Buddhism: History and Diversity of a Great Tradition

Elizabeth Lyons and Heather Peters. 64 pp., 15 color and 45 black and white ill., map, bibliography, glossary. Softbound. $8.95

This handbook was written to complement the exhibition of the same name, now on permanent display at The University Museum. Co-authors Lyons and Peters begin with the historical foundations of this important world religion, including information on the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha. The authors then examine the spread of Buddhism into Central Asia, China, Japan, Tibet, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and its diversification in each of these areas as it absorbed elements of the local religions. Numerous illustrations in both color and black and white depict objects relating to Buddhism, as well as scenes of contemporary Buddhist life.

Also available is the poster from the Buddhist exhibition, featuring the same Chinese painting in gold on dark blue that appears on the cover of the handbook. The poster is approximately 17" x 23" and sells for $4.95.

To order either of these publications or the poster, write to the Publications Division, The University Museum, 33rd and Spruce Streets, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Checks in U.S. dollars should be made out to "The University Museum." There are no postage or handling charges on prepaid orders. A list of other Museum publications is available upon request.

The 1986 Archaeological Fieldwork Opportunities Bulletin is available from the Archaeological Institute of America. The price is $4.00 for AIA members (include your account #), $6.00 for non-members; add $2.50 postage for addresses outside of North America. Send orders (prepaid ONLY) to: AIA, Dept. FL, Box 1901, Kenmore Station, Boston, MA 02215.

Introduction

DAVID GILMAN ROMANO

One of the most popular aspects of modern Western culture is its universal interest in sports and athletics. Our world is permeated with athletic contests, youthful athletic images, athletic slogans and athletic accoutrements. College and professional athletics are multi-million dollar businesses, and the modern Olympic Games have taken on major world political, social, and economic proportions. Running, jogging, and physical fitness are a current obsession with millions of Americans.

What you may ask, does this have to do with The University Museum and Expedition Magazine? How do modern athletics relate to the study of archaeology and anthropology? You may be surprised to learn that there is a good deal of evidence for athletics from the history, literature, and archaeology of ancient and more recent cultures, and that this evidence often relates to the contemporary world in numerous ways. The theme of this issue of Expedition is athletics, with examples from a number of varied cultures represented by the collections and the research of The University Museum.

The word "athletics" today can mean many things. It can include amateur as well as professional participants. It may at times encompass such competitive activities as basketball, baseball, crew, football, hockey, soccer, wrestling, tennis and track and field, to name only a few. The word "athletics" is originally an ancient Greek word with a very specific meaning, "one who competes for a prize," and is related to two other Greek words athlos meaning "contest" and atthon meaning "prize." (Fig. 1). The original and still primary meaning of athletics, therefore, is tied very closely to the concept of a competition for which a prize is given. The papers in this issue are mostly restricted to theme informal athletic competition in which there is a contest and sometimes a prize. Non-competitive sports, recreational activities, pastimes and board games are generally excluded from consideration.

Some of the earliest information
about athletics is from ancient Mesopotamia. Professor Åke Sjöberg of the Babylonian Section of the Museum and his colleagues are reading, translating, and interpreting thousands of Sumerian cuneiform tablets of the third and second millennia B.C., a number of which have to do with the evidence for Sumerian athletics. This project, when completed, will tell us much about what may well be the earliest examples of athletic competition in the world.

Based on all the available evidence at the present, the earliest record of formalized athletic contests and full-blown athletic festivals comes from ancient Greece. Greek literary, historical, and archaeological sources confirm the existence of a rich tradition of athletic competition. It is, of course, this tradition upon which the introduction of modern track and field competition in the western world was based in the 19th century, and that was the inspiration for the inception and organization of the modern Olympic Games. So indebted are we to ancient Greek athletics that not only have we modeled many of our track and field events on theirs, but we have also borrowed their words for these events, e.g., pentathlon, decathlon, discus.

The name of the marathon is from the ancient Greek place name in Attica, site of the important battle between the Greeks and the Persians in 490 B.C. According to Herodotus, a 5th century B.C. historian, an Athenian professional day runner by the name of Phidippides was sent to solicit help from the Spartans upon the news of the Persian landing at Marathon. Phidippides covered the distance of about 150 miles in two days. This ancient legend accounted for the introduction of the modern marathon in the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. (The marathon was never an ancient athletic event.)

The site of many modern athletic contests is the stadium, originally a Greek word, stadion, meaning "standing place;" it refers to the religious structure found as a part of Greek sanctuaries. It was, of course, the place where Greek athletes were contested and where spectators were accommodated. As far as we know, there was no precedent for the Greek stadium in any earlier civilization (Fig. 2, 3).

The Mediterranean Section of The University Museum has among its holdings a number of examples of Greek vases with scenes of ancient athletes and athletics. Two of the finest of these are illustrated on the cover of this issue. The late 6th century B.C. black figure amphora, on the left, depicts a boxing match between the two central figures, each of whom has his hands wrapped with ox-hide strips, early boxing gloves (dimetra). A trainer or judge stands to the left and an assistant stands to the right holding additional leather strips. The early 5th century B.C. Attic red figure Kylix, on the right, depicts a wrestling scene where two athletes compete under the watchful eye of the trainer to the left. Above the athletes, on the wall of the training area, is seen a diskos in a sling and two halteres or jumping weights, which were carried by ancient long jumpers. Behind the wrestler on the left are probably two javelinists set into the ground. Wrestling, discus, long jump and the javelin were four of the five events of the ancient pentathlon.

The fifth event was the stadium, a footrace one length of the stadium or 000 feet.

Many aspects of the modern Olympic Games have striking similarities with the ancient Games, including the political dimension that has received so much publicity in recent years. This is the subject of the essay on the ancient Olympic Games contained here.

The Romans were influenced to a great degree by the Greek athletic tradition and held Greek-like festivals in Rome itself. The Romans were also innovators in the athletic sphere; for example, they conceived of a new type of elaborate architectural complex devoted to baths, pools, restaurants and other recreation areas, spectacles, for which the Romans were more famous, i.e., strictly speaking outside the realm of athletics. Professor Donald White of the Mediterranean Section summarizes our knowledge about Roman athletics and Dr. Murray McClellan comments on a Roman ball game and its connection with an object from the Museum collection. Ball games were an important part of Roman life, as they were in ancient Greece, though technically not "athletic" in the sense that they were casual recreational sport rather than part of a competition for a prize.

The Etruscans, neighbors of the Romans to the north, also appear to have borrowed heavily from Greek athletic tradition. We have limited written information about Etruscan athletic practice, but there exist colorful and informative wall paintings from Etruscan tombs with depictions of athletic scenes, as well as occasional bronze, terracotta or stone sculptures of athletes. Karen Vellucci gives us insights into the difficulties of obtaining a dispassionate account of Etruscan athletics.

Important original research relating to the subject of Mesoamerican athletics is being conducted by the American Section of The University Museum. The excavations at the Maya site of Tikal in Guatemala between 1956–1970 produced quantities of new information. Included here is a report on the subject of the ball courts at Tikal by Dr. Christopher Jones, one of the excavators of the site, prior to formal publication of this information in the Tikal Report Series of The University Museum.

Lacrosse, a native North American game, may have been first developed by the Iroquois in the 15th century. Dr. Marshall Becker describes the organization and rules of the original game and comments on its political and social importance.

Finally, to bring the subject of athletics still closer to The University Museum, Dr. John Coller gives us a glimpse of athletics from Colonial America and specifically from Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania, as an early leader in the development of collegiate athletics in this country.

**Time Line**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ancient Olympic Games**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>776</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Modern Olympic Games**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cultures discussed in this issue represent a span of several thousand years.
"Trials of Strength"

Athletics in Mesopotamia

ÁKE W. SJÖBERG

Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk (modern Warka in southern Iraq), was on his way to the place where a couch had been prepared for the "sacred marriage" between him and the goddess Ishtar. When he approached the place where this wedding was to be performed, Enkidu, who had been sent into Uruk to compete with Gilgamesh, stood in the street to bar the way. Gilgamesh and Enkidu began to wrestle.

This episode is preserved in the Old Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh (ca. 1700 B.C.E., the original is housed in the University Museum):

Enkidu barred the gate with his foot, they seized each other, they bent down like expert (wrestlers), they destroyed the doorpost, the wall shook. Gilgamesh and Enkidu were holding each other like expert (wrestlers): they bent down, they destroyed the doorpost, the wall shook.

Gilgamesh beat his (one) knee, with the (other) foot on the ground. (col. is 128c)

The last two lines of this passage describe the position of the victorious wrestler who has succeeded in lifting his opponent from the ground, holding him by his girdle over his head while bending his own knee.

The heroes depicted on Near Eastern seals frequently wear girdles, even when they are otherwise unclothed. I refer the reader to a period is a fragment of a stele on which we find the oldest representation of wrestlers (Fig. 3). Both these examples indicate that the Mesopotamians practiced belt wrestling. On some seals we see the victorious hero with a bent knee, holding a lion over his head. Even if the hero was wrestling with a bull, that animal was wearing a belt (as did the hero) that the wrestler grasped (see Gordon 1939: 5). The passage in the Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh has to be interpreted as representing belt wrestling; the victorious wrestler beat one knee on the ground and lifted his adversary over his head (even if it is not explicitly said in the text).

Let us now deal with another text from the Old Babylonian period, written in Sumerian, concerning the marriage of Mardu (CBS 14061, copied in Chiera as no. 5c: original in the University Museum). (Mardu was a west Semitic god, brought into Mesopotamia by the invading Amorites from the west.) Mardu is unmarried and he asks his mother to obtain a wife for him. Her advice is: "Take a wife wheresoever you raise (your eyes), take a wise wheresoever your heart leads you!" A feast is celebrated in Ninh to which Mardu invites the god Nanninda, his wife, and his beautiful daughter named Adgarkiud. During this festival, athletic games took place.