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978-0-521-19126-5 - Delphi and Olympia: The Spatial Politics of Panhellenism in the Archaic and Classical Periods

Michael Scott

Excerpt

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## Introduction

A reader picking up this book might well think ‘not another book on Delphi and Olympia’! But by far the majority of English-language books about Delphi focus on its oracle and about Olympia on its games, particularly for the archaic and classical periods, relying heavily on (sometimes much later) literary evidence.

Such an understanding of these sanctuaries is simply insufficient. It takes the oracle and the games out of the context of the much wider range of activities with which these visitors were also deeply engaged while present in the sanctuary space. It ignores the importance of the manner in which individuals, poleis and other types of communities (like *ethne*) engaged with this range of activities and spaces, and of the varying impressions visitors created of the similarities and differences between these sanctuaries and their roles in the wider landscape. The focus of much previous scholarship on (literary accounts of) the oracle and the games illuminates only a fraction of the dynamic, complicated and vital roles played by these sanctuaries in the wider Greek world.

If we are to understand the crucial place of these sanctuaries in the history of ancient Greece, we need to think about the place of the individuals and poleis of ancient Greece in the history and development of these sanctuaries as lived spaces. To do that we need to have a much better idea of how these sanctuary spaces developed and, most importantly, how they were perceived and used differently over time. In short, we need to know what was happening on the ground at Olympia and Delphi. We need to understand the spatial politics of these sanctuaries.

In chapter 1, I first make the case for the necessity of moving past the (literature-orientated) oracle- and games-obsessed approach to the study of Delphi and Olympia. I then show why analysis of the physical material from these sanctuaries has failed to attract previous scholars, and I offer a new level of spatial analysis which is capable of engaging with the vast array of material evidence and of unravelling the complex ways in which visitors interacted with these sanctuaries.

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In chapters 2–7, I use this spatial analysis to evaluate the spatial politics of the sanctuaries of Delphi and Olympia during the archaic and classical periods. In chapter 2, I focus on the fundamental question of the management of these two sanctuaries and analyse the potential power that different individuals, groups and communities had to do as they pleased within Delphi and Olympia. In chapters 3–7, I analyse the activities of these visitors and the development of the two sanctuaries over time. The analysis centres on their spatial development and the monumental commemorative, martial and athletic dedications offered at these sanctuaries. The focus is on the ways in which different individuals, groups and communities were affected by, contributed to and made use of the changing nature and contents of the sanctuary spaces during the archaic and classical periods, and how this in turn affected the development of these sanctuaries' roles in the wider landscape. In each chapter, the analysis begins with the material evidence and proceeds to link that evidence to our broader historical understanding. At the end of each chapter, a concluding review is offered to highlight the most critical aspects of the sanctuary's development and the historical implications for that sanctuary's place in the wider Greek world during that period.

Given that nearly all the work on the archaeology of Delphi and Olympia has been published in French or German, this book is one of the first major works on the material evidence from the archaic and classical periods of these sanctuaries in English (following on from Morgan's analysis of Olympia and Delphi in the tenth to seventh centuries BC).<sup>1</sup> It thus hopes to make more easily available a vast amount of material evidence to a much wider archaeological and historical audience, which can in future be used to contextualise further detailed work on individual structures, and to facilitate a much more detailed comparison of the two sanctuaries than has previously been undertaken. It is also the first book (in any language) to publish complete chronological maps for Delphi's development and complete chronological lists of its monumental dedicators (650–300 BC – appendices A–F).<sup>2</sup>

By privileging the spatial and dedicatory history of Delphi and Olympia in these chapters, this investigation of spatial politics not only demonstrates how the physical space of each sanctuary operated, was used and was

<sup>1</sup> Morgan 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Such maps and lists for Olympia are already well published. For discussion, see ch. 1. For discussion of the notation and contents of the appendices, see the introductory key.

perceived (often simultaneously) in very divergent ways, but also highlights how the story of these sanctuaries 'on the ground' can diverge from their story told from a (literary) oracular and athletic perspective. As a result, this analysis forces us to rethink how we conceive of the way in which the roles of these sanctuaries in the wider Greek world were generated and understood.

In the final chapters, I evaluate the implications for how we should understand these two sanctuaries. In chapter 8, a new way of understanding the fundamental similarities and differences in the spatial experience of Olympia and Delphi and their resultant places in the wider landscape is offered, which in turn is compared with the spatial and dedicatory development of the two other *periodos* sanctuaries, Isthmia and Nemea. This model of spatial and dedicatory activity at Olympia and Delphi is subsequently contextualised within the wider set of activities ongoing at the two sanctuaries (bringing back in the oracle and games amongst other things), to construct a more complete picture of the complex ways in which each of these sites constructed its simultaneously multiple, divergent and changing place in the Greek world.

In the final chapter, I analyse the consequences of this new model of the ways in which the place(s) of Delphi and Olympia were constructed in the Greek world, with a view to the consequences for the future archaeological and historical study of Greek sanctuaries in general and Delphi and Olympia in particular. I examine the unrivalled reputation of Delphi and Olympia in scholarship as panhellenic sanctuaries during the archaic and classical period in the light of the evidence and model presented, and reassess not just the applicability of this label to these sanctuaries, but also the nature, fragility and indeed existence of panhellenism itself. This book thus chimes with, and contributes to, other calls, made particularly in the study of Greek (archaic) literature and religion, to reassess the mythology and construction of the concept of panhellenism.

In conclusion, this book hopes to achieve three goals. First, it seeks to question some of our, apparently 'well-known', assumptions about the development and role of Greek sanctuaries and particularly Delphi and Olympia, and to re-evaluate some of the aspirations, values and ideas attached to these sanctuaries, which have often been thought central to the ancient Greek world. Second, in developing a new level of spatial analysis, which better links archaeological discussions of small-scale spatial development with historical discussions of large-scale place in the wider

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landscape, this book hopes to offer an approach which can helpfully be used to investigate the complex roles of other sanctuaries and poleis in the ancient world. Lastly, in a subject area where historians still too often ask archaeologists the question ‘so what does your material actually tell us?’, this book hopes to showcase the need for, and usefulness of, full engagement with material evidence in mainstream historical discussion.

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## 1 | Athletes and oracles – but what else?

**Too much oracle, too little space**

If you think about Delphi, the likelihood is that you think about its oracle – with good reason. Scholarship has been fascinated with the Pythian priestess and has devoted a great deal of time to understanding better how the system of oracular consultation worked and the effect it had within the Greek world. These studies have predominantly been carried out through an analysis of the literary testimonia and have resulted in the creation of complex histories of the oracle, of its impact and, as a consequence, of Delphi itself.<sup>1</sup>

Such histories have without doubt been invaluable to our understanding of Delphi. In particular, they have been crucial in the elucidation and interpretation of Delphi's many literary foundation myths and have made important contributions to the analysis of Apollo's character and place within the Greek pantheon.<sup>2</sup> Most crucially, however, the history of the Delphic oracle has played a central role in discussions on the formation and workings of the wider Greek world, particularly in the fields of politics and religion, and on Delphi's place within that world as a panhellenic sanctuary. The oracle's role in the process of colonisation (and indeed the debated absence of such a process) has long been under the microscope, as has its relationship with democracy.<sup>3</sup> The role played by the oracle in polis and inter-state politics and religion has also been fiercely debated. Was it primarily for religious issues or political ones?<sup>4</sup> Was it an initiator or

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Dempsey 1918; Amandry 1950; Parke and Wormell 1956a; Flacelière 1961: 31–58; Parke 1967a; Lloyd-Jones 1976; Jacquemin 1995b; Amandry 1997; Catenacci 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Foundation myths: Dempsey 1918: 3–42; Parke and Wormell 1956a: 295–319; Fontenrose 1959; Miller 1986; Clay 1989; Malkin 2000. For the myth of its earliest temples: Sourvinou-Inwood 1979. The character of Apollo: Clay 1996; Davies 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Colonisation: Dempsey 1918: 96–114; Parke and Wormell 1956a: 49–81; Forrest 1957; Parke 1967a: 44–55; Parker 1985; Malkin 1987; 1989: 136, 152; Londey 1990; Osborne 1998; Wilson 2006. Debate over whether the oracle was obligatory in colonisation: Curtius 1869: 37; Fontenrose 1978: 5; Hall 2007: 1–4, 100–5. Democracy: Parker 1985: 323; Osborne 1996: 352; Price 1999: 74; Bowden 2005: 155.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Dempsey 1918; Defradas 1954; Gernet 1983; Parker 1985. See also Pl. *Resp.* 427b–c. In contrast: Plut. *Mor.* 435E.

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confirmer of decisions?<sup>5</sup> Was it a reference point, an arbitrator, a centre of knowledge, a device for social cohesion or all of the above?<sup>6</sup> Such studies have led recently to a more nuanced understanding of the way in which the popularity of the oracle varied chronologically, but also how it was used by (and actively related itself to) particular individuals, groups and communities as well as the wider Greek world in different ways at different times.<sup>7</sup> Such work has been carried out within the context of the increasingly sophisticated understanding of the Pythian oracle's place as but one of the major oracles available for consultation in Greece and as but one of the many forms of divinatory practices available to the Greeks.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, the degree to which these histories and arguments surrounding both the working of the oracle and its role in the Greek world rely on literary texts has become increasingly apparent. Fontenrose in the late 1970s argued that the majority of oracular responses recorded as evidence by Parke and Wormell were not historical in the strictest sense of the word.<sup>9</sup> If we want to write a history of the oracle, Fontenrose argued, we have to reject this literary evidence (particularly for Delphi's early period of formation) and we are left with precious little to help us understand what effect the oracle had on Greek society. Few scholars have been willing to follow Fontenrose's call. But many, as a result, started to consider more carefully the archaeological evidence for the oracle at Delphi and to approach oracle study through an anthropological rather than strictly literary analysis.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, the problem of our understanding of the oracle as constructed by literary testimonia has once again been brought to the fore by Julia Kindt, who argued that oracle stories – from Herodotus to Plutarch – should be primarily understood as performing roles within their own narrative frames.<sup>11</sup>

It is without doubt that the oracle at Delphi did have a crucial role to play in the Greek world and that our increasingly sophisticated analysis of the ways in which this role is presented to us will only help create an even more nuanced and detailed picture of it. But it also highlights a major problem with the way in which we conceive of Delphi.<sup>12</sup> We have allowed the story

<sup>5</sup> Parke and Wormell 1956a: 420; Fontenrose 1978: 239.

<sup>6</sup> Parker 1985; Price 1985: 143; Malkin 1989: 136.

<sup>7</sup> Parke and Boardman 1957; Parke 1984; Jacquemin 1995b; Arnush 2005; Bowden 2005; Malkin 2005: 62. Cf. 'the adaptability of the oracle': Malkin 1989: 152.

<sup>8</sup> Other oracles: e.g., Parke 1967b; Parke 1985; Morgan 1989. Recent work on the wider context of oracles in Greece: Arnush 2005; Eidinow 2007; Flower 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Fontenrose 1978: 233–9. <sup>10</sup> E.g., Price 1985; Maurizio 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Kindt 2003; 2006. For the oracle as portrayed by tragedy: Dougherty 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Noted by Barringer 2008: 3.

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of the oracle to become the story of Delphi. But Delphi was not just an oracle. It was a large and complex inter-state sanctuary, at which a plethora of other activities were taking place.<sup>13</sup> The focus on the oracle has blinded scholarship to the ways in which the sanctuary's many other activities both created their own roles for the sanctuary in the wider Greek world and, just as importantly, impacted and engaged with one another.<sup>14</sup>

In recent work this focus in scholarship has begun to shift. Scholars have begun to think about the complex engagement between different activities at the site, particularly in terms of the different kinds of religious worship at the sanctuary and in terms of its Pythian games.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in contrast, English-language scholars particularly have largely remained unenthusiastic about reorientating their interest towards the physical space of the sanctuary and towards the story told by the many monumental dedications that thronged the sanctuaries of Apollo and Athena at Delphi.<sup>16</sup> This is despite the fact that the literary testimonia offer us a detailed view of the sanctuary as a crowded place of constant (competitive) interaction.<sup>17</sup> Such a spotlight on the oracle, or rather lack of spotlight on dedications and sanctuary space, is even harder to understand (and to countenance) given the overwhelming amount of archaeological evidence for the development of the sanctuary and its monumental dedications available to us. The French excavators have published complex and detailed excavation reports from over one hundred years of excavation at the site, alongside countless articles and books.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 'Sanctuaries were multidimensional institutions which served the needs of their communities and the needs of the Greek city-state as a whole': Marinatos 1993: 233.

<sup>14</sup> Noted by Price, who underlined the need to study Delphi in the round as an institution: Price 1985: 128.

<sup>15</sup> Religious life: Amandry 2000. Pythian games: Amandry 1990; Davies 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Important forays into this area have increasingly been made in French scholarship, particularly Jacquemin 1999b. In Britain, scholars have been most interested in using archaeological evidence to investigate the first Sacred War; cf. Davies 1994. In discussion, dedications at the sanctuary are often interpreted solely through the oracle stories attached to them: e.g., Spivey 1997a: 125–6. For more discussion of the way in which the archaeological evidence has been approached and interpreted, see the third section of this chapter, 'Spatial scholarship so far'.

<sup>17</sup> The sources encourage us to see spatial location and development as crucial to understanding the sanctuary's role in the wider landscape: Paus. 10; Plut. *Mor.* 393–409; Eur. *Ion*. We are also encouraged to see competition between poleis as central to Greek life, e.g., Pl. *Leg.* 626a4: 'every polis, by nature, perpetually engages in an undeclared war with every other polis'; Pl. *Symp.* 208c: 'the lustful desire to make a name for oneself and to assure for all eternity an imperishable glory'. For the impact of Pausanias on our understanding of Delphi: ch. 8; Jacquemin 1999b: 259.

<sup>18</sup> Contained in the *Fouilles de Delphes* series, with inscriptions re-published in the *Corpus d'inscriptions de Delphes*. Many other articles on the archaeology of the sanctuary have been published yearly in *BCH*, alongside three *BCH* supplements and several recent publications

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There are of course exceptions to the lack of focus in English-language scholarship on Delphic space and dedications. Snodgrass applied the theory of peer-polity interaction to Delphi in 1986 and Morgan offered a major reassessment of the physical development of Delphi and Olympia in the tenth–seventh centuries BC in 1990 (yet notice her title: ‘Athletes and Oracles’).<sup>19</sup> At the same time, scholars have also focused on artistic interpretations of individual dedications within the sanctuary.<sup>20</sup> However, the physical story of the Delphic sanctuary as a whole during the archaic and classical periods – the busiest time in Delphi’s history – has remained unexplored. The question becomes why the physical space of the sanctuary has not been taken up with as much gusto as the oracle and what story it could offer, which will help to achieve a more nuanced and balanced understanding of activity within the sanctuary and of the sanctuary’s panhellenic place in the wider Greek world.

### Too much games, not enough space

A similar fate has befallen the sanctuary of Olympia, the other great panhellenic sanctuary with which Delphi is so often compared.<sup>21</sup> This time, however, it is not the oracle that has captured our attention (although there was indeed an oracle at Olympia) but the games held at the sanctuary every four years in antiquity.<sup>22</sup> In some ways, this focus on the games at Olympia is even more understandable than the focus on the oracle at Delphi. The ancient Olympic games act as the progenitor of our modern Olympic games and so, with each meeting of our Olympic games, more books are published responding to the interest generated in their ancestors.<sup>23</sup> Equally, books which centre on the phenomenon and importance of sport and athletics within Greek society quite rightly focus on the games at ancient Olympia as an extremely important source of evidence for their arguments.<sup>24</sup>

celebrating 150 years of French work at Delphi: e.g., EFA 1977; 1981; 1992; Etienne 1996; Jacquemin 2000a. Most crucially in recent years: Jacquemin 1999b.

<sup>19</sup> Snodgrass 1986; Morgan 1990. <sup>20</sup> E.g., Neer 2003; 2004; Scott 2007; 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Holmberg 1979; Yalouris 1979; Felten 1982; Morgan 1990; Jacquemin 2003; Valavanis 2004.

<sup>22</sup> For the oracle of Zeus at Olympia: Parke 1967b: 165–254. Focus on the games noted by Barringer 2008: 3.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Swaddling 1980; Spivey 2004; Young 2004; Schaus and Wenn 2007. In 2000, Sinn lamented the lack of English scholarship on the games: Sinn 2000b: 136.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Sansone 1988; Decker 1995; Golden 1998; Pritchard and Philips 2003; Miller 2004; Nicholson 2005.



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In scholarship on the sanctuary of ancient Olympia itself, however, we have also focused our attention too much on the minutiae of organising, managing and competing in the games.<sup>25</sup> From the Olympic programme to the abilities needed for different events, from the reality of the Olympic truce to the varying stories of cheats, from the Greek tyrants to the Emperor Nero, it is the games that have attracted our attention when we think of Olympia and have constructed how we understand individuals, groups and communities to have engaged with the sanctuary, a focus which has, to a large extent, been led by the many tales of success and failure recorded in the literary sources.<sup>26</sup>

We are in danger, just as at Delphi, of letting our attention be captured by the games at the expense of understanding the other activities taking place at the sanctuary and, as a result, of simply accepting the panhellenic story of the games as the story of Olympia as panhellenic sanctuary. It is crucial to understand that Olympia was not just its games, but a large, packed and busy sanctuary which, amongst other activities, hosted games. The games at Olympia were without doubt crucial to the sanctuary's development and role in the wider Greek world, but without considering those games in the context of the sanctuary, its space and activities, scholarship will fail to capture the nuances of the ways in which Greeks engaged with the sanctuary, not just once every four years, but on a more continual basis.

This continued focus on the games at the expense of a wider view of the sanctuary space and activities is particularly surprising, given that scholarship on the games has not been so heavily based on literary testimonia as is the case with the oracle at Delphi. Much of the scholarship which focuses on the Olympic games does so through (and uses the games to explain) many of the physical structures and structural development of the sanctuary.<sup>27</sup> Such works have examined some of the complex relationships between cult, festival and sport at the sanctuary, while others have focused exclusively on the archaeology of the Olympics.<sup>28</sup> Such a focus on the archaeological evidence at the sanctuary has been underpinned and spurred on by the continuing publication of the excavations at Olympia, which, as at Delphi, have been ongoing for over one hundred years, as well as a large

<sup>25</sup> Olympia as the games: e.g., Rodenwaldt and Hege 1936: 10, 20; Yalouris 1979: 77; Spivey and Squire 2004: 36–7.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., Bengston 1971; Finley and Pleket 1976; Fontenrose 1988b: 127–8; Lee 1992; Siewert 1992; Yalouris 2002; Crowther 2004a.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Gardiner 1925; Drees 1968; Mallwitz 1972; Holmberg 1979.

<sup>28</sup> Cult and sport: e.g., Sinn 1996. Archaeology: e.g., Raschke 1988b.

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amount of literary evidence for interaction within the physical space of the sanctuary.<sup>29</sup>

This work on the way in which the games affected the development of the sanctuary has been complemented by more focused work on individual buildings within the sanctuary, its votive deposits, its religious altars (of which there were around seventy) and its surviving art.<sup>30</sup> Lists of monumental dedications at the sanctuary have been drawn up and scholarship has also focused on interpreting the lists of Olympic victors recorded in the surviving sources.<sup>31</sup>

Scholarship on the sanctuary of Olympia (in both English- and German-language texts) is thus, perhaps, better placed to engage with a wider interpretation of the ways in which Greeks interacted with the sanctuary, and particularly with an investigation into the multiple ways in which the sanctuary's physical space and its dedications were used, were perceived and contributed to the sanctuary's place in the wider Greek world.<sup>32</sup> In fact, there has already been significant movement in that direction. Scholars, such as Morgan, have reanalysed the material evidence for the early development of the sanctuary.<sup>33</sup> Others have examined particular monumental dedications and analysed them in terms of their spatial location and meaning.<sup>34</sup> They have looked at how athletic victory statues interacted with sanctuary buildings and with military victory dedications within the sacred Altis.<sup>35</sup> They have thought about how the sacred space of the sanctuary was

<sup>29</sup> Initially under E. Curtius and F. Adler, starting in 1897: *Olympia* (vols. I–IV). Second and third series of excavations 1937–66, 1976–99, under Wreke, Kunze, Mallwitz and Kyrieleis: *Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Olympia* (vols. I–XII). At the same time, a second series of excavation reports was begun by Kunze and Schleif in 1944 with an emphasis on individual monuments and types of finds: *Olympische Forschungen* (vols. I–XXXII). See also regular articles in journals (*AA*, *AM*, *JDAI* etc.) as well as commemorative publications such as Kyrieleis 2002. For the literary evidence, see Paus. 5–6.

<sup>30</sup> Individual buildings: see the volumes of *Olympische Forschungen*; also e.g., Dyer 1905; 1908; Miller 1971; 1973. Votive deposits: for the full list of recent bibliography see Østby 1993. Altars: e.g., Schleif 1934; Hölscher 2002. Art: e.g., Ashmole and Yalouris 1967; Hölscher 2004; Sinn 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Lists of dedications: e.g., Hyde 1921; Mallwitz and Herrmann 1980; Nielsen 2007. Olympic victor lists: e.g., Moretti 1957; Christesen 2007a. For the importance of the lists in creating a unified concept of time in the Greek world: Clarke 2008: 109–21.

<sup>32</sup> Because of the way in which the sanctuary was covered in antiquity (through river silt deposits) a greater amount of more perishable material was still intact and in situ at the time of excavation, enabling a more rounded picture of the sanctuary to be presented in the excavation reports, in comparison to Delphi which was covered by rock falls and subsequently built over: Jacquemin 1999b: 163–70; Kyrieleis 2003b: 41–2.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan 1990. See also: Eder 2001; Kyrieleis 2006.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., K. Herrmann 1972; Hölscher 1974; Laroche and Jacquemin 1982; H. V. Herrmann 1988; K. Herrmann 1988.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Raschke 1988a; Nielsen 2007; Smith 2007.