Gymnasia and Philosophical Schools
in Athens and Attica

ABSTRACTS

Guy Ackermann (Postdoctoral fellow, University of Geneva), Sotiria Kriemadi (Independent Architect) and Paul Segault (Independent Architect)

An Athenian Palaistra on Delos? The "lake Palestra" in the 4th century BCE

Two Athenian inscriptions dated to the years 354/3 to 352/1 BCE explicitly mention a palaistra in Delos. The island was then under Athenian control, and its gymnasium appears to have been administrated by the Athenian amphictyons. In 314 BCE, the Delians recovered their independence and undertook during the following decades major building works – or rather rebuilding operations – on the palaistra, which, according to the accounts of the hieropoioi, included a peristylion, an apodyterion, and a loutron. This early third-century palaistra most likely corresponds to the so-called "Lake Palaestra", a building that has been fully excavated by the French School at Athens in 1910, and subsequently between 1947 and 1949, before being published in a monograph by Jean Delorme in 1961 (EAD XXV).

A new study of this building was initiated in 2023 by the French School at Athens, with funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation. The architectural analysis has identified several construction phases, culminating in a palaistra structured around a square peristyle court flanked by two opposing wings of rooms. This building appears to correspond to the early third-century BCE palaistra of the Delian accounts. It remains difficult, however, to ascertain the gymnasium function of the successive structures that preceded these major works. Trenches conducted in 2025 produced stratigraphic evidence allowing the occupation of the site to be traced back to the late fifth or early fourth century BCE. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the architectural development of these early remains and to explore whether they can be identified with the palaistra of Delos mentionned in two mid-fourth-century inscriptions discovered in Athens.

Stavroula Asimakopoulou (Dr. Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens) and Dimitris Sourlas (MSc, Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens)

An enigmatic archaic head from Plato's Academy

The over life size of a limestone male head was discovered in the year 1936 during the first excavations in the site of the alleged Plato's Academy in Athens.

The head was dated in the archaic times and it was interpreted as a testimony of the existence in the area of an archaic period temple or temenos. The study of the find aims to give answers to the long enduring enigma. Was an early representation of Dionysios or a Herm as it was alleged in the past or belongs to a statue connected with the earlier phases of the gymnasium of the site?

Barbara Carè (Dr., Université de Lausanne)

Astragaloi in the Education and Athletic Culture of Ancient Attica

Drawing on Plato's Lysis (206d–e), where young men are described as astragalizontes in the context of the Hermaia, and on Attic vase paintings depicting knucklebones in connection with youth and athletic practices, this paper explores the place of these objects within the cultural world of the Greek gymnasium. While astragaloi are commonly associated with gaming and leisure, their presence in contexts connected with education and athletic life invites a broader consideration of their cultural meanings. What did these tarsal bones represent when appearing alongside young bodies, physical training, and the social practices of the gymnasium? And how might literary and visual evidence help us understand their place within the education of young Greeks? Moving beyond their role as mere gaming objects, this study examines how astragaloi acquired different meanings within the broader cultural environment of youthful education and athletic practice.

Ada Caruso (Researcher, Sapienza Università di Roma)

Aristocratic Identity and Athletic Practices in the Seventh Century BC Academy

The gymnasium of the Academy, attested from the sixth century BC onwards, is considered one of the earliest gymnasia in the Greek world, if not the earliest. What circumstances led the Athenians to establish such an educational institution in this part of the city? My contribution stems from this question. It focuses on the early Archaic phases of the Academy, and more specifically on the seventh century BC, with the aim of exploring the site and its inhabitants in the period immediately preceding the establishment of the gymnasium in the sixth century BC. The seventh-century BC finds, drawn from the catalogue published in the recent (2024) volume edited by Alexander Mazarakis Ainian and Alexandra-Fani Alexandridou, come from an area lying to the west of the proper gymnasium of the Academy. Although fewer in number than those dating to the eighth century BC, they nevertheless attest to the continued use of the area by a community that engaged in feasting, banqueting, and funerary practices. Given the relatively high occurrence of horse representations in the iconographic repertoire of the seventh century BC, I suggest that these people

may also have engaged in athletic contests involving horses, in keeping with the role of horsemanship as a marker of aristocratic status among seventh-century BC Athenians. This (the supposed horse-races) may have contributed to establishing the area as a cultural marker of aristocratic and athletic identity, a character that persisted in the subsequent history of the site.

Maria Dimitra Dawson (MPhil, Academy of Athens)

The Value of Archives in the Study of the Prewar Excavations at Plato's Academy

This paper focuses on the value of archive material — in an attempt to shed light on the pre-war excavations (1930-1939) at Plato's Academy, sponsored by Panagiotis Aristophron. By collecting and organizing the old archival data - excavation journals, field notes and reports, drawings, photographs, correspondence and administrative documents, plans, maps, and other unpublished sources—from various institutions (the Academy of Athens, the Archaeological Society at Athens, the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens, and the National Archive of Monuments), we aim to reconstruct Aristophron's archive in its entirety and enrich it with additional evidence.
Studying this material allows us to uncover previously unknown information and valuable details for archaeological research, particularly regarding the different excavation periods, the methods employed, the location of the trenches, and the people who participated in the excavations and their roles. Furthermore, these records provide us the opportunity to re-examine this past archaeological activity: the discovery and interpretation of major monuments uncovered during the pre-war excavations, and, at the same time, to trace the identification and archaeological context of numerous finds currently housed in the storage facilities of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens at Akadimia Platonos. Through the presentation and analysis of the archives, the history of Aristophron's excavations gradually unfolds, enabling a new reading of the preserved evidence and opening new perspectives for further research.

Stamatis Fritzilas (Researcher, Academy of Athens)

Aphesis and Hysplex. The starting mechanism for the hippodrome and stadium in Athens

This contribution examines the origins of the starting mechanism used by athletes in ancient Athens. It is based on an uninterpreted scene depicting an hysplex during a horse race, as shown on an Attic black-figure krater which was once on the art market. Dating to around 510 BC, the scene illustrates the starting gate (aphesis) of the hippodrome, shedding new light on equestrian iconography and the origins of this ingenious starting mechanism. Drawing on

written sources and archaeological data, the scene on the vase's rim featuring five charging horsemen (with one fallen under his horse) and a man flanked by two pairs of five wooden vertical posts is likely to depict an Athenian hysplex, with the aphetes standing behind the horses in the centre and operating the starting mechanism. The depiction of the eight starting gates of the Athenian hippodrome on a late Archaic vase is significant, as it is the earliest evidence of its existence. The vase painters' decision to depict this method of starting horse races suggests that it was developed at that time.

The unusual iconography of this Athenian vase, which depicts the eight starting gates and the racecourse of the Archaic Hippodrome, suggests aristocratic patronage. Only the wealthy could afford to own and breed horses and celebrate their victories by organising symposiums. Athens was a major centre for gymnastics, equestrian sports, and military and athletic training. It was also where the equestrian competitions of the Panathenaic Games were held. This vase painting corroborates the theory that the initial concept of a wooden barrier at the starting line was conceived for horse racing and then adopted for running races. The Olympic hippaphesis was invented by Kleoitas, who worked in Athens and Olympia in the first half of the 5th century BC. Such systems must initially have appeared in hippodromes before being adapted for use in stadia. Similar movable systems with individual barriers for each athlete may also have existed in gymnasia, in spaces such as xystoi and paradromides. Based on ancient principles and practices, similar barriers must also have existed in other major Greek stadiums. These were indispensable elements of stadia and hippodromes, as they could be used for footraces and horse races alike.

Aikaterini *Gianna*, (PhD Candidate, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

«Θησεὺς εἰμὶ νέος…»: The funerary stele of the young Paramonos.

This paper examines the funerary stele of the ephebe Paramonos (second half of the second century AD), which was found in the fill of an ancient cistern at Marathon. An Attic funerary monument combining relief sculpture and funerary epigram, it constructs the identity of the deceased through image and text. The relief depicts Paramonos standing between his parents, nude on a pedestal, wearing a *chlamys* and carrying a *sfaira* and a sheathed sword. The accompanying epigram identifies him as an Athenian ephebe and compares him to the Dioscuri and the "new Theseus."

The study investigates how this monument contributes to our understanding of the Athenian ephebate during the Roman Imperial period through three questions. First, does the term ephebos function as a technical designation indicating Paramonos' participation in the Athenian ephebate, and

which iconographic features express his age and status? Second, how does the epigram interact with the relief? In particular, do the sfaira, sword, chlamys, and the statue-like representation of the deceased evoke the gymnasium and reinforce associations with the Dioscuri and Theseus, figures linked to the ideals of Athenian youth? Third, what does the monument reveal about the social background of Paramonos' family and the significance of its reported findspot at Marathon (if Marathon represents its original context)?

Drawing on archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence, the paper argues that the stele should be understood not merely as a family funerary monument but also as a carefully constructed medium celebrating the ideal of the Athenian ephebe and linking the deceased with heroic virtue and the cultural memory of Roman Athens.

Regina Hanslmayr (Associate Researcher, University of Zurich) and Caterina Schorer (PhD candidate, Universities of Zurich and Heidelberg)

Carving the Face of the Ephebeia – Herms and Inscribed Herm-Bases from the Hellenistic Period on Delos

Herms, widely regarded as ornamenta gymnasiode par excellence, provide an important lens for investigating the gymnasium as a social, educational, and cultural institution. Delos preserves an exceptional corpus of Hellenistic herms and inscribed herm bases and therefore offers a valuable comparative case for examining the significance of herms within gymnasia and the wider Attic cultural context.

This paper explores the iconography and inscriptions of Hellenistic Delian herms and closely related dedications, such as torch consoles, associated with athletic training and the education of ephebes. A first part will trace how their visual language reflects the athletic, civic, and philosophical functions of the gymnasium and the ephebeia. The analysis will center, amongst other iconographic types, on the youthful shoulder herms with ephebic head types found both in the gymnasium by the stadium and elsewhere on Delos.

Inscribed herm bases and torch consoles, dedicated repeatedly by groups such as ephebes and gymnasium magistrates, form the material evidence for the second part of this study. Here, the question of how Athenian presence (166–88 BC) shaped the Delian ephebeia both materially and conceptually, will lead the investigation.

By combining visual and epigraphic analysis, this paper adopts a holistic approach that moves beyond the study of individual objects to provide a deeper understanding of how this particular sculpture type shaped Delian ephebic institutions.

Pelayo Huerta Segovia (Postdoctoral fellow, University of Santiago de Compostela

Hermes and Hermai in Gymnasia and Agonistic Contexts of Attica

This paper examines the presence of Hermes and herms in gymnasia and wider agonistic contexts of Attica. Although herms were ubiquitous across the social spaces of classical Athens, their meanings, functions, and perception in agonistic places remain insufficiently explored. Through a reassessment of material, epigraphic, iconographic, and literary evidence, the paper considers how herms were perceived and used in these spaces and the ways in which their semantics persisted or changed over time. Particular attention is given to the potentially ambivalent relationships between the herm as an object of dedication or worship, its viewers, the identities it embodied, and other divine recipients.

Examining these relationships will help clarify how the placement and display of herms shaped the experience of gymnasia and other agonistic settings, while opening a broader discussion of Hermes' figure and role in these places. The evidence for Hermes Enagonios, the Hermaia, and gymnasia associated with the god is therefore reassessed alongside his representations and related cultic material to explore how his divine prerogatives found expression in the practices of training and competition. This combined approach seeks to clarify the role of herms as active agents within the social and religious life of Attic gymnasia, where bodily exercise, cult actions, and civic education were closely connected within the framework of Athenian paideia

Chris De L'Isle (Assistant Professor Durham University)

Changing times: Commemoration of the ephebeia in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial times

This paper explores how the epigraphic and monumental commemoration of the Athenian ephebeia changed between the Hellenistic and Imperial periods, with a particular focus on the first century BC and the early second century AD. In the first half of this period, commemoration took the form of inscribed decrees, catalogues of all the ephebes, and a painted image 'en hoplo' of the kosmetes. These monuments disappear around 20 BC. When commemoration returns in the 40s AD, it takes the form of shorter lists of a selection of the ephebes who happened to enjoy particular ties of friendship. Full catalogues return in 61/2 AD with a new relief motif of the ephebes crowning their kosmetes. Although these catalogues are closely modelled on the Hellenistic ones, they tend to emphasise social hierarchies, where the Hellenistic ones emphasised egalitarianism. The location is also different, moving from massive stelai in the Agora to smaller panels in the Diogeneion gymnasium. Finally,

honorific herms for the kosmetai were introduced around 120. This is a substantially different way of honouring the kosmetai from that used in the Hellenistic period, but the underlying goal – presenting an idealised male citizen role model for the ephebes – remained the same (although there was a greater emphasis on the family of the kosmetes as a microcosm of the community in the Imperial period). Ironically, we see continuity of form to communicate a changing message and continuity of message communicated by a changing form.

Ralph Krumeich (Prof. Universität Bonn)

A significant place in the heart of the city. Images of deities, portrait statuary, and cultural references in Athenian gymnasia

Gymnasia have been among the most important venues for the physical and intellectual education of young men in Athens. The Academy and other gymnasia of the Classical and Hellenistic periods were also significant sites for the display of divine images and portrait statues or herm portraits. A few statues of prominent philosophers could still be seen in the Roman imperial period and reminded of the heyday of the respective gymnasia.

The following focuses on the statuary that were on display in Athenian gymnasia from the 4th century BC to the Roman imperial period; it aims to identify period-specific characteristics and references of these monuments. The selection, typology and iconography of divine statues and portrait statuary reveal much about contemporary ideals and concepts. This applies not least to the slightly larger-than-life herm portraits of kosmetai and other members of the gymnasium that were on display in the Diogeneion from the Trajan period onwards. The accompanying portrait heads were either period faces with clear references to imperial portraits, but in some cases also made allusions to classical or Hellenistic statues that were on display at the same time at the Academy or elsewhere.

Eftychia Lyngouri-Tolia (Former Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Piraeus)

Tracing the Origins and Development of the Gymnasia in the Outskirts of Athens: The Academy and the Lyceum

The identification of the site of the ancient Academy is due primarily to the excavations conducted between 1929 and 1939 in the area now known as Plato's Academy, commonly referred to as the pre-war excavations of the Academy. These investigations were financed by the architect Panagiotis Aristophron, a member of the Greek diaspora in Egypt and an admirer of Plato. The excavations brought to light, above all, the foundations of two large buildings,

which appear to have formed part of the principal installations of the celebrated gymnasium. In particular, the large rectangular building was identified either as the gymnasium itself or, more specifically, as its palaestra. It formed part of a much larger complex that has never been excavated in its entirety.

The precise location of the Gymnasium of the Lyceum became known in 1996 through a rescue excavation carried out by the Third Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (Γ' ΕΠΚΑ) on a plot on Rigillis Street, south of the Sarogleion. The excavation revealed the foundations of a large rectangular building displaying all the characteristic features of a palaestra, the most important architectural component of a gymnasium, situated to the east of the ancient city. According to the ancient sources, the Gymnasium of the Lyceum was located east of Athens, within the wider area of the Lyceum, an extensive open landscape in whose eastern sector the gymnasium appears to have been established.

Following the discovery of the palaestra of the Gymnasium of the Lyceum, comparison with similar buildings from other excavated gymnasia showed that its closest parallel, particularly in the arrangement of the rooms along its northern side, is provided by the other major Athenian gymnasium, that of the Academy. This shared architectural feature appears to have played an important role in the development of both buildings.

Eftychia Lyngouri-Tolia (Former Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Piraeus)

The So-Called Gymnasium at Kynosarges. A Contribution to the Interpretation of Its Function

Of the three earliest gymnasia established on the outskirts of Athens—at the Academy, the Lyceum, and Kynosarges—only the precise location of the third remains uncertain.

Ancient sources generally indicate that Kynosarges lay outside the city, at a short distance from it, south-east of the Olympieion, on the left bank of the Ilissos, and beyond the Diomeian Gate. Kynosarges was also the site of an important sanctuary dedicated to the hero Herakles. The gymnasium, which was traditionally associated with the nothoi (those of illegitimate birth), appears to have been of lesser status than the other two major Athenian gymnasia. Information concerning the gymnasium itself is extremely limited, in marked contrast to the relatively frequent references by ancient authors to the sanctuary of Herakles at Kynosarges.

During the first excavations in the area of Kynosarges (modern Neos Kosmos), undertaken by the British School at Athens in 1896–1897, two buildings were discovered. One was identified as the gymnasium of the Archaic period and the other as its Roman-period successor. Much later, during

the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, rescue excavations conducted by the Third Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (Γ' ΕΠΚΑ) brought to light further sections of the second building uncovered by the British excavations, thereby allowing its ground plan to be reconstructed more fully. The discoveries made during the 1970 rescue excavation led Ioannis Travlos to accept the earlier British interpretation and to identify the building with the celebrated Gymnasium of Hadrian, principally on the basis of constructional similarities with Hadrian's Library.

The subsequent excavation of additional parts of the building, however, provided more specific evidence concerning its function. This new evidence suggests that its identification as a gymnasium—and, more specifically, as the gymnasium of the Hadrianic period—should be rejected. The function of the building must therefore be reconsidered and an alternative interpretation sought.

Georgios Mouratidis (Ass. Director BSA)

The First BSA excavation at the so-called Gymnasium of Kynosarges

This paper revisits the British School at Athens' 1896–1897 excavation at Kynosarges. Located south of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, the excavation was intended to contribute to the reconstruction of Athenian topography and to test the identification of the area as the site of Kynosarges, one of Athens' three early gymnasia and the location of the shrine of Herakles.

Drawing on the surviving BSA archival material—including preliminary excavation accounts, plans, photographs, and records of the finds—this paper explores what these sources reveal about the excavation practices, interpretations, and limitations of the project. Particular attention is given to the remains of a substantial sixth-century BC building, constructed above Geometric graves and later covered by a Roman structure, as well as to the adjacent Roman complex identified as the Hadrianic bath-gymnasium. The architectural evidence, together with literary, epigraphic, and comparative material, will be assessed in relation to the proposed identification of the site.

Nikos Petrochilos (Dr, Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens)

Memory and History in the Gymnasium: The Case of Plato's Academy

The spatial association between funerary monuments and gymnasia was not accidental, but rather a deliberate political and social practice of commemoration. As institutions devoted to the formation of the citizen, gymnasia functioned simultaneously as spaces of physical exercise, socialisation, and ideological education. The incorporation of the tombs of distinguished individuals or elite families into such spaces transformed the memory of the dead into an active pedagogical mechanism: young men were

educated within a landscape in which virtue, civic service, and social distinction were given architectural expression. At Syracuse, the gymnasium was organised around the tomb of a civic hero, while in the stadium-gymnasium at Messene monumental tombs were incorporated into the stoa. The tomb thus appears to have functioned either as the founding nucleus of a public space or as a means of social display and officially sanctioned commemoration within the educational environment. In both cases, death was not segregated from civic life but incorporated into the process through which civic identity was reproduced. The gymnasium thus emerges as an institution of memory: a space in which the past was continually re-enacted through bodily practice and spatial experience. Collective memory was transmitted not only through discourse or inscriptions, but was also inscribed in the landscape through which citizens moved and which they experienced in their daily lives.

Plato's Academy fits particularly well within this mnemonic model, and does so with exceptional intensity and longevity. The area occupied by the gymnasium and the philosophical school was not separated from the world of the dead, but developed in direct relation to the *Demosion Sema*, Athens' principal public burial ground and a primary locus of civic and political memory. Burial areas also developed in the immediate surroundings of the buildings conventionally identified as the Palaestra and the Peristyle. The coexistence of education, physical exercise, cult, and burial transformed the Academy into a fully developed memorial landscape, in which the civic identity of Athens was inscribed both upon the body and into space.

Dimitris Sourlas (MSc, Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens)

A Heracle Herm from Athens and the puzzling history of a Palaistra of Diogeneion/Ptolemaion and other sculptures from the area

A small Heracle Herm was found many years ago in a salvage excavation just South from the Roman Agora. The sculpture which remain unpublished belong to a type connected with the Palaistra, the place where the ephebes were exercised in Athletics.

The existence of a Palaistra in Athens it is firmly connected with the Gymnasia of the city and specific the Diogeneion/Ptolemaion, the exact place of them remain an unsolved problem. The aim of the presentation is to try to shed some more light in the history and to present new finds that are connected with the Gymnasia of Late Hellenistic Athens.

Estelle Strazdins (Senior Lecturer, Australian National University)

Beyond the Gymnasium: Herodes Atticus, Marathon, and the Education of 'the Greeks'

In Philostratus' Lives of the Sophists, the author records an anecdote about the sophist Alexander of Seleucia, known as the Clay Plato. On arrival in Athens, he proposes to deliver an epideixis, but when he hears that Herodes Atticus is residing in Marathon with 'all of the youth' (τὴν νεότητα …πᾶσαν), he writes him a letter requesting he send 'the Greeks' (τοὺς Ἕλληνας, 2.5.571) back to hear him. Herodes responds that he will come himself and bring his Greeks with him (ἀφίξομαι … μετὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ αὐτός). This anecdote paints an intriguing picture of the sophistic and paideutic scene in second-century Athens and the Greek world more broadly: Herodes is its central figure, Athens its cultural heart, and Marathon one of its most important spaces – the Greek youth are described as following him there (ἐπακολουθοῦσαν αὐτῷ) to learn like some sort of Pied Piper. This paper will explore Herodes' self-constructed role as educator of 'the Greeks', and argue that Herodes' Marathon acts as an educative space that parallels the gymnasium in a number of significant ways. Evidence marshalled in support includes Philostratus' Lives, commemorative herms of Herodes' foster-sons (τρόφιμοι), and inscriptions relating to Herodes and his Marathon estate. Herodes' activities will be contextualised within broader ephebic tradition, such as the crowning of the polyandreion in the Kerameikos, and the annual pilgrimage and sacrifice at the Marathon soros. Through this exploration, Herodes' Marathon emerges as a kind of gymnasium common to the Greek world.

Dimitra Terzopoulou (Dr Academy of Athens)

A glimpse of the Gymnasium through Attic funerary monuments

Participation in the institution of the gymnasium and especially within the ranks of ephebate was considered a mark of prestige and high social status. It instilled a set of qualities, virtues and values in youths, and prepared them for their civic duties. A group of funerary stelai dating mainly to the imperial period depict boys in various figural types associated with the gymnasium. Most of these types also appear on reliefs decorating stelai with ephebic catalogues, portraying youths who had completed the ephebate. Interestingly, these types are adopted by various age groups on funerary monuments, revealing the parental and social aspirations for male offspring to become part of this prestigious peer group and receive the associated education and athletic training. The deceased sons are usually depicted wearing only a himation or a chlamys. As is often the case in Attic funerary art from the Imperial period, most of these types allude to Classical models.

Emmanuel Voutiras (Prof. Emeritus, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

Plato's portrait statue in the Academy

The existence of a statue of Plato dating to the 4th cent. BCE is reliably attested by Diogenes Laertius, who reproduces (without citing it exactly) the text of the inscription engraved on its basis. The inscription stated that the statue had been erected by a Persian named Mithradates and that it was the work of the Athenian sculptor Silanion. Konrad Gaiser plausibly argued that the Persian dedicator of Plato's statue was the same person as the "Chaldaean" who, according to the "Index Academicorum Herculanensis", visited Plato as an old man and stayed by his side on the day he died. The dating of Plato's statue shortly after his death (347 BC) is compatible with the evidence that Silanion was active in Athens in the third quarter of the 4th cent. It is widely accepted that Plato's statue stood in a sanctuary of the Muses which was part of the school Plato had founded on a plot he owned close to the public gymnasium associated with the cult of the local hero Academos. It is probable that a statue of Socrates had already been erected in the same sanctuary. The proximity of the sanctuary of the Muses to a public gymnasium underlines the importance of philosophy for the education of young Athenians. The statues of the philosophers helped keep their memory alive. A similar situation is documented in another Athenian gymnasium, the Lykeion, which was associated with the Peripatos, the school of Aristotle.