

NEWS RELEASE

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The Penn Museum Commemorates Ancient Olympics with a New Spotlight Gallery Installation



Photo: Lekythos (oil flask) from 550 BCE, which was excavated from Narce, Italy. It was likely made in Euboea, Greece. Object: MS739.

PHILADELPHIA — Ahead of the Summer Olympics' Opening Ceremony in Tokyo, the Penn Museum will unveil an artifact in a league of its own.

The first Olympic games featured a *stadion*, or a race, similar to one depicted on a Greek vessel more than 2,500 years ago. That vessel—a [lekythos](#) (oil flask) dating back to 550 BCE —is now on view in the Penn Museum's Spotlight Gallery, a 360-degree viewing space.

Decorated with images of ancient athletes engaged in a fierce running competition, the lekythos was probably created on the island of Euboea in southeastern Greece. It was excavated from a tomb in Narce, Italy (about an hour north of Rome).

"Displaying this lekythos invites museum guests to trace the history of the Olympics back to its origins, making connections between ancient athletes and today's competitors," says Jessica Bicknell, Head of Exhibitions at Penn Museum.

The Olympics began in ancient Greece as a way to honor the god Zeus. Winners of the earliest games, which included running, wrestling, and boxing, were crowned with olive wreaths.



"This artifact inspired a U.S. postage stamp in 2004, honoring the Olympic Games' return to Greece," Dr. Ann Blair Brownlee, Associate Curator of the Mediterranean Section, adds. "Ancient runners speed out of the past and into today, symbolizing the enduring spirit of the games."

The Spotlight Gallery is adjacent to the 25,000-pound solid red granite [Sphinx of the Pharaoh Ramses II](#), located at the Museum's Main Entrance.

Guests can see the lekythos, artifacts in the [Rome](#), [Greece](#), and [Asia](#) Galleries, along with other objects related to ancient sports during a visit to the Penn Museum. To continue expanding access to archaeology and anthropology, the Museum is offering **free admission** on **select Sundays** this summer. No promo code is required. [The next free admission day is Sunday, August 15](#). Advance registration is recommended.

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About the Penn Museum

Home to over a million extraordinary objects from around the world, the Penn Museum has been highlighting our shared humanity across continents and millennia since 1887. In expanding access to archaeology and anthropology, the Penn Museum builds empathy and connections between cultures through experiences online and onsite in our galleries.

The Penn Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00 AM–5:00 PM with safety guidelines. For more information, visit www.penn.museum, call 215.898.4000 or follow [@PennMuseum](#) on social media.