

The History of Excavations at Olympia

by Dr. Berthold Fellmann

Born on 14th January 1938 in Nuremberg, Dr. Berthold Fellmann studied at Neustrehlitz and then Munich, where he took his secondary examinations in 1959. After his military service he studied classical archaeology, ancient history, the history of art and the science of journalism at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. In 1969 he took his doctorate under Professor Homann-Wedeking with the thesis "Ancient Representations of the Adventure of Polyphemus". Then at the Institute of Neurology attached to the University of Texas he collaborated on a publication on head injuries "Boxing, Wrestling and Pancratium in Ancient Times".

In 1970 he became technical assistant at the archaeology seminary at the University of Munich. Finally, for the Organising Committee of the Games of the XXth Olympiad, he was in charge of the preparation and direction of the exhibition entitled "100 Years of German Excavation at Olympia".



Because of the complete destruction of the Olympic precincts and the great temple by two earthquakes in the sixth century A. D. and the subsequent burial of the site due to the overflowing of the river Kladeos, even the very name of Olympia, inseparably connected with this most famous place, came to be forgotten. It was only one thousand years later that the merging point of the rivers Kladeos and Alpheios was once again given a name on a Venetian map of 1516. The name was Andilalo.

At the end of the Thirty Years War it seems that it was a German who was the first Westerner to visit the place. His name was Matthias Palbitzki, art connoisseur and diplomat, born in Stolp (Swedish-Pomerania) and a member of Queen Christina of Sweden's circle of artists and scientists, who travelled in Greece between 1645 and 1648 and reached Olympia in 1647. But it was Bernard de Montfou-

cond who first expressed the idea, in a letter to the Archbishop of Corfu in 1723, of starting excavations in Olympia. Following the descriptions of Greece made by Pausanias, the English theologian Richard Chandler went to Elis in 1766, stood on the ruins of the Temple of Zeus and actually discovered remains of the Cella wall and a Doric capital.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the originator of classic archeology, had plans for doing research at Olympia at this time. His untimely death did not prevent but only delay the carrying out of these plans.

The Frenchman Fauvel was commissioned in the year 1787 by the French ambassador to Constantinople to work on an initial topographical sketch of the plain and a description of the terrain. At the beginning of the nineteenth century famous English archeologists showed interest in the sacred grounds of Olympia.

On February 25th, 1805, Captain Leake arrived there and made the following note: "There is every reason to believe that . . . the most interesting discoveries in excavations at Olympia are still to be made." For three whole days Dodwell and Gell dug at Olympia together with some Turks. They found the remains of columns and other fragments of the Temple of Zeus. Some years later Wilkins published in his "Antiquities of Magna Graecia" (1807) a floor plan of the Temple of Zeus which already contained the correct ratio of 6:13 columns of the Peristyle (an arcade of columns). After Cockerell had visited Olympia too, Lord Spencer Stanhope made a complete plan of the Olympia site in 1813, according to the systematic measurements provided by the architect Allason. In three numbers of Cotta's Art periodical for 1821, Sickler, the Headmaster of a German Grammar School in Hildburghausen, made an appeal in the spirit of Winckelmann for an excavation at Olympia, but the War of Independence in Greece made a German enterprise of this kind impossible. A

French Aid Corps under Marshall Maison followed the "Expédition scientifique de Morée" in 1829 with the order to ascertain the lie of the land and local monuments. On May 10th the excavation of the Temple of Zeus began, the Cella Wall was freed and in the Pronaos (entrance hall) two fragments of a Frieze were found (a horse's head of the Diomedes metope and of Geryoneus). Within the space of six weeks a group of architects attempted to draw a floor plan. During this operation several frieze fragments came to light in the Opisthodom (back chamber) depicting the deeds of Heracles. But the intense heat of the season then put an end to further activities. Furthermore, the newly formed government under Kapodistrias raised objection to further excavations, but allowed the finds made until then to be transported to the Louvre in Paris.

After the foundation of the Kingdom of Greece under Otto I von Wittelsbach, scholars at the Court began to be anxious to regain the sacred shrine of Olympia. The Curator of Ancient Monuments and

West pediment of the temple of Zeus.



Professor of Archeology at the University of Athens, Ludwig Ross, conceived several plans, and in 1853 he launched an appeal from the city of Halle entitled "Excavation of Olympia". His suggestion for the collecting of money for the project did not, however, prove to be very successful.

After decades of persistent efforts, Ernst Curtius, the archeologist, was able to implement his excavation plans. He delivered a lecture on January 10th, 1852, in the presence of King Friedrich IV in Berlin, which caused the monarch himself to take the initiative in the matter. At the immediate request of the Professor Carl Ritter, Ernst Curtius and Carl Bötticher, the King answered, together with his Cabinet, with his consent. In February 1854 the Prussian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, von Manteuffel, received the order to open up negotiations with Athens. But once again political developments (the Russian-Turkish War) in Greece necessitated a further delay of the project.

In the year 1873, newly opened negotiations between the German Reich and the

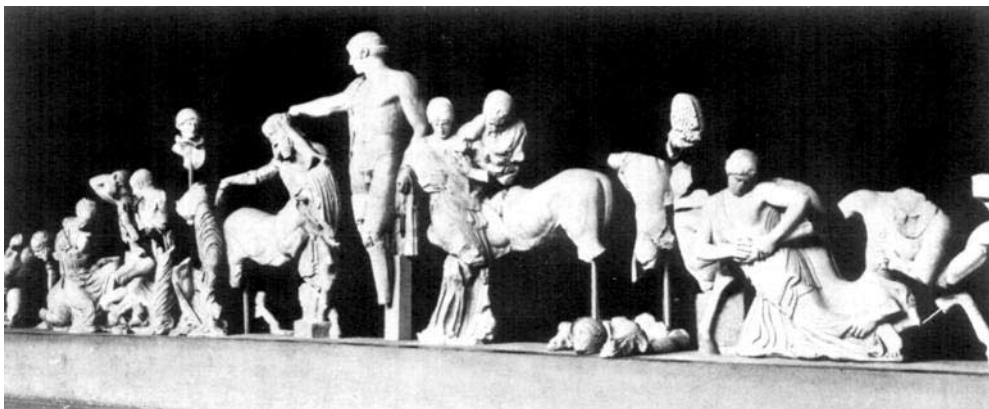
East pediment of the temple of Zeus.

Royal Greek Government led to the drafting of a contract for excavations in Olympia. Finally, on April 25th, 1874, the contract allowing German excavation work at Olympia was signed in Athens by the Greek Foreign Minister, J. Delyanny, the Curator of Ancient Monuments, P. Eustratiades, the German Ambassador and Minister E. von Wagner, and Ernst Curtius, sent there with a special mandate for the purpose.

The excavation was carried out under the direction of Ernst Curtius, Friedrich Adler and Dr Busch, counsellor in the Foreign Office. They formed a Directorium in Berlin, and, at the beginning of September 1875, they sent the Commissioners Dr Gustav Hirschfeld and Adolf Boetticher to survey operations at the site and begin the first excavation campaign in Olympia.

The first Campaign 1875-1876

Hirschfeld and Boetticher arrived at Olympia on September 12th, 1875, and moved into the excavation house built in





work, which disclosed most of the larger fragments of the west pediment. It is well worth mentioning the discovery of some statue bases (the base of the Zeus colossos and of the charioteer Telemachos, among others). The inscriptions on them allowed repeated comparison with Pausanias' report (dating from the second century A. D.). Pausanias had seen these bronze offerings still standing on their original site.

In order to obtain more information of a topographical nature, the excavators pressed on westwards to the Kladeos and northwards to the hill of Kronos making four ditches as they went. The ditch to the west brought to light the Byzantine church which the French had examined previously. The foundations revealed in front of the Kronion slope and a doric capital turned out to be the remains of the long sought Temple of Hera in which, on May 1877, the Hermes of Praxiteles was discovered on the very spot where Pausanias had seen it. (Paus. chapter 5, 17, 3).

Third Campaign 1877-1878

In the third year of the excavations Dr Georg Treu of the Berlin Antiquarium took the place of Dr Hirschfeld, who retired, and he was given further support by Dr Weil. Richard Bohn and Wilhelm Dörpfeld, two architects, joined the excavations staff. An extension of the excavation territory on the west side of the Temple at a distance of 37 metres resulted in the find of the mighty torso of Apollo, the bride of the Lapith and other fragments, so completing the finds belonging to the west pediment. But this led to the disclosure of the Gate of the Altis in the southwestern segment of the peripheral wall of Olympia. A ditch starting at the Heraion and going westwards struck the foundations of a round construction after only 15 metres. This was the Philippeion. As reported by Pausanias, King Philipp of Macedon had commissioned this Monopteros to be built, ordering the Athenian sculptur Leochares to decorate it with statues of gold and ivory depicting the ruling family.

Pancratists



To the west of this round temple an approximately square building, more than 66 metres long on each side was discovered in which the Palästra or sports ring could be ascertained. A little later two points of orientation mentioned by Pausanias were found next to this, the entrance gate (Propylon) to the north Gymnasium (training grounds for light-athletics) and opposite, the north gate of the wall of the Altis in its foundations. (Compare Paus. chap. 6, 21, 2 and chap. 5, 15, 8).

By April, 1878, the entire terrace of the treasure-houses had been excavated. In front of its supporting wall so-called Zanes bases were found at regular intervals. Formerly they were decorated with bronze statues of Zeus and were paid for with the fines contributed by those athletes who had broken the competition rules by bribery. (Paus. 5, 21, 3 following).

Fourth Campaign 1878-1879

Wilhelm Dörpfeld now replaced Mr Bohn as first architect. It was he who directed the excavations to their completion aided by R. Borrmann. Dr Adolf Furtwängler took over the work of Dr Weil, the second archeologist. From this time onwards a German physician was on the spot to care for the good health of the workers and civil servants on the staff. Up to 250 workmen and 19 horse-carts were working on the excavations at certain times.

The research work already begun was then continued; later three additional ditches were opened up. These diggings led to the discovery of the Prytaneion, a building in which magistrates were

housed as watchmen over the sacred precinct. There they held feasts for the victors in the games and cared for the undying hearth-fire of the Altar of Hestia. On December 11th the more than life-size limestone head of the old and venerable Hera cult from the Temple of Hera was found not far from this spot. To the extreme south Dörpfeld found the corner of the wall of Altis, to the east they attempted to throw light on the situation of the stadium by means of digging a ditch from Alpheios to the north-west, heading towards the vaulted entrance. Soon finds in terracotta (the Zeus head from the Zeus-Ganymed-group) and bronze weapons not far from the surface gave reason to suppose that here must have been the spectators' wall. A further ditch running from the south-east in the direction of the Philippeion finally brought to light the most important find, the small remains of the long sought Shrine of Pelops.

On May 14th King George of Greece visited Olympia. On this occasion it was decided that all the finds made here should be kept in Olympia.

Fifth Campaign 1879-1880

Dr Karl Purgold scholar at the Institut in Rome, now took over the job of second archeologist, replacing Dr Furtwängler. Paul Graef was added to the team of architects. The operations were intensified, the number of workers rose from 250 in January to 450 in March, and there were at times up to 50 horse-drawn carts in use.

In November excavation work in the south-west outside the wall of the shrine



Head of a griffin.

struck upon the second biggest building in Olympia, an inn surrounded by a hall with more than 140 ionic columns and called after the architect Leonides of Naxos, the Leonidaion. On a closer examination of the foundations of the Temple of Hera, only 25 cm below the level of excavation so far, the right foot of the praxitellic statue of Hermes was found.

In the last week of the fifth excavation year the exertions of the excavators were rewarded by yet another marvellous find. The bronze head of a boxer came to light north of the Prytaneion under a Roman building. Of the hundreds of statues of

winners which stood in the shrine, this is the only head to have been completely preserved.

The head was supposed to be a portrait of the boxer Satyros who won after 338 in Olympia and whose statue (made by Silanion) was still seen by Pausanias in the second century A. D.

Sixth Campaign 1880-1881

The last part of the excavation work was spent mainly examining and cataloging all the finds. From these, doublets in stone and clay sections of the architecture, bronze and terracotta were sent to the royal museums in Berlin according to the Olympia contract made with the German Reich.

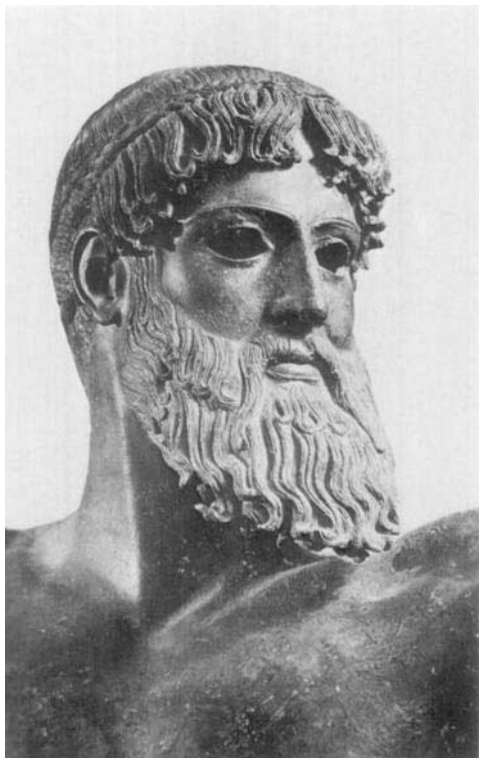
On March 21st, 1881, after a total of six years work, the excavation work was concluded.

A generous gift from the Athenian banker Syngros enabled the erecting of a museum on the right bank of the river Kladeos, under Dörpfeld's direction, and according to Adlerés plans. Richard Grüttner, the sculptor, carried out the reconstruction and arrangement of the two groups of large pedimental sculptures, according to data provided by G. Treu and A. Furtwängler. This included the Nike of Paionios, the Hermes and the remaining marble sculptures. In the presence of the Greek Royal Family the Museum was officially opened on 18th May, 1887.

The new excavations 1936-1966

As from 1906 and after the first World War, Wilhelm Dörpfeld carried out research into the pre-history of the shrine at the Temple of Hera and the Pelopion. One year after the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936, excavations were started again. This fresh beginning, initiated above all by scientific interest, was given great encouragement by Baron Pierre de Coubertin's founding of the modern concept of Olympia and the Games.

Zeus



After a preparatory examination by A. von Gerkan, R. Hampe and U. Jantzen the excavation work began in the spring of 1937 northeast of the stadium gate. They discovered bronze-workshops and made numerous finds: sacrificial animals, weapons, chased bronze. Special mention must be made of the stone weight of Akmatidas and the statuette of an athlete starting on his course. As you know, the long jump in antiquity was executed with the help of jumping-weights, made of stone or metal. The purpose of these objects was clearly to increase the body's momentum. The inscription on the upper edge says: "Akmatidas, the Lacedaemonian, winner of the Pentathlon without dust, has dedicated this." It means, that Akmatidas had won without competing and dedicated this weight in order to thank the Olympic Zeus. The weight is made in the beginning of the 5th century B.C.

The figurine of a starting competitor might have been consecrated to Zeus by a winner of the olympic race. The inscription on the right thigh says: "I belong to Zeus." This bronze was made about 480 B. C. in an Argivian workshop.

From the beginning of the winter campaign 1937/38 Emil Kunze had considerable influence on the excavation work in Olympia. Together with the architect Johannes Schleif, and later with the architect Alfred Mallwitz, he directed operations until 1966. The greatest task was the digging out of the entire stadium, freeing approximately 40 000 square metres from various layers of earth and rubble to a height of 3-5 metres.

This hard work threw light on the almost one thousand years history of the stadium,

which had been extended and improved in five different building phases.

After the outbreak of the second World War the excavations near the Hall of Echoes and at the West Wall were continued until the spring of 1942.

It was thanks to the efforts of Prof. Dr h. c. Carl Diem, for many years secretary of the International Olympic Institute in Berlin, that excavations were re-started seven years after the end of the war. The financial backing for the work was initially provided by the Federal Ministry for Home Affairs, later funds were made available by the German Institute of Archeology and the German Research Association.

The excavation work accomplished during the campaigns of 1952-1954 dealt with the clearing of the Stadium course and the West Wall as well as continued work on the clearing of the Leonidaion. Between the years 1954-1958 careful examination was made of the Byzantine church at various levels and the storage-rooms immediately in front of it. Finds were made of the remains of the following materials: cut-ivory, semi-precious stones, ornaments with glass stems and numerous sculptor's tools, which finally convinced the excavators that they were standing on the ground where Phidias had made his Zeus in gold and ivory. The final proof came on the discovery of a small pot with a frieze pattern with the following inscription: "I belong to Phidias".

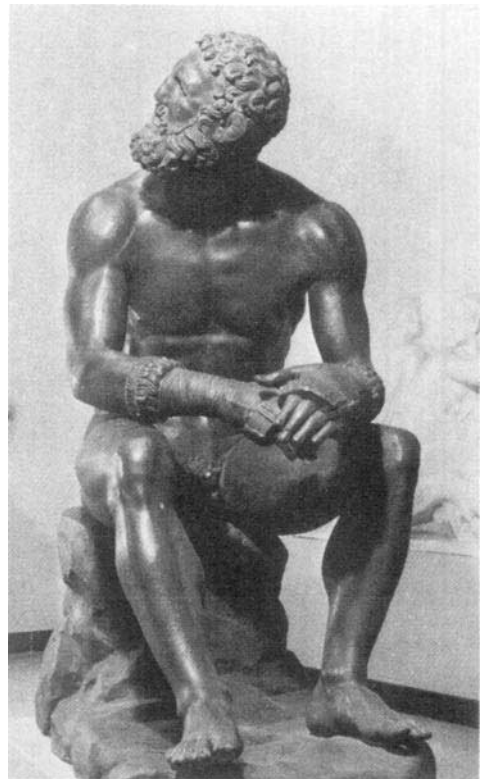
The most difficult task, technically speaking, which occurred in 1958-1961, was the last section of the excavation of the Stadium and the re-assembling of it. The

greater part of the costs arising from this were covered by the helpful intervention of Carl Diem. He himself put up a sum of money for the purpose and obtained further funds from the German Olympic Society and the German Sports Federation. The German Institute of Archeology and the German Research Association contributed again generously.

B.F.

(Following p. 162)

Boxer



(Continued from p. 132)

History of excavations at Olympia

At this point bulldozers and scrapers were employed for the first time to clear away from this ancient ground the great masses of earth from which the finds had been extracted. At the north wall alone 200,000 cubic metres of earth had to be moved and sifted with the aid of pick-axes and shovels and more than forty wells containing particularly precious bronze artefacts examined. The final aim of the work was the complete restoration of this monument, impressive for its sheer size, to the state in which it had existed in the fourth century B. C.

On June 22nd, 1961, the National Olympic Committees of Greece and Germany together with the International Olympic Committee then meeting in Athens held the formal inauguration of the Stadium.

Since the beginning of 1966 further excavations have been going on in Olympia, which have been recently concluded. For several more years researchers will be occupied with the listing, restoration and publication of yet more valuable finds.

B. F.