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# Greeks battle over Neolithic fort at site of new airport

FROM JOHN CARR  
IN ATHENS

ACTIVISTS in the town of Spata, 12 miles east of Athens, have applied to Greece's highest court to halt work on a £1.2 billion international airport because a Neolithic fort will have to be destroyed.

The fort's remains were found just beneath the surface of the 160ft Tsangada Hill, which has to be levelled to make way for a runway. Last November, after a dispute with archaeologists, the Culture Ministry gave permission for the hill to be bulldozed for the new airport, which is due to open in 2000.

Spata Town Council says the ministry decision contravenes international conventions on the protection of historic relics. The airport site

is littered with Neolithic remains, and archaeologists are recording and photographing the site.

The project will also entail the removal of the tiny 15th-century church of St Peter, which stands at the place where work is due to start on the main terminal building this year. However, experts plan to lift the church, rich in frescoes, and move it by rail to a safe site near by.

Spata airport is expected to handle up to 600 flights a day and 15 million passengers a year, almost double the capacity of Athens airport. The airport has been planned for 20 years and building work started two years ago.

On the Greek island of Crete, archaeologists are resisting plans to build what is claimed to be the world's first purpose-built private international airport. The European Investment Bank and Greek Government intend to spend \$130 million (£80 million) on East Crete Airport, to be built over the remains of a 5,000-year-old settlement at Vasiliki, known for its unique mottled red pottery.

The project, which is due to start this summer, has 2,000 shareholders among local businesses.

