

Enquiry: The Ancient Olympics

Imagine...

Imagine your classroom
was the biggest
Sports Museum
in the World!

Like this...



Imagine you now have the opportunity to design one of its galleries, full of exciting exhibits for all the visitors to tell the story of the Olympic Games from their origins in Ancient Greece 2700 years ago

Think...

How you are going to
organise all the displays
and exhibits?

Think...

What you are going to focus on to tell the story of...

- How and why the Olympic Games first started in Ancient Greece
- What they were like and why they were so important to the Ancient Greeks
- How the Ancient Games are different to - but still influence - the Modern Olympics today

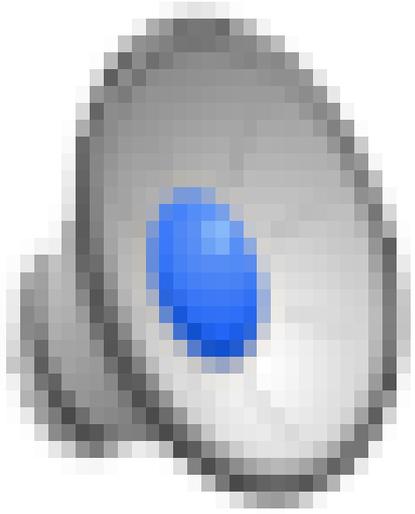
So, let's get going...!

Milo of Croton









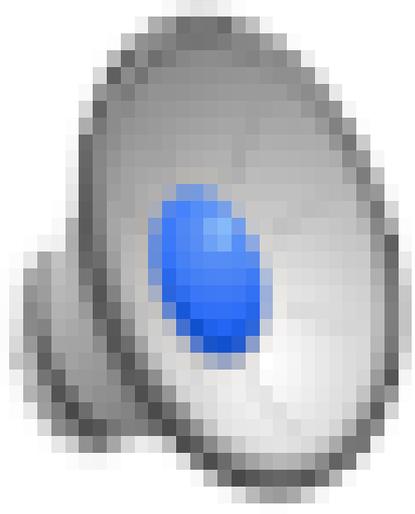


How and why did the Olympic Games first start in Ancient Greece?

The legend of Milo of Croton takes us right back to world where the Ancient Games started in Olympia, in South West Greece in 776BC

Think...

As you **watch** the following video on modern Olympic opening ceremonies, note down any thoughts, ideas, words or feelings about them which come into your mind...



Think again...

- Look at your ideas. Share and discuss them with a partner. Do you agree that...
- The ceremonies don't seem to have that much to do with a sporting event
- They appear more like the opening of a festival of a celebration
- They involve celebrating the culture and spirit of the host city and nation



How and why did the Olympic Games first start in Ancient Greece?

Actually in doing all those things, the modern Olympic opening ceremonies you've just watched take us right back to the origins of the Ancient Games which started in Olympia, in South West Greece in 776BC

Let's start to take a closer look and begin to think about what exhibits and displays we will want to include the first section of our exhibition of the history of the Games.



How and why did the
Olympic Games first start in
Ancient Greece?



How and why did the Olympic Games first start in Ancient Greece?

The Origins of the Ancient Olympic Games

- The Ancient Olympic Games in fact started in 776BC as a religious festival or celebration in honour of the powerful King of the Greek Gods, **Zeus**
- Sport was not the main focus at the start of the Games – the events were added later
- Instead, the first ‘spectators’ at the Games travelled from all over Greece to worship and make sacrifices to Zeus at the country’s most important and sacred religious site – **Olympia**



According to Greek Mythology, the mighty Zeus, King of the Greek Gods, began his reign in Olympia in about 1200BC, showing how awesome his power was by throwing a thunderbolt from his home at the top of Mount Olympus into the grove which lay below



That grove in Olympia
therefore became the venue
for the Games...

Thinking deeper...

If you want to find out more about Greek Mythology, the Greek Gods and religion and, in particular, Zeus... take some time to explore the following link. It might make a great section in your exhibition!

<https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/greek-mythology>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-mythology>

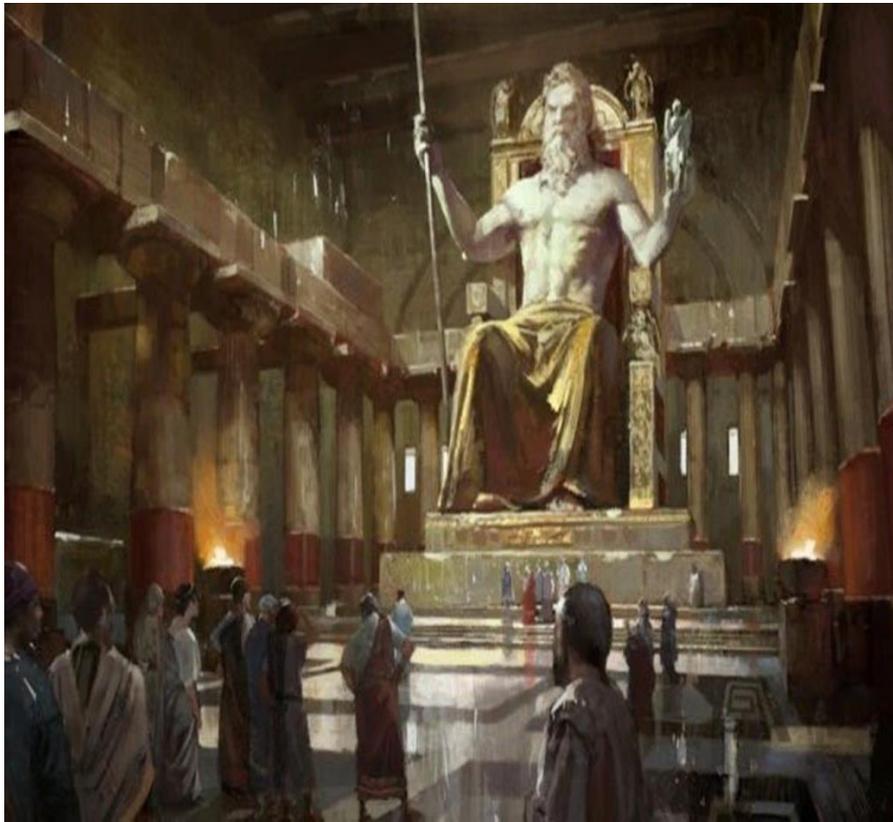
http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk/gods/home_set.html

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zeus>

Thinking deeper...

You might be especially interested to learn about the Temple and Statute dedicated to Zeus that was built at Olympia in the 5th Century BC. It was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World...

<https://www.greecehighdefinition.com/blog/7-wonders-of-the-ancient-world-the-statue-of-zeus-at-olympia>

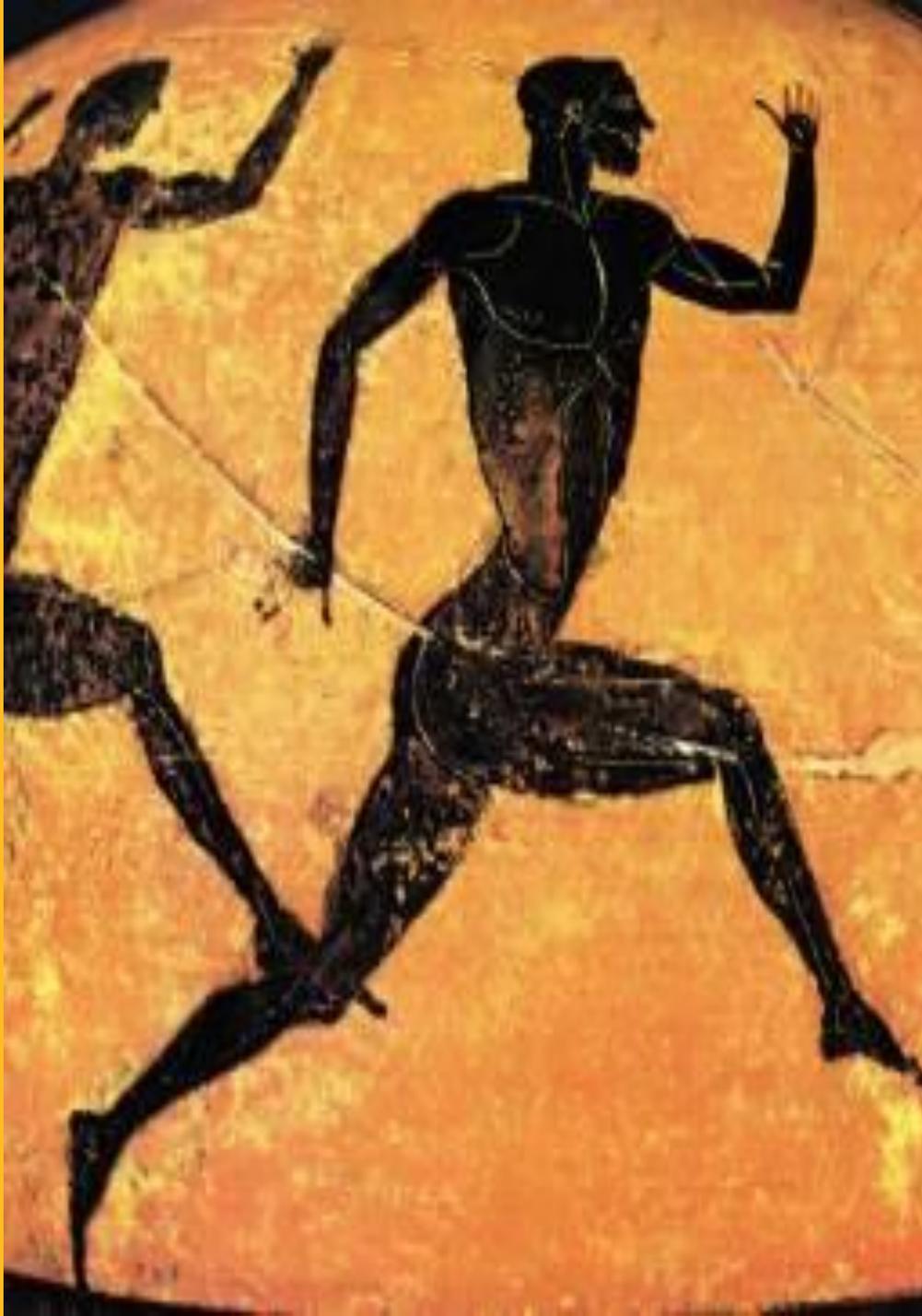




This is an artist's impression of what the site might have looked like at the height of the Games

The First Games

- So, the focus of the first Games was almost all about religion
- They lasted just one day and the main event was the sacrifice of 100 oxen in honour of **Zeus**
- This act of sacrifice remained a major feature of all the Ancient Olympics, moving to the mid-point of the Games and becoming linked to a huge feast involving all the crowds as the Games became longer in length



For the first 12 Games the ***Stadion*** foot-race was the only athletic event and it remained the most prestigious event throughout the history of the Ancient Olympics. The race was ran over one length (a *stadion*) of the stadium track, 600 ancient feet or 192 m



Think...

What ideas do you
now have for your
first exhibits?

We now need to start think about what the Games were like and why they were so important to the Greeks...

And what they can also tell us about life, society and culture in Ancient Greece...

As you build up your exhibition you could also start to think about similarities and differences to the Modern Olympics today.

The Growth and Development of the Games

- The Games rapidly grew to become the greatest spectacle of the ancient world
- They were held every four years - the four-year period becoming known as The Olympiad: they were so important in the ancient world that they were even used as a basis for the calendar!
- They were held every year on this four-year cycle from 776BC to 393AD
- In 684BC they became a three-day event and at some point in the 5th Century BC increased to five days
- As the Games grew more sporting events were added – you can get a preview here before we look at them in detail if you'd like to:
- <https://www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games/the-sports-events>

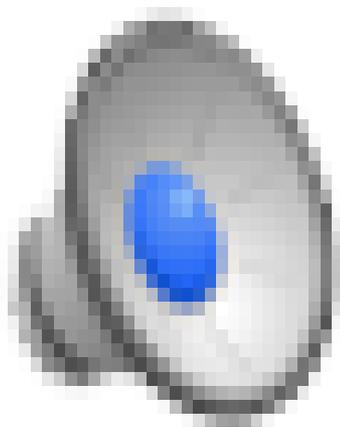
The Olympic Truce

At the first Games, and at all that followed, a **truce** was announced to enable all athletes and spectators from the different states that made up Ancient Greece – and which were often at war with each other – to travel safely to Olympia and to return peacefully home again afterwards.

The Modern Olympic Truce

- In 1992 the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which organises the Modern Olympic Games, brought back this tradition
- It said that the “Olympic Truce” should protect the athletes and the values of sport like fair play and friendship, and to encourage the use of sport to bring nations together and help to solve disagreements between countries peacefully
- The United Nations have also adopted the “Olympic Truce” as a resolution (commitment) to build a world without war through the values of sport. This resolution asks UN member state to observe the Olympic Truce during the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

You can find out more about the Olympic Truce here...



Thinking Deeper...

What do you think about the idea, based on the original Ancient Olympic Truce, that sport can help bring nations together and encourage peace?



So, what was the experience like as a spectator?

- The Crowds were huge, with up to 50,000 people attending on each of the five days of the Games, creating an atmosphere which was absolutely buzzing with noise and excitement
- Athletes, leading politicians, diplomats and ordinary Greeks all watched together, many staying in make-shift camps next to the site
- Artists, poets, musicians, tradesmen and speakers all also wanted to be at the Games to increase their popularity in front of such a massive audience
- People also enjoyed what was effectively a gigantic BBQ after the sacrifice of the Oxen to Zeus at the mid-point of the Games – eating meat was a luxury for many people in Ancient Greece!

*But, you could only watch
if you were a man....!*

- If a woman was caught sneaking into the stadium to watch, she could face the death penalty and be thrown off the side of the mountain!
- But women were allowed to own horses in the chariot races at the Olympics and unmarried women had their own separate festival at Olympia every four years



This festival was called the **Heraia** as it was held in honour of **Hera**, who was Zeus's wife

Thinking Bigger: What was the wider importance of the Games?

- The Ancient Games started as a religious rather than sporting festival in celebration of Zeus, the King of the Greek Gods
- Every four years Olympia and the Games was the focal point of Greek life
- Already, as we've seen, this was the country's most sacred religious site
- Olympia and the Games grew to become a cultural centre for artists, musicians and poets – and somewhere where lots of trade went on
- The Games helped to promote peace and safety across the country because of the Truce
- The Ancient Games have influenced the development of the modern Olympics by emphasising the importance of ceremony and wider links between sport and society – and relationships between countries

Think...

Based on all this,
what other ideas do you
have for your next set
of exhibits?

What about the sports and the superstar athletes?

The following symbols show all the sports that will take place at the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

How many can you identify?



The Sports

- How many did you identify?
- At the Tokyo Games in 2021 there will be no fewer than 50 different sports played!
- In the Ancient Games at Olympia, the maximum number of events was ten!
- Here they all are at a glance:

<https://www.olympic.org/ancient-olympic-games/the-sports-events>

- There may have been fewer sports than we are used to in the Modern Games, but the competitions certainly made up for it in terms of danger, excitement... and plenty of blood!
- And another key difference with today is that all athletes competed naked!
- Its no surprise that with brutal Boxing bouts without any weight categories, the thrill of Chariot Racing and the the no-holds barred Pankration, the Games kept the spectators enthralled for nearly 12 centuries...

So, now let's follow the athlete's path into the Stadium and look more closely at what each of the competitions involved, starting with those that we would recognise as being most similar to what we know today...



Running

- The **Stadion** sprint race was the first sporting event introduced in the Games and was the only event for the first 12 Olympics
- The race was ran over one length (a **stadion**) of the stadium track, 600 ancient feet or 192m
- The Stadion remained the most prestigious event of the the Games - a bit like the 100m in today's Games - and the eventual winner after heats and the final would even give his name to that particular Games and so be remembered for all time

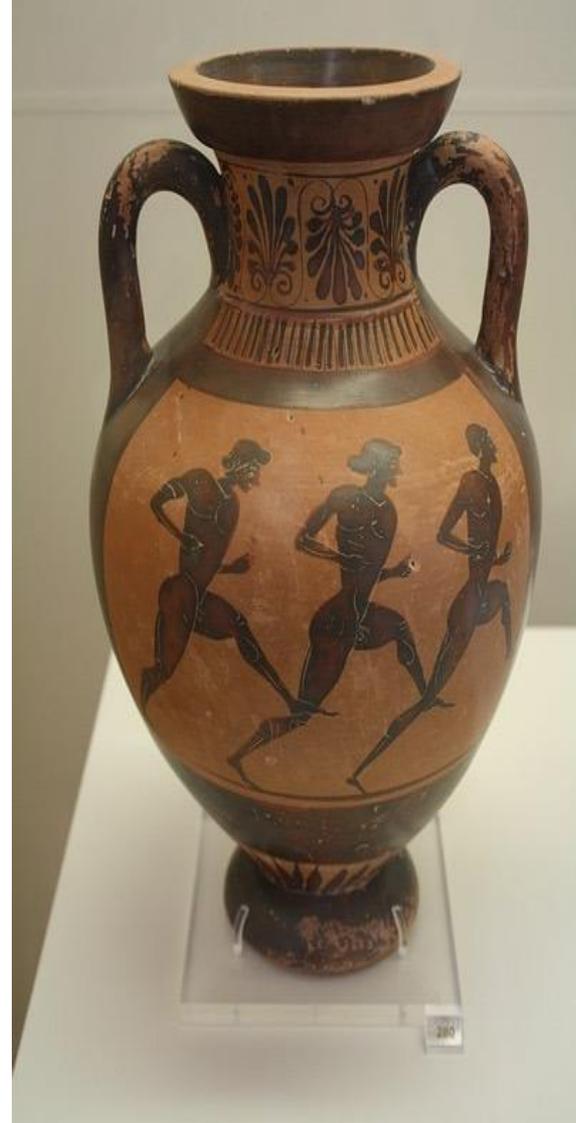




Here's the start line and starting blocks in the Stadium for the Stadion. A false start could result not only in disqualification but a beating!

Running

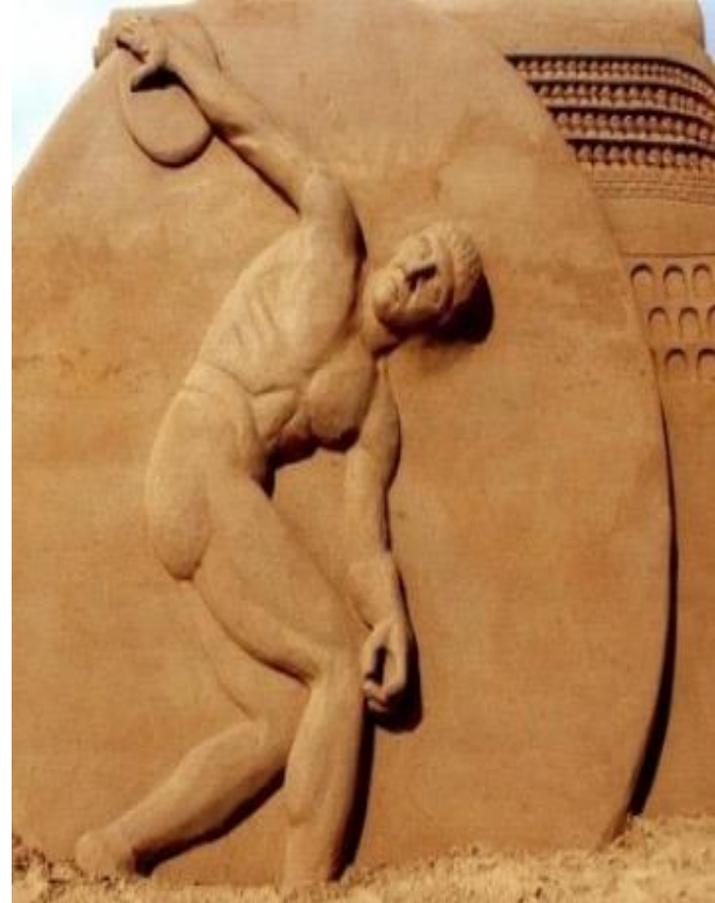
- Other running events were added as the Games developed:
- **diaulos** - the two stadium lengths race, added in 724 BCE – equivalent to today's 400m
- **dolichos** - longer races of 7 to 20 stadium lengths, added in 720 BCE – middle to long distance today
- **hoplitodromos** - a very different race in full armour (helmet, shield and spear) between 2 and 4 stadium lengths which was added in 520 BCE and was usually the last event of the Games





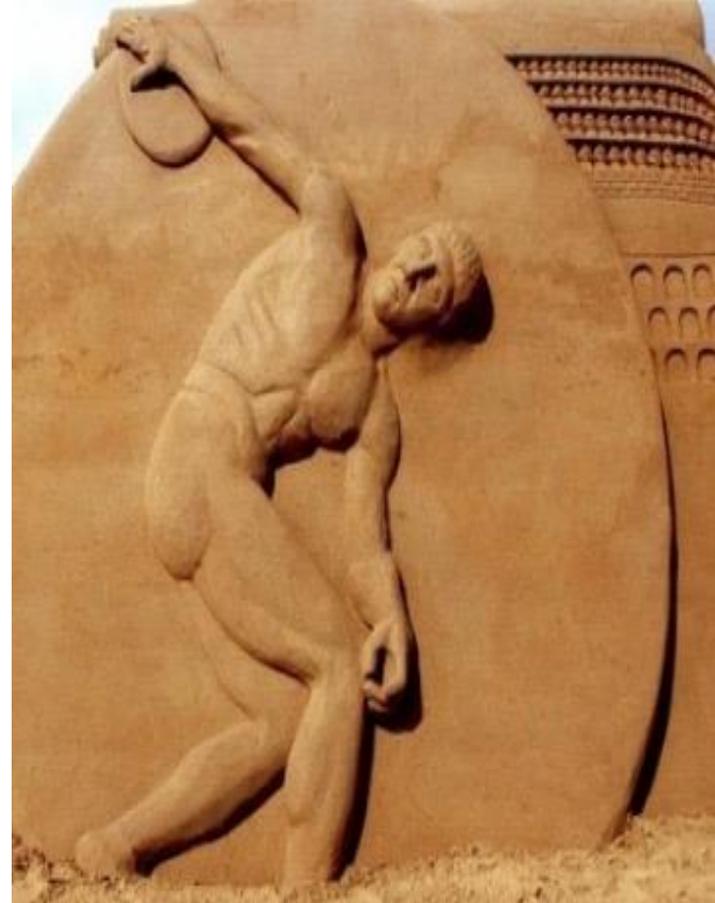
Javelin, Discus and Long Jump

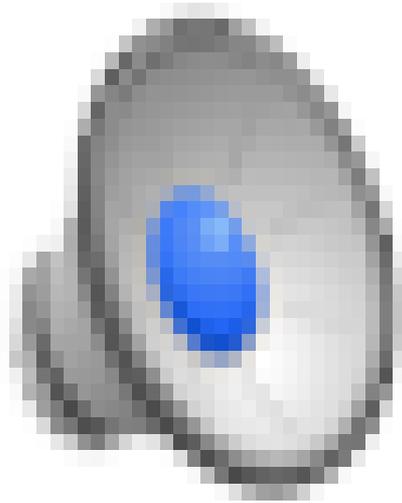
- Although these three 'field events' might at first seem very similar to those we would watch at a Modern Olympics, there were some very important differences...
- The Javelin had a leather strap attached to it so that it was thrown almost like a sling shot
- The first discuses were often engraved with elaborate scenes or poetry and made of stone - later iron, lead or even bronze



Javelin, Discus and Long Jump

- The discus appears to be the event in the Games most linked to Greek religion and Mythology – the Gods Apollo and Perseus both accidentally killed loved ones with throws that went off target!
- The Long Jump was perhaps the field event most different to today...
- Each jump was accompanied by live flute music and the athletes also held weights in their hands which they swung backwards and forwards before their take off...





Long Jump...

Boxing

- As there were no weight classifications, time limits to bouts or scoring systems other than a knock-out, this was one of the most brutal sports of the Ancient Games, with some competitors actually dying as a result of their injuries!
- Boxers were drawn to fight each other by lot at the start of the Games, so a much heavier man could face a much lighter but more agile opponent
- This could mean that some bouts would last for a very long time as skilful lighter fighters dodged heavier but slower opponents – there are even reports of fights lasting for more than a day!



Boxing

When fights did go on for hours with no obvious winner emerging, the Boxers could opt for what was called Klimax – each fighter was granted a free hit in turn until one was knocked out. A toss of the coin decided which one could go first!



Boxing

- In the early Games the boxers had soft leather woven around their hands and wrists. This was designed to encourage quick and attacking boxing and protect injury. However in later Games the leather used was deliberately made harder and had lead studs added to increase the risk and danger!
- Despite the apparent brutality of all of this, there is evidence of mutual respect, honour and fair play recorded in accounts of many boxing competitions at the Ancient Games



Wrestling

- Wrestling was the first sport to be added to the Ancient Olympic Games schedule that was not related to running
- It was added in 708 B.C to reflect what already its huge popularity as a sport in Greece



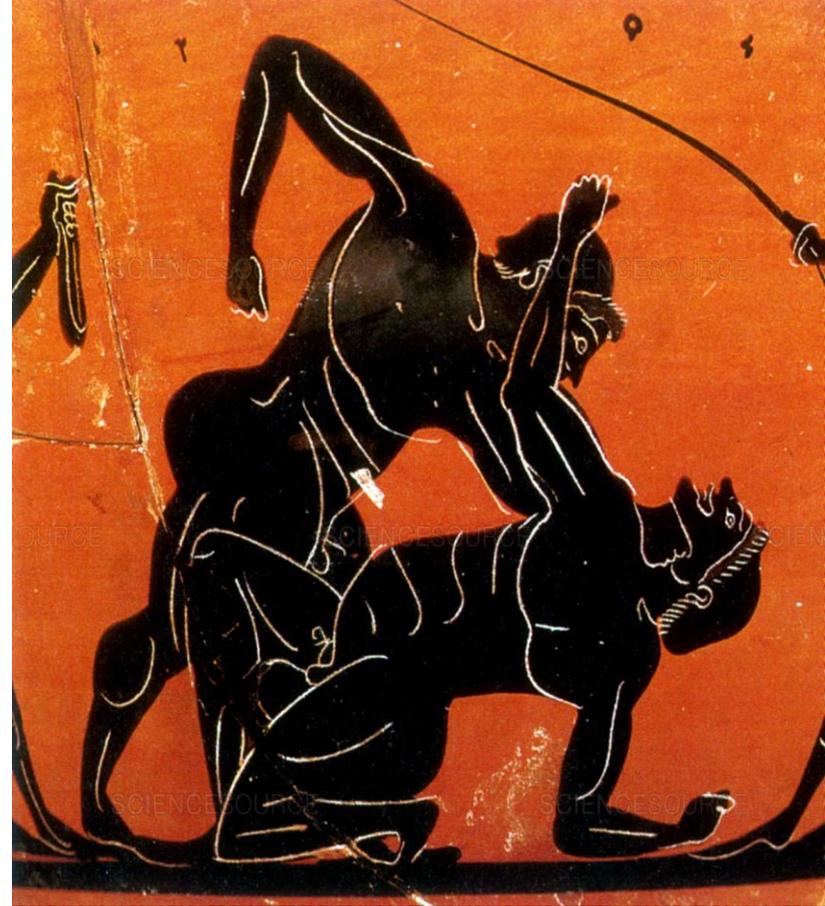
Wrestling

- Because of its existing popularity, the winners of the Wrestling tournaments at the Games became 'superstars' - the most famous of Ancient Olympians...
- But victory could come at a high price in terms of injury – bouts were savage and broken bones were a regular, with wrestlers often deliberately breaking fingers or even arms as a tactic to escape holds!



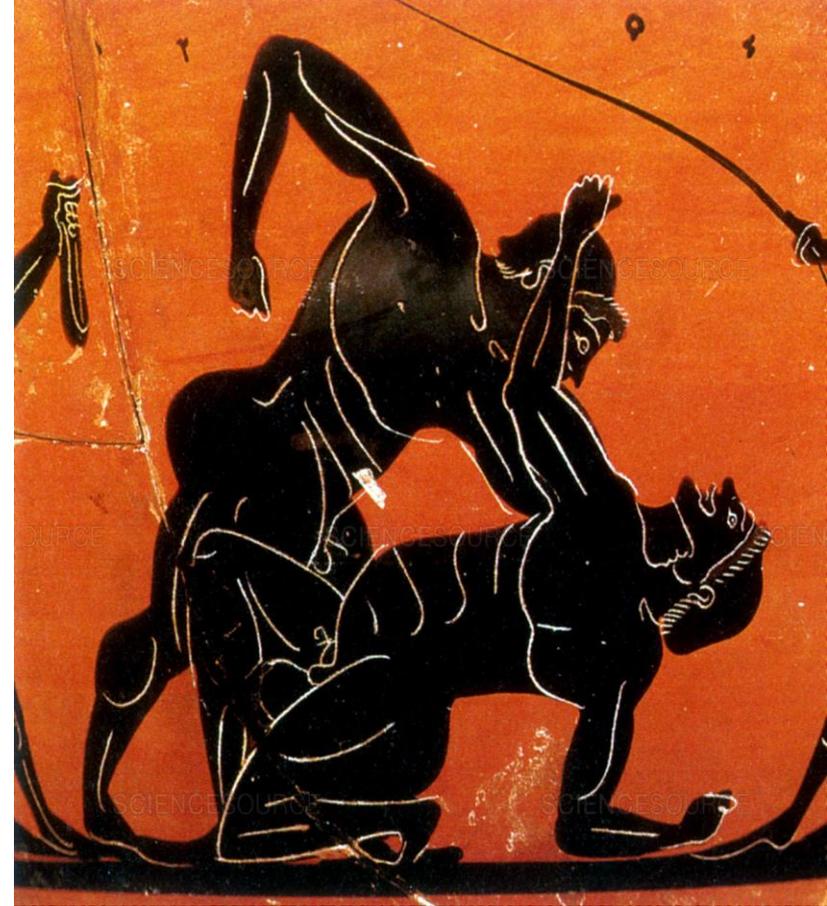
Pankration

- This was the most brutal of all the combat sports at the Ancient Games – a unique mixture of no-holds barred boxing, wrestling and mixed martial arts where the fighters were covered in oil and almost anything was allowed!
- In fact were only two rules – no biting and no gouging!



Pankration

- As with all Ancient Greek sports, it was believed that a god or a hero was responsible for inventing the rules, and in the case of Pankration they were down to **Theseus**
- The mythical Theseus was said to have combined wrestling and boxing to defeat the Minotaur, the half-man half-bull which lived in a labyrinth below the palace of King Minos of Crete



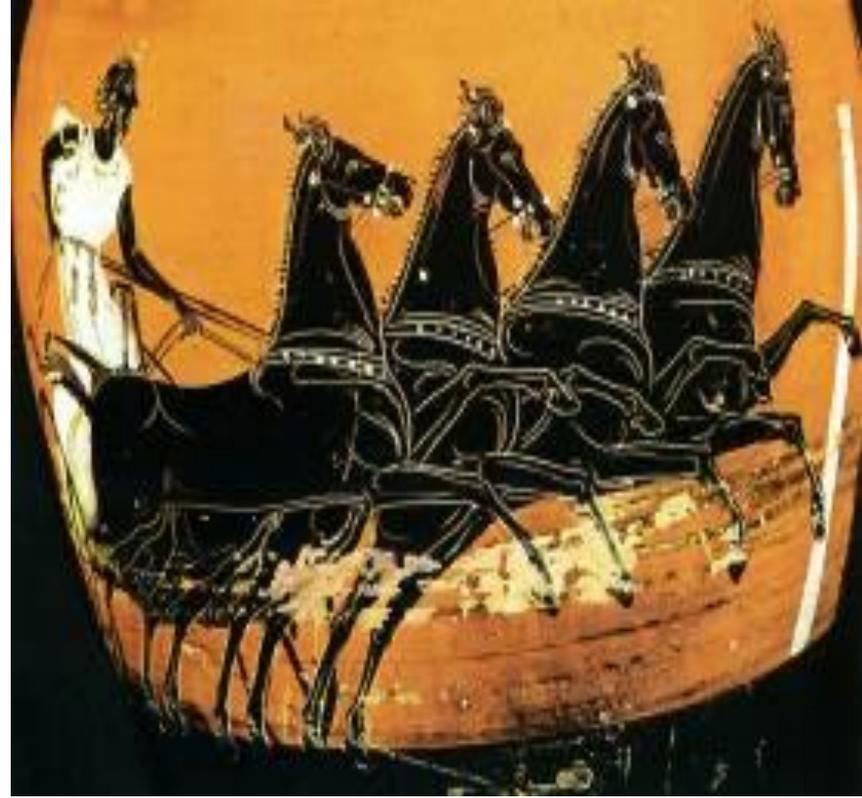
If you want to find out more about the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur click below or do some further research of your own...



<https://greece.mrdonn.org/theseus.html>

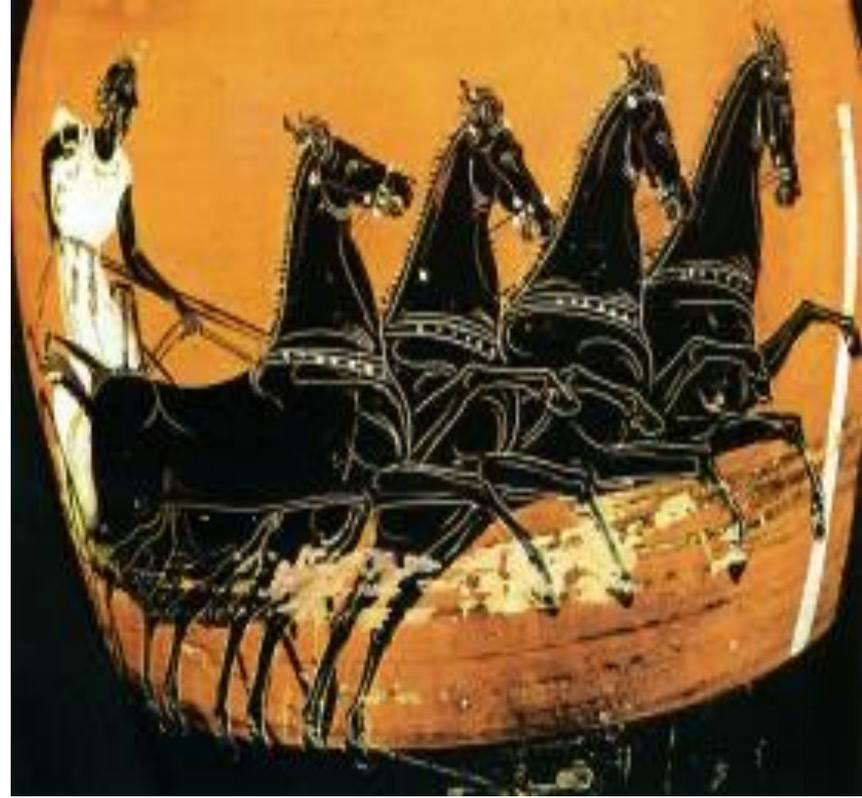
Chariot-racing

- Introduced in 680BC, Chariot-Racing was perhaps the most thrilling and dangerous of all the Ancient Olympic Sports – and perhaps of all time!
- The races took place at the specially designed Hippodrome Stadium at Olympia
- The four-horse chariots with wooden wheels raced 12 times around the track, covering about 14,000m, with the charioteer balanced dangerously over the back axle!



Chariot-racing

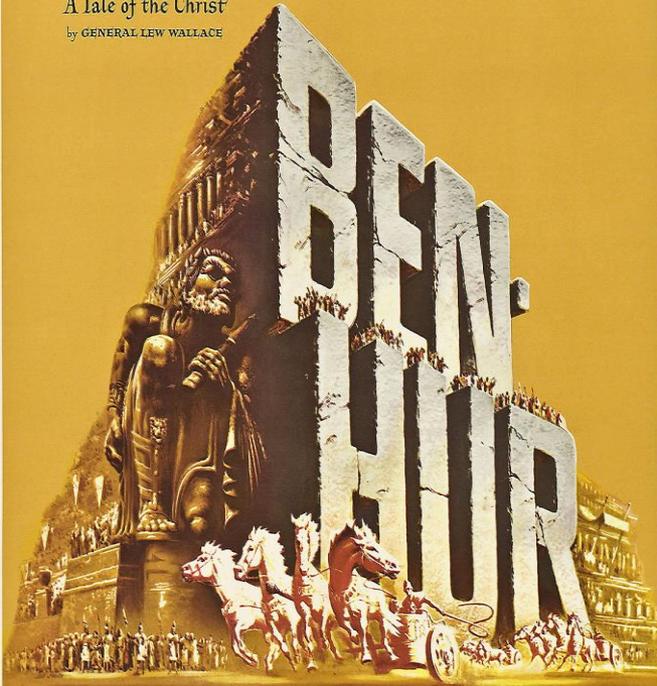
- Despite the incredible risks and dangers involved in taking part, all the glory of victory went not to the charioteer but instead the owner of the winning chariot and horses, who received the symbolic olive wreath!
- This made Chariot-racing a focus for the most wealthy and powerful figures in Greek society, with many of the ancient world's most influential figures owning chariots
- And it was also the only Ancient Olympic sport that allowed women to be involved – because they could be the owners



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by GENERAL LEW WALLACE



Directed by

WILLIAM WYLER

Starring

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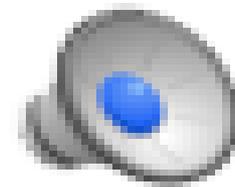
HUGH GRIFFITH · MARTHA SCOTT with CATHY O'DONNELL · SAM JAFFE

Screen Play by Produced by

TECHNICOLOR® KARL TUNBERG · SAM ZIMBALIST

FILMED IN
CAMERA 65

Chariot-racing continues to excite audiences nearly 2500 years later, with the Chariot-Racing scene from the 1959 Oscar winning film ***Ben Hur*** being one of the most famous in cinema history. See what you make of it for yourself...



Think...

How are you going to use all this information on the different sports to add to your exhibition?

What about the athletes?

- First of all, like the spectators, they were all male – although they could come from any social class from kings to peasants
- The only exception was, as we've just seen, in the Chariot Race - Kyniska, daughter of the Spartan King Archidamos, became the first female Olympic champion as a result
- Many of the athletes would have a professional trainer called gymnastes and had to declare that they had been training for at least 10 months to qualify to take part – and arrive in Olympia one month before the Games started to prove their commitment to the competition
- For the athletes, the Games started with a procession which went from the nearby town of Elis to Olympia, led by the Hellanodikai - the judges and officials who wore purple robes to distinguish them
- On arrival at Olympia all the athletes and officials swore an oath to follow the rules of the competitions and to compete with honour and respect

The winners...

- There were no Gold, Silver or Bronze medals at the Ancient Games like today
- Instead the **Hellanodikai** - the judges - presented only the winners of each event with a victory crown of wild olive leaves taken from the sacred trees at Olympia. The olive was significant because the trees of Olympia were believed to have been originally planted by another of Greek Gods, Hercules



The winners...

- Winners were welcomed back to their home cities as heroes. This usually involved a procession where they rode a four-horse chariot, followed by a huge banquets held in their honour
- They also often received benefits such not having to pay tax and invitations to become political leaders
- The city also received prestige from victories at the Games so they sometimes offered financial rewards to successful athletes



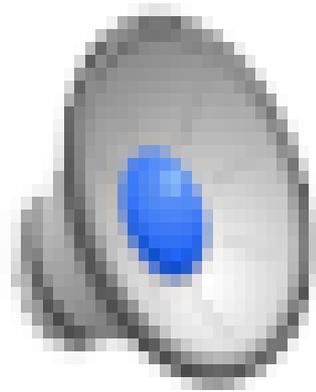
The winners...

- Victorious athletes therefore enjoyed great glory, fame and sense of immortality. This was achieved through the creation of personal statues dedicated to them and victory odes written in their honour.



And the superstars and heroes...

- As we know, repeated victories in Modern Olympic Games can make the winner a global superstar...



And it was no different in the Ancient Games...

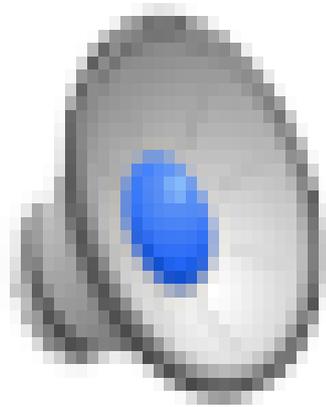




Sporting Heroes of the Ancient Games

- In fact the ‘superstars’ of the Ancient Games were perhaps even more admired as heroes than those today, and were given a status similar to that of a god, with their own mythology and legend
- Multiple champions became amongst the most famous and respected people in the Ancient world
- Let’s meet two of them, starting with the ‘Usain Bolt of the Ancient Games’...

Leonidas of Rhodes – Running





Milo of Croton – Wrestling

- Widely regarded as the greatest Ancient Olympian, especially because of connection with the most popular of sports, Milo won six Olympic Wrestling titles in the 6th Century BC
- He was famed for his incredible strength and carrying a bull into the stadium on his shoulders!
- According to legend, Milo died after tearing apart a tree with his bare hands. The trunk closed down one hand, and held him captive until he was attacked and eaten by wolves

Research time...

Look at all the sports again.

Can you find out more about
some of the most famous
athletes that took part in them?

Think...

How are you going to incorporate this information on the athletes into your exhibition?

So, if the Games were so popular, why did they come to an end?

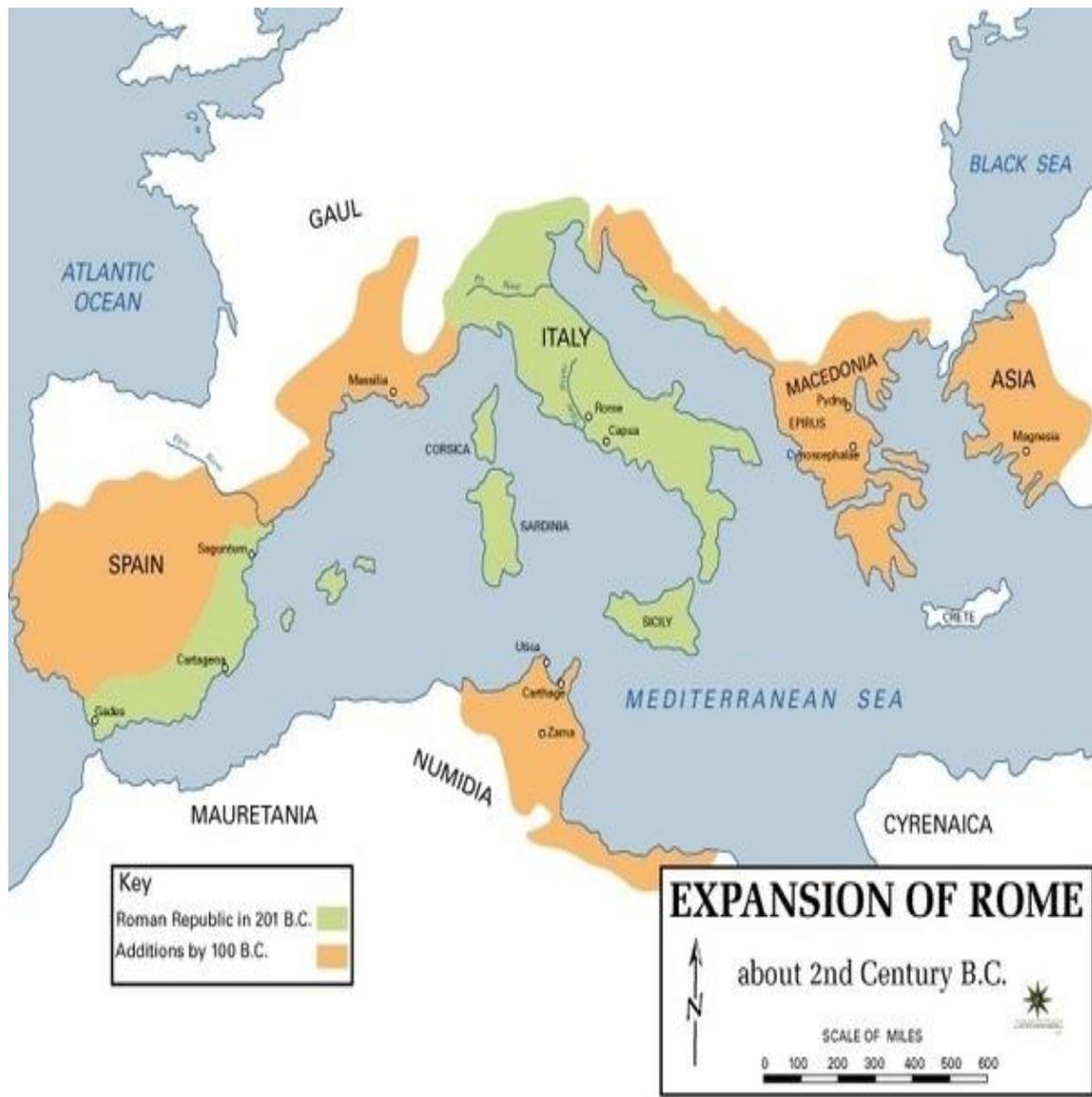
Roman

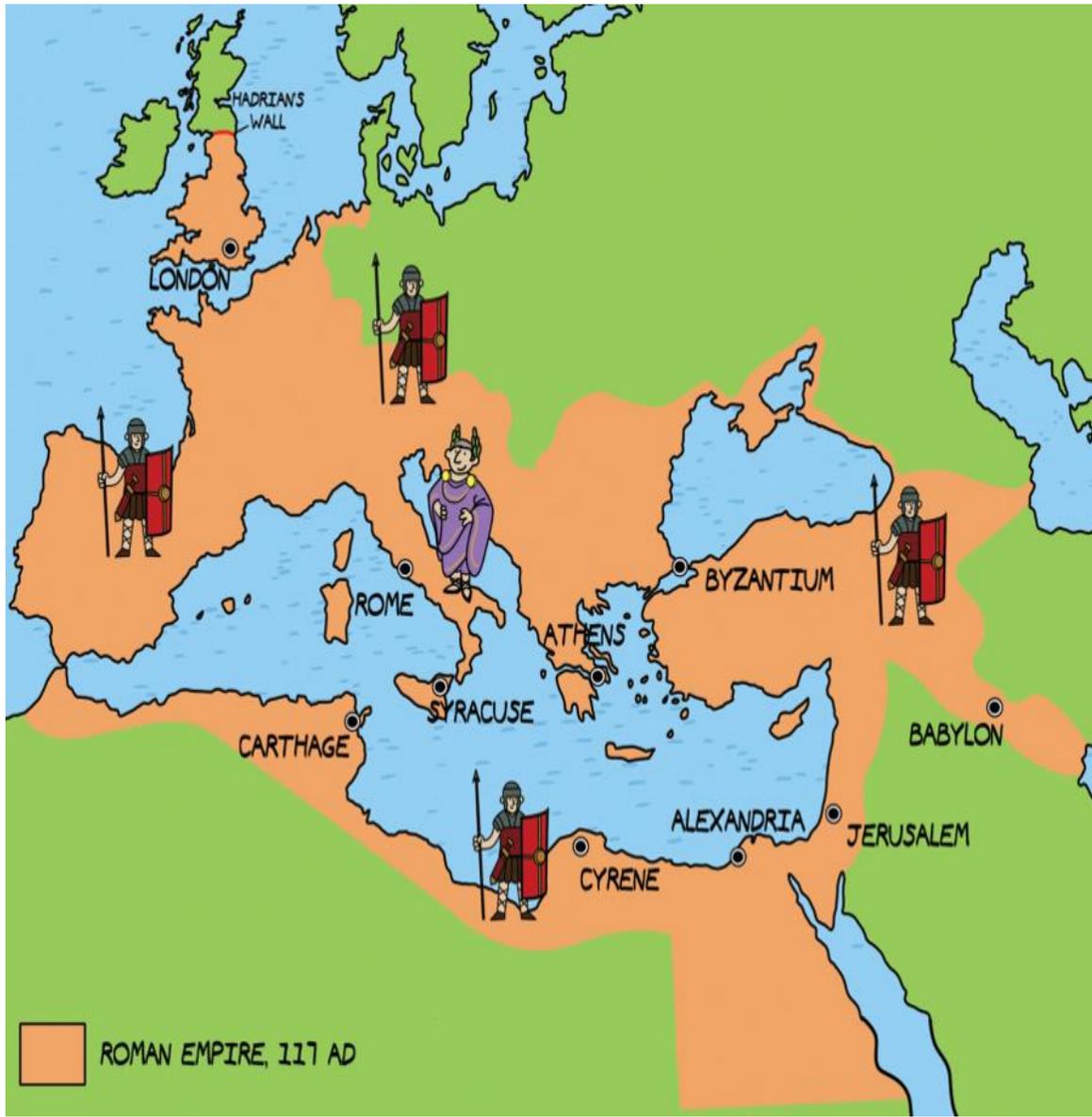


VS

Greek

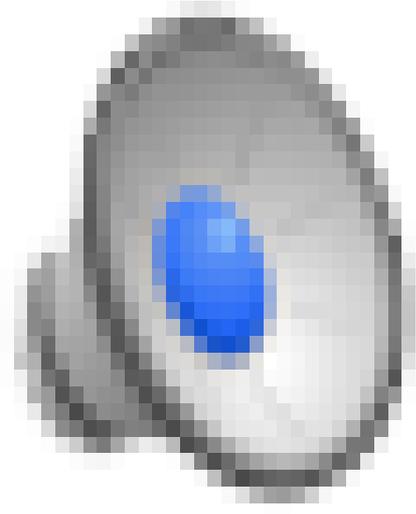






- During the 2nd Century BC the Romans became increasingly powerful and began to gain more and more control over Greece as a result of a series of wars
- By 30BC the Romans had conquered all of mainland Greece





- Under Roman rule, the Games began to decline in importance
- At the same time, Christianity started to become the main religion in the Roman Empire
- Finally, in A.D. 393, the Roman Emperor Theodosius I, who was Christian, banned the Games because they still represented a pagan religious festival in celebration of the God Zeus



So, the reason why the Games started was also the main reason why they came to an end nearly 12 centuries later!

Think...

How are you going to include information about the decline and end of the Games into your exhibition?

Now...

...look back over
your exhibition and
what it set out to do...

How effectively does it tell the story of...

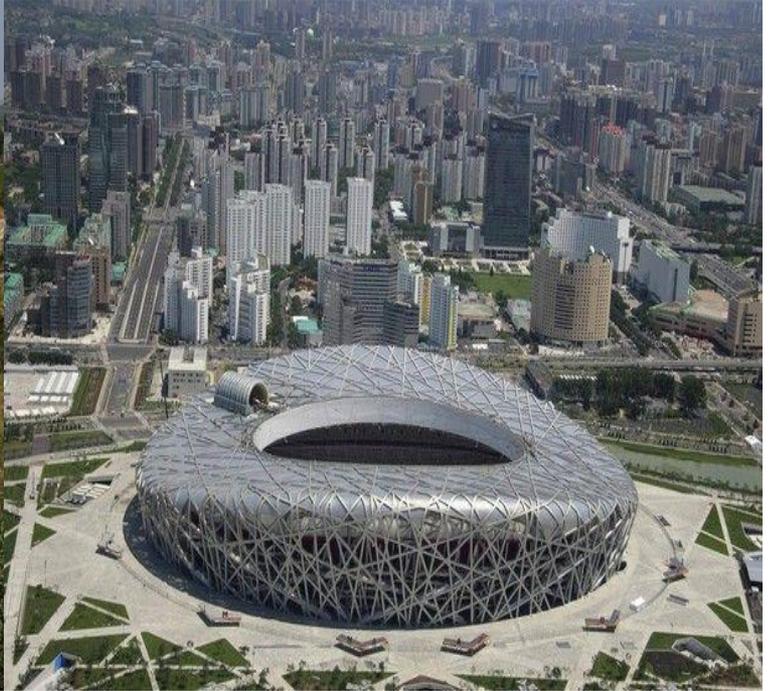
- How and why the Olympic Games first started in Ancient Greece
- What the Games were like and why they were so important to the Ancient Greeks
- How the Ancient Games are different to – but still influence – the Modern Olympics today

Is there anything
else to add
or change?

If you haven't already, it would be great to think about including a final section of your exhibition which compares what you have found about the Ancient Games with what you know about the Modern Olympics!

Similarities and differences?





Think about...

- Ceremonies
- Who can take part
- The number of events
- When the Games are held
- How long the Games last last
- And much more!