

Spyros P. Loumanis

PANKRATON IN ANCIENT GREECE



CONTENTS

PREFACE	4
1 THE BEGINNING	6
Prehistory of competitive games.....	8
Athletics and religion.....	10
Athletics in time of war.....	12
Nudity	12
Creto-Mycenaean Era (2100 - 1200 BCE).....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Homeric Age (1200 - 776 BCE)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The moral value of athletic competition in the Homeric Age</i>	Error!
<i>Bookmark not defined.</i>	
<i>The presence of the gods</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Participation in games</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The techniques of the sporting events</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The agonistic spirit of the ancient Greeks</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Violence in ancient games	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Military athletes</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The social context of violence</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2 PANKRATION	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The technique.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The rules.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Ephedros and anephedros	Error! Bookmark not defined.
'Dustless' victory - <i>akoniti</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Sacred draw.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Training.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Trainers and Anointers.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Wages of the <i>paidotribai</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Diet.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Injuries	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Medicinal treatment	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Offenses	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Sarapion	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The <i>palaestrae</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The palaestra at Olympia</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The palaestra at Nemea</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The palaestra at Delphi</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3 THE GAMES	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Sacred - panhellenic games.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The sacred truce	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The <i>Hellanodikai</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Olympic <i>prorrhesis</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Number of participants	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Olympian Games	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The location</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Mythology</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>History</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The cultural value of the ancient Olympic games</i> ..	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>defined.</i>	
<i>The journey to Olympia</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.

<i>The importance and radiance of the games</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>When they were held</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The events</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The program</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Pankration</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Stadium capacity</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The prize</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Isthmian Games	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Mythology</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>History</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>When they were held</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Pankration</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Stadium capacity</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The prize</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Nemean Games	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The location</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Mythology</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>History</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>When they were held</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Pankration</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The prize</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Pythian Games	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The location</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Mythology</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>History</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>When they were held</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Pankration</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Stadium capacity</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>The prize</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4 THE ATHLETES	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Olympic Victors.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>First period: 776 - 480 BCE</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Second period: 480 - 146 BCE</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Third period: 146 BCE - 393 CE</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Isthmian Victors.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Nemean Victors	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Pythian Victors	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The <i>Periodonikai</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The <i>aph' Hēracleous</i> athletes.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5 HONORS FOR CHAMPION PANKRATIASTS ... Error!	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Honors for winners at Olympia.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Honors for winners returning home	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Fame beyond the <i>palaestrae</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Professional associations – Guilds.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Paradoxos.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Money prizes for pankratiasts.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Hero cults and deification of pankratiasts.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6 THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE CHAMPIONS ..	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	

Limited to aristocrats	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Restricted participation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Famous aristocrat pankratiasts	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Pindar	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The change in social class of the participants ..	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Funding for athletes from lower classes	Error! Bookmark not defined.
How the ruling class saw athletics	Error! Bookmark not defined.
7 PANKRATION IN EDUCATION	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Organization of the education system	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The institution of the <i>ephēbeia</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Spartan athletic festivals	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8 PANKRATION AFTER 393 CE	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Olympism	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Roman period	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Christianity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The internal breakdown of the games	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Byzantium	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Middle Ages - Renaissance	Error! Bookmark not defined.
9 PANKRATION IN THE EAST	Error! Bookmark not defined.
EPILOGUE	Error! Bookmark not defined.
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Original sources:</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Secondary sources:</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
INDEX	Error! Bookmark not defined.

PREFACE

This book is the result of my many years spent studying contact sports. Any attempt at understanding free fighting between two individuals inevitably leads to the source. The first historically complete form of fighting, called the *pankration*, was developed in Ancient Greece as a unique form of defense against a threat from humans. As an Olympic sport, it spread throughout the known world and influenced those that followed. It became part of Greek athletics and remained a singular phenomenon unrepeated in human history.

The space in which the match takes place brings the opponents together, as they ultimately communicate through their technique, regardless of what has motivated the conflict. Through combat, each one demonstrates his training and all of the cultural elements that it embodies. Thus, wherever pankration appeared, it transmitted elements of Greek civilization, functioning as an ambassador of the heritage that influenced the world as we now know it.

The history of pankration is particularly interesting to anyone who is involved in contact sports. It will be noted in this book that the answers to be found in connection with a particular sport are the same as those provided some 2,500 years ago, with astounding similarity. This may lead to further study and comparison between prevailing conditions in the two periods, while a better understanding of the present is gained along with ideas and inspiration to evolve as an athlete.

It will also be of interest to anyone seeking to learn more about Greek civilization in general since, in contrast with modern times, sports were closely linked to both religion and warfare. On the other hand, their interaction with politics and economics bears a great similarity to the present.

However, if we try to look at pankration in isolation, simply as a series of techniques performed between a pair of athletes, we would be no better off than trying to smell a flower in a photograph. For this reason, the book develops along two lines. The first is that it follows the historical unfolding of events. It was in ancient Greece that the concept of athletics was first developed and pankration embarked on its course at that time. The book follows its rise to glory and is there as it peaks. By following the course of the sport, we also observe the course of Greek civilization, since sports in the era under examination was a particularly complex phenomenon, reflecting events taking place beyond the *palaestrae* and *gymnasia*. The second line of this book follows a path from the general to the specific, wherein it describes a larger picture within which pankration is placed. Without this context, any description of the sport would seem piecemeal and even inexplicable in places. The context comprises three parameters: the religious environment, as it was shaped by the origins of physical competition; the athletic milieu, mainly manifested through the sacred Olympic, Isthmian, Nemean and Pythian games; and finally, the political and social climate. The influence of all three was very important because the games were primarily religious, filled with ancient symbolism, and taking part in them was an act of worship. They were also sporting events, though, as participants were engaged in an athletic competition which they sought to win. Everything that took place in Olympia and at the other sacred games were part of the experiential expression of the edifice we refer to as "ancient Greek civilization." Finally, the political and social environment could not be excluded, given that the impact of athletics on the people could be used to advantage.

If we focus on the sport, certain questions will emerge, such as: what was pankration; what rules were followed; was it violent; was it deadly; did it appeal to the public; what were the prevailing beliefs about pankratiasts; why did athletes take part in such a difficult and tough competition; was it reasonable to fight to the death for an olive branch or some other plant; what was the value of a victory at Olympia; from which social class did pankratiasts mostly originate; did they enjoy special honors; how did the political authority look upon the sport; what changed and what remained the same over time; was it just another sport; did it influence people or society beyond the actual arena? All of these questions can be answered once we are in a position to understand the context in which athletes were called upon to compete.

There are not many direct sources on pankration to be found in ancient texts. However, there is significant information embedded in other fields which either touch

upon our topic or are pertinent to pankration because they refer to the period of time under study. We will attempt to highlight all of these aspects. The chapters of the book are linked to one another so that some references also apply to topics which have been developed elsewhere in the book.

The limited material certainly makes research more difficult, but it also presents an opportunity. In areas where information is lacking, the imagination can fill in the gaps. In this way, and depending on how knowledgeable one is about ancient Greece, the reader can create a more personal concept of pankration which can be expanded as deeper knowledge is acquired. This process could lead to, if not a necessarily more accurate, a more personal and intensely felt impression of the sport, of the people engaged in it and the period overall. Perhaps this will spur further research and a creative dialog - that can only be a good thing.

In any case, the book attempts to reflect a reality as it emerges from the use of sources. It does not aim to glorify the sport nor the athletes, nor the particular period in history. It focuses on describing what was happening at the time and to identify the links between the sport and its people, and everything that was going on inside and around themselves, in their soul and in their environment.

Our time defines us and in the period in question, this is apparent even if we look at it from a distance of 2,500 years. This is possible when the image is so powerful and brilliant, that it can travel through time, in the souls of people, and helps us to see what was happening then and how its effects have reached us in the present.

So, prepare yourselves: a journey of more than 1,000 years is about to begin. When does it end? By the end of the book, you will be able to provide your own answer.

Spyros Loumanis
Athens, 2016

1

THE BEGINNING

Life is uniquely characterized by movement. The human body is defined by this functional need, whether it is voluntary or involuntary movement.¹ This need is dictated by nature itself and it is closely linked to the metabolic system, which is the chemical processes of the body involved in nutrition and whose function is essentially reliant on

¹ Georgios Papantoniou, "Oi epidraseis tēs ēthikēs stous Olympiakous agōnes tēs archaiotētas: apo tēn enarxē tōn agōnōn eōs to telos tēs klasikēs epochēs [The effects of ethics on the Olympic games of antiquity: from the beginning of the games to the late classical period] (776-336 BCE)" (PhD dissertation, University of Thessaly, Trikala, 2003), p. 18.

motion.² Nutrition has always been the most important bodily function and was related to the instinct of self-preservation. In order to find food, our ancestors had to run, jump or throw something in order to evade wild animals or other dangers. These activities contained running, jumping, throwing, climbing and lifting, among others. These prehistoric athletes engaged in these types of activities from an early age, guided exclusively by their instincts. This instinct, combined with the experience they acquired over time as they managed to survive by relying on their actions, naturally led to developing the most effective techniques for a particular terrain, the distance they had to run or the type of evasive jumping required, or how to strike an animal. What was happening to them is exactly what continues to happen to all animals that must learn to jump or swim most effectively without the aid of a teacher, but only guided by nature.³

At the same time, because of their need to be on the defense, humans were forced to be in a constant state of battle-readiness, maintaining peak physical strength and excellent conditioning. Thus, continual and painstaking physical activity was desirable and constituted the predominant characteristic of many societies.

Nevertheless, human movement was not only intended to respond to everyday needs. In times of peace, people were able to devote more time and engage in forms of movement that may have appeared to have no specific purpose, but which contributed to their recreation.⁴ Thus, from formless and primitive, movement evolved and took form. Moreover, it developed in two directions: in the first case, the same movement was repeated in time and rhythm to create dance, and in the second, two or more individuals combined their movements to engage in actions dictated by convention and thus creating a game.⁵

In this way, movement evolved from the primitive to dance and play, both of which subconsciously served to nourish. But the drive to satisfy the biological need for movement did not stop there. Play could be considered instinctive or natural, and it should be seen as a source of every developed form of athletic movement. Therefore, athletics were the natural evolution of play.⁶

Despite its natural origins, this impulse to play developed, became reoriented and moved in other directions, ultimately toward the pursuit and attainment of a higher purpose.⁷ In each game, the movements that arose from it were not repeated in a standardized and unchanging manner. Through experience and maturity, they became deliberate. That is how we arrived at organized play. In this regard, we believe that logic and sentiment are two key factors that helped to create it. Humans were already in a position to set goals and targets in their lives, but also in their thoughts and actions. Every beginning and end of a movement in every game acquired a specific purpose. In this way, it was possible to move beyond the purposeless motions and impose a specific

² Evangelos P. Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs agōgēs kai athlitismou* [Philosophy of physical education and sports], Thessaloniki 1985, p. 49.

³ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 53.

⁴ Papantoniou, "Oi epidraseis," pp. 19, 20

⁵ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 49.

⁶ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 50.

⁷ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 50.

form and rules on a game.⁸ Through the game, it was possible to demonstrate one's true potential as a creator, an innovator and an active poet of the world.⁹

Over time, the tendency to display physical strength and skills led to the development of a noble competition, resulting in participants endeavoring to improve performance and overcome their opponents. Thus, free physical activity became a premeditated, competitive event that evolved into a contest. The aspiration to excellence and the desire for distinction led competitors to strive for improvement, with the result that they provided a spectacle that was increasingly more enjoyable, exciting and pleasing to spectators. And so certain activities developed through which one competitor achieving victory over another emerged as the main purpose. Thus, we conclude that movement, dance, play and competition are expressions dictated to human beings by their very nature. That is why the roots of physical activity are lost in the very distant past, since they appeared along with humans from their primitive period and evolved along with them.¹⁰

The game, as a sport, may be seen as the primary form of athletics. The components of the game, the rivalry and intense voluntary physical effort constitute the competitive aspect of competitive athletics.¹¹ The agonistic approach entails great effort and testing based on rules and conditions marked by purity, honor and precision.¹²

Prehistory of competitive games

The early forms of athletics can be traced to the peoples of the East. Many athletic games were known in Egypt during the third millennium BCE and more so in the second. But these games, as well as the similar games in the region, essentially have nothing in common with the Greek games beyond the natural inclination of a strong young body to exercise. The sole purpose of these demonstrations was to entertain the public and to serve some kind of ideal comparable to the subsequent Olympic idea.¹³

Crete was at the crossroads between the East on one side and Mycenaean Greece on the other. It is in Crete, then, that we find early indications of the subsequent athletic spirit. Here, the games we know from Egypt and the East slowly evolved into sports with rules which, in addition to displays of strength, were also associated with religious events.¹⁴ With the passing of time, humans became more "civilized," marking the end of the instinctive "natural athlete."¹⁵

We see that the belief that competition and games are a Greek invention is not correct, since movement is dictated by nature itself. However, competitive games are a

⁸ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 51.

⁹ Georgios Farantos, *Philosophia 1: Theōria tou ellēnikou Athlētismou* [Philosophy 1: Theory of Greek Athletics], Telethron, Athens 1992, p. 35.

¹⁰ Papantoniou, "Oi epidraseis," pp. 20, 21

¹¹ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 52.

¹² Farantos, *Philosophia 1*, pp. 38, 39.

¹³ G. Sakellarakis, M. Andronikos, N. Gialouris, K. Palaiologou and M. Pentazou, *Oi Olympiakoi Agōnes stēn archaia Ellada* [The Olympic Games in ancient Greece], Ekdotiki Athinon, Athens 1982, p. 13.

¹⁴ Sakellarakis et al., *Oi Olympiakoi*, p. 14.

¹⁵ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 53.

Greek institution and a creation of the Greek spirit. This is because the Greeks took the games, gave them the form of major celebrations, cherished them, deified them and established them as humanistic, ethical, social, religious, political, psychological and educational events. They were first in the world to show that benevolent competition contributes to the advancement of civilization.¹⁶ From that great historical moment in time, human beings ceased to be invisible units, but became free entities and members of a political and social whole.¹⁷

Athletics in ancient Greece were incorporated into the social life of the people and were an integral part of their education. In the Greek sense, education had exceptional depth; it meant the cultivation of the whole person, where the body was not separate from the mind.¹⁸

The cultivation of the athletic spirit in ancient Greece was based on that very spiritual foundation upon which the other cultural values of Greek civilization rested. First among those was the liberation of the individual from despotism of any kind. The religious faith of Greeks did not deny them human freedom and therefore did not exempt them from human responsibility. Social discipline and compliance with the laws of the state comprised the obligation of free and responsible citizens. For ancient Greeks, the law was binding on both the gods and on humans, the rulers and the ruled. In order for the people to enjoy such responsible freedom, they needed to believe in themselves, in other words, in their body and spirit and in the supreme value of human life. The visible image of deity was man himself, since even the Greek gods had all of the human characteristics in their idealized form. For Greeks, physical perfection - beauty - was bearing a likeness to god.¹⁹

Besides the human factor, we are also defined by the environment. The magnificent landscape of Greece - the mountains, the sea, the air and the sun - can inspire nothing less than beauty and freedom.²⁰

Religion was initially an assistant and a supporter of tradition and character; later on came the state, which had realized the benefits of athletics and helped to set an example and provided the means for their dissemination.²¹

Another important point of reference was the manner in which Doric severity (discipline, forbearance, terse speech) coupled with Ionic agility (spirituality, realism, beauty) to create a cultural moral unity that was unique for that period.²²

In antiquity, athletics represented reality; another form of religion that was not a transcendent but a purely human form of worship springing from a joy of life and its paramount goal - human perfection through beauty and truth - so that absolute good and happiness prevail and merge completely with the gods, as Plato believed.²³

¹⁶ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 54.

¹⁷ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 54.

¹⁸ Sakellarakis et al., *Oi Olympiakoi*, p. 8.

¹⁹ Sakellarakis et al., *Oi Olympiakoi*, p. 9.

²⁰ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 55.

²¹ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 55.

²² Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 55.

²³ Papakyriakou, *Philosophia physikēs*, p. 56.

In antiquity, games were held for various reasons, usually to honor a dead hero, to select a groom or simply for entertainment. This tradition of occasionally holding games, as developed by the Greeks and evolved during the Archaic and classical period, would ultimately lead to the establishment of local and panhellenic competitions, finally elevating them to events of a unique social scale.²⁴

Athletics and religion

Greek religion and athletic events have been closely linked for a very long time. Participation in these games was akin to a religious act. Athletes competed to honor the gods, as well as to win for their cities and for themselves.²⁵ Much later, from the Archaic period onward (after 800 BCE), though their association with religion did not cease, these games gradually were transformed into authentic sporting events. Nevertheless, the earlier function of the games was retained as part of worship traditions throughout antiquity, even when they acquired independent status.²⁶

According to tradition, all of the major panhellenic events were established in honor of a dead hero or a divine action. The custom of honoring dead heroes with funerary games was maintained throughout antiquity. The connection between athletic competition and both funerary customs and religious feasts associated with fertility is due to the belief of the ancients that the relation between life and death is dialectical: new plants sprout from the dead earth, the youth who engage in sports draw strength from dead heroes in whose honor they compete. A symbol of this ceaseless rebirth of hope, vitality and joy brought about by sports was the sacred flame of Olympia, which burned perpetually at the Prytaneion (home of the priests and magistrates). Remembrances of this earlier role of the games were preserved through religious agricultural celebrations in classical times.²⁷

Primitive societies associated the life-giving power of the earth, manifested through the succession of the seasons and the cycle of growth and decay, with divine intervention. The cyclical fertility of the natural world led them to imagine a number of fertility gods who personified the forces of nature. Through formalized rituals, they hoped to appease them so the gods in turn would ensure abundance, wealth and prosperity. Beginning with the simple assumption that every birth must be the result of the conjoining of two forces - a man and a woman - it followed that they had to invent the existence of a male deity analogous to Mother Earth who they would consider as a symbol of strength on which the fertility of the earth depended. This union of divine power with the annual rebirth and growth of crops led to creating a religious cult in which athletic competition played an important role and which sought to demonstrate physical strength and endurance. Thus, physical activities and the demonstration of

²⁴ Konstantina Gogaki, *Oi antilēpseis tōn archaiōn Ellēnōn gia ton athlētismo* [The perceptions of the ancient Greeks about athletics] (Tipothito-Giorgos Dardanos, Athens, 2005), p. 31.

²⁵ Donald Kyle, "Pan-Hellenism and Particularism: Herodotus on Sport, Greekness, Piety and War," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 2 (February 2009): p.189.

²⁶ Sakellarakis et al., *Oi Olympiakoi*, p. 36.

²⁷ Sakellarakis et al., *Oi Olympiakoi*, p. 36.

physical prowess became a part of the cult's rituals and the staging of games was incorporated into the ritual of religion. The winner in these games was considered a symbol of fertility and was honored with the victor's wreath, thus also symbolizing a divine presence. During the ceremony, the god would take a human form in the winner, who was not meant to receive a prize of any material value, but instead a symbol expressing the divine aspect of fertility. In this way, the fertility of nature was linked to the activities of humans, through which a winner would emerge.²⁸

The idea that one individual would mediate between gods and humans came about gradually. It had to be perceived as the duty of the strongest, given that bodily strength was associated with healthier agricultural crops and plentiful harvests. Thus, the process of identifying the strongest individual through competition became an event of great importance for society and took on a religious dimension.²⁹

However, the smooth development of these competitive activities presupposed the consistent prevalence of some form of religion. The revival of the Olympic games was the result of a religious compromise, on the one hand, and the dominance of the new religion of the Dorian conquerors. This compromise served as the basis for the development of a new type of society, which acquired considerable energy and vigor with the creation of the new *polis*, or city-state.

Each new city could select a specific deity as a protector and patron, but two or more cities could worship the same one. Often, cities would decide together to establish ritual celebrations in honor of the same deity. Their citizens would get together regularly to organize sacred ceremonies and share extravagant meals accompanied by hymns, prayer and games. Each city sent its own official delegation of *theoreis*, or envoys, to take part in the sacrifices. The sacred games were major religious gatherings. A key characteristic of these events was that the people came together to celebrate the same cult and this connection linked initially a large number of cities, and ultimately the entire Greek world. This shared characteristic was a common religion. The foundation of the sacred games was mainly religious, not political. It is clear that the games in Olympia, which were revived as part of tradition, brought with them traces of their religious past and cult character. But they gradually emerged in their new form with the appearance and prevalence of the new city-state, marking in turn the dawn of what we know as ancient Greece. In mythology, we saw gods and heroes fighting for victory and the right to found their own games, and they were seen as patrons of specific events. Cronus, Zeus, Apollo, Hermes and Ares were the first to take part in games, followed by Idaean Heracles, Pelops, Oinomaeus, Heracles, the Dioskouroi and a whole line of kings and governors.³⁰

In his epinician odes, Pindar confesses that "nothing that the gods accomplish ever appears unbelievable." Therefore, the victories of heroes depended on the will of the gods, since they are the ones who endowed the victors with the necessary talents, which combined with their efforts to help them claim a victory. The entire ideological

²⁸ G. Papantoniou, "Religiosity as a main element in the ancient Olympic Games," *Sport in Society* 11, no. 1 (January 2008): pp.32, 33.

²⁹ Papantoniou, "Religiosity," p. 41.

³⁰ Papantoniou, "Religiosity," p. 39.

structure of the Olympic games was built on religious feeling. The victor was considered sacred and this explains the extravagant honors bestowed upon him, as he symbolized the god in whose honor the games were held. Any violation of the rules applied to the games was seen as an act of disrespect and punishment involved offerings to the offended gods. But as the Olympic games evolved during this period in history, they were often the object of religious intervention, as religion attempted to control them. It should be noted that such interventions would often hide financial or even political motives.³¹

Athletics in time of war

Religiosity and militarism in ancient Greece were compatible concepts. The Greeks took part in religious duties, but the warlike Greek states were not disposed to risk a loss or a conquest simply for religious reasons. Their acceptance of the will of the gods was not absolute. Moreover, despite King Leonidas and the Battle of Thermopylae, the Spartans, being fully aware of their limited number of citizens, did not appreciate the reckless sacrifice of their soldiers. The Greeks had no idea about martyrdom or turning the other cheek, and meekly accepting catastrophe as the will of a just god and expecting judgment and resurrection. Their leaders regularly consulted the oracles and the soothsayers read all the omens, but they were realistic about their calculations with regard to waging wars. Political and military matters may well have taken precedence over the interpretations of divine will.

The Greeks had many contests throughout the year and the Persian campaign lasted a long time. Thus, certain games coincided with battles, raising tensions with regard to duty-bound obligations to the gods and the country, and calling on the political leadership to decide whether or not to fulfill its obligations to help other countries and defend Greece. Longtime enmities and self-interest were set aside to create a difficult and fragile alliance. For some, the games were convenient excuses used as tactics for distracting attention, delaying, creating divisiveness and facilitating desertion. The cities wished to be pious, but they were also aware of the risk of piety conflicting with the principle of justified self-defense.³²

Nudity...

FIND THE FULL BOOK HERE: www.spyrosloumanis.com

³¹ Papantoniou, "Religiosity," p. 40.

³² Kyle, "Pan-Hellenism," pp.190, 191.