



# 36

## HOURS TO SPARTA

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## HISTORY

### LESSON PLANS

# 36 HOURS TO SPARTA

## HISTORY

### Film Screening & Discussion

#### THE DOCUMENTARY (26')

##### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The documentary **36 Hours to Sparta** follows four Europeans who have dedicated their lives to completing the *Spartathlon Ultra-Distance Race*. The film follows them through a whole year of preparation, as they confront extreme hardship and surpass the limits of their body and mind, during the 245 kilometers they will need to cover in 36 hours, running from Athens to Sparta.

The *Spartathlon* is a historic ultra-distance marathon race, which takes place every year, at the end of September, in Greece. It is one of the most difficult long-distance races in the world and attracts widespread interest because of its historical background.

The *Spartathlon Ultra-Distance Race* retraces the footsteps of Pheidippides, an ancient Greek long-distance runner from Athens. Before the Battle of Marathon, in 490 BCE, he was sent by the Athenians as an envoy to Sparta, to seek help in their fight against the Persians.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> Book of his *Histories*, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus mentions that before going to battle, the Athenian generals sent a long-distance runner (a so-called “hemerodromus” or “day-runner”) as an envoy to Sparta, to inform the Spartans of the Persian threat and seek their help. The runner covered the 240km distance in less than two days and, following the Spartans’ refusal to help, returned to Athens to take part in the Battle of Marathon. This seems to be a more-or-less true story, both because it is mentioned by Herodotus and because its protagonist was a “hemerodromus”, a long-distance runner, which is known to have existed as a professional activity in antiquity.

This incident seems to have inspired John Foden, a British Group Captain of the Royal Air Force (RAF) and long-distance runner himself, who in the early 1980s decided, together with four of his colleagues, to run the distance from Athens to Sparta, as described by Herodotus. Their aim was to discover whether modern humans could manage to reach Sparta from Athens in less than two days. Having covered the distance in 36 hours, Foden conceived the idea of establishing an ultra-marathon race. It was thus that in September 1983, the first *International Spartathlon Ultra-Distance Race* took place. Ever since then, runners from all over the world gather in Athens once a year, to take part in the *Spartathlon Race*, retracing the footsteps of the legendary Pheidippides<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.spartathlon.gr/index.php/el/the-spartathlon-race-el/historical-information-el>

## SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS:

We suggest the following questions/discussion topics:

1. The *Spartathlon* is an ultra-distance marathon described as the most difficult race in the world. The main motivation for participating athletes is the experience itself of running the course in the space of 36 hours, not any material rewards as such. The only reward for those who manage to finish the race in time is the indescribably intense emotions they experience, an olive branch, and a little water from the hands of a woman of Sparta.

Using the above as a starting point, a discussion with the students may take place, concerning the ways in which this particular race differs from other great sporting events, such as the Olympic Games.

2. Can you compare and contrast the ancient and modern *Sparthathlon*. What are the differences and similarities between the two races?
3. Exercise and sport in antiquity were closely linked with the cultivation of the soul, so that a human being might become complete. Many philosophers, thinkers and writers in antiquity, such as Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Xenophon and others, underlined the importance of exercise in forming and ennobling the human spirit, thus leading to the development of moral and righteous citizens.

Do you believe that this view of exercise and sport is still held today? How do you see exercise influencing people's souls in general and more specifically in the context of the *Spartathlon*, as seen through the personal stories shown in the documentary film *36 Hours to Sparta*? Do you have any relevant personal experience you'd like to share with the group?

## Further Reading

### **The Spartathlon: The lunacy of the long-distance runner**

Economist Podcast and article on the *Spartathlon*

<https://www.economist.com/news/christmas/21568593-vomit-bleeding-nipples-and-hallucinations-why-would-anyone-their-right-mind-run>

### **The Road to Sparta**, by Dean Karnazes, Rodale Books

Spurred on by the classicist Professor Paul Cartledge of Cambridge University and the Pheidippides expert Pamela-Jane Shaw, Dean Karnazes tracks the events that led up to Pheidippides' famous run in 490 BCE.

### **Thermopylae: The Battle that Changed the World**, by Paul Cartledge

In 480 BCE, the Persian king Xerxes led a massive force to the narrow mountain pass called Thermopylae, anticipating no resistance in his bid to conquer Greece. But the Greeks, led by Leonidas and a small army of Spartan warriors, nearly halted their advance. Paul Cartledge's authoritative account of King Leonidas and the 300 illuminates this valiant endeavour that changed the way future generations would think about combat, courage and death.

### **Delphi Archaeological Museum**, by Rozina Kolonia

This edition includes photographs of the exhibits at the Archaeological Museum of Delphi, as well as photographs of the archaeological site of Delphi and its monuments, overseen by the 10th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. The Hellenic

Ministry of Culture has the copyright to these photographs and the antiquities they show, and the Archaeological Receipts Fund receives the royalties from their publication.

READ ONLINE:

<http://www.latsis-foundation.org/eng/electronic-library/the-museum-cycle/the-archaeological-museum-of-delphi>

## Sport & Archaeology

All of the exhibits contained in the museums which belong to the *36 Hours to Sparta* network are listed below. We suggest that teachers start by presenting these to their students, stimulating a creative discussion on their use. Some or all of these exhibits can be presented in class, depending on the students' particular interests.

The following museums participate in the programme network:

- Archaeological Museum of Delphi
- Museum of the History of the Olympic Games in Antiquity
- Archaeological Museum of Olympia
- Archaeological Museum of Nemea
- Archaeological Museum of Tegea
- Archaeological Museum of Isthmia
- The Athanasakeion Archaeological Museum of Volos.

Having completed the presentation of exhibits, the teacher may initiate a broad discussion on all of this material or give students some assignments based on the specific artefacts presented. Assignments may be done as group work or individually.

Topic for discussion:

Which artefact made you the greatest impression and why?

Student assignments:

- Choose one artefact from each museum and create a story based on it, which takes place in Ancient Greece.
- Choose your favourite artefact and draw it or paint it on paper.





### Archaeological Museum of Delphi

The **Charioteer of Delphi** is one of the best-known statues from Ancient Greece. The life-size statue of a chariot driver was part of a group representing a four-horse chariot. A youth from a noble family, the charioteer wears the victor's ribbon on his head and a long tunic or "chiton" which reaches to his ankles. He parades before a cheering public.

The statue was set up at Delphi to commemorate the victory of the tyrant Polyzeus of Gela, Sicily and his chariot in the Pythian Games of 478 or 474 BCE, which were held at Delphi, in honour of Pythian Apollo.

Chariot races, which were one of the most popular ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine sports, were a prominent feature of the ancient Olympic Games and other games associated with Greek religious festivals. The racing chariots were light and easily smashed, in which case the driver was often entangled in the reins and dragged to death or seriously injured.

Chariot races could be watched by women, who were banned from watching many other sports. The sport declined in importance after the fall of Rome.

Source: *The Archaeological Museum of Delphi*, Latsis Foundation publications, p. 321



### Archaeological Museum of Delphi

The **statue of the pankration athlete Agias**, pankration champion and victor of many Panhellenic games in the 5th century BCE, belonged to the family offering of Daochos II (a group of nine marble statues dedicated to Apollo).

Pankration was a dangerous combat sport, in which everything was permitted except biting, stabbing your fingers into your opponent's eyes, nose or mouth, and attacking the genitals. The danger of getting wounded was nevertheless smaller than with boxing. Pankration was a favourite with spectators. At those games where money could be won, the winning pankratiast received the highest prize-money of all the winners, except for the winners of the equestrian events. The Greeks regarded it as the ultimate test in strength and technique.

Source: *The Archaeological Museum of Delphi*, Latsis Foundation publications, p. 321



### Archaeological Museum of Delphi

This **bronze pair of athletes** was found in 1939, and dates from 470-460 BCE.

The athlete on the left, probably a winner of the long jump in the Pythian Games, holds a jumping weight (or “halter”), which helped him win, while displaying his wreath of victory with his other hand. The youth on the right salutes his fellow athletes.

The long jump was part of the pentathlon. The jumper landed, as still happens today, in a sandpit. A major difference with today’s long jump is that the Greeks held jumping weights of 1.5 to 2 kg in each hand. Thanks to these “halters”, the athletes jumped farther and landed more steadily.

Source: *The Archaeological Museum of Delphi*, Latsis Foundation publications, p. 273



### **Museum of the History of the Olympic Games in Antiquity**

Bronze statuette of runner, bearing inscription.

These small figurines make up, in a way, for the loss of the great sculptures dedicated to Zeus; their small size does not in any way affect their quality of execution, which is usually very high.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE the workshop of Argos enjoyed a very high reputation that continued well into the Classical period, when Polykleitos, the most celebrated sculptor of his time, emerged from it, to be followed by many others. When one sees the minuscule figurine of a runner leaning forward with bent knee and extended arms ready to start the race, one realizes how well the Argive craftsmen managed to represent, in the simplest and most condensed way possible, both the toned body and the fleeting moment before the word “Go!”. The inscription on the figurine’s right thigh – TO ΔΙΦΟΣ ΙΜΙ (= I belong to Zeus) – tells us that an athlete must have dedicated this to the patron and protector of the Olympic Games, sometime around 480-470 BCE.

Source: Andronikos M., Hatzidakis M. & Karageorgis V. (1974) *The Museums of Greece*. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon





### Archaeological Museum of Olympia

Statue of Nike (=Victory), by the sculptor Paeonius

This Nike (=Victory) by Paeonius of Mende is the only victory monument in the form of a statue to have been described by Pausanias (5, 26.1). It came to light in 1875, during the first German archaeological excavations, in a prone position (i.e. face looking down), having fallen from its original triangular pedestal. The latter bears two valuable inscriptions which mention the reasons for commissioning the piece and the name of the artist: ΜΕΣΣΑΝΙΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΝΑΥΠΑΚΤΙΟΙ ΑΝΕΘΕΝ ΔΙΙ ΟΛΥΜΠΙΩΙ ΔΕΚΑΤΑΝ ΑΠΟ ΤΩΝ ΠΟΛΕΜΙΩΝ (= The Messenians and Naupaktians commissioned [this] as tithe from the spoils of war to Olympian Zeus). The second inscription reads: ΠΑΙΩΝΙΟΣ ΑΠΟΙΗΣΕ ΜΕΝΔΑΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΑ ΑΚΡΩΤΗΡΙΑ ΕΠΙ ΤΟΝ ΝΑΟΝ ΕΝΙΚΑ (= Paeonius of Mende created [this], together with the acroteria of the temple [i.e. the ornaments at the corners of the temple pediment], having won a contest). The sculpture is an admirably virtuosic display by the artist of his

ability to “tame” a rough block of marble, about 3 cubic metres in size; in so doing, he has opted to sculpt a goddess in flight, rather than a standing or resting bodily form. The goddess is shown landing, with a particularly daring forward posture of her torso. The statue of Nike, made out of Parian marble, was dedicated to Zeus, the god protecting the shrine, in order to highlight the military aspects of his worship. Its more specific symbolic function is also important, as it has been linked to various military events of political and historical significance (421 or 420 BCE).

Source: Vlahopoulos A. (ed.) (2012) *Archaeology – The Peloponnese*. Athens: Melissa publications, pp. 390-407



### **Archaeological Museum of Nemea**

Stone halter bearing inscription, 500 BCE

Stone halter from the stadium at Nemea, bearing a dedicatory inscription to Nemean Zeus, by an athlete from Sicyon who won at the Games. This forms part of the athlete's sports gear, which he would have dedicated to Zeus. The athlete's name has not survived. Halters were dumbbell-like weights out of stone or lead, which the athletes would use when performing their jumps, in order to propel their bodies forward. They were also used for exercising the hands and fingers.

Source: Vlahopoulos A. (ed.) (2012) *Archaeology – The Peloponnese*. Athens: Melissa publications, pp. 117-123



### **Archaeological Museum of Tegea**

Ceramic vessel depicting athlete

This kind of pot was called a skyphos (pl. skyphoi). It was a drinking vessel, i.e. people used it to drink from. This particular skyphos bears a dark background, on which the athlete's figure is painted in a light red colour.

Source: Plantzos D. (2011) *Greek Art and Archaeology: 1100-30 BCE*. Athens: Kapon editions.



### **Archaeological Museum of Isthmia**

Iron strigils, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE

The strigil was an instrument which athletes used to cleanse their bodies after a game. Following a training session or an athletic event, they would use a strigil to scrape off dirt, perspiration and any oil they had applied to their bodies. Strigils were usually made of bronze or iron and sometimes bore an inscription on their handle, mentioning the workshop they came from.

Source: Webpage of the *Museum of Cycladic Art*:  
<https://www.cycladic.gr/exhibit/kp0128-stleggida?cat=archaia-elliniki-techni>





### **The Athanasakeion Archaeological Museum of Volos**

Small aryballoid (i.e. globular) lekythos bearing black-figure style representation of a discus thrower

This is a lekythos preserved intact, bearing a depiction of a discus thrower, with decorative palmettes (or “anthemia”, meaning floral patterns) surrounding the athlete. The latter is holding the discus with both hands, which means he is at the start of his throw. The lekythos (pl. lekythoi) was a vessel widely used to store perfumes and fine oils in. Lekythoi are frequently found as “kterismata”, i.e. grave goods, meaning items buried along with the body or used as burial accessories, since the anointment of the body with fine oils was part of the burial ritual. This lekythos is decorated in the black-figure style, in which black-coloured figures are placed against a lighter background. The craftsman has combined the technique of silhouetting (where faces or objects are depicted by drawing their main contours) with the technique of incision by sharp instrument (c. 500-475 BCE).

Sources:

Zafiropoulou D. (ed.) (2004) *Games and Sports in Ancient Thessaly*. Athens: Archaeological Receipts and Expropriations Fund editions.

Plantzos D. (2011) *Greek Art and Archaeology: 1100-30 BCE*. Athens: Kapon editions.



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