

A votive tablet unknown in Greece

As everybody knows, the transport of the Olympic Flame at the commencement of the Games is of German origin and took place for the first time on the occasion of the Berlin Olympics in 1936.

In course of the Session of the International Olympic Committee in Athens in 1934, Dr. Theodore Lewald (Member of the International Olympic Committee for Germany) revealed a project conceived by the Organizing Committee of the Games in Berlin, whereby an Olympic Flame lit by the rays of the sun at Olympia should be carried by relays from Olympia to the Marathon tower of the Stadium in the German capital. Lewald's plan was submitted at a Meeting of the International Olympic Committee which took place on May 18th 1934 at Athens. At the close of the Session, the members were invited to participate in an excursion to Olympia. Halfway, the party stopped for lunch at TEGHEA (in the middle of the Peloponnese). Under the shade of centuries-old plane trees, a conversation began between Dr. Theodore Lewald, Prof. Dr. Carl Diem (respectively president and Honorable Secretary of the Organizing Committee of the Berlin Games) and Mr. Jean Ketseas, member of the International Olympic Committee for Greece. Its subject was the settling of the modalities of transporting the Olympic Flame. This interview took place on May 22nd 1934. During the lunch following, there was much discussion, and the members present unanimously supported this attractive proposal, they accepted the idea with enthusiasm, the excellent wine of Mantinea helping to loosen their tongues. At least so Dr. Carl Diem told us last October!

A fact, however ignored by us, is that recently, Mr. Jean Ketseas made the same trip and, to his surprise, while stopping under the same 'centuries-old plane trees', discovered a marble tablet recording the visit of the members of the International Olympic Committee. This tablet was placed there by the desire of the inhabitants of Teghea

unknown to the Hellenic Olympic Committee. Dr. Diem was the only person aware of its existence as he discovered it a few years ago in the course of a trip. The only error noticed in the inscribed text on the tablet is that the idea of transporting the Olympic Flame by relays was conceived at Teghea on May 22nd, whereas, the International Olympic Committee had already approved the scheme at the Athens Session, four days earlier on May 18th 1934. We would like to put this little legend to rights for the sake of history. As far as the plane trees are concerned, they are still there as reminders of this historic decision to the modern generation. In the present issue of the Bulletin, we reproduce an illustration of the place where the tablet is to be seen. Its text in Greek, which Mr. Ketseas has kindly translated for us, runs as follows:

"Teghea, with its ancient monuments and its beautiful natural setting, inspired the members of the International Olympic Committee when they gathered on May 22nd 1934 under the shade of the centuries-old plane trees of this sacred place, to conceive the idea of organizing the transport by relays of the Apollonian Flame from Olympia to Berlin, where the Games were held with great success from July 20th to August 1st 1936.

To commemorate this event, which drew the attention of the whole world to the Hellenic spirit, a spirit, which brought about the Olympic Truce and which preaches the message of peace and the collaboration of all the nations of the world in striving towards ideals inspired by Fine-Arts and Sciences and towards the prosperity and progress of mankind, the Tegheans League, has erected this commemorative tablet on August 17th 1936, the date upon which the inhabitants of Teghea hold an annual Festival in honour of Athena Alaea (Minerva) and the goddess of health: Hygiaea to the glorification of the Virginity, symbolized by these two goddesses.'



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