



Eros and Greek Athletics

By Thomas F. Scanlon

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Ancient Greek athletics offer us a clear window on many important aspects of ancient culture, some of which have distinct parallels with modern sports and their place in our society. Ancient athletics were closely connected with religion, the formation of young men and women in their gender roles, and the construction of sexuality. Eros was, from one perspective, a major god of the gymnasium where homoerotic liaisons reinforced the traditional hierarchies of Greek culture. But Eros in the athletic sphere was also a symbol of life-affirming friendship and even of political freedom in the face of tyranny. Greek athletic culture was not so much a field of dreams as a field of desire, where fervent competition for honor was balanced by cooperation for common social goals.

Eros and Greek Athletics is the first in-depth study of Greek body culture as manifest in its athletics, sexuality, and gender formation. In this comprehensive overview, Thomas F. Scanlon explores when and how athletics was linked with religion, upbringing, gender, sexuality, and social values in an evolution from Homer until the Roman period. Scanlon shows that males and females made different uses of the same contests, that pederasty and athletic nudity were fostered by an athletic revolution beginning in the late seventh century B.C., and that public athletic festivals may be seen as quasi-dramatic performances of the human tension between desire and death. Accessibly written and full of insights that will challenge long-held assumptions about ancient sport, *Eros and Greek Athletics* will appeal to readers interested in ancient and modern sports, religion, sexuality, and gender studies.

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Editorial Review

Review

"There is a wealth of anecdotal material for the careful student of ancient sexuality...the book needs to be in the library of every scholar of antiquity, ancient athletics, and sexuality." --Journal of the History of Sexuality

"[An] excellent new study of the sexual dimension in Greek sport.... Scanlon also provides us with an enlightening glimpse of Greek women in the heroic age.... Scanlon's richly informative book represents a culmination of a lifetime's study of ancient athletics. It is amply illustrated and does not lack humour."--Erich Segal, *Times Literary Supplement*

"Throughout this in-depth survey, Scanlon treats the evidence thoroughly and judiciously. Frequent summaries keep the reader focused on the forest. Illustrations accompany many of the vases and artifacts discussed... The book is a trove of bibliography and insights into most aspects of athletics in Greek culture. Most importantly, Scanlon has enriched our understanding of Eros, that most potent force in every culture."--*Bryn Mawr Classical Review*

"Rewarding. Readers will find much interesting information on Greek athletics and the varied sources for it. The section on games for women will be of particular use to many."--*Classical Outlook*

"A work of considerable arete in bringing together the literary and artistic connections between Eros, the Greek god of love, and Greek athletics.... The book would be an excellent reference source for anyone interested in ancient Greek culture, ancient athletics/sports studies, gender studies, or classical studies."--*H-Net Reviews*

"A leading expert on ancient sport, Scanlon moves athletics from the periphery to the center of our understanding of Greek life. What used to be denied--the erotic power of athletics in Greek culture and society--is now explained. Brimming with insights, this sophisticated, balanced, and compelling examination of the integral role of athletics in Greek culture and society should be read by all classicists and sport historians. Insightful, sophisticated, and persuasive, Scanlon's work makes a major contribution to our understanding of the social and cultural significance of Greek athletics."--Donald G. Kyle, University of Texas at Arlington

About the Author

Thomas F. Scanlon is at University of California, Riverside.

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