

= Stamata Revithi =

Stamata Revithi (Greek : ??????? ?????? ; 1866 ? after 1896) was a Greek woman who ran the 40 @-@ kilometre marathon during the 1896 Summer Olympics . The Games excluded women from competition , but Revithi insisted that she be allowed to run . Revithi ran one day after the men had completed the official race , and although she finished the marathon in approximately 5 hours and 30 minutes and found witnesses to sign their names and verify the running time , she was not allowed to enter the Panathinaiko Stadium at the end of the race . She intended to present her documentation to the Hellenic Olympic Committee in the hopes that they would recognize her achievement , but it is not known whether she did so . No known record survives of Revithi 's life after her run .

According to contemporary sources , a second woman , " Melpomene " , also ran the 1896 marathon race . There is debate among Olympic historians as to whether or not Revithi and Melpomene are the same person .

= = Biographical elements = =

= = Before the 1896 Olympics = = =

Stamata Revithi was born in Syros in 1866 . Records of her life from 1896 show that she was living in poverty in Piraeus in 1896 . At that point she had given birth to two children , a son who died in 1895 , aged seven , and another child who was seventeen months old by the time of the 1896 Olympics . According to Olympic historian Athanasios Tarasouleas , Revithi , who was blonde and thin with large eyes , looked much older than her age .

Revithi believed that she could gain employment in Athens , and so walked there from her home ? a distance of 9 kilometers (5 @.@ 6 mi) . Her journey took place several days prior to the Olympic marathon , a special race of 40 kilometers (25 mi) invented as part of the athletics program , and based on Michel Bréal 's idea of a race from the city of Marathon to the Pnyx . Bréal took inspiration from Pheidippides , who , according to legend , ran the distance from Marathon to Athens to announce the Greek victory over Persia at the Battle of Marathon , and died immediately after giving his message .

En route to Athens , Revithi encountered a male runner along the road . He gave her money and advised her to run the marathon to become famous , and , consequently , earn money or more easily find a job . After this discussion Revithi decided to run the race : she had enjoyed long @-@ distance running as a child , and believed she could beat the male competitors .

The 1896 Olympic Games were the first held in the Modern era and the most important international multi @-@ sport event Greece had ever hosted . The rules of the Games generally excluded women from competition . Influenced by both his times ? in the Victorian era women were considered to be inferior to men ? and his admiration for the ancient Olympic Games , when only men were allowed to participate in the events , Baron Pierre de Coubertin , the visionary of the modern Olympic Games , was not in favour of women 's participation in the Olympic Games or in sports generally . He believed that a woman 's greatest achievement would be to encourage her sons to be distinguished in sports and to applaud a man 's effort .

= = = 1896 marathon = = =

Revithi arrived at the race location , the small village of Marathon , on Thursday , 9 April [O.S. 28 March] , where the athletes had already assembled for the following day 's race . She attracted the attention of the reporters and was warmly greeted by Marathon 's mayor , who sheltered her in his house . She answered the reporters ' questions and was quick @-@ witted when a male runner from Chalandri teased her , predicting that when she entered the Stadium , there would be no crowds left . Revithi retorted that he should not insult women , since male Greek athletes had

already been humiliated by the Americans .

Prior to the start of the race on the morning of Friday , 10 April [O.S. 29 March] , the old priest of Marathon , Ioannis Veliotis , was scheduled to say a prayer for the athletes in the church of Saint John . Veliotis refused to bless Revithi because she was not an officially recognized athlete . The organizing committee ultimately refused her entry into the race . Officially , she was rejected because the deadline for participation had expired ; however , as Olympic historians David Martin and Roger Gynn point out , the real problem was her gender . According to Tarasouleas , the organizers promised that she would compete with a team of American women in another race in Athens , which never took place .

Beginning at 8 : 00 the following day , Revithi ran the marathon course on her own . Before starting , she had the town 's only teacher , the mayor , and the city magistrate sign a statement testifying to the time she departed from the village . She ran the race at a steady pace and reached Parapigmata (the place where the Evangelismos Hospital stands today , near the Hilton Athens) at 13 : 30 (5 ½ hours) . Revithi was not allowed to enter Panathinaiko Stadium ? her race was stopped in Parapigmata by a few Greek military officers whom she asked to sign her handwritten report to certify her time of arrival in Athens . She stated to the reporters that she wanted to meet Timoleon Philimon (the General @-@ Secretary of the Hellenic Olympic Committee) to present her case . Historians believe that she intended to present her documents to the Hellenic Olympic Committee in the hopes that they would recognize her achievement . Neither her reports nor documents from the Hellenic Olympic Committee have been discovered to provide corroboration .

= = = Aftermath = = =

There is no account of Revithi 's life following the marathon . Although some newspapers printed articles about her story in the build @-@ up to the marathon , these reports did not follow up on her life after the race . It is not known whether she met Philimon or if she ever found a job . As Tarasouleas stated , " Stamata Revithi was lost in the dust of history " . Violet Piercy , of the United Kingdom , was the first woman to complete an officially timed marathon race : she clocked a time of 3 hours and 40 minutes in a British race on 3 October 1926 . Women were finally allowed to run the Olympic marathon at the 1984 Summer Olympics , when American Joan Benoit won the inaugural race in a time of 2 hours and 24 minutes .

= = Melpomene = =

In March 1896 , a French @-@ language newspaper in Athens (the *Messenger d 'Athènes*) reported that there was " talk of a woman who had enrolled as a participant in the Marathon race . In the test run which she completed on her own [...] she took 4 ½ hours to run the distance of 42 [sic] kilometres which separates Marathon from Athens . " Later that year , Franz Kémény , a founding International Olympic Committee member from Hungary , wrote in German that , " indeed a lady , Miss Melpomene , completed the 40 kilometres marathon in 4 ½ hours and requested an entry into the Olympic Games competition . This was reportedly denied by the commission . " According to Martin and Gynn , " a peculiarity here is why there is no first name for Melpomene " . The *Messenger* report faded into obscurity for about 30 years before it was revived in 1927 in an issue of *Der Leichtathlet* .

Olympic historian Karl Lennartz contends that two women ran the marathon in 1896 , and that the name " Melpomene " was confirmed by both Kémény and Alfréd Hajós , two @-@ time Olympic swim champion of 1896 . Lennartz presents the following account : a young woman named Melpomene wanted to run the race and completed the distance in 4 ½ hours at the end of February or the beginning of March . The organizing committee , however , did not allow her to run , and the newspaper *Akropolis* criticized the committee for its decision . The Olympic Marathon took place on 10 April [O.S. 29 March] 1896 , and another female runner , Stamata Revithi , took 5 ½ hours to run the course on 11 April [O.S. 30 March] 1896 . The newspapers *Asti* , *New Aristophanes* and *Atlantida* reported this on 12 April [O.S. 31 March] 1896 .

However , Tarasouleas argues that no contemporary press reports in Greek newspapers mention Melpomene by name , while the name Revithi appears many times ; Tarasouleas suggests that Melpomene and Revithi are the same person , and Martin and Green argue that " a contemporary account referring to Revithi as a well @-@ known marathon runner could explain the earlier run by a woman over the marathon course ? this was by Revithi herself , not Melpomene " . The daily Athens newspaper Estia of 4 April [O.S. 23 March] 1896 refers to " the strange woman , who , having run a few days ago in the Marathon as a try @-@ out , intends to compete the day after tomorrow . Today she came to our offices and said ' should my shoes hinder me , I will remove them on the way and continue barefoot ' . " Moreover , Tarasouleas notes that on 13 March [O.S. 1 March] 1896 , another local newspaper indicated that a woman and her baby had registered to run the marathon , but again her name is not mentioned . Trying to resolve the mystery , Tarasouleas asserts that " perhaps Revithi had two names , or perhaps for reasons unknown she was attributed the name of the Muse Melpomene " .