An Essay on the Extent and Significance of the Greek Athletic Culture in the Classical Period*

THOMAS HEINE NIELSEN

1. Introduction
Most people know that in antiquity, as in our day, the Olympics were celebrated every four years. Most classicists know that in antiquity the Olympics were not the only major athletic festival in existence, but formed a part of the famous *periodos* (“tour”, “circuit”), a series of four athletic festivals which were scheduled with an eye to each other in such a way that every year saw one or two celebrations of games in this most prestigious group of festivals.1

Most Pindarists know that even the four famous athletic festivals of the *periodos* – those at Olympia, at Delphi, at Nemea, and on the Isthmos of Korinthos – were only the tip of a large athletic iceberg: in the victory catalogues of his epinician odes, Pindar refers, in addition to the four big festivals of the *periodos*, to more than twenty athletic festivals at which his customers had been victorious prior to the victory celebrated by the ode, which is almost always a victory in one of the festivals of the *periodos*.2 Clearly, then, the ancient Olympics were far from being the only athletic and equestrian festival celebrated in ancient Greece. In the following, I shall discuss just how many athletic festivals we can reasonably assume were actually celebrated in Classical Greece – and ask why this matters, as I believe it does.3

2. The epigram commemorating Nikolaidas of Korinthos
I shall begin by considering a well-known athletic epigram which is of great interest in the present connection,

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<th>Olympiad year</th>
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<tr>
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Fig. 1. *The periodos of the 75th Olympiad (after Golden 1998, 10-1)*

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* This essay is based on a lecture given at The Danish Institute at Athens on December 8, 2010 and at the Centre for Spartan and Peloponnesian Studies at the Department of Classics, University of Nottingham on 15 March, 2011. I thank Dr Rune Frederiksen, Director of the Danish Institute at Athens, for the invitation to give the lecture at Athens, and for his hospitality during my sojourn at the Institute; and Dr Jim Roy for the invitation to speak at Nottingham as well as for his hospitality. Mr Niels Grotum Sørensen kindly read and commented on a draft of the text and his eagle eyes and sharp mind greatly improved it.

1 The formation of the *periodos* is discussed by Funke 2005.

2 The basic treatment of Pindar’s victory catalogues is still Kramer 1970; a brief treatment is offered by Gerber 2002, 71-8.

3 Most of the empirical material on which the following is based is presented in detail in my forthcoming publication: ‘The proliferation of athletic and equestrian competitions in late-Archaic and Classical Hellas and the prestige of a Nemean victory’, to which I should be understood to refer throughout the essay.
the epigram celebrating the victories of the Korinthian sprinter and pentathlete 5 Nikolaidas:


5

Nikolaidas is not otherwise known, and the epigram is unusual in having been transmitted by manuscript and not as an inscription. 7 It is attributed to Simonides and though it is probably not by him, it is commonly accepted that it must date to the late 6th or to the 5th century BC 8 and was copied from the base of a commemorative statue erected nally, it may be noted that the last verse states that the

verses implicitly claim that Nikolaidas will be spoken of by future generations on account of his Pythian victory: “This monument a Korinthian erected, who won at Delphi once, Nikolaidas”. By his use of “pote” – “once” – the author of the epigram takes the perspective of a future reader, 10 and a future reader would, by reading the poem aloud to himself and others, prove the poem’s implicit claim to kleos to be true when he read the word “pote” aloud; and that claim to kleos is followed immediately by the name of the athlete, who is, accordingly, made to live on the lips of future generations. Furthermore, the first three verses are, like many an opening in Pindar, cast more or less in the form of a herald’s proclamation of victory, which was from the point of view of the athlete the most euphoric moment of a competition, the very moment which marked and created his victory, since they give his name (Νικολάδας), the name of his polis (Κορίνθος) as well as of the sites at which (ἐν Δελφοῖς … καὶ Παναθηναίοις) and the discipline in which (πέντ’ ἐπ’ ἀέθλοις) he had won (ἐνίκηκα). 11 Finally, it may be noted that the last verse states that the victories of Nikolaidas “were a joy unto the mighty city of Korinthos” (ηφορανεν μεγάλαν Κόρινθον): it is a reasonably common idea in victory epigrams, as well as in Pindar, 12 that an athlete shares the symbolic capital of his victory with his home city. 13

4\footnote{At least three other athletes of the late Archaic and Classical period were outstanding both as pentathletes and as sprinters: (1) Phaylos of Kroton won the pentathlon and the stadium at Delphi (Paus. 10.9.2); (2) Xenophon of Korinthos won the same disciplines at Olympia (Pind. Ol. 15.29-31), on the same day (Schol. in Pind. Ol. 15.12 (Dračmann): τοῦτο τὴν ὑπόμνησιν ἰδέως), a ‘first and only’, on which see more below, p. 14-5; (3) Eupolemos of Elis won the stadium at Olympia in 396 BC and the pentathlon twice at Delphi and once at Nemea (Paus. 6.5.7); on Eupolemos’ Olympic victory of 396 BC, see Crowther 1997 and Romano 2007.}

5\footnote{Text after Maróti 1990. On the metre, see Page 2008, 262. On the epigram in general, see Blinkenberg 1909; Ebert 1972, no. 26; Page 2008, no. 43.}

6\footnote{“This monument a Korinthian erected who won at Delphi once, Nikolaidas; and at the Panathenaia he took as prizes in the pentathlon countless amphorae of oil. At the sacred Isthmos the shore saw him gain the prizes of the Lord of the Sea thrice in a row. At Nemea he won thrice and four times at high Pellene; twice on Mt Lykaion, and at Tegea, on Αίγινα and at strong Epidauros, at Θῆβαι and among the people of Μεγάρα; and one victory at Phleious. All these victories in the stadion were a joy unto the mighty city of Korinthos.” All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.}

7\footnote{Anthologia Palatina XIII.19.}

8\footnote{Ebert 1972, 93: “Da im Epigramm ungefähr dieselben Feste wie z.B. bei Pindar Ol. VII 8 ff. und Nem. X 44 ff. erwähnt sind … dürfte Nikoladas ins Jh. v. Chr. gehören”; Maróti 1990, 133: “Vermutlich ist der in das 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr. datierbare Text von einer Steininschrift aus Korinth abgeschrieben worden”, Page 2008, 268: “The epigram is certainly inscriptional, and the heading ‘by Simonides’ may be an indication that it is relatively old, one of the numerous athlete-inscriptions of the late archaic and classical periods”.}


10\footnote{Ebert 1972, no. 26 comm. ad loc.: “τοτέ zeigt, daß das Denkmal für die Betrachtung auch durch späteren Geschlechter berechnet ist”.}

11\footnote{On the herald’s proclamation of victory, see Wolicki 2002, esp. 75-6: “As a rule it was composed of the following elements: 1. ‘Personal data’ of the winner: his proper name, the name of his father and his ethnic background; 2. A suitable form of the verb νικᾶν; 3. The description of a competition which he won”.}

12\footnote{Saïd & Trédé-Boulmer 1984.}

13\footnote{See Ebert 1972, nos. 12, 19, 27, 35, 36, 39; see also Nielsen 2002, 204-10 and Nielsen 2007, 88-98.}
This epigram clearly makes as much as possible of Nikolaidas’ victories, and though he was apparently never an Olympionikes, his career is in fact quite impressive as described in the victory catalogue of the epigram, its most notable feature: Nikolaidas won at twelve different festivals, among which were three festivals belonging to the prestigious periodos. However, the nine non-periodic festivals at which Nikolaidas won are more significant in the present context. These festivals were all staged by poleis situated within reasonably easy travelling distance from Korinthos, and it is rather striking that this description fits no less than nine athletic festivals, since it suggests, in a general way, that most poleis near Korinthos celebrated religious festivals which included athletic competitions. None of these nine non-periodic festivals, it should be noted, were put on by Korinthos itself, and this observation is not as unimportant as it may at first seem, for it means that the poleis which arranged these athletic competitions allowed athletes from foreign poleis to participate in them. It is, of course, well known that at Olympia "every Greek who so wished" (ὁ βουλόμενος τῶν Ἑλλήνων) was allowed to compete, and that we know of Olympic victors from no less than sixty-five different poleis in the Classical period. It should, however, be remembered that this extremely international profile of the Olympics was at least in part the result of a conscious decision by Elis to attract athletes from all over the far-flung Hellenic world by setting up a complex system of epangelia by which it announced upcoming celebrations of the Olympics throughout the Hellenic world, and that the invited cities regularly sent official delegations to Olympia in response to Elis’ invitation to participate in the festival of Zeus. It seems a reason-

able assumption that poleis such as Tegea, Aigina, and Epidaurus – mentioned together in verse 9 – must have had some way of announcing their festivals outside the poleis itself. Even if these were less ambitious systems than that of Elis, they will still have created at least some official diplomatic interaction between the poleis organising athletic festivals and the poleis invited to participate.

Sometimes the epangelic system became just as complex as the Olympic system, as in the case of Epidaurus, which set up an elaborate epangelic system in the 4th century BC. However, the Epidaurian festival of the Asklapieia existed at least from the second half of the 6th century and attracted foreign athletes right from that point in time. It is, accordingly, not very likely that the festival was not internationally announced in one way or another in the 6th and 5th centuries, when it is known to have been visited by athletes from at least Aigina, Argos, Korinthos, and Rhodes, as well as by the rhapsode Ion of Ephesos.

Finally, it should be noted that the festival at Phleious is attested only by the epigram commemorating Nikolaidas – by coincidence, in other words: had this epigram not survived, it would not have been known that the city of Phleious staged an athletic festival which attracted non-citizen competitors; and what this suggests is, of course, that there must have existed athletic festivals which have left no mark in our records at all, though there is no way of quantifying this Dunkelziffer. The Nikolaidas epigram, in conclusion, testifies to the existence in the late 6th or 5th century of at least nine athletic festivals outside the prestigious periodos, at least one of which is of great obscurity.

15 Nielsen 2007, 60-1.
16 On the Olympic epangelia by Elis, see Perlman 2000, 63-6 and Nielsen 2007, 62-8.
18 Cf. Pind. Nem. 5.50-2 with Sève 1993, 305; Perlman 2000, 67 n. 1 (’530 BC at the latest’).
20 Pl. Irm 530b (Sève 1993, 328 no. 19).
21 From Xen. Hell. 4.2.16 it appears that Phleious proclaimed an ekhotheia in the 4th century, but the passage does not reveal for which festival this truce was proclaimed; it cannot, of course, be excluded that it was proclaimed for the festival at which Nikolaidas won his victory; the CPC Invento-
yry s.v. Phleious (no. 353) 614 notes cults of Ganymede and Hera at Phleious.
22 As an example of an athletic festival which is not attested in the Archaic or Classical period we may mention the festival at Arkadian Mantinea in honour of the patron divinity Poseidon Hippios, which is known only from the Hellenistic period (IG IV, 1 629) but presumably was much older (Joost 1985, 133).
The epigram is a conspicuous example of a polis highlighting and taking its share of the glory generated by the athletic victories of one of its sons. It employs most of the methods of creating surplus-value, that is, ways of enhancing the prestige of a victory, which were pointed out by Pleket (1975, 79):

Victory in itself was not enough. There is a tendency to add, so to speak, a ‘surplus-value’. I shall not give a long list of these ‘surplus-values’ here; I have in mind athletes who won ἀκονιτί (i.e. without having to fight, because all opponents withdrew before the beginning of the games out of fear of the superstar) and ἀπτῶτος (without having fallen on one’s knee; a surplus value for wrestlers, who had won when they had thrown their opponents on the floor three times) or who achieved a series of victories on one day or for the first time; in the latter case he could be first of all human beings or first of his fellow-citizens or first of his fellow-provincials.20

Thus, the present epigram states that no other man won both the boxing and the pankration at Olympia (οὐ γὰρ
tic Ὀλυμπίαι ἐστεφανώθη ... ὥν[τὸς] [ἂν]ήρ, a first and only, as it in fact was at the time. Furthermore, one of the three Pythian victories was won ἄκονιτι, without dust = without opposition, again a first and only, as spelled out in verse six: "This no other mortal man achieved" (τὸ δὲ θνητὸς ἀνὴρ οὔτις ἐρέξει ἔπερος). Finally, at the Isthmian Games Theogenes won both the boxing and pankration "on the same day" (ἡματὶ τῶιτω), again a first and only (μοῦνον ἐπιχθονίων). Clearly, Thasos is at pains to squeeze the last drop of glory out of Theogenes’ career: the city obviously took great pride in its famous son.

However, the most remarkable detail of the epigram is the fact that Theogenes is credited with 1,300 victories during a career lasting more than twenty years (vv. 10-2). Considering the obvious fact that the epigram is a triumphant celebration of Theogenes by his home polis it might perhaps be suspected that this is an inflated number of victories. However, two other sources give similar numbers for the victories achieved by Theogenes: according to Plutarch, Theogenes won 1,200 victories; and according to Pausanias the number of his victories ran to 1,400. Now, since they do not give the exact same number as the epigram and since they do not agree with each other, Plutarch and Pausanias probably derive their numbers from two different sources independent of the epigram and so may be taken to confirm, in a general way, that the number given by the epigram is of the right order of size, and I shall for the present purposes accept that the number of victories won by Theogenes ran to 1,300. It goes without saying that these cannot all have been won at the festivals of the periōdos, and this is confirmed by the prose catalogue of his victories appended to the epigram, which meticulously lists every periodic victory of Theogenes:

THEOGENES TIMOXÉNOU THÁSIOU ΕΝΙΚΗΣΕΝ ΤΑΔΕ

| Ολύμπια πύξ | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Πυθοὶ πύξ | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Πυθοὶ πύξ | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Πυθοὶ πύξ ἀκονιτί | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Ιθμοὶ πύξ | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Ιθακηκόσιον | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Ιθμοὶ πύξ | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| ιχθιόνοις | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Ολυμπία πύξ | Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε | Νέμεα πύξ |

31 Plut. Prae. ger. rep. 15.7: ... χιλίους καὶ διακοσίους στέφανους, ὥν συνεπετο οὖν τις ἡγήσαι τοὺς πλείστους (cf. Pleket 1975, 60 and Brunet 2003, 224.)
32 Paus. 6.11.5: τοὺς δὲ σύμπαντας στέφανους τετρακοσίους τε ἔσχε καὶ χιλίους.
33 Text after Ebert 1972, no. 27.
34 Theogenes, son of Timoxenos, of Thasos won these victories

Olympia, boxing
Olympia, pankration
Delphi, boxing
Delphi, pankration
Delphi, boxing akoniti
Isthmos, boxing
Isthmos, boxing and pankration
Isthmos, boxing at the same
Isthmos, boxing
Isthmos, boxing

Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing
Nemea, boxing

Hekatamboia
dolichos
at Argos

Theogenes, then, won ‘only’ twenty-four victories at the festivals of the periodos. Accordingly, he must have won some 1,276 victories at festivals outside the periodos. Only two of these festivals can be identified and only a single one with certainty. (1) One victory was won at the Hekatomboia at Argos, as appears from the prose catalogue appended to the epigram (col. IV.3-5). This is the only non-periodic victory recorded on the monument in honour of Theogenes, and it is probably included because it was his most remarkable and prestigious victory in a contest outside the periodos and was won in an unusual discipline, the dolichos (long distance running). (2) Theogenes won another victory in the same discipline at an unnamed festival in Thessaly, according to Pausanias, presumably celebrated in honour of Achilles.

It cannot be entirely excluded that Theogenes won some of his remaining 1,274 victories in contests which were staged only once, to mark victory in war, the burial of a great man, or some other important event. Contests of this kind are not unknown: In 326 BC, Alexander the Great marked the victory at R. Hydaspes by athletic contests; and Roller has devoted an excellent study to funeral contests held to mark the burials of great men from Sicily adds a second example, which seems to have become a Macedonian peculiarity. In comparison with athletic contests incorporated into the religious festivals of city-states, such ad hoc competitions are rather poorly attested and it seems unlikely that victories in such competitions can constitute any significant part of Theogenes’ 1,276 non-periodic victories. Accordingly, the assumption should be that to gain 1,276 non-periodic victories Theogenes must have been victorious at numerous contests incorporated in the standard way into religious festivals, such as the Hekatomboia, and the presumption must be that he won his victories at the same festivals, or at the same kind of festival, as Nikokles of Korinthos, of whom Theogenes was in all probability a contemporary.

If we grant Theogenes an active career of 25 years, he must, to gain 1,276 non-periodic victories, have won on average 51 victories a year or approximately one every week. This scenario would mean the existence of 51 athletic festivals outside the periodos in the first half of the 5th century, if these festivals were celebrated every year. But most religious festivals incorporating athletic competitions were staged only every two or four years, and so the number of festivals needed for Theogenes to win his victories must be multiplied by a factor ranging between two and four, which would imply the existence of perhaps as many as 200 athletic festivals. Theogenes’ speciality was obviously boxing, in which he won 22 victories in the contests of the periodos (cf. the prose appendix) and was...
Xenophanes fr. 2.5 (West): cal, and archaeological evidence relevant here adds several
However, a survey of the literary, numismatic, epigraphical, and archaeological evidence relevant here adds several other sites of athletic competitions to these eleven. The most precious evidence is provided by epinician poetry and associated scholia. As indicated above, the victory catalogues of Pindar’s epinician odes refer to more than twenty athletic festivals outside the periodos, and in addition to Pindar we have fragments of Simonides and Bakchylides. This extremely valuable evidence is, however, not always easy to interpret in detail as a few examples will show. In his Thirteenth Olympian Ode, Pindar refers to victories won by Korinthian athletes and witnessed by “ταὶ ὑπ’ Ἁἰτνας ψυλλόφου καλλιπλουτοῦ | πόλεως” (Ol. 13.111-2). It is here implied that at least two poleis near Mt Etna staged contests, but it is not clear which these were; the usual assumption is that the reference is to Aitna and Syracuse, though at least Leonitinoi and Messana would seem to be candidates as well. Whichever cities arranged these festivals, it should be noted that they must have been open to non-citizens and that Korinthian nobles thought it worthwhile to travel for them.

Fig. 3. Sites of non-periodic athletic festivals attested by the career of Theogenes of Thasos

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<thead>
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<th>Inv.no.</th>
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<td>Argos</td>
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4. Non-periodic athletic festivals attested by or inferred from other evidence

4.1 Epinician poetry

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43 Xenophanes fr. 2.5 (West): ἄει ὁποίων ἀνέθλαιν δ ἁγιάρταιν καλλόσχοι.
47 Emended from νικάσ
48 Simonides fr. 506 (Campbell): “Who among men of this day has so often crowned himself with leaves of myrtle or garlands of roses after winning in a contest of the neighbours?”
49 So also Molyneux 1992, 215-6. Mann 2001, 101-2 argues, on the assumption that periktiones is a poetic equivalent of amphiktiones, that the reference here is to Pythian victories, but as pointed out by Molyneux (Molyneux 1992, 215-6) “[T]here is no evidence that Pindar felt ἀμφικτίονες alone (and a fortiori περικτίονες alone) to refer especially to the Delphic Amphictyons or to suggest especially the Pythian games; we may therefore assume that the same was true of Simonides”. Campbell (1991) in his Loeb edition translates ἐν ἄγωνι περικτίονον as indicated in the text and adds the explanatory note “In local games”. Pindar uses periktiones twice in his epinicians, at Nom. 11.19 and Isthm. 7.64; in both passages the word is best interpreted to refer to “men from the surrounding districts” (Bury 1892, 151; cf. 1890, 223); Race (1997b) in his Loeb edition translates “from the neighboring peoples” (Nom. 11.19) and “the men who lived around him” (Isthm. 7.64).
50 Cf. Molyneux 1992, 215: “[S]uch games were probably open to strangers as well as local entrants”.

43 Xenophanes fr. 2.5 (West): ἄει ὁποίων ἀνέθλαιν δ ἁγιάρταιν καλλόσχοι.
44 On Theogenes’ career, see also Ebert 1972, 120; Pleket 1975, 60, 81; Pleket 1998, 154; Pleket 2000, 642; Pleket 2001, 177; Brunet 2003, 224.
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was a native of Kroton in Southern Italy, but he may at
one point have become a citizen of Syracuse, and it is,
accordingly, not clear where we should locate the festivals
suggested by this fragment, since both Southern Italy and
Sicily are real possibilities.

Neither the passage of Pindar nor the fragment of
Simonides enables us to locate the festivals they mention
with any accuracy. Their evidence is, nonetheless, still
valuable since details on western Greek athletic festivals
are few indeed. However, these epinician references do in
a general way suggest that there must have been a well-de-
veloped athletic life in the Greek west, an assumption
which is also corroborated by the massive involvement
of the elites and athletes of these areas with the contests
on the Hellenic mainland.51

On the basis of the preserved epinician poetry we
may, with varying degrees of certainty, add 28 agonistic
festivals at 19 different sites to the 11 festival sites identi-
ﬁed on the basis of the sources relating to the careers of
Nikolaidas and Theogenes.

<table>
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<td>Simon. fr. 506</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Schol. Pyth. 8.91, 113</td>
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<td>Rhodos</td>
<td>Ol. 7.77-80</td>
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<td>1028</td>
<td>Kyrene (4)</td>
<td>Pyth. 97-103</td>
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Fig. 4. Sites of non-periodic athletic festivals attested by epinic poetry (in brackets the number of festivals if more than one)

51 On athletics in the Greek west, see Todisco 1997.
52 In addition to the Aiakeia at which I assume Nikolaidas was victorious.
53 At Eleusis and at Marathon, i.e. different from the Panathenaia at which Nikolaidas was victorious.
In this way, 39 non-periodic festivals at 30 different sites known or assumed with a very high degree of probability to have existed in the 5th century BC may be identified, most if not all of which must have allowed non-citizen entrants.

4.2 Athletic festivals attested by other types of evidence

39 non-periodic athletic festivals is an impressive number in itself, but it must be remembered that it has been generated exclusively from prosopographical evidence, i.e., these festivals can be identified only because they were visited by superstars such as Theogenes and high aristocracy such as the Diagorids of Rhodos. Accordingly, the presumption must be that a survey of other kinds of evidence will produce evidence of (many) other agonistic festivals.

(a) Numismatic evidence. Numismatic evidence is particularly difficult to handle in this connection. At Metapontion in Southern Italy competitions in honour of the river divinity Acheloos are attested by mid-5th century BC coins inscribed ΑΧΕΛΟΙΟ ΑΕΘΛΟΝ. To my knowledge, it has never been denied that this coinage is evidence of competitions at Metapontion, but, clearly, the coins themselves do not clarify whether these were athletic competitions; since the Greeks could turn almost anything into a competition, it cannot be considered certain that Metapontion put on athletic competitions, though it is of course in itself more than likely.

The famous coin from 5th-century Kos depicted in Fig. 5 has been interpreted as evidence for "prestigious local games" and if that is a valid interpretation, the type itself reveals that the competitions must have been athletic. The reference may perhaps be to the contests in honour of Apollo Triopios staged by the Dorian hexapolis and known from Herodotos (1.144), but it should be obvious that the evidence provided by the coin is too general to allow any conclusion on this matter. Numismatic evidence, then, is usually too vague to allow us to establish the existence of athletic competitions at a given polis with complete confidence and here I merely note that various agonistic competitions have been inferred for at least 14 poleis on the basis of numismatic evidence of the 5th and 4th centuries.

(b) Archaeological evidence. The most important archaeological evidence for the question under scrutiny is remains of or attestations of gymnasia and stadia. If the existence of a stadium is taken to be evidence of the existence of athletic competitions, it is worth noting that we have evidence of late Archaic or Classical stadia at at least 12 poleis. Gymnasia are perhaps a less certain indication of the existence of competitions, as opposed to the gymnastic lifestyle, but it may still be noted that the CPC Inventory notes remains of pre-Hellenistic gymnasia at 17 different poleis.

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54 On the Diagorids of Rhodos, see Hornblower 2004, 134-43.  
56 Burkert 1985, 105: "The number of things which the Greeks can turn into a contest is astounding: sport and physical beauty, handicraft and art, song and dance, theatre and disputation"; contests in painting and drawing are known from Delphi and Korinthos (Donderer 1996); cf. Kyle 1998, 117.  
57 Smith 2007, 121 Fig. 21.  
58 Aegean of the coins 89.
(c) Epigraphical and literary evidence. Though the archaeological evidence is valuable in giving a general impression of the extent of the athletic culture, epigraphical and literary evidence is more important in the present context, though we encounter difficulties of interpretation even here. Whatever the etymology and early meaning of the Greek term ἀγών was,59 by the Classical period it was the standard term employed to refer to competitive contests, as demonstrated by Ellsworth,60 who points out that it is clear from Herodotos (9.33-6) that even in ambiguous contexts 5th-century Greeks would commonly understand agon to refer to athletic contests.61 Herodotos here relates a story about the mantis Teisamenos of Elis who had received from Pythia an oracle to the effect that he would “win the five greatest contests” (ἀγῶνας τοὺς μεγίστους ἀναιρήσεσθαι πέντε). Teisamenos – mistakenly (ἀμαρτών τοῦ χρηστηρίου) – interpreted the oracle as referring to athletic victories (ὅς ἀναμνήσαμενος γυμνικοῦς ἀγώνας) and devoted himself (προσεῖχε γυμνασίοισι) to the πεντάεθλον in which he reached the finals at the Olympics only to be defeated by Hieronymos of Andros, possibly in 484 BC.62 The Lakodaimonians, however, realised that the reference was not to athletic contests but to “contests of Ares” (μαθόντες οὐκ ἐς γυμνικοὺς ἀλλ᾿ ἐς ἀρηίους ἀγῶνας φέρον τὸ Τεισαμενοῦ μαντήιον) and made Teisamenos a Spartan citizen, in which capacity (γενόμενος Σπαρτιήτης) he proceeded to function as mantis at five major military victories of the Lakodaimonians (listed in Hdt. 9.35.2). This story demonstrates that even a mantic expert could be represented as taking agonês to refer to athletics,63 even in this ambiguous oracular context; of course, it also demonstrates that on occasion the term could refer to military

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<td>Rutter 1997, 157; Pleket 2001, 168</td>
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<td>Rutter 1997, 49; 2001, no. 1491</td>
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<td>747</td>
<td>Kyzikos</td>
<td>Klose &amp; Stumpf 1996, no. 73</td>
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Fig. 6. Sites of agonistic competitions inferred from numismatic evidence

59 On this, see Scanlon 1983.
60 Ellsworth 1976, 229-30.
61 Ellsworth 1976, 229 n. 7.
62 Flower & Marincola 2002, 168 ad 9.33.2; Hieronymos is Moretti 1957, no. 173.
63 See further Flower 2008, 40-2 who points out (42) that the story was probably designed to enhance the stature of Teisamenos.
64 E.g. Antiph. 6.21.
 contests though it took a community of martial experts to realise this. Moreover, it is well known that the term was also employed to refer to forensic contests.64 Accordingly, even if the standard meaning of agon was by the Classical period "athletic contest" it does on occasion carry another – possibly an older – meaning and the occurrence of the 

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<td>Bommelaer 1991, 72-9</td>
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<td>Welter 1941, 35-8; Jameson et al. 1994, 83</td>
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<td>Kyle 1993, 64-92</td>
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<td>Marangou 1987, 255</td>
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Fig. 7. Sites with stadium or gymnasium
term in, e.g., an inscription cannot be taken with full certainty to be evidence for the existence of athletic contests (gymnici agones) at a given site. One example will suffice:

At Teos a "full gymniv program" has been assumed for the festival of the Anthesteria. The assumption is based on a passage in the famous early 5th-century imprecations of the city, in which occurs the passage καθημένου τῶγονος Ανθεστηρίσιν και Ηρακλείσιν και Δίοισιν: "when the agon is assembled at the Anthesteria and the Herakleia and the Dia". Clearly, three central festivals are referred to here, but whether they included "a full gymniv program" or contests at all, must depend on the interpretation of τῶγονος. Tod (1948, 30) took it to refer to "the people assembled to witness a contest", a perfectly possible meaning attested already in epic. Ellsworth (1976, 232), however, is convinced that the reference here is in fact to athletic contests:

To be sure, καθημένου indicates that ἀγῶνος designates people gathered together. The question is, for what purpose are they gathered? The inscription limits ἀγῶνος to the Anthesteria, Herakleia, and Dia; very little is known about these festivals. When one considers that at this time (1) religious festivals and athletic contests were closely associated, and (2) one of the most common meanings of ἀγών was 'games, contest(s)', it is reasonable to conclude that these festivals included contests.

Ellsworth’s conclusion is probably correct; but certainty is impossible and the existence of athletic contests at Teos must remain an assumption, though it would not at all be surprising to find athletic competitions incorporated into festivals in honour of Zeus and Herakles.

In other, more special, cases the existence of athletic contests can be inferred with greater confidence. Classical poleis often granted an honorandus proedria – an honorary

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Fig. 8. Poleis granting proedria en tois agosin

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65 Scanlon 2002, 290.
seat in the front row – when they voted honorific decrees. The term *proedria* is not infrequently specified by the addition of a phrase like ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν or εἰς τοὺς ἀγώνας (“at the competitions”). *Poleis* granting the privilege of *proedria en tois agosin* presumably arranged more than one agonistic festival and it seems a reasonable assumption that at least one of these will have been athletic or equestrian. At least 13 different *poleis* voted the honour of *proedria en tois agosin* in the 5th and 4th centuries:

But inscriptions, of course, often refer to sites of competitions in a straightforward way, and a good example of this is provided by a 4th-century catalogue of victories won by one Prateas and his son Aischylos from Argos, who were both wrestlers:

Πρατέας Αἰσχύλου
πάλαν Λύκαια,
"Ἰθμια, Νεμέαια.
παρ’ Ἰῆρα, Παναθάναια,
Νεμέα, Νεμέα, Νεμέα,
ἐς Μαίναλως, Πόθια ἐν Δελφοῖς
Τιμία.
Αἰσχύλος Πρατέα Νεμέαι πάλαν.

Most of the festivals at which Prateas and Aischylos were victorious are well known, but the festival at the Arkadian city of Mainalos – or perhaps on Mount Mainalon – is attested only here amongst Classical sources.

Another excellent group of evidence is constituted by inscribed artefacts which originally served as prizes, as for example a vessel originating from Boiotian Thespiai and inscribed [...] *H*eρακλέως ἐς *Θεσπίας* (“[... of/from H]erakles at Thespiai”), where in front of the preserved text some word such as ἄθλων or παρά must originally have stood. Clearly, competitions in honour of Herakles existed at Thespiai and it seems a safe assumption that they were athletic. Going through the epigraphical corpus I have identified a further 16 sites at which athletic competitions were certainly or probably held. From the literary evidence six more sites can be added. Adding up all the sites identified in the way described here, we reach the conclusion that some 82 sites were in the 5th and 4th centuries with varying degrees of probability and certainty the location of athletic and/or equestrian competitions. I do not claim to have identified every athletic festival there was and personally I believe that the real number of *poleis* arranging athletic festivals was a good deal higher than 82. It is also worth noting that some cities, most notably Athens, Aigina, Syracuse, Sparta, and Kyrene, incorporated athletic contests into more than one festival and so the number of athletic festivals is higher than the number of *poleis* staging athletic contests.

Even more interesting is the fact that no less than 15 sites outside the *periodos* are known, or strongly presumed, to have put on athletic festivals as early as the 6th century BC. One of these 6th-century festivals may profitably be singled out for comment: the festival in honour of Miltiades the Elder in his capacity of oecist of Chersonesos. *Herodotos* (6.38.1) relates that ever since the death of Miltiades – c. 524 – “the people of the Chersonese have offered in his honour the sacrifices commonly due to the Founder of a state, with chariot-races and athletic competitions in which nobody from Lampsakos is allowed to compete”. The last remark – that nobody from Lampsakos was allowed to compete in these contests – suggests that they were in fact open to citizens of other *poleis* in the area, as pointed out by Lionel Scott. Even such local competitions, then, may regularly have

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68 SEG XVII 158; date: Amandry 1980, 220.
69 "Prateas, son of Aischylos, won the wrestling at the festival of the Lykaia, the Isthmia, the Nemeaia [sc. at the Nemean Games], at the festival of Hera, at the Panathenaia, the Nemeaia, the Nemeaia, at Mainalos [or: on Mt. Mainalon], at the Pythia at Delphi, the Isthmia. Aischylos, son of Prateas, won the wrestling at Nemea."
71 On Herakles at Thespiai, see Schachter 1986, 31-6.
72 Details in Nielsen forthcoming (*Proliferation*).
73 Isaac 1986, 171.
74 καί οἱ τελευταίαν Χερσονησίας θύουσι ὡς νόμος οἰκιστῆς, καὶ ἄγωνι ἵππων τε καὶ γυμνικῶν ἐπιστᾶσι, ἐν τῷ Λαμψακηνῶν οὐδὲν ἐγγίγματα ἄγωνες ἐφιέθεοι (trans. de Selincourt 1993).
75 Scott 2005, 176.
been open to outside competitors already in the Archaic period, as the competitions at Epidauros demonstrably were.

Adding the festivals attested in the 6th century to those attested for the Classical period we reach the tentative conclusion that some 87 sites were or may well have been the location of athletic competitions in the late 6th century and the Classical period (see Fig. 9 below), and that is as close as we can reasonably expect to get to a verification of the assumption made above on the basis of the career of Theogenes that there must have been at least somewhere around a hundred athletic festivals in the Classical period, though such a survey is by necessity of a somewhat impressionistic nature.

5. The significance of the athletic culture and of its extent

It is clear that the identification of 87 sites with athletic competitions rests on a number of sometimes unverifiable assumptions, but it seems not unreasonable to assume that this number must be of the right order of size and perhaps even a minimum figure. This large number may be quite surprising, but it may still be asked what the significance of this great extent of the athletic culture is: does it matter? In the following, I shall attempt to outline an answer to this question, though it goes without saying that I cannot here do more than suggest the importance of the athletic culture in a selective and even vague sketch.

It seems rather clear that the Greeks took the traditional athletic festival to be something distinctively Greek, something which distinguished Greeks from Barbarians; in other words, athletics constituted an ethnic boundary marker separating the Greeks from their neighbours. In this connection reference is commonly made to the ethnic exclusiveness of the Olympics. In fact, the rule for admission to the Olympics was formulated, not as a ban on Barbarians, but as an invitation to non-Eleian athletes, since it allowed ὁ βουλόμενος τῶν Ἑλλήνων to compete.77 In this respect, the Olympics simply resembled most other athletic festivals, which as a rule permitted non-citizens to compete, as should be clear from the discussion above. But it is also clear that the Olympic stipulation could on occasion be interpreted as a ban on Barbarian participation, as is clear from Herodotos’ story about King Alexander I of Macedon: according to Herodotos (5.22), the other competitors protested against Alexander’s participation on the grounds that the Olympics were not open to Barbarians, and in this connection it does not much matter whether this story – which ends by affirming the Hellenic identity of King Alexander – is a propagandistic fabrication since it had at least to resemble reality in order to be persuasive.78

The idea that athletics distinguish Greeks from Barbarians is found in other texts than Herodotos, as e.g. in Demosthenes’ First Philippic (40) where Demosthenes compares the way in which the Athenians react to the moves of king Philip II of Macedon to the way in which an inexperienced Barbarian boxer would meet the attacks of an accomplished boxer, who of course must be taken to be a Greek. Demosthenes says:

You carry on your war with Philip exactly as a Barbarian boxes. The Barbarian, when struck, always clutches the place. Hit him on the other side, and there go his hands. He neither knows nor cares how to parry a blow or how to watch his adversary. So you, if you hear of Philip in the Chersonese, vote an expedition there; if at Thermopylae, you vote one there.79

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76 This point has, of course, often been made in modern research on Greek culture, e.g. by Golden 1998, 4-5: “Athletic exercise and competition marked Greeks off from their neighbours, and the great Greek festivals of athletic and equestrian competition excluded non-Greek outsiders, barbari”; by Hansen 2000, 144: “[T]he have competitions in sports was a distinguishing mark of Greek civilisation, something in which the Greeks differed from all their neighbours”; and by Kyle 2007, 80: “That Homeric epics and the Olympic sanctuary – things shared and respected by all Greeks – both included athletic contests, as well as religious rituals and a traditional value system, meant that later Greeks regarded athletic games as part of their ethnicity, as proof of being Greek”. See also Nielsen 2007, 12-28.


79 οὐδὲν δ᾿ ἀπολέσσετε, ὅπερ οἱ βαρβάροι πυκτοῦσιν, οὗτο πολεμεῖν Φιλίπποι, καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι ὁ πληγεὶς ἐχει τῆς πληγῆς ἔχειν, καὶ ἐπέρρεσε πατάξῃ τῷ ἐκεί, ἐκείνοι οἱ χέρες προβάλλεσθαι δ᾿ ἡ βλέπειν ἕναντιν οὐ, οὔτε χέρες ἐθέλει καὶ ὡμες, ἐν ἑν Χερσονήσῳ πένθῃ Φιλίπποι, ἐκείνοι βοηθῆναι ζητεῖσθε, ἐν ὑμῖν Πόλιας, ἐκείστε κτλ. (trans. Vince 1930).
The underlying idea here is that a Greek knows boxing, whereas a Barbarian does not, and that of course is part of the more general idea that athletics distinguish Greeks from non-Greeks. The real sting of the comparison is surely that it is the Athenians who are cast in the role of an unsophisticated Barbarian boxer, whereas Philip – a Barbarian to Demosthenes – is assigned the role of an elegant Greek fighter. That one was definitely intended to hurt!

A passage in Plato suggests that at least some Greeks considered the role played by athletics in Greek society to be a function of the Greek way of life and thus again something distinctively Greek. In the Symposium (182b), Plato has Pausanias state that among “the Barbarians” pederastic relationships, philosophy, and philogymnastia (“fondness for gymnastics”) are considered aischron, “a bad thing.” It should follow e contrario that philogymnastia was not considered a bad thing among the Greeks, and it is interesting to note that the reason given for Barbarian dislike of philogymnastia is their political constitutions: διὰ τῶν ψαλάντιδων, “because of their dictatorial governments”, from which it ought to follow that there is a connection between athletics and the Greek way of life. Again, such a statement is part of the more general idea that athletics distinguish Greeks from non-Greeks.

Now, it is not true, as for instance Thucydides well knew, that “the Barbarians” did not practice various forms of athletics – even boxing, actually – but even so the Greek practice of athletics was constructed as an ethnic boundary marker and if the Greek athletic culture was in fact as extensive a phenomenon as I have suggested above, then we are in a better position to appreciate on what basis the Greek notion was founded and acknowledge that it did in fact have a solid base in the social and religious life of the Greeks. This is one important reason why the study of athletics matters.

But there are other reasons just as important. One reason, which was well understood by the Greeks themselves, is that athletics made a perfect setting for the pursuit of fame – kleos. The locus classicus is a passage from the Odyssey in the context of the athletic games put on by king Alkinoos to entertain the anonymous stranger who is Odysseus. When encouraging Odysseus to participate in the contests the young Phaeacian prince Laodamas says: “There is no greater glory – kleos – for a man so long as he lives than that which he achieves by his own hands and his feet.” There may perhaps be some poetic exaggeration involved in this statement, but the sentiment is not unique to this passage. One of the things constituting real kleos is that a man’s name and his achievements are remembered and spoken of by future generations. I pointed out above that the initial verses of the Nikolaidas epigram are composed in such a way that the implication is that the Pythian victory of Nikolaidas constitutes a claim to fame and in such a way as to force future readers to make that claim come true by the elegant juxtaposition of pote and the athlete’s name. This epigram, of course, not alone among post-Homeric sources in promoting athletic achievement as a claim to fame. Not surprisingly, the idea is found in Pindar, whose job it was to perpetuate the glory created by victory. The most general statement of the idea is found in the opening of the Fifth Isthmian Ode in honour of the pankration-fighter Phylakidas of Aigina. The passage reads as follows:

and in athletic competitions a man gains the glory (kleos) he desires, when thick crowns wreathe his hair after winning victory with his hands or the swiftness of his feet.

In addition to this gnomic sort of remark we find statements to the effect that particular victories brought kleos to the victor. Thus, in the opening of the Eighth Olympian Ode Pindar states that an Olympic victory brings eternal
glory – μέγα κλέος αἰεί – to the victor, the implication being that mega kleos is what the young Alkimedon of Aigina has earned for himself.66 Similarly, the First Olympian Ode claims that the kleos of Hieron of Syracuse shines brightly at Olympia on account of the victory won by his famous horse Pherenikos.87

The same idea – that athletic victory generates kleos – is found in epigrams accompanying sculptures set up to commemorate victory. A rather fragmentary 4th-century epigram from Olympia says of an unidentified runner that "twice has he gained kleos at the foot of Parnassos";88 and another, commemorating an equestrian victory at Olympia by one Xenobrotos of Kos, states that "Hellas sings his imperishable kleos in remembrance of his horsemanship."89 Finally, a 4th-century epigram from Delphi says the following of the equestrian victor, Archon of Pella: "Twice, oh happy Archon, did you receive your horsemanship at the Isthmos and at Delphi".90 The Greeks, then, developed two highly complex artistic genres to commemorate victory, epinikian odes and inscribed sculpture, two wonderful and extremely expensive ways of creating and perpetuating the fame of agonistic victory. That fame, clearly, must have been central to what athletes thought they were doing, and athletics must have constituted one of the primary arenas in which individuals pursued their fame; and since obsession with fame is one of the most fundamental characteristics of Greek culture, we have here one more reason why athletics matter – and the sheer extent of the athletic culture emphasises just how much it really matters.

I pointed out in my discussion of the epigram celebrating Theogenes that it was just that: a celebration of the athlete by his polis of origin, and the clear implication is that the city of Thasos took the enormous success of Theogenes to reflect on itself, or in other words, that the city took his victories to be its own victories. That a city rejoices in the victories of its athletes is also clear from the Nikolaidas epigram, which states that his victories were a joy unto the mighty city of Korinthos. Though an athletic victory was won by an individual, it was standard to construe victories as being also victories of the home city of the athlete. Thus, a Lysianic speaker can say that when his father was crowned as equestrian victor at the Isthmos and at Nemea, the polis of the Athenians was "proclaimed by the herald" (τὴν πόλιν κηρυχθήναι).91 This was not an entirely unreasonable thing to claim, since the herald’s proclamation of the victor contained his city-ethnic and so in this way the polis of the victor was in fact proclaimed.92 However, the thought often drifts to the metaphorical statement that during the victory ceremony the victor crowned his polis, as in a late 4th-century decree from Ephesos honouring a Nemean boy victor, Athenodoros, who, though he was in fact a metic, had himself proclaimed as an Ephesian at the victory ceremony: "Since Athenodoros, son of Semon, an isoteles living in Ephesos, has won the boys’ boxing at Nemea and by having been proclaimed as an Ephesian has crowned our polis", let it then be resolved that he be made an Ephesian citizen and receive various honours.93 The idea is fairly common, and there can be no doubt that the home polis of victorious athletes shared in the glory created by their victories.94 In short, such victories enhanced the fame of the home cities, as is clearly stated by both Xenophon and Isokrates.95 In other words, athletics constituted an arena in which polis competed with each other for fame and honour, in much the same way as the athletes themselves did, and that is one more

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86 Ol. 8.10–1: μέγα τοι κλέος αἰεί, ἦτοι τὸν γέρας ἔσπευ’ ἀγλαών.
87 Ol. 123.4: λάμπει δὲ οἱ κλέος ἐν εὐάνορι Λιδοῦ Πέλοπος ἀποκινήματι.
88 Ebert 1972, no. 48.7: [’Πήλεα Εἰσθανοῦσα Πολέως φέρει κλέος·] Ebert 1972, no. 46.1: [οὐκ οὗ κλέος Εἰσθανοῦσα·]
89 Ebert 1972, no. 48.5–6: [εὐάνορι Λιδοῦ Πέλοπος ἀποκινήματι.
91 Lysias 19.65: πρὸς δὲ τούτων ἄξιον εἴνησθαι οἷς ὄφοις ἐλεύθην ὁ παπερ. ὅσα γὰρ ἔχου τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἔπεμψαμεν ἀναλύσακαν πάντα φανερώστηκαν τουτα ὅθεν καὶ τὴν πόλιν τιμή μελελέεται ἐπιστήμῃ. αὐτίκα ὅτε ἐπέσαν, οὐ μόνον ἐπιστήμῃ ἐκπροκείμενῃ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀθλητῇς ἄξιος ἐνίσχυσεν Ἰσθμοῖ καὶ Νεμέα, ὅποτε τὴν πόλιν κηρυχθήναι καὶ αὐτοῦ στορονθήθηναι.
92 On the herald’s proclamation of victory, see note 91 above.
reason why athletics matter to the ancient historian, since it must be considered a fundamental characteristic of the interaction between poleis in the Greek city-state culture.

As is well known, poleis celebrated their victors in various and often extravagant ways. Cash payments for victory in the periodos are known from for instance Athens, Sybaris,94 and Ephesos,95 and mentioned already by Xenophanes,96 who also mentions such honours as proedria and public entertainment, known also from Athens in the form of entertainment in the pryta@neion, the symbolic centre of the polis.97 On occasion, such honorific gestures were highly extravagant, as in 412 BC, when Exainetos of Akragas was escorted into the city by 300 chariots drawn by white horses when he returned home after his second Olympic victory in the stadion.98 Now, since athletic victories were construed as victories of the poleis of the athletes, what a polis was celebrating by such honorific gestures was in fact itself, and in this way athletics will have helped promote a sense of civic cohesion, another good reason why athletics matter and why the extent of the athletic culture is not a question of mere antiquarian interest.

The last point to which I want to draw attention is that athletic festivals must have created a good deal of interest among the Greek poleis and their citizens and must have sent large numbers of individuals out on the roads and seas, travelling to athletic destinations. In my discussion I have repeatedly emphasised the fact that most if not all athletic festivals were open to athletes from other poleis than the one arranging the festival:

Nikolaïdas of Korinthos competed at Thebes and Athens; Korinthians competed on Sicily; athletes from Aigina competed at Epidaurus; Theogenes of Thasos competed in Thessaly and at Argos; and the great boxer Diogoras of Rhodes competed not only at all the contests of the periodos but also in Arkadia and Boiotia as well as at Athens, Argos, Thbes, Pellene, Aigina, and Megara.100 Clearly, Diogoras must have travelled a lot as must Theogenes of Thasos and many others. How did they know where to go? In the cases of the festivals of the periodos as well as in the cases of Epidaurus101 and tiny Lousoi in Arkadia102 we know that the polis arranging an athletic festival announced upcoming celebrations internationally by epagoge systems. The many other poleis who arranged athletic festivals probably did so too in one way or another, not least in order to attract high-profile athletes. They need not all have done so on a Panhellenic scale, as Epidaurus did, but may have restricted the announcement for instance to a regional level, as Chersonesos probably did if it announced its games for the oecist Miltiades outside the city itself, but even so the simple business of announcing upcoming

95 Xen. Mem. 5.7.1: Ὑπάρχοντι δὲ τὸν Ἡλετόκοσον οὗτος ἀξιόλογον μὲν ἀνδρὰ ὡντα καὶ πολλὰ δυνατότερον τῶν πολιτικῶν τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅνων δὲ τὸν ὅμοιον τοῦ θείου τῆς πάλιν ἐπιμελείται, Εἰπὲ μοι, ἐπικεφαλής ἄπαντος πατρίδας, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸς τε μεταπαθεῖ καὶ τὴν πατρίδα ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι εὐδοκιμεῖται ποιηθεῖ ἴδιον μὲ θέλει αγγέλεσθαι, ποιν τινα τοῦτον νομίζειν ὁν ἄνδρα αὐτὸς εἴναι ἔνα πώς ἐπικεφαλής τῆς πάλιν ἐπιμελεῖται. Isocrates 16.32: ὅραν τὴν ἐν Ὀλυμπία παίγνησιν ὑπὸ πάντων θανάτων ἀνθρώπων ἀγαμομένην καὶ τOfMonth, τος Ἑλλήνης ἐπιδίδει πνὸμα στὴμεῖ, τῆς τοῦ ἑν θάνατος παθομένων πανεπιστηθείς καὶ τοῖς τῷ ἥθελες ἡγεμόνες καὶ τὰς πάλιν ὀνομασάς γνομικὰς τὰς τῶν νικῶντων. See also Ebert 1972, 46.3-4: ἤρθονται δὲ πατὴρ Κλεινος κοτοδείκτης εἰς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ εἰς καθώς | Πέπαινε δὲ ἅτα μεταμόσχοντας εἰς Ὀλυμπίας κλέος, εἰς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ᾦς δέξαμαι καὶ τὰς πάλιν ἐπιμελειται πατρίδας, δὲ τοὺς ἑν τῇ Ὀλυμπία αὐτὸς δὲ πατὴρ τοῦτος ἐπιστράνωσε. See further Robert 1967, 21-8.
96 Athens and Sybaris: Nielsen 2007, 95, 97.
97 I. Ephesos 154.10-2: τὸν δὲ οἱ αὐτοκτόνοι τῶν δὲ τοῦ νόμου τεταρτον τοῖς ταῖς ἐπιστράνωσε. – Xenophanes fr. 2.9 (West): δὸρον δ’ οἱ κυβέρνησαν ἐπ.”
98 Xenophanes fr. 2.9 (West): δὸρον δ’ οἱ κυβέρνησαν ἐπ’.
100 Dio. 32.4.7: καὶ κατὰ τὴν προστάτην δὲ ταύτης Ὀλυμπαδόα, δυνατὰ ἐπὶ τῷ νόμῳ ἐνίσχυσαν, κυβέρνησαν Ἐμιστοῦ Ἀκραγαντίνου, κατήγγειλον αὐτόν ἐπὶ τὴν πάλιν ἐν ᾑρμ. – Artemis: συνεποιήμενον δὲ αὐτῷ χωρὶς τῶν ἄλλων συνορίας τοιαύτης λεικοῖς ἔπαινον. On the signif}

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celebrations must have sent a good deal of official delegations out to make announcements in foreign poleis and this must have created extensive official interaction among city-states. Official delegations and private individuals will have travelled to athletic destinations to watch the rituals and the contests as representatives of their home poleis or for their own pleasure. Not every single local festival would have resembled the Olympics in this respect, but some would, such as for example the Asklepieia, the Hekatomboia, and the Panathenaiia. Others such as the festival at Thespiai in Boiotia probably created such interaction on a more modest level, but what matters here is not the individual festivals but the large number of festivals which must all have created at least some interaction. Such interaction will have eased the establishment of private intercity networks; it will have helped spread news, rumours, and new ideas in, for instance, politics and other intellectual spheres. In short: it will have contributed to the sense of intercity cohesion among the Greeks, and that is one more, and perhaps the most important, reason why athletics should really matter to classicists.

Moreover, this function of athletic festivals was one which was well understood at least by Greek intellectuals, as appears clearly from two well-known passages in Lysias and Isokrates. Thus, the orator Lysias in his Olympia, delivered at Olympia in 388 BC, ascribes to Herakles, the mythical founder of the Olympics, the wish to promote friendship (philia) among the Greeks as his motive for founding the festival; and the Athenian intellectual Isokrates in his Panegyrikos, a literary essay in the style of an Olympic oration, has a longer and more general reflection on the benefits of panegyreis as such:

Now the founders of our great festivals are justly praised for handing down to us a custom by which, having proclaimed a truce and resolved our pending quarrels, we come together in one place, where, as we make our prayers and sacrifices in common, we are reminded of the kinship which exists among us and are made to feel more kindly towards each other for the future, reviving our old friendships and establishing new ties.

It is tempting to brush such passages aside as mere rhetoric but that temptation should be resisted. Rhetoric has to be persuasive: but the great extent of the athletic culture in Greece, which I have attempted to illustrate in this essay, should make us realise, once again, that such ideas may in fact have a solid foundation in the social and religious life of the Greeks and that though they may be ideals, they may well be ideals with a good admixture of reality.

6. Conclusion

Let me end by summarising the argument of this essay. In antiquity, the Olympics and the three other festivals of the prestigious periodoi constituted only the tip of an enormous athletic iceberg. The career of the otherwise unknown Korinthian sprinter and pentathlete Nikolaïdas proves the existence in the late 6th or 5th century of nine athletic festivals outside the periodoi which allowed athletes from foreign poleis to compete. The career of the great Theogenes of Thasos proves the existence of two other athletic festivals and presupposes the existence of some 50 to 100 others, which must all have allowed a non-citizen athlete to compete. On the basis of preserved epinician poetry and associated scholia it is possible to identify another 28 agonistic festivals, and in this way we can identify 39 athletic festivals outside the periodoi celebrated in the 5th century and admitting foreign competitors. A survey of other types of evidence allows the tentative conclusion that at least some 87 cities arranged athletic festivals in the late Archaic and Classical periods; 15 of these existed already in the 6th century and admitted non-citizen competitors. The Greek athletic culture, in conclusion, was an extensive phenomenon.

104 Lysias 33.2: ἡγήσατο γὰρ τῶν ἐνθάδε σύλλογον ἄρχην γνησίεσθαι τοῖς Ἑλλησ ἡμῶν ἐνεστηκυίας πρὸς ἅλλος ἀλλήλους φιλίας.
105 Isokrates Paneg. 41: Τῶν τούτων τὰς πανηγυρίους καταστρατεύον, δικαίως ἐπαινοῦμένων ὅτι τοιοῦτον ἔθος ἦλθαν παρέδοσαν ὅστε σεπασμένους καὶ τὰς ἄρχους τὰς ἐνστροφικάς διαλυσαμένους συνελθὼν εἰς ταύτας, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἰς καὶ θεσίας κοινὰς ποιημάδους ἀναμφισβηθήσει τῆς συγγενείας τῆς πρὸς ἅλλος ὑπάρχουσας εὔμενεστέρος δέ εἰς τῶν λοιπῶν χρόνων διαποτιθήνατα πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτούς, καὶ τὰς τε παλαιὰς ἥλιος ἀνακατασταθὺς καὶ κοινὰς ἐτέρας ποιησαμένους κτλ. (trans. Norlin 1928). – Cf. Pl. Leg. 950e where the four festivals of the periodoi are referred to as ἡμίκοικαις συνοικίαις.
If we go on to ask what the significance of this fact is, a first answer is that the very extent of the athletic culture should make us realise that some of the highly rhetorical Greek ideas about athletics were not created out of thin air, but had a solid basis in social life. Thus, it was not a completely ridiculous idea that athletics constituted an ethnic boundary marker separating the Greeks from their neighbours, and there must have been a good deal of reality in the idea that athletic festivals provided a perfect context for peaceful and friendly networking, at least among the elite. A second reason why athletics matter is the fact that athletics constituted one of the primary arenas in which individuals as well as their home poleis pursued that glory and fame which in many ways was one of the most basic values in Greek culture. A third reason why athletics matter to the ancient historian is the fact that the often extravagant celebration of victory was in fact also a celebration of the polis of the victor and must have contributed to the social cohesion of cities. Furthermore, athletics must have created a good deal of interaction among poleis, among athletes, and among spectators, and in this way athletics constituted one of the glues, as it were, of the Greek city-state culture – and here the great extent of the athletic culture is of course of immense significance.

Finally, two more reasons why athletics matter may briefly be added. One is that athletic festivals were clearly wonderful opportunities for recreation, as Thucydides has Perikles say in his funeral oration:

\[\text{"Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round" (trans. Crawley 1996).}\]

Another reason is that athletics must be considered the clearest expression of, perhaps even a celebration of, one of the most central social principles in Greek culture, the principle that competition is useful. There are, then, several good reasons why athletics are important to the ancient historian, and the enormous extent of the athletic culture should serve to emphasise just how important these reasons really are.

THOMAS HEINE NIELSEN
University of Copenhagen
SAXO-Institute – Archaeology, Ethnology, Greek & Latin, History
Karen Blixens Vej 4
2300 København S
Denmark
heine@hum.ku.dk

106 Thuc. 2.38.1: τῶν πόνων πλείστας ἀναπαύλας τῇ γνώμῃ ἐπορισάμεθα, ἀγόσι μὲν γε καὶ θυσίας διετησίος ("Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round" (trans. Crawley 1996)).

107 Diod. sic. 12.26.4: διόπερ πολεμικὴ μὲν καὶ ἀξία μνήμης πρᾶξις οὐδέμια συνετελέσθη κατα τούτοις τοὺς χρόνοις, εἰρήνη δὲ μία συνετελέσθη, καὶ πανηγύρεις καὶ ἁγίας καὶ θεῶν θυσίας καὶ τάλλα τὰ πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἀνήκοντα παρὰ πᾶσιν ἐπεπολάζοντο ("Consequently, during this period no military action worthy of mention took place, and universal peace prevailed; while festivals, games, sacrificial feast-days in honor of the gods, and all other elements that go to make a happy life flourished everywhere" (trans. Green 2006)). – Cf. Eur. Autolykos fr. 282.13-15: τὸν Ἑλλήνων νόμον, οἳ τῶνδ᾿ ἡκατὸν σύλλογον ποιοῦμενοι | τιμῶσ᾿ ἀχρείους ἡδονὰς δαιτὸς χάριν ("the custom of the Greeks who assemble to watch athletes and thus honor useless pleasures in order to have an excuse for a feast" (trans. Miller 1991)).

108 Spivey 2004, 13; Cartledge 2006, 207-9, esp. 207 where Cartledge singles out as one of the fundamental characteristics of ancient Greek culture “a devotion to competition in all its forms, almost for its own sake”. Cf. Burckhardt 1999 [1898-1902], 160-213.
Fig. 9. Sites identified as the location of athletic festivals
() indicate assumptions; numbers indicate the number of festivals attested for each site if above one – bold indicates festivals attested for the 6th century. If not presented above, the details of each site may be found in Nielsen forthcoming (Proliferation).

Abbreviations

AJP = American Journal of Philology
IG = Inscriptiones Graecae, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1873-.
SEG = Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, Leiden & Boston 1923-.
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