

LEPROSY IN GREECE¹

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Greece appears to be the first of the Mediterranean countries which was infected with leprosy. It has not been possible to determine when the infection was introduced. Most probably it was carried from Eastern Mediterranean territories by the Phoenicians about the middle of the second thousandth, and later by the Persians, during the invading campaigns of Darius and Xerxes (521-465). The military enterprises of Alexander the Great, and later the Romans, in Assyria, Syria and Egypt, the Crusaders who conquered Greece, and later the Turkish and Egyptian troops which moved in mass into Greece and her islands during the Greek Revolution of 1821-1825, have undoubtedly contributed to the spread of leprosy into Greece.

The official statistics of the year 1840 give the following cases of leprosy: Peloponnesé 96, Aegean Islands 60, other areas 6, total 162. The statistics of the year 1851 brought the number of lepers to 350. In 1853, Littré, at the suggestion of the Academy of Paris, gave a summary of a report of Dr. Kigala of Thera Island, Greece, on the subject of leprosy in modern Greece. According to this report, from personal observation he [Dr. Kigala] discovered 186 cases of leprosy, of which 121 were male and 65 female. He did not find any case among children under 10 years of age, but he rather met the disease in individuals aged 10-20 years. He believes that leprosy is hereditary and infectious, and he recommends that marriages [be] not contracted between lepers, or lepers and the healthy, or families whose members had leprosy. Prof. Karamitsas reported in the Assembly of Greek Doctors held in Athens in April 1882 that leprosy is endemic in many parts of this country.

Since the first years of her independence, Greece has taken restrictive measures against leprosy. Thus, the Decree of 31 December 1836 concerning the "prevention of spread of infectious diseases" determines that cases of leprosy should be reported, contacts between lepers and the healthy should be prevented, marriages between lepers and the healthy should not be

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allowed, care and treatment should be given in isolation, and the expense paid either by the patient or the community. Police [were] entrusted with . . . application of measures which contribute to the reduction and avoidance of the causes which produce leprosy. By special decrees and laws, leprosaria were established and began to function in Samos Island (Karlovasi) in 1896, and in Spinalonga, Crete Island, in August 1904. The organization and function of these leprosaria did not meet the demands and conceptions of up-to-date care and treatment of leprosy. By Law 2450, published in 1920, concerning "measures for the restriction of leprosy" the reporting and isolation of cases of leprosy becomes obligatory, the immigration of lepers is prohibited, marriage between lepers, lepers and the healthy, and the attendance of schools by leper students are also prohibited.

In 1924 Dr. Ph. Kopanaris, Director General of Hygiene, assumed the duties of the director general for the first time. It was then that a new era started for the control of leprosy. Besides the efforts which have been made for the improvement of the living conditions of the lepers who are isolated in leprosaria, a fact of considerable importance is the investigation of all known and suspected foci of leprosy which was made throughout the country.

In 1929, an Anti-Leprosy Station was established in the Contagious Diseases Hospital of Athens; this station began to function on April 13, 1929. The purpose of this station is therapeutic as well as investigative and educational; it is there that students of medicine are taught the clinical, pathological and therapeutic aspects of leprosy. The professional staff of the station was composed of medical men who specialized in leprosy.

In 1930, a hospital was erected in Spinalonga for the treatment of the patients who needed hospitalization; its erection was made possible by a donation of Mr. Mihalinos, a Greek of London. The function of the leprosarium of Samos has improved considerably, and treatment there as well as in the [other] leprosaria is given with the newest medical preparations. Efforts have been also made for the improvement of the conditions in the rest of the leprosaria.

In 1924, I began to pay periodical visits to the various parts of the country in order to discover cases of the disease. I came into contact with the Nomiatri, who had been entrusted with the investigation of the foci of leprosy over the area for which they are responsible, and I indicated the manner and means of

investigation. For this purpose I supplied them with a special questionnaire for lepers and suspected cases. This questionnaire was also sent to all Nomiatri and leprosaria, and the histories of hospitalized patients were taken.

The first official statistics, published by Dr. Ph. Kopanaris in his Book of Public Health, shows that the total number of patients treated in all leprosaria of the country was 560, 278 of which were treated in the leprosarium of Spinalonga, Island of Crete, 170 in the Anti-Leprosy Station of Athens, 76 in the Leprosarium of Samos Island, 26 in that of Khios Island, 6 in the Transfer Station of Salonica, and 4 in the Leprosarium of the Monastery of Ivyron on Athos Mountain.

The discharge of treated lepers from leprosaria is allowed only for patients who were not affected with the tuberculous or mixed form of leprosy and who after treatment of one or two years in the leprosarium, follow up, and direct supervision, did not show that their condition became worse, but it became either stationary or improved with treatment. The repeated laboratory tests of various discharges, as from glands and blood from suspected parts should also be negative. When lepers are discharged they assume the obligation to come for an examination every month, they are followed up by the Nomiatri, and every three months they should come to the Anti-Leprosy Station of Athens where they should stay for some days for a detailed clinical examination and laboratory tests.

The Island of Crete is the most important focus of leprosy in Greece; most probably it has existed as such since the ancient times. Savari was the first to describe this disease, in 1779. In 1853 Smart reported that there were 628 cases in nine villages of Crete. In accordance with the statistics compiled by the medical mission composed of Ehlers, Cahnheim and Myloyannaki, which was sent to this country in 1900 after invitation by Prince George, Supreme Governor of Crete, the number of cases of leprosy was 368. This mission, at the instructions of the Governor, visited the peninsula of Elounta in the gulf of Marabello and decided that it is very suitable for the isolation of the lepers of Crete; it also decided that a leper colony be established there after the erection of a sufficient number of houses, a small hospital, prison, etc. It also suggested that a law be passed which would cover all appropriate measures for the control of leprosy. Regarding leprosy in Khios Island, historical facts make it evident that leprosy was transmitted from ancient times by the

Syrians, Phoenicians, Cretans, and slaves who were transported to Khios by the inhabitants of this island.

Zambako Pasha, who visited Khios, found out that leprosy had spread on the whole island in a proportion of 15% of the population, and its confusion with syphilis created diagnostic errors among the various doctors. On Samos Island, leprosy has been endemic since the ancient times, but it has not been possible to determine when it first appeared. According to tradition, the disease was transmitted by prisoners [from] Mytilene Island and Albanians who were transported to Samos Island at the time of Suleyman the Great. In a memorandum submitted to Zambako Pasha by Dr. Manoliades after the wide investigation carried out by him, it is stated that the disease is infectious, and the measures taken by the people for the isolation of lepers were approved, but it was not [denied] that the disease is hereditary. According to Dr. Manoliades, it is a fact that leprosy is found in families whose members were never related with lepers, and they never came into contact or intercourse with lepers, and, vice versa, in couples whose one member was a leper and who lived with the healthy for a long time, the healthy member was not infected with leprosy.

The Dodecanese were infected with leprosy from the ancient times because they are not far from the East and Egypt. The most important foci were in the islands of Tylos, Kalymnos, Kaw, Rhodes, Symi, Patmos, and Karpathos. However, the most important of the foci in these islands disappeared with the advance of years, and with the isolation of lepers far from residential districts in the various islands and in uninhabited small islands which has been used from the ancient times. The first scientific investigation of leprosy in the Dodecanese was made in 1910, at the recommendation of Zambako Pasha, by Dr. Ioannnidis of Leros Island, who visited the islands of Kalymnos, Kaw, Tylos, Nissyros, and Symi. In August 1947 I went to the Dodecanese in order to carry out an investigation of the foci of leprosy in the various islands [and] I discovered 12 cases of leprosy in only four islands, i.e., 6 cases in Tylos, 2 in Leros, 2 in Kalymnos (which had already been isolated), and 2 in Rhodes.

We wish to give the following summary in connection with the establishment of each leprosarium and its function:

1. "Aghios Panteleymon" Leprosarium of Spinalonga, Crete. It opened in 1904. By June 7, 1947, 1,286 lepers had been treated, of which 789 were male and 497 female; 189 were still being treated in the leprosarium at that time.

2. Leprosarium of Khios. This is the oldest leprosarium of Greece. It was established by the monks of the Order of Justins about the middle of the 16th century. From 1874 to August 19, 1947, 228 lepers had been treated in it, of which 158 were male and 76 female; 22 lepers were still being treated at that time.

3. "Aghioi Anarghyroi" Leprosarium at Karlovasi, Samos Island. It has been functioning since 1896. The number of lepers treated from June 23, 1896, to July 13, 1947, is 295, 176 of which were male and 115 female; 37 were still hospitalized at that time.

4. Anti-Leprosy Station of Athens. It opened and started to function on July 13, 1929. The number of lepers treated in it until December 31, 1947 is 979, of which 495 were male and 484 female; 395 lepers were still being treated at that time.