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SPORTS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The sports competitions which have taken on such importance in the life and world of today are connected, over the centuries, with the ideas and customs of the Greek people. The Greek heritage still manifests itself in the collective and individual sports today, and our contemporaries were not mistaken in recognizing this fact. After an interval of 1500 years a new series of Olympic Games began, reviving those pan-Hellenic games which, every four years, gathered athletes and crowds from all over the Greek world at Olympia. It is of utmost interest to study closely the similarities, relationships, and differences which exist between our ways of competing and the ways in which our distant forebears competed. Such a study is enthralling and requires the simultaneous use of all the auxiliary disciplines such as ancient history, the study of literary texts, the study of inscriptions, and archeology.

By using such diverse means we are able to discover the range of physical exercises liked by the young, from the end of Homer's time up until the end of Roman times, which offered the possibility of gaining durable glory. One must, however, distinguish both the periods and the places. In fact both the vogue and the ideas concerning sports are quite different in the various periods of Greek history, in Etruria, and later still in Rome and in the Roman world.

On a specifically technical level a great deal of data is mussing

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concerning the distances attained by throwers, distances achieved by the broad jumpers, and, of course, the times achieved by runners. However, a close analysis of ancient texts can still teach us much and the archeological documents of Greece and Etruria often supply something like an image caught by a fast and accurate glance. It is instructive to compare these precise images with the infallible documents supplied by present day techniques.

THE MEANING AND VALUE OF ATHLETIC COMPETITION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

In classical antiquity games and sports were born from religious and magical beliefs. In the very beginning the meets which pitted athletes against each other were part of a magical practice which had as its goal a kind of rejuvenation, a reinvigorating of the world of men, and even of the gods themselves. The exploits of these athletes, through the power and vigor they developed, was to awaken and activate the secret powers of the earth and the strength of divine powers, as well as giving back to the dead something of their past life. This belief remained current throughout classical antiquity and can still be found in the practices of several contemporary peoples. But it is in the funerary rites that the meaning of sports in classical antiquity becomes clearest to us. The exploits of the athletes served to pacify and satisfy the dead in their sad and sombre dwelling; to give them some of that vigor which they had possessed on earth and which they regretted bitterly after their death. The ancients believed that the dead led a life below earth which was vaguely similar to the one they had led above but that it was slower and without strength. As in the case of the offerings of sacrificial blood and wine, the athletic competitions were thought to give the dead some of that energy which they no longer had.

This belief is quite evident in the first description of Greek sports which takes up a large part of Book XXIII of the Iliad. In this description Achilles organizes games in order to appease the spirit of his companion in arms, Patroclos, who had fallen in combat. It is a form of worship which he organizes in honor of the young hero who died before his time. In the same way, in the fifth book of the Aeneid, almost a thousand years later, Aeneas organises funeral games on the shores of

Sicily which he offers to his father Anchises who had died earlier on during their dangerous voyage.

However, one notices an evolution even in Greece as time goes on. The early ideas did not prevent the development of more human and secular tastes. Physical exercises and sports soon seemed to be important to the Greeks for reasons that hinged on their conception of life itself. As warriors they found sports the best means for toughening up the body and the best way to accustom soldiers to physical effort and suffering. Having turned to science early on and in particular to the science of the body and medicine they saw in repeated physical exercise a good means for retaining or regaining good health. Passionate lovers of games and competitions of all kinds, they found through peaceful competition in the stadiums, the means to satisfy their unbridled taste for combat and their need to assert themselves by winning games that pitted one man against another. Finally one must remember the general ideal of life which belonged to the Greeks of the classical period and which was both a profoundly original conception and a philosophy of life.

Beauty and virtue seemed equally important to the classical Greek thinkers and to those who established the theory of "*kalokagathia*," according to which a man had to develop in equal measure his spirit and his body in order to attain a true equilibrium. Of course one does not receive the strength and beauty that one wishes as a gift of nature, and the role played by chance and heredity, in this domain, appear to be primordial. Nevertheless, according to the Greeks, man can fight against the imperfections of his body thanks to a well planned training and courageous perseverance. To a certain degree the Greek believed it possible to mold his body according to his desires and ideal. Goodness, the fruit of intellectual and moral research, and beauty, the result of difficult and painful efforts, became two parallel and complementary virtues which characterized the man who was worthy of being called a man. Under such conditions gymnastics and athletics became an important element in the education of a child and all of the Greek writers who were interested in *paideia* gave great importance to sports in the education of the young.

Thus this balanced and humanistic vision of man agreed with the ancient religious ideas as well as with the Greeks' passionate

taste for combat and their burning desire to achieve glory by winning in the stadium. In fact it is these concurrent elements which are the mainspring of the incredible popularity of sports in Greece.

GAMES IN HOMER AND IN CLASSICAL GREECE

Homer's epic poem belongs to an ancient past and the traditions that one finds in it are partially derived from the Mycenaean period, the second half of the second millenium before Christ. Already in Homer we find the program of Greek athletics completely formed. As early as that we clearly see the appearance of the Greek competitive spirit with its components of ability and trickery. The games organized by Achilles next to the disfigured body of his dear friend Patroclos are the same as those on the list of the pan-Hellenic games. It is by following these games step by step that one enters into the very heart of the Greek conception of sports. At the very dawn of the pre-Hellenistic period one finds some exercises which were not accepted by Greece but of which at least one was to be remembered: bull fighting. Bull fighting is above all a Mediterranean game and was already highly thought of in Crete during the third millenium B.C. There are whole groups of baked earthenware pots which show bulls on whose horns acrobats perform what must be called real vaulting exercises. A mural painting of Knossos, dated 1800 B.C., depicts the different instants of a similar scene in which we may see the dangerous jump made by an athlete over a charging bull. The young man jumps and grabs the horns of the animal then vaults above the croup and lands behind the animal, standing with stretched out arms.

This is the first example, at an early date, of a painting technique which captures, in successive moments, a complex athletic exercise. One could not find a more ancient ancestor to slow motion in film. In the same way, on some Greek vases, we see the same dancer drawn several times in successive moments. By animating such pictures on film it has been possible to make these pictures recreate some of the steps of an ancient Greek dance. Furthermore, it seems to us that the same could be done for some Greek representations of sprints and long distance races.

The first event organized by Achilles is the most important one: a chariot race that is described in almost four-hundred verses and which remains the most important competition, confering the most exciting and durable glory when won. Homer's description is admirably poetic, full of emotion and humor as well as being of extreme technical precision. The war chariots which first appeared in the Middle East were used in ancient times as a disruptive element in battle, but they were soon supplanted by the use of cavalry. The use of chariots in sports was derived from their military use. But let us see what the chariot race organized by Achilles in the Skamandros plain, close to the ramparts of proud Troy, were like. First of all the heroes set the stakes of the race; magnificent prizes that excited the ardor of the competitors. In classical Greece, in the Olympic Games, material attractions were not used and the only object of the competition was to obtain glory and the laurel wreath that was placed on the head of the winner. Professional competitions made their appearance during the Hellenistic period and were developed even further during Roman times.

The five competitors: Diomedes, Menelaus, Antilochos (son of Nestor), Meriones, and Eumelos line up on their chariots in the lane assigned to them by fate and prepare to ride to the distant post which they must go around before coming back to the point of departure which is also the finishing line. Before the race Nestor, the wise ruler of Pylos, an ancient Mycenaean town, counsels and warns his son Antilochos as to the tactics he must use during the race. The speech is fifty verses long and extremely revealing. He points out the great importance in sports and competitions, as well as in life itself, of what the Greeks called *metis*, that is to say ideas or intelligence.

In the various sports, the form of the athlete, his valor, and, in this case, the speed of the horses are not everything since intelligence is also a factor in the race. Nestor gives various probing examples to his son, and the athlete who will win with his chariot will be the one who will control his horses and chariot most firmly and intelligently and will have turned around the post more closely than the others. Physical strength and speed are not everything, and victory belongs to the one who is able to husband his strength during the race and organize the race or combat intelligently. The Greek people, whose hero was the

crafty Ulysses, had understood this. For us this intelligence and cleverness must not go beyond the limits of fair competitiveness. Sports, at least in the Anglo-Saxon revival of them, must remain fair, and fair-play is an absolute and unwavering rule. The Greeks knew similar rules but it must be said that admiration for cleverness and trickery in games and sports at times made them forget these rules.

The race is full of sudden changes of fortune and ups and downs so that one might say that never was a race described with more suspense. The gods themselves, Apollo and Athene, come to help their favorites and are not afraid to handicap purposely the rivals. Apollo makes Diomedes drop his whip. Athene, who favors Diomedes, hurries to give it back to him and inspires his horses with strength. In her irritation she goes even further and does not hesitate to break the yoke of Eumelos' harness. All of a sudden disaster strikes Eumelos and the race is finished for him. In fact his horses begin to separate and the pole begins to drag on the ground causing Eumelos to fall to the ground, lacerate his skin, and hurt himself. His eyes are filled with tears of disappointment and pain. In the meantime Diomedes flies to victory.

Thus one may say that for the ancient Greeks it was not deemed sufficient to be the strongest, fastest, and most clever. In order to win it was also necessary, thanks to one's piety, to be loved by the gods. This is a deep belief which will be found again in the following centuries. There is nothing more religious than the triumphal odes written in honor of the winners of the pan-Hellenic games. These odes are full of prayers in which the poet ceaselessly begs favors from the gods for his heroes and thanks the gods when they accept and make the heroes win. Thus religious sentiments continue to dominate and elevate the competitions that take place in the stadiums.

In the chariot race of the Homeric poem the fight is keen and the horses, like their masters, try their best. They are driven by feelings that are similar to those of human beings: fear, shame, and a keen desire to win. Antilochos speaks to his horses as if they were companions: "Are you falling back my brave horses?... Make all the speed you are able."[1] He speaks to them

[1] *The Iliad,* translated by Richmond Lattimore, Chicago and London 1951, p. 461.

and they fear the angry voice of their master. They then run harder for a while.

This is not just a literary trick because horses are inspired throughout the epic by feelings that are close to human feelings. In fact a horse following behind his master's body at a funeral participates in the general grief and his eyes fill up with tears. Let us re-read the beautiful verse in which Virgil describes Aethon, who was the war horse of Pallas who had been killed in combat (Aeneid, XI, 89) "Then came his charger Aethon, stripped of his trappings, tears pouring down his face."[2]

There is no such thing as a competition without spectators, and depending on the peoples or the periods examined this part of the spectacle is of varying size. Rarely was an equilibrium achieved between these two elements of sport: practice and spectacle. Certainly Archaic Greece and Classical Greece had an equilibrium and in this sense remain an example to be followed. In the race we have been examining, it is the entire Greek army that follows the outcome of the event with bated breath. All of the warriors are familiar with the methods used in chariot racing and therefore live the various episodes of the race as knowledgeable spectators. The description of the feelings that move them is no less fascinating than the description of the race itself. The Achaeans are grouped around the area used as the point of departure, which is also the arrival line, because there were as yet no arenas with seats as was the case later on in Greece itself and in Rome. The whole event takes place in the plain at the foot of the Trojan ramparts, and the spectators can see only the beginning and the end of the race clearly. What happens far away from them they do not see or see in a confused manner due to the dust flying around the wheels of the chariots. This fact favors the starting of verbal fights among the supporters of the various competitors. Thus there is even a fight between the old Idomeneus, lord of the Cretans, and Ajax, son of Oileus.

There are several events that follow the chariot race in Book XXIII of the Iliad. First of all there is boxing, followed by wrestling, armed combat, discus throwing, archery, and javelin throwing. Almost all of these events, excepting armed combat and archery, are also present in the pan-Hellenic games and

[2] *Aeneid*, translated by Patrick Dickinson, 1961, p. 247.

especially in those held at Olympia. But in other places learning the use of weapons and preparing for combat were exercises that could be chosen by the young. One also thinks of the medieval knights of the Japanese Samurai class. In so far as archery is concerned, a sport which is now so popular in many countries, it made the hand more steady for the decisive moment in the field of combat.

Boxing was, along with wrestling and pancratium, part of the competitions of strength so highly thought of by the Greeks and which are found again at Olympia. In the Iliad only pancratium is missing. Achilles determines the two prizes for the boxing match and invites the best to present themselves for the contest. There is only one match. A hero stands up, Epeios, an experienced fighter who wishes to win the mule that has been offered by Achilles to the winner of the meet. Euryalos accepts to fight too, not fearing the terrible threats spoken by Epeios. Boxing in Greece was hard and dangerous sport that could lead to the death of a man. The hands of fighters in the Iliad are wrapped in thongs cut out of ox hide. At the end of the fourth century B.C. these straps were replaced by more complicated and heavy coverings which almost came up to the elbows. However it does not seem that the Greeks ever knew the Roman *ceste* which was loaded with lead and iron so as to make it a very dangerous weapon. The punches in ancient boxing were aimed exclusively at the head and face of the opponent. For this reason the boxers fought with raised arms. The fight continued without interruption until one of the partners lost; it was not subdivided into rounds with intermissions for resting in between. Finally, there was no separation into weight categories, a fact that held for all of the ancient competitions of strength. Unavoidably the heavier boxers were favored by this, and their whole way of life would be quite incomprehensible if one did not know the reasons for it. In fact all of the combat athletes ate a great deal and were thought of as gorgers by the philosophers who were indignant at the sight of them eating the whole day long.

The fight continued until one of the boxers was unable to go on fighting. Because of this by the end of the fight often the loser was in terrible shape.

The next fight described in the Homeric games is a wrestling

match which shows two famous warriors fighting each other. The two warriors are Ajax, son of Telamon, and the industrious Ulysses. The prizes at stake are magnificent. The attack in this case is less brutal than in boxing and uses not just brutal strength but also the ability, speed, and cleverness of the participants. In Greece wrestling was the most popular sport, the teaching of which in the gymnasium was most important. In fact there were many metaphors taken from wrestling in Greek literature and the heroes of Greek mythology, at least those known for their superhuman strength, often beat their enemies in a regular wrestling match. This was the case with Herakles who beat Anteus, as well as with Theseus who beat Cercyon.

In wrestling the opponents stood still and holds could be taken on any part of the foe's body. The object was to throw the opponent's body to the ground. The fight did not continue on the ground and the winner was the first one who managed to throw his opponent three times. Ulysses and Ajax are equally good and neither one of the heroes is able to win the combat. Faced with the long undecided match Achilles intervenes and calls off the wrestling match.

Wrestling has remained a favorite sport among different peoples of the various continents. The rules might have changed somewhat but this sport remains nevertheless the very incarnation of virile fighting between two equally determined opponents. It is in Japan in particular that wrestling has remained, ever since its origins, a most popular and appreciated sport. In the ninth century A.D. a wrestling match between the two sons of the emperor Buntoku was the means used for determining the succession to his throne. A religious atmosphere surrounds the preliminaries of the Japanese national wrestling sport called "Sumo." The match is preceeded by a serious and slow ceremony which is a kind of sublimation of the fight. The men who do this kind of wrestling are heavy athletes, often extremely heavy, but, nevertheless, their agility is great. The match itself is quite short because the first to touch the floor is declared the loser.

The next type of athletic competition, a foot race, opposes three candidates: Ulysses, Ajax (the son of Oileus), and Antilochos (the son of Nestor). The object of the race is to run to a point at some distance and then come back to the point of departure which is situated near the funerary pile on which

Patroclos' body was burned. At a later date there were to be special constructions for foot races; stadiums whose ruins may still be seen in various Greek cities. The stadium, shaped like an elongated parallelogram, was of varying length but usually close to a hundred and twenty meters, a measure which gave the stadium its name. Today the best preserved stadium is that of Delphi which is in a beautiful position on a kind of rocky terrace above the sanctuary. Built during the second half of the fifth century B.C., it was rebuilt during the second century A.D. by Herod Atticus. Originally the stadiums were much simpler constructions.

In the race pitting Ulysses against Ajax, Antilochos is no more than a foil since he cannot measure up to the other two competitors; we see that divine intervention again decides the outcome of the event. Ajax is leading and, it is true, Ulysses is just behind him "Odysseus ran close up, but behind him, and his feet were hitting the other's tracks before the dust settled."[3] Then Ulysses calls his patron goddess, the green-eyed Athene: "Hear me, goddess; be kind; and come with strength for my footsteps."[4] Athene hears him and fulfills his wish. "She made his limbs light, both his feet and the hands above them. Now as they were making their final sprint for the trophy, there Aias slipped in his running, for Athene unbalanced him, where dung was scattered on the ground from the bellowing oxen slaughtered by swift-footed Achilleus, those he slew to honour Patroklos; and his mouth and nose were filled with cow dung, so that Odysseus the great and much enduring took off the mixing-bowl, seeing that he had passed him and come in first..."[5]

The armed races which began in the early sixth century B.C. were an essentially military kind of exercise. We have not found any traces, in ancient times, of the obstacle races which are so popular in our own times.

The last few events organized by Achilles are more rapidly described. Two of these events, armed combat and archery, are not sports that are practiced today in Greece nor were they

[3] *Iliad,* translated by Richmond Lattimore, Chicago and London 1951, p. 470.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.* p. 471.

practiced in the pan-Hellenic games because of their essentially military nature.

The throwing of the discus and of the javelin were to remain the most popular sports in Antiquity. In fact one sees a great many representations of these sports in Greek, Etruscan, and Roman art.

The discus of the past was heavier than the one in use today. In the *Iliad* the discus is just a block of iron, certainly very heavy, which Achilles found in the treasure of Eetion after killing him. Rather exceptionally this discus was to be the prize given to the winner of the event. The reason for this is that during the Mycenaean period and later on in the Homeric period iron was a rare and precious metal that was extremely sought after. Achilles explains this when opening the event.

Later on the weight of the discus varied as testified by those found at excavation sites. Usually they were made of bronze. The throwing style used at the time has been the object of very close study by some contemporaries who have tried to deduce correctly the postures shown by statues or drawings on vases. In any case we know that the Greeks did not have a pit as we have today but that there was a straight line which could not be crossed by the athlete when throwing the discus. Today the athlete completes a full spin around before throwing the discus at the end of the spin. The Greek athlete did not execute this rotation but stood still. He began by raising the discus above his head and holding it with two hands. He then bent rapidly to the right, now holding the discus in only one hand, and turned his head in the same direction. A powerful thrust forward made the discus fly afar. In these conditions the entire power of the thrust came from the half rotation executed by the trunk of the body. From these movements, so often repeated by adolescents as well as adults, could develop the characteristic abdominal muscles called the great obliques which one notices on the statues of athletes. Such a muscular development below the waist is seen only rarely in contemporary people. The Greek sculptor, so concerned with the precision of anatomical detail and well aquainted with the stadiums, included faithfully an anatomic trait which was for the most part caused by the current technique used in discus throwing.

The throwing of the javelin was no less popular but it had

its origins not only in sports but also in a practical activity: the javelin, in fact, was used both in war and for hunting. In the *Iliad* the event does not even take place because Prince Agamemnon, son of Antreus, decides to participate and Achilles who knows his exceptional qualities decides that it would be superfluous to hold the event.

Strength and cleverness were equally important in this event because it was not quite the same as today, when the object of the event is to reach the greatest distance. In the past the athlete was meant to hit a target which was horizontally marked on the ground. The javelin for competition was very light, as long as the body is high, and as thick as a finger. The javelin then in use did not have a tip but did have a slight weight on the end which balanced it sufficiently. The throwing style does not seem to have differed much from the one currently used but there was a difference that must be pointed out; there was a kind of propeller on the body of the javelin itself. This was a leather thong, about thirty to forty-five centimeters long, which was attached to the center of the weapon. The thrower could fit his middle and index finger into a loop which was at the end of the thong. The thong was wrapped around the body of the javelin. This device was called *agcule* by the Greeks and *amentum* by the Romans. When the javelin was propelled with the use of this device it rotated on itself thus making the trajectory both longer and more precise.

SPORTS IN GREEK EDUCATION: THE PAN-HELLENIC GAMES

Homer reflected a time before his own as well as becoming the educator of Greece, and Plato was not wrong in noticing this fact. The idea of education, *paideia*, changes as the centuries go by, but the same sports continue to be practiced as part of a conception of life that is not completely different but in any case new. The ideal of life in Homer is a chivalric ideal, and the model that it presents to later generations is that of a life entirely devoted to obtaining glory by means of military virtues: *arete*. The heroic model and the desire for glory do not disappear from the Greek spirit and many centuries later Alexander the Great dreamt of being a new Achilles. But in the meantime the Greek consciousness had continued to enrich itself morally, and sports became integrated into a new ideal of life.

Sparta, whose ideal of life was a military one, remained a conservative city and maintained a taste for horseback sports and athletics. It is not mere chance that they had a very important place in the Olympic Games. From 720 to 576 B.C. we find forty-six Spartans among the eighty-one Olympic winners known to us. Even young women participated in these sports as testify different texts and the little bronze statues depicting women athletes during a race.

But towards the middle of the sixth century the city stagnated in its aristocratic stadium and was soon by-passed by the other Greek cities. Culture suffered from this and the arts were impoverished; even sports were abandoned. From this point on the Olympic champions became something of the past. To other cities, where all was not subordinated to the interests of the State, fell the task and glory of evolving an ideal of life in which the public good and the development of the personality, both physical and moral, went hand in hand. Athens became an important center in the great cultural movement of the fifth century which caused a decisive evolution of *paideia* and a new ideal of life for the citizen. The military aspect of life no longer held a pre-eminent place in life, education became more democratic and no longer a privilege destined to a caste designated by birth and fortune. Nevertheless this evolution proceeded only by stages as aristocratic culture was long defended with assiduity. In the meantime the ideal of *kalokagathia*, in which physical beauty and moral stature were considered to be equally important, became clearer during the fifth century. At the begining of the century the well-balanced man was essentially a sportsman but with the advent of the great philosophers, the masters of classical culture, we see a decisive development at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century. The intellectual side of education then took on the most important role.

It is in the great sanctuaries of Greece, the pan-Hellenic sanctuaries of Olympia, Delphi, of the isthmus of Corinth, and Nemea in Argolis, that the important periodic feasts were instituted so that the Greeks could measure themselves with other Greeks in competitions that were essentially sports but where the pleasure of the spirit was not neglected. In fact there were also musical auditions and the works of the poets and

orators were read in all solemnity. Nevertheless the essential part of these games were the sports practiced there.

The most important of these games were of course those of Olympia which were taken, justly so, as the model for the present Olympic games which began in 1896. The Greek games were held every four years in Olympia by the river Alphea. The first time they were held was in 776 B.C. and they continued until 393 A.D.

The origins of these games are not yet clearly understood. Even before their begining and more precisely during the Minoan and then during the Mycenaean period there seems to have been a substrata of ceremony which was in connection with agricultural fertility rites. The begining of a regular cycle of games, especially dedicated to sports, came from a new spirit of competition and an ideology which was, in the begining, patriotic and aristocratic. The creators of this cycle are the new conquerors of Greece, the Doric people who loved the glory of victory and the exaltation of the individual. Thus the rites changed and by integrating old myths they were then placed inside the sphere of Olympian religion and its Pantheon. Zeus and Hera, the most important couple in Olympus, thus dominated the ceremonies and the games.

Their approach was announced in the various Greek towns by sacred heralds and immediately all hostilities and war ceased. Thus the athletes could go freely to the site of their future glory. Their training before the event lasted one month. They had to be Greek and born free men. Ancient Greece was not a unified country and her inhabitants did not form a single nation. The pan-Hellenic games helped to give to the inhabitants of towns which were separate from each other and often hostile to each other a feeling of belonging to a definite people because of similar religious traditions and language.

The spectators could come from anywhere. Greeks, barbarians, or slaves, everyone was admitted. Only married women were not allowed to watch the games which lasted seven days and were always held in the middle of summer, during the month of August. The opening day and the closing day were reserved entirely for the religious ceremonies that gave a kind of framework to the five days in which the various kinds of meets were to be held. Some competitions, three at the time of Pindar,

were reserved for children while the rest pitted adults against other adults. At Olympia children competed in sprinting, wrestling, and boxing.

Our contemporaries also use a division into ages and have even, justly so, increased the number of divisions. In fact competitions opened to all are only apparently fair and invariably end up making it impossible for children or adolescents to compete. In the same way the absence of weight categories in combat sports made it impossible in the past for a light athlete to win. Therefore we can not but approve the present system of dividing athletes into age groups such as the very young, young, juniors, and seniors as well as subdividing them further into weight categories going from light weight to heavy weight.

Nevertheless the organizers of the modern Olympic Games did not deem it worthwhile to have special disciplines for the younger ones. The very young athletes are also excluded except in gymnastics, in which suppleness is the most important quality and in swimming where very young swimmers can compete with older ones and even win at times. In the latter case strength and speed are no more important than a perfect adaptation to the element. Here the suppleness of a young body compensates for muscular inferiority.

In Olympia the adults competed both on the racetrack, with chariot races and on horseback, and in the stadium. In the stadium there were three running events: a pure speed race which was held over a distance equal to double the stadium (close to our four-hundred meter dash), a long distance race, and an armed race. The events devoted to strength were boxing, wrestling, and pancratium.

Pancratium was a violent and brutal sport which the Greeks considered to be a mixture of boxing and wrestling. No holds were barred in this sport including kicking and punching any part of the adversary's body. Even biting the adversary was permitted in this form of combat. The fight began standing up and then continued on the ground (somewhat like our catch and judo) and was not finished until one of the two athletes was no longer able to continue the combat and admitted to having lost. Here again the lack of subdivisions according to weight categories made it practically impossible for a light-weight man to compete or ever win.

The pentathlon included five events: running, jumping, wrestling, discus throwing, and javelin throwing. The placing was calculated on the basis of the five events and only a complete athlete could compete with some chance of winning, as is the case today in the similar discipline called decathlon. The wrestling in the pentathlon, like the wrestling reserved for children, must have been, in the combat sports, the most beautiful event to participate in as well as to watch because speed, promptness, and suppleness were certainly just as important as strength itself.

As we have already mentioned, jumping was part of the pentathlon. The Greeks did not have high jumping, or in any case it was not something done in a competitive way. The same is true for what we today call pole-vaulting. Only the broad jump was an Olympic event. We have numerous representations that document this sport. The broad jumper carried in each hand a dumb-bell of stone or bronze that weighed anywhere from one to five kilos. Some ancient texts speak of athletes who managed to jump as much as fifteen meters. Obviously there must have been more than one jump as a single one would seem to be quite unlikely. The presence of the dumb-bells would seem to indicate that it was a standing jump. Such weights would have only handicapped and bothered a running jump. If this was the case then one could understand this distance to have been achieved in five successive jumps. Contemporary athletes have been asked to try this kind of jump so as to have an indication of the possibilities and to confirm the above hypothesis. The results that they achieved are in conformity with the above mentioned hypothesis.

These then were the disciplines practiced at Olympia and, with slight variants, in all of the big pan-Hellenic games. Pentathlon was introduced to Olympia in 708 B.C. and shows very clearly that Greek athletics had had a rational and precocious development because this kind of complex discipline made the complete athlete stand out. In fact the Greeks had an understandable admiration for the champions of pentathlon, and Aristotle speaks of this in his works on rhetoric: "Beauty varies according to age. Beauty for a young man is to have a body trained to withstand fatigue in running and in the exercises of strength and at the same time to be agreeably

presentable. Those who do pentathlon are the most beautiful because they are fit for both exercises of speed and for those of strength."

One had to wait until the present day to see again, in international meets, all of the sports practiced by man. The Greeks certainly made a judicious choice but did not include in their competitions such essential sports as swimming, canoeing, and sailing which must have been highly thought of amongst such a sea-going people.

On the other hand we may today witness Olympic meets on lakes, rivers, and on the sea, which reflect a growing taste for rowing and sailing. These sports are not only for specialists but attract, in all countries, young people wanting to compete in another element. One can not forget that the mountains and the snow also have their Winter Olympics in which courage and even temerity are necessary in order to obtain speeds or achieve jumps that border on the impossible. Today, thanks to television, a good part of humanity can watch, with bated breath, these heroic games on snow which the Greeks did not know.

The winners at the important Greek games received extraordinary honors and the town from which they came shared this honor. The extreme popularity of today's winners give only a vague idea of what it was like for the winner of the past. The Olympic winner received a crown made of olive branches taken from a sacred tree which legend thought to have been brought by Herakles from the country of the Hyperboreans. The prizes for winning an event were no longer, as they had been in Homeric times, animals or captured enemies; they had become purely honorary and athletes only fought for the glory that could be obtained.

This was amateurism in its purest form. The glory of victory was without bounds and one city, it was said, broke down part of the wall that surrounded it so that her Olympic champion, the most glorious of her sons, could enter the city in a place that had never before been darkened by the footsteps of another.

Amongst the uncountable honours that an Olympic champion enjoyed two were extremely precious and significant. He could place a statue that immortalized him in the *Altis* of Olympia, the sacred area where were the temples and altars of the gods

and heroes. He could also, if he had enough money to sustain the expense, ask a poet to write an ode in his honor. It was this custom that produced the admirable poems of Pindar, those hymns to victory, which form four collections celebrating and immortalizing the winners of the games of Olympia, Delphi, Nemea, and the isthmus of Corinth. Before him Simonides and his nephew Bacchylides had made their names in this genre of poetry, but Pindar who exalted with unequaled lyrism the winning athletes towers above all of his predecessors. The obliged themes of these trimphal odes: glorification of the winner, of his family and his city, as well as thanks given to the immortal gods who allowed the athlete to win and who favored the athlete, are ennobled by a powerful inspiration. Achievements in sports never had known such glory.

Nevertheless sports were not to stay at such a level, a peak which was never again reached in history, because they soon started to go down-hill. Throughout the fifth century and during the fourth century philosophy and sophistry were passionately interested in the education of the young, in *paideia*, and it is quite natural that the emphasis was slowly being put on the moral and intellectual side of the formation given to the young Greeks. But the philosophers did not despise physical education and gymnastics, as it was said at the time, since the harmonious development of the body and of the spirit still remained their ideal.

Gymnastics began to be considered in terms of their use in forming a person and soon their medical and literary role became the most important. Athletics continued to be practiced but the place of honor accorded to competition was no longer recognized. What had happened was that the passionate desire to win had brought about a constant training of the athlete whose way of life was changed by this activity. In fact a kind of professionalism had emerged.

Due to this it was quite easy for the philosophers to denounce the excesses that the practice of any one sport had brought about, creating a disequilibrium that could even be physical. As of the end of the classical period one can say that the pure glory derived from a victory at Olympia was no longer in existence. Physical exercises do not disappear from the education of the young but the Olympic ideal is blunted and tarnished. During

the last few centuries before Christ, during the Hellenistic period, Greek education reached its highest point and gymnastics as well as physical education had an important role. One finds that there were gymnasiums all over which permitted the rational training of young people. One also finds that there were competitions between towns involving youths who had been trained very early on in life. The history of the gymnasiums shows us that their quantity augmented somewhat during the third century in Greece and that they proliferated in the eastern provinces in particular. One might say that the gymnasium is one of the most important expressions of hellenistic culture which only disappeared with the culture itself.

ETRURIA AND THE ROMAN WORLD

It is not easy to determine the role that sports played in the Etruscan culture. In the absence of Etruscan literature one must rely on the rare allusions that may be found in Greek and Roman texts. Fortunately archeological means are much more fertile in giving us some information.

Etruscan art is, for the most part, a funerary art, an art of the tombs. Frescoes, sculptures and bas-reliefs were meant to give some life back to the dead. All of this funerary material redoubled and reinforced, in a way, the effects of the cult celebrated for the dead. The painted and sculpted images were thought to be magically animated the moment the door of the tomb was closed. The representation of banquets accompanied with music and dancing as well as the representations of athletics pleased the dead who led an exuberant life.

It would seem that sports were quite popular in Etruria. In any case it is obvious that Etruscan art was inspired by the Greeks from whom they borrowed both forms and themes. However, the funerary representations were also based on reality and the parallelism between life and death makes it impossible to see the images concerning sports other than as an exact depiction of reality.

Equestrian sports were much liked by the Etruscans, a people who raised horses and horsemen. According to legend the first Etruscan king of Rome, Tarquinius the Ancient, had set up equestrian games in Rome during the seventh century B.C. that

were held in the Murcia valley which was later to become the Circus Maximus. Hence chariot races began in Rome, under the influence of the Etruscans, at the very dawn of the city's history and their popularity steadily increased throughout the centuries. The noble Etruscans were to have their racing stables up until the time of the Roman Empire. The Etruscan frescoes of the fifth century B.C. already show this passion for chariot racing. In fact the frescoes of the tomb called the Tomb of the Olympic Games, discovered in Tarquinia in 1958, shows a beautiful scene from a chariot race. Three chariots may be seen racing each other while a fourth has just capsized and the horses and charioteer are rolling on the ground in great confusion.

These same frescoes and those of two other tombs in Tarquinia, the tombs of Auguries and of the Chariots, show us almost lifelike representations of the same sports that were practiced in Greece. One sees athletes running, jumping, preparing to throw the discus and the javelin, wrestling, and boxing. As in the pan-Hellenic games there are spectators present who participate enthusiastically. One sees spectators sitting in what resembles bleachers protected by a *velum* while underneath, half reclining on the ground, one may see the lower classes and the slaves. There are even referees in the frescoes of the tomb of Auguries. Finally, in the frescoes of the Hunting and Fishing tomb there is the silhouette of a diver who has been depicted in mid-air. The Etruscans were the first ones to begin the more bloody games, in which gladiators were pitted against each other, which were to have a durable interest for the Romans and whose funerary origins seem to be quite certain. Human blood was even more precious to the dead than any other kind of offering. In a fresco in the tomb of Auguries and in the tomb of the Olympic Games one sees a cruel combat between a hooded man armed with a club and a large dog who attacks him and wounds him. A masked figure, not unlike a menacing and grotesque Punch, holds the infuriated dog on a leash. These are the beginnings of those bloody spectacles which the Romans liked so much and which do them no honor.

When one enters the Roman world one enters, of course, a world that was quite different from the Greek one. This is felt in all of the different domains as well as in the domain of gymnasiums and sports. Certainly the Romans were far from

despising physical qualities. Being a people of farmers and soldiers they could appreciate the hard working man who was tough in combat, who could endure fatigue and long marches as well as being an expert in the handling of arms. But physical exercise and training in Rome had a purely utilitarian goal and the education of the body was to ensure success in military life.

Rome never knew sports as a disinterested and gratuitous competition whose only goal was the glory of victory. The Roman *ludus* is a type of training or game, unlike the Greek *agon* which was a competition. The physical education known in Rome had a utilitarian goal and the pure athleticism of the Greeks, as it was practiced in the stadium and gymnasium, with its glorious apogee in the pan-Hellenic games, did not attract the interest of the Romans until they fell under the cultural influence of Greece and imported it as a foreign custom quite alien to their own traditions. Nevertheless the Emperors, and Augustus first of all, favored the *Collegia Juventutis* which were a kind of club for the young which reminds one of the *ephebea* of Greece. In these clubs the young prepared themselves for military life but at the same time practiced sports in the same way as was done in the ephebic schools of Greece during the Hellenistic period. Campania, which was hellenised at a very early date, plays a role in the development of this institution in Rome which to a certain extent, inherits the habit of sports from Greece.

The discovery of the beautiful *palestre* in Pompei proves, in any case, that in the Roman Campania sports were practiced in places similar to those that were in vogue in Greece. Of course it is especially in the eastern part of the Roman Empire that hellenistic traditions remained alive and where the interest of Augustus and his followers for athletics and sports was most felt. The temple of Zeus at Olympia was restored thanks to Augustus' concern and the games then regained much of the popularity they had once had. Some members of the imperial family even competed in the chariot races which had again been incorporated in the recurrent cycle of the Olympic Games. The other great games were also revived and their popularity spread afar. In fact the coins of the second century A.D. frequently mentioned the games and used their emblems.

However, this movement had an artificial nature at least in

the western part of the Roman empire. Admiration was never again felt for the Greek competition in which naked athletes competed with each other in gratuitous events. The professionalism of the athletes continued and became even more intense, thus giving rise to the hostility of the philosophers. Philostratus, the Greek rhetorician of the third century A.D., wrote an essay "About Gymnastics" in which he defined real training in sports and violently criticized the conception of life and morality held by professional athletes. Doctors also criticized, and no less violently, the type of life that professionalism brought along with it. Galen repeated and accentuated the criticism that had been uttered by Hippocrates against the overly rich diet and the excessive training that all professional athletes underwent. He tried to incorporate gymnastics into the science of medicine.

Thus it is as an hygienic exercise rather than as a sport that the Romans do gymnastics. In fact the Roman gymnasium becomes an annex to the baths. It is true that the baths, which we would call hydrotherapy today, have always been a necessary part of athletic life and the Greek athlete who always softened up his muscles with oil and then covered himself with sand would, after the event, wash the perspiration and dirt from his body with ablutions and a strigil. Finally the perspiration room helped to clean his skin and to relax his tired muscles. For the Romans the values were reversed and the baths became one of the most studied buildings as well as the most characteristic monuments of any Roman city. In fact one find ruins of these baths in the remotest corners of what was the Roman Empire. The gymnasium becomes architecturally an annex and was used for doing some physical exercise before the baths so as to make the baths even more pleasureable. The Romans baths were, in the large cities, large buildings which at times were even immense as in the case of the baths of Diocletian and those of Caracalla in Rome. In them there were various types of baths to be taken as well as physical exercise to be done and intellectual interests to be enjoyed. They were a rather conspicuous contribution to comfort and good living. As we have already pointed out sports never became something typically Roman. On the other hand Rome developed the spectacle-games whose popularity was immense. These games were competitions but they opposed a limited amount of competitors and the crowds of the Roman

cities went to satisfy their taste for competition, often bloody, in which they did not participate but rather followed passionately. In fact the games held in the circuses and in the amphitheatres were an important part of Roman life.

The passion for chariot races and for horse races did nothing but grow in Rome and in the Roman world. The victory of a charioteer came to be the symbol for all victories and in the Christian period it symbolized the victory of the spirit over death. This last symbol explains the images, frequent in Christian art of the first few centuries, in which one may see the winning charioteer holding a palm leaf in one hand and a laurel wreath on his head. An inscription on a goblet found near Lago Maggiore effectively evokes the symbol of supreme victory which could be obtained in the games of the circus. "The palms and laurels are always green in the circus so that there may never be a lack of recognition for the winner." Four stables or four parties were always represented in the Roman Empire: white, blue, green, and red. The color of the tunics of the charioteers distinguished them. Each one had convinced partisans and the division of the stables was to be found in the town. The chariots belonged to professionals whose glory was immense and there are some bas-reliefs depicting the most famous of them while inscriptions enumerate their victories and the immense fortunes they won. These victories were decided depending on the number of horses harnessed to the chariot (from two to seven horses were used) and also on the technique which had been used during the race, and, finally, on the faction for which the chariot had raced. Thus it is this same event which, from the beginning to the end of Antiquity, had the most success with the crowds because of its spectacular and grandiose nature. From the chariot race described by Homer in Book XXIII of the *Iliad* up to the unequaled glory of the famous Roman charioteers the tradition is unbroken. However, the Greek competitions became, in Rome, a pure spectacle which excited the crowds and made them bet as to the outcome but did not allow them to participate.

The same may be said of the cruel games which, however, were ignored by the Greeks and which took place in a new kind of building: the amphitheatre. The games of the gladiators were certainly derived from the Etruscans and their original

use was funerary. Progressively these games became ever more popular and the amphitheatre became, along with the baths, the most characteristic building in Roman life. Here men fought against men or animals with arms. The gladiators were condemned men, prisoners of war, or professionals. They belonged to groups and to "families" that belonged to a *lanista.* Serious training was the rule for these fighters who risked their life each time they entered the arena. According to the category of fighters they belonged to they had different defensive and offensive arms. The light-weight fighters such as the netters and the *secutores* had to rely mostly on their agility. Then there were heavily armed fighters such as the *Mirmillones,* the Samnites, and the Thracians. Some of the gladiators even fought on chariots and were called *essedarii.*

The hellenised East adopted these cruel games as show some three-hundred archeological documents and inscriptions about gladiators found in the eastern regions of the Empire.

It is true that during the games given in honor of Patroclos there had been an armed combat between Ajaz and Diomedes and that these armed combats had once been practiced. However, the Greeks had abolished them and did not take them up again until much later and then under the influence of Rome. In any case the favor enjoyed by the combats of gladiators against men and animals certainly can not be seen as a glorious memory for Greece under the Romans.

With the end of the ancient world and the end of the deformed interpretation given to Greek competitions, sports disappeared for many centuries from the Western world. Little by little, after the Middle Ages, they began to reappear but it was not until the nineteenth century that the Olympic spirit was reborn and the countries of the world resuscitated the great Games of Greece. In our own times the spirit of sports is deeply felt by the young and, despite an excess of professionalism, we see that the ideal defined by the philosophers of old is regaining life and meaning. One can not but applaud a movement which tends to bring back one of the greatest achievements of Greece, which is the spirit of free competition and the pleasure felt in striving fairly for glory, in the stadium, against opponents whom one tries to beat with all one's strength but who are never enemies.

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