

## MATCH FIXING AND VICTORY IN GREEK SPORT

The recently published P.Oxy. 5209 purports to be a legal contract between the father and the trainer of Nicantinous and the guarantors of Demetrius, two boy wrestlers active in third-century CE Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The document is dated to 267 CE and lays out the details of an agreement between the two parties to fix the final of the boys' wrestling in the upcoming Great Antinoeia games. According to this arrangement, Demetrius was to yield victory to Nicantinous for the sum of 3,800 drachmas. Moreover, the document contains provisions for compensation in case the bout was declared sacred (i. e. a draw) by the Antinoeia officials, or in case Demetrius reneged on the deal. Even though there is other evidence for rule-breaking in ancient sport, this document is exceptional in that it illustrates in detail the logistics of match fixing from the athletes' perspective. Taking P. Oxy. 5209 as a starting point, the aim of this paper is to expound its implications for our understanding of match fixing as well as perceptions of victory and defeat in Greek athletics during the Hellenistic and Roman imperial era.

### *Match Fixing in Ancient Greek Sport*

Match rigging is well documented in ancient Greek sport and the practice has attracted some scholarly attempts to account for it. Even though local factors always played a role, common patterns in the practice of cheating and match fixing suggest that such practices should also be studied in the context of a widespread athletic culture. This is especially so in the case of Greek sport during the Roman imperial era. Hundreds of local games, including *θεμίδες* and *ἐφηβεία* contests, are attested in the Greek-speaking east dur-

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1) Editio princeps in: W.B. Henry / P.J. Parsons et al., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* Vol. LXXIX, London 2014, 163–167.

ing this period. Agonistic inscriptions from individual cities reveal local athletes that never made it to the international athletic scene as well as complex networks of families who dominated local sport and politics. Such local athletic microcosms were nodal points in civic life as they articulated social identities and power relations. At the same time, this multitude of local games and athletic practices were interconnected into an ecumenical network of Greek sport characterized by standardization of rules and events, fixed athletic calendars and a group of cosmopolitan athletes who shared the same aspirations and values. In other words, sport practices and contests at the local level were largely modelled on a well-embedded template of distinct and widely shared Greek athletic culture.

A starting point for any discussion of cheating in sport, ancient and modern, is the fundamental question: why do athletes resort to it? From the perspective of the athlete who concedes victory, P. Oxy. 5209 would suggest that financial gain was an immediate motive. How likely it would have been for athletes to succumb to cheating for pecuniary reasons? In the case of P. Oxy. 5209, as the editor has pointed out, it is possible that besides Demetrius his guarantors made a profit out of the affair as well. In this scenario there was probably a surcharge to the 3,800 drachmas that Demetrius was to receive. One possibility is that Demetrius, as many other athletes of local caliber, might have needed the money to further finance his athletic career. But the evidence suggests that cheating, including match fixing, was also practiced by athletes talented enough to compete at the highest echelons of the athletic circuit, including the Olympics. A case in point that bears some striking similarities to P. Oxy. 5209 concerns Polycctor and Sosander, the Olympic finalists in the boys' wrestling of 12 BCE. In this instance the father of Polycctor allegedly bribed the father of Sosander. Polycctor presumably won but the bribe was revealed and the two fathers were fined with the cost of two Zanes statues.<sup>2</sup>

It would be apposite to view such and other stories of monetary bribing in ancient Greek sport in the context of the evidence for the social background and subsidization of athletes, especially in the post-classical world. We are aware of the fact that as early as the mid-third century BCE there were in Egypt young and talented athletes that were in need of financial aid – e. g. an athlete called

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2) Paus. 5.21.16–17.

Pyrrhus, who received material assistance and tutelage from the powerful and influential Zenon.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, two early Hellenistic decrees from Ephesus provide evidence for the attempts of Athenodorus and Timonax, two talented athletes of distinction but of limited financial resources, to obtain the funds necessary in order to take their athletic careers to the next level, i. e. hire a private coach and compete at the Olympics.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that neither Athenodorus nor Timonax were absolutely destitute: before they filed the requests for subsidies they had achieved victories in panhellenic contests, presumably by using family resources, the material prizes won at local games or even grants from private patrons.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the level of support required, it is safe to conclude that during the Hellenistic period in some parts of the Greek-speaking world there were mechanisms in place for those seeking to finance the athletic careers of talented and promising youths who lacked the necessary financial means. Moreover, during the Hellenistic and Roman periods athletically inclined youths could receive a head start in athletic training through participation in the civic *ephebeia*. That was especially so because the post-classical *ephebeia* appears to have been rather socially inclusive, thus providing the opportunity for athletic and cultural training to youths from a wider cross-section of the civic body.<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to gauge, even approximately, the number of athletes of modest social backgrounds that succeeded, through external subsidization or other means, in making a name of themselves at the top level of Greek athletics in the post-classical world. Nevertheless, it is by the same token certain that during the same

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3) P. Lond. VII 1941. See W. Clarysse / K. Vandorpe, *Zénon, un homme d'affaires grec à l'ombre des pyramides*, Leuven 1995, 58–62 and S. Remijsen, *Challenged by Egyptians: Greek Sports in the Third Century BC*, in: Z. Papakonstantinou (ed.), *Sport in the Cultures of the Ancient World: New Perspectives*, London 2010, 109–110 for a discussion of additional examples.

4) Athenodorus, I. Eph. 2005; Timonax, I. Eph. 1416. For Athenodorus and Timonax see also L. Robert, *Sur des inscriptions d'Éphèse. Fêtes, athlètes, empeureurs, épigrammes*, RPh 41, 1967, 14–32 and S. Brunet, *Olympic Hopefuls from Ephesus*, *Journal of Sport History* 30, 2003, 219–235.

5) See the remarks by D. G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, Malden, MA / Oxford 2015, 236–237.

6) See S. Hin, *Class and Society in the Cities of the Greek East. Education during the Ephebeia*, *AncSoc* 37, 2007, 141–166; C. Laes / J. Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire. The Young and the Restless Years?*, Cambridge 2014, 104–120.

period social elites continued to engage in sport at the competitive level and achieve victories at top games.<sup>7</sup> All things considered, on the present state of the evidence it appears that many, if not most, victors at the Olympics and other top games originated from at least relatively affluent families that could invest in their offspring's training and sport-related travel. Furthermore, many Olympic-caliber athletes, especially those who reached the final rounds of their event, would have been capable, if they wished so, to amass numerous monetary prizes from local games across the Greek world. For such athletes, therefore, the pecuniary incentive for cheating as a source of enrichment and financing of one's athletic career would have been less compelling. It is also worth noting that in all the stories of corruption in the ancient Olympics recorded by Pausanias, our main source for cheating and match fixing in the most prestigious agonistic festival of the Greek world, we are never provided with an actual amount that changed hands.<sup>8</sup>

However, in Philostratus' *Gymnasticus* we do hear of a specific monetary sum used to fix the outcome of a match at a panhellenic contest (Gymn. 45). Following a diatribe against cheating and corruption in Greek sport, Philostratus discusses the case of two unnamed boys who fixed the wrestling final at the Isthmia games for 3,000 drachmas.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the story is not cor-

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7) See H. W. Pleket, Zur Soziologie des antiken Sports, Mededelingen Nederlands Historisch Instituut te Rome 36, 1974, 57–87 (revised reprint in Nikephoros 14, 2001, 157–212) and idem, Games, Prizes, Athletes and Ideology. Some Aspects of the History of Sport in the Greco-Roman World, Stadion 1, 1975, 49–89. The accumulation of epigraphic evidence since the publication of Pleket's articles does not invalidate his conclusions regarding the dynamic presence of social elites in post-classical Greek athletics.

8) Besides Polyctor and Sotades, discussed above (Paus. 5.21.16–17), see also Paus. 5.21.2–9 and 5.21.12–15 for other cases of cheating or other misconduct in the ancient Olympics. See I. Weiler, Korruption in der Olympischen Agonistik und die diplomatische Mission des Hypereides in Elis, in: A. D. Rizakis (ed.), Achaia und Elis in der Antike, Akten des 1. Internationalen Symposiums, Athen, 19–21 Mai 1989, Athens 1991, 87–93; idem, Korruption und Kontrolle in der antiken Agonistik, in: K. Harter-Uibopuu / T. Kruse (eds), Sport und Recht in der Antike, Vienna 2014, 1–30; J. S. Perry, 'An Olympic Victory Must not Be Bought': Oath-taking, Cheating and Women in Greek Athletics, in: A. H. Sommerstein / J. Fletcher (eds), Horkos. The Oath in Greek Society, Exeter 2007, 81–88.

9) For a discussion of the *Gymnasticus* in the intellectual context of the Second Sophistic see J. König, Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire, Cambridge 2005, 301–344.

roborated by any other sources, and it is true that in the *Gymnasticus* Philostratus occasionally slips into factual inaccuracies. Nevertheless the episode is worth investigating, at the very least as an indication of what an intellectual with an interest in athletics, like Philostratus, would have thought as plausible circumstances for sport-related bribing. It is also interesting that the *Gymnasticus*, in all probability written in the 220s or 230s CE, is a near-contemporary to P. Oxy. 5209 and that both contain references to fixing a wrestling final in the boys' age-category. The editor of P. Oxy. 5209 has argued that in the context of Antinoopolis and the surrounding areas in Middle Egypt the amount of 3,800 drachmas that Demetrius agreed to receive for conceding defeat at the Great Antinoeia was low. That was especially so, the argument continues, since the Great Antinoeia was an eiselastic contest and hence the victor would have been awarded a monthly pension from his home town.<sup>10</sup>

The expectation for rewards would have been even higher after a victory at Isthmia. Most Isthmian victors would have received from their home cities significant accolades, including one-off or long-term monetary grants. The same would have been true for the Olympics and all other games of the expanded, late-antique *περίοδος*.<sup>11</sup> Given the ever expanding circuit of *περίοδος* and local games during the Roman era, top-tier athletes would have had to spend more time and money on travel throughout the Greek-speaking world. Regarding the amounts spent on trainers, there is evidence that a *παιδοτρίβης*, i. e. a coach who supervised the training of youths in the city's gymnasium, earned 500 drachmas per year in Teos (c. 200 BCE) while in Miletus (second century BCE) the same position paid 30 drachmas per month.<sup>12</sup> The inscription from Miletus points out that the gymnasium trainers could accompany youths who wished to travel to crown games, ostensibly to assist with their training (SIG<sup>3</sup> 577, 54–58). It is certain that pri-

10) Henry / Parsons et al. (n. 1 above) 164.

11) For the Greek athletic *περίοδος* in the late Roman world see S. Remijsen, The So-called "Crown-Games": Terminology and Historical Context of the Ancient Categories for *Agones*, ZPE 177, 2011, 97–109. The term *περίοδος* is encountered for the first time in IvO 186, a monument of the late third-early second century BCE. The term *περιοδονίκης* is encountered for the first time during the Roman imperial period.

12) Teos SIG<sup>3</sup> 578; Miletus SIG<sup>3</sup> 577.

vately hired coaches would have been remunerated more handsomely. How much more depended on the reputation and the record of each particular coach.

Hence the 3,000 drachmas reported by Philostratus as agreed for fixing a final bout at the Isthmia would have been a relatively paltry sum, considering also the travel expenses and fees for top-level trainers that competitive athletes at the *περίοδος* games would have had to dispense. Similarly, the 3,800 drachmas agreed in P. Oxy. 5209 would have been able to sustain Demetrius only for a few months or a bit longer, assuming that the athlete in question did not have aspirations to compete beyond his immediate geographical milieu.

Since the pecuniary gain of the athletes who agreed to yield victory does not adequately explain known instances of bribing and match fixing in the ancient world, we should perhaps approach the question from the perspective of the athlete who paid the bribe. In the case of the Olympics and other panhellenic and *περίοδος* games, a victory was followed by unsurpassable fame within the athletic community as well as, as we have already pointed out, significant rewards from various sources, including the athlete's home city. Victories in local contests were less valued in terms of reputation, although at times substantial material prizes could accrue to the victors in games of local caliber. In the ever expanding and increasingly competitive athletic culture of the Roman east, it is not hard to imagine why the allure of everlasting fame and a comfortable life induced some athletes to take the risk and attempt to resort to victory through bribing and other forms of cheating.

### *Greek Athletic Victories in the Roman World*

The immense prestige that accompanied victories in panhellenic games is almost as old as Greek sport itself. The concept must have been firmly in place by the mid/late sixth century BCE when athletic contests and training spread rapidly throughout the Greek world. Epinician poets did their part in augmenting the multifaceted value of an athletic victory in the Olympics and other major games. The entire genre of epinician poetry is predicated on the perception of athletic victory as glorious, unique and indivisible. Epinician poets also underscored the dominance of an athletic victor at the expense of other athletes: a runner-up was the first

loser.<sup>13</sup> Through their emphasis on the individual victor and his family, agonistic inscriptions and monuments of the sixth and fifth centuries also indirectly corroborated the notion that it was a clear-cut victory that really counted. To be sure, this was a largely self-serving attitude as both poets and their rich patrons aimed at asserting their athletic and by extension social ascendancy. According to this mentality, it was only after an Olympic or other major victory was achieved that its ripple effects could be felt on the social fabric, e. g. the notion that such victories ultimately bestowed greatness on the victor's community.

The perception of the uniqueness of athletic victory was actively propagated until late antiquity. For instance, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods sport victory memorials increasingly employed 'value added' neologisms in an attempt to maximize the impact of a particular victory or even an entire athletic career. Most of these new concepts that qualified athletic performances highlighted the exceptional nature of a victory or series of victories. Thus athletes often made the claim that they were the first among a group of peers to achieve victory in a certain contest. Such claims could have had local or panhellenic appeal. For instance, in a memorial of the early third century BCE Philocrates from Kamiros in Rhodes claimed to have been the first of his fellow citizens (νικάσαντα πρώτων Καμιρέων, l. 8) to win the boys' wrestling at the Pythian games.<sup>14</sup> About a century later, Agesistratus from neighboring Lindos claimed to have been the first athlete from his city to win the boys' wrestling at the Olympic games (νικῶντα Ὀλύμπια παίδας πάπαν πρώτων Λινδίων, ll. 4–6).<sup>15</sup> As S. Brunet has argued, these and similar claims of athletes were based on a detailed knowledge of athletic history and records and should be considered legitimate.<sup>16</sup> Hence even though both Philocrates and Agesistratus were high-caliber athletes with victories in one of the 'Big Four' contests, given the rich athletic history of Rhodes neither could

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13) Pind. Ol. 8.68–9; Pyth. 8.81–7.

14) Tit. Cam. 92.

15) IG XII, 1 841.

16) S. Brunet, *Living in the Shadows of the Past: Greek Athletes during the Roman Empire*, in: B. Goff / M. Simpson (eds), *Thinking the Olympics. The Classical Tradition and the Modern Games*, London 2011, 90–108. Cf. D. C. Young, *First with the Most: Greek Athletic Records and 'Specialization'*, Nikephoros 9, 1996, 175–197.

claim to be the first among the Greeks or even among the Rhodians to have achieved a particular athletic victory. They had to restrict themselves to the more modest proclamation of being the first ever from their home cities.

On the contrary in his memorial Leon, an early second-century BCE (and thus contemporary of Agesistratus from Lindos) wrestler and pancratiast most likely from Rhodes, claimed to have been “the first among Greeks” to have achieved a certain victory or combination of victories.<sup>17</sup> That this was a well-researched claim that could not have been made lightly is suggested by other contemporary evidence. For instance, a recently discovered statue base of the first century CE contains a list of the most important victories of a Messenian wrestler and pancratiast.<sup>18</sup> Even though a part of the inscription, including the portion that contained the name of the athlete, is not preserved, the list of victories inscribed in two columns seems to be complete. The athlete in question was twice Olympic victor in men’s wrestling. In addition, he achieved several victories in the major panhellenic games in different age groups – twice in Delphi, twice in Isthmia and thrice in Nemea. Despite his illustrious record, it appears that this Messenian athlete did not claim in his honorific monument any firsts or unique achievements. This implies that at the time the monument in question was erected Messene could boast of other multiple panhellenic victors with an even more distinguished record.

The ideal of the one and indivisible athletic victory persisted during the Roman imperial period. In addition to circumlocutions expressing unique athletic feats, the same notion is encountered in stories that conveyed the message that athletic victory at the highest level was as precious as life itself. In some cases, athletes were portrayed as presented during a contest with the dilemma of victory or death.<sup>19</sup> In turn, those who died in competition are often glorified in language reminiscent of rhetorical *topoi* used to honor soldiers who died in battle. A most striking case concerns Agathos Demon, also known as Camelus, of Alexandria, an athlete of the

17) *Ol. Ber.* 7, 1961, 218–223 = SEG 22.350.

18) P. Themelis, *Μεσσήνιοι αθλητές*, in: A. Delivorrias et al. (eds), *Έπαινος* Luigi Beschi, Athens 2011, 143–144.

19) L. Robert, *Les épigrammes satiriques de Lucilius sur les athlètes: parodie et réalités*, in: A. Dihle (ed.), *L'épigramme grecque*, Vandœuvres / Geneva 1968, 198–201.

third century CE who died while competing in Olympia “having prayed to Zeus for the crown or death” (εὐξάμενος Ζηνὶ ἢ στέφος ἢ θάνατον, ll. 6–8).<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps ironically, it is the rhetorically flamboyant decree for Tiberius Claudius Rufus, a pancratiast who competed in Olympia and “thought it better to scorn life than the hope of the crown”, that provides the evidence for the earliest case of a “sacred” victory at Olympia.<sup>21</sup> Contrary to Camelus, Rufus did not die competing in Olympia. He competed “in a magnificent and admirable manner” (ἠγωνίσσατο μέγα τι καὶ θαυμαστόν, l. 15) and, being pitted in the final against an athlete who had enjoyed a bye, strove for the Olympic wreath until nightfall, whereupon the judges declared a draw. Rufus’ performance and sacred victory is presented in the decree as a token of distinction. The text underscores that Rufus was the first athlete to ever record such a sacred victory in the Olympic games. Eventually sacred and joint victories became more common and were proudly recorded by some athletes of the Roman imperial period.<sup>22</sup> At times, a minority of athletes even bragged about the fact that they competed in the final of an event, without winning or drawing, at the Olympics and other major contests.<sup>23</sup> Eventually even mere participation in a major contest became in some quarters a source of pride and as a result the notion of an honorable mention in the absence of victory took root, at least in some parts of the Greek-speaking world. Thus in a decree of 58 BCE the city of Del-

20) G.-J.-M.-J. Te Riele, *Inscriptions conservées au musée d’Olympie*, BCH 88, 1964, 186–187 = SEG 22.354. Cf. the comments by L. Robert / J. Robert, *Bulletin épigraphique*, REG 78, 1965, 111.

21) IvO 54, second century BCE. Quotation from ll. 22–23 (λογίσασθαι τῆς ψυχῆς ὑπεριδεῖν ἢ τῆς περὶ τὸν / στέφανον ἐλπίδος). For Tiberius Claudius Rufus see R. Merkelbach, *Der unentschiedene Kampf des Pankratiasten Ti. Claudius Rufus in Olympia*, ZPE 15, 1974, 99–104; M. B. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World. Competition, Violence and Culture*, New Haven / London, 1987, 127–128. A sacred victory refers to a situation in which after declaring a draw the prize was dedicated to the god of the festival. In cases of joint victories, on the other hand, after the officials declared a draw they awarded a crown or other prize to two athletes. See N. B. Crowther, *Resolving an Impasse: Draws, Dead Heats and Similar Decisions in Greek Athletics*, Nikephoros 13, 2000, 125–140; Z. Papakonstantinou, *Spectator-Athlete Interaction in Ancient Greek Athletics*, in: N. Gökalp et al. (eds), *Vir doctus anatolicus. Studies in Memory of Sencer Şahin*, Istanbul 2015, 797–805.

22) L. Robert, *Études d’épigraphie grecque*, RPh 56, 1930, 28–29; Crowther (n. 21 above) 132 n. 29.

23) I. Didyma 194; L. Moretti, *Iscrizioni agonistiche greche*, Rome 1953, no. 85.

phi commended Hermocrates, an athlete from Smyrna, for competing “worthily” (ἀξίως, l.9) at the Pythian games, ostensibly without winning the crown.<sup>24</sup> At the local level, there are several known cases of athletes of the imperial period who conspicuously advertised the fact that they competed “with distinction” (ἐνδόξως), again without winning or drawing, in a parochial θέμις or other contest.<sup>25</sup> Claiming to have competed ἐνδόξως, with or without victory, was not merely vainglorious rhetoric on the part of athletes. Value added terms were viewed as hard-earned tokens of distinction, so much so that an ἐνδόξως postscript was added, in a different hand after the remainder of the inscription was carved, in a third-century CE honorific text recording the victory of an athlete from Heracleia in the Pontus at the Asklepeia games in Ancyra.<sup>26</sup>

These and similar texts indicate a gradual adaptation in the perceptions and valuations of athletic victory. By the late Hellenistic period sacred and joint victories as well as honorable performances had become for some athletes legitimate objects of athletic commemoration. As N. Crowther put it, “perhaps the concept of not losing became more important in the imperial period rather than the earlier credo of winning ‘at all costs’”.<sup>27</sup> At the rhetorical level, for the archaic and classical panhellenic champions the boasts of later athletes to “have competed with distinction” or to have scored a number of joint victories would have been unthinkable in the context of athletic commemoration.

How can the trend to elevate joint victories or mere participation as tokens of distinction in agonistic inscriptions be accounted for? The answers to this question need to be sought in the changing circumstances in which Greek sport was performed during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Sport became a major, if not the most crucial, component in what we can call the process of Hellenic acculturation. In a multicultural world of ever-chang-

24) Syll.<sup>3</sup> 740. Cf. φιλονείκος in I. Sardis 78.

25) MAMA 4.132; MAMA 6.73; R. Heberdey / E. Kalinka, Bericht über zwei Reisen im südwestlichen Kleinasien, Vienna 1897, 50, 67; J. G. C. Anderson, Festivals of Mên Askaênos in the Roman Colonia at Antioch of Pisidia, JRS 3, 1913, 294–295; T. Wiegand, Reisen in Mysien, AM 29, 1904, 326; TAM V, 2.1013; TAM V, 2.1015. For additional references see L. Robert, Inscription agonistique d’Ancyre, concours d’Ancyre, Hellenica 11–12, 1960, 356–358.

26) Robert (n. 25 above) 351.

27) Crowther (n. 21 above) 140.

ing borders, elites of the cities of the eastern Mediterranean (especially Asia Minor, Near East and Egypt) that wished to identify themselves as Greek increasingly turned to sport as an old, venerable, tried and true practice of a Hellenic way of life. Involvement in Greek sport as a means of fostering a Hellenic cultural identity could take several forms, including participation in the local ἐφηβεία for youths, competition and victory in civic and interstate athletic contests as well as munificence directed towards sport (e.g. taking on the formal role and expenses of a γυμνασιαρχία or ἀγωνοθεσία; providing an endowment for a local θέμις).

In this spirit, it was considered essential that Hellenic or Hellenized elites participated and succeeded, in plain view of their fellow citizens, in athletic training and contests. Consequently, at times regulations were adapted to accommodate the need of elites to participate en masse in local athletics and guarantee that they would maximize the symbolic rewards of their participation and victory. An example is the practice, documented for several cities especially during the Roman period, of admitting in the annual intake for the ἐφηβεία underage or older youths.<sup>28</sup> In other cases, local contests appeared to have been accessible only to local residents. For instance the record of victors at the Meleagria, a local festival celebrated in the small city of Balboura in Lycia during the second and third centuries CE, suggests that the games in question were open only to Balbouran citizens. Moreover, extant victory monuments and inscriptions from Balboura demonstrate that most of the victors belonged to the local elite. In addition to the circumstances of victory at the Meleagria, these monuments underscore both the illustrious pedigree of the athlete / civic persona as well as the fact that he was a member of the ruling elite of the city (e.g. τάξεως τῆς πρωτεύουσας; ἀνὴρ ἐκ τῶν πρώτων ἐν τῇ πόλει; ἀνὴρ τῶν παρ' ἡμῶν εὐσχημονεστάτων).<sup>29</sup>

It is within this context that we need to assess the willingness and, we may assume, eagerness of local-caliber athletes and organizing authorities to proclaim draws, in the form of joint victories,

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28) N. M. Kennel, *The Greek Ephebate in the Roman Period*, in: *Papakonstantinou* (n. 3 above) 175–194.

29) N. P. Milner, *Victors in the Meleagria and the Balbouran Élite*, *AS* 41, 1991, nos. 1,11–13; 3,13–15; 5,10–12. See also nos. 4, 6, 8 and 9. Nos. 7 and 10 record joint victories.

especially in civic athletic festivals. This was because in the second and third centuries CE joint victories in local games were represented, in the context of victory commemoration, in language that legitimized the elite athletes' claims of sharing in the culturally powerful symbolism of Greek athletics. It is indicative of this trend that on some occasions even otherwise unrelated joint victors were commemorated jointly.<sup>30</sup>

The overwhelming majority of the evidence for shared athletic victories comes from Roman Asia Minor, especially the western and southern regions. It is likely that the afterlife of ancient monuments in this part of the Roman world has contributed to a higher survival rate of honorific decrees for athletes. Furthermore, even though athletes throughout the Greek-speaking world eagerly commemorated their victories and careers in monumental fashion, on the present state of the evidence commemorative practices for athletes – victorious or not – in Roman Asia Minor seem to have been more inclusive and certainly more indifferent to old stereotypes, entrenched since the archaic age, regarding the value of an individual athletic victory. It would appear then that by adapting the old notion of the indivisible nature of athletic victory local elites in communities across south and western Asia Minor created a hybrid script of athletic victory and commemoration that conformed to the trend towards Hellenization, i. e. the urge to emphasize one's Hellenic cultural credentials in the Roman world. In other words, participation in athletics and the rhetoric of its commemoration was for the elites of Roman Asia Minor an act of identity self-fashioning, a way to inscribe themselves in a tradition (pre-existing or invented) of Hellenism.<sup>31</sup>

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30) See e.g. joint victors in boys' pancration, W.M. Ramsay, *Antiquities of Southern Phrygia and the Border Lands* (II), *AJA* 4, 1888, 12 no.9 = V. Bérard, *Inscriptions d'Asie Mineure*, *BCH* 16, 1892, 424, no. 53, Pogle, Pisidia, third century CE; joint victors in boys' wrestling, A.M. Woodward / H. A. Ormerod, *A Journey in South-Western Asia Minor*, *ABSA* 16, 1909/1910, 117, 10, Pisidia, imperial era; joint victors in boys' wrestling, *SEG* 2.745, Pisidia, third / fourth centuries CE; joint victors in men's boxing, Moretti (n. 23 above), no. 83, Lycia, third century CE. For additional references to recorded draws in agonistic inscriptions see Robert (n. 25 above) 353–354; Crowther (n. 21 above) 126–130.

31) For the wider cultural context see O. van Nijf, *Athletics, Festivals and Greek Identity in the Roman East*, *PCPhS* 45, 1999, 176–200 and idem, *Local Heroes: Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-fashioning in the Roman East*, in: S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, Cambridge 2001, 306–334.

Moreover, this template of victory commemoration that at times emphasized in almost equal measure participation, performance and victory, was ultimately integrated into the local civic power politics of peer co-existence. Post-victory practices, including epinician ceremonials and the strategic placement of victory memorials in key sites across the civic space, guaranteed that local elites who contributed or participated in athletics received their fair share of social recognition.

Nonetheless, one cannot emphasize enough that even though the number of joint and sacred victories increased during the Roman period they still constituted a small percentage of the overall number of attested sport victories. Despite the efforts of some late antique agonistic inscriptions to elevate the importance of joint and sacred victors, and given the strong, centuries-old tradition of individual victory, we can reasonably assume that in popular mentality the social prestige accruing from shared victories or even mere participation in athletic contests could never compare to the distinction of an individual victory, especially in a *περίοδος* contest. In addition to the relative paucity of favorable references to joint or shared victories the strong drive towards sole victory is also suggested by the eagerness of athletes, discussed above, to highlight extraordinary athletic achievements. Hence most athletes, at the local or interstate level, would have first and foremost opted for a sole victory, and would have settled for a joint or sacred one only as a last option.

It is also worth noting that the willingness to dilute the old notion of individual and unique victory is overwhelmingly, albeit not exclusively, encountered among athletes who in principle could only manage victories or draws in local games. This certainly accounts for the fact that the record of notable athletes with victories in the Olympics and other major games often included boasts that they never succumbed to a joint or sacred victory, as e.g. the multiple champion M. Aurelius Asclepiades from Alexandria, who proudly declared ca. 200 CE that he was never jointly crowned (*μήτε συστέφανωθείς*) and the Olympic victor Publius Aelius Aristomachus who never recorded a sacred victory (*μήτε ἱεράν ποτε ποιήσας*).<sup>32</sup>

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32) For M. Aurelius Asclepiades see Moretti (n.23 above) no.79, 13 and W.Decker, *Antike Spitzensportler. Athletenbiographien aus dem Alten Orient, Ägypten und Griechenland*, Hildesheim 2014, no.77. For Publius Aelius Aristomachus see Moretti (n.23 above) no.71, 15 and Decker (see above) no.65.

One can of course expect bragging rights from such athletic superstars but it is also illuminating that athletes of various backgrounds and skills would at times strive for sole victory at the expense of the rules. The gymnasium law of Veroia includes a provision against anyone who “yields a victory” (ἐάν τις νίκην ἐτέρῳι παραδῶι), presumably at a profit, at the local Hermaia games.<sup>33</sup> In the same vein the evidence for cheating and match fixing, especially during the Roman imperial period, also provides a glimpse on the keen efforts of athletes to achieve victory at local and interstate games. In the case of P. Oxy. 5209, given that the financial rewards of a victory at the Antinoeia games were rather moderate, we must assume that the prestige of a sole victory and its wider social implications were major, if not the most important, motives behind Nicantinous’ attempt to buy out the victor’s crown in the boys’ wrestling competition.

### *Conclusion*

Sport is largely a cultural construct that is sensitive to historical and ideological permutations. One cannot assume a uniform understanding and practice of sport throughout the Greek world, even during the same historical period. In such a context, it is plausible that prompted by civic peer polity interaction and elite competition for recognition, there emerged in Hellenistic and especially Roman Asia Minor a perception of sport that encouraged participation and joint victories as evidence of Hellenic identity. It appears that in local games a victory, either individual or joint, would bestow to the athlete or athletes involved the necessary Hellenic cultural credentials, augmented by the prestige that usually accompanied athletic achievements.

This template of signification of athletic victories spread in other parts of the Greek-speaking world and was adopted by mostly local-caliber athletes. It did remain, however, secondary to the strong hankering for sole victory. The latter attitude can largely account for the increasing importance of recording unique athletic achievements in agonistic inscriptions. It can also be detected behind the increasing attempts to rig athletic contests. Even though

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33) P. Gauthier / M. B. Hatzopoulos, *La loi gymnasiarchique de Beroia*, Athens 1993, A, 71 with commentary pp. 116–117.

there was money to be made in such circumstances, the extant evidence suggests that the amounts involved were not always very substantial, considering the cost of training and travel, especially for full-time professional athletes. It appears therefore that whatever other considerations might have come into play, for the instigators of known episodes of match fixing, including P. Oxy. 5209 and other cases, the old and powerful appeal of an individual athletic victory, with all its attendant Hellenic cultural implications, constituted a major if not the primary motivation.<sup>34</sup>

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34) My thanks are due to Wolfgang Decker, who generously made available to me his forthcoming article on P. Oxy. 5209 entitled "Ein abgekartetes Spiel. Zu Papyrus Oxyrynchus 5209 (Sport am Nil, Suppl. II)".