

OLYMPIA

ILEBA



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Heritage
Convention

The sanctuary at Olympia flourished from the 10th c. BC to AD 426, the year in which the emperor Theodosius II closed all the ancient sanctuaries. It was a major religious, cultural and sporting centre, a pole of attraction for Hellenism, and the bond that linked motherland Greece with the colonies of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

The Altis, the sacred grove at Olympia, took shape in the 10th-9th c. BC, and was devoted mainly to Zeus. The first monumental buildings were erected in the Archaic period (7th-6th c. BC), and new structures were gradually added to meet the continuously growing needs of the sanctuary. The area of the sanctuary received its final form at the end of the 4th c. BC. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it underwent a number of modifications dictated by the conditions of the times.

The games, which were held in the area already in prehistoric times, were reorganised in the 8th c. BC by Iphitos, king of Elis, Kleisthenes of Pisa and Lykourgos of Sparta, who instituted the "sacred truce". From that time on, the Olympic games were held every four years and acquired a panhellenic character. The athletes competing in the games had to be true-born, free Greek men. Women were not allowed to watch the games.

Victors in the games were crowned with a branch of the "beautiful-crowned wild olive tree" that stood near the temple of Zeus. This crown bestowed the greatest honour on the competitor, his family and his native city, and could not be compensated for by either money or high office.

When the pagan religions were suppressed, the institution of the Olympic games, which had flourished for twelve centuries and made a brilliant contribution to the history of sport, fell into disuse.

The Monuments

1. The Gymnasium is a 2nd c. BC building that consists of an open area surrounded by stoas, in which athletes trained for running events and the pentathlon. A large propylon was built at the south end of it at the end of the 2nd c. BC.

2. The Palaestra, a square building dating from the 3rd c. BC, consists of an open peristyle courtyard with rooms round it. It was an area in which athletes trained for wrestling, boxing and jumping.

3. The Theikoleon, a rectangular building with a peristyle courtyard, was the official residence of the *Theikoloi*, the priests of Olympia.

4. The Baths were built in the 5th c. BC and modified in later periods.

5. The workshop of Pheidias, in which Pheidias created the chryselephantine statue of Zeus that stood in the god's temple. In the 5th c. AD, a Christian basilica was erected on its ruins.

6. The Leonidaion was built in 330 BC by Leonidas of Naxos, and was used as a guest-house for official visitors to the sanctuary.

7. The Bouleuterion (Council Chamber) was built in the 6th c. BC, and underwent many additions and modifications down to the 2nd c. BC. The athletes swore the required oath before the games at the altar of Zeus Horkios in the Bouleuterion.



8. The South Stoa, dating from the 4th c. BC, marks the southern boundary of the sanctuary.

9. In the South-east Building, dating from the beginning of the 4th c. BC, was an altar of Artemis. In the 1st c. AD Nero built a villa on its ruins.

10. The Echo Stoa or Heptaechos separates the Altis from the Stadium. It was built about 350 BC.

11. The Crypt, a vaulted passageway linking the Stadium with the Altis, was built at the end of the 3rd c. BC.

12. The Stadium, where the athletic games were held, was 212.54 m long and 28.50 m wide. There were no seats, apart from the stone *xedra* of the *Hellanodikai* standing opposite the altar of the goddess Demeter Chamyne, and the embankment could easily seat 45,000 spectators.

13. The Hippodrome was to the south of the Stadium. It no longer survives.

14. The sixteen bases of Zanes, or statues of Zeus, were dedicated by athletes who were fined for cheating during the games.

15. The Treasuries are small buildings in the form of temples dating from the 6th and 5th c. BC. They housed valuable dedications made in the sanctuary.

16. The Metroon, the temple of Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, dating from the 4th c. BC.

17. The Nymphaion, built by Herodes Atticus in AD 160.

18. The temple of Hera, one of the earliest Doric temples in Greece (600 BC). The Hermes of Praxiteles was found in its cella.

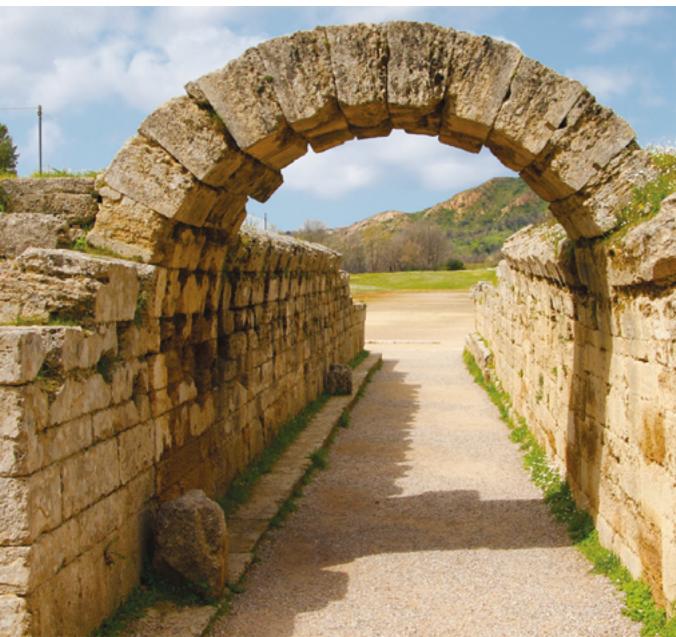
19. The Pelopion, the grove of Pelops, dating from the 5th c. BC.

20. The large altar of Zeus, to the south-east of the temple of Hera, where sacrifices were held in honour of the god.

21. The Philippeion, a circular building begun by Philip II, king of Macedonia, after the battle of Chaironeia (338 BC) and completed by his son, Alexander the Great. It housed five statues of Alexander and his forefathers by the sculptor Leochares.

22. The Prytaneion, official residence of the *prytaneis*, in which was the sacred hearth and the fire that was never extinguished. A 5th c. BC building.

23. The temple of Zeus, the most important building in the Altis, was a Doric peripteral building with 6x13 columns, built between 470 and 456 BC. It was the work of Libon, an architect from Elis. In its cella stood Pheidias's masterpiece, the chryselephantine statue of Zeus. The famous sculptural compositions from the pediments are on display in the Olympia Archaeological Museum.



OLYMPIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

VESTIBULE

On display here are a model of the archaeological site and a panel showing recommended routes through the Museum's rooms.

ROOM 1

The showcases in this room contain finds from the Prehistoric period at Olympia, ranging from the Late Neolithic to Mycenaean times. The centre of the room is occupied by a model of the large tumulus of the Pelopion, dating from the EH II-III periods. The three showcases to the right as one enters the room contain Assyrian bronzes with repoussé representations of men and animals, dating from the 8th c. BC.

ROOM 2

Metal objects dating from the Geometric and Early Archaic periods: anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, bronze cauldrons, griffin heads, metal sheets with repoussé representations of mythological subjects, cuirasses, shields, various kinds of helmets, greaves, and other parts of the defensive and offensive equipment used by soldiers. The rear of the room is dominated by the central terracotta akroterion from the temple of Hera.

ROOM 3

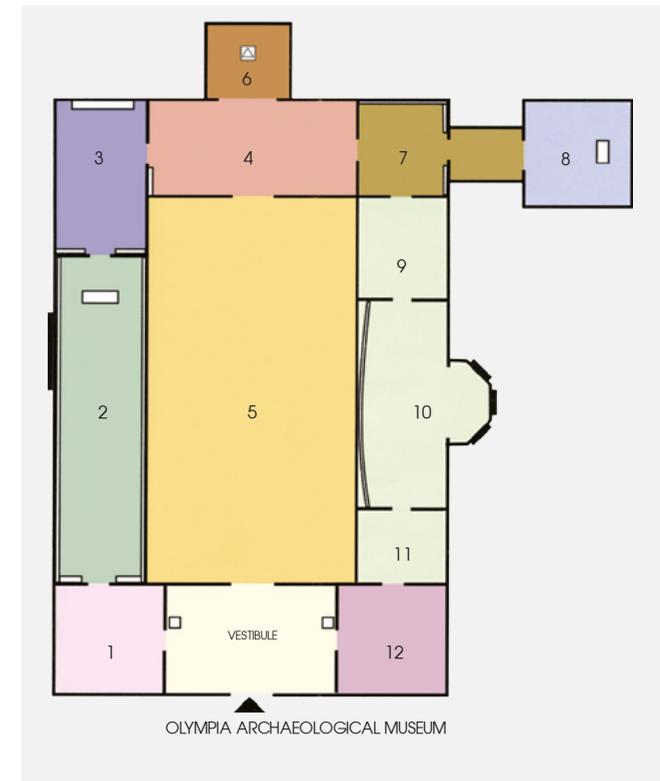
The showcases contain metal objects and pottery (late 6th-early 5th c. BC), and at the back of the room is a reconstruction of the entablature and pediment of the Treasury of the Megarians, the sculptural composition of which depicts scenes from the Gigantomachy. On the east wall of the room are suspended lavishly painted terracotta architectural members from various buildings in the sanctuary.

ROOM 4

The showcases on the walls contain metal objects dating from the Classical period and parts of terracotta akroteria from the roofs of various buildings in the sanctuary. In the free-standing showcases are some excellent large-scale terracottas, the outstanding item being the group of Zeus and Ganymede. The helmet of Miltiades, dedicated in the sanctuary after the Athenian victory at the battle of Marathon (490 BC), is of great historical value.

ROOM 5

On display are the two monumental pediments from the temple of Zeus, with their famous sculptural compositions executed in the Severe Style. The east pediment depicted the contest between Pelops and Oinomaos, in which the central figure is Zeus, while the west portrays the battle between the Lapiths and Centaurs. The centre of the west pediment is dominated by the figure of Apollo. On the two side walls of this room are displayed the twelve metopes depicting the labours of Herakles from the temple of Zeus.



ROOM 6

The Nike of Paionios stands on a triangular base. This masterpiece of 5th c. BC sculpture was dedicated to Zeus by the Naupaktians and Messenians to commemorate their victory over the Lacedaemonians in 421 BC.

ROOM 7

This room is devoted to Pheidias's workshop and his majestic creation, the gold and ivory statue of Zeus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The showcases contain clay moulds for the drapery, tools, and raw materials used in the execution of the statue. Particular interest attaches to the personal mug used by Pheidias, inscribed "I am Pheidias".

ROOM 8

The centre of this room is dominated by the famous statue of Hermes, the unique work carved by the sculptor Praxiteles in the 4th c. BC. It depicts the god carrying the infant Dionysos to his nurses in Boeotia. The perfect polish of the Parian marble and the combination of rhythm and naturalism in the statue are the main



reasons why it is regarded as one of the finest works of art of the Late Classical period.

ROOM 9

This room contains Late Classical and Hellenistic finds from the sanctuary. On the wall is displayed part of the terracotta sima of the Leonidaion.

ROOM 10

This room is devoted to the Nymphaion or the Exedra of Herodes Atticus. In front of the slightly curving wall stand the statues of the Antonine dynasty and also the family of Herodes Atticus that adorned the two storeys of this monument. At the centre of the room stands the statue of the marble bull dedicated by Regilla in the sanctuary of Zeus.

ROOM 11

The Roman statues in this room come from the Metroon, which was converted in Roman times into a building for the imperial cult, and from the Heraion, where many statues were housed as works of art.

ROOM 12

This room contains finds from the final centuries of the sanctuary's life, and also iron objects and tools of everyday use. One large group of exhibits comes from the Late Roman cemetery at Frangonisi, Miraka, in which athletes and sanctuary officials were buried.



MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN ANTIQUITY

The 463 objects on display in the museum present the over a thousand year history of the Olympic games, antiquity's longest-running institution (2nd millennium BC-5th c. AD). The most important exhibits are the gold seal-rings with the first depictions of the games, the bronze and terracotta Geometric figurines of warriors and chariots, and various objects used by athletes such as discuses, weights, and others.



MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF EXCAVATIONS AT OLYMPIA

The museum exhibits visual and photographic material presenting the history of excavations at Olympia from 1875 to the present.





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