



Ancient Greek Wrestling and Its Reflections on Other Nations

Antik Yunan Güreşi ve Diğer Milletlere Yansımaları

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı Antik dönemlerdeki Yunan güreşinin diğer medeniyetlere yansımalarının araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. Literatür taraması yapılmıştır. Güreş antik dönemde Yunan destanlarında çokça yer bulmuştur. Antik Olimpiyatlarda uygulanmıştır. Antik dönemde Yunanistan'da güreşin ayakta ve yerde olma üzere iki şekilde yapıldığı kabul edilmektedir. Ayaktaki güreşte yenmek için rakibi üç defa yere atmak gerekli idi. Yerdeki güreş türü ise boks ve pankreas karışımı bir spor olarak kendini göstermiştir. Yerdeki güreşte Günümüz Judo sporundaki boğmaya benzer uygulama vardı. Yer güreşi çamur bir yerde ve ayakta güreşler ise kum alanlarda yapılıyordu. Güreşçiler vücuduna zeytinyağı ve ince kum (pudralama) sürerlerdi. Yağ sürme günümüz yağlı güreşlerinde devam eden bir uygulamadır. Güreşçi müsabaka ve antrenmandan sonra yıkıyor ve vücudundaki kir ve yağı "strigil" denen kavisli tunç alet ile temizliyorlardı. Güreşlerde eşleşmeler günümüzde olduğu gibi kura ile yapılıyordu. Güreşlerde rakibi yumruklamak, gözleri oymak ve ısırarak yasaktı. Ceza olarak kırbaç vurma uygulaması vardı. Güreşçilerin çıplak güreştikleri kabul gören bir inanıştır. Antik dönem Yunan güreşinde günümüz minder güreşinde mevcut uygulamalar ve tekniklerin birçoğu yapılmıştır. Sonuç: Antik dönemde yapılan Yunanda yapılan güreş zaman içinde değişerek günümüz serbest ve özellikle de grekoromen güreşin temeli olarak görülebilir. Yunan güreş faaliyetleri antik Roma'ya ve oradan da diğer milletlere yansımış olabilir. Üç defa yere atma şeklinde ortaya çıkan yenilgi kuralı bugün hala Afrika ülkeleri geleneksel güreşlerinin birçoğunda uygulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antik Yunan, Spor, Güreş, Destan, Tanrı.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the reflection of Greek wrestling in ancient times on other civilizations. A literature review was done. Wrestling took place a lot in Greek epics in ancient times. It was practised in the ancient Olympics. In ancient Greece, it is accepted that wrestling was done in two ways, standing and on the ground. To beat the standing wrestling, it was necessary to knock the opponent down three times. The type of wrestling on the floor showed itself as a mix of boxing and pancreas. In wrestling on the ground, there was a practice like strangulation in modern-day Judo. Ground wrestling was done in a mud place, and standing wrestling was done in sandy areas. Wrestlers rubbed olive oil and fine sand (powdering) on their bodies. Oiling is an ongoing practice in today's oil wrestling. The wrestler would bathe after competition and training and clean the dirt and oil from his body with a curved bronze instrument called a "strigil". Matching in wrestling was made by lottery as it is today. Punching the opponent, gouging the eyes, and biting were forbidden in wrestling. There was the practice of whipping as punishment. It is an accepted belief that wrestlers wrestle naked. Many of the existing approaches and techniques in today's cushion wrestling were made in ancient Greek wrestling. Conclusion: Ancient Greek wrestling changed over time and can be seen as the basis of today's freestyle, especially Greco-Roman wrestling. Greek wrestling activities may have reflected ancient Rome and, from there, to other nations. The rule of defeat, which emerged as throwing three times to the ground, is still applied in many of the traditional wrestling of African countries today.

Keywords: Ancient Greece, Sports, Wrestling, Epic, God

INTRODUCTION

Sport has shown its popularity as a cultural element since ancient times (Doğan and İmamoğlu, 2020; Türkmen et al., 2006). The epics of the Iliad and Odyssey in Ancient Greece talk about races in the form of struggle (Doğan & İmamoğlu, 2019; Okudan & Koca, 2020). Lifestyle, social values, and various factors are effective in the formation of cultural values of people (Koca et al., 2018; Koca and İmamoğlu, 2018).

There were wrestling schools (palaestras) in ancient Greece. Athletic games (running, wrestling, discus, etc.) in the ancient Greek Odyssey are activities performed only after dinner. The wrestling match is very famous in the games that are stated to be arranged for the death of the hero Patroclus in the Iliad. In these funeral games held in honour of Patroclus, the third match after the chariot races and the boxing match is the wrestling between Odysseus and Aias. This wrestling match ended in a draw. Greeks also showed wrestling on pottery, coins, and statues besides epics. One of Herakles' twelve missions, wrestling with the Nemean lion, is one of them (Aksoy, 2021; Doğan & İmamoğlu, 2020). In ancient Greece, gods and heroes were reflected as wrestling with each other or with animals (Dilek et al., 2018).

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The origins of wrestling go back to ancient times. However, the origins of Modern Minder wrestling are generally based on Greek civilizations in Western literature. This study aims to investigate the reflection of Greek wrestling in ancient times on other cultures.

DEVELOPMENT

Wrestling was called "palé" in ancient Greece.

There were two distinct styles in ancient Greek wrestling: One of the wrestling styles was "standing wrestling" (ortepale or stadia pale), and the other was ground wrestling (kulisis or alindesis).

Standing Wrestling: The aim of standing wrestling was to throw the opponent to the ground. The rules required a wrestler to knock his opponent to the ground without committing a foul and either stand up, or the opponent would fall face down. A fall was counted when any body part other than the feet touched the ground. Standing wrestling was held in a shallowly dug and flattened sand-filled ground. In standing wrestling, it was considered valid to throw the opponent down openly. The one who knocked the opponent down three times was considered the winner. The winner was called a "treble" because of three throws. The technical terms used for winning were "triassein" meaning "three times" and "triakter" meaning "three times" when knocking down the opponent (Miller, 2004).

Ground Wrestling: It was a form of wrestling, almost like the pancreas, as it is very familiar with wrestling. In other words, the combination of boxing and wrestling was defined as floor wrestling. This wrestling aimed to neutralize the opponent and make him give up. In floor wrestling, the aim was to continue the fight until one of the opponents accepted defeat rather than throwing the opponent to the ground. One of the opponents would raise his index finger to admit defeat. An athlete would withdraw because he was too tired and could no longer resist. Floor wrestling developed the arms, waist, thighs and knees the most. A wrestling match often begins by grabbing an opponent's neck or trying to control their wrists. They often pressed their heads against each other in what might be termed the "coach position." Critical variables in the challenge were balance and lifting activities. Because each athlete was looking for a chance to attack himself while fending off the attacks of the rival wrestler. A significant position in this type of wrestling was that where one of the contestants was lying on his stomach while the other was trying to strangle him. While the bottom athlete was trying to grasp the upper one's arm and turn it on his back, the top athlete would try to complete the choke without rolling over (Aksoy, 2021).

Oiling and Cleaning in Ancient Greek Wrestling: Wrestlers used olive oil and fine sand (powdering) on their bodies. The purposes of applying oil and sand are stated to be to stay cool in the summer by protecting them from the sun, to stay warm in the winter, and to be protected from the stick that their trainers will hit to punish them. The wrestlers rubbed oil on themselves before both training and matches and then powdered them. The wrestler would bathe after competition and training and clean the dirt and oil from his body with a curved bronze instrument called a "strigil". After the competition or training, the athletes would clean the sweat, oil and sand from their skin with the help of a curved device called "strigil". Finally, they would finish cleaning with water and a sponge (Tekin & Tekin, 2014).

The areas where the wrestling was held were different: In the Palestra, both styles of wrestling were held in the places reserved for them. Ground wrestling was usually done in a secure place, and the ground was watered until it became muddy. The mud made the body slippery, making it difficult to hold. Standing wrestling took place in a shallow dug and flattened sand-filled area, so the area was called the same word as the jumping pool (skamma) we saw earlier. Ground wrestling was usually done indoors, and the ground was watered until it became muddy. Playing was difficult as the mud stuck to the bodies of their opponents and made them slippery. In wrestling, competitors would smother themselves with olive oil and powder. This made it easier for them to grasp each other while wrestling in muddy pits. The wrestling field could be a large square, 28.5 x 28.5 meters, or any size determined by the organizers of the games, and it is believed to be all sand or earth.

Wrestling equipment: The Greek wrestler carried three pieces to the palaestra. One is an oil bottle, another is a scraper, and the third is a sponge for cleaning and drying. The oil bottle was a wide-lipped and narrow-mouthed ceramic vessel that held a wrestler's daily portion of olive oil. These vessels took various shapes. Some are shaped to resemble birds, animals, or parts of the human body such as the head, feet, or penis. Most of them were simple round shapes with no fulcrum. The scraper (strigil or strings) was a tool with a concave blade. It is made of bronze, silver, glass, or iron. It scraped the olive oil and sweat accumulated on an athlete's body. After removing sweat and oil, the wrestler was cleaned with a sponge (Aksoy, 2021).

Pairings: Wrestling matches were made by lottery as it is today. The ballots were marked with alphabet letters, two from each, and thrown into a helmet, and each competitor drew one number. The only one left would automatically lap when the contestants were paired in pairs.

Some facts on Greek wrestling:

- ✓ The Olympic Festival lasted for five days in mid-summer, and wrestling was held on Day 4 (other races on Day 4: senior race, jumping, boxing, pancreas, and gun running). Generally, wrestling was held on the third and fourth days of the Olympics. Generally, boys aged 17-20 competed on the third day, while the others competed on the fourth.
- ✓ If a wrestler who fell on any part of his body fell into this situation three times, he was considered defeated.
- ✓ If two wrestlers fell together, wrestling would start again.
- ✓ If not banned, holding legs was a rare game (Doğan & İmamoğlu, 2020).
- ✓ Although it is not certain, the trip was free.
- ✓ It was forbidden to punch, gouge eyes and bite.
- ✓ Large-bodied athletes were advantageous because there was no time and weight limit in wrestling, boxing, and pancreas branches in the heavyweight division. Because there were no weight classes, smaller competitors had to rely on dexterity rather than strength to overcome their larger feet (Kyle, 2014). It is understood from Pausanias's words that other factors besides muscular build is very important. Pausanias wrote: "Only size (muscle and built) can matter until Theseus reveals the qualities required of a good wrestler."
- ✓ According to Homer, in the funeral games of Patroclus, the wrestler who broke his opponent's finger in wrestling would eat the stick/whip. Wrestling matches are narrated by the Greek poet Homer. The poet Pindar tells how the gods Zeus and Cronus wrestled along the Alpheus River in Olympia to have the universe (Aksoy, 2021). Festivals held in honour of the gods were held in wrestling within acrobatic dances and competitions (Türkmen & İmamoğlu, 2018).



Picture 1: Wrestlers depicted in an Attic vase, 520 BC Louvre Museum, Paris (<https://arkeofili.com/antik-yunanistanin-olympiyat>)



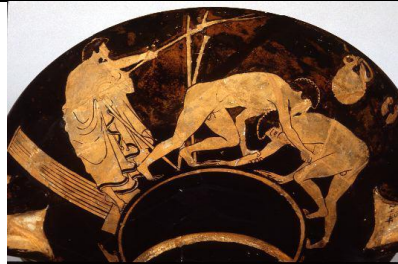
Picture 2: Wrestlers from the ancient Greek combat sport



Picture 3: Two Greek wrestlers in the Bronze Age



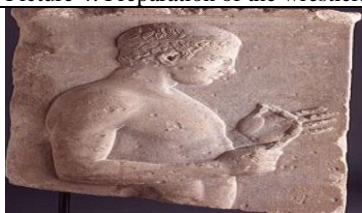
Picture 4: Preparation of the wrestlers



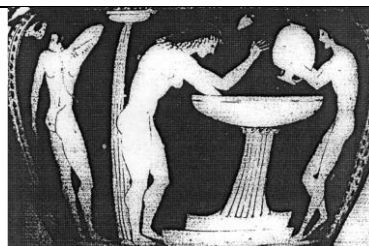
Picture 5: Wrestlers in front of the referee or coach



Picture 6: Famous Wrestler Theseus



Picture 7: Marble relief depicting the athlete cleaning himself from sand and oil by using "strigil" after training or competition, 470-46 BC



Picture 8: Red-figure Attic Vase showing young women washing after exercise



Picture 9: Wrestler and Trainer in Ancient Greece

- ✓ After the Roman conquest of Greece, Greek wrestling was absorbed by the Roman culture and became Roman Wrestling during the Roman Empire (510 BC - 500 BC) (Aksoy, 2021).
- ✓ These trainers, who worked in the palaestras (wrestling fields), wore a purple cloak. The long, forked sticks they carried in their hands indicated their duties. They used this stick to warn disobedient students, who breaking the rules or making mistakes. These trainers also controlled the athlete's nutrition, sleep, massage, and other sports activities (<http://www.turkeireiseleiter>).
- ✓ Ancient Greek youths were engaged in sports branches specialized in different categories such as wrestling, athletics, javelin throw, discus throw, boxing, pancreas, long jump, and chariot races.
- ✓ The training ground of the wrestlers prepared for the Olympics was called "consistorian". Consistorian was called the areas where the wrestlers did their training, in other words, the powdering process. Eleutherin is the name given to the areas where the wrestlers lubricate (<https://okuryazarim.com>).
- ✓ Physical activities such as wrestling, boxing, 'Pancras', discus throwing, long jumping and running were generally held in gymnasiums until noon. In the afternoon, language, grammar, eloquence (rhetoric), geography, mathematics and music lessons were given.
- ✓ Amnesias from Barca in Libya, the Olympic wrestling champion in 460 BC, was a shepherd (<https://arkeofili.com/antik-yunanistanin>).
- ✓ Wrestling was included in the Olympic Games program in 708 BC.
- ✓ Athletes competing in boxing, wrestling and pankration would eat much meat.
- ✓ It is stated that Plato himself is an excellent wrestler (Sener,2018).
- ✓ Women wrestlers competed in ancient Greece. The virgin hunter Atalanta, who wrestled against men and many of whom wanted to marry him, is mentioned (Aksoy, 2021; Doğan, 2020; Okudan & İmamoğlu, 2021).
- ✓ Homer first mentioned wrestling in Labours for Patroclus. Wrestling was one of the pentathlon races. At the same time, an independent event was held in the Pan-Helen Games (Şener,2018).
- ✓ Homer's Odysseus is the clever archetypal wrestler who deflects and neutralizes the immense power of a much larger man (Ajax) in Book 23 of the Iliad. It is a statue honouring Aristides of Elis for his victory at Olympia in 388 BC. "I won because of my technique, not because of my body size." There is a text in the form. We know with certainty that wrestling was one of the oldest forms of fighting as early as the Iliad, where Homer talks about the Trojan War in the 13th or 12th century BC (Aksoy, 2021).
- ✓ Plato praised wrestling as a suitable exercise for educating Athens' youth. Plutarch referred to wrestling as "the most technical and difficult".
- ✓ An inscription discovered from Olympia shows the rules of a judge adopted in the late 6th century BC. These rules prohibit wrestlers from breaking each other's fingers and authorize referees to whip athletes who do not comply with the rule.
- ✓ Leontiskos of Messene did not obey the breaking finger rule while winning the Olympic crown in wrestling in 456 and 452 BC.
- ✓ It is claimed that Heracles taught men to wrestle and revealed the length of the stadium used for foot races.
- ✓ Wrestlers cheated at the Ancient Olympic Games: Cheating was standard at the Ancient Summer Games. Athletes used to apply oil to themselves to protect their skin from dirt and sunlight. In these games, the wrestlers were not allowed to use oil, but some wrestlers cheated by lubricating a part of the body, making the opponent's grip slippery (Doğan & İmamoğlu, 2020).
- ✓ Atalanta was a girl trained by her father in hunting, wrestling, and running. The first to shoot the Calydon pig, she wrestled with Peleus, who was shown in Pelias' funeral plays. Although Atalanta has many suitors, the story is told that she does not want to marry. He declared that if anyone could beat him in the race, he would marry them, if not...he would kill them. Another story: A young man prayed to Aphrodite, giving her three golden apples that he threw across the road to distract her (Anderson,2019).
- ✓ In many parts of Sparta, they held mini-wrestling and running competitions for women (they were allowed to participate in "boys" to encourage marriage and procreation) (Scanlon, 2004).

- ✓ Palé is the ancient Greek form of wrestling featured in all four ancient Greek games and performed in all four important organizations. These organizations are the Ancient Greek Olympic Games, the Isthian Games, the Nemean Games, and the Phidian Games (<https://healthandfitnesshistory.com>).
- ✓ The ancient Greeks are considered among the most fanatical of wrestling. Wrestling is described in the first famous works of Greek literature, the Iliad, and the Odyssey.
- ✓ Festivals held in honour of the gods were performed in wrestling, among acrobatic dances and competitions (Okudan & İmamoğlu, 2021).
- ✓ Philo Stratos claimed that Palaestra, the daughter of Hermes, invented wrestling, and the whole world was happy with this discovery. Because the iron weapons of war would be put aside, and stadiums would look sweeter than military camps. He stated the effectiveness of wrestling in war, claiming that the military success in the marathon was almost tied to a wrestling match and that the Spartans in Thermopylae used their bare hands after losing their spears and swords (Dilek et al., 2018).
- ✓ Wrestling was the most popular event in the ancient Greek Games, and lists of Olympic wrestling winners have been recorded from 708 BC.
- ✓ The rules of Greek wrestling have changed over time. Some rules were set by Orikadmos, a Sicilian wrestler. Hitting, holding, and biting an opponent's groin (genitals) is prohibited. No punching, no piercing of your opponent's eyes or face with your nails, and no hugging or biting were allowed. Apart from these, few things were legal (Miller, 2004).

Plato recommended that wrestling be done primarily to prepare for future wars rather than learning what was known before (Tekin & Tekin, 2014).

- ✓ If the wrestlers went outside the boundaries of the area designated for wrestling in the fight, the referee would stop the competition and return them to the same place in the middle of the area where they started again.
- ✓ Violations were punished by immediate whipping by the referee until the undesirable behaviour was stopped.
- ✓ Competitions started and ended with the referee's signal. When the wrestlers were ready to stand outside each other's contact range (touch area) from the middle of the wrestling field, the wrestlers were ready to start the match, and the distance of these wrestlers was at the discretion of the referee.
- ✓ The ancient Greeks have depicted their heroes and gods wrestling with each other or with animals since ancient times. Wrestling with the Nemean lion, one of the 12 tasks of Heracles, or the wrestling of Heracles and Antaios, had a very important place in both sculpture and painting (Dilek et al., 2018).
- ✓ Wrestling has been the subject of epics in ancient Greece. The Iliad describes Aias and Odysseus wrestling against each other. The Iliad and the Odyssey are among the most significant epics of the 8th century BC. The Homeric epics refer to semi-legendary events between 1200 and 800 BC. Two wrestling matches draw attention, the first between a mythological Greek hero, Ajax and Odysseus, and the second between Peleus and Atlanta. Achilles' mother, Goddess Thetis, decided that the winner could take Achilles' armour and weapon with him in a wrestling match. Drawn by reward, Ajax and Odysseus decided to fight. After a long and tiring match, there was no winner. Nestor suggested that the Trojan prisoners who witnessed the match decide who would be the winner. They decided it should be the Odysseus. Enraged, Ajax suddenly lost his sense. He took out his sword and, thinking it was the enemy, slaughtered all the cattle standing in front of the camp. Seeing what he had done, he took his own life. There is also another wrestling fight recorded in the same epics. This story concerns Peleus, husband of Thetis and father of Achilles. According to Apollo Dorus, he participated in Atlanta wrestling competitions at funeral games honouring the Greek scholar and grammarian Pelias. He gained more fame by winning against Peleus (Penjak & Karnincic, 2013; Mendot et al., 2021).

Reflections on the Games in Ancient Greek Wrestling:

Those depicted in a Greek art show that very strong grips and throws were standard in wrestling. No matter how complex the tactics, the fight was likely bitter and intense. Greek sources are clear that, although seemingly rare, subjugation by strangling an opponent can result in a legitimate fall.

Trip in Ancient Greek Wrestling: Whether tripping is allowed in Ancient Greek wrestling is unknown. Because tripping is rarely shown in Greek vase paintings, capturing legs is rarely seen in vases. A wrestler who bent enough to catch his opponent's leg was bound to be in trouble if he failed (<http://www.turkeireiseleiter.com>).



Picture 10: Atalanta wrestling in Pelias' games of Peleus, Chalcidian black-figure pottery. Side A: Peleus and Atalanta wrestling for the funeral games of King Pelias. In the background, the prize of the duel: the skin and head of the Calydon pig. Side B: Zeus throws his arrow at Typhon (<https://commons.wikimedia>).



Picture 11: Wrestlers catching fire in front of referees: Wrestling game visualized with marble relief art, BC. 510, Photo: Berliner Festspiele, Mardin-Gropius-Bau (<https://tunadergi.com/antik>).



Picture 12: Flutist, javelin thrower, wrestlers and pancreases and loser raising his finger in submission (terracotta, 510-500 BC).



Picture 13: Confessing defeat: Men's wrestling, detail of an ancient Greek cup, Epictetus, 520 BC; At the Agora Museum in Athens (<https://www.britannica.com>).

Gripping and throwing techniques from the wrists: Wrestlers often grabbed their opponents by the wrists. Lifting and throwing your opponent was a challenging game, but if successful, there was no salvation. To achieve this throw, the wrestler first grabs one of his opponent's arms with both hands, one wrist grasps the forearm just below the elbow, then quickly turns his back on the opponent, pulls his arm over his shoulder and throws it over his head. At the same time, he also bends down or gets down on one knee to make it easier to throw.

Handle Pull: For a wrestler, the neck is also significant. Presumably, the wrestlers were testing each other by pulling out before they got to their actual game. The technical term for attracting Elense was traheliksein (<http://www.turkeireiseleiter.com>).

Nude Wrestling Psychic and Clothes in Ancient Greek Wrestling: It is stated that Homer's wrestlers in the Iliad wore loincloths. Shortly after the Homeric Age, Greek athletes began to undress. Later, Greek athletes were reflected in the statues as they trained and competed in the nude in the ancient world. The reason for bare wrestling is not well known. But in today's mat wrestling, the joke of wrestlers being checked by a naked doctor in international championships could have had similar reasons back then. There were legendary reasons for bare wrestling, though. It is stated that he wore a runner's loincloth and that the authorities banned it because it was unsafe. Some say that athletes undress to prove they are men or because they can run better naked. Other reasons were also cited: erotic reasons, cult reasons, for good luck, or as a democratic stabilizer for athletes to be nude. Some say they undress because they are proud of their muscular bodies and tan (<https://simple.wikipedia>). Some argue that adding trousers, belts or other clothing to wrestling has changed the game quite a lot. That's because when any garment relates to stifling sports, it tends to be used as a focal point for grip, as a sweaty hand is a much more confident grip than a sweaty limb.

CONCLUSION

Wrestling took place a lot in Greek epics in ancient times. It was practised in the ancient Olympics. In ancient Greece, it is accepted that wrestling was done in two ways, standing and on the ground. To beat the standing wrestling, knocking the opponent down three times was necessary. The type of wrestling on the floor showed itself as a mix of boxing and pancreas. In wrestling on the ground, there was a practice like strangulation in modern-day Judo. Ground wrestling was done in a mud place, and standing wrestling was done in sandy areas. Wrestlers rubbed olive oil and fine sand (powdering) on their bodies. Oiling is an ongoing practice in today's oil wrestling. The wrestler would bathe after competition and training and clean the dirt and oil from his body with a curved bronze instrument called a "strigil". Matching in wrestling was made by lottery as it is today. Punching the opponent, gouging the eyes and biting were forbidden in wrestling. There was the practice of whipping as punishment. It is an accepted belief that wrestlers wrestle naked. Many existing approaches and techniques in today's cushion wrestling were made in ancient

Greek wrestling. The old Greek wrestling changed over time and can be seen as the basis of today's freestyle and especially Greco-Roman wrestling. Greek wrestling activities may have reflected ancient Rome and, from there, to other nations. The rule of defeat, which emerged as throwing three times to the ground, is still applied in many of the traditional wrestling of African countries today.

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