

**Egnatia and Venizelos streets, the Metro station:  
On the central crossroad of Thessaloniki through time.**

A street that crosses the city from East to West, ending at the main city gates - Chryse in the west and Kassandreotike to the east- is the main road axis of Thessaloniki from Roman times and up today. Along this road were built important public and private buildings, fountains, the triumphal arch of Emperor Galerius which was connecting his palace with the Rotunda and the Hippodrome. The Metro excavations are now revealing a monumental tetrapylon which was marking/defining the middle of the street and the very center of the city; there where it was intersected by a vertical street, nowadays known as Venizelos Street. The excavation for the Metro station revealed at the same spot a series of shops and workshops which were lining this street in Byzantine era. The commercial character of the road was constant through time until the 21st century, having been renamed in the meanwhile to Egnatia Street. Ioannis Caminiates, in his work on the Sack of Thessaloniki by the Saracens in the August of 904 AD clearly refers to the central role of the city's main street the Mese hodos, or leophoros (avenue). He mentions that big crowds were thronging, both locals and visitors seeking merchandise and commodities. The crowds were so big that counting the grains of the sand would be easier than counting the people who were crossing the market. Thessalonians were profiting from all these people and they were accumulating big treasures of gold, silver and precious stones; they had silk as in other cities had woolen fabrics, while other materials like bronze, iron, tin, lead products and glassware existed in such abundance that they were enough to build a new city. The real size of the commercial activity of this street becomes more evident through the description of the 12th-century satire Timarion, where it is noted that merchants from all over the world, namely Greeks, Bulgarians, Russians, Hungarians, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Gauls, Syrians and Egyptians, were streaming into the city especially for the fair of Saint Demetrios.

Furthermore, the Metro station excavation confirms what was known only from written sources: that the roofed sidewalks of these two streets, stoas, or emvoloi, were functional part of the market and that a considerable part of the commercial activity was taking place between and under the columns that were supporting them. Parts of these stoas were property of ecclesiastical institutions and noblemen who rented them either as independent shops, in fact venting benches, or as showcases of the actual shops behind them (provolai). Venizelos street retained this picture of these roofed- albeit now by timber or tents- sidewalks with open-air shops and benches until the early 20th century, thus illustrating the uninterrupted continuum in the use and function of space in the millennia of the city's life.









