LETTER TO THE EDITOR

PANANEIO MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL: FROM THE INITIAL SHINE TO THE RUINS, A HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the era of Ottoman rule on the island of Crete, the growing urban population of the city of Heraklion needed a new health care facility. After the efforts of the Christian community and a large donation by the couple Pananos and Athena Theodoulaki, a hospital was built, which soon took the name Pananeio Municipal Hospital of Heraklion. For a period of 70 years, it was the place of treatment of the inhabitants of the city. This hospital echoed the concern of the Cretan State for the local residents. Today, time has left its mark and Pananeio awaits its future in ruins.

Keywords: Pananos Theodoulakis, State of Crete (Romanized: Kritiki Politeia), Municipality of Heraklion.

RéSUMÉ

Hôpital municipal de Pananeio: de l’éclat initial aux ruines, une vignette historique


Mots-clés: Pananos Theodoulakis, État de Crète (Romanisé: Kritiki Politeia), Municipalité d’Héraklion.

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INTRODUCTION

Before the city of Heraklion entered the 19th century, the “Public Institutions of the City of Heraklion” operated within it. These included the Christian Schools, the sacred temple of Agios Minas, and the Christian Hospital or Roman Spitalia. The Christian Hospital was the oldest civil hospital on the island of Crete, administered by a three-member committee elected by the associations, pertained the Heraklion Demogerontia (Council of Elders), with the current church Metropolitan serving as the president1-2. This hospital, dating back to 1669, served as both a Poorhouse and a Geriatric Hospital, contributing during the 19th century revolutions. In its courtyard, patients, warriors, and even dismembered bodies have been buried1,3. Despite the efforts of the Christian community at the time, the hospital was insufficient to meet the health and care needs of the population of Heraklion. From 1863, an effort began to find resources for the construction of a new institution. In 1992, Metropolitan Hierarch Timothy Kastrinogiannakis (Figure 1) initiated the effort with a thankful message, while in 1894, it was clarified that the amount of 500 pounds would be paid at the start of the work at the location called Petrichan Pasha, near the Gate (Retirata during Venetian rule, a refuge) of Bethlehem2,4-6.

To strengthen the effort, the couple Pananos and Athena Theodoulaki (Figure 2) had donated 2000 twenty-francs and were named by Metropolitan Kastrinogiannakis as great benefactors of the city. Thus, on the Sunday of All Saints, on May 28, the

Figure 1. Timotheus Kastrinogiannakis, Metropolitan of Crete, Bust, marble. Tribute of the family of Efthymios and Eleni Kastrinogiannis, Saint Menas, Heraklion, Crete, 1975.

Figure 2. Pananos and Athena Theodoulaki couple, portraits, 19th century, artist unknown.
cornerstone was laid. However, even though the construction had reached the roof, the Hellenic revolutions of 1896 and 1897 against Ottomans interrupted its completion. Finally, in 1900, during the period of the Cretan State (Romanized: Kritiki Politeia, Greek: Κρητική Πολιτεία), under the rule of High Commissioner Prince George of Greece and under the religious patronage of Metropolitan Eumenios Xiroudakis, the completion of the hospital resumed2,7.

**Pananeio Municipal Hospital: Finding its pace**

On February 10, 1903, the acceptance of the Hospital’s donation took place at the sacred temple of Agios Minas and the Holy Temple of Agios Panteleimon, while, at the same time, the inauguration ceremonies were also being conducted. The Hospital’s Brotherhood included notable figures of the time, specifically: a) Rifaat Afentakis, the Ottoman Mayor of the city of Heraklion, b) Aristidis Zafeiridis, a physician, c) Ioannis Hatzidakis, a physician and Curator of antiquities, d) Aristidis Stergianidis, a lawyer, and e) Fazil Bey Hatzifazilazade, the Ottoman official of the city (Figure 3)2,8.

The Pananeio Hospital (Greek: Πανάνειο) (Figure 4) begins its operation with challenges. Despite having the capacity for 50 beds, there were issues as there hadn’t been provision for its equipment, and the appropriate spatial arrangement for the surgical operating rooms had not been realized. Consequently,
a dispute arose between the Metropolis and the Municipality, while patients were being treated at the Ottoman Hospital in the Konakio Velis Pasha area, in exchange for a fee paid to the Ottoman Demogerontia. For those reasons, the Municipality requests financial assistance from the Metropolis for the construction of a surgical wing, but in response, the Metropolis offered stones, beams and lime. Following the Municipality's directive, the engineer K. Tsantirakis prepared a study for the construction of a building on the north side of Pananeio, costing 3234 drachmas of that era. Such challenges, not easily addressed by the Church, led the Hospital's Brotherhood to approach the Holy Metropolis in 1902 and draft a lease for the Hospital. A year later, the management committee of Agios Minas had transferred the ownership of the Hospital to the Municipality, a fact which remained until Pananeion’s merger with the Venizelio Hospital (a newest public hospital in the city of Heraklion).

Soon, the Prefecture approved a decision for hiring of the appropriate personnel. By an authoritative decree, the surgeon and ophthalmologist Savvas Savvakis (1859/1860-1934) was appointed as the director of the Surgical Department. Savvas Savvakis was born in Sellia in 1859. He studied medicine at the expense of the state and continued his postgraduate studies in Paris. After completing his studies, he was hired in 1884 at the Ophthalmic Institute of Athens as an assistant to the distinguished professor Andreas Anagnostakis. He eventually moved to Heraklion, Crete, where he engaged in politics. Later, returning to Paris, he specialized in surgery and played a significant role in the Pananeio Municipal Hospital. Vasileios Theiakakis (1872-1918) was appointed as the physician of the Pathological Department, and K. Xyniarakis, with a degree from the National University and a license from the latroscopy (Greek: ιατροσυνέδριο, the state core commission to approve health issues), became the first pharmacist. For the equipment of the surgical rooms, Savvakis went to Chania, where, with the support of royal physician E. Klark, he had selected the most prestigious surgical tools to be ordered from various European manufacturers.

In 1904, the regulations for the operation of the "Internal Regulations of the Municipal Hospital of Heraklion" were published, within which its name was referred to as the "Pananeio Municipal Hospital of Heraklion." The regulations explicitly stated that healthcare and provision of medical and pharmaceutical care should be provided without discrimination based on religion and nationality. The indigent residents of the Municipality should receive services for free, while when it comes to indigent individuals from other Municipalities, although entitled to the same privileges, the Municipality of their origin should pay the appropriate fee for them. Significant mention was made for the upper-class residents, the rich inhabitants of Heraklion, who were obligated to pay certain fees for healthcare services when they used them.

**Pananeio Municipal Hospital: Service Offerings**

With the commencement of Pananeio’s operation, women working as prostitutes flocked for examinations, leading to an immediate need for the establishment of a special Department for Venereal Diseases. At the same time, specialized departments were founded at Pananeio, such as those for Infectious Diseases, Pediatrics, and Vaccination Centers. Heraklion had to face infections such as smallpox, diphtheria, cerebrospinal meningitis, typhus and scarlet fever. In 1918, Pananeio joined the fight against the 1918 influenza pandemic (Spanish Flu). Vaccination with "heifer tubes" was carried out massively, concerning both Greeks and Ottomans. Notably, according to documents from that time, 57.5% of vaccinated children were Ottoman.

At the same time, documents from that period attest to the well-organized pharmacy of the Hospital. The heifer tubes were supplied through the Municipality from the "Greek Damalostirion" (Heifer State Laboratory) of the European-trained physician A. Defteraios. Major pharmaceutical companies such as Merck Darmstadt in Berlin and Carlo Erba in Milan traded their products, demonstrating a particular interest in collaboration with the new Hospital.

**Pananeio Municipal Hospital: Bribery and Cruelty**

Physicians and staff, despite their efforts in challenging operational periods, were not permanent employees, while a significant number of nurses had not received the necessary training. The staff was not compensated neither as they should be, nor when they should be, since delays in payment were common. Unsubstantiated complaints and corrupt hiring and firing practices rendered their work very challenging.

In 1953, the city of Heraklion had the opportunity to acquire a fully equipped General Hospital by either constructing a new one or nationalizing Pananeio. Despite numerous discussions and the proposal of Mayor Georgios Georgiadis for nationalization, the decision made in the Municipal Council was for Pananeio to remain municipal. However, the population had already become much larger and was constantly increasing, leading Pananeio to struggle to live up to its role of serving a few, usually poor, citizens of the city. In 1972, Stilianos Pattakos, Vice President of the Government and Minister of Interior...
Affairs, during the Dictatorship, visited Heraklion and observed the dire situation of Pananeio, noting simultaneously that only 90 beds out of the 200 in its capacity were operational at Venizelio Hospital. Exactly 70 years after its founding, on February 10, 1972, Pananeio immediately ceased its operation and merged with Venizelio under the name “Pancretan Venizelio General Hospital of Heraklion” 2,4.

EPILOGUE

At the Pananeio Municipal Hospital of Heraklion, you were welcomed by the arch at the external gate and the grand marble staircase that led you to the internal gate (Figure 5). In the foyer, the busts of the couple Theodoulakis welcomed you through entrances, two entrances that resist among the ruins even today (Figure 6). The central complex of Pananeio’s buildings would be declared a preserved monument in 1987, but the relentless passage of time would destructively intervene in the monument². Pananeio was in time desolated, its roof tile had collapsed and eventually surrendered to modern concrete! The Annex of Pananeio for Contagious Diseases, near the Holy Temple of St. Andrew, was demolished in 1991. Today, the Pananeio Municipal Hospital, a donation of the couple Pananos and Athena Theodoulaki, bears no resemblance to the glorious moments of its early years, as it succumbed to the indifference of the very citizens it sought to serve (Figure 7).

Figure 5. The outer door in 1975 (top side) & the inner door with the marble stairs as saved in 2002 (bottom side).

Figure 6. Recesses in the wall with the two busts of Pananos and Athena Theodoulaki inside Pananeion Municipal Hospital when in operation (top side) & The two recesses without the busts in ruins today (bottom side).

Figure 7. Pananeion Municipal Hospital in ruins, photo taken during 2000, Patris Newspaper, Heraklion Crete.
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“The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this article”.

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