

NIGEL B. CROWTHER

SECOND-PLACE FINISHES AND LOWER IN GREEK ATHLETICS (INCLUDING  
THE PENTATHLON)

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 90 (1992) 97–102

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn



## SECOND-PLACE FINISHES AND LOWER IN GREEK ATHLETICS (INCLUDING THE PENTATHLON)

At Olympia and the other "Crown" Games in Greece only the victors received a prize; there were no second or third place awards. The agony of defeat - that is for athletes who did not finish first - can be seen in the odes of Pindar (Ol. 8.67ff., Pyth. 8.84).<sup>1</sup> Such is said to be the agonistic spirit of Greek society.<sup>2</sup>

Yet this concept that only victory counted is probably too extreme,<sup>3</sup> for in general terms the Greeks did speak of second and third places. Herodotus (1.31-32) records that Solon gave to Cleobis and Biton the second prize of happiness. He also relates that after the Battle of Salamis the Greeks voted to discover who was first and second among the admirals and awarded the second prize of excellence to Themistocles (8.123).<sup>4</sup> Plato (Phlb. 22C-E) states through the mouth of Socrates that a life of pleasure cannot be considered to be in first place or even second, and is in fact even lower than third place.<sup>5</sup>

Even in the athletic games not all believed in victory at all costs. The philosopher Pythagoras advised athletes to compete, but not to win; one should endure the exertions of competition, but avoid the envy of victory (Porph. Vit.Pyth. 15. 16-18).<sup>6</sup> In addition several inscriptions speak of athletes who competed well in festivals without winning;<sup>7</sup> terms such as ἀξίως, ἐνδόξως, ἀξιονεϊκώς and ἐπιφρονῶς are used. None of these festivals mentioned is known to have awarded second or third places. These may be viewed as consolation inscriptions, a solace to those who did not win, but it may be noted that some refer to athletes who took pride merely in competing.<sup>8</sup>

Places other than first in athletic contests can be seen as early as the Iliad (23.261ff.) of Homer where almost all contestants in the Funeral Games of Patroclus receive a prize; the five competitors in the chariot race receive a prize; there are prizes for both contestants in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M.B.Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World* (New Haven-London 1987) 106.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E.Segal, "To Win or to Die of Shame, A Taxonomy of Values," *Journal of Sport History* 11.2 (1984) 25-31.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M.W.Dickie, "Fair and Foul Play in the Funeral Games in the Iliad," *Journal of Sport History* 11.2 (1984) 8-17 who maintains that winning was not everything in Greek athletics.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Plut. Them. 17, Diod. Sic. 11.27, Lib. 1 p14C.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also SIG<sup>3</sup> 305, a fourth century inscription exhorting the Athenian people to reward the first, second and third person to equip a trireme.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Poliakoff (above n.1) 179 n.54.

<sup>7</sup> See L.Robert, "Les épigrammes satiriques de Lucillius sur les athlètes: Parodie et réalités," in *L'épigramme grecque. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* (Geneva 1968) 186-87, and "Inscription agonistique d'Ancyra," *Hellenika* 11-12 (1960) 355-58, who lists twelve such inscriptions and two literary references in Artemidorus.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. I.Didyma 194. See L.Robert, "Études d'épigraphie grecque XXI-XXXI," *R.Phil.* 4 (1930) 29. Most of these references relate to the "heavy" events, but one to the boys' stade.

boxing, wrestling, the fight in armour, archery and javelin throwing; all three in the foot race receive a prize; only in the discus throw is a single prize awarded to one of four competitors (vv. 826-49). Willis believes from other references in Homer and Hesiod that the giving of a single prize was older than Homer.<sup>9</sup> If one subscribes to the theory of Sansone, this early tradition of having a single victor may date from the time when only the winner was dedicated to the god, and when all others were considered losers.<sup>10</sup> The epic imitators of Homer generally follow their model with some variations.<sup>11</sup> We can merely speculate why Homer spoke of multiple prizes in the *Iliad*. It may have been his own invention to fit the spirit of the poem, for poetic effect. On the other hand one may suggest that Homer was following the traditions of actual funeral games, where the possessions of the dead hero were distributed among the best warriors, but no evidence has been discovered for second places there.<sup>12</sup>

Even at Olympia, pace Pindar, it seems that notice was sometimes taken of places other than first. It is well known that Alcibiades boasted of gaining first, second and fourth position in the four-horse chariot race at Olympia;<sup>13</sup> he no doubt added second and fourth places to his claim to enhance his reputation. Similarly Callias of Athens, who won the horse race at Olympia in 564 B.C. (Ps. Hdt. 6.122), is said to have been second in the four-horse chariot race at Olympia, having previously won the prize at Delphi (Schol. Aristoph. Av. 283). Buhmann remarks that the example of Callias and the chariot race is different from that of Alcibiades in that the former did not place first in this event at Olympia.<sup>14</sup> It may be that second places and lower were recorded (although not officially rewarded) in chariot racing, because of the large numbers of entrants.<sup>15</sup> Similarly in the stade it appears that outstanding feats were noticed, if not recorded.<sup>16</sup> Strabo (6.262) relates that in 576 B.C. the first seven runners were all from the city of Croton; hence the saying that the last among the Crotoniates is the first among the rest of Greece.

<sup>9</sup> W.H. Willis, "Athletic Contests in the Epic," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 395-96, 409-10.

<sup>10</sup> See D. Sansone, *Greek Athletics and the Genesis of Sport* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1988), especially 80ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Willis (above n.9) 409-17.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H.J. Rose, "The Greek Agones," *Arete* 3.1 (1985) 165 = *Aberystwyth Studies* 3 (1922) for distribution of property. L.V. Hinckley, "Patroclus' Funeral Games and Homer's Character Drawing," *CJ* 81.3 (1986) 218-19 comments on the poetic qualities. For funeral games, see L. Malten, "Leichenspiel und Totenkult," *MDAI (R)* 38-39 (1923-24) 300-40, L.E. Roller, "Funeral Games for Historical Persons," *Stadion* 7.1 (1981) 1-18, W. Decker, "Die Mykenische Herkunft des griechischen Totenagons," *Stadion* 8-9 (1982-83) 1-24.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Thuc. 6.16; Plutarch Alc. 11 and Isocrates 16.34 state that he was first, second and third; cf. Gomme ad Thucydides.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. H. Buhmann, *Der Sieg in Olympia und in den anderen panhellenistischen Spielen* (Munich 1972) 15.

<sup>15</sup> J.H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses, Arenas for Chariot Racing* (Berkeley-Los Angeles 1986) 8 suggests that there was room for forty-eight chariots or more.

<sup>16</sup> There is no evidence, however, in inscriptions for claims of athletes to second or third place.

Several local festivals are known to have awarded official places other than first. The quinquennial Panathenaic games gave second prizes in the first half of the fourth century (IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311). In athletic events two prizes were awarded in the stade, pentathlon, wrestling, boxing and pancration to men, intermediates and boys in a ratio of five amphorae to the winner and one to the runner-up.<sup>17</sup> According to the same inscription second prizes were also awarded in equestrian events.<sup>18</sup> In the musical contests five prizes were given to the cithara singers, three to the citharists, three to the [rhapsodists?], two to the flute singers and two to the flautists.<sup>19</sup> Boy musicians also received second and third prizes. Only first prizes, however, were given in the Pyrrhic dance, euandria, torch race and regatta, which unlike the other events were limited to Athenian citizens.<sup>20</sup>

The question arises why the Panathenaia had more than one prize in athletic, equestrian and musical contests in the fourth century. The reason perhaps was to attract the best competitors to these Panhellenic competitions, something considered unnecessary in tribal events. Certainly the victory lists show that many of the winners were non Athenian.<sup>21</sup> One would have thought that the Panathenaia was large and prestigious enough not to need second prizes. On the other hand it may have achieved its status because of second prizes, although unfortunately it is not known when they were first added.<sup>22</sup> It appears from inscriptions dated to the second century that second places were no longer then awarded: IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311-2317 give the names of victors in three successive celebrations of the festival, but have no reference to second place.<sup>23</sup>

The quinquennial Asklepieia on Cos added second prizes in the second century: of the numerous victory lists dated 250-180 B.C. only the latest includes second prizes, in athletic and musical contests for Isthmian and Pythian boys, intermediates and men.<sup>24</sup> According to the figures of Klee, few of these second-place winners came from Cos.<sup>25</sup> Hence Klee

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A.W.Johnston, "IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311 and the number of Panathenaic Amphorae," *ABSA* 82 (1987) 125-29 for other probable events missing from the inscription, D.G.Kyle, *Athletics in Ancient Athens* (Leiden 1986) 36-37, D.C.Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletes* (Chicago 1984) 115ff.

<sup>18</sup> Six have survived in the inscription, the prizes ranging from 5 to 1, to 3 and a half to 1.

<sup>19</sup> The ratio of these prizes varies. Young (above n.17) 126 remarks that the monetary prizes for musicians were more valuable than the oil and vases for athletes.

<sup>20</sup> On these events, see Kyle (above n.17) 36-37, 190-94, N.B.Crowther, "Male 'Beauty' Contests in Greece: the Euandria and Euexia," *AC* 54 (1985) 285-91.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. S.V.Tracy, C.Habicht, "New and Old Panathenaic Victor Lists," *Hesperia* 60.2 (1991) 202ff.; T.Klee, *Zur Geschichte der gymnischen Agone an griechischen Festen* (Leipzig-Berlin 1918) 119 lists only seven Athenians of fifty-five athletic victors.

<sup>22</sup> Johnston (above n.17) 128 n.4 sees little indication of changes in the number of events in the mature games, but does not speculate on second places.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Tracy and Habicht (above n.21) 187-236. The Theseia in Athens (IG II<sup>2</sup> 956) also did not have second prizes in the second century.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Klee (above n.21) 3-19; second places are recorded only on Stele IIC.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Klee (above n.21) for lists and citizenships.

suggests that the reason for second prizes was to lessen the [financial] risks of athletes and to maintain the prestige of the festival over its rivals.<sup>26</sup>

The earliest reference to the awarding of second place in an athletic festival after Homer comes from a fifth-century inscription from Salamis (IG<sup>2</sup> 846), which lists modest prizes at a simple, local festival.<sup>27</sup> First prizes in boys', intermediates' and men's wrestling, boxing and pancration were ten obols (perhaps more in the pancration); boys and intermediates received three obols for second place (except in the pancration); men received six obols. Possibly second prizes were larger for men because they came from further afield than boys and intermediates.

Five catalogues of prizes (CIG 2758) from Aphrodisias in Caria from imperial times relate that second prizes and sometimes third were awarded in musical competitions, a not uncommon occurrence.<sup>28</sup> There also appear to have been second prizes in equestrian events, in the synoris for colts and in the race for war chariots.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly there are no second prizes listed for athletic contests.

At the Caesareia in Jerusalem, a quinquennial festival founded at the end of the first century B.C., Josephus (BJ 1.415) relates that second and third prizes were personally given by the founder Herod. The actual events are not mentioned, but if there were third prizes for athletics (as well as for musical events), this would be the only known instance of such outside Homer.<sup>30</sup>

There were no doubt numerous festivals about which we have no knowledge in the early imperial period which gave prizes other than for first place. Philo of Alexandria (Spec. 1.38) - without reference to a specific festival - gives evidence of the athlete who aimed at second place after failing to win the first. The numerous references in Philo to second and third places in contests suggests that they were common in his day, although when the contest is not specified we should not assume that they relate necessarily to athletic events.<sup>31</sup>

Second place was also found in some gymnasiarchial contests. At Coressus on Ceos the Lex Coresiorum (SIG<sup>3</sup> 958) bids the gymnasiarch to set up contests three times per month in men's archery, javelin throwing and catapult.<sup>32</sup> In all three contests second prizes were

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Klee (above n.21) 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. G.Fougères, "Inscription de Salamine", BCH 16 (1892) 298-301, who dates it to the second half of the century.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Plut. Mor. 628 A-B (below), Reisch, "Agones," RE 1 (1893) 851, S.Mitchell, "Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor," JRS 80 (1990) 183-93. See also on Aphrodisias Le Bas 1620d, M.A.M.A. 8.420, Pickard-Cambridge, DFA<sup>2</sup> 321 16 b, Reynolds, Aphrodisias Doc. 60.

<sup>29</sup> In the synoris the prize was 350 denarii for second place, first prize not listed. For the war chariot first prize was 1500, second 500.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. H.A.Harris, Greek Athletics and the Jews (Cardiff 1976) 36, L.Moretti, Iscrizioni agonistiche greche (Rome 1953) no. 72 (where Menander was victor) and Philo (below).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Congr. 22.6 (below), Agr. 121. 2-3, Ebr. 35-38, Harris (above n. 30) 80ff.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. E.Ziebarth, Aus dem griechischen Schulwesen (Berlin 1914) 41-42.

awarded, although it may be noted not in the torch race or boys' events.<sup>33</sup> Similarly at Sestos (OG 1.339.81ff.) the gymnasiarch set up contests in honour of Hermes and Herakles in which second prizes were given (but not specified). Second prizes, however, were not universal in contests of the Greek gymnasium; they are, for example, not found listed in the famous Beroea inscription.<sup>34</sup> Presumably when second prizes were given in the gymnasium, the purpose was not to attract contestants, but rather to encourage.

The awarding of second prize also has relevance for the workings of the pentathlon. We have seen that official second prizes in this contest were given to different age groups at the Panathenaia in the fourth century and at the Asklepieia in the second. There must have been a regular mechanism for determining these places, but scholars seem not to have addressed this problem in their discussion of the pentathlon.<sup>35</sup> We may make the following observations and suggestions regarding second place. If the contest lasted five events, it is likely that second place went to the runner-up in wrestling.<sup>36</sup> If the victor were determined in the first triad (or after four events),<sup>37</sup> there are several possibilities:

1. The other athletes competed in another event, the winner of which gained second place overall. It is not likely, however, that the competition would continue after the victor had already been determined, and with no athlete eliminated after three events (except the victor), there could be an unwieldy number of entrants in the foot race.

2. The athlete who placed second in the third event (or in the fourth event if the competition went that far) was the overall second. It is difficult to think in terms of what was considered fair by the Greeks,<sup>38</sup> but in this system there seems to be too much emphasis on a single event. It is true that if the pentathlon went five events, the prize winners would be determined by wrestling, but presumably not all competitors reached that stage.<sup>39</sup>

3. There was some kind of points system, that is places other than first were recorded.<sup>40</sup> We may make several observations which make this a possible scenario.

---

<sup>33</sup> Cf. SIG<sup>3</sup> 1061 18-19 (Samos), SIG<sup>3</sup> 1060, 1062 (Tralles) for these events. The second prizes for javelin throwing and catapult were much poorer than that for archery.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J.M.R.Cormack, "The Gymnasiarchal Law of Beroea," *Ancient Macedonia II. Papers read at the Second International Symposium held in Thessalonika 19-24 August, 1973 (Thessaloniki 1977)* 139-50.

<sup>35</sup> For studies on the pentathlon, see N.B.Crowther, "Studies in Greek Athletics," *CW* 79.2 (1985) 77-79, D.G.Kyle, "Winning and Watching the Greek Pentathlon," *Journal of Sport History* 17.3 (1990) 291-305.

<sup>36</sup> This assumes that there was no points system (see below).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Schol. ad Arist. Panath. 3.339, Pollux 3.151, G.E.Bean, "Victory in the Pentathlon," *AJA* 60 (1956) 361.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Kyle (above n. 35) *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> As suggested by Harris, "The Method of Deciding Victory in the Pentathlon," *G&R* 19 (1972) 60-64 and others.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. L.Moretti, "Un regolamento rodio per la gara del pentatlo," *RFIC* 84 (1956) 55-60.

a. The concept of second place in this kind of pentathlon has already been established. Therefore, the argument that no account was taken of places other than first, since it was un-Greek, is not valid,<sup>41</sup> unless one accepts the first scenario outlined above.

b. It is apparent that in certain kinds of competitions in the ancient world places other than first were indeed recorded from first to last. Plutarch (Mor. 628 A-B) states that the chorus of the Athenian tribe, Aiantis, has never been judged last in competition. Philo (Congr. 22.6) speaks of prizes awarded for second, third and last place. There is no reason why such recording of places could not be applied to athletics.

c. Philostratus (Gym. 3) relates that Peleus was second in the first four events of the pentathlon, but won the wrestling and was declared the overall winner. Scholars have seen problems in this story in terms of determining victory in the pentathlon;<sup>42</sup> although this statement cannot be interpreted as being literally correct, it may reflect the practice of taking into account in the events of the pentathlon places other than first.

d. A black-figure Attic vase from the sixth century depicts a jumper surpassing three pegs in the ground.<sup>43</sup> If the painter is depicting a realistic scene, one may question why three pegs are needed, not one, if only first place counted in the jump.

It is interesting to speculate whether this system of assigning places had any relevance for the regular pentathlon where only a single victor was determined. There is no evidence that the pentathlon at the Panathenaia, for example, was different than that at Olympia. Although not conclusive, it may lend some support to those who believe that second-place finishes were taken into consideration in determining victory in the regular pentathlon and to those who suggest points were awarded for places.<sup>44</sup>

To conclude, there certainly seems a possibility that generally in Greek athletics places other than first were recorded, as today, although certainly most athletes would not be rewarded. Athletes were probably appreciative of the monetary value of second-place prizes.<sup>45</sup> The attitude of Pindar to victory and defeat may have been as extreme in the ancient world as is the view of those athletes today who treat with contempt a second-place finish.<sup>46</sup>

University of Western Ontario

Nigel B. Crowther

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (London 1972) 34.

<sup>42</sup> One should see, however, the interesting article of R.Merkelbach, "Der Sieg im Pentathlon," *ZPE* 11 (1973) 261-69 on Philostratus and the problem of how second place may have worked in individual events in the pentathlon. See also Bean (above n. 37) for other references and comments.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Illustration 106 in E.N.Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World* (Oxford 1930). This is hardly conclusive by itself, as it may for instance show practice rather than competition, but is not cited by scholars.

<sup>44</sup> See notes 37 and 40 (above) for two such scholars.

<sup>45</sup> We may compare the monetary allowances for athletes at the Sebasta (IvO1. 56), the oil at Sparta (IG 5.1.20, 5-7); and appearance money, for which see H.W.Pleket, "Games, Prizes, Athletes and Ideology," *Stadion* 1.1 (1975) 64-65.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the disgust of R.Seagren in "winning" second place in the pole vault in the 1972 Olympics, and that of the U.S. men's basketball team at the same games.

ZPE 95 (1993) 220

## CORRIGENDA

ZPE 90, 1992, 98, Z.17 lies: at Olympia in 564 B.C. (Schol. Aristoph. Av. 283).

Z.18 lies: prize at Delphi (Ps. Hdt. 6.122).