

0. OLYMPIA: HOST OF THE GAMES - Story Preface

1. THE LEGEND BEHIND THE GAMES

**2. OLYMPIA: HOST OF THE GAMES**

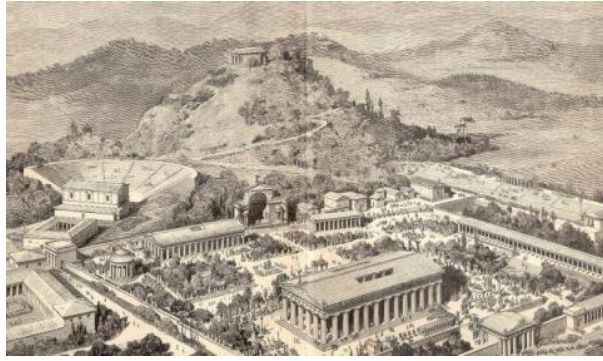
3. A TRIP TO OLYMPIA

4. WHO PARTICIPATED?

5. ANCIENT OLYMPIC SPORTS

6. ATHLETES IN ACTION

7. OLYMPIC POETRY



This illustration, from 1891, depicts an artist's impression of how Olympia may have looked during the ancient Olympic Games. Archaeological excavations began at the site, circa 1891. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Festival games were held in Olympia, in the section of Greece called Elis. (Elis is in the northwestern Peloponnesus.) Getting more rain than other parts of this dry country, Elis has more trees and forests. It also has beautiful groves. One of those groves, called Altis, was a sacred place.

Located in the valley between the rivers Alpheus and Kladeos, the grove of Altis represented holy - hence, neutral - ground. It was home (be patient with this slow-loading Greek web site) to the great sanctuary of Zeus, chief god of the Greeks, whom the ancients believed lived on Mount Olympus.

A smaller sanctuary, dedicated to Hera (the wife of Zeus) was part of the sacred site. The area, where Greeks traveled to honor their gods, was also a perfect place to honor their top athletes. Included in the temple of Zeus (on the East Pediment) was a depiction of the chariot race between Oinomaos and Pelops.

For more than 1,000 years - in war or peace - Greeks gathered in Olympia for the Olympic festival. According to Hippias (a sophist who lived in Elis and, in the 5th century B.C., compiled a list of initial victors), the games began in about 776 B.C.

They ended, in 393 or 394 A.D., when Emperor Theodosius I closed all ancient pagan sanctuaries and banned all associated games. His successor, Theodosius II, had the temples demolished in 426. Thereafter, earthquakes and floods buried the remains until German archaeologists began uncovering Olympia's ruins around 1829.

Let's take a trip to Olympia (today a small town of about 1,800 people who farm and tend to the tourists) to view what remains of the original Olympic stadium (and its surroundings).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/OLYMPIA-HOST-OF-THE-GAMES-Ancient-Olympics>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/OLYMPIA-HOST-OF-THE-GAMES-Ancient-Olympics>

Media Stream



Peloponnesus

Image online, courtesy the University of Arizona [website](#).

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Peloponnesus>



224 Aerial view of Altis at Olympia with Hill of Kronos (top), stadium (right center), and the Altis (center).

### Aerial View of Altis at Olympia

Image online, courtesy Perseus Digital Library. Photograph by Raymond V. Schoder, S.J., courtesy of Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Aerial-View-of-Altis-at-Olympia>



### Alpheus River near Sanctuary of Zeus

Image online, courtesy the Hampden-Sydney College [website](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Alpheus-River-near-Sanctuary-of-Zeus>



### Sanctuary Dedicated to Hera at Altis

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sanctuary-Dedicated-to-Hera-at-Altis>

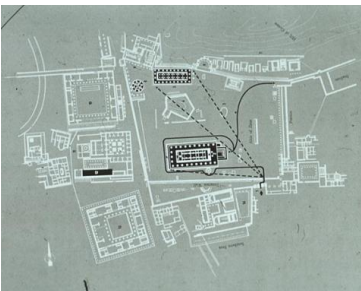


### Sanctuary For Hera - Lighting the Olympic Flame

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 2.5.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sanctuary-For-Hera-Lighting-the-Olympic-Flame>



### Detail of the Sacred Site of Altis

Image online, courtesy the State University of New York College at Oneonta [website](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Detail-of-the-Sacred-Site-of-Altis>



### Temple of Zeus

Photo by Wknight94, online via Wikimedia Commons.

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Temple-of-Zeus>



## Map of Ancient Sites of Greece

Image online, courtesy the greeceathensaegeaninfo.com [website](http://www.greeceathensaegeaninfo.com).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-of-Ancient-Sites-of-Greece>



## Statue of Theodosius II

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Statue-of-Theodosius-II>

## Depiction of Original Olympic Area

What did ancient people see when they arrived at Olympia to participate in the ancient Olympics or to worship at the Altis Sanctuary?

Experts have pieced-together a layout of what they believe likely shows how things appeared thousands of years ago. This image depicts that layout which is displayed at the museum in Olympia.

The large building, in the middle of the model, is the Temple of Zeus.

A Greek website, [Ancient Greek Thesaurus](#), describes the model and the general lay of the land at the Sanctuary:

*The sanctuary lies in the alluvial valley formed by the confluence of the rivers, Kladeos and Alpheos; to the north is the wooded Hill of Kronos. To the south is one of the most important buildings at Olympia, the Bouleuterion , the Council building.*

*Far to the north is the Prytaneion where the Prytaneis, the high priests, were in residence, not only during the year of the Games, but permanently.*

*To the west, close to the banks of the Kladeos River, are the Palaestra and the Gymnasium where athletes were privileged to exercise and take final training for the Games. In the center is the Temple of Hera, wife of Zeus. South of the Temple of Hera stands the overpowering Temple of Zeus.*



*In ancient times hundreds of statues of athletes and other famous personages were placed throughout the Altis; those statues were votive offerings dedicated to Zeus. Few of the statues have been found since the German School of Archaeology began its nineteenth-century excavation of Olympia.*

*The color, modeling, and perfection of the Altis statues appealed to the Roman conquerors who carried away the art treasures. Happily, a few remained at the site, and, on exhibit today at the Museum of Olympia, they give us some inkling of what a dazzling sight the entire group of fine statues must have been. Bordering the Altis, to the north, are a series of Treasury Buildings. The arched tunnel, just outside the Altis to the northeast, leads to the stadium.*

*The sanctuary itself, the Altis, was separated from the rest of the area by a precinct wall and was entered through three main gates, two of the west and one on the south side. The wall enclosed the temples and buildings that were directly connected with the cult. Outside the wall were the buildings serving the needs of visitors to the sanctuary and of the athletes during the Olympic Games (priests' houses, baths, hostels, gymnasium, palaestra, etc.).*

*Activities in the Altis were greatly limited with the edict forbidding the festivals of the great sanctuaries in AD 393. The destruction of the monuments was by imperial decree in AD 426 and the devastation was completed by an earthquake that struck the region during the 6th c. AD.*

*Click on the image for a better view.*

*Image and quoted passage online via [Ancient Greek Thesaurus](#).*

*View this asset at:*

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Depiction-of-Original-Olympic-Area>

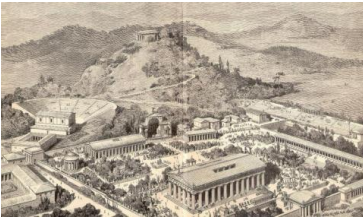


## Site of Original Olympic Stadium

Image online via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Site-of-Original-Olympic-Stadium>



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