



# Social transformation of olympism from the position of historical analysis

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## Abstract

**Objective of the study** was to reveal new ideas about its social essence and role in modern society based on a critical analysis of the traditional understanding of Olympism.

**Methods and structure of the study.** In the course of the experimental work, an analysis of theoretical sources was carried out and a generalization of the scientific literature on the history of Olympism was carried out.

**Results and conclusions.** Like the movement of humanism, Olympism should by no means be described unequivocally as a socially homogeneous democratic movement. In different eras, Olympism, manifesting itself as a social institution, fulfilled and continues to fulfill fundamentally different social class orders.

**Keywords:** *Olympism, historical roots, historical forms, traditional stereotypes, social heterogeneity, concrete social analysis.*

**Introduction.** Nowadays, in the views of the general world and Russian public, Olympism is presented as an unshakable symbol and practical embodiment of the ideals of humanism, a hymn to human perfection and heroism in the highest achievements that go beyond human capabilities [1]. Meanwhile, scientists, researchers of the history and modern practice of Olympism, have different opinions about the economic, social, political essence of this world phenomenon [2-5].

It would be wrong to associate the assessment of the place and role of Olympism in the ancient and modern history of mankind only with changes in state-political courses and with the changeability of ideological interpretations. Apparently, in the very social nature of Olympism, in its real history, there is something that makes scientists try to discern the far from cloudless, not always unambiguous, contradictory essence of this phenomenon behind a beautiful signboard and festive shell [1-5].

And this, in turn, means that our knowledge of Olympism is not as accurate and complete as we would like. This suggests that we judge him too ab-

stractly, not seeing his complex and changing social essence [1-5].

The relevance of the research topic lies in the realization of the fact that the well-established not entirely correct retrospective ideas about the history of Olympism give rise to an unambiguous and narrow understanding of its modern social role and, accordingly, create prerequisites for an erroneous forecast of the socio-political existence of the international Olympic movement in the near future.

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**Methods and structure of the study.** In the course of the experimental work, an analysis of theoretical sources and a generalization of scientific literature on the history of Olympism were carried out.

**Results of the study and their discussion.** Let's present a number of traditional provisions about the essence of Olympism, which today are presented as unshakable truths:



- The ancient Greek Olympic Games were sacred competitions that had a pan-Greek character, that is, they played the role of a symbol of the unity and rallying of the Greek people. The modern Olympic Games have a universal character and take a position that is outside politics, above economic and social contradictions.

- Ancient Greek Olympic Games preached humanism and selfless heroism of sporting achievements. Modern Olympism is based on the same principles.

- During the Olympic Games, the Greeks did not fight among themselves. It was a period of general truce. The modern Olympic Games also act as a champion of peace among peoples.

- The ancient and modern Olympic Games gave rise to a special philosophy, a special "world view" (or the idea of the world order), praising the perfection and harmonious development of man.

- Ancient Olympism as a pagan religion was in irresolvable conflict with the Christian religion, with the Catholic Church, which was the main reason for its death. Modern Olympism, as a secular movement, is indifferent, neutral to the Christian and any other religion.

- Olympism was and remains far from any imperial ambitions, from imperialist principles of enrichment and suppression.

For a critical analysis of these provisions, as a historical and methodological basis, we present the conclusions from the study of P.V. Nesterov, who identifies the following historical forms of Olympism:

- proto-Olympism, which became widespread in the eastern regions of the Mediterranean in the Aegean period;

- ancient Olympism, within which at least two opposing varieties can be distinguished: Greek democratic and Roman imperial;

- medieval Christian Olympism, which found its expression both in socio-political practice and in the traditions of Latin church hymnography of the 9th - 15th centuries;

- Olympism of the New Age, most vividly represented by the Olympic games in the Cotswolds, which have been going on since 1612 (a break in these games for 111 years, 1852-1963) to the present;

- modern Olympism, which in a relatively short time of its existence has gained worldwide fame,

but at the same time has undergone a number of very significant transformations, having made a difficult path from praising disinterested amateurism in sports to unconditional recognition of the "religion of the market" [2].

Presented by P.V. Nesterov, the historical forms of Olympism allow us to get away from the stereotypical characteristics of the phenomenon of Olympism that has passed through three millennia, and consider it from the following positions:

- Olympism arises much earlier than the traditional reference points of historians and, in addition, has its historical roots even outside the Greek ethnoses [4, 5];

- Olympism is not only a cultural and civilizational product of Antiquity, but in its historical movement captures several historical eras at once;

- Olympism does not have millennial gaps in its development, but it has a clear and obvious continuity, characterized by both similarity and originality of its forms;

- Olympism in its early historical forms was closely connected either with the Greek heroic-democratic, or with the Roman imperial religious-mythological worldview, in the medieval form - with the Christian religious-mythological worldview. At the same time, starting from the ancient confrontation between the Phoenician and Greek city-states (and later between Carthage and Rome), until the New Age, inclusive, Olympism carried the germs of the so-called "religion of the market", that is, the capitalist formation [2, 4, 5].

The above statements reveal the essence of the capitalist transformation of modern Olympism, which has a socially heterogeneous heterogeneous character. Any attempts to somehow circumvent, ignore this fact unequivocally lead to abstract images of Olympism and further to absolutizations of the following type of reasoning:

- that "the new Olympic movement should become a religion with its own church, dogma and cult" (P. Coubertin, 1946, p. 431);

- about the confrontation between Olympism and Christianity (A.V. Kylasov, 2009);

- about the religious and pagan essence of modern Olympism (ibid.);

- about the uniqueness of Olympia as the center of the Olympic Games.

Particularly interesting, in our opinion, is the documentary refutation cited by P.V. Nesterov about the



last, seemingly familiar and undoubted thesis about the only center for the Olympic Games [2]. As a document refuting this thesis, for example, the text of the Parian Chronicle (created around 264 BC) is cited, that is, a chronology of the main historical events of antiquity carved on a marble slab, where there is a mention of the Panathenaic, but there is no mention of the Olympic Games [6]. What Isaac Newton, who thoroughly studied the specified text, mentioned with surprise in the work "Brevia Chronica" [8]. This circumstance most clearly refutes the all-Greek status of the Olympic Games. And the well-known researcher of the history of the Olympic Games, Ferenc Meze, as P.V. Nesterov, "quite cautiously states" that some signs of the "pan-Hellenic nature" of the games of Elis Olympia appeared only "in a short period of time, covering sixty-eight years - from 468 to 400 BC." [7]. P.V. Nesterov believes that such a status of the Games of Olympia manifested itself only during the three-decade fratricidal Peloponnesian War for the entire Greek world, which the Games still could not "neither prevent nor stop" [2].

The socially heterogeneous nature of Olympism is also emphasized by far from simple ups and downs of continuity between the ancient antique and medieval Christian variants of the development of this movement and social institution. To obtain evidence of the existence of this continuity, it is enough to look up the works of the Archbishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom, other Byzantine historians and philosophers, which contain indications of the "ascension of Christ to Olympus", where he sits on the throne of the judge as the "ruler of Olympus"; about the apostles - "the keys of Olympus"; on the analogy between the bodily achievement of the Olympionists and the higher spiritual achievement of the Christian ascetics [5]. P.V. Nesterov points out that only the Reformation interrupts this continuity and creates the conditions for the restoration of the ancient (including religious) version of the Olympism of the New Age and the modern Olympism of Pierre de Coubertin, in which the social and ideological influence is no longer feudal-clerical, but capitalist [2, 4, 5].

As for the very principle of "one Olympus - one Olympia", then, as P.V. Nesterov, this is definitely not a democratic, but a pronounced imperial principle, originating from the influence of the Roman Empire and flourishing in the so-called "Olympic imperialism" [2].

**Conclusions.** Like the movement of humanism, Olympism should not be unequivocally described as a socially homogeneous democratic movement. In different eras, Olympism, manifesting itself as a social institution, fulfilled and continues to fulfill fundamentally different social class orders.

One of the most proven mechanisms for concealing this fact has always been the method of abstraction in conjunction with the method of absolutization: the creation of an abstract image of Olympism was a condition for the successful absolutization of its principles and values. Therefore, until we begin to adhere to the line of a specific social analysis of Olympism, we will remain captive to mythologemes and ideologemes that distance us from understanding the really changeable essence of this phenomenon of world culture and civilization with all the ensuing negative consequences.

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