

# CLAS 0210

## Sport in the Ancient Greek World



- Class 2
- Friday 9 September
- The ancient games as ritual and politics

# Gymnasion (Gymnasium)



King Agesilaos  
(4th c. BC)

Pausanias  
(2nd c. AD)

*The Gymnasion at Olympia*



# Stadion

(Latin: Stadium)

Stadium at Delphi



- gymnos *naked, nude*
- gymnastes *trainer in nude exercises, coach*
- athletes *professional athlete*
- athlon (pl. athla) *a prize given at a contest*
- athlos *contest (games)*

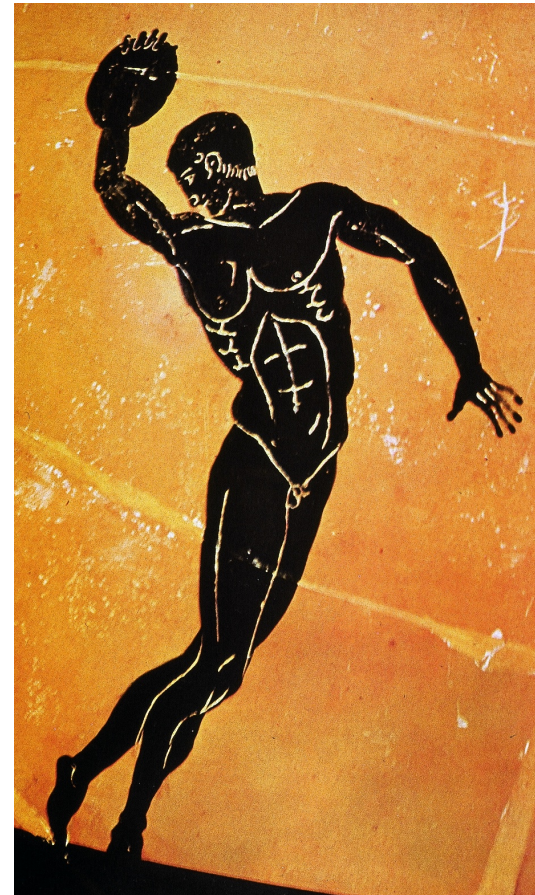
For all technical terms, consult  
Stephen G. Miller,  
*Ancient Greek Athletics*, Glossary  
(p. 241).





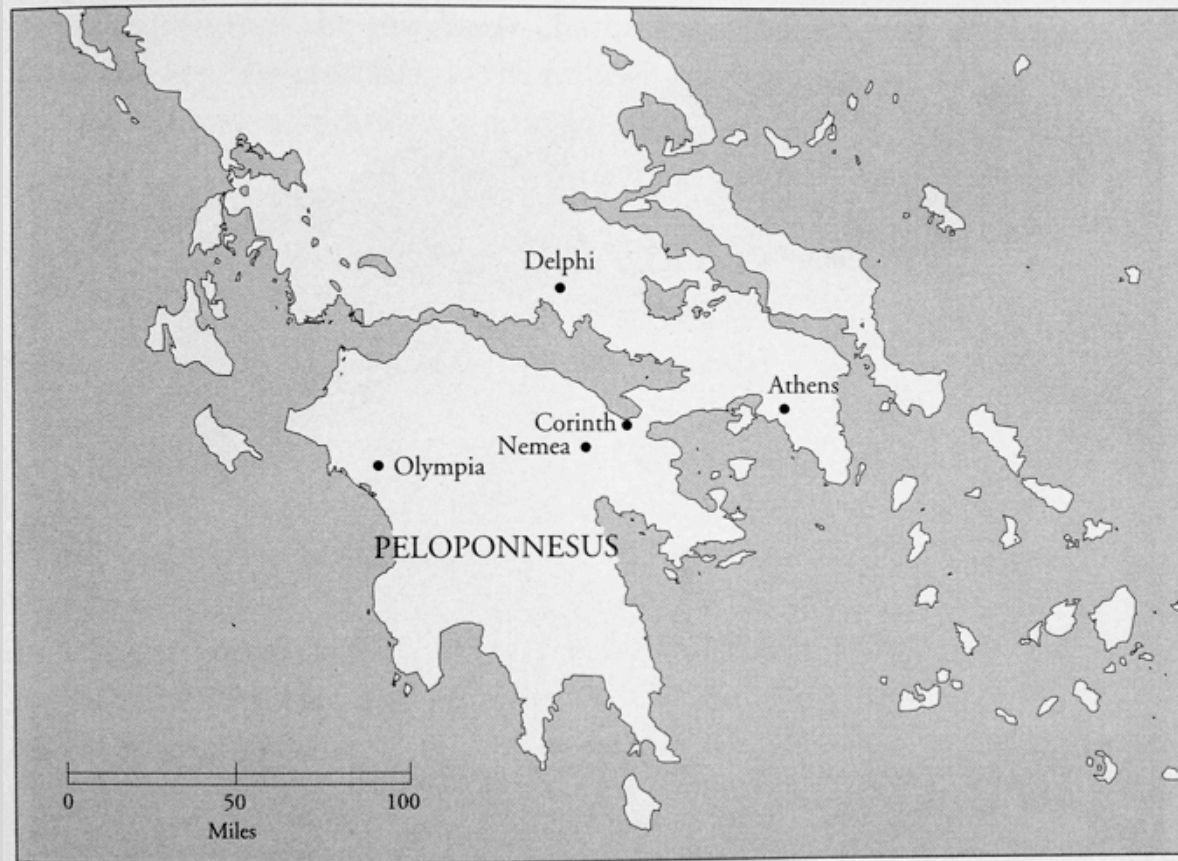


Long jump



Discus

# Sites of the major Greek Games



**Map 6**

*Sites of major Greek games. The Olympics were held at Olympia; the Pythian Games at Delphi; the Isthmian Games near Corinth at Isthmia; and the Nemean Games at Nemea. Together, these four constituted the ancient "circuit" of Greek athletic festivals. The most important local games were held at Athens during the Pan-athenaic festival.*





Inscriptions

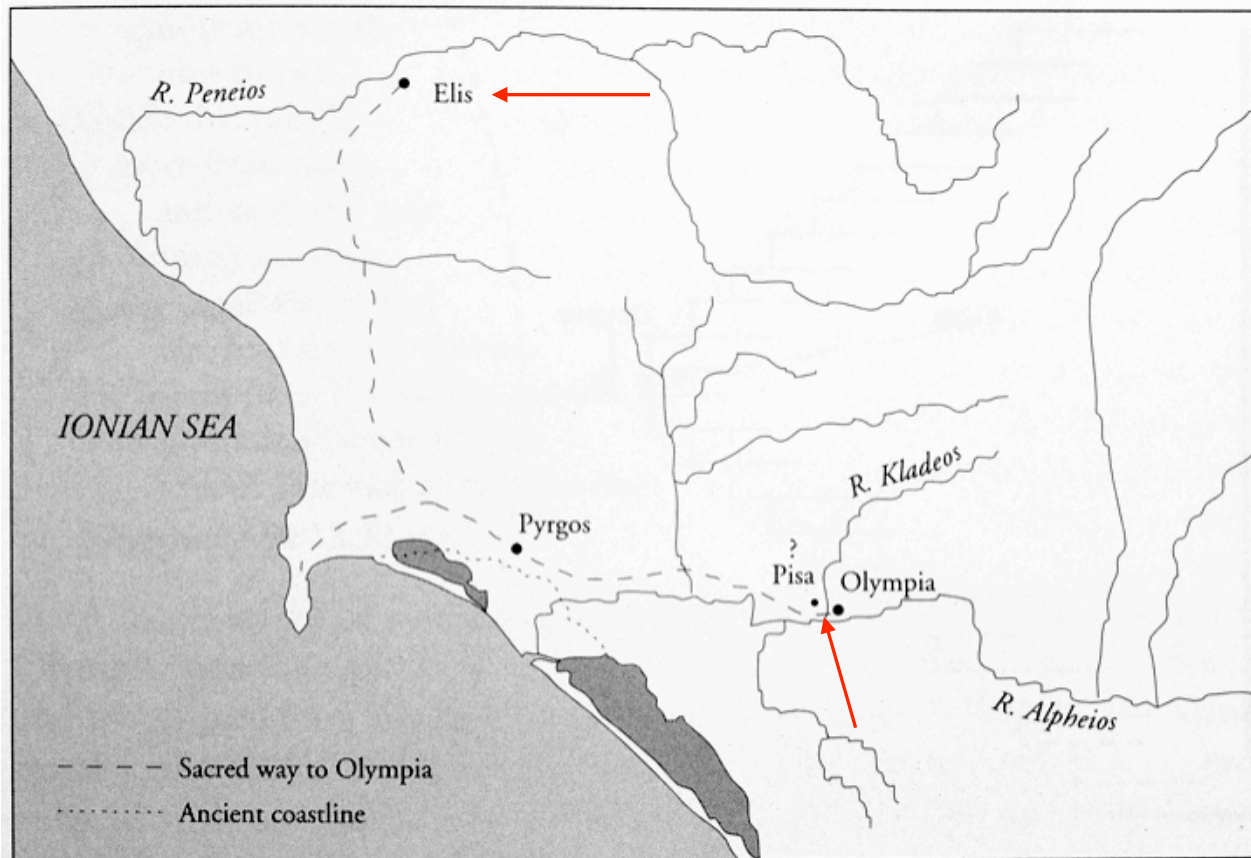


Excavations



Vase paintings

## *Location of Olympia, Elis, River Alpheios*

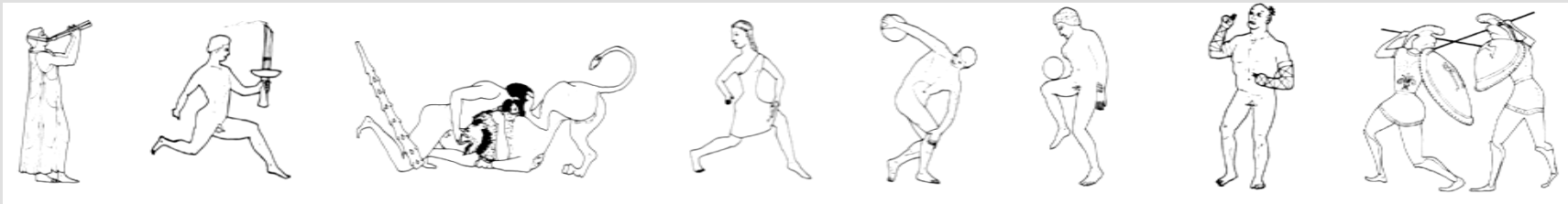


*Map 9*

*The athletes' route from Elis to Olympia. Two days before the Olympics began, the judges, athletes, and their trainers began their 36-mile journey along the sacred way to Olympia.*



# The Ancient Olympics: Fact or Myth?



## *Question:*

We're about to celebrate the 30th Olympiad of the modern Games, inaugurated over 100 years ago. For how many years did the ancient Games run?



**A: For about 1,200 years, beginning in 776 BC**

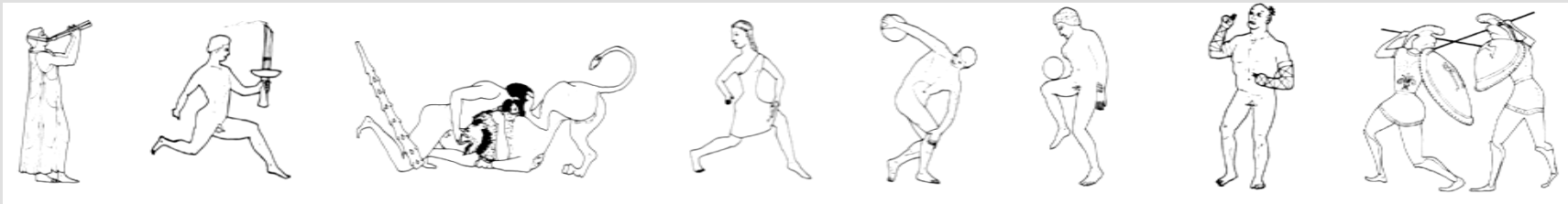
## Your guesses...

- 70
- 75
- 100, 100, 100
- 136
- 175
- 200, 200, 200, 200
- 300, 300
- 400, 400, 400
- 500, 500, 500
- 1000, 1000, 1000, 1000, 1000
- 1016
- Correct answer = ca. 1200 years
- 1400





# The Ancient Olympics: Fact or Myth?

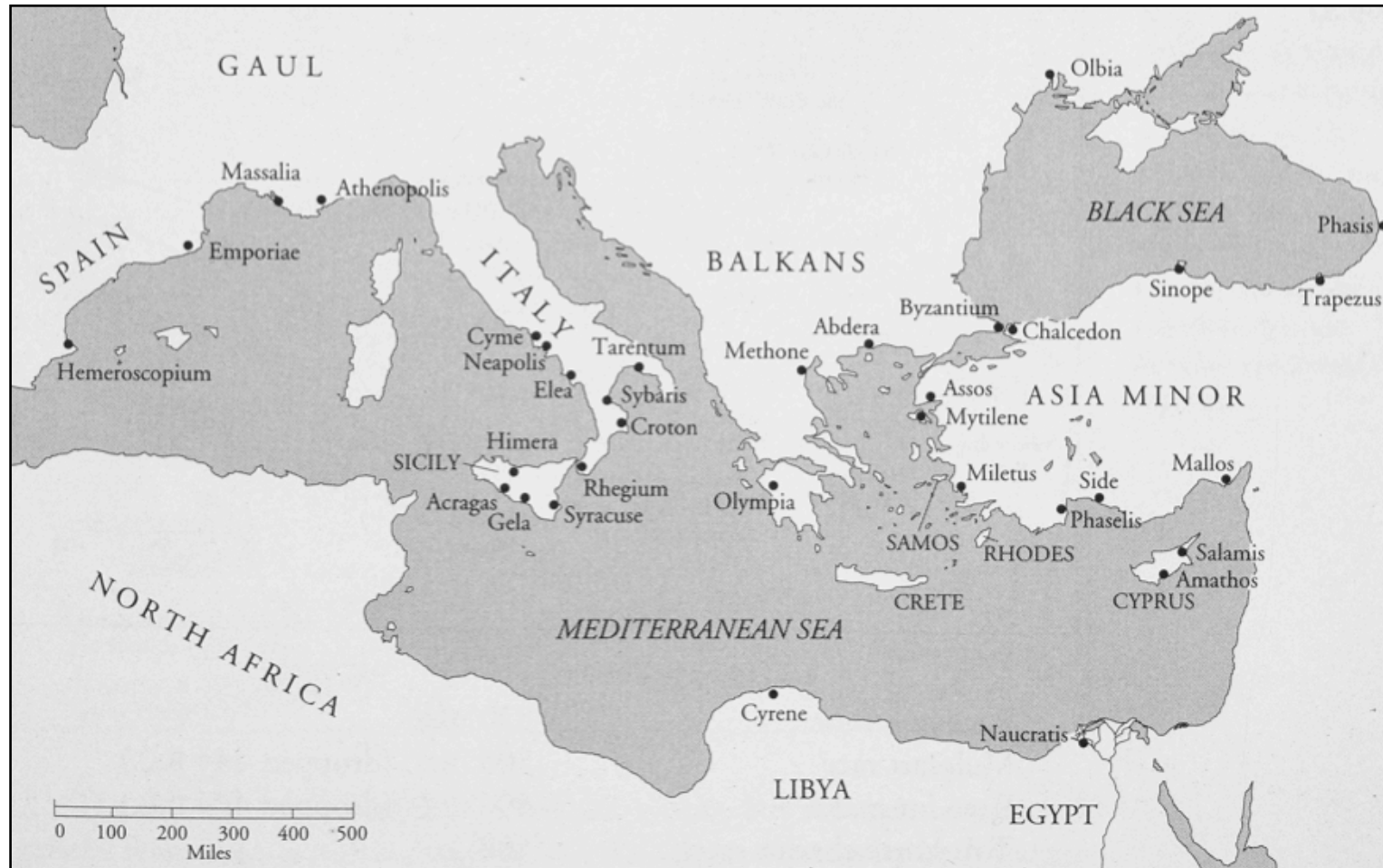


## *Question:*

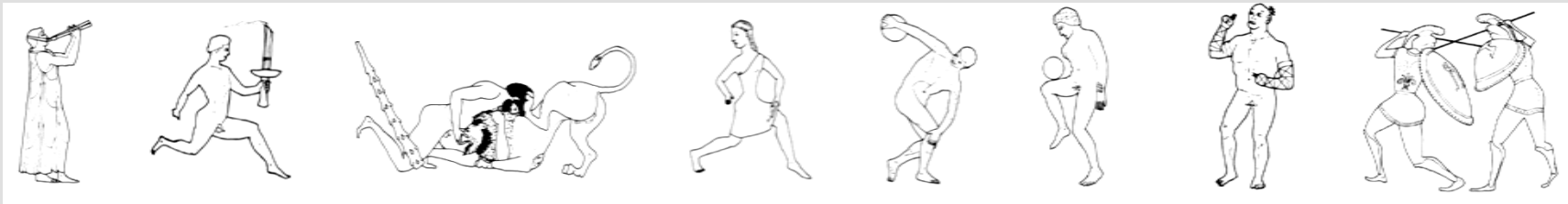
War caused the cancellation of the modern Olympics in 1916, 1940, and 1944. How often were the Games cancelled in antiquity?

**A: Never — they were held every fourth summer for over 1,000 years, without a break.**

# Greek colonies outside Greece that sent athletes to Olympia in the 5th century BC



# The Ancient Olympics: Fact or Myth?



## Question

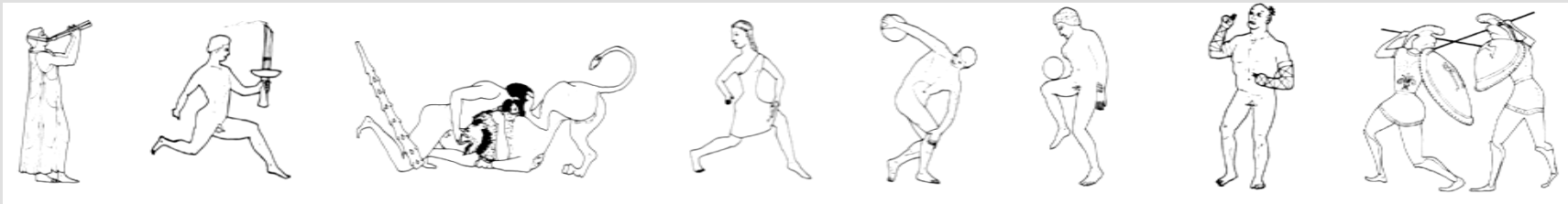
Then, as now, the Olympic Games were open to competitors of all nations and races. True or false?



A: False. The Games were multinational, but **panhellenic** (“all-Greek”), rather than truly international



# The Ancient Olympics: Fact or Myth?



## Question

Both men and women competed in the ancient Olympic Games.  
True or false?

A: False.  
Only free, male  
Greeks could take  
part



# Terms to remember

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- **Hellas** (Greece); **Hellenes** (Greeks); **Panhellenic**
- “**Crown**” (stephanitic) games (stephanos = crown)
- **Olympia**, **Delphi**, **Nemea**, **Isthmia**, with crowns of:
- Olive, laurel, wild celery, pine
- The circuit of games = the **periodos**
- The 4-year cycle of Olympic Games = an **Olympiad**



## What was *not* at the ancient Olympic Games?

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- ✗ No winter events (introduced only in 1924)
- ✗ No water sports (swimming, diving, sailing...)
- ✗ No ball sports
- ✗ No team sports of any kind
- ✗ No events for women
- ✗ No gold, silver, and bronze medals
- ✗ No prizes for coming 2nd or 3rd
- ✗ No marathon race

*Mount Olympus*







The Greeks did all these things... just not at the Olympic Games





# Stadia for footraces

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Olympia



Delphi

- **Stadion**
- = a unit of length, 600 ancient feet
- = a footrace that was 1 stadion in length
- = the parallel-sided place for running the “stade race” (modern **stadium**, although these are generally oval in shape)

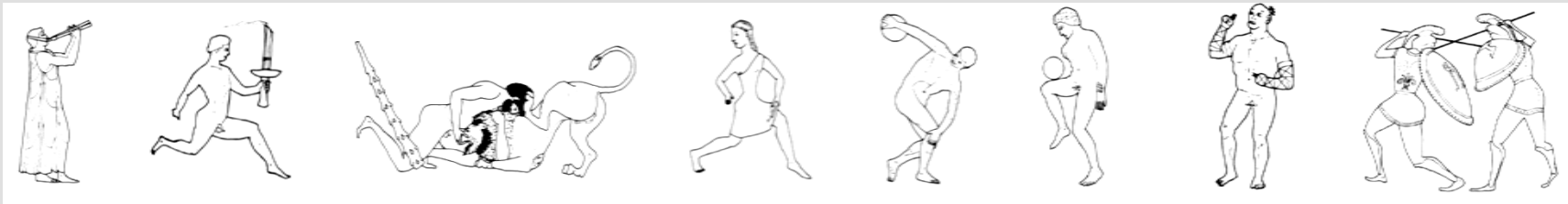


# Hoplitodromos (hoplite race)



- Hoplites = foot soldier

# The Ancient Olympics: Fact or Myth?



## Question

The ancient marathon race was introduced to memorialize a famous runner at the Battle of Marathon, in 490 BC



A.: False. The marathon is an entirely modern race, first held at the 1896 Olympic Games

1896 marathon →







Marathon

Athens





# The Ancient Olympics: Fact or Myth?



## *Question*

The ancient Games always began with the lighting of the sacred Olympic flame.



**A.: False.**

The torch relay to the Games and the lighting of the Olympic flame is a creation of the “Nazi” Berlin games of 1936





# Torch relay races

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member of winning team

- Nike (victory)



Altar



# The riddle of the rings

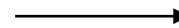
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Baron Pierre de Coubertin,  
creator of the modern games



- Leni Riefenstahl, director of the 1936 movie *Olympia*



# The fake 'ancient' rings, 1936



block with  
rings

starting line  
at Delphi

