

10 Greece--Back to the Western Beat

Istanbul, Turkey, to Kavala, Greece
Friday, April 30

Departing exotic Istanbul about 8:30 A.M., we proceeded west on an inland road into the region of Thrace. Nearing the border, we noticed a buildup of Turkish military. But our border crossing was relatively simple and succinct taking less than an hour. At customs, we had changed our remaining Turkish liras into Greek drachmas. Then we continued our journey on paved Greek roads toward the Balkan Peninsula.

The day had turned overcast and seemed to match the rather bleak scenery of bare hills and deserted roads; thus we were all occupying ourselves with the various activities we had devised during our weeks on the bus.

The weeks of travel had also brought about some close male-female relationships. Foremost was the fateful pairing of Brenda and Neil due to her lost passport. Reticent Brenda had seemed to come alive since Afghanistan. Also she and Neil shared a common interest in music, and as we drove along she was sitting on his

lap in a front seat and together they were leading Australian songs as others joined in. For religious reasons it was debatable if these two were right for each other; but for now they seemed right.

Ross and Kathy had become close, with Sandra a welcome third party. Each was intent on studying the Bible, and had much to discuss through the days.

Carol and Derik were very affectionate toward each other. Was it love, and if so, would it last?

Wolfman Brian continued teasing the younger girls and any others who would let him, but he had yet to settle down with someone.

Jen continued to eye Graeme with interest, but that was as far as it went--a one-sided scenario.

Nino and I were having lots of fun and laughs. We probably had thoughts of something more serious, at least I did, but we hadn't yet verbalized these thoughts. He was still very independent.

Then there was Robert whose position warranted his staying clear of any such involvements.

Brenda slipped off Neil's lap so he could cue us in on some relatively modern Greek history. He said that, during World Wars I and II, Greece had tried to maintain a policy of neutrality, but was eventually dragged into both wars. During World War II, civil war had erupted between the communist guerrillas and the Royalist groups for eventual control of Greece. Governmental

unrest continued to plague the country following the civil war. Only recently, in 1973, had Greece become a Presidential Republic replacing the monarchy.

When asked to elaborate about the Greek-Turkish problem, Neil said that this obviously stemmed from the Ottoman Turks' complete control of Greece for nearly three hundred and fifty years. From the late 1400s to the early 1800s their control had extended well into southeastern Europe where they dominated not only Greece but her Balkan neighbors, today's Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria and Rumania.

As a result of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, Greece's independence was realized in 1829. She was very distraught with her new boundaries which encompassed less than half of present-day Greece, so she set upon a foreign policy of expansion. The Congress of Berlin held in 1878 recommended that Turkey readjust Greece's borders. This eventually gave Thessaly back to Greece. With the first Balkan War of 1912, Greece and her Balkan allies defeated Turkey which surrendered all claims to Crete and all its European territory except Constantinople and its surrounding region. A second Balkan War followed in 1913 among the former Balkan allies as to the disposition of the newly acquired Turkish territories. As a result, Greece was awarded the most important regions of Macedonia and Thrace doubling her area and population.

The expansion scheme continued into World War I when Prime Minister Venizelos who opposed pro-Axis King Constantine set up a provisional government at Salonika. Hoping to establish a

Greek empire based at Constantinople backed by encouragement from the Allies, he seized his opportunity and invaded Turkey in 1921, but was defeated. Thereafter, under the Treaty of Lausanne, the European Turkish border was reestablished at the Maritsa River. To this day, Neil concluded, territorial squabbles have yet to be fully resolved.

Around noon, we stopped in a village for lunch, and the cooks bought groceries for our evening meal. Our low-key drive continued until late afternoon when we entered the more picturesque region of Macedonia immortalized by Kings Philip and Alexander and later by Paul. The landscape improved dramatically when we began driving along the scenic Gulf of Kavala which, according to Neil, was one of the most beautiful stretches of coast in Europe.

Turning off the main road near the port city of Kavala, we entered a secluded beach campsite of grassy flatland partially surrounded by mountains. Here we set up camp. Despite good bathroom facilities, there was no camp kitchen. Therefore, the cooktent was raised for the first time, and the two two-burner camp stoves were used.

After setting up camp, all but the cooks took early showers or beachcombed before a scheduled devotional time on the beach. At devotions, we sat bundled and huddled on the sand around a campfire. To the sound of gentle waves lapping the shore, Robert began with prayer. He then explained that in ancient times Kavala was known as Neapolis and that it was here that Paul, Timothy and Silas landed after following the vision Paul had received in Troy to

spread the gospel in Macedonia. They were headed for Philippi ten miles inland where they founded the first European church.

Robert then read from Acts 16:8-12 to support what he had summarized:

And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

We then took turns reading passages from Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Aside from this, someone mentioned that Alexander's father Philip had captured Philippi, then known as Crenides, in 358 B.C. renaming it for himself.

Singing accompanied by our three guitars and prayers concluded the meeting. The banging of a spoon on a kettle summoned us to dinner which was followed by an early lights out.

Kavala to Athens, capital of Greece
Saturday, May 1

Around 7 A.M., we left the quiet misty campsite and continued through Macedonia on an inland road. To save time, we had a light breakfast of bread, butter and peach jam on the bus.

The hillsides were abloom with wildflowers and many people were picking bouquets. Some of the cars we passed were laden with bunches of flowers tied to their roofs and hoods. At this novel sight, we all wondered what was going on until we remembered that it was May Day.

We had definitely returned to the Christian world as evidenced by the numerous churches and cemeteries with crosses we passed. A novelty to us were the many wayside shrines of statuettes of Christ or Mary encased in glass.

Through the course of the day, Neil alerted us to our proximity to historical points of interest. One such place was the port of Salonika some miles to our south where Prime Minister Venizelos had permitted allied troops to land in 1915 involving Greece in World War I. Centuries before Paul had established a church there to which he later addressed his first and second epistles to the Thessalonians. Then Neil mentioned Pella, some miles north, the ancient capital of Macedonia and Alexander's birthplace.

By afternoon, we were skirting the Aegean coastline where off-lying mountainous Greek islands loomed through the mist. In the region of Thessaly, we began driving south on a smooth modern

expressway, like those in the States, linking Athens to the rest of Europe. The momentum of anticipation began to build as we sped over the highway toward the metropolis of Athens. Quite suddenly and a little sadly, I realized the days of bumpy roads through quaint rustic villages providing unique scenes were gone. Our travel mode had changed.

We arrived in Athens in the late afternoon and made our way slowly through the busy boulevards and narrow streets, some affording a view of the scene we were all anticipating--the Acropolis with its Parthenon commanding the city. But despite this grandeur, I was at first disappointed with Athens' general appearance. I had two words for it: gray and ugly.

Graeme dropped us off in front of the modern Eretria Hotel, and we unloaded the bus quickly due to the traffic. We were just off Omonia Square and less than a mile from the Acropolis.

Jen and I shared an attractive fourth story room with balcony and private bath with standard toilet. (The porcelain slabs were now a facility of the past.) After the rigors of camping, I was elated with the hotel and its modern conveniences.

We would be on our own while in Athens with the exception of an overnight cruise to a Greek island, weather permitting, and one Sundowners' dinner. After freshening up, Nino, Tanya, Jen and I went out in search of a place to eat. We passed innumerable kiosks, fast food places and inexpensive restaurants. Finally, deciding on a fast food establishment, we ordered at the counter sauvlakia, skewered broiled lamb chunks wrapped in pita bread.

We were served quickly and impersonally, but thoroughly enjoyed the Greek dish.

It was quite apparent here in Athens that free enterprise thrived at every corner. Fast walkers, fast talkers, impatient people and speeding traffic added to my cultural shock. Except for the language, I felt as if I were in New York City. The Asian reverie had now been completely shattered! We had returned to our world and now faced the reality of readjusting to it. The thought of arriving in London within a mere fifteen days began to make its impact.

Athens
Sunday, May 2

Leaving our room by 8 A.M., we joined the others in the cheerful hotel coffee shop for a leisurely continental breakfast of rolls, butter, jam and strong coffee--our first since Singapore. Here we discussed our plans for the day. We would all group off as usual and discover Athens in our own inimitable ways.

If only for a short time, my ancient Greek history course would become relevant: Athens was named for the great Olympian goddess of wisdom and war, Athena. Here a culture developed that was to influence the world in democracy, art, architecture, literature, drama, philosophy, mathematics and science. In no other period of Athens' history was the city composed of so many contemporary geniuses as were found here during her Golden Age, 480 to 399 B.C. Where we would walk today, they had walked yesterday--the philosophers Socrates and Plato, the historian Thucydides, the

dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Aristophanes, the poet Pindar, the sculptor Phidias and countless others.

Despite Greece's domination by Rome which began in 146 B.C., Athens' Hellenistic civilization was absorbed rather than extinguished by the Romans. Her renown as a great university center, attracted such Roman students as Cicero, Rome's greatest orator, Horace, Rome's famous lyric poet, and Julian the Apostate, a Roman emperor.

Today this glorious city of antiquity basking in the Mediterranean sun was ours to explore. Nino, Tanya, Jen and I first set out on foot for the National Archeological Museum. Along our way were many communist propaganda posters on buildings and telephone poles. What they proclaimed was up for conjecture, since it was all Greek to us.

Inside the museum hordes of noisy Americans were scurrying through the various expansive rooms which contained displays of ancient gold coins in glass cases and remnants of magnificent marble friezes, reliefs, entablatures, columns and statues. The golden masks, vessels, dishes and vases vividly depicted scenes of Greek life. Some of the pieces were 5000 years old.

Leaving the museum, we made our way through the city and climbed the path to the top of the Acropolis where hundreds of other tourists were tripping through the ancient rubble. Before us stood ruins which had once been whole buildings of stunning Greek architecture designed to make Athens the most beautiful city in the world--a goal the statesman Pericles implemented during his

rule (467?-429?B.C.) In 447 B.C., he and the sculptor Phidias supervised the architect Ictinus and his associate Callicrates in the building of the Parthenon, a new temple for the city goddess, Athena Parthenos. Inside this Doric temple of classic simplicity, considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world, would stand Phidias' masterpiece--the thirty-eight foot statue of Athena Parthenos made of ivory, gold and other precious metals.

Under Byzantine rule, many of Athens' temples were converted into churches, the Parthenon among them in the 6th century. When the Ottoman Turks captured Athens in 1456, three years after capturing Constantinople, they transformed the Parthenon into a mosque. The Venetians, attacking Turkish controlled Athens in 1687, fired a cannon ball into the Parthenon, then used as a magazine. This ruined the priceless structure, blowing off the roof and breaking half the columns.

The Erechtheum, though never completed, won fame for its flawless Ionic columns and caryatides, pillars in the forms of maidens. Named after Erechtheus, one of the guardian dieties to whom the temple was dedicated, its construction took place between 420 and 409 B.C. During the Byzantine era, it too served as a church until Turkish occupation when it became a harem.

After studying these two masterpieces and taking photos, we hiked to the edge of the Acropolis where, through the urban haze, we could see the city's low skyline of gray high-rises extending to Mount Lycabettus topped by the Chapel of St. George. Rising intermittently among the contemporary buildings were bits and

pieces of ancient Athens. Directly below us on the ancient site of Athens was the Plaka, a cluster of old buildings set among narrow crooked streets. Full of quaint shops, restaurants and nightclubs, it was the tourist "in spot."

We began our descent of the Acropolis in search of Mars' hill, a lesser promontory jutting out from the Acropolis. It was here that Paul addressed the Athenians as recorded in Acts 17:22-23. Sentimental Tanya read us the following account from her Bible:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

After our Mars' hill excursion, Jen left us to join some of the others for lunch. Nino, Tanya and I continued on toward the Plaka. Seeing some fenced ruins across a busy boulevard, we set upon investigating them as they were on our way. Nino helped Tanya and then me over the fence, but I caught my jeans and a second later with a ripping sound a large section of the seat was torn away. This made us roar with laughter. Tying my cardigan around my waist, we marched on in ignorant bliss still laughing to examine one enormous column that had fallen into even chunks in a neat row. This brought us to the guarded entrance. Luckily,

We were not detained.

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As it was Sunday and still early, the Plaka was relatively quiet with only a few shops and tavernas open. Winding through the old stone streets, we were soon lured by music from a rollicking band playing at the botanical gardens nearby. Here promenaders strolled among old statues and straight rows of fragrant blossoming orange trees. Some of them rested on park benches or at an outdoor cafe near the lovely music hall. Others, oblivious to the passersby, were asleep on the grass. A group of about twenty-five city fathers were congregated on the lawn bordered by shrubs, palms and evergreens listening to and interrupting a fellow Athenian's exhortation on some "important" issue of the day. It was such a perfect day and the grass looked so inviting that we also stretched out to rest and soak up some sun for awhile.

By 4:00 P.M., we returned to the Plaka for dinner at a modest taverna. We walked through a long hallway of the whitewashed building, past the kitchen to the large courtyard bordered on two sides by similar buildings on which brightly colored murals of country life were painted. Here, seated at one of the several blue and white checkered cloth-covered tables under an olive tree, we enjoyed a delicious inexpensive dinner of dolmothakia, rice and meat wrapped in grape leaves served with lemon sauce and a local wine.

After eating, Nino left us to buy tickets for the "Sound and Light Show" at the box office near the Acropolis where we would meet him later. Tanya and I browsed through several shops on our way back

to the Acropolis area. In one of these shops, Tanya spied a sewing machine in the back room--a possibility to repair my ripped jeans. I showed the lady shop owner the tear. She laughingly motioned us to the homey back room where I changed into a skirt from a rack while she began work on my jeans.

As the lady sat at her old-fashioned sewing machine sorting through remnants of cloth for a matching piece, we chatted in Greek and English. Soon her policeman son, George, joined us. Tanya produced her world map showing them our origins and the scope of our trip. We were once again enriched to have shared with the locals. In our limited way, we were all trying to learn from each other. The jeans mended, I changed and then offered to pay the lady but she refused. We thanked these kind humble people, then hurried on to meet Nino.

The sun was setting when we found him amid the crowd of tourists. He was talking to another George, a slight dark friendly fellow, a Greek Cypriot holidaying in Athens. He had already seen the "Sound and Light Show," so we made plans to meet him afterwards for a walk through the Plaka.

On our way up a well trodden path to our seats, we met Margaret, a short rotund girl from San Francisco. My questions about state-side happenings were endless as we found our seats in the outdoor theater on a hill facing the Acropolis.

The story of Greece and Athens began with music and soon the narrative unfolded as colored spotlights played on the various Acropolis structures. An hour later we met George at the theater