

## Herakles: From Boy to Man at Ancient Olympia

The metopes depicting Herakles' labors that once crowned east and west porches of the early Classical Temple of Zeus at Olympia are now considered the hero's canonical challenges. Yet embedded in these familiar scenes are details associated with the Panhellenic sanctuary and the role of Herakles as founder of the sacred games and heroic embodiment of the Panhellenic masculine experience in this special setting. It is just possible that the placement of specific scenes over west or east porches reflected the earlier use of the space occupied by the temple from the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. No evidence for previous structures in the vicinity of the early Classical temple, but it was prime Olympic real estate. According to Pausanias, the olive tree that produced prize *stephanoi* for victors at the sacred competitions was located near the west side of the temple. The branches were cut by a *pais amphithales*, a little boy whose parents were both flourishing. And somewhere west of the Zeus temple was a shrine for Hippodamea, the quintessential bride. Above the west porch, Herakles grew up. As a beardless boy, he conquered the Nemean lion and from then on appears as a bearded, grown up man. In the northernmost panel over the west porch, Herakles conquered an Amazon. Perhaps this exoteric, violent episode can be associated with his sexual coming of age.

The east side of the temple also may have reflected functions that predated it. Pausanias reported that in the pronaos of the Zeus Temple prize wreaths were displayed on a table. And a few meters east of the building itself, the Homeric Achaean Dedication (roughly contemporary with the completion of the temple ca 456 B.C.E.), could have marked the spot where the assignment of lanes and partners had once been performed by sortition. The metopes over the porch, perhaps where the *stephanoi* were on display are a mixture of local and exotic. Herakles

bringing the Erymanthean boar to Eurytheus and his river-shifting flood of the Augean Stables frame his encounter with Atlas near the Garden of the Hesperides, the struggle with one of the man-eating mares of Diomedes in Thrace, combat with triple bodied Geryon, and his ascent from the Underworld dragging Kerberos with him.

At Olympia Herakles wears different costumes depending on the labor. In many scenes he is nude; his body on display is itself an attribute. In a few others, he dons garments, some of which were probably completed or enhanced with paint, although few traces of pigment survive on the sculptures of the Zeus Temple. Herakles' outfits may reflect the sanctuary's multilayered functions. For example, fighting with Geryon over the east porch, Herakles probably wore a cuirass; folds of the tunic beneath it were sculptured on his thigh. Herakles in the Kerberos metope on the east side also wears chitoniskos folds across his right thigh. But the entire cuirass above must have been painted on his well-preserved torso since no sculptured details appear at all. In these metopes, Herakles, like armored Oinomaeus and Pelops in the pediment above, reflects the important military aspect of Zeus's sanctuary, with its war oracle and quantities of martial dedications.

Another metope on the east side of the Zeus Temple depicts Herakles taming the horses of Thracian King Diomedes. Although only fragments of the hero's body survive, he wore a thick cloak diagonally across his thigh. This distinctive garment may be the *zeira*, a mantle worn by Thracian horsemen been adopted by Greeks from at least the second half of the sixth century B.CE., perhaps symbolizing the far reaches of Greek colonization and Panhellenism at Olympia. From boy to man at Olympia and beyond, Herakles embodied the Panhellenic masculine ideal but maybe also local traditions of maturation predating the temple of Zeus.