lanes, pointed to the kerbside and ordered the driver out of the vehicle. This policeman was over six feet tall; his uniform and white belt were immaculately clean...his trouser creases were like knife blades. He demanded documents and wrote out a ticket which he took ages to administer.

Our driver was a sad man as he re-entered his taxi...honestly, he was the only true driver we saw in Salonika, as we later discovered. Tremendously bad driving appeared to be the norm, except for the many taxi drivers...but during our day in Salonika we didn't see any of the horrendous driving misdemeanours being corrected.

We stayed in our room at the Hotel Capsis just long enough to have a shower. The hotel receptionist gave us a map of Salonika and we sallied forth into the amalgam of incredible heat and horrific driving.

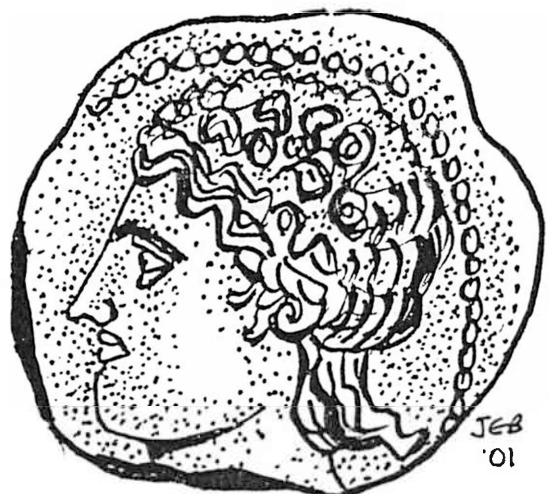
We walked along the main thoroughfare Egnatia to the Platia Sintrivaniou and turned right along Angelaki to the Archaeological museum.

The museum was excellent...many of the items on display were found at Derveni, 10 kms east of Salonika, whilst work was being carried out on the road to Kavala, and at tumulus at Vergina. The most marvellous item was a wreath of oak leaves and acorns made of solid gold, dating from the middle of the fourth century B.C....absolutely incredible. In an open courtyard at the museum is a Roman mosaic, with seating around the periphery, and shaded trees gave us brief respite from the sun.

We returned to the Hotel Capsis along Tsimisk and right along Doderkanisson.

Next morning our taxi awaited...a fast drive to the airport, and then, a final bonus, my first flight in an A.300 Airbus over the Alps to Heathrow.

SILVER SLATER OF CYDONIA
320 - 270 BC (x 2)



We stayed all night in the passenger lounge at Gatwick Airport; there was no alternative, because the holiday instructions dictated that 'booking in' for the flight to Mitilene was at 6am, Friday 20th June 1986, and public transport from Hatfield to Gatwick was non-existent during the early hours of the morning. The lounge was a vast complex, various comfortable seated areas and a small coffee shop. Many other people had the same waiting period, and there was competition for seats which would accommodate pre-passengers in the prone position. I slept fitfully with my head on Diane's handbag, unable to slip into the infinite because of the unrelenting repetitious clicking of Diane's knitting needles, her own remedy to avoid boredom. Just after 5 am I noted activity in the lower section devoted to booking in for flights, and for the first time in our travels we managed to be first in the queue for our flight, which really meant nothing except that I was able to select advantageous seats at a window in the non-smoking section.

Into the Departure Lounge, thus directed by a disembodied voice to the short robot rail link to Gate 49, where we boarded the flight to Mitilene, Lesbos, and what an extremely pleasant surprise, our jet was a Boeing 727, a type in which I had not previously flown. It was patriotically painted red white and blue, and we settled excitedly in our seats. After take-off, a stewardess attempted to vocally combat the crackling intercom to alert us to an unfortunate state of affairs insofar as catering was concerned, and as if to soften the blow, the captain had selected a girl with a foreign accent, undefinable as to source, perchance even pseudo. A linguist seated nearby who also happened to have finely attuned nerve endings in his ears, confirmed the grim message was that nineteen hot lunches were missing, but the captain offered free drinks to the discerning passengers who would volunteer to go without the plastic-packed offering. The volley of raised hands, rather like the salute at a meeting in the Reichstag in 1939, confirmed that an unusual number of gormets were aboard. Diane and I didn't volunteer and eventually received our heated surprises which we carefully ate with pliable plastic knives and forks.

Our flight took us across Belgium, West Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia and Greece...we started to descend over Greece and on the left I noted the island of Thassos, where we had stayed a couple of years previously, and north of it the town of Kavala, standing rather like an abrasion on the pure-textured skin on a woman's face. Lower and lower, that had to be brown-flecked Turkey, close by to the east, then the 727 banked, and we followed the Lesbos coast to Mitilene, landing perfectly on the off-white stripes at our end of the runway.

The airport building was small, passport examination and stamping being merely a bureaucratic routine...if I'd left my hand on the counter the bored official would have stamped it.

A fleet of taxis took our Katia-bound group southwards along extremely pot-holed roads, the experienced drivers swerving to avoid the major chassis-bouncing craters. Just a brief drive for 3 km and we arrived and were allocated our rooms. Diane and I had the top storey of a two-floor building a short distance from the main red-pantiled concourse. The room was

large with white-painted walls and a high ceiling. From the balcony the hilly coast of Turkey was on the horizon, nearby the blue Mediterranean water beckoned to us to try its bouyancy and warmth. The sweet sticky smell of pine trees seduced our nostrils.

The single beds in our room were designed to frustrate any other function than that of obtaining rest and sleep. The beds were several feet apart, hugging right-angled walls, and were actually made of white-plastered and painted brickwork, blatantly not permitting the obvious strategy of bed-moving to facilitate, as a left-wing politician recently observed in London, 'pernicious heterosexuality.' Diane and I tossed a coin for bed selection, the loser merely being the first one likely to be bitten by mosquitos.

Mitilene, the only large town in Lesbos, was just over 8 kms to the north, in other words, 5 kms past the airport. Taxis were available to take visitors to Mitilene merely by telephoning from the Katia, but that afternoon we decided to walk there. The sun blasted its heat downwards without mercy, and our proposed walk might have been considered foolhardy, but mad dogs and Englishmen, as Noel Coward used to proclaim 'go out in the midday sun', and we accorded with his lyric.

The terrible road surface continued to the airport, with the sea on our right; unfortunately, sandy beaches are rare in Lesbos, and on the entire stretch of beach from Katia to Mitilene the sea could only be reached by stepping precariously over football-sized white stones, very slimy because of being permanently under the sea...perhaps twenty of thirty feet had to be negotiated before the sand accepted tense toes, curled to grip the unwelcome barriers.

Before we reached the airport I noted a poignant sight on my left. A four feet high stone wall was gated by two higher brown metal plinths, bearing a floral design. Atop each plinth was a chubby loin-clothed cherub, hands raised aloft, palms uppermost, to support I know not what. Presumably during World War II a passing moronic soldier had riddled the right hand cherub with a burst of sub-machine gun fire...each cherub bore a resigned expression, as if to ask, 'haven't I suffered enough, can I put my hands down, please ?'

The unrelenting sun was overhead, making our shadows merely an extension of bur sandals, but we didn't perspire, the extreme heat was dehydrating, and we stopped at the airport for an ice-cold drink before plodding northwards towards Mitilene, following a series of bays. After curving the third bay we saw a large fortress ahead of us on a promontory jutting out from the left. But each time the fortress was hidden by a bay and it was re-revealed, it didn't seem to be any nearer. When we looked across the sea to the Turkish mainland, the very hilly area visible from our room had definitely slipped away, showing that our progress was steady...the final bay before we reached Mitilene was longer and straighter and although we were walking perhaps slowly but nevertheless firmly we didn't appear to be getting any closer. It really was disconcerting.

When we eventually reached the southern edge of Militene the road swung to the left, away from the coast, and the change was immediately evident...a subtle breeze from the north followed the coastline, but now, houses arrowed the breeze away from us, and it was absolutely stifling, like walking into an oven. Diane had maintained a dignified plod for two hours but now she started to complain bitterly about the insanity of walking in the extreme heat when taxis were available, but I

explained the elements of the physical challenge to her... why take a taxi to travel another half a mile...'er, maybe just over half a mile'...when the triumph of her mind over her body would forever more sustain her through the multifarious vicissitudes of her existence ? By the time she'd worked this out we'd reached the harbour, we staggered along, saw a tree-lined road, and in a sort of park we noted, through our bleary eyes, little tables with Greek persons, mostly male, sitting drinking little cups of black coffee, alternating each sip with a drink of iced water from a half pint drinking glass.

We sat at a table; Diane's long coated tongue furtively sought her parched lips.

"Get me a drink quick," she croaked.

A large and elderly Greek waiter crossed to me, smiling nonchalantly, wiping crumbs off our plastic-topped table.

"Two large orange crushes, please" I said politely.

His eyes narrowed for a few seconds, then gleamed in triumph. He backed away from us, somewhat obsequiously, then disappeared into the serving area, from which he frequently re-appeared bearing coffee and glasses of water to various tables. I feverishly sought his eyes, because Diane had started to groan in anguish...when our eyes did sometimes meet he waved confidently, letting us know he hadn't forgotten us. Then the precious moment came...it was worth waiting for...he headed directly to us, weaving his way through tables, the tray seeming to be glued to his hand. He set the tray down and gave us each a plate bearing two thick toasted ham sandwiches. But no orange crush.

I certainly didn't wish to dampen his apparent enthusiasm, but something seemed to be wrong.

"No" I screamed, "two orange crushes."

He backed away in bewilderment, and then my vast experience as a world-wide traveller came to my aid...on a nearby table I spotted two empty orange crush bottles. I pointed to them and smiled.

"Two bottles of orange crush for God's Sake" shouted Diane in what I thought to be an unnecessarily belligerent voice.

The shaft of pure understanding which now eased across his visage was absolute proof that the contretemps had now been fully overcome. There was no doubt whatsoever in my mind that he would now rapidly return with two bottles of orange crush... and what a magic moment, he did exactly that...he flipped off the metal caps, inserted a straw in each bottle and placed them reverently on the table top. I, of course, always strive to present to the foreigners the savoir-faire they have come to expect from the Englishman, and although my stomach was bubbling like a vat of hydrochloric acid, it was with a certain cautious moue that I introduced the straw into my mouth and puckered a couple of times before permitting the iced orange to resuscitate my dehydrating body. Diane threw the straw under the table, held the bottle in a vertical grip and poured the contents directly into her system, looked at me, and I saw extreme relief in her eyes, her temper mellowing at my skill in eventually ordering her requirement, despite the language difficulty. Her brown eyes softened, she smiled at me, little creases of promise in corner of her eyes as her long lashes flicked up and down a couple of times, and then her face hardened again.

"Ohhh nooo," she sobbed.

The waiter placed another two large plates in front of us, each surmounted by two very thick toasted ham sandwiches...

All the residents at Katia Bungalows were English, and Diane and I made friends with Peter and Beryl. Peter was grey-haired, and the harsh experience of life had formed lines around his mouth. Beryl had an English 'upper class' accent; she was unflappable, whimsical...she had natural fair hair with wispy streaks of grey...her blue eyes shafted a direct glance which did not require verbal corroboration.

Whilst sipping ouzo (Aphrodite, not the inexpensive brand) Peter said that he'd hired a car and would we care to travel to Sigri on the morrow? Sigri was almost 100 kms away, on the western tip of Lesbos, and our holiday brochure stated that a petrified forest was adjacent to Sigri. Diane and I were therefore delighted to accept, so at 9.30 am next morning we drove northwards, carefully avoiding the potholes, past the airport to Mitilene...I sat on Peter's right and was duly accorded the rank of map-reader...as only one major road traversed Lesbos, I believed I had been given a sinecure.

We'd travelled 4 kms past Mitilene, turned left through Moria, a little village. The road did seem narrow, and Peter's wing mirrors seemed to scrape the windows on either side. A man stood in the middle of the road, his right hand held high, palm towards us, the international sign for us to stop.

"One way street," he announced in quite reasonable English, "and you're going the wrong way."

Map-readers appear to be whipping boys, and even your best friends turn on you when things go wrong.

"You messed up that one, John," said Peter.

"Back the way you came and turn right," said the man. He was authoritative, and he loped ahead of us, blocking the left exit in case we thought to disobey him.

Half a mile outside the village, heading west, we saw the remains of a magnificent Roman aqueduct in front of us as we turned sharp right.

I had already noted its presence on the map, and had decided to either walk to it or take a taxi...and here it was. Obviously it crossed a valley...most of the upper section had disappeared, probably used in the construction of the fort at Mitilene, but seven lower arch sections remain, and four supports for the waterway were rampant above the lower arches, giving an excellent idea of its former glory. We photographed the aqueduct, and the other three passengers pardoned me for the apparent lack of concentration, stating that the error had given us a nice bonus.

"Which way?" asked Peter, when we were settled in the Fiat.

As I have explained, the tourist map showed only one road to the west...unfortunately it didn't show a road adjacent to the aqueduct...but, after all, there was such a road...we were on it. Most definitely we couldn't go back, the man would be waiting for us, and the alternative didn't give me any room for compromise.

"Ever onwards," I gulped and Peter slipped into gear, we went under an aqueduct arch.

Ten minutes later, Beryl icily voiced my worst fears... "this isn't a first class road surface," she stated, "but we should be on one."

English people have a penchant for under-statement...we were actually negotiating a deeply rutted track, Beryl was really being kind.

Bushes, with sharp triangular hooks like barbed wire entanglements scratched at the Fiat's bodywork and quite frequently the vehicle jerked as Peter unavoidably hit a large

rock. Peter was tense, mouth open, teeth bared as he swung the steering wheel about to maintain control.

"Not wishing to embarrass the map-reader," he scowled (as I looked at him he slipped me a surreptitious wink) " but it is quite possible we are lost."

Once again, d'you see, we had a perfect example of Anglo-Saxon sang-froid, alternatively, it could be utter sarcasm.

"One consolation," observed Diane, " the chassis may be dented but its probably the cleanest one in Lesbos."

My mind raced as I tried to divert their attention in the forlorn hope that we would miraculously hit a main road.

"Imagine a tv car advertisement," I panted, " with a shy sensitive car salesman pointing at you from the screen and saying... 'Has your car got Lesbos suspension?' "

No one laughed because at that precise second Peter swung the Fiat to the right to avoid a boulder, and a long narrow yellow pole obstructed our progress. We followed the pole to the right and saw a green-clad soldier hanging over the end of the pole. Peter braked and the front of the Fiat bonnet snuggled up to the yellow pole.

Half a dozen soldiers ran towards us from a row of huts, buttoning trousers, putting on helmets, juggling with rifles.

I got out of the car and faced the nearest soldier; I had attempted to learn the Greek for 'I am lost' but it sounded phonetically a mite like 'arse holes' and I didn't want to attempt it at this juncture.

"Is this the way to Kalloni?" I asked.

The soldier gibbered in amazement, finger ends between his teeth...I could see an idea forming in his mind...a Turkish Suicide Squad.

The other soldiers faced us in an arc...alert, but not pointing their rifles at us.

Beryl stood at my side.

"Fetch an officer," she ordered formally, peering at each soldier in turn from beneath quizzically-arched eyebrows.

A tall handsome soldier approached us, adroitly adjusting the last button on his tunic...even from a distance he was obviously officer material.

"Good morning," he said in perfect English.

"G'morning," I said, " we're lost."

"You're not," he smiled, "I know exactly where you are."

"Where are we ?" I hissed.

"In my army camp," he confirmed.

"I know that" snapped Beryl, her voice containing just the slightest suggestion of controlled fury, " we want to get to Kalloni."

"Show me your map," he commanded. Diane and Peter also got out of the Fiat and we spread the map of Lesbos on the hot bonnet. He pointed vaguely to the south west of Moria, but said if we turned around and turned first left we would be on the Kalloni road.

Peter asked if we could enter the camp to turn the Fiat ? Although there was no alternative the officer pondered before finally giving permission. The soldier raised the pole, the officer uttered a command in Greek, the soldiers duly raised their rifles and we all held our respective breathes as Peter entered the camp, did as small a turning circle as he could. We piled into the Fiat, waved enthusiastically and rutted away down the track, then left for half a mile, and straight onto the main road...we turned left, a sign said Kalloni 26 kms.

"John, we'll give you a fresh start from here," said Beryl, and we surged forward, unrestrained by the smooth tar-macadam.

Kalloni was like a wild west town...stores on either side of the road, with horse-drawn carts being trotted along, although of course most of the traffic consisted of vehicles and trucks. We turned right at the 'T' junction, then left turn to follow a mountainous road through Dafia, Scalochori, Vatoussa and Antissa, a distance of 35 kms. The main road through Antissa swung sharply to the right, which I should have remembered.

We were excited at the prospect of visiting the famous petrified forest (Fersteinerter Wald) near Sigri. Instructions were that the car should be parked near the main road, and a forty five minute walk would bring the visitor to an amazing sight, hundreds of tree trunks jutting upwards, turned to marble millions of years ago. We came to the indicated 'T' junction, and correctly turned right, past a monastery atop a high mountainous needle point (a plug formed by a volcano), looking for the track to lead us to the petrified forest. We noted a track southwards, and a hundred yards down it I saw a thick marble column about ten feet high. It was a tree trunk. This was it...we parked the car at the entrance to the track and walked down it to the fossilised trunk... indeed it was marble, mostly yellow and brown, with little striations of red and green. We walked along the track for a long time...the air was fresh because we were at an altitude of around 5,000 feet...the land was barren, little prickly bushes sought to grip the stony surface. Peter opined that the track was wide enough to carry a car... 'a much better track than the one we were on this morning'...throwing me an askance glance. We discussed the de-merits of Greek maps which I have found necessary to criticise in these pages. My sharp eyes noted a little dot approaching us along a track ... 'a car'...I shouted. We waved it down when it reached us. Two Germans were in it...they explained that the track carried on for 5 kms, and then they had to walk for forty five minutes. They said it was worth it, the petrified forest was a wonderful sight. We heard them laugh as they drove away. We decided to return to the car and drive the short distance to the western coast, foregoing the trip to the petrified forest.

Sigri was a little gem...the sort of place to go to to recover from a nervous breakdown...a small resort with red-roofed bungalows, a fortress, narrow streets, a museum (closed) but with several small fossilised trunks on sentry duty outside. We turned eastwards to commence the return journey, and on our left we saw a small bay with gentle waves lapping on black sand. Peter drove along the beach and we paddled in the warm sea for a few precious moments. I found a piece of fossil tree in the sea, only about the size of one's thumb, but bark lines were plainly visible.

On our return journey we passed the track on our right which led to the forest...we conjectured for a moment whether or not we should visit the site...it would mean at least two hours added to our journey. It was almost 6 pm...it would be dark well before 9 pm, and even though Peter was a superb driver, some of the roads were narrow and winding, consequently I swayed them into rejecting the idea. But a mile or so past the track, Peter suddenly braked hard on the mountainside and pointed upwards. A long fossilised trunk was lying parallel to the road and about fifty feet above it.

I grabbed my camera and scuttled up the slope like a mountain goat...the trunk was of course marble, white, yellow, green, grey and brown, all jumbled together...the tree rings were visible where the trunk had cracked. I bent down and

saw several small pieces of marble where some unscrupulous person had been battering at it with a chipped rock lying nearby. With a hoarse shout of triumph I announced my find and put several pieces in my trouser pocket. A blue car travelling at fast speed towards Sigri screeched to a halt. A Greek youth with two girls leapt out of the car and shouted to me.

"Beg pardon?" I shouted back at them.

"Snakes," they screamed.

I quickly joined them and thanked them for being so sporting and warning me of an incipient attack by several deadly species which they said abounded in the area.

Antissa is another little gem...a village sprinkled amongst pine and olive trees on a mountainside. The map merely showed a dot for Antissa, and I vaguely tried to recall an observation I'd made when we'd passed through it eight hours earlier...er ...shouldn't we turn sharp left?

"No, sharp right," ordered Beryl.

"Sharp left," said Peter.

"Sharp right" confirmed Diane.

Peter instinctively turned right.

This reminded me of a cartoon I'd seen in a magazine. A weary man sat at the steering wheel and two women argue in the back seat. The caption read ...'Who is driving this car, you or your mother?'

The little village roads became narrower...old bent women dressed entirely in black with white hawkish faces peered at us from their doorways as we edged past them. We arrived at a small village square. A memorial was in the centre of the square, and around it, at rickety tables sat the men of the village sipping coffee and water and beer. They were tousle-haired, unshaven, dressed in blue shirts with sweat stains under the arms.

"We're lost," I said.

"Where exactly do you want to go to?" said the roughest looking man, in perfect English.

"Kalloni" I said.

"Back through the village and take the sharp right hand bend."

I thanked him. Peter had difficulty in turning the Fiat... back through the village, streets gradually getting wider, right turn and we were once more on the main road. The two women were quiet for a few moments...only a few moments.

(Antissa was captured by the Roman general Labion in 167 B.C...he destroyed the town and took the inhabitants to Methymna, northern Lesbos, because they had helped the Macedonians in the past.)

The sun was getting lower, and it was really a race to see if Peter could pass the mountainous regions before darkness descended upon us...we reached Katia just before the dinner deadline.

Sparrows are also found in Lesbos. A clutch of them occupied pine trees outside our room, and at 5 am each morning a family tiff re-commenced as the dawn alerted them, they chattered incessantly.

I was pleased that they had woken me up, because we required to arise early as this day was duly scheduled for 'the trip to Turkey'.

Diane was still sleeping. I sat on the chilled plastic seat on the balcony and looked eastwards. The high Turkish

hills looked as though they had been cut from grey cardboard by a child with blunted scissors; the sun was blood red behind them, changing to orange as it crested the mounds... the dozen miles of intervening blue-grey sea suddenly produced a gold strip mirroring the sun.

At 7.30 am our hotel party were taken in three taxis to the harbour at Mitilene...we hung about for twenty minutes, the required protocol, until guided to a room where our passports were roughly stamped on any vacant page except the next appropriate one...then round a corner where another stamp was smashed on a passport page and duly initialled.

We boarded the LESVOS, a white-painted metal ship with an awning over the deck surface to repel the sun. Most of the passengers preferred to sit on the upper deck, smiling confidently at each other as a prelude to our first trip to Asia.

The LESVOS chugged into action, skirting the long projecting harbour wall, the magnificent castle high on a hill to our left proudly guarding Mitilene, as it had done for several centuries. Eastwards...the sea was in a gentle mood, white-scuffed waves being rare, until gradually the Turkish coastline became clearer...little coloured blobs became red-roofed houses.

One and a half hours later we berthed at the Turkish port of Ayvalik...houses and dark green trees covered the hillsides, and a couple of minarets thrust upwards, so that the bell-calls to the faithful would re-echo unchallenged by obstructions.

Off the LESVOS into a building where the Greek passport sequence was repeated...a hefty thump on the first opened page, round a corner, another date stamp duly initialled.

Outside the little harbour we board a luxury coach, each passenger receiving a yellow gladiola stem from a youth flashing us his white teeth.

The coach drove southwards from Ayvalik, and the Turkish guide, with a diffident smile, produced a thick wallet from which he changed our Greek drachma into Turkish paper money, our day's finances.

Soon we were travelling along a dusty road; solitary hills sloped on the horizon, in between were fields of tobacco, tended by women. My God, Turkish women are in dire need of a Fatima Pankhurst. They tended the crop, working in rows of eight or nine, attired in voluminous blouses and long skirts in the arid heat, faces hidden except for a vacant strip revealing their creased brown eyes. They bent downwards from the waist, looking like hanging puppets awaiting a pseudo life-tug, only their hands moving as they weeded and tended, sometimes jerking spasmodically to attack a new area of outraged vegetation. At the edges of the fields were rudely constructed habitations one would have presumed to have been used to keep the goats and sheep we occasionally noted, except I believe they were the abodes of the field workers. The dark moustached men in shirts and trousers obviously keenly felt their responsibilities to their families and discussed the situation in roadside taverns sipping little cups of Turkish coffee. Their problems seemed to be so weighty that it seemed that it required a full day to deliberate, to conjecture, to philosophise, to fully accept the responsibility of having to maintain their wives in the life-style to which they were accustomed.

After an hour, we reached a large town, Bergama, historically known as Pergamos. To the north I saw a high hill with almost vertical sides, but we turned left, past a Turkish

military camp, and the coach was parked, with others and I saw a long column of pillars with large ill-fitting paving stones between them. Our guide took us along this ancient route to an area he called 'Asklepios' which I understand to be an ancient Greek term for a healing place, a hospital. He explained with some authority that well over two thousand years ago sick persons were sent to this site and were vetted by doctors who reluctantly 'tut-tutted' the incurables, who were led away, gibbering, and the hospitalisation zone was for the fortunate majority who might presumably recover. (The site was of course built hundreds of years before the Romans occupied Pergamos in 133 B.C.) A notice informed the camera-clicking tourists that their photographs should be taken pointing northwards, as southern shots would include the military camp...all cameras were hurriedly turned northwards.

A long row of fourteen standing pillars with gaps on the right led to an amphitheatre, acoustically magnificent, where plays of a re-assuring theme were performed to patrons to facilitate 'their mental recovery'.

We re-boarded the coach, crossed through Bergama and approached the vertically-sided hill..we progressed up the sides via a zig-zagged route, and the view from the top was as if we were in an aircraft. This place represented the defensive site par excellence...we were told that neolithic hand axes had been found on this site, but it came into prominence after the Greek 'Wars of The Successors' when various descendants and associates of Alexander the Great attempted to sub-divide his vast kingdom. Pergamos was a treasure centre during Alexander's campaign eastwards, and in 275 B.C. it was held by the eunuch Philetairos against the invading Gauls (Galatians). In 241 B.C. Attalos defeated the Galatians and Suleukids, and adorned Pergamos with vigorous sculptures and buildings. Between 180-160 B.C. the Temple of Zeus was built... it now resides in a museum in East Berlin, returned by the Russians after seizure after World War II. Its previous site is a ravaged area on a lower level than the major Pergamos area, with a huge green tree rising from the base of shattered stone. Atop Pergamos was the acropolis...this is being restored by Turks and East Germans...the marble pillars have been polished to their previous whiteness, and a large crane studiously affixes squared marble sections on top of them. On the north western edge of the mountain is a huge Greek amphitheatre that seated sixty thousand spectators. Our guide showed us a wide deep well, and in the centre of it, level with the top of the well, is a pillar with a square top...it seems as though acute-angled sections were centred on it to prevent evaporation in the extremely hot climate. On this particular day the heat was blistering, dehydrating, white headware was universally worn. The guide pointed to numerous small-denomination coins on top of the pillar, and announced that good luck would accrue to any fortunate person who could flip a coin and make it stay on top of the pillar.

"I'll show you how to do it," he said in his excellent English. He carefully placed a small silver coin on his right thumb nail, placed the tip of his right forefinger over the coin, and flipped it...the coin arched over the gap and landed in the centre of the square-topped pillar. It stayed exactly as it fell; it didn't even spin on its axis or roll in a semi-circle. The tourists smirked at this simple trick, and silver and brown coins rained on top of the pillar but they all shot off again like shrapnel. Diane is stubborn, and only after her

tenth coin bounced down inside the stone well did I remonstrate with her, suggesting that the trick was impossible, and we had been the subjects of mass hypnotism. But in silent moments I have wondered about his technique...did the coin have chewing gum underneath, or a similar adhesive base ?

Pergamos held a great library, and specially prepared skins were produced to record data...the invention was termed 'pergamene', hence 'parchment'. (I haven't worked this out, but that's what the guide book reported.)

In 133 B.C. the last King of Pergamos, Attalos III, left Pergamos to the Roman Republic.

After absorbing as much of the culture as we could, the coach descended the narrow roads, blasted from the vertical sides, and teeth were clenched by those sitting on the right side of the coach until we reached Bergama, where we had an excellent lunch of Turkish dishes.

En route to Ayvalik we stopped at a carpet factory. Four females were crouched in a row on six inch high wooden bases, weaving carpets. One was a girl I reckon was no more than ten years old...she was sitting in an ungainly unfeminine manner, her young body akimbo over horizontally placed legs. She was performing the Turkish Knot, and action repeated many hundreds of thousands of times to manufacture one carpet. The heavy thread strands were strung vertically in front of her, close together, weighed down by a heavy wooden base. Her chore was repetitious...twist...twist...thread...pull...the surplus wool snipped off, later, areas about six inches square were carefully clipped to an overall level. She smiled proudly when photographed.

A handsome Turk invited the tourists into a long curtained room with seats around the edge. He snapped his fingers and a minion appeared through the curtains, giving each person a glass of Turkish tea on a small silver salver. Whilst we sipped, he expertly twirled large gorgeously-coloured carpets, and they spread out before us on the floor. His quoted prices were extremely high, but as he reduced the quality of the carpets and the prices accordingly dropped, a few of the tourists began to take an interest, and he concluded a few sales, the Berry's refusing to participate.

We de-coached at Ayvalik and walked around the place for an hour before it was time to join the LESVOS.

The passport-banging process was repeated, and we walked with the other tourists towards the LESVOS. A uniformed officer perused passports with indifference until he looked at mine and motioned me to stand by his side...had the dreaded voodoo struck again ? He ushered Diane and the other aboard, and when, so to speak, they were off Turkish soil, he licked his lips and avidly examined every page of my passport. His eyes bulged so much it just had to be affectation. He called another uniformed officer over who beckoned me to a bench beside a fence. He pointed to the seat, his right thumb seeming to click downwards like Caligula on a bad day. I sat down. He looked at me, a face depicting the sensitive features of a man whose hobby was throwing live kittens on a furnace. An elderly grey-haired man in civilian clothes walked slowly across the dock area to the officer holding my passport. He examined the fine print for a few agonising moments and seemed to be as equally astounded as his colleagues. I keep re-iterating this cliché in my writings, but, dammit, here we go again...I saw large red-veined throbbing optics. He came across to where I was sitting and looked at me...his mouth closed

like a trap, and he trudged towards an entrance where a car was waiting. He got in the car carefully, as if suffering from haemorrhoids. He was still clutching my passport. The car raced away in a cloud of blue smoke from its exhaust...from a distance he looked at me before the car turned right.

The LESVOS sounded its strident siren. The tourists were pressed against the rail under the awning, laughing, waving at me, shouting advice...one shrill voice informed me that...'the Turks can only hold you for seven days'. I felt that English phlegm should be seen not to be an abstract adjunct. I stood up, forced a wide smile and held my hands together above my head. My guard looked at me, his lined face couched above a lantern jaw, looking as if he were awaiting another basketful of kittens. I sat down again on the warm wooden bench. Fifteen moments later the chain holding the short slatted carriageway to the LESVOS rattled, as if it were being removed, and heavily moustached Greeks peered through adjacent portholes...I felt a surge of panic, because very shortly a decision would be made to chug the LESVOS away from the jetty. The tourists were now silent, because they realised the climax was very close. The heat was so strong that dehydration was the norm, but now I was sweating profusely...my head whipped round as I heard a screech of brakes. The official got out, smiling broadly, waving my passport. He crossed to me.

"Everything is O.K." he said. He put his arm affectionately round my shoulders and escorted me to the LESVOS. The chain had been withdrawn...two Greeks held my arms and pulled me aboard...the engine surged into life. I staggered up the companion-way to the deck. The tourists smiled, one or two nodding sagely...Diane wanted to know why...'it always happens to you'. ***

On Sunday we decided to walk round the southern coast of Lesbos, south of our hotel, to Cape Kavouroninos, a distance of 8 kms. It was extremely hot, and Peter and Beryl thought it was a foolhardy project, bearing in mind that we would have to walk back again, a total distance of about ten miles.

We dressed lightly, heads covered, I carried a plastic bag with towels, camera and other accessories...we left the hotel at 11 am and walked southwards along the minor road.

We noted a Greek military post observing Turkey...we walked on high roads round wide bays of deep blue sea, gradually the Turkish coastline slipped behind us and we saw two small islands appear, and soon the opposite coast of the large inland sea.

Two more military posts with radar pointing eastwards, three more wide bays, pine scent pervading the air, and we saw the thin line of a black beach at the head of the inland sea.

We walked slowly...thoughtfully...the only shade from the violently assaulting sun was from little avenues of pine trees, and sometimes fresh air raced up from gulleys leading down to the sea, full of broken trees where heavy rains, at some time or other, had raced down from the high mountains on our right.

It took two hours to reach Cape Kavouroninos, we were thirsty but not too tired, as we had walked slowly to retain our strength and comfort.

A taverna was off the road to the left, close to the sea. We had ouzo, Greek salad and fish, a long, thin, curved fish, head, fins and tail rampant, dull eyes hoping we wouldn't enjoy the meal, which was fabulous.

The beach was composed of large black stones, slippery

where the sea lapped over them. To get to a swimming depth was like walking on hot ice...when we returned to the shore our knees and elbows were bruised. The locals were sun-bathing on the beach using foam cushions to ensure comfort, they looked quite surprised that people had actually bathed on that beach.

Almost three hours to return to Katia...walking gently, extremely thirsty, but controlled...the hotel residents lying at the side of the swimming pool muttered from behind their hands as we supported ourselves to our room.

One night the lights blacked out at the Katia at 10.45pm, whilst the residents were having drinks on the terrace after dinner. We made our way carefully to our room...just off the stone path I noted a little greenish light, a glow worm, throbbing in a delighted manner now that it had the monopoly of the darkness.

We had a wide marble-tiled terrace behind our room and I looked up and saw the magnificent spread of the Milky Way... the only earth lights visible were a dozen miles away on the Turkish coast, little street-light strings of pearls. I am an enthusiastic amateur astronomer, as I've explained before, and I picked my way unerringly amongst the constellations and visible planets. I know that our Solar System is on an arm of our galaxy, and accordingly most of the bright stars we see are part of the arm, and I looked up and pondered and suddenly saw everything in three dimensions, instead of being in a planetarium. I was able to visualise the galactic arm, almost to see it join the main body. Why, I asked myself, is the bright centre of our galaxy hidden by dust clouds, when the central mass of many side-viewed galaxies in the far reaches of the Universe is visible? Shouldn't we see the top and bottom of the bright centre, even though the black band of interstellar gas bisects it, because we are on a plane? Diane said it would be a wonderful night to see a satellite, and as if on cue, to make my night complete, we saw one travelling across the sky from south to north, skipping past the Great Bear.

This night I lay awake for a long time until ouzo captured my brain.

Next morning, as Diane and I were frugally breakfasting at our table, Peter and Beryl asked if we would like to accompany them to Methymna, on the northern tip of the island? We met them half an hour later.

Peter now knew the road to Kalloni, and after an ouzo at a roadside taverna in the locale, we turned north and drove a mere 15 kms through very mountainous countryside to Petra.

We surveyed the uninhabited black sandy beach at Petra, then drove the other 5 kms to Methymna, which had a settlement there over 3,000 years ago. The little town is on a high headland, surrounding a picture-book castle, built by the Genoese circa 14th century A.D.

We drove to the castle. I just could not believe my luck. Below a turretted wall at the northern aspect, a section of soil had been cut away to facilitate parking vehicles. The vertical band of hard-packed soil under the castle wall was peppered with jutting sections of brown pottery. They had to be in the foundations of the castle prior to it being constructed. Notices at the airport at Mitilene and in

Katia warned that the exportation of Greek archaeological items was forbidden without permission....I knew that this probably referred to important items such as vases or statues, but just where was their line of demarcation? So I merely took the pieces of pottery as illustrated. I did find a large piece of blue-tinted opaque glass with a fluted centre, as if from a vase, but I figured this might come into the 'forbidden' confines, so I re-buried it.

The castle covered a wide area...it was spacious inside, also with little pieces of pottery in the hardened soil; bushes with bright red flowers were scattered all around. The view from the turrets was magnificent in all directions

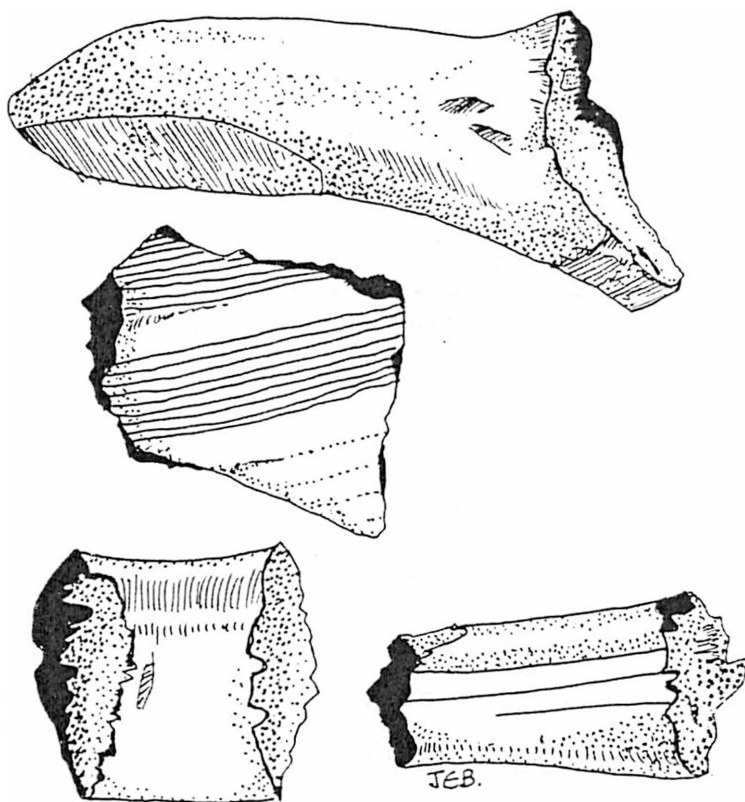
...northwards the expanse of blue sea...eastwards, wild rocky scenery...southwards, the coast as far as Petra, westwards, more blue sea. Below the castle on the west side was the village; gregarious bungalows with white, pink, red and yellow walls with red pantiled roofs.

We drove down to the little harbour at the northerly tip of Lesbos...a few fishing boats were moored at the jetty, and shoals of little fish sought the shadow of the slightly rocking boats. Tables were spread all over the harbour area, tourists were sipping ouzo...they all had English accents.

We stopped at Petra for a swim. The sand was black, and angled steeply into very deep water a short distance from the beach. The water was very warm and we porpoised for half an hour. A sole young girl around fifteen years of age, definitely English by her appearance and demeanour, sat down on the beach with a towel wrapped behind her, disrobed and put on a bikini. Fortunately, I was in front of her, just a few feet away, bobbing about in the water, snorting through my moustache. ...she must have noted my interest, but didn't seem to bother. Peter was also treading water in close proximity...

We taxied to Mitilene several times; we were soon au fait with locations of streets and shops. Sometimes luxury cruisers were berthed in the harbour, and several Hellenic Navy vessels 'tied up' there, regularly cruising along their side of the imaginary line between the Greek and Turkish waters.

A narrow main street bore most of the shops and stores, there



POTTERY FOUND IN CAR
PARK EXCAVATION AREA,
METHYMNA CASTLE~1986.

wasn't a pavement and cars and trucks were driven carefully amongst the promenaders, mostly Greeks purchasing their daily necessities, although tourists were about seeking the souvenir shops, mostly dealing in ostentatious trash, but with diligent searching good quality shops were to be found.

We traced our way through the narrow side streets to the castle....a lot of the compacted little houses were dingy, with lumps of plaster missing, but this was the old part of Mitilene. The payment to enter the castle was 100 drachma, but that sum represented one of the biggest bargains I have ever obtained. The area surrounded by the castle walls was vast, and I was sad to see that the construction of the high walls, mostly granite, also included parts of the ancient Greek acropolis. Aristotle is supposed to have taught in the ancient Greek town, where the castle presently stands. He would have seen an agora, a theatre, an asklepios, and two parts of the ancient port were joined by two marble bridges which, in those days of superb architecture, were described by a contemporary writer as 'magnificent'.

Most of the castle, I understand, was built during and after the Byzantine occupation of Lesbos (then known as Mitilene) circa 1400 A.D. Many pieces of white marble from the ancient Greek buildings are scattered around the grounds inside the walls, including long fluted pillars. Of course, I was on the alert for ancient pottery, and in long brown grass I found the neck rim with part of an attached handle of an amphora. It was an incredible find, but realisation hit me at the moment of euphoria...this definitely was not an item to try and smuggle out of the country. It almost broke my heart, but after fondling the artifact for a couple of moments I replaced it where I had discovered it.

A section in the middle of the site was roped off, and a notice in English stated that a Canadian team were excavating and would be pleased to answer questions...but this was their rest day. But where they had excavated deeply into the soil and rock, steps and walls could be seen, showing habitation existed from the earliest times.

Outside the castle was a pine wood, sloping down to the harbour; against the castle wall I counted a pile of twenty white pillars...there is surely scope for the reconstruction of the acropolis, and, after all, the Turks are doing it in Bergama !

We walked downhill back to the town, to the harbour to see the statue of Sappho, whom the Ancients referred to as the Tenth Muse. She was ' on top of the Aeolian pyramid' and in 591 B.C. she turned her house in Mitilene into a school for poetry and music. Her pupils were all female, to whom it is stated she showed much devotion, a feeling allegedly unanimously mutual, and she was known to write 'erotically passionate verses' to her students. Ancient Roman comedians, who performed to coarse and vulgar audiences, made insinuations regarding the close sexual bond between the women, hence the word 'lesbian' has found a place in our language to denote this deviation. Sappho stands on a white plinth in white robes, facing the sea..she has a lyre in her left hand, and her face bears a whimsical expression as if saying... 'Girls, please don't have your hair cut short and wear tweed jackets, thick socks and big boots; it spoils my image'.

The last day came, its approach accelerating all the time during the blissful second week. Taxis, still swerving to

carefully avoid the unfilled potholes, left us at the airport. The Boeing 727 came in exactly on time and disgorged its cargo of white-faced tourists looking enviously at us as we bared our arms and opened our shirts to let them see our brown bodies. We took their places...I breathed a sigh of relief that inquisitive customs officials hadn't found my four pieces of pottery in Diane's hand luggage.

We blasted off northwards across this beautiful island, looking brown and dark green and mysterious from the air, and at the Turkish mountains as they became vague and slightly bluish as they disappeared over the curved horizon.

BRONZE COIN SHOWING HEAD OF MARS.
213 -209 BC (x 2)



1987 THE PEBBLE GATHERERS OF MACEDONIA

"Yes," we decided," we would take our two grandchildren to Greece for a fortnight's holiday."

It was not really a last resort decision; although I was approaching my 61st birthday...Diane, though not really reticent regarding the announcement of her age, would still rather be referred to as being a few unspecified years younger than myself. The fact that it is common knowledge that we have a son in Australia aged 37 years, and that we were married when she was twenty years of age suggests to her that people are not really adept at mental arithmetic. One's age, of course, though an unquestionable statistic is still abstract when compared with one's physical and mental state at the time of one's own reflection; I consider myself to be on the credit side of nevertheless approaching senile dementia, and due to my morning quota of 250 'press ups' I believe I present a satisfactory picture of a finely-attuned middle-aged man still capable of flared and snorting nostrils if given a few days notice of extra-curricula activity!

We felt that the two boys were of an age where the educational aspect of foreign travel would be beneficial to their appreciation of 'how other people lived'.

Steven, 11½ years old, had recently passed an important examination assuring attendance at a higher-grade school as a prelude to a possible university education in

seven years time. He had an interest in sporting activities, but was presently obsessed with a computer which I had awarded to him upon the successful examination result.

Peter was four years younger, and had also obtained a good school report. Both boys were tall for their ages, blue-eyed, blond hair, laughed quite a bit, and had melodious accents which bore traces of a basic English pronunciation embroidered lavishly with a flowery Ulster accent.

Diane and I selected the Gerakina Beach Hotel in Halkidiki, because the brochure showed a photograph of a large sandy beach, surrounded by chrystal-clear water, '1½ hours coach drive south of Thessalonika'.

The boys arrived at Heathrow on Saturday 11th of July 1987...Diane met them...this permitted us one whole day to get acquainted before we left late on Sunday night.

Our charter flight to Salonika left Gatwick at 6.45 am on Monday morning, a most unsatisfactory time, because we could not reach Gatwick from Hatfield by travelling early in the morning, so we had to spend the night at the airport. I sensed it would be beneficial if the boys had a long sleep on Sunday afternoon, but probably because of childish excitement they were tearing round my house and garden like blue-arsed flies, and it was obvious that even if they were ordered to bed, they would not sleep...ergo...perchance if they were physically exhausted they might fall asleep on a seat in Gatwick.

We reached Gatwick at 11.30 pm...most of the seats had already been captured by holiday-makers with the same problem as ourselves, but I was able to skilfully obtain two seats...trouble was, four persons were in my party. Diane and Steven sprawled on the seats, but Peter was absolutely exhuberant and in the following five hours he and I explored every corner of the concourse, myself merely being a reluctant escort.

We eventually booked in at the Monarch Airlines desk, took the mysterious robot satellite train to the departure lounge, awaiting the call to our 'plane flight number OM 843. Diane and Steven were bleary-eyed but cognisant of our impending departure, but Peter was electrified with excitement as we boarded the Boeing 757. The boys had already drawn the long straw to see who was to have the window seat...Steven won...as soon as the 757 took off, Peter's head fell against my arm. He was completely asleep, there was no element of somnolency, this was the sudden snap of exhaustion. The uncertain aroma of heated sausages and bacon, normally his favourite breakfast, failed to awaken him. I lifted an eyelid, the eyeball was unseeing, oblivious to my snapping fingers. Steven and I shared his breakfast. The snow-capped peaks of the Austrian Alps passed underneath us...Peter had especially wanted to see them...the rugged Yugoslavian terrain and the mountains of western Macedonia were excused his perusal.

The 757 landed at Salonika...the female official stamped our passports lustily, ignoring a sweaty hand exploring my face as Peter, hanging round my neck, struggled to get his fingers up my nostrils like a Ten-Pin-Bowling grip to maintain his status quo. Whilst Steven and I awaited our cases and collected them, Peter was sprawled over our hand-luggage, the object of eyebrow-raising solicitude by patrons of the Salonika Airport building, not a place for quiet contemplation.

Our charter company, Horizon, had coaches lined up

to distribute the passengers to the various holiday locations. I carried Peter inside our vehicle, and he lay across Diane's lap in a spontaneous foetal posture.

"Very hot, isn't it ?" Diane observed. We had been to Greece several times, and had experienced very hot weather, but this seemed more emphatic. I agreed with her, my dry lips received no salve from my rasping tongue.

Along a double carriage-way for some miles south of Salonika until we reverted to a tarmacadam road...people in the coach were silent, as if breath was too precious to waste on idle chatter.

We reached Gerakina, sited on the coast between the two long strips of land Kassandra and Sithonia. I carried Peter from the coach to register and collect the key to our chalet. His bleary eyes opened.

"When do we fly from Gatwick ?" he asked.

When he realised he'd slept through the flight, a sausage and bacon breakfast and a long coach journey, his chagrin was obvious, though controlled.

A minion pushed our cases and Peter and took us to the chalet, a mere hundred yards from the hotel complex. I saw people lying under the shade of trees, seeming to compete for the shade.

The boys were anxious to go to the beach, but Diane disciplined them to assist with unpacking before we did a preliminary reconnaissance. The large swimming pool was fifty yards from our chalet, but it was being cleaned and refilled. Plenty of people were swimming in the sea, and, yes, Steven and Peter looked at each other before giving me the information I had already digested.

"Bampa" they said. They always called me Bampa. "Bampa, did you see those topless ladies ?"

They always referred to the exhibitionists as 'ladies'.

I nodded, unsuccessfully attempting to control the smirk of triumph.

After a further look around, realising that my wildest dreams were to be fulfilled, we returned to the chalet for a rest.

We slept for several hours, then went for dinner in the Byzantine Restaurant, then returned to the chalet where I carefully briefed my party on anti-mosquito training. I lit a coil outside the slightly-opened door, the fumes of which were allegedly noxious to mosquitos. With all the electric lights on, and with rolled newspapers, we ruthlessly sought out the evil little blood-sucking critters, smiting them, splattering them all over the walls. My final precaution was to smear arms and legs with a spray.

We were all perspiring after this conflict, but I still ordered everyong to drink a cup of mineral water because of the heat. I told them that if they didn't move about, they wouldn't perspire.

Because of our previous night's lack of sleep, oblivion settled over us.

Next morning, no mosquito bites. We heard raised voices in the chalet next to us, and we listened.

"I heard them buzzing round me all night and I've been bitten twelve times."

A male complained bitterly to his loved one, and he replied that he would obtain a salving lotion immediately.

The boys looked at me with raised eyebrows of approbation. Bampa had been quite correct to hunt mosquitos

although at the time it had appeared quite eccentric (Diane's words.)

At breakfast, people complained about the heat. Many of the patrons were English, but there were also sizeable contingents of Germans, Swedes, Danes and Hollanders.

I felt eyes looking at me, which, mysteriously, is an esp facility which remains dormant in our brains.

I looked in the direction my esp indicated, and a man lazily looked away in another direction. He and I were probably the oldest men present. He was tall, hair greying, and I reckoned he was German. Diane also noticed that he had been looking at me. From then on, for several days, I kept looking at him to see if he was looking at me, and we were !

People sprawled under trees, hiding from the sun, utilising a new innovation...a small fan, held about a foot from ones face...it was powered by two small batteries. Cold air circulated briefly, permitting a beautiful respite from the heat, lasting only as long as the blades revolved. Diane and Peter immediately purchased fans, and used them ostentatiously. I ordered the boys to wear wide-brimmed floppy hats and I also wore a hat to set a good example,

I have trees in my garden in Hatfield, and if I had wished to spend time under their shade I would not have journeyed to Halkidiki, so we went to the swimming pool. The water was very warm, and I speedily joined the topless beauties cavorting in the water. I had to stay with Peter, because he was not permitted to swim out of his depth, and many of the girls inhabited this area, the theory apparently being that if they were in the deeper water the men couldn't see they were topless. I have worked for the last thirty three years on the premise that all fingerprints are different, and after preliminary research it occurs to me that the same Law of Nature applies to boobies. The variations of size, shape and colour suggests that a voluminous thesis is waiting to be written, but unfortunately I cannot undertake the task as I have research commitments in other directions.

Whilst Diane and Steven swam in the pool or lazed in the loungers, I took Peter on an expedition southwards along the sand, skirting several small bays. The sand was incredibly hot under our feet, and we sought the yard wide strip of sand where the warm sea water lapped across it. I discovered small pebbles of marble which had been eroded by the sea over aeons of time, bearing in mind that the Mediterranean does not feature much tidal activity. The pebbles were mostly flat and circular, some of them completely symmetrical, and these were the ones we sought...green, pink, pure white, red, some with multi-colour striations straddling the flat surfaces. Peter and I scanned, picked up, examined, rejected, gradually collecting a score or so of perfectly shaped pebbles of various colours.

In the more secluded bays shy girls sunbathed, presumably not wishing their boobies to be ogled, and sometimes they lay on the hard sea-washed sand, because the landward sand was far too hot for their bodies. Peter and I stepped carefully around them, paddling in the water, pretending to look for pebbles, and Peter, under the misapprehension that I was totally absorbed in pebble-collecting would whisper hoarsely:-

"Did you see those ladies, Bampa ?"

"Er, oh crikey, no," I would lie persuasively, so as not to cause his little mind to consider that Bampa could be diverted from the main chance.

Before we went to dinner that night Diane was sceptical about our collection of pebbles as we deposited them on a table. She understood the miracle of infinitesimally slow honing but did not appreciate their aesthetic value.

"No one else would collect them" she observed, and indeed, Peter and I had not observed any other pebble hunters. But in just a few days we were to be magnificently vindicated.

That night I completely closed the sliding doors before remorselessly slaughtering the few mosquitos who had thought to outflank us. It was extremely hot. Diane complained that closing the doors and windows would make us perspire heavily during the night...it was common sense, but I felt that it was essential for our bodies to remain untouched by ravaging mosquitos. We each drank a glass of mineral water and retired to our separate beds. I fell asleep to the sound of battery-operated fans whirring in the darkness.

It dawned on me, by the various signs that I have indicated, that the heat was excessive, but it was rather a shock to scrutinise the front page news of the English newspapers, which Diane has expensively purchased, one day late, and discover that Greece was gripped in the highest temperatures ever recorded. Three hundred people had died, it reported, and Athens and Salonika were particularly affected. A few English tourists had fatally succumbed. I purchased more bottles of pure mineral water, and kept them quite cold by standing them on the marble floor of the bathroom, and we frequently drank cups of water, as I realised this was the way to combat dehydration. More people were sheltering under trees in the complex, but my party spent a long time in the swimming pool...I had coaxed Peter to sprockle to the deep end by holding onto the ribbed jutting edge of the pool. He actually jumped off the plank into twelve feet of water, I was underneath him to catch him. But we had to clear the pool because the 'Grand Water Polo Final' was to take place.

THE HUNS took the water first...these were strong men wearing black and white striped polo hats and black swimming trunks; their faces were unsmiling, chins thrust forward, eyes little darting dots of venom. They were German, of course, but there was no tension in the scenario, because their opponents were also mostly German, with an Englishman and a Dane literally thrown in to make the opposition. The referee was a young lady on the administrative staff of the hotel...she had little initial difficulty because THE HUNS quickly rattled in half a dozen goals. But the opposition fought back, players were dragged under the water and a fist or two were thrown. Each time such a contretemps occurred she would swiftly look to her left. Sprawled lazily in a lounge alongside the pool was the man with whom I had exchanged uncommunicative glances. He wore a blue costume. With raised eyebrows he clinically surveyed the contest, nodded or shook his head when an incident happened, and the girl whistled and ruled accordingly. No one argued with his decisions. For a second our eyes met as he noticed me, there was a quick flash of...comraderie?...then he returned to his unofficial umpiring.

"Oh look," panted Diane.

"Crikey," I expostulated.

The deep area of the pool was roped off for the

polo match, but a little girl about three years old, astride a plastic duck, had somehow paddled into the playing area..."Daddy" she cried, but THE HUNS and company were threshing the water like hooked sharks. Spectators gasped in horror, it would only be a second before the little girl was thrown into the maelstrom.

A flash to my left, and the man's ram-rod body burst into the water, surfaced, and arms, moving as if powerfully mechanically motivated, thrust him across the white surging water to the girl. He grabbed her, raised the rope and pushed her back into the safe area with a loud rebuke in German. Everyone except THE HUNS applauded. Energetically he levered his body out of the water and draped himself over the lounge. He looked at me, smiled and wagged a finger...'you were slow'...it suggested.

I had booked and paid £50.00 for my party to go on the ALEXANDER THE GREAT tour. I knew it would be enormously educational for the boys...but it was a twelve hour trip and on this day it was hotter than ever. We wore our wide-brimmed white hats and carried bottles of water as we boarded the air-conditioned coach, Diane and Peter already using their hand fans.

We picked up travellers from other hotels, mostly English but with half a dozen Germans.

It took one and a half hours to reach Salonika. As we approached the city centre, and the city houses one million people, I noted rows of blocks of flats on either side of the wide thoroughfare, crammed with people fanning themselves at opened doors and windows.

We changed coaches in the centre of Salonika and a female guide, a Greek lady, spent the rest of the day with us whilst north west of Salonika.

We drove northwards into Macedonia...much of the countryside was green and cultivated, spurting hose pipes putting arcs of water into 360 degree circumference. After three quarters of an hour we reached Pella, the birthplace of Alexander in 356 BC. The site was discovered in 1958, when a farmer accidentally discovered masonry when cultivating the ground. The area is some four square kms in area with wide streets, a few standing columns, but most spectacular of all were the mosaics.

It was so tremendously hot that the Germans refused to leave the coach. The guide tied a white handkerchief around her head, just revealing two brown eyes and a little nose, and gave us the briefest of instruction at the site. An amazing scenario developed...the guide sheltered against a column so as to protect herself from the sun, and a dozen of us archaeological buffs stood in line against an adjacent column, facing her, minimising the sun's pulsating heat.

THE SUN, Wednesday, July 29, 1987

Browned-off Brits

flee the deadly sun

From HENRIETTA KNIGHT in Athens

BRITISH holidaymakers told yesterday of their fight for plane tickets to escape from the killer heatwave in Greece.

Temperatures flared at Athens Airport as many found their flights home were overbooked.

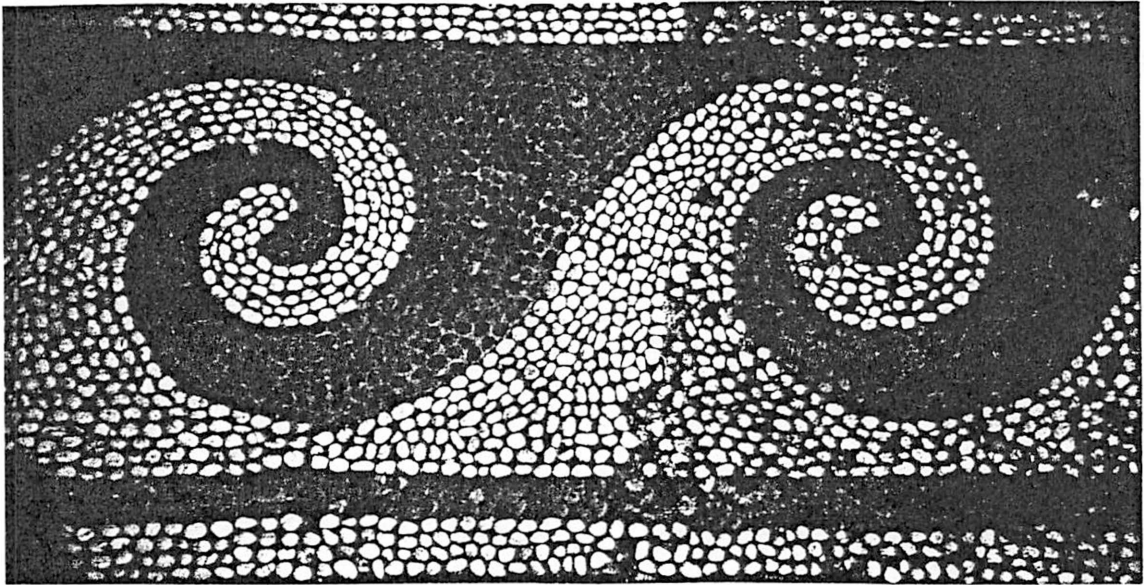
John Jacobs, 21, from South London, stormed: "I can't stand it. I just want to get straight out of this hellhole."

On the island of Skiathos dozens fainted after being forced to queue at the airport for more than an hour in the full glare of the sweltering sun.

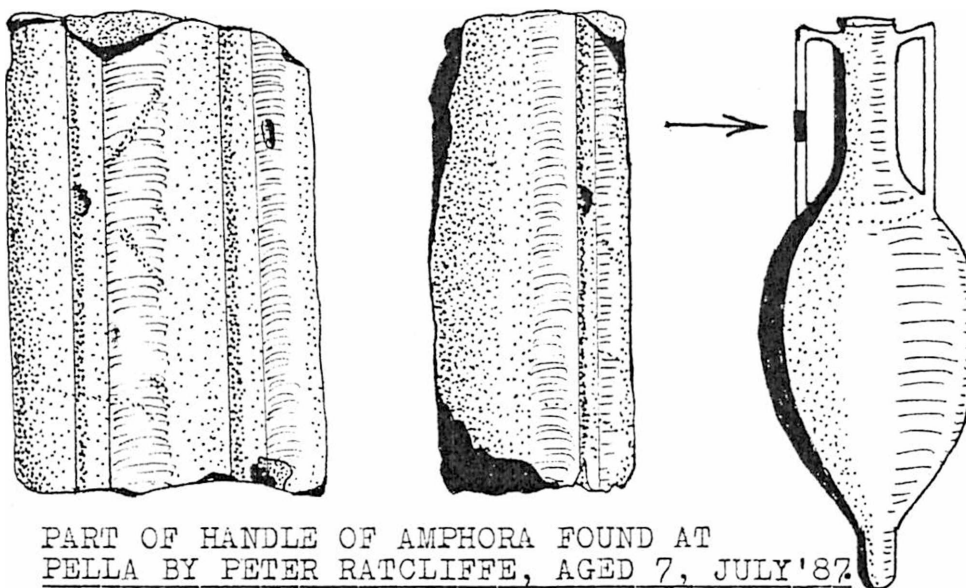
At least five Britons have died during the 10-day heatwave which has claimed nearly 900 lives.

Steven, Peter and I wandered off to look at the mosaics, one huge one, adjacent to the columns consisted of black and white squares surrounded by a border of white curves on a black background. (See photograph below). Suddenly Peter shouted as he noted the remarkable coincidence...the mosaics were made of pebbles. On closer scrutiny each of the black squares was composed of about 150 pebbles, ranging from dark grey to basalt black. The white squares featured the same number of pebbles, and there were many light colours, light brown, grey, lavender, pink and pure white.

BORDER OF PEBBLE MOSAIC, PELLA, MACEDONIA.



PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY STEVEN RATCLIFFE, AGED 11, JULY '87.



PART OF HANDLE OF AMPHORA FOUND AT
PELLA BY PETER RATCLIFFE, AGED 7, JULY '87.

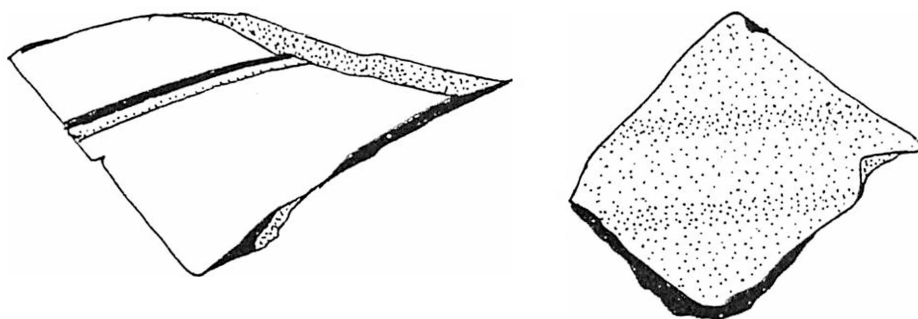
On many of the white stones we noted closely ribbed striations of colour, exactly as Peter and I had collected, and it was obvious that selectivity had been uppermost in the minds of the Macedonian pebble gatherers...they also only required smooth-shaped marble pebbles, and the only way they could have acquired them 2,400 years ago was exactly as Peter and I had done, scour the area where the sea dribbled against the sand.

We looked for pottery...Peter found part of the handle of an amphora, as illustrated, and we all found small shards of pottery, illustrated overleaf.

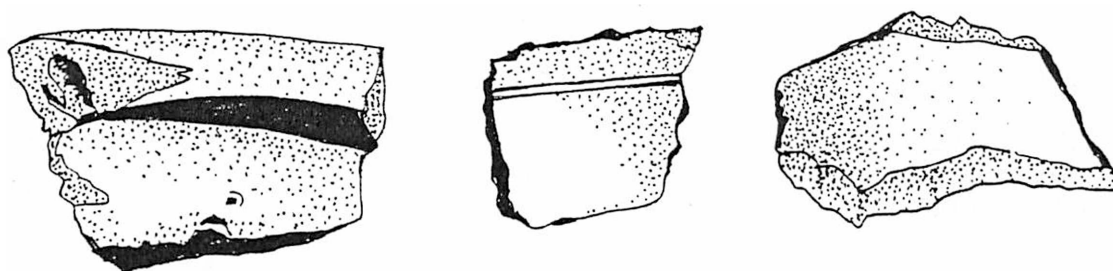
It was a relief to cower in the cool atmosphere of the Pella Museum, just across the road, where several mosaics were on display, including THE LION HUNT, which I have often seen in Greek History reference books. Two men, naked except for neck cloaks, stand either side of a sylistic lion...the men are armed with spear and sword, left, and raised sword, right. The guide pointed out little holes where the eyes should be...precious stones, depicting the optics of the hunters and the lion had been removed in antiquity.

We drove northwards; the countryside was still fertile. We stopped at a Macedonian tomb at Leukadia. It was found under a mound, and whilst travelling across Halkidiki, and north of Salonika it was not unusual to see such mounds, thirty or forty feet high, some tree'd, others grassy, which were obviously not naturally created. The guide, to my questioning, confirmed that they probably were tombs awaiting excavation.

At Leukadia the archaeological authorities had built a roof over the tomb to protect it and make it amenable for examination, but it had cracked from top to bottom, and



POTTERY SHARDS FROM PELLA, JULY 1987.



POTTERY SHARDS FROM SUMMER PALACE OF PHILIP II, VERGINA, JULY 1987.

thick planks had been structured around it, although it was still a magnificent sight.

Outside the tomb there was a tap in the stone wall, from which ice cold water was available...I cautioned my party to certainly swill their faces under it but but to drink it. A tractor pulled up, an aged Greek farmer and his son filled kettles. I saw a wooden box containing extremely large peaches at the front of the tractor, and in sign language, and rattling a few drachma, I indicated my interest. The boy, eyes gleaming, handed me four large peaches, and I gave him 100 drachma in various coinage. We wiped the peaches with tissue and sunk our teeth into them...absolute bliss...the juice dribbled down our chins and the flesh was soft and succulent.

Back into the coach... a half-hour drive up hill-

sides, with low mountains as a back-cloth and we stopped in the centre of a town named Veria, where St. Paul held one of his first meetings in Europe. The guide escorted us to a site nearby and showed us three white-washed stone steps, with worn edges and announced that those were the actual steps from which St. Paul had preached. Much clicking of cameras. The mosaic surround was of recent innovation, and truly it lacked the subtlety of the Macedonian mosaics.

We were allotted one hour to obtain lunch and return to the coach.

The sun's rays were so powerful that people were trying to smooth themselves against walls which were in the shadow. Luckily, this ancient town, with many Byzantine churches, had narrow streets along which one could flit adroitly and avoid the sun so long as they accorded with the direction one wished to travel.

Most restaurants had closed down for siesta or heat (that day it was the hottest...127 degrees), and we could only find one place open for business. The other passengers from our coach had found it first, and when we joined the end of the queue we were on the pavement outside. The waiters were cleanly dressed with towels over the arms as they took orders. A woman in an adjoining shop beckoned to us and we looked inside.

Hmmm.

Several men eating there had two days of stubble, were in shirt sleeves and smelled of unwashed Y-fronts. Untopped tomato sauce bottles, with their contents congealed down the outside, blushed in the centre of the tables, covered with newspapers.

We tried to edge our way out, but the proprietor, also unshaven, adroitly nipped from behind the greasy counter and barred our way. He whipped out the stubble of a pencil and requested our order.

We looked nervously at each other.

"Kebabs" I said.

He nodded triumphantly...the woman flicked a brownish towel and abolished the dead flies off a table to which we were invited to sit. I ordered four canned drinks which we opened like a burst from a Tommy Gun, wiped the revealed recesses with our shirt fronts and quaffed the glorious icy-cold contents.

After ten minutes of tense anticipation he gave each of us a length of wood with lumps of tender lambs meat skewered onto it...lovely.

He wrote down the cost...600 drachma...we paid his wife, the proprietors smiled in union and waved as we raced down the street to catch the coach which was emitting blue smoke rings from its exhaust.

Half an hours drive to Vergina, and from the fertile plain upwards along 'S' bends to the remains of a palace built in the third century for Alexander's father, old one-eyed Philip II. It was 2 pm, the hottest time of the day, but here, on high land overlooking a vast plain northwards there wasn't even the vantage of a breeze. The ruins were little more than foundations, with large piles of roof tiles heaped in several places. I found several pieces of pottery, as illustrated. The guide explained that several large mosaics had been assembled on the palace floors, but a few hundred years later, when Christians lived in the palace, they abhorred what they presumed to be the vulgarity of the designs, and destroyed them except for one extant

innocuous design. I did note a large number of small shiny black pebbles lying in the ruins, and after we had left the site I conjectured they were probably from the smashed mosaics, I earnestly wished I'd collected a few examples.

The guide briefly lectured us; most people sheltered under the trees, but I considered it desirable to walk over the site with the boys, looking for pottery shards, our wide-brimmed hats admirably providing shade, but Steven and I fequently pleaded with Peter to give us a blast from his fresh air machine.

We returned to Vergina for much-needed drinks...the royal tombs nearby were covered in vast corrugated iron structures to protect the vast and fruitful excavations taking place.

The coach returned south, soon through the northern outskirts of Salonika; we changed coaches once again in the centre of Salonika, then the drive to Gerakina.

We arrived at 7.30 pm...we were extremely hungry, and longed for dinner, but we quickly whipped on our bathing dress and threw ourselves in the empty swimming pool, allowing the still warm water to engulf us...we floated for half an hour and then ate ravenously.

The anti-mosquito offensive was still a considerable success...none of us had succumbed to even a nibble, though many other holiday-makers had been smitten, with queues at the 'Mini Market' for mosquito-bite salve. That night, after the heated exertions on the Trail of Alexander, we were very tired, but still drank our mineral water, and once again I exhorted them not to move about, but to lie still and sweating would not be a big problem. With the whirr of the battery fans in my ears I fell in a deep sleep.

I awoke with a shock in the middle of the night.

Something was terribly wrong.

I lay and assessed the situation in my clouded mind, and the sensation suddenly struck me.

I WASN'T BREATHING !

My chest was still, unmoving, my nose and mouth dry and unassailed by the humid air.

With all my strength I forced my rib cage to function, I took a tremendously deep breath, forced out the air, then another chest expansion, then blowing out the air as if I was trying to extinguish 61 candles. I did this for a long time until the exertion seemed unnecessary and my breathing routine settled once more and I returned to sleep.

I suppose medical opinion will be that I over-estimated the situation in my sleep, or half-sleep, that my breathing was continuous though perchance imperceptible, but I put it on record that I reckon I had a narrow escape that night.

I rested the following day, in the shade like most of the other people, permitting myself only the luxury of a pebble run with Peter.

At dinner, the German sat a couple of tables from us...he was with his wife.

Diane noticed again that he was looking in my direction.

"He looks as though he was in the Afrika Korps," she observed, and immediately it all became very clear. Most people at Gerakina were young, the many parents with young children were about thirty years old. He and I were the same

age; twice as old as the others, he knew I was English and I believed he thought that we may have something in common, we had both been in the army during WW II.

The diners in the intervening tables moved away, and we looked at each other across the crowded room.

Grey-flecked hair, bronzed face, etched under the eyes with the sometimes bitter experience of life; a slightly cynical cavalier smile hidden by the greying moustache, the square, clean-shaven chin confidently thrust forward.

His visage bore a similar configuration !

I silently agreed with Diane; definitely the Afrika Korps, and most probably the steppes of central Asia. Of course, I have numerous scars received during my army days in WW II...these were mostly caused by my insistence in always taking my father's advice. He was an old soldier, and when I joined the army during the war he had a short 'man-to-boy' talk... 'Always be the first soldier outside the cook-house door,' he said, with a far-away look in his eyes, 'you never know when they're going to be short of food.' I was always successful, though obviously meeting opposition, especially from soldiers who were there when I arrived, and who signalled their selfish inhibitions with the steel toe-caps of their army boots.

That night we performed the now routine anti-mosquito parade. We were still untouched, but I had a worrying thought...if AIDS could be spread by a hypodermic syringe, who not a mosquito proboscis ?

A couple of days before the holiday concluded, we booked four seats on a coach tour to the Petralona Caves, which, according to an illustrated booklet I purchased in the hotel 'from a scientific point of view, anthropological and palaeontological, is one of the most important in the world'.

The coach drove westwards for half an hour to the seaside village of Nea Moudania, where we were permitted to sojourn for two hours before the coach took us to Petralona. This fishing village is at the top of the Kassandra promontory, on the west coast. Fishing boats came into the port, each towing two or three smaller boats with extremely large downwards-pointing neon lights, obviously to attract fish during the night. We gathered round to see the fishermen unloading fish into slatted wooden boxes full of lumps of ice...the fish were small, and the nets weren't really full, which is why I suppose the fishermen looked sullen, and gave us askance glances, muttering to themselves.

Diane and Peter toured the shops, many of them engaged in trying to sell shoddy souvenirs to the tourists, but I had noted to the south of Nea Moudania a cliff about half a mile in length, a reddish colour, showing strata lines, and as I had got Steven very interested in fossils he was quite keen to assist me to examine the area. It was one of the most depressing experiences I have ever had during my numerous visits to Greece. The base of the red cliffs was a couple of yards from the sea, and this area, which should have been fine sand, was covered with all the flotsam and jetsam with which one associates the presence of uncaring humanity. Car tyres, empty bottles and cans, thick oil, broken masonry and rotting wood formed a foul-smelling barrier, and only our extreme enthusiasm to examine the strata forced us to negotiate the mess. After all our effort to negotiate the morass, the strata was nonfossiliferous, and we dejectedly returned along this frightful avenue of

rejected effluent. It was the first time I had ever noted such an unpleasant area on the Greek coastline, where normally the water is chrystal-clear.

We wiped our footwear in the long dry grass and re-joined civilisation, awaiting the coach run to Petralona.

The little village of Eleohoria is twenty minutes coach drive north of Nea Moudania, and passing through it there is a signpost 'The Petralona Cave'. There actually is a village called Petralona, under the shadow of Mount Katsika. Petralona comes from the Greek words 'petrina alona' which succinctly defines the horizontal layers of eroded limestone on the mountain, and means 'stone threshing floors'. One of the villagers, a certain Philippos Hadjandis was herb-hunting on the south west of Katsika in 1959, and when he rested he heard dripping water. He marked the spot, and the villagers, keen to discover a new spring, returned to the site, knocked away rocks and entered the magnificent cave we had come to examine.

At the cave entrance the visitors were divided into nationalities...as English people predominated, we were given priority, and the guide led us inside...it was cool and very slightly damp in there, for which we were very grateful, because this was the second hottest day of the heat-wave.

It took almost an hour to complete the tour; it was marvellous, vast chambers with stalactites and stalagmites, still dripping moisture...subtle lighting threw shapes into relief and the important palaeological aspects were extremely well displayed. The oldest fire known to have been started by Man, dated by the latest techniques, occurred in this cave, 700,000 years ago. The exact site has a replica fire. Another site reveals the location of a skull dated 200,000 years old (+ or - 40,000 years) thought to be a transitional stage between Homo Erectus and Homo Sapiens. Display cases inside the cave show the many tools of stone and bone, and fossilised teeth and bones of many animals found in the cave, mostly bears and hyena.

Outside, the heat barrier was like a door we had to struggle through after the cool interior of the cave. The small non-English party commenced the tour, and we patronised the small shop where tins of soft drink were sold as soon as they were removed from the refrigerators. In due course the coach returned to Nea Moudania and we returned to Gerakina in the original coach.

The boys were playing with video games in the recess under the swimming pool...Diane had walked down to the Mini-Market...I sat on a chair at the edge of the swimming pool, looking out to the sea, noting the deep red colour of the sun as it dropped towards the purple Kassandra frieze on the western horizon. I was able to muse alone for a few moments, chin on my balled right fist, contemplating the senario. So entranced was I that although I heard a chair scrape nearby and it impinged on my senses I rejected any association it might have with myself. I heard a cough, turned, and saw the elderly German with whom I had this mysterious abstract association. He smiled, eyes creased in the corners...resigned...at least we could have this talk between war veterans with which the others could not intrude or even understand. But I looked back at the sun as it preened itself for the final plunge...I didn't want to talk to him, why should I?...presuming of course that that was

the consideration. I got up from my chair and waved to Diane as she approached me across the sand, the lights from the restaurant throwing her figure into a yellow-tinged silhouette...

Steven and Peter had made friends with similarly-aged children of other nationalities, and we gave them a certain amount of freedom to disperse within the precincts of the swimming pool whilst we sat and watched the glorious sunsets.

This was our last night, and alone amongst the people we met we were mosquito-free. No bites at all in my party. That night we made our last reconnaissance, rolled newspapers mercilessly splattered on the walls where the insects had craftily inserted themselves hoping we wouldn't see them. The coil burned outside, our first line of defence; indeed, next morning at 7.30 am when we dressed for our last meal, our skins were clear of the nasty red lumps revealed on everyone else.

One and a half hours on the coach to Salonika... it was Monday morning, we were told that our travel representative was extremely busy with flights in both directions. The two groups threaded their set courses with difficulty in opposite ways in the airport concourse. We were not told from which desk the Heathrow flight would be administrated...there were a dozen desks, and my party, pushing the loaded trolley, moved with great difficulty from one to the other...I chose to follow the knowledgeable travellers who smiled smugly to themselves. Diane preferred to play Salonika Roulette...when one desk was cleared, she, and a hundred others, presumed the Heathrow flight would be called. It was chaotic..when the Heathrow desk was finally allocated it reminded me very much of scenes I've seen in Westerns where free prairie land was available, the best land for the fastest horseman...the prize here was to be well-placed in the queue for checking in. Meantime, the Greek administrative staff who had been vigorously fanning themselves in the extreme heat suddenly wilted and staggered away for resuscitation. The erstwhile passengers, of course, were not granted this injunction, and sweating bodies crammed together really brought out the best of Anglo-Saxon ability to absorb pressure...Diane tried to get our immediate neighbours to sing 'Rule Britannia', but they weren't too enthusiastic, as it would require energy and that was in short supply. After half an hour the Greeks returned and we were duly accomodated.

Our 757 was the very last 'plane to get permission to take-off. The pilot, in his intimate talk to his passengers made certain observations about the inefficiency of Salonika airport, specifically the air control section. I think they must have eavesdropped. We were sorry to go...

TETRADRACHM OF ALEXANDER
TROAS 130 BC (x 2)





1990 THE MOSAIC MAN

A friend of mine, Clive, offered to hire me his villa in Paphos, Cyprus, for two weeks at the beginning of July 1990, for three hundred pounds.

"It isn't a high price to pay," he observed, "because I can assure you that it is luxuriously furnished, with air-conditioning, television, video with a supply of films, a radio, fully equipped kitchen, etc."

I must state here and now that everything Clive told me was completely and utterly factual...not the slightest exaggeration.

He stated he would also book flights for Diane and myself, and our two grandchildren, Steven 14 years old, Peter 10 years old. A month before our departure date, he asked me for my cheque for £930.00.

"Sorry I couldn't manage to get you charter flights, so I've booked you all on a scheduled flight with Cyprus Airways. The flights are always punctual. During the flight you get a particularly good meal, and unlimited bottles of Cyprus wine are available."

I must state also that everything Clive told me about the flight came to pass.

A couple of days before the flight he called at my office and gave me the four air tickets, and the keys to villa 101, Ikeria Village, Tomb of the Kings Road, Paphos, together with a map for the taxi driver.

"Nothing can possibly go wrong," he stated, "but if it does, contact Big George on site. If the lovely big swimming pool isn't finished, a friend of mine called David has a villa half a mile away... you can use his pool."

It wasn't until we boarded the AIRBUS 310 at Heathrow Airport (it was two hours late) and I buckled myself in my seat that a chill suddenly struck me. Who was Big George? And why was he 'on site'?

The meal was the finest I've ever had during a flight... all beverages and wines were gratis, only spirits required payment. I had a couple of bottles of Cyprus red wine, a couple of white ones with dinner, and a red one after coffee, and yet one more white wine before landing to enable me to maintain my euphoric state of extreme pleasure.

My two grandsons beamed at the Immigration official, and his eyes bulged as he closely scrutinised Steven's temporary passport. He whispered to me that the boy's passport could only be used in E.E.C. countries...Cyprus has applied to join the E.E.C, but its application is presently in limbo. The official licked his lips...obviously he didn't want to put the boys on the next flight to London...he made a decision and hurriedly stamped the boys passport. Then he examined my passport...his face turned a strange colour under the early morning neon lights.

"When are you returning to London?" he croaked.

"Monday 16th July."

"But your passport expires on 17th July."

"I know, I've only just made it," I chuckled.

He pointed with a quivering right forefinger on a chart on the wall:-

'ALL PERSONS ENTERING CYPRUS MUST HAVE AT LEAST THREE MONTHS REMAINING ON THEIR PASSPORTS.'

Well, it was 2 am...he'd already let the boys enter the country...as if against his better judgement he hammered my passport with his stamp.

This was a gentleman...a rare species of the breed.

Three hundred passengers had disembarked, and there were chaotic scenes outside the airport, where a few taxis attempted to facilitate the suitcased throng. One entrepreneur asked Diane where we wanted to go...she showed him Clive's map... 'O.K.' he said, and pushed us inside a limousine in which two other passengers were already seated.

The driver swiftly left the airport and turned left for Paphos, merely a dozen kms away...we discovered in the early morning that Paphos is quite a large place.

Eventually, with a shout of triumph, he stopped outside a building in Icarus Village.

"No no", I shouted, showing him the map, "Ikeria Village."

Of course, I cannot understand the Cypriot language, especially when spit out of a row of even white teeth, but I did decipher one or two basic Anglo-Saxon expletives. He appeared to be somewhat perplexed, as was evinced by the way he performed a four-wheel spin and roared along the road to the destination of our two fellow passengers, who muttered incoherently as they staggered onto the forecourt of their hotel.

Our driver called his base over the radio, and tried to elicit the location of Ikeria Village. Eventually he reached a road with the sea on his left, swung to the right and parked outside a villa. It was 3 am.

The number 101 was on the door. I tried the latch key but the door wouldn't open. (I found out later that the lock on the door was burglar-proof, and required two turns of the latch key.) The taxi driver had dumped our four large cases, whipped the key out of my hand, turned it energetically to the right. The door opened. He pushed us out of the way, switched on the lights and the fans and dragged in our cases. His raised eye-browed expression suggested that he had 'gone through the card' in an attempt to initiate us into the Cypriot scenario. The fare he quoted was too cheap for the effort he had gone to on our behalf, so I tipped him far too generously.

We were all exhausted, so we switched on respective air-conditioned units in the various rooms and climbed into our beds, Diane deciding to unpack on the morrow.

I was in command of one thousand Russian tanks, facing one

one thousand German tanks on the steppes of Russia during World War II.

A thousand tank commanders looked at me for the signal to commence battle - I raised my right hand and brought it down swiftly and two thousand tank engines roared into first gear...there was a blinding light as my turret was hit by a shell.

Diane had switched on the bedside lamp and it burned into my unprotected eyes.

"What time is it?" I panted.

"Seven am," she snapped back.

"We've only been asleep for three hours" I protested.

"Three blasted excavators have just driven past our villa" she shouted, "and they will be returning in a moment.

They came back, the deafening roar even penetrating the wooden shutters over the windows, and the double-glazing.

We went to the patio, and three yellow excavators turned right and up a road, throwing white dust into the air. We looked to our right ..we saw white concrete-framed villas in course of construction. We looked to the left, from whence the excavators had returned...we could see the swimming pool, or at least the site of it...blue tiles on the inside of the pool sides, admittedly, but piles of concrete slabs, mounds of cement...nearby, Cypriot workers congregating around the periphery of pool, rakes in hand, obviously awaiting the arrival of Big George to give them his orders and supervise their execution.

We were in the midst of a dusty building site and the pool was not, I repeat, not, Clive...the swimming pool was not finished. It was sans water, Clive, and although I have no experience of construction work, it is going to be a long job finishing that pool.

Diane swept the dust off the patio table and chairs, and made me a big mug of coffee.

"At least the sun is shining in a cloudless sky," I observed, and then the excavators returned to the pool with their loads, this time waking up Steven and Peter.

David Levy and his wife Jacqueline called to see us at twelve noon. I had known them both for several years...when David retired from the Hertfordshire Constabulary, he married Jackie, one of the telephonists, and moved to his apartment in Paphos.

He told us that Paphos didn't have much of a beach, just a brief stretch of pebbles. However, he pointed out that Coral Bay was an excellent beach just 12 kms north of Ikeria Village, reached easily by frequent bus and taxis.

"Yes," he confirmed in answer to my question, "you can most certainly use the swimming pool on my complex; if anyone asks what you are doing, say that I have given you permission."

They drove away, promising to call and see us in the near future.

Diane prepared lunch, then we decided to go for a swim in David's pool. My instructions from Clive that David lived half a mile south of Ikeria Village was also an under estimate. We walked along a dusty path on the left side of a ribbon of tarmac, cars and motor cycles passing us at tremendous speed. This was no place for pedestrians, we were merely statistics.

After I had judged we had walked over half a mile, we reached GENISIS, a restaurant with a complex of flats at the rear. The swimming pool was large, and not many swimmers were using it. I saw an executive-type Cypriot in the restaurant. I mentioned to him that a Mr. David Levy owned property on the complex and said that we could swim in the pool. He said he had never heard of Mr. Levy, but he shrugged and smiled.

"But, anyway, you can certainly use the swimming pool."

We spent two hours in the pool, it was a respite from the heat of the sun, now at its zenith...but not many people took advantage of the balm the pool offered.

We walked back to Ikeria. The white villas and flats

with blue and green window shutters were on a crest leading to the sea ...on our left we could see the sea about a quarter of a mile away but we knew the coast was rocky and there were not any suitable swimming places.

It was 3pm...we had a snack and decided to go to Coral Bay...David had told us that taxi fares were cheap, so we crossed the busy road and stopped the first taxi. Actually, he stopped when he saw us. We drove past a 12th century Byzantine church, and noted many hotels being constructed. The road northwards follows the coastline... we noticed large areas on both sides of the road where bananas were being cultivated...the plants were about eight feet high with broad green leaves with little bunches of unripened green bananas at the bases and up the thick stem.

Coral Bay is an excellent place. The taxi cost us C£2.50, but it must be remembered that the Cyprus pound (C£) was worth rather more than one pound sterling...in fact, the British pound was worth 90 Cyprus cents. Coral Bay was the site of the first landing by the Greek Achaeans about three thousand years ago. On this day the beach was covered in sun beds with a large multi-coloured umbrella rammed between pairs of sun beds. Price C£3.00. The heat was now so oppressive that we had to conform to the monopoly. The sand was so hot that hopping was the only means of navigation between the rows of sun beds. We secured our sun beds with our towels, German style, and rushed into the blue sea... in fact, so swift was my progress that it was a few moments before I noted that many topless young ladies were enjoying the warmth of the sea.

After a couple of hours of sheer bliss, we caught a bus which deposited us at our villa.

Whilst we had been absent, small brown ants had invaded the kitchen, and were swarming over the areas where food was prepared. I seized the nearest spray I could find, PLEDGE, actually a furniture polish, and sprayed around the crack in the wall which I thought to be their entrance. We brushed other ants into the sink and washed them away. I had noticed some large black ants with pronounced pincers in the garden, and was thankful that they had not forced an entry.

We were all extremely tired, and retired quite early.

On Wednesday morning we bussed to Kato Paphos, the harbour area. There were restaurants, souvenir shops, hotels, etc, all specifically designed for the tourists, mainly English, who thronged the site, purchasing the ubiquitous garish souvenirs and seemingly delighted to be able to have 'full English breakfasts,' a delicacy I've always avoided, 'adhereing strictly to coffee and toast.

We returned to the villa for lunch, and found that the water had been turned off...pure water it had been, cold, clean, quite drinkable, except that it always left a white limestone-type residue in the kettle.

A young English couple were staying across the road and I sent Peter to ask if their taps were turned off...they most certainly were. Peter sought Big George near the swimming pool, who explained that it was quite common, sometimes for over 24 hours. "You tourists are very lucky," he told Peter, "in the villages it is sometimes cut off for four days."

Cyprus was in a drought condition, the usual rains early in the year had not arrived.

Charles, the young man, offered to drive Peter to a supermarket to purchase bottles of mineral water. He came back with a pack of six large bottles which cost C£5.00. We were totally unprepared for the water being cut off, Clive, otherwise we could have filled your array of saucepans with precious water. We washed the sweat off our faces with mineral water, and poured the contents of the sink into the toilet system after we had washed plates and cutlery with mineral water. Steven discovered the constructors were using a roadside tap, and we were able to provide a reserve of water for the cistern.

The water was cut off for 27 hours, Clive.

Charles said to me that evening:-

"Do I look like a German?"

It was a leading question...there was only one answer. Before we had met I said to Diane 'that chap over the road is a German'. He was tall, broad, very fair hair, light blue eyes...his face was square and rugged and he had a thick bull neck. If I had been casting for films and a German prisoner-of-war Commandant had been required, I would have chosen Charles.

"Frankly," I said carefully, "I must state, now that you mention the fact, that I suppose one could say there is some slight suggestion that you had Teutonic forebears...only because you made the observation, I hasten to add."

He told me a rather alarming story...he had been in Crete a couple of years earlier with Paula, astride a 1000cc motor cycle, and stopped at a village square. Charles was not to know that the Germans had executed every man in the village during WWII. The villagers became militant and surrounded him, shaking fists and attempting to hit him. He and Paula escaped by roaring along the dusty village street as fast as possible.

Charles turned to me and whispered an aside.

"I wear Union Jack underpants now."

A wise precaution, I told him, but advised him to adopt a thoughtful posture when stopping in front of a group of villagers in Crete next year and coyly unbuttoning his shorts to show his underpants.

"The Greeks had a word for it," I hissed.

We retired, leaving a very worried man.

David and Jackie came round next morning. I enthusiastically described the wonders of his swimming pool, and thankful we were to be accorded this privilege.

"And the restaurant provides superb meals at quite acceptable prices," Diane observed.

Ridges of skin formed across David's brow and warning beads of perspiration suddenly appeared on his chin.

"There isn't a restaurant on my complex," he said. "You've been swimming in the wrong pool."

The six of us took deep intakes of breath, all in different keys.

David described his complex in more detail...we were to be guided by a tv satellite dish on the roof of a nearby hotel.

Our kind and considerate friends then departed, stating that they would call for us at 6.45pm on Wednesday 11th July, dress informal, for a 'meze' at a taverna in the foothills of the Troodos Mountains, where the host was unused to tourists visiting his establishment.

Obviously we were anxious to visit the new swimming pool, but I introduced a subtle incentive by suggesting that we should first of all visit the mosaics to the north of the harbour, then examine the nearby Byzantine fort...get home for an early lunch and then visit the Levy Pool.

The 15 bus, always exactly in rapport with the timetable, dropped us at the harbour. We walked up the busy road, northwards to the entrance to the mosaics. These were at two different sites, although reasonably close together. A small entrance fee had to be paid in a small building (free to the boys) and we walked to the right along wooden corridors above the mosaics, protected from the elements by a sloping wooden roof. The mosaics, over a dozen of them, were unearthed within the last thirty years or so on the sites of two Roman villas circa 300AD. One could lean over the wooden bannister, getting an excellent view of the most beautiful and detailed mosaics just a yard or two below. I was

so entranced with one long mosaic that I photographed it in four sections, forming a continuous panorama. I have to admit with considerable embarrassment that I was using 400 ASA colour film, and I forgot to change the camera ASA reading, which was at 100. The photographs are nicely in focus, and fit together very well, but I have lost the delicate colour detail, the photographs unfortunately having a subtle light dun hue. This particular mosaic, possibly twenty feet long and eight feet in width, has a surround rather like intertwining rope. On the left is depicted a seated youth with leaves in his hair, proffering a large bunch of grapes to a topless gal, reclining, who is holding an unidentifiable circular object in her right hand. This section is titled 'AIONYCOCAKAH'. The central motif shows a balding, bearded man of heroic physique, standing, holding the reins of two beasts of burden, pulling a square bi-wheeled cart with large sacks on top. The letters above the man in this exciting episode are 'IKAPIOC'. To complete the mosaic tableau, on the right, are two young men...one of the youths is drinking from a flask...the other youth is reclining on the floor, leaning against a sack, as if inebriated. The words 'OHIPWT OI OINONZIONTEC' are painted above the chaps.

To the left of the pay kiosk was a zig-zag fenced pathway leading to a wooden pathway three feet above building foundations. We came to the 'HOUSE OF AEON', which had been excavated by a team of Polish archaeologists. Once again the roof-protected mosaics were superb. On the return along the raised wooden route, Steven noted a pottery shard on the ground...he adroitly dropped through the wooden fence, retrieved it and continued his perambulation in one smooth movement. I was extremely proud that my tuition had been so faithfully rendered.

It was merely a short walk in the unrelenting sunshine to the ruin of a Byzantine fort.

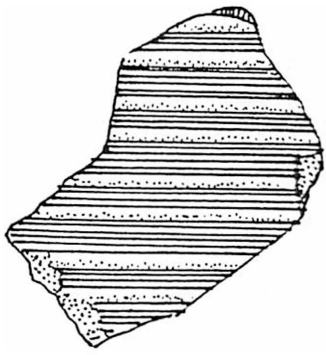
The first thing I heard was a shout of triumph from Peter, who had found a portion of amphora handle, his speciality. We discovered that pottery shards were scattered all over the fort site, as if seeded by a cunning Tourist Manager. There were so many shards on the ground that selectivity became a premium.

The boys found the ruined fort quite exciting. Portions of the walls and two arches were standing, although small black numbers on stone blocks, especially on the arches, displayed the blessings of reconstruction. Granite Greek columns were lying all over the site, it looked like a hotch-potch of antiquity. Steven and Peter discovered two long tunnels which we explored, Peter having had the initiative to have brought with him a small torch. We entered one tunnel and in the probing light followed its twists and turns before the other end of the tunnel was reached...about ten foot above us was a metal grill. Exit was impossible so we had to retrace our steps. God, it was humid in that tunnel. Every breath was an endeavour...our bodies were soaked in perspiration. Although it was probably '100 in the shade' when we reached the entrance, it was a tremendous relief. I decided to permit the boys to investigate the other tunnel without my assistance.

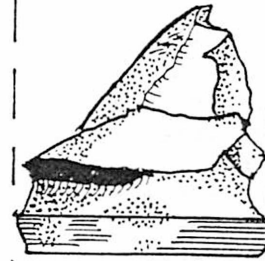
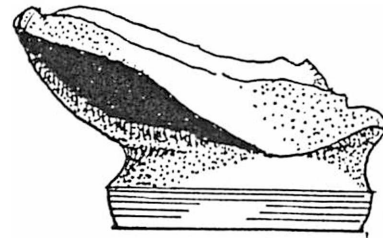
Diane had wisely remained seated on a lump of granite under a tree and I sat down beside her. I felt pain on my calf, and found that I had inadvertently hit my leg against the carved top of a Doric capital. The deep grazes bled for several minutes, but I bore the blood and pain with honour, taking responsibility for the barbarians who had devastated this site, hoping that the spirit of an anonymous Greek mason somewhere up there would sigh with relief now that revenge had finally been obtained.

We shouted to the boys to join us, took a swift taxi to Ikeria, snatched a quick lunch, and walked a mile to Levy's Pool.

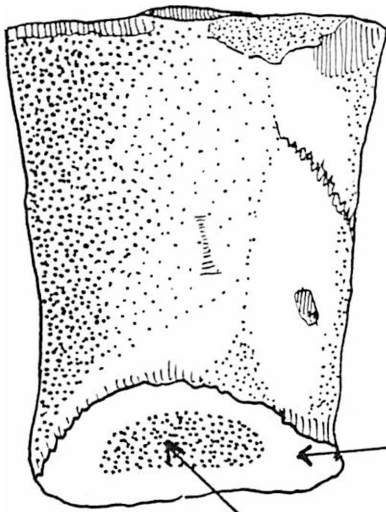
The pool was quite large, full of spring water, brought from the mountains in twenty eight tanker loads, because the local authority would not permit the pool to be filled from their water pipes. It was 2 pm...the sun was a pulsating white orb, giving no quarter,



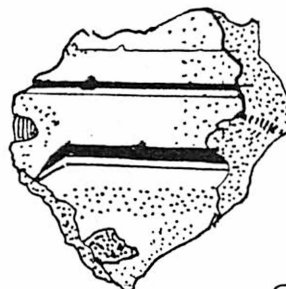
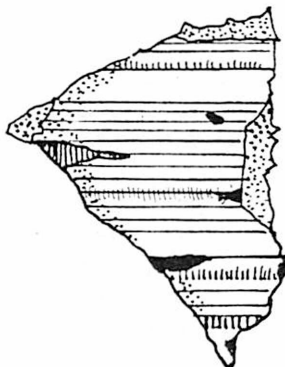
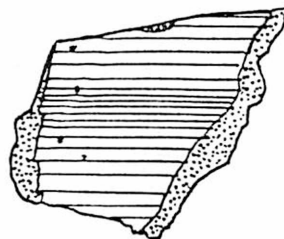
HOUSE OF AEON.



TOMB OF THE KING.



sandy colour.
grey filling.



SHARDS FOUND
AT BYZANTINE FORT.

and yet the pool was completely empty. We quickly disrobed and dived into the comforting envelope of cold water. After half an hour a small boy and a very beautiful girl around seventeen years old joined us in the pool. The boy had a rubber ring round his body and lowered himself into the water. The boys soon ascertained his name was Ben and he was five years old.

Ben had with him a large green water pistol, obviously designed and built by Krupps. He and Steven and Peter had an animated conversation at the deep end concluding with Peter announcing that they were 'goodies' and I was a 'baddie'. Ben said he didn't like baddies. At first, the full import of my designation didn't reveal itself. It so happened that I was talking to his sister and was suddenly zapped in the eyes with an extremely accurate long range shot...this powerful water pistol was designed to aim single blasts, and my head, ears, and especially my eyes were hit with deadly salvos. I dived under the water to avoid being a target, rapidly swam away, but this devil was unrelenting. I nipped up for a mouthful of air and received a salve in my mouth. I returned to the sanctity of swimming under the water. I looked up at him, his body surrounded by a sun halo, little legs threshing as he pursued me. Once more I bobbed up to fill my lungs with fresh air...then swam along the bottom of the pool until I was directly under him, I arched upwards and grabbed the water pistol. I shot to the surface and confronted him.

I swear the following senario took place.

Ben looked at me coolly, summoned up the experience of his full five years and boldly stated :-

"Emergency Action immediately required."

Steven and Peter swam over to us.

"You are a baddie," he told me, " and you have just seized a Weapon of Justice."

The little imp then most accurately recited an official police caution, pronounced before a person is charged with a crime.

Just at that second, luck enabled me to ease away from this tense situation. I saw an old grey-haired man enter the water...I could see from his expression that he had a glass eye.

"Ben" I whispered " you have been given the wrong information. I am a goodie, but that man over there is definitely a baddie."

"Oh ho" said Ben. "Please accept my apology."

With a snarl he whipped the water pistol from my tense grip and stalked his new target, the water surging across the bow of his rubber ring.

We re-visited the harbour area to have a look at the other fort, built in the year 1592AD on top of previous defensive structures. It was a square, solid structure, larger inside than one would imagine from its exterior. There were various rooms built into the thick walls, obviously built for the incarceration of prisoners...cells unsuitable for persons suffering from claustrophobia, those desirous of breathing fresh air, or persons of normal physique.

Returning to Kato Paphos we met a pelican walking on the pavement towards us, quite unassuming, having more right to be there than we had...he was actually a mobile advertisement for a local cafe. Most people ignored the bird, but to the curious he would return stares, clapping his beak to caution approach.

Although we wanted to return to the Byzantine fort to precure more pattery shards (at least, I did) which was nearby, en route we noted a camel parked close to a staired structure. For the trifling cost of C£1.00 each, the boys mounted the camel, and the swaying beast did a five minute circuit, guided by its smiling owner. The beast looked quite contented and was not overworked.

We picked amongst the shards for nicer items then returned to Kato Paphos to await the 15 bus to Ikeria Village.

Several other English people were waiting for the bus, including one insignificant youth supported by the wall of the bus shelter, and Diane pointed out to me the motto around the band of his white sun hat. The youth so very much reminded me of a character in a story I'd read, an anti-hero, who suffered from a profound inferiority complex. His psychiatrist advised him that the next time he was invited to a party he should wear the most garish, flowery, ostentatious clothing he could purchase, so as to immediately establish his status quo. The youth obtained a suit of green and purple stripes with vivid multi-coloured imagery splashed all over it. He entered the party room with incredible bravura, only to be completely ignored because the wallpaper had the same motif. This young man at the bus shelter at Paphos had also sought his psychiatrists advice to try and assert himself, and had been told..."look, son, you've just flown into Paphos, don't be insipid, let them all know you've arrived...establish yourself." The youth had therefore purchased a white hat with the most suitable definition of his present status....'I've just come'.

Ikeria Village is on a long road named TOMBS OF THE KING ROAD, and exactly opposite the Levy Pool was the entrance to this important archaeological site, named as being on the UNESCO LIST OF CULTURAL HERITAGE.

Once again the boys were admitted without payment to this large site, fully fenced. The area was continuously used as a burial ground during the Hellenistic/Roman periods (300BC to 300AD). The tombs are large, and were heavily looted in the 14th century. The CYPRUS DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES has undertaken a protracted plan of systematic excavation, revealing three large tomb complexes and many smaller tombs. I purchased a book describing the site and was thus able to move from tomb to tomb. The first tomb, we noted was hewn out of solid rock, a brown colour, not as hard as granite, and inside were the niches where the deceased had been placed...of course the tomb was completely devoid of artifacts, all had been looted or recently placed in museums. However, my instinct urged me to slyly scuff my sandal toe on the hard-packed soil, and my heart leapt as I noted a beautiful little shard, obviously the base of a small receptacle (see illustration). I seized it with great triumph.

Some of the tombs were constructed as the result of considerable below-ground excavations, and Tomb 2 was superb, having Doric columns around a courtyard, known as 'peristyle atrium' ...a ring of columns around an inner court of a house or tomb. All this was underground, of course. I had never seen anything like it before. We visited all the tombs, and were returning to the exit near the small room where Diane and I had paid our entrance fee. I had picked up one or two small shards when Steven suddenly approached me, eyes agleam, holding in each hand a large amphora handle in splendid unchipped condition. I asked him where he had found them?...he looked round furtively before taking me to a spot against the fence where I saw a mound of pottery, including broken vases, handles, bases, in one magnificent archaeological dump. I instructed Steven to return the handles to the dump, and with tremendous self-control I led my party from this shard harvest. I am of course a purely amateur shard collector, finding my own items (with assistance of the two boys) and considered that although Customs in Paphos would not be unduly concerned with the objects we had found, the dump items were in a different category. Besides, when we had paid our fee in the small room, I had noticed a uniformed policeman sitting next to the girl supplying tickets, and a swift glance from the dump had confirmed that the window in the room had a direct over-view of the location.

Soon it was the second Wednesday of our holiday...the fresh water was frequently cut off, usually about six hours a day. I'd like to remind you, Clive, that we had another 24-hour drought cycle, and I think I've finally got rid of your blasted ants.

As per our arrangement the previous week, David and Jackie arrived at exactly 6.45.p.m, and we climbed into their car. They had told us that there would not be any requirement to amend our dress in any way, so Steven, Peter and I wore loose shirts and our swimming costumes; Diane wore a dress. I immediately noted that Jackie wore a dress of somewhat thick material, and David had a sports pullover and brown khaki shorts. It was so hot as we drove northwards from Paphos that Steven, Peter and I appeared to be the most comfortable.

David drove some 40 kms north east, into the Troodos Mountain foothills...we gained height quickly, and eventually, as we scanned the panorama of green Cyprus countryside, it was as though we were in an aeroplane. We passed through the villages of Peyia and Kathikas...narrow streets, white houses, no sign whatsoever of tourists.

Eventually, some way outside Droushia, we arrived at the tavern.

A long farm building had chairs and tables under a bamboo covered roof...a number of men, handsome, dark skinned, all with neat black moustaches, were working at an oven in the far corner, cutting slabs of meat and holding them over the hot coals.

Half an hour passed by, during which time we were not approached, which David said was the norm. No rush, no stress...except for the customers !

We were in the mountains, and it became darker, and yes, dammit, colder. My legs were turning blue...Peter mentioned he was cold, but Jackie tut-tutted and said it was really quite warm, and being easily led, I believed her.

A very old man picked his way across fields over low stone walls towards the tavern...David pointed out that the sage was dressed in the traditional manner...heavy black snake boots, and very large pantaloons that seemed to loop all round him, bound at the waist with a wide cloth belt. David said the pantaloons were called 'brahas'. The old man sat down and started to open bottles of beer in rapid succession and empty the contents. Just then a boy came to our table and asked us what we wanted to drink...David ordered 'local village wine', and cokes for the boys.

The wine was pleasant, perchance a slight taste of raisins, but it took a long time to warm my freezing limbs.

The routine of the 'meze' commenced.

Men, women and children living in the building carried plates of food to our tables...we filled out plates with salad items, slices of very large tomatoes, and also yoghurt, which seemed to taste sweet and salty at the same time. There was also a bowl of light-lavender coloured fondout, which had an unusual taste, but was quite palatable. Every few moments members of the family brought large plates of meat dishes, with adequate amounts for each of us, lamb, beef, chicken...repeat dishes with the meats prepared somewhat differently. More village wine was supplied, but although it warmed my body, my back was very cold as the mist settled on it, but I was extremely warm at the front as I stuffed myself with delicacies.

Other large families of Cypriots arrived, some with small children, all nicely dressed, giving our table polite smiles and glances. I did notice that after sitting at the tables under the bamboo roof for some moments, they started to don woollen jackets, and as if from a subtle word of command they all speedily moved inside the building...our party of course remaining in situ, braving the chill.

Eventually coffee was produced, very small cups, most of the contents having the consistency of something floating in a sump, and tasting as I imagined sump dregs would taste.

Mine host appeared, asked after our welfare, flicked crumbs off the table with a towel. David said it was an excellent meal, which mostly it was...the bill was C£18.00, reasonable bearing in mind all the food, village wine and cokes we had consumed.

As we drove downwards and southwards in the darkness, through the car window I could see the Milky Way speckled across the sky,

so brightly that I drew it to Peter's attention, and he was enthralled as I explained that what he was really seeing was a symbolic plate edge-on, and my questioning revealed that he understood the analogy...excellent for a ten-year-old boy.

I must write about the ubiquitous taxi drivers of Paphos. Whenever they see English people, either in the sparsely populated areas such as Ikeria Village, or in the city, they gently tickle their horns to announce availability, and screech to a halt, almost touching your toes, if his and your eyes meet. The fares they charge are quite reasonable (£1.00 from Ikeria to Kato-Paphos), and the drivers are also polite and considerate. They drive at speed, but in Paphos, time is money, obviously. The vehicles range from 4-seat cars to limousines...it is unwise to clamber aboard a highly-polished limo, especially if the journey is short. One night we took a limo from David's pool to our villa...less than a mile, but on this one instance the driver frowned as he considered our fare when we reached the villa...he did not wish to demean the salubrious appearance of his superb vehicle, especially as we were all in utterly informal dress, by charging one pound, and he obviously realised he could not charge a fee deserving of the huge polished vehicle under his control. I put him out of his misery by offering a sacrificial £2.00, which he grabbed and roared away in a cloud of white dust.

In two weeks we each became very brown, although on not one instance did we specifically sunbathe. Steven, Peter and I invariably wore white sun hats to deflect the sun's heat, and I wore bathing trunks the whole time.

Sometimes in the morning, at about 7.30 am, there would be a few grey clouds in the sky, but these were indignantly moved aside by the aggressive sun, anxious to maintain the very high average Cypriot sunshine rate.

Most of the construction workers wore sun hats, also the two middle-aged women who had cornered the market in filling in spaces between newly-laid pavement squares, which they did in a monotonously efficient way by sweeping wet cement in the crevices. We regularly offered them ice-cold drinks of lemonade, which they quaffed in obvious pleasure. And yes, Clive there is now a pavement outside your villa.

Cypriots are smiling and cheerful, and do not exhibit any apparent animosity towards the Brits, with whom they waged a terrorist campaign via EOKA, until being granted independence in 1960, however, still choosing to remain within the British Commonwealth. Turkey invaded northern Cyprus in 1974, obtaining 37% of the island. Cyprus does not recognise the seizure of the northern part of their territory and do not permit visitors to Cyprus to enter or leave by the Turkish sector.

On Monday 16th July we took a taxi from Ikeria Village to Paphos Airport...as we left we noted that all the construction workers were thronged around the Ikeria swimming pool, obviously making a concerted effort to finish the structure. On 10th August Clive telephoned me in great delight, to inform me that David had told him that the pool was now completed, but the information did not inspire me as Clive thought it should !

The 310 Airbus flight was excellent as were the meal and drinks. We expected that as we landed at Heathrow we would feel a cold breeze on our faces, and perhaps paddle through pools of rain, but the temperature upon our arrival in London was exactly the same as when we had left Cyprus.

1993

CHANIA REACTION

We had planned to visit Crete in November 1991, three months after I had retired, but a routine visit to my doctor for blood pressure tests revealed such a high reading, which caused him to ask when my trip to Crete was to commence ?

"Tomorrow morning at 4 am from Gatwick," I told him.

After ten minutes he took another reading, frowned at what he saw, and told me that his advice would be to cancel the holiday. He spoke about the poor hospitalisation availability in Crete...I was too frightened to ask him what was the thrust of his diagnosis. He said that if I was fully insured, which I was, he would write to the insurer stating it was his opinion that I should not take the holiday because of hypertension. I duly got most of my money returned.

Now, almost two years after, we had booked to travel to Crete for a few days from 18th June 1993. Three weeks before we were due to leave, I was suddenly struck with bouts of flashing spots in front of my eyes and a feeling that I was going to faint. These effects were caused when I bent down suddenly or looked upwards, which I frequently did, the latter because I am an aeroplane spotter, and the Hatfield area is particularly fruitful in this respect.

My doctor was unavailable, and I was handed over to Dr. Raj who inspired faith and re-assurance. He took a blood-pressure test, "...slightly high but acceptable"...and after I had graphically recounted my symptoms, and he tested my heart thoroughly..."completely normal..."he opined that my condition was quite common..."amongst elderly men." Admittedly I am almost sixtyseven years of age, but I really felt quite fit and well, and asked him if it was alright for me to go to Crete ?

He nodded assent.

Phew !

So we were at Gatwick to catch the 20.00 hrs flight to Heraklion. Once again our luck quivered on hold...the continually-changing flight display showed that the Heraklion flight was delayed for two hours. All other flights were sacrosanct. Actually it was 23.30 hrs when we took off in the Britannia Airways Boeing 757.

Crete was two hours ahead of GMT, so I added that time to my watch, calculating that we would arrive in Heraklion at about 04.15 hrs Cretan time.

We landed in darkness, Customs and Passport Control were not interested, and the travel agent representative diverted the passengers to their respective coaches for circulation to the holiday spots in Crete. We had booked for the CHANIA CHANDRIS hotel in Maleme, and mounted coach 'C' for a three hour drive westwards to Maleme.

After the lights of Heraklion had receded it was absolutely black except for the coach's headlights...no moon...the light still to percolate from the east. And gradually it did...with difficulty I could pick out the silhouettes of mountains to the south. We had a pre-dawn mixture of blacks and greys, rather like under-developed 35 mm negatives I created when dabbling with photography many years previously. Continual bulges on both sides of the road eventually became bushes, and in the early sun, after an hours drive, I saw they were purple flowers, although permutations of scarlet, mauve and white were occasionally noted. A knowledgeable gentleman in the seat behind noted my interest, and announced that the flowers were orleanders. Even though wedges of mountain had been removed to create the main road running parallel with the northern coast, orleanders still had been planted where possible, rich red soil had been transported to facilitate planting where granite mostly predominated. It was breathtakingly beautiful. And as the sun took a firmer grip on the senario, it coloured the mountain tops to the south

into glorious pink hues.

Gradually, as the journey progressed, the coach swept to the coastline down 1 - 10 declines and deposited holiday-makers in resorts, until we were the last two passengers. Some of the hotels and tavernas we had stopped at looked rather bleak, but the hostess affirmed 'last is best', and it was.

The CHANIA CHANDRIS hotel was luxurious, as befitted the money we had invested in the holiday. We had paid an extra £8.40 for 'a sea view'. I wasn't particularly bothered about this extra luxury, because we would obviously be looking at the sea for hours every day, but Diane felt it would make the holiday complete.

We were allocated a bungalow on the second floor, and to the north, where the sea should have been, we saw only the tops of trees. The sun was an absolute scorcher, and amongst the massed foliage, I did occasionally spot a small flash of silver, which was the sun shining on the sea, visible when a vagrant breeze temporarily moved a leaf covered twig. Diane was disappointed.

"But we have a wonderful view of the swimming pool," she exclaimed, and as two topless beauties arched their backs prior to diving into the blue water, I persuaded myself that I would not complain to the management.

It was 8 am, so we walked from the bungalows across grass and orleander-monopolised flower beds to the main hotel building, and entered the restaurant, serving breakfast buffet-style. We were on a half board deal, breakfast and dinner, so in these circumstances it was incumbent upon the guests to have a hearty breakfast so as to last until dinner, save for a snack at lunchtime. It must be immediately confirmed that the hotel did cater for the glutton.

We filled our plates, sat down at a table set for two, and suddenly Diane and I looked at each other. Not an English word was to be heard, most of the breakfasters were Germans. The coffee waiter gave us a smile, which emerged from a grim face, and said "Good morning, tea or coffee?". He had diagnosed our nationality. How did he do it?

He poured our coffee, answering our thanks with a very loud "You're welcome."

At the next table to us six Germans were eating, three men and their wives. Their plates were heaped with food, whereas I crept back furtively to the buffet a couple of times to capture small quantities of tomato, cheese and toast. The Germans disdained this attempt at subtlety and gorged through their pyramids. Suddenly one German man, unsmiling, looked at the coffee waiter across the crowded restaurant and flipped his right thumb and fingers arrogantly for attention, bottom lip curled.

The coffee waiter completely ignored him. He came back to us, filled our cups, moved away. Eventually, in the natural course of things, he came to the German's table, poured their coffee, keeping the finger and thumb flicker until last.

I learned that during the invasion of Crete in World War II, the area between Maleme and Chania had been heavily bombed by the Germans, and two km south of Maleme is a very large cemetery for German troops. Further observations during the holiday demonstrated that the Cretans do not like Germans, they are an unforgiving race. (See Appendix.)

After Diane had emptied our suitcases and put clothing in the cupboards, we went to the pool for a swim. The Germans had already booked all the loungers under the shades round the pool by placing towels there early in the morning. Young German women were quite unabashed and paraded topless round the pool. Unfortunately, their plump mothers also did the same, frowning at me when I inadvertantly glanced in their direction, whereas the girls were quite uninhibited.

Whilst being driven to Malene, the hostess had

stressed the presence of mosquitos at night and stated that the shop at the hotel sold various devices to eliminate them. We called at the shop and I did note, as one would expect at hotels, that prices for their goods were quite expensive. We explained our quest; the vendor tried to hide a smirk and said that he thoroughly recommended a certain product "...expensive, yes, but extremely effective".

He proudly produced THE ELECTRIC MOSQUITO EXTERMINATOR, £5.00. The device plugged into the wall socket, and had a black circle about three inches in diameter and half an inch thick, with a grill at the front. A packet of tablets was also required, and every night the tablet was replaced with a new one...it was heated, and exuded a deterrent which humans could not detect, but the mosquitos...psssst... I still fancied my old stand-by of a rolled-up newspaper at dusk, but we felt that we should keep up with the latest innovation.

Back in our room we examined it...bilingual instructions were printed on the sides of the box the device was enclosed in. Quite straightforward...and suddenly I read:- 'FIRST AID' - induce vomiting and in case of anxiety call a doctor.' There was no build-up as to the reason for the announcement, therefore I presumed that a risk of toxicity was a distinct possibility. Before we went to dinner I switched on the exterminator, leaving the door slightly open, and upon returning from dinner and a promenade a couple of hours later, I closed the door and unplugged the device. No mosquitos...there was definitely no form of living insect present.

We were warned that the beach was pebbly, we like sand, but at least we had been warned. The pebbles were large, and smoothed by the sea, mostly oval and fairly flat, some of them six inches in circumference. I saw a red notice with white lettering on the western perimeter fence of the hotel grounds...it stated that the army sometimes used the land next



PEBBLE FOUND ON MALEME
BEACH - ACTUAL SIZE.

to the hotel as a rifle range, and strongly urged that this beach should not be negotiated. The only route we had was eastwards, towards Chania, and a narrow tarmac road travelled close to the pebble shore for a while, and as we walked along it under the powerful sun we noted that the pebbles decreased until, one mile to the east of the hotel, the shore was almost completely sandy. The sea was clean, blue, warm and waist-high, with gently lapping waves, and we surrendered to it. No one else was near to us, the closest humanity were little dots in the distance. The Germans were far too insular to walk to the sand; their world was centred at the pool and environs, where they strutted their gloriously tanned bodies to their proud countrymen.

Walking back to the hotel we looked at the pebbles, hoping to see fossils embedded in them...not a fossil did I see, but I found the nice pebble illustrated herewith...it is light green in colour and is now a permanent feature on the desk in my den.

Dinner was also buffet service...some informality in dress was permitted, but most people made the effort to give the meal just that little extra. The Cretan girls attending tables, pouring drinks, etc, were all very beautiful with dark flashing eyes and sallow skin. The long tables bearing the many varieties of hot and cold comestibles were patrolled by the Master Chef and his moustachio'd minions who glared at diners in an attempt to stop them bearing away mountains of food on

their plates. Diane and I were hungry, but selected the quantities we would have eaten at home, and the four courses were quite filling, but the Germanic appetites required substantial fueling, and they returned the chef's glares with interest as they consolidated their provisions.

We visited Chania several times, an ancient town, first of all a Minoan settlement, later a Samian town in 520 BC, and, of course the Romans were there. The Genoese and the Venetians and Turks built, captured and re-captured the site, the Venetians building a large fort at the harbour, which, together with other buildings, was heavily damaged by the Luftwaffe in 1941.

We caught a local coach outside the hotel; one of the few English people in the hotel had advised us that we required to catch a Number 3 coach which would drop us off at our hotel on the return.

The journey took half an hour...we reached the busy coach station, and being a man who attempts to inculcate a modicum of organisation in his life whenever possible, I went to the information kiosk to ask what time the Number 3 coach departed for Maleme ?

A small thin man with a big bristling moustache hunched in his little domain and looked at his watch...it was 10.30 am, and he ran his finger down a list of times and numbers and said "Number 49 in three minutes."

"No," I said. "I want to stay and look around Chania...I mean at three or four o'clock this afternoon."

His eyes flashed like overworked neon lights.

"Number 49 in two and a half minutes" he shouted.

I showed him my watch, in case he didn't get my drift, and with my right forefinger symbolically moved the hour hand to mid afternoon.

He literally screamed, saliva dripping from his lips.

"Number 49 in two minutes."

We tiptoed away, somewhat perplexed, and I used a small map, provided by the travel agent, to negotiate our way to the harbour.

The harbour, called the VENETIAN PORT, is beautiful, and is almost fully enclosed by walls, terminating at an old lighthouse. Very large buildings, Venetian arsenals, are on the east side several are mere shells, probably due to German bombing. A mosque is dominant, built in 1645 AD; it is now used as a source of tourist information, but was closed during our visits, and the rusted padlock on the door suggested to me that it has not been operational for some time, but there is a need for it. Narrow streets lead northwards to the harbour...busy shops and stores catering for tourists from numerous countries, mostly Germany, England and Scandinavia. A few boats ply in the harbour...the water is absolutely clean and clear and many fishes can be seen...shoals of little fish, near the surface, flitting suddenly in different directions...larger fish, mostly in groups of half a dozen or so, moving more slowly, not frightened by my sudden appearance.

The San Francesco Museum is also near the harbour...it is actually a 14th century Gothic church, with a nave and two aisles. The entrance tickets (less than £1.00 for E.E.C. old age pensioners) accorded with my previous experience of Greek museums, showing an archaeological discovery on the ticket, in this case a 13th century BC Mycenae fresco, showing a sharp-nosed woman holding bunches of flowers in each hand.

Items of interest are spaciouly set out, giving ample room for examination. Several late Minoan sarcophagi are on

display, one replete with skeleton lying in the foetal position. Finds from the Roman, Venetian and Turkish occupation are placed advantageously. There is a courtyard with a few larger archaeological items strewn about, including a fountain dating from the 14 century. It was cool in the museum and we lingered there for over an hour before ejecting ourselves once more into the relentless sun.

Many restaurants line the harbour, and at lunchtime handsome young Cretan males, mostly with black moustaches, harange the passing tourists, urging them to patronise their particular establishments. They smile widely, giving their clients the full benefit of 32 perfectly white teeth...they are quite polite but somewhat persistent; anyone showing the slightest hesitation would find themselves sitting down starting on the first course.

We sought refreshments in a quiet taverna near the harbour, and then walked alongside the arsenal buildings eastwards to part of the fortress, a ruin, at the junction of the harbour and the wall leading to the lighthouse. From the seaward aspect the wall of the fort looked quite dominant, but it is merely a facade, the land-side of the high wall has crumbled, perhaps it was bombed in 1941, but I scrambled up a path of beaten earth, rummaged in the debris and rapidly collected six pottery shards, including the rim of a clay container. (See illustrations.) I was delighted.

We retraced our route back past the arsenal, skilfully avoiding the soliciting restaurateurs, and reached the Naval Museum at the western side of the harbour. Under a Venetian arch, up recently constructed wooden steps and we were on the top of the fortifications defending the gap between the western bank and the lighthouse. Several rusted cannon were casually placed on the ramparts, and there was really nothing else to see except the magnificent view. Some instinct urged me between the cracks of the stone floor; my heart beat as I noted a thin edge of shard. With a pen I prised it from its hiding place. I was utterly thrilled.

The toilets near the harbour in Chania are sited in a large garden with trees, orleanders, and busts of prominent Cretans of the last century. The imposing male and female entrances, down marble steps, are quite separate, but meet underground with the briefest of barriers between. I paid my visit and waited in the garden for Diane. She came back looking quite flustered. She stated that upon leaving the toilet cubicle, she was approached by an elderly man, an official attendant, she hoped, who offered her a couple of paper napkins to dry her hands after washing them. When she had completed her chore, the man asked if she was 'Deutsche ?'

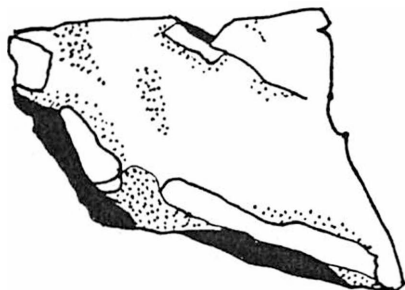
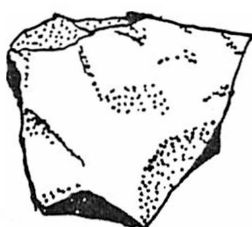
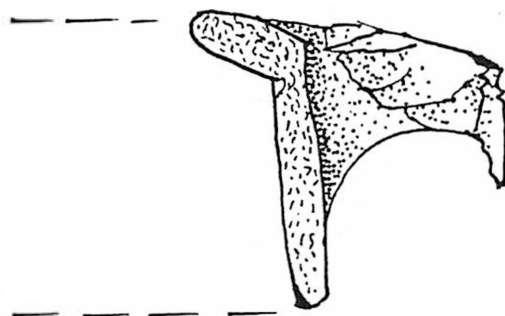
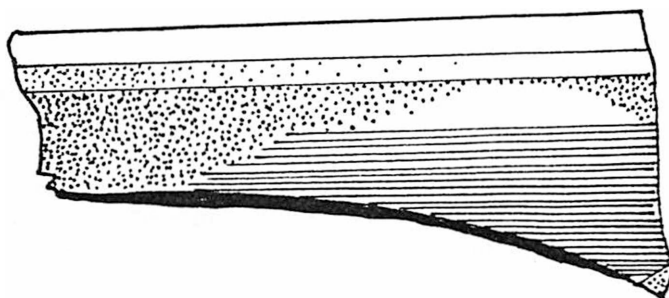
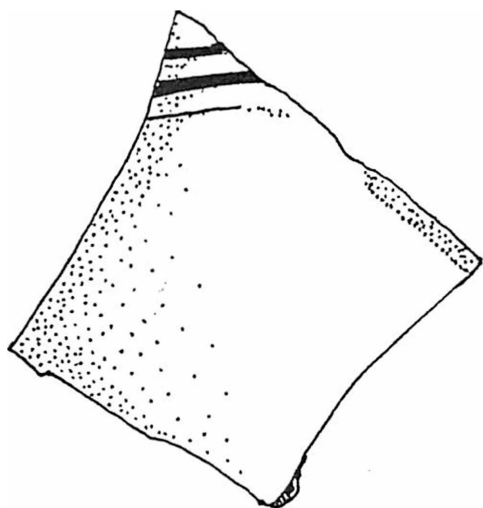
"No, English," she stated.

"Ah, I love English people," he announced and demonstrated his approbation by embracing and kissing her with far more fervour than racial harmony dictated. She thought she might have been indecently assaulted, but not quite.

It didn't happen to me !

The three visits to the coach station to return to the hotel absolutely stunned me from the administrative aspect. The clean coaches were either BMW's or DAF's, the drivers keen and fast, fingers always twitching near the strident horns, but I just could not figure out the timetable system.

Back here, in Hatfield, and elsewhere, the coaches and buses have permanent numbers, such as WH8, and with a timetable I know its route and where to catch it. Although the coaches we travelled on from Chania to the hotel always travelled the same route through Chania westwards, along the coast road to Maleme and thence the hotel, the numbers were always different. I made a note of the information given by the kiosk administrator:-



POTTERY SHARDS
FOUND IN VENETIAN
FORTRESS, CHANIA,
CRETE — JUNE 1993

JEB

First day....	Number 23 in six minutes;
Second day...	Number 19 in three minutes.
Third day....	Number 66 in four minutes.

The destination plates were always the same, the fare was always the same...600 drachmas...but the coaches were numbered differently. The 'bus station was busy, with vehicles entering and trundling from it all the time, and the duty driver in the kiosk had large sheets of paper in front of him, scribbling like mad, seemingly one coach ahead of his next rapidly-approaching deadline. The ticket system was also bizarre; the conductor, usually a small agile man, big moustache, and with a strong personality, held a wooden clip about six inches long, and dozens of small white tickets were crammed into it. When he was handed the fare he would give the passenger various numbers of tickets, from one to six, which would have numbers on them, and when totalled, they would roughly constitute the fare.

I have mentioned the military rifle range, and the doctrine of militarism appeared to extend to the hotel precincts, or over them, anyway.

Every morning at 7.am. the hotel was buzzed by two military biplanes. They were modern 'planes which I could not identify, and as they passed over the hotel they revved their engines to really high pitch...for an encore they would return in five minutes. Why the hell did they do it? Was the hotel built on what was previously a military site, and were they expressing disapproval? The double-biplane passes were only a prelude. On one particular day, two helicopters frequently flapped over quite low, and to complete the air display, two jet fighters flew over us several times, once roaring over very low when Cretans, in full traditional dress, were giving a dancing display. I've told you I am an aeroplane spotter, and although my technique failed me because I could not identify the 'planes or helicopters, I was somewhat excited, but definitely bewildered as to the motive. Er, did they know that most of the clientele were Germans, and were deliberately buzzing them because of the attacks in the area in 1941...no...of course not...but...

We were taken by coach on the return journey to Heraklion for the flight home at the end of our short holiday. Our flight was due to leave at 02.45 hours, and even as we arrived and joined the sweating masses of passengers waiting to fly back to England, a female Cretan's voice stated in poor English that the Gatwick flight was delayed for two hours...

APPENDIX.

Operation Merkur, the invasion of Crete, commenced on 20th May 1941, with the bombing of various ports, including Chania. There was an airstrip at Maleme, defended by New Zealand troops. Most un-Germanlike, due to the speed of the planning of the operation, it was not properly conceived, with German parachutists landing haphazardly at various places, and their losses were heavy particularly at Maleme. The German High Command rapidly changed their plans, because they needed an airstrip to supply their troops which had already captured some territory. The decision was that top priority was to be given for the capture of the Maleme airstrip. More parachutists were dropped in the area, losses were unimportant, the airstrip must be captured. The official German report on the Maleme action stated... 'relentlessly, inexorably, the Junkers Ju 52's came in to disgorge their troops and equipment.' The report also stated that Junkers Ju 52's landed on the beach at Maleme...well, it certainly wasn't on the pebbles, but on the area to the east which I've already described. German mountain troops, from the snowy peaks of Austria, were flown to Maleme...must have been a shock for them, their losses were high. New Zealand reports state that Maori troops tracked them in the countryside, bayoneting them to death. Eventually the Germans captured Maleme, and ultimately, Crete. German military strategists, after the war, when assessing the Crete campaign, stated that it was a serious military error; they opined that

Malta should have been invaded instead. The German invasion of Russia could not take place until Crete was captured. The campaign took much longer than intended, and it is now considered that the delay of a couple of weeks was crucial to the ultimate outcome of World War II.

1994 KEPHALONIA, HERE I COME

We had booked via our friendly travel agent to fly to our holiday resort, Kefhalonia, from Luton Airport, which is only fifteen miles from our bungalow in Hatfield, whereas our usual departures have always been from international airports Heathrow (thirty miles) or Gatwick (fifty miles).

Of course, it was a compromise...the Luton flight was scheduled to leave at 06.05 on Thursday 16th June 1994, and Luton's closeness to Hatfield, did, however, provoke problems. We could have ordered a taxi at 3 am, but I have always been chary of permitting taxi drivers to be aware of empty houses. Most of them, I am sure, are entirely trustworthy, but being a crime investigator for thirty eight years before retiring in 1991, and studying statistics, I find that a small percentage of burglaries occurred a day or two after taxi's had collected persons from their homes for transportation to the required airports.

The alternative meant two or three hours, in the very early morning, sitting in Luton Airport, but being both of patient dispositions, Diane and I didn't really mind. The basic plan was to take a local 'bus (cheap fares for pensioners) to St.Albans railway station (four miles from our abode) late at night, so as to catch the last train to Luton, arriving at about 1 am...thence a taxi to the airport.

Previously, over the years of taking foreign holidays, our plans had sometimes been scuppered for various reasons, and I have to report that the voodoo struck yet again.

A national rail strike was called on Wednesday 15th June because British Rail would not cough up an 11% pay rise, when most people had to be satisfied with an annual rise of around 2%. Ergo, no train to Luton. My new stratagem was to travel from St.Albans town centre on a 'bus to Luton 'bus station...the last one left St.Albans at 9.15 pm... and then take a convenient express coach from Luton 'bus station to the airport. We permutated the various 'bus and coach timetables, and damn it if we didn't arrive at Luton Airport as early as 10 pm...an eight-hour wait for the 06.05 take-off.

Luton gradually became deserted and windy, at by 12 midnight we were the only travellers present ...the only relief to extreme boredom was the sight of airport functionaries drifting about during the long, lonely hours. Fresh-looking travellers arrived after 4 am. We then took our place at the head of the Britannia Airways stand, and were able to select window seats on the Boeing 757.

We were allowed to go immediately to the International Departure Lounge, and noted to our utter chagrin that our flight was delayed for two blasted hours...and then, the final insult, delayed for yet another hour. We eventually left at 09.05, eleven hours after arriving at the bloody airport. We boarded the 'plane like two zombies.

The Captain, whose fresh voice suggested he had had a good night's slumber, announced that passenger's would be permitted free alcoholic drinks on the flight to compensate for the delay, which wasn't too bad, really, unless you were teetotal !

Kephalonia International Airport (allow me to sneer behind my cupped right hand) had only just opened, although the approach to the runway was excellent...a sweep southwards over the blue sea, level out and land on the airstrip parallel with the coastline. We experienced the roughest landing I've ever known...the air hostesses were strapped in their seats facing us...their wide and bulging optics confirmed that they shared my opinion, and they were extremely used to landings. There was silence in the 757 for a moment or two, until travellers realised that they were safely on terra firma, and we de-planed.

Diane and I had booked a four-star hotel, half board, and this was quite expensive. Many of the passengers had utilised a new scheme by the travel agent. For a much cheaper holiday the clients arrived at the holiday location unaware of where they were going to stay. Consequently, after we'd negotiated Customs and Passport Control, brevity personified, crowds of travellers milled around outside the airport building, being served with an A4-size sheet of paper, which revealed the destination...it took quite a long time to organise the couple of hundred holiday-makers in their correct coaches...luggage and passengers hopefully being on the same vehicle.

The coach drove to different locations in the very strong and hot sunshine, and people were dropped off at their locations, but not before the travel company representative had warned that Greek toilet techniques, except for starred hotels, were primitive, and she did state that those travellers who were on cheap sight-unseen holidays could expect to have to put their used toilet paper in a tin can next to the toilet, it was not permitted to feed it into the toilet bowl. There were sharp intakes of breath at this revelation, and a knowing smirk crossed between Diane and myself.

Half our load of potential nose-peggers were left at various small hotels and tavernas, and we arrived at the capital of Kephalonia, Argostoli, a nice-looking town with colourful buildings wilting under the stong sun. We were driven to the ferry.

We were told that the ferry left Argostoli on the hour, and returned from our destination, Lixouri, on the half hour, in other words, the crossing took twenty five minutes. The coach drove on with our suitcases, and we climbed the ramp of this austere-looking craft, with very few rounded surfaces. It shunted northwards from Argostoli, then turned westwards, crossing the rippled water of Kolpos Argotolia, to Lizouri.

The hotels on this promontory were of a better class, and our destination, the Kephalonia Palace Hotel, was the last stop, and the few remaining passengers knew we had the best place, three storey'd white buildings with red slate roofs, surrounding a very large swimming pool.

Our room overlooked the pool...we arrived there at 6 pm on Thursday evening, so allowing for Kephalonia being two hours ahead of GMT, Diane and I had been on route to the location for eighteen hours, and we were exhausted.

We had an excellent dinner, both buffet and waiter service for the main course, and we retired to our twin beds quite early.

Next morning the resident tour operator's representative gave us the 'run down' on the resort, first of all passing on the most welcome news that ' we are in the majority.' We cheered to the echo... this meant that the British outnumbered my long-standing holiday foes, the Germans.

She gave us a brief history of the island, the most important information being that in 1953 there had been a massive series of earthquakes on Kefhalonia, and on its small sister island Ithica, lasting for three days and causing massive damage...with a death toll of over eight hundred inhabitants. Being islands, most houses were widely spaced, the casualties demonstrating the severity of the 'quakes. Most of the buildings on the islands had been rebuilt, except in the northerly aspects, where damage was negligible.

As usual with Greek islands, various imperial powers had controlled Kefhalonia, including Athenians, Spartans, Romans, Venetians, Italians, French, and Great Britain had ruled for sixty years, from 1814 to 1864, until the reunion of Greece. The Germans were there in World War II.

We duly booked a day's tour of Ithica for Tuesday 21st...

Diane and I decided to walk to the little village of Mantzavinata, to view the terrain, before going to the beach, which the brochure had depicted as being composed of very red sand.

The new asphalt road threaded its way upwards, following the ground around various large quarry-like areas. Much erosion had taken place, and possibly there were earthquake faults. The soil was quite hard, and light grey in colour, obviously formed millions of years ago by minute sea creatures dropping to the bottom of the sea and solidifying with pressure, rather like the white cliffs of Dover. Most of the grass was brown, but here and there were small orchards of olive trees, and the road was edged with very small trees, which will be a sheltered avenue in twenty years time. Wild flowers were also on the verges, including a strange green prickly plant, which turned to a lovely delicate blue at the ends of the little fronds.

We reached the small village...we were hot, but not sticky or perspiring...white-walled, red-tiled houses were on both sides of the road, not regimentally sited, and we saw an orange/brown tiled roof which we had been told was the local store.

We pushed open the door, and it was dark and cool inside. Two elderly Greek men were sitting at a table, they followed our progress into the shop.

A woman crossed to us, she was around forty years of age, somewhat plump, but with a most engaging smile. We asked for ice-cream, which she extracted from a freezer. We sat down, and she asked if we were English? Good...she smiled even more...we said we lived near London...'London' she said to the two men, who repeated it.

She disappeared into the bowels of the shop, and returned with two glasses of lemonade. We had been told that the local water was completely safe...to Greek bladders, anyway, but had been advised only to drink bottles of mineral water. But protocol dictated that we at least take a couple of long sips, so show our appreciation, which we performed.

She left the shop, leaving the two old men looking at us unblinkingly...she returned with three white-petalled flowers radiating from small yellow centres..."jasmine"...she explained, and handed the little bouquet to Diane.

We purchased a bottle of the local wine, and as we left the shop she said, rather shyly..."please come back"...and we nodded and said that we would.

We returned to the hotel, I filled a beach bag with essential items, and we walked the hundred yards to the beach.

Indeed, the sand was red...well, brownish/red, and high grey cliffs bordered the beach about fifty yards from the blue and slightly white-crested sea.

The water lapped gently...it was shallow and absolutely clean. Very few bathers were on this glorious beach, and we pondered on the phenomenon that almost everyone at the hotel preferred to bask round the large swimming pool; whilst we two, by far the oldest guests at the hotel, were prepared to trek along the beach, and marvel at the clear sea, red beach and grey cliffs.

We walked westwards along the beach until we reached the end of it, and continued to negotiate a beaten path on dried seaweed...then traversed more hard-packed sand, then over large rounded rocks, and after travelling about a mile we reached a little baylet. The water was less than two feet deep, was warm and inviting, and soon we were throwing ourselves into it with reckless abandon.

We stayed there for about four hours, protecting ourselves periodically with clothing draped over us to defend us from the strong sunlight.

We dressed for dinner, not ostentatiously, and we watched the other guests, mostly in their twenties, herding from the pool area, thinking they'd had a really wonderful day...

On Friday night we had booked our seats on the Courtesy coach to Lixouri on the morrow...the fare was extremely cheap, but hotel protocol instructed that only persons who booked would be able to travel on the twenty-seater vehicle.

So at 9.30 am we went to the hotel entrance where the coach was parked. The first three persons to bustle onto the coach when the driver opened the door were Germans...a very muscular man, an ugly woman with dyed blonde hair, his wife, and a little boy about five years old who looked as though he could open crimped bottle tops with his teeth.

In a few moments the other passengers arrived, all English, who had booked seats...but three of them couldn't get seats, they were all occupied.

"We've paid for our seats," they moaned to the driver, who, typically Grecian, was laid back, and said there was sufficient room to stand...he was too tired to go and check the hotel booking arrangements. "It is only an eight kilometre drive," he smiled.

My very firm theory is that the Germans hadn't bothered to book seats, they just commandeered them, but English people (except football supporters) invariably take the peaceful line, and we drove eastwards and northwards to Luxuori, passing through the village we had visited the previous day,

The village square at Lixouri had trees round its perimeter, and countless shops supplied the tourist trade. Normally, with our vast experience, we are careful buyers, but on this day Diane purchased a sponge for 1,500 drachma (about £5.00), and upon the first day of usage upon our return to Hatfield, it broke apart in several little pieces.

We decided to board the ferry to Argostoli, which we had travelled upon the previous day, except this time it was in the opposite direction. First of all, motorised traffic drove up the ramp...several coaches, a rusty tractor, a lorry filled to overhang with

fresh-smelling hay, and then the passengers were permitted to embark. The ferry commenced its short crossing, and in due course a young man came round to exact payment for the journey...250 drachs...about 80 pence...very cheap.

We walked around Argostoli, and met our travel representative, who was awaiting new travellers, and she suggested that we should take a taxi to Lassi Beach...cost, 500 drachs..."to the best beach on the island."

We stopped a passing taxi, and were driven southwards, later stopping at the top of a long flight of concrete steps, surrounded by trees. We negotiated the steps, and what a sight met our eyes.

The beach was quite narrow, but the sloping sand edged to superbly clear water...but the whole beach was covered in sun beds and colourful umbrellas, protecting nubile bronzed bodies from the unrelenting sun. Many of the girls were topless...broad, handsome men strutted along the sand...my impression was that the oldest person on the beach couldn't have been more than in his/her mid twenties...and all were attired in miniscule bathing costumes.

Diane and I had not anticipated that we would have an opportunity to swim, and were costume-less. I wore long light cotton trousers, shirt with sleeves rolled up, carrying the heavy beach bag, strap on my left shoulder, thumb supporting it, rather like a rifle sling. Diane wore a flowery red dress, a wide-brimmed straw hat on her head bearing the legend I LOVE CRETE. The sun was so hot that I had to put on my floppy brown sun hat. We staggered along the entire length of the beach, and duly returned. Eyes followed our progress, suggesting that this beach was for the swingers, not the wrinklies.

"I bet they're saying... look at that old geezer." laughed Diane, carefully throwing the old-age image in my direction.

(In May 1994, whilst walking past the police station in Hatfield with Diane, I heard a shout, and looking to my left I saw two young men, one very large, one quite small, rapidly approaching me pursued by two prison warders. The youths had obviously escaped from custody whilst being transferred from a prison van to the nearby courthouse. I made the immediate decision to intercept them, and stood in front of them...obviously I selected the smaller escapee, and I edged him towards a wooden fence. I saw stark fear in his eyes. I reached out and grabbed his jacket as he tried to avoid me. He swore, and struggled violently. He swung me round, and I was forced to release my grip. He turned and ran into a motor car which braked, and the youth rolled over the front of the vehicle, and limped away. However, during the short period I had restrained him, the two warders and a gaggle of police officers caught up with him and descended upon him like a school of porpoises. They also captured the larger youth.

As the two miscreants were led away, I noticed blood pouring down my left hand from cuts on my left fore and middle fingers. A female detective came across and asked me if I was the man who had attempted to capture one of the escapees? I nodded, and she asked if I would make a statement? She took us upstairs to an office...put dressings on my two fingers, and she wrote down everything as I explained it to her. She asked if I thought the cuts on my fingers had been made by the escapees' finger nails? I said I presumed so.

Meantime, four prison warders sat at the next table, drinking coffee and discussing the escapes.

"Did you see that old geezer try and catch one of them?" one said, and they all laughed heartily.)

This beach was not for us...it was the domain of the young body beautiful, and so we wearily climbed the concrete steps and hailed the first passing taxi, which screeched to a halt.

He recognised we were English, and asked our destination in that language.

The only place I knew in Argostoli was the ferry, which, in any case, was conveniently placed. We were not in any hurry, because we didn't require to catch the ferry until 4.30 at the earliest.

"The ferry," I said.

He looked at the clock on his dashboard...ten to three.

"I'll get you there on time," he shouted excitedly, and with a loud screech and the smell of burning rubber he raced along the road, swerving round cars...I swear he took corners on two wheels.

At ten seconds to 3 pm he triumphantly rammed on his brakes at the ferry as passengers were embarking.

We got out of the taxi...I gave him his 500drachs and a big tip. I noticed that he rapidly opened all the taxi windows before jetting away in search of new prey.

My apprehension regarding constipation, sometimes a problem where travelling overseas, was quickly terminated, so speedily in fact that we quickly sought a taverna where I ordered a beer, took a quick sip, and then sought the toilet, extremely pleased to find that used paper, quite a lot of it, was not required to be segregated.

We returned to Lixouri on the exactly-on-time ferry, and the 6.30 pm courtesy coach took us to the hotel.

I was quite looking forward to visiting Ithica, a smallish island to the right of Kefhalonia, separated at its nearest point by a two-mile-wide strait. The island is only thirty eight square miles in area, and is merely 600 yards wide at the middle.

The coach collected us at 7.15 am, and we drove to Lixouri, picking up excursionists en route, until all the coach seats were filled. We did not, to my surprise, travel by the Lixouri/Argostoli ferry, but drove northwards from Lixouri for about 10 kms, then swung to the right, closely following the coastline of a wide bay. From this point the coach was driven for a dozen kms along mountain roads, getting higher and narrower, with tremendous views of the sea far below.

Our driver, we quickly learned by tense observation, was anxious to traverse territory in the shortest possible time...lo and behold, a tourist coach was in front of us, travelling slowly, either to give the passengers the benefit of the gorgeous scenery, or because the driver was rightly apprehensive of negotiating such a narrow road with a sheer drop on his left...

I saw the wide grin spread across our driver's face in his mirror...he closed up to a yard or so behind the coach, and popped his klaxon loudly, but we smiled smugly to each other, realising that this was merely a macho demonstration, and there was absolutely no possibility of our driver overtaking. But he bloody well did. We all gasped in horror and amazement as the two coaches travelled side by side, until ours suddenly shot forward. Honestly, there must have been only an inch to spare. The tour hostess hurriedly switched on the intercomm and in a shaking voice she said..."No need to worry, Spiro does this every day." Of course, I immediately started to suffer stress anticipating the return journey, because we'd be on the outside.

We eventually swung right (and I mean swung) and followed a valley to the little port of Ag Evfima, where the THAKI passenger ship was moored. Numerous other coach parties disgorged day trippers, and we boarded the vessel.

The sun was tremendously hot, and we all appreciated the slight sea breeze on the one and a half hour passage esstwards to the rugged south coast of Ithica...we swung north westwards and entered the little port of Vathi, the capital of Ithica.

Unfortunately, the captain of the THAKI had permitted our coach driver to board his vessel, as we re-entered our coach, we looked in anguish at a little white line high on the northern mountains, which we knew was a narrow road, and we just knew this was to be our route.

The road travelled northwards and upwards from Vathi, giving a breath-taking view of the narrow straits between Ithica and Kephallonia, and after an exciting drive at high speed, we reached the little hilltop village of Stavros.

Visitors to Kephallonia & Ithica must be warned that public toilets are non-existant, which is why I purchased that beer in a taverna in Argostoli after the dramatic taxi ride, just so that I could use that establishment's lavatory. Numerous passengers who walked up and down the colourful main street of Stavros, walking in little steps, knees touching, urgently required to visit a toilet, but such a location just did not exist. There was silence in the coach as we climbed in again and travelled to the northern port of Kioni, where we were due to catch another smaller vessel which would return us to Vathi, following the east coast of Ithica.

Kioni was a nice little picture-postcard port, surrounded by mountains, and we were granted half an hour before we were told to board the ship for the return to Vathi. Naturally, all the tourists sought toilets, but public ones could not be found. There was one hotel, but it was obvious that one would require to purchase a drink of some sort before using it. Diane made friends with another passenger, a woman whose mission was most distressing, and from the clenched teeth bisecting her visage it was obvious, if you'll excuse the expression, that she was touching cloth. They did not wish to purchase a drink, that would only exacerbate their condition later...they merely required a quick relief visit, which was not an unreasonable request, as the local populace were entirely dependant upon tourists, and would be expected to do all they could to encourage them.

Diane and her friend therefore made a furtive approach to the hotel toilet, which was attached to the main building... I noted a hotel employee in a black dress observe them with shifty eyes, and she speedily rushed into the hotel, and the sound of a quickly-closed door reached my ears. They struggled to open the door to the toilet, but the beady-eyed woman had pushed home the bolt.

I was pleased that Diane was so principled that she had refused to buy a drink at the hotel in order to use the toilet, but I told her not to worry, there would be a lavatory on the ship.

We boarded the vessel at the appointed time, a dingy ship, and Diane speedily vanished into the little recess where the door, with paint flaking off it, bore the faint legend 'W.C.' She later admitted ruefully that only dire necessity forced its usage.

We docked once more at Vathi, and were granted a couple of hours to look round the port and environs, and have a meal, before the THAKI returned to Ag Evfima.

Our coach driver rubbed his hands together with delight

as we nervously entered his sanctum. He gripped the large steering wheel, eyes gleaming, ascending to the mountain roads as quickly as he could. Now that we were hugging the outside edge of the road, we should have accepted the opportunity to ogle at the passing scenery, but most passengers, especially those sitting on the right of the vehicle, were most apprehensive. A purveyor of worry beads would have disposed of his entire stock.

As we neared our hotel, the tour representative tactfully suggested that we should show our appreciation of the gallant driver for successfully negotiating all those narrow twisting mountain roads. I must confess that sheer relief overcame any reluctance to punish him financially. As I stepped off the coach I realised how precious life is...

Our last day in Kephallonia was Wednesday 22nd June 1994. I awoke from a deep slumber to find that I was coughing up copious amounts of phlegm of various colours...indeed, the dreaded red would have made a snooker set, but luckily that colour was absent.

However, I felt quite strong, and decided that the constant coughing would not inhibit my activities.

Whilst Diane swam in the warm sea, I decided to look for fossils in the grey cliffs. They were difficult to find, but a careful phlegm-spraying scrutiny revealed four distinct types, all small, around one cm in length or diameter, but exquisitely formed, especially when viewed with my little fingerprint magnifying glass. I've classified the finds as far as I can...*Helix Vectiensis*; *Turritalle Granulata*; *Cyrena* (?) and the broken stems of four Crinoids.

In the afternoon we returned to the village of Mantzavinata ...actually, it was in the nature of an experiment. Our tour hostess had told us that the owners of the little store we had previously visited closed at twelve noon, siesta time..."but they are always upstairs looking out of the window, hoping for customers."

Although I was still coughing quite a lot, I managed to wave as the wife's smiling face appeared at the window.

"I'm coming down," she shouted, and in a moment or two opened the entrance. We had come to the shop to purchase a couple of bottles of wine to take home, but when she heard my cough, she bade me to sit down at a table, reached behind a door and produced a large glass cask with a bulbous stopper. She pressured the stopper with her thumbs, eyes flashing with annoyance until it shot out of the neck of the cask. A sort of atom-bomb type mushroom slowly emerged from the bottle...it was slightly blue, and when it reached the ceiling it spread out like a smoke ring.

She poured out a tumbler full of frothing liquid, and passed it to me. She gave a copy-cat cough and smiled confidently, and I raised the tumbler to my lips.

Hmmmm.

My teeth and gums became numbed...it gurgled down my throat and hit the phlegm barrier.

She gave a tilted-glass indication with her right hand, and, hypnotised by her confidence, I drank the entire contents. I let the battle commence behind my ribs, and I didn't want mine hostess to be near then the climax occurred.

"Get the wine," I wheezed to Diane, and she made the purchases.

The shop owner was a really nice affectionate woman, she kissed and hugged Diane, tactfully avoiding repeating the action on

myself, and I saw her eyebrows raise as I slowly turned purple.

I stumbled away, looking for a deserted section of the village where I could expectorate...ah...a blind corner with a battered rowing boat upside-down on the verge. You probably do not wish to know this, but my chest and stomach heaved, I felt a tremendous kick against my rib cage, and the epitome of feculence covered the upturned keel. I'm sorry to have to relate this, but that is what happened. After a couple of moments I suddenly felt really good...I breathed heavily and the buzz saw noise from my chest had been totally eliminated.

Back in our room, I just couldn't face dinner. When Diane returned, she said that our coach left the hotel for the airport at 7.15 next morning.

I lay back on the bed, perspiring from every pore...and then the phlegm barrage re-commenced...

Throwing modesty aside, it was only my superior strength of mind which enabled me to arise from my sweat-drenched bed the following morning. I hadn't slept all night, and the only temporary relief I could obtain was to make a triangular structure from a thick spare blanket I found in a wardrobe, and place it against the bed-head in such a way that I could lay my upper torso against it, so that, at an angle of 45 degrees, it enabled me to breath without mucous dribbling down my nostrils...it went directly to my lungs and I coughed it up !

How on earth did I manage to shave and get dressed, and actually drag a heavy suitcase to the restaurant for an early breakfast ? All I could manage to imbibe was a cup of thick black Greek coffee without milk, normally a horrible thought, but now it was like honey down my throat.

The coach was waiting...my pockets were stuffed with tissues, and I coughed relentlessly. We drove along very narrow roads to pick up travellers who had patronised the little tavernas with tin can receptacles for used toilet paper...then we reached Lixouri and took the ferry to Argostoli.

En route to the airport we continued to pick up more holiday-makers until the coach was full, and then drove the few kms to the airport. I was in a phlegm-driven trance...we got our 'plane seats on the outside of two rows, so as to facilitate frequent trips to the toilet, which I thought would be required.

I tried to restrain my diaphragm, so that only one cough in five was a treble-tissue job...our flight was held up for half an hour, and we took off.

This 757 demonstrated a new acquisition...the tv screens showed a map of the return route, with the 757's position relayed by satellite...and frequently, figures on the screen displayed our speed and height, and time to Luton Airport...only another two hours and forty nine minutes to go.

Christ.

The encapsulated meals were expertly delivered, to me, they appeared smaller, but with more ecoutrements, and not sufficient space to accomodate all of them, I noted that it was rather like occupational therapy to actually prepare one's meal for consumption. I retained the plastic bowl holding chopped fruit, and passed everything else to Diane, who passed me her chopped fruit in exchange. I drank my little cup of coffee neat.

The woman on my left kept looking at me with pursed lips,

and changed places with her husband, who assumed a throaty cough by the time we landed at Luton. I know it was my fault, but there wasn't any alternative...I had to take that flight, irrespective of my physical condition.

Eventually, when my pockets were stuffed with sticky tissues and heavy handkerchiefs, and my eyelids were stuck together, we reached Luton and somehow I negotiated the administrative landing requirements.

An airport bus took us to Luton railway station, a fast train to St. Albans, and only one taxi was parked there, driven by an elderly Pakistani.

Now my physical state was such that I didn't care about what the taxi would cost, I just wanted to get home for a really good cough to clear my lungs. But I noted the taxi was being driven very slowly and the price indicator was never static. I began to take notice...the obligatory identity photograph of the driver on the dashboard revealed a black-haired young Pakistani, well under thirty years of age. Our balding driver was as old, if not older, than myself.

Bloody Hell.

So because he was driving another person's taxi, he was driving slowly to avoid a crash...or was he trying to get the fare well above a legal expectancy?

Both, I decided...both...

When we got to my bungalow, I asked him the cost... he looked at the trembling meter, and added another couple of pounds to it, but, what the hell, I was home...I gave him what he asked, and added a sarcastic fifty pence tip.

At home, I lay on my bed and immediately succumbed to coughing beyond my experience...two or three preliminary heaves, and then a tremendous thump in my chest and I expectorated wildly, and this happened for half an hour. Diane said she would telephone the doctor and ask him to come quickly, but there wasn't any reply from the surgery. She rushed to a nearby chemist who supplied a bottle of sticky brown expectorant, and in due course this provided relief.

Next morning the doctor arrived examined my chest, listened in awe at my description of my coughing the previous afternoon, asked where I'd been holidaying, pondered, and then gave his diagnosis. "You have caught a virulent Mediterranean-type virus", and prescribed a week's course of anti-biotics.

The following days saw a steady improvement in my coughing and expectoration. On Friday I swallowed my last anti-biotic capsule.

On Sunday I coughed all day, literally every two or three minutes...however, they were civilised coughs, and the phlegm was pure white. On Monday I visited the doctor who 'tut-tutted' and gave me another week's course of anti-biotics.

I am typing this in the middle of July...excuse me for a moment whilst I reach for a tissue....

1997

THE CRETAN CONGA

Diane and I departed from Stansted Airport at 10.35 pm on 17th July 1997, escorting Number grandson Philip, almost ten years of age. This was the first time we had taken him abroad. Our destination was Heraklion Airport, Crete, and adding two hours to balance British Summer Time, we landed at Heraklion at 4.30 am...it was still dark, but I noted a delicate blue tinge on the eastern horizon. We were in the second row from the right on the 757, and following the usual pre-landing procedure, air hostesses sat, belted up, facing the passengers, assuming unflappable lemon-sucking visages.

I have made exactly 197 flights in my life, all fully documented, but none of them produced a landing like this one...an absolute thump on the runway, definitely a pilot miscalculation. The air hostesses, eyes bulging in uncontrollable amazement and alarm, calmed down when they saw we were trundling safely along in reverse thrust... they gained immediate control of their facial muscles, once more bland and confident, albeit one of the younger ones rapidly eliminated a slightly concerned raise of the eyebrows, as if pondering whether or not she carried talcum powder in her make-up bag.

We were collected into coaches for the many destinations... we drove eastwards for almost two hours, over mountainous passes and through a long tunnel until the coach stopped outside our hotel in Kalo Chorio.

The brochure assured us that our hotel was in a quiet untouched area of Crete, where tourists were still looked at in amazement by the locals, It did also mention that the hotel was built on a hillside and 'might not be suitable for those with mobility problems.' Admittedly I was approaching my 71st birthday, but most certainly did not consider that I was in any way immobile.

The dozen new guests stood surrounded by suitcases, looking at a concrete road which swung to the right and ascended at about 1 - 4. Steep. A little van arrived and took our suitcases, leaving us to negotiate the climb to the hotel. Our eventual arrival at the hotel indicated that we had declared ourselves not deficient of mobility problems...we staggered upwards, younger persons than myself breathing stertorously. Philip kindly grabbed my left arm, and whether for support or not, Diane gripped my right arm, and eventually, quite exhausted, we reached Reception where our suitcases were waiting patiently to be claimed.

Large glasses of iced orange juice were supplied, eagerly quaffed by the gasping clientile, and we followed the receptor to our room, fortunately, he carried the suitcases.

Our room was somewhat smaller than we usually obtained in Greece, but the view from the verandah was magnificent...in the immediate foreground, just below us, was the concrete climb, strategically sited to enable the seated observers (us) to smile encouragingly at the poor devils en route to Reception.

On the horizon were many mountain peaks in echelon formation, and to the right was the sea, demonstrating varying shades of blue, from indigo to faded bluebell.

Philip had a narrow camp bed, and our single mattresses were esconced on a foot-high concrete base, painted antiseptic white ...I have scars on my right shin, which have healed into half-inch orbs, where I gashed myself on that blasted concrete.

The swimming pool area was where it all happened...a

smaller pool for children and diffident performers, and a large and deep pool for experienced swimmers. There were plenty of sunbeds scattered around the pool, and therefore the few German guests did not require to book them with blatant towel arrests...I know this disappointed them. The sun was overhead and was so blindingly hot that for the whole seven days I lugged my sunbed to shaded areas and did not permit the ultra-violet rays to attack my prostrate body. Philip was in the small pool every day, sometimes for several hours, but always covered in high-factor sun lotion and I empowered him to always remain in the shaded area of the pool.

Every morning, before the sun became too oppressive, we walked into the village...which consisted of a main road without pavements, with white-painted buildings on both sides of the road. Vehicles were always driven at a fast rate, and as there wasn't a kerb, they intended to drift on corners or on areas presumably dedicated to pedestrians. Old women, in wrinkled faces, and dressed entirely in black, sat outside their houses...elderly men sat outside the local tavernas, probably discussing how lazy their wives were.

One surprise was the existence of BERRY'S TAVERNE, and I permitted myself to be photographed outside it with Philip...this permanent record of the ubiquitous Berry's herewith embroidering my narrative.

Many of the buildings on the roadside had arrangements of vertical metal rods, in clusters, protruding from the flat white roofs, which I have noted before in Greece. The scheme is that, in future, maybe even in a decade's time, more storeys can be added. Looking down on the village from our vantage point at the hotel, there were at least a dozen flat roofs with rod clusters; I asked Philip to guess their use, obviously he is not going to be an architect !

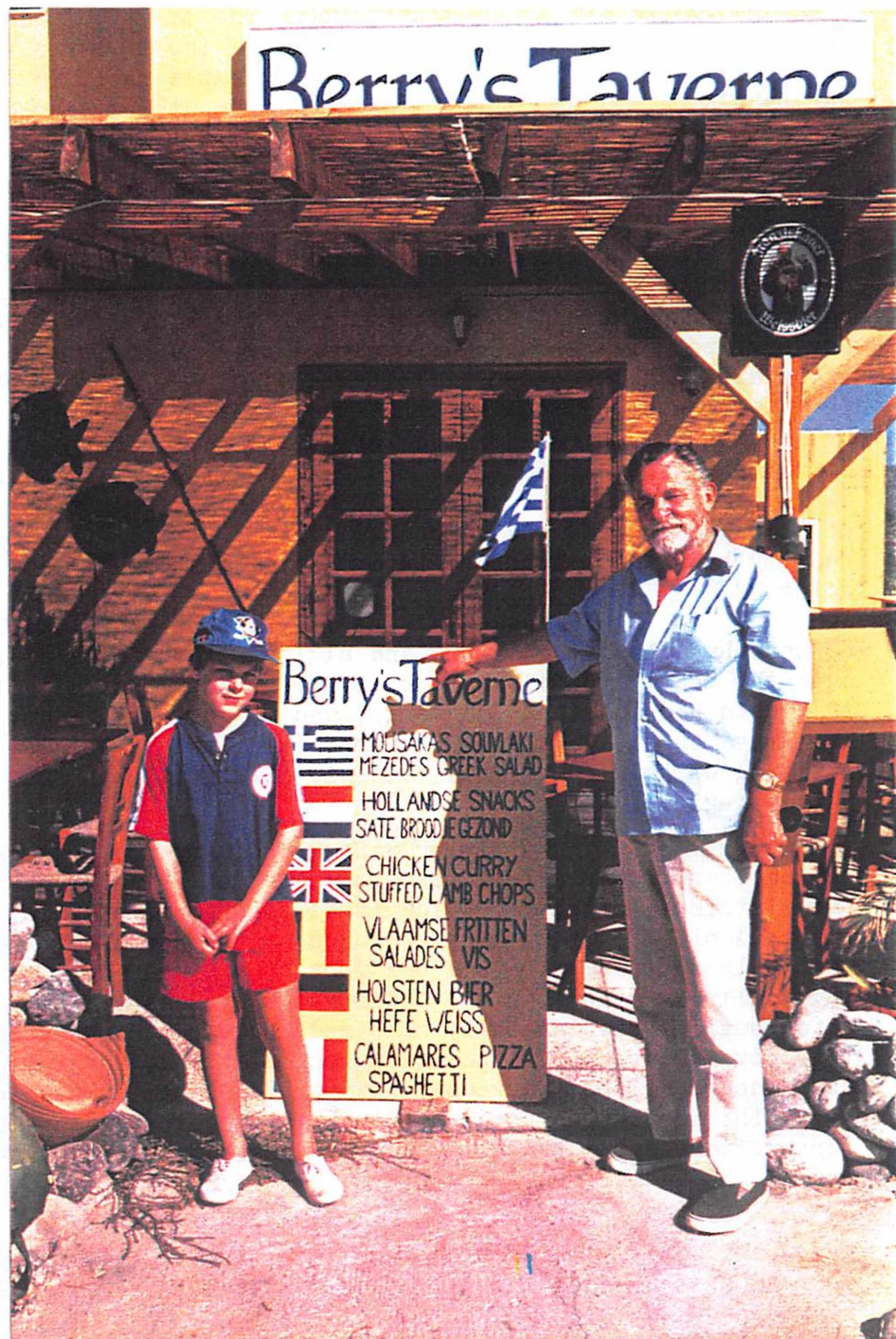
A Cretan Dance Evening was announced for Saturday 19th inst; the majority of the hotel's clientele, mostly English, but with a sprinkling of Germans, sat around the paved courtyard, tree surrounded, at the required time.

Four dancers appeared, two young men, and two twentyish females. They walked into the centre of the arena holding hands. The men were dressed in grey shirts, buttoned at the wrists, with black breeches and jackboots...they reminded me of old tv footage I had seen of the Hitler Jugend. The gals wore modest gowns, with lots of chiffon on their corsages.

The men were by far the most ambitious dancers, scuttling around with abandon, including incredible leaps, whereby they touched their knees, ankles and jackboot heels whilst still aloft, landing adroitly. Their female associates drifted around the periphery of their partners, clapping hands gently to the Cretan music, and imparting much-lipsticked smiles to the audience, who clapped enthusiastically at the conclusion of the first dance demonstration.

Whilst the male dancers panted for breath, two girls employed by the hotel, attired in Cretan dress, entered, one carrying a tray of small tots of a transparent drink, said by the knowledgeable to be 'raki'. ("It's extremely potent, mate.") The other girl carried a tray of flat raisoned cakes, typical Cretan party fare, we deduced.

The raki coursed through my body slightly slower than an electric shock...my fixed, teeth-bared grin would not permit me to sample the cake.



Philip and myself outside Berry's Taverne...photograph,
Diane Berry.

One of the dancers announced in quite good English that there would now be an audience-participation dance...they quickly plucked forth the obvious simpletons - I claimed a painful war-wound - and to the strains of a Cretan tune which sounded remarkably like their first dance, they led four long lines of delighted pseudo-dancers in complicated formations around the courtyard, concluding in a confused huddle. My wife and Philip had been commanded, and they said it was "good fun."

Another round of raki...was it my imagination, or were the filled tots now sliding round the trays...I glanced at the wide frightened eyes of the bearer as she used the tray-rim to rotate the tots round the tray. My wife didn't wish to sample raki, so I took a tot on her behalf. I swilled them both round my mouth, swallowed the warm milch, ran a numbed but questing tongue over my fillings.

Myself, and, I understand, most of the other guests were quite unprepared and amazed at the next dance.

The two male dancers brought in a table, about a yard square; they placed it in the middle of the courtyard and selected three gorgeous young women, whom they led to the table and levered them onto its surface. Slow Cretan music flowed over us, reflected by the cold night air, and the three girls began to gyrate seductively on the table... they were so close together that they only avoided flesh contact by keeping to the edge of the table. Two were German girls, in their late teens, dressed in white blouses and tight black skirts...the third girl worked in the bar, and had a red ensemble notable for the brevity of the skirt. I was only a couple of yards from them, and was returned to reality by Diane whispering in my ear..."What are the Cretan dancers doing?"

I looked at the direction she indicated...the four dancers had plastic bottles, and slyly jettied a strange-smelling liquid over the courtyard tiles. My nostrils wrinkled to test its source, but the music had increased in tempo, and my geriatric heart palpitated in overdrive as the gals became uninhibited, undoing blouse buttons and hitching up skirts to facilitate air-distribution around their twitching nether regions.

Suddenly my wife grabbed my arm..."look...look" she panted...and I saw a male dancer, a look of triumph on his expressive face, strike a match and flick it at the liquid staining the courtyard floor. A blue flame shot upwards and then raced along the sprayed area. Obviously the flames, about one foot high, were 'cold' and not physically dangerous in the slightest...at least, reason dictated this. A few small girls initially screamed, but spectators soon applauded this novel display of a peaceful napalm attack. Meantime the three table-top dancers glanced nervously downwards as the flames licked the table legs. The music concluded, and the flames quickly died out, and the table-toppers were eased to the ground by numerous male volunteers; I was not one of the lucky ones...

During the next break in the entertainment the bleary-eyed raki servers entered, now holding one tray between them and trying to retain it in a horizontal stance. I grabbed a half-filled tot as they staggered past, and shot it down in one gulp. I felt good, excited, war-wound forgotten, ready for anything.

The four dancers entered the arena once again, and as the opening bars of ZORBA THE GREEK began, they snatched spectators like a Press Gang.

De de de de de de de de
De da de da de da de da

The music, which I knew so well, was hypnotic... one

male dancer had ensnared the two German girls, he held their hands tightly, and as he passed in front of me, he saw my wide eyes and pulsating toes, and grabbed me by the shoulders and substituted me for himself. I leered at the two girls, gripped their hands, and the shuffle began.

De de ... de de ... de de ... de de ...

De da ... de da ... de da ... de da ...

The music became faster, and the long crocodile of dancers threaded through the courtyard...now hands were transferred to hips...I was delighted to put my hands round the girl's waist, and I felt the girl behind hold me.

De de . de de . de de . de de .

De da . de da . de da . de da ,

Now the rhythm was increased, and I saw to my amazement that the line of waist-grabbers in front of me had seemingly disappeared ...then the girl in front of me looked round with sheer terror in her eyes as she followed the routine of the dancers in front of her. She bent forward and pushed trembling fingers between her legs, and I grabbed them. A hand groped between my legs from the rear, and I rushed a protective hand to grab the wriggling invader. We swayed from side to side in this undignified manner at a fast pace, and it was several moments before the line of dancers assumed the upright position and the music stopped.

I looked at my two partners, their eyes narrowed as they searched my face for signs of enjoyment. The girl who had been in front of me in the crocodile gasped air out of her lungs in a burst of spittle, and only a person with an above-average suspicious mind would have concluded that her burst of effluvium sounded rather like 'schweinhund.'

I staggered back to my seat. I saw Diane and Philip return in high spirits. My wife said she hadn't enjoyed herself so much for many years. Philip opined that he would ask his teacher to include this activity in the Junior Physical Training Period.

I lay in bed that night pondering on the origin of the dance. Perhaps the young men seated round the fire in a Cretan village, ages ago, seemed preoccupied with a desire to return to their goats, and in order to re-direct their attention, a village elder had introduced this new sensational dance. It was quite superior to the Sir Roger de Coverley, an 18th century terpsichorial routine on which I had been weaned.

A local coach stopped outside the hotel every hour, travelling to the major town/harbour in the area, Agio Nikolaos, some 20 kms to the south, so we entered the vehicle at 10 am on the 22nd July. The only available seats were at the end of the coach, and we walked between the seats, and all I saw were elderly Cretan men and women looking at me in a somewhat disgruntled manner. I knew that the German Syndrome had struck once again. All the passengers thought I was German, and the Cretans do not like the Germans, only accepting their presence with quietude for financial reasons. I mean, I am a Saxon, an Anglo-Saxon to be sure, but the Cretan passengers were not sure. If they smiled, and I was German, then they would forever regret it...by not smiling or showing the slightest degree of approbation, they were accepting the lesser evil. Of course, I beamed at them with a forced show of bonhomie, but this approach was not reciprocated. Only when I conversed with Philip, in rather a loud voice, did nearby passengers relax and smile at me.

The coach depot was at the harbour...it was a small square, and somehow the driver's manipulated their vehicles in and around it with great skill.

Agios Nikolaos has lots of shops, many of the streets are narrow but geared to one-way traffic so that pedestrians had only a fifty per cent chance of finishing up on slabs 3,4 and 5 in the local mortuary. Cretan drivers regard pedestrians as objects on an assault course, and generally depend upon the reflexes of the pedestrians to avoid contact. We edged our way warily along narrow footpaths; it was hot, albeit a dry heat, not humid, and large ice creams and bottles of water were necessary to avoid dehydration. Rows of motor schooners were moored close-pack along the harbour, and pretty people relaxed on the decks...the handsome, tanned young men wearing caps with anchor designs above the peaks...the girls lounged languidly sipping drinks from long thin glasses. None of them seemed unduly worried about the imminent arrival of income tax bills, which cause me a palpitation or two.

We made a few trite purchases, and, panting like landed fish, we returned to the coach station to catch the scheduled 12 noon coach to our hotel, but it didn't arrive, leastwise, as far as we know it didn't. The senario was riddled with confusion; driver's shrugged when I asked them if our coach was due. Eventually I noted an old black-shawled woman with a wart on her nose, sitting patiently...she had been on our coach, and I presumed she was awaiting the return vehicle. We sat and watched her intently, and when she eventually stood up and angled forward to a coach, we stood behind her. As we climbed on the coach after her, I gave the name of our hotel to the heavily-moustached driver. He nodded...my detective-type hunch was a success...twenty moments later we reached our hotel, and physically prepared ourselves for the steep ascent to our hotel room.

In order to maintain the myth that the hotel was the centre of the known universe, and anything outside it was merely peripheral, a disco was presented after dinner in the hotel, the DJ being a thinly-disguised waiter. Diane and I were certainly not appreciative of the throbbing, rapping music being presented, but, surprisingly, this seemed to be Philip's forte, and he swayed onto the courtyard and danced quite energetically, sometimes leaping into the air and performing 360 degree spins. Spectators looked at him with admiration, after all, he wasn't quite ten years old...he had the monopoly of the dance area. No one appeared to have the nerve to accompany him. He frowned, and loudly exhorted people to join him. I saw him cross to a table and gesticulate his wish that they join him. They were adults, to whom we were smilingly acquainted, and they laughed and declined his invitation. One of the men crossed to me, and asked if I knew what Philip had said to them? I shook my head.

"This is not an exhibiton, he said, " quoth the man, "You are all supposed to join in." Eventually, several young girls did just that, and later a few adults deigned to move a limb or to. We pulled Philip from the arena after an hour of this exhibitionism, quite a surprise for us.

The last day...we had to vacate our room at 12 noon, but the airport coach didn't leave until sixteen hours later. The repayment of monies for the use of a wall safe enabled us to hire another room for the period, but it was small and facing the sun, and we perspired the whole time, luckily being able to shower frequently.

The coach journey to Heraklion was in darkness, and we were very tired, and slept the whole way to Stansted in the 757.
