

Athens awakes to an Olympian hangover

FROM JOHN CAHILL
IN ATHENS

AFTER a weekend party over the award of the 2004 Olympics, Athens will wake up today with a monumental bill in prospect.

The Greek capital is an inefficient, polluted city. A chronic shortage of money in a deficit-ridden economy has been holding up vital projects for decades. Analysts question where the Greeks are going to find the £2.2 billion needed to pay off the Olympic-sized costs and there is hardly any evidence that the financial aspect of the Games has been thought out.

The first priority is to modernise an obsolete public transport system, which the rival Romans hampered as the city's weakest link. The first trains in a new underground system are expected to be operating by the end of 1999, relieving a hopelessly inadequate rail service and overstretched bus network.

Thanks to the efforts of people such as Dimitris Avramopoulos, the city's Mayor, Athens has improved its appearance since the mid-1970s when Constantine Karamanlis, then Prime Minister, wondered aloud whether the only solution might be to "tear it all down and start again".

Mr Avramopoulos ensured that the Olympic infrastructure was 80 per cent complete by the end of last year. He is confident that the Games will be a "fitting testament to the renaissance of our city".

The biggest improvement, due to come on stream in 2000, is an international airport capable of handling 16 million passengers a year. The carrot of the Olympics was the main reason why the work passed through Greece's single red tape.

Not all Greeks want the fuss and bother and corruption of the Olympics. Some would readily revive another old suggestion by Mr Karamanlis — to strip the Games of their commercial elements and stage them permanently in the groves of ancient Olympia, where the highest prize was an olive wreath.



Empedocles: little of his work remains

Papyrus 'contains work of Greek writer'

BY RICHARD OWEN

A CONFERENCE in Sicily this week will hear evidence that a long-neglected papyrus is a "missing link" in the surviving writings of Empedocles, the fifth century BC Greek philosopher, physician and statesman who popularised the theory that all matter is made up of "four elements" — earth, water, air and fire.

The papyrus, dating from the 1st century BC, is of Egyptian origin and was acquired by the University of Strasbourg in 1904. It was recently rediscovered by a Belgian scholar, Alain Martin of Brussels University, who claims that it consists of 70 lines by Empedocles.

Although Empedocles was influential as a thinker, little of his writings have survived except in the form of quotations in the work of other authors such as Aristotle. Gabriele Giannantoni of La Sapienza University in Rome told *Il Messaggero* that the papyrus was "of extraordinary importance".

Empedocles was born on the Sicilian coast and, according to legend, jumped to his death in Mount Etna's volcanic crater trying to prove his divinity. A poet and philosopher — he developed the theory of the transmigration of souls — he is regarded as a founder of modern medicine.