



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Foreign Places:  
The Mediterranean: Getting Started and Arriving**

## The Mediterranean

### Report

### Topic

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To help you follow the places visited during this trip, this map will be useful.<sup>1</sup> I will have more to say about this charted course as we proceed into the journey.



The quotes preceding each chapter are taken from several Internet sites. They are not my creations, but I have taken the liberty of altering these quotes to place them into the context of this essay.

As exemplified by these quotes, for millennia, humans have subdued (with killing, torture, raping, and slavery) fellow humans in the Mediterranean. There is nothing new about this thought. It has been going on throughout the world since we humans became humans.

Nonetheless, during this trip and my research for it, it struck me how each of these places suffered similar fates, even though they are remote from one another. Mass pillages were the practice of the day:

“One murder made a villain,  
millions, a hero. Princes were privileg’d  
to kill, and numbers sanctified the crime.”

Billy Portels, “Death,” 1.154, 1759, in : Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 529.

<sup>1</sup> The map is courtesy of Google.

## **The Mediterranean Report One: Getting Started**

*The Mediterranean Sea: An ancient passageway for armies, priests, and merchants. For many centuries, these adventurers sailed across its waters and walked onto its shores to pillage and proselytize the locals.*

**June 2-17, 2006**

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. For the next two weeks, I will be sending reports from the Mediterranean Sea.

I have long wanted to visit this part of the world. I have thought of the Mediterranean as an exotic sea, rich with rich people, and rich in legacies. For most of my time in the navy, I sailed in the Western Pacific. I did not have the good fortune of having a "Med Cruise," which entailed a few days at sea, followed with a visit to a port offering lovely wine, lovely olives, and olive-skinned lovelies.

At long last, these next two weeks would take me to places I had only read about or dreamed of. I was finally going to the "Med."

This set of essays will encompass eleven reports. Attention spans are sparse now-a-days as the Internet competes for our attention. But I hope you will come with me on this cruise, if only vicariously. We will visit many historical treasures. We will learn about aspects of America's Mediterranean heritage.

### **Getting There Depends on Starting**

We flew from Dulles Airport in Virginia to Frankfurt, Germany, with a transfer to Istanbul. At Istanbul, we boarded our ship, the Minerva II, a truly great vessel of the Swan Hellenic Lines.

Prior to closing my businesses, I spent 80 percent of my nights away from home. I was on airplanes frequently, but for this trip, it occurred to me I had not flown overseas for some time. As I settled into my assigned seat on the airplane, I encountered a control console resembling a flight instrument panel. I came across a 20-page booklet--- *Seat User's Manual*---of instructions on how to use my seat. Among its features included directions for changing the seat:

Go up; go down; harden, soften; extend or contract to fit a different butt size; adjust for more or less back support; *manipulate for massages!* Plus: Different electrical outlets; private TV/movies/games; Internet surfing; weather; flight path of our airplane; saving seat positions for future use.

Airplane seats had certainly changed over the past few years. After a stewardess helped me with the basics of seat engineering, I settled-in for the flight.

Our travel companions were Al and Carol. You met Al in my report about the Library of Congress. His job title is Reporter Junior for these essays. Carol is Reporter Juniorette. On occasion, the handle for Al and Carol will be "The Juniors."

## The Mediterranean Report Two: Arriving

June 3, 2006



We arrived in Istanbul, Turkey and made our way to baggage claim. There, we came across good news: a sign was posted that advertised the upcoming Iraq Trade Fair. Trade fairs indicate the country sponsoring the trade show is in good shape. Otherwise, the country would not be trading stuff. For the bad news: the Iraq Trade Fair was being held in Istanbul, but not Iraq.

### To the Ship

Baggage in hand, we boarded a tour bus and headed for our ship, the Minerva II. During this short trip, we met our first tour guide. He introduced us to Turkey (with my comments in parenthesis):

- Turkey was not named after a bird, but from the Greek term *stin poli*, meaning “to the city” or “in the city.”
- We were motoring over Kennedy Highway, named after JFK. (The highway might be renamed the Bush Highway, if George Jr. can succeed in preventing the Iraqi Kurds from annexing northern Turkey.)
- An earthquake in 1999 leveled many new buildings, but the old ones remained intact. The guide spoke about the solidness of old buildings, but the old buildings were not in the fault zone.
- Sectarian and nonsectarian folks were not getting along very well. (Duck!)
- The Turkish citizens’ support for joining the European Union (EU) was diminishing. The citizens are learning they will be instructed in matters such as How to Grow a Tomato. Being an independent sort of people, they think this amount of coddling might be too intrusive.



**Figure 1. Istanbul, from our cabin.**

At Minerva II, we gave up our passports, checked in, and were guided to our cabin, a lovely room on the starboard side of the ship. (The Juniors were located next door.) Reporterette and I negotiated the allocation of drawers and cabinets, then settled down on our balcony for a look at this part of Istanbul. (See Figure 1.) Mosques and minarets accentuated the landscape.

The four of us stood in silence on our balconies, taking in this enchanting scene. As we were drinking our first glass of welcome-aboard wine, we began to hear plaintive muessin calls, emanating from the mosque towers, calling to the faithful, beckoning them to begin their prayers. It was a foreign scene to us yet a commonplace ritual to the indigenous citizens of this enchanting city.

I thought of my neighborhood in Falls Church, Virginia, and the large population of Muslims who share my space. I thought about the traffic cops who direct traffic on Route 7 before and after the Islamic prayer sessions. As I tried to make my way to the local Post Office, I thought of how out-of-place this congestion seemed.

But now, standing on the balcony of a ship tied up in Istanbul, and beholding the Muslim call to prayer, I also thought, *what is out of place depends on where the place is.*