

# ARISTOTLE'S LYCEUM to open this summer

A walk down Rigillis Street near central Athens, between Vassilissis Sofias and Vassileos Constantinou avenues, reveals glimpses into the significant progress that has been made in the excavations at the archaeological site behind the Byzantine and Christian Museum, the location of the Lyceum, Aristotle's school of philosophy. On the banks of the Ilissos River, most of which today runs underground, the Lyceum was a part of a large complex which also housed a gymnasium where the city's hoplites and riders were trained in the art of war.

The discovery of the Lyceum and the adjacent Palaistra, or wrestling school, was made by archaeologists in 1996 and was hailed as the "discovery of the century" by international media, not just because it is where Aristotle taught some 2,500 years ago, but also because it contained valuable information regarding the topography of ancient Athens.

For the past 15 years, archaeologists have been excavating and studying the site, which is expected to be opened up to the general public this summer to coincide with the 23rd World Congress of Philosophy, scheduled to take place in Athens from August 4-10. The congress is organized by the International Federation of Philosophical Societies in collaboration with the University of Athens.

The entrance to the site is located behind the elegant building of the Officers' Club on the corner of Vassilissis Sofias and Mourouzi Street, where the visitor information booth will be located. The 1.1-hectare site contains the remains of the Lyceum and the Palaistra, which are also visible from the small Church of Aghios Nikolaos and the Athens Conservatory on the Vassileos Constantinou Avenue side of the site.

The perimeter of the site has been planted with herbs such as lavender, mint, sage, thyme and oregano, with indigenous trees – pomegranates, olives, laurel, cypress and acacias – here and there, giving visitors a picture of what the landscape would have looked like during antiquity.

Eleni Banou, the head of the Third Ephorate of Classical Antiquity, which oversaw the excavation and the design of the site, speaks about its significance during a tour of the area, accompanied by architect and site supervisor Niki Sakka.

"The three gymnasium's – Plato's, Aristotle's and Cynosarges – were complexes where the city's youth and men would receive physical and mental training, as well as intellectual stimulation," explained Banou.

"The Lyceum was set in a very green suburb of Ancient Athens that was named after the Sanctuary of Lycian Apollo. The Lyceum is best known for its connection to Aristotle, who had rented the facilities and in 335 BC founded his school there, known as the Peripatetic School," Banou added.

The gymnasium, located near the banks of the Ilissos, takes up a quarter of a hectare. It consists of a large internal courtyard of 23 by 26 meters surrounded by a colonnade. Symmetrically arranged around the courtyard were the ephedion, where young men would train to become citizens, sparring rings, dressing rooms, baths and other facilities. The building was

abandoned in the 4th century AD and was used only occasionally up until the early Byzantine years.

Much of the site has been planted with grass to give it a more relaxing feel. "We want the public to be able to sit on the grass, to lounge around, take a stroll. We want people to feel free to touch things and wander about," said Banou.

Architect Dimitris Koutsoyiannis, who is responsible for landscaping the site together with Dimitris Koukoulas, explained how the temporary shelters over the antiquities will be removed and glass casings will cover water features representing the river and the two hot baths. The area will also have walkways, plenty of seating areas and a pavilion.

The budget for the site's revamp is 1.2 million euros, but Banou stresses that they have been very frugal with its use and there is money left over, which should strengthen her case for allowing the public free admission for the first year after the site opens.

## MUSEUM REVAMP

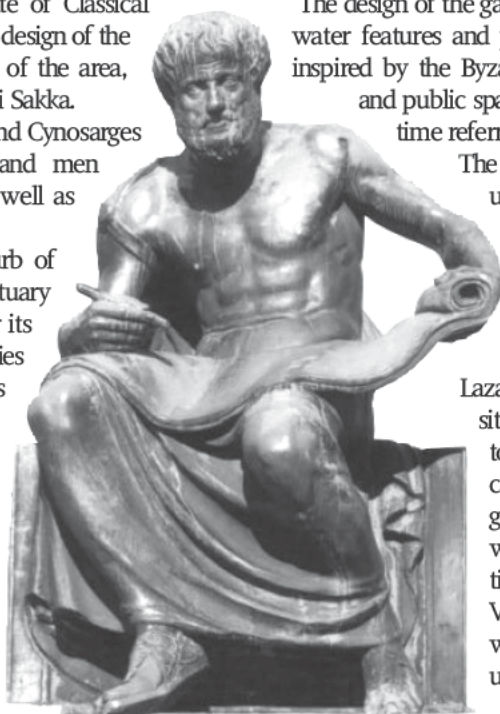
The Byzantine Museum has been busy landscaping and revamping its 2-hectare grounds to create a lush garden complete with walkways and monuments that will be open to the public and will about the new archaeological site of the Lyceum, which is slated for opening this summer. The project is the brainchild of museum director Anastasia Lazaridou, who wants visitors to have a more interactive experience and to open the grounds to the general public.

The aim, according to Lazaridou, is "to provide a breath of fresh air – both aesthetically and spiritually – in the chaotic urban landscape of Athens" by providing a pretty garden area that will also serve as an outdoor exhibition space. The garden will also be connected to the adjoining Lyceum site through a 6-meter gate that will replace the current fence, though the gate will be open only during the site's operating hours.

The design of the garden, which will consist of shaded paths, water features and plenty of trees and flowering plants, is inspired by the Byzantine-era concepts of beauty, harmony and public space, and also draws on writings from the time referring to paradise.

The Ilissos River, which today runs mostly underground, used to pass through the area behind the museum during Byzantine times.

"Water is the star in the gardens, together with the concept of paradise and symbolism of the afterlife," said Lazaridou, adding that a tomb found on the site may be used for educational purposes to demonstrate how excavations are carried out. The trees and plants in the gardens will be chosen according to what was endemic in the area in Byzantine times, while an old water tank near the Vassilissis Sofias Avenue side of the site will serve to illustrate irrigation techniques used in Athens at the time.



## THE LYCEUM

The Lyceum was a gymnasium and public meeting place in Classical Athens named after the god of the grove that housed the Lyceum, Apollo Lyceus (Apollo as 'wolf-god'). Though best known for its connection with Aristotle and the peripatetic school he led there, the Lyceum was in existence long before Aristotle's formal founding in 334 or 335 BC and continued under several heads until the Roman general Sulla sacked Athens in 86 BC.

### BEFORE ARISTOTLE

Speculation suggests that Pericles or Pisistratus may have originally opened the first building of the Lyceum, as a gymnasium, in the 5th or 6th centuries BC, though the Lyceum grounds would have predated the gymnasium. In the early years of the Lyceum the head of the Greek army was said to have had an office there, which would have made it easy for him to be involved in the military training and exercises which the grounds were used for. The Lyceum's use as a recreational gym and military training base is supported by the existence of wrestling rings, a racetrack, and seats for athlothetai, the judges of athletic events.

A long list of philosophers and sophists gave talks at the Lyceum prior to Aristotle, including Prodicus of Ceos, Protagoras and Rhapsodes. The most famous philosophers to have taught there, however, were Isocrates, Plato (of The Academy) and the best-known Athenian teacher, Socrates. In addition to military training and educational pursuits, the Lyceum also housed Athenian Assembly meetings before the Pryx became the official meeting place in the 5th century BC. Cult practices of various groups were also held at the Lyceum.

### UNDER ARISTOTLE

In 335 BC, Athens fell under Macedonian rule and Aristotle, aged 50, returned from Asia. Upon his return to Athens, Aristotle began teaching regularly in the morning in the Lyceum and founded an official school, The Lyceum. After his morning lessons Aristotle would frequently lecture on the grounds for the public, and manuscripts of his compiled lectures were eventually circulated. The group of scholars who followed the Aristotelian doctrine came to be known as the Peripatetics due to Aristotle's tendency to walk as he taught.

Aristotle's main foci as a teacher were cooperative research, an idea which he founded through his natural history work and systematic collection of philosophical works to contribute to his library.[3] His students were assigned historical or scientific research projects as part of their studies. The school was also student run. The students elected a new student administrator to work with the school leadership every ten days, allowing all the students to become involved in turn. Before returning to Athens, Aristotle had been the tutor of Alexander of Macedonia, who became the great conqueror Alexander the Great.

Throughout his conquests of various regions, Alexander collected plant and animal specimens for Aristotle's research, allowing Aristotle to develop the first zoo and botanical garden in existence. It is also suspected that Alexander donated what would be the equivalent of more than 4 million dollars to the Lyceum. In 322 BC Aristotle was forced to flee Athens with his family when the political leadership reacted against the Macedonians again and his previously published works supporting Macedonian rule left him a target. He passed on his Lyceum to Theophrastus and died later that year in Chalcis, near his hometown.