

COMMUNICATIONS

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With little surprise, really, I read Bob Barney's short piece in the last *Olympika* (Vol. 12 — 2003) entitled: "Setting the Record Straight: The Photograph Portraying the Start of the 1896 Marathon." I have long been aware of how often mistakes occur when it comes to interpreting the photographic documents of the second Athens Olympic Games in 1906 as those of the Athens Games a decade earlier, in 1896. In effect, photographs taken at the 1906 Games are often brazenly published as representing scenes in 1896. On almost innumerable occasions collectors have called or visited me in my office convinced of having come across "sensational" new and until then unknown pictures of the 1896 Games in Athens. And each time I have to disappoint them, because what they show me is actually photographic material from 1906. Two years ago I was asked to "sort" the photographic files of the IOC at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne. Having done so, I learned there are not many pictures from 1896. The 1906 file was much larger. There are numerous incidents where pictures really representing 1906 Olympic scenes are labeled as 1896 views (Bob Barney has earmarked one such incidence with regard to the marathon race). One can see, for instance, in a recent issue of *Olympic Review*, a picture showing a "final day" scene in 1906 "passed off erroneously as a scene from the opening ceremonies in 1896. Finally, as Bob Barney has recounted to me, there is the book written by the American Burton Holmes (*Burton Holmes Travelogues: Olympian Games, Grecian Journey, The Wonders of Thessaly*), "with illustrations from photographs by the author" (New York: The McClure Company). Holmes' book, first published in 1901, with a second revised edition in 1908, recounts the author's visit to Greece near the end of the 19th century.

With respect to that part of the book dealing with the "Olympian Games," the author's sole literary focus details the events of the 1896 Athens festival, liberally endowed with photographs. Only eight of almost four dozen "Olympic" photographs were taken in Athens at the 1896 festival; the rest depict events in 1906, most of them "passed off" as scenes from modern history's first international Olympic Games. The confusion, it would seem, has continued for over a century.

Naturally, I was somewhat flattered that Bob Barney mentioned twice in his article that I had previously and correctly identified the marathon picture he addressed. I used that particular marathon picture for the exhibition and catalogue: *100 Jahre Olympische Spiele: Der neugriechische Ursprung*, which I organized with Wolfgang Decker and Georgios Doliantis. I also supplied the 1906 photographs for the First Century Project (See *The Olympic Century - III Olympiad St. Louis 1904 – Athens 1906* (Los Angeles: World Sport research & Publications, Inc., 2000). The photograph investigated by Bob Barney originally appeared in the publication, *Leukoma to en Athenais B' Diethon Olympiakon Agonon 1906* (History of the Second International Olympic Games in Athens in 1906) by P. Savvidis. It was published in 1907 and remains one of the two best sources for the 1906 Olympic festival, together with the *Bulletin du Comité des Jeux Olympiques à Athènes* (published by the 1906 Athens Olympic Committee), sometimes referred to as the official report, which is not quite correct. This book is still available in many libraries and Olympic memorabilia auctions.

I add a note here on P. Savvidis. He was an Athenian journalist and close friend of the Greek Royal Family. His book contains more than 100 photographs and documents of the 1906 Games. They are the work of the photographer Kazanes. Many of the photographs were published in foreign sports journals, including the German publication, *Sport im Bild*. In addition to the photograph discussed by Bob Barney, three other pictures of the start of the marathon can be found in Savvidis' book. As well, Savvidis' book also contains a photograph taken while the marathon race is in progress. Savvidis does not show a picture of Billy Sherring crossing the finish line with the Greek Prince George, a scene that was later printed in many books. However, he does include a picture of Sherring entering the stadium with Prince George nearby. Greek postcards were produced from a number of the pictures in Savvidis' book, as well as from photographs taken by other photographers. Some of these are valuable collector's items today. One photograph of this genre, for instance, shows an important technology introduction in Greece in 1906—in 1896 a horse conveyed the clock into the stadium, in 1906 this labor was performed by an automobile.

Savvidis' book is not the only publication contemporary to 1906 that left us a photographic legacy of the 1906 Games. James E. Sullivan, who needs no introduction to American Olympic historians, published the *Spalding Athletic Library Series* in the early years of the 20th century. In 1906 the *Library Series* published a long article entitled, "The Olympic Games at Athens in 1906." It contained a detailed description of the marathon race and displayed pictures of four American participants, Michael Spring, Robert Fowler, Joseph Forshaw, and William Frank, all posed at the start. Also appearing in pictures contained in the *Spalding Athletic Library Series* piece, was one of Frank inside the stadium (he finished third) and the Swede, Johan Svanberg, about to cross the finish line in second place. As well, a number of interesting pictures can be seen in the Swedish report of the 1906 Games (*Sveriges deltagande i Olympiska Spelen i Athen 1906*, edited by the Swedish IOC member, Viktor Balck). One picture therein

showed Swedish Olympic athletes training aboard the ship *Thalia*, which conveyed the Swedish team from Trieste to Athens. For the readers of Swedish journals, the Greek marathon runners from the island of Crete must have been especially interesting in that they were attired in their traditional fustanella costumes. Fight runners from Crete started the race, but not one finished—each dropped out. The second place marathon finisher, Svanberg, was captured thrice in Swedish photographs--running outside the stadium, just before crossing the finishing line, and posing with Mellander (winner of the pentathlon) holding their respective winning trophies.

Finally, Greek and German pictorial documents related to the 1906 Games should be mentioned. In Greece, a colored poster was produced depicting the 1896 marathon winner, Spiridon Louis, shaking hands with the 1906 marathon victor, William Sherring. Two somewhat similar versions of this poster exist today. One of them can be found in the foyer of the City Museum of Athens, the former Parliament Building. Postcards were produced from both motifs. Although the marathon race in Athens in 1906 was documented quite thoroughly by photographers (the quality of some of them is inferior), the photographic record of the famous 1896 Olympic marathon is exceedingly limited. Only a few photographs exist and they can be found in Volker Kluge's book, *1896 Athens: The Pictures of the First Olympiad by Albert Meyer and other Photographers* (1996).