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Greek stadia and Roman spectacles: Asia, Athens, and the tomb of Herodes Atticus

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Along with the temple, stoa, theater, and gymnasium, the stadium was one of the most distinctively Greek of building types. The stadium functioned as the venue for athletic competitions, a central element of Hellenic culture, and thus stadia were present in almost all Greek *poleis*. But like so much else in the Greek city state, the stadium underwent change in both form and function when Greece came under Roman rule. This article examines the changes that occurred in Greek stadia as a result of contact with the Romans, and explores the architectural and cultural contexts in which the changes took place. The evidence is both archaeological and textual, coming primarily from Asia Minor and from Athens. The discussion begins with the Greek East, and then moves to Athens where it focuses on a particular building — the Panathenaic Stadium built by Herodes Atticus — as a paradigmatic example of how stadia reflect the larger phenomenon of Greek cultural adaptation to Roman rule. I end with a re-examination of the problem of the location of the tomb of Herodes Atticus and consider a recent theory proposing a burial place for Herodes under the Panathenaic Stadium's running track.¹

The architectural form and function of stadia

Stadia were rectangular or U-shaped buildings that were used for athletic events (the *gymnikos agón*) that formed part of Greek religious festivals.² Events included short-distance

1 The following abbreviations are used:

Gardner E. A. Gardner, "The Panathenaic ship of Herodes Atticus," *CR* 28 (1914) 225-26.

Gasparri C. Gasparri, "Lo stadio panatenaico," *ASAtene* 36-37 (1974-75) 313-92.

Golvin J.-C. Golvin, *L'amphithéâtre romain* (Paris 1988).

Humphrey J. H. Humphrey, *Roman circuses. Arenas for chariot racing* (London 1986).

Robert L. Robert, *Les gladiateurs en Orient grec* (Paris 1940).

Roueché C. Roueché, *Performers and partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and late Roman periods* (London 1993).

Thompson H. A. Thompson, "The impact of Roman architects on Athens, 170 B.C. - A.D. 170," in S. Macready and F. H. Thompson (ed.), *Roman architecture in the Greek world* (London 1987) 1-17.

Tobin J. Tobin, "Some new thoughts on Herodes Atticus's tomb, his stadium of 143/4, and Philostratus VS 2.550," *AJA* 97 (1993) 81-89.

Travlos J. Travlos, *Pictorial dictionary of ancient Athens* (New York 1971).

Welch K. Welch, "The stadium at Aphrodisias in Caria," *AJA* (102) 1998.

Wiedemann T. Wiedemann, *Emperors and gladiators* (London 1992).

Wycheley R. E. Wycheley, "The Pythion at Athens," *AJA* 67 (1963) 75-79.

2 On the architectural history of stadia in general, see S. Dorigny, "Stadium" in *Dar.-Sag.* vol. 4.2, 1449-56; P. Sommella, "Stadio" in *EAA* 464-68; *RE* III A2, 1967-73 (Fiechter); P. Mylonas, *Peri stadion* (Athens 1952); P. Aupert, "Évolution et avatars d'une forme architecturale" in C. Landes (ed.), *Le stade romain et ses spectacles* (Lattes 1994) 95-106. For specific buildings, see: A. von Gerkan, *Milet II.1: Das Stadion* (Berlin 1921); A. M. Colini, *Stadium Domitiani* (Rome 1943); Gasparri (supra n.1); P. Aupert, *Fouilles de Delphes, II. Topographie et architecture: le stade* (Paris 1979); O. Broneer, *Isthmia II* (1973), and S. G. Miller's *Nemea II: the stadium* (in preparation). Other recent work on stadia: D. Romano, *Athletics and mathematics in Archaic Corinth: the origins of the Greek "stadion"* (Philadelphia 1993); P. Roos, "In search of ancient stadia and hippodromes in Anatolia," *OpAth* 20 (1994) 179-88, and "On the connection between theatre and stadium in Anatolian cities," in H. Malay (ed.), *Erol Atalay memorial* (Izmir 1991) 165-68. The stadium is to be distinguished from the hippodrome/circus, which is longer and has a central barrier in the track because it was used for chariot and horse racing; on the subject of hippodromes see Humphrey (supra n.1); and Y. Porath, "Herod's 'amphitheatre' at Caesarea: a multipurpose entertainment building," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: some recent archaeological*