

Video transcript

The Olympic Games

Olympia was not only a centre of sport - but of culture, politics and religion.

This was a man's world. Women were forbidden from coming here on pain of death, and inside the stadium the athletes would stand naked before all of Greece, and the gods.

Here they competed not for money, but to honour Zeus, the most powerful god of all.

Every four summers, for over a thousand years, tens of thousands of Greeks would come to the games from across the Mediterranean. All converging on Olympia, to experience the greatest spectacle of the ancient world.

We can't be certain what people saw when they came to this valley 500 years before the birth of Christ. But from fragments of written evidence, experts have been able to construct some idea of what would have happened once they'd arrived.

Even returning champions would have had to fight for space amongst the diplomats, philosophers and the thousands of spectators who descended upon Olympia.

For the athletes this was a time to concentrate and prepare for competition. And many young challengers would have sought support from the gods.

Local priests acted as judges taking up special positions in a judge's stand. While the sun-scorched banks filled with expectant crowds.

Just like today, before being called to compete, the waiting pentathletes would have prepared mentally as well as physically. The athletes knew that only five events separated them from immortal fame.