

STORY OF THE RINGS - PART II

by Karl Lennartz*

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1. Preliminary remark

My investigations concerning the history of the Olympic Rings have received a good amount of approval by the readers. I also received letters, which gave me further insight into certain aspects concerning the Olympic Rings. I therefore find it necessary to submit a supplementation:

2. Already 1925: The Olympic Rings on a postmark

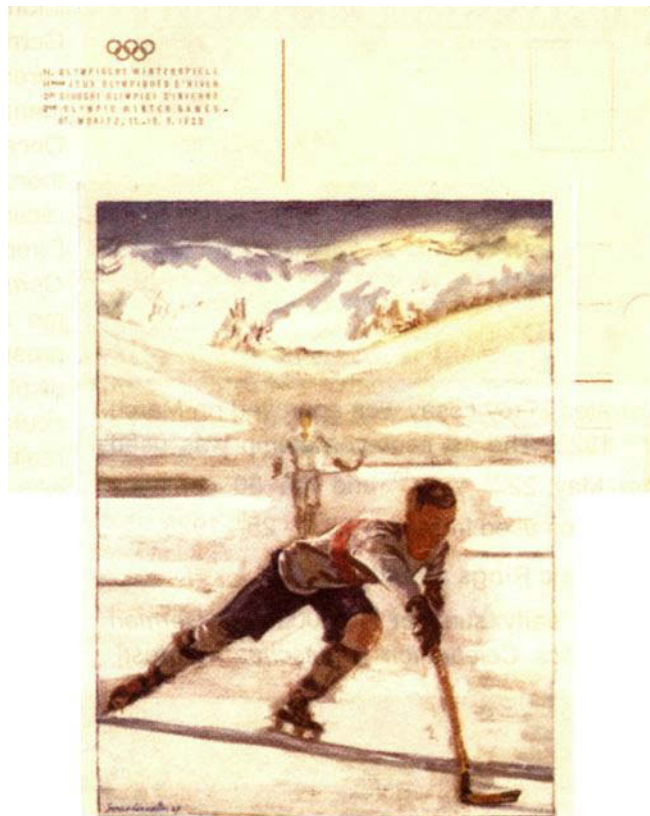
In my contribution I had found out, that the Olympic Rings had first appeared on a stamp in Portugal in 1928. My friend Manfred Bergman, the IOC-expert for philately, told me, that postmarks also belong to the field of philately. Bergman indicated¹, that the Czechoslovakian Post had used a so called "promotional stamp" from April 8th until May 9th 1925, on the occasion of the VIII. Olympic Congress, which was held in Prague from May 29th until June 4th 1925. He also provided me with the corresponding illustration.

Bergman also pointed out, that the Olympic Rings were also presented on the reverse of postcards, issued by the *Olympia-Verlag* München/Zürich. They had been produced for the *II. Olympic Winter Games*, which took place in St. Moritz between February 11th and 19th. The series, which contained nine different motives, was sold in January and February 1928.

At request of the Swiss NOC, the vignette of the Games – a smaller version of the official poster, which also displayed the Rings – was allowed to be stuck next to the stamp. That way it was also stamped.

Just like the French NOC had done during the *Olympic Games* 1924 in Paris, the Swiss NOC used the Olympic Rings frequently, for example on envelopes.

Bergman added, that the Portuguese stamp, which was



Front and reverse side of the post-card by the *Olympia-Verlag* with the imprint of the Olympic Rings (Bergman-archive)



Postmark used by the Czechoslovakian post from April 8th to May 9th 1925 (Bergman-archive)



Vignette of the *II. Olympic Winter Games* with the stamp on the postcard (Bergman-archive)

* For the translation I owe a debt of gratitude to Brendan Birch.

¹ E-mail from 31.12.2002.

Envelope of the Swiss NOC with the Olympic Rings (Bergman-archive)



illustrated in my essay was approved on March 22nd 1928. The 15 centavos stamp was used from May 22nd – 24th and the 30 centavos stamp was used from May 23rd – 25th 1928.

3. Olympic Rings already 1909?

In early summer of 2002 the *German Gymnastics Celebration [Deutsches Turnfest]*

took place in Leipzig. On this occasion the *Sport Museum* in Leipzig displayed a very informative exhibition concerning the history of German gymnastics. I attended at the opening ceremony, but, because I lacked time, did not manage to have a close look at all the exhibits. Once at home, before I had time for a thorough study of the substantial catalogue², I received a call from Prof. Manfred Lämmer, Director of the *Institute for Sports History of the German Sport University Cologne*. He informed me about a diploma from 1909, which was presented in this exhibition in Leipzig. It displayed the Olympic Rings. He asked me, if I could make anything of it. I immediately realised, that this had to have something to do with the Olympic Cup, which was awarded to the *German Gymnastics Federation* in 1909.³

I got into touch with Dr. Gerlinde Rohr, head of the *Sport museum* in Leipzig, and found out, that the Diploma belonged to the *Friedrich Ludwig Jahn-Museum* in Freyburg an

IOC-diploma awarded to the *Deutsche Turnerschaft (Friedrich Ludwig Jahn-Museum, Freyburg)*



² Sport museum Leipzig (ed.), *Sport:Schau. Deutsche Turnfeste 1860-2002, Katalog*, Leipzig 2002.

³ During a long period of time the *German Gymnastics Federation* was not all too keen on the Olympic Movement. The Olympic Games were a big sporting event. The German gymnasts disapproved of sports, because it was international and promoted the performance of the individual. German gymnastics were national, served the military ideals and trained the body in many ways. To make things worse, a Frenchman stood at the head of the Olympic Movement. But there were always some German gymnasts, who took part in the Games on their own initiative. It was only in 1908, during the Games in London, that the German "*Turnerschaft*" was prepared to take part with a demonstration- squad. But the performance was scheduled within the tea-break of the Olympic Officials and also the spectators paid little attention. Now the Games were in danger of being rejected permanently by the German gymnasts. The German athletes, though, wanted to organise the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1912. Therefore

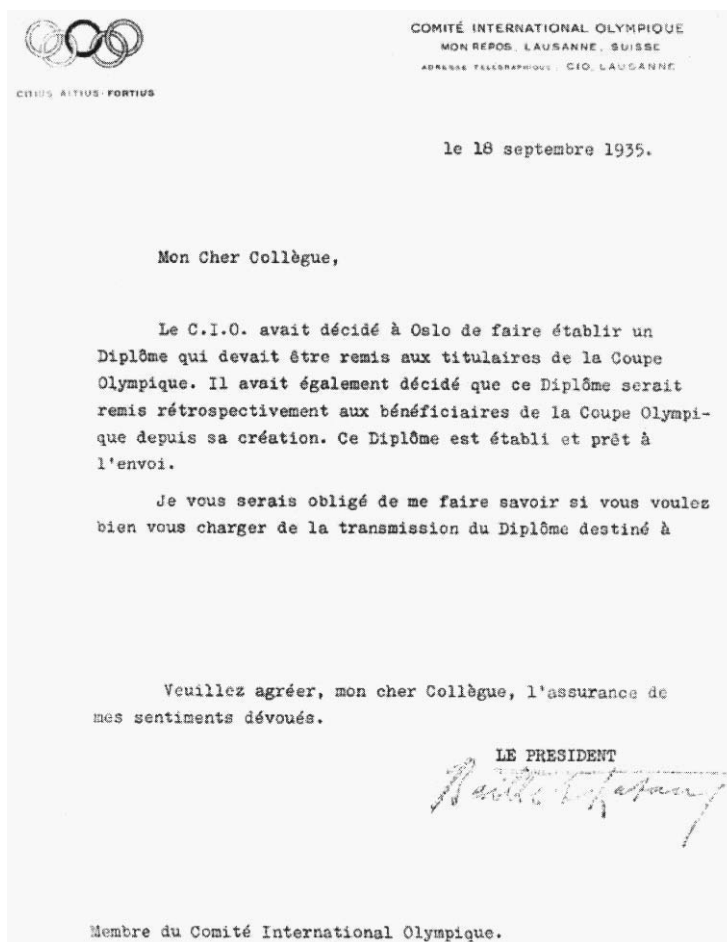
der Unstrut.⁴ I asked the museum for information on this matter and received a colour photo of the diploma⁵ shortly after. It bore the date of 1909, the signature of Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN and the Olympic Rings in the typical formation of the 1930s – just slightly wider though.

At first I was slightly astonished. The inscription made me suspicious:

"Créé par le Baron Pierre le COUBERTIN, rénovateur des Jeux Olympiques de l'ÈRE MODERNE"

I could not imagine Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN writing this on the diploma in 1909. Then I noticed, that the diploma had been printed in Brussels and it began to dawn on me. COUBERTIN did not use printing offices in Brussels. The diploma had to have something to do with his successor BAILLET-LATOURE. To be sure about this assumption, I sent a colour copy to the *Olympic Archive* in Lausanne. There my finding aroused quite some excitement, which calmed down quite quickly though, after the corresponding record had been thoroughly checked. My assumption was correct. BAILLET-LATOURE had been active, though only indirectly. The Olympic Cup had been donated by COUBERTIN. It had been awarded to organisations, which contributed to the world-wide promotion of physical exercise, by the IOC once a year since 1906. These chosen institutions were then informed by COUBERTIN, that they had been honoured. The Cup – a challenge cup – stayed with COUBERTIN resp. is today kept at the *Olympic Museum* in Lausanne.

For the IOC this terse information was not enough. It wanted, and that is of course correct, that the honoured institutions received a



BAILLET-LATOURE'S letter, dated September 18th, 1935

corresponding representative certificate. On June 21st Patricia Eckert of the *Olympic Studies Centre* in Lausanne sent me copies of the proceedings, e.g. a letter from BAILLET-LATOURE to an IOC-member, in which the president refers to a resolution from the 34th session on February 18th 1935.

One glance at the minutes of the session certified: It was Sigfrid EDSTRÖM⁶, who made the

Coupe Olympique.

Le Comité, après avoir entendu un rapport présenté par M. Bolanschi, décide que la Coupe Olympique sera attribuée pour 1936 à la S.E.G.A.S., Fédération Hellenique de Gymnastique et des Sociétés Athlétiques, dont M. Rinopoulos est le président.

M. Edström propose qu'un diplôme soit remis aux bénéficiaires de la Coupe Olympique. Cette proposition est adoptée et le diplôme sera aussi remis aux détenteurs présidents de la Coupe, signe par le Baron Pierre de Coubertin, créateur de la Coupe Olympique.

Extract from the Minutes of the 34. IOC-Session (IOC-archives)

Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN suggested to the IOC during their session in Berlin in 1909, that the Olympic Cup should be awarded to the German "Turnerschaft", because of promoting physical exercise the way they had.

- 4 Friedrich Ludwig JAHN was banished to this place in 1925. He lived there with only a few interruptions until his death in 1852.
- 5 A correspondence concerning this diploma was not found in the archive of the museum.
- 6 May I remark, that EDSTRÖM was one of the few persons to be honoured with the Olympic Cup, for keeping up the contact with the IOC-members in 1947 during the war.

petition to send a belated certificate to the previous cup holders. BAILLET-LATOUR then had the certificates printed in Brussels and COUBERTIN signed them.

Hereby we can now state clearly: The Olympic Rings did not already exist in 1909.

4. Found: The Bolanaki-Flag

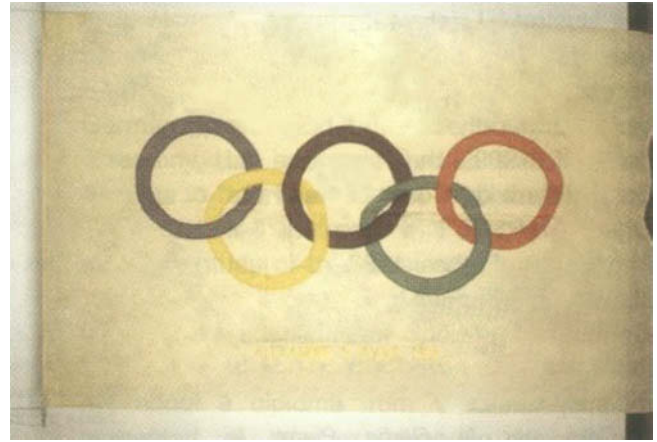
The Bolonaki-flag (*Olympic Museum Lausanne*)

In my essay I had reported, that the flag, which Angelo BOLANAKI was allowed to use during the *Pan-Egyptian sports meeting* in Alexandria in 1913 and which he gave to the *Olympic Museum* in Lausanne in 1963, was no longer to be found there. On September 4th 2002 I received a fax from Frédérique Jamolli, head of the *Collections and Exhibitions Department* of the *Olympic Museum*. She wrote:

"according to an old inventory from the 1970s, the flag was stored at the Olympic Museum, but it was lost after the Mon-Repos Museum was closed in 1970. We recently found it and we were able to identify thanks its number. The flag is now hold in our collection. As you wish, we would be very pleased to provide you with a picture."

5. Where is the Belgian Traditional Flag of 1920?

There is a German saying: "*In a well organised household nothing gets lost too easily!*" Let us hope, that we can apply this to the Belgian flag. Although here I have greater fear than with the *Bolanaki-Flag*. During my investigation for my essay I was informed repeatedly, that the flag is not in the *Olympic Museum*. A few months ago the 3rd German Congress of Sport-Economics took place at the *German Sport University Cologne*. One of the invited speakers was Professor Jean-Loup Chappelet from Switzerland, whom I know well. He spoke to me about the Olympic Flag and stated, he knew exactly what happened to the Belgian Flag of 1920. He used to work for the IOC in Lausanne. He told me, that the flag had last been swung during the closing ceremony in Moscow. Four years later, at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, the mayor of



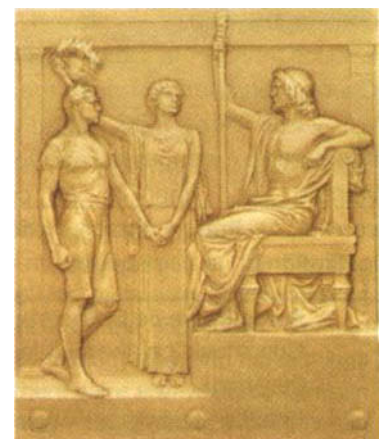
Moscow, resp. his deputy, did not take part, because of the Russian boycott of the Olympic Games. This put the Americans into an awkward situation; they had to produce a copy of the flag for the closing ceremony. This was probably the reason, why the Korean NOC, resp. the Organising Committee of Seoul 1988, gave the IOC a new flag as a present in 1985⁷.

In the official statement it said, that the Belgian flag had suffered over the years and that it would now be handed over to the *Olympic Museum*. The Belgian flag could still be in Moscow. Perhaps with the NOC? Perhaps my essay encourages the Russian ISOH-members to do some investigation in this matter. Perhaps the IOC will consider to ask the Russian NOC officially.

In 1984 in Los Angeles the IOC decided – probably to avoid such problems in the future – to hand the flag over to the mayor of the city of the next Olympic Games straight after the end of every closing ceremony⁸. The Olympic Flags should therefore now be in Athens and Turin.

6. Olympic Rings 1915 in San Francisco

A few moths ago the remaining volumes



Badges of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (FIRST CENTURY PROJECT [ed.], *The Olympic Century, vol 6, V & VI Olympiad. Stockholm 1912. The Inter-Allied Games, Los Angeles 2002, p. 108*)

⁷ The leading Korean silk factory Dong-A Sil Co. produced two flags. The second flag was given to the Olympic Museum. (KLUGE, Volker, *Chronik*, Bd. 4, Berlin 2002, p. 238.)

⁸ KLUGE, Volker, *Chronik*, Bd. 4, p. 34.

of *The Olympic Century*, were published by *First Century Project* under the leadership of Gary Allison. In volume V & VI Olympiads on page 108 the front and back side of a badge is shown. On the top edge of the front side the five Rings are to be seen – however in a straight line and representing garlands. On the bottom edge the allegories of the Atlantic and the Pacific kiss – united by the Panama-canal: "MEETING OF THE ATLANTIC & PACIFIC". In-

between the rings and the goddesses it reads:

*"DONNE PAR LA PANAMA-PACIFIC
INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION
SAN FRANCISCO 1915
A PIERRE DE COUBERTIN
RENOVATEUR DES JEUX OLYMPIQUES
À L'OCCASION DE LA CREATION DU
PENTATHLON MODERNE
STOCKHOLM 1912
POUR ETRE REMIS A CHAQUE OLYMPIADE
AU VAINQUEUR QUI EN AURA
LA GARDE
JUSQU'A L'OLYMPIADE
SUIVANTE"*

The back side shows ZEUS on the right

side sitting in an armchair, which is standing on a pedestal. Here the statue of the father of gods, which was created by PHIDIAS for the temple of ZEUS in Olympia, probably served as a model. A victorious athlete is standing in front of ZEUS and a priestess (goddess) is holding an olive garland above the athletes head. So the *Panama-Pacific International Exposition* had donated a new Challenge Cup, which the next Olympic champion in the pentathlon would have been the first to win. Because of the various problems concerning these exceptional awards (late, or no return; damages) the IOC decided not to continue giving out these awards and now keeps them in the Olympic Museum.

We know, that COUBERTIN allowed the *Panama-Pacific International Exhibition* 1915 in San Francisco to use a flag showing the Olympic Rings, during their sports meeting. Now we also know, that a badge with the five rings was donated there. Up to now I have not seen a photo of the flag. Perhaps one of the American ISOH-members is able to obtain such a photograph.