



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

MASTER'S THESIS

**“The Importance of Religion in Ancient Hellenic Games
MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC EVENTS”**

Konstantinos Vasileiou

Supervisor: Ingomar Weiler, Professor

Sparta, March 2011

To the Immortal Olympic Spirit



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Sparta, March 2011

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ABSTRACT

The religious background of a structured society no doubt constitutes a very important element for the consolidation and the knowledge of a civilization. The objective of the current thesis is the study and the presentation of the role and the importance of religion in all the aspects of the sporting events and rituals of the Ancient Greece. The collection of the elements comes mainly from the priceless cultural heritage of the great ancient Greek writers and also from the remarkable publications, books and articles of the modern era. The presence of the religious manifestations is proven and taken for granted. The question that remains to be answered is to which extent religion affected the sporting events of the Ancient Greek era.

In the Minoan period, the dominant element of the religion was the great Goddess of nature and fertility who was worshipped with the sport games. In the Mycenaean period, the athletic games were part of the worship of the dead and later they become part of the hero-worship. During the historic times, which include the Archaic, Classic, Hellenistic and Roman era, the role of the religion in the athletic games was significant.

During the antiquity, there were many different festivals and games held, some of them with regional character and some others with pan-Hellenic character. However, four of them had the greatest glamour and attracted the interest of spectators and athletes: Olympia, Pythia, Isthmia and Nemea.

The issue of the birth of the Olympics is still bothering researchers and writers. There are various legends and myths about this matter and what makes the issue complicated is that every theory shakes down the others. The four more prevalent legends regarding the derivation of the Games are related with Hercules Dactylos, Oenomaos and Pelops, Hercules and Zeus.

In Ancient Greece all the athletic games were linked with the temporary inhibition of the armed conflicts. The Sacred Truce was a very important institution and generally was respected by all the city-states and within the 1200 years of the organization of the Ancient Olympics only a few violations are reported.

The winners of the Games were honoured with official victory celebrations (epinikia) such destruction of the wall of the cities, the winning processions, the sacrifices, the statues and the winning odes. Furthermore, there were the victory ceremonies as the wreath, the taping procedure, the fyllovolia and periagermos.

Taking into account all the aforementioned elements, the role of religion was of great importance in all the sporting competitions of the Greek antiquity and in every chronological period. The presence of religion was intense in every single activity of Ancient Greeks. Historians, archeologists and theologians agree that every element and every activity of ancient Greeks involved the sense of the sacred, the holy and the worship.

PROLOGUE

When I had to choose a topic for the dissertation of my first Masters degree -which I did in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki- I had to deal with the following dilemma: Ancient or Modern Olympic Games? After a mature consideration, I ended up with the second choice, clearly influenced by the contemporary organization of the Athens 2004 Olympics.

Some years later, in course of the postgraduate program on Olympic studies organized by the International Olympic Academy and the University of Peloponnese, I have the opportunity to deal with the first aforementioned choice and to complete in the best possible way the unforgettable experience that I gained by living in the holy ground of Ancient Olympia.

At this point, I want to thank those who supported this effort and contributed significantly to achieve my goals.

Firstly, I express my sincere thanks to my supervising professor, Dr. Ingomar Weiler. I thank him for his cooperation, his gentleness, his maturity of thought and the transmission of his knowledge.

I would like also to thank the two members of the advisory committee, Dr. Konstantinos Georgiadis and Dr. Konstantinos Mountakis and the lecturers of the module of Ancient History of the Master Program, Dr. Stephen Miller and Dr. Werner Petermandl.

In addition, I want to thank the staff of the library of the School of History and Archaeology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, for their valuable contribution.

INTRODUCTION

The religious background of a structured society no doubt constitutes a very important element for the consolidation and the knowledge of a civilization. It is now accepted that the combination of religious customs and habits with the sporting activity in Ancient Greece uncovered many dark elements of the religious and sporting life of the antiquity. The gathering of this information and data, derives mainly from the rich philological resources and the archeological findings.

The objective of the current research is the study and the presentation of the role and the importance of religion in all the aspects of the sporting events and rituals of the Ancient Greece. The collection of the elements comes mainly from

the priceless cultural heritage of the great ancient Greek writers and also from the remarkable publications, books and articles of the modern era.

In all the chapters of the dissertation, the presence of the religious manifestations is proven and taken for granted. The question that remains to be answered is to which extent religion affected the sporting events of the Ancient Greek era.

The first two chapters of the thesis present the association of religion with sports games in Minoan and Mycenaean periods and in the historic period consisting of the Archaic, Classic, Hellenistic and Roman times. The third chapter elaborates on the four Panhellenic Games, while the fourth chapter, the prevalent legends and myths regarding the establishment of the Olympic Games. The last two parts of the essay present the institution of the Sacred Truce and the victory ceremonies and celebrations of the Games.

CHAPTER 1

RELIGION AND GAMES IN THE PREHISTORIC TIMES

Minoan period

According to the archeologists, the first inhabitants of Crete, the place which was to be the forerunner of the Minoan civilization, arrived there at the beginning of the neolithical era, approximately between 2000BC and 1450BC, a period during which Crete developed great activity and became the center of a great civilization.

The Minoan civilization was clearly influenced by the prehistoric civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia of the 3rd millennium BC, because of the geophysical position of Crete and its commercial relations with the East¹. In these civilizations one can find the first forms of sporting activity with reference to events and games, such as archery, aquatics and wrestling. It is indicative that the objective of these sporting activities was, on the one hand the right physical training of the participants and, on the other hand, the offer of a fine spectacle to the spectators of these activities².

The close link between religion and sport in the Minoan Crete is indicated by the fact that these events were a part of the religious rituals of this society. The great Goddess of nature and fertility was a dominant element of the religion³.
(Picture 1)

The main sport activities of the Minoans included the kyvistisis, the race, the force, the wrestling, the pagration, the dance, the hunting, archery and of course, the 'tavrokathapsia', which were acrobatics with bulls⁴. (Picture 2)

The event of tavrokathapsia emerged in Crete quite early and both men and women were participating therein. Many researchers support that there is a link with the contemporary bull-fighting but the truth is that there are not too many similarities. The athletes executed dangerous and spectacular leaps on the back of running bulls⁵. Initially, the athlete grappled the horns of the bull while the latest was running towards him/her. Afterwards, the athlete left the horns and jolted to the back of the bull, making a whole circle in the air. In the third leap, the most dangerous one, the athlete landed behind the bull with the

¹ J. Puhvel, Hittite athletics as prefigurations of ancient Greek games, 1992, pp. 26-29

² S. Giatsis, Eisagogi stin istoria tiw fysikis agogis ston Elliniko kosmo, Thessaloniki, 1985, p. 31

³ I. Mouratidis, Istoría Fysikis Agogis, Thessaloniki, 1990, pp. 43-49

⁴ T. Giannakis, Archaiognosia-Philisofia agonistikis, Athens, 1979, p. 123

⁵ J. G. Thompson, Clues to the location of Minoan Bull-Jumping from the Palace of Knossos, 1989, pp. 62-68

assistance of another athlete. Participating in the event of tavrakathapsia required excellent physical shape, perfect technique and familiarity with the bull⁶.

Based on pictures of the time, we can deduce that the athletes of tavrakathapsia belonged to the higher social classes. This is indicated by their clothing which involved luxurious jewels, special hairstyles and high shoes. Their participation to the event did not constitute a way to present their physical strength but rather indicated their respect to the religious basis of the event. The sanctity of the tavrakathapsia is closely linked to the sanctity that Minoans attributed to the bull⁷. This is certified by the discovery of two conic vessels which are dated back in 2000 BC and depicted athletes grappling the horns of bulls, the bodies of which were covered by clothe strips, which proved their holy character.

As has been mentioned, the centre of the Minoans' religion was the Great Goddess, the Goddess of Nature and fertility. All the sport events, including tavrakathapsia were organized in her honor. There were more gods of course, but this female Goddess was the superior religious form and was connected with the fertility of the earth and the ability of a woman to give birth. Many female figurines found in the region of Crete depict the shape of that Great Goddess⁸.

According to the well reputed archeologist Sir Arthur Evans, who brought the Minoan world into light, this female Goddess was protecting the Games and took pleasure in watching her followers taking part in the dangerous event of tavrakathapsia⁹. The Goddess, herself, is depicted in drawings, taking part in the events either as an athlete or as a dancer. In addition, the Great Goddess represented all the stages of the human life and had the state of the Goddess of dance and sports, with absolute powers over the Earth, the sky and the sea. Sir Arthur Evans named the Minoan Goddess 'The Lady of the hunting', because she was often depicted to hunt wild animals and, in particular, deers.

⁶ N. Platon, *I akmi tou Minoikou politismou*, Athens, 1987, p. 199

⁷ B. Cook, *Animal worship in the Mycenaean Age*, 1894, p. 130

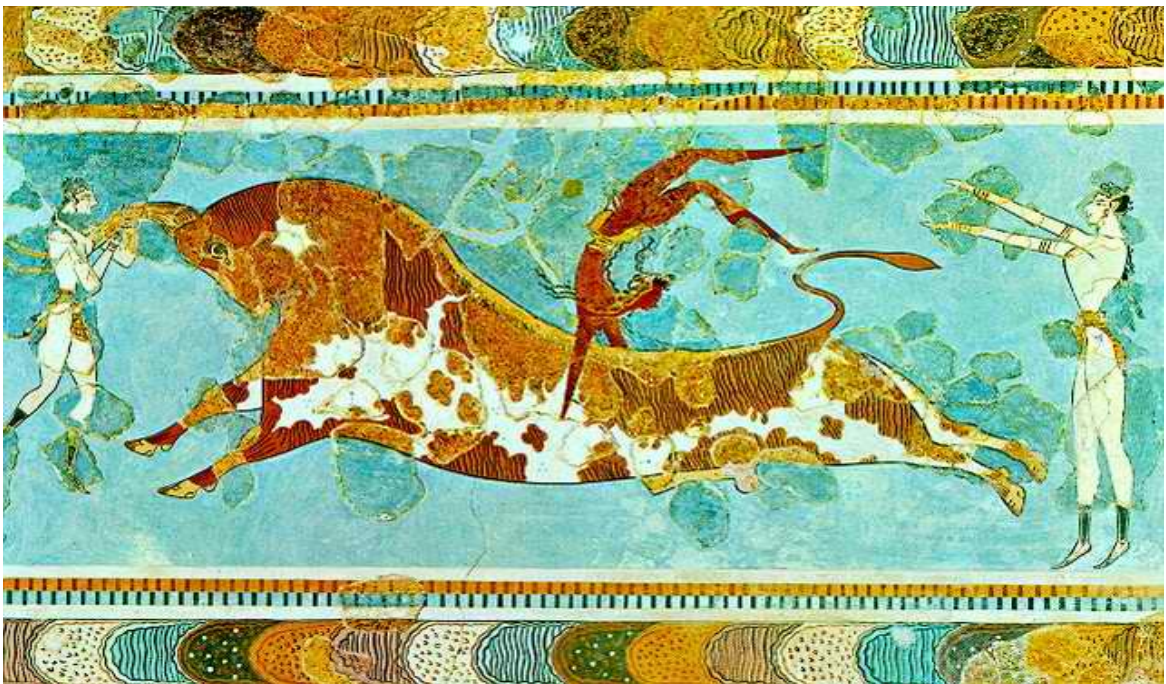
⁸ N. Papachatzis, *I thriskeia stin Archaia Ellada*, Athens, 1987, pp. 47-50

⁹ Giannakis, *Archaiognosia*, p. 143

Picture 1



Picture 2



Mycenaean Period

The Mycenaean culture was created during the Bronze Age (2.200-1.900 BC), after the invasion of Indo-Europeans in the mainland of Greece and after their interaction with the inhabitants of the Greek area, the so-called Pre-Greeks. A great progress was noted after the 16th century BC, when the Mycenae became the center of the respective civilization. (*Picture 3*)

There was an obvious influence by the Minoan civilization in all the aspects of the Mycenaean one: the religion, the art, even the handwriting with the use of the Grammic B which clearly derived from the Minoan Grammic A¹⁰.

More specifically, as far as religion is concerned, Mycenaeans adopted many Minoan religious elements which were added in their religion. For example, the Great Minoan Goddess was named Artemis (Diana) and, at the same time, ancestor and hero-worship was also noted¹¹.

Nevertheless, the sport customs in the Mycenaean world were quite different from the Minoan ones. While Minoans were a peaceful and religious people and did not attach great importance to wars and the glory deriving from them, Mycenaeans were warriors, determined to reach their glory no matter what. The tough training and physical development constituted a daily activity of the Achaians and the sport events did not aim at the amusement of the spectators, but at the reach of the glory and prevalence after an intense competition. Tavrokathapsia, Minoans' favourite sport, did not appeal to the Mycenaeans¹². Chariot racing was the favourite event of Mycenaeans. This deviant sport habit is mainly a result of the different religion and the different graving habits of the two cultures. For instance, while the Minoans were dedicating all their sport fests to the Great Goddess, The Mycenaeans were dedicating them to their ancestors and heroes.

The information about the Mycenaean sport competitions comes mainly from Homer. (*Picture 4*) The two masterpieces of Homer, Ilias and Odyssey, referred to the Trojan War between Greeks and Trojans, which took place in 1220 BC approximately. Homer referred in various occasions to the boom of Mycenae in the 14th century BC. Indeed, in the 23rd book of Ilias, one can find the most

¹⁰ M. Nilson, *The Mycenaean origin of Greek Mythology*, Berkeley, 1932, p. 33

¹¹ L. Palmer, *Mycenaeans and Minoans*, London, 1961, pp. 177-180

¹² D. Lazaridis, *O athlitismos stin Archaia Ellada*, Athens, p. 473

ancient Homer's reference to sporting events, when Achilles organized games in honour of his dead friend, Patrocles¹³.

The epos of Homer eulogises the Mycenaean society which is characterized as aristocratic and heroic at the same time. The Homeric hero is an excellent athlete and a brave warrior, who endears glory and victory. Throughout the work of Homer one can detect the constant effort for recognition. The competition is perceived as a quest for glory and the fair play constitutes an important element of the competition¹⁴.

Homer describes two kinds of sporting events. The first one is the intricate and lively description and the other one is the memories of the poet himself or the ones of other heroes. Examples of the first kind, the direct description, can be found in both Iliad and Odyssey. In rhapsody Ψ of Iliad the Games that Achilles organized in honour of Patrocles are described¹⁵ and in rhapsody Θ of Odyssey Homer describes the Games that the king of Pheakes organized in honour of Odysseus¹⁶.

As regards the second kind of the events mentioned, the memorabilia, we can find many references in various rhapsodies. In Iliad, in rhapsody Δ, Agamemnon recognizes the brevity of Tydeas and in rhapsody Λ Nestor refers to his father who had won the Games of Iliad and in rhapsody X a parallelism between the chase of Hector and the chariot-racing is drawn¹⁷. In Odyssey, in rhapsody Ω, it is mentioned that Thetis, organized Games in honour of Achilles and established prizes for the winners¹⁸.

The references of Homer to the sporting events of Mycenaean are of great importance. Homer refers to the chariot-racing, which is closely linked to the aristocratic background of the period, the wrestling, the boxing, the javelin, the discus, the running ('dromos') and the weapon-fighting. In the descriptions of the events, Gods have much to do with sports. Artemis seems to prefer hunting, Apollo prefers boxing and archery, while Zeus prefers horses and Poseidon

¹³ S. Miller, *Arete*, Chicago, 1979, pp. 1-16

¹⁴ W. Kullmann, *Gods and men in the Iliad and the Odyssey*, 1985, p. 15

¹⁵ Homer, *Iliad*, Ψ

¹⁶ Homer, *Odyssey*, Θ

¹⁷ Homer, *Iliad*

¹⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, Ω

prefers the chariot-racing¹⁹. Homer himself highlights the interference of Gods to the sporting competitions, either by supporting or by preventing an athlete from winning.

However, the religious background of Mycenaeans is quite intense during their funerals and the commendatory prayers. The sport games in honour of the deads constituted the most important part of the funeral²⁰. In Ilias, Nestor addressing to Achilles says: 'go honour your dead friends by Games'. It is remarkable that wealthy families with an aristocratic background organized very luxurious funerals²¹.

The main reason for the organization of such sport competitions during the funerals was the satisfaction of the soul of the dead and the conviction that the athletes who competed in these ceremonies gained power for the rest of their life.

Picture 3



Picture 4

¹⁹ Mouratidis, Istoría, p. 62

²⁰ Ploutarch, Symposiaka, 639

²¹ Homer, Iliad, 23.646



CHAPTER 2

RELIGION AND GAMES IN THE HISTORIC TIMES

Archaic and Classic era

The period of the Greek history beginning after the end of the dark ages and extending until the beginning of the Classical years (800-500 BC) is called 'Archaic period'. After the descent of Dorieis, the ancient traditions and customs did not disappear. However, even though the praising of the deads continued, the symbolism was different and the connection of the Games with the funerals was no longer intense. The Games during the archaic period instead of a way to praise the deads became a means to express ideals and the moral excellence.

Also, a very important element was the national character of the games, since the sport competitions were now pan-hellenic and no longer local. The establishment of the city-state institution contributed a lot to this reality. City-states were essentially independent communities which were created by areas-districts of the main Greece and the kingdoms of the Mycenaean period²².

During the city-state institution, there was obviously a better organization as regards religion, as national celebrations were organized and holy days were also established²³. The local worships, which constituted the centre of Greek religion remained its basis throughout the Greek antiquity. Every city-state had its own fests and celebrations and connected them to the 12 Gods of Olympus. Also, every city state was constantly trying to have a greater influence, which resulted in an intense competition among the cities-states. This competition led to an intense physical training of the citizens. This was happening because the city state had to be ready to defense itself in case of war and to be glorified in social events during peace time²⁴.

In addition, there was a new relation between the individual and the society. This relation was known as the 'ideal of the city' and first emerged during the pre-classical era at the beginnings of the 6th century BC. So, every citizen, and not only the aristocrats, constituted an inextricable part of the society and their fundamental need was to take actively part in it. This participation, though, required the creation of a fine citizen- 'kalokagathia'- a term, which became really popular during the classical years²⁵. The 'kalos kai agathos' citizen was characterized by the harmony and the excellence, which were a result of both education and physical exercise. The physical training was no longer an individual matter. It was an element of a collective social integration. The individual was no longer involved in physical training in order to satisfy his personal ambitions but rather to be capable of dealing with the affairs of his city-state.

As has been proven above, citizens of every social background and from all the cities-states were involved in sport competitions. For instance, the very first

²² B. Xenidou, *Oi gunaikes stin elliniki arhaiotita*, Athens, 1995, p. 201

²³ E. Rikenson, *Arhaies Ellinides athlitries*, Athens, 2000, p. 35

²⁴ B. Poliakof, *Combat sports in the ancient world*, London, 1987, p. 95

²⁵ W. Donlan, *The origin of καλός καγαθός*, 1973, pp. 370-374

Olympic champion, in 776 BC, Korivos from Iliia, was a humble cook. (*Picture 5*) At the ends of the 7th century BC, all the citizens, from their infancy until their latter end, had to train²⁶.

This policy would be intensified during the classical years, as a result of the great democratical and sociopolitical changes of that period. Sport and education were in perfect harmony, as the concept of “healthy soul in a healthy body” had prevailed. In particular, in Ancient Athens there was a great emphasis attached on the combination of physical and intellectual development, in contrast to the system of Ancient Sparta which was based on a rigid physical and war education without any intellectual complement²⁷.

As for religion and worship, there was a superficial uniformity. In effect, though, each one of the two cities-states had its own local Gods that were somehow connected to the Olympic Gods²⁸. So, while, the Olympics initially were games organized in honour of the local hero Pelops, in the Archaic era they were organized in honour of Zeus. The connection of the games with the agricultural religious celebrations for the fertility of the earth is also remarkable. This connection is evident in the way of rewarding the winners: olive branch in the Olympics, pine branch in Isthmia, laurel branch in Pythia and celery branch in Nemea.

The adherence to the religion marks the use of certain elements of exaggeration and prevalence. The human being is strong, but gods are stronger²⁹. Greeks attributed to Gods human characteristics and reactions. Some Gods are presented to be very interested in the Games and some others seem to be protectors of some games who are organized in their honour.

The organizations of sport events constituted a form of gratitude and pray to the Gods. The presence of many spectators was perceived as being a great honour for the God. The winners of the Games felt that they owed their victory to the Gods and this is why they devoted their victory to them³⁰.

²⁶ N. Yalouris, *Oi arhaioi Olympiakoi agones ka ii symvoli tous sti diamorfosi tis Ellinikis Paideias*, Athens, p. 46

²⁷ H. W. Pleket, *The participants in the ancient Olympic Games-Social background and mentality*, Proceedings of an international symposium on the Olympic Games, Athens, 1988, p. 188

²⁸ N. Papahatzis, *I thriskeia kata tin Arhaiki ephi*, Athens, p. 76

²⁹ Plato, *Politeia*, 381

³⁰ D. Sansone, *Greek athletics and the genesis of sport*, Berkeley, 1988, pp. 79-80

Picture 5



Hellenistic and Roman era

The Hellenistic period covers the 3rd and 2nd century BC and is connected with the territorial conquests of Alexander the Great and the foundation of the Hellenistic kingdoms.

A main element of the period was the rapid increase of sport facilities, which took the form of gymnsasia, palastras and stadia. Also there was a parallel augmentation of the sporting fests, in both the Mainland and the new states created by the heirs of Alexander the Great³¹. (*Picture 6*) The number of the sporting fests of that period is really impressive. Beyond the four famous pan-hellenic fests (Olympia, Pythia, Isthmia, Nemea) there were 19 more Games organized within the 4 years in-between the Olympic Games. This was due to the glamour of these fests, the expansion of hellenism and the great ambitions of the kings of the Greek dynasties.

The participation of the Macedonian king Alexander the Great in the Panhellenic Games, led his heirs who undertook the power in the dynasties to participate in

³¹ J. Noble Wilford, *When the Games Began – Olympic Archaeology*, New York, 2004, p. 2

the Games as well. According to the sources, Ptolemeos, was the winner of the chariot-racing event in the Games of Pythia. His heir, Ptolemeos Philadelphos, followed his example and won the gold medal, also, in the event of chariot-racing in the Olympic Games of 260 BC.

The kings of the Hellenistic era made sure that there was enough funding for the sport fests and the sport arenas and this led to an increase of the spectacularity of the Games. Particular emphasis was attached on the comfort of the spectators, the massiveness of their number and the cosmopolitan character of the Games³². This reality, though, led to a negative aspect of sport: professionalism. There were incidents reported about offers of money and other goods to the winners and even incident of bribery. This professionalism of sport during the Hellenistic years was a result of the general economic and social development of Greeks and aimed at the improvement of the circumstances under which athletes had to perform³³.

The new ways of being involved in sport led to its compulsory disconnection from religion. The Games were no longer religious games but people's Games and also the victory was no longer the result of a divine support but rather a result of the athlete's personal effort.

After the Hellenistic period, the Roman Empire came to power. The Roman era began the 2nd century BC and lasted until the 3rd century AC.

After the occupation of the Greek territory by Romans in 146 BC, the situation was really tragic. The constant wars culminated in the economic and social decline which also led to the inhibition of the vast majority of the Games. Despite all the difficulties, though, the sport ideals of Hellenism remained alive, mainly thanks to the great glamour of the pan-Hellenic Games, which also contributed to the political reinforcement of Romans³⁴.

During the first years of the occupations, Romans demonstrated respect towards the Greek sacred places. This did not last though. In 86 BC General

³² S. Giatsis, *Istoria tis athlisis kai ton agonon ston elliniko kosmos kata tous ellinoromaikous, tous byzantinous kai tous neoterous hronous*, Thessaloniki, 2000, pp. 31-33

³³ E. Hatziefrimidis, *Oi Olympiakoi Agones prin tin katargisi tous (393-426 AC)*, Athens, 2005, pp. 35-45

³⁴ V. Kirkos, *O athlismos stiin Ellinistiki kai Romaiki ephi*, Athens, pp. 275-278

Syllas did not respect the holy ground of Olympia and transferred the Games to Rome.

However, there were also some positive thoughts and activities which led to the gradual reinforcement of the glamour of the Greek sport Games. The philhellism of certain Roman Emperors, who tried to include in roman spectacles elements of the Greek games, contributed a lot to this reality. This can be certified by the following examples: Julius Caesar included sport activities in the Great Roman hippodrome, Herodes the Great funded the games of Olympia, as he were a lover of Greek art and literature, August combined the Greek way of physical education with the Roman one, he reconstructed the temple of Zeus in Olympia and founded new Games with Greco-Roman character. Actia was the most important among these Games. Neron, though, proved to be the greatest supporter of Hellenic sport. Being a follower and supporter of the institution of the Olympic Games, he had been constantly studying the Greek culture and founded sport games in his honour, the Neronia³⁵.

Nevertheless, the close link between port and religion, which was an integral part of ancient games, was no longer there. The Games were held in the honour of certain Roman emperors and not in the honour of Gods. The bloodthirsty and harsh roman events formed part of the 'bread and spectacles' policy (*Pane et Circenses*)³⁶. (*Picture 7*) The only religious element of the Games was probably the praising of the winners, who were being honoured as immortal heroes³⁷.

Undoubtedly, the decline of the religion and worship led to the subsequent decline of the Games. Christianity brought to a definite end any kind of religious connection with the Games. Besides, Emperor Theodosius banned the Games in 394 AC.

Picture 6

³⁵ Mouratidis, *Istoria*, pp. 373-376

³⁶ H. W. Benario, *Sport at Rome*, 1983, pp. 40-43

³⁷ D. Harmon, *The religious significance of games in the Roman Age*, Raschke Olympics, p. 236



Picture 7



CHAPTER 3

THE PANHELLENIC GAMES

During the antiquity, there were many different fests and games held, some of them with regional character and some others with pan-Hellenic character. However, four of them had the greatest glamour and attracted the interest of spectators and athletes: Olympia, Pythia, Isthmia and Nemea.

Olympia

Olympia Games used to be the most important fest of Ancient Greece and were held in Olympia every four years in the honour of Zeus. (*Picture 8*) The findings of the excavations in the region of Olympia verify the sanctity of the place. Pausanias refers to the temple Gaio, mentions that it is the most ancient temple in the area and is dedicated to Goddess Earth, who also has an oracle in the area³⁸. Evidently, the Goddess Nature was the dominant Goddess in the area and its worship had emerged really early. The results of the excavations

³⁸ Pausanias, *Eliaka*, 14.10

reinforce the opinions that Kronos and his wife Rea, daughter of Ouranos and Gaia, were worshiped³⁹. Rea, the mother of the Gods, had her own temple in Olympia, which was named Mitron.

In the region of Olympia many figurines and statues have been found which depict horses, chariots, fully armed warriors and charioteers. The findings are chronologically placed between 1000 and 800 BC. Most of the findings are placed in the 8th century BC. Evidently these findings were dedicated to the temple by athletes after their victory in the Games⁴⁰.

The worship of Goddess Dimitra Chaminis is also relevant, a Goddess that was connected to the Games (that were held in honour of Gaia) and was a form of the Great Goddess of Nature.

Obviously, the fest had a long tradition. It started as a regional fest with increasing interest from both athletes and spectators. Over the years, the fest acquired a pan-Hellenic glamour, which is due to the worship of Zeus in the region. The already existing fest is reorganized in 776 BC, as well as other fests like Pythia, Istmia and Nemea⁴¹. Within the region of Altis, the temple of Zeus, the temple of Hera and the one of Poseidon had been erected. All the places of worship were surrounded by a big number of thymeles. Visitors offered sacrifices to the Gods there. The glyptic decoration of the temple reflects the mood for competition and effort which is emphatically depicted in figurines with athletic features⁴².

Picture 8

³⁹ S. Schobel, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, London, 1966, p. 18

⁴⁰ J. N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece*, New York, 1977, p. 335

⁴¹ C. Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles, The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eight Century*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 32

⁴² W. J. Raschke, *The Archaeology of the Olympics. The Olympics and other festivals on antiquity*, Wisconsin, 1988, p. 43



Pythia

The temple of Delphi was as important as the one of Olympia. Within the temple there was also the very famous oracle of Delphi. Since the pre-historic era, the ground of Delphi, just like the one of Olympia, was sacred. The findings of the excavations prove that since the last period of the Bronze Age in Delphi the Goddess Gaia was worshiped⁴³. The findings are reinforced by the sources of the ancient Greek literature. Beyond the functioning of the temple and the oracle, which was initially dedicated to Gaia, at that place there were also sporting games and competitions organized. As regards the worship of the God Apollo, it was widely held that the God came to the area of Delphi after the Homeric revolution and settled down there after the transportation of Gaia in the 8th century BC. (*Picture 9*)

The findings of the modern archeological research and the interpretation of the archeological data coincide with the tradition. The Goddess Gaia, since the 14th century BC enjoyed the worship in Delphi. The worship of Gaia in Delphi involved a lot of sacrifices. The Goddess Gaia constitutes an expression of

⁴³ Isiodos, Theogonia, 41

Nature and fertility and is praised and worshiped with dances and competitions. We can, therefore, accept that the situation in Delphi was quite similar to the one of Crete.

During the Pythian fest, a great number of athletes, spectators-worshippers and musicians flocked at the place. The fest, apart from the nude sporting activities, included music contests as well, which is closely linked with Apollo, the God of music and light⁴⁴. According to Pausanias, the oldest competition in Delphi was about the creation of a hymn in honour of Apollo, which clearly shows the religious background of the celebrations in that holy place⁴⁵. After the arrival of Apollo, music contests formed part of the program which was unique as regard the activities in the agonistic part of the fest until 585 or 586 BC. The worship of the God is connected to quite similar competitions in Sparta and in the island of Delos, places where there was a developed worship of Apollo, Artemis and their mother Leto.

Pythia Games, according to the tradition, were held in the honour of Apollo and in particular to celebrate the victory of Apollo against Python, the guard of the oracle so far. After this victory, the God, in order to reach an atonement, he exiled himself for 8 years. It is believed that this 8-year exile is relevant to the organization of the Games every 8th year⁴⁶. The sport competitions had many things in common with the Games organized in the honour of Zeus in Olympia. Over the years the schedule of the fest got differentiated not only as regards the procedure but also as regards the number of the contestants (musicians, artists and nudists).

Picture 9

⁴⁴ Pausanias, Fokika, 7.4-8

⁴⁵ Pausanias, Fokika, 7.2

⁴⁶ I. Mouratidis, *Istoria Fysikis Agogis kai Athlismou tou Arhaiou Kosmou*, Thessaloniki, 2008, p. 272



Isthmia

The organizing city-state of Isthmian Games was Korinthos. So, in the first and third Olympic year and during the spring there were Games organized in Korinthos in the honour of God Poseidon, the so-called Isthmia⁴⁷. (*Picture 10*)

As nearly every other ancient sport festivity, Isthmia were linked with legends, Gods and myths. Both the Games and the fest were initially dedicated to Meliketis or Palaimonas who was later replaced in the worship by Poseidon⁴⁸. This phenomenon of worship replacement was quite usual in Ancient Greece. It is remarkable, though, that whenever this happened the locals never renounced the old God or hero worship. Likewise, in Isthmia, the findings of the excavations provided important information about the past of this fest and demonstrated that this past had remained eligible on any memory from the part of ancient Greeks. In its initial form, the fest gathered elements of a “funeral-

⁴⁷ E. N. Gardiner, *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals*, London, 1910, pp. 215-222

⁴⁸ Pausanias, *Korinthiaka*, 1.6

type” festivity. The competitions organized therein, started as a way to honour Melikertis. Palaimon who is the same person as Melikertis, was hero-worshiped and there were Games established in his honour after an oracle. The historic probative procedure cannot provide strong evidence about the worship of Palaimon in the pre-historic era. According to writers, though, the start of this worship is placed in 580 BC, the year when the isthmian fest started. In terms of the excavations, a figurine was discovered in the place which has the form of ‘kouros’⁴⁹. As the typology of kouros usually concerns pieces orientated to be placed in graves of very important persons, there is a likelihood that this piece depicts Palaimon.

Another historic version gives a mythological background to the beginning of the fest and the worship of Melikertis-Palaimon. As the myth has it, Adamantas, the king of Orchomenos, attributed the drought and the hunger of his kingdom to his wife, Ino. In order to punish her, he killed her son, Learhos. After that, Ino, in order to avoid the anger of Adamantas, she killed herself by jumping in the isthmus along with Melikertis. Afterwards, according to the myth, Melikertis’ body was taken to the beach by a dolphin. The kingdom of Admantas, though, kept being tantalized by drought and hunger. So, the Delfhi’s oracle held that the disaster would come to an end only if the dead young man was praised with Games. Under another version of the myth, Sisyphos was the one who found the dead body of his nephew Melikrates in the beach and founded Games in his honour⁵⁰. The Games were being held at the exact place where the body was found. Later the temple of Poseidon was erected at the very same place.

According to the tradition, the beginning of the Games is placed either in 592 BC or in 580 BC, at the same period that Pythia (582 BC) and Nemea (573) were established. At the place where Isthmia was discovered by the findings of excavations a temple has been found which is dated at the first quarter of the 6th century BC and before 582 BC. All this evidence reinforces the opinion about the existence of religious-devotional activity at the place before the beginning of the inclusion of sporting activities-competitions in the schedule of the fest⁵¹.

⁴⁹ O. Broneer, *Isthmia, Topography and Architecture*, Princeton, 1973, p. 23

⁵⁰ Pindar, *Apospasmata*, 5.6

⁵¹ K. Adshead, *Politics of the Archaic Peloponnese. The Transition from Archaic to Classical Politics*, Aldershot, 1986, p. 40

Picture 10



Nemea

Nemea was an important fest of Peloponnese which was held to honour the father of Gods, Zeus. The temple was placed in a small forest in the center of a valley⁵². (Picture 11)

We do not have much information about Nemea and this is because there are not many findings or references. Like some other cases, the beginning of the fest has a mythological background. The reason of its foundation was the death of Ofeltis, a young man who was eaten by a snake. The seven military generals who are involved in the myth and in particular Adrastos organized Games to honour the young man at his funeral. The same games were organized many years later by Epigones who destroyed the city-state of Theva. Under another version, Hercules, the son of Zeus and Alkmini, was the one who founded the Games after killing the lion of the place in order to honour his father, Zeus⁵³.

⁵² Pausanias, Korinthiaka, 2.2

⁵³ Apollodoros, Vivliothiki, 2.5

Regarding the foundation of the games, the first version of the myth (the myth of Ofeltis) seems more plausible for two reasons: firstly, there are relative references in many ancient Greek sources and, secondly, it inspired the ancient Greek art⁵⁴.

The recent archeological activity brought into light quite important findings. The coins which were found are of great interest. One of the coins-of Corinthian form and placed at the mid 2nd century BC- depicts a figure fighting with a snake who has wrapped round the body of a baby and nearby a woman is depicted to recede.

These two figures which have been craved on the coin have been recognized as Ofeltis and Ipsipili⁵⁵.

Out of a chronological point of view, the beginning of the fest is placed at 573 BC, most probably as an attempt to rival the Olympic Games. The fest had a praising of the deads character and was held in honour of Ofeltis⁵⁶. The prize was a celery wreath. Celery was a plant perceived as being connected with Adis, the underworld. Under the tradition, the plant grew in Ogigia, an island also connected with the deads and the island of Kalypso. Another element that supports the dead-honouring character of the fest concerns the dressing of hellanodikai. While hellanodikai in Olympia used to wear the royal red laver, in Nemea they used to wear black chitons, the colour of which was linked with the reasons of the establishment of the Games⁵⁷.

The fest was being organized in the 2nd and 4th Olympic year during the summer, as the vast majority of the ancient Greek festivities. We do not have enough knowledge about the duration of the fest. The only source which could enlighten this aspect is the catalogue of the facts that makes us accept that the organization must have been lasting many days. During the fest there were nude games, horse races, music contests and oration competitions.

Picture 11

⁵⁴ L. E. Roller, *Funeral Games for Historical Persons*, 1981, pp. 5-17

⁵⁵ E. N. Gardiner, *Numismatic Commentary on Pausanias*, 1985

⁵⁶ St. Miller, *Nemea, a Guide to the Site and Museum*, Berkeley, pp. 104-110

⁵⁷ Gardiner, *Greek*, 225



CHAPTER 4

LEGENDS ABOUT THE FOUNDERS OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The issue of the birth of the Olympics is still bothering researchers and writers. There are various legends and myths about this matter and what makes the issue complicated is that every theory shakes down the others. The four more prevalent legends regarding the derivation of the Games are cited below.

Hercules Daktylos

The Cretan Hercules Daktylos is claimed to be the founder of the Olympic Games. The Courrians or Daktyloi were coming from Crete and were dwarfs and servants of the Great Goddess of nature and fertility that was worshiped in Ancient Crete. (*Picture 12*) According to Pausanias, there were five siblings, called Hercules, Peonaios, Epimides, Iasios and Akesidas⁵⁸. These five siblings had visited the region of Elis and built the temple of Zeus. Hercules asked his siblings to compete in running, founding in this way the Olympic Games. Peonaios, the winner of the race, got an olive branch as a prize. Hercules Daktylos was the first one who made sacrifices in honour of Zeus and placed the dust of the sacrifice in the altar of ashes⁵⁹.

It has been accepted that this legend was invented in order for the new worship of Zeus to be reinforced. It can be easily understood that it was a human concept, as Hercules Daktylos was never worshiped in Crete. The Daktyloi dwarfs had nothing to do with the powerful and glorious Greek role-model.

The people of Elis, though, had every reason to link Hercules Daktylos with the Olympic Games. Pausanias mentions that people of Elis wanted to replace the legendary hero Hercules with Hercules Daktylos, as Hercules was the one who killed the king of Elis, Avgeias as well as Nileas and his sons, who were all coming from Elis⁶⁰. In addition, according to Pausanias again, Iphitos was the one who convinced the people of Elis to make sacrifices in honour of Hercules, who was their enemy up to that point.

One can detect major religious elements at this myth. It is supported that the races involved a kind of initiation ritual and during the games a new demon of fertility was selected⁶¹.

The ritual was characterized by the inclusion of youth in the social life. The young people had to go through strength and endurance tests. The winner of the games was considered to be the new king of the period and the demon of fertility of the year. According to Harrison, the Games of Olympia involved an initial race that Kourites, the young men, had to participate in and the result defined the greatest Kouros of the year. The winner of the race did not get a

⁵⁸ Pausanias, *Messiniaka*, 7

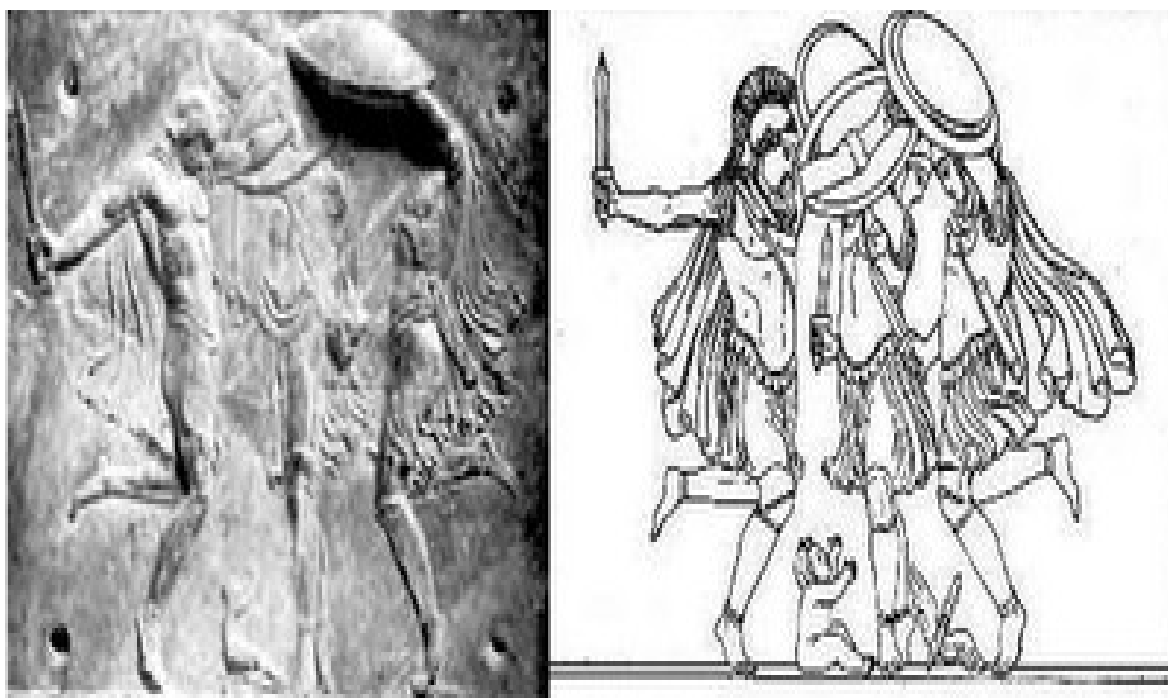
⁵⁹ Pausanias, *Eliaka*, 6-8

⁶⁰ Homer, *Iliad*, 11

⁶¹ H. D. Evjen, *The origin and function of normal athletic competition in the ancient world*, Athens, 1992, pp. 101-103

prize. Instead, he got a symbol of his capacity, as a demon of fertility: a branch of the sacred olive tree⁶². This capacity was connected to the duration of the fertility of the Earth and depended on the physical powers of the human being.

Picture 12



Oenomaos and Pelops

As the legend has it, this hypothesis concerns the conflict between Oenomaos and Pelops. Oenomaos was the king of Pisa and Elis and he had three sons and a daughter, Ippodamia. Oenomaos tried to prevent her daughter from getting married, as, according to an oracle, she would be killed by her husband's arm. So, Oenomaos had decided that only the one who would beat him in the event of chariot-racing would be allowed to get married with his daughter. Beating Oenomaos in the chariot-racing, though, would be extremely challenging given that Oenomaos had in his possession the horses of the God Aris which were invulnerable and powerful. Indeed, everyone who tried to challenge the king in the event of chariot racing, ended up with losing his life during the race⁶³.

⁶² J. E. Harrison, *The origin of the Olympic Games*, 1996, pp. 43-45

⁶³ E. Brulotte, *The pillar of Oinomaos and the location of stadium at Olympia*, 1994, pp. 54-63

Pelops from Lydia, though, son of king Tantalos met Ippodamia and fell in love with her. So, he decided to challenge king Oenomaos. Pelops, in order to win approached Myrtilos, the charioteer of Oenomaos, who was also in love with Ippodamia and was so far helping Oenomaos to beat the candidate grooms. Pelops promised Myrtilos to give him the half of his kingdom in case he won. Myrtilos accepted and replaced the wedges of the chariot with candle. So, during the race, the wheels of Oenomaos' chariot melted and Oenomaos found a tragic death overtaken by the horses⁶⁴. (*Picture 13*)

Pelops, thrilled after his victory, took Ippodamia and Myrsilos at the island Eleni. However, Myrsilos tried to rape Ippodamia. Pelops threw him in the sea, which was named after him ever since: the Myrtoos Sea. After that, Pelops went back to Elis and founded the Olympic Games in order to reach atonement for the death of Oenomaos⁶⁵.

According to the ancient sources, Pelops was a leading figure among his compatriots. In the region of Olympia he was worshiped and honoured more than any other hero. On an annual basis a black ram was sacrificed in his honour and there is evidence that this was happening just before the beginning of the Games⁶⁶.

Picture 13

⁶⁴ J. Barringer, *The temple of Zeus at Olympia, heroes and athletes*, 2005, p. 217

⁶⁵ R. Graves, *The Greek myths*, Great Britain, 1960, pp. 32-39

⁶⁶ M. Nilson, *The Mycenaean mythology*, London, 1972, pp. 95



Hercules

Hercules, the most important ancient Greek hero, is also claimed to have founded the Olympic Games. (*Picture 14*) According to Pindar, Hercules after completing his 12 labours, wanted to occupy the region of Elis. Avgeias was the contemporary king of Elis, whom Hercules was confronted with during his 5th labour⁶⁷.

According to the myth, the king Avgeias had in his possession a great number of flocks and the issue of the cleanness of his byres was constantly bothering him. So, he asked Hercules to clean all the byres within a day and, in return, he would give him his half kingdom. Hercules accomplished the task successfully, but Avgeias did not keep his promise. Hercules, therefore, angry as he was,

⁶⁷ Pindar, Olympionikos, 10.28

declared a war against the king Avgeias. In the first fight Avgeias won, but Hercules recomposed his powers and won the war, occupying Elis⁶⁸.

As a result of his prevalence, he founded the Olympic Games, in honour of his father, Zeus. He named the hill of the area, 'kronion', he built a temple in honour of Pelops who was an ancestor of his and he dedicated 6 temples to the Gods of Olympus⁶⁹. Hercules is also claimed to have found the institution of the sacred truce, during which armed conflicts stopped throughout the Games. There will be an analytical reference to the Olympic truce in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

The theory about the foundation of the Games by Hercules makes perfect sense given that he was a hero and athlete with pan-Hellenic glamour. His presence in the area of Olympia is certified by objects which have been found there and depict armed warriors, whose shields and helmets depict Hercules⁷⁰. Also, in a fresco of the 7th century BC, Hercules is presented to offer sacrifices for the foundation of the Olympic Games. Lastly, the anthem which is still displayed during the flame lighting ceremony of the Modern Olympics, the famous 'Tinella kallinike' (Τήνελλα Καλλίνικε) is considered to be the winning song of Hercules, sung by his warriors for their victory⁷¹.

Picture 14

⁶⁸ Pausanias, *Ellados Periigisis*, 5

⁶⁹ M. Mauromatakis, *Olympia kai Olympiakoi agones, apo tin arhaiotita mehri simera*, Athens, 2002, pp. 31-35

⁷⁰ Mouratidis, *Istoria*, pp. 255-259

⁷¹ Pindar, *Olympionikos*, 9.1



Zeus

Zeus is also claimed to have founded the Games. According to this version, Zeus had a duel with his son, Kronos, on the Kronion hill of Olympia. The winner would gain the absolute domination of the world⁷². Zeus finally prevailed and in order to celebrate his victory, he founded the Games. (*Picture 15*) In these first games, the Gods themselves competed. Indeed, Apollo is claimed to have become the champion after having beaten Hermes in running and Aris in wrestling. Therefore, the Games were founded by the Gods of Olympus as a memoire of their dominance over the world⁷³.

This myth is claimed to be an invention of the people of Elis, when they occupied the sacred place of Olympia in the 6th century BC. However, this theory involves a more general migration. The first habitants of the area, Pelasgoi, worshiped Kronos and Gaia, which justifies the name of the Kronion

⁷² Pausanias, Ellados, 5,7

⁷³ U. Sinn, Olympia – Die Stellung der Wettkämpfe im kult des Zeus Olympios, Nikephoros 4, 1994, p. 48

hill⁷⁴. After the descent of Achaioi in the region of Elis, the God Zeus was recognized and had been already named 'Olympian', as a superior God than Kronos. So, the Games were renamed as 'Olympic' Games and the place was called ever since Olympia. So, it is claimed that it is because of Achaioi that the worship of Zeus became the prevalent one, while the worship of Kronos declined⁷⁵.

Picture 15



CHAPTER 5

⁷⁴ M. Andronikos, *Olympia, o arhailogikos horos kai to mouseio*, Athens, 2000, p. 5

⁷⁵ G. Murray, *Pente stadia tis Ellinikis thriskeias* (translation), Athens, 1996, p. 59

THE SACRED TRUCE

Content of the Truce

The combination of constant armed conflicts among the city-states and an epidemic had culminated in the inhibition of the holding of the Games for many years. During an unstable period in Ancient Greece either in 884BC, the king of Ilios Iphitos resorted to the Delphi oracle, trying to find a solution to the atrocities that tortured the entire Greece. According to the oracle, the old games should be revived and escorted by Truce⁷⁶. (*Picture 16*) It underlined that the Truce should not only be based on an oral agreement or custom but on a written law. So, the written law of the Truce was written down on a discus that was kept in the temple of Hera until the 2nd century AC⁷⁷. Therefore, the Truce was applied much earlier than 776BC. However, it had only the form of an oral agreement among city-states or custom and subsequently the connection with the Olympics was a little bit loose.

In Ancient Greece all the athletic games were linked with the temporary inhibition of the armed conflicts. According to Homer, when Patroklos died and Achilles organized games to honour him, Greeks inhibited the conflicts against Trojans and Achilles was reconciled with Agamemnon⁷⁸.

It is of pivotal importance, though, that the so far custom was embodied in a written form. It was a kind of pan-Hellenic international law, which could be characterized under the contemporary terminology as an international law act⁷⁹. In order to spread the news of the Truce before the beginning of the Olympic festival, three heralds decked with olive wreaths and carrying staffs were sent out from Elis to every Greek city-state. They were holding a stick which symbolized their power. It was the heralds' duty to announce the exact date of

⁷⁶ Pausanias, V. 4.6

⁷⁷ S. Giannaki, The Impact of the Truce law on the configuration of the common consciousness of Greeks, in *Lex Sportiva*, Vol 4, 2005

⁷⁸ Homer, *Iliad*

⁷⁹ I. Mouratidis, The Olympic Truce, el. Article ifose.gr, 2005

the festival, to invite the inhabitants to attend and mainly to declare the Olympic Truce⁸⁰. So, they became known as the Truce-bearers (spondophoroi).*(Picture 17)* They served not only as heralds but also as full time legal advisers. They were considered to be holy persons and protected by Zeus. They inspired respect to everyone and nobody was allowed to prevent their duty. Initially the Truce lasted for one month but it was extended to two and then three months in order to protect visitors who were coming from further afield. In all cases the starting point was the day that the heralds began their journey. The heralds started their journey on the first full-moon after the so-called 'therino iliostasio', which is considered to be the beginning of the summer" and the Olympic Games were held in the second full-moon after that point. The full-moon was considered to be holy and this is one more piece of evidence about the holy character of the Truce and the Olympics.

As has been already mentioned the terms of the Truce were engraved on a bronze discus that was kept in the temple of Hera in Altis. It imposed to the city-states to abstain from any kind of armed conflicts among them. Furthermore, especially in the wider area of Olympia, no armed soldier was allowed to enter. It was considered to be a constantly inviolable and peaceful place. Additionally, during the Truce Courts were not permitted to convict to death and death penalties were not executed⁸¹. The Truce reached even the extent that thieves used to make a vow that they would not commit any thefts during the periods of the Truce. It is considered to be admirable that they did not merely swear that they would not commit thefts but they actually did abstain from doing so. This is indicative of the pivotal importance of the truce in the antiquity. Even the outlaws respected it. Finally, it should be also stated that during this period people who had been exiled were allowed to return to their homeland or even go to Olympic to watch the Games. Therefore, it is obvious that the Truce was not limited to the temporary inhibition of the armed conflicts among the city-states but had a wider scope. It is believed that it had a deeper meaning which involved moral values such as friendship among states and individuals, lenience, forgiveness and sympathy. However, it should be pointed out that the

⁸⁰ J. Swaddling, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, the British Museum Press, 3rd edition, London, 2004, p. 11

⁸¹ Flavius, Appolonius Tianeus, 7-172

scope of the truce did not include external countries⁸². Greek cities-states were free to be in a war with any country outside the Greek wider territory without violating the Truce.

The reason of the compliance to the Truce is no other than its holy basis. The Truce is closely linked with the term 'ierominia', which means holy month. So, the period that the Olympics were held was considered to be sacred and this is why no form of violence or human humiliation and confinement was permitted.

Picture 16



Picture 17

⁸² L. Velissaropoulou-Karakosta, *The Legal Frame of the Ancient Olympics*, Olympic Games Law, Athens, 2003, pp. 55-65



Importance of the Truce

During the Olympic Games and the inhibition of the armed conflicts the leaders of the cities-states in conflict, had the chance to have a peaceful and fertile conversation which often led to a settlement. Many peace treaties, such as the 30-year peace treaty between Athens and Sparta were signed during the Truce of the Olympic Games. Another important peace Treaty was the 100-year peace treaty among Athens, Argos, Ilis and Mantinea which was being renewed every 4 years in the Olympic Games. The most important contribution, though, of the Olympic Truce was that it made all the Greek cities-states understand that there were more things that unified them rather than differentiate them. It made them

develop their common Hellenic consciousness and focus on the external dangers and enemies. Philosophers and orators from all over Greece flocked every 4 years in Olympia, expressed their opinions and beliefs and warned the people about the dangers of the constant conflicts among cities-states. Olympia, also, was a cultural centre which gave the chance to artists, sculptors, painters, poets, writers and singers from all over Greece to present their work in a peaceful environment. The importance that Greeks attached to the Truce is even more obvious if we take into consideration that they considered it as a Goddess, for the honour of whom they had erected a statue in the temple of Zeus in Olympia⁸³.

Generally the Olympic Truce was respected by all the city-states and within the 1200 years of the organization of the Ancient Olympics only a few violations are reported. This was mainly because the violations were considered to be disrespectful to the Gods and could result in a punishment by the Gods. The violations were perceived as crimes and subsequently followed by strict sanctions⁸⁴. The violators were not allowed to participate in the Games and were also fined⁸⁵. The fine was called 'the holy money' and was mainly used to build bronze statues of Zeus. Nevertheless, things were not always ideal. There were some violations of the Truce. According to the ancient historian Herodotus, the battle of Thermopyles in 480BC coincided with the 75th Olympiad. (*Picture 18*) Furthermore, in the following Olympiad of 476BC Themistocles asserted pressure on the Greeks to attack against the leader of Syracuse Ierondas, who was also there, because he refused to help the other Greeks during the war against Persians⁸⁶. Even the powerful Sparta was punished for having violated the Truce in the Games of 420BC. It should be also mentioned that Philip the 2nd -the father of Alexander the Great- of Macedonia apologized and accepted to pay the fine when his soldiers prevented Athenians people from going to Olympia to watch the Games⁸⁷. Apart from the disqualification and the fine, the moral consequences were even worse, since

⁸³ Giannaki, *The Impact*, p. 88

⁸⁴ Pausanias, *Eliaka*, V 24,9

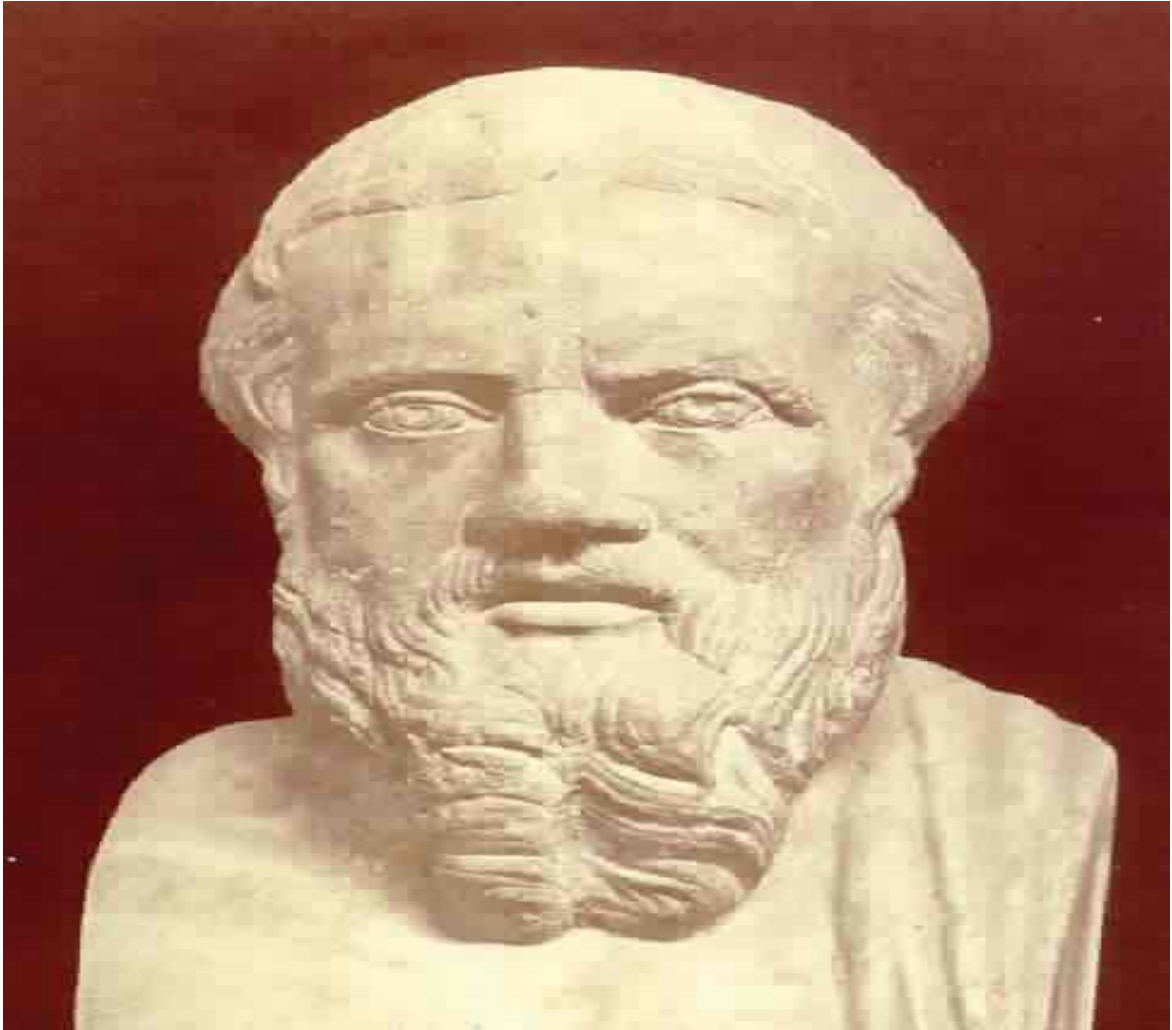
⁸⁵ Pausanias, *Eliaka*, V 2,2

⁸⁶ Velissaropoulou, *The Legal*, p. 72

⁸⁷ E. Albanidis, *History of Sport in the Ancient World*, Thessaloniki, 2004, pp. 66-68

violators were stigmatized forever and were disrespected and ignored by everyone.

Picture 18



CHAPTER 6

THE VICTORY CELEBRATIONS AND CEREMONIES

The celebrations (epinikia)

Praising the winners of the Games was considered by their compatriots the least they could do for them. The winners were honoured with official ceremonies and other events and sometimes they were even worshiped. This worship was in conjunction with the social and political background of each city-state. For instance a city-state in decline was glorified by the victory of one of its athletes, even many centuries after his victory⁸⁸.

The poet Pindar, in order to eulogize the winners of the Games, compared them to bravely fighting warriors⁸⁹. (*Picture 19*) Pindar believed as well, that a winner of the Olympics did not only glorify by his victory himself, his homeland and his family, but also, his dead ancestors. In addition, in the hymn of Archilohos of Paros, it was mentioned that Olympic winners were an embodiment of Hercules and on some occasions they were even dressed in his clothes⁹⁰.

A well-known policy of honouring the Olympic winners was to destroy partly the walls of the city-state. The winner, coming by a glamorous, enormous chariot, passed through the destroyed walls of his city-state. Initially, this custom found its origin to the belief that the winner was perceived as being a God, so he had to enter the city as a God. Therefore, there should be a special entrance for him. Later, though, it was held that the winner was not in need of a divine help and support and his victory was a result of his personal effort. So, the custom indicated that a city-state that had produced an athlete like that, was not in need of walls to be protected⁹¹.

The winning processions constituted another way to demonstrate admiration and the worship towards the winners. The processions were really spectacular

⁸⁸ F. Bohringer, *Cultes d'athletes en Grece Classique, propos politiques, discours mythiques*, 1979, pp. 7-16

⁸⁹ I. N. Perysinakis, *The athlete as warrior-Pindar's P.*, 1990, pp. 43-45

⁹⁰ C. M. Bowra, *Xenophanes and the Olympic Games*, 1938, p. 265

⁹¹ M. Pentazos, *Oi Olympiaki Agones stin Arhaia Ellada*, 1995, p. 135

and triumphal, since the crowd was bedewing the winners with flowers and leaves. After having passed from the great square of the city, the winner was led to the temple of the God-protector of the city-state and he offered a sacrifice to him, dedicating to him his victory⁹². Afterwards, there was a massive symposium, in which all the citizens participated. Dion Chrysostomos mentions that in the Isthmia Games the procession was formed outside the stadiums and inside the temple of Poseidon. Exactly the same procedure was followed after Alkiadis' olympic victory in 416 BC⁹³.

The libations and the sacrifices to the Gods also formed part of the winning ceremonies⁹⁴. The Gods who were considered to be athletes themselves, like Hercules and Hermes, were specially honoured. In the Olympic Games, the winners were given the olive branch inside the temple of Zeus, which reveals the secret communication between man and God. Most probably, there was a thanking sacrifice following in the altar of Zeus, as depictions of altars reminiscent of winning sacrifices have been found.

Statues and figurines were the best way to guarantee the eternal glory of the winners. (*Picture 20*) Thanks to the statues, winners could remain famous even many centuries after their victory. The winners of the Games had the privilege to have a statue built in their honour in the sacred Altis. In the inscription of the statue, one could find the athlete's father name, his city-state and occasionally the event in which he won. The importance attached to the statues was so great that poets were assigned with writing the inscriptions on them⁹⁵. The inscriptions of the statues were placed on the stony basis or carved on the piece: on the femur, on the chariot or on the horse. The descendants of the winners took a good care of the statues and in case they found them eroded, they amended the text of the inscription. According to the archeological findings in the site of Olympia, the statues had a normal shape, as only Gods had the privilege of an abnormal shape. However, only athletes who had won at least in three events could have a statue of normal shape created in their honour⁹⁶. The

⁹² Pentazos, *Oi Olympiakoi*, p. 137

⁹³ C. M. Bowra, *Euripides' epinician for Alcibiades*, *Historia* 9, 1960, p. 68

⁹⁴ Pindar, *Pythionikos*, 8.76

⁹⁵ W. W. Hyde, *Greek Literary Notices of Olympic Monuments outside Olympia*, *TAPA* 42, 1911, pp. 55-67

⁹⁶ H. Schobel, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, 1975, p. 46

most ancient statue in Olympia was the one of the Olympic winner Eftelis from Lakonia, while Pausanias refers to the statue of Arrachion, which was a kouros-style statue⁹⁷.

Many important poets, including Pindar, Simonides and Vakhylides, undertook the writing of the winning odes, that is, the hymns that were written in honour of the winners. The writers were asked by the winners themselves to write the odes. The winning odes praised the competitive ideal and helped the winners to integrate in the society after their absence for the Games⁹⁸.

Picture 19



Picture 20

⁹⁷ Ch. Waldstein, Pythagoras of Rhegion and the early athlete statues, *JHS* 1, 1880, pp. 169-200

⁹⁸ S. Hornblower, *Thucydides and Pindar, Historical Narrative and the world of Epinikian Poetry*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 27-29



The victory ceremonies

The winning ceremonies were the ones who followed the victorious outcome of the games. The citizens of the city-state used to honour the winners by these ceremonies and give to that special occasion the prestige that it deserved.

The main objective of the athletes who participate in the Games was to win the first place and the olive wreath. The wreath- and not the material riches-

constituted the greatest honour and this is why the Games were called stefanites (στεφανίτες- the Games of the olive wreath) (*Picture 21*)

The use of wreaths was quite common in ancient Greece, as it was present in all the stages of human life: the birth, the wedding and the death. Their connection with the games, the religion and the worship is proven, as the wreathing of the winners was being held evidently under the influence of the worship of heroes and deads. According to Blech, the wreaths were being used in symposia, weddings, funerals, sport victories and worships⁹⁹. The semiology of the wreath relied on the belief that plants embody the spirit and the vegetation. The wreath was considered to be a symbol of prosperity and protection by the Gods and the wreathed person was considered to be in touch with God. The wreathing involved the sense of affluence, health and fertility which derived from trees and vegetation¹⁰⁰. In addition, the wreath protected the head of the winner and made obvious to everyone the person wearing the wreath was sacred.

The derivation of this custom can be detected in the primitive years. It is connected with the ritual followed by hunters and with their direct goal which was the successful outcome of the hunting. The hunters of that period used to cover their body with various camouflages to avoid being noticed by their future prey. This was considered to be a successful policy and, ever since, the wreath was considered to be a symbol of success¹⁰¹.

The taping procedure was also of similar importance. (*Picture 22*) A tape was placed on the head or on the body of the winner with the objective to mark him and distinguish him from the others¹⁰². The wrapping was considered to be the simplest and easiest procedure to mark a person in a literal and metaphorical way. According to Harrison, this wrapping showed a contact with the Gods. It functioned, therefore, as a holy link¹⁰³.

⁹⁹ M. Blech, Studien zum Kranz bei den Greichen, p. 365

¹⁰⁰ T. Scanlon, The footrace of the Heraia at Olympia, Ancient World 9, 1984, p. 82

¹⁰¹ H. D. Evien, The origin and functions of formal athletic competition in the ancient world, Proceedings of an international symposium on the Olympic Games, Athens, 1992, p. 102

¹⁰² Pausanias, Ellados Periigisis, 6.2.2

¹⁰³ J. E. Harrison, Themis, Cambridge, 1912, p. 138

It is indicative that the taping procedure was followed as well to honour politicians or soldiers who also demonstrated a brave attitude. Tapes were also placed on dead men, columns of tombs, worship figurines, trees or even on animals which were orientated to be sacrificed in the honour of a certain God¹⁰⁴. Fyllovolia (φυλλοβολία) and periagermos (περιαγερός) constituted two important parts of the winning ceremonies. The word fyllovolia means the shedding of the leaves. The two aforementioned terms have many similarities. Their greatest similarity is the existence of leaves and branches, as the spectators used to bedew the winners with them, while their greatest difference is that periagermos was taking place inside the stadium, while fyllovolia could also take place outside the stadium¹⁰⁵.

The throwing of the leaves was closely linked with the strong personality and the prestige of the individual. An indicative example is Alexander the Great who was bedewed with leaves after recovering from his illness, which showed how much admired and respected he was¹⁰⁶. The scholar Cook notes that fyllovolia constitutes a magical ritual which made the winner an embodiment of the trees' and forests' spirit¹⁰⁷.

Picture 21



Picture 22

¹⁰⁴ Sansone, Greek, p. 81

¹⁰⁵ Euripides, Ekavi, 573

¹⁰⁶ H. Lolas, Mia fora stin Olympia, Athens, p. 145

¹⁰⁷ B. Cook, Zeus, Jupiter and the oak, 1903, pp. 175-186



CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account all the aforementioned elements, the role of religion was of great importance in all the sporting competitions of the Greek antiquity and in every chronological period. The presence of religion was intense in every single activity of Ancient Greeks.

It is ascertained that all the places, where games are organized, are considered to be holy, the Great pan-Hellenic Games were being held in the honour of a certain God and the winners used to dedicate their victory to a certain God as well. In addition, all the legends about the foundation of the Olympic Games are closely linked with some Gods or heroes, while the establishment of the institution of the Olympic truce was of great religious importance. No matter from which perspective one is trying to examine the matter, he/she will end up with the same conclusion. Historians, archeologists and theologians agree that every element and every activity of ancient Greeks involved the sense of the sacred, the holy and the worship.

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