

## Book Reviews

Miller, Stephen G., ed., with contributions by Ana M. Abralde et al. *Nemea. A Guide to the Site and Museum*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1990. Pp. xiii, 214. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$30 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

Since 1974 the site of Nemea, the original home of the Nemean Games, has been under systematic excavation by the University of California at Berkeley under the direction of Stephen G. Miller. These excavations deservedly have generated a great deal of interest. Here Miller offers us a concise but thorough guidebook to the site and the museum, one that lets both layman and scholar learn about ancient Nemea and its games.

Miller and his team deserve high praise for reconstructing the complex history (and mythology) of Nemea. He explains that the earliest foundation legend was not that of Herakles and the Nemean lion but rather one of funeral games held by the Seven Champions for the dead baby Opheltes. A hero shrine found at Nemea fits Pausanias' description of the shrine of Opheltes. Historically, the establishment of the games in 573 BC by the nearby city state of Kleonai is associated with the definition of the sanctuary, an early Temple of Zeus, and an early stadium. Oikoi (treasuries) were established in the first half of the fifth century, but the site soon experienced a pitched battle and a violent destruction, probably in the period 415-410 when Argos gained control of the site. The games were shifted to Argos and the site lay inactive for more than the first half of the fourth century. Around 330 there was a restoration of the games at Nemea and a major building program including a new Temple of Zeus, the Xenon and Bath, and the (later) stadium and its tunnel. This work was probably a result of Macedonian influence, and an inscription of 311 shows that Demetrios Poliorketes established a league which was to meet at Nemea. By the 270s the games were moved permanently from Nemea to Argos. Aratos of Sikyon, however, did temporarily establish alternative Nemean Games at Nemea around 235; and he blockaded those at Argos, breaking the truce and even capturing and selling into slavery athletes from the games at Argos. Violent and widespread destruction on the site ca. 235 BC is to be associated with Aratos or the returning Argives. There are no indications of games at the site thereafter.

Although the Nemean Games were held at a Panhellenic religious sanctuary, like Olympia, and not a habitation center or city, like Athens, Nemea's uneven history shows that the games were not immune to political or military intervention. Miller points out that the games actually took place at Nemea for less than a quarter of the millenium of their existence: "Nemea shows us that peace in the ancient world was an elusive goal" (p. 193). The Panhellenic impulse met with

considerable success, but it also encountered problems. There was a Panhellenic truce and an ideal that Greeks of different states could gather in peace to recognize their common culture. However, political interference and destruction layers at Nemea show that such ideals were cherished in the absence of their complete fulfillment.

In addition to descriptions of monuments and artifacts, this guidebook allows us to view the Nemean Games in their complete context as part a religious festival and the life of a sanctuary complex. The related activities of such Panhellenic Greek sport include religion, patronage, spectatorship, and administration. Here coins from the site shows us that spectators came from all over the eastern Mediterranean. We learn that Oikoi were built at Nemea, as at Olympia, by various states to operate as storerooms and meeting halls. We see the Bath and its associated Xenon or fourth-century hotel for athletes and trainers, with rooms for sleeping and eating. We find bases from victor statues, and even the buried dedication of athletic and drinking equipment (discus, halter, cups) after some competition in the pentathlon. Archaeology puts us in touch with ancient athletes here, how they prepared, worshipped, competed and celebrated.

With a heightened understanding of the broader context, we can go, in M. Goethals' account, to the stadium at Nemea, where excavation has revealed the physical arrangements for competition and spectatorship. Built in the fourth quarter of the fourth century, the stadium included several elements. A sidewalk and water channels with settling basins were provided for athletes and spectators; but, beyond a judges' stand and possibly some *prohedria* or "front row seats," there was little formal seating for the estimated 40,000 spectators, just some informal seating ledges cut into the bedrock at the south end of the stadium. The starting lines typically consisted of rows of stones with two parallel toe grooves for the erect stance of ancient runners, and with sockets for posts between lanes. A *kampter* post stood in front of the starting line, a little off center, to act as a turning post for longer races. At a later stage the starting lines were recut, and a *husplex*, a starting mechanism of uncertain operation, was added. The length of any Greek stadium is 600 feet, but Greek feet varied between sites, and at Nemea the length of the track is 178 m. There were markers at hundred foot intervals along the sides of the track, but in distances between markers, and in the width of the stadium over its length, there was a characteristic lack of exactitude of measurement. A remarkable find, the well preserved 36.35 m. long entrance tunnel runs at right angles to the track. It connected the stadium with the Sacred Way to the Temple of Zeus, and it created a dramatic entrance for athletes. Architecturally it reflects Macedonian influence at Nemea as well as the introduction of the arch into Greece at a time much earlier than traditionally thought. The tunnel is also a treasure for the graffiti found scratched into the stucco of its vault. Some of them can be associated with known figures: Akrotatos *kalos* here is probably the Spartan prince (and king of 265-252) of that name known for his beauty; and the Telestas recorded probably is the Olympic boy boxing victor of ca. 340.

The excavations at Nemea are ongoing, and one still needs to follow the annual reports in *Hesperia* until a final and complete excavation report appears. In fact, after the publication of this guidebook, last summer's campaign found a square building constructed ca. 325 in association with the tunnel to the stadium. This seems to have been an ancient "locker room," and Miller suggests it may represent an "architectural manifestation" of an increasing separation of athletes and society with the rise of professionalism (*The New York Times* Jan. 1, 1991). Such dramatic discoveries will necessitate some revisions, but this guidebook, with its clear explanations and helpful illustrations, will long remain a splendid introduction for those who want to understand the context of Panhellenic sport and to appreciate the expertise of the archaeologists unearthing ancient Nemea.

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