



**A scene from the training ground. In the center, two people are starting a wrestling match, while the man to the left is ready for a jump. The person to the right is preparing the pit. Carved towards the end of the sixth century and found in the Kerameikos cemetery, this relief is now in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.**

Olympia in terms of its cultural importance. This importance can be seen in the growth of the sanctuary itself, in the ubiquity of the Delphic Oracle, and in the growth of its Pythian Games. Of course Delphi was important to Greece as a whole because of the Oracle and the Sanctuary to Apollo in a way that Olympia was not. In many ways the importance of Olympia was its games whereas the Pythian Games, although second in importance, were not essential to Delphi itself in the way that the Olympian Games were to Olympia and the host city of Elis. This is perhaps why Olympia strove for such objective standards of excellence and did not include subjective competitions the way the Pythian and Isthmian (and later Nemean) Games did. Olympia's position and reputation was very important to maintain, something reflected in the "Olympic announcement" (Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 5.43):

*If you have trained in a way worthy of your coming to Olympia, and have done nothing lazy or dishonorable,*

*proceed with confidence. But those of you who have not so trained in this way may go wherever you please.*

### Sources

Our sources for the various games are even more problematic than usual in ancient history. We have large gaps in our knowledge despite the unusual confluence of literary, artistic, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence. Our knowledge of the horse races for instance is limited, but then no ancient Greek hippodrome has ever been fully excavated. We must draw our material from a wide variety of sources, many of them obscure. Even among ancient writers there is no single source the way there often is for historical periods, and we must cull anecdotes and snippets from a vast array of writers (and other evidence) from a wide range of dates. Often we are forced to use a single piece of evidence from one games and apply it across all of them even though this may lead to confusion. Perhaps the most useful single source is Pausanias, who in his *Guide to Greece* (second century AD) explored the site of each of the Panhellenic games. Pindar of Thebes (c.518-c.438 BC) is also vital since his forty-five odes were addressed to the victors.

### Competing for the prize

The (male) competitors would compete in the nude (*gymnos/gymnazien*). This tradition seems to date to the eight century and it appears that before that date competitors

## PREPARING GAMES

We know that much work must have gone into preparing each sanctuary for the games. An inscription from Delphi (*CID* 2.139) records the meticulous (and immensely expensive) preparations. For example, the uncovered practice track needed to be levelled, fenced and repaired; pedestals had to be constructed; the stadium's entrance was in need of some repair work; thirty-six turning posts for the running track had to be made; the Castalian spring had to be cleaned out. 270 bushels of white earth were needed to overlay the covered practice track.

The inscription names the workman and the cost of each job and we should probably assume that these preparations were standard in the build up to the games every four years. The inscription dates to 246 BC, well after the heyday of the festival, but it shows that the Pythian Games were still important (and costly).