

BOOK REVIEWS

Ioannis Mouratidis, *Istoria Physikis agogis kai athletesmou tou arhaiou kosmou (History of physical education and sports in the ancient world)*, Ekdoseis Platon, Thessaloniki 2008, ISBN 978-9607924-05-6.

Ioannis Mouratidis's new book – the fruit of his long-lasting research – is an extensive study of physical education and sports in ancient Greece from prehistoric ages until the end of Roman times. The book, comprising 670 pages, is a revised and more detailed version of his earlier publications. The author examines in depth the most important issues of physical education and sports in ancient Greece, taking full advantage of extensive sources as methodically, effectively and comprehensibly as possible. The book consists of eleven chapters.

Chapter One (Physical education and sports of ancient peoples) deals with prehistoric sports of ancient eastern populations (Sumerians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Phoenicians, Chinese and Indians). Mouratidis discusses concise documents regarding the history and culture of these populations as well as makes extensive references to their athletic activities, all accompanied with rich photographic material (37 pictures).

In Chapter Two (Minoan and Mycenaean civilization), Mouratidis presents conclusions of historical studies and archaeological excavations from Knossos and Mycenae. He also focuses on perceptions of modern historians of religion, writing, trade, funeral ceremonies, art, architecture, and Minoan and Mycenaean culture in general.

Chapter Three (Sports, games and dances in Minoan Crete) focuses on the sports, games, dances, as well as other physical activities such as hunting and fishing, of the Cretans. A more extensive analysis of the most popular sport of Minoans, i.e. bull leaping (*taurokathapsia*), is also included. The author describes the religious character of athletic activities of Minoan Cretans with clarity and refers to their connection with the cult of "Mother Goddess". He points out the role of spectators in various events as well as the presence and social roles of women.

Chapter Four (Homeric and Mycenaean games) is dedicated to the athletic games described

by Homer in the Iliad and the Odyssey. Specifically, Mouratidis discusses the funeral games held in honour of Patroclus and those dedicated to Odysseus by Phaiakes. In the description of those games the author uses extended extracts from the Homeric poems translated into modern Greek.

Chapter Five (Physical education in ancient Greece) deals with the two basic systems of physical education of ancient Greece: Spartan and Athenian. Regarding oligarchic Sparta the author describes the obligatory character, severity and cruelty of education. On the other hand, in the system of democratic Athens academic education, music and gymnastics co-existed, aimed at the harmonious development of both the body and the spirit. In different sub-chapters, Mouratidis discusses the *palaistra* and *gymnasion*, the role of *paidotribes* and *gymnastes*, the money the staff of athletic foundations were paid and the institution of *ephebia*. The chapter concludes with a concise reference to the systems of physical education in other Greek cities.

Chapter Six (Olympia: Early history) is a historical retrospection of the early history of Olympia (before 776 B.C.) and the prehistory of Olympic Games. The author presents ancient heroes and gods that were worshipped in the sacred area of Olympia. Mouratidis maintains that the worship of heroes in Olympia preceded that of gods. Consequently, he assumes that the games in honour of heroes, preceded those in honour of gods.

Chapter Seven (Pan-Hellenic games) focuses on the Pan-Hellenic Games (Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, Nemean). Mouratidis offers an analytical survey of the Olympic Games, their program, institution of Olympic truce (*ekecheiria*), the *Hellanodikai* and their duties, fines and penalties for the athletes, the drawing of lot by athletes, the *akoniti* ("dustless" or without competition), victories and draws. The Chapter makes an extensive reference to nude events as well as equestrian races

with the use of ancient sources and modern perceptions.

Chapter Eight (Problems connected with the Olympic Games) includes many sub-chapters focusing on miscellaneous issues: exclusion of women from Olympia, Olympic lists of victors, the first event of the Olympic Games, roots of athletic nudity, and relation between athletic nudity, homosexuality and pederasty. In his extremely analytical study of ancient sources Mouratidis concludes that women were excluded from Olympia due to the local cult of Hercules. Similarly, women were also prohibited access to altars, temples and ceremonies in honour of Hercules throughout Greece. According to the author, the reason for women's exclusion was that their presence in the ceremonies of Hercules could cause damage to and physical deterioration of that hero's strength.

Chapter Nine (Problems of games and athletes) deals with a variety of issues relevant to ancient games and athletes such as the importance of Pan-Hellenic sacred games for kings, tyrants and politicians; records and performances of athletes, their deaths, diet, professionalism; the use of baths; significance of music in games, contemporary criticisms of ancient Greek sports, ball games, swimming, rowing, etc.

Chapter Ten (Sports and games for boys and women. Local games) refers to sports and games for boys as well as to the participation of women in athletic activities. Mouratidis discusses here the most important local games in the ancient Greek world with extensive references to the *Panathenaia* Games.

In the final chapter (Games and spectacles of Rome), the author describes and analyzes athletic activities in ancient Rome, causes and consequences of the *panem et circenses* policy, attitude of Roman intellectuals towards public spectacles and Emperor Nero's passion for Greek games and arts.

The book is completed with an extensive summary, a Greek and English index of people and subjects, as well as exhaustive bibliography and coloured photographs (pp. 661-670). Mouratidis's book is a truly unique work. Undoubtedly, it is the best, concise Greek publication on the history of physical education and sports in the ancient Greek world. Using a vast array of ancient sources and observations of modern historians, Mouratidis reconstructs ancient Greek sports, athletic festivals and details of specific events. He dares and provides new interpretations on subjects such as the exclusion of women from the ancient Olympic Games, presence of Hercules in Olympia, origins of athletic nudity, the birth date of the Olympic Games or lists of Olympic victors. These perspectives, differing from the hitherto prevailing opinions and supported with excellent bibliographic sources and extensive analysis, open up new research paths in the area of history of physical education and sports in ancient Greece.

Evangelos Albanidis
Democritus University of Thrace, Greece

Janusz Iskra, *Lekkoatletyka w starożytnej Grecji i Rzymie. Klasyczne wzorce i ich implikacje we współczesnym sporcie (Track and field athletics in ancient Greece and Rome. Classical patterns and their implications in modern sports)*, Politechnika Opolska, Opole 2007, ISSN 1429-6063.

Janusz Iskra is certainly a remarkable author. He is a researcher, trainer and methodologist of general athletics. Iskra has published scientific articles in a number of renowned periodicals, such as *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness* and *New Studies in Athletics*.

In his coaching career Janusz Iskra has trained nearly twenty sprint and hurdles runners – members of the Polish National Team. One of his trainees was also the 1998 European 400 m hurdles

champion, Paweł Januszewski. Iskra's studies on sports training have been published by various international publishing houses, e.g. 'The Hurdles. Contemporary theory, technique and training', Mountain View, California, 1999 and 2004.

Iskra also wrote many papers on didactics and methodology of athletics, such as 'Bieg przez płotki. Teoretyczne podstawy i praktyczne rozwiązania treningowe' (Hurdles. Theoretical bases and practical training solutions) and prepared