

# Modern Olympic torch lighting has ancient feel

VANCOUVER - The rays of sunlight shining down on Greece will warm next February's Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

In an intricate ritual set in the ruins of an ancient temple in Olympia, a special mirror will concentrate the noon sun on Thursday and ignite the Olympic flame, setting off a relay that will end at the 2010 opening ceremonies.

The torch lighting ceremony, with its participants wearing Greek robes, has all the flavour of an ancient sacrament borrowed from the days of the original Olympic Games.

But experts say the torch and the relay's connection to ancient times are as mythic as the gods the ancient Greeks once worshipped and that their real origins are more about marketing and propaganda.

The lighting itself takes place in Olympia - where the ancient Games were held - at the ruins of the Temple of Hera, dedicated to the Greek goddess of that name.

After the metal reflector lights the Olympic flame, a woman representing an an-



cient high priestess recites a prayer and a hymn before placing the flame in an urn and bringing it to the first torch bearer.

The torch is relayed around Greece for eight days before it reaches the Panathenian Stadium in Greece to be handed over for its journey to Canada, where it will arrive in Victoria on Oct. 30 and begin a 106-day relay throughout the country.

The lighting ceremony is awash in symbolism meant to draw a connection to ancient times, while the relay will be the only chance most Canadians will have to experience the Games in person.

"It's roots are ancient. When you have that flame in your hand, it transforms you," said

John Furlong, CEO of the Vancouver Olympic organizing committee.

"This flame represents hope. And all you have to do is look at the torch relay in Canada and the millions of people that have applied to be runners to know that it matters to people."

The modern Olympic flame first appeared in 1928, when a cauldron was set ablaze at the Summer Games in Amsterdam.

The relay didn't appear until the controversial Berlin Olympics in 1936, where the Nazi Germany's propaganda machine planned the journey to bring the flame from Olympia.

The flame for the Winter

Olympics was lit outside of Greece, in places such as Norway and Rome, until 1964, when the lighting was moved to Olympia.

But historians say the flame and relay have no equivalents in ancient times.

Ceremonial flames were common in ancient Greece, particularly for animal sacrifices, which happened throughout the Olympic festival, but there was no central flame that would burn during the Games and no relay.

"The central act of the Olympic festival was the sacrifice of 100 oxen to Zeus at a big altar between the temples of Hera and Zeus," said Greek historian Mark Golden, who teaches at the University of Winnipeg.

"I can't think of any other place where you'd need flame. That is it, and it's not much of a connection."

Golden said the ritual surrounding the torch lighting has a simple, and rather obvious, purpose.

"It comes from the desire to legitimize the modern Games, to make them appear that they are connected in some way with a past that has some pres-

tige," he said.

Kevin Wamsley, an Olympic historian at the University of Western Ontario, said it's difficult to trace exactly why the flame was lit in Amsterdam in 1928 in the first place.

The idea came from Jan Wils, the architect behind Amsterdam's Olympic stadium. Wils was a Mason, and Wamsley said fires run deep in Masonic symbolism and rituals.

"There's no full story yet, and we can't really pin down where Jan Wils got his idea for the stadium flame," he said.

And even though the Berlin Games staged the first relay, Wamsley said the notion of a torch relay had been talked about for years before the Nazis latched onto it.

Regardless of their origins, Wamsley said the torch and the flame persist today for the same reason the Olympic Games were revived more than a century ago.

"The rituals are very powerful," he said.

"The Olympic Games was part of a 19th-century movement which celebrated ancient Greek culture, and we still have that fascination with the ancient world."

## Greek lecturer of finance receives award for research in UK

The 2009 Alumni Prize from the Committee for Departments of Accounting and Finance (CDAF) was awarded to Dr Panagiotis Andrikopoulos for his research paper on Seasoned Equity Offerings in the UK. Andrikopoulos - who is of Greek descent - is one of the principal lecturers at De Montfort University (DMU) in Leicester, UK, Department of Finance, and has received recognition for his research which revealed that over-optimistic executives in the stock market dissipate the money of share-holders.

He based his research on a sample of seasoned equity offerings in the London Stock Exchange for the period 1988 to 1998 and studied the link between the underperformance of the stock market and the activities of these companies.

Dr Andrikopoulos is also a member of the Athens Institute for Education and Research.

## Greek film-makers threaten to boycott Film Festival

ATHENS — Greek film-makers are threatening to boycott the country's leading cinema festival in a row over funding.

A group of 140 directors, producers and writers said they would not show their films at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in November unless the government took action to improve funding for the industry.

The dispute could deprive the festival, now in its 50th year, of 23 films - the bulk of Greek cinema's output over the last 12 months.

The group, which calls itself "Film-makers in the fog", includes Yorgos Lanthimos, whose "Dogtooth" won a prize at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year.

Constantin Moriatis, a

member of the group, told AFP the protest was not aimed at the festival, and said: "We will not give in until we have a change in the law".

The protest began in the summer to put pressure on the Ministry of Culture and has continued despite a snap election on October 4 which brought the socialist opposition to power.

"The current arrangements say the television companies are supposed to give 1.5 percent of their turnover to cinema production, but this has never happened, and public grants are handed out in an opaque way," he said.

"The whole system needs to be cleaned up and made more efficient."

The director of the festival, Despina Mouzakis,



Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos

told AFP she believed the legal framework around cinema funding needed modernisation and hoped a solution to the dispute would be found before the opening ceremony on November 13.