

The Olympic Games

The ancient Olympic Games are one of the most famous traditions from ancient Greece. They are believed to have started in 776 BC at a sacred site called Olympia, located in the region of Elis in southern Greece. The games were held every four years in honour of Zeus, the most powerful of the Greek gods.

Only free Greek men and boys were permitted to compete. Women were strictly banned from both competing and attending. Athletes took part in a range of events including sprinting, long jump, discus, javelin, wrestling and the pentathlon — a demanding contest combining five different sports.

Winning was considered an enormous achievement. Champions received a crown woven from olive branches taken from a sacred tree near the temple of Zeus. They were celebrated as heroes in their home cities, and poets such as Pindar wrote odes in their honour.

The Olympics were so important that warring Greek city-states would declare a truce called the "ekecheiria" to allow safe travel to the games.

The ancient games continued for over a thousand years before being banned in AD 393 by the Roman Emperor Theodosius, who considered them a pagan tradition. The modern Olympics were revived in Athens in 1896.



Questions

1. When are the ancient Olympic Games believed to have started?
2. Where exactly was Olympia located?
3. Why were the games held?
4. Who was banned from competing and attending the games?
5. What was the pentathlon?
6. What did the winning athletes receive as a prize?
7. Where were the olive branches for the crown taken from?
8. What was the "ekecheiria"?
9. When were the ancient games banned, and who banned them?
10. Why do you think the Romans might have wanted to ban the Olympic Games?

