


# Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi The Journal of South-Eastern European Studies

Research Article

Open Access

## Gymnasium, Stadion and Athletic Games in Perinthos



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### Abstract

Perinthos, the largest city-state on the northern coast of the Propontis, maintained its position as part of the traditional athletic games world of the Eastern Mediterranean, just as it had in the centuries before Christ, both during the Roman Empire and when it was the capital of the province of Thrace. The epigram was erected in memory of a young athlete, Doras, who was trained by his father to compete at the Perinthos gymnasium and died shortly thereafter. It is dated to the early 3rd century AD.

### Keywords

epigramm · athletic games · gymnasium · olive wreath · stadium



“ Citation: Sayar, Mustafa Hamdi, . 2023. 'Gymnasium, Stadion and Athletic Games in Perinthos', *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi–The Journal of South-Eastern European Studies*, 41, pp. 61-67. doi:10.26650/gaad.20230015

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According to a metric inscription found in Perinthos (Map. 1-2), the capital of the province of Thrace during the Roman Empire, a young athlete named Doras died in this city. (Fig.1) The text of the inscription written on a stone by his father, who was also his coach, was first copied by Johannes Mordtmann, one of the researchers who came to Marmara Ereğlisi in the early 1880s<sup>1</sup>. The 14-line inscription was seen and copied a few years later in Tekirdağ by Papadopoulos Kerameus, who was traveling in Thrace<sup>2</sup>. This inscription was documented once again by Lampousiades in 1920 in Tekirdağ<sup>3</sup>.

Johannes Mordtmann provides the most detailed information about the work. According to Mordtmann's description, the work features a relief of Hermes and a palm branch relief on either side. To the left of this relief is a jug and two striglis inside a circle. According to Mordtmann's measurements, the gravestone of Doras is 28 cm high and 194 cm wide. Mordtmann did not mention the thickness of the work or the height of the letters in the inscription on it. In 1955, Werner Peek, who published the inscription once again, made adjustments to the metrical inscription<sup>4</sup>.

Παῖδά με γυμνασίων ἐμπείραμον Ἑρμάωνος

καὶ τυχὸν ἰδρώτων ἄξιον Ἡρακλέους,

ἤδη που μέλλοντα παρὰ ξυστοῖο φιλάθλοις

καύτὸν ἀριθμεῖσθαι τοῦ μεγάλου σταδίου

ἤρπασεν ἡ πάντων φθονερὴ θεός, ἥς ὑπὸ νῆμα

κλήρω τῆς ἀδίκου κεκλίμεθ' ἔργα Τύχης

ἤδη γυμνασίοις ἡσκημένον ἔντροφον ἄθλοις

παῖδά με καὶ πάτρης ἐλπίδα καὶ πατέρος,

ἐγγύς καὶ κοτίνῳ φθονερός κατακοίμισεν Ἄδης

φευσάμενος τόσσους εἰς ἀρετὴν καμάτους

οὐνομά μοι Δωρᾶς, πατρός Διοκλεῖος, ἀπ' αὐτῶν

ἄθλων εἰς διδαχὴν τὰ αὐτὰ πονησαμένου

ἄλλα με πρηυτέρος πενθήσατε καὶ γὰρ ἐς Ἄδην

ἔρχομαι ἡρώων οὐδενὶ λειπόμενος

The translation of the funeral elegy is as follows:

*As a child who gained experience in Hermes' gymnasiums and perhaps worthy of Heracles, I was about to be included among those participating in competitions in the great stadium and those competing on the closed running track when Moira took me with her nets, which were the product of the unjust goddess of fate, to which we were subjected by drawing of lots.*

*Having trained in the gymnasium, I was awakened by Hades, who was jealous of the olive wreath I had won at the Olympics as the hope of my country and my father, causing me great disappointment in my diligent efforts. My name is Doras, and my father is Diokles, who trained me for the same competition. Do not mourn me too much, for I am going to Hades, where no hero can return.*

<sup>1</sup>Mordtmann 1884, 220 no. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1886, 83 no. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Lampousiades 1941, 113 f.

<sup>4</sup>Peek 1955, 1969; about this inscription, see. Sayar 1998, 360-361, no.214.

Herakles and Hermes, whose names are written in lines 1 and 2 of the inscription, are known as the gods of the gymnasium<sup>5</sup>. Herakles had already prepared his place in the competitions at Olympia. Doras was almost selected to participate in the competitions held in Olympia<sup>6</sup>. The olive branch wreath mentioned in line 9 of the inscription is awarded as a prize for victory in the Olympics. From line 11 of the inscription, it is understood that Doras' father, Diokles, was also his son's coach. As mentioned in this funeral elegy, athletes were regarded as heroes, just like mythical heroes, because of the competitions they won.

Doras was most likely trained at the gymnasium in Perinthos and then coached by his father Diokles himself before participating in competitions held at stadiums in Perinthos and other city-states<sup>7</sup>. The Perinthos stadium, whose location was identified in 1986, with the athletic games played an important role in the social life of the city<sup>8</sup>. (Fig. 2-3) The games held in Perinthos in the 3rd century AD are mentioned in inscriptions on the pedestals of statues honoring two athletes. One of these inscriptions was seen and copied by some scholars in 19th and 20th centuries on the acropolis of Perinthos. The inscription lists the games won by an athlete who participated in various cities in the Mediterranean world in the 3rd century AD.<sup>9</sup>



These are the Pythia games in Karthago, the Aktia games in Perinthos, the games of Pythia in Perinthos<sup>10</sup>, the games of Pythia in Philippopolis, holy Agon of Kore in Kyzikos, the games of Pythia in Troas, the olympic games in Alexandria in Beroia, the olympic games of Hadrianeia in Kyzikos, the games of Pythia in Kalchedon, the common games of the inhabitants of Bithynia in Nikomedeia.

Another fragment of an athletic inscription listing the games in which an athlete participated was found on the coast of Perinthos by Cyriacos of Ancona in the mid-15th century<sup>11</sup>. On this fragmentary inscription are mentioned the olympic games of Hadrianeia in Kyzikos and the common games of the inhabitants of Bithynia in Nikomedeia.

Both the epitaph written for the athlete Doras and the games mentioned in the honorary inscriptions written for athletes indicate that athletes in Perinthos were trained in such a way as to enable them to participate in competitions held in city-states throughout the Mediterranean world and achieve success there.



Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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<sup>5</sup>About Hermes and Heracles being the patron gods of the gymnasium see. Aneziri –Damaskos 2004, 248-256; Kuhle 2020, 230-239.

<sup>6</sup>For Xystos, meaning a covered running track, see Decker 1995, 49 ve 119.

<sup>7</sup>For the training of athletes and their coaches, see Decker 143-150.

<sup>8</sup>For the Perinthos Stadium see Asgari 1988, 135-146; About stadiums, athletes, and city life in city-states see. Begass 2025; Mann 2025.

<sup>9</sup>For this inscriptions see Sayar 1998 no. 31.

<sup>10</sup>For the games of Pythia in Perinthos, see Schönert-Geiß, 1965, 120.

<sup>11</sup>For this inscriptions see Sayar 1998 no. 32.



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## Appendix

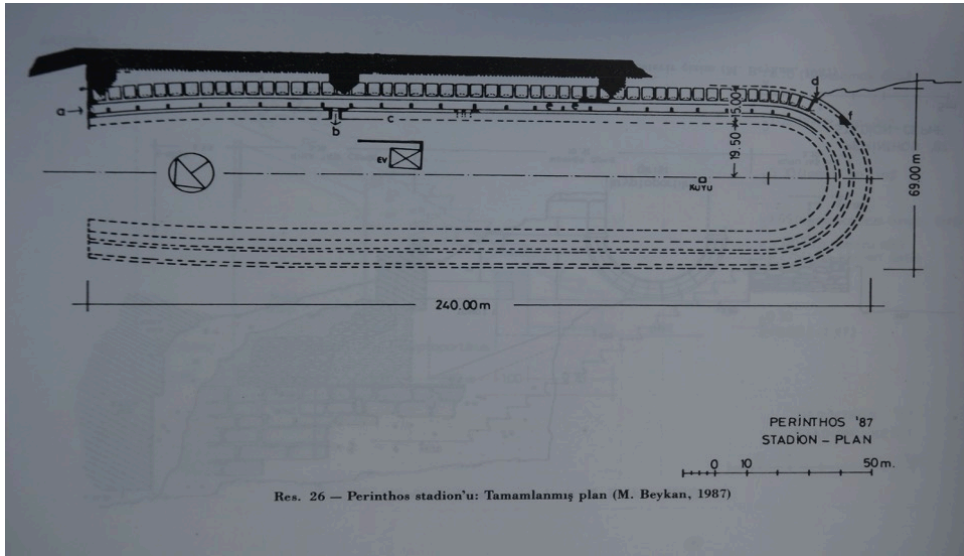
Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Map 1



