

The exhibition "Myrtis: Face to Face with the past"

It is a traveling exhibition designed to be transported and assembled in suitable places of reception, in Greece and abroad



The aim of this exhibition is to present to the public all stages of the course followed for the reconstruction of Myrtis' face, starting with the archeological excavation of a mass grave in the ancient cemetery of Kerameikos, through the study of the skeletal material it contained –in order to determine the disease that caused the death of 50.000 Athenians during the first phase of the Peloponnesian War and became known as “the plague of Athens”–, and ending up to the reconstruction of the face of an 11 year-old victim of the plague

Moreover, the exhibition highlights on the results of the research on genetic material taken from the pulp of the teeth of three skulls from the mass burial, which reveal the possible cause that, alone or in combination with other factors, caused the plague of Athens of the 5th century B.C. killing one third of its population and also the leader of the Athenian Democracy, Pericles.

At the same time, the interdisciplinary collaboration for the study of archaeological skeletal material is presented, on the occasion of the reconstruction of the skull of Myrtis.

In 1994-1995, during works for the construction of the new Athens' metro in the historical area of Kerameikos, where lies the ancient cemetery of Athens, the archaeological excavation brought to light a common grave dating back to the time of the notorious Plague of Athens (430-426 B.C.) that killed Pericles and decimated the Athenians.



The grave contained skeletal remains of some 150 people, both children and adults, and among them the skull of an eleven year-old girl, which retained both deciduous and permanent teeth, a characteristic typical of her age.

Thus, the idea of reconstructing the head and face of an ancient child -who was given the ancient name Myrtis- occurred, as well as its presentation to the general public in a relevant exhibition.

A lot of thematic exhibitions have been organized, and even more referring to a specific science or research area. It is the first time, however, that an exhibition highlights on the significance of inter-disciplinary research and cooperation. In this exhibition, in addition to the impressive achievement of bringing back to life the face of an ancient child, we also want to show the importance of taking advantage of modern technology, as well as cooperating with many disciplines towards a common goal. Greek, French and Swedish scientists, technicians and artists have shared their knowledge and experience for the best possible approach of our theme. For the first time the “present meets the past” in such a vivid way.

The exhibition consists of “islets” that highlight and develop the material from the excavation of Kerameikos, and aims to show the significance of human remains in research programs of various scientific fields, in our case, archaeology, medicine, anthropology, forensics, computed modeling et.c., and in the extraction of reliable results.

The first presents the excavation on Kerameikos and the unearthing of Myrtis’ skull. The second focuses on the medical research in Greece and France, in order to specify the pathogenic agent responsible for the Plague of Athens. The third introduces the step by step reconstruction of the ancient face and its techniques.

Finally, on a last turning, the visitor of the exhibition comes face to face with the reconstructed Myrtis.



Exhibition

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