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This and related questions await further study, for which B.'s systematic and thorough book now serves as a solid point of departure.

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Sebastian Scharff, *Hellenistic Athletes: Agonistic Cultures and Self-Presentation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. 369 pp. ISBN 9781009199957.

Sebastian Scharff has contributed a work of painstaking scholarship—or to steal a phrase from the Hellenistic Callimachus, a σύμβολον ἀγρυπνίας. (Chapter 3 alone has 707 footnotes.) His book will engender future breakthroughs in understanding the phenomenon of Hellenistic sport and, most important, Hellenistic culture. However one defines the Hellenistic period, it is a crucial entry point for understanding what happens subsequently in the athletics of the Greco-Roman era.

The Hellenistic Age was a time of innovation, boldness, and with that, excess. ‘Spectacularization’ (p. 36) is an apt neologism for the enhanced facilities for the audience as well as the *hysplex*, elaborate starting gates for the runners. The impulses of the age are writ large in its politics, art and literature, and, indeed, athletics.

Needless to say, periodization finds only rough consensus, especially in regard to athletics. Much of what we see is quite familiar from earlier centuries, and many differences are a matter of degree. S. properly invites reflection on what to include (p. 5) as Hellenistic, and his convention of keeping the label for the period from the reign of Alexander to the death of Kleopatra is sound: witness the *periodos* growing from the Pindaric four great athletic festivals to the expanded *periodos* of Imperial times (27).

It can only be a good thing that our gaze and the scholar's intense focus turn to these post-Classical centuries. There is much that will seem contemporary to us. (The energetic efforts to raise the prestige of a festival to international status, for example, as seen in Kos, Miletus and Magnesia (20–1) might strike us as familiar, as nations vie for the opportunity, not infrequently a financial disaster, to host the Olympics and World Cup events.)

S. is consistently careful about the fragmentary state of the evidence. He properly dismisses the fantasy that posited archaic amateurism and purity against presumed Hellenistic corruption and decline (pp. 1–3). S. is not swayed by current fashion, either. He respectfully parts company with the contemporary, rather polemical rejection of Jakob Burckhardt's perspective of an *agonales Wesen* in Greek civilization (9, note 49). (One could, in fact, reasonably connect the expanded number of age categories at the local festivals [38–40] with the undimmed Hellenic desire to be recognized as the best, somewhere, somehow.)

In chapter 2, S. turns to key features of Hellenistic athletics. He discusses the elaborate system of announcing the games (*epangelia*), increase in the number of athletic festivals, expansion of the number and features of the facilities themselves, prizes for the athletes, sponsorships, and corruption.

The gravamen of this volume comes in the chapters that follow. These take up the question of how victorious athletes present themselves, principally in the epigrams that

celebrate their success, supplemented by other epigraphic evidence from victory monuments. The book makes full use of the seminal study of Joachim Ebert¹ and intensively studies the New Posidippus, the sensational twenty-first-century publication of the recently obtained papyrus text. S. reads the texts with care and sensitivity to literary style. An elegant example of this is S.'s exposition of the Kleonikos epigram (Ebert 65; Peek 11). He notes how delicately the epigram omits the father's name, which given the Doric ending of the named brother suggests deliberate avoidance of the victor's non-Milesian origin. He also pays close attention to prosopography, much of it built upon the solid structure of the Mannheim Database of Hellenistic Athletes, which Christian Mann, Sofie Remijnsen, and S. himself created.²

Starting with the 'heavy' athletes (pankration, wrestling, boxing) of Miletus, S. provides abundant evidence for the advantage that athletic victory provided for a political career. It is another reminder that participation even in the most formidable, bloody, and dangerous sports was in no way an obstacle to a career in political leadership and was likely a contributing factor. Aristocratic families remained represented in Miletus (66–72). The same is true for Elis (142–3) and Messenia (176–8).

In the self-presentation of the athletes, S. demonstrates the 'themes and variation' aspects, contextualizing the variations in the circumstances of the athletes and the politics of the day. Some of the persistent themes are familiar all the way back to Pindar, particularly ancestry and mythology. The deep-seated Greek sense of competition, *das agonale Wesen*, surfaces often. Athletes desire to be the first to accomplish something, even if it is only to say they were the first from their city to achieve a distinction. This trajectory will only intensify, as discussed below.

The question emerges, for example, whether the high premium placed on athletic victory in Rhodes (87–8) was a compensation for aristocrats after the loss of Rhodian territory in the second century BCE. In a culture as agonistic as ancient Greece, so driven toward personal distinction, sport was always a crucial outlet for ambition that could otherwise be destructive to social and military order. S.'s suggestion that Thebes placed conscious emphasis on strong, youthful combat athletes (100–12) is provocative. Some of that emphasis and success is clearly born of necessity, since the poverty of the city after the devastating assault of Alexander and, centuries later, Sulla, was not likely to leave the level of wealth for equestrian investment.³ An intriguing theory is that the osteoarchaeological evidence S. cites for a meat diet might bespeak a culture focused on building bodily strength. If the hypothesis of conscious emphasis on young combat athletes is correct, it is another example of athletic success as 'compensation' for political and military decline. It is worth recalling here the words of Epeios, the victorious boxer in the funeral games for Patroklos: he admits being undistinguished in war and therefore is ferocious about proving he is the best boxer. It seems a natural consequence not only for an individual, but for a polis to turn to sport as such compensation, as it saw its geopolitical status diminished.

¹ J. Ebert, *Griechische Epigramme auf Sieger an gymnischen und hippischen Agonen*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972.

² See mafas.geschichte.uni-mannheim.de/athletes/

³ This reviewer is not convinced that *pammachos* is Theban jargon for pankration (p.100): it figures in a notable agonistic context in the Hymn to Zeus in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 169.

In this regard, S.'s explanation for the apparent Athenian retreat from panhellenic competition (112–33) seems unsatisfying. Even with the expansion of civic contests and the Panathenaia and Theseia, it seems odd that the lure of the Big Four would not have remained. There are surprises that do not always lend themselves to ready interpretation, but it is very good to think, for example, that Akriai and Kyparissia, small towns in the Peloponnese, produced Olympic victors (189–91) and can be grateful to S. for keeping that before us.

S. pays attention to the valence of polis and region and provides some plausible historical explanations for the predominance of one or the other in victory celebrations. As S. notes, our evidence is hardly robust, and we may be surprised in the future, but his arguments are soundly reasoned. For Rhodian aristocrats, the ancestral link to the pre-synoecism polis communities seems to surface in the language of the inscription celebrating athletic victory. In Thessaly, the region famed for its horses predominates over the local polis in the celebration of equestrian victory.

S. provides convincing explanations for the variation in the approach of Hellenistic royalty toward athletic competition, drawing on the different practices of Philip, who did participate, and Alexander, who did not. The contrast that S. draws with the Seleucids and Antigonids is dramatic. The intensity of Ptolemaic athleticism and the emphasis on the Macedonian identity of the dynasty is a phenomenon, however, that is still not fully explained. The series of eight small bronzes, five of which were found in Egypt, perhaps offers a clue. They show a wrestler trapping and locking the arm of an opponent, sometimes with barbarian features, adding pressure to the hold by commandingly stepping over him. The features of Ptolemy III Euergetes and Ptolemy V Epiphanes are discernable in the face of the victor in different variations of the statuette.⁴ Thus, in addition to the presentation of the dynasty, both male and female, as equestrian victors, the Ptolemies seem to revel in the pre-Hellenistic trope of Greek superiority over barbarians as an intensification of their legitimacy as Hellenes.

Chapter five, on participation of non-Greeks in Greek athletics, 'Becoming Greek through Athletics', is one of the most exciting analyses of the volume. In speaking of the Sidonian Diotimos' victory epigram, for example, S. notes what he calls a 'subversive submission'. That is, reminding the reader through mythological genealogy that this Sidonian ruler is not only ultimately of Greek pedigree, but that that pedigree, via Cadmus, conveys the ancestral superiority of founding Thebes (279–83). The robust discussion of Romans integrating themselves into local Greek communities (288–96), and in one case, the ethnic community, is important for understanding the operational principles of the Romans abroad. It brings to mind what Arnaldo Momigliano described in *Alien Wisdom*.⁵ The Romans, hardly altruistic, were, nevertheless, very good at this.

The brief section on Jews in the gymnasium stops short of the depth it needs. The Book of Jubilees 3:31, close in time to the Maccabean Revolt, expresses a vehement objection to public nudity: 'They should cover their shame and should not uncover themselves as the Gentiles uncover themselves'. The flash point, moreover, went in both

⁴ H. Kyrieleis, 'Kathaper Hermes kai Horos', *Antike Plastik* 12 (1973), 133–47. The figurines are more likely depicting a wrestling scene, rather than pankration.

⁵ A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

directions. Admittedly after the period that S. sets as Hellenistic, the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians (41 CE) documents that many Jews craved admission to the gymnasium, and the Greek population of Alexandria was angry about this. Philo Judaeus' intense interest in Greek athletics deserves mention, as do sections of the Mishna that show that Jews did indeed visit the Greek athletic facilities.⁶

It would be both unfair—and mean-spirited—to criticize a book for what it does not do outside of its stated scope. It is worthwhile to consider lines of research to which S.'s work would point. The connection of success in sport and political success that we see in the Hellenistic age continues, indeed seems to amplify, in the Imperial period. The inscription honoring the 2nd century CE pankratiast Marcus Aurelius Asclepiades,⁷ for example, shows where the lust for distinction that S. so well describes in the Hellenistic age was heading. In addition to all the prestigious offices he held and the many cities in which he was a citizen, the long inscription from Rome honoring him offers a series of three alpha-privative adjectives, *aleiptos*, *asynexostos*, *anekkletos*, the second of which only appears twice-again in Greek, and in reference to him.⁸

Another aspect to which S. hints (see p. 106) is the evidence that spiritual and intellectual achievement were part of the persona of the great athletes, including those in pankration and boxing. Asclepiades, as noted, held membership in the Mouseion of Alexandria, which suggests at least a desire to be seen as a person of intellect in addition to his athletic and political distinction. He was not alone in that self-presentation. The praise of Kallicrates in an inscription from Aphrodesias, for example, observes he was renowned, 'among all men throughout the world because of the perfect wisdom that was the object of his dedicated effort... he took care of his soul'.⁹

These are only thoughts for research that could build upon this volume. What Sebastian Scharff has given us is a treasure trove of carefully researched and documented insights into Hellenistic sport and Hellenistic culture that will lead to a more nuanced and profound understanding of that era.

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⁶ S. Liebermann, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942, at 92–7.

⁷ IG 14.1102 (=IGR 1.153 = Moretti, *IAG* 79 = *IGUR* 1.240). See also IG 14.1104 and *Corp. Pap. Hermop.* 7.2.3.

⁸ M. Poliakoff, 'ΑΣΥΝΕΞΩΣΤΟΣ', *ZPE* 44 (1981), 78–80.

⁹ *MAMA* 8.417 (=L. Robert, *Hellenica* 13 [Paris, 1965] 134–47).