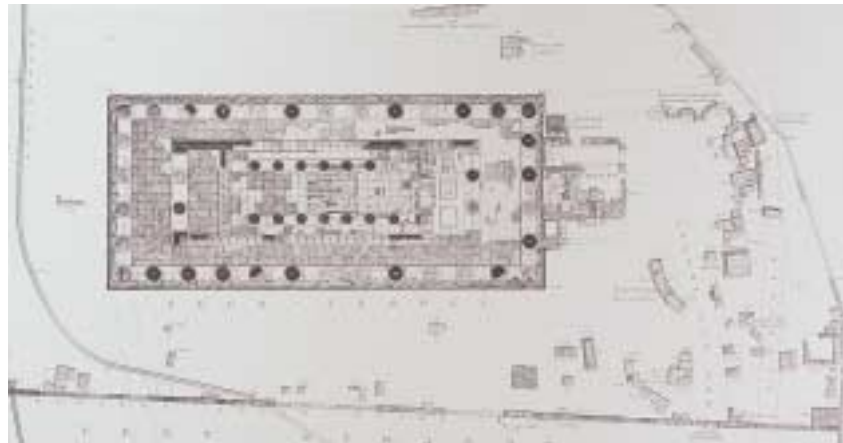




# History of Excavations at Olympia

- 1516 The earliest indication of the site on a map in “modern” times is as Andilalo on a Venetian map by Battista Palnese. The map was first published by C. Sathas in 1880.
- 1723 The Benedictine B. Montfaucon suggested in a letter to Cardinal Quirini of Corfu that Olympia should be excavated.
- 1766 Richard Chandler, English theologian and antiquarian, visited the site. He could see wall stubs and Doric capitals, and identified the site as Olympia.
- 1767 J. Winckelmann, “father” of art history, expressed the view that if only Olympia could be found and excavated, it would reveal those monuments referred to by ancient authors, the exposure of which would reveal the true greatness of ancient Greek art. The following year in a letter from Rome he proposed his own excavation at the site to a colleague at Göttingen University.
- 1791 The 1780 plan of Barbié du Bocage was published by Barthélemy in *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis*. Unfortunately, it was completely wrong, with the stadium and hippodrome placed to the west of Mt. Kronos, and the “Temple de Jupiter” far to the southeast. It is interesting how many buildings, which were in fact not visible in 1780, are marked on the plan, indicating a close reading of Pausanias’ *Guide to Greece* (160 AD) by the mapper.

- 1806 The Englishmen Edward Dodwell and William Gell, assisted by local labourers, exposed part of the Temple of Zeus. They revealed column drums lying in a row and part of the black floor mentioned by Pausanias in his *Guide to Greece*, written around 160 AD.
- 1807 Wilkins published *The Antiquities of Magna Graecia*, in which he included a plan based on the work of Dodwell and Gell. He identified the Temple as a 6 x 13 peripteral temple.
- 1813 Lord Spencer Stanhope and his architect Allason made a measured plan of Olympia.
- 1830 Lt. Leake published *Travels in Morea*, based on his journeys in 1805. He included Stanhope and Allason's plan of Olympia.
- 10 May 1829 Excavation work began under Dubois and A. Blouet of the Louvre by the French team of soldiers and scientists of the Expédition scientifique de Morée. This team had come immediately after Greece had won independence from the Ottoman Empire.  
Work concentrated on the Temple of Zeus. Some fragments of the metopes were found (which are now in the Louvre in Paris). Attempts were made to find the pedimental sculpture, but after realising that the ancient ground surface lay some five metres below the current ground level, east of the Temple of Zeus, work there was abandoned.  
The Triton mosaic in the pronaos (front porch) was exposed, as well as two more columns and more black flooring in the interior of the Temple.  
Leaving the Temple, the team moved to a substantial building further west. This was the Byzantine church, which was subsequently shown to have been built in the ruins of Pheidias' workshop.  
No further excavation was permitted, although the fragments of metopes and other sculptures were removed to the Louvre.  
The French published promptly in three volumes.
- 1834 L. Roß was appointed the Chief Conservator of Antiquities in Greece by King Otto.



*The Temple of Zeus at Olympia, part of one of the detailed plans in Olympia I, folio volume, plate VIe  
With permission Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam*

1875-1881

The Imperial German Archaeological Institute, which had opened offices in Athens, began work at Olympia with the support and permission of the Greek authorities. The work was carried out under the authority of a special contract, which had been ratified by the Greek parliament. This was the first contract of its kind ever issued for an archaeological project. Heinrich Schliemann, famous excavator of Troy and Mycenae, had applied for a licence to excavate Olympia at the same time, and was disappointed to have missed out.

The first project, which ran until 1881 included as directors E. Curtius, W. Dörpfeld, G. Hirschfeld, A. Furtwängler and G. Treu. These men were some of the leaders of Classical Archaeology of their time, and scholars of the highest standards. Curtius in particular had been working since 1836 to obtain backing and permission for just such a project.

Publication was prompt with hundreds of detailed plans, elevations, sections, object drawings and reconstructions.

A museum was opened at the site, where most of the over 14,000 objects inventoried were displayed or stored. The Greek benefactor Andreas Syngros provided the funding for the building which was constructed between 1886 and 1888, designed after ancient Greek structures.

1908-1929

Under Dörpfeld, work resumed, and for the first time evidence of the earliest periods at Olympia was extensively investigated.

- 1936-1943 Spurred by the Berlin Olympics in 1936, a new series of limited excavations were directed by E. Kunze and H. Schleif.
- 1952-1966 E. Kunze and A. Mallwitz directed seasons which were particularly fruitful in establishing the chronology of the site in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. After 25 years work the stadium was fully excavated in 1962.
- 1969 Stephen Miller made a detailed investigation of the *prytaneion* (Council House), as Dörpfeld's work was unclear for the interpretation of this very important building. Unfortunately, Miller was unable to elucidate the exact history of the building, but made corrections to Dörpfeld's work.
- 1972 – present Olympia is under the authority of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, based at the Museum at Ancient Olympia, and which undertakes its own research programme at the site.  
A new museum was opened at Ancient Olympia in 1982, nearly 100 years after the first. This allowed, amongst many other improvements, a new arrangement of the pedimental and metope sculptures from the Temple of Zeus. The *Nike* of Paionios is also now displayed in a wonderful setting. The German Archaeological Institute (DAI), in collaboration with the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, continues to sponsor projects at Olympia.  
Although limited excavations do continue, restoration work is now taking a higher priority.  
The DAI carried out further work on the *prytaneion* (1993-1996), but were unable to solve the problems. Specific issues, such as the retaining wall of the Kladeos are the subject of continuing excavations.  
A major research project dealing with the later history of Olympia has begun, investigating the Roman and Byzantine periods at the site.  
Research work continues on the objects already excavated. Publication of special research topics is undertaken through a substantial monograph series.



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Many other reports can be found in a range of scholarly journals, particularly Greek and German publications.

**Images:**

- Palmette Terracotta akroterion from the workshop of Pheidias at Olympia, made around 430 BC, from *Olympia II: Die Baudenkmäler von Olympia*, F. Adler et. al. Plate CCXXII no. 3 used with permission from Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert
- Temple of Zeus at Olympia plan from *Olympia I: Topographie und Geschichte*, F. Adler et. al., Map VIe used with permission from Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert

