A technological marvel

THE LEVENTIS Museum in Nicosia is shedding new light on ancient technology with its current exhibition on the Antikythera Mechanism.

Organised by the Cyprus Institute in collaboration with the Antikythera Mechanism Research Project, the exhibition features the first international presentation of the new working replica of the controversial device built by the Aristotle University research team.

The history of this impressive artefact begins in the middle of the 1st century BC, when a vessel loaded with works of art and other precious objects sank near the island of Antikythera, by the southern tip of the Peloponnese. About 2,000 years later, in the spring of 1900, two small boats crewed by sponge divers from the island of Symi discovered one of the greatest treasures of antiquity.

Along with about 100 sculpture pieces and various other objects recovered from the spot, a rusty assemblage of cogs and wheels resembling the innards of a very badly maintained grandfather clock were salvaged. An object such as this challenged conventional historical chronology, too complex to have been constructed during the same time period as the bronze statues and other objects discovered alongside it.

Devices with the level of complexity of the Antikythera mechanism would not appear again until the 12th century. It astonished the international community of experts on the ancient world, raising a myriad questions such as, 'When and by whom was it created?' What purpose did it serve?' and 'How did it look in its entirety?'

For decades, scientific investigation failed to yield much light and relied more on imagination than the facts. An x-ray of the mechanism, however, revealed it contained a sophisticated system of differential gears and today it is understood to be dedicated to astronomical phenomena and operates as a complex mechanical 'computer' which tracks the cycles of the solar system.

Built between 150 and 100BC, the Antikythera Mechanism was capable of highly accurate astronomical and calendar calculations. It estimated the exact position of the sun, the moon and possibly the planets in the sky. It also displayed the phases of the moon, predicted eclipses and determined the dates of the ancient Greek crown games (Stefanites). Its exterior and interior parts featured inscribed Greek text with astronomical, geographical and technical information.

It has been studied over the years since its discovery, and at various times scientists and archaeologists have attempted to replicate the device. But since 2001, a group of European scientists called the Antikythera Mechanism Research Project has utilised state-of-the-art technology both to decide definitively the purpose of the device and to build an accurate replica. This reproduction is a key feature of a travelling exhibition currently on display at the Leventis Museum. Following successful shows in Paphos and

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Limassol, the exhibition, which is open from Tuesday to Sunday and runs until February 12, hits the capital to give locals an insight into one of the most important archaeological artefacts ever found.
New technologies have significantly revised the study of this ancient computer. Novel approaches and techniques have permitted the reading of several new inscriptions and the detailed examination of the internal structure of its fragments. The close study of these valuable data, which remained unknown for over 2,100 years, allowed a new understanding of the functions and uses of this unique object.
The current exhibition features rich photographic and informative material on the Antikythera Mechanism as well as physical and digital models of the Mechanism which complement the presentation of the working replica of the Aristotle University team. The exhibition presents great educational interest for students. In addition, pedagogical activities, programmes and presentations will also be offered at the Leventis Museum.

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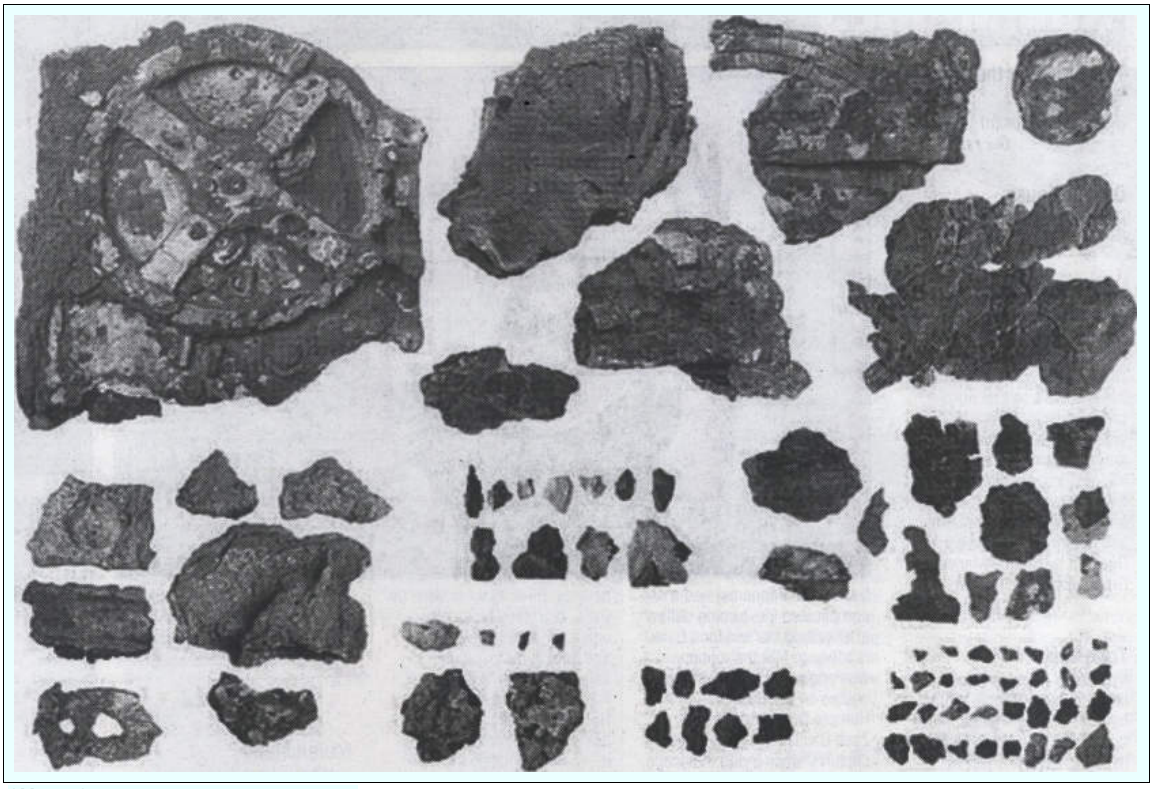

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