



Eros and Greek Athletics

Thomas F. Scanlon

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Ancient Greek athletics offer us a clear window on many important aspects of ancient culture, some of which have distinct parallels with modern sports and their place in our society. Ancient athletics were closely connected with religion, the formation of young men and women in their gender roles, and the construction of sexuality. Eros was, from one perspective, a major god of the gymnasium where homoerotic liaisons reinforced the traditional hierarchies of Greek culture. But Eros in the athletic sphere was also a symbol of life-affirming friendship and even of political freedom in the face of tyranny. Greek athletic culture was not so much a field of dreams as a field of desire, where fervent competition for honor was balanced by cooperation for common social goals.

Eros and Greek Athletics is the first in-depth study of Greek body culture as manifest in its athletics, sexuality, and gender formation. In this comprehensive overview, Thomas F. Scanlon explores when and how athletics was linked with religion, upbringing, gender, sexuality, and social values in an evolution from Homer until the Roman period. Scanlon shows that males and females made different uses of the same contests, that pederasty and athletic nudity were fostered by an athletic revolution beginning in the late seventh century B.C., and that public athletic festivals may be seen as quasi-dramatic performances of the human tension between desire and death. Accessibly written and full of insights that will challenge long-held assumptions about ancient sport, *Eros and Greek Athletics* will appeal to readers interested in ancient and modern sports, religion, sexuality, and gender studies.

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