

EQUESTRIAN COMPETITION IN ANCIENT GREECE: DIFFERENCE, DISSENT, DEMOCRACY

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I MOVE IN THIS PAPER from a motley mix of mercenaries on a mountain on the margins of the Greek world to the economic and political élite of classical Athens. The long journey is perhaps made more manageable by the presence of horses throughout. In the first section (I), I announce a major theme—the creation and expression of difference in Greek sport—and identify a particular area, equestrian competition, marked by the age and wealth of its participants. In the second section (II), I take evidence from many places and periods in the Greek world to demonstrate that entrants in horse- and chariot-racing were indeed usually older than athletes, and suggest that this pattern might influence competitive choices among the élite. The concluding section (III) has a more restricted focus. It reconsiders and revises a current hypothesis on the value of equestrian competition as a claim to political preferment in the Athenian democracy.

I

Sometime early in 400 BCE, the remnants of the “10,000,” Greek mercenaries who had served under the Persian pretender Cyrus, reached Trapezus on the Black Sea. What happened next is recounted by one of their leaders, Xenophon, in his *Anabasis* (4.8.25–28). In the commentary which follows, I try to maintain a balance between historiographical and literary approaches, assuming that Xenophon reports events reliably while shaping the narrative for purposes of his own (cf. Moles 1994: 70); the dialectic of fact and representation is made more complex in this instance by Xenophon’s position of influence, which may have allowed him to pattern what actually occurred as well.

After this they set to preparing the sacrifice they had promised; they had enough oxen to sacrifice to Zeus in thanks for their salvation and to Heracles for his guidance as well as to conduct the sacrifices they had vowed to the other gods. They also held an athletic competition right on the mountain where they were camping. To see to the track and to preside over the competition they chose Dracontius, a Spartan who had been exiled from his home as a boy for accidentally killing another boy he had stabbed with a knife. After the sacrifice, they handed the hides of the slaughtered animals to Dracontius and began to encourage him to show them where he had made the track. He pointed to where they

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happened to be standing. "This crest," he said, "is a very good place to run wherever you please." "But how can men wrestle on ground as hard and overgrown as this?" they asked. "The one who is thrown will get hurt a little more," came the response. Boys—most of them from among the prisoners—competed in the sprint, more than sixty Cretans in the long race, others in wrestling, boxing, and *pankration* . . .; it was good to see. For many entered the events and, since the campfollowers were watching, there was a great deal of rivalry. There were horse-races too. The riders had to drive the horses down the steep slope, turn them around in the sea, and then lead them back to the altar. Many rolled down, and on the way up the slope was so steep that the horses proceeded only with difficulty at a walk. There was a lot of shouting and laughter and cheering.

There is more involved here than simply rest and recreation. Trapezus is the first Greek city the "10,000" have reached on their long and dangerous trek, and they celebrate in prototypically Greek fashion, recalling as they do an earlier competition, for Lycaean Zeus, at the expedition's outset (Xen. *An.* 1.2.10). Sacrifice is the central act in Greek religious observance; athletic and equestrian competition a mainstay of Greek male culture. And yet this is a very unusual competition. Captives, slave booty, run against free Greeks. Cretans run alone. While some of the events familiar from Olympia and the other great festivals are included, others are not (unless they have dropped out of the text after the *pankration*), notably those which distinguish the pentathlon: the long jump, and discus and javelin throw. This is all the more surprising in that soldiers on active duty might be expected to demonstrate their prowess with the javelin at least as a weapon of war. (Elsewhere in Xenophon, other soldiers on campaign in Asia Minor practise the discus: Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.18.) Oddest of all, perhaps, is the horse-race. In one direction, it involves a laborious climb towards the altar, attended by all the *ponos* of a *stadion* runner at Olympia and aiming at the same goal. In the other, however, horses and riders run or roll downhill, like Persians or Odrysians instead of Greeks (Xen. *Eq.* 8.6); and their inevitable missteps call forth cheers and merriment. Compare this to the accounts of other equestrian accidents in some other literary texts, especially to the chariot disasters of tragedy, in which Hippolytus and the imaginary Orestes crash to the horror of their onlookers and the sorrow of all who hear. In the *Iliad*, failures in the footrace and the weight throw spark laughter, but none attends Eumelus' fall from his chariot (Homer *Il.* 23.784, 840).

Is this, then, a kind of comic travesty of an athletic competition, Xenophon's deadpan way of making us share the relief of his funloving fellows and also, it may be, of suggesting that their time among the barbarians has made them, for now at least, less than Greek? The Cretans may occur to us here; famous as runners from Orsilochus, fleet of foot (Homer *Od.* 13.258–270), to Sotades, twice Olympic champion in Xenophon's own lifetime (Moretti 1957: nos 390, 398), they were no less well known as archers, the role they played in Cyrus' army (e.g., *An.* 1.2.9). Their ability to fight from afar and lightly encumbered was ridiculed as well as respected, and their speed earns them a rather undignified

special detail in a fake ambushade a little later on (*An.* 5.2.29–32). And certainly comedy offers an approach to the figure of Dracontius, whose choice of a track is clearly less considered, as well as less comfortable, than his colleagues had in mind. That's what you get when your *agonothetes* is a man polluted by bloodshed, accidental bloodshed at that—the Spartan who couldn't stab straight. This is an attractive reading, but I think a misleading one. Dracontius' hides, presumably to be distributed as prizes, recall a famous passage of the *Iliad*, Achilles' pursuit of Hector: "It was no sacrificial beast or oxhide they strove to win—the usual prizes that men gain in a foot race; rather, they were running for the life of Hector, tamer of horses" (Homer *Il.* 22.159–161). Dracontius' role is Achilles' of course, reintegrated into his equally temporary community to preside over the funeral games for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23; but there is something of Patroclus about Dracontius too, the Patroclus who accidentally killed a playmate as a boy in Opus and had to flee to Thessaly and exile (*Il.* 23.83–90). These Homeric echoes persuade me that Xenophon's tone is not altogether mocking after all. But that is not to deny something subversive in the spectacle.

Let us consider again the competition among boys. Nigel Crowther has recently suggested that slaves could compete in the Panathenaea (Crowther 1992). This is hardly plausible, given the law (ascribed to Solon) which forbade slaves even to oil themselves or compete in Athenian palaestras (Aeschin. 1.138–139, Plut. *Sol.* 1.3; cf. the comments on the oil of the gymnasium as the smell of a free man in Xen. *Symp.* 2.4), and is anyway not a necessary inference from the text Crowther adduces in its support (cf. Kyle 1992: 208, n. 127). The Demosthenic *Eroticus*, among other distinctive marks of the *apobates* competition (probably at the Panathenaea), notes that "in the other competitions (ἀθλημάτων), both slaves and foreigners take part (μετέχοντες), but the *apobates* contest is open only to citizens" (ps.-Dem. 61.23). Crowther takes this to indicate that "slaves participated in all athletic events except the *apobates*" (37), but in fact the Greek need not imply that slaves took part in all competitions. The reference is most likely to the use of slave jockeys and charioteers in the equestrian events; these might well be said to "take part" in competition, though there was no question of their winning prizes in their own right. Though slaves were given access to gymnasia in some cities as early as the Hellenistic period, the only sure evidence for their competing against free Greeks comes from an otherwise unusual local festival in Pisidia as late as the second century CE. So this competition at Trapezus is very remarkable indeed. Xenophon and his comrades have maintained one of the usual distinctions in Greek athletics, the categorization of competitors as *paides* and *andres*, while foregoing another. We may speculate as to why one distinction was maintained and the other abandoned in these specific circumstances. Boys, after all, were noncombatants, so it may well have seemed appropriate to mark them out in soldiers' games as well. But warfare had a way of enslaving the free, often suddenly and arbitrarily: the distinction so important at Olympia and elsewhere, between freeborn Greeks and all others, may have appeared less clear cut on campaign.

Whatever the explanation, this eccentric and little-noticed competition is yet another indication of how varied the world of athletic and equestrian competition really was in ancient Greece; however, it also points towards one of its main constants, the production of difference. This must sound simple-minded. After all, creating difference is something competition, concerned as it is to establish winners and losers, is bound to do. I have in mind something more far reaching: Greek sport, to use a misleading term, was enveloped in a series of hierarchies in which events, festivals, genders, nations, and other groups were ranged and ranked no less than individuals. As elsewhere, it could be a vehicle "of identity, providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others, whether latitudinally or hierarchically" (MacClancy 1996: 2).

That the games fostered unity among the Greeks is a cliché. An old cliché: Lysias told his audience at Olympia that Heracles founded their festival in the hope of encouraging mutual amity among the Greeks (Lys. 33.2; cf. Isoc. 4.43–46). The reality, of course, is that such amity was forged at the expense of other ties—or rather, through their rejection. So the great Greek festivals of athletic and equestrian competition excluded outsiders, *barbaroi*, and at Olympia, the most prestigious among them, married women at least were barred from the site (Paus. 5.6.7–8, 6.20.8–9). Every competition involved a series of statements about various categories of humankind, some marked off, some masked. The likelihood that such a scheme of differentiation was working on the Greeks at Trapezus (or at least on Xenophon's representation of their activities) may lead to a resolution of a textual problem in the passage I have translated above. Most manuscripts read *ἑταίρων*, "their companions"; some *ἑτέρων*, "the others." I translate *ἑταίρων*, an emendation ascribed to the sixteenth-century French scholar Brodaeus (Jean Brodeau), printed by Cobet in his school edition of 1859, defended by Löschhorn (1918), noting references to such campfollowers earlier at *An.* 4.3.19, 30, and accepted into, for example, the Teubner text of Hude (1931) and the selection edited by Antrich and Usher (1978). An account so concerned with distinctions of age, juridical status, and national origin might well comment on gender too. With Brodaeus's conjecture, women are present, and where they belong, watching from the sidelines.

Another important distinction is not made explicit in Xenophon's account: social class. Nor was it marked in other competitions—no games included contests reserved expressly for the rich. But such contests there were all the same, the various equestrian events. At Trapezus, the soldiers ride their own horses, most of them, at this stage of their expedition, probably stolen. In general, however, the horse- and chariot-races of the Greeks were open only to those who could afford the extraordinary expense they required. In theory, they competed against all comers; in fact, the pool of opponents was very limited, the chance of success correspondingly high, the probability of losing to a social inferior negligible. And the super-rich, or abnormally extravagant, could improve their odds through multiple entries, since they were not required to ride or drive for themselves

or even attend the competition. One of the many reasons horse-races were an essential part of Greek athletic festivals was precisely to allow the élite to compete with each other without advertising the fact unduly, even after their communities (and to some extent other events) became more open to the participation of the less wealthy; and to compete longer than men who could only run, jump, throw, and fight. (We may think of Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between popular sports, linked with youth, which are generally abandoned very early, and bourgeois sports, which are pursued much longer [Bourdieu 1984: 212].) As Xenophon suggests, however, this privilege, or at least the response it was expected to evoke, might not always go unchallenged.

II

How long could an athlete compete? Philostratus mourns the good old days, when athletes used to contest eight Olympiads or even nine (Philostr. *Gym.* 43). It is true that philosophers and physicians recommended lifelong exercise, and prescribed special regimes for the elderly (Crowther 1990). In *Laws*, Plato stipulates that the young men (*neoi*) of his ideal city should build gymnasia for themselves and their elders—these last specially catered for with hot baths (Pl. *Leg.* 6.761c–d; cf. Plut. *Mor.* 789f); Aristotle prefers separate establishments for young and old and states that the body does not reach its fullest development until age 30 or 35 (Arist. *Pol.* 8.1331a36, *Rh.* 2.1390b9). Some followed this advice: Socrates himself supposedly practised wrestling with Alcibiades (and disappointed his young admirer with his sexual continence) when he was in his late thirties (Pl. *Symp.* 217b–c); Lycon, a philosopher of the third century, was very well trained (*γυμναστικώτατος*), fit in his body, and altogether athletic, with battered ears, skin covered with oil and all, though we are not told that he maintained his fitness right up to his death at 74 (Diog. Laert. 5.67). Old men, *γέροντες*, are among the beneficiaries of a gymnasiarch's generosity at Magnesia near Mt Sipylus (*TAM* V.2 1367, Imperial period); but these probably include all men over thirty, like the *presbuteroi* we hear of in Hellenistic gymnasia (Blümel 1985: 40, no. 23 [Iasus]; Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993: 163, n. 4 [Amphipolis]). Some cities did indeed have separate places for older men to work out: Hellenistic Samos (Robert 1935: 476–477 no. 2, *γεροντικῆ παλαίστραι*), perhaps fourth-century Athens (Antiphanes fr. 298 K.-A. = Poll. 2.13 mentions *γερόνται παλαίστραι*, quite without context). Macedon's oldest soldiers are (so Plutarch says) real “athletes of war” (*ἀθληταὶ πολέμων*, Plut. *Eum.* 16.4.); if the metaphor, echoing Polybius, is not dead, it intimates what Plutarch thought plausible—the men are all at least sixty, some seventy and up (cf. Polyb. 1.6.6, 1.59.12, 2.20.9). On the other hand, older men with athletic pretensions might appear ridiculous (Pl. *Resp.* 5.452a–b, *Thet.* 162b–c; Xen. *Symp.* 2.17–20; Theophr. *Char.* 27.4, 6; Plut. *Luc.* 38.4), and many, like another Lycon, in Xenophon's *Symposium*, probably preferred to quit (Xen. *Symp.* 2.3–4). It was older men who made up the majority of the victims

in the massacre at Corinth in 392 BCE: they were in the *agora*, while the *neoteroi* remained quietly in a gymnasium (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.4; cf. Plut. *Nic.* 12.1).

Anyway, exercise is not competition. Philostratus exaggerates. Milon of Croton won six (conceivably seven) times at Olympia, once as a boy (Maddoli 1992); the Spartan Hipposthenes won the first wrestling competition for boys and then, after an interval, five Olympics in a row as a man. Their careers spanned say twenty-five years, as must Theogenes' have done if he really won 1300 (*SIG* ³ 64a) or even 1400 (Paus. 6.11.5) crowns and was unbeaten in boxing for twenty-two years. These extraordinary archaic and early classical combat athletes may, therefore, have competed until their early forties (cf. the pancratiast Ephoudion, "old and grey," Ar. *Vesp.* 1190–94, 1381–87); danger and envy induced M. Aurelius Asclepiades to retire from the *pankration* at 25, only to return (seemingly under duress) and win again many years later, when he was perhaps going on forty (*JG* XIV 1102 = Moretti 1953: no. 79, about 200 CE). An Alexandrian boxer was less fortunate despite his name—Agathos Daimon, "good luck." After winning in the Nemean games, he died at 35 trying to repeat the feat at Olympia (*SEG* XXII 354, Imperial period). Few runners would persevere so long; no known career outlasts that of Leonidas of Rhodes, triple winner in four successive Olympics from 164, though an Argive runner of the *diaulos* matched it. ("I can't argue with Protagoras," Socrates tells Callias. "It's as if you asked me to keep up with Crison of Himera in his prime [ἀκμάζοντι], or with one of the long distance runners or the professional couriers. I'd like to, but I can't"; Pl. *Prt.* 335e.) Athletes who did go on would eventually risk humiliation (cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.16). Yet the competitive drive and desire for the benefits of success would often outlast athletic prowess. Some were no doubt content merely to watch younger men train or perhaps to pace them (Plut. *Mor.* 593d); some were less resigned—Cicero rather unsympathetically tells a sad story about Milon, long past his prime, bewailing his lost strength while others exercise, and the pancratiast Timanthes is said to have burned himself alive when his strength slackened (Cic. *Sen.* 9.27; Paus. 6.8.4). Athletes might also choose to compete vicariously, like Melesias, Nemean wrestling champion as youth and man and later a renowned trainer (Pindar *Ol.* 8.54–59 with Schol.). The feisty Isidorus was probably unique, a regular habitué of the palaestra, now ninety-one—though not looking a day over sixty—and still sufficiently imbued with the drive to excel to take on younger men in eating and drinking bouts (Arr. fr. 113 Domingo-Forasté; cf. Plut. *Mar.* 34.3–4, *Pomp.* 64.1). For the wealthiest athletes, however, there was an alternative: equestrian competition.

As so often, Homer may supply a model, the Gerenian horseman Nestor. He was once a great athlete, winner of four contests in the funeral games for Amarynceus; "there was no man like me then" (Homer *Il.* 23.629–637). Now his old age presses hard upon him and his competitive days are over. Yet he can still help his son Antilochus, providing ample and prescient advice on the tactics for charioteers at Patroclus' games, and at the end of the chariot-race

Achilles recognizes the strength of his competitive spirit and the present manner of its expression by a special prize (*Il.* 23.615–623; Kyle 1984: 4–5). Historical athletes who moved from running or combat sports to equestrian competition on their own behalf include a citizen of Thebes, Melissus, whose chariot triumphs at Isthmia and Nemea follow (according to the most convincing reading of two obscure poems by Pindar) those in the *pankration* at local festivals (Pindar *Isthm.* 3 and 4; Privitera 1978–79; cf. Willcock 1995: 72); the Olympic *stadion* champion of 408, Eubotas of Cyrene (Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.1), preeminent forty years on in 364 in the four-horse chariot as well (Paus. 6.8.3, 364); Sosibius, Callimachus' patron, both runner and wrestler before he owned chariot champions (Callim. fr. 384, 384a Pfeiffer); the Sicyonian leader Aratus, a successful pentathlete in his youth and then a chariot winner at Olympia (Plut. *Arat.* 3.1–2; Paus. 6.12.6); perhaps Alcibiades (associated with wrestling in the story recounted above and in other sources: ps.-Pl. *Alc.* 1.106e; Plut. *Alc.* 2.2, 4.4) and (?) Sostratus (Kyle 1987: 225, P108; if Lycinus, winner of the Olympic *hoplitodromos* in 448, were the Spartan of the same name whose four-horse team is sometimes thought to have triumphed in 432 [Moretti 1957: no. 324], we would have another example, but as the ethnic of the earlier winner is unknown and the later victory should probably be dated to 384 or sometime after, this is improbable). The so-called Damonon stele, a long inscription from Sparta detailing the athletic and equestrian prowess of a father and son, offers the best evidence for this trajectory (*IG* V.1 213, dated 450–431 or [more likely] early fourth century). In his youth, Damonon was a runner, often the winner among the *paides* at Sparta. He then went on to drive his own horses to other local victories, while his son Enymacratidas followed—rapidly—in his footsteps as a victorious runner as both boy and man. We are left to imagine that Enymacratidas will one day emulate his father's equestrian excellence too, perhaps when he inherits his share of the family's stables and the wealth to maintain them.

These examples are instructive. But it is probably better to think of the pattern in a broader context, in class terms: equestrian competition gave the Greek élite access to honour and rewards after age and its concomitants denied them to most athletes. Of course young men too might race horses. (The *Iliad*'s Antilochus is an athlete as well as a charioteer.) The competitions called *apobates* and ἡνίοχος ἐκβιβάζων, characteristic of Athens and Boeotia, involved some combination of dismounting from, running alongside, and entering a moving chariot; they were probably too demanding for anyone older. (The addressee of Demosthenes' *Eroticus*, ps.-Dem. 61, is young enough to be the focus of respectable homoerotic attention and Phocus, a participant in the *apobates* in the 320s, is termed *neaniskos* and *meirakion*, Plut. *Phoc.* 20.1–2; cf. Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 1.17.) And what horseman could be more enthusiastic than young Pheidippides in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (cf. *SEG* XXXIX 1418, Lycaonia, second century CE)? In general, however, we hear of older men as equestrian competitors—successful ones at least. When Lichas entered his Spartan team under the colours of the Theban community in 420, and was then struck by the *rhabdoukhoi* as he garlanded his victorious charioteer,

he was an old man (*andra geronta*), perhaps, if Xenophon is using the term quasi-technically, a member of the *gerousia*, and so over sixty (Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.21; Cartledge 1984: 99). Pindar's poem for Psaumis of Camarina, winner of the Olympic mule-car race in about 460, refers to his age (*geras*, Pindar *Ol.* 5.22). In what is probably a companion piece for the same occasion, the poet recalls an anecdote about Erginus, first among the Argonauts in a legendary race in armour on Lemnos (Pindar *Ol.* 4.19–27). The Lemnian women jeered at his gray hair. "Gray hair often grows on young men too, and belies their real age," Erginus retorted—likely a compliment to the vigour revealed by Psaumis' victory. The chart below (Table 1) identifies the better attested winners of equestrian events at the Olympic (O), Pythian (P), Nemean (N), Isthmian (I), and Panathenaic (Pan) festivals down to about 100 BCE, along with the date of their first known victory, their birthdate, and their approximate age when that victory was won. The frequent resort to question marks will establish the surest conclusion, that it is very insecure in detail. But the data are consistent enough to seem reliable, all the more since dates of birth and victory (however uncertain they may be) are arrived at independently.

Table 1

Legend:

4 = *tethrippon* 2 = *synoris* h = *keles* f = foal(s) sprint = *akampion*
 pair = *zeugos* H = *hippos* w = war chariot * = event open to Athenians only

Victor	Date: event, festival	Birthdate	Age	Notes
Cleisthenes (Sicyon)	582: 4, P	?	35+?	tyrant from (?) 595
Callias (Athens)	before 564: 4+h, P	?shortly before 590	25?	
Miltiades (Athens)	?560/?548: 4, O	before 585	25+?/35+?	
Cimon (Athens)	536: 4, O	?585	50?	
Peisistratus (Athens)	532: 4, O	?605–600	65+	proclaimed in place of the actual victor, Cimon
Damaratus (Sparta)	?504: 4, O	about 550	45?	
Xenocrates (Acragas)	490: 4, P	?about 530	40+?	son a young man
Gelon (Gela)	488: 4, O	about 530	40+	
Megacles (Athens)	486: 2 or 4, P	530–510	25–45	

Hieron (Syracuse)	478: h, P	?about 530	50+	younger brother of Gelon
Theron (Acragas)	476: 4, O	?about 530	50+	tyrant from 488
Chromius (Aetna)	?476: 4, N	?	35+?	warrior as young man, 492
Arcesilaus (Sparta)	448: 4, O	?510–500	50+	son a <i>geron</i> in 420
Megacles (Athens)	436: 4, O	about 480	50+	
Alcibiades (Athens)	421–416: 4, P, N, Pan	before 451	30	councillor, 422/1. One or all of his other victories preceded that at Olympia in 416.
Lichas (Sparta)	420: 4, O	?480–470	50+	<i>geron</i> . Victory proclaimed in name of Thebans.
Teisias (Athens)	416: 4, O	?	30+	general, 417/6. Victory proclaimed in name of Alcibiades.
Archelaus (Macedon)	?408: 4, P	?450–445	35+?	
Timon (Elis)	?400: 4, O	?	40+?	son won horse race, ca 400
Chabrias (Athens)	374: 4, P	before 420	45+	
Eubotas (Cyrene)	364: 4, O	before 425	60+	
Philip II (Macedon)	356: h, O	383 or 382	26 or 27	
Timarchus (Athens)	?352: 2, O	before 400	45+?	
Phocus (Athens)	320s: <i>apobates</i> , Pan*	?340s	under 25	<i>meirakion</i> , <i>neaniskos</i>
Demades (Athens)	?328: ?, O	before 380	50+?	
Demetrius (Athens)	?320: 2 or 4, Pan	before 355	35+?	
Ptolemy I Soter (Egypt)	310: 2f, P	about 367	55+	
Glaucon (Athens)	?272: 4, O	before 300	30+	hoplite general, 282/1
Aratus (Sicyon)	?232: 4, O	271	35+	
Polycrates (Argos)	?198: 4, Pan	?	40+	three daughters also won

Ptolemy v (Egypt)	‡182: 4 <i>diaulos</i> , Pan	210	28?
Micion (Athens)	182: 4 sprint, Pan	about 245?	60+?
Mnesitheus (Athens)	‡178: 4f sprint, Pan*	after 201	under 23?
Attalus (Pergamum)	‡178: 2, Pan	220	42?
Eumenes II (Pergamum)	‡178: 4, Pan	before 220	40+?
Philetærus (Pergamum)	‡178: 4f, Pan	220–215	35+?
Athenæus (Pergamum)	‡178: h, Pan	before 215	35+?
Socrates (Athens)	170: pair sprint, Pan*	195	25
Hagnias (Athens)	170: pair <i>diaulos</i> , Pan*	195	25
Theophilus (Athens)	170: H <i>diaulos</i> , Pan*	before 200?	30+?
Ophelas (Athens)	170: H sprint, Pan*	about 200	30?
Philocrates (Athens)	170: 2 sprint, Pan*	soon after 195?	under 25
Eucles (Athens)	166: 4w, Pan*	after 200	under 35
Seleucus (Athens)	162: pair <i>diaulos</i> , Pan*	after 201	under 40?
Ptolemy vI (Egypt)	162: 2w, Pan*	186 or 184	22 or 24
Ptolemy vI (Egypt)	‡158: hf, Pan	186 or 184	26 or 28?
Alexander Balas (Syria)	‡150 or 146: 4, Pan	about 173	23 or 27?

We must not forget that these ages are maxima, representing known victories instead of first entries. Even at that, some younger men appear on the list: Philip II, the Athenian *hippeis* who won at the Panathenaea in the 170s, Alexander Balas, Ptolemy VI. (If Tracy and Habicht are right to restore Ptolemy's name, rather adventurously, at *IG II*² 2314.56, his first victory was even earlier, in (?) 182, when he was still an infant; Tracy and Habicht 1991: 221.) Still, older winners predominate. One factor must be the expense of equestrian competition, beyond the reach of sons of any but the most indulgent fathers until they came into control of their family's wealth (but of course not beyond the reach of reigning monarchs like Philip and the Ptolemies). Few games offered prizes as munificent as those at the Panathenaea, so athletic success alone would rarely be

sufficient to allow a man of moderate means to take up horse-racing. A second is the pattern traced above, of athletes moving on to horse-racing as they aged. This is not to assume that all or many of the men on this list had previously run or fought in festival competition. But the very fact that some young men could, and did, influenced others who were unable or unwilling to match them to delay their entry into equestrian events. Otherwise, the contrast between the athlete's active struggle for distinction and its indirect pursuit by horse owners and breeders who generally relied on others to ride and drive might be too stark, and equestrian victors might risk being regarded not just as gifted men who surpassed others in wealth but as physically inferior. Such considerations need not concern Mnesitheus and his fellow *hippeis*, who made up a distinct subset of victors at the Panathenaea: those marked with an asterisk competed only against other Athenians, used their own cavalry horses and equipment—cheaper than special racing stock and chariots—and likely rode and drove for themselves. (Mnesitheus was fit enough to win ἡνίοχος ἐκβιβάζων too.) Nor would they sway young men in a hurry like Alcibiades. It provokes thought to find that his hippic successes began when he was about thirty, and so eligible for Athens' most important elective office, as general. He was still fit (see Plut. *Alc.* 23.5). Yet he was then just old enough, perhaps, to avoid legitimately the competition with athletes "of lowly birth, from small towns, poorly educated" which his son disdained (Isoc. 16.33–34), and still be a success on the racecourse earlier than most—part of his appeal to younger Athenians, οἱ νεώτεροι (cf. Thuc. 6.12–13).

III

With Alcibiades we arrive among the Athenian political élite. Was their conspicuous equestrian competition only accepted and applauded by their poorer fellow citizens, or did resentment and even ridicule prevail as well? And can we trace trends in popular reactions and their effects?

Teisias sued Alcibiades for either five or eight talents—sources differ—the value of the Argive team which won the Olympic four-horse chariot-race in 416 (Isoc. 16.46, Diod. Sic. 13.74.3). Even the smaller sum represents around 100 years of wages at the time, say \$3,000,000 today. This is just the yearly take of a modern superstar, or rather of a midstar—the top athletes earn six times as much. But of course Alcibiades had to stable and feed his horses, buy a chariot and its appurtenances, arrange for a driver. Whatever the numbers, raising horses was a rich man's game, the business of "the most fortunate" (Isoc. 16.33). Everyone knew it, not everyone approved (see Spence 1993: 191–193, 202–211). No *ostrakon* I know mentions athletic activities, but one does reproach Megacles for *hippotrophia* (Siewert 1991: 10), and though comedy makes no attack on athletes, a four-horse Thessalian chariot—the most beautiful kind (Pollux 7.112)—comes into Eupolis' *Autolykus* (fr. 66 K.-A.) and the reference by Aristophanes' chorus of cavalrymen to the chariot crashes of the gilded youth may be meant to raise a

laugh (Ar. *Eq.* 556–558; cf. the report of popular enthusiasm for such mishaps at ps.-Dem. 61.29; Crowther 1994: 50–51). Victories in horse racing (according to Lycurgus) are evidence of wealth and nothing more, of less value than trierarchies or building the city's walls (Lycurgus *Leocr.* 139–140; cf. Dem. 18.320). Yet a defendant includes among his father's services which brought honor to the city his racehorses; with them he won at Isthmia and Nemea, so that Athens was proclaimed by the herald and he himself crowned (Lys. 19.63). For another speaker in another case, keeping horses, including a racing team, is a respectable, even expected, way for a rich man to spend a lot of money (Isaeus 7.43, cf. 11.41; Xen. *Eq.* 11.8–9; Hyper. 1.16). The best example of this kind of claim, of course, is Alcibiades himself—or Thucydides' portrayal of him—entering a record seven chariots at Olympia, finishing first, second, and fourth; in this way he earned honor on his own behalf and displayed Athens' power (Thuc. 6.16.2–3). Other sources say Alcibiades was third, not fourth, but are as insistent on the scope of his achievement (Eur. 755 *PMG* in Plut. *Alc.* 11; Isoc. 16.34; cf. Dem. 21.144–145).

Isocrates, of course, is an advocate for Alcibiades' son; his presentation of Alcibiades, disdaining athletic competition because of the presence of some athletes of low birth and little culture, living in small cities, is meant to place him beyond the reach of the vulgar theft of which Teisias charged him, just as the account of his ancestor Alcmaeon, first to win the Olympic *tethrippon* for Athens, elides the origins of his wealth, ignobly rooting about in Croesus' vaults (cf. Too 1995: 213–221 and, for the notion that *hippikē* is more pleasurable and less toilsome than athletics, Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 8.5–6). An invective, no less skewed, provides balance: not only is Alcibiades to be deemed guilty of horse theft, but their owner (here called Diomedes) is said to be of merely moderate means, a man like the audience rather than a figure of awe (ps.-Andoc. 4.26). Nor do Alcibiades' successes impress Thucydides' Nicias (Thuc. 6.12.2). Indeed, Thucydides himself supplies a critical commentary on Alcibiades' speech, preceding it with the observation that he spent more than he could afford (6.15.3) and following it, as often, with an instructive and ironic narrative. The armada was marked by competition among the soldiers in respect of their weapons and equipment; it was more like a show of wealth and power before the rest of the Greeks than a military expedition. It put to sea in a single column, and then the ships competed to reach Aegina first (6.31.3–4, 32.2). The echo of Alcibiades' speech is no accident; his pursuit of glory, like the sailors', is futile in the historian's eyes, another example of the peril of *philotimia* for private ends (cf. 2.65.7, 3.82.8, 8.89.3; Whitehead 1983: 58).

Yes, Alcibiades was an especially controversial figure. But this controversy does not arise with him. Dispute over the worth of equestrian events affected reconstructions of the early history of the Olympic program. Almost one hundred years intervene between the traditional date of the founding of the games, 776, with the *stadion* race as the only event, and the supposed introduction of the earliest of the chariot-races, the *tethrippon*, in 680. Given the prominence of the

chariot-race in the funeral games for Patroclus (Homer *Il.* 23), finds of bronze statuettes of chariots among the lowest levels at Olympia itself, and Pindar's account of Heracles' original Olympics, at which Samus of Mantinea won a chariot-race (Pindar *Ol.* 10.64–74), this has struck many as implausible (see Bell 1989: 170–172; Peiser 1990: 47–49; Morgan [1990: 90–91] accepts the traditional chronology). Explanations for the status, special but suspect, of the stade race invoke local patriotism on the part of Hippias of Elis, the compiler and likely inventor of the standard victor list, or the festival's inheritance from the (allegedly) earlier celebration for Hera. Ideology too may have played a part, as it did in the exclusion of archery, also attested in epic. The festival's canonical charter myth features a chariot-race in which Pelops defeats king Oenomaus of Pisa and wins the hand of his daughter Hippodameia, “tamer,” or better, “tamed by horses.” This must reflect early esteem for chariot-racing. There is no answering role for running in any early aetiology we know (despite Nagy 1986). Such stories—that the Cretan Heracles matched his brothers in a race at the original Olympiad, that Endymion's sons ran for his throne at Olympia—are late (Paus. 5.7.6–9, cf. 8.2.2; 5.1.4, 5.8.1). Instead, we find alternative traditions about chariot-racing: Pindar's ascription of Pelops' victory to the winged chariot he got from Poseidon (*Ol.* 1.69–87, a gift depicted on the sixth-century Chest of Cypselus: Paus. 5.17.7) is answered by Sophocles' tale of the treachery of the king's charioteer, Myrtilus, a figure on whom Pindar is silent (Soph. *Oenomaus* in Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3–9; cf. Pherecydes *FGH* 3 F 37a; sources fully discussed in Howie 1991). In this second strain, favored by Athenian authors, chariot-racing is suspect from the start. Sophocles' play was well enough regarded to be revived in fourth-century productions (Dem. 18.180, 242 with Hsch. α 7381). Yet we can hardly suppose that hostility to hippic competition was the cause. Is there better evidence for widespread popular resentment of, or opposition to, this most costly of competitions and its wealthy participants?

Some has been seen in the Prytaneion Decree, an inscription from the 430s or early 420s awarding *sitesis*, free meals in the Prytaneion, to victors in the four crown games of the festival circuit (*IG* I³ 131.11–19; for other references to *sitesis* and discussion, see Miller 1978: 4–13; Schmitt Pantel 1992: 147–163; and, on the date, Mattingly 1990: 114–115). Athletic and equestrian victors (at least) are specified separately. Is this the result of “democratic opposition towards the granting of *sitesis* to hippic victors,” necessitating a restatement of their rights (Morrissey 1978: 124)? A means to give them something extra, fodder for their horses (Thompson 1979; Spence 1993: 203)? The inscription is too fragmentary to tell. We should remember, however (as Thompson does), that the rewards were extended to the winners of the Olympic two-horse chariot-race, first run not long afterwards, in 408. And Socrates: he asked his peers to grant him *sitesis*, as this was more suitable for a poor man than for someone who had won a horse- or chariot-race and could afford to buy his own meals, but they preferred to condemn him to death (Pl. *Ap.* 36d–e; cf. Kyle 1987: 145–147).

It remains to explore an attractive hypothesis of John Davies, the most industrious and insightful chronicler of the lifestyles of the rich and famous at Athens (Davies 1981: 97–105). Struck by the drop in the number of known chariot-entries in the crown and other panhellenic games in the fourth century (see Table 2, columns 3 and 4), a drop more startling still in light of the contemporaneous explosion of information on the propertied Athenians listed in his register (Table 2, column 2) and of the doubling of opportunities for victory with the addition of six new equestrian events at Olympia and Delphi from 408 to 314, Davies drew the “tentative inference that for much of the fourth century spending of this sort did not have its former political importance” (103). Some have been skeptical—Rhodes thinks chariot-racing never paid political dividends (Rhodes 1986: 138–142) and it is disconcerting for generalizations that over half the entries of two- and four-horse chariots were made by three famous families (Davies 1981: 100–101). Of course, such skepticism suits the scarce and scattered nature of our data, which could easily take on a completely different cast with the discovery of a single inscription. But in general Davies’ view prevails (cf. Kyle 1987: 160–161, 167–168). The issue is important for our purposes because heightened sensitivity to this form of elite display among the *demos* provides one obvious explanation. It is easy enough to sketch a plausible context. Alcibiades’ performance at Olympia in 416 was a hard act to follow, and his subsequent career alone would dissuade most from following it; for those still so inclined, the alignment of the *hippeis* with the Thirty Tyrants and their complicity in some of their worst outrages much reduced the appeal of a political persona based on equestrian competition, given the likelihood that the cavalry was purged after the restoration of the democracy and reorganized to bring in new members from outside the traditional horse-raising families (Spence 1993: 216–224, Németh 1994). (I have the impression—imprecise dating precludes more—that *hippos* names were less frequent among propertied Athenians born during the earlier fourth century than their fifth-century fellows.)

Table 2

1 generation ¹	2 propertied Athenians ²	3 chariot entries ³	4 chariot entrants ³	5 hippic victors at Olympia ⁴	6 Athenian hippic victors at Olympia ⁴	7 athletes / equestrians ⁵
A	2	2	2	2	1	3/1
B	10	7	3	6	3	1/7
C	3	5	3	8	2	1–3/4–7
D	16	5 or 6	3+	16	0	7–8/4–6
E	32	5 or 6	3	12	1	10/5
F	71	12	2	7	1	8/7

G	154	3	2	9	0	12-13/2
H	334	10	9	7 or 8	1	16-18/9
I	206	5	3	4	1	4-5/3

Notes:

1. A, 600-567/6; B, 566/5-534/3; C, 533/2-501/0; D, 500/499-467/6; E, 466/5-434/3; F, 433/2-401/0; G, 400/399-367/6; H, 366/5-334/3; I, 333/2-301/0. See Davies 1971: xxvii.
2. Davies 1971: xxvii.
3. Davies 1981: 167-168 (with the addition of chariot competitors at the panhellenic Amphiareia at Oropus, 366-338).
4. Moretti 1957, 1970, 1987 (with the omission of the three victories attributed to Callias in 500, 496, 492).
5. Kyle 1987: 104-109 (including both attested and possible competitors until 322/1 only).

Nevertheless, some doubts remain. First, Chabrias, Timocrates, and Demades: three fourth-century political figures who won Olympic or Pythian chariot victories. In maintaining that horse racing was "no longer viable as a claim to leadership," Kyle dissociates their political and competitive activities (Kyle 1987: 166-167). But why? True, Chabrias' Pythian victory in 374 came some fifteen years after his attested service as general in 390/89, but his political and military career continued into the 350s. Timocrates was important enough to warrant an attack by Demosthenes in 353/2, about the time of his triumph at Olympia, and appeared as a witness for Midias in 348. And if chariot-racing were unpopular or inappropriate for political leaders, Demosthenes' failure to so much as mention Timocrates' activities would be very odd, all the more so in view of his slap at Midias for driving his wife about with a pair of white horses from Sicyon (Dem. 21.158). As for Demades, Kyle simply labels him a *parvenu* and asserts that it was oratory, not horse-racing, which gained him influence. For his part, however, Demades must have thought that competing, and winning above all, consolidated and enhanced his position. The case for distinguishing these men from their few fifth-century counterparts is not compelling.

Second, Davies' hypothesis envisages an Athenian élite out of step with their peers in other Greek cities, who presumably continued to enter the established hippic contests of the crown games (though in what numbers we cannot tell) and may well have encouraged the introduction of the new ones. (It is a pity that we know nothing about the process by which the equestrian program at the Greater Panathenaea had become so elaborate by the 380s.) This is not impossible. Courting a boy by extolling his ancestors' triumphs with chariots and racehorses is made to appear laughable in Plato (Pl. *Lys.* 205b-d). Still, others (we hear) told similar tales and Plato was a crank anyway, happy to exclude chariot-racing from his Cretan city (Pl. *Leg.* 8.834b). Besides, the Athenian record in equestrian events at Olympia (see Table 2, columns 5 and 6) does not fully bear it out. Though we

have less information on victors as a whole, there are no fewer Athenians known to have won in the fourth century than the fifth; and even at that Alcibiades, in the fifth century, won in the enforced absence of the Spartans, who had dominated the four-horse event for a generation. The downturn in Athenian fortunes seems to occur a hundred years or so earlier, between generations C and D. Similarly, owners of horses make up a larger proportion of the known and possible competitors in the fifth century than the fourth, but here again the difference from the sixth to the fifth seems as great or greater (see Table 2, column 7). We might have expected that the continual growth of the cavalry wing of the armed forces during the expansion of the Athenian empire in the mid-fifth century would spur more interest in equestrian competition than we find (for that development, see Bugh 1988: 39–52). The earlier period apparently saw another, perhaps related, shift, from depictions of horsemen to athletes in Attic vase painting. “Partly this must be a change of interest and partly perhaps the increasing expense of keeping horses,” writes Webster (1972: 215); “it may be that if you are rich enough to keep a horse or horses, you are also rich enough to have decorated metal symposium ware and so cease to buy special pots for the symposion.”

Neither should the impact of democracy be discounted, and not just that restored at the end of the fifth century; Cleisthenes’ too may have ushered in a period in which equestrian competition and excess aroused less admiration, and more antipathy than before (though in neither context was it utterly discredited as a path to political leadership). It is of course impossible to be sure whether the relative scarcity of known Athenian victors at Olympia which follows generation C really reflects a drop in participation, no less difficult to pinpoint when it began. Each of Davies’ generations covers a period of thirty-three or thirty-four years; any shift might be the result of a relatively small cluster of instances early in one generation or late in the next, and so dates may be sixty-odd years out either way. The earlier shift I have pointed to, then, might come near the beginning of generation C. Certainly Cimon’s fate, murdered on Peisistratid orders after his third victory, might discourage imitators; and Hippias and Hipparchus, for all the equestrian overtones of their names, are associated with the arts as a means of personal expression or political propaganda. But the Alcmaeonids, at any rate, seem to have maintained their interest, racking up a notable string of successes at Delphi even before Megacles’ victory in 486. We have already mentioned his *ostrakon*, with its accusation of *hippotrophia*; Megacles was in fact ostracized just before his Pythian triumph. It is preferable, I think, to date the shift in attitudes and actions within generation D and to see opposition to equestrian display in competitive contexts as yet another delayed effect of Cleisthenes’ revolution, spurred (like ostracism itself) by the Persian threat. It says something about the flavor of early democracy that it did not (so far as we know) aspire to race horses on its own, despite the example of the Argive community’s successes at Olympia in 480 and 472. If my hunch here is correct—a supplement to Davies’ hypothesis,

not a refutation—it is another sign that the Athenian *demos* was normally content to rein in its wealthy citizens and harness their resources for its own purposes, not to supplant them in their chosen pursuits, whether in athletic and equestrian competition or in political leadership.

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