

# Other Peoples Games: The Olympics, Macedonia and Greek Athletics

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THE MOST FAMOUS STORY CONCERNING MACEDONIA and the Olympics is a negative one. The popular version is that Alexander the Great was urged to compete in the *stadion* (200 meters) in the Olympic games (as his ancestor Alexander I had done, according to Herodotus). To this suggestion, Alexander the Great replied that he would do so only if the other *agonistai* ("competitors") were kings as well.<sup>1</sup> The story is used frequently as an expression of Alexander the Great's dislike of professional athletes and of his youthful arrogance. Almost all the elements of this tale are demonstrably false: the majority of scholarly opinion is that Alexander I Philhellenos never competed at the Olympic games;<sup>2</sup> Alexander the Great had a lifelong love of athletics which was demonstrated throughout his campaigns in Asia and included professional athletes;<sup>3</sup> and one would be hard pressed to find an Olympiad which would fit the circumstances.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is a real story of participation by the Argead Royal House in the Olympics, as well as by the average Macedonians themselves, that the Olympics held a great deal of importance to both the Argeads and the Macedonians within the kingdom and that there is a clear record of the importance of Greek athletics throughout Macedonia in the literary, epigraphic and archaeological record.

## Macedonians and the Olympics

The first, and undoubtedly most controversial, reference to Macedonia and the Olympic games comes from Herodotus. In confirming the Greek heritage of the royal house of

Macedonia, he states as his authority (in part) that "the Hellanodikai, who regulate the games at Olympia, determined this to be so."<sup>5</sup> The antecedent to this is that when Alexander I Philhellenos decided to compete in the games, the Greeks who were to contend with him objected on the grounds that he was not a Greek but a *barbaros*, and being Greek was a requirement for participation in the ancient Olympic games: "But Alexander [I], having proved himself to be an Argive [the Argeads claimed descent from Herakles], was judged to be Greek, competed in the *stadion* and ran a dead heat for first place."

There are numerous problems with this tale ranging from when the possible date for this event could be (if one accepts it at face value)<sup>6</sup> to the convenient fact that (because of the dead heat) there was no record of his achievement.<sup>7</sup> That has not stopped others from accepting it or even elaborating on it. The late N.G.L. Hammond expanded the tale, based on a passage in Justin, to include the participation of Alexander I in the *pankration* (the "no holds barred" fighting competition).<sup>8</sup> Felix Jacoby took the story as evidence of personal contact between Herodotus and Alexander I, and indeed it smacks of an anecdote told over dinner (complete with the inability to check it out and the fact that Herodotus did not seem to bother to do so).<sup>9</sup> But what was the purpose behind it?

The standard interpretation is that this whole story, along with Alexander's role in the Battle of Plataea (which saw the Greek allies drive out the Persian invaders in 479 B.C.), is pure propaganda on the part of Alexander I in an attempt to be accepted by the Greeks as a Greek. By extension this would mean an acknowledgment of his legitimate role in the Greek world.<sup>10</sup> But the modern discussion underplays the most important aspect: it was clearly important for Alexander I to assert the claim; it was not just a whim. It also misses several other points altogether. First, there is no record of public Greek outrage at this claim (and it could not have had a wider play in the Greek world as it was in Herodotus' *Histories*); the objections to it are all modern.<sup>11</sup> Second, it is interesting to note that the primary forum in which Alexander makes his claim is the Olympic games as an institution that was quintessentially and unassailably Greek. No further proof of his ethnicity would be required of him. It was both a statement to the Greek world and to his own kingdom and proclaimed the status of the Olympic games as much as Alexander I's desire for acceptance. Third, later Argead kings did compete in the Olympic games and did so without any comment from the Hellanodikai about their being Greek, so the claim was accepted at some point. The only question is "When?"

Unfortunately, it is a question that cannot be answered without controversy. It is unlikely that Alexander I's successor (Perdikkas II) could have done so. At first he is plagued with internal dissension, and then, when Thucydides begins his narrative of the Peloponnesian War itself, Athens is already at war with Perdikkas.<sup>12</sup> He and Macedonia will be caught between Athens and Sparta for the rest of his reign.

After Perdikkas' death (around 412 B.C.), he is succeeded by his son Archelaus, who reigned from 412 to 399. It is entirely possible that Archelaus participated in the games. Indeed, there is a late reference to his winning in the prestigious four-horse chariot race at both the Olympic games and the Pythian Games to Apollo.<sup>13</sup> Though the reliability of this source has been questioned and there is no other specific confirmation, there is no conclusive reason to reject it out of hand.<sup>14</sup> Archelaus did institute a policy of neutrality in the Peloponnesian War, as well as a policy of hellenization internally which included found-

ing games of his own at Dion (on the slopes of Mount Olympus).<sup>15</sup> He also welcomed émigrés Greek poets and artists, getting out of the way of the war between Athens and Sparta.<sup>16</sup> These are, in fact, the general circumstances in which Solinus, the source for this passage, places Archelaus' Olympic and Pythian victories. Even Ernst Badian, the chief critic in this case, is not so sure of his point and states that everyone must assess the Solinus passage for themselves.<sup>17</sup> One has to acknowledge at least the possibility of Archelaus' Olympic and Pythian victories, if not the probability.

Badian has speculated that the founding of the games at Dion by Archelaus was motivated by a challenge to or rejection of his right to participate in the Olympic games.<sup>18</sup> This is, of course, predicated on his rejection of Solinus passage. The problem is that there is no evidence that Archelaus was challenged or rejected by the Hellenodikai, or for that matter of any other Argead's attempt to do so prior to Philip II. In any event, there would have been little opportunity to do so.<sup>19</sup> Archelaus was assassinated in 399, and there were no fewer than five successors on the throne in the next six years. Eventually a cousin of Archelaus, Amyntas III, became king in 393 and managed to stay on the throne for the next twenty-three years. Nevertheless, Amyntas' reign was anything but stable, and the throne was frequently threatened externally, forcing Amyntas to seek aid from the Spartans, the Athenians, the Chalcidic League and Jason of Pherae by turns. The kingdom was subject to frequent invasion by the Illyrians, the Paeonians, the Thracians and the Greeks of the Chalcidic League. At the same time, various parts of the kingdom successfully broke away or simply acted independently. The Olympic games must have been far from anyone's mind. Amyntas III was followed on the throne by his son, Alexander II, who only reigned from 370 until his assassination in 368. The kingdom was controlled under regency for the next three years, when Alexander II's younger brother Perdikkas III took control. Faced by the emergence of an Illyrian bandit chieftain (Bardyllis) who demanded tribute and controlled most of the upland cantons of the kingdom, Perdikkas would have little opportunity to pursue any Olympic dreams. He was killed trying to drive the Illyrians out in 359, which brought Philip II to the throne. In short, for at least forty years there was not much room for the Olympics on the Macedonian program.

All of that changes with Philip II. In the first three years of his reign, Philip in turn defeats the Illyrians, the Paeonians, the Thracians and even an Athenian invasion. By 356 B.C., he has fully restored the kingdom.<sup>20</sup> In that same year (356), the controversy concerning Argead participation in the Olympics is settled, regardless of how one views the Solinus passage. The definitive reference is from Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*. In recounting the events around Alexander's birth in 356, Plutarch states: "To Philip, having just taken Potidaea, there came three messages at the same time: the first that Parmenio [Philip's favorite general] had beaten the Illyrians in a great battle; the second that his horses had won at the Olympics, and the third announced the birth of Alexander."<sup>21</sup> Further, in framing the context for the story about Alexander the Great refusing to compete at the Olympics, Plutarch remarks that "Philip took care to engrave the victories of his chariots at Olympia on his coins."<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the Argeads had achieved recognition of their right to compete at the Olympics (and hence validated their Greek heritage). It is a point unchallenged by modern scholarship and without remarks concerning our previous debate about Alexander I or reference to Archelaus. Either some previous monarch (the most likely

candidate being Archelaus), despite the trying times, had managed to get his credentials accepted, or Philip simply trotted out the old Herodotean tale and it did the job (hallowed now by a century of existence). Regardless, the fact of it is there.

Nor can one doubt the importance of the Olympic victories to Philip and his ambitions. He placed the record of those victories on his coins, and they became the icons of his reign.<sup>23</sup> An even bolder statement was made at Olympia itself. Pausanias states that in the Altis (the sacred precinct at Olympia), next to the Prytaneion, Philip constructed a building bearing his name, the Philippeion ("the place of Philip"), made "of burnt brick surrounded by columns," which he did after his victory over the Greek allies at Chaironeia.<sup>24</sup> In it "were set the statues of Philip and Alexander"<sup>25</sup> and with them the statues of Philip's parents and his wife Olympias. It was the ultimate statement of Philip's power in the Greek world, and the remains can be seen at Olympia to this day.

Likewise, though Alexander the Great never attended the Olympic games, they provided the occasion of one of his most breathtaking and autocratic gestures. At the Games of the 114<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (in 324 B.C.), Alexander had his envoy (Nicanor of Stagira) announce the Exiles Decree to an audience of 20,000 political exiles. The decree required the Greek cities to take these men back in harmony or be forced to do so.<sup>26</sup> It was a blatant demonstration of his power and prestige. More importantly, Alexander chose the most significant Greek stage upon which to do it. He followed it up at the same event with a decree requiring that he be accorded divine honors. Admittedly, the substance of both Philip's memorial to his family and Alexander's decrees are not athletics, but they are demonstrative of the role played by the Olympics in Macedonian policy.

It may seem somewhat anticlimactic by comparison to grand political events, but a return to simple Macedonian athletic participation in the games is revealing. There may have been a debate about Macedonian ethnicity previously (revolving around the royal house), but the standard contention was that the average Macedonian would not pass muster in that regard. But in the era following Alexander the Great, there is clear evidence that competition at the Olympic games from plain Macedonians was commonly accepted.<sup>27</sup> The victor lists from Eusebius for the *stadion* contain the names of two Macedonians in this period: Antigonus, who won the event in the 122<sup>nd</sup> and the 123<sup>rd</sup> Olympiads (292 and 288 B.C., respectively), and Seleucus, who won in the 128<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (268 B.C.).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Pausanias mentions among the noted winners at Olympia, two more Macedonians who won in the chariot races. The first is particularly intriguing: one "Belistiche, a woman from the Macedonian coast" for winning a chariot race with a brace of foals, which is dated to the 128<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (the same year as Seleucus' victory in the *stadion*; a very good year for Macedonia at the Games).<sup>29</sup> The second is Lampus, whose statue ("a horse breeder and his chariot") stood in the Altis and was identified by his name and city "the last city founded in Macedonia, named after its founder Philip, the son of Amyntas."<sup>30</sup> Clearly by the Hellenistic period, Macedonian participation at the Olympic games was taken for granted. It should be noted that these were the prominent victors; many more must have competed. After 146 B.C., Macedonia became a Roman province, and its participation would have been problematic if not impossible.

## The Olympic Program and Athletics in Macedonia

So much for Macedonians in the Olympic games, but what of examples of athletics and for that matter the "Olympic" program and style of athletics in Macedonia? The obvious place to start, oddly, is also the most controversial. Diodorus states that Alexander the Great, in an attempt to raise the enthusiasm and spirits of his friends "for the *agonas* which lay ahead [i.e., the campaign against Persia] . . . made elaborate sacrifices to the gods at Dion in Macedonia and held dramatic contests [*skenikous agonas*] in honor of Zeus and the Muses, which Archelaus, one of his predecessors, had founded."<sup>31</sup> He goes on to describe a festival that took place over nine days, one in honor of each of the Nine Muses (the daughters of Zeus).

More revealing is Arrian's account of the same event, where Alexander "offered the traditional sacrifice to the Olympian Zeus, which Archelaus had established, and celebrated the Games in Olympian fashion (*ton agona . . . ta Olympia*) at Aigai."<sup>32</sup> He continues: "Some also say that he held games in honor of the Muses." It is not clear whether the antecedent here is meant to be Alexander or Archelaus. The model of holding both athletic and artistic competitions became a model for Alexander, as we shall see.

There is no reference to these games prior to this, although equally there is no reason to doubt that it was Archelaus who established such a festival. What is interesting is the characterization of the games as *ta Olympia* which must refer to the nature of the contests. Diodorus' version really only talks about theatrical events (*skenikous agonas*). There are several resolutions to these differences. First, the festival (wherever it was celebrated) was similar to the program at Delphi or the Panathenaia in Athens; these games had both athletic and literary contests. The second is that Arrian is correct, and two separate festivals were held, both founded by Archelaus—one at Aigai and one at Dion, one *ta Olympia* and one *skenikous agonas*. Diodorus would not be wrong in this case; it is only that he failed to mention the athletic program at Aigai.<sup>33</sup>

It is the athletic program that is controversial. Both Badian and Borza characterize the founding of the games as the establishment of a "counter-Olympics" (as Badian puts it)<sup>34</sup> or a "Macedonian Olympics" (as Borza states).<sup>35</sup> Both predicate this on the rejection of Archelaus' participation in the Olympics and equally assume that the games at Dion would be held in "low esteem" by the Greeks.<sup>36</sup> In fact, though there are plenty of disparaging remarks by Greeks about both individual Macedonian rulers and the Macedonians themselves, there are none that do so in the context of the Festival of Zeus and the Muses at Dion (or Aigai). One doubts that there would be, because of the religious context of the games. Equally, we do not know if these were occasional games or were celebrated on an annual or quadrennial basis. The chances are that they were not quadrennial and so would not be seen in the same light as the Olympic games anyway. The real inspiration for this festival would seem to be the Panathenaic Games held in Athens.<sup>37</sup> Athenian intellectuals came to Archelaus' court, including the previously mentioned Euripides and Agathon; Archelaus also adopted Attic Greek as the court and legal language for the realm.<sup>38</sup> As the quintessential expression of the Athenian culture he so clearly admired, the Panathenaia would be the obvious model for Archelaus. In that case, the whole argument about "counter-

Olympics" would disappear, but the objections (in any event) are all modern rather than ancient.

The real point is that, at least by the time of Alexander and probably originally by that of Archelaus, athletic contests based on the Olympic model were introduced into Macedonia. Arrian states as much. Is there any other evidence? As it turns out, there is a good deal of literary and material support for this. In this case, the best place to start is with the one king whose own Olympic credentials are unimpeachable: Philip II.

Clearly Philip's main engagement in formal athletic competitions was the sponsoring of chariot teams, or presiding over games, as he did at the Pythian Games to Apollo following the Peace of Philocrates in 346.<sup>39</sup> However, Philip had to have engaged in personal exercise and training, for Macedonian kings (like Spartan ones) commanded their forces from the frontlines.<sup>40</sup> As will be demonstrated below, there are numerous references to *palaestra* (wrestling and training grounds) in Macedonian cities. There is in fact one chance reference to Philip training personally in one. In Polyaeus' *Stratagemata*, he refers to Philip "trying his strength with Menagetes in wrestling."<sup>41</sup> He is approached by some soldiers clamoring for their back pay (so this training is in the context of military conditioning), but "dripping with sweat and covered with dust" he makes a joke about "perfuming myself with this barbarian" so he would be fit company for his veterans and runs through them to plunge into a fishpond (avoiding the situation altogether). It later became one of his favorite dinner stories. The point is that athletics were personal, and not just on the part of the king. Alexander demonstrated the same kind of training in regard to running. It was because of his running ability that his companions had urged him to compete in the Olympics to begin with. Though the context of Alexander's reply may be doubted, the background rings true.<sup>42</sup>

Still, the main role for Philip, as with any Macedonian king, was in the festivals and games held in the normal context of his religious and public duties. We may presume that he conducted the athletic events and dramatic contests founded by Archelaus for Dion (and Aigai). The one instance of this that has come down to us surrounds the celebration of his coming campaign against the Persians (and the marriage of his daughter, Cleopatra, to the king of the Molossi) in the spring of 336 at Aigai. These may have coincided with the normal festivities from Archelaus' time, or been specially commissioned, but Diodorus states that "immediately [Philip] set in motion plans for sumptuous sacrifices to the gods, joined with the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra."<sup>43</sup> Philip wanted "as many Greeks as possible to take part in honoring the gods, and so planned brilliant musical contests and lavish banquets." Diodorus states that great numbers of people flocked to the festival "and the games [*kai ton agonon*]."<sup>44</sup>

The next scene is, in fact, Philip's last. "Finally the drinking was over and the start of the games set for the next day," Diodorus begins.<sup>45</sup> While it was still dark, the spectators gathered at the theater for a dawn procession in which the images of the twelve Olympians would be carried into orchestra of the theater, followed by Philip. He was cut down by Pausanias, one of his bodyguards who bore him a personal grudge. Ironically, politics and personalities aside, Philip died in the context of the athletic games that seemed to frame his life.

If the games were important to Philip, we have even more evidence that they were important as well for Alexander the Great. As noted above, Arrian maintained that it was

Alexander's practice "to offer sacrifice to the gods after some good event, and put on athletic and artistic games (*kai agona . . . gymnikon te kai mousikon*), and hold drinking bouts with the *Hetairoi* (Companions)."<sup>46</sup> These celebrations fall into a number of categories: funeral games, celebrations of victories, respites from long marches, entertainment, an excuse for military practice, and the simply sentimental. As an example of the latter, when Alexander landed below Troy in his initial invasion of Asia, he made sacrifices to Athena, and "the grave stele of Achilles he anointed with oil, and with his *Hetairoi* ran a race naked, as was the custom" to honor Achilles.<sup>47</sup>

Usually these events were more elaborate and consisted of two types: those that involved athletic and artistic competitions; and those that consisted of athletic and cavalry competitions. The first of these recorded was in Asia Minor, at Soli, before Alexander moved on Tarsus and when he was well into his second year of campaigning. Alexander "sacrificed to Asclepius [god of healing] and put on a parade of his whole army, with a torch relay race (*lampada*) and athletic and artistic games (*kai agona diathesis gymnikon kai mousikon*)."<sup>48</sup> The torch race was a unique feature here, which is not mentioned in the later instances.

After Alexander left Egypt (in the spring of 331), he paused at Tyre in Phoenicia before beginning his final push to confront Darius III in Mesopotamia. There he "sacrificed to Herakles again, and put on athletic and artistic games (*kai agona poiei gymnikon te kai mousikon*)."<sup>49</sup> Plutarch fails to mention the athletic games but gives great detail to the artistic ones that involved the dithyramb chorus and tragedies.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, in this category, following his return from India and a trying march across the desert, Alexander again paused (this time in Carmania) before continuing back to Susa. He "gave thank offerings for his victory in India and safe passage through the Gedrosian desert . . . and put on artistic and athletic games (*agona mousikon te kai gymnikon*)."<sup>51</sup> Here the artistic efforts seem to be placed first, and this may be a clue to this type of competition. All three of the events of this type occur when the army has paused to regroup after a long march (and before continuing), rather than after a battle. They were probably designed to lift the army's spirits, give them a rest and some entertainment: a Greek version of a U.S.O. show.

The second type, which involved athletic and cavalry competitions, had more of a military exercise function and usually followed a battlefield victory or a set of them. First, while campaigning against the Scythians in Central Asia, following a string of sieges, Alexander "sacrificed to the gods as was his custom and put on a set of games, both cavalry and athletics (*agona hippokon te kai gymnikon*)."<sup>52</sup> The practical purpose here, following a series of attacks on cities, may have been to hone their cavalry skills before going further against the Scythians, who were renowned for their horsemanship.

The last two examples of the type involving athletic and cavalry competitions both come from the Indian campaign. Following the Battle of the Hydaspes River, a particularly tough fight, Alexander celebrated the victory by sacrificing "as was his custom, to the gods and put on a competition of athletic and cavalry events (*kai agon epoieito auto gymnikos kai hippikos autou*)."<sup>53</sup> Then, at the Hyphasis River (on the edge of the Punjab), the army refused to go farther. After trying to persuade them to continue, Alexander divided them into twelve sections, each of which erected an altar to one of the Pantheon of Olympic

Gods: "And when the altars were finished, he sacrificed on them, as was his custom, and put on games of athletics and cavalry competitions (*agona poiei gymnikon kai hippikon*)."<sup>54</sup> This marked the farthest extent of Alexander's conquests, though not the end of his campaigning, as he had to fight his way out of India.

There are several things to note about these instances. First, the phrases used by Arrian in all of them are formulaic and may reflect the fact he pulled them out of the *Ephemerides* (the Daybook kept on Alexander's campaigns and hence an original source). Secondly, his constant use of the phrase "as was his custom" may also indicate that there were many more instances, simply not reported by Arrian or others. Finally, although the events vary in regards to artistic competitions or cavalry exercises, there are always athletics involved.

Finally, the category of funeral games also produces specific instances. The primary example of this is the funeral games for Hephaistion, whose death came while Alexander was holding yet another celebration of games involving athletics and literary competitions at Ecbatana. It was this set of games which were the occasion for Arrian's original remarks about Alexander frequently holding games which opened in this section. Hephaistion took ill in the course of the games, or the drinking bouts, and died. When he had recovered sufficiently from this shock, "Alexander proposed athletic and artistic games with a great number of *agonistai*, far more splendid than any before." Towards that end, Alexander "provided 3000 competitors in all, and these not long afterwards competed at Alexander's own funeral."<sup>55</sup>

Alexander clearly saw athletic competition in many lights, but regardless the numerous references demonstrate the constant role those games played for Alexander and his Macedonians. Nor was he the only sports fan in the crowd. Athenaeus reports that two of his Hetairoi and chief commanders, Perdikkas and Craterus, "being lovers of gymnastic sports, always had in their baggage piles of goatskins that would cover a *stadion* . . . under cover of which they would exercise."<sup>56</sup> It was a normal facet of Macedonian and, for that matter Greek, life.<sup>57</sup> The literary record has an abundance of references as we have seen.

But one of the problems with the ancient record is that one frequently has to accept the literature at face value, or open it up to a great deal of controversy. The literature shifts to firmer ground if one can find confirmation in the material record (archaeology) or other literary contexts (epigraphy). Does that happen here? To a large degree, the answer is "yes." The most spectacular of these would be the finds of Manolis Andronikos at Vergina (ancient Aigai), especially in Tomb II (the contents of which formed the heart of the "Search for Alexander Exhibit" that toured the country two decades ago).<sup>58</sup> The context of the tomb provided evidence of funeral games, in a collapsed brick box on top of the tomb that held weapons (two burnt iron swords and an iron spearhead) and the bits from the trappings of horses sacrificed in the obsequies.<sup>59</sup> Inside, among the grave goods was found a bronze tripod, a victory trophy, inscribed, "I am from the Games of Argive Hera [the Nemean Games]."<sup>60</sup> Though the tomb is late fourth century B.C., the tripod is dated to the previous century and was clearly a family piece. There is no reason to get into the extensive discussion here of whether this is the tomb of Philip II or his son Philip Arrhidaeus, the point is that the material remains confirm both the practice of Homeric style funeral games and participation in Greek Games, albeit not the Olympics.

What about sites for games in Macedonia? Though literary evidence refers to athletic competitions *ta Olympia* at Aigai, no stadium or structures connected to athletics have yet

been excavated there. But the theater in which Philip II was assassinated has.<sup>61</sup> The same holds true for Dion; only the theater has been found (or in this case both a Greek amphitheater and Roman *odeion*), although if athletic events in Archelaus' Festival were held at Aigai and those in honor of the Muses at Dion, there might not be an athletic field to find.<sup>62</sup> The capitol of Pella likewise is still undergoing excavation, with the *acropolis* (palace structure) and some spectacular Hellenistic villas uncovered but none of the other civic structures.

Oddly, some of the more outlying Macedonian towns do have better examples. Demetrias, the fortress town and naval station built by and named after the Antigonid king of Macedonia, Demetrius Poliorcetes, in the early third century B.C., has both a theater and a stadium-hippodrome.<sup>63</sup> A site survey only of the area has been done. It lies north of the theater and is identified because of its open horseshoe shape (similar to the *stadia* Delphi and Nemea, for example).

The best example of all is Amphipolis, on the Strymon River. Initially a fifth-century B.C. panhellenic colony sent out by Athens, it was in fact taken over by Macedonia in Philip's reign and remained a Macedonian city down to the organization of the Roman province in 146 B.C. In short, it was Macedonian over twice as long as it had been Athenian. One would expect civic athletic structures, but in fact the athletic complex dates to the third and second centuries B.C. (the Macedonian period).<sup>64</sup> Excavated beginning in 1982, the *gymnasion* complex is quite large and is situated on the southern slope of the *acropolis*, looking out toward the coast and the harbor at Eion (where it could catch the breezes). The complex consists of ceremonial steps leading down to the main buildings. These are made up of a wrestling courtyard (*palaestra*), baths (with an elaborate cistern and drainage system) and a covered *paradromos* (which allowed for exercise in inclement weather).

The most extensive single piece of evidence for athletics in the normal Macedonian context, however, is epigraphic. The town of Verroia lies a few kilometers west of the ancient Macedonian capitol of Aigai (Vergina) on the hills above the left bank of the Haliacmon River. There a large, two-sided, marble stele was found upon which was inscribed an elaborate set of regulations for the athletic training of the youth of the city and the institutions connected with it: the Gymnasiarchal Law.<sup>65</sup> The inscription lays out how the *gymnasiarch* (who will oversee the process) will be elected; how the youths and boys (*neaniskoi* and *paides*) are to be treated; restrictions on those who can enter the *gymnasion*; sacrifices to Hermes and the festival to him (the *Hermaia*); the running of a *hoplitodromos* (race of armored men) and *lampadedromeia* (torch races by both the boys and the youths); and how the torch leaders and judges for the events are to be selected. It is one of the most comprehensive views of a civic athletic program that has come down to us.

As demonstrated in this article, the material record provides ample confirmation of the role of athletics in Macedonian society. Equally, it substantiates what we find in the literature itself and presents a complete picture. Future excavations will only enrich this. That role is far richer and far deeper than one would expect, or that previous scholarly arguments acknowledge. This article set out to establish the participation of both Macedonian kings and ordinary people (insofar as any Olympic athlete can be ordinary) in the Olympics. One can see this in the victories of Philip II in the fourth century; of the stadion runners Antigonos and Seleucus in the third century; and the horse breeders

Belistiche and Lampus. At the same time, it intended to show the importance of an Olympic program (as with the Festival of Zeus established by Archelaus). The importance and frequency of athletic competitions in the reign of Alexander elaborates on that theme. The archaeological and epigraphic records cap it. More importantly, this may have a good deal to add to the discussion of the Greek nature of Macedonian ethnicity. One hopes it is just only a beginning.



<sup>1</sup>The story is entirely derived from Plutarch, and varies in his telling of it. The standard version is that "those about him" (i.e., his "companions" or *hetairoi*) suggested this to Alexander (*Vita Alexandri 4; De Fortuna Alexandri 9/Moralia 331B*). The variant is that Philip suggested it (*Mor. 179D*). The addition of Alexander I to the story is admittedly a modern one. Plutarch's reasoning was that Alexander had a reputation of being fleet of foot. The story of Alexander I is introduced here as a matter of convenience because it is so widespread and popular a modern notion.

<sup>2</sup>This question will be thoroughly discussed below, for now see Eugene N. Borza, *In The Shadow of Olympus: The Emergence of Macedon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 111-113.

<sup>3</sup>See for example, Arrian, 7.14.1, which is discussed in detail below.

<sup>4</sup>In 344 B.C. (the 109<sup>th</sup> Olympiad), Alexander would have been twelve; in 340 B.C. (the 110<sup>th</sup> Olympiad), at the age of sixteen, he was left as regent of Macedonia by Philip and conducted his first campaign against the Maedi (see Nicholas G. L. Hammond and Guy T. Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 3 vols. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979], 2: 558); in 336 B.C. (the 111<sup>th</sup> Olympiad), Alexander's father was assassinated by a disgruntled bodyguard and Alexander ascended the throne. Though he made a quick tour of Greece that summer, including Corinth and Delphi, Alexander did not even attend the Games (see A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 25-28). From 334 B.C. onward Alexander was in Asia and never returned to Greece.

<sup>5</sup>Herodotus 5.22. The later quotation in this paragraph is from the same section.

<sup>6</sup>See Paavo Roos, "Alexander I at Olympia," *Eranos* 83 (1985): 162-168. The chief problem with the timing is at what age would Alexander be best seen as competing? Borza makes a point that the *stadion* is a "young man's event" (p. 111), but the list of Olympic victors in this event include numerous examples of athletes who won the race in succeeding Olympics (including a Macedonian named Antigonus!). There were three runners (Charmis of Sparta in the seventh century; Astylus of Croton and Crison of Himera in the fifth century) who won the event in three successive Olympiads. The most renowned runner of all, Leonidas of Rhodes, in the second century B.C., was the victor in this event in four Olympic games (the 154<sup>th</sup> through the 157<sup>th</sup> Olympiads) over the course of sixteen years. See David Matz, *Greek and Roman Sport: A Dictionary of Athletes and Events from the Eighth Century B.C. to the Third Century A.D.* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 1991), 121-126. Clearly craft and experience counted as much as youth, but the other points raising different problems with the story are more telling. See also, Ernst Badian, "Greeks and Macedonians" in *Macedonia and Greece in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Times*, *Studies in the History of Art* 10, eds. Beryl Barr-Sharrar and Eugene N. Borza (Washington, D.C.: [National Gallery of Art], 1982), 34-35, for an example of rejection; and Peter Green, *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.: A Historical Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 6-7, for accepting it. Part of the debate is caught up in the question of Macedonian ethnicity.

<sup>7</sup>Borza discusses all the possibilities for resolving this and dismisses it altogether as propaganda on the part of Alexander I. See *In the Shadow of Olympus*, 112.

<sup>8</sup>Hammond and Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 60; Justin, 7.2.14.

<sup>9</sup>Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker II* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1923), "Herod.", frag. 7, 272; Truesdell S. Brown, *The Greek Historians* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Co., 1973), 31n54.

<sup>10</sup>The clearest discussion of this is in Borza, *In The Shadow of Olympus*, 112-113.

<sup>11</sup>There continued to be those who called Alexander I or later Argeads (including Philip II) barbarians, but no denunciation of the Hellanodikai story has come down to us. As for later charges against Alexander, see Herodotus 8.142.5; for similar examples concerning Philip II, see Demosthenes' *Philippics*, which are peppered with such rhetoric.

<sup>12</sup>See Hammond and Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 115-136.

<sup>13</sup>Solinus, 9.16. See Hammond and Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 150.

<sup>14</sup>Badian ("Greeks and Macedonians," 35n16) dismisses this passage first because it is a late source (dated to between A.D. 250-390). But one should note that this is also the time frame for both the Victors List of Eusebius for the *stadion* and its source (Sextus Julius Africanus). In and of itself, that is not a persuasive reason. Badian goes on to reject Solinus because of the author's claims that Archelaus founded the Macedonian navy and excessive mourning over the death of Euripides (who had come to the Macedonian court, written at least two plays there—the *Bacchae* and the *Archelaus*—and become an *hetairos* of the Macedonian court). Thucydides makes the point that Archelaus did more in reforming the military and building roads and fortresses than all of the eight preceding Macedonian monarchs (2.100.2). Given that Macedonia had been providing ship timber to Athens since before Xerxes' Invasion, the idea that Archelaus also formed the navy is not outlandish (See Eugene N. Borza, "Timber and Politics in the Ancient World: Macedon and the Greeks," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 131 (1987): 323-352. Nevertheless, Borza accepts Badian's reasoning on this point (*In the Shadow of Olympus*, 174-175). Hammond, on the other hand, accepts Solinus at face value (Hammond and Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 150n5).

<sup>15</sup>For Archelaus' cultural policies, see Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus*, 171-177 ("Archelaus' Philhellenism") as well as his "The Philhellenism of Archelaus," *Archaea Makedonia* 5 (1993): 237-244; and William S. Greenwalt, "Archelaus the Philhellene," *The Ancient World* 34 (2003): 131-153.

<sup>16</sup>Again, see Hammond and Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 137-141 for the general political narrative, and 149-150 for the cultural material.

<sup>17</sup>See Badian, "Greeks and Macedonians," 47n16.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 35; he is followed in this by Borza, "The Philhellenism of Archelaus," 241.

<sup>19</sup>For the narrative history on this, see Hammond and Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 167-200.

<sup>20</sup>See *ibid.*, 203-295, for the historical narrative.

<sup>21</sup>*Alex.* 3.5.

<sup>22</sup>*Alex.* 4.5. Note that Plutarch refers to "victories" (in the plural) implying either multiple victories in different chariot events at the same Olympics, or in successive Olympics, or both.

<sup>23</sup>Plutarch's earlier statement is confirmed in the numismatic evidence, see Hammond and Griffith, *A History of Macedonia*, 664.

<sup>24</sup>Pausanias 5.20.10. See also, 5.17.4. See also Homer S. Thompson, "Architecture as a Medium of Public Relations among the Successors of Alexander," in Barr-Sharrar and Borza, eds., *Macedonia and Greece*, 173-189. Despite his title, Thompson uses the Philippeion as the benchmark for the Successors to Alexander (173-174).

<sup>25</sup>Paus. 5.20.10.

<sup>26</sup>For the great scene and the Exiles Decree, see Diodorus Siculus 18.8.3-5. See also Curtius 10.2.4-8. See also Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire*, 220-228. The bibliography on Alexander and divine honors is extensive; for an excellent discussion of all the material, see *ibid.*, 278-290.

<sup>27</sup>As the period after Alexander (the Hellenistic Age) wore on the ethnic distinctions between Greeks and Macedonians dwindled, not the least because they could not be perceived by anyone outside the Greek world (such as the Romans). By the end of the period, Strabo could simply state that Macedonia was part of Greece (7.9). See Winthrop L. Adams, "Historical Perceptions of Greco-Macedonian Ethnicity in the Hellenistic Age," *Balkan Studies* 36 (1995): 207-222.

<sup>28</sup>For convenience's sake, see the Eusebius list in Matz, *Greek and Roman Sports*, 123.

<sup>29</sup>Paus. 5.8.11. Thus Kyniska of Sparta is not alone as a female victor at the Olympics, keeping in mind that by Olympic tradition, it is the owner of the horses who is celebrated and does not require

actual participation. See Donald G. Kyle, "'The Only Woman in All Greece': Kyniska, Agelaus, Alcibiades and Olympia," *Journal of Sport History* 30 (2003): 183-203.

<sup>30</sup>Paus. 6.4.10. It is ironic that the last named chariot victor from Macedonia came from a city named for Philip II (here identified by his patronymic). Pausanias is probably nostalgically referring to Philippi (but doing so incorrectly in terms of "the last city founded" in Macedonia or even the last city founded by Philip).

<sup>31</sup>Diod. 17.16.3-4.

<sup>32</sup>Arr. 1.11.1. Note that he has either incorrectly placed them at Aigia, the traditional royal residence and ancient capitol, or is perhaps referring to two sets of festivals, which will be discussed below. See Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus*, 174-175, and especially n30.

<sup>33</sup>Borza, "The Philhellenism of Archelaus," 238 seems to opt for two separate festivals, one at Aigai and one at Dion.

<sup>34</sup>Badian, "Greeks and Macedonians," 35.

<sup>35</sup>See Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus*, 174, and "The Philhellenism of Archelaus," 240-242, for a slight revision of his original position. He also states that these games may have grown out of local festivals and were not intended as a challenge to other panhellenic events.

<sup>36</sup>The phrase is Borza's ("The Philhellenism of Archelaus," 241) but echoes Badian as well ("Greeks and Macedonians," 35-36).

<sup>37</sup>The Panathenaia was held annually but every fourth year was called the "Greater Panathenaia" and was a kind of Athenian Olympics. For this, and Athenian athletics in general, see Donald G. Kyle, *Athletics in Ancient Athens* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987).

<sup>38</sup>See Borza, "The Philhellenism of Archelaus," 37-39, for a discussion of this.

<sup>39</sup>Diod. 16.60.2. For that matter, simply being an honored spectator was also a possibility. Polybius states that Philip V in 217 B.C., following an allied conference at Corinth, "hurried to Argos to be present at the Nemean Games," and it was there that he heard of Hannibal's victory over the Romans at Lake Trasimene (Polyaenus 4.102.4).

<sup>40</sup>On the institution and requirements of Macedonian kingship, see Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus*, 236-241.

<sup>41</sup>Poly. 4.2.6.

<sup>42</sup>See endnote 1 above.

<sup>43</sup>Diod. 16.91.4. The remaining quotation is from the same passage.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 16.92.1. See also Justin 9.6.3.

<sup>45</sup>Diod. 16.92.5 for the quotation; *ibid.*, 16.93-94 for the remaining scenes.

<sup>46</sup>Arr. 7.14.1. The phrase concerning sacrifices and games becomes, as we shall see, virtually formulaic.

<sup>47</sup>Plut., *Alex.* 15.4

<sup>48</sup>Arr. 2.5.8. I have chosen to render *mousikon* as "artistic" rather than "music" as many translations do because it is closer to the Greek meaning. Note that Arrian uses the same phrases here as he does in the later passages.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 3.6.1 but see also Curt. 4.8.16.

<sup>50</sup>Plut., *Alex.* 29 where he characterizes the performances as brilliant.

<sup>51</sup>Arr. 6.28.3

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 4.4.1.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 5.20.1.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 5.29.2.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 7.14.10.

<sup>56</sup>Athenaeus 12.539C.

<sup>57</sup>One can find similar examples to these games in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, for instance at Trapezus on the Black Sea (when the Greeks have finally broken out of the mountains of Asia Minor). There they rest for thirty days and hold games involving the *stadion*, *dolichos*, boxing, wrestling, the *pankration* and horse races (a virtual Olympic program). *Anab.* 4.8.25-28.

<sup>58</sup>For the finds at Vergina, see Manolis Andronikos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenaiou, A.E., 1987). Naturally, these provoked a good deal of discussion. For an excellent summary of that and good bibliography, see Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus*, 253-266.

<sup>59</sup>Andronikos, *Vergina*, 98.

<sup>60</sup>See *ibid.*, 164 (for an illustration) and 165-166 for text.

<sup>61</sup>See *ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>62</sup>Dion promises to be a rich archaeological site, and one would expect to find the normal civic *palaestra* at least. See Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus*, 173-174.

<sup>63</sup>See Anthi Batziou-Efstathiou, *Demetrias* (Athens: Archaeological Receipts Fund, Directorate of Publications, 2002), 16 for the overall plan, 33-35 for the theater, and 35-36 for the stadium.

<sup>64</sup>See Demetrios Lazarides, *Amphipolis* (Athens: Archaeological Receipts Fund, Directorate of Publications, 1997), 52-58.

<sup>65</sup>The epigraphic reference is *SEG* 27.261, but for convenience sake, it is cited in total in Stephen G. Miller, *Arete: Greek Sports from Ancient Sources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), no. 126, 131-138.