



Ioannis Thomakos

ATHENS 2004 – Olympic NOC Pins and Related Memorabilia, Vol. 1, A Reference Guide

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Reviewed by Volker Kluge

In the preface to *Athens 2004*, ISOH member Gianni Thomakos, writes that after a lecture on Olympic history, he was asked by a student about the meaning and significance of the 2004 Games of Athens. The question, he says, hit him like a thunderbolt from Zeus. Then he realised that this 18-year-old was of a generation that had never experienced the magic of these Games first-hand. Thomakos writes: "And at the very moment, I decided to take action."

The result is a high-quality, appealing publication in which Thomakos presents one of the biggest and most complete NOC pin collections of the world on a single Olympiad. The collection, which the author accumulated over 15 years, consists of no fewer than 1,678 different NOC pins and badges from 201 countries. As a reminder: precisely that many countries took part in the 2004 Olympics. There were actually 202 at the opening ceremony, but Djibouti did not enter any athletes in the competitions. Nonetheless, all absent East Africans are represented with three badges in the book.

Nowadays, the pin collectors who gather outside the competition sites, media centres or the Olympic Villages have become a common site at the Olympic Games. Laypersons tend to linger a while admiring the displays, while the collectors search for badges they might be missing from their collections. One might not necessarily recognise their professional approach to this collection area, as Thomakos and many others pursue it.

The wide range of pin and badge collections shown in this book exceeds all expectations. In a rating of nations from 2004, the United States indisputably led with a 120 different items, as can be seen in chart 3 (Top 50 countries of total NOC pins). Japan and Canada were next with a total of 83. Bulgaria ranked fourth (81), Ukraine fifth (74), ahead of Russia in sixth place (60).

However, there were 14 countries which only had one badge. On a few teams, the number of different pins even surpassed the number of participating athletes. Care for an example? Micronesia had 20 badges minted, even though it just sent four athletes; only one athlete participated for Brunei, but the small team had four badges with them. The proportion of Olympic newcomers in 2004 was similar: Kiribati had three athletes to five pins; Timor-Leste had two to five.

There were no restrictions on the design. Next to a variety of national symbols and NOC emblems, one comes across an array of animals such as a turtle (Fiji), parrots (Dominica), elephant (Thailand) and Mishka the bear, Russia's Olympic mascot in 1980 (its 2004 successors – Athenà and Phèvos – were used in Palau) as well as antique vases (Canada) and pictograms. Several countries (Bulgaria, Japan, Russia and the USA) dedicated an exclusive badge to each type of sport.

The book is rounded out by depictions of commemorative plaques, medals and gifts which are traditionally distributed by the NOC delegations. The host Greece is represented by an olive oil vessel. At the end, the author provides a glimpse of a more ancient history. We see for the first time a pin worn by the Greeks in 1896.

Thomakos, who dedicated his book to both Korean teams which marched behind one flag at the Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, emphasises that his intention was to publish a reference guide and not a catalogue, which he considers to be a model and inspiration for later publications.

Thus, he includes a flow chart of project activities, and a timeline at the end in which he describes the development in a chronological way to help future authors and designers.

Furthermore, he financed his book entirely himself. Does one need more proof of a strong Olympic commitment?