

GODDESS AND POLIS

THE PANATHENAIC FESTIVAL IN ANCIENT ATHENS

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH—September 12 to December 6, 1992

Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL—January 9 to April 16, 1993

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA—May 11 to August 1, 1993

The Art Museum, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ—August 31 to November 28, 1993

Neils, Jenifer. *Goddess and Polis. The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*. (With contributions by E.J.W. Barber, Donald G. Kyle, Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, and H. D. Shapiro.) Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1992.

Pp. 227. 24 color plates. 170 black-and-white illustrations. \$19.95 paper. \$49.50 cloth.

Athletic heroes of ancient Greece are the focal point of this first-of-its-kind exhibit of the Panathenaia which was organized by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH. This memorable traveling display has already attracted viewers to the Hood Museum in the fall of 1992 and can be seen in Florida, Virginia, and New Jersey during 1993.

The Panathenaic festival, one of 300 in Greece and one of four in Athens, was held every year with a "great" one every fourth year. It was established 200 years after the Olympics which probably explains why heretofore the public knew little of the Panathenaia. This was the only festival to commission artists to create awards and the only one to recognize both the winner and the runner-up in the competitions.

The guest curator, Jenifer Neils (Case Western Reserve University), in conjunction with Hood Museum staff, put together a creative design to educate, intrigue and entertain the viewers. The dominant content of the exhibit is a varied collection of earthenware vases, or amphoras. Their style is called "black figure" which is black artwork on a light (usually orange) background. As many as 1,300 amphoras, each holding 8½ to 10 gallons of olive oil, were commissioned for each Panathenaia. The importance of an athletic event could be ascertained by the number of amphora awarded the winner. The two-horse chariot race was the number one event with 140 amphora for the winner, with the men's footrace next at 100. The exhibit also includes other artifacts of bronze, marble and terra cotta and range in size from coins to a life-size statue of Athena.

The display area set aside for **Goddess and Polis, The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens** is divided into three semi-rooms: the first devoted to Athena, the second to athletics, and the last to ritual/tribal and an honoring of Athena. The focal point of the exhibit is the exquisite wrestler's amphora by the "Berlin painter" which commands a central spot in the middle room. The glass display cases are relatively small and one can move around all sides of each case; the lighting is appropriate such that every artifact is seen clearly and all accompanying texts are easily read. The four wall plaques containing more extended text are in large print and placed at a convenient height to accommodate the short/tall and young/old viewer.

The first plaque is an introduction to the exhibit; the second explains Athena in her various roles: Polias (of the city), Promachos (fighting in front), Parthenos (virgin), and Ergane (worker); the third explains the use of music at the festival; while the last plaque explains the Panathenaia. The total area of the three alcove rooms is such that one can stand at any one place and see the general layout of the whole exhibit. This latter aspect is an integral part of enjoying the totality of the Athens festival. A viewer can stand at the entrance to the exhibit and look all the way through the display to where

Athena stands against the back wall. Or stand with their back to Athena and look forward to the entrance and see the figure of Athena which graces the back of each amphora in the various display cases.

The educational aspect of the exhibit is enhanced by TOUCHSTAR, an interactive computer program which was researched and compiled by a Dartmouth College senior. The program is sophisticated, impressive and very user-friendly. It includes four general sections (ancient Athens, goddess Athena, religion, and competitions). Within "competitions," five areas are presented (arenas and rules, athletic contests, tribal, equestrian and music). Each category has clear text and excellent pictures, many in color.

There are two components of special interest to sport historians: the athletic representations and the catalog. The catalog is a magnificent reference manual, and should be perused BEFORE viewing the exhibit and again AFTER as it will enhance the enjoyment and understanding of the Panathenaic festival. The most notable of the catalog articles is "The Panathenaic Games: Sacred and Civic Athletics" by Donald G. Kyle. Support for the importance of this particular exhibit is expressed by Kyle as he writes "Future studies of Greek sport . . . will pay more attention to sport at the local level . . . a study of athletics at Athens provides our best chance to understand the interplay of cult, sport, and community—to see the significance of sport in the lives of citizens of an ancient Greek polis." (78) The catalog also includes an extensive glossary of terms and excellent commentary about each entry in the exhibit.

There is no question that this exhibit has succeeded in attracting and educating all ages as well as both the novice and the knowledgeable historian. This story-telling, creatively designed exhibit is definitely viewer-friendly and must be seen, as it will not only enhance the sport historian's understanding of athletics and athletes in ancient Greece, but it has opened the doors to a new awareness of the high regard placed upon athletics in ancient Athens.

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