

## The Czech Olympic Committee and its symbols in 1912

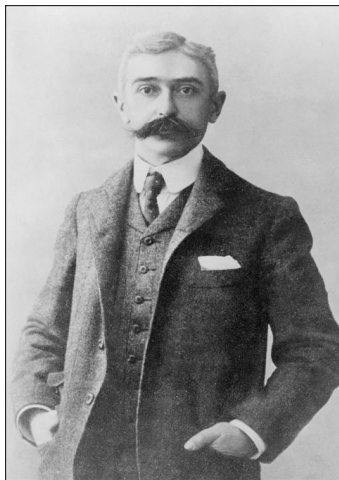
Roman Klimeš

### Abstract

*The participation of a team representing Bohemia in the Olympic Games prior to the First World War provoked controversy within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as it had implications for the unity of the Empire. Many behind-the-scenes discussions had to take place before Bohemian symbols could be carried at the Games. The flag behind which the athletes marched in 1912 was thought to have been destroyed, but the author has found the flag stored at the clubhouse of the Prague Yacht Club.*

### Establishment of the International Olympic Committee

French educator and historian Baron Pierre de Coubertin<sup>1</sup> spent several years studying the physical education system in the UK and USA. He wrote several books about his findings and sought their integration into the French educational system.



*Baron Pierre de Coubertin*

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre de Frédy, later Baron de Coubertin, was born on 1 January 1863 in Paris and died on 2 September 1937 in Geneva. He was a French educator, historian, and sports official. He came from an old French aristocratic family. He studied arts, philology, and law at the Sorbonne. He wanted to be an officer, but a military career did not work out, and instead he devoted himself to teaching. He promoted the renewal of the Olympic Games and in 1894 founded the International Olympic Committee (IOC). He created the protocols for the opening and closing ceremonies of the games, and created the Olympic flag, symbol and motto. All these symbols were presented at the congress of the IOC in 1914 in Paris. He did not favour women's participation in the Olympic Games. In 1924 he resigned from the IOC, but he remained the honorary chairman until his death in 1937. He is buried in Lausanne, which is the seat of the IOC, and his heart was buried at the memorial near the ancient Greek Olympia.



He thought that physical sports training should be part of the regular curriculum. He was convinced of the importance of sport for the proper development of young people. His literary activity, however, did not raise enough interest, so he decided to move from words to deeds. In his mind he hatched a plan to restore the ancient Greek Olympics and began to seek support for the plan in his circle of acquaintances and friends.

He made the first proposal for the organisation of the modern Olympic Games on 25 November 1892 at the jubilee session of the Union of French Organisations of Athletic Sports in the amphitheatre of the Sorbonne University in Paris. His proposal, however, was completely unsuccessful.<sup>2</sup> To popularise his plan, on 16-25 June 1894, at the Sorbonne, Coubertin organised an International Congress for the restoration of the Olympic Games. It was attended by 79 delegates from 49 associations and clubs representing 12 countries. The Czechs, however, were not present.

At this Congress, Coubertin made a proposition to re-establish the Olympic Games. On 20 June the Congress agreed to the proposal and on 23 June approved the composition of the governing body – the International Olympic Committee (IOC). This day is considered the date of the IOC's foundation. Coubertin became its general secretary, a position in which he served from 1894 to 1896.

The 1894 Congress established the guiding principles of the Olympics, which have continued until today. The Olympic Games are held every four years, all athletes are equal, sporting competitions have a modern character, and only amateur athletes could participate.<sup>3</sup> The Olympic Games are international and are held in different cities around the world. At the same time, it was determined that the principle purpose of the Games was the promotion of sport. The first revived Olympic Games were awarded to Athens for the year 1896. It was decided that the chairman of the IOC should be a member from the host country, namely Greece, and Demetrius Vikelas was selected. The first modern Olympics was very successful, and after Demetrius Vikelas resigned from office, Pierre de Coubertin became the IOC chairman.

A month after the founding Congress in 1894, Pierre de Coubertin personally selected the first members of the IOC. It was decided that IOC members should come from all parts of the world, based on their position and contacts to expand the Olympic idea. The first International Olympic Committee had thirteen members: two from France (Pierre de Coubertin and Ernest Callot); two from the United Kingdom (Charles Herbert and Arthur Russell); and one each from Greece (Demetrius Vikelas), Sweden-Norway (Viktor Balck), Russia (Alexei Butovskij), Bohemia (Jiří Guth), Austria-Hungary (Ferenc Kemény), Italy (Mario Lucchesi-Palli), USA (William Milligan Sloane), New Zealand (Leonard Cuff), and Argentina (José Benjamin Zubiaur).

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<sup>2</sup> Jiří Kössl, František Krátký and Jaroslav Marek, *Dějiny tělesné výchovy II* (Praha 1986), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> In February 1986 the IOC executive recommended that all top athletes, including professionals, be allowed to take part in at the Olympic Games. In October 1986 the IOC decided to allow professional athletes to participate at the Olympic Games. Gradually, it paved the way for the participation of professional hockey players, tennis players, cyclists and others.



*International Olympic Committee, Athens 1896: standing (left to right), Willibald Gebhardt (Germany), Jiří Guth-Jarkovský (Bohemia), Ferenc Kemény (Hungary), Viktor Balck (Sweden); seated (left to right), Pierre de Coubertin(France), Demetrius Vikelas (Greece), Alexej Butovskij (Russia)*

Notably, Coubertin did ask for an IOC member from Germany. After the Franco-German War of 1870–71, relations between the two countries were strained and the reluctance to socialise was mutual. It was only in preparation for the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 that Germany organised a national Olympic Committee at the initiative of the chemist and entrepreneur Willibald Gebhardt, and the question of German representation on the IOC could no longer be avoided. In April 1896 IOC Chairman Vikelas appointed Gebhardt as a German member of the IOC. Vikelas also appointed Maxime de Bousies as a Belgian member of the IOC. At the time of the first Olympic Games in 1896, the International Olympic Committee had a total of 15 members.

#### **Establishment of the Bohemian Olympic Committee**

In 1896, Jiří Guth (later Guth-Jarkovský)<sup>4</sup> participated in the first modern

<sup>4</sup> Jiří Guth was born on 23 January 1861 in Heřmanův Městec and died on 8 January 1943 in Náchod. He was an important educator and author, internationally known as a founding member of the IOC. From 1920 he used the name Jiří Stanislav Guth-Jarkovský. He graduated from the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University at Prague. A year later, in 1883, he passed the state exam for school teachers. In the years 1883–7 he was a tutor to a German prince of Schaumburg-Lippe. From 1887 he taught at the grammar school in Prague. During his Swiss stay he encountered the French system of education and also Pierre de Coubertin, forming a lifelong friendship with the Frenchman. Coubertin appointed him a member of the IOC. Guth continued working as a teacher. He recognised the possibility for Bohemians to become independent of Austria in the field of international sports and promoted the establishment of the Bohemian Olympic Committee, of which he became chairman. After the success of Bohemian athletes at the Olympic Games in 1900 in Paris, Austrian leaders asked for the end of Czech independence in the Olympics, as well as the exclusion of Guth from the IOC. Coubertin took these efforts as the basis of his doctrine of 'sports geography'. In 1919, Guth was appointed Chief of Protocol of the Czecho-Slovak president T.G. Masaryk. He is known as the author of many



Olympic Games in Athens and returned home excited. The Olympic Movement was being discussed in Bohemian and German journals; Guth-Jarkovský tried to immediately establish a Bohemian Olympic Committee and become a leader in the Bohemian Sokol sports movement, but he was initially unsuccessful. In 1897 he established the Bohemian Amateur Athletic Union, which he initially led. Subsequently, another major sporting organiser, Josef Rössler-Ořovský,<sup>5</sup> took over the Union's leadership, and on 18 May 1899 Rössler-Ořovský and several other athletes founded the Bohemian Olympic Committee.



*Jiří Guth-Jarkovský*



*Josef Rössler-Ořovský*

At first the committee did not function well, so it was re-established in January 1900. From March 1900, the Bohemian Olympic Committee was in continuous action<sup>6</sup> because its aim was to send a Bohemian team to the 1900 Olympic

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books on the rules of correct behaviour in all areas of life, placing the emphasis on decency, honesty, humility and mutual respect. He was also a translator of French and German literature.

<sup>5</sup> Josef Rössler-Ořovský was born 29 June 1869 in Prague, where he died on 17 January 1933. He was a versatile Czech athlete and sports organiser. He is still one of the greatest personalities of Bohemian sport. He was responsible for introducing a variety of sports into Czech territory. He collaborated in the establishment of numerous sports clubs and sports associations. He was above all a great rower, but he was also active in speed skating, ice hockey, tennis, yachting, track and field athletics, football, and canoeing. He was also an excellent diplomat, speaking several languages. Along with Guth, he founded the Bohemian Olympic Committee in 1899. On 21 November 1903, on his own initiative he founded the Ski Association of the Bohemian Kingdom, the first ski association in the world. He created the Bohemian Lawn Tennis Association in 1906, the Bohemia Ice Hockey Association in 1908, the Central Union of Amateur Athletics in 1910, and the Bohemian Association of Fencing in 1913. In October 1918, during the republic, he organised and directed an organisation called Scout Post, which provided a courier service between the nascent state authorities. He was also an avid philatelist and a member of the Bohemian Philatelists Club, the oldest Bohemian philatelic club, founded in 1887. He is buried at Vyšehrad cemetery in Prague.

<sup>6</sup> Kössl et al., *Dějiny tělesné výchovy II*, p. 73.



Games in Paris. Although there was no sovereign Czech state, the Bohemian National Committee attended the Paris Olympic Congress in 1914. After that time, the Committee withdrew until the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918. For 30 years (1899–1929) Guth-Jarkovský was the chairman of the Czech and later the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee, and he was also the first Bohemian member of the International Olympic Committee (1899–1943).

### Participation of Bohemian athletes in the Olympics

As already noted, from the beginning of the modern history of the Olympic Movement, the Czechs had a representative in the International Olympic Committee. From its founding in 1894, Dr Guth-Jarkovský was a member of the international body. The Bohemian Olympic Committee was founded in 1899, which gave the Bohemian representatives a right to display a Bohemian flag at ceremonial Olympic functions. However, the Bohemian Olympic Committee encountered various obstacles and problems, initially from the Austrian Olympic Committee, and later from the Austrian authorities. Like the Finns and the Hungarians, the Bohemians did not have their own state, but under the doctrine of 'sports geography', the Bohemians were allowed to participate as equal partners in the Olympic Games.<sup>7</sup>

At the First Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, Bohemia was represented only by Dr Guth-Jarkovský and its flag was not used. At the Second Olympic Games in Paris in 1900, four Bohemian athletes participated, but there is no known reference to a Bohemian flag being used. The Third Olympic Games was held in St Louis (USA) in 1904, in association with the anniversary of the city and that year's World's Fair. There was no Czech participation in the Games, and Bohemia was represented only by Dr Guth-Jarkovský. There were very few European athletes at the St Louis Games, mainly because of the problem of overseas travel. Greece was opposed to the Olympic Games being held in conjunction with a world exposition, and so in 1906 games entitled 'Interludes' were hosted in Athens. These games were later declared unofficial. Concerning the participation of the Bohemian delegation, J. Rössler-Ořovský wrote the following<sup>8</sup>:

In Athens, although we did not want to refrain from carrying our red and white flag, the procession went with no flags at all, to avoid a conflict with Austria (concerning our opinion) and Russia (the Finns). We then paraded, like all nations, in a separate group, but at least we were carrying the red and white flag of Bohemia without a staff, draped across the shoulders of two men on their right-hand side, where it was seen by the Greek and English monarchs on the dais with the ministers and delegates from around the world. The Austrian ambassador Count Macchio took a hostile position against us and there was a lot of correspondence and inconveniences, especially when the *Athenian* published a satirical issue with a cover page cartoon showing Franz Joseph as an athlete straddling enormous barbells, the two big balls marked 'Bohemia' and 'Hungary'. And when Ambassador Macchio invited the Bohemians, Hungarians, and Austrians to a garden party – each of these three groups separated and grouped in corners of the garden to demonstrate

<sup>7</sup> Ludvík Mucha: 'Český olympijský prapor', *Vexilologie*, no. 38 (1980), p. 675.

<sup>8</sup> Josef Rössler-Ořovský, 'Z odboje Českého olympijského výboru proti Rakousko-Uhersku', *Olympijský věstník*, 1 (1924), p. 115.



their 'independence' ... The English King Edward noticed our team and paid us some attention.

At the Fourth Olympic Games in London in 1908, Bohemian athletes paraded on their own behind the Bohemia sign and behind the white-red banner. The Austrian embassy in London was again forced to explain to Vienna. J. Rössler-Ořovský wrote:<sup>9</sup>

At the London Olympics our participation was very political. English journalists picked up on the participation of the old 'Kingdom of Bohemia'. The Austrian authorities were furious, the *Neue Freie Presse* publishing an incendiary article, arguing that we were acting as an independent state. Dr Guth-Jarkovský was 'officially here sniffing' – but from this cloud there was no rain. In London, in programmes and in newspapers all over Bohemia, in procession to the stadium we marched with the board [sign] of Bohemia and the red and white banner, behind us there were 4 Bohemian official delegates in black coats and top hats (consul Captain Wentworth Forbes, Count Lützow, Rössler-Ořovský and Brother Müller). The Austrian embassy received criticism from Vienna. The response in London was socially and politically excellent, though less sporting.

For the Fifth Olympic Games in Stockholm, the Austrian authorities were better prepared. Austria's<sup>10</sup> new representative in the IOC, Otto Prince Windisch-Grätz,<sup>11</sup> wrote to the IOC President Baron Coubertin and Dr Guth-Jarkovský that the minister did not want Bohemia go to the Olympic Games as an independent group. Regarding the red and white flag, approved by Otto Prince Windisch-Grätz in a letter dated 16 October 1911, the Austrian authorities stated that if there was a Bohemian victory in any competition, the imperial flag should be raised along with a smaller Bohemian provincial flag.<sup>12</sup> Independent of this, on 5 June 1912, Emperor Franz Joseph I allowed the Bohemian Olympic Committee to use the Bohemian provincial coat of arms.<sup>13</sup> This was communicated by letter to the Bohemia Olympic Committee through the Emperor's governor addressed to Dr Jiří Guth.<sup>14</sup> The text of the letter reads:

His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty by the supreme decision

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre de Coubertin named Otto Prince of Windisch-Grätz as a member of the IOC at the 12th IOC session in Budapest on 25 May 1911.

<sup>11</sup> Werian Hugo Otto Ernst (from 1902 Prince) zu Windisch-Grätz was born on 7 October 1873 in Graz, Austria, and died 25 December 1952 in Lugano, Switzerland. His wife was Archduchess Marie Elisabeth of Austria, daughter of Crown Prince Rudolf and his wife Stefanie, the daughter of Belgian King Leopold. He was a loyal Austrian, but always acted correctly and diplomatically with representatives of the Czech Olympic Committee. He was an IOC member from 23 May 1911 until 1919.

<sup>12</sup> Jiří St. Guth-Jarkovský, *Paměti, díl II, Paměti olympijské (1894–1918)* (Praha 1929), p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> Jiří Kössl, *Dějiny československého olympijského hnutí* (Praha, 1977), p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Archiv hlavního města Prahy, Fond: Spolkový archiv, SK XIV/375, dopis místodržitelství z 10.6.1912, č. 8A: 1356/4. (Archive of Capital of Prague, Federal archive, SK XIV/375, letter of governancy dated 10 June 1912, No. 8A, 1356/4).



dated June 5, 1912 graciously permits the 'Czech Olympic Games Committee in Prague' to use the Czech national emblem in its member's badge, as well as in their publications, papers and correspondence. You are hereby informed of this in accordance with the decree of the Czech Ministry of the Interior dated 7 June 1912 No. 17,423.

This was the provincial coat of arms of Bohemia, not a symbol associated with other countries of the Bohemian crown. The Provincial coat of arms of Bohemia, actually known as the Kingdom of Bohemia, was the red shield with silver double-tailed lion with golden claws and tongue, a golden crowned, with the St Wenceslas crown.

It was a unique situation. The Austrian authorities were trying their best to suppress the independence of the Bohemian team at the Olympic Games in Stockholm, but the Emperor himself thwarted their efforts. In his memoirs, Dr Guth-Jarkovský wrote:<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, I could say that the Bohemian kingdom had announced that the committee had been allowed by the Imperial decision to use the Czech emblem. Probably few of those present realised clearly what it meant: nothing less than the Imperial recognition of separate Czech sport! I have the impression that Deputy Thun, perhaps under the influence of Ferd. Lobkowitz, the decision to sign somehow sneaked by and the Emperor signed, not fully understanding.

Maybe later, I will have the opportunity to explain. But I just noticed when I intervened at the time of the leadership to speed up this matter, the Chief Deputy, District Governor X answered: 'But what do you think, Doctor, it is not possible, you are not an association and you do not have statutes, you can not even let it go!' And it was allowed.

The complexity of the situation is reflected in J. Rössler-Ořovský's minutes of activities<sup>16</sup> that took place even on the eve of the Games:

Minutes of the arrangement between Hanuš, Count Kolowrat, secretary of the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Stockholm and Mr J. Rössler-Ořovský, general secretary of the Bohemian Olympic Committee made orally on the eve of the official parade of participating nations at the V Olympiad in Stockholm. Yesterday, on ... 1912 both the aforementioned individuals met at the open lawn tennis courts at the new lawn tennis pavilion in Stockholm.

Mr Rössler-Ořovský said he has a flag of Bohemia bearing the Bohemian lion; that the flag will be carried at the head of the Czech team in the parade; that on the board carried ahead of the

<sup>15</sup> Guth-Jarkovský, *Paměti olympijské (1894–1918)*, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> Národní muzeum Praha, Archiv tělesné výchovy a sportu, hnutí olympijské, Český olympijský výbor, karta č. 5, Protokoly ČOV 1911–1912. pp.213–16. (National Museum Prague, Archive of Physical Education and Sports, Olympic Movement, Czech Olympic Committee, Protocols of Czech Olympic Committee 1911-12, pp. 213–16).

Czech athletes in the parade would be the inscription *Bohême*; that he knew the words 'Bohême' or 'Böhmen' or Kingdom of Bohemia do not appear anywhere in Austrian law, but the laws indicate that the Kingdom has never been abolished. The Swedes and the police do not care what name is used, and the flag can be carried in Stockholm only by anyone who wishes, providing they do not offend the Swedes or their King, or do not mingle with the Austrians. Count Kolowrat conveyed the views of the Austro-Hungarian Legation, asking specifically what instructions were received by J. Evans from the Swedish Count Dumby?

Rössler-Ořovský repeated his well-known position regarding the Czechs. We belong to Austria, we fully understand and appreciate this situation, and we have always used Austrian symbols everywhere as required. Naturally, however, we think our nation and the Czech Olympic Committee should always be respected by the Austrian government, but at home and abroad J. Rössler-Ořovský is often asked to refrain from public mention of his nationality, the flag, and other matters.

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After a debate on the situation of Hungarians and Bohemians in Austria, the question of their behaviour abroad was raised. Rössler-Ořovský summarised the situation as follows: in previous Olympiads Bohemians had followed the agreement reached between the Bohemian Olympic Committee and Prince Windisch-Grätz; Rössler-Ořovský further stated that His Majesty has now allowed the Bohemian Olympic Committee to use the provincial coat of arms of the Kingdom of Bohemia; the agreement with Prince Otto Windisch-Grätz required that the Bohemian team should march without a board, but Rössler-Ořovský now proposes that the Bohemian team should do so.

After long bilateral discussions, Rössler-Ořovský made the following proposals:

- 1) The Bohemians will march as a completely separate group a few metres behind the Austrians;
- 2) The Bohemians will march with a board in French, which will be in a font of exactly the same size as that used by the Austro-Czechs, no larger, no smaller;
- 3) Behind the board, the Bohemians will carry their Bohemian lion flag; next to the Bohemian flag-bearer, the Austro-Hungarian red-white-red with green lower right corner field will be carried.

After consulting with His Excellency Count Dumby, who was also present, Count Kolowrat said that His Excellency accepted the conditions, but because of the Hungarians and their relationship to the Empire, he asked us to use the Bohemian flag with the Austrian flag, rather than with the Austro-Hungarian flag proposed. But that [the Austrian] flag is [black and] yellow. After Rössler-Ořovský objected that the internationally known Austrian flag has a red-white-red field, Count Kolowrat stated that only the





Austrian flag may now be used, and that this is now black and yellow. Rössler-Ořovský took note of this, stating that the Czechs would march:

- 1) with a board reading "Autriche-Tchèques";
- 2) with the Bohemian lion flag next to the Austrian flag; and
- 3) as a separate group, behind the Austrians but in front of the Hungarians

To avoid any doubt, a drawing was made of these dispositions.<sup>17</sup>

With the full approval of His Excellency Count Dumby, Count Kolowrat and Rössler-Ořovský, a new Austrian flag and a new board for the parade were made overnight. The parade was also conducted according to my notes.

To understand the usage of the Bohemian flag, it is necessary to explain the historical context of Austria-Hungary in the year 1912. The Austrian Empire had existed since 1804, but the Austro-Hungarian Compromise<sup>18</sup> of 1867 transformed the empire into a dual monarchy called Austria-Hungary. Both parts of the monarchy had equal status. The Kingdom of Hungary (Transleithania) adopted its own flag in the Hungarian colours of red, white, and green.



*Flag of Hungary (Transleithania)*

These colours are documented from the sixteenth century onwards. During the revolution of 1848, the Hungarian tricolour was adopted as the national flag in 1848–9. Hungarian rebels used it as a symbol of the anti-Habsburg uprising. The colours correspond to the colours of the Hungarian coat of arms (red shield silver (white) stripes and silver (white) patriarchal cross over three green hills, with a small golden crown).<sup>19</sup> The Hungarian flag has three horizontal stripes of

<sup>17</sup> First, there is a board with the inscription *Österreich*, the Austrian black-yellow flag, and the Austrian delegation. Second, a board with the inscription *Autriche-Tchèques* and two flags: the Bohemian lion flag and the Austrian black-yellow flag, and the Bohemian delegation. Third, a board with the inscription *Hongrie* and the Hungarian flag.

<sup>18</sup> The Austro-Hungarian Compromise (in German *Ausgleich*, in Hungarian *Kiegyezés*) was a constitutional act of 1867 which transformed the Austrian Empire into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and simultaneously restored the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Hungary. The Habsburg dynasty reigned from the moment the empire was formed through two peculiar political entities: Austria (Cisleithania) and Hungary (Transleithania), which had their own parliaments and legal systems. Both halves of the empire shared some common ministries and certain institutions, and were represented by the head of state – the Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Znamierowski, *World Encyclopedia of Flags* (London, 2000), p. 137.

equal width in the colours of red (top), white (middle), and green (bottom).

In 1804, the Austrian Empire adopted the black-and-yellow flag of the former Holy Roman Empire.<sup>20</sup> This flag represented the Austrian Empire until 1867, when it became the flag of the Austrian part of Austria-Hungary (Cisleithania). But this flag was never legally established; it was only a de facto flag. From 1867, the Austrian part of Austria-Hungary used this flag, consisting of two equally wide horizontal stripes in the colours of black (top) and yellow (bottom).



*Flag of Austria (Cisleithania)*

The flag for all of Austria-Hungary was established as follows: three horizontal stripes of equal width, the upper stripe red, the middle stripe white, and the lower stripe divided in the middle with the part on the hoist red and the part in the fly green. This flag linked the Austrian colours (red, white, and red) and the Hungarian colours (red, white, and green).



*Flag of Austria-Hungary*

### **Small Bohemia Olympic flag**

There was a problem with the provincial flag of Bohemia. Dr Guth-Jarkovský, who made considerable efforts to determine the official appearance of the provincial Bohemian flag, wrote later in his memoirs that the Bohemian Provincial Governor did not know the correct design of the flag of Bohemia.<sup>21</sup>

After the Olympics, an inaugural member of our Olympic delegation gave an insight into the embarrassment of the Bohemian Olympic Committee – even if not taking sides in the argument – when he wrote: 'But what is the flag of the Bohemian Kingdom, precisely, specifically, defined by law or regulation? Neither I nor Havlíček<sup>22</sup> himself knew properly, otherwise he could never have written about the colours red and white. The white-red flag is only the

<sup>20</sup> Richard Baumberger and Franz Maier-Bruck (eds), *Österreich Lexikon*, Erster Band A-K (Wien, 1966), p. 296.

<sup>21</sup> Guth-Jarkovský, *Paměti olympijské*, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> Karel Havlíček Borovský was a very important and famous nineteenth-century Czech writer.

Bohemian colours, no more.<sup>23</sup> The search was certainly made in connection with a letter from the 1912 Olympic Games organising committee, which asked that a Bohemian flag be sent, and said that it would make six examples, each 4.8m long. This note was discussed by the Bohemian Olympic Committee at its meeting on 26 February 1912.<sup>24</sup>



*Small Bohemian Olympic flag: left, obverse; right, reverse.  
Original from collection of National Museum, Prague*

In his memoirs, Dr Guth-Jarkovský wrote: 'We were satisfied, therefore, with a flag that was issued once by certain textile firm: a white flag with the Bohemian coat of arms, with a border of alternating white and red triangles.'<sup>25</sup> Several examples of these flags are preserved at the National Museum in Prague in the sport collection.<sup>26</sup> The documentation pertaining to this flag states, 'Flag of wool cashmere, creamy white, with a lion and St Wenceslas crown, edged with red and white triangles. Status – damaged by moths.'<sup>27</sup> Members of the Czech Olympic team were issued with these flags in Stockholm.<sup>28</sup> The photo published in the journal *Český svět* ('Czech world')<sup>29</sup> shows members of the Bohemian Olympic team on 3 July 1912 waving these flags from the windows of Prague station before departing for Stockholm. The following issue<sup>30</sup> of the same magazine shows a photograph of the Bohemian athletic team also with the Bohemian Olympic flag. On the back cover of this journal<sup>31</sup> is a photo of the parade at the stadium with the Bohemian team carrying the Olympic flag as a banner.

<sup>23</sup> Newspaper *Národní listy*, ročník padesátý druhý, v Praze v sobotu 27. července 1912, číslo 205, str. 3. Sportovní věstník. Pátá olympiada ve Štokholmě. III.

<sup>24</sup> Mucha, 'Český olympijský prapor', p. 677.

<sup>25</sup> Guth-Jarkovský, *Paměti olympijské*, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> The original flag from 1912, photographed on 6 May 2014 by R. Klimeš with the help of Mgr Šárka Rámišová, an employee of the National Museum in Prague.

<sup>27</sup> Národní muzeum Praha, sbírka sportovních trojrozměrných exponátů, inventární číslo 13 623. (National Museum Prague, collection of sports three-dimensional exhibits, inventory number 13.623).

<sup>28</sup> See [http://simonak.eu/index.php?stranka=pages/olympijske\\_hry\\_letni/stockholm\\_1912.htm](http://simonak.eu/index.php?stranka=pages/olympijske_hry_letni/stockholm_1912.htm)

<sup>29</sup> *Český svět*, ročník VIII, číslo 46 (Praha, 1912), p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, číslo 47, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, číslo 47, p. 3.



The small Bohemian Olympic flag is a white square with a side length of 45cm, which has a 3.6cm wide border of alternately white and red equilateral triangles each with a length of 4.2cm.

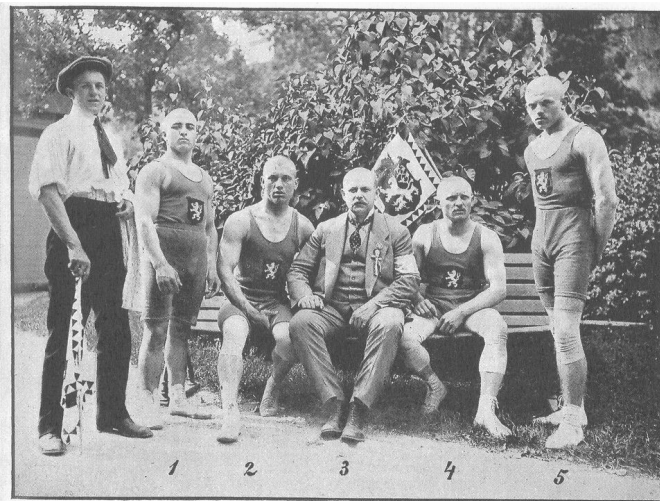
All of the red triangles point out from the flag. In the four corners, there are red deltoids. In the centre of the flag is the Bohemian coat of arms, which is 37.5cm high.

The coat of arms of Bohemia is a red shield with a pseudo-gold border of acanthus scrolls and two rolls,<sup>32</sup> top right and top left, a double tailed silver lion with a red tongue, golden claws and a golden crown. On the shield is placed a golden crown of St Wenceslas with a red cap. On the obverse and reverse of the flag the lion facing towards the hoist.



*Bohemian coat of arms*

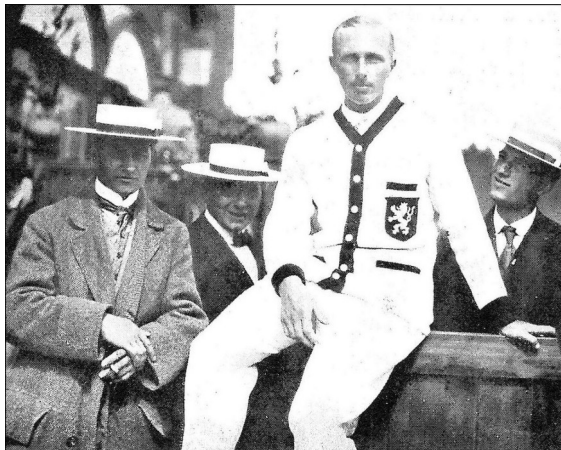
The coat of arms of Bohemia (the shield alone, without the St Wenceslas crown) was sewn onto the vests of the athletes.



TEŽKÝ ATHLETICKÝ TEAM ČESKÝ VE ŠTOKHOLMU, 1. BALEJ, 2. KOPŘIVA, 3. KAPITÁN TEAMU ARCH. SCHINDLER, 4. HALÍK, 5. BERÁNEK

*Bohemian field athletics team with small Bohemian Olympic flags*

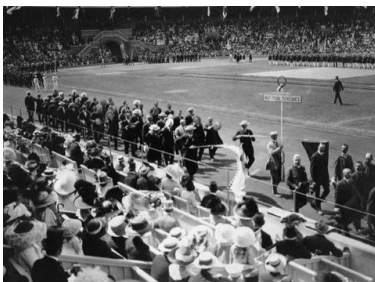
<sup>32</sup> *Rollwerk* is an ornament resembling a strip of sheet metal sheet rolled at the end. *Rollwerk* originated in the sixteenth century in Italy. It is used mainly on cartouches.



*Tennis player J. Žemla-Rázný in his uniform with the Bohemian coat of arms*

### Large Bohemian Olympic flag

The Bohemian Olympic flag was carried in the parade of athletes at the opening ceremony of the Fifth Olympic Games in Stockholm in 1912. However, the photographs from this period are either indistinct or blurred.<sup>33</sup> A photograph of the entire flag exists in the publication *Československá vlastivěda*<sup>34</sup> as a part of a 1918 Czechoslovak Boy Scout flag ceremony.



*Above left, the marching Bohemian team, Olympic Games, 1912;*

*Above, the Bohemian delegation in 1912, with board and flag;*

*Left, the Bohemian Olympic flag.  
Image from Československá vlastivěda*

Dr L. Mucha says in his study,<sup>35</sup> citing in particular Mr J. Kössl,<sup>36</sup> that the flag was apparently destroyed in a fire at Prague Old Town Hall during the May 1945 Prague Uprising. But this is incorrect. I am now able to provide the following new information. After long research, I discovered that the Olympic flag was never deposited at the Old Town Hall; instead, for the whole period from 1912

<sup>33</sup> Guth-Jarkovský, *Paměti olympijské*, p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> *Československá vlastivěda*, díl V. Stát (Praha, 1931), p. 131.

<sup>35</sup> Mucha, 'Český olympijský prapor', pp. 675–81.

<sup>36</sup> Kössl, *Dějiny československého olympijského hnutí*.



to the present day it has been stored at the Czech Yacht Club in Prague-Podolí. After the Olympic Games in Stockholm, the flag was shipped to Josef Rössler-Ořovský. In April 2014, I saw the flag and photographed and documented it. The flag is made from fine wool fabric, slightly damaged by moths, but otherwise is complete.

Furthermore, Dr L. Mucha mistakenly wrote<sup>37</sup> that the Bohemian Olympic flag was raised on 14 October 1918 at the Czech Yacht Club as an expression of resistance against Austria-Hungary. That date must be corrected. The flag was hoisted in the Czech Yacht Club, but not until 20 October 1918. It was hoisted not because of resistance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which at that time was already crumbling, but because the Czech Yacht Club was celebrating its 25th anniversary.<sup>38</sup> This date is also confirmed in a publication issued by the Czech Yacht Club in 1931.<sup>39</sup> Another version of the Bohemian Olympic flag was donated to the Swedish Olympic Committee, handed over by a deputation composed of Dr Guth-Jarkovský, Rössler-Ořovský, Hermann and Šebek.<sup>40</sup> Dr L. Mucha, citing Dr J. Kössl, states that even after the First World War, Dr Karel Popel, general secretary of the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee in the years 1949–55, saw this flag in Stockholm.<sup>41</sup> The Sixth Olympic Games, which were to be held in 1916 in Berlin, were cancelled due to the First World War. For the Seventh Olympic Games in 1920, Czechoslovak athletes were marching under the flag of Czechoslovakia.



*The original Bohemian Olympic flag from 1912: left, obverse; right, reverse*

The large Bohemian Olympic flag consists of a rectangular white sheet measuring 130cm × 212cm, with an 8.5cm wide border of alternating white and

<sup>37</sup> Mucha, 'Český olympijský prapor', p. 680.

<sup>38</sup> Ze zápisu XXIX.výborové schůze jubilejní konané dne 19.října 1918 v místnostech klubových v Podolí. Kopie originálu v archivu autora. Kopii poskytl ing. Richard Holý, archivář Českého Yacht Klubu. (Protocols of XXIX Jubilee Committee meeting of 19 October 1918 in club rooms in Prague-Podolí. Copy given to disposition Ing. Richard Holý, archivist of Czech Yacht Club.)

<sup>39</sup> Knihovna Českého Yacht Klubu v Praze, svazek II. Yachetní sport, kanoe, vodní turistika, napsáno ku čtyřicetiletí Českého Yacht Klubu, tiskem. Al. Wiesnera, V Praze 1931, fotografie před stranou 28. (Library of Czech Yacht Club in Prague, Volume II, Yacht sport, canoe, water tourism, writing to 40th jubilee of Czech Yacht Club. Print of Al. Wiesner, in Prague 1931, photo preceding p. 28).

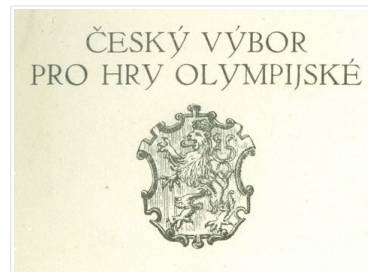
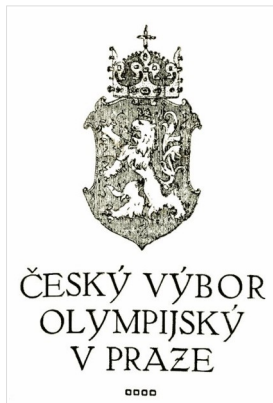
<sup>40</sup> 'Pátá olympiada ve Štokholmě I', *Národní listy*, no. 202 (24 July 1912), p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> The author contacted Dr Eva Turek, curator of the Army Museum in Stockholm, to ask where this flag is now deposited. She replied that it was impossible to obtain this information.

red isosceles triangles with a base of 9.3cm. All of the red triangles point out from the flag. In the four corners, there are red deltoids. In the middle of the flag is the Bohemian coat of arms, which is 93cm high. The coat of arms has the same graphic design as the small Bohemian Olympic flag.<sup>42</sup>

#### Official papers of the Bohemia Olympic Committee

I managed to find in the Archives of the National Museum two different versions of the official papers of the Bohemian Olympic Committee for the period discussed in this article, which are quite different regarding the rendition of the provincial arms and the inscription. On the document marked *no. 1*,<sup>43</sup> in the header on the left side is a black-and-white drawing of the provincial coat of arms of Bohemia in the same visual design as on the small and large Olympic flags (see description above); the colours are shown hachured. Under the provincial coat of arms is located a three-line description in capital letters *ČESKÝ VÝBOR / OLYMPIJSKÝ / V PRAZE* ('Bohemia Olympic Committee in Prague'). Beneath are four little empty squares. On the document is an official copy of the agreements between J. Rössler-Ořovský and Hanuš, Count Kolowrat on the eve of the games in Stockholm. On the document marked *no. 2*,<sup>44</sup> the header to the left contains a two-line inscription in capital letters *ČESKÝ VÝBOR / PRO HRÝ OLYMPIJSKÉ* ('Bohemia Committee for the Olympic Games'). Below the inscription is a black-and-white drawing of the provincial coat of arms of Bohemia, but without the St Wenceslas crown; moreover, the Bohemia lion is not located in the shield, but in the cartouche. The red colour on the shield is shown by hachuring. This document served for the donation of money to the address of the general secretary of the Bohemia Olympic Committee, J. Rössler-Ořovský.



*Symbols from the official papers of the Bohemia Olympic Committee*

<sup>42</sup> Photograph of the original flag from 1912, taken by Mr Jaroslav Váňa, 5 April 2014. Many thanks to him from the author.

<sup>43</sup> Národní muzeum Praha, Archiv tělesné výchovy a sportu , hnutí olympijské, Český olympijský výbor, karton č. 5. National museum Prague, Archiv. (National Museum Prague, Archive of Physical education and Sports, Olympic Movement, Czech Olympic Committee, box no. 5.)

<sup>44</sup> Národní muzeum Praha, Archiv tělesné výchovy a sportu , hnutí olympijské, Český olympijský výbor, karton č. 5. (National Museum Prague, Archive of Physical Education and Sports, Olympic Movement, Czech Olympic Committee, box no. 5.)

### Seal of the Bohemia Olympic Committee

The seal of the Bohemia Olympic Committee is circular, in red; the sealing surface is shown in silver, gold-crowned Czech lion with a golden tongue and claws. The middle area is framed by a wide silver trim, inside and outside bounded by a gold line on which is placed a red inscription *ČESKÝ VÝBOR / OLYMPIJSKÝ* ('Bohemia Olympic Committee') in capital letters. The seal's diameter is 28mm.



*Seal of the Bohemia Olympic Committee*

This seal is printed on a sheet of paper which is stored in the archive together with a letter of 10 June 1912 from the Governorship, addressed to Dr Jiří Guth. To the left of the seal is the stamp of the Governorship. The stamp is circular, bordered by a thin line. The sealing surface displays an Austrian eagle, around which is placed an inscription '*KK STATTHALTEREI für das Königreich Böhmen*' (the Governorship of the Kingdom of Bohemia). The beginning and the end of the description is marked by a small cross. Above this stamp is affixed to the Austrian government stamp (*KK Oesterreichische STEMPELMARKE*) value 1 crown, which is reprinted blue stamp showing three lines inscription *ČESKÝ VÝBOR / OLYMPIJSKÝ / V PRAZE* ('Bohemia Committee for the Olympic Games in Prague') in capital letters. Under a duty stamp is written in ink, *8A-1356/4 Line*. Clearly, the document is related to a letter from the Governorship<sup>45</sup>, but I do not know the document's contents.

### Badge of the Bohemia Olympic Committee

All members of the Bohemian team at the Olympic Games in Stockholm (athletes and officials) were issued with an Olympic badge. The circular badge was made of white metal and coloured enamel on the face. The appearance of the badge is based on the seals of the Bohemia Olympic Committee. On the red surface is a silver, gold-crowned, Czech lion with golden claws and a silver tongue. The red area is enclosed by a wide white border, edged inside and out in gold, on which are the gold capital letters *ČESKÝ VÝBOR OLYMPIJSKÝ ŠTOKHOLM 1912* ('Bohemia Olympic Committee Stockholm 1912'). The beginning and the end of the inscription is marked by a golden cross. The badge had a diameter of 2.5 cm.<sup>46</sup> The reverse is a soldered safety pin, and there is a two-line inscription engraved *P. Svoboda, Prague*. I managed to track down the badge manufacturer Petr Svoboda in Prague. In the Prague directory of 1910<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Archiv hlavního města Prahy, Fond: Spolkový katastr, SK XIV/375. Dokument je založen v této složce.

<sup>46</sup> Národní muzeum Praha, Archiv tělesné výchovy a sportu, hnutí olympijské, olympijské hry letní 4., inv. č. 5973. (National Museum Prague, Archive of Physical Education and Sports, Olympic Movement, Summer Olympic Games 4, inventory no. 5973.)

<sup>47</sup> *Adresář král. hl. města Prahy 1910* (Praha, 1910), p. 1309.





we read the following: 'Petr Svoboda Sr., engraver, artisan, enameller and rigorous expert witness. 309-I, Bartolomějská ulice 13'.



Badge of the Bohemia Olympic Committee: left, obverse; right, reverse

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