

GREECE

Archaeological Site of Olympia

Brief description

The site of Olympia, in a valley in the Peloponnesus, has been inhabited since prehistoric times. In the 10th century B.C., Olympia became a centre for the worship of Zeus. The Altis – the sanctuary to the gods – has one of the highest concentrations of masterpieces from the ancient Greek world. In addition to temples, there are the remains of all the sports structures erected for the Olympic Games, which were held in Olympia every four years beginning in 776 B.C.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription

1989

Agency responsible for site management

- Hellenic Ministry of Culture
7th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities
Ministry of Culture
Ancient Olympia, 27065 Greece
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria

C (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)

Justification provided by the State Party

It was at the Panhellenic Sanctuary of Olympia, where the Olympic Games were held every four years, that the noble ideas of fair competition and the peaceful coexistence of peoples were first conceived. Greeks gathered there in ancient times irrespective of city or tribe and competed together in harmony to show who was the best.

Even today the ruins of the Sanctuary and the finds there of wonderful works of art still capture worldwide interest. The Altis gives us a complete picture of an ancient sanctuary that was at the same time a religious, social and political centre.

All of these activities were represented there. And the picture is enhanced by the precious finds uncovered during the excavations and displayed in the Museum next to the archaeological site. Among

them the bronzes and the metal work, chiefly from the Archaic period, have a special importance.

But what has brought Olympia its worldwide fame were the Olympic Games; for here in antiquity were held the Panhellenic Games which, in addition to the Panhellenic festivities and the athletic competitions, reflected the high ideals of peace, noble rivalry, friendly reconciliation and the abolition of racial distinctions.

This idea was reborn in the last century at the instigation largely of the Baron de Coubertin.

The Olympic flame that is carried to the ends of the earth to accompany the World Games and to keep hope for world peace ever alight is kindled here in the Altis at the altar of Hera.

The archaeological site of Olympia is the most ancient and the most complete in its organization: a complex of religious buildings and athletic installations which for centuries embellished and served this Panhellenic Sanctuary.

Within the Sacred Altis monuments of supreme importance were erected; in them votive offerings were dedicated that were unique in their time, masterpieces by eminent artists. In the Temple of Zeus, standing in the middle of the Altis, parts of the base have survived of the chryselephantine statue of the god made by the famous 5th c. BC sculptor Pheidias, and one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The group of Hermes holding Dionysus, the infant god of wine, is one of the very few genuine works by the renowned 4th c. BC sculptor Praxiteles.

The pedimental compositions on the Temple of Zeus have preserved until our day a complete picture of the monumental sculpture of the 5th c. BC.

Moreover, the aesthetic importance of the monuments is a special one because they are linked historically to real events: thus the largest Doric temple in the Peloponnese was dedicated to Zeus Altis (470-457 BC) from the spoils of war of the Eleans when they established their absolute control over the Sanctuary. This temple influenced the development of the Doric style in architecture and became the model for all the temples of South Italy and Sicily in the 5th c. BC. The Temple of Hera in the Altis, too, affords a unique opportunity to study the development of the Doric style since it preserves elements of the transition from the Archaic timber construction in the columns to the monumental form in stone.

In the building that had been Phidias' studio the terracotta moulds for hammering the gold sheet used in the manufacture of the chryselephantine statue were discovered together with the sculptor's personal tools and pots bearing inscriptions showing that they belonged to him. The prehistoric mound of the Pelopion remained the religious nucleus of the site. The Olympic games were a testimony to the expression of religion in the Archaic Stadium. The artistic masterpieces that were dedicated in the Sanctuary testify to the importance of the Games: not only were they Panhellenic in scope, but they influenced the spiritual development of all the peoples in the Mediterranean basin. Important works from Greek and foreign workshops were dedicated in the Sanctuary, large sculptures in stone and bronze being the most characteristic offerings, as well as vases, jewelry, weapons, etc.

Among the collection of marvelous statues of Nike in the Museum, that by the sculptor Paeonius, made ca. 420 BC, influenced the typology of all the later Nikes, whose dynamic forms rose up harmoniously in the open spaces of the Sacred Place.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

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 Pheidias 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 Pheidias 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 benefiting 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.

Committee Decision

Bureau (1989): The Bureau recommended that this property be inscribed, and invited the Committee to request the Greek authorities to continue to protect carefully the site and its environment from the effects of increased tourism.

Session (1989): The Committee requested the Greek authorities to continue to carefully protect the site and its environment from the impact of increased tourism.

- Statement of significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site. At the time of initial inscription, the World Heritage Committee did not approve a Statement of Significance for the site which defined the outstanding universal value
- Proposal for text has been made by State Party

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate. The archaeological site and its surrounding landscape, including the Archaeological Museum of Olympia, the Archaeological Museum of the History of the Olympic Games, and the Museum of the History of Excavations at Olympia. This was defined by a Ministry of Culture Decision 10834/566 (ΥΠΠΟ/ΑΡΧ/Α1/Φ7/10834/566π.ε), Government Gazette 128/B/27-2-1992, Government Gazette 216/B/31-3-1992

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained; Improvement of the integrity of the archaeological site (restoration of the Philippeion and of a column of the temple of Zeus)

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Designation of buffer zones A and B by decision of the Ministry of Culture 10834/566 (ΥΠΠΟ/ΑΡΧ/Α1/Φ7/10834/566 π.ε.) and Government Gazette 128/B/27-2-1992, Government Gazette 216/B/31-3-1992)

- Law 3028/2002 “On the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in General”
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- Measures for the protection of the environs of the archaeological site should also be taken by the primary level of the Local Authority

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Paid visitor attraction

Management /Administrative Body

- Management by the State Party
- Site manager on part-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national
- The current management system is highly effective

5. Management Plan

- No management plan; the management and protection of monuments and archaeological sites in Greece is not based on a concrete management plan. Greece has a system of protection, which is administered centrally by the Ministry of Culture through its regional services, i.e. the Ephorates of Prehistoric & Classical and Byzantine Antiquities. The Ministry of Culture is the competent body supervising the sites and overseeing all works carried out. As far as the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage is concerned, there are cases where other competent bodies besides the Ministry of Culture are involved. The Ministry of Culture sets out the guidelines and the general policy for the management of the monuments and sites which is then implemented by the competent Ephorates. In the case of the Archaeological Site of Olympia the 7th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities is responsible for the management and protection of the monuments

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State budget
- EU Funding (3rd Community Support Framework)

- Sufficient funding available for the adequate management
- No adequate funding for the protection and conservation of the site: hiring of temporary guards
- Sources which provide funding for conservation and protection of the site: Programme for the Public Investments and European Programmes (3rd C.S.F. for the presentation – landscaping of the Archaeological Site of Olympia, 2002-2004)

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 26
- Specialised conservators (stone, mosaics) from the directorate for the Conservation of Antiquities; human resources are appropriate, but the guarding staff needs to be increased

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation, management, promotion, interpretation, education
- Average: visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- No expertise or training is offered to the staff for the time being; there are needs of training of the guarding staff in issues related to the safety/security and reception of the public
- There is training available to stakeholders

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 417,107 (tickets), 2004
- Visitor facilities: visitor paths, access ramps for people with disabilities, WC, explanatory signs, enlargement of the area open to visitors

10. Scientific Studies

- Archaeological surveys, publications of the German Archaeological Institute, archaeological guides etc.

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Many signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem is not used on publications

- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising: inform the inhabitants of modern Olympia on the importance of protecting and promoting the site, and on their obligations towards it
- Educational programme “Melina” developed by the Ministry of Culture for elementary school students; guided tours for elementary and secondary school students
- Web site available

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- Conservation/restoration works: Support work at the buttress wall of Kronios hill (2003); Shelter over the Southwest Thermai (2003); Re-arrangement of architectural members (2003); Visitor paths (2003); Restoration of a column of the temple of Zeus (2004); Restoration of the Philippeion (in progress); Cleaning works
- Present state of conservation: very good

Threats and Risks to site

- Increase in the number of visitors because of the site's listing in the World Heritage List; weather conditions
- Emergency measures taken: continuous conservation of the monuments, designation of visitor paths in order to avoid negative impact on the monuments

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: social; promotion of the site at an international level – Restorations, visitor paths, cleaning works, explanatory signs, rearrangement of architectural members and of the site's layout in general, enlargement of the area open to visitors, ensuring the construction of better facilities for the visitors.
- Weaknesses of management: needs to be met regarding restorations and conservation of building material

Future actions:

- Support work at the buttress wall at Kronios hill in cooperation with the Restoration Service of the Ministry of Culture. There is a need to elaborate a study and then a programme in cooperation with the Restoration Service of the Ministry of Culture, for the conservation of sensitive building material that suffers due to weather conditions and the large number of visitors