

## Practicing Philosophy: Athletic Training in Epictetus' *Discourses*

The ancient world provides a wealth of material for any who are interested in athletics. Sources range from the literary to the archaeological, and similarly the subject matter from the philosophical to the medicinal benefits of physical activity (Dean-Jones, 2021). However, there is a surprising paucity of information concerning specific methods of training the body which athletes would employ, aside from repeating the activities of a given competition (i.e. sparring to practice boxing). Such training is often described simply as *ponoi*, or toils, a term which sheds unfortunately little light (Pritchard, 2021). Due to this limited evidence, it is important to carefully examine ancient sources which directly mention athletic training. As Stocking argues, scholars often overlook seemingly mundane details of athletic training, instead devoting more time to other aspects of the literature (Stocking, 2016).

Before turning to textual sources, this paper will provide a brief overview of what is known about the methods of training deployed by ancient athletes. While evidence for ancient athletics covers a broad timeframe, I draw from Newby and others to argue for the continuity of Greek athletics into the Roman world (Newby, 2005). Through this, and with caution, specific texts can be analyzed while simultaneously situating them within the wider context of ancient athletics.

In particular, this paper focuses on the passage “On Training” from Epictetus’ *Discourses*. A number of lines from this section have continuously vexed translators (Oldfather, 1928; Waterfield, 2022). The activities described by Epictetus that this paper will investigate are setting up palm trees (τὸ φοίνικα στῆσαι) and carrying around a leather tent, a mortar, and a pestle (τὸ στέγην δερματίνην καὶ ὄλμον καὶ ὑπερον περιφέρειν, Epict. diss. 3.12.9-10). Through

a close reading of these lines, and a comparative analysis of their language, I will propose an alternative translation. Where appropriate, reference to works that use similar language will be employed to bolster this proposal. The aim of this translation is to both answer the questions posed by translators such as Oldfather and Waterfield, and to situate the actions described by Epictetus within the broader, although limited, knowledge of ancient athletic training.

### Bibliography

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