



The Site of Olynthus

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THE SITE OF OLYNTHUS.

EARLY in 1915 during a short journey in Macedonia I took the opportunity of exploring the site and neighbourhood of Olynthus¹ (Fig. 1),

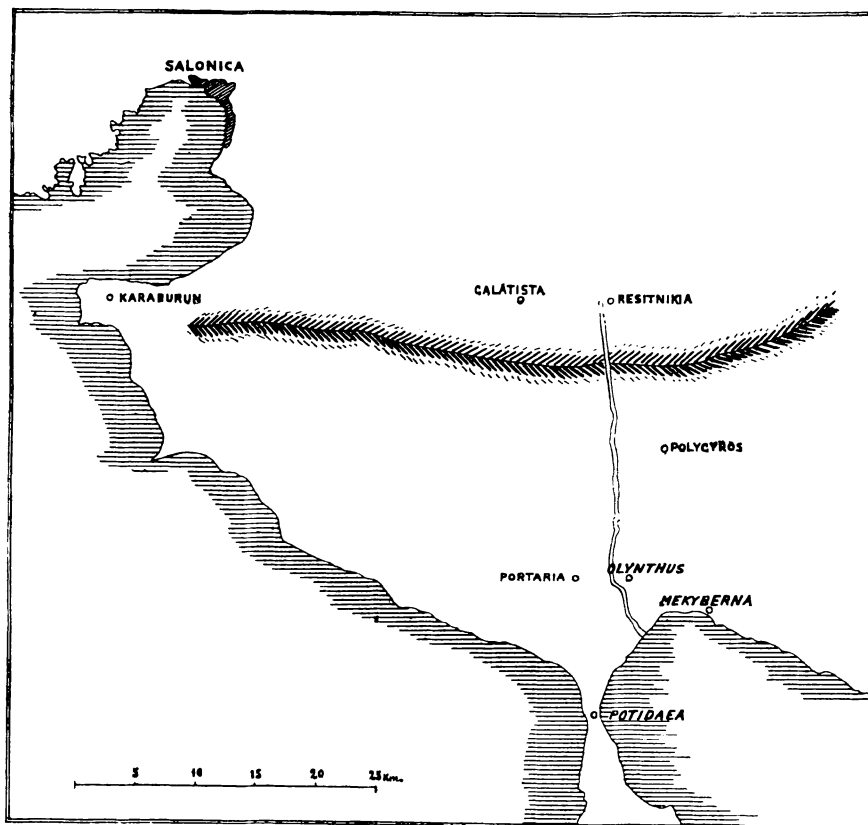


FIG. 1.—SKETCH MAP OF CHALKIDIKE.

because it is hoped that the British School at Athens will before long be able

¹ See :—Voemel, *De Olynthi situ*, pp. 1 ff.; Leake, *N. Greece*, iii, p. 154; Cousinéry, *Voyage dans la Macédoine*, ii, pp. 160 ff.; Struck, *Makedonische Fahrten*, i, pp. 38 ff.; Χρυσόχδος, 'Επετηρίς Παννασσού, iii (1899), pp. 142 ff.; Δημήτρης, *Μακεδονία*, pp. 607 ff., 621 ff.

to begin excavations there. I spent two days in the territory of Olynthus examining sites at Hagios Mamas, Myriophyton and Molivopyrgos as well as the ruins at Pizla, Magazudia and Palaiportes, all near Polygyros, which are those of mediaeval or modern villages. Although somewhat impeded by a heavy fall of snow I had the satisfaction of seeing for myself the comparative warmth of the climate of Olynthus even in winter. All about the reputed site of Olynthus the snow soon melted, whereas to the west beyond the village of Portaria towards the Kara Burun promontory, the snow remained for several days. The biting north-west Vardar wind which freezes the western end of Chalkidike in winter is kept off from Olynthus by the range of hills behind Polygyros, some of which are over three thousand feet high. Along the coast from Hagios Mamas to Molivopyrgos the territory of Olynthus is warm, faces south and is fertile, producing oil, corn, wine and silk. The low ground towards the coast is covered with olive groves, while the hills to the north are clothed with oak woods which were undoubtedly finer in antiquity than they are to-day. In most of the houses in Polygyros the doors and floors are of oak instead of the usual pine. These circumstances, coupled with the good anchorage¹ at Molivopyrgos (the ancient Mekyberna), make it easy to understand the wealth and commercial importance of Olynthus. In addition to its other advantages, from Polygyros there runs the best road northwards into the upper country. Iron is said to be found in the hills and to-day mines of chrome and magnesite are worked along the coast.

As regards the actual site of Olynthus there are two opinions. The older view, that of Leake, places the site at Hagios Mamas where some inscriptions have been found. Leake, however, does not seem to have ever visited Hagios Mamas himself, but to have followed a local tradition also adopted by Cousinéry,² Demitzas and most subsequent writers on Macedonian topography. The newer view of Chrysochoös supported by Struck, places Olynthus at the mound on the east or left bank of the river of Resitnikia opposite the farm of Myriophyton (Fig. 2).

At Hagios Mamas there seems to be no ancient site at all and the inhabitants state that if to-day they want stone for building they fetch it from Portes (the ruins of Potidaea-Kassandra) which is within the bounds

¹ Struck's suggested harbour for Olynthus near Hagios Mamas does not seem likely.

² He however puts Olynthus at Myriophyton in his map.

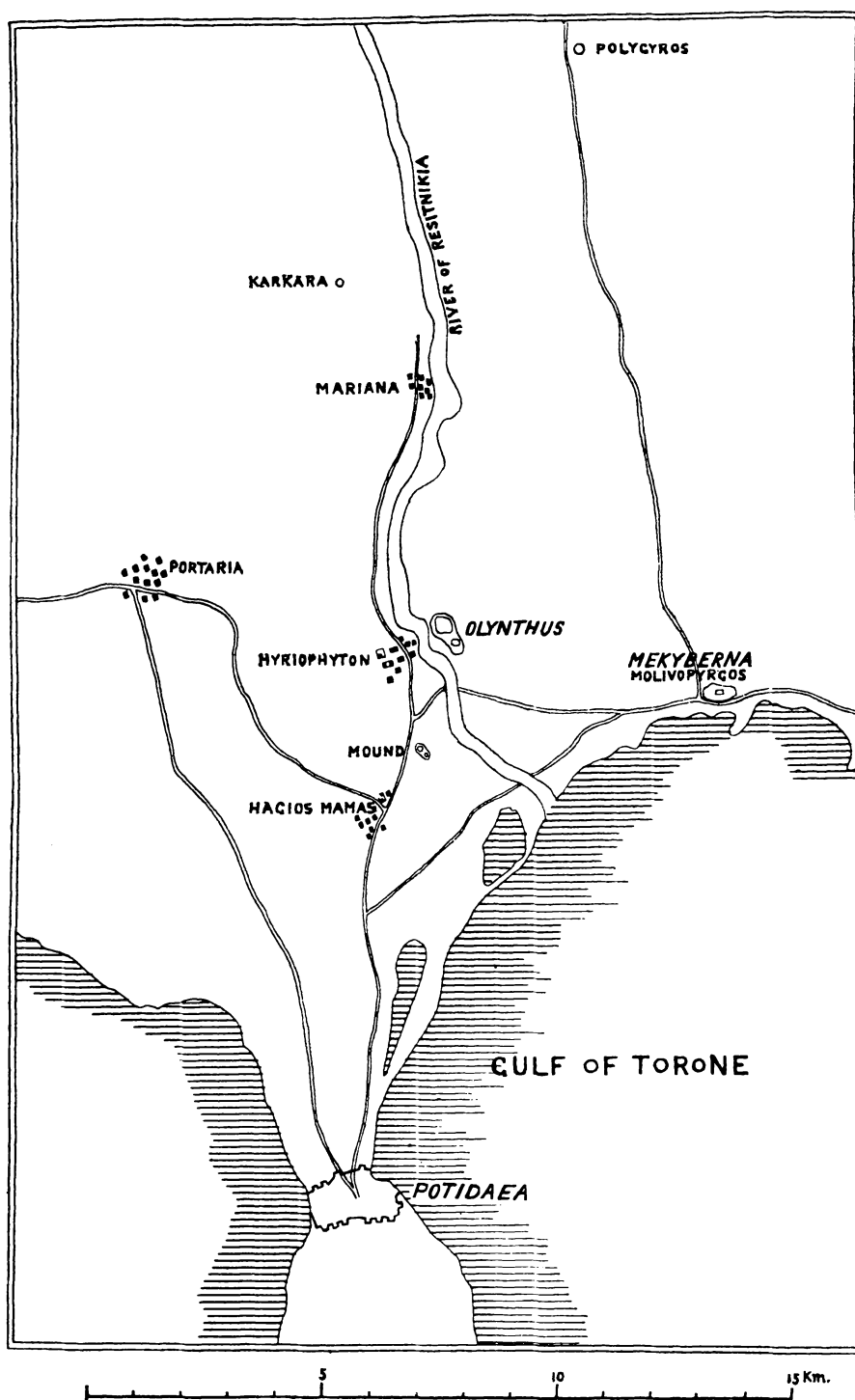


FIG. 2.—SKETCH MAP OF THE DISTRICT ROUND THE SITE OF OLYNTHUS.

of the village lands. Apparently, then, the inscriptions¹ at Hagios Mamas should be attributed to Potidaea and to Olynthus. At Myriophyton there are two inscriptions² and on the opposite bank of the river near a chapel of the Virgin, to the south of Olynthus is another.³ At the church of Hagios Nikolaos near Polygyros is one inscription⁴ and two more are reported to exist or to have existed there. One is said to have been removed by the bishop; the other my guide could not find because of the snow. There are also in Myriophyton village many cut blocks of marble and stone all brought from the site on the other bank of the river. This site agrees with the distances given by Thucydides,⁵ who says Olynthus was sixty stades from Potidaea, and Harpocration who states⁶ it was twenty stades from Mekyberna. The site of Potidaea is fixed from its well known position on the isthmus uniting the peninsula of Pallene with the mainland. According to the Austrian Staff Map, which is not remarkable for accuracy in this district, from Potidaea to the site at Myriophyton is a distance of twelve kilometres and thence to Molivopyrgos six kilometres. Hagios Mamas on the other hand is eight kilometres both from Potidaea and from Molivopyrgos. Thus apart from all other questions, calculation of the distances given by the ancient authorities points to Myriophyton rather than to Hagios Mamas as the most likely site for Olynthus. One other natural feature confirms this. Xenophon⁷ mentions a river flowing by the walls of Olynthus and from his account the river appears to have been on the Potidaean or western side of the city. At Hagios Mamas not only is there no ancient site, but not even a river to flow under its walls. The site at Myriophyton stands directly on the left or eastern bank of the Resitnikia river, which is thus on the Potidaean side of the city.

The site in question is a large, flat-topped mound about half an hour in circumference, with a small bastion like projection at its southern end where are the ruins of a Turkish tower. This mound is mainly of natural formation, composed of hard ground covered by a flat, table-like layer of conglomerate. Above the conglomerate is a layer of soil from one to two

¹ Δημύρζας, Nos. 744 to 753 except No. 750 for which see below.

² Both grave stelai (fourth-third century?): one reads ΚΗΘΙΣΘΑΔΡΟΣ | ΘΕΥΓΕ- ΤΟΝΟΣ; the other ΚΥΔΡΩ | ΘΕΟΚΡ · ΟΥ.

³ A grave monument much defaced and almost illegible. At Karkara and Mariana are a grave monument and a stele, perhaps from Olynthus.

⁴ Demitzas, No. 750 = *C.I.G.* 2007 *i*.

⁵ *i*, 63.

⁶ *s.v.*

⁷ *Hellenica*, v, 3. 3.

metres thick and full of ancient debris. I was shewn some late terracotta figurines (probably of the third century B.C. or later) which peasants had found here, and all round the edges of the mound-walls Greek tiles and potsherds are to be seen. The mound from its size was clearly the site of an important ancient city and that city from the topographical indications given above was in all probability Olynthus. In the plain to the east the peasants say they find ancient foundations when they plough their land or plant olive trees. The idea that the city extended far into the plain is to them a proof that it was a very great one, but it does not seem likely that it extended much, if at all, into the plain. There is however in the plain to the east a small funereal tumulus and on a ridge to the north is a field where the peasants have excavated cut blocks of stone. Although the site on the mound seems to have been badly plundered yet the depth of the soil gives hope that excavations may bring to light important finds, especially in view of the well known inscription¹ from Olynthus now in Vienna.

Between Myriophyton and Hagios Mamas on the west side of the river is a large prehistoric mound which has already been referred to elsewhere.²

Molivopyrgos, the site of Mekyberna, is a long oval flat-topped mound lying close to the shore some six kilometres south-east of Olynthus at the head of the Gulf of Torone. The mound is of natural formation, but is thick with ancient remains ranging apparently from prehistoric to late Hellenic. The mound takes its name, 'Lead Tower,' partly from the ruined tower on the top, partly from the fact that leaden sling-bullets and clamps are often found here. That it was Mekyberna, the port of Olynthus, is highly probable. It is the nearest anchorage to Olynthus and the remains of an ancient mole are to be seen stretching out into the sea, and the inhabitants say that on a vase fragment found here was inscribed ΜΗΚΥΒΕΡΝΑ.

It will thus be seen that though the identifications of the sites of Olynthus and Mekyberna are not absolutely certain, yet the probability is very strong in favour of the sites described being correctly named; it remains, however, for excavation to settle the point decisively.

A. J. B. WACE.

¹ Hicks-Hill, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* (ed. 2), No. 95=Dittenberger, *Sylloge*² No. 77.

² *B.S.A.* xx, p. 128, B. 9.