

Panathenaic Amphorae: Their evolution and contribution to the promotion of the Great Panathenaea

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to delve into the integral part sports played in Attica, as evidenced by the role they played in the Festival of Panathenaea and especially as is depicted on a specific vase form, the Panathenaic amphora. Inspired by the Panathenaic festival, Athenian artists created great works of art, decorated with sports-related scenes that promoted the festival, as well as the actual sports events that took place. It is well known that in the attic region, a considerable number of well-organized and prestigious festivals took place, as Pericles highlighted in his 'Epitaph'. During the afore-mentioned festivals, various kinds of events were held, some of which in the form of competitions, for instance musical competitions, athletic competitions and beauty contests. The Panathenaic vase, decorated with and celebrating these competitions and exceptional performances, contributed to a great extent to the promotion of the virtues that are instilled through exercise and sports. Additionally, its importance lies in the fact that the Panathenaic vase provides valuable information, as the scenes depicted are festival- and event- specific, not illustrations of generic athletic events. The Panathenaic amphorae are telling examples of their creators' exceptional technique and constitute an important source of information on their synchronous evolution with the great Athenian festival. Ceramic art, as well as other forms of art, fostered a creative outlet for all kinds of religious and cultural attitudes of the ancient Greek world.

Keywords: Great Panathenaea; Panathenaic amphorae; Athens; Games.

1 Introduction

This study aims to cite all relevant evidence which demonstrate the degree of interaction between a religious festival and the prize that was awarded to the winners of the athletic events associated with the festival in question. To that end, an examination of the Panathenaic festival and the promotion of sports throughout the festival is conducted, considering also the great prize that was awarded to the winners, that is, the Panathenaic amphora. The fact that artists sought to depict sports events and athletic scenes on the vases provides us with an opportunity to rediscover both the Ideal and the notion of Beauty.

The religious festivals which were held in the attic area were numerous and prestigious. An indicative reference is cited in the 'Epitaph' of Pericles, according to whom, Athenian politicians listed contests and festivals held in Athens throughout year among the other indulgences and provisions the Polis granted its citizens with (Thucydides II 38). The majority of these festivals included musical competitions, athletic competitions and beauty contests.

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The athletic decorations of the Panathenaic vessels could be characterized as expressionistic since they depicted the emotional tension of the contestants in a naturalistic manner. The artistic merit of these vessels was due to the excellent quality of the pottery and the skills of the potters, who managed to render the strength, persistence and agony of the athletes vividly. Athletic vigor and youth were enveloped in beauty and health, and all these elements coexisted.

For the successful completion of the current research and especially the analysis of primary sources, the method of historical methodological research has been used, along with historians' ancient texts.

2 The establishment of the Panathenaea-the Great Panathenaic Festival

A great number of local festivals and contests were established in ancient Athens (Nilsson, 1977; Rhodes, 1972; Deubner, 1932; Garland, 1984). It seems, therefore, that there was an 'overcrowding' of festivals and contests in honor of gods and heroes (Thucydides II 38; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.2.8; *Hellenica* 2.4.20). Pseudo-Xenophon corroborates this idea, as he points out that festivals in Athens were double in number compared to those of other Greek towns (Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians* III. 8).

Among all other festivals, the Panathenaea was the one that aroused the greatest interest among the Athenians (Sinclair, 1988). The establishment of the festival can be traced back to prehistoric times, shrouded in the mysteries of mythology, as King Erichthonius is named as its founder (Pausanias I.2.6; Davison, 1958). In the beginning, the festival was known as 'Athinaea' (Pausanias VIII.2.1; Papachatzis, 1996). Theseus contributed to the evolution of the festival, changing its name to Panathenaea in order to emphasize the political union of Attica (Mouratidis, 1998; Hall, 2014).

In 556/65 B.C., during the time of eponymous archon Hippokleides, Peisistratus initiated a series of important reforms. The promotion of local festivals in honor of Athena contributed in reviving interest in festivals which would be open to all Athenians (Hall, 2014). This promotion of civic festivals resulted in 'rebranding' the Panathenaic festival, creating the conditions for the establishment of the Great Panathenaea, while the older festival, known as the Lesser Panathenaea, continued to be held. (Ragavi, 1991).

The Great Panathenaea held a prominent position not only among the festivals in Athens, but also in the conscience of citizens (Sinclair, 1988). It was a local festival whose greatness could not be compared with any other festivals in Athens or other city-states. It is no coincidence that the procession of the Great Panathenaea, the culmination of the festival, was the main theme depicted on the frieze of the biggest and most illustrious temple of Athens, the Parthenon (Hadziaslani, 2001).

Since the beginning of the 6th century B.C., one can observe a tendency to reorganize the festivals in accordance with the standard of the Olympic Games, while Peisistratus introduced athletic events in the festivities (Davison, 1958; Ehrenberg, 1968). Consequently, during the Lesser Panathenaea ceremonies and competitions were held to celebrate the birth of Athena, whereas during the Great Panathenaea the rituals and sports competitions were related to the union of municipalities (Dimoi) of Attica under Theseus (Plutarch *Theseus* 24.3; Davison, 1958).

The Great Panathenaea was established as a quinquennial festival which was held every four years during the third year of an Olympic period. This festival, as most other festivals in antiquity, took place on the 28th of the month Hekatombaion (Dragatsis, 1929; Mouratidis, 2008), that is, from 15th July to 15th August (Sakellariou, 2000). Along with the introduction of the athletic competitions a valuable prize was established, the Panathenaic amphora (Figure 1) which contained oil and was awarded to numerous athletes (Gardiner, 1912).



Figure 1. Panathenaic Amphora.

During this time, musical and poetic competitions were introduced, whereby Homeric epics were recited (Lycurgus Against Leocrates B 102; Cohen, 1992). The musical competitions included kitharoidia (performance of kithara lyre and song), aulodia (aulos performance and song) and aulos, as is described on an inscription of the first half of the 4th century B.C. The winners of the musical competitions were presented with golden wreaths or money as prizes. At the same period, the athletic events of Panathenaea also included a Pyrrhic chorus of children (a dance performed in choruses of tribes), teenagers and men, evandrias competition (a type of pageant for men), a torch relay race and rowing ('Amilla Neon', which means fair play for young athletes) where the prizes were bulls and money (IG II2, 2311).

3 The coveted prize

The effort to rebrand the festival in 566-565 B.C was probably rooted in political reasons. It was unthinkable for ancient Athens, a most powerful city-state, to be considered inferior in athletic events in comparison to other Panhellenic festivals and especially to the ancient Olympic Games, in the reconstitution of which Sparta was involved. Apparently, the time was ripe and the circumstances were ideal for the festival to become more attractive. The athletic competitions and the evolution of the Panathenaea constitute a manifestation of the leading role Athens played in ancient Greece (Ehrenberg, 1968). The worship of goddess Athena is also indicative of the pride in the leading role that citizens wanted Athens to play in every political or spiritual activity with political or spiritual ramifications. This fact is ascertained by the eager and massive participation of the citizens not only from Athens but from other city-states too (Mouratidis, 2008). However, despite this aggressive attitude, both Athens and the Great Panathenaea did not manage to compete against Olympia and the Olympic Games, held in honor of Zeus (Valavanis, 2002).

The prize of the contests, which were held during the great Panathenaic festival around 560 B.C., was the remarkable Panathenaic amphora which contained oil (Gardiner, 1912; Hall, 2014). Research has approached the amphora in an intriguing way, attempting to shed light on the development of the form, the decorations and their interpretation, as well as some dark aspects of the prize (von Brauchitsch, 1910; Peters, 1942; Eschbach, 1986). The Panathenaic amphora which, regarding technique was a

demanding form of vessel, contained oil and was awarded to the winners by the judges of the contests (Aristotle, Athenian Constitution 60.1). Because of the strong religious tradition and institutions, the decorations of the Panathenaic amphorae remained unequivocally similar throughout the ages. The surface of the vessel is separated in two parts, while the two handles divide it and thus create the main and the secondary side. On the main side, Athena Promachos was depicted (Davison, 1958) together with an inscription (Valavanis, 1991). The surface of the second side represented the event for which the amphora was an award.

The oil that was inside the vessel was a valuable prize for the victor whereas the vessel and the decorations were considered an honor and a trophy for the winner. It is believed that the winners took one or more amphorae bearing inscriptions, while the main quantity of the oil they were awarded was given to them in uninscribed amphorae or in amphorae with a different shape, probably with a pointed bottom (oxypythmenos) (Kefalidou, 1996). The existence of numerous vessels and their geographical dispersal away from the Attic borders could be explained by the fact that the participants in the contests were from different Greek regions and they transferred the prizes of the contests back to their hometowns (Pindar Nemean Odes X.31; Valavanis, 2002; Tiberius, 2000).

The vessel comprised a separate group from the 6th to the 4th century B.C and was produced in large quantities in order to store oil for the winners (Tracy, 1991; Beazley, 1971; Endwards, 1957). Excavation findings provide information about its existence until the late imperial times (Shear, 1936; Seltman, 1947; Seltman, 1955). In an inscription of the 4th century B.C., the number of Panathenaic amphorae which were awarded as prizes for the first and second winners in various contests is accurately recorded (IG II2 2311; Gardiner, 1910). During the 260 years the contests were held, it is estimated that the pottery workshops constructed approximately 100.000 amphorae (Valavanis, 2002). A significant number of these vessels have been preserved and are a source of information for the evolution of the shape of the vessel.

Athens awarded the prizes to the winners. The winner of the quadriga race was awarded 140 amphorae (Decker, 1995; Young, 1984) full of Attic oil that is, around 5.000 liters, which was an important incentive for participation. Taking into consideration the gradation of the prizes for the contests, it can be estimated that approximately 1.500 vessels were required for each event. Depictions of goddess Athena on the main side served as a guarantee for the quality and quantity of the olive oil the vase contained. The inscription «τῶν Ἀθηνηθεν Ἐθλων», meaning prizes from Athens, directly correlates the city-state with the games held (Valavanis, 1991). The secondary side gives information about the type of the contest in which the winner took part.

The Panathenaic black-figure vessel differs from any other vessel in form, in its depictions, style, decorative motif, in theme and content, which is given as a prize. The Panathenaic vessel was big, 60-70 cm in height and could hold 29, 7-40,7 liters (Decker, 1995). Its special features were its small solid handles, the narrow neck bearing decorations of antipodal flowers, alternating with decorations of antipodal lotus flowers and big surfaces for the depictions (Themelis, 1976; Boardman, 1980). The decorative motif remained the same in the Panathenaic amphorae of Hellenistic times, while in some vessels there are double lines (Endwards, 1957; Kontoleon, 1937). The oldest Panathenaic amphora (in shape and depictions) is the Burgon amphora (Davison, 1958).



Figure 2. Burgon Amphora.

This amphora dates back to the late 560 B.C. and an owl can be seen on its neck while an archaic Athena is depicted on its body, where there are no naturalistic analogies since the goddess figure is represented as short and flattened. On the secondary side a two-horse chariot contest is depicted. The earliest information about the amphora prize comes from an oyster shell known as “Halle fragment” which shows a race and bears the inscription «ἀνδρῶν» (‘of men’) (Boardman, 1980). On some amphorae, runners with weaponry are the main decoration, whereas in other vessels the inscription identifies the owner (διαυλοδρόμου εἰμί) or declares victory (σταδίου ἀνδρῶν νίκη) (Boardman, 1980).

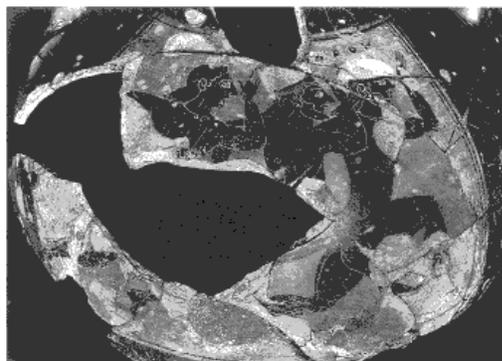


Figure 3. Piece of Halle.

The first eponymous reference on a prize-amphora is that of the Euphilotos eponymous archon (Boardman, 1980; Valavanis, 1991; Kefalidou, 1996). On the main side, Athena is seen brandishing a shield and a spear and her feet show movement. It was probably inspired by a statue of the goddess which was related to the ceremonies and the events of the festival (Valavanis, 1991). The deity is framed by two doric style columns with a cock on top (Papaspnyridi-Karouzou, 1948-1949), the latter being a symbol of competitiveness [Insert fig. 3]. Beside the left column there is the inscription ‘τῶν Ἀθήνηθεν Ἰθλων’ (Papaspnyridi-Karouzou, 1948-1949; Boardman, 1980; Brandt, 1978; Endwards, 1957). On the secondary side a running contest is depicted; however, the scenes on this side can commonly be also of horse races, chariot races, boxing and the pentathlon.

The form of the Panathenaic vessel provided an outlet for the creative powers of illustrious artists. Some of these vessels were made by the painter Kleophrades (Boardman, 1980) which bore Pegasus as an ornament, by the Berlin painter and by the Achilles painter (Boardman, 1980) with a gorgoneion as ornament (Boardman, 1980).

The 4th century B.C. is an era of significant artistic innovations. From that century onwards, the right column is branded with the name of an eponymous archon while the top is adorned with an outstanding symbol, such as a statue or a symplegma. The Panathenaic amphorae take on fine characteristics, a broad mouth, leaning shoulders, slender neck and foot. The orientation of inscriptions changes from vertical to horizontal. Athena's form takes on new characteristics, as the deity is portrayed as slender, with a very small head. The Hellenistic amphora usually departs from conventional illustrative compositions. The convention of placing two columns on the main side is more or less abandoned, and three pattern variations are followed. Studies of the lines of these vessels have shown that artists favor the placement of either a column on each side or only one column on the whole surface of the vessel—either on the main or secondary side (Valavanis, 1991; Endwards, 1957; Brauchitsch, 1910; Papaspyridi-Karouzou, 1948-1949). During the period of 359-348 B.C., the figure of Athena changes direction and starts facing to the right, while her shield is raised and as a result its internal side becomes visible (Boardman, 1980; Papaspyridi-Karouzou, 1948-1949; Themelis, 1976; Valavanis, 1991). On the Panathenaic amphorae of this period, the shield loses its former shape and is drawn having an elliptical shape. This shift gives us the opportunity to observe the inner side of a shield. On the amphorae that belong to the latter quarter of the 4th century however, artists abandon the perspective technique with the elliptical formula and return to the characteristics of the archaic and former classical form, where artists prefer to show the entire circular disk of the shield (Papaspyridi-Karouzou, 1948-1949; Endwards, 1957; Valavanis, 1991; Tiverios, 2000). This new direction in style did not have the same artistic results as former techniques because it excluded any possibility for the addition of decorative elements, as was seen in amphorae on which Athena was turned sideways. On these amphorae, the goddess wears an epiblema which falls on her arms and its edges end in a scissor-like tail, as do her chiton and himation (Papaspyridi-Karouzou, 1948-1949).



Figure 4 – 5. Panathenaic Amphora in the last quarter of the 4th century.

The culmination of the form appears in 363 B.C. on the amphora of Eleusina and it was at the same time an expansion of the archaic technique observed in attic art (Beazley,

1943). On a vessel dating back to 336-335 B.C. (Boardman, 1980), although Athena is archaistic in style (Havelock, 1965), the figures of athletes follow the new proportions. Alongside athletes, there are also coaches, depictions of Nike and personifications of the ancient Olympic Games (Olympias) (Themelis, 1976). This decorative element, that is the attendance of the games by Olympias, attests to the fact that Panathenaic sports events were equal to the ancient Olympic Games (Valavanis, 1991; Themelis, 1976; Boardman, 1974). The Panathenaic festival consisted the ultimate effort on the part of Athens to promote itself, as Athenians sought to match their local festival with the Olympic Games (Pindar, Olympian Ode 81, 84b).

Around 320 B.C., although the production of inscribed vessels in the attic workshops stopped, with few exceptions, the Panathenaic amphorae continued to be produced. The decorations on the main and secondary sides go through “dramatic changes”, so the artists could not neglect the secondary side where sports performances are described. In order for these changes to be understood, examples of the themes of the amphorae regarding running races will be given. The running races which are depicted on a significant number of Panathenaic amphorae are the race course and the long race. The contribution of the artists was important since they provide researchers with a vast and vivid array of races, allowing for longitudinal observation (Gardiner, 1910; 1930).

The oldest type of runners is the archaic. Athletes bearing archaic feature can be seen on the Copenhagen amphora and were depicted «ἀρχαϊκῶς ἔχοντες τοῖς σχήμασι» (Beazley, 1937; Smets, 1936) with their body turned towards the viewer. The advancing foot looks as if it is caught mid-movement, while the foot in the background shows the toes touching the ground creating the impression of a leap forward. Typical characteristics of these depictions are the sharp angles that are formed by the upper limbs and the advancing leg (Gardiner, 1903).



Figure 6. Copenhagen Amphora.

A most typical sample of the innovations that took place during the Hellenistic times can be found on the Pantikapaeum amphora. One can observe bigger, even spaces among the Hellenistic runners. As a result, the scene features three instead of four runners. It is a detail which, in combination with the plasticity of the runners' strides, was ignored by the Copenhagen painter. As for the upper limbs, the advancing one is bent, while the arm that is extended backwards does not form an angle. The perspective of the race is rendered by shifting the runners' weight on the advancing foot. It is obvious that it is an artistic innovation whose origin can be traced back to 341 B.C. on the amphora of Alexandria (Gardiner, 1930; Beazley, 1943). Research suggests that that this posture,

shifting the weight forward, may indicate the end of the race when it is combined with an intense forward leaning of the body (Beazley, 1943; Gardiner, 1930).



Figure 7. Pantikapei Amphora.

The painter Kleophrades, the Berlin painter and the Achilles painter played an integral role in the innovations of Hellenistic art through works they produced during the early classical period. The Bologna amphora, for example, bears many of the characteristics introduced by the aforementioned painters (Peters, 1942; Beazley, 1943).



Figure 8. Bologna Amphora.

The figures of the runners differ, but there is a change in the layout of the contest from the archaic amphorae (Gardiner, 1912). The runners of Bologna represent a transitional stage. They preserve the characteristics of the pre-classical works in their lower limbs with naturalistic elements, while the body and the upper limbs herald the forthcoming change. The head of the runners does not protrude and their weight is carried by the back leg. The body is characterized by plasticity; flexibility characterizes their movement, whereas the figures evoke ethos and superiority.

The depictions of long-distance race runners are few, the most important reason probably being the fact that the race required a great deal of endurance and was thus not particularly appealing to Athenians (Plutarch, Fokion 23.17-22). The amphora 'Archon Nikokratus' from 333/2 B.C. renders the contest in an exquisite manner; the observer can notice its contrast from the ancient amphora that exists in the same museum (Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum, III H pl. 4,1 a-b). It is obvious that the artists based the characteristics of the long race runners on those of the runners described above with slight differences in the movement of limbs and in the positioning of the body.



Figure 9. Anchor Nikokratos Amphora.



Figure 10. Ancient Amphora.

From the few instances of long-distance race scenes, there is one of high artistic merit on a fragment of a Panathenaic amphora (3rd century B.C.) (Dow, 1936) exhibited in the British Museum. The sports performance consists of four and not three runners, whose body type is that of professional athletes, while their long legs are not muscular. One can readily observe the harmonious movement of the advancing leg, together with the support and the movement of the corresponding arm. Obviously, the painter wanted to create a frontal view of the athletes, aiming to stress their physique. Actually, the painter portrays the athletes' stride as asynchronous, in order to create a more realistic depiction of the performance and to render the theme as naturalistically as possible. It is also evident that there were previous attempts to make the scene more naturalistic, as a correction of the first draft which showed the leg of the middle runner touching the ground and not mid-movement can be seen on the amphora (Papaspyridi-Karouzou, 1948-1949; Xenophon, Symposium 17).



Figure 11. Panathenaic Amphora's fragment (3rd century B.C.).

Additionally, the tension of the race is made evident by the muscle spasms of the runners' necks and arms, which further proves that the painters were highly skilled and were able to lend plasticity to the figures. The upper limbs are bent, they are close to the torso, and the palms are clenched. A similar scene is found in British Museum, too. On this vessel, the flaccidity of the figures may be due to the painter's attempt to describe the end of the race. In any case, though, the creator does not show the same enthusiasm as the painter in the former figure.



Figure 12. Panathenaic Amphora (British Museum).

Another interesting version of the vessel is the white Panathenaic amphorae of the 3rd century B.C. They bear a strong resemblance to the famous Panathenaic amphorae but diverge in terms of their decorative technique.

A special sub-group of the Panathenaic amphorae, for which we do not have solid information, are those constructed from valuable metals (Toynbee, 1943; Seltman, 1947; Seltman, 1955). The study of decorations on coins and sculptures of the Roman period suggested that these metal amphorae, in combination with their decorative elements, indicate that they were used as prize-amphorae in the Great Panathenaea (von Brauchitsch, 1910). Other researchers accept that such amphorae potentially existed during specific time periods, and for specific races. (Tiverios, 2000).

It is commonly acknowledged that we know very little about the exceptional art of the Hellenistic times, as the works of that period are considered decadent and inferior according to the “classicist” European view. However, the Panathenaea of the Hellenistic times were a glorious event, with the royal courts represented in the festival. In the Panathenaea festival both sexes are represented; members of royal families participate both as judges-sponsors and athletes, at times emerging as victors (Tiverios, 2000). The Panathenaea festival held in 162 B.C. was a special case in point. In that festival, the royal dynasties of the era participated (of the Attalid, Ptolemy and Seleucid dynasties) (Decker, 1995; Tracy, 1991)); that is, all the people who shifted the image of Athens and who, through their sponsorships, molded Athens into a Hellenistic city-state.

4 Conclusion

To sum up, it is obvious that the local festivals and cults appealed to Athenians and became important occupations for the citizens of Athens. Research suggests that during the great public festivals, such as the Panathenaea, no other religious festivals took place in other city-states of the region. As a result, a large number of people from the country flocked to Athens and, together with the citizens of Athens, enthusiastically took part in the festivities. The Panathenaea took place in the height of summer after the harvest. During the festival, Athenians gathered to honor Athena as a patron goddess of the city (Polias) through dances, songs, processions, sacrifices and musical contests. The procession was the leading event of the festival. It began at dawn from Dipylos to Kerameikos, crossed the Agora and culminated in Acropolis. It is no coincidence that this procession is depicted by Phidias in the 160m frieze of the Parthenon. The presence of Peisistratus in the attic political scene was instrumental, as he turned the local festival into the Great Panathenaea. The Great Panathenaic festival was held every four years and was a glorious event. During the Great Panathenaea there were running races, horse races, chariot races, pentathlon, wrestling and boxing. The prize could not be anything less than something outstanding, special, valuable and appealing enough to attract the

interest of the athletes-connected to both the town and Athena. The only thing that met all the above requirements was the fruit of the tree-symbol of Athena. It was oil from the sacred olives stored in a valuable vessel, the Panathenaic amphora. This amphora holds valuable evidence; it is a vessel which can provide information on the everyday lives of athletes, the sociopolitical status quo and the evolution of art forms. Findings from excavations support the claim that the glorious amphora was given as a prize and passed through many evolutionary phases until the time of Hadrian (117-138 A.D.) Athens and its citizens promoted and took advantage of the Panathenaea for religious and political reasons. Although the Panathenaea festival was essentially and primarily connected with the agricultural community, its evolution reflected the sociopolitical importance of the goddess Athena, who protected the town from her sacred rock. The Panathenaea was held for many years but never gained the fame and glory of the Panhellenic festivals. The prize of the races passed through changes only to the vase form. Future research should focus on issues related to the evolution of the great Panathenaea feast and the role of the Panathenaic amphora in fostering sponsorship.

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