

# Introduction to the Photo-Atlas of Athletic-Cultural Archaeological Sites in the Greco-Roman World

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Citizens of all countries have come to accept the Olympic games as a singular title covering a unique form of competition in sports, dramatics, dance, music, and arts, whose history goes back to ancient Greece. Popularization of the term "Olympics" has overshadowed the existence of similar athletic-cultural competition in many other ancient cities in widely diverse areas of the classical world. Writings of a number of scholars who specialize in this field provides an extensive catalogue of cities, wherein games, festivals, and spectacles were held.

Research conducted in the period 1967-1983 resulted in a collection of over ten thousand colored slides and eight thousand black and white photographs taken by the author at over five hundred classical sites in twenty-five countries. Included among these are a considerable number of photographs taken at over two hundred on-site or nearby museums, containing artifacts directly related to or associated with each ancient city.

Field research was supported by in-depth reviews of on-site investigations made during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by geographers, military and naval observers, architects, and travelers. Such reports included geographic locations, maps, local landmarks, latitude, longitude and altitude figures, identification of nearby villages or towns and descriptions of existing structures accompanied by dimensions or distances. Travel guides in successive editions such as Baedeker, Hachette, Bann and others were used to fix points in time when certain "ruins" were still observable. These same travel books furnished maps of sufficient reliability to locate many of the sites.

A review of the work of the twentieth century archaeologists, dedicated frequently to a lifetime of research on a single site, furnished exact locations as well as data for interpreting the nature, extent and use of the many structures in each area.

Correspondance with archaeological societies of the countries provided resources in the form of suggestions, guide books, site manuals, maps and direct references to professional personnel in the field. The official tourist bureau of each country must be credited with furnishing maps and fairly accurate assessment of contemporary conditions in areas under their jurisdiction.

In view of the past loss as well as the potential disappearance of these landmarks, it seemed appropriate to capture what was left of the rich athletic-cultural heritage of the classical world. By use of the camera's impersonal eye it would be possible to arrest in time sheer evidences of this greatness before some new war or force of nature abetted by man's feverish quest for progress obliterated all.

In classical times large cities had separate facilities for each type of sporting interest. Rome, in its classical lifetime had eight circuses, two stadia, seven amphitheaters, five theaters, four gladiator schools, eleven public *thermae* (with numerous swimming pools, ball courts, *palestrae*), and two *naumachia* (with the possibility of converting several of the amphitheaters to this purpose.) This accounting does not include the private facilities maintained by wealthy Romans.

Smaller cities who could not afford separate huge facilities converted existing ones such as theaters to multipurpose use. Thus, the blocking off of several lower tiers of seats created a protective wall for the spectators. The space below accommodated many activities such as drama, dances, poetic recitals, music events, bear-baiting, gladiatorial events, boxing, wrestling, and, if properly waterproofed, even a miniature naumachia for water shows.

This research effort represents a definitive illustrated review of man's rich heritage, which in the beginning combined with athletics, dramatics, poetry, music, dance, architecture, sculpture, and painting to form the basic ingredients of the Greco-Roman festivals – games and spectacles.