

# DELPHI

Grand Master Julie Scott, S.R.C..

*All people of good will should consider themselves citizens of Delphi.*  
UNESCO<sup>1</sup>

**F**EW traditions in the history of the world have exercised greater influence in their time or inspired more intrigue throughout the ages than Delphi.

For centuries, kings, generals, philosophers, and common people consulted the Oracles of Delphi before making any major decisions. The injunction “Know Thyself,” inscribed on the wall of the ancient Temple of Apollo at Delphi, still inspires many people today. Socrates invoked the words of the Oracle of Delphi at his trial, in order to make the point that ultimately ended his life. Every four years (on off years between the Olympian Games) a truce was called so that the ancient Greeks could gather in Delphi for the Pythian Games, which included not only athletic competition; they

also included contests in art and music. The *Omphalos*, a conical shaped stone, marked the navel or center of the world, which the ancient Greeks believed was located in Delphi. The Greeks always kept their sacred flame burning in the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. More recently, one of the most fascinating transdisciplinary scientific inquiries into the ancient world centered around Delphi.

This issue of the *Rosicrucian Digest* explores these remarkable aspects of the ancient Delphic tradition and more.

To begin, let us consider the site. Delphi is perched on the southern slope of Mount Parnassus, one of the holy mountains of Greece. The surrounding cliffs were called the “shining ones” by the ancient Greeks.



Map of Greece and Asia Minor



The partially reconstructed Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia. The oldest goddess figurines were discovered underneath this sanctuary. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

Delphi is 110 miles (180 kilometers) northwest of Athens and 6 miles (10 kilometers) north of the Gulf of Corinth.

Before the Olympian gods invaded Greece, an Earth Mother tradition existed in Delphi for centuries, possibly millennia. The word *Delphi* comes from the Greek word *delphus*, meaning womb.<sup>2</sup> The Omphalos, or navel (symbolized by a carved stone), was placed at the location the Greeks believed was the exact center of the world. (What closer connection have any of us had to our mothers than through our navel?)

Terracotta figurines of female deities or priestesses (including some seated on three-legged chairs) dating to 1600 BCE were found in the area, and in the nearby Corycian Cave thousands of “knucklebones” were found. These “bones” are the hooves of sheep and goats that were used to draw lots or to obtain yes/no answers. They date from the even earlier Neolithic period (5000-3000 BCE).<sup>3</sup>

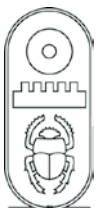
There were at least four phases of worship in Delphi. First, there was the worship of the Earth Mother, Gaia (or Ge); followed by Themis (daughter of Gaia

and Uranus), goddess of divine order; then Phoebe, a sun goddess; and finally Apollo, the sun god and god of music, poetry, art, cures, and prophecy, who arrived in the area some time before the eighth century BCE.<sup>4</sup>

There were many temples dedicated to Apollo around the ancient Mediterranean world, and at least four temples were built for Apollo at Delphi. The ancient travel writer Pausanias reported that, “the first temple of Apollo was made of laurel branches, the second temple of beeswax and feathers, and the third one of bronze.”<sup>5</sup> The



The Omphalos at Delphi. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.





The Sibyl's Rock. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

first temple was probably a hut. The second and third were sturdier structures later destroyed by a fire and an earthquake. The final Temple of Apollo was grand beyond all imagination.

The temple complex included the "Sacred Way," a path lined with thousands of statues that had been donated to Delphi in gratitude for the advice or protection the Oracles had given wealthy petitioners and city/states. There were also at least a dozen treasuries on the path leading up to the Temple of Apollo. Each treasury would have been packed full of riches sent in thanks to the Oracles and Apollo. Before entering the Sacred Way, guests would bathe in the nearby Castalian Spring, where the Oracles also prepared themselves separately.

About halfway up the walkway to the temple, one can still see the craggy Sibyl's Rock (see photo above), the place where the earliest Oracles presented their prophecies. Later the Oracles moved inside the great temple. Just beyond the Sybil's Rock was a thirty-foot (ten meter) column that supported the famous Naxian Sphinx<sup>6</sup> (see photo, page 5). In front of the temple stood a colossal statue of Apollo (now missing, although the base is still

there) that was more than fifty feet (fifteen meters) in height.

In the pronaos of the temple, leading to the Holy of Holies, were inscribed at least two sayings: "Know Thyself" and "Nothing Too Much" (or "Nothing in Excess"). There may have been other sayings as well.

In the southwest corner of the temple was the *adyton*, the Holy of Holies where the Oracles presented their prophecies. Pausanias described the Oracles' inner sanctum. Just outside was a waiting room for petitioners. Inside there was a human-size statue of Apollo made of gold,

the Omphalos with gold eagles, the grave of Dionysus (also important in the Delphic tradition), the temple hearth (the ever burning flame), laurel, and the Oracle seated atop a tripod.

The outdoor Theater of Delphi was up the mountain from the temple and the stadium was beyond that.

The Delphic tradition, which began in the mists of time, ended in 394 CE with Roman Emperor Theodosius's edict that prohibited the practice of ancient (pagan) traditions. In 397 Romans were given permission to use materials from the old Greek temples for public works projects, and by 435 any extant temples were forced to close.

Little by little the debris from Mount Parnassus buried what had once been one of the most important and revered sites in the world. Eventually Delphi was lost and a new town, called Kastri, sprouted up on the site. By the sixteenth century no one even knew where the old sanctuary had been. Then, in 1676, two travelers recognized an inscription (DELFOI) carved on a stone that by then stood in the kitchen of one of Kastri's residents.<sup>7</sup> The location of old Delphi had been rediscovered.

Still, excavation was slow. The Turks had occupied Greece for centuries, and Greece was at war for much of the next two centuries, struggling to gain its independence.

In 1861 the French Archaeological Society began digging around Delphi. In the late 1880s, in a series of fascinating (and somewhat questionable) maneuvers, the French and Americans competed for the prestigious right to officially excavate the site.<sup>8</sup> The French won, after allowing certain trade concessions to Greece. They also earned the right to pay for the relocation of every resident of Kastri.

Today the entire site has been excavated and the well-organized and beautiful Archaeological Museum of Delphi (owned and managed by the Greek government) shares its extraordinary collection with more than one million guests annually. Several of the old buildings have been rebuilt or partially rebuilt, and a few of the restored columns of the ancient Temple of Apollo now stand upright again.

UNESCO includes the archaeological site of Delphi on its prestigious list of World Heritage Sites, thus acknowledging its outstanding cultural value to humanity. They note, “Blending harmoniously with the



The Naxian Sphinx.  
Photo from the  
Rosicrucian Archiives.

superb landscape and charged with sacred meaning, Delphi in the 6th century BCE was indeed the religious center and symbol of unity of the ancient Greek world.”<sup>9</sup>

Few traditions in the history of the world have exercised greater influence in their time or inspired more intrigue throughout the ages than has Delphi. Even now, amidst the ruins, one can sense the force of this mighty tradition, and if you listen closely, really closely, you can still hear the voices of Delphi, from so long, long ago.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Engraved on the UNESCO plaque at the entrance to the archaeological site of Delphi.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Broad, *The Oracle*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006) 22. *Delphus* also means “dolphin,” revealing the ancient Greeks’ knowledge that dolphins are mammals (with wombs), not fish.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Hale, “Delphic Oracle,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 466, <http://www.religionandnature.com/ern/sample/Hale--DelphicOracle.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> No one knows exactly when the worship of Apollo began at Delphi. Suggested dates range from 1500 BCE to 900 BCE.

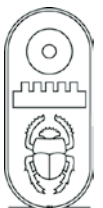
<sup>5</sup> Pierre Amandry, *Delphi and Its History*, (Athens: Greek Archeological Guide, 1984), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Donated by the people of the Cycladic island, Naxos.

<sup>7</sup> Amandry, *Delphi*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> For a fascinating description of this competition see Broad, *Oracle*, 77-82, and Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 57-60. [http://books.google.com/books?id=k9XbDPZOcjQC&pg=PA60&clpg=PA60&dq=delphi+archaeology+french+and+americans&source=web&cots=ZjilDCg9N2&sig=AQtbyIH11u1fxJWVrf\\_kiGMJrJg](http://books.google.com/books?id=k9XbDPZOcjQC&pg=PA60&clpg=PA60&dq=delphi+archaeology+french+and+americans&source=web&cots=ZjilDCg9N2&sig=AQtbyIH11u1fxJWVrf_kiGMJrJg).

<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites around the world that are considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/393/>.

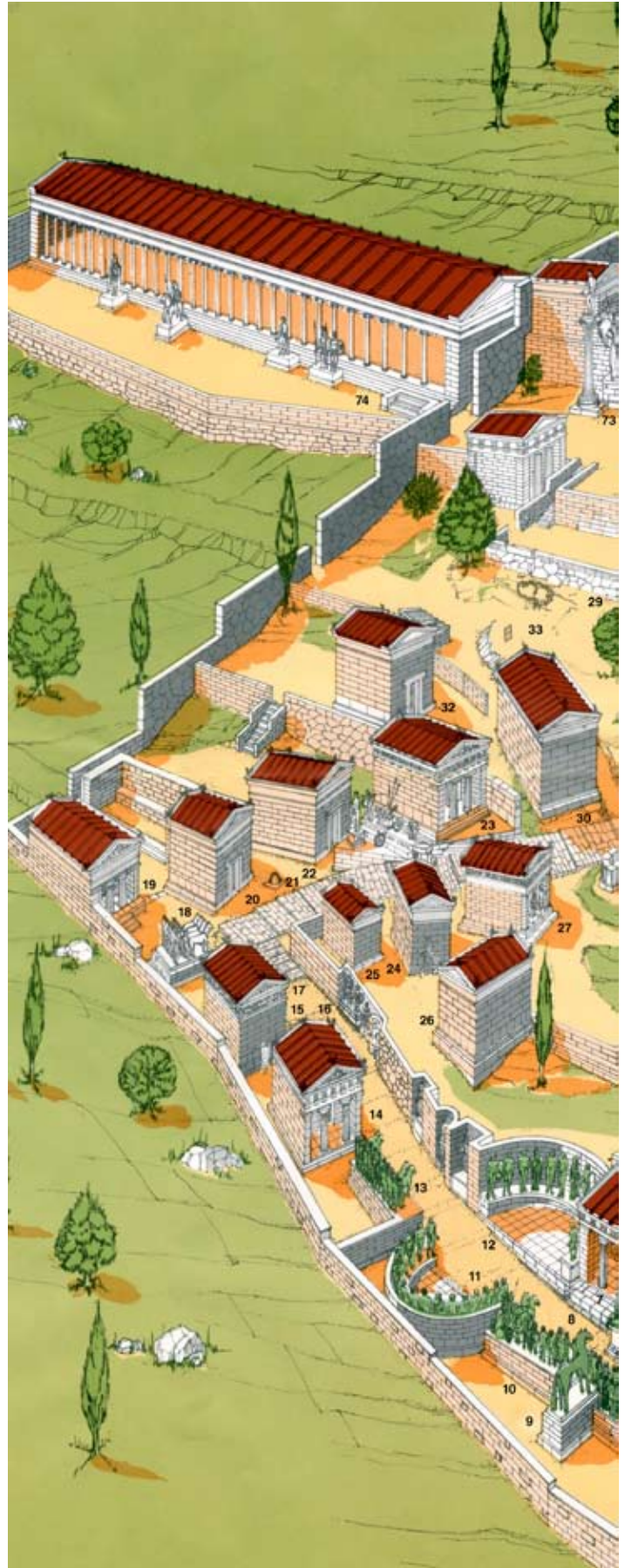


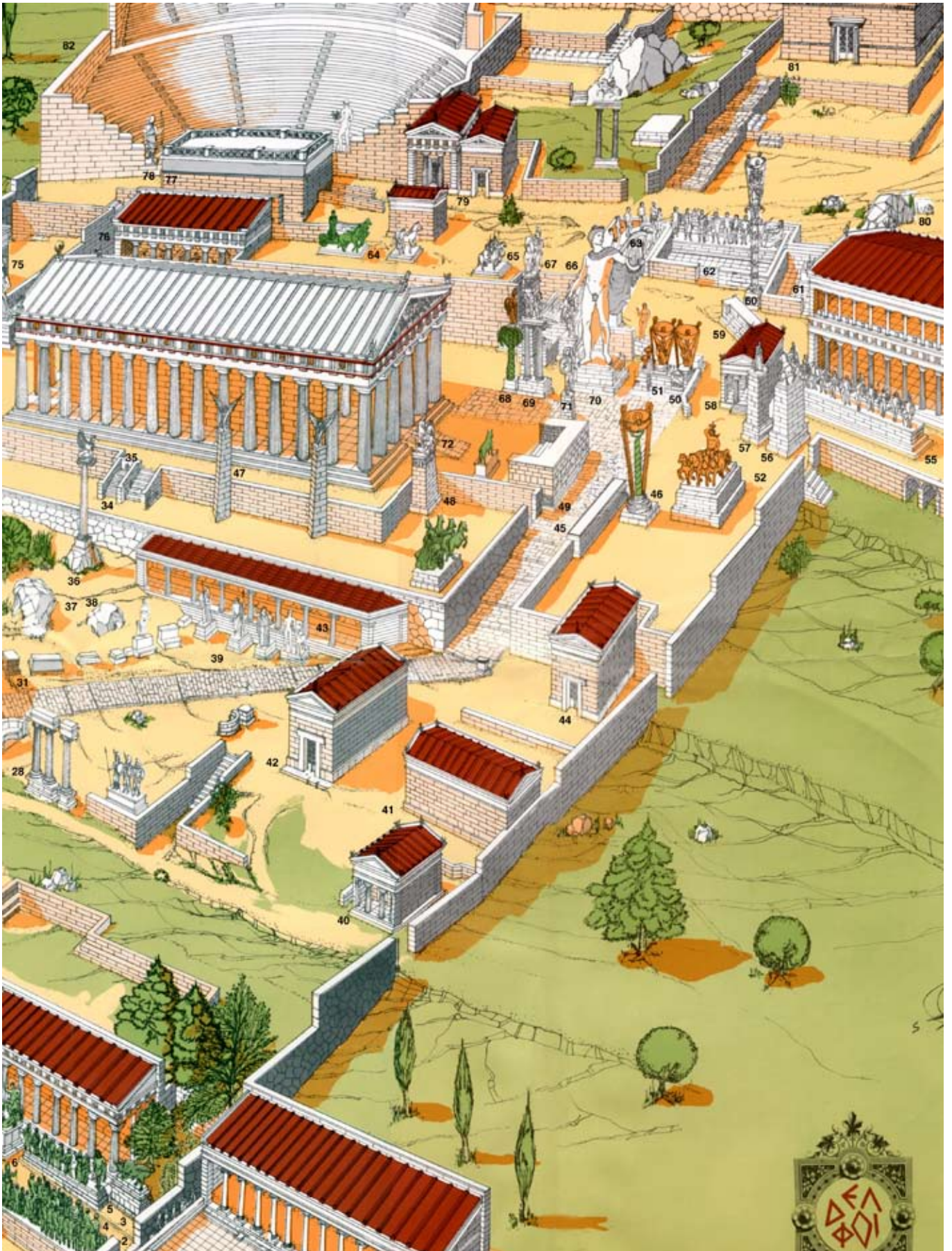
# PLAN AND RECONSTRUCTION OF DELPHI

by C. Pappas

Published in Pierre Amandry, *Delphi and its History*  
(©Greece: An Archaeological Guide Edition, 1984).

Legend on following page.





# Delphi Plan And Reconstruction— I. The Sanctuary of Apollo

## Legend

1. Court and stoa: agora (market place) of the Roman period.
  2. Main entrance of the Sacred Way to the Sanctuary of Apollo.
  3. Bronze bull. Votive offering of the Corkyrans. About 480 BCE.
  4. The Admirals of the Spartans (37 statues). About 404 BCE.
  5. Ex-voto of the Arcadians (9 statues). About 371 BCE.
  6. Statue of mounted Philopoimen. About 207 BCE.
  7. Building with Doric stoa of the Hellenistic period.
  8. Ex-voto of the Athenians to commemorate their victory at Marathon, composed of 13 statues, created by Phidias. About 460 BCE.
  - 9-10-11-12. Argive votive monuments :
  9. Bronze "Dourian Horse" (Wooden Horse of Troy). About 371 BCE.
  10. Statues of the "Seven against Thebes." About 456 BCE.
  11. Statues of "Épigones." About 456 BCE.
  12. The Kings of Argos (10 statues). About 369 BCE.
  13. Ex-voto of the Tarentines. About 473 BCE.
  14. Treasury of the Sikyonians. 6th c. BCE.
  15. Statues of the Knidians. 6th c. BCE.
  16. Votive offering of the Aitolians. 3rd c. BCE.
  17. Treasury of the Siphnians. 530 BCE.
  18. Ex-voto of the Liparians.
  19. Treasury of the Thebans. About 371 BCE.
  20. Treasury of the Beotians. 6th c. BCE.
  21. The Omphalos (navel-stone)—present position.
  22. Treasury of the Poteidaians.
  23. Treasury of the Athenians. 590-585 BCE.
  24. Treasury of the Syracusans. About 413 BCE.
  25. Treasury of the Megarians.
  26. Aiolian Treasury - of the Klazomens.
  27. Treasury of the Knidians. 6th c. BCE.
  28. Pedestals and bases of monuments.
  29. The polygonal wall. 6th c. BCE.
  30. The Delphic Council House (Bouleuterion).
  31. Ex-voto of the Boeotians.
  32. The Asklepieion and spring.
  33. Pedestal of Herod Atticus.
  34. The Sanctuary of the goddess Ge (Earth) and the Muses. Kassotis Spring (6th c. BCE).
  35. Spring of the Sanctuary of the goddess Ge (Earth).
  36. The column (10 m) surmounted by a colossal Sphinx. Votive offering of the Naxians. 570 BCE.
  37. The rock of Sibyl.
  38. The rock of Leto.
  39. The Halos: threshing floor.
  40. Treasury of the Kyreneans. 4th c. BCE.
  41. The Delphic Prytanaion (Magistrates' Hall).
  42. Treasury of the Corinthians. 6th c. BCE.
  43. Porch of the Athenians. About 478 BCE.
  44. Treasury of the Akanthians. About 422 BCE.
  45. Ex-voto of the Tarentines.
  46. Columns of the Messenians. About 425 BCE.
  47. Statue of Aemilius Paulus. 168 BCE.
  48. Altar of Apollo, erected by the C'hians. 6th c. BCE.
  49. Golden tripod with serpent column. Ex-voto of the Greek victory over the Persians at the Battle of Plataea in 479 BCE.
  50. Stele of Cleitor (Arkadia). 332 BCE.
  51. Tripods and Victories of gold, offered by the Syracusan sons of Deinomenes, Gelon and Hieron after the victory at Himera over the Carthaginians. About 479 BCE.
  52. The golden chariot of Helios, dedicated by the Rhodians. About 304 BCE.
  53. The Stoa of Attalos I. 3rd c. BCE.
  54. Building (oikos) of Attalos—"Dionysion".
  55. Monument of Attalos I, King of Pergamon.
  56. Statue of Attalos I.
  57. Statue of Eumenes II.
  58. Archaic Treasury.
  59. Ex-voto of Corkyrans.
  60. Column with three dancers. 325 BCE. (To be seen in the Museum.)
  61. The temenos with shrine of Neoptolemos, son of Achilleus.
  62. The Thessalian monument, built by Daochos II. About 335 BCE. (To be seen in the Museum.)
  63. Votive offering, from the Hellenistic period. (117 statues)
  64. The Charioteer. Most likely position. 475-470 BCE. (To be seen in the Museum.)
  65. Statues of the generals of Aitolians. About 279 BCE.
  66. Spring of Cassotis 14th c. BCE).
  67. Column with statue of Prusias, King of Bithynia.
  68. The bronze Palm Tree, surmounted by a gilt statue of Athena. Votive offering of the Athenians after their victory over the Persians near the Eurymedon River in 468 BCE.
  69. Ex-voto of Aristaineta.
  70. Colossal statue of Apollo Sitalkas.
  71. Column that carried a statue of Eumenes II, King of Pergamon. 2nd c. BCE.
  72. The Temple of Apollo. Reconstruction of the Temple of the 6th c. BCE.
  73. Pedestals of statues.
  74. Western Portico of Aitolians. 3rd c. BCE.
  75. Archaic Treasury.
  76. The lion hunt of Alexander the Great, a bronze group. About 320 BCE.
  77. The stage building of the Theatre.
  78. The Theatre of Delphi.
  79. Archaic Treasuries.
  80. The rock of Cronos.
  81. Lesche (meeting hall) of the Cnidians. About 460 BCE.
  82. Exit towards Stadium.
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