GYMNIKÉ PAIDEIA:
GREEK ATHLETICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURE

It can be misleading to speak of sports history in general, as if the term encompasses all cultures and time periods. Such a view implies that the various phenomena which constitute "sports" are roughly equivalent since they seem to recur in similar fashion in various societies and can be traced as they change through time. While the physical actions of many sports may bear resemblances to one another, the meanings with which those actions are invested are very much the unique construction of the society in which they occur. A "history" of these pursuits can therefore be meaningfully discussed only to the extent that the activities we call "sports" in one society have evolved from, or somehow affected those pursuits in, another society. In short, each society invests its sporting activities with a particular set of cultural values which are preserved in and transmitted by those practices. While the modern term "sport" gives a false sense of the fixed categorization of certain kinds of activity, it also forestalls the better understanding of those activities free of anachronistic prejudice. The "sport" of any one society can only be understood to the extent that the values, implicit or explicit, of such activity can be understood in its own proper and total, historical and social context. One reliable constant of collective activities is that they do, in various ways, reflect the culture of which they are a product. And sports reflect culture not only for those of us who are later observers of them, but, in a historically more significant way, sports in their original contexts conveyed certain values to their participants and audience.

The Greek phenomenon of athletics is in some senses of wider interest than that of other societies, in part because of the influential role which Greece had in the formation of modern Western notions of athletic competition, most obviously the Olympic Games, and in part because of the rich variety of literary and archaeological evidence which permits a broad historical study of a culture in many ways very foreign to our own in the late twentieth century. The establishment of the Modern Olympics has mistakenly led many to assume that in our sports, as in many other aspects of our culture, "we are all Greeks," but the modern

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1See D. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York, 1990) 15–53, for a similar argument denying that there can be a history of sexuality since sexuality is a cultural construct which will, by definition, vary with each society. For a good overview of the different philosophies of sport in various cultures, see E. Segal, "'To Win or Die:' A Taxonomy of Sporting Attitudes," *Journal of Sport History* 11 (1984) 25–31.

realities behind our sporting culture are radically different from their ancient analogues.2

Social and Cross-cultural Views

If one examines carefully the social context, Greek athletics differ radically in form and substance from any other similar cultural pursuits before or since. The complex and unique historical circumstances which came together to produce Greek athletics ensure that the “sports” of later societies which appear to be similar in fact carry with them a host of values and ideals alien to the Greeks. By way of contrast to modern “sports,” we may cite one perceptive critic of the current scene who is attempting to account for the great popularity of (American) football, the most violent of major spectator sports:

All sports serve as some kind of release but the rhythm of football is geared particularly to the violence and the peculiar combination of order and disorder of modern life. Baseball is too slow, too dependable, too much like a regional drawl. Basketball is too nervous and too tight; hockey too frenzied; boxing too chaotic, too folksy. Only football provides a genuine catharsis.3

In view of the pervasiveness of violence in many aspects of American life, these observations may point to a frightening, deep-seated attraction to violence in the popular culture of this society. The full implications of this cannot be unraveled here, but we may comment on the contention that sports serve as a “catharsis,” a release. Surely this perceived “catharsis” is not simply a purgation of pent-up emotions, but, as in viewing drama or films, a way vicariously to act through one’s view of society and self. As with Greek athletics, the effect is more often conservative of popular values than critical or revisionist. The ideals behind the competition reinforce societal norms since the contests themselves are a product of normative social institutions.

It is also noteworthy that team sports are the most popular in the United States and generally in the modern world, whether measured by participation at school, attendance or television audience.4 Do team sports


4Guttman (supra n. 3) 139–152, who notes, however, that the youth of America prefer team sports to individual ones, while the preferences of European and Japanese youth are the reverse (151).
represent a high valuation of community and individual sports of the individual? How can we reconcile the American tradition of praise for the individual and the loner with the love of team sports? One commentator plausibly attributes this to the nature of modern life in which our notions of freedom often include elements both of autonomous effort and of cooperation towards common goals.\(^5\) Although Greek athletics consisted almost entirely of individual competitions, there were, by most measures and in most city-states, fewer individual freedoms and a higher priority of the well-being of the polity than is the case in most modern states. The Greeks also confronted the ambiguities or tensions in the competing notions of freedom of the individual and of the state, which, we have noted above, are also manifest in their athletics in displays of self-sufficiency and of social affiliations, of personal freedom and of civic responsibility.

In short, the form of competition, team or individual, is neither necessarily nor by itself an indication of a society’s dominant values. Cultural activities which bear a superficial resemblance, or are even formally identical to one another, take on significance and are interpreted by members of the culture who collectively participate in or observe those activities. The activities are, in other words, culturally constructed. The Greeks relied upon popular myths, epic descriptions, artistic depictions, religious contexts, and many other formal and informal signs which led them to place certain values upon their athletic events. Nor were these activities, the associated values, and the social contexts in which they were found entirely static. There were consistent aspects of them which survived centuries of social change in the essentially conservative milieu of athletic festivals. But there were also significant individual, local and historical deviations. Comparable modern phenomena have certain analogies in our myth-like elevation of sports heroes and the representations of sports in art, but the parallels between these and ancient analogues are more apparent than real.

### Gods in the Gymnasium

To illustrate the uniqueness of Greek sports, four aspects of the ancient construct, the contest-system, education, initiation, and sexuality will be investigated. But first, let us investigate one rich example of a Greek construction of the social meaning of sports. The encyclopedic Athenaeus, writing late in the second century A.D., explained the presence of the three gods whose shrines were most frequently found in the ancient gymnasion by positing that Hermes presided over eloquence (λόγος), Heracles over strength (μάχης), and Eros over friendship (φίλαθλος) (Deip. 13.561d).\(^6\) The fixing of these precise powers to each god

\(^5\) Guttmann (supra n. 3) 157–161.

\(^6\) See H. Siska, De Mercurio ceterisque deis ad artem gymnicae pertinentibus (Ph. D. Diss., Halle, 1933) for a catalogue of epigraphic and literary sources on these and other cults related to Greek athletics. More recently, M. W. Dickie, "Παλαιστρίτης"—"palaistria".
may be a late rationalization, but it is a reflection of the historical presence of these cults in the gymnasion since at least the classical period. The three cults served complementary social functions and they literally enshrined the ideals of physical strength, bodily beauty, and communication or transition. The first two of these, the domains of Heracles and Eros, are primary concerns here and reflect the agonistic and erotic spirits. The third god represents a third thematic concern wherein athletics serves as a medium of communication and of initiation to adulthood. Hermes was crucial in the narrowly conceived rhetorical and philosophical education of the gymnasion, issues that are not of direct concern here. He is also important as a deity of the transmission of social values, of the “education” very broadly conceived by the Greeks as paideia and more properly translated “formation” or “upbringing.” These three gods, then, symbolize complementary aspects of the life of the gymnasion, what Plato, in a narrower and more formal sense, calls gymnike paideia, “gymnastic formation” (Rep. 376e, 410c), whose object is as much improvement of the soul as of the body.

The evidence of ancient monuments gives further evidence of the strong presence of the gods of the athletic space. The close relation of Hermes to Eros in the gymnasion is graphically portrayed by a life-sized bronze sculpture of a pillar of Hermes, or “herm,” now in the Getty Museum in Malibu; the pillar shows traces where an Eros figure had been joined to it in a leaning pose. A second-century B.C. bronze statue of Eros, now in Tunis, holding a victory palm in his left hand and placing a crown on his own head with his right hand as his right elbow leans on a pillar of Hermes, or “herm.” The god so depicted is called Eros Enagónitos, “Contesting Love.” Its size and style suggest that this Eros may in fact be the very statue formerly joined to the Malibu herm.5 Hermes is thus a literal and figurative support for the victorious figure of Eros, and the scene reflects earlier vase paintings in which Eros crowns a

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Callisthenes in the Greek and Roman Gymnasium”, Nikephoros 6 (1993) 105–151, esp. 120–123, 129–132, shows how Hermes and Heracles were gods of the gymnasion and how Hermes, in particular, at times embodies the ideal form of the young athlete.


human victor, or in which an athlete leans on a terma or herm. Two calyx craters in Athens, National Museum, one (inventory no. 1669) showing Eros making an offering of some object to two herms, a male and a female; the other (inventory no. 1460) showing Eros crowning a satyr who has one hand raised in a gesture of victory and one foot resting on a raised “victor’s pedestal.” The herms need not be in a gymnasia, but are likely to be, given the other associations cited here, and given the occurrence of the theme in at least five paintings or gems from the Roman era. A poem of the third century B.C. also attests to Hermes’ statue as an object of homoerotic beauty:

I, Hermes, having departed from the steep peaks of Cyllene with its quivering foliage stand here guarding over the lovely gymnasium.
On me boys have often placed marjoram and hyacinth, and fresh crowns of violets. (Greek Anthology 16.188 [Nikias])

The herm here alludes to the offerings placed on it in the gymnasium, typically wreaths on its two post-like “arms”. The erotic beauty of the setting is noted in the description of the gymnasium as “lovely” (eratōn), connoting the aesthetic appeal or the eros the reader might feel for the flowers or the boys themselves. Hermes is strongly identified with the gymnasium, both as guardian and as an embodiment, in part, of the spirit of the place. From the early Classical period onwards he was known, like Eros, as a god “of the contest” (enagōnios) or “of the palaestra” (palaistriēs) and associated with the agon in myth, yet he himself did not embody the ideal of strength. Yet the herm paradoxically lacks the body which is the sine qua non of an athlete. The importance of the herm thus seems to be more as a guardian figure in general, a god who watches over and assists in transitions, here perhaps related to the education of the youths to adulthood in the most general sense.

The Contest-System

The Heracles-Eros-Hermes triad in the gymnasium can, in a sense, stand for the physical, spiritual, and intellectual aspects of the individual which are fostered by the contest system. The agon or “contest” is the unifying concept behind the themes of this work, and it is important to set

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4 See N. Blanc and F. Gury, 988 nos. 271 (a Pompeian painting) and 272–274 (citing six gem carvings) in L. Khalil (supra n. 8, 1986).
5 In translating palaiestriēs “of the gymnasium” and not “who is a gymnasium athlete,” I differ from Dickie in his conclusions on this title of Hermes: above, note 6, p. 130. For Hermes’ function, especially as a god of transitions and boundaries, see W. Burkert, Greek Religion, J. Raffen, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1985) 156–59 (= Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche (Stuttgart, 1977) 243–247).
it in its social context. Jacob Burckhardt’s influential argument that the Greek agon is unique and central to our understanding of ancient Greek society remains true in its main point. Alvin Gouldner, in a useful elaboration of the “Greek contest system,” derives a number of chief themes in Greek culture from the agonal spirit. Gouldner notes that the Greeks prized youth, health and beauty, all objects with a “body locus,” and that it was not so much the possession of these beneficial traits as fame itself, the more stable and enduring product of them, which constituted the superior honor in that society. The prevailing system of values associated with athletes in particular held physical beauty and strength as claims to fame, as Greek literature and honorary decrees frequently attest. The proliferation in the archaic age of around 20,000 kouroi statues, larger-than-life idealized images of naked youths (or youthful divinities), testifies to the widespread idolization of the healthy male figure. “Fame” (Greek kleos, timē, eukleia, etc.) is of course a very broad concept. To the bodily centered traits which, according to Gouldner, foster fame, we could add many others which promote a “good life,” “happiness,” and, ipso facto, fame in the Greek view. In Lucian’s Anacharsis (15), Solon cites not only bodily health as a prime product of athletics, but also personal and civic freedom, enjoyment of ancestral festivals, security for the household, and even wealth.

The contest system is further characterized by Gouldner as follows. Fame must be achieved by one’s own, active efforts, usually recognized as aretē or “excellence.” The social struggle to attain fame was a “zero-sum” contest, i.e. one in which the glorification of one individual often entailed the diminution of others. The total amount of glory is finite, and at any given time it cannot be spread thinly over large numbers of


15We should be careful to see the “zero-sum” aspect of honor not as an absolute, but as a generally true characteristic of the contest system: see D. Cohen, Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens (Cambridge, U.K., 1991) 183 n. 30 and Cohen (supra n. 12, 1995) 63 n.6.
citizens. In a public contest, a few were proclaimed victors and most were left as anonymous “also-rans.” The striving for glory often provoked envy, and required the exercise of shame (aidôs) to guard against excess in effort (hybris).10

The contest system, Gouldner argues, benefitted Greek society indirectly by leading to the establishment of alternatives which unify citizens despite the self-seeking impetus of competition, notably rationalism and homosexuality. By emphasizing individual achievement over incidental wealth, or what you are instead of what you own, the system encouraged a search for value in personal excellence. In particular it encouraged the high valuing of ideas which are freely available, such as “wisdom” and other demonstrations of rationalism most fully expounded by Plato and Aristotle. Though mens sana in corpore sano, “a healthy mind in a healthy body,” is a Roman dictum, it expresses well the spirit espoused by Plato in his Republic. The schools of Plato, Aristotle and the Cynics were, after all, founded in the settings of gymnasia.

The contest system also fostered pederastic relationships, i.e. homosexual relations between an older male lover and his younger boy beloved, which mitigated the harshness of interpersonal competition. The contest system put strains on friendship, but this was countered by a much more intense form of male bonding in which elders courted youths and became their mentors as well as their lovers.17 Since the gymnasium was a place sanctioned both for homosexual liaisons and for rational education, Greek athletics was a thread tying together both the competitive and cooperative spirits in that society.

Paideia

Frequently athletics and its brutal ethic of “the-wreath-or-death” were justified by appeal to the ameliorating social effects of public contests.18 The cults of Herakles, Eros, and Hermes in the gymnasium are reminders of different aspects of the social benefits. One scholar, Schmitt-Pantel, has recently demonstrated how a variety of collective activities or “rituals of conviviality,” including those of cult associations, informal political groups, cliques of friends, and gatherings of athletes

10For two excellent recent studies on these concepts, see D. L. Cairns, AIDÔS: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature (Oxford, 1993) and N. R. E. Fisher HYBRIS: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece (Warminster, England, 1992). Cairns, p. 94 note 141, rightly cautions that “the zero-sum view ... can be taken too far; ... to dishonour another is not always to require his honour for oneself ...” See also on hybris, Cohen (supra n. 12, 1995) 143–50.


18On the ethos of “victory-or-death” and the toleration of extreme violence in (at least some) Greek athletics, see Poliakoff (supra n. 11) 90–91.
contribute in various ways to the state. These group activities can provide socialization in political life, apprenticeship in civic values, and places for expressing social order—"the disparities of fortune, the hierarchies of power." Each activity is an instrument of paideia, of social formation. Here we invoke a definition offered by Plato in the Laws (1.643e–644a):

[Paideia is] that training in excellence (aretē) from childhood which makes one into an adherent and a lover (erastēs) of becoming a perfect citizen, knowing both how to rule and how to obey in accord with justice...whereas an upbringing which aims at money or physical strength or some other cleverness without reason and justice is workmanlike, slavish, and entirely unworthy of being called paideia.20

Plato's requirement of "reason and justice" and disparagement of "money and physical strength" reflects his philosophical ideals which could contradict the realities of Greek life. Yet he conveys with some accuracy a societal ideal of how the best paideia also produced the best citizens. Insofar as athletics was one element of most Greeks' formal paideia, it can be included in Plato's, and most Greeks', scheme of training in excellence. In another sense, the competitive spirit itself can be harnessed to foster heroic valor in the young. The Spartan educational system was renowned for its integration of competition into all aspects of adolescent life, as Xenophon says with regard to the concerns of the legendary reformer, "Lycurgus": "Since he saw that those who had in them the strongest spirit of rivalry (philoneikia) produced choruses most worthy of hearing and athletic contests most worthy of seeing, he thought that, if he could join the youths in a struggle for excellence (aretē), they would also in this way best arrive at a high degree of manly nobility" (Rep. Lac. 4.1–2).

In short, athletic paideia fosters the broader contest system of the Greeks. Like most human social systems, the contest system contained an inherent tension between self-interest and group cooperation. While an individual could advance his personal status through demonstration of athletic excellence, he could also learn social interdependence by his very participation in athletics. Before one can compete alone in the stadium, one must exercise with fellow citizens in the gymnasium.

20Schmitt-Pantel (supra n. 7) 205–6.

20While Plato's criticism of wealth or bodily beauty as ends in themselves is consonant with values of the contest system generally, he elsewhere criticizes contemporary athletic training more strongly than most Athenians would have. See D. Kyle, Athletics in Ancient Athens (Leiden, 1987) 137–40.
Initiation and Eros

Let us now turn in the balance of this discussion to two aspects of Greek culture which have been associated with athletic paideia in recent scholarship, namely the origin of contest from ritual initiation and the association of athletics with notions of sexuality. Initiation is taken here specifically as a rite of passage with certain general characteristics which can be grouped under three stages of the process of transition: separation from society, life in isolation, and reintegration into society. Other characteristics which often, but not always, belong to rites of passage are that they are compulsory, communal, sexually segregated, pre-nuptial, and instructive in adult activities and communal traditions. Most significant for their relation to athletics is that rites of passage often require a test of physical strength, they impose definite restrictions on dress and diet, and their rituals occur periodically according to age groupings. The initiation ceremony, then, has the real function of introducing youths to established religious and social institutions and testing their fitness to inherit them.

Some scholars, most significantly Brelich and Jeanmaire, have argued that a number of Greek athletic contests resemble initiatory rites, and that therefore all athletic contests, including the Olympics, may have originated as in initiatory trials. Both Cretan and Spartan cultures, each with strongly Dorian strains, preserve systems of education which segregate youths into "herds" (agelai), and require them to undergo trials and receive instruction while in isolation, until they are finally promoted to adulthood. When a Cretan youth is admitted to the "herd" or agelê, for instance, he must perform exercises in the gymnasium area called the dromos, "the track." Among other activities, initiates hold contests including hand-to-hand or armed combat. Until the age of 26 or 27 the initiate is called a dromeus or "runner," a minor is conversely called an apodromos or "one excluded from the track." A Spartan festival with initiatory characteristics is the Carneia held in honor of Apollo Carneius possibly staged at the Spartan Dromos or "track" near the sanctuary of the god (Paus. 3.14.6). The festival was celebrated by certain unmarried men. The agonê, which seem to have been

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21The classic formulation of this structure is by A. van Gennep, Rites de passage (1909); see also V. Popp, Initiation, Zeremonien der Statusänderung und des Rollenswechsels. Eine Anthologie (Frankfurt, 1969) 7–8; Burkert (supra n. 10, 1985) 260 (= supra n.10, 1977, 391).


23Chief sources: Ephorus FGrHist 70 F 149; Pl. Leg. 636 c-d; Arist. fr.611.15; Dosiades FGrHist 485 F 2; Nicolaus FGrHist 90 F 103.


established in the 26th Olympiad (672 B.C.), included most notably a foottrace of the *staphylodromoi* or "carriers of grapes." The chief source is a lexicographer (Aeneid, Bekker 1.305) who reports:

*Staphylodromoi:* during the Carneia a certain youth on whom some wool bards were tied runs and prays for something beneficial for the state; youths called *staphylodromoi* pursued him. And if they should catch him, they would expect some good in the region for the state. If not, the opposite.

We may note that besides the incidental initiatory characteristics, the race of the *staphylodromoi* concerns the symbolic renewal of the state through tests of strength. If other contests of the Carneia imitated military training, then the festival as a whole may be considered at least a symbolic revival of Spartan military might.

Despite the attractiveness of this thesis, there are difficulties in ascribing an initiatory origin to all Greek athletics. Most obviously, the Cretan and Spartan contests are of late origin, and the fact that they resemble one another suggests that they may share a late origin arising from their common Dorian ancestry. The real difficulty comes in arguing that the Olympics themselves, the oldest regular athletic festival, also began as an initiation ritual. The Olympics and other athletic festivals certainly had some characteristics in common with initiation, namely age categories, separation of the sexes, the periodic nature of the celebration, the calling of a sacred truce, the special period of isolated training for athletes, a prescribed diet and enforced codes of athletic nudity, and strict supervision by whip bearers. Yet many of these characteristics are late developments. There were, in the earliest days of the games, no age categories, and very possibly none of the other aspects which are known only from later periods and sources. In sum, it is more likely that the so-called "initiatory" characteristics were added as the games became more formalized, and served mainly to reinforce the spirit of athletic *paideia* which seems to have been the earliest common thread of all Greek athletics, including those described in the Homeric epics.

We are safer seeing the origins of Greek athletics in occasional contests, especially among the nobles, with the primary aim of establishing an impromptu hierarchy among participants. This is a logical extension of a society in which the "contest system" prevailed. The victor immediately assumed the image of "king for a day." Religious rituals, we might imagine, naturally accompanied the games because most public, communal events were attended by sacrifices to the gods to ensure success of the proceedings. Participants individually sacrificed to personally favored deities for help in their event. Where chance plays a role in the activities of an ancient society, as it always does in contests, divine favor is ordinarily sought.

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The sparse evidence for female contests in early Greece merits special comment in this regard. Here I can merely allude to the three most salient examples of female contests, namely the footraces of the Games for Hera at Olympia, the running events for girls at the festival of Artemis Brauronia in Attica, and the footrace of the so-called Daughters of Dionysus at Sparta.\textsuperscript{27} I omit the more extensive athletic training of Spartan girls, which was clearly modelled on a similar program for boys. I have argued elsewhere that the three running events for girls in their respective festival contexts do have a clearly initiatory, prenuptial function. For example, many vases have been uncovered in Attica over the last thirty years which illustrate the girls' running rituals for Artemis. The girls, clad either in short dresses or else completely naked, were required to run near an altar in a celebration of their virginal "wildness" prior to being "tamed" in marriage.\textsuperscript{28} In short, women's festivals, when seeking an appropriate ritual to mark girls' transition to adulthood, frequently selected the activity of running to a goal as an appropriate metaphor for movement to a goal of marriage. Thus the girls' contests are closer to true initiations than are men's events.

So far we have discussed men's and women's contests as they may relate to the initiation of each gender group to adulthood. More complicated is the association of athletics with sexuality in the unique and complex way in which it was constructed among the Greeks. Many Greek male citizens were openly bisexual from the sixth century B.C. onwards. They married and fathered children, but they also had sexual relations with other males according to social customs which were carefully defined and closely followed. Greek male homosexuality, or more accurately, pederasty, was closely related to athletics. Kenneth Dover and others have amply documented the fact that the gymnasion was a primary locus of pederastic liaisons, whereby an older male courted, or at least assessed the desirability of, younger males as they exercised.\textsuperscript{29} The man was the active and dominant partner, the boy was


\textsuperscript{29}K. J. Dover, \textit{Greek Homosexuality} (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989) 54–55, and the following figures in his text: R305, a vase showing older man admiring a young victor in pentathlon (not the javelin held by the boy), red-figure kylix, Oxford, Mississippi; \textit{ARV} 177 (id., no. 3); Par 339; R59, a vase illustrating a man embracing a naked youth in a gymnasion setting (note the partial figure of a boy to the left holding a discus), Louvre Museum, Paris, inventory no. G45; \textit{ARV} 31 (Dikaios Painter no. 4); Par 324; R59, a vase
passive and subordinate, exhibiting a coyness characteristic of some partners in modern heterosexual relationships. Less usually, boys were shown to be responsive to their elder suitor in a gymnasium setting. Promiscuity by either partner was frowned upon, and the consent of the boy's family was desirable or required. The conduct of pederastic affairs was regulated and encrusted by a variety of unwritten, and sometimes written, protocols. Most man-boy relationships also involved a kind of mentoring process whereby social networks were established. Lover and beloved and their families were joined in a new political nexus. When a boy reached his late teens, the sexual relationship was ended, and as a young adult, he could in turn court boys. Though the precise courtship customs undoubtedly varied over time and in different places and situations, the gymnasium remained throughout Greek history the best place for men to meet boys and form relationships. Undoubtedly the practice of nudity and the ideal of healthy good looks fostered the association of pederasty within the gymnasium. On these points there is little controversy.

But what can be said about the early chronology and the possible causal nexus of athletics, pederasty, and nudity? A poem of Theognis, possibly from the early to mid-sixth century B.C. provides the earliest explicit literary evidence associating eros with athletics:30

Happy is the lover who after spending time in the gymnasium goes home
to sleep all day long with a beautiful young man.
(Theog. Eleg. 2.1335–1336)

showing a man arousing a boy in gymnasium setting (sponge, oil-flask, and scraper or "stingil," all implements for washing after exercise, hang on the wall); \textit{ARF} 378 (id., no. 137); \textit{Pur} 366.


The verb γυμνόζεσθαι, meaning “spend time in the gymnasion” or possibly “practise athletic competition,” appears first here.31 This passage also gives the earliest clear indication that a special place in the community was established for athletic activity and that those athletes frequenting it were “naked” (γυμνός). If we are to accept the recent argument for a date of about 600 B.C. for the wide adoption of the custom of nudity in the practice of Greek athletics,32 then we have here a coincidence of early evidence suggesting that athletic nudity and athletic pederasty became more common phenomena and were popularly associated by the mid-sixth century. Two generally accepted historical observations put this in the wider context of contemporary trends: the “social acceptance and artistic exploitation [of homosexual eros] had become widespread by the end of the seventh century B.C.,” and the earliest gymnasia, consisting of simply delimited, open fields, became common in Greek cities during the sixth century.33 It is difficult if not impossible to determine the causal relationship between the gymnasion and the popular acceptance of pederasty, but the two institutions certainly complemented one another, as a wealth of literary and artistic evidence attests.34 The high value placed on an athletic type of physical beauty and nudity probably also contributed to the establishment of gymnasia and the sanctioning of homosexuality among athletes, at least from the sixth century onwards. The Greeks themselves seemed to believe that pederasty took root as a consequence of the institution of gymnasia, as a character in Plutarch’s Amatorius explains in a mythological allegory:

Like a late-born son, a bastard of some old man, and a child of the shadows, Eros paidikos (“Love of boys”) tries to drive out his legitimate older brother, Eros. For it was only yesterday or the day before, after the undressing and stripping naked of the youths, that he entered the gymnasia, rubbing up against and putting his arm around others calmly during exercise. Then little by little he grew wings in the palaestrae (“wrestling schools”) and would no longer sit still, but he hurls abuse and throws mud at that brother, conjugal Eros... (Plut. Amat. 751f–752a)

33On the early popularity of homosexuality, see Dover (supra n. 29, 1989) 196; on the sixth-century gymnasion, see Delorme (supra n. 30) 26–30; Kyle (supra n. 20) 65; Glass (supra n. 31) 155–173.
34Dover (supra n. 28, 1989) 54–55.
The speaker here does not fairly represent either early or general attitudes towards pederasty, but he does echo the view that common acceptance of the practice was an innovation which arose from the institution of gymnasia.

Solon, the famous lawgiver and chief archon at Athens in 594/3 B.C., is alleged to have instituted two pieces of moral legislation in Athens pertaining to homosexuality in the gymnasium. The first prohibits slaves from activities of the gymnasium and from having freeborn boys as lovers:

[Solon] wrote a law forbidding a slave to practice gymnastics or to have a boy lover, thus putting it in the category of honorable and dignified practices, and in a way inciting the worthy to that which he forbade to the unworthy. (Plut. Sol. 1.4)

As Donald Kyle has convincingly argued, some regulation of this sort was probably proposed and instituted by Solon ca. 580 B.C. Homosexual eros in gymnasia was a reality in early sixth-century Athens. A second “Solonian” law, this probably dating to the late fifth century, prescribes hours for opening and closing schools and palaestrae to discourage homosexual liaisons from taking place there in the dark or without the presence of the proper supervisors:

...[Solon] forbade teachers from opening schools and paidotribai from opening the palaestrae before sunrise, and he ordered that they shut them before sunset, holding the deserted and dark places in very great suspicion. (Aeschin. 1.10 [In Tim.])

Though the authenticity of some of Solon’s laws has been questioned, the parts concerning opening and closing times and age regulations appear to be authentically Solonian, as Kyle rightly argues.

Recently some scholars, primarily Jan Bremmer and Bernard Sergent, have argued that Greek pederasty is preserved as a remnant of a primitive Indo-European rite of passage wherein an older man took a young lover with whom he spent time in seclusion and for whom he served as a kind of father, tutor, and governor (cf. Plut. Lyce. 17). But Dover has successfully refuted the theory that Greek homosexuality derived from an

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initiation rite, largely because references to overt homosexuality are absent from all evidence of the seventh century or earlier.\textsuperscript{37}

Thus our chronological survey does not support the thesis that initiation rituals gave rise to pederasty, nor that they gave rise to men’s athletic contests. Instead, we have seen that athletics and the gymnasium fostered the widespread acceptance of pederasty by the mid-sixth century. Athletic nudity was certainly an essential component of the nexus of eros and athletics in classical Greece, but it cannot be determined whether nudity was adopted because of the importance of male physique in the ideal of the warrior culture, or whether it came about because of the growing acceptance of pederasty. All that is certain is that the ethos of homoeroticism was fostered in the athletic culture of the day.

In sum, sexuality, like the ancient constructions of gender, functioned through the medium of athletics as a kind of paideia reinforcing the Greek contest-system and contributing to the construction of the polis. In Greek terms, Heracles’ strength, Eros’ desire, and Hermes’ communication of social formation all work together in the gymnasium. As it is overseen by this unique trinity, the Greek construction of sport seems truly foreign to our own.

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\textbf{Latin Haiku: Haiku Dum Ludo}  
by \textit{Harudine}, A Belgian group of nine Latin haiku poets  
edited by \textit{Dirk Sacré}  
illustrated by \textit{Mark McIntyre}  
translated into English by \textit{Herman Servotte}

- 92 Latin Haiku  
- English Translations  
- Four sections: \textit{Caelestia, Terrestria, Animalia,} and \textit{Humana.}  
- Vocabulary  
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