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## INTRODUCTION

A hot, late July afternoon in the Peloponnesian countryside in 200 B.C. (Figs. 1, 5). The travelers have walked many kilometers over many days, and suddenly someone spies a flash in the distance, and the word spreads quickly: we're nearly there. Olympia! The glint of sun reflecting off bronze and gilt multiplies as they draw nearer, and soon the brilliant colors of marble sculptures are visible, and the hum of voices, both animal and human, the sounds of wagons, tools, and water fill the air. After such a long journey through a nearly monochromatic landscape of scrubby brown and green vegetation, almost empty streams, and tranquil mountains, the rich palette of materials, hues, and sounds at Olympia, the greatest Panhellenic sanctuary of them all, is dazzling, overwhelming, magical, and awe-inspiring. As the travelers approach the site, they mill with hundreds, thousands, of others, stopping for a drink of water for themselves and their animals, unloading carts, and talking excitedly among each other as they search for a comfortable place to camp for the five days of the Olympic games. Merchants hawk food and votives to the visitors, as priests make offerings at the various altars in the site.

When imagined in this way, it is easy to grasp the extraordinary spectacle Olympia and its games must have been for the ancient visitors. New books on the ancient Olympic games proliferate around the time of every modern Olympiad. But Olympia was more than athletics in antiquity and offers far more than that for study now. Olympia's fame rested not only on its prestigious Panhellenic athletic games but also on its religious sanctuary and its oracle, where politics and prestige were played out. To hold political and military power in the ancient world meant leaving a mark at Olympia: cities and rulers gravitated to the site and used the placement of their monuments and imagery to vie with, and outdo, one another again and again. Cities victorious in battle erected lavish monuments to trumpet their successes, and various patrons, as well as Olympic officials, recruited monuments—buildings and sculpture—to foster and propagate ideas about religion and politics, about themselves, their accomplishments, and Olympia itself to the thousands of visitors to the site (Pl. 1).



Fig. 1. Map of Mediterranean.



An Olympic victory was the most prestigious athletic achievement one could acquire: Olympic victors' hometowns frequently celebrated them with extraordinary honors, and ancient authors make it clear that victory on the racing track prepared young men for triumph on the battlefield. Olympic victors enjoyed the special honor of being able to erect a statue of themselves (or someone could do this on the athlete's behalf) in the Altis, the sacred area, at Olympia. We know of later athletic victor statues at other sanctuaries, such as the well-known bronze chariot-eer of Delphi (Pl. 2), but the practice seems to be largely peculiar to Olympia, where there were hundreds of such thankofferings as evidenced by ancient authors and inscribed bases.

These mostly bronze (but sometimes marble) statues commemorating military success (often with statues of Zeus) and athletic victories (usually statues of the victors), as well as statues erected as honorifics by poleis (especially Elis, often together with the Olympic Boule) and others, stood on inscribed bases, which usually, but not always, record dedications to Olympian Zeus. Of the original bronze statues themselves, only fragments remain; in a few instances, we are fortunate to have feet still attached to their bases (Pl. 3a). Large-scale marble statues—both architectural and non-architectural, free-standing and relief—survive to a greater extent, which is not surprising considering the demand for metal in the late and post-antique periods. The vast majority of these extant sculptures are from the Temple of Zeus, the Nymphaion, and the Metroon (see chapters 3–5).

## STATE OF THE SCHOLARSHIP AND GOALS OF THE STUDY

One of the first things that strikes a scholar (at least, *this* scholar) who begins to work on Olympia is how much material there is and how much we still do not know. This seems strange for one of the most important sanctuaries in the ancient world. Excavations at Olympia began under French direction in 1829 and resumed in 1875 by Germany (Fig. 2); this work eventually came under the direction of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (hereafter DAI). The German excavations continue to this day, along with excavations by the local ephorate of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. The significance of the work of the DAI is hard to overestimate. Without their tireless investigations and conscientious, steady publication, we would scarcely know anything about the physical site of Olympia. We have an abundance of inscriptions in several media from Olympia, and we have the remains of buildings and architectural sculpture—in some cases quite substantial remains, inscribed bases that once supported sculpture, and thousands of votive objects, as well as elements of infrastructure, for example, water lines and aqueducts. Numerous studies exist (and others are under way) on many buildings in the sanctuary although new buildings continue to be uncovered and discovered; on the most famous sculpture, that

from the Temple of Zeus; on the terracotta sculpture; on some bronze objects, including a thorough treatment of the helmets recovered from the site; and on certain areas of the sanctuary, such as the southeast. A narrative history of Olympia, limited in its scope and aims, has emerged, but it tends to focus on the main structures and, naturally, is continually subject to revision. However, there has been far less interpretation at a larger level, putting the whole of what we know together to consider the site in its many facets—archaeological, political, social, religious—in depth over the *longue durée*. This challenge is one thing, of course, that makes the study of Olympia so lively and exciting, and it is precisely the goal of this study to address these issues.

This book focuses on the development of Olympia, particularly (but not exclusively) the Altis from the period of its first monumental architecture c. 600 B.C. until the late Roman period, when pagan cult practices were officially abolished by the Christian emperor Theodosius in 393 A.D. Although this was followed by a transformation of Olympia into a thriving early Christian community, we will not venture there. Scholars usually claim that Olympia and its games experienced their peak in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., then declined in the fourth century, but recent discoveries along with a reconsideration of the already existing evidence should cause us to revise our picture: the site's prestige and importance and the games continued right up to the time of Theodosius' decree and beyond.

Here, I offer a new way of viewing Olympia to answer the primary questions of how and why the site developed as it did over this long period of time. In particular, my focus is on how sculptural monuments (both architectural and free-standing) related and responded to each other; what messages patrons intended; and what interpretations were available to viewers. The last question is the most difficult to investigate since we have so little evidence of specific responses to the site (as opposed to general acclaim and appreciation for Olympia). But the physical context in which the monuments are situated, as well as the social, historical, political, and religious events that occurred at Olympia (i.e., cultural context), help with this issue and often enable us to posit responsible possibilities regarding viewer response. This method employs all available evidence—material and written—to formulate a picture of the site over time. The goal is to obtain a coherent understanding of the site as it developed, not just in terms of its architecture but also in terms of meaning, to understand why objects were placed where they were (when we know) and what the intended effect was. This work is meant to offer a method that can be applied to other sites and sanctuaries. Remarkably, such holistic interpretive work has rarely been done for any archaeological site in ancient Greece (Hurwit's 1999 excellent study of the Athenian Akropolis is an exception), and it is my hope that this study might offer a model to interpret other sites in the ancient world.

Abundant archaeological evidence of many varieties—architecture, sculpture (stone, terracotta, bronze), stone foundations, armor, weapons, pottery, coins—is available



Fig. 2. Photo of excavation of 'Heraion' in 1877/1878 by the Romaïdes brothers.  
Photo: D-DAI-ATH-2003.0009.

to help answer these questions and, read together with written evidence, including a large cache of inscriptions from the site, permits us to make some headway. Pausanias' two books devoted to Olympia, however, remain the richest written source for the appearance of Olympia in the 160s A.D. and are absolutely instrumental to anyone studying the site. His text is usually regarded as a rare ancient Greek example of travel writing, something like an ancient Baedeker, but this does a disservice to his work, which is far more than a list of places and descriptions. It is carefully crafted and includes an abundance of information of what Pausanias saw, thought, heard, and experienced in his own time. Pausanias does not mention everything he saw, but only those things that interested him, which were mostly religious. Excavators at Olympia continue to unearth buildings and monuments that he never named, such as the



‘athletic guild’ in the southwest (Fig. 3, SW Baths), as well as some that he does, such as the sanctuary of Demeter Chamyne (6.21.1; Pl. 4 and Fig. 12); such discoveries sometimes cause us to revise our understanding of the text and the placement of structures. In addition, monuments or buildings the author mentions no longer exist or have not been found, such as the Hippodameion (5.22.2), which compounds the problems in identifying the few structures that do remain.

In order to interpret the site, one must first, of course, establish its appearance at any given period. Beyond the major buildings, such as the Temple of Zeus and the ‘Heraion’ whose position was unchanged from what we see today, there are smaller buildings, such as the treasuries, the Southeast Building, the Echo Hall, the Philippeion, and large-scale monuments, such as the Ptolemaic Monument, whose positions are certain. But the situation with the free-standing sculptural monuments is



Fig. 3. Olympia, plan of Roman period by K. Herrmann, H. Birk, and M.-L. Charalambis. Courtesy of DAI.

more challenging and dependent on what is extant (usually only an inscribed base) and whether the remains are in situ. The earliest large-scale free-standing sculptures, known only from written accounts, are from the sixth century B.C., but the earliest *extant* examples are only from the fifth century B.C. Reuse and rebuilding occlude the picture: although we have Pausanias' vivid and detailed account, he describes the site as he found it when he visited in the mid-second century A.D., and not necessarily as it was when the monuments were erected.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the history of the site is one of reuse: we know with certainty that both Greeks and Romans moved monuments around—in some cases only a short time after their erection—to change their location or for reuse in various ways. Over one thousand statue bases survive, 340 of them with inscriptions, but we can be certain of the original placement of only some 170,<sup>2</sup> which were found in situ. We can establish monuments to be in situ when their foundations show no signs of disturbance or change, and this requires scrutiny of foundations for all monuments. In addition, we know of other statues only from ancient writers, usually Pausanias, or from inscribed plaques, usually of bronze, that were once affixed to bases.<sup>3</sup> Altogether, we know of 274 athletic victors' statues, 98 of which still retain inscriptions.<sup>4</sup>

Purgold and the authors of *IvO*, Dittenberger and Purgold, published what was known of the statue bases in 1892 and 1896, respectively, but many more have been found since then. Select types of statue bases, such as those associated with Hellenistic rulers, appear in various publications, for example, Herrmann 1988; Hintzen-Bohlen 1992; Bringmann, von Steuben, and Ameling 1995; Kotsidu 2000; and Schmidt-Dounas 2000, and, of course, newly discovered bases appear in *OlBer*; Siedentopf 1968, 89–108 catalogued bases belonging to equestrian statues according to location at Olympia. As I write this, Christina Leybold is currently engaged in the mammoth project of studying and publishing all the statue bases, and Klaus Hallof has been entrusted with the even larger project of restudying and publishing *all* of the inscriptions from Olympia, including those previously published in *IvO* and elsewhere.

Several problems dog the study of the archaeological remains. Lack of information—whether through lack of excavation (some areas have been excavated, others have not), loss in either antiquity or the modern period, or lack of publication of recovered

<sup>1</sup> A surprising number and variety of scholars seem unaware of this fact and base interpretations on this supposition. See, e.g., Lehmann and Gutsfeld 2013, 95–97; Schmidt-Dounas 2000, 207–9; Krumeich 1997, 38–39.

<sup>2</sup> Leybold 2014b, 31; Leybold 2014a, 33. Hyde (1912) tries to establish the position of statues on the basis of groupings by family, state, artist, or event as enunciated in Pausanias. In other words, he endeavors to reconstruct the appearance of the sanctuary at the time that Pausanias saw it.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., *IvO* 166; *SEG* 14, 358; 16, 288; 39, 1822; 40, 809; 42, 386.

<sup>4</sup> Leybold 2014a, 34. Herrmann (1988) reckoned that Pausanias mentions 197 athletic victor statues and that another 62 are known from inscribed bases but are not mentioned in Pausanias. Habicht (1985, 22) says that Pausanias lists 203 of the “most notable” statues. Cf. Habicht 1985, 65 n. 4, 149; Herrmann 1972, 244 n. 438.

material (sometimes for decades)—and changes to the site, both in antiquity and more recently, hobble one's ability to secure a picture of the site at any one moment. These impediments would seem to doom any possibility of addressing the issues outlined above, but that would be too pessimistic a view. We possess the most information about Olympia in the fifth century B.C. and the Roman imperial period, but a great deal is known beyond these chronological parameters, and our knowledge is increasing all the time.

There are limitations to the scope of this project. This work does not aim at a comprehensive examination of every aspect of the site, nor does it concern itself with all sculpture at the site. Rather, my focus here is exclusively on material that has been published and that is *in situ* or can be placed with certainty, while bringing in comparanda as needed. The treatment of material is uneven, in part because of the nature of the evidence itself, and in part because of the specific goals of this analysis.

This study is organized chronologically in an effort to gain a synchronous and diachronic view of the site. The shape of the Altis and the logistics of Olympia are the subject of chapter 1. New finds enable us to reconfigure the boundaries of the Altis, which is far larger than ever acknowledged. The chapter also examines the scattered evidence for how the sanctuary actually functioned. Water, accommodation, hygiene, pasturage for animals (for both transport and competition), and food were all concerns for visitors to the site, especially during the Olympic games, when some 45,000–50,000 (at least in the fourth century B.C.) were present at Olympia for five days.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 2 concerns the archaic period at Olympia. Questions of who was worshipped, where, and how open this chapter, which goes on to look at the growing internationalism of the site, as expressed through the construction of treasuries and the types of votives. The placement of buildings and choice of sculptural themes exhibit a jockeying for position and prominence, particularly among western Greek cities, as this Panhellenic site and its number of visitors grew. Politics, religious needs, and an ever-increasing number of visitors in response to the growing prominence of the Olympic games shaped archaic Olympia.

The fifth century is the focal point of chapter 3, which traces the rapid development of the site, now securely under Elean control, and the construction of numerous buildings and victory monuments in the Altis. Free-standing sculptural dedications still *in situ* enable us to reconstruct ceremonial areas of the Altis, and the sculptures of the Temple of Zeus demonstrate a complex cross-referencing of mythological themes and compositional motifs with the activities that actually took place at Olympia. In addition, by considering depictions of Zeus at Olympia from the archaic to the clas-

<sup>5</sup> Wacker 2012, 269–70; Lee 1992, 106; Herrmann 1972, 124. The games began as a one- or two-day event and extended to five days by the early fifth century at the latest.

sical period, one can observe changes in how the god and his sanctuary were regarded by contemporary Greeks.

Chapter 4 takes up Olympia in the fourth century B.C. and the Hellenistic period, when new building concentrated on the areas immediately around the Altis with the exception of two major structures within: the temple that Pausanias dubbed the Metroon and the Philippeion, which housed statues of Philip II, Alexander the Great, and their immediate family members. The latter was only the most elaborate of a number of dedications from fourth-century rulers, athletes, and military leaders. The Philippeion's placement was carefully chosen to respond to earlier monuments and served as a reference point for later Hellenistic royal monuments. The fourth century at Olympia also marks an extraordinary event: warfare within the Altis itself. Romans, of course, frequented Olympia during the Republican period and left their mark on the site. Although military victory monuments became less common at Olympia after the mid-fourth century B.C., Mummius revived this practice in 146 B.C. by, among other things, affixing shields to the classical Temple of Zeus. In doing so, Mummius aligned himself and his victory with those of the past and reified the Temple of Zeus' function as military victory monument.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the imperial Roman period during which the Olympic games continued to thrive in spite of several earthquakes at Olympia that caused extensive damage. Although the site continued to function and games were held into the late antique period, perhaps the fifth century A.D., Olympia's role in the Roman world had changed, and the monuments—their placement and function—reflect that. Non-sacred buildings, especially baths, multiplied at the periphery of the Altis and along the banks of the Kladeos River, and honorific statues—for rulers (from local magistrates to emperors), priests and priestesses, benefactors, military leaders, and other dignitaries—exceeded all other types of monumental sculptural dedications at the site. The site had become a truly Roman sanctuary, yet the new rulers and their new subjects understood the importance of Olympia and its history. The Eleans transformed the earlier Metroon into a Sebasteion in honor of Augustus, and the Nymphaion of Herodes Atticus and Regilla was constructed in the mid-second century A.D., an act of patronage that provided a continual source of water to Olympia. Refurbishment and rebuilding of older monuments, particularly the temples, seemed to be ongoing during the Roman period, and rulers, such as Nero, not only left statues and structures at the site but also removed objects from Olympia. This seems to have been the case with one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the magnificent Pheidian Zeus that once sat in the Temple of Zeus; it was removed to Constantinople in the early fifth century A.D., where it was destroyed in a fire in 476 A.D.

A brief final chapter offers a summary of the transformation of Olympia from the time that the games and pagan cult trailed off in the first part of the fifth century until

the abandonment of the site in the ninth century. Christians increasingly reshaped Olympia for their own purposes, and an agricultural community developed here. Slavs also came to dwell at late antique Olympia, but eventually earthquakes and flooding brought an end to human habitation. Where thousands once cheered athletes on to victory, only the sound of birds and cicadas remained.

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