



Ancient Greece and the Olympics

Ancient Greece

Greece was made up of a number of city states that were often at war with each other.

Greece is seen as one of the most important ancient civilisations.

Ancient Greece left a legacy that is still felt by us today. Many things around us that we take for granted have their origins in ancient Greece:

- trial by jury
- myths and legends we know
- the idea of democracy
- our style of theatre
- the style of many famous buildings
- our alphabet
- the Olympic Games of course!

But Greece was a very unequal society. One in four people were slaves and had few rights. Women were also discriminated against.

Greek society viewed disability in a different way to many today. Blindness was frequently seen as a blessing and you could still fight in the army if you were blind! The Greek god and blacksmith Hephaestus was disabled - he had a lame foot.



A 2,500 Year Old Greek vase, probably awarded as a prize to the winner of a race. It would have been filled with olive oil.



The red box indicates the site of Greece today. In ancient times it stretched all around the Mediterranean Sea and even as far as India!

The Original Olympics

The first recorded Olympic Games took place in 776BC. They were then held every four years for almost 1000 years.

The first Olympic Games had just one event, running. Other sports were added later and eventually the Games lasted for five days.

The ancient Olympics were rather different from the modern Games. There were fewer events, and only free men who spoke Greek could compete, instead of athletes from any country.

The Games were always held at a special Olympia instead of moving around to different sites every time. The site grew over the years with new temples, baths and sports arenas. Today, the modern Olympic flame starts its journey around the world from Olympia.

Like our Olympics, though, winning athletes were heroes who put their home towns on the map. One young Athenian nobleman defended his political reputation by mentioning how he entered seven chariots in the Olympic chariot-race. This high number of entries made both the aristocrat and Athens look very wealthy and powerful.

The ancient Olympic events were boxing, chariot racing, horse riding, pankration (a Greek martial art), the pentathlon, running and wrestling.

The pentathlon was made up of five events - discus, javelin, a sprint race, the long jump and wrestling.

The Acropolis

This is just one of the many ancient buildings still standing in Athens today. It is over 2,000 years old and has survived several earthquakes.

Athens was the largest of all the Ancient Greek cities. It is still the largest city in Greece today.

