

**ARCHIVES
UNEARTHING
FAMILY
STORIES AND
MEMORIES.
CASES FROM
GREECE**

YANNIS
STOYANNIDIS

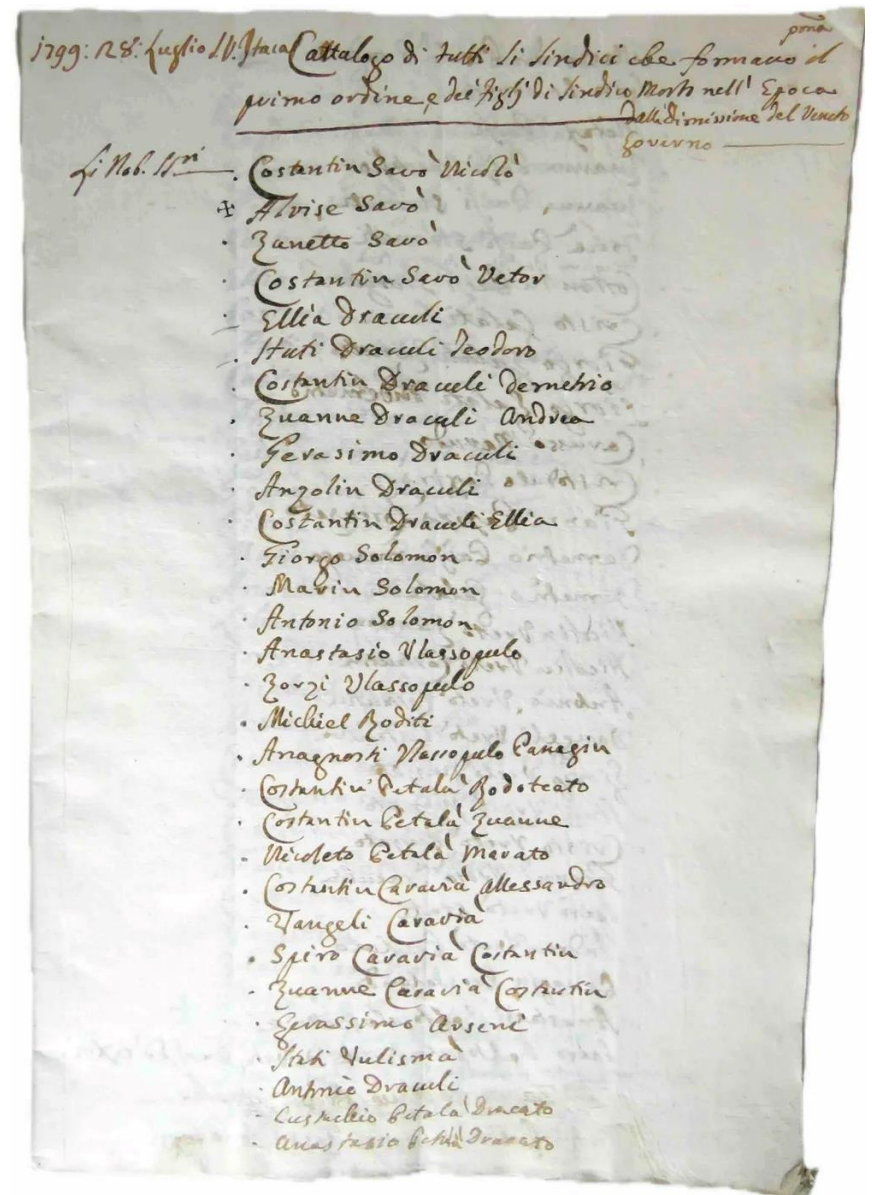
UNIVERSITY OF
WEST ATTICA
(ATHENS)



Family stories and research about roots in Greece

- Unfortunately, no records about births, deaths and marriages are held in Greek National Archives.
- City Services are in controversy with National Archives. They prefer to keep in-house these records instead of submitting them.
- As a result, one can find information about his roots only in the Ionian islands where they hold 'libre d'oro' or the Golden Book with all families and their genealogical trees.
- Some data are being held in parish records, which are not open to public to consult.
- Citizens are usually looking up election catalogues of different periods in order to draw a line of their family. These lines between voters are always hypothetical and not accurate.

LIST WITH NOBLE MEN NAMES FROM ITHACA



Coat of Arms Bulfari Family



National Archives and Genealogical Research

- Greek National Archives have not developed yet any Genealogical Research Department.
- Citizens are not informed that they can find information about their ancestors in state records and documents.
- Lately, they are educating elementary school pupils to look up for their origins in some records concerning the Asia Minor refugees that came in Greece in 1922.
- Thus, pupils are learning to look up names in a list and after finding their surname in a list, they realize their social origin.
- This programme helps children to understand human mobility and migration/refugee routes are something common in human history.

HOW DO HOSPITAL RECORDS RELATE TO FAMILY HISTORY?



How do we get access to archives and collections

- In Greece archival policy is not fully implemented. State services often keep documents and files that date back to the 19th c. in State bureaus.
- Archival appraisal and clearing is still a hot issue that state archivists negotiate with public servants.
- My research in 2010 about the social history of TB in Greece and Greek sanatoria dealt with a serious problem. No health institutions records had been acquired in the state repositories.
- As an early researcher I contacted many state hospitals asking for access. Many responded that research in their official records could be taken only by medical personnel.
- Some historical hospitals submitted their old records to the State archives.

What is intriguing in these archives?

- Patient boards include info about their origin, their age and profession, gender and in some cases their close relatives (spouses, siblings, cousins).
- In certain cases, one can find different members of the same family treated inside sanatoria.
- Until WWII tuberculosis was a widely spread contagious disease and 2-3 members of a family might have been hospitalized or died in these sanatoria.
- In terms of archives management National Archives should digitize all patient registers using OCR. AI will be able to relate names and possibly find family relations.
- Thus, trees might be created that will help a researcher to note how many members of the same family contracted a contagious disease as TB.
- Citizens nowadays want to learn how their relatives lived in these sanatoria. They want to understand what it meant to live in hospital ward for years and die isolated from close relatives.

A patient's hut

They had to built huts as the wards were outnumbered



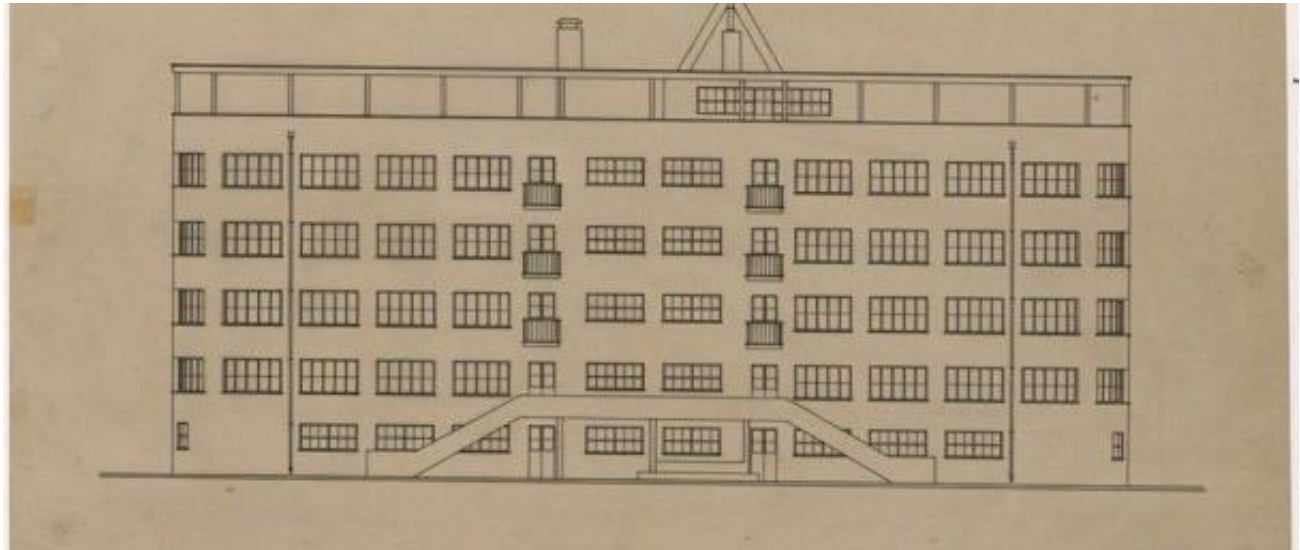


Τὰ φρικιαστικά «ντέκερ» τῆς «Σωτηρίας».

Army tents turned into open-air cabins

All photos come from
newspapers

**Drawings
depicting large
sanatoria
hospitals in
Greece**



MARINE WORKERS TUBERCULOSIS SANATORIUM

IT WAS BUILT IN
1948 THANKS TO
THE MARINE
WORKERS' TRUST



Family history through alternative records

- Looking up ancestors in Hospital, Prison or University records helps descendants to comprehend their relatives' lives.
- Through these records they find data and understand everyday life in different periods.
- Being a leftist and get in prison for his/her ideas.
- Being ill and sent away from relatives to protect them from social stigma (tuberculosis, leprosy).
- Being poor, work and study for a degree.

UNCLAIMED

A DOCUMENTARY
ON PATIENT
LETTERS

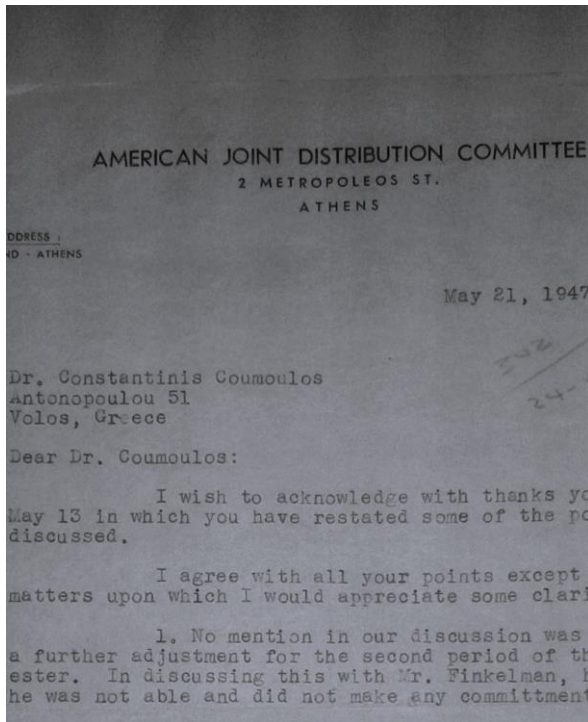


SUITCASES BEARING STORIES



Unclaimed

A documentary about personal stories of TB



- This Documentary was filmed in 2023. It was a response to a sudden violent discovery.
- During Covid2019 the first State Sanatorium SOTIRIA which keeps operating as General Hospital decided to pull down an old wall in the Cookers' section. Inside the wall more than 80 patients' suitcases of the 1940-1960s were found.
- A group of conservators was hired to preserve these letters, photos and personal items (religious icons, cinema and theater tickets, drawings) found in individual suitcases.
- In 2022 Marianna Economou a director decided to speak about this unexpected finding and the unclaimed patients that no one knew how or cared to find their relatives. They all had died inside the sanatorium as they beared a contagious bacillus. She called the relatives. Some were in shock as they had never heard that a relative had TB, while others hung up the phone.
- In 2024 the awarded documentary aired across cinemas and soon relatives appeared in the movies.

ARRANGING PERSONAL RECORDS



ARRANGING DOCUMENTS IN FILES



Unclaimed The Impact

- For some meeting with the documentary truth was hard to deal with. Families in the 1960s rejected tuberculars even if they had improved. "Please stay away. Your brothers and sisters will not manage to marry, if villagers hear that you came back in our house".
- A child of 10 years was segregated from its 6 siblings. Even if he died alone at the sanatorium his last sister did not want to hear anything more about her brother. In his letters he was always crying and expressing how he missed his mother's touch and hugging. His sister at her 80 years claimed that she could not listen once more to these words. She felt like his crying for affection was coming to life.
- A son whose father died in the sanatorium while he was only 6 was told by his mother that his father abandoned them. She did not want her son to face social criticism and stigma for his father's disease. When the director's team contacted him, he was in a shock that became intense when he read his parents' correspondence. His mother was in agony how she would raise a child all alone in the society. Postwar years were hard for single mothers.
- A young woman of 23 years died alone at the sanatorium even if her health improved at a certain point, because her father forbid her to return to village out of causing damage to her siblings' social status.
- A man watching the film realized why his father was sent to the sanatorium and recalled that his mother separated the 2 elder brothers and sent them to an orphanage. They never returned to live with the other 3 siblings. He accused the disease of his unhappy childhood.
- As Maurice Halbwachs mentioned this is the surplus of social memory. We build consciousness and ideas on experiences we have not lived ourselves, but they are part of our social group. It is exactly what public history can contribute to.

Ουσία

Νοσοκομείο Μαιζας
Γεωργίου Λαυρίου
Αρ. 1234

Αθήνα
1925

Προς
Αγαπητό μου
Ανδρέα



Θωμάς Νταλμας
(1) Τηλεγράμματα

Σωτηρία



ARCHIVES PUBLIC OUTREACH

MAKING PAST FAMILIAR



SANATORIO PROJECT

1. In 2011 an abandoned sanatorium on Mt. Pelion hosted activistic performances
2. Musicians played requiems
3. Actors performed abstracts of theatrical plays on hospital patients
4. Furniture were placed in verandas, so visitors had the chance to feel the sun and air as patients in old times did.

PATIENTS INHALING AIR

SANATORIO
PROJECT



Ἀεροθεραπεία ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ.

La cure en plein air.

Sanatorio Project Impact

- The City of Volos services (Central Greece) wanted to turn the old sanatorium in a luxury hotel, but the idea was never implemented.
- Actors wanted to turn it in a theatrical hub.
- Locals felt the past of their ancestors and some recalled family stories that later were recorded as oral testimonies and submitted to the local archives.
- It is quite significant that many comprehended and questioned for the first time how hospital experience affected patients' life.
- Recalling stories from the sanatorium records surprised everyone.
- For instance, letters about relatives quarreled the sanatorium's administration to take their relatives back home at their last moments, even if they suffered from a contagious disease.



GREEK ADOPTEES A COLD WAR STORY

Adoptees of Cold War

- Since the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) ended many leftists were imprisoned, taken into exile or killed in battles. Orphans wandered in villages or were taken into orphanages.
- The Royal Family and especially Queen Frederica built a programme for sending these orphans away.
- Until 1960s many children of communist couples or living with a single mother left Greece for adoption.
- Step 1: Mothers were encouraged to give their children to orphanage either due to hardships or under the fear of exile.
- Step 2: Children stayed in the orphanage until a foreign family visited and asked to meet the child.



**Communist male
and female
soldiers on
mountains**



Adoptees of Cold War_Genealogy Issues

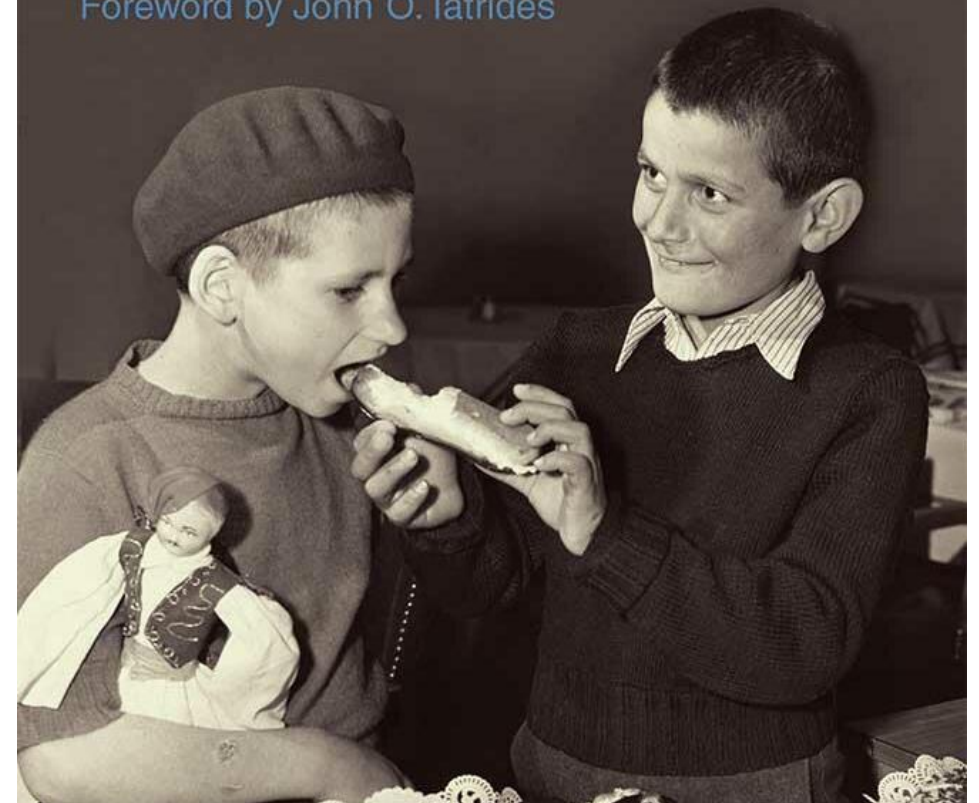
- This programme targeted unhappy and childless families in U.S.A. and the Netherlands.
- All children were taken there. In some cases, one family took a second child later from the same family.
- What came on surface in 2020 was the publication of a book from a Dutch historian who studied state documents and told this story.
- Gonda van Steen unearthed a story of legal and illegal adoptions as in many cases parents were not informed or in special cases, they informed only a distant relative who had little interest.
- It is estimated that approximately 7.000-8.000 children were sent in both countries.
- All of them took American or Dutch names and surnames.

**HOW THE
ADVENTURE
TRACKING
FAMILIES
STARTED.**

**Adoption, Memory,
and Cold War Greece**
Kid pro quo?

Gonda Van Steen

Foreword by John O. Iatrides



Searching for family roots

- Many of these adoptees nowadays are over 70 years old.
- Some figured out that their stories were mentioned in the book. Then they started contacting other “lost children” that already had questioned their origins.
- They contacted State archives for their files. Adoption records apart from the city of Thessaloniki are still in the State bureaus and have not been taken to National Archives.
- These aged adoptees urged to meet their biological relatives before their death.
- In order to get access to information they hired a small private firm Greek Ancestry who took up research for them with the few data they might hold.

An exchange for free access to family records

- Greek State in order to overcome a hot public issue in 2024 granted Greek citizenship with one Act to all these “lost children”.
- As long as they had their adoption papers in hand and claimed for their right to citizenship, they were named Greeks.
- Until today only a number of 150 have contacted National Archives Services for data. Attempts are unsuccessful as there is no Genealogy Service in the state archives.

Greek Ancestry Services

- Greek Ancestry historians and archivists started searching for the parents of each adoptee in their regions through the phone catalogue.
- They managed to bring them successfully in contact with their relatives.
- In many cases these adoptees carried the news of genealogical research to other third or fourth generation Greek immigrants in the U.S.
- Thus, many brought their grandpa's letters and hired Greek Ancestry to take a research for them in the Greek villages.
- Greek Ancestry is not only giving them data about the villages where one can find his grandpa's surname but also accompanying them while they visit the village.

Greek Ancestry

A family research platform



Bringing descendants back home



TAKING UP RESPONSIBILITY ARCHIVAL AWARENESS



ARCHIVAL AWARENESS

1. In Greece family archives are being preserved mainly since the 19th c.
2. Archivists have preserved politician's, distinguished authors and artists, businessmen archives.
3. What about personal stories and memories of simple families?
4. Last month I suggested the City of Athens Archival Service to cooperate on a crowdsourcing project.
5. Named *Memory Vaults* after bank vaults, this project calls citizens to trust City archivists with letters, diaries, photographs and videos of their ancestors.
6. Thus, a family archive will be created for each family, and their descendants will be able to visit them in the future decades.

MEMORY VAULTS

CITY OF ATHENS
ARCHIVES

ΘΥΡΙΔΕΣ ΜΝΗΜΗΣ

4 Ιουνίου 2026

11:30-13:30 Λέσχη Φιλίας Παγκρατίου

**"Μοιραζόμαστε το Παρελθόν μας:
Η Έναρξη της Δράσης"**



6 Ιουνίου 2026

11:00 Ξενάγηση

Ιστορικό Αρχείου του Δήμου Αθηναίων



Η δράση υλοποιείται από το Τμήμα Δημοτικού και Ιστορικού Αρχείου της Δ/νσης Αποκέντρωσης & Διοίκησης και το Τμήμα Αρχειονομίας, Βιβλιοθηκονομίας και Συστημάτων Πληροφόρησης του Πανεπιστημίου Δυτικής Αττικής, σε συνεργασία με το Τμήμα Τρίτης Ηλικίας της Δ/νσης Κοινωνικής Αλληλεγγύης.

Public history

- All public history/archival outreach activities have a positive impact on social groups (elder people, children, corporate employees)
- Social history highlights issues of daily life
- Gender, Labour routine, Illness, everyday life all can revive personal or family past
- Citizens of any age need these quests and their outcomes as they help them to build a consciousness about their origins
- Public History and Genealogy can help citizens comprehend their place in contemporary social reality

**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR PRECIOUS
TIME**

YANNIS STOYANNIDIS

UNIVERSITY OF WEST ATTICA