

Stadiums of Sports and physical education in the ancient world

(Greek as a Model)

الملاعب الرياضية والتربية البدنية في العالم القديم

(الإغريق أنموذجا)

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Abstract:

In Athens, the capital of Greek civilization, those who practice sports are athletes (from the root *athlos* or *athlus*, meaning "war"). Those who participate in competitions are contestants (from the word *agon*, meaning "struggle" or "conflict"). An athlete spends their time training, achieving a physical condition, technical level, and experience that distinguishes them from others. When an athlete is impoverished, they seek glory and wealth to escape their situation. Conversely, when they are affluent, they only engage in sports occasionally. Although sport remained for some time the preserve of the aristocracy who practiced it to gain balance in life and military skill, and only nobles could participate in the Greek Games, sport gradually opened up to professional athletes from all social classes.

Keywords: Olympism; sport; complexity; sporting authenticity; Greek civilization.

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I- Introduction :

When the English word "sport" was adopted in France at the beginning of the 19th century, it effectively returned to its original language. Indeed, the old term "desport," which referred to an enjoyable way of passing time, whether through conversation or play, had made its way to England, where it came to denote the refined lifestyle of the nobility. Once it became "sport," it retained this aristocratic connotation, even when, in the 19th century, it was applied to the competitions devised by Thomas Arnold at Rugby School, where he was headmaster, to complement the physical and moral education of the students. Thus began the great adventure of modern sport. Did it begin or simply restart? For contemporary theorists, sport is inherent to human nature. From the earliest ages, humanity has shown an instinctive tendency toward activities similar to sport. Engaging in sport also involves striving for survival, hunting, and reconnecting with an animal, authentic body that ties to the fundamental needs of mankind. This is the opinion of Jean Giraudoux: "Sport is the only means of preserving in man the qualities of the primitive man. It ensures the transition from the passed Stone Age to the future Stone Age, from prehistory to posthistory."

Amateurs do not derive any financial profit from sports, although their competitions sometimes reach an excellent level and the same intensity as those of professionals. National and international sports regulations have officially distinguished between amateurs and professionals since the 19th century. But did Antiquity even recognize this distinction? In Greece, those who practice sports are athletes (from the root *aethlos* or *athlos*, meaning war). Those who participate in contests are *agonistès* (from the word *agôn*, meaning struggle or conflict). The athlete spends his time training, achieving physical preparation, technical skill, and experience that set him apart from others. When impoverished, the athlete seeks glory and fortune to escape his condition. On the other hand, when privileged, he only practices sports occasionally. While for a time, sport remains the domain of the aristocratic class, who practice it to acquire a balanced life and military skill, and only nobles celebrated by Pindar, Simonides, or Bacchylides can participate in the Panhellenic games, gradually, sport opens up to professional athletes from all social classes. Therefore, competitive sport and physical rivalry correspond to a need. Human instincts drive them to engage in a deadly struggle to assert their superiority over others. Such instincts may have been softened or sublimated by society, which would have constrained them to be expressed in less lethal and more stylized ways. All of them have a natural foundation. Each of these sports appeals to one or several natural tastes of humans. While splashing around in a pool or at the edge of the sea is not considered a sport, swimming exists only because it is pleasurable for humans to immerse themselves in water, to move within it, and because there is a need to overcome the fear of water and to conquer it. The throwing events in athletics exist solely because humans enjoy throwing stones. The natural instincts that gave rise to various basic sports disciplines are limited in number: running, jumping, swimming, throwing, moving... competing, fighting directly (boxing) or indirectly (racing), demonstrating either strength or greater strength. However, the origin of sports is inseparable from social relationships and a socio-cultural context. Hence, the proliferation of new sports that have no connection to their origins in ancient times. Yet, these novelties sometimes seem secondary in light of the constants. From the Egyptian to the Sumerian, Assyrian, Phoenician, Aegean, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, and Muslim civilizations to the emergence of the modern era, the influence of sports worship has been ever-present (P. E. Ohl). It is unnecessary to search for the origin of athletics, R. Bobin notes. Running, jumping, and throwing represent life. The practice of jumping, running, and throwing to flee or pursue, to defend oneself or to attack, forms the essence of physical activity... J. Lahana confirms the same idea: two thousand years before our era, Egyptians of both genders already enjoyed the pleasures of swimming.

1. Physical Education During the Trojan War (1250 BCE)

As much as can be gathered from the legends and Homeric poems, it seems that, during the time of the Trojan War, athletic training was inseparable from the formation of the warrior. After being raised in the gynaeceum by their mothers until the age of six or seven, boys reaching puberty were trained in the mountains or by the shores. It is the Nymphs, Muses, Naiads, and Oceanids who preside over their education. The elders teach the younger ones to hunt, swim, fish, and fight. Considered incomplete during their initiation, the boys are dressed as girls. When they return to the village, they may marry and receive weapons. Those who are destined for war are trained by specialized instructors, with Chiron, who raised Achilles, being the mythic emblem. In Crete, Aetolia, and Euboea, these instructors are the *Corybantes*. The young men or *Korwoi* must submit to all kinds of disciplines: one-on-one combat, wrestling against beasts, crossing a deep and icy river, diving into

the sea, driving a chariot, archery... The heroes are often great killers or fearsome hunters. Sometimes they hunt alone, without weapons, performing feats in solitude that attest to their strength and mastery. Weapons, jewelry, steles, and Mycenaean vases endlessly depict these hunts. For sustenance and for the love of sport, the stag, deer, ibex, and hare are captured. All the hunting methods of the classical era were known by the end of the second millennium. A future warrior hero must therefore be athletic, uncompromising, and generous. In the Mycenaean world, the development of individualism in military matters led to war, which emerged from hunting and play, occupying both the cultural and athletic fields. The soldiers are credited with the creation of funeral games where major sporting competitions and equestrian contests originally took place.

Archaeology further confirms the existence of a sanctuary and a village at Olympia as early as the middle of the Bronze Age. War ends with a playful struggle. The courage, skill, and cunning of the competitors represent tributes to the deceased. This competition also allows them to forget death itself, an unknown finality in our modern games. Chroniclers, more or less faithful to these times when myth and reality are inseparable, have left on the threshold of Greek history ideals and exemplary behaviors through the Homeric poems (B.Jeu, 1977). The famous "a sound mind in a sound body," the harmonious balance of the head and body, which for centuries has been the privilege of the best, finds its theory and practice in Homer. The Greeks' commitment to physical exercise is evident in their tradition of systematically building a stadium or gymnasium in each of their cities. The noble class engages in hunting wild beasts such as lions, panthers, wolves, and boars.

They also hunt hares, deer, mouflons, and chamois. The most athletic form of hunting is that of the boar. Ulysses will receive an injury during this hunt, which will later lead to his recognition by his nurse (B.Jeu, 1977).

It is in the archery contest that the suitors of Penelope compete for Ulysses' bow and quiver; Melanthius starts a fire to heat the bow, which is greased to make it easier to draw. But none of the suitors manage to shoot. The elbow of the bow represents the metal frame forming the center of the bow. The notches are two indentations made in the string to allow the archer to hold it between the index and middle fingers. These contests continued until the end of the Homeric era in the great royal and aristocratic families, as Hesiod attests. He recalls, in fact, how he went to Chalcis to participate in the funeral games in honor of Alcidas, with the sons of the deceased offering many prizes. These events were merely a survival of old traditions where funeral games represented true succession struggles in which competitors vied for the honors, women, and possessions of the deceased. The winner was considered the favorite of the gods. During the funeral games of Patroclus, a struggle even takes place between Apollo and Athena. Apollo knocks the whip from the hands of the charioteer Diomedes. Athena breaks the yoke of Eumelus' chariot and makes the son of Oileus slip into the ox dung to help Ulysses in the race. In the archery contest, Apollo assists Merion. The games also serve to test the value of a king, with Cretan kings (or Spartans) being renewed every eight years by Zeus (or by the ephors) (Forbes, 1929).

2. Spartan Education

The importance placed on sport is nowhere more evident than in Sparta, where the institutions emerged as early as the 6th century, unyielding and rigid after the aristocratic coup that halted the democratic rise. The Spartan laws, attributed to a possibly mythical legislator named Lycurgus, impose an unchanging and harsh educational system. Even young girls, who in Athens are kept away from political life, engage in numerous sports such as wrestling, discus throwing, and javelin. Female athletics is attested as early as the first half of the 6th century, thanks to bronzes depicting young girls running in short athletic tunics. The practice of these sports prepares them for battle and war while also shaping beautiful bodies, ensuring the city's continuity through their union. This form of education for a fine race inspired Plato: "By being together (the men and women) in the exercises of the gymnasium and for the rest of the education, they will naturally be led to form unions. At the Olympic Games, Spartan champions hold an esteemed position (B.Gillet, 1967).

3. The First Spartan Victory

The first Spartan victory dates back to the 15th Olympiad (720). From 720 to 576, forty-six Spartans won, compared to eighty-one Olympic champions. In the footrace event (the stade race), twenty-one Spartans out of thirty-six winners took first place. The training of Spartans has the sole purpose of making them soldiers, and all education is sacrificed to this goal. If there is any intellectual aspect of education, it is kept to a minimum: "The Lacedaemonians find it good that children learn neither

music nor letters; the Ionians, on the other hand, find it shocking to ignore all these things," notes the sophistic author of *Dissoi Logoi* around 400, a student of Protagoras (Gilbet, 1925).

Very early on, gymnastics was supplemented by military training: handling weapons, fencing, javelin throwing, and movements in tight ranks. The Spartan army was the only professional army in Greece, admired for its maneuvers, transitioning from a file formation to a line formation with sudden and skillful changes on the battlefield or training ground. This physical training remained inseparable from the formation of character, aligned with a well-defined ideal: the well-being and interest of the national community above all. The two guiding principles were patriotism and devotion to the state, even to the sacrifice of one's life. The aim was to cultivate in the young gymnast, and later the soldier, a sense of community and an appreciation for discipline: Lyscurgus accustomed citizens not to want, nor even know how, to live alone, but to always be united, like bees, for the public good around their leaders (C.Diem, 1967).

The child is trained to obey. There is never a lack of authority above him. All of this takes place in an austere and harsh climate, with the educator even seeking to develop in the child a tolerance for pain starting at the age of twelve. While the child sleeps at night on a reed mat on the banks of the Eurotas, is poorly fed, and forced to steal to eat, his masculinity and combative spirit are developed during the day through boxing, organizing brawls at Platanistas, or in front of the sanctuary of Orthia (B.Gillet, 1967). The girls also receive a regulated education where sport takes precedence over music and dance.

The Spartan woman's primary role was to bear strong children. Thus, all delicacy and any effeminate tendencies were removed by hardening her body, displaying her naked in public festivals, and seeking the most vigorous man for her to perpetuate a strong and healthy race (Forbes, 1929).

If the Sparta of Terpander, where the courage of young men, harmonious muse, and justice flourished, is the great Sparta, the city soon closed in on itself, hastening its own death. The severity of Spartan education only intensified. The Gymnopaedia, which in the 6th century were music contests, transformed into competitions of endurance and resistance under the heat of the summer sun. In the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, originally the setting for an innocent quarrel between two groups of children fighting over cheeses stacked on the altar, boys in the Roman era endured cruel flagellations and competed in endurance, sometimes to the point of the ultimate sacrifice, all under the watchful eyes of a satisfied crowd. This is the cruel trial of diamastigosis (D.C.Young, 1984).

By the beginning of the Empire, so many tourists flocked there that a semicircular theater had to be built in front of the temple to accommodate them all. According to Libanius, the ceremony of Orthia still welcomed tourists in the 4th century AD. The Spartan example continued to fascinate the Ancients even after Greece's submission to Roman power (Kyle, 1987).

Cicero does not view physical education as a negative practice, but rather as an endurance trial that acclimates one to pain. Indeed, it is better to fortify oneself against pain than to stubbornly deny that it is a harmful force. Virtue, too, must triumph over pain. Familiarity with effort and training strengthen one against suffering, even if philosophy remains the most reliable means of overcoming it. Masculine energy can even subject the irrational part of the soul to reason. And why not seek famous examples to focus all of one's soul's strength in the fight? If the gymnast suffers, the pride he feels in enduring the pain makes it bearable. Therefore, it is impossible to separate the young Spartan soldier's training from his physical education (C.Diem, *Welgeschichte des Sports und der leibeserziehung*, 1960).

Placed under the supervision of a pedagogue from the age of seven and entrusted to the state, the boy progresses from the twelfth to the fifteenth year, then becomes an *irene* or *ephebe* in the first, second, third, and fourth years. Plutarch specifies: "The rest of his education consists of learning to obey well, to endure fatigue patiently, and to prevail in combat. This is why his training becomes progressively harder as he grows." His head is shaved. He is accustomed to walking barefoot and playing naked most of the time (M.Andronicos, 1986).

4. Pederasty

Between the young athlete and his mentor, ambiguous, even romantic or sensual relationships are established, relationships that the law permits while imposing certain somewhat vague limits. The mentor becomes the model, the tutor; this creates a form of emulation that develops the boy's martial values. Pederasty plays, indeed, an essential role in Greek physical education, even more so in Sparta than in Athens. The nudity of the young athletes encourages love between men, particularly among the *pedotribes*. Numerous vase paintings depict gymnasts accompanied by eloquent dedications. It seems that the origin of this homosexuality, particularly well-established among the Dorian peoples, is military. The circle of Socrates even asserts that the invincible army should only consist of pairs of lovers, such as the Sacred Band created by Gorgidas, which made Thebes superior to other cities in the 4th century (R.Auguet, 1970).

Although Solon's laws prohibit access to the palestra for men who have no function there, Plato reports that these prohibitions were rarely observed. In the *Lysis*, Socrates and his friends enter the palestra of Miccos to admire the "handsome athlete." Thus, special bonds of friendship are formed between the *eromenos*, who is mentoring his junior, and the *eraste*, the beloved, who is often filled with gratitude and admiration for his senior. According to Strabo, the young man is often abducted, taken to a "men's club," an *andreion*, and spends two months in the countryside, where he hunts and participates in banquets. Once the honeymoon is over, the *ephebe* receives armor from his lover, becoming his squire (*parastatheis*). Integrated into noble life, he then enters the choruses and gymnasiums. Strabo emphasizes: In such relationships, the pursuit is less about beauty than about bravery... The practice of pederasty is everywhere linked to valor and courage. In the gymnasium, the elder seeks to shine in the eyes of the beloved; the younger attempts to prove himself worthy of the lover, striving to achieve an idealized superior perfection. The elder represents the hero, the model who seeks to seduce. The younger admires and venerates him so much that the elder gradually becomes a teacher, sensing the emergence of a pedagogical vocation within himself (J.Heurgon, 1961).

This conduct, adopted in Lacedaemon, is rejected by regions under the yoke of the Barbarians: "... among the Barbarians, indeed, the tyrannical regime sees it as a disgrace (pederasty), as much as loving knowledge and physical exercise". However, love can only exist in the beauty of a perfect soul and an ideal body shaped by physical exercise. "... for beautiful bodies, there is more tenderness than for ugly ones... and when he (a man) encounters a beautiful, noble, well-born soul, the tenderness he feels for this whole is then at its peak... In front of such a being,... he sets out to be an educator and to perpetuate himself in a being similar to him, bringing forth Beauty. This process of formation and maturation takes place through communal life, the initiation of the younger one into the banquet and the gymnasium." If all education is primarily moral, it shapes character and personality within a framework of sporting and social life (G.Prouteau, 1948). However, Plato raises a question: Would this chastity, which athletes adhere to during their training, be beyond the strength of men and women whose souls are infinitely more elevated than those of athletes, and whose bodies are less vigorous? Yet it seems that training is precisely the occasion for all kinds of encounters.

The laws of Solon recommend that parents withdraw their children from school or the palestra before sunset to combat pederasty, in order to avoid dangerous paths in the darkness! For gymnastics instruction, the teacher welcomes students into his own house, rather than a public building. Children do not attend the same palestras as men, who go to public places. Each palestra designated for athletic education seems to be the property of the *pedotribe* whose name it bears. Thus, one speaks of "the palestra of Miccos," "the palestra of Tauréas" (G.Meyer, 1960).

The counterpart to this male homosexuality can be found at Lesbos, where a similar form of education developed as early as the 7th century, in the *thiase* (school) of Sappho, Gorgo, and Andromeda. The young girls strive to attain Beauty and Wisdom. They practice collective dance inherited from the Minoan tradition, music, and singing, but also athletic sports. Sappho herself proudly declared that she had been the instructor of a champion runner (H.I.Marrou, 1948).

5. The Evolution of Physical Education in Athens

Initially, there is little difference between Spartan and Athenian education. In the 7th century, the same warrior ideal is found throughout Greece, but by the end of the 6th century, Athenian education begins to focus on concerns beyond making the citizen a skilled athlete and future warrior. The type of tournaments where Ajax and Diomedes compete in the funeral games in honor of Patroclus gave rise in the following century to a sporting technique, armed combat (*hoplomachia*), but this soon became a disinterested sport, giving rise to competition. Although Plato questions in the *Laches* the place it might occupy in military education and Nicias develops arguments in its favor, *hoplomachia* quickly seems to evolve into an art. Herodotus even expresses surprise at encountering a valiant fencing champion on the battlefield (Forbes, 1929, pp. 89-90).

Like the athlete, the warrior must possess both strength and skill. Therefore, his preparation primarily consists of the practice of athletics and gymnastics, an idea that likely facilitated the democratization and popularity of physical education, which became of paramount importance in 5th-century education (Forbes, 1929, pp. 106-108). Even during the height of the democratic period, Athenian education was directed toward a noble life, that of the great landowner, wealthy and idle. In the 4th century, Xenophon would write three manuals for noble education: *Hunting*, *Horsemanship*, and *The Cavalry Officer*. The horse remained an expensive sport, while athletics became more democratic (J.Heurgon, 1961, pp. 34-37). By the end of the 5th century, all Athenians attended gymnasiums, provoking discontent among the old aristocrats (J.Heurgon, 1961, pp. 61-62).

By transitioning from the knights' class to the people, athletics carried with it the Homeric ideal of achievement, a set of values that had previously been reserved for the noble class and had transformed into open athletic competitions. Pindar celebrated the value of champions in his *Odes*, granting them an almost divine status. Nearly all were from exemplary, wealthy families. Thus, the taste for sport spread, accompanied by the idealized image of the victor, even though the concept of sporting virtue was criticized by Tyrtaeus and Xenophanes. Aristocratic education became the education of every Athenian child, democratized through the creation of schools (J.Heurgon, 1961, p. 123).

Although being well-born was not enough to become an excellent rider, innate talents still had to be developed. For Pindar, however, education was only suitable for nobles; he held nothing but contempt for the "upstarts," for those who learned simply by being taught. Soon, collective education overshadowed independent pedagogues. Physical education took precedence, consisting of preparing the child for running, discus and javelin throwing, long jumping, wrestling, and boxing, with the *pedotribe* having taught these disciplines since the 7th century, when children's competitions were introduced in the Panhellenic games. In Olympia, these events date back to 632 BC (Forbes, 1929).

These children, trained throughout Greece, likely began competing at around seventeen years old at Olympia, and between twelve and sixteen years old at Nemea, the Isthmian Games, or the Panathenaic Games. The expressions "Isthmian or Pythian children" were commonly used in the Hellenistic or Roman period to refer to age groups in catalogs or lists of competitive victories. Alongside this athletic training, music and dance provided a balance—gymnastics for the body, music for the soul. In *The Clouds* (973 BC), Aristophanes takes children to the *pedotribe* and the citharist (H.I.Marrou, 1948).

6. Physical Education in the Classical Era

The young Athenian may begin his lessons with the *pedotribe* at around eight years old, though it is more likely that he would wait until twelve, when he is already attending the school of the *grammatistes* and the citharist. The *pedotribe* divides his students into two classes: the "small" (*païdes*), aged twelve to fifteen, and the "large" (*néaniscoi*), aged fifteen to eighteen (G.Meyer, 1960).

The teaching of gymnastics primarily takes place in the *palestre*, an open-air sports field, square in shape, surrounded by walls. On one or two of the sides, there are dressing rooms, resting areas with benches (*exèdres*), baths, and storage rooms for oil and sand. The *palestre* is often adorned with busts of Hermes, the patron of gymnasts (H.Bengtson, 1971).

With the exception of foot races, which are held in the stadium, all sports are practiced there. The *pedotribe* is the owner of the establishment. The *palestre* of Timæas or Antigenes were famous in Athens, while those of Staséas, Nicias, or Nicoratos were renowned in Delos. The *pedotribe* is typically dressed in a purple cloak, which he removes to perform demonstrations for his students. He carries a long forked staff, a symbol of his role, which he is not hesitant to use to separate two wrestlers or correct young athletes. In his service, various instructors work. The gymnasts are selected

from among the oldest and most gifted of his students. A whole ritual accompanies the gymnast. Initially, the athlete performs his sport completely nude (the term *gymnastics* comes from *gymnos*, meaning naked). The athlete anoints his body with oil and is accompanied by the sound of the flute during exercises, a custom, according to Thucydides, that originated in Sparta: "The Lacedaemonians were the first to strip off their clothes and present themselves naked and oiled for gymnastic exercises." In the past, athletes wore belts to cover their private parts during the Olympic games, and this custom only recently disappeared. Some barbarian peoples, particularly in Asia, still wear belts during bouts of pugilism and wrestling (H.A.Harris, 1972, pp. 32-33).

In vase paintings, gymnasts are depicted without belts, shoes, or hats, sometimes wearing only a small leather cap to protect themselves from the sun. The young Athenian who goes to the *palestre* needs a sponge for washing, a small bottle of oil (*alabastron*), and a bronze scraper or strigil (*stleggis* or *strigile*), a kind of spatula with a curved end. Before each training session, he washes himself at the fountain or in a large stone basin, then rubs himself entirely with oil and sprinkles his limbs with sand or dust, which he lets fall in a fine shower onto his skin. The oil and sand protect the body. After gymnastic sessions, the *strigile* scrapes off the mixture of oil and dust, mixed with sweat, and the child washes again. The *pedotribe* is required to pay for the services of a flute player, whose music sets the rhythm for the stretching exercises, the discus throw, or the javelin throw. On vases, the *aulètes*, whose instrument is held in place by the *phorbeia*, accompanies the athletes (D.C.Young, 1984).

Such is the ancient education of the young Athenian. It is more athletic than intellectual. In *The Clouds*, Aristophanes devotes only eight lines to music, none to letters; the rest concerns physical education. At the beginning of Plato's *Laches*, the two fathers of families debate whether they will have their sons taught fencing, but not whether they will learn letters! All of ancient education converges toward a single goal: to make the citizen a beautiful and good man. The *kalos kagathos* is primarily a sportsman sculpted like a statue, such as Charmides, whose facial features lack expression except for soul. Athletes cultivate their bodies and devote all their energy to perfecting them (B.Jeu, 1977).

Among the Sophists, the clear intention to disavow the traditional sporting ideal quickly emerges, opposed to philosophical wisdom. Soon, true value (*aretè*) is no longer defined in the realm of sport, but in political action. Aristophanes criticizes these teachers of obscure knowledge; Xenophon, in the conclusion of his treatise *On Hunting*, reclaims the ancient education (K.J.Freeman, 1924).

Sport gradually takes a back seat. The very interest that the archaic period showed in sport, the glory of its champions, and the level of international competition widen the gap between professionals and mere amateurs. To improve their performance, champions introduce new methods, invent or modify training rules, and adhere to special diets and hygiene practices. Thus, the coach Dromeus of Stymphalus, former Olympic champion of long-distance running in 460 and 456 BC, invents the meat-based diet, which becomes the foundation for overfeeding athletes (B.Gillet, 1967).

Sport is now considered a profession. While athletes in the time of Pindar came from the most prominent families, by the start of the Peloponnesian War, they emerged from rural regions such as Arcadia or Thessaly. Their morality shifted away from that of the exemplary nobility. "Rough, brutal, vulgar," most sell themselves to the highest bidding "club," even changing nationality if necessary. In 480, the runner Astylos of Croton becomes a Syracusan under the tyrant Hieron. As intellectual subjects in Athens become more refined, the gap widens between the two disciplines and their respective followers. Sport and intellectual work no longer complement each other; sport is no longer the favored activity of Athenians.

Yet it is in a gymnasium that Plato immortalizes the Academy. He teaches seated at the center of an *exedra* adjoining sports grounds surrounded by colonnades. Plato returns to a more balanced mode of education combining gymnastics and culture. He reacts against the competitive spirit that harms sport, wishing to return it to military preparation, thus favoring wrestling (G.Proutreau, 1948).

The games should include races, fencing, heavy and light infantry combat, and emphasize military character exercises: archery, javelin throwing, slingshot, marches, and tactical maneuvers, intended for both women and men. Horsemanship and hunting are also mandatory for young girls (L.Robert, 1973). This training must be given in public gymnasiums, stadiums, and riding schools under the direction of instructors paid by the state, which is a new development. However, like in the archaic

period, Plato still emphasizes the moral significance of sport, which shapes character and personality as a complement to culture. For those who engage solely in gymnastics without balance become too harsh, and those who only cultivate music become softer than is desirable. Plato also does not neglect the field of hygiene and lifestyle. He closely links the medical field and the work of the doctor with that of the athletic trainer. Did not Herodicus of Selymbria practice both roles? Herodicus was a *pedotribe*. Having become ill himself, he combined gymnastics and medicine (Gilbet, 1925).

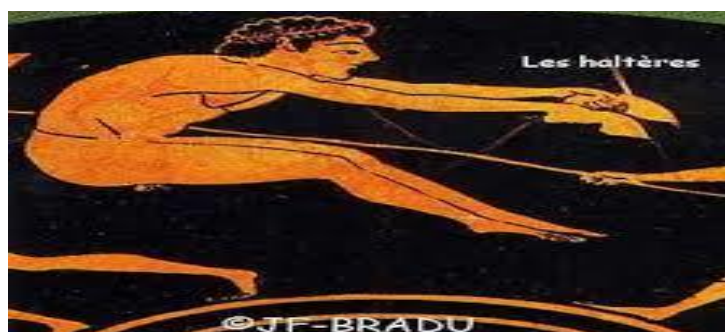
Plato goes even further, boldly asserting that the Sophists have always existed, practicing their art under the guise of poetry or gymnastics. The *Laws* add dance to gymnastics (H.A.harris, 1972).

He states that it is one of the means to discipline and direct the need to move toward the harmony of a law, thereby contributing to moral discipline, especially for the youth who are ready to become animated at the slightest opportunity. Isocrates, too, believes that education is intended for the complete individual, one who balances both gymnastics and intellectual culture (D.C.Young, 1984).

7. The Different Athletic Events

The Greeks did not know obstacle courses or cross-country running. They only practiced races on a flat, straight track, and there were many variations. The most prestigious event, whose winner gives his name to the Olympiad, is the *stade* race, or *stadion*, which also refers to the track and the distance over which the race is run: six hundred feet (approximately 200 meters), representing a variable distance, with the standard foot differing from one city-state to another (B.Jeu, 1977).

The Olympic stadium measures 192×27 meters, the one at Delphi 177×55 meters, and the one at Pergamum 210 meters. Shorter distances are unknown. The technique of the race is not the same as we know it today. Runners never kneel to start. When there are many competitors, a system of eliminations and a final race are held. The races include the sprint, the length of the stadium, the double stadium race (*diaulos*) of 385 meters at Olympia, the much rarer quadruple stadium race (*hippios*), and the long-distance race (*dolichos*) of 7, 12, or 20 stadia, which can even reach four kilometers (24 stadia). The starting line is marked by a row of *cippes* (truncated columns). At the end of the stadium, the runner rounds a marker (*ferma*) and returns to the starting point. All races are held on a "standard track." At the start, runners stand, waiting for the signal, their torsos leaning forward with their feet placed very close together. Most athletic games also include the race in armor (*hoplitès*), where the runners wear a helmet and shield (since 450 BC, they no longer wear *cnemides*). The distance varies by location: two stadia at Olympia and Athens, four at Nemea, and likely more at Plataea, where the rules are very strict and the runners compete in armor (C.Diem, *Der Olympische Gedanke*, 1967). The Greeks only knew the long jump with a running start. They did not practice the high jump, long jump (into a pit), or pole vault. The standing jump was merely a preparatory exercise. Athletes loosen the ground at the spot where they will land their jump.



the long jump (H.A.harris, 1972)

Young athletes throw lighter weights than adults. The weight itself varies depending on the time period and location, with the lightest weights dating back to the 6th century BC. The discus throw consists of two movements. The starting base (*balbis*) is marked at the front and sides, rather than by a circle as we use today. After lifting the discus with both hands at head level, the *discobolus* presses it against his right forearm and leans forward, stepping with his left foot. He then quickly straightens up, pivoting his torso from left to right on his hips, with his body supported by his right foot. His right arm traces a large circle from front to back, but the power of the throw does not come

from the arm; it originates from the release of the thigh and the straightening of the bent body. At the spot where the discus lands, a mark is placed in the ground .

While the javelin is used for hunting and warfare, it is also employed by athletes. In athletics, the focus is on the distance achieved in a given direction. The Greeks did not know rounds in combat; fighting continues until exhaustion, which results in a slower pace than what we experience today.

Young athletes look up to heroes, champions such as the formidable boxer Diagoras, the son of Damagetus, who is said to measure four cubits and five fingers, or 1.96 meters. Diagoras is a *periodes*, an athlete crowned at the four major games.

The Greeks do not appear to have known arbitration. Virgil, like Homer, describes a boxing match in the *Aeneid*: "If someone feels courage and strength in his chest, let him advance and raise his arms, with his hands wrapped in leather" (v. 363-364). One may wonder if Virgil attended the Olympic Games, which continued until 393 AD (G.Bourdon, 1924, p. 88).



Boxing in the Greek Sports (G.Bourdon, 1924)

To form balanced bodies, it is better to practice multiple disciplines than to focus entirely on one. It is better to excel in all exercises than to break records at any cost. Exercise, whether excessive or insufficient, diminishes this vigor; similarly, excessive consumption of food and drink compromises good health, while moderation in these areas creates, develops, and preserves health (J.Ulmann, 1965).

To practice these sports, young athletes also engage in various flexibility exercises such as *cheironomia*, which are movements of the upper and lower limbs, ball and hoop games, and the *putting bag* with a *corymbos*, a leather bag filled with sand suspended at chest height to practice boxing. Herodotus attributes the ball game to the Lydians. Claudius Galen (131-201), physician to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, studied the excesses of physical exercises in Pergamon and advocated for ball games, saying that they are designed to amuse and maintain the health of the body, ensuring proper proportion of the limbs while also developing mental qualities.

In the classical era, Athenians primarily hunt wolves, wild boars, deer, hares, and various birds: partridges, quails, larks, thrushes, magpies, turtledoves, larks, warblers, *hypothymis*, doves, *nertos*, falcons, pigeons, cuckoos, redlegs, redheads, sultana hens, *crécelles*, osprey, and finches. During the time of Pericles, hunting is mostly done with snares, spring traps, and pit traps for larger game (J.Assa, 1963).

The *ephebes* (young men) carry different names depending on the city-states: *irènes* in Sparta, *triakatíoi* in Cyrene, *apodromoi* and *agelai* in Crete. Their training lasts for one year, two years in Cyzicus and Apollonis, or three years in Chios. Then the *ephebia* becomes more athletic than military. Above all, the Greek father asks the *ephebia* to prepare his son for athletic exercises rather than for a military career. In Egypt, during the Ptolemaic period, its role is to introduce young Greeks to a life of sports from the age of 14, distinguishing them from the natives. Although the *ephebia* lasts only one year, *ephebes* meet in associations (*airesis*) fifteen years later. Privileged aristocrats may thus attach the title "Former Gymnasium Students" to their names. On a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus dated

260 AD, a father requests the enrollment of his fourteen-year-old son and lists the years of *ephebia* of his ancestors up to 4/5 AD (J.M.Brohm, 1976).

This is why parents register their children (as early as one year old!) on the list of *ephebes*. If a physical disability prevents them from participating in sports exercises, they are placed in a special class. The *ephebia* continues at least until the 4th century AD, as evidenced by the papyrus from Oxyrhynchus (E.Labou, 1948).

The *gymnasiarch* can also be a citizen who personally finances these expenses, even though the city's budget allocates a certain sum. He is expected to restore or build a gymnasium, pay for supplies, maintenance costs, and the salaries of teachers. For the role of the *gymnasiarch*, citizens who are honorable and generous are sought, individuals who take on this responsibility for their entire life, sometimes passing it down to their children. Again, private foundations help finance the institution. Most of these foundations help cover the heaviest expenses, such as the oil needed for athletic exercises. We know of about twenty from the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD. Both in the cultural and athletic realms, education is marked by the competitions integrated into the numerous national festivals of the Hellenistic period (E.Mireaux, 1954).

For the discus throw, bronze discs weigh from one to four kilos, perhaps more if the 5 kg 707 disc that was found is not a votive disc. Young athletes throw lighter weights than adults. Moreover, the weight varies according to place and time, the lightest dating from the 6th century BC⁵⁷. The discus throw is divided into two movements. The starting base (*balbis*) is limited in front and on the sides, and not by a circle as in our time. After raising the disc with both hands to head level, the discus thrower wedges it against his right forearm and leans forward, advancing his left foot, then straightens up suddenly, his torso pivoting from left to right on his hips, his body supported by his right foot. His right arm describes a large circle from front to back, but the force of the throw does not come from the arm; it comes from the extension of the thigh and the straightening of the bent body. As the disc descends, the body bends, and the left foot, which was behind during the ascent of the disc, returns to the front, the fingers folded and the nails dragging on the ground. This attitude is expressed by Myron's *Discobolus*. To prevent the disc from slipping between the fingers, it is coated with sand. At the place where the disc falls, a marker is stuck in the ground.



the discus throw (B.Gillet, 1967)

8. Physical Education in the Hellenistic Era

Wherever Hellenism spread, gymnasiums and stadiums developed, from Marseille to Babylon, Susa, Egypt, and Crimea. Sporting competitions were introduced for children in places like Chios, Teos, Larissa, and the towns of Euboea such as Tamynae and Chalcis, as well as Athens. Children were often categorized by age. Seniors were pitted against juniors, as seen in Larissa or Oropos, while children and toddlers competed in places like Coronea and Chalcis.

It seems that gymnastics was practiced from a very young age, as in Sparta, where nine or ten-year-old *mikkikhizomenes* (children in training) competed in athletic contests. A series of sarcophagi depicts a young deceased child, no older than seven, depicted as a victorious athlete. Girls were not excluded from these training sessions, in which they participated, sometimes even mixing with the young men (Forbes, 1929). Aristotle specifies that children undergo the same exercises as the *ephebes*, though they are adapted, as some events are, to the physical strength of females (H.I. Marrou, 1948). For example, at Olympia, according to Pausanias, the *Heraia* race for women is one-sixth shorter than the men's race. In the Hellenistic period, the framework and spirit of physical education remain largely the same as in the previous era. With the Sophists, the distinction between professional sport and amateur sport emerges, the latter being separate from school sports. From Herodotus to the physicians of the Roman era, hygienic science becomes more demanding, but, as in the archaic period, physical education remains focused on sports, fostering an emulation of competitive spirit and preparing the child to participate in athletic competitions. Other sports are notably less emphasized. As in the classical era, horsemanship remains the privilege of the aristocratic class. It is because the *ephebic* college of Athens took on a social character that equestrian exercises were placed on the same level as gymnastics between 47 and 38 BC. According to Teles and Lucian, and according to Galen from childhood, the learning of horsemanship begins at adolescence (H.A. Harris, 1972). A swimming or diving competition (*kolumbos*) exists only at the sanctuary of Dionysus near the site of Hermione in Argolis.

Regattas became more common at the Panathenaic Games, in Corcyra, and in Nicopolis starting with Augustus. The *ephebes* of Athens compete in canoe races in the waters of Salamis and Mounychia. The Greeks likely did not develop water sports extensively due to their origins. Having become a seafaring people and though influenced by the more maritime Minoan civilization, they never lost traces of their northern origins, where sport was tied to an aristocratic culture and chivalric tradition. Even in the Hellenistic period, athletics remains the preferred practice above all others. Additionally, traditional ball games are played: wall ball (*aporraksis*), thief ball (*phaininda*), triangular ball, air ball, or "hockey". These exercises are not part of the Panhellenic or municipal competitions, whose programs have not changed since the 6th century (B. Jeu, 1977).

Physical education is still entrusted to a *pedotribe*, who must not only possess knowledge of sports but also a perfect mastery of hygiene rules and medical science, including observations and prescriptions related to body development, the consequences of certain exercises, and diets. Young Greeks receive the best education due to the importance placed on professional sport. The required qualities are numerous and allow athletes to achieve a remarkable degree of perfection and precision. After the *pedotribe*, the *gymnaste* trains athletes who then become professionals (H. Bengtson, 1971). When the *pedotribe* is not paid a monthly salary, as in the public schools of Teos or Miletus, the parents offer him a flat rate for all the lessons. Around 320 BC, this flat rate is evaluated at one hundred drachmas. The method of the *pedotribe* remains quite similar to that of the teacher of letters. Gymnastics is not learned solely through exercise and practice. The athlete must become aware of his movements and analyze them in turn. The pedagogy of the *pedotribe* extends to the development of a theory (G. Bourdon, 1924). The teaching of wrestling is the best known: the *pedotribe* teaches the different positions or schemata.

On a papyrus from the 2nd century AD, a fragment of a manual for gymnastics teachers is found. A wrestling lesson is given to two students: "Present the torso sideways and perform a headlock with the right arm. You, belt him—You, grab him from below—You, step forward and embrace him. You, grab him from below with the right arm—You, belt him where he grabbed you from below; advance the left leg against his stance—You, push him away with the left hand—You, change position and embrace him—You, turn him over—You, grab him by the parts. You, step forward—You, hold him in a bear hug—You, push forward and bend him backward—You, bring the body forward and straighten up; (throw yourself) on him and counter..." (E.N. Gardiner, 1910).

It seems that the Greek language at that time used a very rich and sometimes difficult-to-translate technical vocabulary, but one that was familiar to the audience. The *pedotribe* prescribed a whole series of stretching exercises preparing for athletics, and this list expanded over the centuries to present, by the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, a clever and imaginative repertoire (B. Jeu, 1977): cross-country walking, short-distance running of about thirty meters, running in circles, forward and backward running, jumping in place with feet striking the buttocks (particularly favored by Spartan women), high kicks, arm movements (*cheironomia*), climbing the rope, and hoop games.

The practice of digging to loosen the ground before wrestling strengthens the arms and soon serves as an exercise to build muscle (C.Diem, *Der Olympische Gedanke*, 1967). The preparation for boxing develops the arms: holding the arms extended, fists clenched for as long as possible trains the boxers to maintain their guard and resist the opponent's attacks. The use of the *kôrakos* strengthens the balance of the pugilists and *pancratiasts* as they attempt to withstand the shock of the bag striking their heads or bodies. To prepare for the jump, the athlete performs arm movements with dumbbells in place, bends forward, touching one foot at a time with the opposite hand. As in the army or navy, and as in the classical era, the *aulêtes* accompanies the stretching exercises and the events themselves with the sound of the flute. Thus, athletic technique gradually developed into a hygienic gymnastics practice akin to Swedish gymnastics in the 19th century (E.N.Gardiner, 1910).

This evolution is reflected in the medical practices of the Romans, and Galen confirms the existence of hygienic gymnastics, although alongside it there exists therapeutic gymnastics, such as walking on tiptoes to treat constipation or ophthalmia, running to treat gonorrhea, or swimming to remedy dropsy (J.Assa, 1963).

In the Hellenistic era, athletes still practiced completely nude. However, this total nudity, sometimes presenting disadvantages, led to a practice known to the Greeks as *kunodesmé*. This technique involves tightening the tip of the foreskin with a cord attached to a belt for hygiene purposes, a method not conducive to violent exertions. The leather cap used to protect the head from the sun is still worn, tied under the chin, and should not be confused with the ear protectors (*amphôtides* or *épôtides*) worn by boxers. The body is rubbed with oil in a room at a moderate temperature. After a moderate dry friction, the oil serves as an embrocation (G.Bourdon, 1924). The rubbing is done with the bare hand, initially gently, then more vigorously, taking into account the child's age. A "therapeutic" friction finishes every exercise and relaxes the muscles by eliminating any fatigue. The skin is thus more difficult to grab by the *pancratiast* even if the body is covered in dust after being oiled; this dust allows the wrestler to grip the skin of his opponent. The oil or dust, which controls sweat and protects the skin from the elements—wind or sun—are used, as in the classical era, for hygienic purposes. Galen only advises against the use of dust for very young children. Philostratus lists its qualities: mud dust is cleansing, pottery dust induces sweating (Lucian seems to hold an opposing view), asphalt dust warms, black or yellow earth dust is good for massage and nutrition, and yellow dust makes the body shine and appear magnificent. Draped in his *himation* (purple cloak), the *pedotribe* does not hesitate to strike the clumsy or dishonest student. The runner who starts before the signal is even beaten. "Beware of receiving good corrections if you do not perform the prescribed movements," writes Lucian (M.Berger, 1927).

Figurative monuments are equally eloquent; for example, this red-figure vase from the British Museum (E-78), where the *pedotribe* strikes the *pancratiast* with his forked staff because the latter attempts to gouge out his opponent's eye by pushing in his thumb and index finger.

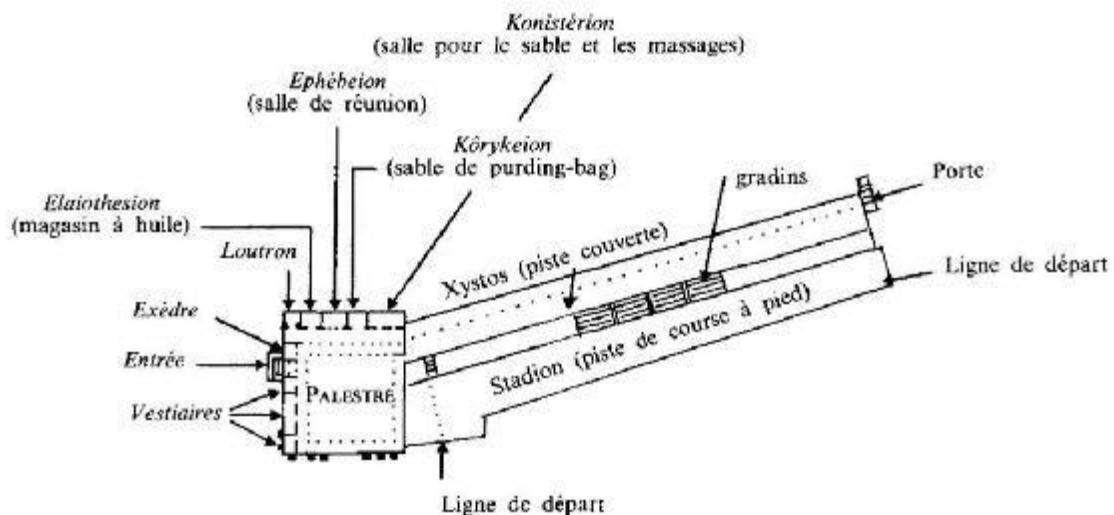
The school is indiscriminately called either *palestre* or *gymnase*, with the Hellenistic usage employing either term without real distinction. The *palestre* seems always to refer to the school for children, while the *gymnase* is for *ephebes* and adults who practice there. In fact, the *gymnase* encompasses all the sporting facilities of the *palestre*, including the exercise grounds surrounded by complex structures and the stadium. It also hosts philosophers, sophists, poets, and speakers giving lectures under its colonnades and in appropriate rooms (D.C.Young, 1984).

At Delphi, the *gymnase* is constructed on two levels. On the lower terrace is the *palestre*, composed of a square central courtyard with a colonnade and rooms located on the south and west sides. Wrestling training takes place in the courtyard, while the other rooms include the changing area, the *konika*, where fine sand is piled up for athletes to dust their bodies, the weight-throwing room where pugilists train using sandbags, and a room in the shape of a temple, possibly a sanctuary dedicated to Heracles. The athletes bathe in the cold water of a circular pool, 10 meters in diameter and 1.80 meters deep.

Near the northern retaining wall are ten stone basins fed by the Castalian spring, which pours its water through ten bronze spouts placed in the wall. These basins are connected, with the excess water flowing into the northern pool 88. To the west, Roman baths were constructed in 120 AD, allowing the athletes to take hot baths. On the upper terrace of the gymnasium is a covered portico,

the *xystos*, the length of a Delphic stade. In the 4th century BC, the portico featured a Doric colonnade made of *poros*, which was replaced during the Roman period by an Ionic colonnade made of marble. The *xystos* enables athletes to train for races when the weather is too hot or too cold. Otherwise, the runners practice on the *paradromis*, a flattened open space in front of the portico (M.Genevoix, 1969).

In comparison, the Hellenistic gymnasium of Priene, dating from the 2nd century BC, is built on a terrace supported by a wall. The entrance, framed by columns, opens onto a stairway. To the west is a square courtyard, surrounded by porticoes (*palestre*) measuring 35 meters on each side (R.Depagniat, 1911).

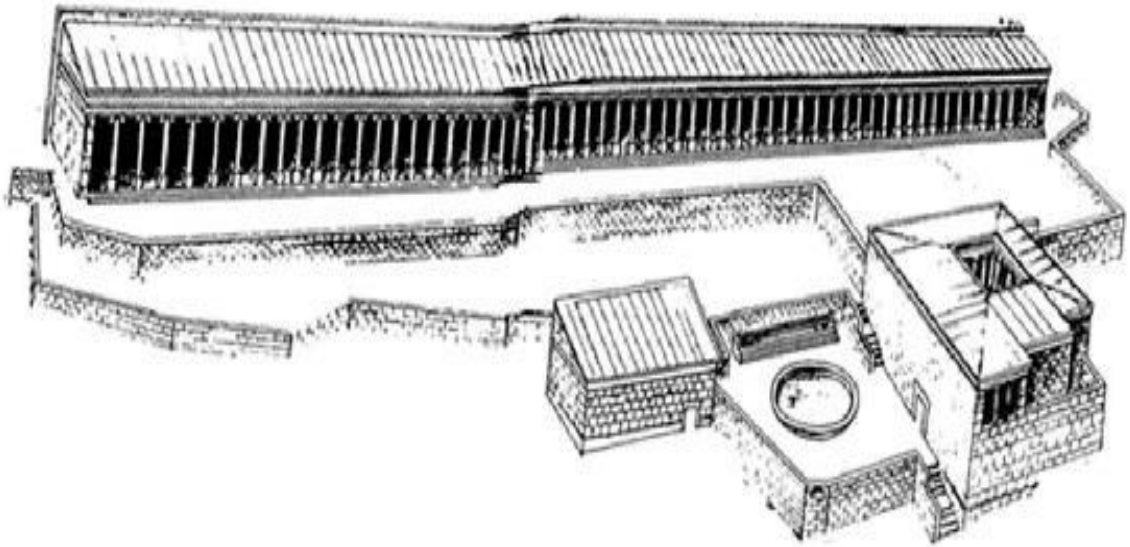


The palestre (B.Gillet, 1967)

To the north of the entrance is an *exedra*, and to the south are three rooms, which probably served as changing rooms. The northern portico is twice as deep and features two rows of columns to prevent wind gusts from entering during storms or southerly winds. Built into the hillside, the first-floor structures have been completely demolished, but the ground floor features five interesting rooms: in the center, a room measuring 9.50 meters by 6.60 meters, with marble-covered walls, and an arcade housing the statue of a benefactor, which is likely the *ephebeum*, the meeting and lecture hall for the *ephebes*. Graffiti on the walls designate the spots of specific athletes. In all gymnasiums, the meeting room is located in the same area. In the Roman period, it was expanded with a small semicircular tiered theater. The *palestre* and porticoes are adorned with statues and Herms offered by donors, with Heracles and Hermes being the divine protectors of sport par excellence. In the northwest corner, the cold baths (*loutron*) are located, which were supplemented by hot baths during the Roman period. The baths then became the essential part of the construction, to the detriment of the *palestre* (R.Vanker, 1968).

The interior appears to be similar to the vase paintings of the 5th century. The *elaeothesium* represents the store where oil is distributed, and the *conisterium* is the store for sand or dust. There, massages are practiced in shelter, as recommended by Galen. To the east, one can access the facilities for running, jumping, and the throwing of javelins and discuses. In Priene, the entire complex is spread across three levels. Five meters below the *palestre* extends the stadium (*dromos*), 18 meters wide and 191 meters long. The runners position themselves between pillars, with their feet placed on a double line drawn in the sand. In longer races, the competitors run around these pillars before returning to the starting point. To the west, a second facility features a starting line marked by a stone threshold, as at Olympia, Epidauros, or Delphi, with each runner's position separated by a pillar. The starting signal may be given not verbally but by the opening of a gate. To the north, a row of twelve seats occupies only a third of the length of the track, with spectators sitting on wooden benches or on the ground if there are too many. The stadium, built on flat ground, usually presents two rows of seats connected by a curve (*sphendoné*). At the very top is the *xystos*, 7.75 meters wide and 191 meters long (P.Conrad, 1976).

The way in which the working hours of the young Greek were divided remains unclear. However, the demands of physical culture and intellectual culture appear, since Xenophanes of Colophon, to be antithetical. The balance between these two trends is often only realized intermittently. "We ask in our prayers for the health of the mind along with that of the body," Juvenal wrote in the 2nd century AD (X, 356). Professional athletics is precisely criticized in the name of balance and the harmony of form and mind because the champion, in pursuit of performance, neglects the study of letters and overtrains his body. Even though this ideal of perfection seems difficult to attain—the aristocratic *ephebia* that combines gymnastics, music, letters, science, and arts achieves it only superficially—the Greek, at all times, aspires to reach it and never gives it up. The teacher primarily shapes the morals of a child, and all higher education involves a complete bond between the teacher and the student, in which affection plays a key role (J.Assa, 1963).



Gymnast and Delphos (reconstitution). (B.Gillet, 1967)

Conclusion:

There is one that endures, that of innocent, honest sport, perverted and distorted by unhealthy social, political, or ideological use. Even in antiquity, sport invaded childhood and adolescence; the gifted child was spotted by coaches and then prepared for the Olympic Games. They were made into mythical figures. Sporting history thus reduces itself to the exploits of heroes, to their performances. A man is interesting only because he is a superman, like Coroebus, the first known winner of the stadion, or Milon of Croton. Their names and exploits are passed down from generation to generation, with the mission of sport being to rank values. It is in ancient Olympism, however, that modern athletes seek to rediscover a humanity, an ethics & quot; distorted & quot; by a materialistic world, with Olympia being the sanctuary of a superior civilization, the holy city of ancient athletics. It is difficult to establish a comparison between modern sport and ancient sport, but it is certain that modern sport demands the unlimited development of the human body& 39;s capacities. While the purpose of ancient sport was the celebration of a cult, the goal of modern sport is the maximum performance of the body. What mattered in antiquity was victory more than performance, records, and comparisons of performances, which seem to have been unknown to the Ancients. Ancient games were practiced by the Greeks, with barbarian peoples coming to watch; modern Olympiads, on the other hand, welcome the maximum number of countries. The competitions between athletes brought about a kind of rejuvenation of the world, of men and gods, awakening the secret powers of the earth. Modern performances are more directly linked to monetary gain. The Ancients sought to win in the moment, not to break a previous record, although rare performances (notably in long jumps) are known.

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