

Athletes and artists at the *Sebastà* new agonistic catalogues from Neapolis



Plan of the ancient Neapolis.



Piazza Nicola Amore.



In October 2004 about 1000 fragments of agonistic catalogues have been found in one of the building sites of the new Naples underground. The excavation area lies in Piazza Nicola Amore (Duomo Station), where, in the first half of the first century AD, a podium temple with marble columns and pediment was built. It looked out into an open space bordered by a portico built over a more ancient portico, dating from II century BC. The excavations have unearthed just a little portion of the building. Actually the inner wall of the portico is about 14 metres long and 2 metres high. It was completely covered with marble inscribed slabs, bearing the names of several winners of the *Italikà Rhomaia Sebastà Isolympia*.



The epigraphic team started working in the building yard and now goes on filing and copying the inscriptions in a shed outside the city.

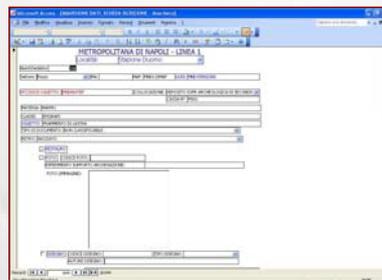
The games were held every four years in honour of the emperor Augustus from 2 AD till to second half of the third century. The *Sebastà* are known thanks to several historic and epigraphic evidences, not least a famous inscription from Olympia. They featured equestrian, athletic, and artistic contests. The athletes competed in their age groups. Initially there were two age groups, boys and adults; these were later increased to three with the addition of a "youths" category in between. In addition the program included two special age-classes, the *Sebasté* and the *Klaudiané*, as well as race contests for women (*stadion* and *diaulos*). The winners received a wheat-stalk wreath, but there were also prizes in money for the artists.



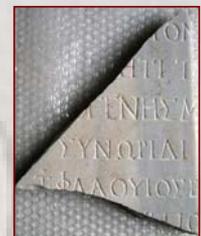
The first goal achieved is the exposition of three restored slabs in the exhibition "Stazione Neapolis, i cantieri dell'archeologia", still open to the public in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.



A first data processing has enabled the creation of a tentative map showing the origin of the competitors. Most of the winners came from Asia Minor and Egypt, but also from Greece, Thrace, Cyprus and so on. At least two of the athletes are said to be Neapolitan.



After filing the fragments, the epigraphic team is working out a database extremely useful for comparing the feature of each fragment. At the present time about 600 fragments have been filled in the database.



The equestrian contests included horseback races, and races of chariots drawn by teams of two and four horses. The athletic contests included stadium, double-stadium and long-distance races, pentathlon, wrestling, boxing, *pancratium*, the armed race and the acrobatic race called *apobates*. The games had also an artistic section which included flute, kithara, poetry, comedy, tragedy, and pantomime. The new inscriptions record also a contest of prose and poetry panegyrics in honour of Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and the Flavian dynasty.

