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SPORT AND FESTIVAL IN *OD.* 8. FROM SCHERIA TO BEIJING[1]

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The Australian Olympics of 2000 AD and the Greek Olympics of 2004 AD have given rise to a spate of books researching ancient sport, athletics and festivals in Homer and in the archaic and ancient worlds.[2] Finland has been no exception.[3] In preparation for the Beijing Olympics for 2008, the Chinese claim that sports in Ancient China and Greece have common roots.[4] There is even a trend to see social aspirations behind the organisation of games that culminate in the formation of the *polis* (city-state). It has also become fashionable to investigate homoeroticism, class differences and gender considerations in sports history. Most work has been done on the Funeral Games for Patroclus in *Il.* 23 and on the archaeology of Olympia leaving a significant gap for the Phaeacian Games in *Od*. 8.[5] One scholar has gone so far as to suggest that the Phaeacian

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[1] This paper was written in the aftermath of the Fourth Biennial Meeting of the Celtic Conference in Classics, 30.8.–2.9.2006 held at the University of Wales, Lampeter. There I had the opportunity to hear Prof. N. Fisher and Dr. D. Pritchard debating live the egalitarianism versus elitism of ancient Greek sport. I wish to thank them as well as Prof. H. van Wees, who led the panel on competition, for inspiring discussion on archaic and ancient Greek society.

[2] See the review article by S. Evans, BMCR 2004.09.24 on M. B. Poliakoff, *Kampfsport in der Antike,* Düsseldorf 2004.

In this article I refer to the original English version *Combat Sports in the Ancient World*, New Haven and London 1987.

[3] S. Koski, M. Rissanen, J. Tahvanainen, *Antiikin urheilu* (=Ancient Sport), Helsinki 2004. This book achieved extraordinarily rare acclaim for a classics book in 2005 by winning the coveted annual Finnish prize for non-fiction and textbooks (Tieto-Finlandia). They point out (p. 14) the curiosity of the root meaning of the Finnish word for sport (*urheilu*) as indicating "recklessness", "boldness", and is not connected to the Latin "*disportare*".

[4] http://arabic.china.org.cn/english/features/olympics/100651.htm

[5] Good earlier accounts of Homeric sport can be found in E. N. Gardiner, *Greek Athletic*

Games deserve a special study while another researcher, though not pinpointing Phaeacian chorus-dancing, has called for new studies on the transition from archaic to classical chorus-dancing in Greece.[6]

Greek festivals have received growing scholarly attention over the past few decades, with an important theme of research being the roles of festivals in the formation of the Greek *polis* and the development and articulation of *polis* identity. Agonistic festivals in particular were an integral part of the *polis*, its discourses and its social relations, and Panhellenic festivals were fundamental to the notion of "Greekness" – an identity based especially upon language and religion. This article explores in detail the cultural, religious, political and social import of sport and festival in Scheria as a reflection of the Greek world of the archaic period, including the Olympic Games, taking into account the fantasy nature of the island and the possible contrasts to society adumbrated in the *Iliad* or in Hesiod. It investigates how athletics bore out and reinforced central aspects of Greek culture such as *arete* (manly excellence and bravery), *agon* (publicly adjudicated contest) and ideals like manly beauty. I also study how the Phaeacians staged this festival not just to ensure the *charis* (gratitude) of its city-protecting deities and heroes, but also as a way to articulate and broadcast civic ideology and the communal identity of its citizens and as a means to legitimate its political institutions and social structures, just as in a Greek *polis*. *Polis* in Homer, it is to be noted, means nothing more than a fortified site, a town.[7] But some scholars see Scheria as having at least some of the appearance of the classical *polis,* certainly more than Ithaca.[8] In particular the Phaeacian Games reveal how festivals, sporting and musical *agones* led the way, throughout the archaic period, in the crystallisation and development of the *polis* and in the creation of its juridical and political practices. To this we can add dance as it occurs after the games. Recent research underscores that dance is an activity through which society instills collective discipline in its members.

Sports and Festivals, London 1910, 17–18, 402–434; H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletes and Athletics*, London 1964, 97–101; N. Richardson, *The Iliad: a Commentary vol.6:books 21–24*, Cambridge 1993, 201–271.

[6] B. Brown, "Homer, funeral contests and the origins of the Greek city", in D. Phillips and D. Pritchard (eds.), *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World*, Swansea 2003, 149; B. Kowalzig, "Changing Choral Worlds" in P. Murray and P. Wilson (eds.), *Music and the Muses. The Culture of Mousike in the Classical Athenian city*, Oxford 2004, 41.

[7] M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 1965, 27.

[8] J. Halversen, "Social Order in the Odyssey", *Hermes* 120 (1985) 129–145, repr. in *Homer: Readings and Images,* London 1992, 185.

The participant in the dance accepts the rules of the community. This provides a mean of internalising discipline in a period with no police, army or prisons. Discipline was thus obtained not through fear but through bodily activity, a form of group therapy.[9]

There are clear signs of cult and festival activity in Olympia from 2000 BC, a fact which suggests such activity may well have existed elsewhere on the mainland in Greece and in the Aegean islands.[10] There is furthermore a clear link between archaic Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Minoan and Mycenaean sports that passed on in some degree to Geometric Greece in the eighth and seventh centuries. Homer is closer to Geometric sport than to Minoan or Mycenaean sport as bull-leaping or bull-fighting is no longer a central issue. It has become customary to divide this early history into three periods: 2000–1100 BC including the Middle Bronze and Mycenaean Ages; 1100–800 BC including the so called "Dorian Migration" and the Geometric period; and 800–476 BC, the early Archaic and Classical Periods.[11] The first two periods and part of the third are the most difficult to unravel due to a large amount of conflicting legends and scattered, mostly nonathletic archaeological evidence. Contradictions in stories may result from alternate versions by the citizens of nearby Elis and Pisa who vied for the sponsorship of the games. What happened between the Golden Age of Mycenae and the Homeric period that resulted in the athletic image of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the ultimate development of Greek athletics?[12] I attempt an answer in this article. There are, however, points of agreement between common tales and the archaeological monuments. Reference to ancient mythical chronology at least gives a sense of the relative sequence of events in the tradition, not of course, in historical time.

The large number and variety of Greek athletic festivals known in historical times, held both on the mainland and on the islands, prohibit a comprehensive list and a full litany of the gods and heroes with whom each festival was associated. We may, however, note that since the traditional founding of the Olympic Games in 776 BC and the establishment of the other three Panhellenic games, namely the Pythia, Isthmia and Nemea, between 586

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[9] Y. Garfinkel, *Dancing at the Dawn of Agriculture*, Austin 2003, 80

[10] For the fundamental history of the Olympia excavations, see J. Whitley, *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge 2001, 34–35 and references there.

[11] T. F. Scanlon, *Eros and Greek Athletics*, Oxford 2002, 32.

[12] This question is posed by S. G. Miller, *Ancient Greek Athletics,* New Haven and London 2004, 26.

and 573 BC, there arose a popular tradition throughout the Greek world of including an agonistic element in the major local festivals of pre-established cults. In the epinician odes of Pindar (518–438 BC) there is mention of at least twenty, presumably regularly held, games in addition to the four Panhellenic festivals.[13] In a comprehensive study of inscriptional evidence for games of the Greek mainland (excepting Athens) and the Aegean Islands (except Euboea), one scholar has catalogued some 140 different games, about one third of which are attested only in the Roman period. By the Roman imperial era, another esimate has it, the agonistic market gained such popularity as to offer at least 270 athletic festivals to athletes, who were then better organised in professional unions.[14]

Scheria has usually been identified with Corcyra (Corfu), but as that is within some 80 miles from Ithaca, whereas Scheria is a night's voyage away for one of the magical Phaeacian ships (*Od.* 13,81 f.), the identification is unlikely. It is the land of the Phaeacians at which Odysseus arrives after his shipwreck (*Od.* 5,451f). It is a fertile country, obviously an island (*Od.* 6,204), having an excellent, almost land-locked harbour (*Od.* 6,263f.) by which its city stands, at least one river (*Od.* 5,451) and a mild climate (*Od.* 7,117f.) where fruits grow all the year round. The population are enterprising and very skilful seafarers, great gossips, boastful and rather impudent, not very warlike or athletic, fond of pleasure, but kindly and willing to escort strangers in their wonderful ships. The Phaeacians function as an integral community and the advantages of communal life are many and obvious. Where the solitude of the Cyclopes keeps them at the level of crude improvisation, their Phaeacian cousins are craftsmen whose gardens, ships, palaces, dances and banquets abundantly reveal their creative élan.[15] Despite their isolation the Phaeacians are thus well-informed about the customs of the rest of the world through their escort contacts and through listening to epic poetry.[16] The phantom nature of the island does not prohibit us

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[13] These were held in Sicyon, Argos, Aegina, Megara, Tegea, Epidaurus, Cyrene (Sparta), Thebes, Pellene, Eleusis, Athens, Rhodes, Corinth, Cleitor, Arcadia, Orchomenus, Phylace, Pellene, Acragas, Delphi, Achaea, Marathon and Euboea. Cp. R. Stoneman (ed.), *Pindar, The Odes and Selected Fragments,* London 1997, introd. 50–51.

[14] Scanlon (above n. 11) 29.

[15] N. Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon. Poetic Problems in Homer's Odyssey*, Los Angeles 1975, 162

[16] A point made by R. Scodel, "Odysseus' ethnographic digressions", in R. J. Rabel, *Approaches to Homer, Ancient and Modern*, Swansea 2005, 151.

from investigating the very typically Greek sports practised there, not to mention the typically Mycenaean feasting and dancing exercised there.[17]

In fact, the whole of *Od.* 8 has been seen as a festival with μουσική and γυμναστική alternating in a Geometric structure.[18] It may well be that the mere depiction of a festivity that combined athletic competition with musical performance would have been suggestive in the archaic age of the matching poetic and athletic contests where were the core of great festivals auch as the one on Delos for Apollo.[19]At the end of *Od.* 7, Alcinous had announced that the next day he would first entertain the stranger and then attend to his escort home. Book 8 brings in reverse order the fulfilment of this announcement: the stranger's escort is publicly announced in an assembly (*Od.* 8,1–47) and the initial preparations for the journey are made (*Od.* 8,48–55), followed by the entertainment, consisting of a meal and song (*Od.* 8,62–103), games and song (*Od.* 8,104–468) and another meal and song (*Od.* 8,469–586). The reverse order allows the entertainment to take on enormous dimensions, with Odysseus himself becoming the entertainer for the duration of four books (9–12) so that de Jong conjectures that we are in fact dealing here with a powerful instance of misdirection.[20] Throughout the narratees are given to understand that the "stranger" is to depart that evening. In *Od.* 8,26–45 Alcinous orders ships to be prepared; in *Od.* 8,51–55 we find the first elements of a "departure ship" type-scene; in *Od.* 8,150–151 Laodamas reassures Odysseus that "your return is not far away, for a ship is already lying ready"; in *Od.* 8,367–417 we have "farewell" speeches and the exchange of guest-gifts; and in *Od.* 8,536–586 Alcinous repeatedly mentions his *pompe,* but in the end Odysseus does not depart that evening, postponing his passionately desired voyage home himself.

Now is the time for "micro-textual" sports analysis on the basis of the text in *Od.* 8 and for comparison with what we know of the early Olympic Games. The announcement of the games is issued only to the sons of the nobles

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[17] See the bibliography on Scheria in A. Heubeck, S. West and J.B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, vol.1, Oxford 1990, 344–346; J. C. Wright (ed.), *The Mycenaean Feast*, Princeton 2004, *passim.*

[18] C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Homeric Tradition*, Cambridge MA 1958, 288.

[19] A. Ford, *Homer, the Poetry of the Past*, Ithaca and London 1992, 117.

[20] I. de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*, Cambridge 2001, 190. Similar analyses of the structure of *Od.* 8 can be found in A. F. Garvie, *Homer, Odyssey Books VI–VIII,* Cambridge 1994, 237–350, and in W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer,* vol.1, 2nd ed. London 1967, 330–331.

(Φαιήκων οἱ ἄριστοι) as well as to πολλοί τε καὶ εσθλοί. This is to be distinguished from πουλὺς ὅμιλος. The original summons (*Od.* 8,11,26 and 97) is to Φαιήκων ἡγήτορες ἠδὲ μέδοντες. The elitism of Greek sport is a hotly contested issue. A long line of classicists, including Percy Gardner, E. Norman Gardiner and H.A. Harris, had elaborated how the golden age of Greek sport was the archaic period when athletes were drawn exclusively from the traditional landed elite and competed as amateurs for prizes of only symbolic value.[21] These scholars also argued that the supposed introduction by fifth century Greek cities of valuable prizes at their own sporting competitions and cash bonuses for those of their citizens victorious at the international games, like the Oympics, attracted members of the lower class into athletics and encouraged them to train and specialise. Henri Pleket however pointed out that long before the classical age there already were prizes of great value for athletic victory, which "archaic nobles are not known to have rejected".[22] Evidence in *Il.*23 and Hesiod clearly shows how aristocrats of the eighth and seventh centuries competed for bullion, cauldrons and slave women at the funerals of fellow members of the upper class.[23] It must be admitted that the Phaeacian episode would seem on the surface to support amateur sporting, but in the Homeric world this is in fact the stark exception to the rule and seems to support elite participation as elsewhere in Homer.[24] In the games of *Il.*23 there is much emphasis on the prizes awarded to the winners. Here, where the games are not important in themselves, no such prizes are awarded. Instead after the completion of the games, dancing and ball-games, Alcinous proposes that each of the βασιλῆες should present Odysseus with the gift that will formally mark his status as a guest-friend. From *Od.* 8,387f. there is great emphasis on the gifts to Odysseus proposed by Alcinous. The giving and receiving of gifts may in

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[21] D. Pritchard, "Athletics, Education and Participation in Classical Athens", in Phillips and Pritchard (above n. 6) 293.

[22] H. W. Pleket, "Games, prizes, athletes and ideology: some aspects of the history of sport in the Greco-Roman world", *Stadion* 1 (1975) 59.

[23] *Il.* 23,259.261, 557–562; Hes.*Th.* 435–438; *Op.* 654–657. For Homeric poetry as an admittedly imperfect reflection of early archaic Greek society, see K. A. Raaflaub, "Homeric Society", in I. Morris and B. Powell (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer*, Leiden 1997, 624–648.

[24] It was Aristarchus who introduced the phrase Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν – to clarify Homer through Homer.

Homeric society mark the establishment of a friendly relationship.[25]

Other scholars have noted parallels between the young men of the ruling class in Phaeacia and the easy-living suitors in Ithaca whose daily routine consists of a bit of sport (*Od.* 4,626, *Od.* 17,168) and a great deal of feasting and dancing. The celebration there of a *kleos* (fame) derived exclusively from sports (*Od.* 8,147–148), the self-conscious class character of their snobbery against people in trade (*Od.* 8,159–64) and the general emphasis upon a daily routine devoted to feasting, dancing, sports and sex (eg *Od.* 8,244–249) – all throw further light on the contemporary element in the poet's portrait of the suitors.[26] Nevertheless there have been ardent advocates for the participation of lower-class athletes in the classical and archaic periods. These claims are much facilitated from the fifth century onwards when one find scraps of evidence for cooks, goatherds, cowherds, farmers and a fish porter participating in athletic competitions or having victory epigrams written about them.[27] Personally I find little evidence in *Od.* 8 to support the idea that the ideological underpinnings of democracy, *isonomia* or legal equality and *isegoria*, equality of speech, if not *demokratia* itself developed out of athletics or that archaic Greeks first encountered equality in athletic competitions where winners were determined by reference, not to rank or class, but to absolute standards of distance, speed and strength.[28]

Od. 8,103 succinctly outlines the four types of sports: πύξ τε

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[25] M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, New York 1965, 70–76, 140–143; S. B. Pomeroy, S. B. Burstein, W. Donlan, J. T. Roberts, *A Brief History of Ancient Greece: Politics, Society and Culture,* Oxford 2004, 49 on guest-friendship. (Cp. reviews by T. Howe *BMCR* 2005.02.06 and S. Evans, *Scholia Reviews* n.s. 14 [2005] 7.)

[26] Noted by P. W. Rose, "Class ambivalence in the *Odyssey*", *Historia* 24 (1975) 129–149, repr. in C. Emilyn-Jones, L. Harwick and J. Purkis, *Homer: Readings and Images*, London 1992, 199–200.

[27] D. C. Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics,* Chicago 1984, 163, where Young's actual words are:"I emphasise the case for non-noble participation in early Greek athletics; for others had badly overstated the argument for aristocratic exclusiveness, Lest I mislead, I hasten to reiterate the extensive participation of the nobility. No reliable proportion of nobles to non-nobles can be established at present." See also his article "Professionalism in archaic and classical Greek athletics", *AncW* 7 (1983) 45–51 and "How the amateurs won the Olympics", in W. Raschke (ed.), *The Archaeology of the Olympics: The Olympics and other festivals in antiquity*, Madison 1988, 55–78. Fisher and Miller take their cue from Young.

[28] These are the views of S. Miller, "Naked Democracy" in P. Flensted-Jensen, T. H. Nielsen and L. Rubinstein (eds), *Polis and Politics: Studies in ancient Greek history: Presented to Mogens Herman Hansen on his Sixtieth Birthday, August 20th*, Aarhus 2000, 278

παλαισμοσύνῃ τε καὶ ἅλμασιν ἠδὲ πόδεσσιν. That is "boxing, wrestling, jumping and running". I wish to include the later dancing in a ring and ball-throwing display as part of this competition and display. Running or δρόμος has long been recognised as the first event to be introduced at Olympia. The omission of the *pancration* is notable. The extraordinary list of names at *Od.* 8,111–117 has always been a bone of contention and source of amazement. The names remind us that these sports are exclusively male. When women play so prominent a role in the Phaeacian court it is not merely coincidence that there is no reference whatsoever to any feminine presence at the games, which are introduced by a catalogue of sixteen male names, of spectators and participants.[29] The majority of translators simply transliterate them but Fagles, following Fitzgerald, renders these lines thus:

> Topsail and Riptide rose, the helmsman Rowhard too
> and Seaman and Sternman, Surf-at-the-Beach and Swing-Aboard,
> and Seagirt the son of greatfleet, Shipwrightson
> and the son of Launcher, Broadsea, rose up too,
> a match for murderous Ares, death to men –
> in looks and build the best of all Phaeacians
> after gallant Laodamas, the Captain of the People.[30]

There is an element of parody and exaggeration in these names. The names are all to do with ships, with sailing the seas, surfing the waves and handling ships. The lines confirm the maritime background of these island athletes. The admiration for the physical beauty and form of the male body is typically Greek, but breeds no direct suspicions of rampant homosexuality in Phaeacia.[31]

In Dark Age Crete, by contrast, institutionalised pederasty actually existed, with the beloved enjoying certain honours at choral dances and at races

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[29] Only when the men return to the palace in the evening do women reappaear on the scene. This is noted by Austin (above n. 15) 160.

[30] Homer, *The Odyssey*, transl. by R. Fagles, Harmondsworth 1997, following the style of R. Fitzgerald, Aylesbury 1962, as opposed to the literal or transliterated renderings in the revised Penguin transl. by E. V. Rieu, D. C. H. Rieu & P. V. Jones, Harmondsworth 1991; M. Hammond, Trowbridge 2000; S. Lombardo, Indianapolis 2000.

[31] Phaedrus is right in Pl. *Symp.* 180a in saying that Homer represents Achilles as younger than Patroclus (*Il.*11,786), yet he does not, according to Dover (K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, New York 1988,197,) discard the erotic interpretation of the story; for Phaedrus, Achilles is the *eromenos* who so honoured his *erastes* Patroclus that he was ready to die in avenging him.

(*dromois*) where they have the most honoured places. This was not however practised formally elsewhere until the seventh or sixth centuries, when it received a huge boost from naked sports.[32] The number of events is increased in *Od.* 8,129 by throwing the discus. Clytoneus won the footrace "by the range of two mules in fallow-land", Euryalus or Broadsea won the wrestling bouts, "pinning" his opponent, Amphialus or Seagirt won the jumping and Elatreus or Rowhard won the discus throwing.

Running is placed first in this competition and it was the first event to be introduced into the Olympic Games in 776 BC.[33] Its description is messy. If Clytoneus outstrips the other competitors by the "range of two mules in fallow-land", the running distance is more likely to be a double lap (δίαυλος) rather than a straight sprint in one direction (στάδιον), so that the spectator crowd is waiting at what is both the starting- and finishing-line.[34] Running was a contest involving considerably less risk of personal injury than chariot-racing or the combat sports, but there is no evidence that it was therefore regarded with disdain. Achilles is usually described as "fleet-footed" and his swift efficiency as a killing-machine was in no small measure based upon his sprinting speed.

Wrestling (πάλη, παλαισμοσύνη) has received a vast amount of attention.[35] It was introduced into the Olympic programme in 708 BC. Most modern writers deplore the demise of wrestling in the modern world. Sports in Egypt included wrestling.[36] The oldest reliefs with wrestling scenes, dated from 2400 BC, decorated the tombs of Ptahotep and Akhethotep. There the wrestlers are depicted naked. By contrast, wrestling scenes from Mesopotamia, carved on seals and reliefs of all periods, show wrestlers wearing belts and grasping their

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[32] A. Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge 1997, 28–29.

[33] Koski et al. (above n. 3) 44–48; Miller (above n. 12) 11,31– 34, 44, 46, 50, 57, 60, 83, 95, 99, 125, 126, 130, 134, 14, 146, 205, 210, 216, 217, 221, 225, 226. T. Perrottet, *The Naked Olympics: the True Story of the Ancient Games,* New York 2004, 138–148; N. Spivey, *The Ancient Olympics,* Oxford 2004, 111–117; J. Swaddling, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, London 1999 2nd ed., 57–62; W. B. Tyrrell, *The Smell of Sweat: Greek Athletics, Olympics and Culture,* Illinois 2004, 59–74.

[34] I agree with Garvie 1994, 262, here and disagree with Stanford 1967, 334.

[35] Koski et al. (above n. 3) 58–61; Miller (above n. 12) 21–24, 46–50, figs.76–77, 68–69; Perrottet (above n. 33) 9, 12, 148, 162–165, 170–173; Poliakoff (above n. 2) 23–53; Spivey (above n. 33) 4, 10, 16–18, 23, 32, 99–101; Swaddling (above n. 33) 72–75; Tyrrell (above n. 33) 107–109.

[36] They also included stick fighting, boxing, acrobatics, archery, equestrian events, boating and ball games.

opponents by them. Cuneiform texts from Mesopotamia refer to different postures and holds on the limbs and belt. According to one view, belt wrestling was an essential part of a warrior's or hero's life. In the epic of Gilgamesh, the divine hero meets Enkidu in a wrestling match, whereby "they seized each other, they bent down like expert wrestlers." Likewise the Sumerian king Shulgi and the Jewish patriarch Jacob stand their ground as wrestlers.[37] On a seal, dated from 1800 BC, a hero and a bull man fight wearing belts.

Jumping (ἅλμα) must here mean the long jump. There is ample evidence that to increase their speed the ancient Greeks, if not archaic Greeks, used dumb-bells (*halteres*) which came in two basic types identified by modern scholars as the spherical and the long.[38] The Greeks frequently confused the long jump, the high jump and the triple jump. Of the five events included in the pentathlon, jumping, the discus throw and the javelin throw were not contested outside the pentathlon, whereas the stadion race and wrestling existed independently. Some modern scholars reconstruct the ancient jump as a triple jump on the basis of an alleged jump of 16.5 metres by Phaÿllus of Croton. But based on vase paintings the ancient jump can be satisfactorily reconstructed as similar to today´s long jump, with the addition of the weights and accompanying flute music.[39]

Boxing (πύξ, πυγμή, πυγμαχία) was regarded by the Greeks as even more dangerous than the *pancration* as only blows to the head were accepted.[40] It was introduced into the Olympic Games in 688 BC, twenty years after the wrestling. Homer tells us simply that Laodomas won the boxing. There were no weight categories in ancient boxing so this was a sport which clearly favoured the hefty. Both the Greek and the Latin (*pugillare*) words for boxing imply use of the fists; and since no padded gloves were worn for a bout, only tightly wrapped leather thongs, serious damage might be inflicted, especially about the face and ears. Ancient boxing was not limited by timekeepers and bells, so it tested stamina.

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[37] Poliakoff (above n. 2) 23.

[38] Koski et al. (above n. 3) 49–51; Miller (above n. 12) 63–68, figs. 103–104, 114–130; Perrottet (above n. 33) 10, 12, 15, 105, 111–113; Spivey (above n. 33) 91, 95, 96, 160; Swaddling (above n. 33) 68–71; Tyrrell (above n. 33) 210–213, esp. illustration 27.

[39] Miller (above n. 12) 68.

[40] Koski et al.(above n. 3) 61–64; Miller (above n. 12) 51–57, 236–237, figs. 80–95; Perrottet (above n. 33) 166–170; Spivey (above n. 33), 103–105, 153–156; Swaddling (above n. 33) 77–81; Tyrrell (above n. 33) 118–122.

In Egypt and Mesopotamia wrestling and boxing preserve their popularity from 3000 BC onwards as is witnessed in frescoes, vase-painting and texts. The pharaohs of Egypt and the kings of Mesopotamia have recorded their interest in athletic activities on the walls of their temples and tombs in the depictions of different sports such as wrestling, bull-leaping and boxing. In both sports the athletes had elaborate coiffures, rather as in Japan, they wore sandals and necklaces. Wrestlers wore a special kind of helmet with cheekpieces, whereas boxers had their heads uncovered. The winner is portrayed with raised left hand, a possible posture to demonstrate his triumph. The defeated is shown in various postures, whether on his knees or while trying to avoid his opponent's blows.[41] In all the above-mentioned scenes, high-quality performance requires long periods of practice as well as developed athletic ability and coaching. The famous fresco from Thera (circa 1550 BC), depicting two boys boxing, proves that training was a dominant concern from an early age. Each of the boys is wearing a girdle and a boxing glove on their hand only. Bull-leaping scenes imply absolute precision in action and highly developed acquaintance with the dangers encountered by physical contact with the animal. Acrobatic exericises and wrestling scenes show exercised bodies with narrow waists and well trained bodies and rippling muscles.The consistency and precision of movement show that athletic events were organised activites of a repetitive nature in Minoan times.

The subsequent slanging match between Laodamas and Odysseus reveals a great deal about archaic Greek attitudes to and expectations from sport and sportsmen. First Laodamas wonders whether Odysseus knows the ropes of any sport, as if to confirm that a rudimentary knowledge of and skill in sport was expected of every single Greek man. Then Laodamas plays into the hands of the sports historian:

> οὐ μὲν μεῖζον κλέος ἀνέρος ὄφρα κεν ᾖσιν
> ἢ ὅ τι ποσσίν τε ῥέξῃ και χερσὶν ἐῇσιν. (*Od.* 8,147–148)

At this point it is perhaps worthwhile noting that the footrace is given no special treatment or prestige in *Od.* 8 or *Il.* 23. Neither are there age categories in Homeric athletics, and in fact older men are shown competing more often

41 K. Lange and M. Hirmer, *Ägypten: Architektur, Plastik, Malerei in drei Jahrtausenden*, Munich 1967, 72 acrobatic dance, 84 wrestling from Beni-Hasan, 168 girls dancing, 210 and 211 lyre-playing.

than younger boys. Periodic cycles are not evident, and competitions, such as this designed to signal the departure of Odysseus and demonstrate the skills of the local Phaeacians to the guest-friend, are more often irregular occasions than in the context of recurring festivals. There are, then, serious doubts about placing athletics in contexts of "prehistoric initiation", as argued for either by those seeing connections with pederasty or by those detecting links with athletics in local rituals apart from pederasty. These doubts suggest a more cautious,. alternative view that what some call "prehistoric iniation" can be more reliably described as a form of social formation or *paideia* which was widespread in many cities of ancient Greece but only after the eighth century BC.[42] Male and female contests are clearly segregated in Scheria, but there are many practical reasons for that provision and the holding of a purely male athletics competition gives no grounds for suspecting homoeroticism between competitors, for example between Topsail and Riptide.

When finally Odysseus is goaded into participating in the games, he throws the discus, this time a heavier discus, farther than anybody else. About twenty ancient discuses have survived; most are bronze, a few are marble, and one is lead. They vary in diameter from about 17 to 35 cm. with an average thickness of 0.5 cm. The weights range from approximately 1.5 to 6.5 kg, 4 kg being the average, just half a kilo more than the minimum weight for a modern discus, which is usually made of wood with an inner metal plate and rim.[43]

He seems to participate fully clothed. The rise of athletics in the seventh century BC is connected to athletic nudity and the founding of gymnasia over the same period. But since the Bronze Age, the athletes of Greece and of various Mediterranean cultures (Minoans, Mesopotamians, Egyptians) had

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[42] Scanlon (above n. 11) 69. See there references to Sergent, Bremmer and other scholars who see pederasty as an institution that evolved from Indo-European initation rituals in the prehistoric period, in which an older male became the lover of the initiate and his mentor in hunting, sports and other aspects of adult life. Dover (above n. 31) 131–132 has refuted these views and maintains that homosexulality "came out of the closet" in the seventh century because once social approval has been given to an activity which is physically, emotionally and aesthetically gratifying to the adult males of a society, it is not easily suppressed.

[43] Koski et al. (above n. 3) 54–55; Miller (above n. 33) 60–63, "The degree to which the discus was standardised is not clear". Perrottet (above n. 33) 105–110; Swaddling (above n. 33) 63–66: "Myron's "discus thrower" (*discobolos*) may be the most famous of all Greek athletic statues today, reproduced on coffee cups in Greek diners around the world, while replica statuettes grace the mantelpieces of millions of tourists"; Tyrrell (above n. 33) 204–210, pointing out that "quoit" is a mistaken translation for discus.

worn little, as can be seen in contemporary drawings.[44] The boxer's loincloth (and gloves) are described at *Il.* 23,683: ζῶμα δὲ οἱ πρῶτον παρακάββαλεν and it is widely assumed, following Thucydides (Thuc.1,6,5–6), that in the eighth century athletes regularly wore something approximating to the Japanese Sumo-wrestler's loincloth. Writing in 420 BC Thucydides ascribes a Spartan origin to nude competition but states that it is "not many years since the custom began". Pausanias (1,44,1) attributes the "invention" of nude athletics to Orsippos of Megara who won the *stadion* at Olympia in 720 BC when his *perizoma* (loincloth) fell off during the race. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (7,72,2–3) also dates the custom to 720 BC but attributes it to a Spartan Acanthus. It seems then that the ancients themselves were uncertain about the beginning of athletic nudity.[45]

The proliferation of games in the archaic and ancient periods resulted in a formal distinction between the so called stephanitic or "crown" games (*agones stephanitai*), the four sacred or Panhellenic games in which a crown was the only prize, and the "thematic games" (*agones thematikoi*), also called "prize" or "local" games, which were sometimes modelled on the crown games in their programmes, but which always awarded valuable prizes. The Phaeacian Games must surely be called "local games" but without the awarding of prizes, except for the guest-friend gifts that Odysseus receives after the games and prior to his departure.

Feasting, music, story-telling and athletics are the traditional entertainments of a civilised aristocratic society. Feasting and athletic contests were an important aspect of the warrior's life, an exemplication of his *arete* (prowess), which was consistently being put to the test in battle in times of war, and in the field of sport in a nonbelligerent situation. Thus, for the early hero athletics were in a sense the peacetime counterpart of war. This is Orwell's "War minus the shooting". Depictions in art show that athletics, especially boxing and wrestling, were already enjoyed in Minoan-Mycenaean times. It is of course uncertain whether Homer's description preserve a genuine memory of Mycenaean conditions or depicts those of his own day. The traditional date for the first Olympic Games is 776 BC and already at *Il.* 11,698–701 we hear of a chariot race at Elis.

Archaeological evidence for Mycenaean feasting is far more widespread

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[44] Poliakoff (above n. 2) illustrations 1, 7–11, 15–18, 24, 41, 48–51, 64 and 69.

[45] Miller (above n. 11) 11.

than that for festivals and athletics, though together with singing and dancing, all were interconnected. Different archaeologists emphasise different aspects of feasting. Some have seen feasts as mechanisms for redistribution, others as means for demonstrating heritable holdings and status, while many claim they demonstrate and amplify prestige.[46] It is evident also that feasts and festivals were not merely performed for practial and social benefit, but also for theological and liturgical reasons – in order, for example to maintain the cosmic order and keep Poseidon, in the Phaeacians' case, happy. In any case, the result is practical, as Hayden has emphasised, and his list of nine benefits of feasting is a powerful statement about the degree to which this social practice permeates the many dimensions of human activities. According to Hayden, feasts

> 1. mobilise labour;
> 2. create cooperative relationships within groups, or converse, exclude other groups;
> 3. create cooperative alliances between social groups (including political suuport between households);
> 4. invest surpluses and generate profits;
> 5. attract desirable mates, labour, allies, or wealth exchanges by advertising the success of the group;
> 6. create political power (control over resources and labour) through the creation of a network of reciprocal debts;
> 7. extract surplus produce from the general populace for elite use;
> 8. solicit favours; and
> 9. compensate for transgressions.[47]

The feast and the festival are part and parcel of the Phaeacian Games. To continue with the games: the four events listed at *Od.* 8,103 are all described, though in a different order, in what follows. Boxing, wrestling, and running but not jumping, are featured at *Il.* 23 which also describes events that do not appear here, and lays much stress on the prizes, which are not mentioned here at all. An archery contest is perhaps deliberately omitted (already at *Od.* 6,270 we have learnt that the Phaeacians are not archers), so as not to detract from the much more serious one in *Od.* 22. Instead, Homer will more subtly foreshadow that climax by letting Odysseus (*Od.* 8,215–228) boast of his prowess as an archer. The one event at which Odysseus will display his athletic prowess to the

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[46] J. C. Wright, "The Mycenaean Feast: an Introduction", in J. C. Wright (ed.), *The Mycenaean Feast,* Princeton 2004, 6.

[47] B. Hayden, "Fabulous Feasts: A Prolegomenon to the Importance of Feasting", in M. Dietler and B. Hayden (eds), *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power,* Washington DC 2001, 29–30.

Phaeacians (*Od.* 8,186–198) is prepared for in a single line at 129. The treatment of these games is quite summary, and contrasts with the extended account at *Il.* 23. For the most part, Homer gives us merely the names of the winners, and only the footrace is allowed a slightly fuller description. *Od.* 8, 121, 122 and 125–125 are all based on lines found elsewhere in Homer. As with Demodocus' song, what matters is not much the contest itself, as the effect that it will have upon Odysseus. If behind these games lies a story in which the unknown stranger defeats the other competitors to win the hand of the princess, Euryalus may originally have been Odysseus' principal rival. So at *Od.* 21,68–79 Penelope herself is to be the prize in the contest with the bow.

The Homeric epics are likely to be something of a patchwork in their presentation of equestrian and athletic competition. Any reading of them by the sport historian must be literary as well as literal. After Schliemann's revolutionary discoveries, scholars jumped onto the Bronze Age historical band–waggon. This has been called "Homeric fundamentalism" that once saw the epics as a transmitted reflection of thirteenth century history retained (as far as the vagaries of transmission allowed) in a thirteenth century setting.[48] This was denied in the influential work of Moses Finley who thought that the world of Odysseus was set neither in the Mycenaean era nor in the time of the composition of the poems, but sometime in the intervening Dark Age, the tenth or ninth century.[49] A sharp break after the fall of the palaces became archaeological orthodoxy too. The wheel has now begun to turn full circle. The idea of a long prehistory of aoidic inheritance that ultimately fed into the epics, once uncritically championed (not to say exaggerated) and subsequently dismissed as wishful thinking, is becoming respectable once more.[50] Recently scholars, including specialists in sport history, have preferred to pick out elements of continuity between Mycenaean and later Greece.[51] Funeral games are one, chariot racing and boxing and perhaps spear throwing and footraces others.[52] But there are phenomena in epic for which Mycenaean parallels are

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[48] V. Isaakidou, P. Halstead, J. Davis and S. Stocker, "Burnt Animal Sacrifice in Late Bronze Age Greece: New Evidence from the Mycenaean 'Palace of Nestor', Pylos", *Antiquity* 76 (2002) 90.

[49] See n. 25.

[50] S. Sherratt, "Feasting in Homeric epic", in J. C. Wright (ed.), *The Mycenaean Feast*, Princeton 2004, 212.

[51] M. Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge 1998, 93.

[52] H. J. Evjen, "The origins and functions of formal athletic competition in the ancient

rare or lacking – three- and four-horse chariot, contests in archery, prize tripod vessels. Some features, such as armed combat and the provision of prizes for all participants, may be Mycenaean and Homeric but counter to later Greek custom.

The Phaeacian Games are far from funereal; nor is there any indication that those in Elis, where Neleus sent his chariot, or the the Theban games in which Tydeus excelled, are linked to death ritual. It was Karl Meurli who attempted to show the extent and inner necessity of the connection between funerals and competitive contests.[53] Burkert is quite happy to maintain that "the Greek agon of historical times was a sacrificial festival".[54] But in contrast Achilles' Myrmidons enjoy their discuses, throw javelins, shoot arrows much like the suitors waiting for Penelope. This may be recreation, not competition. Not all archaic sport, then, is related to sacrifice or funerals. Even, so the casual references to the lengths of a discus throw or a javelin cast which a man might make "in contest or in war" as measures of distance imply that Homeric competition was the stuff of everyday life as well as an important adjunct to funerary ritual. Public festival provided a unifying social backdrop to major aspects of athletics, poetry and rhetoric in classical Greece in terms of their performance and reception. All three activities could come under the rubric of *agon* (competition) – an element obviously essential to sport but also significant for Pindar's conception of himself as a poet, as well as later rhetorical concepts. We should bear in mind that athletics, poetic performances, rhetoric and philosophy were similarly competitive pursuits in the *polis* culture of Greece, and each could function as a metaphor for the other. In fact, Panhellenic and other festivals by the fifth century BC began to include poetry competitions, rhetorical displays and prose recitations in addition to athletics. We have, for instance, fragments of Gorgias' Olympic speeches (B7,8,8a D-K), evidence of his speech in the Pythian Games (B9 D-K) where we are told that Herodotus and sophists such as Prodicus and Hippias performed at Olympia.[55]

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world", in W. Coulson and H. Kyrieleis (eds.), *Proceedings of an International Symposium on the Olympic Games (5th–9th September 1988)*, Athens 1992, 99–100.

[53] K. Meurli, "Der Ursprung der Olympischen Spiele", *Antike* 17 (1941) 189–208; *Der griechische Agon: Kampf und Kampfspiel im Totenbrauch, Totentanz, Totenklage und Totenlob*, Basel 1968 (orig. Habilitationsschrift Basel, 1926).

[54] W. Burkert, (transl. P. Bing), *Homo Necans. The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, Los Angeles 1983 (orig. 1972).

[55] P. O'Sullivan, "Victory statue, victory song: Pindar's agonistic poetics and its legacy", in

It is possible to see that in archaic Greece athletic and dancing competitions and displays emerge out of practices central to the origin of the *polis* itself – the changing structure of elite relations, the emergence of standardised value, the power of adjudication and not least, the assuaging of disturbing fears about authenticity and legitimate claims. Athletic competition and dance display emerge in the *Odyssey* not simply as part of a colourful episode but as institutions cut from the same cloth as the poet's speech. Like the *Odyssey* itself, formal athletic and dancing contests and displays among an emerging aristocracy of birth belong to a mode of thought that is historically interstitial, oscillating at various points between an archaic and mythical mode of thought and the dialectical rationality of the *polis.*

As a "choral scholar" (to coin a new term) has recently remarked, what is only in its infancy is work on the precise relation between the archaic Greek and classical Athenian choral worlds.[56] I have elsewhere posited that the ring-dance in *Od.* 8 is a forerunner to the comic and tragic chorus.[57] That chorus singing is a form of social integration is both long acknowledged truth and a fashionable thing to say. There is evidence that the Greeks themselves were well aware of their choral *habitus*. The transition from archaic to classical Greece is puzzling and several proposals have been made to account for differences or similarities, but the question of how the dramatic chorus, I could add epic chorus, relates to the lyric one is essentially still unresolved. Again scholars guess that the change at stake is primarily socially motivated. What is clear is that relationship is to be sought in the political changes within the *polis* environment, and is deeply intertwined with early fifth century history: the move from elite chorus to the paid citizen chorus is a social, not a literary, one. And at its heart lie musical strategies to enhance participation.

To summarise the correspondence of sports events in the *Odyssey* with those in the *Iliad,* the historical era, evidence from the Bronze Age and evidence from Egypt, I append the following table which is adapted from Miller

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Phillips and Pritchard (above n. 6) 78. Philostratus (*VS* 1,11); Lucian (*Herod.* 1–3); Aelian (*VH* 12,32) tells us of sophists dressing in the purple robes of rhapsodes at public festivals; and we know of painting competitions by the fifth century (Pliny, *NH* 35,58).

[56] See reference to Kowalzig in n. 6

[57] S. Evans, *Hymn and Epic. A Study of their Interplay in Homer and the Homeric Hymns,* Turku 2001, 76–106. The topics of dancing in *Od.* 8 and the function of the chorus there are to be dealt with in two forthcoming articles.

(x representing "present").[58] In Homer, in addition to the Funeral Games and Phaeacian Games, athletics games are briefly referred to three times (*Od.* 4,625–627, *Od.* 24,85–92; *Il.*11,698–702). They may include boxing, wrestling, running, horse-racing, jumping, panoply fighting, discus throwing, spear throwing and archery. In *Od.* 8, the narrator deals quickly with a number of contests (running:*Od.* 8,120–125, wrestling 126–127, jumping, 128, discus throwing129, boxing 130) before rushing on to the main event, the quarrel. The dancing involved in Demodocus' second song can be included as a display, likewise the ball-throwing and dancing after the song. This can be compared to the dancing in the Shield at *Il.* 18,590–606.

Event	Present in historical era (date at Olympia)	Present in *Od.*	Present in *Il.*	Evidence from Bronze Age[59]	Evidence from Egypt[60]
footrace	x 776 BC	x	x		x
wrestling	x 708 BC	x	x		x
pentathlon	x 708 BC				
javelin	x	x	x		
discus	x	x	x		
jump	x	x			
boxing	x 688 BC	x	x	x	x
chariot	x 680 BC		x	?	
archery		x	often mentioned	x	x
hoplomachia		x	x	x	stick fighting
dancing		x			x
singing		x	e.g. *Il.* 9	x	x
bull-leaping				x	
acrobatics		x		x	x

By the eighth and seventh centuries BC, by which time emergent city-states began to appear on the scene, Olympia had become a leading political and religious centre for all Greeks. The incorporation of an athletic festival and the participation of contestants from ever more distant reaches of the Greek world led, by the sixth century BC to an "athletic revolution" characterised by three significant events. First, some regions established their own Olympic-style Panhellenic games at the prominent sanctuaries of Delphi (from 582 BC), Isthmia (from 581 BC), and Nemea (from 573 BC). This happened alongside

[58] Miller (above n. 12) 23, with my Egyptian additions.

[59] E. Vermeule and V. Karageorghis, *Mycenaean Pictorial Vase Painting*, Harvard 1982, 43–44, 93.

[60] Lange and Hirmer (above n. 41) *passim*.

the widespread setting up of regularly held local athletic festivals, most prominent among which was the quadrennial Great Panathenaea of Athens, organised in 566 BC. Second, cities generally fostered participation in athletic contests by establishing local training centres, *gymnasia*, wrestling schools, or specially designated tracks (*dromoi*). With these came special trainers or coaches and training programmes, the earliest of which may been that of the philosopher Pythagoras in Croton in the last third of the sixth century. Moreover the custom of total nudity seems to have been widely adopted in this period, as the testimony of Theognis and other evidence seem to indicate. "Happy the lover who spends time in the gymnasium (or practises the gymnic events = γυμνάζεται; Theog. *Eleg*. 2,1335)".[61] While the term *gymnos* may at times have meant "lightly clad", its first appearance in the sixth and fifth centuries in athletic vocabulary suggests that a new terminology had been coined to describe the phenomenon of practising athletics stark naked

What is never overtly stated in *Od.* 8 is the enormous enthusiasm in and enjoyment of sports in Greek society of that time. The correspondencies to Olympic history are much closer than to earlier Minoan or Mycenaean history.[62] Despite the peaceful ambience of Scheria, with possible echoes of Minoan Crete, physical working-out and hard, daily training could be linked to preparation for war, as in early Spartan society. Age-groups have not yet been introduced nor are pederasty, homoeroticism or initiation rites of passage noticeable. On the other hand Demodocus' erotic song on the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite is placed slap bang in the middle of choral dance and acrobatics. Since periodic cycles have not yet been introduced, this is a spontaneous show match for Odysseus.Archery is deliberately saved for *Od.* 22. Above all, in the festival games in *Od.* 8 there is something of the flavour of the early amateur Olympics in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries AD where landed gentry simply played games and had fun.[63]

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[61] See n. 32.

[62] The writing of this article happened to coincide with a debate on the Aegean Archaeology List (Aegeanet) on the peacefulness of Minoan society. The picture we have of Minoan society closely resembles that of Scheria.

[63] I wish to thank Prof. O. Salomies and Prof. M. Kajava for encouragement in the writing of this article and Prof. T. Viljamaa for useful tips on approaching this topic.