

The forgotten anniversary

TENS OF thousands of Athenians walk by or through a series of fine archaeological exhibits every day, usually without noticing, while guidebooks largely ignore them. Similarly, their 10th anniversary last month passed without fanfare.

When Line 2 and Line 3 of the Athens Metro were inaugurated in 2000, the nicely displayed and well-labelled exhibitions of archaeological finds were one of the most striking features of the new stations, a great gift to all who yearn to learn about the history of this ancient city, and a relief to archaeologists.

When the mammoth project of building two new underground mass transportation lines under the historic centre began in 1991, it caused concern in archaeological circles worldwide. The project, enormous and difficult in any case, also represented a massive archaeological challenge.

Essentially, wherever you dig a hole in central Athens, you will find metres upon metres of antiquities, ranging from at least the Archaic period, through Classical and Hellenistic, via the Roman to the Byzantine.

Most of the tunnels themselves would be bored through bedrock, thus below any archaeological layers. But the building of every single station and every ventilation shaft would have to entail careful and time-consuming archaeological excavations of varying scale, often under difficult circumstances. The scale of



Construction of an air vent near Syntagma revealed a well-preserved Roman bath

the urban archaeological project was, for Greece, unprecedented.

To cut the long story short, the job was done, and done well. Under the supervision of the ministry of culture, dozens of excavations took place through up to 7m of archaeological deposits, revealing hundreds of thousands of ancient artifacts, hundreds of structures, roads, wells, houses, graves and so on from all periods, and thereby adding a huge amount of new information to the known history of the city.

But that's not all. It was also decided to highlight these fascinating finds and display part of them to the public near where they had been found, at the various stations. This ambitious and innovative approach has transformed the accessibility of Athenian archaeology and incorporated it into daily life. As there is no Museum of the Archaeology of Athens (the National Mu-

seum has much broader scope), up until then the city's ancient past was only presented in fragments at the site museums of the Kerameikos, Agora and Acropolis. The metro added no less than five such local exhibitions in a single year. So what better way to celebrate this anniversary than to take a few rides under the city centre, hopping on and off the train to explore a whole array of windows on the past. Each station exhibit has its own focus, each displaying unique, interesting and intriguing things to see.

Metro, a window on the past

Monastiraki

The metro contains an especially spectacular feature. Beside the northbound platform of the Kifisia-Piraeus line, part of the ancient riverbed of the Ilissos has been revealed. The stone-built

channel of the 5th century BC was covered with large tiles in the 2nd century AD. Unseen for the two intervening millennia, the river still flows within.

Panepistimio

The station is located outside the margins of the ancient city, where the cemeteries were located. The exhibition displays clay sarcophagi and very fine pottery of the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

Evangelismos

Another area outside the ancient city. The small display contains clay pipes from 6th century BC Peisistratid aqueduct that brought water from Mt Lykavittos to the city, and a well-preserved Roman pottery kiln.

Acropolis

Here, excavations revealed residential houses and streets

from the Classical to the Byzantine period, but also Bronze Age graves dating back to the 2nd and 3rd millennia BC. The exhibition includes pots and many Classical or later household objects, as well as children's toys.

Syntagma

The huge display at Syntagma works as a cross-section of Athenian history

As the station is the biggest hub of the network, excavations here were most extensive. Discoveries included graves from the Bronze Age to Byzantine periods, the ancient bed of the Eridanos River, various ancient road surfaces, Archaic and Roman water supply systems, and other structures, including a Classical workshop that produced bronze sculptures. The exhibition is quite large and includes not only pottery, household objects, mosaics and grave-stones from various periods, but also a huge display of a reconstructed section through the city's ground, a fascinating panorama of millennia of activity, right under our feet. Some architectural remains are on open-air display on the eastern side of Syntagma Square.

It is worthwhile strolling a little further along Amalias, on the National Gardens side of the road. Here, excavations for one of the metro air vents have revealed a spectacularly well-preserved Roman bathhouse, now protected by a modern roof. The building is preserved beyond the height of its ground floor, and many features of its elaborate heating systems are visible.

The exhibitions in the Athens Metro share the opening times of the Metro network: from early morning to late evening. All can be visited for free.

GPs angry about 'bypass' program on web

AUSTRALIAN researchers have developed a world-first program that allows people to bypass GPs and be assessed, diagnosed and treated by psychologists over the internet.

About 1000 people have already been treated for anxiety disorders, including obsessive compulsive disorder and agoraphobia, and developers, from Swinburne University in Melbourne, want to start treating depressives, bulimics and gamblers next month.

The program, designed to tackle the nation's crippling shortage of mental health services, has drawn the ire of doctors, concerned that patients could be dangerously misdiagnosed.

"A patient who has chest pains and gets sweaty and clammy could put it down to a panic attack when they may be having a heart attack - two very d-

ifferent outcomes," the vice-president of the Australian Medical Association, Steve Hambleton, said.

But the co-director of Swinburne University's National E-Therapy Centre and one of the developers of the anxietyonline program, David Austin, said more than 25 per cent of Australians suffered from anxiety disorders, but less than half received the right treatment.

"There are unfortunate social stigmas associated with mental health disorders that can stop people from admitting they need help. For others, the cost of seeing a specialist is too high, and even then waiting lists are very long," he said.

"The problem is compounded for people living in regional areas where access to specialist mental health services is severely limited."

The most commonly used treatment for anxiety

disorders, cognitive behavioural therapy, was as effective over the internet as in face-to-face counselling, Associate Professor Austin said.

Liz Boyd, 50, from Tahmoor in Sydney's southwest, used the program after her 18-year-old son crashed his car into a tree and spent nine days in hospital, including three in the intensive care unit.

"The sound of sirens or loud crashes, or the mere thought of a family member going out would bring on crippling panic attacks, cold sweats and I couldn't breathe - I always thought something terrible was going to happen," she said.

Diagnosed online with post-traumatic stress disorder, Mrs Boyd spent 12 weeks completing tasks and receiving feedback. "I felt fantastic when I finished."

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