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EXCAVATIONS AT MECYBERNA 1934, 1938

MECYBERNA, the port-town of Olynthos, lies at the head of the Toronaeon gulf at a distance of twenty stades to the southeast of Olynthos.¹ Its site, identified by Chrysochoos and Wace,² was tested for the first time by Professor David M. Robinson in 1934 and some work of minor extent was carried out during the campaign of 1938 conducted by the Johns Hopkins University and Washington University of St. Louis.³

The location of the port-town so far east of Olynthos has caused some concern among scholars, who would have liked to place it directly to the south of that city and by the mouth of the Sandanos (Retsinikia) river which flows to the west of Olynthos.⁴ The position occupied by Mecyberna, however, is the only one possible for the establishment of a port settlement, and this can be seen easily from a survey of the area prepared by Alexander Schmidt (fig. 1). The area immediately around the mouth of Sandanos (fig. 1, S) is marshy and not suitable for the erection of a permanent settlement. To the west of the river the area is too near Potidaea for safety and comfort. To the east of the river the coast for a considerable distance continues to be filled with swamps, is flat and exposed and not suitable for habitation. Even today it is entirely deserted. The first favorable position for establishing a port-town east of the Sandanos is the location over which Mecyberna was erected (fig. 1, M). There the hills come near the shore and offer protection to a settlement. A fair anchorage is also available and furthermore at that point there exists a comfortable supply of water not to be found around the mouth of Sandanos. The location of the port at such a distance and at such an angle from the city it was destined to serve can therefore be attributed to the peculiar natural conditions existing along the coast of the Gulf of Torone.

A series of three mounds rising besides the few houses which form the modern village of Molyvopyrgho⁵ mark the ancient site. Of these the smallest (fig. 2, H) was excavated in 1928 by W. A. Heurtley⁶ and has yielded prehistoric remains ranging in date from the Early to the Late Bronze Age. Of these the most interesting are fragments of Minyan ware which were found in the filling belonging to the second period of the site. They were taken originally to indicate the Trojan origin of this ware, but are now accepted as imports from the mainland or as the work of colonists

¹ Harpokration, *Lexikon* and Suidas, s.v. Μηκύβερνα; Strabo vii, 330, fragment 29.

² Χρυσόχοος, Ἐπετηρίς Παρνασσού iii, 1899, pp. 142–51; Wace, BSA. xxi, 1914–1916. pp. 11 ff., figs. 1–2.

³ AJA. xxxix, 1935, pp. 229–31; xliii, 1939, p. 69 and pp. 304–5. To Professor Robinson I am indebted for permission to study and publish his material from Mecyberna.

⁴ Cf. Struck, *Makedonische Fahrten* i, p. 56 and map.

⁵ The name Molyvopyrgho (the lead tower) seems to have been given to the village, according to the villagers themselves, from a ruined tower which stood at its top and in the construction of which a great quantity of lead was employed. Wace, *op. cit.*, p. 15, suggested that the village "takes its name partly from the ruined tower on the top, partly from the fact that leaden sling-bullets and clamps are often found here."

⁶ BSA. xxix, 1927–1928, pp. 156–75; *Prehistoric Macedonia*, Cambridge, 1939, pp. 10–17, 176–77, 209–13.

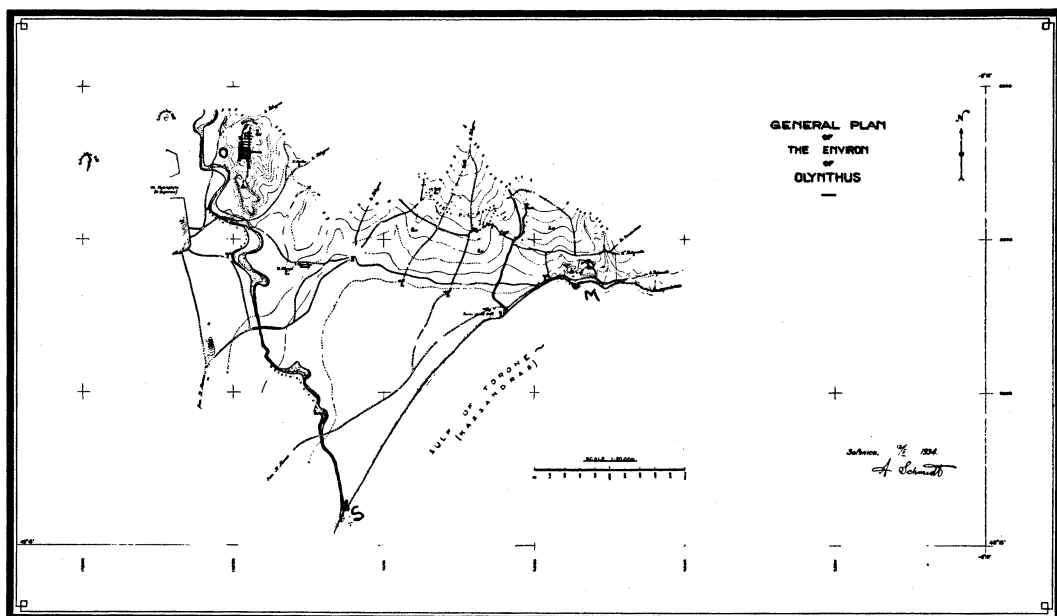


FIG. 1.—GENERAL VIEW OF THE DISTRICT TO THE SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST OF OLYNTHOS

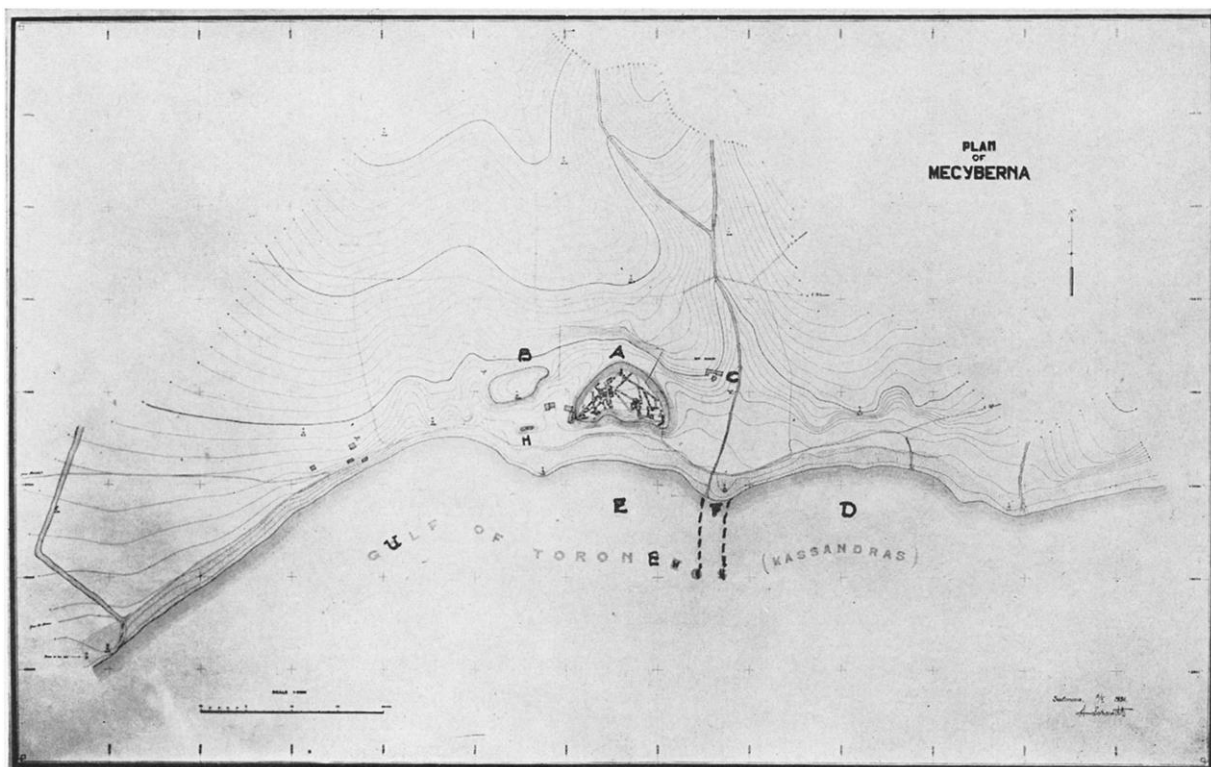


FIG. 2.—GENERAL PLAN OF THE SITE OF MECYBERNA AND ITS ENVIRONS

from the mainland established in this district in the Middle Helladic Period. They offer most valuable evidence for the chronology of the prehistoric periods of the Chalcidice.⁷ No remains of a later age were found there and apparently the mound was not occupied in historic times. To the north of this prehistoric settlement lies our second mound "B." This was tested by Heurtley in the spring of 1928 and again by Professor Robinson in the spring of 1938. Heurtley failed to uncover any remains in his trenches and reached the conclusion that this mound was "entirely natural,"⁸ but Professor Robinson's work revealed some foundations and a good quantity of pottery, proving that the mound was occupied in historic times. The center of the city of Mecyberna was located, however, in the largest heart-shaped natural mound with its extensive flat top marked by the letter "A" in our plan and lying to the east of these two smaller mounds (figs. 2, 3).

This hill comes close to the shore and dominates two rather open havens, indicated by the letters "D" and "E" (the east and west respectively), and a wide strip of sandy beach which at its widest point amounts to about 50 meters. The havens, apparently used in antiquity, formed the approach to the town and were protected by an artificial mole projecting beyond point "F" in our plan. The mole was constructed of roughly hewn blocks of stone piled on each other in a manner still practised today in the smaller Greek islands, and its remains can be seen easily below the surface of the water and could be followed to a distance of at least 25 m. from the shore line. At places the pile of stones has a width of 10 m. This mole protected the west haven from the eastern and southeastern winds and the east haven from the west wind or the Vardar, which is the strongest and most disastrous wind with which this coast is afflicted. It proved impossible to determine whether the mole projected simply from the coast in a straight line, as it is indicated on the plan (fig. 2), or whether it was made to turn and form an enclosure. It was equally impossible to determine the original height of the pile above the sea level. The havens indeed are very open, but the ships could be pulled out of the water and made secure in the broad strip of sand spreading between the foot of the hill and the water line.

The top of the main hill "A" was tested in 1934 by a series of narrow trenches averaging 80 cm. in width. Certain areas around these trenches were further cleared to reveal a larger portion of the settlement. The trenches dug, the larger areas excavated and the remains uncovered in both are indicated in Mr. Travlos' plan made

⁷ Heurtley in *BSA*. xxix, 1927-1928, pp. 182-85 maintained that the Minyan ware of Mecyberna proved the Trojan origin of this ware and that it confirmed Forsdyke's view on the matter (cf. *JHS*. xxxiv, 1914, pp. 126-56). In the *Πρακτικά τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν* 1931, pp. 106-13, I pointed out the impossibility of this view and placed the beginning of the Second Period at Mecyberna at about 1700 B.C. Heurtley (*Prehistoric Macedonia*) has accepted this date (p. 126), as well as the southern origin of the ware (p. 123), although he has taken pains to point out that "Mylonas' arguments do not prove it" and that they "are not convincing." I am satisfied with the fact that my arguments were strong enough to make Heurtley change his view and accept my conclusions. The evidence on the problem obtained at Eutresis is eliminated by Heurtley, *op. cit.*, p. 123, because in "the final report on Eutresis . . . nothing is said of such priority" (of the plain over the grooved Minyan). Yet Miss Goldman, *Excavations at Eutresis in Boeotia*, Cambridge, 1931, states definitely that "incision while not found in the period of transition from Early to Middle Helladic, begins to appear at the first building level" (p. 141). With the incised she groups the grooved ware also (p. 142 and figs. 197 and 199) and her transitional is the earliest or first stage of her Middle Helladic Period (pp. 31 and 32).

⁸ *BSA*. xxix, 1927-1928, p. 156 and note 2.



FIG. 3.—THE SITE OF MECYBERNA. HILL "A" FROM THE WEST

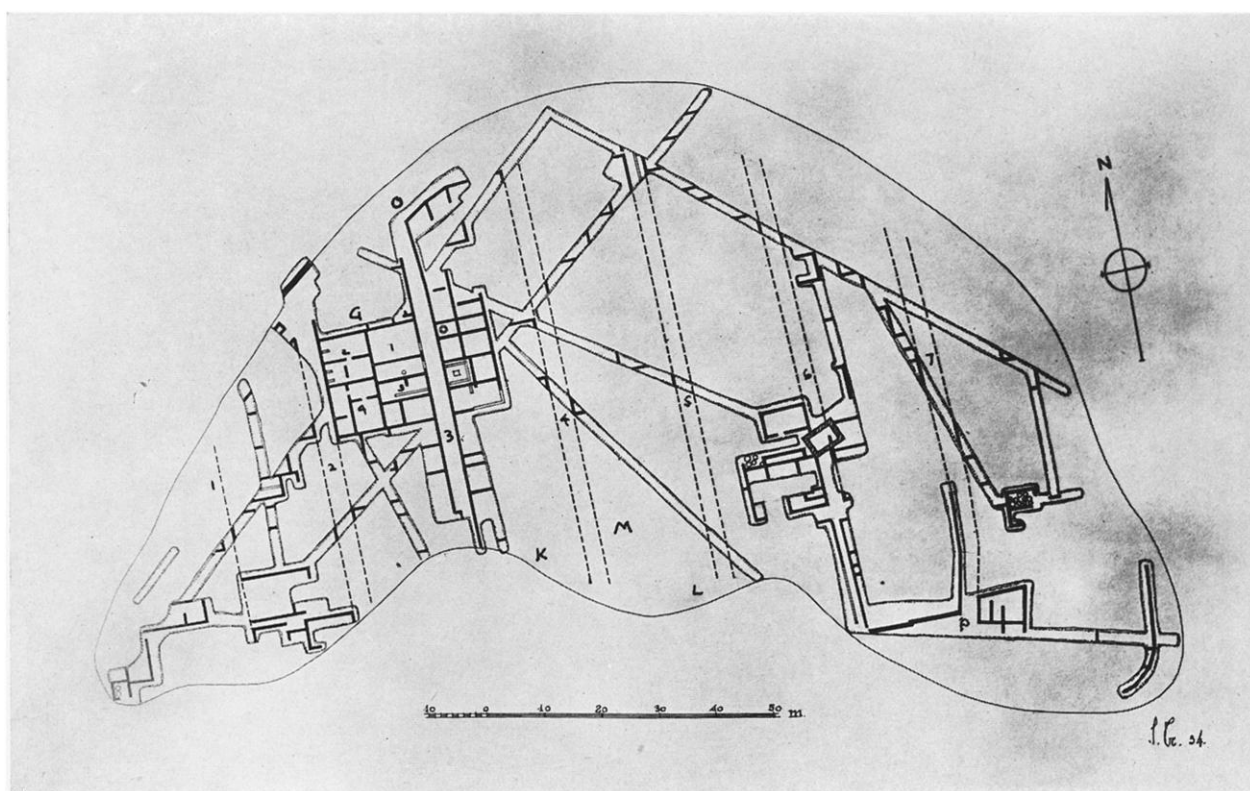


FIG. 4.—THE EXCAVATED AREA OF HILL "A"

in 1934 and reproduced in our figure 4. With a group of 10 to 12 laborers in the spring of 1938 we tested the edge of the hill at the points "K" and "L" and also excavated completely an area, about 10 by 10 m., at the section indicated by the letter "M." In all the excavated areas remains began to appear at a depth of 25 to 35 cm. below the present surface of the soil, proving that the top of Hill "A" was covered thickly with structures. Whether these were laid on a regular city planning system, such as that used at Olynthos,⁹ is not very certain, but the results obtained from the campaign of 1934 seem to indicate that the area was divided in somewhat narrow strips of land by streets running approximately from north to south laid parallel and at a distance of 18 m. from each other (fig. 4). The only indication of the existence of streets running in a different direction was revealed at the point "O" and at the point "P," where it seems as if we have the beginning of two streets running roughly from east to west. It remains therefore uncertain whether the entire city area on the top of Hill "A" was divided in long and narrow strips, or in square or oblong blocks. This verification of the plan as well as of the parallel streets remains to be accomplished in a future campaign.

Indications of seven streets running from north to south have been revealed thus far. They are unpaved, average 2.50 m. in width, and become stepped when they reach the sharply sloping sides of the hill. Their appearance is well illustrated by street no. 3, which was excavated almost to its entire length. A good part of the area to the west of street 3 towards street 2 was cleared and its remains will enable us to form some idea of the way in which the buildings were arranged in the "land strips" limited by the streets. It is apparent from the plan (fig. 4) that the structures were placed back to back with their fronts facing the parallel streets. Evidently the roofs of these structures were sloping to the streets and to the opposite direction from a common ridge pole which marked their common rear wall. The buildings are very small and we seem to have at least four distinct edifices in the area marked by the letter "G": two facing east (1 and 3) and two facing west (2 and 4). Two of these buildings, at least, are divided into four compartments, and we shall see later on that this division is rather typical of Mecyberna. The foundations of these structures have survived usually to a height of 40 cm. above their floor levels (fig. 5).

Only the west half of the strip to the east of street 3 was cleared with the structures facing that street (fig. 4), but it may be permissible to assume that a similar arrangement facing street 4 will be found if the area is excavated further. The remains revealed in this narrow area belong to two separate buildings, each of which is divided into four compartments. In one of them a well was found; in the other a stone hearth similar to those discovered at Olynthos¹⁰ (fig. 6).

The ground plan of these structures and their nature was further studied in 1938, when one of them was fully excavated on the east side of street 4 and at the section indicated by the letter "M" in the plan of 1934. The remains of this structure (M) are well preserved to a considerable height (fig. 7), its openings or doorways are clearly defined and its division in compartments is very certain. In the plan of Mr. Lefakis (fig. 8) we can easily see that the structure is divided into four compart-

⁹ Cf. D. M. Robinson and J. W. Graham, *Excavations at Olynthus* viii, *The Hellenic House*, Baltimore, 1938, pp. 29-38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-88, fig. 13; pl. 52, 2.



FIG. 5.—FOUNDATIONS UNCOVERED TO THE WEST OF STREET 3. UNEXCAVATED STREET 2 IN THE FOREGROUND



FIG. 6.—FOUNDATIONS UNCOVERED TO THE EAST OF STREET 3. "A," STONE HEARTH



FIG. 7.—REMAINS OF BUILDING “M”

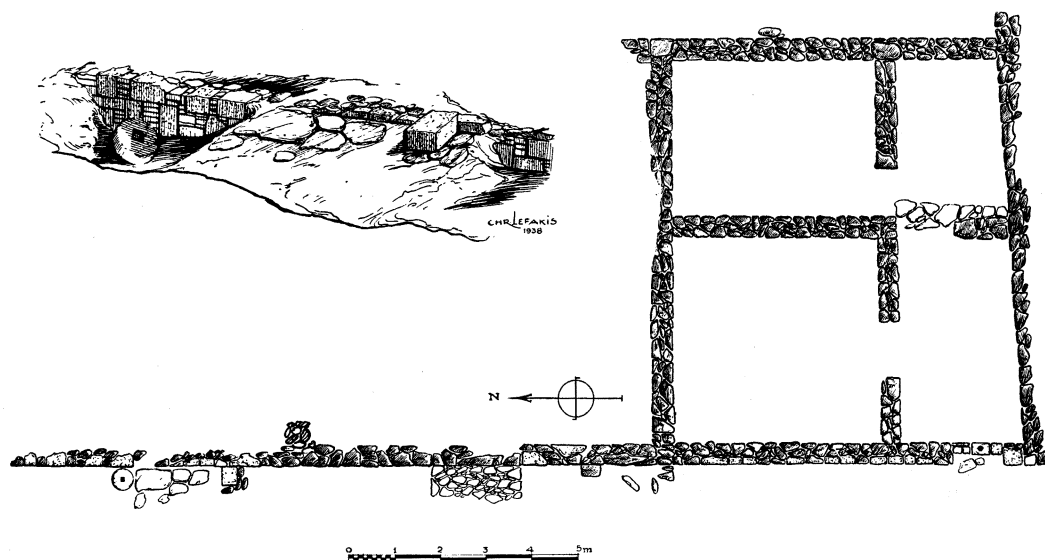


FIG. 8.—PLAN OF HOUSE “M”

ments, consisting of two larger and almost square rooms opening from two smaller and narrower rooms. The floors in every case are of packed earth and are at a lower level than that of the street. Owing to this difference in levels, the stone foundation wall was carried across the door opening to act as a threshold and as a retaining wall to the filling of the street. This arrangement was also noticed in the wall construction of the structures along street 3 and perhaps it will explain the lack of apparent door openings in the various compartments of the buildings at Mecyberna.¹¹ All four compartments were found filled with terracotta roof tiles of the common long and narrow tunnel variety, proving that the structure was roofed over entirely. Apparently it was ventilated and lighted by means of "ὄπαια κεραμίδες," fragments of which were found in the débris of the two inner rooms of the structure.¹²

The foundation bearing the façade of the structure was built of cut flat stones, large and small in size, carefully laid in an intricate pattern. This foundation was constructed in the same manner to a considerable length and apparently served for the façades of the buildings which were erected on the east side of street 4 (fig. 8). At a distance of 3 m. from the north wall of house "M," the doorway of another building was uncovered and beyond that the door opening of a third edifice. From these door openings and the beginnings of the partition walls uncovered, it becomes apparent that to the north of building "M" we have two more buildings of the same width as that of "M." Furthermore, if we add a structure of similar dimensions to those of "M" beyond its rear wall, we will fill the entire width of the strip limited by streets 4 and 5. The apparent conclusion is that the buildings occupying this strip of land measured approximately 9 by 8 m. and were divided into smaller compartments, perhaps four. The same small dimensions are exhibited by the structures uncovered in 1934 around street 3. It is interesting to remark that these dimensions are almost equal to half those used as a rule for the houses uncovered at Olynthos. No evidence was uncovered as yet indicating the existence of a second story in any of the buildings of Mecyberna, which by their remains are proved to have served as houses. These houses, of the simplest type, with very few rooms and without any pretensions, contrast very sharply with those excavated at Olynthos, and this contrast will be difficult to explain. The principle of the grouping of rooms about an open court, always present at Olynthos, apparently is scarcely employed, if at all, at Mecyberna.¹³ The drainage alleys, so prominent at Olynthos, are entirely missing at Mecyberna¹⁴ and differences exist even in the details of construction. The walls of the houses at Mecyberna as a rule are not covered with plaster stucco

¹¹ The same could be maintained for similar instances in the houses of Olynthos. This use of the foundation for a threshold is a very old arrangement. We find it for the first time, to my knowledge, in the Early Helladic Period. Cf. Mylonas, "Excavations at Hagios Kosmas," *AJA.* xxxviii, 1934, p. 260.

¹² Such tiles were also found at Olynthos. Cf. Robinson-Mylonas in *AJA.* xliii, 1939, p. 54.

¹³ Thus far not a single example of a house with a court has been uncovered at Mecyberna.

¹⁴ It is evident from the plans that they were not necessary at Mecyberna. The streets apparently were used for drainage. The houses of Mecyberna in style and in construction are nearer to those uncovered on the southern hill of Olynthos. Perhaps the limited space necessitated the crowding of structures at Mecyberna, as it did at Athens. It seems probable that at Olynthos only when they felt secure in the increased strength of their city, and when they extended the city area to include the adjacent hills (north and east spur) did they begin to build larger and more spacious houses.

(only two fragments of such plaster were found in the entire area) and only in one instance was the Olynthian "cement" employed to pave one of the rooms. This difference becomes more striking when we consider that the finds made in the simple houses of Meczyberna are as numerous and as valuable as those from the elaborate houses of Olynthos.

The center of the town of Meczyberna, as revealed on the flat top of our hill "A," must have presented a very crowded appearance when all its buildings were standing, and its remains can help us to visualize the cramped conditions which are reported to have existed at Athens during the Classical period. Its houses were certainly "εὐτελείς" and could be called "οἰκίδια"; its streets could be blocked by doors swinging outward and the hill itself could be called a Pnyx, "διὰ τὴν συνοίκησιν πυκνουμένην εἶναι."¹⁵ Certainly some of its rich inhabitants, like those of Athens, must have had their spacious homes in the surrounding country and perhaps at Olynthos itself.

Remains of an earlier building period were found below the foundations of the houses discussed (figs. 5, 6), but they are so fragmentary that they do not permit definite conclusions as to their plans.¹⁶ They were found, however, associated with black-figured and red-figured ware of the Early Archaic period. These vases, along with coins and lamps uncovered, will place the earlier structures in the Pre-Persian Period. In many parts of the hill extensive layers of ashes were found associated with the earlier remains and these may indicate that the earlier settlement was destroyed by fire and perhaps by the retreating Persian army in 479 B.C. The settlement, the remains of which we have discussed, seems to be contemporary with the buildings uncovered on the north hill at Olynthos. Apparently it was not destroyed by Philip, even though it was occupied by him before 348 B.C.,¹⁷ and continued to be inhabited even after his death. On the basis of the coins found at the site in 1934, Robinson and Clement have concluded that Meczyberna "remained inhabited until the founding of Cassandrea and then it was depopulated in favor of its new large neighbor."¹⁸ This conclusion is substantiated by the results of the work carried out at the site in 1938. The hill remained uninhabited until modern times, when a "kastro" or "pyrghos" (castle or tower) was built by the Turks at its northeast corner to provide shelter to a Turkish garrison. The "kastro" was destroyed in 1912, after the occupation of the area by the Greek army.

The portable objects uncovered at Meczyberna are similar in every respect to those found at Olynthos. Perhaps the most numerous are the coins. In 1934, 213 well preserved ancient coins were found. Of these 41 date before 348 B.C., 77 belong to the reign of Philip II, 92 to the period from Alexander III to Cassander, and only 3 to the years after Cassander.¹⁹ In the very short campaign of 1938, 32 coins were found and of these 9 date before 348, 11 belong to the reign of Philip II, 12 to the period of Alexander III to Cassander, and none to a later period. Vases and terracottas come next in quantity and importance. The vases include black-figured,

¹⁵ Harpocraton, *Lexikon*, s.v. πύκνι.

¹⁶ A full discussion will appear in the final publication of the material. ¹⁷ Diodorus xvi, 53.

¹⁸ D. M. Robinson and P. A. Clement, *Excavations at Olynthus* ix, *The Chalcidic Mint and the Excavation Coins found in 1928-1934*, Baltimore, 1938, p. 374.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

red-figured, plain and stamped ware.²⁰ In both campaigns a number of terracottas were found in the buildings, representing every type discovered at Olynthos. Perhaps the most interesting is a "Kourotrophos," discovered in 1938, perfectly preserved and standing to a height of 10 cm. A good many lamps and the regular quota of pointed amphorae and pithoi were also found, as well as a variety of loom weights, sling bullets,²¹ arrowheads, fish-hooks, beads and rings. Some of the loom weights were made of lead.

It will prove very interesting to clear the entire area of this flat-topped hill and to uncover completely its remains. This will be done we hope in a future campaign. Until then all definite conclusions on the site of Mecyberna and of its problems have to be withheld. But what has been found and what remains to be found at that site will prove of great consequence as comparative material and will supplement the evidence uncovered at Olynthos.

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²⁰ Cf. Robinson, *AJA.* xxxix, 1935, pp. 229-231, fig. 30. Wace, *op. cit.*, p. 15, has recorded the rumour ("the inhabitants say") "that on a vase fragment found here was inscribed MHKYBEPNA."

²¹ Some of these bullets bear the name of Philip stamped on them; the inscription ΑΘΕΝΑΙΩΝ is found in a few instances. Cf. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 231.