

## **FOLK ATHLETIC COMPETITIONS AND GAMES IN GREEK THRACE AND MACEDONIA**

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**Abstract:** *Folk athletic games were events that took place in customary events of the common rural and urban. Some of these events were related to religious holidays, harvest happenings, events of social - religious life, customs of production and trade fairs. In pre-industrial societies, they were events aimed at euphoria, while in the 19th century they aimed at socializing and confirming the national and community identity of the inhabitants of an area. They were intertwined with the particular economic and current challenges of the time. Hence the most popular games corresponded to the preparation for warfare, with the most characteristic being wrestling, horse racing, jumping, road racing, stoning, weightlifting, tug-of-war and the swing. The following paper, utilizing a number of journal articles and monographs, as well as unpublished manuscripts of the Greek Folklore Research Center, presents the circumstances and places where they took place, the way they were organized and the functions they performed in the regions of Greek Macedonia and Thrace.*

**Keywords:** *Folk sports, customs, wrestling, horse racing, jumping, road racing, stoning, weightlifting, tug-of-war, swing*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Folk worship is a set of primitive beliefs and religious acts which are interwoven with Christian holidays and transitory rites of passage, of pre-Christian origin, which to a large extent have been Christianized. In the context of customary events, happenings that are witnessed in primitive peoples and rural populations of civilized societies and continue to exist due to the conservatism of society play an important role (Kyriakidou, Nestoros 2008, 147-149). In Greece they are organized jointly by the rural and urban population, in the context of some Christian feasts or festivals that have a fertile and auspicious character, as part of a wider series of religious activities. The events include, among others, music, dance, dramatic performances, religious litanies and other types of rituals (Eichberg 2005, 612-613). Some of them concern events that modern research called "traditional athletic games". The most common are wrestling, horse racing, footraces, jumping, stone-throwing, weightlifting, tug-of-war, swing<sup>1</sup> and some special events. When these are held during religious holidays, they have a ritual character, aimed at enhancing the fertility and production of the land. At trade fairs, where the economic and commercial element is primary, they complement the entertainment element of the organization (Varvounis 2010, 354-364).

The delimitation of today's paper can be complicated for two reasons: Firstly, because the targeted areas extend historically today to other countries (North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Turkey) and, secondly, because a large part of the Greek population of modern Turkey and Bulgaria was forced to leave their ancestral homes and settle in present-day Greece. The present paper will also include the regions from which the refugees who settled in Greece come from. Purpose of the following paper is the presentation of the traditional athletic competitions and games that were held during customary events in the regions of Thrace and Macedonia, taking as its source relevant literature and field-work material. Journal articles and monographs of the folklore and physical education sciences were thoroughly studied, identifying relevant references of the above-mentioned happenings. The main questions that the paper is asked to answer are: Were folk sports competitions held in the aforementioned areas? If so, which and where? How were they organized? What function did they perform? Were there changes going from pre-industrial to post-industrial societies?

## **FOLK ATHLETIC COMPETITIONS**

### **Brief history of folk competitions**

It is well known that the Greek people like to display their skill, courage and bravery in various forms of human life, whether it concerns periods of war or peace. Examples of

the fighting spirit of the Greek people can be found in many ceremonies of folk worship. As an example, I mention the struggle between the so-called Bei<sup>2</sup> and those present in the attempt to take his *siniki*<sup>3</sup> in Ortakioi or in Kostis the tug-of-war between the young and the married in order to bring the plow to the place where it was to be sown (Romaïos 1944-45, 111). Such representations are not modern and several have attempted to find connections with the ancient Greek origins of the Greek population. Thomson (Thomson 1954, 116-118) mentions a tradition in ancient Olympia where after a race or chariot race the winner was declared a god-king (Plutarch, 675), just as in Herae similar competitions were held between girls, with the winner being crowned queen of the year. Cornfold (Cornfold 1912, 212-259) recognizes that the competitive element observed in the various customary events of the Greek people culminated with the establishment and development of the Olympic Games.

Of course, the performance of traditional athletic games did not end with the collapse of the ancient Greek world, but they continued to exist throughout the Byzantine period, although their regularity is a matter of debate. Koukoules<sup>4</sup> (Koukoules 1949, 247-249) informs us that they continued to exist during the Byzantine period, both in the most official form and in the most popular, as they happened in the streets and plazas of the cities, in taverns, weddings and festivals, although this view was strongly criticized (Giatsis 2006, 213; Antzaka-Vei 2008, 72-77)<sup>5</sup>.

These events have reached our days in a modified form. A general reason for the longevity of these events has to do with observing of nature. The people watched with sympathy and reverence the dramatic struggle of nature to leave the hibernation and death of winter and to begin a new productive cycle during the summer season. In this battle the people did not watch idly. With the games, he believed that he could subdue the unruly nature and facilitate the coming of an era of fruitfulness and fertility (Romaïos, 1944-45, 113)<sup>6</sup>. Over time this function faded, but it remained in the life of the people due to its conservatism, and survived as an entertainment supplement to the customs (Varvounis 2000, 233-235; Ekaterinidis 2006, 100-102).

### **Function: From pre-industrial to industrial era**

The function performed by traditional athletic games during the 19th and 20th centuries was multifaceted. To be evaluated in their proper dimension they should not be studied as isolated sporting events, unlike what is done in modern sports, but as part of a wider customary cycle. Days before the event, the preparation for the main day began. Housewives cleaned the houses, churches were decorated, the organizing committee saw to the smooth running of the festive program, visitors from the surrounding areas flocked to participate or watch the spectacle, traders prepared their wares and youngsters trained under the supervision of the more experienced fighters. On the morning of the day of the feast, there was a litany<sup>7</sup> in the church and in some cases expiatory sacrifices of new-born lambs and calves<sup>8</sup>. Afterwards everyone gathered in an open-air place to watch

the main spectacle, which was none other than the games. In the case of festivals of the spirit of vegetation<sup>9</sup>, the etiquette was different. After the tour of the troupe in the village, the participants and the spectators gathered in the village plaza, where some events with symbolic content were dramatically<sup>10</sup> held and after their completion the games started. In the wedding games, the athletes competed either during the process of announcing the arrival of the groom or during the wedding feast. After the end of the games, the residents retired to their homes to rest, have lunch and later gathered in the plaza again to continue with a festive mood during the rest of the night (Olympios 1886, 76).

From the above, we can perceive certain issues concerning the functioning of folk sports competitions. Originally, they had a religious content, since they were mostly held during religious holidays, in a similar way that the ancients honored the holidays of the gods and the memory of heroes. But, at the same time, it was also a communal and national holiday. The enslaved populations of Macedonia and Thrace recognized, although uneducated and simple in morals, that "only through religion was it possible to preserve any ethnic heritage" (Olympios 1886, 75). Dressing up the games with a religious content legitimized their existence and satisfied the need to differentiate against other religions, which was a coherent element of defining a community. Therefore, through the games they sought the preservation of the religious, communal and national identity, with the hope of the birth of the Nation. After all, there are cases where clubs, such as "Orfeas" of Serres, were founded under the pretext of organizing such sports activities, among others, but in fact they were a secret laboratory of fighters and an executive body of the Consulate's guidelines (Chiolos 1996, 204-205).

The need for participants to demonstrate their courage and skills in front of a large number of spectators is a point to be checked. This need should be interpreted by focusing on the innermost psyche of man. Huizinga (Huizinga 1944, 1-27) considers that play is an instinct, a function that is innate in humans from childhood. Through the game, man has the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities and physical and mental powers<sup>11</sup>. When the game is combined with some form of ritual, an atmosphere of secrecy is created that increases the grace of the game. One such form of ritual is folk sports competitions. Participants feel that they are taking part in a ritual that transcends the sensible world and extends into the transcendent. Winning such a test is a special moment for them: It is a testament to their courage and abilities, a sign of favor from the transcendent element, a contribution to the community that transcends the present moment, and finally, a moment where they earn the respect of fellow athletes and spectators.

In addition, folk sports competitions and more generally customary events were for the population of pre-industrial societies one of the few opportunities of the year for entertainment and socialization. In pre-industrial societies there was a close relationship between the agricultural cycle and the working year, while a clear division of work and non-work did not exist and leisure time was defined by religious holidays and climatic changes. Thus, folk entertainments can be interpreted through the prism of periodic relief

and "liberation" from the morals of a strictly hierarchical society (Thomas 1964, 53-54). The moral values of the time wanted work as a collective task, which gave birth to specific social relationships. These relationships were expressed collectively in festivals, in which residents were entertained as a group with common roots and goals. In contrast, in industrialized societies the way leisure time is treated is different. Industrialization, due to rationalization and new means of production, causes the creation of leisure time for the middle and lower classes, the homogenization of time and the separation of work and non-work, resulting in a change in the organization of social life and the way Sports are understood. Urbanization is also an important factor in changing leisure (Koulouri 1997, 39-40). The modern economic profile of the city and its operation favors the commodification of leisure and the need of the economic elite to control it. At the same time, it highlights a middle class whose distinctive feature is participation in specific forms of social organization. One of them is sports clubs that serve the need of belonging (Koulouri 1997, 38-44).

Another parameter worth mentioning is the nature of folk sports competitions. As already said, they are closely linked to festivals and other traditional events, as an entertainment element complementary to dance, music and song<sup>12</sup>, while the elements of socialization and the promotion of community and national identity are dominant. This is not the case in modern sports. The spontaneity and lack of rules that distinguish them give way to specialization, bureaucratic organization, rationalization, quantification and performance, there is detachment from the wider festive cycle and shows autonomy in the conduct of sporting activities, while the civic values of equality and democracy are also visible (Guttman 1978, 26-55). The above facts create a confusion as to whether the two forms of sports are related to each other and whether modern sports are an organic continuation of folk athletic games (Koulouri 1997, 84).

### **Organization**

Regarding the organization of the games, the ecclesiastical committee is usually responsible in cooperation with the local lords, while moving forward in time the responsibility is assumed by local associations. They gather the prizes and appoint the judges and the judicial committee (Paschaloudis 2013, 205-207). In the case of wedding games, they are organized by the groom or best man. They take place in an outdoor area, where the crowd gathers, while the time of performance depends on the custom<sup>13</sup>. What determines the smooth conduct of the games is tradition. Through tradition, the rules are handed down and the moral values of the athletes are formed. Competitions are rarely announced and only in cases where the preparation of the athletes is necessary. For example, in some horse races where it takes time to prepare riders and grooms. The prize for the winners, in addition to the recognition of those present, is some everyday object, such as a handkerchief, a mirror, a comb, and for the most important competitions a

domestic animal. Finally, depending on the event, foreigners and people of different religions are allowed to participate<sup>14</sup>.



Figure 1. Macedonia and Thrace

## FOLK ATHLETIC GAMES IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL ERA

The events in which the athletes<sup>15</sup> liked to compete were "inspired by nature itself and taught by tradition" (Loukatos 1952-56, 170). These responded to the particular conditions and needs of the society at that specific time period. They were products of a society organized for war and connected to various economic needs (Koulouri 1997, 38-39). Hence their preference for wrestling, horse racing, weightlifting, jumping, footraces, tug-of-war, stone-throwing and swing. After all, such competitions were also held during the entertainments of the so-called kleftarmatoloi<sup>16</sup> (Tsiantas 1971, 208-231) and are witnessed in a large number of folk songs (Nimas 2002, 135-188).

### Wrestling

Wrestling, as is known, was one of the most popular sports since the time of ancient Greece. At every major customary event, wrestling matches were held, without special formalities, with the consent of the local Ottoman authorities. As said, the responsibility of the organization fell on the ecclesiastical committee in cooperation with the local lords,

while in the case of wedding matches it was organized by the groom or the best man. The judges and the judicial committee, which consisted of the church committee, local authorities and experienced athletes, placed the athletes in categories according to their experience and age. Usually, there were two categories, the experienced wrestlers and the less experienced, but in major customary events there might be more. For example, in the festival of Sunday of Thomas in Nigrita Serres there were three categories, the middle one of which had three subcategories: The lowest was the *basmas*, corresponding to today's children's, the middle one, the *orta*, with three subcategories, the *kyuchuk orta*, the lowest class, the *buyuk orta* or intermediate and the *orta*, the upper middle class. The class of experienced wrestlers was called *bas(i)* (Paschaloudis 2013, 208-209). It is worth mentioning that in traditional wrestling there were no categories of weights, as was the case in ancient Greek games. But there were age categories. Poliakoff (Poliakoff 1987, 20) mentions that ancient Greeks organized some festivals with five categories, though the most common were two. So, it was quite common for bigger athletes to have a better chance of winning. What compensated for this injustice was the application of oil, which made the sport more technical since the handles became more difficult.

In these matches the winner was the one who managed to "eat dirt" on his opponent's back, the one who lifted the opponent over his shoulders, or if the opponent gave a *pes*, i.e. a light blow to the opponent's thigh, which declared his admission of defeat. There were no written competition regulations, but everyone knew that dangerous holds and strikes were prohibited. The matches started with the less experienced wrestlers and followed the more experienced ones. In this category, the wrestlers were anointed with oil and wore a short collar, the so-called *kiouspeti*<sup>17</sup>, which made it difficult for the opponents' grips. Later the *kiouspetti* gave way to short shorts and the one-piece uniform and the oil smear disappeared. A natural consequence was to change the way of fighting, since the grips were now modified, and sports clubs also influenced this development, as the athletes who participated in the official matches were used to counting the score in points. The entire ritual was accompanied by the *gioures* rhythm, a song of wrestling with drums and *zournas*<sup>18</sup>. The prize in the minor categories was some useful object and in the major a lamb or ram, as their value was very important at that time. In our days the prize is monetary or the committee liquidates the domestic animal at the duration of the festival and gives the winner the value of the animal (Paschaloudis 2013, 224). In the following chart I mention some areas where wrestling matches took place:

Place	Custom	Source
Karoti	Halloween	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 1499, 25
Sochos	Day of Forty Apostles	Margaritis 2015, 34-37

Nigrita	Sunday of Thomas	Olympios 1886, 75-76; Ganosis 1921, 220-221; Paschaloudis 2013, 204-236; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2763, 37-40; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 315
Nigrita	Easter	Damanis 1911, 128-133
Terpni	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Paschaloudis 2012, 103-125
Ainos	Saint George	Mistakidis 1886, 186-187; Mistakidis 1886, 194-195; Samothrakis 1944, 27
Sozopoli	Saint Zosimos	Papaioannidis 1928, 458; Vafeiadou 1974, 155-156; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 12, 1
Tsado	Saint Athanasios	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 230
Skoutari	Holy Trinity	Psathas 1973, 268-269
Didymoteicho	Pentecost	Vafeiadis 1940, 245; Manakas 1955, 331; Manakas 1957, 258-260; Manakas 1963, 50-51; Papathanasi-Mousiopoulou 1974, 181; Manakas 1982, 157-160
Samakovi	Prophet Elias	Kiakidis 1960, 68
Kastanies	Saint George	Sarantis 1937, 418; Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 239
Irakleia	Saint George	Kourilas 1957, 122-123
Strantzia	Saint George, Easter, Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Evmorfopoulou 1961, 110
Mesimvria	Saint George	Megas 1975, 54
Ormenio, Kastanies	Saint George	Ekaterinidis 2006, 171
Fanari, Metrai	Saint George	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 215



Tsakili	Panagia Rheumatokratousis	Chourmoussiadis 1942- 1943, 324
Oklali	Saint Athanasios	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 227-229
Tsado	Saint Athanasios	Stamouli-Saranti 1943; Apostolidis 1961, 76
Oinoi	Saint Athanasios	Basogiannis 1933, 7-10
Ftelia	Saint Athanasios	Ekaterinidis 2006, 171
Giasorni	Saint Athanasios	Mistakidis 1886, 194-195
Epivates, Tsanaktsi	Saint Constantine	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 260
Michalitzi	Holy Trinity	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 283
Kavakli	Holy Trinity	Kolozov-Markidou 1981, 209-210
Gialas	Prophet Elias	Manakas 1955, 335-336
Bana	Prophet Elias	Megas 1911-1912, 170- 171
Vairion	Saint John the Theologian	Athanasiadis 1965, 316
Kiostemeri	Decapitation of Prodromos	Apostolidis 1961, 47
Petra	Assumption of the Virgin Mary	Papachristodoulou 1937- 38, 151; Papachristodoulou 1944-1945, 165
Petra	Easter	Tzounis 1967, 302
Kik Vounar	Assumption of the Virgin Mary	Papathanasi- Mousiopoulou 1974, 182
Pythio	Birthday of Virgin Mary	Grammatikoglou 1969, 187-202
Orestiada	(Saint Theodoroi	Basogiannis 1933, 7-10
Karagats	Saint Theodoroi	Tolidis 1985-1987, 213
Stenimachos	Saint Tryphonas	Megas 1943-1944, 142; Loukatos 1945-1946, 161; Megas 1975, 62
Komara	Saint Kyriaki	Ekaterinidis 2006, 171
Aigeiros	Saint Tryphonas	Varvounis 2001-2003, 220- 221
Skopos	Lent	Kalokardou 1946-1947, 158; Psathas & Mitrakli- Psatha 1970, 321
Sitochori	Dormition of the Virgin	Ekaterinidis 2006, 171

Maistros	Saint Marina	Mamelis 1934, 174-175; Tsirligkani-Kinali 1959, 377-379
Gkerdeli	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Tzounis 1976, 189
Maroneia	Saint Charalambos, First day of the Lent	Konstantinidis 1991, 400- 401
Xylagani	Ascension of the Lord	Mountzakis 1985-1987, 274-276
Ortakioi	Beis	Rodooinos 1940, 318; Papachristodoulou 1943- 1944, 93; 103; 111-112; 116; Papachristodoulou 1966, 346-347; Thrakiotis 1973, 4-12
Amfia	Beis	Kouleris 1970, 179
Madytos	Halloween	Oikonomidis 1936-1937, 108-109
Rizia, Elia	Beis	Albanidis 2006, 171
Ladi, Metaxades	Beis	Thrakiotis 1973, 4-12
Sapes	Livestock trade fairs	Tsitsonis 1981, 255-339
Anchialos	Vine harvest	Mavrommatis 1958, 263
Thourio	Festivals	Ktenidis & Kotinis 1969, 137
Metron - Athiron region	Festivals	Chourmouziadis 1940- 1941, 86, 129-130
Soufli	Festivals	Papastamatiou-Babaliti 1960, 278; 283; Psathas & Mitrakli-Psatha 1970, 253
Soufli	Saint Christoforos	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 1687, 8
Neo Souli	Saint George, Holy Spirit	Ekaterinidis 2002, 224, 233
Syrpi	Saint Athanasios	Damanis 1911, 128-133; Paschaloudis 2013, 204- 236
Serres	Dormition of the Virgin	Ekaterinidis 1969, 334
Serres	Pilgrimage to the Cross	Anastasiou; Kechagias; Koulas 1992, 20-22
Nea Irakleia, Jumagia, Nigrita, Sktoussa	Trade fairs, Festivals	Vozikas 2015, 20-22; 37; 41-42

Epanomi	Saints Charalampos, George, Anargyroi, Virgin Mary	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2202, 31-32
Nision Veroias	Saints Anargyroi	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2558, 1-4
Emmanouil Papas	Saint Athanasios	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2761, 322-323
Agio Pnevma	Holy Spirit	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2761, 386-387
Sitochori	Saint George	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2763, 100-101
Chrysi Kastoria	Festivals	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2887, 63-64
Anthi	Saint George	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 1-2
Mavrothalassi	Saint Marina, Dormition of the Virgin	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 313
Choumniko	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 315
Skotoussa	Saint George	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 3573, 15

Wrestling matches were also a common activity during the wedding. In this case the matches were organized by the groom's family and took place during the wedding feast. The pairings were arranged between the contestants and the role of the judges and the judicial committee was assumed by the spectators. The prize, which was a lamb, weighed on the bridegroom and was often consumed at the end of the games. Such matches are witnessed in many villages in the area we are interested in (Karoti, Ormenio, Kessani, Raidestos, Megalo Zaloufi) <sup>19</sup> (Tolidis 1975, 204; 1985-87, 212-217), Siatista (Ganoulis 1930, 184).

### **Horse races**

The love for horses has been known since ancient times in the area under study. This love was maintained until the middle of the 20th century, when agriculture was mechanized and machines entered everyday life. The horse in pre-industrial society was an important productive capital and a means of social advancement, since the wealthy and householders were capable of owning and maintaining them. Spontaneous horse races were held on the way to the workplaces throughout the year by young people who wanted to show their worth, but special prestige was gained by the one who would achieve victory in an organized race held at some customary event.

In these races it seems that there was a proclamation, under the responsibility of the church committee, in which the place, the time of departure and the prize were defined. The start was given by someone appointed by the church committee, the distance was usually 3, 4 and 5 kilometers and during the start and duration there was no order. It is worth noting that the age of the horse was not taken into account and that the horses were ridden without saddles, as the riders were accustomed to doing so from their daily work (Loukatos 1952-56, 170). They usually started at noon, so that the finish would take place at the time when the litany ended. Then the winner received the prize, which was a domestic animal (Basogiannis 1933, 7-10). Some areas where horse races occurred were the following:

<b>Place</b>	<b>Custom</b>	<b>Source</b>
Anchialos	Halloween	Maurommatis 1958, 61-63
Didymoteicho	Saint Vlassios	Manakas 1963, 50-51
Orestiada	Saints Theodoroi	Maurommatis 1958, 61-63
Oinoi	Saint Athanasios	Maurommatis 1958, 61-63
Marasia	Transfiguration of the Savior	Maurommatis 1958, 61-63
Kastanies	Saint George	Maurommatis 1958, 61-63
Giasorni	Saint Athanasios	Mistakidis 1886, 194-195
Nigrita	Sunday of Thomas	Olympios 1886, 75-76; Ganosis 1921, 220-221; Paschaloudis 2013, 204-236; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2763, 37-40; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 315
Nigrita	Easter	Damanis 1911, 128-132
Syrpi	Saint Athanasios	Damanis 1911, 128-133; Paschaloudis 2013, 204-236
Epanomi	Saints Theodoroi	Tsaknakis 1961, 203-208; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2202, 31-32
Terpni	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Paschaloudis 2012, 110
Sozopoli	Theophany	Papaioannidis 1928, 458; Vafeiadou 1974, 217-218; Megas 1975, 58; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 12, 1

Tsakili	Saint George	Chourmouziadis 1938, 324
Fanari, Metrai, Kastanies	Saint George	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 215
Ainos	Saint George	Mistakidis 1886, 186-187; Mistakidis 1886, 194-195; Samothrakis 1944, 27
Oinoi	Saint Athanasios	Basogiannis 1933, 7-10
Samothraki	Saint Athanasios	Paraskeuaidi 1983, 164
Giasorni	Saint Athanasios	Mistakidis 1886, 194-195
Exastero	Saint Constantine	Stamouli 1943, 215
Tsado	First day of the year	Apostolidis 1961, 45; 58
Madytos	Birthday of Virgin Mary	Oikonomidis 1936-1937, 115; Megas 1975, 75
Coastal Thrace	Saint John	Sitaras 1960, 311
Kavakli	Birthday of Prodromos	Vafeiadis 1938, 325
Skopos	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Konstantopoulou 1939-1940, 215; Psathas & Mitrakli-Psatha 1970, 228
Thrace	Easter	Loukatos 1952-1956, 170-173
Maistros	Saint Marina	Mamelis 1934, 174-175; Tsirligkani-Kinali 1959, 377-379
Maroneia	Saint Charalambos, First day of the Lent	Konstantinidis 1991, 400-401
Ortakioi	Beis	Rodooinos 1940, 318; Papachristodoulou 1943-1944, 93; 103; 111-112; 116; Papachristodoulou 1966, 346-347; Thrakiotis 1973, 4-12
Serres	Easter	Koutzakiotis 1992, 106
Siatista	Dormition of the Virgin	Bontas 1978, 301-304
Nea Irakleia, Jumagia, Nigrita, Sktoussa	Trade fairs, Festivals	Vozikas 2015, 20-22; 37; 41-42
Chrysi Kastoria	Festivals	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2887, 63-64
Anthi	Saint George	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 1-2

Mavrothalassi	Saint Marina, Dormition of the Virgin	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 313
Choumniko	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 315
Skotoussa	Saint George	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 3573, 15

Wedding horse races were also common. In these contestants, single men from 15 to 30 years of age, competed to be the first to bring the message of the start of the wedding procession to the bride's house. The winner received the bride's handkerchief, which was highly honorable, and other gifts. We have such testimonies for both Macedonia (Abbot 1909, 216-217; Xanthos 1963, 277; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre, 2526, 8) and Thrace (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 1936, 10; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre 1687, 19; Saranti-Stamouli 1934, 340-342; Perakis 1962, 160; Tsakmaki 1966, 159; Co-operation of teachers 1971, 230-231).

### Footraces

The rest of the competitions were less popular than the previous two. The organization of the road races belonged to the ecclesiastical committee which, in collaboration with other local ministers, formed the judicial committee. The distance was from 300 meters to 2 kilometers, the runners ran in festive clothes, the starter followed the runners on horseback and, as in horse races, order was not observed. The winner was the one who reached the finish line first and grabbed the handkerchief. There he was given the prize, usually a sheep, put it around his neck and passed through the village, having first given the victory handkerchief to a woman. Some of the villages where such competitions were held were:

Place	Custom	Source
Maistros	Saint Marina	(Mamelis 1934, 174-175; Tsirligkani-Kinali 1959, 377-379)
Malgara	Theophany	Deligiannis 1935, 362-363
Epivates	Saint George	Stamouli-Saranti 1943, 236; Veikou-Serameti, 1961, 200
Ainos	Saint George	Mistakidis 1886, 186-187; Mistakidis 1886, 194-195; Samothrakis 1944, 27
Tsakili	Saint Athanasios	Chourmouziadis 1942-1943, 328; Megas 1975, 63
Terpni	Day of Life-Giving Fountain, Saint Mandilios	Paschaloudis 2012, 103; 127; 207

Nigrita	Sunday of Thomas	Paschaloudis 2012, 103; 127; 207; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2763, 37-40; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 315
Syrpi	Saint Athanasios	Paschaloudis 2012, 103; 127; 207
Fanari, Metrai, Kastanies	Saint George	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 215
Giasorni	Saint Athanasios	Mistakidis 1886, 194-195
Exastero	Saint Constantine	Stamouli 1943, 215
Michalitzi	Holy Trinity	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 283
Thrace	Easter	Loukatos 1952-1956, 170-173
Ortakioi	Beis	Rodooinos 1940, 318; Papachristodoulou 1943-1944, 93; 103; 111-112; 116; Papachristodoulou 1966, 346-347; Thrakiotis 1973, 4-12
Ladi, Metaxades	Beis	Thrakiotis 1973, 4-12
Soufli	Festivals	Papastamatiou-Babaliti 1960, 278; 283
Neo Souli, Aidonochori, Sitochori	Saint George	Ekaterinidis 1970, 239; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2763, 100-101
Syrpi	Saint Athanasios	Damanis 1911, 128-133; Paschaloudis 2013, 204-236
Nea Irakleia, Jumagia, Nigrita, Sktoussa	Trade fairs, Festivals	Vozikas 2015, 20-22; 37; 41-42
Agio Pnevma	Holy Spirit	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2761, 386-387
Anthi	Saint George	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 1-2
Mavrothalassi	Saint Marina, Dormition of the Virgin	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 313

Choumniko	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 315
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Also, a peculiar street race took place during baptisms. Years ago parents did not go to church when the child was baptized. The godfather would take the child to the church and during the naming, children would run to announce the name to the parents. The one who arrived first got the biggest token, a silver coin, and the rest some coins and sweets. This custom is witnessed in almost every village, but nowadays it has disappeared (Tsakiri 1969, 164).

## Jumping

Jumping was also a common competition. These were in singles and triples<sup>20</sup> only with speed and in a rough way they marked the biggest jump. The jumper with the best effort awaited the jumps of the others and if someone overtook him, he had three attempts to come back first. The winner would get a handkerchief, which he would later give to a woman. There was also the high jump, which was less serious and performed for entertainment. In this case, improvised objects were placed, such as a table, chair, etc., which the jumper had to overcome. Jumping competitions happened in:

Place	Custom	Source
Ortakioi	Beis	Rodooinos 1940, 318; Papachristodoulou 1943-1944, 93; 103; 111-112; 116; Papachristodoulou 1966, 346-347; Thrakiotis 1973, 4-12
Petra	Assumption of the Virgin Mary	Papachristodoulou 1937-38, 151
Vairion	Saint John the Theologian	Athanasiadis 1965, 316
Terpni	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Paschaloudis 2012, 112-113
Ainos	Saint George	Mistakidis 1886, 186-187; Mistakidis 1886, 194-195; Samothrakis 1944, 27
Fanari, Metrai, Kastanies	Saint George	Stamouli-Sarantis 1943, 215
Giasorni	Saint Athanasios	Mistakidis 1886, 194-195
Exastero	Saint Constantine	Stamouli 1943, 215
Thrace	Easter	Loukatos 1952-1956, 170-173



Neo Souli, Aidonochori, Sitochori	Saint George	Ekaterinidis 1970, 140; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2763, 100-101
Syrpi	Saint Athanasios	Damanis 1911, 128-133; Paschaloudis 2013, 204-236
Terpni	Day of Life-Giving Fountain	Paschaloudis 2012, 110
Nigrita	Sunday of Thomas	Olympios 1886, 75-76; Ganosis 1921, 220-221; Paschaloudis 2013, 204-236; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2763, 37-40; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2897, 315
Nigrita	Easter	Damanis 1911, 128-132
Nea Irakleia, Jumagia, Nigrita, Sktoussa	Trade fairs, Festivals	Vozikas 2015, 20-22; 37; 41-42

### **Stone-throwing, weightlifting and tug-of-war**

Stone-throwing was another common game. The stones were irregular river stones, weight proportional to the age of the athletes, and there were two ways of throwing: One over the shoulder, as is done today, and the second by holding the stone with both hands under the legs. The way to win was similar to that of the jumps. It is worth noting that different categories of athletes according to age are not mentioned, except that the younger ones started their effort first (Olympios 1886, 75). The next game was weightlifting. In it, participants lifted specific objects, such as sacks of wheat, a barrel of water, or current stations. The prize was the wine they would consume during the event (Loukatos 1952-1956, 170-173). Tug of war was a team game. There were two opposing teams who, either holding a rope or hugging each other, were trying to overpower the opposing team. In the custom of Kalogeros<sup>21</sup>, the tug-of-war was an important part of the ritual, with the young on one side and the old on the other trying to bring a two-wheeled carriage to the plaza and the symbolic victory of the former, which foretold the smooth outcome of the year. This custom is especially witnessed in Vizii (Viziinos 1897, 101-120; Dawkins 1909, 191-206; Ekaterinidis 2006, 100-102), Kosti (Petropoulos 1939-1940, 283) and Agia Eleni (Ekaterinidis 1979, 197-201; Ekaterinidis 2000, 301; Ekaterinidis 2006, 100-102; Ekaterinidis 2007, 192-193; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2743, 3-4; Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 2938, 12-13).

### **Swing**

A special competition mentioned by Loukatos (Loukatos 1956, 172-173) was the swing. The swing does not appear to have been competitive, as no winners or prizes are mentioned. The only reward they received was morale and the appreciation of their courage by their loved ones. At the time of year it took place, i.e. Easter and St George's Day, the tree listened to the rocker's wishes and granted them. In it, young women would sit in the swing and the lads would push them while singing love songs in an attempt to attract their beloved. The swing, however, has ancient origins and is associated with magical and supernatural energies (Lazos 2002, 127-139). It was held at festivals when the earth blossomed and was associated with fertility, health and good fortune. In Ainos it was done to achieve the production of sesame (Manasseidis 1936-1937, 79), in Mesimvria it was considered to bring good luck (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre 1104C, 231), as it was similarly celebrated in Vizii (Polimenis 1926, 267) and Kessani (Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. 1971, 61-162). Frazer (Frazer 1966, 283-285) considered the swing to be a means of atonement and purification from the souls of the dead who have been deprived of burial or malevolent spirits. He also believed that it was intended to provide cool air during the coming heat wave.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the areas under consideration, we notice that there was sports activity that forged the soul and body of young people, even if organized sports were a distant dream for the residents of the areas. Folk sports competitions were held in many places and in many circumstances. The most often were on religion holidays, on fertility events, weddings and trade fairs. These events were organized locally by the appointed lords. They defined the judges and the judicial committee; they gathered the awards and they were responsible for the smooth conduct of the competition. The games mentioned were inspired by life itself, particular local needs and tradition. The most favorite were wrestling and horse racing, with the rest following. One interpretation of the love of wrestling may be that it was also particularly popular to the Turks, the Pomaks and the Bulgarians, while the love of horses in Thrace and Macedonia has a centuries-old tradition passed down from generation to generation.

In pre-industrial era, they were a dominant element of festive events, as their performers believed they were fulfilling a purpose beyond this world. The fear and anxiety of the unknown in the psyche of primitive man manifested itself in ways that modern experience considers outdated and, in many ways, strange. For this reason, any comparison with modern competitions is inappropriate, as they served different needs. In the midst of all this, we should not overlook the innate will of man to assert himself and show off his abilities in front of a crowd of people who were eager for the main part of the festive program. Far from the formalistic and bureaucratic character of modern sports

events, they preserved the fighting spirit of the subjugated Hellenism and prepared the population for the birth of the Nation.

Last but not least, although the evolution of the competitions was not seen in full scale, due to the limited area, it is noticeable that their character has changed due to the different function they are called upon to perform. Furthermore, the process of such an undertaking is extremely difficult and its successful completion needs further study.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Tug of war is a game played between two teams, who use a rope and try to pull the other towards them.

<sup>2</sup> Beis is the name of the main character of a fertility happening.

<sup>3</sup> A siniki is a container-shaped tool used to measure the volume of goods.

<sup>4</sup> Phaedon Koukoules (1881 – January 15, 1956) was a Greek Byzantine scholar and member of the Academy of Athens. His research and writing work was defined by the attempt to demonstrate the cultural continuity of the Greek people.

<sup>5</sup> The criticism received by Koukoules lies in the fact that in trying to prove the continuity of Hellenism, he overlooks changes, displacements and intersections, focusing mainly on the form of the phenomena and less on their function.

<sup>6</sup> This conception concerns the totality of primitive man. The work of Jung (1964) was important for the way of understanding the thinking of primitive man.

<sup>7</sup> Outdoor religious procession of a holy image or relics, mainly of a supplicatory nature.

<sup>8</sup> This custom is maintained as a means of securing goods and life itself. Moreover, the entertainment-symposium character should not be overlooked in an era of chronic poverty and deprivation of earlier years.

<sup>9</sup> Auspicious events are performance events associated with certain holidays or seasonal critical moments and aim at auspiciousness, a good year, robustness and rich agricultural and livestock production.

<sup>10</sup> Part of the performance was also the holding of competitions. For example, a wrestling match was held between the so-called *Arapis* and *Cantina*, who were members of the procession, with the former's predicted victory and the subsequent procreation of *Cantina*, guaranteeing the coming year's euphoria.

<sup>11</sup> The game, in addition to the fun it offers, is also a process of demonstrating skills. That's why when it takes a more organized form, with the presence of spectators and the existence of prizes, the feeling of satisfaction grows.

<sup>12</sup> Music and dance were essential recreational elements of entertainment, confirming the sense of belonging and reflecting the ideology of the specific society.

<sup>13</sup> Check the subchapter 'Function: From pre-industrial to industrial era' for more details.

<sup>14</sup> For example, foreign athletes were not allowed at the festival of Saint Thomas in Nigrita (Paschaloudis 2013, 224).

<sup>15</sup> An "athlete" is defined as the person who takes part in a match with the aim of winning the feat, i.e. the prize. Babiniotis, George: Dictionary of the Modern Greek Language. Center for Lexicology, Athens 2002, 83.

<sup>16</sup> Kleftes were disobedient groups, who during the Turkish occupation had taken refuge in the mountains, lived from raids and robberies and formed the bodies of resistance against the Turkish arbitrariness. Armatoloi were disorderly military corps, who during the period of the Turkish occupation undertook the guarding of a certain area from kleftes. In many cases, these two groups were cooperating and acquired a mythical status.

<sup>17</sup> The use of leather belts was quite common in the Middle East as early as 2000 BC. Even today in the aforementioned regions wrestling with leather pants prevailed (Poliakoff 1987, 31-33).

<sup>18</sup> The song of the palaestra consisted of three melodic and rhythmic parts: The first, in a slow tempo, was played before the start, the second, in a faster one, when there was match action and the third when a wrestling match was nearing its end and the winner had been singled out (Ekaterinidis 2000, 322).

<sup>19</sup> Kessani, Raideostos and Megalo Zaloufi were villages of Eastern Thrace.

<sup>20</sup> The traditional way of triple jumping refers to the "step-step-jump" pattern, which was in effect until the 1920s. The international way is based on the "limp-step-jump" pattern.

<sup>21</sup> *Kalogeros* is the name of a fertility event that was held mainly in the region of Eastern Thrace. There is a group, a theatrical action, the central role of which is played by the *Kalogeros* and secondary roles by *Basil*, the *Babbo* and

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the Carnivals. The whole action of the group is connected with euterical contests, with sacred sowing, with deterrent shapes and with magical obscenity. The group goes around the houses of the village and finally ends up in the plaza. There they bring a two-wheeled carriage with *Basil* on it, after a dispute between the young and the old, and then the *Kalogeros* plows and sows figuratively with a plow. Then follows the death of the *Kalogeros* by the lads and his subsequent resurrection, which portends fruitfulness of the new era.

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