



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Foreign Places:  
The Mediterranean: Civitavecchia**

## The Mediterranean

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## The Mediterranean Report Eleven: Civitavecchia, Italy

*Because of Italy's strategic importance and crossroads location, it experienced centuries of warfare between, and occupations by Germans, Osogoths, Byzantians, Lombards, Duces, Franks, Saracens, Muslims, Germans (again), Normans, French, (House of Anjou), City States, Spanish and Austrian Hapsburgs, French, and Austrians. Presently, no one is in charge of the Italians, including themselves.*

June 15, 2006.



This report will be the last on the Islands of Antiquity cruise. Before pulling into our port of Civitavecchia, Italy, the *Minerva II* hosted another reception to bid farewell to its passengers. By now, many of us had made new friends, and we had also become acquainted with the members of the ship's crew. Figure 1 is a photo I snapped during this reception of the Diffy String Quartet, minus one. Again, notice the dress of the passengers. All in all, pretty spiffy, and I will need to replace my black suit with a tux on my next trip.



Figure 1. Three members of the Diffy String Quartet.

### **Russ the Absolute and Joyce the Fine**

At the reception, we met up again with our new friends, Joyce and Russ. You may recall that Russ is the expert on absolute zero and has been the butt of a couple of jokes in these reports. I hope he will not take offence when he reads them. Joyce, a lawyer, has had her profession pilloried a time or two. Again, I hope she will take it in good humor. And Russ the Absolute was not absolute at all. He was fine company. So was Joyce. In harmony with the many titles we came across on this trip, I tagged her with Joyce the Fine, which fitted her well.



**Figure 2. Reporterette, Joyce the Fine, and Russ the Absolute.**

### **Final Wrap-up on the Knights**

The Knights of Jerusalem, later of Rhodes, still later of Malta, have followed us across parts of the Mediterranean. Or rather we have followed them. Let's use the final report to dispose of the Knights. We left the Knights at Malta, their residence when Napoleon forced them to leave in 1798. They also lost their mainland European holdings.

For a while, it appeared they had chosen the wrong religion to champion. During the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648), the Catholic Knights' English and German possessions were taken over by Protestant rulers. The French Revolution (1799) did not threaten them well either. All their holdings in France were seized. The Protestant English and Germans, and the anti-cleric French prompted a Knights' downsizing worthy of a dotcom crash.

But ever the survivors, the Knights packed up what was left of their organization and went to Rome (1834), where they found a friendlier place to do business in the name of the Vatican. In 1961, Pope John XXIII recognized the order as a, "religious community of the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>1</sup>

What is more, Pope John declared them to be an order of chivalry. And they are still around, although they have given up their propensity toward acquisition and warfare. Today---giving us

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<sup>1</sup> "Knights of Malta," *Microsoft Encarta* 2006, Microsoft Corporation, 1993-2005.

hope that humans can change---they manage hospitals, care for war wounded, as well as succor war refugees. In our modern world of health-care profits, exploding bombs in marketplaces, and dislodged Serbs and Africans, the Knights made an admirable career decision.

If I have learned anything from this cruise, it is the extraordinary inferential power of archeologists. Time and again, I marvel at their detective skills and their ability to piece things together. Another example is shown in Figure 3. To the casual observer, the only obvious part of the gate that can be reconstructed from the ruins is the statue pedestal, which I have circled in red.

I've made light of this subject in these reports. Truth is, the historians are able to salvage many parts of architecture because of the constituent pieces that have fallen around the ruins---in this example a gate. They are not evident to tourists, because the site managers cannot leave these artifacts strewn on the ground, waiting for Americans to stumble over them and initiate a lawsuit.



**Figure 3. The Porta Romana.**

It is believed this gate was built around 63 BC, during the year of the consulate of Cicero. It was the main entrance to the city of Ostia for travelers arriving from Rome. The fragments found at the site led archeologists to think the gate was, "about five meters wide, slightly recessed into the walls, and the central passage arch was flanked by two square-plan towers built on tuff blocks."<sup>2</sup>

Amazing inferences and admirable reconstructions. I remain impressed and thank these experts for giving us modern humans a much better understanding of our ancestors.

### **Civitavecchia**

This writer did not visit the last stop on this cruise, Civitavecchia, but worked on the essays you have been reading. Truth is, as much as I treasured these past days in the Med, I was rocked-out. Holly, Al, and Carol took a tour of the area and told me what I was missing: more ruins of ancient ruins, such as those shown in Figure 4.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Soprintendenza Archeologica of Ostia," *Microsoft Encarta* 2006, Microsoft Corporation, 1993-2005, 22.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://blog.shoreexcursionsgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/shutterstock\\_86997008.jpg&imgrefurl=http://blog.shoreexcursionsgroup.com/civitavecchia-without-](https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://blog.shoreexcursionsgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/shutterstock_86997008.jpg&imgrefurl=http://blog.shoreexcursionsgroup.com/civitavecchia-without-)



I do not mean to diminish this part of the cruise, but as I did not visit the site personally, I've no right to write about it. My companions told me I had missed some extraordinary sights. I told them they had missed an extraordinary time for relation and reflection. It was a win-win afternoon for the four of us.

**Figure 4. A ruin in Civitavecchia**

### **It's a Wrap**

We made it home in one piece. After a couple days of recovering from jet lag, Holly and I resumed our previous routines. But I often think back to those many piles of rocks and wondrous buildings we walked over and through. I thought about the ancient people we had come to know, if only a small bit more. I thought of how it seemed our ancestors continued to repeat history, yet slowly made progress toward more just behavior. After all, the Knights of Malta started off as a mean bunch and eventually became model citizens. The Knights somehow managed to rise above their history.

I wonder if we humans are destined to repeat our history or rise above it? This question pertains to a quote I jotted down many years ago, "Civilization is a race to discover remedies for the ills it produces."<sup>4</sup>

Maybe this earth is nothing more than "...a crossroads location, destined to experience centuries of warfare between, and occupations by...the party that possesses the biggest hammer at the time. ... Perhaps God or Nature (take your pick) has introduced a struggle for survival into the working of the universe, and there is no way to opt out of that struggle."<sup>5</sup> Time will tell, and none of us will be around to learn the answers to these ponderings.

Thank you for taking this journey with me to the Mediterranean and its "Islands of Antiquity."

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rome/&h=1699&w=2624&tbnid=NJ5QzDoGy8uUnM:&tbnh=160&tbnw=246&usg=\_\_n0tcIXZuF\_wgzom7cJH-7DYL0Qo=&vet=10ahUKEwjtmNfs5tfTAhUN2GMKHL6DjsQ\_B0IigEwDg..i&docid=4BImmKc8duEWVM&itg=1&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjtmNfs5tfTAhUN2GMKHL6DjsQ\_B0IigEwDg#h=1699&imgdii=gs6CVrTKExmmSM:&tbnh=160&tbnw=246&vet=10ahUKEwjtmNfs5tfTAhUN2GMKHL6DjsQ\_B0IigEwDg..i&w=2624.

<sup>4</sup> Undated comment from William Ebenstein on Rousseau's philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> Undated comment from an unattributed source.