

ANCIENT OLYMPIA

Olympia, the sacred ground, was the sanctuary of ancient Greece in Elis, known for having been during the classical times the site of the Olympic Games (one of the four Panhellenic sports festivals), the most famous games in history.

The Olympic Games were held every four years throughout Classical Antiquity, from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD. The winner of each game was crowned with the "Kotinos" an olive branch from the wild olive tree that grew in Olympia, intertwined to form a circle or a horse-shoe. The first Olympic Games were in honor of Zeus.

Over time the site was buried under alluvial deposits, up to 8 meters deep, long thought to be the result of river flooding. Modern research hypothesizes instead—based on the presence of mollusk and gastropod shells and foraminifera— that the site was buried by ocean waters resulting from repeated tsunamis.

The exact site was re-discovered in 1766 by the English antiquarian Richard Chandler. The first excavation of the sanctuary at Olympia was not carried out until 1829, by the French "Expedition Scientifique de Moree". German explorations of 1875-81 threw much more light upon the plans of the buildings; they were resumed in 1936, 1952, and 1960-61. The discovered site contains many treasures of Greek art, such as temples, monuments, altars, theaters, statues and votive offerings of brass and marble, the most important being the statue of Hermes, the messenger of the gods, by Praxiteles.



