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**Thomas F. Scanlon**. *Eros and Greek Athletics.* Riverside: University of California Press, 2002. 468 pp. $74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-513889-4.

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The connection between eros and athletics is a complex one; one that encompasses the realms of initiation, the cult of body culture, sexuality, religious influences and a host of other interconnecting threads. Trying to create a coherent tapestry of contemporary American culture is difficult enough. But trying to understand a culture more than two thousand years old from incomplete archeological evidence and second and third hand literary sources often 600 years removed from the time period being discussed may be downright impossible. Thomas Scanlon's *Eros and Greek Athletics* is nonetheless a work of considerable arete in bringing together the literary and artistic connections between Eros, the Greek god of love, and Greek athletics. It may take someone else, or a second book of a different nature by Scanlon to tie all these threads together in a more coherent way and ultimately to relate these topics to contemporary society.

Scanlon discusses the intersection of the prominence of among other things, athletic festivals, the rise of the Greek city state or polis, the custom of nudity and the centrality of the gymnasium as locus of education for Greek youths by the 6th century BC. Out of this set of variables arose the socially sanctioned practice of pederasty, whereby Greek youths were educated by an older male mentor. Indeed, the odes to love spoken of in Plato's famous dialogue, "The Symposium," were not only abstract notions of love but the ideals of the loved and beloved that developed between men and boys in the context of the gymnasium in sixth-century Athens and other city states.

Other themes in Scanlon's book are myths of the female hunter/warriors Atalanta and Artemis and the rigorous physical training of Spartan women–a phenomenon uncommon anywhere else. Spartan women were envied for their athletic bodies and confidence and even chided by non-Spartans for their revealing chitons or skirts. According to the author, Spartan women were the "California girls" of classical Greece. Scanlon also takes the reader through a number of historical guesses and deductions as to whether the nude females on sixth century mirror handles are really in fact, accurate depictions of Spartan women athletes.

Finally, the author identifies a unifying image in tying eros to athletics–that of an altar dedicated to Eros in the Athenian Academy which served as the beginning of the famous torch race. The torch race, which precedes the opening ceremonies in our modern Olympics, was to be run by athletes who were swift, strong and beautiful, but also with proper restraint that the fire not go out. This latter requirement represented the Greek virtue of moderation. The ancient torch race finished at the temple of Athena on the Acropolis at the base of which was the altar of Anteros, or "love returned." Originally, the torch race began at the altar of Prometheus, who stole fire from Zeus to give to humans. For the author, the elevation of Eros as the starting point of the race symbolized the new primacy of Eros in Greek athletic culture.

Scanlon's research is annotated with ninety-eight pages of notes and a selected bibliography of more than thirteen pages. The book would be an excellent reference source for anyone interested in ancient Greek culture, ancient athletics/sports studies, gender studies, or classical studies. Although Scanlon summarizes some important myths before discussing how they were interpreted, reinterpreted, redacted, changed, etc., it was helpful to reread the myths of Atalanta, Artemis and Eros. A primary source for Scanlon is Lucian, a Syrian who in 146 AD wrote a fictional comedy about life in sixth-century BC Athens. Scanlon also cites Pindar as one of the supreme poets who sings praises to athletes, competition and love.

Scanlon references and evaluates literally thousands of literary and art sources from different time periods, most of which have a variety of possible interpretations with respect to the telling of a story even within their