

# THE CIRCLE NEWSLETTER

Well, after some months of reflection and inner calm I have been able – finally – to report on this year’s Circle meeting in Athens. It has been a very special affair, not only because we had been to the cradle of mankind but also because we had persons in our group which bear names related to Greek mythology. You might want to know that we could avoid another Trojan war because Paris choose another woman and – “bella Elena” – did not cause an outbreak of hostilities – at least not that I know of...but let’s start in some sort of cronical order to let people who have not been there catch up with events.

As you know, the story started when Paris showed up in Stockholm last year and volunteered to host the next Circle meeting. We do not know how many times he did regret this decision; we only know that he did his best to show us some highlights of his home country.

Most members of our group arrived on April 30<sup>th</sup>, except Jan who had found some excuse to explore the Greek ski-slopes and beaches two weeks prior to the meeting...Since nothing special was planned the first evening, the gourmet experts from Belgium, Spain, Norway, and Austria easily found one of the most expensive sea-food restaurants of Athens, invaded the kitchen, selected a fine meal, and nearly collapsed when the bill arrived: A sudden reminder that also the Greeks had raised their prices substantially when the Euro finally made it to this corner of Europe...

Not very content with this observation we fell into our beds, overlooking the Acropolis, except Jan who had found some alternative lodging overlooking something else...

The next day we met for a walking tour of Athens, passed by the Plaka and up to the Acropolis which was closed because it was May 1<sup>st</sup>...therefore we retreated to a Greek tavern, created some problems because a group of 15 is not very easy to accommodate, and stuffed ourselves with tsatsiki, feta and other highlights of the Greek cuisine. Outside the historic Plaka area, Athens is very busy catching up with Berlin as the biggest building site in Europe – the Olympic games next year cast their shadows over the Greek capital already.

In the evening Paris had chosen a fantastic site for the Circle Dinner, a beautiful terrace with view over the city and the moon-lighted (good planning) Acropolis. Swept away by so much romance we assured ourselves how lucky we are to experience such a nice evening together and praised the Lord before getting really drunk; no exception there...

The next day Paris had booked a small van and several cars to get us to Delphi, the historic site of Greek mythology and the famous oracle. Since we have been out from business school for a while and our memory of rational and not so rational decision making is waning fast anyway, some of us tried the oracle and got as confused as in an Efendioglu class; but this might be because the revered professor is from a neighboring origin and might therefore be slightly prejudiced in this respect... anyway. Paris persuaded one of the guides to cut short on his lunch break and give us a 15-minute lecture on Greek mythology.

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Thank heavens we did not reveal to the guy that we had a Paris and an Elena amongst us, he would have never stopped. Equipped with this new knowledge about Geek history we climbed the mysterious mountain and explored the Temple of Apollo and the seat of the oracle. The ancient Greeks had a fantastic combination of business and religion where money spent seemed to be in direct relation with the fortunes told by Sybille.

On top of the hill was the old stadium where Circle members showed their athletic capabilities, which culminated in a – fake – running competition. Some Circle members cited bad knees and back injuries to explain their abysmal results, even without any real competition...

After so much sightseeing we retreated to a nice coastal town – Itea where Paris demonstrated that Odysseus was definitely Greek. We managed to get lost in a small village and it took time and material (tires) to get us back on track. A beautiful bay and a picturesque tavern gave us a perfect opportunity to relax from our stressful day.

Back in Athens most of us felt too tired to go out, so we retreated to a tourist trap and watched the boys who watched the girls who watched the boys go by...it seems that we are getting really old, at least some of us. Of course except Jan, who happened to have other plans for the night....

On Saturday Paris took us to his tennis club – the oldest in Athens – where he hosted a nice reception and a brunch. We sat in a perfect green surrounding in the middle of Athens and thought that life is not so bad after all. In the afternoon we decided to check out the beaches of Athens because the temperature had already hit 30 degrees. Some of us went to the public beach and a small group sneaked into a private beach to enjoy the beautiful Aegean Sea. Exhausted from so much activity Paris had organized a dinner at the Yacht Club in Piraeus, the harbor city next to Athens. It turned out that half of Athens had had the same idea and we ended up in a formidable traffic jam on Saturday night! But the relaxed atmosphere of the Club and the Greek wine and food more than compensated for the difficult arrival. In the adjacent discotheque we had the chance to have our farewell drinks because another Circle meeting came to an end.

On Sunday morning we finally took the opportunity to visit the Acropolis, in perfect sunshine and with a great view over the city before we had to leave the Greek capital.

Many thanks to Paris and Victoria who had organized another memorable Circle event. But who else was there? You have read in the text that we had the occasional pleasure of Jan who was getting ready to start another chapter on his book about his grandfather. He has changed location in Brussels and welcomes visitors now in the hip Sablon area of the Belgian capital. Doretta, his Greek girlfriend during his stay has helped us moving around and became another Circle groupie. Luis, who could finally make it although he had some family business to get over with first. President emeritus and Circle founding father Jos Piron and Nathalie enjoyed the trip and were getting excited for another tour of Canada later this year.

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Another ex-president, Petter presented his fiancée Angelique to the group and cut his visit short in order to see some of the Greek islands as well. He has left Norway and has himself settled in Brussels for the time being. Elena was in the process of quitting her job and Dirk had started in April to work for MasterCard in Belgium. The neo-retired Lars enjoyed his trip before he planned his move back to Norway. Marlyse and Bernard are in the final stages of the housing project so that we can start planning a house warming in the South of France very soon.

See you in Budapest very soon!

Wilfried