

The Olympic Games

The ancient Olympic Games stand as one of the greatest legacies of ancient Greek civilisation. According to historical records, they began in 776 BC at Olympia, a sacred sanctuary in the region of Elis, south-western Greece. Held every four years — a period the Greeks called an "Olympiad" — the games were a religious festival dedicated to Zeus, the supreme ruler of the Greek gods.

Participation was restricted to free-born Greek men and boys. Women were entirely excluded, and married women who were caught watching could face severe punishment. Competitors travelled from Greek city-states and colonies across the Mediterranean.

Events included sprinting, the long jump, discus, javelin, wrestling, boxing and the pankration — a tough combat sport with very few rules. The pentathlon tested athletes across five disciplines: running, long jump, discus, javelin and wrestling. Perhaps the most prestigious event was the stadion — a short sprint of approximately 192 metres.

Victors were awarded a kotinos, a crown of wild olive leaves, yet the glory it represented was immeasurable. Champions were honoured with statues, free meals for life and celebrated in victory odes composed by poets like Pindar.

A sacred Olympic truce, the "ekecheiria," temporarily halted conflicts to ensure safe passage for athletes and spectators.

The games endured for over a millennium before Emperor Theodosius banned them in AD 393. They were famously revived in Athens in 1896 by Pierre de Coubertin.

Questions

1. What word did the Greeks use to describe the four-year period between games?
2. Where was the sanctuary of Olympia located?
3. What was the games' religious purpose?
4. Who was excluded from competing and watching?
5. What was the pankration?
6. Which five disciplines made up the pentathlon?
7. What was the stadion, and how long was it?
8. What was a "kotinos"?
9. Who revived the modern Olympic Games, and in which city?
10. The article says that the olive crown had "immeasurable" glory despite being a simple object. What does this suggest about what the ancient Greeks valued most highly?



Text D Quiz



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