

IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship Report

The Olynthos Project

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Introduction

Thanks to the IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship, I was able to participate in my second season as a ceramics analysis team member with the Olynthos Project. The Olynthos Project, which began in 2014, is a multi-disciplinary project which uses excavation, field survey, geoarchaeology, faunal and botanical analysis, and ceramics analysis to more fully understand not only the Greek household, but also the interactions of neighborhoods and cities.

The City of Olynthos

The city of Olynthos was built on two hills in the region of northern Greece called the Chalcidice. The first settlement at Olynthos was on the smaller South Hill. Although there is evidence of a Neolithic settlement on the South Hill, the site was later abandoned until the 7th century B.C., when a city of small houses and shops grew up along four main roads, two running north-south and two running east-west (Cahill, 2002). The cityscape of Olynthos changed significantly during the Peloponnesian War, when a rebellion of the cities in the Chalcidice from the Athenian empire caused neighboring communities to seek shelter in the easily defensible site of Olynthos. This movement of people, called an *anoikismos*, caused a huge population boom in the city and perhaps as much as tripled the number of people residing in the small city (Cahill, 2010). Thus, around 432 B.C., a new city was built on the North Hill. This city was built in an orthogonal plan with blocks of ten houses, which were arranged in two rows of five houses back to back

separated by a narrow alley. The typical house on the North Hill at Olynthos was centered around a large courtyard with a transitional space on the north side of the courtyard called the *pastas*. The *pastas* led into a set of rooms used for cooking, bathing and domestic activities, called the *oikos* complex. Many of the houses at Olynthos had *andrones*, men's quarters, which were connected to the rest of the house via the courtyard. The *andron* was the home of the Greek symposium, a drinking ritual, in which men, reclining on banqueting couches, would consume mixed wine and otherwise entertain themselves. These rooms were often lavishly decorated with wall painting and pebble mosaics. The famous Bellerophon Mosaic from Olynthos is just one example of this type of decoration. The new city on the North Hill was built up over time and new housing blocks were added as the community expanded and the need for housing grew (Cahill, 2010). An example of this type of expansion was the creation of a suburb called the Villa Section in the early fourth century B.C., which did not maintain the grid plan of the main city, although it probably still lay within the city walls (Cahill, 2010). Despite its rapid growth, the Classical city at Olynthos was not long lived. It was destroyed and sacked by Philip II and his army in 348 B.C. and was never reoccupied, although Cahill argues that the city remained in used until 316 B.C. (Cahill, 2010).

The city was excavated extensively by David M. Robinson in the 1920s and 30s. During his work on the site, he uncovered over one hundred houses, making Olynthos one of the most important sites for the study of Greek houses in the ancient world. Although his archaeological methods are widely criticized, he laid the foundation for a broad understanding of the nature of the Greek city, which would not have been possible without his work. Robinson did archaeological work on both the North and South Hills, although it is only on the

North Hill that his excavations have led to the conservation of houses open to the general public. The Olynthos Project seeks to fill in the gaps left by Robinson's more crude archaeological methods and also to use modern methods and technologies to gain a fuller understanding of the site of Olynthos.

The Olynthos Project

Since 2014, an excavation led by Dr. Lisa Nevett (The University of Michigan), Dr. Bettina Tsigarida (The Hellenic Ministry of Culture) and Dr. Zosia Archibald (The University of Liverpool), has sought to answer important questions about the ancient city of Olynthos. The project combines field survey, excavation, and geophysics to accomplish these goals. The field survey, led by Dr. David Stone (The University of Michigan), uses the collection of diagnostic artifacts to understand the area around the city, the extent of the urban space and possible production areas in the agricultural fields, which surround the hill. The excavation of the site is focused on two areas, one on the North Hill and one on the South Hill. On the North Hill, the excavation of a single house is being used to answer questions about the stratigraphy of the site, since Robinson's recording of stratigraphy was woefully limited, as well as answer questions about domestic space in Olynthos. Using geophysics, an area of the South Hill was also identified and trenches were opened in 2016. These trenches, which were expanded in 2017, are providing valuable information about the layout of the older city as well as providing information on the periods of occupation. In addition to this, geochemical analysis, microdebris analysis, borehole core sampling, electrical resistivity tomography, and phytolith analysis provide important information on the use of domestic space and how that changed over time.

My Participation in the Olynthos Project, Summer 2017

As a ceramics analysis team member with the Olynthos project, my role in the excavations was to contribute to the sorting of ceramic material from both the survey and excavations. Days at Olynthos began early, with a brisk walk to the site at dawn. The ceramics team was responsible for sorting a wide variety of ceramic material including coarse kitchen wares, fine wares, terracotta roof tiles, and decorated wares of both local origin and Athenian import. Each day, the ceramics team was responsible for collecting pottery from drying screens and sorting it into various types based on the coarseness of the material ceramic and its possible function, keeping out diagnostic pieces for later analysis. Once the sherds were weighed and recorded, the team would then use diagnostic sherds to try and identify certain shapes in an attempt to understand the types of assemblages at Olynthos. With the help of experts like Dr. Chevdar Tzochey, an amphora specialist, Dr. Nikos Akamatis, a red figure specialist, and Dr. Anna Panti, a specialist in the local wares of northern Greece, we were able to identify the origins of imported goods, interpret complex decorative scenes from the smallest sherds, and start to understand the duration of the settlement on the older South Hill. After primary processing was completed, our team leader, Dr. Bradley Ault, began secondary processing, making a detailed analysis of important artifacts and taking high resolution photographs for publication.

Conclusion

Thanks to the IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship, I was able to participate in this exciting interdisciplinary program for my second season. My time spent at Olynthos was invaluable to my dissertation research, which focuses on

women in domestic spaces in the Greek world. The IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship allowed me to jumpstart my dissertation research by giving me the opportunity to examine objects used by women in the domestic space in context. It is with this in mind that I would like to thank the IEMA Board, the Department of Classics, the Department of Anthropology, and Milton Ezrati for giving me the opportunity to travel to Greece to participate in the excavations and continue my dissertation research at Olynthos.

Works Cited:

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Nevett, L. et al. 2017. "Towards a Multi-Scalar, Multidisciplinary Approach to the Classical Greek City: The Olynthos Project." *Annual of the British School at Athens* 112:155-206.

"The Olynthos Project" <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/olynthos-project/>