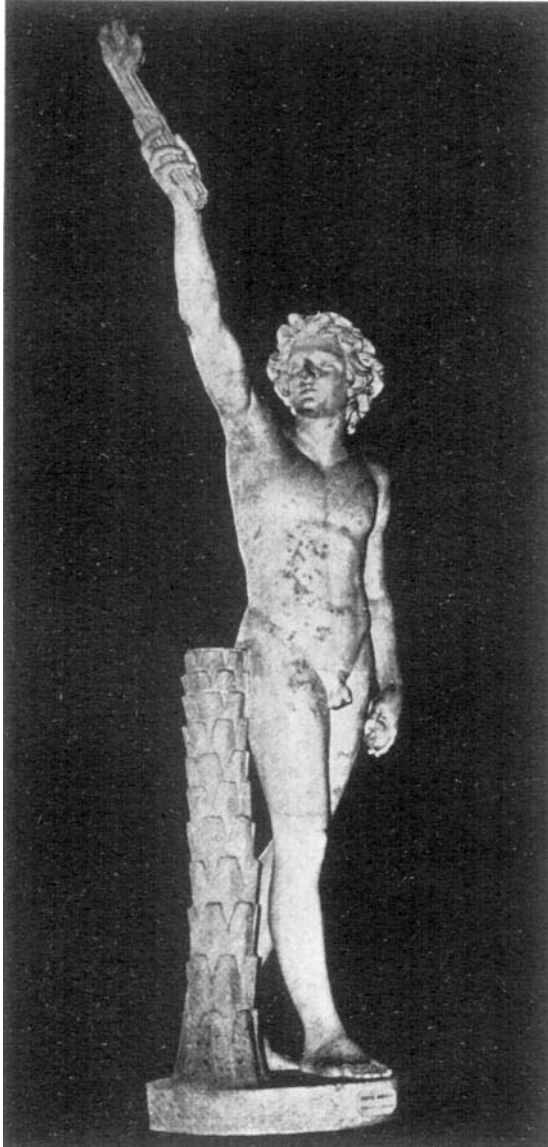


# Defending solemnities

*Young man with torch.  
Statuette of  
4th Century B. C.  
(Rome - National  
Roman Museum).*



*"It seemed that, under the vaults of the Sorbonne, the words Olympic Games would re-sound so as to impose themselves... The opening meeting which took place with great solemnity, on Saturday, 16th February, before an audience of nearly 2,000 spectators and which ended on the "Hymn to Apollo" (1), gave the Congress its true character."*

Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN thus showed, as early as 1894, his attachment to the solemnity which marked the re-birth of Olympism.

Moulded in the culture of antiquity, he was concerned, as the Greek authors stipulated, by the form as well as the substance. In making the Olympic Games live again, he wished, beyond the *"sporting gesture"*, to contribute to the expression and adoption of a spirit, of a conception of life aimed at universality, maybe even of a religion: Olympism. This is why the Games, quadriennial expression of a *"Thought"* must be marked by a ceremony, where art is found, poetically and musically, based on real and living feelings. *"In Olympia, people met to make a pilgrimage to the past and at the same time an act of faith in the future"* wrote Pierre de COUBERTIN, "and

(1) Found in Delphi in 1893, deciphered and reproduced, this is the only ancient musical composition we have today, which is nearly intact.

*this would also apply to the new Olympiads. It is their past and their destiny to unite, through the fleeting hours, what has been and what will be. They are in themselves a festival of youth, beauty and vigour. The secret of the ceremonies must be found in the same way."*

Some describe the opening and closing ceremonies as out-of-date, heavy and tiresome!.. What else?

These critics denounce their uselessness.

What are their ideas of Olympism? Have they forgotten, or never felt, the mysterious greatness, the magnificent nobility, celebrating the alliance of muscle and art, youth and beauty? Here, like in so many temples, many enter the sacred places, forgetting their meaning and the scope of their presence.

Let them read COUBERTIN again: *"The question of ceremonies is understandably, one of the most important to be settled. It is in this way, above all, that the Olympiad must differ from a mere series of world championships. It involves a solemnity and a ceremonial, which must match its noble title. On the other*



*Comte de CLARY, President of the French Olympic Committee, gives his speech during the opening of the Games of VIIIth Olympiad, Paris - 1924. Behind, on the left, Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN.*

*Mexico - 1968: the Mayor of Tokyo has just given the Olympic flag to Mr. ROSAL, Mayor of Mexico. In the centre, President BRUNDAGE.*





*The Belgian fencer, Victor BOIN, swears the Olympic oath for the first time in the history of the Games. Antwerp - 1920.*

*hand, the danger of a vain parade must be avoided and it must be kept in the strict limits of good taste and measure." (2)*

The Olympic solemnities with their artistic overtones enrich and embellish the sports festival. Musical art, for instance, underlines the emotion shared by each of the participants. The communion of feelings, which is a direct

result of it, tends to keep the spirit and the work of the renovation of the Games intact.

Jean-Louis MEURET

(2) *From a speech in 1909.*

