

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

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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,

| Olympiad year | Festival | Date |
|---------------|----------|--------|
| 75.1 | Olympic | 480 BC |
| 75.2 | Nemean | 479 BC |
| 75.2 | Isthmian | 478 BC |
| 75.3 | Pythian | 478 BC |
| 75.4 | Nemean | 477 BC |
| 75.4 | Isthmian | 476 BC |
| 76.1 | Olympic | 476 BC |

Fig. 1. *The periodos of the 75th Olympiad (after Golden 1998, 10-1)*

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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 pentathlete⁴ Nikolaidas:⁵

Ἄνθηκεν τόδ' ἄγαλμα Κορίνθιος, ὅσπερ ἐνίκα
 ἐν Δελφοῖς ποτε, Νικολάδας,
 καὶ Παναθηναίοις στεφάνους λάβε, πέντ' ἐπ' ἀέθλοις
 ἐξῆς ἀμφιφόρεις ἐλαίου·
 Ἴσθμῳ δ' ἐν ζαθέα τρις ἐπισχερῶ εἶδεν ἐλόντα 5
 ἄκτὰ Ποντομέδοντος ἄθλα·
 καὶ Νεμέα τρις ἐνίκησεν καὶ τετράκις ἄκρα
 Πελλάνῃ, δύο δ' ἐν Λυκαίῳ,
 καὶ Τεγέα καὶ ἐν Αἰγίνα κρατερᾶ τ' Ἐπιδαύρῳ
 καὶ Θήβῃ Μεγάρων τε δάμῳ, 10
 ἐν δὲ Φλειοῦντι· σταδίῳ δὲ τὰ πάντα κρατήσας
 ἠΰφρανεν μεγάλην Κόρινθον.⁶

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 BC⁸ and was copied from the base of a commemorative statue erected perhaps at Delphi,⁹ a much more prestigious location for such a monument than Korinthos itself.

The epigram contains a number of interesting literary features which are worthy of note. The first two

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* (Κορίνθιος) as well as of the sites *at* which (ἐν Δελφοῖς ... καὶ Παναθηναίοις) and the discipline *in* which (πέντ' ἐπ' ἀέθλοις) he had won (ἐνίκα).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” (ἠΰφρανεν μεγάλην 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 At least three other athletes of the late Archaic and Classical period were outstanding both as pentathletes and as sprinters: (1) Phayllos of Kroton won the *pentathlon* and the *stadion* at Delphi (Paus. 10.9.2); (2) Xenophon of Korinthos won the same disciplines at Olympia (Pind. *Ol.* 13.29-31), on the same day (Schol. in Pind. *Ol.* 13.1a (Drachmann): κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡμέραν), a “first and only”, on which see more below, p. 14-5; (3) Eupolemos of Elis won the *stadion* at Olympia in 396 BC and the *pentathlon* twice at Delphi and once at Nemea (Paus. 6.3.7); on Eupolemos’ Olympic victory of 396 BC, see Crowther 1997 and Romano 2007.

5 Text after Maróti 1990. On the metre, see Page 2008, 262. On the epigram in general, see Blinkenberg 1919; Ebert 1972, no. 26; Page 2008, no. 43.

6 “This monument a Korinthian erected who won at Delphi once, Nikolaidas; and at the Panathenaia he took as prizes in the *pentathlon* countless amphoras 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 Aigina and at strong Epidauros, at Thebes and among the people of Megara; 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 *Anthologia Palatina* XIII.19.

8 Ebert 1972, 93: “Da im Epigramm ungefähr dieselben Feste wie z.B. bei Pindar *Ol.* VII 83ff. und *Nem.* X 44ff. erwähnt sind ... dürfte Nikoladas ins 5. 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”.

9 Merkelbach 1987, 294: “[S]icherlich von einem Stein kopiert”; Page 2008 *ad v.* 1 τόδ' ἄγαλμα: “[P]resumably a statue of Nikolaidas”.

10 Ebert 1972, no. 26 *comm. ad loc.*: “ποτέ zeigt, daß das Denkmal für die Betrachtung auch durch spätere Geschlechter berechnet ist”.

11 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 Saïd & Trédé-Boulmer 1984.

13 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 Nikolaïdas' 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: Nikolaïdas won at twelve different festivals, among which were three festivals belonging to the prestigious *periodos*. However, the nine non-periodic festivals at which Nikolaïdas 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,¹⁴ and that we know of Olympic victors from no less than sixty-five different *poleis* in the Classical period.¹⁵ 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,¹⁶ 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 Epidauros – mentioned together in verse 9 – must have had some way of announcing their festivals outside the *polis* 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 Epidauros, which set up an elaborate epangelic system in the 4th century BC.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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 Rhodos,¹⁹ as well as by the rhapsode Ion of Ephesos.²⁰

Finally, it should be noted that the festival at Phleious is attested only by the epigram commemorating Nikolaïdas – by coincidence, in other words:²¹ 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,²² though there is no way of quantifying this *Dunkelziffer*. The Nikolaïdas 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.

14 Nielsen 2007, 18-21.

15 Nielsen 2007, 60-1.

16 On the Olympic *epangelia* by Elis, see Perlman 2000, 63-6 and Nielsen 2007, 62-8.

17 Perlman 2000, 67-97.

18 Cf. Pind. *Nem.* 5.50-2 with Sève 1993, 305; Perlman 2000, 67 n. 2 ("530 BC at the latest").

19 Aigina: Pind. *Nem.* 3.84; *Isthm.* 8.68. Argos: *CEG* II 814 (Sève 1993, 328 no. 22). Korinthos: Nikolaïdas (Sève 1993, 328 no. 25). Rhodos: *Syll.* 3 82 (Sève 1993, 327 no. 14).

20 Pl. *Ion* 530b (Sève 1993, 328 no. 19).

21 From Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16 it appears that Phleious proclaimed an *ekecheiria* 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 Nikolaïdas won his victory; the *CPC Inventory* s.v. Phleious (no. 355) 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 IV², 1 629) but presumably was much older (Jost 1985, 133).

| Inv.no. ²³ | Site |
|-----------------------|------------|
| 221 | Thebes |
| 225 | Megara |
| 240 | Pellene |
| 297 | Tegea |
| – | Mt Lykaion |
| 348 | Epidaurus |
| 355 | Phleious |
| 358 | Aigina |
| 361 | Athens |

Fig. 2. Sites of non-periodic athletic festivals attested by the career of Nikolaidas of Korinthos

3. The epigram celebrating Theogenes of Thasos

Another epigram of the utmost importance in the present context is one celebrating perhaps the greatest athlete of antiquity, the famous Theogenes of Thasos, which is preserved on a sculptural base at Delphi. It is beyond doubt that Theogenes' impressive career fell in the first half of the 5th century: his first Olympic victory was achieved in 480 BC,²⁴ the year of the naval battle at Salamis, and his commemorative statue at Olympia was a work by Glaukias of Aigina,²⁵ who was active in the late Archaic and early Classical period.²⁶ The epigram celebrating him, however, dates to the early 4th century and probably belongs to a restoration of an earlier monument carried out by the *polis* of Thasos; accordingly, the epigram was in all probability commissioned by Thasos.²⁷ It reads as follows:²⁸

Ο[ὔποτε τοῖον ἔφουσε Θ]άσος, Τιμοξένου υἱέ,
καίπ[ολύγ']Ἑ[λλή]νων[π]λε[ῖστ]ον[ἔπαιν]ονἔχεις
καρτερίας· οὐγάρ τις Ὀλυμπίαι ἐστεφανώθη
ὠ[ὐ]τὸς[ἄν]ῆρ πυγμῆι παγκρατίω τε κρατῶν.
σοὶ δὲ καὶ ἐμ Πυθῶνι τριῶν στεφάνω[ν] ἀκονιτί 5
ἔς· τὸ δὲ θνητὸς ἀνήρ οὐτίς ἔρεξε ἕτερος·
ἐννέα δ' Ἰσθ[μ]ιάδων νῖκαι δέκα, δις γὰρ αὐσεν
κῆρυξ ἐγ κύκλωι μοῦνον ἐπιχθονίων
πυγμῆς παγκρατίου τε ἐπινίκιον ἤματι τούτῳ·
ἐνάκι δ' ἐν Νεμέαι, Θεόγενες, αἰ δὲ ἴδια 10
νῖκαι τρίς τε ἑκατὸν καὶ χίλια, οὐδὲ σέ φημι
πυγμῆι νικηθῆναι ἕκοσι καὶ δύο' ἐτῶν.²⁹

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 ἀπῶτος (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*.³⁰

Thus, the present epigram states that no other man won both the boxing and the *pankration* at Olympia (οὐ γάρ

23 The reference is to the serial numbers in the *CPC Inventory*. This and the following figures employ the geographical order adopted in the *CPC Inventory*.

24 Moretti 1957, no. 201.

25 Paus. 6.11.9.

26 For Glaukias of Aigina, see *RE* VII, 1400 and Pollitt 1990, 39-41.

27 Ebert 1972, 122.

28 Text: Ebert 1972, no. 37.

29 "Never, son of Timoxenos, did Thasos produce your equal, and of the Hellenes you enjoy by far the greatest reputation for sturdy endurance. For no one was crowned at Olympia for victory in boxing and *pankration*, one and the same man. Of your three Pythian crowns one was won without dust. This no other mortal man achieved. At nine Isthmiads you won ten victories, for twice on the same day did the herald announce you in the circle of spectators for victory in boxing and *pankration*, a singular achievement among men of the earth. Nine victories did you win at Nemea, Theogenes. Your own efforts produced 1,300 victories and, I proclaim, for twenty-two years you were undefeated in boxing."

30 See further Tod 1949; Ramba 1990; Young 1996 and Young 2004, 30-2; and Brunet 2010.

τις Ὀλυμπία ἐστεφανώθη ... ὠ[τὸ]ς [ἀν]ήρ), a *first* and *only*, as it in fact was at the time. Furthermore, one of the three Pythian victories was won ἀκονιτί, *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 οὐτίς ἔρεξε ἕτερος). Finally, at the Isthmian Games Theogenes won both the boxing and *pankration* “on the same day” (ἡματι τῶντῶι), 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;³¹ and according to Pausanias the number of his victories ran to 1,400.³² 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 *periodos*, and this is confirmed by the prose catalogue of his victories appended to the epigram, which meticulously lists every periodic victory of Theogenes:³³

Θεογένης Τιμοξένου Θάσιος ἐνίκησεν τάδε

| | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Ὀλύμπια πύξ | Ἴθμοϊ πύξ | Νέμεα πύξ | |
| Ὀλύμπια παγκράτιον | Ἴθμοϊ πύξ | Νέμεα πύξ | Νέμεα πύξ |
| Πυθοῖ πύξ | Ἴθμοϊ πύξ | Νέμεα πύξ | Ἑκατόμβοια |
| Πυθοῖ πύξ | Ἴθμοϊ πύξ | Νέμεα πύξ | δόλιχον |
| Πυθοῖ πύξ ἀκονιτί | Ἴθμοϊ πύξ | Νέμεα πύξ | ἐν Ἄργει |
| Ἴθμοϊ πύξ | καὶ παγκράτιον | Νέμεα πύξ | |
| [Ἴθ]μοϊ πύξ | τῆι αὐτῆι | Νέμεα πύξ | |
| Ἴθμοϊ πύξ | Ἴθμιάδι | Νέμεα πύξ | |
| Ἴθμοϊ πύξ ³⁴ | | | |

31 Plut. *Prae. ger. reip.* 15.7: ... χιλίους καὶ διακοσίους στεφάνους, ὧν συρφετὸν ἄν τις ἠγήσαιο τοὺς πλείστους (cf. Pleket 1975, 60 and Brunet 2003, 224).

32 Paus. 6.11.5: τοὺς δὲ σύμπαντας στεφάνους τετρακοσίους τε ἔσχε καὶ χιλίους.

33 Text after Ebert 1972, no. 27.

34 Theogenes, son of Timoxenos, of Thasos won these victories

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Olympia, boxing | Isthmos, boxing | Nemea, boxing | |
| Olympia, <i>pankration</i> | Isthmos, boxing | Nemea, boxing | Nemea, boxing |
| Delphi, boxing | Isthmos, boxing | Nemea, boxing | <i>Hekatomboia</i> |
| Delphi, boxing | Isthmos, boxing | Nemea, boxing | <i>dolichos</i> |
| Delphi, boxing, <i>akoniti</i> | Isthmos, boxing | Nemea, boxing | at Argos |
| Isthmos, boxing | and <i>pankration</i> | Nemea, boxing | |
| Isthmos, boxing | at the same | Nemea, boxing | |
| Isthmos, boxing | Isthmiad | Nemea, boxing | |
| Isthmos, boxing | | | |

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,³⁵ presumably celebrated in honour of Achilles.³⁶

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 competitions;³⁷ the Ten Thousand *Kyreioi* celebrated their arrival at the coast of the Black Sea by a joyful athletic festival;³⁸ and Roller has devoted an excellent study to funeral contests held to mark the burials of great men in the historical period.³⁹ She counted ten examples of such funeral games in the Archaic period but only a single one for the Classical period, and though a recently found inscription from Sicily adds a second example,⁴⁰ by the

Classical period funeral games for individuals were clearly a highly unusual phenomenon,⁴¹ which seems to have become a Macedonian peculiarity.⁴² 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 Nikolaidas 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

35 Paus. 6.11.5: ἐν Φθίᾳ δὲ τῇ Θεσσαλῶν πυγμῆς μὲν ἢ παγκρατίου παρήκε τὴν σπουδὴν, ἐφρόντιζε δὲ ὁπως καὶ ἐπὶ δρόμῳ ἐμφανῆς ἐν Ἑλλήσιν εἶη, καὶ τοὺς ἐσελθόντας ἐς τὸν δόλιχον ἐκράτησεν.

36 Paus. 6.11.5: ἦν δὲ οἱ πρὸς Ἀχιλλεῖα ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν τὸ φιλοτιμημα, ἐν πατρίδι τοῦ ὀκίστου τῶν καλουμένων ἡρώων ἀνελέσθαι δρόμου νίκην, on which see Jacquemin 2002, 172 *ad loc.* Cf. Harris 1964, 116; Stamatoroulou 2007, 334.

37 Arr. *Anab.* 5.20.1: Ἀλεξάνδρῳ δὲ ἐπειδὴ οἱ ἀποθανόντες ἐν τῇ μάχῃ κεκόσμηντο τῷ πρέποντι κόσμῳ, ὁ δὲ τοῖς θεοῖς τὰ νομιζόμενα ἐπινίκια ἔθηκε, καὶ ἀγὼν ἐποιεῖτο αὐτῷ γυμνικός καὶ ἵππικός αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῇ ὄχθῃ τοῦ Ὑδάσπου, ἵνα περὶ τὸ πρῶτον διέβη ἅμα τῷ στρατῷ; cf. 2.24.6 with CEG 879; 4.4.1; 6.28.3; 7.14.1 (cf. Diod. Sic. 17.72.1). See also: Slowikowski 1989, 72; Romano 1990, 75; Adams 2003, 210-12; Kyle 2007, 238-9.

38 Xen. *An.* 4.8.25-8, on which see Golden 1998, 1-4 and Kyle 2007, 231.

39 Roller 1981.

40 SEG XLIX 1286.

41 Roller 1981, 6: “[T]his kind of funerary contest ceased to be held during the fifth century B.C.”

42 Roller 1981, 10. Note, however, that king Euagoras I of Salamis was buried with extensive funeral contests by his son Nikokles (Isoc. *Euagoras* 9.1). Though both Euagoras and Nikokles were in fact Greeks, they are both described in modern scholarship as “philhellenes” (Costa 1974, 45; Maier 1994, 317); Euagoras came to power in Salamis by unseating a Phoenician usurper, he waged war against the Persians for ten years (391-381 BC) and an Athenian decree honours him as a champion of Greek liberty (Rhodes & Osborne, *GHI* no. 11.16-7 with comm. at 54; cf. Hunt 2010, 82 n. 59); it may, then, very well be correct that these funeral contests were a studied emulation of epic depictions of funeral contests designed to emphasise the Greek identity of the Salaminian royal house (Roller 1981, 10). Alexander the Great, too, seems to have had the Iliadic funeral contests of Patroklos in mind when he staged “the most magnificent contests ever” (Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.19) to mark the burial of Hephaisstion. By the 4th century, such ostentatious funeral contests are peripheral royal phenomena and not a part of mainstream Greek culture.

undefeated for 22 years (vv. 11-2 of the epigram). However, he was also an accomplished fighter in the *pankraton*, as is clear from the fact that he won both an Olympic (v. 4) and an Isthmian victory (v. 9) in this “terrible event”, as Xenophanes called it.⁴³ If we assume that Theogenes regularly entered and won both the boxing and the *pankraton*, he need only have entered two festivals a month, and we can reduce the number of festivals needed to win 1,276 victories to somewhere between 50 and 100. It is a reasonable conclusion that the career of Theogenes presupposes the existence of approximately a hundred athletic festivals which did not belong to the great *periodos*, which must have admitted non-citizens competitors, and which must have been internationally announced in some way. Of these, eleven can be identified by the evidence pertaining to the careers of Nikolaidas and Theogenes.⁴⁴

| Inv.no. | Site |
|---------|----------|
| 347 | Argos |
| — | Thessaly |

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

4. Non-periodic athletic festivals attested by or inferred from other evidence

4.1 Epinician poetry

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 “ταῖ ὑπ’ Αἴτνας ὑψιλόφου καλλίπλουτοι | πόλιες” (*Ol.* 13.111-2).⁴⁵ 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,⁴⁶ though at least Leontinoi 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.

Of course, fragments are even harder to interpret. A fragment of an ode by Simonides for the great runner Astylos of Kroton reads as follows: “τίς δὴ τῶν νῦν τοσάδ’ ἢ πετάλοισι μύρτων | ἢ στεφάνοισι ῥόδων ἀνεδήσατο, | νικάσ<αις>⁴⁷ ἐν ἀγῶνι περικτιόνων?”⁴⁸ The phrase ἐν ἀγῶνι περικτιόνων (“in a contest of the neighbours”) probably refers to a local contest at which Astylos was victorious,⁴⁹ though the drift of the fragment, in fact, suggests that Astylos was victorious several times or in several contexts. The fragment, then, suggests the existence of one or more festivals with running competitions open to non-citizens among Astylos’ neighbours,⁵⁰ but it is not clear who these neighbours were. Astylos

43 Xenophanes fr. 2.5 (West): τὸ δεινὸν ἄεθλον ὃ παγκράτιον καλέουσι.

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.

45 “[T]he splendidly rich cities under Aitna’s lofty crest” (trans. Race 1997a).

46 Kramer 1970, 55; Gerber 2002, 72.

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?” (trans. Campbell 1991). For a discussion of this fragment, see Molyneux 1992, esp. 215-8. On Astylos of Kroton, see Nielsen 2007, 91-2.

49 So also Molyneux 1992, 215-6. Mann 2001, 301-2 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 ἄμφικτιόνες alone (and a fortiori περικτιόνες 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 ἀγῶνι περικτιόνων as indicated in the text and adds the explanatory note “i.e. in local games”. Pindar uses *periktiones* twice in his epinicians, at *Nem.* 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” (*Nem.* 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”.

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-developed 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 identified on the basis of the sources relating to the careers of Nikolaidas and Theogenes.

| Inv.no. | Site | Source | Kramer 1970 |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 8 | Aitna | <i>Ol.</i> 13.111 | 55 |
| 47 | Syracuse | <i>Ol.</i> 13.111 | 55 |
| — | Magna Graecia (2) | Simon. fr. 506 | - |
| 213 | Orchomenos | <i>Isthm.</i> 1.56 | 48 |
| — | Onchestos | <i>Isthm.</i> 1.33 | 46 |
| — | Boiotia (2) | <i>Ol.</i> 7.84 | 52, 60 |
| 227 | Korinthos | <i>Ol.</i> 13.40 | 41 |
| 228 | Sikyon | <i>Ol.</i> 13.109 | 54 |
| — | Achaia (2) | <i>Nem.</i> 10.47 | 50 |
| 276 | Kleitor | <i>Nem.</i> 10.47 | 40 |
| 345 | Sparta (2) | <i>Nem.</i> 10.49-53 | 56 |
| 358 | Aigina (2) ⁵² | Schol. <i>Pyth.</i> 8.91, 113 | 27 |
| 361 | Athens (2) ⁵³ | <i>Ol.</i> 9.89, 99 | 31-3 |
| 370 | Eretria | <i>Ol.</i> 13.112 | 38 |
| 386 | Opous | <i>Ol.</i> 9.112 | 47 |
| — | Thessaly | Bakchyl. 14 | 61 |
| 440 | Phylake | <i>Isthm.</i> 1.59 | 51 |
| — | Rhodos | <i>Ol.</i> 7.77-80 | 53 |
| 1028 | Kyrene (4) | <i>Pyth.</i> 97-103 | 42 |

Fig. 4. Sites of non-periodic athletic festivals attested by epinician 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.⁵⁴ 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 AXEAOIO AEΘAON.⁵⁵ 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,⁵⁶ 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”⁵⁷ 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),⁵⁸ but it should be obvious that the evidence provided by the coin is too general to allow any conclusion on this matter. Numismatic evi-



Fig. 5. 5th-century tridrachm of Kos depicting a *diskobolos* (after Aegean of the coins 89)

dence, 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*.

54 On the Diagorids of Rhodos, see Hornblower 2004, 134-43.

55 See Rutter 2001, no. 1491; Rutter 1997, 49; Nielsen 1996, 58.

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. 22.

58 Aegean of the coins 89.

| Inv.no. | Site | References |
|---------|-------------|---|
| 47 | Syracuse | Rutter 1997, 157; Pleket 2001, 168 |
| 61 | Metapontion | Rutter 1997, 49; 2001, no. 1491 |
| 71 | Taras | Klose & Stumpf 1996, nos. 150-1; Brauer 1974-75, 7 |
| 400 | Krannon | Stamatopoulou 2007, 335 n. 163; Klose & Stumpf 1996, 89 |
| 401 | Larisa | Stamatopoulou 2007, 335 n. 163; Klose & Stumpf 1996, nos. 166-8 |
| 409 | Pelinna | Stamatopoulou 2007, 335 n. 163; Klose & Stumpf 1996, 89 |
| 412 | Pharkadon | Stamatopoulou 2007, 335 n. 163; Klose & Stumpf 1996, 89 |
| 414 | Pherai | Stamatopoulou 2007, 335 n. 163; Klose & Stumpf 1996, 89 |
| 415 | Skotoussa | Stamatopoulou 2007, 335 n. 163; Klose & Stumpf 1996, 89 |
| 417 | Trikka | Stamatopoulou 2007, 335 n. 163; Klose & Stumpf 1996, 89 |
| 497 | Kos | Smith 2007, 121 Fig. 22; <i>Aegean of the coins</i> 89 |
| 553 | Amphipolis | Klose & Stumpf 1996, no. 70 |
| 640 | Abdera | May 1966, 208-9; Klose & Stumpf 1996, no. 17 |
| 747 | Kyzikos | Klose & Stumpf 1996, no. 73 |

Fig. 6. Sites of agonistic competitions inferred from numismatic evidence

(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 (*ἀμαρτῶν τοῦ χρηστηρίου*) –

interpreted the oracle as referring to athletic victories (*ὡς ἀναιρησόμενος γυμνικὸς ἀγῶνας*) 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 Lakedaimonians, however, realised that the reference was not to athletic contests but to “contests of Ares” (*μαθόντες οὐκ ἐς γυμνικὸς 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 Lakedaimonians (listed in Hdt. 9.35.2). This story demonstrates that even a mantic expert could be represented as taking *agones* 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

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 in 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.

| Inv.no. | Site | Evidence for | Reference |
|---------|------------|----------------------|--|
| 74 | Thourioi | gymnasium | Pl. <i>Leg.</i> 636b with <i>CPC Inv. s.v.</i> |
| 141 | Zakynthos | stadium | Plut. <i>Dio</i> 23.4 |
| 177 | Delphi | gymnasium | Bommelaer 1991, 72-9 |
| 221 | Thebes | stadium gymnasium | Symeonoglou 1985, 108-9, 140 Symeonoglou 1985, 140, cat. nos. 65, 169 |
| 227 | Korinthos | stadium | Romano 1993, 43 |
| 251 | Elis | gymnasium | Xen. <i>Hell.</i> 3.2.27 |
| 347 | Argos | stadium gymnasium | Pariente <i>et al.</i> 1998, 216, 218-9 Pariente <i>et al.</i> 1998, 213-4, 218 |
| 349 | Halieis | stadium | Romano 1993, 36 |
| 357 | Troizen | stadium | Welter 1941, 35-8; Jameson <i>et al.</i> 1994, 83 |
| 358 | Aigina | stadium | Krinzinger 1968 |
| 361 | Athens | gymnasia | Kyle 1993, 64-92 |
| 370 | Eretria | stadium gymnasium | Altherr-Charon & Lasserre 1981, 33 <i>CPC Inv. s.v.</i> |
| 473 | Minoa | gymnasium | Marangou 1987, 255 |
| 534 | Dion | stadium | Pandermalis 1999, 76, 80-1 |
| 542 | Mieza | gymnasium | Allamani-Souri & Misaelidou 1995, 203-12 |
| 553 | Amphipolis | gymnasium | Lazaridis 1988; 1989 |
| 559 | Akanthos | gymnasium | Macedonians 1994, 76 pl. 9 |
| 665 | Kardia | gymnasium | Plut. <i>Eum.</i> 1 |
| 674 | Byzantion | stadium gymnasium | <i>IByz.</i> 42 with <i>CPC Inv. s.v.</i> Arist. <i>Oec.</i> 1346b19 |
| 690 | Olbia | gymnasium | <i>CPC Inv. s.v.</i> |
| 844 | Ephesos | gymnasia | Xen. <i>Ages.</i> 1.25, <i>Hell.</i> 1.25 |
| 861 | Priene | stadium | Kyle 1993, 61 n. 27 |
| 913 | Mylasa | gymnasium | <i>I.Mylasa</i> 21.9, 12 |
| 1000 | Rhodos | stadium gymnasium | Valavanis 1999, esp. 99 with Fig. 4 Vitruv. <i>De arch.</i> 6 intr. 1 |

Fig. 7. Sites with stadium or gymnasium

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

term in, e.g., an inscription cannot be taken with *full* certainty to be evidence for the existence of athletic contests (*gymnikoi agones*) at a given site. One example will suffice: At Teos a “full gymnastic program” has been assumed for the festival of the *Anthesteria*.⁶⁵ The assumption is based on a passage in the famous early 5th-century imprecations of the city, in which occurs the passage *καθημένου τῶ γῶνος Ἀνθεστηρίοισιν καὶ Ἡρακλέοισιν καὶ Δίοισιν*: “when the *agon* is assembled at the *Anthesteria* and the *Herakleia* and the *Dia*”.⁶⁶ Clearly, three central festivals are referred to here, but whether they included “a full gymnastic program”, or contests at all, must depend on the interpretation of *τῶ γῶνος*. Tod (1948, 30) took it to refer to “the people assembled to witness a contest”, a perfectly possible meaning attested already in epic.⁶⁷ 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*, *Heracleia*, 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

| Inv.no. | Site | Source | Phrase |
|---------|----------|---------------------------------|---|
| 177 | Delphi | <i>I.Delphes</i> 1.146 | προεδρία ἐμ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀγῶνοισι οἷς ἂ πόλις τίθητι |
| 370 | Eretria | Meiggs & Lewis 1988: no. 82.8 | προεδρία ἐς τὸς ἀγῶνας |
| 502 | Myrina | <i>IG XII.8</i> 2 | προεδρία ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν τοῖς δημοτελέσιν |
| 507 | Naxos | <i>SEG XXXIII</i> 676 | προ[εδρία ἐν] τοῖς ἀγῶσιν |
| 526 | Thasos | Pouilloux 1954, 371 no. 141.14 | προεδρία ἐς τοὺς ἀγῶνας |
| 534 | Dion | <i>SEG XLVI</i> 739 | [προ]εδρία ἐν τοῖς [γυμνικ]οῖς ἀγῶσι |
| 844 | Ephesos | <i>I.Ephesos</i> 1389 | προεδρία ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν |
| 845 | Erythrai | <i>SEG XXXI</i> 969.11 | προεδρία ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν |
| 848 | Kolophon | <i>AJP</i> 1935, 379-80 no. 4.8 | [πρ]οεδρία ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσ[ιν] |
| 861 | Priene | <i>I.Priene</i> 58-9 | προεδ[ρία] ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι |
| 864 | Samos | <i>IG XII.6</i> 38.22-3 | προεδρία ἐν το[ῖ]ς ἀγῶσιν οἷς ἂν ἡ πόλ[ις] ἄγηι πᾶσιν |
| 891 | Iasos | <i>I.Iasos</i> 60 | προεδρία ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν |
| 997 | Lindos | <i>I.Lindos</i> 15 | [π]ροεδρ[ία ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι] |

Fig. 8. Poleis granting proedria en tois agosin

⁶⁵ Scanlon 2002, 290.

⁶⁶ Meiggs & Lewis 1988: 30B.31-4.

⁶⁷ Ellsworth 1976, 232 and Laser 1987, 11-3.

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 ἀγῶνας (“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:⁶⁸

Πρατέας Αἰσχύλου
πάλαν Λύκαια,
Ἴθμια, Νεμέαια.
παρ’ Ἡραι, Παναθάναια,
Νεμέαια, Νεμέαια,
ἐμ Μαινάλωι, Πύθια ἐν Δελφοῖς
Ἴθμια.
Αἰσχύλος Πρατέα
Νεμέαι πάλαν.⁶⁹

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 Thespiiai and inscribed [... Η]ερακλέος ἐς Θεσπίας (“[... of/from Η]erakles at Thespiiai”), where in front of the preserved

text some word such as ἄθλων or παρά must originally have stood.⁷⁰ Clearly, competitions in honour of Herakles existed at Thespiiai and it seems a safe assumption that they were athletic.⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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. 524⁷³ – “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”.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ Even such local competitions, then, may regularly have

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 Nemeia [sc. at the Nemean Games], at the festival of Hera, at the Panathenaia, the Nemeia, the Nemeia, at Mainalos [or: on Mt. Mainalon], at the Pythia at Delphi, the Isthmia. Aischylos, son of Prateas, won the wrestling at Nemea.”

70 Vocotopoulou 1975, 752; SEG XXX 541; SEG XXXVII 387; cf. Johnston 1977, 157 and Amandry 1980, 211-2 n. 4.II.

71 On Herakles at Thespiiai, see Schachter 1986, 31-6.

72 Details in Nielsen forthcoming (*Proliferation*).

73 Isaac 1986, 171.

74 καὶ οἱ τελευτήσαντι Χερσονησίται θύουσι ὡς νόμος οἰκιστῆ, καὶ ἀγῶνα ἵππικὸν τε καὶ γυμνικὸν ἐπιστάσι, ἐν τῷ Λαμψακηνῶν οὐδενὶ ἐγγίγνεται ἀγωνίζεσθαι (trans. de Sélincourt 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.⁷⁶ 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 Thermopylai, you vote one there.⁷⁹

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, *barbaroi*"; by Hansen 2000, 144: "[T]o 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.

77 Hdt. 2.160 and 5.22 with Nielsen 2007, 18-21. See also Nielsen 2014.

78 On Herodotos' story of Alexander at Olympia, see Badian 1982, 34-5; Borza 1982, 10-1; Borza 1990, 110-4; Roos 1985; Scaife 1989, 133-4; Adams 2003, 205-8; Kertész 2005; Hall 2002, 154-6; Mitchell 2007, 45.

79 οὐδὲν δ' ἀπολείπετε, ὡσπερ οἱ βάρβαροι πυκτεύουσιν, οὕτω πολεμεῖν Φιλίππῳ. καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνων ὁ πληγῆς ἀεὶ τῆς πληγῆς ἔχεται, κἂν ἐτέρωσε πατάξῃ τις, ἐκεῖσ' εἰσὶν αἱ χεῖρες· προβάλλεσθαι δ' ἢ βλέπειν ἐναντίον οὐτ' οἶδεν οὐτ' ἐθέλει. καὶ ὑμεῖς, ἂν ἐν Χερρονήσῳ πύθησθε Φίλιππον, ἐκεῖσε βοηθεῖν ψηφίζεσθε, ἂν ἐν Πύλοις, ἐκεῖσε 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 –⁸⁰ 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.”⁸¹ 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 τυραννίδας, “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,⁸² 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 them-

selves, 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.”⁸³ There may perhaps be some poetic exaggeration involved in this statement,⁸⁴ 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 is, 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
wreath his hair after winning victory with his hands
or the swiftness of his feet.⁸⁵

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

80 Dem. 9.31; cf. 3.24; cf. Badian 1982, 42. See further Hunt 2010, 77–84.

81 τοῖς γὰρ βαρβάρους διὰ τὰς τυραννίδας αἰσχρὸν τοῦτό [sc. paederastic relations] τε καὶ ἡ γε φιλοσοφία καὶ ἡ φιλογυμναστία.

82 1.6.5: ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς βαρβάρους ἔστιν οἷς νῦν, καὶ μάλιστα τοῖς Ἀσιανοῖς, πυγμῆς καὶ πάλης ἄθλα τίθεται, καὶ διεζωμένοι τοῦτο δρῶσιν.

83 Hom. *Od.* 8.147–48: οὐ μὲν γὰρ μείζον κλέος ἀνέρος, ὄφρα κεν ἦσιν, | ἢ ὅ τι ποσσὶν τε ῥέξῃ καὶ χερσὶν ἔῃσιν.

84 Cf. Heubeck *et al.* 1988 *ad loc.*: “Laodamas speaks *ad hominem* and *ad tempus*. Homeric ἀρετή, the foundation of κλέος, embraces excellence in βουλή as well as πόλεμος (for which the sports are a peacetime substitute), though the martial arts are the more important”.

85 *Isth.* 5.7–10: ἐν τ’ ἀγωνίοις ἀέθλοισι ποθεινόν | κλέος ἔπραξεν, ὄντιν’ ἀθρόοι στέφανοι | χερσὶ νικάσαντ’ ἀνέδησαν ἔθειραν | ἢ ταχῦτάι ποδῶν (trl. Race 1997b).

glory – μέγα κλέος αἰεὶ – to the victor, the implication being that *mega kleos* is what the young Alkimedon of Aigina has earned for himself.⁸⁶ 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 Xenombrotos 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 a wreath of beautiful *kleos* when you were victorious by your horsemanship at the Isthmos and at Delphi.”⁹⁰ The Greeks, then, developed two highly complex artistic genres to commemorate victory, epinikian ode 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 κηρυχθῆναι).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 *poleis* 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 *poleis* competed with each other for fame and honour, in much the same way as the athletes themselves did, and that is one more

86 *Ol.* 8.10-1: μέγα τοι κλέος αἰεὶ, | ᾗτινι σὸν γέρας ἔσπετ’ ἀγλαόν.

87 *Ol.* 1.23-4: λάμπει δέ οἱ κλέος | ἐν εὐάνορι Λυδοῦ Πέλοπος ἀποικία.

88 Ebert 1972, no. 48.7: δις δὲ ὑπὸ Παρνασσοῦ φέρει κλέος.

89 Ebert 1972, no. 49.5-6: [οὔ] κλέος] Ἑλλάς | ἄφθιτον αἰεῖδε[ι] μνωμένα ἵπποσύνας.

90 Ebert 1972, no. 46.1-2: ὦ μάκαρ εὐκλείας Ἀρχων στέ[φανον δις ἐδέξω] | Ἴσθμια νικήσας Πύθιά τε ἵππ[οσύνας]. – Cf. Xenophanes fr. 2 (West) 6: ἀστοῖσιν κ’ εἶη κυδρότερος προσορᾶν.

91 Lysias 19.63: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἄξιον ἐνθυμηθῆναι οἷαν φύσιν εἶχεν ὁ πατήρ. ὅσα γὰρ ἔξω τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐπεθύμησεν ἀναλίσκεν πάντα φανήσεται τοιαῦτα ὅθεν καὶ τῇ πόλει τιμὴ ἔμελλεν ἔσσεσθαι. αὐτίκα ὅτε ἵππευεν, οὐ μόνον ἵππους ἐκτήσατο λαμπροὺς ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀθλητὰς <οἷς> ἐνίκησεν Ἴσθμοῖ καὶ Νεμέα, ὥστε τὴν πόλιν κηρυχθῆναι καὶ αὐτὸν στεφανωθῆναι.

92 On the herald’s proclamation of victory, see note 11 above.

93 *I.Ephesos* 1415.2-4: ἐπε]ιδὴ Ἀθηνόδωρος Σήμονος ἰσοτελής ὦν καὶ κατοικῶν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ νενίκηκεν τὰ Νέμεα παῖδας πύκτην [καὶ ἀνα] γγελίς Ἐφέσιοις ἐστεφάνωκε τὴν πόλιν, [ἔδοξε]ν τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ· κτλ.

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,⁹⁶ and Ephesos,⁹⁷ and mentioned already by Xenophanes,⁹⁸ who also mentions such honours as *proedria* and public entertainment, known also from Athens in the form of entertainment in the *prytaneion*, the symbolic centre of the *polis*.⁹⁹ 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*.¹⁰⁰ 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 interaction 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:

Nikolaidas of Korinthos competed at Thebes and Athens; Korinthians competed on Sicily; athletes from Aigina competed at Epidauros; Theogenes of Thasos competed in Thessaly and at Argos; and the great boxer Diagoras of Rhodos competed not only at all the contests of the *periodos* but also in Arkadia and Boiotia as well as at Athens, Argos, Thebes, Pellene, Aigina, and Megara.¹⁰¹ Clearly, Diagoras 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 Epidauros¹⁰² and tiny Lousoi in Arkadia¹⁰³ we know that the *polis* arranging an athletic festival announced upcoming celebrations internationally by epangelic 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 Epidauros 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

94 A few examples more: Bousquet 1959, 186: [νίκαν Δα]μά[ρε]τό[ς(?)] θ' εἴλετο | Πυθιάδα, | [πυγμαχέων παί]δων [ῥθ]εν ἐστεφάνωσε [π]αλαιάη | [πρῶτος Μεσ]σάναν, [α]ὐτόνο[μον] πατρίδα. – SEG XXXV 1125: Πρῶ[τ]ος ὁδ' ἐξ [Ἀσίας Ἐρμησία]ναξ Γονέως παῖς | ἀπτόως εἴλε πάλης ἄθλον Ὀλυμπιάδι· | εἰκόνα δ' ἔστησεν πατρὶς, ἦν στεφανώσας | ἀθανάτου χάριτος θνητὸς ἐὼν ἔτυχεν. – Simonides no. 30 (Page 2008): τὸν Ὀλυμπιονίκαν ... ὃς πατέρων ἀγαθῶν ἐστεφάνωσε πόλιν. – Demosthenes 58.66: Ἐπιχάρης μὲν ὁ ἀπππος ὁ ἐμὸς Ὀλυμπίασι νικήσας παῖδας στάδιον ἐστεφάνωσε τὴν πόλιν. – Theotimos (FGHst 834) fr. 1: πέμπει μὲν εἰς τὰς πανηγύρεις ἵππους ἀθλήσοντας ... νικήσας δὲ τὰ Πύθια καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πατρίδα ἐστεφάνωσε κτλ. See further Robert 1967, 21-8.

95 Xen. Mem. 3.7.1: Χαρμίδην δὲ τὸν Γλαύκωνος ὄραν ἀξιόλογον μὲν ἄνδρα ὄντα καὶ πολλῷ δυνατώτερον τῶν τὰ πολιτικὰ τότε πραττόντων, ὀκνοῦντα δὲ προσιέναι τῷ δήμῳ καὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως πραγμάτων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, εἰπέ μοι, ἔφη, ὦ Χαρμίδη, εἴ τις ἱκανὸς ὢν τοὺς στεφανίτας ἀγῶνας νικᾷ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸς τε τιμᾶσθαι καὶ τὴν πατρίδα ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι εὐδοκιμωτέραν ποιεῖν μὴ θέλοι ἀγωνίζεσθαι, ποῖον τινα τοῦτον νομίζεις ἂν τὸν ἄνδρα εἶναι; Δῆλον ὅτι, ἔφη, μαλακὸν τε καὶ δειλόν. – Isokrates 16.32: ὄραν τὴν ἐν Ὀλυμπία πανηγύριν ὑπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἀγαπωμένην καὶ θαυμαζομένην, καὶ τοὺς Ἑλληνας ἐπίδειξιν ἐν αὐτῇ ποιουμένους πλούτου καὶ ῥώμης καὶ παιδείσεως, καὶ τοὺς τ' ἀθλητὰς ζηλουμένους καὶ τὰς πόλεις ὀνομαστάς γινομένας τὰς τῶν νικῶντων. See also Ebert 1972, no. 463-4: ζηλοῦται δὲ πατὴρ Κλεῖνος κ[λυτοῦ εἵνεκα παιδός] | Πέλλα τε ἀείμαστον πατρὶς ἐ[λοῦσα κλέος].

96 Athens and Sybaris: Nielsen 2007, 95.

97 I.Ephesos 1515.10-2: τὸν δὲ οἱ[κόνω-]μὸν ἀποδοῦναι Ἀθηνῶδωροι τὸ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου τετ[α-][γμ]ένον ἀργύριον εἰς τὸν στέφανον·

98 Xenophanes fr. 2.9 (West): δῶρον ὃ οἱ κειμήλιον εἶη.

99 Nielsen 2007, 52. On the *prytaneion* as the symbolic centre of the *polis*: Miller 1978, 13 (cf. Hansen & Fischer-Hansen 1994, 31).

100 Diod. Sic. 13.82.7: καὶ κατὰ τὴν προτέραν δὲ ταύτης Ὀλυμπιάδα, δευτέραν ἐπὶ ταῖς ἑνεήκοντα, νικήσαντος Ἐξαινέτου Ἀκραγαντίνου, κατήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν πόλιν ἐφ' ἄρματος· συνεπόμπευον δ' αὐτῷ χωρὶς τῶν ἄλλων συνωρίδες τριακόσαιο λευκῶν ἵππων. On the significance of chariot processions, see Sinos 1998, 75-78.

101 On the career of Diagoras of Rhodes, see Pind. Ol. 7.80-7.

102 Perlman 2000, 67-97.

103 Perlman 2000, 158-60.

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 *Asklapieia*, the *Hekatomboia*, and the *Panathenaia*. 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 *Olympikos*, 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;¹⁰⁴ 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.¹⁰⁵

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 *periodos* constituted only the tip of an enormous athletic iceberg. The career of the otherwise unknown Korinthian sprinter and pentathlete Nikolaidas proves the existence in the late 6th or 5th century of nine athletic festivals outside the *periodos* 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 *periodos* 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 τὸν ἐνθάδε σύλλογον ἀρχὴν γενήσεσθαι τοῖς Ἕλλησι τῆς πρὸς ἀλλήλους φιλίας.

105 Isokrates *Paneg.* 43: Τῶν τοίνυν τὰς πανηγύρεις καταστησάντων δικαίως ἐπαινουμένον ὅτι τοιοῦτον ἔθος ἡμῖν παρέδωκεν ὥστε σπεισασμένους καὶ τὰς ἔχθρας τὰς ἐνεστηκυίας διαλυσασμένους συνελθεῖν εἰς ταῦτόν, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτ' εὐχὰς καὶ θυσίας κοινὰς ποιησασμένους ἀναμνησθῆναι μὲν τῆς συγγενείας τῆς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὑπαρχούσης, εὐμενεστέρω δ' εἰς τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον διατεθῆναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτοῦς, καὶ τὰς τε παλαιὰς ξενίας ἀνανεώσασθαι καὶ καινὰς ἐτέρας ποιήσασθαι κτλ. (trans. Norlin 1928). – Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 950e where the four festivals of the *periodos* are referred to as εἰρηνικαῖς συνουσίαις.

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;¹⁰⁶ the Hellenistic historian Diodorus Siculus even highlights such festivals as among the ingredients that make up human happiness.¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸ 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.

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¹⁰⁶ Thuc. 2.38.1: τῶν πόνων πλείστας ἀναπαύλας τῆ γνώμη ἐπορισάμεθα, ἀγῶσι μὲν γε καὶ θυσίαις διετησίαις (“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 οὐδεμία συνετελέσθη κατὰ τούτους τοὺς χρόνους, εἰρήνη δὲ μία συνετελέσθη, καὶ πανηγύρεις καὶ ἀγῶνες καὶ θεῶν θυσίαι καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἀνήκοντα παρὰ πᾶσιν ἐπεπόλαζεν (“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, | οἷ τῶνδ’ ἕκατι σύλλογον ποιοῦμενοι | τιμῶσ’ ἀχρεῖους 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, 15; 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.

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| (8. Aitna) | – Mainalos | 507. Naxos |
| 47. Syracuse 4 | – Mt Lykaion | (509. Paros) |
| 56. Kroton | 291. Pheneos 2 | (525. Tenos) |
| (- Magna Graecia 2) | 297. Tegea | 526. Thasos |
| (61. Metapontion) | 322. Thouria | 534. Dion |
| 70. Sybaris | 332. Geronthrai | (542. Mieza) |
| (71. Taras) | 345. Sparta 10+ | 553. Amphipolis 2 |
| (74. Thourioi) | 347. Argos 2 | (559. Akanthos) |
| 114. Anaktorion | 348. Epidaurus | 598. Poteidaia |
| – Kephalenia | (349. Halieis) | (640. Abdera) |
| (141. Zakynthos) | 355. Phleious | 661. Chersonesos |
| 177. Delphi | (357. Troizen) | (665. Kardia) |
| (198. Akraiphia) | 358. Aigina 3 | (674. Byzantion) |
| – Boiotia (2) | 361. Athens 9 | 690. Olbia |
| 210. Koroneia | 363. Salamis | (747. Kyzikos) |
| 211. Lebadeia | 370. Eretria 2 | 792. Skepsis |
| – Onchestos | 386. Opous | – Troad (2) |
| 213. Orchomenos | – Aiaia | 844. Ephesos |
| 214. Oropos | (400. Krannon) | 845. Erythrai |
| 221. Thebes | (401. Larisa) | 848. Kolophon |
| 222. Thespiiai | (409. Pelinna) | 861. Priene |
| 225. Megara | (412. Pharkadon) | 864. Samos |
| 227. Korinthos | (414. Pherai) | (868. Teos 3) |
| 228. Sikyon | (415. Skotoussa) | 891. Iasos |
| – Achaia (2) | – Thessaly 3 | (913. Mylasa) |
| 240. Pellene | (417. Triikka) | 997. Lindos |
| (251. Elis) | (473. Minoa) | – Rhodos |
| 276. Kleitor | 478. Delos | – Dorian hexapolis |
| 279. Lousoi | (499. Kos) | 1028. Kyrene 4 |

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*

FGrHist = *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby, Leiden 1954-57.

IByz. = *Die Inschriften von Byzantion. Teil I. Die Inschriften*, ed. A. Łajtar, Bonn 2000.

I.Iasos = *Die Inschriften von Iasos I-II*, ed. W. Blümel, Bonn 1985.

I.Delphes = *Fouilles de Delphes. III. Épigraphie*, Paris 1909-1985.

I.Ephesos = *Die Inschriften von Ephesos. Teil IV. Nr. 1001-1445*

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IG = *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1873-.

I.Lindos = *Lindos. Fouilles de l'acropole 1902-1914. II. Inscriptions*, C. Blinkenberg (ed.), Copenhagen & Berlin 1941.

I.Priene = *Inschriften von Priene*, F. Hiller von Gærtringen (ed.), Berlin 1906.

SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden & Boston 1923-.

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