

# The Ancient History Bulletin

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## **Edited by:**

Edward Anson ✦ David Hollander ✦ Timothy Howe  
Joseph Roisman ✦ John Vanderspoel ✦ Pat Wheatley ✦  
Sabine Müller



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# The Thrill of Victory and the Avoidance of Defeat: Alexander as a Sponsor of Athletic Contests<sup>1</sup>

David Lunt

In ancient Greece, founding and presiding over athletic festivals augmented an individual's prestige and position. For Alexander, the founding and sponsoring of athletic festivals throughout his campaigns played an important role in policy as a military and political leader. In addition to the benefits that games offered to the soldiers in his army, Alexander sponsored athletics in order to associate himself with victory without risking defeat.

Alexander understood the connections between kings, authority, and patronage of games as established in myth and historical precedent. Presiding over athletic competitions allowed the sponsor to associate himself with victory without risking defeat. Thus, the sponsor "manufactured" victories connected to his reputation. In using athletic festivals to connect himself with victory, Alexander was acting within his 4th century context, following the literary models of athletic patronage and sponsorship established by Achilles in the *Iliad*, and bolstered by a long line of Archaic and Classical-period rulers, tyrants, leaders, and kings.

Victory was a powerful force in ancient Greece. Whether in battle or in athletic competition, associations with victory, its attendant *kleos*, and the recognition of the victor's *arete* elevated individuals above their peers and allowed ruling elites to claim and maintain their positions of power.<sup>2</sup> In *Politics*, Aristotle explained how *arete* justified the possession of ruling power. As he wrote, a king was chosen "according to the supremacy of his *arete*, or of the works produced from his *arete*."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the Archaic and Classical periods, tyrants, kings, and claimants to power sought to associate themselves with athletic champions in order to bolster their own prestige and reputations, and to justify their claims to power. As the Crown Games increased in popularity during the Archaic period, the athletic contests became more competitive and exclusive. Aspiring rulers who sought the *kleos* of athletic victory came to focus their efforts on equestrian events, which allowed them to capitalize on their financial resources to compete at the highest levels.

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was presented at the VI International Alexander Symposium at the University of Utah in October 2014. The author is grateful to Timothy Howe and to the *AHB* reviewers for their encouragement, insights, and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Kurke has argued that victory, especially prominent victory in a major festival or contest, brought *kudos* to the victor, which she defined as a "special power bestowed by a god that makes a hero invincible." Leslie Kurke, "The Economy of Kudos" in *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece*, ed. Carol Dougherty and Leslie Kurke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 132. However, cf. Poulheria Kyriakou, "Epidoxon Kydos: Crown Victory and Its Rewards," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 58 (2007): 119-158. Kyriakou challenged this narrow definition of *kudos*, but agreed that victory in panhellenic competition brought great "political potential" to the victor (149).

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1310b: καθ' ὑπεροχὴν ἀρετῆς ἢ πράξεων τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς,

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Such was the case with the Deinomenid tyrants of Sicily, who were especially involved in panhellenic athletic contests during the first half of the fifth century BCE. Gelon's brother Hieron won the four-horse chariot race at the Pythian Games in 470, and at Olympia in 468, and he commissioned Pindar and Bacchylides to commemorate his victories in verse. In addition, Hieron ordered a large bronze statue group to dedicate to Zeus at Olympia.<sup>4</sup> Typical Syracusan coinage issue, introduced around the time of Gelon, commemorated the equestrian victories of these tyrants.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the Sicilian tyrants, the kings of Macedon capitalized on their associations with the Olympic Games to bolster their own authority. Herodotus relates that Alexander I, king of Macedon from 495-452 BCE, competed at Olympia after satisfactorily demonstrating his Hellenic origins to the officials at Olympia.<sup>6</sup> About a hundred years later, Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, won an Olympic Crown in chariot racing, an achievement that he publicized on his coinage like the tyrants of Sicily.<sup>7</sup>

Additional examples illustrate the urge for tyrants and leaders to associate themselves with athletic victory. Among these are the Olympic victor Cylon, who around 632 BCE unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of Athens. In the late sixth century BCE, Cimon, a triple Olympic victor in Olympic chariot races, managed to "give" his second victory to the Athenian tyrant Peisistratus.<sup>8</sup> In the fourth century, the Sicilian tyrant Dionysius I attempted to bribe a young Olympic boxing champion to have his citizenship switched over to Syracuse. The boy refused.<sup>9</sup> The unprecedented equestrian success in the Olympic Games of 416, in which his teams won first, second, and fourth places, provided Alcibiades of Athens with the justification for seeking the right to command the ill-fated expedition to Sicily in 415. As Thucydides recorded, Alcibiades' victories in the Olympic Games had given the right to him

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<sup>4</sup> Pindar's *Olympian* 1 and *Pythians* 1 and 2; Bacchylides *Odes* 3 and 5 commemorate Hieron's athletic feats. For comments on Hieron's victories, see Christian Mann, *Athlet und Polis im archaischen und frühklassischen Griechenland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 240-244. For Hieron's dedications at Olympia, see Pausanias 6.12.1 and 8.42.8-10.

<sup>5</sup> G.F. Hill, *Coins of Ancient Sicily* (Westminster, England: Archibald Constable & Co., 1903), 53-65.

<sup>6</sup> Herodotus 5.22. Alexander I had a ways to go to ingratiate himself with the Greeks at Olympia: he had supported both the Persians and the Greeks during the Persian Wars of 480-479. For a treatment of the literary and material evidence surrounding Alexander's attempts to appeal to the Greeks while surviving the Persians, see Johannes Heinrichs and Sabine Müller, "Ein persisches Statussymbol auf Münzen Alexanders I. von Makedonien" in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (ZPE), Bd 167 (2008), 283-309.

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander* 3.5.

<sup>8</sup> For Cylon, see Thucydides 1.126. Hdt. 5.71. Mark Munn, *The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 21-22, 27. Cf. Plut., *Solon* 12. Mann, 64-67. For Cimon, see Hdt. 6.103. See Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 179-180 for analysis.

<sup>9</sup> Paus. 6.5.6.

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more than any other to lead the Athenian forces.<sup>10</sup> Thucydides related that some Athenians, understandably in this context, viewed Alcibiades' actions as an aim to seize power as a tyrant.<sup>11</sup>

Such were the aims of tyrants, kings, and leaders to participate in and associate themselves with the *arete* that came from prominent athletic victories. Although victory in athletic contests could bring great glory, honor, and *arete* to an individual, there was an inherent risk of defeat whenever a leader, a king, or a tyrant competed personally against other athletes. Equestrian events necessarily involved the use of proxy drivers & horses, and thereby reduced the potential loss of *kleos* for a team's owner, but the risks associated with stepping onto a literally level playing field jeopardized a ruler's reputation. This aversion to risking status perhaps accounts for Herodotus's cryptically worded account of the outcome of Alexander I's race at Olympia, explaining only that Alexander "ran together with the first."<sup>12</sup> Modern scholarship has both supported and challenged the reliability of this story. Eugene Borza rejected it because he could find no Olympiad in which Alexander I would have been of an appropriate age to compete, and cannot reconcile the strange language of Alexander's finish in a dead heat with his omission from Eusebius' victor list. W. Lindsay Adams leaned towards accepting it, since the Greeks seemed to. Neither gave much credence to Justin's report (based on Pompeius Trogus) that Alexander I was a talented man who competed at Olympia in a variety of events.<sup>13</sup>

If a ruler competed against ordinary citizens, the risk of defeat posed a threat to his position and authority. Xenophon recognized this when he urged the tyrant Hieron to eschew competing against common citizens, even in the aristocratic venue of equestrian events. He remarked that victory for the tyrant would excite envy rather than admiration from the populace, and defeat would bring ridicule. Indeed, Xenophon went on, it would be more fitting for Hieron to compete against other political leaders in pursuing prosperity for his city.<sup>14</sup> Plutarch described Alexander's aversion to competing against inferiors in his *Life of Alexander*, writing that Alexander, although he was a fast runner, nevertheless distanced himself from the "race of athletes."<sup>15</sup> In his telling of Alexander's reaction when asked if he would compete in the Olympic Games, Alexander reportedly replied, "Yes, if I have kings to run against me."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thuc. 6.16.1: Καὶ προσήκει μοι μᾶλλον ἐτέρων, ὢ Ἀθηναῖοι, ἄρχειν . . . καὶ ἄξιος ἅμα νομίζω εἶναι.

<sup>11</sup> Thuc. 6.15.4.

<sup>12</sup> Hdt. 5.22: συνεξέπιπτε τῷ πρώτῳ.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus: The Emergence of Macedon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 110-112. Winthrop Lindsay Adams, "Other Peoples Games: The Olympics, Macedonia and Greek Athletics" *Journal of Sport History* 30, no. 2 (2003): 206. Justin, *Epitome* 7.2.14.

<sup>14</sup> Xenophon, *Hieron* 11.6-9. The author is grateful to Christopher Kegerreis for pointing out this passage.

<sup>15</sup> Plut., *Alex.* 4.6: καθόλου πρὸς τὸ τῶν ἀθλητῶν γένος ἀλλοτρίως ἔχων πλείστους. For Alexander's fondness for exercise in Plutarch, see, for instance, Plutarch, *Alex.* 15.4, 39.3, 73.3. The anecdote where Alexander

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As W. Lindsay Adams pointed out, this story is probably apocryphal, if only because it is difficult to find an appropriate Olympic festival that fits into the years of Alexander's youthful endeavors.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Plutarch's story reveals Alexander's attitude towards athletes and athletics. Rather than interpret this event as a disdain for athletic competition, Alexander preferred to act as a sponsor or patron of athletic contests instead of competing himself. Consistent with Xenophon's advice to Hieron, Alexander preferred to associate himself with overseeing and sponsoring victories rather than risk defeat.

The appropriate model for overseeing, administering, and sponsoring athletic contests was first set out in the *Iliad*, as Achilles administered the funeral games for Patroclus. Alexander's desire to imitate and associate himself with the mythic Achilles, otherwise well discussed, can also be connected to his sponsorship of athletic contests.<sup>18</sup>

When Achilles announced the funeral games for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23 and laid out the prizes, he explained that he will not take part. While it makes sense that Achilles would not compete for the prizes that he was providing, there were more compelling reasons for Achilles to act as the overseer of the competitions. As the patron of the games, he determined the competitive program, fixed the boundaries of the racecourse, supplied the prizes, and offered arbitration. As victory in athletic contests provided a means for acquiring and displaying *kleos* and outstripping one's competitors, Achilles' role in presiding over the funeral games also distinguished him from the competitors. Indeed, he informed his comrades before the chariot race that, were he to compete, he would surely win the prizes for the top finisher.<sup>19</sup> Although he declined to compete, Achilles' role as the organizer and patron of the games still afforded him ample prestige, and it precluded any risk that Achilles would be unable to make good on his boast.

As Homer told the story, Achilles' actions as the sponsor and administrator of the games were comparable to the actions of the Olympian gods. Throughout Homer's account of the contests, the gods were involved in helping or hindering the heroic competitors, and Achilles likewise played a role in assigning victory and defeat. As Aias and Odysseus prepared for their wrestling match, the son of Telamon expressed to Odysseus the role of the gods in determining victory, stating that "either you will lift me, or I you, but Zeus will attend to everything in

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declines to participate in the Olympic Games is also found in Plut. *Moralia*, at 179D (*Sayings of Kings and Commanders*), and 331B (*On the Fortune of Alexander*).

<sup>16</sup> Plut., *Alex.* 4.5: 'εἴ γε,' ἔφη, 'βασιλεῖς ἔμελλον ἔξειν ἀνταγωνιστάς.'

<sup>17</sup> Lindsay Adams, "The Games of Alexander" in *Alexander's Empire: Formulation to Decay*, ed. Waldemar Heckel, Lawrence Tritle, and Pat Wheatley (Claremont, California: Regina Books, 2007), 125-127.

<sup>18</sup> For Alexander and Achilles, see Michael Flower, "Alexander and Panhellenism," in *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, ed. A.B. Bosworth and E.J. Baynham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108-109. David Lunt, "Chasing the Fleet-footed Hero: Alexander at the Tomb of Achilles" in *Ancient World* 42, no. 2 (2011), 157-165.

<sup>19</sup> Homer, *Iliad* 23.274.



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turn.”<sup>20</sup> Despite Aias’ words, it was actually Achilles who intervened in the match, calling it off before either competitor achieved a third and decisive throw. By awarding victory to both wrestlers, Achilles interjected himself into the role of the divine Zeus, and his generosity augmented his status as the patron and leader of the competitions. In a similar juxtaposition, Odysseus won the footrace after Athena intervened on his behalf, and Antilochus, the race’s last-place finisher, praised the role of the immortals in helping the older (and therefore presumably slower) Odysseus to win. Achilles, pleased with Antilochus’ praise of the older generations, awarded him an extra half-talent of gold. Achilles, then, as an arbiter and benefactor, saw fit to modify and augment the original prize, an act that emphasized Achilles’ generosity and his involvement in the competitions.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these episodes, Achilles awarded unwon prizes to Nestor and Agamemnon in deference to their past accomplishments.<sup>22</sup>

Based on this model set out in the *Iliad*, the ability to sponsor athletic festivals allowed historical tyrants and kings to justify and augment their authority, as well as to take upon themselves certain characteristics reserved for the gods, namely the ability to acknowledge and confer victory on successful athletes. Although the sources are limited, modern scholars (beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) connected the augmentation of the great panhellenic festivals to specific Archaic-period tyrants: the Olympian to Pheidon of Argos, the Pythian to Cleisthenes of Sicyon, the Isthmian to Periander of Corinth, and the Nemean to the fall of the Orthagorid tyranny.<sup>23</sup> Despite the difficulties of dating these tyrants and the shortcomings of this simplification, there do exist important connections between tyrants and the panhellenic games during the Archaic period. Pheidon, according to Herodotus and Pausanias, meddled in the Olympian Games, probably during the mid-seventh century BCE, and was perhaps responsible for augmenting the festival program.<sup>24</sup> Peisistratos of Athens, as well, is sometimes

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<sup>20</sup> Hom, *Il.* 23.724: ἢ μ’ ἀνάειρ’, ἢ ἐγὼ σέ· τὰ δ’ αὖ Διὶ πάντα μελήσει.

<sup>21</sup> Hom., *Il.* 23.768-796.

<sup>22</sup> Nestor: *Il.* 616-625. Agamemnon: 23.884-897. The giving and receiving, or taking of prizes in athletic competition has been investigated by both Ben Brown & Donald Kyle. Brown viewed the prizes essentially as wages for work performed, while Kyle argued that “prize-giving” was really more like “gift-giving.” Both positions have merit, since there is some ambiguity in the nature of victory as it relates to mortals and the gods: the gods can grant victory while mortals simultaneously earn it. Victory is both a gift and a reward. Ben Brown, “Homer, Funeral Contests and the Origin of the Greek City,” in *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David J. Phillips and David Pritchard (Swansea, Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003), 123-62. Donald G. Kyle, “Gifts and Glory: Panathenaic and Other Greek Athletic Prizes,” in *Worshipping Athena: Panathenaia and Parthenon*, ed. Jenifer Neils (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 107.

<sup>23</sup> A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 60, 62-63; 113-114. Oswyn Murray, *Early Greece*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 143. J.B. Bury, *The Nemean Odes of Pindar* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1890), 252-255.

<sup>24</sup> Hdt. 6.127. Aristotle, *Politics* 1310b. Strabo 8.358, 376. Paus. 6.22.2 dated Pheidon to the eighth Olympiad (i.e. 748) but this seems much too early. See Alfred Mallwitz, “Cult and Competition Locations at Olympia” in Wendy Raschke, ed. *The Archaeology of the Olympics: The Olympics and Other Festivals in Antiquity*



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connected to the augmentation of the Panathenaea in the mid-sixth century, but the extent of his personal influence is unclear.<sup>25</sup>

After the Peloponnesian War ended in 404 BCE, the founding and sponsoring of athletic competitions exalted the individual patron to an even greater extent. Plutarch's *Life of Lysander* relates that, after Sparta's victory in the Peloponnesian War, Lysander was more powerful than any Greek had ever been, and that his pride outstripped his power.<sup>26</sup> To commemorate Sparta's victory at Aegospotami, Lysander set up bronze statues of himself and his two admirals at Delphi, a group which featured Poseidon himself crowning the statue of Lysander.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the people of Samos dedicated a statue to him at Olympia, with the inscription praising his "undying *kleos*" and "*arete*".<sup>28</sup>

Plutarch goes on to quote Duris of Samos, claiming that Lysander "was the first of the Greeks to whom cities erected altars and performed sacrifices as if he were a god."<sup>29</sup> In addition, Lysander was the first to have a paean sung for him, an honor normally reserved for gods such as Apollo. Finally, the people of Samos changed their festival to Hera to a festival to Lysander, the *Lysandreia*. Lysander evidently presided or judged at the games as well, since Plutarch related that the Spartan awarded a victory in one of the festival's poetry contests.<sup>30</sup>

As a negative example, it is notable that the Spartan king Agesilaus, who regularly trained his men with athletic exercises and contests while campaigning in Asia Minor, declined to preside over the Isthmian Games in 390.<sup>31</sup> While he apparently had no qualms about offering prizes to the best athletes in various categories during his military campaigns, and he was enthusiastic in promoting the choral and athletic festivals in Sparta, Agesilaus's decision to

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(Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 102-103 for Pheidon's possible role in expanding the Olympic program. See also Malcolm F. McGregor "Cleisthenes of Sicyon and the Panhellenic Festivals," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association (TAPA)* 72 (1941): 276.

<sup>25</sup> Henry J. Walker, *Theseus and Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42-44.

<sup>26</sup> Plut., *Lysander* 18.2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Plut., *Lys.* 18.1. Paus. 10.9.3. An epigram composed by Ion of Samos from this dedication has been recovered at Delphi (*Carmina Epigraphica Graeca* 819). See *Fouilles de Delphes*, vol. 3, fasc. 1, 27. This epigram commends both the individual glory of Lysander and the victory of Sparta, calling the city the "acropolis of Greece." See Marco Fantuzzi and Richard Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 289-291.

<sup>28</sup> Paus. 6.3.14: ἀθάνατον πάτρα καὶ Ἀριστοκρίτῳ κλέος ἔργων, Λύσανδρ', ἐκτελέσας δόξαν ἔχεις ἀρετᾶς.

<sup>29</sup> Plut., *Lys* 18.3: πρῶτῳ μὲν γάρ, ὥς ἱστορεῖ Δοῦρις, Ἑλλήνων ἐκείνῳ βωμοὺς αἱ πόλεις ἀνέστησαν ὡς θεῷ καὶ θυσίας ἔθυσαν.

<sup>30</sup> Plut. *Lys.* 18.4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 3.4.16-18. Xenophon related that Agesilaus trained his men in Asia Minor with athletic exercise and contests, offering prizes to the best in various categories. See Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.17, Plut. *Agesilaus* 21.1-2 for Agesilaus declining to preside at Isthmia. In addition, Plut. *Ages.* 21.3 for Agesilaus's promotion of athletic contests at Sparta.

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refuse this position at Isthmia was consistent with his general opposition to status, autocracy, luxury, and wealth (perhaps especially in comparison with the recent extravagances of Lysander).<sup>32</sup> Agesilaus recognized the significance attached to presiding over one of the Crown Games. As Plutarch wrote, Agesilaus called the Argives cowards for not fighting to retain their privilege of presiding over the games, since they regarded this as a great honor.<sup>33</sup>

In his description of Lysander's and Agesilaus' opportunities to preside over panhellenic contests, Plutarch emphasized the power and prestige both men possessed at the time. Lysander was the most powerful man in Greece when he presided at the Lysandreia; Agesilaus was the most powerful man of hegemonic Sparta when he was offered the chance to oversee the Isthmian Games.<sup>34</sup> This association was not lost on later rulers: the connection between authority, power, and presiding at the Games lent great prestige to the kings and leaders of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Archelaus, who was king of Macedon from 413 to 399, founded games to Zeus and the Muses at Dion, modeled after the games at Olympia.<sup>35</sup> After the conclusion of the Third Sacred War in 346/5, Philip II was given the right to administer the Pythian Games, along with the Boeotians and Thessalians.<sup>36</sup> In this regard, Philip seems to have been imitating the practice of Jason of Pherae, Tagos of Thessaly who had briefly united much of Thessaly in the late 370s. Jason had made preparations for and planned to supervise the Pythian Games of 370 before he was assassinated earlier in the year.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Philip possessed the right to administer the Pythian Games, thereby exercising his political influence at the Delphic Amphictyony in conjunction with his sponsorship of the Pythian Games.

Although the administration of the Pythian Games at Delphi was an important political venture for Philip of Macedon, his endeavors at Olympia were more extravagant and lavish, allowing him to advertise his family's achievements. Sometime after the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, Philip commissioned the Philippeion at Olympia. Pausanias described the

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<sup>32</sup> See Plutarch's comparison of Agesilaus with Lysander at Plut., *Ages.* 7. Agesilaus, was offered "temples" and "deifications" (ναοῖς . . . καὶ ἀποθεώσεσι) by the people of Thasos but he demurred. Plut., *Sayings of the Spartans* 25 210d. Bruno Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 159-160 for additional commentary.

<sup>33</sup> Plut., *Ages.* 21.3.

<sup>34</sup> Plut., *Lys.* 18.2: τότε δ' οὖν ὁ Λύσανδρος ὅσον οὐδεὶς τῶν πρόσθεν Ἑλλήνων δυνηθεὶς ἐδόκει φρονήματι καὶ ὄγκῳ μείζονι κεχρησθαι τῆς δυνάμεως. Plut., *Ages.* 21.1: μέγιστον οὖν δυνάμενος ἐν τῇ πόλει.

<sup>35</sup> Diodorus Siculus 17.16.3-4. Arrian 1.11.1 (erroneously) situated the Games at Aegae. A late source (Solinus 9.16) stated that Archelaus competed in the four-horse chariot race at Olympia and Delphi. Ernst Badian doubted the source's credibility, as did Eugene Borza, who cited this as proof of Macedonian exclusion at Pan-Hellenic festivals. See Borza, 174-176 for discussion of his and Badian's position. For an alternate view, see Adams, "Other People's Games," 206-207.

<sup>36</sup> Diod. Sic. 16.60.2.

<sup>37</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.4.29-30.

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Philippeion as a round building made of brick, surrounded by columns. Within this structure, situated in the Altis, were placed statues that appeared to be made of gold and ivory, sculpted by Leochares, depicting Philip and his family: his father Amyntas, his mother Eurydice, his wife Olympias, and his son Alexander.<sup>38</sup> Although the statues inside the Philippeion are better described as “dynastic portraits” rather than “cult statues,” the monument’s placement inside the Altis staked out important ground within the sanctuary, terrain usually reserved for the commemoration of gods, heroes, and athletic victors.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Peter Schultz noted that the chryselephantine appearance of the statues located in “arguably the most revered *temenos* of the Greek mainland” made an “extraordinary – even revolutionary – for their time” statement about Philip and his family.<sup>40</sup>

Situating this monument within the Altis clearly stood as a statement to connect Philip and his family to the prestige of the gods and athletic victors at Olympia. As Elizabeth Carney pointed out, the chryselephantine images “hinted at the divinity of Philip’s family, but did not proclaim it.”<sup>41</sup> The association of the building’s construction with Philip’s great triumph at the battle of Chaeronea is rightly interpreted as a victory monument, consistent with the other offerings in the Altis but brazen in its message. As Carney wrote, the message of the Philippeion was “Macedonian *dunasteia*, past, present, and future.”<sup>42</sup> As leader of the Greeks, Philip had the building constructed to associate himself with divinity, kingship, and victory at Olympia. Besides the magnificence of the Philippeion, the Eleans saw fit to honor Philip and Alexander, as well as the later Macedonian generals Seleucus and Antigonus, with statues at Olympia.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Paus. 5.17.4; 5.20.9-10. Although Pausanias claimed that the sculptures were chryselephantine, archaeology has revealed that plinth cuttings used to mount the statues were prepared for stone sculptures. Peter Schultz suggested that the sculptures were gilded or painted to look like gold and ivory in “Leochares’ Argead Portraits in the Philippeion,” in *Early Hellenistic Portraiture: Image, Style, Context*, ed. Peter Schultz and Ralf Von Den Hoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 220-221. Olga Palagia offered the possibility that a sculpture of Philip’s seventh wife, Cleopatra, was featured in this building instead of Philip’s mother. See “Philip’s Eurydice in the Philippeum at Olympia,” in *Philip II and Alexander the Great: Father and Son, Lives and Afterlives*, ed. Elizabeth Carney and Daniel Ogden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33-41.

<sup>39</sup> Palagia, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Schultz, 205.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Carney, “The Philippeum, Women, and the Formation of Dynastic Image,” in *Alexander’s Empire: Formulation to Decay*, ed. Waldemar Heckel, Lawrence Tritle, and Pat Wheatley (Claremont, California: Regina Books, 2007), 36.

<sup>42</sup> Carney, 52.

<sup>43</sup> Paus. 6.11.1.

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Timothy Howe and Sabine Müller have shown how Alexander himself, as well as the historians who chronicled his campaigns, was strongly aware of precedent and models.<sup>44</sup> Alexander's relationship with athletic contests, including his desire to foster victory and to avoid defeat, drew heavily from earlier episodes from history and myth.

It was upon the models laid out by Homer's Achilles, the tyrants of Sicily, the kings and leaders of Sparta, and the rulers of Thessaly and Macedonia that Alexander relied when sponsoring athletic contests during his campaigns. Alexander celebrated athletic contests to produce victories in order to encourage his soldiers and to solidify his own position as the greatest of leaders and kings.

According to Arrian, Alexander sponsored fifteen athletic contests during his nearly thirteen year reign.<sup>45</sup> In these contests, it was Alexander who bestowed gifts, rewards, and honors on the victors. Following the Homeric model of Achilles, and the practice of tyrants and kings before him, Alexander institutionalized the sponsorship of games and festivals to an unprecedented degree. Besides the military recreational benefits that staging games provided for his campaigning soldiers, Alexander's actions institutionalized victory, associating himself with the *arete* and *kleos* of athletic success.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Alexander's games were carefully orchestrated to manufacture victory while avoiding defeat.

While athletic contests naturally produce winners and also-loses, Plutarch wrote that Alexander, like Lycurgus at Sparta, discouraged athletes from competing in sports which required one of the two parties to surrender (these sports are pankration and boxing).<sup>47</sup> While it is obvious that pankration and boxing were popular among Greek athletes, it is interesting that Alexander and Sparta were especially fixated on military victory. It is possible that this preoccupation with victory brought a corresponding avoidance of admitting defeat. Other competitions did not require the losers to admit defeat. A race ended when the first runner crossed the line; a wrestling bout concluded with the third throw. Furthermore, a losing athlete in these other events could always attribute the winner's victory to the favor of the gods rather than his own submission. Although there were clearly winners and losers in all

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<sup>44</sup> Timothy Howe and Sabine Müller, "Mission Accomplished: Alexander at the Hyphasis" in *Ancient History Bulletin* 26 (2012), 28-31 examined Alexander's choice to associate his conquests with Cyrus, rather than the less popular (in Greek eyes) Darius I.

<sup>45</sup> They are: the "Olympian" Games in Macedonia (Arr. 1.11.1; Diod Sic. 17.16.3-4); Victory Games at Soli (Arr. 2.5.8); Victory Games at Tyre (Arr. 2.24.6); Games to Apis at Memphis (Arr. 3.3.4); Games at Memphis, again (Arr. 3.5.2); Games at Tyre, again (Arr. 3.6.1; Plut. *Alex.* 29.1-3); Victory Games at Susa (Arr. 3.16.9); Games at Hyrcania (Arr. 3.25.1); Games at the foundation of Alexandria *Eschate* (Arr. 4.4.1); Games upon reaching the Indus River (Arr. 5.3.6); Games after the "peaceful victory" at Taxila (Arr. 5.8); Victory and Funeral Games at Hydaspes after the victory over Porus (Arr. 5.20.1); Thanksgiving competitions at Carmania (Arr. 6.28.6); Games at Ecbatana (Arr. 7.14.1; Plut. *Alex.* 72.1); Funeral Games for Hephaestion (Arr. 7.14.10).

<sup>46</sup> For the motivations and benefits of staging games during Alexander's campaigns, see Adams, "Other People's Games," 210-212.

<sup>47</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 4.6. See Plut, *Lyc.* 19.4 for Lycurgus' similar prohibition at Sparta.

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contests, Alexander neatly circumvented any obligation for competitors to recognize defeat by his refusal to participate in or sponsor boxing and pankration. This avoidance of the admission of defeat is a clever means of respecting the conceptual ideal of victory without acknowledging its practical realities. Spartan and Macedonian athletes were not always victorious. They just refused to acknowledge defeat. Thus, they were able to satisfy the ideological constraints of victory, even when these ideals conflicted with reality.<sup>48</sup>

Alexander's desire to associate himself with victory while avoiding defeat is evident in his relationship with prominent athletes of his time. After the victory at the Granicus River, Alexander sent offerings to the city of Croton to honor their city's prestigious athlete Phayllus and his valor at the battle of Salamis, nearly 150 years earlier in 480 BCE. Although he won no victory at Olympia, Phayllus won the pentathlon twice and the *stade* race once at Delphi, where he dedicated a statue. At Athens, he was represented as an accomplished and archetypal athlete since his foot speed is mentioned in two of Aristophanes' comedies.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Phayllus participated in the highest levels of military and athletic victory to which a Greek could aspire: Salamis was surely among Greece's most glorious military victories, and three championships in the Crown Games were prestigious indeed. Although Alexander was honoring the Crotonian Greek for his *military* service against the Persians (at Phayllus' own expense, no less), the contexts of athletic and military competition are not so easily separated. Phayllus was renowned for his associations with *both* military and athletic victories, as the historical records indicate: all three ancient sources (Herodotus, Plutarch, and Pausanias) list his accomplishments in both realms. This association was clearly not lost on Alexander, who actively fostered a culture of competition and victory among his troops in both the athletic and military realms.<sup>50</sup>

Dionysidorus of Thebes represents another athlete whom Alexander honored because of his status as a victor. Arrian recorded that after Alexander's victory at Issus, he released some envoys from Greece whom Parmenion had captured in Darius' camp, among them the Theban athlete Dionysidorus. Although Alexander may have been moved to release the captured envoy by the memory of his destruction of Thebes, he privately admitted that he had acted leniently with Dionysidorus "because of his success at the Olympic Games."<sup>51</sup> Another renowned athlete, Philonides, was one of Alexander's dispatch-runners. Philonides was from Crete and had a statue at Olympia.<sup>52</sup> Athenaeus wrote that Aristonicus of Carystus was

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<sup>48</sup> It is also noteworthy that these two states enjoyed strong traditions of kingship. This fixation on victory might have stemmed from notions of divine kingship. See Munn, 13-55 for treatment of kingship and divinity.

<sup>49</sup> Paus. 10.9.2. Plut. *Alex.* 34.2. Also Hdt. 8.47. Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 215 and *Wasps* 1206.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Flower suggested that Alexander might have honored Phayllus of Croton with an eye towards a future panhellenist campaign into Sicily and Syracuse. Flower, 132.

<sup>51</sup> Arr. 2.16.

<sup>52</sup> Paus. 6.16.5.

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“Alexander’s ballplayer” and was eventually honored at Athens with citizenship and a statue because of his skill.<sup>53</sup> Although it is unclear if Aristonikos held any other position in Alexander’s court, at some point he was evidently prestigious enough to merit a 1,000 drachma crown, Athenian citizenship, and *sitesis* in the Prytaneion.<sup>54</sup>

Linda-Marie Günther’s examination of Alexander’s observance of “spontaneous” and more ritualized contests lent great weight to the importance of observing cultic and funerary practices while far from Greece and Macedon. In addition, Alexander’s “spontaneous” Games played an important role in connecting Greek and Macedonian troops into a “zusammengehörige Gemeinschaft” or “associated community.”<sup>55</sup> Alexander’s desire to foster solidarity among his troops is consistent with his overall panhellenist ideology. Contests and competitions provided a useful tool in constructing this solidarity through associations with victory.<sup>56</sup> However, in fostering this sense of comradeship among his troops through competitions, the Macedonian commander took pains to emphasize victory while avoiding associations with defeat.

Alexander’s attitudes towards victory, defeat, and surrender surfaced in the duel between the Athenian Dioxippos and a Macedonian soldier named Koragos in 325 BCE.<sup>57</sup> Dioxippos was an Olympic champion in pankration during the 330s and was well-known to, and well-liked by Alexander because of his great strength. A fragment from Aristobulus characterized Dioxippos as one of Alexander’s flatterers, but this only suggests that Dioxippos enjoyed a preferential status in Alexander’s company.<sup>58</sup>

At a banquet, Dioxippos, who had regularly endured taunts from the Macedonians about his belly,<sup>59</sup> agreed to fight the antagonistic Koragos in a duel, and they prevailed upon Alexander to sanction the event. In Curtius’s account, Koragos declared that this duel would

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<sup>53</sup> Athenaeus 1.19A: τὸν Ἀλεξάνδρου σφαιριστήν.

<sup>54</sup> Note the highly restored IG II<sup>2</sup> 385 and Sterling Dow’s commentary in “The Athenian Honors for Aristonikos of Karystos, ‘Alexander’s sfairisths,’” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 67 (1963), 77-92.

<sup>55</sup> Lisa-Marie Günther, “Alexanders III. Agone in Asia. Quellen- und interpretationskritische Überlegungen” in *Kultur(en). Formen des Alltäglichen in der Antike*, ed. Peter Mauritsch and Christoph Ulf (Graz: Grazer Universitätsverlag, 2013) 298.

<sup>56</sup> Flower, pg. 112.

<sup>57</sup> The episode is recorded in both Curtius 9.7.16-26 and Diod. Sic. 17.100-101, although Curtius calls the Macedonian “Corratas.” See E.J. Baynham, “Quintus Curtius Rufus on the ‘Good King’: The Dioxippos Episode in Book 9.7.16-26,” in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, Vol II, ed. John Marincola (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2007), 427-433 for a detailed examination of the incident.

<sup>58</sup> Fr.Gr.Hist 139 F47 = Athenaeus 6.215A. See also Plut., *Moralia* 341B.

<sup>59</sup> It was practically a cliché for the Greeks to remark upon the size and appetites of the heavy-event athletes. A fragment from a play by Euripides criticized an immoderate athlete as “a slave to his jaw and overcome by his belly.”<sup>59</sup> Euripides, fragment §282 in Augustus Nauck’s *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889), 441.



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allow Alexander to judge between the men. After Dioxippos, having presented himself as an athlete, nude and oiled, rather easily disarmed and defeated his militarily equipped Macedonian opponent, both sources agree that Alexander ended the duel before Koragos could be killed or – perhaps worse – could surrender. Dioxippos's actions, however, brought him scant acclaim. The defeat of Koragos, a soldier who represented the Macedonian way of war, dismayed Alexander and his army since, according to Curtius, "barbarian" ambassadors from the Mallians and the Sudracae had been present at the duel. Rather than view this as a rivalry between Greeks and Macedonians, Curtius's explanation that the outcome of the duel had tarnished the "famous Macedonian courage" in front of foreign ambassadors suggests the root of Alexander's discomfort.<sup>60</sup>

Soon afterwards, Dioxippos was framed for theft, and the disgraced athlete committed suicide. E.J. Baynham suggested that Alexander was aware of the conspiracy to discredit the athlete, noting that "the embarrassing outcome" of the duel had placed Alexander "in an awkward position." Needing to help the Macedonians save face before their barbarian subject-guests, Alexander willingly sacrificed Dioxippos.<sup>61</sup> However cynical this suggestion may be, it nevertheless reinforces Alexander's commitment to fostering victory and avoiding any associations with defeat. Furthermore, this episode demonstrates the real risks that defeat could bring to a contestant, and bolsters the importance of Alexander's role as presider and judge in this impromptu competition.

Plutarch recorded a similar episode in the lead-up to the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE, in which the army's camp followers had divided themselves informally into two factions, one claiming to be the army of Alexander and the other portion calling itself the army of Darius. Alexander ordered the leaders of the two factions to fight in single-combat, and the army watched attentively for an omen of the impending battle with Persia. Fortunately for Alexander's designs, the leader of "Alexander's" army proved victorious after a "strenuous fight."<sup>62</sup> Although the rivalry between the camp followers started out as a topic of amusement, Plutarch's description of the fight as "strenuous" (ἰσχυρά) suggests that it was a real contest, although we might suspect that there was pressure for the representative of the Macedonian king to win. Nevertheless, the possibility of defeat in these types of duels – and the potential attendant negative associations – posed a risk to Alexander's prestige, status, and image. Sponsoring and presiding over athletic contests offered a much safer way to associate himself

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<sup>60</sup> Curtius 9.7.23: celebratam Macedonum fortitudinem.

<sup>61</sup> Baynham, 432-433.

<sup>62</sup> Plut., *Alex.* 31.1-2: ἰσχυρᾶς δὲ τῆς μάχης γενομένης ἐνίκησεν ὁ καλούμενος Ἀλέξανδρος. Plutarch claimed that this story came from Eratosthenes. Elizabeth Carney, "Macedonians and Mutiny: Discipline and Indiscipline in the Army of Philip and Alexander," *Classical Philology* 91, no. 1 (1996): 26 called this duel "a rougher form of relaxation." However, the substantial prizes awarded to the victorious "Alexander", (twelve villages and the right to wear Persian dress) suggest that Alexander recognized in the contest an occasion for more than idle amusement.



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with the power of victory with no risk of personal defeat and no risk of forcing his soldiers to surrender.

In conclusion, powerful leaders, like Alexander, who sought to compete in athletic events were faced with the possibility of defeat, and subsequent loss of legitimacy as the man most fit to rule. Besides the benefits to his army, Alexander sponsored athletics for the status that accompanied this position. In presiding over and fostering so many competitions, games, and festivals, Alexander was consciously perpetuating a tradition of heroes and kings. As the leading patron and presider, Alexander chose kings of Cyprus to sponsor the competing dramatic troupes at Tyre.<sup>63</sup> By presiding over these the sponsors and overseeing the competitions, Alexander exhibited himself as a leader of kings. By fostering competition among his troops, he both augmented his own position and formed them into more efficient soldiers. In both formalized Games and impromptu contests such as rowing competitions for his navy, a drinking contest in Persepolis, or his generals' enthusiasm for *palaestra* exercise, Alexander's emphasis on competition fostered solidarity and identity among his troops.<sup>64</sup> His games and contests created contrived competitive environments where troops could continue to claim victories, hopefully without having to admit defeat. Plutarch indicated that Alexander was fond of exercise, yet Alexander himself did not compete in formal games, preferring instead to claim the heroic and kingly right to sponsor games, and associate himself with victory.

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<sup>63</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 29.1.

<sup>64</sup> Rowing competitions: Arrian 7.23.5. Drinking contest: Plut., *Alex.* 70.1. Palaestra exercise: Athenaeus 12.539C and Plut., *Alex.* 40.1.

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