

Capturing the Spirit and Cultural Heritage of Ancient Olympics

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ABSTRACT

The Olympics that symbolizes the struggle of the humankind between his ideas and the reality that he must live was started in archaic age in B.C. 776 by Greeks. Although Ancient Olympic games, that brings all of the independent Greek people together in the great play fest that is fulfilled in each 4 years are explained to provide the unity among the Greek sites that are in a political struggle and to prepare for war, the common thought is that these games are done to honor Zeus, the great God of Greek mythology. The aim of this study is to give information about Ancient Olympics by conducting examinations about the origin of Ancient Olympic game that has started in 776 B.C., spirit of these games, how the contests are conducted. As a consequence, with Romanians in Greece who started to increase their power, the games also started to lose their effect. When Christianity became the official religion of Roman Empire, it was thought that the games were out of religion and it was a contrary situation to effect of Christianity. As a consequence, Emperor Theodosius withdrew these archaic games that had been played for more than a thousand years in the year of 393. And to the Greeks, Ancient Olympics were something so solemn that we have no equivalent to them today.

Keywords: *Ancient Olympic Games, Olympic Spirit, Olympic Events*

INTRODUCTION

Ancient Olympic Games: The Olympic Spirit

The rich mythology which decorates both the derivation and the consecration of one of the greatest institutions in the progress of mankind is known as Olympic Games. The Olympic Games are unique link between the classical world and the modern times. During the thousands years of their ancient life and the century of their modern existence, competitors and spectators alike have same passion for sport and exhilaration in human strength, power and achievement and the excitement of competition (Swaddling, 2000). And these "Olympic Games" had continued to be played for 1200 years without break in the old Olympia in the Southwest of Peloponnes Peninsula of Greece (Swaddling, 2000).

Showing curiosity of Olympic Fest that was lived in each four years through a thousand years from 776 B.C. until 393 A.D. had attracted citizens from whole Greek world. Thousands of people from neighbor cities and city governments in first years and then from far colonies by overland and sea, from the exploitations in Spain and Africa had came to Olympia that is the fixed place of Olympic game (Swaddling, 2000).

The games were organized in august and the city of Elis was responsible for the organization because the city of Elis was in a central position. In the months of august, fields were harvested and so, people used to have more time for enjoy (Ustel, 2005). The Olympic Games were a meeting place for poets, artists, philosophers, historians and others (Crowther, 2001).

On the other hand, these collective games that were conducted as a contest in Greece had a religious meaning (Afşar, 2001). The games were conducted to honor Zeus, the great God of Greek mythology (Swaddling, 2000). The ancient Greeks believed that the gods themselves were present and followed the games, enjoying the sight of the beautiful bodies of the athletes who were competing in their honor. The games were a prominent institution in ancient Greece with a major role in the development of society, politics and arts. In particular, they contributed to success by creating leading personalities, which is one of the outcomes of sport and competition (www.olympic.org). On the other hand, Olympic games had been a historical sign for the archaic Greece world. The year of 776 B.C. when the first Olympic games were played was the first recorded date, because names of the winners were officially recorded (Andronicos, 1985).

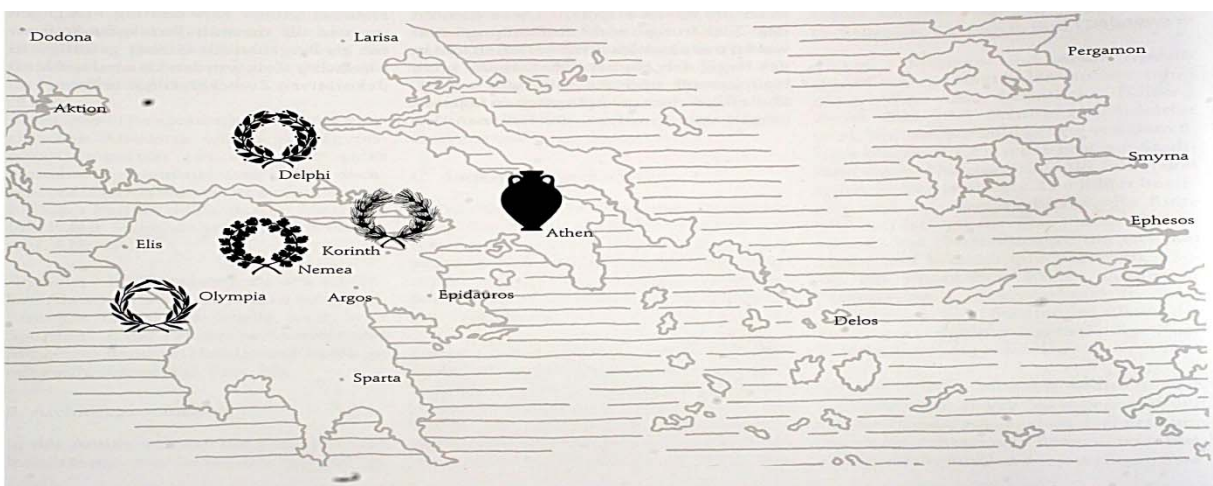
It is well known that the prevailing education of young men in ancient times prepared them in a natural way to become strong, to have fortitude and endurance. Education aimed at serving the interests of the state and these dictated the development of “kalokagathos” citizens. “Kaloskagathos” was the youth who was beautiful and balanced in body and soul (Palaeologos, 1970). The word *agon* (contest) is rightly considered to be one of the key words for understanding the phenomenon of ancient Greek civilization (www.olympic.org).

Olympic Games were special because they brought the Greek world together (pan = all, hellene = Greek) at a time when Greece was not a single state, but a series of city-states (politically and economically independent communities). From Greece and the colonies (in Italy, North Africa and Asia Minor), people travelled to take part in or attend these Games, inspired by the shared feeling of belonging to the same culture or religion (Tom, 2007). Also Herakles, one of the legendary founders, believed that the Olympic festival would be the beginning of friendship among the Greeks (Crowther, 2001).

However, in 146 A.D., Romanians occupied Greece and caused the Olympics games to spoil by attending to the games. From this angle, it can be said that the games had lost their Panhellenistic features. After this date, people who were not Greek had been able to attend to the games. At first stage, Romanians did not appropriate and they were not interested in the games. Romanian people were effective on Greek society with their own custom and traditions and as a consequence of this, some cultural changes formed in social life of Greek people. In this date, Romanians changed the form of Olympics games by giving an aim out of sports targets and aims. So, the games became different that gladiators fight to each other and at the end one side dies (Seçilmiş, 2004).

Olympia

Figure 1. Ancient Greece Map



Olympia, the site of the ancient Olympic Games, the most splendid athletic festivity of ancient times developed into great athletic contests out of simple religious contests (Palaeologos, 1964).

Olympia attracted the greatest crowds for any kind of festival in Greece and the popularity of the Games began early in their history. All importance of Olympia comes from the games (Gillet, 1975) and Olympia was associated with the glory of Greece (Crowther, 2001). According to poet Pindar, Olympia was created by Herakles who was the super hero of Greek mythology. According to the legend, Herakles had created a plain and drew the borders of Altis, and he

started the first games for the honor of Zeus (www.nuveforum.net).

Going to Olympia was meaning to circumambulate the grove that is known as Altis that is the holiest place belonging to Zeus. Because of that, there is no other place as Olympia in modern sport and Olympia is a place that was combining the sport institutions and temple (Swaddling, 2000).

Old Olympia was formed by three sections. The first section was the religious part and temples that are done for Zeus, Meter and Hera, Zeus horses, holly olive tree which championship crown was made from its branches and ascribed to Herakles, horses belonging to Hera and Meter, the grave in which hero Pelops is buried, the monument belonging to Filip who is father of Alexander, buildings in which treasures are hidden and hundreds of statues that are done for the memory of Greek Gods especially Zeus and champions of Olympics were in it (Tmok, 1988).

And in the second section of Olympia, there were Palestra in which the athletes were training, Gymnasium, bathrooms, swimming pool, the building belonging to the priests working in Olympia, the workshop of Fidiyas, the great sculptor who made the statue of Zeus, the building in which the Olympic council was assembled and the archives were stored (Tmok, 1985; Tmok, 1988).

The third section was the field on which Olympics contests were conducted and there were Stadium, hippodrome and horses belonging to Demeter in it. Except the place on which the Olympics referees and Demeter nun used to sit, the audiences used to sit on the ridge surrounding the stadium and watch the contests (Tmok, 1988).

The promoting feature of all archaic and Greece cities was the sports centers called as "Gymnasium" (Segal, 1987). Body building had an important role in Greek life style. Because of that, it was necessary to reserve a free field for children and young boys to run, to ride horse, to box, to wrestle, to throw discus or play football. More than being a building contrasted as traditional, Gymnasium must be considered as a wide sports complex. As well as physical education, gymnasium was the center of mental education (Wycherley, 1986).

In the Gymnasium, the lessons used to be conducted with wrestle, box, discus throw, throwing jeered, long jump and stadia (200 m) running studies under the control of the teachers until noon. And afternoon, language and grammar, speaking, geography, math, philosophy and music lessons were given. The administrator of the Gymnasium was called as "Gymnasiarkhos" and was honored with golden crown (Serdaroğlu, 1996). Gymnasiums were places more than school. It used to serve for not only the education of children, young people and young boys, but also for the education of adults (Urlich, 1996).

The Gymnasium in Olympia was constructed in the second century B.C.. The sports saloon was too long because there was a coupled running track of 192,28 m in its gallery, with east column same with the one in the stadium. While preparing for the games, the athletes could train on the smooth soil in too hot and rainy weathers. The court of the sports saloon was so wide that there were extra running tracks, fields for throwing discus and jeered (Swaddling, 2000).

At first times of body building applications, the word "Dromos" (Training field); during the times when a simple wrestle field was used for studies, the word "Palaestra" indicated the whole institution. As the types of body building had increased with time, special fields were needed for each type and because of that the difference between Palaestra and Gymnasium was identified. Then Palestra was identified as a part of Gymnasium and a place that was flatted with soft sand (Alpman, 1972).

There was no stadium in the first years of Ancient Olympics in Olympia. The athletes used to use a line drawn on the sand on ground and they used to run on a road that was big enough. These simple arrangements were enough for the first centuries of the Olympics. As a consequence of the slow developments, a main stadium was constructed in Altis. And then, in about 350 B.C., a brand new wonderful stadium was constructed. The track in the stadium was flatted with a tiny sand layer made of clay. The thresholds placed through the two ends were showing the start and finish points. The length of the track was 600 olympic fit (192,28 meter). According to the mythology, this distance was identified with Herakles's sequential 600 steps (Swaddling, 20000).

Before the Games: The Regulations & Instructions

The regulations and the instructions which were set for the Olympic Games are called by Pindar "The Ordinances of Zeus". Early the contestants had to be Greeks. Participation was not permitted to slaves and non-Greek. Also, the contestants must not have been declared as dishonorable or convicted for crime. Every athlete who wished to take part in the Olympic Games had also had to prove that he had trained for ten months prior to the games (Palaeologos, 1964; Yalouris, 1998; Karaküçük, 1989).

Athletes who wished to take part in the games at Olympia had to stay in Elis for at least one month to go through the necessary testing procedure and they registered personally in Elis when they felt they were capable of competing at the highest level (Pleket, 2004). Finally during their stay in Elis they had to train in the city's spacious gymnasia and palaestra and be briefed on the rules which governed the games. Then they were divided into groups and categories

depending on their age and the event in which they would be competing. It is worth nothing that from the moment on athlete was admitted to the games and entered in a specific age group for an event, it was strictly forbidden for him to withdraw and any transgressors would be severely punished (Yalouris, 1998). Although slaves were not allowed in the Crown games, they could enter some local festivals (Crowther, 2001).

One of another regulation was women's prohibition from attending the Games and the stadium. Only one woman could enter the stadium and she was the priestess of the Temple of Demetra and she had a special seat at an altar opposite the seats of the judges (Palaeologos, 1964).

Another important issue of the Olympics was the referees. The referees (Hellanodikai) used to swear that they will act justly and they will hide the information about the competitors. They were totally responsible for applying the rules and they were both defenders of justice and referees; they were also executing in a violation. Punishments were very hard; the contesters and trainers who violated the rules were punished as done to slaves. They were whipped in public by "Mastigophorai" (Whippers). When the most disgusting crimes, for example bribing was seen, sometimes hard punishments were applied. On counter to the potential criminals, the income from these punishments was used in the financing of the bronze Zeus statue on the terrace wall at the entry of the stadium. In the absence of methods such as photo finish, to define the winner was too hard in horse race contests. In situations of equality, the crown was given to the gods. There was only one winner and it was not important to be second or the third one (Swaddling, 2000).

Transportation

Transportation for The Games was difficult even for the elite (Crowther, 2001). The athletes and spectators who came to Olympia were usually members of the ruling class from all the Greek cities of Greece, lower Italy, North Africa and Asia Minor. They all traveled on foot, by coach or by boat and often needed several days before reaching their destination. A Greek from Marseilles would spend about 10 days on the boat, while an Athenian would have to walk for one week approximately (Valavanis, 2009). A journey from the west (Lower Italy, North Africa, Asia Minor) would have taken a minimum of a few days and perhaps weeks, depending on winds, storms, piracy, the availability of boats and other variables (Crowther, 2001). Traveling was also difficult and dangerous because of robbers and pirates, getting to Olympia from far away regions must have been a tough decision (Valavanis, 2009).

The Games: Beginnings and Evidence

The Olympics were conducted as one in four years and the time line between two Olympics were called as "Olympias". (www.e-kütüphane.teb.org.tr). The Olympics were generally conducted in summer months and August and September were the best time because agricultural activities were stable (Şentürk, 2003). Although the early Olympics had only one event and lasted just one day; The Olympics was a five-day long event including competitions for running, wrestling, horse racing, chariot races and the pentathlon (Yalouris, 1998; Chakley, Essex, 1999; www.mpf.org.tr).

At least ten months before each Game, the state of Elis sent its official heralds to all the city-states of continental Greece, the island and colonies to the East and to the West, to announce the exact date of the opening of the games. This also marked the beginning of the truce which lasted for about three months. During that period, all hostilities had to stop between Greek cities to allow people who attended the games as competitors or spectators to travel from their homeland to Olympia and back, even though enemy territory, without any risk (Yalouris, 1998).

Table- 1.Olympic events and their introduction to the games

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Games</i>	<i>Event Introduced</i>
776 BC	1	Stade
724 BC	14	Diaulos
720 BC	15	Dolichos
708 BC	18	Wrestling and pentathlon
688 BC	23	Boxing
680 BC	25	Chariot race for four horses
648 BC	33	Horse race and pankration
632 BC	37	Stade and wrestling for boys
628 BC	38	Pentathlon for boys (discontinued 628 BC)
616 BC	41	Boxing for boys
520 BC	65	Hoplite race
500 BC	70	Race for mule carts (discontinued 444 BC)
496 BC	71	Race for mares (discontinued 444 BC)
408 BC	93	Chariot race for two horses
396 BC	96	Contest for heralds and trumpeters
384 BC	99	Chariot race for four colts
268 BC	128	Chariot race for two colts
256 BC	131	Colt race
200 BC	145	Pankration for boys

(Reference: Toohey & Veal, 2007)

The athletic contests fell into two categories: the “light” and the “heavy” events. The former essentially consisted of footraces and the pentathlon. There were three major footraces: the stadion, the diaulos (= two stadia) and a long distance race called the dolichos. The ancient stadion was rectangle with a linear track; its length varied from place to place between 180 and 190 m (Pleket, 2004).

The second category was that of the heavy sports, significantly also termed “combat sports”; wrestling, boxing- a combination of those two, with a bit of judo thrown in- the *pankration*, in which everything seems to have been allowed except biting and gouging one’s opponent’s eyes. Boxing and pankration were really tough and bloody. There were neither weight-classes nor a limited number of rounds (Pleket, 2004).

Women in Olympics

“There is a hard mountain on the road of Olympia. Its name is “Typaeum” and according to the law of Elis, each woman who is discovered to attend to the Olympics will be thrown as on head from this mountain.” That means, women cannot attend to the Olympics games (Pausanias).

Women were not allowed to attend to the Olympics but this was not an obstacle for them to be active indirectly. As horse owners, they could not be stopped to attend to cart races. It is also known that some women did this in Olympia. The first and the most famous one of them was “Kyniska” who was daughter of “Archidamos” who was the king of Sparta (Swaddling, 2000).

Also one married woman, “Kallipateira” or “Pherenike”, was recorded to had been admitted to the games, although the authorities were initially unaware of her sex, as she said disguised herself as a male athlete. Fortunately, because of previous Olympic boxing victories by her father, brother and son, she didn’t sentence to death punishment (Toohey, Veal, 2007).

Only one married woman could watch the Olympics and that was “Nun Demeter Chamyne”. The marble altar of the goddess was placed on the north side and half road of the stadium and Demeter Chamyne was watching the games from here. Demeter was the god of plant and abundance (Swaddling, 2000).

Heraia Games

With the exception of the priestess of Demeter Chamyne, women were banned from the men’s Olympic Games. The girls had their own games, the Heraia (Mouratidis, 1988, Saltuk, 1995). Heraia games were a part of Olympia reserved only for women. For the honor of the greatest goddess, this contest was conducted in each four years just before or after the Olympic Games. The fests started with a religious ceremony. The only contest of the fests was 160 m running to which only unmarried women can attend. In this contest, girls could not race naked as boys but by wearing the dress called as “Chiton” (Swaddling, 2000).

But the exclusion of women from the Olympic Games was due to some religious taboo rather than to any sense of modesty or decorum because women in Ionia attended the Delian Festival in honour of Apollo, and in Sparta they participated in athletic exercises with boys (Mouratidis, 1984).

Cultural Heritage of Olympic Games

The ancient Olympic Games, as we say at the beginning, were celebrated for the first time in 776 BC (although it is possible that this was merely a reorganization of a festival that had existed before) and were closed probably in 393 AD when the Emperor Theodosius 1st prohibited the celebration of pagan festivals. His son, Emperor Theodosius 2nd decreed the destruction of the temples and the sanctuaries some thirty years later (Gomez, 1997).

Following Theodosius’ decree, little by little pagan cults began to disappear and the Games were progressively abandoned. An agricultural settlement grew over the ruins of Olympia, with a church and several modest workshops. This city was abandoned during the 7th century AD and the site gradually disappeared under several metres of earth (Gomez, 1997).

The contests that were conducted in Olympia among the Greek people in each four years (Ancient Olympics) are accepted as the beginning of the sport events of today (Iskan, 1988). On the other hand, it is necessary to remember the main two issues in Ancient Olympics. One of that is a context that is called as “Arete” and meaning “Power” that had a role in Greek philosophy. This power would defeat your enemy in war and your rival in Olympics. And the other issue is the context of sponsorship that has been newly understood even in today’s world (Koryürek, 1976).

In old Greece, champions of Ancient Olympics were called with the cities names on behalf of which they attend. Almost all cities that have the opportunity to support a champion or to save a young boy to whom they believe, that he will be the champion, used to use their all power to make these young boys race on behalf of them. And in order to

deserve this generous act of cities, these champions used to accept the sport as a job. According to this situation, in old Greece, all champions were professional from all angles and they used to live with the support that they gain from sports and contests (Koryürek, 1976). But the importance given to the championship, cannot be compared with today's understanding (Koryürek, 1976).

From the first periods, the Olympic Games were a social event that was assisting the development of the sports (Sentürk, 2003). In order to make the champions immortal, to make their statue was a tradition. These statues, most of which were made of bronze that was known as the most durable material, were melted for different usages because of the value of this material. For centuries, even if thousands of statues in holy places of Greece have been stolen and most of them have been decorating collections of Roman aristocracies, at the end, most of them have been destroyed (Swaddling, 2000).

As the time passes, it is possible that Olympics Games were affected from other neighbor cultures (Koryürek, 1976; Karaküçük, 1988). For example, Hittites' principle, the aim is to win, was generally seen in Ancient Olympics. In the documents, it is obvious that we can only see the names of winners; there is no name of the losers (Koryürek, 1976).

It is totally normal to see some beliefs of Hittite civilization took place in Olympics. Geographical nearness has importance on Ancient Olympics ceremonies and philosophy as well as cultures and beliefs. In society of Hittite, the double contradiction is considered as hotness-coldness, day-night and goodness-badness. This understanding was accepted as the superiority of "goodness" on "badness" and maybe because of this, while name of the winner was made almost holy, even name of the loser was not used in Ancient Olympics (Koryürek, 1976). Another issue on which historians emphasize is that the sports took place in Olympics organizations had been done for centuries and these sports were not discovered by Greek people but they came from Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Aegean regions.

As a result, we can consider Ancient Olympics as social issues that were used to assemble the Greek people. And in order to carry the legendary motion of Ancient Olympics and the champions, statues of the successful champions, who had been legends, were made in different cities (Koryürek, 1976). To the Greeks, the Olympic Games were something so solemn that we have no equivalent to them today (Durantez, 1985).

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