Munn on McKechnie on Munn (BMCR 4.5 [1993]: 374-77)

Paul McKechnie’s review of my book, The Defense of Attica: The Dema Wall and the Boiotian War of 378-375 B.C. (Berkeley 1993), endorses my account of the war of 378-375, but suggests that it could stand without the Dema wall. If his critique of the archaeological evidence were cogent, then I would admit that the relationship of the wall to the policies of territorial defense for fourth-century Athens remains problematic. But such is not the case.

McKechnie believes that my excavation at the Dema tower tends to confirm a date of ca. 337, previously advocated by C.W.J. Eliot (in Jones, Sackett, and Eliot, BSA 52, 1957, 152-89), rather than to disprove it. McKechnie bases this assertion on the fact that the most abundant pottery found in the excavation indicates activity at the tower sometime in the period ca. 340-300. He makes the simplistic assumption that the most abundant pottery provides the most compelling evidence for the date of the original use of the tower (“it is perverse to attempt to avoid this,” McKechnie argues, p. 376). But the excavated context of this material rules out the association of this later-fourth-century pottery with the original use of the tower. The excavation demonstrates that the Dema tower site was reused, for non-military purposes, sometime in the second half of the fourth century, after the tower as originally constructed had fallen into ruin (as described in Munn, pp. 67-70, 81-86).

Proof that the later-fourth-century material belongs after the collapse of the tower comes from the context of most of the thousands of roof-tile fragments found in excavation (see no. 24, pp. 79-80). On the south and east sides of the tower the uneven ground surface had been made more regular by fills of roof-tile fragments mixed with a crumbly red earth that came from disintegrated sun-dried mud bricks (figure 27 shows a typical roof-tile fill during excavation). Most of these roof-tile fragments were small, and had been well mixed before they were placed where they were found (n. 9, p. 69). These tile fills stopped at the foot of the tower, and at four rubble walls built adjacent to it (map 4, p. 66, and figure 27). This circumstance demonstrates that the fills were laid down after the walls were in place, and the fact that a few tile fragments were found built into the rubble structure of two of these walls demonstrates that both the walls and the

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fills were put in place when large quantities of broken roof tiles were available on the site (as described on pp. 69-70, and n. 15, p. 81). The tiles could only have come from the original roof of the tower, and the disintegrated mud brick from its walls, after the collapse of the tower.

Numerous sherds (137 individual fragments are recorded) coming from at least thirteen different ceramic vessels datable to the second half of the fourth century were found on top of or nearby these roof-tile fills; none was found under the tile fills (see nn. 6 and 8, p. 68). Among these, fragments of a small vessel, an aryballos (no. 6, pp. 73-74), were found together in one spot atop one of these roof-tile fills, where it evidently had been broken and abandoned. The undispersed nature of these fragments contrasts sharply with the considerable mixing undergone by the roof-tile fragments under them. This vessel had to have been broken where it was found after the tile fill was in place, and therefore after the tower had collapsed. Single or multiple sherds, many of the latter undispersed, of at least twelve more vessels and two ceramic beehive lids (nos. 3-5, 7, 8, 12-20, pp. 73-78) likewise indicate that this reuse of the site came to an end sometime within the period ca. 340-300. The date for the tower's original use is indicated by the five sherds from two cups (nos. 1 and 2, pp. 71-73), whose use most likely belongs within the range ca. 425-375 (as discussed on pp. 82-84, 86, 90-91, and 124).

McKechnie's critique of my explanation of the Dema tower has nothing to say about the significance of the contexts and relationships revealed in excavation. Instead, he challenges the plausibility of the corollary of my demonstration, namely, that the ruins of the tower were used specifically as an apiary. This conclusion follows simply from the discovery of numerous ceramic beehive fragments throughout the excavation (nos. 18-20 pp. 77-78). Given the prevalence of beehive fragments at rural Attic sites, and the testimonies to beekeeping in the area of the Dema wall in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (as discussed on pp. 84-86), there is nothing implausible about this practical reuse of the debris of the Dema tower. Reuse at this time is all the more plausible when we recall that the ruins of the nearby Dema house were also partially reused at this time (as discussed on pp. 44-46, and n. 15). McKechnie has no comment on the presence of beehives among the later fourth-century finds at the tower. Rather, he calls attention to the fragments of three transport amphoras (nos. 14, 15, 16, pp. 75-76), which he regards as the "giveaway" that the "beekeeper theory is not good enough" (p. 376). Amphoras normally signify large capacity water (or wine) storage, which McKechnie notes would be more plausibly associated with a detachment of guards than with a beekeeper or two puttering around on occasion. But among the many sherds of these three amphoras there were no necks or rims and few remnants of upper bodies. These circumstances, along with the discovery of an entire ceramic beehive lid under one of these partial amphoras, makes it likely that the amphoras had been broken off at the shoulder and reused as beehives (as noted on p. 86, and n. 20).

The reinterpretation of archaeological evidence offered by McKechnie thus cannot undermine the case for dating the Dema wall to 378. This understanding of the wall serves as a heuristic device, not to support any radical theory about
defensive strategy, but to clarify and confirm what is already attested from other sources about the Boiotian War, and about the defenses of Attica in general.

When imminent danger confronted the Athenians, the counsel of despair was sometimes avoided by a bold stroke. As in 480 and in 431, so too in 378, the Athenians were enabled to sustain their resolve to go to war when a way out of their strategic predicament was shown to them. Someone (perhaps Kallistratos), relying on a scheme probably devised by Chabriasis, proposed that the Spartan threat to Attica could be contained if a tactical barrier were erected to complete the natural line of defense created by the mountains around Athens. So understood, the Oema wall opens another window into Athenian strategic planning and decision-making, revealing ad hoc measures designed to meet immediate needs.

The corollary to this conclusion, namely, that standing measures were inadequate for the security of Attica as a whole in wartime, is the most significant general conclusion to emerge from this scrutiny of the Oema wall. The perimeter of Attic territory was marked by a series of border forts. It has long been common to speak of these forts as “controlling the routes into Attica.” But figurative language should not obscure the evidence indicating that, in the face of an invasion, forts were primarily passive centers of resistance (as discussed in Munn, pp. 3-33). When invaders were to be excluded, several ancient authorities (beginning, significantly, with those writing in the decades immediately after the Boiotian War) cite tactical fieldworks comparable to the Oema wall as an appropriate defensive measure. No authority discusses garrison forts in the same terms. The passive role of forts can no longer be regarded as a peculiarity of the Periklean strategy of the fifth century, but can now be recognized as a characteristic of classical strategy generally. Active defense depended upon active generalship, as exemplified by the deeds of Chabriasis and his contemporaries in the Boiotian War, and as illustrated by the surviving vestiges of their defensive preparations, chief among which is the Oema wall.

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