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Year in School: Senior

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Female athletes: Bronze Age - Classical Period

Although much has been written about ancient athletics performed by Greek men, little is yet known of women's participation in ancient sport. I am interested in understanding what sports were available to women and what function they served in society. In order to better understand the ancient world, we must understand the roles and lives of both sexes. I focused my approach on four separate case studies from different areas and time spans in ancient Greece: from the Bronze Age, Minoan bull leaping on Crete; from the Archaic and Classical periods, the race for Hera at Olympia, the race for Artemis at Brauron in Attica, and women's athletic rituals at Sparta. By using these four cases I can compare and contrast them in order to learn more about the individual events and participants. To conduct my research I read modern scholarship and ancient sources on the subjects of both ancient women and athletics, and also studied ancient artistic representations. I have found that the athletic festivals seemed to have served as a coming of age or premarital event for ancient women. The events seem to have been performed by young, unmarried women, in honor of some type of goddess, such as Artemis or Hera, which may have been a way of asking the goddess for protection during the rest of their lives as wives and mothers. The Spartan women alone seem to have lived in a culture that encouraged them to get exercise, and this seems to have been done in order to produce stronger baby boys to grow into mighty Spartan warriors.

This project was completed to fulfill a Capstone requirement.