

Jürgen Weidner

Mount Olympus

Ancient Sites

Museums

Monasteries and Churches

Imprint

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Cover: Statue of Alexander the Great, Alexandrion, Litochoro (Photo: Jürgen Weidner)

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Warm thanks to my friends Heidi Milde and Jorgos Arzanas for polishing my English, thank you for your lot of work!

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Welcome

Pieria offers a unique taste of the Mediterranean in a soothing combination of sea, plains and mountains. Mount Olympus and the abundance of chapels, churches and holy monasteries along with a variety of places of religious importance to pilgrims or visitors are what make our region so unique. Some of these places date back at least 1000 years.

The small chapel of Prophet Elijah is located on one of the peaks of Mount Olympus, being the highest holy site of the Balkans and of Orthodox Christianity worldwide.



Bishop's Seat in Katerini

A historical fact frequently unnoticed is that Saint Paul the Apostle, whose Epistles are of critical importance in Holy Scripture visited Pieria on his second Apostolic Journey about 50 years after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, making thus our region one of the earliest places where Christianity thrived. We wholeheartedly invite you to visit our Ecclesiastical Museum and follow the Traces of the Apostle.

You are most welcome to one of Greece's most historic and beautiful places. We hope and pray that you will enjoy your stay.

† **GEORGIOS**

[Metropolitan of Kitros, Katerini and Platamon.](#)

At Mount Olympus

Some information in advance

The border between Thessaly and Macedonia runs across the peaks of Mount Olympus. The Macedonian side of the mountains is located in the prefecture of Pieria, the name for this beautiful area has existed since ancient times.

The prefecture of Pieria forms the southernmost part of Central Macedonia and is in turn divided into three municipalities. It is home to more than 100000 people who live mainly from agriculture and tourism.

Pieria was settled approximately 6500 years ago, during the Neolithic period. Historically, the region was represented by the resident Macedonians, whose most prominent representatives were Alexander the Great and his father, Philip II.



Map of Ancient Macedonia

The first members of the Macedonian royal family came from the peninsula Peloponnese from the town of Argos, therefore they are called Argeads. The foundation of the kingdom took place around 700 B. C. The history was changeable, one was almost constantly in conflict with the neighbours. The territory of the kingdom was to be extended, the Macedonians wanted to gain access to gold and silver mines on the peninsula of Chalkidiki and in Thrace.

Philip II revolutionized the warfare of the time by introducing the phalanx. Its soldiers, the phalangites, were equipped with spears up to six meters long, the sarissa. Even for enemy cavalry they were difficult to overcome. Philip's son, Alexander, who was later given the byname "the Great", started a campaign directed against Persia, which ended with the creation of the huge Alexander Empire. After Alexander's

death, the Argead dynasty was ousted by the Antigonids. The end of the Macedonian royal house came by the Battle of Pydna. The Romans won this war and Macedonia became a Roman province.

Excavation sites and monuments such as Dion, Leivithra, the origins of the castle of Platamonas, Pydna and the great Macedonian tomb of Korinos bear witness to this epoch.

Another formative personality was the apostle Paul. On his second missionary journey he passed through Pieria. Thus, the people on Olympus came into contact with Christianity very early and directly.

The apostle came from the city of Veria, where he was accused by followers of the Jewish faith. Paul fled, preached in several places in Pieria and thus created the foundation of the Christian faith in the region. He traveled on the route Livadi, Kolindros, Aeginio, Methone and Pydna. Archaeological evidence and local tradition refer to his special activities in Kolindros. He is said to have preached the Gospel there before he traveled to Pydna to go from there by ship to Athens. In his later travels he crossed Pieria on the historic road that still exists today, heading south.

Very early monasteries and churches were built at Mount Olympus. Today only ruins are left of the original buildings of these times, but at some of the places where the apostle had preached monasteries can be visited.

Today the Archdiocese of Kitros, Katerini and Platamonas is responsible for most of the monasteries and churches at Mount Olympus. The bishop's seat is located directly at the city park of Katerini ([Map and navigation](#)). Worth seeing is the Episcopal Museum, which is also used for receptions on special occasions.

Detailed information about [History and Archaeology](#) on Mount Olympus can be found at the end of the book in the chapter of the same name.



Apostle Paul

Some Useful Tips

How to get to Mount Olympus

- By car on highway No. 1, Athens - Thessaloniki
- By plane to Makedonia Airport (SKG), Thessaloniki. Here you can rent a car or take a taxi or bus number 78 who will take you to the train station.
- The trains stop in Katerini, Litochoro (the train station is about 5 km east of the village), Lep-tokarya and Neoi Poroi, near Platamonas.
- By country bus to Katerini. From there you will get to your final destination by local buses.

Accommodation

On the entire "Olympus Riviera", from Katerini to Neoi Poroi you will find plenty of accommodation that will fit your needs.

How to get to the sights and how to translate the book into other languages

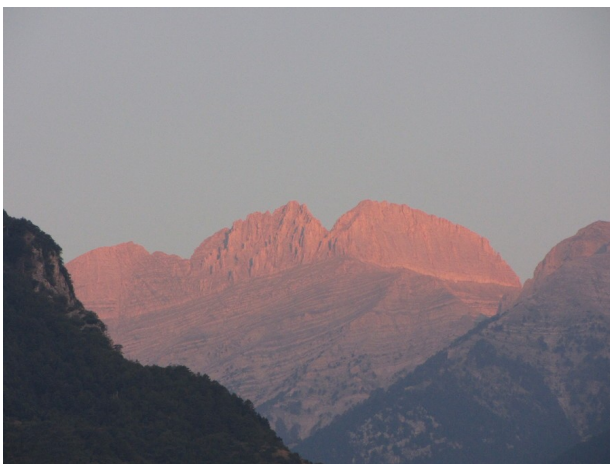
Navigation

At the beginning of a chapter, you will find the section "**Most important**".

In order to be able to find the sights easily, their coordinates are given in the last line.

For example: [Map and navigation](#)

Click on these link and you'll get to "Google Maps". The exact location of the sight is shown on the map.



The Peaks of Olympus in the Morning Light

Google offers the possibility to use the cell phone as a navigation device. First switch on the "GPS" or "Location" function on your device. After you have touched the "Route" icon (bottom left) you will be shown the traffic connections from your location to your destination. Tap on the "Start" icon and you will be guided to your destination.

There may be differences in handling due to different operating systems.

Translation

To translate the text into other languages, I suggest the use of the “Google Translate” app (you’ll find it in your app store). The app works offline, the translation is usually of good quality. Simply copy the text you are interested in and paste it into “Google Translate”. If you are online, the app will also read the translation to you, so you have the feeling of a personal guide. Feel free of course to use any other translation service you like.

Opening hours

Since the opening hours differ not only in the summer and winter months, but some sights are only open sporadically, it can be useful to inform yourself about this before your visit. If available, the telephone numbers are listed under the headline “**Most important**”.

As a rule of thumb, one can assume that in the summer, almost all described destinations are opened at 10.00 a. m.

Entrance fees

- Admission to all monasteries and churches is free.
- The Nautical Museum in Litochoro and the Geological Museum of Olympus in Leptokaria charge a small entrance fee.
- There is an entrance fee to the Archaeological Park of Dion, the Archaeological Museum of Dion and the Castle of Platamonas. On the following days there the entrance is free:
 - March 6 (in memory of Melina Mercouri)
 - April 18 (International Monuments Day)
 - May 18 (International Museums Day)
 - The last weekend of September (European Heritage Days)
 - October 28 (Greek National Day)
 - Every first Sunday of the month from November 1st to March 31st

Glossary

I have tried to use technical terms sparingly. If a term is unknown to you, so you will probably find it in the [Glossary](#) at the end of the book.

German Version / Deutsche Ausgabe

Falls Sie dieses Buch lieber in deutscher Sprache lesen möchten finden Sie es hier:

If you prefer to read this book in German you’ll find it here:

bit.ly/Olymp-20-GZ

General Map



This Map was Created with Data from the Open Street Map Foundation.

Ancient sites

Museums

Monasteries and Churches

Dion

Dion is located on the northeastern edge of Mount Olympus. It is five km from the sea, during the Hellenistic period, the distance was only 1.5 km. Dion is connected to the sea by the once navigable Vaphyras River.



Mosaic Center

Until 1961, the current village Dion was called Malathria. The main source of income for the residents is agriculture, animal breeding and tourism.

For traditional reasons, Dion has developed into one of the most important centers in Greece, where the art of mosaic is cultivated. For ages,

artists have lived in the vicinity of the ancient site, which keep this tradition alive and teach their skills to interested people in seminars. For this purpose, a “mosaic center” was founded, which is also used for exhibitions in the summer months.



Mosaic, Classical Motif



Tavligame with Surrounding Meander

Swimming in the Ourlias River

If you are tired after a tour of the Archaeological Park and the Museum, you can take a dip in the crystal-clear water of the Ourlias River (also called Helikon). It can be found around 5.5 km west of Dion.

Map and navigation

Simply follow the signs to “Olympus”. After a short walk you will reach the Ourlias gorge. Even in summer, the waterfall is constantly supplying cool water.



The Ourlias

The Ancient Site

Most important

- One of the most important ancient sites in Greece
- Founded in the 5th century BC, for around a thousand years inhabited
- Sanctuaries and buildings from the Classical to the Byzantine period
- In the 5th century AD, the city was abandoned by its inhabitants.
- Despite decades of excavation, Dion has not been fully explored yet.
- [Video about the Archaeological Park of Dion](#)
- [Video about the restoration of the Dionysus Mosaic](#)
- For further information see the book „DION - The Archaeological Site and the Museum“ written by Prof. Dimitrios Pandermalis. ISBN: 960-500-080-6
- Phone: 23510-53484
- [Map and navigation](#)

Some History

424 BC the Greek historian Thucydides described Dion as the first city reached by the Spartan general Brasidas, coming from Thessaly (Tempi), to Macedonia. Pausanias mentioned Dion as one of the places where Orpheus lived. In the Classical period, Dion became the religious center of Macedonia. Zeus was worshiped here and the Olympic Games in honor of Zeus and the Muses were held. Alexander the Great made a sacrifice at the Zeus sanctuary before he began his campaign against the Persians. Later he had set up 25 bronze statues of the cavalrymen, killed in the Battle of Granicus, in the Zeus Olympios sanctuary. They were crafted by the famous sculptor Lysippos.

219 BC Dion was destroyed by the Aitolian, but Philip V had the city rebuilt immediately. The Romans conquered Dion 168 BC and gradually, Roman settlers came and brought with them their administration, their measures and weight units. In 31 BC, Octavian declared Dion as a colony that was exempt from tax payments and had a certain autonomy.

After the middle of the 3rd century AD, the decline started by raids of neighboring tribes, earthquakes and floods. In the 4th century AD, Dion (Dium) last flourished when it became a bishopric. The place was last mentioned as an administrative district of the Byzantine emperor Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos (Constantine VII) in the 10th century.

The Archaeological Park



Entrance of the Archaeological Park

The park covers an area of 150 hectares, of which almost 50 hectares are urban and about 50 hectares are sanctuaries. A lot of the area has not yet been archaeologically explored. In the Archaeological Park, sanctuaries and monuments from the Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods were discovered. Among other things residential buildings, a marketplace, public buildings, churches, bathhouses, shops, workshops and toilets have been found in the former urban area. Outside are the sanctuaries, the theaters and the cemeteries.

Let's start exploring the park in the area outside the city walls. We follow the path that leads us past the pond, one of the sources of the Vaphyras River, and turn right (south) to the Hellenistic Theater.



The Area Outside the City Walls

Hellenistic Theater

It is set against the great backdrop of Mount Olympus. Follow the path and stand in the middle of the stage (orchestra). You are now exactly at the place where Alexander the Great spoke to his officers before his campaign against the Persians.

Architecture

Alexander III (the Great)

Reign from 336 B.C. to 323 B.C.

No other Macedonian king shaped world history like Alexander the Great. His father, Philip II, left him a functioning state and an army that was the most modern armed force in Eurasia at the time. Since Philip II married several women, it was by no means clear who would follow him to the throne. In the end, Alexander and his mother Olympias prevailed.

334 B.C. the campaign of the Macedonians against the Persians began. His first battle, at the river Kranikos, ended with the victory of Alexander. Also the following battle of Issos (333 B.C.) was a success for the Macedonians, the Persian king Darius fled the battlefield. Finally Persia was subdued by Alexander. The spoils of war enabled him to continue his campaign. He led him to India, to the edge of the then known world.

Alexander died in the year 323 B.C. in Babylon.



Alexanders arrival in Babylon

The shape of the theater corresponds to the typical Hellenistic style of construction. It is an open-air theater built in a north-east direction on the slope of a low hill. The orchestra (stage) was built on clay soil and was surrounded by a trench to drain the rainwater. Underneath the orchestra, an underground corridor was connecting two rooms.

Unique among the Hellenistic theaters was the kind of seats of the auditorium, the koilon. The semicircular rows of seats were covered with 50 by 50 cm clay bricks. The current form of the building is the result of a modern reconstruction upon the antique foundations. The rows of seats in the spectator area are now covered with wooden boards.

History

The theater was built during the Hellenistic period, probably during the reign of King Philip V. A former theater was probably destroyed during the raid of the Aitolians. Inside the building, a larger number of coins from the reign of Philip V was found. In Roman times, useful building materials were removed and used to build the Roman theater near the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios.

King Archelaus held a nine-day festival in Dion in honor of the nine Pieric Muses, which also included theater competitions. He invited the Athenian playwright Euripides, who wrote the dramas "Archelaus" and the "Bacchae". Both works were probably, also performed in Dion.

After completion of all renovations, the theater has been regularly hosting performances of the Olympus Festival since 1991.

The ancient stadium, an important venue for the Olympic Games in Dion, was very close to the theater.

The Stadium

Although known since the discovery (in the beginning of the 19th century) by William M. Leake, the excavations of the stadium didn't take place until 1995. During the excavations, many coins were found, the oldest are from the time of Alexander I. After the Second World War, the inhabitants of Malathria (then the name of the village, today Dion) expanded the agricultural land and their settlement area. So as the village expanded, most of the stadium was overbuilt.

Go back the path that led you to the theater about 100 m. Turn right (heading southeast) and follow the small path that leads you around the Zeus Olympios sanctuary to the Roman theater.

Roman Theater

The Roman theater was built in the 2nd century AD. It had 24 rows of seats arranged in a semicircle, beneath them were built vaults. The orchestra had a diameter of about 21 m. The building consisted of field stones, bricks and mortar. The stage was decorated with marble elements. Among the exhibits excavated here was a statue of Hermes.

After visiting the theater, turn north and walk over to the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios.

Zeus Olympios Sanctuary

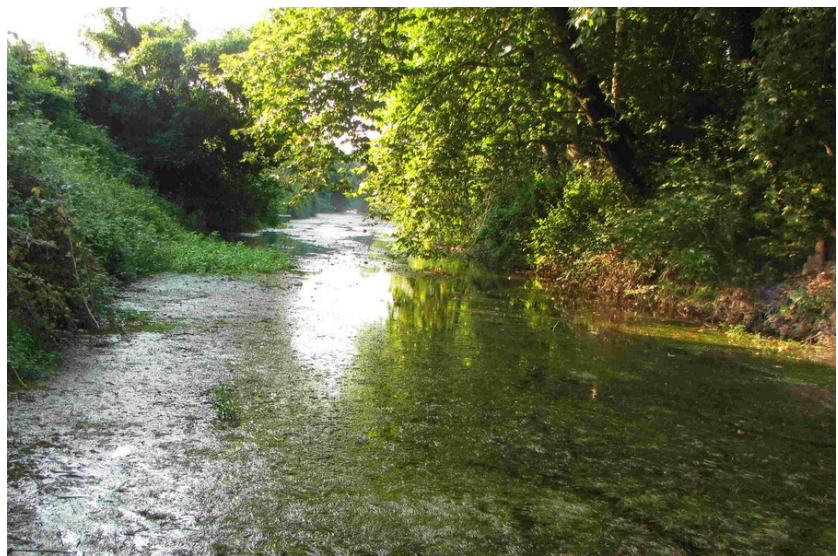
A huge temple was placed in a sacred grove, dedicated to Zeus. Within were the gilded statues of the Macedonian kings and also 25 statues donated by Alexander the Great in memorial to his cavalymen killed in the Battle of Granicus. The central square within the site was occupied by a 22-meter altar. On metal rings, sacrificial animals were tied. At the sacrificial celebrations (Hecatomb), the most important part of the Zeus cult, 100 cattle were sacrificed to the god. In their attack on Dion, the Aitolians destroyed the sanctuary, which was rebuilt immediately. Remains of the wall, surrounding the site, are still preserved.

Now keep right and walk on a winding path between trees and bushes. It is worth taking a look at the Vaphyras, with a little luck you can watch some trouts. This small jungle is home to many animals, the dragonflies are particularly beautiful, but we have also come across a fox here.

Turn right (east) at a fork in the road and you'll arrive at the second Zeus sanctuary in Dion. It was discovered by chance when the riverbed of the Vaphyras River was moved a few meters to the west.

Vaphyras

Although no separate sanctuary was built for it, the river Vaphyras was considered a male deity. Its source gushes about 100 meters east of the park entrance. Here probably grew the sacred grove of the Muses. The head of a statue, representing the personified river, was found in the source area. According to Hesiod, the Vaphyras springs from the cosmic stream Okeanos, which is ruled by the primeval goddess Tethys.



The Vaphyras

The Vaphyras is closely interwoven in Greek mythology with Orpheus and the Muses. In the 2nd century AD, Pausanias wrote that the upper reaches of the Vaphyras bore the name Helikon. For two-thirds of its length, the river runs underground before reappearing in Dion. According to Pausanias the inhabitants of Dion claimed that once the Helikon flew along Dion. But when the women who had killed Orpheus tried to wash the blood off their hands in the Helikon, the river dried up, wanting no part in this deed. In Dion, he did reappear on the surface.

Zeus Hypsistos Sanctuary

A road led to the sanctuary of Zeus-Hypsistos. It was lined by small pillars, with marble eagles on their top. The street led to a square where a temple with several rooms existed. In the northernmost room, the Zeus Temple, there was a statue of Zeus Hypsistos and the figure of a marble eagle. The floor

around the statue was decorated with mosaics, of which the image of two ravens can still be seen. The floor of the building itself was also covered with mosaic. Here a white bull and double axes were preserved. On the western side, there is a pool of water. In front of the temple are the remains of an altar. A metal ring was fastened on it, which served to tie up the sacrificial animals. Both gods, Zeus Hypsistos and Zeus Olympios, were worshiped simultaneously. While Olympios ruled the people from the summit of Mount Olympus, Hypsistos dominated the sky, everything supernatural.

The Zeus Cult in Dion

Dion was the religious center of Macedonia. At the time of the reign of the Macedonian kings, the temple of Zeus Olympios was the most important sanctuary in the city. It is not yet clear whether Dion got its meaning from the Olympic Games initiated by King Archelaus, or whether, perhaps inspired by Homer's Iliad, it already had a central role for the region. Deukalion claimed, that after the sanctuary of Zeus Lykaios, the second oldest altar dedicated to Zeus was erected in Dion. From the late 8th century BC Zeus was worshiped in various parts of Greece. All these venerations had in common that they took place on the top of a mountain, or near a mountain. Inscriptions, clay pots and remnants of charcoal from the Hellenistic and Roman periods on peak Agios Antonios (2817 m) near Dion, testify that the cult of Zeus was practiced not only in Dion itself. The Macedonian kings used the temple complex to archive their royal decrees. Some of them are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Dion.

If you climb the metal tower, you can see the Isis sanctuary across the stream. Unfortunately, it cannot be reached from here, since the bridge that led over the Vaphyras was destroyed by a flood. So go back the same way you came, but after about 70 m turn right and walk the short distance to Sanctuary of Demeter.

Zeus

As the so-called godfather, Zeus throned above all the other gods of Olympus. He is the son of the titans Kronos and Rhea.

Zeus is often depicted with a bundle of lightning bolts, his scepter and the mighty shield Aegis. His heraldic animal is the eagle.

Zeus is the most powerful of the gods, but he is not allmighty. So it happend that he also listend to the advice of his divine colleagues or the prophecies of an oracle.

He is able to change his shape, an ability that he made frequent use of. His transformations as a bull when he robs Europe or as a swan when he seduces Leda are well-known.

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