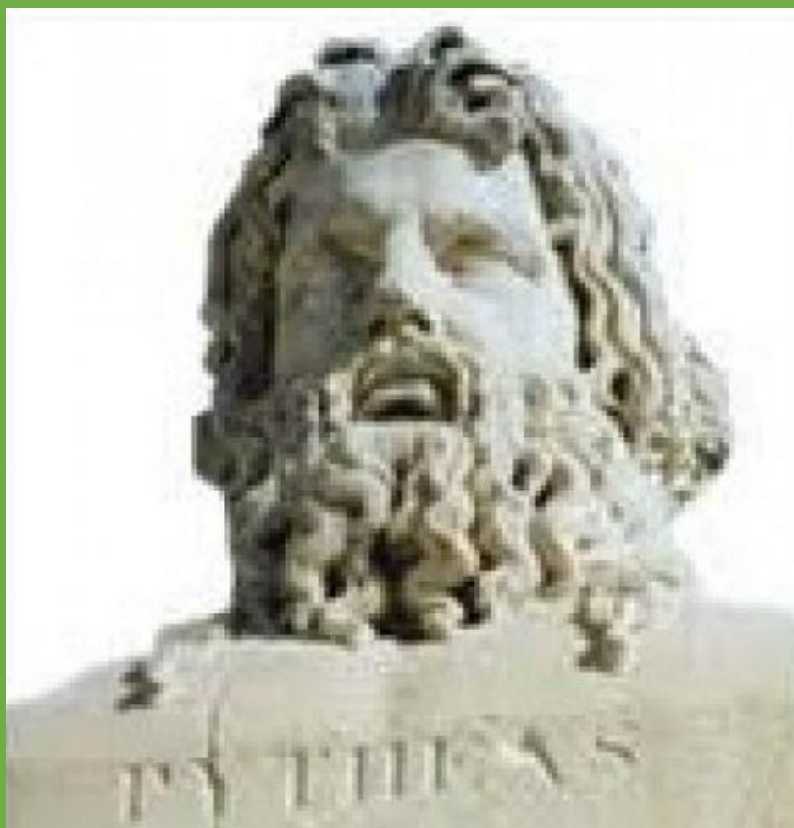




*In the*  
**FOOTSTEPS of**  
**PYTHEAS**  
*the GREEK*  
**From MASSALIA**

*John Vlachopoulos*



# Περπάτησε τ' άπάτητα της άπωτάτης Θούλης

Adapted from verse 3028 , Captain Yorgos Spiliotis, PYTHEADA

Walked on the untrodden land of  
ultima Thule

# In the Footsteps of Pytheas the Greek from Massalia

## PROLOGUE

Pytheas travelled (probably in 330 BC) from Massalia (modern-day Marseille) in the Mediterranean to the edge of the known world, the frightening Thule, where sea-mist, land and ocean appeared to be combined into one frozen vastness. He wrote a book **τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ὠκεανοῦ** (on the Ocean), but it has been lost some two thousand years ago. What we know about his voyage is from other historians who referred to his book.

He was so much ahead of his time that Polybius (born about 200 BC) and Strabo (born about 64-63 BC) did not believe his stories and made some very disparaging remarks. Some other historians like Timaeus, Eratosthenes and Pliny the elder were amazed by Pytheas's story of the voyage to Thule. Recent historical and archaeological evidence shows that he indeed circumnavigated Britain and reached near the arctic circle. Historical evidence favors Iceland as Pytheas's Thule. Some recent geodesic recalculations, of geographical latitudes reported by Pytheas, favor an island in a fjord near Trondheim in Norway, according to a German team of researchers.

Pytheas was an explorer, astronomer and geographer. As Winston Churchill said "one of the greatest explorers history has ever known. He confirmed and proclaimed the existence of the British Isles. He was treated like a liar and it was long after the disappearance of the world in which this great sailor had lived, that people began to have some admiration for the discoveries he had made"

I would recommend the fascinating book by Oxford archeologist Barry Cunliffe, '*The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek*', for more information. I would also recommend Captain Yorgos Spiliotis's masterfully crafted epic poem in modern Greek '*Pytheada*', which is written in the style of The Iliad and The Odyssey and it is accessible from <https://yorgos-spiliotis.com/>.

We do not really know how he travelled or along which route he proceeded. In this travelogue, I start from Monaco, not far from Marseille, which Pytheas must have visited before going on his journey to the distant north. I follow both probable routes, around the Iberian Peninsula and overland from Marseille to Bordeaux in the Atlantic Ocean. From there I go to Normandy in northern France, Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium and the English Channel (La Manche). At each one of my "stops" I provide snippets of history and pictures, which are edited versions of my Facebook posts during 2021. By describing some personal experiences, I have tried to provide an informative and entertaining narrative.

*John Vlachopoulos*

Burlington, Ontario, Canada

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John Vlachopoulos, *In the Footsteps of Pytheas the Greek from Massalia*.

Polydynamics Inc, Canada (2022)

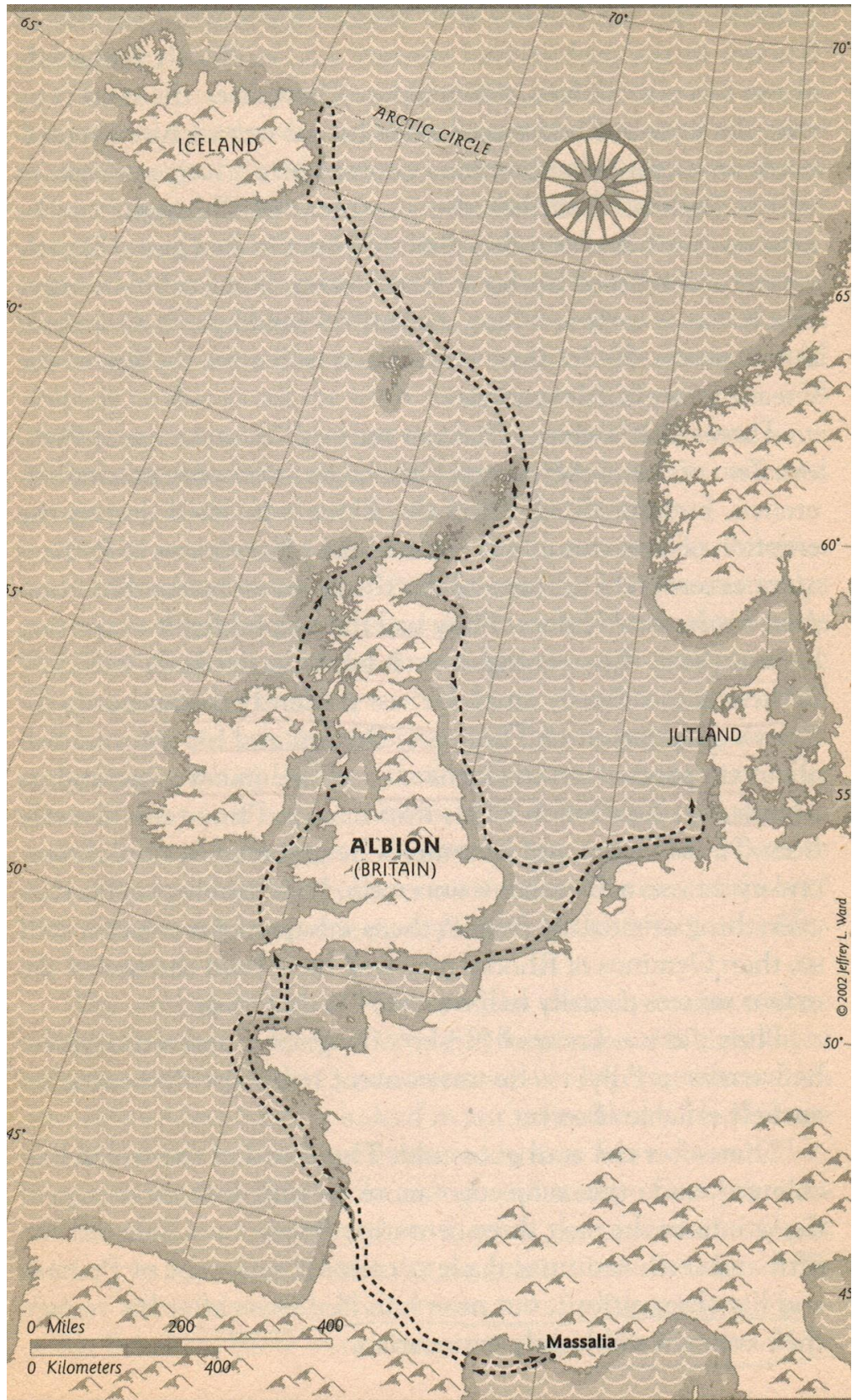
ISBN 978-0-9952407-9-7 (Book)

ISBN 978-0-9952407-8-0 (Electronic book)

Published by:

POLYDYNAMICS INC, Dundas, ON, CANADA

[www.polydynamics.com](http://www.polydynamics.com)



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*ZfV - Zeitschrift fuer Geodäsie, Geoinformation und Landmanagement.*, 137(6), pp. 335-339 (2012)

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# MONACO



Monaco derived its name from the Greeks, who had sailed from Phocaea, situated in the eastern coast of the Aegean, and built several towns and settlements in the French Riviera, the first one being Massalia (Marseille) around 600 BC. According to the legend, **Hercules** had passed through the area of present-day Monaco and dispatched all gods from there.



A single temple was built for him alone. In Greek **Monoikos (μόνοικος)**, means "single house" or "the only house".

Monaco has been controlled by the Genoese family of Grimaldi since 1297. It has a population of a bit less than 40,000 and only about 10,000 being Monegasque citizens. It is a sovereign ministate of 2.1 square kilometers, located about 15 km from the Italian border. It is known as a tax heaven and it has been attracting the rich and famous for over a hundred years. Somerset Maugham described Monaco as "a sunny place for shady people". However, the current sovereign Prince Albert has decided to put "ethics at the centre of life" and he has started rooting out business and individuals involved in questionable practices.

My first visit to Monaco was in 1971 and I visited many other times. It was in September of 1981, after the high tourist season, when I went inside the PALAIS PRINCIER DE MONACO. As I was walking out of the gate (shown behind me in the 2016 picture), a pink Rolls-Royce convertible was slowly entering. In the back seat was Princess Grace, dressed in a bright red dress. She looked fabulous and very regal. I did not have enough time to snap a picture, I would certainly cause irritation if I did. It appeared that she was returning from some kind of a formal event.

Sadly, she died in a car crash a year later (September 13, 1982, aged 52). There was lots of speculation on what caused the accident. Officially, she had a minor stroke, missed a very sharp turn and drove her car 40 meters down a steep slope. There were rumors that her young daughter Stephanie was in the driver's seat. The truth is that the road from La Turbie (elevation about 500 meters) to Monaco is very dangerous to inattentive or inexperienced drivers.

I was on sabbatical research leave at the Centre de Mise en Forme des Materiaux (Paristech) in Sophia Antipolis and I was living in Juan-les-Pins/Antibes just west of Nice, September 1981 till July 1982. I was frequently visiting Monaco/Monte-Carlo (just east of Nice) and I checked all possible routes for getting there the fastest. On a Saturday in October of 1981, after sundown, I drove to La Turbie along a highway and noticed that there were no other cars on the stretch of the road from La Turbie to Monaco, which was rather unexpected. The many hairpin turns were very scary, especially in the dark, and never took that road again. I was back on sabbatical at the same research center in Sophia Antipolis during the academic year 1988-1989, but I had no desire to take that road.

# MONTE CARLO



The world-famous CASINO OF MONTE-CARLO was founded in the late 1800's for the purpose of boosting the economy of the near bankrupt principality of just 2 square kilometers. After the 1st World War, Casino de Monte Carlo was again in financial trouble and so was the entire principality. Arm's dealer and industrialist Basil Zaharoff was invited to take over the corporation, which eventually became very profitable.

**Zaharoff** was born Vasileios Zacharias (Βασίλειος **Ζαχαρίας**) in Asia Minor (Turkey) in 1849 to Greek parents who had lived in Russia and slightly changed their name to sound Russian. In Athens he met a Swedish arms manufacturer and started working for him as an arms dealer. Eventually, Zaharoff became one of the richest men in his lifetime, known as merchant of death for selling arms to both sides of various conflicts and also major benefactor to various causes and organizations. He was knighted twice in Britain. Under his management the Monte Carlo Casino became profitable. Zaharoff is the inspiration for Stavro Blofeld in 007 stories, by Ian Fleming. He died in 1936.

In 1953 shipping magnate **Aristotle Onassis** became the majority owner of the casino corporation and about 1/3 of the acreage of the entire country. Onassis was also a Greek born in Asia Minor. He emigrated to Argentina and was an importer of tobacco before investing in shipping. Onassis used the wedding of Prince Rainier to Grace Kelly as a business opportunity for promotion and gave the couple a 45-meter yacht as a wedding present. Things went smoothly for a few years, but eventually the relationship with Prince Rainier deteriorated due to differing visions. Onassis wanted Monte-Carlo to remain a resort for exclusive clientele. Rainier's vision was for mass tourist developments.

Eventually, Onassis was forced to sell his holdings and left the country in the late 1960s. Monaco has now 39,000 inhabitants and the world's highest per capita GDP. The statue of Onassis is not in Monaco, but in the Greek island of Lefkada.

Did I ever play at the Monte Carlo casino? I am one of very few Greeks who do not know how to play cards and I have no desire to learn. However, on December 31st, 1988, following Greek tradition for the last day of the year, I went..... gambling at the casino. I played American roulette for a couple of hours till I got tired and left with a loss of no more than \$50. The festive atmosphere and hearing repeatedly the original "rien ne va plus" was well worth my modest expense.

# NICE, FRANCE



Nice is just 15 kilometers from Monaco and 30 kilometers from the Italian border and it is the largest city in the French Riviera (Côte d'Azur), with population of about 350,000 and an urban area totalling about one million people. The locals are proud of their cultural heritage which goes back to the 4th century BC. Greek seafarers from the city of **Phocaea**, Asia Minor, near Izmir of modern-day Turkey, had established a colony in Marseille and subsequently in other areas of the French Mediterranean coast. After a successful battle outcome, they named the city NIKAIÁ, from **Nike (Νίκη, the goddess of victory)**. There are streets, shops, hotels, travel agencies, sports clubs and a TV station named **Phocéen**.

There are also some Roman ruins in the Cimiez district of Nice. In medieval times, Nice was ruled either by French or Italian nobility. In 1860 the city and the surrounding area was ceded to France after some kind of a referendum. About a quarter of the population fled to Italy claiming that the vote was rigged. Italian patriot and revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi, was born in Nice and he was one of those opposing the cession to France.

From the 17th century, the mild winter weather with moderate rainfall started to attract English and Russian aristocrats, including kings and czars. The English lords and ladies liked to walk along the waterfront and they financed the construction of the first part of the promenade, in the early 1800s. Since the early 1800s it is called the Promenade des Anglais. Among the **notable visitors** Queen Victoria and her son (later) King Edward VI, spent several winters in Nice. The heir apparent Nicholas of Russia died in Nice in 1865, at the age of 21. His fiancé, princess Dagmar of Denmark got married to his brother (later) Czar Alexander III. Dagmar (known by her Russian name as Maria Feodorovna) and Alexander were the parents of the last Czar of Russia, Nicholas II. Dagmar was also the sister of King George I of Greece.

As for me, I was afraid to visit Greece for my summer vacations, when the country of my birth was ruled by an oppressive military junta (1967-74), and I was coming to the French Riviera. I have also lived in the French Riviera, for over a year and a half, on sabbatical research leave (1981-82 and 1988-89) at a research center in nearby Sophia Antipolis. I have visited the area many other times, most recently in the summer of 2016. I am fluent in French, I have traveled extensively between Monaco in the east and St. Tropez in the west, and I feel at home in this area.

The beautiful Promenade des Anglais was the site of a massacre on July 14, 2016 (Bastille Day, French National Day). A terrorist drove a truck into a crowd watching a fireworks display and killed 86 people, mostly young children.

## MOUNTAINS near NICE



**La Foux d' Allos, near Nice, France**



The pictures are from ski resorts that I visited long ago (1982), when I was living for a year at Antibes/Juan-Les-Pins. During my second stay (1988-1989) for about 8 months, I was too busy travelling in other parts of Europe and never went skiing.

The French Riviera is reputed for its famous coastline, but the beaches did not really impress me. Greek island beaches are superior by far. However, I was very impressed by these two ski areas less than 100 km from the Mediterranean. Big mountains, lots of snow and at **La Foux d'Allos** it was gorgeous sunshine the entire week that I was there. The total length of the ski runs at Foux D'Allos is more than 200 kilometers (!). Highest elevation is 2575 m and the lowest 1760 m. The combination of Alpine snow and Mediterranean sun was superb during my visit. I encountered some very challenging ski runs at **Auron** and thousands of skiers. There is also **Isola 2000** in a neighboring mountain area, but I have not been there. However, I skied for a day at **Limone, Piemonte** in Italy within easy reach from Nice by train.

Away from the Mediterranean coast there are some very beautiful villages. **Saint-Paul-de-Vence** is on the hills, less than 10km from the waterfront. It has narrow streets and very charming village architecture. It is well known for a modern art museum and for being popular among artists and movie stars.

**Grasse**, a city with population of about 50,000, is considered as the world's capital of perfumes. It is further away from Nice to the west, but not too far from the Mediterranean coast.

# ANTIBES/JUAN-LES-PINS





**Antibes** is located just 15 km west of Nice. It was founded in the 4th century BC by the Phocaeans of Massalia (Marseille) as Antipolis (opposite-to-the-city (Nice)). I was on sabbatical research leave (1981-82 and 1988-89) at the Centre de Mise en Forme des Matériaux (Paristech) at **Sophia Antipolis**, which is a science and technology park located just a few kilometers in a wooded area.

**Juan-les-Pins** is a district of Antibes full of hotels, restaurants, cafés and beach bars. Cap d'Antibes is mostly an area of fenced villas and estates, and luxury yachts moored at the port. Peter Sarstedt in his 1969 hit "Where Do You Go To My Lovely", about a young woman of modest beginnings who managed to become part of the jet-set, was spot on. Here are some of the lyrics: "... You go to the embassy parties, Where you talk in Russian and Greek ..... on summer vacation, You go to Juan-les-Pins".

**Writers and artists** like **Jules Verne, Victor Hugo, Nikos Kazantzakis, Graham Greene, Ernest Hemingway, Monet, Picasso** have lived there. Château de la Croë was once the home base of Duke (Edward VIII) and Duchess (Wallis Simpson) of Windsor. It was subsequently owned by Greek shipping magnate Stavros Niarchos and now by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. The property was seized by the French government in April 2022, due to the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The waterfront villa where **Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald** lived has been converted to the 5-star hotel Belles Rives. The Great Gatsby was partly written there. The waterfront villa where Picasso lived in 1946 is now a museum, with a Picasso art collection.

Let me translate what is written on a plaque on the house where Kazantzakis lived: Here, NIKOS KAZANTZAKI(S), poet and writer 1883-1957, stayed to complete his work. ANTIBES THAT HE CHOSE WAS STILL GREECE. " I fear nothing, I hope for nothing, I am free" In Greek: ΕΔΩ, Ο ΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΑΖΑΝΤΖΑΚΙ(Σ) Ποιητής και συγγραφέας 1883-1957, έμεινε για να τελειώσει το έργο του. Η ΑΝΤΙΜΠΕΣ που διαλέξε ήταν ΑΚΟΜΗ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ. "Δεν φοβουμαι τιποτε, δεν ελπιζω τιποτε, ειμαι ελευθερος"

# CANNES



Croisette,  
CANNES,  
FRANCE



**Cannes** is less than 10 km from Antibes/Juan-les-Pins. At about half the distance, the seafront road passes in front of the Château de l'Horizon, a residence of considerable history. Before the second World War it was visited frequently by many statesmen and celebrities, including Winston Churchill, Lloyd George and the Duke (Edward VIII) and Duchess of Windsor. On the eve of WW II, it served as a meeting place between British and French government officials. It was later purchased by Prince Aly (Aga) Khan, who lived there with Rita Hayworth in the early 1950s. It is now owned by the Saudi royal family.

Aly Khan was a rich socialite, horse breeder and Pakistani diplomat known for his extravagant lifestyle. He was son of Aga Khan III and the father of the Aga Khan IV. The current (Karim) Aga Khan IV is the religious head of some 15 million Nizari Ismailis, a sect of Shia Islam. His net worth is estimated at more than \$10 billion.

In Cannes, the seafront road becomes the palm tree lined Boulevard de la **Croisette**. Carlton Intercontinental luxury hotel is where most of the movie stars stay during the **Cannes Film Festival**, held every year in May. Le Palais des Festivals et des Congrès is a slow ten-minute walk from there. The sidewalk cafés are overcrowded during the Film Festival, but on one occasion I managed to be seated with a great view of film celebrities passing by. There is a lot of bling-bling along the Croisette. Away from the Croisette, Cannes seems to be overbuilt.

# SAINT -TROPEZ

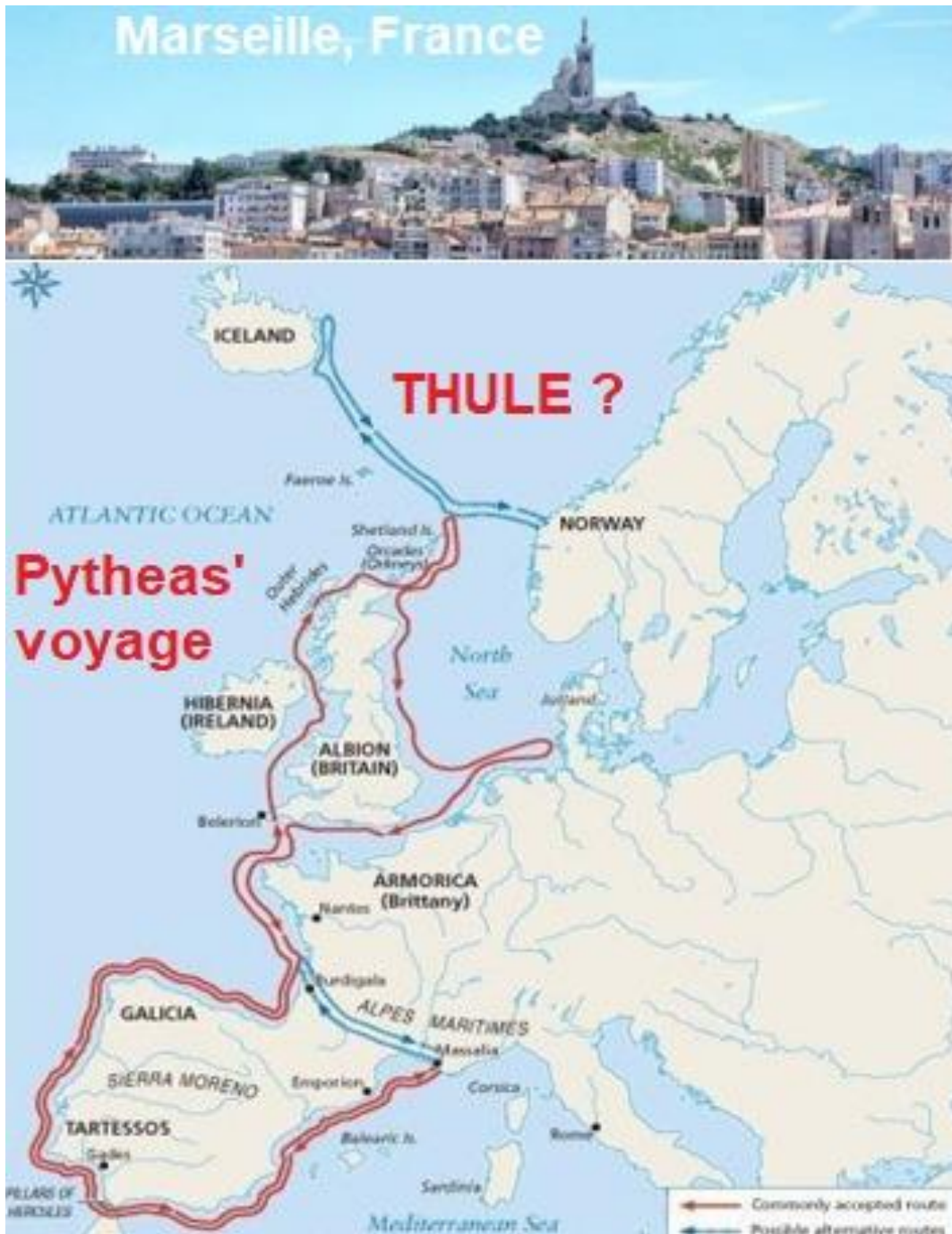


**Saint-Tropez** is the epicenter of the French Riviera (**Côte d'Azur, Κυανή Ακτή**). It has a very long history that goes back to the Phocaeans of Massalia (Marseille). They had established **Athenopolis** according to the Roman author and philosopher Pliny the Elder. The exact location is not known, but my guess is that it was at the innermost point of the Golfe de Saint Tropez, at Port Grimaud, 6 km from the where my picture was taken. There is a hotel Athenopolis, which is located near the natural harbor of Port Grimaud.

Le Senequier café-bar-restaurant is the place to see and to be seen. **Plage de Pampelonne** is the most famous beach, around 5 km long. The fishing village of St. Tropez became the favourite seaside resort of the international jet-set after the movie *And God Created Woman (Et Dieu... créa la femme)*, with **Brigitte Bardot**, was filmed there in 1956. The meteoric fame resulted in the construction of villas priced at several million Euros, in hundreds of stores, cafés and restaurants and in thousands of pleasure boats and yachts in the Golfe de St. Tropez.

Despite the extravagant display of wealth, St. Tropez retains its small-town charm. The Tropéziens have been grateful to Bardot and gave her an exceptional permission to "privatize" the beach in front of her villa (la Madrague) by allowing her to build walls to water's edge. For me, it was easy to drive to St. Tropez from my home base at Antibes/Juan-les-Pins, in the Fall/Winter/Spring months, in about an hour-and-a-half. But once, I made the mistake to drive there in August and it took me 6 hours, in the late 1990s.

# MARSEILLE (MASSALIA)



I have visited Marseille two or three times. It is the third largest city in France with population about 2 million (including the suburbs). It is not part of the French Riviera and does not attract large number of tourists like Nice, but it has a long and fascinating history. The founding of **Massalia** (modern Marseille) is a tale, wrapped in a legend, inside a myth: Around 600 BC Greek colonists arrived from Phocaea, located on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, near modern Izmir. Soon after arrival, the leader of the Phocaeans, Protis, was invited by the local tribal chief, Nannus, to a feast where his daughter Gyptis was expected to choose a husband among many suitors by offering a ceremonial cup of wine (according to one version), a cup of water (according to another). Gyptis offered the cup to the Greek.

The etymology of Massalia (which became Marseille) is not clear. It might be Greek or perhaps pre-Greek. Several hypotheses have been proposed. La Marseillaise is the name of the French national anthem: '*Allons enfants de la Patrie, Le jour de gloire est arrivé ! Contre nous de la tyrannie....*'. It was sung by volunteers from Marseille in the streets of Paris in 1792.

Massalia became an important trading post in the Mediterranean with population of 50,000. The most famous of the Massalians was **Pytheas** who, around 330 BCE, went on a voyage to explore the edges of the then known world. He circumnavigated the island of the Pryttanike\* (P was transcribed as B later by the Romans). He estimated the length of the coastline to 4,450 miles or 4,260 miles, depending on conversion factors (from the ancient stade to mile). According to recent measurements, the length of the coastline of Britain is 4,548 miles [ from Sir Barry Cunliffe's book "The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek"].

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\*Epic poet Edmund Spenser (in the 16th Century) in his "The Faerie Queene", associated the name of Britain, not with Pytheas' Pryttanike, but with the Cretan virgin goddess Britomartis, allegorically Queen Elizabeth I. Poetic license led to false etymology and to.... Richard Branson's Virgin Stores, Virgin Atlantic, Virgin Media and British Virgin Islands. That's another tale wrapped in a legend inside a myth

# BARCELONA, SPAIN



November 2011



Barcelona is the capital of the autonomous region of **Catalonia**, whose mythological origins go back to Hercules. There has been the suggestion that the name was derived from Hamilcar Barca father of Hannibal, without much historical or archaeological evidence. It was a colony with special privileges under the Romans.

**Spanish (Castilian dialect)** is spoken in Barcelona, but two thirds of the population speak also Catalan. The **Catalan** language (which is composed mostly of Spanish and French words) was banned in schools during the Franco dictatorship. The modern separatist movement can be perhaps traced to Francoist repression of their language and culture. Catalans had formed a major maritime power in the Mediterranean competing against Venice and Genoa. They ruled a significant part of Greece in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. From the late 1400s Castile and Catalonia were united, maintaining local autonomy.

**La Sagrada Familia** cathedral of Barcelona was designed by Antoni Gaudi in his own and easily recognizable style. It is the most iconic landmark of Barcelona. **La Pedrera** is another one of Gaudi's most admired works.

There is a statue of **Christopher Columbus (Cristobal Colon, in Spanish)** on top of a column near the waterfront. According to mainstream historians, he was born in Genoa Italy. However, the intrepid navigator, who discovered America, never uncovered his own identity. Based on linguistic and other evidence, modern historians have proposed several hypotheses. These include but not limited to Catalan origin, Catalan-Jewish origin, Spanish nobility origin and Portuguese nobleman father-Jewish mother. If he had Jewish roots, he had a good reason not wanting to reveal his identity. A few months before departure for his first voyage on August 3, 1492, Jews were ordered to leave Spain by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela, who were Columbus' supporters. Of course, he would also have a good reason to hide his identity if he was a Catalan pirate (according to another hypothesis) who had fought against the Castilian (Spanish) crown or if he was born illegitimate. As Winston Churchill might have said, Columbus origin is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.

# VALENCIA



Valencia is Spain's third largest city, after Madrid and Barcelona, with population in the metro area of around 2 million. It is the capital of an autonomous region by the same name. The local Catalan dialect (Valencian) was repressed during the Franco dictatorship. I saw lots of signs in Valencian, but I have not heard anyone speaking it. There is no separatist movement like that in Catalonia.

Valencia was occupied by Berber and Arab Moors from 714 to 1238. Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar (more widely known by his Arab honorific title as El Cid) conquered Valencia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. According to the legend he also had a posthumous victory during the siege of Valencia. The three hour long epic movie (El Cid, 1961) with Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren is based on this saga.

To me Valencia appeared more a city of modernity than tradition. Where I had my picture taken is obviously **Calatrava** architecture, in the gigantic Ciudad de las Artes y de las Ciencias. Santiago Calatrava was born and studied in Valencia, before going to Zurich (ETH) for a second degree.

The waterfront promenade in the bottom picture is very beautiful and there are a lot of restaurants in the area. On a previous visit, I happened to be in Valencia in March 2008, during the **Fallas festival**, when they celebrate the arrival of Spring, with parades, street dancing fireworks and bullfights. I remember having finished my lectures, caught a taxi and made it just in time to watch the burning of the huge papier-mâché effigies and see and hear the extremely loud fireworks. They sure know how to organize fiestas in Spain, with the running of the bulls in Pamplona (in June), Fallas in Valencia and tomato throwing (in August) in Buñol, some 40 kilometers from Valencia.

# MARBELLA



It was November of 2011, when I took the train from Barcelona to **Malaga**, about 1000 kilometers southwest. It is a beautiful city of half a million, the birthplace of **Pablo Picasso**. Two Museums have many of his works, donated by members of his family. I stayed for a few days at **Puerto Banús**, which is a marina surrounded by restaurants, bars and luxury shops. It is the tourist center of the **Costa del Sol**, roughly about 80 kilometers southwest of Malaga and 80 kilometers northeast of Gibraltar. It took me about two hours to slowly walk along the beautiful beach from Puerto Banús to **Marbella**.

Although it was off-season during my visit, the weather was surprisingly mild, but not for swimming. According to the local folklore, the name is due to Queen Isabel la Católica, who exclaimed "que mar bella" upon seeing the magnificent sundrenched coastline.

Malaga and the surrounding area were on the Republican side at the start of the Spanish civil war (July 1936), but they suffered a devastating defeat by the combined Nationalist (Francoist) and Italian forces in February 1937.

Costa del Sol experienced an explosive economic growth with the boom in tourism, from the early 1960s. Long stretches of the scenic coastline, from Puerto Banús to Malaga and beyond, have been seriously impacted by the rapid commercial and residential developments.

# GIBRALTAR



**NAPOLI**  
**1965.08.29**

As the lyrics say "It was a very good year" (1965): I had finished my studies at NTU (Ε.Μ. Πολυτεχνείο) Athens and received a Fellowship for a doctoral degree at Washington University, St. Louis, MO, USA. I also received a Fulbright travel grant for my voyage to New York, by ocean liner Queen Frederica. The ship left the port of Piraeus, in the afternoon, on August 27. Next day we reached Messina in the afternoon and then Palermo, in Sicily, where some passengers disembarked. In the morning of August 29, we arrived in Naples (Napoli, Νεάπολις). My picture was taken as I was disembarking for a half-day tour.

The Mediterranean was very calm as we were sailing west. The ship laid anchor a couple of kilometers away from the **Rock of Gibraltar**, in late afternoon of August 31, for a couple of hours. Upon seeing the more than 400-meter-tall silhouette of the rock, rising from the sea, there was no doubt in my mind that this was one of the **Pillars of Hercules (Ηρόκλειαι Στήλαι)**. The pillar on the African side is not so obvious, with two claimants being Monte Hacho, in Spanish controlled Ceuta, and Jebel Musa in Morocco. The Pillars of Hercules appear in the coat of arm of Spain and of Andalusia. In fact, in the emblem of Andalusia an arc joins the two columns with the Latin inscription: "DOMINATOR HERCULES FUNDATOR".

According to Greek mythology, Hercules was required to travel west in order to fetch the cattle of Geryon (Γηρυόνου βόες) as his tenth labour. On his way there, instead of climbing Mount Atlas, he smashed through it and joined the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, thus the Straits of Gibraltar were created.

# SEVILLA

**SEVILLA, ANDALUSIA**



**ROSSINI**  
**IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA**

**Maria Callas**  
**Luigi Alva**  
**Tito Gobbi**

NEW  
Mastering

CLASSICAL MUSIC  
CENTURY'S RECORDING  
Philharmonia Chorus





SEVILLE is a city, of over a million, located some 80 kilometers from the Atlantic Ocean and it has a river harbor on Guadalquivir. In fact, Magellan departed from Seville for the first circumnavigation of the Earth in 1519. Unfortunately, he was killed in the Philippines and just a few members of the crew made it back to Spain.

I travelled to Seville in September of 1994 by AVE (Alta Velocidad Española) train from Madrid, for a rheology conference. At Bodegas Tío Pepe (as they say, it is the Templo del Vino y el Brandy de Jerez), rheologists were entertained by the machine-gun like footwork of flamenco dancers.

Seville was under the Moors from 711 to 1248. The Moorish influence can be seen today not only in landmarks like the Alcázar and Torre del Oro, but also in the old town. More Operas have been set in Seville than in any other city, like Rossini's **Barber of Seville**, Bizet's **Carmen**, Beethoven's **Fidelio** and Mozart's **Marriage of Figaro** and **Don Giovanni**. I am not going to an Opera House anytime soon, so I searched the internet for Carmen's aria "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" and listened to superb Maria Callas (1962) and Elina Garanca (2014).

The full opera at Sankt Margarethen (2005) is a marvelous open-air spectacle. Nadia Krasteva is young, with fiery gypsy looks, for a very convincing Carmen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h-fP4zSH40&t=142s>

# ALGARVE, PORTUGAL



ALGARVE is the southernmost region of Portugal, from the border with Spain to the Atlantic Ocean, about 150 kilometers away. Faro is the largest city and international airport. There is historical evidence of settlements, before the Romans occupied this region. There is also some architectural and cultural influence left by the Moors (716-1294).

As I am trying to follow the steps of Pytheas of Massalia (Marseille), I am guessing that Pytheas probably stopped at a port near Portimão or Alvor, both at walking distance, from where I took these pictures. I visited the small village of Alvor for a conference in October of 1994. I was on vacation at PRAIA DA ROCHA in June 2002, before presenting a course in Milan, Italy and a lecture at a conference in Guimarães, Portugal. I had fun trying to figure out the similarities and differences between Spanish (which I speak fluently) and Portuguese and Italian (which I pretend to speak by using lots of Spanish words). No problem, my Italian and Portuguese are understandable by the respective natives.

# LISBON



LISBON is situated at the mouth of Tagus river and it is the second oldest capital in Europe (after Athens). There is no historical evidence that Pytheas went ashore near Lisbon, during his voyage to the British Isles (end of 4th century BC).

Several hundred university professors of rheology were there for the 16th International Congress, in August of 2012. The 19th Congress on Rheology will be held in Athens, in the summer of 2023. Our motto is Heraclitus' **πάντα ῥεῖ (everything flows)**. From left: John Tsamopoulos (U. Patras, Greece), Georgios Georgiou (U. Cyprus), moi, Evan Mitsoulis (NTU Athens), Savvas Hatzikiriakos (UBC, Vancouver).

Most of the Portuguese expeditions left from Lisbon (15th to 17th centuries), including Vasco da Gama's voyage around Africa to India.

In the morning of Saturday, November 1st, 1755, Lisbon was hit by a devastating **earthquake** (at least 8.5 magnitude) and a **tsunami**, less than an hour later. The epicenter was some 300 kilometers southwest, in the Atlantic. Some 85% of buildings were destroyed and tens of thousands of people perished. The monastery of the Jerónimos (built in the 1500s) survived with minor damage. The royal palace (Paço da Ribeira) was destroyed, but the royal family survived. They had left early in the morning of November 1st, for a holiday, away from Lisbon. However, the king (José I) developed a severe case of claustrophobia and did not want to live in a walled structure, after his return. So, he built a huge complex of tents in the outskirts of Lisbon. After his death, his daughter started the building of a new palace at the same location, Palácio da Ajuda.

# CASCAIS and ESTORIL

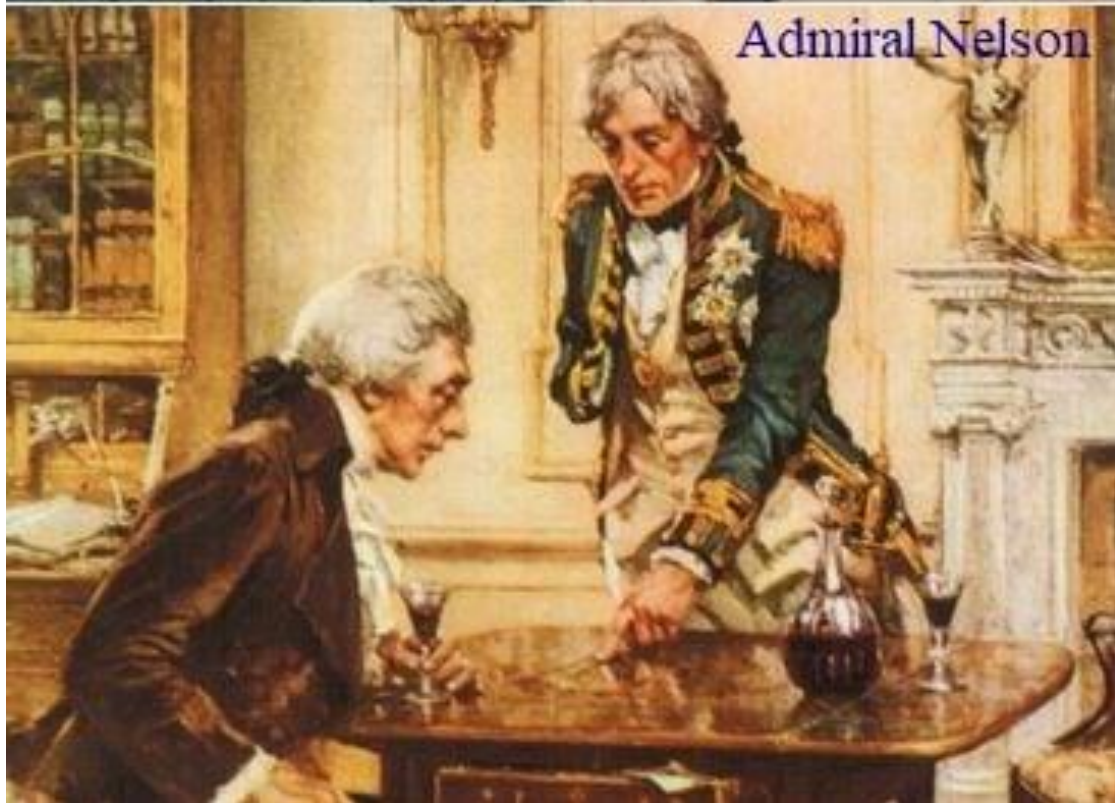


ESTORIL and CASCAIS are seaside resort towns on the Atlantic Ocean, just 25 kilometers from Lisbon. There is a 3-kilometer oceanfront promenade between Estoril and Cascais. To my recollection the ocean water was rather cold for swimming, but there was a pleasant breeze for my long walks along the promenade, in late July 2012.

During and after World War II, Estoril was the destination of choice for **deposed monarchs**, including Umberto II of Italy, the family of King Juan Carlos of Spain, King Carol II of Romania and King Edward VIII of UK.

During World War II, Portugal was officially neutral and Estoril became the hub of spies, counter-spies and adventurers. British author **Ian Fleming**, of **007 James Bond** fame, visited Estoril as an officer of the Naval Intelligence Division. His first novel 'Casino Royale' was inspired by **Casino Estoril**, located just 100 meters from Hotel Palacio, where Fleming was staying. Double agent Duško Popov, a suave scion of a wealthy Serbian family, was working for both the German Abwehr and the British MI6, was also staying at hotel Palacio and was a gambler (with Abwehr money) at the casino. Apparently, it was Fleming's responsibility to observe him, because he was not fully trusted by the British. It is believed that the James Bond character is modeled, to a large extent, after Popov, especially for his dashing lifestyle, gambling, drinking, fast cars and fast women. Fleming books sold more than 100 million copies and over half the earth's population has seen at least one James Bond movie.

# PORTO





PORTO is one of the most beautiful cities of Europe. It is situated on the right side of Douro river, Gaia is on the left. Coincidentally, at the time that I was writing these lines, a summit of the EU leaders was held in Porto. The view is dominated by the Dom Luis I bridge, built in 1886, which spans the river. I visited Porto on three different occasions. The climate and soil of Douro Valley favor the production of grapes of high quality. Viniculture has been practiced and refined over hundreds of years. **Port wine** is transported to cellars in the Gaia riverside. It has been a major industry since the 17th century, after a commercial deal between England and Portugal.

The city of **Guimarães**, not far from Porto is where 'Portugal was born' as proclaimed in Portuguese on a wall in the historic center '*Aqui nasceu Portugal*'.

In March 2004, I visited the Sandeman winery and heard how port wine is fortified with the addition of brady, to be converted to, simply, 'port'. Port has been immortalized in history by Britain's most beloved naval hero, Horatio Nelson. Five weeks before the battle of Trafalgar (just west of Gibraltar), Nelson dipped the index finger of his left arm in his glass of port and sketched on Lord Sidmouth's table his battle plan, as shown in a painting by A. D. McCormick. Nelson was much admired for his bravery, but also known for his vanity. During the battle, he was walking on the upper deck, giving orders and encouraging his crewmen. He was wearing his admiral's uniform and decorations in plain view of a nearby enemy ship. Easily spotted by a French sniper, he was killed by a single musket bullet (1805). He won the battle, but never tasted port again.

If you want to read more about Nelson, go to Portsmouth on page 43. As I am retracing the footsteps of Pytheas of Massalia, my first 'stop' in England is at Portsmouth, where Nelson's flagship HMS Victory is in dry dock.

# BASQUE COUNTRY

BILBAO, 2010



BILBAO is situated very near the coast of the Bay of Biscay, in northern Spain and it is the largest city in the BASQUE country (**País Vasco**, Pays Basque), with population of nearly 1 million. It rightfully holds the title of a UNESCO City of Design, for its outstanding urban planning and architecture. There are several masterfully designed buildings and bridges, including the iconic Guggenheim Museum, which houses an impressive modern art collection.

I visited Bilbao in November of 2010 and in July of 2013. The Basque country straddles the western border between Spain and France in the Pyrenees. To my Greek friends the name of the mountain range may sound Greek, because it is. According to one source of Greek mythology Pyrene was the daughter of a local king who gave hospitality to Hercules, as he was on his way to fetch the cattle of Geryon (Γηρυόνη βόες). Hercules was not an honorable guest, raped the princess and as a result she had a tragic death. Hercules was heartbroken and remorseful, he was crying out Pyrene! and the mountains echoed Pyrene! Pyrene! According to another source, the name is related to the Greek word for fire πῦρ (pyr), because at one time the whole area had been consumed by fire, lit by herdsmen.

The **Basque language** (Euskara) is almost of mythological origin. It is the only pre-Indo-European language still spoken today in Europe. It has absolutely no relation to any other language in the world, except for recently borrowed words. During the Franco dictatorship (1936-1975) Basque was subjected to severe repression, which led to separatism and the ETA armed insurrection. I did not hear much Basque during my two visits in Bilbao, but it is taught in schools and some 30% of the Basques speak it.

In **Pamplona**, famous for its annual (June 6-14, **San Fermin Fiesta**) running of the bulls.. The run starts exactly at 8.00 AM every day on an 850-meter stretch through the narrow streets of the old town to the Plaza de Toros (bullring). Thousands of people run ahead, between or on the sides of 6 bulls and 6 steers, and the run is usually completed in about 3-4 minutes. Luckily, a friend of friend had a home at a choice location. I took the bottom picture from a balcony, about 5 meters above ground. **Hemingway's** novel "The Sun Also Rises" is about American and British expats, living in Paris, going on a trip to PAMPLONA during the Fiesta. It is largely based on Hemingway's visit in 1925. Of course, I had drinks at Hemingway's favorite watering hole, Café Iruña.

# CARCASSONNE, FRANCE



Carcassonne is famous for its medieval fortress on a hilltop. It consists of two outer walls, 52 towers, barbicans, a dry moat and it is very well designed for defense in times of siege.

Based on historical and archeological evidence, it is a fifty-fifty chance that Pytheas did not go around the Iberian Peninsula, but took the easier land route to the Atlantic, on his way to the British Isles, and Carcassonne was at the ancient crossroads and not far from Massalia.

The fortress was considered impregnable and became famous as a stronghold of the Christian heretical sect of **Cathars** (from Greek καθαροί (the pure ones)). In August of 1209 they were forced to surrender to Crusaders, organized by Pope Innocent III, and were expelled with no more than a shirt on their backs. Actually, they were lucky, because several thousand Cathars in the surrounding towns were arrested, interrogated, tortured and brutally killed. The Pope was not so innocent, in spite of his name. He had also organized the Fourth Crusade, which ended with the sacking of Constantinople in 1204. Pope John Paul II apologized to the Greeks in Athens in 2001.

Benedictine monks in the Abbey of Saint-Hilaire, about 12 kilometers from Carcassonne, invented the first recorded **sparkling wine** in 1531. Contrary to the popular misconception, Dom Perignon, also a Benedictine monk, did not invent **champagne**, but he perfected the art of champagne making in northern France. The art of sabrage, which is the ceremonial opening of a bottle of champagne by the stroke of a saber, sword or some other blade, was invented by Napoleon's soldiers, somewhere between Carcassonne in the south and Reims in northern France (Champagne Province). According to one story it was Veuve (Widow) Clicquot who gave bottles of champagne to the soldiers. That is another tale, wrapped in a legend, inside a myth.

# BORDEAUX



Pytheas of Massalia, most likely visited BORDEAUX, either after sailing around Iberia or by taking the land route through Carcassonne. Bordeaux is a high-tech city, but, its modern developments are overshadowed by a long history of **Bordeaux wines**. Viticulture started with the arrival of the Romans, when Bordeaux was called Burdigala. However, it was a very remarkable woman, as the French would say "belle et rebelle", **Aliénor** (Eleanor) **d'Aquitaine**, who made Bordeaux wines widely known.

She became Queen of France soon after she got married (1137) at age 15, to the 16-year-old Louis VII. She joined the Crusaders during the Second Crusade, had her marriage annulled and became Queen of England at age 30, after marrying to, the 19-year-old, Henry II Plantagenet. When the royal couple moved to England, they brought with them a huge quantity of Bordeaux wines and as a result the demand for Bordeaux vintages exploded, in both England and France. Eleanor's favourite son was **Richard Cœur de Lion** (**Lionheart**).

There are numerous prestigious wine estates in the Bordeaux area, like Château Mouton Rothschild, Château Lafite Rothschild, Château d'Issan, Château Talbot and Château Margaux, with rich and interesting history.

**Château Margaux** has a history of several hundred years. Following the French Revolution, the owner of the estate was arrested, with other rich people, and guillotined. Fans of Château Margaux have included Thomas Jefferson, Ernest Hemingway and China's former President Hu Jintao. Margot Hemingway changed her name to Margaux, after finding out where it came from. The estate fell into disrepair and dilapidation in the 1970s. It was acquired for \$16 million by Greek born André **Mentzelopoulos**, who had amassed a fortune as a grocery chain owner in Paris, France. André died (1980) before seeing the Château fully restored. His daughter Corinne managed to raise Chateau Margaux to unprecedented prominence.

Their wines are considered as the most expensive in the world, with Lafite Rothschild also competing for the title. Just before typing these lines, I checked the prices online at LCBO (Ontario monopoly): A 750 ml bottle of 2017 blend of 89% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot, will set you back CAN \$999.85, which is US \$ 826.32 or Euro 677.31. There is a story reported in NY Times and Forbes, that a clumsy waiter accidentally broke a bottle of Margaux 1787 vintage (collector's item, not drinkable) at Four Seasons Hotel in New York, in 1989, and the insurance company paid \$ 225,000.

# NORMANDY



**Landing at Juno Beach, Normandy  
June 6, 1944 D-DAY**

With Gordon W. Hendery in Burlington, ON,  
Canada, April 2012



25-Dec-1944 CORFU



On June 6, 1944 (**D-DAY**), more than 150,000 American, Canadian and British troops landed in **NORMANDY**, for the liberation of France and the rest of Western Europe. General Eisenhower was the supreme commander of the allied forces and General Erwin Rommel of the Germans. The beaches were codenamed Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword.



The Canadian troops landed at **Juno**, early in the morning. I have been north of Normandy at Calais, but never at any of the Normandy beaches. However, my former neighbor and friend Gordon Hendery (1921-2017), was the commander of one of the landing craft shown on the top picture on D-Day. Gordon frequently needed my help for his computer and for accessing the internet. So, I heard many stories about his WW II experiences. The ship in the picture is HMCS Prince Henry and it is about 11 kilometers from the beach. Gordon's landing craft was carrying 30 troops.

This is how he described the early morning landing at Juno, to a reporter: "I didn't get any sleep that night. We had breakfast at four o'clock. We boarded the craft, and, was it ever rough. It was awful. We wanted to get the boys landed on dry sand, but the craft got stuck on an obstacle under the water. Just think how the boys felt: seasick, packs on their backs, being splashed from machine-gun bullets beside the craft. I hesitated to order "down doors," but it had to be done. They jumped into the water. Some were up to the waist. The guys got out in one heck of a hurry. They dashed across the beach. Some fell from machine-gun fire. Some were hit before they even made the beach. We could see all this. Imagine training in England for three years and not even being able to get to the beach before being killed".

On D-day 374 Canadians were killed and 759 were wounded at **Juno beach**. By the end of the Normandy campaign, 5021 were Canadian, out of a total of 72,911 allied troops killed in action. The American landing at **Omaha beach** on June 6, was the bloodiest, with over 2000 casualties, mainly due to fortified cliffs near water's edge.

The Canadians at Juno beach faced fanatical Waffen-SS, under the command of Kurt Meyer. Meyer had been battle-hardened in Poland, Greece and Russia. After the war he was arrested, tried as a war criminal and condemned to death, for the massacre of 20 Canadian prisoners of war, in the garden of Abbaye Notre-Dame d' Ardenne (10 kilometers from Juno beach). He was released after serving less than 10 years in Canadian and British jails.

Gordon Hendery spent the rest of 1944 and most of 1945 in the Mediterranean. With his ship, he visited Corsica, a couple of ports in Italy, Suez Canal and Corfu (Κέρκυρα) and Thessaloniki in Greece. He was named Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (2015), by the French Government.

# PORTSMOUTH, ENGLAND



PORTSMOUTH is located in South East England, across the Channel from Normandy, France. In fact, it was the pivotal embarkation point for the D-Day landings on June 6, 1944 and the headquarters of General Eisenhower. It has a large and well protected natural harbor, which serves as the home port for two-thirds of the fleet of the Royal Navy.

The **isle of Wight** (called Vectis, in historical documents related to Pytheas' voyage) is just a short distance to the west, on the other side of the Solent strait. At the invitation of a friend, I spent a few days at a nice beach house that she owned, across from the isle of Wight in 1988, visited Portsmouth and saw Admiral **Horatio Nelson's flagship**, the legendary HMS Victory. She was launched in 1765 and took part in the battle of Trafalgar (just west of Gibraltar) in 1805, where the Franco-Spanish fleet was pretty much wiped out, and Nelson was killed. After the battle, Napoleon stopped making plans to invade Britain. There is a plaque on the exact spot where Nelson fell, by a single musket bullet.

Nelson did not have any children with his wife, but he had one daughter (Horatia) with his mistress, Lady Hamilton. Horatia married an Anglican clergyman, Philip Ward, and they had 10 children. HMS Victory was badly damaged in the **battle of Trafalgar**, but she has been marvelously restored and open to several hundred thousand visitors each year. At the time of Trafalgar, Victory had 104 guns and 821 crewmen. At the age of sail, it is estimated that between 30% and 70% of the seamen in the Royal Navy were volunteers and the rest were "pressed men". They were literally grabbed off the street, without any previous warning, by the so-called press-gangs and were forced to serve. Living quarters were cramped aboard Navy ships, but food was plentiful and included a daily rum ration.

The bottom picture is from an **engraving** by James Basire. It shows the sinking of the Mary Rose, with King Henry VIII watching from the castle at the foreground. Apparently, after firing the guns against the French armada, the crew forgot to close the lower gunports, water rushed in as she was turning in breezy weather and she sank with the loss of over 500 crewmen. Mary Rose was salvaged and the remains are on display at the museum. The armor-plated and steam powered HMS Warrior is also berthed at the Portsmouth Maritime Dockyards. The launching of Warrior in 1861 marks the change from wood and sail to armor-plating and steam power, for navy ships.

# WALES

Pembrokeshire, Wales, UK



After reaching the south coast of Britain around 325 BC, Pytheas, the Greek from Massalia, sailed west towards Cornwall. He probably went ashore somewhere close to where the G7 Summit was held (Carbis Bay, on June 11-13, 2021). In fact, Pytheas reported that the natives were very friendly. Apparently, most of the tin was coming from that area and there was a lot of trade between the Celts of Cornwall and the Celts living across the water in the French provinces of Britany and Normandy. Tin was a very valuable commodity for converting soft copper into hard bronze.

The Breton Celts called the inhabitants of Albion Pretannike "the painted ones", referring to their habit of body decoration. Pytheas thought that it was the name of the country and after conversion of P to B, in Roman times, the name Britannia emerged. From Cornwall, Pytheas sailed north and probably went ashore somewhere in Wales.

The top picture shows one of the Welsh megalithic tombs. Stonehenge is some 100 km southeast from the Welsh border. Wales is one of the four constituent countries of the UK. Some 20% of the population of 3 million speak Welsh, which is a Celtic dialect. The sense of distinct nationhood is very strong in Wales and I witnessed a remarkable incident: At a scientific conference in **Swansea** in July 1985, the after-dinner speaker was a professor from Cambridge. He started saying something like "when the English conquered Wales" apparently in good jest. However, another professor from Swansea, with whom I happened to share a table, pounded his hand hard on the table, stood up and started shouting very loudly and repeatedly "rubbish, rubbish".

Julius Caesar invaded Britain in 55 BC and although he left quickly, Roman influence increased and from 43AD to 410AD most of Britain was occupied by the Romans. After the Romans left, large numbers of Saxons arrived and language and culture changed, from Romano-Celtic to Germanic. In fact, the Anglo-Saxons pushed the Celtic tribes north to Scotland and west to Wales.

A Welsh king fought against the Anglo-Saxon invaders in the 5th century and he might be the real King Arthur. From 12th century, legendary stories of chivalrous knights, around the round table in **Camelot**, appeared and flourished, without any connection to a real time or place. Of course, the love triangle of King Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot is a product of the fertile imagination of writers and poets.

The bottom picture shows a monument in honor a **canine hero**, Swansea Jack. He was seen saving 2 human lives from drowning, but legend has raised the number to 27, in the 1930s.

## DUBLIN, IRELAND



Dublin appears as Eblana in Claudius Ptolemy Geographia, written around 150AD. The absence of snakes from Ireland gave rise to the legend that they were somehow banished by St. Patrick in the 5th century. Henry II, the French speaking Norman King of England, declared himself Lord of Ireland in 1171. Several rebellions occurred in subsequent centuries against the British overlords.

Due to a disease that destroyed the leaves and roots of potato plants, an estimated 1 million people died and a further 1 million emigrated (**Irish Potato Famine**, 1845-1849). Today, some 40 million people claim full or partial Irish lineage in USA, including half (23) of the US presidents, with Joe Biden one of them. In Canada, several prime ministers including Justin Trudeau trace part of their ancestry to Ireland.

The struggle for independence from Britain started in earnest after the Easter Rising of April 24, 1916. **Michael Collins** was the mastermind of the **Irish Republican Army (IRA)** and negotiated a Treaty with Lloyd George for the establishment of a Free Irish State, within the British Commonwealth. He became a revolutionary celebrity and after ratification of the Treaty, Chairman of the Provisional Government. However, some of his IRA comrades disagreed, they wanted Republic of Ireland, as the official name, without any links to the Commonwealth. A civil war ensued between the pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty IRA.

Michael Collins was ambushed and killed in a country road, two months short of his 32nd birthday. He is the "Laughing Boy" whose song by Mikis Theodorakis is well known to all Greeks, even though few have ever heard his name. The song was based on a translation of a poem written by Brendan Behan, when he was just thirteen years old: ".....an Irish son with a rebel gun shot down my Laughing Boy...." "**Laughing Boy**" was the affectionate nickname that Brendan's politically active mother had given to Collins.

The Irish, apparently, have **poetry and literature** in their DNA, with so many prominent names coming to my mind: **George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett**....and, of course, I will add Patrick **Lafcadio Hearn** (aka Koizumi Yakumo), who was born to a Greek mother and an Irish father and became one Japan's greatest storytellers.

Ireland was one of Europe's poorest countries, but became the "Celtic Tiger" between 1995 and 2007. After the economic crisis of 2008 to 2013, the economy rebounded quickly and it is currently one of the richest in the world. I will let the 2021 IMF per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data speak for themselves: 1. Luxembourg \$131,782, 2. Switzerland \$94,696, 3. Ireland \$94,556, 4. Norway \$81,995, 5. US \$68,309, while the erstwhile overlords of the UK are in the 23rd spot with \$46,344.

Moly Malone's name is heard in a famous Irish ballad. "In Dublin's fair city where the girls are so pretty....." and her statue has become a major tourist attraction. The vigor of the economy was abundantly evident in the Temple Bar entertainment district, during my two visits, in 2000 and 2005.

# BELFAST, N. IRELAND



**TITANIC leaving BELFAST**



**BRITANNIC in Mediterranean**

H. M. S. BRITANNIC

**World's most bombed hotel, BELFAST, N. IRELAND**





Belfast is Northern Ireland's capital, located some 150 km north of Dublin. My first visit was in May 2000 to present a lecture at Queen's University. In one of my subsequent visits, my hosts booked a room at Europa Hotel, which has the dubious reputation of being the most bombed hotel in the world. The conflict between the Roman Catholic ("nationalists" who wanted N. Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland) and the Protestant ("unionists" who wanted to remain part of the UK) have very deep roots. In the 20th century "The Troubles" lasted thirty years (1968-1998) and resulted in over 3,500 dead and over 50,000 injured.

Europa Hotel was where most of the journalists were staying and it was frequently targeted for reasons of publicity. Apparently, most if not all, of the 36 bombings were preceded by warnings and evacuations. I have not read any reports of a person being killed there. When US President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary stayed at Europa Hotel in 1995, 110 rooms were needed to accommodate their security and other entourage. During my visit in 2006, when I was staying at Europa Hotel, the symbol of the troubles had become the symbol of normality. In fact, there were a lot of festive activities at the hotel every evening as I can remember. The pent-up demand, for freedom to go out without fear, led to some sort of exuberant normality.

The **Titanic** and her two forgotten nearly identical "unsinkable" sisters **Olympic** and **Britannic** were built at the famous Harland & Wolff shipyard, in Belfast. The tragic story of Titanic's maiden voyage in 1912 is well known and she is perhaps the most famous (or infamous) ship of all time. Olympic's maiden voyage was in 1911. A couple of months later, she collided with Royal Navy cruiser Hawke, repaired and was on service till 1935. Britannic was requisitioned and became a hospital ship as soon as completed in 1915. After five successful trips she struck a deep sea mine near the Greek island of Kea, in the channel between Makronisos and Kea in the Aegean Sea, in 1916. She sunk in 55 minutes with 30 people killed and 1035 rescued.

Among those rescued was Argentine born ship stewardess and nurse Violet Jessop (1877-1971). She was also aboard the Olympic during her collision with cruiser Hawke and had also survived the sinking of the Titanic! Another Britannic survivor was WW1 nurse Sheila Macbeth Mitchell (1890-1994). At the invitation of famous undersea explorer Jacques Cousteau, she descended to sea bottom of about 120 meters in a mini-submarine in 1976 for a second visit to the hospital ship. Filming of the wreckage has been done many times and several videos are available for viewing on YouTube.

# SCOTLAND



The British Isles were referred to as Cassiterides (Tin Islands) by the ancient Greeks. Pytheas was the first to write about the islands in the north as Orcades (Orkneys). Some Latin authors were calling the inhabitants of northern Britain Scoti, but the **etymology** is unclear. Most likely the name relates to skotos (which means darkness, in Greek), probably because of rumors and mystery of long dark nights in the north. The word is Indo-European from which Schatten in German and shadow in English come from, in addition to the Greek σκότος.

Scotland was inhabited by Celtic tribes and was never occupied by the Romans. Hadrian's Wall was apparently built to keep the troublesome tribes of the north out of the empire in the south. After the Romans left, Saxons started to settle in the south and Scotland experienced Viking invasions. In late 1200s there were too many claimants to the Scottish throne and King Edward I of England decided to invade Scotland. At Sterling Bridge, the English were badly defeated by the numerically inferior Scots, under the leadership of Scotland's greatest hero **William Wallace** in 1297.

The movie Braveheart, with Mel Gibson in the lead role, is a fictionalized account of William Wallace's life. There is legend and mystery about his life as an outlaw, independence fighter and "Guardian of Scotland". He was eventually defeated by the English, captured and brutally executed in London (hanged, drawn and quartered).

**Robert the Bruce** (from Norman French, de Brus) emerged as the most powerful of the claimants to the throne and eventually became the most important king of Scotland. There is a legend that as he was hiding in a cave, while on the run pursued by the English, he observed a spider making several attempts in weaving a net. He told his troops "If at first you don't succeed **try, try and try again**" before the battle at Bannockburn, where with 6,000 Scots he defeated the English army of more than 15,000, near Stirling Castle in 1314.

Among Robert the Bruce's descendants is Queen Elizabeth II (her 19th great grandfather) from her father and also from her Scottish mother. I had visited Stirling Castle in September of 1990, in connection with a conference in Edinburgh (50 km to the east). Apparently, there have been major renovations recently in the castle, which is perhaps the most important in Scottish history located at the crossroads of Lowlands and Highlands (hold Stirling and you control Scotland, was the maxim).

# ICELAND



I have never been to Iceland, but my travel plans were impacted by the eruptions of the **volcano** with the unpronounceable name, which some reporters were calling E15, because E is followed by 15 Latin characters, I presume. E15 eruptions started in March 2010. On April 14, there was a major eruption, which forced airlines to cancel several flights to, from and within Europe, due to large quantities of ash in the air. I called Lufthansa on April 15, to confirm my flights to Frankfurt and then to Warsaw. I received a terse reply "your flights are on schedule".

I was scheduled to depart on April 16 around 6.00 PM, for lecturing at Politechnika Warszawska. I packed my suitcase and in the morning of April 16 there were reports that most flights to Europe were cancelled. I tried to contact the airline again, but it was impossible to get through and did not know whether I should go to the airport or not. After patiently dialing and re-dialing on two phones, I managed get a booking confirmation for a flight to Frankfurt and then Athens, for April 22, but my lecturing in Warsaw was postponed for April 2011.

Half of Iceland is on the Eurasian tectonic plate and the other half on the North American. Consequently, a significant part of the country is volcanically very active. It is believed that the extreme weather events of 535-537 AD were caused by eruptions of a volcano in Iceland, but some researchers have not excluded eruptions of a volcano in North America. Byzantine historian Procopius (Προκόπιος) wrote that "the sun seemed to be in eclipse". Roman statesman Cassiodorus wrote that "sun rays were weak", "no shadows of people were visible on the ground" and "summer was without heat".

According to other historical sources, the weather cooling resulted in famine in Ireland and significantly reduced harvest in other parts of the Northern Hemisphere. It is also believed that this phenomenon of "volcanic winter" and the associated hardship contributed to the emergence of the Plague of Justinian (541-549 AD), during which 1/3 of the population of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire died.

Historians are divided as to whether **Pytheas's Thule** was **Iceland** or the **coast of Norway**. His original writings were lost, so historians rely on secondary sources, like Timaeus, Diodorus, Strabo, Pliny and others. Pytheas reached a location six days by sea north of Britain, where "the sea is frozen" and "where the night is extremely short" and "where earth and the sea exist in a form impassable by foot" and "Thule was the farthest of locations". These references point toward Iceland, but the coast of Norway hypothesis cannot be discarded.

# NORWAY



BERGEN is situated on the west coast of Norway, population of about 300,000, on a fjord surrounded by mountains. I travelled by train from Oslo, some 500 km away, in August of 1990. For at least 100 km the railway track was above the treeline. Due to high northern latitude (over 60 degrees) and high elevation (over 1000 meters) no trees grow. There were several areas of spectacular landscape along the mostly desolate mountainous terrain. Roughly at mid distance between Bergen and Oslo, south of the railway tracks, is the town of Rjukan, surrounded by mountains. It was deprived of sunshine in the winter months, till computer controlled giant mirrors were installed at a mountain top and shine an elliptical beam to the town square.

Some historians support the theory that Pytheas's **Thule** (Θούλη) was somewhere along the west coast of Norway, north of Bergen. The **island of Smøla** ( near Trondheim) has been suggested by a German team of historians\*. Whether Iceland or Norway the voyage of Pytheas, who left from Massalia (Marseille) in the Mediterranean, around 330 BC, was an extraordinary achievement. Little was known about Norway before the Romans made contact with the Germanic tribes in the north of Europe. Vikings from Norway and Denmark were invading the British Isles from the 8th to the 10th centuries.

**Bergen** was a major trading center from the 14th century. Norway was ruled from Copenhagen, Denmark, until 1814 (a total of 434 years) and was united with Sweden till 1905. Norway had proclaimed neutrality during the two world wars. In World War II, Bergen was quickly occupied by German troops on April 9, 1940. King Haakon and his government escaped to London, UK. A resistance movement was formed and fought against the German forces of occupation. Norwegian politician Vidkun Quisling formed a collaborationist government and participated in Nazi crimes. The word "quisling" became synonymous to "collaborator" and "traitor" in English, Greek and several other languages.

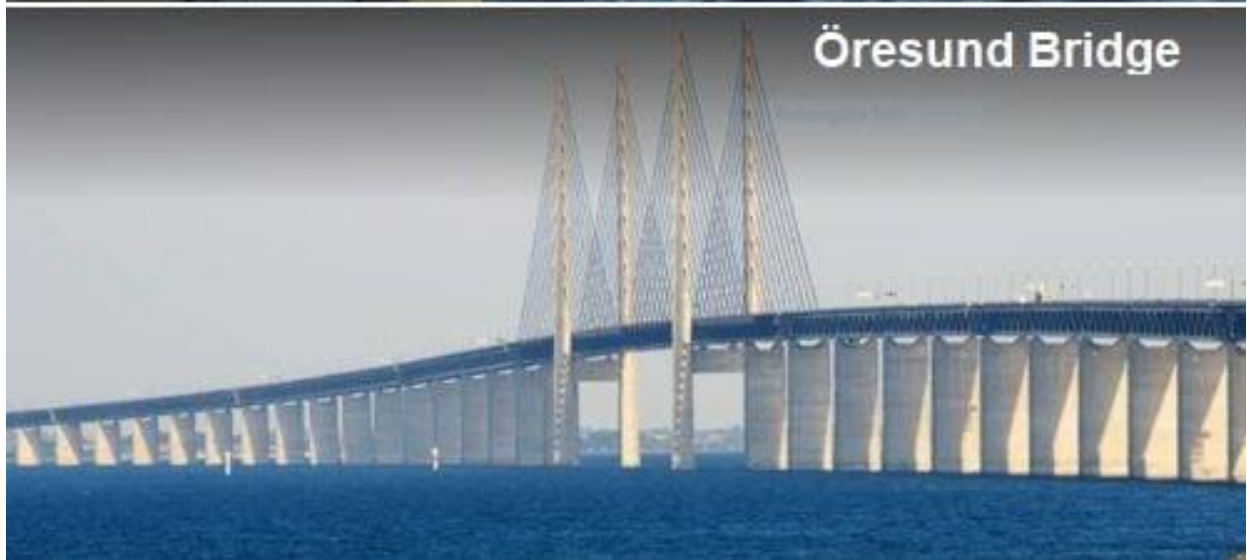
Significant deposits of oil were discovered in the North Sea west of Norway in the 1970s and oil production has helped the economy enormously, making Norway one of the wealthiest countries in the world in terms of GDP per capita. Norwegians have been very careful in spending and in investing the oil money.

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\*Highly recommended reading on the Iceland versus Norway debate:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/this-norwegian-island-claims-to-be-fabled-land-thule-180975740/>

# DENMARK





Denmark consists of the Jutland peninsula and some 400 islands the most populous being Zealand (largest city Copenhagen). In ancient times, Jutland and the southern coast of the Baltic were presumed to be the mysterious places in the north of Europe where **amber** was produced by a natural fossilization process of tree resin.

The Greek word ἤλεκτρον (ēlektron) gave the name to electricity, due to its ability to develop an attractive force after rubbing with animal fur, an observation first made by Thales of Miletus (circa 636-546 BC). Pytheas voyage to the end of the known world (ULTIMA THULE) had also a practical commercial objective in addition to scientific exploration, to locate the sources of amber. There is some historical evidence that Pytheas visited parts of what is now Denmark, but it is not known whether he ventured also towards the southern coast of the Baltic.

I have visited Denmark, or travelled through by train, about ten times. The train travels on a ferry from Helsingør in Denmark to Helsingborg in Sweden. In 2000, a 4 km long tunnel and the 8 km long **Øresund bridge** were inaugurated between **Copenhagen and Malmö** in Sweden, for both train and automobile traffic. Denmark has a very strong economy, which combines free market with socialist policies. Denmark is one of the world's most prosperous countries (same GDP per capita as USA), but socialist to such a degree, that would impress Vladimir Lenin and outrage Margaret Thatcher (guaranteed housing, health care, income and more). It is remarkable that a country with less than 6 million population is the world's leader in wind power and very competitive in other areas of technology. About 50% of Denmark's total electricity consumption is produced by wind power.

I am standing in front of the statue of Christian IX, who became King of Denmark in 1863 till his death in 1906, even though he was far from the immediate line of succession to the throne. His six children married into the leading royal families of Europe. Every summer his children would come back for their vacations in the royal palaces in Copenhagen. According to a story, they were walking in a large park, when an older gentleman asked them for directions on how to get out. King Christian suggested that the surest way was to follow his family. When they reached the exit, the gentleman thanked them and asked if they could tell him who they were. Christian IX replied "I am the King of Denmark, my son Frederick is the Crown Prince, my son George is the King of Greece, my daughter Alexandra is the Queen of the UK, my daughter Dagmar [Maria Feodorovna] is the Czarina of Russia, my daughter Thyra is the Crown Princess of Hanover and my son Valdemar is an Admiral in the Danish Navy". The old gentleman stared at them, shook his head in disbelief and said "my name is Jesus Christ", as he was taking off.

# THE NETHERLANDS



Amsterdam is the cultural and economic capital of the Netherlands and has more than 100 km of canals. I visited the city more than 20 times and I have been in transit at **Schiphol Airport** many other times. In fact, I remember that on a flight from Toronto (KLM, Boeing 747), the plane was hit by a lightning a few minutes before landing. We felt a jolt and the lights flickered for a few of seconds. The pilot did not say anything till after we landed.

My first visit was in 1962 as one of 15 lucky Greek students invited by the Dutch Government to attend a course on the emerging European Common Market, at the University of Utrecht. The entire class went for a boat tour in the Amsterdam canals. The second time that I went for a boat tour was in 2000 after having completed 3 long days of lecturing in Amsterdam. Coincidentally, the tour starting point was exactly the same as in 1962, but the tour photographer had exchanged his black and white camera for an instant color one.

In addition to the canals, Amsterdam has several popular attractions including the famous **Rijksmuseum** (Rembrandt and much more), the **Van Gogh Museum** and the **Anne Frank house**. The entire country is flat with about one third of the Netherlands below sea level, the lowest point being - 6.76 meters. There is a saying that "God created the earth and the Dutch created the Netherlands". A combination of very strong winds and high tide on January 31 to February 1, 1953 resulted in numerous breaches in the dykes and flooding of a very large area near the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt Delta, in southern Netherlands. Some 100,000 people were evacuated and 1836 lives were lost.

Modern Dutch history starts with a rebellion against the Spanish Crown in the 16th century and the Eighty Year War. During the Dutch Golden Age (from about 1588 to 1720) Netherlands was the foremost economic power in the world and Amsterdam was at the center. Merchants could get profits of as much as 500% from a single voyage to the Far East. Incidentally, only the Dutch were allowed to visit and trade in the small island of Dejima, in the Bay of Nagasaki, when Japan was completely closed to the rest of the world. After tulip bulbs and seeds arrived in Amsterdam from Turkey, in the late 1500s, they became a fashionable luxury item for the merchants, who were bursting at the seams with cash. They started investing in tulip bulbs in the world's first stock exchange, in Amsterdam. At the peak of **tulip-mania**, sought-after bulbs for their beauty and rarity, could be sold for as much as ten times the annual salary of a skilled artisan (!). Economists have estimated the price in today's money, as exceeding half- a-million dollars (!). That was the world's first speculative economic bubble, which burst at the end of 1637. Tulip-mania is taught in schools of business and economics around the world.

# BELGIUM

Brussels  
opera



La  
Monnaie  
e



Antwerp Cathedral



Brussels  
Grand  
Place

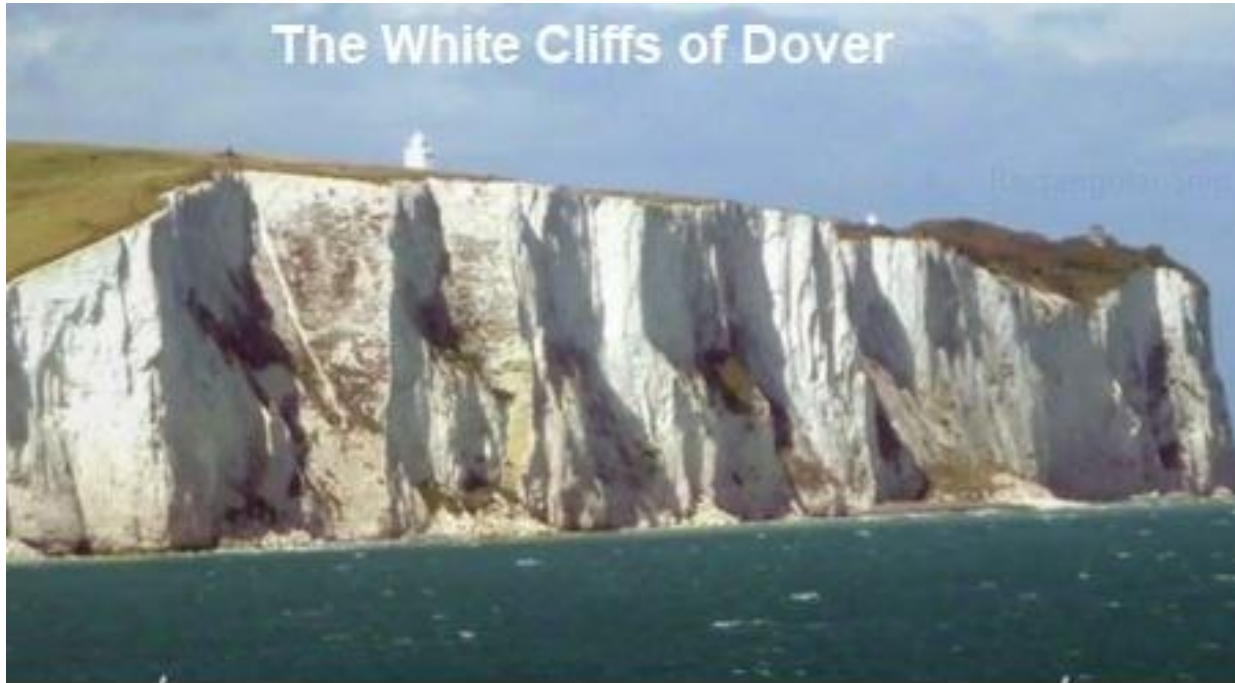
**Antwerp** (Anvers in French) is the second largest city in Belgium. It is situated 15 km south from the Dutch border in the **Flemish** region of Belgium and it is famous for being... "the **diamond capital** of the world". It is where 60-80% of the world's diamonds are cut and traded. Traditionally the trade was controlled by Hasidic Jews, but in recent years Indians, Lebanese Maronite Christians and Armenians have taken over a significant part of the trade. Diamond polishing has moved away to low labour cost countries, especially to India.

**Brussels** is 40 km south, also within the Flemish region. The French speaking region is south of Brussels. Belgium has also a small German speaking region. The obvious question is, how Belgium came into being an independent country with two plus one ethnicities and languages spoken by the more powerful neighbours. Gallia Belgica was a Roman province, but the modern history of Belgium starts after Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat at Waterloo (close to Brussels) in 1815.

At the Congress of Vienna, it was decided to create the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, which included the Dutch dialect speaking **Flemish** and the French speaking **Walloons**. They were traditionally Roman Catholic and did not want to be dominated by the Protestant north. The spark that ignited the revolutionary fire was Daniel Auber's opera *La Muette de Portici* (The Mute Girl of Portici), which was performed at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, on 25 August 1830. It is the story of a mute girl who was seduced by the son of the viceroy of Naples and imprisoned to avoid scandal. Upon learning this, her brother vowed revenge and started an uprising against the Spanish crown, in the 17th Century. The patriotic lyrics inspired the wealthy theater crowd to join the proletariat outside the opera house and a riot erupted in the streets of Brussels. After one month of riots, an invasion by Dutch troops and bloody street fighting, the revolutionaries prevailed and declared independence. With the approval of the great European powers, Leopold (uncle of Queen Victoria) of the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha Duchy of Germany, was sworn as king, on 21 July 1831 (celebrated as National Day of Belgium).

I have presented my rheology course 18 times in Brussels and once in Antwerp, between 1994 and 2019. In fact, in Antwerp I had hosted a dinner for the entire class at a restaurant, which was occupying a few rooms in the back side of the huge cathedral. I have a vivid recollection of the charming old-fashioned interior and the large stones of the cathedral walls. Brussels is mostly French speaking (over 90%), even though situated within the Flemish region. There is not much difference from French spoken in France. However, I was startled the first time that I heard "septante" instead of soixante-dix (70) and "nonante" instead of quatre-vingt-dix (90). Well, that's Belgium, Brussels is the capital of the European Union and Grand Place is at the center of it all.

## The CHANNEL (La MANCHE)



### Crossing the English Channel (La Manche)



The narrowest point of the Channel (la Manche) is between **Dover, UK and Calais, France**, the shortest distance being about 34 km. Crossing was being done by conventional ferry boat for many years. From the late 1960s to the late 1990s there was hovercraft service as well. Hovercraft is an interesting technology: Air is blown downwards from below the vessel's deck for the formation of some kind of an air-cushion. The flexible black "skirt", shown in the picture, facilitates stability and control. Relatively, little power is needed for propulsion, due to virtual elimination of friction on the water surface.

The first time that I travelled on hovercraft was from England to Hoek van Holland, in April 1974. From Calais to Dover, I travelled on a ferry boat in 1985 and I remember vividly the beautiful sight of the white cliffs of Dover (reaching over 100 meters above sea level). The return trip was on hovercraft. The Channel Tunnel (aka **Eurotunnel**) has been open to traffic since 1995. It is a railway tunnel, for people and cars, of about 50 km (38 km being underwater) from a terminal near Calais to a terminal near Dover. People can stay in their cars and complete the trip in 35 minutes. Hovercraft service was discontinued in 2000 due to competition. There is no commercial hovercraft passenger service in Europe, except at the Solent in south England.

Since Matthew Webb swam the Channel in 1875 (in about 22 hours), 1,881 people have done it 2,428 times so far. Among them, Greek army Major Jason Zirganos, from my home town of Volos, swam the channel successfully 4 times, the first one in 1949. Zirganos died in 1959, aged 49, while attempting to cross the North Channel (between Ireland and Scotland) just 5 km before completing the 35 km distance.

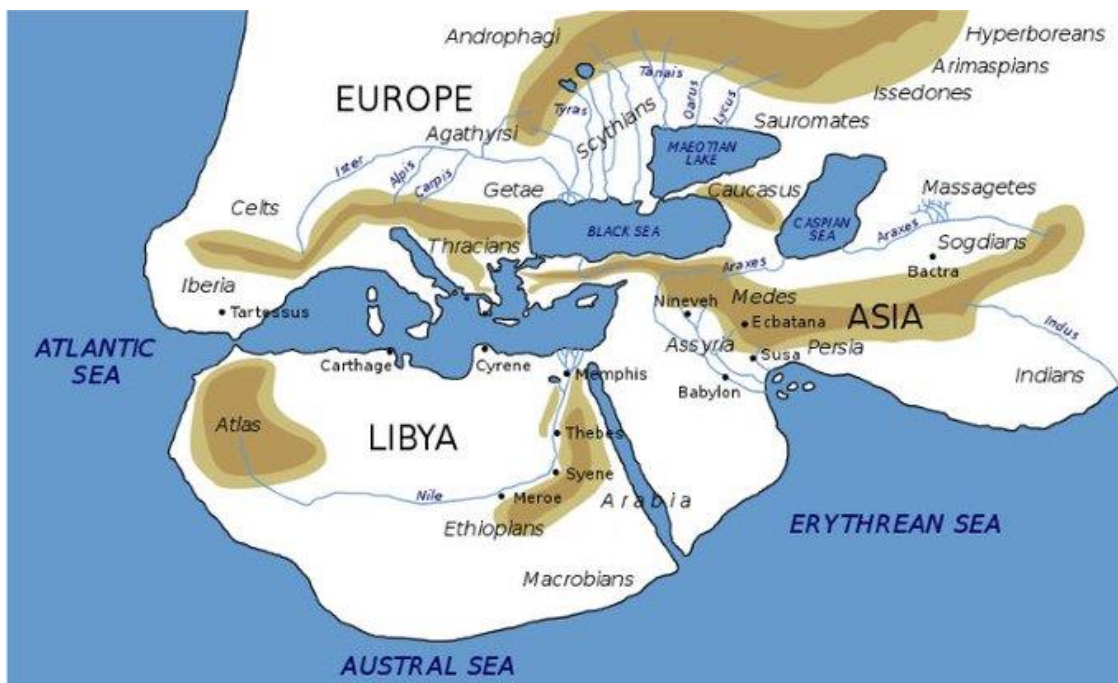
From the 1990s migrants have been gathering near the port of Calais in France. They have been attempting, and many times succeeding, to cross the Channel by stowing away on trucks, cars and trains or traversing on smaller inflatable boats with rickety engines. The obvious question is: Why don't they stay in France? The main reasons are family connections, job opportunities offered by acquaintances in Britain and the fact that English is more widely spoken than French.

## MAP OF THE WORLD AS HERODOTUS KNEW IT



What THULE might have looked like when PYTHEAS arrived

(photo credit: Camila posted at [www.nordicvisitor.com](http://www.nordicvisitor.com))



Map of the known world in the time of Herodotus (c.484 BC-c.425), the Greek writer who is known as “The Father of History.” Credit: User:Bibi Saint-Pol – Own work , based on the GIF by Marco Prins and Jona Lendering from [www.livius.org](http://www.livius.org), from

<http://www.mediterranees.net/geographie/herodote/cartes.html>,

<http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/Ancientimages/109A.GIF>





**Pytheas by Auguste Ottin, 1859, Palais de la Bourse, Marseille**

