

# E.N. Gardiner: Scholar, Gentleman, Sportsman

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Despite recent criticisms by H.W. Pleket, D.C. Young, myself and others, the works of E.N. Gardiner (1864-1930), such as *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals* (1910) and *Athletics in the Ancient World* (1930), remain standard and influential works on Greek sport, obvious starting points for ancient sport studies in the English-speaking world. The study of ancient sport is now moving past Gardiner to a point where, beyond simply *disproving* or *rejecting* many of his ideas, we need better to *understand* his views and his historiography. Gardiner is to the supposed decline of Greek sport what Gibbon has been to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

Why have modern trends in sport historiography, especially as reflected in Gardiner, reinforced a conventional but flawed modern view of Greek sport as undergoing a long and tragic period of decline? Why has this 'rise and fall' schema been so persistent, and why has it been under increasing attack of late? Was Gardiner a second-rate scholar? To what degree was Gardiner influenced by his Victorian cultural milieu (e.g. Athleticism, Amateurism, Humanistic Hellenism), his mentors (e.g. P. Gardner), and his own experiences as an athlete (in rugby), a scholar of Classics, and a schoolmaster (at Epsom College)? To what degree was he influenced by ancient sources (e.g. Philostratus, Aristophanes) and the ancient concept of decline in general? To what degree is sporting nostalgia traditional, universal and perhaps somewhat inescapable for all sport historians?

This paper examines and attempts to explain Gardiner's sport historiography and his concept of decline in the context of his life, career, and scholarship overall. Gardiner was a selective and engaged scholar led to misrepresentations by his convictions and enthusiasm. He eloquently said what he believed, and what he felt ancient evidence indicated, to an audience predisposed to believe the same things.