



College Year in Athens

BEYOND THE SKAMMA: A SYMPOSIUM ON GREEK ATHLETICS IN MEMORY OF HAROLD 'HAL' EVJEN



Saturday 22 June 2024
10:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Daphne & George Hatsopoulos Hall
College Year in Athens
5 Plateia Stadiou, Athens (2nd floor)

Conference Program & Abstracts

10.30 Welcome and Introductory remarks

11.00 Angelos Papadopoulos (College Year in Athens):

Preparing for War? Sports and status in the Bronze Age Aegean pictorial arts

The aim of this paper is to show how representations of sports and athletics (in the modern sense) depicted in the pictorial arts of the Bronze Age Aegean can be connected to images of military and hunting prowess. Namely bull leapers and boxers, wrestlers and acrobats can be associated with warfare, hunting and violence in general. This is by no means a new notion, but this paper intends to provide a different approach and through the deconstruction of the pictorial elements, the symbolism of a selected number of pictorial media will be discussed and compared. The owner/ bearer or commissioner of these artworks could or rather should be considered a person of high status as these objects possibly function as insignia for the few rather than simply luxurious works of art.

11.30 Thomas Scanlon (University of California, Riverside):

Masculinity and the Popularity of Violent Sport in Ancient Greece

The history and practices of the violent combat sports in ancient Greece have been well documented, but what has been missing is a discussion of their exceptional public popularity and their crucial role in the construction of masculine identity. Some indices of their esteem are the wide depiction in vase painting, inscriptional references to combat athletes, and testimonia in literature. Of particular interest here is how this evidence reflects and defines the intense interest in violent sport among the ancient audience, and how these sports validate or heroize the violent behavior of males in society more generally. We will note how the Greek phenomenon has parallels to the violent spectacles in ancient Rome and to violent sport in modern society.

12.00 Coffee break

12.30 Nigel Kennell (University of British Columbia):

Dreaming of Victory: Athletes and Athletics in the Oneirocriticon of Artemidorus

The dreams of athletes and about athletics are noticeable by their frequency in the *Oneirocriticon*, the manual of dream criticism that is the sole remnant of a thriving later Greek subculture. The frequency of these dreams no doubt reflects the outsized profile athletics enjoyed in the popular culture of the time, but is also the product of Artemidorus's method of collecting his material through visits to major athletic festivals in (mostly) mainland Greece and Italy. Unsurprisingly, athletes' concern for victory is reflected in their dreams, while outside the world of the gymnasium and festival, the success of ordinary people in overcoming their tribulations was often expressed through athletic imagery too. In my talk, I draw on recent scholarship to examine this imagery and its significance, according to Artemidorus, in order to clarify the range of ways in which victory and its opposite, defeat, might be expressed for athletes as well as the wider public.

13.00 David Braund (University of Exeter):

Running with horses at the Olympics: Kalpe in athletics, geography and mythology

Kalpe is among the more obscure competitions of ancient Greek athletics, though it was included in major festivals. It was a race that required the athlete both to run with his horse and to ride it. In myth Achilles is said to have practised the art on the banks of a Bithynian river, which was therefore named "kalpe". Elsewhere Gibraltar might be named Mt. Kalpe, for reasons about which we may only speculate.

13.30 Lunch break

14.30 Olga Palagia (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens):

Posthumous portraits of athletes

When Pausanias visited the sanctuary of Apollo at Amyklai, he saw a portrait statue (eikon) of the athlete Ainetos, who had won the pentathlon at the Olympic Games, only to drop dead while he was being crowned. We do not know why his posthumous portrait was erected at the Amyklaion rather than in Olympia, but it had to be an idealised image not an exact likeness. The date of his victory is also unknown. Further examples of idealised portraits of long-dead Olympic victors are recorded, the most notable examples being two portraits of pankratiasts created by the sculptor Lysippos in the fourth century BCE, of Polydamas of Skotoussa erected by his city in Olympia and of Agias of Pharsalos, set up by his great grandson, Daochos, at both Delphi and Pharsalos. This paper explores the phenomenon of posthumous portraits of athletes set up either in Olympia or in other sanctuaries and hometowns to commemorate athletes famous for their extraordinary exploits.

15.00 John Karavas (College Year in Athens):

Ancient Greek athletics: An experimental component

This presentation looks on the hands-on and experiential approach that we follow during the course entitled Sports, Games and Spectacles in the Graeco-Roman World, whereas the main emphasis is on confirming questioning, or refuting the available primary sources with regard to how ancient Greek athletic events were actually performed.

15.30 Georgia Tsouvala (Illinois State University):

Female Teenage Athletes in the Graeco-Roman World: Parthenoi as an Age Group

There is a highly developed technical vocabulary for the different male age groups in Greek athletics, such as pais, neos, ephebos, aner, and several other gradations in between, that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood, but there has been little interest in creating one for the female groups.

This is part of the strong denial in modern scholarship of the participation of women in athletic facilities and contests of the East (except in Sparta which has been explained away as “an aberration”). But females participated in gymnasia and palaistra and competed in local and panhellenic games. Like their male counterparts, they had the support of their families and achieved fame, citizenship beyond their own polis, and prizes. In this paper, I will focus on the age groups for female athletics in general and on the parthenoi of Greek literature and epigraphy in particular. While the word parthenos and its Latin equivalent virgo (usually translated into English as “virgin,” “maiden” or -more recently- “young woman”) have very strong ties with Christianity, I will argue here that the term is one among the three female age groups (paidēs, parthenoi, and gynaikes) associated not only with the transitional phases from childhood to adulthood but also with their education and athletics.

16.00 Coffee break

16.30 Robert K. Pitt (College Year in Athens):

Some new inscriptions from Athenian gymnasia

This paper presents a set of inscriptions related to athletics, gymnasia and the ephebate from Hellenistic and Roman Athens that were discovered in the manuscripts of the French 18th-century traveller Michel Fourmont. They add interesting nuggets of information about groups of young men in athletic competitions at the city’s gymnasia and include the first dedication in our sources by neoi from a torch-race.

17.00 Wendy Raschke (University of California, Riverside):

Athletics, Cult, and the coming of Christianity at Olympia

The identity of major ancient athletic festival sites faced a critical turning point with the transition to Christianity. Was the change to involve a subversion of pagan culture to Christianity, or did it call for a complex reorientation between the temples of gods as patrons of body culture and the churches extolling the spiritual? A case in point is the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia, site of the Olympic Games, the Temple of Zeus, and the workshop of Phidias. The workshop was eventually turned into a Christian church. Why the Christian community chose to appropriate it rather than the Temple of Zeus itself is something of an enigma. Certainly the basic form of the workshop is similar to that of the Temple. Was the choice of the Christian community determined by the size of the building, by location, or by other considerations? Were the games a factor? This study examines some new possibilities.

17.30 Nikos Tsivikis (College Year in Athens & IMS/FORTH):

Late Antique uses of stadia in Greece: The case of Messene

Athletic and agonistic traditions in the Greek world seem already to be changing by the Roman imperial period. By the time of Constantine ancient athletics is almost an echo of past practices, and this process of change is difficult to reconstruct as Late Roman and Early Byzantine sources offer only limited insights. A possible avenue to explore further the late evolution of athletics or other festival events is to examine closely the material remains of these processes. The aim of this paper is to scrutinize the material evidence from the main athletic venues, the stadia buildings of Greece, and though this commentary to frame the fate of Late Roman and Early Byzantine athletics. A special position will be given to the stadium of Messene in the southwest Peloponnese, that has been systematically excavated and thus offers sufficient evidence for the fortunes of such a building in the 3rd to 4th centuries and beyond.

18.00 Concluding remarks and Reception

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