Archaeological data on the foundation of Megara Hyblaea. Certainties and hypotheses
Henri Treziny

To cite this version:

HAL Id: halshs-01434820
https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01434820
Submitted on 13 Jan 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers. L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.
Conceptualising early Colonisation

Lieve Donnellan, ed.
Valentino Nizzo
Gerti-Jan Burgers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Donnellan &amp; V. Nizzo, Conceptualising early Greek colonisation: Introd. to the volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Donnellan, Greek 'colonisation': what was, and what is, at stake?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Nazzaro, Greek colonisation: The Right to Return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Wael, Quanto ci è di “greco” nella “colonizzazione greca”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Edmonston &amp; A. Frassetto, Postcolonial America to Magna Graecia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Sassin Simons, Greek-Indigenous intermarriage: a gendered perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Emrich,Connectivité et croissance: des clés pour le VIIe s.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. De Amicis, Il pluribus unum: The Multiplicity of Models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Nizzo, Tempus fugit: Storia e interpretazione della “prima colonizzazione” e una riflessione “interpretativa” su cronologie, culture e contesti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Cuozzo &amp; C. Pellegrino, Culture ebraiche, attività ebraiche, dinamiche di conservatorismo e resistenza: questioni Trevor e casi di studio della Campania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Morina, Indigenous networks: homogeneity of connectivity and early colonisation in Iron Age Campania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Donnellan, A networked view on Euboean colonisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Trinquier, Archaeological data on the foundation of Magna Graecia: Certainties and hypotheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Fanizza, ‘Sistemi’ coloniali e definizione identitaria: le colonie meridionali e della Calabria orientale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Giusso, Le abitanti analoghi strutturali nell’organizzazione delle case: il caso della città nascosta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Yntema, Greek groups in southern Italy during the Iron Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. J. Bologna &amp; P. Chiarella, The Mycenaean Identity, ‘Greek’ and ‘Natives’ at Euboea: Southern Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.G. Grano, Osservazioni finali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Cira, Osservazioni finali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Le texte est un résumé des principaux apports des publications des fouilles de Mégara Hyblaea, revus à la lumière de travaux récents encore inédits. Le plan d’urbanisme de MH est structuré sur deux grandes rues Est-Ouest, A et B, dont nous savons aujourd’hui qu’elles sont parfaitement rectilignes de l’Agora à la fortification occidentale. Aucune des deux ne semble directement en relation avec la porte Ouest. Les lots (oikopeda) sur lesquels sont construites les maisons sont à peu près égaux. La mise en place du plan urbain est une acte cohérent, qui comprend aussi l’agora et se date vers la fin du VIIIe s. même si la documentation archéologique est encore très partiale pour la moitié Ouest du site. On suppose dans la deuxième moitié du VIIe s. une phase préalable à la mise en place du plan, que l’on appelle « phase des campements ». L’espace urbain est régi par une fortification construite entre la fin du VIIe et le milieu du VIe s. av. J.-C. Dans la plaine, les tombes les plus anciennes (seconde moitié du VIIIe s.) semblent déjà occuper l’espace des nécropoles archaïques.

Megara Hyblaea was founded, according to Thucydides around 728 BC, some twenty kilometres to the North of Syracuse, on a coastal site, almost completely flat. According to the historiography, the Megarians settled on fields given to them by the Sicule king Hyblon. Rather than in Pantalica, as suggested by L. Bernabò Brea, we think today that king Hyblon and the Hyblaioi resided in Villasimundo, less than 10 km to the Northwest of Megara Hyblaea. The site contains a fortified village from the end of the Neolithic Age, excavated by P. Orsi, then by G. Vallet and Fr. Villard, and more widespread traces of occupation from the Eneolithic period and the Bronze Age. But the Megarian plateau did not seem to be occupied at the time of the Greek arrival.1

Delineated in the North by the valley of the Cantera river and in the South by the torrent of the “s’mall San Cusmano”, the site is a vast limestone plateau of triangular shape. It is divided on the sea side by a natural depression, the Armonda, in two parts, called conventionally “Northern plateau” and “Southern plateau”, but both plateaus are united in the Western part (fig. 1).

After the work of F.S. Cavallari and P. Orsi at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries (fortification, necropolis, sanctuary), the archaeological exploration of the city and of its necropolis only resumed in 1949 with the intervention of the École Archéologique data on the foundation of Megara Hyblaea. Certainties and hypotheses

Henri Tréziny

Archaeological data on the foundation of Megara Hyblaea.

Henri Tréziny
In the wake of the archaeological publications of Georges Vallet and François Villard, and in particular the monumental *Megara Hyblaea* I (edited in 1976, with architect Paul Auberson), the field researches have been limited to a series of drillings in the central depression and on the Southern plateau. Other work in 2005-2006, still unpublished.

Fig. 1: The street network of *Megara Hyblaea*. In green, excavated areas; in red, the Neolithic ditch. Both circles indicate the changes in orientations of the streets A and B.

In collaboration with the Superintendenza archeologica per la Sicilia Orientale, *Megara Hyblaea* I, with François Vallet and François Villard, one of the rare Sicilian cities from the end of the 8th century which has not been covered by a modern town, and the only one which has been explored archaeologically fairly extensively. It still constitutes today a unique case.

concerned the Cantera lighthouse in the North-east angle of the Archaic and Hellenistic city (L. Guzzardi), the West gate of the Archaic citadel (M. Musumeci). Geophysical prospections, begun in 2008, enable to complete the layout of the streets on the North plateau of the city. This presentation will include few entirely new data; the aim is rather to recap as simply and as clearly as possible all the archaeological data in our possession today to reconstruct the genesis of a colonial city from the end of the 8th century BC.

1. The streets

The map of Megara Hyblaea is famous for the trapezoidal shape of the agora, enclosed between two networks of North-South streets, the streets B in the East and C in the West and major East-West streets, A in the North and B in the South. The streets A and B have one another (axial spacing of the streets 20 m, insulae 23 m) as well as the streets C1 to 3 in the East (axial spacing of the streets 25 to 28 m, insulae 22 to 25 m). The width of the streets is regular, around 3 m, except for the street C1 and the two streets A and B, between 5 and 6 m. The streets C1 and D1, surrounding the public square, join up in the North near the fortification wall, in a position where we can be tempted to situate a “Marine gate”, connecting the city with its harbour.

The group of plots included between the streets A and B, groups which, for convenience, we shall call insulae, have all been built with a different North-South measurement, but their layout could hardly be delimitated quite readily. Thanks to geophysical prospections, in the North, the street A is absolutely rectilinear towards the West from its crossroad with the street D1, at the Northeast angle of the Agora, up to the fortification, at the North of the necropolis at the site of the great sanctuary of Centaurs. Street A runs along the great sanctuary of the Centaurs, on the flank of the North Eastern citadel. It does not seem to have extended beyond the fortification. More to the South, the street B is also rectilinear towards the West from its crossroad with the street C1 to the "tempietto B" and runs along the South side of it (which we already knew thanks to ancient excavations). It runs along a straight line towards the West at least up to the limit of the lemon tree field, which for the moment prohibits geophysical prospection. The Western end of street B is not known precisely yet, but we can see that, contrary to the hypothesis suggested in Megara 1 (drawing 1), and as envisaged already in Megara 5, street B does not extend towards the West archaic gate.

The streets C1 and D1, parallel to one another at the West of the Agora, which may suggest that they were set up in a single time, but they are not parallel, whereas their spacing varies from 180 m at the rampart to 110 m at the West of the Agora at the street C1. Their orientations change at the front of the streets C1 and D1, but they always run closer up to a theoretical spacing of 80 m by the seaside.

The groups of plots included between the streets A and B, groups which, for convenience, we shall call insulae, even if the notion of insula is only second, have all been built with a different North-South measurement, but we have also seen that their widths are variable, in any case, from one sector to the other, between 22 and 25 m. It is in that context of high regularity...
(parallel streets, groups of insulae of same width) and of irregularities (non-orthogonal system, variable length of the insulae) that we must endeavour to understand as the conditions under which the building plots were set up.

2. The lot-sizing procedure

The other major feature of the Megarian urbanism was indeed the existence of building plots, particularly clear in the sector of the Agora, but it can be seen also in all the other excavated sectors, both in the West portion of the North plateau and on the South plateau. In the sector of the Agora, the plots of the 8th century measure approximately 12.50m by 9.70m at the West of the square (group of the streets C), 12.45 by 11m at the East (streets D) in a sector which, admittedly, has barely been excavated. On the South plateau, the plots seem to measure 11m (in the North-South direction) by 11m to 11.50m in the East-West direction. Comparable measurements are likely at the West of the railway, in a sector still little explored (streets E).

It has also been shown, and I shall not dwell upon it, that, if the plots from the late 8th century were not materialised by walls, all the houses from the late 8th century identified on the sector of the Agora or on the South plateau were perfectly aligned with the street network and integrated in the theoretical grid of the building plot, as it can be established for the 7th century. It should be remembered that, contrary to what was suggested in Megara Hyblaea 1, the houses of the 8th century are never in the centre of a plot (fig. 2) which hence certifies that this land division was set up, at least in the two sectors mentioned, in the late 8th century. The insulae delineated by the streets were most probably major primitive plots,从来没有在同一条直线上的， finally integrated in a superimposed grid of insulae. The division into plots is primary and constitutes the base of the urban plan. The division into plots is primary and constitutes the base of the urban plan. The division into plots is primary and constitutes the base of the urban plan.

The sizes of the plots vary between 110 and 160m², around 120m², and we think that the variations are not sufficient to say that these plots had different surface areas. It is undoubtedly the consequence of the difficulties encountered by the surveyors to set up a regular subdivision in a non-orthogonal space.

We endeavored in Algèbre 5 to offer hypotheses on the mode of construction of the plots. I shall add here that there are at least two ways of developing the plots, two "processes" I would say. The former (fig. 3a) consists of a base line (for example the street A or the street D), with next the drawing of perpendicular lines to the street D1. This method defines equal quadrangular plots, except at both ends of the insula, and because the streets are not orthogonal, causes on the median axis an offset which is all the greater since the angle of the streets is acute. In the cases observed, that offset varies between 0.5 and 1m approximately.

In the second process (fig. 3b), the method is the same as above, but lines are drawn parallel to the baseline, which produces plots in the form of a parallelogram or of a trapezium.
ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA ON THE FOUNDATION OF MEGARA HYBLAEA

Fig. 2: The houses and the plots on the West of the Agora in the 7th century (map 5), in black, layout of the houses in the end of the 8th century (see Fig. 47, modified).

Fig. 3: Lot-sizing procedures at: a - at the East of the Agora, insula 18 (Procédé n°1); b - at the South of the Agora, insula 9 (Procédé n°2).
which are all equal, except perhaps at the end, without any offset on the median axis, which might form a broken line. This method was apparently used in the North (insula 16) and in the South (insula 9) of the Agora and perhaps in the sector of the streets E at the tempietto B (insula 131).

The existence of circular platforms in certain plots of the habitation West of the Agora has aroused all the more interest since similar constructions were discovered more recently in Selinunte. They were construed in place of honor worship in the honour of the ancestors, probably of ancient date (late 8th century for the platform 11,12 of Megara Hyblaea), and perhaps with the setting up of the building plots.

3. The chronology of the implantation

As we saw, in sector of the Agora and on the South plateau, the setting up of the street network and of the subdivision certainly dates back to the late 8th century.

In the Western part, to the West of the railway, the small extension of the excavations does not enable a sound conclusion. A number of houses found during the excavations or through geophysical prospections suggest that the Western part of the site was already inhabited in the 7th century. As for the end of the 8th century, the pottery is abundant and we noted that the majority of the Thapsos cups published in Megara 2 in 1964 originated from the excavations of the 1950s, before the beginning of the exploration of the Agora district. The excavation of 1990 in the carriage gate of the Western rampart has again delivered a few ancient fragments (Alcione Thapsos cup) of Megara Hyblaea, of late 8th century. But to this day, no wall with large stones (“mur à orthostates”, type 1 of Megara 1) characteristic of that period, has been found in this portion of the city. In specific, I am not saying that the Western half of the city was not occupied at the end of the 8th century, but only that the current state of researches does not provide us with the archaeological evidence.

The recent development of the geophysical prospections on sites like Selinunte or Megara Hyblaea demonstrates (for Selinunte) and suggests (for Megara Hyblaea), that there was no significant space left void in the city, with the exception of the Agora or of certain sacred spaces. Without stratigraphic verifications, this is valid for the end of the period beginning of the 5th century in Megara Hyblaea, and obviously does not say anything of the ancient phases.

Besides, even if the space was divided from the late 8th century, it is probable that certain plots were not immediately occupied but kept as reserves, whose legal status would be interesting to know.
4. Districts, villages, encampments

It has been attempted once to explain the variety of the orientations of Megarian urbanism with reference to the Megarian komai attested by the sources. Today, this hypothesis has been abandoned, and we prefer to emphasize the unity of the Megarian society, even if the existence of different Megarian groups or of groups of other ethnic origins can still be contemplated.15 It has also been suggested that the urban plan of Megara Hyblaea took some time to be set up, and that it had been preceded by a “proto-colonial” implantation, also called “encampment phase”. Several types of evidence can be related to the “encampment phase”. First of all, post holes recently found by L. Guzzardi under the Cantera lighthouse, whose dating is unfortunately quite uncertain (Neolithic? Bronze Age? Geometric era?).16 Subsequently, bottle-shaped silos, abandoned or transformed in the first half of the 7th century.17 These silos, whose date is quite difficult to fix, were grouped in the Northeast or in the settlement area in the Southwest. They were quite probable prior to the installation of the urban plan (last quarter of the 8th century) and we note with interest that both groups are quite close to the inflection points of street A in the Northeast and of street B in the Southwest. Finally, ceramic material listed in the past by F. Villard18 seems to date to the middle or the third quarter of the 8th century, which could be backed up by the recent re-examination of certain material of the Southern necropolis. Perhaps, one has to imagine during this “encampment phase” several groups of huts (megara), which probably ought to be situated rather in the sector of the characteristic agger than in the corona of sanctuaries.19

5. Agora and sanctuaries

F. de Polignac has suggested that the major public areas of the city, the agora and the sanctuary of the North-West, were only organized around the middle of the 7th century. Formerly, the city would have been surrounded with a corona of sanctuaries.20 We suggested in Megara 5 that the sanctuary of the North-West was probably older than the 7th century and probably implanted at the centre of the Neolithic village whose contour (ditch and agger?) was still visible at the Greeks’ arrival.21 The geographical location of the first place of worship (”temple B”) and the delineation of the sanctuary would then be attributable to the first settlers, perhaps during the setting up of the urban plan, maybe even during the “encampment phase”.22
As for the agora, which occupied the Northern half of the quadrilateral space between the streets A, B, C1 and D1, it was linked to the South by a line perpendicular to street D1. This line cannot be the result of the construction from street B of the insulae 15, 12, 10, that on the contrary, is the starting point of the construction from the North to the South (fig. 6). The shape of the agora hence resulted from a contemporary construction of the urban plan. Obviously, this does not rule out that its monumental arrangement and the definition of its functions are the result of a gradual construction during the 7th century.

6. The Megarian urbanism

We have used on several occasions the expression "urban plan" to designate the land divisions. Indeed, we cannot consider any longer the Megara Hyblaea plan as a simple "allocation of plots" in opposition to a "true urban design", nor imagine that the streets and ancient kleroi subdivided in a second stage. The aim of the primary division of the ground into 120 to 180 m² plots was to build houses. They were oikopeda, and not gepeda. This was indeed an urban plan inasmuch as it allowed to define plots for building urban houses and not fields to cultivate corn or vineyards. This urban plan is also striking because of its stability. The building plot established toward the end of the 8th century did not undergo any significant modification during the lifetime of the city, and its "rigidity" has been mentioned as one of the causes of the colonisation of Selinunte. Stability also becomes, if there are no major empty spaces inside the city, there were no suburbs outside the city. The separation between two divided spaces, city and countryside, was marked by a fortification at an early stage.
7. The city wall

The excavations on the Southern wall have enabled to define three main phases of the rampart (fig. 5). It was first of all a simple ditch together with an agger with an external facing, datable to the middle of the 7th century, at the least, but which might be older. Then, toward the end of the 7th century, the agger was completed on the city side with an internal facing. Thus, it became a wall with a double facing, of approx. 6 to 7m in width, sometimes more. During the 6th century, the rampart was rebuilt in heavy masonry. The excavation of 2006 on the West gate, already explored by P. Orsi, has fully confirmed these first hypotheses without enabling to specify the chronology. The first enclosure is certainly older than the second one (last quarter of the 7th century) and contemporary with the digging of the ditch, which was filled around the middle of the 7th century. In the absence of archaeological material inside the agger and of archaeological structures or levels defining the rampart, it is not possible to specify the date of the first rampart further, which may hence be contemporary with the first town planning or slightly posterior. The city walls were therefore built in the 7th century, possibly after the destruction of the city, which might advocate contemporaneity of the enclosure and the setting up of the urban plan. Moreover, as will be seen later, the hypothesis of a correspondence between street B and the West gate has now been abandoned.

8. Town and necropolis

The oldest tombs of Megara Hyblaea were found in the Southern necropolis (fig. 6). The largest groups are thus quite removed from the city and the fortification. Based on the current...
state of knowledge, no tomb originates with certainty from the extra-muros space, with the exception of four unpublished sets of the beginning of the 7th century, from the central depression of the Arene, whose topographical significance still remains to be verified. These would be isolated tombs anyway. The material of the oldest tombs in the Southern necropolis exists mainly of globular aryballoi from early Protocorinthian period.
which we suggest dating rather from the last quarter of the 8th century and the first quarter of the 7th century.34 No tomb from Megara Hyblaea contains Thapsos cups, but this has no chronological meaning; the Thapsos cups were found in the settlement or in indigenous tombs, practically never in Greek tombs.35 Certain tombs without material and some tombs at enchrystrismos could be, as seen above, contemporaneous to the oldest pottery found in the city, and may have been contemporary to the “encampment phase.” This would imply that the tombs of the first Megarians of the “encampment phase” are already included in the sector which will become the cemetery (or one of the cemeteries) of the city at the time of the first building plots.36

9. The foundation of Megara Hyblaea and the Megarian «model»

In the late 8th century the site of Megara was occupied by an urban-type land-division, involving an orthogonal division of the land into small-sized plots, for accommodating houses. That land-division may quite likely have crossed all of the sixty hectares of the ancient city, even if the state of the archaeological exploration does not enable to assert that it was the case everywhere. That “urban” space, inside which public areas (agora, sanctuaries) are delimitated, is separate from the “rural” space or chora and from the necropolis by a boundary, i.e. the present or future fortification, whose date (between the end of the 8th and the middle of the 7th century) cannot be fixed with accuracy.

Despite the deficiencies of our documentation, the organisation of the space which can be seen clearly today in the layout of Megara Hyblaea, seems to be quite close of that most in Ortygia at the end of the 8th century.37 The same building plot system, probably superimposed along parallel streets, but forming several different and non orthogonal systems (or “districts”).38 It is the solution that seems to have been adopted in most of the known sites (with the exception probably of Leontinoi, due to a rugged topography) around the same time (end of the 8th century) and independently from the assumed origin of the first settlers.

Bibliography


3. The apparent differences between the houses of Megara Hyblaea and the tombs of Megara Hyblaea are also to be found in terms of their arrangement and types of decoration.