

On to Crete

The Captain had invited us to join them on the return voyage to Crete. Eric decided to stay in Pylos and pack up our gear, but encouraged me to join the ship. And so I did. The ride from Pylos to Heraklion, the home port for the R/V *Philia*, is about 200 miles and at 10 knots, that's about 20 hours, if the weather is good. We were done with the mooring recovery and back in Pylos by noon. We had the ship unloaded by 2 pm. As so the Captain announced that the ship would sail at 6 pm. I had a few errands to do, including checking out of the hotel. But I couldn't find the hotel owner. So I left a message that he should come to the ship, and he appeared about 5:30pm. I was given the Chief Scientist's cabin down below – no windows. We left on schedule. The cook wanted me to eat dinner, but I didn't want to miss anything. And so I quickly ate and then rushed up to the bridge to watch the Greek coastline go past.



Methoni from the R/V Philia. The Meteorological Station is the white building at the top of the hill. The radar was deployed just behind it. The castle is in the foreground, with the modern town behind it. The mooring location was out at sea on the left. Pylos is beyond the mountain and Finikounda is to the right.

It got dark as we crossed the Gulf of Kalamata (famous for olives). I went to my cabin to rest. There were no windows, just a bunk bed and a desk. The ship shakes as the waves bang on the hull; the engine drones on and the generator hums. The waves were growing and the forecast for the straits was not too good, although Captain Kokos had a very low opinion of the forecasts. I suppose that only one or two "misses", and a ship's Captain doesn't trust the forecast. I woke up, not knowing the time, but I was sure that it was still dark. The ride was quieter – no banging. It was 12:30 am. I lay awake an hour, and then the engines went quiet. Where were we? I jumped up, dressed and went up to the galley. The Captain and Chief were getting ready for a late snack – olives, crackers, Feta cheese, cold cuts of meat and raki – the Cretan moonshine. They said that last year they had had a 45-day cruise in Libyan waters, where the ship was supposed to be "dry" as Libya is a Moslem country. There were Libyan "observers" on the ship. These observers politely dismissed themselves whenever "hot water" was served. Indeed, raki does warm the tummy. It is a crystal clear liquid, that is stored in plastic water bottles. My first encounter with raki was in January when I went to pour a large glass of water from the "water bottle" on the table. Just before I took a large gulp, somebody said "That's not water." A second later and they would still be talking about my first encounter with raki. We had dropped anchor just north of Elafonisi, an island just off the southeast corner of the Peloponnese. There were gale warnings in the straits, and the Captain had decided to wait until morning to cross.



The north coast of Crete. We sailed along the coast all day long, including through a gale that rose suddenly.

We were underway at 7:30 am, heading south past Elafonisi and Kythira. The seas in the straits were relatively calm. The bird of the day was a Cory's Shearwater, but mostly there wasn't much to see. Finally Crete appeared, and we turned east to steam along the coast. I retired again to my cabin to rest. The banging

of the waves increased. In fact, a gale was blowing – winds over 50 mph. On progress was slow. When I came up to bridge, the Captain said that we would arrive in Heraklion about 10-11 pm. I decided to call my sister, Leslie, who was already in Heraklion and planning to meet me when I arrived. Supposedly, she was staying at the Kronos Hotel.

Using the Captain's cell phone, I called the hotel. "No, she checked out this morning. There is no message for you." Hmmm. "Are you sure?" "Yes, I think that she was with another person, and a guide." This didn't make sense. My cousin, Elaine, was also planning to meet us in Heraklion, but Elaine was scheduled to arrive on Sunday (the next day). Where was Leslie? Our backup plan was to meet in the lobby of the fanciest hotel in town – the Astoria – for cocktails from 4-6 pm. But it was already after 6 pm. I decided to call the Astoria. They had no record of her, nor was there any message. Hmmm. I stewed over this information for 30 minutes or so. Maybe I should check my email. Could the Captain go online? He said ok, but then turned off the navigation program and brought up the lights on the bridge. Normally, one sails at night with the bridge dimly lit with red light, so that night vision is not impaired. I was worried that we might hit something, and so I quickly checked my email. Why are computers so slow? There was a message from Leslie!! She was at the Lato Hotel. The crew knew the hotel; it overlooked the harbor. I called the Lato Hotel. Leslie was there. Apparently, the Kronos was not up to her standards, and so she had decided to switch, but had decided not to leave a message as a message might not be translated correctly, and that would be confusing. Hmmm. We agreed to meet in the morning for breakfast.

The Philia arrived in Heraklion at 10:30 pm, 28 hours in transit. It costs \$70 and 50 minutes to fly from Athens, but the experience ... Some of the crew dispersed immediately, but the Captain and First Mate got out the olives, cheese, meats and raki, and we snacked well into the night. The berth for the Philia is right in the middle of the harbor. One could see the lights of the Hotel Lato, but I slept on board.