

# The Statue of Zeus at Olympia



The Statue of Zeus at Olympia:  
New Approaches

Edited by

Janette McWilliam, Sonia Puttock,  
Tom Stevenson and Rashna Taraporewalla

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Finally, we want to thank the student volunteers who made our life so much easier as the conference approached and became imminent. The rooms, for instance, were all set up and maintained by student groups, especially the Committee of Postgraduate Students and the Classics and Ancient History Society. We hope they derived benefit from the experience and will look upon this book warmly as something for which they were significantly responsible.

JMc, SP, TS, RT

## Note on abbreviations

Abbreviations of ancient sources and modern works used in the footnotes and bibliography are those of S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, xxix-liv. In addition, the following have been employed:

*BMC Lycaonia, Isauria, and Cilicia* = Hill, G.F. 1900. *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum: Lycaonia, Isauria, and Cilicia*, London: British Museum Press (reprint Bologna: Forni, 1964).

*BMC Peloponnesus* = Gardner, P. 1887. *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum: Peloponnesus (excluding Corinth)*, London: British Museum Press (reprint Bologna: Forni, 1963).

*BMC Syria* = Gardner, P. 1878. *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum: The Seleucid Kings of Syria*, London: British Museum Press (reprint Bologna: Forni, 1977).

*RPC* = Burnett, A., Amandry, M. and Ripollès, P. P. (eds.) 1992, 1999. *Roman Provincial Coinage*, London: British Museum Press; Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

## INTRODUCTION

Around 430 B.C. the great Athenian sculptor Phidias unveiled his latest creation.<sup>1</sup> The leaders of Elis had given him the task of creating a statue of Zeus which would maintain the pre-eminence of the god's renowned sanctuary at Olympia, the site of the Olympic Games. Phidias seems to have succeeded brilliantly. His gold and ivory masterpiece of Zeus seated in awesome majesty became the most famous statue of the ancient world. Although the statue itself does not survive, a considerable amount of literary and other evidence testifies to its outstanding quality, impact on the viewer, and influence throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup>

Many writers expressed their admiration. Perhaps the most famous was Pausanias, the Greek traveller and antiquarian, writing in the mid second century A.D. Towards the end of his detailed description of the statue, Pausanias writes (5.11.9):

The measurements of the Zeus at Olympia, both its height and breadth, have been written down and are known to me, but I will not bestow praise upon those who did the measuring, because the measurements that have been recorded by them are far less impressive than the effect that the statue makes on those who see it.

He goes on to record that Zeus sent a lightning bolt as a sign of his approval (5.11.9):

In fact they say that the god himself bore witness to Phidias' artistic skill. For when the image had just been completed, Phidias prayed to the god to send him a sign if the work was pleasing to him, and at that very moment, they say, a lightning bolt struck the floor at a spot which in my day was covered with a bronze hydria.

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<sup>1</sup> For the date of the statue, see Vlizos 1999, 19-21; Bourke, this volume, n.38 for refs.

<sup>2</sup> For the literary and artistic evidence, see Lapatin, this volume, n.1; Priestley, this volume, n.1 for refs. The best known ancient descriptions are those of Pausanias (5.11.1-9) and Strabo (8.3.30); cf. Lapatin 2001, 80 n.186. Translations in this section are those of Pollitt 1990.

A short treatise wrongly attributed to Philo of Byzantium, a Greek engineer who flourished in the second century B.C., describes the excellence of the statue in religious as well as artistic terms.<sup>3</sup> On the score of fulsome praise, Dio Chrysostom is hard to surpass. A philosopher and rhetorician of the late first century A.D., Dio addresses himself on behalf of his audience to an imaginary Phidias and declares that his statue has a tranquilising, healing effect on viewers (*Or.* 12.50-2):

O best and noblest of artists, that you have created a sweet and engaging sight, an inescapable delight for the vision, for all those Greeks and non-Greeks who have come here on many different occasions – this nobody will deny. For it would even overwhelm those beings in creation that have an irrational nature – the animals – if they could once see this work...And among men, whoever might be burdened with pain in his soul, having borne many misfortunes and pains in his life and never being able to attain sweet sleep, even that man, I believe, standing before this image, would forget all the terrible and harsh things which one must suffer in human life.

In less elevated language, the encyclopaedist Pliny the Elder (*HN* 34.54) declared that there was no rival to the Zeus at Olympia. Quintilian (A.D. 35-95), a contemporary of Pliny, thought that the statue's religious significance was enhanced by its artistic merit, and that its majesty matched that of the god himself (*Inst.* 12.10.9):

...the beauty of [the Phidian Zeus] seems to have added something to traditional religion; to such an extent is the majesty of the work equal to the majesty of the god.

Others such as Strabo, the geographer who wrote at the time of Augustus, claimed that Phidias had been inspired by the famous lines of Homer's *Iliad* in which the supreme god nods in assent to Thetis' prayer, thereby causing 'great Olympus' to shake.<sup>4</sup>

Phidias did not, of course, have a physical model to portray. As a result, some writers believed that he aimed to move beyond the sphere of nature to that of the divine. Cicero (106-43 B.C.) thought that the great Athenian had an extraordinary vision of beauty in his mind (*Orat.* 9):

Surely [Phidias]...was not contemplating any human model from which he took a likeness, but rather some extraordinary vision of beauty resided in

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<sup>3</sup> For the treatise of [Philo], which may date to the sixth century A.D., see McWilliam, this volume, n.6 for refs.

<sup>4</sup> Hom. *Il.* 1.528-30; cf. Strabo 8.3.30; Val. Max. 3.7.4; Plut. *Aem.* 28.2; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12.26, 62.

his mind, and, fixing his mind on this and intuiting its nature, he directed his hand and his art towards making a likeness from it.

Plotinus (*Enn.* 5.8), a leading neo-Platonist philosopher of the third century A.D., argued that Phidias must have moved beyond his physical senses in constructing the statue, instead drawing on his mind and imagining how Zeus would have appeared if the god actually did condescend to show himself to mortal gaze. Such writers saw Phidias as a visionary, a contemplative idealist.

There were indeed writers who expressed reservations about the Phidian Zeus. Diodorus Siculus (26.1) made the point that no work of a mortal could be entirely flawless. Strabo (8.3.30) thought that the statue was too large for the temple that housed it. The iconoclastic Lucian even stooped to jibes at the statue's expense, joking on one occasion that the interior of the Zeus had become infested by rats (*Somn.* 24). According to the biographer Suetonius, the Roman emperor Caligula (A.D. 37-41) wanted the Phidian Zeus brought to Rome, and intended to replace its head with the emperor's own (*Calig.* 2.2; 57.1; cf. Cass. Dio 59.28.3). Among other implications, it seems that Caligula thought the statue could be improved. A further view held that although the Zeus was a surpassing work of art, it was art all the same, and its creator an artist, a common craftsman who made his living with his hands. In the words of Plutarch (*Per.* 2):

No gifted young man, upon seeing the Zeus of Phidias at Olympia, ever wanted to be Phidias...For it does not necessarily follow that, if a work is delightful because of its gracefulness, the man who made it is worthy of our serious regard.

The view of Phidias as a mere craftsman, and of his Zeus as mere art, was hardly the prevailing opinion in the ancient world, just as it has little traction today. One reason for the existence of such views, therefore, seems to have been to attract attention, even to shock. The Phidian Zeus was normally above such treatment.

In light of this evidence, the fame and importance of the Zeus at Olympia can hardly be questioned. It seems quite remarkable, therefore, that the statue has rarely attracted book-length studies, and scholarly analysis has dealt largely with artistic and archaeological questions.<sup>5</sup> There

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<sup>5</sup> For book-length studies of high academic quality, writers continue to cite Liegle 1952, while Lapatin 2001 deals with chryselephantine statues more generally. Scholarship in English is still noticeably reliant on the short 1966 article by Richter.

are probably a number of reasons for this. One is that the statue has not survived, and so there is great interest in what it looked like and how it was created. A second reason, which might initially seem surprising, is that the Zeus has been generally recognised as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Hence it is often treated as one of a set, and is consequently limited as well as elevated. In addition, surviving evidence takes many different forms – archaeological, artistic, numismatic, epigraphic, literary, historical, and philosophical – and involves numerous interpretive problems across genres, cultures, and huge expanses of time. Chapter-length studies, or introductory studies, or treatments of particular aspects of the statue, have seemed more appropriate under these circumstances.

This book effectively constitutes the proceedings of a conference held at the University of Queensland from 2-4 July 2008. The conference was designed to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines, such as art history, archaeology, history, literature, and theology. In general, the organisers looked to the statue itself for a unified focus but sought a wide-ranging treatment, rather than numerous studies of a particular aspect or question. It was hoped that various interdisciplinary perspectives would extend analysis of the statue beyond matters related to artistic concerns and the framework provided by the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. As the conference unfolded, politics, theology and cultural poetics took their place alongside art history, archaeology, and literature. The statue was placed – highly appropriately – in the midst of intense inter-*polis* competition and agonistic rivalries of previously unforeseen kinds. Moreover, receptions of the statue through to the modern period featured strongly. The chapters which follow will hopefully prove useful to researchers in various fields. Perhaps the majority will be interested primarily in classical antiquity, but there is also something for scholars of the Byzantine age, the Renaissance, and more recent centuries.

The first two chapters deal with the political background. Graeme Bourke focuses on the Eleans, who are sometimes overlooked as agents in the creation of the statue. He stresses that decoration of the temple of Zeus at Olympia was carried out according to Elean imperatives, and that the Eleans had reason to celebrate the status of their new democratic *polis*, to proclaim their ties to Athens, and to make a bold statement against Spartan interference. Like the temple itself, the Phidian Zeus is described as a manifestation of the spirit of the new *polis* of Elis, whose *synoikismos* took place in 471 B.C.

Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides examines political thought which probably influenced the decision to represent Zeus as a seated judge holding a sceptre rather than a youthful warrior wielding a thunderbolt. She envisages



the Eleans in consultation with Phidias and explains the form of the statue as a product of debate between tyrannical and paternal conceptions of autocratic rule. Her analysis lays stress upon developments in the image of Zeus, especially in Athens, where a youthful Zeus who supported tyranny and employed force gradually gave way to a more mature god who supported the democracy and dispensed justice.

The next chapter, by Rashna Taraporewalla, also deals with the decision to create the statue, but gives credit to a process of competitive emulation which does much to explain the size and form of the statue. Rashna persuasively refers to the process of 'peer-polity interaction,' which had been operating in preceding centuries between Greek *poleis* of equal status, and had been played out through the construction of monumental temples of competing dimensions and embellishment. In the case of the Phidian Zeus, she identifies ongoing rivalry between Olympia and Athens, and describes the statue as a crowning element in the incremental process of one-upmanship. This chapter approaches competitive emulation in the medium of chryselephantine statuary as an extension of the process involving monumental temples, and considers the significance of the Zeus at Olympia as both a product and catalyst of this phenomenon.

Diana Burton interprets the iconography of the famous statue in terms of interdependence between *nike* (victory) and *dike* (the justice underlying cosmic order). Her analysis dovetails with that of Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides in that the emphasis upon Zeus as a judge is once again seen as highly significant. Rather than describing a more mature, less violent image, however, Diana lays stress upon the polyvalency of features like Nike, the sceptre, the throne, and the myths which adorn the throne. Such features were individually capable of evoking milder and harsher aspects of Zeus by turns, even though the thunderbolt is certainly absent. The underlying ambivalence of Greek thought about monarchy is thereby exposed. *Nike* and *dike* were each loaded with ambiguous associations, and in fact the two were inseparable and interdependent.

Judith M. Barringer takes the analysis into later periods by discussing echoes of the statue of Zeus at the site of Olympia itself. She shows (in a manner which tends to reinforce the findings of Rashna Taraporewalla) how the process of competitive emulation operated within the sanctuary (between monuments) as well as beyond it (between *poleis*). It is demonstrated how some of the famous monuments of the Altis (the Nike by Paeonius, the Philippeion, the Monument of Ptolemy II) were deliberately fashioned so as to engage in dialogue with the Zeus. When read in their context, these sculptural works signal a new way of viewing and interacting with images at Olympia. Moreover, it becomes obvious

that the Phidian Zeus contributed to the idea of the Hellenistic ruler portrait, both at Olympia and elsewhere.

Kenneth Lapatin maintains the focus on ancient receptions of Phidias' lost masterpiece in a careful and illuminating analysis of various objects, including coins, gems, statues and statuettes, which yield representations of the Phidian Zeus. These objects are treated in context in an attempt to understand the significance of the Zeus through changing circumstances. Great care is taken to employ the term 'representations' rather than 'copies' ('representations' must conform to Phidias' iconography in at least its basics). In comparison to Phidias' other great masterpiece, the chryselephantine Athena Parthenos, the Zeus seems to have been employed in fewer contexts, but it had great potency as a symbol of power, authority and protection with universal appeal.

Chapters of a more literary character now come to the fore. Jessica Priestley explains how Callimachus treats the work of Herodotus in *Iambus* 6. The poet evokes Herodotus' interest in 'great and marvellous' works, along with his rhetorical methods for highlighting wonder, but systematically undermines these elements in an ironic treatment involving the statue of Zeus. The famous measurements of the Zeus given by Callimachus are part of a dialogue with Herodotean attitudes and methods which is in turn part of a wider discourse about the value of autopsy versus the value of remote learning. Callimachus' parodic handling of Herodotean rhetoric deflates rather than stimulates the audience's sense of wonder at the Zeus. Jessica sees this procedure as highly provocative, given that the statue was particularly known in antiquity for the awe it inspired. It seems that Callimachus' fundamental point is that even the supreme craftsmanship of the Zeus is inferior to the *technē* which most deserves admiration – fine poetry.

Arlene Allan contributes a penetrating analysis of *Revelation* 4 from the point of view of a Christ-curious gentile, asking how such a person would have interpreted the seated God in the heavenly throne-room. Although there is no longer any question as to the Jewish origins of the *Book of Revelation* and its imagery, Arlene argues that the wider gentile Christian community was probably not as familiar with Hebrew scriptures as their Hebrew Christian counterparts, so that the 'world-famous' statue of Zeus at Olympia, whether known through representations or through literary descriptions, could have served as their image of reference. She then demonstrates ways in which the description of the enthroned God in *Revelation* 4 calls to mind aspects of the Zeus statue and surpasses it, encouraging the faithful to apprehend the magnificence of their God enthroned above all others.

Patrick O'Sullivan rounds out the papers of literary character by examining Dio Chrysostom's *Twelfth Oration* in a manner which illustrates its erudite handling of influences from archaic and classical Greece. In his twelfth oration, of course, Dio gives a supremely elaborate and elegant appraisal of Phidias and his great statue of Zeus. Patrick examines Dio's praise (especially at §§50-52), and argues that, while he quotes Homer (*Od.* 4.221) when describing the effects of the statue on onlookers, his comments are more fully informed by other concepts in archaic poetry and classical literary criticism, including Hesiod's praise of the rhetorical powers of the *aoidos* and *basileus*, Pindar's views on poetry, and Gorgias' aesthetics. The recurrence of these concepts testifies to Dio's erudition as an intellectual of the Second Sophistic, and has implications for ancient debates on the perceived powers of visual and verbal art forms.

Tom Stevenson examines the evidence for the fate of the Phidian Zeus and concludes that transportation to Constantinople, and ultimate destruction by fire there, are the scenarios most in conformity with the evidence, which is nevertheless far from clear, so that alternative interpretations are possible. More precisely, he argues that the statue may have remained intact into the late fourth century A.D., that it was probably transported to Constantinople in the early fifth century A.D., that its association with the so-called 'Collection of Lausus' should be questioned more determinedly than has happened to date, and that it was probably destroyed in one of the awful fires which racked the Byzantine capital in the late fifth century A.D.

Victoria Bladen carries the story of the statue down to the early modern period in a chapter which analyses the representations of Phidias' Zeus by Maarten van Heemskerck and Johann Fischer von Ehrlach. With particular reference to van Heemskerck, Victoria shows how the statue's representation must be interpreted in terms of contemporary understandings of Zeus gleaned from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Like other artists and writers who were interested in interactions between Zeus and mortals, van Heemskerck sought to imbue his Zeus with sensual materiality and dramatic intensity. Such depictions of the supreme classical deity were an opportunity to reflect on the nature of man and the fragile boundaries between the divine and the human, and the human and the bestial.

Kerry Heckenberg traces the statue's influence in European, American and Australian art, especially in seated images of power and majesty. Since the pose, attributes and fame of Phidias' Zeus have for a long time been widely known through literary descriptions and material representations, it provided a powerful model for representations of deities and leaders in

western art. Kerry examines the uptake of this model in the medieval period for representations of Christ, the challenge its formal attributes provided in the Renaissance, difficulties experienced when adapting the model for depictions of leaders such as Napoleon, Washington and Lincoln, and lingering influences in Australian art.

Janette McWilliam rounds out the book by investigating the presence of the Phidian Zeus on the internet. This presence appears at first glance to be extensive, with various types of searches resulting in a vast array of sites. However, a close examination of many of these sites shows that the Zeus is normally described as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. No site attempts a prolonged or scholarly treatment of the statue and, as Janette shows, misinterpretations and misunderstandings abound. The Zeus continues to hold a special place in the cultural imagination of the western world, just as it did in antiquity, but it is seen as a symbol of power and wonder rather than a work of human genius which encourages deeper research. To a fair degree, this conclusion echoes that of Kenneth Lapatin with respect to the symbolic value of Phidias' Zeus in antiquity.

The authors of this book, approaching the statue of Zeus at Olympia from the time of its creation to the time of its destruction, and tracing changes in the cultural reception of the statue through to the present day, hope to reinstate Phidias' chryselephantine masterpiece as an object worthy of wonder in and of itself, rather than as part of a catalogue of marvels of the ancient world. It is further hoped that the chapters herein will stimulate other multi-disciplinary treatments of the Zeus in future, and perhaps raise its profile more comprehensively and meaningfully for a modern audience. The attention and renown accorded the statue in ancient times were commensurate with its size and the skill demonstrated in its execution, and given the profound influence it exerted from the moment of its unveiling through to modern times, it is fitting that the statue continue to command attention worthy of its stature, in both the physical and metaphorical senses.

—JMc, SP, TS, RT

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE STATUE OF ZEUS AT OLYMPIA AND THE *POLIS* OF THE ELEANS

GRAEME BOURKE

In the first half of the fifth century B.C. the Eleans, in whose territory the sanctuary of Olympia was located, built there a magnificent temple of Olympian Zeus. Later in the same century they commissioned the Athenian sculptor Phidias to construct a gold and ivory statue for the temple. A consideration of the iconography of the temple and statue, along with further evidence, suggests that the building programme at Olympia was in part intended both as a celebration of the Elean *synoikismos* of 471 B.C. and a deterrent to outside interference in the internal affairs of the new, democratic *polis*. It can also be understood as a reaffirmation of both the special relationship of the Eleans with Zeus and the central importance of Olympia in the religious affairs of Greece.

A passage from the *Declamations* of the fourth century A.D. rhetorician Himerius provides a convenient starting point. Although he lived eight centuries after the temple was constructed, Himerius was familiar with the works of the early Greek lyric poets, including Simonides. The following anecdote concerning a visit of Simonides to Olympia, despite surviving only in Himerius, is likely to have originated in one of the poet's own works. Himerius reports that:

Ἡλεῖοι ποτε τῆς Σιμωνίδου λύρας λαβόμενοι, ὅτε ἐπὶ τὴν Πίσαν ἔσπευδεν ὕμνῳ κοσμηῆσαι τὸν Δία, δημοσίᾳ φωνῇ τὴν Διὸς πόλιν πρὸ Διὸς ᾄδειν ἐκέλευον.

Once, when Simonides was hurrying to Pisa to honour Zeus with a hymn, the Eleans, catching sight of his lyre, called upon him by public decree to sing the praises of the *polis* of Zeus before Zeus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simon. fr. 84, no. 589 Page (Campbell 1991, 470); cf. Siewert 1991a, 67 n.11; 1994, 30 n.70.

This passage raises several questions: Where was Simonides going? What was ‘the *polis* of Zeus?’ When, and for what purpose, did Simonides make his journey? In what sense did he sing ‘before Zeus?’

### The *Polis* of Zeus

In regard to Simonides’ destination, our sources disagree on what is meant by the term ‘Pisa.’ Pausanias (6.22.1) believed that a *polis* of Pisa had once existed, but found no remains of a city wall, nor of any other buildings, and reported that vines were planted all over the district where he imagined that the city had once been located. Strabo, on the other hand, concluded that there had never been a *polis* called ‘Pisa,’ since, if so, it would have been counted among the eight cities of Pisatis, an apparently well-known list.<sup>2</sup> Further investigation suggests that Strabo was right about this.

The name ‘Pisa’ can be found in neither Homer nor Hesiod, and the late-archaic and early-classical poets, including Stesichorus (perhaps), Xenophanes and Simonides, are our earliest evidence for its use. Strabo reports that ‘some’ (τινές) say that Stesichorus calls the district of Pisa a *polis*,<sup>3</sup> but this third-hand evidence does not even allow us to be sure that the poet actually used the name, since Strabo or his sources may have misunderstood or misconstrued Stesichorus’ original meaning. Even if he did use the term ‘Pisa,’ Stesichorus’ actual words are likely to have been in line with those of Xenophanes and Simonides, for whom it signified the stream, later known as the Cladeus, that ran past the sanctuary of Zeus.<sup>4</sup> Explicit testimony of Pisa as a place is found no earlier than in two odes of Bacchylides and Pindar, both from 476 B.C. Neither poet, however, implies that there was a *polis* of that name, and each uses the term simply to indicate the sacred precinct where the Olympic festival was held,<sup>5</sup> as

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<sup>2</sup> Strabo 8.3.31. Note that while Strabo refers to ‘Pisatai’ from Pisatis, Pausanias (e.g. 6.22.4) has ‘Pisaioi’ from Pisa.

<sup>3</sup> Strabo 8.3.31: Στησίχορον δὲ καλεῖν πόλιν τὴν χώραν Πίσαν λεγομένην; Stesichorus fr. 86, no. 263 Page (Campbell 1991, 176).

<sup>4</sup> Xenophanes 2.3, 21 (Gentili and Prato 1979, 169-70); Simon. fr. 153 D (Campbell 1991, 544); Pind. *Ol.* 14.23; Bourke 2008, 146-9. This stream was diverted to the west of the sanctuary c.700 B.C. to prevent winter flooding of the site, apparently to facilitate the building of permanent structures, and was thus closely associated with the sanctuary from an early period: Sinn 2000, 11, 23-4; Christesen 2007, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Bacchyl. 5.182; Pind. *Ol.* 2.3; 3.9 (Bowra 1969, 78, 84); cf. Simon. no. 519 Page (Campbell 1991, 386).

does Herodotus (2.7.1-2) when he offers a precise calculation of the distance between Athens and Pisa.

Modern scholars are divided over the question of the existence of a political entity called Pisa or Pisatis before the fourth century B.C. Roy, while concluding that ‘there is no reason to believe in a town called Pisa’ at any time, maintains that ‘in the Archaic period Elis struggled with an independent community Pisa,’ located in the district that included Olympia.<sup>6</sup> Luraghi, on the other hand, claims that ‘everyone now agrees [that Pisa] never existed as an independent political entity before being created by the Arcadians in 365 B.C.’<sup>7</sup> While we may doubt that there had ever been a kingdom of Pisa, Pindar’s references to the mythical king Oenomaus as ‘Pisatan’ in an ode dated to 476 B.C. show that by that time a mythology had begun to circulate that spoke of ‘the Pisatans,’ a people unknown in any earlier source.<sup>8</sup> Our earliest epigraphic evidence of a place called ‘Pisa’ belongs to the same period: in an inscription from Olympia of the first quarter of the fifth century B.C., an Elean community called ‘the Chaladrians’ grants citizenship to a certain Deucalion and guarantees his right to land ‘in Pisa.’<sup>9</sup> Pausanias says that ‘the Eleans put down Pisa in war’ before the construction of the temple and statue of Zeus, a statement corroborated by Herodotus’ report of a conflict within Elea during his own lifetime,<sup>10</sup> so the members of some of the Elean communities of the Alpheus valley, taking their collective name from the stream beside which the sanctuary lay, may well have opposed the remaining Eleans in an essentially civil conflict that was resolved shortly before the *synoikismos* of 471 B.C.<sup>11</sup> Even so, it is unlikely that such an amorphous entity was the ‘Pisa’ to which Simonides was hurrying, so we need not doubt that the poet’s intended destination was indeed the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia.

Nor can such a ‘Pisa’ be ‘the *polis* of Zeus’ in the passage from Himerius, since we can hardly expect the Eleans to have called upon Simonides to sing the praises of a hostile political entity, and while it is conceivable that the sanctuary itself might be described as a *polis*, this

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<sup>6</sup> Roy 2004, 500-1, no. 262; cf. Meyer 1950, 1747-52; Siewert 1994, 27-31; Ruggeri 2004, 15-19, 65-7.

<sup>7</sup> Luraghi 2008, 79 with n.36, cf. 76, 213; Niese 1910, 26-47; Inglis 1998, 61-9.

<sup>8</sup> Pind. *Ol.* 1.70 (Bowra 1969, 69).

<sup>9</sup> Minon 2007, 12 (= *IVO* 11). On the date, see Jeffery, *LSAG* 220.8; Minon 2007, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Paus. 5.10.2; Hdt. 4.148.4.

<sup>11</sup> For the Pisaians as Elean, see Niese 1910, 26-47; Inglis 1998, 61-9; Bourke 2008, 145-73; *contra* Meyer 1950, 1732-55. On Pausanias’ use of ‘Pisaians’ rather than ‘Pisatans’, see n.2 above.

would make little sense of the passage. There is, to the contrary, sound reason to believe that ‘the *polis* of Zeus’ was in fact that of the Eleans. The name ‘Elis’ is used eight times in the Homeric literature to designate a region,<sup>12</sup> and there is epigraphic evidence from the sixth century of a people known as ‘the Eleans.’<sup>13</sup> There was, however, no single Elean *polis* until 471 B.C. Before that time, the various communities of the Eleans had been members of a loose religious and political association based upon Olympia itself.<sup>14</sup> Only in the *synoikismos* of 471 B.C. did they come together to form a single political entity.<sup>15</sup> No evidence of a city called ‘Elis’ pre-dates this event, and it is likely that when the various Elean communities of the Peneus and Alpheus valleys united in 471 they chose one of their settlements as a political centre and re-named it ‘Elis,’ thus reviving and re-utilising the Homeric name for the region.<sup>16</sup> The relationship of the citizens of the Elean communities with Olympian Zeus, nevertheless, was a long-standing one by Simonides’ time.

Olympia could not claim the only temple of Olympian Zeus in classical Greece.<sup>17</sup> There was one in Athens, started by the Pisistratids in the sixth century, but not completed until the time of Hadrian.<sup>18</sup> A temple of Olympian Zeus, equal to any in Greece, was begun at Acragas in Sicily

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<sup>12</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2.615; 11.686, 698; *Od.* 13.275; 15.298; 21.347; 24.431; *Hom. Hymn Ap.* 3.426; cf. Strabo 8.3.11.

<sup>13</sup> Minon 2007, 10, 18, 20 (= *IVO* 9, 14, 2); Ebert and Siewert 1999, 392-3.

<sup>14</sup> Kahrstedt 1928, 157-76, esp. 160-3; Bourke 2008, 101-11.

<sup>15</sup> Diod. Sic. 11.54.1; Strabo 8.3.2; cf. Ps.-Scylax 43; Leandros, *FGrH* 492 F13; Paus. 5.4.3; Moggi 1976, 157-60; Roy 2002, 249-51.

<sup>16</sup> In considering Elean history, it is essential to keep in mind that the term ‘Elean’ in both the archaic and classical periods referred to the members of a number of communities scattered across the region that included Olympia, and was not restricted to the inhabitants of a single city: Bourke 2008, 101-11.

<sup>17</sup> Pausanias alone gives Zeus no less than sixty-seven epithets: Paus. 1.32.2; 5.14.1, 7. Schwabl (1972, 253-376) provides a much longer list, with references. Our concern here, however, is with only one of these, Zeus Olympios, ‘Zeus of Olympus.’ It is highly unlikely, as claimed by Burkert (1985, 184), that the epithet Ὀλύμπιος was derived from the name of the festival, τὰ Ὀλύμπια, particularly since Homer, who uses the epithet, does not mention the festival. The name of the festival rather appears to have been derived from the epithet, as does the name of the shrine. Siewert (1991a, 66) finds that the term ‘Olympia’ inscribed on some dedications to Zeus Olympios, including a seventh-century B.C. helmet, ‘denotes no more and nothing other than “shrine of Olympian Zeus.”’ If the god were named after the sanctuary, we would expect Ζεὺς Ὀλυμπικός.

<sup>18</sup> Thuc. 2.15.4; Pl. *Phdr.* 227b; Arist. *Pol.* 5.9.4, 1313b; Andoc. 1.16; Polyb. 26.1.11; Paus. 1.17.2; 18.6, 8; 19.1; 41.1; Plut. *Sol.* 32.2.



early in the fifth century, perhaps as a result of contact with Olympia.<sup>19</sup> Just before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, the Megarian sculptor Theocosmos produced a chryselephantine statue of Olympian Zeus for the Megarian Olympieum (Paus. 1.40.4). Another Olympieum near Syracuse was the scene of battle during the Athenian invasion of Sicily in the late fifth century B.C.<sup>20</sup> It might have been established at the time of the city's foundation as a colony of the Corinthians, particularly if the temple of Olympian Zeus at Corinth, which Pausanias (2.5.5; 3.9.2) says burnt down in the fourth century B.C., also dates from the archaic period. Further evidence suggests, however, that Elean *manteis* from Olympia joined the Corinthians in colonising Syracuse, so perhaps they or their successors were responsible for the temple.<sup>21</sup> Thucydides' report that the Spartans sacrificed at home when excluded from participation in the Olympic festival of 420 B.C. suggests that one of two Spartan temples of Olympian Zeus recorded by Pausanias was in use by at least the classical period,<sup>22</sup> but we cannot assume an archaic origin for either. Pausanias (7.2.9, 20.3) gives no clue as to the date of the Olympieum at Ephesus, nor of that at Patrae in Achaea.

By the classical period, it appears, there were sanctuaries of Zeus Olympios at Athens, Sparta, Megara, Corinth, Acragas, and Syracuse, and there may have been more. By Pausanias' time, the cult was observed in Ephesus and Patrae as well. There is no evidence, however, for the worship of Zeus Olympios at any of these places until at least two centuries after the earliest known dedications to Zeus at Olympia, which date from the tenth century B.C.<sup>23</sup> Nor does the presence of Olympian Zeus in the Homeric epics predate these dedications, since these poems date from no earlier than the mid-seventh century B.C.<sup>24</sup> The early existence of the cult of Zeus Olympios at Olympia suggests that it spread from there to other parts of the Greek world. It appears either to have

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<sup>19</sup> Polyb. 9.27.1-9; Paus. 5.25.5, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Thuc. 6.64.1, 65.3, 70.4, 75.1; 7.4.7, 37.2-3; 42.6; Diod. Sic. 13.6.4; 16.68.1, 83.2; Plut. *Nic.* 16.6.

<sup>21</sup> Pind. *Ol.* 6.4-11; Drachmann 1903, 155-6, 6a-8b; Paus. 5.7.2-3; cf. Pritchett 1985, 50, 53; Malkin 1987, 93-7; Yalouris 1996, 31, 196 n.79; Dillery 2005, 193.

<sup>22</sup> Thuc. 5.50.2; Paus. 2.12.11, 14.5.

<sup>23</sup> Dedicatory inscriptions confirm that the Zeus worshipped at the sanctuary in the archaic period was indeed Olympios: *IVO* 244; Minon 2007, 2, 3, 6, 10 (= *IVO* 6, 5, 1, 9), 36, 37; Siewert 1991a, 65-6; Siewert 1991b, 81-2.

<sup>24</sup> Raafaub and Wallace 2007, 24; cf. Raafaub 1998, 169-93. The epics may even have been composed at a later date than is generally supposed: Hall 2002, 230-6, cf. 54, 153.

originated among the Eleans or to have been adopted by them soon after its inception.

There is also a considerable amount of direct textual support for a close relationship between the Eleans and Olympian Zeus. In the Homeric epics, where the land later called 'Elea' is known simply as 'Elis,' there are seven references to Ἡλῆς δῖα, generally taken to mean 'divine Elis.'<sup>25</sup> This in itself suggests a religious orientation for the region and its people, but we should further note that although the epithet is used liberally in the epics, δῖα, aside from 'divine,' can specifically mean 'belonging to Zeus,' so Ἡλῆς δῖα may be translated 'Elis, the land of Zeus.'<sup>26</sup> This translation is to be preferred, since we have it on the authority of Pindar that the Eleans referred to their country as 'the grove of Olympian Zeus.'<sup>27</sup> Several ancient sources report that the Eleans were considered sacred to Zeus on account of their management of Olympia: Polybius says of the Eleans that 'having received a concession from the Greeks because of the Olympic gathering, they lived in an Elea that was holy and unravaged;' Strabo reports that Elea was sacred to Zeus; and, according to Diodorus, whose work in the chapter cited here is largely based on Ephorus, the Eleans were dedicated to Zeus in the archaic period.<sup>28</sup> This evidence from Homer, Pindar, Polybius, Strabo and Diodorus, considered with the fact that the earliest evidence for the cult of Zeus Olympios comes from Elea, leaves little doubt that the *polis* of Zeus in the passage from Himerius was that of the Eleans, first established in the second year of the 77th Olympiad, 471 B.C.<sup>29</sup>

## The Song(s) of Simonides

In regard to the third question raised by the passage from Himerius, Simonides' visit to Olympia is likely to have taken place during the first Olympic festival after the *synoikismos* of Elis, the 78th, held in 468 B.C.

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<sup>25</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2.615; 11.686, 698; cf. Strabo 8.3.11; Hom. *Od.* 13.275; 15.298; 24.431; Hom. *Hymn Ap.* 3.426.

<sup>26</sup> Frisk 1960, 396-7, 610-11.

<sup>27</sup> Pind. *Isthm.* 2.27-8: τὰν δὴ καλέουσιν Ὀλυμπίου Διὸς ἄλσος.

<sup>28</sup> Polyb. 4.73.9-10; Strabo 8.3.33, cf. 8.1.2; Diod. Sic. 8.1.1. Several scholars argue that the sacred inviolability of the Eleans was fabricated at the end of the fifth century B.C. during the Elean War as a piece of anti-Lacedaemonian propaganda, but there is no actual evidence of this: Bourke 2008, 13-43; Bourke (forthcoming); *contra* Busolt 1880, 18-34; Meyer 1892, 242 n.1; 1937, 342 n; Walbank 1957, 526; Rigsby 1996, 43 with n.6.

<sup>29</sup> Diod. Sic. 11.54.1; Strabo 8.3.2.

Simonides wrote an epitaph for a seer who died at Thermopylae, and the poem known as the ‘new Simonides’ concerns the battle of Plataea, so he was still active at least until after that battle, fought in 479 B.C.<sup>30</sup> The *Suda Lexicon*, moreover, reports that Simonides lived until the 78th Olympiad, 468-465 B.C.<sup>31</sup> If so, the last Olympic festival for which he was alive was the first celebrated after the Elean *synoikismos* of 471 B.C. Before then, there was no ‘*polis* of Zeus’ to sing to, and Himerius’ report that the Eleans called upon him ‘by public decree’ suggests that their democracy, generally associated with the *synoikismos*, was in place by the time of his visit.<sup>32</sup> The *damos* of the Eleans, it seems, asked Simonides to sing the praises of their new, democratic *polis* in the year of the first Olympic festival held after its establishment, the 78th, celebrated in 468 B.C. Since it is unlikely that they suddenly caught sight of Simonides’ lyre as he ‘was hurrying’ to Olympia and called upon him to compose an impromptu lyric, it is sensible to conclude that the Eleans had commissioned the famous poet long in advance both to ‘honour Zeus with a hymn’ and sing the praises of the new *polis*.

This leaves the final question, that of what is meant when Simonides is asked ‘to sing the praises of the *polis* of Zeus before Zeus.’ The variety of meanings that can be attributed to *πρό* makes it unclear how we should understand *πρὸ Διός* in this case.<sup>33</sup> It cannot mean ‘instead of Zeus,’ since the Eleans could not have been so hubristic as to ask that their *polis* receive an honour intended for the god. There remain, it seems, two viable alternatives: that Simonides was asked to sing a song to the *polis* before singing a hymn to Zeus; or that he was asked, in addition to his hymn in honour of the god, to perform a song to the *polis* in front of a representation of Zeus.

Simonides may indeed, passing through Elis in the period leading up to the Olympic festival, have acceded to an earlier request from the Eleans in assembly to sing the praises of their new *polis*. If so, the athletes and their companions had probably gathered there already. In Pausanias’ day (6.23.1-5), athletes were obliged to undertake a period of training in the old gymnasium in Elis before competing at Olympia, and this may have been the case in earlier times. Even so, such a custom is unlikely to have been in place before the *synoikismos* made Elis, rather than Olympia, the

<sup>30</sup> Hdt. 7.228.4; Sider 2001, 13-29; Hornblower 2004, 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Suda Lexicon* s.v. ‘Simonides’ 439; cf. the passages (1-9) in Campbell 1991, 330-6.

<sup>32</sup> Δημοσίᾳ φωνῇ. For φωνέω in the form πωνύω, used to mean ‘testify’ or ‘declare,’ see the Gortyn code in Willetts 1967, 1.19, 2.54.

<sup>33</sup> LSJ, *πρό* with the genitive, A.I, II, III.1; cf. Goodwin 1894, 1215.

political centre of the Eleans, and may even date from the time of Simonides' visit. Pausanias (6.23.8) also records that speeches and recitations were given at the *bouleuterion* of the Eleans. We have no way of knowing whether this was the case in the fifth century B.C., but his report does suggest a public venue for the performance of Simonides' song in praise of the *polis* of Zeus. If the former of the two viable interpretations of  $\pi\rho\delta\ \Delta\iota\omicron\varsigma$  mentioned above is the correct one, Simonides may have been among the first to participate in a dual celebration that linked the new political centre of the Eleans to the shrine that remained their religious heart.

The second alternative, however, that at the 78th Olympic festival Simonides celebrated in song the foundation of the newly unified *polis* of the Eleans in front of a representation, presumably a statue, of Zeus, is also worthy of consideration. It is unlikely that this was the magnificent statue of ivory and gold produced by Phidias. Pausanias records that 'the temple and the statue in honour of Zeus were made from spoils when the Eleans put down Pisa in war' and cites epigraphic evidence that the Athenian Phidias, a contemporary of Pericles, created the statue.<sup>34</sup> Construction of the temple followed 'general improvements to the site...in the 470s' and innovations to the games around 472,<sup>35</sup> so we can conclude that it commenced soon after the 77th Olympiad, 472 B.C.<sup>36</sup> It must have been completed, at the very latest, not long after the victory of the Spartans at Tanagra in 458/7 B.C., since they dedicated a golden shield there from their booty.<sup>37</sup> Pausanias' report (5.10.2) that the temple and statue were both made from the spoils of the conflict with the 'Pisaians' at first glance appears to suggest that the statue belongs to the same period as the temple. Despite this, recent scholarly opinion seems justified in dating the statue to the 430s B.C. rather than the 460s,<sup>38</sup> and we can assume that if Simonides

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<sup>34</sup> Paus. 5.10.2; cf. Polyb. 30.10.6; Strabo 8.3.30; Plin. *HN* 34.19.49, 54, 87; 35.34.55; 36.4.18; Joseph. *AJ* 19.8; Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.6; 2.8, 19; Plut. *Per.* 2.1.

<sup>35</sup> Barringer 2005, 214.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Shaw 2003, 98.

<sup>37</sup> Paus. 5.10.4; cf. Thuc. 1.108.1-3; Diod. Sic. 11.80.2, 6; Robertson 1981, 80; Stewart 1983, 133; Morgan 1990, 18; Jacquemin 1999, 147; Roy 2002, 260; Barringer 2005, 213-14; Hurwit 2005, 136.

<sup>38</sup> Gardner 1929, 280-5; Richter 1950, 222-6; Lawrence 1972, 215-27; Morgan 1990, 18; Lapatin 2001, 79 with nn.179-80; Hurwit 2005, 140-1. The relevant ancient texts include: Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F121; 134.8-15; 135.5-7; Schol. Ar. *Pax* 605 (Dübner 1877, 189-90); Strabo 8.3.30; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12.50; Paus. 5.4.5; 5.11.3, 10; 5.14.5; 5.25.1; 5.26.3; Plut. *Per.* 31.5; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 4.53.4-5.

did sing in front of a statue of Zeus at Olympia in 468 B.C., it was not the one created by Phidias, so it must have been some other statue, most likely one of the many in the Altis, aside from the Zanes, enumerated by Pausanias (5.22.1-24.11).

This suggests that Simonides performed his song in honour of the new *polis* in the open air, most likely in the Altis near the site where progress had already been made on the temple. Such an arrangement would have been fitting, since the citizens of the democratic *polis* would have made sure that they were included in any such celebration: the intention may have been to demonstrate clearly to a large audience of Eleans, Olympic competitors and wealthy spectators from all over the Hellenic world that a new player had arrived upon the Greek political stage, the unified *polis* of the Eleans, dedicated to Olympian Zeus. We can thus conclude that whichever of the two viable interpretations of  $\pi\rho\delta\ \Delta\iota\omicron\varsigma$  in the passage from Himerius considered above is the correct one, the Olympic festival of 468 B.C., following the *synoikismos* and the commencement of the temple of Zeus in the previous few years, was the occasion for a public celebration of the new *polis*. The temple itself may be viewed as part of the same celebration.

### **The *Polis* of Zeus and the Statue of Zeus**

Phidias' statue came later than both the song and the temple, but we may see it too as a manifestation of the spirit of the *polis* of Zeus. Pausanias says that the Eleans commissioned the Zeus of Phidias from the spoils of the Pisaian war, but in another passage suggests that peace was achieved in Elea by reconciliation rather than the defeat and surrender of one side.<sup>39</sup> The question would then have arisen of what to do with the booty that the various communities had accumulated as they won victories over their rivals. To allow each to retain what it had acquired may have been considered out of keeping with the spirit of reconciliation, but to attempt to return each item or sum of money to its previous owner would have presented considerable practical difficulties, so perhaps it was agreed that this wealth should become the property of Zeus.

While these spoils alone may not have been sufficient to meet the expenses of both temple and statue,<sup>40</sup> the Eleans appear to have had other

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<sup>39</sup> Paus. 5.16.5-6; Bourke 2008, 173, 208.

<sup>40</sup> Richter (1950, 226-7) suggests that funds for the statue must have been contributed later by the whole of Greece, but there is no evidence that this occurred, and Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 12.25, 49, 52, 72, 82) confirms that it was produced at the Eleans' own expense. The statue, furthermore, may not have been

lucrative sources of income during this period. It is clear that theirs was a particularly wealthy and populous region of Greece by the end of the fifth century B.C., since Xenophon reports that in 401 the Spartans and their allies carried off an enormous quantity of booty during the Elean War, and this from the countryside alone, without having captured the city of Elis itself.<sup>41</sup> We need not doubt that the Eleans were just as prosperous in the middle of the same century, especially since they seem to have lived in peace for the entire period from the commencement of the temple to the completion of the statue. In addition, the rising fame of Olympia in the classical period generated funds by way of increased profits from the festival. From 468 B.C., the first Olympiad after the commencement of the temple and the same year in which Simonides sang in praise of their new *polis*, the Eleans regularly issued special, finely crafted but under-weight coins for the duration of each Olympic celebration. Upon arrival at Olympia, visitors had to exchange full-weight coins for these lighter ones.<sup>42</sup> This coin exchange must have returned a tidy profit to the sanctuary, regularly supplementing what remained of the treasure that appears to have been acquired as a result of the civil conflict and subsequent reconciliation. Zeus may thus have made a significant contribution to the cost of his own statue.

The Eleans who administered the god's treasury determined how the money would be spent, and decisions about the subject matter (though not necessarily the style) of Greek temple decoration in general appear to have been made by the relevant religious and secular authorities.<sup>43</sup> The iconography of the temple and statue of Zeus reveals that both were constructed with local themes in mind. The sculptures on the two pediments and twelve metopes that decorated the temple 'were created to serve as positive models to inspire and exhort Olympic athletes to deeds of honor and glory.'<sup>44</sup> While the west pediment depicts the battle of the Lapiths, a Greek people aided by the Athenian hero Theseus, against the Centaurs, the east pediment shows the preparations for the chariot race between Pelops and Oenomaus. Each metope illustrates one of the twelve

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as expensive as some assume: Lapatin 2001, 81-3; *contra*, for example, Palagia 2000, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.26. Polybius has much the same to say concerning the invasion of Philip V in the late third century: Polyb. 4.73.4-75.8.

<sup>42</sup> *Coins of Olympia: the BCD Collection* 2004, 9-12; Kraay 1976, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Robertson 1981, 89; cf. Burton (forthcoming), who allows Phidias considerable, but not sole, input.

<sup>44</sup> Barringer 2005, 211; cf. Lapatin 2001, 84.