



international confederation of architectural museums

Post Conference Tour, 9-13 June 2006: Tour of the Peloponnese

The Post Conference tour is a tour of the Peloponnese peninsula. During the tour we will visit archaeological sites, medieval towns and fortresses and neoclassical towns. We will have the opportunity to visit older buildings restored and put to new uses, protected settlements restored and even contemporary structures!

Friday 9 June

Helen Dorey, Soane Museum, London

Departure from Athens after breakfast

Visit to *Epidaurus*, ancient religious and healing centre, famous for its open-air theatre's acoustics.

The Sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidaurus was the most celebrated healing centre of the ancient world. The authority and radiance of Asklepios as the most important healer god of antiquity, brought to the sanctuary great financial prosperity, which in the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C. enabled the implementation of an ambitious building program for the construction of monumental buildings for worship (the temple and the altar of Asklepios, the Tholos, the Abaton, etc.), and later, of buildings mainly secular in character (the Theatre, the Ceremonial Hestiatoreion, the Baths, the Palaestra, etc.). The Asklepieion survived until the end of antiquity, having experienced a second heyday in the 2nd century A.D.

The theatre of the Asklepieion of Epidaurus is the ideal specimen of the achievements and experience of the ancient Greeks on theatre construction. It was already praised in antiquity by Pausanias for its symmetry and beauty. The theatre was used for musical and poetical contests and theatrical performances. During the 1950s there was a movement to revive the theatre and since it hosts, every summer, mainly ancient drama plays.

Guided tour of *Nafplio*, on the east coast, the first capital of independent Greece

It was in this beautiful land that god Poseidon first saw Amymone, the lovely daughter of Danaos, and fell madly in love with her. From their union Nafplios was born in one of Euboia's shores, but when he grew up he sailed with his ship to the creek of the Argolic bay and founded there the ancient city of *Nauplia*, which took after his name.

The city holds a key position which enables sea communications, but is also protected by the steep rock of Akronafplia, a combination which made Nafplio ever since the Neolithic era, one of the most desirable places of inhabitation but also of conquest. Indeed, Nafplio will be repeatedly invaded by Argians, Goths, Slavs and Albanians, Byzantines, Franks, Venetians and Turks. Until 1822 when the Greeks revolted against the Turks, fought and won back Palamidi and finally free Nafplio. In January 1823, it became the seat of the temporary government of the Greek nation, which was at the time struggling for its independence. In January 1828, Ioannis Kapodistrias, the first governor of Greece, will come to the city, but a few years later in 1831 he will be assassinated. A period of anarchy and upheaval will follow until King Otto, accompanied by 36 foreign vessels and a large retinue will arrive at Nafplio's bay in January 1833. The next year, the Greek capital will be transferred to the city of Athens.

From an architectural point of view, Nafplio is an amalgam of Frankish, Venetian, Turkish and neoclassic buildings. Its broad streets and small alleys, its squares, Ottoman fountains, monuments, statues and beautiful parks paint the portrait of a most charming city which captivates its visitors. But apart from Nafplio's picturesque quality, one can take a journey back in time.

an organisation of architectural museums, centres and collections



international confederation of architectural museums

We will start our tour on top of the Akronafplia and then we shall proceed to visit the historic centre of Nafplio, and time permitting the Museum of the Peloponnesian Folklore Institute, which in 1981 won the European Museum of the Year Award for its contribution to the study of modern Greek civilisation, for the magnitude and quality of its collections, for its educational and aesthetically innovative exhibition, and for the originality of its educational projects.

Overnight stay in *Nafplio*, in the Amalia Hotel, designed by one of the most significant contemporary greek architects, Nikos Valsamakis.

Saturday 10 June

Janet Parks, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York

Leaving Nafplion early the next morning we began the short trip to Mycenae. The trip had barely begun before a stunted acropolis was pointed out on our right, and a small, 12th century Byzantine chapel on our left. It was rapidly becoming clear just how densely and continuously populated the area had been in ancient Greece through the modern era. We had a beautiful morning drive through olive and orange trees, gradually moving through the valley toward the hills. Distant in time, the actual site of Mycenae came quickly into view. Sited between Mts. Zara and Profitis Ilias and surrounded by a deep ravine, Mycenae was strategically located on a triangular promontory. Most of us had been reading of the power of the fortress town and its mighty walls and the bustle of activity that would have gone on there, so the archaeological site itself, stone remnants lying close to the ground, was like a whisper calling us.

Just a short walk up from the parking lot was the Lion's Gate, the entrance to the city, known to everyone who has ever taken a survey course in art history. Surprisingly the gate itself has survived fairly well, perhaps because its monumental stones and carvings have little value as spolia, and perhaps the rest of Mycenae is now spread throughout the houses across the Argive Plain. Just as magnificent as the view into the gate is the view out the gate, the strength and solidity of the masonry framing the lands the citadel protected. Armed with maps (aerial views are really helpful) we spread out over the ruins, piecing together a vision of daily life within the compound. Just to the right after entering is Grave Circle A, one of the most easily identifiable areas. Much of the site has been excavated to square and rectangular foundations, which indicate the houses. After walking up the path one arrives at the palace itself at the top of the promontory. It would have been very close quarters in a siege and it is not hard to imagine people running up to the fortress when the alarms bells rang. At the back of the site is a back entrance, hidden from view, where troops or spies could have been sent out. Like many sites, Mycenae has its own museum for artifacts found at the site.

A short distance from Mycenae –almost directly across from the site-- we made a brief stop at the *tholos*, or tomb, called the Treasury of Atreus or Ageamemnon. Roughly contemporary with the Lion's Gate, the tomb looks like a grass-covered mound rising from the hill side, its full shape hidden in order to protect the treasure inside (didn't work, as it was empty). Monumental stone walls flank the entrance, which is cut into the hill and topped by an enormous lintel of a single stone. Inside the tholos it is cool and dark, with the stones, smoothly dressed and placed, rising in a monumental beehive about 25-30 feet high. A small chamber on the right contained the now-stolen treasury for the tomb. One emerges from the tomb into the bright Mediterranean sun and a view of the ruins of Mycenae.

an organisation of architectural museums, centres and collections



international confederation of architectural museums

From Mycenae we began the long drive into the mountains of Arcadia to the hill towns of Dimitsana and Stemnitsa through steep winding roads. The area played an important role in Greek Independence, especially as a hiding place for rebel leaders hiding from the authorities. The Lousios River runs through the area in a spectacular gorge, where with the mists rising off the water it is easy to believe the legend of the infant Zeus being washed in its waters. It started to mist as we got closer to Dimitsana where we stopped for lunch at a roadside taverna that had a wide patio with outdoor seating; it seemed a perfect place for Greek families to take their Sunday dinner. Given how much time we spent at Mycenae we had to leave the town immediately following lunch. We went on the nearby town of Stemnitsa for a short walk through its streets of traditional stone houses and churches from the Byzantine era.

Then we began the long trip down to Sparta in the southern end of the Peloponnesus where the land flattens out and the sea comes into view again. With mental images of ancient Sparta we came back to the 21st century and into a small Greek city with a central boulevard with most of the local population getting ready to watch the World Cup. We made a first stop at the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil housed in the buildings of the former Electricity Company of Sparta. The architect responsible for the conversion of the site gave us a detailed tour of the building and its exhibits. The exhibition, beautifully planned and executed, gave a complete history of the olive and its economic importance in ancient and modern Greece as well as the mechanics of pressing the olives themselves. After purchasing a great deal of olive oil products, we headed for the hotel and a good evening meal and a bit more of the World Cup.

Sunday 11 June

Departure from *Sparta*

Visit to *Monemvasia*, medieval fortress-town

Monemvasia occupies a steep, rocky islet connected to the Laconian coast by a bridge. The settlement was founded in the 6th century A.D. by the inhabitants of Laconia. A second settlement was later founded on a lower level, and gradually developed into a town of significant strategic importance. After a short domination of the Popes, the area was captured by the Venetians in 1464. In 1540 it was occupied by the Turks and its decline became more evident. In 1690 it was given over to the Venetians and in 1715 was recaptured by the Turks. It was the first among the fortified towns of the Peloponnesus to be liberated by the Greeks in 1821.

During the second half of the 20th century, a couple of architects Mr. and Mrs. Kalliga, have worked on the reconstruction of the majority of the buildings, so that today the town is reminiscent of its old image, although around 90% of the buildings are the result of restoration work. The demolished parts of walls in the Upper Town have been reconstructed; the church and the wall paintings of Aghia Sophia have been restored. In the Lower Town, the sea wall has been rebuilt, the Moslem Mosque has been restored, the east and west bastion of the fortification wall have been consolidated, and many of the churches have been repaired and restored.

Touring *Lakoniki Mani*

Return and overnight stay in *Sparta*

an organisation of architectural museums, centres and collections



international confederation of architectural museums

Monday 12 June

Marc Treib, Berkeley

Under rather cloudy and foreboding skies, we departed Sparta promptly at 9:00 a.m. Rain seemed to be in the offing: we were again headed for hilly terrain where the clouds gathered ominously and darkness ensued. After a short drive we arrived at Mystrás, a classic Byzantine site—a town really—inserted into the hills. The bus wound upwards depositing the group at the summit from which we gingerly began our descent on surfaces wet with drizzle. Fortunately, the threat of rain proved greater than the reality, and the steepness of the slope proved to be a far greater challenge to the group than the weather. Our guide was once again at no loss for words, and soon members of the group her company and took off on their own, passing downwards through the Ayia Sophia church, the Despots Palace, a number of other centralized or aisled Byzantine churches, enjoying along the way the fresco fragments that had survived in lesser or greater measure. Of the extensive complex, perhaps the most rewarding was the Moní Pantánassas —still a functioning nunnery and thus the one sub-complex that still retained a sense of life.

Back on the bus again, conversations centered on who had been where, and “Did you see the...?”. Some talked of coffee or food partaken, or offered bags of snacks of unknown origin or ingredients. As the bus wound through the Taygetos mountainsides, heading west toward Kalamata, we again marveled at the skill of our driver Yannis—and again considered about how many hours had already been spent on that bus. Then northwards along the western coast. After a pit stop to acquire towels at a local emporium, we settled on a beach about fifteen kilometers south of Olympia at the request of numerous would-be swimmers. Here we found a café, a rail line, some changing booths, and the promise of the sea. The more intrepid ICAMers donned their swimwear and headed for the shore in a scene straight from Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* (or was that Antonioni’s *L’Avventura*?). The cold temperature of the water did little to diminish the pleasure of the bathers, although several of us (more wisely, we thought) opted for watching the placid sea scene—or viewing the rows of Italian stone pines bathed in glorious light along the shore. After the swim, Ford Peatross—bless his heart—provided a round of strong drink at the local cafe, intended to warm the hearts—and no doubt the feet—of the swimmers.

Yannis and the bus soon brought us to Ancient Olympia, and to another Amalia hotel designed by “a famous Greek architect” (Nikos Valsamakis). There we found another 9:00 dinner of acceptable quality, wine of a better vintage, and a late cup of tea among the few remaining stalwarts. And then—blissfully—to bed, perchance to dream of the morrow’s ruins at Ancient Olympia.

Tuesday 13 June

Ford Peatross, The Library of Congress, Washington

After breakfast at the Amalia Hotel, we departed for Olympia one of the most important sanctuaries of the ancient world, the site of the Panhellenic games (every four years or Olympiad) from ca. 776 B.C. until the 4th century, A.D.

Led by Melina we spent the next four hours visiting its extensive remains, where excavations were begun in 1829 by French archaeologists of the *Expédition Scientifique de Morée*, followed by Winckelmann and, in 1875, the German archaeologist Ernst Curtius. Excavations continue to be conducted under the supervision of the *Deutsche Archäologische Institut (DAI)*. The exhibits in the relatively new museum provided impressive and highly informative reconstructions and displays of sculptural and architectural remains and of bronze trophies and artifacts from the site.

an organisation of architectural museums, centres and collections



international confederation of architectural museums

We entered near the 1st century A.D. Villa of Nero, making our way through the partially re-erected porticos of the 2nd century B.C. Gymnasium, for discus and javelin, and the Paleastra, for wrestling and boxing, built during the 3rd century, B.C. At the studio where the sculptor Pheidias assembled the huge, seated, chryselephantine statue of Zeus, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, we observed the structure's overlays from its period of use as a Byzantine church. Nearby the handsome mosaic floors of the 5th century B.C. baths near the river Alfeiós were visible. Although somewhat obscured by overgrown oleanders, the plan and water elements evident in the 4th century B.C. Leonidaion, a residence for foreign guests and officials named after its donor and architect, Leonidas of Naxos, appeared similar to those of Hadrian's Villa near Tivoli.

The single column recently reerected made even more impressive the great tumbled drums of Doric columns that cascaded from the stylobate of the peripteral Doric Temple of Zeus, of 470-456 B.C., the work of the Elean architect Libon. We moved on to the Hippodrome and the Stadium, where athletes would parade in at the start of the games, the elevated row of treasuries, the altars of Hera and Zeus, and the 7th century B.C. Heraion or Temple of Hera, and began to exit the site at the peripteral Ionic portico of the circular Philippeion, begun by Philip II of Macedon and completed by his son, Alexander the Great.

Some of us recovered briefly and usefully in the shade of the portico of the museum before entering its great central hall with monumental flanking reconstructions of the sculptural groups from the east and west pediments of the Temple of Zeus, the chariot race of Pelops and Oenamaos appearing opposite the Battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs, supplemented by metopes depicting the Labors of Hercules. Other highpoints of the museum included the Nike of Paeonios a powerful painted terracotta acroterial group of Zeus and Ganymede, a feast of cornices and acroterial decorations, including an entire painted terra-cotta pediment, the huge central disk from the Heraion or Temple of Hera, and statues from the Roman period. The famous statue of Hermes holding the infant Dionysios by Praxiteles was featured in a setting with deep red walls, providing an effective contrast. After concluding our visit to Olympia, our lunch was in the arbor of a restaurant, with tomato salad with kalamata olives and grilled chicken kabobs, followed by delicious slices of watermelon.

3:00 pm departed Olympia.

On the bus we conversed, napped, expressed our thanks to our guides and driver, sang, and celebrated Sherry Birk's birthday before our arrival at the next stop, the Rion-Antirion stayed cable bridge spanning the Strait of Corinth from the Peloponnese peninsula to the mainland. The bridge was first proposed more than a century ago, but proved unbuildable until recent technological advances.

Representing a collaboration of Greek and French engineers and contractors, the Rion-Antirion is not only the world's longest cable-stayed bridge (its deck is attached by cables directly to its pylons), but also one of the most technologically advanced, overcoming major obstacles inherent in the site. The water in the strait is more than 200 feet deep in places, and bedrock lies far beneath its soft soil. Seven earthquakes measuring more than 6 on the Richter scale have struck near the Strait of Corinth in the past 40 years. The bridge's designers hung the bridge's deck from its pylons like a giant pendulum and added dampers at the base to absorb the jolts of a tremor. Also known as the Harilaos Trikoupi Bridge, in honor of the 19th-century Greek prime minister who advocated for it, the bridge is designed to withstand winds up to 155 mph, earthquakes measuring up to 7.5 on the Richter scale, and the impact of a 180,000-ton tanker sailing at 18 knots.

6:30 pm stopped again at the Corinth Canal for coffee.

After more talking, napping, saying our goodbyes, and singing "We all wore out our knees in the Peloponnese, thanks to ICAM" to the tune of "That's Amore" (a 1952 song by composer Harry Warren and lyricist Jack Brooks best known in a 1953 hit version by singer Dean Martin), we arrived back in Athens and at the Esperia and other hotels.

an organisation of architectural museums, centres and collections