

The Excellent Symbol in Sports: Pierre de Coubertin's Rings

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Abstract

Baron de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, made many attempts to make the games more effective and recognizable. One of these attempts is the design of the Olympic flag, because there was a need for a visual symbol. The idea of Olympism created by Coubertin aims to interlock the world with the bonds of love and friendship as a result of the unity of mind, soul and body. This ideal which also constitutes the meaning infrastructure of the rings, is coded on six different colors and five rings. It can be said that the intellectual origin of the rings is based on the institutions Coubertin was in and on some symbols and visuals he witnessed. The rings first appeared in two letters Coubertin sent to a close friend. They were then formally announced in a written declaration in 1913 and introduced at the 1914 Paris convention. The flag was first waved at a sporting event in Egypt, at a non-Olympic event. After that the usage areas of the rings expanded considerably. The Olympic Games in Antwerp in 1920 and in Paris in 1924 increased the popularity of the flag and it was used in many different places. The officialization of the flag also promoted the flag ritual over time. The attempt to associate the ring symbol with the ancient Olympic Games remained a mistake. The aim of the study is to bring to the forefront the birth and developmental stages of the world's most popular flag, the Olympic flag with five rings, along with the ideas, contradictions, and disagreements found in the literature on the subject, and to provide a clearer and more understandable chronological structure.

Keywords: Ancient olympics, Modern olympics, Olympic flag, Olympics rings

Sporda Zirve Sembol: Pierre de Coubertin'in Halkaları

Öz

Modern olimpiyatların kurucusu Baron de Coubertin, oyunları daha etkili ve tanınır hâle getirmek için birçok girişimde bulundu. Bu teşebbüslerden biri de görsel sembole duyulan ihtiyaçtan dolayı olimpiyat bayrağının tasarımıdır. Coubertin tarafından oluşturulan Olimpizm fikri insanın zihin, ruh, beden birliğinin sağlanması sonucunda dünyayı sevgi ve dostluk bağlarıyla birbirine kenetlemeyi hedeflemektedir. Halkaların anlam alt yapısını da oluşturan bu ideal altı farklı renk ve beş halka üzerinde kodlanmıştır. Halkaların fikri kökeninin Coubertin'in içinde bulunduğu kurumlara, tanık olduğu bazı sembollere ve görsellere dayandığı söylenebilir. Halkalar ilk kez Coubertin'in yakın bir dostuna gönderdiği iki mektupta ortaya çıktı. Daha sonra 1913'te yazılı bir beyan ile resmi olarak açıklandı ve 1914 Paris kongresinde tanıtıldı. Bayrak ilk kez olimpiyat dışı bir etkinlikte Mısır'da düzenlenen bir spor organizasyonunda dalgalandı. Bu süreçten sonra halkaların kullanım alanları ciddi manada genişledi. 1920 Anvers ve 1924 Paris Olimpiyatları bayrağın popülaritesini artırdı ve bayrak birçok farklı yerde kullanıldı. Bayrağın resmîyet kazanması, zamanla bayrak ritüelini de teşvik etti. Halkalı sembolün antik olimpiyat oyunları ile ilişkilendirilme çabası ise büyük bir yanılgı olarak kaldı. Çalışmanın amacı, dünyanın en popüler bayrağı olan beş halkalı olimpiyat bayrağının doğuşunu, gelişim evrelerini, konu ile ilgili literatürün barındırdığı fikirleri, çelişki ve anlaşmazlıkları gündeme taşıyıp, kronolojik olarak daha net ve anlaşılır bir yapıya kavuşturmadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antik olimpiyatlar, Modern olimpiyatlar, Olimpiyat bayrağı, Olimpiyat halkaları

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INTRODUCTION

Many organizations today need a symbol to reach a wider audience and gain recognition. People who see the logo immediately understand who or what it is referring to and what message it is conveying. In this context, some symbols have been used for thousands of years. Labarum is one of the ancient symbols said to have helped Emperor Constantine win the Battle of Milvian Bridge. Everyone knows the Christian Cross and the Islamic Crescent. The Coca-Cola logo, the Mercedes star, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent symbol are among the most well-known. On the other hand, there are forbidden symbols such as the swastika of the Nazis, the German National Socialists and the yellow Jewish star. Symbols are also frequently used in the field of sports. For example, Ferrari which is one of the champions of Formula 1, has a very famous logo. The flag with the Olympic ring used for the modern Olympic Games, which is considered the most important sporting event, occupies the top spot among sports logos (Lennartz, 2002).

The flag was designed by Pierre de Coubertin. Pierre de Coubertin was born on January 1, 1863 in the French aristocracy, and embraced the liberty, equality and fraternity values of the French Republic as a young adult. Subsequently, he turned to sports and played a pioneering role in French educational reform by enabling French youth to be acquainted with English sports through education. He became an advocate for a universal system that would allow not only French youth but also ordinary people in the world to benefit from the privileges of sports. The system advocating the soul, body and mind integrity had the goal of bringing humanity together for world peace, friendship, and brotherhood.

In this direction, he proposed the idea of the Olympic Games during the Sorbonne Congresses in 1892 and 1894, and in 1896, he started the first modern Olympic Games in Athens which is the place of birth of the Ancient Olympics. Then, he proved that sports are a common heritage of the world by organizing the 1900 Paris and 1904 St. Louis Olympics. The common heritage's need for a universal symbol led Coubertin to the invention of the flag (Olympics, t.y.a). Conceived and drawn by Pierre de Coubertin himself, the symbol consists of five interlaced rings. Three of these rings are located at the top; the other two are located at the bottom. The rings at the top, from left to right, are blue-black-red, and the rings at the bottom are yellow green (Anonymous, 1913a).

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was founded in 1894, and the first Olympic Games were held in 1896. On the other hand, the flag was designed and introduced after a long period of nineteen years. This move can be considered as delayed, and the sources do not provide clear evidence on the issue. In the literature, there is no confession of Coubertin in this regard. One of the possibilities that does not go beyond guesses is that the IOC and Coubertin postponed the design of the symbol because of other issues and problems related to the Olympic Games. The Games are generally under the control of National Olympic Committees (NOC) and international sports federations. In addition, many problems, such as the violation of the principle of amateurism, the inclusion of women in the Games, and the desire of the Greeks to monopolize the Games, are still waiting to be solved. There are serious conflicts, especially with the Greeks.

Coubertin designed the logo of the Union of French Societies of Athletic Sports (USFSA) (*Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques*) in 1890 and created a symbol consisting of two interlocking rings (Anonim, 2000: 595). In this context, it is unlikely that Coubertin did not consider designing a logo for the Olympic Games. He certainly had an idea in mind for a logo design. However, it is believed that Coubertin may have postponed this for a while because of the problems mentioned above (Anonymous, 1913a).

It can be said that the design of the Olympic flag is one of the most convenient actions of Coubertin who encountered many oppositions and challenges during the creation and organization of the Olympic Games. There were no objections to the flag and it was accepted immediately. It is not entirely clear whether Coubertin consulted while designing it, but the design has an interesting and unknown history. However, it is much more interesting that the Olympic flag which has a higher recognition level than the national flag of many countries in the world, has been the subject of numerous studies in foreign literature, but it has not been used in any independent article in Turkish literature. From this point of view, it is believed that the research will be a unique reference source and will fill an important gap in the Olympic flag.

The literature shows us that the history of Coubertin's ring flag goes back much earlier than thought. And again, we see in the literature that this idea dates back to years before the idea of the Olympics existed, and that many different examples activate and affect Coubertin's subconscious. In the decades after this accepted symbol gained popularity, it was also put forward that the symbol was not consistent with Coubertin's formal and semantic expressions. Our research will bring these ideas back into focus, the contradictions, and inconsistencies they contain. Thus, readers will see the chronological phases of the design of the Olympic flag more clearly. Due to the method of document analysis that we have used in our research, we have referred to Coubertin's original texts in particular.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Connection Between Pierre de Coubertin's Rings and the Ancient Olympics

In the late 1950s, two British writers, Lynn and Gray Poole, visited the Delphi Stadium and saw a stone with familiar symbols engraved on its edges, and they published a photograph with a comment describing it as an ancient altar at Delphi in their book *"History of the Ancient Olympic Games"*:

"In the stadium at Delphi, there is a stone altar on which is carved five rings symbolic of the.... timing for the celebrated games. The design of the five circles on the Delphi altar is today the symbol of the Olympic Games. The circles form a link between ancient and modern Olympics" (As cited in Barney, 1992).

Robert Knight Barney visited the Greek archaeological site of Delphi for the fifth time in early August 1984. During this visit, he saw a stone with carved symbols on it but still visible towards



Figure 1. The “Stone” in Delphi (Barney, 1992).

the end of his tour of the area. After examining the symbols more closely, Barney realized that this symbol was the five rings of the modern Olympic movement (See Figure 1).

Considering that the stone at Delphi has eroded and faded over time, it is tempting to think that Pierre de Coubertin might have been by those used in ancient times. Even if not the stone at Delphi, he may have been inspired by a similar one at Olympia, a place he visited more than once in his life or even the sacred sanctuary of his heart's final resting place (Barney, 1992).

General explanations for the origin of the Olympic rings go against the alleged historical link between the five-ring symbol of the modern Olympic movement and the ancient Olympic Games, as well as widely accepted legend that the five-ring symbol is three thousand years old (VanWynsberghe & Bowling, 1994). Recent studies also support this argument (Barney, 1992). This confusion results, in part, from



Figure 2. The “Diem-stone” in Delphi (Barney, 1992)

an altar located at Olympia and more recently at the International Olympic Academy near Olympia. This altar has five interlocking rings (See Figure 2). In addition, there is a stone located in Delphi that also has these five rings (See Figure 1). According to Young (1985), it would be a great mistake to refer to any of these altars as the origin of the three-thousand-year-old association between the ancient and modern Olympic Games (As cited in VanWynsberghe & Bowling, 1994). This is because both altars are products of "Nazi propaganda" dating back to the 1936 Berlin Olympics (VanWynsberghe & Bowling, 1994). The person who caused this mistake was Carl Diem who

was the main organizer of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. According to Young (1985), the 1936 Olympic Games Committee, under the direction of Carl Diem, organized and implemented a plan to conduct a torch run from the point where the sacred fire was lit in Altis, adjacent to the Ancient Olympia Stadium, to the large Olympic stadium in the suburbs of Berlin. Diem and his supporters are masters of ritual and symbolism. They took every opportunity to organize

the Berlin Games in an atmosphere and environment reminiscent of the ancient Olympic Games. The route of the torch run starts in Olympia in the Peloponnese, going through northern Greece to the Danube, then to Austria and finally to Germany. Diem who recognized the athletic and religious importance of Delphi in ancient times, planned to lead the torch from Athens to the west, to Delphi, and he planned special ceremonies in the ancient stadium on the top of the sacred temple of Apollo on Mount Parnassus. The theatrical decorations designed by Diem for the ceremonies in the stadium in Delphi were placed on the Olympic structures at the western end and in the starting area of the stadium. After the ceremonies were completed, the torchbearers run towards the northern points. However, the stone with the rings remains for years on the thresholds of the ancient starting line (Barney, 1992). According to Grombach (1980), symbols with four and five interlocking rings were found on marble blocks and doors from the fifth century BC at Olympia (As cited in Barney, 1992). However, these interlaced rings which ancient Greek artists used as decorative elements, bear no resemblance to the modern Olympic rings. It has also not been proven that the interlocking ring motifs from ancient times were symbols of the ancient Olympic Games. Coubertin visited the Olympia region many times, but it is obvious that the design of the logo with the five rings was the result of brainstorming in the late nineteenth century and not directly based on the symbolism of the ancient Olympic Games (Barney, 1992).

The Origin of the Coubertin Rings

It can be said that the sources of inspiration and building blocks that led Coubertin to brainstorm were laid as early as the 1880s. Some studies conducted about the Olympic rings suggest that fairs, exhibitions, museums, tours, newspapers, magazines, souvenirs and various commercial advertisements served Coubertin as reference sources.

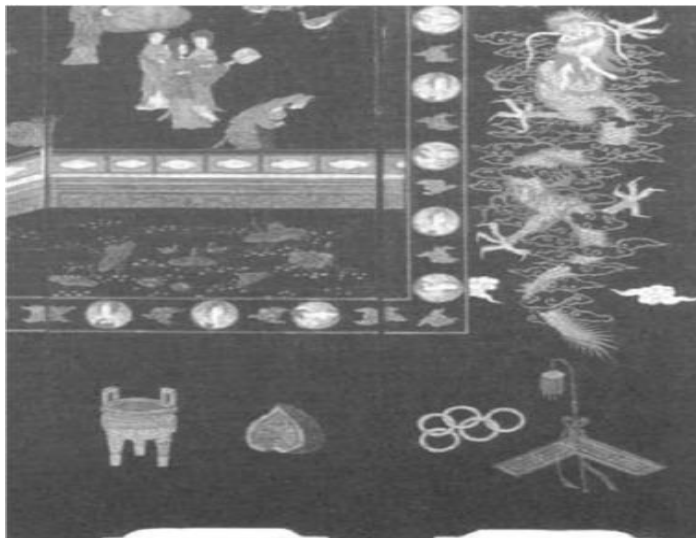


Figure 3. Detail of a Japanese standing shade with the five rings (from: KOPPLIN, *Lackkunst*, 105-106, as cited in Lennartz, 2002).

From a broader perspective, it is possible to see that symbolic rings are used in different communities with different forms and meanings. A Japanese folding screen from 1710, depicting a festive gathering of women and children in the great palace areas (210x320), has five interlaced rings on its lower right corner as a decorative element, almost identical to the Olympic symbol (See Figure 3). This artwork is currently on exhibit at the Museum of Japanese Lacquer Art in Münster, Germany (Lennartz, 2002). When we examine the relationship between East Asia and the five rings based on this artwork, we come across "*The Book of Five Rings*" by Miyamoto

Musashi, a Japanese swordsman from 1645. This book contains five different books written about Kenjutsu and martial arts in general.

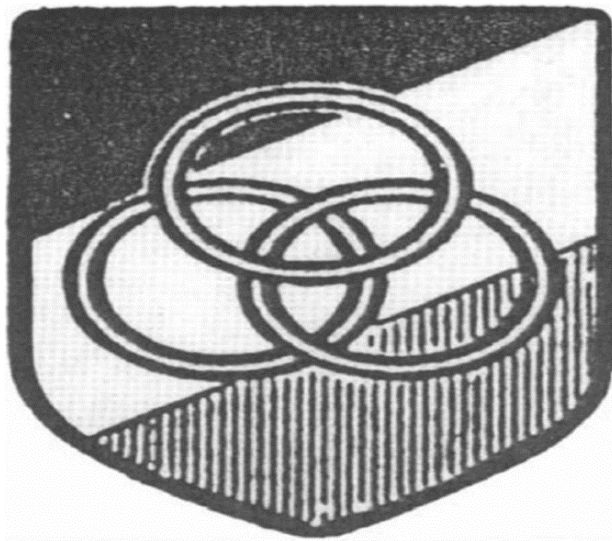


Figure 4. Logos of the firms Krupp (Lennartz, 2002)

The Krupp company has used a logo since 1875 that shows stylized rail wheels with three interlaced rings, with two rings at the bottom and one ring at the top (See Figure 4). With this design, Krupp participated in the 1889 and 1900 world exhibitions and received numerous awards. It is likely that Coubertin saw this logo (Lennartz, 2002).

Two separate clubs which were established in 1882, "French Racing Club" (*Racing Club de France*) and "French Stadium Club" (*Stade Français*) decided to merge in 1887 and formed the "Union of French Running Associations" (*Union des Sociétés Françaises de Course à Pied*) (McAloon, 1981: 157). According to Young (1985),

this union later merged with the "Committee for the Propagation of Physical Exercises" (*Comité pour la Propagation des Exercices Physiques*), for which Pierre de Coubertin served as secretary general in the early 1890s and took the name USFSA applying various sports disciplines together. Coubertin becomes president of the union (McAloon, 1981: 157-158; Vanwynsberghe & Bowling, 1994). The USFSA logo consists of two interlaced rings. These rings symbolize the two different associations that merged (Barney, 1992). The symbol has the inscription "LUDUS PRO PATRIA" (*Play for Your Country*). The athletes of this association



Figure 5. Logo of the USFSA (Lennartz, 2002).

carried this emblem both in competitions and later in the Olympic Games (See Figure 5) (Lennartz, 2002). In the first marathon run which took place near Athens, French athlete Albin Lermusiaux who was a member of the USFSA took part in the race with this logo on his chest (Barney, 1992). According to the information given by Coubertin's great nephew, Geoffrey de Navacelle, Coubertin designed the logo in 1890. The two rings of the USFSA may have become a small model for the five rings of the Olympic logo (Anonymous, 2000: 595).

Dunlop, a United Kingdom-based company, placed an advertisement for bicycle tires in the *Radfahr Chronik* newspaper in 1896. There is a drawing in

the middle of the advertisement that covers the whole page. The four angels that are connected by ribbons with inscriptions "Africa, America, Asia, Europe", represent the four continents, and the angels hold four interlaced bicycle tires while flying (See Figure 6). The Australian continent is not represented in this image.



Figure 6. Dunlop advertisement with five rings (from: Radfahr-Chronik 9[1896]62, p. 646, as cited in Lennartz, 2002).

Another issue of Radfahr Chronik newspaper from the same year includes a bicycle advertisement given by Acatene company. This advertisement shows a total of 33 aristocrats, including Baron de Coubertin as a reference (See Figure 7). From this point of view, Coubertin may have seen and memorized the advertisement of Dunlop (Lennartz, 2002).

The First Appearance of the Olympic Rings

The Olympic movement had no symbol when the Sports Congress convened by Coubertin in Sorbonne between June 16 and 23, 1894, decided to restart the Olympic games on 23 June. Like many sports federations and organizations, the IOC undoubtedly needed a symbol of recognition. However, the idea of a flag was first presented at the twelfth session of the IOC in Luxembourg in 1910. In this session, Theodore Cook who was the organizer and artistic executor of the 1908 London Olympic Games, presented a flag model and medal design. Although it is not known what the design looks like, a commission including Godefroy de Blonay, Jules de Muszha, Clarence von Rosen and Eugenio Brunetta d'Usseaux discussed this design. The commission held a meeting and submitted a proposal to the general assembly, but it was not approved. Coubertin allowed the matter to be postponed (Lennartz, 2002). Cook's proposal was not brought up during the 1911 Budapest and 1912 Stockholm IOC sessions and it was rejected during the 15th session in Lausanne in May 1913 (Anonymous, 1913b). Considering the



Figure 7. An advertisement of the firm Acatène referring to Baron de COUBERTIN (from: Radfahr-Chronik 9[1896]61, p. 933, as cited in Lennartz, 2002).

literature reviews and Coubertin's character, it is understood that he wanted to design this important symbol himself and worked on it during this process.

The Olympic rings are seen for the first time as printed in their form in the upper left corner of a letter Coubertin wrote to Godefroy de Blonay on July 15, 1913. This letter is the first document found in the IOC archives that contains the rings. The second document containing the rings is another letter Coubertin wrote to Blonay on August 6, 1913 from the Hotel Quellenhof. An attempt was made to draw similar rings with a pen under the logo at the top left of the letter. This person could be either Blonay (Lennartz, 2002) or Coubertin.

Coubertin first officially described the Olympic rings in writing, without using pictures, in his article *"1914 Emblem and Flag"* in the August 1913 issue of *Revue Olympique*, the official publication of the IOC. Coubertin writes in the article as follows:

"The emblem selected to illustrate and represent the 1914 world congress which was to place the final seal on the restoration of the Olympics began to appear on various preliminary documents: five rings linked at regular intervals, their various colours - blue, yellow, black, green and red - standing out against the white of the paper. These five rings represent the five parts of the world now won over to Olympism, ready to accept its fruitful rivalries. In addition, the six colours combined in this way reproduce the colours of every country without exception. The blue and yellow of Sweden, the blue and white of Greece, the tricolor flags of France, England, the United States, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Hungary, and the yellow and red of Spain are included, as are the innovative flags of Brazil and Australia, and those of ancient Japan and modern China. This, truly, is an international emblem. It was made to be turned into a flag, and the look of the flag would be perfect. It is a light, appealing flag, a delight to see fluttering in the wind. Its meaning is largely symbolic. Its success is assured, to the point that after the Congress it can continue to be raised on solemn Olympic occasions. However, this may turn out, the celebrations of 1914 now have the eurythmic messengers they needed to announce them. The great poster; the first copies of which have been given to the national Olympic Committees and which continues to be available to them, met with immediate general admiration. The reduction to post card format is equally successful for that medium. The five rings and their various applications will also be deeply appreciated.

Are these five rings solidly riveted together? Will war someday shutter the Olympic framework? This is an issue we have been asked about before, and since the occasion presents itself; we are pleased to respond. Olympism did not reappear within the context of modern civilisation in order to play a local or temporary role. The mission entrusted to it is universal and timeless. It is ambitious. It requires all space and all time. One must acknowledge that its initial steps immediately marked it out for that future. That being the case, war can merely delay, not stop, its advancement. As the preamble of the Regulations for the next Congress state, 'an Olympiad may fail to be celebrated, but neither the order nor the interval may be changed'. If God forbid, the Seventh or Eighth Olympiads were unable to be celebrated, the Ninth Olympiad would be held. If bloody memories, still too fresh, made it impossible to hold the necessary celebrations in one part of the world, there will be people on the other side of the world ready to honour the eternal youth of humanity.

In addition, a more sporting conception of war - the word is not inappropriate - is becoming predominant. This will not make the heated exchange any less harsh, but it will make the aftermath somewhat more easily tolerated. People will learn a great lesson from the athlete: hatred without battle is not worthy of man, and insult without blows is utterly unbecoming.

Perhaps we have strayed from our topic. Let us return to it, repeating that war cannot influence the future of the Olympics. Once peace is restored, the International Committee will be at its post ready to continue its worldwide work. That is why the new emblem eloquently evokes both conquered terrain and guaranteed endurance” (Anonymous, 1913a).

Coubertin's article on the Olympic flag aroused great interest in the sports world (Lennartz, 2002). Angelo Bolanaki (Anonymous, 1963), appointed by Coubertin as Secretary General of the Egyptian National Olympic Committee, asked Coubertin for permission to wave the Olympic flag at the opening of the Chatsby Stadium in Alexandria on April 5, 1914, within the framework of the first Panegyptian Games. At this request, Coubertin had a flag made - probably in Paris - and sent it to Egypt (Lennartz, 2002). The Olympic flag was waved there for the first time (Anonymous, 1964). There are no known pictures of the flag waving in Egypt, but Bolanaki wrote in his work *"History of Sports in Egypt" (Histoire du Sport en Egypte)* that the flag is fluttering in the wind (Lennartz, 2002).

The Paris Congress (June 13-23, 1914) and the Development of the Rings

The idea of Olympism, in which the idea of the unification of the world is encoded in rhetoric, is symbolically surrounded in practice by five colored rings. Given the period, this call was great value (Anonymous, 2002). But the effort to unite the world through sport was unfortunately interrupted by the bells of war. At the beginning of the 20th century, nationalism was strong and tensions between certain countries were high (Anonymous, 2002). World War I which began on July 28, 1914, was to shake the entire world and drive societies apart for four years. Millions of people would face death, famine, and displacement (Eyquem, 1966: 207). Coubertin sensed the growing dangers. Ironically, just one month before the war, the Paris Congress was convened to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the Olympic Games, and Coubertin presented the flag there in detail (Clastres, 2013).

However, there was a serious mistake by the printer in printing the logo which Coubertin considered very important and paid careful attention to, on the invitations for the music and dance performances at the congress on June 14, 1914 (with two rings on top and three below). (Lennartz 2002; Pierre de Coubertin..., 2000: 595).

During the congress held under the IOC, the Olympic flag was waved on June 15, 1914 (Lennartz, 2002; VanWynsberghe & Bowling, 1994). Coubertin couldn't attend because of a sudden illness and could not witness the flag waving. The special train that was going to take the members of the Congress to Maintenon Castle on June 19 was carefully prepared by the management of the State Railways. The locomotive was decorated with Olympic flags and a plate dated 1894-1914. The Maintenon station was also decorated with Olympic flags. On the evening of June 21, the Barones de Schoen gave a party in honour of the Congress. Five rings of the Olympic flag, with a large, illuminated design, stand in the middle of an elaborately lit garden. On June 22, President Raymond Poincare and his wife, Madame Poincare held a garden party in honor of the Elysee Palace, decorating the entire garden with Olympic flags. (Anonymous, 1914).

Twenty years later, on October 9, 1935, Coubertin wrote a letter to Albert Berdez, Secretary General of the IOC. In this letter, he conveyed the reactions of his colleagues in the IOC to the symbol and other developments at the twentieth-anniversary congress in Paris. This letter was taken from the IOC archive, and it is as follows:

“Dear Colonel Berdez, the significance of the importance of the five coloured rings representing on a white background all colours of the world only became clear when the flag was created. Before 1913 my colleagues who had rejected the ideas of a ceremonial entry, oath, opening and closing phrase and who had only started changing their views after Stockholm, would have gone against a unification of gymnastic. They were opposed to any opinion of this kind. I let Brunetta who was an exception concerning these views present a flag that was completely overloaded and complicated. One restricted himself to observing it without discussing it. Towards the beginning of 1914 I then presented my deeply symbolic flag (the five continents united by the Olympism and the colours of all nations) after having carefully reconsidered the proportions in regard to the background. I had the flag made in the Bon Marché (a machine had to be constructed solely for its fabrication). I think nearly 500 flags were made. I covered most of the costs via the festivities of Paris. Thus, I was given a free hand as to what I spent money on. Only at the festivities in the Trocadéro did the IOC have to make a contribution. The flag appeared for the first time two days before the commencing of the festivities at a celebration organised by the Count de Bertier and his wife in the Bois de Boulogne on Saturday June 13, 1914. On Monday 15 the flag could be seen by a large number of people in the Amphitheatre Richelieu. On the 17th it accompanied the president Poincaré at the 20th anniversary being borne by six boy scouts. It decorated the engine and the train station of [at the outing of June 19, in short, it was everywhere, and many members of the congress took a flag back home with them.

In 1915 it was in the town hall of Lausanne on the occasion of determining the seat, and 1916 at the IOC-day it had the central location at a place of honour during the exhibition in San Francisco. Thus, it was not introduced in Antwerp as de Blonay writes in 1928 making a rare mistake which I have already had to correct several times. I think that you will see these details in the Olympic Memories, but I think that it has been good anyway to again send you a detailed summary that you can hand on to Diem the way it is.” (Anonymous, 1914; The Berdez Letter, 1935, as cited in Lennartz, 2002).

It is thought that the flag was originally intended to be waved for the first time in 1916 in Berlin during the Olympic Games. However, because of World War I, this could not be realized (Anonymous, 2002). Coubertin received a second request to use the flag. The flag was hoisted on March 18 during a sporting event at an exhibition in San Francisco in the spring of 1915 (International Olympic Committee Day), (Anonymous, 1964). A badge with the Olympic rings was also given at the same event (Lennartz, 2003). Between April 5 and 8 1919, during the celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary and the seventeenth session, the flag was hoisted in the university hall (Anonymous, 1964).

The long-awaited big day for the Olympic flag finally arrived on August 14, 1920. During the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games VII in Antwerp in Belgium, the flag with the rings fluttered in the wind (Anonymous, 1964). It is estimated that this flag was three by six meters (Lennartz, 2002). After the equestrian games, the Belgian NOC gave the IOC an Olympic flag embroidered on silk as a commemoration of the Games. Coubertin asked the officials of the Antwerp municipality to keep this flag and hand it over to the authorities in Paris in 1924. During the closing ceremony, the Olympic flag was lowered in company with the sounds of trumpets and cannon shots, similar to the opening ceremony. In the meantime, "cantata" by

Pierre Benoist was performed by 1,200 musicians. The 1920 Antwerp Games, in which no effort was spared to closely combine art and sport, thus come to an end on September 12, 1920 (Anonymous, 1957: 50-51).

In the first edition of the "*Olympic Charter*" published by Coubertin in 1921, the following is written under the heading of flags:

"As in all Olympic venues, there should be many Olympic flags among the flags of the participating nations in the stadium. During the Games in the stadium, a large Olympic flag should fly on a central pole, which is raised when the opening of the Games is announced and lowered when the closing is announced. On the other hand, each confirmed victory should be celebrated by raising the flag of the nation of the winning athlete on such a pole. With music, the national anthem of that nation is played, and audience stands up and listens." (Anonymous, 1921: 10).

In the same edition, it also is stated about the closing ceremony as follows:

"The Olympic flag is lowered from the central pole by being greeted with a salute of five cannon shots, and the choirs sing the final cantata. At the same time, the President of the International Committee presents the mayor of the host city with the satin embroidered Olympic flag, originally donated by the Belgian Committee in 1920 and received by the representative of the previous host city of the Games. This flag should be kept in the town hall until the next Olympic Games." (Anonymous, 1921: 12).

Coubertin added these new practices to the rituals of the opening and closing ceremonies and probably made them himself, along with many other things (Lennartz, 2002).

The Olympic rings won a great victory at the Olympic Games VIII in Paris in 1924. The rings were not only on numerous flagpoles in the stadiums but also on posters of the Games, building walls, curtains of the offices of the organizing committee, accreditations, and tickets. Each of the staff, athletes and journalists had an Olympic logo. After a short speech by Comte Justinien de Clary who appeared on the podium covered with a large Olympic flag, the French President made the opening speech of the Opening Ceremony. Later, Geo Andre took the Olympic oath on the same podium. The Olympic flag can then be seen in photos taken during the Winter Sports Week in Chamonix, where the Winter Olympic Games I would be held (Anonymous, 1925: 85, 715, 732, 791, 821).

After IOC President Coubertin's speech at the closing ceremony on July 27, a flag ceremony was held for the first time in the form known today. It is stated in the report of the French NOC as follows:

"The trumpets of the Republican Guard played. The Olympic flag was lowered after being saluted with five cannon shots. Then the Greek, French and Dutch flags were lowered, respectively and the singers began to sing Auber's "La Muette: The Mute Girl" and Ambroise Thomas's "Hymne à la France: French National Anthem". Meanwhile, the President of the International Olympic Committee presented the President of the Paris City Council with the satin embroidered Olympic flag, donated by the Belgian Olympic Committee in 1920 and received from the Mayor of Antwerp, to be kept in the Paris Town Hall until 1928 when the Olympic Games IX would be celebrated."

The President of the Paris City Council Maurice Quentin later gave a speech in which he gushed about the importance of the Olympic flag with several sentences. He expressed that the flag symbolized the high values becoming prominent in sporting competitions and that it was an honour to keep it in Paris for four years (Anonymous, 1925: 615).

In 1925, the Olympic rings were used in philately for the first time. The Czechoslovak Post Office used stamps with the Olympic rings from April 8 to May 9, 1925, to promote the Olympic Congress VIII, held in Prague from May 29 to June 4, 1925 (Lennartz, 2003). The Swiss NOC frequently used the Olympic rings, as did the French NOC at the 1924 Olympics in Paris (Lennartz, 2002).

After Paris, the Olympic flag was displayed on the advertisements and official posters of the 1928 Winter Olympics II in St. Moritz. The organizers of these games also added the Olympic rings to the Olympic medals, commemorative medals, and certificates of achievement. This situation subsequently became a tradition for winter games. The American NOC is probably the first institution that included the rings in its emblems and thus on the uniforms of its athletes (Lennartz, 2002). The flag handover ceremony in Paris took place in the stands, but it took place in the middle of the stadium during the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam in order to allow everyone to see it (Anonymous, 1928: 915).

The Portuguese NOC sought financial support to send its Olympic group to Amsterdam and received support from the national post offices. In 1928, 15- and 30-centavos stamps with the Olympic rings were affixed to all mails (Schmidt & Schneider, 1958, as cited in Lennartz, 2002). Since then, the rings have been used on almost all Olympic stamps, and in case of their absence, the stamps are referred to as "stamps without rings" (Lennartz, 2002).

For many years, the flag was accepted in the form proposed by Coubertin and flew on the poles in many member countries and Olympic Games. In 1957, another version was officially approved by the IOC Executive Board. When the IOC which separated the rings from their intersections and made them independent rings considered this decision a mistake in 2010, they returned to the original, seamlessly interlaced design, fulfilling Coubertin's vision (Olympics, t.y.b).

A Discussion on the Meaning of the Rings

According to VanWynsberghe & Bowling (1994), the common misconception that the symbol of the five rings and its colors were meant to represent the participation of the continents in the Olympic Games is not accurate. The main purpose of Coubertin regarding this symbol was not to represent the continents (VanWynsberghe & Bowling, 1994). According to Young (1984), it is disputed whether the flag shows five continents or six continents (As cited in VanWynsberghe & Bowling, 1994). There is no record of any athlete from Antarctica who participated in the Olympic Games, either before or after 1914. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that Antarctica was included in the colour scheme of the logo. The number of continents Coubertin could include is five, but, as Coubertin himself acknowledged, the number of colours is six (VanWynsberghe & Bowling, 1994).

According to Young (1985), the rings may symbolize the five Olympic Games that were played before the Paris Congress of 1914. According to Barney (1992), as claimed in many contemporary Olympic publications, Coubertin did not intend each colour to represent a continent. Instead, the white background of the flag and the green, red, yellow, black, and blue rings represent at least one of the colours of the flags of each nation that was represented at the first five Olympic Games. In Coubertin's article "*1914 Emblems and Flags*" which is mentioned in detail above, it is seen that he expressed ideas in this regard (Anonymous, 1913a; Anonymous, 2000: 594-595).

According to Barney (1992), if the rings really symbolize the continents of the world, why is Africa not mentioned? Africa was not part of the logo scheme, at least not in Coubertin's thoughts about the Olympic Games. It is true that white South Africans competed in the Olympic Games, but these athletes competed under the auspices and representation of Great Britain from the beginning. Until the 1950s, they were forced by European colonial establishments in the African continent to become independent, and thus real African participation in the modern Olympic games was allowed (Barney, 1992).

On the other hand, in a letter written by Coubertin to Albert Berdez on October 9, 1935, the word "continent" is mentioned. The relevant section of the letter is as follows:

"At the beginning of 1914, having carefully reconsidered the proportions in the background, I presented my profound and symbolic flag (the colors of the five continents and of all the nations united by Olympism)" (Letter to Berdeze, 1935, as cited in Lennartz, 2002).

According to Miller (1979: 194), the Olympic rings symbolize the unity of the five continents and the gathering of athletes from all over the world in the spirit of justice, fair competition and friendship, which are the ideals preached by Coubertin.

In his book "Olympic Memoirs" he wrote in 1931, Coubertin speaks about the subject as follows:

"The commemoration at the Sorbonne, attended by all the ambassadors, presided over by the Head of State, and at which more than a hundred addresses or telegrams were delivered by monarchs, seeming heirs, governments, universities and associations, was crowned by the performances of famous Swedish singers who had come to Paris for the festivals. The Olympic flag which was recently printed in large numbers and highly acclaimed, was presented to the public for the first time. This snow-white flag, consisting of interlaced blue, yellow, black, green and red rings, represented the five continents brought together by the Olympic Games and reflected the colors of all nations." (Coubertin, 1931: 144).

In the 1948 report of the American NOC, the "*unity of color and continent*" is mentioned. The relationship is as follows:

- Blue: Europe
- Yellow: Asia
- Black: Africa
- Green: America
- Red: Australia

The related report gives the relationship between colours and continents, but there is confusion here. In the literature, the color green represents Australia, while the color red represents America. However, this report states the opposite (Anonymous, 1949: 14)

Paleographer, research director at the School of Applied Advanced Studies (Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes) and expert in symbolic systems, especially dynastic coats of arms, sigillography and color symbolism, Michel Pastoureau, noted that there was a matching between color and continent. In his book, *"Green: The History of a Color"* Pastoureau says the following:

"Another somewhat different example is the green that represents Oceania in the series of Olympic rings. There it is a matter of an athletic color that was not chosen but imposed. The rings had been established on paper in 1912-1913, but events made it so that they could not be flown on the Olympic flag until the Olympic Games in Anvers in 1920. Each ring represents one continent and possesses its color: red for America, yellow for Asia, black for Africa, blue for Europe, and green for Oceania. The first three colors seem to have been chosen according to ethnic considerations (and also perhaps slightly racist ones): red for the continent of the redskins, yellow for that of the yellow peoples, and black for that of the blacks. The other two, though, are trickier to interpret. Blue, associated with Europe, appears to be an old cultural legacy; blue has been Europe's favorite color since the eighteenth century, and it is also the color other societies around the globe use to symbolize it. But where does the green for Oceania come from? Why this choice? Oceania has no special relationship, either natural or cultural, to with this color. In fact, it was a matter of elimination. Five of the six basic colors were already taken-four for the first four rings and white for the background of the flag-only green remained for the fifth ring. Oceania became green and seems gradually to be forming an attachment to this color, chosen for it by solemn European gentlemen who had never set foot on its soil and who probably had no intention of ever doing so. First imposed from without, green was nevertheless accepted by Oceania, and is now embraced and proudly displayed on the playing fields." (Pastoureau, 2014: 216).

CONCLUSION

The claim that the idea of the Olympic rings originated in the ancient period is false based on the research conducted and the results presented. The attempt to trace the origin of the rings back to the ancient period reflects a theatrical scenario presented by Carl Diem. From a young age onwards, Pierre de Coubertin's wandering and exploratory nature enabled him to see and memorize many things, as well as to improve his intellectual perspective and expand his knowledge. Fairs, exhibitions, museums, congresses, conferences, the reading of books, newspapers and magazines, sports activities and corporate responsibility allowed him to realize the largest sports organization in the world. All this experience and knowledge led to the creation of the globally recognized symbol of the Olympic flag, consisting of five interlaced rings. The flag was inspired by various ring figures and elements. Coubertin's first logo experience can be seen in the symbol of the USFSA, which can be considered the precursor of the Olympic flag. The transition from the emblem with two rings to the global flag with five rings is directly related to the ideology of Olympism.

The Egyptian Olympic Committee raised the first logo, which was used in a letter to his close friend Godefroy de Blonay, and Coubertin ceremoniously presented it to the sporting community at the Paris Congress of 1914 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Olympic Games. Thus, the flag began to become a symbol with the potential for popularity

worldwide. However, the great war slowed it down to some extent. The 1920 Games in Antwerp and the 1924 Games in Paris contributed to the flag gaining the value it deserved and becoming the most popular flag in the world. The logo became a symbol used widely in various sporting events, postage stamps, postcards, store signs, clothes, flags, accreditations, etc.

With the spread of the famous logo, several debates and four different interpretations emerged about the meaning of the rings and colors:

- The rings represent the continents.
- The rings represent the continents, and each continent has its own color.
- The rings symbolize the nations that participated in the five Olympic Games before 1913 and the colors symbolize at least one color from the flags of those nations.
- The rings represent the continents. The colors symbolize at least one color from the flags of all countries. There is no correspondence between color and continent (as Coubertin stated).

From Coubertin's own statements, we can see that the idea of a "*continent-color matching*" is a misunderstanding. Black: Africa, yellow: No specific connection between color and Asia was found in primary sources. From Coubertin's own writings, we can conclude that the rings represent the five continents participating in the games. Also, according to Coubertin, the six colors used represent the flags of all nations without exception. In this case, both the rings and the colors symbolize the unity of the world in terms of continents and nations, but they do not confirm color-continent matching. There is no current evidence to support the claim that Coubertin made such an assignment.

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Since this study is a review, there is no need for an ethics committee.

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