

*Sport, Victory Commemoration and Elite Identities in Archaic Athens*

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This paper is part of a wider project that examines aspects of the interaction between sport and the construction and negotiation of identities in the ancient Greek world. For the purposes of my present talk, I focus on the evidence and the process whereby elite status identities were articulated in sixth-century Athens. I argue that archaic Athenian elites constructed status identities through sport primarily through the employment of 3 interrelated strategies: i) systematic training, competition and victories in panhellenic games; ii) the chronic construction of familial narratives of athletic distinction and iii) the consolidation of patterns of kin sport victory memorialization in select sites, what I call geographies of commemoration.

The record of Athenian victors at the major games is well known and therefore I do not want to test your patience by presenting it here in detail. Suffice it to point out some key points and patterns that illustrate my case. The victory charts from the seventh and sixth centuries are dominated by social elites. Seventh-century Athenian victors include the infamous Cylon, Olympic victor of around 640 BCE. Cylon was certainly the most notorious, however the most accomplished Athenian athlete of the seventh century was the runner Pantacles. His first *stadion* victory is attributed to 696 BCE and he went on to win the *stadion* and probably the *diaulos* in 692 BCE.<sup>1</sup> His multiple victories in successive Olympiads suggest a level of specialization and athletic skill that can be achieved only through long-term and methodical training – in other words with Pantacles we see at a very early period some fundamentals of Greek sport practices already in place. Also during the seventh century and contemporary to Cylon a certain Phrynon won at the Olympics, probably of 636 BCE. This Phrynon later led an Athenian expedition

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<sup>1</sup> Moretti 1957, nos. 25-27; Kyle 1987 A53, p. 209. Eus., *Olympic Victors List*, 80-81 (text in Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006); *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 2326.

against the tyrant of Mytilene Pittakos in Sigeion and he was subsequently honored as an oikistes of Sigeion.<sup>2</sup>

So, already in the seventh century then when we look at the record of Athenian Olympic victors we seem to be moving in exalted social circles. When we compare the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century Athenian victory record perhaps the most interesting and revealing change is the shift of emphasis, as can be presumed from the success rate at major games, from athletic events during the seventh century to equestrian competition and especially the tethrippon, during the sixth. And it is interesting to observe that the trend evens out in the fifth century. At the same time, there is a marked increase in the representation of equestrian racing competition in Athenian painted pottery, especially starting at the second quarter of the sixth century. Since Athenian black and red-figure vases were accessible to a wider segment of the population beyond the elite, we can argue that the growing number of equestrian competition images in Athenian pottery was generated or at least partly motivated by the success of Athenian elites in chariot-racing contests during the same period. In other words, the individuals and families that were the protagonists in raising the profile of Athenian horse-racing with their victories at the highest level of competition were also successful in bringing equestrian sport at the center of the social gaze and in establishing it as a major mode of artistic representation of elite status.

But for our purposes the main questions are why did Athenian elites made the choice to invest heavily in equestrian sport during the sixth century and what meanings did the practice of hippotrofia and equestrian victory generate? Before I try to answer this question let me give a very brief outline of the major accomplishments in sport, with particular emphasis on equestrian competition, by Athenians during the sixth century. I believe that it makes more sense, for reasons that I will explain later in my talk, to look at this evidence not only in terms of individual victors, but perhaps most importantly, as the cumulative athletic record of families.

The Alcmeonids seem to have possessed the best record of victories during the sixth and early fifth century, although there are severe gaps in our understanding of it. By 486 BCE the family could boast a total of eight panhellenic victories: an Olympic crown, two victories at

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<sup>2</sup> Leadership of military contingent in Sigeion: Diog. Laert. 1.74; Strabo 13.1.38; Plut. *malign. Herod.* 15; possibly the founder of Sigeion and Elaious, Develin 1989, 32-33 with references to scholarship and testimonia. See also Höhle 1972, 47-8.

the Pythia and five at the Isthmia. The family's only Olympic victory at that point was won by Alcmeon I at the tethrippon of 592. Herodotus directly links this victory with the memorable but ultimately derogatory for the Alcmeonids story of Alcmeon visiting Lydia and stuffing himself with Croesus' gold (6.125). "Thus the family", Herodotus concludes, "grew exceedingly rich. Alcmeon came to keep horses for the *tethrippon* (τεθριπποτροφήσας) and won with them at Olympia".

The Philaids had a better Olympic record than the Alceonids, having won the tethrippon four times during the sixth century, but cumulatively they could claim less victories in the major games. The first Philaid tethrippon Olympic victory was achieved by Miltiades III in c. 560 BCE and followed by three victories by Miltiades' half-brother Cimon I in 536, 532 and 528 BCE.<sup>3</sup> According to Herodotus in 532 Cimon, while in exile at the time, struck a deal with Peisistratus according to which Cimon would be allowed to return to Athens in exchange for Peisistratus getting credit for Cimon's eventual victory in the upcoming Olympics that year. Herodotus also maintained the Miltiades, the first Olympic victor in the family, hailed from a household that maintained horses suitable for the *tethrippon* (οϊκίης τεθριπποτρόφου 6.35.1), i.e. the exact same term reserved for the Alcmeonids. Hence at least at the time of Herodotus, if not earlier, breeding horses for the tethrippon was considered the ultimate signifier of wealth.

The equestrian achievements and family narratives of the Calliads exhibit several interesting parallels with modes of sport competition and popular traditions related to the Alcmeonids and Philaids. A favorable for the family but not necessarily unreliable interpolation in Herodotus gives pride of place in the equestrian achievements of Callias, son of Phaenippus (Callias I): an equestrian victory at the Pythian games of 566, followed by a victory in the horserace (*kelēs*) and a runner-up placement in the *tethrippon* of the Olympics of 564.<sup>4</sup> Callias, who was famed throughout Greece for the lavishness of his spending, named his son Hipponicos and later generations continued the family's tradition in chariot-racing. A scholiast attributes to Callias II three Olympic crowns in chariot-racing which, if historical, should be dated in the late sixth or early fifth century BCE, i.e. when Callias II was a young man. Later in life Callias II became notable for his political and diplomatic activities and his deep wealth – he was

<sup>3</sup> See Kyle 1987 A 46, p.208 (Miltiades) and Kyle 1987 A 34, p. 204 (Cimon I). For Cimon's Olympic *tethrippon* victories see Papakonstantinou 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Hdt. 6.122.1. For the textual tradition and the historical reliability of the passage see Scott 2005, 409.

nicknamed *lakkoploutos*. We see here once again the topos of the wealth acquired in suspicious circumstances that we have encountered in connection with Alcmeon. Overall Callias II had the assets, family background and the social status usually associated with high-level *hippotrophia*, and it is therefore very likely that he engaged in it. This possibility is indirectly corroborated by an epinician epigram dedicated in Delphi by Callias III, the grandson of Callias II, which refers to ancestral Olympic victories.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the Peisistratids. There are no known victories won by a member of the family, except of course the 532 tethrippon Olympic victory won by Cimon's horses and credited to Peisistratus. In fact, there is not even any direct evidence confirming that the Athenian tyrant or other members of his family engaged in horse-breeding and racing. Peisistratus, as other wealthy men of his time, gave his sons names containing the hippos root, a fact that is indicative of a person who was genuinely interested or at least trying to appear as a horse enthusiast. In the context of sixth-century Athenian political power struggles where most of the protagonists flaunted their equestrian achievements, it is highly unlikely that the Peisistratids would have watched pathetically from the sidelines. But as I said the evidence is silent on this point, so we can leave it at that.

So now I want to return to the questions I posed earlier: why horse-racing and what did it all mean? Regarding the first question, I think the answer is, and now I am anticipating some of my conclusions, that by the middle of the sixth century at the latest sport was a prime stage for the articulation of elite status identity and group coherence as well as a prime stage for negotiating social distinction. Notice that I said sport and not just equestrian sport. That is because there is some evidence that at least in the case of the Alcmeonids there was also an attempt to diversify by encouraging and investing on the athletic training of members of the family. Hence we know of at least two Alcmeonids, Alcmeonides the I and another individual, possibly a brother called Cratios, who won athletic events at the Panathenaea c.550-540 BCE. Success in sporting events that require developed physical skills and technique came as a result of a long process of training and specialization that, for the most accomplished of athletes, must have started in puberty if not earlier. Hence it is safe to assume that the Alcmeonids trained their youth in sport from an early age. Besides Athens, this long-term strategy was pursued by certain

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<sup>5</sup> Bousquet 1992, 585-596.

aristocratic families in other Greek cities as well, as elites vied for social visibility and prestige through sport.<sup>6</sup> Yet sport, and especially athletic events, is unpredictable in its eventual payoffs – after all, even if a family engaged the best trainers, how could they ensure that their youths had what it takes to become a sport champion?

Partly to offset this uncertainty, most Athenian elites eager to obtain prestigious victories in interstate contests chose to direct their efforts and outlay primarily towards equestrian sport.<sup>7</sup> Starting in the early sixth century in Athens traditional avenues of conspicuous, competitive display were no longer available. As Athenian Geometric vase representations and other evidence strongly suggest, during the seventh century funerals constituted a traditional domain of elite display and self-fashioning. Athenian aristocrats exploited the public aspects of funerals to stage elaborate performances, complete with processions, mourners and spectacular grave-markers. It is noteworthy that the inception of the streak of sixth-century panhellenic equestrian victories by elite Athenians coincides chronologically with the enactment of legislative restrictions on funerary practices, attributed by late traditions to Solon. However, sumptuary legislation alone cannot eliminate social differentiation. There is strong evidence to suggest that social elites actively negotiated with and adapted to the new funerary landscape created by Solon's legislation. Hence during the sixth century the emphasis in funerary monumental display shifted from spectacular funerals to costly tombs and gravestones.

Another possibility, not necessarily incompatible with the conditions created after the Solonian abolition of conspicuous funerals, is that the emphasis of sixth-century Athenian elites on equestrian sport was a fad that began by “new money” that flowed into the city in the early sixth century. This is echoed in the story of the Alcmeonid newly-found wealth discussed above. Since in ancient Greece status was publicly performed, it is likely that the Alcmeonids and perhaps other Athenian families that found themselves in a similar situation, turned to horse-breeding and racing at games conducted in interstate festivals as a way to assert their arrival among the wealthiest echelons of Athenian society.

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<sup>6</sup> For the systematic training of youths in athletic events and the creation of family sports traditions see Papakonstantinou 2012.

<sup>7</sup> See also the comments by Golden 2008, 9-10.

Horse-breeding and racing was eminently suitable as a status marker for an additional reason: it allowed its practitioners to insert themselves into the process, attested since the Homeric epics, of claiming their spot in the social ladder on the basis of skill and achievement. For sixth-century Greek elites the breeding of horses (*hippotrofia*) was a conspicuous signifier of wealth and inherited social status. If one's *hippotrofia* resulted in equestrian victories in one of the major games, then the practice also contributed to the owner's achieved status. Selecting foals, their trainers and ultimately putting together a successful horse team required skills that few people could claim.

To wrap up this first part of the paper I am arguing that since the early sixth century Athenian wealthy families engaged systematically in horse-breeding and racing with a level of commitment and outlay sufficient for generating victories in the Olympics and other major festivals because a) by the early sixth century at the latest success sport in had become a prominent signifier of wealth and constituent of elite status identity b) other avenues of publicly negotiated status (e.g. ostentatious funerals) were no longer accessible which fitted well with c) i.e. the fact that neouveux riches families sought novel ways to embed themselves in traditional discourses of inherited and achieved status.

I am turning now to the second part of my paper, i.e. the processes and long-term strategies whereby the articulation of elite identities through sport was instantiated in sixth-century Athens. I have already elaborated on the first of these strategies, namely the systematic athletic training and breeding of horses with the objective of competing and winning at the top games.

Let's now look at the second strategy employed for the consolidation of elite identities, namely the long-drawn process of creating intergenerational familial master narratives of athletic distinction. These traditions are better attested from the classical period and even though it is not clear when the various details concerning sport were added to the stories, sixth-century inscriptional evidence suggests that the process of constructing these athletic victory narratives was well underway at least since the late archaic period. I am referring here to the traditions that were endorsed, internalized and disseminated by members of powerful clans and their supporters – although, as we have already seen, our sources often echo other oral traditions, not attributed to the orthodox familial narrative, that are clearly hostile to particular families. However, in

eulogistic traditions adopted by the families success in sport looms large, as do prominent episodes of civic service, e.g. in the case of Athens stories of resistance to the Peisistratid tyranny.<sup>8</sup> Concerning sport, elite families skillfully propagated family bonds and the roster of victors that each family could boast of. This victory record was made accessible through epinician poetry and monuments – Athenian examples include Pindar’s Pythian 7 which, as I have already pointed out, provides a list of all Alcmeonid panhellenic victories up to the point it was composed. Another example is the honorary monument erected by Callias III in Delphi, which contains an explicit reference to the past equestrian Olympic victories of his family, stretching all the way back to the mid sixth-century.<sup>9</sup> Echoes of this practice can be found in literature as well – e.g. the reference in Plato’s *Lysis* to tethrippon victories by the family of Democrates and *Lysis* at the Pythia, Isthmia and Nemea games (Plato, *Lysis* 205C).

Family traditions tend to emphasize the role of the individual and family while downplaying the contribution of the wider community in achieving a sporting victory; the same traditions do, however, highlight the benefits (e.g. prestige, image of power) that accrue to the city as a result of the victory by a particular family member. It is in fact only during the early fifth century that we find for the first time in epinician texts for Athenian athletes direct references to the value and the importance of panhellenic victories for the city. But even when a more civic-minded language is adopted, the family narrative remains dominant: witness again the Pindaric epinician for the Alcmeonid Megacles (*Pyth.* 7) in which, after a passing reference to the glory of Athens, it underscores Alcmeonid grandeur and power.

Finally, narratives of intergenerational athletic success were consolidated by weaving in claims of unique or spectacular achievements. Claims to primacy, the so-called “firsts”, is a familiar trope in sport epinician discourses until late antiquity and was one way of denoting noteworthy athletic success. Such achievements were in fact documented since the classical period for individuals active in the sixth century, and it is very likely that the practice is sixth-century in origin. For instance, during the fourth century it was publicly and proudly proclaimed by individuals positively disposed towards the Alcmeonid family traditions that Alcmeon was the first Athenian to win a *tethrippon* victory in the Olympics. Another example of this practice

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<sup>8</sup> During the classical period, and especially during the fourth century, a familial record of civic service in the interest of the people also figured prominently in elite family traditions. See e.g. for the Alcmeonids Isoc. 16.26-28.

<sup>9</sup> Bousquet 1992, 585-596.

is the reference, undoubtedly deriving from Philaid family traditions, to the fact that the three *tethrippon* victories won by the horses of Cimon I had tied the record of the horses of the Spartan Evagoras.<sup>10</sup>

I turn now to the third interrelated strategy whereby elites consolidated family discourses of athletic distinction and negotiated status identities through sport in sixth-century Athens, namely the elaboration of geographies of epinician commemoration.

Competitive sport was in ancient Greece a quintessentially social act. Victory no doubt bestowed feelings of achievement and satisfaction to victors. Yet for some the immediate but fleeting glory of victory was not enough. As a result, since the archaic period lasting epinician memorials became synonymous with the achievements of the most celebrated athletes. Due to the popularity of sport and the recurring opportunities for competition, athletically successful Greek elites were presented with multiple prospects and contexts for commissioning self-promoting epinician poetry and monuments. Hence, for athletes and families that wished to exploit the options for victory commemoration to its fullest extent, epinician memorials contributed to a continuous re-performance and re-negotiation of the social and ideological import of sport victory.

Athletic memorials were therefore a dynamic component of elite narratives of social recognition. Such memorials were usually consecrated in sanctuaries. However, in archaic Athens elite sport memorials also overlapped frequently in content and format with funerary modes of commemoration – e.g. funerary monuments that depicted the deceased as athletes or otherwise referred to athletic achievements. In keeping with the wider Greek trend, elite Athenian families were very active in commissioning and erecting memorials for sport victories. The geographical distribution, the format and content of victory memorials or other dedications with athletic overtones is symptomatic of elite perceptions of the social value of sport as well as of the deployment of sport in elite power struggles. In the ensuing section, I will trace Athenian strategies of commemorating engagement and success in sport in five different sites, namely the Athenian Acropolis, the Kerameikos, the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios and finally the panhellenic sanctuaries of Zeus in Olympia and Apollo at Delphi.

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<sup>10</sup> Alcmeon: Isocr. 16.25. Cimon the Elder: Hdt. 6.103.4.



I begin with the sanctuaries outside Attica. The earliest known memorial by an Athenian victor dedicated in a location beyond the territory of Athens concerns Alcmeonides I and it was discovered at the site of the Apollo Ptoios sanctuary in Boeotia. The epinician epigram was inscribed on the capital of a doric column which supported a votive object, possibly a statue. Thus the memorial must have been several meters high, visually impressive and dominant among most other contemporary dedications at the Ptoion. The epigram highlights the name and family pedigree of the dedicant, the equestrian event (*tethrippon*), the games the victory was achieved (Panathenaia), the swiftness (i.e. superior quality) of the horses and finally the contribution of the charioteer, in all likelihood a Boeotian aristocrat and personal friend of Alcmeonides.<sup>11</sup> The memorial dates to the mid-sixth century and the date has been connected by various scholars with the alleged exile of the Almeonides after the battle of Palene in 546 but I believe that there might have been other, more compelling reasons for the choice of locale. Alcmeonides possibly considered the Ptoion a suitable stage for his Panathenaic epinician memorial, because his charioteer was in all probability a Boeotian aristocrat with whom Alcmeonides was engaged in a *xenia* relationship. Moreover, during the same time the Ptoion received an extraordinary number of dedications, especially kouroi. This might have been partly due to the fact that at the time the sanctuary of Delphi was out of commission as a result of a fire of 548 that had destroyed the temple of Apollo. It is also worth noting that a few decades after the dedication of the monument of Alcmeonides the Peisistratid Hipparchos dedicated a monument at the Ptoion— this is the inscribed base of a column. We do not know the reason for this dedication and it doesn't have to be related to sports. However, it seems clear that during the second half of the sixth century the Ptoion attracted a significant number of elite votives from different parts of the Greek world, including votives dedicated by members of the powerful Athenian families.

Turning to Olympia and Delphi, the scarcity of archaic epinician monuments dedicated by Athenians in the flagship sanctuaries of the archaic Greek world is remarkable. This does not mean, however, that Athenians altogether desisted from engaging with the dedicatory landscape of both sites. For instance, in a passage (6.10.8) discussing epinician monuments of equestrian victors Pausanias refers to Miltiades III, Olympic *tethrippon* champion in c. 560 BCE, and

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<sup>11</sup> Moretti 1953 no. 5 and Ebert 1972 no. 3. For the charioteer see Nicholson 2005, 54-7. It should be noted that it is likely that an Alcmeonid commissioned and dedicated a *kouros* at the Ptoion at around the same time as the column recording the equestrian victory of Alcmeonides I. See Richter 1970, 122-123, no. 145 and Anderson 2000, 400, n.53.

pledges to discuss his votives in another section of his work.<sup>12</sup> But the only other reference by Pausanias to a dedication by Miltiades III concerns an ivory horn of plenty, a memorial of a military victory, that Pausanias saw in the treasury of the Sicyonians.<sup>13</sup>

The only known epinician statue in Olympia commemorating the victory of an Athenian athlete was dedicated by the pankratiast Callias, Olympic victor in 472 BCE. Pausanias (6.6.1) mentions the statue and points out that it was made by the Athenian Micon. The statue base has been discovered (*IvO* 146) and bears a straightforward inscription that contains the victor's name, patronymic and city of origin followed by his event and the name and city of origin of the sculptor. Equally noteworthy is the almost complete absence of Athenian archaic and early classical epinician memorials in Delphi, especially in light of the evidence pointing to continuous and substantial involvement, influence and investment there by the Alcmeonids.<sup>14</sup> As I have already pointed out by 486 BCE (Pind. *P.* 7) the family had won two Pythian victories but there is no evidence that any of them were commemorated with a special epinician monument in Delphi.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that epinician statuary became popular in Olympia in the last quarter of the sixth century BCE might partially explain the lack of Athenian victory monuments at the site before this date. Yet it fails to account for the scarcity of suitable memorials dedicated by Athenian elites in Olympia and other panhellenic sanctuaries during the late archaic and early classical periods, i.e. at a time when their social peers from other Greek communities zealously engaged in victory statumania on these same sites. Overall, the evidence suggests that even though temporary fashions and external conditions might have influenced the choice of locale for the dedication of epinician monuments by Athenian elites, additional factors must account for Athenian epinician dedicatory patterns.

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<sup>12</sup> For problems surrounding this passage see Graham 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Paus. 6.19.6. Graham 1993 believes that it is possible that the horn might have been dedicated by Miltiades the Younger. Scott 2010, 168 argues that in Pausanias' time the treasury of the Sicyonians had become a convenient storage room for diverse dedications.

<sup>14</sup> The influential position of the Alcmeonids in Delphi possibly commenced with Alcmeon's involvement in the First Sacred war (Plut. *Sol.* 11.2) and continued throughout the sixth century, culminating in their reconstruction of the temple of Apollo in the 540s and the instrumental role of the oracle in Alcmeonid attempts to topple Hippias (*Ath.Pol.* 19.4)

<sup>15</sup> An inscribed base of the last quarter of the sixth century BCE (*SEG* 27.135), once thought to be the epinician monument of Alcibiades I from Athens (Daux 1922; Kyle 1987, 195, A3) is in all likelihood a thanksgiving monument dedicated by a Spartan. See Daux 1977, 51-57.

A closer look at athletic commemoration within Attica might help account for the discrepancy in dedicatory behavior between Athenian and other Greek elites during the sixth-century. When we look at Attica we find the opposite of what we observe for the major panhellenic sanctuaries, i.e. a long-standing interest and investment by Athenian elites in the monumental commemoration of engagement with and victory in sport. In the Athenian Acropolis, besides an otherwise unknown statue mentioned by Pausanias representing Cylon, the earliest athletic commemorative monument was dedicated by Alcmeonides and another Alcmeonid, probably a brother called Cratios. The epinician inscription was carved on the abacus of an over life-size column which supported a bronze votive, possibly a bowl or tripod. It records victories in the *hippios dromos* and the pentathlon respectively. The monument dates to the mid-sixth century, perhaps slightly before Peisistratus assumed power in 546 BCE.

The epinician monument of Alcmeonides I and Cratios must have been impressive to look at but it had to visually compete with dozens of other votives commemorating the feats of elite Athenians. Among the monuments with a securely identified athletic content, we can point out several that memorialize the achievements of athletes active during the last stage of the archaic period. These included the monument of Epicharinos, a runner in the race in armor, which was dedicated c. 475 BCE.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, a statue of Ermolykos, an Athenian pancratiast of the 480s or slightly earlier, who also distinguished himself in the battle of Mykale.<sup>17</sup> There were also two monuments of the pancratiast Callias, son of Didymos, the most accomplished Athenian athlete that I have already referred to. The first is a dedication, inscribed in a column of c. 480 BCE, most likely a memorial of an early victory of Callias, perhaps in 482 at the Panathenaia in the boys' pancration.<sup>18</sup> The second is a life-achievement monument dedicated in the 440s-430s but it recaps Callias's career in the late archaic and early classical period.<sup>19</sup> There was also an epinician monument by Phayllos of Croton, a top-rank athlete of the late sixth/early fifth century

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<sup>16</sup> Paus. 1.23.9; Raubitschek 1949, no. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Palls. 1.23.10; Hdt. 9.105. Ermolykos was most likely related to a prominent political family, see the testimonia in Kyle 1987, 205, no. A25.

<sup>18</sup> Raubitschek 1949, no. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Raubitschek 1949, no. 164. For Callias son of Didymos see Kyle A 29, p. 202.

with victories in the pentathlon and running events, that had a special connection with Athens having fought at the battle of Salamis with one ship that he equipped at his own expense.<sup>20</sup>

A number of other unattributed statues or fragmentary inscriptions are likely to have been part of epinician monuments. Those include the Rampin rider, a monument that probably commemorated an equestrian victory as suggested by the fact that the rider wears a wreath of wild celery, prize at the Isthmian and Nemean games. A c. 550 BCE statue base of an unknown dedicator who won a contest “for the first time” and an early fifth-century large statue base dedicated by Sostratos that supported an equestrian monument are some of the other fragments from the Acropolis that likely formed parts of sport victory memorials.<sup>21</sup>

Another prime location of dedication and display of memorials related to the athletic achievements of the Athenian elite was the Kerameikos cemetery. Due to their proximity to the urban center Athenian cemeteries were undoubtedly a most attractive option for monumental memorialization.<sup>22</sup> For our purposes, it is revealing that a number of wealthy Athenian families chose to commemorate their dead as athletes. The exact way whereby this was achieved was subject to shifts in wider tastes, practices and external interventions.

In his narrative of the life and death of Cimon I Herodotus illustrates how elite funerary monumental display could highlight sport achievements in order to assert elite status. According to Herodotus, Cimon’s team of horses that had won three Olympic *tethrippon* were buried opposite their master in what must have been a monumental funerary peribolos. In all likelihood Cimon’s horses were sacrificed and buried on the occasion of Cimon’s funeral. Furthermore, Aelian claims that a bronze statue of them was set up in Athens. The symbolism emanating from the sacrifice and burial of Cimon’s horses could not have been missed by contemporary Athenians. The prominence accorded to the burial and commemoration of Cimon’s horses was embedded into wider narratives of elite equestrian achievement. The first of such narratives operated in connection with the practice of *hippotrophia*. By sacrificing and conspicuously

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<sup>20</sup> Dedication in the Acropolis, Raubitschek 1949, no. 76, Moretti 1953, no. 11 and Romano 1998; in the battle of Salamis, Hdt. 8.47. Phayllos also dedicated a statue in Delphi, Paus. 10.9.2. For further testimonia see Golden 2004, 131-132.

<sup>21</sup> Moschophoros and Rhondos statue base, Raubitschek 1949, no. 59 and Hurwit 1999, 103; unknown dedicator, won “for the first time”, Raubitschek 1949, no. 61; statue base dedicated by Sostratos?, Raubitschek 1949, no. 171 and Kyle 1987, 225, P108 with some reservations and Lambert 2001, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Meyer 1993.

commemorating the team of superb quality racing horses the Philaids asserted Cimon's successful engagement with horse-breeding and racing as a key feature of his public persona. In addition, they inserted Cimon's equestrian successes into the wider tableau of equestrian distinction by the Philaid clan and reinforced Philaid epinician remembrance. We should also read the monumental burial of Cimon's horses in the context of the episode of Cimon allowing Peisistratus to take credit for the 532 *tethrippon* Olympic victory. For the Philaids, the publicly conspicuous burial and public statuary monument of Cimon's horses was a reminder to the Athenian public of who should really take credit for the splendid victories of the horses in question. In this way the arrangement between Cimon and Peisistratus in 532 BCE was relegated to the realm of an expedient transaction, dictated by special circumstances. In this way, the Philaids ideologically re-appropriated the horses and all their victories.

That sport was a primary signifier of status among late archaic elite Athenian men is also demonstrated by the numerous fragments of funerary memorials, namely gravestones and statue bases, that employ sporting iconography. Even without the aid of a text on the gravestone, onlookers would have been able to identify the deceased by other elements in the grave and/or the positioning of the stele in a family tomb. The elaborate and ostentatious execution of the stelai leaves no doubt that they were expensive items to acquire and that only individuals of certain means could afford to commission them.<sup>23</sup>

A fundamental aspect of this process in late sixth-century Athens is the mortuary representation of elite personae of the deceased by his/her survivors, i.e. the process whereby key practices, roles and attributes, which in reality they represent only a small fraction of the plethora of identities held by the deceased in life, are given prominent and symbolic expression in posthumous representation.<sup>24</sup> Thus in sixth-century Athens the two most frequent and securely identifiable elite personae represented in funerary memorials are warriors and athletes. Many sixth-century gravestones depicted elite Athenian males as one or the other, a fact that has led some scholars to believe that these memorials represent an idealized aristocratic type.<sup>25</sup> Even though extant stelai betray elements of idealization, e.g. in the depiction of the physical body of

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<sup>23</sup> Nielsen et al. 1989 argues correctly that in Athens simple grave stelai were much more affordable during the 4<sup>th</sup> century. But such a levelling effect on funerary commemoration customs is not detectible in the sixth century BCE.

<sup>24</sup> See Morris 1987, 37-43 with references to earlier scholarship.

<sup>25</sup> D'Onofrio 1982, 165; Day 1989, 21; Stewart 1990, 109-110; Meyer 1993, 107.

the deceased, the story of Cimon's grave and commemoration strongly suggests that funerary representation was closely intertwined with a nexus of individual traits, familial traditions and wider discourses of social prominence and power.

Once such customs became established they were integrated in funerary commemoration. A good case in point is a fragmentary funerary statue base of c. 550-525 BCE from the Kerameikos.<sup>26</sup> The extant part of the epigrammatic inscription highlights the fact that the deceased was an Olympic victor (l. 1), and provides his name, of which only the end is extant (--cles). Moreover, the epigram underscores the familial connection by mentioning the deceased's mother (l. 2) and requests from readers to mourn for he had died "before his time". Some scholars have argued that this was the funerary monument of the Alcmeonid Megacles II. But the inscription is quite lacunose and hence defies secure interpretation.

Relief grave stelai often emphasized athletics as an individual attribute. Representations of the deceased as an athlete include fragments of a grave stele from the Kerameikos, dated c. mid sixth-century, which depicts a young male with a discus.<sup>27</sup> A similar-looking stele of around the same date discovered in the southern coast of Attica (Lagonissi/Phoinikia) but with a badly withered surface also represents a youth standing up in profile and holding up a discus.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, a mid-sixth century fragment of a funerary stele from the Kerameikos shows a boxer, presented as a bearded man with his left upper arm raised. He is sporting a boxing glove, with the straps tied around his wrist.<sup>29</sup>

There are also some instances when the deceased is not portrayed as an athlete but a panel, usually underneath the main image at the bottom of the stele, depicts a scene that explicitly refers to horse-breeding and racing. For instance in a painted grave stele of the end of the sixth-century found in Velanideza in east Attica, underneath the image of a bearded man there is a panel depicting a galloping horse with jockey. The inclusion of such images of horse-riding and racing in a funerary monument was probably meant to single out the deceased as a *hippotrophos* and hence as member of an exclusive group of elites dedicated to equestrian sport.

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<sup>26</sup> Willemsen 1963, 110-17; *IG* 1<sup>3</sup> 1213.

<sup>27</sup> Richter 1961, no. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Richter 1961, no. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Richter 1961, no. 31.

In addition to grave stelai, funerary statue bases from archaic Athens frequently display athletic and hippotrophic themes. For instance, in a late sixth century Athenian funerary statue base, the front side depicts three events of the pentathlon. On the left side there are six youths playing a ball game and on the right a group of youths and adults are watching a cat and dog fight.<sup>30</sup> In another Athenian funerary statue base of the late sixth-century the front side is decorated with a scene of youths playing or watching a type of field hockey while on the two longer sides there are scenes of hoplites and four-horse chariots in procession.<sup>31</sup> While it is possible that in these cases the deceased was an athlete, cumulatively the decorated sides of the statue bases present a pastiche of elite bodily and recreation activities that encode the commemorated individual as a member of the leisure class.

### Conclusions

In order to conclude, we should step back and look at all this in a wider context. The sixth century is pivotal period for Greek sport. New interstate and local games are established at a quick pace and purpose-built athletic facilities appear for the first time. Even though wealthy elites dominate the victory lists of the major games, there is some evidence that in at least some parts of the Greek world the social base of participation in sport is slowly widening. More importantly, popularity of sport competitions of all sorts truly takes off during this period. Sport is a performance and a spectacle and archaic audiences simply desired more of it. Civic and sanctuary authorities enthusiastically obliged while ruling elites gauged and explored a wider range of social and cultural implications of sport.

As a result throughout the archaic period, but especially during in sixth century, sport operated as a prime signifier of cultural capital and a prominent status referent. How did this situation play out on the ground in sixth-century Athens? While wider Greek trends certainly influenced the development of perceptions and practices of sport in Athens, by the same token some factors that account for the changing nature and reception of sport in this prominent Greek city are directly related to internal developments. The evidence suggests that in some quarters among the traditional elites the increasing participation by other social groups in formerly

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<sup>30</sup> NAMA no. 3476. Illustrated in Philadelphus 1922; Miller 2004, 74 and 173; and <http://www.namuseum.gr/collections/sculpture/archaic/archaic19-en.html>

<sup>31</sup> NAMA no. 3477. Illustrated in Miller 2004, 175; and <http://www.namuseum.gr/collections/sculpture/archaic/archaic20a-en.html>

exclusive aristocratic practices (e.g. sport, sympotic commensality) was perceived as the co-optation, if not high-jacking, of distinctive cultural markers by nouveaux riches and middling citizens.<sup>32</sup> Yet as athletes the same elites were certainly aware that true social recognition through sport could only be achieved by the widest possible exposure, a condition that could not be easily attained by sport practitioners that did not originate from well-heeled backgrounds. Hence athletically inclined and talented Athenians of means trained and competed, some successfully, in the top games in the land, including the Olympics. Especially during the politically contentious decades of the mid to late sixth century, there were palpable gains to be made through successful engagement with sport and as a result more members of the Athenian ruling elite enthusiastically joined the circuit of athletic competitions.

Engagement and success in sport were sufficient to guarantee immediate publicity and kudos. But for the ideological corollaries of sport to take root, a lasting propagandization of the athletic victory and its value was indispensable. Throughout this paper I have argued that Athenian elites employed sport to articulate status identities and social distinction primarily through the pursuit of competition and victory in prestigious games, the construction of familial narratives of athletic distinction, and finally the elaboration of landscapes of epinician commemoration.

Sanctuaries and cemeteries were symbolically loaded, dynamic and reflexive sites that contributed to the dissemination of elite narratives, communal values and collective memory. Yet commemorative landscapes do not merely symbolize meanings but also operate as instruments and agents of cultural power, identities and values. Hence social and civic identities were performed and negotiated through commemorative activity in such settings. In the field of athletic commemoration, Athenian elite athletes of the archaic and early classical periods chose to commemorate their athletic achievements primarily within the borders or the vicinity of Attica as well as to self-represent many of their deceased ancestors as athletes in funerary memorials. This picture is partly at odds with the increasing popularity and accessibility of most sites of panhellenic contests from the mid sixth-century onwards as *lieux de mémoire*. I have argued that such a deviation in Athenian epinician dedicatory patterns is related to the particular conditions of factional conflict endemic in Athens from the 560s until the end of the sixth century. The

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<sup>32</sup> See e.g. the elegies of Theognis regarding aristocratic sympotic practices and other elite attributes (e.g. clothing).



concentration of elite epinician monuments in locales accessible to many Athenians as well as the creation of funerary reference points for elite excellence in athletics and war were devices used for the consolidation of elite metanarratives but also as constituents of discursive landscapes of conflict between powerful individuals and families. In times of political crisis and uncertainty it was expedient for Athenian elites to reinforce traditional representations of dominant masculinity, valor and social distinction, attributes that since the Homeric epics were closely associated with elite sport.