

Prizes



There were two classes of athletic competitions in the ancient Greek world: civic and Panhellenic. Civic competitions included the Great Panathenaia at Athens, games in honor of Asklepeios at Epidauros, and games honoring **Zeus** at Larissa. The **Panhellenic Games** included the Olympics at Olympia in honor of **Zeus**, the **Nemean games** at Nemea, also in honor of **Zeus**, the **Pythian games** at Delphi in honor of Apollo, and the **Isthmian games** at Isthmia in honor of Poseidon.

These two types of games, civic and **Panhellenic**, can be

distinguished according to the prizes awarded as well as the identities of the participants and the deities venerated.

Crown Games

In the 4th century BCE, ancient authors and inscriptions described the four **Panhellenic games** as *stephanites*, literally “of a crown,” to indicate that while the games themselves awarded only an olive wreath as a prize, individual cities motivated their contestants by offering gifts and honors (see Section 6: Politics). However, during the Hellenistic period (321-31 BCE), cities sought to apply the term *stephanites* to their local games. Perhaps in an effort to distinguish the **Panhellenic games** once more, the term *hieros*, “sacred,” was used by ancient sources. Unfortunately, this term was often used in conjunction with *stephanites* since every game, local or **Panhellenic**, was put on to honor one god or another. As a result, non-**Panhellenic games** were given the title of *hieros*, putting them once again into the same class as the **Panhellenic games**. Suffice it to say, the matter is complicated, made more so by anachronistic assignment of **Panhellenic games** to the category of *stephanites*, and the local games to the category of *thematikos*, prize-games, despite the fact that *thematikos* was used by the ancients as a category only starting in the 2nd century CE. Furthermore, a game may have been viewed as *stephanites* by one city, but not by another city, and games moved between categories over time.



Olive Wreath, Greek, late 4th-3rd century BCE, Gold, 1991.014, Atlanta, Michael C. Carlos Museum

At the Olympics, the prize was a crown of wild olive branches from the sacred tree that Herakles himself was said to have planted. Individual cities offered their victorious athletes additional prizes, nothing of monetary value was awarded at Olympia itself. At other games, participants could earn bronze amphorae filled with olive oil or a sum of money.

Suggested Further Reading

Kyle, Donald G. "Archaic Greece: Athletics in an Age of

Change." In *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient*

World, 70-90. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Incorporated, 2014.

"Panhellenic Sacred Crown Games and More." In *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, 133-46.

Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Incorporated, 2014.

"Sport, Society, and Politics in Ancient Athens." In *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity*. Edited by Paul Christesen and Donald G. Kyle, 159-75. Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, Incorporated, 2013.

Kurke, Leslie. "The Economics of Kudos." In *Greek Athletics*. Edited by Jason König, 204-37. Edinburgh:

Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Remijsen, Sofie. "The So-Called "Crown-Games": Terminology and Historical Context of the Ancient

Categories for Agones." *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 177 (2011): 97-109.