



**THE IOC'S CENTENARY 1894-1994. THE  
CONTRIBUTION OF DEMETRIUS  
VIKELAS TO THE REVIVAL OF THE  
OLYMPIC GAMES  
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One hundred years ago, from June 16 to 23, 1894, in the impressive hall of the Sorbonne University, in the presence of 2000 participants and representatives of sports associations from 13 countries, the "International Athletic Congress" was held.

The man who had had the inspiration for the organization of the Congress and was the driving force behind it was the French educator and visionary, Baron Pierre de Coubertin. A major figure among the participants at the Congress was the Greek scholar D. Vikelas who, by a happy chance, had been asked to represent the Panhellenic Gymnastics Association (PGA) at the meeting. This historical Congress ended its work by formulating the wish that the first International Olympic Games should be held in Athens in 1896 and constituted the first 14-member International Olympic Committee (IOC) with D. Vikelas as President and Pierre de Coubertin as Secretary General.

Historical initiatives are conceived by visionaries and a long period of gestation is required before they can bear fruit and are adopted by larger groups of people. Their survival will depend on the response they will obtain in the hearts of the people.

I will try to briefly outline this long gestation period until the Paris Congress, the factors which led to the historical decision and the Olympian efforts which were made by Greece at the time for the revival of the Olympic Games in Athens, in 1896, limiting myself only to the necessary references to the Congress and Pierre de Coubertin since international bibliography has extensively covered the Congress and in particular Coubertin's contribution to the international Olympic Movement. As we celebrate the centennial, the time has come to bring to light and reflect for a while on certain milestone events in Olympic history and give due recognition and honour to those individuals who are at last entitled to take their place in the Olympic Pantheon.

## **The Olympic Ideal through the ages.**

The competitive instinct of the Greeks was first revealed in Crete, in 2000 B.C., with the bull fighting contests; it continued with the funeral games which the Greeks held in honour of their dead heroes during the Homeric period and finally found its most perfect expression in the Games of Olympia which reflected the evolution of the religious, political and social convictions of the Greeks.

For 1000 consecutive years after 776 B.C., the historical date of the first Olympiad, the ancient Greeks came every four years, from all the corners of the then known world, to the sacred land of Olympia to live together in peace, forgetting the differences and animosities that divided them, in the spirit of the holy truce, to take the same oath and compete for the highest distinction, the wild olive wreath, and to take part in the mystic rituals that surrounded the staging of the Olympic Games and acclaim as Olympic winners the greatest representatives of letters, rhetoric and the arts and those who had fought for the nation, experiencing what has been called the Olympic Ideal.

The words and concepts which refer to the games and sports, like thousands of other Greek words for that matter, which describe the greatest human conquests (in science, philosophy, etc.) have been incorporated in most of the world's languages: Olympian, Olympic, Athletic, Agon, Agonistic, Antagonistic, Discus, Gymnasium, Stadium, Pentathlon, Decathlon, etc.

The Olympic Ideal has never ceased to move the hearts of the people and to be a source of constant inspiration, even after the abolition of the Olympic Games in 395 B.C. Through the centuries, the magic words "Olympic Games", "Olympic", have been used in different countries to give prestige and appeal to sports events, mostly of a local character.

The only significant attempts were made in the 19th century, in Greece, Great Britain and France with the "International Athletic Congress".

## **Efforts to revive the Olympic Games in the 19th century**

### **1. In Greece (The first official Greek attempt to revive the Olympic Games)**

Probably the first written reference to the necessity of reviving the Olympic Games is included in the poem "Funerary Dialogues" by the poet Alexandros Soutsos that was published in issues n° 2, 3 and 4 of the newspaper "Helios", published in 1833 in Nafplion which was then the capital of the Greek State.

In 1856, a hero of the Greek revolution, Evangelos Zappas from Rumania where he lived and had amassed a vast fortune, proposed to King Otto the revival of the Olympic Games undertaking to finance the project with his own money.

King Otto entrusted his Foreign Minister of the time, Alexandros Rizos Rangavis, to make the necessary arrangements; Rangavis was able to convince Zappas to modify his initial proposal and accept his plan, i.e. the organization of

various contest involving mostly industrial goods. These contests would also include Sports Competitions. The contests would be called "Olympia" and their object would be to further national development.

With Zappas' consent the Royal Decree on the "Establishment of the Olympia Contests" was published in the Official Journal of 19-8-1858.

The Royal Decree, in spite the fact that it did not wholly meet Zappas' intentions and visions, nevertheless marked a turning point in the course of Olympism and Sport in Greece and played a major role in the success of the 1st International Olympic Games. At the same time, as we shall see further on, it met with exceptional response abroad.

The management and supervision of the Olympia contests was entrusted to a committee of prominent personalities which was chaired by the Foreign Minister in office. Certain newspapers wrote about decrees on the revival of the Olympic Games.

This was due in part to the use of terms intended to bring prestige to the contests by linking them to the ancient Olympic Games: Olympia, Olympiad, Hellenodikai, Alytarchis, Gymnic Games, etc.

Several dissenting voices were heard and articles were published which criticized the non-adoption of the Zappas project. Even in Paris, the Greek professor of Greek and writer from the city of Serres in Macedonia, Minas Minoidis, accelerated the publication, from a manuscript in his possession, of the famous book "Philostratos on Gymnastics, by Minas Minoidis", in French and Greek. At the end of the book he included a special chapter entitled "On the establishment of the Olympic Games in Greece", where he passionately supported Zappas' proposal.

The sports competitions of the 1st Olympia Contests were held on Sunday, November 15, 1859, on Louis Square, as the present National Resistance Square was called at the time, instead of the Panathenean Stadium where they had initially been scheduled to take place.

They were attended by the King and Queen, civil and military authorities and numerous politicians.

In the suitable area of the Square, the following events were held, under conditions of extreme unpreparedness and disorder and no visibility for spectators: racing, jumping, discus, javelin throwing and mast climbing, and were a total disaster. All of the Greek press severely criticized the manner in which the contests had been organized and castigated those who were responsible.

In spite of the difficulties with which the new Greek state was confronted, 29 years after its independence and with a large part of the Greek population still under foreign rule, Zappas' vision and generosity had enthused Greeks all over the world. Unfortunately though, the right people could not be found and thus a major opportunity for the revival of the Olympic Games in their proper form already in 1859 was lost.

## **On the way to the 2nd Olympia Contests.**

As a result of the failure of the 1st Olympia Contests, as well as the events that followed in Greece, the eviction of King Otto etc., that the 2nd Olympia Contests were not held in 1863 and the Committee became inactive.

Evangelos Zappas died in 1865. In his holograph will, drawn up in 1860, in addition to the property which he had transferred, while still alive, to the Olympia Contests Committee, he stipulated that after the death of his cousin C. Zappas whom he had appointed as the usufructuary of his movable and immovable property, a large share of that property would go to the Olympia Contests Committee with the obligation on its part to build a building and stadium for the contests. This was the majestic Zappeion Hall which was inaugurated in 1878 (4th Olympia Contests) and was made available for the events of the 1st International Olympic Games in 1896. By virtue of the Royal Decree of 11-8-1865, the Olympia Contests Committee was finally formed and its name was changed into the Bequests Committee to allow it to make the necessary arrangements for the execution of the provisions of Zappas' will. The Committee remains to this day under that same title.

The Committee was composed of outstanding and responsible persons. The widespread wish of the Greeks for Games which if they could not equal would at least not be an insult to the ancient Olympic Games, influenced the Committee's action, which enjoyed the support of university professors.

The early announcement of the "Olympic Gymnastic and Rowing Games", the daily compulsory training of candidate competitors for 45 days under the supervision of a specialist, the uniform clothing of athletes, the ceremonial of the Games, the selection of the judges (three university professors) and, above all, the holding of the competition in the historical "Panathenean Stadium", which had been hastily arranged for that purpose, all contributed to the unprecedented success of the Games.

On 3-9-1869, about one year before the 2nd Olympia Contests, an extensive set of rules (69 articles) for the 2nd Olympia Contests was published. This is an innovative and comprehensive document whose provisions on the staging of individual events and the ceremonial are quite impressive. The Olympia Committee (O.C.), inter alia:

- Announced a "Poetry Contest" and invited all the nation's men of letters to take part in it, in accordance with Zappas' wishes.
- Set up special commissions for the better promotion and organization of the Games, in the capitals of the prefectures under the responsibility of the prefects, as well as abroad, under the responsibility of the diplomatic services.
- Added new events, such as wrestling and pole vaulting.
- Introduced, for the first time, special awards for the best musical composition, shooting, rowing, etc.
- Invited the Senate of the University to designate a speaker at a special event of the Contests (to deliver the "Olympic Address").

- Laid down the ceremonial which included: a religious ceremony before the opening of the Games, a public declaration-oath before the judges, the opening of events by trumpeters, proclamation of the winners by the judges and announcement of the name and the home city of the victor by a herald to the sound of music.

The sports competitions of the 2nd Olympia Contests were held on November 16, 1870 with the appropriate solemnity, in the presence of the king and the cabinet. For the first time, a chorus song whose words had been written by professor Orphanidis was performed. It was something similar to the Olympic Anthem.

30,000 spectators (a large portion of the residents of Athens and Piraeus at the time and many foreigners), according to the Vice-President of the Committee, D. Christidis, Member of the Council of State, followed the competitions sitting on the slopes of the stadium with "religious discipline", contributing with their enthusiasm to the success of the Games.

The Greek press as a whole provided front-page coverage to the event, with extensive and laudatory reports.

This was the most serious and noteworthy sports competition ever organized at world level, which vindicated Zappas' vision and those who believed in the revival of the Olympic Games.

### **3rd Olympia contests 1875**

The 3rd Olympia Contests were announced in 1874 and held for the first time at a suitable period for sports competitions, i.e. in May 1875.

The organization of the competitions was entrusted to Ioannis Fokianos, a scientist of gymnastics, the man who marked the evolution of competitive sport in Greece and who would be awarded, 19 years later, the honorary title of Vice-President of the Paris Congress by Coubertin who would take into serious consideration his comprehensive Memorandum, a summary of which would be published in the Olympic Review.

The sports competitions of the 3rd Olympia Contests were held in the Panathenean Stadium on May 21, 1875; the chief judges were three university professors. The events were the same as those of the 2nd Olympia Contests; however, on Fokianos' recommendation, events "taken from modern gymnastics" were added, without prizes (jumping over the parallel bars, jumping on the horizontal bar, etc.) and the Rules provided, for the first time, the awarding of diplomas to the winners.

## **On the way to the 4th Olympia Contests 1888-1889**

For a considerable length of time, the Olympia Contests Committee would concentrate its action exclusively on the execution of the two terms of Zappas will; i.e. the operation of a gymnasium for the training of young athletes and the construction of the Olympia Contests Building.

13 years after the 3rd Olympia Contests, on 11-1-1888, the Royal Decree "on the inauguration of the Zappeion Hall and the opening of the 4th Olympiad" was published.

In spite of the fact that the sports competitions of the 4th Olympia Contests had been announced one year before, they had to be postponed due to financial and organizational problems. Following Fokianos' strong reaction and his commitment to finance the competitions, the O.C. entrusted him with their organization.

The sports competitions of the 4th Olympia Contests were held in May 1889, in the limited area of the "Central Gymnasium", in the presence of government ministers and other officials. The large crowds of spectators and the disorder which ensued, created problems, especially on the first day. The 30 or so competitors impressed the spectators with their physical qualities, the impeccable execution of the events and their uniforms. The competitions were preceded by gymnastic demonstrations.

## **1891 Foundation of the Panhellenic Gymnastics Association**

This was the historical association that was invited to attend the Paris Congress and which has recently celebrated its first centennial of successful and continuous activity.

The Statutes of the P.G.A. were published in n° 183 of the Official Journal on 28-6-1891. The objectives of the Association are outlined in article 2 of the Statutes: "To promote gymnastics among all social classes and improve performances. This purpose shall be served through the establishment of ancient Olympic Games, the creation of a Gymnasium and the publication of works on gymnastics." This is the first official reference and statutory commitment, at world level, with respect to the revival of the Olympic Games.

On the request of the founding members, Ioannis Fokianos took over the position of President of the P.G.A. Since its foundation, the Association has remained to this day a pole of attraction for outstanding personalities, an oasis of sporting and gymnastic activity for thousands of young Greeks, and a nursery for Olympic winners and champions.

### **The first Games of the P.G.A. - 1891**

Two months after its establishment, the P.G.A. organized sports competitions in the central gymnasium on May 30 and 31, 1891, along the model of the Olympia Contests and Fokianos' games. Distinguished figures of Greek public life wishing to support the Association offered prizes for the winners. The success of those competitions was such that the King, who had followed the events, declared that would be offering a prize for the next year, while the Prime Minister, Theodoros Deligiannis, undertook the commitment to support the Association and two Greeks who lived in Paris, Votis and Sklivaniotis, offered to provide the medals for the winners of the next Games.

### **The second Games of the P.G.A. - 1893**

These were held on May 14 and 15, in the presence of the King who was one of the prize-givers. The Jury was chaired by the King's second son, Prince George. The games opened with the P.G.A.'s anthem whose words had been written by Constantinos Manos (Chief Official at the 1st International Olympic Games) and the music by Spyros Samaras (who wrote the music of the Olympic Anthem).

### **1894 participation of the P.G.A. in the International Athletic Congress of Paris**

In April 1894, the President of the P.G.A., I. Fokianos, received an invitation from Coubertin to attend the "International Athletic Congress" in Paris. In that same invitation Coubertin offered the title of Honorary Vice-President to Fokianos. By a stroke of luck, the P.G.A. was represented at the Congress by Demetrios Vikelas, thanks to whom Athens was chosen as the host city of the 1st International Olympic Games. The P.G.A. would concentrate its efforts on the success of the Olympic Games, which were, after all, the object of the Association.

To understand the scope of the efforts we have just mentioned, one should take into account the conditions in Greece at the time and in the whole of the Balkans still under Turkish occupation. Only the living memory of a competition tradition of 4000 years could withstand the comparison with dire reality. Thanks to this tradition, which was tangibly reflected in the Olympia Contests, the revival of the Olympic Games became possible in 1896.

## 2. In England

In England, educational reform happened almost too soon, thus giving proper recognition to physical exercise. The events of the ancient Pentathlon were very frequently held in English schools. They were combined with other sports, (tennis, football, cricket), together with the traditional English sports like fencing, rowing, riding, etc. The annual boat races between universities were a major event.

Dr W.P. Brookes - The forerunner of Olympism in England

In the Pantheon of Olympism a special place belongs to the English physician Dr William Penny Brookes (1809-1895), the man who devoted his life to the dissemination of Olympic values. He was born in Much Wenlock (Shropshire). Following in his father's steps he studied medicine in London and Paris and then returned to practise in his home town. A great humanist, he developed a remarkable social action. He founded and gave financial support, in 1841, to the "Society of Rural Studies".

On 25-2-1850, the society's Olympic Class was created, at a public meeting, with the aim of promoting the "moral, physical and intellectual improvement of the people in the city and the wider area, the working classes in particular, by encouraging open air recreational activities and the awarding of prizes every year, during public gatherings, for outstanding performances in sport, cultural and industrial achievements".

Dr Brookes was elected Secretary General and the first open air games called the Much Wenlock sports festival were held in October of that same year.

The term "Olympic" mostly reflected Brookes' training and visions.

In 1860 the "Olympian Class" became independent and the Wenlock Olympian Society was founded; it organized 34 annual sports festivals until 1895.

So Brookes organized in all 44 sports festivals at Much Wenlock.

Dr Brookes, his eyes always turned towards the birthplace of the Olympic Ideal, hastened, as soon as he heard about the staging of the 1st Olympia Contests in Athens, to offer a prize of 10 pounds for the winner of the "dolichos race" (a middle-distance race).

Dr Brookes also named the winner of the event, P. Velissaropoulos, an honorary member of the Wenlock Olympian Society.

The British Ambassador, Sir Thomas Wyse, sent the programme of the 1st Olympia Contests to Dr Brookes and briefed him fully about the games. As time went by, Dr Brookes began to talk more about Olympic Games. The venue of the Wenlock sports competition, "Linden Field", was renamed "Olympian Field". Banners with Greek inscriptions like "AEIN APIETEYEIN" (always excel) adorned the ceremonies of the games. In 1861, the victors were crowned with an olive wreath. In 1865, medals (silver and bronze) were introduced. Most of the bucolic sports were abandoned and the events became, year by year, more closely related to the Olympic events.



In 1868 the Pentathlon was introduced for the first time, together with a score system for the identification of the winners. The medal for the winner of the pentathlon was a silver one depicting the Greek goddess Nike, with an inscription from the ancient Greek poet Pindar. After 1870, the winner of the pentathlon received an olive wreath. The influence of the 1st Olympia Contests could clearly be seen in the staging of Brookes' annual sports festivals. The period 1859-1870 was the most fruitful as far as competition goes and represents a milestone in the history of sport and the development of Olympic ideology in England.

As time went by the reputation of the Much Wenlock sports festival spread beyond the area's limits. On Brookes' initiative, the National Olympic Association (N.O.A.) was founded in Liverpool, in 1865, by decision of a meeting of sports associations representatives. The N.O.A. decided that the annual competitions sponsored by it would, henceforward, be held in a different city each time. Schools and universities did not take part and created a counter association, the "Amateur Athletic Club".

The N.O.A.'s first sports meet was held in London in 1866 with much success and the last in Hadley (Shropshire) in 1883.

The games of 1877 were of special importance for Brookes. The King of the Hellenes, George I, wishing to show Greece's support for sports activities promoted by organizations or persons who believed in the Olympic Idea and probably aware of Brookes' relation with the Greek Olympia Contests Committee, offered a heavy silver cup as a prize for the winner of the Pentathlon, through the Greek ambassador in London, Gennadios. In 1880, ambassador Gennadios became the second Greek to be named an honorary member of the "Wenlock Olympian Society".

Brookes was not discouraged by the inglorious end of the N.O.A. and continued with the same enthusiasm, in spite of his age, to organize the annual sports festival in his home town and to follow closely any developments in Greece in relation to the revival of the Olympic Games.

In 1880, the annual report of the Wenlock Olympian Society states that: "... The Committee had proposed the celebration of an international sports festival in Athens...". The Greek newspaper of Trieste "Clio" published an extensive article in its issue of 13/25 June 1881 on the Wenlock Olympian Society and the personality of Brookes which ended with the phrase, "Mr Brookes, this devoted friend of Greece, is working for the staging of an Olympic festival in Athens in the near future".

On Brookes' invitation Coubertin attended the 1890 sports festival as a guest of honour; he was impressed by the quality of the competitions and Brookes' Olympic beliefs and visions. So much so that he would give him the title of honorary member of the union of French sports associations. Brookes would return the compliment by naming him an honorary member of his own society. On his return to Paris Coubertin wrote an article in the "Revue athletique"

entitled "Les Jeux Olympiques a Much Wenlock, une page dans l'histoire de l'athletisme" (The Olympic Games of Much Wenlock, a page in the history of sport).

In spite of the fact that he was by now 82 years old, Brookes would continue to organize games in his home town which, however, were no more than a local event.

### **3. In France**

The influence of the English educational system was felt in France where similar reforms were attempted. There was even a conflict between sportsmen and educationalists about whether or not to introduce the English model.

The French educationalist and sportsman Philippe Daryl in his book, "Renaissance Physique", (Paris 1888), praised the ancient Greek athletic ideal and dreamed of annual French games along the Olympic model.

In 1889 in Paris, the Greek-French magazine "L'Orient" which was published in French by the Greek N. Nicolaidis, presented an interesting essay by Christos Zappas, the nephew of Constantinos Zappas, on the Olympic Games. At that same time, Ch. Zappas who was the secretary of his uncle C. Zappas, contacted D. Vikelas.

#### **Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the International Athletic Congress of Paris**

In 1889 Coubertin, who was then 26 years old, was instructed by the French government to organize a Congress of Physical Education. The education of French children was his constant concern, educational reform his continuous pursuit.

In November 1892, the fifth anniversary of the foundation of the union of French sports associations was celebrated in the hall of the Sorbonne. Coubertin, the union's General Secretary, would deliver an inspired and progressive speech in which he would speak for the first time in public of "the pursuit and achievement of the great and beneficial project of reviving the Olympic Games, on a modern basis, compatible with contemporary life". The meaning of his words was not understood and his wish found no response. Coubertin, however, was not discouraged but, seizing the opportunity of the international congress about to be organized by his association on amateur sport, he included as the eighth and last item on its agenda the "possibility of reviving the Olympic Games; under what conditions could they be revived".

Coubertin, after the bitter experience of 1892 and afraid of ironic comments, was very careful and tried to create the proper conditions. To make participants receptive to his idea he created a strong Greek atmosphere. He ensured the participation of the heir to the Greek throne, Constantine, as one of the congress' honorary members; he managed to obtain a telegram of congratulations from King George I of Greece,

he appointed I. Fokianos, the President of the P.G.A. as honorary Vice-President of the Congress and arranged for its opening to take place to the melodious music of the Hymn to Apollo which had just been discovered in Delphi. Without having planned for it he was lucky to have the support of the P.G.A.'s representative, D. Vikelas.

#### **D. Vikelas and the International Athletic Congress of Paris**

Around the middle of May 1894, D. Vikelas received in Paris, where he had been living for the last twenty years, a letter from the President of the P.G.A. asking him to represent the Association at the "International Athletic Congress" in Paris. By the same mail he also received the diploma of corresponding member of the Association. Because of his strong sense of responsibility his first thought was to decline, believing that as he was no expert in sports matters he could not represent an athletic association. As this thought crossed his mind, however, he received a letter, dated 26-4-1894, from Alexandros Rangavis, son of his friend the former Foreign Minister Alexandros Rizos-Rangavis who invited him, also on behalf of the P.G.A., to accept the request: "... our Association wishes to be properly represented at the Congress and believes that it could not choose a better representative, aware as it is of the zeal with which you support all matters that can contribute to the progress of our poor Greece...".

This paragraph and the ultimate aim of the Congress dispelled any misgivings which patriot Vikelas may still have had and in his letter of 16/28-5-1894 to Rangavis he informs him that, in spite of the fact that "I feel that I am not competent, I cannot refuse this appointment with which I have been honoured by the P.G.A. on your recommendation".

So, in this rather unexpected way, the Olympic progress of the future President of the IOC would begin. An interesting correspondence between Vikelas and Fokianos followed which reflects the sense of responsibility, the concern, the anxiety and enthusiasm of the man. A correspondence which is part of the history of the Olympic Movement and which records, in diary style, the progress of the preparations for the Congress and highlights Vikelas contribution to the adoption of the historical decision by the Congress.

He sent a cable to Fokianos informing them that he was pleased and honoured to accepted the Association's request and that he had begun to translate his report to the Congress. This is a very interesting text written by Fokianos which presents the history of the Olympic Games, the importance of the individual events of the ancient Pentathlon for physical exercise, which is identified with the aims of modern gymnastics, the efforts of modern Greeks to revive the Olympic Games through the Olympia contests and ends by proposing a number of questions for discussion by the Congress.

As can be deduced from Vikelas' letters to Fokianos and Coubertin's above-

mentioned report, Vikelas had met with Coubertin a number of times before the Congress and the friendship and collaboration between the two men dates back to that period.

The P.G.A., wishing to express its interest for the Congress, honoured its protagonists, Coubertin and Baron de Courcel, by naming them honorary members of the Association before the Congress. The two men thanked the Association in writing for this honour; Coubertin, in his letter of 14-6-1894 to the Association expressed his satisfaction at the fact that the Association had chosen a "distinguished man like Mr Vikelas" as its representative.

In his letter of 18-6-1894 Vikelas confides to Fokianos his intention to propose, at the appropriate time, "the inclusion of Athens on the list of capital cities where the Olympic Games shall be held and I believe that I can rely on the support of the P.G.A. and the Government even, should the need arise".

On the penultimate day of the Congress, 22-6-1894, he writes to Fokianos about the city where the games would be held; "I foresee an opposition to the proposal regarding Athens because of the distance, but I shall try to defend it, convinced that I am conveying not simply the wish of the Association, but of all Greeks...".

Full of joy, in his cable of 24-6-1894 (Athens 25-6-1894), he announced to the P.G.A. "the wish formulated by the Congress for the celebration of the first International Olympic Games in Athens, in 1896". On the following day, in a long letter and with his usual modesty, without any mention of his by now historic speech, he says, *inter alia*, "My proposal was warmly supported by the French and foreigners and was accepted with enthusiasm and unanimously. I personally assumed the responsibility for the proposal saying that I did not present it the name of the Association and, even less so, in the name of the Greek government".

But let us return to Vikelas' letters to Fokianos from which we will quote another passage. On 2-7-1894, he expressed his pleasure at the fact that the P.G.A. had supported its representative, hoping that the wish of the Congress "would be welcomed by all" and announced Coubertin's visit to Athens in autumn. Then, with his characteristic modesty, speaking of his nomination he writes "... I was appointed as well a member of the Committee of which I will also be the President during the first Olympiad until 1896".

### **Vikelas' contribution to the Congress**

Coubertin's initial idea had been to stage the Games in Paris in 1900. The time period of 6 years, however, would be detrimental in every respect and for that reason the participants in the Congress raised the question of their celebration in 1896. In the margin of the Congress the unofficial candidatures of various cities were presented. Vikelas was deeply preoccupied. As a Greek he wanted to propose Athens and use his influence for its election. At the same time though, as a responsible person, having no authority either from the government or from the

Association which he represented, he was aware of the heavy responsibility he might be taking in proposing Athens. He did not fail, however, to sound out a number of participants on the matter. As mentioned above, on the eve of the final decision, Vikelas wrote that "I foresee an opposition to the proposal regarding Athens because of distance". In one single day, with his inspired speech, he changed the scene, enthused participants and obtained the unanimous selection of Athens. In conclusion we can affirm that:

1. In view of the conditions of the time, without Coubertin's combative spirit, his faith, his international connections and prestige, it would have taken many more decades before an international Congress could be convened to discuss such issues and express the wish for the revival of the Olympic Games with an international participation and set up the International Olympic Committee.

2. Without the presence of Vikelas at the Congress the Olympic Games, if the wish of the Congress was respected, would have been held in Paris six years later and forgotten or in 1896 in another city, probably Budapest, to coincide with the World Fair. The one thing that is certain is that Athens would not have been chosen. The very flattering reference to Greece which we find in the first issue of the Olympic Review and which must have been written by Coubertin, "the constructive idea of reviving these games is an exceptionally Greek idea and it is therefore only fair that they should be celebrated on the soil where they were first born", would probably have not been published if Athens had not been the host city. The selection criteria were not much different then from what they are today.

3. Given the acknowledged failure of the 1900 and 1904 Olympics, in spite of the triumphant success of 1896 which had set a positive precedent, we are led to the conclusion that without the historical grandeur of Athens and especially without the passion, the faith and the enthusiasm of the thousands of Greek spectators and the unprecedented hospitality offered to foreign competitors and officials, the future of the Olympic Games would have been uncertain.

4. The choice of Athens was the exclusive achievement of Vikelas

Vikelas' protagonist role at the Congress and during his IOC presidency is a true reflection of his personality. To understand this personality it is necessary to refer briefly to his life and his work until that time, which his biographer, Alexandros Economou, needed 632 pages to describe.

#### **D. Vikelas**

When reading the hundreds of documents in the D. Vikelas file in the National Library of Greece, with the thousands of letters, mostly from famous figures of politics, the letters, art, science and sport, both Greek and foreign, his extensive writings and when reading, also, in the Greek and foreign press, the warm reports and favourable comments on the man and his work, we realize that his was a special personality that left an indelible mark in its path.

We have picked out the references and judgements about Vikelas by Pierre de Coubertin and the great Greek poet Costis Palamas, two men who influenced, each in his own way, the revival of the Games.

"Bikelas, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus noble sur la terre". With these words ended Coubertin's letter to Vikelas of December 16, 1899. The poet of the beautiful text of the Olympic Anthem, C. Palamas, wrote in the Athenian periodical "Estia", four years before the Games, on the occasion of the publication of Vikelas' article in the French review of international fame, "Revue des Mondes":

"Sweetness and modesty, conservative convictions and a desire to reconcile conflicting elements, clarity of thought and nobility of feelings, a propensity to discover and promote the good side of things, a latent ethical concern under his literary production which made intellectual work an instrument for enlightening rather than igniting the hearts".

Let us have a quick look at the fascinating progress towards eternity of the man to whom Dr Louis Dyer dedicated his work "Studies of the Gods in Greece", published in London, in 1891, by the historical publishing house MacMillan and Co.

D. Vikelas was born on the island of Syros in the Cyclades on February 15, 1835. He was especially proud of the fact that his father came from Veroia, Macedonia and he considered himself a Macedonian. His mother Smaragda came from the well-known Melas family of Epiras. The families of both his parents had a significant national, commercial, social and literary tradition which Vikelas worthily pursued.

He spent his childhood years between Syros, Istanbul and Odessa.

Vikelas' literary inclination became apparent very soon. At the age of 16, encouraged by his headmaster Evangelidis he translated from the French, in verse, Racine's famous tragedy "Esther", which was published in Syros in 1851 under the title, "Esther, tragedy by Racine and various other poems".

The first references and critics in the press about Vikelas, which were to be followed by hundreds of others, date back to that year.

His father's commercial activities and the financial problems which he was facing were to mark young Vikelas' future course. He was obliged, against his wishes as he confesses in his autobiography, to turn to trade in order to make a living.

### **1852-1876, the London period**

At the age of 17, coming from Istanbul, he settled in London where he was to remain for 24 years.

He began his commercial career as an accountant in the commercial firm "Mela Bros" of which he was later made a partner.

The young Vikelas spent his few free hours at University College where he

studied botany and obtained his degree; it is evident that this was not what his restless literary and historic mind wanted. He was forced to make that choice because only the department of Botany operated in the evenings, during hours that is when Vikelas was free after his hard day's work.

His extensive knowledge that was deeply appreciated by many people was not the result of systematic academic studies, but of a personal urge to read and study and his special talent for foreign languages, which helped satisfy his need to become acquainted and communicate with various people and their culture.

When he finished his university studies, he devoted his few free hours to reading and writing. Whilst learning German and Italian he also took fencing and riding lessons and, as he reports in his autobiography, he especially enjoyed rowing. The future 1st president of the IOC therefore had some contact with sport during his adolescence, independent of the fact that circumstances did not allow him to continue.

His life in London for 24 years, in addition to his successful commercial activities, is also important as regards his literary, national and social work.

His literary talent was encouraged by his uncle Leon Melas and by his conversations with poet Julius Tipaldos and the Greek ambassador in London at the time, Spyridon Tricoupis (1788-1873), father of Prime Minister Harilaos Tricoupis.

His relation of friendship and esteem with people who played an important role in the staging of the 1st International Olympic Games dates to that period.

Day by day Vikelas was winning the respect both of Greeks and foreigners. He was becoming the person to whom students, postgraduates, scientists, Hellenists, politicians, publishers would come to seek advice, to exchange views, to obtain information, to ask for cooperation, for permission to translate his works, etc. Very early he began to exchange letters with famous people.

At the same time he was a pure patriot to whom Greek politicians (Prime Ministers, Ministers...), scientists, social institutions and organizations from the still occupied Greek territories of Crete, Eastern Romylia, Macedonia, etc., would turn for assistance and support. He wrote many political articles in major foreign papers and periodicals.

He was also a literary man (poet, novelist, translator) who with his rich and progressive work for his time would influence the literary situation in his country and promote Greek literature abroad through the translation of his books into about 15 foreign languages and his contributions to foreign publications. He would become a much sought-after scholar among foreign intellectual circles, the semi-official ambassador of Greece, according to French poet Sully Prudhomme. His first essay was published in installments in 1859 and 1860 in the very good Athens magazine "Pandora"; it was about the last Byzantine emperors, the Palaeologues. In his scarce free hours he would write poetry in demotic and his collection of poems "Verses" was published in London in 1862. During that same year as a result of political changes in Greece (eviction of King Otto, etc.) he led

the fund-raising in support of the provisional government of the time and wrote articles in the foreign press about the rights of Greece. His letters were published in the "Times" and the "Daily News".

In 1864-1874 he wrote poems, translations and essays in many Greek and foreign publications, such as "Journalism in England" published in the Athens newspaper "Eunomia" in 1864. His opinion of the press is characteristic: "Journalism is a reflection of the degree of political and moral culture of any nation".

A new era began for Vikelas in 1866. He married Calliope Geralopoulou, daughter of the big London merchant C. Geralopoulos and became a partner in his uncles' firm. His name was added to the company's title.

During that same year the Cretan revolution for reunification with Greece broke out. The heart of the Macedonian was beating in unison with that of the fighting Cretes. He led fund-raising once again, he published articles in the English press and sent out an appeal to English scholars which found immediate response with the creation of the English support committee. His close sentimental ties with Crete are confirmed by the donation of his library which he bequeathed in his will to the city of Herakleion and which bears his name.

In 1869, as part of his efforts to make Greece known to foreigners, he addressed the "Statistical Society" on the subject "Statistics of the Kingdom of Greece 1861-1866"; this paper was published in the Society's journal.

On his initiative, a Greek school for young Greeks was established in London, in 1870, which became a centre for Greeks living in England. In 1871, the school's headmaster at the time read a study by Vikelas on "modern Greek literature", which was then published in an individual volume.

In 1873, for the benefit of his nephews he translated 9 stories by the famous Danish writer C. Andersen which he published in that same year in Leipzig under the title "Danish Tales".

His historic study "On the Byzantines" was published in Greek in London in 1874. This was a work which he had written in 1873 in the form of three lectures which were delivered at the Greek Association of Marseilles. In October 1873, he wrote to his friend, the German Hellenist W. Wagner about the reasons that had led him to write it, "... a summary review of the Byzantine state and society and a modest attempt to restore its reputation...". Favourable criticism appeared in foreign publications by renowned Hellenists.

Vikelas did not have time to enjoy the publication of his book because a real tragedy began for him that would last 20 years. His wife suffered her first nervous shock as a result of her father's death. This condition would persist, with a few intervals, until her death. The doctors recommended to Vikelas that he should stay as much as possible away from his wife. Condemned to this forced isolation, with a heart that was broken but still filled with ideas, he continued to write with the same intensity as before and go about his other important activities.



An article of his was published in that same year in the yearbook of the "French Association for the Promotion of Greek Studies", an outstanding scientific association of which he was to become the President 20 years later.

He continued to translate the works of Shakespeare and the plays "Romeo and Juliet", "Othello" and "King Lear" were published in Athens, in 1876, with an introduction, interesting notes and parallelisms which show a deep knowledge of English literature. Spyridon Lambros (1851-1919), professor of History, Rector, Secretary General for many years of the Hellenic Olympic Committee and Prime Minister, speaking at the "Parnassos Association" would praise this translation which was very favourably received, as evidenced by the many new editions that followed.

The world trade crisis left its mark on the small commercial firm "Melas Bros - D. Vikelas". The partners, not wishing to jeopardize the substantial fortune they had acquired and their reputation, decided to dissolve the company. Vikelas was all in favour of that decision; ending his commercial career in 1876 and with abundant means, he wanted to complete his literary and social objectives. He decided to settle in Athens and in 1877 he began the construction of a house in a central location of the city. During his stay in Athens he was in great demand from intellectual and social circles; he began to correspond with important friends in other countries and to publish his work in various publications. His first short story appeared in the periodical "Estia", in 1877.

### **1878-1894 The Paris Period**

At the beginning of 1878, before his new house was finished, a sudden deterioration of his wife's health forced him to leave for Paris so that she could be admitted for treatment at the well-known neurological clinic of Ivry. This painful stay in Paris would last until 1894. His only solace in his personal tragedy was writing, reading and the contemplation of high ideals and visions.

He continued his translation of Shakespeare's plays with "Macbeth" and "Hamlet" and during the breaks from work he discussed linguistics with his cousin Ioannis Psycharis.

In 1879 his book "On the Byzantines" was published in French and German and was very well received by the critics. Two renowned Hellenists, the Frenchman Emile Legrand and the German W. Wagner had undertaken the translation.

Filled with loneliness and despair because of the attitude of the powerful towards Hellenism (the struggle of the Cypriot Greeks was in the forefront at the time), Vikelas decided to write the book, "Loukis Laras", which made him famous. In it he describes, in an original and wonderful way, the adventures of an old man from Chios, Loukis Tzifos, during the period of the Greek War of Independence of 1821. "Loukis Laras" was published in Athens as a serial in the magazine "Estia" in 1879 and was very well received by the whole of the Greek press.

In that same year, "Loukis Laras" came out in France and Germany. The French translation had been made by Vikelas' famous friend, the Marquis de Queux de Saint Hilaire and the German by W. Wagner whom we know already. After the decision of the French Ministry of Education to include "Loukis Laras" on the list of the approved books to be given as prizes for examinations and to be included in school libraries, a second edition followed in Paris in 1880. It is worth mentioning that the introductory report of the French Ministry stated that "this book is one of the most interesting that one can read. It depicts the bloody and heroic struggle of the Greeks for their liberation, as seen by a man who was not an actor, but a victim, a man who does not pretend to be a hero, but has felt the terrible effects of Turkish cruelty...". The book was translated into 12 languages and received very good write-ups in the international press. Loukis Laras made a very strong impact in Greece and promoted Greek literature abroad.

In 1879, he received yet another distinction. He was elected member of the 20-member Board of Trustees of the "Association for the Promotion of Greek Studies".

Two years later his translations of "Macbeth" and "Hamlet" were published in Athens.

In 1884 he travelled all over Greece. As was his custom he kept the Marquis de Queux de Saint Hilaire informed of his impressions. Encouraged by his friend he published his fourteen letters in Paris under the title "De Nicopolis a Olympic, lettres a un ami".

A second complete edition of this collection of poems, "Verses" was published in Athens in 1885. His friend the Marquis de Queux Saint Hilaire wrote an article on Vikelas' literary work in the French review "Le monde poetique".

At the beginning of 1887, 6 of his stories were published in Athens and then in France under the title "Nouvelles Grecques", in Germany and later in other language (English, Italian, Serbian, Spanish, Danish, Bohemian, Bulgarian, etc.). To give you an idea of the success of his stories in France, I shall quote a letter to Vikelas from his friend and translator de Queux de Saint Hilaire, dated 13-5-1888, informing him that the great Pasteur had especially liked his story "Enraged" which, in his opinion, was "noticeable for its accuracy and a sense of observation one rarely finds in literary works".

On the invitation of this friend and translator the Marquess of Bute he visited Scotland in the summer of 1889. In October of that same year he returned to Athens in order to attend the wedding of the Crown Prince Constantine who later became the first President of the HOC and King of Greece. His lecture on Scotland at the "Parnassos" literary association was published in the "Estia" and came out as an individual issue.

The death of the Marquis de Saint Hilaire made him return to Paris where, at an official meeting of the "Association for the Promotion of Greek Studies" he read the biography of his departed friend which was published in the Association's journal and other publications.

In October of that same year his book "Seven essays of Christian Greece" came out in England. It contained various essays written by Vikelas, like the essay "On the Byzantines", "Le role de la Grece dans la question de l'Orient", etc. which had been translated by the Marquess of Bute and published in the publication "Scottish Review". The book received good reviews in about 25 British newspapers and periodicals. Indicative of the book's success is the letter of the famous British statesman and Prime Minister William Gladstone (1809-1898) to the English publisher which was communicated to Vikelas by Bute, in December 1890. The great statesman who was a staunch friend of Greece wrote inter alia "I believe it is a work of considerable historical value... of all the false ideas that have prevailed, possibly the most striking is that concerning the role and actions of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire. The book published by you will probably help to dispel such erroneous notions".

Vikelas, who was a cosmopolitan, missed no opportunity to travel and see the world and meet people. In the summer of 1890 he travelled for two months in Normandy and then, in November, he visited Istanbul where he was warmly received by the Greeks and the intellectual circles of the city. The references to his visit in the Greek and French-speaking press of Istanbul are quite interesting.

In July 1891, he addressed the "Society of Diplomatic History" of Paris, of which he was a member, and his lecture was published in the Society's journal, "Revue d'histoire diplomatique". In that same year a new edition of "Loukis Laras" came out in France, with illustrations by the well-known Greek painter Th. Rallis. France would become the first foreign country to honour the man and his work. On 31 December, 1891 he was made a knight of the Legion of Honour by the French government.

In March 1892, on the occasion of the publication in Munich of the remarkable book "The history of Byzantine literature" by his friend Krumwacher, a famous Byzantinologist, he published an article on "Byzantine Literature", as mentioned above, in the "Revue des Mondes". During that same year he met in Munich the famous Greek painter Nicolaos Gyzis who would be one of the painters who would later illustrate his book "Stories".

In July 1893, he contributed to the building of the Greek Orthodox Church in Paris and published his book "La Grece Byzantine moderne".

In November of that same year, he travelled to England to attend the ceremony at which the honorary title of league doctor of the very old "Saint Andrews" University of Scotland was conferred on him. He was the first Greek to receive such an honorary distinction from the old University of Edinburgh.

In March of 1894 he was elected first Vice-President of the "Association for the Promotion of Greek Studies".

## **1894-1896 The period of the Vikelas Presidency - From the wish to the revival**

As was perfectly natural the decision of the Congress delighted Greeks all over the world.

Vikelas immediately began to inform the competent persons with whom he was on friendly relations, whilst at the same time launching an appeal for the necessary support to make the Congress' wish a reality. Among the first to respond was Crown Prince Constantine. His aide, C. Sapountzakis, in an answering letter informed Vikelas that he had been instructed by the Crown Prince to assure him that "... the King and the Crown Prince would lend their full support for the success of the Games of Athens".

The well-known but misinterpreted refusal of the government of the time to provide the necessary funds for the realization of that ambitious project, the knowledge of the difficulties and the country's awareness of its great responsibility to be worthy of its great heritage, began to give rise to doubts and reservations about the feasibility of holding the Olympic Games.

Faced with this situation, Vikelas abandoned all his other commitments and came to Athens, at the end of September 1894, where he began a Marathon of meetings, consultations and interviews. He was acting with the faith and conviction that the Games should and could be held.

He corresponded with Coubertin whom he kept informed of developments and urged to spare no effort to ensure the greatest possible number of foreign competitors.

Vikelas organized, in the best possible way, Coubertin's forthcoming first visit to Greece in November 1894, responding to his wishes, as expressed in a letter, to be given an official welcome.

On October 19, 1894, Vikelas had to leave for Paris in a hurry because his wife's health had suddenly taken a turn for the worse.

Coubertin arrived in Athens during Vikelas' absence and was given a very warm welcome. Coubertin immediately paid a visit to the Prime Minister, Harilaos Tricoupis, who explained to him the reasons why his government was not able to take over the financial cost of organizing the Olympic Games.

The only official who was resolutely in favour of the Games was Crown Prince Constantine who, during his many meetings with Coubertin, assured him of his moral support and of his intention to lead the special committee.

Coubertin visited all the sites that could be used for the Games and, as repeatedly emphasized, his impression was that Athens fulfilled the requirements for hosting the Games whose costs he estimated at 250,000 to 300,000 drachmas. Regarding the Panathenean Stadium in particular, his opinion was that it was not necessary to renovate it completely.

On 12-11-1894 and on Coubertin's initiative, a meeting of 29 prominent figures was held at the headquarters of the "Olympia Contests Committee" at the

Zappeion Hall, for the purpose of setting up the Organizing Committee of the 1896 Olympics. The invitation was in Coubertin's handwriting, on IOC stationery and dated 9/21-11-1894. It included a special reference to the fact that the Crown Prince had accepted the Honorary Presidency of the Committee. The meeting was also attended by the host, the President of the "Olympia Contests Committee", Stephanos Dragoumis.

Coubertin developed in detail the whole question of the Games, emphasizing the necessity and feasibility of staging the Games in Athens and assured his audience of the special interest of Crown Constantine, who had accepted to chair the special committee. Immediately afterwards the first Organizing Committee was established and 4 Vice-Presidents were elected.

At the Zappeion meeting the General Programme of the Games proposed by Coubertin was discussed and adopted with a few changes. Certain events were taken out and two added : discus throwing, on the proposal of I. Fokianos and the Marathon race, on the proposal of the professor of the College de France and member of the French Institute, Michel Breal.

Vikelas' friend and co-worker at the French "Association for the Promotion of Greek Studies", Michel Breal, who has offered us one of the most popular events to this day, with its important symbolic dimension, wrote to Vikelas on 9-1-1896 : "... the time is coming nearer when we will have to seriously think about the cup for the Marathon race..." ; he then gives the text in French that will be inscribed on the Cup that he will be offering, asking Vikelas to translate it, as epigrammaticity as possible, into modern Greek, adding "I could of course have written the text in ancient Greek, but I want it to be understood by the young runner too, who may not be a student. For that reason I turn to you who can cope so effectively with both languages". In this document, of great historical significance for the Olympic Games, he also gives a draft of the inscription in Greek. A few days before the Games, on March 25, 1896, Breal wrote an interesting letter to Vikelas which reveals the man's learning and highlights the symbolic dimension of his proposal. In this letter which was also published in the Greek press he writes, inter alia, "... I do not know what will be the nationality (of the Marathon winner), but what ever his origin I proclaim him the representative of Greek tradition...".

After the closing of the Games, at the official dinner in honour of the Olympic victors and foreign guests, attended by King George, another Frenchman, author and journalist would say in his toast about the winner of the Marathon : "A Greek had to come to announce : Forget your discord. The barbarians have been defeated. Civilization is again triumphant". The Olympic Movement owes a place in the Olympic pantheon to Michel Breal too.

But let us return to Coubertin who received a very warm welcome.

On 13-11-1894, at the hotel "Grande Bretagne", the P.G.A. gave a dinner in honour of Coubertin and warm toasts were exchanged.

On 16-11-1894, in the lecture hall of the "Parnassos" literary association, before a large audience and in the presence of many officials, Coubertin spoke about the Games, with special emphasis on the fact that they could be held in Athens. The lecture was widely publicized. The honorary and friendly gestures towards Coubertin would continue until his departure. In a long letter to Vikelas he would speak in very flattering terms about his stay in Greece and express his warm thanks.

On 17-11-1894, an unscheduled debate took place in the Greek Parliament on the Olympic Games, with speeches by the Prime Minister and Minister Stephanos Dragoumis.

During this extremely interesting debate, there were references to the Congress of Paris, to the timeless value of the Olympic Games, to the presence of Coubertin in Athens, his contacts, his statement about the feasibility of the Games and the amount of 150,000 drachmas that was needed in his opinion. A member of the Opposition criticized the government for its attitude and urged it "... to participate and fight for something serious and important".

In particular, the Prime Minister confirmed the government's inability to undertake any commitment and Minister Stephanos Dragoumis referred to the reasons for which the "Olympia Contests Committee" was unable to provide any financial support.

At this point one thing should be made clear.

Many foreign researchers, isolating the refusal of the Greek government and the O.C.C. to give any financial assistance, are affirming that the official circles at that time adopted a negative attitude, without any justification.

But let us return once more to Coubertin, after this necessary parenthesis.

The Prime Minister at the time, Harilaos Tricoupis, had been obliged, because of the situation, to say a few months before to the Greek Parliament the famous phrase "We have, unfortunately, gone bankrupt", a statement which understandably displeased foreign lenders; therefore, he was now compelled, be it against his inner wishes, since he was a sportsman himself and aware of the Greek efforts to revive the Olympic Games to make that Official statement, the only thing a responsible Prime Minister could do.

Let us think what the creditors of the Greek state, or the various people who criticized the Greeks for that matter, would have said if the government had followed a demagogic policy and declared that it would provide financial assistance out of its empty cash boxes in order to fulfill the wish of the Congress of Paris !

It is clear that such a statement would have had a negative effect. The above mentioned foreign circles would immediately have said that the government was not paying them but spending the money "not even for bread but for circuses", to satisfy the megalomania of the Greeks (in that case they would have identified Greece with the revival of the Olympic Games).

This point of view is further strengthened by a letter, dated March 16, 1895, from the Crown Prince of Saxe-Mainingen, Prince Bernard, a general in the Prussian army and a friend of Greece. The letter is written in Greek and begins with the words

"I am deeply sorry for the fact, that after careful consideration, I am unable to reply positively to your letter" and continues "... Greece today has much more urgent needs to satisfy than to establish the Olympic Games. Even if I were to decide, dear Sir, against my beliefs, to appear today as a defender of the Greek cause before the German public, I would expose myself needlessly and to no avail and would not be helping Greece, since all over Germany there is considerable indignation as a result of the fraudulent bankruptcy of the Greek government...".

The above mentioned statement of the President of the O.C.C. before Parliament refutes the affirmation concerning the existence of circles opposed to the project. The fact that the Committee offered the Zappeion Hall and the historical Panathenean Stadium was a more substantial contribution than any amount of money.

The overall attitude, as well as the indirect help given by the governments of the time was significant.

The Tricoupis government, by virtue of circular 3271/31-1-1895 of the Postmaster General exempted the Olympic Committee's mail from postage. The next Deligiannis government, in response to the proposal of the "Association of the Athens Philatelists", dated 12-2-1895, decided by virtue of a law of 22-8-1895, to issue commemorative stamps, transferring to the Olympic Committee 50% of net profits. Under that same law, the O.C. was allowed to take a bank loan under state guarantee for an amount of 400,000 drachmas which, according to the government's estimates, would correspond to the receipts from the sales of stamps. Other forms of indirect financial support to the Games on the part of the government were also used, such as the issue of a commemorative medal and the tax exemption of the tickets for the Games.

We therefore see that, in spite of affirmations to the contrary, the indirect and only possible form of support on the part of the government at that time was far from negligible. Of course expenses were enormous and cash flow problems often brought the Olympic Committee to an impasse situation.

In our opinion, the official and justified refusal of the government had a positive effect. It rallied and mobilized the Greeks, all over the world, who with their touching fund-raising efforts in support of the Games, gave the much needed ethical dimension to the revived institution.

In the last ten days of November, a few days before Coubertin's departure, the four Vice-Presidents of the Organizing Committee, which had never been convened, handed in their resignations to the Crown Prince, on the grounds that it was not possible to find the 600,000 drachmas needed for the Games, according to a study by experts.

As a result of these new developments, Vikelas returned to Athens in December and began a new round of consultations, whilst writing letters in all directions to obtain support for the Games.

The statements of various professional groups, articles in the press and the encouraging letters he received, gave him courage. The son of his friend

Th. Manos, the Vice-President of the Organizing Committee Constantinos Manos informed him, in a letter dated 28-12-1894, that he had deposited an amount of 10,000 drachmas as a core contribution for the staging of the Games; he encouraged Vikelas to contact certain people in the Greek community in London who would be willing to help and informed him that Romanos, the Greek attache in London, had promised him 5,000 drachmas.

In addition to the results of the fund-raising, he briefed Vikelas on his other activities related to the Games. His letters to Vikelas are indicative of the climate which prevailed in England at the time and of the actions of the English members of the IOC. On 2-1-1895, he informed him that he had received a kind letter from Coubertin who promised him that certain concessions would be granted to the English (he refers to certain events and to the rules of the Games), but on March 8 he writes, despondent, "I am unfortunately totally alone, as the members of the International Committee do not care in the least".

Around the end of December 1894, the situation remained confused and critical for the future of the Games. The confusion that existed at the time can be seen in the letter of the Greek ambassador in Istanbul, N. Mavrocordatos. His friend the diplomat informs Vikelas of his actions so far to ensure a massive attendance at the Games on the part of Greeks living abroad and recommends "an able person who could undertake to put pressure on certain people who could provide financial help" whom he names. Finally, he recommends to the Organizing Committee to send a circular to Greeks all over the world.

To face this critical situation, Vikelas "besieged" the Crown Prince, knowing that he was favourably disposed, as a result of his experience from the Olympia contests and the P.G.A. competitions.

Vikelas' efforts began to bear fruit and the new year sounded promising.

The Crown Prince convoked, on 13-1-1895, 12 prominent citizens at an official meeting at the Zappeion Hall and set up the first National Olympic Committee in the world (the HOC) which has remained active to this day. The invitation, which bore the date of 11-1-1895, was written on the stationery of the Crown Prince's House and signed by his aide Sapountzakis. The General Secretariat of the HOC was entrusted to Timoleon Philemon, former mayor of Athens and C. Manos, Georgios Strait, Agis Merkatis and Georgiso Melas were appointed Secretaries.

One of the HOC's first actions was to send out a warm appeal to all Greeks to lend their support to the Games. However, the payment of contributions by non-Greeks was strictly forbidden. This distinction is indicative of the extent to which the Greeks considered the revival of the Games as a national duty.

The HOC assigned fund-raising to special commissions which were set up by the municipalities, following the pattern of the Olympia Contests. Abroad, this responsibility was given to the diplomatic authorities. The case of London is of special interest; on February 1/3, 1895, a circular was issued inviting the community to "contribute to the attainment of the noble goal", signed by the Greek attache A. Romanos and Secretary C. Manos. The contributions of



individuals from different social backgrounds which were often mentioned in the press •were truly touching.

In a very short time the HOC set up 9 special commissions which met for the first time on February 1, 1895 at the Zappeion Hall. From that date onward, the HOC began its real work and achieved a real feat, within a time period of 14 months, thanks to popular support and the enthusiasm and zeal of its members, making the country worthy of its ancestral heritage.

Infrastructure projects (renovation of the stadium, construction of the velodrome and shooting range, in accordance with international standards), the refurbishing of the city, the drawing up of the detailed programmes and regulations for individual events and their publication in three languages, the issue of 12 commemorative stamps and a commemorative medal, the publication, as from February 15, 1896 of a weekly newspaper in French with exclusive information about the Games... truly deserve the title of Feat.

Financial problems created serious difficulties for the HOC. Work on the stadium was not advancing. But then as a *deus ex machina*, national benefactor Georgios Averof stepped in; he had responded "with enthusiasm to the written appeal of the Crown Prince and President of the HOC, which had been handed to him by Z. Philemon in Alexandria, Egypt.

Georgios Averof paid the huge amount of 920,000 drachmas for the renovation and marble reconstruction of the stadium during a first stage and then, an additional amount of 1,000,000 drachmas to allow for the parts of the stadium which for lack of time had not been reconstructed to be completed. This first great and disinterested sponsor of the modern Olympic Games continued the tradition of the great sponsors of the Panathenean Stadium, the site for which had been donated by the Athenian citizen Deinios.

Together with the HOC, other bodies (municipal councils, guilds) rallied to the cause of the Games.

The presence of Vikelas was very strong and necessary. On his recommendation, the HOC asked the famous Greek painter, Nicolaos Gyzis, who lived in Munich, to design the diploma of the Olympic Games. The first exhibitor and judge of the Olympia Contests, N. Gyzis, in a letter to Vikelas dated 21-8-1895, informed him that the HOC "... has asked me to contact you if I need any details. Both the honour bestowed on me and which I owe to you, as well as this opportunity to work with you, give me great satisfaction...".

Whilst a whole nation was getting mobilized and putting all its heart in the revival of the Olympic Games, outside the country there was ignorance, indifference (the few references in the foreign press require a magnifying glass to be found) and sometimes even irony about the Utopian nature of the whole enterprise.

Aware of this climate and of the prevailing views, the President of the International Athletic Congress of Paris, Baron de Courcel, in his opening speech says in reference to the Olympic Games: "We are all gathered here today

in order to reflect on the revival of the Olympic Games. Do not smile when you hear these words". His speech was published in issue n° 2 of the Olympic Review in October 1894.

In certain countries like Germany there was organized reaction for the non-participation of German athletes in the Games. The Greek ambassador in Berlin, Cleon Rangavis, wrote to Vikelas on this matter on 24-9-1895, "... the Germans have accepted, in principle, the idea of the Olympic Games, with total lack of enthusiasm, first because they consider it as a French project and, secondly, because they are afraid that if their compatriots went to Greece they would not be warmly received because of our pro-French stand...".

In this general climate of indifference, the information about the participation of foreign competitors was not encouraging. This situation gave rise to serious concerns. There was even a recommendation on the part of the HOC members to postpone the Games. Vikelas was asked to intervene in all directions, especially in Germany. Vikelas' friend and very able diplomat, Cleon Rangavis, would work very hard to that end and, with the support of prominent Germans he would secure, at the last minute, the participation of German athletes.

Time does not allow us to refer further to the special efforts of Vikelas and the HOC which continued, with the same intensity, until the end of the Games. We shall simply quote an excerpt from an interview given by Vikelas and which was published in the newspaper "Estia" two days before the opening of the Games: "... the victory of any athlete, be he Greek or not, shall equally honour Greece and should therefore be greeted with special enthusiasm".

Dear friend of the International Olympic Movement,

Summing up what I had the honour and pleasure to develop before you, I wish to make the following observations :

1. Baron Pierre de Coubertin was the inspiration and the driving force behind the International Athletic Congress of Paris and a protagonist in the promotion of the Olympic cause until his departure from the earthly to the Olympian fields. In view of the conditions that prevailed at the time, without Coubertin's contribution, the convening of an International Congress with the same topics would not have been possible before a number of years.

A major Olympian figure of the Congress was the Greek D. Vikelas who, thanks to his international reputation, his spontaneity and disarming sincerity, succeeded in obtaining the unanimous wish of the participants for the staging of the Olympic Games in Athens. A man of ethics, of deep faith and surprising energy, he worked tirelessly for the fulfilment of the Congress' wish which represented an everlasting dream of his compatriots, honoured the title of President of the IOC and incarnated the Olympic Idea. Without the presence of D. Vikelas at the Congress, Athens would not have been chosen and without Athens the future of the International Olympic Games would have been uncertain.

2. The Congress of Paris, like any other historical event, was the result of earlier visions and actions. The efforts made, during the 19th century, for the revival of the Olympic Games, in Greece and England in particular, had paved the way and made participants in the Paris Congress, as well as those who contributed to the organization and the tremendous success of the 1st Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, more receptive to the idea.

The vision of E. Zappas and his patronage, in the ancient Greek sense of the term, of the revival of the Olympic Games which, because of conditions existing in Greece in 1856-1858, had to take the form of the Olympia Contests of 1859, 1870, 1875 and 1888-89, was an event of decisive importance which spread beyond the confines of Greece, from the very beginning, inspiring great people who were adepts of Greek culture. The uniqueness of the Olympia Contests, in respect to their competition aspect, compared to similar foreign events, is due to Zappas' lifetime donation, their institutional renewal, every four years, by virtue of a Royal Decree, the introduction of competition rules and events taken from the ancient Olympic Games, to their all-Greek character, their ceremonial and, above all, to the enthusiastic presence and participation of a large number of spectators.

In 1851, the Englishman Dr W.P. Brookes, a follower of Asclepius, attempted to fulfil his humanist convictions, through the Olympic Ideal, by creating the "Wenlock Olympian Society". With the annual sports festival he organized for 44 consecutive years in his hometown and with the "National Olympian Association" which he founded in 1865, he would lay the foundations for the future British Olympic Association.

His eyes were always turned to the birth place of the Olympic Ideal. He welcomed, encouraged and supported the Olympia Contests which he used as a model.

He dreamed of organizing international sports festivals in Athens, an idea he had first conceived in 1881, according to the Greek newspaper of Trieste "Cleio". Together with *Zappas* in the Elysean Fields they expect from history, which was always been hard towards ideologists and modest men, to be given a place in the Olympic Pantheon, not to satisfy a personal need, but because the Olympic Movement needs luminous examples.

3. The time period of 22 months which elapsed from the moment the wish was formulated until the revival of the Olympic Games, was a fascinating race against time and all possible odds in Greece, a struggle against indifference, ignorance, prejudice, biases about sports and the Utopian character of the revival idea, on the part of most countries in the world.

Among the first Olympic runners who successfully finished the difficult Paris-Athens race, transcending human potential, was Demetrios Vikelas.

Georgios Averof, the man who made the renovation of the Panathenean Stadium possible, was the first stadium winner, crowned before the opening of the Games with the laurel wreath of national recollection and appreciation, as well as the Olympic wild olive wreath.

4. If Coubertin's heart, in response to his wishes, lies in the land of Olympia, then the heart of another Frenchman, Michel Breal, should be resting 42 km from Athens, at Marathon, where it would beat loudly at every start of the race, a race that was first conceived by the professor who loved Greece, so that the Marathon victory, 2500 years ago, of democracy over totalitarianism, of civilization over barbarism, could be honoured and recalled.

The main protagonist and reviver of the Olympic Games was the Greek people who, "with the fervour of their soul and the blood of their heart", created the appropriate conditions, before and during the Games, which allowed participants to experience the true feeling of the ancient Olympic Games which had been kept alive, through the centuries, with religious zeal. And when the revived institution was threatened with extinction, after the failure of the 1900 and 1904 Olympics, that same people, in the same stadium, with the same passion and enthusiasm, would save it in 1906, with the so-called interim Games !

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