The Annual of the British School at Athens

<http://journals.cambridge.org/ATH>

Additional services for *The Annual of the British School at Athens*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)

The Topography of Megara

S. Casson

The Annual of the British School at Athens / Volume 19 / November 1913, pp 70 - 81

DOI: 10.1017/S0068245400009102, Published online: 11 October 2013

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0068245400009102

How to cite this article:

S. Casson (1913). The Topography of Megara. The Annual of the British School at Athens, 19, pp 70-81 doi:10.1017/S0068245400009102

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF MEGARA.

ACCORDING to early investigators of the topography of the Megarid, the sites of Minoa and Nisaea were identified, the former with the small hill surmounted by a mediaeval castle standing in the middle of the coast-line in front of Megara, and the latter as the hill upon which is the church of St. George, above the hamlet of Pachi (Fig. 4). Spratt¹ was the first to suggest this identification, which he based both on the existence of remains of ancient buildings around the small hill and on the assumption that it was originally severed from the land (Fig. 1).

His view was subsequently confirmed by Lolling.²

It has, however, recently been suggested³ that the site identified as Nisaea is really the site of Minoa, while that given to Minoa is the real Nisaea. This reversal of the accepted identification is based on the fact that when Demosthenes in 424 made his attempt to capture the Long Walls of Megara, reinforcements were sent from Athens by land *via* Eleusis. These reinforcements, it is urged, would have taken up their position immediately outside the eastern Long Wall of Megara, as it would have been both difficult and dangerous to make the long circuit round the north of Megara and camp outside the western wall. Since, therefore, Minoa is expressly described by Thucydides as being at the end of the Long Wall near which the Athenians camped, it can only be placed on the hill of St. George. The same arguments used by previous writers to explain the difficulty of the title of *νήσος*, as given to Minoa, are used in this case in regard to the other hill and it is assumed that the marsh now lying to the east of the village of Pachi extended right round the hill and joined the sea.

¹ *Journal of the Geographical Society*, vol. viii, part ii, p. 205.

² *Ath. Mitt.* v, p. 1.

³ *Ath. Mitt.* xxix, p. 79.

FIG. 1.—PLAN SHOWING THE TOPOGRAPHY OF MEGARA.

1. Approximate Site of the 'Εννάλιον.	2. Approximate Site of the Gate in the western Long Wall.
3. Foundations of the Bridge.	4. Site of the Ποσειδώνιον.
5. Approximate Site of the Gate in the eastern Long Wall.	6. Continuation of the main Wall of the Acropolis.
7. Possible Site for the 'Ορυγμα.	8. Fifth-century Walls and Site of Tower. (See Fig. 2.)

How far this identification of the sites is correct will be seen by an analysis, in the light of present conditions, of the topographical evidence given by Thucydides in his description of events connected with the two places.

There were altogether during the Peloponnesian War two expeditions to the coast of Megara.

The first¹ was in 427, when Nikias sailed to Minoa, which was used by the Megareans as a *φρούριον*.² He besieged the island and, apparently after little or no resistance, captured it. The object of the Athenian attack was, according to Thucydides, threefold: it was to enable Athens to have a *φυλακή* nearer than Budorum in Salamis, to prevent raids and *ληστών ἐκπομπαί* and to blockade Megara. There were three distinct operations on the part of Nikias: the first was the capture of *δύο πύργω προέχοντε . . . ἀπὸ τῆς Νισαίας*. The second is described in the phrase *τὸν ἔσπλουν ἐς τὸ μεταξὺ τῆς νήσου ἐλευθερώσας*. By the third he *ἀπετείχιζε καὶ τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἡπείρου, ἥ κατὰ γέφυραν διὰ τενάγους ἐπιβοήθεια ἦν τῇ νήσῳ, οὐ πολὺ διεχούσῃ τῆς ἡπείρου*.

The second expedition³ was in 424, when Demosthenes and Hippokrates made a sudden dash by sea upon Minoa at night-time. The latter with six hundred hoplites took up his position *ἐν ὀρύγματι ὅθεν ἐπλίνθενον τὰ τεῖχη καὶ ἀπεύχεν οὐ πολὺ*. The former with a force of Plataean *ψιλοί* lay in ambush at the *Ἐνυάλιον* (or *Ἐνναλεῖον*).

Arrangements were then made with traitors within the Long Walls to enable the Athenians to enter. Certain men, who were the traitors, had been in the habit of conveying a boat (*ἀκάτιον ἀμφηρικόν*) secretly by night to the harbour, and there running the blockade *ὡς λησταί*. They had made a point of getting the permission of the governor to open the gates and 'had then carried the boat down on a waggon. They subsequently carried it back again before dawn *κατὰ τὰς πύλας . . . ὅπως τοῖς ἐκ τῆς Μινώας Ἀθηναίοις ἀφανῆς δὴ εἶη ἡ φυλακή, μὴ ὄντος ἐν τῷ λιμένι πλοίου φανεροῦ μηδενός*.

The Athenian plan was to rush the gates with the connivance of the traitors when the waggon which conveyed the boat was half-way through.

This they did and the Plataean *ψιλοὶ ἐπέδραμον οὗ νῦν τὸ τροπαῖον ἐστι* and, once within the gates, they got possession of the walls.

The Peloponnesian garrison resisted for a time, but finally fled to

¹ Thuc. iii, 51.

² Pausanias (viii, 6, 1) also calls it a *φρούριον*.

³ Thuc. iv, 67.

Nisaea, and the Athenians, who now held all the land between Megara and the sea, proceeded to negotiate for the capture of the walls of the town itself. But the treachery within the city was discovered and they retired. They then turned their attention to Nisaea, which *εὐθὺς περιτείχιζον*, and they sent for material and workmen from Athens to enable them to carry out their work quickly. Meantime, during their negotiations with the traitors in Megara, four thousand hoplites and six hundred horsemen had come from Athens during the night.

The walling round of Nisaea is described as follows: *ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους δ' εἶχον καὶ διοικοδομήσαντες τὸ πρὸς Μεγαρέας, ἀπ' ἐκείνου ἐκατέρωθεν ἐς θάλασσαν τῆς Νισαίας, τάφρον τε καὶ τείχη διελομένη ἡ στρατιά.*

Later on in the fourth book¹ Thucydides mentions the following important points in regard to the topography of Nisaea. By the treaty of 423, he says, the Athenians in Nisaea and Minoa were not to go beyond the road which led *ἀπὸ τῶν πυλῶν τῶν παρὰ Νίσου, ἐπὶ τὸ Ποσειδώνιον*. *ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ Ποσειδωνίου εὐθὺς ἐπὶ τὴν γέφυραν τὴν ἐς Μινῶαν.*

Now the operations of Nikias during the first expedition are by no means clear. The phrase *δύο πύργῳ προέχοντε . . . ἀπὸ τῆς Νισαίας* is not very definite. Jowett² gives the alternative translations of 'two towers on the side of the island towards Nisaea' or 'two towers projecting from Nisaea.' The latter rendering, however, can plainly be ruled out, as the operations of Nikias are distinctly limited to Minoa and the second act appears to be incidentally the result of the first. By 'freeing the channel' he presumably destroyed a bridge. But from the text of the treaty of 423 it is clear that there *was* a bridge joining Minoa to the mainland. It is, therefore, safe to infer that there was no bridge from 427 to 424, but that, as soon as the Athenians had got possession of the Long Walls, they linked up Minoa to the mainland, and the bridge thus built, perhaps on the site of that destroyed by Nikias, is that mentioned in the treaty.

There are at the present day on the small hill crowned by the mediaeval fortress, fairly extensive remains unconnected with the mediaeval walls, of a wall of Hellenic structure of the close-fitting semi-polygonal type common in the fifth century.³ It runs along the south side of the hill in a

¹ iv, 118.

² Vol. i, p. 201.

³ This wall, which is plainly of the utmost importance to any topographical study of the site, appears to have escaped the notice of Spratt and of Lolling, and Bölte and Weicker do not attach any importance to it. See Fig. 3 and 8 on map.

south-easterly direction and comes to an end at an angle with a return side running north-east. In a line with the south-eastern side there are remains of a wall in the sea—a continuation, as it were, of the wall on the hill. This latter was identified by Spratt as a mole. From its direction, however, which is distinctly ἀπὸ τῆς Νισαίας, it might well be one of the two projecting towers. Arnold's suggestion,¹ therefore, that one of the towers was probably on the end of a mole running out from Minoa and the other on a corresponding mole which ran out to it from the mainland, is not without foundation.

To the north of the hill and to the west of the main road are two square foundations, noticed by Spratt, which are at the right angle and in the right position to have belonged to a bridge or causeway from the hill across the intervening morass, to firm land.

The third part of the operations of Nikias implies the existence of a wall along the north side of the hill; but there are little or no traces of walls on that side, and as the mediaeval buildings have encroached on the hillside to a greater extent on the north than on the south, there is little chance of finding any wall there.

The account of the expedition of Demosthenes and Hippokrates is hardly plainer than that of the previous expedition. Not the least of the difficulties is the uncertainty of the meaning of the text. The two positions at the ὄρυγμα and the Ἐννάλιον are obviously near together and both near the walls, the latter, according to Thucydides, being the nearer. But the exact method of the conveyance of the boat is uncertain. It was, as subsequent events showed, taken through a gate in the Long Walls and conveyed down a ditch at the side of one of the walls to the sea. Of the two walls it is almost certain that the wall which ran near Minoa is meant.²

It is obvious, therefore, that the boat was launched (or would have been launched, according to the story the λησταί told their ἄρχων), on the west side of Minoa outside the harbour, for the west Long Wall must have ended opposite the middle of Minoa, or more probably at the west end of the island, and certainly not at the east end. The difficult phrase ὅπως . . . ἀφανὴς δὴ εἴη ἡ φυλακή, μὴ ὄντος ἐν τῷ λιμένι πλοίου φανεροῦ

¹ Vol. i, p. 414.

² If the site of the Long Wall has been rightly identified (see below, p. 78), the boat could not possibly have been conveyed outside the walls there, as the ground is too steep and rocky and there could not have been any ditch.

μηδενός, however, does not mean, as Jowett interprets it,¹ that the Athenian watch would be baffled because 'the vessel would never appear in the harbour at all'; it does not refer to the fact that the Athenian watch was baffled because the boat was always *outside* the harbour, it refers rather to the withdrawal of the boat every night before dawn *within the walls*, the result of which would be that the Athenians would not see it drawn up on the shore. This interpretation is adopted by the scholiast, who paraphrases the sentence into ὅπως ἀφανὲς δῆθεν ἦ τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τί χρὴ φυλάττεσθαι. οὐ γὰρ ὄντος οὐδενὸς ἐν τῷ Μεγαρικῷ λιμένι πλοίου φανεροῦ διὰ τὸ ἐντὸς τειχῶν μεθ' ἡμέραν κρύπτεσθαι τὸ ἀκάτιον, ἄπορον ἦν γινῶναι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ὅφ' ὧν τινῶν ληστεύονται.

The plot by which the Athenians captured the Long Walls was eminently successful. The site of the two positions taken by the two parts of their forces is necessarily dependent on the site of the Long Wall between Minoa and Megara. The gate in the wall and the *τροπαῖον* must similarly be close at hand. It is assumed, however, by Bölte and Weicker that there was no gate in the western wall.² The reason given for this assumption is quite inadequate and the course of events suggests that there was a gate in each wall, for the forces from Eleusis arrived after the capture of the Long Walls, and it would therefore be easy for the Athenians, who had entered by the West Gate, to let in their reinforcements by the East Gate. It would also be extremely unlikely that there was a gate in only one of the Long Walls. The Long Walls of Athens, on which those at Megara were modelled, had more than one gate in each wall.³ The chief obstacle, then, to placing Minoa on the west thus disappears.

The Athenian siege of Nisaea was no small undertaking. The suggestion that if the hill of St. George is Nisaea, it could not possibly have been walled off in two days, which is the time Thucydides gives to the operation,⁴ is of no importance, for the Athenians, as the historian expressly states, had sent for material and workmen from Athens for the very purpose of doing the work in the shortest possible time.

What exactly was the nature of the operations is not quite clear.

¹ *Op. cit.* i, p. 289.

² *Op. cit.* p. 84. 'Wenn der peloponnesische Kommandant sich bereden lässt, in der dem Feinde zugekehrten Mauer ein Tor zu öffnen, so muss man schliessen dass es in der andern Mauer kein Tor gab.'

³ See Kaupert's large map: 'Die Halbinsel Peiraeus.'

⁴ See *Ath. Mitt.* xxix, p. 87.

Their main object was certainly to cut off Nisaea from Megara. This the Athenians did by building a cross-wall—as Thucydides says—from the Long Wall at Nisaea (ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους ὃ εἶχον) to the sea. If, however, Jowett's translation is correct they drew another, or rather two others, from the cross-wall to the sea. But this would involve a quite needless waste of time and labour and it seems better to refer ἐκείνου in the phrase ἀπ' ἐκείνου ἐκατέρωθεν εἰς θάλασσαν to the τείχος ὃ εἶχον of the preceding sentence, and not to the τείχος implied in διοικοδομήσαντες. The wall built would thus start from the inside and from the outside of the Long Wall and run thence to the coast on each side both of Nisaea and of the Long Wall, being roughly of a Λ shape.

Now there are at the present day extensive remains of walls on the hill of St. George, which are shown correctly but insufficiently on Spratt's and Lolling's maps and incorrectly on Kaupert's survey.¹ A large wall about two metres broad starts at the church and runs almost due east along the ridge of the hill. As this ridge curves round to the north the wall follows it in three angular bends until it runs due north. Between the church and the last bend are remains of one tower only, facing the south near the church: at this point the wall is about one-and-a-half metres high. At the point where the wall runs due north a second wall meets it, running due north-west down a steep slope to a small valley on the north side of the hill. It can only be traced half-way down the hill and has three towers on the west side, with a double width of wall between the last two. The main wall continues down the eastern spur of the hill at a steep angle, almost down to the plain. It has altogether seven towers, all on the east side, but it is not so well preserved here as on the summit.

Now Spratt calls the wall modern and Lolling did not think it was very old,² but there seems to be no doubt whatever that it is ancient. It is built of rough unshaped blocks of rock, without mortar, and is of a type frequently found on ancient sites (Fig. 2). The Phokian wall at Thermopylae, and the walls of the so-called Herakleion at Marathon are built in exactly the same way and the former has towers of much the same dimensions.

Bölte and Weicher, however, who have to explain these walls to fit in with their identification of the hill with Minoa, recognise them as the wall with which Nikias ἀπετείχιζε τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἡπείρου, and believe that

¹ Section 4 (Salamis).

² *Ath. Mitt.* xxix, p. 14.

the original tower of the Megarean fortress stood on the site of the church. But, as Thucydides expressly stated that the wall of Nikias was ἡ κατὰ γέφυραν and as the main wall which extends from the church round to the plain was built to cut off the hill *from the sea* and from the east, as

FIG. 2.—THE WALL ON THE SUMMIT OF THE HILL OF ST. GEORGE.

FIG. 3.—FIFTH-CENTURY WALL (IN FOREGROUND) AT THE FOOT OF MINOA. (See 8 on Map.)

FIG. 4.—HILL OF ST. GEORGE FROM THE MEDIAEVAL CASTLE.

the alignment of its towers shows, and so could not possibly be in any relation to a bridge to the mainland, the identification seems quite without reason.

From the general appearance and position of the main wall, therefore,

it seems better, without definitely identifying the hill either as Minoa or Nisaea, to recognise it as the chief defence of the acropolis built early in the fifth century when the hill belonged to Megara, and to suppose that it continued from the church southwards, to the village of Pachi, and that at the point where it ran down to the plain on the north an eastern Long Wall was built to join it. The extremity in each case has disappeared owing to the ease with which a wall on the level could be dismantled by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

The second and shorter wall which runs to the north-west is rather difficult to explain. Perhaps it represents the line of fortification which the main wall followed before the Long Walls were built—a line presumably running along the northern and western slopes of the hill, and so round again to the church, forming the circuit wall of a separate fortress, which the hill must have been before the Long Walls were built. The fact that the towers are on the west side, however, is an argument against this view, and it might, perhaps, judging by the position of these towers, be the wall which preceded the main wall running eastwards from the church before the Long Walls were built, and rendered obsolete by the inclusion, at a later date, of the peak on which the church stands in the defences of the hill.

In any case it seems impossible to identify it either with the wall of Nikias or with the *περιτείχισμα* of Demosthenes. Each of these was of so temporary a nature that it is hardly likely that even traces could remain.

The road mentioned in the treaty of 423 clearly ran east and west, whether the bridge is placed at the hill of St. George or at the smaller hill. But that it did not run in a straight line seems suggested by the mention of the *Ποσειδώνιον*, which is a middle point at which it might well have bent at an angle. The modern road (Fig. 4) does not seem to be in the same position as the rough track which Spratt shows. But it runs almost east and west and is most probably on the site of the ancient road. The *Ποσειδώνιον*, which, presumably was near the sea, might therefore, well be on the site of the little church near the modern mole east of the small hill, and the road in ancient days, as now, would have bent at that point at a slight angle to the north and passed close to the bridge. If the square bastion foundations now at the west of the road and north-east of the mediaeval castle really represent the bridge

of Minoa—and it is hard to explain them otherwise—then the line of the road is proved and the hill cannot possibly be Nisaea.

This argument is admittedly not based on certainty, but the absence at the other hill of any traces either of a bridge from the hillside to the plain, or of a building which might be the sanctuary of Poseidon are in its favour. Further, the assumption of Bölte and Weicker that the hill of St. George was originally an island seems quite without foundation, for, although the marsh might have extended round the northern end of the hill, it could not possibly have been at the foot of the steep slope which is crowned by the turreted wall, and, failing that, the only way to evolve an island at all at this place would be to include the long hill to the east of church; and to do that would be to make Minoa so large as to be impossible to defend; it would also render the main wall defending the east side of the hill quite meaningless. The absence of any traces of fortifications east of the turret-wall is important in this connection.

The hill previously identified as Minoa, on the other hand, has, without any doubt, been originally an island, or at least an island according to the description of Thucydides, *i.e.* cut off from the mainland by marshes. If, as the writers above referred to believe, the eminence of St. George was once an island, the same argument must apply with much greater force to the other hill, with the result that the argument for the former is weakened. On the other hand, while everything points to the existence of marshes round the smaller hill, this argument does not apply *a fortiori* to the larger. All that one is justified in inferring is that, if there were marshes round the former they would, perhaps, extend round to the back of the latter hill. It needs much stronger geological evidence to show that they made it a complete island.

But at the present day there are no traces whatever of marsh-land on the north of the hill of St. George, while, as Spratt and others have noticed, round the east side of the other hill is a stretch of water, some 25 feet wide, which passes through a channel under the main road, and at the west and north sides the ground is marshy.

The case for the identification of the smaller hill with Minoa thus seems very strong. The occurrence of Mycenaean pottery¹ on the hill is further evidence which must not be neglected in view of the name and Cretan traditions of Minoa. Nothing of a similar nature has been

¹ *Ath. Mitt.* xxix, p. 95.

found on the other hill, which is mostly of rock and has no earth stratification.

There remains one other question which has not been touched upon by previous writers. As in 427 Athens held Minoa and yet had not got possession of the land between the Long Walls, which is clear both from the description of the expedition and in particular from the fact that Nikias built an *ἀποτείχισμα* to defend Minoa from the mainland, it seems certain that there was a cross-wall along the coast between the two Long Walls; otherwise it would have been an easy matter for the Athenians to land a force of almost any size they wished between the Long Walls, and the attack made by Demosthenes would have been a farcical waste of time. Since the Long Walls were copied from those of Athens the cross-wall would be the equivalent of the walls from Eetioneia to Munychia harbour, or to the inner cross-wall on the north slopes of Munychia hill. The Long Walls were built soon after 455, but this cross-wall need not necessarily have been built at the same time, for, as long as the Megareans held Minoa, it would be almost impossible for an enemy to effect a landing. It was probably built just before 427, when an attack was to be expected at any moment; it might even have been put up hurriedly immediately after the fall of Minoa.

There are, unfortunately, no traces above ground of such a wall, but it must have followed the line of the modern road between the two hills.

The extent of the harbour of Nisaea cannot be definitely settled, but, as it had to hold a large number of ships on several occasions, it may have included both the natural harbour immediately on the west of the promontory of Pachi and the modern artificial harbour on the east side. Westwards it could not have extended beyond the Hellenic wall which projects into the sea. That it extended as far is clear both from the use of Minoa as a blockade station and from the tradition that it was at Minoa that the Cretan fleet was anchored.¹

Except Thucydides no other author gives any evidence that is at all helpful. Pausanias,² who had plainly visited the Megarean plain, merely says that Minoa, *νῆσος οὐ μεγάλη παρῆκει τὴν Νισαίαν*. Strabo,³ who

¹ Steamers of fairly large draught come in quite close to the modern mole at the foot of the small hill.

² i, 44. 3.

³ ix, i. 4.

could not have seen the place, describes Nisaea as being eighteen stades from Megara, but any arguments which previous writers have based on this, cannot but be invalidated by his conclusion that ἐκαλεῖτο δὲ καὶ τοῦτο (*i.e.* the harbour of Nisaea) Μινώα.

The events, therefore, which Thucydides describes as having taken place on the coast of Megara all point to the identification of the small hill with Minoa and the larger hill of St. George with Nisaea. Without systematic excavation, perhaps, the identification cannot be definitely proved, but to invert the order of the sites involves too many contradictions and leaves a large part of the recorded history of the places in inexplicable confusion. The main argument drawn from the arrival of the Athenian troops from Eleusis is seen to be quite inconclusive, and upon it the minor arguments largely depend.

S. CASSON.