

TRAVELLERS' TALES

Doctors at Sea

In October 2008 several ANZSHM members joined a group of medical history enthusiasts from the UK for a conference with a difference – on board a cruise ship.

The Fred Olsen Lines *MS Braemar* spent a fortnight sailing around the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Departing from Rome - Civitavecchia actually - we called into Naples, Santorini (Thira), Mykonos (and Delos), Istanbul, Constantza, Odessa, Sevastopol, finishing at Palermo in Sicily. Travelling was mostly at night, so that almost every morning we awoke in a new port and boarded coaches for guided tours of the local sights, particularly those with a medical or archaeological connection. So we visited the ruins of Pompeii, the Crimean War battlefields, and the barracks hospital at Scutari in Turkey where Florence Nightingale made her reputation as the 'lady with the lamp'. On the days when we are at sea, we listened to lectures on related themes.

Tour leader was Sue Weir, a former nurse and president-elect of the British Society of the History of Medicine, ably assisted by Professor John Richardson from the University of Birmingham, who has an extensive knowledge of military medicine and provided running commentaries as we passed such landmarks as Gallipoli while sailing through the Dardanelles. The other main speakers were John Ford and our own Jim Leavesley. Twelve of the tour participants also gave short presentations on medical or historical topics related to the places we visited, so overall we discussed a wide range of

interesting issues that helped to make the shore excursions more meaningful.

I must admit that sometimes I felt rather an outsider, being the only speaker who was purely an historian, and not also a medical practitioner. Some of our British colleagues found this anomalous as well, expressing surprise that somebody without medical training would speak about medical history. I learnt that in England there are in fact two separate groups – 'medical historians', who are members of the Royal Society of Medicine and who must be medical practitioners, and 'historians of medicine', who are customarily academic historians who are members of the British Society of the History of Medicine. Not everybody in our group was a medico, of course, as many were accompanied by their non-medical partners; besides, I was not the only individual Australian who does not have medical qualifications.

The conference/tour was organised by Jon Baines Tours in London, and because it had been advertised in this *Newsletter*, attracted a strong antipodean participation. Of the fifty people in our group, twelve were from Australia and two from New Zealand. Nevertheless the whole ship was not devoted to our needs and interests. It is a luxurious vessel, recently lengthened and refitted, of some 24,000 tonnes. Our contingent was but a small component of the 900-odd passengers on board, so we were effectively a tour within a tour. A lecture room on the ship was made available as we needed it, while we had dedicated tourist coaches and local guides for the shore excursions, so that we saw what we wanted, and did not waste time on shopping expeditions or other touristy trivia. At both the

ports we visited in Ukraine we were even welcomed by the town brass band!



Although the British passengers found the climate congenial, removing their clothing at the first glimpse of sun, we people from warmer climes often felt rather chilly, especially on the days when the ship was ploughing into a Force 8 gale.

Three other Australian participants have given their impressions of the trip in this *Newsletter*. The cruise will be repeated next year, on a different ship, visiting some different ports. Check the website: www.jonbainestours.co.uk

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ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

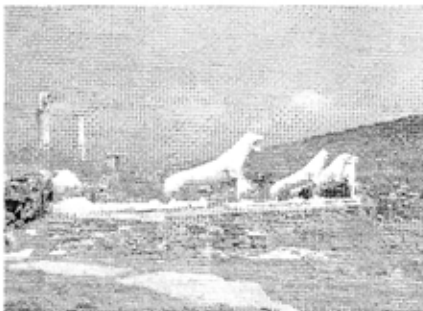
A gathering of people with a common interest, medical history for instance, is always pleasurable. There is a meeting of like minds where each knows what the other person is on about and any discussion is usually above the mundane. If you add the frisson of this meeting being on a cruise with its balmy nights, fine food, a hint of romance as you watch phosphorescent seas trailing about the ship, then you are almost always in for an enjoyable time.

There were lectures on each of the three days when we had full days at sea and when we did call at various ports we had our own designated buses to transport us to local medi-

cally historic sites. There were three invited lecturers and seven others who volunteered to speak for 15 minutes each on two of our lecture days. The invited lecturers generally spoke about the area which we were to visit, whereas the 'ring-ins' spoke about their medically historic hobbyhorses. All speakers were of a very high standard.

The places visited ranged from the Pompeii ruins, including the 'surgeons house' and brothel, to Florence Nightingale's Hospital at Scutari situated on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus opposite the main city of Istanbul, to the archaeological museum at Odessa, to the island of Delos, birthplace of Apollo, God of Medicine.

This latter, Delos, was visited after the *Braemar* anchored at the nearby famous and trendily expensive holiday resort of Mykonos. Though one of the smallest of the Cyclades islands of Greece, Delos was not only an ancient centre of religious, political and commercial life of the Aegean Sea, but a highly significant medically historic site.



Uninhabited apart from the coffee shop, there remains the ruins of a large, pre-Hellenic townsite. Temples to Apollo and Artemis (his twin sister) and other gods abound, but the most famous sculptured work is the line of 5 (formerly 9) lions which menacingly line a processional way. In fact they are

stone replicas, the originals being safe in a museum.

Though a mythological story, on this island one felt at the very centre of the genesis of medicine. It was here in the 10th century BC was said to take place the birth of the divine twins to the Titaness, Leto, daughter Phoebe, herself born of a union between Heaven and Earth. Leto is said to have delivered the babies after a marathon nine day labour. In turn, as an adult Apollo had a child by Coronis whom he called Aesculapius. Myth has it that Coronis proved to be faithless, so was slain by Artemis, but Apollo was able to snatch the child Aesculapius from the pyre and entrust him to Chiron who taught the boy the art of medicine.

Aesculapius was a mortal and as we all know later became 'the blameless physician' of Homer's Iliad and the god of healing.

So Delos is special to doctors and I sensed it from the ambience. For me the visit was the highlight of this medical history cruise.

Jim Leavesley, AM
Margaret River, WA

HISTRIA

I have many special recollections from the wonderful Medical History Tour on board the *Braemar* but for me the experience that stands out above all others probably because it was such a great surprise, occurred when we reached the Black Sea port of Constanza in Romania. Here I discovered the extensive archaeological site of Histria, an ancient metropolis I confess was hitherto unknown to me.

This excursion was not specifically for our group but one offered by

the tour company. We left the port through a sea of idle cranes and silent submarines past mountains of scrap metal and lines of trucks both adding to and taking from these great piles. The sudden incongruous vision along the esplanade opposite, of a charming 'wedding cake' edifice – the Paris Casino –, offered an introduction to the architectural contrasts that would unfold that day.



Paris Casino, Constanza, Romania

The city of Constanza was typical of many of those of Eastern Europe that had experienced the past communist regime, with unimaginative buildings now in need of much attention. Our guide informed us that the visible proliferation of new fountains, of questionable purpose and architectural merit, stood as excesses of the Mayor's great ego. He wished to be remembered by these monuments, and yet nearby essential structures were allowed to deteriorate. On the streets were the ever present hordes of stray dogs, a familiar and disturbing feature of Black Sea ports.

It was a relief to leave the city and eventually drive through a village where life appeared to have changed little for generations. There were old but attractive traditional wooden houses each with a garden of fruit and vegetables and housing a few animals. Transport was predominately by donkey and cart. It seemed a world away from

Constanza.

Then through a bleak, bare landscape to the shores of Lake Sinoe and the sudden remarkable sight of Histria, a huge, breathtaking collection of ruins of a former Greek and then Roman metropolis. It is situated between the River Danube and the Black Sea, where now Lake Sinoe forms the freshwater entry to the latter. The excavations began in 1914 and are continuing today. They are vast and revealed successive cities of great sophistication.

On the site a relatively new, impressive museum housed an extensive collection of locally excavated artefacts ranging from the Neolithic period to the Middle Ages. Altogether, the visit to Histria was quite an overwhelming experience and so unexpected.

The return journey ended at another archaeological museum where we viewed a huge mosaic. In front of the building as if standing guard, was the bronze statue of Ovid, banished to Constanza (Tumis) in 8 AD and where he died about 10 years later. A memorable day indeed.

Elizabeth Arthur
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YET ANOTHER VIEW

Is there any better way to study the history of western medicine than to sail through the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, its very cradle and place of nurture? This is what a group of 50 'seekers of knowledge', including 12 Australians and 2 New Zealanders, forced themselves to do in September this year!

As we sailed we listened and learned. We were very fortunate to have eminent medical historians on board, including John Richardson,

Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for the History of Medicine at Birmingham University, our own Jim Leavesley, whose paper "Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta" I found particularly interesting, and John Ford, past president of the British Society for the History of Medicine and a current examiner for the Diploma in the History of Medicine of the Society of Apothecaries. John Ford's paper 'Florence Nightingale; Angel of Mercy' prepared us to 'meet' this brilliant yet complex woman and to appreciate her contribution to the Crimean War in particular, and her lasting work in the evolution of modern nursing and the re-organization of hospital and military administration in general.

We spent 2 days in Istanbul, on the first of which, through very tight security, we visited Selimiye Barracks, still a military establishment, as it was in 1855, and it was here that the famous, or infamous, hospital of Scutari was situated. To walk the long corridors, now so clean and shining, but then so crowded, filthy and the scene of indescribable suffering, was quite humbling (Sir John Hall, Chief Medical Officer in the Crimea and Inspector General of Hospitals, disparaged the use of anaesthesia and felt that the loud cries of the soldiers undergoing surgery was a 'stimulant' for their recovery!) At times there were 2000 sick and wounded in this hospital and the death rate in 1855 was 42%.; when sanitary reforms were carried out later that year the death rate fell dramatically. The tower (there is some controversy whether it is the tower!) where Florence had her apartment, is now a museum and the furniture she used is on display, including the couch she slept on (she is reputed not to have gone to

bed, but perhaps the thought of climbing the very steep spiral staircase to her bedroom was just too much after 20 hours on duty!).



From her window she would have watched as convoy after convoy of wounded was unloaded from ships which had brought them across the Black Sea from the battlefields of the Crimea, a journey of several days. In 1855 she visited the hospitals at and near Balacava, where she used her famous carriage, which became known as 'Florrie's Lorry', and it was here, in the heart of the Crimea, that she became very ill, the legacy of which dogged her all her life. Our group also visited this area and saw the place where the Charge of the Light Brigade took place in October 1854. According to Tennyson's poem, 600 rode into the valley of death that day, of whom only about 200 survived (one wonders how many horses fell) and the Russian casualties are unknown.

Cruising is an easy way to have a holiday, no packing and unpacking, but of course on this cruise we also studied! Unfortunately the length of time in each port is very short, but at least it gives one a taste of the sights and is an introduction to places which had once been but specks on the map. We visited Odessa and Sevastopol in the Ukraine, for example; cities more beautiful than I had ever imagined.

Marie Rogers
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