

The Grooming of Athletes: Seeing in the Greek Symposium

by Marina Haworth

In fifth century Athens, images of athletes could be found everywhere, in virtually any medium, from expensive dedications in sanctuaries and marketplaces, to prosaic drawings on quotidian pottery vessels. Athletes pervaded the visual culture. The objectification of young men was such a ubiquitous phenomenon that the activity of watching young athletes practicing in the gymnasium was noted as typical behavior in both Attic comedy and philosophical writings. Despite the pervasiveness of the images of athletes, or perhaps because of it, scholars have generally only approached the subject in a summary manner: the issue of athletics has become an almost banal pursuit. Nevertheless, the very ease with which academics regard the conspicuousness of the athletic imagery masks a lack of scholarly analysis. Classicists have not been disinterested in Greek athletics, but the primary concern seems to have been the historical logistics of the games in general. The ancient texts are often read in a positivistic manner, with the purpose of gleaning as many historical facts from them as possible. The prescription of normative values assumed by the ancient authors about athletics, ideals of masculinity, and the archetypal beauty of athletes go relatively unquestioned. Apart from often beautifully written, well-illustrated exhibition catalogues and some often rather conservative art historical discussions of the classical style, there is very little scholarship available on the athletic images themselves.

In this study I will examine images of athletes on Attic red-figure pottery from the late sixth to end of the fifth centuries B.C. In order to understand the importance of the athletic image to the Athenian male, and its embodiment of masculine ideals, I will not consider images of performing athletes in this paper, but rather focus on the representation of athletes grooming in the gymnasium. Such grooming images are exceedingly numerous on painted sympotic pottery, as well as in other media, so this study can not hope to be

exhaustive, but it is rather an exercise in detailing the complicated and important nature of the topic. I hope to examine other genres of athletic images in further studies, but commencing with images of grooming will enable us to begin to challenge our own modern perceptions of the ancient male athlete, and how we frame our discussions of the problem.

In order to retain clarity of purpose of this study, the corpus of images used here contain only those in which athletes are actively grooming or undressing in a gymnasium setting. This is indicated by the figures either holding strigils or aryballoi, or washing at a laver, or the figures shown in the process of undressing by the active removal of clothing, or the handing of folded clothing to nearby attendants. A search of the Beazely Archive for Athenian red-figure pottery featuring athletes has revealed 233 such images out of a total of 799. Nearly one-third of these athletic images therefore contain images of grooming, which suggests the popularity, and by extension, the significance of this type of representation during the late sixth and fifth centuries. Although there are many more images that may show imminent bathing or grooming by the presence of such equipment (aryballoi, sponges, strigils) hanging on the gymnasium wall, such scenes will be reserved for a later study to avoid any ambiguity for the purposes of this study. This study is also limited to pottery shapes used exclusively in the symposium, for the function of the imagery in the context in which the images were viewed is of primary significance.

To modern viewers, the popular image of a person at toilet is almost necessarily an objectified woman who displays herself, often with the negative personification of Vanity implied. Seeing young men on display in a similar way presents interesting problems of subjectivity and objectivity for a modern viewer who might be entrenched in the structuralist formulation of simple binary oppositions. If these youths are displaying their bodies to a viewer, are they not objects of another's gaze? If so, how is the masculinity of the young athlete reconciled with their objectification? What purpose does such objectification serve in the cultural mores of the citizens of the Athenian polis? I will argue that the viewing of

athletes, and the fetishization of their images was central to not only the development of the young athlete, but to the ideal stability of the culture of the polis¹.

These images were painted in the red-figure technique on ceramic symposium vessels. Symptotic imagery was enormously varied, and was very likely used as part of the evening's entertainment or topic of discussion. The diversions, drinking, and discussions that could take place during a symposium would usually occur among a select group of normally upper-class friends or *hetaireiai*. These groups could be formed on the basis of kinship, but were just as much determined by age, community, and social status². Boys and adolescents could attend the symposium along with their elders, for the purpose of education and their gradual induction into adult customs and society, of which the tradition of *paidierastia* played a central part³. Didactic symptotic poetry was addressed to the younger members of the symposium, and their attendance could determine the focus of discussion during the drinking party⁴. Indeed, youths feature prominently in the imagery of symposium pottery, which undoubtedly also promoted discussion, whether the vessels depict scenes of lyre instruction, practice in the gymnasium, or scenes of *paidierastia*. The expense of these drinking parties essentially required the participants to be among the wealthy elite. According to Oswyn Murray, the gradual democratization of warfare caused by the use of hoplite phalanx led the wealthy to focus their agonistic energies on sport and other contests⁵. If this is true, it might help explain the increased popularity of images of athletic events and athletes in training in symposia for the wealthy strata of Athenian society. These athletic scenes would have taken on a greater meaning when regarded in the context of the symposium, during which various cultural ideals might be prescribed for young men, such as modesty, beauty, and even sexual abstinence during athletic training.

¹ I limit myself to late archaic and classical Athens in order to simplify the problem of evidence at this stage. I hope to expand the topic to other *poleis* in a further study.

² Murray, 1990, p. 151.

³ Bremmer, 1990, *passim*.

⁴ In Xenophon's *Symposium*, the discussion of beauty is triggered by the presence of Autolykos, the attractive young athletic victor.

The ideal of sexual abstinence for athletes in training has been discussed in studies of both athletics and Greek culture of *paiderastia*, but the affect this notion had on attitudes towards athletes and the viewing of their images remains to be examined. There have been debates as to whether the athletes actually abided by this rule, or rebelled against it. Scanlon's recent study has thoroughly and eruditely examined the textual sources for clues as to the historical practice of sexual abstinence. He concludes that it was "widespread as early as the fifth century B.C. and inspired philosophers and others to cite such athletes as models of self-control"⁶. Some of what he calls "historical examples" are, however, not so much fact as they are rumors used as exempla in philosophical writings, which presents problems in assessing them as historical realities. Furthermore, many of the texts under analysis were actually written during the period of the "Second Sophistic", and these later Greek writers most likely used Plato as their own source. Golden and Scanlon rightly notice that such a taboo was, as far as we know, not formally instituted, and that it is unknown how common it was in actual practice. What we do know, however, is that the taboo is mentioned in the ancient texts fairly widely, encompassing a long span of time. This suggests that whatever the unknowable truth of each individual athlete's adherence to the recommendation sexual abstinence, the idea of the taboo as a cultural ideal was a significant factor in the identity of the athlete⁷. Ancient discussions of the sexual abstinence of athletes inform us that athletes were commonly thought to at least consider the possibility of abstaining from sexual activities during training. The most commonly cited example is an excerpt from Plato's *Laws*:

Ἐὰρ οὖν οὐκ ἴσμεν τὸν Ταραντῖνον Ἴκκον ἀκοῆ διὰ τὸν Ὀλυμπίασιν τε ἀγῶνα καὶ τοὺς [τε] ἄλλους, ὡς διὰ φιλονεικίαν καὶ τέχνην καὶ τὸ μετὰ τοῦ σωφρονεῖν ἀνδρεῖον ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κεκτημένος, ὡς λόγος, οὔτε τινὸς πώποτε γυναικὸς ἤψατο οὐδ' αὖ παιδὸς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ τῆς ἀσκήσεως ἀκμῇ; καὶ δὴ καὶ Κρίσωνα καὶ Ἀστύλον καὶ Διόπομπον καὶ ἄλλους παμπόλλους ὁ αὐτὸς που

⁵ Murray, 1980, p.193.

⁶ Scanlon, 2002, p. 230.

⁷ I will now refer to this ideal of abstinence as a "taboo" in quotation marks to indicate that, as far as we know, it was not a ritualized, but rather informal practice, and not a taboo in a religious, polluting sense.

λόγος ἔχει. καί τοι τῶν γ' ἐμῶν καὶ σῶν πολιτῶν, ὧ Κλεινία,
πολύ κάκιον ἦσαν πεπαιδευμένοι τὰς ψυχάς, τὰ δὲ σώματα πολὺ
μᾶλλον σφιγῶντες.

Do we not know by report about Iccus of Tarentum, because of his contests at Olympia and elsewhere—how, spurred on by ambition and skill, and possessing courage combined with temperance in his soul, during all the period of his training (as the story goes) he never touched a woman, nor yet a boy? And the same story is told about Crison and Astylus and Diopompus and very many others. And yet, Clinias, these men were not only much worse educated in soul than your citizens and mine, but they also possessed much more sexual vigour of body.⁸

This passage affirms the ideal nature of the “taboo”: athletes with “φιλονεικίαν καὶ τέχνην”, (ambition and skill), and “σωφρονεῖν ἀνδρεῖον”, (modesty and manly courage), might exercise sexual abstinence during training. The conversational context of the account implies that the speaker assumes that the listeners are very familiar with these exemplary athletes. This assumption is proved to be true by Clinias the Cretan, who responds:

Ἀληθῆ ταῦτα λέγεις, ὅτι σφόδρα ὑπὸ τῶν παλαιῶν ἐστὶν
εἰρημένα περὶ τούτων τῶν ἀθλητῶν ὡς ὄντως ποτὲ γεγόμενα

That this really happened in the case of these athletes is indeed, as you say, confidently affirmed by the ancients⁹.

Apparently, even those in a place as far off as Crete would have known, not only the story, but also the ancient sources in which it was contained. Therefore, accounts of sexual abstinence were undoubtedly known by young athletes. Hearing about these ideal athletes would effectively put pressure upon the youths to at least respect this tradition, if not practice it themselves. In fact, athletes as late as the second century A.D. were being encouraged to adhere this “taboo” for health reasons, among others¹⁰:

Εἰ δ' ἐξ ἀφροδισίων, ἀμείνους μὲν μὴ γυμνάζειν· οἱ γὰρ
στεφάνων καὶ κηρυγμάτων αἰσχρὰν ἡδονὴν ἀλλαξάμενοι ποῦ
ἄνδρες; εἰ δ' ἄρα γυμνάζοιντο, ὑπὲρ νοουθεσίας γυμναζέσθων
ἐλεγχόμενοι τὴν ἰσχύνα καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα· ταυτί γὰρ μάλιστα αἱ τῶν
ἀφροδισίων ἡδοναὶ ἐπικόπτουσι¹¹.

⁸ *Laws* 839e-840b, Loeb Classical Library edition and translation, 1968.

⁹ *Laws* 840b, Loeb Classical Library edition and translation, 1968.

¹⁰ This has been discussed extensively: Fiedler, 1985 *passim*.

¹¹ Philostratos, *Peri Gymnastikes* 52, Teubner, 1909.

It is better for athletes who have just had intercourse not to take a workout. For how can they be men if they have exchanged crowns of victory and the herald's announcements for a shameful pleasure? If they do work out, they should exercise openly after being warned to watch out for their endurance and breath, because sexual pleasures cause the most harm in these areas¹².

In this text, the very manhood of an athlete is said to be compromised if he does not comply to this protocol. Indeed, the containment of desire had far-reaching implications for the ideal citizen in the classical period, as Winkler, among others, has shown¹³. The consummate citizen would be the master of self-control. If not, one was on a slippery slope to being labeled a κίναιδος, or licentious, and even being forbidden from participating in the Assembly, juries, or councils¹⁴.

Plato's Athenian also stressed that this "taboo" involved a serious commitment to check one's impulses. The Athenian went on to add that it was not from lack of desire that these athletes of old practiced the "taboo", on the contrary: "these men were not only much worse educated in soul than your citizens and mine, but they also possessed much more sexual vigour of body". The word translated as "sexual vigour", σφιγῶντες, could also be rendered: "swelling, throbbing with desire"¹⁵. This colorfully marked term emphasizes the masculine ideal of repression: the restraint exercised by these young athletes is only impressive if there is a considerable force to hold back. For the athletes and their spectators, the practical effect of this idea of sexual abstinence was that the activities of the athlete in training were further erotically charged. Perhaps in part because "if the abstinence reportedly observed by some athletes during their preparations for competition was widespread", then "the place of sex among the pleasures of a carousing victor must have been especially prominent"¹⁶. The symposium would be the primary locus for this, as

¹² trans. Scanlon, 2002, p. 229.

¹³ Winkler, 1990, p. 57 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Winkler, 1990, p.196.

¹⁵ *LSJ*, 1968, p. 1742.

¹⁶ Golden, p. 75.

symposia often followed athletic games, and were frequently held to honor a victor, such as the one Xenophon described¹⁷.

Xenophon's *Symposium* occurs as a celebration for Autolykos, winner of the boy's *pankration* in the Panathenaia of 421.

Ἦν μὲν γὰρ Παναθηναίων τῶν μεγάλων ἵπποδρομία, Καλλίας δὲ ὁ Ἰππονίκου ἐρῶν ἐτυγχάνεν Αὐτολύκου παιδὸς ὄντος, καὶ νενικηκότα αὐτὸν παγκράτιον ἦκεν ἄγων ἐπὶ τὴν θέαν. Ἦς δὲ ἡ ἵπποδρομία ἔληξεν, ἔχων τὸν τε Αὐτόλυκον καὶ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἀπήει εἰς τὴν ἐν Πειραιεῖ οἰκίαν¹⁸.

It was on the occasion of the horse-races at the greater Panathenaic games; Callias, Hipponicus' son, was enamoured, as it happened, of the boy Autolykus, and in honour of his victory in the pancratium had brought him to see the spectacle. When the racing was over, Callias proceeded on his way to his house in the Peiraeus with Autolykus and the boy's father¹⁹.

Here the relationship between Autolykos, the *eromenos*, and Kallias, the *erastes*, is suggested by the participle ἐρῶν²⁰. Although only a boy, παιδός ὄντος, he is apparently old enough to enter into this relationship.

There has been some difficulty in the scholarship as to who might qualify as an *erastes*, and at what age is it appropriate to be the loved one, the *eromenos*. Aristotle blurs the age groups in his *Politics*:

“There are two periods of life with reference to which education has to be divided, from seven to the age of puberty, and onwards to the age of twenty-one. The poets who divide ages by sevens are in the main right: but we should observe the division actually made by nature....”

δύο δ' εἰσὶν ἡλικίαι πρὸς ἃς ἀναγκαῖον διηρῆσθαι τὴν παιδείαν, πρὸς τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ μέχρι ἡβῆς καὶ πάλιν πρὸς τὴν ἀφ' ἡβῆς μέχρι τῶν ἑνὸς καὶ εἴκοσιν ἐτῶν. οἱ γὰρ ταῖς ἑβδομάσι

¹⁷ “The sacrifice and banquet that marked the moment of release from the taboo after the games was the signal for renewed sexual indulgence, and myths like that of the visit of the Argonauts to Lemnos have been connected with this fact”. Lloyd-Jones, 1983, p. 99.

¹⁸ Xenophon, *Symposium*, 1.2.

¹⁹ translation O.J. Todd, Harvard University Press, 1979.

²⁰ Although their relationship here is ambiguous, the use of the word ἐρῶν clearly indicates the desire for such a relationship, if not its immediate potentiality. Furthermore, the use of the word *pais* is also ambiguous as far as age groups are concerned, and can be used to mean even an eighteen year-old, as Dover has shown (Dover, p.86)

διαιροῦντες τὰς ἡλικίας ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ λέγουσιν οὐ κακῶς, δεῖ δὲ τῇ διαίρεσει τῆς φύσεως ἐπακολουθεῖν.²¹

So by his calculations, puberty begins at approximately fourteen years of age, although he makes concessions for individual variations, according to nature. Unfortunately, with the material record, the answer is also far from clear. The visual repertoire undoubtedly functions in terms of ideals and metaphors, and some pots tend to show the *erastai* as full citizens, complete with a beard, whereas others show *erastai* as youths with the ἵουλος, or the beginnings of the growth of facial hair. Though one might assume artistic license may be causing much of this variety, it is, in fact, even more complex. Shown on the exterior of a kylix is a series of couples, in which some *erastai* have full beards, but others have the ἵουλος (Fig. 1) [City of Images 114. Munich, Staat. Mus. 2655, Cup. ARV2 471, 196, Makron, 480 BC]. Clearly the painter was interested in depicting not only different stages of seduction, but a variety of ideal *erastes/eromenos* couples. The constant is that the *erastes* is always shown as older, by means of their greater height, and their greater amount of facial hair, in varying degrees. Dover has complicated the matter by suggesting that homosexual relations between two coevals could indeed occur. He cites painted pottery in which young men are depicted in erotic activities together²². I would argue, however, that these images do not necessarily depict the conventional couple of the *erastes/eromenos* combination, which was a prescribed cultural norm. Rather, I would suggest that such images of boys and their cohorts in age are simply unmarked representations of male eroticism, without the otherwise implied normative, didactic meanings of the normal relationship in the context of *paiderastia*. Even images of nonspecific male on male eroticism among young men would serve to encourage the prescribed relationship according to the custom of *paiderastia*, when they occurred on sympotic pottery. Because of this general atmosphere in which images of males were eroticized in general, the ambiguousness

²¹ *Politics*, VII. 1336b-1337a. trans. Benjamin Jowett in *Aristotle, The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, 1996. Greek Text, *OCD*, 1957.

²² Dover, 1989, p.86.

of the ages of the youths depicted on such pottery may have been deliberate, as a sort of blank check upon which the viewer could write his own desires.

Dover has shown satisfactorily that the upper age limit for an acceptable *eromenos* was upon coming of age, with a full beard²³. Nevertheless, the lower age limit for such a relationship is still debated. Vidal-Naquet posits that there were actually two separate acknowledged age classes for males within adolescence, one inducting the boy into the phratry, the other into the deme²⁴. At the end of their two-year military training as ephebes, the boy would acquire “full civil rights”²⁵. This elaborate system was most likely organized around the time of Kleisthenes, who had reformed the system of demes. It may not be mere coincidence that it is precisely this period in which images of ephebes (the ideal age of an *eromenos*) begin to pervade the Attic symposium. Therefore, at the age of sixteen, the father of the boy swore that his son was a true Athenian, and inducted into his phratry, becoming a sort of proto-citizen (pending their military service, etc.)²⁶. Then, at eighteen, he enters a further liminal stage called the *ephebeia*, in which he takes on military responsibility, but is not yet fully enfranchised in his citizenship. As an ephebe, the youth has a privileged position in Athenian society, but has yet to come into his full sense of entitlement as a citizen. He is the embodiment of potentiality. At the cusp of their enfranchisement, the ephebe is favored within his “Männerbund”²⁷, so that they may come to feel the close sense of belonging that their identity as citizens required. But although the age of the ephebe seems secure, what about the age of athletic competitors? The sources seem to vary quite a bit as to what age constitutes a *pais*, and what constitutes an *aner*²⁸. It seems that stricter divisions were maintained for at least the Olympic games subsequent to

²³ Dover, 1989, p.86.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* XLII, Vidal-Naquet, 1986, p. 98.

²⁵ Vidal-Naquet, 1986, p. 98, and Winkler, 1990, p.25.

²⁶ Vidal-Naquet, 1986, p.99.

²⁷ see Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, 1980.

²⁸ see for example Golden's discussion: 1998, p. 104-112.

the Classical period; before this the division was simply between the men and the boys²⁹. Different *poleis* also had slight variations on their respective age classes, but at Olympia it seems that the upper age limit for competing as a boy was seventeen³⁰.

It was, therefore, a civic and cultural necessity for the tradition of *paidierastia* to be perpetuated. The abundance of eroticized athletic images on symposium vessels encouraged and normalized the sexualization of youths in general. These normative images also functioned to feed the desire for young beautiful protégés by helping to create a demand. Jacques Lacan's theories of the relationship between desire and demand can serve to explain the logistics of this process. The upper age limit of the *eromenos* creates the inevitability of loss for the *erastes*. The relationship has a culturally prescribed ending, in which the *eromenos* becomes a fully enfranchised citizen, and then becomes an *erastes* to his own *eromenos*. Therefore the brevity of the relationship creates the eventual feeling of lack, which in turn creates the demand for the next *eromenos*³¹. To add to the already limited availability of the *eromenos*, those of ephebe age will be forced to remove themselves from their "Männerbund" for a good part of their final year of their military training, which would, according to Lacan's theories, intensify the desire felt by the *erastes*. As Terry Eagleton has understood it: "all desire springs from lack, which it strives continually to fill"³². Desire for the ephebic athlete is also maintained by the fixation upon the symptomatic images, creating a fantasy of the desired youths. Representations of young, beautiful boys, shown in the symposium would stimulate and further the older men's interest in the relationship, with all the responsibilities it entailed.

²⁹ By the third century B.C. the boys were arranged into three classes for the purposes of athletic competition (Frisch, 1988, p.179.)

³⁰ Crowther, 1988, p.306.

³¹ "Most of all, *hebe* is fleeting, encompassing the brief span of time between the first appearance of down on the boy's face and the growth of a proper beard." Ferrari, 2002, p.133.

³² Eagleton, 1983, p. 167.

Xenophon went on to write about the effect the beautiful young athlete Autolykos had on his fellow symposiasts:

Αὐτόλυκος μὲν οὖν παρὰ τὸν πατέρα ἐκαθέζετο, οἱ δ' ἄλλοι, ὡσπερ εἰκός, κατεκλίθησαν. Εὐθύς μὲν οὖν ἐννοήσας τις τὰ γιγνόμενα ἠγήσατ' ἂν φύσει βασιλικόν τι τὸ κάλλος εἶναι, ἄλλως τε καὶ ἂν μετ' αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης, καθάπερ Αὐτόλυκος τότε, κεκτῆταί τις αὐτό. Πρῶτον μὲν γάρ, ὡσπερ ὅταν φέγγος τι ἐν νυκτὶ φανῆ, πάντων προσάγεται τὰ ὄμματα, οὕτω καὶ τότε τοῦ Αὐτολύκου τὸ κάλλος πάντων εἴλκε τὰς ὄψεις πρὸς αὐτόν· ἔπειτα τῶν ὀρώντων οὐδεὶς οὐκ ἔπασχέ τι τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπ' ἐκείνου. Οἱ μὲν γε σιωπερότεροι ἐγίγοντο, οἱ δὲ καὶ ἐσχηματίζοντό πως. Πάντες μὲν οὖν οἱ ἐκ θεῶν του κατεχόμενοι ἀξιοθέατοι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι· ἄλλ' οἱ μὲν ἐξ ἄλλων πρὸς τὸ γοργότερον τε ὀρᾶσθαι καὶ φοβερώτερον φθέγγεσθαι καὶ σφοδρότεροι εἶναι φέρονται, οἱ δ' ὑπὸ τοῦ σώφρονος Ἔρωτος ἔνθεοι τὰ τε ὄμματα φιλοφρονεστέρως ἔχουσι καὶ τὴν φωνὴν πραοτέραν ποιοῦνται καὶ τὰ σχήματα εἰς τὸ ἐλευθεριώτερον ἄγουσιν. Ἄ δὲ καὶ Καλλίας τότε διὰ τὸν Ἔρωτα πράττων ἀξιοθέατος ἦν τοῖς τετελεσμένοις τούτῳ τῷ θεῷ³³.

Autolyclus took a seat by his father's side; the others, of course, reclined. A person who took note of the course of events would have come at once to the conclusion that beauty is in its essence something regal, especially when, as in the present case of Autolyclus, its possessor joins with it modesty and sobriety. For in the first place, just as the sudden glow of a light at night draws all eyes to itself, so now the beauty of Autolyclus compelled every one to look at him. And again, there was not one of the onlookers who did not feel his soul strangely stirred by the boy; some of them grew quieter than before, others even assumed some kind of a pose. Now it is true that all who are under the influence of any of the gods seem well worth gazing at; but whereas those who are possessed of the other gods have a tendency to be sterner of countenance, more terrifying of voice, and more vehement, those who are inspired by chaste Love have a more tender look, subdue their voices to more gentle tones, and assume a supremely noble bearing. Such was the demeanour of Callias at this time under the influence of Love; and therefore he was an object well worth the gaze of those initiated into the worship of this god³⁴.

Sitting by his father's side rather than reclining with the others further indicates Autolykos' age class: an older youth of ephebe age most likely would have reclined. This passage also illustrates well the importance of the elder members of the symposium to set a good example to the young athlete. In Xenophon's telling, being inspired by Eros compels the men to assume a more "noble" posture, and become more nurturing to the boy. The word "noble", ἐλευθεριώτερον, (here in the comparative form of the adjective), can also be

³³ Xenophon, *Symposion*, 1.8-11.

³⁴ translation O.J. Todd, Harvard University Press, 1979.

rendered “free”, or “liberal”, and had democratic connotations. As Thucydides implied throughout his *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, democracy is only as good as its *demos*. The tradition of *paidierastia* existed for the purpose of guiding the future citizens into a productive *demos*, based on the philosophy that love, or *eros* facilitates this instruction by fostering a nurturing impulse in the *erastes*.

This passage also emphasizes the importance of beauty, and the necessity for a citizen to not only unabashedly gaze at the youth, but also to ruminate upon his attractiveness: “So now the beauty of Autolykos compelled every one to look at him”. This moralistic text exhibits this ideal situation as a societal norm, in order to serve as an *exemplum*. The symposiasts do not merely desire the boy, they are inspired by “σώφρονος Ἔρωτος”. Autolykos is not merely beautiful, but he also possesses αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης. The boy’s behavior, and the following philosophical discussion of beauty could not be more idealized, nor more culturally prescriptive. The act of viewing a young athlete was apparently an important part of stimulating desire in the *erastes*. In Plato’s *Charmides*, an almost identical situation occurs as soon as young Charmides enters the palaistra: Socrates, goaded by Kritias and Chairephon, is taken aback when he views the youth, and reports that all the rest could not take their eyes off him, but “they all gazed at him as if he were a statue”³⁵. This seems to have been a practically culturally recommended behavior, as evidenced by the pressure put upon Socrates by his friends to admire Charmides. The societal purpose of stimulating desire in the onlooker naturally would be to promote the system of *paidierastia*. The locations of these events: a symposium celebrating an athlete, and a palaistra are also significant. Aristophanes presses their importance further to suggest that men go to the palaistra with the express purpose of

³⁵ *Charmides*, 154. c-d, Loeb 1927. ὡς οὐδεὶς ἄλλοσ’ ἔβλεπεν αὐτῶν,....., ἀλλὰ πάντες ὡσπερ ἄγαλμα ἐθεῶντο αὐτόν.

gazing upon the young athletes³⁶. Therefore the very process of *looking* at the potential *eromenos* also plays a significant role in furthering the tradition of *paiderastia*.

The examination of viewing of young athletes by Athenian citizens necessarily explodes the way in which scholars discuss the gendered nature of the gaze, in which “visual activity is culturally constructed across a split between active (=male) and passive (=female) roles—where the man is bearer of the look, and the woman is the object for that looking, is image³⁷”. Strictly speaking, this model by definition does not work when discussing a viewer and object who are both males. In order for such a binary opposition to serve us, the young athlete must be cast in the role of the female/passive object³⁸. This stratagem is, however, unhelpful and oversimplistic. Admittedly, the culture of *paiderastia* in classical Athens has been understood within the confines of their own terminology, which does have active and passive elements: the ἐραστής is the active noun related to the verb ἐράω, to love passionately, used for the citizen who gaze upon and pursue the ἐρώμενος, the younger male who takes his designation from the passive participial form of the same verb. But as we shall see, the relationship was far more complex than the grammar would allow us to believe.

While there was undoubtedly some reality in the active/passive nature of these roles in some aspects of the relationship, the subjectivity of the *eromenos* was ideally not to be questioned. On a fragment of a kylix in Boston attributed to Onesimos, ca. 505-485 B.C., an *erastes* persuades a boy: his desires made explicit with the dipinti labeling: “let me”. But the boy, his potential *eromenos*, is no passive object, which is made apparent with his

³⁶ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, lines 972-980.

³⁷ Bryson, p. 230.

³⁸ While underscoring the problems of this formulation for the couple, it should not be thought that I agree that the active/passive opposition is necessarily an apt one even for the male viewer and the female-as-the-viewed-object. In much of this paper I will argue that the young *eromenos*' own subjectivity prevents their total objectification in the cultural mores of Athens, but a woman's own subjectivity should likewise not be discounted in similar discussions.

answer: “won’t you stop!”³⁹ (FIG 2)[Boardman *Athenian Red Figure Vases the Archaic Period*, fig. 226, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 63.873, *Para* 360, 74 *quater*.] This light-hearted and humorous pottery fragment illustrates the complex interplay between the future citizens of Athens and their older mentors. There are many examples of potential *eromenoi* refusing the advances of the would-be *erastes*⁴⁰. While there also exist images in which the *erastes* is gratified in winning the affections of a youth, the proliferation of images of refusal may speak to the concern that the *eromenos* maintain his own self-mastery, in preparation for becoming a citizen who exhibits the proper σωφροσύνη. Dover has noticed that there is an “interesting contrast” between heterosexual and homosexual encounters in painted pottery⁴¹. He sees that women were consistently shown in a “subordinate role”, whereas in scenes of intercrural copulation, the “eromenos stands bolt upright, and it is the erastes who bows his head and shoulders”⁴². Furthermore, Schnapp has observed that by the fifth century, the *eromenos* is equated with a tamed hare, not a hunted one, “a partner in the game, a sign of seduction and no longer the prey”⁴³. It has also been noticed that the role of the *eromenos* was differentiated from that of the typical Greek female: “by establishing norms concerning the sexual use that may be made of his body and, most of all, by allowing him the right to choose”⁴⁴.

For a young athlete who was abstaining from sex for the duration of his training, the self-mastery of his own subjectivity might be even easier to maintain. A well-known kalyx krater in Berlin attributed to Euphronios shows a youth infibulating his penis (Fig. 3a) [Kalyx krater by Euphronios, ca 510-500 BC, Berlin, Antikenmuseum F 2180, *ARV2* 13, 1.]. Infibulating the penis, (tying the foreskin and looping it up against the body) seems to have been a common practice, judging from its frequent appearance on painted pottery and

³⁹ Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accession number: 65.873.

⁴⁰ Dover documents several on page 92.

⁴¹ Dover, 1989, p. 101.

⁴² Dover, 1989, p. 101.

⁴³ Schnapp, 1989, p.84.

⁴⁴ Ferrari, 2002, p. 145.

mention in ancient texts. The usefulness of this practice in protecting the genitals during physical activities, however, is agreed to be limited at best⁴⁵. Although athletes are represented infibulating themselves, or being infibulated, komasts and satyrs also are seen infibulated⁴⁶. The sexualized context of the rowdy komast and the bestial satyr would seem to preclude the necessity for athletic purposes. The purpose of infibulation must therefore not be protection during physical exercise, but rather the inhibition of physical desire. Modern scholars also agree for the most part that this practice may also signal to others the athlete's commitment to chastity⁴⁷, when at a symposium or some other eroticized setting.

Above the boys' heads is written "ΛΕΑΓΡΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ", a dipinti text which also appears on the other side of the vessel. While this "*kalos*" name probably doesn't refer to the youth in the scene on the left, it does relate to the actions of the boy, and the scene as a whole. The adjective "*kalos*" references the beautiful youths on display and their noble activities, but also alludes to the gymnasium context, where "*kalos*" names have been found in graffiti form⁴⁸. Like Xenophon's ideal symposium, this scene is highly moralizing and prescriptive. Each youth is shown in a deliberate variety of postures, which have been read in the past as the artist's experimental attempt to depict the human body from various angles. This may very well be true, but each of these postures also reflects a moral ideal which would function didactically for the youths attending the symposium where this krater would have been featured, as well as functioning to promote the voyeuristic culture of the gymnasium for the potential *erastai* at the symposium. The aforementioned youth who is infibulating himself, aided by a younger boy labeled "Ο ΠΑΙΣ", is preparing himself in order to remain "sober" and "moderate" like the ideal Autolykos in Xenophon's *Symposium*. The next youth, labeled "ΑΝΤΙΦΩΝ", is receiving instruction, presumably

⁴⁵ Sweet, 1987, p.130.

⁴⁶ Sweet, 1987, p.131.

⁴⁷ Scanlon, 2002, p.235.

⁴⁸ Miller, 1990, p. 188.

from a *paidotribes*⁴⁹ (labeled “ΗΙΠΠΑΡΧΟΣ”), perhaps on how to perform better in the next competition. He performs the instructions of his trainer, which was an attitude highly valued in a young man. Plato, in his *Protagoras*, presents the case that those who take orders from their trainers are the most virtuous⁵⁰. The next young man, labeled “ΠΟΛΥΛΛΟΣ” takes hold of his cloak, assisted by an unnamed boy, most likely a servant.

On the other side of the krater (Figure 3b), also on the right, is another athlete, ΛΥΚΟΝ, in a similar position: he takes up his cloak, and is attended to by a small boy on his left. This dressing of oneself is a way of exhibiting one’s *aidos*, or respectful modesty, also remarked upon by Xenophon in his sympotic text, and implies that the young men are preparing to head out to their own symposium, perhaps in celebration of the games. Furthermore, the witnessing of these beautiful examples of youths in various stages of dress and undress would be titillating for the citizen viewer, or potential *erastes*. This idea is emphasized by the dipinti again proclaiming “ΛΕΑΓΡΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ”, which is written in between Lykon and a youth named ΗΕΓΕΣΙΑΣ, who is about to oil himself down for scraping. The “*kalos*” text appears at the level of Hegesias’ groin and aims downwards towards his cloak, conspicuously piled onto a nearby stool. This simple trick of the composition emphasizes the youth’s nudity by the juxtaposition of his unused clothing. The text then continues, looping up the border of Lykon’s cloak, helping to showcase the fact that while he holds his *himation*, it does not cover him. His body is on display: his genitals noticeably revealed.

In Lucian's dialogue between the Skythian Anacharsis and Solon, Solon explains the training procedure for athletes. Although written in the second century A.D., the setting is in the sixth century B.C., and purports to document the traditional grooming and training

⁴⁹ While his gesture and accouterments make his identification as a trainer likely, these identifications are often not without question.

methods. After the observation that the athletes take turns rubbing oil on one another before exercise, in order to make their bodies more flexible (Figure 4) [Kylix, ca. 480 BC, Rome, Villa Giulia. Phot. M. Pucciarelli. #49 from Douskou, Iris, ed., *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, Ekdotike Athenon S.A., 1976]⁵¹. After their event, the athletes would then further anoint themselves, then scrape off the excess and dirt with a strigil, which we see Hegesias preparing to do (Figure 3b). Based on the fact that almost all the figures wear wreaths, and Lukon specifically wears the olive wreath, I would argue that it is most probable that they have finished their exercise for the day, and are making their way to the symposium that undoubtedly followed the festival. The olive wreath indicates that that particular youth has been victorious in his event, and the day is over. The youth on the left, labeled “HITTTOMEΔON” is already wearing his cloak, and holds his walking stick, indicating he is about to exit the gymnasium. He appears to be having one last muscle cramp rubbed out by a boy labeled “TPANION”. Hippomedon’s aristocratic bearing and *noblesse oblige* demeanor have been commented on in the past, and certainly seem to convey the ideals expressed by Plato and Xenophon. His twisting posture and foreshortened limbs would have further attracted the attention of the symposiasts using this krater in their gathering.

The image of the *apoxyomenos*, or scraper, was a popular subject for symposium vessels. The attraction for the symposiasts is understandable: the athlete, finished for the day, cleans himself of the sweat, oil, and dirt acquired during his training (Figure 5) [Amphora, ca 500 BC, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Phot. E. Meyer. #47 from Douskou, Iris, ed., *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, Ekdotike Athenon S.A., 1976]⁵². An amphora like this, used to hold wine during a symposium, would have been all the more appealing with the image of a young desirable youth such as this one on

⁵⁰ *Protagoras*, 326b.

⁵¹ Lucian, *Anacharsis*, 24

⁵² Sansone furthermore makes reference to the thought that anointing oneself might have been thought to increase the subject’s power or performance (Sansone 1988, p.126).

display. Since an athlete in training like this one might have been adhering to the tradition of sexual abstinence, his grooming in preparation for perhaps his own symposium would have promoted further desire in the symposiast viewing the pot. The athlete scrapes down his abdomen with a strigil, apparently unaware of any onlookers, his gaze averted. His impressive height is implied by his stooping posture; he is almost too tall for the amphora upon which he is depicted. This posture also recalls the modest pose of a youth endowed with *aidos*, which is thought to increase beauty⁵³. While *aidos* would normally require the covering of one's body, the *apoxyomenos* here is blissfully ignorant of the symposiast's gaze, so he paradoxically can lower his eyes in the typical gesture of *aidos*, he can remain exposed, giving the viewer the best of both worlds.

The appeal of the scraper is also apparent in the tondo of a symposiasts' drinking cup (Figure 6) [Kylix, ca. 460 BC, Musei Vaticani. Phot. M. Pucciarelli.

#18 from Douskou, Iris, ed., *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, Ekdotike Athenon S.A., 1976]. Having just cleaned themselves off, two young athletes wipe their strigils clean. Aryballoi hang on the walls, referencing the act of anointing that they have just completed. Although this oiling up before and after exercise was an everyday occurrence, it was not overlooked as sexual or seen as completely innocuous. Aristophanes took the opportunity in the *Clouds* to poke fun at those who paid attention to this activity and who found moral value in prescribing particular behaviors for how to anoint oneself properly:

ἤλειψατο δ' ἄν τούμφαλοῦ οὐδείς παῖς ὑπένερθεν τότ' ἄν, ὥστε
τοῖς αἰδοίοισι δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς ὥσπερ μήλοισιν ἐπήνθει·

What's more, they never put on oil below the belt, and their pricks looked like peaches, all velvety and dewy and..⁵⁴

This aside, voiced by the spokesperson for the traditional education, is clearly far-fetched satire. Nevertheless, it does express the obvious, that which might have otherwise remained unspoken: that the necessary oiling and massaging for athletic activities was very erotic

⁵³ Ferrari, 1990, p. 188.

⁵⁴ *Clouds*, lines 976-977, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Penguin, 1973.

indeed. Images such as the cup tondo prove this, although they have been studied in the past through the sanitized lens of the modern view of Greek athletics. All the eroticism of oiling is alluded to with great economy by the hanging aryballoi and the presence of the strigils in this composition.

The boys' clothes are draped over a post on the left, drawing further attention to their nudity. This cannot be but an erotically charged image: not only are the boys young and beautiful, but now having cleaned themselves off, are now prepared to meet their *erastai*, and be admired, much like Charmides or Autolykos. The "porthole composition" of the circular cup tondo conveys the impression of voyeurism, all the more so when seen within the context of the viewing culture of the gymnasium. The image is located in the bottom of a drinking cup, where a symposiast could gaze upon the boys, the objects of his desire, contained in their spherical frame. If a youth was using the cup, he would not only appreciate the attractiveness of the boys, but would also be confronted with a normative image which instructs him as far as his own conduct, and shows him what he should aspire to be like.

The voyeuristic culture of the gymnasium is shown explicitly on the neck of a symposium krater in Athens (Figure 7) [Neck and Lip of Volute krater by the Syriskos Painter. ca 470 BC, Athens, National Archaeological Museum ACR. 758. ARV2 260, 4]. Although unfortunately only a fragment, it captures the scene of a gymnasium with beautiful young athletes and interested, older onlookers. The figures are arranged in small groups. In one, a young, blond boy with a strigil turns his head towards a bearded man on the left, who gestures to the youth. His body, however, is turned in the other direction, towards another bearded man who appears to be speaking to the boy. The men have been labeled *paidotribai*, although there is nothing to suggest they are training the boy⁵⁵. In fact, there is every reason to believe that the bearded figures are would-be *erastai*, in a tumultuous scene

reminiscent of the one in Plato's *Charmides*. Here, all eyes are directed towards the blond boy (with the notable humorous exception of the dog). This includes another youth to the right of the man with the dog, who seems to have stopped in the middle of undressing to gaze over at the scene. The bearded man to the right of the latter youth, although his body is turned in the opposite direction, also doubles back to take a look. If these men are trainers, why are they training the youth who has clearly finished for the day, and has just cleaned himself off? Furthermore, the men are fully clothed, and lean against heavy, knobbed walking sticks. This attribute is very different from the thin switches with which the athletes and trainers sometimes represented.

Many examples of athletic scenes, set in gymnasia, and depicting grooming athletes remain to be examined, for many questions about the particulars of these images remain: at this point they are more taken for granted than understood. The draped figures in the gymnasium who are not participating in the exercises or cleaning up are usually labeled *paidotribes*, or trainers. This cannot certainly be the case in every instance. In fact, more research remains to be done on who these trainers might have been. The age of onlookers or attendants in gymnasium scenes vary greatly, and the possible reasons for this also needs to be analyzed. Representations of athletes adorned with wreaths also need to be examined further. Do these images imply a specific festival? If so which? Is this a crown *agon*, or are these *stephanoi* merely festival attire? Further study may inform us of the festival contexts intended in these images which have, for too long, been reduced to type, and labeled "genre images" of "daily life". On the contrary, these unique and expressive painted pots are often as individually specific as historical sources, and should be given the same attention. In this paper I have tried to outline some of the issues that remain to be examined concerning images of Greek athletes, if only during Athens in the early classical period. The cultural importance of grooming images of athletes on symposium vessels in particular is significant, first for the relationship that was the custom of *paidierastia*, but also for the

⁵⁵ Tzachou-Alexandri, 1989, p.161.

perpetuation of the idea of an ideal youth, who would become the ideal Athenian citizen.

There is still much work to be done in examining other types of athletic imagery, and what value these complex representations might have had for the average Greek viewer.

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