
The Role of Women in Ancient Fertility Cults and the Origin of Sports

by
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It was the intent of this study to focus on the central role of women in fertility cults which in turn constituted the soil from which our modern sports originated.

The ancient cultures in the Mediterranean basin worshipped a universal mother goddess, who was associated with earth, agriculture, fertility, and death. The rites for this deity were conducted primarily by women who, perhaps, were identified with the goddess herself. In the course of fertility rituals, priestesses, as the votaries of the goddess, engaged in games which were regarded by the ancients as an effort to ensure good crops or control the seasons by magic. Thus, agricultural rites and festivals conducted by women were transformed, through slow evolution, into sports and games.