

Athletics in the Era of Peloponnesian War

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Sports, as a public performance event that accompanies social development, finds its roots in the Homeric epics, as from the burial games in honor of Patroclus,¹ we are gradually led to the crown of sports with the organization of the Olympic Games in 776 BCE.² Given that sport is an element that accompanies all aspects of public life, it is considered as the instrument that strengthens the cultural values of Greeks through the sphere of competition, as expressed by all city-states.

However, the subject of this paper focuses on the two Greek cities that were the dominant dipole in power and competition during the 5th century BCE, since according to Herodotus (1.56), Athens and Sparta are the most powerful cities of the ancient Greek world. Given the competitiveness that distinguishes them and culminates in the outbreak and conduct of the Peloponnesian War, I will try to present the way each city handles and utilizes sports in the context of social cohesion. As sport is one of the key cohesive links that connect the social fabric, not only locally but also nationally, the question is how this cohesion is achieved in each of the two cities, precisely because their structure is different, both politically and socially.

Therefore, since the social structure of the two cities is drastically different, the subject of my research is the way in which the two great rivals manage sports and integrate it into their political and social development. For this reason, I will start my study with the type of sports education, in conjunction with the education system of each city in general. At the same time, I will refer to the criteria for the participation of athletes in competitions, as well as the way of dealing with the winners. Finally, I will try to show that the political differentiation of the two

¹ Homer *Iliad* 11.257–357.

² On the dating of Olympic Games see Scanlon 2004, 61 and especially Christensen 2007.

cities has an impact on the way they perceive and manage sports, as a key cohesive element of 5th century BCE society.

1. Athletics in Athens

1.1. The Educational System

Unfortunately, although Athens has pioneered the intellectual development and introduction of innovations that rapidly changed its institutions,³ it has not bequeathed us any history of Athenian sports. However, her involvement is given after 696 BCE, when Pentacles wins the stage, bringing the first of a series of Olympic victories to Athens.⁴ Therefore, the gradual appearance of Athenian Olympians and the parallel increase of sports depictions in archaic pottery, show the intimacy and relationship that Athenians have begun to develop with sports since the 7th century BCE.⁵

This relationship was cultivated with Solon as the central figure, who in 594 BCE attempted the democratization of sport,⁶ legislating monetary rewards for sporting victories (Plutarch *Solon* 23.3).⁷ In essence, Solon sought to present sport as a public rather than a private issue, thus encouraging Athenians to view sport as politics.⁸ At the same time, the institution of prizes pushed members of the lower classes to engage in sports,⁹ although such involvement is considered characteristic of the upper classes, as argued by both, Aristophanes (*Wasps* 552–557 and *Plutus* 281, 552–554) and Aristotle (*Politics* 1273a 21–36).

³ Thucydides 1.70–71.

⁴ For the Olympic victors see Kyle 1987, 20 and Christensen 2007, 200–219.

⁵ Kyle 1987, 21.

⁶ Christensen 2012b, 164–183.

⁷ Kyle 1984.

⁸ Kyle 1987, 22 and 2014, 169.

⁹ Cf. Harris 1964 and 1972, as long as Pritchard 2003, 293.

Given the tendency to expand sports, the question is how Athenians become acquainted with sporting events. For Athens 566 BCE is a landmark date, as the Panathenaic Games are introduced in the annual festive program, which now includes sports games (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 60), thus preparing the Athenian citizens for their military service.¹⁰ The fact that these races are accompanied by a cash prize, makes it clear that the victories are ranked.¹¹ At the same time, with the reforms of Cleisthenes in 508 BCE, new institutions are introduced that aim to involve the Athenians.¹² The new institutions, the Army and the Vouli of 500, including Dithyrambic Dance competitions, enhance stability between members of different classes or races and make them see Athens as a political, cultural and religious homeland, with the ultimate goal, according to Aristotle, for more to participate in the state (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 21.2: *πρῶτον μὲν συνένειμε πάντας εἰς δέκα φυλάς ἀντὶ τῶν τεττάρων, ἀναμειῖξαι βουλόμενος, ὅπως μετάσχωσι πλείους τῆς πολιτείας*).¹³ Therefore, by creating the context in which the Athenian citizens belong together, regardless of social class, the religious celebrations are finally a point of reference for the Athenians, as they stand out in relation to all other Greeks.

More specifically, in many cases there is a tendency of Classical Athens to have celebrations that surpass any other modern Greek city (Xenophon *Athenian Constitution* 3.2 and 8). As Pericles claims in his Epitaph speech for the dead in the first year of the Peloponnesian War, the state has established many ways of resting from the daily struggle (Thucydides 2.38). Throughout the year, struggles and public sacrifices take place, in which every citizen

¹⁰ Miller 2004, 144–145.

¹¹ After all, this is the main difference that characterizes the crowned ones from the money games, according to Miller 2004, 135. For a detailed presentation of the games that took place on the Panathenaic celebration, see Miller 2004, 139–144, while for the program of these games see Kyle 2014, 161–165.

¹² Pritchard 2004, 208.

¹³ Zimmerman 1996, 42–43.

participates. Events and spectacles, which stand out for their magnificence and are admired mainly by foreigners, for whom Athens is a place where the festive events never end (Isocrates 4.43–46).¹⁴

In other words, we observe the tendency to spread the fame of Athens through these spectacles, a fact that explains the efforts of politicians, starting with Peisistratus, for sports to acquire a key position in the political life of the city, from which it is ultimately influenced.¹⁵ In fact, the nationalization of sports, which from 566 BCE henceforth came under political supervision, since the preparation and the prizes of the games involve the athletes as political lords (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 60.1–3), it is finally connected with the Athenian glory, which everyone shares.¹⁶ Therefore, Athenians are completely familiar with sports, as the city itself offers them a wealth of opportunities, a fact that is only possible in democratic Athens. Since sport in Athens is an event with which all social classes come into contact, either as athletes or as spectators or as benefactors, we are called to examine whether the education system, which raises athletes, is equally common.

According to Protagoras (Plato *Protagoras* 325e–326c), the Athenians, as soon as their children begin to understand, send them to teachers who will teach them the appropriate lessons.¹⁷ The basic education of the children includes Writing, Music and Gymnastics. The *grammatistes* emphasizes reading and writing in order for the student to be able to cope with the practical needs of his daily life, but also to shape the right character (εὐκοσμία). Consequently, the *kitharistes* brings the child in contact with Music in order to familiarize him with rhythm and harmony, elements necessary in human life. Finally, *paidotribes* has the

¹⁴ Pritchard 2015, 28–51 and 2021, 309.

¹⁵ Kyle 1987, 31 and 53–54.

¹⁶ Kyle 1987, 54–55.

¹⁷ For a detailed presentation of the educators of Athenian education, see Miller 2004, 186–189.

responsibility for the exercise of the body, so that by acquiring a robust and strong body, he can serve his spirit and not be afraid of war because of his physical weakness. It is emphasized that this type of education is primarily available to the rich.

In other words, Athenian education is a private matter, since it is the family that decides what the duration and type of education will be,¹⁸ a fact that is certified by Aristotle (*Politics* 1337a). He argues that education should be public and not private (*Politics* 1337a: τήν ἐπιμελείαν εἶναι κοινήν), while pointing out that the training of the body should precede the training of the mind, which in fact contributes to bravery (*Politics* 1337b25–30: τήν γυμναστικήν ὡς συντείνουσιν πρὸς ἀνδρείαν). In other words, he considers that Physical Education brings positive results in the overall formation of young people, since it creates the right habit of the body.¹⁹

The importance of Gymnastics is also certified by the Attic Orators (Aeschines 1.10 and Isocrates 15.180–185), as well as by Plato, in terms of the training of the guardians of the ideal State, with the difference that the cultivation of the soul precedes that of the body.²⁰ Since the virtuous soul is what makes the body as good as possible (Plato *Republic* 403d–e), after it is cultivated, it is entrusted with the care of the body.

Taking into account the views expressed, as expressed by Philosophy and Rhetoric, in combination with the view of Aristophanes, when he expresses his complaint about the fact that the young people of his time left *palaistra* and the *gymnasiums*, to follow the new education of the Sophists (*Nubes* 961–1054), we conclude that Physical Education remains a key element

¹⁸ Petermandl 2014, 238.

¹⁹ Petermandl 2014, 238.

²⁰ For the educational system of the ideal state see Plato *Republic* 3.404b, 3.411e–412a, 3.407b and *Laws* 7.795.

of the Athenian educational process.²¹ However, the question is how the Gymnastics course is related to the cultivation of competition, which is necessary for participation in sports.

First of all, a clarification is necessary. *Paidotribes* teaches children basic gymnastics in the *palaistra*.²² Instead, *Gymnastes* is the specialized trainer hired in order to prepare the athlete for the competitions, supervising the diet and the necessary exercises.²³ In this way, Physical Education is separated from the sports gymnastics provided in Ancient Athens (Isocrates 15.181: διττάς ἐπιμελείας κατέλιπον ἡμῖν περί τὰ σώματα. τήν παιδοτριβικήν ἥς μέρος ἐστί ἡ γυμναστική, περί τὰς ψυχὰς ἢ φιλοσοφία). This teaching and practice turns students into athletic competitors, without this meaning that sport in Athens is just a competitive activity that simply aims to teach skills. On the contrary, the main goal is to form good and virtuous men.²⁴

At the same time, the fact that the ancient writers consider athletic training necessary to achieve victory,²⁵ proves that it is difficult to perceive the presentation of athletes in competitions independent of athletic preparation. Especially since it is concluded from everyone that only education turns men into athletes, every victory depends on the lesson and practice.²⁶ Therefore, the question now is which kind of citizens have the opportunity to be actively involved in sports in democratic Athens.

As already mentioned, Athenian education is a private affair, as it depends on the possibility and the choices made by each family (Plato *Protagoras* 326c and Aeschines 1.9–11).

²¹ Pritchard 2003, 302 and 2004, 216.

²² For the *palaistres* and the *gymnasiums* as places of training of the athletes, see Miller 2004, 176–185.

²³ Pritchard 2003, 303.

²⁴ After all, as Aristotle argues (*Politics* 1338b 2–8), after physical education the educational system must proceed to spiritual education. See also Pritchard 2003, 304–309.

²⁵ Isocrates 16.32–33, Aeschines 3.179–180, Aristotle *Politics* 1338b39–1339b4, Plato *Laws* 807c.

²⁶ Pindar *Olympian* 8.54–66, *Nemean* 4.93–96, *Isthmian* 4.70–72. See also Pritchard 2003, 300.

Depending on the financial ability of every Athenian, they choose the corresponding education that they will offer to their children. In fact, according to Isocrates (7.43–45 and 14.48), because the poor Athenian cannot afford to have slaves, their children come to fill this gap. They are forced to help in any family work, so due to lack of time the educational opportunities they have are diminished (Herodotus 6.137, Demosthenes 57.41–44, Aristotle *Politics* 1323a5–7).²⁷

Given the view of the Athenian Municipality, in which sports education is considered necessary to participate in the games, it is obvious that the poor Athenians finally choose the Letters course as the most useful for them, in order to help them cope with their private obligations and participate in the public affairs of the city (Plato *Protagoras* 313a, 326b–c).²⁸ This fact is also certified by modern writers, who characterize the involvement with music and sports as a subject and activity of the upper classes.²⁹ Therefore, it seems like the poor Athenians have little chance and opportunities for great participation or career in sports due to financial weakness, since only the rich can afford the burden of education in all three lessons.³⁰

Despite this, the presence of three texts on the sport of Classical Athens, which suggest a growing activity and participation in sports by citizens and the lower classes,³¹ has led to the tendency to link sport with the creation of democratic expectations.³² In fact, there are scholars who claim that the participation of the lower classes in sports, helped and developed the democratic state, since the ideological strengthening of this regime, with the equality and

²⁷ Pritchard 2021, 312.

²⁸ Pritchard 2003, 311 and Ober 1989, 157–158.

²⁹ Aristophanes *Frogs* 718–737, *Wasps* 1122–1164, Euripides *Electra* 528, Isocrates 7.45.

³⁰ See Pritchard 2003 332, 2009 & 2013 34–83 and Kyle 1987, 102–123 & 2015, 202–204.

³¹ Isocrates 16.33–34, Xenophon *Athenian Constitution* 1.13 & 2.10 and Euripides *Fragm.* 282.

³² Fisher 1998, 85–89.

freedom of speech it entails, was created by sports.³³ Indeed, social and political changes encouraged mass sports, as it enabled participation at all levels of society through equality and the growing political participation promoted by the state of Cleisthenes (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 21.2). For this reason, the connection between meritocratic sports and the political democratization of Archaic and Classical Greece is proposed.³⁴

However, despite the political and social changes that took place in Athens, the fact remains that we tend from the elitism of origin to the elitism of wealth, so athletes were often connected to wealth and social superiority.³⁵ But, although sport is projected as an elitist and exclusive privilege of the rich,³⁶ this does not exclude lower classes, especially if we consider Isocrates' *On the Team of Horses*, where it is said that Alcibiades choose horse racing at Olympia, because he did not want to compete with lower class citizens in the *gymnoi agones*.³⁷

1.2. Importance and Function of Sports in Athens

As we have seen, Athenians come into contact with sports through two activities. On the one hand, through the games that took place during the Athenian festivals. On the other hand, through the sports teachers in the teaching classes of the Athenian students.³⁸ It is obvious that sport functions in a complementary way, as a culture of the body and ultimately of the soul, and even on an individual level, since it is left to personal choice. Especially if we take into account the relations of freedom that govern the Athenian Republic and the complete lack

³³ Miller 2004, 278.

³⁴ Christensen 2012b, 135–163.

³⁵ See Kyle 1987, 123; 2014, 166 and 2015, 200.

³⁶ Pritchard 2003, 318–323.

³⁷ Isocrates 16. 32–33.

³⁸ Pritchard 2021, 311.

of coercion, except of course the observance of the laws (Thucydides 2.37), we realize that the operation of sports in Athens is an event with special characteristics.

First, as evidenced by Lyric Poetry, ceramics and tributes in honor of the gods, sports flourished in Athens in the 5th century BCE.³⁹ In fact, Classic Athens is the ideal place for sports, due to the plethora of opportunities given for games during the celebrations that flood the Athenian calendar.⁴⁰ These games, as a spectacle, worship and celebration, glorify the city and at the same time spread its fame everywhere, while satisfying the struggling tendencies of the Athenian citizens.⁴¹

What is at stake, however, is the fact that, although sports are primarily, if not exclusively, economically upper-class citizens, athletes have the full acceptance of all citizens. Of course, there are strong criticisms, as expressed by ancient writers of the 5th century BCE, which disapprove honors and prizes, for the most part, that athletes receive to a greater extent than spiritual people.⁴² There is a tendency to reject the public worship of athletes that prevails to the detriment of spiritual people.⁴³ Therefore, we understand that the supremacy of Physical Education in the traditional educational practice of Athens, gives way to the Letters during the “Educational Revolution” (450–350 BCE),⁴⁴ a change which is part of the wider spiritual and social change of life in the city.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the lower classes of the Athenian state continue to support elite athletes and races, even if they don’t have the same opportunities in participating in sports. The positive

³⁹ Kyle 1987, 172.

⁴⁰ Thucydides 2.38, Isocrates 4.45, Xenophon *Athenian Constitution* 3.2.

⁴¹ Kyle 2015, 158–159.

⁴² Xenophanes Fr. 2. 11–15 and Euripides Fr. 282.

⁴³ Isocrates 50. 1–2, 5 and 15.250. For a detailed presentation of the criticisms and comments against Athenian sports, see Kyle 1987, 124–154.

⁴⁴ Aristophanes *Nubes* 1002–1017.

⁴⁵ Kyle 1987, 143.

treatment of sports by the citizens and its public support, is certified not only by the public care of the holidays and the maintenance of the Gymnasiums by politicians, such as Kimon, Pericles and Alcibiades, but also by the Comedy. In other words, while anyone came into the sights of comic poets, only the Athenian athletes escaped the blame.⁴⁶ Therefore, the fact that comedies, and Literature in general, present athletes in a positive light as a positive example,⁴⁷ is not only an indication of the lower class's esteem for sport and athletes, but mainly points out that Athens as a whole valued athletics.⁴⁸

The explanation for all these should be sought in the relationship between sport and war and its democratization. Since the lower social classes, which are ideologically connected with the military and militant values of the war, also take part in the war, they acquire a common sports and military culture, which exists between the Athenian athletes and the warriors.⁴⁹ Why is it common? Because both sport and battle contain the element of struggle that is conducted according to specific rules.⁵⁰

Also, both sports and warfare test the physical endurance of the athletes and involve them in pain and danger, while victory ultimately comes because of virtue.⁵¹ Therefore, the fact that the poor soldiers identify with the elite athletes in trouble and danger, explains the appreciation they show them.⁵²

This does not mean, however, that sport was for the Athenians a practice for war. After all, military training was provided to students during adolescence, the two-year training of young

⁴⁶ Somerstein 1996, 331.

⁴⁷ Aristophanes *Nubes* 961, 972–984, 1002–1032.

⁴⁸ Pritchard 2021, 308–311.

⁴⁹ Pritchard 2013, 84–138.

⁵⁰ For the way the battle takes place, see Thucydides 1.29.1 and Euripides *Heracleides* 841–842.

⁵¹ Pritchard 2021, 313–314.

⁵² Pritchard 2021, 315–317.

people to become citizens (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 42). The eighteen-year-old Athenians received the training and practice in the military service required by their registration in the list of Athenian citizens. The training in weapons, such as javelin and archery, was provided by a teacher specialized in military training and not *paidotribes*, a fact, which proves that traditional sports training does not presuppose military training.⁵³

Therefore, it is understood that sport, while it contains the element of competition, is essentially a unifying element for Athenian society. The Athenian festivals and their races give every Athenian the opportunity to share the common experience.⁵⁴ An experience in which everyone participated; both the rich, whether as athletes, sponsors or *Gymnasiarchoi*, and the poor who enjoyed the sports and festive events, not only as athletes but mainly as spectators. Through this shared experience, social harmony is promoted and social consciousness spreads, which contributes to the social cohesion of the classes.⁵⁵

Thus, sport may remain an almost exclusive pursuit and privilege of the rich in the most democratic city of the time,⁵⁶ but in essence it becomes a common property for all social classes, whether they participate directly as athletes, or indirectly as spectators or benefactors. This is in line with the very nature of democracy and the values of equality and equity.

2. Athletics in Sparta

2.1. The Educational System

According to Pericles (Thucydides 2.39), there are great differences in the educational and military system of Athens and Sparta. As far as the raising of the children is concerned, the

⁵³ Miller 2004, 188–195.

⁵⁴ Kyle 2015, 169–170.

⁵⁵ Kyle 2014, 167. You can also see Pritchard 2003, 332 and 2009, 229.

⁵⁶ Pritchard 2003, 331.

Spartans practice bravery with strenuous exercise from their childhood (ἐπιπόνῳ ἀσκήσει εὐθύς ἐκ νέων ὄντες τό ἀνδρεῖον μετέρχονται), in contrast to the Athenians, who, although living a more comfortable life (ἀνειμένως διαιτώμενοι),⁵⁷ they are thrown with the same effectiveness into the dangers of war. Therefore, the differentiation is located in two points: the duration of the Spartan education and in the type of the education provided.

In terms of duration, the education of the Spartans begins at a very young age (παῖδες) and continues throughout their lives (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 2.1–2).⁵⁸ As soon as the children reach the age of seven and begin to understand, the *Paidonomos* takes them on with the power to supervise their behavior and punish them, when necessary, so that there is shame and discipline. The education continues during the period of adolescence (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 3.1: ἐκ παίδων εἰς τό μαιρακιοῦσθαι ἐκβαίνουσι). At this stage the aim of the training is to prepare the young Spartans to become proper citizens and soldiers.⁵⁹ For this reason and because arrogance increases at this age, the legislator Lycurgus imposed a lot of effort and a lot of work (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 3.2–3: τηνικαῦτα πλείστους μὲν πόνους ... ἐμηχανάτο).

The aim was to avoid cowardice in the face of dangers and the means, in order to reach the highest degree of bravery, became the tendency to motivate young people in rivalry and especially in the competition for the conquest of virtue (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 4.2: συμβάλλει εἰς ἔριν περί ἀρετῆς). By the time the Spartans became adults, formal education

⁵⁷ Thucydides 1.6.3: ἐν τοῖς πρώτοι δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι τόν τε σίδηρον κατέθεντο καὶ ἀνειμένη τῇ διαίτῃ ἐς τὸ τρυφερώτερον μετέστησαν.

⁵⁸ Christensen 2014, 147.

⁵⁹ Christensen 2012a, 200.

was complete, but engaging in sports continued, making it difficult to find healthier men than the Spartans, who also exercised their entire body (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 5.8).⁶⁰

Before proceeding to the type of education of the Spartans, we must make it clear that this education was common to all. This element is primarily certified by Aristotle. According to the philosopher from Stageira, since every city has an ultimate goal, the ideal educational system that must apply, must be common to all citizens and the care of education must be public and not private (*Politics* 1337a: ἐπεὶ δ' ἐν τὸ τέλος τῆ πόλει πάση, φανερόν ὅτι καὶ τὴν παιδείαν μίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πάντων, καὶ ταύτης τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν εἶναι κοινὴν καὶ μὴ κατ' ἰδίαν). He does not even fail to praise the Spartans, because they also take great care of their children and impose the same on everyone (*Politics* 1337a: ἐπαινέσειε δ' ἅν τις κατὰ τοῦτο Λακεδαιμονίους. καὶ γὰρ πλείστην ποιοῦνται σπουδὴν περὶ τοὺς παῖδας καὶ κοινῇ ταύτην).⁶¹

This common educational system is based on the perception of the Lycurgus legislator that children do not belong to their fathers but to the city (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 15.8). Therefore, their education does not allow everyone to educate their son as he wishes, but it must be common (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 16.1). After all, the supervision of the children's struggles by the elders proves that everyone is considered the father of all, both the *Paedonomoi* and the archons (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 17.1).

Consequently, given the public nature of Spartan education, it is interesting to consider the type of education provided. Its first and basic characteristic is the hardness and rigor of the morals to be cultivated. Unlike other cities, the Spartans take care to harden the children, leaving them barefoot, with a dress all year round and with little food, in order to be able to cope with any difficulty they face (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 2.2–3). A key feature of

⁶⁰ For a detailed presentation of the Spartan educational system see Christensen 2012a, 200–201.

⁶¹ After all, as he claims, only in the city of the Spartans the legislator has taken care of the food and the occupations, while in the other cities everyone lives as he wants (Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1180a25).

Spartan education, then, is the austerity and complete lack of luxury and tenderness, as reflected in the Cretan state, which Lycurgus studied thoroughly before enacting the laws of Sparta (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 4.1 δίαίτα ἀύστηρά καί εὐτελής).⁶²

More specifically, the Spartan education includes courses that constituted the basic education of the time, namely Letters, Music and Gymnastics (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 21.1–2). However, the course that dominates throughout the educational process and not only, is that of Gymnastics. At first, *Paidotribes* taught sports similar to what children learned in other cities.⁶³ Apart from these, the Spartans had included various types of physical exercises for the sake of war,⁶⁴ which led them to the acquisition of bravery (Plato *Laws* 636a–c). The view that Gymnastics contributes to bravery (Aristotle *Politics* 1337b) finds its full reflection in the Spartan education system, which reinforces the Spartans' need to develop a strong military force from their own citizens.⁶⁵

In fact, sport plays a leading role in all phases of Spartan education and in fact, the older the children, the more competitive it becomes. Even the games they play, are part of the education system, as they promote skills that need to be developed before they can serve in the military.⁶⁶ Therefore, because sports are considered a preparation for war,⁶⁷ the law that requires all Lacedaemonians to exercise throughout their military service (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 12.5–7) is justified, thus following their daily activities.⁶⁸ Therefore,

⁶² This austerity is also certified by Thucydides, who claims that the Spartans from an early age practice in strenuous exercises to gain courage (2.39: ἐπιπόνῳ ἀσκήσει).

⁶³ For the sports played by the ancient Greeks, see Kyle 2014, 21–35.

⁶⁴ See Guttman 1978, 1–14 and Christensen 2012a, 197, where sports are defined as physical activities undertaken to prepare for physical competitions.

⁶⁵ Miller 2004, 146.

⁶⁶ For the sports games of the Spartans see Christensen 2014, 147–149.

⁶⁷ See Plato *Laws* 636a, 795e–796e, 823–833a, *Republic* 1338b9–28 and Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 639a–640a.

⁶⁸ See Herodotus 7.208.3 where the Spartans before the battle of Thermopylae comb their hair and exercise naked,

sports are the way in which men are prepared to play the role of a soldier, because this requires them to show physical aggression, while at the same time acting very effectively in the addition of discipline for the purpose of immediate obedience.⁶⁹

In essence, the educational process in Sparta is extended until adulthood, because no one can live as he wants, but as defined by the laws of the city, thus turning Sparta into a permanent camp (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 24.1 & 25.3).

However, in addition to Gymnastics, dance also played a special role in Spartan education, as participation in choral dances contributed to the preservation of the social order of Sparta.⁷⁰ Its benefits, however, are not limited to the social sphere. Choral dance required timing and highly precise movements, an element that resembled the results of a military exercise (Xenophon *Economicus* 8.3–7).⁷¹ So, as the youngsters prepare for war, they acquire the required skill through the dance moves they repeated in the Sparta armed games (Plato *Laws* 795e–796d).

Of course, apart from war, the military skills of the Spartans were tested on another level, that of festive events, in which sports competitions were also introduced (for example naked, equestrian and musical competitions). Of course, the festivals of Sparta⁷² cannot compete with the range of the respective Athenians. But they are similar in their goal, and in both cases their main goal was to educate young people, so that they become citizens ready to serve their city.⁷³

following their daily routine.

⁶⁹ Christensen 2012a, 216 & 238.

⁷⁰ Christensen 2012a, 198

⁷¹ Christensen 2012a, 218–219.

⁷² For the Spartan feasts see Miller 2004, 146–149 & Kyle 2015, 178.

⁷³ Miller 2004, 148.

2.2. Meaning and Function of Athletics in Sparta

The contact of the citizens of Sparta with sports is a perpetual process, as it lasts throughout their lives.⁷⁴ It is also a process common to all, from which no one is excluded, not even the women of Sparta (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 1.4).⁷⁵ So this fact proves the role that sport is called to play in the Spartan Society.

More specifically, the society of Sparta is a closed society (Thucydides 2.39: ξενηλασίας) with the main characteristic of complete submission to the laws (Thucydides 1.18 and Herodotus 7.104). This submission was not a given, but required constant practice in order to familiarize the citizens. For this reason, Lycurgus set as a basic parameter of his legislation, the obligation for everyone to participate in everything, since the main goal of the legislators of Sparta is to make the citizens good and obedient to the laws, as Aristotle claims (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a, 11).

To make this possible, Lycurgus used sports and rigorous military training, which began in childhood. This training is carried out, transmitting rules and principles that must be followed by the trainees. Therefore, sport is the powerful mechanism used in Sparta in order to

⁷⁴ Cf. Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 5.8 (ὁ Λυκοῦργος... ἐπέταξε τὸν ἀεὶ πρεσβύτατον ἐν τῷ γυμνασίῳ ἐκάστῳ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) and especially Plutarch *Lycurgus* 24.1 (ἡ δὲ παιδεία μέχρι τῶν ἐνηλίκων διέτεινεν. οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἦν ἀφειμένος ὡς ἐβούλετο ζῆν, ἀλλ' οἷον ἐν στρατοπέδῳ τῇ πόλει καὶ δίαίταν ἔχοντες ὠρισμένην καὶ διατριβὴν περὶ τὰ κοινὰ καὶ ὅλως νομίζοντες οὐχ αὐτῶν, ἀλλὰ τῆς πατρίδος εἶναι διετέλουν) and 25.3 (τὸ δὲ ὅλον εἴθιζε τοὺς πολίτας μὴ βούλεσθαι μηδὲ ἐπίστασθαι κατ' ἴδιαν ζῆν, ἀλλ' ὡσπερ τὰς μελίττας τῷ κοινῷ συμφυεῖς ὄντας ἀεὶ καὶ μετ' ἀλλήλων εἰλουμένους περὶ τὸν ἄρχοντα, μικροῦ δεῖν ἐξεστῶτας ἑαυτῶν ὑπ' ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ φιλοτιμίας, ὅλους εἶναι τῆς πατρίδος).

⁷⁵ Women's sports are, of course, meager compared to men's, but they continue to be a feature of women's education in Sparta. In fact, the way the Spartans were educated differs radically from other cities (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 2.1–5) and for this reason it is often criticized by the ancient writers (Euripides *Andromache* 597–601, Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 76–82, Ibycus Fr. 58). For a detailed presentation of Spartan women's education, see Christensen 2012a, 203–214, Kyle 2007, 132 and 2015, 179–181.

introduce compliance with rules and behaviors, especially since it extends throughout the life of the Spartans.⁷⁶

Particularly important is the cultivation of collectivity, the teamwork on which Spartan education is based, since the children, at the beginning and throughout the training, were included in groups, the milestones (ἵλες), in which they practiced hard and disciplined strict rules of their behavior (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 2). This collectivity is intensified by the meals, in which Lycurgus includes the young Spartans, so that they cannot disobey the imposed orders, but also in order to achieve, through the mixing of the ages, the best education from the experience of the older ones (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 5.1–6 and Plutarch *Lycurgus* 12.4).

At the same time, an important role in the cultivation of collectivity is the special place occupied by dance and group games in the Spartan society. Through the very demanding rules that everyone is forced to obey, the submission of the individual to the group is taught, which is the key element of Spartan socialization. Both, dance and sports games, integrate the citizens in competitive environments, which require obedience to the rules of the team, while showing physical strength.⁷⁷ Therefore, the submission of all members to common rules and the accuracy of the required movements, in order to obtain the combined result of choral dance, unites the members of the dance in a tightly knit group.⁷⁸

Therefore, the Spartans, by integrating into all these group activities, perceive and support the priority of the group over the individual. This priority is also cultivated during sports

⁷⁶ Christensen 2012a, 197.

⁷⁷ Christensen 2012a, 219.

⁷⁸ Christensen 2012a, 219.

education, as sport forces them to live in an environment of coercion and rules, which everyone must obey, while in case of violation of these rules, there are sanctions.⁷⁹

It is therefore understood that Spartan cohesion is the result of the education and way of life shared by the Spartans, who are compelled by law not to live individually, but to learn everything collectively (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 25.3). Through the activities we have described, the group acquires coherence and cohesion, because citizens share common values, which they are forced to obey.⁸⁰ In this way the educational system of Sparta combines education, socialization and initiation, turning sport into a kind of preparation for politicization.⁸¹

Finally, a key parameter that contributes to all the above process is the habit of the Spartans fighting naked, a habit that they were the first to introduce (Thucydides 1.6.4: μετρία δ' αὖ ἐσθῆτι καὶ ἐς τὸν νῦν τρόπον πρῶτοι Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἐχρήσαντο καὶ ἐς τὰ ἄλλα πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς οἱ τὰ μείζω κεκτημένοι ἰσοδίατοι μάλιστα κατέστησαν). Athletic nudity functions as an element of separation of athletes from other members of society. At the same time, however, by playing naked, they emphasize the bond that unites them and helps them promote the feeling that they belong to a special group.⁸²

In conclusion, the Spartans are ultimately nationally identical⁸³ and the most striking example is their education system, which is the same for everyone.⁸⁴ The sport used as a means

⁷⁹ Christensen 2012a, 240.

⁸⁰ See Christensen 2014, 151 and 2012, 232–246. According to him, there are three main sources of social order in Sparta: Socialization, Coercion and Consent.

⁸¹ Kyle 2015, 176–177.

⁸² Christensen 2012a, 242 and 2014, 154. See also Waldo 1987, 124–133.

⁸³ The effort to maintain similarity on a social level is proved on the one hand, by the fact that the element of wealth is absent from Spartan society, as there is no separation between rich and poor (Aristotle *Politics* 1294b 26–28). On the other hand, from the perception that wealth can threaten social order. This explains the special treatment of the Olympians, who are heroized only after death, as evidenced by the fact that only one of the dozens of victors was written for the Spartans (Ibycus 5.166). See also Christensen 2012a, 228–230.

⁸⁴ Ducat 2006, 169.

of social control in Sparta played a dominant role in this, if we take into account the way cowardice is treated in Sparta (Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 9.4–5). In other words, the fact that cowardice is not forgiven in Sparta, as it is the exception, leads to specific sanctions. It is considered a violation of law and order and is punished by persecution by the Spartan community. By community we mean, in this case, the common actions of the Spartans from which they are persecuted. This fact shows how important these activities are for the identity of the Spartans.⁸⁵

3. Conclusions

In summary, we followed the way the two great rivals of the 5th century BCE, Athens and Sparta, manage sports. In order to clarify the difference between them, we first analyzed and presented their educational system, in which, however, Gymnastics has a dominant position. As we have seen, the main difference lies in two points. On the one hand, on the type and character of the education provided. In Athens education is a private affair and the result of free choice, while in Sparta is a state affair, common to all Spartan citizens. On the other hand, they differ in content and duration of the educational process, where there is still a large gap, since in Sparta the mainly military training lasts throughout the life of the citizens, in contrast to what happens in Athens.

Of course, the fact that these differences are not in line with the type of government of each city makes an impression. In other words, we would expect in a democratic Athens, where equality, equity and freedom prevail, that all those who wish, regardless of economic status, have access to sports, and that any restrictions be characteristic of oligarchic Sparta. However, this contradiction can be removed, if we focus on the way each city manages sports.

⁸⁵ Christensen 2014, 155.

More specifically, participation in the sports activity of Athens, as we have seen, is depended on the financial capacity of the citizens. However, the city itself brings them all in touch with sports due to the numerous opportunities that are given every year through the games that flood the Athenian calendar. By allowing everyone to attend these events without exception, the Athenian Republic achieves a dual goal: through sporting success it cultivates national pride, which it spreads throughout the Greek world and at the same time, by shaping the Athenian identity, strengthens the social coherence and a sense of unity.

The treatment of sports in Sparta is diametrically opposed. Despite its oligarchic regime, everyone is obliged to participate in sports, since education is common to all Spartan citizens, as required by law.⁸⁶ This difference is explained by the significant place of military training in Spartan society, which has been transformed into a permanent camp, where Spartans are called upon to respond to activities dominated by the collective spirit.

But in order to cope with the demands of such rigorous training, it is necessary to adhere to principles and rules. However, because the maintenance of social order presupposes the familiarity with rules, it becomes clear that through constant involvement in sports, attempts are made to strengthen team spirit and maintain social cohesion, as a cohesive element of Spartan society.

Therefore, we conclude that the two cities may differ in the way they manage sports, but they have the same purpose: to maintain social cohesion. In Sparta it is achieved by the participation of all Spartan citizens and by the effort to feel community through the common experiences they tried. In Athens, although it is not easy for everyone to participate as athlete, however everyone participates as spectator or benefactor, achieving in this case also

⁸⁶ In a way, this is perhaps more exclusionary than Athenian practice, because it appears that the Spartan citizen's main function was war, while most forms of labor would have been outsourced to Helots. So, in a way Spartan practice in sport and education may have been equally elitist, but of a different type.

experiences that are common and shared by everyone. Therefore, despite the different types of participation, sport eventually becomes the strong link that unites the citizens of the two great cities.

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