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Discerning the evidence of 'in situ museums' in Greece

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This paper explores the birth of 'in situ' museums in Greece examining the gradual evolution of in situ preserved ancient remains in the basements of modern buildings from their simple preservation to their presentation to a broader public. The term 'in situ museums' refers to those buildings that enclose in situ preserved archaeological remains and present them to the public according to recent museological trends. These buildings can be either museum buildings or other types of structures such as private houses, banks etc. The focus is placed on remains deriving from stone structures dating back to the Prehistoric, Classical, Roman or Medieval period. After examining the general practices applied to the management of ancient finds discovered in rescue excavations in Greece, a thorough discussion about the criteria, on which the decision for preserving in situ archaeological remains is relied, will follow. The data, on which the analysis is based, derives mainly from the Annual Archaeological Newsletters of the Greek Ephorates of Antiquities (Archaeologikon Deltion, AD) covering the period from 1929 until 1998. The discovery of important archaeological finds after 1998 are usually mentioned in the daily newspapers, which proved to be a useful source as well. Finally, conclusions will be excluded concerning the extent to which international legislation has affected the management of archaeological remains in Greece that are discovered during the construction of modern buildings and are integrated in modern buildings.

Introduction

This paper explores the emergence of 'in situ museums' in Greece by examining the administrative and legislative framework regarding the protection of archaeological heritage at international and national levels and the socio-political and financial context within which 'in situ museums' were created.

The paper is divided in three sections. The first section conceptualises 'in situ museums' by identifying their special characteristics that differentiate them from common museums. The second section identifies the criteria on which archaeologists in Greece base their decisions on *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains that are discovered during the construction of public or private works. The final section examines the evolution of 'in situ museums' in Greece.

The term 'in situ museums' in this paper refers to modern structures that accommodate and present to the public *in situ* preserved archaeological remains. The remains usually include immovable structures, occasionally presented in association with movable objects.

1. Conceptualising 'in situ museums'

'In situ museums' fit within the broader definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) according to which, 'a museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment'.¹

However, 'in situ museums', in contrast to other types of museums, contextualises the movable objects in their original setting and in association with the immovable architectural remains with which they are related. In view of this, the authentic sense of the place is enhanced and, consequently, visitor experience is enriched. Secondly, 'in situ museums' might constitute a compromise between developers or private owners and archaeologists, who decide the *in situ* preservation of significant archaeological remains. Therefore, 'in situ museums' can integrate archaeological remains into the present in an innovative and beneficial way for the public.

2. Types of archaeological remains that are preserved *in situ*

In order to identify the criteria, on which archaeologists base their decision for *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains, a thorough research was conducted in summer 2004. A database of 207 *in situ* preserved sites in the basements of modern buildings was created linking each *in situ* preserved site with city, type of remains, criteria of significance, type of structure that encloses the remains, references and photographs. The data on which the research is based derives from *Annual Archaeological Newsletters* dating back to 1873 and newspaper articles covering the period from 1980 until 2005.

The research showed that the most usual types of archaeological remains that the Greek Archaeological Service decides to preserve *in situ* are parts of fortification walls (25 per cent), burial complexes (25 per cent), building complexes (14 per cent) and public buildings (11 per cent) such as parts of Hippodromes or Agoras. Private buildings such as Roman or Early Christian houses (5 per cent), ceramic workshops (4 per cent), baths or ancient roads (4 per cent), water pipes and

¹ ICOM 2001: art. 2.

aqueducts or fountains and nymphaeums (3 per cent), churches or monasteries (2 per cent), parts of well preserved walls, parts of palaces, storerooms, and dockyards (1 per cent) are also preserved *in situ*.

The criteria, on which the *in situ* preservation of the above remains is based, differ according to the type of the remains and the extent to which these remains are frequently discovered. The most common criteria are the topographical significance of the archaeological remains (23 per cent), their state of preservation (19 per cent), their uniqueness and continuation to the adjoining plots (11 per cent). Burial structures or graves are usually preserved *in situ* when they are characterized by monumental architecture or constitute rare types (8 per cent). Other criteria are the extent to which ancient remains can be identified through the ancient written sources (1 per cent), the extent to which the location of their discovery facilitated their *in situ* preservation (1 per cent) and the extent to which they are representative examples of archaeological structures (1 per cent).

3. The emergence and evolution of 'in situ museums' in Greece

'In situ museums' emerged from the *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains in inaccessible modern structures and their gradual evolution to *in situ* presentation into modern buildings.

The evolution of 'in situ museums' in Greece could be divided in four chronological periods. The first period extends from the formation of the Greek independent state in 1834 until the Greco-Turkish war in 1921-22. The defeat of the Greek army, generally referred to as 'Minor Asia Catastrophe', led to the exchange of populations between the two countries. Consequently, refugees fled to Greece and were hosted in blocks of flats, the construction of which revealed significant archaeological remains. During these years, antiquities played a significant role in the formation of national identity of the new state but the severe financial situation and the constant military events caused instability and did not allow a systematic protection of the archaeological heritage.

The second period is characterized by the intensive construction of blocks of flats that started in 1922 and reached a peak during the 1960s. During this period the *in situ* preservation of significant archaeological remains in the basements of modern buildings gradually replaced the reburial of ancient remains, which used to be the most common practice for 'rescuing' archaeology.

The third period covers the years between 1960 and 1990 when the Greek Archaeological Service attempted to provide the *in situ* preserved archaeological remains with more systematic conservation measures and at the same time to render them accessible to the public.

Finally, the fourth period extends from the early 1990s until the present and is characterized by the attempts of

the Hellenic Ministry of Culture to enhance and present the archaeological remains to the broader public according to contemporary museological practice.

3.1. 1834-1922: From reburial to *in situ* preservation

The newly formed Greek state endeavoured to establish a legal framework for the protection of archaeological heritage endangered by construction works as early as in 1830.² However, it was only after the independence of the Greek state in 1834, when George Ludwig von Maurer, a consultant of the King Otto, composed the first archaeological law. This law analysed issues of discovery, ownership and preservation of archaeological collections and was strongly influenced by the archaeological legislation of Rome during that period.³ At the same time, the establishment of the Greek Archaeological Service in 1835⁴ and the founding of the Archaeological Society in 1837⁵ contributed to a more systematic protection of archaeological heritage. These first attempts show clearly that the preservation of classical antiquities was among the first priorities of the new state, since the 'the *raison d' être* of Greek archaeology' was 'the justification of Greek national identity'.⁶

Despite these protective measures, *in situ* preservation was still a rare practice due to the severe financial situation of the new state that was incapable of compensating private owners for the expropriation of their lands. However, two exceptional cases took place during these years. The first example is the case of the 'Zappeion Megaron' in Athens, that was constructed after the initiative of Evengellos Zappas in 1873 to reconstitute the Olympic Games in Athens.⁷ During the construction of the 'Zappeion' a significant Roman bathhouse was discovered, which, after the reactions of the Archaeological Society, was preserved *in situ*.⁸ In 1886, a public 'stoa', discovered during the construction of a private house in Piraeus, a city close to Athens, was preserved *in situ* by removing the foundations of the new house.⁹

3.2. 1922-1950s: *In situ* preservation, inaccessibility and lack of conservation

The construction of blocks of flats in big cities for housing the refugees of Minor Asia in the 1920s revealed extensive archaeological sites that were usually reburied or even destroyed. Again, the severe financial situation and the lack of archaeologists did not allow the *in situ* preservation of remains.

Theoretically, according to the archaeological legislation of this period¹⁰ the most appropriate method for rescuing

² Πετράκος 1982: 113-17; Πρωτονόλης 1967: 142.

³ Πετράκος 1982: 20; Σκουρή and Τροβά 2003: 11.

⁴ Κόκκου 1977: 72.

⁵ Κόκκου 1977: 99.

⁶ Yalouri 2001: 35.

⁷ Hellenic Ministry of Culture 2001a.

⁸ ΠΑΕ 1874: 37-47.

⁹ ΠΑΕ 1886: 17.

¹⁰ Archaeological Law no. 5351/1932.

archaeological heritage was the expropriation of the lands.¹¹ However, the limited financial sources and public's perceptions towards archaeological heritage as an inhibitory factor to the modernization of the big cities, did not allow the establishment of *in situ* preservation as a common practice.¹² An exceptional case took place in Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, when funding for rescue excavations by the state was approved, for the first time, in 1925-1929.¹³ This resulted in the *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains in the basement of blocks of flats as a compromise between the archaeologists and the property owners.¹⁴ Reburials continued constituting the most usual practice for rescuing archaeology. A characteristic example is the reburial of the Sanctuary devoted to Isis, Osiris and Sarapis, that was discovered in 1937 at Dioikitirion street in Thessaloniki.¹⁵ The reburial as practice for 'rescuing' archaeology was compatible with the 1931 Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments according to which the reburial as a technique for rescuing archaeological remains, that 'are not subject to immediate restoration', could be an alternative solution.¹⁶

The years between 1939 and 1950s were again characterized by political instability and serious social and economical changes due to various wars (Second World War - 1940-1944, Greek Civil War - 1944 - 45 and 1946 - 49). During these years, classical antiquities regained their heroic dimensions, which consequently affected the public attitudes towards their preservation.¹⁷ This was the result of the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas (1936 - 1941) known as the 'Third Hellenic Civilization' (implying that the two previous civilizations were the ancient Greek and the Byzantine).¹⁸ As a result, there was an ideological basis on which the protection of archaeological heritage could be based. The development also of tourism in the late 1950s and 1960s led to the construction of hotels and tourist infrastructure in big islands, a process, which brought about the discovery of important archaeological remains that were preserved *in situ*.¹⁹ This coincided with the 1956 Recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavation, adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation,²⁰ which emphasized the *in situ* preservation of monuments and the educational significance of archaeology.

3.3. 1960s-1980s: From *in situ* preservation to *in situ* presentation

The rapid urban development that started gradually in the late 1950s, continued during the 1960s and the 1970s unremittingly. During that period, the 'General Building

Law' allowed the construction of blocks of flats in the urban centres.²¹ The intensive construction resulted in the discovery of significant archaeological remains the rescue of which proved to be impossible due to the small number of archaeologists who served the Archaeological Service. However, some of the discovered remains were preserved *in situ* in the basements of blocks of flats. The main reason for *in situ* preservation was to secure archaeologists' accessibility to the ancient remains rather than to render the sites accessible to a broader public.

However, an exceptional intervention took place in 1978 in Serres (Northern Greece) where the local Ephorate of Antiquities preserved parts of the Byzantine fortification of the ancient city in the basement of a block of flats catering for both the conservation of the remains and its aesthetic enhancement.²² The 'Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities' undertook the appropriate conservation works and reconstructed a small part of the fortification. Afterwards, a supporting wall was constructed at the north side of the basement in order to form three levels from which the visitors could gain a view of the remains. There was also provision for the aesthetic presentation of the basement space by using different colours for different parts of the basement. This case reveals, to some extent, the international concern for rendering museums and archaeological sites accessible to 'everybody'.²³

Despite this exceptional example, most of the archaeological remains were destroyed during the construction of the blocks of flats. This was facilitated by the 1968 Statutory Decree and the 1975 Law according to which developers could undertake the construction of public works ignoring the presence of antiquities.²⁴

At international level, the destruction of archaeological remains during the development of public or private works was also a common problem in several European countries. This is clearly reflected in the 1968 'Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works'.²⁵ This recommendation provides guidelines for the preservation of cultural heritage in harmony with social and economical development, emphasising that cultural property can contribute to the social and economic development of countries and regions by promoting national and international tourism. It is this 'harmony' between the past and present that was the requirement of that period and which 'in situ museums' seemed to fulfil some years later.

The intensive construction of blocks of flats and the development of tourist infrastructure continued unremittingly during the 1980s. At the end of the 1980s, archaeologists were greatly interested in rendering the *in situ* preserved remains in the basements of modern buildings or beneath streets visible to pedestrians.²⁶ A

¹¹ Πάντος 2001.

¹² Βελένη 1993: 96.

¹³ Βελένη 1993: 96.

¹⁴ Βελένη 1993: 95.

¹⁵ Αποστολάκης 2003; Βελένη 1993: 97.

¹⁶ Iamandi 1997.

¹⁷ Ιωαννίδης 1988.

¹⁸ Ιωαννίδης 1988.

¹⁹ Μαλλούχου-Tufano 2000.

²⁰ UNESCO 1956.

²¹ Βελένη 1993: 98.

²² Μπακιρτζής 1978: 316.

²³ UNESCO 1960.

²⁴ Πετράκος 1982: 26.

²⁵ UNESCO 1968.

²⁶ Χριστοδουλάκος 1993: 472.

characteristic example is the *in situ* preservation of a monumental Hellenistic water pipe in the basement of a hotel at Rhodes, an island in eastern Greece, built at the location of a former beer brewery. The remains were covered with a heavy concrete slab that functioned at the same time as a pavement for pedestrians. The slab was covered by glass bricks that allowed the sunlight to penetrate.²⁷ Another characteristic example derives from Chania, Western Crete, where a part of a Minoan lustral basin with very well preserved wall paintings was preserved *in situ* beneath two blocks of flats. The pedestrians are able to gain a view towards the remains through an opening from the street. The basement is also accessible through a staircase accessed from the street.²⁸ These examples reveal a change in the management of archaeological remains that are found during the construction of modern buildings in Greece. The tendency to constitute the underground remains visible to a broader audience is mainly an attempt to render archaeological heritage a common heritage for everyone. Occasionally, this is also used as a way of convincing the local community of the significance of their local archaeology and, therefore, ensuring the collaboration of landowners, in case significant remains are recovered during the construction of their properties.

This policy again is influenced by the international heritage management policy that emphasises the importance of involving local people in the protection of archaeological heritage.²⁹ At national level, the 'General Building Law' changed in 1985³⁰ forcing town-planners to request permission from the Archaeological Greek Service.

3.4. 1990s – 2005: From *in situ* presentation to *in situ* enhancement

The creation of 'in situ museums' was established as a common practice in Greece during the 1990s as a result of the various major public works and the changes in heritage management principles regarding the enhancement of archaeological heritage.

Both the 1990 'Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage'³¹ and the 1992 'European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe'³² stress the significance of *in situ* preservation and accessibility to the public. The international principles affected the recent archaeological law in Greece according to which, the owners of an 'immovable monument' or the landowners in the property of which immovable remains are preserved *in situ* are obliged to collaborate with the Archaeological Service and follow the instructions regarding the preservation, enhancement and the protection of the monument.³³

One of the first examples of 'in situ museums' is the archaeological museum in Vergina, Northern Greece (fig.1). The museum is a subterranean structure that has externally the appearance of an earth mound, which was covering initially the tombs. It actually replaced the initial shelter that was mainly aiming to preserve the movable and immovable finds discovered by the archaeologist Manolis Andronikos rather than to render the site accessible to the public. In the light of the new principles in heritage management, the construction of an 'in situ museum' that could allow both visitor access and preservation of the site proved to be essential. The current museum structure was designed in 1993 by the Greek architect J. Dimakopoulos, aiming to protect the ancient monuments by maintaining a constant temperature and humidity required for the preservation of the remains, which at the same time was suitable for visitors (fig.1).³⁴ In the museum, finds from the Royal tombs are exhibited while the cult place of the kings, the collapsed 'heroon', is one of the most significant displays (fig.2). This museum fulfills the basic principles regarding the *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains in a contemporary context since not only the architecture of the museum building is distinctive and close to the original setting of the Royal tombs but also it successfully provides the balance between preservation and visitor access.

Another early example of 'in situ museum' is the 'Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art' in Thessaloniki. During construction works for the extension of the museum building in 1996, an important ancient settlement and cemetery were discovered. The most important find was considered to be a part of a paved road in the middle of which there is a gutter for the drainage of waters. The ancient road was considered of particular historical and topographical significance since it constitutes a unique find of the road system of the ancient city of Thessaloniki. Therefore, the road is preserved *in situ* in the basement of the museum and is presented as an integral part of the museum exhibitions.³⁵

The above examples inspired archaeologists in Athens to enhance in an innovative way the most significant archaeological remains discovered during the construction of the Metropolitan Railway in 1990. The idea was to display objects and archaeological remains in the 'Metro' stations aiming to inform people about the history of the city. Most of the movable objects as well as the stratigraphy of a part of the ancient city are replicas (figs. 3,4) with the exception of the 'Evangelismos Station' where the archaeological remains are original (fig.5). The case study of the 'Metro' stations constitute an intermediate stage between a small-scale archaeological site which is preserved *in situ* and a proper 'in situ museum' that displays movable objects in association with the architectural remains aiming to contextualize the exhibition.

This innovative way of presenting archaeological remains in historic-urban centers affected the policy taken in the

²⁷ Δρελιώση and Φιλήμονος 1993: 439.

²⁸ Χριστοδουλάκος 1993: 472-73.

²⁹ ICOMOS 1999; Truscott and Young 2000.

³⁰ Πάντος 2001.

³¹ ICOMOS 1990.

³² Council of Europe 1992.

³³ Σκουρή and Τροβά 2003: 113-23.

³⁴ Dimakopoulos 1997; Hellenic Ministry of Culture 1996.

³⁵ Τσιμπιδου-Αυλωνίτη 1996: 427.

case of the 'in situ museum' at Naxos, an island in Eastern Greece (fig.6). The museum emerged when a significant archaeological site was discovered during the modulation of the central square of 'Mitropolis' undertaken by the Municipality of Naxos and the Hellenic Organization of Tourism in the 1980s. While the initial plan was to construct a shelter for the protection of the archaeological site, the final decision was the construction of an 'in situ museum'³⁶ (fig.6). The museum displays not only immovable architectural remains covering a period from prehistoric until Roman times but also replicas of movable objects presented exactly as they were found (fig.7-8). This example reveals the attempts of archaeologists to contextualise the discovered movable finds in their original setting by displaying them in association with the immovable architectural remains. What really matters is the contextualisation of the objects even if they are replicas. This proves that contextualisation in the museums of the 21st century does not necessarily presuppose the authenticity of the displayed objects aiming to cause visitors' admiration of the 'aesthetic' of the 'genuine'. The aim is to make visitors understand the use and meaning of the objects and displays in their real context. This approach affected the treatment of archaeological remains discovered during the construction of modern buildings in Athens. A typical example is the National Bank of Greece, at Aioulou street, in the basement of which, the 'Acharnikai Gates' of the ancient fortification are preserved *in situ* and are visible to pedestrians (fig.9).³⁷ An informative panel explains briefly the history of the excavations and the fortification. Opposite the bank the remains of the continuation of the fortification and of the water pipe are also preserved *in situ* beneath pyramidal, transparent protective shelters.

Two years later, in 2004, parts of the ancient fortification of the city were revealed during the restoration and expansion of the 'Benaki Museum for the Islamic Art' in Athens, which are preserved *in situ* in the basement of the museum.³⁸ Their *in situ* preservation required the modification of the initial design building eight times.³⁹ This shows that *in situ* preservation can be particularly costly and time consuming and therefore the implementation of such projects might be a difficult task when funding is limited. Similar problems occurred in the case of the 'Monastiraki Metro station' during the construction of which (1983-2001) a section of the riverbed casing, dating to the Second century AD, of the well-known 'Iridanos' river, was revealed along with Classical structures on both sides of the riverbank (fig.10). The riverbed was considered particularly significant since its discovery contributed to the identification of an additional point of the river's course, which has its source on 'Lycabetus' Hill. Due to its significance, there is the intention to present the 'Iridanos' riverbeds to the visitors through a glass, next to

the platforms. Although, initially there was the intention to show the flow of the river, a flood of the river in the 'Monastiraki' station due to a strong rainfall, the initial plans had to change.⁴⁰ This again shows how visitor access, *in situ* preservation, conservation and required cost clash with each other.

The controversy can be even more difficult to resolve when values of different involved stakeholders contradict with each, as in the case of the New Acropolis Museum, the construction of which is still under way. In this example the discovery of a significant Late Byzantine archaeological site raised or cultivated already existing conflicts from different parties at national, local and international levels including archaeologists, architects, citizens and local societies who opposed the construction of the museum due to the destruction of the archaeological remains.⁴¹ As a result, the decision was to build a museum building that could integrate in its basement the archaeological remains and present them to the public.⁴²

Conclusions

'In situ museums' represent the shift in heritage management policy from conservation of archaeological remains to their presentation and enhancement encouraging also the involvement of local communities and people. Moreover, 'in situ museums' constitute an innovative way of integrating the past into the present, bridging the 'romanticism' or 'nostalgia' for the past with the contemporary, usually densely inhabited, historic-urban centers. In addition, 'in situ museums' can function as a compromise between developers, landowners and archaeologists as in the case of the New Acropolis Museum. In view of this, 'in situ museums' can achieve the balance between the rapid urban development and the preservation and enhancement of archaeological sites. Furthermore, 'in situ museums' emphasise the contextualisation of objects in their context regardless of the authenticity of the remains and objects, as in the case of Naxos. Although, the integration of original objects in their original setting is ideal, conservation problems have to be in balance with visitor access issues, as in the case of the Vergina museum or the 'Monastiraki Metro Station'. This might cause internal conflicts when dilemmas deriving from prioritizing conservation or visitor access occur. Therefore, recognizing the significance of 'in situ museums' as a practice that balances the requirements of the present development and the preservation of the past, specific strategies are required to be developed in order to prevent or resolve potential problems that might occur during the implementation of these projects.

³⁶ Kouvela-Panagiotatou 2000; Μικελάκης 2002b: 20.

³⁷ Μικελάκης 2002a: 25.

³⁸ Κατημερτζή 2004a.

³⁹ Θέριμου 2002; Κατημερτζή 2004b.

⁴⁰ Kontrarou and Rassia 2002b.

⁴¹ Fouseki 2002.

⁴² Kontrarou and Rassia 2002; Χαρισσοπούλου 2003.

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Fig. 3: Reconstruction of the stratigraphy of the ancient road I, 'Acropolis Metro Station', Athens (photo: K. Fouseki, February 2004)



Fig. 4: Display showcases, 'Syntagma Metro Station', Athens (photo: K. Fouseki, September 2004)



Fig. 1 Facade of the 'Vergina' 'in situ museum' (Hellenic Ministry of Culture 1996: www.culture.gr)



Fig. 2: Interior view of the collapsed 'heroon', Vergina, North Greece (Hellenic Ministry of Culture 1996: www.culture.gr)



Fig. 5: Ancient kiln preserved *in situ*, 'Evangelismos Metro Station', Athens (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005: <http://www.mfa.gr/>).



Fig.6: Archaeological 'in situ museum' of Naxos, Greece (Hellenic Ministry of Culture 2001b:www.culture.gr)



Fig. 7: Offering funeral tables, Naxos, Greece (photo: K. Fouseki, August 2004)



Fig. 8: Mycenaean ceramic workshop, Naxos, Greece (photo: K. Fouseki, August 2004)



Fig. 9: Part of the fortification in the basement of National Bank, Aiolou street, Athens (photo: K. Fouseki, August 2004)

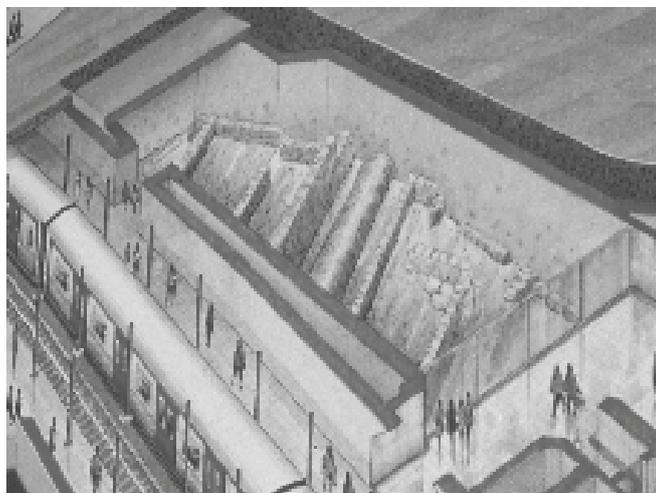


Fig.10: Panel displayed in the 'Monastiraki Station' that shows the 'Iridanos' riverbed remains preserved *in situ* (photo: K. Fouseki, August 2004)