Spyros Louis’s Bréal Cup and the Greek Heritage of the Olympics
The marathon, the most popular and revered of all events on the sporting calendar, owes its existence to Michel Bréal. It was Bréal, who suggested this race be included in the first modern Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896, and created a special cup to be awarded to the winner. The race was held on the last day of the first Olympics, and it turned out to be the most anticipated and dramatic of all the events. The victory of a Greek runner, Spyros Louis, moreover, triggered a wave of enthusiasm in Athens and it provided a fitting climax to the successful revival of the Olympic Games. Since then the marathon race has been a highlight of each Summer Olympic Games and its popularity has generated the holding of separate marathons in cities all over the world.

Michel Jules Alfred Bréal (1832-1915) was a leading French intellectual at the time the Olympics were revived in the 1890s. He was born to French Jewish parents in Bavaria. A comparative philologist, who became a professor at the Collège de France, the most prestigious research and higher education institution in France, he is considered the founder of modern semantics, a term he coined. In 1890 he was made commander of the Légion d’Honneur, the highest decoration in France. His published works are diverse: philology, Greek mythology, the teaching of ancient languages and French educational policy.¹

The race that Bréal envisioned was based on the legend that in

Ο Μαραθώνιος Δρόμος, το πιο δημοφιλές και αναγνωρισμένο αγώνισμα του αθλητικού ημερολογίου, χρωστά την ύπαρξή του στον Μιχαήλ Μπρέαλ, ο οποίος πρότεινε να συμπεριληφθεί ο αγώνας στους πρώτους σύγχρονους Ολυμπιακούς που πραγματοποιήθηκαν στην Αθήνα το 1896 και επίσης συνέλαβε την ιδέα της δημιουργίας ειδικού κυπέλλου προς απονομή στον νικητή. Ο αγώνας έλαβε χώρα την τελευταία ημέρα των πρώτων εκείνων Ολυμπιακών και αποτέλεσε το πλέον αναμενόμενο και δραματικό γεγονός της διοργάνωσης. Επιπλέον, η ανάδειξη ενός Έλληνα δρομέα, του Σπύρου Λούη, ως νικητή, ξεσήκωσε ένα κύμα ενθουσιασμού στην Αθήνα και αποτέλεσε την κορυφαία στιγμή της επιτυχημένης αναβίωσης των Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων. Εκτότε, ο μαραθώνιος αποτελεί το κορυφαίο γεγονός των Θερινών Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων και η δημιουργία του έχει οδηγήσει στη διοργάνωση ξεχωριστών μαραθωνίων σε διάφορες πόλεις ανά τον κόσμο.

Ο Μιχαήλ Ιουλίους Αλφρέδος Μπρέαλ (1832 -1915) ήταν διακεκριμένος Γάλλος διανοούμενος της εποχής της αναβίωσης των Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων, τη δεκαετία του 1890. Γεννήθηκε στη Βαυαρία από Γαλλοεβραϊκές γονείς. Φιλόλογος και καθηγητής στο Collège de France, το πλέον αναγνωρισμένο ερευνητικό και εκπαιδευτικό ίδρυμα της Γαλλίας, ο Μπρέαλ θεωρείται ο ιδρυτής της σύγχρονης σημασιολογίας (semantics), όρο που επινόησε ο ίδιος. Το 1890 διορίστηκε Αξιωματικός της Δεκεμβρίου της Τιμής, που
490 BCE Pheidippides ran from Marathon to Athens – a distance of about 42 kilometers or 26 miles to announce that the Persians had been defeated at the battle of Marathon. Upon his arrival at the assembly in Athens he cried out νενικήκαμεν (we have won) and died of exhaustion. There is a debate surrounding the historical accuracy of this legend. Herodotus, the main source for the Greco-Persian Wars mentions Pheidippides (or Philipides) as the messenger who ran from Athens to Sparta to ask for help and ran back, a distance of over 250 kilometers or 155 miles each way. Herodotus makes no mention of a messenger sent from Marathon to Athens, and wrote that the Athenians marched back to their city the same day in order to defend against a possible Persian naval attack. The account of the run from Marathon to Athens first appeared in a work by Plutarch of the 1st century AD but he gives a different name for the runner, who however is named Philipides in a work by the satirist Lucian of Samosata, that appeared in the 2nd century AD. The feasibility of running from Athens to Sparta over 250 kilometers or 155 miles has been proven in modern times and a “Spartathlon” race has been organized every year since 1984 by the “International Spartathlon Association.” It is run in September because according to Herodotus that was when Pheidippides made his run to Sparta.

While Pheidippides’s run is debated, the significance of the helmet of Miltiades (circa 490 BCE), Olympia Museum, Greece. The Athenian general in the battle of Marathon dedicated his helmet to Zeus as a sign of gratitude for the Greek victory over the Persians. The contest was founded on the myth, according to which, in 490 BCE, the Phidippides ran from Marathon to Athens – a distance of about 42 kilometers or 26 miles – to announce that the Persians had been defeated at the battle of Marathon. Upon his arrival at the assembly in Athens he cried out νενικήκαμεν (we have won) and died of exhaustion. There is a debate surrounding the historical accuracy of this legend. Herodotus, the main source for the Greco-Persian Wars mentions Pheidippides (or Philipides) as the messenger who ran from Athens to Sparta to ask for help and ran back, a distance of over 250 kilometers or 155 miles each way. Herodotus makes no mention of a messenger sent from Marathon to Athens, and wrote that the Athenians marched back to their city the same day in order to defend against a possible Persian naval attack. The account of the run from Marathon to Athens first appeared in a work by Plutarch of the 1st century AD but he gives a different name for the runner, who however is named Philipides in a work by the satirist Lucian of Samosata, that appeared in the 2nd century AD. The feasibility of running from Athens to Sparta over 250 kilometers or 155 miles has been proven in modern times and a “Spartathlon” race has been organized every year since 1984 by the “International Spartathlon Association.” It is run in September because according to Herodotus that was when Pheidippides made his run to Sparta.
Tomb of Greeks who fell at the Battle of Marathon (US Library of Congress).
Τύμβος των Ελλήνων που έπεσαν στη μάχη του Μαραθώνα (Βιβλιοθήκη του Κογκρέσου).
battle of Marathon in historical but also symbolic terms grew steadily. To the extent that one can identify consensus among historians of Classical Greece there is agreement that the Greek victory at Marathon did not mean Athens won the war, but rather that it was one of several events and battles that eventually eliminated the Persian threat. Yet it is undeniable that it represented an enormous psychological gain for the Athenians. Herodotus viewed the battle as the beginning not the end of the wars against the Persians, and Themistocles regarded the battle as a prelude and part of a greater struggle. But soon history gave way to legendary associations. The playwright Aeschylus who fought there and who lost his brother in the battle depicted it as a victory of free men, living in a democracy, over a monarchy that ruled over vassals. Gradually the battle grew in significance. Pausanias asserts that the local people of Attica worshipped its battle heroes as divine. The value attached to Classical Greece in the minds of 18th and 19th century literary figures in Europe contributed to the amplification of the battle’s symbolism. Samuel Johnson, the prominent 18th century English author and essayist, saw it as an important reflection of patriotism. Lord Byron considered it a magic word associated with the idea of freedom, and John Stuart Mill believed it to be more important to British history than the battle of Hastings, which ushered in the Norman conquest of England in 1066.2

Par’ ότι η διαδρομή του Φειδιππίδη συζητείται, η σημασία της Μάχης του Μαραθώνα συνέχισε να μεγαλώνει σταθερά, από ιστορικής αλλά και συμβολικής πλευράς. Στο βαθμό που υπάρχει ομοφωνία στους ιστορικούς της Κλασικής Ελλάδας, κυριαρχεί η άποψη ότι η νίκη των Ελλήνων στο Μαραθώνα δε σήμαινε ότι η Αθήνα κέρδισε τον πόλεμο, αλλά ότι η συγκεκριμένη μάχη ήταν μέρος μίας σειράς γεγονότων και μαχών που τελικά εξουδετέρωσαν την Περσική απειλή. Παρ’ όλα αυτά, δεν υπάρχει αμφιβολία ότι επέφερε στους Αθηναίους σημαντικά ψυχολογικά οφέλη. Ο Ηρόδοτος θεωρεί τη μάχη ως την αρχή και όχι το τέλος των πολέμων κατά των Περσών, και ο Θεμιστοκλής την αντιλαμβάνεται ως προοίμιο και μέρος ενός ευρύτερου αγώνα. Σύντομα όμως, η ιστορία παραχώρησε τη θέση της σε μυθικούς συνθέτες. Ο τραγικός ποιητής Λιοχύλος, ο οποίος πολέμησε ο ίδιος και έχασε τον αδελφό του στη μάχη του

συγγραφέα Λουκιανού από τη Σαμοσάτα, ο δρομέας ονομάζεται Φειδιππίδης. Το κατά πόσο είναι εφικτό να τρέξει κανείς τα 250 χιλιόμετρα ή 155 μίλια από την Αθήνα στη Σπάρτη έχει αποδειχθεί κατά τα σύγχρονα χρόνια και ο αγώνας δρόμου “Σπάρταθλον” διοργανώνεται ετησίως από το 1984 από το Διεθνή Σύνδεσμο Σπάρταθλον. Ο αγώνας πραγματοποιείται το Σεπτέμβριο διότι, σύμφωνα με τον Ηρόδοτο, αυτός ήταν ο μήνας που ο Φειδιππίδης έτρεξε ως τη Σπάρτη.
In the wake of the growing symbolic significance of the battle of Marathon, the story of Pheidippides was also celebrated in the 19th century before Bréal came up with the idea of the race. In 1834, French sculptor Jean Pierre Cortot completed *Le soldat de Marathon annonçant la victoire* (The Soldier of Marathon announcing the Victory), a sculpture of the messenger from Marathon dying as he announced victory (currently in the Louvre Museum). The French painter Luc-Olivier Merson produced a painting entitled *Le soldat de Marathon* that depicted the messenger’s death in Athens; this work won the “Prix de Rome” in 1869, a scholarship that supported the winning artist’s residence at the French Academy in Rome. Then, in 1879, Robert Browning, one of England’s foremost poets, whose knowledge of several languages included Ancient Greek, wrote the poem “Pheidippides.” It had a subtitle in Greek: “χαίρετε νικώμεν” “hail, we won,” the words Pheidippides is said to have uttered in announcing the victory. In the poem, reference is made to Pheidippides’s run to Sparta to request aid for the Athenians and then, in the penultimate verse, the poem talks about the run from Marathon to Athens:

...Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:  
So, when Persia was dust, all cried “To Akropolis!  
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!  
‘Athens is saved, thank Pan,’ go shout!” He flung down his shield,  
Ran like fire once more: and the space ‘twixt the Fennel-field  
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,  
Till in he broke: “Rejoice, we conquer!” Like wine thro’ clay,  
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

This was the background against which Bréal came up with...
the idea of creating a modern marathon race to be included in the first modern Olympic Games. Bréal proposed the idea of the race and the cup at the conference held at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1894, where Coubertin and his close collaborators including the Greek Demetrios Vikelas announced the revival of the Olympics with the first Games to be held in Athens in 1896.

The founder of the modern Olympics baron Pierre de Coubertin embraced Bréal’s idea and hoped that it would be feasible. Indeed, Coubertin promoted the idea of a marathon and accepted Bréal’s offer of a special cup for the winner. This was an exception to his rule that the winners of each event should be presented with a medal, diploma and olive wreath. Coubertin wrote in his memoirs that Bréal’s enthusiasm was persuasive, even though the idea of a marathon “was wildly ambitious for the day” because of the distance, 42 to 44 kilometers, and the logistical difficulties involved in staging it. Yet it was an extremely popular idea, Coubertin added, therefore “it was hardly possible, once word got about, to avoid doing so.”

As soon as the idea of the marathon and the special prize were approved, the actual cup was made out of silver. The medals for winners were also silver at that time. Gold medals for first place were adopted later. In keeping with the modesty associated with the Olympic tradition the cup was of a relatively small size, standing at 15 centimeters or six inches. It was inscribed in Greek with the

*Εν συνεχεία, το 1879, ο Robert Browning, ένας από τους σημαντικότερους ποιητές της Αγγλίας του 19ου αιώνα, ο οποίος γνώριζε, μεταξύ πολλών άλλων γλωσσών, και αρχαία ελληνικά, έγραψε το ποίημα «Φειδιππίδης», το οποίο περιλάμβανε στα ελληνικά τον υπότιτλο «χαίρετε νικώμεν», τη φράση που λέγεται ότι είπε ο Φειδιππίδης όταν ανακοίνωσε τη νίκη. Το ποίημα αναφέρει τη διαδρομή του Φειδιππίδη ως τη Σπάρτη προς αναζήτηση βοήθειας για τους Αθηναίους και αργότερα, στην προτελευταία στροφή του ποιήματος, τη διαδρομή του από τον Μαραθώνα στην Αθήνα:

...Εσύ που δεν προέβλεψες! Ναι, πολέμησε τη μέρα του Μαραθώνα:
Έτσι, όταν η Περσία ήταν σκόνη, όλοι φώναξαν «Για την Ακρόπολη!
Τρέξε, Φειδιππίδη, έναν αγώνα ακόμα! το έπαθλο είναι το καθήκον σου!
‘Η Αθήνα σώθηκε, δόξα στον Πάνα,’ να φωνάξεις!» Πέταξε κάτω την ασπίδα του, Έτρεξε σαν πυρκαγιά για μια ακόμα φορά: ανάμεσα στον αγρό με το μάραθο και η Αθήνα ένα χωράφι με στάχυα ήταν και πάλι, ένα χωράφι που το διασχίζει η πυρκαγιά,
Μέχρι που έφτασε: «Χαίρετε, νικώμεν!» Σαν το κρασί που ρέει μέσα από τον πηλό, έτσι η χαρά ρέοντας μέσα στο αίμα του έσπασε την καρδιά του, πέθανε – τι ευτυχία!"
The Bréal Cup - The inscription reads: Olympic Games 1896, Marathon trophy donated by Michel Bréal.

Το κύπελλο Μπρεάλ – Η επιγραφή αναφέρει: Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες 1896, τρόπαιο Μαραθώνιου, δωρεά Μιχαήλ Μπρεάλ.
words “Olympic Games 1896 Marathon Trophy Donated by Michael Bréal.” The translation from the original Greek was provided by Demetrios Vikelas. He was Greece’s representative at the Sorbonne conference of 1894 and had worked closely with Coubertin to make the Athens Games of 1896 a reality. Bréal could not travel to Athens to attend the Olympics and present the cup to the winner so he sent it to the director of the French School in Athens to pass on to the Hellenic Olympic Committee.

Coubertin embraced Bréal’s idea of creating a ‘marathon’ and distinguishing it from all other events by adding a special cup as a trophy because it corresponded with his dream of reviving the Olympics. The marathon race was a novel concept, a new sport. It had never been practiced in the games held in Ancient Olympia or any other of the sacred venues that held sporting events in Ancient Greece. The longest running event in Olympia was the *dolichos* (run over 24 stades the equivalent of just over 4.6 kilometers or 3 miles). Yet there is ample evidence that the ancient Greeks ran distances that were greater than the *dolichos* and the modern marathon. There are several sources that mention the existence of a *hemerodromos*, meaning day-runner, and Herodotos wrote that Philippides (rather than Pheidippides), the messenger the Athenians sent to Sparta was an expert *hemerodromos*. These runners who functioned as couriers and messengers are mentioned by Aristotle and Socrates.\(^5\)

Spyros Louis’ first place medal. Designed by the Frenchman Jules Clément-Chaplain. The front depicts the god Zeus holding Nike the goddess of victory.

To μετάλλιο πρώτης θέσης του Σπύρου λούη. Σχεδιασμένο από τον Γάλλο Jules Clément-Chaplain. Η πρόσοψη απεικονίζει τον Δία κρατώντας τη νίκη.

\(^5\) Ο ιδρυτής των σύγχρονων Ολυμπιακών, ο βαρόνος Πιέρ ντε Κουμπερτέν, ανταποκρίθηκε με θέρμη στην ιδέα του Μπρεάλ, ελπίζοντας ότι θα ήταν εφικτή. Ο Κουμπερτέν, μάλιστα, όχι μόνο προήγαγε την ιδέα του αγώνα αλλά δέχτηκε και την πρόταση του Μπρεάλ για τη δημιουργία ειδικού κυπέλλου για τον νικητή, παρ’ ότι αποτελούσε εξαίρεση στον κανόνα του Κουμπερτέν ότι το έπαθλο των νικητών του κάθε αγώνα θα ήταν ένα μετάλλιο, ένα δίπλωμα κι ένα στεφάνι ελιάς. Ο Κουμπερτέν έγραψε στα απομνημονεύματά του ότι τον έπεισε ο ενθουσιασμός του Μπρεάλ, παρ’ ότι η ιδέα του Μαραθωνίου «ήταν ιδιαίτερα φιλόδοξη για την εποχή εκείνη», λόγω της απόστασης, 42-44 χιλιόμετρα, καθώς και των οργανωτικών δυσκολιών που προϋπήρθησε η διοργάνωσή του. Παρ’ όλα αυτά, η ιδέα του ήταν πάρα πολύ δημοφιλής, προσέθεσε ο Κουμπερτέν, και
Bréal and Coubertin were correct in believing that the idea of the marathon and its special cup as an additional trophy would capture the imagination of everyone involved in the revival of the Olympics and underscore their connection with the classical past. Despite the fact that this race had not existed in antiquity, its association with the battle of Marathon made its links with antiquity obvious. It is worth noting that when Bréal came up with the idea of the race he envisioned that it would start at Marathon and end at the Pnyx, the hill at the foot of the Acropolis where the city’s assembly had met and where the messenger had made his announcement. For practical purposes though, the finish of the marathon had to take place in the Panathenaic Stadium where the 1896 Games were held. In his correspondence with Demetrios Vikelas, Coubertin’s liaison with the organizers in Athens, Bréal made the historical significance of his concept explicit. In March 1896, a few weeks before the Games opened he wrote to Vikelas stating that irrespective of the nationality of the marathon winner he would consider him a bearer of Classical Greek tradition and he expressed his excitement at the revival of the Ancient Games that was about to take place in Athens.⁶

Bréal reiterated his belief in the value of reviving the Ancient Olympics when the Athens newspaper To Asty solicited his views on the eve of the Games. He expressed his joy that the idea of the revival was born in France and that the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens.⁷
ern Games were taking place in Athens. Bréal added that the Games would create bonds of friendship and unforgettable ties among the competitors. In what was a characteristic sense of modesty he chose not to mention his contribution to the marathon race.7

The connection between the present and classical antiquity that the idea of the marathon represented was amplified in Athens by Spyridon Lambros, a Professor of History at the University of Athens who was involved in promoting the 1896 Olympics and who later served as secretary of the Hellenic Olympic Committee from 1901 to 1917. Lambros suggested that Bréal’s inspiration came from Pindar’s Ninth Olympic Ode that made reference to an athletic competition at Marathon, where the winner received a silver cup.8 Indeed, Pindar’s Ode celebrates Epharmostus of Opus’s victory in a wrestling match at the Olympic Games at Olympia in 468 BCE and makes reference to a victory of his at Marathon in his youth against older athletes: “...what a glorious contest for the prize of silver cups did he maintain at Marathon.” And because he was much younger, he had to rely not only on his strength but also on cunning and speed.9

The Greek organizers of the first modern Olympics recognized the value of including a ‘marathon’ in the program and what it meant in terms of signifying the ties of the Games to Classi-
Bréal’s message of wishes for the Athens 1896 Olympics published in the ASTY newspaper on the eve of the Games and reproduced in the handwritten original in 1906.
The marathon appeared in the first list of sporting events planned for the Olympics in the Hellenic Olympic Committee’s bulletin in January 1895. The fervent preparations for the Games included a test run of the marathon in February 1876 by Georgios Gregoriou, a runner of the Ethnikos athletic club. He started his run at the burial mound at the site of the battle and finished at the Panathenaic stadium. Aside from proving the feasibility of running this distance – Bréal had not known how big a distance it involved – the test run alerted the organizers to the condition of the terrain along the route: measures were taken immediately to make improvements. In March 1896 the first race between Marathon and Athens was held as part of the first Hellenic track and field games in which the winners would represent Greece in the Olympics. Of all the events the marathon race was the one that attracted the most interest.

The Greek public’s growing excitement about the upcoming Olympic Marathon confirmed that Bréal was right in believing that such a race would affirm the ties between the ancient and the modern Olympics. Most Greeks were rallying around the concept of the revival of the Olympics because they considered the ancient Games as part of their heritage and by the same token they also responded enthusiastically to the marathon race. Although the Greek public understood that in terms of performance in most sports it would be difficult for the Greeks to compete against the American and European athletes, the idea of the marathon race, combined with the fact that the race started from Marathon and finished at the Panathenaic stadium, was seen as a way to connect the ancient and modern Olympics.
athletes, they hoped that a Greek could win the marathon. As one of the earliest histories of Greek track and field explained, “the general and commonly held wish of the people was that we win at least the marathon, which people considered from the first moment as our par excellence national event.” 10 There was such great interest in the marathon that some individuals took it upon themselves to run from Marathon and arrived at the stadium reporting the time they left though in many cases there were no witnesses. 11

The organizing committee was overwhelmed by requests to run and after sifting through all of them it allowed several additional runners to participate beyond those that had been selected after the Pan-Hellenic Games marathon. One of them was a certain Spyros Louis, who lived in Maroussi, which was then a village just north of Athens (it is presently a municipality in the Greater Athens area), and whose job was transporting fresh water from Maroussi to Athens on a horse-drawn wagon. Louis had not been involved in sports but was a strong runner with innate athletic abilities. Louis had come 5th in a trial marathon race held just before the opening of the Games in 1896.

The Bréal Cup as well as evoking the ancient heritage of the Games is also emblematic of the marathon race of the Athens Olympics of 1896, which was, by all accounts, the signature...
event of the entire sports program for two reasons. The first was because of its outcome: held on the last day of the track and field events, this, as most Greeks had suspected represented the only chance for a Greek to win in any of the track and field events. While a huge crowd was assembling at the Panathenaic stadium to witness the finish of the race, the runners were gathering at the start at the village of Marathon. Two officials addressed them before the race, a Parisian Greek who was running with the French colors said a few words of encouragement to the foreign competitors, and a major of the Greek army spoke to the Greeks, not only wishing them luck but also reminding them that Greece expected a victory. One of those Greeks, Spyros Louis, despite being a late entrant, was in eighth place at the twenty-second kilometer, just over the halfway mark. As the leaders began flagging towards the end of the race Louis overtook them one by one and eventually took the lead to the cheers of the crowds lining the streets of Athens. In the stadium confirmation came when the army major who was in charge of the race and had seen the runners off at Marathon rode up to the dais and informed the royal family that the lead runner was a Greek. He was wearing number 17 on his white vest – it was Spyros Louis. Unable to contain their enthusiasm, the two princes jumped on to the track and escorted the winner across the finishing line amid the deafening roars of enthusiasm from the crowd. The king greeted Louis by telling him he had honored the Greek nation.12

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The awards ceremony, Athens Olympics, 1896.

Η τελετή απονομής των μεταλλίων, Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες, Αθήνα, 1896.
Spyros Louis at the finish line of the 1896 marathon - artist’s rendering.
Ο Σπύρος Λούης στη γραμμή τερματισμού του μαραθωνίου του 1896 - καλλιτεχνική απεικόνιση.
Coubertin more than shared the elation of all Greeks at Louis’ victory at the marathon. Concerned above all that the first modern Olympics be successful so as to ensure their international acceptance and continuation every four years, he sensed the significance of the moment. It was the type of excitement that sporting competition could generate and Louis, a “magnificent peasant,” was not versed in training or scientific methods and thus corresponded to Coubertin’s own view of sporting purity. He noted in his memoirs: “His victory was magnificent in its brilliance and its simplicity. At the entrance of the stadium, filled with over sixty thousand spectators he arrived without any signs of exhaustion, and when Prince Constantine and Prince George, in a spontaneous gesture seized him in their arms to carry him to the King standing before his marble throne, it was as if the spirit of Ancient Greece had entered into the arena. Wild applause greeted his victory. It was one of the most extraordinary sights I have ever seen. I shall never forget the scene and it left me convinced that psychic forces play a much more active role in sport than is generally believed.”

Coubertin’s thoughts on the marathon lead us to the second way the race became the signature event of the 1896 Olympics. All major sporting events, several scholars have suggested, acquire a lasting significance not only by what happens on the field of play but by the extent to which they become a collective event. The ASTY newspaper’s report on the marathon race and an interview with Louis published the day after the marathon race. Η αναφορά της εφημερίδας ASTY στον μαραθώνιο και συνέντευξη με τον Σπύρο λούη, που δημοσιεύτηκε την ημέρα μετά τον μαραθώνιο.

The orchestral epiphany είχε κατακλυστεί από αιτήσεις για συμμετοχή και, αφού τις εξέτασε όλες, επέτρεψε τη συμμετοχή πολλών παραπάνω δρομέων από όσους είχαν επιλεγεί μετά το Μαραθώνιο των Πανελλήνιων Αγώνων. Ένας από αυτούς ήταν κάποιος Σπύρος Λούης, που ζούσε στο Μαρούσι, το οποίο,
tively and intensively experienced spectacle. John MacAlloon, a Chicago University professor, Coubertin’s biographer and an authority on the Olympic Games and especially their performative aspects, has suggested that the finish of the marathon was the most important moment of the 1896 Olympics. After the opening of the Games before a large crowd at the Panathenaic stadium, the quality of the Games as an evocative spectacle had dissipated as each competition took place, some in different venues. There had been no concentrated event recreating the experience of the opening ceremony. The witnessing of the finish of the marathon in the stadium filled by spectators functioned as an ideal conclusion to the Games because it provided a single unified spectacle and experience of feeling and meaning that conveyed in a powerful way the spirit of the Olympics and, one could add, justified their revival.14

MacAlloon goes further in his analysis by suggesting that Louis’s victory, its epic quality and all that it represented on that occasion, added immeasurably to the impression created by the 1896 marathon race. And in doing so it ensured the continuation of the Olympic Games over their difficult early period. He writes:

“Without Louis, the Athens Games would have no epic hero, no master symbol to condense and express so richly so many ideological, sociological, and historical themes. Though such ekeíni tìn epoikh, õtan õna xwori sta bóreia tis Athínaas, o õpioio érghazótan ós metaforóreas vernoû me ámazì aπò to Máravoî stìn Athína. O Louîs õtan õtan aðlíthiè, allá õtan dùnaton droméas me èmfutes aðlíthikèes ikanótìtes. O Louîs èíxe terramísi 500 se dokimastiko máráðwion drómu pòi eíhe gínei ligo prìn tìn ènarríz tòwn Aýónwòn tò 1896.

Εκτòs toû õti syndétei suñeírmikà me tìn arxhìa kílronomíà tòn Olymptików Aýónwòn, to Kúpello toû Mpréál èínei epísiûs emblêmatikò toû Márabwion dòrom tòwn Olymptików tòis Athínaas tò 1896, o õpioio èítan, aπò káðe ìpòsi, to kateçoxhîn gegeñòs tìs diorgánwpsis, gia duç lógonw. O prwòtòs èítan to apotélèsmà tòun. O Márabwion, o õpioio pragmatopoiíðhke tìn teléutaià ìmerà tòn aðlímatów stìbou, antiprosopìpeue, õpìso eíñan antìlìftrièi òi pèriosoûteroi Êllhñes, tìn múñè elpída na anaðexhèi Êllhñes aðlíthikèes vikêtìs se ópooiòdítoto aπò tà aðlímatà stìbou. Ènò õna terástio plíðhos suýkentronwntà stò tòn Panaðhñàikò Stàdio gia na paraðokolouthèi to têlos tòun aýónà, oi dromèes suýkentronwntà stòn ekkìnshè sto tìn xwori tòun Márabwion. Dùo epísìmìou toutò miðhìsan prìn tìn ènarrìz tòun aýónà: õnas Êllhñas tòun Pàrisiòu, o õpioio suýmèteixè me tìn eðnikà cròmata tìn Gallìas, apènthìne merikà emfìnètikà lògia stòns xèvous aðlíthèes kai õnas tágmàtrìhçìs tòun Êllhnikòu stràtoû apèuðúnthke stòns Êllhñes, gia na toutò euçhìthèi kalì èpítuxia allà kai na
things cannot be proved it seems to me it seems to me that the Olympic Games would have been less likely to survive the traumas of the next twelve years had not the symbolic capital of those ‘indescribable’ and ‘unforgettable’ moments in the stadium that Friday been there to draw upon. While it is not clear how thoroughly he recognized it, Coubertin had found his most potent ally in the peasant from Maroussi. Indeed, it may be fairly said of Louis that, more than any man but Coubertin, he created the modern Olympic Games.”

Following the conclusion of all the sporting events, a special awards ceremony was held at the stadium at which the athletes received their medals, a diploma and an olive wreath. Louis received those along with Bréal’s silver cup and an ancient vase, which was offered to the winner by professor Spyridon Lambros. Following the awards, there was a procession of the winners as had been the case in the Ancient Olympics. Louis marched at the head of it carrying his awards including the cup in its box in one hand and a small Greek flag in the other which he waved as the crowd applauded.

The success of the first marathon race in 1896 meant that it would become a permanent fixture of the Olympic games and indeed track and field competitions around the world. The race steadily grew in stature. At the London Olympics of 1908

Louis holding the Bréal Cup in its presentation box and an olive branch at the awards ceremony of the 1896 Olympics. Ο Λούης κρατώντας το κύπελλο Μπρέαλ, μέσα στο κουτί του, και ένα κλαδί ελιάς στην τελετή απονομής των Ολυμπιακών του 1896.

Πορτραίτο του Λούη με εθνική ενδυμασία. Λεύκωμα των Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων, 1896, Ιστορικά Αρχεία, Μουσείο Μπενάκη.
its length which until then had varied around the 40 kilometer or 25-mile mark was fixed at 42.195 kilometers or 26 miles and 385 yards so as the runners finished in front of the royal box in the stadium. The International Athletic Federation adopted that distance as the standard length in 1921. It was at the 1908 Olympic marathon that witnessed a dramatic incident that added to the aura surrounding the race. The Italian runner Dorando Pietri who began stumbling before the end was helped over the finishing line by officials and disqualified even though he was not responsible. He showed such gracious sportsmanship that the next day he was awarded a special cup. The picture of him being helped at the finishing line is one of the most recognizable images in modern Olympic history.

Both Bréal and Louis remained linked to the 1896 marathon but played no part in its future history aside from the legacy both men in different ways had created. Bréal joined Coubertin in supporting Greece in its war against the Ottoman Empire in 1897. He continued also to support Coubertin’s efforts to strengthen the Olympic Games and encouraged him to ensure the marathon remained part of its events.\textsuperscript{17} Bréal died at the age of eighty-three in 1915 and was lauded for his immense contributions to semantics and French public education. An obituary note written by the famous French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero ran to thirty printed pages.\textsuperscript{18} Louis did not run another marathon, withdrew immediately from the limelight, and continued to live

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The reverse side of the medal Louis won in 1896 that depicts the Acropolis.

H πίσω πλευρά του μεταλλίου που ο λούης κέρδισε το 1896, η οποία απεικονίζει την Ακρόπολη.

Οι σκέψεις του Κουμπερτέν για το Μαραθώνιο μας οδηγούν στον δεύτερο τρόπο που ο συγκεκριμένος αγώνας αναδείχθηκε ως το πιο χαρακτηριστικό γεγονός των Ολυμπιακών του 1896. Όλα τα μεγάλα αθλητικά γεγονότα, όπως υποστηρίζουν πολλοί μελετητές, αποκτούν μακροχρόνια σημασία όχι μόνο βάσει των γεγονότων στον αθλητισμό αλλά και του βαθμού
in Maroussi. Of all the offers made to him he chose a new wagon so that he could continue his water-carrying job. In 1936 he was a guest of the organizers of the Berlin Olympics. He died in 1940 at the age of sixty-seven. He was guaranteed a permanent place in modern Greece’s history and the modern Greek vocabulary in which the expression for someone who could disappear fast was “Egine Louis” (he became a Louis).

The Bréal cup meanwhile had remained in the family all those years and it was passed on to Louis’s son. He hid the cup in a tomato patch during the difficult World War II years when Athens was occupied by German forces in order for it not be stolen or confiscated. Over time the existence of the cup was forgotten, but researchers in 1989 discovered it was in the possession of Eftychia Louis, the runner’s daughter-in-law who was living in Maroussi. Although darkened by age and oxidation, it was still intact. In 2012, Louis’s grandson, also named Spyros decided to put up the Cup for auction, a few months before the 2012 Olympics that would be held in London, where the official distance of the race his grandfather won was determined. This became much more than a mere auction, it was an occasion to reflect on the historic roles of Michel Bréal and Spyros Louis and the ancient and modern Greek legacies of the marathon race and the Olympic Games.

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Γράφει: «Χωρίς το λούη, οι Ολυμπιακοί της Αθήνας δε θα είχαν τον επικό τους ήρωα, το κυρίαρχο σύμβολο που συγκεντρώνει και εκφράζει με τόσο πλούσιο τρόπο τόσα πολλά ιδεολογικά, κοινωνιολογικά και ιστορικά θέματα. Παρ’ ότι αυτά τα πράγματα δε μπορούν να αποδειχθούν, εγώ πιστεύω ότι οι Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες θα είχαν πολύ λιγότερες πιθανότητες να επιβιώσουν από το συμβολικό κεφάλαιο των «απερίγραπτων» και «αξέχαστων» εκείνων στιγμών στο στάδιο εκείνη την Παρασκευή. Αν και δεν είναι ξεκάθαρο σε ποιο βαθμό το αναγνώριζε, ο Κουμπερτέν είχε βρει τον πιο ισχυρό του σύμμαχο στο πρόσωπο του χωρικού από το Μαρούσι. Μπορεί μάλιστα δικαίως να ειπωθεί ότι ο λούης, περισσότερο από οποίονδήποτε άλλον με την εξαίρεση του Κουμπερτέν, δημιούργησε τους σύγχρονους ολυμπιακούς αγώνες.»

Μετά την ολοκλήρωση όλων των αγωνισμάτων, πραγματοποιήθηκε στο στάδιο ειδική τελετή απονομής των βραβείων, όπου οι αθλητές είχαν τα μετάλλια τους, ένα δίπλωμα και ένα στεφάνι ελιάς. Ο λούης, εκτός από τα παραπάνω, έλαβε και το ασημένιο κύπελλο του μπρέαλ, καθώς και ένα αρχαίο βάζο, το οποίο προσέφερε στους νικητές ο καθηγητής Σπυρίδων λάμπρος. Την απονομή ακολούθησε παρέλαση των νικητών, όπως συνηθίζοταν και στους αρχαίους ολυμπιακούς. Ο Λούης κατά την επίσκεψή του στους Ολυμπιακούς του Βερολίνου το 1936.
Louis's portrait in national costume, photo by Ioannes Lampakes.

Πορτραίτο του Λουί με εθνική ενδυμασία, φωτογραφία του Ιωάννη Λαμπάκη.
πόλεμο ενάντια στην Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία το 1897 και
συνέχισε να υποστηρίζει τις προσπάθειές του για την ενίσχυση
tων Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων, ενθαρρύνοντάς τον να διασφαλίσει την
καθιέρωση του Μαραθωνίου Δρόμου ανάμεσα στα αγωνισματά
tους.17 Ο Μπρεάλ πέθανε σε ηλικία ογδόντα τριών ετών το
1915 και εξυμνήθηκε για την τερότσα συνεισφορά του στη
σημασιολογία και τη γαλλική δημόσια παιδεία. Μία νεκρολογία
που γράφτηκε από το διάσημο Γάλλο Αιγυπτιολόγο Gaston
Maspero είχε έκταση τριάντα έντυπες σελίδες.18 Ο Λούης δε
συμμετείχε σε Μαραθώνιο και αποσύρθηκε αμέσως από το
φως της δημοσιότητας, συνεχίζοντας
tη ζωή του στο Μαρούσι. Από όλες
tις προσφορές που έλαβε, διάλεξε
μία νέα άμαξα για να μπορέσει να
συνεχίσει να μεταφέρει νερό. Το 1936
ήταν καλεσμένος των διοργανωτών των
Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων του Βερολίνου.
Πέθανε το 1940, σε ηλικία ενός ετών, έχοντας κερδίσει
μία μόνιμη θέση στην ιστορία της σύγχρονης Ελλάδας
και το σύγχρονο ελληνικό λεξιλόγιο, όπου καθιερώθηκε η έκφραση, για
cάποιον που εξαφανίζεται γρήγορα,
«Έγινε Λούης».19

Πέρα από το 1989 ερευνητές ανακάλυψαν ότι βρισκόταν στην
κατοχή της Ευτυχίας Λούη, της νύφης του Μπρέαλ, η οποία
ζούσε στο Μαρούσι. Παρ’ ότι μαυρισμένο από το χρόνο και την
ξέχωση, ήταν ακόμα άθικτο.19 Το 2012, ο εγγονός του Λούη,
που ονομάζεται και ο ίδιος Σπύρος, αποφάσισε να δημοπρατήσει
το Κύπελλο, λίγους μήνες πριν τους Ολυμπιακούς Αγώνες

στο Λονδίνο, όπου θεσμοθετήθηκε η επίσημη απόσταση του
αγώνα που κέρδισε ο παππούς του. Το γεγονός ήταν κάθε άλλο
από μια απλή δημοπρασία: ήταν μια ευκαιρία για συλλογισμό
πάνω στον ιστορικό ρόλο του Μιχαήλ Μπρεάλ και του Σπύρου
Λούη και την αρχαία και σύγχρονη ελληνική κληρονομιά του
Μαραθωνίου Δρόμου και του Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων.

Αλέξανδρος Κιτροέφ, Haverford College

Me την πάροδο του χρόνου, η ύπαρξη του κυπέλλου ξεχάστηκε,
αλλά το 1989 ερευνητές ανακάλυψαν ότι βρισκόταν στην
κατοχή της Ευτυχίας Λούη, της νύφης του Μπρέαλ, η οποία
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Louis in the Olympic Stadium, Berlin 1936
Ο Λούης στο Ολυμπιακό Στάδιο, Βερολίνο 1936.
ENDNOTES


7 To Asty March 24, 1896 (Nb. Greece had not yet switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar thus the Games opened on March 25th which was Greek Independence Day or April 6th for most of the rest of Europe).

8 Eleftherios Skiadas, “Η Αγνωστη Ιστορία του Εθνικού Κειμηλίου (Κύπελλο Σπύρου Λούη)” [The Unknown History of a National Heirloom (Spyros Loues Cup)] O Mikros Romios electronic newspaper.


11 To Asty March 18, 1896.


13 Coubertin, Olympism… 333.


15 MacAloon, This Great Symbol… 240.


17 Müller, “Michel Bréal…” 68-70.


The author acknowledges the contributions of Professor Patrick Clastres of the Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris and journalist Alexandros Stergiopoulos who did research in Athens.
Ο συγγραφέας ευχαριστεί για τις συνεισφορές τους τον Καθηγητή Patrick Clastres του “Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris” και τον δημοσιογράφο Αλέξανδρο Στεργιόπουλο ο οποίος πραγματοποίησε έρευνα στην Αθήνα.
The Stavros Niarchos Foundation and Bréal’s Cup.

On April 18th, 2012 the Stavros Niarchos Foundation acquired in an auction held at Christie’s the historic Bréal’s Silver Cup, presented to Spyros Louis, the winner of the first competitive marathon race at the inaugural Modern Olympic Games, held in Athens in 1896. The cup was offered for sale for the first time by the runner’s grandson. The Foundation’s decision to participate in its auction was motivated by the cup’s historical significance both as an Olympic and a national artifact. After the acquisition of the cup, the Foundation announced immediately its commitment to make it available to the public and to share it with everyone by displaying it permanently at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, upon its expected completion in 2015. As Andreas C. Dracopoulos, Co-President of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation said, “Bréal’s Silver Cup will be shared with the public and serve as a reminder of our history, heritage and resilient spirit. Our hope is that the cup inspires and rekindles Greek pride, just a Louis’s victory did on the last day of what would become the Modern Olympic Games.”

At the same time, and in line with its principal intent to make the cup available to the public, the Foundation immediately embarked upon a process of evaluation and selection of suitable temporary exhibition venues across Greece. A series of visits
Rendering of the Library and Opera building in the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Center, future home of Spyros Louis’s Breal cup.

Απόδοση του κτιρίου της Βιβλιοθήκης και της Λυρικής στο Κέντρο Πολιτισμού Ίδρυμα Σταύρος Νιάρχος, το μελλοντικό σπίτι του Κυπέλλου Μπρεάλ του Σπύρου Λούη.
was conducted in order to identify venues that could serve as temporary homes for the cup. The main criteria in selecting potential venues were the cup’s safety while in display, and its widest possible and free accessibility to the general public.

Throughout the cup’s display at the Acropolis Museum, the Foundation will continue its efforts to locate other suitable venues across the country, which could be considered as temporary display sites after the completion of the cup’s exhibition at the Acropolis Museum in September of 2013.
The ASTY newspaper’s report on the marathon race, published the day after.

Η αναφορά της εφημερίδας ΑΣΤΥ στον μαραθώνιο, που δημοσιεύτηκε την επομένη ημέρα του αγώνα.
The Stavros Niarchos Foundation would like to thank the Marathon Run Museum as well as the Library of the Hellenic Parliament and the Benaki Museum for providing access to their archives.

The Ίδρυμα Σταύρος Νιάρχος θα ήθελε να ευχαριστήσει το Μουσείο Μαραθωνίου Δρόμου καθώς και τη Βιβλιοθήκη της Βουλής των Ελλήνων και το Μουσείο Μπενάκη για την πρόσβαση στα αρχεία τους.
Scan to view a short documentary on Spyros Louis and the Bréal Cup on your mobile device.

Σκανάρετε τον κωδικό για να δείτε ένα σύντομο ντοκιμαντέρ για τον Σπύρο Λούη και το Κύπελλο Μπρεάλ στο κινητό σας.