

## Athlete's equipment

A **strigil** and an **aryballos** were the basic cleaning equipment used by a Greek athlete. A strigil is a bronze tool with a curved, hollowed blade [Education 15; Body beautiful 40]. An aryballos is a small, round pot with a very narrow neck and a flat mouth; oil was shaken instead of poured out of an aryballos [Education 16, 24, 27; Body beautiful 6–8, 43]. Athletes used an aryballos to carry oil, which they smoothed over his skin before exercise, and a strigil to scrape the oil and dirt off their skin afterwards.

Strigils and aryballoi help us to identify images of athletes in Greek art. They first appear in vase painting in the second half of the 6th century BC when athletic festivals grew in importance: athletes are depicted with aryballoi dangling from strings tied around their wrists. Vases and sculptures also show athletes holding strigils and sometimes even using them. The *Apoxyomenos* by Lysippos (4th century BC) would have held a strigil (now lost) and gives us a good idea of the scraping gesture.

Strigils and aryballoi are often found in graves [History: Rhitsona grave 145]. They appear on gravestones to show that the dead person was an athlete. Ancient Greeks thought an athlete was a good citizen because he was physically fit and therefore prepared to defend the **polis** (city-state).

We know strigils and aryballoi in graves were not just symbols, because some of the aryballoi were filled with oil. If the afterlife was anything like life, the athlete would need these tools there too.

*Leslie Bonaventura*

