This is on the whole an excellent book, with beautiful illustrations and a very attractive lay-out. Instead of the perennial footnotes we now have notes in the margin of the pages. Decker signs for the chapters on Egypt and Greece, Thuillier for Rome. Both authors have won their spurs with many publications in their respective fields. Problems of definition are not my favorite but they are, alas, inevitable. Decker mentions a very broad definition, including hunting, dancing and playing (le jeu) but adds that he does not adopt such a definition in his chapter (13). Nevertheless, in his discussion of the fundamental role of the Pharaoh in what is called Egyptian sport he emphasizes the importance of the hunt and posits the «équivalence entre guerre, sport et chasse» (23, my italics, HWP). This is hardly consistent and I see little value in subsuming hunting, dancing and playing under the heading 'sport'; they belong to the realm of entertainment and recreation. Sport is a matter of standardized, competitive games subject to fixed regulations and decisions of referees applying the rules and imposing penalties (see my brief remarks in Nikephoros 13, 2000, 281–282). Homo ludens may or may not have lain at the roots of homo competitivus but there is little to nothing left of the former in the latter, at least in the Greek variant: Greek agon meant both athletic contest and military battle. There is very little of the homo ludens in either of them.

The problems with Egyptian sport (wrestling, boxing, running) are manifold. First, in some cases the pharaoh is the predetermined winner; his victory confirms his vigor and power and legitimizes (the continuation of) his rule. Occasionally he is represented on a two-wheel chariot; such chariots were used for transportation, in war, for the hunt and «à faire du sport» (32). But in the same vein D. acknowledges that there is no source documenting the existence of regular equestrian games, in the Greek manner, for horse- and chariot owners. The Egyptian chariots refer to the pharaoh’s role as invincible warrior and have nothing to do with sport.

Other contests are ceremonial and ritual; the so-called Taharqa stele (early 7th cent. B.C.) represents selected soldiers as long-distance runners (100 km): a clear instance of «finalité militaire» (14). The connection between war and sport was also important in Greece but in that world physical exercises and athletic disciplines developed into an end in their own right and materialized in a dense network of contests (agones), nourished by the ubiquitous gymnasion. D. (18) rightly points out that the gymnasion was non-existent in Egypt; the same seems true for a network of agonies in the Greek manner.

Decker’s chapter on Greek sport is excellent. Brief sections on Minoan/Mycenaean and Homeric sport are followed by up-to-date chapters on the ever-present agonies, the athletic and equestrian disciplines, the athletes, their associations and mobility, the fundamental importance of the gymnasion and ancient, mainly intellectual, criticism of agonistic practice. There always remains room for disagreement on details. I mention a few quisquiliae.

The xystarches is not a «président de jeux» (112. 125) but an imperial commissioner appointed to supervise all the agonies in one city or region (probably with special attention for the financial aspects). On 107 D. does me the honor of agreeing with my thesis that after 400 B.C. elite athletes continued to be active in the business side by side with lower
class athletes. But some lines further down he writes that sport remained a «phénomène essentiellement réservé aux couches supérieures de la société» and that athletes «continuent, à quelques rares exceptions près, à être exclusivement issus des rangs de l’aristocratie» (my italics, H.W.P.). I prefer the 'side by side'-view; quantification is impossible, given the fact that in the prosopography of athletes there are too many who remain just a name for us. As to the gymnasion D. (135–137) gives full credit to C. Mann’s thesis (Klio 85, 1998, 7–21) that in origin the gymnasion was the athletic preserve of the aristocracy who sought and found compensation for the loss of their monopoly on the battlefield. For the Hellenistic period D. might have elaborated a bit more the function of the gymnasion as a place for both military and athletic training. The military aspect seems somewhat over-emphasized; the same is true for the cultural aspect of the gymnasion in the Greek East. The role of itinerant ‘professors’ giving lectures (ἐκποιεῖται) in gymnasia is not to be neglected but it was a subordinate role. For the gymnasion see my article in ‘Scienze dell’Antichità’ 12, 2002, 623–644, esp. 629–640, and, above all, D. Kah – P. Scholz (edd.), Das hellenistische Gymnasion, Berlin 2004.

In Thuillier’s piece on Roman Sport the equestrian events in the Roman circus take pride of place. T. devotes 35 excellent pages to the jockeys (superstars), the sparsores (men, who poured water on the heads of the horses), the factions, the way the races were implemented and the spectators’ behaviour. T. does not eschew comparisons with contemporary mass-sport: the chariot races are what the primera division is in football and the NBA championship for America’s basketball (incidentally, T. writes NBC! Sorry for my pedantry; we should be grateful nowadays for every educated French citizen referring positively to an aspect of American society!); Diocles, one of the superstars among the jockeys, is the Zidane or Ronaldo of our times.

There is more to Roman sport than the sensational circus races. T. appropriately distinguishes between the private (159–177) and the public (224–246) domain. As to the former, he rejects the traditional idea of Romans being, above all, spectators as opposed to the Greeks, who actively practised their games both in and outside the gymnasia: «les Romains faisaient du sport à titre individuel, et cela depuis toujours» (161). True, Roman soldiers practised contests in various athletic disciplines as preparation for their job (161), and on the urban campi, in Rome and elsewhere (162–163), citizens played ball- and hoopgames and wrestled; but it is all a matter of «spectacles improvisés» (163). The context is one of a relatively relaxed, non-institutionalized body culture rather distinct of what happened in Greek gymnasia and stadiums. T. makes much of the Roman baths, the ‘gymnasia of the West’ (165). It is true, quite a few baths contained palaestras, but we do not know whether bathers or other visitors practised wrestling or boxing for fun, for more physical fitness or for real competition in contests; iconographical material from bathhouses shows boxers or wrestlers (166–167) but it is not always known whether they were visitors training and competing in the thermae or athletes either training (171, 173) or hired by benefactors and presented to the public during ludi. A detailed study of the ‘sport’-mosaics found in the Latin West, with special attention to the question what they refer to, seems a desideratum (cf. now I. Newby, PBSR 72, 2002, 177–203; nondum vidimus). Most evidence concerns swimming and ballgames in the baths (168–174); sheer fun or the quest for health and fitness rather than organized competitive sport.

Wealthy families, at least in Rome, had a private palaestra or a small gymnasion in their private villas (167 and 176–177); they employed athletes as private
trainers or as performers in private games organized for friends and relatives; but they could also rent them to local politicians, who presented a *spectacula pugilum* to their fellow citizens. This is all distinct from Greek athleticism where free-born citizens voluntarily participated in the hundreds of official agones all over the ancient world.

With the *spectacula pugilum* we set foot on the public domain; and here a main problem presents itself: to what extent and in which form Greek athleticism had an impact on Roman society? T. seems to suggest (147) that the increasing popularity of Greek athletics in Roman imperial times, as reflected in the growing number of contests (174), indicates the intensity of Roman sport: «les agônes à la grecque vont fleurir comme jamais dans tout l’Empire, en Occident comme en Orient, de Nîmes à Pergame, d’Aquilée à Carthage». This is perhaps too optimistic. First, the increasing popularity of Greek sport in the Roman empire has little to do with Roman sport. Second, in Aquileia, Carthage, Puteoli and Naples genuine quadrennial Greek contests were introduced, belonging to the top category of sacred crown games, some of them even to the *περίοδος* (‘Big Four’) (cf. recently C. Mann, Nikephoros 15, 2002, 125–158; in Narbonensis Vienna, Marseille and possibly Arles and Nîmes celebrated annual money games (cf. A. Bouet, RA, 1998, 33–105; I have not yet seen Bouet’s ‘Thermes privés et publics en Gaule narbonnaise’, 2 vols., 2003). A well-known mosaic from North-African Gafsa (229–230, 240, 242–243; cf. J.-Y. Strasser, RevPhil 75, 2001, 301–303), showing a more or less complete program of a Greek athletic agon, may testify to the existence of such an agon in the city; but it may just as well reflect the mentality of an individual fan of Greek athletics, who got excited by the Carthaginian Pythia. That is all: between the cities mentioned by T. there are large tracks of territory untouched by Greek agonistic life. Incidentally, the number of days during which Greek contests could be watched, is very small when compared to the time (and money) invested in gladiatorial games, *venationes* and circus-races. What remains are the *spectacula pugilum* (235–236; also 155) already on record under Augustus and frequently mentioned in inscriptions from North-Africa.

These *spectacula* are offered by benefactors in the context of Roman *ludi*, *scaenici* or otherwise. We probably have here a series of matches between individual boxers who fought on the basis of Greek rules and technique, well to be distinguished from the *pugiles catervarii* (235), who fought in groups and presumably continued an indigenous, early Etruscan-Roman tradition (see Mann’s above-mentioned article in Nikephoros). Whether the other *pugiles* also stood in an age-old Etrusco-Roman tradition or reflect the impact of Greek athletics is not clear, at least not to me. T. (147, 174, 244) seems to opt for the latter. Whatever the truth T. (236–237) rightly emphasized the relative brutality of Roman boxing and the use of boxing idiom in gladiatorial language; he also points out (162, 176–177) that Greek athletics never was a matter of Roman citizens presenting themselves in regular and respectable public contests. Was it perhaps more a matter of hired persons, who like gladiators, were to entertain the crowds? In a way the *spectacula pugilum* seem to me to testify to the ‘gladiatorialization’ of boxing and thereby to a world clearly distinct from the *certamina Graeca*. Incidentally, much to be recommended are T.’s sections on
athletic nudity (224–227) and on the cirrus, i.e., a «touffe de cheveux» or a «sorte de queue de cheval», often visible on the head of Roman athletes (227–231).

Thuillier pays no attention to the term gymnasium on record in Latin inscriptions. Some render the word as ‘gymnastic displays or competitions’, others as ‘(distribution of) oil’. G. G. Fagan, ZPE 124, 1999, 263–275, recently analysed the 48 Latin inscriptions containing this term and concluded that «the preponderance of evidence seems to be in favor of the reading ‘oil distributions’, which can be made to fit the majority of cases from North Africa, albeit uncomfortably in some instances» (271). I am prepared to argue that the reading ‘gymnastic competitions’ does not merely fit uncomfortably in some cases but does not fit at all; in the few instances, in which according to F. the meaning ‘oil distributions fits uncomfortably’, there is more comfort than F. allows for. Anyhow, it seems that gymnasium does not provide an argument for the increasing impact of Greek sport on Roman society.

All in all: Decker and Thuillier have written an eminently readable, well-researched and quite up-to-date account of Graeco-Roman sport, with some audacious but quite justifiable comparisons with modern sportstars and mass-events. The 150,000 spectators in the Circus Maximus are a worthy predecessor of the ca. 100,000 fans in Camp Nou in Barcelona or in Bernabeu in Madrid!

Oegstgeest

H. W. Pleket

