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Why No Swimming in the Ancient Olympics?

By Edward Clayton[*]

Numerous authors have raised, but not answered, the question of why there were no swimming events in ancient Greek athletic competitions. There are many reasons why it seems inevitable that such competitions would have taken place: the Greeks were intensely competitive, the knowledge of how to swim was seen as distinguishing the Greeks from the barbarians, and the proximity of the ocean. This paper argues that swimming events did not take place because of the danger that such events could have been won by fisherman, oyster divers, or other men who earned their livelihood from swimming. Such men, despite their physical abilities, could not have displayed the arete that was the true focus of Greek athletic competition.

Keywords: *Ancient Greece, Olympics, swimming*

Introduction

Why weren't there any swimming events in ancient Greek athletic competitions? More than one author has found their absence surprising. Tony Perrottet says "It is strange that, among a people who even held eating races at dinner, swimming was one of the only pursuits that was *not* elevated to a competition, except in one small, provincial city of Hermione." (Perrottet 2012, p. 137)[1]. Stephen Miller writes "We might assume that aquatic sports would have played a prominent role in a country tied so closely to the sea, but there are only passing references to swimming, always as a way of training for other sports, and depictions of swimming are rare and clearly show it as a recreation, not a competition." (Miller 2004, pp. 166–167)[2]. And in The Encyclopedia of Ancient History's entry on Swimming, Michael B. Poliakoff tells us that "Swimming was technically advanced in Antiquity….Remarkably, there is only minimal evidence of competition."[3] All of these authors are implicitly raising the question that inspired this paper, but none of them tries to answer it. This paper will do so, and in doing so I intend to show that their absence is quite consistent with ancient Greek attitudes about athletic competition and indeed it would have been surprising if swimming contests had taken place[4]. Their exclusion was intentional, and not the result of

[*]Professor, Central Michigan University, USA.

[1]The reference to Hermione is from Pausanias 2.35.1 and is therefore late; this contest may not have taken place during classical times. Larmour (1990) suggests that the contest at Hermione may have been a diving contest rather than a swimming contest.

[2]See also Golden (1998, p. 8), which will be discussed later in this paper.

[3]Poliakoff (n.d.) also cites the reference in Pausanias noted above.

[4]Because the amount of information available about the Olympics is much greater than that for other competitions, and the amount of information about Athens is much greater than that for other cities, my focus will be on the Olympics and on Athens. However, I believe my conclusions will hold true for other competitions and other cities.

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being overlooked. I will argue that swimming competitions were excluded from athletic competition because if they had taken place the successful competitors would likely have come from a class that could not be allowed to compete: the *banausoi*, or laboring class. Men from this class were held to be inherently unable to achieve the excellence of body and soul that athletic competitors strove for, could not participate in the city's athletic culture, and would not have been able to properly represent their city in panhellenic competition. Therefore, any competition which such a man might win was by definition not an *athletic* competition and could not be treated as such.

Methodology

The genesis of this paper was a study abroad trip led by the author several years ago. My students and I were returning to Athens with several employees of the Athens Centre from a field trip to Olympia, where archaeologist Michael Wedde and I had talked with the students about the role of the Olympics in particular and athletics in general in the ancient Greek world as we toured the site. We stopped at a café on the shore on the way back to take a break, and the students went off for a swim. As they swam, I asked Michael whether there were ever swimming events in the ancient Greek athletic competitions. I had developed a broad, but not exceptionally deep, understanding of ancient Greek culture and I thought that there must have been swimming competitions at some athletic competitions, even if there hadn't been in the Olympics. After all, how could there not have been? But Michael thought that there were not, a belief that I was able to confirm fairly quickly. As it had for the authors cited above, and doubtless others, this raised the question "Why not?" It seemed impossible to me that the Greeks, whose lives were tied so intimately to the sea and who were so invested in competition, had simply overlooked the possibility of competitive swimming, and so I set out to answer this question.

My approach was to focus on two questions which, when answered, would shed light on my main question. First, how did the ancient Greeks understand athletes, athletics, and athletic competition? Second, how did the ancient Greeks think about swimming? I thought that, after answering these questions, I could figure out why swimming did not fit into the understanding of athletics and why swimmers were not thought of as athletes.

Discussion

It is certainly always risky to try to explain the reasons why something did not happen. After all, it may simply be that it never occurred to any of the Greeks that swimming contests might be a worthwhile addition to formal athletic competition. But this seems unlikely, given the intensely competitive spirit of the ancient Greeks already noted above. If we consider the Olympics alone, it is hard to imagine that at no point from the beginning of the Olympics in ca. 700 BCE to the

time of their closure by the Roman emperor Theodosius in 393 CE did it cross anyone's mind that swimming competitions might be possible. We know that the schedule of competitions at the Olympic Games changed over time, so innovation was certainly possible. We also know that there were hundreds of athletic festivals throughout Greece, from the smallest towns to the largest cities, yet aside from the ambiguous (and late) reference to competition at Hermione referenced above there is no mention of swimming competitions at any other location. Surely some of these smaller towns would have been able to innovate even if the Olympic organizers had chosen not to – unless, of course, there were very good reasons not to innovate in this way.

The absence of swimming contests also cannot be an issue of practicality. Several of the major Greek athletic festivals were held in close proximity to the ocean, along with many or even most of the minor ones, and even for those Greek cities that did not find the ocean readily accessible, it would not take a lot of imagination to modify the concept of public baths to create swimming pools and the possibility of competitive swimming[5]. It is also not the case that few Greeks swam, or that Greeks did not think swimming was important, or that they did not take pride in the ability to swim. Knowledge of how to swim was widespread among the Greeks[6], and in fact it was a proverbial way of calling someone ignorant to say of them that "they know neither how to read nor how to swim." (Plato, Laws 689d). We also know that the Greeks took pride in their ability to swim; they believed it to be an important distinction between themselves and the barbarians, who could not swim (Herodotus, Histories 8:89). So swimming events must have been imagined, would have been practically possible, could have been introduced, and would have involved a significant and (to the Greeks) uniquely Greek attribute. Nevertheless, there were no such events. Why not?[7]

Much scholarly analysis of Greek athletics argues that the particular athletic contests which took place at the Olympics and elsewhere were included because of their connection to military prowess. If this explanation is correct, swimming competitions would be left out of the Olympics because of their non-military nature. A number of scholars explicitly connect athletic and military competition in ancient Greece. Spivey, for example, says that the Greeks had "…an understanding, essentially, that all games were war games." (Spivey 2012, pp. 3, 18, 20). This also is the argument of Edith Hall, who says that "[Swimming] was

[5]There is some disagreement in the literature about Greek "swimming pools". Swaddling says there was a swimming pool at Olympia, "unique in classical Greece." (Swaddling 1984, p. 30). "Swimming pools were used in antiquity…The most representative example is the swimming pool in the gymnasium at Delphi which was round, with a diameter of 10 m. and a depth of about 1.90 m. It is thought that the Lyceum at Athens had a swimming pool, and other gymnasia will have had them for the athletes." (Tzachou-Alexandri 1989, p. 37). Whatever their uses were, these pools were not suitable for competitive swimming. A modern Olympic swimming pool is 50 meters long and the "short course" pool is 25 meters long, so a round pool with a diameter of 10 meters will be much too small

[6]Harris (1972) 112 ff. He says that despite this "there is hardly anything in Greek literature to suggest that the Greeks looked on swimming as something to be done for pleasure or as a sport." (Harris 1972, p. 115). See also Gardiner (1930, pp. 93, 95) and Plato Republic 453d.

[7]One practical obstacle, which is that the punishment for fouls in athletic contests was flogging, and flogging someone underwater is not likely to be effective, will be set aside.

not treated as a formal competitive sport such as those performed at public games. This may have been because, unlike combat sports, equestrian sports, and running on land, swimming does not seem to have been a standard part of public military training." (Hall 2006, p. 266)[8]. There was also what Pritchard calls a cultural overlap between sport and war: "Classical Athenians described and thought of athletics and war with a common set of words and concepts." (Pritchard 2009, pp. 223–224). For example, both war and competition were *agon* – contests decided by mutually agreed rules (Pritchard 2009, pp. 223–224). This theory has some obvious merit, since as Hall correctly points out many athletic competitions certainly did have connections to military action. Races with shield and armor took place at the Olympics and elsewhere, such as the Panathenaic Games (which had additional events with a clear military component not found at the Olympics). In addition to the improvement in the physique that would come from exercise, the courage to confront and the ability to endure the pain and injury that were almost inevitably part of the so-called "heavy events" – boxing, wrestling, and the pankraton – and continue to fight would have value for athletes who would almost certainly face them again on the battlefield as soldiers.

But there are two significant objections that can be raised to this explanation. First, swimming clearly did have military value, and the Greeks viewed it as an important asset in naval combat, as Herodotus tells us in reporting on a key battle during the Persian Wars: "There fell in this combat Ariabignes, one of the chief commanders of the [Persian] fleet, who was son of Darius and brother of Xerxes; and with him perished a vast number of men of high repute, Persians, Medes, and allies. Of the Greeks there died only a few; for, as they were able to swim, all those that were not slain outright by the enemy escaped from the sinking vessels and swam across to Salamis. But on the side of the barbarians more perished by drowning than in any other way, since they did not know how to swim." (Herodotus Histories 8.89)[9]. In addition to its usefulness during and after naval battles, swimming also had value as part of other kinds of military operations. There are recorded incidents of talented swimmers bringing supplies to the besieged Spartans during the Peloponnesian War, and of talented divers cutting the moorings and anchor-lines of Persian vessels during the Persian Wars, and of Athenians engaging in underwater swimming operations during the battle with Syracuse[10]. Since these incidents illustrate that the Greeks understood swimming to have military value, and historians found them important enough to record,

[8]See also Gardiner (1930, pp. 93, 95) where he suggests that it is because the Greeks would have taught one another informally how to swim and thus this knowledge was ubiquitous across all social classes that there is no known training regimen for swimming and that the fact that everyone learned how to swim informally explains why the only known competition was the one at Hermione. This seems unlikely to me. All Greeks would also have learned informally how to run, yet running was developed into a training regimen and a competitive sport but swimming was not. Why the difference?

[9]See Hall (2006, pp. 269–270 ff.), who lists sources that describe the military value of being able to swim and argue that the inability to swim is one of the defining traits of the barbarians – swimming is therefore an element of Greek identity, as has been said.

[10]A list of swimming achievements noted by ancient authors can be found in Harris (1972), chapter 4.

swimming competitions could certainly have been included as athletic contests if military value was the sole standard that determined which events were allowed.

A second objection is that even if many events did have a clear military element, many others did not. This position was taken even by some of the ancient scholars, who made the argument that training for and competing in athletic competitions was of dubious military value[11]. For example, chariots were not used in Greek warfare, but chariot races were prestigious events in the Olympic games. Indeed, in all of the equestrian events the riders were slaves or hired drivers rather than their owners or trainers, because of the high likelihood of crashes and injury or death, so they would not prepare anyone for any kind of military action[12]. Many of the non-equestrian events are also of uncertain military value: the high jump was part of the pentathlon, but would not have been part of a hoplite's military training; the discus was not used in combat. Even if we were to accept that each of the individual activities might contribute to or demonstrate military ability in some way, it is still the case that all of the events were individual events. Individuals competing in the Olympic Games were not acting with the kind of regimented coordination that was the hallmark of phalanx combat[13]. Phalanx warfare required regimented coordination and when fighting in a phalanx the ability to e.g. run faster than one's companions would have been more of a liability than an asset since it would have broken the ranks. As Golden says, "the usual sports of the gymnasium and the competitive festivals were just not very well designed as preparation for hoplite warfare." (Golden 1998, p. 27)[14]. So even if swimming events were not related to military prowess, this in and of itself cannot be the reason for their exclusion.

But although the explanation for the exclusion of swimming events from athletic competition does not depend directly on their military character or lack thereof, it is nevertheless vitally important to recognize that only those who could be soldiers – in Athens, those who were from the aristocratic or hoplite classes – could engage in athletic competition. This is so because, despite the fact that the Olympics were theoretically open to all Greek men, there was an unwritten, but nevertheless essential, exclusion of men below a certain socioeconomic level from participation in the Games. For something to be an athletic competition, it needed to meet certain requirements. Crucially, the participants in an athletic competition needed to display *arete*, or excellence, not only in their physical performance but also in their physical appearance. Both of these served as proxies for the excellence of the soul, and it was the demonstration of the excellence of one's soul and the desire for the honor that was due as a result that was the basis of the real competition. This meant that they needed to come from families which were

[11]As Christesen notes: "[T]he practical value of athletics as a form of military training was a subject of vigorous debate in ancient Greece." (Christesen 2012, p. 237). See Kyle (1993), chapter 5, and Christesen and Kyle (2014) Chapter 21 for critics and criticisms of athletics. See also Miller (2004, p. 198).

[12]The fact that it is nevertheless the owner of the horses rather than the rider who is declared the winner is very significant, and we will return to this point later.

[13]Though there were some such events in the games at Athens.

[14]He also notes that "If the games ever reflected the military metier of the mass of the citizenry, rowing would presumably be more prominent." (Golden 1998, p. 26).

capable of having such *arete*, and in Athens, this meant the aristocratic (and, later, the hoplite) class. The men in these upper classes were free from having to engage in the banausic labor that (as Aristotle and others argued) damaged both the body and the soul rather than perfecting them. Swimming was not associated with *arete*, and was instead associated with men who did not have any, such as divers for sponges or oysters, fishermen, and so on. It was associated not with the hoplites who bravely faced the spears of the enemy but with the rowers of triremes. Thus swimming is dismissed by Plato: in the Gorgias, Socrates responds to Callicles' assertion that he should cultivate rhetoric by comparing it to swimming. Callicles suggests that learning rhetoric is a good strategy for avoiding death in the law courts. Socrates responds by asking "But now, my excellent friend, do you think there is anything grand in the accomplishment of swimming?" Callicles replies "No, in truth, not I." And Socrates says "Yet, you know, that too saves men from death, when they have got into a plight of the kind in which that accomplishment is needed." (Gorgias 511b). So, however useful swimming might be, in military situations or otherwise, it was not esteemed as an activity connected to excellence. Men who were good swimmers as a result of their employment, like others who had to work for a living, could not achieve athletic excellence in any activity; therefore, anything they could excel in (such as swimming) was, by definition, not an athletic activity.

Let me develop this argument more fully. First, it is well known that the Greeks were very careful to protect the ideal that the athlete was not a professional, by which they meant that the athlete was not competing in order to receive money. In most cases the athlete received money or saleable goods such as the famous Athenian amphorae of olive oil if he was successful, and the amount received could certainly be very substantial, especially for those men who participated in dozens of competitions every year[15]. Most games were so-called "prize games," in which successful competitors received money or other prizes, but the victors in the Olympics and other contests which did not offer such prizes would receive remuneration from their home cities upon their return because of the honor and status they brought to their cities, about which I will say more shortly. But the compensation for athletic successes was always considered a prize or an award, as befits an aristocrat who does not need to earn money to live, and never a form of pay, which would go to someone who did have to work. Certainly the athlete exerted himself and strove, both physically and mentally, and received money as a result, but from the Greek point of view it was important to maintain the belief that they were not engaged in using their bodies to earn a living. This would have been beneath anyone who was truly an athlete (Pleket, in König 2010, pp. 167–168). They were engaged in the pursuit of *arete*, and the recognition of that *arete* in the form of glory, to the point that some competitors chose death rather than defeat. They were also demonstrating a "strong and continuous emphasis on the manly and military virtues of sport." (Pleket, in König 2010, pp. 165–166). Because of this ideal, it would be unthinkable to associate an athletic contest with an activity

[15]As many modern scholars point out, the attempt to project an ideal of amateurism back onto the original Olympics does not work if one considers the historical evidence.

that was undertaken for money, or one that was undertaken by someone who needed to work for a living.

Second, while the Olympic Games were famously open to all Greeks, the events were such that only someone who had at least a moderate amount of wealth (much greater wealth would be required for the equestrian events) would be able to participate; as a result, there was a de facto (and I am arguing intentional) exclusion of the poor, including anyone who had to work for a living. If swimming competitions had been included, they would undoubtedly have attracted those whose jobs meant that they spent their lives in the water (and remember that the Olympics were open to all free male Greeks, with no explicit exclusions). Such men would be able to compete against, would even be likely to win against, those who did not have to rely on swimming and diving in order to eat. But lower-class men lacked the wealth to be part of the hoplite class or the aristocratic class, and lacked the leisure to be part of the culture of the gymnasia, seeing and being seen while exercising[16]. Many authors have commented on the relationship between Olympic competition and aristocratic funeral games modeled after the funeral games for Patroclus, arguing that in both cases the participants would have come from the aristocratic class and the games would reflect aristocratic activities and values[17]. The aristocratic origins of the games would militate against the inclusion of anything that would be related to the kind of banausic labor that aristocrats believed to be destructive to the body and degrading to the soul. Golden draws a parallel between aristocratic games in Greece and those in Hawaii: "The elite [in Hawaii did not engage in surfing competitions], however, [and] preferred to race in sleds over ground they owned themselves, a cumbersome and costly form of competition which advertised their special status….We may be reminded that there is very little evidence for swimming races among the Greeks (and this only in connection with the cult and myth of Dionysius) and that even boat races are rarer than one would expect among a maritime people." (Golden 1998, p. 8)[18].

[16]Spivey (2012, p. 56): those who did banausic labor did not attend the gymnasium. Reid's claim that virtue through sport becomes during the classical era "something available through cultivation to individuals regardless of social status" (2) is therefore overstated (Reid 2011). See also Reid (2011, p. 37).

[17]Funeral games continued to be held in the archaic and classical eras, in addition to the regularly scheduled civic and religious games. It should be noted that another theory about Greek athletics connects these competitions back to the funeral games of Patroclus: the events that were centrally important to the Greeks were those events that were recorded as having taken place in the Iliad. If this is the case, then swimming events would have been excluded from competitions because there were no such events in Homeric epic. I think that this is unconvincing. There were many events included in athletic competitions that were not part of Patroclus' funeral games. In addition, as Golden (1998) points out, the equestrian events that were central to those funeral games were introduced to the Olympics late, which is not what we would expect if derivation from the Iliad is central to determining which competitions would and would not be included in the Games. However, the aristocratic values that are so central to the Iliad were also central to the ancient Olympics. As Reid (2011) notes, at the funeral games Achilles "is recognizing virtue and distributing honour rather than merely recognizing results and distributing goods" (17). See also Cartledge in Easterling and Muir (1985, p. 106).

[18]In Chapter 5 of his book Golden writes that "Athletic activities were carried out under an ethos significantly different from that of the democratic polis." (Golden 1998, p. 161). However, as Hubbard notes, extending athletics downward in the social hierarchy actually reinforced the

The competitions celebrated aristocratic values and therefore required a level of wealth associated with aristocratic, or at least hoplite, status. It is true that, at least at Athens, access to participation in athletic competitions spread down the economic spectrum over time, but it never spread down further than the hoplite class. Fisher argues that participation in the gymnasium became more and more widespread over time at Athens: "participation in such things became part of democratic expectations, at least for those roughly of hoplite status." (See Fisher, in König 2010, pp. 66–86). He goes on to analyze the question of whether the games were, practically speaking, likely to have participants from the lower economic classes. The spread of participation is linked to the need for democratic political cohesion and military discipline and thus is particularly fostered by military drill. His conclusion is that "poor but able young athletes could well have found support and forms of patronage to develop their careers" but "poor" in this context means "poor but not too poor to be an *ephebe*" (p. 75) – which is to say that those of the working class were excluded. Pleket, in the same volume, says that "It is improbable that immediately after the rise of the gymnasion non-nobles penetrated into the Olympic realm…It is probably in the local contests, which increased rapidly from the sixth century onwards, that the hoplite middle class got its first chance to participate but we cannot substantiate this probability because of the usual lack of evidence." (Pleket in König 2010, p. 162)[19]. Even if participation did spread downward from the very top of the social order, "inclusion expanded only by steps and was more about preserving privilege by limited sharing than due to any genuine democratising idealism." (Hubbard 2008, p. 385). Spivey insists that anyone who did banausic labor did not attend the gymnasium and therefore would not have participated in the training that would have been necessary for aspiring athletes (Spivey 2012, p. 56)[20]. Pritchard concludes at the end of a detailed discussion of the various arguments about what classes of Athenians would have been able to participate in athletic competitions in the classical era that only the sons of upper class citizens received training in athletics[21]. Kyle says that "At Athens athletics were demonstrably related to wealth and social prominence." (Kyle 1993, p. 123). Their work all leads to the conclusion that the inclusion of events which did not fit into the aristocratic culture would have been disruptive to the social order and thus would be avoided. Discussions of Greek athletics often focus on the idea that there were two tiers of competition, with the equestrian events being the domain of the wealthy while the poorer citizens competed in the

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hegemonic power of the elite (Hubbard 2008, p. 379). For the alternative view that the values of sport reinforced democratization, see Christesen and Kyle (2014), chapter 13.

[19]He investigates in some detail the ideology of athletics and the status of those who earned money by participating in athletic competitions. Golden agrees that we cannot say that poorer athletes taking part "in any significant numbers was probable." (Golden 1998, p. 144).

[20]Is it possible that the belief in the connection between athletics and military virtue was in part maintained in order to justify the exclusion from athletics of those who did not have sufficient wealth to be part of the hoplite class?

[21]There is a long discussion of the likelihood that poor Greeks would be able to participate in athletic contests: Pritchard, "Athletics, Education and Participation in Classical Athens," in Phillips and Pritchard (2003). Pritchard notes his "profound disagreement" with Fisher (note 27 above) on page 332. See also Pleket in König (2010).

other events. But this division overlooks the third tier of citizens: those who were not wealthy enough to participate in athletic training and also would not participate in hoplite military service (Crowley 2012, pp. 83, 91, 93). These two identities are linked: Fisher writes that he hopes his arguments "strengthen the case that the focus of the public gaze towards the ideal boy, youth, or adult male as equally athlete and warrior steadily extended downwards from the aristocratic or elite members at least as far as those in the hoplite class." (Fisher in König 2010, p. 81). Allowing swimming competitions would have meant allowing this class of citizen to participate, which would have been seen as intolerable. As Cohen says, "The ideology of egalitarianism embraces all those who are seen as entitled to compete for honor…To deny to a person as a matter of principle the right to compete means denying them a full social identity as an Athenian citizen…" (Cohen 1995, p. 64)[22]. This was intentionally done – restricting athletic competition to certain kinds of events denied those of the lower classes a full social identity while uniting the aristocrats and hoplites in a shared activity that would create a shared social identity which would carry over to the battlefield even if the events themselves were not especially helpful to military service.

Another set of reasons for the exclusion of swimming involves the idea of beauty, both of body and soul, that Olympic athletes were expected to demonstrate. As Simonides notes, expressing a widely shared Greek view, being handsome is the second best thing in life, after good health (Perrottet 2012, pp. 18, 27). Theognis connects physical activity with physical desire: "Happy is the lover who works out naked / And then goes home to sleep all day with a beautiful boy." (Theognis 2.1335–36). Aristotle, in the Rhetoric, praises the panathlete as the acme of human beauty: "Beauty varies with each age. In a young man, it consists in possessing a body capable of enduring all efforts, either of the racecourse or of bodily strength, while he himself is pleasant to look upon and a sheer delight. This is why the athletes in the pentathlon are most beautiful, because they are naturally adapted for bodily exertion and for swiftness of foot"[23]. Gaining victory in an athletic competition was, for the Greeks, a moral and intellectual achievement at least as much as it was a physical one, and one in which the beauty of the body displayed the inner beauty of the soul[24]. One of the characteristics that was expected of Greek aristocrats, and which they believed differentiated them from the lower classes and barbarians, was self-control. As James Arieti says, "Since the athletes were entirely stripped, stripped even of the loincloth the barbarians continued to wear, if they yielded to whatever sexual arousal they may have felt, it would have been blushingly apparent to all the spectators." (Arieti 1975, p. 435)[25]. Public nudity in athletic competition meant that the athlete's "intellectual

[22]Cohen is speaking not about athletic competition in particular but the ethos of competition at Athens in general.

[23]http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%253Atext%253A1999.01.0060%253Abekker+page%253D1361b. See also Reid (2011) Chapter 6 "Aristotle's Pentathlete."

[24]See Plato, Symposium, for a famous account of how Alcibiades was vexed by Socrates' physical ugliness but inner beauty.

[25]Note that Socrates is prepared to allow the men and women of the ideal city of the Republic to exercise naked together because, due to the excellence of their souls, they can be trusted to not display or succumb to erotic desire.

sophrosyne would be as much subject to public scrutiny as his athletic *arete*." (Arieti 1975, p. 436). Heather Reid makes a similar point: "the beautiful athletic body is framed in ancient Greek thought, not just as an aesthetically pleasing image, but as an ideal expression of a certain kind of soul." (Reid 2012, p. 281). Scanlon also talks about the conjunction of physical beauty and moral excellence (Scanlon 2002, p. 205, see also Reid 2011). But this excellence could only appear among the elites, and not among the poor. For example, Kyle writes that "By the sixth century gymnastic nudity, with its attendant homoeroticism, was a costume and a social marker of free, male citizen status and Greek ethnicity." (Kyle, in Papakonstantinou 2010, p. 40). But, as has been noted, the poor could not participate in the culture of the gymnasium, and so their bodies would not have the same beauty, and neither would their souls (Christesen and Kyle 2014, p. 228).

So there are important reasons for athletic nudity and its role as a marker of social status and individual *arete*. But the homoeroticism noted by Kyle was also important. That athletic competitions had a strong erotic component for the ancient Greeks is beyond dispute[26]. Swimming events would not have allowed for this element of competition, since such competitions would have obviously taken place in the water, which would have substantially obscured the view of the competitors by the audience. Their bodies would not have been seen glistening with oil and dust as were those of the other competitors; indeed, it would have been hard for them to be seen at all. In addition, it is also likely that the motions of swimming were seen as less than beautiful by the ancient Greeks, given how ridiculous these motions would look if performed on land. Recall Patroclus' mockery of Cebriones, who he has just slain by hitting him with a rock: "And both [Cebriones'] brows did the stone dash together, and the bone held not, but the eyes fell to the ground in the dust even there, before his feet. And like a diver he fell from the well-wrought car, and his spirit left his bones. Then with mocking words didst thou speak to him, knight Patroclus: "Hah, look you, verily nimble is the man; how lightly he diveth! In sooth if he were on the teeming deep, this man would satisfy many by seeking for oysters, leaping from his ship were the sea never so stormy, seeing that now on the plain he diveth lightly from his car. Verily among the Trojans too there be men that dive."" (Iliad 16:740). Notice the mocking dismissal of his fallen foe's ridiculous appearance as he performs the "dive," as well as the insulting association of the Trojan warrior with the work of diving for oysters which Cebriones an aristocratic son of Priam would of course not do. Further evidence that swimming was not considered beautiful can be found by comparing the multitude of images of athletes in Greek art with the almost complete absence of images of swimmers[27]. If swimming was considered beautiful, or associated with excellence, there surely would be more representations of it in painting or sculpture than the handful that have survived. So, the difficulty of seeing the bodies (and by extension the souls) of competitors in swimming races, and the lack of beauty to be found in the motions of swimmers, would be reasons

[26]See Fisher in König (2010, pp. 75–83) for a discussion of eroticism in the Athenian gymnasia and palaistrai. Golden (1998, p. 67) discusses athletic nudity. See also Christesen and Kyle (2014) Chapter 15.
[27]See fn. 2.

why such races would not have taken place as athletic competitions. But even when the swimmer was out of the water, they would not have been viewed as beautiful.

As has been said, the Greeks believed that not every human body, no matter how strong or well-trained for particular physical activities it might be, can be considered beautiful, because only some men can have beautiful souls. By definition, men who have to work for a living cannot have beautiful bodies or beautiful souls (Aristotle and others). As the Old Oligarch says: "[A]mong the best people there is minimal wantonness and injustice but a maximum of scrupulous care for what is good, whereas among the people there is a maximum of ignorance, disorder, and wickedness; for poverty draws them rather to disgraceful actions, and because of a lack of money some men are uneducated and ignorant." (Pseudo-Xenophon Constitution of the Athenians 1:5). Therefore, any physical competition at which such men might excel is, by definition, not a proper athletic competition; and swimming is an example of this kind of physical competition. If this theory is correct, it would also help explain why the Greeks did not have marathon races as part of their athletic competitions, because the winners would likely have been men that were couriers and heralds and therefore were among the banaousoi (Spivey 2012, p. 114)[28]. It would also contribute to an explanation of why there were (with the exception of Sparta) no athletic contests for women, because women could not have the beautiful bodies and souls that were necessary to succeed in athletic contests[29]. And it would also explain why the winners of the equestrian contests were the owners and not the riders. It was the riders and not the owners who demonstrated skill; the riders and not the owners who used physical strength to master their horses, and the riders, not the owners, who used their courage to master their fear of injury and death in what were incredibly dangerous competitions. But despite all this, slaves could not demonstrate *arete*, and so they could not be declared the winners of an athletic competition.

[28]We can see an image of the different body types which are necessary to excel at different sports here: http://www.howardschatz.com/newsite/books/images/athlete/070.jpg. - notice that the photographer has chosen to have the athletes' bodies oiled, much as the Greek athletes would have been oiled in the past. However, the modern athletes are not covered with dust as the Greeks would have been. Neverthless, these photos show that the body type of the successful swimmers is distinctive when compared to wrestlers or boxers.

[29]Kratzmueller (2012) points to the depiction of women as engaged in swimming as an activity; since women by definition do not participate in sport, the depiction of women engaging in swimming may be another piece of evidence which can reinforce the fact that swimming was not regarded as a competitive sport. If I am right about this it would lead to the conclusion that the women running at Brauron were not in fact engaged in racing, but were simply running together. Lämmer, in Borms et al. (1981), says of the women running at Olympia that "[The Heraea] were not genuine contests with foreign or even Panhellenic participation, they were merely a traditional cultic ceremony for local girls" (19). This would also be evidence that the victory of Kyniska as an absentee horse owner was intended as a statement not about the ability of women but the absence of true *arete* from the equestrian events because even women could "win" at them – as Xenophon and Plutarch said (Reid 2011, p. 39). Note that Socrates allows identical and shared athletic exercise to the women and men in the ideal city of the Republic because the souls of the guardian men and women are the same with regard to excellence, but he does not allow the class that contains those who work for a living to exercise with the elite classes because their souls are different.

A final observation: The participants in the Olympic Games needed to be good citizens, good soldiers and good men because they were not only representing themselves. They represented their city as a whole, which is why the winners received lavish gifts and celebrations in their home cities. The cities were sending men who embodied the city, and so they had to be handsome, muscular in the appropriate ways, and demonstrate aristocratic qualities even if they were technically of the hoplite class. Think about Alcibiades' argument about his Olympic victory causing other Greeks to see Athens as more powerful than it was: "For the Grecians have thought our city a mighty one, even above the truth, by reason of my brave appearance at the Olympic games, whereas before they thought easily to have warred it down. For I brought thither seven chariots and not only won the first, second, and fourth prize, but carried also in all other things a magnificence worthy the honour of the victory. And in such things as these, as there is honour to be supposed according to the law, so is there also a power conceived upon sight of the thing done." (Thucydides 6.16). Papakonstantinou argues that "This representation of Olympic victory echoes a cliché argument found in late archaic and early classical (sixth to mid-fifth centuries) epinician (i.e., victory) poetry that depicts victories won by individuals of aristocratic origin as honorable and beneficial to both the victor and his home city." (Papakonstantinou 2003, p. 174)[30]. Howe agrees: "By outstripping the competitors from other Greek cities, Alkibiades brought honor both to himself and to his community, since victory at such an important pan-Hellenic religious festival was seen as a manifestation of heroic ability as well as divine support." (Howe 2008, p. 100)[31]. In return the Athenians gave him free meals for life, and this victory undoubtedly influenced their support for his command in the Sicilian Expedition. No city would want to send as its representative to any Panhellenic athletic competition an ugly, unsophisticated rustic who had to earn their living as something like a fisherman or sponge diver (or a messenger, or a courier). In order to avoid this, it was necessary to be sure that there were no events, such as swimming, that would allow such men to win.

Conclusion

Although at first it might seem surprising that there were no swimming contests at ancient Greek athletic competitions, given the Greek devotion to competition and their connection to the sea, upon a closer examination we can see that there were very good reasons for this, given what they understood athletes and athletic competition to be. As I hope I have shown, to be an athlete was not merely

[30]He goes on to say that this attitude was not universally shared: "[T]his survey demonstrates that both positive and negative evaluations of horseracing and sport in general were current throughout the classical period." Papakonstantinou (2003, p. 176).

[31]See also Gribble (2012): Alcibiades "staged a display of personal and civic wealth and power surpassing both previous competitors and those who would come after" (45). A book-length discussion of the Olympic Games of 416, focusing on Alcibiades' activities, can be found in Stuttard (2012).

about developing a physical ability and demonstrating this ability for the entertainment of an audience. To be an athlete was to dedicate one's life (and in some cases be willing to sacrifice it) to the idea of *arete*, or excellence, not only of the body but also of the soul. This effectively limited the kind of people who could be athletes, as well as the kinds of activities in which they could participate. They had to be excellent, not only physically, but also morally, which required training and which could only be achieved by certain types of people. Originally this meant only aristocrats, and although effective eligibility was eventually expanded to other elite citizens in at least some cities, there were clear limits as to who was understood to have the potential for athletic excellence. In addition, the bodily excellence of the athletes needed to be visible and beautiful; swimming would have fallen short with regard to both of these qualifications.

In addition, swimming was stereotypically something that all Greeks could do. Unlike the participants in athletic events that required athletes to train and display their excellence, and who at the highest levels did so for only a wreath, the best swimmers would have been judged incapable of virtue and would have developed their bodies in the cause of earning a living, which no athletic competitors would do (or, at least, no athlete would ever admit to doing). Swimming was in the province of the commoners who had to work for a living, and therefore was not and could not be connected to the displays of aristocratic values, beautiful bodies, and excellent souls that were crucial to any competition being seen as rising to the level of the athletic. Any competition that was likely to be won by men who did not have the prerequisites for a beautiful body and a beautiful soul could not be an athletic competition, and swimming competitions would inevitably have been competitions of this sort.

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