

Figure 4. Cover of the spring 2018 issue of the Makrygialos Middle School student newspaper. (Adapted from <https://blogs.sch.gr/germatas/archiv/eu/2018/04/04/20180404/20180404/>.)



Whereas the pandemic temporarily suspended in-person activities, it also stimulated experimentation with alternatives. The Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki—one of the major public museums and a cultural hub in the vibrant second-largest city of the country (Siefani et al. 2020)—created a series of highly successful digital events for participants of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life (Figure 6). Visitors were invited to draw inspiration from the collections of the museum and then tap

into their own creativity to express themselves and make connections, despite social distancing. Playful projects for families included making origami birds, paper models of ancient dolls, figurines of dough, and theater masks and costumes; drawing prohibitive artifacts; and making leaf collages of wreaths in imitation of ancient gold originals. Role-play took children on a trip back to a time of pandemic in 165 CE in ancient Thessaloniki (Koukouvou forthcoming).



Figure 5. Students of the Makrygialos Middle School report on their visit to the Makrygialos Archaeological Collection. (Photograph courtesy of Athena A. Thanasiadou.)

On offer to broader audiences were creative comparisons between modern and ancient objects—*Everything Changes in Time and All Remains the Same*—literary calligrams referencing a variety of shapes—*Poetry in the Shape of Things*—and creative writing inspired by ancient artifacts and names on inscriptions—*The Museum Has a Story to Tell, Yours!* Among the submitted calligrams from Greece and abroad were messages by elders to family members far away; remembrances of persons, places, and events (including an entry by an Afghan refugee); and ancient and modern poetry. Students participated collectively during remote learning. More than 250 short stories, in a variety of genres, imagined, transformed, and recreated ancient material. In various examples, a bone needle is inserted into a vaccine syringe; a clay lamp burns with a wish for deliverance; a teenage couple in love sees on their phone a figurine of Cupid and the Soul from their art class; a votive relief ear listens to confidences, prayers, and gossip; a gold ring inscribed “ΑΙΡΩΝ” (Iris) is a token of love, betrayal, or loss; stories from a student for battered women shine light on dark social issues (Galinski forthcoming).

Exiting the Tunnel

In 2021 Greece celebrated the bicentennial of the War of Independence from Ottoman rule. Major public museums paid tribute with large-scale exhibitions that were at once uplifting and nuanced.¹⁰ At the same time, Greece was looking ahead. The Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki invited public participation on the theme of the 2021 International Museum Day, *The Future of Museums: Reflection and Renewal*. The Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki launched the periodically renewable exhibition *New Entries/New Approaches*, with new arrivals or recently “revisited” artifacts from the storerooms. The National Archaeological Museum in Athens dedicated its 2021 “Exhibit of the Month” web event to *Faces and Identities*, a portrait gallery of famous and ordinary persons from antiquity and the recent past, each one with their own story to tell in the present.

10. For Istanbul, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, *These Are What We Fought For: Anticipation and the Greek War of Independence*, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, *In a House That Burns: On Antiquities and Memory*, Thessaloniki, Macedonia (1821–2021), and Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki, WLAG, *We Are All Greeks!*