

0. THE LEGEND BEHIND THE GAMES - Story Preface

**1. THE LEGEND BEHIND THE GAMES**

2. OLYMPIA: HOST OF THE GAMES

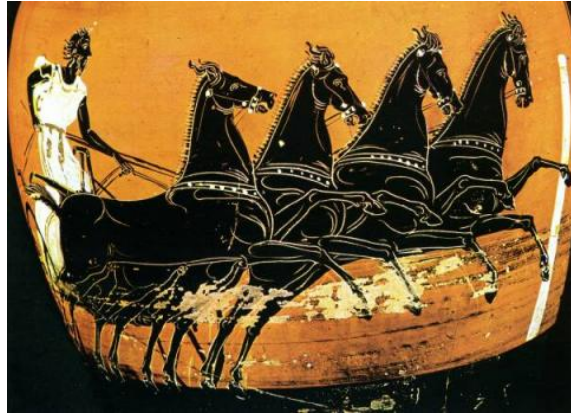
3. A TRIP TO OLYMPIA

4. WHO PARTICIPATED?

5. ANCIENT OLYMPIC SPORTS

6. ATHLETES IN ACTION

7. OLYMPIC POETRY



Four-horse chariot races, running 12 rounds (about 14 km), became part of the Olympics circa 680 B.C. It was the first equestrian event of the ancient games. Because turns were to the left, the right-outer horse had to be fastest of the team. This image depicts an amphora, c. 420-400 B.C., showing a four-horse chariot in a turning maneuver. The owner of the horses, not the charioteer, was the official Olympics participant (and, if the team won, was declared the victor). Image online via [KU Leuven](#) (Belgium's largest university).

Oinomaos (Oenomaus) was a legendary king of Pisa (an area not far from Elis in the western part of Greece). His daughter Hippodameia, of marriageable age, had many suitors with whom Oinomaos was not always pleased.

He had reason to worry. An oracle had warned Oinomaos that he would die at the hand of his son-in-law.

Boastful of his chariot-racing skills, Oinomaos issued a legendary challenge. He would determine the worth of any potential son-in-law by testing his racing skills.

If the king failed to overtake any of his daughter's suitors in a chariot race between Olympia to the Isthmus of Corinth (where ships were moved overland in ancient times but now travel through the man-made Corinthian Canal), the victorious racer could marry Hippodameia.

However ... if any suitor lost the race, he would die.

Many erstwhile suitors had already lost their heads to the sword of Oinomaos. The king, an expert charioteer, thought he would never lose a race. Then love interfered.

Desiring to marry a handsome man named Pelops, Hippodameia approached her father's charioteer, Myrtilus (Myrsilos), with a devious plan. If her father's chariot were missing a linchpin from one of its wheels, she could fix the outcome of the race between her father and her suitor.

Myrtilus, also in love with Hippodameia, agreed to betray the king. He loosened the linchpin so the wheel would break free from the axle. (Note that some of the legends say it was Pelops who concocted the plan.)

With Oinomaos holding the reins of his horses, attempting to overtake the speeding chariot in front of him, his chariot wheels fell away. According to one version of the story, the king was caught in the reins and was dragged to death. Another version says that Pelops killed him.

In either event, Oinomaos lost both control and his life.

Pelops won the day and the bride. He also became king and, after conquering nearby Apia and Pelasgiotis, named the entire region after himself. The southern part of the Greek mainland is called the Peloponnese (or Peloponnesus, meaning Island of Pelops) to this day.

To honor Zeus (whose statue at Olympia, later sculpted by Pheidias, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world) and to celebrate the life of Oinomaos (after his death), Pelops organized commemorative games to be held in Olympia. It was the beginning of a thousand-year tradition in the ancient Greek world.

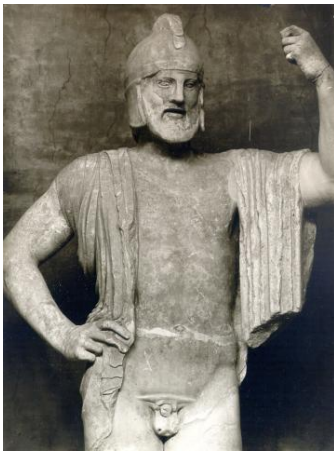
According to legend, it was also the beginning of a curse on Pelops' family.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-LEGEND-BEHIND-THE-GAMES-Ancient-Olympics>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-LEGEND-BEHIND-THE-GAMES-Ancient-Olympics>



### Oinomaos - Expert Charioteer and King of Pisa

Cast-image replica of Oinomaos - from the East Pediment, Temple of Zeus - online, courtesy Hellenica.de (a German-language website).

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Oinomaos-Expert-Charioteer-and-King-of-Pisa>



### Map of Ancient Greece

Image online, courtesy Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

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### Map Depicting the Location of Elis on the Peloponnese

Image online, courtesy Bryn Mawr College.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-Depicting-the-Location-of-Elis-on-the-Peloponnese>



### Statue of Hippodameia

Image online, courtesy the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Theology at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (known as FAU), located in the cities of Erlangen and Nuremberg (in Bavaria, Germany).

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### Chariot Race - Ancient Greece

Athenian red-clay vase, described above, maintained by Museo Nazionale Archeologico in Arezzo, Italy. Image online, courtesy Oxford University.

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### Map Depicting Location of Olympia

Map image online, courtesy Tokyo University of Science.

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### Pelops Statue

Image online, courtesy the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Theology at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (known as FAU), located in the cities of Erlangen and Nuremberg (in Bavaria, Germany).

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### Map of the Corinthian Canal

Image online, courtesy the United Methodist Church website.

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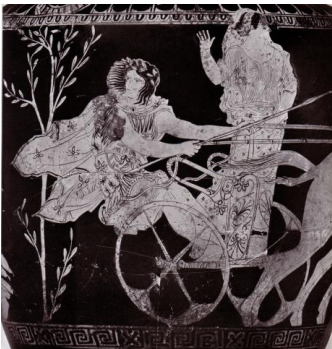


### Isthmus of Corinth

Image online, courtesy NASA.

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### Chariot Race Scene - Ancient Greek Vase

This image depicts the detail of a late-classical Greek vase telling the story of Pelops and Hippodameia.

They are in a chariot race during which, according to the tale, Pelops defeats Hippodameia's father, King Oinomaos.

The prize for the victor was the hand of the King's daughter, Hippodameia.

Click on the image for a better view.

Image, described above, online via the University of Texas, at Austin.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chariot-Race-Scene-Ancient-Greek-Vase>



### Hippodameia

Image online, courtesy the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Theology at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (known as FAU), located in the cities of Erlangen and Nuremberg (in Bavaria, Germany).

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### Hippodameia Statue

Image online, courtesy the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Theology at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (known as FAU), located in the cities of Erlangen and Nuremberg (in Bavaria, Germany).

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### Map of Southern Europe

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Path Used to Move Ships Over Land

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Pelops, Namesake of the Peloponnese

Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

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### Pelops and Hippodameia in a Chariot Race

Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

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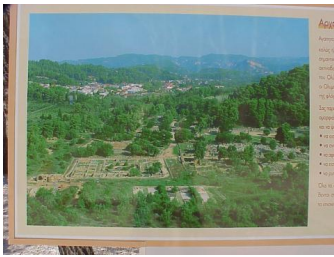


### Corinthian Canal Cutting Through Isthmus of Corinth

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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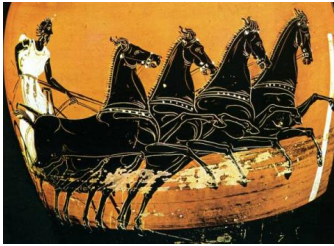
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Corinthian-Canal-Cutting-Through-Isthmus-of-Corinth>



## View of Ancient Olympia

Image online, courtesy allexperts.com website.

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