

Short Review – Historical Article

Cretan Venizeleion Hospital heist. A glance from within Heraklion newspapers to demonstrate an unexpected bond between a hospital and the local community

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It was 1936 when the Union of American Cretans had decided for the establishment of a new Hospital in Heraklion city to honor former Prime Minister of Greece Eleftherios Kyriakou Venizelos (1864-1936). In 1949 the Hellenic state, members of the American Cretans and Municipality of Heraklion, had concluded for a memorandum for the hospital to be built in a municipal plot. In 1953 the hospital was named as Pancretio Venizeleio Tuberculosis Hospital (Greek: Παγκρήτιο Βενιζέλειο Νοσοκομείο Φυματιωτών) dedicated to patients suffering from the pulmonary disease of tuberculosis, operating as a sanatorium.

In 1967, 200 patient beds were added to its power and it turned to a general hospital for Heraklion citizens named General Hospital of Heraklion. Meanwhile, some years later, during 1973, an addition of beds combined with the absorption of Pananeio Hospital resulted for the hospital to grow up further.¹ As the eldest big hospital in the city, enjoys the preference of the citizens and various commentaries in the local newspapers. One incident which attracted huge readability and strong interest was the robbery of the 16th December 1988.²

It was the day when 15.000.000 drachmas were in the cash desk for the personnel payment when 4 hooded robbers, with a “Sicilian” surprising entrance in 12.20, within 5 minutes they had concluded their well-planned

operation. With only the hearing of a twice shout “robbery” all attending had tried to find refuge in nearby rooms. One had approached the cashier and ordered him to put the money in a white sac. They had escaped with a brown Datsun Cerry (Greek Nissan Factory), rented from a local bureau of an international company. One of the administrative employees had tried to phone police department but the line was busy. The car was found burned. The robbers moved to another car to avoid pursuit, a blue or white Fiat. Some witnessed only 3 to have escaped with the car and the 4th with a motorcycle. Some of the robbers with an Alfa Romeo had travelled the next few hours towards Chania city. All reported to be between 25 and 35 years of age, having as demonstrated later, fake documents and passports.

The authorities feared initially for a terrorist group which was searching for funds. Police officer Mpinihakis organized the search and within 5 days they had arrested the first 2 robbers having in their possession guns, transmitters and a police uniform. The brain of the robber’s team was one of the arrested, while the second was a relative who in his car kept a big summary of the money. The other 3 robbers, known to the police after the interrogation of the first arrested, were wanted all around Greece. A conflict started between them, a procedural dispute, a clash of

persons and lawyers for whom to blame. The money summary was later reported to be 17 million or even 18 million. Among the key witnesses was a hospital physician who gave descriptions for the robbers.

Other newspapers reported that the time of the robbery was 12.40 precisely, in the evening. Some reporters noted that the robber just asked the cashier for the money, while others recorded that the cashier was beaten in the head and forced to open the safe. This incident is memorized yearly in the local newspapers.²⁻³

In August 2000 police officer Lianeris, who was the interrogator narrated once more the story, testifying that he was blackmailed by the robbers to cover up the operation. All 4 were convicted and moved to Neapoli Cretan Prison.⁴

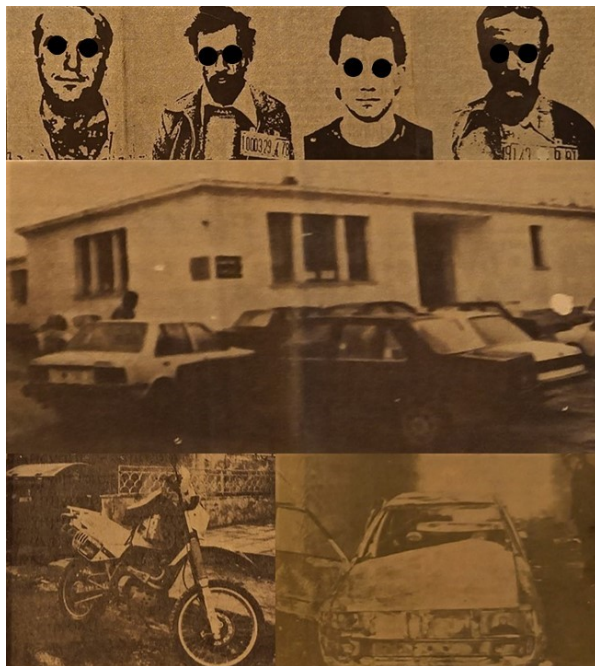


Figure 1. The 4 robbers accused (some characteristics are covered), the hospital building where the robbery took place, the allegedly used motorcycle and the burned Datsun as they were pictured and printed in the 1988 newspapers. Photoshoot by Nicolaos Maltezakis.

We must emphasize that soon after the robbery the administrative manager of the hospital asked for an armed guard to protect the money and payment department, until a bank payment system to be established. It is noted that hospital guards had not been armed. He avoided to even mention the person as a policeman, even though in Greece armed guards were (and are) prohibited by law. The payments continued of course the next months with no armed guards. The second peculiarity was the wide spectrum of testimonies among the witnesses. All attending the robbery, or seeing the cars or even wanted a moment of publicity, gave information or interviews in the newspapers, sometimes controversial. The plan of the robbery implied that an inner side help may have been in place. The difference for the amount of money reported also raises questions, as 3 million drachmas in paper money is a serious issue. Hospital employees had continued to offer their services even though they had remained unpaid for a reasonable time period.²⁻³ The fact that decades after the robbery reports reach readers and are accepted with great interest, testifies the bond between common people and Venizeleion Hospital. A community may be defined as a place, or as a sense of attachment to the place. To the later definition, all are included, material and thoughts, rendering Venizeleion hospital to stand among people as the spirit of the community.⁴⁻⁵

Public health ethicists consider the new public health concept as a shift towards an interaction between local community and local health institutions.⁶ A health institution, a hospital in this case, offers security to the users, needs community support and lives among the thoughts of the local community. All issues of such an institution, even though they escape the sphere of health services,

wrest public opinion and endure in the memory of all those who live around it.

References

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