

THE OLYMPIC FLAME

A Christian Perspective

Andrew Chapman

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Oxford
June 2012

Introduction

Until the twenty third of April 2012, I had perceived the Olympic Games primarily as a sporting event, albeit one with a pagan history, having its origins in ancient Greece. On that day, I did a little research, and discovered to my horror, that it is not so much a matter of pagan roots but of a still living tree of pagan and idolatrous worship.

Acts of worship to foreign gods are an integral part of the Olympic Games, enshrined in the Olympic Charter and in the Protocols of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which is the governing authority of the Games.

For a Christian nation like Britain (which despite its great backsliding still has the Coronation Oath, Christian acts of worship in State schools, oaths on the Holy Bible in Courts, and a majority of the population describing themselves as Christian) to host the Olympic Games and thereby be responsible for the commission and execution and propagation of idolatrous worship is a great transgression against Almighty God, who gave us His only Son to die for us that we might be saved from our iniquity and find the path of eternal peace in Him.

For the church of Jesus Christ to join in the celebrations of a pagan nature which have already begun with the arrival of the Olympic Torch in Britain on 18 May 2012, is to commit a sin of the worst sort, amounting in effect to a denial of the Lord and a transgression of the most basic of all commandments:

'You shall have no other gods before Me.' Exodus 20 v 3

Ceremonies

The IOC state explicitly that the 'ceremonial aspects of the Olympic Games have served to set them apart from other international sport competitions'¹. The two main ceremonial elements are first, the Opening and Closing and Victory Ceremonies, and second the Olympic flame, the two dovetailing together in the entry of the torch into the stadium during the opening ceremony, and the lighting of the Stadium cauldron.

Lighting of the flame

Months before the Games begin, a flame is lit from the sun in a special ceremony in Olympia in Greece, the site of the ancient games. A prayer is said in modern Greek just before the flame is lit. It reads as follows in Greek and in the official English translation:

Sacred silence
Let the sky, the earth, the sea and the winds sound.
Mountains fall silent.
Sounds and birds' warbles cease.
For Phoebus, the Light bearer King shall keep us
company.

Apollo, King [literally, 'god'] of the sun and the
Idea of light,
Send your rays and light the sacred torch
for the hospitable city of London

And you Zeus give peace to all peoples on earth and
wreath the winners
of the Sacred Race.²

Ιερά σιωπή
Να ηχήσει όλος ο αιθέρας, η γη, η θάλασσα
και οι πνοές των ανέμων.
Όρη και Τέμπε σιγήστε.
Ήχοι και φωνές πουλιών παύσατε.
Γιατί μέλλει να μας συντροφεύσει ο
Φοίβος, ο Φωσφόρος Βασιλεύς.

Απόλλωνα, Θεέ του ήλιου και της Ιδέας
του φωτός,
στείλε τις ακτίνες σου και άναψε την ιερή
δάδα
για τη φιλόξενη πόλη
του Λονδίνου

Και συ ω Δία χάρισε
ειρήνη σ' όλους τους
λαούς της γης και
στεφάνωσε τους νικητές
του Ιερού Αγώνα



Praying to Apollo



Praying to Zeus

Phoebus is the forename of Apollo and means 'bright' or 'pure', and 'the view became current that he was

¹ IOC Factsheet 'Opening ceremony of the Games of the Olympiad' Update July 2009

² Email from the Hellenic Olympic Committee Press Office, 2 May 2012. See also http://www.hoc.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=348&Itemid=106&lang=en

connected to the sun'.³ So Phoebus Apollo, to whom the prayer is made, is described as the Light-Bearer King. The name Lucifer means literally light-bearer, so this is quite close to being a Luciferian invocation.

To be more rigorous, the Greek word Φωσφορος, meaning light-bearer, used in the prayer, is used only once in the bible, in 2 Peter 1 v 19, is often translated 'morning star' and is generally understood to be referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Giving a title or designation to Apollo which truly belongs to Jesus Christ is the work of the spirit of antichrist.

We know that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11 v 14), and so it seems to me that if Phoebus Apollo is called upon as 'Light-Bearer' and 'god of the sun' (θεε του ηλιου) to light the 'sacred torch', then an evil demonic influence or power may be released and enter the flame. In 1996, more than one runner alluded to an 'out of body' experience as the body and torch 'floated' over the ground⁴. Could this not be the result of the invocation of a foreign god to 'enlighten' the torch? We know also that there is something called 'strange' or 'profane' fire in the bible (Leviticus 10 vv 1-3), which may arouse the severe anger of the Lord. What could be more strange and profane than a flame which is lit from the sun with an invocation to the 'god' of the sun?

The ceremony is performed at the site of the Temple of Hera (the wife of Zeus in Greek mythology) in ancient Olympia by actresses playing the role of priestesses of that Temple:



Lighting the flame



Lighting bowl from the torch

Start of the torch relay

Once lit, the flame is carried in a small urn to another location where the torch relay is to begin. Before an audience of dignitaries (including First Lady Hilary Clinton in 1996), the high priestess prays again as follows:

Ματερ ω χρυσοστεφανων αεθλων, Ουλυμπια,
δεσποιν' αλαθειας, ινα μαντιες ανδρες
εμπυροις τεκμαιρομενοι παραπειρωνται
Διος αργικεραυνου,
ει τιν' εχει λογον ανθρωπων περι
μαιομενων μεγαλαν
αρεταν θυμω(ι) λαβειν,
των δε μοχθων αμπνοαν.

These are the first verses of Pindar's 8th Olympian Ode, and read in a standard English translation:

³ The New Encyclopedia Britannica 15th Edition

⁴ 'Aesthetics and Sport in the Olympic Flame Torch Relay: An Historical Analysis from 1936-1996' by Elizabeth A Hanley, Pennsylvania State University in Olympic Perspectives: Third International Symposium for Olympic Research, October 1996, <http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/ISOR/ISOR1996y.pdf>

O mother of the golden-crowned games, Olympia,
mistress of truth, where men who are seers
examine burnt offerings and test
Zeus of the bright thunderbolt,
to see if he has any word concerning mortals
who are striving in their hearts
to gain a great success [better "to gain great excellence"]
and respite from their toils..

After a short pause, she prays again as follows:

Apollo God of sun
and the idea of light
send your rays and light the sacred torch
for the hospitable city of London
And you Zeus give peace to all peoples on earth and
wreath the winners
of the Sacred Race.

Απόλλωνα Θεέ του ήλιου
και της ιδέας του φωτός
στείλε τις ακτίνες σου και άναψε την ιερή δάδα
για τη φιλόξενη πόλη
του Λονδίνου
Και συ ω Δία χάρισε
ειρήνη σ' όλους τους
λαούς της γης και
στεφάνωσε τους νικητές
του Ιερού Αγώνα

She then lights a torch from the flame of the urn and uses this to light the torch held by an athlete who kneels on one knee before her. Then as the priestesses leave the vicinity, he commences his run to begin the torch relay. Whereas the high priestess may be an actress, the athlete is not, meaning that this is not a play which ends as the curtain is drawn, as it were, but a real event in the real world. The 2012 Lighting Ceremony was broadcast live via web streaming, apparently under the auspices of the Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC), to many millions of people, with more than 66 million visits being recorded.⁵ During the broadcast, just before the ceremony begins, the commentator explains that: 'A number of dignitaries are attending the temple of goddess Hera, and a ritual is to take place. The ritual mainly includes a call on Apollo the god of sun to assist in igniting the flame, and the flame will be ignited by help of sun-rays and a parabolic mirror. The chorus will be led by a high priestess. It's a ritual that has been taking place in ancient Olympia since 1936 ahead of the Berlin Games.' It was described to the watching millions as a ritual, and that is what it is.



Crying out to Apollo



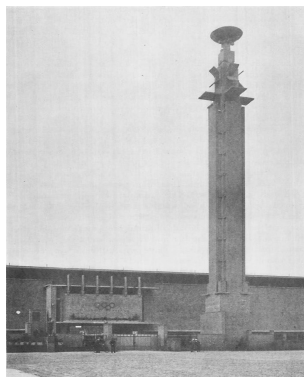
Lighting the Olympic torch

⁵ News/press release at HOC web-site: http://www.hoc.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1033%3A2012-05-29-11-58-10&catid=36%3Apress-release&Itemid=98&lang=en

History of the torch relay

The lighting ceremony and the torch relay were introduced for the first time in 1936 for the Berlin Olympic Games, and were conceived of by Carl Diem, who served as Secretary General of the Organizing Committee for the Berlin Games. He became the director of the foreign affairs section of the National Socialist Association for Physical Culture (1939-45), and is described as being 'close' to Hans von Tschammer und Osten, the Reichssportfuhrer (Empire Sport Leader), who had previously been a Storm Troop Leader, whose storm troopers had killed several workers, sportsmen and children.⁶ In June 1940, shortly after their blitzkrieg through France, he (Diem) wrote an article called 'The Battle Charge through France' in the Reichssportsblatt (Official sports organ of the Nazi Party) in which he spoke of Germany as being a nation destined to lead a 'victory charge for a better Europe'.⁷

The Olympic flame itself, which burns in a cauldron next to the stadium for the duration of the Games, was introduced at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam, and was conceived of by Jan Wils, the architect for the stadium. Wils became a freemason the following year, and became actively involved in the design of masonic lodges, among other things becoming a director of the Foundation for Rites and Temple Building. In an official masonic newsletter (April 2010) for a district of Hamilton in Canada, the question is asked: 'Therefore, is the Olympic Flame a re-tooled Masonic Candle? It's hard to say for sure. But the connections are, to say the least, quite striking.'⁸



Marathon Tower, showing fire-bowl on top, Amsterdam 1928

Professor Robert Barney of the University of Western Ontario, in an article entitled 'The Genesis of Sacred Fire in Olympic Ceremony: A New Interpretation', also argues that Wils probably drew his inspiration for the Olympic Flame from freemasonry. 'More important than any other factor, I argue, is the fact that Wils was an active member of the Order of Free Masons for most of his adult life.'⁹ Barney points out that 'a fundamental aspect of Free Masonry is so-called "living fire" or "regenerative fire", and he quotes Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry as describing this fire as "a universal spirit permeating all nature.. the essence and the vital spark of all that it animates, of all orders of beings, classes and races in which it is incarnated"¹⁰. He concludes that 'For Wils, then, "regenerative fire" in Free Mason context, became his sacred fire in Olympic context.'¹¹

It remained for Diem to add the flame lighting ritual and the torch relay to the stadium cauldron to create the ceremony in the basic form that we have it today. Unlike Wils, he looked to ancient Greece for inspiration, and found it in a ritual race that may have been the origin of the Olympic Games. According to Philostratus's Gymnasium 5, a race was held over about 200 metres, 'finishing at the place where the

6 'Carl Diem and the Olympics' by Mehmet Tunckol and Yasar Sahin. <http://www.analefefs.ro/anale-fefs/2010/issue-2-supplement/files/141..pdf>

7 'The genesis of sacred fire in Olympic ceremony: a new interpretation' by Robert K Barney, pp 219, 236 in Olympic Studies Reader, ed. Hai Ren et al, Beijing 2008. <http://doc.rero.ch/record/12705>

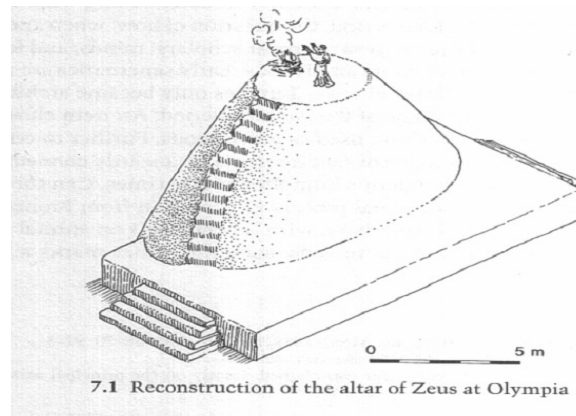
8 'Masonry and the Olympics' by R.W.Bro. Kenneth Wood, DDGM Sarnia District, District 'C'hronicle, April 2010, Hamilton Masonic District C, p4

9 'The Genesis of Sacred Fire in Olympic Ceremony: A New Interpretation' by Robert Barney, p230.

10 Albert G. Mackey, Encyclopedia of Freemasonry (Chicago: The Masonic History Company, 1909), p. 594, quoted in Barney, p230

11 Barney, p 231

High Priest stood, bearing a torch in his hand. The first competitor to reach him was given the torch and had the honour of lighting the altar flame with it.¹² This altar was the Great Altar to Zeus, on which one hundred oxen were sacrificed on the middle day of the Games¹³, and which Pausanias described as being 22 feet high and made of ash from the sacrificed victims¹⁴. Diem also drew inspiration from the ancient torch relay races, known as lampadedromia, which took place in Athens and elsewhere, and which 'always started at one altar and ended at another'¹⁵



Great altar of Zeus at Olympia

The idea of lighting the flame from the sun came¹⁶ from Plutarch's *Life of Numa Pompilius*, in which Plutarch first describes the institution of the Vestal Virgins in Rome during the reign of Numa (c717-637BC). They were priestesses of Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, and tended a sacred flame which burned continuously at her altar. In his discussion Plutarch mentions that in Athens and Delphi, when a sacred flame went out, 'in kindling this fire again, it was esteemed an impiety to light it from common sparks or flame, or from anything but the pure and unpolluted rays of the sun, which they usually effect by concave mirrors, of a figure formed by the revolution of an isosceles rectangular triangle, all the lines from the circumference of which meeting in a centre, by holding it in the light of the sun they can collect and concentrate all its rays at this one point of convergence..¹⁷

In ancient Olympia, as in Rome, a 'sacred' flame burned continuously, tended by priestesses, at the altar of the Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, and Greek equivalent of Vesta.¹⁸ Plutarch states that 'In Greece, wherever a perpetual holy fire is kept, as at Delphi and Athens the charge of it is committed, not to virgins, but widows past the time of marriage'¹⁹, so it would seem that Carl Diem (who designed the ceremony himself in detail)²⁰ followed the Roman practice in choosing young maidens to perform the 1st Olympic torch lighting ceremony, which took place on the 20 July 1936 at noon.

12 Conrado Durantez (President, International Pierre de Coubertin Committee and Iberoamerican Association of Olympic Academies), 'The Olympic Torch' in 'Olympic Review' June -July 2000

13 'The Ancient Olympic Games' by Judith Swadding, (British Museum Press and Texas University Press, 2002), p.16-17.

14 'Description of Greece' by Pausanias, trans. By W.H.S.Jones, 5.13.8 – 5.13.10
<http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias5A.html#10>

15 Durantez, p17-18, where he cites Carl Diem: *Historia de los deportes*. [Barcelona 1966]

16 'The Olympic Torch and its origin' by Jean Ketseas, in *Bulletin du Comité International Olympique*, no. 87, August 1964

17 'Numa Pompilius' by Plutarch (written 75AD) translated by John Dryden. http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/numa_pom.html

18 'Aesthetics and sport in the Olympic flame torch relay: an historical analysis from 1936-96' by Elizabeth Hanley, in 'Olympic Perspectives: Third International Symposium for Olympic Research, October 1996', p226
<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/ISOR/ISOR1996y.pdf>

19 'Numa Pompilius' by Plutarch.

20 Durantez, 'The Olympic Torch', p19



Torch Lighting Ceremony, 1936



Lighting the flame from the parabolic mirror, 1936

In the Report of the 36th Session of the International Olympic Academy (1996, Olympia, Greece) there is an article by Athanassios Kritsinelis, the technical director of the flame lighting ceremonies in Greece, about the torch relay. Kritsinelis writes about how the Olympic Torch was lit for the first time, for the 1936 Berlin Games:

A way had to be found to light the flame directly from the rays of the sun, without using any fire and all this had to be integrated in a ceremony that would link antiquity to the present. The technical aspects related to the kindling of the Flame were entrusted to Mr Peristerakis, Professor of Athens University, who used a concave parabolic mirror manufactured by the German firm Krups for the University. The parabolic shape of the mirror captures the rays of the sun, 3 or 4 cm from its base, thus making it easy for the flammable material placed there to self-ignite as a result of over-heating.²¹

In 1980 Professor Peristerakis handed over to Kritsinelis the technical part of the ceremony. The latter stresses what he considers to be the supreme importance of lighting the torch directly from the sun:

Have you ever thought what would have been the fate of this most important symbol of Olympism, if the flame had been lit, the first time, with a match or lighter or even a mirror, by some well-dressed gentleman? It would probably have degenerated, whilst now, through constant improvements, it has become a divine, inviolable, heavenly institution. Millions of eyes around the world are watching the ceremony, with tears in their eyes when Apollo, god of the Sun, gives his vitalizing flame to illuminate and warm the site of the Olympic Games.²²

'Purity' of the flame

An IOC Factsheet on the Olympic Torch Relay states that in the Ancient Olympic Games, 'The flame was lit using the rays of the sun, to ensure its purity, and a skaphia, the ancestor of the parabolic mirror used today for lighting the Olympic flame.' Moreover 'in the context of the modern Games.. the purity of the flame is guaranteed by the way it is lit using the sun's rays.'²³ The purity of the flame in a conventional scientific sense would presumably depend only on the material purity of the combustible elements, whereas for the IOC there is another kind of purity which comes from the sun only. In reality, the sun and the energy from it is neither more or less pure than the rest of God's creation, so this is a pagan view linked to idolatrous worship, either of the sun itself or of Apollo as 'god of the sun'.

21 'Lighting ceremony of the Olympic Flame. Technical specifications of the Olympic Torch Relay.' by Athanassios Kritsinellis. In the Report of the 36th Session of the International Olympic Academy (1996, Olympia, Greece), pp150-1.

22 Kritsinellis, p151

23 Factsheet: 'The Olympic Torch Relay' IOC, update October 2011.

http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reference_documents/Factsheets/The_Olympic_Torch_relay.pdf

The plan for an Olympic Torch Relay was approved at a meeting of the IOC in Athens on 18 May 1934, and on the 22 May further discussions took place in a village called Teghea in Greece between Carl Diem, Theodore Lewald (President of the Organizing Committee of the Berlin Games) and Jean Ketseas, member of the IOC for Greece.²⁴ On 17 August 1936, two and a half weeks after the end of the Berlin Games, a tablet was erected in Teghea to commemorate 'the idea of organizing by transport of relays of the Apollonian Flame from Olympia to Berlin.'²⁵ Durantez writes that 'The ceremony of the fire, which has taken place in Olympia .. since 20 July 1936, and all the ceremonial surrounding its onward journey – relays, festivals, protection of the flame, etc. – have remained practically without change in the form in which the German professor originally formulated them.'²⁶ Since the flame was already being described as 'Apollonian' in 1936, and since the ceremony is said to have been essentially unchanged since that time, it seems reasonable to suggest that the prayer to Apollo which we see and hear today at the lighting ceremony owes its origins to the time of the Nazi Olympics.

A 'bond of fire'

In his speech during the opening ceremonies of the Berlin Olympics, Theodore Lewald declared, according to the correspondent of the New York Times: 'In a few minutes the torch bearer will appear to light the Olympic fire on his tripod, when it will rise flaming to heaven, for the weeks of this festival. It creates a real and spiritual bond of fire between our German fatherland and the sacred places of Greece founded nearly 4,000 years ago by Nordic immigrants.'²⁷ James Pitsula, Professor of History at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, comments that Lewald's 'Nordic immigrant' remark revealed what was the Nazi understanding of the Olympics: 'They were not an exercise in liberal internationalism à la Coubertin [the founder of the modern Olympic Games] but a revival of the ancient athletic rites of the Greeks who were presumed to be German blood relatives.'²⁸ Walter Borgers, of the Carl Diem Archive, writes that in Diem's 'Olympischer Verknupfung', in 1936, 'the torch relay appears as the connection between Hellenism and Germanism (Athens and Berlin), between the old and the new world'²⁹. The text of Lewald's speech as it appears in the Official Report of the 1936 Games reads: 'From the altar of the temple of Zeus in ancient Olympia, through Hellas and Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Hungary, through Austria, Czechoslovakia and Germany, the flame has been carried. Over mountains and valleys, on hard or dusty roads, through rain and darkness, in the heat of the noonday sun and through the coolness of the nights, in order to create both an actual and a spiritual bond of fire between our German fatherland and the ancient Greek shrine, founded nearly four thousand years ago by settlers from northern lands.'³⁰ So the President of the Olympic Organizing Committee proclaimed a spiritual bond of fire between an altar to Zeus, and Germany.

The regime began preparation for the Games by forming a planning committee under propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, who had been convinced by Lewald to give the Olympic Games first priority in his ministry.³¹ In their book on 'The Nazi Olympics', Arnd Kruger and William J Murray state that all the details for the torch relay were developed by a committee under an official called Haegert in Goebbels' Ministry. The Krupp Company, Germany's largest armament producer, created and sponsored the torches. According to Kruger, the Nazi anthem, 'Horst-Wessel-Lied', was played in ancient Olympia when the fire was lit. 'Altars were set up along the way for semireligious ceremonies in the tradition of the ancient fire

24 According to an alternative account the occasion was a formal dinner for several IOC members, including the President, Count Baillet-Latour, on their way back from a visit to Olympia. Kritsinellis, p.149-150. But see 'Olympic Flame' by Henri Pouret, who places this dinner in Olympia on 23rd May.

25 'A votive tablet unknown in Greece' in Bulletin du Comité International Olympique No. 77 February 1962

26 Durantez, 'Olympic Flame', p19

27 '100,000 hail Hitler; U.S. Athletes avoid Nazi salute to him' by Frederick T Birchall, New York Times, 1 August 1936 <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0801.html>

28 'The Nazi Olympics: a reinterpretation' by James M Pistula, Professor in the Dept of History, The University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, in 'Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies', Vol XIII - 2004

29 'Olympic Torch Relay – a link between ancient and modern Olympic Games' by Walter Borgers, 36th International Session for Young Participants, 19 June-2 July, 1996, International Olympic Academy, Olympia, Greece

30 The XIth Olympic Games, Berlin 1936, Official Report, Volume 1, by Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936 E.V., p.562

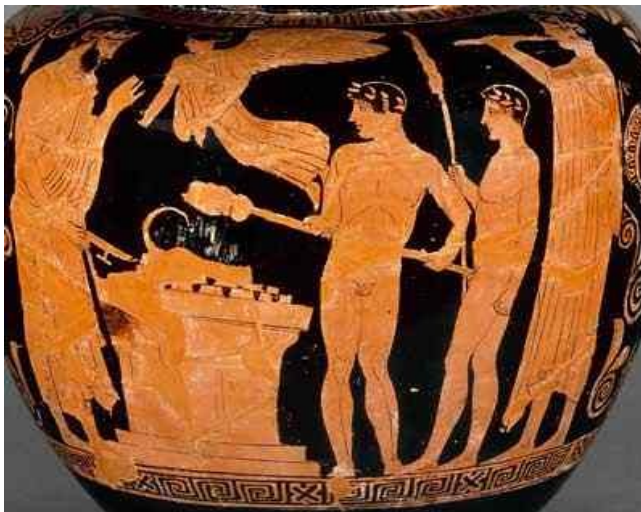
31 'The Nazi Olympics' by Arnd Kruger, William J Murray (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), pp 20-21.

cults, which had been prevalent in ancient Greece, as in ancient Germany'.³²

Altars

In an official publication³³, the IOC avow the 'profound connection' 'between the Ancient and Modern Games'. Insight may be gained, therefore, into the modern games by examining the spiritual nature of their ancient counterpart. Pausanias, writing in the 2nd century AD, describes the altars at Olympia, in the order in which sacrifice was made to them by the inhabitants of Elis, the region in which Olympia was located: 'They sacrifice to Hestia first, secondly to Olympic Zeus, going to the altar within the temple, thirdly to Zeus Laoetas and to Poseidon Laoetas.. Fourthly and fifthly they sacrifice to Artemis and to Athena, Goddess of Booty..'. He proceeds to describe altars to the Worker Goddess, to Alpheius, Hephaestus, Heracles, the brothers of Heracles, to Zeus of the Courtyard and Zeus of the Thunderbolt, to an altar of Unknown Gods, to Zeus Purifier, to Victory, and to Zeus Underground.

He goes on to say that there are altars of all gods, of Hera Olympian, of Apollo and Hermes together, of Concord, of Athena, and of the Mother of the gods. Near the entrance to the stadium were altars of Hermes of the Games, and of Opportunity. Besides these there were altars of Earth (made of ashes), Themis, Zeus Descender, Dionysus and the Graces, the Muses, the Nymphs, 'to all the gods in common', of Aphrodite, of the Seasons, of Artemis of the Market, of Mistresses, of Zeus of the Market, of Apollo Pythian, and another of Dionysus. Near the starting-point for the chariot-race there was an altar to 'the Bringer of Fate', who Pausanias understands to be Zeus. Nearby were altars of Fates, of Hermes, and two of Zeus Most High. At the starting-point for the chariot-race were altars of Poseidon Horse-god and Hera Horse-goddess, and of Dioscuri. Moving on, he found altars of Ares Horse-god and Athena Horse-goddess, of Good Luck, Pan and Aphrodite, of Nymphs called Blooming, of Artemis, of the river Cladeus, Artemis Coccoca, Apollo Thermius, Artemis Huntress, and lastly in the Town Hall an ashen altar of Pan, on which fire burned day and night. Remarkably, the Eleans sacrificed each month on all these altars, burning upon them incense with wheat and honey, and on almost all they poured out wine as a libation to their gods. 'Traditional words', presumably meaning prayers, were spoken at the libations to their gods, and hymns were sung. In attendance were a priest, soothsayers and libation-bearers, a guide, a flute player and the woodman (presumably to stoke the fire).³⁴



Left: Storage jars showing two athletes roasting meat over an altar³⁵

The IOC Factsheet on the Torch Relay states that 'a flame burned permanently on the altar of the goddess Hestia' in ancient Olympia, and that 'such fires were also lit on the altars of Zeus and Hera, in front of whose Temple the Olympic Flame is lit today'. The web-site of the International Olympic Academy (IOA)

³² Kruger and Murray, pp32-33

³³ Factsheet: 'The Olympic Torch Relay' IOC, update October 2011

³⁴ Pausanias, 5.14.4 – 5.15.11

³⁵ In 'Ancient Greek Olympics Gallery' by Judith Swadding

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/greeks/greek_olympics_gallery_02.shtml

at Olympia, describes today's Olympic Flame as being lit at 'the Altar of Hera'³⁶. In 1936, after the flame was lit, it was 'carried by the Greek maidens past the Temple of Hera to the Fire Altar in front of the Altis where the first runners were waiting.'³⁷ The first runner in today's torch relay stops at Coubertin Grove in Olympia, where the (physical) heart of Pierre de Coubertin was interred in 1937, and lights a 'marble altar in the Grove, in honour of the man who revived the Olympic Games'.³⁸

At the IOC meeting of 18 May 1934, where the torch relay was agreed to, plans were made for 'altars .. to be erected where the Olympic flame would burn night and day, [and where] songs, dances, and folkloric games were to be organised.'³⁹ Not only this but altars were to be built at intervals of 100km along the route, where the flame was to burn for an hour, to allow for possible delays.⁴⁰ Durantez writes that: 'Diem had imagined that halts or rest breaks of this kind might be made in places where there were ancient monuments or buildings in which the flame could be deposited in bowls specially placed there for the purpose. Diem hoped that in this way the inhabitants of the city in question might feel the call of the spirit of the ancient world which gave birth to the Games – a call symbolised by the fire crackling in the great bowl in the shadow of the night.' For the actual relay, a model programme was sent to each city which would host the Olympic flame, to include the 'arrival of the runner, ignition of the Olympic Fire, singing of the hymn, "Burn, Olympic Flame," address by the Mayor, general singing, gymnastic exercises by the men, women and children, sporting demonstrations, singing of the Olympic Hymn, festive address dealing with the Olympic Games, folk dancing, folk songs, preparation for the departure of the next runner, words of consecration, singing of the national anthem, departure of the runner, pealing of the bells.'⁴¹

36 'Coubertin Grove', web-site of the IOA, http://www.ioa-sessions.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=23&lang=en

37 1936 Official Report, pp 515-6

38 'Coubertin Grove', web-site of the IOA, as above.

39 'The Olympic Flame' by Henri Pouret, Member of the Academie des Sports de France, Laureate of the Academie Francaise, in 'Olympic Review No. 85-6 Nov-Dec 1974, p.615

40 Ibid.

41 1936 Official Report, p.521

The Acropolis

The lampadedromia (torch races) which took place in ancient Athens started at an altar to Prometheus in the Academy of Athens⁴² and ended at the foot of the Acropolis where the winning torch lit the altar for the sacrifice to Athena Polias.⁴³ In 1936, the Olympic Torch was carried by athlete Andreas Paouris to the gate of the Acropolis, where Nikos Rozan, a Greek actor playing the part of an ancient priest, took the torch and walked on the 'Sacred' Acropolis hill to light the altar, surrounded by 30 Greek high school girls, playing the role of priestesses.⁴⁴ According to Wikipedia a 'special invocation' was made there.⁴⁵



Left: Priest lighting altar at Acropolis, 1936

Below: Athlete lighting the altar on Acropolis, 2012



In 2012, a cauldron was lit at the Acropolis by torch-bearer Dimitrios Chondrokoukis, ahead [of] what the BBC described as a 'special ceremony in which the torch was "laid to rest" '.⁴⁶ The Hellenic Olympic Committee refers to Chondrokoukis, world champion in high jump, as lighting 'the altar on the Acropolis sacred rock'.⁴⁷

Tripods

The tripod used to support the cauldron is reminiscent of the one used in the Olympic Stadium at the 1936 Olympics, a '7.15 feet high tripod constructed according to a Greek pattern', according to the Official

42 Pausanias 1.30.2 <http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias1C.html>

43 Description of Attic Vase (Harvard 1960.344 (Vase)) held at Harvard University Art Museums, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/artifact?name=Harvard+1960.344&object=Vase>

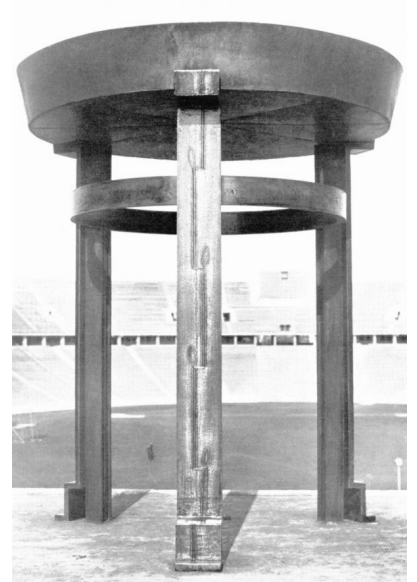
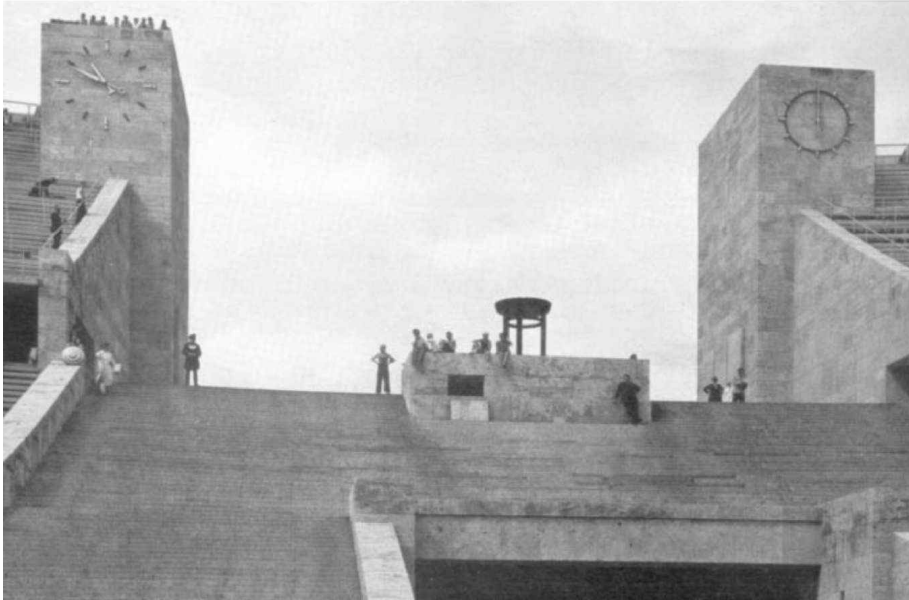
44 'The lighting of the Olympic Flame, 1936' by Manolis Mavromatis, <http://www.defendeurope.net/DefendEurope/OlympicGames/Greece-Berlin%20Olympic%20Flame%201936.htm>

45 'Carl Diem' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Diem

46 'London 2012: Olympic Flame tours Greece' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-18065977>

47 Press Release, Hellenic Olympic Committee http://www.hoc.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=975%3Ao-l-2012r&catid=36%3Apress-release&Itemid=98&lang=en

Report.⁴⁸ Thomas Alkemeyer and Alfred Richartz, in their 'The Olympic Games: From Ceremony to Show', write of 'the Marathon Gate with its resemblance to an altar, the massive stone blocks, [and] the gigantic tripod brazier in which the Olympic flame burned (in antiquity the tripod fire connoted sacrifice).'⁴⁹ Partly in allusion to the rape of a tripod from Apollo by Hercules, and the recovery of it by the former, the tripod was one of his [Apollo's] usual attributes.⁵⁰ Ironically, de Coubertin wrote in 1894, describing his vision for the Olympic Games that they would be 'modern, very modern' and that there would be no 'tripods or incense; these beautiful things are dead, and dead things are never resurrected.'⁵¹



Above left and right: Tripod brazier, 7.15 feet high, 1936

48 'The XIth Olympic Games, Berlin, 1936' Official Report Vol 1, p.119

49 'The Olympic Games: from ceremony to show' by Thomas Alkemeyer and Alfred Richartz

50 'Tripos' by James Yates, M.A., F.R.S., in 'A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities' by William Smith, op. cit.

51 'Le retablissement des Jeux Olympiques,' La Reue de Paris, 15 June 1894, 184, cited in 'The Modern Olympic Games and their Model in Antiquity' by Louis Callebat, International Journal of the Classical Tradition, Vol. 4, No. 4, Spring 1998

Hymn to Apollo

But perhaps Coubertin was about to release forces that he could not control. The day after these words were published in the *Revue de Paris*, the “Congress for the Revival of the Olympic Games” opened at the Sorbonne. In the ‘marvellous setting’ of the main amphitheatre, ‘graced’ with Puvis de Chavannes’ “Sacred Cope”, Coubertin had arranged for the first choral performance of the Hymn to Apollo discovered the previous year by French archaeologists in the ruins of Delphi.⁵²⁵³ The text had been translated into French by Theodore Reinach, and Gabriel Faure had composed an accompaniment. The words as they appear in a score published in 1914⁵⁴, with an English translation from the Greek⁵⁵ are:

O Muses de l'Hélicon aux bois profonds,
Filles de Zeus retentissant,
Vierges aux bras glorieux,
Venez par vos accents charmer le dieu Phébus,
votre frère à la chevelure d'or,
Le dieu sur les flanes du Parnasse,
Parmi les belles Delphiennes,
sur la roche à double cime,
monte vers le cristal pur Deseaux de Castalie,
maître étincelant du mont à l'antre prophétique

Venez à nous, enfants d'Athènes
Dont la grande cité, grâce à Pallas,
la dé esse aux bras vainqueur,
reçut un sol ferme, inviolable.

Sur les autels brille la flamme,
qui des jeunes taureaux consume les chairs.
Vers le ciel moute l'encens d'Arabie
Le doux murre des flûtes
Sonne enchants modulés,
et la cithare d'or, la cithare aux doux sons,
répond aux voix qui chantent les hymnes.

O pèlerins de l'Attique chantez tous le dieu
vainqueur!
Dieu dont la lyre est d'or
O fils du grand Zeus!
sur le sommet de ces monts neigeux,
Toi qui répands sur tous les mortels d'infailibles,
d'éternels oracles,
Je dirai comment tu conquis le trépied fatidique,
gardé par le dragon,
Quand de tes traits tu mis en fuite l'affreux reptile
aux replis monstrueux.

O Muses de l'Hélicon aux bois profonds,
Filles de Zeus retentissant,

Hear me, you who possess deep-wooded Helicon,
fair-armed daughters of Zeus the magnificent!
Fly to beguile with your accents your brother, gold-
tressed
Phoebus who, on the twin peaks of this rock of
Parnassus,
escorted by the illustrious maidens of Delphi,
sets out for the limpid streams of Castalia,
traversing, on the Delphic promontory, the
prophetic pinnacle.
Behold glorious Attica, nation of the great city
which,
thanks to the prayers of the Tritonid warrior,
occupies a hillside sheltered from all harm.
On the holy altars Hephaestos consumes the thighs
of young bullocks;
mingled with the flames, the Arabian vapor rises
toward Olympus.

The shrill rustling lotus murmurs its swelling
song, and the golden kithara, the sweet-sounding
kithara,
answers the voice of men.

And all the host of poets, dwellers in Attica,
sing your glory, god, famed for playing the kithara,
son of great Zeus, beside this snow-crowned peak,
o you who reveal to all mortals the eternal and
infallible oracles.

They sing how you conquered the prophetic tripod
guarded by a fierce dragon when, with your darts
you pierced the gaudy, tortuously coiling monster,
so that, uttering many fearful hisses, the beast
expired.

52 'Olympic Memoirs' by Pierre de Coubertin, Ch. 1.,

<http://www.la84foundation.org/OlympicInformationCenter/OlympicReview/1976/ore101/ore101s.pdf>

53 'The Delphic Hymn, Antigone, and a Brief Revival of Ancient Greek Music' by John Solomon, University of Illinois,
<http://philomusica.unipv.it>

54 'Hymne a Apollon', T. Reinach and G. Faure, Paris, S. Bornemann, Editeur, 1914 [http://imslp.org/wiki/Hymne_%C3%A0_Apollon_\(Faur%C3%A9,_Gabriel\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Hymne_%C3%A0_Apollon_(Faur%C3%A9,_Gabriel))

55 'Musique de la Grece Antique, by Gregorio Paniagua, liner notes for the LP released in June 1978
http://www.rakkav.com/biblemusic/pdfs/booklets/mga_new_bklt.pdf

Vierges aux bras glorieux,
Venez par vos accents charmer le dieu Phébus
votre frère à la chevelure d'or,
Le dieu qui sur les flanes du Parnasse,
Parmi les belles Delphiennes,
sur la roche à double cime,
monte vers le cristal pur Deseaux de Castalie,

O Muses formez le chœur autour du dieu prophète.

Coubertin writes in his memoirs that:

'the playing of this sacred piece of music created the desired atmosphere among the huge audience. A subtle feeling of emotion spread through the auditorium as if the antique eurhythmy were coming to us from the distant past. In this way, Hellenism infiltrated into the whole vast hall. From this moment, the Congress was destined to succeed. I knew that now, whether consciously or not, no one would vote against the revival of the Olympic Games.'

The choir had just sung praise, even worship, to the 'god' Phoebus [Apollo]. No wonder that something entered the great hall, which Coubertin sensed would give him victory in his plan to revive the ancient pagan Games!

On July 29, 1936, two days before the start of the Berlin Games, the Hymn to Apollo was played again, at a reception for the members of the IOC at the Pergamon Museum, hosted by the Reich Minister of the Interior, Dr Frick. The caption for the photograph of the event in the Official Report reads: 'Before the Pergamon Altar'.⁵⁶



Official Report photographs of IOC members 'before the Pergamon Altar', 1936

The handover ceremony

Games modelled on the Olympic Games were held in Athens every 4 years at the Panathenaic Stadium from 566 BC to the 3rd century AD. The Stadium, made of marble, was rebuilt in the nineteenth century for the purpose of hosting modern Olympic Games, and was chosen as the site for the 1896 Games. In 1936, the Olympic torch was carried from the Acropolis to this stadium, where it was handed to Constantinos, the King of Greece, who lit an altar in the stadium, initiating festivities and a recital of the Olympic anthem.⁵⁷

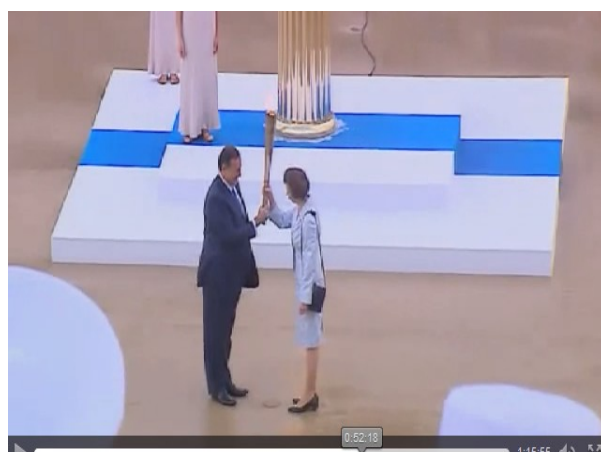
⁵⁶ 1936 Official Report, p.95

⁵⁷ Mavromatis, 'The lighting of the Olympic Flame, 1936'

Today, the Panathenaic Stadium is the site of the handover ceremony of the Olympic torch. On 17 May 2012, after the torch entered the stadium, and with the President of the Hellenic Republic in attendance, athletes from Greece and China lit what the Hellenic Olympic Committee describe as an 'altar' in the centre of the stadium.⁵⁸ Then actresses playing the role of priestesses entered the stadium, the high priestess (the same woman who performed the lighting ceremony at Olympia) carrying an Olympic torch.



She lit the torch from the altar, and then handed it to the President of the Hellenic Olympic Committee, Spyros Kapralos, who bowed before her: (This bowing can be more clearly seen at the handover ceremony for the 2010 Vancouver Games.) Kapralos then handed it to Princess Anne, the President of the British Olympic Committee, who in turn bowed her head to him.



A lantern was lit to carry the flame to England, and carried out of the stadium by Princess Anne. As the priestesses leave the stadium, a double-headed statue of Hermes can be seen standing facing the altar.



⁵⁸ Press Release, Hellenic Olympic Committee http://www.hoc.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=975%3Ao-l-2012r&catid=36%3Apress-release&Itemid=98&lang=en

Altars along the route

In line with Diem's vision, altars were lit in 1936 along the torch relay route from Athens to Berlin. For example, in Belgrade, 'the fountain on the Terazija was transformed into a high altar from which the Olympic Fire burned during the ceremony in the Capital City'. In Kecskemet in Hungary, 'an altar was erected on the idyllic market square and adorned with the Olympic rings formed of apricots'. In Vienna, the torch-bearer ignited 'the Olympic Fire at the altar high above the principal square'. In Germany, the Olympic flame burned from 'fire-altars' in Dresden, Pirna, Meissen, Luckenwald, and from two altars in the Lustgarten in Berlin. Finally, during the Opening Ceremony of the Berlin Games, 'a slender youth.. ran up the Marathon steps to the altar which contained the bronze tripod. After raising the torch again for a final time in greeting, he illuminated the Fire at the altar', which burned throughout the Games.⁵⁹



Above left: Ceremony in front of cathedral in Sofia, Bulgaria



Above right: Altar, Berlin City Palace, 1936

Below left: Altar at Berlin Lustgarten, 1936



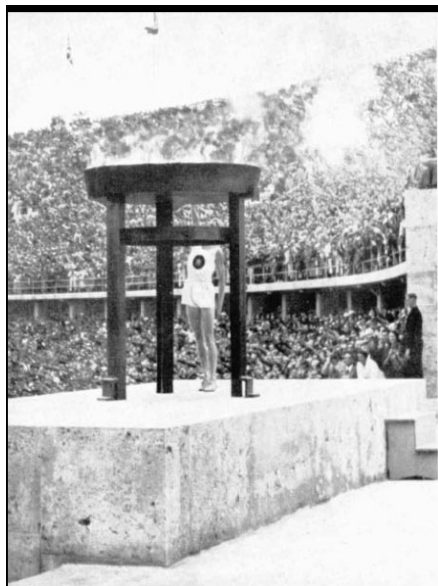
Below right: Altar lit at Berlin Lustgarten

The stadium altar

The idea that the Olympic Stadium cauldron is an altar did not die out with the 1936 Games. Kritsinelis, in his paper on the Lighting Ceremony and Torch Relay, presented to the International Olympic Academy in 1996, writing of the Opening Ceremony of the 1952 Helsinki Games, states: 'The Flame entered the stadium carried by the legendary Paavo Nurmi, 55 years old, who ran to a small altar in the field which he lit and then handed the torch to Hames Kolehmainen, 63 years old and many times Olympic victor who easily ran up the steps and lit the stadium's central altar.' Likewise, in Rome in 1960, he says that 'the Flame.. was taken to a special altar placed on a tower, near the Olympic Stadium.' Again, in Tokyo in 1964,

⁵⁹ 'The XIth Olympic Games, Berlin, 1936' Official Report Vol 1, pp 121,526,527,528,531,540 and 564

Munich in 1972, Moscow in 1980, Seoul in 1988, Barcelona in 1992, and Lillehammer in Norway in 1994, he refers to the lighting of the Stadium cauldron as the lighting of 'the altar', in the last case by the hand of the Prince of Norway.⁶⁰ Moreover, the idea is still current in official Olympic bodies. The web-site of the Hellenic Olympic Committee refers to Chinese Olympic medalist Li Ning as 'the man who lit the altar at the Olympic Stadium of Beijing in 2008'⁶¹



Lighting the stadium altar, Berlin 1936



Lighting the stadium altar, Rome 1960

Altars, by definition, are places of worship and praise to a deity to whom, normally, offerings are brought. The purpose of fire at an altar is to burn and consume the offering. An Olympic torch burns for a few minutes only, and so unless the runners run at night, there is a need to keep the flame burning during those hours. A portable cauldron or fire bowl is one practical way of doing this, and if set up in a town or city on the torch relay route could be seen from a secular perspective as simply giving publicity to and building enthusiasm for the coming Games. To describe such a flaming cauldron as an 'altar' is to invest it with spiritual or religious significance, since it implies that worship is being given to a god, and perhaps that some sort of sacrifice or offering is being made. Flaming cauldrons are being lit on stages up and down the country at the time of writing, at the end of each day's journey of the Olympic torch. Given that the Olympic flame is defined in the Olympic Charter as that 'which is kindled in Olympia under the authority of the IOC'⁶², and given that the IOC is responsible for carrying out this kindling from the sun in the name of Apollo, can we be sure that we are not in fact in effect lighting altars to a foreign god when these cauldrons are lit, just as many in the Olympic official bodies apparently believe?



Lighting of cauldrons, 2012

60 Kritsinelis, pp 153,154,155,156,157,158

61 Press Release, Hellenic Olympic Committee http://www.hoc.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=975%3Ao-l-2012r&catid=36%3Apress-release&Itemid=98&lang=en

62 Olympic Charter, in force from 8 July 2011, p.21

In the Official Report of the 1936 Games, these flaming cauldrons along the torch relay route are several times⁶³ described as 'fire altars'. It is possible that the term is used because fire altars were associated with Aryan people, and with the swastika. In 1871 Heinrich Schliemann discovered objects bearing the swastika square in his excavations of ancient Troy. He consulted Orientalist Emile Burnouf and was assured that this sign 'was Aryan, and that this same emblem had been "completely rejected by the Jews"'⁶⁴ Burnouf also argued that the swastika had its origin in a mechanical device, made of wood, which produced fire by 'violent rotation'⁶⁵, and hinted at its use for 'the production of holy fire for the sacred altars'⁶⁶. The notion that the swastika is Aryan in origin was a primary cause of its adoption by the Nazi Party as their emblem. Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that it signified 'the struggle for the victory of Aryan mankind'⁶⁷. He also wrote that 'its effect at that time was something akin to that of a blazing torch'⁶⁸.



Swastika

After the success of the first mass meeting of the German Workers Party (precursor of the Nazis), he wrote that a 'fire was enkindled from whose glowing heat the sword would be fashioned which would restore freedom to the German Siegfried and bring back life to the German nation'⁶⁹. In his book *'Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics'*, Frederick Spotts writes of Hitler that 'Fire was an element in the scenography of the commemorative ceremonies that gave him such pleasure. Torches, bonfires, Bengal lights, fireworks, flares, pyres, flames rising out of enormous braziers all produced a wondrous spell.'⁷⁰

On the 30 January 1933, to celebrate Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany earlier that day, there was a massive torchlit procession through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin:⁷¹



Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-02985 A
Foto: o. Ang. 1.30. Januar 1933

Above: Torchlit processions at Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, 1933

63 The XIth Olympic Games, Berlin, 1936' Official Report Vol 1, pp 121,126,455,456 and 516

64 'A charm spinning in blood' by Malcolm Quinn, a lecturer in art and design history at Wimbledon School of Art. The Times Higher Education Supplement, 28 October 1994.

65 'Des Sciences et Religions' by Emile Burnouf p.257, cited in 'Swastika earliest known symbol and its migrations' by Thomas Wilson, Curator Department of Prehistoric Anthropology, of the United States National Museum. Chapter in "Report of National Museum" (1894), p.777.

66 Wilson, op. cit, p.777.

67 *Mein Kampf*, by Adolf Hitler; Vol.2 Ch.7 <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200601.txt>

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid. Vol.1 Ch.12.

70 'Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics' by Frederick Spotts, (Pimlico 2003), p58 [CHECK]

71 The photograph on the left is from an University of Oregon web-page:

<http://pages.uoregon.edu/dluebke/Germany342/342-3Week06.html>. Photo on the right is encaptioned: Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-02985 A Foto: o. Ang. 30 January 1933

Leni Riefenstahl directed a propaganda film, called *Triumph of the Will*, about the 1934 Nuremberg Congress of the Nazi Party, bringing her international fame and notoriety. In an article in *Logos Journal* entitled 'Propaganda As Vision', Ken Kelman writes that the basic motifs of the film are 'ancient things (buildings, statues, icons); the sky; clouds (or smoke); fire; the swastika; marching; the masses; Hitler. The central theme which they develop is that Hitler has come from the sky to kindle ancient Nuremberg with primal Teutonic fire, to liberate the energy and spirit of the German people through a dynamic new movement with roots deep in their racial consciousness.'⁷²

In an article on Nazi book-burning at the web-site of the United States Holocaust Museum, the writer points out that for 'Americans, the iconography of Nazism is found in the swastika, the jackboot, the Nazi banner. But another symbol - flames and fire - accompanied the Third Reich from its strident inception to its apocalyptic demise. On January 30, 1933, torchlight parades announced the onset of the Nazi revolution. One month later, the flames of the Reichstag fire consumed the last vestiges of the Weimar Constitution.' Then on 'April 6, 1933, the German Students Association's Main Office for Press and Propaganda proclaimed a nationwide "Action against the Un-German Spirit," to climax in a literary purge or "cleansing" (*Säuberung*) by fire.' On 10 May 1933 German university students marched in torchlight parades, and burned more than 25,000 books. At the Berlin burning, Joseph Goebbels encouraged the students that they were 'doing the right thing at this midnight hour – to consign to the flames the unclean spirit of the past.. This is a great powerful and symbolic act.. Out of these ashes the phoenix of a new age will arise..⁷³

The Nuremberg Rallies included great torchlight parades. As the head of one such procession approached, wrote an observer of the 1927 Rally, 'the Frauentor moat resembled a sea of fire. In astonishing order, the Brown Shirts marched past their Führer and greeted him with their eyes shining, the hand with the burning torch raised as in an oath. The enthusiasm of both the onlookers and the marchers hardly knew any limits.' A march the next day was guided by 'blazing fires on fir-decked pylons', marking the way.⁷⁴ Similarly, a regional rally held in Hildesheim, Lower Saxony, in June 1936, just a month before the Olympic torch was lit by the sun in Olympia, included a torchlight parade with flaming pylons in addition to the 'thousands of torches', which became a 'huge fiery stream' which seemed 'to flow down from the hill into the city'⁷⁵



Flaming pylons, June 1936

72 'Propaganda As Vision: Triumph of The Will' by Ken Kelman, in *Logos* 2.4 – Fall 2003.

<http://www.logosjournal.com/kelman.pdf>

73 'The book burnings' at <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/bookburning/burning.php>

74 'Nuremberg 1927: Torchlight Procession, Dedication of Banners, Mass March'. Source: Alfred Rosenberg and Wilhelm Weiß, *Reichsparteitag der NSDAP Nürnberg 19./21. August 1927* (Munich: Verlag Frz. Eher, 1927), pp. 47-52. From: <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/rpt27d.htm>

75 'Lower Saxony Marches, The Gau Rally in Hildesheim: 1936. Source: *Niedersachsen marschieren: Gautag Hildesheim 1936* (Hanover: Gauleitung der NSDAP, 1936). From: <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/gautag.htm>

The Nazi period in Germany was marked by a resurgence of paganism, both within the National Socialist Party before they took power, and in the country as a whole under Nazi rule. William Shirer, correspondent for the Universal News Service and later for CBS in Berlin and Vienna from 1934 to 1940, wrote in his 'The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich' that 'under the leadership of Rosenberg, Bormann and Himmler, who were backed by Hitler, the Nazi regime intended eventually to destroy Christianity in Germany, if it could, and substitute the old paganism of the early tribal Germanic gods and the new paganism of the Nazi extremists'⁷⁶ One aspect of this was the revival of the summer and winter solstice festivals. In his monumental study of pagan ritual, the Golden Bough, James Frazer, who was a Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge, and Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Liverpool, devoted more than 220 pages to the fire festivals of Europe. He writes that 'the season at which these fire-festivals have been most generally held all over Europe is the summer solstice, that is Midsummer Eve (the twenty-third of June) or Midsummer Day (the twenty-fourth of June). A faint tinge of Christianity has been given to them by naming Midsummer Day after John the Baptist, but we cannot doubt that the celebration dates from a time long before the beginning of our era.'⁷⁷ 'According to a medieval writer', Frazer says, 'the three great features of the midsummer celebration were the bonfires, the procession with torches round the fields, and the custom of rolling a wheel,' and the meaning of the custom of trundling a wheel was that the sun 'having now reached the highest point in the ecliptic, begins thenceforward to descend.'⁷⁸ An account from 1541 tells of public bonfires being lit in 'almost every village and town of Germany' on the Eve of St John (June 23rd)⁷⁹. Midsummer fires used to blaze all over Upper Bavaria down at least to the middle of the nineteenth century⁸⁰.

According to one account, German tradition required that the midsummer fire should be lighted, not from a common hearth, but by the friction of two sorts of wood, namely kindled by oak and fir⁸¹. Frazer gives another example, from Switzerland, where the rotation of a wooden pole is used to kindle 'new and pure fire', from which boys light torches.⁸² In a Polish district of Eastern Prussia, a flame was kindled through the rapid rotation of a wooden axle, after all the fires had put out on the eve of Midsummer Day. Each home then relit their hearth from the 'new fire'.⁸³ In the sixteenth century, a Polish priest, Martin of Urzedow 'denounced the heathen practices of the women who on St John's Eve (Midsummer Eve) kindled fires by the friction of wood, danced, and sang songs in honour of the devil.'⁸⁴

Frazer wrote that it had been customary in Catholic countries, on Easter Eve, to extinguish all the lights in the churches, and then to make a new fire, sometimes with flint and steel, sometimes with a burning-glass. The Easter candle was lit from this, and then used to rekindle all the extinguished lights in the church. In many parts of Germany, a bonfire was also lit from the new fire.⁸⁵ In the Hollertau, Bavaria, young men would light their lanterns at the newly-kindled Easter candle in the church and then race to the bonfire; he who reached it first set fire to the pile.⁸⁶ In two villages of Upper Bavaria, there were races of young men to win the right to set fire to the 'Easter Man', a tall cross enveloped in straw.⁸⁷ Frazer gives many examples of the burning of effigies, and gives evidence that anciently human beings were burned on these occasions.⁸⁸ The traces of a former practice of human sacrifice are 'particularly clear and unequivocal' for the Beltane fires of the central Highlands of Scotland, observed on the First of May.⁸⁹ A Beltane cake was divided into a number of pieces and distributed to the assembled company. Whoever

76 'The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: a history of Nazi Germany' by William L Shirer, online edition at <http://untref.academia.edu/Nicol>

<http://untref.academia.edu/Nicol> %C3%A1sMato/Papers/931760/The_rise_and_fall_of_the_Third_Reich_a_history_of_Nazi_Germany , pp 212-3

77 The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion' by J.G.Frazer, D.C.L., LL.D., Lit.D., Part VII 'Balder the beautiful' Vol.1 'The fire festivals of Europe and the doctrine of the external soul', 3rd edition, (Macmillan 1913), p.160

78 Ibid. p.161, referring to John Beleth, a writer of the twelfth century, and G Durantis, of the thirteenth century.

79 Ibid. p.163, citing J. Boemus, 'Mores, leges, et ritus omnium gentium' (Lyons 1541)

80 Ibid. p.164

81 Ibid. p.169, citing Montanus, 'Die deutschen Volksfeste, Volksbrauche und deutscher Voldsglaube' (Iserlohn, N.D.)

82 Ibid. p.170, citing C.L. Rocholz, 'Deutsche Glaube und Brauch (Berlin, 1867)

83 Ibid. p.177, citing M. Toppen, 'Aberglauben aus Masuren' (Danzig, 1867)

84 Ibid. p.177, citing F.S. Krauss 'Altislavische Feuergewinnung' (1891)

85 Ibid. p.121

86 Ibid. p.122, citing 'Bavaria, Landes- und Volkskunde des Konigreichs Bayern' (Munich, 1860-67)

87 Ibid. p.144

88 See ibid. p.106 for his summary.

89 Ibid. p.146

received one particular piece (which was daubed black with charcoal) became known as the Beltane carline, was laid hold of and a show was made of throwing him into the fire. Moreover, for a period after, the people spoke of this one as if he were dead.⁹⁰

Animal sacrifices continued into recent centuries. In consequence of a disease among the black cattle in Mull in 1767, a fire was kindled on top of a hill through rotation and friction after all the fires within sight were extinguished. Then a heifer was sacrificed on the fire for the purpose of staying the plague.⁹¹ Almost universally, children and young people have leaped through the bonfire, at midsummer and other festivals, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this is a relic of the ancient practice of passing children through the fire. Ovid describes the ancient Roman rite of Pali'lia, in honour of Pales the god of the shepherds, and both sheep and shepherds running through bonfires as an act of purification.⁹² Attempts were made by Christian synods to suppress these customs. Thus 'the third council of Constantinople (a.d. 680), by its 65th canon, orders: "Those fires that are kindled by certaine people on new moones before their shops and houses, over which also they use ridiculously and foolishly to leape, by a certaine antient custome, we command them from henceforth to cease." And the Synodus Francica under Pope Zachary, a.d. 742, forbids "those sacrilegious fires which they call *Nedfri* (or bonefires), and all other observations of the Pagans whatsoever.'⁹³ Dr William Borlase stated in 1754 in his book 'Antiquities of Cornwall' that the carrying of lighted torches, was 'particularly prohibited by the Gallick Councils: they were in the eye of the law 'accensores facularum', and thought to sacrifice to the devil and to deserve capital punishment'.⁹⁴ In his day, the Cornish attended the Midsummer fires with 'lighted torches, tarr'd and pitch'd at the end, and make their perambulations round their Fires, and go from village to village carrying their torches before them', and Borlase concludes from the early prohibition of practice that it had its origin in 'Druid superstitious fires'.



Jumping through the fire, Midsummer Eve

The Cornish midsummer fires were revived at St Ives in 1929 and spread from there so that today on Midsummer Eve, according to the web-site of the Redruth Old Cornwall Society 'bright yellow points of light may suddenly be seen to blaze forth from a number of hilltops scattered throughout the length and breadth of the county.. in accordance with a very ancient custom'. The Society is unashamed to describe this as a 'heathen festival' and believes that by observing it 'a bond is formed between Cornish people of the present age and our distant Celtic forbears'. They say that 'there can be no question but that these fires owe their origin to a form of sun worship and it is believed that at one time the ceremonies included burnt offerings sacrificed on Cornish hilltop altars .. rabbits and pigs and sometimes criminals [being] sacrificed in the flames'. They say that the Church 'adopted and adapted' the fires under the new name of the Eve of St John. Instead of having a sacrifice, a wreath of symbolic herbs, both good and bad, was cast into the fire. Today, the ceremony starts with a prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ to 'bless the bonfire', but continues with a pagan-sounding invocation from the Master of Ceremonies to 'set the pyre at once on

90 Ibid. pp. 147-148, citing 'Scotland and Scotsmen in the eighteenth century' from the MSS of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, ed. By Alexander Allardyce (Edinburgh and London, 1888)

91 Ibid. pp 289-90, citing J. Grimm, 'Deutsche Mythologie', who refers to a Miss Austin as his authority.

92 'Palilia' by Leonhard Schmitz PhD, FRSE, in 'A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities' by William Smith D.C.L., LL.D. (John Murray, London 1875) http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Palilia.html

93 'Bonfire' in Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33614/33614-h/33614-h.htm>

94 Cited in 'Popular antiquities, chiefly illustrating the origin of our vulgar customs, ceremonies, and superstitions' by John Brand, with the additions of Sir Henry Ellis (Chatto & Windus, London 1913)

fire', followed by the 'Lady of the Flowers' throwing in a wreath of good and bad plants, while calling forth fertility to good seed, and destruction to weeds, presumably by some sort of magical sympathetic action: 'Flowers for burning here are found, Both good and ill. Thousand fold let good seed spring, Wicked weeds, fast withering, Let this fire kill.'⁹⁵

Four years before Hitler came to power, and thus at the same time that the midsummer fires were re-kindled in Cornwall, a young woman called Gudrun Streiter attended a Summer Solstice celebration organised by the Sturmabteilung (Brownshirts). In her diary, published in George Mosse's 'Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich', she describes how she saw for the first time 'women and girls in the brown Hitler uniform'. They sold her badges for the solstice celebration and 'this touched me in a wondrous way' to serve Hitler's cause. 'A torch', she writes, 'had been thrown into my heart and continued to flame and blaze. There was no place for any other thought within me. Almost in a trance, I followed my girl comrades to our quarters. I no longer heard or saw what was happening around me; I just sat on my cot and wondered how I could become a helper in the reconstruction of the Fatherland.' She and her companions bought torches from the SA men, and they were lit at fifteen minutes after midnight. As they marched up the mountain towards the solstice fire, 'The brilliant glare of the torches in the night was glorious. It was an overwhelming sight. My words are too poor to portray this experience. For a long time we let this picture enter our thirsty souls to their uttermost depths until our eyes were focused on one mighty flaming fire. It was our solstice celebration.' After listening to a 'flaming address' by Hermann Goring, speaking of the Rhine as 'Germany's river but not Germany's border', they sat around the 'great fire', and finally flung their torches into it. An SA man admonished her never to 'forget the solstice fire. Let it flame in your heart and let its rays reach out to your racial comrades. Then you will truly help in the great work of Adolf Hitler.' In his comments on Streiter's diary, Mosse refers to the 'the acted-out mythology of the summer solstice celebration. The marching, the torches, the fire - this was the "magic" that produced enthusiasm among many a youth'.⁹⁶

In another diary, Hans Snyckers, the leader of a S.A. Sturm with something over 100 members, describes a Summer Solstice celebration held on 21 June 1938, with more than 2,000 in attendance out of a local population of 17,000. In his speech, he connects the festival with that held by their 'forefathers of the German community of blood' from 'the earliest days of our history', 'millenia' before, and says that 'we sense something of the eternal stream of blood that unites us to the people of our race from the distant past to the far future.' These ancestors 'gathered around the fire that reflects the strength of the sun to thank the godly power that blessed their labors', and came to 'receive strength from the community.. of their tribe'. Likewise now for them 'the summer solstice is first of all an hour to contemplate the god-ordained unity of all people of German blood'. Finally, 'all our thoughts turn to.. the Fuhrer. .. We salute the Fuhrer and pledge him our loyalty.'⁹⁷ There is no sign of Christian faith in Hans Snyckers' speech, only an idolatry of race and leader, resting upon a deeper foundation of nature and sun worship. He associates their gathering with the so-called 'godly power' that ancient Germanic tribes had worshipped, millenia before, and thus constitutes it as a pagan ceremony.

Vienna 1936

The Olympic Torch entered Vienna on the evening of 29 July 1936, to be greeted by pro-Nazi demonstrations and disturbances. A report in the Sydney Morning Herald said that 400 to 500 persons were arrested and sent to a concentration camp. Cries of 'Heil Hitler' greeted the Olympic runner as the torch entered the Heldenplatz through the Roman gates of Hofburg. Then when, after lighting the 'sacred flame', the Austrian Olympic President (Herr Schmidt) mentioned the name of the President of Austria (Herr Mlkas), there was a storm of catcalls, and booing. Many fights, throughout, the city followed the demonstration, especially in the Jewish quarters, and the cry "Heil Hitler" rang out through the streets.

⁹⁵ 'Midsummer Bonfire Celebration, 22nd June 2012..' Redruth Old Cornwall Society
<http://www.redrutholdcornwall.org/bonfire.htm>

⁹⁶ 'Dem Tod so nah ...: Tagebuchblätter einer SA-Mann's Braut' by Gudrun Streiter, in 'Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich' by George L. Mosse (Univeristy of Wisconsin Press)

⁹⁷ 'Diary of an S.A. Leader' by Hans Snyckers. Source: Hans Snyckers, 'Tagebuch eines Sturmführers' (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941) <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/tagebuch.htm>

German agents were suspected of hiring demonstrators to shout the Nazi slogans.⁹⁸ A despatch from George Messersmith, the United States Ambassador to Austria, to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull, on August 10, put the number of arrests at around 700, many of them Austrian Nazis recently released from prison after an amnesty associated with the Austro-German Accord of 11 July 1936.⁹⁹ In a sworn deposition made in August 1945, Messersmith stated that a campaign of Nazi terrorism had ceased after the failed putsch of 25 July 1934 had been followed by two years of relative peace. As 'soon after July 11 as July 29, 1936', he went on, 'when the Olympic Torch was carried through the streets of Vienna, there were violent Nazi disorders. From then on, and until Austrian sovereignty was destroyed, there were constant arrests and trials of persons accused of distributing illegal literature or staging illegal demonstrations, accompanied by numerous press comments of more or less violence.'¹⁰⁰ In other words, the downward slide into tyranny in Austria could be said to have begun in earnest with the arrival of the Olympic flame.



Sydney Morning Herald, 31 July 1936

In a letter to Hamilton Fish Armstrong, the editor of 'Foreign Affairs' the journal of the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, on the 4 August, Messersmith said that the 'rowdies -for that is what they really are - who disturbed the peace on July 29th, ended the evening by breaking the windows in a few Jewish shops.' Hanni Deutsch, a member of a Jewish sports club in Vienna called Hakoah, recalls (as summarised in a web-site article) that ' In honor of the Olympics and the Olympic torch bearer who ran through Vienna on his way to the stadium in Berlin, there was a parade in which all sporting clubs marched. Onlookers regaled members of EWASK, a pro-Nazi sports group with loud cheers of "Heil Hitler." Members of Hakoah were met with silence. Hanni said she could feel the hate and it was terrifying.'¹⁰¹ In

98 'NAZI OUTBURST. Olympic Torch-bearer. PANDEMONIUM IN VIENNA.' Sydney Morning Herald, 31 July 1936 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/17256567> et al

99 Messersmith, G.S., Vienna. Despatch No. 857 to Secretary of State [Cordell Hull], Washington. 10 August 1936. <http://dspace.udel.edu:8080/dspace/handle/19716/6685?show=full>

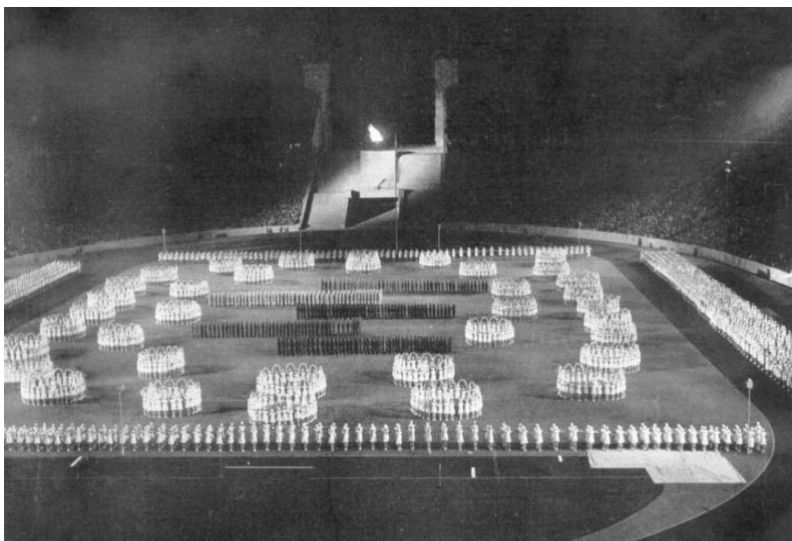
100Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression Volume IV, Document No. 1760-PS <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/1760-ps.asp>

101Watermarks (documentary) directed by Yaron Zilberman 2005 (in English, Hebrew and German) 6 June 2011, <http://compellingjewishstories.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/watermarks-documentary-directed-by.html>

a letter to the editor of the Journal of the Association of Jewish Refugees (for Jewish victims of Nazi persecution living in Great Britain), written in 2008 in support of the 'Free Tibet' demonstrations against the Olympic torch in London, Francis Deutsch recalls being in Vienna on 29 July and passing through the fringe of the demonstrations. The atmosphere, he said, was 'hate-filled' and 'frightening'.¹⁰²

'Olympic Youth', Berlin Games, Opening Day

A large-scale 'festival play', or pageant, called 'Olympic Youth', was performed on the evening of the opening day, 1 August 1936, of the Berlin Games, starting at 9pm and finishing at 11pm. It was designed by Carl Diem himself, and was in four parts. The first part began with the ringing of the Olympic Bell: 'I summon the youth of the world' was the inscription upon it. 2,500 girls aged 11 and 12 and 900 boys did round dances, forming the rings of the Olympic flag on the lawn. Dancing of a similar nature continues in the second part, this time with 2,300 girls aged 14 to 18. Thousands of boys, including groups from different nations, enter in the third part, and sit around camp-fires, sing national songs and play.



Above and right: 'Olympic Youth' performance, Olympic opening day, August 1936



Then thousands of flags from 'all nations' enter the arena, their standard-bearers salute one another's symbols, and then the 'forest of flags' groups itself round the Olympic Fire and a youthful reciter speaks the Hymn of Fire (with a rough and partial English translation):

Lohe,
Olympische Flamme,
himmelauf
flackernd
zum Freudenfest!

Heiliger Atem
der Reinheit,
der Schönheit,
des feurigen Geistes
erhabenes Sinnbild.

Blaze,
Olympic flame
heavenward
flickering
for rejoicing!

Holy breath
the purity
the beauty,
the fiery spirit
sublime symbol.

¹⁰²'The Olympics: memories of 1936' letter to the Editor of the Journal of the Association of Jewish Refugees.
<http://www.ajr.org.uk/journal/issue.May08/letters>

Du gleichest
der Seele der Jugend,
ewig verglühend,
ewig sich zündend,
sich immer erneuend [erneuernd?].

You are like
the soul of youth,
burn forever,
eternally on fire
always erneuend [renewing?].

Lohe auf Jahre,
bis wieder beim Feste
mit reinen Händen
Jugend dich trägt
zum Flammenaltare.

Blaze for years,
up again at the festival
with clean hands
Youth supports you
Altars to the flame.

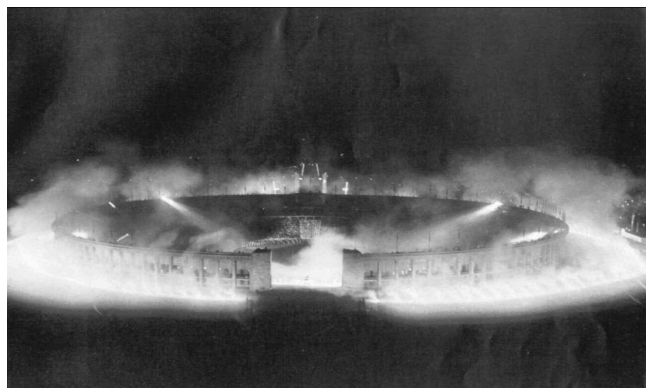
Presumably, this is the same as the Hymn 'Burn, Olympic Flame', mentioned above, which was sung during the torch relay ceremonies in host cities.

The fourth and final part was entitled 'Heroic Struggle and Death Lament'. The reciter, who 'had his place in front of the Olympic Fire, [and] wore the white Olympic Festival costume'¹⁰³, 'emphasized the solemnity of the occasion with these words:

Allen Spiels
heil'ger Sinn;
Vaterlandes
Hochgewinn.
Vaterlandes höchst Gebot
in der Not:
Opfertod!

Alkemeyer and Richartz translate as: 'The holy meaning of all play: triumph of the Fatherland! The Fatherland's highest commandment: self sacrifice and death in times of crisis [or need]'.¹⁰⁴

Phalanxes of dancing warriors advance, their two leaders engage in a duel, one falls, then the other, wounded, also dies. As the 'fallen heroes' are borne away, a long procession of wailing women perform the 'Lamentation'. Finally, Schiller's Ode to Joy is played from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, as searchlights shine up in the sky, and a flame of fire encircles the 'edge of the Stadium, which is filled with thousands of flag-wavers, and the chorus sings the "Seid umschlungen, Millionen ! Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt! Freude, schöner Götterfunken!" (May millions be embraced! This kiss to the whole world! Joy, divine spark!)'.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the fire imagery continues even to the last word.



Flame of fire around the stadium, August 1936

According to Alkemeyer and Richartz, Carl Diem saw the fourth and final act, with its struggle, death and

¹⁰³1936 Official Report, p.580

¹⁰⁴Alkemeyer and Richartz, p.4

¹⁰⁵Description of the performance is from 1936 Official Report, pp 583-6

lamentation, as revealing the 'true meaning' of the Games.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the reciter had made it clear: the 'holy meaning' of the play of the first three acts was the 'triumph of the Fatherland' (ie Germany) through willing self-sacrifice of their young men, even unto death. Out of sacrifice and death would come joy. Hitler had promised in 1933 to '.. build a living national solidarity, the German nation. To properly understand this idea of national solidarity, the idea of sacrifice must first be grasped..'.¹⁰⁷ In 1984, Reinhard Appel, the editor-in-chief of the Second German National Television (ZDF), told of a wartime experience. In March 1945, Carl Diem spoke to Appel, aged 18, and his fellow soldiers serving in the so-called Hitler division Grossdeutschland. 'In a flaming speech', Appel recalled, 'during which much was said about Sparta and the spirit of sacrifice, he asked us to go into the victorious final battle against Germany's enemies. We did go into battle, but nothing could be victorious for us in March 1945.'¹⁰⁸

Langemarck-Halle

The Berlin 1936 Olympic Park contained a bell-tower with its Olympic Bell, situated across the May Field, which was used for May Day gymnastic demonstrations, and facing the Olympic Stadium. Beneath the bell-tower and the May Field stands, were huge halls known as the Langemarck-Halle, built to commemorate the 2,000 German dead of a battle fought not far from the town of Langemarck in Belgium on 10 November 1914. The German High Command issued a misleading report stating that 'young regiments charged forward singing "Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles" against the front line of enemy positions and took them.'¹⁰⁹ A myth grew up around the battle which played a major role in the development of National Socialist ideology and legend. Adolf Hitler wrote about it in *Mein Kampf* as if he had been there: 'And from the distance the strains of a song reached our ears.. 'Deutschland, Deutschland uber Alles, uber Alles in der Welt! .. Seventeen-year-old boys now looked like men.. [and] knew how to die like old soldiers.'¹¹⁰ Again the message was that sacrificial death led to glory and the revitalisation of national Germany. George Mosse cites the memorial speech by Josef Magnus Wehner, read publicly in all German universities in 1932 as exemplifying the Langemarck cult. 'Before the Reich covered its face in shame and defeat', Wehner had written, 'those at Langemarck sang.. and through the song with which they died, they are resurrected.' 'The war dead at Langemarck.. were invoked to regenerate a defeated nation', Mosse wrote.¹¹¹ 'Youth and death were closely linked' in 'the Myth of the War Experience': 'youth as symbolic of manhood, virility and energy, and death as not death at all but sacrifice and resurrection.'¹¹²

Horst Wessel Song

An important feature of the disturbances described in George Messersmith's despatch from Vienna to Cordell Hull (see above), was the singing of the Deutschlandlied (Deutschland uber alles) and of the Horst Wessel Song, despite their both being proscribed in public gatherings in Austria at that time. Police investigations showed that large numbers of Austrians had been paid to sing the songs, probably by agents from Germany.¹¹³ A look at the text of the Horst Wessel song shows why it was banned:

106 Alkemeyer and Richartz, p.4

107 'Fiihrerreden: Zum Winterhilfswerk', 1933-1936, Munich/Berlin, 1937, p. 4, cited in Alkemeyer and Richartz, p.5

108 'The importance of the Historians' Quarrel and the Problem of Continuity for the German History of Sport' by Horst Ueberhorst, Ruhr-Universitat Bochum, Journal of Sport History, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 1990)

109 'The World War I (First) "Battle of Langemarck" on Nov. 10, 1914, by Harold Marcuse, Professor of German History at University of California Santa Barbara.

<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/dachau/legends/langemark1914.htm>

110 'Mein Kampf', Vol.1, Ch.5 <http://www.mondopolitico.com/library/meinkampf/v1c5.htm>

111 'Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars' by George L Mosse, pp 72-3,

112 Ibid. p.173

113 Messersmith to Cordell Hull, pp 3-4, op. cit.

Die Fahne hoch!

Die Fahne hoch! Die Reihen fest geschlossen!
SA marschiert mit mutig-festem Schritt
Kameraden, die Rotfront und Reaktion erschossen
Marschieren im Geist in unseren Reihen mit

Die Straße frei den braunen Batallionen
Die Straße frei dem Sturmabteilungsmann!
Es schaun aufs Hakenkreuz voll Hoffnung schon
Millionen
Der Tag für Freiheit und für Brot bricht an!

Zum letzten Mal wird nun Appell geblasen!
Zum Kampfe stehen wir alle schon bereit!
Bald flattern Hitlerfahnen über Barrikaden/allen
strassen
Die Knechtschaft dauert nur noch kurze Zeit!

The flag high

'The flag high, the ranks tightly closed.
SA marches pluckily at a firm pace.
Comrades, shot dead by Red Front and Reaction,
march in spirit within our ranks (repeated as
stanza 4).

The streets clear for the brown battalions,
the streets clear for the SA man.
Already millions are looking to the swastika full of
hope.
The day of freedom and bread is dawning.

For the last time the rollcall has sounded,
we are all ready for the fight.
Soon Hitler flags will fly over barricades/all the
streets;
the servitude will not last long now'¹¹⁴

Horst Wessel was a very successful Nazi SA (Stormtrooper) leader, who wrote the song for street battle against the Communist forces who opposed them. He was shot at his home by a Communist in January 1930, and died the next month. He became the 'most prominent martyr of the Nazi Party'.¹¹⁵ In a eulogy published shortly after Wessel's death, Joseph Goebbels wrote: 'Horst Wessel has passed on. His mortal remains have given up struggle and conflict. Yet I can feel almost physically his spirit rise, to live on with us.. He himself put it in words: he "marches in spirit in our ranks." ' Goebbels continued: 'I see endless columns marching in spirit. A humiliated people rises up and begins to move.. He marches behind them in spirit.. Many will have gone where he now is.'¹¹⁶ After Hitler came to power in 1933, the Horst Wessel song became the second part of the German national anthem. Extraordinarily, given its violent nature, it was sung during the Opening Ceremony of the Berlin Olympic Games.¹¹⁷ If Arnd Kruger's information is correct, then it was also sung at the first lighting ceremony of the Olympic Torch.¹¹⁸



Storm troopers parade at Nuremberg rally in August 1929,
Horst Wessel (front). Taken from Annefrank.org

114 'Das Horst-Wessel-Lied: A Reappraisal' by George Broderick, Universität Mannheim, first published in International Folklore Review Vol. 10 (1995): 100-127, http://www.george-broderick.de/ns_docs/ns-horst_wessel_lied.doc, p.9

115 Randall Bytwerk, Background to 'Raise high the flag' By Josef Goebbels,
<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/angrif11.htm>

116 'Raise high the flag' by Joseph Goebbels. The source: "Die Fahne hoch!" Der Angriff. Aufsätze aus der Kampfzeit (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1935), pp. 268-271. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/angrif11.htm>

117 Berlin 1936 Official Report, p.575

118 See note above. In the Nazi Olympics, he appears to cite the New York Journal, Dec 9, 1935, as his source, which is of course before the ceremony. He is a Professor at the University of Göttingen. I have emailed him for clarification.

Drang Nach Osten

The potentially aggressive intent of the first torch relay was not lost on observers at the time. 'A prescient editorial in the New York Times' (according to an article in the same paper in 2008) 'sensing the drumbeats of war, called the torch's route a "strategic highway" that traced the line of the German "Drang Nach Osten" — the drive to the East that the Kaiser sought in the First World War, and which Hitler was soon to put into practice.'¹¹⁹ The torch relay occasioned 'so much animosity among the Czechs that the runners passing through the Slavic portions of the country had to be protected by police escort,' wrote historian David Clay Large in his book 'Nazi Games.'¹²⁰



Map of the torch route 1936

According to an article on the BBC web-site in 2008, 'the torch made its way from Greece to Berlin through countries in south-eastern and central Europe where the Nazis were especially keen to enhance their influence'.¹²¹ In 1936, the relay was under the jurisdiction of the Nazi regime, not the IOC.¹²² As the torch crossed into Greece into Bulgaria, the Greek representative said 'I give into your hands the sacred Fire, the symbol of the Olympic spirit which has illuminated the universe throughout the centuries, in order that you may have it carried intact by the Bulgarian, Yugoslav, Hungarian, Austrian, Czechoslovak and German athletes to Berlin, where it will ignite the Fire at the Marathon Gate. Thus, under the protection of the German nation and redounding to the honour of Greece, the eternal Olympic spirit will again shine upon the world.'¹²³ The notion that the torch would be under 'German protection' even when in Bulgaria, seems to me to be in keeping with ideas of empire. Adolf Hitler is quoted in the Official Report of 1936 as saying that 'Sporting and chivalrous competition awakens the best human qualities. It does not sever, but on the contrary, unites the opponents in mutual understanding and reciprocal respect. It also helps to strengthen the bonds of peace between the nations. May the Olympic Flame therefore never be extinguished.' What sort of peace did he have in mind, and what role did the Olympic Torch play in bringing about the years of conquest and terror that soon followed?

¹¹⁹ 'The relay of fire ignited by the Nazis' by Edward Rothstein, New York Times, 14 April, 2008

¹²⁰ Cited in 'Olympic event: protests kick off the torch relay', Wall Street Journal, 26 March 2008

¹²¹ 'The Olympic torch's shadowy past' by Chris Bowlby, 5 April 2008 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7330949.stm>

¹²² Kruger and Murray, op. cit., p.32

¹²³ 1936 Official Report, p.523

London 1948

It is surprising that the Olympic torch relay was continued after the war, given its Nazi origins. Efforts were made to remove it of any militaristic overtones: 'the first runner, Corporal Dimitrelis of the Greek Army, stepped forward, clad in uniform with his rifle in his hand. Laying down his arms and taking off his uniform, he appeared clad as an athlete.'¹²⁴ According to an onlooker, 'You could feel the Olympic fever run through the crowd' as the torch landed at Dover.¹²⁵ Remarkably, according to the BBC, 'Reports in the local press and Janie Hampton's book *The Austerity Olympics* say the flame blew out for the first time as soon as it landed in Dover, only to be relit not by the back-up flames from Olympia, but by a cigarette lighter, and later on, by a firework.'¹²⁶

The last runner was a medical student called John Mark, chosen for his looks, by all accounts, rather than for his athletic ability. The favourite had been Sydney Wooderson, who had been world record holder at the mile and half mile. In an article in the *Journal of Olympic History*, David Thurlow wrote that 'it is apparent that those who made the choice did not think that the little weedy-looking but wonderful runner fitted their image of a Greek god to bring in the flame.'¹²⁷ According to Thurlow, Philip Noel-Baker, the British Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, wrote in the preface to the official 1948 report about John Mark that 'Tall and handsome like a young Greek god, he stood for a moment in the sunshine, ran in perfect rhythm round the track, saluted again and lit the flame in the bowl.'¹²⁸, whereupon according to the account in the body of the Official Report, 'the Sacred Flame sprang into life'¹²⁹ It is strange that the British Organising Committee, in selecting an 'anonymous Adonis', as Thurlow calls John Mark, had apparently adopted the same policy as the Nazis, who had chosen 'a handsome but unknown athlete (Fritz Schilgen)' to light the flame.¹³⁰

The Olympic Hymn for 1948 was *Non Nobis Domine*. Written by Rudyard Kipling, it is perhaps the only Olympic Hymn ever sung which sounds like it is addressed to Almighty God. Although not explicitly Christian, it seems to me to be a fine attempt to give the glory where it belongs:

<i>Non nobis, Domine !</i>	<i>And we confess our blame,</i>
<i>Not unto us, O Lord,</i>	<i>How all too high we hold</i>
<i>The Praise and Glory be</i>	<i>That noise which men call Fame,</i>
<i>Of any deed or word.</i>	<i>That dross which men call Gold.</i>
<i>For in Thy Judgment lies</i>	<i>For these we undergo</i>
<i>To crown or bring to nought</i>	<i>Our hot and godless days,</i>
<i>All knowledge and device</i>	<i>But in our souls we know</i>
<i> That Man has reached or wrought.</i>	<i>Not unto us the praise,</i>

*O Power, by Whom we live,
Creator, Judge and Friend,
Upholdingly forgive,
Nor leave us at the end.
But grant us yet to see,
In all our piteous ways,
Non nobis, Domine,
Not unto us the Praise.*

124 1948 Official Report, p.217

125 Ibid. p.219

126 'London 2012: The 1948 torch relay on a shoestring' by Claire Heald, BBC News, 18 May 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12760836>

127 'Who was John Mark?' by David Thurlow, *Journal of Olympic History*, Volume 9, Number 3, September 2001 <http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/JOH/JOHv9n3/johv9n3l.pdf>, p.2

128 Ibid. p.3

129 1948 Official Report, p.223

130 Thurlow, op. cit., p.1

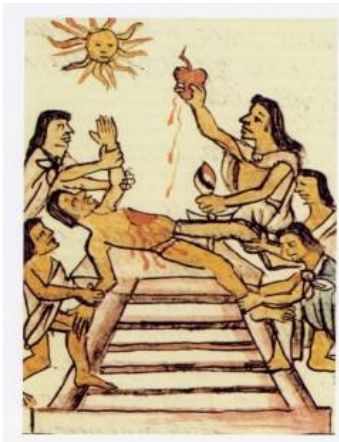
Pyramid of the Moon, Teotihuacan

At dusk on the 11 October, 1968, the Olympic torch arrived at Teotihuacan in Mexico, and was installed on the first esplanade of the Pyramid of the Moon.¹³¹ 3,000 dancers 'revived the ceremony of the 'New Fire' – a ritual performed by ancient Mexicans every 52 years.' According to the Official Report, 'Teotihuacan was a perfect setting to blend different myths, which, in the end, came to the same: the consecration of spring, the assurance that the sun would rise again after the reign of the moon, and the Resurgence of Fire – life and light – the final word.'¹³² In an article in the Bulletin of the IOC, Jacques Yerrey wrote of Teotihuacan as the place where 'according to Aztec tradition “ ..men become gods.” Writing in advance of the event, he looked forward to the flame being 'solemnly received during a typically Mexican ceremony inspired from the sacred rites of Pre-Hispanic peoples — a homage to fire rendered in the most elevated manner : the purity of spirit. Culture and tradition, from Hellas to Teotihuacán, will therefore be revived next year and linked by the course taken by this living symbol — the olympic flame.'¹³³



Above right and left: New Fire ceremony at the Pyramid of the Moon, 1968

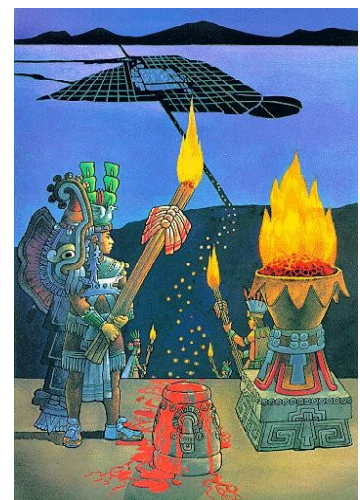
The tradition that was being revived had involved human sacrifice, the heart of a man being ripped out, and fire being kindled with a fire drill inside his chest, after all the fires in the city of Tenochtitlan had been extinguished.¹³⁴



Human sacrifice



Kindling fire with fire drill



Torches, altar and sacrifice

¹³¹ Olympic Report Mexico 1968, Vol. 2, Part 2, p.248

¹³² Ibid. Vol.4, Part 2, p. 630

¹³³ 'The olympic flame from Greece to Mexico' by Jacques M Yerrey, in Bulletin du Comite International Olympique, No. 98-99 May – August 1967

¹³⁴ 'Aztecs, importance of sacrifice.' Web-site of Pacific Lutheran University <http://www.plu.edu/~bluchehn/sacrifice/importance-sacrifice.html>

James Frazer writes that the Incas of Peru kindled new fire at the summer solstice in June, in honour of the sun. The 'sacred new fire' was obtained direct from the sun by concentrating its beams 'on a highly polished concave plate and reflecting them on a little cotton wool.' For three days before the festival 'the people fasted, men did not sleep with their wives, and no fires were lighted in Cuzco, the capital.' Lambs and sheep were sacrificed, offered up to the sun, and consumed in this 'holy' fire, with parts also roasted and eaten at the feast. It was used also to light flames in the temple of the sun and the 'convent of the sacred virgins', which were kept burning for another year.¹³⁵ Frazer (writing around 1913) describes similar annual ceremonies (using friction to kindle the new fire) amongst the Zuni Indians of Mexico, the Iroquois, the Eskimos, in the Sudanese kingdom of Wadai and in the Arab Bahr-el-Gazal province of the Egyptian Sudan, amongst the Swahili of East Africa, the Todas of South India, the Nagas of North-East India, and in Burma.¹³⁶ In China, 'of old', officials used to go about the country and order all fires to be extinguished. For three days the people ate cold food, and then on the 5th or 6th day of April 'new' fire was kindled 'by reflecting the sun's rays either from a metal mirror or from a crystal on dry moss.' The Chinese called this 'heavenly fire' and used it for sacrifices. Fire kindled by friction was called 'earthly fire' and was used for domestic purposes.¹³⁷

Strange fire

The annual 'renewal of fire' was known in China from the time of the first dynasty, about two thousand years before Christ,¹³⁸ and thus before the time of Aaron's sons. Richard Hess, Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Denver Seminary, writes concerning Leviticus 10 vv 1-2 that in light of 'the specific commands regarding fire in the sanctuary (Exod 27:20-21), the strange fire would have been brought in from outside the Holy Place. Furthermore, the .. association of the root, *zwr*, with foreigners and with other deities invites the possibility that the fire was used or produced in a manner similar to other non-Yahwistic cults.'¹³⁹ Hess points to ritual texts from 13th century BC Emar in the West Semitic world, which include a torch in the procession which accompanies a priestess of the storm god Addu as she enters for the first time into her new home in the temple. He asks whether it could be that 'this torch of fire, included as it is with the sacrifices, represents a special offering to the storm god, whether he goes by the name of Addu or Baal?', and suggests that Nadab and Abihu, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, were 'following a custom known elsewhere in ordination rituals.'¹⁴⁰ Hess also refers to other scholars who have connected the offering of strange fire with practices of devotion in foreign lands, including Egypt and Zoroastrian Persia.¹⁴¹

The September 1968 Bulletin of the IOC carries the text of a talk by Dr Henri Pouret, Laureate of the Academie Francaise, entitled 'Symbolism of the Olympic Flame'. He says that 'tomorrow .. we shall witness the birth of the sacred flame on the steps of Hera's temple. The sun of Peloponnesus, flame of all flames, will ignite a small wood fire and this newly-born flame will make its way to Mexico.. When thinking about the newly-born flame .. one suddenly experiences a sensation of joy and a feeling of fear when one imagines that this flame might go out before it reaches its destination.. The Olympic Flame increases the desire to change, to hasten time, to bring life to its end, to its hereafter.. The reverie which is aroused in the presence of the fire is really very thrilling and dramatic.. Tomorrow, thanks to lenses and the sun, fire will be born in the symbolic cup.. Halting in historic places, the flame will be carried day and night. This flame is all fire, will give us light and heat but also the elevation of our human state.'¹⁴² This notion of the fire being 'born' anew at the Lighting Ceremony in Olympia seems to me to be remarkably similar to the concept of the 'new fire' prevalent in pagan religion. The desire which Pouret expresses to 'bring life to its end' to reach the 'hereafter', also seems deeply pagan. Only Jesus Christ gives a new birth

135 Frazer, 'The Golden Bough', op. cit., p.132, citing Garcilasso de la Vega, Royal Commentaries of the Yncas, translated by (Sir) Clements R. Markham (Hakluyt Society, London, 1 869-1 871), vol. ii. pp 155-163

136 Ibid. pp 132-136

137 Ibid. pp 136-7, citing G. Schlegel, Uranographie Chinoise (The Hague and Leyden, 1875), pp.139-143

138 Ibid.

139 'Leviticus 10:1: Strange Fire and an Odd Name' by Richard S Hess, Denver Seminary, Bulletin for Biblical Research 12.2 (2002) http://www.ibr-bbr.org/files/bbr/BBR_2002b_02_Hess_Lev10StrangeFire.pdf , p.3

140 Ibid. p.8

141 Ibid. p.8, citing Laughlin 'The "Strange fire of Nadab and Abihu" ', et al

142 'Symbolism of the Olympic Flame' by Dr Henri Pouret, Bulletin of the Comite International Olympique, September 1968

and eternal life, only He can raise us up, not a transient flame.

Hymns to fire

The Fire Hymn, which was sung in 1936 at the torch relay ceremonies, and at the 'Olympic Youth' pageant, was not the last Olympic hymn addressed to fire itself. A new Olympic Anthem was sung at the 1952 Games at Helsinki, and had the following words:

Olympic Hymn of the XVth Olympic Games

Many a torch has been kindled on paths Man has trodden,
Many a torch has soon languished, fading in smoke in the darkness.

Thou ever shinest —
Shinest, Olympia-kindled,
Now on this day of my song over regions
Wider than when thy flame beckoned
Then when its white-gleaming lily
Burst into flower
In honour of Zeus, and
Hellas her youth saw in Elis' arena
So godlike in beauty that sculptors
Chiselled in marble also the statues
Of gods in their likeness.

Now to a world has Hellas expanded!
From all the earth's nations youth now assembles
In contest to resolve
Whose is the sturdiest soul and body, whose brow
The goddess will crown
With the laurel of honour,
Voicing the uplifting message:
Great is to conquer, greater is noble combat !

As long ago high-towering Pharos
Led with its beams the seafarer to harbour,
So ledest thou us, Olympian beacon,
Lighting the pilgrimage route of our hopes
To the coast of World Peace
With thy bright effulgence
In which are united two heaven-born elements:

A golden arrow of light and the soaring soul of mankind,
Swiftest of wing, these twain, in the whole vast cosmos.¹⁴³

Thus the choir in the Olympic Stadium at Helsinki in 1952 sang not to Almighty God, to whom all praise, glory and honour is due, but to the Olympian beacon, kindled at Olympia. They sang that two 'heaven-born' elements were united in the flame, a beam of light and the 'soul of mankind', and they looked to it to lead them to 'World Peace'.

An Olympic Hymn, with words by Kostis Palamas and music by Spiros Samara, was written for the 1896 Games in Athens. In 1958, according to one of their own Factsheets, the IOC at its Tokyo Session, adopted

¹⁴³ Olympic Hymn for the XVth Olympic Games, words by Toivo Lyy, translated from the Finnish original. Official Report of the XVth Olympic Games, p.107

it as the official Olympic Hymn.¹⁴⁴ It reads, in an official English translation:

Immortal spirit of antiquity,
Father of the true, beautiful and good,
Descend, appear, shed over us thy light
Upon this ground and under this sky
Which has first witnessed thy unperishable fame.

Give life and animation to those noble games!
Throw wreaths of fadeless flowers to the victors
In the race and in the strife!
Create in our breasts, hearts of steel!

In thy light, plains, mountains and seas
Shine in a roseate hue and form a vast temple
To which all nations throng to adore thee,
Oh immortal spirit of antiquity!¹⁴⁵

The IOC Charter, which all host nations are obliged to abide by, states that 'The Olympic anthem is the musical work entitled "Olympic anthem", composed by Spiro Samara.'¹⁴⁶ Unlike the IOC Factsheet, it does not mention the words or their author. Since the 1984 Los Angeles Games, completely different words have usually been used when the anthem is performed at Opening and Closing Ceremonies in English speaking countries. I have not been able to find an authoritative source, and repeated requests for information from the relevant national Olympic Committees have met with no helpful response. Wikipedia gives the following lyrics:

1. Olympian flame immortal
Whose beacon lights our way
Emblaze our hearts with the fires of hope
On this momentous day

6. As tomorrow's new champions now come forth
Rising to the fervent spirit of the game
Let splendour pervade each noble deed
Crowned with glory and fame

2. As now we come across the world
To share these Games of old
Let all the flags of every land
In brotherhood unfold

7. And let fraternity and fellowship
Surround the soul of every nation

3. Sing out each nation, voices strong
Rise up in harmony
All hail our brave Olympians
With strains of victory

8. Oh flame, eternal in your firmament so bright
Illuminate us with your everlasting light
That grace and beauty and magnificence

4. Olympic light burn on and on
O'er seas and mountains and plains
Unite, inspire, bring honor
To these ascending games

9. Shine like the sun
Blazing above
Bestow on us [the wondrous prize of] honor, truth
and love¹⁴⁷

5. May valor reign victorious
Along the path of golden way

144 Factsheet: Opening ceremony of the Games of the Olympiad. IOC, Update July 2009

145 Official Report of the 1st Olympic Games in Athens 1896, p.60

146 'Olympic Charter' IOC,

147 'Olympic Hymn' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Hymn

Video footage confirms that stanzas 1,2,4,5,6,7,8 and 9 (or something very similar) were sung at the 1984 Los Angeles Games.¹⁴⁸ At the 2010 Vancouver Games, all the stanzas appear to have been sung, numbers 1,2,4 and 6 in English and the rest in a French translation.¹⁴⁹

The IOC Technical Manual on Protocol lays down the order of proceedings in the Opening Ceremony. As the following extracts show, the opening of the Games by the Head of State of the host country (or their representative) is followed by the playing of the Olympic Anthem, which is in turn followed by the entry of the Olympic torch into the stadium and the lighting of the Olympic Flame.¹⁵⁰

1.9 The Head of State proclaims the Games open by saying: "I declare open the Games of ... (name of City) celebrating the ... Olympiad of the modern era (or the ... Olympic Winter Games)."

1.10 While the Olympic anthem is being played, the Olympic flag, unfurled horizontally, is brought into the stadium and hoisted on the flagpole erected in the arena.

1.11 The Olympic torch is brought into the stadium by runners relaying each other. The last runner circles the track before lighting the Olympic flame which shall not be extinguished until the closing of the Olympic Games. The lighting of the Olympic flame shall be followed by a symbolic release of pigeons.

Thus this version of the Olympic Anthem, which is addressed to the 'immortal' Olympian flame, and which we can expect to be sung at the 2012 London Games, is followed immediately by the entrance of the flame which is borne by the torch, and the lighting of the stadium flame. It is idolatrous in the extreme, especially since it is the same flame, from the point of view of the Olympic authorities, as was lit from the sun at Olympia, while calling upon the name of Apollo, light-bearer and god of the sun. This flame is to light the way of those who join in with the proceedings, to emblaze their hearts, to illuminate them with an everlasting light and bestow on them honour, truth and love. Only the light of God is true light. Only the fire of God brings goodness and truth. Let us not invite the devil to shine on us.

Andrew Chapman
Oxford
18 June 2012

Revised,
with corrections,
19 June 2012

148 Olympic Anthem 1984 Los Angeles Opening Ceremony <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20coe3f09N4>

149 Measha sings the Olympic Hymn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxQNQPJmzrc>

150 Technical Manual on Protocol, IOC 2001, pp 47,49