KOURION — PAST ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE PLANS

Now that we are perfecting plans for a number of new excavations, it may be well to look back on one excavation which is already in progress, to see what has been accomplished, and to indicate what remains to be done. We began work at the site of the ancient city of Kourion in Cyprus in 1934, carried our work forward annually until the war, and have since resumed it; word has just been received of the beginning of the 1948 season of excavations. The work has always been conducted on a rather modest scale; we have at no time employed as many as a hundred workmen, and have usually had less than fifty. On the other hand, our archaeological staff has spent years in the field without interruption, rarely returning to this country. This has resulted in a particularly intimate knowledge of the site on the part of the excavators, and in the fact that the study of the material found has generally kept pace with the actual discovery. The excavation has been under the general supervision of Dr. B. H. Hill since the beginning. Much of our success is due to his mastery of the techniques of excavation and his unparalleled knowledge of Classical architecture. Mr. George H. McFadden was an initial member of the expedition, and has remained with it until the present time. The undersigned was the third member of the original expedition, was in the field continuously until the outbreak of war, and plans a brief return visit during the coming fall. The present staff consists of Dr. Hill, Mr. McFadden, Dr. and Mrs. John H. Young and Mr. Joseph Last. The Youngs and Mr. Last have been with us since 1939. In addition to these we have had the services, for one or more seasons, of Miss Virginia Grace, Miss Dorothy Hannah Cox, Miss Sarah Anderson, and Mr. Louis Lands. Most recently Mr. P. Dikaios, Curator of the Cyprus Museum, has joined our expedition on a temporary basis to supervise the excavation of the Sotira site.

When we began work we knew relatively little about the ancient city. The scanty references in ancient literature told us that Kourion was one of the several independent kingdoms on Cyprus, that it had been colonized by Argives, that its port was the point of departure for Greece, and that it possessed a sanctuary of Apollo Hylates set in the centre of a large grove which was a sanctuary for wild animals. We also knew—

from various earlier excavations conducted in the carefree manner of the nineteenth century—that Kourion possessed rich tombs of the Mycenaean, Geometric, and Classical periods, and that it was the reputed place of discovery of Cesnola's celebrated "Kourion Treasure", considered by many to have been a fraud.

Cyprus is rich in ancient tombs, easily found, and full of pottery and other objects. Understandably enough, previous excavators in Cyprus had concentrated on tombs and their easily acquired booty, with the result that we knew a great deal about what had happened to ancient Cypriotes after they died, but knew next to nothing of how they had lived. Our expedition determined to rectify this situation. Although we too hoped to find some interesting objects for our collection, we made our primary goal the study of the conditions under which people had lived in ancient Cyprus, not only in one period but from the beginning of human habitation until the end of the ancient world. Kourion appeared to be an ideal site for this purpose. It was inhabited continuously from Neolithic times until it was destroyed by an earthquake in the fourth century of the Christian era. Even after this the city was rebuilt on a nearby site and was a place of wealth through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Archaeologists who are accustomed to the great mounds, the *tells*, of the Near East will be surprised to find no great accumulation on any one spot at Kourion. The centre of population shifted from place to place at different times in the history of the city; rather than level out the ruins after the city had been destroyed and erect a new city over the debris of the old, the Kouriotes preferred to move to a nearby region and start again from the beginning. As a consequence, the city was at one place in the Neolithic period, at another in the Early Bronze Age, at still another in the Late Bronze Age, and at even another place a mile or more away in Greek and Roman times. Thus the ruins of ancient Kourion cover a vast area, one of the largest of any ancient city. In describing the different areas our point of departure will be the modern village of Episkopi, the headquarters of our expedition, a pleasant place on rolling land looking out over the plain, about a mile from the sea on the west, and somewhat less than a mile from the river Kouris to the east.

From the earliest times until about 1000 B.C. the city was at various places in the foothills near the Kouris river, to the east of Episkopi. The very earliest settlement, of the Neolithic period, elsewhere described in

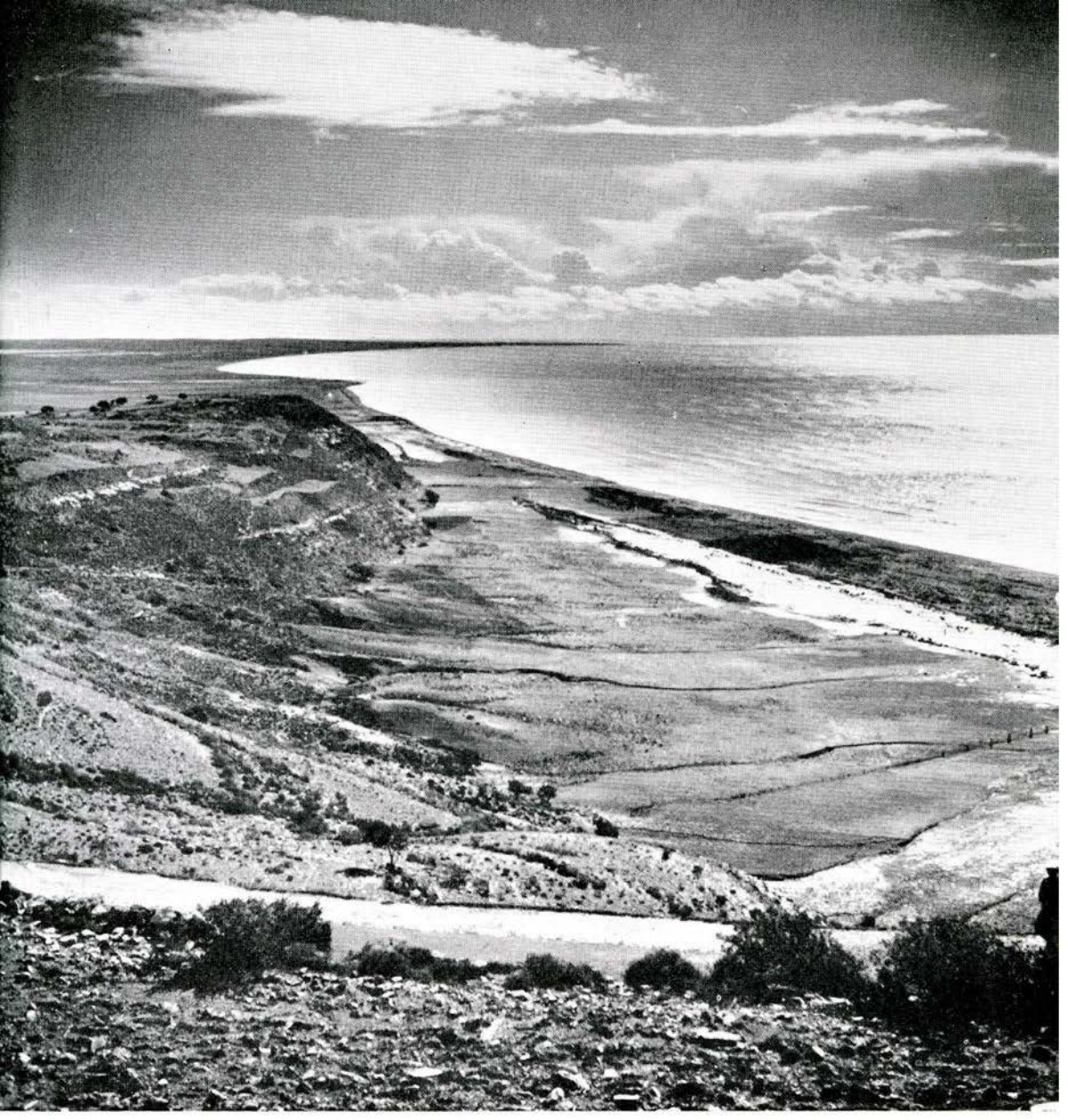

PLATE II

Kourion.

View from near the stadium along the bluff on which Classical Kourion stood, and out over the sea and plain.

PLATE III.

Kourion.
Cypro-Minoan inscriptions on pot-sherds found at the Bamboula site.

this issue by Mr. Dikaios—is near the village of Sotira, about five miles northeast of Episkopi. In the Bronze Age, from 3000 to 1000 B.C. the city lay along the last range of foothills before the plain, shifting gradually from its southern end, where it began, to the northern end, known as Bamboula, which was the centre of the town in the Late Bronze Age.

The writer excavated extensively at the Bamboula site between 1937 and 1939, and contemplates a short final season there in 1948. Here we found the remains of an extensive fortified city of the Mycenaean period, at which time Kourion was a unit of the Greek empire which had its brilliant centre at Mycenae. Our excavations have revealed one of the most important sites known for this fascinating period. We have added measurably to our knowledge of the history of the rise, triumph, and collapse of the Mycenaean empire and of the Greek colonization of Cyprus. We have found magnificent pottery imported from Greece, seals from the Levant, and ivory objects from Egypt, as well as admirable products from Cypriote workshops. Our highly stratified deposits have made possible the establishment of the chronology of Mycenaean and Cypriote pottery with a degree of accuracy previously unobtainable, and have furnished the chief chronological evidence for an important recent study on cylinder seals. Perhaps the most important result of our work was that we have more than doubled the number of inscriptions in the Cypro-Minoan script, and thus brought one step nearer the deciphering of the mysterious Minoan script, to which Cyprus appears to hold the key.

Mycenae fell before the Dorian Invasion at the end of the twelfth century B.C., one part of the tremendous migration which swept into the ancient world from the north and overthrew the Hittite empire and other great powers. When Mycenae fell a few of its inhabitants—Homer calls them the Achaeans—fled in their ships and eventually found refuge in Cyprus. Some of the refugees settled in the old city on the Bamboula site near the river, but the bulk of them started a new city on the high bluffs which overlook the plain and the sea, and which was to remain the heart of Kourion until its destruction in the fourth century A.D. We had the good fortune to discover the tombs of two of these refugees in the plain near the sea. Rich in objects, particularly pottery, and including vessels of the types which were being made in the homeland at the time it was overrun, these two tombs have become key points in the history of Cyprus. The Museum has recently acquired the contents of one of these historic tombs, and is preparing it for exposition.

The city on the great bluffs overlooking the sea, then, formed the centre of the city from about 1000 B.C. until the fourth century A.D. The great bulk of the present remains on the hill is of the last centuries B.C. and the first centuries of our era. The Cypriotes of this period built well, supporting their buildings on massive foundations which were cut through the earlier remains and firmly grounded on the bed-rock. As a result of the extent and thoroughness of the later building activity, very little which can be assigned to the early centuries of the history of this site has been found intact. We are best able to trace its early history through the tombs which we have excavated in the plain at the foot of the bluff. Beginning with the two tombs of the original immigrants, mentioned above, we have discovered material which illustrates the development from these relatively simple beginnings down through into the first century of our era, at which time the aristocracy of Kourion was buried in great underground chambers entered from a formal street of tombs, lined with altars and other constructions built on monumental lines. Mr. McFadden has cleared a number of tombs in this late cemetery, and hopes to return to it in a later season.

On the bluff itself our excavations have revealed the presence of imposing public buildings and the dwellings of the well-to-do. Kourion seems to have enjoyed all the amenities of a large Greek city, with a certain added touch of the luxury for which Cyprus was celebrated among the ancients. Our excavations on this site have been brought to the point where the buildings could be identified and their place in the history of the site established. Some work remains to be done, however, on all the chief buildings before our project in Cyprus can be considered finished.

The most important building discovered as yet is a palace which occupies a commanding position at the edge of the bluff. Built in the first century A.D., the palace was rebuilt in the third century and again in the early fourth century A.D. Its chief glory lies in the mosaic floors of the main apartments. These are of great interest in themselves, with their intricate and carefully worked geometric designs, interspersed with extraordinarily realistic representations of birds and fish. They represent the last flowering of Classical art, and already point the way in some particulars to the Byzantine civilization which was to become the chief cultural heir of the Roman Empire. Even more important than the artistic aspects of the mosaics are the inscriptions which are worked into them, also in mosaic. These are original compositions in Greek verse, closely imitating the Homeric style of an older day, striking examples of a Classical revival. The inscriptions refer to the dignities of the family and

to the functions of the various parts of the building. One of them mentions Apollo as the chief god of Kourion in former times. The most sensational of the inscriptions proves conclusively that the household had already become converted to Christianity, for it states that the house is supported not by strong iron, gleaming bronze, or even adamant, but by "the signs of Christ, which are much worshipped." This inscription seems to date from the very beginning of the fourth century of the Christian era, and is probably the earliest known monumental record of Christianity in the Greek world.

Another important building was a large basilica, a quarter of a mile or so from the palace, in a high place overlooking the sea. This building,

Kourion.
Sanctuary of Apollo Hylates: foundations of the prytaneion seen from across the main court; the propylaia to the right, and the plain and sea in the distance.

of which a considerable area has been cleared, was first built in early Roman times, probably for secular purposes. At some time during the early centuries A.D. it was converted into use as a church, and became an important shrine. It alone of all the buildings we have discovered at Kourion was rebuilt after the great earthquake in the fourth century, and was maintained as a Christian sanctuary into Byzantine times. It may well have been the seat of the Bishops of Kourion, who are mentioned in mediaeval records.

A theatre of the usual Greek type lay next to the palace. This has been partially excavated, and gives promise of excellent results when it is further cleared, since it seems to be unusually well preserved. It appears to have been built in the fourth century B.C. and to have undergone various alterations at subsequent times.

Another imposing building of early date is a monumental gateway or propylon at the top of the hill, leading through the fortification wall into the city. Further excavations are needed before we can be certain of its exact date or purpose.

We expect to devote considerable attention to these buildings on the bluff during the next two years. The palace will be completely cleared, and enough work will be done in the theatre, the basilica, and the propylon to reveal their essential plans and enable us to trace their history. We are fortunate in having secured the services of Mr. De Coursey Fales, Jr. of Harvard University, who will join our staff in the fall of 1948 in order to undertake this part of our work.

Two of the most important monuments of Classical Kourion were outside the city limits. The sanctuary of Apollo Hylates lay about two miles northwest of the bluff site in the midst of an extensive grove, where wild animals received sanctuary. Nearer to the city, on the way from the town to the sanctuary, was the stadium, the scene of the athletic contests and games which were as popular in Classical times as they are today. Dr. Young has devoted parts of two seasons, in 1939 and again in 1947, to clearing this vast structure. Its main outlines are now plainly visible, and several rows of seats look very much as they must have in late antiquity.

The sanctuary of Apollo Hylates was, after the great shrine of Aphrodite at Paphos, the most important religious centre in Cyprus. Like the sacred precincts at Delphi and Olympia, this was not a single temple but rather a complex of many buildings pertaining to the cult and catering to the needs of visitors. It was also the administrative centre of the city of Kourion. The excavation of this sanctuary has been proceeding since

1935 under the supervision of Mr. McFadden. A large area has now been cleared and it is hoped that two more seasons will be sufficient for the complete excavation of at least the most important buildings. Entering the sanctuary from the west, the visitor passed through an elaborate entrance building, or propylaia, to find himself facing on a great paved courtyard. To the left a broad flight of steps led up to a temple built in the Doric style. On the left of the visitor entering the precinct was a great building with a colonnaded portico. This was the prytaneion, the hall where the elders of the city met in council and decided the affairs of the state. A broad street led from the paved courtyard, opposite the prytaneion, past various buildings, to a second and smaller temple. We know from inscriptions found in the sanctuary that Apollo was worshipped here in at least two aspects, as Apollo Hylates and as Apollo Kaisaros. We have not yet been able to determine which of the two small temples belongs to which god.

The excavators have recovered many objects which were placed in the sanctuary as dedications to the gods. The site had not been particularly rewarding in marble sculpture until the past season, when an important piece was found, in large part complete. It is tentatively described as a good Roman copy of a Greek original of Praxitelean style, possibly a statue of Apollo. Further details of this important discovery are eagerly awaited. What the site seemed to lack in marble, it more than made up in terracotta. Nearly five thousand terracotta statuettes were found, ranging in date all the way from about 700 B.C. into Roman Imperial times. Dr. and Mrs. Young have devoted several years of painstaking work to sorting and identifying this huge body of material, a task made all the more difficult by the fact that it was broken into bits and scattered. Their work has borne fruit in an exceptionally interesting body of material, which enables us to trace the development of the choroplast's art at one centre for a millennium, and with a degree of detail which has never been possible before. The final publication of this material should add an important chapter to the study of Classical antiquity.

When we began excavating in Cyprus fourteen years ago, little or nothing was known of the life of the ancient Cypriotes and there were more questions than fixed points in the history of the island. Thanks to our work, we can now form a reasonably complete impression of the character of a large city and of its changing fortunes through almost five thousand years. Many questions have been answered, and several major problems in ancient history—we may again mention the Minoan script—have been brought nearer to a solution. J.F.D.