

The Annual of the British School at Athens

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

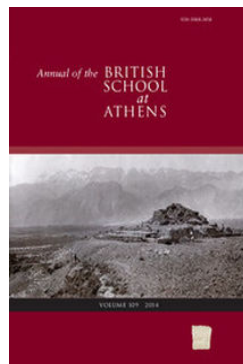
Additional services for *The Annual of the British School at Athens*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Excavations at Melos—The East Gate

R. C. Bosanquet

The Annual of the British School at Athens / Volume 2 / November 1896, pp 77 - 82

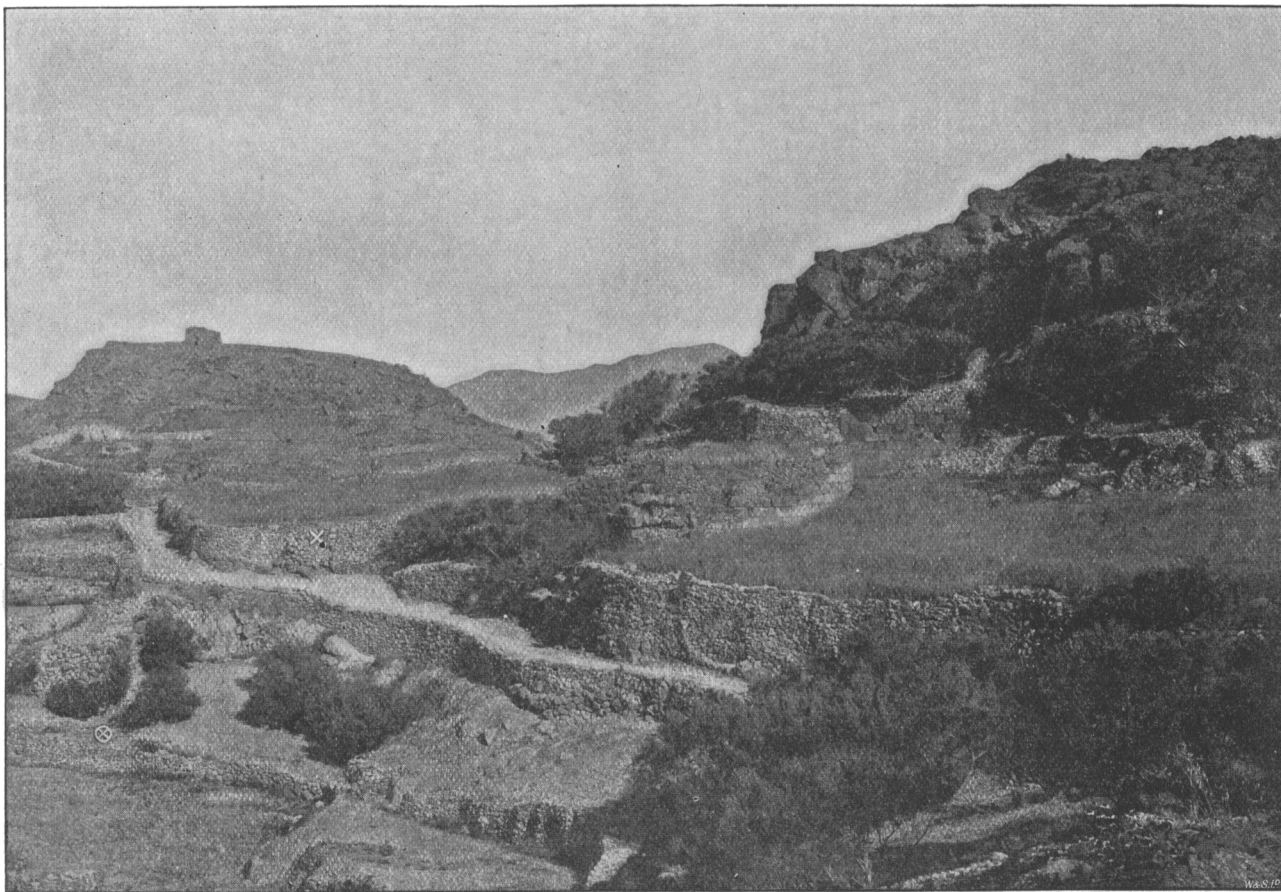
DOI: 10.1017/S0068245400007085, Published online: 18 October 2013

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0068245400007085

How to cite this article:

R. C. Bosanquet (1896). Excavations at Melos—The East Gate. The Annual of the British School at Athens, 2, pp 77-82 doi:10.1017/S0068245400007085

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)



British School at Athens, Annual II.

EAST GATE OF MELOS.

PLATE I.

⊗ Spot at which "Venus of Milo" was found. X Spot at which gate was discovered.

EXCAVATIONS AT MELOS—THE EAST GATE.

EXCAVATIONS AT MELOS—THE EAST GATE. BY R. C. BOSANQUET.

PLATE I.

THIS excavation was undertaken with a view to determining the position of one of the town-gates. Although there are considerable remains of the fortifications, no gate of the ancient town was visible above ground. It was evident that the discovery of the gates, and consequently of the roads, would afford the best clues to internal and external topography.

Description of the Site.—Melos, as the map shows, possesses one of the finest natural harbours in the Ægean. The ancient town, like the cluster of modern villages, lay on high ground east of the straits by which the nearly landlocked bay is entered. The site is a ridge which stretches three-quarters of a mile inland, and consists of (1) the Small Acropolis, a table-topped hill crowned with a chapel of St. Elias; (2) farther from the sea, the Large Acropolis, a long crescent-shaped crag with precipitous sides; and (3) the "saddle" or tract of level ground, probably the ancient Agora, which separates the two heights. The walls also included part of the Tramythia valley on the north, and perhaps also of the Klima valley, which runs down to the landing-place on the south. These main divisions can easily be recognised on the plan on p. 64, which reproduces, with a few corrections, one published by Leycester in the *Geographical Journal* for 1852.

We may assume *à priori* the existence of, at least, three gates: (1) on the side of Tramythia; here there are several likely spots which have still to be examined with the spade; (2) on the side of Klima, where the ancient harbour was situated; but there seems little chance of fixing the position of this seaward gate, since west of the theatre the wall has almost entirely disappeared; (3) on the east or landward side, where the plateau between the two heights is continued in a narrow strip of level ground at the foot of the Larger Acropolis. It was the third of these hypothetical gates that we sought and found.

The Excavation.—The cornfield, marked F on the general plan, lies just north of the point at which the present road—a broad mule-path—from Klima and the sea to the interior of the island crosses the line of the ancient wall. Some stones visible in the road suggested that the wall here formed a recess, flanked on the south by a square bastion, the termination of the straight south wall, and on the north by a strip

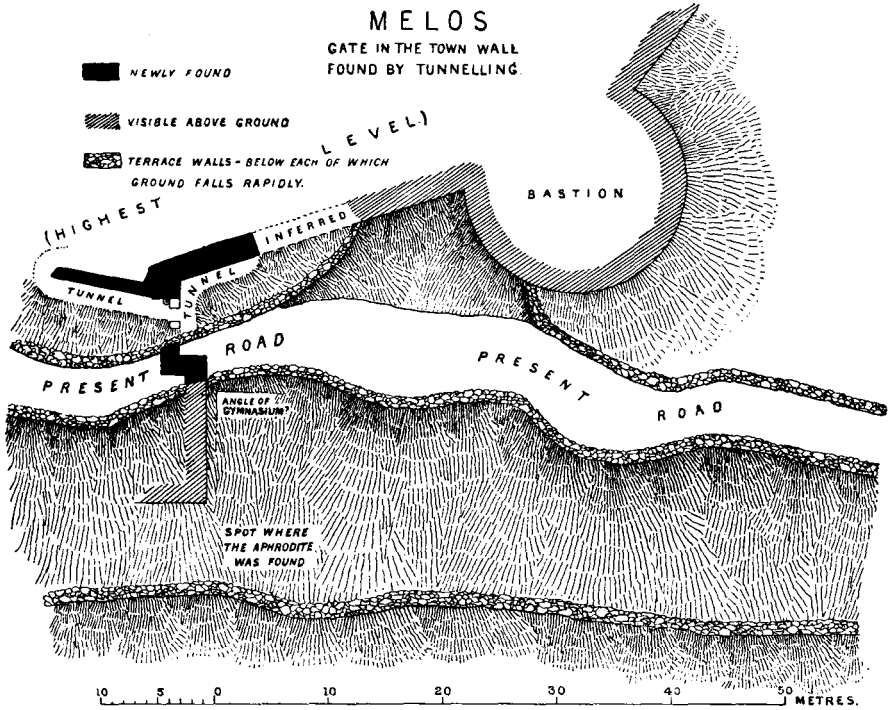
of curtain-wall and a projecting round tower. In order to examine this re-entering angle, I obtained leave from the demarch to sink a pit in the road; in this way we verified the return of the square tower. To the north we were stopped by the high retaining-wall of the field above. As a direct excavation from the top would have involved the purchase of the crop and a descent through eight feet of soil, I decided to follow the wall by tunnelling, a cheap but tedious method of excavation, in which the Melians, many of them miners by trade, are particularly skilled. We soon came on a stratum of whitish gravel, some inches thick, and rammed so tight as to resist the pick. This *μῦγμα*, as the men called it, appears to have been the bedding of a pavement since removed. Associated with it were sixth-century pottery and an archaic bull's head in terra-cotta. Just in the line of this roadway we found the gate; its southern jamb had been destroyed, probably at the time when the terrace-wall of the field was built, but the northern jamb and part of the threshold were found *in situ*, and within the threshold a stone drum with a square hole to receive the metal socket in which the gate-pivot turned.

We tunnelled on to the angle from which the wall turns towards the round tower, and then carried a branch tunnel through the gateway. Here we discovered a line of very large blocks, evidently the lowest course of a wall, bounding the roadway on the right. We followed this for nine metres and reached an opening which led through the wall to the north, and seemed to indicate a side-road leading to the Larger Acropolis; a part of it was paved with large slabs. Apparently the strong wall inside the gate, together with the square tower opposite, formed a narrow passage, and so prolonged the gateway into a kind of barbican.

Externally the gate is exceedingly well defended. Owing to the abrupt fall in the ground on the south side of the road, any one approaching the gate had no choice but to pass close under the round tower, which effectually commanded, first, his unshielded right side, and then his back. The modern road rests in part on an artificial substructure, and it is likely that the ancient road passed even nearer to the round tower. The present appearance of this part of the fortifications is shown in Plate I. On the right is seen part of the Larger Acropolis and below it is the round tower; on the left is the Small

EXCAVATIONS AT MELOS—THE EAST GATE.

Acropolis; between the two rises the shadowy outline of Eremomelos, one of the last homes of the ἀγρίμιον, or Cretan goat; in the foreground is the road from Klima and the sea (on the left), to Trypete on the right; near the middle of the picture is the point, marked by a cross, at which the tunnel started. To the left, in the angle formed by the road and the inconspicuous face of the square tower which turns at right angles to it southwards, are the remains of a building, apparently



Roman, which occupied the plot now covered with olives. It was here that the famous "Venus of Milo" was found in a niche or *exedra*; the traditional spot is indicated on the plan and is recognisable as a heap of small stones, the filling-in of a recent re-examination of the niche by inquisitive peasants, on the extreme left of the Plate I. The inscriptions found with the statue make it probable, as Furtwängler has pointed out, that the building was a gymnasium; we know now that it occupied a prominent position on the terrace adjoining the town-gate.

Date of the Fortifications.—In the part of the defences which we have been discussing, there are two very different styles of masonry. The strips of curtain-wall are good examples of what has been called “fish-scale jointing.” The joints are curved, and to some extent recall the beautiful curvilinear jointing of the Temple-terrace at Delphi, which cannot be later than the sixth century. The difference is that there are no courses at Delphi, while at Melos we have what may be a later development of the same polygonal style, with fairly regular courses. Inserted between two strips of this fish-scale polygonal are the round tower and the strip of curtain-wall to the north of it, both built in regular rectangular masonry; and similar isodomous work appears in the jamb of the gate. Now it is conceivable that regular courses might be employed as more convenient in the round tower and gate, while the polygonal jointing was still in use for curtain-walls; but this does not account for the rectangular work in the curtain-wall attached to the round tower.

If the two styles are not contemporary, the isodomous parts must be the later, and it is simplest to suppose that, at some time, the original gate was rebuilt and its flank defence strengthened by the insertion of the round tower.* When were these changes made?

There is one period at which such a strengthening of weak places in the city’s harness was peculiarly necessary. At the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, Melos and Thera alone, of the Cyclades, remained outside the Athenian confederacy. In 426, an expedition under Nikias called on the island to yield. It returned without effecting anything, but left behind it a dread which turned the Melians into open enemies of Athens. In the assessment-tables of tribute for the following year, the name of Melos figures, assessed at fifteen talents, an unfairly large sum in proportion to the size of the island. Ten years elapsed before there sailed from Athens an expedition which besieged and captured the place. We hardly doubt that the Melians made some preparations in the interval. It would be rash to pronounce a final opinion on any part of the lines until the whole has been examined,

* There is some reason to think that the round tower had a further use, and that a cross wall which separated the Large Acropolis from the plateau at its foot, abutted against the circuit wall at this point.

EXCAVATIONS AT MELOS—THE EAST GATE.

but it is not unlikely that the rectangular insertions in the polygonal work may date from the years 426-416 B.C.

The ἀγορά mentioned by Thucydides.—I have already referred to the view that the saddle between the two Acropoleis was the site of the ancient ἀγορά. This view occurred to Weil (*Ath. Mitth.*; 1876, p. 247) and independently to ourselves. The following reasons may be given:—

- (1) It is the largest and almost the only level tract within the walls.
- (2) Its position as a centre of traffic is proved by the traces of two paved roads, leading, one from the harbour, the other from Tramythia; while a third road leads to it from the East Gate.
- (3) It lies near to the East Gate, by which produce from the interior of the island would naturally enter the town.
- (4) In or about it are important remains, in particular, the substructure of a large temple; and a great number of statues, statue-bases and inscriptions, especially honorary decrees, such as were usually set up in the ἀγορά, have come to light in this part of the town.

If this view be accepted, we are in a position to explain an incident of the siege related by Thucydides (v. 115). "The Melians made a night attack and captured that part of the Athenians' wall of circumvallation which looked towards the agora, and slew some of them, and carried in corn and such other supplies as they could, and then returned and remained quiet." Now the gate which we have discussed was in any case the gate by which people came in from the country to the agora, and the most probable site for the agora is the level tract which lies between the two Acropoleis, and if this be so, continues some way towards the gate.

We can hardly suppose that the Melians dashed through a more westerly gate into the valley of Klima and made good their retreat up the steep hill laden with sacks of corn; the Tramythia gates, being further away, do not concern us. It is only on the east that such a sortie seems easy. Here the road leads slightly uphill outside the walls; the retreat of the laden party would be downhill. And it is just on this side that supplies of corn would naturally be collected; for the policy of Greek invaders was to begin their campaign early in the summer, drive the enemy within their walls, and reap their harvest for them, insuring short rations for the besieged and plenty for the besiegers. Harvest in Melos is later than in Athens. Barley ripens

in May, wheat in June. We can imagine how the Melians watched their own grain being brought in from the country farms, and marked where it was stored on the opposite hill. It is not surprising that the sortie was successful. The original expedition numbered only 3,000, and less than half remained to continue the blockade—a very small number to invest so large a circuit of walls.

It will be convenient to sum up the conclusions of this paper:—

(1) The ancient road from the interior of the island followed the line of the present road from Trypete to Klima.

(2) The gate by which this road entered the town lies near to a plateau which is the most probable site for the ancient agora.

(3) It was probably through this gate that the sortie described in Thuc. v. 115, was made.

(4) Certain rectangular insertions in the polygonal fortification-walls may best be explained as repairs or improvements made in the time of suspense between the first Athenian expedition of 426, and the fatal siege of 416.