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Sommario/riassunto

War was a constant activity, almost a staple livelihood, in the cities of ancient Greece, and many public festivals served to promote and celebrate war. They entailed reunions of the whole community, often at the new year, for enrolling citizens or conducting games. Noel Robertson focuses on such festivals in Athens, Aprta, Argos, and two smaller centres, in order to reconstruct the social conditions reflected in the festival programs and settings. He begins with a close analysis of the extant evidence, bringing together for the first time the many small, scattered indications in familiar sources. He uses in addition new epigraphic and archaeological evidence which has recently come to light at Athens. Since ritual is by definition unchanging, public festivals can disclose earlier stages of social organization. Robertson also shows how the festivals gave rise, by way of aetiology (explanatory tales or legends), to some persistent misconceptions about the past.