

Athlete and State: Qualifying for the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece

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Did individuals who wished to compete in the ancient Olympic games have to endure the complex and rigorous process of selection so familiar to us today? Could athletes simply turn up at Olympia at the appropriate time and enter the games? To what extent did the Greek city state, the *polis*, subsidize athletes, or provide assistance to those who aspired to be athletes, or represent the interests of competitors in disputes which arose during the course of the games? This article attempts to discuss these and other questions with some reference to the modern games. It will be seen that in the ancient games, unlike in the modern, religion and ritual were important aspects in the qualification and preparation of athletes.

It is, of course, known that the cities of Athens, Sparta, Croton, Sybaris and others in ancient Greece lavished considerable rewards on *successful* athletes, rewards that could be either monetary or honorary or both!¹ Victorious athletes, whether at Olympia or elsewhere, brought great fame to their native cities: the scholiast on Pindar (p.175, ed. Drachmann II) says that Arcesilaos IV, victor at the Pythian games in 462 B.C., crowned his native land. Pliny (*Natural History* 7.26) compares the Roman general Pompey to those athletes victorious in the games who crown not only themselves, but also their country.² To gain political prestige, cities, rather than individual athletes, sometimes entered competitions at the games in equestrian events (which needed considerable wealth). Three successful instances are known from the ancient Olympics: the Eleans of Dispontium won the *quadriga* (the four-horse chariot race) in 672 B.C.;³ the Argives entered and won both the *quadriga* in 472, and the horse race in 480.⁴

Some Greek cities took an interest in trying to recruit athletes from other cities, again for reasons of national prestige. Representatives of the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, for example, unsuccessfully tried to bribe Antipater of

1. See H.W. Pleket, "Games, Prizes and Ideology. Some Aspects of the History of Sport in the Greco-Roman World," *Stadion*, 1 (1975): 49-89.

2. For other examples, see L. Robert, "Décrets d'Éphèse pour des athlètes," *Revue de Philologie*, 41 (1967): 20-21.

3. The victory list for Olympia (as it has survived) may be seen in L. Moretti, *Olympionikai. I vincitori negli antichi agoni Olimpici* (Rome: Signorelli, 1957).

4. M.B. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 107, suggests that these were groups of people who entered the events, but we may note that it is the cities, not individuals, who are enrolled as victors. According to Isocrates (*Team* 32-35), Alcibiades entered a greater number of teams at Olympia than even the biggest cities had entered.

Miletus to compete for Syracuse (Pausanias 6.2.7); Astylos of Croton competed for Syracuse after being recruited by the tyrant Hiero (Pausanias 6.13.1); Dicon of Caulonia also competed for Syracuse (Pausanias 6.3.11); Sotades of Crete was bribed to be an Ephesian (Pausanias 2.7.4); Dorieus of Rhodes was driven out of his home city and competed for Thurii (Pausanias 2.7.4).⁵ We are familiar today with athletes who have competed in the Olympic games for countries other than their own native lands, although perhaps not with such blatant recruiting.⁶

It is reputed that the city of Croton in Magna Graeca according to Timaeus, or of Sybaris according to other sources, tried to abolish the Olympic games by setting up rival games at the same time (Athenaeus 12.522c-d). Although Athenaeus does not give the reason for this action, we can assume that it was for national pride, as substantial prizes were offered. We may note here that President Carter in 1980 was not the first to encourage an alternative site for the Olympic games, when he sponsored the Liberty Bell Track and Field Classic in Philadelphia as an alternative to the Olympics, which were boycotted by the United States.⁷

These examples suggest that ancient cities rewarded well athletes who were victorious in the games and thereby brought prestige to the city;⁸ but it is less clear to what extent they rewarded or took an interest in athletes *before* they attained any degree of success. There were, of course, athletic facilities provided free for citizens and others, at least in Athens,⁹ where those who intended to compete in the games could train. Yet if we are to believe not only that the Olympic games were open to all classes of people for most of their history, but also that victors came from a cross-section of society,¹⁰ there must have been considerable subsidies either from the state or from private individuals. The sources, however, are remarkably silent on this topic, and only one or two such examples can be cited: it is known that the Ptolemies in Egypt in the third century B.C. (a part of the greater Greek world at this time) certainly took an interest in their athletes, as we can see from a papyrus where Zenon asked a teacher whether money spent on athletic training for a boy was a good investment,¹¹ The city of Ephesus too in Asia Minor granted subsidies for aspiring athletes: in an inscription dated to c. 300 B.C., a trainer successfully asked the city to provide a subsidy for the training and travel of a young athlete.¹² This is the only request of its kind

5. Cf. also for Ephesus and "recruiting" athletes: Robert, "Decrets," 18-31; C.G. Starr, "Subsidization of Athletes," *Classical Journal*, 31 (1936): 444-45; A.J. Papalás, "Boy Athletes in Ancient Greece," *Stadion*, 17 (1991): 179; H.W. Pleket, "Zur Sociologie des antiken Sports," *Mededelingen Nederlands Instituut te Rome*, 36 (1974): 57-87, n.60.

6. See D.C. Young, "Croton and the Games," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 10 (1972): 2-16. See notes 32 and 34 below.

7. As D.G. Romano, "Boycotts, Bribes and Fines. The Ancient Olympic Games," *Expedition*, 27.2 (1985): 18-19, suggests. The American press gleefully compared the "better" results in Philadelphia with those in Moscow.

8. See Pleket, "Games"; D.G. Kyle, *Athletics in Ancient Athens* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), *passim*.

9. See Kyle, *Athletics*, 56-101.

10. Cf. D.C. Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics* (Chicago: Ares, 1985); Pleket, "Games."

11. Cf. P.Zenon 59060, Papalás, "Boy Athletes," 179. Alexandria indeed became a successful city at Olympia.

12. Cf. Robert, "Decrets"; Poliakoff, *Combat Sports*, 131; Pleket, "Games," 72; and "Some Aspects of the History of the Athletic Guilds," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 10 (1973), 199; Kyle, *Athletics*, 150, Young, *Olympic Myth*, 109, 159, who sees subsidization as unnecessary.

that we know of from the ancient world, but we may assume that there were others, the evidence for which has not survived.¹³

There are several known instances where cities acted on behalf of their athletes, but only after the games were over. When Kallippos of Athens was fined in 332 B.C. for bribery at Olympia, the Athenians sent the distinguished individual Hypereides to persuade the Eleans to forego the fine and even threatened a boycott of the games (Pausanias 5.21.5). Similarly in 68 B.C., the city of Rhodes acted on behalf of one of its athletes by paying the fine imposed on a wrestler for wrongdoing at the games (Pausanias 5.21.8). Yet there is little evidence that the city state in Greece intervened on behalf of an athlete *during the progress* of the games. Although no ancient source mentions the reason for such non-intervention, we may speculate that the home cities thought that the games were outside their jurisdiction during the time of the games, even though individuals, as we shall see, could and did intervene successfully.

Several cities had an official delegation, a *theoria*, which represented the *polis* at the games, as we know from inscriptions and numerous references in Greek literature; but these theoric embassies, being largely religious, had limited power as the official delegates of cities. The most famous instance of a *theoria* to Olympia is that of Alcibiades in 416 B.C. (Thucydides 6.16.2, Plutarch *Alcibiades* 12, Athenaeus 1.3e, Isocrates *Team* 34), but this was probably not a public *theoria* as such, which represented the state, but rather a private undertaking at Alcibiades' own expense, to promote his own interests.¹⁴ Yet even when the *theoria* clearly did represent the state at the games, it did not apparently become involved in the selection of athletes, although one suspects that appeals for subsidies could be made to it. In this respect, the *theoria* did not perform the functions of a national Olympic Committee, for there is no evidence that the *theoria* safeguarded the interests of athletes during the time of the games, nor do we hear of instances where an athlete appealed to his home delegation. If it had the power, one would have expected the *theoria* to intervene in instances of dispute between athlete and officials at the games, but when the son of Eualces of Athens, for example, was in danger of being excluded from the boys' event at Olympia (on which see below), it was not the Athenian *theoria*, but an individual, Agesilaus of Sparta, who intervened on his behalf; the sources allege that the reason was to help a Persian friend of Agesilaus who was enamored of the boy

13. For subsidies provided by the authorities at the time of the festival, we may compare the money given to athletes during the training period at the Sebastan games in Naples (1. *Olympia* 56), and oil provided for competitors in Sparta (*Inscriptiones Graecae* V 1.20.5-7). These references are, of course, not to the Olympic games themselves, which may have had different regulations, but are worth noting for subsidies to Greek athletes in general.

14. Cf. K.J. Dover, *Thucydides, Book VI* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), who translates *theoria* as "attendance" p.xiv and as "participation" p.25. Although S.G. Miller, *Arete. Greek Sports from Ancient Sources* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), nos. 48 and 159 seems to believe that it is an official delegation, on the various meanings of the word, see c.P. Bill, "Notes on the Greek *Theoros* and *Theoria*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 32 (1901), 196-204; C.M. Bowra, "Euripides' Epinician for Alcibiades," *Historia*, 9 (1960): 68-79; Cf. H.A. Harris, *Greek Athletes and Athletics* (London: Hutchinson, 1964, and Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1966), 152-53.

(Plutarch *Agesilaus* 13.3, Xenophon *Hellenica* 4.1.39-40).¹⁵ This is the only recorded instance of intervention on behalf of an athlete *during* the games. We do not hear, therefore, of the home city intervening for Nikasylos of Rhodes who was not allowed to compete in boys' wrestling (Pausanias 6.4.2), nor for Pythagoras of Samos,¹⁶ nor for Theagenes of Thasos when he was fined for "collusion," nor for Cleomedes of Astypalaea who killed his opponent in boxing (Pausanias 6.9.6). The Alexandrian *theoria* (assuming that there was one present) clearly did not intervene on behalf of the Alexandrian athlete Apollonius who was fined by the Olympic officials, the *Hellandikai*,¹⁷ since he arrived late for the training period at Elis before the Olympic games of A.D. 93 (see below). According to Pausanias (5.21.13), Apollonius tried to excuse himself on the grounds that he had been delayed by contrary winds, but it was Heracleides, a fellow Alexandrian, who informed against Apollonius, stating that the latter had been competing at another festival instead of proceeding to the training period. There is no state unity apparent here, nor good of the community, but rather we see *personal* animosity among athletes. This absence of intervention by the state for its athletes during the time of the games is strange to modern eyes, since we have seen that the cities of Athens and Rhodes "looked after" their athletes after the games were over. Yet it seems that the prime reason for the attendance of the *theoria* at the games was not to look after the well-being of the athletes, as national delegations look after their athletes today, but rather to promote the state by taking part in the sacrifices at the festival. Plato (*Laws* 950E) refers to the duties of the *theoriai* at the Crown Games as follows:

It is right that embassies [*theoriai*] should be sent to Apollo at Pytho [Delphi] and to Zeus at Olympia and to Nemea and the Isthmus, to take part in the sacrifices and games in honour of these gods.¹⁸

The duties of these officials were primarily, if not entirely, religious and political at Olympia and at other festivals, namely to represent the interests of the state not of the athlete, even though the state, as we have seen, identified the victory of the athlete as its own.¹⁹

15. M.L. Finley, H.W. Pleket, *The Olympic Games: The First Thousand Years* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976), 62 interestingly (but wrongly) says that Eualces came from Sparta.

16. Cf. Moretti, *Olympionikai*, no. 88.

17. On the *Hellandikai* and other officials, see DR Jordan, A.J.S. Spawforth, "A New Document from the Isthmian Games," *Hesperia*, 51 (1982): 65-68, = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 32. 364, 67, who remark that Herodotus (5.22) in the fifth century B.C. and Lucian (*Pro Imaginibus* 11) in the second century A.D. both speak of the officials at Olympia as being the *Hellandikai*.

18. This and other translations (below) are taken from the Loeb editions.

19. Pseudo-Andocides (*Against Alcibiades* 29) speaks of the Athenian officials, the *architheoroi*, at Olympia intending to display their wealth in the state procession in the form of gold vessels and incense burners (which were borrowed by Alcibiades for his own private display). Cf. H.M. Lee, "Some Changes in the Ancient Olympic Program and Schedule," in *Proceedings of an International Symposium on the Olympic Games, 5-9 September 1988*, Ed. W. Coulson, H. Kyrieleis (Athens 1992), 107. A helpful reviewer has suggested that city states would be reluctant to interfere in the operation of games at Olympia, which was an "august interstate sanctuary."

One would expect that competitors in the Greek world would have had the support of the guild of athletes, the *xystos*, from the time it came into existence in the first century B.C.²⁰ Indeed it has been suggested that this guild was a significant factor in assisting athletes,²¹ especially those of the lower-class in Roman times, but although the guild obviously worked for the improved status of its member athletes in terms of privileges, rewards and pensions, it did not materially assist *aspiring* athletes. Rather it seems that the guilds were concerned with organizing games and offering prizes, and we may observe with Pleket that "there is no evidence to show that they supported young, promising athletes with 'scholarships'."²²

It is apparent, therefore, that ancient athletes, far from having to undergo a rigorous process of selection by the officials of their home city, were free to enter the games at Olympia on their own initiative. This can be deduced from a passage in Philostratus (*Gymnastics* 26), which points out that dogs and horses are chosen and selected for specific purposes, such as hunting or racing, whereas men are entered *without examination* into the Olympic or Pythian games as contestants for the herald's announcement of victory such as Herakles coveted.²³ With his specific comparison of dogs and horses, Philostratus is referring here to the absence of *athletic* qualifications for aspiring Olympic competitors, rather than to personal qualifications (see below). There is further evidence that the Pythian games at Delphi had no athletic qualifications, for according to Heliodorus (*Aethiopica* 4.1) the herald at this festival invited *any athlete who wished* to enter the competition, specifically the race in armor.

We should point out, however, that unlike the modern Olympic games these festivals were national and officially excluded all non-Greek athletes: as Herodotus (2.160) relates, the Eleans who officially ran the Olympic games declared that the games were open to any (male) athlete who wished to compete either from Elis or from the rest of Greece.²⁴ Yet not all male Greeks were eligible to compete, for it is evident from fragments of inscriptions that there were indeed Olympic rules (of a personal rather than athletic nature), which were based not only on tradition and word of mouth, but were written down at least from the sixth century B.C. to the third century A.D.²⁵ None of these inscriptions has survived which relates directly to Olympic qualifications, but we can make deductions about their content from chance passages in literature: Pausanias (5.24.10) says that those who judge the qualifications of boys and foals at Olympia

20. See Pleket, "Guilds."

21. See I. Jiithner, *Die Athletischen Leibesübungen der Griechen* (Vienna: Boehlau, 1965), 91-92.

22. Pleket, "Guilds," 199. Harris, "Notes on Three Athletic Inscriptions," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 82 (1962): 20-21 believes from an inscription from Ephesus that an athlete competed at a festival in Athens which was not on the program of the *xystos* without the moral, vocal and financial support of the guild, but this seems unlikely.

23. Cf. Jiithner, *Leibesübungen*, *ad loco*

24. Even these same officials were allowed to compete at Olympia until the fourth century B.C., when one of them actually won two events (Pausanias 6.1.4-5). Thereafter it was considered inadvisable for judges to participate in competition at the festival. For non-Greeks who competed, see below.

25. Cf. P. Siewert, "The Olympic Rules," in *Proceedings* (above n.19), 113-17.

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(no specific examples are mentioned) swear an oath that they will decide fairly and will keep secret what they have learned about candidates, whether they are accepted into the games or not:

An oath is also taken by those who examine the boys, or the foals entering for races, that they will decide fairly and without taking bribes, and that they will keep secret what they learn about a candidate, whether accepted or not.

Philostratus (*Gymnastics* 25) gives specific details on qualifications for contestants in the boys' events and states that an Olympic (or Pythian) judge examines the athlete to see if he is a member of a [Greek] city state, belongs to a tribe, has a father and family, and is free and not illegitimate. This regulation is not unlike part of the Athenian constitution where pseudo-Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution* 42) states that boys of eighteen are registered on the rolls of the deme, if they are shown to have reached the lawful age and if they are free and of legitimate birth, but it is unknown whether Olympic regulations originated from state regulations. We may assume that the qualifications for adults at Olympia were similar to those for boys, since Himerius (*Declamatio* 24-26), in the fourth century A.D., declares that the herald at Olympia announced an athlete's father, tribe and family.

Slaves were not allowed in the Crown games, although they could enter some local festivals.²⁶ John Chrysostomus (*In Epistulam ad Hebraeos* 63.133.9-12) says specifically that slaves, thieves and those of ill character are excluded from the Olympic games. The judging of potential athletes took place in the presence of the crowd after the training period at Elis in a special area at Olympia where the unqualified could be excluded (John Chrysostomus *In principium Actorum* 51.76.5-10).

Moreover it seems, if we can judge from a statute in Athens (Demosthenes 23.37), that a person guilty of homicide was barred from athletic competition, a regulation that may be applicable to the whole of Greece.²⁷

Individuals at Olympia could protest against the qualifications of an athlete, who in turn had to prove that he was eligible. Alexander, son of Amyntas of Macedon, competed at Olympia, but had to show that he was Greek (Argive), when his rivals protested that the games were for Greeks only (Herodotus 5.22).²⁸ The *Hellanodikai* made the decision, but it is uncertain whether they simply accepted Alexander's word that he was Argive, or whether others such as the Argives vouched for him.²⁹

26. Cf. Artemidorus 1.62. See also N.B. Crowther, "Slaves and Greek Athletics," *QUCC*, 40: 1 (1992): 35-42.

27. Cf. J. H. Krause, *Olympia* (Vienna 1838; reprinted Hildesheim, New York: G. Olms, 1972), 132-33.

28. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports*, 169 n.32, states that birth requirements are evident in this example.

29. Harris, *Greek Athletes*, 160, who suggests that Alexander came equal first and was beaten in a runoff. This is not in the victory list of Moretti, *Olympionikai*. According to L. Drees, *Olympia: Gods, Artists and Athletes* (London: Praeger, 1968. Originally in German 1967), 158, the Romans were the first foreigners to compete at Olympia, followed by Egyptians, Lycians, Lydians, Phoenicians and Armenians. See the list in Moretti, *Olympionikai*, for names and dates. Protests were also allowed apparently elsewhere in Greece in musical contests: cf. Andocides (*Against Alcibiades* 20) where an individual, Taureas, had tried to eject a member of Alcibiades' chorus as not being eligible, and was beaten for it by Alcibiades. Cf. also the example above of the fellow citizen who informed against Apollonius, the Alexandrian.

We may consider here two noteworthy examples of athletes who were considered ineligible for the Olympic games: one athlete in the fourth century A.D. was already enrolled at Olympia when he learnt that his country was at war: he left to fight for his city, tried to enroll again (after an obviously short war), but was denied registration.³⁰ If this incident occurred during the 30-day training period at Elis, as seems likely, since the Olympic festival itself lasted only five days, we can assume that the athlete was not allowed to re-register, since he had missed part of the compulsory training. A second athlete, who fled from his home city of Athens after the battle of Salamis in the fifth century B.C., was not allowed to compete at the Olympic games, since he was declared to be stateless.³¹

Athletes were not allowed to compete in the Olympic games when their home city was excluded.³² One famous example is that of Lichas of Sparta who was banned from the games of 420 B.C., because the city of Sparta was banned; he nevertheless entered the four-horse chariot race as a Boeotian, but was fined and publicly flogged (Thucydides 5.50.4, Pausanias 6.2.2-3, Xenophon *Hellenica* 3.2.21). It is unknown whether Lichas competed in the games with the connivance of the Boeotians, although Pausanias (6.2.4) states that the *Hellaniotikoi* recorded the victor in the event not in the name of Lichas, but in the name of the Theban people.

Attempts were sometimes made by individuals in Greece to ban from the Olympic games competitors they considered undesirable. Themistocles, for example, if we believe Plutarch (*Themistocles* 25),³³ tried to have excluded the tyrant Hiero, but his attempt was unsuccessful, since Hiero is recorded as victor in the games of 476 B.C.³⁴ Moreover, all Eleans were permanently excluded from the Isthmian games because of political rivalry with Corinth (Pausanias 5.2.2-5, 6.12.2, 5.21.5).

We can conjecture from Plato (*Laws* 955 A-B) that there was legislation in some states aimed against a person who prevented others from competing in athletic competition. Plato is, of course, proposing this in his ideal state, but it was possibly found in his day in some actual cities. Plato states that if anyone prevented a rival from appearing in the games (no specific festival is mentioned), whoever wished could announce it to the officials, and he would be legally allowed to compete. If he could not enter, in case the one who prevented won the contest, the prize was to be given to the prevented . . . the preventer would also be liable to pay damages.³⁵ Plato would have had no

30. Sopater (*Rhetores Graeci* 8.349 10ff.). We may note that these two examples come from late fourth-century sources.

31. Scholia on Sopater (4.534.18ff.). Cf. also 4.546.14ff.

32. In this way, the ancient Olympics are different from the modern, where athletes from banned South Africa, for instance, have competed for other countries.

33. See Drees, *Olympia*, 41-42, on the authenticity of this passage.

34. Hiero may not actually have been present at the games, but merely a patron. We may compare modern attempts by prominent individuals to prevent on political grounds the South African runner Zola Budd from running for Britain in the Olympics.

difficulty in dealing with the notorious Harding-Kerrigan affair in figure skating before the 1994 Winter Olympic games.

Athletes and horses could be banned from competing at Olympia and elsewhere, if it were deemed that they did not meet the required age categories. At Olympia, for example, there were defined categories for boys, as already alluded to: those as young as twelve were admitted to the games, while those eighteen years old were excluded, with the *Hellanodikai* having the power to exclude some athletes because of size.³⁶ There were also distinct qualifications for horses: one of Lycinus' foals at Olympia was disqualified, but entered the race for full-grown horses and won (Pausanias 6.2.2.).

We can gain some insight into how officials conducted the examination of would-be athletes in the Crown games from three, fragmentary lead tablets, which have been found at the site of the Isthmian games, dated to the imperial Roman period; these have been identified as ballots, probably secret, for the inspection of athletes who wished to compete in the games. One ballot records the rejection of the athlete Semakos by one of the judges, Marios Tyrannos:

I, Marias Tyrannos,
Exclude Semakos.³⁷

Such ballots have not been found at Olympia, although we may infer from Isthmia that a similar, if less elaborate, system was in operation there. In addition at Isthmia there were also special rooms in which officials judged would-be competitors (*Inscriptiones Graecae* 4.203).³⁸

Artemidorus (5.13), who wrote a book of dreams in the second century A.D., adds further information on athletes and officials at the games, namely that an aspiring boy contestant marched together with other boys in a parade before the competition.³⁹ Artemidorus expresses the fear of boys of rejection at an athletic contest, and indeed in his story the would-be competitor is rejected by the judge Asklepios. Artemidorus elsewhere (1.59) speaks of the adult wrestler who dreamed that his entry for the Olympic games was rejected. There must have been considerable fear among athletes of rejection by the officials at the games,

35. Cf. the long and useful article of E. Klingenberg, "Diakoluein Antagoniston. Eine Platonische Bestimmung des Griechischen Wettkampfrechts: Pl. Lg. 955A2-B4," in *Studi in onore di Arnoldi Biscardi* (Milan, 1987): 435-70, on this passage. In addition, Pseudo-Andocides (*Against Alcibiades* 26) alleged that Alcibiades deprived Diomedes of his team of horses and competed with it himself, but such was his influence that no penalties were exacted.

36. Cf. N.B. Crowther, "The Age Category of Boys at Olympia," *Phoenix*, 42 (1988): 304-08, and P. Frisch, "Die Klassifikation der *Paides* bei den griechischen Agonen," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 75 (1988): 179-85.

37. Cf. Jordan, Spawforth, "A New Document," 65-68, and Jordan, "Inscribed Lead Tablets from the Games in the Sanctuary of Poseidon," *Hesperia*, 63:1 (1994): 111-26.

38. Cf. Jordan, "Lead Tablets," 115, who believes that these ballot houses were the "result of a formalization, for whatever reason, of the preliminary part of the competitions." Cf. I. Weiler, "Regel und Regelbruch bei den antiken Olympischen Spielen," in R. Renson (ed.), *The Olympic Games Through the Ages: Greek Antiquity and its Impact on Modern Sport* (13th HISPA Congress, Olympia May 22-28, 1989, Athens 1991), 55-64, *quod non vidi*.

39. Cf. Jordan, "Lead Tablets," 67; Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1972), 254.

who in turn were probably subject to pressure from the families and friends of the candidate.⁴⁰ There is, however, no evidence of pressure from the athlete's home state at the time of the festival.

These regulations, as we have seen, are largely of a personal nature. Yet although there were no specific athletic standards that an athlete had to attain before he could compete at Olympia, many factors would ensure that only the best athletes would compete. Would-be Olympic athletes, for instance, with their fathers, brothers and trainers had to swear an oath in the Council Chamber at Olympia that they would in no way sin against the games, and that they had been in training for 10 successive months (Pausanias 5.24.9):

Beside this image [of Zeus] it is the custom for athletes, their fathers and their brothers, as well as their trainers, to swear an oath upon slices of boar's flesh that in nothing will they sin against the Olympic games ... the athletes take this further oath also that for ten successive months they have strictly followed the regulations for training.

Under oath to Zeus with the fear of dishonoring the gods and committing perjury, this would carry considerable weight.⁴¹ Moreover, Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 5.43) states that the Eleans addressed the athletes on the way to Olympia, no doubt after the training period, and encouraged those who had not trained hard to withdraw from the games:⁴²

If you have laboured so hard as to be entitled to go to Olympia and have banished all sloth and cowardice from your lives, then march boldly on; but as for those who have not so trained themselves, let them depart whithersoever they like.

The thirty-day training period itself at Elis, found only to the best of our knowledge at Olympia and at the Isolympic Sebestan games in Naples in the Roman period, would ensure high standards.⁴³ The length of the training period without financial reward would deter poorer athletes who had little hope of success. Even the distance of the journey to Olympia from many Greek communities, five or six days from Athens according to Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 3.13.5), would doubtless keep away mediocre athletes who had little resources and who did not live in the region. The *Hellandikai* would also have the opportunity, if they so desired, to get rid of inferior athletes during the training period, or at least to make life difficult enough for them so that they would withdraw. These ancient customs would serve in some ways as the equivalent of modern

40. Cf. Jordan, "Lead Tablets," 68.

41. Cf. E. Klingenberg, "*Diakoluein Antagoniston*," and Siewert, "The Olympic Rules," 113-17, who show that the Olympic rules were based on sacred laws different from the law of the Greek city states from which the athletes came.

42. Athletes could withdraw without penalty before the games had begun, but would be fined if they withdrew during the time of the games.

43. See N.B. Crowther, "The Olympic Training Period," *Nikephoros*, 4 (1991): 161-66.

qualifications needed for entry into the games. In general, we may observe that it would be difficult to impose actual athletic standards on aspiring competitors, but entry into the games would be left to the athletes' judgment.

Fear of shame at not finishing first in athletic competition would deter some athletes from competing: Pindar (*Olympian Ode* 8.68-69) speaks of defeated athletes having a wretched return home from the games thrust upon them by the victor.⁴⁴ There was on the whole no pride in Greece for an athlete to have done well in competition without actually winning; certainly there is little evidence for delight merely in participation, despite the belief that the modern Olympic credo "It is more important to participate than to win" is derived from an ancient source.⁴⁵ Today, with stringent qualifications, we are accustomed to seeing only the best athletes in the Olympic games, but we may note that occasionally in the modern world when a country is allowed to enter one competitor in an event whether or not the Olympic standard is met, a mediocre athlete does participate: in 1976 in Montreal, O. Charles of Haiti finished 14 minutes behind the winner of the heat in the 10,000 meters to the jeers and derision of the crowd; he ran the last six laps alone after the others had finished. It is unlikely that this would have happened at ancient Olympia, since such a relatively poor runner would probably have been too ashamed to enter (if we accept that Pindar is not exaggerating in his comments on the shame of athletes), and even if he had entered, he could have been weeded out in the training period.⁴⁶

We may conclude that unlike in the modern world where nations take a great interest in athletes competing in the Olympic games, the *polis* in ancient Greece was little concerned with aspiring athletes until they were actually victorious in competition and thereby brought honor to the city. Any aspiring athlete who met the required personal qualifications was eligible to participate in the games, but other factors would ensure that only the best would compete at Olympia. We should, however, bear in mind that the program of the Olympic games changed during its more-than-1,000-year history, and procedures and qualifications probably also changed over time.

44. Cf. *Pythian Ode* 8.83-87. See also Aristophanes below. On the other hand, see Papalas, "Boy Athletes," 168 n.13; A.M. Miller, "Apolline Ethics and Olympian Victory in Pindar's Eighth *Pythian* 67-78," *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 30 (1989): 483-84, who suggest that Pindar may be exaggerating and that there was no dishonor for the defeated. On the shame culture in Greece, see D.L. Cairns, *A/DOS. The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

45. See D.C. Young, "On the Source of the Olympic Credo," *Olympika*, 3 (1994): 17-25, who believes that the motto comes from the Roman poet Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 9.5-6). Cf. Plato (*Theagenes* 128e-129a) on Channides who said that even if he did not win in running at Nemea the training would be of benefit to him. For other occasional hints of pride in participation, see Poliakoff, *Combat Sports*, 179 n.54.

46. Cf. V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes*² (New York: Bames and Noble, 1974), 256, who deduces from Aristophanes (*Frogs* 1089-98), cf. fr.442, that runners who came last in the torch race at the Panathenaia were thrashed. Cf. the satirical epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology* (11.82-86) on the slowness of runners. There is no joy of participation evident here!