

# On the eve of the FIRST MEDITERRANEAN GAMES

AT ALEXANDRIA (Egypt)

From 6th. to 20th. October 1951

**organised under the Patronage of the International Olympic Committee**

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## PHARAONIC EGYPT ORGANISED THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL SPORTS COMPETITIONS

The Roman saying « Nil novi sub sole » is once more confirmed by the discovery that, 3000 years B.C., International sports events were organised by the Pharaohs.

In organising the Ist Mediterranean Games, Egypt is just renewing a tradition of its glorius past. As they did more than forty centuries ago, athletes from Egypt's neighbouring countries will gather to compete in the presence of the King of the country.

Many Egyptologists had noted the remarkable sculptures discovered on the walls of pharaonic temples, which gave a clear indication that ancient egyptians practiced extensively wrestling, fencing, and boxing.

Recent studies reveal that the practice of these sports led to their inclusion in the programme of ceremonial games which had an international character and are the forefathers of the Olympic Games of ancient Greece. It is generally thought that these

games were initiated by King Rameses III who added them to the events of a Festival celebrating his victory on foreign invaders. To this festival, the King invited his allies who had helped in the fight.

A very important place was given, during this celebration, to a series of competitions between boxers, wrestlers and fencers. These took place in the presence of the Pharaon surrounded by his courtiers and distinguished foreign guests.

The « bas-relief » representing scenes of these festivals leave no doubt as to the international character of these friendly encounters. Not only have the artists of the time clearly underlined the racial characteristics of the competitors but they have also shown, beyond the Judges who control a fencing bout, rows of foreign spectators anxiously following the progress to their representative.

Moreover, the accompagniung hyeroglyphic

texts explain clearly that it is an Egyptian matching his skill against a foreigner.

In the most complete study made on the subject by M.J.A. Wilson of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago it is clearly pointed out that these competitions were governed by a very strict code and that the events were keenly contested.

It is thrilling to find that, in what concerns wrestling most of the holds used by our modern exponents were already practiced in Pharaonic times. Professor Harper of Yale University, writing on this subject, states: « Egyptian wrestling was amazingly like our own. Some of the holds are carried out just as we should wish to do them now. »

Although we have very little data on the form of pugilism practiced at the time, many documents have reached us concerning Pharaonic fencing, the undoubted origin of skill-at-arm throughout the centuries.

Competitors are using hard-wood batons the extremity of which is protected by a button like our modern foils. Their attitudes are

strongly reminiscent of modern sabre competitions. In one of the bas relief a successful competitor is shown giving a « grand salute » similar to that practiced at present...

The way these fencers are represented, protected by leather shields on the waist, chin and forearm suggests a real match with hard blows given and taken and not a conventional display of skill.

Finally, inscriptions have reached us and give the details of the honours reserved to the winners, the equivalent of the « Cérémonie Protocolaire Olympique » of our Modern Games.

The successful competitors, after bowing to the Judges, saluted the Pharaoh who pronounced then the ritual formula: « Advance, Advance, thou the best of fighters... »

Thus, 20 Centuries before the birth of Ancient Olympic Games, Pharaonic Egypt had started the international sports movement.

In October, at Alexandria, the First Mediterranean Games will resume this glorious tradition.