



UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE
FACULTY OF HUMAN MOVEMENT AND
QUALITY OF LIFE SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS ORGANIZATION
AND MANAGEMENT

MASTER'S THESIS

“OLYMPIC STUDIES, OLYMPIC EDUCATION,
ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC
EVENTS”

Sports in Minoan Crete

Nikoleta G. Bratsi

Supervisor: Werner Petermandl

Sparta, January 2013



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Prologue

The first home of mankind, the first beginnings of awakening took place and surrounded by the nature. It's the place where man was born and grew physically and spiritually, in which he suddenly found himself and where with nature's help turned into a powerful little god.

In the early stages of his existence he was weak and powerless to deal with her. The instinct of self-preservation was what led him and helped him survive. In this primary stage of development the primary task was to collect food. Slowly, as he is gaining more and more physical strength he learns how to hunt, to bathe and to defend. He organizes the environment according to his needs, laying the foundations of his society and defines a leader. He contacts and balances with nature. Through this contact he develops various and different kind of activities, which are becoming a way of life and expression, forms of demonstrating capabilities; will result in a real physical and athletic sport activity with main goal and element the competition.

Sport begins to appear. Early traces can be located geographically in the Near East, between the Tigris and Euphrates River, and in Egypt already in the 3rd millennium BCE. Over the years physical education acquires a special value and function. The various people, who settle down in these parts, found cities and manage to expand their borders through military operations that require good physical condition and preparation of the army. These exercises become necessary and systematic. In the field of social life will take the form of entertainment and relaxation. They acquire a specific action in religious celebrations events. The biological needs of everyday life becomes signs of every era, represented in works of art such as paintings and reliefs from palaces and tombs, and on billboards of cuneiform writing, featuring the same people, but mainly the nobleman who holds a special place and he is been glorified on them. The king is being worshiped as a god and as a hero.

Abstract

The excavations and the discoveries of the recent years have brought to light very important set of findings which also served to broaden our knowledge of the physical and athletic activities of prehistoric peoples in the Mediterranean and Near East and, particularly, in Minoan Crete. The excavations of Sir Arthur Evans in various Minoan centers revealed a large number of works of art that adorn palaces (paintings, gems, vases, etc.) which are mostly scenes of everyday life on the island, with emphasis on those that depict physical activities such as bull-leaping, a special activity which took place during religious ceremonies. In ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia reliefs of kings and nobles have been found carved in tombs bearing athletic scenes, of which it seems that people in these areas had their own long tradition of similar demonstrations. Some of these Minoan expressions were adopted by the Mycenaean civilization adding more elements and giving them a new form. Over the centuries these activities were established in various cities taking place during the religious festivals in honor of the God worshiped at that city or to honor a hero. The goal was to win and its rewarding. This phenomenon was institutionalized and around 776BCE, according to the tradition, the Olympic Games started.

However it is difficult to classify these physical activities as *sports* without making at least an attempt to define sport with the current data and subsequently compare the past with the future regarding this definition and the forms of its expressions on these civilizations.

Today sport can be understood to mean all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include play; recreation; casual, organised or competitive sport; and indigenous sports or games (Sport, Recreation and Play, UNICEF 2004) ¹. According to DSB (Deutscher Sportbund, 1993) sport is defined as *an active, regular and systematic physical activity with the intention to support a healthy lifestyle in physical and psychological-social aspects*. Various definitions of the Oxford English Dictionary are the following:

¹ The Olympic Museum-Educational Kit, *FINDING THE ROOTS OF SPORT*, Educational kit developed in collaboration with the Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Regional Office, Lausanne © IOC, Olympic Museum / FED 2005, pag. 7.

a) *an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment*, b) *activity undertaken for pleasure and that requires physical effort or skill, usually carried out in a special area and according to fixed rules* c) *an occasion on which people compete in various athletic activities*, e) *success or pleasure derived from an activity such as hunting or fishing*, f) *entertainment; fun*, g) *a source of amusement or entertainment*².

The term sport appeared in the 15th century, derived from the Old French “desport” (12th century), meaning entertainment. There are a number of languages which have no word for sport. In Finnish, for example, the word sport is translated as ‘urheilu’, which combines the notions of courage, risk-taking game and vainglory. Additional the educational kit of Olympic Museum separates the traditional sport (a sport typical of a region or a community, with a long history) from the national (sport practised country-wide) and the Olympic sport (a sport whose governing Federation is listed in the Olympic Charter). On the other hand, the difference between sport and game is substantial and the reason can be revealed quoting the definition of the word *game* (according to the educational kit of Olympic museum): 1. *Physical or mental activity whose only purpose is the pleasure obtained from practising it. A game may have several characteristics: simplicity, gratuitousness, futility, etc.* 2. *Activity organised by a system of rules defining success and failure, winning and losing*³.

From the above definitions turns out that the *sport* or the *game* have a common element which characterizes them and it’s the physical human activity which is the source of maintaining healthy and of entertainment, amusement and of competition. But did these activities have the same concept at prehistoric times? It would be necessary, for someone studying the athletic activity of prehistoric civilizations in Mediterranean and in Near East, not to have in mind the meaning and functions of sport in the modern world, as it appears, through the archaeological evidence and ancient sources that events with athletic character in those distant times were associated with other aspects of culture such as religion, often in the form of sporting events that included the demonstration of physical ability, well-trained army and

² <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sport>

³ The Olympic Museum-Educational Kit, *FINDING THE ROOTS OF SPORT*, Educational kit developed in collaboration with the Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Regional Office, Lausanne © IOC, Olympic Museum / FED 2005, pag. 7.

political ideology. And this will be the main goal of this essay. To provide the necessary information concerning the physical activities that took place in the civilizations in Mediterranean and continuously in Minoan Crete through the ancient findings and sources giving the proper attention to the activities and expressions that were transformed into athletic and as we say today sportive activities. This means activities that appeared by the need of pleasure and of demonstration, by practising them in order the contestants to be excellent, accompanied by ritual ceremonies to honor the deity.

History of research

Among the many recent, and older, studies which have been done to explore the physical and social activities of prehistoric societies, particularly relevant in the field of physical exercise and sport of the people in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, it must be mentioned as worthy these of: a) Wolfgang Decker, whose study on the Greek civilization is considered as the best, the most accurate and complete and analyzed in his writings *'Sport in der griechischen Antike'* (1995) and *'Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten'* (1987), b) V.Olivova, who devotes an important chapter in her book 'Sports and games in the ancient world' (1984) providing excellent information on the physical exercise of the habitants of the Middle East starting from the early steps of human, c) physical studies of J.Wilson for the development of sport within the royal Egyptian society and culture of the Egyptians, d) E.N.Gardiner, e) U.Sinn, f) J.Jüthner, g) H.L.Lorimer, and h) L.Siegfried, i) S.N.Kramer • j) also those of A.Parrot regarding the history, culture and character of the Sumerian, k) J.G.Macqueen, who has made a thorough study of the people of the Hittites, and of l) I. Mouratidis. Regarding the Minoan Civilization must be mentioned first of all the researches of Sir Arthur Evans, *'The palace of Minos'*, the great excavator of Knossos, b) St.Alexiou, *'Minoan Civilization'*, c) P.Faure, *'Daily life in Crete in Minoan Era'*, d) Sp.Marinatos, *'The ancient Cretan Civilization'*, e) S.Hood, f) N. L. G. Hammond, g) G.Mylonas, and at Nikephoros, *Journal of Sports and Culture in Antiquity* h) Arapogianni, *Xeni: Olympia. Stätte, Geschichte, Wettkämpfe, Museen*

[griech.], Athen 2007, XXII.10, 239-243 (W.Decker) (2009), i) Decker, Wolfgang: *Vorformen griechischer Agone in der Alten Welt*, XVII.4. 9-25 (2004), j) Valavanis, Panos: *Thoughts on the Historical Origins of the Olympic Games and the Cult of Pelops in Olympia*, XIX.9, 137-152, (2006), k) Hillbom, N.: Minoan games and game boards, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Lund 2005, XXI.13, 291-296 Ulrich Schädler (2008), l) Mouratidis, Yannis: *The Mother Goddess of the Mainland Greece and her Associations with Dances and Games*, XVIII.14., 85-90 (2005), m) M. Serrano Espinosa,: *La tauromaquia minoica*,, Alicante 2006, XX.14., 277-283 (Fernando García Romero) (2007), n) Scanlon, Thomas F.: *Women, Bull Sports, Cults and Initiation in Minoan Crete*, XII.12, 33-70 (1999) and o) Mouratidis, Yannis: *Are there Minoan Influences on Mycenaean Sports, Games and Dances?*, II.6., 43-63 (1989).

1.1 Physical activities in early civilizations in Near East

Physical activity was a constant phenomenon in human history, because it relates to its biological nature. The correct and appropriate use of human body movements, and the systematic learning of these movements, physical education, was born from specific necessities of human societies. Such necessities could have been physical, such as hunting and gathering food in primitive societies, but also spiritual. A particular mode of physical activity, distinguished by the movement aimed at acquiring material resources, was developed during the leisure of man in religious festive events. Of course, the forms of sporting activity present great diversity depending on the time and place where they were developed- and that's why as a cultural phenomenon reflects ideas about the world, aesthetics and ethics it depends and tailored to the political situation and the degree of the social development.

Wolfgang Decker quotes that these physical activities do not have their roots in ancient Greece. The pre-Greek world of the ancient Orient and Egypt shows a considerably older tradition of physical/athletic events, which runs until early 3rd century BCE. But not even here we find the roots of the sport. However it is certain that the evolutionary processes in the prehistoric stage of human, which led to a genetic programming, are related to the genesis of the sport, and that beyond the aggressive instincts and the behavior of the exploratory game, the lifestyle of the hunter, which compared with the model of the permanent establishment had significantly longer duration, played a very important role⁴.

As it was mentioned before, sport and games can be considered as a continuation of physical exercises or activities of all prehistoric tribes which in their primary activities, especially at hunting, they run to capture wild animals, they marked them with stones and spears, often fought together, jumped ditches or swimming in lakes and rivers. Later, with the creation of the army, exercises in running, jumping, wrestling and in sign, were necessary for the preparation of the soldiers and the maintenance of the well-trained and their good physical condition. The athletic exercise of the soldiers never stopped and continues even today in modern armies,

⁴ W.Decker, '*Sport in der griechischen Antike*', München: C.H.Beck, 1995 (Greek Translation), Copyright © 2004, pag. 29.

despite the development of weapon systems and the increasing decline of the importance of infantry, but also the personal bravery in the outcome of a battle⁵.

The first testimonials of physical activities can be traced with certainty to prehistoric peoples of the Near East, who inhabited in Egypt and in Mesopotamia from the 3rd millennium BCE. In art, mainly in wall paintings and reliefs are depicted scenes of wrestling and weightlifting, and exercises with balls, sticks and swords. However, these activities are only one form of racing games that took place in the palace for the amusement of the spectators – but mostly of the kings.

The pictorial art and the Cuneiform texts show characteristically, among others, the physical abilities of the king, but also his skill in handling weapons either in the military operations in which he is leading personally, or in hunting wild animals. The natural superiority of the kings was also symbolic of their unique position, and according to the contemporary theocratic thought, was stemmed from their divine origin. The most powerful heroes were those who were descended from the royal and divine genus, whose accomplishments have been the subject of many hymns and poems. In fact, the strength was derived from the access to the most modern weapons, bows, arrows, sword and dagger. These weapons became most effective when horse-drawn chariots were started to be used.

⁵ Valavanis P., '*Athla, Athletes kai Epathla*', Athens © 1996, pag.14.

Chapter 1°

Physical activities in early civilizations in Near East

1.1.1 Egypt



This map shows the location of some of the main archaeological sites of ancient Egypt.

At the end of the fourth millennium BCE flourished in the fertile valley of the Nile the remarkable civilization of ancient Egypt. The history of this civilization falls into four main periods: the Old Kingdom (27th to 23rd century BCE.), the Middle Kingdom (21st-18th c. BCE), the New Kingdom (16th-11th century. BCE) and the Late period (6th-century 7th.BCE). Throughout the history of ancient Egypt, the Egyptians tried to achieve the greatest measure of pleasure and bliss. Although this quest was ideal and advantage of Pharaoh undoubtedly, the nobles demanded also beauty and happiness, throughout their lifetime and posthumously. However, it affected the lower social classes as well, who were seeking happiness in whatever gave to man pleasure and delight: in beautiful objects, flowers, animals, the exploration of nature and the simple comforts of everyday life. The happiness stemmed from the natural love and beauty of human form, especially of the naked and trained human body.⁶

The demand for recreation, spiritual and physical, was dominant and this has been ascertained clearly in the frescoes of the graves of Ben-Hassan, where there is a wonderful display of games and athletic activities but also other works of art, reflecting the love of the Egyptians in various forms of entertainment and physical-athletic activities. What makes deep impression is the separation between the royal-aristocratic and folk forms of entertainment and exercise.

Socially, the Pharaoh was the supreme ruler, who along with the nobles- at the same time over them - was directing the progress of the state and the lives of his subjects. Supreme duty of the Egyptians was to serve their king. The existence of the state and the prosperity of the Egyptian society were depending solely by the Pharaoh. He was the guarantee of the development and balance of the world. Originally he was God himself. Later he was their representative, to who they had entrusted the earthly power and thus they gave him only victories. He was the unsurpassed war hero.⁷

Peace and unity of the country were achieved after great conflicts, as there have been numerous invasions of neighboring nomadic peoples. The Egyptians, however, managed to establish their supremacy. The enemies were not allowed to challenge the

⁶ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.41-42, 44.

⁷ Wilson, John A., *'The culture of Ancient Egypt'*, (Originally published in 1951 as "The Burden of Egypt by the University of Chicago Press), © Paperback Edition 1956, pag. 69-73.

supremacy of the Pharaoh and his state. For the king the failure or defeat in a war or conflict in a sporting battle did not exist. His role as military leader demanded physical strength and adequate physical therapy. For this reason the Pharaohs were training during the adolescent age. The trainers came from the aristocracy. Along with the princes, the children of the aristocracy were trained as well. ⁸

Hunting

The first form of Pharaohs' exercise was *hunting*⁹. Since it serves not only to collect food, a new kind of entertainment was created, whose origins are found in Egyptian pre-history. The *hunting of wild animals*, as bulls, lions, crocodiles, hippos and elephants - a kind of safari - it was an aristocratic form of entertainment and one of the royal duties, which required good physical condition (Fig.1). It was a demonstration of the human body. The choice of such strong and dangerous wild animals showed courage and bravery of the king. In the valley of the Nile Pharaoh with aristocrats engaged in group hunting, often by risking their own lives. The founder of the first royal dynasty, Meni, was fatally wounded by a hippopotamus during hunting. Since then, the Pharaoh decided it was safer the servants to hunt and the Pharaohs would be mere spectators.

Chariot

The military campaigns conducted by the Egyptian kings in the Near East brought significant changes in the army training, but also in the lifestyle of the Pharaohs. One of these changes was the use of a chariot, which the people were already using in Mesopotamia. The *chariot*¹⁰ was one of the most important weapons on military training, but also it was used in hunting. Now the king was hunting lions and bulls on horse-drawn chariot, tied from the waist with a rope in order to be safe, and having his hands free to hold a spear or arrow, but within a limited area, defined by fence. Their servants used to capture lions, which they transported them in cages and released them in specially designed arenas that they had built there in order

⁸ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag. 52.

⁹ a) Decker, W., *'Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten'*, © 1987, pag.155-166, b) Sinn, Ulrich, (Hrsg.), *'Sport in der Antike'*, Ergon Verlag, ©1996, pag.138-139.

¹⁰ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.49-50.

Pharaoh to hunt safely¹¹. The chariot accommodated them to capture the games more easily, because before they escaped due to their speed.



Fig.1 Statue of Tutankhamen as a hippopotamus hunter from his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. 18th Dynasty, 1361-1352 BCE. Cairo JE 60 709.

¹¹ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.50.

Numerous are the illustrations of hunting scenes in Egyptian art (Fig.2). In their hunt they were always followed by their servants and soldiers. Especially impressive is the use of lasso to capture the animal, although the traditional way was to throw spear and arrow (Fig. 3). From inscriptions we are being informed that Pharaoh Touthmosis III wanted to be seen as the most capable hunter. Pharaohs in order to enhance their image of royal sovereignty adopted the habit to have close to the throne, the king of animals, the lion, as a symbol of strength, courage, bravery and excellence.¹²



Fig.2 Pharaoh Ramses III hunting wild bulls in the traditional way by hurling a spear. Relief from the temple of Ramses III in Mentinet-Habu, around 1190-1160 BCE.

¹² Decker, W., *‘Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten’*, © 1987, pag.162-165.

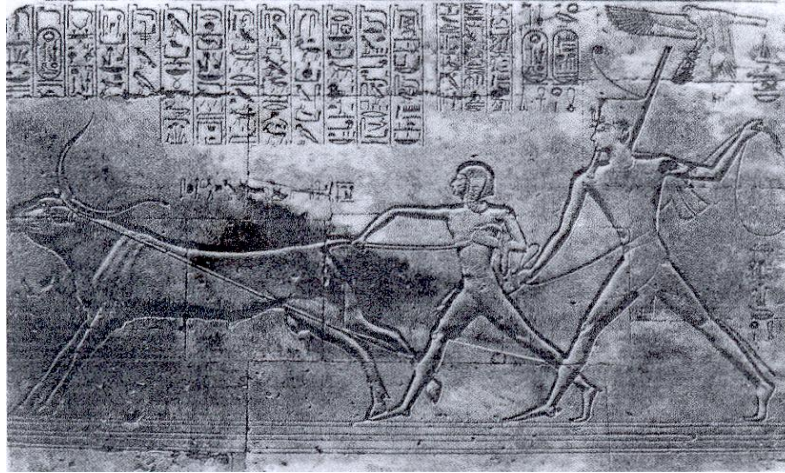


Fig.3 Hunt bull using lasso. Temple of Seth I, 19th Dynasty, Abydos.

According to W.Decker, hunting wild animals was mainly privilege of the king, like hunting in swampy areas. Gradually the nobility acquired privileges that belonged exclusively to the king, including *hunting birds*¹³, which became one of the most popular activities. Through murals we find that the hunt took place on the banks of the Nile in a papyrus boat, where there was a multitude of birds because of the dense reeds and plants that grew there. The hunter had his assistant, one of his servants, who gave him the weapons. Usually they used arrows to achieve their goal (Fig.4).



Fig.4 A nobleman on a light papyrus boat using the ancient technique of throwing a curved stick to hunt birds. Mural painting from a tomb in Thebes, around 1400BCE.

¹³ Decker, W., '*Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten*', © 1987, pag. 166-168.

Fishing

*Fishing*¹⁴ has maintained its popularity in the royal and aristocratic circles throughout the course of Egyptian history. It was one of the most traditional forms of entertainment. The pharaohs and noblemen fished more in ponds that were built in the royal gardens, rather than in natural. They used either a spear or a kind of stick with a rope.

Archery

Popular physical activity, which probably derives and represents a further development and an evolution of hunting in a chariot, was the *archery*⁶. Pharaoh, leading the chariot, targeted to one or more wooden targets - although sources indicate that these targets may have been constructed by copper-material that was used extensively judging from the large number of bronze objects which have come to light (Fig.5).



Fig.5 Pharaoh Amenhotep II standing on a light chariot, driving horses with the reins tied around his hips and shooting arrows at a target in the form of a copper ingot. Relief from Karnak, around 1429 BCE.

¹⁴ Olivova, V., '*Sports and games in the ancient world*', London © 1984, pag.50-51.

Horses, running and water sport activities

The Egyptians rulers bared high affection for horses¹⁵. They looked after them to such a degree that even the princes took part in their training in the royal gardens.

In the training of young kings and aristocrats was included also running, swimming and rowing¹⁶. The water sport activities were more relevant from any other due to the proximity of Egypt to the Nile. In the literature of the cult of the god Osiris is described a contest between Horus and Seth, which was to be judged the strength under the water, and in another case rowing race as well.

The Pharaohs did not concern with all these forms of entertainment only for their own pleasure but mainly aimed at their promotion and the public admiration. Along with them they were always nobles and the army, which followed them and admired them. It was the *spectators* to who they wanted to demonstrate their skills and prowess. They did not hesitate to provoke the soldiers in archery competitions, running, rowing, by setting *prizes* for the winner, adopting the Greek ones, which were animals, leather and greatcoat, as Herodotus (II.91) mentions for the organized games and the prizes in the city of Chemmis:

Herodotus, Book 2.91, around 485-425BCE:

... The Egyptians shun using Greek customs, and (generally speaking) the customs of all other peoples as well. Yet, though the rest are wary of this, there is a great city called Khemmis, in the Theban district, near the New City. In this city is a square temple of Perseus son of Danae, in a grove of palm trees. Before this temple stand great stone columns; and at the entrance, two great stone statues. In the outer court there is a shrine with an image of Perseus standing in it. The people of this Khemmis say that Perseus is seen often up and down this land, and often within the temple, and that the sandal he wears, which is four feet long, keeps turning up, and that when it does turn up, all Egypt prospers. This is what they say; and their doings in honor of Perseus are Greek, inasmuch as they celebrate games that include every form of contest, and offer animals and cloaks and skins as prizes. When I asked why Perseus appeared only to them, and why, unlike all other Egyptians, they celebrate games,

¹⁵ Olivova, V., 'Sports and games in the ancient world', London © 1984, pag.51

¹⁶ Olivova, V., 'Sports and games in the ancient world', London © 1984, pag.49

they told me that Perseus was by lineage of their city; for Danaus and Lynceus, who travelled to Greece, were of Khemmis; and they traced descent from these down to Perseus...

Various types of physical activities seem to have been incorporated in the festive events of the Egyptians. They were devoted to nature and fertility, and resolved to pre-historic times. They divided the year into three seasons: flood, harvesting, drought. The summer floods of the New Year were celebrated by a magnificent procession, as the full moon and the new moon. The celebrations that took place during spring involved the regeneration of nature. They were directly associated with religion. All major and local deities were worshiped, as the god Osiris, who was one of the most popular, and his feast lasted ten days. The historical events were also occasions of celebration, such as the integration of the country at the end of the 4th millennium BCE, the conclusion of peace treaties or a visit of an ambassador. The coronation or the funeral of a Pharaoh or a nobleman was one of the most important events. Apart from the sacrifice, which was accompanied by lunch, the attendees watched performances with songs, music and competitions.¹⁷

The king also took part at these competitions. The *running race* was one of the most common, with which he showed his physical strength and endurance and at the same time gave a symbolic expression to a certain action. The central point was a sacrifice, symbolizing the destruction of the enemies of the gods and men.

Acrobatic exercises and games with balls

In the entertainment of the royal family, nobles and the guests was included and dance, performed by professionals, men and women, members of the orchestra. The dancing programs were enriched with *acrobatic exercises* and *games with balls*¹⁸, which presupposed agility and strength and required a long and painful training (Fig.6). And here the king was originally the chief performer; he danced a harvest thanksgiving dance, in honor of the god Min. Dancing girls enacted the victory of the king over his enemies. Soldier danced war-dances, to imitate mock combat.

¹⁷ Olivova, V., 'Sports and games in the ancient world', London © 1984, pag.53-54.

¹⁸ Olivova, V., 'Sports and games in the ancient world', London © 1984, pag.45, 48, 54, 56.

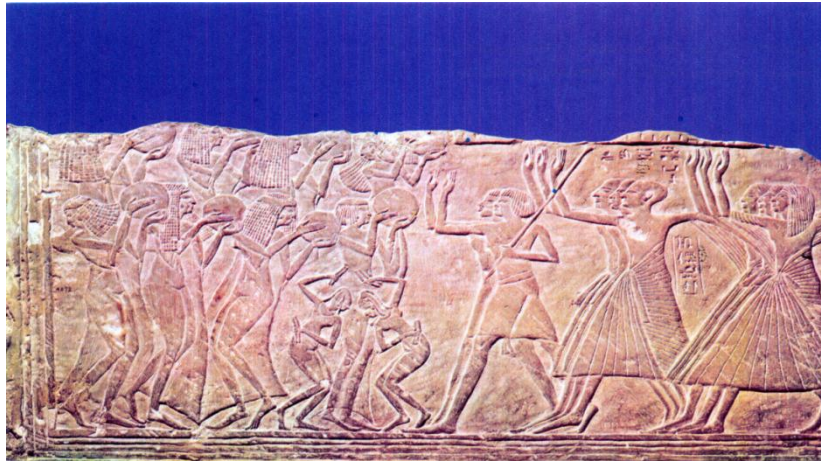


Fig.6 Women dancing with a ball. The two smaller dancers are probably marking the rhythm with their rattles. Part from a burial scene from the tomb in Saqqara, 19th Dynasty, 13th century BCE.

On the walls of the tombs of Ben-Hassan acrobats are depicted performing very difficult exercises, either individual or group or in pairs. The executors of acrobatic exercises were mostly women, as evidenced by their clothing. We can watch them bending their bodies backward, touching the ground and playing various games with balls, which are throwing them high and trying to catch them with their two hands or crossing them.

A bizarre exercise was the one in which two teams of three acrobats are exchanging the ball by throwing it.

Jumping exercises

In another scene a team is performing *jumping exercises* in successive phases. First they lift up one leg by boosting with the hands, followed by a static position and then the two movements of jumping (Fig.7a-b).¹⁹

¹⁹ a) Decker, W., *Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten*, © 1987, pag.74-77, b) Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.26, c) Gardiner, E.N., *Athletics in the ancient world*, originally published by the Oxford University Press, London, © 1930, republ. © 1967, pag.6.

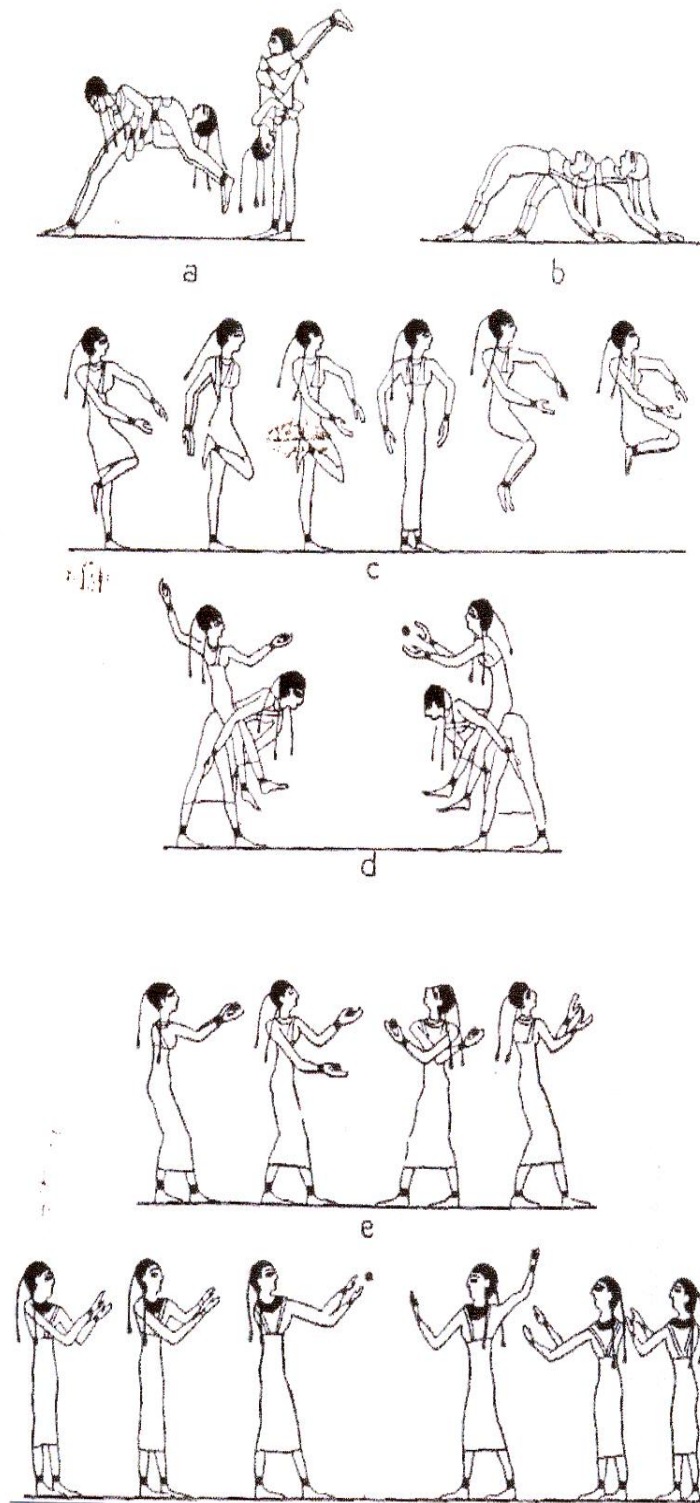


Fig.7a Acrobatic scenes, hop and jump and ball games from the wall-paintings of Beni-Hassan' tombs. Around 1900 BCE.



Fig.7b Woman performing a religious dance. Detail of a scene from a relief. Temple of Queen Hatshepsut in Karnak, around 1480 BCE.

Among the most popular spectacles of celebratory events in the royal court was *bullfighting* · were performed either by two bulls or a matador and a bull. Such scenes can be found on reliefs in the tombs of Beni-Hassan²⁰.

In the lower part of the social pyramid are locating the common people and the army. There is little information on the folk class. Apart from the presentation of servants and peasants in tombs' scenes, everything we know derives from later years. Everyday life is mainly reflected in Coptic texts, Hellenistic and late Egyptian times, which are lost while investigating the past. Exploring the reliefs of the tombs of the 3rd millennium BCE we observe the portrait of the Egyptian peasant. Daily activities were the planting or the concentration of harvesting of his master, the construction of buildings and the care of animals. He lived close to nature and in close contact with animals. The activities were always accompanied by laughter and song. Of course he had fewer opportunities than a capable and skilled craftsman, from the domestic servant or the slave of a nobleman. But he had also, by nature, physical and spiritual needs. He loved the various forms of entertainment and exercising, which he enjoyed in his spare time. On the other hand, the expansionary policy of the Pharaohs the 2nd millennium BCE resulted in the intensive organization and training of the army, which was consisted of mercenaries from Libya, Nubia and Asia.

²⁰ a) Gardiner, E.N., *'Athletics in the ancient world'*, originally published by the Oxford University Press, London, © 1930, republ. © 1967, pag.4-6, b) Olivova, V. *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.45-48.

The following formats of activities constitute spontaneously games of children, popular ways of amusement and training of the army.

Wrestling

From the beginning of the Egyptian history, in the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE, numerous are the depictions of wrestling, an athletic activity with great impact and very popular to the ancient Egyptians. According to W.Decker²¹ and other authors²² there were three kinds of wrestling: *the battle body with body*, *boxing* and *fencing* (Fig.8). In thirty royal tombs at Beni-Hassan we have one of the greatest representations of this particular sport in friezes. On one mural there are 59 pairs of wrestlers, in another 122 (Fig.9) and another 219, in successive phases and different ways of wrestling, of fighting and of repulse. The training took place between two opponents. All the handles were allowed and the race continued even on the ground. In some scenes we can observe the presence of referees.



Fig.8 Wrestling scene. The relief depicts the different handles. Tomb of Ptachotep in Saqqara.
Around 2300 BCE.

²¹ Decker, W., *‘Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten’*, © 1987, pag.78-96.

²² a) Wilson, J., *‘Ceremonial games of the new kingdom’*, JEA 17(1931), pag.211-220 b) Jüthner, J., *‘Die athletischen Leibesübungen der Griechen’*, ©1965-68, pag.52-54 c) Gardiner, E.N., *‘Athletics in the ancient world’*, © 1967, pag.6-8, d) Olivova, V., *‘Sports and games in the ancient world’*, ©1984, pag.48, 52, 59.

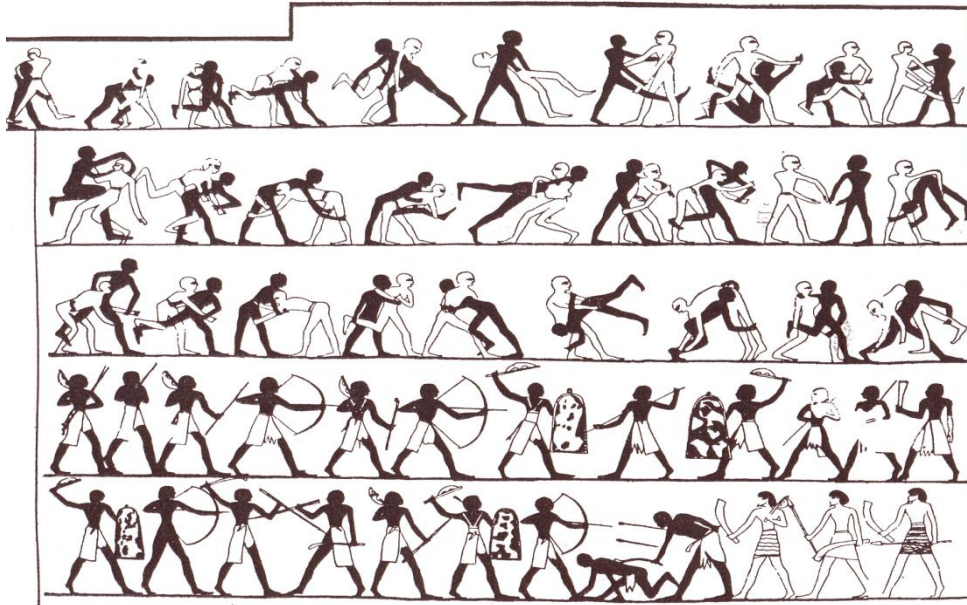


Fig.9 Wrestling scene in friezes. The various stages of a wrestling match. Mural painting of Bhakti III, Beni-Hassan, which shows altogether 122 contesting couples. Around 2050 BCE.

Boxing

In *boxing*²³ the two boxers wore bandages specially designed for the face, the chin and the ears. Usually they were naked, wearing only a white girdle. There were special units of the army which were consisted of the most talented boxers, as depicted in a mural tomb in Thebes (ca. 1450 BCE) (Fig.10).



Fig.10 Boxing scene. Young men in bound up light tunics boxing with unprotected fists. Relief from the tomb of Vizier Ptahhotpe in Saqqara, around 2300 BCE.

²³ a) Olivova, V., 'Sports and games in the ancient world', ©1984, pag. 52-53, b) Decker, W., 'Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten', © 1987, pag.94-96.

Fencing

In *fencing*²⁴ the opponents battled with short, long and curved swords at a distance of 2 meters from each other and were protecting their bodies with small wooden shields fastened to the lower part of their left hand and with bandages from leather on the forehead, the chin and the head. In Mentinet-Habu there is a relief in the temple of Ramses III with 10 pairs of wrestlers who hold swords with handle (Fig. 11a-b).



Fig.11a Young men in light tunics fencing with papyrus stalks, presumably re-enacting an actual event. Relief from around 2300 BCE.



Fig.11b Wrestling and fencing with sticks. Two men fencing with sticks protect their heads with raised arms. One of the contestants greets the spectators. The inscriptions suggest the fighters' shouts and the spectators' comments. Relief from the temple of Ramesses III in Medinet-Habu, around 1160 BCE.

²⁴ a) Olivova, V., '*Sports and games in the ancient world*', ©1984, pag.52, b) Decker, W., '*Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten*', © 1987, pag.92-93.

Herodotus (II.63) mentions a religious ceremony in honor of the god Mars in the city Pamprimes, the main element of which was fighting with wooden swords:

Herodotus Book 2.63, around 480-425BCE,

... When the people go to Heliopolis and Buto, they offer sacrifice only. At Papremis sacrifice is offered and rites performed just as elsewhere; but when the sun is setting, a few of the priests hover about the image, while most of them go and stand in the entrance to the temple with clubs of wood in their hands; others, more than a thousand men fulfilling vows, who also carry wooden clubs, stand in a mass opposite. [2] The image of the god, in a little gilded wooden shrine, they carry away on the day before this to another sacred building. The few who are left with the image draw a four-wheeled wagon conveying the shrine and the image that is in the shrine; the others stand in the space before the doors and do not let them enter, while the vow-keepers, taking the side of the god, strike them, who defend themselves. [3] A fierce fight with clubs breaks out there, and they are hit on their heads, and many, I expect, even die from their wounds; although the Egyptians said that nobody dies. [4] The natives say that they made this assembly a custom from the following incident: the mother of Ares lived in this temple; Ares had been raised apart from her and came, when he grew up, wishing to visit his mother; but as her attendants kept him out and would not let him pass, never having seen him before, Ares brought men from another town, manhandled the attendants, and went in to his mother. From this, they say, this hitting for Ares became a custom in the festival...

The soldiers had to be perfectly aware of *archery* and *handling the chariot* - chariot races were held as well. To maintain their physical condition they occupied themselves in running, because their role as messengers demanded it. The distances that they had to cover were quite long. The most important source for this physical/athletic activity is known as the Column of Taharka. The king obliged his soldiers on a daily training, by covering a distance of 100km. from Memphis till Fayum with a break of two hours. The winner was rewarded with an honorary meal at the royal court.²⁵

²⁵ Decker, W., 'Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten', © 1987, pag.68-71.

High jump

In the royal tombs' reliefs at Saqqara groups of children are depicted operating jumping exercises. Two boys are sitting opposite each other with their feet and hands bound together, creating a natural barrier. A third boy jumps higher in order to overpass it. In another scene, from the tomb of Imenemchet, between two women applauding, a man leaves the ground. Both scenes are reconstructions of *high jump*²⁶ (Fig.12).

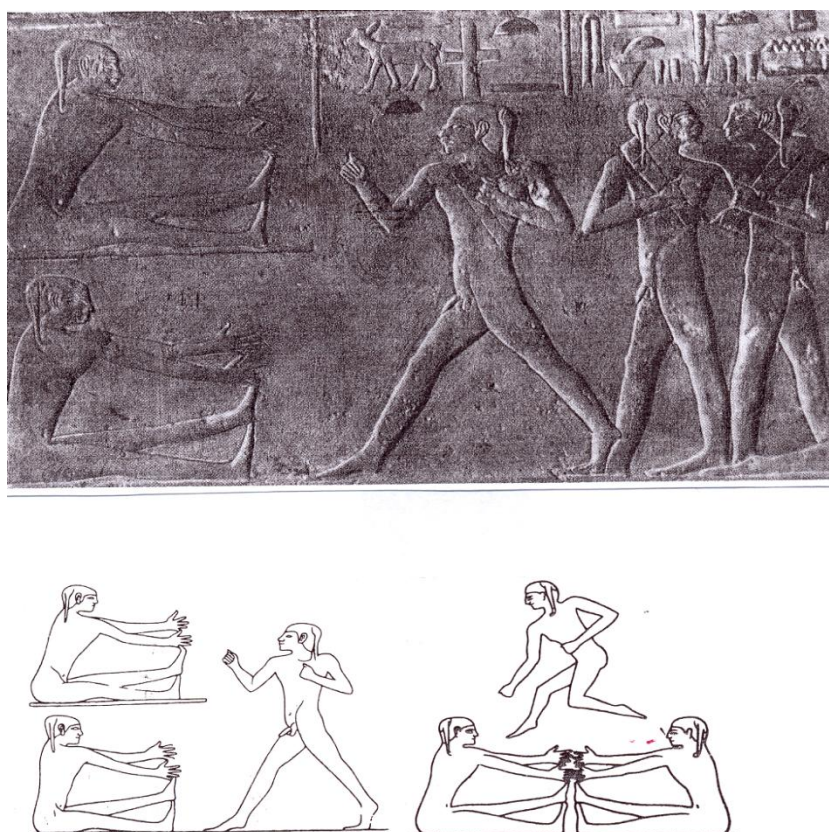


Fig.12 High jump scene. Relief from the Ptachotep' tomb in Saqqara, 5th Dynasty.

Swimming, rowing, fishing

Water activities were *swimming, rowing and fishing*²⁷. The knowledge and the development was a logical consequence of the occupation of the Egyptians in the Nile regions. Early archaeological evidences regarding the art of *swimming* were found in urns and hieroglyphics, on spoon handles, in shells and cups. They depict naked

²⁶ Decker, W., *'Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten'*, © 1987, pag.68-78.

²⁷ Decker, W., *'Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten'*, © 1987, pag. 96-111 and Sinn, Ulrich, (Hrsg.), *'Sport in der Antike'*, Ergon Verlag, ©1996, pag.140-141.

swimmers or have the form of swimmer, as the handles of the spoons. They might have religious-cult use. *Boats* were a common means of transport and in several areas were constructed ship sheds were they kept different kinds of boats. This implied the existence of professional boatmen, who knew perfectly the use of rudder. In the art of that era boats are depicted, manned by crews, armed with long poles, trying to turn over the rival boat. *Fishing* also took place on the Nile, in canals and lakes, on boats made of papyrus bound together. The fishermen were using rope with hook or harpoon and net (Fig.13, 14 and 15).

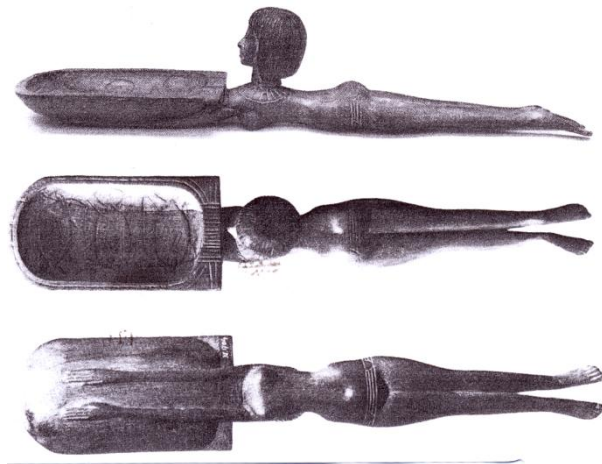


Fig.13 Spoon in the form of a swimmer. 18th Dynasty.



Fig.14 Rowing scene. Relief from the temple of Queen Hatshepsut, 18th Dynasty, Deir el-Bahri.

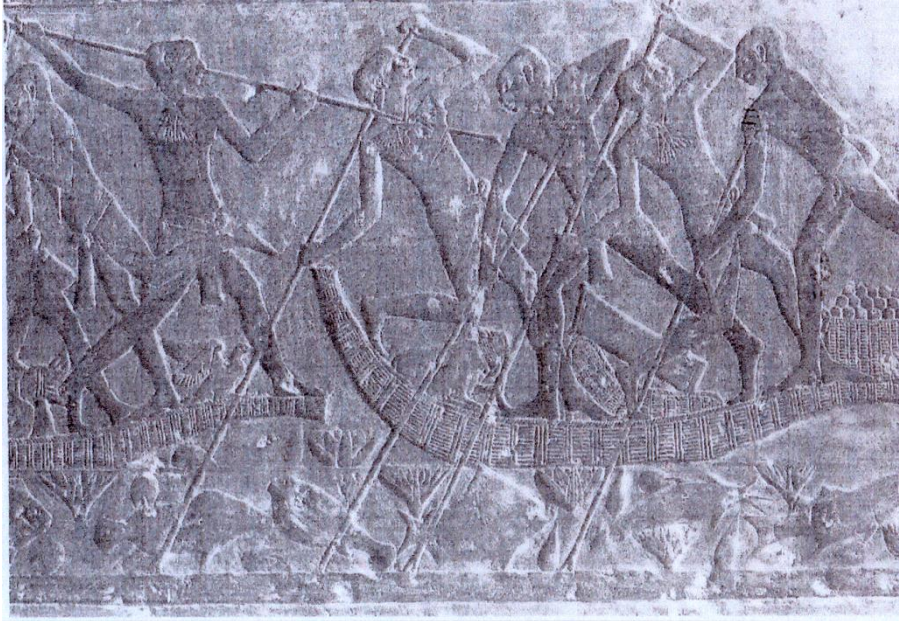


Fig.15 Battle scene between fishermen. Relief from the tomb of Ptachotep in Saqqara.

One cannot find more truthful references on these activities than the carvings on stone, or more accurate indications than the pictorial records on murals which the Ancient Egyptians left in their temples and tombs. The Ancient Egyptians engaged themselves in sports with the intention of training and strengthening their bodies, and also for pleasure and recreation. The Stele of Amenophis II in the vicinity of the great Sphinx in Giza is proof that sports were practised in higher strata of society and must have been very popular and widespread in Ancient Egypt. Amenophis II was very proud of his skill in archery, running, rowing and his love of horses. The same was true for Tuthmosis IV who was proud of his skill in shooting, hunting and other major sports. The high standard which the Ancient Egyptians reached in physical fitness is revealed in their standard portrayals of the male and female forms in sculpture and painting.

There are numberless representations on tomb and temple walls, but none is more striking than the oldest document relating to sport. It is a unique mural, not only because of its historical date, but also through its social implications, for it depicts the Pharaoh himself, Djoser the Great, the founder of the third dynasty nearly 3000 years before Christ or about 5000 years ago. This mural shows Djoser participating in the running programme of the Heb Sed festival, as a symbol of the significance of physical fitness of the Ancient Egyptians. The artist has brought out, with a thorough

knowledge of anatomy, the harmonious play of muscles. The positions of Djoser's arms, trunk and legs denote an expertise of technique and movement which only advanced development can achieve. Queens were no less aware of the importance of sports in all round culture, for on a wall of her sanctuary in the Karnak Temple, Hatshepsut of the eighteenth dynasty had herself represented in a similar attitude in the Heb Sed.²⁸

Even though it cannot be said for sure, the Ancient Egyptians aware of the invaluable role of training and practising in raising the standard of health, and hence of national productivity, as a whole, men, women, youths and children, were all engaged in physical and athletic activities with a zeal which amounted to a cult.

Several of the above forms of entertainment were forerunners or influence Greek physical and athletic activities. The Egyptian culture withstood the wear of centuries and became the model of future civilizations. The commercial contacts of the Egyptians with the Minoans influenced the last by the early second millennium, in the art of which we find similar but more advanced forms of physical and athletic activities. And as Decker W.²⁹ refers "Where the hunt serves no longer only the food and leaves the level of self-protection, the sport begins".

²⁸ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, ©1984, pag.42.

²⁹ Decker, W., *'Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten'*, © 1987, pag.29.

1.1.2 Sumerians



The history delays further to emerge through pre-history in Mesopotamia than in Egypt. Undoubtedly, the causes lie in the geographical location. While Egypt in an environment of vast deserts is blocked in a world where factors of unity imposed most often on disruptive trends, Mesopotamia, even though much different in composition, no where presents inviolable borders. Mesopotamia's story, therefore, is much more turbulent and the periods of unity are the exception. It is natural, under these circumstances, the geographically limited, weak and ephemeral powers to leave only rare and scattered traces of their existence, traces of everyday people who spontaneously developed natural attitude and culture needed for fun, work and war.³⁰

Around 3000BCE Sumer included a complex of independent cities and among them the Quiche, the Oumma and Lagos. The hereditary rulers fought for the conquest of excellence till the day when the Lougkal Zagkisi from Oumma, put under his authority almost every city (about 2320BCE). But he was overthrown in turn by Seabreams (2306-2250BCE), ruler of Akkadias, north of Sumer. The dynasty of Akkadias' kings was Semitic and did not speak the Sumerian language. The Semites had a long wander like nomads. Penetrating in Akkadias, composed a significant segment of the population. On the other hand, the Sumerian culture never ceased to grow under the tutelage of Akkadias. Its power was weakened over time and its authority was replaced by the power of the Sumerian kings of the third dynasty of Ur, during the era of Ur-Nammou (ca. 2079-2061BCE). During this dynasty the glory and prosperity of Sumer reached its pinnacle. The kings of Ur were absolute monarchs. The most significant however is that the excavations in the royal tombs prove that the Sumerians were the inventors of the wheel, writing, of the dome, of the semicircular arch and the birth of city.³¹

Religion³² played an important role. The representative temples were the so called *zikkurat*, imitation or perhaps recollection of the mountains of Central Asia, from

³⁰ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.3-6

³¹ a) Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.3-6, b) Olivova, V., *Sports and games in the ancient world*, ©1984, pag.21

³² Olivova, V., *Sports and games in the ancient world*, ©1984, pag.21-22.

where it is believed that the Sumerians originate. Lord of Heaven was Anu, god of water Enki and of the Moon Nannar. Their culture was based on the belief that the world was created and was ruled by the almighty and immortal gods and they created man in order to serve them. God was the true Monarch. The secular ruler is the common representative or replacement. Nothing is done without consulting him and every event is a result of his will. Man as an entity had no value and this was reflected in their art. The human body³³ was trivial and attributed schematically and naked, unlike the body of animals which was depicted in great detail. The female body was depicted even rarer than the male. Herodotus (I, 10.3) quotes that for the peoples of the Near East were a shame to be seen naked, whether man or woman:

Herodotus, Book 1.10.3, around 480-425BCE:

... since among the Lydians and most of the foreign peoples it is felt as a great shame that even a man be seen naked...

Their literary monuments are being mentioned in epic poems, religious hymns and myths with main characters the gods and heroes. From the epic poems the best known are those which belong in the circle for the achievements of the legendary hero and king of the Sumerians Gilgamesh. Chronologically the epic evolves before 2500BCE as it is shown from the archaeological findings, and outlines his ideas on heroism and sacrifice. Gilgamesh believed to make a very great achievement, something that would bring great and memorable glory. The human happiness was combined with drinking, eating, the clean body, love for nature and children, as well as with festive events with games and dancing.

All the pleasures of life were privilege of the king. The natural beauty and extraordinary bravery was symbolic of his position and was derived from his divine and royal origin. His labors and habits was the subject of countless hymns. His bravery and power was proved to the battlefield. The conduct of the war was one of the royal duties and wish of the gods. For the king, except from obligation, was a form of entertainment, of course when the score was victorious and his opponent was defeated.

³³ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, ©1984, pag.22-23.

*Sulgi*³⁴, son of Ur-Nammou and second emperor of the Neo-Sumerian Empire was a skillful and capable king, whose achievements have been recorded in the royal hymns of the 3rd dynasty of Ur (2112-2004BCE). He was multitalented and had all the skills of a great athlete. In three royal hymns - self laudatory - is presented an ideal image in his public and private life: a) *Sulgi, King of the Road* b) *Sulgi, the ideal King* and c) *Sulgi, King of fame and glory*. Besides his writing and mathematical ability, praises his military and leadership ability. He has superhuman strength and is an expert at handling all types of weapons. On the battlefield leads the army and his triumphs reach the ends of the world, causing fear to enemies.

The athletic function³⁵, as is formed during this period in Mesopotamia, was the result of many factors: ability, skill, physical effort and behavior. The Sumerians believed that good physical condition was a prerequisite for the maintenance and expansion of their state. The ability of someone to run fast and to travel long distances became essential. It has been an integral part of military training as it served religion - especially in celebrations - and the ideology of the king. The performance of *Sulgi* in running is particularly impressive. In one of the three self-laudatory hymns is described his journey from Ur to Nippur and back, in one day, a distance of about 200km. The purpose was to attend the feast *eshesh* in both these cities the same day, by running. The description of this journey³⁶ is the praise of supernatural speed and capacity of the Emperor.

With regard to Royal *Hunt*³⁷, King's primary purpose was to kill the wild and dangerous animals (lions, bulls, boars and leopards) that represented enemies and evil

³⁴ Vermaak, P.S., '*Šulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns*', Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.7-9.

³⁵ a) Olivova, V., '*Sports and games in the ancient world*', London ©1984, pag.23-24, b) Vermaak, P.S., '*Šulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns*', Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.20.

³⁶ a) Vermaak, P.S., '*Šulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns*', Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.11-13, b) Lamont, D.A., '*Running phenomena in Ancient Sumer*', Journal of Sport History 22, ©1995, pag.207-215.

³⁷ a) Vermaak, P.S., '*Šulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns*', Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.13-15, 17-19, b) Olivova, V., '*Sports and games in the ancient world*', London ©1984, pag.24, 30-31.

spirits and often was considered battle against evil forces. Main weapons were the *bow* and the *spear*³⁸ (Fig.16). The young princes and nobles were taught and trained in various weapons like sword, bow, arrows, lances, slings, in a place called Ntamproum. In hunting they had to prove that they were worthy of their reputation and thus competing with their partners. The skill was shown by how quickly they threw the arrow in order the hitting to be effective and bring instant death to the animal, but also whether they could stretch the bow correctly.



Fig.16 Stele of Uruk. A nobleman hunting lions on foot, with a bow and arrows and a spear.
Sumerian culture, Mesopotamia, around 3400BCE.

These weapons became most effective when the first *horse-drawn chariots*³⁹ were constructed. The chariot was the most important development of civilizations of the ancient Near East, because it replaced the man. It was an exclusive privilege of the

³⁸ Vermaak, P.S., '*Šulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns*', Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.13, 14, 17, 18.

³⁹ Olivova, V., '*Sports and games in the ancient world*', London © 1984, pag.24-25, b) Mouratidis, I., '*History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*', Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.6-7.

king and over the years it was used in the army- it was an instrument • which would bring perfection to the military exercises. Two-or four-wheel were depicted in the art of ancient Mesopotamia from the beginning of the third millennium BC (Fig. 17). Passed several centuries during which the chariot refined and developed and became lighter and faster. Originally it was dragged by oxen, zebras later and eventually horses. In the military field were constructed various kinds of war chariots, for two or three charioteer and specially designed space for weapons (Fig.18).



Fig.17 Driver sitting on the box of a chariot with disc wheels steering a four-in-hand of onagers. Bronze statuette from Tell Agrab, Iraq, turn of the 4th and 3rd millennium BCE.



Fig.18 Sumerian war chariot with a crew of two, drawn by two horses. Detail from 'Standard of Ur', around 2500BCE.

In contrast to these activities which were probably forms of entertainment of the royal circle, public festive events⁴⁰ were organized as well in which folk classes. The most significant event was the "Sacred Marriage" of the king and the goddess of fertility, a union which symbolized the rebirth of nature. At these events were also included *bullfighting*⁴¹ and various forms of sport, such as competitions between teams and duels. Entities of athletic performances have been commemorative plates, cylinder seals and devotional columns. A bronze statuette with a pair of wrestlers depicts with the most spectacular way the *sport of wrestling*⁴². This is a type of double vase with decorative bracket from the region Khafaje and is dated back to 2900-2680BCE. Both men wear girdle and catch each other from that (Fig.19). Handles were allowed from legs as well in order to overthrow the opponent. In the epic of Gilgamesh is described his mythical race with Enkintou, a wrestling contest· the story progresses to the point where it would take place the sacred marriage Gilgamesh with the goddess Ishara and was prevented by Enkintou. Then the fight started.



Fig.19 Two men, perhaps acrobats. Wrestling with vases on their heads, grasping each other's loincloth. A copper vase from Khafaje-Nintu, 4th to 3rd millennium BCE.

⁴⁰ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.35-37.

⁴¹ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.37.

⁴² a) Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.38, b) Vermaak, P.S., *'Šulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns'*, Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.15-17.

The discipline of *boxing*⁴³ is certified by a ceramic relief from Tell Asram representing a pair of wrestlers with girdle and their wrists tied with crossed hands and feet (Fig.20). Those habits are known from the "lectern" or "the book of military instructions," one of the most famous monuments of the time. Through it is also confirmed the discipline of *swimming*⁴⁴ by using inflated animal skins. This proves that they were aware of boating. A daily occupation was *fishing*⁴⁵ in which they were using nets and hooks. It is also worth to refer an economic-administrative document⁴⁶ from the 3rd dynasty of Ur which reports a large quantity of beer as nutrition for athletes and in two other texts of the same period is confirmed that sheep and flour constituted food of athletes.



Fig.20 Two boxers with bound wrists wearing short skirts. Tell Asram, Iraq, around 2000BCE.

During the reign of Shu-Suen (2038-2030BCE), son of the king Sulgi, two texts are dated, of economic-administrative nature, from the Sumerian city Oumma. In the first document there are mentioned animal offers from the king and another person in high

⁴³ Olivova, V. *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.38.

⁴⁴ a) Olivova, V. *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London © 1984, pag.35, 37-38, b) Vermaak, P.S., *'Šulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns'*, Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.15-17.

⁴⁵ a) Kramer, S.N., *'The Sumerians: Their History, Culture and Character'*, Chicago ©1963, pag.110 b) Loyd, S., *'Mesopotamia: excavations on Sumerian sites'*, Publisher, Lovat Dickson, Original from the University of Michigan, ©1936, pag.110, 121.

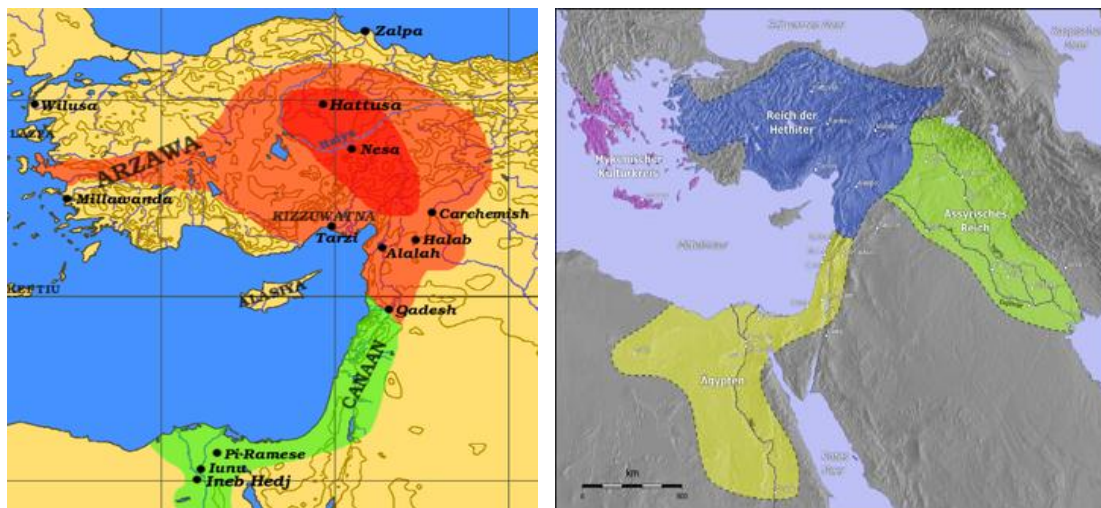
⁴⁶ Sjoberg, A., *'Trials of strength. Athletics in Mesopotamia'*, Expedition 7, ©1985, pag.8-9.

authority in a circumstance where the city organizes a race. The second document from Umma, dated the same period, mentions an enumeration of animals, in an occasion where a race was organized again by the city during a celebration. There were runners messengers as well, who served in the royal body, which possibly smeared their body with oil, according to a financial document. What is viewed through the sources and the monuments is the importance of vigorous physical activity, which seems well-symbolized in the claims for King Sulgi, the 'first long-distance runner'. Secondly, the wrestling scenes on votive plaques and devotional columns appears that are inherent in patterns of the cult symposium under which they were conducted, and are associated with religious ritual activities. The early poetry of Mesopotamia, such as the hymns of the king Sulgi and the epic of Gilgamesh, contain references to the physical abilities and skills of the king or hero, who appears in an athletic role and it's considered an important source concerning athletic activity in the ancient people of Near East.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ a) Vermaak, P.S., '*Sulgi as sportsman in the Sumerian self-laudatory royal hymns*', Nikephoros 7, ©1993, pag.8-13, 18-19 b) Olivova, V. '*Sports and games in the ancient world*', London © 1984, pag.38-39.

1.1.3 Hittites

The people of the Hittites and Mitannion, probably of Indo-European origin appear in Asia Minor around 2200 BCE, by developing a remarkable culture the 2nd millennium BCE (1750-1200 BCE.). They subordinate the indigenous people in the area and found the territory Hatti with its capital Hattusa. Their story is divided in two periods: the Old and New Empire. The Hittites kings extended their conquests in Syria and North Mesopotamia. The influence of the indigenous was undoubtedly prevalent. Their religion was polytheistic. Although the deities have Indo-European names, the pantheon was inherited from the Sumerians. The influence of Sumerian and Egyptian art is obvious.⁴⁸



The empire of Hittite

The king of the Hittites was the leader of his people and religious leader. His main occupation was *hunting*⁴⁹. He himself on a chariot used bow and spear to capture his prey, especially lions (from their art it is known that in hunting they used hunting dogs as well). These weapons were adopted in the army when the horse-drawn chariots became widely known (Fig.21). The Hittites experienced many military

⁴⁸ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.16-17.

⁴⁹ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.19-20.

successes, as they maintained a very strong and well trained army. By practicing military activities managed to maintain warily their army. The most effective weapon was the *chariot*⁵⁰.

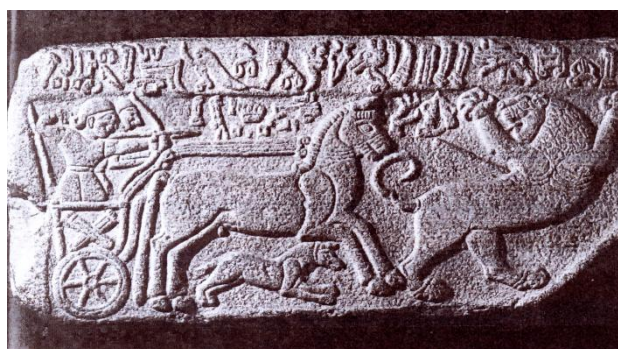


Fig.21 Lion hunting from a chariot. A dog runs alongside the horse. A Hittite relief from Malatya, Asia Minor, 850-750BCE.

A Hittite inscription from the 18th century BC reports that the Hittite king Anita was the leader of 1400 army soldiers and 40 military chariots. In the battle of Qadesh, in 1286BCE, the Hittites fought against the Egyptians with 17000 soldiers and 3500 chariots. It was at that time when, along with the chariot, the horse became known. It was specifically given attention to its breeding and domestication, practices which were codified in a special handbook with the earliest information the one of hostler Kikouli of Mitanni. The text of the Handbook provides instructions on how to train a horse, but veterinary advice as well. The systematic practice with the horse led to the birth of *riding* and the young princes and noblemen were trained in riding by expert instructors. Since 11th and 10th century BCE the representations of riders in Hittites reliefs are increasingly frequent (Fig.22). This aristocratic form of entertainment was established in the cultural tradition and religious events. However chariot races were maintained as well.⁵¹



Fig.22 Three Hittites men, in an upright position on horses, on a bull or other wild animal.

⁵⁰ Olivova, V. 'Sports and games in the ancient world', London © 1984, pag.26, 29, 31, 33.

⁵¹ Olivova, V. 'Sports and games in the ancient world', London © 1984, pag.26.

The religious celebrations of the Hittites comprised a variety of activities including processions, sacrifices, offerings, ritual purification, ritual meals and athletic competitions. They were public, but the main character was the king, who took part. Reports of such events are dated back to the 13th century BCE and they derive from cuneiform plates and documents found in "Big Temple" and in the royal citadel of ancient Hattusa. The biggest religious festival took place in the spring. Some texts refer to *wrestling* and *boxing*⁵², *weightlifting* and a sort of *shot-put*⁵³ in honor of a deity. In a plate is described a *race*: is the journey of king during the feast of the New Year from the city to the palace. Before he comes down from his chariot the men of the royal guard are making race⁵⁴. The winner is rewarded with the title of royal charioteer. In another inscription it's described the tale of the sport of wrestling. Between two soldiers, rival groups, is unfolding a battle in the presence of a deity. Both are wrestlers. The opponent falls down and the soldiers, who attend, applaud the winner. In the events were performed dances followed by music and acrobatics (Fig.23). Some interesting scenes in their art illustrate games with horses or bulls.⁵⁵



Fig.23 Jugglers and acrobats. Hittite relief on the city wall in Alaça Hüyük, Asia Minor.

⁵² Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.20.

⁵³ Carter, C., *Athletic contests in Hittite festivals*, Journal of Near Eastern Studies 47 (1988), pag.185.

⁵⁴ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.20.

⁵⁵ Carter, C., *Athletic contests in Hittite festivals*, Journal of Near Eastern Studies 47 (1988), pag.185-187, Olivova, V., *Sports and games in the ancient world*, London©1984, pag.37-39, Puhvel, J., *Hittite athletics as prefigurations of ancient Greek games*, in W.J.Raschke (eds): *The archaeology of the Olympics*, ©1988, pag.27, 28, 30, Gurney, O.R., *Some aspects of Hittite religion*, (Schweich Lectures 1976), ©1977, pag.25, 27, 31, 36.

In the texts recording the worship is described a virtual contest⁵⁶ in a religious ceremony in one of the provinces of the Hittites. The feast is celebrated in the autumn and is dedicated to the god of weather. The priest carries the god of the temple on a stone huwasi. Followed by purifying process, animal sacrifice and after the ritual meals, young men are preparing for the contest: They separate men into 2 teams and give them a name. To the first team they give the name *men of Hatti* and to the other *men of Massa*. The men of Hatti have bronze weapons, while the men of Massa have weapons of reed. They fight and the men of Hatti defeat them. They take a prisoner of war and deliver him to the deity. The result of such a fight is prefabricated. The team with the bronze weapons inevitably wins the opponents. In the descriptions of provincial ceremonies there are references to a virtual ritual competition, but also clues for activities probably similar to the weight throw and weightlifting. The above athletic events form part of religious ceremonies in honor of a goddess and seem that they took place after the ritual meal and before the procession which accompanied the god back to the temple.⁵⁷

The importance given in the above sources relates to the clear recognition of athletic competitions organized by the Hittites in the context of the local worship. The Hittite contests were always a subordinate but integral part of the cult activities.

⁵⁶ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London©1984, pag.37-38.

⁵⁷ Carter, C., *'Athletic contests in Hittite festivals'*, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 47 (1988), pag.186.

1.1.4 Babylonians

Just before 2000 BCE the Amorites, Semites who had come from the Syrian desert flooded the Akkadia and Sumeria, they united them in a unique state and nominated its capital as Babylon. The name of Babylon originates from the word Babel, which is the Babylonian word Babili and means ‘Gate of God’. Herodotus mentions that the city had 100 gates with the greatest the gate of Ishtar. The ancient inhabitants of Babylon settled down in southern Mesopotamia between the two great rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Through inscriptions becomes known that these tribes were of Semitic origin and very early established city-states, one of which was Babylon. The greatest emperor, conqueror and legislator of Babylon was Hammurabi. To rule the empire more easily he drew a code of laws by which he divided the society into three classes: the nobles- large landowners, the middle class, who could possess land and slaves, and slaves. His laws are preserved in the homonym code and are one of the largest collections of laws in the history of law (Fig.24).⁵⁸

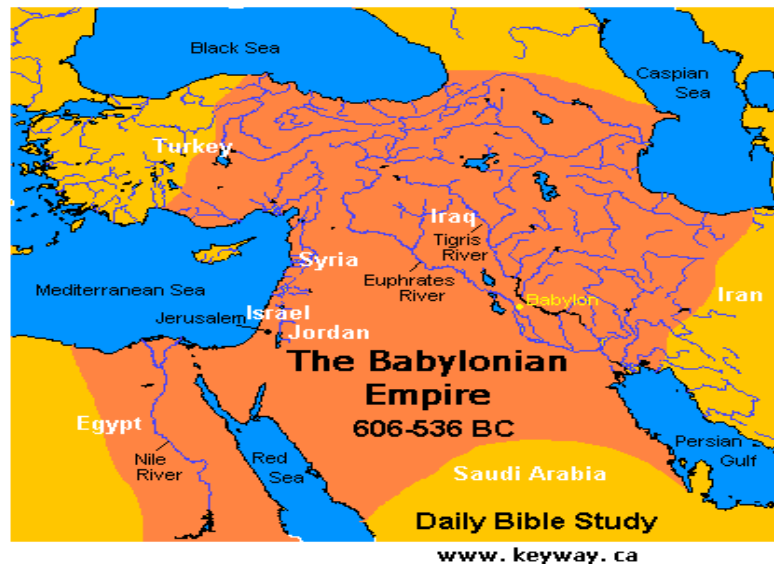


Fig.24 Part of Hammurabi's codex.

Different cultures occupy successively the throne of Babylon, initially the Hittites and later the Kassites. But the Babylonians were able to prevail over their conquerors.

⁵⁸ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.10-11, 12.

Soon a new martial people showed up and threatened Babylon: the Assyrians. Asshurnasirpal conquers Babylon. Babylon revives from her ashes and enters a new period of growth, culminating in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. After him a new fall begins and Medes with the Persians conquer the country, which becomes province of the Persian state.⁵⁹



The Empire of Babylonian

During the reign of Hammurabi and after long-lasting wars he managed to defeat his opponents. These wars were the reason of the creation of two city-states, the state of the Assyrians and the state of Babylonians. The Babylonians were more peaceful people from their neighbors the Assyrians. The Assyrians, as a people were warlike, conducted several wars with success and managed to extend their state in all directions and finally to subordinate Babylon, whose religious and cultural traditions influenced their conquerors. The Babylonians used the cuneiform writing and due to the numerous of plates that were found, have come to light important information about their daily life. Their history begins around the 2nd millennium BCE and comes to an end around 540BCE due to the Persian occupation. They are famous not only for their knowledge relating to astronomy but in mathematics, constructions and arts as well.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.10-11, 12.

⁶⁰ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.11-12.

Similar to the other peoples of Mesopotamia so Babylonians organized religious events⁶¹ relating to the nature and the gods. The celebrations that took place in spring, particularly in March (Nisan), and the annual proclamation of the function of king by the god Marduk (to honor him they built the biggest temple known as the Temple of Babel), associated with the rebirth of nature. There are detailed references to these ceremonies from the Neo-Babylonian era, which lasted from seven to twelve days. A typical event was the recitation of epic of the creation of the world or mythological adventures with central element the fight of heroes or gods with animals or demons. Protagonists were the king and the priests. Everything was connected with the journey of god Mardouk whose image was transferred with a litany on land and on water. Those who brought gifts to the god they had the right to take part in various events in his honor, such as music, dancing, drinking and running races, wrestling.

The official part of the programme was accompanied by spontaneous popular entertainments. According to Gudea's notes, dating from the end of the 3rd millennium BCE, existing law and order was suspended for the duration of the festival. Feuds were dropped and quarrels made up, parents refrained from punishing their children, work ceased and slaves were the equals of free men. Musicians dressed in animal skins passed through the streets of Babylon, wearing animal heads – bands of musical lions, bears, asses or foxes. A king of the festivities was elected – a condemned prisoner who set upon the throne and adorned with the attributes of royal power. He could issue orders, and eat and drink to his heart's content, but in the end he was stripped, bound, and publicly executed. The general merriment rose to a climax of music, dancing. Drink and sex. This was the pattern not only in Babylon, but in many other cities such as Uruk, or Assur, and it served as a model for the Neo-Babylonian festivals. The same pattern occurs in many other Near Eastern countries, and through the Jewish feasts of Purim and Rosh Hashanah the tradition passed into the Christian Easter festivities and the Islamic Spring feast. The cart-boat used for the god's progress was given a Latin name in later centuries, *carrus navalis*, and still survives in the word 'carnival', meaning masked popular festivities.⁶²

⁶¹ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.11, Olivova, V., *Sports and games in the ancient world*, London©1984, pag.37-38.

⁶² Olivova, V., *Sports and games in the ancient world*, London ©1984, pag.37-39.

Through the archaeological findings it seems that the most popular physical activity of the Babylonian nobles was *swimming*⁶³. Part of the education of the new aristocracy was practicing the *bow* and the *horse* as well in order to be successful in *hunting*, especially in hunting wild and dangerous animals.⁶⁴

The ideology of a capable and strong and powerful king was existed in Babylon as in the whole area of Mesopotamia. In a cuneiform tablet, dated in 1700 BC, is mentioned a *wrestling* scene⁶⁵ where the king gives advices and strategies to his son. The wrestlers in order to win their opponents they use various tricks.

Babylon was famous for its naval and military power, for its wealth and obviously the maintenance of these benefits would premise at least good physical condition, even though they preferred to be involved with arts and astronomy.

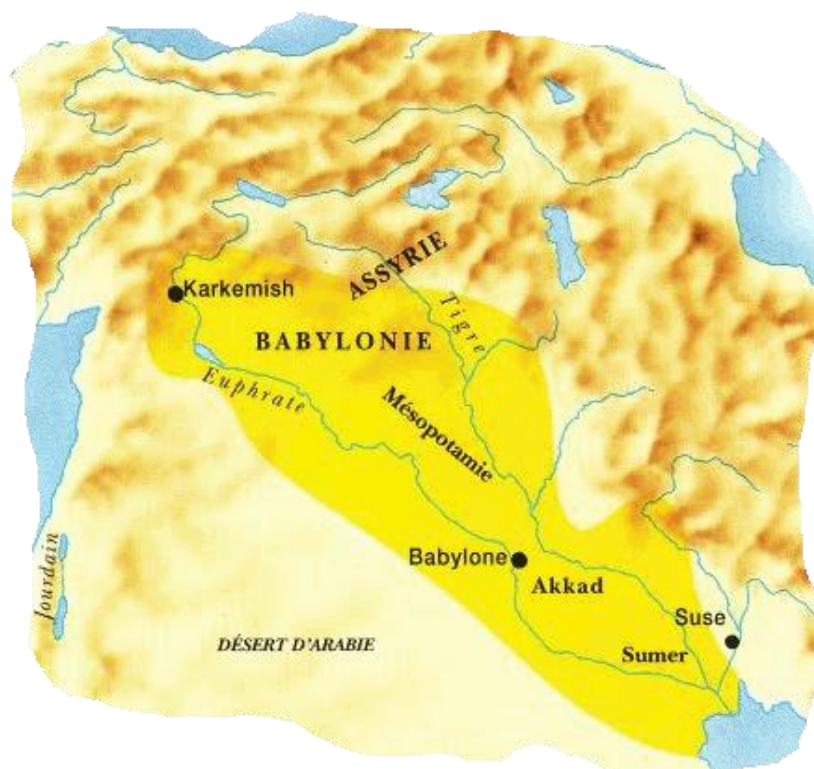


Fig.25 Mesopotamia

⁶³ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.12

⁶⁴ Olivova, V., *Sports and games in the ancient world*, London ©1984, pag.32-34, Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.12.

⁶⁵ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.12.

1.1.5 Assyrians

Assyria was a great and powerful country in ancient times. It was located in northern Mesopotamia, bordered on Babylonia, and from the east Tigris River flowed. The name originates from the son of Shem, Assur. The first inhabitants were Semites from Arabia. The capital was Assur. During the second millennium BCE, Assyria was conquered by the Amorites. Around 13th century BCE they began a series of conquests in the surrounding area. The partial collapse of their empire in the 11th century BCE did not stop them. Thereby after they had crossed the River Euphrates in 1100 BCE, they conquered Babylon, and reached up to the shores of the Mediterranean. From the 10th to the 6th century BCE, Assyria was the greatest power in the broad area of Mesopotamia. Towards the end of the 7th century BCE Assyria lost its power. The city Assur was occupied in 614 BCE. Two years later, in 612 BCE, the capital of Nineveh was occupied as well after a siege that lasted three years, and was completely destroyed, while all the Assyrian Empire was enslaved to Babylon. Large cities which were capitals of Assyria were Assur, Halil and Nineveh.

The Assyrian religion was pagan and had many influences from the Babylonian. Headed god of pantheism was Assur, who was believed to be the creator of heaven and humanity. They used the cuneiform writing and spoke the Assyrian, which was characterized as a Semitic dialect.⁶⁶

The pictorial art and the Cuneiform texts present in a realistic and supernatural "word" the properties of the king including his physical abilities and skills in the handling of all weapons or during warfare or hunting wild animals. The *hunt* was a sign of audacity, determination and high-performance elements that gave him the right of possession of the royal title. It is known that the Assyrian king's education, Assurnasirpal, included mental and physical education.⁶⁷

The excavations at the palaces of the Assyrians brought to light buildings of large dimensions. Between the 16th and 12th century BCE, horse-drawn chariots begin to appear in the hunt of the aristocratic class. This hunting pattern becomes very popular in the palaces that they built for themselves the kings of the New Assyrian period

⁶⁶ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.13

⁶⁷ Olivova, V., *Sports and games in the ancient world*, London ©1984, pag.29.

(934-610 BCE). In the so-called Northwest Palace of King Assurnasirpal II on Nimrud (in the beginnings of 9th century BCE) the walls of most of the rooms were decorated with *relief scenes of victorious wars and hunting wild animals*. In these depictions the king is represented to hunt lions with his bow on a chariot with a charioteer. On the chariot there is a spear, a quiver of arrows and an ax. Soldiers follow with shields restricting the space (Fig.26).



Fig.26 The Assyrian King Assurnasirpal II hunting lions from a light chariot driven by a driver. The king shoots the lion. Relief from the palace of Nimrud, 9th century BCE.

The tradition of war chariots was equally strong in Assyria as well, as it can be concluded by the reliefs. Among the most remarkable are those that decorated Assurnasirpal's palace at Nineveh (7th century BCE), and particular the throne room with scenes of war or hunting wild bulls and lions, due to a new element which appears, the one of the *spectators*. In a neo-Assyrian relief spectators, mostly noblemen, climb to a tree-lined hill to watch their king hunting lions (Fig. 27). The presence of the spectators it is considered to be convincing evidence that the royal hunt acquired the character of a game and became a form of entertainment. In another scene a guard frees a lion from a wooden cage and rushes to the king who, although pedestrian, kills it with his arrow (Fig.28). From these depictions it appears that the lions were captured in advance and transferred to an open area where hunting would take place. ⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Olivova, V., *'Sports and games in the ancient world'*, London ©1984, pag.31-32.

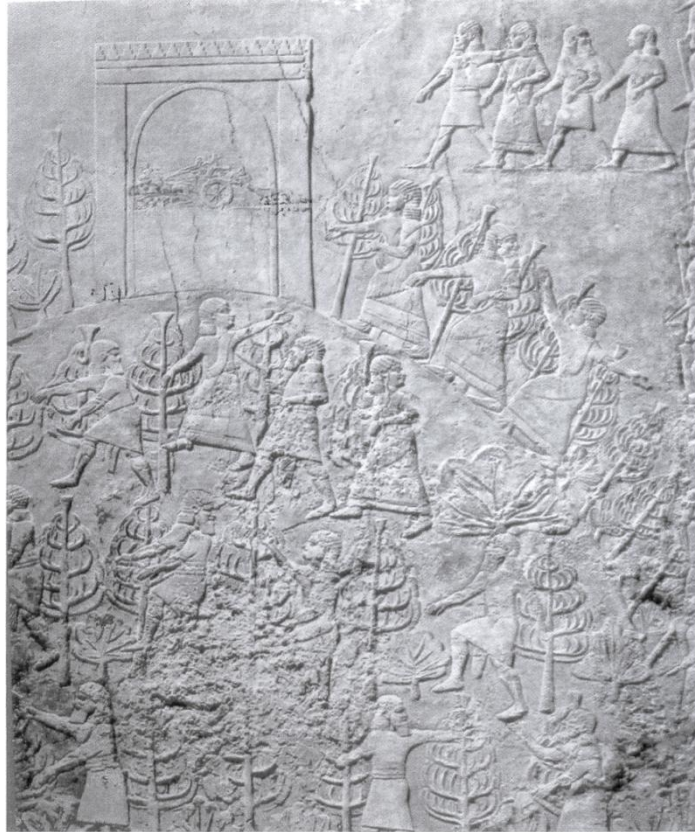


Fig.27 Assyrian noblemen watching from a wooded hill as king Assurnasirpal hunts lions.
Relief from the palace of Nineveh, northern Mesopotamia, 7th century BCE.



Fig.28 The Assyrian king Assurnasirpal hunting: He's protected by a shield-bearer with a spear, hunting on foot with bow and arrows a lion that has been let out of the undergrowth
Relief from the palace in Nineveh, 7th century BCE.

The entire region of Mesopotamia was not only a fertile ground for traditions and epics for hunting and for hunting itself. Furthermore the legends and traditions, including the appropriate depictions compose the reflection on a higher level in the arts and literature of an ancient practice. With the basic criterion the goal of the hunt could be made a clear distinction between the hunting of the working classes and its

use as a livelihood means and the hunting of the aristocracy and the king. In the case of the King's hunting is presupposed good physical condition and skills of the protagonist, but is also displayed the ruler in an activity that is no longer aims at a direct satisfaction of vital needs and gradually takes the form of a game. The primary purpose of this king's activity was to kill wild creatures that represented enemies and evil spirits and often was considered to be a battle against the enemy's forces. Defeating wild animals the king proved that he had a special bravery on which his claim to govern was counting on. A cylinder seal of the 13th century BCE, of the Middle Assyrian period shows heroes fighting winged dragons. Another, of the New Assyrian period, depicts a god standing on a winged and horned dragon, shooting at an escaping lion with bow and arrows. Scenes such as these are innumerable.

The expansive wars conducted by the Assyrians led to a strong and well prepared army. The soldiers were trained in archery, running, swimming, in boat and chariot races (Fig.29). Over the years, specific chariots were manufactured in order to transport the rams with which they attacked in well fortified cities.⁶⁹



Fig.29 Assyrian soldiers swimming on inflated animal skins towards an enemy stronghold. A relief from the palace of Nimrud, northern Mesopotamia, 9th century BCE.

⁶⁹ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.16.

Chapter 2°

The Minoan civilization

The ancients, named Crete, the largest island of the eastern Mediterranean, 'an island blessed', favored because of its position and the mild climate. Located in the center of the major sea arteries leading to Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, the mainland of Greece and the West, accepted throughout the course of its history, various influences by foreign cultures but also Crete influenced them in turn.

Since the days of Heinrich Schliemann's discovery of the 'the Tomb of Agamemnon' at Mycenae and Arthur Evans' excavation of 'the Palace of Minos' at Knossos, modern scholars have made some – but not very much – progress in their effort to decipher the language of the Minoan culture that appeared, [prospered, and disappeared in Crete during the second millennium BCE. Of the documents that can be translated from this pre-Hellenic culture, none refers specifically to sports. Archaeological evidence depicts a great deal of physical activity, but the precise nature and significance of the activity remains conjectural. Minoan cult may have been a combination of sports and religious worship similar to the Greek athletic festivals celebrated (much later) at Olympia, Delphi, and other sacred sites.⁷⁰

The social structure of the island is characterized by palaces, which determine the life on the island and they constructed it in comprehensible units. Knossos, Aghia Triada, Malia, Gournia, Kato Zakros is some known (most of them recent) names of locations with extended, palatial architectural complexes, of which the equipment testifies a remarkable level of culture.⁷¹

The history of the excavations in Knossos begins in 1879. The first investigations conducted by Minos Kalokairinos since December 1879, with twelve field sites in the central courtyard and the West Wing of the Palace of Knossos. Henry Schliemann tried to excavate the site in 1833. In March 1894 Sir Arthur Evans visited Knossos and opened negotiations for the purchase of plots. In 1897 he managed to purchase a license of excavations and in 1900 he had already excavate almost the entire west wing of the palace. Investigations on a large scale began in 1900 and continued with the help of J.D.Pendlebury periodically until 1932. Time to time some other archaeologists helped or took over the investigation of the sites around the palace (D.

⁷⁰ Guttman, Allen, *Sports: The First Five Millennia*, ©2007 by University of Massachusetts Press, pag.14-15.

⁷¹ Decker, Wolfgang, *Sport in der griechischen Antike: vom minoischen Wettkampf bis zu den Olympischen Spielen*, (Muenchen ©1995), Greek Edition ©2004, pag.30.

Hogarth, A.Wace, E.J.Forsdyke and J.D.S.Pendlebury; Nikolaos Platon as well since 1945, 1955 to 1960). S.Hood continued the English excavations from 1957 till 1961 and finally from 1973 till 1987. British archaeologists made researches in the eastern part of Crete (among them Hogarth, Bosanquet, Dawkins and Myres). Italian archaeologists (such as Halbherr, Savignoni Paribeni), cleared the palace of Phaistos and Agia Triada. American archaeologists made important excavations, such as Scager, Miss Boyd and Miss Hall. Greek archaeologists such as I.Chatzidakis, St.Xanthoudidis, S.Marinatos and N.Platonas contributed to the excavation work as well.

2.2.1 Chronology

It is true that the Bronze era of the Aegean is easily separated by two important political events: a raid of invaders, apparently from the East, in some islands and parts of the mainland Greece, two centuries before 2000BCE, and a destruction phase in Crete, which apparently came from the conquerors of the mainland around 1450BCE, almost fifty years after a huge explosion of Thera's volcano. However, these facts, while they deeply influenced the life and development of the arts in the Aegean region, can hardly be compared with the periods of foreign occupation, the First and Second Transitional period that divides the Ancient from the Middle and the Middle of the New Kingdom in Egypt.

The invaders from Anatolia to the Aegean, towards the end of the 3rd millennium BCE, seem that they didn't affect Crete, and the conquest by residents of the mainland of Greece, around 1450BCE, appeared at a time, in which they had already begun to assess and enjoy the fruits of the Cretan civilization. The beginning of Bronze era in the Aegean is determined by the changes in pottery which are very intense in Crete and the south part of the mainland of Greece. These changes are likely to reflect some of the Aegean migrations. It may even be introduced in Crete by foreigners techniques for working the metal, where there are population shifts points, suggesting a war and a possible invasion, at the end of the local Neolithic era. Crete may well have been the target of immigrants from eastern Mediterranean coasts, which at times had been destroyed by wars of conquest and invasions of barbaric peoples, during the 3rd millennium BCE.

Evans called the Bronze era of Crete *Minoan* by *Minos*, the legendary king of Knossos and he divided it into three periods⁷² - Early, Middle and Late - and each one of them in three main divisions. Each of these nine denominations could be determined in accordance with the changes of the technique, and in particular the changes of the style of pottery that had been constructed at Knossos. This system was implemented finally by Blegen and Wace for the rest of the Aegean, while using the term Helladic for the Bronze era of the mainland and the term Cycladic for the

⁷² Evans, Arthur, 'The palace of Minos at Knossos', Annual of the British School at Athens, Vol. II, 1900-1901, pag.119.

islands, though in reality at that time was not possible to distinguish these areas in nine successive archaeological periods.

During the period of turbulence prevailing in the mainland of Greece and the islands on Middle-Bronze era (2000-1450BCE), it seems that Crete had not been conquered or occupied by invaders and the Early Minoan civilization evolved without interruption towards the Middle Minoan. During the period around 1700BCE, the Cretan influence dominates more and more to the islands and becomes stronger in Greece. Around 1450BCE settlements throughout central, southern and eastern Crete were destroyed by fire and subsequently many of them were abandoned. These misfortunes were attributed to one last disastrous volcano eruption in Thera, but likely appears to represent the conquest of Crete, or part of it, from invaders of mainland of Greece, since at Knossos there are several signs of the presence of the conquerors (changes in pottery of Knossos and the tombs) from 1450BCE onwards. During the centuries after 1450BCE approximately, burning palaces and cities in the whole Aegean indicate to the utmost wars. Departments of Knossos were burned at the end of Late Minoan II, around 1400BCE, and finally the palace was destroyed in an era which seem to be positioned on 14th or on early 13th century BCE.

Another chronological chart⁷³ is the below which follows the proposed by the Myers and Cadogan (1992, 32-34):

Early Minoan Period

Early Minoan I, 3650/3500-3000/2900 BCE

Early Minoan II, 2900-2300/2150 BCE

Early Minoan III, 2300/2150-2160/2025 BCE

Middle Minoan Period

Middle Minoan IA, 2160/1979-20th century BCE

Middle Minoan IB, 19th century BCE

⁷³ Mantzourani, Helen, 'Prehistoric Crete', Athens © 2002, pag.17-18.

Middle Minoan II and Middle Minoan IIIA, 19th century-1700/1650 BCE

Middle Minoan III, 1700/1650-1600 BCE

Late Minoan Period

Late Minoan IA, 1600-1480 BCE

Late Minoan IB, 1480-1425 BCE

Late Minoan II, 1425-1390 BCE

Late Minoan IIIA1, 1390-1370/1360 BCE

Late Minoan IIIA2, 1370/1360-1340/1330 BCE

Late Minoan IIIB, 1340/1330-1190 BCE

Late Minoan IIIC, 1190-1070 BCE

Sub-Minoan, 1070-970 BCE

Pre-Palatial era: Early Minoan I – II – III – Middle Minoan IA

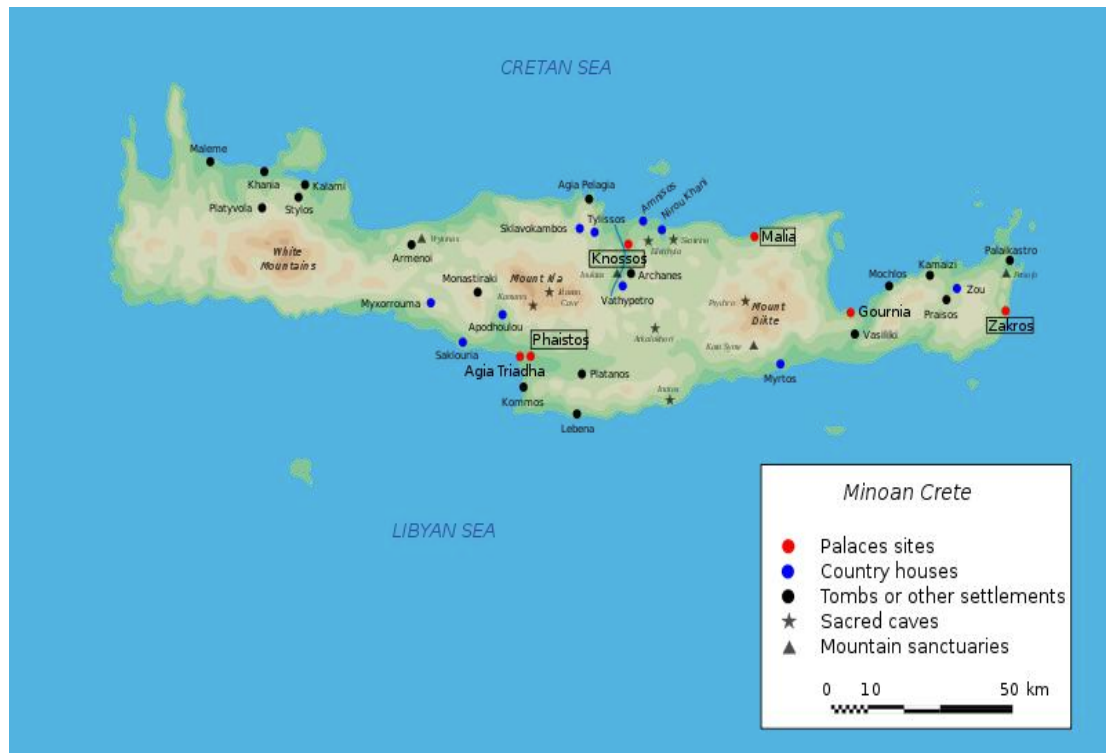
Old-Palatial era: Middle Minoan IB – II – IIIA

New-Palatial Era: Middle Minoan IIIB – Late Minoan IB – II

Post-Palatial era: Late Minoan III

It should be noted that at least regarding the dating of the Neolithic and the Proto-Minoan period there are variations among researchers. Some suggest higher and others lower chronology. The radiocarbon dates for Neolithic Knossos (C 14) ranging from about the middle of the seventh millennium BCE for the X layer until the end of the fourth millennium BCE for the layer I. The dating of the layer I has been revised now and so the transition from the Neolithic Age to the Minoan period of Knossos is positioned in the middle of the 4th millennium BCE. Warren and Hankey (1989)

identify the Final Neolithic around 3650-3500 BCE. For the Middle and Late Minoan period there is unanimity. The crucial point of reference remains the ultimate chronological identification of the destruction in Akrotiri of Thera with its consequences on the centers of Minoan Crete. Most of the New-Palatial centers were destroyed at the end of Late Minoan IB, while Knossos was rebuilt and inhabited again in the Late Minoan II.⁷⁴



Map of archaeological sites in Crete

⁷⁴ Mantzourani, Helen, *Prehistoric Crete*, Athens © 2002, pag.17-18.

2.2.2 Minoan religion

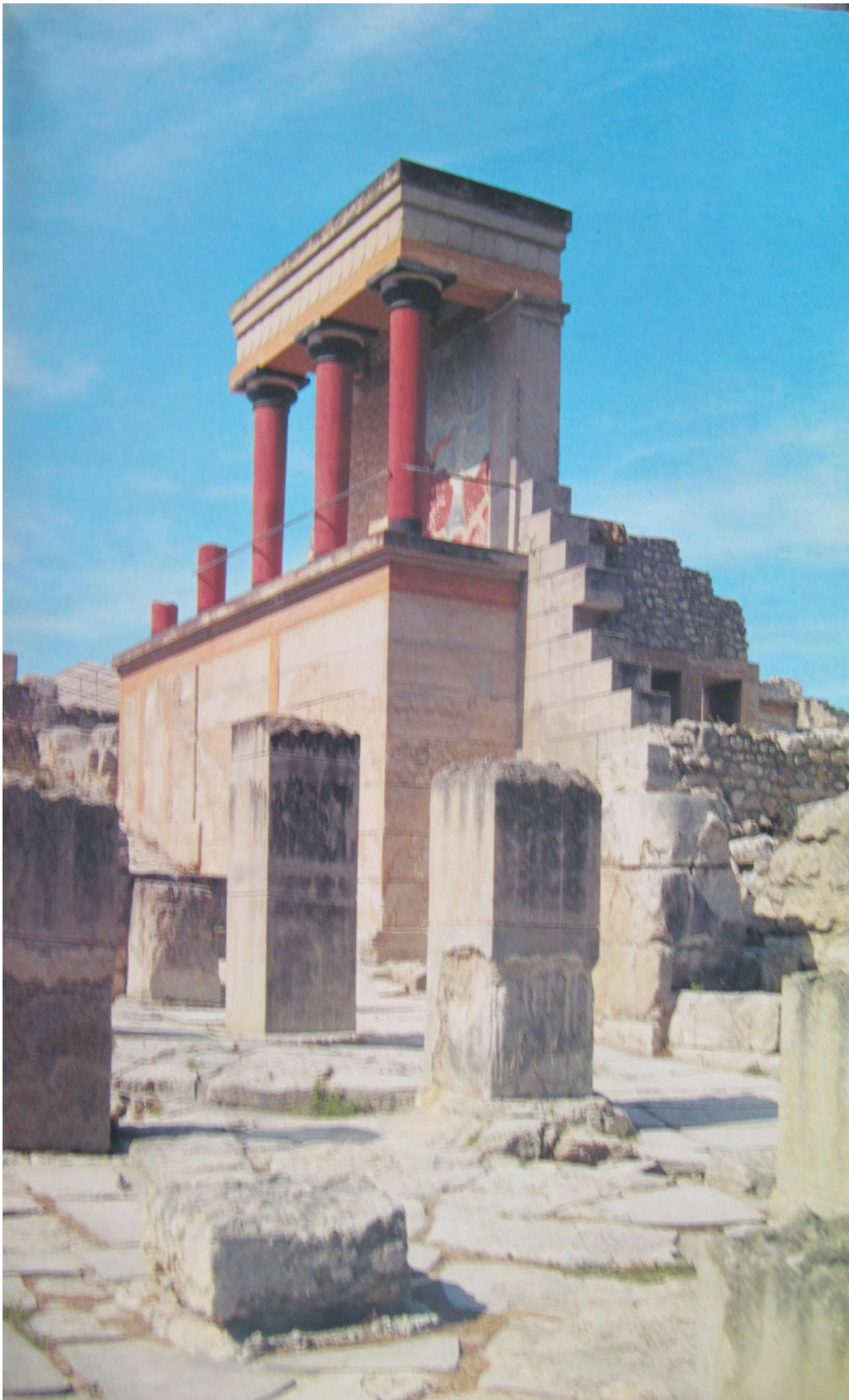


Fig.30 Part of the north side of the palace at Knossos.

The Cretan religion offered a lot in shaping the Greek beliefs about gods and demons. Certainly we should not forget on this matter that the pre-Hellenic population of Greece was closely related to the Cretans, and that always the culture of indigenous inhabitants affected the foreigners. Very clear is the naturalistic character of Cretan religion, but also the strong presence of the female element in it is remarkable. Primary position holds the Great Mother, but also the Goddess of Snakes and the Mistress of Animals (Potnia Theron). In caves, but also in household sanctuaries of the palaces offered sacrifices to these deities. Between the various religious symbols, the horns and the double ax have special significance. The origin of the horns of consecration is uncertain. The double ax occurs in Asia Minor, between the Hittites, as well as in Northern Mesopotamia as a symbol of the god Teschub, who is the God of the storm. The external image of Cretan Religion is completed by the presence of various demons and monsters, resembling similar forms of Hittite tradition, as well as from the worship of the column and the tree. But the content and the deepest essence of this religion remain undetermined to us regarding the most of their details.⁷⁵

The cults of the peaks started shortly before 2000BCE. The rites were held at the beginning at the countryside, within an area surrounded by rocks⁷⁶. Later, during the half of the Middle Minoan era they constructed buildings of carved stone, with two or three aisles, within which there were idols and altars.

The great number of religious findings should not surprise because the Minoans were religious people⁷⁷. The signs of worship are everywhere observable. The religion played an important role in their lives and this is why they invoked the divine in each of their action. The pictorial frescoes have always religious significance and were found together with other indications of worship, physical-athletic activities and acrobatic exercises, which were held for cult reasons connected with each other in direct relation.

⁷⁵ Bengtson, Hermann, *'Griechische Geschitchte'*, München ©1969, Greek Edition, pag.45-46.

⁷⁶ Faure, P., *'La Vie quotidienne en Crete au temps de Minos'*, ed.Hachette, Paris ©1973, Greek edition, Athens © 1990, pag.186.

⁷⁷ Faure, P., *'La Vie quotidienne en Crete au temps de Minos'*, ed.Hachette, Paris ©1973, pag.126.

According to Evans⁷⁸, in the scene depicted on 'Ring of Nestor' appears a chthonic Deity⁷⁹ that existed before the Minoan civilization and which the people of ancient Crete developed into a mystical faith and worship. Based on his excavations real evidence can be found on the nature of Minoan deity. Sources⁸⁰, myths and names are included into a mystical idea, the Virgin-Mother. Numerous are the tributes and figurines, that have been found, to honor Mother Earth, a female deity who appears in different locations, in different times in women's lives.

The Minoan Religion of the Cretan civilization was mainly devoted to a great deity; monotheism existed and was continued with the Mycenaean civilization. The subsequent religion became polytheistic⁸¹. There were at least four different names, which were referred to the chthonic deity of pre-Hellenic Crete: Rea, Vrytomarta, Diktynna, and Afaia. The archaeological excavation revealed the Mistress of Animals⁸² (Potnia Theron) with lions, holding snakes or birds in a hieratic situation. The character of the chthonic deity⁸³ is analyzed as follows: it burns and destroys and is interested for its believers and their souls, looking after for their transition to another world.

The goddess of snakes proves the combination of the terrestrial life and death, with all the chances of worship and dedication to women's loyalty and allegiance. The mystery of birth linked with the mystery of reproduction of nature created the Great Goddess, Mother of the gods, lifeblood, and is usually depicted with bare breasts of which derives the saving milk of life. This is the Minoan religion, the goddess of chthonic Powers⁸⁴ the one who tames the snakes (Fig.31).

⁷⁸ Leveque, P., 'L'aventure Grecque', Armand Colin editeur, Paris ©1964, pag.22-26.

⁷⁹ Evans, A., 'The palace of Minos at Knossos', Vol. III, Macmillan and Co., London ©1930, pag.147 and Sir A. Evans, 'The Ring of Nestor': a glimpse into the Minoan after-world, and a sepulchral treasure of...By Publisher London: Macmillan and Co., limited, 1925.

⁸⁰ Alexiou, St., 'Minoan Civilization', Iraklion ©1969, pag.98-99

⁸¹ Scanlon, T., 'Greek and Roman Athletics', Ares Publishers Chicago (MCMLxxxiv), INC, University of California, Riverside.

⁸² Warren, P., 'The Aegean Civilization', New York ©1989, pag.99

⁸³ Mouratidis, I., 'History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)', Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag. 63.

⁸⁴ Nilsson, P., M., 'Geschichte der Griechischen Religion, die Hellenistische und römische Zeit', Verlag C. H. Beck, München ©1988, pag.44-48.



Fig.31 The goddess holding the snakes.

Minoan religion had and religious symbols⁸⁵ (as it was mentioned above), present in the Museum of Iraklion in Crete, as the cross, the double ax, a pair of sacred horns, and pots of religious use - the *rhyta* resembling shells and animal heads.

Moreover, Evans's excavations showed that the cult of the dead was practiced as it appears in the performances of the famous painted sarcophagus of Agia Triada, on which scenes of sacrifices to the dead are depicted.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Alexiou, St., *'Minoan Civilization'*, Iraklion ©1969, pag.98-99.

⁸⁶ Tsountas, Ch., *'History of the Ancient Greek Art'*, Publishing Company, Athens ©1928, pag.24-28.

Besides the main deity, the Minoans worshiped and other gods mainly martial⁸⁷ and many demons with heads of bulls, birds, asses, springs and forests. Undoubtedly the caves are connected with places of worship and stories, like the birth of Zeus, held a great sanctity long before the coming of the Greeks.

Both excavations and myths lead us to the conclusion and demonstrate that there was a chthonic deity⁸⁸, the Mother Earth, Mother Nature. The character of the goddess Athena agrees in many versions with the character and the sanctity of the Great Goddess of Crete⁸⁹.

Both the Minoan religion and the similar rites of other elements (the rest of the Greeks), had affected the whole process of worship and of the other ancient Greek mysteries with the earliest the one of the Eleusinian. Their basic worldview-teaching was the origin and birth of the humanity. The Initiation of the purification process aimed at the initiates of the offenses that they had committed against the divine law, but also against the laws of the State to have a better fate in their other life, after death.⁹⁰

The oracles were protecting the Games and sport in general. The religion had taken under its protection the athletic competition (*Xenophon, Anabasis IV, 8, 26*) and in many ways strengthened the feeling of the athletes-heroes:

Xenophon, Anabasis, IV, 8, 25-26, around 427-355 B.C.E:

.. After this they made ready the sacrifice which they had vowed and a sufficient number of oxen had come to them so that they could pay their thank-offerings to Zeus for deliverance, to Heracles for guidance, and to the other gods according as they had vowed. They instituted also athletic games on the mountain side, just where they were encamped; and they chose Dracontius, a Spartan, who had been exiled from home as a boy because he had accidentally killed another boy with the stroke of a

⁸⁷ Sakellariou, T., 'Greece and Civilization', Edit. Sakellariou Ch. & Son, Athens ©1947, pag.34.

⁸⁸ Alexiou, St., 'Minoan Civilization', Iraklion ©1969, pag.121

⁸⁹ Nilsson, P., M., 'Minoan-Mycenean Religion, and Its Survival in Greek Religion' (Lund: Gleerup) Revised 2nd ed. ©1950, pag.403, 471-485.

⁹⁰ Parke, W. H., 'Greek Oracles', Athens © 1979, pag.19-24, 37-40.

dagger, to look out for a race-course and to act as manager of the games. [26] When, accordingly, the sacrifice had been completed, they turned over the hides to Dracontius and bade him lead the way to the place he had fixed upon for his race-course. He pointed out the precise spot where they chanced to be standing, and said, "This hill is superb for running, wherever you please." "How, then," they said, "can men wrestle on ground so hard and overgrown as this is?" And he replied, "The one that is thrown will get hurt a bit more."

The chthonic deities symbolized the chthonic cosmogenic reproductive powers. In the 'ring of Nestor'⁹¹ in Minoan Crete we have the divinity of nature or the earth that purifies people or arrange for their passage to another life⁹². Other rings like the 'ring of Minos'⁹³, Epiphany is shown, the tree of life, the ship, indicating the worship of Athena or Demeter.

The Minoans probably had the same ceremonies as those of Eleusis, which would work in complete privacy and respect for their worship, fact proved by the Evans' excavations⁹⁴ in the palace of Knossos, where they were found large jars, and some larger than human height, full of barley and cereals, which are used both for food and for sacrifices to the Goddess of Nature.

Many historians⁹⁵ believe that the Phaistos' disk (Fig. 32a-b) symbolizes religious hymns for the goddess of Nature. In addition, the cult of Athena began from prehistoric Crete⁹⁶. She was worshiped as goddess of agriculture and arboriculture. She was called Taurovolos or Tauropolos and they worshiped her with sacrifices.

⁹¹ Evans, A., *'Essays in Aegean Archaeology'*. *Ring of Nestor*, pag.48-70. *'The Ring of Nestor': A Glimpse into the Minoan Afterworld'*, JHS 45, London ©1925, pag.1-75

⁹² Alexiou, St., *'Minoan Civilization'*, Iraklion ©1969, pag.128.

⁹³ Evans, A., *'The palace of Minos at Knossos'*, Vol. IV, part II, Macmillan and Co., London ©1930, *'Discovery of Ring of Minos'*, pag.948.

⁹⁴ Platon, N., *'Crete'*, editions Nagel, London ©1966, pag.23-26.

⁹⁵ Page, D., *'Iliad and History'*, 4th edition, Publisher Papadima, Athens ©1999, pag.213-215.

⁹⁶ Nilsson, P., M., *'Geschichte der Griechischen Religion, die Hellenistische und römische Zeit'*, Verlag C. H. Beck, München ©1988, pag. 97 and Papathanasopoylos, G., *'Neolithic and Cycladic Civilization, "Melissa" Publishing House, ephor of Antiquities, Athens ©1981, pag.31.*



Fig.32a The one side of Phaistos' disk.



Fig.32b The second site of Phaistos' disk.

In the Great Eastern Hall of the Palace of Knossos, where was placed a colossal female statue of the goddess, should be owned, according to Evans⁹⁷, the series of the murals that depict combative, athletic scenes and represent the most great prosperity of the Minoan sculpture, physical and sporting, and cultural life.

Undoubtedly sacred character had the activities with the bull which were part of the celebration of spring and which will be discussed below. These contests were called *bullfights* in proportion to the Spanish, but in fact in the Cretan *tauropaidias* there was no battle with the bull neither the animal was killed during the contest. Perhaps at a special ceremony, after the demonstration, the bull was sacrificed, who, after all, for this purpose had been captured. But also other types of sporting events took place during the days of the sacred celebrations. On a relief rhyton from Agia

⁹⁷ Evans, A., *The palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol. IV, part II, Macmillan and Co., London ©1935, pag.209-218.

Triada, in some seals and miniature frescoes from Tylosos is depicted boxing. We do not know if these activities had some meaning religious or were merely a spectacular demonstration on the occasion of the celebration. It is however characteristic that in Egypt similar events held as a representation of Osiris victory over its adversaries.⁹⁸

Religion was the result of different parameters in complete connection with the historical evolution of the Greek tribes, a fact that is indicated by the number of deities, the ways of worship and performance of ritual practices.⁹⁹

The formation of a religious framework with festive events, rites and rituals are strictly interwoven with everyday life. The ancient festivals and sacred rituals in a large part are related to agriculture and farming. The return of worship with popular features provides the necessary information to maintain and operate a religious practice which we can barely first conceive and secondly to know unlike the clearly structured hierarchy of major deities, concerning the elements that compose the environment.

The excavation activity in Crete and especially in places where it was observed daily activity revealed a lot of artworks that are important examples of daily life. All findings reinforce the view that the Minoans were interested in exercise, in competitions, in dance performance and for a significantly large number of activities.

The devotional mood towards the Cretan goddess is expressed with dances, competitions and other devotional practices¹⁰⁰. Concerning the activity of dance it is argued that is an expression of worship, a position that is supported by the large number of findings and the positions that they were located¹⁰¹. In Crete's Minoan period the activity of dance is growing since the beginning of the second millennium and has been linked with both the devotional mood of the Cretans as well as with the rituals related with the promotion and the divine epiphany of the Minoan goddess.

⁹⁸ Alexiou, St., *'Minoan Civilization'*, Iraklion ©1969, pag.116-117.

⁹⁹ Martin R. - Metzger H., *'The Religion of Ancient Greeks'*, Publ. Kardamitsa, Athens ©1992, pag.11.

¹⁰⁰ Giannakis, Th., *'Physical Education and Sport'*, Athens ©1980, pag.115.

¹⁰¹ Alexiou, St., *'Minoan Civilization'*, Iraklion ©1964, pag.117.

In the ancient Greek environment from early times are encountered worship and rituals associated to the far side Neolithic past. The most part of these acts had chthonic character and the athletic competitions which were conducted form the chariot approach of the divine¹⁰². The athletic competitions held in an environment loaded with special symbols under the protection of the divine and the participants became receivers of divine intervention¹⁰³. In ancient world celebrations are taking place within which competitions are conducted. The festive events which took place in various locations had honorary character to a deity or hero, and the whole migration process to watch or participate in these activities had character pilgrimage.

All physical and athletic activities were associated with the religion¹⁰⁴ and were taking place for one reason: the belief in the Great Goddess, the euphoria of the earth. The whole ideological edifice of ancient sports and contests were based on the religious feeling. In Minoan Crete, the bull-leaping ceremonies and other activities were a way of demonstrating the city, the Gods, the institutions and the political regimes.

The ancient Greek world had the impression that the divine was very close, since the gods had the same characteristics as ordinary mortals differentiating only in immortality. The common anthropomorphic characteristics of gods and common mortals acted as a catalyst in order the sporting activities to be connected with religion and the athletic competitions to form an expression of honor and worship. The ancient religious frame undoubtedly played a significant role in the long period of celebration of athletic festivals supporting the athletic ideal. The athletic activity, which has been an integral part of religious festivals, significantly reinforced in the minds of the Greeks putting the form of the athlete to the highest step of the podium in the ancient Greek society.

¹⁰²Giannakis, Th., *'To chthonio stoixeio tw'n arxaiwn epitafiw'n agwnwn'*, PhD Theses, Athens ©1987, pag.76.

¹⁰³ Kefalidou, E., *'Nikhths'*, Thessaloniki ©1996, pag.77, n.142.

¹⁰⁴ Snodgrass, A., *'Early Greek Armour and Weapons'*, Aldine Publishing Co, Edinburgh University Press, Chicago ©1964, pag.23-29.

In conclusion, from the above, it is indicated that all the actions of the people of Minoan Crete were based on religion. All physical and sports activities, all their movements had strong the element of a cult¹⁰⁵ that was expanded throughout Greece¹⁰⁶-or otherwise a “common”¹⁰⁷ cult with the rest of Greece, indicating that they were all Greeks¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁵ Barnett, D., R., *The Sea Peoples*, Cambridge, U.P. ©1969, Vol.II, Ch.28.

¹⁰⁶ Nilsson, P., M., *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion, die Hellenistische und römische Zeit*, Verlag C. H. Beck, München ©1988, pag.31.

¹⁰⁷ Hammond, N. L. G., *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.*, second edition, Oxford University at the Clarendon Press, ©1967, pag. 68.

¹⁰⁸ Branigan, K., *Pre-Palatial, The Foundations of Palatial Crete, A survey of Crete in the early Bronze Age*, published by Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam ©1988, (first published 1970, London), pag.109-113.

2.2.3 Daily life and physical-athletic activities

Evans¹⁰⁹ argues that the Cretans were spread not only in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean but also they reached Thrace from the one side and till England on the other side. However there are no sources and we cannot draw with our imagination's help such conclusions. During the Minoan civilization, archaeologists and historians believe¹¹⁰ that Crete, with its ships, as a great naval power, communicated with Cyrene, the Cyclades, the Argolis, Egypt and Canaan (Herodotus 1.173):

Herodotus, 1.173, around 485-425 B.C.E:

.. Such are their ways. The Lycians were from Crete in ancient times (for in the past none that lived on Crete were Greek). [2] Now there was a dispute in Crete about the royal power between Sarpedon and Minos, sons of Europa; Minos prevailed in this dispute and drove out Sarpedon and his partisans; who, after being driven out, came to the Milyan land in Asia. What is now possessed by the Lycians was in the past Milyan, and the Milyans were then called Solymi. [3] For a while Sarpedon ruled them, and the people were called Termilae, which was the name that they had brought with them and that is still given to the Lycians by their neighbors; but after Lycus son of Pandion came from Athens—banished as well by his brother, Aegeus—to join Sarpedon in the land of the Termilae, they came in time to be called Lycians after Lycus. [4] Their customs are partly Cretan and partly Carian. But they have one which is their own and shared by no other men: they take their names not from their fathers but from their mothers, [5] and when one is asked by his neighbor who he is, he will say that he is the son of such a mother, and rehearse the mothers of his mother. Indeed, if a female citizen marries a slave, her children are considered pure-blooded; but if a male citizen, even the most prominent of them, takes an alien wife or concubine, the children are dishonored...

¹⁰⁹ Evans, A., 'The palace of Minos at Knossos', Vol. I, The Neolithic and Early and Middle Minoan Ages, Macmillan and Co., Limited St. Martin's str., London ©1930, pag.50-51.

¹¹⁰ Golz, 'Histoire Grecque', Alfred A. Knopf, ©1926, pag.38.

According to the ancient sources (Herodotus, 1.173), we can assume that the first fleet of Knossos occupied the nearest islands and then moved northern. The Cretans gave a great impetus to the development of the trade and to the war-predatory raids¹¹¹. With the improvement and development of shipbuilding were rulers of the sea (Thucydides 1.4) for centuries throughout the Mediterranean and the Aegean, while Knossos turns into a big and powerful center:

Thucydides 1.4, around 460-398B.C.E:

..4. And the first person known to us by tradition as having established a navy is Minos. He made himself master of what is now called the Hellenic sea, and ruled over the Cyclades, into most of which he sent the first colonies, expelling the Carians and appointing his own sons governors; and thus did his best to put down piracy in those waters, a necessary step to secure the revenues for his own use..

However it is undeniable fact that in Crete started to create civilization in a very early stage, (the origin of which must be sought or in the influence of the Pelasgians or in the performance of indigenous elements of ancient Eteocretans; they invoked this name in order to be distinguished apparently from the coming Pelasgians¹¹²). The excavations in Crete proved that over time a large and great culture had been developed, flourishing and declining on different variations, from the Neolithic till its last phase of its history. Around the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C.E the settlements and the cities in Crete are increased and later on two cities appeared: Knossos and Phaistos, in which magnificent and colossal palaces are erected. There, at the crossroads of different civilizations and cultural currents, where they met the Egyptian, Eastern, North African, Libyan and other Mediterranean influences, the Minoan civilization was formed and the first physical activities transformed into athletic; they were established as part of Minoan festivals to honor Nature and Gods, demons and the dead.

The historical research has shown that the Olympic Games attract its origins most likely of the Late Minoan-Mycenaean period (after the 13th century.) The fighting temperament of Indo-European tribes that inhabited in Greek area, in combination

¹¹¹ Sergejev, S. Vladimir, 'History of Ancient Greece', Athens ©1960, pag.99.

¹¹² Edith, H., E., 'Hall Excavations in Eastern Crete', London ©1963, pag.48-49.

with the great athletic tradition of the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean prepared the ground and led to the major sporting revolution that occurred later in Greece, after an interval of silence of civilization at the early historical times¹¹³.

During the Pre-Palatial era is observed simultaneous introduction of copper from Anatolia and Egypt on the island which was used to make weapons and tools. A new era begins characterized by the quick development of shipping and the external relations. The contact with Egypt, which was more developed culturally, but also with Asia Minor, Syria and through it with the Mesopotamia, influenced advantageously the evolution of the Minoan civilization, but without being totally original, indigenous civilization of Crete. At the beginning of the period it's observed a strong survival of sub-Neolithic elements in the ceramic and in the use of obsidian of Melos. The presence of marble figurines of Cycladic type also shows relations with the Cyclades, where there are similar types, but sometimes much larger, figurines. The dead are still buried in cavernous cavities, it also appear the built vaulted tombs. Caves are used as houses during this period but at Ierapetra latest relics of settlements, which prove a great progress. Progress is being made in pottery as well. Moreover, the development of shipping and the contact with Egypt allowed to Cretans to learn the technique of the construction of stone vessels. Later on and during the pre-Palatial period seals appear as well, which are mainly used for securing boxes and doors. At the end of Pre-Palatial era, Crete provides an image of peace, prosperity and wealth. Exports of Cretan products such as oil, olives, herd flocks, sheep, goats and pigs are continuing to ensure copper, gold, silver and ivory.¹¹⁴

During the Old- Palatial era, around 2000 B.C.E, an important event took place. In Knossos (Fig.34), Phaistos (Fig.35) and Malia (Fig.36), the first large buildings are erected, the *palaces*. The foundation of palaces was certainly a result of the creation of strong central powers in these rich areas. It is obvious that great power was concentrated in the hands of once local princes, who are being transformed into real kings founding dynasties. It is no coincidence that all three palaces are located in the most fertile plains of the island.

¹¹³ Valavanis, Panos, 'Sanctuaries and Games in ancient Greece, Olympia, Delphoi, Isthmia, Nemea, Athens', publishing Capon, Athens © 2004, pag.17.

¹¹⁴ Alexiou, St., '*Minoan Civilization*', Iraklion ©1969, pag.13-26.

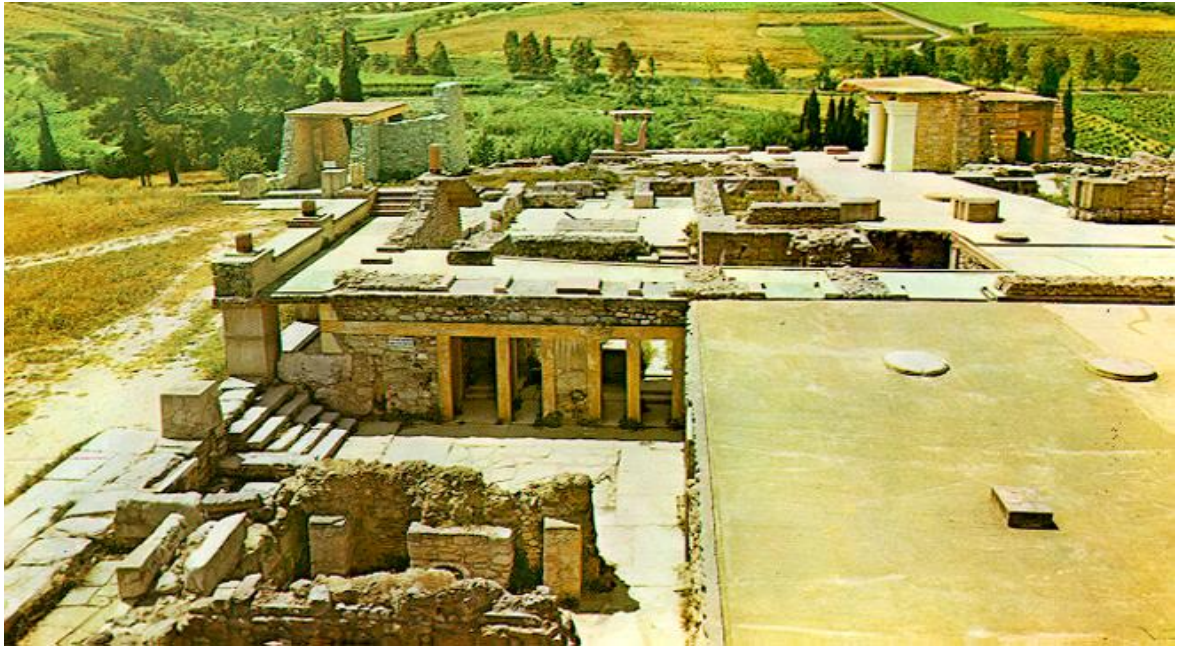


Fig.34 The palace of Knossos.

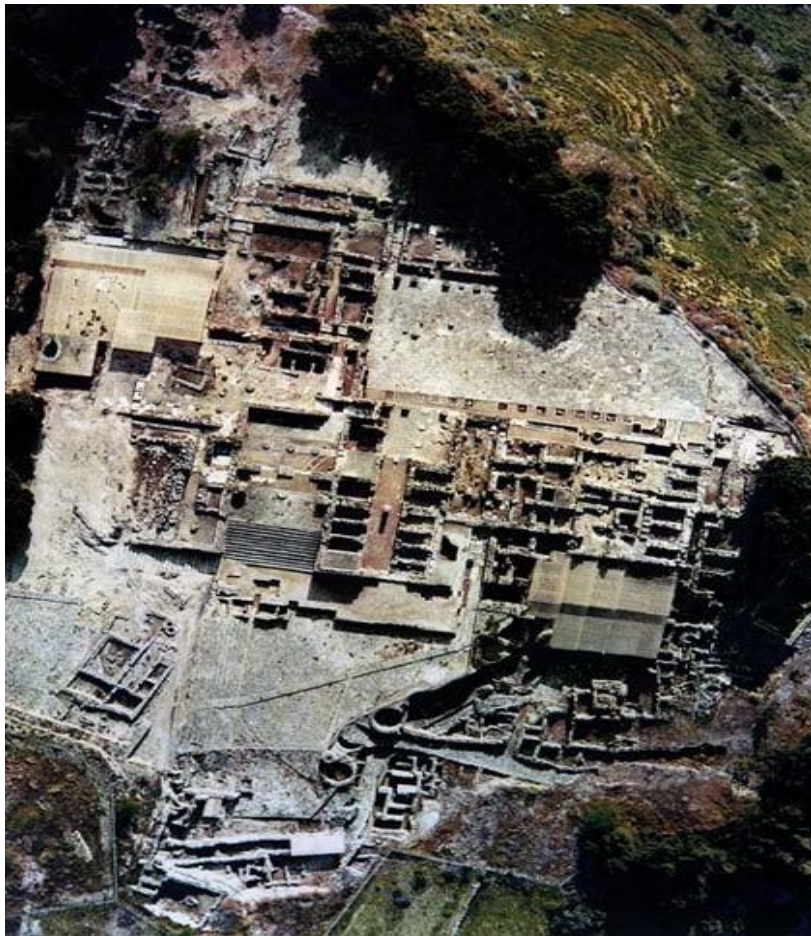


Fig.35 The palace of Phaistos.



Fig. 36 The palace of Malia.

The kings are undoubtedly large landowners and this is evidenced by the extensive stores of agricultural products, grain, wine and oil. The Minoan society already had a large and organized labor, including servants according to the signs of the new palaces. The first linear script, is being developed, specimens of which were found in the palaces of Phaistos. Furthermore evolution is observed in the construction of the tombs. Now ossuaries are being used while most common are becoming the burials in the urn and jars. Sculptured graves appeared at this period. The progress at the architecture is combined with a rapid development of pottery. A New ceramic style is created in the palaces of Knossos and Phaistos by craftsmen who belong to the palace workshops. The seal is progressing rapidly as well as the metalwork. The brilliance of the Minoan civilization is now noticeable and outside of Crete. The kings of Knossos have already laid the foundation of the Minoan thalassocracy with the Minoan stations in the Aegean, Egypt and Syria, Cyprus as evidenced by the pottery found in these areas. Suddenly, around 1700 B.C.E, a terrible disaster hit and the three palaces. Probably, due to an earthquake or to raids of barbarians from abroad, perhaps Greek tribes. However, these tribes are not so strong in order to consolidate the island.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Alexiou, St., *'Minoan Civilization'*, Iraklion ©1969, pag.27-35 and pag.37-47.

The disaster did not lead to interruption of life. The palaces were restored immediately in the three main centers and the Minoan period entered the livelihood of its peak (Era of the New Palaces). The ruins of the previous palaces leveled and covered and on those new majestic structures were raised. The general prosperity is revealed by the creation of private rich 'Megara' and the development of populous cities. The palaces are now decorated with vivid, tactile paintings using inedible colors, which depict different themes with different styles (Fig.37, 38). Around the same time, 1600 B.C.E 1600, the *miniature paintings* become common, the themes of which are religious celebrations (Fig.39).¹¹⁶



Fig.37 Fresco of the "Lily Prince".

¹¹⁶ Alexiou, St., 'Minoan Civilization', Iraklion ©1969, pag.27-35 and pag.37-47.

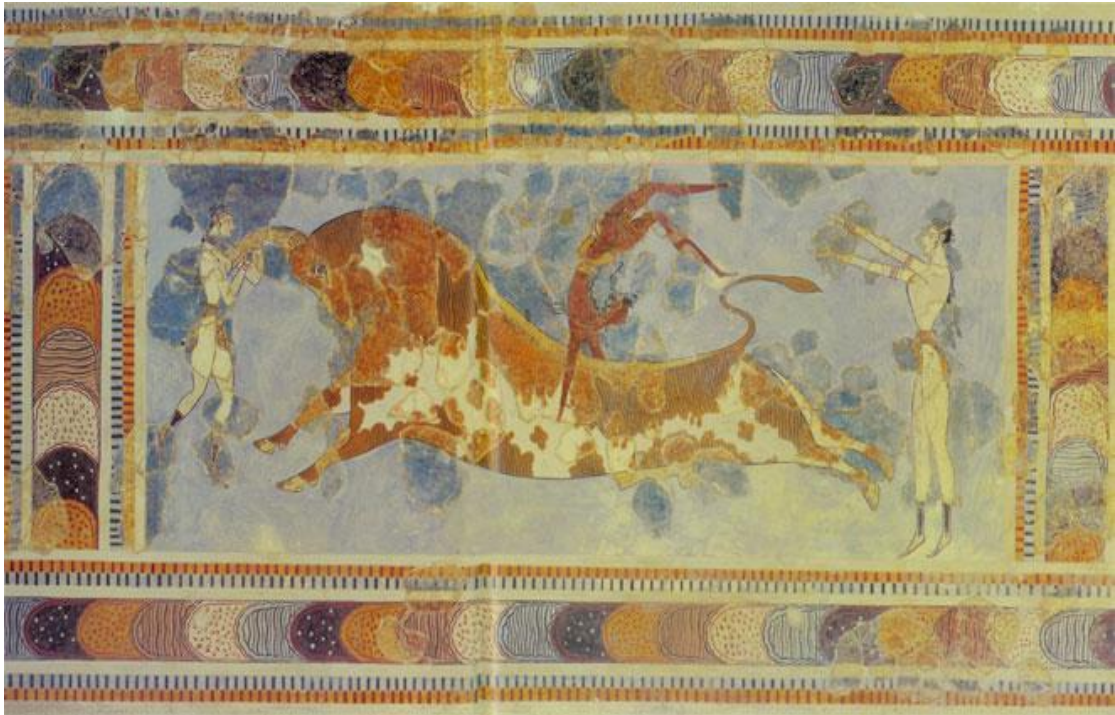


Fig.38 Bull-leapers fresco.



Fig.39 Dance performance in a sanctuary at a sacred forest.

Shortly, around 1600-1500 B.C.E, scenes of natural life are common as well (Fig.40, 41).

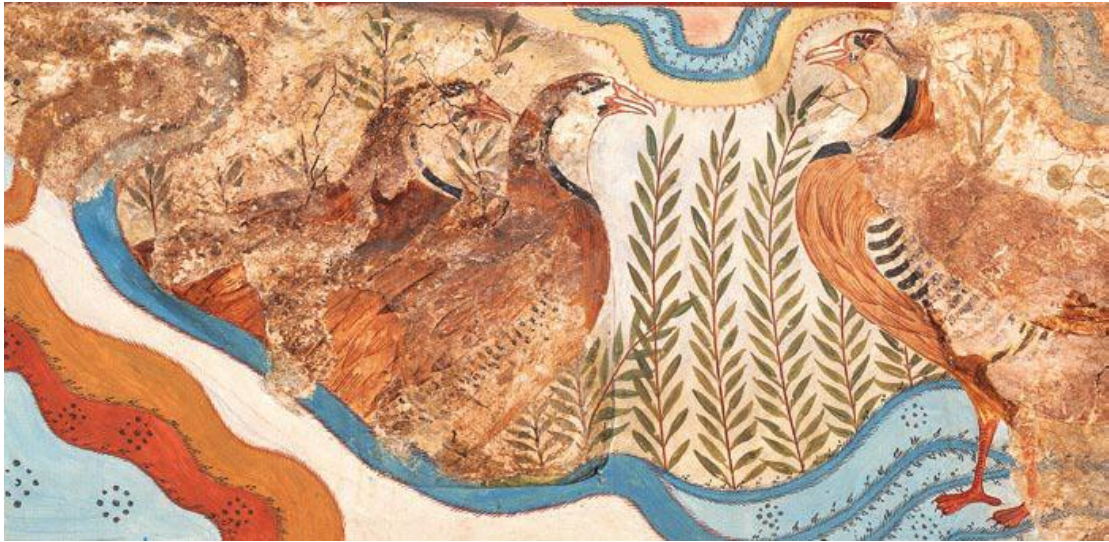


Fig.40 Detail from the painting of 'partridge fresco'.



Fig.41 "Krokosyllektis (saffron picker)".

Especially now the plastic flourishes. The Cretans, as in previous periods, prefer to manufacture small figurines of faience, gold, ivory, copper and rare of stone. Among the masterpieces of the era is included the bull-leaper from Knossos (Fig.42). New peak is now ahead for the pottery, metalwork and seal.



Fig.42 Bull-leaper.

The statuette with the bull-leaper and many of the findings with athletic activities shows that sports and the athletic spirit existed in Crete and in the Mediterranean during the Proto-Minoan era, long before the Olympic Games were institutionalized in Greece in the 8th century B.C.E. A number of literary and pictorial sources from Egypt and Mesopotamia indicate the existence of such physical and athletic activities, perhaps not yet as an established sport activity as it will be in Greece later.

Despite the multi-expressed contention that the sport culture was highly developed in Crete, the main sources of the history of sport focus, after a closest observation, on *boxing* and *bullfighting*. Beyond this critical discussion it should be however recognized the very good representation of these two events.

Boxing

Boxing, which here shows its age, is depicted in a relief frieze vessel of a ritual use (rhyton) from Agia Triada, made in the second half of the 16th century B.C.E (Fig.43). The performances of contesting character which run the four zones depict, in at least 2 of these, pairs of boxers who have been involved in various scenes of contests. The scenes of falling into the ground after some blow dominate on the vessel. The *athlete* that override, has thrown his opponent to the ground. The athletes

of the upper strip can be considered boxers as well. All athletes who are represented on the vessel wear a protective apron. The boxers of the second zone have the specificity that they wear protective helmets with chin strips, which suggests that the hits were very effective. Also the young athletes of the lower tier may belong to a younger age group. Finally, the third tier shows turbulent motif bullfighting. Others boxing scenes from Crete are testified as well. In fact the recent interpretation of well-known parts of artifacts of Knossos leads to the conclusion that this issue apparently decorated large plaster wall reliefs of the palaces.¹¹⁷



Fig.43 Boxer rhyton.

The most famous scene of boxing in the Aegean is a fresco from Thera. From the eruption of the volcano- around the 2nd half of the 2nd century B.C.E - on the island it was seriously damaged but it was saved. The mural depicts two boxers of aristocratic origin - an indication that the origin of the athletes in Minoan Crete remained aristocratic- with curly hair in childhood (Fig.44). They wear only belt and they are

¹¹⁷ Decker, Wolfgang, *Sport in der griechischen Antike: vom minoischen Wettkampf bis zu den Olympischen Spielen*, (Muenchen ©1995), Greek Edition ©2004, pag.30-33.

armed only with one boxing glove, which they wear on their right fist. N.Marinatou considers that the scene, which is surrounded by a herd of restless antelopes, represents ceremonial binary contests, which aim to express the games of power in nature.¹¹⁸

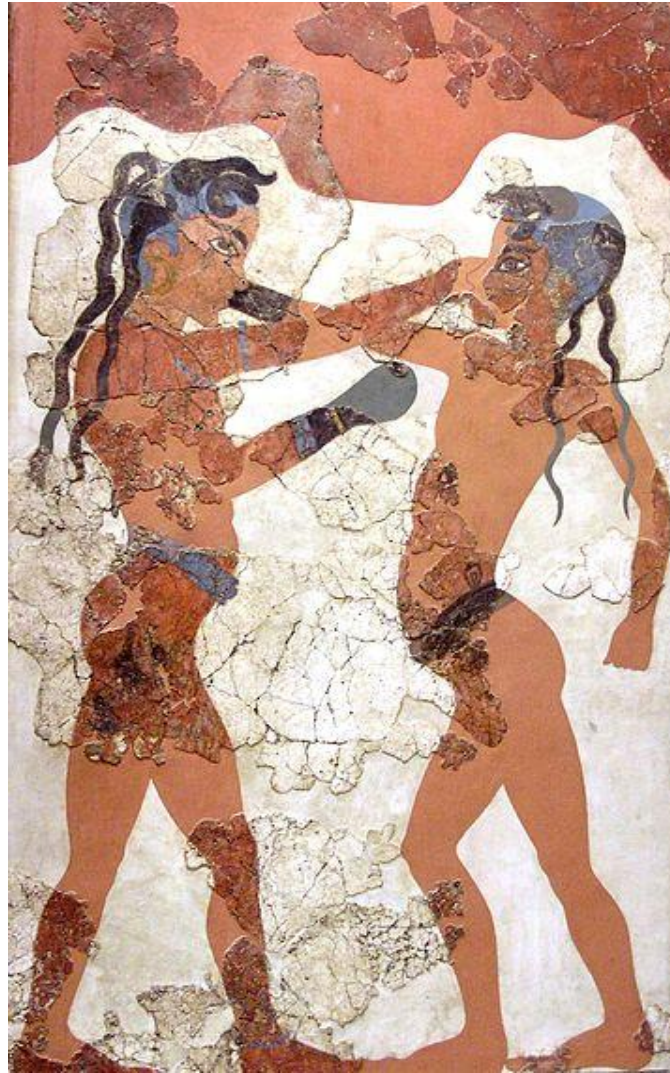


Fig.44 The Boxers.

In Minoan Crete, we find the model of use of the fist for boxing, the protection of the upper arm with gloves and the method where the left hand is used defense and the right to attack.¹¹⁹

These blows show a developed knowledge and technique, like many of the movements or positions are still used today. Consequently there was a daily practice

¹¹⁸ Marinatos, 'Excavations at Thera', Athens © 1971, University of Athens, pag.47-48.

¹¹⁹ Sakellariou, T., 'Greece and Sports', Publish. Sakellariou & Sons, Athens © 1947, pag.24.

and training which inevitably created high skills and readiness in the unarmed and the armed conflict. Boxing¹²⁰ was actually a difficult sport, which required special preparation of the athletes and close cooperation with the trainers, something that does not apply in Minoan Crete¹²¹, since the presence of the trainer does not exist in any event.

The sum of the New-Palatial sealants motifs confirmed the overall picture of the very rare presence of war scenes or performances that depict warfare. These sealing depictions verify that the representations with fight scenes or duel belong to the Late Bronze Age in Crete. Thereby they offer a foothold for questioning and review of the expressed and widely accepted view that the Minoans in contrast to the warlike Mycenaeans were absolutely peaceful people, because the war scenes were not a subject for illustration. The belief that Minoan Crete did not involve in wars and hostilities has led to the view that the under consideration wrestling and duel scenes should not be interpreted as representations of some kind warfare but competitions and athletic activities.

But such interpretations are affected by the supposed non-aggressive nature of the Minoans and by the tendency to appreciate the entire Minoan illustration as a set of religious scenes. In each case, either we realize these scenes as sports events¹²², either as a real scene of boxing and attack, there are in fact the depiction of sports activities, which regulates above all competitive Spirit, as they require special physical strength, agility, dexterity and skills and aim on excellence of someone from the opponents to gain credit or consolidate his position in society and towards the deity that is worshiped.

¹²⁰ Evans, A., *The palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol. I, The Neolithic and Early and Middle Minoan Ages, Macmillan and Co., Limited St. Martin's str., London ©1930, pag.502-504.

¹²¹ Mouratidis, I., *History of physical education (with elements of philosophy)*, Thessaloniki: Christodoulides and Melenikos Publishers © 1992, pag.36.

¹²² Xanthoudidou, S.A., *The Minoan Civilization*, Publ.Sakellariou, Athens©1904, pag.95.

In addition, these contests had official and sacred character¹²³, as a demonstration of power and skill in honor of the dead heroes, as a symbol of victory of the good over evil, as apotropaic act.

Bull fighting

Without a doubt the characteristic event was the Cretan *bull fighting* (Fig.38, 42 and 45). As Wolfgang Decker¹²⁴ mentions, “whether are appearing as a decorating theme on rings (Fig.46) or seals, as relief wall or plastic shaped, the performance is complete of acrobatic elegance. Only the fact that they are depicted on the vessel of Agia Triada, surrounded by scenes of boxing, is enough to prove their athletic character. Common point to all performances is the man, who is in an acrobatic position on a bull”. And he continues “according to recent research, one can no longer insist on the position that women participated in this dangerous cult game. The explanation of the course of the movement of the intended athletic performance escorted by the bull remained for a long time defined and blighted by the initial interpretation that was given by Sir Arthur Evans, the excavator of Knossos, in the large plaster relief with representation of bullfight of these palaces.



Fig.45 Minoan Bull-leaper at the British Museum. Bronze group of a bull and acrobat, around 1550-1450 BC.

¹²³ Tsountas, Chr., ‘*History of Ancient Greek Art*’, Publ.Sipsa&Papakonstantinou, Athens © 1957, pag.73, 88.

¹²⁴ Decker, Wolfgang, ‘*Sport in der griechischen Antike: vom minoischen Wettkampf bis zu den Olympischen Spielen*’, (Muenchen ©1995), Greek Edition ©2004, pag.33-37.



Fig.46 Minoan ring with bull-leaping scene

The explanation of the course of the movement of the intended athletic performance escorted by the bull remained for a long time defined and blighted by the initial interpretation that was given by Sir Arthur Evans, the excavator of Knossos, in the large plaster relief with representation of bullfight of these palaces. J.Chadwick along with M.Ventris, the decipherer of the Linear B, identifies precisely the problem by writing that the requested in bull-leaping seems to be this: the bull-leaper should cause the bull to attack him while in that critical moment he would jump high in the air so that the bull could pass, by running, under him without injuring him. At the same time the oblique crossing of the animal, probably in the form of a simple lateral jump, appears to be within the possible”.

Important role in the overall preparation of the bull-leapers played the familiarity from their childhood¹²⁵. This is confirmed by representations¹²⁶ with bull-leaping on seal stones of 1600 B.C.E., something that brings us back to the modern familiarity of children with short gym equipment and the acquisition of kinetic dexterities. The support on the horns of the bull and subsequently the swing and leaping, resembles

¹²⁵ Decker W., Herb M., Hbo Bildatlas, ‘*Zum Sport in Alten Agypten*’, N.York, Koln, ©1994, pag.22-30.

¹²⁶ Marinatos, Sp., *The ancient Cretan Civilization*, Publ.Sergiadou, Athens ©1927, pag.60.

the exercises of parallel bars especially the exit with leaping at the end of the gymnastic organ, but also the exit with jump in support when entering the parallel bars.

Moreover the Minoan bull-leaping has nothing to do with the killing of the bull, but with the struggle between man and bull, in which the strength of the bull is compensated by the skill of the athlete. Several ceramic seals found at Knossos, show various ways to perform the jump over the bull. Both men and women¹²⁷ took part in this event, which was considered festive religious activity of the Minoans and which apart from the ritual character offered and entertainment.

According to Allen Guttmann¹²⁸, “young men and women leaping over the horns of a charging bull are depicted in the spectacular fresco that Evans found in what he surmised to have been the palace of the legendary King Minos, constructed, most probably around 1500 B.C.E. Girls (painted white) boldly grip the horns of the huge bull or wait to catch the boy (painted red) who is in flight over the bull’s elongated back. It is possible that the painted figures represent acrobats performing for the amusement of the court, but it is more likely that they were engaged in an initiatory ordeal or a fertility ritual. “The question”, writes Thomas Scanlon “should probably be not whether the bull games were religious, but how and to what extent the participants were conscious of a sacred dimension to the activity.” To say this is not to deny that the ritual may also have been a sports contest. Minoan cult may have been a combination of sports and religious worship to the Greek athletic festivals celebrated (much later) at Olympia, Delphi, and other sacred sites. Minoan athletes may have competed for the excitement of the contest and to pay homage to the gods. If that was so, the motivation for their feats was comparable to the motivation of a modern choral group singing Johann Sebastian Bach’s Christmas Oratorio- for the glory of the music and as a celebration of the birth of Jesus”.

Most scholars accept the performance of bull-leaping as a real aspect of the life of the Minoans and attempt to answer questions regarding the identity of the bull-leapers, if they were men or women as mentioned above, if they came from the

¹²⁷ Alexiou, S., *Minoan Civilization*, Edition B, Alexiou Bro, Iraklion, pag.49.

¹²⁸ Guttmann, Allen, *Sports: The First Five Millennia*, University of Massachusetts Press ©2007, pag. 15

aristocracy of the Minoan society or whether they were religious or merely ceremonial event. Some researchers¹²⁹ argue that the leaping constitute a sport with pure 'secular' character. Others accept that this is a form with obvious sacred character and religious significance, which derives from the hypothesis that the bull was identified with deity and worshiped by the Minoans.

Regarding the location¹³⁰ of indisputable historical documented bull-leaping, the opinions of the interpreters differentiate between them. The latest view prefers again the large central courtyard of the palace, keeping one last prejudice. Almost unanimously bull-leaping are treated as a religious ritual, some authors even speculate that followed and bull sacrifice.

Kyvistima

As a basis for the development of the bull-leaping is considered the *kyvistima*¹³¹, a form of acrobatics and originates from Egypt. The *kyvistires* were young people who performed with excellent flexibility spectacular jumps, very often risky, among mounted upright to the ground swords. From the variety and the number of the performances we conclude that it was the most popular sport. The acrobatics of *kyvistires* are for their time fabulous, as one or two at the same time acrobats handstand on the ground and perform leaps vertically lifting their body into complex combinations and clusters. Later the *kyvistires* executed spectacular demonstrations, such as those with the swords. Leaps combined with wreaths and swordsmanship seems were common spectacles in Minoan celebrations as well.

¹²⁹ Marinatos, Sp., *'The ancient Cretan Civilization'*, Publ.Sergiadou, Athens ©1927, pag. 120, 121.

¹³⁰ Decker, Wolfgang, *'Sport in der griechischen Antike: vom minoischen Wettkampf bis zu den Olympischen Spielen'*, (Muenchen ©1995), Greek Edition ©2004, pag.37.

¹³¹ Valavanis, P., *'Athla kai Epathla'*, Athens @1996, pag.14, Papaeuthimiou, K., *'Sports in Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece'*, Journal of Archaeology, Vol.4, Athens © 1982, pag.16.

Acrobatics

According to Mouratidis¹³², “during the excavations of Arthur Evans in Crete were found a cylinder and an intaglio, showing *acrobatic scenes* with two pairs of men. Is an independent acrobatic scene or a scene of training - preparation for bull-leaping? Maybe the second version is closer to the truth since the practice in this kind of activity is a significant prerequisite for the implementation of bull-leaping”.

Hunting and archery

The Minoans loved *hunting*¹³³ and nature as a need for survival and as a place of fun and exercise of various activities. Alongside hunting they practiced and *archery*¹³⁴. They had developed several means and tools for a safe and enjoyable hunting such as the use of dogs and arcs. The hunting of wild bulls was a usual activity of Cretans and it was very important to capture the bull, without the animal being injured in order to train it for the bull-leaping¹³⁵.

Two gold cups which are characterized as masterpieces of the Minoan art, depict the capture of bulls¹³⁶. In one of the two cups the hunter uses bait, a cow, to capture the live animal. The other side of the cup¹³⁷ depicts a bull being caught in nets between 2 trees, while in the same scene a hunter¹³⁸ is lying in the ground and another is being attacked by a wild bull.

¹³² Evans, A., *The palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol.4, London pag.502, Hellenic Company of Athletic History and Philosophy, Thessaloniki ©2006, pag.49.

¹³³ Evans, A., *The palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol. IV, part II, Macmillan and Co, London ©1935, pag.576-577, Fig.560.

¹³⁴ Sakellariou, T., ‘Greece and Civilization’, Edit. Sakellariou Ch. & Son, Athens ©1947, pag.16.

¹³⁵ Mouratidis, I., *History of Physical Education*, Edit. Christodoulidi, Thessaloniki ©1990, pag.42.

¹³⁶ Hall, R., H., *The civilization of Greece in the Bronze Age*, N.York / London ©1928, pag.24-27.

¹³⁷ Alsop, J., *From the silent Earth, The Greek Bronze Age*, printed in England M. Secker & Warburg Ltd., ©1965, pag.112, 191.

¹³⁸ Evans, A., *The palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol. IV, part II, Macmillan and Co, London ©1935, pag. 576.

The Minoans most likely also involved in hunting birds¹³⁹. This can be concluded by several murals depicting various species of birds. Homer¹⁴⁰ describes the labor of Mirioni, servant of the king of Knossos, Idomeneus. However, the use of the arrow appears frequently in Minoan art as well as in some plates of Linear A¹⁴¹, always from the aristocratic class of the Minoans. It is also no coincidence that the most important goddess of western Crete, Diktynna¹⁴², was the goddess of hunting, as well as the corresponding goddess in eastern Crete, Vritomartis, who later was identified with Artemis. Whether the scenes are considered as sports events, either real fight scenes, or scenes of ceremonial and symbolic significance, undoubtedly it is about depicting activities¹⁴³ which governs them above all the spirit of competition, as they require special physical strength, agility, dexterity and aim at the superiority of one of the opponents.

Fishing and shipping

One of the most favored occupations of the Minoans was *fishing*¹⁴⁴ and consequently *shipping*, since it is known that Crete was a great naval power. For the construction and value of the ships during the Minoan Golden Age in 1500 and 1400 we can now form a good picture by boats which they placed in the tombs and sanctuaries¹⁴⁵, of the engraved representations on seal stones and rings of that era, the representations of the sarcophagus from Aghia Triada, from several inscriptions¹⁴⁶ and finally from various accounts.

The people of Crete used for fishing and coasting in general, an innumerable fleet of round or oblong rowing boats and often with an extra oar at the stern, which

¹³⁹ Alsop, J., *From the silent Earth, The Greek Bronze Age*, printed in England M. Secker & Warburg Ltd., ©1965, pag. 61

¹⁴⁰ Evans, A., *The palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol. IV, part II, Macmillan and Co, London ©1935, pag. 576.

¹⁴¹ Sakellariou, T., *Greece and Civilization*, Edit. Sakellariou Ch. & Son, Athens ©1947, pag.16.

¹⁴² Faure, P., *Daily life in Crete in Minoan Era*, Edit. Papadima, Athens ©1990, pag.172

¹⁴³ Sakellariou, T., *Greece and Civilization*, Edit. Sakellariou Ch. & Son, Athens ©1947, pag. 26.

¹⁴⁴ Evans, A., *The palace of Minos at Knossos*, Vol. II, part I, Macmillan and Co, London ©1928, pag.243-246.

¹⁴⁵ Mylonas, E. G., *Ancient Mycenae*, Routledge ©1957, pag.20-21.

¹⁴⁶ Hammond, N. G. L., *History of Greece to 322 B.C.E*, 2nd edit, Prehistoric and Early History, Edit. At the Clarendon Press, Oxford ©1967, pag.33, 38-40.

resembled the oar which, as it is mentioned in mythology, Charon used this to pass the souls of the dead¹⁴⁷. The type of boat¹⁴⁸ for which we have most data is a galley with both edges raised, without axle inside the keel, without ram of the bow, with the stern lifted more than the bow, which was often decorated with a sculptured figure or the snout of an animal. A seal of black steatite¹⁴⁹ found in central Crete and kept at the Museum of Oxford represents a type of a more large ship with twelve oars on each side and dual antenna. This is a second type of Cretan galley¹⁵⁰, with frame and crescent shape, the *gavlo*, which is influenced by the contact of the Minoans¹⁵¹, with the fleets of Syria, Phoenicia and perhaps, with more precisely with these of the Bible¹⁵². Such a fleet of numerous ships¹⁵³ ensured the economic sovereignty of the princes of Knossos¹⁵⁴ in a large part of the same Crete¹⁵⁵.

Dance, gaming board and the cubes or pessoi

However, the Minoans tried to entertain themselves with various kinds of activities such as *dance*, the *gaming board* (Fig.47) and the cubes or *pessoi*.

¹⁴⁷ Evans, A., *'The palace of Minos at Knossos'*, Vol. II, part I, Macmillan and Co, London ©1928, pag. 250.

¹⁴⁸ Page, D., *'History and the Homeric Iliad'*, University of California Press ©1963.

¹⁴⁹ Faure, P., *'Daily life in Crete in Minoan Era'*, Edit. Papadima, Athens ©1990, pag. 172.

¹⁵⁰ Chamoux, F., *'La civilization Grecque'*, C. B. Arthaud, Paris, France ©1968, pag.36.

¹⁵¹ Faure, P., *'Daily life in Crete in Minoan Era'*, Edit. Papadima, Athens ©1990, pag. 172.

¹⁵² Higgins, R., *'Minoan and Mycenaean Art'*, Thames and Hudson, London, England ©1967, pag.54, Fig.53-54.

¹⁵³ Evans, A., "The palace of Minos". Fishing in the prehistoric Aegean World *Ancient History* 22 (1992): 5-24. / The Palace of Minos at Knossos, and its Dependencies, reprinted from the annual of the British School at Athens 1904-5, Knossos Excavations, 1905, pag.13, fig.7.

¹⁵⁴ Faure, P., *'Daily life in Crete in Minoan Era'*, Edit. Papadima, Athens ©1990, pag.227-231.

¹⁵⁵ Evans, A., "The palace of Minos". Fishing in the prehistoric Aegean World *Ancient History* / vol. II, part I, 1928, *'Palace of Minos at Knossos'*, pag.244 and The Palace of Minos at Knossos, and its Dependencies, reprinted from the annual of the British School at Athens 1904-5, pag.13.



Fig.47 Gaming Board. Late Bronze Age

Evans's excavations at Knossos frescoes unearthed the palace, as is the feast in front of the tripartite sanctuary (Fig.48) and the dance in the sacred grove (Fig.39). In a type of Minoan statuettes¹⁵⁶ of this era belongs and the statuette of Bagianteras, a religious dancer, showing that the dance was a sacred rite, even though almost all athletic and other activities associated with religion¹⁵⁷. In these frescoes of Knossos female groups - viewers are depicted which are admiring female ritual dances under the shade of trees. Representation of another mural depicts woman, perhaps a dancer, with waving hair (Fig.49)¹⁵⁸.

Mythology mentions the birth of Zeus on the island and how chose the Curetes to protect the little baby from his father Cronus and in order not to hear the cries of the small Jupiter they danced a pyrrhic dance, while creating great noise with their voices, their shields and swords¹⁵⁹. In Iliad¹⁶⁰ is clearly seen Mirioni's skill in the dance something which is recognized even by the Trojans.

¹⁵⁶ Cadogan, G., *'Palaces of Minoan Crete'*, Routledge, London – New York © 1976, pag.35.

¹⁵⁷ Alexiou, St., *'Minoan Civilization'*, Edition VI, Iraklion, pag. 116-118.

¹⁵⁸ Faure, P., *'Daily life in Crete in Minoan Era'*, Edit. Papadima, Athens ©1990, pag.348.

¹⁵⁹ *History of Greek Nation*, Athens, Vol. A', pag.196-198.

¹⁶⁰ Mouratidis, I., *'History of Physical Education'*, Thessaloniki ©1990, pag. 33.

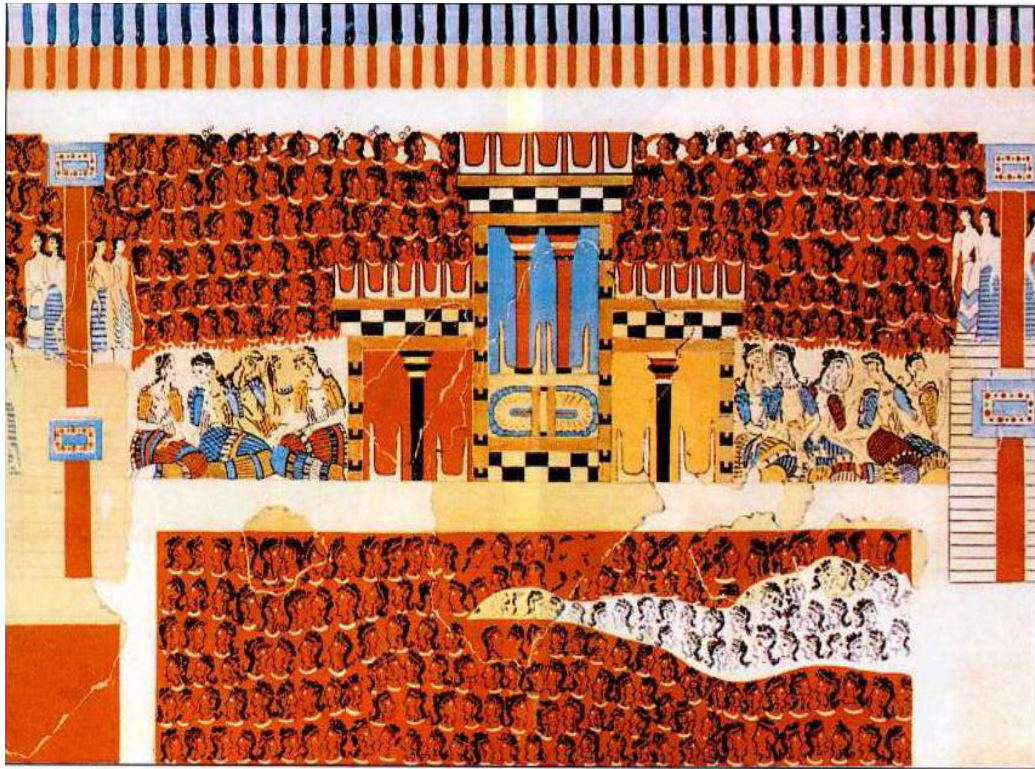


Fig.48 The tripartite sanctuary



Fig. 49 Woman with waving hair

From the archaeological sources (Homer, *Odyssey* IV, 17-19; *Iliad* XVIII, 590-605) becomes known that in Minoan Crete there were several types of dances: the dance of Ariadne or the Labyrinth (Homer, *Iliad* XVIII, 590-595), in which dancers imitate the movements of the Sun, believing that this helped the sun to make its daily journey. Evans mentions an acrobatic dance¹⁶¹, which took place into the large central courtyard of the palace of Knossos but also in other palaces. Athenaeus informs us that all the acrobatics in dance that existed in his time originated from Minoan Crete and that these two were inherent to the Cretans¹⁶².

Homer, Odyssey 4 17-19, around 8th century B.C.E:

..So they were feasting in the great high-roofed hall, the neighbors and kinsfolk of glorious Menelaus, and making merry; and among them a divine minstrel was singing to the lyre, and two tumblers whirled up and down through the midst of them, as he began his song..

Homer, Iliad 18, 590-605:

.. [590] Therein furthermore the famed god of the two strong arms cunningly wrought a dancing-floor like unto that which in wide Cnosus Daedalus fashioned of old for fair-tressed Ariadne. There were youths dancing and maidens of the price of many cattle, holding their hands upon the wrists one of the other. [595] Of these the maidens were clad in fine linen, while the youths wore well-woven tunics faintly glistening with oil; and the maidens had fair chaplets, and the youths had daggers of gold hanging from silver baldrics. Now would they run round with cunning feet [600] exceeding lightly, as when a potter sitteth by his wheel that is fitted between his hands and maketh trial of it whether it will run; and now again would they run in rows toward each other. And a great company stood around the lovely dance, taking joy therein; [605] and two tumblers whirled up and down through the midst of them as leaders in the dance...

¹⁶¹ Evans, A., *'The palace of Minos at Knossos'*, Vol. III, London © 1935, pag.76-77.

¹⁶² *Hellenic Encyclopedia*, Vol. X, Greece, Publ.Pyrsos, Athens © 1965, pag.970.

Other forms of dance were the *circle dances*¹⁶³, closed or open, which took place around a tree or an altar or around a musician who played the lyre¹⁶⁴. A red ceramic vase¹⁶⁵ (Fig.50) found in Palaikastro depicts a circular dance where three women are dancing with outstretched hands around a flute player.



Fig.50 Circular dance of women

A second complex of terracotta (Fig.51) found in Kamilaris shows four men dancing also in circular dance. It appears that such activity held an important position in their lives closely connected with the Minoan religion in honor of which was celebrated like the scene depicted in the golden ring (Fig.52).



Fig.51 Circular dance of men

¹⁶³ Dawkins, R. M., 'Excavations at Palaikastro', British School at Athens, 10 (1903-4), pag.217, P.M. 3.72.

¹⁶⁴ Mouratidis, I., 'History of Physical Education', Thessaloniki ©1990, pag.33.

¹⁶⁵ Evans, A., P.M. 3. 68, 'Tomb of Double Axes and Associated Group' *Archeology* 10 (1914), p.10 and 'The Palace of Minos at Knossos', vol. III, Macmillan & Co, London ©1930, pag.72, fig.41.



Fig.52 Four women dancing

The Cretan tradition in music is as important as in the musical instruments which are represented in archaeological finds such as in sarcophagus of Agia Triada (Fig.53). The testimonies of Greek writers¹⁶⁶ place the invention of premium lyre and double flute south. Another great example is the *harvester vase* (Fig.54), a masterpiece of Neopalatial art. It is a rhyton of oblong shape, resembling an ostrich egg, and bears a unique scene.



Fig.53 Sarcophagus of Agia Triada

¹⁶⁶ Mylonas, G. M., 'Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age', Princeton University Press © 1966, pag.145.

In its surface is depicted a procession of men, walking in groups and carrying harvesting tools on their shoulders, while several of them sing along to a sistrum, an Egyptian musical instrument. The procession is led by a middle-aged man with long hair, dressed in a curious robe with scales and a fringe, and holding a stick in his raised right hand.



Fig.54 The harvester vase

Typical were during the days of feasts the processions of the priests and of other persons associated with the cult. Procession relative to rural cult is depicted in rhyton of Agia Triada (Fig.43). The participants of the procession men carry tools of winnowing and harvesting.¹⁶⁷

The female open circular dance is considered as the most important Minoan dancing, which continued to be performed throughout the duration of the Minoan era. It was danced with the same brightness both in the palatial environment and the countryside in the context of religious rituals on the Epiphany of the female deity of vegetation. And as characteristic features of this dance was, apart from exclusive

¹⁶⁷ Alexiou, St., *Minoan Civilization*, Edition VI, Iraklion, pag. 118.

women's participation, the free circular movement of the dancers and the gestures of invocation with the most important the one of raising the hands above the head and torso leaning slightly backwards. During the Palatial period dance was combined with offers while the top accompanied now the dance with music. At the same time the dance started to take place in cemeteries gaining funeral character. It was an invocation to the goddess, in order to secure the passage of the dead in Hades. Different was the male dance, which was closed with handle from the shoulders and performed on paved areas or within circular precincts of cemeteries during funeral ceremonies.¹⁶⁸

Another female dance which seems to be equally loved by the Minoans and the Mycenaeans was the one with the triangular arrangement of the dancers who had their arms bent at the hips, wearing special clothing and collar. Finally, there was the grand palace procession with the offer of pottery and clothing to the deity from which are being revealed significant differences over time. Thus in the New Palace period both sexes move to independent processions, while during the Palatial period men and women participating in the same procession. Similar ceremonial processions were held in the countryside as well accompanied by music and choir during happenings for the fertility of the earth.¹⁶⁹

As it was mentioned above one of the Minoan entertainments was the gaming board or *zatrikion* (Fig.47). This large and impressive gaming board from the Palace of Knossos is unique in Greek prehistoric art. It is rectangular in shape and constructed of precious materials cut into different shapes. The frame consists of ivory and rock crystal rosettes. At one end are four large medallions of gilt ivory, rock crystal and glass paste, and a pair of ivory argonauts at each corner. At the other end, ten small medallions framed by ivory plaques sit on rods of rock crystal with silver sheeting. Four ivory gaming pieces from the same context probably belong to this board. Similar gaming boards and pieces have been found in the Near East and Egypt, but this one is the largest example of all.

¹⁶⁸ <http://www.tovima.gr/culture/article/?aid=199394>

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.tovima.gr/culture/article/?aid=199394>

It was found in the southern end of the east hallway of the palace, the '*hallway of the zatrikion*' as it is called by the experts. It is believed to be a kind of game¹⁷⁰ with which were being entertained the princes or the king. It required great ability of intelligence for accounts and operations¹⁷¹. Many people believe¹⁷² that it resembles to that of the city of Ur in Mesopotamia (Fig.55). Both are made of ivory, gold and crystal.

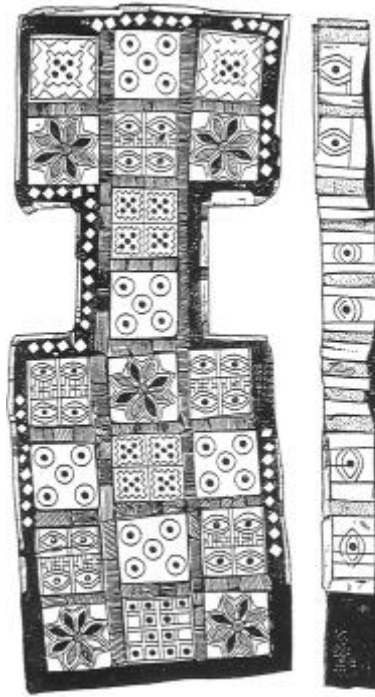


Fig.55 Gaming board of Ur or *zatrikion of Ur*

From the archaeological investigations of Evans¹⁷³ is known that the inhabitants of Crete were playing the game with the cubes or *pessoi* in the cobblestone of the sidewalks. This mural was found in the northwestern part of the palace of Knossos (1600 BC) and depicts four children figures playing a game.

¹⁷⁰ Faure, P., 'Daily life in Crete in Minoan Era', Edit. Papadima, Athens ©1990, pag. 345.

¹⁷¹ Starr, G., '*The Origins of Greek Civilization, 1100 – 650 b.c.*', Norton & Company, New York / London ©1931-1935, pag.40-41 and Mylonas, G., '*Ancient Mycenae: the capital of Agamemnon*', Princeton university Press ©1957, pag.33-35.

¹⁷² Murray, H. J. R., 'A History of Board Games other than Chess', ©1957, pag.143 and Mouratidis, I., 'History of physical education', Thessaloniki ©1990, pag.50.

¹⁷³ Evans, A., '*The palace of Minos at Knossos*', Vol. IV, part II, Macmillan and Co, London ©1935, The British School at Athens, pag.78-79.

Race

Ultimately, it would be a remiss not to mention another activity of the Cretans, the *race*¹⁷⁴, although few archaeological data have survived. From the excavations of Evans few murals have been found for this event. The race, as an activity, exists among the events of the prehistoric period¹⁷⁵ but it is unknown the style or kind or why the Minoans were engaged in this activity.

The "finding" of the first and most important event of the Olympics, the race stadium dates back in Crete, the birthplace of the sport from the Minoan era. The five Idaean Daktyloi, the Curetes, Hercules, Paeonaeus, Epimedes, Iasius and Idas, mythical figures of Crete, magicians and protectors of metalwork, competed in running according to the tradition (Pausanias V, 7, 6-9).

Pausanias V, 7, 6-9, around 2nd century A.C.E:

..As for the Olympic games, the most learned antiquaries of Elis say that Cronus was the first king of heaven, and that in his honor a temple was built in Olympia by the men of that age, who were named the Golden Race. When Zeus was born, Rhea entrusted the guardianship of her son to the Dactyls of Ida, who are the same as those called Curetes. They came from Cretan Ida—Heracles, Paeonaeus, Epimedes, Iasius and Idas. [7] Heracles, being the eldest, matched his brothers, as a game, in a running-race, and crowned the winner with a branch of wild olive, of which they had such a copious supply that they slept on heaps of its leaves while still green. . It is said to have been introduced into Greece by Heracles from the land of the Hyperboreans, men living beyond the home of the North Wind [8] Olen the Lycian, in his hymn to Achaeia, was the first to say that from these Hyperboreans Achaeia came to Delos. When Melanopus of Cyme composed an ode to Opis and Hecaerge declaring that these, even before Achaeia, came to Delos from the Hyperboreans [9] And Aristeas of Proconnesus—for he too made mention of the Hyperboreans—may perhaps have learnt even more about them from the Issedones, to whom he says in his poem that he

¹⁷⁴ Evans, A., 'The palace of Minos at Knossos', Vol. II, part II, Macmillan and Co, London ©1928, pag.756-757.

¹⁷⁵ Starr, G., 'The Origins of Greek Civilization, 1100-650 B.C.', W. W. Norton & Company, New York / London © 1931-35, pag.44.

came. Heracles of Ida, therefore, has the reputation of being the first to have held, on the occasion I mentioned, the games, and to have called them Olympic. So he established the custom of holding them every fifth year, because he and his brothers were five in number.

According to another tradition (Pausanias, V, 8, 1):

..Later on there came (they say) from Crete Clymenus, the son of Cardys, about fifty years after the flood came upon the Greeks in the time of Deucalion. He was descended from Heracles of Ida; he held the games at Olympia and set up an altar in honor of Heracles, his ancestor, and the other Curetes, giving to Heracles the surname of Parastates (Assistant) . And Endymion, the son of Aethlius, deposed Clymenus, and set his sons a race in Olympia with the kingdom as the prize.

A fresco from Knossos depicts a Minoan leading a group of black men who are running¹⁷⁶. It is known as the 'Official' or the 'Captain of blacks'¹⁷⁷(Fig.56). However he holds two horns suggesting that these may be a military education¹⁷⁸.



Fig.56 Official or Captain

¹⁷⁶ Decker, W., 'Sport in der Griechischen Antike', C. H. Beck, München © 1995, pag. 22, 221.

¹⁷⁷ Mouratidis, I., 'History of Physical Education', Thessaloniki ©1990, pag. 54, / P. M. 2. 775, PL. 13.

¹⁷⁸ Sakellariou, T., 'Greece and Civilization', Publ. Sakellariou Athens © 1947, pag.20.

Other sources that mention various traditions regarding running which are connected with *Talos*, son of Daedalus or son and creation of Hephaestus, are a) Plato, *Minos* 320c, b) Apollonius Rhodius *Argonautica* 1639-1644, c) Apollodorus *Library* 1, 9, 26.

Plato, Mino 320c:

..For Minos used him as guardian of the law in the city, and Talos¹ as the same for the rest of Crete. For Talos thrice a year made a round of the villages, guarding the laws in them, by holding their laws inscribed on brazen tablets, which gave him his name of “brazen.”

Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica 4, 1639-1644:

*τοὺς δὲ Τάλως χάλκειος, ἀπὸ στιβαροῦ σκοπέλοιο
ῥηγνύμενος πέτρας, εἶργε χθονὶ πείσματ' ἀνάψαι,
Δικταίην ὄρμοιο κατερχομένους ἐπιωγήν:
τὸν μὲν χαλκείης μελιγενέων ἀνθρώπων
ρίζης λοιπὸν ἔοντα μετ' ἀνδράσιν ἡμιθέοισιν
Εὐρώπῃ Κρονίδης νήσου πόρεν ἔμμεναι σύρον,
τρὶς περὶ χαλκείοις Κρήτην ποσὶ δινεύοντα.*

Apollodorus Library 1, 9, 26:

..Putting to sea from there, they were hindered from touching at Crete by Talos.² Some say that he was a man of the Brazen Race, others that he was given to Minos by Hephaestus; he was a brazen man, but some say that he was a bull. He had a single vein extending from his neck to his ankles, and a bronze nail was rammed home at the end of the vein. This Talos kept guard, running round the island thrice every day;

These were all the kind of events that the Minoans practised during their daily-life and became known throughout Sir Arthur Evans' and others' excavations.

Chapter 3°

*The connection - parallels between the Minoan Games and the
Olympic Games.*

3.1 The connection-parallels between the Minoan Games and the Olympic Games throughout centuries.

The concept of Minoan events is not clearly known, as Dr. Coulomb mentions¹⁷⁹. Some believe they were part of initiation ceremonies, others that they were part of simple spectacles in honor of the Cretan princes. Libation vases, altars, shrines, representations of athletes, spectators' crowd depicted in the frescoes of Knossos, all bring to mind the contests that, much later, reborn in the quiet and wooded valley of the Alpheus, in Olympia.

The competitions on the other hand, cannot be interpreted in a single plane. They form a complex of coded symbols, a spherical structure involving the whole of fantastic humans' relationship with the world. It's a way of varied rationalizing relation with the divine, a way of taming the supernatural and of arrogation of superiority through acts seemingly simple such as running, wrestling, chariot racing, the song, which reach their highest point under the gaze of gods.¹⁸⁰

The Minoans, like the ancient Greeks subsequently, developed and cultivated the ideology and act of the "contest" with equal conditions of competition and aiming at the prevalence of the best, most experienced and most physically gifted athlete, along with the demonstration of athletic skills, physical power and endurance by teams of trained athletes to spectators. Highlights of various events depicted mainly in luxury items, such as gold rings, seals, ivory reliefs and murals mainly in the palace of Knossos, the largest and most important center of power in Minoan Crete.

The physique of the athletes, men and women, with muscular parts of their bodies and the thin and flexible athletic body, as they are depicted in the representations, indicates that the Minoans athletes should be highly toiled to exercise the body and the soul in order to be able to withstand the trials of hard and life-threatening events such as bullfighting and boxing.

¹⁷⁹ Coulomb, Jean, *'The Lily Prince'*, Archaeology, Vol.4, © 1982, pag.22-27.

¹⁸⁰ Leveque, Pierre, *'Greek Contests, roman sports and sports of Central America'*, Archaeology, Vol.4, © 1982, pag.12.

From this perspective it seems that the Minoan society formatted and highlighted, through various events, a model of sportsmanship with the above goals: on the one hand the prevalence and the victory and on the other hand the offer of a spectacle to a “sportsmanship” audience.

Seen from this perspective, the Olympics and the other Panhellenic games of subsequent Greek times seems to continue a pre-existing ancient tradition materializing values and standards equivalent to those that were developed and cultivated for the first time in Minoan Crete. It is no coincidence that, according to ancient Greek mythology, the famous Games of Olympia were established in memory of the legendary race that took place there between five Cretan demons the Curetes.

But the main issue and the question is if and to what point the Minoan civilization and specifically the Minoan activities and events affected and adopted by the following civilizations throughout the centuries and finally to the Modern Olympic Games.

The Greek word *hero* - whose origins are Cretan- means *despot, principal* (for the feminine goddess Hera is *lady*), an etymology which emphasizes the reality of class in the despotic kingdoms, where the privilege of life beyond death belongs to the kings and the princes. The Greek games are connected precisely with this ancient Minoan tradition, as it is underlined by the games of Ida which are related with the death of the child-king, an event that explains the Cretan and not the Greek origins of the two key terms in the vocabulary of Greek games: *aethlos* (agon) and *kterea* (offerings, offerings to the dead). Connecting link for the dissemination of this tradition in Greece is of course the Mycenae. It is characteristic that in the columns of the first cycle of burials are depicted chariot races. The funeral games in memory of Patroclus constitute another link in this long chain. The funereal character of the games is documented in Olympia, according to Bacchylides, for which Pindar commemorates the real and constant presence of the hero. And the other Panhellenic sanctuaries (Delphi, Isthmia and Nemea), where games were held, the rite was organized around a great dead. In the Games were added choral odes, connected directly with the dead than the event which took place to honor him. The choruses are perpetuating the memory of crying and wailing of burials, already known from Homer and the Mycenaean winning songs. Therefore it is about games, from one side, in the general

sense of the term, allowing participants to express the vital dynamism in an atmosphere of sportsmanship. They are games between people, according to rules of play which require long training. Finally, they constitute a building block of the community element that is clear in the Panhellenic Games, which bring together in a religious and peaceful trial, contestants from all the Greek cities. The mortal protagonists reproduce the actions of the gods. Their movements are dated back to a primitive and standard time, the only thing that counts as the triumph of an Olympian is considered that always remains the victory of Pelops. As so rightly M. Eliade observes, everything tends toward the same purpose: to counteract the years that passed, the overthrow of the history through a perpetual back in illo tempore by repeating the cosmogony.¹⁸¹

According to David C. Young¹⁸² “The Games held at Olympia were the ultimate in athletic competition. Pindar, we may recall, compares the way they eclipse the others to the way the sun outshines all the other stars in the noonday sky. The Olympic Games were in a class of their own. Above all, the most of the centuries that they were held, the Olympics were a showcase for human physical excellence, where mortals, as Pindar said, could ‘resemble the gods’. Of equal importance, the Olympics played so unique a role in antiquity that they passed beyond the athletic events proper to exemplify, even to symbolize, all of ancient Greek civilization at its best. That, in fact, is precisely the reason why they were revived in modern times.” and he continues “Our modern Games are, in fact, the brainchild of a *Greek*, and *modern Greece* had Olympic Games before Coubertin was even born. England Had Olympic games when Coubertin was still a toddler. Coubertin *was* important to the revival, and deserves much of the credit. But so do some other unsung fathers of the Olympic idea, an idea which I believe Coubertin never could have conceived on his own. It is difficult to believe that an institution as massive as esteemed as the Olympic Games could have had so humble a birth. After faltering baby steps, the Olympic revival movement suffered an extended, trouble youth, for decades barely surviving while on the verge of dying from neglect. Having come full circle, robust and nourished again on their

¹⁸¹ Leveque, Pierre, ‘*Greek Contests, roman sports and sports of Central America*’, *Archaeology*, Vol.4, © 1982, pag.9-15.

¹⁸² Young, C. David, ‘*A Brief History of the Olympic Games*’, Blackwell Publishing Ltd © 2004, pag.12, 140.

native Greek soil, the modern games will have reached full maturity as they march on to China, which was a different world from Greece in the 1830s – but is now just a large part of a single human civilization. Our Olympic Games are not so much a revival of the ancient Greek Games as a genuine continuation of them. The modern Olympics are not Olympics in name only. Despite great differences they have the same spirit, the same dedication to the pursuit of excellence, and the same goal of bringing out the best in people. And mostly important, there is a legitimate, direct Greek line of descent which can be traced all the way from the simple ancient stadium over in Olympia, through Sydney and all the rest, on up to the modern Olympic stadium at Kephissias in Athens.”

Kristine Toohey and Anthony J. Veal argue¹⁸³: “In reality many of the events contested in the early modern games had very little in common with their ancient counterpart, and in recent years the difference has been even more pronounced. As the Games evolved and responded to changes in the twentieth century some of these notions have been challenged and replaced. However, myths have often provided the keystone to the structure and rules of the modern Olympics. Despite the many myths about Ancient Olympics which have influenced the modern Games, there were some similarities. Crowther (2002) describes disturbing similarities in the organization of both the Ancient and modern Games, though ‘home town’ decisions, bribery and political pressures. Golden (1984 : 4) notes that Greek sport ‘was enveloped in a series of hierarchies in which events, festivals, genders, nations and other groups were ranged and ranked no less than individuals’. Today, the modern Olympic Games, like their ancient counterpart, are considered the pinnacle of athletic excellence. They are prized by athletes, spectators, sponsors and the media. However, Coakley details one other resemblance between Ancient Greek sport and its counterpart in the twentieth century which merits a different consideration: They reflected and recreated the dominant social structural characteristics and patterns of social relations in the society as a whole. The power and advantages that went along with being wealthy, male and young in Greek society served to shape games and contests that limited the participation of women, older people and those without economic resources. In fact the definitions of excellence used to evaluate performance even reflected the abilities

¹⁸³ Toohey Kristine, Veal J. Anthony, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective*, © CABI, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK, 2007, pag.9-11.

of young males. This meant that the abilities of others were by definition substandard. We can see the same things in organised sport today (Coakley, 1992: 56).”

According to Wendy J. Raschke¹⁸⁴ “The Minoans obviously practiced a number of sports and the principal evidence comes from their depictions. The reliefs from the Agia Triada rhyton indicate that *pyx* (boxing) and *pale* (wrestling) were practiced in Minoan Crete prior to the year 1450B.C.E. The other well-documented Minoan ‘sport’, bull-leaping, is represented in a number of depictions. When we turn to the Mycenaean world, we find a much more martial atmosphere, with a much more evident linkage between sport and combat. The existence of the chariot is first clearly indicated in Mycenaean times by the famous relief on the stele from the shaft-graves, dating around 1600B.C.E. The archaeological evidence from the Minoan and Mycenaean worlds is thus indicative of the sports of boxing and bull-leaping with the suggestion that other martial games, including chariot racing, may well have been held in the Mycenaean world.

The Olympic Games, like other great Panhellenic games, were at once a major athletic contest, a great religious celebration, and a social event of significance throughout the Greek world. Precursors, and perhaps origins, for each of these aspects can indeed be traced back into the Mycenaean period. Athletic sports, specifically boxing and wrestling, were already practised in the Minoan world by 1450 B.C.E. and there are plausible suggestions that chariot racing may have been practiced at funeral games also in the Mycenaean period. Indeed, it is not impossible that the sports described by Homer in his account of the funeral games of Patroclus were indeed already practiced in Mycenaean times, although for a number of sports this remains doubtful. Likewise the origins of the religion of the Greeks can be traced back to the Minoan and Mycenaean periods, and specific features of the Mycenaean religion formed the basis, through a number of transformations, for the religion of the ancient Greeks of the first millennium B.C.E’.. ‘Evidences for the incorporation of the games as an institution in relation to the recognized cult of a deity at one of the principal sanctuaries in honor of a departed leader or hero, are notably lacking until the eighth

¹⁸⁴ Raschke, J. Wendy, *The Archaeology of the Olympics: The Olympic and other festivals in Antiquity*, ©1988 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, USA, pag.14-15, 256-257.

or seventh century B.C.E. It was then that these various strands came together, although individually each may be traced back very much earlier. Indeed, the terracotta dancing group from the Late Minoan period at Palaikastro reminds us that good evidence for the dance goes back into the Late Minoan period also, and the dance was a significant feature of the celebration at many of the Panhellenic games. Evidence for the kithara and the aulos, both instruments which featured in the Pythian contests at Delphi, can be traced right back to the Early Cycladic period to a date around 2.500B.C.E., when delightful marble figures of kithara-players and pipe-players were produced”..

And he continues “despite the proliferation of scholarly theories on the origins of the Olympics and Greek athletics during the past century, Renfrew and Puhvel demonstrate that the same headway can be made by the application of new methods and new cross-cultural evidence to the questions of aetiology. After a survey of the primary sources of evidence for athletics in Minoan-Mycenean times, Renfrew reminds us of the necessarily dim state of our knowledge concerning traditional Greek athletics prior to the eighth century B.C.E. But by his rejection of later legends and his emphasis on religious and , to some extent, athletic continuity from late Mycenean times to the late Dark Ages, he places in proper perspective the remarkable synthesis of traditional religion, sports, and cooperation between the *poleis* which was achieved by the institution of the Panhellenic Olympics in the eighth century B.C.E.’.. ‘Renfrew’s conclusions are indeed complemented by Puhvel’s most enlightening exposition of parallel Hellado-Anatolian practices combining athletics in festival contexts. Puhvel’s original juxtaposition of Hittite and Homeric descriptions of games shows that “many of the organized events which gradually were incorporated into the Olympic Games were neither new nor specifically Greek”. The very presence of Hittite games in cult contexts points to an ultimate Indo-European heritage for the Mediterranean athletic tradition, but it still leaves open the question of when and where this tradition was adopted by the Greek peoples.”

Miller St. refers¹⁸⁵ “Scholars have sought the origins of Greek athletics in the older cultures of Mesopotamia and especially Egypt because of the influential contacts between Egypt and Greece that were already present in the Bronze Age. It is clear that

¹⁸⁵ Miller, Stephen G, ‘*Ancient Greek Athletics*’, Yale University Press, © 2004, pag.20-25.

the initial inspiration for large-scale sculpture and monumental architecture came to Greece from Egypt in the period around 600, but we look in vain for indisputable evidence of such borrowings in the area of athletics. The art of Mesopotamia and of Egypt certainly shows evidence of sporting activities, but the scene that these are competitions among equals is missing, nor do the events parallel many of the competitions in the Greek program. Most obvious, the men in these depictions of what may be sporting events are clothed. Consequently, Greek athletics have been understood as a peculiarly and uniquely Greek institution. We may look for the origins of Greek athletics in Bronze Age Greece. The brilliant Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations of the second millennium B.C.E. are clearly the ancestors of Greek culture of the following millennium, and the Mycenaeans wrote and spoke an early form of the Greek language. Further, the myths of classical Greece are set in the labyrinths of Minoan Crete and the familial bloodbaths of Mycenae. The Greeks themselves looked back to those civilizations as the source of their own. Were the athletics part of those roots? Their presence in the Homeric poems suggests that they were...

More important is the fact that the prominent place of the funeral games of Patroklos in book 23 of the *Iliad* (A1) suggests that Homer and his audience could believe that their athletic practices came down to them from the Mycenaean world. So, too, the informal competitions of the Phaeacians portrayed in the *Odyssey* (8.97-253; A2) reveal a well-developed athletic program. Taken together, the Homeric poems share with the later Olympics competitions in foot-racing, wrestling, boxing, chariot-racing, and the pentathlon of the javelin, diskos, and long jump... The similarities of the Olympic and Homeric programs are striking...

Archaeology, however, tell us a very different story. Minoan culture was clearly much concerned with bull-fighting (also called bull-leaping). This event was portrayed in many different media: wall-paintings, carvings on gold rings, terracotta figurines...it is equally evident that it was performed by trained, clothed specialists. It has no relevance to the athletics of classical Greece. In the same vein as bull-leaping, with an equal lack of relevance to our subject, are the depictions of acrobats and tumblers on many Minoan artifacts. The Bronze Age archaeology of Greece has produced no depictions of foot races, diskos or javelin throwing, jumping or wrestling. Possible evidence seems to exist for boxing (boxer's Rhyton). It is clear

that athletics in the Homeric poems coincide much more closely with the program at Olympia than with the events that can be documented archaeologically in the Bronze Age.”

And he continues¹⁸⁶ that the clue to the origin of Greek athletics lies in the Dorian invasion that followed the fall of Mycenae. The Dorians were vigorous and warlike with a highly developed sense of competition. And it’s not a coincidence that three of the four Panhellenic sanctuaries are in Peloponnesus and the fourth, Delphi, in a Dorian area. Therefore, the Greek athletics were born under strong Dorian influence during Geometric period, a time when the unbroken chain of depictions of athletics began.

However, modern research has not yet been able to reach a solution to the problem of the historical starting of the games and if there is a powerful connection between them, despite the abundance of evidence and despite the new data from the results of the excavations.

¹⁸⁶ Miller, Stephen G, ‘*Ancient Greek Athletics*’, Yale University Press, © 2004, pag.26.

Conclusion

The origins of the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece are shrouded in myth and historical interpretation. The Ancient Minoans and Mycenaeans lived and worked in the open. For them, nature was alive and familiar, close and deeply felt. Their gods were found in nature, and they believed in the complete harmony of the natural and spiritual world. Ritual ceremonies along with various athletic and social activities were held to honor their deities or a dead hero.

Athletic games like boxing, wrestling and bull-leaping seem to have been indispensable from every religious feast in Minoan Crete. They passed from the Minoan over to the Mycenaean world. Mycenaeans introduced, most probably the race and chariot races to athletic games and were the first who organised athletic competitions on funerary occasions, events that represented on funerary Mycenaean monuments and are so brilliantly described in the Homeric poems.

These activities which were held within the framework of the ritual of ancient festivals were an integral part of the celebration and had religious background. Thus was created an unbreakable relationship of dependence between competitions and religion from the integration of nakedness disciplines to the program of the feasts. It is noted that the competitions are performed in positions identified sacred since prehistoric times. The geophysical characteristics of sacred sites directly refer to the return of worship in chthonic deities which are honored with sacrificial acts, competitions and dancing. Prizes, mainly wreaths, were associated with worship of trees of prehistoric times.

The sacred Panhellenic celebrations were associated with the mythical and divine element. It has been argued that these festive events and every other cult of the classical period constitute evolutionary expression of funerary rites and competitions like these, very graphically, described in Homer's work. These transactions, in the depths of time and under the gravity of social-political changes, denatured and gained Panhellenic characteristics. Their background states that the divine is related with the initiation and the first who competed in them were gods, semi-gods and heroes. The fact of their relationship with the heroic past of ancient society relies on two elements, the obituary nature of competitions beyond the honorary and the cover of an old

celebration from a worship introducing a more intense religious element, the involvement of the gods in the games.

Olympia, centre of a cult of Zeus, enveloped a mystic ceremony, with gatherings of thousands on neutral territory, ameliorated political discord and led to a belief in common values and a common consciousness, contributing to the unity of the whole Greek world. The Ancient Greeks were the first among humans to institutionalized play – like activities into athletics – competitions as important to them as their art, their religion and their morality, in which a man could achieve distinction through his excellence against others in equal competition. Gradually, in parallel with religious ceremonies and celebrations, they developed a set of athletic contests, which came to have extraordinary meaning and significance in the political and everyday lives of Citizens of Greek city-states. In understanding the role played by athletic contests in the lives of the Ancient Greeks and in wondering what produced their motivation to effort, competition and excellence, we come to understand a little more about the society upon whose ideas and achievements so much of Western civilization is based.

For 13th centuries Olympia lay buried and forgotten, but physical and sportive contests did not. The popularity of various events is traces in Britain throughout the 11th to 17th centuries and, additionally, the chivalric education of the knightly classes throughout the middle Ages involved robust preparation for hand to hand combat, including well-regulated contests. Folk feats and festivals for the people were often accompanied by contests such as races and jumping competitions, sometimes with very exact local rule specifications. During the 19th century there were developments in Greece also. A wealthy Greek expatriate, Evangelis Zappas, contributed to the revival of the Games in Greece by offering to pay for the games to be held in Athens together with industrial and commercial exhibitions. Pierre de Coubertin believed that the Ancient Greek heritage remained at the core of Western civilization and that the modern sport in its moral characteristics (though not in its techniques, organization or programme) was largely continuous with Ancient Greek athletics. He began to dream of a revival of the Olympic Games on an international basis and he made his dream come true.

Someone could say that through the centuries it could be seen a continuity between the activities and the events of the Minoan people, passed to the Mycenaean world and to the Panhellenic games, the escort of the Modern Olympic Games.

But, despite the considerable amount of academic work devoted to the investigation of the above issues, the modern reader would be surprised by the number of different opinions, rooted often in the contradictory nature of the available archaeological and literary evidence.

Researchers¹⁸⁷ still debate the question of how sport began. Some see sport as play, a part of nature, or a basic release from tension (a catharsis). Others have suggested that it arose from instinctive drives (or impulses), from the hunting ritual, or tests of strength. Yet others have remarked on the close association between sport and religion in the ancient world, but few would agree that religion is the origin of sport. This element of religion, or more precisely ritual, has largely disappeared from sport in the modern world, although it is still much in evidence, for example, in Japanese Sumo wrestling. According to the Marxist theory, sport is a preparation for work that separates human beings from beasts. One school of thought views sport as a means of discharging aggression; another maintains that it causes more aggression than it discharges. One unusual theory suggests that sport is the ritual sacrifice of human energy that is evident in all societies in different forms: the one who has the most energy to expend is worthy of the greatest honor. No single theory for the origin of sport has met with general acceptance, but sport is clearly a social phenomenon. Because of various complexities, one should not study ancient sport in isolation, but in close relationship with the society, in which it took place, especially in the case of Eastern cultures that developed differently from our own. We can discover much about civilizations from sport. As several scholars have marked, we sometimes learn more from the way people played than the way they worked.

¹⁸⁷ Crowther, Nigel B., *'Sport in Ancient Times'*, Greenwood Publishing Group, @2007, pag. xxi (Introduction).

Raschke W. argues¹⁸⁸ “Although evidence for religious continuity is lacking at the sanctuaries themselves, there are now several indications to support the conclusion that the religion of the ancient Greeks had its roots in those of the Minoan and Mycenaean worlds. Indeed, with the abandonment of the notion that the Greeks entered Greece during Dark Ages and with the discovery, through the decipherment of the Linear B script, that the Greek language was already spoken in Greece during Mycenaean times, we see more clearly that this must be so. There is simply nowhere else for the Greek religion to have formed than in Greece itself. Yet when we compare what we know of the religion of the Minoans, or indeed of the Mycenaeans, we see that it differs significantly from that of Greece in the fifth century B.C.E. between the two must have come a whole series of transformations...The roots of the religious practices seen at the great sanctuaries do indeed extend back to the Mycenaean period and the cult practices seen at Olympia and elsewhere were not entirely novel formation but the result of a series of transformations operating upon the religious practices seen elsewhere during the Mycenaean period.”

The religious nature of the games, even though over the centuries blunted, never ceased to exist. The entire ideological edifice of ancient Greek sport and the close relationship between sport and religion and ritual processes has its roots in the worship of the gods and is based on deep religious feeling of the ancients.

Through all the different theories, it comes out that the games are dated back to primitive traditions and customs which are related to religious or other ceremonies. Through their biotic practice the Minoans succeeded to display the genuine artistic forms of body and coined the competitive athletic spirit of the next generations. They offered a new content in the contests which they became real need in everyday life.

¹⁸⁸ Raschke, J. Wendy, *The Archaeology of the Olympics: The Olympic and other festivals in Antiquity*, ©1988 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, USA, pag.20-21.

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