

# Athletic Dress and Nudity in Greek Athletics

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# I. Introduction

## Ancient Greek traditions of sports events

- Players generally participated in the nude
- Why did Greek athletes compete in the nude?
- Understanding of Ancient Greece sports events and traditions

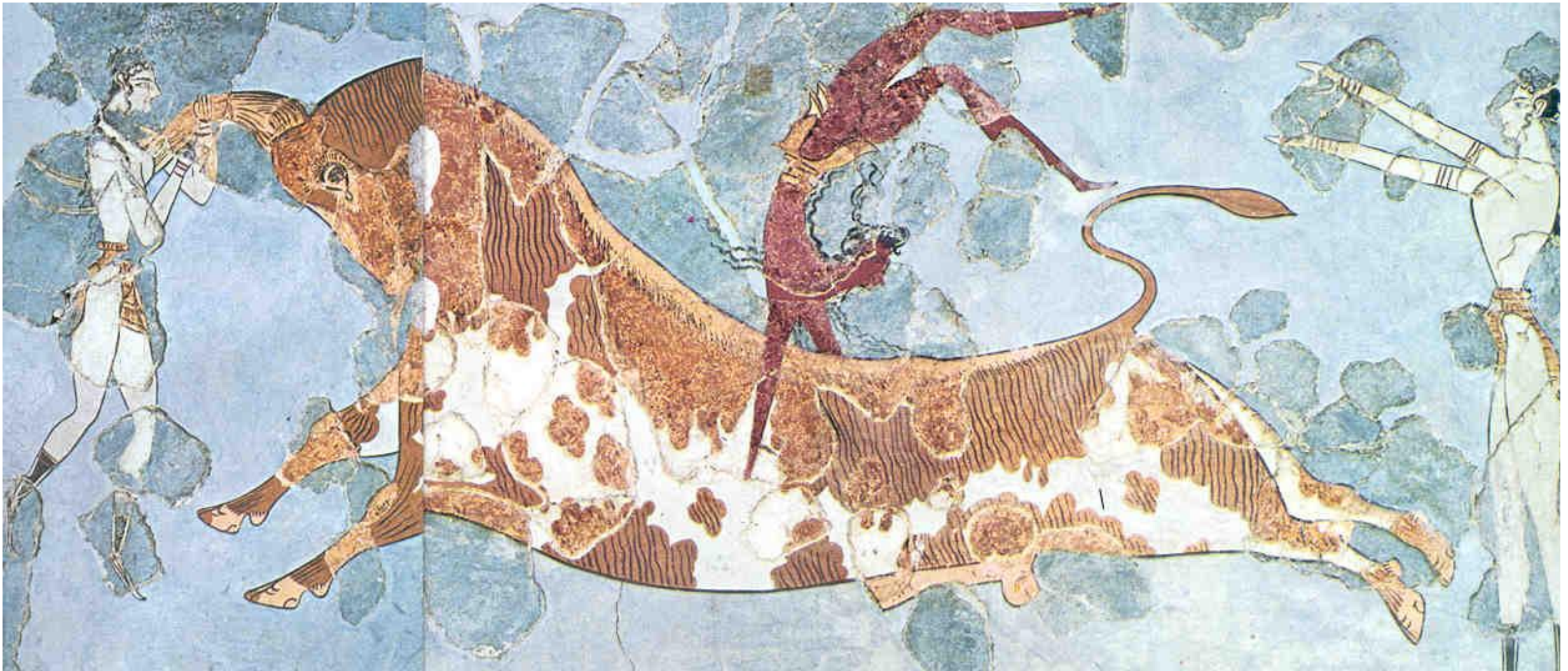
## Purpose of Study

- Early athlete's attire: the loincloth
- Introduction of nude games
- Identify the generalization phenomenon of nude games

## II. Athletic Dress

### Zoma or Perizoma

- Earlier Greek athletes wore a loincloth called Zoma or Perizoma, which was a kind of band that wrapped around the waist and legs. It is rare in Greek prehistoric times, but there are examples of nudity in sports events.



Minoan Period

Bull-Leaping

Fresco from Knossos depicting Preizoma three bull-leapers at different stages of the sport.

**Fresco from Knossos**  
(Harakleion, Archaeological Museum)

# Rhyton from Hagia Triada

(Harakleion, Archaeological Museum)

Minoan Period

Upper band: Wrestling Match

Second band: Bull Leaper

Third band: Boxer

Lowest band:  
Pankration(wrestling+boxing)

All athletes are wearing a Perizoma.



# Fresco from Thera

(Athens, National Archaeological Museum)

B.C 1500, Aegean Islands

The two young boxers are practicing, wearing a girdle and boxing-gloves



# Texts Relating to Early Athletic Dress

Iliad 23, 685. 710

- **Then the twain, when they had girded themselves, stepped into the midst of the place of gathering**

Odyssey 18, 66-69

- **Odysseus girded his rags about his loins and showed his thighs,** comely and great, and his broad shoulders came to view, and his chest and mighty arms

Other(L. Bonfante)

- Suggested that they were engaged in belt-wrestling

# III. Athletic Nudity

## 1. Origin of nude games

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities 7. 72. 3

- the fifteenth Olympiad“(720 B.C), at which time the Spartan runner Acanthus set the fashion for later times by appearing at the Olympic Games without the loincloth that had previously been customary

Pausanias 1 44. 1

- At a time when it was the ancient custom of the athletes to compete in the games with a loincloth, he won at Olympia in the stade running gymnos. I think that his loincloth slipped off his consent, since he knew that a man who is gymnos can run more easily than one wearing a loincloth

### Isidore Orig. 18. 17.2

- There is another tradition associated with athletes competing naked.
- According to Isidore's account of the 7th century BC, The Athenian archon, Hippomenes, decreed that athletes be naked, after an athlete fell and tripped over his Zoma.

### origin of nude games

- Orsippos was the first to be naked in the stade
- Akanthos ran naked in the dolichos

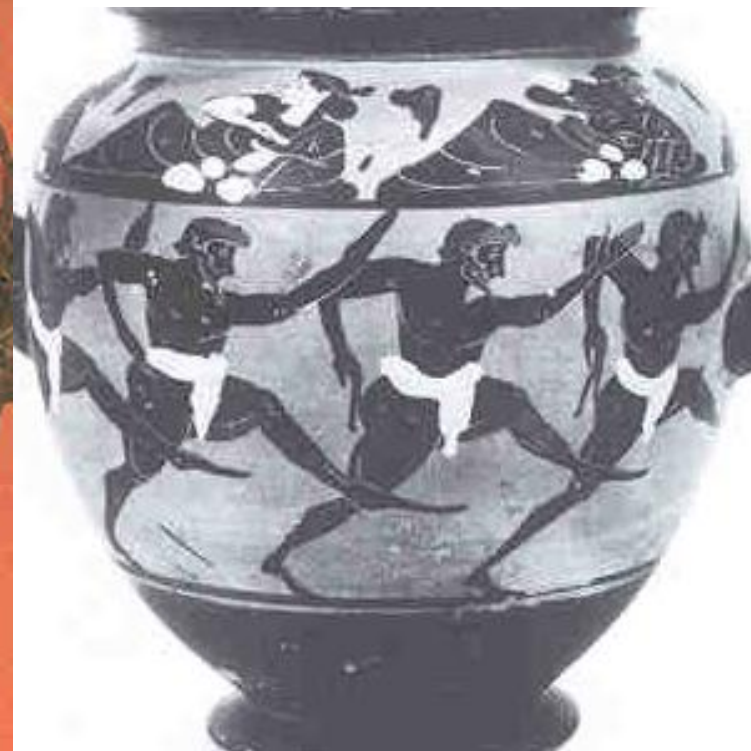
## 2. Testimony of scholars and Analysis of Figure vase Picture

### Thucydides

- The Lacedaemonians too were the first who in their athletic exercises stripped naked and rubbed themselves over with oil. But this was not the ancient custom; athletes formerly, even when they were contending at Olympia, wore girdles about their loins.

### Plato

- Reminding them that it is not long since the Greeks thought it disgraceful and ridiculous, as most of the barbarians do now, for men to be seen naked.
- And when the practice of athletics began, first with the Cretans and then with the Lacedaemonians, it was open to the wits of that time to make fun of these practices, don't you think so?" "I do." "But when, I take it, experience showed that it is better to strip than to veil all things of this sort, then the laughter of the eyes faded away.



**Black-figure vase** painters made in the 6-5th century B.C.

Represent pentathletes, boxers, wrestlers and runner, wearing a large, white loincloth.

# Attic Black figure Skyphos

(Athens, National Archaeological  
Museum)

Foot race

About 540 B.C

In contrast to these vases which show the Zoma there are, of course, many more (fifteen hundred) which show athletes completely naked, including some by Nikosthenes of the same period.



# Attic Black figure Skyphos

(Athens, National Archaeological  
Museum)

Athletes with halters,  
from Tanagra,  
about 520 B.C



6<sup>th</sup> B.C

- Loincloth and nude athlete co-existed

5<sup>th</sup> B.C

- Complete nude athlete was depicted on the red figure vase

## Why the Greeks exercised naked?

- Pausanias states that it is easier to run naked.
- Isidorus suggest that nudity was the result of an accident in which an athlete was killed due to tripping on their loincloth.
- Thucydides: The introduction of athletic nudity into the every life of the gymnasium and palaestra was part of a "modern" way of life, freer, simpler, more democratic.
- Plato maintains that nudity proved "better by experience"

# IV. Conclusion

## 1. Early athletes-wearing Perizoma

- Fresco and rhyton depicted bull riding, wrestling, pancrathion, and boxers wearing perizoma
- The heroes of the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer wore a loincloth in boxing and wrestling matches

## 2. Origin of athletic nudity

- About 720 BC, Orsipos ran nude in the stade game
- Arcanthos ran nude in the dolichos

### 3. Testimony of scholars and Analysis of Figure vase Picture

- In the late 6th century BC and the beginning of the 5th century BC
- Testimony of Thucydides and Plato and the work of the Perizoma group artist were coexistent nude and Perizoma

### 4. Complete naked athlete

- After Persian war
- The view of the Greeks and barbarians became divided
- The athlete's naked customs appeared in earnest in Greece.

*THANK YOU*

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