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WEIDMANN

Euripides' Critique of Athletics in *Autolykus*, fr. 282 N²*

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In the art and literature of Antiquity the important role that sports played is frequently in evidence. Although most instances offer a positive view of the athlete, there was also criticism by poets, philosophers and doctors, who all expressed their disapproval of an occupation that endangered the athletes' lives and was much too highly valued by society. Fragment 282 N², from the Satyr play *Autolykus* by Euripides is especially representative in this respect since it expresses both views.

From an early date because they seemed to embody human ideals athletes were viewed as worthy subjects for artistic treatment. This association was so close that at times it is difficult to decide whether an artist has portrayed a god or the victor in a sports competition. This is because in either case we are given an example of physical perfection. Literature too helped contribute to this positive depiction of sports, principally – and for obvious reasons – in epinikian odes, although this image was also present in other genres and the other arts. From the dawn of Greek literature the figure of the heroic warrior was presented as outstanding both in war and in sports; there was even the association, at times especially clear, of athletics and mythology. Indeed, well-known legends attribute the founding of the Olympic Games to Pelops or to Heracles, the hero who was often used as a model of the perfect athlete.¹ At the same time we should mention the funeral games that Homer describes, in which those who fought before the Trojan walls competed for glory and prizes. The best illustration of this kind of competition, and the best known, appears in Book XXIII of the *Iliad*, where the poet gives a detailed account of the games that Achilles organized in honour of Patroclus, including pre-

^{*)} English translation by Philip W. Silver. For the citations of the Classical authors and journals I use the system of abbreviation of the *Greek-English Lexicon* (H. G. LIDDELL/R. SCOTT/H. S. JONES) Oxford 1968 and of *L'Année Philologique*, respectively.

¹⁾ Pi. O. 1.112–143, 3.13–15, 6.67–69, 10.51–72. A.R. 1.752–758. D.S. 4.14.1–2. Paus. 5.7.9–10. Cf. F. M. CORNFORD, *The Origin of the Olympic Games*, in: J. E. HARRISON (ed.), *Themis: A Study of the Social Origin of Greek Religion*, Cambridge 1927, 212–259; G. NAGY, *Pindar's Olympian 1 and the Aetiology of the Olympic Games*, in: *TAPhA* 116, 1986, 71–88; E. SUÁREZ DE LA TORRE, *La experiencia religiosa del atleta olímpico*, in: *Revista de Occidente* 134–135, 1992, 24–27; V. VANOYEKE, *La naissance des Jeux Olympiques et le sport dans l'Antiquité*, Paris 2004, 73–77.

cise descriptions of the participants, the contests themselves, the prizes offered, and the results of each event. The participants in the games described in the Epic are the heroes who reapply the concept of *arete* to the athletic ideal and seek glory as a reflection of the nobility that justifies their rank in society.

This comparison between the warrior hero and the athlete who competes for a prize was especially attractive to the authors of epinikian odes, who thereby increased their praise of the victor, adding to his nobility by comparing him to exceptional figures from the past. This is particularly apparent in Pindar who gives the same importance to a winner crowned in the games as to a hero on the battlefield.² He offers the victor in sports as a model to be emulated; for Pindar such a man possesses values that are only found together in a select few, who then become the most perfect examples of the aristocratic ideal of *καλοκαγαθία*.³ Particular excellence in the Games was considered in the light of the extraordinary feats of the great heroes of mythology, who were the models that the athletes attempted to emulate.⁴

However, this positive view of the world of sports had a negative side, equally well illustrated in art and literature. Especially beginning in the Hellenistic period – although there are earlier examples –, in both sculpture and vase painting there are realistic depictions of fighting between boxers who are clearly injured, and between overweight wrestlers, especially far removed from any ideal of aesthetic perfection.⁵ In literature, even before the visual arts, we see this negative side of sports reflected in criticism of its physical aspect – overtraining and an unhealthy life destroyed the athletes –, and of its social and moral aspects: sports made no positive contribution to the State although they might bring honor, prizes and public acclaim. This negative view is repeated, from different perspectives, and for a considerable time, in genres as different as lyric poetry, medical literature, and the theatre.

² Cf. *O.* 2.43–44; *I.* 1.50–52.

³ For this concept cf. I. MARTÍNKOVÁ, *Kalokagathia – How to Understand Harmony of a Human Being*, in: *Nikephoros* 14, 2001, 21–28.

⁴ F. GARCÍA ROMERO, *Poesía y deporte en la antigua Grecia*, in: *Revista de Occidente* 134–135, 1992, 49–52.

⁵ On the depiction of athletes, especially in the Roman period, see J. KÖNIG, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge 2005, 102–124.

There is a good example of this view in fr. 282 N² by Euripides, from his Satyr play *Autolykus*.⁶

Κακῶν γὰρ ὄντων μυρίων καθ' Ἑλλάδα
οὐδὲν κάκιόν ἐστιν ἀθλητῶν γένους
οἱ πρῶτα μὲν ζῆν οὔτε μανθάνουσιν εὖ
οὔτ' ἂν δύναιντο· πῶς γὰρ ὅστις ἔστ' ἀνήρ
γνάθου τε δοῦλος νηδύος θ' ἠσσημένος 5
κτῆσαιτ' ἂν ὄλβον εἰς ὑπερβολὴν πατρός;
οὐδ' αὖ πένεσθαι κάξυπηρετεῖν τύχαις
οἰοί τ'· ἔθνη γὰρ οὐκ ἐθισθέντες καλὰ
σκληρῶς μεταλλάσσουσιν εἰς τὰμήχανον.
λαμπροὶ δ' ἐν ἤβῃ καὶ πόλεως ἀγάλματα 10
φοιτῶσ'· ὅταν δὲ προσπέσῃ γῆρας πικρόν,
τρίβωνες ἐκβαλόντες οἴχονται κρόκας.
ἐμεμφάμην δὲ καὶ τὸν Ἑλλήνων νόμον,
οἱ τῶνδ' ἕκατι σύλλογον ποιούμενοι
τιμῶσ' ἀχρεῖους ἠδονὰς δαιτὸς χάριν. 15
τίς γὰρ παλαίστας εὖ, τίς ὠκύπους ἀνήρ
ἢ δίσκον ἄρας ἢ γνάθον παίστας καλῶς
πόλει πατρώα στέφανον ἤρκεσεν λαβῶν;
πότερα μαχοῦνται πολεμίοισιν ἐν χεροῖν
δίσκους ἔχοντες ἢ δι' ἀσπίδων χερὶ 20
θείνοντες ἐκβαλοῦσι πολεμίους πάτρας;
οὐδεὶς σιδήρου ταῦτα μωραίνει πέλας
στάς. ἄνδρας χρὴ σοφούς τε κάκαθούς
φύλλοις στέφεσθαι, χῶστις ἠγεῖται πόλει
κάλλιστα σώφρων καὶ δίκαιος ὢν ἀνήρ, 25
ὅστις τε μύθοις ἔργ' ἀπαλλάσσει κακὰ
μάχας τ' ἀφαιρῶν καὶ στάσεις· τοιαῦτα γὰρ
πόλει τε πάση πᾶσί θ' Ἑλλησιν καλὰ.

⁶ M. MARCOVICH, *Euripides' Attack on the Athletes*, in: *Živa Antika* 27, 1977, 51–54. P. ANGELI BERNARDINI, *Esaltazione e critica dell'atletismo nella poesia greca dal VII al V sec. A. C.: storia di un'ideologia*, in: *Stadion* 6, 1980, 91–92. F. ANGIÒ, *Euripide, Autolico, fr. 282 N.²*, in: *Dioniso* 62.2, 1992, 83–94. V. VISA-ONDARÇUHU, *L'image de l'athlète d'Homère à la fin du V^e siècle avant J.-C.*, Paris 1999, 239–243. F. GARCÍA ROMERO, *El cuerpo del atleta en la antigua Grecia*, in: *biTARTE* 37, 2005, 50. J.P. HARRIS, *Revenge of the Nerds: Xenophanes, Euripides, and Socrates vs. Olympic Victors*, in: *AJPh* 130.2, 2009, 163–166. D.M. Pritchard, *Athletics in Satyric Drama*, in: *G&R* 59.2, 2012 (forthcoming).

This fragment is especially interesting since it is implicitly a summary of the main points of this criticism, incorporating ideas already found in lyric poets such as Tyrtaeus and Xenophanes. To these ideas Euripides added others such as physical ruin – mentioned by doctors such as Hippocrates and, above all, by Galen⁷ in the Roman era –, their inability to fill their family coffers, and their gluttony, recurring notes in descriptions of the lifestyle of athletes.

As regards this passage from Euripides the following observation suggests itself. Euripides has one character voice certain opinions, although there is no way of knowing who the speaker is or to what extent he speaks for the author. However, D. F. Sutton⁸ believes that in addition to a negative view evident in this fragment there may also be an opinion in defense of athletes. In fact, Euripides did write an epinikian ode – the only one he wrote and the last example of this genre – to celebrate the deeds of Alcibiades at Olympia. The latter, in the Games of 416 BC won the chariot races with one team of horses and second and fourth place with two other chariots.⁹ Another point to mention is that the work to which the fragment belongs is a Satyr Play, a genre in which there are numerous allusions to athletic contests and especially to boxing and wrestling. It is common to find mythological figures such as Antaeus, Busiris and especially Heracles characterized as athletes, whether in combat or in humorous portraits of them as gluttons.¹⁰

⁷ Galen, among other occupations, was first a doctor for the school of gladiators in his native Pergamum, and so had occasion to know their world at first hand. V. NUTTON, *The Chronology of Galen's Early Career*, in: CQ 23.1, 1973, 162–164. KÖNIG, *Athletics and Literature* (vd. n. 5) c. 6: *Athletes and doctors: Galen's agonistic medicine*, 254–300.

⁸ D. F. SUTTON, *The Greek Satyr Play*, Meisenheim am Glan 1980, 148.

⁹ Th. 6.16.2. Plu. Alc. 11. Ath. 1.3 c. Cf. C. M. BOWRA, *Euripides' Epinikian for Alcibiades*, in: *Historia* 9, 1960, 68–79; VISA-ONDARÇUHU, *L'image de l'athlète* (vd. n. 6) 324–331; J. M. GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, *En Grecia antigua: la crítica de los intelectuales y la decadencia de los juegos olímpicos*, in: M. PASTOR MUÑOZ/M. VILLENA PONSODA/J. L. AGUILERA GONZÁLEZ (eds.), *Deporte y olimpismo en el mundo antiguo y moderno*, Granada 2008, 148.

¹⁰ SUTTON, *The Greek Satyr Play* (vd. n. 8) 148–149 and *Athletics in Greek Satyr Play*, in: RSC 23, 1975, 203–209. R. SEAFORD, *Euripides. Cyclops*, Oxford 1984, 39–40. L. PAGANELLI, *Il dramma satiresco. Spazio, tematiche e messa in scena*, in: *Dioniso* 59.2, 1989, 263–267. J. L. LÓPEZ CRUCES, *P. Oxy. 2454* (TrGF adesp. 653). *Cuestiones de datación, género y autoría*, in: *Myrtia* 19, 2004, 13. I. C. STOREY, *But Comedy has Satyrs Too*, in G. W. M. HARRISON (ed.), *Satyr Drama. Tragedy at Play*, Swansea 2005, 203. GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, *En Grecia antigua* (vd. n. 9) 143–145.

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Regarding the point of view expressed in the Euripidean fragment, the first two verses are a declaration of principle that leaves no doubt: *κακῶν γὰρ ὄντων μυρίων καθ' Ἑλλάδα / οὐδὲν κάκιόν ἐστιν ἀθλητῶν γένους*, "Although the misfortunes in the Hellenic land are legion, none is more damaging than the race of athletes." The speaker then calls into question all the positive commonplaces associated with athletes in Antiquity, everything from their physical beauty, to the association of athletic prowess with bravery in war, as well as their glorification by a public that praised them as heroic only to abandon them when they reached old age, *τρίβωνες ἐκβαλόντες ... κρόκας*, "just like a worn-out cloak" (v. 12). He then criticizes athletics as injurious to health, a point made by Hippocrates and especially by Galen. Here Euripides follows the lead of Tyrtaeus and Xenophanes, and contributes to a theme that would continue long after, with examples as late as Roman times.

Near the beginning of this fragment, a character ridicules the lives of athletes because they are "not friends of good behavior", but rather "slaves of their jaws and victims of their stomachs" (vv. 8 and 5).¹¹ This sentiment is not arbitrary, because excessive eating will be a constant in the criticism of athletes. In fact their excessive appetite seems to have been a favorite target of the playwrights, particularly in the fourth century BC when they were mocked for having large stomachs and small brains.¹² All examples from the surviving plays in which athletes appear are fragments, so that their presentation is not as pointed as with other *topoi* such as the parasite or the cook. Nevertheless, they gain a certain importance since some playwrights made them the subject of their comedies, of which only the titles have survived, or, at best, a few fragments. Thus we know of a *Ἐπινίκιος* (*The Victorious Athlete*) by Epicharmus and an *Ἴσθμιονίκης* (*The Victor in the Isthmian Games*) by Mnesimachus, and we have titles of plays that touch on different sporting events: *Πένταθλος* (*The Pentathlete*) by Eubulus and Xenarchus; *Παγκρατιάστης* (*The Pankratiast*) by Alexis, by Philemon and by Theophilus (and later Ennius); *Πυκτής* (*The Pu-*

¹¹ This expression recalls another Satyr play by Euripides, *The Cyclops*, where the allusion to the jaws relates to the animal (and cannibal) diet of the monster of the title (vv. 92, 289, 310). In v. 303, Ulysses reminds him that the norms of hospitality do not permit "filling stomach and jaws", *νηδὺν καὶ γνάθον πλήσαι*, with the flesh of new guests.

¹² Cf. G. W. ARNOTT, *Alexis: The Fragments. A Commentary*, Cambridge 1996, 508.

gelist)¹³ by Timocles and Timotheus; and *Ἀποβάτης* (a species of acrobat who at full gallop leapt from one horse to another) by Alexis.¹⁴

L. Bruzzese¹⁵ believes that probably this characterization of the athlete also appears in fragmentary works whose titles do not refer explicitly to athletes. This may be the case of the comedy *Κεραυνός* or *Κεραυνόμενος* by Anaxippus, where fun is made of one Damippus, whose surname is *Κεραυνός* (“Thunderbolt”), since he renders tables sacrosanct, and above all out of reach, once he has “struck” them with tooth and jaw.¹⁶ In the fragments 274 and 275 K.-A. of a play by Alexis, whose title is lost, there is a character who may be either a pankratiast or a boxer. In the first fragment he describes a dream of victory in which he is given a wreath of plums, an especially unusual crown, and he adds that the plums are ripe, that is, purple in color, exactly like his bruised face after the fight. This is confirmed in the second fragment where the meaning of the dream is revealed.¹⁷

The athlete in Comedy is based on the figure of Heracles, who was always associated with sports, and especially with contests of strength in myth, religion, literature and the visual arts. Beginning in 520 BC in depictions of Heracles’ encounter with the Nemean lion he appears in a way that clearly recalls fighters grappling in the arena. The best example in literature is in an epinikian ode by Pindar, where the myths of Heracles are applied to boxers, wrestlers and pankratiasts, at times even confounding the real fighter with the mythical archetype.¹⁸ Then too, in Theocritus’ fourth *Idyll* (vv. 111–118), we see wrestling,

¹³ From Roman literature we could also cite a *Pugil* among the comedies of Caecilius.

¹⁴ Cf. ARNOTT, *Alexis: The Fragments* (vd. n. 12) 104–106.

¹⁵ L. BRUZZESE, *Lo Schwerathlet, Eracle e il parassita nella commedia greca*, in: Nikephoros 17, 2004, 141–144.

¹⁶ This and similar surnames, such as *Σκηπτός*, or *Χείμων*, are not inappropriate for the heavy eaters, especially the uninvited ones, because they also consume the feasts at which they gorge themselves. Cf. Theophil. fr. 3 K.-A.; Alex. fr. 183 K.-A.; Anaxil. fr. 3 K.-A.; Antiph. fr. 193.4 K.-A. These comparisons were certainly a commonplace, because they were used by both Alexis (fr. 47 K.-A.) and Timocles (fr. 4.8–10 K.-A.) to refer to the effect caused when certain lovers of fish visited the markets.

¹⁷ Cf. ARNOTT, *Alexis: The Fragments* (vd. n. 12) 766–768.

¹⁸ BRUZZESE, *Lo Schwerathlet, Eracle e il parassita* (vd. n. 15) 148–151. P. ANGELI BERNARDINI, *Eracle atleta: Eur. HF. 957–62; Alc. 1025–36*, in: RCCM 40 (1–2), 1998, 9. EAD., *L’eroe, l’atleta, il soldato nell’ideologia agonale greca*, in: C. MASSERIA/D. LOSCALZO (eds.), *Miti di guerra, riti di pace. La guerra e la pace: un confronto interdisciplinare*, Bari 2011, 92.

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boxing and pankration as part of the young Heracles' education. In this connection it is interesting to recall that Apollodorus (2.4.9) says he learned the art of wrestling from Autolykus and, while not supported by other sources, it is probable, as Sutton¹⁹ suggests, that the theme of Euripides' Satyr play is in fact the young Heracles learning to wrestle.

One of the characteristics of Heracles is his enormous appetite, his *πολυφαγία*. This appears already in the *Wedding of Ceyx* (fr. 264–268 Merkelbach-Snell), a poem attributed to Hesiod, and in a fragment from Pindar (fr. 168 Snell-Maehler), where the poet expresses astonishment at the speed with which the hero devours two roast oxen. This exaggerated eating and drinking seems to be associated with Heracles, as is suggested by Sophocles (*Tr.* 268) and Euripides (*Alc.* 747–760) in Tragedy, Stesichorus (fr. 181 Page) in Lyric Poetry and Panyasis (fr. 16–19 Bernabé) in the Epic. Also in the visual arts, especially vase painting, the hero is often portrayed eating and drinking at a banquet.²⁰ Because of its exaggerated nature Heracles as glutton soon became a *topos* in the Satyr plays²¹ and in Comedy. Aristophanes (*V.* 59–60) criticized the utilization of this motif of *Ἡρακλῆς τὸ δεῖπνον ἐξαπατώμενος* ("Heracles deprived of his dinner") as a worn-out cliché used to provoke easy laughter, and often repeated in comic scenes, although the playwright himself also shows Heracles as a glutton in several of his comedies.²² The first example that we have of this *topos* is in fr. 18 K.-A. of *Busiris*²³ by the Sicilian playwright

¹⁹ SUTTON, *The Greek Satyr Play* (vd.n.8) 148. Cf. ANGIÒ, *Euripide, Autolykus, fr. 282 N.²* (vd.n.6) 85–86.

²⁰ P. ANGELI BERNARDINI, *Eracle mangione: Pindaro, fr. 168 Snell-Maehler*, in: QUCC 21, 1976, 51. A. VERBANCK-PIÉRARD, *Herakles at Feast in Attic Art: a Mythical or Cultic Iconography?* in: P. HÄGG (ed.), *The Iconography of Greek Cult in the Archaic and Classical Periods. Proceedings of the First International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult (Delphi, 16–18 November 1990)*, Athens/Liège 1992, 85–106.

²¹ Cf. N. CHOURMOUZIADES, *Σατυρικά*, Athens 1974, 115–164.

²² V. 567, *Pax* 739–743, *Lys.* 928, *Ra.* 62–65, 549–576, *Av.* 567, 1583–1590, 1601–1603, fr. 284 K.-A. Cf. Th. PAPPAS, *Le personnage d'Héraclès chez Aristophane: comportent scénique d'un héros secondaire bouffon et satyrique*, in: *Dioniso* 61.2, 1991, 257–268; G. MASTROMARCO, *Introduzione a Aristofane*, Roma/Bari 1994, 163–164.

²³ The theme of Heracles and the Egyptian king Busiris was extremely popular, as we see from the many comedies with the same title as the one by Epicharmus (and probably with a similar characterization of the hero) in Attic authors such as Cratinus (fr. 23 K.-A.), Ehippus (fr. 2 K.-A.), Mnesimachus (fr. 2 K.-A.) and Antiphanes (fr. 66–68 K.-A.). In Satyr plays as well there are several like *Busiris* by Euripides (fr. 313–315 N²) and another by Diogenes the Cynic where, accord-

Epicharmus, where a character describes in detail the intimidating way the hero has of eating:

*πρᾶτον μὲν αἰκ' ἔσθοντ' ἴδοις νιν, ἀποθάνοις·
βρέμει μὲν ὁ φάρυγξ ἔνδοθ', ἀραβεῖ δ' ἄ γνάθος,
προφεῖ δ' ὁ γομφίος, τέτριγε δ' ὁ κυνόδων,
σίξει δὲ ταῖς ρίνεσσι, κινεῖ δ' οὐᾶτα.²⁴*

Possibly the hero's enormous appetite also figures in other comedies by Epicharmus, such as *Heracles at Pholus' House* and *The Wedding of Hebe*, although the evidence is inconclusive. With the authors of Old Comedy, in addition to Aristophanes, a similar picture of the hero appears in Cratinus and Phrynichus. The same image of Heracles also appears in authors of the Middle and the New Comedy such as Alexis, Antiphanes, Eubulus, Strattis or Archippus.²⁵

As to the image that these playwrights offer of the athlete as a species of bottomless pit, there is a good example in fr. 8 K.-A. from Theophilus' *The Pankratiast*, where one character, possibly the protagonist, describes to an amazed listener all he has eaten:

*A. ἐφθῶν μὲν σχεδὸν
τρεῖς μνᾶς. B. λέγ' ἄλλο. A. ῥυγχιόν, κωλῆν, πόδας
τέτταρας ὑείους. B. Ἡράκλεις. A. βοὸς δὲ τρεῖς,
ὄρνιθ'. B. Ἄπολλον. λέγ' ἕτερον. A. σύκων δύο
μνᾶς. B. ἐπέπιες δὲ πόσον; A. ἀκράτου δώδεκα
κοτύλας. B. Ἄπολλον, ὄρε καὶ Σαβάζιε.²⁶*

ing to Dio Chrysostom (6.32), Busiris is depicted as an athlete, "training with great diligence, eating all day, and boasting overly much about his skills as a fighter".

²⁴ "If you saw him eating, first of all, you'd die. His throat emits a roar, his jaws rattle, his molars resound, his canine teeth squeak, he snorts loudly, and he wiggles his ears."

²⁵ Cratin. fr. 346 K.-A. Phryn. Com. fr. 24 K.-A. Alex. fr. 140 K.-A. Antiph. fr. 174-176 K.-A. Eub. fr. 6 K.-A. Stratt. fr. 12 K.-A. Archipp. fr. 10 K.-A. Cf. Ath. 10.411a-412b, 12.512e-f. For Heracles the glutton in comedy see: G.K. GALINSKY, *The Comic Hero*, in: *The Herakles Theme. The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1972, 81-100; J. WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy*, Oxford 2000, 94; M.J. GARCÍA SOLER, *Grands mangeurs et grands buveurs dans la Grèce ancienne*, in: *Food & History* 4.2, 2006, 46-47; S.D. OLSON, *Broken Laughter. Select Fragments of Greek Comedy*, Oxford 2007, 40-41, 265-266.

²⁶ "A. - Almost three pounds of boiled meat ... B. - Tell me more! A. - ... a little snout, a ham, four pig's feet ... B. - Heracles! A. - ... three cow's feet, poultry ... B. -

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This fragment provides clear evidence of the nature of the athletes' diet: especially high in protein so as to build greater strength and endurance. This diet is the endpoint of a development that took place in about the sixth century BC, consisting of food that was considered energy-producing, such as milk and dried figs, which were never entirely dispensed with, as we see in the passage from Theophilus. Dried figs guaranteed an "explosive" energy, while for resisting stress bread with olive oil were ingested. Later the diet was high in protein, according to this fragment from Theophilus and many other literary examples.²⁷

Although there is no direct evidence in this respect, it has usually been thought that this kind of diet was characteristic of athletes dedicated to combat sports. Because there were no divisions according to weight, and the fighting had no limits except surrender, collapse, or the death of one of the contestants, physical strength and endurance were important, and so it was essential to increase muscle-size. This was the origin of the practice called *ἀναγκοφαγία*, a species of forced eating,²⁸ an essential part of the athletes' training, to which there are numerous references. For example, Athenaeus of Naucratis, an author of the second century AD, in Book 10 of *Deipnosophists* (412d–413c), in an extensive section on gluttons – with many references to athletes – states that: *πάντες γὰρ οἱ ἀθλοῦντες μετὰ τῶν γυμνασμάτων καὶ ἐσθίειν πολλὰ διδάσκονται*, "all those who take part in athletic contests, besides gymnastic practice, also learn to eat a great deal".²⁹ At this point he dedicates considerable space to examples of gluttony and the feats of athletes like Theagenes of Thasos, who single-handedly ate an entire bull; Titormus of Aetolia, who on a bet ate a whole

Apollo! Tell me the rest! A. – ... two pounds of figs. B. – And how much did you drink on top of this? A. – Twelve cups of unmixed wine. B. – Apollo, Horus, and Sabazius!"

²⁷ Paus. 6.7.10. Porph. *Abst.* 1.26.2. D.L. 8.12. Plin. 23.121–122. Ruf. *ap.* Orib. 1.40. Cf. M. ZERBINI, *Alle fonti del doping. Fortuna e prospettive di un tema storico-religioso*, Roma 2001, 25.

²⁸ This word, and its corresponding verb, *ἀναγκοφαγεῖν*, and other similar expressions (*τὴν βίαιον τροφήν* "forced feeding", Arist. *Pol.* 1338b40–41; *ἀναγκοτροφεῖν* "having to follow a dietary regimen", Epict. *Ench.* 3.15.2–3) are specific to sports as the lexicographers point out. Pollux (3.153) lists this verb among those dealing with physical training and Hesychius (*α* 4236) defines *ἀναγκοφαγεῖν* as *πρὸς ἀνάγκην ἐσθίειν, ὅπερ ἀθληταὶ πάσχουσιν*, "be forced to eat as happens with athletes". Cf. REISCH, *ἀναγκοφαγία*, in: RE I/2, Stuttgart 1894, 2058–2059; VISA-ONDARÇUHU, *L'image de l'athlète* (vd.n.6) 278–280, and *L'image de l'athlète dans la Collection hippocratique*, in: Actes du VII^e colloque international hippocratique (Madrid, 24–29 sept. 1990), Madrid 1992, 277.

²⁹ Cf. Achae. fr. 4.2 Snell.

cow for breakfast; Astyanax of Miletus, who by himself ate an entire banquet that had been prepared for nine people; or Milo of Croton, one of the most famous athletes of Antiquity, for his strength and for his capacity for food: he was reputed to often have eaten 20 pounds of meat, a like amount of bread, and to have washed it all down with three pitchers of wine.³⁰

This *πολυφαγία* is one of the constants in comparing athletes with Heracles. An especially representative example in this respect is the extraordinary Milo who, as a member of one of the most important families of Croton, acted as a priest of Hera Lakinia, a protective deity of his city. Indeed, according to myth both the shrine and Croton itself were founded by the hero.³¹ This explains Milo's costume when he led the Crotonians against neighboring Sybaris, dressed in a lion's skin and wielding a club, the traditional attributes of Heracles.³²

The most obvious result of an athlete's excesses was obesity, so often depicted on the stage and in literature. Attic pottery from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC shows fat boxers, pankratiasts, and even runners, as does a smaller variety of sculpture, and all continue to appear down to Roman times. In literature Lucian in his *Dialogues of the Dead* (20.5) describes the athlete Damasias with the expression *τοσαύτας σάρκας περιβεβλημένον*, "swathed in such masses of (his own) flesh", and Galen, in his treatise *On Exercise With a Small Ball* (3 = 5.905 Kühn), complains that the kind of exercise practiced in the gymnasium does more to enlarge the body than to cultivate virtue. In the *Thrasymboulos or Whether Healthiness Belongs to Medicine or Gymnastics* (37 = 5.879 Kühn), Galen criticizes athletes who reach an exaggerated size and weight because of the quantities of food and drink associated with their gluttony.³³ According to Aristotle one consequence of obesity is that it causes physical deformity, since it keeps nature from fostering a balanced growth (*GA* 768 b, *Rh.* 1361 b). Socrates too, in the *Banquet* by Xenophon (2.17), alludes to the in-harmonious growth caused by excessive specialization. And Philostratus (*Gym.* 44) attributes the decadence of athletes to their excessive eating, because it causes them to lose energy and become soft and

³⁰ Arist. *EN* 1106b3 and fr. 520 Rose. Str. 6.1.12. Paus. 6.14.5–7. Cf. VANOYEKE, *La naissance des Jeux Olympiques* (vd. n. 1) 81–82.

³¹ PHILIPP, *Kroton*, in: *RE* XI/2, Stuttgart 1965, 2020.

³² Hdt. 3.137.5. Iamb. *VP* 104. Str. 6.1.12. D.S. 12.9.5–6. Cf. M. DETIENNE, *La cuisine de Pythagore*, in: *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 15, 1970, 145–146.

³³ J. M. NIETO IBÁÑEZ, *Galen's Treatise 'Thrasymbulus' and the Dispute between 'Paidotribes' and 'Gymnastes'*, in: *Nikephoros* 16, 2003, 150.

lazy. They were encouraged by the doctors to eat before training "until they were as heavy as blocks of Libyan or Egyptian stone", so that athletes came to be viewed as gluttons with stomachs always hungering for more.³⁴

Nevertheless, despite what Philostratus held, doctors (or at least those not associated with gymnasia) considered the way of life of the athletes dangerous and were the first to severely criticize it for causing a constitutional imbalance and physical malformation. Indeed, Galen, in his *Thrasyboulos*, blamed the trainers for the decadence of the healthy norms of the gymnasium because they made athletes follow a regimen dedicated solely to the defeat of an opponent.³⁵ The author of the Hippocratic treatise *Aphorisms* had already pointed out the dangers of excessive training: a certain precariousness, since once an optimum development was reached, it could only be followed by a decrease in strength. Galen was of the same opinion as Hippocrates, who he quotes repeatedly in his *Exhortation to Study the Arts* (11–13 = 1.26–37 Kühn), basing his argument on the fragment from Euripides. He extends this criticism to the whole system of training, pointing out that in the end their lives are little better than those of pigs, except that pigs neither over-exert nor force-feed themselves the way athletes do. Many of their physical problems were due to the great amounts of food consumed, and also to the fact that their diets were neither varied nor balanced, which led to sudden losses of physical strength, and even to more serious problems if they were followed for too long. It is true that modern sports stars also follow special, restricted diets, but only while in training for their events, and afterwards they return to normal eating.

The natural consequences of this unhealthy life are described by Euripides, who introduces a new factor – physical degeneration – that is not found in earlier critiques of sports:

λαμπροὶ δ' ἐν ἡβῇ καὶ πόλεως ἀγάλματα
φοιτῶσ'· ὅταν δὲ προσπέσῃ γῆρας πικρὸν,
τρίβωνες ἐκβαλόντες οἴχονται κρόκας.³⁶

³⁴ KÖNIG, *Athletics and Literature* (vd. n. 5) 323, 335–336.

³⁵ NIETO IBÁÑEZ, *Galen's Treatise 'Thrasybulus'* (vd. n. 33) 147–156. KÖNIG, *Athletics and Literature* (vd. n. 5) 267–274. GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, *En Grecia antigua* (vd. n. 9) 151–153.

³⁶ "In the youthful prime of their lives they strut about, the glories and delights of their cities; but when bitter old age overtakes them they vanish like a worn-out unraveled cloak" (vv. 10–13).

Galen takes up this notion, adding details that contradict the ideal of the athletes' beauty, when he compares their bodies to battlements that have been attacked by war machines, and in their weakened condition can no longer survive the least earth tremor. "This happens to the bodies of athletes and when they finish competing it is even worse. Some die at once and some live longer but never reach old age. Or, if they do, their fate is as described in the Homeric prayers: they end up 'limping, all shriveled up, deprived of sight' (Hom. *Il.* 9.503)" (11 = 1.30 Kühn).³⁷ Galen also describes their damaged eyes, teeth that fall out, their twisted joints, and earlier wounds that reopen. The practice of sports like boxing or pankration disfigures their faces and leaves them blind in one or both eyes, and he adds: "this – I believe – is when the kind of beauty derived from sports becomes obvious" (12 = 1.31–32 Kühn).

The satirical poet Lucillius, author of epigrams about athletes, holds a similar view to Galen's, but here the negative image of their prowess is a source of humor.³⁸ In his epigram number 81 the boxer Androleos lists his "prizes": *ἔσχον δ' ἐν Πίσῃ μὲν ἐν ὠτίον, ἐν δὲ Πλαταιαίς / ἐν βλέφαρον· Πυθοί δ' ἄπνοος ἐκφέρομαι*, "In Pisa I had (i. e., lost) an ear, in Plataea an eye, at Delphi I nearly died ..." (AP 11.81.3–4). The epigrams 75 and 77 are even better examples. Epigram 75 tells of a boxer who when he returns home is kept from assuming his former life. His brother, unable to recognize him, takes him to court and shows that he is so unlike an old portrait that he is declared a foreigner. In epigram 77 someone tells the boxer Stratophon that, when Ulysses returned to Ithaca after 20 years, his dog recognized him, but that, after only four hours of fighting, he could not even have recognized himself, and that if he saw himself in a mirror he would swear it was someone else.

After referring to the physical collapse of these combatants Euripides criticizes a public that praises them and awards prizes for such "useless pastimes", *ἄχρητους ἡδονὰς* (v. 15). He agrees with the many authors before and after him who complain of the exaggerated social importance accorded athletes, despite the relatively minor value of their profession. In this same passage the author asks what benefit a city obtains, when under attack, from a man who fights well and runs swiftly (vv. 17–24). When Euripides speaks in this way, he adopts a

³⁷) Cf. *On Exercise With a Small Ball* 5 = 5.910.

³⁸) Cf. L. ROBERT, *Les épigrammes satiriques de Lucillius sur les athlètes. Parodie et réalités*, in: *L'épigramme grecque*, Vandœuvres-Genève 1968 (Fondation Hardt, Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique XIV), 181–291.

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tradition that derives from the Ancient poets, beginning with Tyrtaeus (fr. 9 Gentili-Prato),³⁹ who perhaps about 640 BC listed the virtues that would make a man worthy of praise: speed, strength, wealth, nobility and eloquence. Beside these virtues, Tyrtaeus will only acclaim a warrior's courage if he defends and glorifies his city, not if he seeks individual reward. A strong or a swift man is of no use to the city unless he is brave and attacks the enemy; but a hero who fights in the vanguard, and whose shouts urge on those around him, does indeed help to defend his city.

Xenophanes' approach (fr. 9 Gentili-Prato⁴⁰) is more direct and polemical, using as he does the idea with which Euripides will conclude his fragment: athletes receive too much compensation, too much praise, whereas only men of wisdom capable of leading a city really deserve it. Unlike Tyrtaeus, Xenophanes lists specific contests celebrated on a particular occasion, that is, the Olympic Games: foot races, pentathlon, wrestling, pankration and horse races. His complaint is also specific: these victors receive prizes such as a front row seat at the events, financial support by the city, and "a prize that to them must seem an enormous fortune" (vv. 6–9).⁴¹ The poet sees no sense in the distribution of distinctions in this way, since it is unfair to value strength, which adds nothing to the proper governance of the city and does not increase its material wealth. Socrates expresses the same idea before the court that condemns him. He proposes instead of punishment the prize of eating in the Prytaneum, because in his opinion he deserves it more than any Olympic victor: *ὁ μὲν γὰρ ὑμᾶς ποιεῖ εὐδαίμονα δόκεῖν εἶναι, ἐγὼ δὲ εἶναι*, "For he makes you seem happy, whereas I make you truly happy".⁴²

³⁹ ANGELI BERNARDINI, *Esaltazione e critica dell'atletismo* (vd. n. 6) 84–87. VISA-ONDARÇUHU, *L'image de l'athlète* (vd. n. 6) 215–229. G. A. PRIVITERA, *Cibo e gloria: il bivio in Pindaro*, in: RAL Ser. 9 a, 14.1, 2003, 123–124.

⁴⁰ C. M. BOWRA, *Xenophanes and the Olympic Games*, in: AJPh 59.3, 1938, 257–279. M. I. FINLEY/H. W. PLEKET, *I giochi olimpici. I primi mille anni*, Roma 1980, 113–114. P. GIANNINI, *Senofane fr. 2 Gentili-Prato e la funzione dell'intellettuale nella Grecia antica*, in: QUCC 39, 1982, 57–69. ANGELI BERNARDINI, *Esaltazione e critica dell'atletismo* (vd. n. 6) 88–90, and *Introduzione*, in: P. ANGELI BERNARDINI (ed.), *Lo sport in Grecia*, Roma/Bari 1988, xxvi–xxvii. J. M. LUCAS DE DIOS, *Jenófanes: la inteligencia contra el deporte*, in: J. A. LÓPEZ FÉREZ (ed.), *Estudios actuales sobre textos griegos*, Madrid 1991, 57–73. VISA-ONDARÇUHU, *L'image de l'athlète* (vd. n. 6) 229–239. GARCÍA ROMERO, *El cuerpo del atleta* (vd. n. 6) 49. HARRIS, *Revenge of the Nerds* (vd. n. 6) 158–163.

⁴¹ D. C. YOUNG, *Mens sana in corpore sano: Body and Mind in Ancient Greece*, in: *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22.1, 2005, 38 n. 32.

⁴² Cf. Pl. *Ap.* 36 d–e.

As regards the great honors heaped on athletes, cities considered participation in the Olympic Games patriotic: in proclaiming a victor his birthplace was named and this tied it to the victory. Indeed, in the late sixth and early fifth centuries BC the custom of awarding honors to the winning athletes was widespread, especially in southern Italy and Sicily, and this continued into Roman times. Regarding this phenomenon, J. Fontenrose⁴³ has collected many remarks about victorious contestants in which they are likened to mythological heroes. Then too, this same period saw the greater popularity of epinikian odes and a considerable amount of statuary of athletes, probably due to their greater importance at this time.

This criticism of the excessive social role of athletes owes much to the profound changes occurring in the Greek world, with its emphasis on new ethical and political principles. Indeed, from the fifth century BC on, the affirmation of these principles was common due to new ideas of the philosophers, and changes in education that promoted the superiority of the intellectual over the physical. Plato in the *Republic* considers basic for the guardians of the *polis* the same disciplines that figured in the traditional Greek *paideia*, that is, gymnastics and music, this last in the widest sense (376e, 410a–412a). Both are given equal importance and are presented as complementary, so that they contribute to the balanced nature of the individual. But Plato makes clear that the gymnasium he proposes has nothing to do with the preparation of athletes who are only interested in physical strength and muscular vigor.

At the beginning of the fourth century BC we find the complaints of Isocrates who, taking up certain contemporary ideas from his cultural milieu, expresses surprise and dismay at the different treatment of those successful only in physical endeavors as opposed to those who work for the common good. At the same time he stresses the superiority of hard work and intellect over strength and speed. There are three works in which he addresses this theme in similar terms. In his *Letter to the Rulers of Mytilene* (*Epist.* 8.5.1), he is surprised at the number of cities that award their largest prizes to the winners of athletic contests instead of to those who provide something of value to the State. In this case they fail to realize “that the faculties of strength and speed perish with the body, but the arts and sciences are eternal, and benefit those who cultivate them”. Nevertheless, in his opinion,

⁴³J. FONTENROSE, *The Hero as Athlete*, in: *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 1, 1968, 73–104. Cf. Z. NEWBY, *Athletics in the Ancient World*, Bristol 2006, 59; ANGELI BERNARDINI, *L'eroe, l'atleta, il soldato nell'ideologia agonale greca* (vd. n. 18) 92–93.

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“the worst part is that despite acknowledging that the soul is more precious than the body, they look with greater favor on training in gymnastics than on the study of philosophy” (*Antidosis* 250). He makes the same point at the beginning of the *Panegyric* (1–2), where he laments the preeminence given those who pursue physical success and not of those who strive for the common good. This point of view was popular for a long time, as we see in Galen in the second century AD, especially in his *Exhortation to Study the Arts*, in which he seeks to separate the young from the pointless profession of athletes and their unearned glorification.

In fr. 282 N² of Euripides' *Autolykus* there is an excellent summary of these *topoi* regarding the athlete. The aspects he is most concerned with touch different areas: the social, medical and even the moral. In this he shares the preoccupation of other intellectuals for what they viewed as a lack of balance between the athletes' liberal compensation and their actual usefulness. That is to say, their scant contribution to the common good at a time when the citizens' participation in the governance of the city-state was at a premium. He also conveys the concern of doctors for the athletes' health because their training damaged their bodies. However, since we do not have the context of this fragment, it is not possible to know its real sense. Due to the type of work it belongs to, it is likely to have been composed with a humorous intention (this could be the reason for the somewhat exaggerated pathos of the ragged robes image to describe the end of the athletes' career), although later authors, like Galen, took it seriously.

In fact, that this kind of critics continued for so long suggests they had very little effect. Rather, these opinions seem to have been the discourse of a limited circle of intellectuals, moralists and philosophers, who never managed to convince the masses. Indeed the latter continued to enjoy sporting contests. Even if public ridicule by the writers of comedy was recognized as such, it was only because of the prestige that the athletes already enjoyed. Despite the criticism of the intellectuals, the satire of the poets, and their depiction in sculpture and vase painting, the great sports competitions saw an increased popularity in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, first under Macedonian rule and later under the Roman Emperors. Their loss of popularity came only with the decadence of life in the city-state and the decrease in urban wealth that became evident in the third and fourth centuries AD. This in turn led to a reduction of the material base necessary for the organization and financing of athletic events. The spread of Christianity, with its rejection of the physical and everything related to it, did the rest.