

Romano, David Gilman. *Athletics and Mathematics in Archaic Corinth: The Origins of the Greek Stadion*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society. 1993. Pp. xiii, 117. Notes, illustrations, index, bibliography. \$25.00 (hardcover), \$20.00 (paperback).

From the funeral games for Patroclus in Homer and the earliest Olympic Games onward, the footraces of the Greeks and the sites and facilities where the races were run have been subjects of interest and scholarly debate. Based on his dissertation and on archaeological work in Greece, Romano's book first lays its groundwork with a review of the origins and evolution of footraces and their venues, including a discussion of possible Near-Eastern precursors and literary, epigraphical, and historical evidence for Greek *stadia*. Next, Romano provides a good overview of the design of *stadia* by focusing on the archaeological evidence for *stadia* at Olympia, Isthmia, and Halieis, including abundant illustrations of the different sites. The most thoroughly and reliably excavated Greek *stadion*, that at Nemea, receives surprisingly little attention.

The main archaeological thrust of the book is the discussion of a curved starting line of a racecourse (*dromos*) from ca. 500 B.C. at Corinth, and the suggestion that "its unusual design has importance not only for an understanding of athletic activity in Archaic and Classical Corinth but also for the history and evolution of Greek and Roman athletics and athletic architecture for centuries to follow (p. 43)."

Romano proposes that the ancient architect designed the *dromos* with a curved starting line to ensure a fair start and an equal running distance for each runner. By using computer reconstructions of the curved starting line as part of the circumference of a circle, Romano suggests that the architect used the diameter of the circle formed by the starting line to locate "break points" on the racecourse. These break points mark the point in the race at which the competitors would have been allowed to leave their designated lanes. Methodologically, Romano relies heavily on elaborate computer reconstructions of

the sites. However, a projection is just that, an attempt to reconstruct something artificially, in this case a *dromos*, of which only a portion of the original remains. Such projections are impressive and intriguing, but their reliability remains proportional to the completeness of the evidence on which they are based. Unfortunately, most of the racecourse, including the areas where the break points and any western starting line would have been located, remains unexcavated. From the Archaic starting line at Corinth, Romano goes on to look at the starting lines from the classical *stadion* at Isthmia and then the Hellenistic *dromos* at Corinth.

If the ancient architect designed the Archaic starting line in the way Romano suggests, there are important implications for the state of Greek mathematics and geometry at the time of its construction. In short, as Romano points out, it would push back the date of Greek knowledge of the concept of pi, the mathematical relationship between the circumference of a circle and its diameter. Romano, however, is arguing from one isolated example, namely a single stage of a non-Panhellenic site, whose origin and meanings are little understood. Corinth produced its share of famous athletes and Romano includes a discussion of some of the athletes who could have used the Archaic *dromos*. Nevertheless, some of the items that make up this discussion, e.g., a list of Corinthian Olympic victors and quotations of Pindar, seem of little relevance to the argument about the design of a *dromos*. Romano also suggests that the length of the Greek *stadion*, 600 Greek feet, derives from Babylonian mathematics, in that 600 is the product of the base measures of the two Babylonian mathematical systems, 60 x 10. In the absence of specific evidence to establish a causal relationship, however, such an explanation remains speculative.

Romano prefaces his final discussion of the origins of the Roman circus with disclaimers about the lack of evidence concerning Greek and Etruscan venues for equestrian events. He then suggests a connection between the curved starting line of the *dromos* from Corinth and the curved starting line of the circus. Certainly, the "canonical" Roman circus of Imperial times (p. 98), as J. Humphrey has shown, had break points that were designed with a knowledge of *pi*. However, Romano's connection is by necessity very conjectural, since a gap of several hundred years separates the proposed model and any extant examples of its influence.

In sum, Romano offers an informative and clear survey of the evidence and sites of Greek *stadia*, but some of his provocative theories could use substantially more corroborative evidence.

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