

CULTURAL HISTORY

PROJECT



DATE:
Thursday 21st
August 2008

TIME:
4.15-5.15PM

VENUE:
CCCS Seminar
Room, 4th
Floor of the
Forgan Smith
Tower

UQ
CULTURAL
HISTORY
SEMINARS

War minus the shooting: Sport and democracy in classical Athens

David Pritchard



This paper concerns the paradox of athletics in classical Athens. Democracy may have opened up politics to every class of Athenian but it had little impact on sporting participation. The city's athletes continued to be drawn predominantly from the upper class. It comes as a surprise then that lower-class Athenians actually esteemed athletes above every other group in the public eye, honoured them very generously when they won, and directed a great deal of public and private money to sporting competitions and facilities. In addition athletics escaped the otherwise persistent criticism of upper-class activities in the popular culture of the democracy. The research of social scientists on sport and aggression suggests this paradox may have been due to the cultural overlap between athletics and war under the Athenian democracy. The paper concludes that the practical and ideological democratization of war by classical Athens legitimized and supported upper-class sport.

David Pritchard is a member of the Cultural History Project and a senior lecturer in Classics and Ancient History at the University of Queensland. He has held postdoctoral research fellowships at the University of Sydney and Macquarie University where he was awarded his BA Hons and PhD in Ancient History. His research interests include cultural and political participation in the Athenian democracy, the culture of war in ancient Greece, the relationship between war and democracy in the ancient and modern worlds, the Olympic Games, and Greek sport and education. He edited *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World* and has two books forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

Enquiries:

Jason Jacobs, School of English, Media Studies & Art History, j.jacobs@uq.edu.au.
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