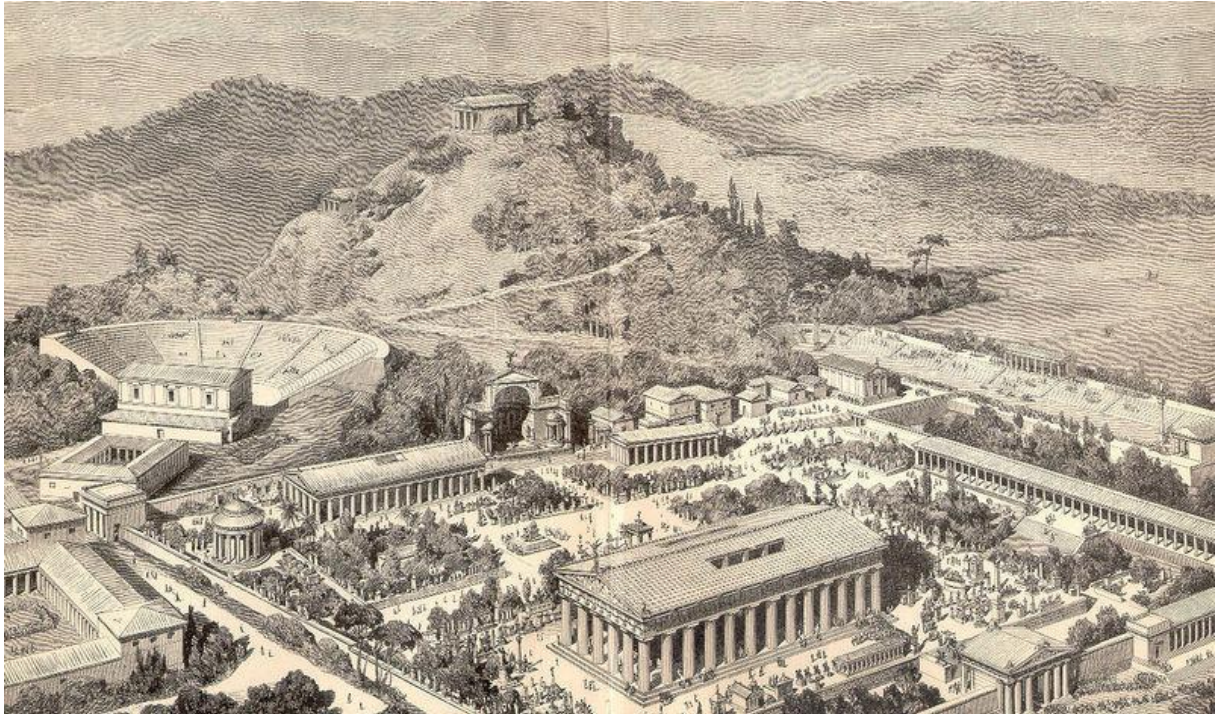


The Olympic Games - by Ruud Verberne

History

The original Olympic Games were held in the ancient Greek city of Olympia. This city had been a religious and political meeting place since the 10th century BC. The Games were held in honour of the supreme god Zeus. From 776 BC, onwards the names of the victors were recorded; this year was considered to be the beginning of the Olympiads and was also the starting point for the Greek timetable.



Although the Games were originally held on the grounds in front of the temple, as the Games became larger events, more and more new buildings were erected for the Games. Ultimately, there was a stadium in Olympia that could seat 40,000 spectators. The Olympic Games, held here every four years, were one of the four Panhellenic Games (public festivals for all the Greeks of the poleis so they could worship their gods).

The aim of those Olympics was to let young men show their physical qualities and to promote the relationship between the different Greek cities. Only Greek men were allowed to participate in the Games, not women.

Slowly the Romans took over in Greece and the Games were considered less important. From the moment Christianity became the official religion of the

Romans, the Games were seen as a pagan festival. The Roman Emperor Theodosius I finally banned the Games in 393 AD.

Temples and buildings

Olympia, a sanctuary at the foot of the forested Kronos Hill and bordered by the rivers Alfeios and Kladeios, was the oldest and most important sanctuary of Classical Antiquity. In the seventh century BC., the tombs of Pelops and Hippodameia were found in Olympia. There remained also a column of the palace of Oinomaos, which, according to mythology, was destroyed by a thunderbolt from the supreme god Zeus. Gradually one by one monumental buildings were erected and the sanctuary became increasingly important. Within the enclosure of that sanctuary, the Hera Temple was the most beautiful and Zeus's temple the most important. Outside the walls were the quarters of



the priests, of the guests, the baths and the wrestling school.

The oldest stadium may have been at the western end, but no trace of it has been found. A second stadium was built in the first half of the 5th century BC., but it was demolished when it was decided to build the temple of Zeus.

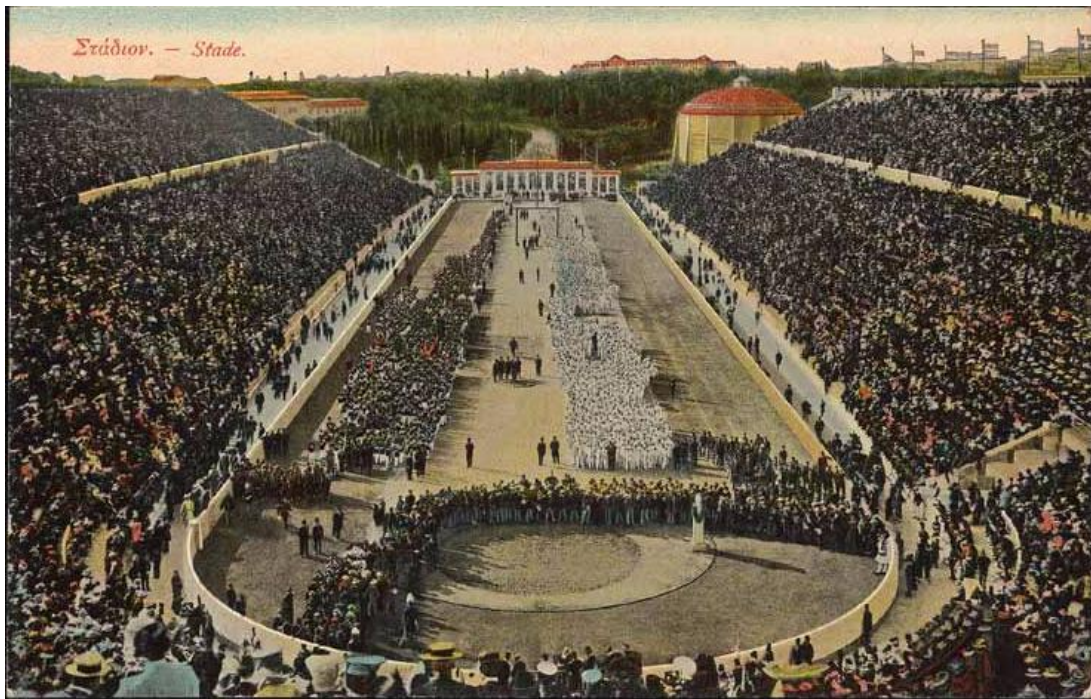
The most recent stadium is 212.54 m long and 28.5 m wide. It was shaped like the capital U. It could seat 45,000 spectators, most of whom would be seated on the ground. Seats were reserved for a few prominent persons: the hellanodikai or referees and the priestess of Demeter. There were fountains for the visitors around the stadium.

Modern times

Fifteen centuries after the end of the Classical Games, in 1896, the current Olympic Games were introduced by Baron Pierre de Coubertin.

De Coubertin was convinced of the promotion of a harmonious physical and mental education of the youth and the strengthening of the bonds of friendship between the peoples, as he believed that the sporting competition would cultivate generosity and chivalry in the athlete, as well as respect for the performance of his opponent.

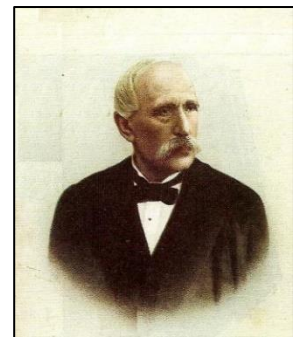
The games were held in the stadium in Athens, completely rebuilt in the old style by the architect Anastasios Metaxas.



It was financed by Georgios Averoff, a wealthy Greek from Alexandria.



His statue is still standing on the stadium square.



After the success of the first games in 1896 and the fiasco of the games of 1900 and 1904, Greece asked to hold the Games permanently in Greece. De Coubertin declined

this request: the Olympic Committee preferred the international character of the games. Nevertheless, Greece did get permission to organize a special interim Olympiad, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the first games. However, these games did not receive official status.

Philately



Just like in 1896, this was celebrated with an extensive special issue.

The designs were made by E. Gilliéron Sr. from images on antique coins and pottery selected by the well-known professor of Classical Antiquity Svoronos.

The 1 Lepton and the 2 Lepta show a discus-throwing Apollo, after a coin from Kos from the 5th century BC. On the 3 and 5 Lepta we see a long jumper, based on an antique dish. The 10 Lepta depicts Nike, goddess of victory, after a Greek coin found in Sicily.



Atlas who offers to Heracles the apples of the Hesperides, is represented on the 20 and 50 Lepta, after an image of old pottery. Regarding the 25 Lepta, Heracles struggles with Antaeus, also after old pottery. The 30 Lepta depicts two wrestlers, after an ancient relief, with the Acropolis in the background. The 40 Lepta is an antique mirror with the goddess of the games holding a rooster in her hands. The 1, 2 and 3 Drachmas show a group of runners, again an image of an old piece of pottery. The 5 Drachma shows a sacrificial scene with 3 torch bearers and Nike, the goddess of victory, also taken from an antique piece of pottery.



In October 1905, Perkins Bacon was commissioned in London by J.P. Segg & Co. to do the engraving of the 14 different Dies.

The actual printing was ordered in November and then the printing plates were composed.

For the 1 to 10 Lepta these consisted of two panels of 100 stamps each, for the 30 and 40 Lepta this was one panel of 100 stamps. This also applied to the large format stamps of 20, 25 and 50 Lepta (probably divided into two panels of 50 stamps each). Plates of 50 stamps were prepared for the Drachma values. Printing started on December 9, 1905. The order was completed very rapidly, resulting in a first delivery on January 20, followed by the second and last batch on January 28. The smooth completion of the printing job is undoubtedly the reason that almost no colour differences occur.

As usual with Perkins Bacon, many printing proofs came into circulation. Both proofs of the Dies and plate proofs in different colours and on different types of paper exist.

For these stamps the same thin watermarked paper was used as for the Flying Hermes Stamps of 1901. As to the small format values the watermark ET with crown is faced upright, with the large format Lepta values it is lying left and with the Drachma values the position is lying right. Up to now no errors in these watermark positions have come to light.



These stamps have the same peculiar comb toothing $13\frac{3}{4}$ as the Flying Hermes issue: a comb in which the horizontal row does not end at a hole in the vertical row, but between two holes. Unlike the Flying Hermes, the sheet margins were left unprinted. There is only a punch hole in the top left corner of each sheet that served as a focal point.



Imperforated stamps are known from the 1 to 25 Lepta and the 1 Drachma. No plate errors are known, but a clear double print of the 30 Lepta exists.

Besides the never issued and never officially distributed compulsory surcharge charity stamps of 1 Lepton on the 1 and 3 Lepta, there are also stamps with fiscal overprints. There is the overprint ΘΕΜΙΣ on the denominations 25 Lepta and 2 and 3 Drachma and an overprint of 40 lepta for a supplementary tax (Π.Τ.) on the 40 lepta stamp.

Also the overprint ΧΑΡΤΟΣΗΜΟΝ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΤ ΤΕΛΟΝ exists (with and without an extra overprinted value), which was used to pay school fees.



The stamps were never invalidated. As a result, Drachma values were still in stock in small offices until 1919.

Also worth mentioning is the New Year's card of the Greek postal service of January 1, 1907. It contains 9 values of this series. The card was printed by Perkins with the help of Segg & Co. and is a splendid example of printer's craftsmanship: in engraved printing, gilded edges, the coat of arms in relief in gold and blue.

A beautiful postcard of this issue has also been published, with the postage due stamps of Greece from that time added.

