

Ancient Greek Athletics

By Stephen G. Miller

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The earliest Olympic games began more than twenty-five-hundred years ago. What were they like, how were they organised, who participated? Were ancient sports a means of preparing youth for warfare? In this lavishly illustrated book, a world expert on ancient Greek athletics provides the first comprehensive introduction to the subject, vividly describing ancient sporting events and games and exploring their impact on art, literature, and politics. Using a wide array of ancient sources, written and visual, and including recent archaeological discoveries, Stephen Miller reconstructs ancient Greek athletic festivals and the details of specific athletic events. He also explores broader themes, including the role of women in ancient athletics, the place of amateurism, and the relationship between athletic events and social and political life. Published in the year the modern Olympic Games return to Athens, this book will be a source of information and enjoyment for anyone interested in the history of athletics and the origins of the world's most famous sporting event.

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Ancient Greek Athletics By Stephen G. Miller Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Scientific American
As the Olympic Games open in the land where it all began, it is both fitting and delightful to sit down with this beautiful, informative book. Miller, an archaeologist and professor of classics at the University of California at Berkeley, brings the ancient Greek athletic festivals to life by reconstructing the scene at one of the Panhellenic games and explores broader themes such as the integral role they played in society and politics. For almost 12 centuries, beginning in 776 B.C. at Olympia in the Peloponnese (not at Mount Olympus, as one often hears), the games were so popular that nothing was allowed to stand in the way; even battles were temporarily halted in deference to the athletic competition. Olympia was the site of only one of four major contests; the others were at Delphi, Isthmia and Nemea. The closest visual link to the classic athletic festivals comes from paintings on amphoras, huge vessels that held as much as 39 liters of olive oil. These were offered as prizes at the games; one side depicted the event for which the prize was given. Modern fans would find other striking differences between today's contests and the original games: There were no second-place prizes--you won or you lost. There were no team sports. Fouls were punished by flogging. Athletes performed nude. By the fourth century A.D., with the spread of Christianity and the waning of belief in the Greek gods, the games "ceased completely to play any meaningful role in society." They were revived in something resembling their modern form in 1896.

Editors of Scientific American

From The New Yorker
This exhaustive survey by a Berkeley archeologist covers not only the Olympic Games but the related festivals at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea (where Miller is in charge of excavations), and uses evidence from vase painting, statuary, and the remains of ancient stadiums to elucidate such details as halteres (special weights used by long jumpers) and the hysplex, a complicated gate intended to prevent false starts. By our standards, many of the events were brutal; an unfortunate boxer named Kreugas had his intestines ripped out in a bout at Nemea. But Miller identifies a specifically Greek ideal in the fact that the athletes, regardless of social standing, competed on equal footing and would even submit to flogging if they fouled. This is a far cry from the behavior of the Roman Emperor Nero, who breezed through Greece in A.D. 67, winning some eleven hundred events; at Olympia, he fell out of his chariot and failed to finish the race but was still awarded the victory crown.
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Review

"Concise yet comprehensive, and wonderfully illustrated . . . the crowning glory of a lifetime’s work in the field."—James Davidson, *Daily Telegraph*

"Excellently documented and marvelously illustrated."—Mary Beard, *Times Literary Supplement*

"Written with clarity and grace, Miller's work exemplifies arete, the excellence of virtue that the ancient Greeks sought to embody. For lay readers and scholars alike."—*Library Journal*

"Miller explores a myriad of engrossing subjects that are relevant today, among them the link between sport and recreation, women and athletics, and the effect of the games on international politics. . . . The book wins a gold."—David Steinberg, *Albuquerque Journal*

"Appraising the literature, the painted pottery and the ruins, S. Miller's scholarly, readable, well illustrated and elegantly produced book reviews the cultural, political and social history."—*Antiquity*

"This is a book with enough insight to make it difficult to put down. It is rare to find scholarship made as completely accessible as this."—Richard Edmonds, *Birmingham Post*

"This fine book marks the coming-of-age of the study of ancient Greek athletics as scholarly enterprise. . . . Particularly valuable are the vivid reconstruction of the ancient Olympic program and the lucid discussion of the evidence for female athletic contests in ancient Greece. Essential. All collections; all levels."—*Choice*

"A superior piece of work in its own right and by far the best general survey of Greek athletics that is currently available. It will appeal to all non-specialists interested in Greek sport, would be an ideal text for any college-level course on this subject, and will provide specialists with a useful reference tool. . . . [This book] will facilitate the teaching of Greek athletics to undergraduates. Instructors who teach ancient Greek athletics at the college level are fortunate to find themselves, finally, in a position to put Gardiner to the side and use a text that is engaging, informative, and up-to-date."—*Journal of Sport History*

"The best of the new books on the ancient games . . . the locus classicus for the history of sport in Greece."—Jenifer Neils, *Odyssey*

"The best of the new books on the ancient games is *Ancient Greek Athletics*.. . . This book will serve as the *locus classicus* forthe history of sport in ancient Greece."—Jenifer Neils, *Odyssey*

"As the Olympic Games open in the land where it all began, it is both fitting and delightful to sit down with this beautiful, informative book. Miller . . . brings the ancient Greek athletic festivals to life by reconstructing the scene at one of the Panhellenic games and explores broader themes such as the integral role they played in society and politics."—*Scientific American*

"*Ancient Greek Athletics* is terrific. A winning combination—erudite and exciting. Miller takes the crown. This authoritative and accessible handbook shows what we can—and cannot—know about Greek athletics."—Donald G. Kyle, University of Texas at Arlington

"Stephen G. Miller has written the finest, most complete and most useful account of ancient Greek Athletics that I have seen. It rests on a thorough knowledge of all the literary and material evidence and adds a thoughtful and unmistakable love for his subject."—Donald Kagan, author of *The Peloponnesian War*

"Miller's *Ancient Greek Athletics* nowtakes the crown as the most complete and authoritative treatment of the subject in any language. In particular, the massive collection of illustrations and statuary is unparalleled and makes the text easy to interpret."—Frank Frost, professor of ancient history emeritus from UC Santa Barbara

"An olive wreath to Miller for producing an eminently readable, generously illustrated, and comprehensive text on Greek athletics. A *must-read* foreveryone interested in the role of sport in the ancient world."—Jenifer Neils, author of *Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*

"Everyone interested in sports will want to own this book, which is a lucid introduction to the ancient athletics and an authoritative resource for the scholar. Miller draws on new information, some of which he himself discovered while excavating at Nemea, to show us in detail how athletes trained and how the various competitions were managed. The book introduces us to a world different from our own in which athleticism

was a means of honoring the gods, while reminding mortals of their limitations, where there was one winner and many losers, and where the modern categories of professional and amateur did not apply."—Mary Lefkowitz, Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities, Wellesley College, author of *Greek Gods, Human Lives*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kim McLoughlin:

Here thing why that Ancient Greek Athletics are different and reliable to be yours. First of all examining a book is good but it depends in the content of the usb ports which is the content is as yummy as food or not. Ancient Greek Athletics giving you information deeper as different ways, you can find any e-book out there but there is no guide that similar with Ancient Greek Athletics. It gives you thrill reading journey, its open up your own eyes about the thing which happened in the world which is possibly can be happened around you. You can actually bring everywhere like in playground, café, or even in your method home by train. Should you be having difficulties in bringing the imprinted book maybe the form of Ancient Greek Athletics in e-book can be your alternative.

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