

A Brief History

The Panhellenic Sanctuary at Isthmia was built along the ancient road connecting the Isthmus with the city of Corinth. As early as the Bronze Age small settlements existed in the region, but in the 11th c. B.C. travellers had begun to offer sacrifices and conduct feasts sacred to Poseidon. The first temple, erected in the mid-7th c. B.C., was constructed entirely of stone and crowned with a tile roof; it was rebuilt two centuries later after a fire. The first stadium and theater followed in the 5th c. The destruction of Corinth by the Romans in 146 B.C. ended the Greek sanctuary, but it was reconstructed in the Early Roman Empire and expanded with the addition of stoas around the temple and a Roman bath. In Late Antiquity the buildings had become derelict and their stones were plundered for a fortress and trans-isthmian barrier wall called the Hexamilion. These fortifications protected the Peloponnesos from attack and were the focus of habitation during the Middle Ages.

Oscar Broneer discovered the central sanctuary in 1952 and excavated through 1967. Subsequently, Paul Clement, Elizabeth Gebhard and Timothy Gregory have continued work at the site under the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

The Isthmian Games

The festival of Poseidon, held in the spring of every second year, was the scene of athletic competitions including foot-races, boxing, wrestling, the pentathlon, horse and chariot-racing. Legend held that the contests were founded by Sisyphos as funeral games for the boy-hero, Melikertes-Palaimon, whose body was brought to the shore on the back of a dolphin. In the Isthmian games, as with the other panhellenic contests at Olympia, Delphi and Nemea, the victor received only a crown. At Isthmia the wreath was first made of pine and later wild celery. Musicians and poets competed in the theater; horse and chariot races were held in the hippodrome (not yet located).

With permission of the
Hellenic Ministry of Culture
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Isthmia Museum

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Hellenic Ministry of Culture
<http://www.culture.gr/welcome.html>

University of Chicago Excavations at Isthmia
<http://humanities.uchicago.edu/isthmia>

Ohio State University Excavations at Isthmia
<http://isthmia.ohio-state.edu>

Cover:
Bronze figurine of an athlete, H. 7,8 cm., 6th c. B.C.
Above:
Gold bull, L. 1 cm., 6th c. B.C.

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Poseidon carrying dolphin and trident: votive plaque 6th c. B.C.

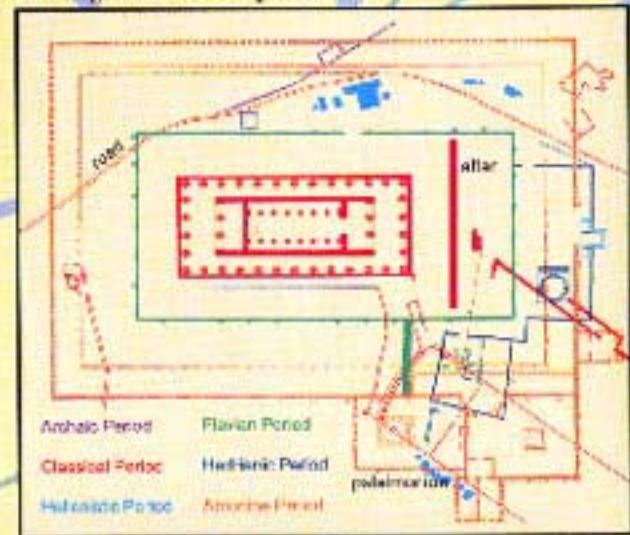


Mosaic from the Roman Bath Mid 2nd c. A.D.



Temple of Poseidon (upper left) and Sanctuary of Palaion (foreground) in the late 2nd c. A.D.

Restored plan of the Central Sanctuary showing features of all periods



Illyrian helmet 7th c. B.C.

Late Roman Fortification Wall



Roman Bath

Late Roman Fortress



Theater

Central Sanctuary of Poseidon

See restored plan below left



Isthmia Museum

Modern Road

Hexamilion



Bronze boat with oarsmen 6th c. B.C.

Early Stadium

Later Stadium

Rachi Settlement



Aryballois with frieze of infantrymen and cavalry; woman's head on handle 600-575 B.C.



Stele commemorating L. Kornelius Korinchos, victor in musical contests at the Isthmian Games 2nd c. A.D.

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