

# History of pentathlon competitions

## -Summary-

**Keywords:** pentathlon, Antiquity, oligarch, religion, athletic competitions, versatility, multidisciplinary, education, sports, army, Olympic, military pentathlon, tradition, organizational, evolution

### **Introduction**

The history of sport is broadly studying the development of sport as an important social phenomenon for human society. The athletic event can demonstrate significant social changes occurred over the centuries in different cultures of the world. The concept of sport seen as an activity that involves basic human skills, physical and mental, and which aims to improve them to be used more effectively in different situations of life, suggests that sport is as old as the development of human intelligence. For primitive man, physical activity was just a way to improve his knowledge of nature and, to the same extent, a way to master the environment. From that moment until now, the importance of physical training for the human individual and for human society is clearly demonstrated. Sport is intended to be a mirror of human culture and society, a factor of cultural and economic progress as well as a binder of the modern world. The history of sport is closely linked to ancient Greek culture because here, in ancient Greece, physical competitions were defined and took an institutionalized form.

The history of ancient pentathlon spans a period of about twelve centuries, during which time the athletic discipline was part of the program of the main ancient athletic festivals: the crown games, the Pan-Athenian festivals and the local athletic festivals. Athletic versatility concept in five events, pentathlon was born, as agreed scientifically, at the peninsula Peloponnese at the end of the eighth century BC., respectively at the 18th edition of the ancient Olympic Games. The five disciplines of ancient pentathlon are discus throwing, long jumping, spear throwing, speed running and wrestling. Three of the ancient pentathlon trials were new to the Olympics when the pentathlon was introduced into their program. These tests were known to the Greeks but they were not yet part of the program of these competitions.

Pentathlon is therefore the second athletic discipline in the program of the ancient Olympic Games. This combined test has four major possible influences, in terms of its origin: religious, military, gymnastics and philosophical. Each of them explains a part of it, they are not mutually exclusive and remain important for the general framework of the evolution of ancient Greek athletic competitions. Pentathlon as part of the ancient athletic phenomenon was important in the sense that it was a step forward in modernizing the institution of athletic competitions and ancient Greek society. The ancient pentathlon produced the remodelling and modernization of the ancient battlefield. Through the new fighting techniques and tactics of their soldiers who soon became athletes, the pentathlon complicated military training by facilitating their effort in combat. Pentathlon in ancient times forced an effort of logical thinking. It redefined the fundamental concepts of thinking and conception, changed strategies both on the battlefield and in the athletic arenas, and changed the way of life of the rich. The pentathlon also influenced the evolution of the Greek writing system and forced the public to an exercise in understanding the designation of the winner, at a time when writing and reading were only for the rich. The five samples of the ancient pentathlon were not chosen at random, but they largely express the occupations

necessary for the soldier on the ancient battlefield. The ancient pentathlon has kept its shape and content for over 1200 years. In all these years this discipline has adapted to both the evolution and development of ancient Greek society.

The athletic competitions were detached from a small athletic event that was part of the religious rituals organized by the ancient Greeks since the archaic ancient period. Once established, they did not nullify the fundamental role of their religious rituals in ancient Greek society. The life of the ancient Greeks was deeply marked by the religious side. This fact was quickly noticed and easily manipulated by the ruling class, by the rich, called by the Greeks as clans of oligarchs, who are like that and what made it possible to organize such competitions. Religion was much more important to the Greeks in relation to athletic competitions, yet man proved to be attracted to the spectacle of their union. After the rise in society of athletic competitions, these two social phenomena functioned in a common framework, complementing each other in an almost perfect way. The pentathlon competitions, seen as an expression of the versatility of the deities, were intended to be an expression of the connection between the best athletes and deities in the athletic arena. Man's closeness to the qualities of the gods materialized in the vision of the ancient Greeks in a combined athletic event. It can be said that religion made possible the careers of ancient pentathlon athlete. Pentathlon has produced evolution in the institution of ancient athletic competitions primarily through the complexity of the newly defined elements of gymnastics in this combined discipline.

The display of social influence among society and other oligarchic clans by organizing lavish ceremonies, under the tutelage of the deities, in honour of the winners of the pentathlon was part of the ancient Greek spectacle of athletic competitions. But the pentathlon is primarily a testament to the well-being of ancient man and his desire for progress in ancient Greek society. The administration of athletics competed from an early age the desire to complicate athletic disciplines in order to offer the public the best athlete of all, the total athlete. From the desire to express human physical harmony in relation to the deities, the financial or political power of the ruling social class, in a very peaceful way, a social phenomenon was born that the Greeks probably underestimated at the beginning. - the ancient pentathlon.

A reality of the regular organization of athletic competitions in the ancient world is the effect of the domination of the masses of simple people by the powerful. The members of the society used the institution of athletic competitions to be able to control the society for hundreds of years. Offering spectacle, other than circus or war, in an organized environment, in the presence of music and art, demonstrating to mankind the progress of classical Greek antiquity, the athletic phenomenon was part of what we today define as: "polis and culture", the essential feature of the classical Antiquity era.

Accurately representing a historical social phenomenon as sport cannot be done without being understood social circumstances in which he appeared and manifested. Knowing chapter presents the first athletic event history that combined ancient pentathlon, is not simplistic, since the time of its occurrence in the Olympics and multidisciplinary that characterizes it. This effort is a process of historical research based on a theoretical foundation appropriate to the ancient Greek athletic field and a deepening of modern experiences, adjacent to a combined athletic discipline. We started the research by investigating as many of the existing historical, literary or artistic sources as possible about the athletic competitions in ancient Greece. I rediscovered the world of ancient Greek civilization in order to create an overview of the society of those times where I could find the importance of a social phenomenon such as ancient athletic competitions. We

have thus noticed the difference in approach between the works of some researchers today and some from the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, well-documented and current works are in many respects different from the literature of the beginning of the century - they succeed in another approach to the ancient Greek athletic phenomenon presented until recently in a total antithesis to Roman influences. Given the ambiguity of some technical problems in the tests of the ancient pentathlon and to prove the best possible option I resorted to the application of practical tests on the sports field.

The history of pentathlon in ancient Greece is suggestive of this historical period and important in the formation of the ancient athletic event. However, it is not sufficiently debated in the domestic and international academic environment. My research is the first historical research in Romania on ancient pentathlon. It is true, pentathlon was not and is not one of the disciplines that gathers fans in large numbers in stadiums. Combined samples are nowadays little known to the general public. These are not necessarily spectacular and bore the general public because of their duration and the points system that the winner gives. And yet the pentathlon is important for modern society and especially for today's military environment! The Pentathlon represents the standard of physical training of the modern military environment and at the same time, through the respect given to this ancient tradition, a way of dialogue between the military at international level is preserved.

The study of the ancient Greek world and the athletic pentathlon competitions was a demanding, multidisciplinary approach, similar to the test itself. History is largely dominated by sometimes bloody and incomprehensible human conflicts. In the case of the history of ancient Greece, a major risk in research is the mythological, religious part, which can pleasantly distort reality. That is why the study of ancient pentathlon is largely an effort to circumvent the unreal, but as part of a chapter in history it is a stain of colour in the general historical context. Mankind has wanted evolution and has always strived for fundamental ideals named in positive terms of peace and understanding between people. The study of ancient pentathlon is intended to be a convincing alternative to the need to rediscover the moral values that the ancient athletic phenomenon had in mind. Thus, my research wants to contribute to the repositioning of the athletic phenomenon in the education process. When we talk about pentathlon, we are talking about a multidisciplinary education. The effects of this training are easily found in the human way of relating and positioning oneself in society. Sport is a social phenomenon that unites the people and peoples of the world, sport produces health, sport defines the peace and well-being of human society, sport writes history. Sport should not be the last human activity and physical education should not be treated as a last subject in the school curriculum.

The ancient pentathlon as an athletic discipline forced progress and development in the institution of athletic competitions. It appeared in ancient athletic competitions as an effect of man's desire for multidisciplinary expression and the pursuit of the physical perfection of the human individual. From the moment the pentathlon appeared, the whole athletic phenomenon matured. The huge leap was made by introducing new and different events in the athletics program. These increased the capacity and the athletic spectrum, and the possibilities of asserting as many athletes as possible could be achieved. The foundations of coaching were laid, the gymnasium was invented and the number of referees and officials increased significantly. Artists' interest in athletic events has grown significantly. Increasing their interest in the athletic phenomenon also increased the value of the quality of their works. The pentathlon thus represents the moment of organizational maturation of the entire ancient athletic framework.

## **The structure of the paper**

I structured my research into six main chapters to which are added an introduction, conclusions and bibliography.

In the first chapter I define the competitions the pentathlon as part of ancient athletic performance. Understanding the context in which these competitions took place is substantial in order to be able to correctly understand their place and role in ancient society. One cannot talk about the ancient pentathlon without mentioning first of all the Olympic Games, but also the other festivals within the periods circuit. For this, we drew up a chronology of athletic competitions structured in four historical periods that marked their evolution over time. The most important data and events as they are represented by the historical sources were introduced at the end of the first chapter to complete the mentioned stages.

Chapter II is significant for understanding how the pentathlon, as the first combined athletic event, was born and developed over time. We have made a classification of the athletic competitions existing in ancient Greece at the time and after the appearance of the pentathlon as an independent discipline at the Olympic Games. I presented the four possible reasons that led to the invention of the pentathlon and explained how it was introduced in the program of the ancient Olympic Games. We highlighted the importance of the Olympia settlement, the place where the first ancient athletic competitions were represented. Also here we presented the way in which mythology reflected the appearance and development of the competition. Following is a presentation and investigation of places outside Greece where evidence of pentathlon practice was found in order to observe the magnitude of the event itself at that time. The Pentathlon kept pace with the development of athletic competitions by naturally crossing the borders of ancient Greece, with other peoples showing a willingness to organize the combined competition. Over time, the pentathlon competition was standardized in the sense that the rules, the way of organization and operation, as well as the way of conduct, were everywhere in the same places where athletic competitions were organized. The pentathlon had thus earned a prominent place among the athletic events of ancient times. The ancient combined competition had an audience with all the stadiums where it took place. Among athletes, it was a contested, sought-after and awarded event. No wonder, then, that this race went beyond the borders of ancient Greece, with pentathlon being primarily an excellent way to train for war. We presented the program and the actual conduct of the combined competition, the order of the disciplines in the competition and how to designate the winner. Much of this research has focused on them. The evidence of practicing pentathlon training in gymnasiums was proved by archaeological discoveries and interpretations of the writings of ancient authors. The clay vessels discovered provide relevant information on the existence of the practice of pentathlon.

Chapter III is the quintessence of my study. It is a reference chapter because it actually deals with the pragmatic issues related to the pentathlon competition tests. The Pentathlon had its apogee regarding the role played in society and in the athletic competitions of Antiquity in the classical period. We demonstrated its importance in activity and respectively we presented its evolution from genesis to the present time through the way each test was carried out and organized separately. In this chapter the five tests of the competition are explicitly presented. In support of the explanations we brought both examples of winning athletes and the presentation of the technique of performing movements in each athletic discipline. The pentathlon appeared, as we have already mentioned, before three of its events became independent events in the Olympic athletics competition program. He appeared at the same edition in which the fight test took place for the first time. We can say that the

pentathlon players were the ones who developed throwing and jumping techniques taken over by other athletes from specific athletic events.

Chapter IV was structured in six subchapters, each of them analysing one of the historical periods that the pentathlon went through. It is a supplement to the first two chapters of this paper with the specification that the periods to which they refer are redefined, thus particularizing only the evolution of pentathlon competitions in the general framework of ancient athletic competitions.

Chapter V presents the festivities organized by the ancient Greeks in honour of the pentathlon champions and all that these festivities entail. Ways to reward pentathlon winners are part of this chapter. They differed from other disciplines and therefore had to be justified. Pentathlon was presented from the very beginning as a special athletic discipline, with special rules, which required a huge effort from all those involved in the competition. So the ancient Greek organizers gave the pentathlon champions a special place in the awards ceremony. Another goal of this chapter was to compile a list of winners in a detailed form including examples of great pentathlon players, but also important events and places where they came from. The prizes offered to pentathlon champions were not higher than other disciplines loved by the Greeks, but they did exist, and archaeological evidence in this regard strengthens the claims of researchers that pentathlon was a popular test among men in ancient Greece.

The current situation of the pentathlon and my own visions for the future are a chapter that is intended to co-ordinate the effort of my study. The last chapter is intended to be more of a warning signal drawn by me for possible decision makers who can act in favour of preserving this ancient tradition. The chapter is in fact the experimental idea of my research. I believe that every doctoral dissertation must somehow find an applicability in real life. The effort of such research must redefine an idea, a phenomenon or a system that can be applicable in society to a certain extent. I am not going to put my research on a dusty shelf, on the contrary, I want you to continue my approach.

I considered it necessary to have a detailed analysis of the ancient pentathlon test in order to finally explain the importance of the presence of the pentathlon in the modern era. Coubertin's idea to revive the Olympics came with the desire to reinvent the pentathlon. Why did Coubertin want so much to introduce pentathlon to the Olympics? The moment of the appearance of the modern Olympic Games does not differ radically from the moment of the beginning of the ancient athletic competitions. The pentathlon needed to be reinvented, redefined and revitalized, taking into account its importance but also the evolution of the modern battlefield. The complete athlete defined the new Olympic competitions. Multidisciplinary perfected the Olympic spirit. That is why I consider relevant the chapter dedicated to Baron de Coubertin as initiator and visionary and in terms of modern pentathlon.

In the closing part, we reserved one of the subchapters for the presentation of the military pentathlon competition. The military pentathlon represents from my point of view the faithful image of the ancient pentathlon. Defining my vision for the current image of the ancient Greek pentathlon is done through the presentation of the modern military pentathlon competition. The new dimension of military sports competitions: International Army Games are intended to be the ultra-modern version of the Military Games. The Russians are the ones who have manifested this will in a very pragmatic way. It remains to be seen whether their idea fits into the Olympic spirit imposed on such sporting-military events.

## Conclusions

Through research we have managed to redefine the importance of ancient athletic competitions - a sporting and social phenomenon of classical antiquity. The first and only combined athletic discipline in the history of the sport, pentathlon, was the way of the ancient Greeks to estimate the multitude of human, physical and mental qualities. Ancient pentathlon demonstrates that multidisciplinary talent possible and that the practice can find a specialist boundary. The pentathlon was not the most beloved event on the ancient stadium, but the show he offered was in line with the public's expectations. After the introduction of the pentathlon as an independent discipline in ancient athletic competitions, the whole athletic phenomenon underwent major transformations. The athletic abilities were redefined, the audience in the stadiums was reoriented, the organizers of the competitions were perfected, the show in the athletic arena became complete. Athletes who did not have the physical resources to cope with the five physical tests could now specialize. The five tests of the pentathlon were in the order of their development: discus throw, long jump with dumbbells, spear throwing, sprinting and hand-to-hand combat. The pentathlon appeared before the tests that made it up were practiced in an organized way: with the advent of the pentathlon, not only an athletic event was invented but also new athletic tests appeared, derived from it. The pentathlon competition ended with the designation of a winner who enjoyed fame both in the arena and in the community of origin. Compliance with the regulations of the competitions, the access of athletes to gymnasiums and gyms and finally to stadiums have shaped over time a spirit of organizational discipline to which the world of sports has been constantly related since then.

The importance of athletic competitions in general and pentathlon in particular, as well as how they were organized for a period of about twelve centuries, largely reflect the evolution of ancient Greek civilization. The way in which the award ceremonies of the champions at the ancient pentathlon were organized and the ways of awarding the winners are inventions to which we refer today. Initially, the crowns on the heads of the pentathlon champions were the only prize offered to athletes after the competitions; the remuneration of the pentathlon champions represented another stage in the evolution of the competitions. After the appearance of material awards, athletic competitions began to move away from the initial ideal. The cult of the Greeks for the beauty of the human body, the free expression of physical capacity without hiding any deficiencies, the deliberate or obligatory display of the physical in front of other competitors, nudity as a guarantee of equal opportunities, are landmarks established then, some of them surviving to this day. Sexual relations in gymnasiums are a feature of Antiquity. Then both corruption and doping, racism and physical violence affected the competitions. They existed in ancient athletics, they are seen as skids but they did not deeply mark the existence of athletic competitions.

A chapter in which we have advanced an original point of view is that of the technical elements in the tests of the ancient pentathlon. The long jump event could be decisive in winning the ancient pentathlon, in which one of the athletes won the first three events. As the first and third trials are throwing events, it is unlikely that an athlete will be as good at throwing as in jumping. This interpretation would reduce the pentathlon test to a triathlon competition that was not to the liking of the Greeks of the time. In particular, I would like to point out that the second pentathlon event, the long jump, could be the decisive event in the possibility of winning the race with "akonites". The arguments brought in this regard also take into account personal experience in the field of combined evidence. The maturity of the modern athletic framework simplifies the pertinent explanation of the technical details of the pentathlon. I also tried to make valid arguments in the case of the

variant in which the pentathlon ended after the conduct of three of the five tests, although I personally support the completion of the pentathlon after the five tests. Another important aspect is the use of the two dumbbells when performing the long jump. Following the experiments, we came to the conclusion that their use is useful only if a series of at least three jumps is performed in a burst. However, this version is in contradiction with the hypostases in which the athletes in the long jump test are represented on the ancient amphorae discovered. The momentum in the long jump with dumbbells is difficult to achieve in reality. It was in some cases in the shape of a loop or made in curves, which is more like the momentum of high jump today. In order to be able to jump, the athlete needs a perfect coordination of the arms and legs during the run. Redefining the place where the jumps were performed raises questions about the possibilities of performing a momentum in a straight line. Detachment from the ground should not exceed the starting line and the movement of the dumbbells in the air should help the athlete through the impulse produced. These technical aspects contribute fundamentally to the objective explanation of the pentathlon test, in the absence of direct evidence to specify exactly how the jump test took place. In general, the first three tests of the pentathlon, considered technical from the point of view of the difficulty of the execution procedures, are from my point of view both tests of the display of the skills and the skill of the athletes. They had to throw the spear and the disc inside the stadium, in a delimited sector, so they were disqualified.

The most sensitive subject treated in this paper is that of the period in which the athletic competitions were organized under Roman domination. The ancient athletic competitions of the Greco-Roman period have important features. I believe that the understanding of the moment of the decline of the ancient athletic competitions in Greece must take into account first of all the domestic context in Greece but also the international one. The moment of the abolition of the ancient athletic competitions, abolition that took place under the emperor Theodosius the Great, represents the effect of a general reform inside the borders of the Roman Empire. The ancient athletic races were at that time in a compromising situation which was not necessarily caused by the Roman presence in the admission of the ancient races. Roman Greece between 146 BC - 330 AD is a positive example of the coexistence for almost five hundred years of two great civilizations. The pentathlon and many well-known athletic competitions have continued to be organized all these years. The Roman civilization, after the conquest of the Peloponnese peninsula and after the transformation of Greece into a Roman province, appreciated, supported, preserved and continued the tradition of organizing athletic competitions. The economic, political and social situation of Greece around the 330s had deteriorated, as if predicting the end of what was to come. Paradoxically, the ancient athletic competitions, derived from the ancient Greek religious funerals, come to be considered under the impulse of a new religion (Christianity) pagan rituals and as a result they had to be abolished. So, if it can be said that religion was a source of inspiration for them, religion was also their source of disintegration.

The medieval period is strongly marked by religious obscurantism. But people of culture were looking for inspiration in the ancient past. Contrary to the beliefs of the vast majority of researchers up to the 1970s, the Middle Ages do not witness the total decline of the athletic phenomenon or the disappearance of military games. Recent studies on the "pearl" of Muslim cities, Cordoba (Spain), precisely shows the huge array of exercises conducted there between 756 and 1235. P OSIB combined competitions during medieval complicated are and those in England and Scotland, so-called "Scottish Highlands Festivals", competitions that still take place today.

After another thousand and a few years, at the end of the 19th century - beginning of the 20th century, the pentathlon is reintroduced in the new athletic competitions, in the modern Olympic Games. At the beginning of the "modern ancient pentathlon" the organizers strove to preserve the original ways of organizing in antiquity. The system of successive elimination rounds and the scoring system for each victory was introduced, thus reproducing somewhere the formula of the ancient pentathlon. With the introduction of the performance measurement system in meters and / or seconds, technical problems arose. These measurements have made modern pentathlon much more difficult to organize and manage now compared to more than two thousand years ago. The performance marking stick for jumping or throwing as well as the cloth thread at the end of the running test simplified the organization. The 1906 pentathlon edition was proof that the procedure for designating the winner after three possible victories was no longer appropriate. Subsequent experience led to the development of a more complex and sophisticated scoring system, which offered the best athlete the chance to win the triathlon, pentathlon, heptathlon, decathlon and other combined events.

The preparation of the five athletic tests quickly led to the idea of systematizing the exercises and the need to have coaches; the appearance of the gymnasium and the gym is largely due to the need to train athletes in the pentathlon test. The complexity of the pentathlon is therefore correlated with an obvious evolution both among the institution of athletic competitions and of society in general. After the 1924 Paris Olympics, the ancient modern pentathlon changed its shape. The institution of the modern Olympic Games considered that human physical versatility can no longer be represented in the sports arena only in five events, events that no longer prove to be relevant. Thus, the pentathlon test became a men's decathlon and in 1940 the women's pentathlon became a heptathlon. Regardless of the name and the combination of events, the combined athletic discipline remains an innovative concept, present in the athletics of the early period of the ancient Olympic Games. Pentathlon promotes the idea of versatility, and versatility characterizes the multidisciplinary man prepared, both for everyday life and in the sports arena.

The rediscovery of human values after the Second World War are expressed in the international military environment by the establishment of the largest sports organization, CISM. The military pentathlon is, in my opinion, an indigo copy of the ancient pentathlon, a rebirth of it in the modern era. The military pentathlon competition reproduces in the clearest possible way the basic idea of the ancient pentathlon: the complete and centralized preparation of the military in peacetime for a possible conflict. The new dimension of the military pentathlon is that of ambassador of peace and friendship between the military through military sport. Any state wishing to promote its military readiness must take part in military pentathlon competitions. These are the mirror of the physical training of the military and the way a state understands to respect an ancient military tradition. In addition to intense physical effort, the military pentathlon requires an effort of history, morals and understanding of principles.

The history of sport is a significant component of human history. In particular, the study of ancient athletic competitions puts in a fresh light Antiquity and, at the same time, brings solid arguments on the importance of the social and cultural role that sport has in today's society. Multidisciplinary seen as a valuable component of the human individual is the substance of the ancient pentathlon. Ancient traditions such as the pentathlon must be promoted and sustained both morally and financially because they have at their centre the value of good, peace, health and human freedom.



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