



PIERRE DE COUBERTIN'S AMERICAN STUDIES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF HIS EARLY EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN;
by Stephan Wassong (English translation and web publishing of the

Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles; www.aafla.org);

The German version: *Pierre de Coubertins US-amerikanische Studien und ihre Bedeutung für die Analyse seiner frühen Erziehungskampagne* was published in Würzburg in 2002.
Reviewed by Otto J. Schantz

This monograph was accepted by the *German Sport University Cologne [Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln]* as a dissertation. It has been slightly abridged and revised for print. The author made it his business to research and analyse systematically the American influence on Pierre de COUBERTIN – a field of research almost neglected up till now.

Since Ernest SEILLIÈRE – a humanist of the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* – as one of the first seriously dealt with the work of COUBERTIN in his book *Un Artisan d'énergie Française: Pierre de Coubertin* (1917); or, Kurt ZENTNER who wrote his dissertation on COUBERTIN in Leipzig in 1934, British influence on the French aristocrat was emphasized. With regard to this British influence, real importance was given to Thomas ARNOLD, who is OFTEN REGARDED AS THE SPIRITUS RECTOR OF YOUNG COUBERTIN to become a progressive minded educational reformer.

COUBERTIN'S American studies and his contacts in the USA has hardly been mentioned in these works. This has also been the case in more recent research on COUBERTIN published for example by Yves-Pierre BOULOGNE (1975), Louis CALLEBAT (1988), Allen GUTTMANN (1992) and David C. YOUNG (1996). Of course one must also mention John J. MACALON, who dealt with the English and American influence on COUBERTIN in a very differentiated way. Even the book *Pierre de Coubertin (1863 - 1937); Olympism; Selected Writings* that was published by the *International Olympic Committee*, and edited by Norbert MÜLLER in 2000 describes some of the American influence, as it contains documents on COUBERTIN'S travelling in the USA.

But nevertheless it is Stephan WASSONG'S merit to have detected this research gap, and to have investigated this gap seriously. By his investigations WASSONG made significant contributions to the discussions about COUBERTIN'S intentions to have revived the Olympic Games. It is still hotly disputed whether COUBERTIN utilized the re-establishment of the Olympic Games for the strengthening of his national educational campaign or whether the revival of the Olympic Games could be seen in close connection to the emerging peace movement at the fading 19th Century. WASSONG'S research seems to be grist to the mill for the latter idea.

Next to COUBERTIN'S writings on America, WASSONG found and analysed in detail COUBERTIN'S substantial correspondence with American university professors, sport leaders and with President Theodore ROOSEVELT. After the first chapter in which he commented on research views on COUBERTIN'S national and international educational campaign, WASSONG describes COUBERTIN'S interest in US-American higher education, university sport and public sport. In the third and last chapter the American influence on COUBERTIN'S educational thoughts are evaluated.

Already since his studies at the *Ecole libre des Sciences Politiques*, COUBERTIN showed a deep interest in US-American culture and politics. On behalf of the French Ministry of Education, Coubertin travelled to the USA and Canada in 1889 for the first time to investigate the system of higher education. In the "New World" he could exchange ideas with university presidents, professors and politicians. He was reaffirmed in his progressive educational thinking that students and pupils can be taught to become responsible, strong-minded and conscientious citizens by giving them the freedom for self-government of extracurricular activities out of which COUBERTIN favoured most the athletic ones. COUBERTIN became first and foremost interested in US university sports, to which he was introduced by William M. SLOANE. It was SLOANE who strengthened COUBERTIN in his opinion that only amateur sport should be used as an effective means to develop social and highly moral character traits.

WASSONG does not only emphasize that COUBERTIN found confirmation of his views on (athletic) education which effectiveness he had already experienced in the course of his study trips to England but he also mentions that in the USA COUBERTIN was inspired to extend his athletic campaign beyond the school and university level. Against the background of both a

growing imperialistic US-American foreign politics and a growing estrangement of the "Old" and "New World" COUBERTIN saw the necessity to stimulate a new interest in European affairs among young US-American citizens. In order to stimulate the interest of US students in French national and international politics COUBERTIN donated medals to various US-American universities. The medals were given to students who won the debating competition or the essay competition on a topic in French history or politics. In this medal campaign COUBERTIN was strongly supported by A.D. WHITE, founding president of *Cornell-University*, D.C. GILMAN, president of *Johns Hopkins University*, Ch.W. ELIOT, president of Harvard and of course W. SLOANE. WASSONG emphasizes that these persons were for COUBERTIN like-minded people because they contributed in different ways to the development of a peaceful internationalism. In COUBERTIN'S relationship to these persons, WASSONG discovers a device for COUBERTIN'S clear commitments to internationalism which he tried to realize by international athletic competitions in the shape of Olympic Games. WASSONG proves that COUBERTIN already in July 1892 did inform A.D. WHITE about his intentions to revive the Olympic Games, which is three months before he mentions this project for the first time in public in November 1892.

Although Stephan WASSONG'S research is not the final chapter in the discussions about COUBERTIN'S intentions to revive the Olympic Games, this monograph definitely fills an enormous gap in the research on this subject and can be regarded as a new milestone in the research on COUBERTIN. WASSONG'S study on COUBERTIN is well researched and well structured. Unfortunately, the author sometimes mentions in some references only the year of their reprints. It is more useful to mention at least the year of their first publishing between brackets. Sometimes a more critical opinion about COUBERTIN is desirable. We all know that COUBERTIN is a hotly disputed personality. His written work gives enough material for both hagiographers and radical critics. WASSONG succeeded in avoiding these two extremes by a strong issue-related approach. Last but not least, it is an advantage for the research on COUBERTIN that the German version of WASSONG'S book has been translated into English and published on the website of the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. Now WASSONG'S research results are available for a broad circle of persons who are interested in COUBERTIN as a pedagogue and re-inventor of the modern Olympic Games.