

5 Centre Tour of Greece – A Classical Pilgrimage

An account (with annotations) from the diary of a thirteen year old girl visiting the country for the first time.

(The girl may remain anonymous. The annotations, for which I (IRG) accept responsibility, may contain some out of date information, particularly with respect to currency and entry charges, but in general reflect experience built up over a number of years taking school trips to Greece and, I hope, may prove useful and informative.)

DAY 1

3.30 p.m. Left QCT in a coach(*1) for Gatwick. We'd had a very successful Greek evening(*2) only a couple of weeks before, so we had a good idea of what to expect, but we were all a little nervous anyway - hardly anyone had ever been before. The weather wasn't bad at Taunton but by the time we got to Gatwick it was cold and wet. Obviously we were hoping for better things in Greece. 8.00 p.m. - 9.00 p.m. What a queue at the check-in desk! We had to show our passports(*3) and the tour leader had to sort out all the tickets, but eventually we made it through to the departure lounge where we could relax.

9.45 p.m. We boarded Flight AE588, a great big, comfortable Boeing Jet, and left Gatwick at 22.10 p.m. virtually bang on time. There was something to eat and drink but I soon fell asleep.

DAY 2

3.40 a.m. I awoke just before we began our descent into Athens and saw all the lights as we touched down. As we left the aeroplane I was surprised to find it warm and dry. Perhaps we were going to be lucky after all. We were met by the local Tour Company Representative and an Athenian who seemed to know the party leader and was very helpful. After going through customs and showing our passports (again!) we finally boarded a coach to our Hotel in central Athens (*3A) where we were allocated rooms and tried to get some sleep.

9.00 a.m. Awoke to marvel at the sunshine, took a shower (interesting experience) and went downstairs for breakfast. I quite liked the bread and jam, but the cake seemed a funny thing to eat and the coffee was undrinkable (ugh!). Managed to summon up the energy for a gentle stroll around the area. We made our way over towards the Acropolis area, fascinating, but quite tiring. The Greeks are mad drivers!

1.00 p.m. Lunch in a local restaurant. We had a short walk along the road from the hotel but it was nice to eat in a different place. There were lots of ordinary Athenians there and a super atmosphere. The food was alright, but nothing special. The staff seemed to like it more than we did.

2.00 p.m. - 6.00 p.m. The long awaited visit to the Acropolis. We had no guide(*5) but we already had a pretty good idea of what we wanted to see(*6). I was particularly impressed with the sculpture in the museum, but the views were a bit special and the Parthenon was pretty impressive too, though it seems to be falling down. We were told afterwards that we could have gone to Sounion(*7) but I'm glad we didn't.

7.00 p.m. Dinner in local restaurant. We were starting to get used to the food now. After dinner we all went for a stroll through the Plaka(*8) and had a good view of the Acropolis, lit up by night and very attractive. We stayed close together as it is easy to get lost there. Bought some souvenirs and post cards.

11.00 p.m. It was nice to turn in. We were all worn out(*9).

DAY 3

8.30 a.m. Breakfast. Same as yesterday.

9.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. A fascinating outing to the National Archaeological Museum(*10). I'd been desperate to see the Golden Mask of Agamemnon and various other things and I was not disappointed, but it was difficult to find our way around and it was very crowded.

2.00 p.m. We strolled back to the local restaurant for lunch but they weren't ready for us(*11). However, we eventually got to the table and enjoyed some lovely chicken and chips.

3.00 p.m. Bags packed and off we went to Delphi(*12). Nearly everybody slept on the way but our courier gave us interesting talks as we went along. When we got into the mountains some of the views were wonderful but nothing compared with what we saw when we finally arrived(*13). The town was lovely and the Hotel, located on the outskirts, was much posher than the one where we had stayed in Athens.

7.00 p.m. Evening meal. A very elegant and enjoyable experience.

8.00 - 10.00 p.m. A gentle stroll through the town of Delphi with a chance to buy more post cards and souvenirs. It was very relaxing.

11.00 p.m. We were all ready for sleep again.

DAY 4

8 a.m. breakfast - more to choose than usual. I think the hotel was more cosmopolitan. We had a little time before the coach left so we walked up the road to look at the views(*14.)

9 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. A fairly rigorous session, though very rewarding. It was hot and getting hotter by the time we reached the site (*15) and the guide had so much to tell us about Delphi that I could hardly take it all in. But when we were given an opportunity to explore on our own I took some marvellous photographs. What a place! The museum was pretty special too!

1 p.m. Back to the hotel for a super lunch overlooking the valley. We all vowed to return to Delphi as soon as possible.

2 p.m. Off on the coach again, past all kinds of fascinating places (*16.)

Unfortunately some of the group missed a lot because they went to sleep, but the ferry crossing woke everyone up and we all enjoyed the visit to the big church in Patra. Unfortunately Louise wasn't let in because she was wearing shorts.

5 p.m. At last we got to Olympia and our Hotel. There was a friendly Alsatian dog to welcome us and the staff couldn't have been nicer. (*17)

7 p.m. We enjoyed the evening meal in the roof top restaurant with lovely views over the town.

8 p.m. - 10 p.m. It was a mild, dry evening, so we had a stroll around the town, where we found plenty of places to buy souvenirs, though some shops were more expensive than others. I had to ask the party leader for more cash(*18)

11 p.m. Bed-time - we were all pretty worn out but some were beginning to get their second wind.

DAY 5

8 a.m. breakfast. Some did not make it (I think it was the ones who had got their second wind last night) but the dog was there.

9 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. In the museum (*19) and on site. We were getting a little shell shocked by now, but the weather was a little cooler and the guide was beginning to develop a better understanding of our concentration span. (I do not think Louise

has got one at all!) I loved the Hermes by Praxiteles and the Apollo pediment was pretty impressive but the best fun was beating most of the boys running up and down the stadium.

1 p.m. Back to the Hotel for lunch - a super meal with much exchanging of presents and farewells with the staff.

2 p.m. Back in the coach again for the journey to Pylos(*20)

Most people in the group have not bothered to unpack their suitcases yet but some of the boys could certainly use a decent shower. David is beginning to look a bit rough around the edges. They cannot take the pressure, I suppose. They needed the rest on the coach anyway.

4 p.m. On reaching Pylos we drove to our Hotel which looked quite nice but we were sent up the hill to another place which turned out to be equally comfortable.

5 p.m. It was a lovely warm afternoon so we went down to the tiny beach near the hotel and had a swim followed by a stroll around the town and drinks at a cafe in the central square. The staff bought orange juice for the next day (*21) or at least they thought they did. It turned out to be cold tea.

7 p.m. Dinner in a seaside restaurant near to the hotel, followed by a gentle stroll - no stamina for anything more energetic.

11 p.m. Wrote a few postcards but the eyes gave up and I fell asleep with the pen in my hand.

6

8 a.m. Breakfast, followed by a quick visit to the castle (*22). Some people found a lovely little museum (*23).

9 a.m. Back on the coach but only for a short journey this time, to Nestor's Palace (*24). It was one of those lovely clear mornings and we were all fascinated by the bath tub but unfortunately one of the girls was ill and we all got a bit worried about her (*25). We got back into the coach and went a little further to a village called Chora where we found a fascinating museum with some lovely Mycenaean frescoes and some real Linear B tablets (whatever they are!) The driver was anxious about the long drive ahead, so he kept hooting the horn and eventually the party leader and the guide re-appeared. Janet, the sick girl, was still feeling pretty poorly. We pressed on regardless, through Kalamata (*26) and up into the Taygetus Mountains. Janet slept through most of the mountains which was just as well because it was all a bit hairy. She woke for the packed lunch stop, in an idyllic setting (*27) and was persuaded to eat some food which made her feel better. When we got going again, on the way down the other side of the range, one or two people found the bends a bit too much to take and were very violently sick (*25) but we made it to Mistra (*28) and Sparta (*29) and eventually Tolon, passing various places on the way.

5 p.m. One or two were beginning to run out of steam now but when we got to Tolon everybody perked up. What a marvellous place! Some went for a swim immediately whilst others preferred a more gentle way of removing the travel grime. The Hotel there was immaculate - just what we needed. The doctor was called for Janet and once she got some medicine inside her she soon started to feel better.

7 p.m. A very pleasant evening meal, then we said farewell to our courier and the coach driver who had brought us safely over so many miles>(*30.)

DAY 7

8 a.m. An early breakfast. The water (*31) was beautiful but it looked as though it might become very hot later.

8.30 - 1 p.m. A 'mini tour' of Epidaurus (*32), Mycenae (*33) and ancient Corinth but the party leader was having to work quite hard now to keep up the enthusiasm level. Fortunately he managed quite well though we were all looking forward to the free day tomorrow.

1 p.m. Packed lunch at Corinth, (*34) followed by a quick visit

to the canal (*35.) It was very hot by now but the rest did everybody good and the sight of the canal was spectacular enough to wake everybody up.

2 p.m. We went back via Nauplion(*26) passing Argos (*37) and Tiryns (*38) and there were some who wished we had time to explore these places but most of us were pleased to wander around Nauplion in the afternoon to relax a little.

6 p.m. Return to Tolon for evening meal. Fortunately Janet was by now feeling a lot better. She had missed the day's excursions but the rest and quiet had been very good for her.

8 p.m. Some of the older ones went to a disco at one of the local hotels. We just had a quiet walk along the beach with the waves lapping quietly on the shore.

11 p.m. Bed

DAY 8

8.30 a.m. A slightly later breakfast than usual followed by a real treat - a free morning(*39). The weather was lovely and we had a really super lazy time, sunbathing, swimming and trying out the pedalo boats. Some walked along to Asine (*40), a local Mycenaean citadel and didn't regret it, but a lot of us could not be bothered. In the afternoon we took the opportunity to complete our shopping and some went into Nauplion again for further exploration.

7 p.m. Our last Greek dinner (was I pleased or not?) followed by packing up and farewells to the hotel staff.

11 p.m. departure to Athens Airport

DAY 9

1.30a.m. Flight NoAE 589 departed for Gatwick with all of us safely on board in varying degrees of consciousness.

6.20 a.m. Arrival at Gatwick. No trouble in customs. Coach was waiting for our return to Taunton (11 a.m.) We all said farewell, (some were quite tearful) but we knew we would all meet up again soon (*41). I do not think I will ever forget this trip.

NOTES

1. This must be arranged independently but is often the cheapest way to transport a party to the airport. It is best to add the cost of the coach to the final account sent to parents. In the interests of security it is a good idea to collect in passports (see note 3 below) and pocket money (see Appendix 2) at this point.

2. It is advisable to establish a reliable communication link with parents at this stage, when many administrative 'chores' can be sorted out (see Appendix 3)

3. The group passport facility is available and can be organised through The Tour Company. I always found it more convenient to ask for individual passports.

3A It is possible to stay in Glyfada but the question of accessibility to central Athenian sites often outweighs the advantages of more luxurious accommodation in this delightful seaside location and you have to remember the noise of the jets as they screech over your hotel.

4. Not always a good idea. This tour is very tiring and some prefer to stay in bed.

5. The question of guides is a vexed one. Group instruction by an unqualified person (i.e. you) is not allowed on Greek sites and there is no doubt that having a qualified guide does add an extra dimension to a tour such as this. Difficulties, however, can arise and situations occur which require the maximum of tact and diplomacy to handle properly. Best of luck!

6. Consult a guide book if you want to find out all about the Acropolis etc. but do not miss the Parthenon, the Erechtheum, the Propylaea and the tiny Temple of Athena Nike. The Museum is well worth a visit, with a superb collection of sculpture from the site, including the Karyatids of the Erechtheum. The views from the walls are staggering but be careful you do not lose any of the party (see App3). Worth pointing out, and very suitable subjects for photographs are: the Odeon of Herodes

Atticus and the Theatre of Dionysus just below you, with, in the distance the Temple of Olympian Zeus, Hadrian's Arch, the Agora with the Temple of Hephaistos and the Stoa of Attalos, and for those interested in the modern Olympic Games, the impressive Stadium built in 1896. Make sure they climb the Areopagus and point out the Pnyx (a knowledge of early Athenian democracy will be useful here). Try to include in the walk to and from the Acropolis as many places of interest as possible. It should not be difficult, but be careful of the traffic (see App 3) (Acropolis open Monday - Saturday, 7.30 a.m. - 7.15 p.m. Sunday 8 a.m. - 6.20 p.m. Admission 600 dr but see App 2)

7. The Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion is situated on a promontory high above the coast and offers superb views over the Aegean (If you have a guide, no doubt he/she will want to tell you about Aegeus. They are very keen on their mythological heritage). Byron came here and wrote something on a pillar - so they say. I have never seen it. (Site open Monday - Saturday 9 a.m. - sunset - try to be there at sunset - Sunday 10 a.m. - sunset. Admission 300 Dr. Last bus to Athens departs at 8 p.m. journey takes c 2 hours each way)

8. A wonderful experience but a good deal of organisation and policing is necessary to avoid difficulties. If you have a young group you ought to be keeping them together - it is not difficult to get lost in the narrow streets. There are thousands of things to see and plenty of opportunities to buy souvenirs etc.

9. A little care in room allocation can avoid some of the more obvious problems but in the end there is no substitute for a master/mistress on duty doing a certain amount of old fashioned patrolling.

10. You could easily spend a whole day in this museum and still miss a good deal of the interesting sights. It is advisable, therefore, to arrange a certain amount of advance planning if you want to include the major exhibits in a morning's visit. Perhaps the prior purchase of a guide book - the one by Dr Semni Karounzou is recommended (800 dr) and would be a useful investment and you could always arrange a guided tour, though for younger members of the group I would not regard this as advisable. Whatever you do, try not to miss the following items:

- a) The finds of Schliemann's digs at Mycenae soon to be housed in a new museum near the site including the golden 'Mask of Agamemnon' (which is, in fact, the death mask of a king who lived at least three centuries earlier.)
- b) The 'koroï' or standing males from various artistic epochs
- c) Minoan frescoes (on the second floor) excavated from a town on Santorini, where they were buried during a volcanic eruption around 1500 BC. They provide a unique glimpse of life in the Bronze Age and give ample material for a later discussion.
- d) a wonderful collection of Greek vases of all colours, sizes and periods.
- e) Some very impressive bronze statues, particularly Poseidon hurling a trident (or is it Zeus hurling a thunderbolt?) There are lots of other fascinating items but probably neither time nor energy to cover them. (Museum open Tuesday - Saturday - 8 a.m. - 7 p.m., Sunday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. Admission 500 dr)

Depending on the location of your hotel the walk to and from the NAM could take in some interesting sights e.g. the Olympic Stadium, Flea Market (Monastiraki), Temple of Olympian Zeus, Parliament Building (with guards) on Syntagma Square etc. Do not overdo the walking at this stage, there is plenty to do later in the week. You may like to take a bus or a tram - a bit hectic but good fun.

11. Timing can become a problem, particularly if you have a large party split into small groups. Be prepared to accept a degree of flexibility on times, particularly when your meals are taken in local restaurants, rather than in your hotel.

12. This is one way of going around the sites. The order may be reversed. It is certainly advisable to have a courier or a guide for this central section of the tour, i.e. Delphi, Olympia and Pylos.

The drive to Delphi, given reasonable weather conditions can be relaxing and informative. It used to take four hours before they built the new road up into the mountains but it is much quicker now. You go

by way of Thebes (passing the battlefield of Plataea), Levadia (the new road looks down on the crossroads where Oedipus is said to have killed his father, Laius) Arachova (a fine place to pick up a locally woven carpet, if you can figure out how to get it back to the UK) to Delphi itself.

13. One of the high spots of the tour. Your guide will probably want to regale you with pseudo-historical and mythological details about the place. When Zeus wished to discover the world's centre he sent two eagles from opposite ends and they touched beaks in Delphi, where the 'omphalos' or navel stone, still marks the exact meeting place. Throughout the ancient world troubled or ambitious souls were drawn to the Oracle of Apollo here. The Pythia, priestess of the God, provided them with advice at once magical, profound but virtually impossible to decipher - hence the role of the priests. It is quite the most impressive location imaginable.

14. Whatever the location of your hotel in the village, the views either way are breath-takingly beautiful. A quick stroll after breakfast, before you visit the site, should ensure that your enjoyment of this particular aspect of your visit is not limited to one particular vista.

15. With a rich mixture of temples, treasures, tributes to the Gods and their holy representatives, a theatre and a stadium famous throughout the ancient world, the ruins have a national character like no other ancient site in Greece. A guide is invaluable, but again there are limits to what you can see in the time available and some allowance must be made for simply standing and staring. The location is the most atmospheric in Greece, given appropriate weather conditions and has to be experienced to be believed but a certain amount of free time to wander among the pines and to take everything in is essential. If you can make it down to the Castalian spring and the Tholos on the lower site your perseverance will certainly be rewarded, but do not do this at the expense of climbing up to the Stadium, and do not forget also that you need to allow yourself time for a look around the museum, which contains at least two indisputable masterpieces of ancient Greek art, the frieze of the Siphnian Treasury and the Charioteer of Delphi. To appreciate the site and the museum fully, consider purchasing the red, white and black map of a 1st century BC reconstruction of the site, available in the village shops for 150dr. A guide book will also be useful; the one by Basil Petrakos is recommended (700 dr) (Site open in summer Monday - Saturday 8 a.m. - 6.45 p.m. Sunday 8 a.m. - 5.45 p.m. in off-season Mon - Fri 9 a.m. - 3.30 p.m. Admission 300 dr. Museum, similar times. Admission 400 dr.)

16. The descent by coach and ride through olive groves to Itea is quite spectacular. The journey from there to Patras, passing by Naupactus (site of various battles) and crossing the Gulf by Corinth by ferry from Antirio to Rio is slightly less impressive but not without interest. Patras itself is easily forgotten but your guide will certainly want to take you around the largest Orthodox cathedral in Greece, Agios Andreas, which is located here and dedicated to St Andrew. He was a martyr who was crucified on an X-shaped cross, not feeling worthy to die on the same kind of cross as Jesus. The custom of marking a kiss with 'x' derives from this episode as his faithful disciples would mark an x on a document and kiss it in memory of his sacrifice. The Cathedral is particularly notable because it enshrines the relic of the disciple's head, presented by the Catholic Church in Rome about ten years ago (Dress code strictly enforced - you will not get in with shorts on!)

17. Hotels are not always able to come up with the precise allocation of rooms which you require, especially as you are only staying there for one night. Tact and diplomacy are needed and rewarded.

18. A friendly courier who will exchange currency for you is very useful by this stage of the tour, but it is more likely that you will have to rely on local banks. Fortunately they tend to open at some very unusual, but quite convenient times e.g. 9p.m.

19. The timing of your visit to the site and museum at Olympia is crucial. The museum is excellent (probably the best in Greece) and is best visited when the children are fresh - also much less crowded early in the morning. Straight ahead as you enter the main hall are the

...taking pediments of the destroyed Temple of Zeus. The western pediment belongs to Apollo whose superhuman figure is flanked by exquisitely sculpted figures from the war between the Lapiths and the Centaurs. The eastern pediment, slightly more fragmented, features figures with figurines around him preparing for the chariot race between Pelops, founder of the Olympic games and Oinomaus, father of his slayer. Even more impressive, perhaps, if that is possible, is the relief by Praxiteles, a masterpiece comfortably buried (like much of the site) in a bed of mud when the sanctuary was flooded, and which was exhibited most strikingly in its own room in the far right corner of the museum. The younger members of the group may prefer to see the 'Hera's' helmet or the jumping weights, but there is plenty to excite anyone's imagination. (Open in summer, Monday and Wednesday - 7.30 a.m. - 7 p.m. Sunday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. Tuesday noon - 5 p.m. in winter Wed - Mon 8.30 a.m. - 5 p.m. Tues noon - 5 p.m. Admission 200 dr.)

The site itself is very complex and can be confusing. Your courier will give you all the historical background and sort out the different directions for you but Manicus Andronicus archaeological guide will be most useful as the ruins are vast and barely marked. Do not miss the following:

the remains of the colossal Temple of Zeus (the statue housed in it is one of the wonders of the ancient world)

the gymnasium and palaestra (very beautiful when the trees are in bloom).

the Temple of Hera (mention the modern Olympic flame)

the stadium itself

Without doubt the majority of the group will want to exhaust themselves by climbing up and down this, but the memory will endure even when the excitement is forgotten. The place is almost as atmospheric as Delphi. Open in summer Mon - Sat 7.30 a.m. - 7 p.m. Sunday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. in winter daily 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Admission 400 dr)

Homer's 'Sandy Pylos' The journey from Olympia hugging the western coast of the Peloponnese takes you off the beaten tourist track and it is well worth the detour. You pass by Bassae where the Doric columns of the Temple of Epictus Apollo stand, sacred and solitary - by all accounts a wonderful place, if you can spare the time and trouble to find it. Pylos, more accessible though perhaps less atmospheric, is reached within 2 hours from Olympia. Navarino, Sphacteria and the palace of good old King Nestor himself give much to think about and topics for discussion.

Packed lunches; can vary enormously in quality but it is always a good idea to supplement them, especially with something to drink.

In addition to the natural sentinel of Sphacteria Island (make sure you know your Thucydides if you want to hold forth on this topic) the island is guarded by fortresses on both sides of its harbour. The northern one, Neokastro, was very near to our hotel and a short walk from breakfast paid interesting dividends. The walls are well enough preserved to allow one to walk upon them and they enclose a church (with original mosque), a large citadel and a museum building (not yet open). There are poppies everywhere (at least in April) and wonderful views from the walls out over the Bay of Navarino. Well worth a visit.

If time permits, Pylos' tiny Museum (Fillenion St) should be visited. It is the home for various finds from the Hellenistic tombs at Mycenaean and Mycenaean ones at Koukounara (open Monday and Wednesday 8.45 - 3 p.m. Sunday 9.30 a.m. - 2.30 p.m. Admission 200 dr)

We are told in the Odyssey that the Palace of Nestor is located somewhere in the SW corner of the Peloponnese. Homer also describes 3 separate locations called Pylos. Archaeologists, however, are confident that excavations 4km south of Chora have actually uncovered the real Nestor's Palace. It is a charming small site to visit - well laid out and clearly marked. The well preserved ancient bath tub will amuse the younger members of the group but the megaron is probably more significant archaeologically (there are also rooms where the first linear B tablets were found on the Greek mainland). Do not miss the beehive 'tholos' tomb which lies below the ruins. There is a very scholarly guide (University of Cincinnati) available on site for the tour (Open Mon - Sat 8.45 a.m. - 3 p.m. Sunday 9.30 - 2.30 p.m.

Admission 200 dr)

25. Medical problems are one of the hazards of any foreign trip and the 5 centre tour of Greece is by no means unusual in this respect, bearing in mind particularly the element of stress which is necessarily involved because of the coach travelling and the pressure of visiting a large number of sites in a relatively limited time. Beware, particularly of tummy problems - a classic reaction to stress, coupled with an unfamiliar diet. Some can appear to be much more dangerous than they are, but it is advisable to err on the side of caution (see Appendix 3). The local doctor at Tolon was certainly very helpful and any charges incurred are retrievable from insurance, but travel sickness, particularly on the coach journey through the Taygetus Mts can be quite problematic and you will need to be aware of the possible delays involved with this.

26. Kalamata was shattered by an earthquake in 1986 and this has left a scar on the city and the spirit of its inhabitants. Crumbling, vacated buildings have streets with temporary accommodation (3000 live in trailers, hoping to rebuild their homes some day) while modern, shatter-proof structures are being erected in all parts of the port. A fascinating place to drive through.

27. A fine day for a lunch stop in the Taygetus Mountains. Clear weather ensured uninterrupted views for miles and the proximity of a wayside cafe guaranteed a plentiful supply of honey, yoghurt etc. to supplement the packed lunch. (cf Appendix 1 on Greek food and drink).

28. A brief stop here did little but whet the appetite for a future visit. If one's itinerary allowed, a day's stop here would provide an impressive insight into Byzantine culture as well as offering an opportunity to explore what many regard as the finest historical site in Greece. All we did was walk around the village and view the site from below, but even this provided a fascinating interlude in the long journey from Pylos to Tolon.

29. Sparta - the mere name evokes all manner of historical associations, and though the place is no Delphi or Olympia, it has to be worth visiting just to say you have been there. Tripolis is hardly the most fascinating of towns but the road northward bypasses Tegea and climbs high into the mountains before dropping down towards Nauplion and Tolon (via Lerna, the home of the fabled Hydra).

30. We said farewell at this point to our coach driver and courier. It is good to show one's appreciation of services rendered with a generous tip, though obviously the payment of the people concerned will have been organised separately by the travel agency in Athens. There is a difference between a courier and a guide. It is advisable to ascertain the status of your tour companion beforehand and to be prepared to pay for any extra requirements. A courier, for example, would not be expected to lecture on site.

31. The weather in Greece in April can be very variable. In fact we were fortunate to be visiting the Peloponnese during a long dry spell and were treated to a surfeit of blue skies, sunshine and very pleasant conditions. At other times I have experienced much less favourable weather.

32. **'At Epidaurus I felt a stillness so intense that for a fraction of a second I heard the great heart of the world beat and I understood the meaning of pain and sorrow'.**

- Henry Miller, *The Colossus of Maroussi*

Definitely a place for the early morning. Your coach from Tolon should be able to get you here by 9.30 a.m. if you leave early. If you are lucky with the weather, as we were, you will have a clear, silent, morning and from the top of the graceful and perfectly preserved 55 tiers of seats in this wonderful theatre, you can hear a pin, or at least a coin, drop. The place defies description and has to be experienced to be believed. Located in a sanctuary to Asclepius, cut into the side of a hill in a pine grove, constructed towards the end of the 4th century BC with a seating capacity of 14,000 it has miraculously remained in almost perfect condition and is still used today. (Site open Mon - Sat 8 a.m. - 7 p.m., Sunday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. Admission 300 dr - hold on to your ticket stubs for the museum which has a stunning collection of

original statuary)

33. No city figures more prominently in Greek mythology than Mycenae and a reading of Aeschylus' tragic trilogy the 'Oresteia' will give you ample background and descriptive material about the House of Atreus. Historically the Mycenaean's link with the Minoans may hold the key to the later flowering of genius in 5th century Athens and certainly represents a crucial stage in the development of European culture. The site itself broods silently and tragically in its magnificent setting and is probably best seen as early as possible on a warm, spring morning - preferably before the hordes of sightseers descend upon it. Discovered by Schliemann, the well preserved ruins of ancient Mycenae rank as one of the most celebrated archaeological locations in modern history. You will not miss the Lion Gate because it is the only way into the main site, but make sure the children notice the Cyclopean Walls, the Grave Circles, the palace and royal apartments, with the postern gate and underground cistern at the far end of the citadel. A short distance from the main site you will find various additional tombs, of which the so-called Treasury of Athens is the most impressive (Beware, the bees!) (Site open Mon- Sat 8 a.m. - 7 p.m., Sunday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. Admission to citadel and Treasury of Athens 500 dr. Hang on to your tickets or you will have to pay twice).

34. Ancient Corinth's position of immense strategic importance, between the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf, made it one of the jewels of the ancient world. Always prosperous in Greek times, the town was refounded as a Roman colony in 44BC by Julius Caesar and became renowned for its pleasure loving inhabitants. Relying on the riches earned through trading, the Corinthians had both time and energy for self-indulgence. Their high life-style attracted the stern disapproval of the Apostle Paul who tried to reform the city's decadent inhabitants by preaching from the steps of the Temple of Apollo (or so they say!)

The remains of the ancient city which have been excavated reflect a largely Roman settlement though there is plenty of evidence of the earlier Greek occupation of the site, notably the famous monolithic columns of the Temple of Apollo mentioned above, which dates back to the 6th century BC and is most impressive, particularly when surrounded by poppies, as it is in April. For a comprehensive outline of what is a difficult site to inspect thoroughly, consult the guide book by Nikos Papatheazis (600 dr). In any case do not miss the fascinating finds (both Greek and Roman) exhibited in the Museum and also the attractive Fountain of Peirene. At all times the Acrocorinth looms over the site and invites a visit but I doubt whether you will have the time. The village nearby provides an enjoyable stroll after the rigours of visiting the ancient site and then coping with the packed lunch (Site and Museum open Mon - Sat 8 a.m. - 7 p.m. and Sun 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. Admission 400 dr)

35. Isthmia is worth a visit but most school parties only find time for a quick look at the Corinthian canal from the bridge above - very impressive and not to be missed. The canal was started as Nero's pet project in 67 AD but he did not get far. The French resumed work in 1881 AD. If you are intrigued by ancient technology you will want to see parts of the 'diolkos' which still remain at the western end of the canal. Boats were hoisted onto this track and dragged along on logs to the other side.

36. On the way back to Nauplion, Nemea, where Hercules slew the lion as one of his 12 labours, and where ancient games were held, may be visited. In addition along this fascinating route

37. one passes Argos, which given longer one would like to explore, and Tiryns,

38. birth place of Hercules and surrounded, like Mycenae, with immense 'Cyclopean' walls. Nauplion itself is an ideal place to finish off a day's tour of this type. No doubt there will be few takers to climb the 900 steps to the Palamidi fortress, built like most of the rest of the city by the Venetians in the 18th century, but there are impressive views of the town to be gained from only a gentle stroll up some of the narrow streets and the Archaeological Museum contains a perfectly preserved Mycenaean suit of bronze armour, with boar's tusk helmet,

discovered in nearby Dendra and dating back to the 15th century BC. In any case it is a fine place to buy souvenirs and presents.

39. Some of the older members may want to spend more time in Nauplion (the Museum closes at 3 p.m. so this may be the only time to see the Mycenaean suit of armour) but the younger ones will certainly need to relax and enjoy themselves on the beach, given good weather conditions (see note 31 above). There is safe bathing at Tolon, pedalboats, wind-surfing (with instruction) and boats to take you to nearby islands for barbecues. Beware bored and badly behaved students. They can fuel local prejudices about 'British' children and sour the last few hours of an otherwise highly enjoyable holiday.

40. Asine, an archaeological 'gem' within strolling distance of your hotel in Tolon. Homer has a cryptic reference to the site but the existing ruins are probably Hellenistic at the earliest. Excavations have uncovered fortifications, chamber tombs and pottery but it is worth going there and climbing to the top of the citadel for the sweeping view afforded of the bay of Tolon. If you have a large group, be careful when you are climbing up. It is never easy and occasionally quite dangerous, but well worth the effort.

41. A follow-up Greek evening, about a month after the trip, is an excellent idea. Slides can be shown, photographs and reminiscences exchanged and friendships renewed over a bowl of moussaka and/or a glass of retsina. It also whets the appetite for the next tour! Bon Voyage.

APPENDIX I

GREEK FOOD AND DRINK

Breakfast usually consists of bread, 'tiropita' (cheese pie) or a pastry with 'marmelada' (jam) along with a cup of coffee. The coffee is exceedingly strong and can have the consistency of sludge, but instant style (called Nescafe) is also available. In some hotels the range of foods offered at this meal is much wider, including various types of meat and cereals.

Lunch (unless it is a packed meal) will be slightly lighter than dinner but probably just as filling. Don't expect too many of the more sophisticated Greek foods; generally hotels which take in school parties stick to a fairly conventional menu. Veal (moskari), lamb (ami) and chicken (kotopoulo) are usually offered at lunch served with chips 'patates', rice (rizi) beans or pasta. Uniquely Greek dishes which are likely to appear at this stage are mousaka, (chopped meat and egg plant mixed with a cheese and tomato puree) pastitio (thick noodles covered with a rich cream sauce). A 'Greek' salad often accompanies the main course (a choriatiiki contains olives, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers and a hefty slab of feta cheese on top). Fruit is the usual desert (if you are lucky you will be given oranges rather than apples) but occasionally Greek yoghurt is offered with honey. Dinner will contain all these elements but will include a starter, most likely soup or pasta. There are plenty of soft drinks available for the children with mineral water preferable to what comes out of the taps. The adults no doubt will want to sample one of the many varieties of Greek wine (resinated or otherwise). The aperitif 'ouzo' is a recognised part of Greek life and no dinner is really complete without a 'metaxa' (Greek brandy) to finish with.

Vegetarians will find Greek fare quite accommodating, owing mainly to the wealth of salads available. Try 'Tsatziki' as an appetiser (yoghurt, cucumber and garlic sauce).

APPENDIX II

MONEY MANAGEMENT

The drachma is the legal tender in Greece. It is issued both in paper notes (50, 100, 500 and 1000 dr) and coins (1, 2, 4, 10, 20 and 50 dr). Before leaving home exchange about £30 for drachmae. This will save you time and money if banks are closed when you arrive and you need immediate cash.

Children's pocket money can be a headache so make sure you have a secure system for dealing with this. Also make sure you, and they, understand the insurance situation relating to the loss of cash. If they have any really expensive items, like cameras, they should make sure that they have extra insurance.

Entry to sites and museums can be very expensive unless you have obtained a pass beforehand. The Tour Company can arrange this for you and will provide details on request. It is a bit of a chore but well worth doing. It will save you and the children a lot of money.

Traveller's cheques, as ever, are just as useful as cash and much safer to carry around. For your own personal purchases you may find a credit card useful.

APPENDIX III

SAFETY

There have been some tragic accidents involving school parties in recent years and whilst security can become an obsession it is clearly advisable in the present climate to err on the side of safety. Parties must be efficiently controlled at all times, even when engaged in apparently innocuous activities and it is probably best to organise a certain amount of precautionary paperwork before you leave. (All local authorities and most Independent Schools now insist on this). Particularly important is a signed statement from the parents that their children are subject to your discipline while in your care. Most schools have a brochure which will be helpful when organising trips. You cannot be too careful.

Oratio Valedictoria

Avete, O Arelates. Quam libenter vos video, praeter eos quibus domum revenire iam dudum necesse fuit, id est Joanna, Petrus, Johannes, Sylvia, Stephanus (et amicus) et quidam alii (1). Spero vos ludo aestivo septuagesimo hic in Collegio Sancti Lucae vel maxime fructos esse. Equidem cubicula optime parata, non sine balneis suis (2), meliora quam antea arbitrator. Sine dubio magnificentissime ac sumptuosissime cenavimus, propter quod gratias vel maximas collegio agere debemus. Mehercule pluit, cotidie pluit; tam turbulenta fuit tempestas, tam aestuosa, ut nos in Italia habitare putaretis! Eheu! Quotienscumque aliquid vel minimum facere conati sumus, totidem sicut porculi sudabamus. Sed quam docte, quam accurate eruditi sumus. Petrus Johannes (3) de fabulis in carmina epica transferendis optime est locutus. Postridie Petrus ut Homerum magis explicaret reveniebat (4), post quem Valeria nobis de Romanis Britanniam vincendis quam dissertissime exposuit (5). Vespere multis picturis ac musicis utebatur Veronica ut fabulam Didonis et Aeneae diligentissime interpretaretur (6). Alii iter ad oppidum vicinum fecerunt ut mosaicum Humilis Pernaie (7) inventum viderent, alii ad cathedralem sunt progressi ut multa mirabilia visitarent. Quibus factis, Petrum Virum-Sapientem de Lucretio vatibusque facunde loquentem diligenter audivimus (8). Heri Davidus Oppidum-Unicum aberat, quod aeger erat (9), sed Hilaria multa de curriculo commune nobis explicavit. Quam libenter hanc rem disputavimus. Deinde, postquam Ivarus de rebus Latinis et Graecis in sua patria plurima exposuerat (10), itinera cum discipulis ad Italiam vel Graeciam facta studiosissime disseruimus. Post prandium Hilaria iterum apparuit ut nobis de amphoris Graecis docendis mirabile utilitate loqueretur (11). Hic dies a doctore reverente de fortitudine ac pietate Aeneae in tecto stantis dicente tandem finitus

est (12). Haud dubium est quin omnes fatigati fuerimus ac profunde dormiverimus. Totum per ludum libros Latinos vel Graecos diligentissime recitavimus; Cicero, Ovidius, Vergilius, Tacitus et Novum Testamentum Graecum. Multa alia in circulis didicimus, atque plurimas horas in canticis cantandis, fabulis Latinis et Graecis studendis, laetissime egimus. Postremo quanto gaudio, quanto studio, quanto commodo Garethum nobis de lingua Latina loquentem audivimus (13). Eheu! Ad finem ludi aestivi mox adveniemus. Cras domum adveniemus. Spero equidem vos omnes itinera tuta facturos et me vos mox incolumes visurum esse. Valet.

Notes:

- (1) Some members of the course left before the final evening.
- (2) For the first time in my experience we enjoyed en-suite accommodation.
- (3) Dr Peter Jones, 'Turning folktales into epic'.
- (4) Dr Peter Jones, 'Comparing scenes of Xenia in Homer'.
- (5) Dr Valerie Maxfield 'The Roman conquest of the South West'.
- (6) Veronica Evans, 'Dido and Aeneas'.
- (7) A visit to the Low Ham Mosaic in the Somerset County Museum in Taunton.
- (8) Professor Peter Wiseman, 'Lucretius and the survival of prophecy'.
- (9) David Singleton was unable to attend because he was ill.
- (10) Ivar Engel-Jensen, 'Classics in Denmark'.
- (11) Hilary Walters, 'Teaching Greek Vases'.
- (12) The Revd. Doctor Alan Griffin, 'Aeneas the wimp'.
- (13) Professor Gareth Morgan, 'The Latin language' in three instalments.