

Kalokagathia: The Citizen Ideal in Classical Greek Sculpture

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Introduction

Nothing useless can be truly beautiful.
— William Morris

Through the Archaic (c. 750-508BCE) and into the Classical period (c. 508-323BCE), the Ancient Greeks created sculptures of human beings that became increasingly realistic.¹ The height of this realism came with ‘Kritian Boy’ (480BCE) and the magnificent ‘Charioteer of Delphi’ (c. 470BCE), sculptures that represent human beings in lifelike detail, proportion and style. The representation of muscles, flesh, joints and bone and the use of *contrapposto* in ‘Kritian Boy’ presents us with a youth frozen in time yet alive; while the meticulous attention to the minutiae of the face and feet as well as the free flowing tunic of the ‘Charioteer of Delphi’ presents us with a competitor focused while in motion. But within a generation, realism was abandoned for an idealism. Sculptors suddenly (seemingly) set out to depict the details and proportions of the human body with mathematical precision and deliberate exaggeration. Polykleitos’ ‘Spear Bearer’ (c. 450BCE) and the recently discovered ‘Riace Bronzes’ (c.

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¹ In identifying the end of the Archaic period and the beginning of the Classical period with the date 508BCE rather than 480BCE as many historians do, we are emphasizing Cleisthenes’ democratic reforms (that followed Peististratus’ economic and social reforms), which emboldened the Athenians to, among other things, support the Ionian Greeks at the start of the Greco-Persian War.

with mathematical precision and deliberate exaggeration. Polykleitos' 'Spear Bearer' (c. 450BCE) and the recently discovered 'Riace Bronzes' (c. 450BCE) represent warriors who are literarily more human than human. The question is: What prompted this rapid move away from realism?

In 'From Realism to Idealism: Ancient Greek Sculpture in the Classical Period'² we consider two explanations, one proposed by the neuroscientist Vilayanur Subramanian Ramachandran and the other a metaphysical account inspired by a reading of Plato. Both explanations, we argue, fail because of a shared commitment to a single, fixed ideal of the human body. Where Ramachandran fixes the ideal biologically in an innate drive that artists have to exaggerate (Supernormal Stimulus Theory), Plato is interpreted as fixing the ideal metaphysically in an eternal, unchanging and abstract entity, viz. the form of the human body. Moreover, both theories assign socio-historical explanations a negative role, one in which their respective ideals *per se* are inflexible and unresponsive to socio-historical factors and where these factors at most explain why these ideals are masked from human beings.

In this article, we present an alternative explanation. We begin by explaining the various kinds of soldiers that served in ground-based warfare during the early and middle Classical period. Next we consider the athletic events that were held in Panhellenic Games and relate these skill sets to those that soldiers were trained in. But war and sports are only part of the story, as any purposeful endeavor including those in the arts and ordinary life bring with them ideals based on what the Ancient Greeks called 'virtues' (*arete*). Virtues, we maintain, cannot be understood independently of their physical manifestation through the human body, the medium of purposeful action. And it is with this in mind that we return to the question: What prompted Greek sculptors to stop making realistic sculptures in favor of idealized sculptures of the human body?

The Roles of Warriors

Unlike many of the civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean such as the kingdoms of Egypt, Persia and Macedonia, the Ancient Greeks were not

² York H. Gunther and Sumetanee Bagna-Dulyachinda, 'From Realism to Idealism: Ancient Greek Sculpture in the Classical Period', *Literature and Aesthetics*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2019), pp. 159-183.

governed by a central political authority until the late Classical period. Rather they were divided into city states (*poleis*)³ that had unique laws, economies, customs and militaries. While democracy is often cited as a political system that emerged during the early Classical period, of the roughly one thousand city states only about fifty had democratic systems at some point in their histories.⁴ But the Greeks did share something basic. In addition to their common language and mythology, they shared a readiness for war and a passion for sports. It is thus not surprising that the best-known *surviving* sculptures from the fifth century BCE are of warriors and athletes.⁵ The significance of war and sports in Ancient Greece during the Classical period is undeniable.

The fifth century BCE began with the fledgling Athenian democracy along with its neighbor Eretria supporting the uprising of the Ionian city states in Asia Minor. These Greek city states had been conquered by the Persians roughly fifty years earlier and were required to pay taxes, to provide military support and frequently to accept a Persian-appointed ruler. While the so-called Ionian Revolt (499-493BCE) initially failed, it set in motion the Greco-Persian War which only ended with a treaty in 449BCE. Notable battles during this time were fought at Marathon (490BCE), Thermopylae (480BCE), Salamis (480BCE), and Plataea (479BCE). But the century of war did not stop with the Persians. In fact, as the economic and military power of the Greek city states grew, so did the rivalry between them, culminating in the (Second) Peloponnesian War (431-404BCE), with

³ This was also true of the Phoenicians until they were conquered by the Persians in 539BCE. See Josephine Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 201-203.

⁴ It is noteworthy that the most renowned sculptors of the Classical period were either from or worked in city states with a democratic history, for example, Myron (of Eleutherae, Northern Attica), Polyclitus (of Argos), Phidias and Praxiteles (both of Athens), Scopas (of Paros), and Lysippos (of Sicyon). Other noteworthy democracies included Corinth, Megara, Elis, Syracuse, Thebes, Ephesus, Miletus, and Samos. See Eric W. Robinson, *Democracy Beyond Athens: Popular Government in the Greek Classical Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 184-85.

⁵ It is noteworthy that Pliny the Elder claims that Myron's most famous sculpture was that of a heifer (34.19), though he is also said to have created sculptures of a dog, a cricket, and a locust (34.19) and a drunken woman (36.4). See Pliny, *Pliny the Elder's Natural History*, ed. J. Bostock, at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:latinLit:phi0978_phi001_perseus-eng1. Accessed 1 May 2020.

pivotal battles or sieges at Plataea (429-427BCE), Sphacteria (425BCE), Mantinea (418BCE), and Sicily (415-13BCE), to name but a few. While Sparta and its allies ultimately prevailed against Athens and its allies, the war was mutually attritional, ultimately costing both sides lives, treasure and, decades later, their political autonomy.

Although the Ancient Greeks fought both on land and sea, at the beginning of the fifth century BCE the centerpiece of an army was the heavy infantry soldiers known as hoplites (*hoplitai*). These soldiers wore bronze helmets (often with cheek plates), breast plates or thoraxes (of bronze, though later leather and/or linen were more commonly used) and bronze greaves, and they carried bronze-covered wooden shields (a combined weight in excess of thirty kilograms).⁶ Along with their armor, a hoplite carried a 2-3 meter long spear (typically with an iron spearhead on one end and a bronze or iron spike on the other as a secondary option and counterweight), and a short sword, and possibly a dagger that were used in case the spear broke or was lost.

While there is evidence that hoplites were trained to fight in single armed and hand-to-hand combat,⁷ they typically organized themselves into *phalanx* formations, a word meaning ‘rows’ or ‘stacks’. A regiment employing such a formation might consist of a few hundred men with “an unbroken mass eight ranks deep,” which when combined with other phalanx units “could extend a mile or more across in an open battlefield.”⁸ Each hoplite in the phalanx would hold his shield in his left hand and overlap it with the shield of the man to his left and the first three rows of hoplites would hold their spears above their heads, aiming the spearheads

⁶ Jonathan Zimmel and Todd Girard, n.d. ‘Hoplite Arms and Armor’ at <http://faculty.fairfield.edu/rosivach/cl115/military/hoplites.htm>. Accessed 29 April 2020. Victor Hanson disputes the frequent uniform and pristine descriptions of hoplites and their weapons and armor, suggesting “In reality, most hoplites patched together whatever second-hand and repaired arms and armor they inherited, bought, borrowed, stole, or looted from the battlefield. The apparently unprotected thighs were, in fact, often guarded by a leather apron that was stitched to the bottom of the shield.” In Victor Hanson, *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 18.

⁷ In the *Iliad*, Homer describes single-combat battles between Menelaus and Paris and later between Achilles and Hector. C. L. Cawkwell makes a similar claim throughout ‘Orthodoxy and Hoplites’, *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1989), pp. 375-389.

⁸ John Lee, ‘Urban Warfare in the Classical Greek World’, in *Makers of Ancient Strategy*, ed. Victor Hanson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 150.

downward (to prevent the iron spiked ends from making contact with their comrades behind them). When advancing, usually the phalanx would move steadily and rhythmically forward (perhaps accompanied by a wind instrument such as an *aulos*) and once it made contact with an opposing phalanx, a rugby-style pushing match would ensue accompanied by thrusting spears.⁹ Front-facing defensive positions were also adopted depending on the nature of the assault: a volley of incoming arrows, for example, might be repelled by overlapping shields front to back as well as left to right (a turtle shell-like defense); an enemy's fast approaching infantry or cavalry might require a wall of spears, where each spear's iron spiked end would be planted into the ground rather than raised above a hoplite's head. There were many tactics used by the phalanx, depending on a variety of factors including the kind of enemy, its approach, the terrain, the weather, and so on.

The Ancient Greeks had horses and most likely a rudimentary understanding of cavalry tactics. However, as Victor Hanson notes, cavalrymen made up only five percent of the fighting citizen army of Athens and had been, with the light infantry, "confined to occasional pre-battle and post-battle skirmishing."¹⁰ Moreover, in their own experience, a cavalry had little success against an organized phalanx.¹¹ This may partially explain why there is little to no evidence of Greeks utilizing their cavalries during the Greco-Persian War. But it must also have occurred to the Greeks upon seeing the sheer number of Persian cavalrymen (during the Ionian Revolt and later in the battles on the Greek mainland) that there was little to no benefit in using the few horses that they had. According to Herodotus, the Persians brought 80,000 horses to Greece in 480BCE.¹² Even if this is exaggerated and they brought half that number, Hanson observes that this is "still nearly five times larger than the mounted forces that Alexander would use to conquer Asia more than a century and a half later."¹³ It may be for this reason that the Ancient Greeks chose their locations in battles with the

⁹ See Victor Hanson, *The Western Way of War* (New York: Knopf, 1989), Chapter 15 for a further discussion of tactics of the phalanx.

¹⁰ Hanson, *The Western Way of War*, p. 69.

¹¹ Hanson, *The Western Way of War*, p. 73.

¹² Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), VII.87.

¹³ Hanson, *The Western Way of War*, pp. 95-96.

Persians carefully. At Marathon (490BCE), for example, they meticulously defended their flanks with trees that they cut down and laid along the sides of their phalanxes; and at Plataea (479BCE) they refused to be lured into the flat terrain around the Persian camps that would have been ideal for the Persian calvary to run them down.¹⁴

During the fifth century BCE, the predominance of the hoplites and the phalanx formations waned. Not only does the cavalry become increasingly central to battles, but so does the light infantry. Where hoplites were typically from the middle classes (as each soldier was responsible for buying or otherwise acquiring his own armor, shield and weapons), the light infantry (*psiloi*), made up of an array of skirmishers and missile troops, were from the lower classes (and often from abroad). Their lack of heavy armor, while likely considered a disadvantage during the Archaic and Early Classical periods (let alone a reflection of their lowly socioeconomic status), gave them speed and a greater agility over rugged and hilly terrain. Instead of bronze, a light infantryman would wear linen or leather headgear and thoraxes and, if he had a shield, it would be made of wicker or wood (not covered with bronze). Among them were archers (*toxotai*), javelin throwers (*akontistai*), slingers of stones, clay pellets or lead bullets (*sphendonetai*), and stone throwers (*litobolai*).¹⁵

In support of a phalanx formation, their role was to scout or serve as an advance guard, to disrupt the opposing hoplites, to screen the maneuvers of their own heavy infantry or to provide a defense against opposing skirmishers and missile troops. In addition to their mobility and capacity for long range assaults, they were “much more effective in urban fighting.” As John Lee explains, “Light troops could hurl missiles from rooftops or sweep the streets with volleys of projectiles [and] could wield their weapons even inside the confines of houses.”¹⁶ In fact, the Persian general Mardonius at the Battle of Plataea (479BCE) was killed by Arimnestus, possibly a Spartan *litobolai* (socioeconomically, ‘the lowest of the low’),

¹⁴ Heroditus, *The Histories*, IX.13.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the slingers with lead bullets could propel their projectiles further than those who used stones or clay pellets, let alone the arrows volleyed by archers. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, ed. H. G. Dakyns, Book III, Chapters 3-4, at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1170/1170-h/1170-h.htm#link2H_4_0003. Accessed 28 April 2020.

¹⁶ Lee, ‘Urban Warfare in the Classical Greek World’, p. 151.

“who crushed in his head with a stone,”¹⁷ an act that arguably turned the tide of the battle and resulted in the slaughter of the Persians and their expulsion from the Greek mainland.

But it was during the Peloponnesian War on the island of Sphacteria (425BCE) when the effectiveness and indispensability of the light infantry was fully recognized in an outcome that, according to Donald Kagan, “shook the Greek World.”¹⁸ Rather than engage the Spartan hoplites with their own heavy infantry, the Athenian sent their light infantry to harry and frustrate the Spartans who, unable to effectively defend themselves against the relentless assaults, were ultimately forced to surrender. This humiliation likely moved the Spartans within a year to raise their own light infantry unit (archers) for the first time in their history, having previously relied on mercenaries or the skirmishers and missile troops of their allies.

Although ownership of horses in Ancient Greece was a reflection of wealth and status, making equestrian competitions among the most prestigious, the major Greek city states did not raise comprehensive cavalries of their own until around the time of the Peloponnesian War. Not only were horses expensive but

the mountains and ravines of southern Greece did not encourage mounted warfare. In hoplite circles during the early Classical period, disdain for Persian horsemen may have smeared the use of a cavalry with some of the ‘barbarian’ mud thrown at archery.¹⁹

Horses were also difficult to ride. In addition to requiring good balance given the absence of stirrups, a rider would have to develop excellent coordination when fighting on horseback with range weapons such as bows or javelins and/or with melee weapons such as swords, spears, axes or machetes. Moreover, in addition to mastering the individual skills of riding and weapon use, cavalrymen would also require formation training in a range of maneuvers including scouting, patrolling, raiding, flanking, screening the movements of their own light and heavy infantry, and pursuing a fleeing enemy.

¹⁷ Plutarch, *Parallel Lives: Aristides*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert, in *The Rise and Fall of Athens: Nine Greek Lives* (London: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 130.

¹⁸ Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War* (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 152.

¹⁹ See John Lee, ‘Warfare in the Classical Age’, in *Companion to the Classical Greek World*, ed. Konrad H. Kinzl (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 491-493.

There is naturally much more that could be said about the Ancient Greek military during the Classical period. For example, we have not described the command structure, logistics operations or medical care during warfare. Moreover, our focus has been exclusively on ground forces, omitting mention of the sailors and officers of the powerful and skilled navies of Athens and its allies in the Delian League. But a discussion of these has been omitted because when it comes to fifth century BCE Greek sculpture, the warriors depicted were exclusively ground troops. Commanders, messengers and medics, let alone sailors and naval officers, were to our knowledge never the subject-matter of sculptures of this time. In fact, even the athletes who were depicted were exclusively those who competed in land-based events.

The Competitions of Athletes

Sports were a central part of Ancient Greek life and the festivals and games that hosted them were at once tributes to the gods and peace-time reflections of the physicality and mentality of war. The oldest of these festivals was the Olympic Games held in the Olympia Valley near the city state of Elis. Honoring Zeus, the king of the gods, their centrality is reflected by the fact that historians measured time in terms of an Olympiad, a four-year period that coincided with the festival. Thus, the first Olympiad refers to 776BCE which ended with the start of the second Olympiad in 772BCE, which itself ended with the start of the third Olympiad in 768BCE, and so on. In fact, years might even be identified by a famous athlete's Olympic victory. Thucydides thus describes the initial meeting at Olympia between the Spartan alliance and Mitylene envoys, who were seeking support from the alliance to break away from Athens during "the Olympiad in which the Rhodian Dorieus gained his second victory" (428BCE).²⁰

²⁰ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley, Book III, Chapter 9, at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7142/7142-h/7142-h.htm>. Accessed 2 May 2020. Dorieus (or Diagoras) of Rhodes was a two-time Olympic boxing champion (also winning the Isthmian Games four times, the Nemean Games twice, and the Pythian Games at least once) whose progeny (both sons and grandsons) were also champions in either boxing or *pankration*. See Nigel Nicholson, 'When athletic victory and fatherhood did mix: the commemoration of Diagoras of Rhodes', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, vol. 61, no.1 (2018), pp. 42-63.

There were other Panhellenic Games besides the Olympics, including the Pythian Games at Delphi honoring Apollo that took place in the second year after the start of an Olympiad (from 582BCE); the Isthmian Games near Corinth honoring Poseidon that took place every two years (from 582BCE); and the Nemean Games in Nemea honoring Hercules and Zeus that also took place every two years (from 573BCE). While in the early days of the Panhellenic games the participants were primarily adult male Greek aristocrats, over time any male (including boys in later years) could represent his city state in events at the Games. Females were, however, barred from participating in athletic competitions but were permitted to take part in equestrian events as owners and artistic contests as performers. As Ancient Greece became wealthier and more powerful, the number of athletes and spectators grew, as did the range of athletic events and the sheer scale of these festivals.²¹

The earliest event was the *stade* (the root of the word ‘stadium’), a sprint that covered a distance of approximately 190 meters. This was followed by running events that were increasingly longer, most notably the *diaulos* (2 *stade*), the *hippios* (4 *stade*), and the *dolichos* (7-24 *stade*).²² There was also a hoplite race (*hoplitodromos*), where athletes outfitted with hoplite armor including a shield ran a distance of 2 or 4 *stade*. The need for and distance of the hoplite race, as Nicholas Sekunda observes, may have been inspired by the actual range of archers at the time, a distance a hoplite phalanx would have to quickly cross before reaching the opposing infantry. As the Greek hoplites would have marched toward a Persian line, “at a distance of about two *stades* (approximately 400 meters) they [would]

²¹ While the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian and Nemean Games were the most prestigious competitions, there were numerous other festivals that hosted athletic, equestrian, and artistic competitions. These festivals were part of a ‘circuit’ (*periodos*) and often attracted local athletes, artists, and spectators rather than those from around the greater Greek world, for example, the Amphiaraeaia (in Oropus on the border of Boeotia and Attica), the Asclepieia (in the northeast Peloponnese), the Charitesia (in Boetia), the Eleutheria (established in Plataea after Leonidas’ battle with the Persians), the Hecatombaea (later called ‘Heraea’ in Argos), and the Panathenaea (in Athens). While team sports were absent from the Panhellenic Games, sports like boat races, torch races, tug-of-wars, mock combat competitions and so on were hosted by some of these local festivals. See Mark Golden, *Sport in the Ancient World from A to Z* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 161-162 and throughout.

²² Note that the marathon was not an event until the modern Olympics in 1896AD.

come within range of the Persian archers [and] at this point they charge[d] at the run through the hail of Persian archery.”²³ It is apparent that the speed and endurance required in other running events would likewise be regarded as an asset to an effective light infantryman.

The combat sports included wrestling (*pale*), boxing (*pyx*), and *pankration*, a combination of wrestling and boxing that was likely similar to the modern sport of mixed martial arts (MMA), though with fewer rules and less structure. Wrestling was the oldest and likely the most popular of the combat sports. While there were two kinds, standup and ground wrestling, only the former was an event at the Panhellenic Games.²⁴ The competition would take place in a designated area between two opponents, each attempting to take the other down onto his back, hip or shoulder, or to submit him or to push him out of the wrestling area. Success in any of these maneuvers would get the wrestler a point and three points would give him a victory. Numerous actions such as biting, eye, nose or mouth gouging, and grasping or striking one’s opponent’s genitals were prohibited. In boxing, in addition to the aforementioned, any form of holding or excessive reinforcement or hardness of the leather wrapped around a fighter’s knuckles was forbidden. Nevertheless, fighters would get visible injuries, including lacerations to the face, and by the Classical period it was considered the most violent of the combat sports. Moreover, unlike today, there were no weight limits or fixed rounds: matches would continue until someone was submitted or knocked out. *Pankration*, literally meaning ‘all power’ or ‘anything goes’, was introduced at the Olympics in 648BCE. It was a combination of wrestling and boxing (abiding by most of their rules) and, while there were two forms, standing and ground *pankration*, only the latter was held at the Panhellenic Games. The goal ultimately was either to knock out one’s opponent with a strike (from the fist, arm, elbow, foot, knee, leg or head) or a violent take-down; or one attempted to submit one’s opponent (with any number of arm bars, joint locks or chokes).²⁵

²³ Nicholas Sekunda, *Marathon 490 BCE: The First Persian Invasion of Greece* (Oxford: Osprey, 2002), p. 62.

²⁴ Sofie Remijnsen and Willy Clarysse, n.d. ‘Wrestling’, *Ancient Olympics* at <http://ancientolympics.arts.kuleuven.be/eng/TC007aEN.html>. Accessed 2 May 2020.

²⁵ ‘Pankration’, *The Martial Arts Encyclopedia* at <https://bullshido.org/Pankration>. Accessed 3 May 2020. See also Stephen Miller, *Arete: Greek Sports from Ancient Sources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 44-46.

The effectiveness of combat sports in military circumstances is obvious. A hoplite whose phalanx has broken apart and whose shield, spear and sword are lost or rendered useless, would be forced to rely on the techniques of wrestling, boxing or *pankration*. That is, assuming he did not flee the battlefield (in which case he would rely on a sprinter's speed and/or a distance runner's endurance), he might strike, clench, take-down and/or incapacitate an enemy infantryman in any way he could, unburdened of course by any rules against biting, gouging or groin grabbing or striking. In fact, Herodotus claims that after their spears and swords had been broken, the Spartans fought the Persians at Thermopylae in hand to hand combat, likely utilizing their *pankration* training: "In that place they defended themselves with swords, if they still had them, and with hands and teeth. The barbarians buried them with missiles, some attacking from the front and throwing down the defensive wall, others surrounding them on all sides."²⁶ The stark reality, of course, is while potentially effective against an unarmed enemy, no amount of training in wrestling, boxing or *pankration* can defend one against an accurate archer, slinger or javelin thrower, let alone a formation of them.

The Ancient Pentathlon was introduced at the Olympics in 708BCE and was the only competition involving more than one event. Where today the discus throw, the long jump and the javelin throw are individual events, in the Panhellenic Games they were events only in the pentathlon. It is generally believed that all the events were performed in a single day, likely with the throwing and jumping events first, followed by the 190 meter *stade* and concluding with standup wrestling. But a number of details about the event are unclear. First, it is not known whether the javelin throw was judged by distance, accuracy, or a combination of both. (The same question might be asked about the discus). Second, given that the long jumper held a pair of 1.5-2 kilogram 'jumping weights' (*halteres*), it is not obvious whether the jump was a single step or multi-step jump (perhaps akin to today's triple jump). Third, "[n]o text describes precisely how the winner was decided. Only one thing is certain: the ultimate victor had to win three events."²⁷

²⁶ Herodotus, *The Histories*, VII.225; 'Pancration', *Ancient History Encyclopedia* at <https://www.ancient.eu/pankration/>. Accessed 1 May 2020.

While the pentathlon may not have been the favorite spectator event, its athletes were highly revered for their diversity and beauty. There certainly were other athletes who had won consecutive titles at multiple Panhellenic Games or multiple titles at a particular games, or even those who had won multiple titles at multiple games. For example, Milo of Croton won six consecutive Olympic wrestling titles (536-520BCE) and another twenty-seven at the Nemean, Pythian and Isthmian Games. Chionis of Sparta won both the *stade* and *diaulos* in three consecutive Olympics from 664 to 656BCE, a feat only replicated by Astylos of Croton almost two hundred years later (488 to 480BCE). Theagenes of Thasos was the first athlete to win Olympic titles in both boxing and *pankration* in 476BCE, winning a total of twenty-four combat titles in Panhellenic Games as well as a title in distance running (the *dolichos*) at the Hecatombaea, a local festival in Argos.²⁸

The pentathletes embodied the broadest set of skills, making them paradigms of beauty and excellence. As Aristotle explains, “Beauty varies with the time of life. In a young man beauty is the possession of a body fit to endure the exertion of running and of contests of strength; which means that he is pleasant to look at; and therefore all-round athletes [viz. pentathletes] are the most beautiful, being naturally adapted both for contests of strength and for speed also.”²⁹ But the beauty and excellence were not just seen as ends in themselves—they were reflections of the skills required for warfare. Aristotle continues:

For a man in his prime, beauty is fitness for the exertion of warfare, together with a pleasant but at the same time formidable appearance ... Athletic excellence of the body consists in size and strength; for the swift man is strong—he who can fling forward his legs in a certain way, and move them fast and far, is good at running; he who can grip and hold down is good at wrestling; he who can drive an

²⁷ Sofie Remijsen and Willy Clarysse, n.d., ‘Pentathlon’, *Ancient Olympics* at <http://ancientolympics.arts.kuleuven.be/eng/TC007aEN.html>. Accessed 3 May 2020. See also Rory Egan, ‘How the Pentathlon was Won: Two Pragmatic Models and the Evidence of Philostratus’, *Phoenix*, vol. 61, no. 1/2 (2007), pp. 39-54.

²⁸ See Evan Andrews, ‘7 Ancient Sports Stars’, *History.com*, at <https://www.history.com/news/7-ancient-sports-stars> and ‘Welcome to the Ancient Olympic Games’, at <https://www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games/the-athlete>. Both accessed 4 May 2020.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 1361b7-11.

adversary from his ground with the right blow is a good boxer; he who can do both the last is a good pancratiast [*pankraton*], while he who can do all is an all-round athlete [*pentathlete*].³⁰

More than just an ancient endorsement of cross-training, Aristotle regards the preparation required for a pentathlon as the foundation for the training of the warrior himself. In fact, as Hans van Wees explains, most of the training that citizen soldiers of the leisure class (the class that did not have to have a particular occupation or trade) took part in was athletic rather than weapon or formation based:

The prevalence of this leisure-class ideal helps explain why training took the peculiar forms of athletic exercise, hunting and dancing, rather than weapons- or formation-drill. Given that most training was undertaken privately, it is perhaps not surprising that formation training is almost unheard of, but one might have expected that the techniques of fighting with shield, spear and sword would have been intensively practiced. Weapons training (*hoplomachia*) was indeed available from traveling specialists, but it was rather unusual, and seen by some as a pointless luxury. The normal form of training consisted of a range of athletic exercises: running, wrestling, jumping and boxing, throwing the javelin and discus. Even Sparta's regimented program of training appears to have consisted primarily of athletics: each Spartan unit had its own running track in camp. These exercises all contributed to general strength, stamina and agility, but very little to the specific requirements of combat. The same is even more obviously true of dancing and even of hunting, which was much praised as good preparation for warfare, but at best—in big game hunting—only approximated some of the conditions of war, and usually—in the common pursuit of hare coursing, where hunters clubbed to death hares caught in nets—had next to nothing in common with war at all.³¹

Although the Ancient Greek cavalry was given an integral role in warfare only after the Greco-Persian War, and while chariots were not used in warfare by the Greeks in the Classical period, the equestrian events at the Panhellenic Games were the most popular. Typically held on the last days of the games at a hippodrome rather than the stadium where the athletic

³⁰ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1361b11-27.

³¹ Hans van Wees, 'War and Society', in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, vol. 1, eds P. Sabin, H. Wees, and M. Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 279.

events took place, there were primarily two kinds of events: chariot races and horseback races. Chariot races involving four horses (*tethrippon* chariots) were run over a distance of about 8,400 meters (first introduced at the Olympics in 680BCE), while those involving two horses (*synoris* chariots) covered about 5,600 meters (introduced only in 408BCE). The horseback races (*keles*) which used neither saddles nor stirrups were about 4,200 meters long and required great balance and grip on the part of riders. These events were further divided into those involving horses under a year old and those involving horses over a year. The popularity of these events was due not only to the speed and power of the horses but to the likelihood of violent crashes, injuries and deaths, which would often occur in the turns:

The plain had to be sufficiently wide for a large number of participants (sometimes up to fifty). Two turning points were built at the ends. These were the most dangerous points. Because everyone wanted to take the inner side of the turn, accidents were most likely to occur here.³²

Moreover, aside from the turns, the shoddiness of the chariots themselves and the rough tracks further contributed to the danger and excitement: “Hired charioteers or slaves normally drove their horses and ran their risks. These were very real: flimsy chariots, crowded fields, rough tracks and long races combined to make crashes common and (apparently) crowd-pleasing.”³³ But the popularity of the equestrian games also had to do with their cost:

Horse racing was the most prestigious competition in the games. Only the very rich could afford to keep racing horses and to transport them to Olympia or elsewhere. The owners did not participate in person, but a jockey drove in their place. Nevertheless the owners were proclaimed as victors. In this way also women, children and even cities could become Olympic victors.³⁴

Perhaps the most famous of the female victors was Cynisca of

³² Sofie Remijnsen and Willy Clarysse, n.d. ‘Horse Races’, *Ancient Olympics* at <http://ancientolympics.arts.kuleuven.be/eng/TC008EN.html>. Accessed 4 May 2020. See also Michael Gagarin, ‘Antilochus’ Strategy: The Chariot Race in *Iliad* 23’, *Classical Philology*, vol. 78, no. 1 (1983), pp. 35-39.

³³ Mark Golden, *Sport in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 35-36.

³⁴ Remijnsen and Clarysse, ‘Horse Races’.

Sparta, the daughter of King Archidamus, “the first Greek woman to keep (or perhaps breed) horses and win a chariot race at Olympia (four-horse race, 396, 392 [BCE]). Her achievements earned her a heroine’s shrine at Sparta.”³⁵ In fact, it was common for great champions in other events to have sculptures made in their honor by the city states they represented.

Aside from the athletic and equestrian events, the Panhellenic Games hosted numerous artistic competitions. These included contests in poetry recitation, dancing, acting, singing, musical instrument playing, for example, the *aulos* (a reed pipe) or *kithara* (a stringed instrument) and a competition for trumpeters and heralds. At these Games, sacrifices were made, rites were given, oaths were taken, plays and reenactments were staged, and generally the events were rife with all kinds of entertainment (music, singing, dancing and, of course, eating and drinking). Against this merrymaking was an austere and crude backdrop: “the heat, crowding, noise and lack of shelter [at the Olympics] were as famous as the festival itself.”³⁶

Embodied Virtues and Ideals

While our focus has been on the various military roles of ground troops, the individual competitions of athletes, and the relationship between the two, the artistic competitions at the Panhellenic Games suggest that life was about more than just war and sports.³⁷ In fact, life was about more than just organized competitions. As Plato in the second book of the *Republic* outlines, a city state needs a vast number of occupations and trades including farmers, builders, weavers, cobblers and a variety of craftsmen; it also needs carpenters, metal workers, cowherds, shepherds and herdsmen, and merchants (import-exporters), sailors (if trade is to be done by sea), retailers, and manual laborers (“wage-earners”).³⁸ And if this city state is to

³⁵ Golden, *Sport in the Ancient World*, pp. 46-47.

³⁶ Golden, *Sport in the Ancient World*, p. 114.

³⁷ Curiously, Pliny the Elder claims that the many bronze statues of a wounded Amazon in the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus were the product of a fifth century BCE sculpture competition between Polyclitus, Phidias, Kresilas, Kydon, and Phradmon. The competition was decided by the sculptors themselves, with each sculptor presumably being able to cast a vote for any sculpture but his own. The winner was Polyclitus. Pliny, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural Histories*, 34.19.

³⁸ Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 369d-371e.

be beautiful (*kalopolis*)—that is, more than just a “city of pigs”³⁹—not only artists but also tutors, wet nurses, dry nurses, beauty parlors, barbers, chefs, cooks, physicians, and ultimately professional soldiers and a political class must be included.⁴⁰ Each of these occupations or trades has a distinct role, a distinction that undoubtedly reflects Plato’s assumption that a division of labor is most efficient, one he makes more than two thousand years before Adam Smith’s own observations about the efficiency of production.

The word ‘virtue’ as it is used today, refers to an ethical trait that someone righteous or upstanding possesses. For the Ancient Greeks, ‘virtue’ (*arete*) is more broadly understood as a property or characteristic that enables a thing or person to perform its/his/her function or purpose optimally (excellently). Consider for example a knife, the function of which is to cut or pierce. A knife cannot perform its function optimally unless it is sharp: sharpness is therefore a virtue of a knife. The purpose of a hammer, by contrast, is to pound nails or other fasteners into surfaces like wood, to shape materials like metal or to break apart objects like stones. To do this optimally, a hammer’s head must be hard—without the virtue of hardness, a hammer would be unable to pound, shape or break well. The function of a set of pliers is to firmly grasp or squeeze objects like bolts, nails, wires or pipes. To do this optimally, its jaws must be able to close tightly and grasp firmly around an object, implying that ‘tight-squeezed-ness’ and ‘firm-grasped-ness’ are virtues that a set of pliers should have.

On reflection, it is doubtful that a tool like a knife, hammer or set of pliers could perform its function well without having multiple virtues. Take the knife, for example. While sharpness (or what knifemaker’s call ‘edge retention’) is indispensable for cutting or piercing well, so too is strength or toughness. A knife whose edge or tip easily chips, cracks or breaks, will not be able to perform its function well, even if its edge remains sharp. Moreover, a knife that is too heavy, short or thick, or one whose handle is slippery or uncomfortable in its user’s hand might prove to be unusable in many circumstances. If the blade corrodes easily or if its edge geometry is ill-suited to the task, its usefulness might likewise be limited or compromised.

³⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 372d.

⁴⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 372e-374e.

But once we enumerate the various virtues of a knife, it soon becomes obvious that these physical properties that enable it to function optimally are not *intrinsic* to the knife: “A thing has its intrinsic properties ... by way [of] that thing itself, and nothing else ... Not so for extrinsic properties, though a thing may well have these [because] of the way some larger whole is.”⁴¹ Consider the property of sharpness. Sharpness is an *extrinsic* property of a knife because it depends on what the knife is being used to cut or pierce. A knife readily capable of chopping lettuce may be unable to cut a block of sashimi. A knife capable of cutting a block of sashimi may be unable to cut a steak. A knife capable of cutting a steak may be unable to shear through a sheet of metal, and so on. Even the sharpest and toughest blades such as those made of obsidian (volcanic glass) are not suited to cutting or piercing everything. In fact, knives can be too sharp for certain tasks, for example, removing the meat from a bone or slicing through a rope (where serrated or ‘toothed’ edges may be more effective than thinly sharpened blades). And the same is true of the virtues of hardness, weight, length, thickness, handle grip and comfort, corrosiveness and edge geometry. In each case, the optimality is determined not only by what is being cut or pierced but by the user him/herself (for example, his/her strength, size and stamina) and by the conditions in which the knife is being used (for example, location, temperature and humidity). None of this should be surprising. One need only look at the assortment of knives found in a professional kitchen that may include a chef’s knife, paring knife, boning knife, bread knife, utility knife and butcher cleaver.

Just as knives, hammers and sets of pliers have functions, so did the citizens of Greek city states. Take, for example, a trade such as carpentry, specifically someone focused on building wooden tables and chairs. A carpenter will need to have a number of physical qualities like strength and stamina as well as a manual dexterity when using tools that aid him in measuring, cutting, hammering, jointing, gluing, sanding and staining (practical virtues). He will also require skills in math and problem solving, knowledge about different kinds of wood, tools, techniques and furniture styles, and even a good business sense (intellectual virtues). It is, of course, possible that a carpenter may be born with some of these traits that,

⁴¹ David Lewis, ‘Extrinsic properties’, *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1983), p. 197.

following Aristotle, we might call “natural virtues” or “natural excellences.”⁴² But, natural virtues alone will not enable a carpenter to do his job well. Natural virtues must be cultivated initially from without by a mentor but eventually from within (by the carpenter himself) using “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*), the intellectual virtue responsible for exercising and thereby transforming natural traits into virtues in the strict sense. A carpenter, even one equipped with a range of natural talents, will have to work initially as an apprentice and eventually on his own to optimize the skill sets required for him to become excellent at his trade. One might say that where a natural virtue is an *intrinsic* property that a person is born with, it is only by exercising and practicing this innate talent on a range of tools, things and materials and in a variety of conditions or ways that these virtues become *extrinsic* properties, that is, ‘practical virtues’. When combined with other intellectual virtues like knowledge, this is what makes the carpenter excellent.

What is true of the carpenters and other occupations in a city state, is true of its athletes. In fact, during the Classical period, many athletes had jobs and while others may have been aristocrats or supported by them, any athlete that was victorious at the Olympics (or possibly at any of the other Panhellenic Games) likely had an comfortable life thereafter: “Their hometowns might reward them with free meals for the rest of their lives, cash, tax breaks, honorary appointments, or leadership positions in the community. The victors were memorialized in statues and also in victory odes, commissioned from famous poets.”⁴³ But this is not to say that it was

⁴² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1141b1ff. Aristotle’s use of ‘virtue’ (*arete*) is more restricted than our own. He uses the word to refer to excellences of “actions and activities relating to soul” (1098b15) rather than those relating to the body such as strength and health. For Aristotle, these excellences of the soul are of two kinds: virtues of character (for example, courage and temperance) and virtues of the intellect (for example, practical wisdom and knowledge [*episteme*]), which when possessed together enabled an individual to flourish (*eudaimonia*). With that said, Aristotle nevertheless repeatedly compares virtues of character or *eudaimonia* to strength, health and/or athletics (1099a3-5, 1104a14-b3, 1106a35-1106b6, 1143b21-35, 1144a4-6, 1145a7-9). See Heather Reid’s ‘Aristotle’s Pentathlete’, *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 2, (2010), pp. 183-194.

⁴³ Anonymous, n.d., ‘The ancient athlete: amateur or professional’, *The Perseus Project* at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics/amat.html>. Accessed 9 May 2020. Around 600BCE, athletes who won an Olympic event were given 500 *drachma*, an amount that could secure

easy to become a great athlete. While having natural virtues like a physique suited to one's sport and a competitive mindset were likely necessary for victory, an athlete had to transform these natural virtues into practical and intellectual virtues. Like athletes today, the strength, stamina, technique and mental fortitude that made one competitive (let alone victorious) involved a commitment to training, diet and learning that most people were unwilling to make.

Training, dietary and learning regiments were tailored to the event or events an athlete competed in. A runner, for example, required greater strength and speed in his legs than his upper body compared to a boxer. Moreover, sprinters competing in the *stade* would require more explosiveness and strength-to-speed conversion from their legs including long swinging arms than athletes competing in distance races like the *dolichos*. Irrespective of the event, it is unlikely that the training for either would involve simply repeatedly running a *stade* or *dolichos*! The event itself would have been broken down into its component parts (the start, finish, and all that is inbetween—to put it simply), but so too would the physical aspects of each part. For example, it would have been recognized that aside from actually starting a race, other exercises or training regiments could *optimize* an athlete's start. Jumping exercises, resistance training, flexibility routines and reaction drills might all be used to develop the explosiveness and strength that would help a runner get ahead of his competition. There would likely have been other detailed analyses of the other parts of such an event. Moreover, weather conditions (dry versus wet, hot versus cold, windy versus calm) could affect how an athlete trained or competed in a race, as would his knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses and tactics of his opponents. Mental visualization exercises might also be employed to sharpen his focus and competitiveness. But to acquire the range of practical virtues like strength, speed, balance and endurance as well as intellectual virtues like knowledge, focus and competitiveness, an athlete had to guard against overtraining or overworking. As Aristotle reminds us, a virtue is a mean between a vice of deficiency and a vice of

their financial future for the rest of their lives. See Brian Cronin, 'Were the Ancient Greek Olympic athletes really amateurs?', *Los Angeles Times* (21 March 2012), at <https://www.latimes.com/sports/la-xpm-2012-mar-21-la-sp-sn-were-the-ancient-greek-olympic-athletes-really-amateurs-20120321-story.html>. Accessed 14 May 2020.

excess. Thus, a great athlete like an excellent carpenter had to possess practical wisdom to ensure that his training, diet and learning would bring about the optimal physical and mental traits that would make him victorious.

When achieved, a great athletic assortment of practical and intellectual virtues reflects an ideal. However, unlike biological or metaphysical ideals, an athlete's ideal (or a carpenter's for that matter) was not fixed. It was ever-responsive to or dependent on the rules of a particular competition, the competitors and the various other conditions of the event. Just as virtues are extrinsic properties, the ideal that they reflect is likewise extrinsic and thus flexible as rules, events, competitors, and the various other conditions change. Moreover, while each event had its own ideal, a higher ideal would be reflected by an athlete who won multiple events at multiple games. Chionis of Sparta's victories of the *stade* and *diaulos* in three consecutive Olympics in the seventh century BCE, matched only in the fifth century BCE by Astylos of Croton, made him among the most celebrated runners of Ancient Greece. But the athletes that reflected the highest ideal were the pentathletes who had to excel not just in one kind of event but in the greatest diversity of events: the discus and javelin throws, the long jump, the *stade* and wrestling. As Aristotle remarks, the pentathlete is "he who can do all."⁴⁴ Doing it all excellently would most certainly have been regarded as the highest athletic ideal.

Similarly, we might think of the highest ideal of a tradesman as someone who is not only the best carpenter but the best at a diversity of trades including farming, building, weaving, metal work and so on. And along the same lines, the ideal warrior would not only include the ideal hoplite but the ideal archer, javelin thrower, slinger, stone thrower, and perhaps even cavalryman. While the latter may not have been regarded as warrior ideals at the beginning of the fifth century BCE, as the century progressed and as the need for a light infantry and cavalry became ever apparent to the Ancient Greeks, these ideals would have evolved and been incorporated into the highest ideal of the warrior. Like the pentathlete, a more diverse regiment of training, diet and learning would have to be utilized to develop the best all-round warrior. This might, of course, have been recognized as unattainable in practice—no one can be excellent at

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1361b26-27.

everything! But this is not to say that it was not worth striving for by citizens in their preparation for war and by sculptures in their depiction of the ideal citizen soldiers and athletes. Perhaps it was this that inspired sculptures like Polykleitos' 'Spear Bearer' and the 'Riace Bronzes'. The sculptures are more human than human because they attempt to idealize warriors, athletes and other citizens by suggesting that their excellence spans across a diversity of military roles, athletic competitions, and occupations and trades. And therein lies their beauty. They are embodied idealizations, a division of labor in reverse: the beauty of the unity of labor embodied in a single individual.

Conclusion: *Kalokagathia*

While these ideals may help to explain the creation of 'Spear Bearer' and the 'Riace Bronzes', there is yet another ideal worth mentioning, viz. the ideal citizen. Such an ideal might have been more than any of these ideals, in fact, more than all of them combined. It was not enough to be excellent at one or more military roles, athletic competitions and/or occupations or trades—the ideal citizen would have to embody an ethical ideal. And according to Aristotle, this was only possible by acquiring virtues of character like courage and temperance. As Heather Reid explains,

this means that athletic training will fit into Aristotle's ethical scheme only if it actually promotes the kind of virtue (*arete*) that leads not just to excellent athletic performance, but also to virtuous activity elsewhere in life—*arete* must manifest itself in good and right action generally, not just in the stadium.⁴⁵

In other words, in all walks of life, on the battlefield, at the Games, and in the workshop, marketplace, gymnasium, *pynx*, home, and so on, only someone who has acquired the virtues of character would be an ideal citizen. And much like practical virtues, virtues of character are acquired through training and practice and through the guidance of practical wisdom.

That Aristotle regarded this as an ethical ideal is evident from the fact that it was not enough and, in fact, not possible, according to him, to have just one or just some of the twelve virtues of character he enumerates. As Christopher Healow explains, for Aristotle

⁴⁵ Reid, 'Aristotle's Pentathlete', p. 185.

an agent having practical wisdom is both a sufficient and necessary condition for that agent's having each of the moral [character] virtues. He then uses this claim to argue for the further position that an agent has one of the moral virtues if and only if he has them all.⁴⁶

In short, to have courage is to have temperance, patience, friendliness, generosity, truthfulness, wittiness, and so on. Likewise, having practical wisdom in the full sense (as opposed to the partial senses we discussed earlier) was itself confirmation that an individual had attained the ethical ideal. Just how widely a view like Aristotle's was held by Ancient Greeks in the fifth century BCE (a hundred years before he formulated his ethical theory), we cannot say. But what is clear is that this unified view of the virtues of character and intellect ('complete virtue') was something that few, if any, citizens could attain.

While the Greek word *kalokagathia* (the beautiful [*kalos*] and good [*agathos*]) could be interpreted in a number of ways, we understand it to refer to the highest possible ideal, one involving the embodiment not just of military, athletic and trade ideals but of ethical ideals as well. And like these other ideals, an ethical ideal is ever-responsive and dependent on individuals and the changing conditions they live in. Thus, the beauty the ideal reflected would itself change with the development of human activity and the transforming laws, economies, politics, customs and militaries of the Ancient Greeks.

⁴⁶ Christopher Healow, 'Practical wisdom & the unity of virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.12-13', (2015), p. 1 at https://www.academia.edu/19673617/Practical_Wisdom_and_The_Unity_of_Virtue_in_Nicomachean_Ethics_VI. Accessed 8 May 2020.