SCANLON, THOMAS. *Eros and Greek Athletics.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. viii+466. $35.00 pb.

Are the origins of our modern civilization to be traced back to ancient Israel or to ancient Greece? My impulse is to say the latter, but a more reasonable reply is to view the West—our handy shorthand term—as the confluence of cultural streams flowing from Israel and from Greece (and from a number of other places as well). There is, however, one aspect of Western modernity that most definitely owes more to pagan antiquity than to early Christianity: our attitudes toward the human body. At best, Christianity has considered the material self inferior to the soul; at their worst, Christian ascetics have looked upon the body as a source of shame.

The Greek view was in stark contrast, and that contrast was most visible at Greek athletic festivals. At Olympia and other sacred sites athletes competed naked as a way to pay homage to the gods. Equally naked, they frequented their gymnasia. Scanlon has explored some obvious but seldom asked questions. Was there an erotic aspect to Greek athletics? Was there an "athletic eros" (p. 5)? These are questions that even now, five hundred years after the Renaissance began the recuperation of the human body, cause considerable embarrassment. Scanlon's book, which is actually a collection of loosely related essays, offers a subtle and wholly persuasive answer to these (and other) questions.

Not all the essays have an athletic eros as their focus. The first two chapters, "Greek Athletics and Religion" and "The Ecumenical Olympics—The Games of the Roman Era,"

are informed, informative, and rather out of place. Then comes "Athletics, Initiation, and Pederasty," which is more to the point. While rejecting the arguments of scholars who maintained that all Greek athletic festivals were initiation rites, Scanlon argues that there was a "liaison between pederasty and athletics" (p. 97) that dates from the seventh century B.C. In the classical period, this liaison became formalized in an educational relationship between a young athlete (the *erômenos)* and an older one (the *erastês),* a tutorial and sexual relationship that Scanlon prefers to describe as *paideia* rather than as "initiatory ritual" (p. 69).

"Racing for Hera—A Girls' Contest at Olympia" is a revised version of an earlier essay on the quadrennial Heraia at which girls ran races as part of a prenuptial initiation ceremony. Since many if not most of the girls at the Heraia were Spartan, there is an easy transition to the fifth essay, "'Only We Produce Men,'" a detailed examination of the Spartan system of physical education for girls. Driven by the need for robustly healthy mothers to produce generation after generation of hardy warriors, Sparta emphasized female athleticism as did no other Greek city. The Spartan *agoge* included the Dionysiades race whose "striking formal and structural parallels with the Heraia at Olympica" enable Scanlon to "characterize both as prenuptial races" (p. 135). This chapter ends with a postscript on an article by Richard Hamilton on "Alcman and the Athenian Arkteia" and with an appendix on Greek vases.

The analysis of Spartan female athleticism leads to a lengthy discussion of Atlanta. Looking closely at verbal texts and at the many visual depictions of the mythic hunter, wrestler, and runner, Scanlon rightly emphasizes the ambivalence or tension inherent in the very notion of a woman who "combined the epitomes of female beauty with male strength and valor" (p. 198). Unlike many feminist historians, Scanlon does *not* reduce men's responses to Atlanta to a misogynistic "fear of women," for which I am grateful.

The eighth essay, "Eros and Greek Athletics," contains the boldest statements of Scanlon's argument: "Until recently, convention wisdom told us that sports and sex were dissociated, if not antithetical activities; but cultural experience says otherwise" (p. 199). If there was any doubt that Greek cultural experience said otherwise, that doubt should now be permanently removed by the vast array of literary and visual evidence that Scanlon has assiduously assembled and carefully analyzed. The citations are apt. The illustrations are black-and-white and not always as clear as they should be.

The last chapter (except for some summary conclusions) is entitled "Drama, Desire, and Death in Athletic Performance." There are somewhat enigmatic discussions of Philostratus and of various athletic festivals, including the Spartan Dionysiades, the Athenian Arkteia, and the panhellenic Heraia. There is also a discussion of similarities between Greek drama and Greek athletics, both of which are agonistic. Scanlon asserts that the "Greek stadium is not so much a field of dreams as one of desire in which each participant yearns to excel" (p. 294). I suppose that's true, but I am not sure what to make of it.

Eros and Greek Athletics is the fruit of decades of careful study. Although it is rather a mixed basket—apples and oranges and maybe a few of Persephone's pomegranates—it is nonetheless a generous and welcome gift.

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