



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF GREECE

ANCIENT GREECE



OLYMPIA

- MONUMENTS AND ARTIFACTS
- HISTORY
- PHOTOGRAPHS, MAPS, AND RECONSTRUCTIONS

GREECE



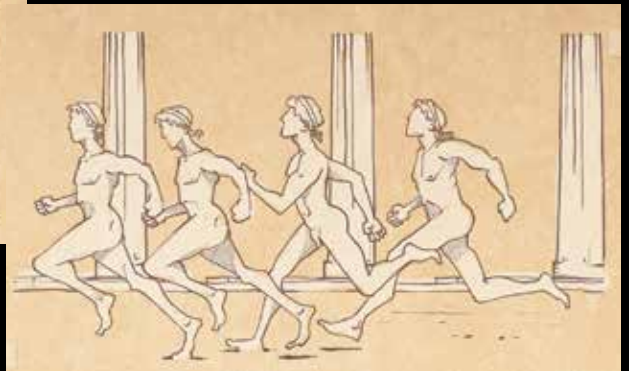
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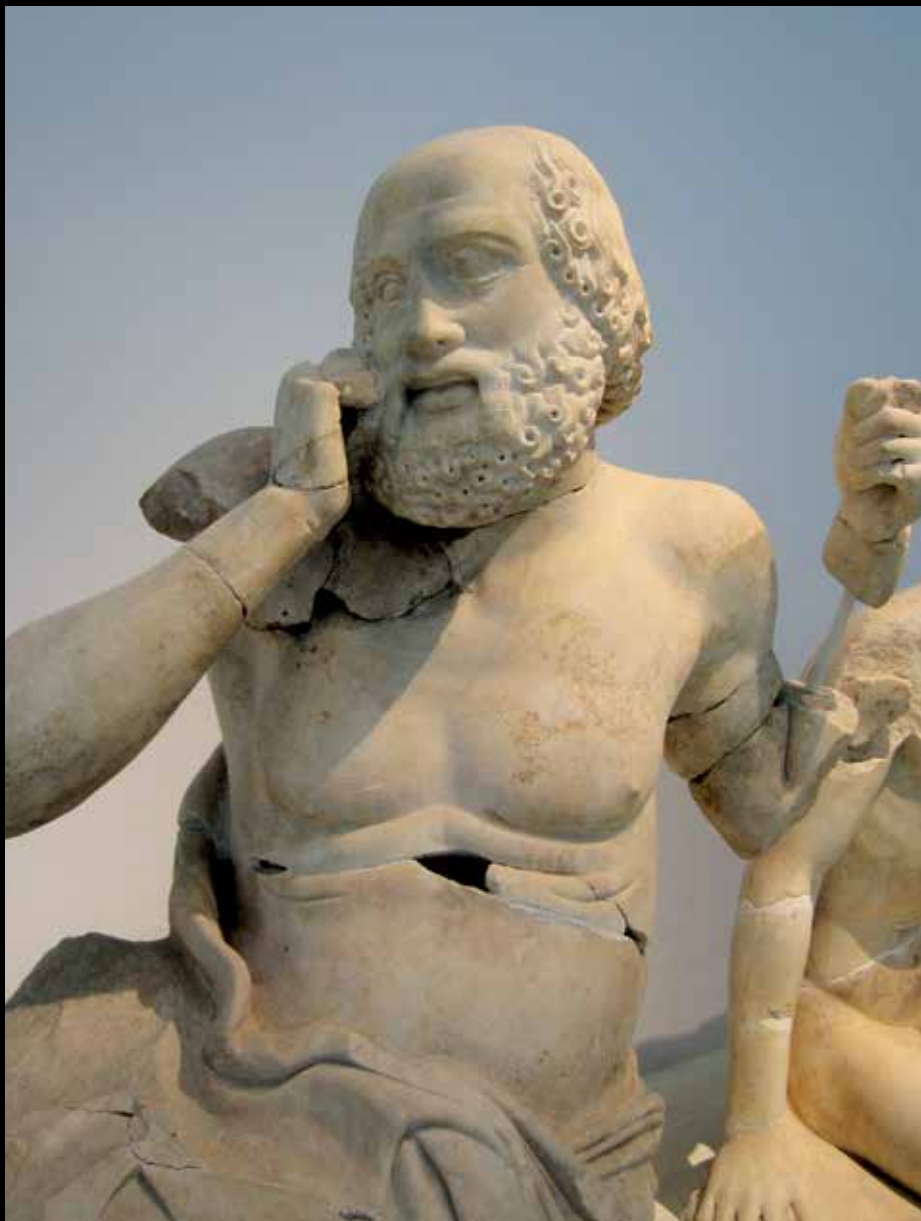
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The history of Olympia

The start of the cult worship and athletic completions held at Olympia is lost in the mists of time. Both mythological references and the study of ancient sources provide evidence of the historical importance of the site and the Olympic Games, with further insight offered by finds from archaeological excavation.

The elderly seer on the eastern frieze with his gaze turned towards the protagonists of the myth of Oenomaus and Pelops.
MANOUELE ZUNELLI



THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

The Sanctuary of Olympic is spread over a fertile area that lays between Mount Kronos (or, colloquially, Kronio) on the north, the Alpheios River on the south, and its tributary, the Kladeios River, on the west. Floods in the Middle Byzantine Era covered the ruins of the ancient sanctuary with layers of mud and it remained hidden until 1875 when the first archaeological surveys were initiated to locate the site.

Altis, the sacred woods of Zeus, extends over the valley and the confluence of the two rivers. Within its perimeter were the buildings used for cult worship, with auxiliary buildings such as the priests' residences, baths, training, and competition areas around it.

Entering the sanctuary from the northwest, the visitor arrives first the Prytaneion, seat of the hierateio or clergy that ran the sanctuary and ensure that the flame of Hestia remained lit. It was built in the late sixth century B.C. but underwent several renovations. The awards ceremony for the Olympic competitors was held at the Prytaneion.

The famed Temple of Zeus dominated the center of Altis. A peripteral temple in the Doric order, it housed the chryselephantine cult statue of Zeus created by the fifth-century-B.C. Athenian sculptor Pheidias. The temple dates from the fifth century B.C. and was built using local shelly marble. The lavish decoration is made from Paros marble. Unfortunately, just two column bases survive today along with a few fallen capitals laying on the ground. The temple was the same size as the Parthenon on the Athens acropolis and erected around the same time.

The Temple of Hera or Heraion is also a peripteral structure in the Doric order. Dedicated to the cult of Hera, it is the sanctuary's oldest shrine and was



Mount Kronos photographed from the altar at the stadium.
PANOS KARAPAGIOTIS/ SHUTTERSTOCK



The Temple of Zeus photographed from the south.

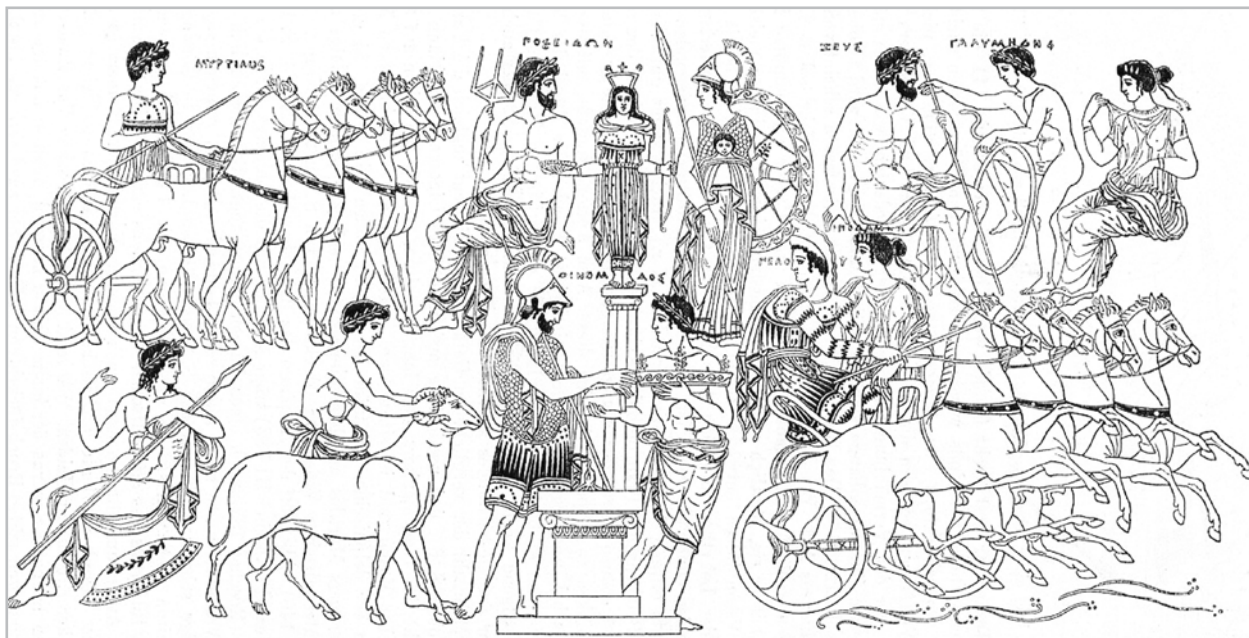
HANSUELI KRAPP

This red krater or serving vessel used for mixing wine with water before serving is decorated with a red-figure illustration of the myth of Pelops and Oenomaus.

MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE

built by the people of Skillous in the late seventh or early sixth century B.C. Three temples have stood on the spot. The ceremony for the lighting of the Olympic flame for the Modern Olympics is held at the altar in front of the shrine.

Left of the Heraion is the Philippeion, the only circular structure in Altis. It was dedicated by Philip II of Macedon after his victory at Chaeronea in 338 B.C. and completed by his son Alexander. The shrine housed five chryselephantine statues by the Athenian sculptor Leochares representing members of the Philip's family—Philip, Alexander, Olympias, Amyntas, and Eurydice.





To the Heraion's northeast is the Nymphaeum, a fountain house built by Herodes Atticus II in the second century A.D. as a tribute to his wife Regilla. It was a vital contribution to the sanctuary because of the water shortage during the Olympic Games. A marble bull decorating the fountain's center is now exhibited at the Olympia Archaeological Museum.

Small temple-like structures known as treasuries are arrayed along the sanctuary's northern end. Most of these were built in the sixth century B.C. to house valuable dedications to the sanctuary made by various cities.

The Metroon is located in the same section of the sanctuary. A relatively small peripteral temple in the Doric order, it was dedicated to the mother of the gods, Rhea (or Cybele). The Metroon was built in the early fourth century B.C. and later used for worship by the Roman emperors.

The Stadium that survives today dates from the fifth century B.C. and is the third stadium at the site. The first, which was built in the Archaic Era, extended along the artificial terrace created for the treasuries, with its west side facing towards the Temple of Zeus. Sometime between the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., the stadium was relocated further east and a sloped side added. Fifty years later, it was moved once more to its present location and shape. According to tradition, the stadium's length was set by Heracles by counting out 600 steps, or six plethra.

Chariot races were held at the Hippodrome just south of the stadium. Pausanias describes it as being 600 meters long and 200 meters wide. Unfortunately, its precise location has yet to be identified as it was buried under the silt of the Alpheios River. The Hippodrome's most interesting features was the starting blocks or hippafesi—a complex mechanism described by Pausanias in *Eliaka* (VI, 20, 10-16).

Before entering the stadium, the athletes stood in front of the imposing statue of Zeus to take the Olympic oath, a pledge that they would honor the

Ernst Curtius was born in Lubeck, Germany, in September 1914. An archaeologist and historian who studied in Bonn, Gettingen, and Berlin, Curtius led the excavation of ancient Olympia. He died in Berlin in July 1896.





Zeus with Ganymede. This clay statue depicts Ganymede's abduction by Zeus. Found in fragments during excavations of the stadium in 1878, it was carefully restored.

MANOUELE ZUNELLI

rules and spirit of the Games. The Zanes, plural for Zeus, were a row of bronze statues of the god arranged on stone pedestals in front of the treasuries. These figures were funded with the money from the fines paid by athletes for violating the rules. At the far end of the Terrace of the Treasuries is the "Crypt", or stone archway linking the stadium to the sanctuary.

The Echo Stoa built by Philip in the fourth century B.C. runs along most of the length of the sanctuary's southeast side. It is thus named because of its good acoustics, although in some sources it is mentioned as the Eptaechos, or seven sounds, because sounds echoed seven times, as well as the Poikili Stoa because of the portraits on its interior walls. The stoa's exterior was marked by a colonnade in the Doric order, with a second row of columns, perhaps Corinthian, along the inside.

The Gymnasium was a rectangular structure built around an interior courtyard framed by a Doric stoa on each side. It was built in the second century B.C., while some years after its completion a monumental gateway in the Corinthian order was added between it and the Palaestra. The Gymnasium was used by athletes to train in sports requiring ample space like the discus and javelin throws.

The Palaestra was a square structure with a peristyle atrium. It was built in the third century B.C. and its perimeter housed auxiliary spaces such as the athletes' changing rooms, the elaiothesion where competitors rubbed their bodies with olive oil, baths, and rooms furnished with benches for classes. The Palaestra was also used for training in wrestling, boxing, and jumps.

The Theokoleon housed the quarters of the priests who looked after the sanctuary and organized the sacrifices. It was a rectangular building with rooms arranged around a peristyle courtyard. The Theokoleon dates from the fourth century B.C., with extensions added during a second construction phase in Roman times.

The Workshop of Pheidias was built in 440-430 B.C. as a space where the sculptor could create and assemble the chryselephantine statue of Zeus. It thus is the same size as the cella of the Temple of Zeus where the statue was installed. Excavations uncovered clay molds and tools used by the celebrated sculptor and a small black oinochoe or wine cup with the words "I am Pheidias's" inscribed on the base. In the fifth century A.D., the workshop was converted into an Early Christian triple-apse basilica.

Ruins of the Leonidaion are visible on the other side of the footpath. It was a large building used as lodging by the athletes; it is likely named after its donor and architect Leonidas or Leonidis of Naxos. The building's exterior is surrounded by the 138 Ionian columns while the peristyle courtyard in the interior, which served as a reception area for eminent visitors, is rimmed by 44 Doric columns. In Roman times, the Leonidaion was used as housing for Roman officers.

The Bouleuterion is located outside the Altis perimeter, south of the

Temple of Zeus. It is one of the oldest buildings at the sanctuary and was the seat of the Eleanboule, or council of elders, which was responsible for organizing the Olympic games. The Bouleuterion was also used for hearing appeals against results and holding hearings for athletes accused of violating rules. Construction on the building began in the sixth century B.C. and was completed in the fourth century B.C., while some additions were made in Roman times.

ORGANIZATION, PREPARATION, AND CONDUCT OF THE GAMES

The Olympic Games were held every four years on the second full moon after the summer solstice, during the eighth lunar month of Apollonios or Parthenios on the Elean calendar, which corresponds to the month of August. At first the Games were held for one day and comprised solely nude competitions, that is, footraces, wrestling, and throwing. New contests were added in 680 B.C. along with a second day of competition featuring equestrian sports (hippica) such as chariot races. At the 77th Olympics, the games were extended to five days.

The Gymnasium was a rectangular building around an interior courtyard framed by Doric columns on all four sides. It was used for training in sports with large space requirements like discus and javelin.

MARTINUS NINHOF



The Olympic Games were hosted and organized by the Eleans. From 776 B.C. to 393 A.D. when Theodosios I banned them by decree, a total of 293 Olympic Games were held as the Eleans did not recognize the unolympics organized under Pisatis, one of the three districts of Elis. Only Greeks were allowed to compete in the Olympics; barbarians, slaves, and anyone who had committed murder or violated the sacred truce was banned from the Games. Women were also strictly forbidden from entering Altis during the Games. The sole exception was Chamyne, a priestess of the goddess Demeter, who was allowed to observe the Games from the altar of Demeter. This rule was breached by Diagoras's daughter Kallipateira who snuck into the stadium disguised as a gymnast in order to cheer on her son. Her defiance was forgiven because the Diagorides had three generations of Olympic champions.

Preparations for the Games became a year earlier. The process began with the election of the Hellanodikai, citizens of Elis, who along with their assistance and the chief of police of the Olympic Games (alytarchis) and his officials, had exclusive responsibility for organizing the competition. The Hellanodikai also acted as judges during the Games and made sure the rules were followed. They lived in a special dormitory, the Hellanodikaiona, and received ten months of training and instruction in the law and its application.

The Olympic truce was then declared. Hostilities were suspended initially for one month and later for two until the truce was eventually extended to three months so that athletes and spectators could travel safely to and from the Games. Elis was declared neutral and inviolable, and no one bearing arms was allowed to cross its border. The truce was announced by heralds known as spondophoroi or theoroi who traveled across the Greek world to inform athletes and spectators of the

The Workshop of Pheidias was built circa 440 to 430 B.C. to facilitate the sculpting and assembly of the chryselephantine statue of Zeus. Even before its excavation, the workshop was believed to lie under the ruins of an Early Christian triple-apse basilica built in the fifth century.

ALUN SALT



dates of the Games.

Athletes wishing to compete in the Olympics had to present themselves—along with their trainers and chaperones—to the Hellanodikai in Elis a month before the Games so they could be separated into categories by age and briefed on the rules. The athletes also trained and took part in qualifying competitions.

The Olympics organizers were responsible for the athletes' reception as well as for housing the official delegations from other cities. Arrangements also had to be made for the spectators.

According to ancient sources, the Olympic Games followed this program: the first day was for official ceremonies, athletes' formal registration and administration of the Olympic oath in front of the statue of Zeus Orkios. Boys competed on the afternoon of the first day in foot races, wrestling, boxing, and the pankratio—a combat sport that combines boxing and wrestling. Chariot races, the Games' most popular sport, were held at the Hippodrome on the second day, while the pentathlon—long jump, discus, stadion (short foot race), javelin, and wrestling—was held at the stadium.

The third day was dedicated to cult worship of Zeus featuring the hekatombe, the sacrifice of 100 oxen by the Eleans as an offering to the god. Foot races were held on the afternoon of the third day. Competitions in the more intense sports—wrestling, boxing, pankratio, and hoplite races—were held on the fourth day. The Olympic Games concluded on the fifth day with the declaration of the Olympic champions and their crowning with the kotinos, a wreath made with the branches of the olive tree, in the antechamber of the Temple of Zeus.



The eastern frieze of the Temple of Zeus depicts, in a masterful way, the preparations for the chariot race between Oenomaus and Pelops.

MANOUELE ZUNELLI



The Philippeion is the only circular structure at Altis and one of the prettiest examples of Doric architecture. It was dedicated by King Philip II of Macedon after his victory at the Battle of Chaeroneia in 338 B.C.

MARTINUS NINHOF

Digital reconstruction of the Terrace of the Treasuries at the foot of Mount Kronos.



THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

The first museum at Olympia, often referred to as the Old Museum, was established in 1886 on a small hill west of Altis with funds provided by the national benefactor Andreas Syngros. In 1954, the building was severely damaged by an earthquake. The large number of finds yielded from the continuing excavations by the German Archaeological Institute also served to highlight the need for a larger museum at Olympia. Thus, work began on the new Olympia Archaeological Museum from designs by the architect Patroklos Karandinos. The new museum was inaugurated in 1982.

The old museum is now the Museum of the History of the Olympic Games. Its 450-odd exhibits are from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia as well as other museums around Greece and include items like gold seal rings with the earliest depictions of the Games, bronze and clay geometric idols of warriors and chariots, items used by the athletes in competition such as discs, vaults, globular flasks known called aryballos, inscribed pedestals, and figurines of athletes from the sanctuary.

The most important exhibits of the new museum are:

Hermes of Praxiteles

This world-famous ancient statue depicts, according to Pausanias, Hermes holding the infant Dionysus and is considered the finest work of the sculptor Praxiteles. Made from Paros marble, the statue was discovered in 1877 inside the Temple of Hera. It has been dated to circa 330 B.C.

Nike by Paeonius

A masterpiece of ancient Greek sculpture, the statue of Nike is the work of

Paeonius of Mende in Chalkidiki. It is made from Paros marble and stood on an 8.81-meter-high triangular base at the northeastern edge of the Temple of Zeus. The colossal head, most likely of Hera, made of limestone. This head is believed to have a cult statue used on the worship of Zeus and Hera. It was found in the Heraion.

The pediment of the Treasury of the Megarians

The pediment depicts the battle between the gods and the giants. It has been dated to 520 B.C.

The sculptures from the Temple of Zeus

The sculptures decorating the temple include 42 figures, twelve metopes, and rain gutters with lion-head spouts that adorned the building's long sides.

The eastern frieze

The frieze depicts the chariot race between Pelops and Oenomaos. Zeus is a central figure and is framed by the protagonists of this myth.

The western frieze

Apollo is the central figure in this depiction of the Centauromachy, the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs. The god is flanked by the Lapith king, Pirithous, and Theseus.

The pediments

The pediments over the entrance to the pronaos and the opisthodomos depicted the labors of Heracles.

These exquisite finds overshadow some other equally fine artifacts such as the athlete's head; the Roman sculptures; the marble statue of the Emperor Claudius; a female statue believed to be Agrippa, Claudius's wife and daughter of the Emperor Nero; the marble bust of the Emperor Hadrian; and the statue of the bull from the fountain of Nymphaeum. The museum's holdings include collections of bronze and clay items. Among the 14,000-odd bronze finds are the helmet believed to be Miltiadis's helmet from the Battle of Marathon which he later dedicated to Zeus.

One pottery collection features drains and rooftop sculptures. Worth noting are the eighth-century-B.C. female idol believed to be one of the earliest representations of the goddess Hera and a clay composition depicting Zeus and Ganymede.

The famed Olympic Games collection features the votive offerings made during the Games by athletes as well as visitors to the sanctuary.

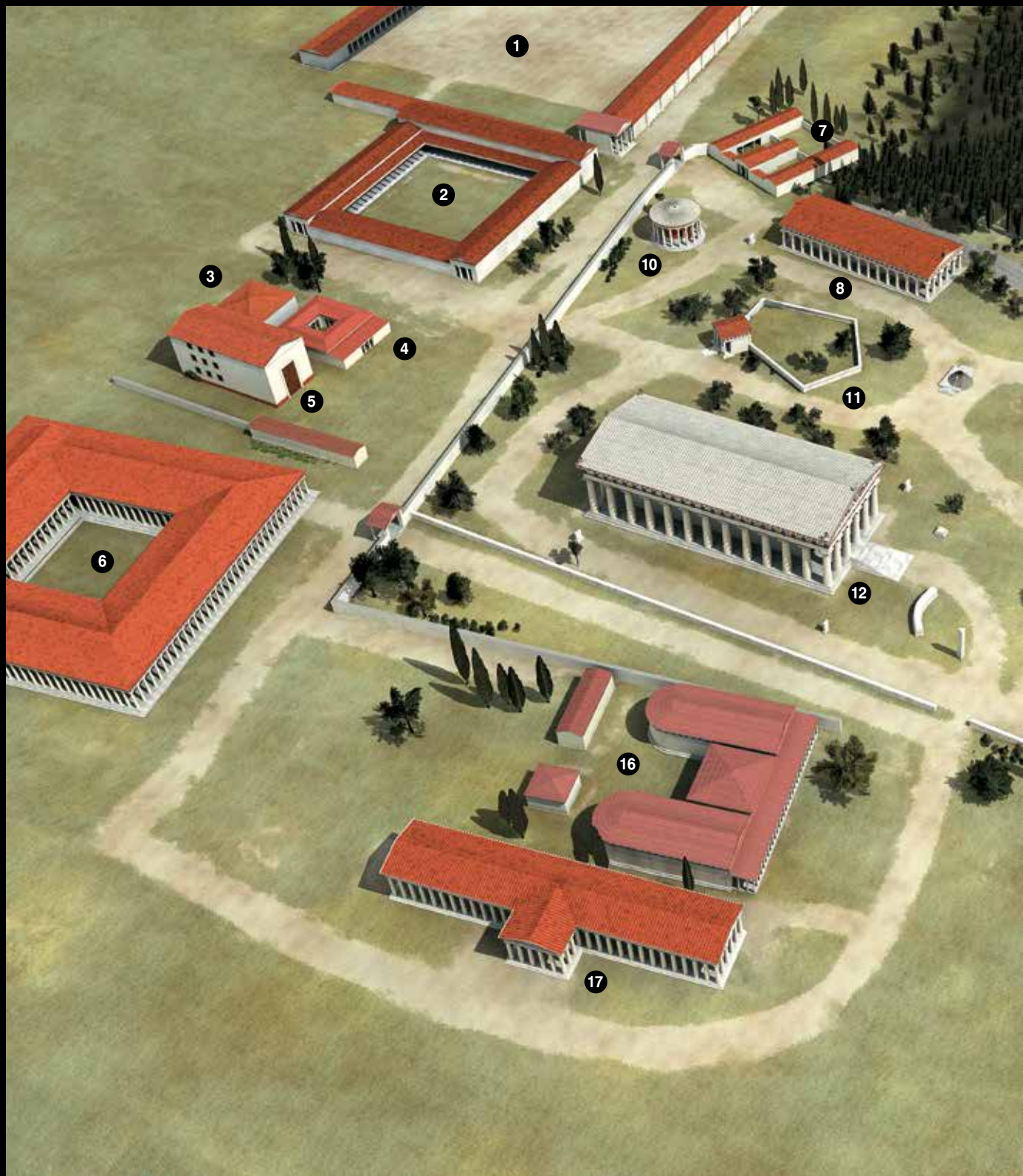
THE SPORTS

Running

Running, or dromos, is the oldest Olympic sport—and the only one at the first fourteen Games. Its length was set at 600 feet or one stade. Athletes were allowed to train for it on a track along the length of the gymnasium, in the stadium, or in the palaestra. In the early competitions, the starting line and



The “Diskobolus of Myron”, a statue of a discus thrower sculpted by Myron is 450 B.C., is one of the best-known artworks of antiquity. Although the original is lost, there are several copies of the statue, including this one in the National Museum of Rome.





MODEL OF ANCIENT OLYMPIA

1. Gymnasium
2. Palaestra
3. Iroon
4. Theokoleon
5. Workshop of Pheidias
6. Leonidaion
7. Prytaneion
8. Heraion
9. Metroon.
10. Philippeion
11. Pelopion
12. Temple of Zeus
13. Echo Stoa
14. Treasuries
15. Southeastern building
16. Bouleuterion
17. South Stoa
18. Stadium



Priestesses played by actresses light the Olympic torch from the sun.

XINHUA SYOGOC

finish were marked by simple lines drawn in the dirt. From the fifth century B.C. onwards, the starting line was marked by stone plates with ruts on the surface and holes for inserting small wooden pegs that set the starting place of each runner. This starting block or *valvida* at the Olympia stadium had twenty places. Later, a mechanism known as the *hysplex* was devised to prevent false starts. This starting gate was essentially a bar with attached strings that dropped to release the runners.

Running events

- The *stadion*, a sprint down one length of the stadium or 600 feet (roughly 190 meters).
- The *diaulos*, a two-stadium-length sprint.
- The *dolichos*, an endurance race of varying distance. At Olympia, the *dolichos* was thought to cover 24 *stadia*. It was introduced as acknowledgment of the heralds who traveled great distances to convey news.
- The *hoplite footrace*, a two-stade race run in full warrior garb with helmet, shin guards and shield.

Long jump

This wasn't an independent competition but one of the events in the pentathlon.

Flute music was played during the competition, which was held in the skamma, a shallow rectangular pit about 16 meters long filled with soft dirt. Excavations at ancient Olympia have yielded a number of springboards of varying shapes and forms—elliptical, rounded, and so on.

Discus

The sport is mentioned by Homer as one of the sports practiced by Patroclus. In antiquity, the discus was made of stone and either round or lenticular. In later times the discus was made of metal, usually bronze, and weighed between three and four kilos. The ancient disks were between 17 and 34 centimeters in diameter. Wooden pegs were placed at set distances on a field and ropes or long poles were used to measure the distance of throws from the starting block.

Javelin

The javelins thrown by athletes were called apotomeus and lacked the metal tips of spears. A throw was considered valid if the javelin remained within the stadium's boundaries.

There were two types of javelin competition: in distance contests, the winner was the athlete who threw the spear farthest while in aim contests, the winner was the athlete whose spear landed closest to the target.



Apollo as depicted on the west frieze.

MANOUELE ZUNELLI

The stadium at Olympia dates from the fifth century B.C. and is the third stadium at the sanctuary.

VILNUS MORKRAFT



Wrestling

Wrestling is the oldest sport and at major panhellenic competitions was one of the events in the pentathlon as well as an independent competition. Opponents were not chosen according to body weight but at random. Wrestlers fought naked; their bodies were first rubbed with oil and then covered with a light dust. Milo of Croton in Lower Italy was the most famed wrestler of antiquity and was crowned Olympic champion six times.

Pentathlon

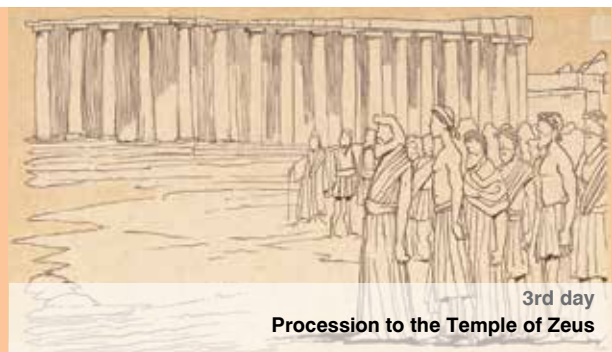
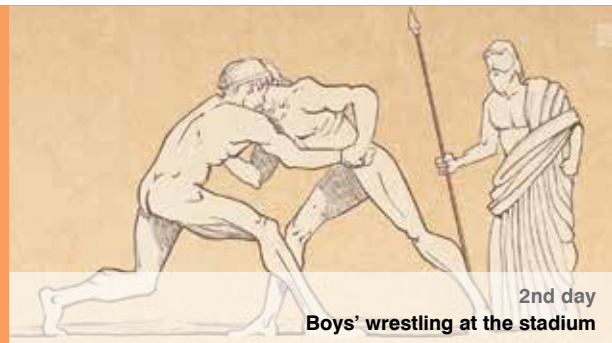
Pentathletes competed in five sports: footrace, long jump, discus, javelin, and wrestling. The winner was the athlete who distinguished himself in three of the five events. The pentathlon embodied the competitive spirit of antiquity as it tested athletes in strength, harmony, and dexterity.

The ancient Olympics were held every four years, on the second full moon after the summer solstice, during the month of Apollonios or Parthenios (eight lunar month of the Eleans). The games lasted five days.

The ancient Olympics concluded on the fifth day with a closing ceremony and the crowning of the champions with an olive wreath, or kotinos, at the Temple of Zeus.

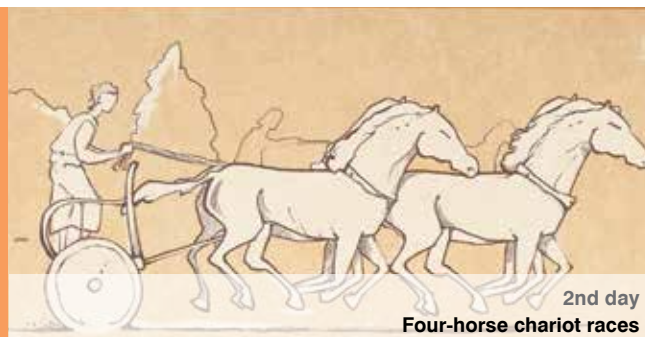
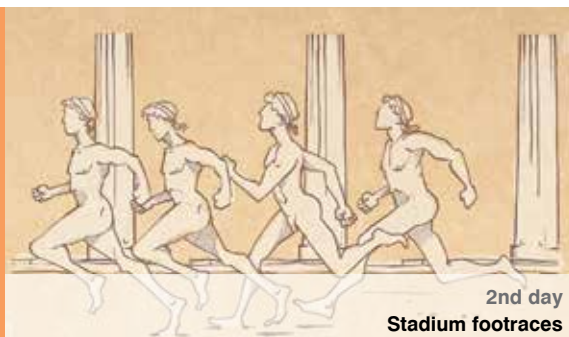
Boxing

Opponents in boxing were decided by drawings. The rules allowed blows to the head, nose, cheeks, body, and hands. The winner was the boxer who took his opponent out or forced him to concede defeat. Boxing matches were held at noon so neither boxer would be blinded by the sun hitting him directly in the eyes. Matches had no set duration; when a match appeared to drag out, the Hellanodikai, with the boxers' consent, could invoke "scaling". Similar to penalty shootouts in football, boxers would take turns landing blows on each



CHRONOLOGY OF INTRODUCTION OF OLYMPIC SPORTS

Games	Year (B.C.)	Event
1	776	Stadion (sprint)
14	724	Diaulos (double stadion footrace)
15	720	Diolichos (endurance and distance race)
18	708	Pentathlon and Wrestling
23	688	Boxing
25	680	Four-horse chariot race
33	648	Pankration and Equestrian events
37	632	Boys' stadion and wrestling
38	628	Boys' Pentathlon (abolished)
41	616	Boys' Boxing
65	520	Hoplite footrace
70	500	Two-mule chariot race
71	496	Foal horseracing
84	444	Mule and foal races abolished
93	408	Two-horse chariot race
96	396	Competitions for heralds
99	384	Four-mule chariot racing
128	268	Two-foal chariot racing
131	256	Foal races
145	200	Boys' Pankration





Depiction of two pankration athletes on ancient vessel.
B.BOROSEVITS ARCHIVE

other without the recipient having the right to deflect. Diagoras of Rhodes was a famed boxer of antiquity.

Pankration

A separate sport that combined elements of wrestling and boxing, the pankration involves bodily contact of two opponents until one of them collapses. No holds or blows are barred, making this a very dangerous sport for contestants' physical wellbeing.

Equestrian events

Equestrian sports were rooted in the warring traditions of the Achaeans and are linked to the myth of Pelops's victory over King Oenomaos of Pisa in a chariot race. Equestrian sports were, by tradition, associated with the nobility as only they could afford to the cost of keeping horses and chariot.

Competitions were held both in riding and chariot racing. Jockeys in horse races rode nude and bareback without stirrups. Chariot-racing, with carriages drawn by four horses, was the most popular sport as competitors were kings, tyrants, nobles, and wealthy citizens. The charioteer was dressed in a chiton or robe and there was great risk of accidents at the turn, that is, the bend rounded by the chariots back down the track. The owner of the chariot or horse was declared the winner and he was crowned with a kotinos while the victorious rider or charioteer was crowned with a wool headdress. Equestrian events included two-horse and four-horse chariot races, chariots drawn by foals, and chariots drawn by two mules and horse races of six laps around the track for full-grown horses and foals.

THE END OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The decline of ancient religions in the first centuries of Christianity had severe repercussions on all expressions of ancient worship, including athletic competitions as these were inextricably linked to religious festivals.

Held in 391 B.C., the last ancient Olympic Games are largely seen as indicative of this decline as the competition was banned by the Emperor Theodosios I who decreed that all ancient sanctuaries be closed.

The principal reasons for their demise was the rampant professionalism that destroyed the spiritual element of the Games and undermined athletic ideals as well as the rise of Christianity which did not take a positive view of sports competitions. While modern research has not conclusively identified the precise reasons for the ban on the Games, there is evidence that they were held until quite late.

The sacred shrines at Olympic, including the Temple of Zeus, were destroyed in the sixth century by earthquakes. But what finally sealed the fate of ancient Olympia was the decline and weakness of local society to overcome the impact of these natural disasters rather than Christian activity.

Trophy with athletes' figures
ARALDO DELUCA





Hermes by Praxiteles is one of the most celebrated statues of antiquity and considered the sculptor's finest work. It was found in 1877 in the Temple of Hera and dates from 330 B.C.
PANOS KARAPAGIOTIS / SHUTTERSTOCK



Forged metal demonic figure from the museum's bronze holdings (left).

Asklipiades of Corinth dedicated this discus, exhibited at the museum, to Zeus after winning the pentathlon at the 255th Games.



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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF GREECE

ANCIENT GREECE



The roots of the religious festivals and sports competitions held at Olympia are lost in the mists of time. There, in the northwestern Peloponnese, at the foot of Mount Kronos, games were held every four years for over a millennium. According to tradition, the games were founded by god, demigods, or heroes.

The sanctuary of Altis included a number of shrines, including the Temple of Zeus with its impressive chryselephantine statue of the god by the sculptor Pheidias, the Heraion dedicated to the cult of Hera, the Bouleuterion, and facilities for athletes and sports competitions. Olympic champions were crowned with wreaths made from the branches of a wild olive tree at the sanctuary, the kallistefanos. The Olympics were so prestigious that a holy truce was declared throughout the Greek world during the event so that athletes and spectators could travel safely to the games.

