
Recognised without Competing? Women and Athletic Prestige between the Greek Exception and Roman Silence.

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Résumé

This study examines, from a diachronic perspective, how the institutional evolution of chariot racing conditioned access to prestige and public visibility, with particular attention to the exceptional and socially restricted possibilities of female recognition. Rather than setting up a homogeneous opposition between "Greeks" and "Romans," the proposal deliberately delimits specific contexts and chronological frames: on the one hand, the panhellenic setting of the Olympic Games in the Classical period (without extrapolating this evidence to the diversity of Greek societies and political regimes); on the other, the Roman circus as an urban institution in the **Imperial period**.

At Olympia, although women were formally excluded from the *agon*, equestrian events provided a limited and exceptional route to recognition, since victory was attributed to the owner of the chariot and horses rather than to the charioteer. This framework accounts for the victories of Kyniska of Sparta in the four-horse chariot race in 396 and 392 BCE, without implying direct female bodily participation (Plut. *Vit. Ages.* 20). This precedent did not constitute egalitarian inclusion, but rather a symbolic form of recognition strictly conditioned by status and wealth (Golden, 2014: 254).

Building on this point, the paper investigates how, in the Roman circus and its public system of legitimation, competitive recognition tended to be reserved for authorized male actors—such as charioteers—thereby reinforcing social and gender hierarchies already embedded in Roman society rather than "producing" them *ex novo* (Goldman, 2013, 90; Potter, 2012, 184). The analysis will draw on specialist scholarship as well as a corpus of **classical** (literary and normative) and **epigraphic** sources in order to assess which rule-based and institutional mechanisms determined who could convert competition into prestige and visibility within the circus arena.

Mots-Clés: Greek Olympic Games, Roman circus, Social and gender hierarchies, Women, Antiquity

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