

# History

Hitting with different extremities of the body, such as [kicks](#) and [punches](#), as an act of human [aggression](#), has existed across the world throughout [human history](#), being a combat system as old as [wrestling](#). However, in terms of [sports competition](#), due to the lack of [writing](#) in the [prehistoric times](#) and the lack of references, it is not possible to determine rules of any kind of boxing in prehistory, and in [ancient times](#) only can be inferred from the few intact sources and references to the sport.

The origin of the sport of boxing is unknown,<sup>[14]</sup> however according to some sources boxing has prehistoric origins in present-day [Ethiopia](#), where it appeared in the sixth millennium BC. When the Egyptians invaded [Nubia](#) they learned the art of boxing from the local population, and they took the sport to Egypt where it became popular. From Egypt, boxing spread to other countries including [Greece](#), eastward to Mesopotamia, and northward to Rome.<sup>[15]</sup>

The earliest visual evidence of boxing comes from [Egypt](#) and [Sumer](#) both from the third millennium BC.<sup>[16]</sup><sup>[10]</sup> A relief sculpture from [Egyptian Thebes](#) (c. 1350 BC) shows both boxers and spectators.<sup>[10]</sup> These early Middle-Eastern and Egyptian depictions showed contests where fighters were either bare-fisted or had a band supporting the wrist.<sup>[10]</sup> The earliest evidence of use of gloves can be found in [Minoan Crete](#) (c. 1500–1400 BC).<sup>[10]</sup>

Various types of boxing existed in [ancient India](#). The earliest references to [musti-yuddha](#) come from [classical Vedic epics](#) such as the [Rig Veda](#) (c. 1500–1000 BCE) and [Ramayana](#) (c. 700–400 BCE).<sup>[17]</sup> The [Mahabharata](#) describes two combatants boxing with clenched fists and fighting with kicks, finger strikes, knee strikes and headbutts during the time of King [Virata](#).<sup>[18]</sup> Duels ([niyuddham](#)) were often fought to the death. During the period of the [Western Satraps](#), the ruler [Rudradaman](#)—in addition to being well-versed in "the great sciences" which included [Indian classical music](#), [Sanskrit grammar](#), and logic—was said to be an excellent horseman, charioteer, elephant rider, swordsman and boxer.<sup>[19]</sup> The *Gurbilas Shemi*, an 18th-century Sikh text, gives numerous references to [musti-yuddha](#). The martial art is related to other forms of martial arts found in other parts of the [Indian cultural sphere](#) including [Muay Thai](#) in Thailand, [Muay Lao](#) in Laos, [Pradal Serey](#) in Cambodia and [Lethwei](#) in Myanmar.<sup>[20][21]</sup>

In Ancient Greece boxing was a well developed sport called [pygmalia](#), and enjoyed consistent popularity. In Olympic terms, it was first introduced in the 23rd [Olympiad](#), 688 BC. The boxers would wind leather thongs around their hands in order to protect them. There were no rounds and boxers fought until one of them acknowledged defeat or could not continue. Weight categories were not used, which meant heavier fighters had a tendency to dominate. The style of boxing practiced typically featured an advanced left leg stance, with the left arm semi-extended as a guard, in addition to being used for striking, and with the right arm drawn back ready to strike. It was the head of the opponent which was primarily targeted, and there is little evidence to suggest that targeting the body or the use of kicks was common,<sup>[22][23]</sup> in which it resembled modern western boxing.

A boxer and a rooster in a Roman mosaic of first century AD at the [National Archaeological Museum, Naples](#)

Boxing was a popular spectator sport in [Ancient Rome](#).<sup>[24]</sup> Fighters protected their knuckles with leather strips wrapped around their fists. Eventually harder leather was used and the strips became a weapon. Metal studs were introduced to the strips to make the [cestus](#). Fighting events were held at Roman [amphitheatres](#).