

War minus the shooting: Sport and democracy in classical Athens

1. The sporting passions of the Athenian people

The classical Athenians lavished time and money on sporting contests and facilities, esteemed athletes above other public figures, and handed international victors the metaphorical keys to the city. Classical Athens had an extensive programme of festival-based *agōnes* or contests, celebrating more festivals than any other Greek city. Many of these *agōnes* were established in the democracy's first fifty years. The most extensive program of contests was staged at the Great Panathenaia, which was the large-scale version of the city's annual festival for its patron goddess. This did not mark the birthday of Athena (a misinterpretation going back to the nineteenth century) but celebrated the Gigantomachy and her prominent role in this military victory of the Olympians over the Giants. In the 380s the four-yearly festival had *agōnes* for individuals in 27 distinct athletic, equestrian and musical events. In addition contests for groups were staged for pyrrhic and dithyrambic choruses and for tribal teams of torch racers, sailors and comely young men. These events were more numerous than those of the ancient Olympics. Eight other festivals also supported sporting contests. In particular the annual games for the war dead, the Eleusinia, which was staged in three out of four years, and the quadrennial Herakleia at Marathon each had a reasonably large set of athletic, equestrian and musical events. Five other festivals, which were staged every year, also featured a solitary athletic or equestrian contest.

For these festivals the Athenian *dēmos* ('people') not only spent public money but co-opted the private resources of individual citizens. Upper-class Athenians were encouraged or, if necessary, conscripted to pay for the training of choruses and sporting teams and for other festival-related activities. By the 350s the city's elite undertook around one-hundred festival liturgies each year. However, ancient complaints about the Athenians spending more on their major festivals than the armed forces are wild exaggerations; for warfare clearly used up more money than all other public activities, usually costing hundreds or thousands of talents each year (see tables 1 and 2). But such complaints could be made, because the Athenians did fund their festivals generously: the Great Panathenaia of the early fourth century alone cost 25 talents 1725 drachmas (table 3), while the total figure for public and private

spending on the entire program of city-sponsored festivals was one-hundred talents. This last figure was comparable to the running costs of the democracy and fully justifies Aristophanes' association of wealth with 'the holding of musical and athletic contests'.

By the 430s at the latest the Athenian democracy awarded *sitēsis* (free dining in the Prytaneion) and 'other additional gifts' for life to those citizens who had won an athletic or equestrian event at one of the Panhellenic games. Since the Athenians never gave *sitēsis* without *proedria* before the Roman period, these 'other additional gifts' for successful sportsmen presumably included front-row seating at the city's dramatic, musical and sporting competitions. These two awards were among the highest civic honours in classical Athens and were granted to the descendants of the tyrant-slayers, generals responsible for military victories, and politicians who had performed an extraordinary service for the city. That sporting victors were considered part of such esteemed company underlines the remarkably high regard of athletic success under the democracy.

This public support and positive assessment of athletics was also reflected in the irreverent comedies of the fifth century. While surviving plays do give the impression that anyone and everyone in the public eye was a victim of comic ridicule, an important study of the targets of the old comedians by Alan Sommerstein shows that one group of conspicuous Athenians escaped such personal attacks: the city's athletes.

Admittedly comic poets recognized the wrestling school as 'the prime arena of pederastic courtship' and occasionally satirized the homosexual predilections of athletes and their hearty eating habits. In contrast to their general treatment of other upper-class activities, however, they did not subject athletics to sustained parody or direct criticism and clearly assumed this pursuit to be an overwhelming good thing. For example, in *Clouds* Aristophanes couples the 'old education', of which athletics is the main component, with norms of citizenship and manliness. Better Argument suggests that traditional education flourished at the same time as two of the cardinal virtues of the Greek city, namely justice and moderation, and nurtured 'the men who fought at Marathon'. According to Better Argument, this education ensures a boy will have 'a shining breast, a bright skin, big shoulders, a minute tongue, a big rump and a small dick'. Depictions of athletes on red-figure pots reveal most of these to be the physical attributes of the 'beautiful' youth. The 'new education' of the sophists,

Better Argument continues, results in ‘pale skin’ and other undesirable physical features and has emptied the wrestling schools of students. Better Argument’s complaints exemplify a well-known commonplace of old comedy, which sees a poet praise the values and practices of the ‘good old days’, while accusing contemporaries of abandoning them for the sake of questionable alternatives. *Clouds* also helps explain why poets, who aimed for as many laughs as possible, subjected theatregoers to this kind of comic ridicule. Contrary to the impression Better Argument gives, contemporary Athenian boys still practised athletics as part of their traditional education. Therefore, the audience laughed at this charge of having abandoned the athletically-centred education of their ancestors, because they knew it to be completely untrue and to be another of the anticipated slanders of old comedy.

Comedians and tragedians were of course members of the Athenian upper class. Nonetheless their plays were performed as part of the dramatic *agōnes* of Athenian festivals for Dionysos. Formally the judging of these contests was in the hands of ten magistrates. But victory ultimately depended on the vocal responses of the predominantly lower-class audience. Poets, then, were compelled to tailor their plays to the dramaturgical expectations, morality and politics of non-elite citizens. Under the democracy litigants and politicians faced a comparable performance dynamic: their *agōnes* or debates were decided by the votes of lower-class jurors, assembly-goers or councillors. As a result, wealthy contenders also sought to negotiate the perceptions of poor citizens. Significantly, these debates and plays were the main forums for developing and perpetuating the agreed communal identities and shared culture of classical Athens. As non-elite citizens had the greatest input into the content of civic ideology, we might call it ‘popular culture’ and Athenian plays and oratory ‘popular literature’. Therefore, the overwhelmingly positive treatment of athletics in old comedy, which also occurs in satyric drama and tragedy, reflects an important aspect of Athenian popular culture: poor Athenians held athletics in very high regard, which helps explain why comic criticism of known athletes was not tolerated, Panhellenic victors were rewarded lavishly, and public resources devoted to athletic competitions and facilities.

2. The paradox of sport under the democracy

For the youths of classical Athens technical instruction and training in athletics were given in the regular school classes of the *paidotribēs* ('athletics teacher'). Isocrates explains how athletics teachers instruct their pupils in 'the moves devised for competition' (*ta skhēmata ta pros tēn agōnian eurēmēna* – 15.183). They train them in athletics, accustom them to toil (*ponein*), and compel them to combine each of the lessons they have learnt. According to Isocrates, this teaching and training turns pupils into competent athletic competitors as long as they have sufficient natural talent. The picture drawn here of the *paidotribēs* teaching groups of students competitive athletics and overseeing their training is confirmed by other classical Athenian authors.

Athletics teachers are most frequently represented in classical texts or on red-figure pots giving lessons in wrestling or in the other 'heavy' events of boxing and the *pankration*. This is not unexpected, as many of these teachers owned a *palaistra* or wrestling school and some of them had been victors in such events in their youth. What is surprising is that we also find them teaching and training their charges in the standard 'track and field' events of ancient Greek athletics. In his *Statesmen* Plato, for example, outlines how there are in Athens, as in other cities, 'very many' supervised 'training sessions for groups' where instructions are given and *ponoi* ('painful toils bringing honour') expended not just for wrestling but also 'for the sake of competition in the foot race or some other event'.

Since the democracy did not finance nor administer education, each family made its own decisions about how long their boys would be at school and whether they would take each of the three traditional disciplines: athletics, music and letters. The Athenians understood very well that the number of educational disciplines a boy could pursue and the length of his schooling depended on the resources of his family. This inequality of educational opportunity is succinctly captured by the Platonic Protagoras, who explains that the three subjects of the 'old education' are taken by those '...who are most able; and the most able are the wealthiest. Their sons begin school at the earliest stage, and are freed from it at the latest'. Money determined not only whether a family could pay school fees, but also whether they could give their sons the *skholē* or leisure they needed to pursue disciplines that were taught concurrently. Contemporary writers make clear that most poor citizens were unable to afford enough household slaves. As a result, they required their wives and children

to help run family farming or business concerns. They were aware too how this child labour markedly restricted the educational opportunities of boys.

In *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World* I collect the evidence which shows how, as a result of socio-cultural barriers, poor Athenian families passed over music and athletics and sent their sons only to the lessons of the letter teacher, which they believed to be the most useful for moral and practical instruction. It was only wealthy boys, then, who received instruction in each of the three disciplines of education. As the Athenian people clearly believed training in athletics was indispensable for creditable performance (let alone victory), lower-class boys and youths would have been dissuaded from entering sporting competitions in the first place. Thus in the most fully developed democracy of pre-modern times athletes continued to be drawn predominantly (and possibly even exclusively) from the city's upper class.

There were other activities in classical Athens, such as the drinking party, pederastic homosexuality and political leadership, which were also exclusive preserves of the wealthy. However, these upper-class pursuits differed from athletics in a critical respect: they were regularly criticized in old comedy and the other genres of popular literature. Poor Athenians may have hoped to enjoy, one day, the lifestyle of the rich, but they still had problems with their exclusive pursuits, frequently associating them with stereotypical misdeeds of this social class. Wealthy citizens, for example, were criticized for their excessive enjoyment of two staples of the *symposion* or drinking party: alcohol and prostitutes. As far as the Athenian *dēmos* were concerned, intoxicated symposiasts were prone to commit *hubris* or physical and verbal assault. They also believed expenditure on a drinking party – along with the fancy dinner before it – came at the expense of a wealthy citizen's ability to pay for festival and military liturgies. Pederasty may sometimes have been viewed in a positive light by lower-class Athenians, but was more often than not linked with the stereotypical misdeeds of the wealthy and considered akin to male prostitution. Finally, while expecting political leaders to be wealthy and well-educated, poor Athenians actually suspected them of taking bribes and embezzling state funds and of trying to deceive the *dēmos* through manipulative oratory.

Athletics, then, was not only highly valued and practically supported by the Athenian democracy but also escaped the otherwise persistent criticism of exclusively upper-class activities in its popular culture. Why this was the case

remains an open question. Today I propose a major reason for this paradox is the close relationship between athletics and the new democratic style of warfare Athens developed and waged.

3. Popular ideas and modern theories about sport and war

There have long been competing popular ideas about the impact of sport on war, which have spawned a range of modern theories on this relationship and helped provoke heated debates within the social sciences. Admittedly the use of theory is not yet standard practice in the discipline of Ancient History, occasionally raising the ire of some of our more traditional practitioners. However, reviewing social-science literature is of clear utility for this study of Athenian athletics. Doing so ensures the discipline-based and apparently common-sense assumptions we bring to the topic are widely accepted and scientifically valid. Social-science models can also help us to make better sense of the evidence and to develop explanations of phenomena which go well beyond those of ancient writers.

Although the Duke of Wellington, in fact, never said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, from the later nineteenth century generations of boys at English ‘public’ schools were made to play organized sport for the sake of their moral fortification. In particular, sports such as rugby, cricket and athletics were widely thought to teach boys of the aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie the dispositions they needed to run joint stock companies, administer the British Empire, and fight for the country. Elite contemporaries in Europe and North America saw these school sports as one of the secrets of Britain’s economic success and worldwide empire and sought to establish amateur clubs for playing them in the hope of raising the fortunes of their own countries. These clubs quickly formed national organizations, out of which were fashioned international sporting bodies. Most notable of these was the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which constituted itself in 1894. As the leading proponent of its establishment Baron Pierre de Coubertin believed revived Olympic Games would bring hostile countries together and encourage world peace. This represented a real change of mind on the part of de Coubertin, as, immediately after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, he had first been attracted to English school-boy sports as a way to ready France for a war of revenge against Germany.

Drawing explicitly on his own experience of a ‘public’ school and the Indian Imperial Police, George Orwell came to somewhat different conclusions about war

and sport in a newspaper column published in December 1945. The Soviet Union had recently sent over one of its premier soccer teams to play local British clubs ostensibly for the sake of maintaining cordial relations between the two wartime allies. However, things did not go according to plan: after controversies over team-selection and refereeing, violent confrontations on the playing field, and unsporting behaviour from the spectators, the Soviet team left England prematurely after only two games. For Orwell this debacle of the Moscow Dynamos was due to aggressive nationalism and vindicated the widely held scepticism about the supposed potential of international sport to foster peaceful co-existence. Although he was not the first columnist to express the view that international sport increases ill-will between nations, his column has certainly become its most memorable rehearsal. ‘Even if’, he wrote, ‘one didn’t know from concrete examples (the 1936 Olympic Games, for instance) that international sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred, one could deduce it from the general principles.’ Orwell suggests that the linking of a sporting team and its performance to ‘some larger unit’ inevitably arouses ‘the most combative instincts’. At the international level this encourages spectators – along with entire nations – to believe that ‘running, jumping and kicking a ball are tests of national virtue’ and to countenance winning at any cost. As a result, Orwell concludes, ‘Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is *war minus the shooting*.’

Needless to say the International Olympic Committee has never heeded any such criticism of the ‘Olympic ideology’ about international sport and peace. Its successive presidents have held to de Coubertin’s view that the promoting of world peace and the reconciling of warring nations are the chief purpose of the games. Likewise, the organizing committee of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games claimed: ‘In the ancient Olympic Games, a truce was declared so that what is good and ennobling in humankind would prevail. The Games today are the greatest celebration of humanity, an event of joy and optimism to which the whole world is invited to compete peacefully.’ Thus ‘...what matters most is to share the common vision of promoting peace and friendship among all the people of the world, through the noble competition in sport.’

Although continuing to present the games as a hallowed means of promoting world peace, the Olympic movement has not explained how ‘noble competition in

sport' might achieve this pacifying end. By contrast, coherent ideas about the impact of sport on individual aggression and a nation's propensity to wage war have long had currency in the popular cultures of the western world. For example, US coaches of basketball and American football believe that playing sport is a safe way to reduce aggression, reinforces socially-constructive values, and hence reduces the likelihood of war, while sports journalists cherish the idea that the *watching* of sport can dissipate aggression. Like sports writers, players of aggressive sports also believe more strongly than others that spectators of such games enjoy a 'symbolic catharsis' of their aggression. Nor are such ideas confined to sports insiders. A recent social-psychology study of Canadians, for example, suggests that a majority of the general public think playing or watching aggressive sport reduces an individual's aggressiveness. Moreover, Hollywood movies, self-help books and other media of US popular culture consistently endorse the closely-related popular idea that 'blowing off steam' by means of playing an aggressive sport or, for example, punching a pillow is a safe way to reduce one's anger.

Within the social sciences this popular view of sport as a 'safety valve' for aggression has been integrated into different theories of catharsis, which can be traced back to Freud and Aristotle. One of the most influential (and certainly the only one to be the subject of an airport best seller) is the so-called drive-discharge model of catharsis, which was promulgated by Konrad Lorenz from the early 1960s. As a pioneer of ethology Lorenz argued that aggression is an innate drive, which constantly accumulates in animals or humans as aggressive tension. For Lorenz this accumulation is similar to the operation of a steam boiler: aggressive tension builds up to a point where it must be released either as a spontaneous explosion or in a series of controlled discharges. Thus aggression can be safely vented through socially-acceptable activities, such as sport. Notwithstanding the teaching of self-control and fair play, Lorenz explains, 'the main function of sport today lies in the cathartic discharge of the aggressive urge'. In general, his model predicts an inverse relationship of sport with aggression and warfare.

This drive-discharge model of catharsis may still be drawn on favourably by historians of ancient Greek sport, but it is now thoroughly discredited within the social sciences. As Brian Ferguson explains, at the conceptual level it has come 'under intense criticism from psychologists and physiologists for oversimplifying the complex phenomenon of aggression, from physical anthropologists and biologists for

fallaciously extrapolating from animals to humans, and from cultural anthropologists for ignoring observed cultural variation in responses to threat and stress and confusing the individual and social levels'. The model has also been repeatedly challenged on empirical grounds. In particular, for the last thirty-five years social psychologists have shown what Lorenz's model predicts about competitive sport and aggression – along with comparable popular ideas – are entirely unfounded: far from an inverse relationship, sport manifestly increases aggressiveness. For example, an empirical study of students at Indiana University in the early 1970s found that the everyday level of unprovoked aggression among those playing contact sports was much higher than those who played no sport whatsoever. Sport seems to have a similar impact on spectators. Interviews at the 1969 Army–Navy gridiron game in Philadelphia showed that male spectators were much more aggressive after the event, regardless of whether their preferred team won or lost. A similar study achieved the same results with Canadian spectators of ice-hockey and professional wrestling: watching either event not only significantly raised the general aggressiveness of males and females but diminished their ability to interact cooperatively with others. These results, the study concludes, 'call into question an assumption that sports events are necessarily rich social occasions where goodwill and warm interpersonal relations are fostered'.

Successive social psychologists have also cast doubt on the related popular idea that 'blowing off steam' can safely reduce anger. One to have done so recently is Brad Bushman, whose study tests how three different 'safe' activities moderate the anger and aggression undergraduates feel, after receiving harsh and demonstrably unfair comments on a piece of written work. In response to this unjust provocation, his first group of students pounded a punching bag, while ruminating about the marker who had enraged them; the second also punched the bag but thought instead of getting physically fit; and the third simply sat quietly. Bushman's results again confound popular thinking. The angriest and most aggressive group were the first, while the second were less angry but no less aggressive. Those with the lowest levels of anger and aggression were the ones who had not 'blown off steam'. For social psychologists such results lend strong support to alternate models of human aggression, which postulate that aggressive stimuli reinforce comparable actions and thoughts, such as the social-learning theory or the cognitive-neoassociation theory. This last theory – the culmination of three decades of research by Leonard Berkowitz

– proposes that aggression-related experiences form an associative network in a person's memory, with similar connections existing between potential emotional and behavioural responses to aggression. Thus an aggression-related thought activates memories of earlier aversive events and primes aggressive feelings and potential responses, thus increasing the likelihood of actual violent behaviour.

Another social-science discipline to challenge the drive-discharge theory of catharsis is anthropology. Its practitioners have habitually assumed that human aggression is not an innate quality but something that is learnt or, at least, entirely shaped by socio-cultural factors. Some have also assumed that common values inform disparate social activities and that large patterns of a culture tend to support each other. Claude Lévi-Strauss for one assumes that different structures of signification in a culture tend to 'overlap, intersect and reinforce one another'. Interestingly, evidentiary support for such assumptions has long come from the cultural history of ancient Greece by Jean-Pierre Vernant, who coopted some of the structuralist methods of Lévi-Strauss and Dumézil. Vernant's research into the so-called historical psychology of the Greeks, while sensitive to cultural contradiction and dissonance, has time and again shown how mythology's structures of meaning are implicit in political, religious and social practices and how symmetries and reciprocal interactions exist between large patterns of thought. Finally Günther Lüschen has inferred from anthropological case studies and sociological research on modern societies that 'sport is indeed an expression of that socio-cultural system in which it occurs'. For Lüschen sport not only bears out a society's values and norms but also 'socializes' towards them and helps articulate and legitimize its social structures.

In a widely acclaimed study Richard Sipes draws these assumptions and findings together in a new theory concerning sport and war, which he calls the 'cultural pattern model'. His model views the 'intensity and configuration' of aggression as 'predominantly cultural characteristics'. It also assumes '...a strain toward consistency in each culture, with similar values and behaviour patterns, such as aggressiveness, tending to manifest in more than one area of culture.' As a result, behaviours and cultural patterns 'relative to war and warlike sports tend to overlap and *support each other's presence*'. His model predicts a direct relationship between combative sports and war: such sports are more likely to occur in warlike societies than peaceful ones. In order to test the validity of his cultural pattern model as

opposed to that of the drive-discharge theory of catharsis, Sipes conducts a quantitative analysis of twenty pre-modern societies, including the Aztecs, Kung Bushmen and Copper Eskimos. His results are decisive: of the ten 'warlike' societies nine have 'combative sports', whereas eight of the ten 'non-warlike' societies lack such sports. Therefore, his cross-cultural analysis confirms that 'war and combative type sports' are not 'alternative channels for the discharge of accumulable aggressive tensions'. Rather, in any one society they 'appear to be components of a broader cultural pattern'.

4. The cultural overlap between sport and war

Classical Athenians described and thought of athletics and war with a common set of words and concepts. Although no ancient writer comments explicitly on this cultural overlap or provides concepts for its analysis, the cultural-pattern model of sport and war highlights its significance for the standing of sport in classical Athens. Indeed this proven explanation provides a very plausible hypothesis for explaining the anomaly of Athenian athletics. What is more, this relationship between social science and ancient history need not be a one-way street; for if this hypothesis is also proven for classical Athens, the wealth of evidence which is available for this city means we can do what has not been attempted for any other historical case study: we can detail the causal mechanisms which brought about this mutually supporting relationship between sport and war.

Athens of the fifth century intensified and transformed the waging of war, attacked other democracies, and killed tens of thousands of fellow Greeks. By the time its democracy was fully consolidated, in the 450s, war had come to dominate the politics and popular culture of the city and the lives of its citizens. War consumed more money than all other public activities, was waged more frequently than ever before, and was the main topic of debate in the democratic council and assembly. The city's military power and frequent victories were constantly glorified and legitimized in the city's public art and architecture, public discourse and civic ceremony. War, then, was a prominent and highly esteemed subject of Athenian popular culture. As such, its ideological affinity with sport would have impacted positively on the general standing of athletics and athletes.

The most fundamental cultural overlap between sport and war was that battle and an athletic or equestrian competition were considered an *agōn* or a contest

decided by mutually agreed rules. Today democracies sometimes wage war contrary to international law and break the Geneva Convention in the course of their occupation of captured territory and open-ended incarceration of ‘militants’ or ‘unlawful combatants’. In such circumstances it is easy to forget that war in the western world was once regulated by widely discussed conventions and customs, limited in its scale and impact on civilian populations, and viewed as a legitimate way to settle outstanding disputes between nation-states. The regular hoplite battle of archaic and classical Greece was no exception, being as it was – to quote the great Jean-Pierre Vernant – ‘a test as rule-bound as a tournament’.

Thus a Greek city informed another of its intention to attack by sending a herald. By agreement their phalanxes met in an agricultural plain – the topography best suited for Greek land warfare. After hours of hand-to-hand fighting, the decisive moment was the *tropē* (‘turning’), when the hoplites of one side broke up and ran for their lives. The victors pursued them only for a short distance, as they had much left to do on the field of battle. There they collected the bodies of their dead comrades, stripped the bodies of the enemy, and used some of the weapons and armour so acquired to set up a *tropaion* or trophy on the exact spot where the turning had occurred. When the defeated had time to re-group, they sent a herald to those controlling the battlefield for a truce to collect their dead. Custom dictated that the victors could not honourably refuse this request. But asking for such a truce was recognized as the decisive proof of a concession of defeat.

For classical Athenians the *agōnes* of athletics and war also tested the moral fibre and physical capacities of individual sportsmen and soldiers. Both activities were thought to involve *ponoi* (‘painful toils bringing honour’) and *kindunoi* or personal dangers. This popular view of athletics as dangerous was well-justified: athletic competitors, especially in the ‘heavy’ events, were regularly injured and maimed or occasionally killed. The classical Athenians also believed that victory was due to the *aretē* (‘manly excellence’) of athletes and soldiers alike and the support of city-protecting gods and demigods. By contrast, the defeat of a sportsman and a soldier or his refusal to compete in either contest was put down to his cowardice and was a source of intense personal shame.

5. The democratization of war

Athens of the fifth century not only revolutionized the waging of war but significantly broadened military participation. With the emergence of democracy war quickly became the preserve of every strata of the citizen-body, attracting thousands upon thousands of lower-class soldiers. Their new experiences of battle were represented in terms of the traditional moral explanation of victory on the battle- and sports field. Athenian democracy may not have changed the upper-class monopoly of sporting participation but this practical and ideological opening up of war profoundly altered the way lower-class Athenians perceived of athletes and athletics. Poor citizens now had personal experience of an activity which was thought to be very similar to elite sport. As such, they could identify more easily with the goals, exertions and achievements of wealthy sportsmen. Certainly the cultural overlap of sport and war in its own right had a positive impact on the standing of sport and sportsmen. But it was this new non-elite affinity with athletics, made possible by the democratization of war, which explains more than any other factor the anomalously high standing of athletics in classical Athens.

Military affairs did not dominate the public life of Athens in the sixth century, before democracy, as it did in the next century. Wars were waged very infrequently and initiated privately by clan leaders. The hoplites of each campaign numbered in the hundreds rather than thousands and came predominantly from the city's upper class. How they represented their soldiering can be seen on archaic black- and red-figure pottery. The military scenes of this ware have been superbly analyzed by François Lissarrague. They bear out that upper-class Athenians drew on the values and ideas of epic poetry to represent and glorify their own martial deeds. A good example of this epic influence concerns the scenes of a hoplite killed in action or his corpse being carried back to the city. Homeric heroes explicate how they will gain everlasting renown and memory of their youthfulness if they die bravely in battle. By this 'beautiful death' a hero gains a categorical confirmation of his *aretē*, which is reflected in the beauty of his corpse. Painters sometimes represent this *aretē* of the hoplite killed in action by painting in a lion – one of the animals Homer uses as a symbol of a hero's martial excellence. They also evoke his attaining of the 'beautiful death' of the heroes by giving him alone of the painted figures long hair and – along with his bearer – a Boiotian shield. Homer repeatedly draws attention to the long hair

of his warrior heroes, with the Boiotian shield given to a named hero in Attic imagery.

Fifth-century Athens opened soldiering – like politics – to every strata of the citizen-body. This marked expansion of military participation began with the reforms Kleisthenes introduced after 508/7. These not only made the *dēmos* the final arbiters of public policy but formally unified Athens and its countryside for the first time. Each free male of Attike was now registered as a citizen of Athens in his local deme and clusters of these villages and suburbs were linked together in ten tribes. These new registers were used to conscript hoplites for each tribal corps for most of the classical period. This was the city's first-ever mechanism for mass mobilization, helping it to raise thousands of hoplites in future campaigns. Soldiering was made possible for the majority of citizens who were too poor to be hoplites by the decision of the Athenian *dēmos*, in 483/2, to build a large navy and their ongoing commitment to its maintenance. A changing proportion of sailors in the fleet may have been resident aliens and slaves. But the largest portion (numbering thousands per expedition) was clearly Athenian.

The common performance dynamic of the democracy gave non-elite Athenians real power to shape civic ideology according to their perspectives and self-interests. As a consequence, the traditional moral explanation of victory, which had once been the preserve of epic heroes and the city's elite, was now applied to their own military activities. This ideological democratization of war can be observed best in the collective funeral for the war dead, held each year when Athenians were killed in action. The ashes of the dead were placed in ten cypress caskets (one for each tribe) and displayed for three days in the city's marketplace. On the day of the funeral they were carried to the public cemetery where they were placed in 'a beautiful and grandiose tomb'. Such tombs were adorned with statues of lions and friezes of hoplites killing opponents that signified the *aretē* of those being buried. They also had epigrams explaining that the dead had put their *aretē* beyond doubt, leaving behind an eternal memory of gallantry. Finally each tomb displayed a complete list of the year's casualties, including Athenian sailors, which was organized by tribes. The funeral oration traditionally delivered after the burial always outlined how the war dead had met 'the most beautiful' death: by falling in battle for the city they had gained ageless praise and renown and a deathless remembrance not only of their *aretē* but also of their youthfulness.

This democratization of war had a profound impact on the standing of athletics. Lower-class Athenians came to believe that upper-class athletes exhibited the same moral qualities and experienced the same ordeals as they did when fighting battles. This non-elite affinity with the values of sport ruled out public criticism of athletes and underwrote the exceptionally high standing of athletics under the democracy. In conclusion, the democratic style of warfare in classical Athens legitimized and supported elite sport.

Dr David Pritchard
The University of Queensland
21 August 2008