

"5 years with Myrtis" conference at the Acropolis Museum

The conference "5 years with Myrtis" held on the five-year anniversary since the reconstruction of the 11-year-old 'Myrtis', the girl that put a face to distant antiquity, will take place on May 13 at the Acropolis museum.

The name 'Myrtis' was given to her by scientists that worked on the reconstruction of her features. Following her 'resurrection' nearly 2,500 years after she died of typhoid fever - the plague that also struck down the statesman Pericles and one third of all Athenians at that time - she was now also made a "Millenium Friend" and her picture posted on a website supporting the UN Millenium Goals as a message to the world about disease prevention. Live streaming of the conference will be available at ANA-MPA website. "My death was inevitable.

In the 5th century BC we had neither the knowledge nor the means to fight deadly illnesses. However, you, the people of the 21st century, have no excuse. You possess all the necessary means and resources to save the lives of millions of people.

To save the lives of millions of children like me who are dying of preventable and curable diseases. 2,500 years after my death, I hope that my message will engage and inspire more people to work and make the Millennium Development Goals a reality," a letter posted next to her picture says. Her bones were discovered in 1994-1995, in a mass grave with another 150 bodies, during work to build the metro station in Kerameikos. Her skull was in an unusually good condition and this inspired Professor Papagrigorakis to enlist the help of specialist scientists from Sweden to recreate her features, using the 'Manchester' facial reconstruction technique.

The final result, wearing a linen dress made especially for the purpose by Greek fashion designer Sophia Kokosalaki based on images of clothing styles of that time, forms the backbone of an exhibition that explores both the various stages of a facial reconstruction. It also exhibits the finds uncovered by archaeologists at Kerameikos, which date around 430-426 B.C. and are linked with the plague that contributed to Athens' defeat from Sparta during the Peloponnesian

Wars. Scientists decided to give 'Myrtis' brown eyes and brown hair, arranged in a Classical era style, like the majority of Athenians at that time but stressed that her true colours could only be discovered by expensive DNA analysis that has not yet been carried out.

DNA analysis techniques have confirmed, however, that Myrtis and two other bodies in the mass grave had died of typhoid fever, confirming theories about the historic plague. When orthodontics professor Manolis Papagrigorakis, the man who first conceived the project of reconstructing Myrtis, was asked how much the ancient Greeks resemble to modern Greeks, he replied: "My study at the University of Bergen in Norway showed that the skull of modern Greeks is exactly the same, statistically, while the cerebral skull has changed, this is normal and this is how it needed to be developed ... due to the human evolution." According to the World Health Organization, 500,000-700,000 people still die from typhoid fever every year and almost nine million children under the age of five die from diseases that can be prevented and cured. The conference is held under the auspices of the University of Athens, the Ministry of Research and Innovation, the UN and the Norwegian Embassy in Athens.



