

# Stadium and Arena: Reflections on Greek, Roman, and Contemporary Social History<sup>1</sup>

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The use of sport for social and political ends, so clearly seen in the 20th century, is not a recent invention, and I will argue in this paper that we will see precedents for it in Greece and Rome: that is to say, some amount of conscious planning underlay the development of stadium and arena and their activities.<sup>2</sup> The observation that Greece and Rome developed substantially different forms of play and entertainment is not likely to occasion any surprise: these are, after all, different civilizations with profoundly different values. Although there are many times when the term Graeco-Roman is as precise as one can be, a sign of the mingling and interaction of Greek and Roman ways,<sup>3</sup> the Greeks and Romans were also aware of how different their cultures were, and we have appropriate observations preserved, one of them by such a thoughtful man as Vergil.<sup>4</sup> What I want to demonstrate in this article is that the differences that we will find between the world of the Greek stadium and the world of the Roman arena are consistent with larger societal patterns regarding the value of competition and the role of the individual in society, and we will find many contemporary issues mirrored in this history.

A brief examination of the role that sport and public shows have played in modern political and social interactions will help us frame the appropriate questions to seek the aetiology of ancient places of contest. John Hoberman has cogently demonstrated how acutely aware political theorists of the last century have been of the enormous power popular pastimes and spectacles can have.<sup>5</sup> “The character of an adult is clearly manifested in his play and amusements . . . we are able, and indeed obliged, to give the satisfaction of this desire a higher artistic quality, at the same time making amusement a weapon of collective education. . .” So Trotsky stated in a 1923 lecture, “Vodka, the Church, and the Cinema.”<sup>6</sup> Paul Franken argued in 1930: “If all the responsible functionaries of the proletarian cultural organizations would recognize that it is precisely the capitalist pleasure industry which is choking and paralyzing the socialist will to action we would have taken a giant step toward our goals.”<sup>7</sup> Showing a different sort of political psychopathology, Mussolini dreamed of having his ministers hurdle through flaming hoops in front of news cameras.<sup>8</sup> Hitler praised boxing above all other sports and desired that a throng of SS boxers demonstrate the superiority of the Reich: the Nazi posturing preceding the Schmeling–Louis fight, of course, made abundantly clear how much the cult of Aryan virility was bound up in that one boxing match.<sup>9</sup>

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## The Greek Stadium

From an architectural point of view the Greek stadium is so primitive that the very term "architecture" is inappropriate throughout most of its history; the stone seats found at the stadium of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor are a late, and unusual exception. Unless one were an official of the games, his seat would ordinarily be a space on an embankment; judging from a 7th century vase by Sophilos that depicts the chariot racing at the funeral games for Patroklos, the earth may have been grooved to form crude rows of seats, or a very rudimentary and temporary stand may have been built, but in principle, nothing more than a simple embankment surrounded the place where the greatest athletes of the Hellenic world met every four years to compete.<sup>10</sup> Nemea, site of one of the four most important athletic festivals, had no formal system of seats; the archaeologist John Humphrey summarized: "irregularities of bedrock and ground cover would have dictated how spectators were arranged on the banks."<sup>11</sup> Pausanias twice observed that a stadium without seats was the typical Hellenic custom (2.27.5; 9.23.1): "a stadium of banked earth, as was typical in Greece." The games took place in July or August: the stadium was, of course, unroofed, and until the beneficence of Herodes Atticus changed matters, the water supply at Olympia was quite inadequate for the crowds that assembled there. The discomfort of the spectator did not escape the notice of Greek authors. Epictetus had some notable comments on the sweat, the lack of bathing facilities, the crowding, the noise at Olympia, and Aelian in *Varia Historia* (14.18) tells that unruly slaves were, at least in jest, threatened with a trip to Olympia; in Lucian's romanticizing, Anacharsis the Scythian who mocks Greek athletics, marvels at Solon's ability to stand bare-headed in the full sun.<sup>12</sup>

However uncomfortable they may have been, the crowds seemed, if we can trust the anecdotes we have, to be excitable, but congenial. We read of crowds leaping from their seats in the story of Arrichion's last bout at Olympia (Philostratus, *Imagines* 2.6) and at least Sophilos thought it worthy to depict the animated spectators described in Homer, *Iliad* 23. Kleitomachus of Thebes was able to dress down a crowd for cheering on his foreign opponent (Polybius 27.9), and we hear at least once of spectators gasping in unison at the blow a boxer received (Plutarch, *Moralia* 29 f, 79 e). A flute player occasionally accompanied some events, notably the long jump and the boxing, but there were no attempts to manipulate the crowd's emotions with music. Although some local festivals went in for torch races and trick-riding (remember, after all, the excitement at the beginning of Plato, *Republic* I over the equestrian torch race), the events seen, especially at the four greatest festivals, were remarkably traditional, a strikingly austere program compared to the modern Olympic Games and a remarkable testimony to how little gimmickry the ancient Greek needed to be drawn to the games.

The nature of the educational system was such that most of the spectators in the stadium had had some first hand experience at the sports they were watching,<sup>13</sup> and the competitors, at least in theory, represented all socio-economic brackets of the citizenry. Starting around the 4th century B.C., we begin to find evidence of city or private subsidy for promising athletes who could not otherwise afford to train for the contests; before that time, one has to believe that the majority of the athletes were from wealthy families. Even though no law or custom stood in his way, it

would have been hard for a working man to afford the training, travel, and time to be a successful athlete. Aristotle, for instance, observed that the fish-monger who became an Olympic champion had achieved something that was beyond expectation (*Rhetoric* 1365). Certainly, as H. W. Pleket of Leiden has argued, the language of athletics remained aristocratic throughout its history:<sup>14</sup> an athlete never received “payment” for his victory--though some of the games gave out a full 6000 drachma (talent) purse--he received, like a Homeric hero, a “gift” (*doron*) for his success. And a bevy of the beautiful and famous did turn out as competitors: Kylon the would-be tyrant of Athens in the seventh century B.C.; Phrynon the Athenian general (c. 600 B.C.); Diagoras of Rhodes with his sons and grandsons, whose lineage boasted gods and kings; Aelius Aurelius Menander of Aphrodisias “of eminent and well-reputed lineage,” as his inscription reads; Tiberius Claudius Rufus of Smyrna, whose family was known to the Caesars; Kallias of Athens, three-time victor at Olympia, and a political figure important enough to get himself ostracized.<sup>15</sup> A late account, hard to substantiate, tells us that Plato competed in the Isthmian games in wrestling.<sup>16</sup>

The Greeks competed passionately. Sport was but one manifestation of a will to excel, poetically phrased in the advice that Glaukos receives on going to war at Troy: “always to excel and to be pre-eminent above others” (Homer, *Iliad* 6, 207-11); more soberly put by Demosthenes (61.52): “If you are better than those whom you encounter, do not cease trying to excel everyone else too; consider that your aim in life should be to become foremost of all, and that it is more to your advantage to be seen to aim at that eminence than to appear outstanding in ordinary company (tr. Dover).”<sup>17</sup> Recognition was more important than the contest: the inscriptions show that athletes were proud to win *akoniti*, “without dust”--without an opponent, as long as they had the immortal achievement of being called the best at that particular festival.<sup>18</sup> Particularly in the combat events, exceedingly rough play was regular—there were rules against gouging and biting in the pankration, but contemporary sources tell that it was not enforced effectively. A seventh century inscription recently found at Olympia forbids wrestlers from breaking one another’s fingers, but one Leontiskos in the mid-fifth century twice won the Olympics with this very tactic.<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that the athletic competitions were anarchic. The referee stood by, with a stick in hand, prepared to use it on athletes who jumped the gate or committed minor fouls. The judges could and did fine or disqualify athletes who committed more serious infractions; indeed, at Olympia, the athletes entered the stadium through a tunnel, the approach of which was lined with statues erected from the fine money paid by corrupt athletes. At Olympia, and a few other sites, the athletes took a formidable oath: “Of all the statues of Zeus, the one in the Council is particularly designed to unnerve the wicked. Its title is Zeus of Oaths, and it has a thunderbolt in each hand. It is customary for the athletes, their fathers and brothers, and even their trainers, standing next to this image, to swear upon slices of boar’s flesh not to commit any wrong against the Olympic contest” (Pausanias 5.24.9).

It is often claimed in scholarship, relying in part on the explicit words of the ancients, that the system of Greek athletics was a means of training men for war. It rose along with the hoplite phalanx, a way of instilling mental toughness and encouraging good conditioning. “They made war training for sport, and sport

training for war,” says the nostalgic Philostratus (*Gymnastica* 43). There is some truth in this: the staging of grueling tournaments in the full midday summer sun may well be conscious conditioning for the stress of warfare in the heavy armor of the Greek hoplite. But a number of the greatest Greek military leaders—Philopoimen, Epaminondas, Alexander the Great—were highly skeptical of the applicability of athletics to war. Epaminondas bid the Thebans practice in the war camps not the palaestra if they would enjoy a long period of peace.<sup>20</sup> Plato, who used the telling phrase “athlete of war” in the *Republic*, sought in the *Laws* imitation warfare to replace the existing combat events—team battle drills.<sup>21</sup> A full explanation for the rise of Greek athletics will need to look beyond military purposes to the competitiveness of the society as a whole. The motive may not have been necessarily kinder and gentler, but it was certainly different.

Whereas the Athenians expressly forbade her generals to put their names on the victory monuments celebrating the defeat of the Persians at Marathon, or again at Plateia, thinking it wrong for the individual rather than the city to be so honored (see Aeschines, *Against Ktesiphon* 183-186), the athletic victor could honor himself with an inscription in the grandest terms plus a portrait statue—sometimes the polis itself paid for the monument. The overly ambitious politician might find himself the recipient of a ten-year forcible leave of absence from Attica—ostracism, crude and imperfect a system as it was, was a safeguard against the amassing of influence that led to tyranny and stasis. Nietzsche had some profound insights in this regard in *Homer's Wettkampf*: “Why should no one be the best? Because then the contest would come to an end and the eternal source of life for the Hellenic state would be endangered . . . Originally this curious institution is not a safety valve but a means of stimulation: the individual who towers above the rest is eliminated so that the contest of forces may reawaken . . . That is the core of the Hellenic notion of contest: it abominates the rule of one and fears its dangers: it desires, as protection against the genius, another genius” (tr. Walter Kaufmann). Athletics was one of the few ways that the potentially volatile heirs of the warrior elite of Greece’s archaic past could find an acceptable outlet for their ambitions. Huizinga’s reflections are strangely relevant to this remarkable feature of Hellenic civilization: “Real civilization cannot exist in the absence of a certain play-element, for civilization presupposes limitation and mastery of the self, the ability not to confuse its own tendencies with the ultimate and highest goal, but to understand that it is enclosed within certain bounds freely accepted.”<sup>22</sup> The competitions of Greece’s archaic past—heroic combat on the battlefield and monopolization of political power—were discouraged or even proscribed, but in the stadium, these passions were given free reign.

In summary, what one finds in the stadium is a celebration of athletic competition and an opportunity for the individual to distinguish himself in the eyes of his countrymen. Spectators endured a relatively high level of discomfort to watch athletes compete in activities that they themselves had experienced. Although the contests were open to citizens of all social levels; especially in the archaic and classical eras, the leisure to train that wealth provided gave the aristocrats an edge; it is fair to say that the noblest blood of Greece was never absent from the stadium.

## The Roman Arena

The Romans gave Greek sport a very cool reception. Plutarch, a Greek who lived in Rome in the first and second centuries A.D., has a very accurate summary: “The Romans considered nothing to be the cause of the Greek’s enslavement and degeneracy as much as the gymnasia and palaestras, which gave rise to much time wasting laziness in the cities, and also profligacy, paederasty, and the ruination of the youths’ bodies through sleep, strolls, eurhythmic exercises, and precise diets, because of which they stopped practicing with weaponry and were happy to be called nimble and wrestlers and handsome instead of hoplites and good horsemen” (*Roman Questions* 40 = *Moralia* 274d). The Roman poets were outspoken critics, mocking the Greeks “who are lazy from their devotion to the palaestra, who are hardly capable of carrying their weapons” (Lucan, *Pharsalia* 7.270-72), who “have learned from their lazy pursuit of wrestling to endure only a soft shaded contest, who delight in shining with oil” (Silius Italicus, 14.136-37). The palaestra, said Pliny, took the military spirit out of Roman bodies (*Natural History* 35.13.47). The dates at which various types of spectator facilities appeared in Rome are worth noting: Roman sources maintain that the Circus Maximus, which was used for a variety of activities, including both equestrian and gladiatorial, dates from the time of the Tarquins (c. 600 B.C.), gladiatorial combat first appeared in 264 B.C., and the first permanent amphitheater, that of Statilius Taurus, in 29 B.C. Pompey built the first permanent theater in 55 B.C., though written evidence for Roman drama goes back to Ennius (third to second century B.C.). Julius Caesar had staged Greek-style games in Rome, but the first stadium appeared under Domitian in 86 A.D.<sup>23</sup>

Why was Greek sport so scorned at Rome? Military considerations alone do not explain the deep contempt, and much more depends, I would suggest, on Rome’s different orientation towards the individual and his pursuits. Perikles asserted that Athenians respected the private lives and decisions of one another:

We act as citizens in a way that befits free men, both in regard to public matters, and regarding suspicion towards one another in daily pursuits: we do not handle our neighbor with anger if he does things as he pleases — we do not even give him angry looks, which are harmless, but still irritating to see. Associating in personal matters without causing offense, we refrain from breaking public laws chiefly through fear, in obedience to those then in office and to the laws (Thucydides II. 37).

Compare the speech that Sallust puts in the mouth of the younger Cato during the Senate’s hearings on the Catilinarian conspiracy. “It is no wonder (that we are in such a crisis): since each of you individually schemes for his own interest, when you are slaves to pleasure at home and to money or influence here (in the Senate), the result . . . falls upon the defenseless state” (*Bellum Catilinae* 52). So much for private acts of consenting adults. Members of the senatorial and equestrian orders would most assuredly get angry at their neighbors if what pleased them in private

violated the norms of noble behavior, the relentless pursuit of office and the prescribed public honors, as we will see.

Let us examine the world of the Roman arena. The accommodations for the spectator were much nicer than those found in a Greek stadium. Instead of the strong sunlight with which the Greek contended, a number of amphitheaters were equipped with awnings (*vela*), which would be pulled out with ropes to shield the spectators. Epictetus had warned of the sweating spectators at Olympia: *sparsiones*—perfumed sprays—were offered at some Roman shows to control the unpleasant odors that the crowded fans might engender.<sup>24</sup> No one watching gladiatorial events would sit on an earthen embankment: some early and primitive facilities had wooden bleachers, but these quickly yielded to permanent stone seats. It is hard to overstate the interest that the Roman government took in impressing and pleasing spectators: at Lepcis Magna (near Homs in modern Libya) tunnels connect the amphitheater to the Circus: as John Humphrey described the site, “the architect determined to ensure through a variety of means that spectators could transfer from one set of games to the other in the shortest possible time and with a minimum of effort . . . the dignitaries of the town, who naturally would have occupied the front rows of the amphitheater, could have transferred by means of tunnels at little higher than arena level, thereby emerging in the circus among the best seats.”<sup>25</sup> Raucous music accompanied the gladiatorial shows: *sonabant clangore ferali tubae* “the horns were sounding with funereal din” (ps. Quintilian. 9.6); the Zlittern mosaics show a small band accompanying the sword and beast fights.

A large number of the participants in the arena were sentenced to die there (*damnati ad gladium* or *damnati ad bestias*). This group consisted of condemned criminals: the *munerarius* putting on the show would purchase them from the praetor with the understanding that they would die within one year. They ended their lives in various ways—thrown to wild beasts, cut down while unarmed by trained gladiators, or in a variety of dramatic settings, choreographed to pique the blood lust of a crowd already used to seeing much blood. Arenas usually had a series of sets and lifting devices below the sand where the gladiators fought - and mythology could come alive with shocking savagery. Shortly before 80 A.D. Martial wrote in rapture of what Titus’s amphitheater presented:

Just as Prometheus bound on the Scythian rock,  
 fed the ceaseless bird from his abundant breast  
 So Laureolus hanging on a cross that was no make-believe  
 offered to the Calydonian bear his exposed innards.  
 His tom limbs were still alive as the parts of his body bled  
 and throughout his body there was no human shape.  
 And then punishment . . .  
 either guilty he had cut with sword his master’s throat  
 Or demented had despoiled a temple’s treasure trove  
 or had set vicious firebrands to you, O Rome.  
 Wicked one, he had surpassed the legendary crimes of old  
 and for him what had once been myth became his doom.

(*de spectaculis* 7)

The following epigram is similarly sinister:

Believe that Pasiphae coupled with the bull of Crete  
 We saw it, antique myth took on reality.  
 Let the depth of time past not marvel at itself, O Caesar:  
 Whatever fame celebrates, the arena presents to you.

(*de spectaculis* 5)

As should be clear by now, in strong contrast to the relatively plain and strongly conservative Olympic program, the arena craved novelty. Nero staged a munus in which only black gladiators appeared (Dio Cassius 63.3); Domitian had dwarves fight (Dio Cassius 67.8). The search for exotic wild beasts was frantic, as one of Cicero's correspondences demonstrates: M. Caelius Rufus urged Cicero to help him procure panthers, *turpe tibi erit pantheras Graecas me non habere*, "it will be your disgrace for me not to have Greek panthers" (ad familiares 8.4, 8, 9). Nero treated the Romans to the spectacle of polar bears chasing seals (Calpurnius Siculus 7.65).

The rest of the gladiators, those not *damnati ad mortem*, had some hope of leaving the arena alive. Some, convicted of lesser crimes, had been consigned to the arena (*damnati ad ludum*)—this was considered a lighter sentence than condemnation to the mines, since the gladiator did have the chance to win his freedom. Masters until the time of Hadrian could sell their slaves into the arena at will—Hadrian demanded either the consent of the slave or legitimate grounds for the sale (*Hist. Auf. Hadr.* 18).<sup>26</sup> Prisoners of war made their way into the training schools: Aurelian's show of power in 274 was a fight featuring gladiators from all the conquered nations: Goths, Sarmatians, Franks, Vandals, etc. (*Hist. Aug. Aurel.* 33). These gladiators perforce were joined by a group of volunteers (*auctoruti*) who joined the gladiatorial school of their own will, seeking money and adventure. All had in common the swearing of a formidable oath: "to be burned, to be bound, to die by the sword" (*uri, vinciri, ferroque necari* [Sen. *Letters* 371]).<sup>27</sup> This obedience was the only rule of the arena. The *auctorati* had to walk under the rod (*ferula*), a sign of the forfeiture of their freedom. Thus, ultimately no one, not even a volunteer, entered as a gladiator into the arena in command of his own fate—and the voluntary participation that Huizinga insisted was part of the basic definition of play has vanished. To appear in the arena, moreover, was a public disgrace—the senators and knights who from poverty or sense of adventure became *auctorati*, like stage actors, suffered *infamia*: their names could not appear on the census of property-owning citizens, they forfeited their seats of honor, they were barred from office.<sup>28</sup> Among the reasons an actor was considered *infamis* was that he showed himself off to the people, and we find a similar motive surfacing in the infamy of gladiators. When a son from a better family chose to enter the arena, it was considered the worst of all options if he became a net-man (*retiarius*), for these gladiators fought bare-headed and were easily recognized.

Most Romans believed that the arena offered sights that were warlike and inspiring. Pliny (*Panegyric* 33) claimed that the shows made wounds glorious and inspired contempt for death among spectators when they saw even slaves and criminals pursuing victory and praise. This helps explain the peculiar role of the gladiator in Roman life. Though associated with *infamia*, many notables dabbled in

the arena. Hadrian was an expert in the use of gladiatorial weapons, and Caesar, the day before his crossing the Rubicon, watched gladiators in training, and spoke at dinner of his plans to build a new gladiatorial school in Rome (Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 32.4; Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 31.1). The hair of a Roman bride was preferentially parted with a spear that had been dipped in the blood of a fallen gladiator.<sup>29</sup> An apocryphal report holds that in 105 B.C., gladiatorial trainers (*lanistae*) were drafted into the army to help train the troops. The date 105 is traditionally given for the first set of gladiatorial games not tied to a funeral celebration: it is tempting to think that along with the Marian reforms of the army came a desire, misguided as it was, to increase the martial spectacles that Romans watched.<sup>30</sup>

But above all else, the arena was a demonstration of the power of the state, at first the Republic, later the Empire. The emperor severely restricted the opportunities for others besides himself to stage games of any substance: his spectacles might last, like that of Trajan, for 123 days, with 10,000 men (Dio Cassius 68.15). The emperor alone could spare a man condemned to death in the arena. He could also display his arbitrary power: Claudius, angered at the faulty stage mechanisms, forced the mechanics to fight in the arena (Suetonius, *Claudius* 34). Domitian punished an uncomplimentary witticism by feeding the wag to the dogs in the arena (Suetonius, *Domitian* 10), and Caligula fed a section of the spectators to the beasts (Dio Cassius 59.10). Dio's account of an event he witnessed and survived needs little commentary:

Here is another thing that he (the emperor Commodus) did to us senators which gave us every reason to look for our death. Having killed an ostrich and cut off its head, he came up to where we were sitting, holding the head in his left hand and in his right raising aloft his bloody sword; and though he spoke not a word, *yet* he wagged his head with a grin, indicating that he would treat us in the same way. And many would indeed have perished by the sword on the spot, for laughing at him (for it was laughter rather than indignation that overcame us), if I had not chewed some laurel leaves, which I got from my garland, myself, and persuaded the others who were sitting near me to do the same, so that in the steady movement of our jaws we might conceal the fact that we were laughing (73. 21-22, tr. Cary).

Unlike the democratically shared discomforts of the Greek stadium, the seating for Roman shows followed a rigid social hierarchy. Paul Zanker observed in his recent study, *Images of Power*: "The clear differentiation of seats, which was recognized by everyone in the audience and enforced by a kind of mutual surveillance, insured that the system worked smoothly . . . In the course of renovation and new construction the different sections were demarcated more clearly than before, and this was not just a visual effect." Juvenal's line that for the Roman people only bread and circuses mattered (10.78-81) is notorious, but the sober Fronto observed: "The Roman People are held by two things in particular: food doles and public shows. Dominion is secured as much by amusements as by serious things" (*Princ. Hist.* 17). The Bolsheviks understood this well.

## Contemporary Meaning

The epilogue to this story is our reflection on its meaning to us. If the study of antiquity is to be anything more than an elite form of mental gymnastics or self-indulgent antiquarianism, then we must look into the mirror of history, however dark and disturbing it might be, and then look at ourselves with better and clearer vision. The distance between the Greek who sought—as Homer would have it, that greatest glory that a man could achieve with his hands and his feet (*Odyssey* 8.147-48)—to the passive voyeur of the Roman arena is enormous. Sobering too, is the realization, as Louis Robert amply demonstrated,<sup>31</sup> that the Greek East took quite a liking to the arena after its exposure to Roman ways: although the Greeks' first reaction to the spectacle was disgust, according to the Roman historian Livy (41.20), they quickly gained enthusiasm for the show. But before this time, the contrast of Greek and Roman orientation toward athletics and public shows was enormous. The bluest blood of Greece appeared and was sometimes shed at the Games, seeking honor against all other citizens. How different the gladiator! Even if free born, he was *infamis*—his toil and pain were to please the crowd, few of whom would understand what his participation meant. The Roman spectator's experience reinforced his acquiescence to hierarchy and order—the arena was no place for even the illusion of self-determination. And in the absence of wholesome competition, the ceaseless contest for power had its political consequences as well. Examine what Keith Hopkins concluded in his study of Rome, *Death and Renewal*:<sup>32</sup> “The cost of the system, implicit in selectivity, was an extremely competitive political culture, focussed externally on military achievement. Internally, the risk of the system, as Polybius saw (6.57) was that the competitiveness would get out of hand. The shame and fear of defeat would drive competitors to use unconstitutional methods of violence and corruption.”

Huizinga described *homo ludens*, “man the player.” Let us also consider “man the competitor.” Different systems have tried to suppress this instinct, to remove the drive to exist in the realm of the non-serious, in the world of arbitrary rules, a world that at its best reminds man of his fragility, his humility. Our century has seen the dark side—the futile but destructive attempt to enforce the collective life. Thorstein Veblen was amusing in his mockery of “emulative efficiency,” with his notable aphorism, “football is to physical culture as a bull fight is to agriculture,”<sup>33</sup> but sadder is the Bolshevik experience that Fueloep–Miller described in 1926, a strange and chilling attempt to eclipse contest with show:

They tried, by the introduction of great festive mass-performances, to make the streets themselves the arena for dramatic events, and to link up parades, processions, and national festivals, so as to form an ordered and systematically organized total effect. In the slogan, “Theatricalize life,” the dictators of revolutionary art saw a possibility of evolving with scenic means a propaganda such as could never be attained within the theatre itself. By this means the “collective man” was to celebrate his glorification in a solemn and magnificent way.<sup>34</sup>

The Bolshevik Proletkultists took the final step in demanding the rejection of competitive sport, to be replaced by labor-related physical culture.<sup>35</sup>

We find elements of both the arena and the stadium in contemporary American sports culture. A positive sign of widening participation is the growing number of people seeking their “personal best” in Little League, the Boston Marathon, and a broad variety of other contests. The number of outlets for participation has spread, conforming to the history of the Greek festivals. Encouraging, too, is the broadening of participation in Olympic competition; the long overdue demise of the restrictions against allowing Olympic aspirants to find financial support for their sports is fair and liberalizing. Elements of the arena, however, are with us still. Ethical debate about professional boxing properly focuses on the safety of the competitors; what receives less consideration is the obscenity of a wealthy crowd at ringside watching men—almost always from the underclass—do what most spectators would never dare to do. The Greeks would have admired our boxers and despised the crowds. The modern ring provides a spectator experience devoid of empathy, humility, or compassion—as voyeurism tends to be. The leering, bloated faces that George Bellows depicted nearly a century ago in his boxing paintings have only multiplied with the improvement of network communications.

The study of play and games is not a trivial pursuit. What we play is a reflection of what we are and what we will be. The decisions we make about sports, in a desire to have them as what Huizinga called “a sound culture producing force,” deserve the clearest scrutiny, in the full light of history.

## Notes

1. This article is an extended version of the 1992 Ion Ioannides Memorial Lecture sponsored by the Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of Western Ontario. I wish to thank the Centre, as well as the Faculty of Kinesiology and the Department of Classical Studies at Western for their kind hospitality and stimulating discussion.

2. This essay focuses on Greece and Rome, but a complete investigation of the social and political significance of sport and recreation needs to be cast in far wider interpretation. See, for example, Wolfgang Decker, *Sport and Games in Ancient Egypt* (English ed.), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 19-55.

3. Note, e.g. that the militantly nationalistic elder Cato wanted his son to have a look at Greek literature (*inspicere*), not to absorb it (*perdiscere*), and according to tradition, learned the language himself in his old age (cf. Pliny 29.1.7.) An important work to consider in this context, as well, is G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford, 1965), which has shown in great detail how extensive the cultural mingling was by the time of the Principate. Such examples can be multiplied at great length.

4. Note Vergil’s famous summary (*Aenied* 6. 847-53)

Others will hammer out brazen sculpture  
so gently breathing—I surely believe it—  
and draw forth from marble faces that live,  
Others will plead better in court of law,  
they will describe with the rod the course

of heaven and tell of rising stars.  
 You, Roman, remember to rule the nations  
 with your power (these will be your arts)  
 to add civilization to peace, to spare the  
 conquered and disarm the haughty.

5. John Hoberman, *Sport and Political Ideology* (Austin, 1984).
6. As cited by Hoberman, *Ibid.*, p.181.
7. Paul Franken, *Vom Werden einer neuen Kultur* (Berlin, 1930), pp. 30-32, as discussed by Hoberman, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
8. Jean Meynaud, *Sport et politique* (Paris, 1966), p. 131, as discussed by Hoberman, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
9. Jeffrey Sammons, *Beyond the Ring* (Urbana, 1988), pp. 96-117.
10. John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (Berkeley, 1986), p. 66.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Epicetus, *Discourses* 1.6.26-27. For further discussion see J. H. Krause, *Olympia* (Vienna, 1938, reproduced by Hildesheim, 1972), pp. 188-94.
13. See H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (English Edition, Madison, 1982), p. 131, citing inscriptions from Termessos in Psidia (*Tituli Asiae Minoris* 3.1.201-210) which describe school contests in jumping, racing, wrestling and pankration.
14. H. W. Pleket, "Zur Soziologie des antiken Sports," *Medelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* (1974), pp. 57-87; and "Games, Prizes, Athletes and Ideology," *Stadion I* (1976), pp. 49-89.
15. For ancient sources and discussion of these athletes, see Pleket, *op. cit.*, and Michael B. Poliakoff, *The Ancient Combat Sports: Competition, Violence and Culture* (New Haven, 1987), pp. 117-133.
16. Diogenes Laertes, 3.4.
17. See further, K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 231-234.
18. See, e.g., *IG* 14.1102 (= *IGUR* 1.240 = Moretti, *IAG* 79) and Poliakoff, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
19. For sources and discussion, see Poliakoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 170, and n. 9.
20. See Plutarch, *Philopoimen* 3, *Alexander* 4; *Nepos*, *Epam.* 15; Plutarch, *Moralia* 192c-d; and Poliakoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100, p. 177, n. 36.
21. Plato, *Republic* 403e-404b; *Laws* 829e-83 1b.
22. John Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (English Edition, Boston, 1950), p. 211.
23. See Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
24. See J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London, 1969), p.

- 257, pp. 297-299; Alex Scobie, "Spectator Security and Comfort at Gladiatorial Games," *Nikephoros* 1 (1988), pp. 191-243.
25. Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
26. See further, Georges Lafaye, s.v. "gladiator" in Ch. Daremberg and E. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des Antiquites grecques et romaines* 2.2 (Paris, 1881-1918), p. 1573.
27. Lafaye, *op. cit.*, *W0* p. 1574.
28. Balsdon, *op. cit.*, *W0* pp. 279-282.
29. Lafaye, *op. cit.*, *W0* p. 1592.
30. Lafaye, *op. cit.*, *W0* p. 1564.
31. Louis Robert, *Les Gludiateurs dans l'Orient grec* (Paris, 1940).
32. Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge, 1983) p. 116.
33. Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, ch. 10.
34. Rene Fuelop-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (reproduced New York, 1965), p. 133, quoted and discussed in Hoberman, *op. cit.*, p.p 174-177.
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