

The Original Olympics: the 'Games' in Classical Greece - University of Sussex

10am to 4pm - Saturday 21 April 2012

The first Olympic Games were held in 776 BC in honour of Olympian Zeus. Thereafter they were held every four years and their importance is shown by the fact that the Ancient Greeks numbered their years by 'olympiads', i.e. the periods between games. There was also a cycle of religious festivals and their associated games at other sacred sites, but the Olympics were the most prestigious.

The competitive nature of the Greeks is displayed in their worship of the gods in physical and intellectual competition. Winning was everything – it gave you immortality in a victory ode and ensured that you were maintained for life by your local city. There was no concept of being second.

First of all, we shall consider the cycle of Panhellenic festivals and the place of the Olympics within this cycle. Then we shall focus on the site of Olympia, the buildings and layout, and changes over several centuries. We shall look at the development of sporting events, attitudes towards specialisation and the importance of the 'all-round athlete'.

The Olympics were significant in the diplomatic relations between Greek states not least because there was a truce declared for the duration of the games. It was also a great opportunity for self-promotion by the various city-states.

We shall discuss the difference between the ethos and attitudes of the ancient and the modern Olympic Games.

Contact: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cce/prospectivestudents/shortcourses/x90298>