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THE BYZANTINE MUSEUM OF DIDYMOTEICHON: ITS PERMANENT EXHIBITION (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

This presentation focuses on the concept and architectural design of the permanent exhibition of the Byzantine Museum of Didymoteichon. The building of the Museum was finished in 2009, whereas the related museological and museographical studies were completed and approved at the end of 2010. It is expected that the Museum will open to the public in approximately three years.

Didymoteichon is located on the Erythropotamos River, a tributary of the Evros River (*Meriç* in Turkish, *Maritsa* in Slavic), which, after the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), has turned from a vital thoroughfare to a border zone. Today, the city is the biggest extant Byzantine city of Thrace, a territory which has, in the recent decades, suffered from severe demographical and financial decline. The existence of a public Byzantine museum, on the borders of Thrace, which will exemplify the presence and the role, not only of Didymoteichon, but of the entire Thrace during Byzantine times, will serve the need of the representation of this part of Greek mainland. In addition, it will cast light on the Byzantine history of Thrace, which is virtually unknown even to its present inhabitants. Last but not least, the Museum, when it opens, will contribute decisively to the cultural and financial regeneration of the area.

The Museum exhibits are approximately 400 and are mostly finds from the excavations undertaken by the Hellenic Archaeological Service in the area of Thrace during the last 25 years. Their greatest number derives from the city of Didymoteichon and the area of Western Evros, whereas fewer but significant exhibits have been unearthed from the rest of Thrace. The exhibits date from Roman to Post Byzantine times¹ (the). It is self-evident that the greatest number of the exhibits represents Byzantine times.

The main exhibition narrative unfolds around the bi-pole Thrace-Didymoteichon. On the one hand, it aspires to help the visitor understand the post 330 A.D. transformation of the territory of Thrace to the epicenter and heart of the

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¹ Post Byzantine period coincides with the period of Ottoman Rule.

thousand-year-old Byzantine empire and of the successive Ottoman one. On the other hand, the exhibition seeks to exemplify the dual character of Didymoteichon as the bulwark of Thrace and as a shield for the protection of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, which was in a breath's distance from the twin-walled city, as the name of Didymoteichon implies. In this context, the exhibition explores the seminal importance of Thrace in the Byzantine Empire and the network of land, river and sea routes, which connected this byzantine *theme* with the most important cities of the Balkans (namely, Stenimachos, Tyrnovo, Philipoupolis, Adrianoupolis, Constantinople and Thessaloniki). Furthermore, the exhibition concept focuses on the occasional –and, certainly, not accidental, operation of Didymoteichon as capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires and temporary residence or retreat of many famous Byzantines, Ottomans and Europeans. The exhibition narrative of the Museum will cover 400 sq.m. and will occupy the two parallel floors of the Museum².

Due to the consistency of the population and the presence of various ethnic and religious groups in Didymoteichon as well as in Thrace, the exhibition narrative will present certain aspects of the multiculturalism and, thus, incorporate elements of interculturalism, which are mainly related to the life and pursuits of the aforementioned groups during modern times. In this way, the Museum seeks to become a point of reference in the daily life of all the inhabitants of Thrace (559 words).

THE LAY-OUT OF THE EXHIBITION NARRATIVE

A. Thrace, a territory next to the capital of two empires

A1. The key position of thrace, parameter for its spacial organisation

A2. Hommage to the eminent people of didymoteichon and thrace

B. Didymoteichon, the focal point of thrace

B1. The lay out of the city in byzantine and post byzantine times

B2. Didymoteichon and thrace from the end of the 19th c. Through today

B3. Life in the city during the byzantine and postbyzantine periods

C. The relation of the people of thrace with the hellenic archaeological service

C1. Voluntarily handing of archaeological finds over to the archaeological service

C2. Confiscation of archaeological finds

C3. The arcaheological research in thrace

² The lay out of the exhibition concept is attached below.