

A Chariot Race for Athens' Finest: The *Apobates* Contest Re-Examined

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Introduction: Athletic competitions formed an integral part of life in ancient Greece and have attracted considerable attention from scholars. Some events are fairly well documented while others still remain obscure due to a lack of evidence. Among the less documented events are several in which the contestants wore armor. This study analyzes one of these, the *apobates* contest, through an examination of archaeological evidence combined with epigraphical testimonia and literary traditions. The archaeological evidence has often been presented as merely a superficial illustration of events described in literary testimonia or virtually ignored, as is the case of the evidence provided by excavations in the Athenian Agora which deal with the route of the Panathenaic Way.¹ This present study will offer a detailed discussion of the evidence provided by sculpture and vase-painting together with that which can be gleaned from excavations in Athens in order to clarify the understanding of the contest to be gained from the epigraphical and literary material, which has already been explored elsewhere.

The *apobates* contest not only required the participants to wear armor but also involved a chariot and a driver. The competition required the contestant to dismount and subsequently remount a moving chariot which was being controlled by the driver. Inscriptions have established that both the hoplite and the driver were held in esteem and regarded as separate victors.²

The military nature of the contest is certainly paramount but it also ranked as an equestrian event in the programs of the festivals. Ancient equestrian events were varied, including horse races as well as chariot races of two- and four-horse teams, but all have a common basis. The considerable expense involved in owning race horses, operating stables, and entering competitions placed equestrian events in the hands of wealthy aristocrats, well above the means of the

1. Donald G. Kyle, *Athletics In Ancient Athens*, supp. 95 in *Mnemosyne* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 188-189. While his references would suggest a thorough investigation, upon close examination it is clear that he is not using the archaeological evidence to its full potential, merely footnoting it and making use of scenes such as found in vase painting as illustrations without fully discussing the potential information they can offer.

2. E. Norman Gardiner, *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 238. Gardiner notes that the driver is described as offering invaluable assistance, being given the title *ἠνιόχοι ἐγβιβάζων*, the charioteer "who lets his companion dismount." The title can be found on a 4th-century inscription from the Amphiarion at Oropos (I.G. VII, 414, 34). [Hereafter cited as *GASF*]

average citizen who on his own abilities might otherwise be able to enter contests such as the foot-race or discus-throw.

The event may well have its origins in the methods of warfare in the Geometric period, recalling the Homeric notion of heavily armed warriors being driven into battle in a chariot. Once there, they dismounted to fight and remounted to move around the battlefield or simply to flee. By the end of the 8th century, however, this method of fighting was yielding to hoplite tactics and was becoming but a distant memory, surviving only in competitions at various festivals.³ It is important to bear in mind that even in Homeric times the war chariot was used more as a means of conveyance and that scholars of Greek military tactics do not envision the hoplite leaping in and out with a frequency which might constitute tactical strategy.⁴ The athletic event rather romanticizes the mobility of a hoplite who in the contest is not nearly as heavily armed as he would be in actuality on the field of battle.

While the *apobates* contest might echo a legendary tactical maneuver of warfare, the tradition is preserved that Erechtheus (the legendary first king of Athens) introduced the contest at the Panathenaia. He is said to have arrived as the driver of a chariot, accompanied by another man who was armed with a round shield and triple-crested helmet.⁵ Apollodorus, writing in the 2nd century B.C., simply states that Erichthonius (Erechtheus) instituted the festival of the Panathenaia (3. 14. 6). It is Hyginus (*Astronomica* 2. 13) who adds that Erichthonius competed at the games in a four-horse chariot and, indeed, is credited with the invention of the quadriga.⁶

The Contest: There are some references to the contest in a variety of epigraphical testimonia but the precise nature of the race is not especially clear. That it was an event held in high regard, however, is suggested by the *Erotikos*, an oration which is generally only ascribed to Demosthenes, from which comes a description of the *apobates* contest as the most respected and best of events.⁷ In the oration, Epicrates is praised for applying himself to this particular contest, "being well aware that slaves and aliens share in the other sports but that dismounting is open only to citizens and that the best men aspire to it."⁸ At least by the 4th century, it was quite popular, apparently being part of festivals in some of the greatest of the Greek cities (*Erotikos* 25).

3. Nicolaos Yalouris, ed., *The Eternal Olympics* (New York: Caratzas Brothers, 1979), 247. The festivals at which the event continued to be held were mainly in Attica and in Boiotia.

4. A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 33, 45.

5. Gardiner, *GASF*, 237. This scene, Gardiner feels, is preserved on the frieze from the Parthenon. The frieze will be discussed below.

6. As an author, very little is known about Hyginus but he may have lived during the early years of the Roman principate. See Mary Grant, ed., *The Myths of Hyginus*, Humanistic Studies No. 34 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1960), 1-3.

7. Even though this oration (LXI) can only be ascribed to Demosthenes and is in all probability not by him, references in the oration to Plato's *Phaedrus* and Demosthenes' own *Funereral Oration* date it to the mid-4th century B.C. For the present inquiry into the *apobates* contest, the date of the *Erotikos* is important, not its precise authorship.

8. Demosthenes, *Erotikos* 23. In *Demosthenes VII*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. N. W. DeWitt and N. J. DeWitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1949.

It is generally held that the contestants (the *apobates*) mounted the chariots when they were at full speed and then dismounted, apparently at regular intervals as the charioteers drove toward a finish line.⁹ Dionysios of Halikarnassus records that at the conclusion of the chariot races “those who have ridden with the charioteers . . . (the *apobates*). . . leap down from their chariots and run a race with one another [αὐτοὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους] | the length of the stadium.¹⁰

The details of the event remain obscure but a mishap described in the *Erotikos* does refer to the team of the opposing chariot bearing down head-on [ἐναντίου] upon Epicrates. While earlier in the oration he is described as the “dismounter,” at this perilous moment he seems to have taken control of his own team and not only saved his own life but also won the race (*Erotikos* 28). No comment is made about the fate of his partner. By his actions, Epicrates also avoided a crash which was apparently a common occurrence (*Erotikos* 29).

Obviously, there were two people in the chariot: the man who had to jump down from the chariot, run, and manage to get back into it again before the race was over; and the man who held the reins and had to drive the chariot in such a way as to assist the movements of the other. The armor worn by the man who would dismount was sometimes a complete panoply, sometimes just a helmet and shield. With his free right hand, he could grip the rail of the chariot. He would bend his right knee and stretch out his left leg so that it almost touched the ground. He would then fling himself backward from the chariot. Of course, he had to remain upright when he hit the ground.¹¹ The contestant would proceed to run behind the chariot for a given distance, presumably staying out of the path of other chariots. Remounting the chariot would have been an easier task, requiring only a slight leap forward. Some scholars maintain that it is for this reason that the remount scenes are rarely shown in art.¹²

Evidence in art: The contest certainly was part of the Panathenaic Festival where it seems to have occupied a prominent position. It is to be found also on the frieze around the Parthenon; the frieze is dated ca. 440 B.C.¹³ On the north

9. Gardiner, *GASF*, 237. He adds that this view is generally suggested by the scenes on the Parthenon frieze. Kyle (in *Athletics In Ancient Athens*, 188) agrees that this activity characterizes the event. We must keep in mind that a team of horses at full speed could easily out-distance a man on foot, all the more quickly since he was encumbered by a panoply. But *Erotikos* 28 mentions that while some chariots were ahead, others were “driven behind.” [ὑφ’ηυοχομένω] perhaps a maneuver referring to slowing down. Just such a maneuver by which the armed contestant could descend the chariot and remount it is probably implied in the title given the charioteer “who lets his companion dismount” on the inscription from the Amphiarion mentioned above.

10. Dionysios of Halikarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities* 7, 73, 3 Loeb Classical Library, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). Gardiner (*GASF*, 238) feels that this may have occurred only in the last lap, at the very end, and does not negate the evidence of mounting/dismounting at intervals during the rest of the race. Gardiner also expresses the opinion that both chariots and *apobatai* raced together for the last lap which seem, improbable if we think of them as racing against each other. Chariots versus chariots or hoplites versus hoplites would be reasonable but anything else would hardly constitute a contest!

11. Yalouris, *Eternal Olympics*, 247. The observation is made that his shield would often pull him into an oblique stance which the artistic representations favor.

12. *Ibid.* But a remount scene is shown on the Panathenaic frieze: North XXII (65) and probably on North XIII (50) as well. See Theodore Bowie and Diether Timme, eds., *The Carrey Drawings of the Parthenon Sculptures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 77.

13. Robertson cautions, however, that just because contestants appear in the frieze (South XXIV-XXXIV and North XIII-XXII) does not mean that they took part in the actual Panathenaic Procession. See: Martin Robertson and Alison Frantz, *The Parthenon Frieze* (London: Phaidon Press, 1975), commentary regarding North XV.



Figure 1. Parthenon Frieze, North XVII, ca. 440 B.C. Parthenon Inv. 859, Acropolis Museum, Athens. Courtesy of the Greek Archaeological Service.

side (XIII-XXII), the hoplites are shown fully clad in chitons carrying a shield and wearing crested helmets. The scene of North XVII (57) shows the warrior in the oblique angle (see Figure I), suggestive of dismounting but in North XXII (65), the angle suggests the remount. On the south side (XXIV-XXXI) appears another group of chariots drawn by four horses in which we again find the *apobates*. In panel South XXX (74), the contestant is clearly visible wearing a helmet and carrying a shield but unlike the north side, wearing only a cloak fastened at his neck. The figure is shown riding in the chariot, turning toward the viewer to look over his right shoulder at the chariot behind him. He does not appear to be in the process of dismounting, just assessing the competition. In other sections, the warrior is standing beside the chariot. Gardiner points out that these different views merely illustrate different moments during the race and not two separate events.¹⁴ The inclusion of the contest in the Panathenaic Festival can be viewed, according to Parke, as “an interesting spectacle” and as a “military archaism.”¹⁵

In addition to the evidence provided by the Parthenon frieze, two small Athenian reliefs are also known which seem to have been bases for dedications by victors in this event. One was found west of the Acropolis; the other was built into the Late Roman Fortification Wall running through the Agora south of the

14. Gardiner, *GASF*, 238.

15. H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 43

Stoa of Attalos (see Figure 2)¹⁶ Both scenes seem to show *apobates* in the dismount position (which, as we noted above, is a common view) with a four-horse chariot and driver.”

A fragmentary votive offering from the Ampharaion at Oropos shows only the driver and the *apobates*, who is armed with a helmet and a shield. While he is depicted in an oblique stance, he has both feet in the chariot so it is unclear if a dismount maneuver is about to be executed.¹⁸

Another statue base, dated to the end of the 6th century B.C., was found south of the Piraeus Gate in the Themistoklean Wall. It is carved on three sides: the only carved short side shows the well-known hockey game; the two long sides illustrate what has recently been referred to as a typical departure scene with a chariot shown in mirror images.¹⁹ When it was first discovered in 1922, the scene was identified as the ἀγών ἀποβατικός.²⁰ In a fuller analysis published in 1925, the scene is still regarded as illustrating the *apobates*.²¹ The armed men are just referred to as “hoplites” by Jeffery in 1962.²² On the long carved sides, a four-horse chariot with its driver stands ready. The driver



Figure 2. Statue Base, 4th Century B.C., Agora Museum S 399. Courtesy of The American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations.

16. See John Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 19. The base (shown by Travlos as figure 27) found west of the Acropolis was discovered in 1880 and is dated to the end of the 4th century B.C. (Acropolis Museum Inv. No. 1326). The base from the Late Roman Fortification (shown by Travlos as figure 26 and here illustrated as Figure 2) was discovered in 1933 and is dated also to the 4th century B.C. (Agora Museum Inv. No. S 399).

17. In discussing the example now in the Agora Museum, T. Leslie Shear maintained that the warrior has just leaped onto the chariot but a dismount maneuver seems more likely, for the reasons noted above (see note 12). See T. Leslie Shear, “The Sculpture Found in 1933,” *Hesperia* 4 (1935): 380. The base bears this inscription: “Krates son of Heoritos of Peiraeus.”

18. See Olga Tzakou-Alexandrou et al., *Το Πνεύμα και το Σώμα* (Athens: National Archaeological Museum, 1989), catalogue entry #186. Dated ca. 400 B.C., the piece is now in the Ethnic Archaeological Museum in Athens (Inv. No. 1391).

19. Jane Sweeney et al., eds *The Human Figure in Early Greek Art* (Athens: Karydakis, 1987), 174 and figure 63. The base is in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (Inv. No. 3477).

20. A. Philadelphus, “Three Statue-Bases Recently Discovered at Athens,” *JHS* XLII (1922): 105 and plate VII.

21. S. Casson, “The New Athenian Statue Bases,” *JHS* XLV (1925): 166. The observation is made, moreover, that the charioteer on the right side wears a shield on his shoulders (p. 171). Shields for charioteers are, of course, unusual and no explanation is offered by Casson.

22. See L. H. Jeffery, “The Inscribed Gravestones of Archaic Attica,” *BSA* 57 (1962): 127-128. No. 2

wears a helmet and a long chiton, the usual dress for a charioteer. Two hoplites approach the chariot while a third one steps into it. The hoplites are each armed with a full panoply: corselet, shield, greaves, helmet, and spear.²³ The presence of the spears may be the factor which distinguishes this as a departure scene and not the *agon apobatikos* in spite of the association with an easily recognizable sporting event. (See below).

On the lower part of the shaft of a stele in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is incised a panel showing a fully armed hoplite stepping into a four-horse chariot whose driver holds the team steady.²⁴ While the idea of a departure scene seems obvious in connection with a grave marker, Richter is careful to point out that the scene may be an *apobates* as well.²⁵ The hoplite clearly is holding his spear in his right hand, the shield in his left, as he steps into the chariot (see Figure 3).

The significant issue in assessing whether or not a particular sculptural scene



Figure 3. Incised panel from an Attic Gravestone, ca. 535-525 B.C. Metropolitan Museum of Art 36.11.13. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1938.

23. Sweeney, *Human Figure*, 174 and fig. 63. The spear of the hoplite stepping into the chariot on the left side (which shows the interior view of the shields) is described as rendered with light engraving and color; on the right side (showing the exterior view of the shields) the spears of the approaching hoplites are also rendered by light engraving and color. These details are quite difficult to make out today.

24. G. M. A. Richter, *The Archaic Gravestones of Attica* (Connecticut: Phaidon Publishers, 1961): 32-33. No. 45. The fragment (36.11.13) is said to come from Attica: it is dated ca. 535-525 B.C. See Figure 3.

25. This possibility she attributes to a suggestion made by Sir John D. Barley. *Ibid.*, 33.

illustrates the *apobates* contest is the presence of spears. Obvious representations of the contest during the actual race (see Figure 2) show the hoplites with their shields on the left arm while with the right hand, they grasp the railing of the moving chariot. Spears are not included in these scenes at all. Studies of war chariots and military tactics make it clear that Greek hoplites did not normally fight with spears from chariots, nor were the Greek chariots equipped with sheaths for holding spears or javelins.²⁶ Hoplites in genuine fighting situations could be transported to and from the battlefield in chariots but during the ride, they would have to hold their own spears and could not place them in any sort of container.

Examples such as we have examined from the National Museum and from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 3) which show hoplites approaching chariots while carrying spears must be considered as departure scenes or as combat-ready scenes and cannot be included in an inventory of illustrations of the *apobates* contest. A hoplite who approaches a waiting chariot while carrying a spear cannot be regarded as merely about to start the race, either. While he could hold the spear during a parade-ride, he is not holding it during the actual contest and there is no place on the chariot to put the spear once the race begins. Scenes of the race under way make it patently obvious that the hoplites use their right hands to hold onto the chariot, not to their spears (see Figure 2).

The evidence, then, provided by the several sculptural examples and the Panathenaic frieze which show indisputable scenes of the *apobates* indicates that spears were not carried by the otherwise armed contestants. But evidence from vase painting rather clouds the issue. Some examples show no weapons, others do illustrate spears. Beazley cites several examples of lekythoi in the Haimon group which seem to show the contest which is all the more recognizable because of the presence of a goal. Some of the hoplites carry spears.²⁷ Some of the scenes with the hoplite carrying a spear also show him running beside the team of four horses which are in full gallop (see Figure 4). As was noted earlier, a team of four horses can easily out-distance a man on foot so the juxtaposition in vase painting of the hoplite and the team can be regarded as the exercise of artistic license, perhaps to emphasize the particular scenes as showing the contest and not a departure scene. The occurrence of spears on the vase painting scenes should, perhaps, also be excused as artistic license.²⁸

It has been noted by scholars that ancient lexicographers refer to "descent wheels" (*apobatikoï trochoi*) which would seem to indicate that the wheels of

26. For two recent discussions of chariot tactics, see Mary Aiken Littauer, "The Military Use of the Chariot in the Aegean in the Late Bronze Age," *AJA* 76 (1972): 145-157 and J. K. Anderson, "Greek Chariot-Borne and Mounted Infantry," *AJA* 79 (1975): 175-187.

27. See Sir John D. Beazley, *Attic Black-figure Vase Painters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 544, nos. 149-183. He summarizes the category: "Chariot at the gallop, driven by a charioteer in a long robe; a hoplite has alighted and runs beside the chariot. There is usually a goal, so the *apobates* race, although the hoplite is sometimes given a spear." Figure 4 is an illustration of *ABV* #154. Cambridge 102. Only the obverse is shown; the reverse is not decorated.

28. Kyle (in *Athletics In Ancient Athens*. 188) mentions the vase-paintings cited by Beazley as showing the *apobates* but fails to examine the scenes closely.



Figure 4. Attic Black-figured Lekythos, obverse ca. 490-480 B.C. Haimon Group. Fitzwilliam Museum, CR 80-1864. Courtesy of The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

the chariots used in competitions had a special form to make the dismount and remount easier. The representations, however, do not make clear just what that difference is.²⁹ In analyzing the event as presented on the two 4th-century bases mentioned earlier, we can observe that both contestants have placed their left feet below the hub of the axle while they have planted their right feet on the floor of the chariot (see Figure 2). A similar position is obvious from North XVII of the Parthenon frieze (see Figure 1). But in all three cases, the left foot is obscured by a spoke of the wheel and unless a step of some sort can be demonstrated below the floor of the chariot, the left foot perhaps should be assumed to be hanging free.³⁰ In discussing the stele in the Metropolitan Museum (see Figure 3), Richter observes that there is a peculiar rendering of the chariot's axle for "the axle of the wheel does not connect with the body of the chariot."³¹ She does not, however, discuss the possibility of these as the "descent wheels." Axles shown in art seem to range anywhere from the front of the chariot to a central position to a rear position. By the Geometric period, the central position is common in art.³² A position at the rear could be an aid in stepping into the chariot.³³

The Race Course: During the Panathenaic Festival, the event may have been held at some point along the Panathenaic Way as it passes through the Agora. Gardiner has proposed that the course of the race ran "from the Kerameikos to the Eleusinion, on the slopes of the Acropolis."³⁴ The distance from the Kerameikos Cemetery at the Dipylon Gate to the Eleusinion is approximately 700 meters, of which the last 120 or so meters are uphill. In fact, the slope of the Panathenaic Way increases considerably from about the Library of Pantainos on toward the Acropolis.

It was during the excavations of the Panathenaic Way in 1973 and 1974 that blocks identified as forming a starting line were discovered. Laid down about the middle of the 5th century, the blocks run across the line of the street in the northwest corner of the Agora.³⁵ A stratigraphic examination of the rock bed of the Panathenaic Way has suggested, moreover, that during the entire 5th century B.C., no wheeled traffic was allowed access into the Agora from the north.³⁶ Chariot races occurring once a year during the Panathenaic Festival

29. Yalouris, *Eternal Olympics*, 247. The suggestion is offered that in all likelihood, the axle passes underneath the chariot.

30. Shear, "The Sculpture Found in 1933," 380-381. He seems to be of this opinion regarding the hoplite on the base from the Agora (see Figure 2).

31. Richter, *Archaic Gravestones*, 32. She adds that this is also found on some black-figured vase-paintings.

32. Littauer, "Military Use of the Chariot," 154. Perhaps the central position is just an artistic preference for symmetry. She observes that we do know that in the Archaic period some racing chariot models at Olympia had axles near the rear or in the rear position. She cites H. L. Lorimer (*Homer and the Monuments* (London: MacMillan, 1950), 318-319).

33. *Ibid.* Egyptian and Near Eastern war and hunting chariots used for speed seem to have preferred the rear position. She details the problems of balance of the yoke when stepping in and out of the chariot. Such problems would make the driver in the *apobates* contest all the more important.

34. Gardiner, *GASF*, 239. While he does not mention I.G. II², 2317 specifically, he must have it in mind. The evidence provided by this inscription will be discussed below.

35. T. Leslie Shear, Jr. "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1973-1974," *Hesperia* 44 (1975): 362-363.

36. *Ibid.*, 362. It did, however, become a major thoroughfare in the 4th century and so continued "until the end of antiquity."

might not leave any ruts but Shear goes on to suggest that the athletic events allowed on the Panathenaic Way may have been just the various foot races.³⁷ Camp, however, suggests that the *apobates* contest was held on the Panathenaic Way, based upon inscriptional evidence of the 2nd century B.C. in which the victor of the contest and the charioteer are described as "dismounting at the Eleusinion."³⁸ Kyle agrees that this inscription (which Gardiner also seems to have had in mind) verifies that the competition was held in the Agora.³⁹ Considering that the inscription dates to the 2nd century B.C. and also in light of the remarks already mentioned by Dionysios of Halikarnassus (*Rom. Ant.* 7. 73) about the hoplite dismounting from the chariot in the last lap and running to the finish line, this inscription cannot be taken to confirm that the event was held in the Agora, at least not in the 5th century B.C. It does, however, suggest that the race may have been run over a portion of the Panathenaic Way, ending before the incline and winners were acknowledged at the Eleusinion.

Such athletic competitions as were held along the Panathenaic Way may have been transferred to the stadium built by Lykourgos near the Ilissos River after its completion in ca. 330 B.C.⁴⁰ And with such a transfer, the turn suggested from the passage in the *Erotikos* (28) may have been introduced to approximate the original length of the race.⁴¹ The location of Lykourgos' stadium and thereby the site of the athletic events which formed the Panathenaic Games in the third quarter of the 4th century has recently been proposed to have been on the Pnyx Hill.⁴² While this suggestion has not been widely accepted, it does serve to point out that scholars are not certain as to the location of the race course in the 4th century and thereby, cannot judge even the length of the race itself.

The Festivals and Awards: That the *apobates* event was a special feature of the Panathenaic Games is widely accepted but its popularity elsewhere is not so clearly documented. Ancient sources do vaguely mention its popularity elsewhere.⁴³ Some particular festivals, e.g., the Anthesteria in honor of Dionysus,

37. *Ibid.*, 364. It is likely, as Shear points out, that most of the gymnastic competitions were held in the Agora until the 4th century. He does not discuss chariot racing.

38. John M. Camp, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), 46. He cites I.G. II², 2317, the inscription of the 2nd century B.C. mentioned above in note 34.

39. Kyle, *Athletics In Ancient Athens*, 188. He does not comment upon the fact that if the race did end at the Eleusinion, it would have been uphill for some 120 meters.

40. Camp, *Athenian Agora*, 46.

41. During the excitement of a race, it is certainly possible that a team of horses might be spooked and run amok but, according to my sources familiar with horses, in all probability the team would continue running forward and would not wheel completely around. If we can, indeed, use the remark in the *Erotikos* as indicating a planned turn in the race, the event can no longer be regarded as taking place on the Panathenaic Way during the 4th century.

42. David G. Romano, "The Panathenaic Stadium and Theater of Lykourgos: A Re-examination of the Facilities on the Pnyx Hill." *AJA* 89 (1985): 441. He proposes that both the ruins identified as the so-called East Foundation and the West Foundation are to be thought of not as stoas but as race-courses. The East Foundation measures 65.8 meters by 17.21; the West Foundation measures 148.105 by 17.86.

43. Demosthenes (*Erotikos* 25) mentions its popularity in the greatest of the Greek cities. Dionysios of Halikarnassus (*Rom. Ant.* 7. 73) says that it is still performed in his day in a few Greek states. Modern scholars have maintained that it was held in Attica, Boiotia, and even Thessaly (I:G., (2), 527, 531) although some would say Attica and Boiotia only. Kyle ignores the inscription referring to Thessaly (see *Athletics In Ancient Athens*, 188). It is also suggested that in Attica and Boiotia a four-horse chariot was used while in Thessaly, only a two-horse chariot. See Trakou-Alexandrou, *To Πνευμα.* 299.

offered as gifts distinctive vases on which were painted scenes identified as the *apobates* event but as Kyle has emphasized, these *choes* were gifts, not prizes and therefore the depiction of an *apobates* race need not mean that it was part of the festival.⁴⁴ It is recognized neither at the pan-hellenic festivals held at Olympia, Isthmia, Delphi, nor Nemea, although the programs included other games of a military nature, in particular, the race in armor.

In spite of its esteemed position, we do not know what prize was awarded to the victors. No Panathenaic amphorae have yet been identified as showing the event, suggesting the obvious conclusion that the prize was something else.⁴⁵ Aristotle does not clarify matters, either. In *Ath. Pol.* (60. 3), he mentions silver money and gold vessels as prizes in music, shields for the victors in the *Euandria*, and olive oil for victors in the gymnastic contest and the horse race. And in the *Erotikos* (25) is only a passing remark about the event having been deemed worthy of the most valuable prizes. A reference to the “envied crown” need not be taken too literally (*Erotikos* 28).

CONCLUSIONS: While it is not possible to define the rules and regulations of the *apobates* competition as clearly as we might like, several aspects of it can nonetheless be elucidated. As has been understood for some time, the event included a charioteer and an armed companion who, at intervals, dismounted and remounted the moving chariot. The panoply consisted only of helmet and shield; spears or other weapons were not carried.

Festivals at which the competition was held were mainly in Attica and in Boiotia but also in Thessaly. The awards remain obscure. Although it was part of the Panathenaic Festival, no Panathenaic amphorae are yet recognized as showing the scene, leaving then the probability of money as the prize.

In all likelihood, the race was run on a straight course but a remark in the *Erotikos* (written in the 4th century) suggests that the opportunity existed for the chariots to turn and race toward each other. Perhaps the race was indeed held along the Panathenaic Way in the 6th and 5th centuries but after the completion of the stadium by Lykourgos in the 4th century, the event was transferred there and a turn instituted.

Leaping in and out of a moving chariot was no easy feat. The charioteer, in providing invaluable aid by reining in the team, earned the title of being the one “who lets his companion dismount.” References to “descent wheels” suggest that special wheels or attachments were also employed to aid the *apobates*. With such special wheels and no weapons, the competition echoes battlefield tactics of a by-gone era but does not duplicate them.

The event is acknowledged, as least in Athens, as highly respected, in which only the best men participate. As an equestrian event, it was aristocratic in nature and on a different level from events like the race in full armour which are perceived to have appealed especially to the “citizen-soldier” in the audience. *The apobates* event at one and the same time recalled the age of Homeric heroes

44. Kyle, *Athletics In Ancient Athens*, 45.

45. *Ibid.*, 188.

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and provided a competition worthy of the best among mortal men. The skill necessary to perform the obsolete tactical maneuvers would not otherwise be applicable on a battlefield now dominated by the phalanx. And yet, the inclusion of such a competition, while militarily impractical in the classical period, served as a visual reminder of past achievements immortalized by Homer. To the audience, the *apobates* competition may even have taken on a quality approaching an “historical re-enactment.” As we endeavor to grasp more fully the details of obscure contests such as this, which were highly regarded in antiquity, we come ever closer to an understanding of ancient Greek society and its social and moral values.