

Friedrich
Adler

THE ARCHITECT WHO HELPED TO EXCAVATE OLYMPIA

by Karl Rathjen

Between 1875 and 1880 a large team of German Archaeologists excavated Ancient Olympia. During the World Exposition from 1889 in Paris, an extensive report on the excavations was published.

It could be possible that this publication already gave Pierre de COUBERTIN the idea to re-establish the Olympic Games in a modern format. The famous researcher of antiquity Ernst CURTIUS, became known as one of the greatest excavators, since he had already proposed in 1852 to start excavating Olympia.

As stated CURTIUS was in fact not an archaeologist. For this reason he had the scholarly educated architect Friedrich ADLER at his side. Equally authorized, both were in charge of the excavations in Olympia. Many of the beautiful books and other publications on the excavations in Olympia carry both names as the authors.

CURTIUS' exploits were always mentioned, but about Adler few publications exist.

Johann Heinrich Friedrich ADLER was born October, 15, 1827, in Berlin and he passed away in Berlin at the age of almost 81 years, on September 15, 1908.

ADLER was a pupil of the architects Friedrich August STÜLER (1800-1865) and Johann Heinrich STRACK (1805-1880), as well as the Archaeologist Karl BÖTTICHER (1806-1899). After finishing his studies at the Academy for Architecture in Berlin, ADLER soon became known as an architect of churches. As architect he made a connection between the classical Greek and the mediaeval style-elements. The first important church he designed was the Thomas-church in Berlin-Kreuzberg.

ADLER became a member of the German Archaeological Institutes in Rome and Athens. In 1862 he published a book about the brick-Gothic style in Mark Brandenburg.

In 1871, together with Ernst CURTIUS, he participated in a journey to the Middle-East, partly related to a commission in Jerusalem, to do preliminary works for the building of the Church of the Redeemer.

Early in the seventies, ancient Olympia came in the focus of his attention. Because of his fundamental knowledge of the ancient building history, CURTIUS decided to make him a partner in the excavations. CURTIUS and ADLER became the directors of the team. Together they decided on the programme for the excavations, which ADLER directed for a part himself.

"*Das Hohe Directorium für die Ausgrabungen in Olympia*", which happened to be the official name of the Directors; had its seat in Berlin; but both CURTIUS and ADLER, visited Olympia every year at the end of the excavation-period to get a first-hand view on the progress of the works.

After the treaty with the Greek Government to start with the excavations had been signed, the excavations could start on October 4, 1875.

The 28 year old leader of the excavations, Gustav HIRSCHFELD could now inform Berlin:

"On Monday, October 4, time 7:30, Bötticher and I, have dug the first spade at the Olympic site and then, together with Demetriades, filled the first wheelbarrow."



The German archaeologists worked in Olympia from 1875 till 1881, and this encompassed six excavation-periods, each starting in the fall and going on till the spring of the next year, because summertime was too hot for digging. This period was later called the "Great Excavation".

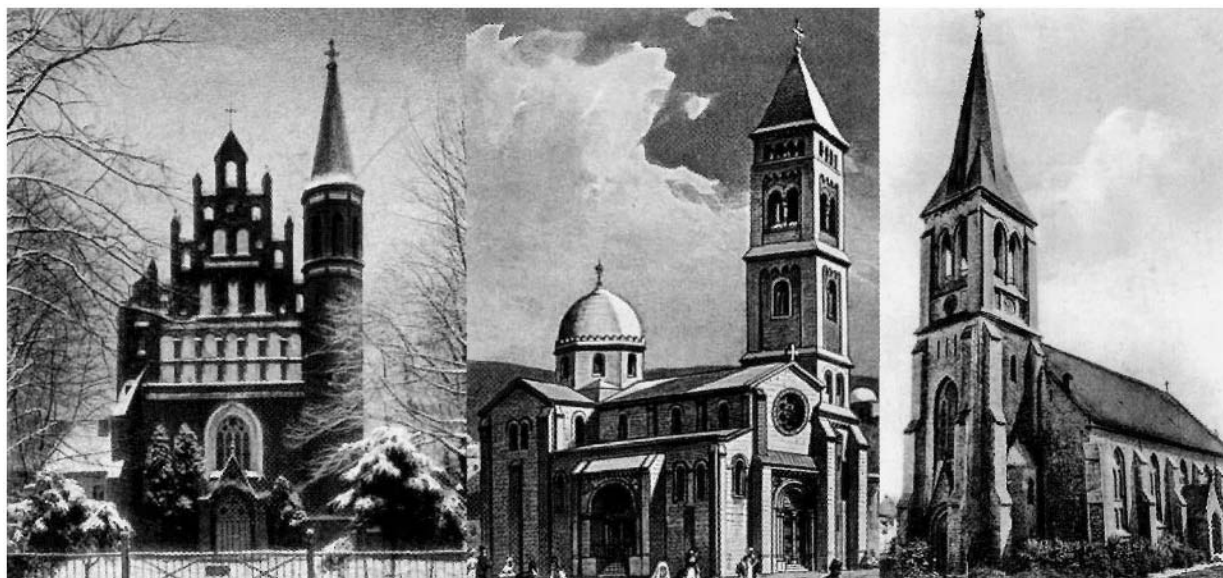
The excavation was started in the holy area; in the Altis. The stadium itself was, by initiative of Carl DIEM, excavated in the late fifties (20th Century).

In the first place the centre of the excavations was the Temple of Zeus. The excavators were suc-

cessful in finding great parts of the life-sized figures from both facades. The presentation of the Eastern façade shows the preparation for the race between Pelops and Oinomaus. On the Western façade the battle between the Lapithen and the Centaurs is shown. All figures were severely damaged. However, the researchers succeeded in finding an exact composition of both presentations.

As is known, the famous and larger than life Zeus-stature, designed and made by PHIDIAS, has been brought to Constantinople in the late antiqui-

Adler's outstanding capacity as an architect: St. Thomas-Church in Berlin-Kreuzberg; Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, and the Protestants' Church in Atzendorf





ties, and then had been burned down. Because of descriptions by PAUSANIAS and illustrations (partly) on coins, ADLER could make a reconstruction of how the statue must have looked like, seen from the front. In the same way he tried to reconstruct the whole area of the Altis.

The discovery of the statue of *Hermes from Praxiteles* was thought to be the finest result of the combined excavations by CURTIUS and ADLER.

In the Treaty with the Greek Government it was decided that Greece would take care of a careful and correct classification of the discovered art objects.

In 1878, during the excavation period, ADLER was commissioned with the design of a museum.

The Greek banker Andreas SYNGROS provided the financial means and in 1887 the museum could be officially opened, attended by the Greek King.

In his design, ADLER presented the museum as a building of the so-called Berlin late-classical style.

The building of a museum in Olympia was quite controversial, because there was neither a railway (which was then built); and neither a good connection by roads.

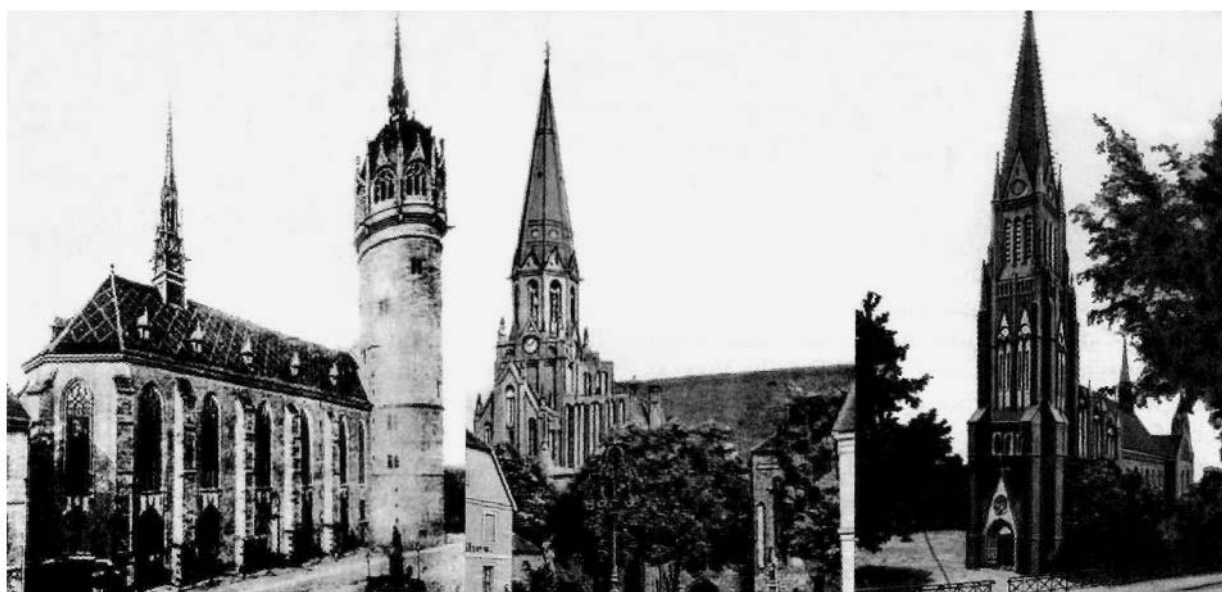
German archaeologists still excavate in Olympia up to the present.

Since 1906 it was mainly Wilhelm DÖRPFELD, a son-in-law from ADLER, who worked there for several decades. DÖRPFELD was as a student already



A high ceiling and a huge central nave: A cathedral for early Olympic memories in Ancient Olympia

- design by Friedrich Adler



involved with the "great excavation". In 1896 he was a member of the Organising Committee for the First Olympic Games.

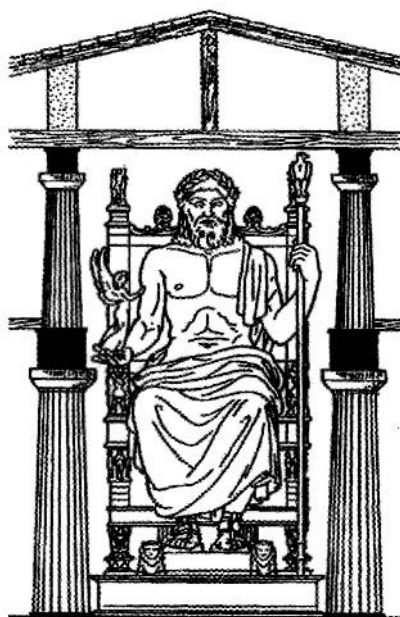
Next to his work as an excavator in Olympia, ADLER devoted his time to the designing and building of churches. In 1877, he was nominated "Geheimer Bau- und Vortragender Rat" in the Prussian Ministry for Public Works. He became Head of the commission for the building of churches. Under his leadership about 300 churches have been designed and built.

The Dom-tower from Schleswig may be regarded as the most important design from ADLER in the new-gothic brick-building.

Three further buildings which demonstrate Adlers architectural work: the Schlosskirche (Palace Chapel) in Wittenberg, St. Nikolai Church in Pritzwalk, and the Cathedral in Schleswig

Special postmark to commemorate Friedrich Adler's successes as Olympic excavator and architect

* All pictures are taken from the Collection of the author.



Phidias' prominent Zeus statue in a reconstruction from Adler