was to underestimate the intelligence and subtlety of the Ancients. Let us not make the same mistake about our more recent ancestors.

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ATHLETES

V. Visa-Ondarçuhu: *L'Image de l'athlète d'Homère à la fin du Ve siècle avant J.-C.* (Collection d'études anciennes, serie grecque 126.) Pp. 453, 11 figs. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999. Paper, frs. 250. ISBN: 2-251-32648-0.

The long road to the nandrolone-spiked food supplements which dominate competitive sport today began with the invention of a milk-and-feta-cheese diet for athletes in early Greece. In the sixth century, after some experimentation with a dried-fig regime, one trainer had the idea of force-feeding his athletes with meat, and the sport has never looked back (Porphyry, *De Abstinentia* 1.26 and *Vita Pythagorea* 15). The good thing about Valérie Visa-Ondarçuhu's lengthy study of athletes in Greek literature is that it occasionally dangles such intriguing bits of information before the reader (p. 276). The bad thing is that usually it does little more than dangle.

V.'s main purpose is not to tell us about Greek athletes, but to tell us about their rôles in the literary texts which mention them. The first 200 pages scrutinize passages in Homer, epinician poetry, and Aeschylus, with the aim of showing that these all share an 'image' of the athlete as a glorious figure, often associated with heroes and great warriors. This is followed by a discussion of two less flattering texts, fragments of Tyrtaeus and Xenophanes, which, it is pointed out, do not so much criticize athletes as argue that other kinds of men—the soldier and the sage, respectively—deserve even greater respect and fame (pp. 213–46). Greek medical writers then pass in review, not for what they might tell us about the nature of diet and exercise or the physiology of sport, but in order to show that they mentioned competitive sport in various contexts and in a mostly neutral manner (p. 289), although they ultimately regarded ordinary good health as preferable to athletic excellence (p. 300). In the last quarter of the book, we turn to athletes in Herodotus, Sophocles, and Euripides, where we find them pretty much still the glorious, heroic figures of Homeric tradition, despite a bitingly sarcastic speech in Euripides' *Autolycus* (fr. 282; pp. 240–1, 374–5), and finally in Aristophanes, who, we are told, does not really satirize athletes despite being a comic writer (p. 413). In short, V. argues that athletes and athletics were prominent in all kinds of Greek literature to the end of the fifth century and got an almost universally good press.

This strikes me as an uncontroversial conclusion and an unambitious agenda for a book of more than 400 pages. It might have been worth exploring, for instance, connections between the image of the athlete in literature and the changing rôle of athletics in the Greek world. Rather than cite Porphyry, as V. does, merely to show that medical writers must be alluding to athletes when they speak of force-feeding, his account of dietary changes might have been exploited to show a growing differentation between recreational and competitive sport in the sixth century B.C. Not only does the establishment of the crown games circuit early in the century show that competitive sport reached a new intensity, but the tradition that the boxer Pythagoras of Samos in 588 was the first Olympic victor to rely on fighting skill rather than on brute

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force (Diogenes Laertius 8.46–7) suggests, like the experimentation with diet, that competitors were becoming specialists, subjected to demanding regimes and in an altogether different league from the ordinary recreational wrestler or runner. (The boxer Pythagoras, incidentally, is surely more likely to have invented the meat diet than his namesake, the famously vegetarian philosopher and mathematician, to whom Porphyry attributed the innovation.) Such a development could hardly have failed to affect the image of athletes in some way, and may help account for what Xenophanes has to say about them.

In the same way, it is all very well for V. to point out that Euripides' *Autolycus* fragment is untypical and that Aristophanes is not especially critical of athletes, but one might have expected her to do more than merely list (under the heading 'athletics ain't what it used to be', pp. 378–83) the passages in Aristophanes which complain that the gymnasia and wrestling grounds lie abandoned as young men are seduced away by the sophists' mental gymnastics. However exaggerated these claims no doubt are, they point to another significant change in attitude towards sport and may provide a background to the fierce denunciation of athletes in *Autolycus*.

As far as the discussion of individual passages is concerned, V. is clear and competent, and she goes easy on the footnotes. Introductions and notes to French translations and editions of the texts are cited more often than relevant books or articles. The bibliography was up-to-date when some form of this book was presented as a PhD thesis in January 1993, but has evidently not been revised since, except for the addition of three articles by the author and one by her supervisor.

A major addition to the canon of studies of ancient sport this book is not, but it will have its uses as a work of reference (V. herself describes it as similar to a sourcebook, p. 12), and to the persevering reader it does offer those fascinating glimpses of ancient sporting practice. Note especially the marvellous 'splashing' exercise recommended by Galen, which involved walking on tiptoes while swinging one's arms very fast in opposite directions (p. 263). Sometimes, an ancient gymnasium must have looked like an aerobics class taught at the Ministry of Silly Walks.

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THE MIDDLE REPUBLIC

C. Bruun (ed.): *The Roman Middle Republic. Politics, Religion, and Historiography c. 400–133 BC. Papers from a conference at the Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, September 11–12, 1998*. (Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 23.) Pp. x + 310, figs. Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2000. Paper. ISBN: 952-5323-00-5.

After the great exhibition 'Roma medio-repubblicana' (1973), it is not surprising that the period should have enjoyed renewed interest: the books of Hölkeskamp and Loreto, a workshop in London, and now this volume. There was evidently little attempt at coherence or coverage, and many of the articles could perfectly well have been published in refereed journals. There is an index of sources, bizarrely including modern authors, and of persons, places, and subjects. The principle according to which the index of sources has been compiled is not obvious, since it excludes Gellius

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