



WRESTLING, BOXING AND PANKRATION: INTRODUCING THE 'HEAVY EVENTS' IN ANCIENT OLYMPIC GAMES

Abstract - The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece took place between 776AC and 393AD, based on predominantly religious reasons, and the mythological values of that time. We know today that fights (wrestling, boxing and pankration) were part of the ancient Olympic program, and the purpose of this research is to introduce and understand the fundamentals that led them to this status. They were present in Egyptian culture since the second millennium BC, and were well described in the main works of Ancient Greece, such as those of Homer. Wrestling is the oldest of all, both in historical elements and in the introduction into the Olympic program. It combined strength, technique and intelligence. In addition to being a combat modality, it was also used as an educational element. Boxing was the second to appear, and it also appeared in an environment where the same fundamentals of wrestling were used but respecting the specific techniques in order to strike with the hands. And finally the pankration, the most violent of all, a kind of combination of the other two. Despite the technical differences, the dynamics of the events were very similar, such as the absence of division by weight category and separation into rounds, that is, from the beginning, the fight would only end by knockout or the opponent giving up. Boxing and wrestling are still part of the Olympic program today, and pankration can be recognized as an MMA practice, demonstrating that these sports have an important role in the field of martial arts, whose historical foundation we present in this research.

Keywords: Olympic Games; antiquity; fights.

LUTA, BOXE E PANCRÁCIO: APRESENTANDO OS 'EVENTOS PESADOS' NOS JOGOS OLÍMPICOS DA ANTIGUIDADE

Resumo - Os Jogos Olímpicos na Grécia Antiga ocorreram entre 776AC e 393dC, fundamentados por motivos predominantemente religiosos, baseados nos valores mitológicos daquela época. Sabemos hoje que as lutas (luta, boxe e pancrácio) fizeram parte do programa olímpico da antiguidade, e o propósito desta pesquisa é de introduzir e compreender os fundamentos que as levaram a este status. Elas estavam presentes na cultura Egípcia desde o segundo milênio antes de Cristo, e foram bem descritas nas principais obras da Grécia Antiga, tais como as de Homero. A luta é a mais antiga de todas, tanto em elementos históricos quanto na introdução no programa olímpico. Ela combinava força, técnica e inteligência. Além de ser uma modalidade de combate, era também utilizada como elemento educativo. O boxe foi a segunda a aparecer, e surgiu em um ambiente em que se tentou utilizar dos mesmos fundamentos da luta, mas respeitando a técnica específica de apenas golpear com as mãos. E por fim surgiu o pancrácio, a mais violenta de todas, sendo uma espécie de combinação das outras duas. Apesar das diferenças técnicas, a dinâmica dos eventos era muito parecida, tais como ausência de divisão por categorias de peso e de separação em rounds, ou seja, a partir do início, a luta só acabaria por nocaute ou por desistência do adversário. O Boxe e a luta ainda hoje fazem parte do programa olímpico, e o pancrácio pode ser reconhecido como uma prática de MMA, demonstrando que essas modalidades esportivas possuem um importante papel no domínio das artes marciais, cuja fundamentação histórica apresentamos nesta pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Jogos Olímpicos; antiguidade; lutas.

LUCHA, BOXEO Y PANCRACIO: PRESENTACIÓN DE LOS "EVENTOS PESADOS" EN LOS JUEGOS OLÍMPICOS DE LA ANTIGUIDAD

Resumen - Los Juegos Olímpicos en la Antigua Grecia se llevaron a cabo entre el 776AC y el 393AD, basados en motivos predominantemente religiosos, basados en los valores mitológicos de esa época. Sabemos hoy que las peleas (lucha libre, boxeo y pancracio) formaban parte del antiguo programa olímpico, y el propósito de esta investigación es introducir y comprender los fundamentos que las llevaron a este estatus. Estuvieron presentes en la cultura egipcia desde el segundo milenio antes de Cristo, y fueron bien descritos en las principales obras de la Antigua Grecia, como las de Homero. La lucha es la más antigua de todas, tanto en elementos históricos como en la introducción al programa olímpico. Combinaba fuerza, técnica e inteligencia. Además de ser una modalidad de combate, también se utilizaba como elemento educativo. El boxeo fue el segundo en aparecer, y también apareció en un ambiente donde se utilizaban los mismos fundamentos de la lucha, pero respetando la técnica específica de solo golpear con las manos. Y finalmente llegó el pancracio, el más violento de todos, siendo una especie de combinación de los otros dos. A pesar de las diferencias técnicas, la dinámica de los eventos fue muy similar, como la ausencia de división por categoría de peso y la separación en rounds, es decir, desde el inicio la pelea solo terminaría por nocaut o la rendición del oponente. El boxeo y la lucha siguen siendo parte del programa olímpico en la actualidad, y el pancracio puede ser reconocido como una práctica de MMA, demostrando que estos deportes tienen un papel importante en el campo de las artes marciales, cuyo fundamento histórico presentamos en esta investigación.

Palabras-clave: Juegos Olímpicos; antigüedad; peleas.

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Introduction

The Olympic Games were first held in Olympia as a quadrennial organization in honor of the god Zeus, without interruption from 776 BC to 393AC. Part of the Panhellenic Games, the Olympic events were the oldest and the three subsequent ones were the Pythian Games at Delphi (where Apollo was honored), Isthmian Games at Corinth (in honor of Poseidon) and the Nemean Games at Nemea (also honoring Zeus, as the Olympic Games). They normally took place during the summer season¹.

Its origin is surrounded by mythological values in the form of poetic language, like many other events of that time². The first rituals that took place there had the culmination of lighting a pyre in honor of Zeus. And for this purpose, no one could be chosen randomly, it had to be someone special, appointed by the gods³. As the Greeks believed that nothing happened simply 'by chance', they decided to organize a race between the suitors, in which the winner would receive the honor of completing the ceremonial, since their victory represented the choice of the gods⁴.

In 776 BC, the first Olympic event with a defined periodicity was organized, and the period of 4 years separating one event from the other was called 'Olympiad'. Winning at Olympia was everything the Greek athlete could wish for, being a source of pride for both himself and his family and also the city. Athletes swore loyalty to the *Hellandotics* (a kind of referees), following their decisions throughout the competition. The prize was just a wreath with olive branches, of special value to the inhabitants of that region⁵.

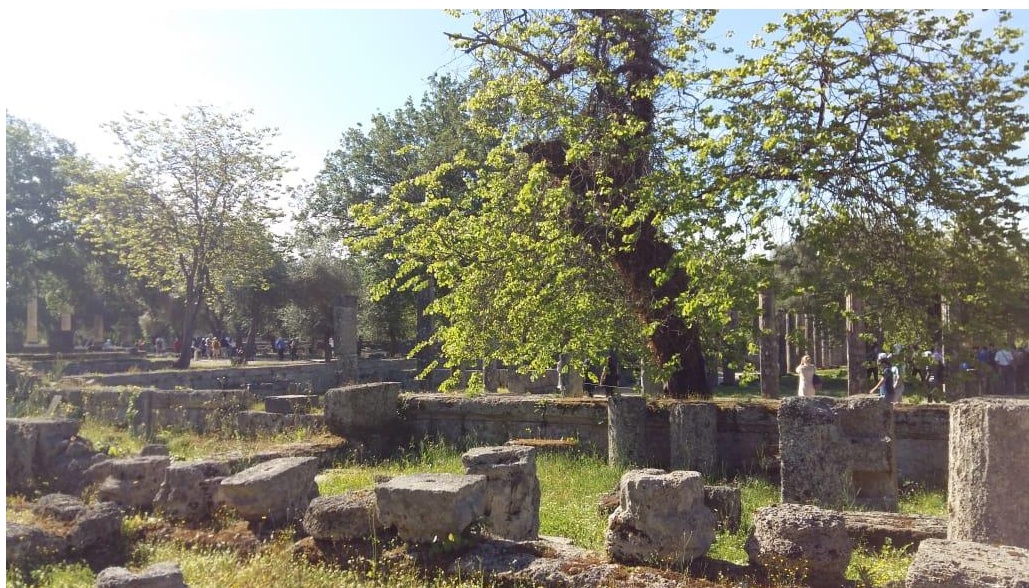
The ancient games in Olympia obviously were smaller than the recent version with the modern Olympics nowadays. It was initially composed by the running events, the equestrian ones, the pentathlon, and the so-called 'heavy' events⁶. These last ones were very popular in the games and were configured as a sort of combat sports section with wrestling, boxing and later pankration was included⁷. In all of them, the fighters would compete and the winners would be known as the *Olympionikai*, the victors at Olympia.

Olympia is a very historical place situated in the Peloponnese peninsula, in Greece. Such area includes an archeological site (Ancient Olympia) and an important museum dedicated to the Olympic Games. Understanding Ancient Olympia and its games is a difficult task as one must try to combine the idea of a sports complex and a center for religious devotion in the same place¹.

Regarding the fighting modalities, their training area was known as the *palaistra*, “[...] a square building with inner central court surrounded by colonnade and enclosed by roof areas sectioned off into special rooms for undressing, anointing the body with oil, powdering it with dust, baths, etc.”*. Such training area can still be seen nowadays through visiting the archeological site in Ancient Olympia (Figure 1).

Thus, the aim of this paper is to introduce and understand how fighting modalities have occurred in the Ancient Olympic Games, known as the heavy events with wrestling, boxing and pankration. These practices share not only similarities but also differences in comparison to the more sportive versions in the modern Olympics, which includes boxing, wrestling, judo, taekwondo, fencing and karate (exclusively in Tokyo edition that took place in 2021).

Figure 1 - Palaistra



Source: Author’s personal file (Archeological site in Olympia, Greece).

Fighting as part of the heavy events in Ancient Olympic Games

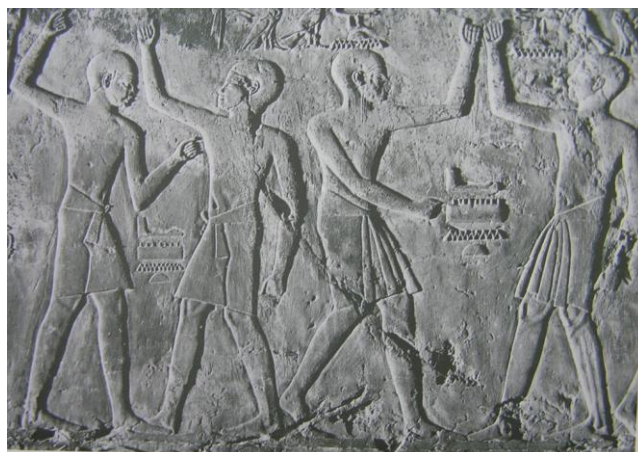
The first known references about athletic events come from the works of Homer. The book XXIII of the *Iliad* brings us with relative precision the development of practices such as chariot racing, boxing, wrestling, foot racing, armed combat, discus and javelin throwing, and archery. In the book VIII of the *Odyssey*, when Ulysses is received by the

* Information written on the place and noted during technical visit in 2019.

Feaces, they festively performed the foot race, wrestling, car race, discus throw and boxing^{8, 9, 10, 11}. From those practices the ‘heavy’ events were already quite present, in its different manifestations. Such works do not appear only in Homer but also in the Myth of the Argonauts, a boxing competition organized by the Bébrices tribe¹², the various fights between the giants described by Hesiod during the Titanomachy¹³ and in the dispute between Hercules against the Nemean Lion, the first of his twelve works, imposed by the goddess Hera¹⁴, of which one we will speak again later.

The appearance of those practices in Hellenic antiquity is not surprising, as they had frequent trade routes with the Egyptians, and along with commercial barter an important cultural exchange also took place. Egyptian civilization was well developed at that time and they had their forms of athletic manifestations – and among them, the fights¹⁵. According to Touny and Wenig¹⁶ the oldest representation of such practices comes from the sarcophagus of Ptah-Hotep, from the 5th Dynasty (about 2470-2320 BC). In the sarcophagus of Ramses III (1194 to 1163 BC), the reproduction of an event of struggle between Egyptians and foreigners was found, representing the figures of the Pharaoh and other important people. There was also a kind of boxing practiced without protective gloves (Figure 2), as well as many representations of false sword duels with papyrus rolls (Figure 3), having been described by Herodotus in his famous book ‘History’ (II, 63)¹⁷.

Figure 2 - Egyptian boxing



Source: Touny and Wenig¹⁶.

Figure 2 - Fencing with papyrus roll.



Source: Touny and Wenig¹⁶.

From the story named 'Memories of Sanchet'¹⁸, the idea of training and exercise with a certain purpose can be identified in Ancient Egypt: "An unparalleled champion [...] said he wanted to fight me [...]. During the night I drew my bow, shot my arrows, practiced with my dagger and polished my weapons (p. 111)". Such practices were quite common in that sociocultural context, and when the great games were introduced in Ancient Greece, these events became naturally part of their program.

Reliable and precise data about the ancient combat sports in the Games are hard to find and one can count more on digital texts on the subject than on scientific papers, which remain scarce on the topic. However, it seems consensual on research finding that such training had a close relation to war and vice-versa. The combat athletes were admired by the Ancient Greeks, especially for their toughness, courage, endurance and fighting spirit, among other virtues. These are all important qualities in a warrior society, constantly dealing with life vs death issues – 'victory or death', as found on the tombs of Greek soldiers. Fundamentally, such athletic training in Ancient Greece was intended to keep male citizens physically fit for war¹⁷.

According to Queval¹⁹, in antiquity the athletic practices were a means of training the individual and, in addition to the consideration of a military preparation, they could also be seen as a pedagogical or medicinal element. Besides preparing citizens to become soldiers capable of defending their territory, bodily development was part of the *Paideia*, as it was believed that this would lead men to explore their potential in the body-soul relationship and in relation to nature. The fact that the youth category was included in the

main Games from the 6th century BC onwards is clear evidence that athletic practices were an essential part of the education of the young Greek citizen.

These great events have changed the Greek culture, as the glory of the reward was justified, as well as the violence seen in the fights. Nevertheless, such fighting events were related to military and they have also kept the matter of spirituality and religion. Knowing the history of the heavy events in Ancient Olympic Games surpasses the idea of a peaceful environment towards Olympic history.

Several centuries after the Olympics began, Assyrian rhetorician and satirist Lucian wrote from a stranger’s perspective of what it would have been like to visit an Athenian gymnasium—center of training:

Some of them [athletes], locked in each other’s arms, are tripping one another up, while others are choking and twisting each other and groveling together in the mud. Others, standing upright, their bodies covered with dust are attacking each other with blows and kicks. One looks as if he were going to spew out his teeth, unlucky man (w/p) ⁷.

Along with the proposal of experiencing fighting as part of being a warrior, such events were also seen as exciting and fulfilled with lots of spectators. Then, Ancient Olympia was a place of tradition of the sportsman-soldier, religion and entertainment. Such combination was typical of that period and it was not rare that military victories were announced in sanctuaries⁷.

Although many historians have translated such expression to ‘combat sports’, the Ancient Greeks seem to have named as ‘heavy events’ the part of Olympic Games which included fighting modalities. This distinction is relevant to highlight the differences between the current idea of sport and that of combat sports in Ancient Greece. More than a sport, they were part of citizenship and education. According to Remijsen and Clarysse²⁰, some other distinctions also include:

- 1 – Absence of weight categories
- 2 – Age segregation: boys and men fought separately
- 3 – Gender exclusion: no women were allowed to fight or even to watch the heavy events
- 4 – Absence of rounds: the fight would end with a knockout or giving up.

Wrestling

According to Cabral¹², wrestling is the oldest and most widespread sport in the world, as well as the first form of combat without weapons. The context in which such practice of fighting emerged as an athletic and educational manifestation, dissociated from training for war, is quite interesting. Although nowadays this modality is recognized as Greco-Roman wrestling, the first signs of this practice were in ancient Egypt¹⁵, as seen in figure 4 a very known position of the wrestling represented in the sarcophagus of Ptah-Hotep (around 2.470-2.320 BC).

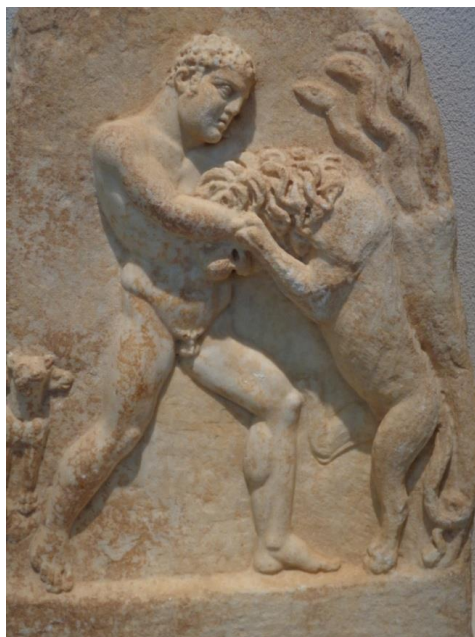
Figure 3 - Egyptian wrestling.



Source: Touny and Wenig¹⁶.

Dien²¹ claims that the numerous representations we still see today give us a kind of manual of the techniques used by the Greeks, which was very similar to the Egyptians. But for the Greeks, the strongest 'memory' of such representations comes from the famous battle between Hercules and the Nemean Lion (Figure 5). He was the strongest man who ever existed, but when he came across the beast, his strength was useless, as the Lion had his skin resistant to iron, bronze and stone²². Then, Hercules needed to also use his intelligence to manage how he could defeat a physically stronger enemy without the use of weapons. He won by strangulation and used the same strategy to defeat the giants Antaeus, Aquiloos and Triton, in other of his historic battles.

Figure 5 - Hercules against Nemean Lion



Source: Author's personal file (Archaeological Museum of Olympia, Greece)

A similar situation was described by Homer in the fight event of the games in honor of Patroclus. Ulysses faced and defeated Ajax who was taller and stronger than him. This is incidentally the oldest known description of a fighting event. Such facts were significant for the education of young Greeks, as they concur that, with the proper technique and the combined use of strength and intelligence, an eventual physical disadvantage could be reversed within a fight. Plutarch, quoted by Christopoulos²³, says that fighting is “the most skillful and most cunning of sports (p. 210)”. With this pedagogical basis, wrestling was the first combat modality to be part of the program of the Ancient Olympic Games.

Wrestling joined the Games in 708 BC and it was considered by the Greeks as a gentlemen's sport, although also rough on the body⁷. It might range from hard training to win a match or taking an enemy down on the battlefield as well as it is quoted on philosophical context, as Plato is also known as a wrestler, according to Tidman²⁴, he competitively wrestled in the Isthmian Games in the 5th century BC.

The disputes started with a draw to decide the duels, which followed in the format of single eliminations, that is, whoever wins advances to the next stage. Even nowadays, the main objective of a wrestler consists of throwing the opponent down landing on the ground whether through the hip, the shoulder or the back. In the Games, in order to win

the match, it was necessary to throw the opponent down 3 times, or make him give up due to fatigue, injury, or recognition of the opponent's superiority. To the latter, they used to lift his arm with the finger pointing upwards. As there was no time limit, the options for ending the fight were summarized in the situations described above²⁵. There were few rules and it was forbidden to bite and also to hold the genitals. As the fight started standing up and could continue on the ground, it was permitted to immobilize, break (the fingers, for example) and strangle the opponent.

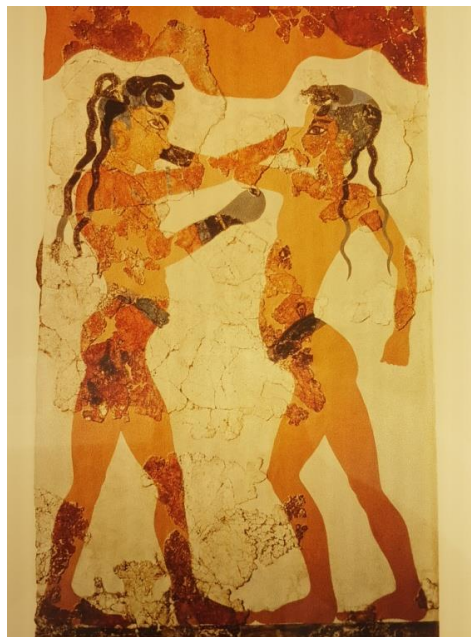
If at first the practice of fighting followed its pedagogical element, in the ceramic representations of a few centuries later, it is seen that the fighters had very disproportionate bodies, with the old and classic harmony giving way to specialization, as we can see in figure 10 below. The most famous fighter was Milon of Croton. His first victory came at the 57th edition of the Olympic Games, in 552 BC, after which he won five more times in a row, six more at the Pythian Games, nine at the Nemeans and ten at the Isthmians. For 24 years he was the most outstanding athlete of Ancient Greece. It is also attributed to him the first systematization of training using the principle of overload as we know it today. The story goes that during the four-year cycle that separated one Olympic event from another, he took a long walk with a calf on his shoulders. He repeated this exercise every day with the same animal, and as it gained weight, Milon gradually increased the strength he needed to perform, adapting it to the overload²⁵.

Boxing

Considered as one of the most brutal heavy events by the Greeks, boxing became regular in the Olympic program at 688 B.C., but at the beginning it was considered an elegant practice, where defense strategies predominated. The philosophy of attacking before being attacked came into force, and the first soft leather straps were replaced by harder and heavier materials, as combats often became deadly²⁵. Dien²¹ argues that those who managed to defeat their opponent without receiving any stroke became more famous. Some speculate that it was created by the Spartans for military purposes to train the soldiers to fight without helmets and it was also said that the sun-god Apollo beat Ares, the god of war, in the first boxing match at Olympia. The relation between boxing and war also appears in the *Iliad*, as a boxer named Epeios makes athletic victory on the battlefield⁷.

The first known record of a boxing practice comes from the Akrotiri boxers fresco (Figure 6), discovered in 1967 on the Greek island of Santorini, and called Tera at that time, made during the Bronze Age, between 1650 to 1700 BC. It represents two boys standing and exchanging strokes with their hands in a position very similar to today's boxing, wearing protective gloves. Throughout this time during the Mycenaean empire, boxing was one of the most portrayed sports, seen in several places in Greece and Cyprus. The muscular bodies and the technical positions, well represented in pictorial art of the vases, already demonstrated that these fighters had some preparation to enter the combat (Figures 7 and 8). Similar to wrestling, the first description of a boxing match came from Homer, when mentioning the funeral games in Honor of Patroclus during the Greek siege of Troy, and in the festive events of the Feaces when they welcomed Ulysses in their homecoming saga¹².

Figure 6 - Akrotiri boxers fresco.



Source: Author's personal file (National Archaeological Museum in Athens, Greece)

Figure 7 - Greek boxing



Source: Author's personal file (Ancient Olympic Games Museum in Olympia, Greece)

Figure 8 - Greek boxing



Source: Author's personal file (Ancient Olympic Games Museum in Olympia, Greece)

Hercules is also pointed out as one of the ‘inventors’ of this modality along with Theseus, but the most famous boxer in mythology is Apollo, who used boxing techniques to kill Forbas, who was known for challenging travelers in combat to death. However, the most beautiful duel is mentioned between the Argonaut Polideuces and Amico, the king of the Bebrices, whose description demonstrates how a weaker fighter can overcome a physically stronger opponent using a good technique²³.

In the Ancient games, matches were paired up randomly with no fixed duration and no category divisions, similar to wrestling rules. The combat would last until

submission (knockout or giving up raising one of the arms with a finger pointing up, as seen in Figure 9). Strikes to the genitals and the use of immobilization techniques were not allowed. Many authors mention that different from modern boxing, in the beginning the athletes did not wear gloves, and with the time, leather thongs wrapped around their hands and wrists started to be used²⁵. However, both in the *Akrotiri* Boxers Fresco as well as in the boxing event described by Homer during the siege of troy in the *Iliad*, it is mentioned the bandage in the hands of the contestants with leather thongs, demonstrating that this practice is very old. Such inventions were also known as *himantes*, which would leave their fingers free and were padded with wool inside them^{20,26}.

Figure 9 - Sign of giving up.



Source: Author's personal file (Ancient Olympic Games Museum in Olympia, Greece)

Through a few images that were reached during this research, we can infer that the strokes used were only 'direct', with no representations of 'uppercuts' neither 'hooks'²⁰. During the training, boxers used soft gloves as well as the punchball, similar to what can be found nowadays in boxing gyms. The history of boxing as one of the heavy events in Olympia can also be told through the legacy of some famous boxers, such as Kleomedes of Astypalaia; Kleitomachos of Thebes; Diagoras of Rhodes & family; Dorieus of Rhodes; Theagenes of Thasos; Melankomas; Euthymos of Lokroi²⁰. Due to the absence of a time limit, some boxing matches were short while others could persist for hours:

Ancient boxing champions Damoxeno and Kreugas ended a match before dark uniquely. After receiving a blow to the head, Damoxenos pierced his opponent under the ribs with his fingers and tore out a handful of his intestines. [...] Boxers Diognetos and Kleomedes both killed opponents in the ring yet were given a hero’s honors. Of the eight specific fatalities recorded in the combat sports, four occurred in boxing—three caused by illegal fighting tactics (w/p)⁷.

The heroic feats in Ancient boxing matches are often described according to their exhausting and sometimes deadly aspect. Agathos Daimon (nicknamed ‘the camel’) from Alexandria was a victor at Nemea who died there boxing in the stadium at 35 years old. Similar to Arrichion, at the 564 B. C. Olympics, they both sought victory or death and died fighting⁷.

These characteristics favored the emergence of the seed of professionalism in Ancient Games. In 388 BC, during the 98th edition of the Olympic Games, Eupolos of Thessalia bribed his five opponents to facilitate the fight, but by refusing to pay the agreed, the injured presented a complaint to the Hellanodics and they were all punished with a sum of money. With the amount raised, the first Zanes were built and placed near the entrance portico of the Olympic stadium. At its base was described “It is not with money, but with fast legs and a vigorous body that victory in Olympia is achieved”. From this edition, the Olympic oath began to be taken²⁵. The significant change in body composition is also a good indicator of this excess specialization, as we can see in Figure 10.

Figure 10 - Over-specialization (boxing)



Source: Author’s personal file (Ancient Olympic Games Museum in Olympia, Greece)

Also from boxing one of the most famous stories of the Ancient Games has originated. The same author claims that when Pisidoros, grandson of the famous Diagoras of Rhodes won the competition, Calipatira, his mother who was wearing men's clothes disguised as a coach, could not contain her joy and walked to hug her son. Upon discovery, as married women could not remain in the sanctuary, the penalty was death. However, as he was the son and grandson of Olympic champions, they decided not to apply the punishment. This was the only exception, but also the only time a woman was discovered inside the sanctuary.

Pankration

Pankration was the last fighting modality to be included in the heavy events in 648B.C. In Greek, it means the 'all-powerful thing' and it is a combination of boxing and wrestling. However, it might also include other forms of striking, grappling and wrestling, as we can see in the very know sculpture of the pankration arm lock (Figure 11). Biting and gouging the eyes, nose or mouth was prohibited, although genital-striking was considered a legitimate move^{7,21,27}. The combat dynamics were very similar to the previous ones, respecting the specific technique of each one. The athletic event started after pulling lots and forming fighting pairs. And in the same way, it ended with the opponent giving up the fight by raising his finger.

The story goes that the one who invented the pankration was Theseus, who had to combine Boxing and Wrestling techniques to defeat the Minotaur¹². However, according to Christopoulos²³, its practice as an athletic manifestation must have been more recent, as it was not described by Homer in any situation.

Sostratos of Sicyon had his own unique strategy. Nicknamed 'Mr. Digits', he snapped his opponents' fingers to force them into surrendering, winning three Olympic victories in the process. It was a tough sport and the trainer of one pankratiast wrote to a competitor's mother: "If you hear that your son has died, believe it, but if you hear he has been defeated, do not believe it (w/p)"⁷. The pankratiasts appeared to use nicknames according to their preferred technique of defeating the opponents, such as the 'Fingertips', a fighter from Sikyon who used to break his opponent's fingers²⁷.

Genuine crowd-pleasers, pankratiasts were amazing showmen. Polydamas of Skotussa strangled a lion with his bare hands, held a bull by its hooves and stopped a

speeding chariot by seizing its wheels. Taking on three supposed ‘Immortal’ Persian bodyguards, he killed all three single-handedly. Painted on vases with blood cascading down their faces, there is little doubt that pankratiasts were considered heroic demigods. It is no surprise that they were among the first sports professionals⁷.

Figure 11 - Pankration arm lock.



Source: Author's personal file (Ancient Olympic Games Museum in Olympia, Greece)

Another story tells the Pankration competition won by Arrhichion of Phigalia at the Olympic Games. He has died in the ring, locked in a tight chokehold. At the same time, he had to break the ankle of his opponent in order to loosen the choke. However, when his competitor raised a finger for submission, Arrichion fell dead, yet he was declared the winner²⁰.

It is also said that Pankration had two important phases thorough its history: the *Ano Pankration* (Upper Pankration) and the *Kato Pankration* (Lower Pankration)^{12,23}. In the first one, contestants had to fight upright and the second one used to start with the first falling on the ground of a fighter. As the main goal in the first version was to knock down the opponent, punches, kicks and all kind of lethal blows were usually performed, while grappling, joint locking, and strangulation were used as more effective methods in the second version. However, the fighters had the liberty to build their own fighting style.

Besides, the pankratiasts initially used to fight nude, with oiled bodies and bare hand Wrapping around their hands and forearms were used to be worn later on. As an adaptive version in Rome, fighters started to cover their genitals and started to use battle gloves designed with leather strips and filled with blades or spikes. Although it has been reported that Pankration was part of the army in many Greek city-states, they have been kept as unarmed fighting techniques. Findings suggest that Pankration had been also used in other military training, such as those related to Alexander the Great, in Macedonia, contributing to spreading this fighting to the East. Some even speculate a relation between Pankration and Asian Martial Arts due to the routes and conquers throughout different territories²⁷.

Conclusion

Although they share peculiarities among them, wrestling, boxing and pankration seem to have an important role in Martial Arts & Combat Sports domain. Wrestling and boxing are still part of the modern Olympic Games, while pankration is closer to the MMA (Mixed Martial Arts as we know it nowadays) tournaments. Besides, these three fighting practices can be considered as foundations to different recent modalities, such as judo, taekwondo and karate, to name some of the Olympic ones.

Further investigation might be conducted to better understand ancient fighting practices thorough the globe, the relations among them and the changing process towards recent styles.

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