



Excursion to Greece in 1958 with the Classicists from the University of Ljubljana

Ksenija Rozman

The first excursion to Greece for classicists after World War II – and likely the first one since the university was established in 1919 – was devised by Professor Milan Grošelj for his classical seminar in 1958.¹

Those were the years when every effort was made to eliminate classical gymnasia in Slovenia, and they were eventually abolished in 1958. This meant eliminating and ridiculing the teaching and knowledge of Greek and Latin. Other students called us *Lateinpatzer*, an odd German slur for “Latin goofs” [“latajnpocarji”]. One of the highly absurd justifications for the abolition of Latin teaching in Ljubljana was the statement that the classes were “attended by children from well-functioning families.” [Cf. Bojan Baskar, *Latinščine prosim*, Ljubljana 1988, p. 137, for the precise wording in the document.]

However, we, the students of those days, still considered ourselves fortunate. Our professors were professionally sound; they took their calling seriously and were aware that they were not merely experts but also teachers and educators. Therefore, the excursions were a serious matter, far from merely fun and charming trips.

¹ This issue’s photo essay and the accompanying text were kindly provided by dr. Ksenija Rozman. The photos were taken by several of the participants in the excursion and then pooled together. *Clotho* would like to thank Ksenija Rozman, Zorka Šubic Ciani, and Nataša Stanič for identifying, *post tot discrimina rerum*, all the participants. These were Milan Grošelj, his wife Zlata Grošelj, and their friend Vlasta Tominšek; and twelve students – two art historians, Ksenija Rozman and Mirko Juteršek; two archeologists, Smiljka Jovanovič Zajc and Zorka Šubic Ciani; and eight classicists, Majda Gabrovšek, Meta Masič, Matija Pogorelec, Primož Simoniti, Nataša Stanič, Jasna Šetinc, Jožica Škof, and Franc Žužek.

Before our trip at the end of April and the first days of May 1958 could even begin, an unexpected difficulty arose. There were only eight classicists. This was not enough for the discounted rail ticket, for which a minimum of twelve participants was required. Professor Grošelj solved the conundrum himself. He asked Professor Josip Klemenc, who taught ancient history and classical art, to assign two students from his seminar; and Professor France Stelè, an art historian, to assign two students from his. I was one of them and remain a witness to those days.

As the saying goes: "First comes the work, then comes the fun." We felt this even before the trip when Professor Grošelj defined the responsibilities of each student, not only his classicists but also the four of us who were their guests. We were allotted individual ancient monuments in places visited, prominent literary authors and philosophers, as well as events, both historical and mythological. Each prospective participant had to come to the seminary and provide a short report of what he or she would later say *in situ*. I was entrusted with a paper on the development of classical art and its examples that we would later see ourselves. I can assure the reader that my report was nothing to write home about. However, the classicists who took the assignment carelessly were held to a higher standard and had to repeat the exercise. No one dared to return with another perfunctory report and to risk a third appearance.

It was a long train ride from Ljubljana to Athens. One of the classicists, the good-natured and talented but somewhat idiosyncratic Franc Žužek, decided to shorten his journey by interviewing the Greeks in his compartment about Modern Greek pronunciation and grammar. The Greeks he encountered were enthusiastic, he was showered with lessons, and upon our arrival in Athens, one of his colleagues remarked that between Belgrade and Athens, Žužek had mastered Modern Greek.

As soon as we came to Athens, we were warned and instructed what to do in case we encountered demonstrations – we were to retreat into the doorway of the nearest building. During that week, protests were organized in Athens in support of the Greek Orthodox Cypriot theologian and politician Archbishop Makarios III, a vocal advocate of the independence of Cyprus, who had to flee the country.

The day after arriving in Athens, life's arduous seriousness began for us, too. While climbing to the top of the Acropolis, we marveled at the architectural monuments in various states of preservation, a mixture of styles and meanings. The students had to perform with their papers, with the professor supplementing them where necessary.

The intoxicating mixture of architectural remains in Doric and Ionic styles, memories of the people of letters that have frequented this place, and gods to whom these temples were dedicated, was crowned with the mighty remains of the Parthenon, dedicated to Athena and built under Pericles, the orator and statesman. The recollections of Sophocles, Phidias, Anaxagoras, Herodotus, Protagoras, and the like were enough to make us walk, look, wonder, and, for the most part, keep silent. I remember this captivating atmosphere from the other places we visited as well.

Before the trip, Professor Stelè told me: "Make sure you go and see Daphni." We had one free afternoon, which everyone could spend as they wished. Professor Grošelj asked me about my plans for using this free time. I mentioned the remark by professor Stelè and told him that I intended to go to Daphni. He found the idea intriguing, as he had never visited this Byzantine monastery with its remarkable eleventh-century church and mosaics, so eventually, the whole group went there.

I remember the amazement during our visit to Olympia. We walked through the thicket to the Temple of Zeus from the fifth century BC and to the even more monumental Temple of Hera from the sixth century BC, one of the oldest temples in the Doric style, marked by its imposing dimensions. Both are outside the present-day settlement. The enormity of the two temples and their position in the charming countryside with the pleasant and mild atmosphere took everyone's breath away. The professor sighed: "Isn't it beautiful?" However, the silence was broken by the Faustian Geist der stets verneint – the spirit that always negates. It was Žužek, adding, as so many times before: "Yes, but ..." Well, this time, the professor cut into his ceaseless remarking: "Mr. Žužek, there is no 'but' here." And we were allowed to watch in silence.

We had no money for the bus ride to Sparta.

The following two stops were the old and the new Corinth, marked by prominent historical events, archaeological remains, and the realization that the ancient Greeks preferred their theater to the bloody amphitheater introduced by the Romans, who built it there, as in so many other places.

Corinth was followed by Mycenae and Tiryns, the sites of the Cretan-Mycenaean culture of the third and the second millennia BC, where one is astounded by the gigantic stone blocks of the ancient fortress palaces and the prominent Lion Gate. However, at the Tiryns railway station, we were eventually forced to let those dreamlike impressions go and to shift our focus to the timetable – our next connection would

only come several hours later since only local trains were stopping there. The stationmaster saw our desperate company. He was pleased with us having visited their somewhat unusual monuments and let it be known that the express train would come soon – and that he would stop it for us. He asked us to climb on it as fast as possible. Indeed, he did what he had promised, his omnipotent baton allowing us to leave quickly for our new destination, Epidaurus.

The Epidaurus Theater, built in the late fourth century BC, is the best preserved Greek theater. Like all such theaters, it leans against a hill; it has 55 semicircular seating rows with exquisite acoustics reaching each spectator. Professor Grošelj's wife, Mrs. Zlata, wanted to experience this. She kept suggesting that two students go into the orchestra and sing something. The professor was eventually fed up with her persistent requests: "Zlata, please stop; this is not your school singing choir, the Magpie Society." Two students of classics, Primož Simoniti and Matija Pogorelec, finally went to the orchestra, laughing uproariously. When they arrived at the center of the theater, they put their arms around each other's shoulders and started singing a Slovenian folk song from the period of the Ottoman raids, "There Beyond the Turkish Hill": "The boy pleaded with his friends so true: / Dig a hole for me, I beg of you. / Put my poor corpse in it with due care, / Let the horse cry since the girl is not there." The acoustics in the theater were outstanding; we heard everything down to the last syllable.

The last place to see before going home was Nauplia, the first Greek capital, which served as the seat of government between 1824 and 1834 after the uprising against the Ottoman occupation. Reader, forgive me, but all I can remember was the seaside location and the good-natured wine seller who turned a blind eye to the mandatory financial deposit for the bottles after the boys assured her of their imminent return. And indeed, that was what happened.

There are many kinds of monuments. One of them is a sense of pedagogical duty combined with enormous knowledge and a kind demeanor toward everyone. It was my good fortune to study and spend my student years, from 1955 to 1959, in the company of such personalities as professors Grošelj, Stelè, and others.

Their authentic sense of humor was part of it all.

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ATHENS (May 1, 1958): Hadrian's Gate / Olympieion / Lysicrates Monument / Agora / Tholos / Stoa of Attalos / Hephaisteion / Church of the Holy Apostles / Museum of the Stoa of Attalos / Buleuterion / Theater of Dionysus / Parthenon / Lycurgus Theater / Asclepeion / Odeon of Herodes Atticus / Kerameikos / Philopappos Hill / Temple of Athena Nike / Erechtheion / Propylaea / Tower of the Winds / Kapnikarea / National Museum / Schliemann Palace (exterior) // ELEUSIS: Telesterion / Museum // DAPHNI // OLYMPIA (May 5, 1958): Temple of Zeus / Heraion / Palaestra / Exedra of Herodes Atticus / Remains of the apsidal buildings / Metroion / Stadium / Hall of Echoes / Philippeion / Leonidaion / Museum / Heroön / Theokoleon // CORINTH (May 7, 1958): Temple of Apollo / Peirene / Lechaion Road / Baths of Eurikles / Sacred Spring / Opus tessellatum / Remains of the Christian church / Glauke Fountain / Odeion / Theatrum / Museum // MYCENAE: Lion Gate / Shaft tombs / Tomb of Clytemnestra / Treasury of Atreus // TIRYNS: Casemates / Cone remains // EPIDAUROS: Theater / Tholos / Sanctuary of Asclepius / Odeion / Palaestra / Hestiatoreion / Stadium / Museum // NAUPLIA.