

El Habashi, Zaki. *Tutankhamun and the Sporting Traditions*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1992. Pp. v, 154. Photographs, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$43.95.

El Habashi's *Tutankhamun and the Sporting Traditions* is the latest scholarly entry that combines interest in ancient Egypt with attention to one of the most pervasive cultural phenomena of antiquity—sport. The book is the culmination of extensive research conducted over 15 years, merging the author's interest in his ethnic ancestry with the enthusiasm for Egypt spawned by the success of the traveling exhibit "Treasures of Tutankhamun" which captivated American audiences in the 1970s.

The volume is divided into two parts—the first five chapters dealing with the general topic of the sporting tradition in ancient Egypt and the remaining three treating more specifically Tutankhamun and the pursuit of sport during that pharaoh's brief reign. Although the book's title purports a focus on sporting pastimes associated with the boy-king and the age during which he ruled, the book actually delivers very little of that. The weight of the text is concerned with tracing the history of sport throughout the very lengthy span of Egyptian history beginning with the Predynastic period and continuing into the New Kingdom and the Eighteenth Dynasty up to the advent of Tutankhamun. In an all-too-brief first chapter promising an historical overview of ancient Egypt, the author summarizes the evolution of outdoor activities as a response to an increasingly more complicated and

sophisticated environment. Those activities went far beyond the initial hunting-gathering subsistence strategies of the Prehistoric period that demanded physical prowess in order to sustain existence. El Habashi rightly maintains that Egyptian sport can be seen as reflecting a continuity of traditions and customs from an earlier period when physical activities were developed in order to survive. Although that point is well taken, perhaps too much emphasis is placed upon linking sport in Egypt during the historical period with earlier utilitarian activities. Certain athletic activities in Egypt were intimately linked with religion and cult ritual, and, in particular, a more in-depth discussion of the association between the very important pharaonic running race held at the Heb Sed festival and religious rite is lacking. So, too, with the issue of the pharaoh and the hunt. Many of the animals pursued by the pharaoh (like the hippopotamus) have symbolic significance and can be directly related to mythological texts. El Habashi does cite correspondences between the pharaoh stalking the hippopotamus with the myth of Horus subduing Seth who has assumed the guise of the animal during their deadly struggle for control over Egypt. But a more detailed discussion of the cosmic significance of the pharaoh's success in the hunt, especially during the New Kingdom, is warranted.

Any book dealing with antiquity must make use of a multiplicity of disparate sources to reconstruct the reality of the past. El Habashi's text is bolstered by various source materials, primarily archaeological. The author has taken care to examine the remains of sporting equipment in numerous museum collections in the United States, Europe, and Egypt; also surveyed are many non-transportable representations of athletic activities carved or painted on the walls of tombs and temples throughout Egypt. Archival materials from the Griffith Institute in Oxford and the Ashmolean Museum (including Howard Carter's notes on the artifacts from Tutankhamun's tomb and Harry Burton's photographs of the tomb objects) have been used to good advantage. One does wish, however, that the author would have relied more heavily on other primary sources like literary and epigraphic texts. The general reader may well be content with the often-cited secondary sources, but the academic reader will miss more scholarly references and will be troubled by the glossing over of important issues, such as the participation of women in sport and how different social classes engaged in athletic pursuits in Egypt. Given the amount of research that the author conducted, a synthesis of the evidence would be more appropriate rather than peppering the text with extensive quotes from secondary sources to substantiate points.

In his discussion of the lengthy history of sporting traditions in Egypt covering a period of almost two millennia, El Habashi treats his subject chronologically, ordering the material into chapters based on large units of time: the Predynastic and Archaic periods, the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and finally the Eighteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom. Although such chronological divisions may be necessary when considering the

political framework of ancient Egypt, the same chronological construct does not work as effectively with the history of sport in Egypt. The ancient Egyptians were extremely conservative culturally, and the changes manifested in sporting practices did not keep pace with chronological divisions; to impose such boundaries onto the material is somewhat artificial. The result is that the text is often redundant and points are repeated from chapter to chapter.

The real meat of the book is the discussion of Tutankhamun and sporting practices engaged in during the pharaoh's 10-year reign. Although the text deviates from discussions of sport and athletic pursuits for two chapters, armchair archaeologists and latent Egyptologists will appreciate the treatment of the tomb of Tutankhamun in Chapter 6. Those not familiar with the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the tomb in 1922 will be fascinated by descriptions of Howard Carter's attempts to locate the final resting place of the boy-king and Carter's diligent patience that was rewarded by his successful discovery hailed as the greatest archaeological coup of the century. Descriptions of the physical layout of the tomb and the position of some of the recovered objects, though not necessary *per se* for a discussion of sporting equipment, allow the reader to visualize the context of some of the objects the author treats in a later chapter. Chapter 7 contains material that is rather extraneous to the stated purpose of the book and sport historians may be troubled at its inclusion. The chapter attempts to come to grips with the historical Tutankhamun, covering such diverse topics as the nature and length of his rule following the turbulent reign of the heretic-king Akhenaten; the identity of Tutankhamun's family, with a lengthy discussion of his disputed parentage; the nature of his education; and the physical characteristics of the pharaoh. No doubt, El Habashi's aim was to present a well-rounded picture of the pharaoh, but the result is a lapse in the momentum that the book strives for as it reaches the final chapter—Tutankhamun and sport. It is here that there is an integration between previous discussion of Egyptian sporting activities and those pursued by the young king. El Habashi is to be credited with dealing with the most important objects from Tutankhamun's tomb which pertain to sport—either in the form of actual sport equipment used by the pharaoh during his lifetime or representations of the king engaged in athletic pursuits which decorate many of the most sumptuous objects found in the tomb.

As is the case with every book that deals with objects, it is always difficult to determine what can be illustrated and what articles must be omitted due to constraints of space and budget. Although the text is accompanied by 29 black-and-white illustrations, the reader will long for more. The quality of the photographs doesn't do justice to the artifacts, but the line drawings are helpful in reading details marred and abraded by time and weathering. The bibliography is extensive and the inquisitive reader will be directed to additional sources for further reading. One omission from the bibliography should be mentioned, however: Nicholas Reeves' *The Complete Tutankhamun*

(London, 1990) is requisite for any study of Tutankhamun and the age in which he lived.

El Habashi writes from his perspective as an expert in physical education and those in the discipline will find his book a welcome volume to the growing literature on sport in antiquity.

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