

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 517

## A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Archaeological Site of Olympia

Location : Peloponnesus

State Party : Greece

Date : December 30, 1988

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, III, IV and VI.

## C) JUSTIFICATION

In northwestern Peloponnesus the archaeological site of Olympia at the foot of the Kronion Hill stretches over a triangular alluvial terrace at the confluence of the Alpheios and the Kladeos. In this area of very ancient settlement, religious centers of worship succeeded one another during the Hellenic period : those to Kronos, Gaïa and other Chtonian divinities; those to Pelops, the hero who gave his name to Peloponnesus, and those to Hippodamia, whose hand Pelops won in a chariot race against Oenomaos, her father. Olympia became a center of worship to Zeus in the 10th century B.C. The name Olympia, which described the wooded valley where the site was located, referred to the sacred mountain of Olympus, the habitual residence of Zeus.

Placed under the protection of the cities of Pisa and later Elis, the Olympian sanctuary experienced unqualified renown in the 8th century B.C., with the panhellenic games which were held every fifth year. Beginning in 776 B.C., the games regularly brought together athletes. Later, orators, poets and musicians also came to celebrate Zeus.

The Altis -the sanctuary to the gods- includes the ruins of the two principal temples : the Temple of Hera (6th century B.C.) and the Temple of Zeus (5th century B.C). To the north stood a row of Archaic Treasuries (6th and 5th centuries B.C.), several of which were built by residents of the distant Greek colonies of Selinus, Cyrene and Byzantium. More recent structures -the Metroon and the Echo Colonnade (4th century B.C.), the

Philippeion in honor of the victory at Chaeronea in 338 B.C., and the Exedra of Herodes Atticus (157-160 A.D.)- gradually added to the complex topography of the sanctuary whose precinct overlooks an area of prehistoric settlements.

The density of buildings outside the Altis is even greater : built up zone combine official housing and assembly rooms for the clergy and administrators, sports structures, thermal baths, lodgings and accommodation for guests. To the northwest, the Palaestra and the Gymnasium (3rd century B.C.), and to the east, the old Stadium, rebuilt during the 1st century A.D. and remodeled in 1961-1962, highlight a landscape of ruins of majestic beauty. Flooding of the Alpheios carried the Hippodrome away; only its original location is known.

The renown and universal value of Olympia are so evident that it would seem superfluous to justify them. ICOMOS observes that this cultural property meets criteria I, II, III, IV and VI of the "Guidelines".

- Criterion I. The sanctuary of the Altis contained one of the highest concentrations of masterpieces of the ancient Mediterranean world. Many have been lost, such as the Olympia Zeus, a gold-and-ivory cult statue which was probably executed by Phidias between 438 and 430 B.C. It was taken to Constantinople by Theodosius II, then destroyed when fire swept the city in 474 A.D. Other masterpieces have survived : large votive Archaic bronzes, sculptures of tympanums and metopes from the temple of Zeus, and the Hermes by Praxiteles, which was found along with its base in the Temple of Hera. These are all major works of sculpture and key references in the history of art.

- Criterion II. The influence of the monuments of Olympia has been considerable. To mention just three examples, the temple of Zeus, built in 470-457 B.C., is a model of the great Doric temples constructed in southern Italy and in Sicily during the 5th century B.C.; the Nike by Paeonios, sculptured c. 420 B.C., so lastingly influenced iconographic allegories of Victory that neoclassic art of the 19th century is still much indebted to it; with reference to the Roman period, the Olympian Palaestra is undoubtedly the typological reference made by Vitruvius in De Architectura. Its value as a standard in architecture is in any case indisputable.

- Criterion III. Olympia bears exceptional testimony to the ancient civilizations of Peloponnesus, both in terms of duration and quality. The first human settlements date back to prehistoric times when the valley was occupied from 3000 to 1100 B.C. Settlements and necropolises from the Bronze Age have been unearthed along the banks of the Alpheios. The Middle Helladic and Mycenaean periods are represented at the site.

Consecrated to Zeus, the Altis is a major sanctuary from the 10th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. corresponding to the zenith of Olympia, marked more specifically by celebration of the Olympic Games from 776 B.C. to 393 A.D. A Christian settlement survived for a time at the site of the ruins of the great panhellenic sanctuary : discovery of the workshop of Phidias under the remains of a Byzantine church is an outstanding indication of continuous human settlement, which was interrupted only in the 7th century A.D. as a result of natural disasters.

- Criterion IV. Olympia is an outstanding example of a great panhellenic sanctuary with its multiple functions : religious, political and social. Inside the peribolus of the Altis consecrated to the gods, alongside the principal temples of Zeus and Hera, are very ancient sanctuaries, such as the Pelopion, and a row of Treasuries to the north, at the foot of the Kronion Hill. All around the divine precinct are the structures used by the priests (Theokoleon) and the administration (Bouleuterion), as well as common buildings (Prytaneion), accommodation (Leonidaion and Roman hostel), residences for distinguished guests (Nero's House), and all the sports structures used for the preparation and celebration of the Olympic Games : the stadium and the hippodrome to the east, and the thermal baths, the Palaestra and the Gymnasium to the south and west.

- Criterion VI. Olympia is directly and tangibly associated with an event of universal significance. The Olympic Games were celebrated regularly beginning in 776 B.C. The Olympiad -the four-year period between two successive celebrations falling every fifth year- became a chronological measurement and system of dating used in the Greek world. However, the significance of the Olympic Games, where athletes benefitting from a three-month sacred truce came together from all the Greek cities of the Mediterranean world to compete, demonstrates above all the lofty ideals of Hellenic humanism : peaceful and loyal competition between free and equal men, who are prepared to surpass their physical strength in a supreme effort, with their only ambition being the symbolic reward of an olive wreath.

The revival of the Olympic Games in 1896 through the efforts of Pierre de Coubertin illustrates the lasting nature of the ideal of peace, justice and progress, which is no doubt the most precious but also the most fragile feature of the world's heritage.

### ICOMOS Observations

ICOMOS recommends that the Greek authorities should very carefully supervise development of the site -where the policy on anastylosis used for the Palaestra, the Temple of Hera and the Treasury of the Siphnians will shortly be extended to the Temple of Zeus - and respect for the landscape in an archaeological zone covering 90 hectares, 40 of which are under the strict control of the Greek government. Construction of the Old Museum and Hotel SPAP and, more recently, the construction of a new museum and conference center did not seriously alter the beauty of the site because the buildings are not within sight of the ruins of the Altis. The growth of a modern village west of Kladeos, the widening of roads and the construction of parking facilities are, however, a menace which should be taken into account in the management policy which so far has been exemplary.

ICOMOS, April 1989

