



International Association of Byzantine Studies

To:

Mr Kyriakos Mitsotakis,
Prime Minister, Hellenic Republic

cc. Dr Lina Mendoni, Ministry of Culture, Hellenic Republic

Tuesday April 21st, 2020

Dear Sir,

I write in my capacity as President of the *International Association of Byzantine Studies* (AIEB) and on behalf of all our members with regard to the current plans for construction of the Venizelou station in Thessaloniki. The AIEB is the representative organization for all scholars of Byzantine history, culture and civilization in some 40+ countries worldwide, and it is with deep concern that we have been observing the changing plans for the important antiquities and archaeological materials excavated in the course of preparing the construction of the metro station. After initial concerns that the antiquities and the priceless scientific information they contain would be damaged, we were delighted to see the ratification in 2015 of the alternative plans to develop the station while leaving the antiquities intact. It is, in consequence, with the greatest disappointment that we note the 2019 order from you, Prime Minister, to remove and then replace the material.

As specialists in the field of Byzantine Studies we wish to emphasise the high level of damage that will result from moving the antiquities, and to note that this is not simply a case of damage to the physical material itself, but also to the context in which it is located, which is in itself the source of a potentially vast amount of crucially important information, derived less by traditional 'archaeological' methods than by modern scientific processes of collecting and analyzing data.

As our archaeological colleagues note in the letter accompanying this appeal, this is not simply a question of the discovery of antiquities in a remarkable state of preservation; they and the context

in which they are found constitute an unparalleled and unique example of Byzantine urban space in its original setting – a cultural as well as a scientific jewel. Greece has an outstanding reputation globally for the care and concern it has always invested in its archaeological and cultural heritage. It would be a tragedy to jeopardise this well-earned reputation by squandering the treasure of the Thessaloniki material and data through an unnecessarily hasty construction project. Given the existence of a viable plan that meets local and national infrastructure needs and that has met with approval both nationally and internationally, it must appear peculiarly short-sighted of any government to ignore it, along with the costs to national and international heritage that this would entail.

In line with the position outlined by Europa Nostra and many other non-governmental bodies, professional agencies and individuals, I write therefore to urge you, Prime Minister, and through you the government of the Hellenic Republic, to reconsider this decision as a matter of urgency.

With respect, your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Haldon', with a long, sweeping underline stroke extending to the right.

Prof. John F. Haldon
President, Association Internationale des Études Byzantines

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