BULGARIAN CYCLING UNION (BCU) - BADGES AND MEDALS

(Preliminary communication)

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Abstract

This paper presents BCU badges and medals from its early period (1902-1930), which belong to private collectors. Cycling is a sport with an impressive history, not only with respect to its achievements, but also with respect to its organizational life. This paper aims to introduce and make public private collection badges and medals related to the Bulgarian Cycling Union and the Ruse Cycling Society. The first Bulgarian bicycle was made in 1880 in Nova Zagora, in 1883 the first original English bicycle, type “spider”, was imported.

Keywords: cycling sport, cycling association, Sofia Cycling Club, interclub meetings, badges, medals,

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to introduce and make public private collection badges and medals related to the Bulgarian Cycling Union and the Ruse Cycling Society. It also aims to acquaint historians and phalerists with them (phaleristics is an auxiliary historical science which deals with orders, medals, badges, plaques, etc.) so that they can use them for the research purposes.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The history of cycling is among the most impressive ones, considering both the achievements and its long organisational life, its presence in Bulgarian sport, public and political life. It is also an important element in our physical culture.

The first Bulgarian bicycle was made in Bulgaria in 1880 in Nova Zagora by the master wagoner Geno Stoyanov - „Арабаджийата“.

In 1883 the first original English Hige bicycle was imported in Veliko Tarnovo by the merchant Metodi Hadzhipekov.

In 1891, about twenty amateur cyclists started a cycling association called „Софийски дицъл изкуствен клуб“(Sofia Cycling Club) which was later renamed to "Софийски колоездачен клуб" (also Sofia Cycling Club). The first protocol of the club reads: “the main goal is to befriend and unite Sofia cyclists, organise group tours and achieve certain order in their rides”. The main goal was later changed to “the club aims to maintain, popularise and propagate cycling as a healthy and physically strengthening exercise and to use bicycles as a means of easier communication”.

The first issue of the Bulgarian Cyclist magazine was published on 15.04.1899. The magazine announced its goal in the introductory article as follows: “This is going to be a monthly issue and it is going to chronicle all cycling-related events in Bulgaria and abroad. It is also going to provide valuable advice on this sport and publish articles related to it. (Вичев (Бичев) & Туджаров (Туджаров), 1959; Кретовников (Кретовников), 1952; Матеев (Матеев), 1994; Мангуро (Мангърьов) & Вичев (Бичев) 1954; Мангуро (Мангърьов) & Вичев (Бичев), 1956).

Meanwhile, cyclists appeared in other cities, too. In 1891 M. Hazan and El. Benesh crossed the streets of Ruse with penny-farthing bicycles (the front wheel is big, while the other one is small). Two years later some resourceful merchants opened the first bicycle factory in Ruse. They imported parts from other countries and assembled the bikes in the workshop. A lot of Ruse’s citizens bought these bikes and in 1895 the second Bulgarian cycling society was created in Ruse.

Over the next several years, 20 cycling clubs had been established all through Bulgaria. The most active ones were those in Sofia, Ruse, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Svishtov, Pleven, Tarnovo, Varna and others. They
enthustiastically promoted and propagated cycling as a way to gain physical strength and express oneself in sport. Journeys, trips, competitions and interclub meetings were widely used for this purpose. The need to create a centralised management for national cycling was becoming obvious.

After a number of preparatory meetings the Bulgarian Cycling Union’s constitutive congress was scheduled on 03.08.1902. In order to do this, the residents of Ruse prepared a special timetable. The guests were welcomed with solemnity in the morning. There were organized big gymnastics and cycling games and hunting competitions in the afternoon. The event ended with a torch procession. The constitutive congress was opened by the Sofia delegate G. N. Georgiev. Ten delegates from six associations (Sofia, Ruse, Pleven, Plovdiv, Varna and Pazardzhik) participated in it. The congress drew up the statute project, approved it and elected the managing board of the Union. The congress chairman, G. Georgiev proclaimed the Union as founded and announced the close of the congress. Colonel G. Vazov was elected BCU’s chairman of the board, Kisimov – vice president, Georgiev – secretary and captain Draganov (chiefain.STAJE OVO) (Bichev (Bичев) 1953; Ignatov (Игнатов) & Bidhev (Бичев), 1956; Mateev (Матеев), 1955; Milushev (Милушев), 1988).

BCU’s foundation accelerated the growth of the cycling movement in Bulgaria. In 1905 the Union numbered 27 organisations, while there were 74 such organisations in 1912. Annual congregations were held where competitions were organised to choose the union flagbearer. The first union flagbearer was Nikola Gyuzelev from Pazardzhik.

Similarly to almost all public and social, and cultural and sport organisations, BCU also made badges and medals for its union members and for almost all BCU-related events. The Union badge (Fig. 1) was made of bronze and had a diameter of 30mm. There was a shield with the Bulgarian flag in the middle and “Български колоездачен съюз * 1902 *” (Bulgarian Cycling Union) was written on white glaze around the shield.

The badge of honour (Fig. 2) was given for the service to the union. It was made of bronze, had a diameter of 25mm, was glazed and shaped as a medal with a red triangular bearer. It represented a five angular star with ten red glazed rays with a green glazed garland around and BCU’s emblem in the middle with a white glazed text around it reading “почетна – за заслуга” (of honour – for service).

We present the unique badge worn by the chairman of the Union from our private collection. It is made of bronze and is glazed. It consists of the union badge and a white glazed inscription above it which reads “ПРЕДСЕДАТЕЛЬ” (CHAIRMAN) (Fig. 3).

One of the most active cycling societies was the Ruse one, which was created in 1895. It ordered a society badge for its members to be made (Fig. 4). It is a bronze shield glazed in white, green and red. The white part is in the top left, the green one is in the middle and the red one is in the bottom right. There is a bicycle in the green circle in the center and an inscription around it saying “колоездачно дружество • здравей •” (cycling society • hello •). There is an inscription on the line above the shield saying “русенско” (Ruse) and a stylized bicycle wheel.

Other societies also ordered badges for their members.

Badges were made for round anniversaries, too. A bronze badge was made for Ruse Cycling Society’s 25th anniversary (Fig. 5). It was glazed in white, green
and red (placed diagonally) and an inscription read "юбилей • български колоездачен съюз • 1902 • 1927" (anniversary • Bulgarian cycling union • 1902 • 1927).

Badges were also made for the annual congregations. From the private collection we are presenting the badges which were made for the 4th, 9th and 10th annual cycling congregations.

A bronze badge was made for the 4th annual cycling congregation in Sofia (Fig. 7). It is silver-plated and shaped like a medal with a triangular bearer which consists of a white stripe with green and red edging. The badge is highly symbolic: a cyclist is holding a bicycle and his right hand, which is holding a garland, is raised. There are floral and geometrical motifs, three shields saying "БКС", 3-5•X" and "1919 г "("BCU", 3-5•X" and "1919") and there is an inscription around saying "Спомен отъ част. колоездачен съборь • софия" (a memory from the Cycling congregation • Sofia). A round bronze badge was ordered for the 9th annual cycling congregation Fig. 8). It has sports and cycling...
symbolism and an inscription saying “плевен • IX редовен колоездачен събор • 9-12. VII 1922” (Pleven • 9th annual cycling congregation • 9-12.VII.1922).

For the 10th annual cycling congregation an elliptical bronze tin badge was made (Fig. 9). It had a cyclist in the middle and a garland in the periphery. There is also an inscription saying “редовен колоездачен събор*X*пловдив*1923*”(annual cycling congregation •X• Plovdiv • 1923 •).

The Bulgarian Cycling Union holds different competitions and races annually. Prize medals different in type, size and layout have been made for the winners.

We are presenting 3 such medals from our private collection. One of them (Fig. 10) is made of copper; it is silver-plated and does not have a bearer. It also has rich cycling symbolism. There is an inscription on the reverse side which reads: “II място, издържливост, 30 км, Рузе, 30.X.1927г”(second place for stamina 30km Ruse 30.X.1927). The second one (Fig. 11) is shaped like a quadrangular star with eight rays made of white metal with a three-colour bearer. Its size is 40x40mm. There is a blue glazed inscription in the middle saying “награда”(prize). An inscription is cut on the reverse - “III-и - Варна, I място, 25.6.1922г” (Shumen - Varna first place 25.6.1922). The third medal (Fig. 12) is similar to the previous one. There is the inscription “награда”(prize) in the middle, glazed in blue and it is surrounded by a gold-plated garland. There is an inscription on the reverse saying “III-и – Каспичан, I място, 13.V.1923г.” (Shumen – Kaspichan • first place • 13.V.1923).

CONCLUSIONS

Following conclusions can be made following the review of the above shown badges and medals:

1. Most badges and medals from the beginning of the 20th century are works of art, namely little plastics with rich decorations and symbols.
2. The badges and the medals (especially the ones with inscriptions) give a lot of information about the respective events, but they are greatly underestimated by the researchers as historical artefacts.
3. The Bulgarian Cycling Union orders badges and medals for almost all their events: congregations, congresses, competitions, get togethers, etc.

REFERENCES


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