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Olympia: The Sculptures of the Temple of Zeus by Bernard Ashmole, Nicholas Yalouris and Alison Frantz (Review)

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The Archaeologist's Bookshelf

OLYMPIA: *The Sculptures of the Temple of Zeus*, by BERNARD ASHMOLE and NICHOLAS YALOURIS. With new photographs by ALISON FRANTZ. 188 pages, 211 plates, frontispiece, foldout plate, 25 figures, 5 drawings, plan, map. Phaidon Press, London 1967 \$15.00

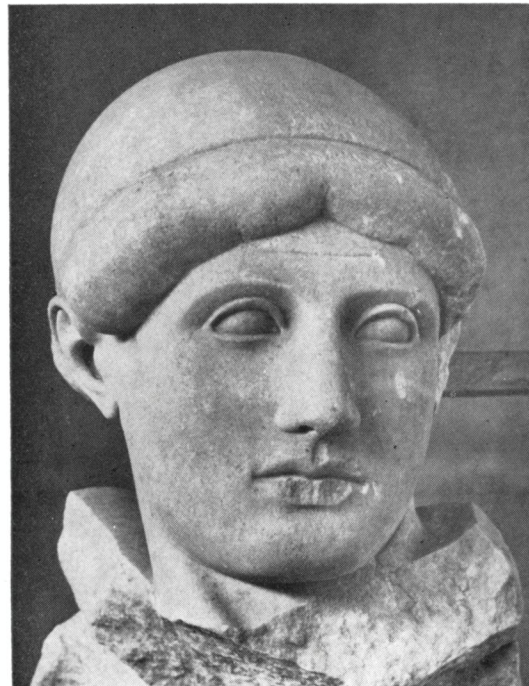
To say something new about the sculptures of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia seems almost impossible. Ever since their discovery—the first few pieces by the French in 1829 and then, between 1876 and 1882, by the Germans—scholars of all nationalities have tried to solve the puzzle presented by the innumerable extant fragments. By 1943, twenty-seven different arrangements had been suggested for the east pediment alone, and the number has increased since then! This very wealth of previous scholarship seems to make it impossible to speak concisely of the Olympia sculptures. Yet this double impossibility, novelty and concision, has been overcome by the two authors, each excellently qualified for the task, in a book which can receive only unrestricted and enthusiastic praise.

In thirty-two pages of text Bernard Ashmole, in his beautiful, lucid style, presents the complete evidence for two pedimental compositions, twelve carved metopes and a colossal cult statue. He also includes Pausanias' text and translation, an annotated bibliography and some prefatory remarks on the site and nature of the sanctuary, the historical and artistic climate of the times, the temple plan and the sculptural technique. In his turn, Nicholas Yalouris matter-of-factly informs the reader that 199 new pieces have been either attrib-

uted or incorporated into the sculptures during the last decade! The initiated reader feels confronted with the literary equivalent of an iceberg: a peak of scholarship based on a formidable though invisible foundation of previous knowledge and research. The uninitiated, unaware of the invisible mountain beneath the surface, rejoices in the beauty and simplicity of the summit.

Yet for all its clarity, the book gives a good example of the difficulties inherent in the subject: the authors disagree in their reconstructions. Each presents his opinions with supporting arguments and allows the reader to choose between them; thus the book is especially

West pediment, Figure M: Theseus, the Athenian hero and close friend of the Lapiths' King Peirithoos. At Peirithoos' wedding banquet, the intoxicated centaurs tried to kidnap the Lapith women and a violent battle ensued. Theseus fought with his friend. Notice the undetailed hair, to be finished in paint, and the lined forehead as sole indication of the effort of fighting.



valuable for students, who are forced to decide for themselves.

And here lies the third superb feature of the book. Tempting the reader to try a reconstruction of his own are the new illustrations by Alison Frantz, so good that only a trip to Olympia could provide better visual information. My only regret is that the pedimental statues were not photographed from the rear, perhaps because of their present setting. The technical peculiarities of the unfinished or only partly finished backs have hitherto been largely neglected and fully deserve photographic commentary. Perhaps this opportunity will arise when the sculptures are moved to the new Museum, thus prompting a new edition of the book. For the time being, it is rewarding to find many technical comments in the text.

The Temple of Zeus was built between 469 and 456 B.C., complete with sculptural decoration. The cult statue, as recent excavations have shown, was made by Phidias a generation later. Then a series of mishaps befell both statue and temple. Already by the mid-fourth century B.C. extensive damage to the building required repairs to some architectural sculpture, and the replacement of an entire figure in the west pediment. By the first century B.C. two new statues had been added to

Olympia, Temple of Zeus, east pediment, Figure P: a river god, probably Kladeos, stares at the central group, where King Oinomaos stands ready to challenge the suitor Pelops to the fateful chariot race for the hand of Hippodameia. The reclining Kladeos not only admirably fills the awkward triangular space and suggests the course of the river in its bed, but also gives a topographical indication of where the scene is taking place.



the same gable, and many metal ornaments were introduced, including a bronze cuirass and helmet for Pelops. In 174 A.D. Pausanias saw and described in detail both the cult image and the architectural sculptures, but of these the former is completely lost to us. The latter however have survived almost in their entirety and can tell a great deal about the original conception, contemporary modifications and later additions and repairs. The arrangement of the pedimental figures is based on the relative size of the statues, which have to conform to the triangular frame; the finding spots; Pausanias' description; the surface finish of parts meant to be invisible; the position of tenon holes for anchorage to the background; and finally the optical corrections introduced in the rendering of faces and bodies. Yet, despite these many clues, only a few statues can be definitely assigned to their original positions; the location of the others remains uncertain, especially within the east pediment.

Traditional scholarship tried to reconstruct the compositions by subjective means; through the gestures of the figures and their possible correlation with Pausanias' description. But in 1954 S. Stucchi attempted to arrange the statues ac-

ording to an objective criterion, by determining the specific point from which they were meant to be seen, as suggested by optical distortions such as uneven shoulder length, uncentered heads and asymmetrical faces. Ashmole closely follows Stucchi's solution for the east pediment, although admitting to some difficulties. Yalouris prefers to give more weight to the finding spots of the individual figures, in the assumption that only fragments may have become displaced in later times, but not the bulk of the statue. Their respective theories are illustrated in figures 14-15 through models, while the folding plate at the back gives the present arrangement of the statues in the museum.

Both reconstructions seem so plausible and based on such reasonable arguments that it is difficult to favor one over the other. The most important difference between the two is the inverted identification of Sterope and Hippodameia, with the consequent changes in Pelops' and Oinomaos' positions on either side of Zeus, and ultimately in the naming of the river-gods reclining in the corners. On this particular point I tend to follow Ashmole, because his arrangement corresponds to the geographical position of the rivers.

Another basic problem is the location of the kneeling maiden O and the seated boy touching his toes, E. Yalouris wants the kneeling girl in front of the horses in the right wing of the pediment. Ashmole puts her next to the last figure in the same corner, a position reserved by Yalouris for the boy E who was found directly below it. On this point I would follow Yalouris, though I am not sure that E represents Arkas, the founder of Arkadia. The personification is not obvious in the pedimental context, and Arkas' pose on the coin used as supporting evidence (figure 11) seems more a numismatic convention than a reproduction of the gable figure; moreover, isn't the numismatic Arkas mature and bearded? As for the kneeling girl, I have qualms about her head which to me seems masculine. A similar doubt had already been advanced by B. Graef and A. Furtwängler, though the latter admitted later to have seen comparable coiffures on female figures. Even if this were the case, the hairstyle appears on undoubted male heads, and within the Olympia temple sculpture only on male heads (e.g., the Theseus of the west pediment). The only other allegedly female parallel, the so-called Athena in the



West pediment, Figures R and S: the Lapith woman struggles to free herself from the centaur's grasp. Her opponent's equine body rises behind her in an implausible U-curve, while a Lapith (not visible in the photograph) plunges a long sword into the monster's chest. In the fifth century B.C. the partial unveiling of the female body was acceptable only in a struggle context.



Metope, east side: Herakles cleans the Augeian stables by diverting the course of the river Alpheios, while Athena gives advice and moral support. Notice the illusionistic rendering of the goddess' shield "sinking" into the background, and visualize the entire slab within its architectural setting, so that Herakles' crowbar would seem directed against the enframing triglyph. Athena's spear and other details were added in metal.

metope of the Nemean Lion, strikes me as equally masculine, especially because of the flat and narrow cheeks. Significantly, this head was found to the east of the temple, though it is at present assigned to a western metope. Since neither the metopal nor the pedimental head make true joints, their attribution could still be questioned, though a new identification is admittedly difficult. The masculine label is perhaps supported by a roughly contemporary head in Volo, with a fillet below the forehead curls as in Figure O, yet clearly identified as male by the braids over the nape.

A variant of the coiffure, with nape roll and long twisted strands in place of the short forehead locks, appears on the old man, east pediment L. Ashmole believes he is wearing an Oriental cap, but the

concentric waves over his cranium are probably the traditional rendering of soft strands to be further detailed in paint, as in so many other Olympia marbles. The straight line encircling the head would then be not the edge of the cap, but the narrow fillet around which the long strands twist, as advocated by G. Treu. The peculiar knob in the center of the forehead is not part of the hairstyle, but a *puntello*, a sure indication that as early as the fifth century B.C. some kind of pointing technique was used to carve a statue after a model, as rightly stressed by Ashmole (page 20).

The west pediment presents fewer difficulties of reconstruction. Undoubtedly Ashmole and Yalouris are correct in changing the present arrangement, so that Peirithoos and

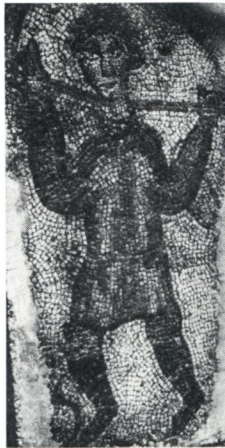
Theseus will stand close to the central divinity. This latter is unquestionably Apollo, *pace* Pausanias, but all explanations for his presence on Zeus' temple seem somewhat forced. Perhaps at that time popularity and decorative suitability still prevailed over symbolism and appropriateness, and a Centauromachy was chosen primarily on those counts. Or should one postulate association of ideas? Archaeologists insist, against mythologists' opinions, in calling Peirithoos' bride Deidameia, as mentioned by Plutarch. But many other sources, including the *Iliad*, call her Hippodameia, like Oinomaos' daughter.

The undulating groups forming the Olympia Centauromachy include some of the most famous statuary of antiquity: the beautiful bride, the bitten Lapith grimacing with pain, the mask-like centaurs, even the reclining old women, though these are the later additions. The complex composition, the almost three-dimensional juxtaposition of some figures, the rendering of emotions, are among the most significant traits of the pediment and of the Severe style as a whole. Though the Greek Archaeological Service has made many additions to the western figures, no basic change in pattern and understanding has occurred.

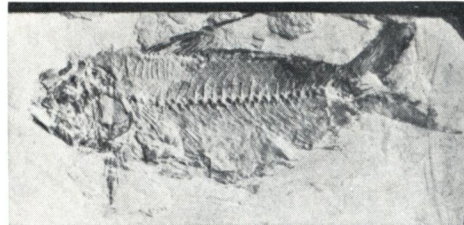
Quite different is the situation of the metopes, where the newly attributed fragments have considerably altered the earlier reconstructions. The most striking changes appear in the metope with the Keryneian Hind—some of them so recent that they could not be illustrated in the plate and a drawing of the new composition was appended at page 182. The Herakles' head formerly attributed to this panel has now been given to the Amazon metope, and the position of the hero's arms has been basically altered. The Amazon metope has greatly benefited from the additions, and Herakles, now endowed with his faithful club, has yielded to the Amazon the shield once attributed to him. The Boar metope has sprouted a hitherto unnoticed tree, an element of landscape unusual in sculpture, but more familiar in vase painting, which may suggest a possible source for the Olympia Master's repertoire.

In recent years it has become fashionable to produce and speak of archaeological books "for the coffee table." These picture books for the general public are so common that reviewers of scholarly works with good illustrations usually hasten to specify that the book under their consideration is not meant for that worldly location. I should like to reverse the pattern and state that Ashmole and Yalouris' *Olympia* should not frighten the uninitiated with its scholarship. It is the kind of book which beautifies any table, be it the archaeologist's desk or the socialite's cocktail stand.

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GREEK AND ROMAN GOLD AND SILVER PLATE, by D. E. STRONG. xxviii, 235 pages, 40 figures, 68 plates. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York 1966 \$12.50

Mr. Strong has prepared a most useful handbook tracing the development of gold and silver vessels and utensils from the Bronze Age through the Roman period. After discussing the use of these metals in the ancient world and the technique of the goldsmith and silversmith (with extensive bibliography), the author proceeds, period by period, to present the main characteristics of the objects, which are

chiefly vessels. For the Bronze Age there is a wealth of material (one should note that the dates assigned to Early Bronze Age phases are somewhat later than those which have found general acceptance). Archaic Greece has little to offer, but contemporary Etruria has more, and the material is thoroughly discussed. Classical Greece is represented largely by the finds in splendid Thracian tombs and Scythian burials. The Hellenistic and Roman periods are of course the richest of all, presenting a great variety of interesting and important vessels fashioned of these precious metals. It is a great pleasure simply to

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