

Ancient Tyre: Its Hippodrome and Other Athletic Facilities

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Coins, inscriptions, the writings of ancient historians and the physical remains of the facilities are evidence of the spread of Greek and Roman culture to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean.

Festivals honoring Melkart (Heracles), the Phoenician god, continued in the Hellenistic period following the siege of Alexander. Stimulated by contacts with Rome, gladiatorial combat was introduced in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

The hippodrome (similar to the colosseum and seating 70-100,000) and a rectangular arena (with 5 tiered steps seating 2,000) were constructed during the 2nd century A.D. A palaestra of the same period was located adjacent to the baths and across a colonnaded street from the arena.

Coins identify games called Actia Heraclia in the 3rd century A.D. with heads of Roman emperors (Caracalla and Gallienus) appearing on the obverse side. A Greek inscription, declaring Eutychos of Ephesus winner of the pentathlos, is also dated to the 3rd century A.D. Eusebius records that Egyptian Christians were martyred at Tyre, presumably in the arena.

With the increased importance of the spectator, politicians carried favor through their sponsorship of the games.

ANCIENT TYRE		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Point of Interest</i>	<i>Source</i>
2750BC	Legendary founding of Tyre	Herodotus
970 BC	Hiram, King of Tyre festival of Melkart	Josephus
332 BC	Siege of Alexander success celebrated with games	Arrian
330-64 BC	Hellenistic Period 175-164 Antiochus Epiphanes IV festival, games gladiatorial combat	II Maccabees Gardiner
64-330 AD	Roman Period	
2nd AD	Palaestra, Arena, Hippodrome dated by archaeologist	Chebab
117-138 AD	Hadrian proclaimed Tyre a metropolis	
211-217 AD	Caracalla	
253-268 AD	Gallienus Actia Heraclia — coins	Hill
3rd AD	Christian martyr in arena Eutychos of Ephesus winner of Pentathlos	Eusebius
4th AD	Reference to circus (hippodrome)	Greek inscription Geographi Graeci Minores