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Lift, Eat, Compete: Athletics in Ancient Greece and Modern America

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Lift, Eat, Compete: Athletics in Ancient Greece and Modern America

Honors Bachelor of Arts Thesis

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Précis

Athletics was an integral part in the education, mentality, and values of the Ancient Greeks. Today, athletics likewise holds an important role in our society. Similarities can be seen in the preparation of ancient and modern athletes as well as the attitudes and motivations surrounding athletics. These similarities illustrate that athletics serves an underlying function in ancient Greece as it does today: to both provide a stage to show self-excellence and a release to dispel pent up human emotions.

Introduction

“One More Rep! Push! Harder! Faster! Stronger!” These words are well known to any athlete preparing for competition. No one understood this preparation better than the ancient Greeks because of the integral role athletics played in their education, mentality, and values. Similarly, today, athletics plays an important role in our society. Although one can note differences in the preparation of ancient and modern athletes, the underlying principles and foundations are the same. Moreover, the attitudes and motivation surrounding athletic competition are strikingly similar between ancient and modern athletes. These similarities illustrate that athletics serves the same underlying function in ancient Greece as it does today: to provide a stage to show self-excellence and to release pent up human emotions.

Ancient and modern athletes underwent rigorous and strenuous training regimens in preparation for competition. Each athlete had his workouts tailored to fit his event in competition. Heavy athletes, who needed strong and powerful body, performed workouts to build strength and size. The light athletes needed to be smaller and faster, altering their workouts to achieve different results. These workouts would get the athletes’ bodies into the proper condition and shape. Modern day athletes attempt to do the same by structuring their workouts in similar ways. Modern workouts are more structured and diverse, but they have the same basic principles in place.

In order to perform strenuous exercise routines athletes in antiquity just as athletes today needed proper nutrition to fuel their bodies for intense energy expenditure. At first glance, the ancient diet might seem inadequate because of limitations on food options: such as a lack of meat, problems with preserving, and access to certain food. Today, there are many different types of diets and access to food is much easier, providing a wider variety of sources of nutrition for

athletes. However, both ancient and modern diets worked toward the same goal of providing enough energy for the athlete to compete and maintaining his health throughout the process.

In addition to similarities in the physical aspects of athletics, the attitudes and motivations for athletes to compete share other parallels. The myths of Homer's heroes were of great importance to later Greeks who upheld the same traditions as their ancestors. Starting with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, I trace the tradition of competition through Classical Greece and connect it with athletics in modern day United States. An examination reveals that both ancient and modern athletes had external and internal factors that drove them to compete. This examination of ancient and modern athletics attempts to show the role competition plays in society, as a universal tradition that connects people separated by time and space.

Before beginning any analysis or examination of ancient athletics a few words must be said concerning the extant sources on the subject. The evidence of ancient athletics is limited and unsatisfactory. The available evidence exists in three categories: literary texts, inscriptions/papyri, and archeology/art.¹ The literary texts that are analyzed in this thesis are: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Pindar's *Odes*, Philostratus' *Gymnasticus*, Hippocrates' *Regimen of Acute Diseases*, Pausanias' *Descriptions of Greece*, Lucian's *Anacharsis*, Diogenes' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*. For the most part literary texts have short passages on athletics mentioned in larger works that are not concerned with sport.² Therefore, we only get small snippets of information from these sources. However, they do reveal the predominant beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts of the authors' time. This can help in understanding what role athletics played in their culture and society. Unfortunately, the only extant work that focuses on athletics is Philostratus' *Gymnasticus*. This piece written in the 1st-2nd century A.D.

¹ Golden 1998:47.

² Golden 1998:49.

supplies information that is not available in other places.³ Even though this piece was written centuries after the classical period in Greece, it is one of the only sources that provides insight into the training regimens and nutrition of ancient athletes. This is also the reason that I included the works of Lucian, Athenaeus, Diogenes, and Pausanias. Likewise, inscriptions on stones near the archeological sites of the Panhellenic games, such as the corpus of the *Inscriptiones Graecae* which contains all known inscriptions from the mainland and islands of Greece, provide fragmented pieces of evidence on athletics. Various papyri fragments, such as the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, also provide information on athletics. These papyri have various dates since they are a compilation of different fragments from all over Greece. Inscriptions and papyri fill in some of the voids left by literary texts such as details of festivals, prizes, and interesting phrases or statements.⁴ Papyri fragments also give the extra advantage of displaying information passed through private communication; but they are sometimes misleading because they were most likely written in haste and they are fairly rare because they only survived in places with dry climates.⁵ Lastly, archeological remains at the sites provide some information and give a picture of the importance of athletics to the ancient Greeks. These remains include ruins of sanctuaries and athletic buildings, statues, and pottery with athletic scenes. Using these we can construct a picture of what the sites would have looked like during the ancient games and what parts of their culture were intertwined with athletic contest. In looking at pieces of evidence concerning ancient athletics one can note that there is not one work that reveals every detail. Therefore, all the evidence are like pieces of a puzzle that must be compiled together in order to give an accurate account of ancient athletics.

³ Golden 1998:49.

⁴ Golden 1998:54.

⁵ Golden 1998:55.

Chapter 1: Training

Both ancient and modern training consist of two parts: acquisition of skill and preparation of the body. Athletes acquire skill by practicing techniques and prepare their bodies with strength training.⁶ Ancient and modern athletes also recognize the importance of cross training because it helps prevent injury, enhances recovery, and develops a more complete and fit athlete. In ancient Greece, athletes who competed in the Panhellenic games subjected themselves to rigorous training that included weight-lifting, conditioning, and sport specific drills.

At first no specific exercise regimen existed, but as athletics advanced an organized system of training eventually emerged. Before the Persian Wars (499-449 B.C.) there was no system for athletic training.⁷ Afterwards, general exercises were conducted in the palaestra (παλαίστρα) since physical education was an important part of Greek education (παιδεία) and society.⁸ These exercises were commonplace activities taught to a group of students and were not intended for individual instruction.⁹ By the 5th century B.C. it seems that athletes had professional trainers, but exercises were directed mostly by “rule of thumb”.¹⁰ Athletes would only practice the skills used in competition because general fitness and strength was obtained by

⁶ I define ancient as from the time period of Homer through the Classical Period in Greece, even though the sources I use are written in the 1st-2nd Century A.D. The reason for this is because there are no previous sources that give detailed accounts of regimens kept by ancient athletes. Therefore, I use these pieces of evidence to illustrate that a systematic approach of athletic training did develop over time. Thus, in chapter one and two ancient refers to athletes all the way up to the 2nd century A.D. In chapter three ancient refers to athletes through the classical period. Furthermore, I define modern as the beginning of the 20th century to the contemporary time period in the United States.

⁷ Gordon 1935:513.

⁸ Prichard 2003:302.

⁹ Prichard 2003:302.

¹⁰ Harris 1966:171,173. The position of an athletic coach provided a useful job for retired athletes: Iccus of Tarentum won the pentathlon at Olympia, Melesias won at Nemea and Isthmia, and Hippomachus of Elis won the boy's boxing at Olympia (Harris 1966:177).

the hardy lifestyle of the ancient Greeks.¹¹ In the 4th century B.C. training regimens began to solidify as Aristotle writes: “[A]nd we deliberate about navigation more than about athletic training, because it has been less completely reduced to a science” (*E.N.* 3.3). This statement is important because of the Greeks long history and effectiveness in seafaring.¹² If the Greeks argued more about athletics than naval navigation one could assume that they had a fair grasp on how to train athletes. Then, sometime before the 1st century A.D. an organized workout routine called the tetrad system was developed for athletes, which allowed for a more systematic approach to training.¹³ Philostratus, a Greek sophist from the 2nd-3rd century A.D., gives some insight into this training regimen. His *Gymnasticus* explains the training and practices included in the tetrad system:

By tetrads is to be understood a cycle of four days, on each of which something different takes place. On the first, the athlete is prepared; on the second, intensively engaged; on the third, given over to recreation; and on the fourth, moderately exerted. The preparatory training is, however, an energetic, short, and rapid movement, which arouses the athlete and prepares him for the coming exertion; the intensive, an irrefutable test of the inner strength of constitution; the recreation, the period in which movement is again systematically resumed; the day of moderate exertion teaches escape from the opponent, but if he himself flees, not to relax (*Gym.* 47).¹⁴

Although this system gave more structure to the workout, its rigidity came under skepticism since the strictness of the program did not give proper consideration to the physical condition of

¹¹ Harris 1966:173. The work of farmers and blacksmiths give an example of the hardy lifestyle: farmers had to work the fields, push the plow, and lift heavy weights; blacksmiths had to work the forge and use heavy tools all day (Harris 1966:173).

¹² Harris 1966:173.

¹³ Poliakoff 1987:17; Gordon 1935: 516. This system apparently was intended for the wrestlers and boxers, and not the lighter athletes.

¹⁴ ἡγώμεθα δὲ τὴν τετράδα κύκλον ἡμερῶν τετάρων ἄλλο ἄλλην πράττουσαν: ἡ μὲν γὰρ παρασκευάζει τὸν ἀθλητὴν, ἡ δὲ ἐπιτείνει, ἡ δὲ ἀνίησιν, ἡ δὲ μεσεύει. ἔστι δὲ τὸ 'μὲν' παρασκευάζον γυμνάσιον σύντονος πρὸς βραχὺ καὶ ταχεῖα κίνησις ἐγείρουσα τὸν ἀθλητὴν καὶ ὄξυν τῶ μέλλοντι μόχθῳ ἐφιστᾶσα, τὸ δὲ ἐπιτεῖνον ἔλεγχος ἀπαραίτητος τῆς ἐναποκειμένης ἰσχύος τῆ ἔξει, ἡ δὲ ἀνέσεως ἡμέρα κίνησις ἀκμὴν ζῆν λόγῳ ἀνακτωμένη, ἡ δὲ μεσεύουσα τῶν ἡμερῶν διαφεύγειν μὲν τὸν ἀντίπαλον, ὑποφεύγοντα δὲ μὴ ἀνιέναι ἰδιδάσκει. All English translations of Philostratus come from Woody 1936.

the athlete. The trainers would not deviate from the prescribed plan which could cause the athlete harm (Phil. *Gym.* 47).¹⁵ However, the tetrad system was put into wide effect because it trained different areas of athletic performance such as conditioning, strength, recovery, and skill work. Regardless of the training system employed, workouts were designed to meet the needs of the different types of ancient athletes.

This specificity in training was necessitated by the division of athletes created by the different athletic events. The events in ancient Panhellenic games were divided into two groups: heavy and light. The heavy events consisted of boxing, wrestling, and the pankration (παγκράτιον), while the light events were running and jumping.¹⁶ The heavy athletes' training was more strenuous since their events consisted of hand-to-hand combat. They used a variety of tools such as weights, punching bags, and various specific exercises to build strength and muscle in order to overpower an opponent.¹⁷ One inscription mentions Bybon, an ancient Greek athlete who boasted great strength. The stone reads, "Bybon son of Phola, has lifted me over [his] head with one hand."¹⁸ This large sandstone rock weighing around 134 kg (315lb) shows evidence of the strength heavy athletes obtained through their weight training. Training also allowed athletes to develop skills as Philostratus notes that boxers used small punching bags and shadow boxing to develop quickness, while the pankrationists used a heavier punching bag to practice their falls, submissions, and holds (Phil. *Gym.* 11,57). The punching bag allowed boxers to grow accustomed to striking and the pankrationists to the feeling of a body, the force of tackling, and

¹⁵ Phil. *Gym.* 54 writes about the death of the wrestler Generos from Naukratis. Apparently after winning at Olympia he celebrated his victory for two days with his acquaintances. He was afforded no sleep due to the level of debauchery he partook in. Consequently, he died during his training from overexertion since his trainer would not take heed of his physical weariness.

¹⁶ Golden 2004:127: "The pankration was a mixture of fighting techniques: boxing, kicking, wrestling throws, strangle holds, leg scissors. Only biting and eye gouging were forbidden...Successful tactics involved kicking the genitals...tripping and...bending back fingers."

¹⁷ Poliakoff 1987:15.

¹⁸ βύβων τῆτέρει χερὶ ὑπερκέφαλά μ' ὑπερεβάλετο ὁ Φόλα (*Inscr. Ol.* 5.717, *Syll.* 3. 1071).

resistance. These exercises gave the fighters an analogue to match conditions so that they could practice their skills in the correct way.¹⁹

Even though the training of boxers and pankrationists was rigorous, there was no training more strenuous than what wrestlers endured. Other heavy athletes had intense days interspersed with light days, but wrestlers had to practice at full intensity everyday (Phil. *Gym.* 11). Wrestlers had to become skilled in every grip, throw, and hold. A fragment of a 1st-2nd century A.D. wrestling manual illuminates the intricacies of their sport:

You stand up to his side, attack with your foot and tangle.
You throw him. You stand up and turn around. You tangle.
You throw him. You sweep and knock his foot out. Stand to the side of your opponent and with your right arm take a headlock and tangle.
You take a hold around him. You get under his hold. You step through and tangle.
You underhook with your right arm. You wrap your arm around his, where he has taken the underhook, and attack the side with your left foot. You push away with your left hand. You force the hold and tangle.
You turn around. You tangle with a grip on both sides.
You throw your foot forward. You take a hold around his body. You step forward and force his head back. You face him and bend back and throw yourself into him, bracing your foot... (*P. Oxy.* III, 466).²⁰

This fragment shows that the moves used by wrestlers were complex and required attention. Wrestlers needed to perform these moves under stress so that they could recall and perform them quickly during competition. Their training mirrored the conditions in the event because of the intricacy and complexity of every move they employed.²¹ If the athlete practiced sluggishly then he would compete poorly having not perfected his technique.

¹⁹ Poliakoff 1987:15.

²⁰ English translation of Papyrus Oxyrhynchus III 466 cited in Poliakoff (1987) 51.

²¹ Poliakoff 1987:23,33. The combat sports were conducted in the *skamma* or “dug up part”, which consisted of dirt and sand. Wrestlers would practice in both dry and wet conditions.

The training of runners and jumpers was not as strenuous as the heavy athletes'. Philostratus supports this writing that light athletes ran certain prescribed distance, which were not supposed to be physically exhausting since it was not the nature of the exercise (Phil. *Gym.* 11). In his dialogue between the statesman Solon and the wisdom seeking traveler Anacharsis, Lucian gives a more detailed account of the runners training:

Further, we accustom them to running, both of the long distance and of the sprinting kind. And they have to run not on hard ground with a good footing, but in deep sand on which you can neither tread firmly nor get a good push off, the foot sinking in (*Anacharsis* 27).²²

Here we see that runners not only trained distance, but also incorporated a type of speed work into their training.²³ The jumpers would also use dumbbells in order to lengthen their jumping distance by timing their jump with the swing of their arms (*Anacharsis* 27), which shows another example of the implementation of weights for training athletes. Like heavy athletes, light athletes used a combination of weights, exercises, and skill work in their physical preparation for competition.

Ancient athletic training developed strong and skillful athletes. One such athlete was Milo of Croton, a wrestler from the 6th century B.C. who won seven Olympic and Pythian victories, nine at Nemea, and eleven at the Pythian Games in twenty-five years.²⁴ He was legendary for his strength and size, supposedly being able to "...burst a cord tied about his forehead merely by the strength of his veins when he held his breath."²⁵ One of his well-known

²² καὶ μὴν καὶ δρομικοὺς εἶναι ἀσκοῦμεν αὐτοὺς εἰς μῆκος τε διαρκεῖν ἐπιτίζοντες καὶ εἰς τὸ ἐν βραχεῖ ὠκύτατον ἐπικουφίζοντες: καὶ ὁ δρόμος οὐ πρὸς τὸ στερρόν καὶ ἀντίτυπον, ἀλλὰ ἐν ψάμμῳ βαθείᾳ, ἔνθα οὔτε βεβαίως ἀπερεῖσαι τὴν βᾶσιν οὔτε ἐπιστηρίζαι ῥάδιον ὑποσυρομένου πρὸς τὸ ὑπεῖκον τοῦ ποδός. English translation of Lucian from H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler 1905.

²³ Grivetti and Applegate 1997:861S.

²⁴ Golden 2004:103.

²⁵ Kyle 2007: 200. It is also said that he could stand on a greased discus and not be thrown off balance, as well as hold a pomegranate in his hand without bruising it while others attempted to pry it from his hands.

stories includes him carrying a calf on his back during training. Athenaeus, a Greek rhetorician and grammarian, recounts Milo's feat of strength:

Milo could lift enormous weights from earth,
A heifer four years old, at Zeus' high feast,
And on his shoulders the huge beast he bore,
As if it had been a young and little lamb,
All round the wondering crowd of standers by (*Deipnosophists*.
10.412f-413a).²⁶

Milo's bull must have weighed around 550kg (1213lb), which is comparable to weight carried by modern day strongmen.²⁷ Milo's "weights" were gradually increased over time by the growing calf suggesting a systematic approach to training.²⁸ This technique is similar to the modern progressive overload system in which weights are increased over specific intervals. In addition, the ancient tetrad system parallels modern training programs. The four day cycle allows for different aspects of fitness to be trained at separate intervals. Likewise, the modern undulating periodization model alters workouts at regular intervals in order to train different aspects of athletic performance.²⁹ The tetrad cycle also shares similarities with the interval training method. This method varies intensity of workouts and puts stress on both the aerobic and anaerobic systems.³⁰ Interval workouts are altered to fit athletes' specific sport or event and include a warm up, alternating high intensity work and rest, and a cool down.³¹ These systems attempt to train

²⁶ τοῖος ἔην Μίλων, ὅτ' ἀπὸ χθονὸς ἤρατο βρῖθος,
τετραέτη δαμάλην ἐν Διὸς εἰλαπίναις,
ᾧμοις δὲ κτήνος τὸ πελώριον ὡς νέον ἄρνα
ἤνεγκεν δι' ὅλης κοῦφα πανηγύρεως. English translation from Yonge 1854.

²⁷ Crowther 1977:114.

²⁸ Crowther 1977:116.

²⁹ Jimenez 2009:1. The variations of the program allow certain periods to focus on different components, such as strength, power, performance, and hypertrophy. This mirrors the tetrad system in the fact that each day varied and focused on employing different stresses on the body to produce results (i.e. preparation, intense work, relaxation, moderate work).

³⁰ McArdle, Katch, and Katch 1991:441-444.

³¹ McArdle, Katch, and Katch 1991:443-444. Although the tetrad system does not allow the same flexibility that interval training does, both share similarities in varying the intensity of workouts to train different energy systems.

different aspects of fitness during training sessions. In this way, both ancient and modern training assist athletes in sporting events by increasing strength, size, stamina, and fitness.

Modern day athletes likewise endure grueling preparation. Today, there is much knowledge concerning athletic training, which allows coaches and trainers to choose methods depending on their preference, experience, and the type of athlete. Nevertheless, coaches need to consider the nature of competition and aspects required for the athlete to be successful in an event. In general, a training program should include: specificity, overloading, and progression. Specificity refers to designing a regimen which mimics the same movements and involves the same muscle groups as those used in competition.³² These adaptations can be obtained by incorporating resistance training, plyometrics, and many other exercises. Overload and progression refers to conditioning the athlete to perform under conditions which are more intense than actual competition and increasing that intensity as the athlete progresses.³³ By using this basic template athletes will see results in increased strength, size, and conditioning.

Training regimens of modern boxers, wrestlers, and Mix Martial Arts (MMA) fighters likewise include weightlifting, conditioning, and sports specific drills because they are crucial for success.³⁴ Professional MMA fighter Kevin Randleman believes weightlifting to be one of the most important facets of his training saying, “Size and strength do matter...Nothing can replace technical knowledge and timing, but if two people are equally skilled, it’s the stronger, better-conditioned athlete that will win.”³⁵ Tim Kennedy, another MMA fighter, focuses his workouts on building power and strength, while incorporating explosive exercise, such as box squats and

³² Baechele and Earle 2000:393.

³³ Baechele and Earle 2000:394.

³⁴ I chose to include information and interviews on MMA fighters to show similarities between ancient Greek and modern U.S. training for events that are similar. The pankration is very similar to modern Mix Martial Arts fighting in that it employs punches, throws, submissions, and kicks. By comparing two sports that share many parallels one can see how their preparations mirror one another.

³⁵ Plott 2011:26-27.

plyometrics.³⁶ Kennedy also emphasizes movements that enhance endurance, cardio capacity, and exercises that mimic fight conditions, such as bag work and sparring.³⁷ Randy Couture, another MMA fighter, explains that his training is made of two daily sessions. The first involves weight training and conditioning; the second, sparring and technique.³⁸ Everything Couture does gets his body to perform under the same pressures as in the fight saying, “We’ve brought in some big guys to spar with me...These guys are helping me prepare for everything...”³⁹ It is evident that athletes and coaches realize the importance of not only building a solid foundation with strength, but also the need to incorporate endurance training and skill work to make athletes’ bodies perform under the same physiological conditions as in the actual event.

A study concerning boxers shows how the implementation of similar techniques can aid in training. In order to increase the effectiveness of a boxer he must do imitation hits and defensive moves while holding dumbbells along with using medicine balls, gloves, and other equipment.⁴⁰ By using these techniques the boxer is able to not only increase his strength, but also his speed and the quickness of his sport-specific movements.

Runners also prepare for competition by incorporating some of the same training fundamentals as the combat athletes. As in ancient Greece, there are two types of runners: distance and sprinters. Both types incorporate resistance (weight) training and running. The use of weights dispels some myths concerning the traditional training of runners. One myth is that runners should avoid lifting weights to avoid gaining size.⁴¹ This fear can be avoided by effective program design and exercises. Another myth is that runners should perform exercises with low

³⁶ Fitzgerald 2011:2.

³⁷ Fitzgerald 2011:3.

³⁸ Finkel 2008:4.

³⁹ Finkel 2008:4.

⁴⁰ Solovey 1982:100.

⁴¹ Kawamoto 2010:15.

weight and high reps. However, runners need to perform “maximal strength training,” which will result in faster muscle contractions and increased power.⁴² Another myth is that runners do not need to do leg training because they get enough from running. This assumption is false because running develops muscle imbalances leading to greater risk of injury. These imbalances can be corrected by certain exercise in order to maintain proper muscle function.⁴³ Sprinters use similar techniques and methods to train in their events. “A good training program must have the following: resistance and assistance training, eccentric/concentric weight lifting and careful monitoring of the volume and intensity of the workloads...”⁴⁴ Free sprint training along with weight training, plyometrics, and resisted sprinting can improve acceleration and performance.⁴⁵ Obtaining speed over a short distance is vital for the success of sprinters; and since acceleration is important, any gains from training must be translated in sport specific movements.⁴⁶ Whether one is a distance runner or sprinter, conditioning and strength training are imperative to be in top competitive shape.

Modern athletic training also employs a technique called cross training in which athletes perform exercises in several modes of training. Although this is a modern method, Philostratus (*Gym.* 43) gives an example representing a possible ancient form of cross training:

Some exercised themselves by carrying heavy burdens; others, by competing in speed with horses and hares, bending or straightening thick iron plates, or by having themselves yoked with powerful oxen, and, finally, by subduing bulls or even lions. Thus did men such as Polymestor, Glaukos, Alesias, and Pulydamas from Skotussa. The arms of the boxer Tisandros from Naxos, who swam

⁴² Kawamoto 2010:15 “Maximal Strength Training” consists of lifting heavy weights for low repetitions (1-5) with long rest periods.

⁴³ Kawamoto 2010:16.

⁴⁴ Mahorn 2009:8. Flexibility is also a necessity to compliment the strength training.

⁴⁵ Lockie, et al. 2012:1547, 1549.

⁴⁶ Lockie, et al. 2012:1539. Explosive muscle firing is key to short distance performance.

around the promontories of the island, carried him far out to sea, thus training themselves and the body.⁴⁷

This passage shows that some ancient athletes not only practiced their sport, but also engaged in other activities to make them efficient in many aspects of fitness, just as modern day CrossFitters.⁴⁸ After analyzing ancient and modern athletic training one can see that, while modern systems are far more advanced, systematic, and concrete, both ancient and modern athletic training implement similar techniques and practices. The systems are different, but both ancient and modern training attempts to physically prepare the athlete as best as possible.

Chapter 2: Nutrition

In addition to training, proper nutrition is essential for peak athletic performance. The body needs adequate nutrients for the rigorous energy expenditure and physical exhaustion that athletics demands. Although ancient Greeks did not have access to the information of nutritional science and were limited in their understanding of nutrition, they still knew that certain foods helped strengthen the body and aided in proper functioning. While the specific foods that athletes get their nourishment from have changed, both ancient and modern diets consist of food that would provide the essentials for maintaining a healthy body and achieving optimal athletic performance.

⁴⁷ ἐγυμνάζοντο δὲ οἱ παλαιοὶ οἱ μὲν ἄχθη φέροντες οὐκ εὐφορα, οἱ δὲ ὑπὲρ τάχους ἀμιλλώμενοι πρὸς ἵππους καὶ πτόκας, οἱ δὲ ὀρθοῦντές τε καὶ κάμπτοντες σίδηρον ἐληλαμένον ἐς παχὺ, οἱ δὲ βουσί συνεζευγμένοι καρτεροῖς τε καὶ ἀμαξεῦσιν, οἱ δὲ ταύρους ἀπαυχενίζοντες, οἱ δὲ αὐτοὺς γλέοντας. ταῦτα δὲ δὴ Πολυμήστορες καὶ Γλαῦκοι καὶ Ἀμησιναῖ καὶ Πουλυδάμας Ὀσκοῦ σσαῖος. Τίσανδρον δὲ τὸν ἐκτῆς Νάξου πύκτην περὶ τὰ ἀκρωτήρια τῆς νήσου νέοντα παρέπεμπον αἱ χεῖρες ἐπὶ πολὺ τῆς θαλάττης παραπεμπόμεναι γυμναζόμεναι τε καὶ γυμνάζουσαι.

⁴⁸ This seems to be most evident in pentathletes than in others since they were required to perform well in five events. An interesting comparison can be drawn from this in that modern day CrossFit reflects some of these ancient training practices. The definition of fitness for CrossFit is: “increased work capacity across broad time, modal, and age domains. Work capacity is the ability to perform real physical work as measured by force x distance / time (which is average power). Fitness is this ability in as many domains as possible” (Glassman). This idea means the Crossfitters are not experts or efficient athletes in one aspect of fitness, such as lifting, running, swimming, etc. Instead they have the ability to be good at a wide arrange of athletic movements. In CrossFit an athlete needs to be strong, conditioned, and good (but not experts) at a variety of movements and exercises to compete at a top level. Therefore it would make sense that they, like ancient pentathletes, would have to train in a variety of exercises.

The ancient Greek diet remained virtually unchanged over the centuries due to limitations in agricultural productivity and food preservation: “Apart from the addition of imported luxuries to the tables of the wealthy, diet did not change much...in the absence of refrigeration and canning, the diet of the city dweller did not differ notably from the diet of the countryman.”⁴⁹ Ancient Greek athletes ate foods that were widely available to most Greeks, such as barley or wheat. Barley was thought to have a beneficial effect on the body as Hippocrates, an ancient Greek physician, mentions: “In fact, [barley] has great power to bring health in all cases of sickness, preservation of health to those who are well, good condition to athletes in training, and in face realization of each man’s particular desire” (*Regimen* 9).⁵⁰ Its purging and energizing qualities made barely a good source of carbohydrates, while at the same time ridding the body of anything that may cause it discomfort.⁵¹ Philostratus notes that in addition to barley and wheat, meat was used in the diet of athletes: “Barley bread and unleavened wheaten bread made from pollard served them for food, and the meat they enjoyed was of the ox, bull, goat, and roe; and they anointed themselves with oil of the wild olive and oleaster. Therefore, they exercised without illness, and were apt to grow old” (*Gym.* 43).⁵² Here one can see that the proper diet allowed athletes to compete and maintain their health through preparation. Philostratus attests to this by saying that the athletes on this diet competed in eight or nine Olympiads (*Gym.* 43). However, meat was not normally consumed for economic reasons: animals were beasts that worked the fields for farmers, provided clothing with their fur or hides, and were usually only

⁴⁹ Harris 1966:88.

⁵⁰ καὶ γὰρ τοῖσι νοσέουσι πᾶσιν ἐς ὑγίην μέγα τι δύνασθαι, καὶ τοῖσιν ὑγαιίνουσιν ἐς ἀσφαλείην, καὶ τοῖσιν ἀσκέουσιν ἐς εὐεξίην, καὶ ἐς ὃ τι ἂν ἕκαστος ἐθέλῃ. English translation from Jones 1923.

⁵¹ Ackermann 1971:242.

⁵² σιτία δὲ αὐτοῖς αἱ τε μᾶζαι καὶ τῶν ἄρτων οἱ ἄπεπτοι καὶ μὴ ζυμῆται καὶ τῶν κρεῶν τὰ βόειά τε καὶ ταύρια καὶ τράγεια τούτους ἔβασκε καὶ δόρκοι, κόνινοι τε καὶ φυλῖαι ἔχριον αὐτοὺς λίπα, ὅθεν ἄνοσοι τε ἦσκουν καὶ ὄψῃ ἐγήρασκον.

eaten at religious festivals.⁵³ In order to meet their dietary needs, athletes had to look to other foods besides meat. “[Instead] the usual Greek diet consisted of thick vegetable soup, bread, cheese, olives, and fruits. Fish was eaten both fresh and dried, but meat was a rare and luxurious commodity.”⁵⁴ Vegetables and fruits were eaten and preserved by drying; milk was readily accessible, but preserving it was a problem, and therefore it was mostly made into cheese. The only other source of drink was water and wine.⁵⁵ These foods and drinks would have been the normal sources of nourishment for many Greeks, including athletes.

There is not much evidence that different diets existed for specific athletes, though surviving records showcase athletes with amazing strength. When discussing the specific nutrition of athletes, Greek writers were most often referring to the heavy athletes because of their popularity. This fact is important when drawing conclusions since the evidence that survives mostly describes the eating habits of heavy athletes, whose nutritional needs are different from the light athletes.⁵⁶ One of the most famous heavy athletes, as mentioned before, was the wrestler Milo of Croton. This legendary figure was reported to have had a normal daily diet that consisted of twenty pounds of meat and bread and eighteen pints of wine.⁵⁷ Milo was not the first athlete to train on a meat diet. Diogenes Laertius notes that Pythagoras, in addition to his work in the field of mathematics, made a contribution to athletics by introducing a meat diet

⁵³ Harris 1966:90.

⁵⁴ Renfrew 1988:176. Although meat was very uncommon, it is mentioned because the evidence that exists concerning the diets of athletes seems to focus on those who participated in the heavy events where muscle and size were paramount. The athletes mentioned: Milo, Eurymenes, and Dromeus were very successful winning at least one Olympiad in their career. This is important because they were some of the only athletes who had evidence of a meat diet. As victors in the Olympic games they would have received lavish prizes and money from their city-state. With this money they would be able to purchase meat more easily than the average person. Their meals were also likely subsidized by their city-state as well, which would have allowed them to have access to foods that were rare or expensive.

⁵⁵ Harris 1960:89.

⁵⁶ Harris 1960:88.

⁵⁷ Renfrew 1988:176; Grivetti and Applegate 1997:862S; Golden 2004:103.

for the heavyweight athlete Eurymenes of Samos: “[Pythagoras] is also said to have been the first to diet athletes on meat, trying first with Eurymenes...whereas in the former times they had trained on dried figs, on butter, and even on wheatmeal” (*Lives of the Philosophers* 8.12).⁵⁸ Pausanias claims that Dromeus of Stymphalos, a two time winner at Olympia, was the first to train on a meat diet: “A man from Stymphalus, by name Dromeus...won two victories at Olympia, two at Pytho, three at the Isthmus and five at Nemea. He is said to have also conceived the idea of a flesh diet; up to this time athletes had fed on cheese from a basket” (Paus. *Description of Greece*, 6.7.10).⁵⁹ Regardless of the identity of the first athlete to use this diet, it is clear that an abundant source of protein was needed to provide adequate nutrition for the athletes’ intense workload. This predominant meat diet was used to produce weight and strength gains necessary for heavy athletes.⁶⁰ The ancient diet was limited to certain foods because of limitations in producing, preserving, and the availability of certain foods. Despite these challenges, the ancient diet was balanced and provided the essential nutrients that athletes needed. The limitations of the Ancient Greek diet, however, diminished with advances in nutritional science.

In modern day athletics there are a variety of diets and sources of nutrition that can be utilized to obtain the necessary requirements for energy expenditure in training and competition.

⁵⁸ Λέγεται δὲ καὶ πρῶτος κρέασιν ἀσκῆσαι ἀθλητάς, καὶ πρῶτόν γ’ Εὐρυμένην...τῶν πρότερον ἰσχάσι ξηραῖς καὶ τυροῖς ὑγροῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τυροῖς σωμασκούντων αὐτοῦς...English translation of Diogenes from Hicks 1925.

⁵⁹ ἀνὴρ δὲ ἐκ Στυμφαλίου Δρομεὺς ὄνομα...δύο μὲν ἔσχεν ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ νίκας, τοσαύτας δὲ ἄλλας Πυθοῖ καὶ Ἴσθμίων τετρεῖς καὶ ἐν Νεμέᾳ πέντε. λέγεται δὲ ὡς καὶ κρέας ἐσθίειν ἐπινοήσκει: τέως δὲ τοῖς ἀθληταῖς σιτία τυρὸν ἐκ τῶν ταλάρων εἶναι. English translation of Pausanias from Jones 1918. Pausanias’ writings are considered to be one of the most important sources for athletics. His descriptions have also been verified by archaeological remains (Sweet: 1987:231).

⁶⁰ Thompson 1971:100. Since there was no weight class in ancient athletics, and athletes were divided into men and boys, the heavy, stronger athlete had a distinct advantage over the others.

Athletes need a balanced diet that provides protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins, minerals, and fluids. These foods provide athletes with energy and enhance recovery after workout.⁶¹

Several nutritional factors are required for these athletes to achieve their training and performance goals, including: (1) meeting energy needs; (2) timing consumption of adequate fluid and electrolyte intakes, before, during, and after exercise to promote adequate hydration...(3) timing consumption of carbohydrate intake to provide adequate fuel for energy demands and to spare protein for muscle repair, growth, and maintenance...(4) timing consumption of adequate protein intake to meet protein synthesis and turnover needs...and (5) choosing effective nutritional and dietary supplements.⁶²

The athlete should focus on eating carbohydrates to restore energy storage, protein for muscle repair and growth, vegetables and fruit for vitamins and minerals, and fluids to maintain proper hydration levels. Carbohydrates are the major source of energy, and by eating the right kinds and amounts, athletes fuel their bodies for long and intense exertion. Fulfilling the carbohydrate requirement is essential in the pre- and post workout in order to refuel energy storage. Oatmeal, rice, and dark breads are excellent sources to obtain complex carbohydrates because they are not absorbed quickly in the body's metabolism and allow athletes to maintain intensity for a prolonged time period. Proper hydration and fluid levels will also prevent fatigue and dehydration.⁶³ Without the proper level of hydration and electrolytes the body does not function properly because water loss during physical exercise alters its internal environment and throws off normal physiological processes.⁶⁴ Adequate protein intake is another necessity for athletes because it promotes muscle growth and rebuilding. Research has shown that athletes who have proper protein intake while following weight training regimens double their mass and strength

⁶¹ Libin 2010:28.

⁶² Houtkooper et al. 2007:S40.

⁶³ Houtkooper et al. 2007:S40.

⁶⁴ Baechle and Earle 2000:247.

gains compared to those with lower protein intake.⁶⁵ Athletes find protein from a wide variety of sources such as meat, beans, fish, eggs, and supplemental shakes.⁶⁶ If the muscles' needs are not met, the body will not repair itself properly and any gains may be hindered or even lost due to the protein deficiency in the body. By adhering to these basic metabolic standards, athletes will have proper nutrition and essential building blocks for creating a strong, powerful, and efficient body.⁶⁷

This examination of the diets of ancient and modern athletes illustrates that nutritional fundamentals are the same. The ancient diet, although very limited, fulfills all the requirements the body needs, just as modern diets. The body requires good sources of carbohydrate, protein, fluids and electrolytes, and vitamins and minerals. Without these essentials the athlete's performance will suffer, affecting his workouts and ability during competition. The sources from which the ancient athletes obtained necessary nutrients are different because the science of nutrition was opaque. Today, the foods from which athletes achieve nutritional needs are well known, much more easily accessible, and come from a wider variety of sources. Both the ancient and modern athletes' diets fuel the body with the carbohydrates for energy, protein for muscle building, fluid and electrolytes for proper hydration, and vitamins and minerals for normal physiological development. By meeting these requirements, an athlete's body can maintain the prolonged and high intensity that athletic training, sport, and competition demands.

⁶⁵ Weider 2010:138.

⁶⁶ Although protein shakes are good for post-work protein intake, athletes should still consume enough protein from foods to fulfill their bodily needs.

⁶⁷ Obtaining the necessary caloric intake is important for athletes. This intake becomes a problem when athletes attempt to cut weight, whether it be for wrestling, boxing, or any sport with a weight class. Therefore the athletes should not cut out the foods that help supply the energy demand of their body. Instead they should cut out "empty calories," which include unhealthy sweets, fats, and oils.

Chapter 3: Athletic Motivations and Desires

So far in this analysis of ancient and modern athletics one can see that not much has changed in regards to training and dieting. For thousands of years athletes have undergone physical trials of pain, suffering, and exhaustion competing in athletics.⁶⁸ Some of the first evidence of athletic competition comes from scenes in the epics of Homer. Although written centuries before the golden age of the Panhellenic Games, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* illustrate some of the most prominent and persistent attitudes toward athletics in Greek culture. These attitudes remained due to Homer's influence on Greek citizens, their education, and ideas.⁶⁹ Handed down by tradition, the ancient Greek desire to compete was fueled by glory, fame, prizes; as well as an internal enticement to showcase one's superiority, channel aggression, and partake in the athletic lifestyle.⁷⁰ These external and internal motivators have persisted to draw athletes to participate in athletic competition with the utmost fervor and effort.

In Homer are found the earliest examples of the importance of athletics in ancient Greek culture, which grows and blossoms during the Panhellenic Games. The Greeks were one, if not the most, athletic nation in antiquity largely because competitiveness was the root of the heroic code.⁷¹ The scene in Homer when Glaukos' father urges him "to always be the best and distinguished over others" (*Il.* 6.208) describes the degree of intensity that remained a distinctive part of Greek culture.⁷² This importance on excellence is manifest in sport, aspects of public life, and war. In Homeric times "sport was an obvious and extended metaphor for war: prowess with

⁶⁸ Scanlon 2002:26: "Athletic contests...were the spontaneous expression of the native human urge to compete."

⁶⁹ Kyle 2007:55; Poliakoff 1987:112.

⁷⁰ Poliakoff 1987:115; Young 1984:175.

⁷¹ Kyle 2007:25. Heroic code refers to a hero's pursuit of glory, fame and prizes, and to display his ἀρετή.

⁷² αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων.

the javelin in sport and war were analogous.”⁷³ Just as skill on the battlefield, skill in athletics was a device for status definition through self-exploit and the awarding of prizes.⁷⁴

Participation was expected if not required by men because athletic competition gave a chance to show status as a warrior and social rank. All men, but especially leaders, were expected to compete and participate in competition and taking on passive roles in contests was looked down on: “High-level Greek athletic competition was not harmless, carefree play...Families and states socialized males to do their duty, to meet expectations. If able, you contributed to war efforts and you sought athletic success.”⁷⁵ The desire to compete and participate in competition displayed excellence, confirmed social status, and brought honor. Nowhere is the importance of participating in athletics more clearly demonstrated than in the epics of Homer, whose heroes were always willing to demonstrate their prowess and skill. In both funeral and social games of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, heroes are invited and expected to compete.⁷⁶ To not compete and to not show one’s excellence (ἀρετή) was seen as renouncing

⁷³ Kyle 2007: 54.

⁷⁴ Kyle 2007:56.

⁷⁵ Kyle 2007:198.

⁷⁶ There are three instances in Homer where a hero may decline to compete having suffered terrible grief. In the first instance Odysseus, still sad in his heart after hearing the songs of Agamemnon and Achilles, wishes to be left out of the competition, wiping away the tears from his brow and covering his head as the Phaeacians compete around him (Hom. *Od.* 8.83-95). As Odysseus sits grieving the Phaeacians notice he does not partake in the games and begin to pressure him. Odysseus responds to a taunt of prince Laodamas by asking why he must be mocked during such sorrow (Hom. *Od.* 8.153-157). The Phaeacians should allow Odysseus to not compete, but because Odysseus’ identity is not known, they cannot grant their guest an excuse that is owed his status (Kyle 2007: 66). In the second example, Achilles will not compete because he is too overcome with grief from the death of Patroclus, but he still wants others to know his talents in his speech after he lists the prizes for the victors of the chariot race (Hom. *Il.* 23.272-284). Being excused from competition solely because he is the host is not sufficient. Achilles explains that he will not compete and instead grieve for Patroclus. However, he still boasts that he would win if he did compete and demands recognition from the fellow heroes (Kyle 2007:59). It seems that in order for a man to be excused from competing not only was a serious reason needed, but also the man’s social status had to warrant such an action. Both Achilles and Odysseus are mythic heroes whose skills and abilities are well known, and their status and excellence is not challenged. Therefore, they can decline contests when they are subject to severe emotional struggles. Achilles’ wishes are answered without question, but Odysseus’ situation requires him to show why he must be respected. In a third example, it also seems that old age could also be a reasonable excuse for not competing. Nestor is not content with just being excused as he elaborates and explains his skill revealing his victories at several funeral games. Achilles recalls Nestor’s ἀρετή and pays him homage and respect (Hom. *Il.* 23.627-649). This agrees with the two

one's status, and marking him as a coward.⁷⁷ Instances throughout the *Odyssey* illustrate that Odysseus must participate in contest to uphold his reputation. In one scene Euryalos, prince of the Phaeacians, vainly challenges Odysseus:

Then again Euryalus made answer and taunted him to his face:
“Nay verily, stranger, for I do not liken thee to a man that is skilled
in contests, such as abound among men, but to one who, faring to
and fro with his benched ship, is a captain of sailors who are
merchantmen, one who is mindful of his freight, and has charge of
a home-borne cargo, and the gains of his greed. Thou dost not look
like an athlete” (Hom. *Od.* 8.158-164).⁷⁸

Euryalos, after winning a boxing match, insults Odysseus saying that he has no skill, must not be *agathos*, and instead is a seeker of profit, not glory.⁷⁹ The final insult in Euryalos' rant enrages Odysseus: Euryalos calls him a non-athlete. Odysseus rises up in anger scolding Euryalos and states that as a youth he was among the best competitors; excellence attended his past achievements (Hom. *Od.* 8.178-185). Following this speech Odysseus proceeds to show his skill and ἀρετή in the discus throw (Hom. *Od.* 8.186-193).⁸⁰ Odysseus then challenges all the other athletes to contests in the javelin throw, archery, and footrace (Hom. *Od.* 8.202-233). Odysseus shows his superiority because he was insulted and wants the Phaeacians to know that he is a Greek hero who deserves proper respect and hospitality. There are no further contests after Odysseus is acknowledged as the victor.

examples I mention since it is not enough to be excused on reason alone. The status of the character is important, as well as the renown of his abilities.

⁷⁷ Kyle 2007:56; Golden 1998:29.

⁷⁸ τὸν δ' αὖτ' Εὐρύαλος ἀπαμείβετο νείκεσέ τ' ἄντην:

‘οὐ γάρ σ' οὐδέ, ξεῖνε, δαίμονι φωτι εἴσκω
ἄθλων, οἷά τε πολλὰ μετ' ἀνθρώποισι πέλονται,
ἀλλὰ τῶ, ὅς θ' ἅμα νηὶ πολυκλήιδι θαμίζων,
ἀρχὸς ναυτῶν οἷ τε πρηκτῆρες ἔασιν,
φύρτου τε μνήμων καὶ ἐπίσκοπος ἦσιν ὀδαίων
κερδέων θ' ἀρπαλέων: οὐδ' ἀθλητῆρι ἔοικας.

All translations of Homer's *Odyssey* from Murray 1919.

⁷⁹ Kyle 2007:67.

⁸⁰ Odysseus hurls the discus farther than any of the Phaeacians winning the event uncontested since no one present could even come close to his distance.

Back in Ithaca, Odysseus must fight in a spontaneous boxing match against Iros, a bully and the palace beggar. When Iros sees the ragged Odysseus he orders him to stay away, calling him an old man and threatening to fight him (Hom. *Od.* 18.10-13). Odysseus, as happened when insulted among the Phaeacians, is angered and challenged to display his excellence. At first he does not want to cause a ruckus and attempts to appease Iros by saying that there is enough room for both of them to beg.⁸¹ Odysseus issues a warning to Iros (Hom. *Od.* 18.20-25), but Iros follows with a repeated threat that catches the attention of the suitors, who turn the conflict into a street fight between the beggars. Athena comes down and enhances Odysseus' physical appearance, hereby causing the suitors to marvel at his body and Iros to backdown (*Od.* 18.73-87). As he did on Scheria, Odysseus defends opposition to his character when another challenges his skill and prowess because it is a direct reflection of his social status and honor. This honor is not only personal, but also belongs to his family and kingdom. He must defend it and reveal his ἀρετή in order to maintain his fame and proper place in society: “[This] fame must be achieved by one’s own, active efforts...[and] was a ‘zero-sum’ contest, that is, one in which the glorification of one individual often entailed the diminution of others.”⁸² The point of Greek contest was to win more fame than your opponent through display of physical skill and the receiving of lavish prizes for the victor.

The funeral games of Patroclus demonstrate the types of prizes awarded to the victors in contest. Achilles offers the other Achaeans magnificent prizes to the one who can excel in the chariot race:

For swift charioteers first he set forth goodly prizes, a woman to lead away, one skilled in goodly handiwork, and an eared tripod of

⁸¹ Kyle 2007:69.

⁸² Scanlon 2002:11. The amount of fame won depended on the risk involved. Greater risk resulted in more fame being won. In turn, Greek athletes would list their victories in inscriptions describing “no-contest” wins they acquired, such as ‘walking over’ another opponent, winning without a bye or fall, etc.

two and twenty measures for him that should be first; and for the second he appointed a mare of six years, unbroken, with a mule foal in her womb; and for the third he set forth a cauldron untouched of fire, a fair cauldron that held four measures, white even as the first; and for the fourth he appointed two talents of gold; and for the fifth a two-handed urn, yet untouched of fire (Hom., *Il.* 23.261-270).⁸³

These prizes were not for everyone, but were reserved for only the top competitors who could outdo their opponents. Successful competitors displayed their excellence (ἀρετή), for there was no greater glory than that which man achieved by his own hands (Hom. *Od.* 8.147-148). Prizes, along with physical prowess, confirmed the status of both the victor and the host, and proved their social superiority above those who did not compete and who were not warriors.

The enticement to compete was driven by both a sense of duty and partly by an underlying shame culture that is seen in Homeric epic. This sentiment is most clearly illustrated in the scene where Hector must decide whether to face Achilles or stay within the walls of Troy (Hom. *Il.* 22.99-130). Hector rejects the option of hiding because it will shame him before Priam, Andromache, and the other Trojans (Hom. *Il.* 22.104-107). The tension between Hector's choice to live in shame or die with honor is overcome by an overwhelming fear of public humiliation for himself and his people. Public opinion was very important to Homeric man and anything that made him lose respect or feel public contempt was unbearable for him.⁸⁴ Men, especially warriors, were compelled to or restricted from certain actions by shame (αἰδώς) in fear of resentment from their peers or inferiors.⁸⁵ Therefore, Hector chooses to go out and fight Achilles even though he knows he will perish. A similar sense of shame and duty underlies the expectations that later Greeks felt to participate in competition. "[T]here were no team competitions. Every event pitted man against man, one on one...One man won, and everyone else

⁸³ All translations of Homer's *Iliad* from Murray 1957.

⁸⁴ Dodds 1971:18.

⁸⁵ Hooker 1987:121.

lost”.⁸⁶ The combined power of shame culture, the prospect of winning glory, and the intense agonistic spirit of the Greeks fueled the athletic mentality and motivation to compete.⁸⁷ For the generations of Greeks after Homer competition remained as the purest form to test man’s skill and his victory was proof of his excellence.

Greeks identified strongly with the legends and ideas of their past, and used them to validate their traditions and the place of their families in history: “As the tales were retold, recited, and in time written down, the athletic past of the age of heroes gained increased cultural force. Homer’s immediate and later audiences believed that their prestigious forbears left them a legacy of agonistic traditions.”⁸⁸ This legacy made later Greeks feel “...a cultural obligation to host and to compete in athletic contest, and the prestige of excellence in athletics, as in war, remained an indicator of social status.”⁸⁹ The heroes in Homer were not only great warriors, but remarkable athletes as well. Warriors receiving spoils and athletic victors winning prizes in funeral games were considered equally important because both granted an elevated, if not heroic status.⁹⁰

As the funeral games of Patroclus in the *Iliad* suggest, the origin of competitive athletics emerged from funeral and other religious rites. The founding of the Olympic games are shrouded in myth.⁹¹ According to one of the many myths, Herakles founded the Olympic games in honor

⁸⁶ Miller 2004:19.

⁸⁷ Evjen 1986:51.

⁸⁸ Kyle 2007:79.

⁸⁹ Kyle 2007:79.

⁹⁰ Brown 2003:134; Kyle 2007:80. From the time of Homer, funeral games became an established tradition as ancient contests were in honor of the dead (Brown 2003:147). Epic associated athletics with the funerals of their legendary ancestors and the funeral game tradition established games in honor of heroes by hero cults (Kyle 2007:92).

⁹¹ For a list of myths surrounding the establishment of the Olympic games see Golden 1998:12; Scanlon 2002:32.

of Pelops and that the other three Panhellenic festivals originated from funeral games as well.⁹² Another tradition argues that ritualized contests during sacred festivals at sanctuaries began the Olympic games.⁹³ “Athletic...contests normally took place at regularly recurring religious festivals, where they joined many activities, including other competitions, to celebrate and worship one god or hero or more.”⁹⁴ The Panhellenic games were all associated with patron deities, a sacrifice of one hundred oxen to Zeus, and a sacred truce announced to all Greek cities.⁹⁵ Athletes, trainers, and judges all had to swear oaths before the statue of Zeus that all regulations had been and will be followed during the festival.⁹⁶ In addition, the geography of the grounds points to a religious association. At Olympia, Nemea, Isthmia, and Delphi there are direct links between the sanctuaries and stadia either by being located within sacred space or connected by a tunnel or path.⁹⁷ From the abundance of examples it is clear that the ancient Greeks kept and incorporated the aspects of earlier religious festivals into the inner workings of the Panhellenic games.⁹⁸

Later on the union of cultic and religious practices with athletic contests transformed to a more political function as the city-state (πόλις) began attaching funeral and hero cult associations to festivals while keeping the old contests and prizes for the victors.⁹⁹ The city-state “...casts

⁹² Scanlon 2002:28. “These [games] took place near the site of Pelop’s tomb, where Herakles is said to have also established a sanctuary to Zeus, called the ‘Altis’” (Scanlon 2002:32).

⁹³ Kyle 2007:92.

⁹⁴ Golden 1998:10.

⁹⁵ Scanlon 2002:37. The Olympic and Nemean were associated with Zeus, the Pythian with Apollo, and the Isthmian with Poseidon.

⁹⁶ Scanlon 2002:38; Golden 1998:15.

⁹⁷ Scanlon 2002: 36-37. The tunnels were ceremonial passages that held athletes, judges, and priests; and served as a symbol to connect religious and athletic aspects of the games.

⁹⁸ Divine intervention, as represented in epic, implies a connection with the gods and athletics; and the festival of a deity was an excellent opportunity to hold contests where participants worshipped and made offering to the deity for victory (Scanlon 2002:35). The abnormal, unusual, or fantastical during contests was attributed to the presence of the divine.

⁹⁹ Scanlon 2002:39.

itself as the inheritor of institutions originally set in place by its founder-heroes seizing and renewing the inheritance that is ‘taken up’ proprietorially by the entire community at the re-enacted funeral of the hero.”¹⁰⁰ At the public festival the city-state took up the position simultaneously as judge and host of the contests. The athletes’ participation in contests confirmed the authority of the city-state, while the city-state confirmed the athletes’ social rank and status by judging their excellence and through the awarding of prizes. One can see the connection between the contests and ideals of Homeric epic and those upheld during the Panhellenic games. Both contain athletic contests, funeral or sacred rites, and a value system upheld by the Greeks as part of their identity. A major part of this identity was the extreme competitiveness that encompassed Greek life and culture.

Athletic contest gave the “agonistic” culture of the ancient Greeks a regulated release for pent up aggression and competitiveness embedded in its citizens. “Agonistic” refers to the aggressiveness and competitiveness of the Greek culture. The term comes from the Greek word ἀγών referring to “contest”. At first, intense devotion to physical excellence played a major role in education and preparation for war. Physical fitness was not a private matter; it was a necessity since men had to be in shape to hold up to the exhaustion of not only fighting, but also the cumbersomeness of their sword, spear, and armor.¹⁰¹ Sport was not a diversion, but an integral part of Greek life.¹⁰² “[However] not long after Homer’s time, it became virtually impossible for anyone to excel in war the way Achilles and Ajax had done, as the era of heroic single combat yielded to the superior power of the tightly organized and unified phalanx.”¹⁰³ With the changing

¹⁰⁰ Brown 2003:147.

¹⁰¹ Casson 1976:13.

¹⁰² Scanlon 2002:7-8.

¹⁰³ Polikoff 1987:113. The Greeks continued to admire the deeds of their heroic ancestors, but the rise and popularity of the phalanx diminished their chances for individual duels. Pindar alludes to this saying: “Prowess without hazard has no honor among men...” (*Ol.* 6.9-11).

style of warfare “...the Greek games had to fill the void that a lingering but inaccessible heroic ideal created.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, the militaristic impulses of war were shifted toward athletic competition because of the “agonistic” spirit which constantly drove Greeks to compete so ferociously and brutally.¹⁰⁵ Warfare no longer offered as many opportunities to prove one’s skill and honor as “the leading role once played by individual, aristocratic champions-the aspect of battle highlighted by Homer - was now taken over by the hoplite phalanx.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, sport became the main expression of competition which further “encouraged, channeled, and refined” the competitive impulses of the Greeks when there was no war.¹⁰⁷ The popularity of athletics developed out of a social need for the city-state to give the citizens an outlet for the ambition and aggressive impulses that would tear apart society if left unattended.¹⁰⁸ These competitive impulses were cultivated in a manner that would not be destructive, but instead promote a sense of honor and establish one's status in society.

Athletics likewise continued to offer prizes as rewards for victorious performances, which drew men to compete in hopes of winning fortune and glory. These rewards took many forms and were often publically funded by the victor’s city-state.¹⁰⁹ Pindar, a Greek lyric poet famous for writing panegyrics for athletic victors, mentions a bronze shield, a crown, olive oil, silver goblets, wool cloaks, and many other things as prizes for victors (*Nem.* 10.22-48). Athletes also won the favor of their city-state, which brought with it both political and military power.

¹⁰⁴ Poliakoff 1987:113.

¹⁰⁵ Evjen 1986:51. The rise in the popularity and importance of athletic contests shows the displacement of competitive impulses, not the use of athletics in preparation of war (Poliakoff 1987: 114). In no way was the athlete a replacement for the warrior. Athletic preparation was not a substitute for the military training done by warriors because it focused on the individual and not on the collective group of the phalanx that is fundamental in hoplite warfare (Golden 1998: 27). Therefore, athletics arose from a social need for contest because of militaristic impulses, not a replacement for warfare preparation.

¹⁰⁶ Golden 1998:25.

¹⁰⁷ Poliakoff 1987:115.

¹⁰⁸ Poliakoff 1987:105,115, Golden 1998:7.

¹⁰⁹ O’ Sullivan 2003:75.

Victors in the Panhellenic games enjoyed amenities provided by their city-state such as free meals (*IG I³* 131.1-18).¹¹⁰ A victor's city-state considered no prize too great for the honor and glory the victor had won for it since the athletes were admired and idealized as having obtained the excellence of gods and goddesses.¹¹¹ Athletes could also receive a victory ode (ἐπινίκιον), such as those from Pindar, which was commissioned by their family or city-state to commemorate their victory, enshrining them both in history: "The wealth and fame of the successful athletes lent them a kind of celebrity status, with the result that they could now become the subject of legend."¹¹²

Modern athletes likewise have both external and internal motivators that compel them to compete in athletic contests. This examination of motivations for competition analyzes individual athletes and sports because team sports did not exist in the Panhellenic games. I confine my analysis to U.S. athletes so as not to speculate on the motivations of athletes in other countries, which are not important to this thesis. By limiting my examination to U.S. individual athletes, I will be able to relate my own experiences as an athlete and use them to draw conclusions about athletics in general. Furthermore, while discussing the external rewards of athletes I will expand my analysis to all sports in the U.S.¹¹³

It is no secret that successful athletes are rewarded for their athletic talents. "These days... successful competitors encounter public adulation in many forms. Among them are media

¹¹⁰ This particular inscription dates back to c. 430-432 B.C. Plato also mentions the provision of publicly funded meals in *Apology* 36d-3.

¹¹¹ Wooyeal and Bell 2004:9.

¹¹² Lee 1998:135-136.

¹¹³ I think this comparison of these sports to ancient individual ones is reasonable because they were the only ones that existed and were the most popular. Most of the evidence that exists concerning ancient athletics records information about the heavy, combat athletes because they were of the most interest. In modern United States the same sports that were the most popular in ancient Greece are not the most popular now. It seems that sports such as basketball, football, and baseball dominate the media and are of most interest to modern Americans. These conclusions are all based off my own experience and readings of sources.

saturation..., the newfound companionship of politicians, and, if not Hollywood offers, then a good chance at endorsement money.”¹¹⁴ In examining some of the popular sports in the U.S. one can see that average salaries of professional athletes are in the millions of dollars.¹¹⁵ In addition, continuously successful professional athletes have the chance to win sponsorship deals with major companies in the form of merchandise, commercial endorsements, or spokesmodel. Last year Tiger Woods received \$54.5 million dollars in endorsements alone simply because of his athletic success and popularity.¹¹⁶ Such large sums of money are comparable to the prizes that ancient athletes received for winning, especially since they are given only to the most competitive and successful athletes. The modern day Milos are easily making money with their talents.¹¹⁷

The public also views top athletes in an almost mythical way because their athletic ability lends them a type of legendary status. Superstar athletes are idolized and viewed as iconic figures in U.S. culture. Reminiscent of statues at Olympia and Pindar’s *Victory Odes*, U.S. athletes are likewise enshrined in statues, such as Michael Jordan in Chicago, and music telling of their superiority and exploits, such as the song “Forever” by the rap-artist Drake. Like ancient athletes, U.S. athletes’ skill and ability lends them a celebrity status that few others can achieve.

Athletes want to compete because there is still a need for that feeling of pitting man against man in the arena. Athletics give man a chance to release intense power, aggression, and excitement that would otherwise be stifled and locked inside with no way to get out.¹¹⁸ In studies, many athletes say that they perceive their opponent as an enemy so that they hold

¹¹⁴ O’Sullivan 2003:75.

¹¹⁵ Gannet 2013; ESPN Internet Ventures 2013; Altius Directory 2013.

¹¹⁶ McKnight 2013.

¹¹⁷ Financial backing for athletes is not only seen in professional sports, but in collegiate as well in the form of athletic scholarships. Collegiate athletes may not be able to legally be paid to attend a certain university, but they are able to earn athletic scholarships that more than pay for the expense of tuition and living.

¹¹⁸ Talamini and Page 1973:329, 330, 335.

nothing back during competition.¹¹⁹ This mindset is characterized in the words of Vince Lombardi, coach for the Green Bay Packer's in the 1960's, "to play this game you must have a fire in you and there is nothing that stokes that fire like hate."¹²⁰ Athletics give the opportunity for participants to channel and release aggression in situations that will not be scorned by society. In turn, the expulsion of aggression in athletics acts as type of catharsis for athletes.¹²¹ This aggression-release complex parallels the need for an outlet of competitive and warlike nature of the ancient Greeks. Athletics provided a chance for ancient Greek athletes to release these ingrained impulses. Today, athletics still provides one, if not the only chance to release these aggressive impulses in a medium that is not frowned upon by society. One can here this aggression in phrases, such as "Prepare for war," "Get ready to do battle," or "Lets crush them", that are used to describe athletic opponents. These words resemble those used in combat which supports the idea that there is an underlying concept that lives on through competition and contest. This concept is also manifested in the innate motivations that persist for individuals to partake in athletics today.

Modern sports psychology attempts to explain the motivations surrounding athletics based upon personality and biological theories, which emphasize behavioral tendencies innate in a person and the psychological activities that produce them.¹²² One such theory is the Zuckerman Sensation-Seeking Component which argues that athletics provide an environment for excitement which is a natural need within individuals.¹²³ Sport provides a chance to free one's

¹¹⁹ Silva III and Weinberg 1984:241.

¹²⁰ Silva III and Weinberg 1984:241.

¹²¹ Silva III and Weinberg 1984:252.

¹²² Pargman 1998:65.

¹²³ Pargman 1998:66.

self to enjoy pleasure and excitement that cannot be found in other places in society.¹²⁴ Athletics also provides a medium through which one can gain continuous challenges, opportunities for personal growth, and ascend beyond the bounds of normal human potential.¹²⁵ This idea is supported by the McClelland's Theory of Need Achievement which "...refers to the tendency to behave in ways that enable accomplishment of success, excellence, and mastery over others and the environment."¹²⁶ Athletes are continuously trying to improve technique, strength, conditioning, and intuitiveness of their sport. There is something raw, almost primitive in the way that athletes train and compete. Mental drive and dedication are imperative for an athlete to be successful. This notion is not a new one. Since the time of the ancient Greeks athletes have given their lives over to athletics: setting goals, overcoming obstacles, and showcasing their athletic excellence. Athletes have been competing for thousands of years and there is no evidence that they will stop anytime soon.

Conclusion

In the comparison of ancient and modern athletes and athletics it is obvious that there are differences. However, history is kinetic and connects the distant past and the present. There is some force that underlies athletics and its power is seen in the importance that sport plays in our lives. It seems to serve a common function and fulfill a certain need that is innate in the human person. U.S. athletes, like the ancient Greeks, continue to participate and are drawn to the athletic lifestyle. Athletes exhaust themselves during workouts, practice their skills, and sacrifice in order

¹²⁴ Orlick 1990:4. This opportunity is not the only thing that draws man to athletics. It is also the community that develops within the sporting culture. "There is a desire to find in sport a companionship with kindred people. Friendships formed under this baptism of fire...have a curious permanence" (Talamini and Page 1973:328). The draw of friendship is not limited to team sports, it can be seen in athletic communities. Such fitness communities as CrossFit have strong supportive members that transgress space, language, and age. The members always try to bring out the best in each other, always encouraging and cheering on other athletes and helping them complete events and contests. Along with this search for companionship is a constant search for self-development and discovery that is intertwined with athletics.

¹²⁵ Orlick 1990:6.

¹²⁶ Pargman 1998:75.

to excel at their sport. This examination points to the fact that athletics and competition play an integral role in the expression of human excellence. It continues to provide an environment in which human excellence can be displayed and in which pent up excitement and aggression can be released in a way that is not harmful. The ancient Greeks were an “agonistic” people that took every opportunity to hold contest to show their abilities, skill, and excellence to the public. Athletic contests, when war was no longer suitable to showcase one’s skill, became an outlet for their competitive impulses. Today, athletic events likewise take place in public settings, bring the entire world together in competition, and provide a suitable medium to showcase skill and release aggression. Athletics is a universal language connecting people separated by time and space which gives man an opportunity to display his abilities and to dispel the intensity that rages inside him in a way that is not destructive and promotes a sense of identity for each competitor.

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