



What did ancient people see when they arrived at Olympia to participate in the ancient Olympics or to worship at the Altis Sanctuary?

Experts have pieced-together a layout of what they believe likely shows how things appeared thousands of years ago. This image depicts that layout which is displayed at the museum in Olympia.

The large building, in the middle of the model, is the Temple of Zeus.

A Greek website, [Ancient Greek Thesaurus](#), describes the model and the general lay of the land at the Sanctuary:

*The sanctuary lies in the alluvial valley formed by the confluence of the rivers, Kladeos and Alpheos; to the north is the wooded Hill of Kronos. To the south is one of the most important buildings at Olympia, the Bouleuterion, the Council building.*

*Far to the north is the Prytaneion where the Prytaneis, the high priests, were in residence, not only during the year of the Games, but permanently.*

*To the west, close to the banks of the Kladeos River, are the Palaestra and the Gymnasium where athletes were privileged to exercise and take final training for the Games. In the center is the Temple of Hera, wife of Zeus. South of the Temple of Hera stands the overpowering Temple of Zeus.*

*In ancient times hundreds of statues of athletes and other famous personages were placed throughout the Altis; those statues were votive offerings dedicated to Zeus. Few of the statues have been found since the German School of Archaeology began its nineteenth-century excavation of Olympia.*

*The color, modeling, and perfection of the Altis statues appealed to the Roman conquerors who carried away the art treasures. Happily, a few remained at the site, and, on exhibit today at the Museum of Olympia, they give us some inkling of what a dazzling sight the entire group of fine statues must have been. Bordering the Altis, to the north, are a series of Treasury Buildings. The arched tunnel, just outside the Altis to the northeast, leads to the stadium.*

*The sanctuary itself, the Altis, was separated from the rest of the area by a precinct wall and was entered through three main gates, two of the west and one on the south side. The wall enclosed the temples and buildings that were directly connected with the cult. Outside the wall were the buildings serving the needs of visitors to the sanctuary and of the athletes during the Olympic Games (priests' houses, baths, hostels, gymnasium, palaestra, etc.).*

*Activities in the Altis were greatly limited with the edict forbidding the festivals of the great sanctuaries in AD 393. The destruction of the monuments was by imperial decree in AD 426 and the devastation was completed by an earthquake that struck the region during the 6th c. AD.*

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image and quoted passage online via [Ancient Greek Thesaurus](#).

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