

The fight for the warrior's helmet

Or: A marathon victory as glue for national identity

By Volker Kluge

On Monday, 17th August 1970, the South Korean lawmaker Park Young Rok invited the West Berlin media to an unusual press conference at the Hotel Kempinski. Full of satisfaction, he explained in front of journalists that at the weekend – in the night from Saturday to Sunday – he had “corrected” the roll of honour in the 1936 Olympic Stadium. In five hours of hard work he had replaced the country name JAPAN, behind the name of marathon winner Kitei Son, by KOREA. His reasoning: “A sovereign independent state cannot permit that its victory should be attributed to another nation.”¹ He spoke, and went off to Tegel airport, but not before sending off a letter of explanation to Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt.

He left the authorities speechless; their attention had been drawn to the case only by this “self-advertisement”. The parliamentary stonemason had carried out the change so expertly that it had not even been noticed by the stadium administration. Without asking,

he had “borrowed” a ladder from them. Hammer and chisel were in Park’s luggage.

The damage was greater than expected, since he had used the “KOREA” letters from different fonts and taken the “JAPAN” letters with him. Despite that, the senator responsible for sport, Horst Korber, did not intend to make anything political of the matter. “For that reason I did not seek to prosecute”, he wrote to German NOC General Secretary Walther Tröger.² However, as the roll of honour was to be put back in order, he sought the view of the IOC as to how to proceed.

The answer came four weeks later from Munich. NOC President Willi Daume had, as President of the Organising Committee of the 1972 Games, by chance his colleagues from South Korea and Japan as guests, and discussed what had happened extensively with them. The case was not simple, wrote Daume, who hoped for a solution in the Olympic spirit: “It could perhaps be that the name Son could be left there with no indication of

nationality or both countries be named, though the first proposal would obviously be the better one.”³ Should no agreement be possible, Daume intended to address the IOC discreetly: “The IOC decision should not however be equivocal, for at the time of the Berlin Games Kitei Son did belong to the Japanese team, formed by the Japanese NOC. And the IOC registers not by states but by NOCs.”⁴

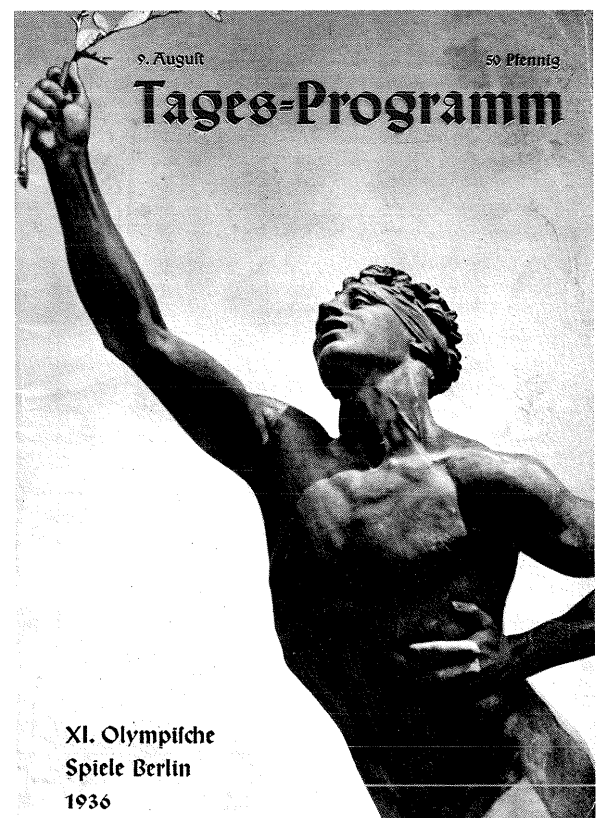
The joy over the liberation from the Japanese yoke was short-lived

Among the best-known German works of art of the 20th century is the *Victory Messenger of Marathon* by Max Kruse. The bronze statue represents the legendary runner who, in 490 BC, brought Athenians news of victory over the invading Persians on the plain of Marathon. With his statue the sculptor won the famous “Rome prize” in 1881.⁵ After that, replicas were erected in several German towns. Reduced scale copies were sold countless times.



With hammer and chisel in his luggage: in 1970, the South Korean MP Park Young Rok reported proudly that he had “corrected” the roll of honour in the Berlin Olympic Stadium. Far right: the programme of 9 August 1936, with the *Siegesboten von Marathon* by Max Kruse on the cover.

Photo: BZ, West-Berlin, 18 August 1970, Volker Kluge Archive



Among those who were fascinated by the legend behind the marathon race was Carl Diem, chief organiser of the 1936 Games. His handwriting is borne by the design of the Berlin Stadium, realised by architect Werner March. Its western stands are interrupted by the Marathon Gate. To the right and left, March had the Marathon Towers built, and under them, the Marathon Tunnel through which the runners ran in 1936.

Diem had written a novella in 1923 entitled *The Runner of Marathon*. This was published in 1936 in the *Olympia-Zeitung* to arouse people's interest in the marathon.⁶ The runner, who is supposed to have brought the message and died in exhaustion thereafter, corresponded to Diem's enthusiastic idea of a metaphorical and sacrificial death. Diem concluded his novella with a quotation of the Spartan elegiac poet Tyrtaeus: "Death is beautiful when a man suffers it as a hero, as a hero dying for the fatherland."⁷

Explained in this way, the marathon race could be, in the scenario of the 1936 Games, nothing but the climax. With it ended the athletic events, which had started a week before. After that the tension decreased markedly.

The German Reichs-Rundfunk, which had declared the second Sunday in August to be "Marathon Day", was part of the drama. Herbert Windt, one of the most prominent film composers of the "Third Reich", created in several months a musical work to frame the live broadcasts of the German elite reporters.⁸ As the race progressed, he restricted himself to a few, ever recurring themes, which were used by the programme editor depending on the



Kitei Son and Britain's Ernest Harper as shadows. A movie still from Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia*.

progress of the race – incessant, becoming slower, tiring, and collapse, as experienced by the Argentinian favourite Juan Carlos Zabala. The advancing, almost breathless finale, concluded in the victory of Kitei Son.

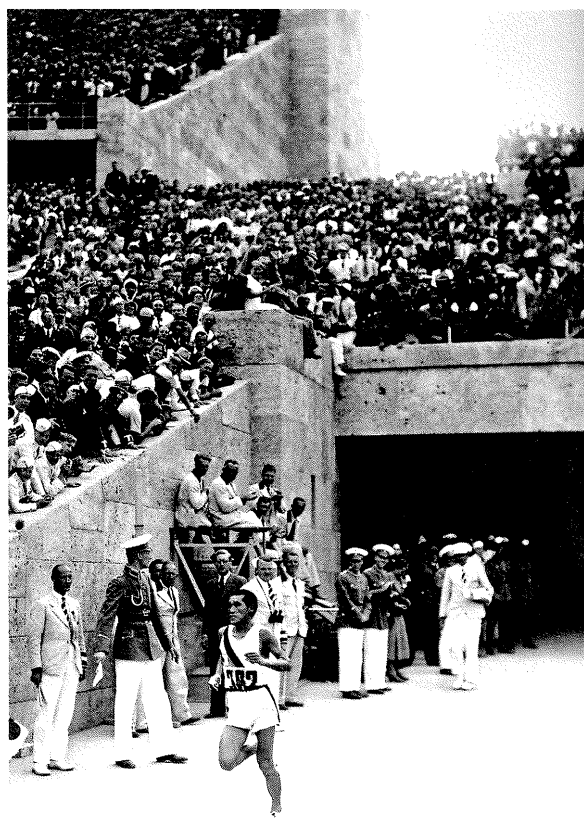
These were impressive, artistic images which the film director Leni Riefenstahl created with an enormous technical and personal expenditure. Accentuated by Windt's music, she integrated landscapes that flew past, close-ups of athletes, physical details highlighting the play of muscles, shadow pictures and slow motion images. The marathon race formed the conclusion of the first part of her *Olympia* films, in order to be shown as an independent work.⁹

The last sequences show the victory ceremony. Son, like all first-place athletes, received the gold medal and a small oak tree as well as an oak-leaf wreath. One can see the display board with his name and the country's title "JAPAN". What the film does not reveal: Kitei Son was in fact Sohn Kee Chung and came from Korea, which had been a Japanese protectorate from 1905 and a Japanese colony from 1910.

That, however, was not unknown in 1936. Several German newspapers did not forget to mention Son's Korean origin, and also that of the third-placed Nam Sung Yong, alias Shoryu Nan. An article appeared in the *Olympia-Zeitung*, in which Son reported "that in his homeland of Korea he had systematically prepared himself for these two and a half hours of the Olympic Games".¹⁰ Radio reporter Dr. Paul Laven did not omit the subject when he described the finish:

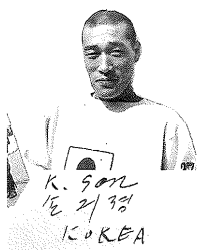
*Here is the finish in the main stadium. Son, the Korean student. He has smashed the forces of the world. With Asiatic toughness and energy the Korean has run through the Marathon Gate, through sunlight and stone-hard streets ... a natural phenomenon and natural runner with his last strength. And now Son, the 1936 Marathon runner, crosses the line.*¹¹

Son also gave innumerable autographs in those days, for which he used the Japanese Romaji (Roman letters) as well as the Korean Hangeul (Korean symbols). He



The myth of the marathon. Winner Kitei Son reaches the finish in the Berlin Olympic Stadium through the Marathon Tunnel, above which rises the Marathon Gate.

Photos: Leni Riefenstahl, *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*, 1937; Volker Kluge Archive



Kitei Son made no secret of his Korean origin during the 1936 Olympics. When he gave autographs, he wrote his name in Japanese Romaji as well as in Korean Hangeul.

frequently extended his name with the description "KOREA".¹² To be sure, that changed nothing about the status of a vassal state, which the Japanese described as the province of Chōsen and whose language from 1938 was forbidden, even privately. Certainly, the attempt in February 1940 to transform Korean names as well, achieved a tiny success with 7.6 per cent. After a delay of six months, ration cards were distributed only to "Japanese" Koreans and 79.3 per cent of the population were registered.

Only the capitulation of the colonial power in the Second World War brought the longed-for independence. A joy of short duration. The Korean peninsula was divided by the allied liberators at the 38th parallel. The Communist-dominated north responded to the foundation of the Republic of Korea on 15th August 1948 in the pro-American south, a short four weeks later, with the proclamation of the Democratic People's Republic, whose troops crossed the demarcation line on 26th June 1950. The Korean War, which cost approximately one million soldiers and an estimated four million civilians lives, lasted three years. No side could win. The armistice agreement of 27th July 1953 brought today's fragile status quo ante.

A Corinthian helmet as a challenge trophy for the victors in the marathon race

Sohn Kee Chung, as the marathon winner was called officially from 1945, took part in the next Games in 1948 as coach. For the first time the (South) Korean flag waved, which he was allowed to carry at the Opening Ceremony. One of the athletes he looked after was Suh Yun Bok, the winner of the 1947 Boston marathon, who was disappointed in London by his 27th place. In 1952 Choi Yoon Chil and, in 1956 Lee Chang Hoon, who came fourth, achieved better results. The latter became Sohn's son-in-law.

In the meantime, Sohn opened a store in Seoul, which declined at the end of the 1960s. In his need, he entrusted himself to Diem's widow, Liselott Diem, who had interviewed him some time before. The Cologne professor turned to Daume with the question as to whether Sohn could be invited to the next Games.¹³ That was already expected, for Daume had sent him an invitation via the South Korean Ambassador.¹⁴

In the late summer of 1972, Sohn along with further well-known people,¹⁵ spent pleasant days in Munich, followed by a detour to Berlin. After 1936, 1956 and 1966 he visited the Olympic Stadium for the fourth time, without publicly expressing himself regarding the controversial inscription on the roll of honour.

He had no time for a visit to the exhibition, "100 years of German excavations in Olympia", which was part of the fringe programme of the Munich Games. Compatriots

reported to him about an antique helmet, which he had allegedly received in 1936 from the Athens newspaper, *Vradini*. In the exhibition catalogue it was stated that the object came from the antiquity department of the Berlin State Museums in Charlottenburg palace. The lender was indicated as the "German Olympic Committee".¹⁶ The description on the base ran:

GREEK-CORINTHIAN HELMET

7th CENTURY BC.

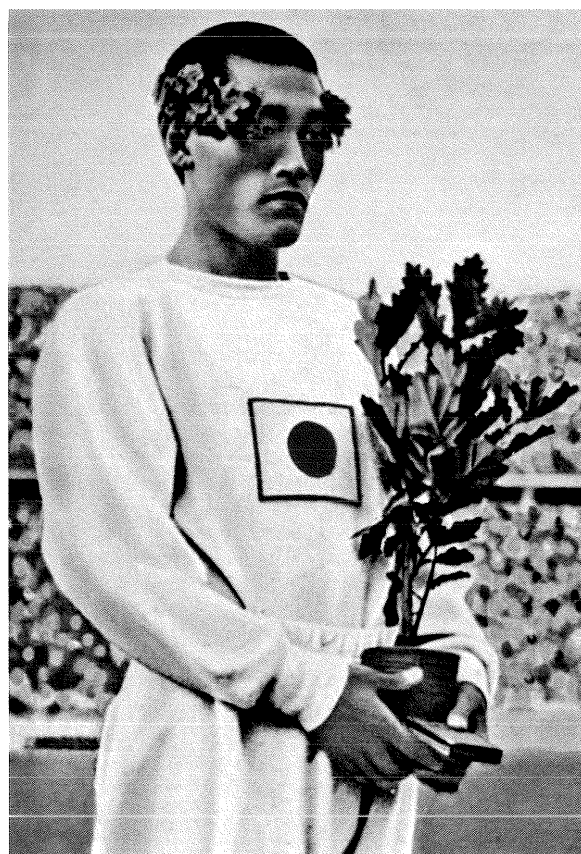
CHALLENGE PRIZE OF THE NEWSPAPER ΒΡΑΔΥΝΗ ATHENS

XI. OLYMPIAD BERLIN 1936

KITEI SON JAPAN 2 STD. 29:19.2 SEK.

Prompted by someone, Sohn turned three years later to Tröger and asked for an explanation,¹⁷ but the recipient of the letter was initially at a loss. The search for the solution to the puzzle was under way only when Korean newspapers in September 1976 – 40 years after Sohn's victory – took up the story and declared it a "national case". In the "Year of the Horse", which according to the Chinese calendar began on 7th February 1978, the helmet was due to return to Korea.

It was obvious that Sohn was acting on the instructions of others. He signed what others laid in front of him. This was confirmed by a letter from the President of the Korean Olympic Committee (KOC), Kim Taik Soo, who asked Daume to give Sohn's "Special Prize" to the "Korean people in commemoration of the 1936 Olympic Games".¹⁸



Because Sohn (Son), in the opinion of many in the media, won under a "false flag", he is often described as the "saddest Olympic champion" – a question of interpretation. Like all individual Olympic champions, he received an oak tree. In a park named after him in Seoul stands a 15 m high oak, which is not, however, a German common oak (*quercus pedunculata*), as was presented in 1936. In the view of experts, it was planted later.

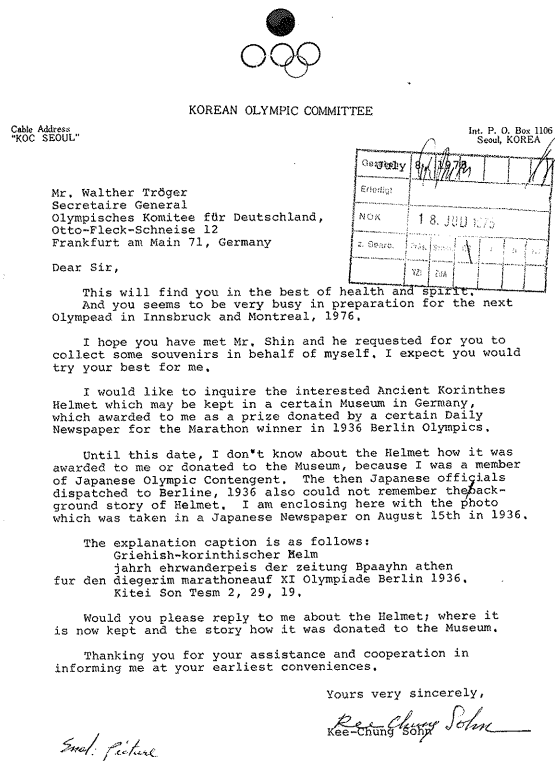
Photos: Volker Kluge Archive



Even before Daume's letter reached Seoul, a Korean who lived in West Berlin appeared, whom Sohn had empowered to "bring the helmet awarded by Greece back into my possession".¹⁹ The confusion was complete. Sohn, until then, was unaware of the existence of the helmet, let alone that he had ever owned it. In early 1977 Tröger brought in the Japanese NOC. Several 1936 participants were asked about the helmet, among them the triple jump champion, Naoto Tajima. But the result was slight. None had heard of an antique helmet. The first place to help was the Carl-Diem-Institute, which traced an undated reference in the estate of the man who gave it its name. On the last page of the first volume of the 1936 *Official Report* there was also a photo of the helmet. The picture title ran:

*Challenge prize for the marathon race at the Olympic Games from the newspaper 'Vradini'-Athens. Remains in the Old Museum in Berlin in memory of the celebrations of 1936.*²⁰

A request to the Greek NOC brought the first results. After that it was the owner of *Vradini*, Dimitrios Aravantinos²¹, who had acquired the helmet in the 1920s and dedicated it to the Olympic victors in the marathon race. The Greek sports enthusiast wanted to create a bridge from ancient to modern times. His special relationship to the city of Berlin, where his brother Panos had become a well-known set designer²², probably played a role. Three days after *Vradini* had announced the gift, the German newspapers announced it, however, with the restriction:



*This gift first must be approved by the International Olympic Committee, as extra-prizes are usually not accepted.*²³

Extra prizes and Challenge Cups – and the IOC resolution of 1936

At the first Games of modern times, some Olympic champions received extra prizes as well as a silver medal and the diploma. No fewer than three went in 1896 to the Greek marathon winner, Spyros Louis: the silver cup of the King of Hellenes, the cup of the German-French philologist Michel Bréal, who had the idea of the marathon race, as well as an antique vase, which the Athenian Professor Spyridon Lambros had made available.²⁴ Also, at the 1900 and 1904 Games, honorary prizes were awarded.

For the Games of 1906 the Greek King donated a challenge prize for the marathon champion – a reduced copy of the statue of the dying victory messenger²⁵. The example was copied: monarchs of other countries, sports organisations and private individuals also made works of art available, which were described as Challenge Cups.²⁶

After the compulsory break of the First World War at the 1919 IOC Session a survey took place, and the number of prizes had risen to 24. Among them were also prizes of the deposed grandees of the "loser states" – from Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II, Austria's Kaiser Franz Josef I and from the Hungarian Count Andrassy – and they agreed for political reasons to use them for the intended Olympic Museum in Lausanne.²⁷

For almost 30 years, Sohn Kee Chung was unaware of the existence of the Corinthian warrior's helmet, which had been donated as a challenge trophy for the marathon champions. After he found out from tourists that the helmet had been exhibited in 1972 in Munich (far left), he sought clarification through this letter to the General Secretary of the NOC for Germany, Walther Tröger.

Photos: DOSB/NOC Archive Frankfurt am Main

The Challenge Cups, which were presented in Stockholm in 1912. In the centre, the extra prize presented by the Greek King to the marathon champion – a miniature copy of the statue of the dying messenger of victory by Jean-Pierre Cortot from the year 1834.



Photo: Official Report Stockholm 1912

One year later in Antwerp the subject again appeared on the agenda. Since only a few Challenge Cups had been returned by the prizewinners of 1912, the IOC ceased giving out any more. The decision was confirmed in 1923.²⁸ When they could be found, the trophies now considered as “historiques” went to the museum.

Thirteen years later – in 1936 – the IOC was not prepared to return to the tradition of extra prizes. The public was also informed. Therefore, one day after the marathon race one could read in *Vradini*:

*The helmet we awarded will, through the decision of the IOC, not be given to the winner, but kept in the Berlin Museum. On the silver plaque [which had been fastened to the inside of the helmet] the name of the winner will be engraved.*²⁹

It took another two years before Diem, appointed as liquidator of the Organising Committee, handed the prize as a loan to the antiquities collection on Berlin’s Museum Island. With or without the agreement of the Greek donorator, as the relevant documents were lost in the war.

It is, however, clear that the helmet, allegedly found near Olympia (and perhaps used as a votive offering), was exhibited in the basement of the Old Museum intended for small artistic items – in the Antiquarium. With the beginning of the Anglo-American air attacks, the artifacts were secured by paper sacks, later in the flak towers in Friedrichshain (a popular park) or deposited at Bahnhof Zoo. So as not to leave them for the approaching Red Army, they were taken in February/March 1945 with several secret railway transport wagons to the west, where they were stored in the Thuringian potash mines of Kaiseroda and Grasleben. There they were confiscated in mid-April 1945 by the western allies.³⁰

When the Soviets in 1958 gave back most of their plunder to the GDR, at the same time the deposits looked after by the Americans in Wiesbaden or by the British in Celle, came back to the western part of Berlin. There was no question of a return to the Museum Island, which was destroyed, in the eastern part – it was the

Cold War. The antiquities came under the administration of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, which exhibited the objects from 1961 in the Charlottenburg palace. Only after German reunification in 1990 could the collections again be brought together.

“One of the three most prominent events for the Koreans”

The “helmet correspondence” today fills a complete document folder and once occupied no fewer than four NOCs, the IOC as well as three authorities and State Museums of West Berlin. The KOC claimed the ancient helmet from the mid-1970s as the property of Sohn, although the marathon victor was known to have been born in North Korea. The West German NOC insisted on its claim; however, this was not proven. There was a second German Olympic Committee, which also had its seat in Berlin where the helmet had been until 1945. The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation was concerned about the loss of a beautiful exhibit, whose material value was estimated at between 50,000 to 100,000 German marks.

The discussion became sharper when a club called Hellenic Association of Friends of Korea began to interfere – founded in 1955 by former members of the Greek Battalion, which in the Korean War had belonged to the UN contingent on the side of the south. Their spokesman was the acting General Secretary, Takis E. Papayannopoulos, a professor who taught in the Athens School of Journalism. He boasted of his good relations with the newspaper *Vradini*, which promptly published an article about the helmet following his views.³¹

In a “Memorandum”, Papayannopoulos demanded the immediate release of the helmet, which he saw not as a sports prize, but as a symbol of the victory of the Occident over the “barbarian invaders”.³² He imputed to the Germans: “an impermissible act of provocation against the world-wide athletic spirit”.

In the hope of being able to clarify the 1936 IOC decision, KOC President Kim turned on 12th April 1978 to Lausanne. To his disappointment, IOC Director Monique Berlioux informed him that the matter had not been discussed either at a Session nor in a meeting of the Executive Board.³³ Tröger, on the other hand, learned via the German Embassy in Seoul that the KOC intended to have the subject placed on the agenda of the next Session – 1979 in Montevideo. If the helmet was given back, according to the KOC, it was to be exhibited in the Korean National Museum.³⁴

At the same time a press campaign began, which either intended conscious disinformation or was intended as wishful thinking. The *Korea Times* announced under the heading, “Germany May Return Helmet To Marathoner”, that a West German cable said:

it would send a letter to KOC detailing the transfer procedure of the helmet, which is rated as a rare treasure of the world.³⁵

There could be no question of that. In reality Daume had only invited President Kim to the World Swimming Championships in West Berlin and announced his intention to discuss the "helmet question" with him.³⁶ In addition he referred to a letter from Tröger, in which was stated:

Therefore, the helmet was given from the Organising Committee to the Museum as a lending piece. The Museum itself considers the Organising Committee respectively our NOC as legal successor as proprietor of the helmet with the obligation that the helmet remains constantly in the Museum as lending piece; ... Once more we should like to express our desire that we want to settle this matter to the satisfaction of everybody. We intend to produce copies of the helmet, which we should like to offer to all still alive winners of the marathon race since 1936.³⁷

The Koreans understood how to raise the temperature skillfully. They involved private individuals, who claimed to be intermediaries. Even the German press was used. The newspaper *WELT am SONNTAG* published the facsimile of a letter from Sohn to the "dear Berliners", in which he asked for support to attain the release of the helmet.³⁸

Undeniable facts, however, were ignored by which the Challenge Cup was not only dedicated merely to the first place runner of 1936, but to all Olympic marathon

champions. Tröger's argument, that the helmet, according to the wish of the donor at that point in time, should be in the possession of Montreal winner Waldemar Cierpinski from the GDR, aroused fury by the "Friends of Korea".³⁹

While the officials exchanged polite formulae, without moving from their positions, Papayannopoulos lost his patience. He sent an ultimatum to Tröger asking for the final decision. In the case that it did not agree with his way of thinking, he threatened to produce a "book of revelation" in five languages, to be distributed during the 1980 Games in Moscow.⁴⁰ A bubble. At the end of February 1980 he quietly announced his abandonment, because it would garner no publicity due to the expected Olympic boycott by the western world.⁴¹

Such attacks did have an effect. Although the legal situation was described as clear-cut, the General Director of the State Museums, Hans-Joachim Fürste, feared above all sport-political concerns, especially as Tröger had informed him: "I am at the moment pretty sure that our committee would agree to return the helmet to Korea, if there are no other arguments".⁴² In order to persuade the IOC to be gracious, Fürste declared himself ready to produce reduced copies of the helmet, provided that the existing lending contract was declared to be irrevocable.⁴³

In the next three years the dispute was nearly forgotten. There were more important subjects. Sohn stayed several times in the German Federal Republic, with the delegation from Seoul, and canvassed for the 1988 Games in Baden-Baden in 1981 with a "Smiling Offensive". The IOC voted surprisingly clearly with 52-27 votes for Seoul and against the arrogant appearing Japanese contestant Nagoya. It was no secret that Adidas boss Horst Dassler had pulled the strings in the background.⁴⁴

Sohn regularly visited the German Embassy in Seoul, where he announced his unchanging interest in the trophy. However, not much more was said about the original. Meantime Sohn could even accept the idea of a reproduction which Tröger had offered him in the autumn of 1982.⁴⁵ For the German Embassy a "Goodwill" campaign had precedence, for which a reason and sponsor emerged: the replica financed by the Düsseldorf Trade Fair Society was to be handed over in 1984 "as part of celebrations for the Korean-German centennial relations" at the sports equipment fair in Seoul.⁴⁶

Yet when the copy was ready in early 1984, the fair was cancelled. Before a new date could be agreed, Tröger received a telex from Seoul, in which KOC General Secretary Choy Man Lip demanded a new discussion, giving as a reason:

But this matter is very important and has very special meaning not only to Mr. Sohn but also to all the Korean people.⁴⁷

Special thanks to Ulrich Schulze Forsthövel, project manager of the German "Memory of the Sport"

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΟΜΙΛΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΦΙΛΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΚΟΡΕΑΣ

친한 회람인 협회

HELLENIC ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF KOREA

OFFICE: 35, BATHYDRASION/LOUREL, ATHENS

WORKING	IV	V	VI	VII
NOK	FEBRUARY 22, 1981			
Α. Καραλής	Πρόεδρος	10.3		
Ε. Παπαγιάννης	Γεν. Γραμ.			

Dear Sirs,

We have the honor of requesting you, kindly to let us know whether a definite decision has been taken with regard to the ancient Hellenic Helmet which had been awarded to the Korean Olympic winner, Sohn Kee Chung and has been kept in the Charlottenburg Museum since 1936.

It is in the last time that we are addressing ourselves to you on this matter and we hope that you will favor us with an answer, above all, consistent with the Olympic Spirit.

With profound respect and cordial greetings,

John D. Theodorakopoulos
JOHN D. THEODORAKOPOULOS
PRESIDENT

E. Papayannopoulos
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΟΜΙΛΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΦΙΛΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΚΟΡΕΑΣ
ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΕΣ ΕΣ 1978
Ε. ΠΑΠΑΓΙΑΝΝΗ
GENERAL SECRETARY

NATIONALES OLYMPISCHES KOMITEE
FÜR DEUTSCHLAND
6, FRANKFURT/MAIN 71,
OTTO FLECK-SCHNEIS 12
M. DEUTSCHLAND.

With aggressive letters and ultimata the Greek "Friends of Korea" tried to help Sohn Kee Chung to his alleged justice.

Photo: DOSB/NOC Archive Frankfurt am Main

What that really meant could be read in the magazine *Newsreview*:

*Sohn's winning of the gold medal was recorded as one of the three most prominent events for the Koreans at that time. Two others were the 1919 Independence Movement and the 1926 Students Uprising in Kwangju.*⁴⁸

Satisfying Sohn Kee Chung without setting a precedent

The whole controversy back to the beginning! "I flatly declined the West German offer. I want nothing but the original. This is also the will of the *Vradyni*", Sohn was quoted.⁴⁹

Along with the signs of weariness now, after ten years of discussion with Daume and Tröger, came a proposal supported by the German Foreign Office. It came from the Ambassador in Seoul, Jürgen Kleiner, who had just been appointed. In order "to bring this sad subject on to the table" he saw no other alternative than a generous gesture. In other words: the original was to be handed over to Sohn in a ceremony in his residence. "About the whole thing, this must be a part of the agreement with the Korean side, tv and press report."⁵⁰

Against his conviction, the jurist Tröger began to accept that he would be on the losing side, when two influential NOC members returned from Seoul in April

1986. Their view was "that the NOC in consideration of the relations with Korea – political as well those in preparation for the Olympic Games – is obliged to hand over the helmet to the Olympic marathon champion of 1936".⁵¹

There was unity that the presentation, – as requested by the KOC – should not take place at the meeting of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ACNO) in Seoul. Instead, Sohn was invited to West Berlin where it was intended that in August for the 50 year anniversary of the 1936 Games he would be given the relic. A more than painful piece of news for the Museum of Antiquities, which for almost 50 years had looked after the helmet and saved it over the period of the war. There were other ancient helmets in the collection, but the "Marathon Prize" was considered a particularly fine piece, so that a gap remained.

Daume, who because of the Berlin Games, was contaminated by the Nazi regime, avoided a memorial celebration and used a reunion of the German medallists of 1936 to hand over the helmet officially to Sohn in acknowledgement of the fact that his homeland is preparing itself now for the holding of the Games of the XXIVth Olympiad. Besides he said in his speech:

*We make no claims to gratitude or any act of fairness or complying with any legal obligations. A little bit of symbolism, which is almost indispensable for Olympic events, a little bit of humour as well, that is all.*⁵²

Sohn Kee Chung was often a guest in Berlin. The photo shows him with his second wife in front of the Olympic bell of 1936 in the Olympic Stadium.

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive



After that the helmet was professionally packed up and sent to Seoul. To correspond to the Korean wishes, the ceremony was repeated on 22nd September 1986 in the residence of the German Ambassador. As he had hoped, the media response was overwhelming. In the photos of this event a happy Sohn can be seen, putting on the helmet, much too small for the size of his head – a horror for every archaeological expert.

As expected, this handing over to Sohn was only symbolic. Soon the helmet went off to the National Museum of Korea, where on 7th March 1987, it was registered as the 904th Korean national treasure. At Sohn's request replicas were prepared and awarded in 2006 – four years after his death – for the first time to the winners of the marathon of Seoul (named after him).

What a history! – and still incomplete today. Scarcely had the helmet changed its owner than the KOC President also demanded the "correction" of Sohn's name and nationality on the Berlin roll of honour.⁵³ However, neither the NOC for Germany nor the Mayor of Berlin (West) Eberhard Diepgen, to whom the Korean member of parliament Lee Jong Chan had turned, was entitled to act. Property of the former Reichssportfeld, to which the Olympic Stadium belonged, was at that time the Federal Property Office as financial legal



successor to the collapsed Hitler empire. The area had been a protected monument since 1966 – a further reason why the compromise favoured by Daume and Tröger, to attach a small notice of explanation to the roll of honour, was refused.⁵⁴ Besides, in accord with the thinking of the IOC, which informed the NOC for Germany:

*This case has been submitted to the Executive Board which decided that the inscription should not be modified, since it would constitute an alteration to the Olympic history.*⁵⁵

Understandably, it is hard for the Koreans, who refer willingly to the long distant but proud tradition of their kingdoms and their existing sovereignty, to accept this decision. Nor is there any lack of attempts to interpret background reports about the Korean origin of Sohn Kee Chung, as can be read on the IOC website,⁵⁶ as a departure from the original resolution.⁵⁷

The marathon victor of 1936 remains in Olympic statistics registered under his Japanese name and as a member of the Japanese team. If the IOC acted differently, it would set a precedent which could set off a chain reaction. In the marathon race alone, the nationality would have to be changed with a further four winners, although their countries at that time did not take part in the Olympics: Michel Theato (France/1900) came from Luxembourg. The victorious Boughéra El Ouafi (1928) and Alain O'Kacha Mimoun (1956) also ran for France but were Algerians, and Emil Zátopek (Czechoslovakia/1952) was a Czech.

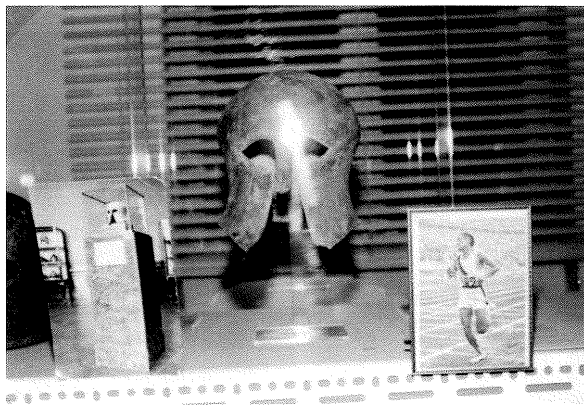
If history proves itself to be true, one can and must not rewrite it. Neither can one run away from it. ■

- 1 "Korea im Herzen – den Meißel im Gepäck", in: *BZ*, 18th October 1970
- 2 Letter Korber to Tröger, 20th August 1970, Volker Kluge Archive
- 3 Letter Daume to Korber, 16th September 1970, German Olympic and Sport Confederation (DOSB)/NOC Archive, folder 1155
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Max Kruse (1854–1942), *Siegesbote von Marathon (Nenikhamen)*, 1879/1884, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie, height 218 cm, width 68 cm, depth 176 cm
- 6 "Wir haben gesiegt!", in: *Olympia-Zeitung*, Berlin 1936, No. 1 (21st July)–13 (2nd August). In the same year the story appeared as a book in the Reichssportverlag.
- 7 Carl Diem, *Der Läufer von Marathon*, Reclam, Leipzig 1941, p. 73. To give the German soldiers in the Second World War an appetite for a "hero's death", the High Command of the Wehrmacht two years later had the book published in the series *Soldatenbücher*, Band 78. Diem also used the Tyrtæus quotation in a speech on 18th March 1945 in front of a Hitler Youth (HJ) battalion, before this was sent as the "last sacrifice" to the Eastern front, already 70 km closer to Berlin.
- 8 Reichs-Rundfunk GmbH (Ed.), "Der Marathonlauf als musikdramatisches Erlebnis", in: *OLYMPIA-WELTSENDER*, Deutscher Verlag Berlin, o.J. (1936). Windt (1894–1965) composed in close collaboration with Leni Riefenstahl the music for her film of the Reichsparteitag 1934 *Triumph des Willens*, after the two *Olympia* films also for propaganda films like *Legion Condor*, *Stukas*, *Feldzug in Polen*, *Sieg im Westen and Kampf gegen den Weltfeind*. After the Second World War he was banned for some years.
- 9 Leni Riefenstahl, *OLYMPIA, Fest der Völker*, Erster Film von den Olympischen Spielen 1936, Tobis Filmkunst 1938
- 10 Joachim Fernau, "Son im Olympischen Dorf", in: *Olympia-Zeitung*, No. 23, 12th August 1936, p. 464
- 11 *OLYMPIA-WELTSENDER*, p. 88. In fact the 23 year old attended the Yosei middle school. Only after the Olympic Games he did study at the Meiji University in Tokyo, where he graduated in 1940.
- 12 Volker Kluge/Karl Lennartz/Hans Joachim Teichler, *Autogrammbücher Berlin 1936*, DKB, 2011, p. 61
- 13 Letter L. Diem to Daume, 18th May 1971, German Olympic Academy (DOA), Willi Daume Archive, Folder 105.9
- 14 Ibid., letter Daume to L. Diem, 26th July 1971
- 15 Among the 15 invited foreign Olympic champions were inter alios Jesse Owens (USA), Abebe Bikila (ETH), Fanny Blankers-Koen (NED), Dawn Fraser (AUS), Emil Zátopek and Věra Čáslavská (both TCH) as well as Valeriy Brumel (URS).
- 16 Organisationskomitee der Spiele der XX. Olympiade München 1972 (Ed.), *100 Jahre deutsche Ausgrabungen in Olympia*, Prestel-Verlag, München 1972, Objekt 47. Deutsches Museum München, 1st July–1st October 1972

Sohn Kee Chung was disappointed that he was not permitted to light the Olympic cauldron in 1988 in Seoul. He was, however, reconciled when allowed to carry the flame into the stadium. There he passed the flame to young people. Far left: Sohn and Willi Daume at the 1986 commemorative celebration. The German NOC President had been a basketball reserve 50 years previously.

Photos: IOC/OSC

The Corinthian helmet has been in the Seoul National Museum of Korea since 1988, where it is registered as national treasure No. 904.



- 17 Letter Sohn to Tröger, 8th July 1975, DOSB/IOC
- 18 Letter Kim to Daume, 5th October 1976, DOSB/IOC
- 19 Power of attorney to Mr. Roho Su Ung, Seoul, 29th October 1976, DOSB/IOC
- 20 Organisations-Komitee für die XI. Olympiade 1936, Berlin, *Amtlicher Bericht*, Vol. 1, Limpert-Verlag Berlin o.J. (1937), p. 640. In the English edition the translation "lending prize" is missing, which also caused irritation and misinterpretations.
- 21 Dimitrios Aravantinos (1880–1960) was a Greek enthusiast for sport, who in October 1924 together with Professor Vladimir Bensis and Antonis Stathatos had founded the Hellenic Car Club. (From it arose the Acropolis Rally of Greece) Two years later he sponsored the first Greek car race on a course of one kilometre in Athens on Syngrou Avenue.
- 22 Panos Aravantinos (1884–1930) lived from 1908 in Athens, where he was employed by the composer of the Olympic hymn, Spyros Samara, as a set designer. Via Switzerland he came in 1917 to Germany, where he successfully applied to Richard Strauss in Munich. He became well-known through his set for Strauss's opera *Frau ohne Schatten*. From 1919 Aravantinos worked at the Berliner Staatsoper.
- 23 *BZ am Mittag*, 30th July 1936
- 24 Pierre de Coubertin/Timoleon J. Philemon/N.G. Politis/Charalambos Anninos (Eds.), *The Olympic Games B.C. 776.–1986.*, Second Part, Beck, Athens 1897, pp. 4, 20 and 68
- 25 Louvre, Paris. Jean-Pierre Cortot (1787–1843), *Le soldat de Marathon annonçant la victoire* (1834)
- 26 Karl Lennartz/Andreas Hüfer/Walter Borgers, *Olympische Siege – Medaillen – Diplome – Ehrungen*, Sportverlag, Berlin 2000, pp. 151–158
- 27 Minutes, IOC Session Lausanne 1919, p. 6, IOC/OSC Archives
- 28 Ibid., Antwerp 1920, p. 10, Rome 1923, p. 29
- 29 *Vradini*, 10th August 1936. The information rests on an announce-

ment of the Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro (DNB), which on the 11th August 1936 was also published by the Japanese newspaper *Hochi-Shinbun*.

- 30 Information Prof. Dr. Wolf-Dieter Heilmeyer, former Director of the Antiquity Collection, 2nd August 2017. The rescue of the cultural items is remembered in a trivialised version in the film *Monuments Men*, director George Clooney, 2014.
- 31 "Donation to Mr. Sohn", in: *Vradini*, 2nd July 1977
- 32 Letter Papayannopoulos to NOC for Germany, 3rd December 1977, DOSB/IOC
- 33 Letter Berlioux to Kim, 8th June 1978, IOC/OSC Archives
- 34 Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to NOC, 12th July 1978, DOSB/IOC
- 35 *Korea Times*, 1st August 1978
- 36 Cable Daume to Kim, DOSB/IOC
- 37 Letter Tröger to KOC, 25th July 1978, DOSB/IOC
- 38 Werner Sikorski, "Sie wollen ihm den Helm nicht geben", in *WELT am SONNTAG*, 29th October 1978, p. 77
- 39 Letter Papayannopoulos to NOC for Germany, 3rd February 1978, DOSB/IOC
- 40 Ibid., 10th September 1978, 16th April 1979, DOSB/IOC
- 41 Ibid., 22nd February 1980, DOSB/IOC
- 42 Letter Tröger to Fürste, 31st October 1978, DOSB/IOC
- 43 Letter Fürste to Tröger, 13th December 1978, DOSB/IOC
- 44 "Wie Olympia nach Seoul kam", in: Paulheinz Gruppe, *Horst Dassler. Revolution im Weltsport*, v. Hase & Koehler, Munich 1992, pp. 9–13
- 45 Letter Tröger to German Embassy Seoul, 22nd February 1983, DOSB/IOC
- 46 Letter German Embassy to Tröger, 3rd May 1983; *Korean Herald*, 20th October 1983, DOSB/IOC
- 47 Telex Prof. Choy to Tröger, 20th September 1984, DOSB/IOC
- 48 "Olympic Marathoner Awaits Overdue Prize", in: *Newsreview*, 12th January 1985, p. 26
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Letter Kleiner to Tröger, 12th June 1985, DOSB/IOC
- 51 Letter Tröger to Daume, 15th May 1986, DOSB/IOC. The both EC members were NOC Vice-President August Kirsch and Heinz Fallak, expected to be Chef de Mission for 1988.
- 52 Manuscript of Daume's speech, 17th August 1986, Hotel Inter-Continental, DOSB/IOC. *Olympic Review*, No. 228, October 1986, pp. 606–607. As the date of the meeting the 10th August is erroneously given.
- 53 Letter Kim to Daume, 24th November 1986, Daume Archive, Folder 67.40
- 54 Letter Diepgen to Lee, February 1987, DOSB/IOC
- 55 Letter Raymond Gafner (IOC Administrateur Délégué) to Daume, 24th June 1987, IOC/OSC Archive
- 56 <https://www.olympic.org/kitei-son>
- 57 "Late Recognition for Korean Olympic Athlete Sohn Kee-chung", in: *The Chosun Ilbo*, 16th December 2011

The roll of honour of the Olympic champions of 1936 at the Marathon Gate of the Berlin Olympic Stadium. The athletics winners are on the left plaque. It can still be seen that an attempt was once made to violently alter the country description "JAPAN" behind Sohn's name.



Photos: DOSB/IOC Archive, Peter Frenkel