READING ATHENS – *A mosaic-city of cultures*

1. **MONASTIRAKI SQUARE**: the **CHURCH OF THE PANTANASSA** (17th c.) – the **TZISDARAKIS MOSQUE** (1759) – the **ELECTRIC RAILWAY STATION** (1895) – *Introduction and core ... idea*

The neoclassical electric railway station that has been renovated, so as to provide access to the Metro also, takes us to the heart of the city. In the square, which has become a mosaic of cultures, the post-byzantine barrel-vaulted basilica of the Dormition of the Virgin that used to be the katholikon of a convent, which was eventually reduced from the ‘Big Monastery’ - as it was called - to the small … ‘Monastiraki’, coexists with the Muslim sanctuary with the graceful porch. The ‘Mosque of the Lower Market’ or of the ‘Lower Fountain’, which was commissioned by the Turkish voevoda Tzisdarakis made of building material coming from ancient structures houses today the annex of the Museum of Greek Folk Art.

*Take a closer look at*

*The modern-day square does not have a fountain, yet water still flows from the bed of Eridanos River that streamed across the ancient city.*

**AVISSINIAS SQUARE – Parallel con-texts**

Avissinas Square, where the flea market or ‘yousouroum’ still takes place every Sunday, lies at the end of Hephaestus Street. The mosaic of Athens consists of fragments of many diverse cultures...

2. The **LIBRARY OF HADRIAN** (132 A.D.) – *A palimpsest*

Established by the philhellene Emperor, this lavish complex with the Corinthian facade was rectangular in plan and contained a peristyle court. The central building included storage facilities for scrolls, reading rooms and amphitheatres. Over the centuries the complex served many additional purposes that entailed equally significant usage, whereas other buildings were later incorporated in its structure; these included: the magnificent Tetraconch, which was possibly the first cathedral of Athens, the ‘Megali Panagia’ basilica that was built on the site of...
the courtyard and replaced the tetraconch church, the seat of the voevoda and the ‘Upper Market’ of latter-day Athens.

*Take a closer look at the HAGIOS ASOMATOS ‘ON THE STEPS’ CHURCH*

Next to the ancient propylon, a little church dedicated to Archangel Michael dating back to the 10th-11th century has nestled. Let’s uncover its evidence! Amongst the landmarks in the vicinity of the city’s market with the weekly bazaar were the ‘Clock Tower of the Winds’ and the ‘Upper Fountain’ to the east.

3 ANCIENT AGORA: the STOA OF ATTALOS (158-138 B.C.) – *A significant … collection, a famous work.*

From the 6th century B.C. onwards administration buildings, shrines, altars, fountain houses and, of course, stores and workshops were gradually clustered around a large public square, thereby establishing the economic, political, social and religious centre of the city. Initially shops consisted in open-air stalls, but during the Hellenistic period they are integrated into stoae, the most prominent example of which was the sumptuous two-storey edifice with the colonnades of different orders that King Attalos of Pergamon had it built as gift to the city of Athens. The building was also a meeting place and a walkway. Today it houses the Museum of the Ancient Agora.

*Between the lines and beyond words*

Next to the ‘rubble’ of the majority of buildings surviving in the Ancient Agora, the Stoa of Attalos is the one and only fully reconstructed ancient edifice that entices us into a debate on the implications of architectural heritage restoration and its standards …

*Take a closer look at the PANATHENAIC WAY*

The stoa offered the best view of the Panathenaic procession that made its way through the most significant street cutting across the Agora diagonally. Before the site was excavated it comprised a lively neighbourhood of the old city. The planting of trees and vegetation that typified the landscape of Attica has contributed to its present-day form.
4 The **CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES OF SOLAKI** (beginning of 11th c., later additions) and **POLYGNOTOU STREET**: the **‘KOLETTIS MANSION’** (1860) – *Ingenious … texts with perspective*

One of the most engaging byzantine monuments in Athens is the church of the Holy Apostles that combines creatively the domed cross-in-square type with a pericentric tetraconch structure. Some of the ceramic embellishments on its masonry suggest Islamic influences. An unparallel setting reveals itself behind the later mansions of the little street stretching over the Rizokastro enclosure. The house with the niche in the attic that holds a terracotta statue and the large garden is a distinctive edifice.

5 The **ROMAN AGORA** (28 B.C.) and the **GATE OF ATHENA ARCHEGETIS** (10-11 A.D.) – *Austere form and timeless value*

During the Roman period, the city’s trading was relocated to the ‘Market of Caesar and Augustus’. The complex was the first marketplace of the city with stores and workshops being contained within the peristyle that surrounded a large Ionic quadrangle. The commercial centre of Athens occupied the vicinity until the end of the 19th century. Because the annual wheat market (‘Staropazaro’) that traded wheat and oil took place on the site, the surviving Doric propylon of Athena Archegetis was named … ‘Pazaroporta’.

*Take a closer look at POIKILIS STREET*

*The street follows the trails of its ancient predecessor that was flanked by arcades and linked the Roman with the Ancient Agora.*

6 The **FETIHIYE MOSQUE** (17th c.) – *‘A chronicle of life’*

Also known as the ‘Staropazaro Mosque’, it is one of the oldest and most beautiful Ottoman buildings of the city that was associated in the past with Mehmed the Conqueror. It replaced a byzantine basilica, which had been converted into a mosque. The building has multiple domes and, in the exposed infill material of its masonry, fragments of earlier structures are still in evidence. It has had a long history for it served as a Catholic church, a school, a barracks, a prison, a barn and a storeroom for antiquities. Today its restoration is underway and the monument will soon be open to the public.
7 AERIDON SQUARE: the HOROLOGION OF KYRRISTOS (mid-1st c. B.C.), the MADRASAH, (1721) and the MUSEUM OF GREEK FOLK MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS (Stamatis Kleanthis, 1840-50) – Something for every taste

The octagonal ‘Tower of the Winds’ with the personifications of the winds carved in relief is closely associated with the market and its activities. The pioneering weather station built by Andronikos of Cyrrhus was equipped with a water clock, a sundial and a wind vane; the edifice was converted into a Christian baptistery and was later integrated within a Dervish tekke. Across the street the only surviving evidence of the Muslim madrasah seminary that was situated there is the grassy rubble of its doorway, which is in sharp contrast with the fully restored mansion dating back to Otto’s reign that matches qualities of vernacular and neoclassical architecture.

Take a closer look at
A much needed … component of the Roman Agora was public convenience or else the Vespasianae, as it was called after the emperor who ... instigated it.

The ‘BATH-HOUSE OF THE WINDS’ – Parallel con-texts
The ‘hamam of Abid Efendi’, the only surviving public bath-house in the city takes us back to the ... private life of Ottoman Athens. It operated until fairly recently!

8 AIOLOU STREET and HOTEL ‘AIOLOS’ (Stamatis Kleanthis, 1835-7) – Business texts ... for an international audience
The first street that was planned in the new capital started from the Tower of the Winds and preserves even today its … 19th century eminence as well as many of the buildings of that time; edifices typically contained stores on the ground floor, whereas the upper storey was designed as residence or was intended for other uses. As expected, the street was the hub of the city’s ‘general trade’ and many hotels were situated in the locality. The two-storey Hotel Aiolos with its simple exterior is the first building originally intended for this purpose.
DIMOPRATIRIOU SQUARE and ERMOU & AIOLOU INTERSECTION – Famous lines

Known initially as the ‘Fountain Square’ this small public place was often the site of outdoor auctions, second-hand bazaars and folk entertainment. War veterans, but also … prison inmates were amongst the regulars of the traditional ‘oriental’ cafés. The famous ‘Oraia Hellas’ café at the intersection of the two historic streets was an opulent male hangout and a nucleus of the city’s social and political life. The busiest crossroads of Athens in Otto’s years was also the starting point of the horse-drawn buses that traveled to Piraeus.

Take a closer look at PANDROSOU STREET
The pedestrian street that once linked the Lower with the Upper Market preserves the aura of old Athens...

Between the lines and beyond words
The square is still full of cafés; traditional cafés as opposed to modern coffee bars: what is different in today’s customers and the role these ‘shrines’ are now called upon to play?

The CHURCH OF PANAGIA KAPRIKAREA (mid-11th c., 12th additions) – ‘By the twists of time’
Built over the ruins of an ancient temple, this elegant byzantine church dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin Mary was seriously threatened when it was found amidst the axis of one of the arteries that shaped the historic triangle of the new capital, but fortuitously it has survived intact. The church was initially a cross-in-square structure with Athenian dome, but an exonarthex and a chapel were later added. There have been a number of different (mis)interpretations concerning its unusual name, whereas the horseshoe-shaped arch over the doorway is symptomatic of Islamic influences.

Take a closer look at
We have all stumbled upon the church before, but how many of us have actually taken a closer look at the wall paintings in its interior. Some of them bear the signature of a Greek artist who was a painter as well as an author.*
ERMOU STREET: the KONIARI-MELA ARCADE (1883) and the PYRROS ARCADE (1884-5) – Excellent taste and ‘connective’ texts

The name of the street is revealing of the role it has played so far. The part facing Syntagma Square has always been more refined with shops surrounded by striking mansions and hotels. The neighbouring palace and the cathedral embodied the political and religious authority of the country respectively. As for the two glass-covered ground floor ‘passageways’, which we hastily pass by, they were the first European-like shopping arcades in Athens!

Between the lines and beyond words

How did the recent pedestrianization affect the modern ‘face’ of Ermou Street?

In our attempt to define the character of streets, buildings, public spaces, even of whole districts of Athens we will get better acquainted with the city...

CHURCH OF HAGIA EIRINI (Lysandros Kaftantzoglou, 1847-92) and HAGIAS EIRINIS SQUARE – Holy texts and pleasurable ... contexts

The church replaced a smaller byzantine edifice that served as the first cathedral right after the liberation of the city. The new building is a three-aisled domed basilica with two belfries that makes effective use of Renaissance and byzantine forms, which nonetheless result in a structure of neoclassical style. Some flower shops, remnants of the open-air flower and seed market situated in the square, which has turned lately into a trendy leisure hub, live on. Aromas and scents compete with each other as they try to tempt us into a break from the study of the city.

Take a closer look at HOTEL BYRON

The cosmopolitan hotel that was built in the 1830s housed even the first ... weather station of the country! The first autonomous restaurant that changed the culinary map of Athens operated in the vicinity. The book of a city stimulates all our senses.

Interpretation ‘keys’

Reference is made to Photis Kontoglou