

**150 years of German excavations in Olympia***Review and prospects for archaeological research at a UNESCO World Heritage Site*

**October 4, 2025** marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the German excavations in Olympia. This historic event was commemorated with a festive ceremony on site, attended by guests from the realms of science, politics, and culture. Since 1875, German archaeologists have been dedicated to researching the more than 1,500-year history of this unique site. To this day, Olympia continues to exert a special fascination as the cradle of the Olympic idea. Every year, the archaeological site of Olympia, which has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1989, attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world. At the same time, new research questions based on interdisciplinary approaches and innovative methods continue to yield new insights.

From the very beginning, work in Olympia has been characterized by close cooperation. What began as a bilateral project has developed over the decades into an internationally operating research project. Researchers from Germany and many other countries work together to study and publish the finds and findings and to initiate new projects. Through research, studies, and building surveys, the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) supports the Greek authorities in implementing measures for the protection, preservation, and communication of the World Heritage Site of Olympia: "What has remained a remarkable constant throughout the years is the excellent cooperation between the German Archaeological Institute and the Greek authorities," emphasized the German ambassador to Greece, Andreas Kindl, at the ceremony. The trusting relationship "shows the diplomatic power that archaeology can unleash and the divides it can overcome," said Kindl.

**Continuity on site creates trust**

The anniversary provided an opportunity to look back and, at the same time, ahead: The results of the current research by the DAI and its collaborators demonstrate that the potential for new discoveries at the sanctuary is far from exhausted. For example, recent field research in the immediate vicinity of already excavated areas reveals that the sanctuary of Olympia was much larger than previously assumed – and that parts of it are still completely unexplored. "150 years of German research in Olympia: a short time – measured against the history of a place whose earliest human settlement dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. However, it is a long period of time when compared to the scientific exploration of other archaeological sites. In fact, Olympia is one of the oldest field research projects still active in the world. But we have not yet reached our goal: Together with our Greek partners, we intend to continue on the path we have started for the next 150 years. By joining forces, we will succeed in researching, preserving, and presenting this wonderful place, Olympia, one of the cultural centers of the ancient world, to visitors from all over the world in a manner befitting its significance," explained Apl. Prof. Dr. Oliver Pilz, Deputy Director of the DAI Athens and Head of the German Olympia Project.

**Future prospects and innovation**

When German excavations began in Olympia in 1875, research at the sanctuary was already characterized as innovative: Although excavation methods were still in their infancy, photography was systematically used for documentation purposes, for example. This continues to this day:

A wide range of research projects are being carried out in Olympia using innovative technology (LiDAR technology, geoarchaeological and geophysical prospecting, and AI): "Digital tools open up new perspectives – for research, for protection, for preservation, and for the dissemination of cultural heritage. Despite all the digitization and virtualization, however, material culture always remains our shared responsibility in archaeology," emphasized DAI President Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Friederike Fless. One focus in recent years has been the digitization of 150 years of excavation history, some of which was carried out as part of citizen science projects. Starting in 2026, a multi-year, interdisciplinary research project is to examine aspects of infrastructure as well as resource use in the sanctuary, particularly water management.

The ceremony was made possible with the support of the municipality of Archaia Olympia, the Ephorate for Antiquities of Elis, and the Theodor-Wiegand-Gesellschaft. Information on **150 years of German excavations in Olympia** and current research projects can be found at: [www.dainst.org/en/dai-standorte/athens/research/150-years-of-german-excavations-at-olympia](http://www.dainst.org/en/dai-standorte/athens/research/150-years-of-german-excavations-at-olympia)

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**Image credits:**

**Fig. 1:** Andreas Kindl, German Ambassador to Greece, Katja Sporn, Executive Director of the DAI Athens, Friederike Fless, President of the DAI, Olympia Vikatou, Director General of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, Erofilis-Eris Kolia, Head of the Ephorate for Antiquities of Elis, Aristides Panagiotopoulos, Mayor of Archaia Olympia, Oliver Pilz, Deputy Director of the DAI Athens and Head of the German Olympia Project, and Andreas Scholl, Director of the Berlin Collection of Classical Antiquities © Giouli Moutsatsou // DAI Athens

**Fig. 2:** Excavations in the stadium, 1958 © Eva-Maria Czako // DAI Athens

**Fig. 3:** Overall plan of Olympia © Hans P. Birk // DAI Athens

**German Archaeological Institute  
Research worldwide**

*The German Archaeological Institute (DAI) is an internationally active research institution within the remit of the Federal Foreign Office. Since its foundation in 1829, it has developed into one of the largest research institutions in the field of archaeology and classical studies. Through global initiatives and a diverse network, the DAI promotes dialogue between cultures and is an important partner in German foreign cultural and educational policy. With a total of eleven large branches—the headquarters in Berlin, three commissions in Bonn, Frankfurt am Main, and Munich, and seven departments in Athens, Berlin, Istanbul, Cairo, Madrid, and Rome—the DAI has a presence both in Germany and abroad. The departments and commissions are supported by additional offices in Tehran, Sana'a, Baghdad, Damascus, and Beijing, as well as research centers in Lisbon, Ulaanbaatar, and Budapest, which strengthen close cooperation with local colleagues and institutions and thus contribute to the protection and preservation of cultural heritage worldwide.*

*The German Archaeological Institute in Athens was founded in 1874 and conducts research projects in Greece with a focus on antiquity. These include identity-forming sites such as Olympia, Tiryns, the Kerameikos of Athens, Samos, and Kalapodi, most of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It maintains important research infrastructures with a library, photo archive, and historical archive. In Greece, the historic institute building, constructed in 1888 in neoclassical style, is listed as a monument of historical and artistic value and is protected as a historic site.*

