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A massive volcanic eruption, around 1627 BC, covered a Minoan settlement on the Greek island of Santorini—known as Akrotiri—with volcanic ash. This phenomenon preserved the settlement's frescoes. One of the preserved frescoes, at Akrotiri, depicts two young Minoan boys boxing.

Boxing has been around for thousands of years. Some historians believe pugilism, as a sport, originated in parts of Egypt and Africa before it spread to southern Europe. Other scholars suggest it developed in ancient Mesopotamia at least 5,000 years ago.

First accepted as an Olympic sport (ancient Greeks called it *Pygmachia*) in 688 B.C., participants in the ancient games trained on punch bags (called a *korykos*). Keeping their fingers free, boxers then wore leather straps (called *himantes*) on their hands, wrists and sometimes lower arms, to protect them from injury.

In Rome, opponents also strapped leather thongs around their fists. Slaves, often fighting to the death in front of Roman spectators, conducted their "sport" inside a circle marked on an amphitheater floor. Thus was born the first boxing "ring."

Boxing in the ancient world was governed by few rules. If a man was down, his opponent could still hit him.

Since they were chosen randomly, boxers in a match could be mismatched in weight. They fought without rounds and without weight classes. The bout was over when one player was knocked out or admitted defeat.

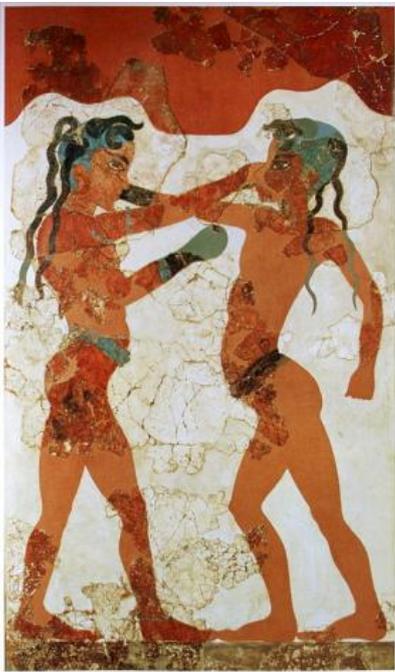
There came a time, during the Roman Empire, when boxing as a sport was no longer permitted. It had become too brutal. Reborn in the 17th century, it took on new life in England.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BOXING-ITS-START-Cinderella-Man>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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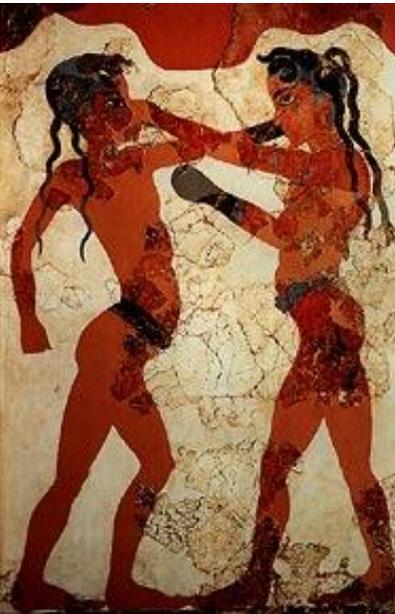


Ancient Minoan Boxing Boys

As unknown artist, working in the Minoan settlement of Akrotiri—on the Greek island of Santorini sometime before c1627 BC—created this fresco. It was preserved after being covered with volcanic ash. Yann Forget took the photo, depicting the fresco, and has released it into the public domain.

View this asset at:

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Ancient Boxing Mural

Image online, courtesy the [National Archaeological Museum](#) website, Athens, Greece.

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Korykos - Ancient Punching Bag

Image online, courtesy Greek-language web site on the ancient Olympics.

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Bronze Figure of Boxer's Hands

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Himantes - Ancient Greek Boxing

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Hands and Wrists of Ancient Boxers

Image of Greek amphora, depicting boxers, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Leather Straps in Ancient Greek Boxing

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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