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for the Modern Greek Studies Association  
of Australia and New Zealand (MGSAANZ)  
Department of Modern Greek  
University of Sydney NSW 2006 Australia  
Tel (02) 9351 7252 Fax (02) 9351 3543  
E-mail: [Vrasidas.Karalis@modern.greek.usyd.edu.au](mailto:Vrasidas.Karalis@modern.greek.usyd.edu.au)

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MODERN GREEK STUDIES  
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Address for all correspondence and payments

MGSAANZ

Department of Modern Greek, University of Sydney, NSW 2006 Australia

Tel (+61-2) 9351 7252 Fax (+61-2) 9351 3543

E-mail: [Vras@arts.usyd.edu.au](mailto:Vras@arts.usyd.edu.au)

*The periodical welcomes papers in both English and Greek on all aspects of Modern Greek Studies (broadly defined). Prospective contributors should preferably submit their papers on disk and hard copy. All published contributions by academics are refereed (standard process of blind peer assessment). This is a DEST recognised publication.*

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**STEVE GEORGAKIS**

The University of Sydney

## SPORTING LINKS: THE GREEK DIASPORA AND THE MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES

It is now well established and accepted that the Greeks played a significant role in the modern Olympic movement. Up until recently, their acknowledged involvement was unjustly relegated to hosting the very first Olympic Games in 1896 and being one of only two countries to have participated in all Games.

Perhaps the first omission and most striking example of this neglect of the Greeks' contribution is reflected in the myth that Pierre de Coubertin was the "sole instigator" of the modern Olympic Games. The first to omit the Greek, or any other, presence was de Coubertin himself in 1908 when he published an article "Why I revived the Olympic Games", and for the next eighty years this omission continued. Even the standard histories of the Olympic Games have not mentioned the Greek involvement in any great detail (Mandell, 1976; MacAloon, 1981; Guttman, 1992). This all changed with the publication of David Young's article "The Origins of the Modern Olympic Games: A New Version" (1987) and a later book *The modern Olympics: a struggle for survival* (1996). The recent works on the modern Olympic Games have started to document the important Greek involvement. (Decker, 1996)

It has primarily been the scholars of sport who have focussed in on this research. Scholars of Modern Greek Studies have not found the topic of sport an important one and have been unwilling to fully examine popular and modern culture as a site where Greek identity is formed and articulated. In the latest edition of the *International Journal of Modern Greek Studies* (vol. 21, No. 2, October 2003), for example, there are articles on poetry, the Church, theatre and politics and nothing on more contemporary issues. In the last couple of decades, Modern Greek Studies has struggled to adapt to a rapidly evolving academic environment that emphasises postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other "isms". The difficulties the field has faced can be traced to a variety of institutional factors.

There is currently a problem with Modern Greek Studies. There is a privileging and emphasis on investigating traditional Greek culture and not novelties such as sport or anything else which makes Greece modern and this obviously falsifies modern Greek

culture. Modern Greek Studies scholars try to trace the folkloric retentions of modern Greek culture. The problem is that they have relied on books for their portrait of the Greeks. Books regularly referred to are Campbell's *Honor, Family and Patronage* (1964), Sander's *Rainbow in the Rock* (1968) and Friedl's *Vassilika* (1962). These books neglect the role of sport in modern Greek culture.

Patrick Leigh-Fermor's *Roumeli* (1966) and *Mani* (1958), so often quoted, are themselves quests for the wild Greece now rapidly disappearing and indeed disappeared in most places. It is clear that the foreign view of Greece and the Greeks has been marked strongly by the generation of expatriates like Lawrence and Durrell, Leigh-Fermor, Sherrard, Campbell and Miller, who were there in the 1930s and wrote for 40 years a mountain of books. They did not go to Greece for the splendours and sins of Athens and Thessalonica, but for the most archaic traditional lifestyle they could find. When Corfu and Rhodes became intolerable, all too largely owing to the success of Durrell's *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (1953) and *Prospero's Cell* (1973), they went further and further out, until Sherrard ended up in Mount Athos and Leigh-Fermor with the Vlachs. The latest text in this long line is by Edmund Keeley (2001) *Inventing Paradise: the Greek journey* which is based on the experiences of British expatriates living in Greece in the post-World War II period.

While the Greek nation has been captivated with the 2004 Olympic Games, it is scarcely recognised that the Greeks themselves revived the Olympic Games before de Coubertin was even born. Barely liberated and not long after the Greek War of Independence (1821–1827), the Greeks held Olympic Games in Athens on six separate occasions: 1859 in Ludwig Square; 1870 and 1875 at the Panathenaic Stadium; and in 1889 at the Central Gymnasium; followed by Panhellenic Games in 1891 and 1893. These were not only the forerunners of the 1896 Olympic Games, but in many ways were authentic descendants of the ancient Olympic Games. Chrysafis (1930) and Manitakis (1962) provide the enlightening accounts of the above Games.

There is also an argument that ancient Greek Olympic-type festivals existed even after the Byzantine Emperor, Theodosius, outlawed pagan festivals in 394 AD which officially brought to an end the ancient Olympic Games. This warrants investigation and perhaps sporting festivals did continue in the Greek world uninterrupted; that is Greek games existed in the periods of Byzantium 394–1453 AD and the Turkish Occupation 1453–1821 AD.

Speros Vryonis supported the view that the Byzantine saints became the heirs of the pagan past and since then, heirs to the occupied nations. (Vryonis, 1981, pp. 196–226). For example, descriptions of famous sporting festivals in Byzantium were first documented by Timarione in the twelfth century who described the Demetria festival of Macedonia as “a

feast, just as the Panathenaea were in Athens and Panionia among the Milesians. They flow to it not only the indigenous Greeks but the Greeks from all parts of the world". (Romano, 1974, p. 5.) During the Turkish Occupation, Evliya Celebi described a festival in the 17th century: "Once a year, at the time of the cherries, 100,000 Greek men from the Ottoman Empire, Arabia, Persia, India, Samarkand, Balkh, Bokhara, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, the entire West, and generally from the four corners of the world come together at the festival ... there are from every land ... dancers, wrestlers, archers, brave and handsome youths." (Vryonis, 1992, p. 217–18). It would seem that these festivals were diminutives, both in name and form, of the ancient festivals with the same medley of religion, sport and art.

What has not been documented in any of the Greek or sporting literature is the role that the Greek diaspora played in the Modern Olympic Movement. This is surprising when one considers the important role of sport in the Greek diaspora. There have been several studies of sports in various immigrant communities, most notably Chinese in San Francisco and Irish in Boston (Wiggins and Eisen, 1994); Italians in St Louis (Mormino, 1982); West Indians in London (Day, 1981); Jews in Australia (Hughes, 2003) and the present author's study on the sporting Greeks in Australia (2000, a and b). We understand that immigrants like to bond by playing together and competing with others. But nobody has looked at one ethnic group across its diaspora locations. In this paper it is proposed to do this for the Greeks, playing particular attention to their connections with the Olympic Games.

It is quite clear that in each of the immigration sites Greeks built up parallel institutions, but with very little retrospection to Greece itself and without too much awareness of what was going on elsewhere in the diaspora. (Petropoulos, 1972) One of the only real contacts that existed was to come together during the Olympic Games.

At the very dawn of the reconception and re-vival of the Olympic Games it was the Greeks of the diaspora who were the instigators. In 1829 Georgios Kallirois, a native of Venice, published the first book in modern Greek dealing with sport (Kallirois, 1829). Three decades later, in Paris, Mynoide Mynas translated Philostratos's work and included an addendum entitled, "Regarding the Establishment of the Ancient Olympic Games in Greece" (Mynas, 1858, pp. 132–43).

In fact the inspiration for the revival of the Olympic Games came from Evangelos Zappas, a hero in the Greek War of Independence of 1821–27, who had acquired substantial wealth in Romania, where a wealthy Greek community had existed. Like many Greeks who had prospered in the diaspora, he decided to devote his fortune to his homeland. Zappas wrote to the King of Greece, Otto, in 1856 offering to fund the entire Olympic revival, thus initiating the Zappas Olympics (1859–1889) and establishing amongst other buildings the Zappeion building. The government received Zappas'



promise graciously and with the Royal Decree 19 August 1858 stated that the Zappas Games would take place very four years with the name Olympics (Committee for the Olympic Games, 1892).

Therefore the first Olympic Games of the modern era were promoted and held in Athens in October 1859. The competitors, all of Greek lineage, came from both Greece and abroad; from Cyprus, Smyrna, Jerusalem, Athens and Constantinople. It is not clear how they found out about the Games, although what is clear is that Zappas designated money for transport and accommodation. This meant that these athletes could attend and distinguish themselves like Petros Velissariou from Smyrna, for example, who won the *dolichos* running race. Chrysafis in his text lists the victors and also reproduces reports of the day from the *Athena* and *Avgi* daily Athenian newspapers (Chrysafis, 1930, pp. 37–44). In 1865 Zappas died, bequeathing his immense estate to fund the modern Olympic Games every four years, “in the manner of our ancestors, and for the stadium to be excavated and restored” (Committee for the Olympic Games, 1892).

Political turmoil postponed the second Zappas Olympiad until 1870, yet these Olympics were a resounding success. The athletic events took place in the newly renovated stadium. The organisers called for entries about three months in advance, and athletes from all over the Greek world were to report in person to the Olympic Committee for training. All athletes swore an oath to follow the rules and not cheat. Just as in antiquity a herald announced the competitions and declared the names of the winners. Travel expenses for needy athletes were paid, as were accommodation, meals and uniforms in Athens. Cash prizes were offered and athletes from all over the world participated once again (Chrestiadès, 1870).

On the opening day 15 November, 30,000 spectators flocked to the newly renovated stadium. The star of the Games was George Akestoridis of Constantinople (Chrestiadès, 1872, pp. 22–3). Chrestiadès who compiled two books related to these Games noted: “The spectacle was glorious and it honours the Greek people. ... We wish in the future to witness these magnificent Games again, fulfilling the sacred aim of the great Evangelos Zappas” (Chrestides, 1870, p. 3).

At the third Games in 1875, once again it was diaspora athletes who distinguished themselves, including Pontian Con Molakidis who won two field events. Even though the Royal family took control of the Games, the last Zappas Olympic Games took place in October 1888, although there were no athletic parts to the games, just agri-industrial games. In the first three Zappas Olympic Games, the Diaspora presence was apparent at all levels; among athletes, across events and in administrators and officials.

There were two other smaller attempts to organise Olympic Games, which, although successful, were of a small scale, that is, only Athenian Clubs entered the competition. In

1891, the Panhellenios Club was founded and this club established Panhellenic Games in May 1891, at the Public Central Gymnasium. The second Panhellenic Games took place in June 1893.

Perhaps the most notable difference between Greek sport and Greek diaspora sport was the strength of their respective clubs. One year before the 1896 Olympic Games, the differences between the clubs of Greece and the Diaspora were significant. The newly established Ethnikos Athletic Club of Athens, formed in 1893, organised the Tinos Olympic Games, held on the Island of Tinos on 15 August 1895, the day of the festival of Theotokou, in the grand and historical church with the famous wonder-working icon. The mayor of Tinos funded the games and invited clubs from both Greece and Asia Minor to participate. Unlike the four Zappas Olympics (1859–89) and the two Panhellenic Games (1981–93), these were the first games organised outside of Athens.

The games at Tinos hold an important and as yet unacknowledged position in the history of Greek sport. First, the games, attracting a crowd of over 20,000 people, were held on a holy religious day, a practice similar to the ancient Greek festivals. Secondly, it was the first time official contact was made between sporting clubs in free Greece and those in the diaspora. Orpheus and Gymnasium of Smyrna sent a team of athletes including the head of the delegation, the Independence poet and journalist, Miltiades Seizanis. Orpheus was the first club formed in Smyrna in September 1890, while the Gymnasium Athletic Club was formed in 1893. At the end of the Tinos games in his keynote address, Seizanis discussed national survival and success through sports, evoking an emotional response from the audience. Linardos' club histories of the *Panhellenios* and *Ethnikos* provide the most detailed account of the Tinos Olympic Games (Linardos, 1993, pp. 27–31; 1991, pp. 30–2).

Thirdly, the reports of these games give concrete evidence of the differences between the clubs of Asia Minor and Greece. For example, Greek authorities were impressed by the professionalism of the Asia Minor club Orpheus whose athletes wore “short athletic pants (shorts) and running shoes with spikes, without socks, whereas the other athletes wore shirts, with wide belts and long white pants” (Linardos, 1993, p. 28).

The Athenian newspaper *Avgi* stated that the Greek athletes wore, “trousers with blue belts, while the athletes from Smyrna were dressed in contemporary attire, athletic shirts, knee length shorts and running shoes with spikes, while surprising their opponents and spectators with their sporting skill”. (Αγοή, 25 August 1895, p. 1. Also contains a photo.)

The Orpheus Athletic Club of Smyrna also introduced the starter's gun and international rules of track and field. It pleased spectators by winning many events, including the triple jump, 100 metres and 1500 metres races. At these games, the establishment of a union of sporting clubs, both in free and unredeemed Greece, was first discussed.

Following the Tinos Olympic Games, it was at the first modern Olympic Games that the Greek diaspora involvement has now been well documented. George Averoff, a wealthy Alexandrian Greek, who donated the necessary funds to remanure the whole Panathenaic Stadium, was acknowledged in Greece as the principal establisher of the Olympic Games. A festival spirit had claimed the city of Athens and the buildings were draped in multicoloured streamers and the letters O.A., the Greek initials of the Olympic Games and the two dates 776 BC and 1896 AD were plastered throughout the city.

The timing of the Games combined symbols of religious, political and ethnic resurgence with emblems of international recognition. March 25 was of course Greek Easter Sunday and Greek Independence Day. The inauguration of the Games took place in the newly constructed Panathenian stadium, with an estimated attendance of 100,000. Athens at the time had a population of no more than 150,000 (Anninos, 1896; Paraskevopoulos, 1896).

Greek athletes from all over the world congregated in Athens. Of the 311 athletes that competed, 230 were Greek including 95 from the Greek diaspora. For the first time there was a Cypriot presence. Cyprus' first athletic club, Olympia, was formed in Lemeso in 1892. In 1896, the first Pan-Cypriot Games also took place with Olympia and the newly formed Pan-Cyprus club of Nicosia competing. Andrew Andreou, of Olympia, who represented Greece in the 1896 Olympic Games, won four events (Manitakis, 1930, p. 75). At the turn of the century, the most numerous and powerful sporting clubs were found in the diaspora. Savvidis lists the number of Greek sporting clubs in existence, prior to 1900: seven in Athens, three in Piraeus, four in rural Greece and twenty seven outside Greece, with the majority in Asia Minor (Savvidis, 1901, p. 142). Some of these diaspora clubs include: Panionios Smyrna, Milon Alexandria, Kastrianis Pergamon, Theseus Constantinople, Hermes Constantinople, Hercules Tataoulon, Olympiakos Chicago, Prometheus Trebizond and Pan-Cyprus of Nicosia.

At the 1906 Intermediate Athens Olympic Games, 88 Greek athletes took part, over 25 per cent of whom were from Asia Minor and so subjects of the Ottoman Empire. These subjects of the Ottoman Empire were greeted with wild enthusiasm in Athens (Savvidis, 1906, p. 39). At the 1906 Olympic Games, brothers Georgios and Nicholaos Alibrantis of Hercules Constantinople both won gold medals in the pentathlon and gymnastics events respectively, while another Constantinopolitan, Michail Dorizas of Hercules, came third in the shot put. The lifting of the Greek flag twice outraged the Turkish Embassy officials, who technically protested to the IOC claiming that the Turkish flag should have been lifted because the Alibrantis brothers were Turkish citizens.

At the 1904 St. Louis Olympic Games, it was the Greeks of the United States who played a dominant role in this global movement. The surplus availability of Greek labour

and the demand for labour by several industrialising countries had created a new immigration stream for Greece and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a general movement of Greeks to the United States. At the 1904 Olympic Games, held in Saint Louis, Periklis Kakousis and Nicholaos Georgantas won gold medals. Both of these athletes, with the financial aid of the Greek Community of Saint Louis, arrived early in the USA to train. At the end of the 1904 Games, gold medallist Periklis Kakousis stayed on in America. By 1906, Georgantas had also migrated to America where there were more opportunities. In fact, the Greek Community in the United States funded both the 1904 Greek Olympic team and the 1932 Greek Olympic team which competed at the Los Angeles Olympic Games. In fact, had it not been for the Greek-American societies funding these squads, the Greeks might not have participated. Thus, in this period, notable Greek athletes, coaches and administrators left Greece for the greater opportunities available in the USA. In fact, by the 1920s the United States had undoubtedly become the stronghold of Greek sport.

It is beyond the scope of this article to document the complete historical involvement. This article has only scratched the surface of the topic and attempted to raise some issues. The questions are many and varied. Why is it that the diaspora has produced the best Greek athletes and Greek clubs? Consider Phyras Dimas who was born in Southern Albania and holds the distinction of being Greece's greatest Olympian. He arrived in Greece in February 1991 and received Greek citizenship just days before the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. He went on to win a gold medal at these games. Four years later he replicated the feat, and in the year 2000, at the Sydney Games, he immortalised his name Greek sporting history by winning a third time.

If the history of Greek sport in the various diaspora communities is written, and if these histories were to be synthesised, the result would be a scholarly piece of work respectfully acknowledging the influence of Greeks in the diaspora. Questions about Greek sport in the various diaspora communities are many and complex. Research into Greek sport should not be limited to a simple record of techniques and achievements, but must investigate the wider context. For it has almost been 150 years since Zappas, one of the richest men in Europe at the time, donated his entire fortune to the re-establishment of the Olympic Games.

Finally, to set this and other similar issues within the context of Modern Greek Studies, we need to broaden our perspective of the field. For it is only through an honest and complete examination of Modern Greek lives that we can understand and fully appreciate the value of ancient Greek lineage, whilst avoiding the tendency to be dominated by academic cultural retrospection.

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