

Making everyone Greek citizens: athletes, and ideals of nationhood in nineteenth-century Britain, France, and Germany

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This chapter explores the multiple Hellenomanias operative in processes of nation-building in Europe and the United States over the long nineteenth century. Developing Hans Kohn's classic distinction between 'Western' and 'non-Western', or 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalisms, it focuses upon phenomena of Hellenomaniac expression in two distinct spheres: the design and construction of civic buildings and practices of physical culture. At the same time as democratic political monuments—ranging from Laboulaye's 'Liberty Enlightening the World' to the parliamentary buildings of France and Austria—were springing up in testament to the universalist, cosmopolitan ideals of 'civic' Hellenomania, development in the human sciences—from Winckelmannian neoclassical aesthetics, through historical linguistics and physical anthropology's characterisation of mankind according to 'races'—promoted an alternative understanding, which posited the ancient Greeks as a particular, ethnic ancestor to northern Europeans in particular. Both these ideals found resonance beyond the academy, in particular national movements (the German Turnverein, English public school culture, and Hippolyte Taine's 'culture musculaire') as well as internationalist endeavours such as the revival of the Olympic Games. The chapter explores the interplay between different strands of these two Hellenomanias in different national contexts, paying particular attention to the role of alternative conceptions of physical culture in rivalry between French and German culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It ends with a discussion of the further recasting of Hellenomania in Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art of the fin-de-siècle, as avant-garde figures such as Cézanne, Renoir, and Picasso turned to the Greeks to paint a new picture of the 'vie moderne'.

5

Making Everyone Greek

Citizens, Athletes, and Ideals of Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Britain, France, and Germany

Athena Leoussi

The currents of European enthusiasm for ancient Greece that soared from the late eighteenth until well into the twentieth century were cultural movements that appealed not only to elites, but had much wider, popular appeal. These new ‘Hellenomanias’ set out to make *everyone* Greek. The desire to be Greek became a characteristic feature of those nations that, by the end of the nineteenth century, had established themselves as the leaders of modern Europe—Britain, France, and Germany. These nations became in their turn models for other nations striving for international prestige and recognition. In this way Greece became ‘the desire of all nations’,¹ and not only in Europe, but also in other parts of the world touched by Europe through trade, exploration, religious mission or empire. There were, however, different ways of becoming Greek. Consequently, modern Hellenomanias took different forms. I shall here concentrate on two that became implicated in the overarching process of nation-building that characterised this period. I shall call them ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ Hellenomanias.

The nineteenth century was a century of such intense national revival and nation-building that it has become known as ‘the age of nationalism’.² The modern idea of the ‘nation’ emerges in the late eighteenth century as part of the cult of the ‘people’ with which both the Enlightenment and what Isaiah Berlin called the Counter-Enlightenment, i.e. Romanticism,

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engaged. Both the Enlightenment and Romanticism elevated the common man to the status of agent and repository of history, and set out to make the people sovereign. This cult of the people found its most famous formulations in the French Revolutionaries' 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen' of August 1789; in Johann Gottfried von Herder's celebration of cultural diversity as the flowering of *Volskgeist*; ³ and in Jules Michelet's famous book, *Le Peuple*, of 1846. The nation meant the people. But who were the people who made up these self-determining nations?

In his now-classic book, *The Idea of Nationalism* (1944), Hans Kohn, who is considered the founding father of nationalism studies, distinguished between two distinct visions of the nation, both of which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, and were consolidated over the nineteenth century. ⁴ According to Kohn, one vision was rooted in the Enlightenment, the other in the Herderian, Romantic reaction against it. ⁵ The two visions of the nation were to mark the course of European and even world history from the French Revolution until the end of the Second World War and beyond.

Kohn held that these visions had clear geographical locations—hence his choice to describe them as the 'Western' and the 'non-Western'. By this he did not, however, mean what we now understand as 'Europe/USA' versus 'non-Europe', but a distinction between North-Western and East-Central Europe, where the dividing line was, as if by Romantic, natural determinism, the river Rhine. West of the Rhine, in France, the Netherlands, and England, as well as the USA, lay the earlier, 'Western' type of nation; east of the Rhine, and especially in Germany, was the home of the 'non-Western' type. ⁶ He described the first as 'basically a rational and universal concept of political liberty and the rights of man, looking towards the city of the future', and the second as 'basically founded on history, on monuments and graveyards,

even harking back to the mysteries of ancient times and of tribal solidarity. It stressed the past, the diversity and self-sufficiency of nations'.⁷

The Western and non-Western visions of the nation are now usually referred to as 'civic' or 'territorial' and 'ethnic' or 'cultural', respectively, abandoning Kohn's geographical terminology, since 'ethnic' nationalism, such as the Irish, could emerge in Western Europe.⁸

The essentialism that seems to underlie Kohn's dichotomy has also been criticised, as civic nations can become ethnic and both types can combine in varying degrees in a single nation.⁹

What, for our purposes, is particularly interesting about the two visions is that *both* came to be connected with ancient Greece. Although Kohn only emphasised the civic vision's connection to 'Hellas', and especially Athens, both visions found their primary models in ancient Greek culture. Each, however, attached itself to *different* principles in Greek culture: the civic to the concept of the citizen, and the ethnic to the concept of the body. I shall examine each of these two Hellenic re-orientations in modern European culture, in turn.

Civic Hellenomania

The civic conception of the nation included everyone—it was universalist, cosmopolitan, individualist, and rationalist. It sought to turn subjects into citizens. Its model was the democratic city-state of Athens, now idealistically transformed into a universal and all-inclusive community of free individuals who could think for themselves. The universalism of the modern civic nation was clearly expressed in Article 120 of the 1793 revolutionary constitution's proclamation of France as a 'land of asylum' (*pays d'asile*), according to which 'the French people offer protection to foreigners banished from their countries for defending the cause of liberty and

refuse it to tyrants'.¹⁰ In the USA, the classicising statue of 'Liberty Enlightening the World', inaugurated in 1886, was designed to symbolise the universal, humanistic aspirations that the two new Republics of the modern world, the French and the American, shared. The statue was conceived by Édouard de Laboulaye (1811–1883), the French political thinker, U.S. Constitution expert and abolitionist, and designed by Laboulaye's friend, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi.¹¹ Laboulaye had intended the statue as a gift of the French to the American people and a Republican celebration, on both sides of the Atlantic, of the spread of the Enlightenment principles of democracy and freedom from slavery and oppression across the world. By 1903, however, the statue had acquired an additional meaning, which is perhaps best expressed in the American poet Emma Lazarus's proclamation of the USA as 'Mother of Exiles' in her 1883 poem, 'The New Colossus'. The poem, together with the experience of international mass immigration into the USA at the turn of the twentieth century, changed the meaning of the statue from liberty enlightening the world to American liberty welcoming the world to its shores.¹²

The civic conception of the modern nation produced parliamentary democracies whose classical roots were most visibly acknowledged in the classical style of the buildings which housed the representatives of the people, as also discussed by Lambrinou in this volume. According to the civic view, it was, in the first instance, all the people of the state, who, transformed into citizens, constituted the nation. In Europe, the attempt to turn *ancien régime* states into magnified and modernised versions of democratic Athens began in Paris. The central site of its metamorphosis was the Palais Bourbon, which, after its confiscation by the revolutionary government in 1791, was transformed from an aristocratic private palace into the home of the French National Assembly (Figure 5.1). Over the following decades a succession of distinguished architects, sculptors, and painters moulded the Palais into a symbol of French

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democracy. A host of architectural, sculptural, and other decorative features proclaims its Athenian roots. These include a neoclassical façade consisting of a pedimented portico supported by twelve columns, and statues of Athena and Themis (representing, respectively, prudence and the legislative process), standing on either side at the bottom of the steps that lead up to the portico.¹³ Designed by the architect Bernard Poyet, the façade was completed in 1810. Another Athenian reference can be seen inside the building, in the seventeenth-century Gobelins tapestry which hangs in the *salle des séances* (also known as *l'hémicycle*, because of its shape), the French Parliament's debating hall. The tapestry reproduces Raphael's famous 'School of Athens' from the Vatican and shows Plato and Aristotle debating, thereby 'evoking the Greek origins of democracy'.¹⁴ The tapestry was hung directly above the desk of the President of the Assemblée Nationale who guides the discussions. It thus confronts the French deputies, also reminding them of the principles of democratic debate.

[Insert figure 5.1 here]

Figure 5.1 Palais Bourbon, Paris.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palais_Bourbon_-_panoramio.jpg

Largely under the influence of Thomas Jefferson, himself an admirer of Greek democratic and Roman Republican principles, classicising parliamentary buildings were also built across the United States of America, with the greatest example being the Capitol in Washington, DC, for which construction began in 1793 (see also Lambrinou's chapter in this volume).¹⁵ Many other parliamentary buildings in Europe were also built in the Greek style in the course of the nineteenth century, as traditional monarchies were challenged by democratic movements largely inspired by the French Revolution.¹⁶

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Another more complicated example of the links between parliament buildings and the tortuous road to the democratic ideal is the Austrian Reichsrat, in Vienna, built in 1874–1883 (Figure 5.2). Designed by the great Danish-born Austrian architect, Baron Theophil von Hansen, its construction was part of a series of compromises between a crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire and liberal-national forces. Hansen had spent many years in Athens studying ancient Greek architecture and had also taken part in excavation and reconstruction work on the Acropolis.¹⁷ After leaving Athens for Vienna in 1846, invited by the Greek-Austrian entrepreneur and banker Georg Simon von Sina to introduce elements of Greek style in various building projects, Hansen became ‘probably the most significant architect of Vienna’s Ringstraße era’, which saw the construction of the monumental ring road decreed by Emperor Francis Joseph I in 1857.¹⁸ The Austrian Parliament was one of those grand buildings lining the Ringstraße. Full popular participation in the legislative process through elected representatives of the people had to wait until the First Austrian Republic of 1919–1938. Nevertheless, the purpose-built Austrian Parliament was a step towards the eventual triumph of democracy in Austria after the Second World War.

[Insert figure 5.2 here]

Figure 5.2 ‘Athena statue and Austrian Parliament’

Source: © 2013 Guillaume Speurt CC BY-SA 2.0 / Adapted by User:Andy king50, Wikimedia

Commons (removing

watermark) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Atine_statue_and_Austrian_Parliament_\(8441082485\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Atine_statue_and_Austrian_Parliament_(8441082485).jpg)

The building

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reflects the views of . . . Hansen, who saw the parliaments of his day and age as ‘new monuments’ which should capture the attention of the peoples much in the same way as the temples of Antiquity and the cathedrals of the Middle Ages had done in the past. **19**

Although well-versed in a variety of historical styles, Hansen chose the Greek for the Austrian Parliament to establish a link between his building and the origins of democracy. **20** With its neoclassical pedimented portico, statues of Greek gods and historians, and its citations from the Erechtheion, Austria’s parliament has clear Athenian credentials. These are reiterated in the monumental fountain that stands in front of the building and has become the parliament’s key landmark. The fountain is dominated by the statue of Pallas Athena, patron of Athens, and ‘the Greek goddess of wisdom, strategy, war and peace’. **21** The original idea had been to have a statue of Austria, but Athena was chosen instead as a more universal symbol, given the multi-national character of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. **22**

There were also some notable exceptions to the classicising idiom of modern Western democracies’ parliamentary buildings. These show the tension between civic and ethnic definitions of the national self, between universalising principles and particularistic traditions.

The Palace of Westminster in London (1835–1860), designed by Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin, was built in the Gothic Revival style developed in England to avoid the revolutionary and republican associations of the classical revival in the USA. **23** Yet even the English Parliament has classical features, for example in its proportions and symmetry. As the Gothicist Pugin famously remarked: ‘All Grecian, sir; Tudor details on a classic body.’ **24**

Gothic was also chosen for the Hungarian Parliament (1885–1902), to associate Hungarian with British liberal institutions as well as in contrast to the Austrian Parliament, to

affirm Hungary's historical identity and claim to self-rule (Figure 5.3). Count Gyulas Andrasy, who became the first prime minister of Hungary in 1867, was a great admirer of British liberalism and supported Imre Steindhal's Gothic Revival design, which was inspired by the British example.²⁵ As Endre Danyi has noted, while 'the classical Austrian parliament building was meant to be the manifestation of universal values and ideas, its Hungarian counterpart was supposed to emphasise the uniqueness of the Hungarian people and their thousand-year-old state. This is the reason why the late 19th [sic] century building is full of historical references to medieval princes, kings, and queens',²⁶ such as Arpad and St Stephen. Both the British and Hungarian parliaments, therefore, distanced themselves from Greek models of democracy. The Hungarian building, in particular, illustrates the use of Gothic and ethnic-historical motifs to express the vision of a separatist and ethnic Hungarian democracy. But Greek models too could be employed in an ethnic way by modern European nations, as discussed in the following section.

[Insert figure 5.3 here]

Figure 5.3 'Parliament building, Budapest'

Source: © 2005 Dirk Beyer CC BY-SA 3.0 / Adapted by User:IgnisFatuus, Wikimedia

Commons (cropped). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Budapest_Parliament_4604.JPG

From Civic to Ethnic Hellenomania

As argued above, the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries were dominated by what we might call, a political, civic Hellenomania. It was a movement for universal liberty, equality, and fraternity, whose most significant expression was the building of parliaments—

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houses of the representatives of the will of the people—inspired by ancient Greece. The second half of the nineteenth century also saw a quite distinct but similarly widespread attachment to another side of ancient Greece, which we might call, ethnic Hellenomania. Ethnic Hellenomania did not entirely replace but threatened and sometimes even subdued the core impulses of its civic counterpart.

Civic Hellenomania had promised universal human emancipation, solidarity, and inclusion regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, or social background. The ethnic view saw nations as old, historical communities, based on ‘blood’ (in the sense of ethnic, i.e. genealogical continuity) and the transmission of cultural traditions from one generation to the next. Consequently, ethnic Hellenomania produced exclusivist and particularist tendencies which made access to the Greek world depend on proof of Greek ancestry. It adopted as its focal theme the Greek body and the Greek cult of the body—the Greek concern for physical health, strength, and beauty. The primary site of its cult was no longer the city, but the open air and the individual bodies of citizens. Ethnic Hellenomania sought to reproduce in the bodies of modern young men and women the beauty of ancient Greek youth. The new body-centred Hellenomania was therefore an emphatically aesthetic movement. Furthermore, it gave physical identity a central place in the definition of nations. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it would dominate the lives of many European nations.

Among the factors which turned European attention to the Greek body were Winckelmann’s taste for ancient Greek art; the development of the new science of physical anthropology; and the importation into Western Europe of original specimens of fifth-century BC Greek art, the most prominent example of which was the British Museum’s acquisition of sculptural fragments from the Parthenon.²⁷ In his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der*

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Griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst (1755), Winckelmann had advocated the imitation of the Greeks—not only their art, but also their political freedom and aesthetic education, which had shaped Greek art itself. By reaffirming the perfect beauty of Greek art, Winckelmann also posited the supreme physical beauty of the Greeks themselves. The beautiful bodies of young Greek men, moulded through physical training in the gymnasia, provided the raw material for that ideal beauty expressed in Winckelmann’s principle of ‘edle Einfalt und stille Größe’ and epitomised in works such as the Laocoön and the Apollo Belvedere. **28**

The rise of physical anthropology as a new science of man also focused attention on the Greek body. Its ‘father’ was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), the German anthropologist, physiologist, and comparative anatomist of the University of Göttingen. Physical anthropologists divided mankind into ‘races’, a category intended to enable organisation of the wide diversity of human physical traits into a stable and finite system of more or less permanent physical types, whose characteristics were transmitted from one generation to the next through biological inheritance. Their attempts produced a large number of typologies or classifications, depending on the physical traits each scientist focused upon, but many of which involved hierarchies of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ races ranked according to subjective judgements. **29**

Through the idea of race, physical anthropology tried to make ethnicity (in the sense of genealogical continuity) visible, by tracing physical similarities among peoples in time and space. It also sought to explain cultural diversity through racial determinism, claiming the co-variation of physical with cultural, including linguistic, traits. **30**

The notion of Aryan superiority and Semitic inferiority was one of the most influential theories of racial determinism. It complemented the polarisation of inferior Black and superior White races and had a direct impact on the European continent. It produced, on the one hand,

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movements of national physical regeneration, and, on the other, new and pseudo-scientific forms of prejudice against the Jewish and other communities. The Aryan race theory was a misapplication of a purely and specifically philological distinction proposed by the Oxford-based German philologist, Friedrich Max Müller, in lectures on language to English audiences in 1859–1861.³¹ Racial determinists incorporated Müller’s purely linguistic distinction between two major linguistic families—the Indo-European or ‘Aryan’ and the Semitic³²—into their racial classifications, producing one of the most destructive myths of the twentieth century. The most influential representative of the dogma of Aryanism was Count Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), who praised the Germanic nations of northern Europe as Aryans and dedicated his hugely influential *Essai sur l’Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1853–1855) to a German sovereign (George V of Hanover). His ideas would form the basis of Nazi racial ideology, although, it must be noted, he was not anti-Semitic.³³

Despite divergences in scientific opinion over the very idea of race, what united all scientists interested in human anatomy and physical health was their common appreciation of the Greek body. Influenced by Winckelmann’s neoclassical aesthetics, European scientists saw the ancient Greek body as represented in surviving Greek art as the fullest realisation of human physical perfection—even if later writers departed from Winckelmann’s love for the Apollo Belvedere, preferring what they considered to be more realistic sculptures.³⁴ On the basis of this sculptural evidence (however badly copied or idealised we now know it to have been) and literary sources, such as physical descriptions of Homeric heroes, physical anthropologists saw the Greek body as the fullest embodiment of the white, Indo-European, Indo-Atlantic, Aryan or Caucasian race, also called *homo europaeus*. This was believed to be the superior human race, excelling in beauty, intelligence, language, morality, and strength. Physical anthropologists

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tended to describe the Greeks as blond and the Greek head as a perfect oval, with regular and symmetrical features, and noses that were perpendicular, continuing their foreheads. They also saw in ancient Greek sculpture, and especially in fifth-century BC Athenian sculpture, a specifically Greek conception of beauty: the beauty of the well-balanced athletic body. As a result, physical anthropologists and medical scientists explained the beauty of the ancient Greeks as the result of two factors: race and athletics. Greek athletic institutions, most notably the gymnasia, cultivated the natural beauty of the Greeks in ways that made their bodies healthy, robust, muscular, symmetrical, and well-proportioned.

These anthropological ideas, which saw in the Greek body the physical type of the European race, turned all Europeans into potential Greeks. At the same time, there was a broad consensus, even among critics of ideas of European racial superiority and racial determinism, as well as critics of the very idea of race (e.g. Friedrich Max Müller, Matthew Arnold, Jules Michelet, Georges Clémenceau, and others), that care for the body as practised in the ancient Greek gymnasia was necessary for the physical regeneration of modern nations. It was widely held that modern human bodies were being destroyed by the sedentary and indoor life of industrial civilisation whose centres were the unsanitary north European cities.³⁵ As George Mosse has observed, the Greek physical ideal was implicated in all European nationalist movements, ‘whether German, Czech or Jewish’.³⁶ The leading Zionist Max Nordau, for example, promoted ‘muscular Judaism’.³⁷ And in the context of international competition for power, wealth, and prestige, there arose in Europe a new competition as to which nation looked more Greek. I shall here concentrate on Germany, Britain, and France.

It was in Germany that the Greek physical ideal found its first modern practical application as a national and liberal ideal in the *Turnverein*, the German gymnastics movement.

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Founded by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1862) as a patriotic organisation in 1809, the *Turnverein* involved rigorous physical training which was both Greek and innovative. The Greek influence on Jahn's exercises came from their debt to Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths (1759–1839), who had led the slow rise of gymnastics as a form of physical education and method of individual self-perfection in late eighteenth-century Germany, and had 'created gymnastics largely from ancient exercise'.³⁸ The core of his curriculum consisted of the Greek pentathlon (discus, javelin, jump, running, wrestling), but GutsMuths also innovated by combining the pentathlon with several new exercises he himself invented.³⁹ It should be noted that GutsMuths believed that the exact replication of the Greek physical type was unattainable. Consequently, he urged his phlegmatic and over-refined contemporaries to emulate the energy and robustness of both the ancient Greeks and the ancient Germanic tribes.

While retaining GutsMuths' repertoire, Jahn substituted the German tribal ancestor for GutsMuths's Greek man as the supreme example of modern health and physical vigour. Jahn was also innovative, adding to GutsMuths's gymnastics the horizontal bar and parallel bars. Jahn's gymnastics movement developed in the context of German defeats by France in the Napoleonic Wars and in the spirit of Fichte's anti-French patriotism.⁴⁰ Its aim was to build a strong, 'soldierly' national body that could fight against French occupation of German lands.⁴¹

Becoming part of regular school curricula after 1815, the gymnastics of GutsMuths and Jahn were seen, especially in the prelude to German unification in 1871, as a way of becoming German: 'Gymnastics our way, Germanness our aim'.⁴² German liberalism, and with it, civic conceptions of the German nation, receded after 1815 (with only a brief interlude in 1848–1849), and especially in the course and aftermath of German unification, which was accompanied by more authoritarian and culturally exclusive (e.g. anti-Catholic) concepts of the German nation.

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Some of these concepts developed an exclusive ethnic and racial Hellenomania which became associated with anti-Semitism. Nazi Hellenomania would be a continuation as well as transformation of what Eliza M. Butler described, in 1935, as the spiritual tyranny of Greece over Germany, which went back to Winckelmann.⁴³ Nothing epitomises this better than Hitler's pursuit of a marble replica of the *Discobolus*, finally purchased in May 1938 for 5 million lire from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Figure 5.4). The statue was displayed in June of that year in the Glyptothek in Munich, and featured prominently in the opening sequence of Leni Riefenstahl's documentary on the 1936 Berlin Olympics (*Olympia*, 1938).

[Insert figure 5.4 here]

Figure 5.4 'The Discobolus Lancellotti', Roman copy of a fifth-century BC Greek original by Myron, Hadrianic period, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome

Source: © 2013 Carole Raddato CC BY-SA 2.0

www.flickr.com/photos/carolemage/11398129933/

In Britain, ethnic Hellenomania became centred on the English. It was the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox, mentioned above, 'the real founder of British racism', who, through his lectures and books produced one of the most influential genealogies which connected the English with the ancient Greeks.⁴⁴ In 1850, Knox published his major work, *The Races of Men: A Fragment*, followed by a second edition in 1862. It was illustrated with drawings of the Elgin Marbles, the Cnidian Venus, and other specimens of ancient Greek art. On the basis of this sculptural material, Knox described Greek men as 'large limbed' and 'athletal', while 'fair and flowing locks, full bosomed, fleshy, and large limbed, seem to have been the characters of Grecian women; look at the Niobe, the Venus of Gnidios [sic] and a hundred others'.⁴⁵ Knox

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traced the genealogy of the 'classic' Greeks to a north European race which he called the 'Scandinavian' or 'Saxon', which arrived 'early in Greece, say 3500 years ago'⁴⁶ and interbred with the 'aboriginal Pelasgic hordes' who inhabited Greece and Macedonia.⁴⁷ From the intermarriage of all these people, with further admixtures of Celtic and perhaps even 'Slavonian blood', 'arose a new race of men (. . .) a mixed race', which produced Greek civilisation, but which was 'destined to cease at a given period' because 'a mixed race [is] an anomaly on earth'.⁴⁸ Knox claimed that ancient Greece owed the beauty of her people to the Scandinavian or Saxon element. This 'classic' type which, according to Knox, could no longer be found in Greece, could now be found in England: 'the streets of London abound with persons having this identical facial angle [the Greek profile]; and it is in England and in other countries inhabited by the Saxon or Scandinavian race that women resembling the Niobe, and men the Hercules and Mars, are chiefly to be found.'⁴⁹ The same belief in the physical-genealogical identity of the English and the Greeks was held and propagated by British followers of the theory of the Aryan race. These included the president of the Royal Academy, Frederick Leighton, and the politician and novelist Benjamin Disraeli. Indeed, Disraeli accepted the Aryans as the 'chosen race', in which he included both the English and the Jews.⁵⁰

Having a Greek body did not just depend on genealogical/racial inheritance. It was also the result of Greek education, and especially of Greek physical education. And it was this combination of *aretê mousike* with *aretê gymnastikê* that Thomas Arnold introduced to English public school education during the 1840s, as headmaster of Rugby school. The Greek athletic ideal spread quickly from the public schools to the universities, becoming a characteristic feature of English middle- and upper-class society.⁵¹ English enthusiasm for Greek athletics involved rowing, swimming, and boxing, and the invention of new ball games, such as rugby, devised at

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Rugby school during Thomas Arnold's headship.⁵² It also involved the assimilation of the traditional English game of cricket into the Greek canon. For example, Walter Pater, in his 1894 essay 'The Age of Athletic Prizemen', readily recognised in the English cricketer the Greek Discobolus.⁵³ Pater and others also recognised Greek Discoboli among working-class young men, among 'half-stripped navvies, and [in] the titanic forms of men employed in gas and other plutonic works'.⁵⁴ The English had become Greek.

For others, however, Hellenism alone was inadequate for a rounded personality. Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) argued that 'Hellenism' had to be combined with 'Hebraism'—crucial notions borrowed from the renegade German-Jewish poet and writer Heinrich Heine (1797–1856). 'Hebraism' meant both Judaic morality and its extension and continuation in Christian, and especially Protestant, morality.⁵⁵ In his *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold, following Heine, emphasised the complementarity of 'Hellenism' and 'Hebraism' as natural human dispositions, expressing a new humanism—'the essential unity of man'. Most probably with Darwin in mind, Arnold declared that science had 'made visible to everybody the great and pregnant elements of difference which lie in race, and in how signal a manner they make the genius and history of an Indo-European people vary from those of a Semitic people'.⁵⁶ Racial differences were, however, less important than those affinities that united different races into common humanity: 'nothing more strongly marks the essential unity of man than the affinities we can perceive, in this point or that, between members of one family of peoples and members of another'.⁵⁷ Both Heine and Matthew Arnold tried to bring to an end the traditional Christian rejection and mortification of the flesh. The Greek-inspired celebration of the human body and its incorporation in a more balanced view of man as mind, soul, and body represented a radical cultural change, which also influenced national attitudes to the body across Europe. But the

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reconciliation of Hebraism and Hellenism was not presented as a way of becoming national—it was a way of becoming human.⁵⁸ It was a reaffirmation of civic and universalising Hellenomania.

French interest in physical culture, ‘la culture musculaire’, emerges later in the nineteenth century. It was partly the result of deep national trauma—the loss of the French German-speaking provinces of Alsace and Lorraine following French defeat in the Franco–Prussian war of 1870–1871. This humiliating national defeat prompted the emergence of new and specifically ethno-racial conceptions of the French nation, aimed at French revenge and recovery of the lost provinces. French hostility was to haunt Germany and contribute to the outbreak of the First World War, after which the provinces were finally returned to France in 1918.⁵⁹

Ethno-racial conceptions of the French nation competed and coexisted with the civic conceptions of the Third Republic, which replaced Louis Napoleon III’s defeated Second Empire. At the centre of these new visions, which combined with a strong militarism, was the Greek physical ideal. Claims to Greek ancestry and thereby to Greek physical-racial powers or, rather, potential powers gave the French a sense of superiority over the Germans.⁶⁰ They led the French to believe that they could become militarily superior to the Germans and thus defeat them *en revanche*. This they could do by developing their Greek body to its full potential through physical education.⁶¹ French claims to Greek ancestry were justified by reference to archaeological and textual evidence for Greek settlements in Provence from the sixth century BC, which suggested intermarriage between the local Gauls and the Greek colonists. This Mediterranean identity rejected the Frankish, ‘Germanic’ north with its centre in Paris and celebrated the Gallo-Graeco-Roman Mediterranean South of France, and especially Provence, as the source of French identity and the centre of modern French national regeneration.⁶² A

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Provençal Renaissance ensued as both a literary and a national revival movement. The poet Joachim Gasquet (1873–1921) celebrated his native land's new status in his 1899 poem, 'Chant filial':

Les hommes de ma race à leur sang sont liés.

Dans la Provence d'or flotte l'air de l'Hellade

[The men of my race are linked to their blood.

In golden Provence floats the air of Hellas] **63**

By developing their bodies as their Greek ancestors had done, the French would regenerate the degenerate and feeble bodies of those defeated at Sedan on 1 September 1870, Victor Hugo's *l'année terrible*.

A new cult of the athletic body and life in (or regular trips to) the Mediterranean South of France, with its warm sun and fresh air, thus emerged in the aftermath of this national humiliation. The ideas of Hippolyte Taine (an Aryanist and arch-champion of classical Athenian notions of physical strength) became immensely influential; even some Catholic opinion championed a new, 'muscular Catholicism', or, as the French painter Paul Signac described it, a 'catholicisme sportif'. **64** For the Catholic, anti-Darwinian anthropologist Charles Rochet, 'Every human being must have a beautiful body, as well as good health; the Creator does not recognise as being His Creation other than beautiful and healthy beings' (my translation). **65** And he urged the French to imitate 'la vie naturelle' of 'la belle race des Hellènes'. **66** Active life in the Southern sun and open air would also enable the French to achieve the skin colour of perfect humanity—'rouge' or 'cuivré' [red or bronze]—bronzed by the sun. **67**

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French cult of the Greek athletic body was also expressed in the proliferation of journals such as *La Revue Athlétique*, founded in 1890, or *La Culture Physique*, founded in 1904, with their illustrations of statues of ancient Greek athletes.⁶⁸ Voluntary gymnastic associations also proliferated as another manifestation of the new physical concerns satirised in Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881). The names of these associations bear witness to the patriotic and specifically *revanchiste* motives that lay behind their formation: *La Régénératrice*, *L'Alsace-Lorraine*, *La Revanche*.⁶⁹ Gymnastics also acquired an official and, indeed, obligatory status on a national scale: Article 1 of the 1882 law of Jules Ferry, which made primary education obligatory as well as '*laïque*' for both boys and girls, also made 'La gymnastique' obligatory in primary education. Furthermore, it made military exercises compulsory for boys.⁷⁰ This form of military gymnastics was pursued in French primary schools until 1890.⁷¹

Thus after 1871 there was 'broad agreement' in France that 'the country must work to outstrip the Germans in the very areas in which Germany excelled: warfare, science, and the education of its citizens', including gymnastics.⁷² But French ethnic Hellenomania of the post-1871 period of *revanchisme* and sense of national insecurity had a darker side. This was expressed, first, in the anti-Semitism that manifested itself in the Dreyfus Affair from 1894 onwards and divided the nation in complex ways;⁷³ and second, in the rise of monarchist and reactionary movements opposed to the Republican ideals of the French Revolution, such as the irredentist and proto-fascist review, *L'Action Française*, founded by Charles Maurras.⁷⁴

Yet French enthusiasm for Greek athletic institutions led to the revival of the Olympic Games where, once again, tensions between civic and ethnic Hellenomania come to the fore. Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937), the driving force in the Olympic revival, was also an admirer of the Greek athletic aims of English middle- and upper-class education. Inspired by Thomas

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Arnold, Coubertin achieved his Olympic goal in 1896, but transformed what had been a local-national, Panhellenic contest into a global, universal one. In this way, he established the Greek athletic ideal as an international ideal (the aforementioned ‘desire of all nations’) rather than confined to specific national or racial groups, despite his initial acceptance of some racist ideas. At the same time his Hellenomania had an ethno-national dimension, since it promoted athletic games and physical exercise for the joy and freedom that they would give to French youths. **75**

This intertwining of ethnic and civic conceptions of the healthy Greek body has a final and often overlooked impact among the French avant-garde. **76** It is most evident in the work of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. **77** The Impressionists, continuing the revolution that had begun with Édouard Manet, set out to be *peintre[s] de la vie moderne*—to show ever-changing modern life in ever-changing modern styles—and to break free from tradition, ‘sans référence au passé’. **78** After 1880, however, many painters of ‘la vie moderne’ revived ‘la vie ancienne’ in various ways. These artists removed the fashionably dressed or undressed French men and women of the Third Republic from the city and placed them nude, in the sunny Mediterranean landscapes, riversides, and coastlines of Provence, bathing, wrestling, running, or resting after physical activity. **79** Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), in particular, took an active part in the development and propagation of this new athletic and Southern vision of the French nation through the series of bathers (male and female in Cézanne, and almost exclusively female in Renoir) that characterise their oeuvre from the 1880s until the end of their lives. **80** The Greekness of these Provençal bathers is indicated by their poses and figural types. These usually derive from statues, such as the *pride of the Louvre*, the robust *Venus de Milo*, and fifth- and fourth-century BC statues of athletes and heroes, as well as the *Belvedere Torso*, often mediated through the nudes of the Italian Renaissance. **81**

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Cézanne's luminous and serene bathing nudes of the last twenty years of his life, set in the Mediterranean countryside around his hometown of Aix-en-Provence, were a new subject in his art. The Hellenism of this later work expressed Cézanne's regionalism—his *enracinement* in Provence (he called himself 'man of the South').⁸² He was intimately connected with members of the Provençal regionalist movement, such as the aforementioned poet Joachim Gasquet, and shared with Gasquet and his circle belief in the Hellenic roots of modern Provence and its destiny as the site of French physical and cultural regeneration.⁸³ In his book on Cézanne Gasquet associates the artist with Hippolyte Taine's 'culture musculaire', quoting him as saying: 'I like muscle, beautiful tones, blood. I'm like Taine.'⁸⁴ Such pronouncements may help us to understand Cézanne's series of male bathers with swelling muscles, such as *Le Grand Baigneur* of 1885 in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, or the *Baigneurs* of c.1890–1891 in the Hermitage and those of 1895–1900 in Baltimore (Figure 5.5). The massive square chest of the male bather facing the spectator in *Les Baigneurs au repos* of 1875–1876, in the Barnes Foundation, repeated in *Le Grand Baigneur* of 1885 in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, also conforms to Taine's campaign for strong, square chests for French men, and reproduces what Winckelmann had described as the 'grand and square' style of fifth-century BC Greek art.⁸⁵ In his review of the Second Impressionist Exhibition of 1877, the art critic Georges Rivière defended *Les Baigneurs au repos* of 1875–1876 by terming Cézanne 'un grec de la belle époque' and arguing that:

[Insert figure 5.5 here]

Figure 5.5 Paul Cézanne, *Bathers*, c.1890, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_C%C3%A9zanne_008.jpg

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ses toiles ont le calme, la sérénité héroïque des peintures et des terres cuites antiques, et les ignorants qui rient devant les *Baigneurs*, par exemple, me font l'effet de barbares critiquant le Parthénon.

[his canvases have the calm and heroic serenity of the paintings and terracottas of antiquity, and the ignorant who laugh at the *Bathers*, for example, impress me like barbarians criticizing the Parthenon].⁸⁶

Cézanne's series of bathers culminated in *Les Grandes Baigneuses* of c.1895–1905. In this final statement, the Provençal landscape is filled with young French women whose Greekness is unmistakable in their physique and poses, which reproduce famous Greek statues such as the *Venus de Milo*, the *Crouching Venus*, *L' Hermaphrodite endormi*, and others.⁸⁷

The classical turn in Renoir's art can be clearly dated to 1881–1882, during his trip to Italy and his exposure to the art of the Italian Renaissance and of Pompeii.⁸⁸ During this trip, Renoir's new female ideal emerged and came to bear all the features of the new French national ideal. He started producing beginning with *Baigneuse Blonde I* of 1881, a series of naked young girls who are innocent, healthy, strong, and, in the amplitude of their forms, especially their hips, fertile.⁸⁹ These images were personal attempts to bring about a new French Renaissance, which, like its Italian counterpart, would combine Catholicism with Greek religion—which Renoir defined as 'a religion of joy, beauty and love'.⁹⁰ Renoir's young girls gradually become more and more distant from the pale Parisian coquettes of paintings such as *La Balançoire* (1876), and more and more monumental and Southern, their bodies becoming increasingly pink, red, or copper-red. These warm colours are suggestive of exposure to the Mediterranean sun, and echo Rochet's description of the French as a Southern race, 'rouge' or 'cuivre' that I discussed earlier. Indeed, Renoir's girls live as he (mistakenly) thought the young girls of ancient Athens had done, bathing freely in the sea and rivers: 'Just as in Athens, the women are not at all afraid of

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the proximity of men on the nearby rocks,⁹¹ even if there are no men near Renoir's women. Renoir would sometimes call his later nudes 'nymphs', which further indicates their Hellenic links.⁹²

The change in Renoir's art from the 1880s onwards was not only thematic, a turn away from images of modern urban life towards more classical themes, but also stylistic. The stylistic change was classical in both its artistic prototypes and in its search for what Renoir described as the 'grandeur and simplicity of the ancients', echoing Winckelmann's 'noble simplicity and calm grandeur'.⁹³ The difference with Winckelmann's ideal was that Renoir's grandeur was massive (Figure 5.6). It is also worth noting that, unlike Delacroix, Cézanne, Maillol, and other French artists, Renoir disliked the *Venus de Milo*, seeing her as a 'big gendarme'.⁹⁴

[Insert figure 5.6 here]

Figure 5.6 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Bathers*, c.1918–1919, oil on canvas, H. 110; W. 160 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre-Auguste_Renoir_125.jpg

Unlike Cézanne, whose love of Provence and support of Provençal regionalism had deep personal roots, Renoir's attachment to the South was associated with the idea of reviving Provençal classical culture as a national culture. This idea, which was part of the 'collective cultural consciousness of late nineteenth-century France', sought to claim that France herself was a living survival of classical antiquity.⁹⁵ Renoir's move to Cagnes has been seen as evidence of his participation in 'new attention to the Mediterranean as the resort of France's Greco-Roman origins'.⁹⁶ It was this 'potent myth', as House has described it, that also pulled south Matisse, Signac, Seurat, and many other non-native artists of the *avant-garde*, alongside masses of French

men and women seeking regeneration.⁹⁷ It was again to Joachim Gasquet that Renoir famously commented:

What admirable beings the Greeks were. Their existence was so happy that they imagined that the Gods came down to earth to find their paradise and to make love. Yes, the earth was the paradise of the Gods . . . This is what I want to paint.⁹⁸

Consistently with his ideas, Renoir painted not only the Mediterranean paradise in his landscapes, but also the Greek gods and heroes who, like the men and women of Provence, were tanned by the sun, strong and healthy.

The current of Hellenomania to which Cézanne and Renoir contributed so creatively was so powerful that if a foreign artist, such as Picasso, wished to become French, this artist had to draw innovatively from the Hellenic tradition. Christopher Green has described Picasso's art as 'sometimes serious, more often ironic applications to belong as a French classicist'.⁹⁹ Picasso's *Three Women at the Spring* of 1921 exemplifies his enlisting in this strand of French Hellenomania. It was inspired by Jean Goujon and the three figures from the east pediment of the Parthenon which, he had known 'for many years from casts, illustrations, and his 1919 visit to the British Museum in London'.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Following the American and French Revolutions, Europe embarked on a long and complex process of nation-building. This involved redefinition of collective identities, appealed to the masses, and transformed radically the way of life of ordinary people. During the nineteenth and

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first half of the twentieth centuries two specifically ancient Greek cultural traits, and their material manifestations, helped to define modern European national identities in decisive ways: the citizen and the athlete. Indeed, the transformation of modern mass societies into ‘nations’ was achieved, at least partly, through programmes of mass Hellenisation.

While producing distinctive cultural currents across Europe, which I have called civic and ethnic Hellenomanias, the ideals of the citizen and the athlete could also be combined in a variety of ways, producing multiple, overlapping universalist and particularist permutations: for example, the citizen and the athlete could coexist in the ideal of what we might call the ‘citizen-athlete’ that we find, briefly, during German unification as well as in Britain and Republican France from the second half of the nineteenth century; muscular Hellenomania could be detached from particularistic, ethnic associations, and become universalised, giving rise even to muscular Judaism; muscular Hellenomania could become intertwined with national religious traditions, producing Protestant and Catholic varieties of Muscular Christianity; finally, the two Hellenic cultural traits underpinning civic and ethnic Hellenomanias, the beauty of the Greek body and the power of human reason, could be combined with both the Old and New Testaments—‘Hebraism’—offering a new path to becoming, first and foremost, human. These civic and athletic Hellenomanias found some powerful visual expressions in parliamentary architecture and the art of the *avant-garde*. The French *avant-garde*, in particular, saw in Greek sculpture a visual vocabulary for celebrating the beauty and vitality of the body and a stimulus for adapting the stylistic innovations of Impressionism to the making of modern works of art equally worthy of a museum.

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1 Haggai 2:7.

2 [Kohn \(2005\)](#) 574; [Smith \(1999\)](#); [Renan \(1996\)](#); [Hobsbawm \(1990\)](#).

3 [Berlin \(1976\)](#) 408.

4 [Baron \(1944\)](#).

5 [Barnard \(1983\)](#).

6 [Liebich \(2006\)](#) 579.

7 [Kohn \(2005\)](#) 574.

8 For example, see [Smith \(1991\)](#).

- 9 For a more detailed exploration of this theme, see [Leoussi \(2016\)](#).
- 10 OFPRA at www.ofpra.gov.fr/fr/histoire-archives/histoire-de-l-asile. Accessed 16 [November 2016](#) (my translation of French text). The 1793 constitution was never implemented. However, the principle was revived in the Preamble to the French Constitution of 27 October 1946, and repeated in the Preamble to the Constitution of 1958.
- 11 National Park Service: Statue of Liberty at www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/the-immigrants-statue.htm. Accessed 16 [November 2016](#). See also, [Gray \(1994\)](#).
- 12 National Park Service: Statue of Liberty, as above.
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- 17 [Goodsell \(1988\)](#) 291.
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- 22 Dányi (2012) www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2012/07/11/architecture-democracy. Accessed 2 December 2016.
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- 25 Hungarian Parliament, <http://hungarianparliament.com/history/>. Accessed 2 December 2016.
- 26 Dányi (2012) at www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2012/07/11/architecture-democracy. Accessed 1 December 2016.
- 27 Prettejohn (2012) 38–103.
- 28 Winckelmann (1764); see also Potts (1994), Jenkins (1992), Harloe (2013).
- 29 Bindman (2002).
- 30 Banton (1990); Challis (2013).

- 31 [Müller \(1864\)](#) 246.
- 32 [Müller \(1889\)](#) 46; [Poliakov \(1971\)](#) 216.
- 33 [Biddiss \(1970\)](#).
- 34 [Rochet \(1886\)](#) 262; [Knox \(1862 \[1850\]\)](#) 41; [Leoussi \(2001\)](#) 473, 474.
- 35 [Stanislawski \(2001\)](#).
- 36 [Mosse \(1993\)](#) 167.
- 37 [Leoussi and Aberbach \(2002\)](#); [Savidor \(1972\)](#) 664; [Umland \(2013\)](#) at http://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/505/. Accessed 4 February 2017.
- 38 [Lempa \(2007\)](#) 74.
- 39 [Lempa \(2007\)](#) 75.
- 40 [Lempa \(2007\)](#) 85.
- 41 [Surak \(2012\)](#) 175; [Mosse \(1993\)](#) 167.
- 42 [Surak \(2012\)](#) 175.
- 43 [Butler \(2012 \[1935\]\)](#).
- 44 [Curtin \(1973\)](#) 377; [Challis \(2010\)](#).
- 45 [Knox \(1862\)](#) 403.
- 46 [Knox \(1862\)](#) 46–7.
- 47 [Knox \(1862\)](#) 14.
- 48 [Knox \(1862\)](#) 14.
- 49 [Knox \(1862\)](#) 403.
- 50 [Leighton \(1896\)](#); [Poliakov \(1971\)](#) 241; [Borgstede \(2012\)](#) 87.
- 51 [Holt \(1990\)](#).

- 52 [Leoussi \(1998\)](#) 120–3.
- 53 [Pater \(2011\)](#) 282.
- 54 [Moody \(1873\)](#) 18.
- 55 [Leonard \(2012\)](#) 120–1; [DeLaura \(1969\)](#).
- 56 [Arnold \(1990\)](#) 141–2; [DeLaura \(1969\)](#).
- 57 [Arnold \(1990\)](#) 141–2.
- 58 [Stone \(1998\)](#) 196.
- 59 [Tombs \(1992\)](#) 713–19.
- 60 For the persistence and reinforcement of the cult of muscularity in France during the Second World War, not only inside the pro-Nazi Vichy government, but also in the *maquis* Resistance, see [Pearson \(2009\)](#) 108.
- 61 For a fuller discussion of the transformation of French national identification after the Franco-Prussian War, see [Leoussi \(2009\)](#).
- 62 [Leoussi \(2009\)](#).
- 63 Gasquet quoted in [Athanassoglou-Kallmyer \(2003\)](#) n. 100, 292.
- 64 [Werth \(2002\)](#) 197. Irish nationalism also developed a form of athletically oriented, ‘muscular Catholicism’, in the 1880s. See [McDevitt \(2002\)](#).
- 65 [Rochet \(1886\)](#) 262.
- 66 [Rochet \(1886\)](#) 246, 232.
- 67 [Rochet \(1886\)](#) 246, 232.
- 68 [Garb \(1998\)](#) 55–7.
- 69 [Holt \(1981\)](#) 47.

- 70 To see the full text of Jules Ferry's law on primary education, go to French Sénat at www.senat.fr/evenement/archives/D42/mars1882.pdf. Accessed 7 October 2011.
- 71 [Riordan & Krüger 2003](#): 106.
- 72 [Revel \(1995\)](#) 5.
- 73 [Harris \(2011\)](#).
- 74 [Affron and Antliff \(1997\)](#).
- 75 [Charreton \(1985\)](#) 34.
- 76 For a fuller discussion of the role of the French artistic avant-garde in French pursuit of physical regeneration, see [Leoussi \(2009\)](#).
- 77 [Isaacson \(1980\)](#).
- 78 [Cachin \(1983\)](#) 392.
- 79 [Dymond \(2003\)](#) 353–70; [Werth \(2002\)](#).
- 80 [House \(1998\)](#).
- 81 [Prettejohn \(2012\)](#); [Leoussi \(2009\)](#).
- 82 [Krumrine \(2000\)](#) 35.
- 83 [Athanassoglou-Kallmyer \(2003\)](#).
- 84 [Kendall \(1989\)](#) 306. Note that Gasquet's accounts of Cézanne are not always accurate.
- 85 [Jenkins \(1992\)](#) 22.
- 86 Rivière, cited in [Conisbee and Coutagne \(2006\)](#) 233.
- 87 [Krumrine \(2000\)](#) 214.
- 88 [Herbert \(2000\)](#) 220.
- 89 [House \(1985\)](#) 252.

90 [Herbert \(2000\)](#) 51

91 Renoir quoted in [House \(1985\)](#) 240.

92 [House \(1985\)](#) 250.

93 [House \(1985\)](#) 232.

94 [Herbert \(2000\)](#) 80–1.

95 [House \(1998\)](#) 25.

96 [Herbert \(2000\)](#) 81.

97 [House \(1998\)](#) 25; [Herbert \(2000\)](#) 81.

98 Renoir quoted in [House \(1998\)](#) 25.

99 [Green \(2000\)](#) 210.

100 [Green \(2011\)](#) 3. The same turn of the artistic avant-garde towards athletic physical types,

both female and male, is observable elsewhere: in England, the Pre-Raphaelites become transformed into ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry [and Art]’; in Germany, the Jewish avant-garde artist, Lesser Urry, turns to painting muscular images of Biblical Jews, e.g.

Rebecca at the Well (c.1908); see [Leoussi \(2015\)](#); and [Leoussi and Aberbach \(2002\)](#).