



ANCIENT OLYMPIC GAMES

BILYANA RANGELOVA

According to a legend, the founder of the Olympic Games was Heracles, who in honor of the victory over the Hellenic king Augius organized chariot races between his four brothers. He determined the distance with 600 steps and decorated the winner with a laurel wreath. According to another legend, the games were in honor of Zeus' victory over his father Chronos in the struggle for dominance. Experts in the ancient history of Greece say that in the beginning, Cronus reigned in the sky and that in Olympia a temple of Cronus was built by the people of that time, called the golden generation. When Zeus was born, Rhea entrusted the protection of this child to the Ideological dactyls, also called Kureti, who came from the Cretan Idi, and their names were - Hercules, Peonei, Epimedes, Iasi, and Ideas. During jokes and games, Hercules, as the eldest of them, was challenging them to a running competition whereas the winner had been crowned with a laurel wreath. It is said that Hercules brought the wild olive tree to the land of the Greeks from the land of the Hyperboreans and that these were the people who lived beyond the "north" wind of Boreas. So, Ideological Hercules had the honor of being the first to create these games, and he was the first to give them the name Olympic. It was customary for them to be performed every 5 years, as his brothers were five. Another legend says that Zeus fought these power games with Cronus himself, and others believe that he invented these games to win them. There were other "gods" who have also been named victors, such as Apollo, who defeated Hermes in the run, and Ares in the fistfight. It is believed that the playing of the Pythian flutes was introduced in the games during the jumps of the fighters in the pentathlon, as the flute was dedicated to Apollo, and Apollo himself was the winner of the Olympic Games.

The first authentic Olympic note dates from 776 BC. The name of the winner of the race is well preserved - Croyba, who was a chef from Elis. The competitions always started at the full moon - the first after the summer equinox. And the arena of sports clashes was the Olympia region in the Peloponnese (Greece). During the games, hostilities ceased and peace treaties were concluded. The word "Olympics" means a period of four years. This is also the period during which the games take place. Since then, they have become a symbol of the world. At the time of the Games, the Olympic Prize was coming into force, so that the participants could safely travel from the lower cities to the place of the event. It should be noted that Olympia's competitions were not the only ones in Greece at that time. The Pythian Games in Delphi, the Isthmian Games in Corinth, the Nemean Games in Argos, the Panathenaic Games in Athens. Some of them were purely sports, in the modern sense competitions (agony from Greek *ἀγών* - competition, dispute) and others, the program was dominated by competitions between singers, poets, and musicians. It is worth mentioning the Herai Games (in honor of the goddess Hera), which were also held in Olympia a month after the Olympics, there were only girls (unlike other games in which they traditionally participated and were present as spectators, men only).

The Olympic Games opened with track and field races at a "small stage" (167-192 meters). According to one of the legends, the largest was the "stage" in the city of Olympia (950 m), because it was measured personally by Heracles. Today's word "stadium" comes from "stage". Athletes lined



SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"

15 Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd, Sofia 1504, Bulgaria,
Tel. (+359-2) 9442749,9308/435; Fax (+359-2) 943-38-18; e-mail: sport_su@abv.bg

up in front of a line and after a signal from the judge went around the "stage". In addition to athletics, the program of the games also included the following disciplines:

- Throwing a spear - at a distance and for some purpose.
- Long jump - the competitors jumped with two small dumbbells in their hands. Metal balls were thought to balance the arms and body better, even pushing the body further away.
- Discus throwing - the competitors used devices with a diameter between 24 and 36 cm, and a weight between 4-5 kg. They were made of stone, iron, or lead. Throwing took place from a place, prohibiting reinforcement. To date, two disciplines are known - throwing at a distance and a height, and in the second the winner was the one whose disc fell last.
- Wrestling - for the Olympic Games were prepared plots sprinkled with fine sand. Couples were determined by lot. Before the gong, the competitors were smeared with olive oil to make the body more flexible and harder to catch by the opponent. A pure victory was considered when one lifted the other high above his head and then threw him on or off the sand. Gradually, in this discipline, technique and beauty in performing the grips began to be appreciated.
- Fistfight - no matter how many rules were followed, the fights often ended in serious injuries.
- Pankrateon - the most brutal discipline according to the chronicles - is a mixture of wrestling and fist fighting.
- Chariot racing - the disciplines were two - with two horses (big) and four horses (quadriga). The most dangerous was turning along the turning poles. Warnings were cut on three pillars: "Be decisive!", "Do not delay!", "Be able to turn!"

Strict procedures and definite conditions for participation were a prerequisite for a uniform methodology of preparation, uniform style, and rules in competitions, for the system in nutrition and hygiene in the training regime.

Heraclitus and Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Diogenes, Polycleitus, Lysippus, and Praxiteles stayed in Olympia, a place of expression for poets, philosophers, artists, and sculptors. But although imbued with culture, reason, and morality, the games lost their inviolability and grandeur. A new specter of money was steadily being imposed. The first tempts Athens - 500 drachmas for each winner. And with the zeal of other cities, the amount increased to 5 talents (1 talent is equal to 6000 drachmas). Thus, the Olympic Games become a serious matter, and athletes become professionals, their unifying meaning gave way to a rivalry between cities, and this pushed them to enmity. From the II century BC, the influence was on Rome. The Olympic Games aimed to become imperial. Organized in Naples, Rome, Alexandria, Pergamum, Megara did not carry the panel spirit and traditions but successfully implemented their new functions - to symbolize the generosity of mercenaries and to neutralize class clashes. Gladiator fights and wild beast fights were often included in their programs. Christianity also contributed to their final demise. It united against the care of the body and preaches extreme asceticism. By an edict that came into force in 393, Emperor Theodosius I banned the periodic games held 292 times. Thus die the holidays in antiquity, which were a symbol of harmony - body, spirit, morality!