

## Harding University in Greece (HUG): Spring 2014

Report #2

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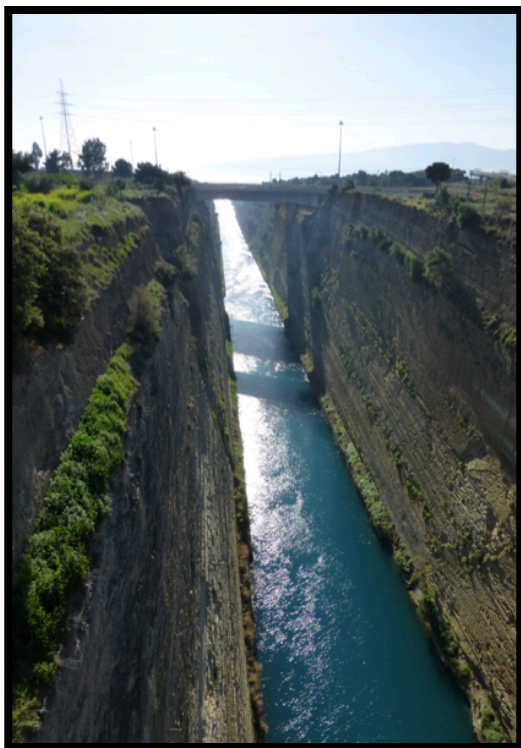
After a few days of rest and the opportunity to worship with the Church in the Athens area we embarked on our trip to the Peloponnese. The weather forecast was for clear skies and temperatures in the mid 60s---remarkable weather for February 18! We'll take it!

On the way to our first stop we passed the island of Salamis (see photo), which was the scene of arguably one of the most important sea battles in world history for its "future shock" impact (had it not been for the Greek victory in this battle, we may well have been speaking Farsi today). Persian animosity had remained high against the Greeks after they humiliatingly defeat Darius and his mighty Persian army at Marathon in 490 BC; Xerxes sought to rectify that loss.

Xerxes is the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther (and mentioned in Ezra as well; Ezr 4:6). Many scholars believe that the extended celebration in Susa mentioned in Esther 1 was intended in part to be a rallying point and planning session to retaliate against the Greeks. It was within the context of this celebration that Queen Vashti refused to comply with the king's demand to show off her beauty (Esth 1:3, 10-12; the third year of his Ahasuerus' reign would be ca. 483 BC). After the protracted empire-wide beauty pageant, Esther was finally chosen queen in the seventh year of his reign (ca. 479 BC; Esth 2:16-18).



Among other attack strategies, the Persians arrived with a flotilla of ships collected from their conquered peoples in the eastern Mediterranean. The Greeks lured them into the confines of the narrow straits between Salamis and the mainland. The Greeks, knowing the vicissitudes and vagaries of the waters, gained yet another major victory over the Persians. The final blow came later in 479 at two battles further to the east (Thermopylae and Platea xxx), after which the Persians left the Greeks alone "for a season," only later to find themselves objects of Alexander's attentions!



Our first stop was at the Corinthian Canal, which traverses the 6 km wide isthmus connecting the Peloponnese to the remainder of Greece. The canal is the latest development to facilitate passage from the Aegean to the Ionian Seas. The passage around the southern Peloponnese peninsula and Crete to the south is treacherous with eddies, currents, winds, and hidden shoals that made for dangerous passage. The famous Antikythera shipwreck (mentioned in the last newsletter) was lost in these treacherous waters. By the Roman era, when Rome had unified the entire Mediterranean basin, trade was under a central control and most of the trade one way or another connected to Rome.

To try to rectify the problem of the seas, early efforts considered digging a canal across the isthmus. As early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, Periander had entertained the idea. Julius Caesar considered it as well, but died before commencing the project (Suetonius, "Julius Caesar" in *Lives of the Caesars*, 44.3). Nero was apparently the first to attempt to dig the canal and Vespasian sent some 6000 Jewish slaves from his wars in Palestine to work on the project (Suetonius, "Nero," Ibid, 19.2). The effort, however, was abandoned when Nero died in 68 AD.

An interesting alternative, however, had been constructed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, consisting of a well-built pavement traversing the entire isthmus from shore to shore. The pavement was designed to take heavy loads on wheeled carts from one side to the other. Some evidence indicates that entire ships would be removed and relaunched on the other side. Aristophanes alludes to the Diolkos in one of his plays (*Thesmophoriazusa* ll. 647-48). The Diolkos was used to the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. While most of the Diolkos was destroyed in the construction of the modern canal, remnants remain and can be seen by the persistent tourist (the photo is from an earlier trip).



The canal was finally begun in 1881 and finished in 1893. It is still used, but its narrow width does not permit many of the more modern trade and cargo ships to use it. It was closed the day we went through; they were dredging the debris that had fallen from the steep sides.

Our departure from the canal took us then to the ancient port of Cenchraea, which was the southern port associated with the trade connection across the isthmus. Aerial photos show the general outlines of the ancient seaport, but most all of it has sunk beneath the waves as a result of the tectonic activity which plagues the area. We were able to visit some of the ruins. The photograph shows basically two buildings, both of which originally were part of a Sanctuary to Isis (ca. 1<sup>st</sup> century AD). These were later transformed into a church. Eventually the structures suffered in the earthquakes and the southernmost of the apsidal buildings is largely submerged as you can see by the wall stubs protruding from the water in the distance. The conversion of the pagan sanctuary to a church probably was to honor Paul's association with the port. From Cenchraea Paul took his vow by cutting his hair and embarked on his trip to Judaea, thus ending his second missionary journey (cf. Acts 18:18). Paul's work in the area of Corinth apparently included Cenchraea in some fashion since he commends "Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchraea," to the Roman brethren (Rom 16:1).



Corinth itself was the scene of our next visit. One of the thrilling visits is to the so-called "Erastus" inscription. It announces that the steward (Latin *aedile*) of the city whose name was Erastus, paid for the pavement at his own expense. Several lines of evidence converge to suggest that this pavement was connected with a person with the same name in the Bible: 1) Erastus was a fairly uncommon name in the first century; 2) I am told that the style of letters in the stone reflects a first century AD date; 3) it certainly refers to one who was a city official (some will argue whether it is the same term that applies in the Bible; even it is not, the likelihood of two people named Erastus existing in the city as public administrators at essentially the same time is fairly slim; either the terms in Latin and Greek refer to the same role in two different languages or Erastus had been one kind of official at one point and another at another time [as politicians are inclined to do]); 4) Paul, when writing from Corinth, explicitly remarked: "Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you" (Rom 16:23; Paul's Greek term is *oikonomos*, an overly literally translation is "house law," but it clearly refers to an





administrative position of some kind).

I left the group briefly to visit the Asklepion at Corinth, which usually is not part of the tour. Sharon and I had visited here a number of years ago, and I wanted to refine my understanding (photo shows the footings of the temple in the stone). The Asklepion is named after Asklepius the Greek god of healing and Corinth was one site among several where people would go for treatment and healing (the main one was in Epidauros; see below). If the people experienced a healing, they often left life-size body parts as



expressions of devotion for his healing; collections of these came to light in the excavations (photo is from an earlier trip). An additional component of the worship often included a formal dining setting in areas attached to the courtyard area west of the temple (see above).

Paul seems to allude to these practices when he addressed problems the new Christians in Corinth had as they wrestled with the issue of meat that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8). There likely were other venues in Corinth other than with Asklepius where these practices posed difficulty as well. The Asklepion's collection of isolated body parts may have prompted Paul's ludicrous extended metaphor in which he argues that the body of Christ does not consist of isolated components: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor can the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor 12:21). As God's people we need to learn that we are part of the whole, "yet one body" (1 Cor 12:20).

I caught up with the group just after they left their first stop and had gathered near the *bema* where the Corinthian Jews demanded a hearing in the presence of Gallio (Acts 18:12; platform in photo to the right; *bema* is translated as "tribunal" in the English Standard Version). Gallio dismissed the charges as irrelevant to Roman concern recognizing that they posed no intrinsic threat to Roman government. The foundations of the *bema* platform still exists and Paul was likely at the foot of the structure when the charges were leveled against him and he was about to defend himself.



Interestingly, Paul may have alluded to the Corinthians' familiarity with this episode and certainly this image when he pointed out that we will all stand before the "judgment seat" of Christ (2 Cor 5:10; he used the same Greek word—*bema*—that in the ESV Acts was rendered "tribunal") to be judged according to our actions.

After walking on the Lechaion Road, which was the main road into Corinth from the north, we departed for the Acrocorinthus, which towers some 1500 feet above ancient Corinth (Acrocorinthus is in the background of photo of *bema*, above). On top of this mountain were the remains of a temple dedicated to Aphrodite, which according to Strabo (*Geography* 8.6) in the 5<sup>th</sup> century was a facility that employed 1000 temple prostitutes dedicated to the worship of Aphrodite. Many scholars scoff at this description and affirm that it did not characterize Corinth in the first century. Paul, however, argued about the prevalence of fornication in Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-2; 6:12-20) to a degree that he does not in any of his other letters. The intersection of trade and travel lent itself easily to the prevalence of such activity and Strabo attributes the immorality in part to this reality (*Geography* 8.6). While we should not argue that everyone in Corinth was involved in these types of activities, stereotypes of towns often reflect a heightened prevalence of the stereotyped description (e.g., movies in Hollywood, music in Nashville, crime in Chicago, computerization in "Silicon Valley," immorality in Las Vegas...).



The view from the top of the Acrocorinthus is spectacular and commanded a sweeping panorama of the isthmus. The photograph shows a distortion of the ranged from the Ionian Sea on the left to the Aegean Sea on the right. The canal passes over the narrow strand connecting the two land bodies. The strategic location of Corinth contributed to its importance in the ancient world.



The presence of a spring about two-thirds of the way up contributed to the viability of the Acrocorinthus as a citadel. It is rare to find springs high up on such relatively small mountains. The spring provided a water source potentially to permit the inhabitants on the mountain to survive a prolonged siege. Strabo (*Geography* 8.6) relates that at the Peirene spring, the mythological winged horse, Pegasus, would come to drink and that Bellerophon caught the winged horse as it was drinking (photo is of the inside of the spring house; the stonework is from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The brighter light in the lower center of the photo is light reflecting off the surface of the water). A massive fortification system circumscribes the mountain and their foundations are essentially those remains left after the Romans destroyed Corinth in 146 BC. The current, impressive fortifications date from the medieval period and the time of the Crusades.

Our departure took us southward to the site of Epidauros, which was the major center for Asklepius worship in ancient Greece. Regretfully, a fan belt broke on our bus and delayed our arrival at the site (the bus driver quickly replaced it so we did not



have to sit and wait for a repairman or another bus), but we did arrive in sufficient time to visit the world renowned theatre.

Ancient medicine was somewhat holistic, attempting often to address maladies with a combination of mental, spiritual, physical and medical procedures. It usually strikes us as odd that these healing centers would have theatres, but the plays were important components of the healing process. The origins of this theatre date to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, but it was expanded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and now can accommodate an audience of ca. 13,000-14,000 people. The orchestra (the round center area below the seats) is essentially original. The acoustics in this structure are most impressive. Without artificial amplification, we were able to hear a coin drop on the small round stone in the orchestra as well as hear our guide tear a piece of paper. Of course, the performers would speak with greater volume than this.

Because of the bus problem we had to leave the site after this brief visit, heading to our hotel for the evening.

The next morning we headed to what is probably the site of ancient Mycenae, the capital of Agamemnon of Trojan War fame. The citadel rests on a mountain looking over the valley. To its west higher mountains with deep declivities provide protection. The fortification wall in the front is built of massive stones. People who lived in the area much later after the city was abandoned and not understanding how the people had built the wall attributed its construction to the Cyclops--the single-eyed giant of mythology (the photograph to the right is of an early pen-and-ink line drawing of Cyclops with Ulysses pouring wine for him). The type of construction is now referred to as a cyclopean wall.

Heinrich Schliemann came in 1876 to locate where Agamemnon had lived and from which he had initiated the campaign against Troy. His excavations uncovered a beautiful golden mask, which he identified with Agamemnon (see photo), but







most scholars recognize that it actually dated from a much earlier period.

Access to the site is through an impressive and intimidating gate surmounted by a heraldic symbol consisting of two lions standing on platforms and flanking a central column (photo above left). Some elements of the construction and layout of the site, particularly the palace throne room area, resemble parts of the shrine that we excavated at Tel Miqne/Ekron in the 1980s. This connection is not particularly surprising since it is usually thought that there were cultural connections between the Mycenaeans and the Philistines.

We took the students to the cistern that had been dug near the back of the palace. This was filled with rain water that channeled into it. The descent was through a stepped tunnel (photo to the left is a view looking from inside to the exterior), turning first to the left and then doubling back on itself to the right. There was no artificial lighting in the tunnel except that which we provided with our

flashlights (and iPhones...). The students were able to get a better feel of what it would have been like to access such water sources in antiquity without the benefit of good lighting while traversing slick, uneven steps. This was much like it would have been in the water system of Jerusalem before the construction of Hezekiah's tunnel.

After our visit to Mycenae, we rode to Nafplio which was the first capital of modern Greece after it gained its independence in the 1800s. It is a quaint town with narrow streets and balconies. It reminds one of the French Quarter of New Orleans, but without the grunginess and worldliness. Looking over the city is the medieval castle of Palamidi. The students were let loose to roam and explore the ruins.

After a pleasant stay overnight at a Best Western hotel in Olympia we visited ancient Olympia—the location of the ancient Olympic games. These started in 776 BC as a celebration of Zeus' victory over Chronos. The ancient Greeks agreed to suspend any wars going on at the time of the Olympics in order to participate in the games. Interesting how people can make up certain rules in some contexts, but have such trouble in others!

Among the ruins is the foundation of the Temple of Zeus, which housed a magnificent statue of Zeus created by Phidias. He was the same artisan who created the statue of Athena that graced the Parthenon in Athens. The statue of Zeus, however, was considered one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World." With all that we know of the geometry and artistry of the Parthenon, it is tantalizing to consider what this site must have been, for the Parthenon and its statue not to have appeared on that prestigious roster. The photograph shows the ruins of the temple as they now rests, but you can see the diameter of the columns. Admittedly, these are not as large as the columns in Luxor or Baalbek, but they are elegant nonetheless.





A highlight of the day was a visit to the ancient Olympic sprint stadium (see below). To stand in the area of the beginnings of such a prestigious event is sobering. Most of the students re-enacted some sprints with separate heats for the men and women. The stadium had no formal seating except for the judges (the area on the slopes to the right), otherwise everyone sat on the slopes watching the races. The stone “curb” that you can see in the foreground is the starting line. There is another starting line on the other end as well. It was a beautiful day. It did not go unnoticed that we were visiting the site at the same time that the winter version of the Olympics were occurring in Russia. I was glad it was shirtsleeve weather where we were!



We leave tomorrow for a trip to Turkey where we will visit most of the sites of the churches to which John wrote his Revelation. We will also go to Troy as well as Istanbul. It should be a notable contrast to some of the things that we have seen.