



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Foreign Places:  
The Mediterranean: Sardinia**

## The Mediterranean

<u>Report</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Getting Started
2	Arriving
3	Istanbul
4	Rhodes
5	Crete
6	Malta
7	Sicily
8	Sardinia
9	Minorca
10	Corsica
11	Civitavecchia

## The Mediterranean Report Eight: Sardinia

*Sardinia is known to have had inhabitants as early as the Seventh millennium BC with people who probably came from the Eastern Mediterranean. Because of its strategic importance and crossroads location, it experienced centuries of warfare between, and occupations by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Visigoths, Arabs, Byzantians, Sardinians(!), Saracens, Pisans, Genoese, Italians, Aragonese (Spanish), Austrians, and Italians again. Presently, the Italians are in charge.*

June 12, 2006



The reporting team is now located in Sardinia, the second largest island in the Mediterranean. *Minerva II* tied up at the port of Cagliari, Sardinia's capital. It's a lovely port, but with only one day to explore this part of the world, we opted for a visit to another ancient site in the Islands of Antiquity. Holly and I decided Cagliari, attractive as it is, would have to wait for another time for us to explore it properly. Thus, off we went into the Sardinian countryside, destined for another pile of rocks.

As the tour bus made its way to the historical site, our guide told us about the pride the Sardinians take in their island. She said, "God mixed the best parts of the Mediterranean Islands to create Sardinia."

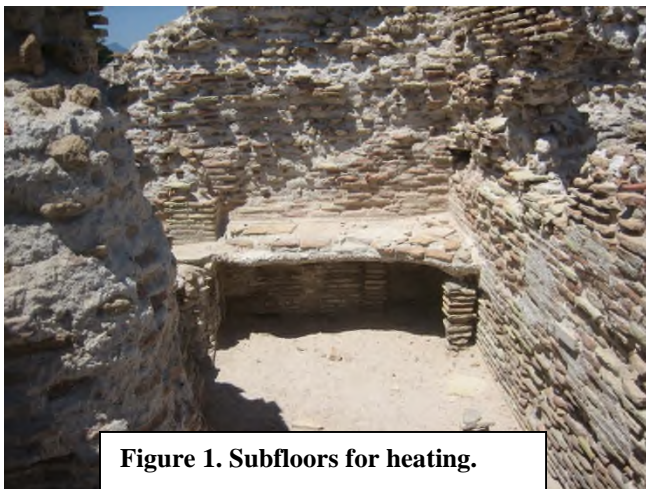
On our short excursion, we saw hundreds of Flamingos standing in lagoons that lined the elevated highway we were traversing. We learned these birds had stopped over from North Africa as part of their migratory pattern. Our tour guide informed us, "The Flamingos are pink because of the pink shells of the food they eat. If we ate carrots all the time, our skin would have an orange color." Being tourists, we took the tour guide at her word.

Our guide was a treasure chest of interesting facts; some examples:

- The oldest industry on the island is salt. It's still a factor in the economy, but freezing preserves food, so the salt industry is not what it once was (I thought back to Russ, my absolute zero friend. He had informed me the Fahrenheit and Celsius scales were irrelevant to the subject of temperature. I thought of how important the idea of 32° Fahrenheit was to my happiness and well being. But I'm not a physicist.)
- Sardinia was once covered by forests, but they were cut down to provide for cooking and heating. The island is now covered with shrubs and bushes. Trees have been trying to make a comeback, but they continue to be preempted for firewood.
- 90% of Italian cork is produced in Sardinia. It takes nine years to grow a tree that can produce good cork. Thus, some wine makers have opted for using synthetic corks. Others are experimenting with screw tops, but are concerned that selling wine in screw top bottles might present an image problem.

## Nora

Our major visit today was the ancient site of Nora. Archeologists believe Nora was founded by



**Figure 1. Subfloors for heating.**

Phoenician seamen as early as the ninth century BC, but little is known about the place until the more recent times when the Romans arrived. Its stupendous ruins, mostly from the times when the Romans occupied the island (238 BC-AD 450), contain scores of old buildings, including temples, baths, and theaters. We were especially intrigued by the Roman innovations. For example, as seen in Figure 1, a subfloor was placed under the main floor in some of the buildings, with about 18 inches of space between them. The Romans filled this space with hot air to heat

the room. Parts of the stone furnaces that provided the hot air are still standing.

During the walk around the site, our tour guide suggested those of us who were hard of hearing move closer to her during her presentations. As she began her next lecture, the entire group moved toward her. What would one expect from a ship full of retirees? Anyway, another interesting part of Nora was the open-air theater, shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The theater.

The semicircular arena was surrounded by a brick wall, with several big "vomitoria" (accesses to theater) placed in the wall. One of these entrances is shown on the right side of the picture. Not shown in this picture is an orchestra pit, which could be reached by separate passageways.<sup>1</sup>

The word *orchestra* surprised me. What kind of orchestra existed in those old days? The dictionary defines orchestra as, "A large group of musicians....consisting of sections of string, woodwind, brass, and percussion players, and directed by a conductor." Let's see what kind of orchestra might have played in the Nora theater:<sup>2</sup>

The earliest European music known is that of the ancient Greeks and Romans, dating from about 500 BC to AD 300... The most common Greek instruments were the kithara, a form of lyre associated with Apollo, and the aulos, an oboelike instrument associated with the god Dionysus. The kithara was said to have had a calming or uplifting effect on listeners, and the aulos was said to have communicated excitement.

The Romans seem to have carried on the Greek musical traditions and to have contributed little of their own. They did develop some brass instruments, however, which they used in battle and in military processions. They also invented the hydraulis, an organ with a hydraulic air pressure stabilizer

[Fade to 100 BC, an evening at the Nora Theater. The performance begins, as the actors and actresses enter onto the stage and begin their recitations and songs. The orchestra, consisting of ten lyres, twelve auloses, four drums, six brass trumpets, and one hydraulis is somewhat limited in its repertoire, because complex musical combinations had not yet been invented. Thus, the various instruments were limited to playing the same melody without harmony. That was the downside. On the upside, the many instruments playing at the same time compensated for the

<sup>1</sup> Carlo Delfino, editor, *Archaeological Sardinia, Nora* (Carlo Delfino, Piazza d' Italia 11, Sassari, 1986), 23.

<sup>2</sup> "Musical Instruments," Microsoft Encarta 2006, Microsoft Corporation 1993-2005.

fact that amplifiers had not yet been invented. Thus, the Sardinian peasants, those in the back rows of the Nora Theater, could hear the monophonic music. ...Fade back to 2006.]

Another fascinating building was located on the top of a hill. According to our guide, this place was, "...where the God of Public Health lived." America's Surgeon General. One of the responsibilities of the God of Public Health was to insure the Nora citizens were healthy. As part of this job, the God of Public Health was in charge of, "...administering a pill that made people sleep for three to four days. When they woke up, they felt better."

I am not making up these comments from our tour guide. I am quoting them directly from my notes. Orange-skinned humans. A four-day sleeping pill. I began to wonder what kind of pill she was on. Still, she was fun and witty.

The walk around Nora took over two hours. The paths were rocky, narrow, and uphill/downhill. Some of the tourists began to grumble. Some asked when the show would be over. Our guide responded with a polite, "Thirty more minutes," and kept right on talking about rocks. I admired her resolve. She was not going to have the tour compromised by individuals who had not bothered to read *Minerva II's* advice on the "rigor" of a tour. She was knowledgeable, had a sardonic humor about her, and kept to the schedule. She was a cool tour guide.

One woman complained that the tour guide was providing too much information, that she was giving us too many details. I longed for a Clint Eastwood response, but remained mute, waiting for something to occur to me. Reporterette took care of my silence with a few deft words, "You're on the wrong boat." Holly polished her off with, "Find a taxi. Go shopping."

### **Mr. Photographic Memory**

On our way back to the bus, I walked ahead of the group, then sat down to fill in my notes. A fellow-tour person passed by, "Doing your notes, eh?"

Reporter, "Yes, I review them as soon as possible after I write them. I can't read my own scribblings."

"I have a photographic memory. I don't need notes."

Christ. Another learned person. But what should I have expected on a cruise devoted to looking at ancient piles of rocks? Still, I had never met anyone with a photographic memory. What my mind lacks in memory, it makes up in forgetfulness. Properly impressed with encountering a forgetless mind, I did not respond.

He continued, "These tour guides spread a lot of bull shit."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Salt going away as an industry. Carrots and orange skin. Gods of Public Health. Bull shit."

"I think she was kidding about the carrots and the public health god." *Come on Uyless, he's attempting to communicate with you. Give it a go*, "By the way have you read the book *Salt*?"

He said, "You've read *Salt*? A brilliant book. I've...."

I said, "Not in its entirety. I read the first few chapters, then skimmed over to the chapter on pickles."

He ricocheted to a new topic, "You must read *When God was a Woman*."

Confusing, as I thought we were talking about salt and pickles, "Oh?"

"Yes, some of our tours on these islands have revealed that these ancient cultures worshipped women," as he turned around and disappeared onto one of the ancient Nora trails.

I would have liked to spoke with him more, especially about his last topic. Worshipping women is an easy thing to do, especially considering its alternative.

### **Back at the Ship**

The Nora visit was one of my favorites of the cruise. While longing for a time machine to go back to ancient Nora to sample those three-day sleeping pills, I turned my attention to the present evening aboard the ship, where we once again dined to fine food and fine company. The ship held a lot of people, and I did not come across the lawyer who could have been in Reporter Junior's crosshairs. But then, Junior, at his most basic level, has a heart of gold, even toward lawyers. I was sure Jim, the lawyer, was alive and well.

Before dinner, Al and I had another of our insightful, philosophical discussions at the pool bar. We talked of the places we had seen these few days. I recalled hearing and reading about the rulers William the Good, Süleyman I the Magnificent, Alexander the Great, and the effect these men had on the Mediterranean. I wondered how they got their names? Did they name themselves? If so, William was a modest man. William the Good pales in comparison to the handles of Magnificent and Great. I also wondered who named Pepin the Short? Most likely it was not Pepin who invented this name.

After dinner, Holly and I had coffee in the lounge, listening to the Diffy String Quartet play Mozart, Bach, Handel, and Gershwin. Four lovely ladies made up the quartet. They were very good at what they did and not nearly as controversial as the Dixie Chicks.