

# Panhellenism in the Sculptures of the Zeus Temple at Olympia

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**G**REEK ARCHITECTURAL SCULPTURE in stone is as old as the Greek stone temple. By the early fifth century B.C. the Greeks had also developed the idea of programmatic design in architectural sculpture. The thematic connections were simple and concrete. The metopes of the Athenian Treasury at Delphi, for example, present the comparison of the labors of Herakles and of Theseus. At Aigina the program occupying the pediments of the Aphaia Temple consisted of scenes from the two Greek expeditions against Troy.

A century later, however, thematic planning of architectural sculpture had moved far beyond such simple and obvious programs and could be conceived with connections that were more suggestive and abstract than declarative and concrete. A case in point is the Nereid Monument at Xanthos in Lycia, a princely tomb designed by a Greek architect and decorated by Greek artists at the beginning of the fourth century B.C. As interpreted by Panofsky,<sup>1</sup> the frieze of the podium combines scenes from the career of the owner of the tomb with mythical scenes meant to reflect that career on an heroic plane. In the colonnade celestial abstractions suggest a benevolent atmosphere. A final motive of apotheosis is expressed by figures of the Dioskouroi in the pediments.

The century between the Aphaia Temple and the Nereid Monument saw the design and execution of the monumental architectural sculpture of the high classical age. The best preserved and best known of these sculptures are those of the Parthenon and Hephaisteion in Athens and of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. The Athenian buildings and the programs of their sculptures have been the subject of

<sup>1</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture* (New York 1964) 21-3.

recent discussion.<sup>2</sup> This article examines the sculptural themes of the Zeus Temple. Dedicated in 458, it is earlier than the Periklean monuments, and it embodies in its sculptures the transition from archaic design to classical program.

Discussion of the Olympia sculptures must begin with Pausanias (5.10.6–9). I cite the Teubner text of F. Spiro, followed by Sir James G. Frazer's translation.

τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς αἰετοῖς, ἔστιν ἔμπροσθεν Πέλοπος ἢ πρὸς Οἰνόμαον τῶν ἵππων ἄμιλλα ἔτι μέλλουσα καὶ τὸ ἔργον τοῦ δρόμου παρὰ ἀμφοτέρων ἐν παρασκευῇ. Διὸς δὲ ἀγάλματος κατὰ μέσον πεποιημένου μάλιστα τὸν αἰτόν, ἔστιν Οἰνόμαος ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Διὸς ἐπικείμενος κράνος τῇ κεφαλῇ, παρὰ δὲ αὐτὸν γυνὴ Στερόπη, θυγατέρων καὶ αὐτῆ τῶν Ἄτλαντος· Μυρτίλος δέ, ὃς ἤλαυνε τῷ Οἰνομάῳ τὸ ἄρμα, κάθηται πρὸ τῶν ἵππων, οἱ δὲ εἰσιν ἀριθμὸν οἱ ἵπποι τέσσαρες. μετὰ δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσιν ἄνδρες δύο· ὀνόματα μὲν σφισιν οὐκ ἔστι, θεραπεύειν δὲ ἄρα τοὺς ἵππους καὶ τούτοις προσετέτακτο ὑπὸ τοῦ Οἰνομάου. πρὸς αὐτῷ δὲ κατάκειται τῷ πέρατι Κλάδεος· ἔχει δὲ καὶ ἐς τὰ ἄλλα παρ' Ἡλείων τιμὰς ποταμῶν μάλιστα μετὰ γε Ἀλφειόν. τὰ δὲ ἐς ἀριστερὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ Διὸς ὁ Πέλοψ καὶ Ἰπποδάμεια καὶ ὃ τε ἠνιοχὸς ἔστι τοῦ Πέλοπος καὶ ἵπποι δύο τε ἄνδρες, ἵπποκόμοι δὴ καὶ οὗτοι τῷ Πέλοπι. καὶ αὐθις ὁ αἰετὸς κάτεισιν ἐς στενόν, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο Ἀλφειὸς ἐπ' αὐτοῦ πεποιήται. τῷ δὲ ἀνδρὶ ὃς ἠνιοχεῖ τῷ Πέλοπι λόγῳ μὲν τῷ Τροίζη-νίων ἔστιν ὄνομα Σφαῖρος, ὃ δὲ ἐξηγητῆς ἔφασκεν ὃ ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ Κίλλαν εἶναι. τὰ μὲν δὴ ἔμπροσθεν <ἐν> τοῖς αἰετοῖς ἔστι Παιωνίου, γένος ἐκ Μένδης τῆς Θρακίας, τὰ δὲ ὀπισθεν αὐτῶν Ἀλκαμένους, ἀνδρὸς ἠλικίαν τε κατὰ Φειδίαν καὶ δευτερεῖα ἐνεγκάμενου σοφίας ἐς ποίησιν ἀγαλμάτων. τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς αἰετοῖς ἔστιν αὐτῷ Λαπιθῶν ἐν τῷ Πειρίθου γάμῳ πρὸς Κενταύρους ἢ μάχη. κατὰ μὲν δὴ τοῦ αἰετοῦ τὸ μέσον Πειρίθους ἔστιν· παρὰ δὲ αὐτὸν τῇ μὲν Εὐρυτίων ἠρπακῶς τὴν γυναῖκά ἐστι τοῦ Πειρίθου καὶ ἀμύνων Καινεὺς τῷ Πειρίθῳ, τῇ δὲ Θησεὺς ἀμυνόμενος πελέκει τοὺς Κενταύρους· Κένταυρος δὲ ὁ μὲν παρθένον, ὃ δὲ παῖδα ἠρπακῶς ἔστιν ὠραῖον. ἐποίησε δὲ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν ταῦτα ὁ Ἀλκαμένης, Πειρίθου τε εἶναι Διὸς ἐν ἔπεσι τοῖς Ὀμήρου δεδιδραγμένους καὶ Θησεῖα ἐπιστάμενος ὡς εἶη τέταρτος <ἀπὸ> Πέλοπος·

ἔστι δὲ ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ καὶ Ἡρακλέους τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἔργων. ὑπὲρ μὲν τοῦ ναοῦ πεποιήται τῶν θυρῶν ἢ ἐξ Ἀρκαδίας ἄργα τοῦ υἱὸς καὶ τὰ πρὸς

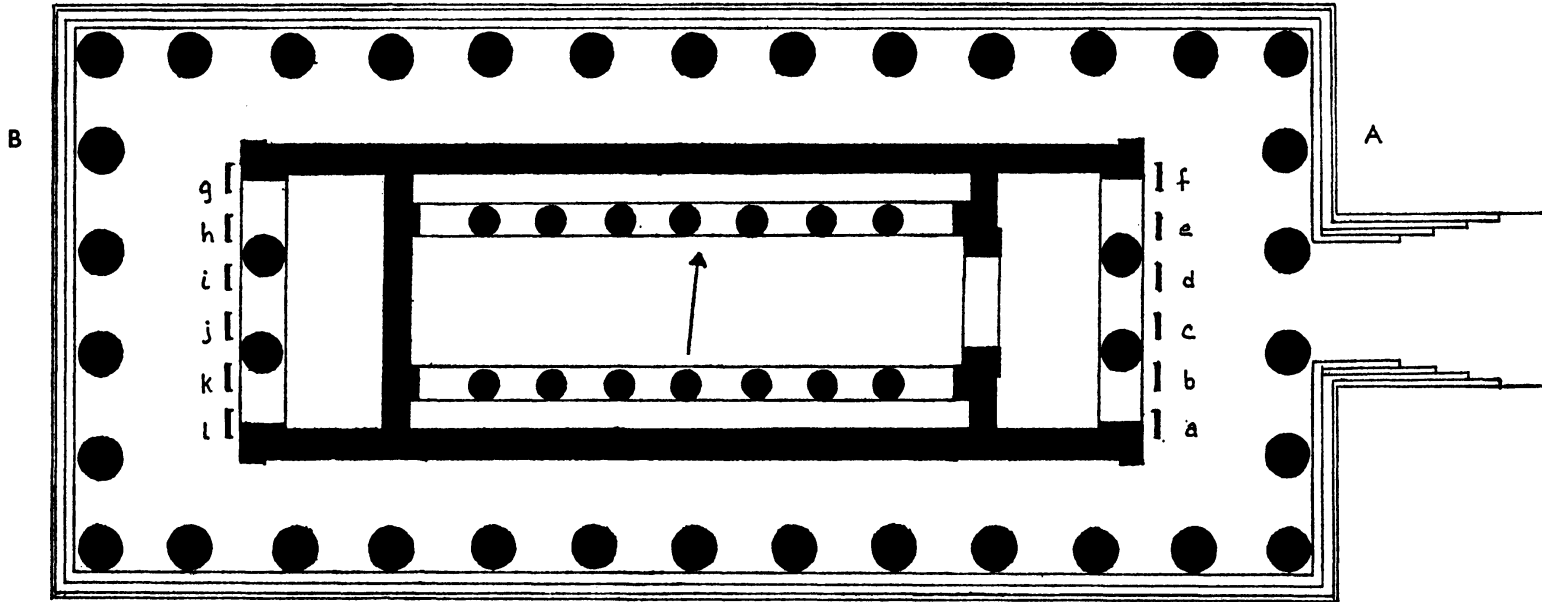
<sup>2</sup> E.g. C. H. Morgan, "The Sculpture of the Hephaisteion: III," *Hesperia* 32 (1963) 91–108; R. R. Holloway, "The Archaic Acropolis and the Parthenon Frieze," *Art Bulletin* 48 (1966) 223–6; Evelyn B. Harrison, "Athena and Athens in the East Pediment of the Parthenon," *AJA* 71 (1967) 27–58.

*Διομήδην τὸν Θρᾶκα καὶ ἐν Ἐρυθραίᾳ πρὸς Γηρυόνην, καὶ Ἄτλαντός τε τὸ φόρημα ἐκδέχεσθαι μέλλων καὶ τῆς κόπρου καθαίρων τὴν γῆν ἔστιν Ἥλείοις· ὑπὲρ δὲ τοῦ ὀπισθοδόμου τῶν θυρῶν [ὁ] τοῦ ζωστήρος τὴν Ἀμαζόνα ἔστιν ἀφαιρούμενος καὶ τὰ ἐς τὴν ἔλαφον καὶ τὸν ἐν Κνωσσῶ ταῦρον καὶ ὄρνιθας τὰς ἐπὶ Στυμφήλῳ καὶ ἐς ὕδραν τε καὶ τὸν ἐν τῇ γῆ τῇ Ἀργείᾳ λέοντα.*

As to the sculptures in the gables: in the front gable there is represented the chariot-race between Pelops and Oenomaus about to begin; both are preparing for the race. An image of Zeus stands just at the middle of the gable: on the right of Zeus is Oenomaus with a helmet on his head, and beside him is his wife Sterope, one of the daughters of Atlas. Myrtilus, who drove the chariot of Oenomaus, is seated in front of the horses: his horses are four in number. After him there are two men: they have no names, but seemingly they also were ordered by Oenomaus to look after the horses. At the very extremity Cladeus is lying down: next to the Alpheus the Cladeus is the river most honoured by the Eleans. On the left of Zeus are Pelops and Hippodamia, and the charioteer of Pelops, and the horses, and two men, supposed to be grooms of Pelops. Where the gable again narrows down, Alpheus is represented. The name of Pelops' charioteer, according to the Troezenians, is Sphaerus; but the guide at Olympia said it was Cillas. The figures in the front gable are by Paeonius, a native of Mende in Thrace: the figures in the back gable are by Alcamenes, a contemporary of Phidias, and only second to him as a sculptor. His work in the gable represents the battle of the Lapiths with the Centaurs at the wedding of Pirithous. At the middle of the gable is Pirithous: beside him, on the one hand, are Eurytion, who has snatched up the wife of Perithous, and Caeneus, who is succouring Pirithous; on the other hand is Theseus repelling the Centaurs with an axe; one Centaur has caught up a maiden, another a blooming youth. Alcamenes, it seems to me, represented this scene because he had learned from Homer that Pirithous was a son of Zeus, and because he knew that Theseus was a great grandson of Pelops. Most of the labours of Hercules are also represented at Olympia. Above the doors of the temple is the hunting of the Arcadian boar, and the affair with Diomedes the Thracian, and that with Geryon at Erythea, and Hercules about to take the burden of Atlas on himself, and Hercules cleansing the land of the Eleans from the dung. Above the doors of the back chamber is Hercules wresting from the Amazon her girdle, and the stories of the deer, and the bull in Cnosus, and the birds at Stymphalus, and the hydra, and the lion in the land of Argos.

In cataloguing the sculpture Pausanias overlooked only the Kerberos metope, of which fragments came to light during the German excavations that permitted Curtius to fit the scene into its place between the

Figure 1. TEMPLE OF ZEUS, OLYMPIA



- A EAST PEDIMENT PELOPS AND OINOMAOIS WITH ZEUS  
 B WEST PEDIMENT THESEUS AND PERITHOOS vs. CENTAURS WITH APOLLO

FRIEZE LABORS OF HERAKLES

<i>over pronaos</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>opisthodomos</i>
a BOAR (Peloponnesos)		g LION (Peloponnesos)
b MARES (Thrace)		h HYDRA (Peloponnesos)
c GERYON (West)		i BIRDS (Peloponnesos)
d APPLES (West)		j BULL (Crete)
e KERBEROS		k HIND (Peloponnesos)
f STABLES (Peloponnesos)		l AMAZON (Asia Minor)

episodes of Atlas and the Apples of the Hesperides and that of the Augean stables.<sup>3</sup> The position of all the sculptures is shown in figure 1.

Pausanias realized that the subject of the west pediment was not a natural one for the Temple of Zeus or for the thematic company in which it was placed. He reassured himself and his readers by a genealogical explanation. Pausanias is not infallible, and the misgivings he felt about the identification of the west pediment have not been left unnoticed by modern scholars. Wilamowitz insisted that the subject was an Elean centauro-machy, Herakles saving Mnesimache (sometimes called Hippolyte or Deianeira), daughter of King Dexamenes of Elis (or Olenos in Achaia), from forced betrothal to, or the unsolicited advances of, the centaur Eurytos. Subsequently Wilamowitz modified his position. Herakles was dropped, and the importance of the two young heroes shown battling the centaurs was emphasized. The two heroes, Wilamowitz reasoned, suggested a double marriage, namely the wedding of the Elean princes Eurytos and Kteates with two daughters of the same Dexamenes.<sup>4</sup> Since one of the kings of Olenos, Phorbas, was a Lapith (who also had connections with Elis), there was a chance that Dexamenes and his family were Lapiths too. But unless the pediment is interpreted as Herakles defending Mnesimache, there is no literary support for the Elean centauro-machy. And if one does see Herakles in the pediment, there are other serious objections.

The masters of the Olympia sculptures were profoundly interested in youth and age and the character of youth and age.<sup>5</sup> To judge from what we know of the building of the Parthenon and the Temple of Asklepios at Epidauros, sculpture over the columns of the pronaos and opisthodomos (*i.e.* the metope series) would have been in place well before the pedimental groups were executed and installed.<sup>6</sup> On the metopes of the Zeus Temple Herakles is a powerful but aging hero. If Wilamowitz' interpretation is correct, the sculptors of the west pediment then chose to make him one of the two youthful figures who battle the centaurs and share the center of the pedimental composition with Apollo. Worse still, King Dexamenes, the father of

<sup>3</sup> "Die Tempelgiebel von Olympia," *AbhBerl* 54 (1891) 5.

<sup>4</sup> In *Euripides Herakles*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin 1895) p.60 n.110; also in "Die griechische Heldensage. II," *SitzBerl* 17 (1925) 237 n.2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. Ashmole, "Some Nameless Sculptors of the Fifth Century B.C.," *ProcBritAcad* 48 (1963) 213-33.

<sup>6</sup> Parthenon, *IG I*<sup>2</sup> 352ff; Epidauros, *IG IV*<sup>2</sup> i 102. Cf. A. Burford, "The Builders of the Parthenon" in *Parthenon and Parthenon*, Suppl. to *Greece and Rome* 10 (1963) 23-35.

a marriageable daughter, would also be presented as a mere youth. Such inconsistency does not fit the minds that created the Olympia sculptures.

The judgement of Pausanias must also be taken into account. It is one thing to say that Pausanias was often misinformed, as he seems to have been about the authorship of the Olympia pedimental sculptures.<sup>7</sup> One must also admit that his sense of scale and memory were also faulty, as in judging the Athene Temple at Tegea to be the largest in the Peloponnese (8.45.5). It is quite something else to say that a man with his knowledge of religious antiquities, who could offer corrections to his local guide on such small points as the name of Pelops' charioteer, did not know what he was looking at when he described the scene of the west pediment of the Zeus Temple.

We must now ask what success the defenders of Pausanias have attained in finding a meaning for the Thessalian centauro-machy in the Olympia program. After a lengthy discussion Buschor arrived at the conclusion that the theme was "new divinities," or, as Seltman translated the idea, "humanity transfigured by its destiny."<sup>8</sup> If this must include Zeus, Apollo and Herakles, the idea is too vague to be satisfactory. More explicit allegorical interpretations share the common defect of failing to embrace the full sculptural program. This is the case even with Treu's idea that the victory over the brutal and sub-human implied by the victory over the centaurs stands for the common welfare of Hellas.<sup>9</sup> It is still more true of the various early attempts to see the west pediment as a memorial of a particular victory.<sup>10</sup> Even if the west pediment commemorated the triumph of Elis over Pisa in 471, the event cited by Pausanias (5.10.2) as the motivation for the construction of the temple, one would face the anomaly of a single allegorical scene in company with direct and concrete

<sup>7</sup> The now famous black glazed cup with Pheidias' name scratched on its bottom and found in the workshop where the great Zeus was made proves that the master was working at Olympia on the Zeus in the late 430's or 420's and makes it extremely unlikely that either of his two younger associates, Paionios and Alkamenes, could have had one of the great commissions for the pediments thirty years before. For the cup and workshop, A. Mallwitz and W. Schiering, "Die Werkstatt des Pheidias in Olympia," *Olympische Forschungen* 5 (1964). The cup is illustrated on pl. 64; also in *AJA* 63 (1959) pl. 75, fig. 9-10, and *BCH* 83 (1959) pl. 33. |

<sup>8</sup> E. Buschor and R. Hamann, *Die Skulpturen des Zeustempels zu Olympia* (Marburg-Lahn 1924) 21-6; C. T. Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art* (London 1948) 63.

<sup>9</sup> *Olympia, Textband III*: G. Treu, *Die Bildwerke von Olympia in Stein und Thon* (Berlin 1897) 132-7.

<sup>10</sup> For bibliography, see *ibid.* 137.

representations of Pelops and Herakles. There has been one special development of the idea of historical allegory. In 1880 Colvin suggested that the centauromachy commemorated the victories of Marathon, Salamis and Plataia.<sup>11</sup> The prominence of Theseus, he argued, gave a distinctly Athenian tinge to the commemoration and provided the grounds for seeing Athenian influence at work in the decoration of the temple. This argument has been used to support the attribution of the sculptures to Athenian artists.<sup>12</sup>

A satisfactory interpretation of the pediment should take account of the aims that the administrators of the sanctuary may reasonably be expected to have had in mind when they discussed the decoration of the temple with the artists in charge. One may seriously doubt if the Hellanodikai would have wished to advertise (even in allegory) the dirty little war that erased Pisa in 471. But if we look at the decoration of the temple through the eyes of the visitors to the Olympic Festival, there is evidence that the program of sculpture was meant to emphasize Olympia's ties to the entire Greek world.

Approaching the temple from the east, the visitor saw Pelops and Oinomaos preparing for their fateful encounter on the chariot course. The story did not discredit Olympia. As Pindar told it, Pelops won by virtue of Poseidon's horses, not by sabotage.<sup>13</sup> Pelops came from Asia Minor, and this fact takes on some significance if we remember that exactly in the center of the frieze over the pronaos and exactly in the line of vision of our hypothetical visitor approaching from the east were the metopes with the battle of Herakles and Geryon and the scene of Herakles and Atlas (the Apples of the Hesperides). Both adventures took place in the far western Mediterranean and introduced a geographical balance to the pediment above.

The standard sequence of the *dōdekathlon* as recorded by Diodoros and Apollodoros is:<sup>14</sup>

LION, HYDRA, BOAR OF HIND, STABLES OF BIRDS  
MARES OF BULL, AMAZON, GERYON, KERBEROS OF APPLES

<sup>11</sup> S. Colvin, "On Representations of Centaurs in Greek Vase-Painting," *JHS* 1 (1880) 109.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. C. H. Morgan, "Pheidias and Olympia," *Hesperia* 21 (1952) 295-339.

<sup>13</sup> *Ol.* 1.75ff; cf. S. Stucchi, "La decorazione figurata del tempio di Zeus ad Olimpia," *Annuario* n.s. 14-16 (1952-1954) 128-9.

<sup>14</sup> Diodoros 4.2.1ff, Apollodoros 2.5. The following remarks on the rearrangement of the *dōdekathlon* at Olympia are derived from C. H. Morgan, "The Sculptures of the Hephaisteion: I," *Hesperia* 31 (1962) 216-7.

The sequence at Olympia is:

over the opisthodomos (west): LION, HYDRA, BIRDS, BULL, HIND,  
AMAZON  
over the pronaos (east): BOAR, MARES, GERYON, APPLES, KERBEROS,  
STABLES

At Olympia the sequence has been rearranged (1) to bring the Elean adventure, the stables, into prominence at the corners of the east (and principal) frieze, and (2) to present the protagonist and the antagonist of the story, Herakles and Eurystheus, who appear together in the scene of the boar, on the east frieze, where they occupy the end opposite to the Elean stables. Furthermore, the sequence Geryon–Apples, rather than Geryon–Kerberos, was adopted with the resulting emphasis on the labors in the western world directly over the entrance to the naos of the temple. Looking at the sculptures of the east frieze our visitor to the temple is also reminded of Herakles in the Peloponnese (Erymanthos and Elis) and of his exploits in Thrace (the mares of Diomedes). Passing to the western side of the temple he found the core of the Peloponnesian labors together with the Cretan Bull and the Amazon (Asia Minor). Looking up on the west front to the pediment above, where Theseus and Perithoös battled the centaurs, he found reference to two important areas of the Greek world untouched by the *dōdekathlon*, Attica and Thessaly.

That such geographical reference could be an important consideration in the planning of the Hellanodikai is obvious if we remember how much the Athenian visitor to Delphi, like the servant girls in Euripides *Ion* 209–11, was cheered by the sight of his own goddess Athene in the sculpture of Apollo's temple. And so at Olympia, whether the visitor came from Asia Minor or Thrace, Thessaly or Boiotia (the birthplace of Herakles), Attica or the Peloponnese, Sicily, Crete or Massilia, there was something that he could call his own.

This simple and hospitable design was the program of the Olympia sculpture. The metope cycle and each of the two pediments remained discrete entities. The characters of one do not reappear in another, as they do in the Periklean programs of the Hephaestion and Parthenon for the purpose of making a connected statement through the different phases of the sculptural decoration. At Olympia the sculpture retains something of the separateness of archaic architectural sculpture. But in seeking to make reference to each part of the Hellenic world,



Olympia has a complexity of design unknown in the Athenian treasury at Delphi or in the Aphaia Temple on Aigina. This is the intermediate and necessary stage of development between the late archaic programs and the allegorical thinking of the Periklean Age.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The author wishes to thank Mrs Dirk T. D. Held for drawing Figure 1.