

# EDWARD CLARKE'S ANCIENT ROAD TO MARATHON

A.D. 1801

(PLATE 97)

ON NOVEMBER 30, 1801, accompanied by the artist Giovanni Lusieri, several guides, an interpreter, a small Danish dog, and a gigantic Epidaurian wolfhound, the Reverend Edward D. Clarke left Athens on horseback with the intention of visiting ancient Marathon. After spending the night in the village of Kakuvies, Clarke and his retinue passed through Kiphissia and proceeded northeast towards the town of Marathona:

As we continued on our journey, we passed quite around this [the northern] extremity of the mountain [Pentelē] leaving it upon our right. The country then became more uneven: we were always among hills, until we reached a village . . . called Stamata, distant five hours from Athens. Hence we descended a mountain, by an antient [*sic*] paved way; having the sea and a port in view. Then crossing over a rocky hill, the village of Marathon appeared, in a beautiful plain below. Traces of the old paved road again occurred; and the earth appeared, in many places, to be stained with the red oxide of iron. Lusieri made a hasty sketch of this renowned village, in the author's pocket-volume of Notes [Pl. 97:a]. From this spot it appeared to be surrounded by mountains; because the extensive plain which afterwards opened towards the right, as we advanced, end at the north-western extremity of which Marathon is situate, was then concealed from us by part of a mountain to the right of the village. We passed some ruined chapels, and a tower, at the base of the mountain; and continued our route to the Village of Marathon by the side of a small river . . .<sup>1</sup>

Whatever his faults, Clarke was a keen observer and was apparently the only one of the early travelers to Greece to notice the ancient road between Stamata and Marathona.<sup>2</sup> Clarke was, however, eager to get to the plain of Marathon; he mentions the road only in passing and obviously followed it only for the short distance it happened to coincide with the path over which his guides led him. The road was relocated in the 1960's by Eugene Vanderpool who suggested to the author that a study of it might be of interest.

Clarke's reference demonstrates that the road antedates the early 19th century, and the fact that it was not in general use in Clarke's time excludes the possibility that it was built in the Turkish period. The road is therefore quite certainly ancient and is one of the finest examples of ancient road engineering to be found in Attica. "Clarke's Road", as we may call it, can be followed for about four kilometers north and east from the spot at which Clarke

<sup>1</sup> E. D. Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa*, 4th ed. (octavo edition), London 1818, VIII, pp. 12–15. I would like to thank Professor Eugene Vanderpool who first relocated Clarke's Road and generously made his notes available to me and Adrienne Mayor who helped survey the road, drew the map and bridge restorations, and made a number of valuable suggestions. My field work was made possible by a generous grant from the American Council of Learned Societies.

<sup>2</sup> F. Aldenhousen (*Itinéraire descriptif de l'Attique et du Péloponnèse*, Athens 1841, p. 57) notes that the left fork of the road leading out from Stamata descends rapidly on a ruined metaled road. This is certainly a reference to Clarke's Road, but Aldenhousen gives no indication of having seen the road himself and was probably cribbing from Clarke's account. J. C. Hobhouse (*A Journey through Albania and Other Provinces of Turkey* . . ., Philadelphia 1817, I, p. 356) went from the cave of Pan up "a most steep and rugged ascent" to Stamata. Presumably he followed Clarke's route (in reverse) fairly closely, but he fails to mention an old road.

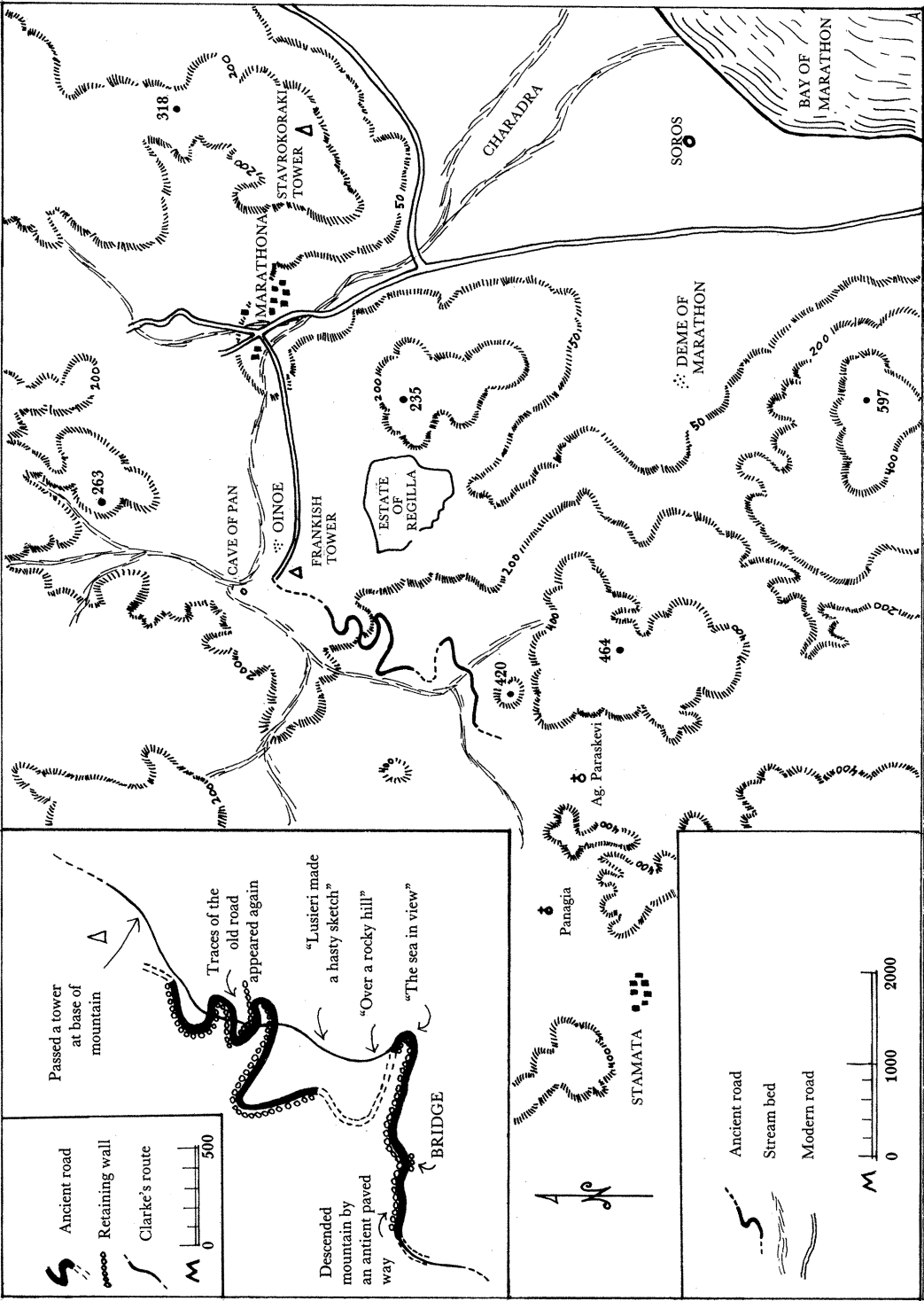


Fig. 1. Map of the route of Clarke's Road

first noticed it into the valley west of Marathona. The traces of the ancient road, along with Clarke's account of his trip, also allow us to determine the route taken by Clarke over the hills to Marathona (Fig. 1).

From Stamata Clarke presumably headed northeast through the region of Mygdaleza, north of a church of the Panagia, and then swung east-southeast, north of a ruined church of Agia Paraskevi, through the northern end of the little upland plain of Koukounarti.<sup>3</sup> From here his route veered north-northeast to skirt the Lukas (height 420 m.) ridge.<sup>4</sup> At the north end of the ridge Clarke noticed that he was "descending the mountain" on the line of an ancient road. Today, as in Clarke's time, it is just north of the Lukas ridge that we find the first definite stretch of terraced road as it drops gently down the northern side of the ridge. Clarke must have followed the ancient road east for about a kilometer, over a well-built rubble bridge and then south of a small meadow. At the eastern end of the meadow the Bay of Marathon comes into view, but the ancient road disappears, having made a sharp swing to the west to enter the meadow. Clarke must have stayed on the road to the end of the meadow, since he indicates that he saw the sea from the ancient road, but at the meadow he cut north to cross the "rocky hill" (a gentle rise, just over 300 m. in height) which gave him his first view of Marathona and from which Lusieri made the "hasty sketch".<sup>5</sup> The road is very difficult to trace from the eastern end of the meadow, but it appears to have swung across it to the west-northwest and then to have curved north and east between the western end of Clarke's rocky hill and the *rheuma*. Here the terracing of the road reappears, and we may follow it for about 500 m. almost due north, to arrive at the crest of the ridge formed by the rocky hill. At this point Marathona comes into view, although we are about 500 m. northwest of the site of Clarke's "first view". The road now curves to the southeast, dropping slowly across the face of the ridge. After about 500 m. it begins to turn to the northeast, makes a sudden switchback to the southwest, heads northwest for perhaps 300 m., and switches back again to the east and northeast for another 300 m. (Pl. 97:b). Here the road curves around to the west again and makes a final wide loop north and east for about another 500 m., to the point where we lose it in cultivated fields. Probably the road continued to drop gently, which would necessitate a swing to the north (around the Frankish tower), and then followed the line of the modern road (Odos Oinois) east into Marathona.<sup>6</sup> From the

<sup>3</sup> An alternative route would be to the southeast, south of the hill east of Stamata on Fig. 1, then northeast up through the Koukounarti plain directly past Agia Paraskevi, and then east to the ancient road. Agia Paraskevi is, however, in the midst of a mass of ancient blocks and architectural members which Clarke could hardly have failed to note had he come this way.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke must have gone around the ridge to the north, since had he gone over the ridge he would have seen Marathona, and his first view would not have been from the "rocky hill".

<sup>5</sup> In the quarto edition of Clarke's *Travels*, the engraving made from this sketch (IV, facing p. 12, reproduced here as Pl. 97:a) is described as "shewing the appearance of Marathon village in the approach from Athens along the antient [*sic*] paved way before the prospect of the Plain opens upon the right . . ." This suggests that the ancient road was in view from the spot at which the sketch was made. It should be noted, however, that somewhere along the way from notebook sketch to completed drawing (by W. Havell) to engraving, the setting of Marathona has been considerably dramatized. The actual mountains do not not exceed 375 m. in height and are not nearly so imposing as those shown in the engraving.

<sup>6</sup> A. Milchhoefer (*Erläuternder Text to Karten von Attika*, Berlin 1889, III-VI, pp. 47-48) noted traces of an ancient road leading west from the northern end of Marathona towards Ninoi (Oinoe) and

top of the rocky hill Clarke descended to the valley by a much steeper path which cuts across the zigzags of the ancient road in at least four places. It was at this point in his route that Clarke noticed "traces of the old road again occurred"; he apparently never regained the ancient way but followed his path almost due north to the foot of the mountain where he passed the Frankish tower (probably to the south) and proceeded east, just south of the *rheuma*, which he correctly identified as the Charadra, to the town of Marathona.

Clarke's Road is remarkably well engineered and presents several notable features. First, the route over which the road passes must have been surveyed with some care. The road follows the contours of the land very closely, and its grade seems never to exceed 3%. This is very much less steep than other known ancient roads; Hammond's Road of the Towers, for example, is as steep as 18% in some stretches.<sup>7</sup> The gentle grade of Clarke's Road is maintained by the use of frequent switchbacks across the slope. The roadbuilder's concern for maintaining an easy grade becomes evident when we consider that from the eastern end of the meadow to the point at which we lose it in the fields near Marathona the road covers over 2.5 km. Clarke's route over the hill in 1801 took only about 1.5 km. between the same two points.

The retaining walls that terrace Clarke's Road on its downhill sides, although rubble, are particularly well built and rise to over a meter in height. They were designed with particular care around the switchbacks. As the road drops downhill approaching a switchback, the retaining wall ends just short of where the road changes direction. A new retaining wall then begins across the road on its downhill side. In the best preserved example the new wall extends 7.5 m. beyond the terminus of the uphill wall, thus providing room for anyone using the road to take a wide swing around the switchback (Fig. 1, detail).<sup>8</sup> In the best preserved stretches of the road, the rubble blocks in the topmost courses of the retaining wall are flattened on their tops to form a smooth surface for the outer edge of the road (Pl. 97:b). It is probably this feature, rather than Turkish-style cobbling, which occasioned Clarke's description of the road as paved. The rock face on the uphill side of the road was cut away where necessary to maintain a constant width of about three meters.<sup>9</sup> Most of the roadbed is therefore bedrock, and it appears unlikely that there was ever a need for metaling of any sort.

Clarke's Road was probably designed to be carriageable. The grade is certainly gentle enough and the switchbacks wide enough for wheeled vehicles pulled by draught animals, but no wheel ruts have been observed along the known length of the road.<sup>10</sup>

then curving around the foot of Kotroni (235 m.). This section of road may be an eastward extension of Clarke's Road but is no longer visible under the improved modern dirt road.

<sup>7</sup> See N. G. L. Hammond, "The Main Road from Boeotia to the Peloponnese through the Northern Megarid," *BSA* 49, 1954, pp. 103–122. The measurements of grade on both Clarke's and Hammond's Roads were done by the author using the clinometer of a Brunton Pocket Transit.

<sup>8</sup> This was apparently the standard method of building switchbacks, at least in Attica. The "Panakton Road" described by E. Vanderpool, "Roads and Forts in Northwestern Attica," *CSCA* 11, 1978, pp. 236–240, is a particularly fine example of the use of this method.

<sup>9</sup> In a stretch of the road north of the meadow persons unknown have attempted to widen the roadbed with dynamite, as is evident by numerous drilled holes for dynamite charges visible in the uphill rock face. That the dynamite users did not build the original road is clear, since the dynamiting has in many places destroyed the downhill retaining wall.

<sup>10</sup> Professor Vanderpool suggests that the road may not have been completed and so was never used by

Perhaps the most impressive feature of Clarke's Road is the bridge (Pl. 97:c, d) which spans a deep *rheuma* (a tributary of the Charadra) about 500 m. to the east of the point at which we first find the retaining wall of the road. The bridge is 14 m. long and 3.5 m. high. At its top it is 5.2 m. wide; since both faces are battered inward it is about 7.5 m. wide at the base. A passage 1.4 m. high by 0.4 m. wide allows water to flow through the base of the bridge during storms. The bridge is solid except for the passageway and built of well-fitted rubble in the manner of the retaining walls of which it is essentially a monumental continuation. The bridge stands to almost its original height, and the fact that it has not washed out demonstrates the care and skill with which it was designed and built. The bridge still provides the only easy way across the *rheuma*, and its continued existence is probably the reason that the roadbed is kept clear of brush above the *rheuma*. Below the *rheuma* the road is very overgrown and obviously has not been in use for some time.

It remains to consider where Clarke's Road went, and when, why, and by whom it was built. Traces of cuttings in the bedrock along the path probably taken by Clarke from Stamata north of the Koukounarti plain suggest that the ancient road followed the same route.<sup>11</sup> If this is the case we may postulate that Clarke's Road branched east off from the road which Ps.-Dicaearchus (*Geog. Gr. Min.* 1.1.6) says went north from Athens past Aphidna; the fork would have been near Stamata, perhaps a little to the west.<sup>12</sup> The southern terminus of Clarke's Road would therefore have been Athens. The northeast terminus is more problematic. Assuming the road did not simply terminate near Marathon it could have followed one of two routes: southeast, south of Stavrokoraki, to the northern plain of Marathon and then north up the Limiko valley to the coast; or northeast through the hills towards modern Grammatiko and then east to the coast. In either case a logical terminus for the road seems to be the deme and fortress of Rhamnous. Clarke's Road would have provided a much more direct route from Athens to Rhamnous than the alternative route, between Hymettos and Pentele and north up the length of the plain of Marathon to the Limiko valley.<sup>13</sup> If, as seems likely, Clarke's Road did serve as the main route between Athens and Rhamnous it is best explained as a military highway. Other known ancient roads provided direct access from Athens to the forts of Eleusis, Gyphtokastro (Eleutherai), Myoupolis (Oinoe), Kavasala (Panakton), Phyle, Tatoï (Dekeleia), Katsimidi, Beletsi, and Kotroni (Aphidna).<sup>14</sup> Since Rhamnous was the easternmost of Athens' line of border forts, we might

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wagons, which would explain the absence of ruts, either worn or cut into the rock. On wheel ruts in ancient roads, see W. K. Pritchett, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography III: Roads, California Publications in Classical Studies*, XXII, Berkeley 1980, pp. 167-170.

<sup>11</sup> The old path from Stamata can be traced for a way east of the church of Panagia. Elsewhere modern construction has obliterated all traces of it.

<sup>12</sup> On the Aphidna route, see H. D. Westlake, "Athenian Supplies from Euboea," *CR* 62, 1948, p. 4 with note 1. As Westlake points out, the Aphidna road is sometimes incorrectly conflated with the road which went by Dekeleia some distance to the west.

<sup>13</sup> This latter is the route which R. R. Berthold ("Which Way to Marathon," *REA* 78-79, 1976-1977, pp. 84-94) has suggested was taken by the Athenian army in 490 B.C.; it was probably the main route to the southern plain of Marathon and the deme of Marathon. This route continued to Rhamnous and Oropos (Pausanias, 1.33.2), presumably joining Clarke's Road either in the northern end of the Marathonian plain or at the head of the Limiko valley.

<sup>14</sup> The main road to Eleusis was the Sacred Way which cut through the Aigaleos range by the Daphni pass and continued near the shore of the Bay of Eleusis. For the road to the forts at Myoupolis, Gyphto-

expect it, too, to be connected with the city by a road. A military origin for Clarke's Road would explain the care with which it was engineered and the great amount of work that went into building it.<sup>15</sup>

Assuming that the road was a military highway to Rhamnous, it must be roughly contemporary with the fortress there. The great circuit walls of trapezoidal masonry at Rhamnous have been variously dated from the late 5th to the early 3rd century.<sup>16</sup> I favor a date in the early 4th century for the fort and thus would propose the early to mid-4th century for the building of Clarke's Road.<sup>17</sup> This being the case, we may speculate that Clarke's Road was taken by the Athenian general Phokion when he led the home guard to Rhamnous in 322 B.C. to engage (and, incidentally, defeat) the Macedonian army of Cassander's lieutenant Mikion (Plutarch, *Phokion*, 25).

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kastro, and Kavasala: Vanderpool, *loc. cit.* (footnote 8 above); the Phyle road: W. Wrede, "Phyle," *AthMitt* 49, 1924, pp. 157–161; the Dekeleia road to the forts at Tatoï, Katsimidi, and Beletsi: Westlake, *op. cit.* (footnote 12 above), p. 4; the Aphidna road: Westlake, *loc. cit.*

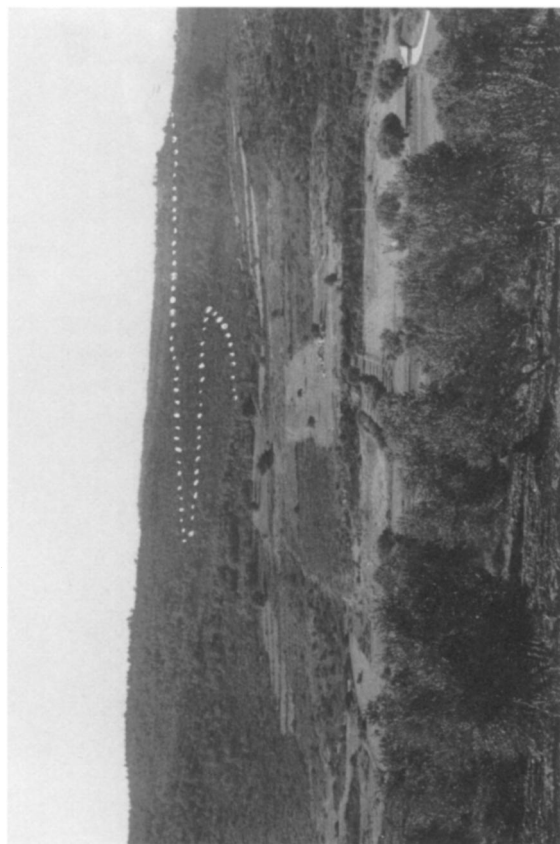
<sup>15</sup> The sophistication of construction techniques certainly suggests that the Athenian state was involved in the building of the road, and the state is unlikely to have built a road for commercial purposes. As has been frequently demonstrated, Athenian commerce was in the hands of private individuals, many of whom were not citizens; most trade went by sea in any case. See especially J. Hasebroek, *Trade and Politics in Ancient Greece*, trans. by L. M. Fraser and D. C. MacGregor, London 1933, *passim*. The proximity of the estate of Regilla might lead one to suppose that Herodes Atticus could have built the road as an access route from his Kiphissia estate to Regilla's Marathon estate, but in that case we would expect the road to continue east at the meadow, towards the gate in the west side of the enclosure wall, rather than crossing the meadow and cutting west and north of the rocky hill.

<sup>16</sup> See J. Pouilloux, *Le forteresse de Rhamnonte*, *BEFAR* 179, Paris 1954, pp. 43–66, who considers the various dates proposed by earlier scholars and argues for a date around 330 B.C. F. E. Winter, *Phoenix*, Suppl. IX, *Greek Fortifications*, Toronto 1971, p. 161, note 41; and A. W. Lawrence, *Greek Aims in Fortification*, Oxford 1979, p. 308, prefer a somewhat earlier date.

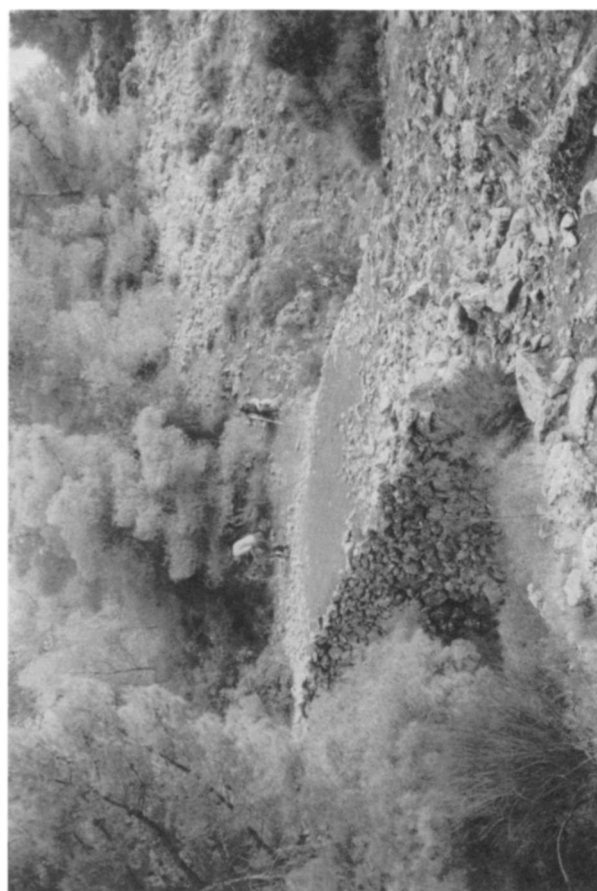
<sup>17</sup> I originally suggested this date on the basis of masonry style, construction technique, and historical considerations, in my doctoral dissertation, *Athenian Reactions to Military Pressure and the Defense of Attica, 404–322 B.C.*, diss. University of Michigan 1980, pp. 319–322. I am currently working on a study of the Classical border fortifications of Attica in which I will argue that most of the forts and towers in northern Attica were built, or rebuilt, in the period 404–340 B.C.



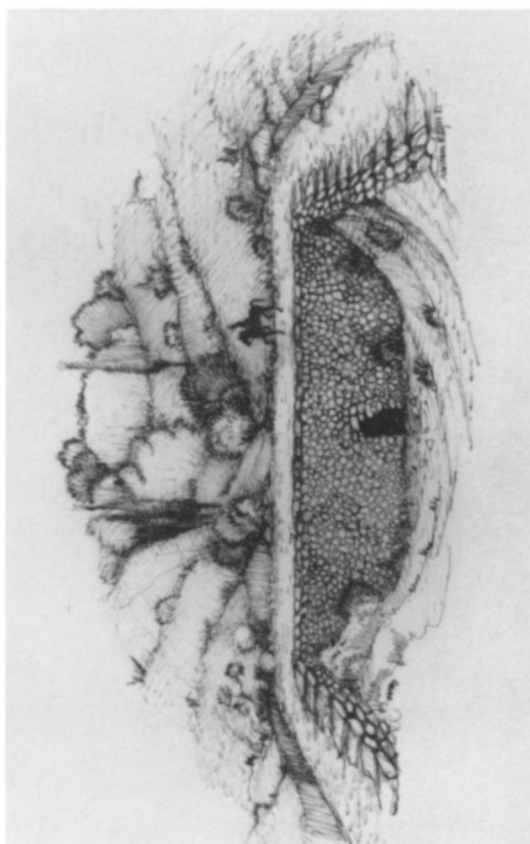
a. Clarke's "first view" from a sketch by Lusieri



b. Clarke's Road descending the hill into the Marathon plain



c. Rubble bridge on Clarke's Road



d. The bridge on Clarke's Road (reconstruction)

JOSIAH OBER: EDWARD CLARKE'S ANCIENT ROAD TO MARATHON, A.D. 1801