

The Reception of Ancient Olympic *Epinikia* in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century European Poetry

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The ancient links between poetry and the Olympic idea were rediscovered and revived in the Renaissance period and beyond. The first references to the ancient Olympic Games appeared in fifteenth-century Italian literature. Then they were exploited by German, French, Polish, Scottish and English poets in the following century. An analysis of sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century poetic works demonstrates that Olympic themes were used in poetry for comparative purposes to evoke moral, ethical, organizational, and athletic models, and even to raise the prestige of local events. The dissemination of Olympic traditions through poetry also contributed to the development of some well-known carriers of the Olympic tradition called pseudo-Olympics, famously exemplified by the Cotswold Olimpicks Games organized in England by Robert Dover and widely appraised by English poets. All these activities testify to the significant role of poetry as a principal component of Olympic legacy in European culture.

Introduction

Almost 1500 years have passed between the demise of the ancient Olympic Games and their modern revival initiated by Baron Pierre de Coubertin. During this time, the broadly defined Olympic ideal has survived in multiple forms including literature, archaeological findings, music and the so-called pseudo-Olympics. As early as the Byzantine times various chroniclers examining classical works came across references to Greek agonism and the Olympic Games (see for example Cedrenus 1838; Adler and Tuffin 2002; Jeffreys *et al.* 1986), which they included in their works. The Renaissance period then witnessed the bloom of Olympic-related themes in literature, including poetic, historical, and medical writings.

The presence of Olympic motifs in the literature of the ‘inter-Olympic period’ (from the end of the ancient Olympic Games to 1896) has already been addressed by

contemporary scholars. One of them is Jeffrey O. Segrave, who in a series of articles discussed the appearance of the Olympic idea in literature, poetry, music, and dance (see for example Segrave 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009). He provided some exemplary works (and their fragments) by specific authors and conducted a detailed analysis of Pietro Metastasio's opera libretto *L'Olimpiade*. Segrave placed the examined literary works in the context of mythologizing and idealizing the Olympic tradition. English scholars, such as Martin Polley, Francis Burns and Peter Radford, also alluded to Olympic themes in poetry, referring mainly to the works of William Shakespeare and to the Cotswold Olimpick Games. Despite the abundance of these examples, the subject of Olympic heritage forms in the inter-Olympic period is still a fairly under-researched area of history of the broadly defined Olympic tradition from antiquity to modern times.

The purpose of this article is to present and analyse Olympic themes in the poetry of the European Renaissance as well as to identify when and where the first poetic works referring to the Olympic tradition appeared, and how Olympic poetic works can be classified in terms of their character and function. The next part of the article outlines the ancient traditions of sports poetry with a special focus on the Greek *epinikia* and collected epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology*. In the subsequent part, Renaissance works dealing with the ancient Olympics are presented together with their characteristics. In conclusion, the function of Olympic poetry in the Renaissance period and its influence on the development of other forms of the Olympic heritage are defined. An attempt is also made at a periodization of Olympic poetry development.

Ancient Greek Origins of Sports Poetry

Athletic rivalry in various competitions was an immensely significant part of ancient Greeks' life. One of the earliest examples of this rivalry were athletic *agons*, traces of which can be found in the mythical songs of the *aoidoi* or in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* (Dombrowski 2012). These early works inspired later Virgil's *Aeneid*, which contains a whole book devoted to the ancient games. Although the participation in athletic *agons*, as described in the Homeric epic poems, was only the privilege of the aristocracy, gradual changes in this regard took place over the years (Wyskok and Bronikowska 2018). Athletic education became a widespread public activity in the Greek city-states as it aimed at improvement of the military fitness of their citizens, in particular, young people who could develop their physical skills in gymnasiums, hippodromes, or other athletic venues (Poliakoff 1987).

The preparation of individual athletes for the games was a test of the measurability of their potential in respective disciplines (Miller 2004). Ancient Greeks, however, focused solely on winning, striving for success at all costs, even resorting to trickery or deception to achieve their goals (Stephans 2020) since, at the end of the games, only the winners of individual competitions mattered. Greek poets interested in athletic rivalry composed mostly *epinikia*, i.e. triumphal songs in honour of victorious heroes, considered to be a genre of laudatory and pathos odes. One of the earliest authors of *epinikia* was Simonides of Ceos (c. 556–468 BCE), also known as the first

poet for whom writing poetry became a livelihood. He wrote hymns in honour of both the gods of Olympus and the winners of the games, regarding the latter as the chosen ones and representatives of the gods on earth (Bravi 2019). Although few fragments survive from his works, Simonides was likely a source of inspiration for subsequent poets, most notably his pupil Bacchylides as well as Pindar – known for his works celebrating the winners of the Panhellenic Games in Olympia, Isthmia, Delphi and Nemea.

Pindar (c. 522/518–443/438 BCE), a native of Cynoscephaliae near Thebes, first displayed his poetic and musical talents, when he won at the age of 20 – a dithyrambic agon in honour of the god Dionysus (Wellenbach 2015). Eventually, Pindar's works were collected by ancient scholars in 17 volumes, four of which included *epinikia*. Interestingly, only these four books have survived in their entirety to the present day, containing 14 Olympic, 12 Pythian, 11 Nemean and eight Isthmian odes. Pindar's poetry touches upon various issues related to heroic victories in the Olympics; for example, praises of gods associated with particular games, venues of the games and their history, and the winners' origins, personal characteristics and family traditions (Brożek 1987, 17). The quality of the works depended on the material at Pindar's disposal – most often obtained directly from the winning athletes or their families, but also from external parties, e.g. customers, who, for various reasons, commissioned *epinikia* for a fee (Neer and Kurkey 2019). Pindar's interpretations assumed that the relevant virtues of athletes (*areté*) were inherited, and that athletes' physical and mental fitness was the result of their innate abilities and a long and impeccable family tradition. However, financial resources were also crucial for athletes because, despite free access to infrastructure and training facilities, training under the guidance of specialists as well as the costs of travelling to the games and staying at the venue of the games had to be paid for (Brożek 1987, 6).

According to ancient scholiasts and leading experts on Pindar, Bacchylides (c. 516–450 BCE) was greatly inspired by his works and also engaged in polemics with the famous Theban poet. For example, Bacchylides was supposed to compose *Epinikion* 5 in order to rival Pindar's Olympic Ode 1 and respond to the insults in Olympic Ode 2 (Zawadzki 1998). Bacchylides' poetic output, however, is rather insignificant when compared with Pindar's 45 *epinikia*. Bacchylides left behind only 14 works, albeit with more panegyric overtones, thanks to which he probably received better royalties (Lipoński 2012). After the death of both poets, the composition of literary *epinikia* ceased as the two were the last representatives of this particular genre of lyric poetry. Furthermore, the Peloponnesian War did not facilitate the development of new forms of poetic songs, and the subsequent replacement of choral music with poetry reading and stage recitation completely sidelined the heritage of triumphal songs in honour of victorious heroes.

Pindar and Bacchylides were not the only poets, and the *epinikion* was not the only form of poetry, that broadly referred to athletic themes in antiquity. One important source containing numerous references to the ancient games and Greek agonistics is *The Palatine Anthology* (*Anthologia Palatina*) – a collection of epigrams (Greek *epigramma* 'inscription') dating back to the Hellenistic period, Imperial

period, and Late Antiquity. The epigrams were probably collected and arranged in the early tenth century by Constantinus Cephalas and Gregory of Campsa. The anthology was based on the surviving collections of epigrams of Meleager of Gadara, Philippus of Thessalonica, Straton of Sardis, and Agathias of Myrina. In total, the Palatine Anthology comprises some 3700 works by nearly 320 ancient Greek and Byzantine poets. The anthology was completed around 980 CE, when it was supplemented with Christian inscriptions from the fourth to tenth centuries and epigrams of Christodorus of Carystus and Gregory of Nazianzus. The name of the collection comes from the place of its discovery – the Palatine Library in Heidelberg. The only extant copy was discovered there in 1606 by the French philologist Claude Saumaise. The anthology is thematically divided into 15 books (Jurewicz 2007, 192). Some of the epigrams had been known before thanks to Maximus Planudes (c. 1255–1305) – a Byzantine Greek monk, philologist, translator, and secretary at the imperial court in Constantinople, who compiled a collection of ancient Greek epigrams entitled *Anthology of Various Epigrams*, also known as the *Planudean Anthology* (written probably between 1280 and 1283). Planudes arranged 2400 epigrams thematically into seven books. Until the discovery of the *Palatine Anthology* in 1606, the *Planudean Anthology* had been the only collection of Greek epigrams that European culture benefited from (Jurewicz 2007, 279). Over time, a 16th book was added to the Heidelberg manuscript, which included poetic works from the *Planudean Anthology* that were not part of the original *Palatine Anthology* (PA).

The earliest surviving epigrams date back to the eighth century BC. Originally, they were brief and concise inscriptions, written in verse or in prose, on stone or other objects (sanctuaries, tombstones, vases, or hermaei). They also had various overtones – from humorous through erotic and votive to pensive and reflective, sometimes similar to epitaphs – and purposes – from public inscriptions on major monuments and temples to private inscriptions on objects of everyday use. Epigrams were thus closely associated with the objects on which they were inscribed. According to some scholars it was after epigrams were collected in books that they began to be considered a distinct literary genre. In other researchers' view, epigrams have always constituted a separate poetic genre, in which both the 'object' and the 'text' permeate and complement each other, allowing for a more precise understanding of this type of artistic output (Kanellou *et al.* 2019).^a

The several thousand works in the *Palatine Anthology* and the *Planudean Anthology* include epigrams with Greek agonistic themes. Following their thematic arrangement in the Heidelberg manuscript, epigrams referring to Greek athletics can be found in Book VI (*Dedicatory Epigrams*) celebrating achievements of the winners of Greek games (*Palatine Anthology*, PA 6. 7, 100, 140, 149, 213, 233, 246, 256, 259, 311, 339, 350); Book VII (*Sepulchral Epigrams*), where, in the context of *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laërtius mentions that Thales died while watching the games (PA 7. 85.); Book IX (*Declamatory Epigrams*) celebrating victories of unspecified athletes in the most important games of ancient Greece (PA 9.19, 20, 21); and in one anonymous epigram mentioning the four Panhellenic games in which the wreath was the victory prize (PA 9.357). References to Greek agonistics

also appear in subsequent books. Book XI (*Convivial and Satirical Epigrams*) presents athletic rivalry in a satirical context. The leading author of the works in the volume was Lucilius, who wrote a series of short, quizzical epigrams about athletes participating in boxing, running (PA 11. 75–81, 258, 83–85), and wrestling competitions (PA 11.316) as well as about athletes heading to the games and drawing on predictions about whether or not they would succeed (PA 11.161, 163). These are not the only works in a satirical tone in this Book, since also Cerealius alluded to competing in poetic agons at the Isthmian and Pythian games (PA 11.129). Mentions addressing participation in the games also appear in Book XII (*Strato's 'Musa Puerilis'*) (PA 12.64, 255), while Book XIII *Epigrams in Various Metres* contains a number of epigrams referring to the achievements of specific athletes at the most prestigious Greek games and celebrating the uniqueness of their deeds (PA 13.5, 8, 11, 14–16, 18, 19). In addition, the following book, *Arithmetical Problems, Riddles and Oracles*, contains a riddle on athletic rivalry (PA 14.28). Epigrams of laudatory character, alluding to Greek agonistics can also be found in Book XVI (*Epigrams of Planudean Anthology not in the Palatine Manuscript*). They commemorate the achievements of winners of various games of the ancient Greek world, similar to epigrams in the previous books (PA 16.1–3, 23, 25, 52–55). Some of these epigrams are attributed (sometimes erroneously) to Simonides of Ceos (Paton 1916–1918).^b

The poetic output of ancient Greeks with regard to broadly understood agonistics reveals the dominance of works celebrating the deeds of the most outstanding ancient athletes and stressing their above-average physical fitness. The idealization of the games winners, and even putting them on a par with the gods, was also a fairly common poetic practice. Certainly, Greek agonistics were also presented in a satirical form in some of these poetic works.

The most widely accepted date marking the end of the ancient Olympic Games is the year 393 CE. However, according to some new findings, the games probably continued to be held in ancient Olympia until the mid-fifth century CE (Remijsen 2015). There has been some discussion that the possible causes of the games termination could have been linked to the decline of community spirit, abandonment of religious rituals, intensification of interest in Christianity and other philosophical currents, professionalization of athletes, or even natural disasters or an economic crisis in Elis (see for example Swaddling 2004; Young 2008; Weiler 2004). Such suggestions were made by Ingomar Weiler, a researcher of the history of the Olympic Games, who refers to the works of Plutarch, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, or Pausanias – the author of the famous *Description of Greece*, comprising ten books, two of which were devoted to Elis, Olympia and its games.^c

In the context of the decline of the Olympic Games and ancient 'agonistic' poetry, one panegyric by Claudian, the court poet of the Roman emperor Honorius, stands out as particularly symbolic. It was written in 399 CE to celebrate the assumption of consulship by Flavius Manlius Theodorus. In one passage Claudian invokes the winners of the Olympic and Isthmian games as if inviting them to the ceremonial swearing in of the consul (Platnauer 1922, 358–359). On the one hand, this may be indirect evidence that the end of the games did not occur in 393, and on the other hand, it is

one of the last, if not *the* last, ancient poetic works referring to Greek agonistics. However, the end of the games regarded as a component of ancient Greek culture came much later. Even if the games in Olympia survived until the mid-fifth century, the so-called Olympic Games inspired by their Peloponnesian original were held in Antioch until 520 CE.^d After the demise of the Greek games, until the fifteenth century, athletic games were also held in Byzantium, featuring chariot races among many other competitions (Lipoński 2012).

The achievements of ancient civilizations were almost completely forgotten during the Middle Ages; however, according to *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*:

From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, humanism played a key role in European culture. Beginning as a movement based on the recovery, interpretation, and imitation of ancient Greek and Roman texts and the archaeological study of the physical remains of antiquity, humanism turned into a dynamic cultural programme, influencing almost every facet of Renaissance intellectual life. (Kraye 1996)

It was only a matter of time before Renaissance scholars of antiquity turned their attention to Greek agonistics.

Olympic Themes in Renaissance Literature

The analysis of collected works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicates that the Olympic idea certainly appeared in Renaissance poetry at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was usually not associated with the poets' desire to depict the games themselves, but rather used for comparisons to situations and times in which the literary works were written. The very image of ancient games and their contestants was highly idealized and served as an unsurpassed model to aspire to. As Renaissance ideas developed there was a growing awareness of the importance of the games in ancient Greek culture, and Olympic themes were used in the names of various local initiatives to popularize them and increase their prestige. The Olympic themes were also often chosen because of current fashions or the desire to demonstrate one's erudition.

The earliest poetic work from the Renaissance period referring to the Olympic Games probably dates back to 1516. It was attached to a treatise, *Opusculum Enchiridion appellatum Ioannis Aquile Ferme de omni ludorum genere*, by the German rector of the University of Tübingen and law professor Johannes Aquila (Adler) (1474–1518). The treatise itself discussed the legal basis of various kinds of games of ancient Greeks and Romans. Not surprisingly, in Chapter 4, Adler described the games at Olympia, Isthmia, Nemea and Delphi (Aquila 1516).^e However, it was not him, but Peter Günther, a local poet, about whom practically no information survives, who wrote a two-part poem attached to the treatise, entitled *On the Games of Johannes Aquila, the Famous Doctor of Philosophy and Law*. In the first part, Günther lists various kinds of ancient games and pastimes that Adler

describes in his treatise (including the Olympic games, gladiatorial duels, poetry contests, theatrical performances, and dice games), and in the second part he calls Adler *Minerva*, referring to the Roman goddess of wisdom, science, and literature, emphasizing at the same time that, ‘Adler’s intellectual pastime is the most important and noble among all games’ (Aquila 1516). Günther’s work thus partly takes the form of a panegyric and was most likely appended to the treatise to raise its profile and emphasize the superiority of science and intellect over ancient amusements. The year of the treatise’s publication also coincides with the Venetian publication of Marcus Musurus’s first edition of Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*.^f Also, three years earlier in Venice, Aldus Manutius had published Pindar’s *Olympian Odes* (Swanson 1974, 309). These developments suggest a gradual increase in the interest in both Olympia itself and ancient agonistic poetry.

Almost 30 years later, the German poet Hans Sachs (1494–1576)^g made references to Olympic agons in his *Der Fechtspruch. Ankunft und Freiheit der Kunst*. Written in 1545, it dealt with the origins and development of fencing which, according to Sachs, could be traced back to ancient Greece, from where it found its way to Rome, and was then banned by Christians who considered it a bloody sport. Sachs describes Herakles as the inventor of fencing and links its origins to Olympic boxing.^h Sachs’s poem became an excuse to depict Herakles as the founder of the Olympic Games and to include information about the games. The German poet also mentions the olive wreath, equestrian competitions, and four-year Olympiads. He refers to the works of Herodotus and Polydorus to demonstrate Herakles’s erudition (von Keller 1870, 209–210). These two works of literature can be classified as belonging to the early period of development of Renaissance Olympian poetry, i.e. the first half of the sixteenth century. They are mainly informative for their main motive was to provide specific facts related to ancient Greek agons.

In the second half of the sixteenth century Olympic themes in poetry began to lose their informative character. Certain literary pieces began to appear that idealized both the events and the competitors. Probably the first to refer to the Olympic tradition in this way was Frenchman Robert Garnier (1544–1590)ⁱ in his tragedy *Cornélie* from 1574. The play is set in ancient Rome at the time of Pompey, Caesar and Crassus. In Act Four, during his conversation with Brutus, Cassius speaks of Caesar’s Germanic mercenaries loyal not to Rome or the Roman army, but to Caesar himself as long as he kept paying them, which is why he made them his personal bodyguards. When referring to the mercenaries from across the Rhine, Cassius depicts them as wrestling enthusiasts, who approached their bouts seriously, lubricated their bodies with olive oil, and competed for glory and prestige as if they were preparing to participate in the Olympic Games (Garnier 1605, 132–133). Garnier made thus a comparison to the Olympic agons as games in which only the best could participate, and in which the key to victory was the planned and professional training of totally committed potential *olimpioniks*. Garnier’s tragedy gained considerable popularity. It was translated into English by Thomas Kyd (1558–1594) and staged for the first time in London in 1595 under the slightly altered title: *Pompey the Great, his faire Corneliaes Tragedie* (Boas 1901, 138).

Before Thomas Kyd's translation of Garnier's play, however, a collection of Latin epigrams, *Foricoenia sive Epigrammatum libellus* by the Polish poet Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584) was published in Cracow in 1584. Kochanowski composed the epigrams between 1552 and 1555 during his stay in Padua and after his return to Poland. The collection was carefully arranged and it contains mostly short epigrams – convivial, light, witty and cheerful, imbued with love and friendship, clearly referring to ancient feasts held in Greece, e.g. in honour of Dionysus (Kochanowski uses the Roman name Bacchus), and to other entertainments of elite character. The Polish poet deliberately alluded both in style and form to ancient Greek poetry. This should not come as a surprise, since as early as 1930 it was proved that Kochanowski had been greatly inspired by the *Palantine Anthology* (or rather the *Planudean Anthology*, since the Heidelberg library copy was discovered several years after the poet's death), which he probably came across while staying in Padua. Kochanowski copied from it 20 epigrams, almost word for word, and slightly modified a few others (Łempicki 1930). Among them is an epigram *In victoriam Nicophontis* (Kochanowski 1584, 138–139) referring to Nicophon, a high priest from Miletus, who in 8 CE (193rd Olympiad) won the boxing competition at the Olympic Games.^j The poem is a laudatory piece and expresses genuine admiration for Nicophon's strength. Kochanowski was interested in physical culture and in his other works emphasized the importance of physical education in the context of his concern for the welfare of his homeland as well as the health of youth (Kowolik 2012). Thus, not surprisingly, he became interested in the poem on Nicophon and included it in his collection. Presumably, Kochanowski intended the reference to the famous boxer from Miletus and glorification of his strength to impress the then Polish elites by offering a national model of physical education and by demonstrating benefits of regular physical exercise. After all, Kochanowski addressed his poems to the Polish nobility. On the other hand, by including a poem on the Olympic winner in his collection, Kochanowski made the games part of his poetic output by turning them into an elite pastime.

The works of Garnier, Kochanowski and Kyd may be regarded as a transitional period in the development of Renaissance poetry with Olympic references. Almost the whole of the seventeenth century was dominated in that regard by poets from the British Isles, including William Shakespeare (1564–1616), who often used various allusions to the Olympic Games, first in *Henry VI, Part 3* written in 1591 and published four years later. In Act Two, during the Battle of Towton, the Duke of Clarence addresses his companions, encouraging them to fight. He compares the rewards they will receive to Olympic victors' prizes and believes they will demonstrate valour in the coming battle, and that after victory they will be held in universal esteem and prestige by all, and receive a generous remuneration from their master, just as the Olympians once did after returning in glory to their hometowns. Shakespeare likens the Olympic prize to the highest possible reward and states that the victor can receive no greater glory (Shakespeare 1965, 53).

Shakespeare also employed the Olympic theme in *Troilus and Cressida*, written c. 1602 and published in 1609. The play takes place during the Trojan War and ends

with a duel between Achilles and Hector. Shakespeare uses the Olympic theme twice in the play. First, Ulysses claims that Ajax is superior in strength to the famous Milo of Croton – a six-time Olympic wrestling champion. The second time is when Nestor (the oldest Greek leader to fight at Troy) addresses Hector, expressing his admiration for the latter's military skills. Nestor mentions that he saw the Trojan prince surrounded by Greek soldiers like an Olympian wrestler (Shakespeare 1901, 73, 117). There was no ring and the wrestling area was formed by the Greeks, who watched the wrestlers grapple in close quarters. Thus, Shakespeare appears to follow the earlier literary tendency to idealize the ancient Olympic games and to treat them as an unsurpassed model to aspire to, both in terms of organization as well as skills and character traits of ancient Olympians.

Before the publication of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, another English dramatist, George Chapman (1559–1634), also made a reference to the Olympic idea in *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron*, first published in 1608. The play tells the story of a French soldier, Charles de Gontaut, duc de Biron, who hatched a conspiracy to elevate himself as sovereign of Burgundy. Accused of treason, he was convicted and executed in 1602. In the tragedy, he is portrayed as morbidly vain and vulnerable to manipulation by the enemies of King Henry IV of France, who want to use de Gontaut for their own ends. The protagonist himself is often compared to ancient heroes (Hercules, Alexander the Great or Orpheus).

In Act Five, Scene One, Byron asks the king to grant him a fortress in Burgundy, but the latter refuses much to the disappointment of Byron, who tries at all costs to convince Henry IV to change his mind. In this context the king alludes to the judges of the ancient Olympics, called *Hellanodikai*, observing that they were renowned for their fairness and impartiality, watching over the observance of the rules and judging any disputes in an objective way. In the king's view therefore, Charles's judgement cannot be objective as he attempts to judge his own person and achievements (Phelps 1895, 388).

The Olympic judges were chosen by the Eleans ten months before the games (Miller 2004, 114). They enjoyed widespread respect and impartiality (there were occasional cases of dishonesty or mistakes on their part, but Chapman was either consciously silent on this fact or had no idea about it), and the public's trust in the judges can be proved by the fact that until 372 BCE they could compete in the games as participants.^k The reference to the ancient institution of *Hellanodikai* in Chapman's play is not surprising in this context.

When considering the question of Olympic poetry in the seventeenth century it is impossible to ignore sports and cultural festivals organized in the British Isles at that time. The best known, and at the same time best documented, are the Cotswold Olimpick Games, organized – as it is usually accepted – since 1612 in Gloucestershire and regarded as the first pseudo-Olympics, i.e. pre-1896 sports and cultural events, referring in some way to the idea of the ancient games in Olympia. Some of the pseudo-Olympics were associated with the Olympic idea to increase their prestige, while others were deliberately called *Olympic* in order to revive the ancient sporting tradition.^l

The originator of these games was an English lawyer and royalist, Robert Dover. By organizing competitions dominated by traditional English sports, Dover intended to thwart the growing influence of Puritanism in England at that time. Inspired by the popularity of classical sciences Dover organized cyclic games aimed at all English social classes. Thus, the programme of the games included, among others, shin-kicking, running, jumping, wrestling, horse-racing, and hunting (Collins *et al.* 2005, 103).^m Dover's initiative quickly rose in popularity, which would not have been possible without poetic works glorifying him and the Cotswold Games. Associated with the Gloucestershire Games is probably the first ever sports anthology, entitled *Annalia Dubrensia: Upon the Yeevely Celebration of Mr Robert Dover's Olympick Games upon Cotswold-Hills*, published in 1636. It contains a total of 34 panegyrics (33 in the first edition) dedicated to Robert Dover and his games. Among the authors were renowned English poets of the time such as Michael Drayton, Ben Johnson, Thomas Heywood and Mathewe Walbancke, who was the editor of the collection (Walbancke 1973). The contents of the anthology and its frontispiece are also a valuable source of knowledge about the Cotswold Games themselves.ⁿ

There has been a great deal of historical research devoted to the Cotswold Games as well as the *Annalia Dubrensia* (Burns 1985; Radford 2012, 2014; Polley 2011). In terms of the context of the use of Olympic themes in Renaissance poetry, it is nevertheless worthwhile to outline the extent to which the poems in the *Annalia* referred to the Olympic tradition. First of all, the poems were laudatory, celebrating Dover as the reviver of the long forgotten ancient games. Some authors even compared him to the mythical dactyl Herakles, considered to be the originator of the Olympics, and idealized the English lawyer, almost attributing to him the features of mythical demigods. This momentous form directly alludes to the panegyrics of, for example, Pindar, who praised the winners of the Panhellenic Games. The importance of the very fact of reviving the athletic agon according to the Olympic model is also emphasized, which is of fundamental significance for saving this tradition from oblivion for future generations. In addition to praising Dover and his endeavour, the *Annalia Dubrensia* contains many direct references not only to the Olympic Games, but also to other games of ancient Greece. Thus, references to the Olympic games appear 18 times, Isthmian games – seven times, Pythian games – seven times, and Nemean games – five times. The anthology is an invaluable source of knowledge about ancient Greek agons and it certainly contributed to their popularization in Britain, for the poems contain information about the etymology of the name of the games, particular competitions, glory and recognition of victors, four-year Olympiads, duration of the games, names of some champions, the poleis from which the competitors originated, and victory prizes. This certainly proves the English poets' extensive knowledge of the subject matter. Apart from the informative elements of the poems, the comparison of the Cotswold Games to the Olympic Games or, more generally, to all four Panhellenic Games, is also of great significance (Walbancke 1973).

Poets explicitly referred to Dover's venture as the Olympic Games and, according to Francis Burns, the first to use this comparison was Michael Drayton in his

opening panegyric in a collection of poetry written in 1631. It was probably at that time that Dover's games were directly referred to as the Olympic Games, although it cannot be ruled out that this had been done earlier. The above examples demonstrate that it was English poets who contributed to the naming of Robert Dover's initiative *Olympic*, and that they had a significant impact on the development of other pseudo-Olympics, i.e. the most popular form of Olympic legacy before the revival of the modern games in 1896 (Burns 1985).

Another attestation of the popularity of the Cotswold Olimpick Games and, at the same time, an example of the use of Olympic themes in poetry is a comedy by Richard Brome (1590–1652), *A Jovial Crew, or The Merry Beggars*, staged first in 1641 at the Cockpit Theatre in London. In Act Two, Scene Two, two gentlemen, Vincent and Hilliard, in an attempt to impress two ladies, Meriel and Rachel, recommend to them all sorts of entertainment pursuits in London. When their efforts fail they propose a trip to Bath, which the ladies also refuse, and then offer to go to Dover's games; however, the ladies reply that there will be too many people there and that it is not the kind of recreation they want to indulge in (Brome 1652). This passage indicates, in fact, the great popularity of Dover's venture in British society and the willing participation of the elite of the time in the event.

Two other works can be also included in the trend of comparing local sports and cultural festivals to the ancient Olympic Games through poetry. The first one is by John Taylor, an English poet, who in 1618 made a journey to Scotland and described it in *The Pennyles Pilgrimage*. Stopping at the Brae of Mar, Taylor witnessed hunting trips attended by lords, knights and esquires, which he likened to the Olympian games (Taylor 1618, 52). As Peter Radford points out, it is not entirely clear how Taylor gained knowledge of the ancient games. Perhaps it was at his birthplace near Gloucestershire, where the Cotswold Olimpick Games were held (Radford 2012, 166). The other work is a poem, *The Muses Threnodie: Or, Mirthful Mournings on the Death of Mr Gall*, by Henry Adamson (1581–1639), published in 1638. The poem focuses on the history of Perth, and in one passage Adamson compares the region's famous archery competitions to the Olympic Games (Adamson 1774, 20). While, in Taylor's case, it is possible to find reasons for calling the Brae of Mar hunt the Olympian games (Taylor's place of birth and likely knowledge of Dover's enterprise), when it comes to Adamson it is unclear why he called the archery competitions in Perth *the Olympic Games*. Archery was not part of the ancient games programme, so perhaps naming local events *Olympic* was so popular that Adamson, too, decided to make use of it himself. It is likely that the motivation behind all these analogies of sports-cultural festivals or local entertainments with the Olympic idea was to emphasize their uniqueness as well as to increase their prestige and popularity in English society.

In order to complete the account of references to Olympic themes in British culture, it is justified to mention fragments of two literary works from the second half of the seventeenth century. One of them is the masterpiece by John Milton (1608–1674), *Paradise Lost*, first published in 1667. The epic poem tells the Biblical story from the fall of Satan from Heaven to the expulsion of the first man and woman from the

Garden of Eden. In Book II, after the dissolution of the Stygian Council, Satan leaves to find another world where the fallen can have a better life. While waiting for his return, demons and fallen angels indulge in various pastimes, including running and chariot races, reminiscent of those at the Olympic and Pythian games (Milton 1858, 47). It can only be speculated what Milton's real intention was. His choice of competitions does not seem to be a matter of coincidence, since running events were among the earliest Olympic competitions, and chariot races were the most prestigious events intended for the wealthiest. Perhaps Milton wanted to depict demons and fallen angels as beings from higher circles, and the competitions themselves as pagan entertainments rooted in the infernal world, in opposition to God.

A brief reference to the Olympiad as a chronological unit can be found in *The Expostulation*, by English poet, writer and translator, Charles Cotton (1630–1687), published in 1689. He used the Olympiad to denote a specific period of time (six Olympiads). Cotton's most likely reason for choosing this archaic unit of time measurement was his desire to demonstrate his knowledge and the fashion of the time (Cotton 1689, 3).

The watershed event in the development of Olympic poetry seems to be the year 1693 when the first literary games were held in the Pontifical Academy of Arcadia (*Accademia Arcadia*) in Rome, inspired by the Olympic agons both in terms of their the name – the Arcadian Olympic Games (*I Giuochi Olimpici*) as well as organization. The games were to be held every four years, following the numeration of the ancient Olympics, and the centrepiece of their programme was a literary pentathlon (*Quinquertium*) based on the ancient pentathlon, consisting of the following events: oracle (*Oraculum*), poetic agon (*Contesa*), intellectual show (*Giuoco d'ingegno*), poetic metamorphosis (*Transformazioni*), and poetic tinsel made from various flowers (*Ghirlande*). Each of these competitions was provided with an ancient athletic design. At the Arcadian Olympic Games physical competitions were replaced with lexical-literary contests, as a way of adjusting ancient rituals to modernity. The Academy members included the leading erudites, writers, poets and influential aristocrats. The main organizer of the games was Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni (1663–1728), co-founder of Arcadia and its first Custodian. He placed intellectual and poetic competitions above the ancient athletic games, appreciating their spiritual virtues and considering them an improved version of the ancient agons. Undoubtedly, the Arcadian Games exemplified the rootedness of the Olympic tradition and its conscious use among the Italian intellectual elite at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.^o

Conclusion

The sources of sports poetry can be traced back to ancient Greece. The *epinikia* of Simonides, Pindar or Bacchylides provided a model and inspiration for poets of the coming ages. Examples of sports poetry in ancient Greek culture can also be found in

The Palatine Anthology, which includes works praising and idealizing ancient Greek athletic champions as well as satirical pieces.

The beginning of Renaissance poetry employing the Olympic theme can most likely be traced back to the early sixteenth century and to a work by the German poet Peter Günther published in 1516. The Olympic motifs were also frequently utilized by French, Polish, Scottish and English poets. The analysis of literary works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals several reasons behind the use of Olympic themes in poetry. First of all, the broadly defined Olympic idea fulfilled a comparative function for Renaissance poets, and served as a point of reference to current events, situations or people. Olympic themes were subject to far-reaching idealization and constituted a moral, ethical, sports, and organizational model. The poetic works lack any negative references or criticism of the games or their participants. At first the Olympic motifs appeared in poems fulfilling only an informative function, and then began to be used more consciously by poets (along with the growing awareness of the importance of agonistics in ancient Greek culture) who began calling local sports and cultural events *Olympic* in order to raise their prestige and popularity. Regardless of the actual motives of individual poets, the Olympic themes used in their works contributed to the dissemination of Olympic traditions in European societies during the Renaissance.

Second, poetry with Olympic elements also had a significant impact on the development of the pseudo-Olympics (Redmond 1988) – the most popular form of the Olympic legacy before 1896. It was poets who first called Robert Dover's Games *Olimpick* and who then contributed to their popularization, which resulted in the organization of a number of similar events in many European countries in the following centuries.

It is possible, therefore, to distinguish three periods in the historical development of Renaissance poetry with Olympic themes. The first period, dating back to the first half of the sixteenth century, was mainly informative, where only specific facts connected with Greek agonism were presented (although Peter Günther's work can be classified as a panegyric). The second period, from the middle to the end of the sixteenth century, witnessed a definite development of poetry with Olympic references both in form and content. In addition, Olympic themes were also used for comparative purposes and the idealization of the Olympic agons became widespread. Additionally, Olympic elements appeared not only in poems but also in plays, or took the form of epigrams. The final period, covering almost the entire seventeenth century, can be defined as the English period, because it was English authors, including William Shakespeare, who exerted the greatest influence on the development of 'Olympic' poetry. In addition to these poetical forms, there were also other literary works related to the development of pseudo-Olympics as well as panegyrics. In the final period, the first anthology of sports poetry, *Annalia Dubrensis*, was published. The symbolic end of the English period is the year 1693 and the beginning of poetic Olympics at the Pontifical Academy of Arcadia in Rome. This initiative represents a peak period in the history of associations of poetry with Olympic themes. Never before or since had an event been organized that was devoted in its entirety to poetic competitions so closely related to the ancient tradition of the Olympic Games.^P

Third, considering the examples of poetic works alluding to the Olympic idea, it can be concluded that thanks to them, the ancient Olympic *epinikia* were well-received in Renaissance Europe both in terms of their character and function. This reception contributed to the revival, continuation and preservation of this poetic form in the European tradition.

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Notes

- a. For more on Greek epigrams, see for example Cairns (2016), Page (1981), Jay and Lane (1973).
- b. All epigrams addressing Greek agonistic issues in *The Greek Anthology* are indicated in parentheses (book number, epigram number).
- c. Lecture and presentation by Professor Ingomar Weiler during the International Olympic Studies Seminar for postgraduate students, International Olympic Academy, Olympia, September 2016.
- d. On the games in Antioch, see Downey (1961).
- e. For more on Johannes Aquila and his treatise, see Mehl (1938).
- f. This edition of Pausanias’ *Description of Greece* is available at: <https://archive.org/details/pausaniaspavsani00paus>.
- g. For more on Hans Sachs, see Berger (1994).
- h. At that time a popular view in Germany was that fencing originated from ancient pugilism. This can be seen, for example, in Figures 48 and 49 from a work by an unknown author dated 1558.
- i. For more on Robert Garnier, see Jondorf (1969).
- j. The author of the epigram that Kochanowski translated into Latin was Antipater, and his poem in original form can be found in the *Palatine Anthology* (PA 6.256). The Polish poet, however, used the version from the *Planudaean Anthology*.
- k. Pausanias *Description of Greece* (6.1.5).
- l. For more about the term *pseudo-Olympics* and seventeenth-century British sports and cultural games and festivals as well as their social, cultural, and religious context, see Polley (2011) and Włodarczyk and Rozmiarek (2021).
- m. For more on the Cotswold Games, their course and program, see, for example, Clarke (1997), Whitfield (1962), Collins *et al.* (2005, 76–77).
- n. A detailed description and analysis of the frontispiece of *Annalia Dubrensis* can be found in Radford (2014).
- o. For more on the Pontifical Academy of Arcadia and the poetic Olympics held there, see Włodarczyk and Rozmiarek (2020).
- p. Olympic themes also appeared later in poetic works, and poetic competitions had been organized in the Panhellenic Games – see Lipoński (2012, 466–469) and Georgiadis (2003, 15–51). However, they never reached the same scale as the poetic games in the Arcadian Academy.

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