

## At Olympia

# The Olympic Games Museum

by Mr. Conrado Durantez Corral

*Mr. Conrado Durantez Corral is no stranger to readers of the Olympic Review (see in particular No. 60-61). Having been its Secretary, he is now Director of the Spanish Centre of Olympic Studies, which comes under the INEF. He is a regular visitor to the sessions of the International Olympic Academy, with which he is therefore perfectly acquainted. The article we are reproducing appeared in the INEF's November 1973 review "Deporte 2000".*

On account of its glorious past Olympia has become the eternal city of sport, and the idyllic valley of the Alpheus arouses deep emotion in every fervent lover of sport who comes to visit it. Today the capital of the province of Elis has grown considerably; the city centre is constantly increasing in size with new hotel complexes to accommodate the continual flow of visitors from all over the world. These visitors come to Olympia to wander through the ancient ruins conjuring up the mythical sanctuary of the Altis, and to admire in the museums' showcases the rare vestiges of a marvellous world of the past, which, by instituting its quadrennial Games, founded one of the most noble and solid pillars of western society.

The first museum constructed at Olympia is a building of harmonious style standing on a small hill on the right bank of the Kladeos, on the city's outskirts. It was built after the sixth German excavation campaign between 1883 and 1885; the German archaeologists Adler and Dörpfeld drew up the plans for it and directed the construction, which was financed by a generous

contribution from Mr. Syngros, a rich Athens banker. A new museum has recently been inaugurated on the other bank of the Kladeos, and these two buildings between them house the vestiges brought up to date during the different excavation campaigns which have taken place for 100 years on the land formerly occupied by the city's sacred precincts. But besides these two "official" and "public" buildings there is a third museum at Olympia with all the charm of a private collection belonging to a man in love with Olympism, a man who has devoted a great amount of his life to the search for the most varied objects and instruments connected with the modern Olympism restored by Baron de Coubertin, of which the first manifestation was the Olympiad celebrated at Athens in 1896.

George Papastefanou Provotakis is the founder of this new collection, unique in the world. It is of exceptional interest and certain items have inestimable artistic and commercial value. An eminent philatelist, his passion as a collector in this field began with his appointment as Secretary General of the International Olympic Philately Union and delegate for Greece to the FIPCO (International Federation of Constructive Philately). With the passing of each Olympiad, Papastefanou gradually enriched his collection until he no longer had sufficient space to store his objects and was obliged to find much larger premises. In 1961 he bought the converted building of the Olympia School of Languages and the adjoining land. In this tiny site, which was no more than a room of about 82 square metres, Papastefanou's collec-

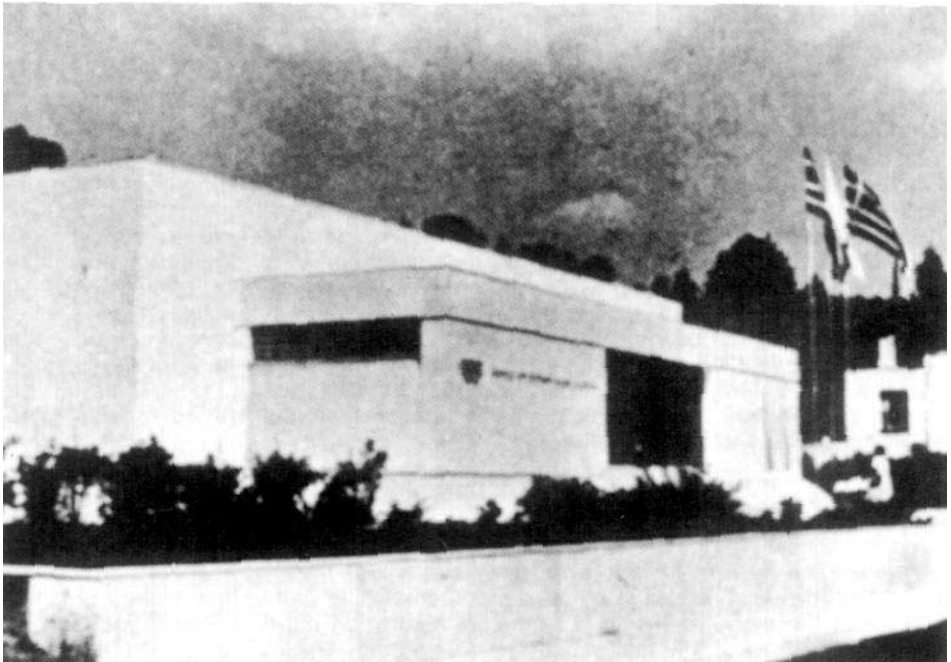
tion was displayed for presentation to the public, and became the Olympic Games Museum or the Olympic Philately Museum. In 1964 Papastefanou presented his collection to the International Olympic Academy, whose seat is in Olympia. At the same time he suggested that the Hellenic Olympic Committee should construct a functional building on the land he had bought with rooms and annexes necessary for the display of the various items of his collection. The Greek General Secretariat for Sport approved and financed this project, supported by the Olympic Committee. At noon on 22nd August 1968, one hour after the Olympic flame had left Olympia for Mexico, the work was consecrated and the first stone of the new Olympic Games Museum laid. 400 square metres in size, it was inaugurated in July 1972 at the XIIth

Session of the International Olympic Academy.

The new museum is composed of a large square room occupying the whole surface area of the building, and a patio with central projectors illuminating the museum during visiting hours. Each showcase is equipped with an electric lighting system in order to show off the items on display to the maximum. The building is also installed with air-conditioning which is particularly useful in the sultry heat in this region in summer.

The items on display are many and varied, the Olympic common denominator so to speak: photographs, medals, stamps, miscellaneous objects, and souvenirs of the lighting ceremonies of the Olympic torch.

*General view of the new Museum.*





*Mr. George Papastefanou, Director of the Museum, guides Mr. Conrado Durantez during his visit.*

Among the photographs are those of Demetrios Saccoraphos, President of the Athens Philatelic Organisation, and Constantine Papamichalopoulos, President of the Panhellenic Gymnastic Organisation and Deputy of the province of Epidaurus, due to whose initiative and vitality the first Olympic stamps were issued on 15th July 1895. Demetrios Saccoraphos was the creator of this idea in 1894, and Papamichalopoulos was its brilliant supporter by giving a detailed and enthusiastic exposé to the Hellenic Chamber of Deputies.

Sports philately occupies a privileged place in this accumulation of precious souvenirs. The museum keeps a complete collection of all the stamps issued throughout the world at the time of the Olympic Games. The stamps issued for

the Athens Olympiad in 1896, of which the museum possesses unique and complete sheets of inestimable value, are particularly precious. Among the philatelic curiosities of this first Olympiad let us note a large collection of cancellations, a philatelic speciality, which is extremely difficult to obtain since a new cancellation was used every day from 25th March 1896, the date of the inauguration of the Olympic Games and the date of issue of the stamps specially printed for this occasion, until 31st December the same year; there are altogether 240, all of them preserved at the museum.

The collection of tickets, programmes, diplomas, trophies, medals, and commemorative and anniversary medals celebrating the first Games is also very complete. The collection of stamps and

various similar souvenir items from the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912 and the Berlin Games of 1936 is particularly rich.

The museum also displays three topographical maps of the region which are of great interest; the first by J. A. Kaupert dated 1880 (topographical maps of Olympia in the Peloponnese), the second also by Kaupert, dated April 1880 (topographical map of Olympia and its surroundings), and the third by the famous researcher Wilhelm Doerfeld, dated Berlin 1897 (detailed topographical map of the ancient Altis).

The library section contains important works on the Olympic Games published in the many countries where the Games have taken place, as well as different volumes on the study and analysis of the modern Olympic movement. A rare edition published in 1700 should be noted containing the names of the winners in the Olympic Games, the Isthmic Games, the Pictish Games and Nemean Games from 776 B.C. to 393 A.D.

Also to be noted are the bibliography, documents, medals, trophies and souvenirs of the Olympic Games reserved solely for Greek participants, which took place in 1859, 1870, 1875 and 1888.

A particularly important showcase contains the wooden casket, padded on the inside, in which the metal urn holding Baron Pierre de Coubertin's heart during its journey to Olympia was placed. In his will the famous renovator of the Olympic Games expressed the wish that after his death his body should be buried in France (his mother country) and his heart taken to Olympia, which during his lifetime had been the symbol of his work, his hopes and the object of an indestructible love. Coubertin died on 2nd September 1937 and his widow saw that his wish

was carried out. Baron de Coubertin's embalmed heart arrived in Olympia on 26th March 1938 and was placed by Crown Prince Paul, at that time President of the Greek Olympic Committee, in a marble stele in the centre of the road leading to the ruins of the sacred precincts of Olympia. At the top of this simple monument is the carved head of Zeus, and on the pedestal can be read in French "Here rests the heart of Baron Pierre de Coubertin".

In 1964, within the International Olympic Academy's precincts, also near the ruins of Olympia, a small walk bordered with cypresses bearing the name "Coubertin Park" has been marked out. The stele erected in Coubertin's memory was therefore moved and now stands in this park.

Next to the wooden casket mentioned above which was used to transport the relic is the stamped and cancelled photograph, taken as the Crown Prince placed the urn inside the marble stele.

The part reserved for the «lighting ceremony and journey of the Olympic flame» is exceptionally complete and unique in its way. All the Olympic torches since the Games of the 11th Olympiad in 1936 in Berlin, when the Olympic torch was lit for the first time at the request of the German professor Carl Diem, until the last Olympiad in Munich, have been preserved. They are displayed in showcases arranged methodically: the kind of torch used at each Olympiad, the bowl in which the first flame was transported from the temple of Hera to the stadium, and the photographs commemorating each phase of the ceremony of the Olympic flame. It should be pointed out that the different models of the torches preser-

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ved in the museum correspond to the first leg covered by the torch, that is, the distance covered from the site of the lighting of the flame in Olympia to the second post which must be within the modern city centre. In addition the path followed by the flame can be studied on maps, some of which bear the stamp issued specially by each city on the route, with the commemorative cancellation of that day. Among the documents existing on this subject, we would point out the photograph of the first lighting of the Olympic flame on 20th July 1936 and the photograph of the runner who took the first leg, the Greek Constantin Condylis. A diploma awarded by the Organising Committee of the Berlin Olympic Games to Menis

Dairopoulos, in charge of the ceremony, can also be seen, and a colour photograph of Kr. Peristeraki, Professor at the Athens Polytechnical College, as he was about to light the first torch with the sun's rays concentrated by a parabolic mirror.

Such are, roughly outlined, the precious contents of the Olympic Games Museum. The private collection of its founder Papastefanou is gradually increasing with individual gifts sent to Olympia from all over the world. From this one may suppose that in the near future the museum will become an exceptional documentation centre for the study of the Games and the modern Olympic movement.

C. D.



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