

or tangibly to generate particular perceptions of sacred spaces or deities – an ability which was purposefully exploited by temple or sanctuary administrators. The same also applies to music and scent (cf. Osborne, pp. 19, 21), where further research is needed. Here it is especially worth noting that Papalexandrou's sensory approach to 'Orientalising' griffin cauldrons has the potential to restore coherence to the much-debated concept of 'Orientalising' itself, especially with regard to the critique – in many ways certainly appropriate – that this concept dissolves a plurality of cultures and cultural stimuli under a vague umbrella term ('Orient'): the griffin cauldrons' capacity to evoke rare sensory experiences operates coherently in different dedication venues, irrespective of any particular cultural influences that may underlie the fashioning of those objects.

All in all, this is a very interesting volume that can certainly be recommended to anyone interested in Greek religion as well as in the conceptual issues surrounding the 'material turn' in the humanities. While taking religion as its core topic, the volume is an excellent example of how disciplines beyond archaeology, including text-based ones, may benefit from materiality studies.

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HELLENISTIC

Sebastian Scharff, *Hellenistic athletes: agonistic cultures and self-presentation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. Pp.384. ISBN 9781009199957, hardback \$130.

In his introduction (Chapter 1), Scharff starts with a brief overview of previous scholarship. He deals with how scholars have moved on from the traditional view that the Hellenistic period saw a decline in agonistic life to a new outlook resting on new evidence and fresh thought that draws on sociological, political, historical, archaeological and linguistic perspectives. In contrast to previous studies, Scharff's focus is upon the victorious competitors (in both athletic and equestrian contests) and on their self-representation. Having analysed the broader context and listing the factors that inform his study, Scharff gives an account of his methodology, stressing in particular that he focusses on victor epigrams as a key element in the representation of athletic glory. This approach will reveal, he believes, the existence of a direct or indirect 'agonistic discourse' among athletes, cities, regions, kings, courtiers and prominent citizens. Such a discourse, says Scharff, is naturally influenced by current circumstances and how athletes wish their victory to be perceived.

In Chapter 2 ('What's New in Hellenistic Athletics?'), the author looks at the various ways in which athletics flourish during the Hellenistic period and especially over the 3rd and 2nd century BC at panhellenic, regional and local levels. Numerous new contests and festivals of various levels of prestige emerge during the period. Several local games are established as crown (stephanitic) games, their status thereby upgraded, so that they can now compete in fame and glory with the four great Panhellenic games (that is, of course, the *Olympia*, *Pythia*, *Isthmia* and *Nemea*). Change and development in agonistic culture during the Hellenistic period is evident in various ways. It is found in the innovations made to the structures of festivals and to the hierarchy of athletic contests, in the introduction of new disciplines to athletic life, in the establishing of new age groups for competitors and in the adoption of new types of prizes, such as metal items termed *brabeia* in place of traditional crowns. The appearance in the Hellenistic period of well-organized and well-equipped facilities for training athletes and for hosting associated

festivals, such as *gymnasia*, *palaestrai* and *stadia*, attest to an increasingly systematic approach to such buildings. Indeed, the spread and development of the *gymnasion* throughout the vast areas of the Hellenistic world marked the beginning of a new era for this civic institution, in that it now had to adapt to both new developments in athletics and to new societal trends. Scharff rightly underlines the important role played by *theoroi/theorodokoi* (sacred envoys from city-states sent to public festivals) in creating the connectivity that characterized this new Greek world which evolved from the general practices of athletics and in particular from the increasing role of wealthy individuals as *agonothetes* (superintendents of public games) and *gymnasiarchs* (supervisors of the function of the *gymnasion* and of athletic events). Scharff also highlights another aspect of Hellenistic athletics, namely the sponsorship and patronage of talented athletes by Hellenistic kings, *poleis* and wealthy private benefactors, so that they might compete in the most prestigious athletic events of the Greek world. The author concludes his second chapter by underlining the fact that these developments were a response to needs that arose in the new agonistic culture of the vast Hellenistic world.

In Chapter 3 ('Athlete and *Polis*: The Hellenistic City as an Agonistic Community of Fame'), Scharff looks at the relationship between athletes and their hometowns. He presents various rules and habits that are the product of local peculiarities and local socio-economic and political conditions. Beginning with the athletes of Asia Minor, he focuses on the individual example of Miletus, a city that enjoyed considerable athletic success. Scharff examines victor epigrams in the light of epigraphic habits to show that thanks to general civic support for agonistic activity, athletically well-trained members of the local elite were successful in crown contests, thus bringing glory to themselves, their family and to their city. The motif involving crowns of victory that repeatedly accompanies Milesian epigrams clearly betrays the athletic victory culture that flourished in the city. Scharff stresses that for some athletes their victories, their fame and prestige could be used for a second career in politics, as is the case with Antenor of Miletus. The author then examines the great accomplishments of Rhodian athletes and the role played in these achievements by the powerful naval elite of the island. Most of the victories in the gymnastic events here were won by *paides* and *ageneioi*, rather than by mature top athletes with long careers. In contrast, Rhodian victors in equestrian victories are adults. The self-presentation of the athletes draws on the local identity of the old communities of Rhodes, that is,

Kamiros, Ialysos and Lindos, and on the fame and history of the individual athlete's family. This was promoted by monuments erected by the family that praise both the victory of the athlete and his lineage, thus contributing to the growth of a distinctive agonistic culture of fame. In the case of Rhodes prestige and fame acquired through agonistic success could become a useful tool for a successful political career.

The author then moves to Central Greece. He deals first with Thebes and the agonistic successes there won by young athletes and in particular victories won in 'heavy' events, such as the *pankration*, which are mirrored in victor epigrams. This picture of a successful athletic community depicted in the epigrams contrasts with political reality. Scharff suggests that praise of Theban athletic success was a co-ordinated answer on the part of the city to 'to the (external criticism of) political decline of the city'. Scharff then turns to Athens, to note the absence of Athenian athletes from athletic competitions outside Athens and particularly from the great 'Big Four' athletic crown-games, at Olympia, Delphi, Nemea and the Isthmus. In Scharff's view, the reason for this absence lies in the fact that the Athenian *Panathenaia* and *Theseia* both became more important and significantly expanded their curriculum, so that Athenian citizens could now compete in a broadened range of events before their fellow citizens, a change that Scharff believes favoured the Athenian aristocracy. Scharff's reason for thinking this lies on a prosopographical analysis of 41 Athenian victors, which reveals the domination of athletic victories by members of the Athenian aristocracy. Local games were thus a great opportunity for the leading aristocratic families of Athens to demonstrate their excellence. The author then turns to Chalcis. The evidence here, although meager and primarily numismatic, makes clear that the competitors from the city did not achieve many athletic or equestrian victories, despite the fact they competed at both local and 'foreign' contests. According to Scharff the fact that Chalcis occupied a militarily important site that for a long time was a place of military operations, is the main reason for the low development of its sporting life.

Turning then to the Peloponnese, the author begins his coverage with the numerous successes of Elean athletes. In his view, this record arose from the fact that, when they competed at Olympia, Elean athletes were on home territory. Constant competition at the Olympic games must also have honed the horse breeding and training skills of the local aristocracy, who dominated the sport at Olympia and competed successfully in the crown games. Scharff stresses

how eminent local families wished it to be known that they supported Olympic games, which, despite their international reputation, for the Eleians still remained local, that they also supported victors at the Olympic games and promoted themselves as guardians of the shrine. Moving on to Sparta, Scharff stresses the highly traditional society of the city and the *polis*-centered aspect to the commemoration of Spartan athletic victories, even when such victories were won by Spartan kings. From about 200 BC a similar attitude prevailed at Messene, where athletic success (in combat sports and in track-and-field athletics) was associated with the *polis*, rather than with the individual athlete. The increase in public buildings concerned with athletic training reflects this interest on the part of the *polis* in agonistic life, manifest also in the civic commemoration of agonistic victories by individuals from the *polis* of Messene. Scharff underlines that this intense agonistic activity 'helped transform the Messenian ethnic group into a polity'. In a brief overview of the lively agonistic life of the Peloponnese, Scharff also looks at Sikyon, Argos and Arkadian and Achaean *poleis* and settlements, to make his point about increasing interest in athletic and agonistic activity and the corresponding new developments in all types of cities.

In his section on northern Greece, Scharff briefly deals with victories won by athletes from Ambracia and Epirus and with the increasing importance of athletic life in Macedonian cities, before looking at the self-presentation of victors from Amphipolis and Pella. He makes clear that victor epigrams show how the Macedonian aristocracy became increasingly involved in athletic activity and participated more and more in athletic contests. Encouraged by the example of Philip II, the Macedonian aristocracy used their participation in contests to advertise that they belonged to the Greek world. Scharff shows that epigrams on Macedonian athletes display a familiarity with current agonistic terminology, in that they involve praise of the *polis* of the victory. However, they betray a distinctly Macedonian outlook in their emphasis on the military excellence of the athletes and their connection with Alexander III.

In Chapter 4 ('Athlete and *Koinon*: Agonistic Success beyond the Level of the *Polis*') Scharff moves from cities-states to regions. He examines in particular how and to what extent the regional identity challenged *polis* identity in the agonistic self-representation of athletes. In his examination of evidence from Thessaly, a region that from Classical times had enjoyed a great reputation for the quality of the horses it produced, the author shows how

local tradition and the old, local elite dealt with new challenges in the Hellenistic period, when it entered into competition with new, 'international' elites, consisting of Hellenistic kings, their queens and courtiers. Scharff combines evidence from Thessaly with victor lists of athletes of Phocian, Arkadian and Achaean *koina*, to show that, despite the appearance of regional citizenship and *polis* 'double citizenship' in epigrams from the last quarter of the third century until the end of the Hellenistic period, it is unclear which of these two identities is strengthened by athletes' self-representation. Scharff therefore concludes that it should not be assumed that regional identity necessarily challenges that of the *polis*.

In Chapter 5 ('Victorious kings: The Self-Representation of a 'New Society of Victors') Scharff examines how Hellenistic dynasties exploited athletic victories or their role as patrons of athletic activities in order to increase their fame and prestige, to gain acceptance by their subjects and to demonstrate their general superiority. Of the four Hellenistic dynasties, Ptolemies, Attalids, Seleucids and Antigonids, the first two dynasties used agonistic successes for their own benefit and pursued agonistic commemoration strategies to this end. The author begins his examination with the most successful Hellenistic dynasty, the Ptolemies, whose successes in equestrian competitions were remarkable. Epigrams referring to royal victories emphasize three aspects, the ethnic origins of the victor's family, the fact that the victory, instead of being perceived as an individual achievement, is regarded as a success for the entire dynasty and, thirdly, the participation by female members of the royal family in competitions. The Ptolemies' victories instilled in their courtiers an agonistic mentality and agonistic mode of self-representation. In order to demonstrate that they belonged to the Greek world and that their subjects were not barbarians, the Ptolemies established a strong agonistic culture in their kingdom. They promoted athletics and its associated way of life, whereby the Greco-Macedonian elite and their Hellenized subjects participated in Greek athletic culture. To this end, the Ptolemies took part in panhellenic contests, founded new festivals and contests of a type and status supposedly equivalent to that of the Olympic games, sponsored athletic talent that then competed in panhellenic games and promoted the institution of the *gymnasion* within and without their territories. The Attalids, on the other hand, were not as agonistically successful as the Ptolemies, although male members of the Attalid dynasty participated in Panhellenic games and especially in the *Panathenaia*. The Attalids, however, established

athletic contests, also sponsored the institution of *gymnasion* and used their equestrian victories to display their family unity. They were not active patrons of athletes. Attalid policy over athletics was part of a pursuit of political and cultural interests whose aim was to demonstrate that they formed a united family, whom agonistic victories served to glorify. The Antigonids' absence from equestrian competitions is perhaps to be explained, Scharff suggests, by the fact that the Antigonids governed a territory where ruler and ruled possessed the same ethnic origins, which may have meant that the kings of Macedon did not have to prove anything to their subjects in order to legitimize their rule. By contrast, the Seleucids, since they ruled a vast kingdom consisting of subjects of various ethnic backgrounds, were forced to pursue a different athletic policy. Although the Seleucids were indeed involved in athletic contests, they were much less active than the Ptolemies and Attalids, since their use of athletics for political purposes was more indirect. The Seleucids sought to bind to themselves subjects and athletes ('agonistic community of fame') by means of cultic honours, the offering of crowns to rulers by athletes and by the attendance of Seleucid kings at contests.

In Chapter 6 ('Becoming Greek through Athletics: The Participation of Non-Greek Victors in Hellenistic Games') in his examination of the participation of non-Greeks in athletic competitions, Scharff underlines the point that the expansion of the Greek world during the Hellenistic period created a revolution in athletics. The author raises the question of whether ethnically-based exclusion or inclusion of non-Greeks in athletic competitions was common in the Hellenistic athletic world and in doing so brings a new element to the general discussion, namely the motivation and aims of the individual concerned. Non-Greek victors did not belong to a coherent ethnic or social group of victors, he notes. During the Hellenistic period, athletic victors belong to various types of communities and are motivated by various aims and goals. Since, however, it is not Scharff's principal aim to analyse this subject in detail, he restricts himself to four case-studies that show how varied the situation is in the Hellenistic period. The author looks firstly at the participation of Phoenicians in major athletic contests in mainland Greece, secondly at invitations directed to Romans to participate in local contests, thirdly at participation by some non-Greek dynasts and members of royal families, such as Mithridates VI Eupator and the Numidian prince Mastanabal, in local and 'international' festivals and lastly at participation by Jews in *gymnasion* life and culture and particularly at the ambivalent role played

by the *gymnasion* in Jerusalem. The fourth case-study, on the participation of Jews in *gymnasion* life and culture, moves somewhat away from the tight focus of the first three case studies, which is the self-representation of these three groups via athletic competition, in that the fourth case-study broadens into an examination of various attitudes on the part of Jews towards Greek agonistic life. Scharff concludes this chapter with the words that 'athletics served as a vehicle for integration in a time whose defining features had originally been seen in the merging of Greek and Oriental cultures'. The Hellenistic period was certainly flexible about accepting non-Greeks into Greek athletic life, which then became a space in which Greek and native cultural elements could be negotiated and shaped depending on a number of complex factors, such as regional and socio-cultural circumstances, civic and royal policy and personal ambition. Viewing the attitudes of non-Greeks towards Greek athletic life one sees them not so much as an overall fusion of Greek and 'Oriental' that creates a new agonistic culture, but as a hybrid culture that combines Greek and native elements and that arises from the fact that athletes move between two distinct cultural words, native and Greek. Greek and non-Greek cultures engage in a constant mutual discourse during the Hellenistic period in a conversation that shades from acceptance to rejection of various cultural forms on either side. Athletics and agonistic life form only part of the process of Hellenization, which is certainly far from being a one-way street.

By way of conclusion, Scharff offers an overview of the main points on which he supports his case that, in contrast to what has so far been asserted, the Hellenistic period was not a period of decline for Greek athletics. The evolution and growth of Greek athletics during the Hellenistic period is revealed by a growing institutional framework, involving building, the foundation of athletic contests and other agonistic-oriented activity. It is also evident in the growing number of individuals engaged in some form of activity related to athletic and agonistic life who were concerned with the sponsorship of athletic life, with its organization and with the training and participation of athletes. Overall, Scharff's book is an excellent work of great importance and should be read by anybody, student, researcher and even the general reader, who is interested in the development of this fundamental element of Greek cultural life during this fascinating period.

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