

The Acropolis Museum took great pleasure to be the temporary home for the special prize of the first Marathon race in the history of the contemporary Olympic Games. This pleasure is ever greater since the symbol of a great moment of Greek History, the first international distinction for modern Greece, is on display at the lobby of the Museum that houses the monuments of the greatest moments of classical Greece.

Exhibited on the third floor of the Museum are the unique sculptures of the Parthenon, which narrate the magnificent mythical story of Athens, with the exception of the Parthenon Frieze, which depicts the procession of the Panathenaic Games, the biggest festival of ancient Athens. From 566 B.C., when Hippocleides was the ruler of Athens, and up until the end of antiquity, this major festival was celebrated in great style. The Panathenaic Games began with contests between talented bards who recited excerpts from the Iliad and the Odyssey, and artists playing musical instruments and singing. The festival continued with sports' competitions, followed by equestrian events and chariot races, martial dances and warriors' parades.

The great procession, which consisted of Athenians and Allies, took place on the 28th of the month of Hekatombaion, around the 15th of August, on the birthday of the goddess Athena. The procession ended at the Erechtheion, where the ceremony of the offering of the precious cloak was performed, to dress the ancient wooden statue of the goddess in a new robe. Such great ceremony in the period of Athens' peak in literature, arts, politics, and economy, became a work of art by the great Pheidias and, at the same time, the first self-presentation of democracy in world history.

On the first floor of our Museum, amongst magnificent ancient sculptures, rises an ionic column, bearing an inscription in its flutings, upon which stands the statue of a winged goddess, Nike, running to deliver the message of the Athenians' victory in Marathon to the Gods of Olympus. This is the monument of Callimachus, the warlord, who cast the deciding vote in favor of the battle. One thousand three hundred and eighty six years after that epoch-making battle, the ardent Hellenist and famous linguist Michel Bréal succeeded in having his idea to create a Marathon race for the new Olympic Games of 1896 adopted, thus connecting the Games to one of the most glorious pages of global history. It was also Bréal himself who donated the first special prize for the race, the silver Cup with relief decoration depicting the wetland of Marathon, which witnessed the battle of 490 B.C.

Bréal's Cup was won by Spyros Louis, a common water-carrier from Maroussi. The Cup is a symbol of many things: the Europeans' love for Greece, the strength of simple but capable Greeks, the successful revival of an ancient tradition, and the trials and tribulations of contemporary Greece.

We are delighted that this Cup, a recent, important acquisition of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, will stand proudly, for one year, alongside the statues of classical Greece.

Dimitris Pantermalis
President of the Acropolis Museum