

ΤΟΝ ΑΘΕΝΕΘΕΝΑΘΛΟΝ 

THE GAMES AT ATHENS



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Excavations of the Athenian Agora

Picture Book No. 25

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FRONT AND BACK COVERS:

FOUR-HORSE CHARIOT RACE; REVERSE OF PANATHENAIC AMPHORA
STRIDING ATHENA BETWEEN COLUMNS; OBVERSE OF PANATHENAIC AMPHORA
LATE 6TH CENTURY B.C. (P 24661)

FRONTISPICE: OWL PERCHED ON PANATHENAIC PRIZE AMPHORA;
REVERSE OF ATHENIAN SILVER TETRADRACHM, 2ND CENTURY B.C.

ΤΟΝ ΑΘΕΝΕΘΕΝΑΘΛΟΝ



THE GAMES AT ATHENS

JENIFER NEILS AND STEPHEN V. TRACY

American School of Classical Studies at Athens



I. REPRESENTATIONS OF ATHLETIC PRIZES, INCLUDING PANATHENAIC PRIZE AMPHORA AT FAR LEFT; MARBLE RELIEF, 2ND CENTURY A.C. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART (ROGERS FUND 59.11.19), NEW YORK

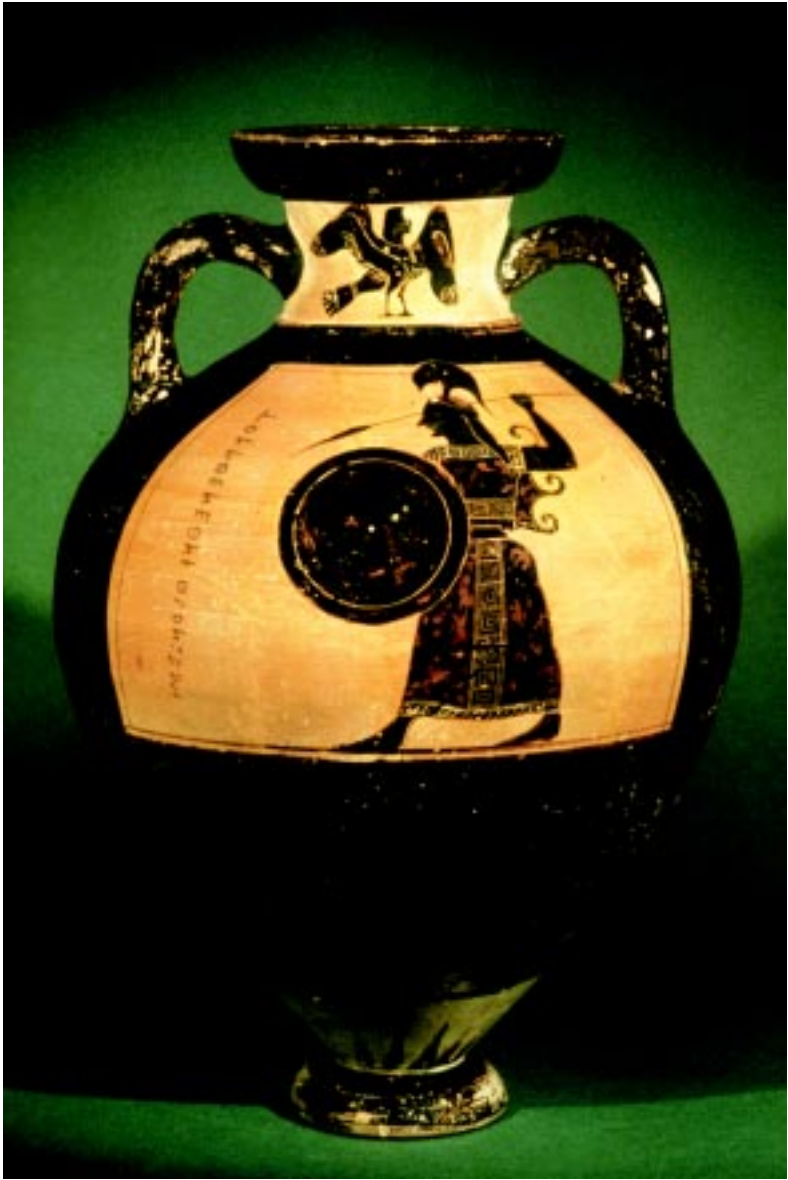


INTRODUCTION

Just about everyone is familiar with the ancient Olympic Games because of their revival in modern times. Less well known are the other three “crown” festivals of ancient Greece, those held at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea, not to mention local festivals that included athletic, equestrian, and musical contests. One of the most splendid of these local festivals was that held in Athens every four years in honor of the city’s patron goddess Athena. Called the greater “All-Athenian,” or Panathenaia, this week-long religious and civic celebration was the highlight of the city’s festival calendar. Its various contests, processions, sacrifices, and other activities involved all the residents of Athens—not just adult males but also women, children, metics (resident aliens), foreigners, and even slaves.

The Panathenaic games were distinctive, and no doubt especially popular with contestants, because of the valuable prizes to be won. Instead of the wreaths awarded at the prestigious crown festivals (Olympia: olive; Delphi: laurel; Isthmia: pine; Nemea: celery), most victors at the Panathenaia were awarded “cash” prizes consisting of olive oil in black-figured amphoras (1), or in the words of the 5th-century B.C. poet Pindar, “in fire-baked clay the olive’s fruit” (*Nemean Ode 10*). The decorated jar in which this oil was packaged always bore the official inscription ΤΟΝΑΘΕΝΕΘΕΝΑΘΛΟΝ, “one of the prizes from Athens,” and is therefore called a Panathenaic prize amphora (2). This distinctive container became emblematic of the festival and as such appeared on the city’s coinage, with an owl, symbol of Athena, perched on it.





2. OBVERSE OF EARLIEST EXTANT PANATHENAIC PRIZE AMPHORA, CA. 560 B.C.
BRITISH MUSEUM (B 130), LONDON



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Like the ancient Olympics, the greater Panathenaic festival grew and changed over the course of many centuries. Evidence for its history and development comes from inscriptions and classical authors such as Pindar, the poet of victory odes, as well as from works of art, such as the prize amphoras and the Ionic frieze of the Parthenon, and archaeological excavations. The traditional founding date of the Panathenaic games is 566 B.C., but the festival is clearly much older. Perhaps as early as the 8th century B.C., and probably under the influence of the games at Olympia held in honor of Zeus (traditionally dated 776 B.C.), the festival of Athena incorporated a program of athletic and equestrian competitions. These contests no doubt resembled those of the funeral games for the warrior Patroklos described in the *Iliad* (Book 23), featuring skills that were demanded in warfare such as running and hurling the javelin. Vase-painting evidence suggests that musical contests, which were part of the Pythian games in honor of Apollo at Delphi, also were held at the Panathenaia at an early date.

In the later 6th century B.C., Hipparchos, the younger son of Peisistratos, tyrant of Athens, embellished the festival with the recitation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by professional rhapsodes; every contestant was required to begin where his predecessor stopped so that each lengthy poem was performed in its proper sequence. The works of Homer were recognized as a national treasure by all Greeks, so their appropriation by Hipparchos was an inspired bit of larceny



worthy of a statesman who, like his father, wished to promote his city as the political and cultural leader of Greece.

Also during this period, a ten-meter-wide ramp leading up to the west entrance of the Acropolis was constructed. Its purpose could have been only ceremonial, that is, to make the approach to the sacred precinct possible for large processions such as those associated with the Panathenaia.

The most famous Athenian statesman, Perikles, contributed to the development of this festival as well. In 442 B.C. he was selected to be an *athlothes*, or supervisor of the contests. He had a particular interest in the musical competitions and is credited with building a concert hall, or odeion, on the south slope of the Acropolis adjacent to the Theater of Dionysos. It was during Perikles' rule that the major building campaign on the Acropolis began. The remarkable Ionic frieze of the Parthenon, with its 378 figures sculpted in low relief, documents many aspects of the Panathenaic procession and its culminating ceremony, the presentation of a new robe (*peplos*) for the venerable olive-wood cult statue of Athena Polias that was housed in the Ionic temple known as the Erechtheion.

In the Hellenistic period the prestige and allure of the Panathenaic games may have been at their highest. Inscriptions listing the winners indicate that the games attracted participants from as far away as Massalia (Marseilles) and what is Baghdad today. Even royalty found the competitions worthy of their participation. In the first half of the 2nd century B.C., King Eumenes II of Pergamon and his brother Attalos, as well as Queen Kleopatra II of Egypt and her brother and consort King Ptolemy VI, were winners in the equestrian events. The festival appears to have been celebrated until early in the 5th century of our era, at which time all pagan ceremonies were decreed illegal.



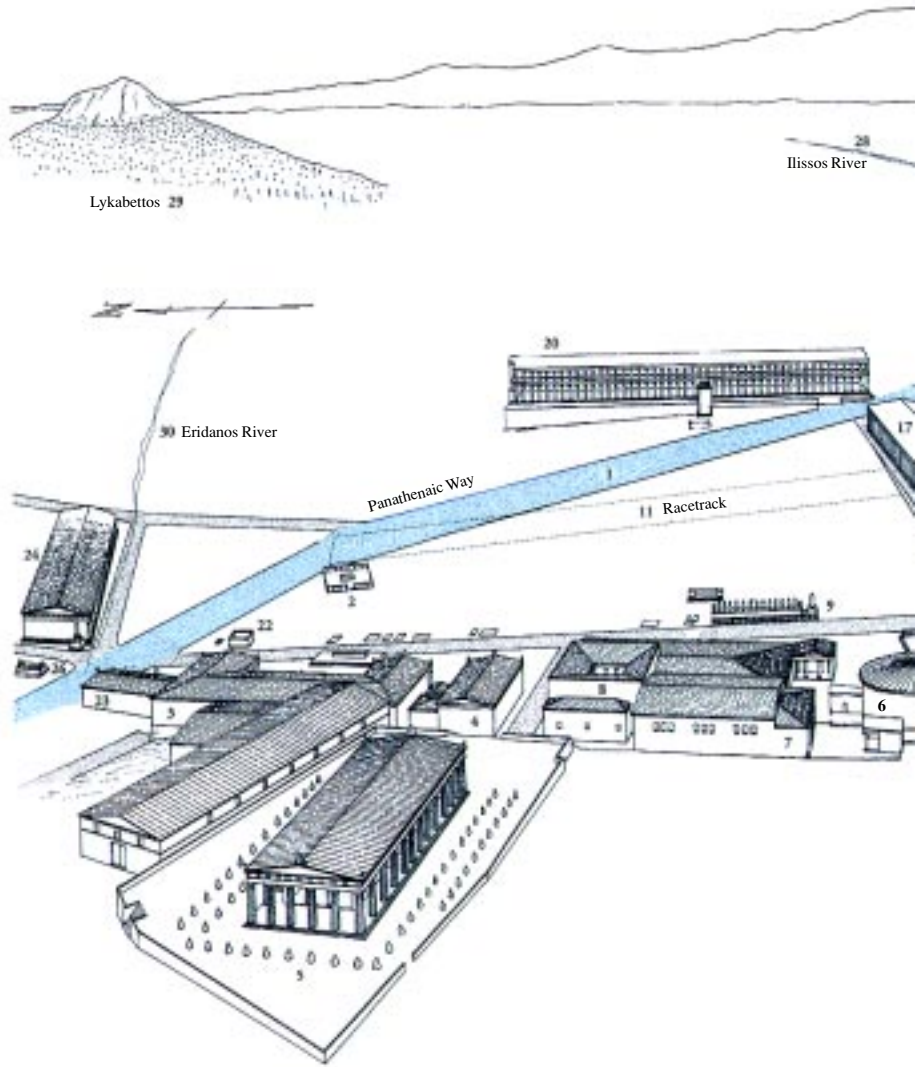
FACILITIES

The most obvious topographical feature relating to this festival is the broad street of the Panathenaia, the Panathenaic Way, which runs for approximately a kilometer from the northwestern gates of the city near the Kerameikos, through the Agora, and up to the Acropolis (4). The great procession (*pompe*) in honor of Athena, with its 100 sacrificial cattle, formed at a special building called the Pompeion and marched from there to the altar of Athena. Along part of this same route there also took place one of the more spectacular equestrian events, the race of the *apobatai*, in which warriors leapt off of and ran beside racing chariots and then leapt back on.

Before Perikles built the Odeion, the musical contests as well as other events took place in the middle of the city's public square, the Agora. This area was often referred to as the "orchestra," and large postholes are evidence of the supports for wooden bleachers known as *ikria* (3). Near one group of postholes are five square limestone

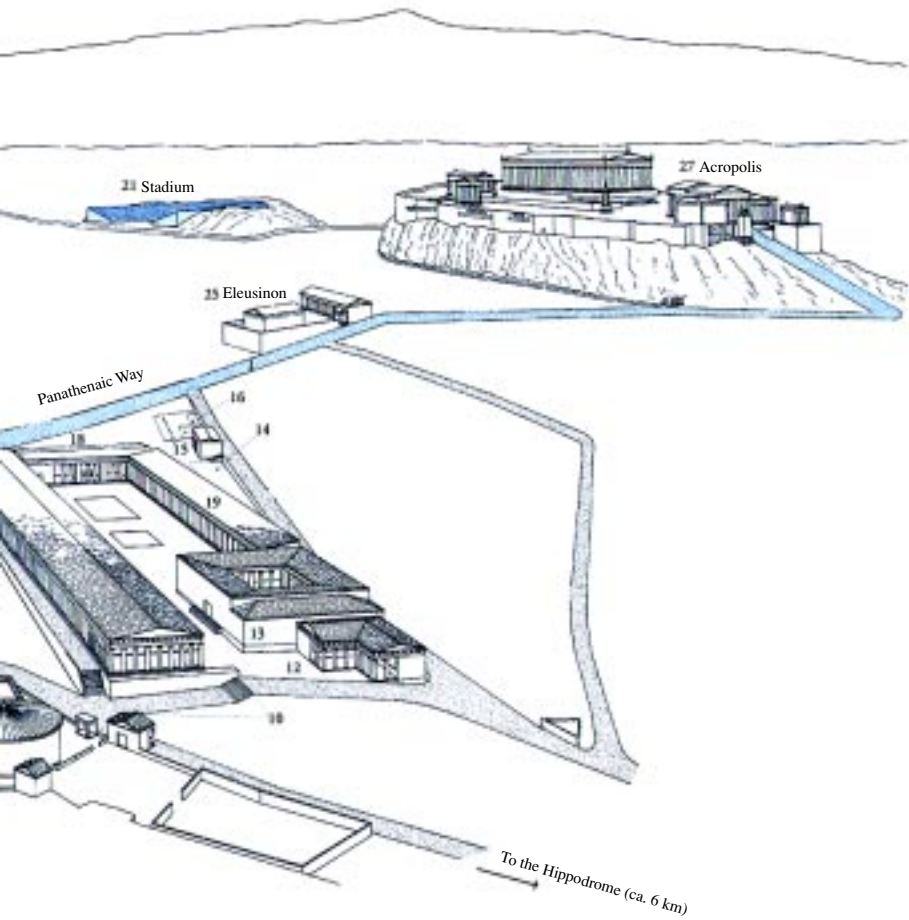


3. SCENE OF GAMES IN HONOR OF PATROKLOS, WITH SPECTATORS ON *ikria*;
FRAGMENT OF DINOS (GOBLET), CA. 570 B.C.
NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (15499), ATHENS



4. PRIMARY FEATURES OF ATHENS IN 150 B.C.
 W. B. DINSMOOR JR., S. L. MARTIN, ASCSA, ATHENS





- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Panathenaic Way | 14 South Stoa I | 27 Acropolis |
| 2 Altar of the Twelve Gods | 15 Southeast Fountain House | 28 Ilissos River |
| 3 Stoa of Zeus | 16 Mint | 29 Lykabettos |
| 4 Temple of Apollo Patroos | 17 Middle Stoa | 30 Eridanos River |
| 5 Hephaesteion | 18 East Building | |
| 6 Tholos | 19 South Stoa II | |
| 7 Bouleuterion | 20 Stoa of Attalos | |
| 8 Metroon | 21 Stadium | |
| 9 Eponymous Heroes | 22 Crossroads Shrine | |
| 10 Boundary Stones | 23 Royal Stoa | |
| 11 Racetrack (ca. 400 B.C.) | 24 Stoa Poikile | |
| 12 Southwest Fountain House | 25 Eleusinion | |
| 13 Aiakeion | 26 Altar of Aphrodite Ourania | |



5. BASES FOR STARTING GATES AND POSTHOLES FOR *ikria*,
NEAR AGORA RACETRACK



6. PANATHENAIC STADIUM IN ATHENS, RECONSTRUCTED IN 1896



blocks, each with a central socket, spaced at regular intervals (5); these once helped anchor the starting gates of a racetrack that accommodated ten runners. It has been suggested that the layout of the city center was determined in part by its function as a site for the Panathenaic games.

Later the gymnastic events were moved to the Panathenaic stadium nestled in a convenient valley across the Ilissos River southeast of the Acropolis. The modern reconstruction of this stadium (6), originally built late in the 4th century B.C., dates from the first Olympics of modern times, which were held there in 1896. Most of the equestrian events probably took place in a hippodrome located on a broad open plain near the coast at Phaleron, where today there is a modern racetrack.



7. *Gymnasion* SCENE OF A NUDE ATHLETE HOLDING A STRIGIL AND TALKING WITH A COMPANION; KYLIX (CUP), CA. LATE 5TH CENTURY B.C. (P 30987)



8. BOXER WRAPPING HIS HAND WITH A LEATHER THONG WHILE SITTING AMID HIS ATHLETIC EQUIPMENT; KYLIX, CA. 520–510 B.C.

HOOD MUSEUM (GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. RAY WINFIELD SMITH, CLASS OF 1918, C.1970.35), DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, HANOVER

In addition to these formal facilities, Athens, like other large Greek cities, had some half-dozen exercise grounds or *gymnasia*, literally places where men stripped for exercise (7). Here boys and young men could run, box, wrestle, jump, and throw the discus (8). On Athenian vase paintings this setting is often indicated by a short pillar that acted as a turning post for races.

TRAINING AND TRAINERS

The top athletes in ancient times were professionals, competing in many games and certainly making a good living from the contests. Like their modern counterparts, they trained extensively, adopted a serious regimen of exercise and diet, and sought out skilled trainers and coaches. On painted vases, scenes of the *gymnasion* often



9. TRAINER AND YOUNG JUMPER
HOLDING *halteres*
(JUMPING WEIGHTS); KYLIX,
CA. 440 B.C.
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
(96.18.119), NEW YORK

show cloaked and bearded trainers with forked sticks among the young nude athletes in training (9). We know of one famous Athenian trainer named Melesias, an aristocrat and personal friend of the poet Pindar. In *Olympian Ode 8* he is credited with preparing athletes who won thirty victories.

Just as today, the specialization of athletics was criticized as excessive and unhealthy. In his *Republic* (3.410b), Plato described such training as designed only to increase brute strength and not desirable for citizen soldiers: “A proper training would produce courage; but if that element is overstrained, it naturally becomes hard and savage.” In general, while the intellectuals tended to deplore the emphasis placed on athletics, the appeal of such competitions for the average citizen remained high.

ADMINISTRATION

When every four years the Athenians mounted the festival of the greater Panathenaia, they invited visitors from far and wide in Greece and beyond. Months prior to the games special ambassadors, called *spondophoroi*, went forth to announce the festival to all the Greek states on the mainland as well as on the Italian peninsula, and, in the Hellenistic period, they traveled as far as the Persian Gulf and North Africa. In the 5th century B.C. the subject allies of Athens



were expected not only to send a delegation to march in the procession, but also to contribute a suit of armor and a cow as offerings to Athena.

The Panathenaic festival was organized by a group of ten overseers called *athlothetai*, who were appointed by lot, one from each tribe. According to the *Constitution of Athens* (60), “they hold office for four years: they administer the procession of the Panathenaia, the musical contests, the athletic contests, and the horse race; they are responsible for the making of the robe, and together with the council for the making of the vases, and they present the olive oil to the winning athletes.” During the three years leading up to the festival they commissioned the prize amphoras from potters, collected the oil from the trees sacred to Athena, and supervised the weaving of a sacred robe to be presented to the goddess Athena. Inscriptions tell us that large sums of money were disbursed from Athena’s treasury to these commissioners of the games.

THE PROGRAM

Inscriptions carved on stone blocks, or *stelai*, enable us to reconstruct a fairly detailed program of musical, gymnastic, and equestrian events (see pp. 16–17). The entire program probably lasted at least a week and proceeded from place to place in the city. During the first few days (in our necessarily hypothetical reconstruction) the musical contests would have been held in the odeion. On days four and five the stadium would have hosted the athletic events, first for boys and youths, then for men. The latter ended with a 400-meter race in armor, an important contest that was the culminating event of the Olympic games. Colorful chariot displays in the Agora began the sixth day, which ended with horse races among members of the Athenian cavalry. On the seventh day the action moved to the hippodrome for the more serious (and lucrative) racing of the thoroughbred horses and chariot teams. The next-to-last day was reserved for competitions open only to Athenian citizens, the contestants being organized by tribe. The festival culminated with a grand procession to the Acropolis, the sacrifice of cattle, and lavish feasting.



MUSICAL CONTESTS

The musical competition included four events that are often illustrated in vase paintings: the *kitharodes* (singing and playing the *kithara*), *aulodes* (singing to a double-pipe accompaniment), solo *kithara* playing, and solo double-pipe (10, 11). The singing was divided into a men's and a boys' competition. Prizes (gold and silver crowns) for the *kithara* competitions were over three times as valuable as those for the double-pipe. This suggests that *kithara* performers were traveling professionals of some distinction.

Music had other important functions at the Panathenaia: pipe-playing accompanied the dance in armor (the *pyrrhike*) and the jumping contests, and both pipe-players and kitharists marched in the Panathenaic procession, as shown by the Parthenon frieze. A *salpinktes*, or trumpet player, no doubt heralded the beginning of the contests, the awards ceremonies, and the great procession.



10 (left). MUSICAL CONTEST WITH YOUNG SINGER AND FLUTE-PLAYER; NECK PELIKE, CA. 500 B.C.

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART (ROGERS FUND, 1907, 07.286.72), NEW YORK.

PHOTOGRAPH ©1990 THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

11 (below). *Kithara* PLAYER MOUNTING PLATFORM WHILE NIKE (VICTORY) HOLDS WREATH; CHOUS (WINE JUG), EARLY 4TH CENTURY B.C. (P 16910)



ATHLETIC CONTESTS

Inscriptions recording victors in the Panathenaic games of the Hellenistic period reflect a detailed and unvarying program for the athletic events. The contests for the boys came first. They competed in six events: three footraces, wrestling, boxing, and a combination of wrestling and boxing known as the *pankration*. Young men called *ageneioi*, that is, “not yet bearded,” are listed next. They competed in one footrace, the pentathlon, wrestling, boxing, and the *pankration*. The men’s division had, in addition to the boys’ and youths’ events, two footraces, one of 800 meters (the *hippios*), the other of 400 meters in armor (the *hoplites*). Thus, the boys competed in six events, the young men in five, and the men in nine. Two of the premier events of the modern Olympics, the marathon run and the decathlon, are not attested in the ancient games.

FOOTRACES

Footracing was traditionally the oldest competition at Olympia (Pausanias 5.8.6), and we have very early evidence for it at Athens, too. The races were run on a straight track, such as the one in the middle of the Agora, so the runners had to round a turning post in any race longer than the 200-meter sprint. An elaborate starting gate called the *hysplex* ensured that the runners started simultaneously, but the events themselves were not timed so we don’t know the pace of ancient runners. In vase paintings we can determine, however, from the positions of the runners’ arms, whether a long-distance race or a sprint is depicted (12).

HOPLITE RACE

With its military overtones, the race in armor was especially appropriate for the war goddess Athena and may have been introduced in Athens before its first appearance at Olympia (520 B.C.). Contestants, laden down with metal helmets and shields, were required to run two lengths of the stadium (400 m). On vases they can be distinguished from running warriors by the fact that they wear no body



PROGRAM OF THE

Days 1–8 (Hekatombaion 20–27).
Recitations of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
Location: Pnyx(?)

Days 1–3 (Hekatombaion 20–22).
Musical and Dramatic Competitions
Location: Odeion(?)

- A. Flute Playing
 - B. Kithara Playing
 - C. Choral Performances
- Location: Theater of Dionysos
- D. Performances of Tragedies

Days 4–7 (Hekatombaion 23–26).
Athletic Competitions

Day 4. Gymnastic Events
Location: Stadium
Open to All Comers

- A. Boys' Division
 - 1. long race
 - 2. 200 meters
 - 3. 400 meters
 - 4. wrestling
 - 5. boxing
 - 6. pankration
- B. Youths' Division
 - 1. 200 meters
 - 2. pentathlon
 - 3. wrestling
 - 4. boxing
 - 5. pankration

Day 5. Gymnastic Events (continued)
Location: Stadium
Open to All Comers

- A. Men's Division
 - 1. long race
 - 2. 200 meters
 - 3. 400 meters
 - 4. 800 meters
 - 5. pentathlon
 - 6. wrestling
 - 7. boxing
 - 8. pankration
 - 9. 400 meters in armor

Day 6. Equestrian Events

Location: Agora, or Market Square
("in the Eleusinion")
Open only to Athenian Citizens, probably
only the Cavalry

- A. Chariot Competitions
 - 1. driver dismounting race
 - 2. dismounting race
 - 3. two-horse chariot, up and back race
 - 4. two-horse chariot, flat race
 - 5. two-horse parade chariot race
 - 6. two-horse war chariot race
- B. Horse Races for Cavalry Commanders
 - 1. race in armor for warhorse
 - 2. up and back race
 - 3. flat race
- C. Horse Races for Cavalrymen
 - 1. race in armor for warhorse
 - 2. up and back race
 - 3. flat race

Day 7. Equestrian Events (continued)
plus(?) the *Anthippasia*

Location: Hippodrome

- A. Open to All Comers
 1. thoroughbred race for colts
 2. thoroughbred race for full-grown horses
 3. two-horse sulky race for colts
 4. two-horse sulky race for full-grown horses
 5. four-horse chariot race for colts
 6. four-horse chariot race for full-grown horses

- B. Open only to Athenian Citizens
 1. long distance horse race
 2. four-horse war chariot race
 3. two-horse parade chariot race
 4. two-horse chariot, up and back race
 5. two-horse war sulky race
 6. two-horse sulky, up and back race
 7. two-horse sulky, up and back race
 8. two-horse sulky, flat race
 9. two-horse sulky, flat race
 10. two-horse sulky, flat race

Day 8 (Hekatombaion 27). Tribal Competitions

Location: Stadium(?)

- A. Pyrrhic Dances
- B. Manliness

Location: Munychia Harbor

- C. Boat Races

Night of Day 8. All-Night Celebration with Torch Races

Location: From the Academy to the Acropolis

Day 9 (Hekatombaion 28). Great Procession, Sacrifice, and Feast

Location: Kerameikos, Agora, Acropolis

Days 10, 11 (Hekatombaion 29–30). Rest and Cleanup



I2 (right). FOUR LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS; REVERSE OF PANATHENAIC PRIZE AMPHORA, CA. 480 B.C. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART (LENT BY TRADE ARTS INVESTMENT, INC.), NEW YORK. PHOTOGRAPH ©1992 THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



I3 (below, left). TWO RUNNERS, WEARING HELMETS AND CARRYING SHIELDS, TAKING PART IN THE *hoplitodromos*; FRAGMENT OF PANATHENAIC PRIZE AMPHORA, CA. 370–360 B.C. (P 3798)

I4 (below, right). YOUNG JUMPER LEANING FORWARD HOLDING *halteres*; KYLIX, CA. 510 B.C. (P 1272)



armor (13). In his comedy *The Birds* (291–292), Aristophanes compares the approaching chorus dressed as high-crested birds with the motley crew of armored runners in the *hoplitodromos*, thereby suggesting that there was something a bit comic about these clanking racers.

PENTATHLON

As its name implies, the pentathlon comprised five events: footrace, long jump, javelin, discus, and wrestling. It appears that one had to win outright three of the events to be the overall winner, but we know nothing about the details of the scoring, number of tries allowed, and so forth. Given the variety of skills needed to be a successful pentathlete, it is not surprising that Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1361b) praised them for their physical appearance: “Pentathletes are the most beautiful; they are naturally adapted both for exertion of the body and swiftness of foot.”

Unlike the barefoot runners, who required no special equipment, pentathletes had a variety of athletic apparatus. They used lead or stone jumping weights to improve the distance of their long jump (14), and a special leather throwing thong was attached to the javelin to enable the throw to be longer and more accurate. The circular discus was made of bronze, marble, or lead (15, 16); surviving examples vary considerably in size (16–34 cm in diameter) and weight (1.25–6.6 kg, average 2.5 kg), but some of these may have been votive offerings and not intended for use in the games.

WRESTLING, BOXING, PANKRATON

Wrestling, boxing, and the *pankraton* were known as the “heavy” events, perhaps because they were relatively brutal, or because there were no weight classes as exist today. As we see in vase paintings, those who took part were often large physical specimens. The famous philosopher Plato, whose name signifies broad shoulders, was known for his skill as a wrestler.

According to Greek legend, scientific wrestling was invented by the Athenian hero Theseus, best known as the slayer of the Cretan





15. YOUNG *diskobolos* WITH LEFT FOOT OFF THE GROUND, ABOUT TO RELEASE THE DISCUS; KYLIX, CA. 500 B.C. (P 2698)



16. NUDE ATHLETE HOLDING LARGE DISCUS; KRATER (MIXING BOWL), CA. 490 B.C. (P 10578)



17. WRESTLERS WITH TRAINER; SKYPHOS (CUP), CA. 500 B.C. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART (06.1021.49), NEW YORK



Minotaur. Wrestling was both part of the pentathlon and a separate event in its own right (17). The object of this competition was to win three falls out of a possible five, with a fall meaning a pin of the opponent's back, shoulders, or hips.

By today's standards Greek boxing was particularly savage, with blows being directed to the opponent's unprotected head rather than to his body. The fight went on until one of the boxers either was knocked out or admitted defeat by raising an index finger (18). There were no padded gloves; contestants merely wrapped their hands with light leather thongs and so, for all intents and purposes, were bare-knuckled. Heavily scarred and broken-nosed boxers are familiar figures in Greek art.

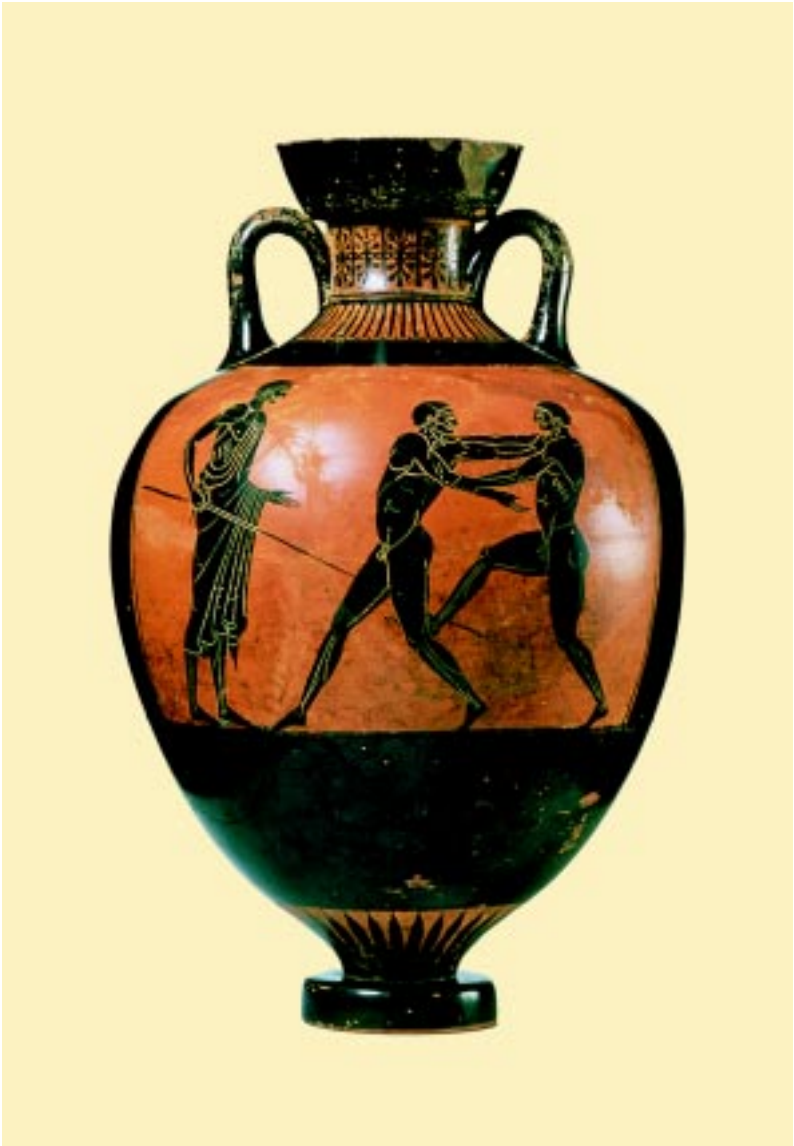
A combination of wrestling, boxing, and kicking, the *pankration* was probably the most violent event of the Panathenaia (19). Fingering, arm-twisting, choking, and blows to the genitals were not prohibited, although biting and gouging apparently were. As in boxing, the match ended when one contestant gave up or was incapacitated. The Athenian pankratist Kallias is the only *periodonikes* (winner at all four of the Panhellenic games) known from classical times. A monument base from the Acropolis records his wins at Olympia, the Panathenaia, Isthmia (five times), Nemea (four times), and Delphi (two times).



18. TWO BOXERS, ONE ABOUT TO STRIKE A BLOW WHILE THE OTHER HOLDS OUT RIGHT INDEX FINGER IN GESTURE OF DEFEAT; KYLIX, CA. 500 B.C. (P 24110)

EQUESTRIAN CONTESTS

If prizes are the criterion, the equestrian competitions were the most prestigious. Because of the expense involved in equipping and sponsoring a team of horses, only the wealthy could afford to compete. The rich Athenian aristocrat Alkibiades entered seven chariot teams



19. JUDGE AND TWO OLDER PANKRATISTS, ONE ENGAGED IN ARM-TWISTING;
REVERSE OF PANATHENAIC PRIZE AMPHORA, CA. 480-470 B.C.
HOOD MUSEUM (GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. RAY WINFIELD SMITH, CLASS OF 1918, C.959.53),
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, HANOVER



in the Olympics of 416 B.C., three of them finishing first, second, and fourth.

The equestrian contests at the Panathenaia were organized into two parts, one comprising three events open to all comers, the other composed of seven to ten events restricted to Athenians. The open events consisted of a thoroughbred race, a two-horse sulky race, and a four-

horse chariot race (the *tethrippon*) (20, 21). Each of these events had two divisions, one for young horses and one for those fully grown. In the pictorial evidence the jockeys are shown as nude youths, but the charioteers are bearded and wear long gowns. Most often the participants, who braved the dangers of riding bareback (without stirrups) or of maneuvering a light chariot around tight, congested turning posts, were not awarded the prizes. They went to the horses' owners, who were often foreign royalty and, in some instances, women.



20. FOUR-HORSE CHARIOT RACE;
PANATHENAIC PRIZE AMPHORA, CA. 500 B.C.
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM (BEQUEST OF
MRS. ALLAN MARQUAND, 1950.10), PRINCETON

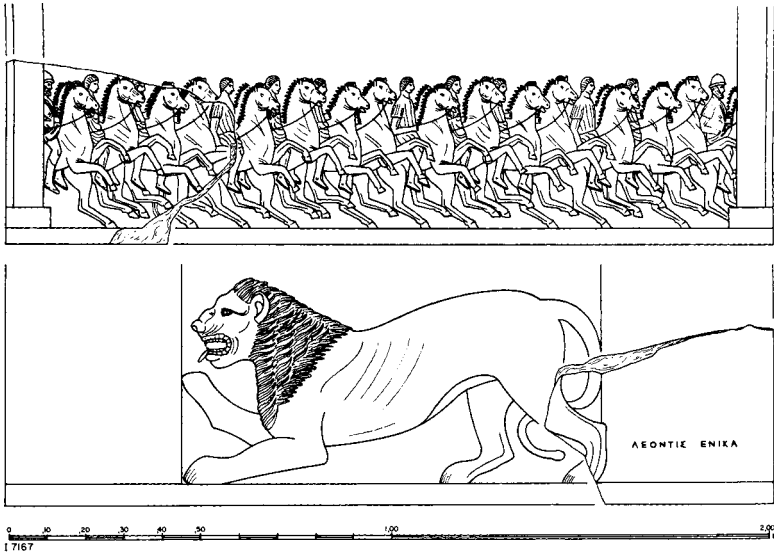


21. BOY WITH VICTORY WREATH
LEADING HORSE; CHOUS,
LATE 5TH CENTURY B.C.
(P 23850)

The equestrian competitions restricted to Athenians had a more military flavor, such as throwing the javelin at a target from horseback. The precise events varied but always included war and parade chariots and climaxed, as though in a grand finale, with flat-out races for the two-horse sulky.



22. ARMED WARRIOR ON CHARIOT IN RACE OF THE *apobatai*;
RELIEF ON MARBLE BASE OF MONUMENT, 4TH CENTURY B.C. (S 399)



23. RESTORATION DRAWING SHOWING BOTH SIDES (HORSES ON ONE, LION AND
INSCRIPTION ON THE OTHER) OF MARBLE RELIEF COMMEMORATING
TRIBAL VICTORY IN THE *anthippasia*, CA. 400 B.C.
W. B. DINSMOOR JR., ASCSA, ATHENS



SPECIAL EQUESTRIAN CONTESTS

The Agora was the venue for some unusual, time-honored equestrian displays. The *apobates* harks back to the time when men dashed into battle on chariots, leapt off the moving vehicle, and later jumped back on board (22). Images of this contest, such as that on a victory monument set up in the Agora in the 4th century B.C., show warriors, armed with helmets and shields, perched on the backs of their racing chariots in what appears to be a dangerous demonstration of athletic prowess. The orator Demosthenes called it “the noblest and grandest of competitive exercises.”

In the late-5th and 4th centuries B.C. the Athenian cavalry developed into an elite corps of 1,000 troops. Its impact on the Panathenaic program is evident in the event known as the *anthippasia*. This was a mock cavalry battle in which two squadrons of five regiments each (together representing the ten Athenian tribes) charged at top speed and rode through one another. Although this event took place in the hippodrome, a victory monument was set up in the Agora, in one instance by the winning tribe Leontis, as indicated by the lion and inscription on the reverse of the monument (23).

TRIBAL EVENTS

The cavalry display was one of a number of events in which participation was restricted to members of the ten Athenian tribes; in this regard the Panathenaia was unique among Panhellenic games. These tribal units were established by the democracy in 508 B.C., and the tribal competitions were no doubt instituted as a means of fostering one’s identity with a tribe, much like what happens between local sports teams and their fans today. This building of group solidarity among the boys and young men of the tribes would have paid off when they joined their military units, which were organized by tribe.

Boys, youths, and men performed in separate contests of the *pyrrhike*. According to legend, Athena performed this dance when she was victorious over the Giants, and, like their patron goddess,





24. PYRRHIC DANCERS; BASE FROM VOTIVE OFFERING OF ATARBOS, CA. 330–320 B.C. ACROPOLIS MUSEUM (1338), ATHENS. DEUTSCHES ARCHÄOLOGISCHES INSTITUT, ATHENS, 72/3004



25. ATHLETE WITH SPIKED CROWN HOLDING FLAMING TORCH BEFORE A TURNING POST; BELL-KRATER, LATE 5TH CENTURY B.C. (P 12040)



26. RUNNER PASSING TORCH IN TORCH RACE; CHOUS, LATE 5TH CENTURY B.C. (P 28245)



these dancers wielded a spear and round shield. Plato (*Laws* 7.815a) describes their movements, which were performed to the accompaniment of the double-pipe: "It consists in imitating, on the one hand, movements that evade all kinds of blows and missiles—by leaning to one side, giving way completely, jumping up high or dipping low—then again striving to imitate the opposites to these, aggressive postures involved in striking with missiles—arrows and javelins—and with all sorts of blows." A 4th-century B.C. relief represents just such a synchronized military dance (24).

One of the least understood tribal contests is that concerning *euandria*, or manly excellence. It seems to have been some sort of team event involving beauty, size, and strength, but as yet we have no definitive representations of it in Greek art. Another team event was the "contest of ships," probably a boat race in the harbor at Piraeus.

TORCH RACE

The night before the great procession a relay race with torches was held (25). Its purpose was to bring fire from the altar of Prometheus/Eros at the Academy outside the city to the altar of Athena on the Acropolis. Thus, it was an event combining both athletics and ritual. The distance of over 2,500 meters was covered by forty runners, four from each of the ten tribes. Vase paintings frequently show the passing of the torch from one runner to the next (26). The tricky aspect of this contest was to keep one's torch lit while racing; the comic playwright Aristophanes tells of one inglorious runner breaking wind and thereby extinguishing his torch.

RELIGIOUS PROCESSION

The final day of the Panathenaic festival was reserved for the main religious events: a grand procession through the city and the sacrifice of 100 oxen to Athena, followed by bountiful feasting. The Panathenaic procession is depicted in considerable detail on the sculpted Ionic frieze that runs above the porches and along the upper walls of the Parthenon. Here we see a splendid cavalcade of horsemen arrayed in their tribal ranks. Ahead of them race the

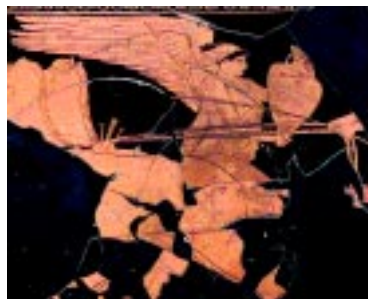




27. PRIEST FOLDING THE PANATHENAIC *peplos*; CENTRAL SLAB (V)
OF EAST FRIEZE OF PARTHENON, 449–432 B.C.
ASCSA, ALISON FRANTZ COLLECTION, ATHENS



28. NIKE PRESENTING PRIZE AMPHORA
TO VICTORIOUS CHARIOTEER;
AMPHORA, CA. 440–430 B.C. (P 9486)



DETAIL



apobatai in armor, leaping on and off their speeding chariots, in a magnificent display of equestrian skill. Then come the participants on foot: old men clutching olive branches, musicians with both *kitharai* and double-pipes, youths bearing water jars and metics shouldering grain baskets for the religious rites, the sacrificial animals led by young herdsmen, and finally, on the east end of the building, young women in the service of Athena carrying libation equipment. The culmination of the Panathenaia is depicted in a unique scene once located above the east door of the Parthenon. Here, in the presence of the Olympian gods, who are seated on either side, the priestess of Athena stands back-to-back with the *archon basileus* (chief priest); she is receiving stools from two female stool-bearers while he, with the help of a young temple boy, is folding up the *peplos* that has just been presented to the goddess (27). According to ancient sources, a scene from the battle of the gods against the Giants was woven into this precious garment.

After the ritual slaughter of the oxen, the meat was distributed to the populace and celebrations and feasting followed. Some critics charged that these great state festivals were put on less for religious reasons than to satisfy the public's craving for meat.

PRIZES

The Panathenaic games were different from the Olympics not only because of their tribal or team events, but also because of the cash values of the prizes. Musicians received gold and silver crowns, the athletes and equestrians olive oil in the special prize amphoras. There were 1st and 2nd prizes, the latter usually being one-fifth of the former. The most valuable prize went to the winner of the chariot race for adult horses: 140 amphoras of oil, or approximately 5,600 liters (28). It has been estimated that approximately 1,400 vases were commissioned from Athenian potters every four years, although a mere 1 percent of these survive. This type of vase became so popular that unofficial and somewhat smaller copies were manufactured (see front and back covers). Winning tribes were usually rewarded with an ox for a communal feast.



29. PERFUME VASE IN SHAPE OF KNEELING BOY TYING FILLET AROUND HIS HEAD; CA. 530 B.C. (P 1231)



In addition to their “cash” prizes, athletes received other honors. Their nude bodies were adorned with ribbons (29) and their hands filled with leafy branches. They were often honored in their hometowns with statues (30) and with the privilege of dining for life at state expense. In some instances the honors were tongue-in-cheek. A case in point is a graffito on a coarse ware water jar from the Athenian Agora that pokes fun at a man named Titas, calling him an Olympic victor in lechery!



30. MAN STANDING BEFORE
STATUE, ON STEPPED BASE, OF
VICTORIOUS ATHLETE HOLDING
ATHLETIC EQUIPMENT; KYLIX,
CA. 500 B.C.
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTION (B5),
BALTIMORE

MONUMENTS

The Acropolis and Agora, like other Greek sanctuaries and cities, were once filled with monuments honoring Panathenaic and Panhellenic victors (31). Two of these have been used in this booklet to illustrate activities involving horses, but others exist only partially today, in the form of inscribed bases without the statues that rested upon them. Most useful to the historian trying to reconstruct the Panathenaic games are the inscribed *stelai* listing the various contests, their prizes, and the victorious athletes. One of the most important of these is an early-4th-century B.C. inscription found on the Acropolis that lists the prizes awarded for the various events of the Panathenaia.

DEMOCRATIC ATHENS

Even though Athens was a democracy, ancient athletics were not necessarily democratic in nature. Because athletic prowess required leisure time for training and expenditures for instruction, athletes usually came from the aristocratic classes. This would have been even



31. ATHLETE MAKING AN OFFERING; BRONZE STATUETTE, CA. 460 B.C.
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more true with regard to equestrian events, as the cost of owning horses was otherwise prohibitive.

Women were excluded from most areas of public life, religious activities being the exception. Although they may not have watched their sons and husbands compete, they played a prominent role in the Panathenaic procession and wove the *peplos* for the goddess. As for slaves, who constituted about 30 percent of the population of ancient Athens, they did not customarily compete in the games but they may have served as jockeys and charioteers.

In antiquity Athens prided itself on being “open to the world”; by encouraging the participation of outsiders, Athenians enhanced the fame of their own games and those of Greece in general. The same is true today. ↪



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