

BOOK REVIEW

by Mark Maestrone

Pierre de Coubertin and Olympic Philately by Rüdiger Fritz and Volker Kluge. Softbound, 256 pages in full color, in English. Published in 2017 by Alpheios Publications. Price 34.00 US\$ (29.90 euros). Postage to USA (2kg) 19.00 US\$. Order from the author: ruedigerfritz.alpheios@t-online.de or by mail to Rüdiger Fritz, Meisenweg 6 b, 06110 Halle, Germany. Bank credit transfer or PayPal.

I thumbed through the original German language version of this book back in 2015 and thought how much more enjoyable (for those of us with less-than-fluent German reading comprehension abilities) if it were in English. With the financial support of the International Pierre de Coubertin Committee, my wish was granted!

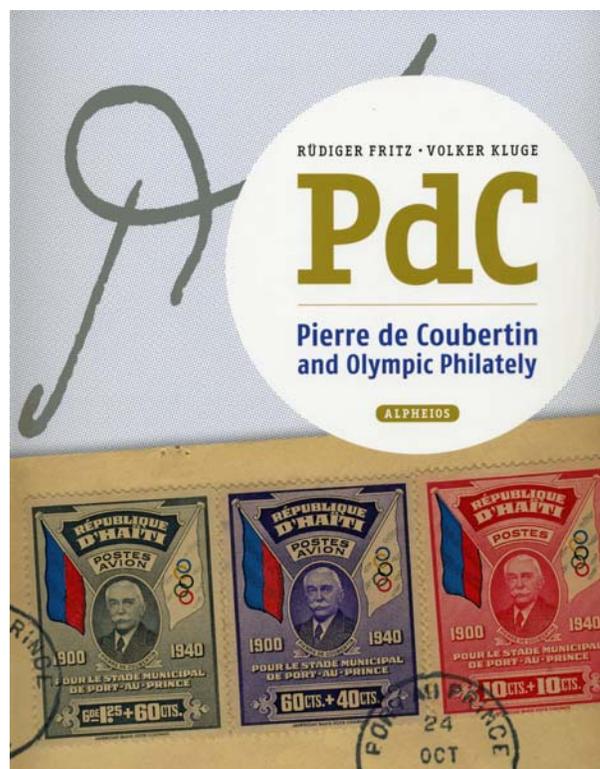
It is not often that we see books on thematic philately, much less with a sport or Olympic subject. In fact, the only publication along these lines that I can recall is Vsevolod Foorman's *Olympic Stamps* published back in 1979 – still a primary reference for thematic collectors and exhibitors. Now we have a second book for our reference collection.

Pierre de Coubertin and Olympic Philately is based upon Olympic philatelist, Rüdiger Fritz's international gold medal exhibit "The Olympic Comeback: The Era of Pierre De Coubertin 1894-1925 and the Games of That Time." With the help of noted Olympic historian, Volker Kluge, the book traces the life of de Coubertin focusing on his renovation of the Olympic Games. The authors, rather than relying solely on established historical references, dig into the voluminous bulk of de Coubertin's correspondence and writings to glean new insights into his thinking.

Organized in roughly chronological fashion into thirteen chapters, each bears a distinctly thematic title. Chapter 3, for example, "The brilliant idea of issuing twelve special stamps," probes the selection of Athens as the host city for the 1st Modern Olympic Games, and then explores the Games themselves.

Chapter 6 is a particularly interesting one for Olympic collectors as it takes a look at the "Synthesis of the arts for the human springtime and the modern pentathlon." We see here the birth of Olympic symbology: the Olympic rings, Olympic motto and athlete's oath, and of course the image of de Coubertin on stamps.

Nearing the end of his life, de Coubertin's most fervent wish was to celebrate the Olympic Games in his hometown, Paris. Despite the many obstacles in the path of the 1924 Olympic Games, they were a great



success. "Coubertin's 'last will' and a congress in Prague constituting a farewell gift" (Chapter 10) describes these events, leading up to what was perhaps de Coubertin's swan song: the combined Olympic Technical and Pedagogic Congresses in Prague in May 1925.

The material used to tell the story varies from quite spectacular philatelic pieces (a postcard home from German rowers telling about their experiences at the 1896 Games), to handwritten documents from/to de Coubertin.

For the de Coubertin philatelist, there are countless illustrations of his philatelic commemoration, culminating in a helpful listing of stamps from 80 countries portraying him.

This is a beautifully designed and produced book. The size, though somewhat odd at 9½ x 10¾ inches, does allow for better display of oversized objects. The quality and clarity of the illustrations is top notch. Philatelists, especially, will not be disappointed!

I have no hesitation recommending this book to any Olympic collector. The thematic story it weaves around the life of this quite unique individual is, in itself, fascinating. The philatelic factor adds icing to the cake.