

Simon, Erika. *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Pp. xx, 122. Index, plates, figures, notes.

The festivals of the ancient Greeks have been the subject of much study, and one might dismiss this latest book as another re-examination of the work done by L. Deubner (*Attische Feste*, 1932) and H. W. Parke (*Festivals of the Athenians*, 1977). *Festivals of Attica*, however, presents some new and well-documented theories surrounding the interpretation of the rites, meanings, and origins of Athenian festivals.

Erika Simon, Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Wurzburg, has published widely in the past twenty-five years, concentrating on post-Bronze Age Greek art, history, and religion. The six chapters of this book were Mary Flexner Lectures given at Bryn Mawr. Investigating some thirty of the hundreds of Athenian festivals, the volume incorporates recent archaeological and literary evidence into its arguments.

Simon's study, though not as encompassing as Deubner or Parke, is a complement to and an update of these classics. Sport historians interested in antiquity have always turned to Deubner, Parke, and others such as M. P. Nilsson and A. W. Pickard-Cambridge because they are proved references for Attica's festivals. Motivated by new finds, studies, and theoretical methodology, there has been a recent trend to re-analyze the Greek festival rites categorized by Deubner, Parke, and Nilsson. These studies have been undertaken with the same intensity and enthusiasm as were those studies at the turn of the century and in the 1930s. Along with the Walter Burkert's survey of festival agons included in *Homo Necans* (English translation, Berkeley, 1983), Simon's *Festivals of Attica* is one of these new studies. What distinguishes Simon's work from Burkert's and others is that *Festivals of Attica* is at once a reference and critique to most of the latest work in this field and is also a source of new suggestions by a qualified scholar about the origin, development, and program of Athenian festivals.

Simon has concentrated her efforts on substantiating or rejecting our current understanding of Attic festivals. Several compelling themes of importance to sport historians arise from her contribution in this area. The information on the torch race goes beyond any other publication to date, adding to the existing knowledge of the ritual. Simon correctly states that it is difficult to interpret torch races in vase painting as belonging to a certain cult. Traditionally torch

racers are categorized as belonging either to the Prometheia, Hephaisteia, Panathenaia, Paneia, or Bendideia depending on the altar and form of head gear depicted on the vase.

A most creative theory of Simon's about torch races involves the youths with hydriai shown on the north frieze of the Parthenon. For Simon, they are not the metic girls most scholars see, but the four victors in the Panathenaia's torch race. That torch race prizes in the Panathenaia were always hydriai and not the usual amphorae and that the Panathenaia's torch races were run between Attica's four tribes are, I believe, the central facts which support Simon's hypothesis. The four youths on the frieze are torch race victors, one from each tribe at the Panathenaia.

The plate showing the Late Geometric cup with perhaps a dance at the Thargelia illustrates another intriguing concept for sport history. Simon tells us that if a dance at the Thargelia is shown on the cup, we have the earliest representation of an Attic festival.

There has been an on-going debate on the understanding of the ritual of the Arrephoria. Simon does not accept the ritual as either a fertility rite or as a rite of passage, nor does she concur with a new suggestion that the Arrephoroi carried balls to Aphrodite since this goddess liked ball games. Although the ball theory will be tantalizing to sport historians, Simon believes we shall never know what the Arrephoroi carried.

Although the author is not concerned with descriptive studies of origins like her predecessors, she does link some festivals—the Dipoliela, Brauronia, and Thesmophoria, to stone age hunting and agricultural rituals. Undoubtedly, Simon's ideas will not be the last in this debate as her theory on stone age origins is speculative and based on meager evidence. While origins are contemplated, none of the chapter contents venture further into the future than the classical period. Indeed, those festivals developed in the Hellenistic age were probably beyond the scope of the Flexner lectures. The material does clarify several mythical, historical, and sociological evaluations of ancient Greek festivals, but it is limited in that Simon chooses only certain festivals to deal with. Moreover, her "interdisciplinary approach" lauded on the dust jacket is sometimes confusing as in her discussion of the festival Aphrodisia. Functionalism, symbolism, myth, cult, and history are different levels of analysis which when combined do not substantiate a thesis, but serve to confuse it.

Though its lack of bibliography of modern authors, its briefness, and its sometimes tedious arguments limit *Festivals of Attica*, this is an exciting book for those interested in ancient festivals and agons. It is full of new suggestions about the rituals, traditions, and participants that comprised Attica's festivals.