Sourcebooks for Ancient Athletics:


In recent years there have been published a large number of books of English translations of Greek and Latin sources with various themes. Some are largely compilations of historical, political and social documents by chronological period, for instance the series published by Cambridge University Press. A popular subject for translations has been in the area of ancient Greek sports and athletics, and the beneficial result has been a greater exposure of the ancient
texts and inscriptions, and the subject as a whole, to scholars, the general populace and most importantly undergraduate and graduate students. For in the past fifteen years, courses on the subject of ancient sports and Greek and Roman athletics have become more commonplace in colleges and universities, and the curriculum can include a discussion of the archaeological and historical evidence taught in tandem with a reading of the literary, epigraphical and historical accounts. I would hasten to point out that such modern courses do not have to be restricted to a large undergraduate lecture format (see Matthew R. Christ, *BMCR* 2.7 (1991) pp. 428-429). They may also be taught in small groups, sometimes a combination of advanced undergraduates and graduate students in a seminar format. In either case, the intellectual content and academic standards of the course need not be different than other classics and archaeology courses.

For the literary, epigraphical and historical material, an ancient sourcebook is very valuable and there have been such available for many years. The most scholarly book on the subject of Greek athletic inscriptions remains Luigi Morretti's 1951 work *Iscrizioni agonistici Greche* which was certainly not meant for popular consumption. It is now somewhat dated since there are recently discovered inscriptions of importance for the subject. As recently as 1971 one could purchase a copy of the 1955 privately printed and revised edition of Rachel Sargent Robinson's *Sources for The History of Greek Athletics*, from the author in Cincinnati. This was a revision of a pamphlet that the author had published privately between 1927-1933 as "The Story of Greek Athletics." From the author's 1955 Preface I have learned that Rachel Louisa Sargent had been a student of Professor Oldfather at the University of Illinois and had undertaken, shortly after completing her doctoral studies in 1925, a translation of Philostratos' essay "On Gymnastics" and of Galen's "Exercise with the Small Ball." These translations were added to Oldfather's collection of translations that he used in classes in the nineteen twenties. Robinson collected these translations and published a pamphlet of them with some explanatory comments without notes, bibliography or indices. Almost thirty years later, Robinson published a fuller and more complete sourcebook with bibliography, extensive notes and multiple indices. This remains today an impressive sourcebook for students and scholars, for in 1981 Ares Publishers issued a reprint of the 1955 private edition. This was two years after the first edition of Miller's *Arete* had appeared in 1979, also published by Ares. Miller's first edition was, by the author's own admission, similar in many ways to the work of Robinson, by the inclusion of many of the same texts. His subtitle explained, to a certain extent, the material that he had chosen to include, *Ancient Writers. Papyri and Inscriptions on the History and Ideals of Greek Athletics and Games*. Miller omitted some of the translations included by Robinson and added some more recently discovered epigraphical texts. It differed basically by the nature of its organization, being structured thematically instead of chronologically, and it also reduced substantially the amount of commentary and discussion by the author and also omitted footnotes and bibliography.

Waldo Sweet's book *Sport and Recreation in Ancient Greece* appeared in 1987, published by Oxford University Press. It, too, is a sourcebook with trans-


lations organized thematically. It is of a slightly different nature than *Arete* since it includes illustrations as well as bibliography, notes, and maps. There is much value to Sweet's book, although there are numerous misspellings and misprints that are most unfortunate. On balance, however, it is a useful sourcebook, perhaps even a kind of workbook for the student to use. I have found its maps and photographs, as well as bibliographies and indices to be of assistance in directing the undergraduate to quick aids to the subject matter. Sweet includes, from time to time, study questions for the reader, which are of rather uneven value.

In 1991, a second and expanded edition of Miller's *Arete* appeared with the subtitle *Greek Sports from Ancient Sources*. There are clearly differences between these various athletics-in-translation sourcebooks and, although the obligation of this reviewer is not to compare these books, some comparisons are unavoidable. Clearly, Miller's second edition of *Arete* is a great improvement over the first edition. The length of sourcebook, which was 117 pages in the first edition, has been expanded to 227 pages. The printed page is now more attractive and the commentary, as well as the translations, much easier to read. The size of the page is larger, the margins are wider and the binding makes for easier and more enjoyable handling and reading of the book. The second edition is well organized and easy to use. Some of the translations in the first edition have been improved as well. For instance, #73 from the first edition, p. 93, the dedication of Kleombrotos of Sybaris, ca. 600 B.C., was, as published, an incomplete translation which has been completed as #160 of the second edition.

Miller has stated that the inclusion of his ancient literary texts and inscriptions is purely subjective and, knowing full well the difficulty of selecting literary and epigraphical texts for classroom use, I will not argue with his selection of material. At times, however, I find an important source or body of material that is not included and which may be found in another of the translation sourcebooks. For instance, there is one abridged Bacchylides ode included in the second edition of *Arete* (there were none in the first edition) but no passages from Simonides in either. Miller does include excerpts from five odes of Pindar in his second edition. In comparison, Robinson (1955) includes twelve pages on the subject of the lyric poets of the sixth and fifth centuries including a page and one-half of introduction and interpretation and, altogether, I have found that this material makes a very good chapter assignment for students.

The Index and Glossary, which are combined in the second edition of *Arete*, are not always totally satisfactory. The Glossary seems to work better than the Index. I have found certain words that I would consider key to be missing from the Index, which can make the search for a particular ancient reference somewhat difficult. For instance, looking for the dedication of Kleombrotos of Sybaris, the Index does not cite the athlete's name or his city. The reference to the inscription is found in the Index under the name of "Athena," the deity in whose name the dedication was made. The reference can also be found under "Olympia or Olympic Games," along with 100 other unspecified source references. I also feel that there could be an argument made for a fuller bibliography in *Arete*, especially since its primary audience is to be the undergraduate. Miller
mentions that there are in existence several good athletic bibliographies (Scanlon and Crowther) which the undergraduate could utilize, but this realistically is often difficult to do, and there is nothing better than having a further bibliographic reference or two found in the same sourcebook as the reading.

My only serious criticism of the book has to do with the use of dollar equivalent figures for the translation of sums of money from the inscriptions. Miller is fully aware of the issue and addresses this problem in the introduction of his first as well as his second edition. In 1979 he wrote that the method he had used to make equivalent values for his first edition was to take the daily wage of a skilled workman from an appropriate period of time to equal a wage in 1979 of $8.00 per day. He quickly admitted that this was very conservative and that Robert Scranton in *The Muses at Work*, ed. Carl Roebuck, 1969, had suggested a figure of $15.00. In 1991 he writes that he had been severely and correctly criticized by scholars who believed that his exchange value was too low. Miller points out, rightly so, that the ancient sources are of different dates with different real values for the sums of money. He suggests the safest solution would be simply to transliterate the sums of money and to give some reasonable indication of the contemporary value of the drachma, talent or denarius (I couldn't agree with him more on this point). For his second edition, Miller has chosen a different equivalent dollar value for the drachma, the value of olive oil. Miller has set his standard on the value of a Panathenaic amphora filled with olive oil (capacity was approximately 40 liters) and by comparing what a liter of olive oil costs today (1991) in Berkeley, $9.88, with the value of eighteen drachmas as the "highest average usual price" for a liter of olive oil in ancient Athens, a figure which he bases on the work of David Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics*, Chicago, 1984, p. 116, note 13. Miller notes that Young cites higher equivalents, as much as 55 drachmas per amphora. Incidentally Robinson (1955) p. 119, mentions that oil-filled Panathenaic amphorae could be sold for 12 drachmas each. Miller notes that the money equivalents of his second edition are approximately two and one-half times greater than those in his first edition. For instance, the fine mentioned in the Delphi inscription from the stadium retaining wall (Miller #73) was increased from $40.00 in 1979 to $110.00 in 1991. Young in 1984 as well as in 1980, "Professionalism in Archaic and Classical Greek Athletics," *The Ancient World* 7 1983 pp. 47-48, suggested a factor of ten greater than the equivalent suggested by Miller. All of this is in my opinion totally unnecessary as well as extremely confusing for the undergraduate or for anyone else reading and using the sourcebook. As Miller writes in his introduction, "I doubt that we will ever get the totals just right. Indeed our own modern rate of inflation guarantees that whatever figures are used today will be out of date for tomorrow's students." Which again raises the question, why use dollar equivalents at all?

The idea of replacing an ancient monetary value with a dollar equivalent figure in a Greek inscription or text, to my way of thinking, biases the nature of the inscription and its meaning. For once a dollar figure is imposed in an ancient context, the ancient associations are less clear and sometimes lost altogether. As Miller has rightly pointed out, the value of the drachma varies over time and it is
difficult to know many important criteria that could be used in determining an
equivalent. More importantly, by not including the drachma figure in the
English translation, and only including the dollar equivalent, the author has re-
ally done a minor injustice to the reader by not giving the entire ancient testi-
mony, in this case the original sum in the ancient standard so that the reader
could make a judgment on his or her own of the proper equivalent. I used
Miller's first edition of Arete in my Ancient Athletics class several years ago and
was faced with just this problem. The solution was to bring in the original in-
scription, translate it and make copies for the entire class which, as it turned out,
was an interesting exercise for all involved. Neither Robinson (1955) nor Sweet
(1987) discuss the subject of dollar equivalencies, and where necessary only cite
the drachma figure. In my own classes, I had used these different interpretations
of the value of a drachma as the departure point for the entire discussion of the
value of prizes and compensation in antiquity. As such, these differences in as-
signment of values by modern authors prove to be an excellent means to expla-
nation. It should also be noted that the Cambridge University series of ancient
sources in translation include a number of athletic related texts, some of which
also appear in Miller's Second Edition of Arete. For instance, Miller #126, a
gymnasium decree from Berytus, is found in M.M. Austin, The Hellenistic World
From Alexander to the Roman Conquest, Cambridge, 1981, #118, with bibliog-
raphy and notes. Austin retains the drachma standard for the translation and, as
such, it serves as a potential source for comparative purposes.

As a complement to a handbook on ancient Greek athletics, Miller's second
edition of Arete will serve the student well and is a welcome addition to the
growing library of books on the subject of ancient athletics.

David Gilman Romano
The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania

********