

Vigla: Excavation Unit 2

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I. Introduction

Vigla Excavation Unit (EU) 2 was excavated between 30 May and 17 June 2008 on the Vigla plateau. The features in the trench include cross walls running east-west and north-south, flooring in multiple phases, and a cistern-like feature carved into bedrock. These features indicate two separate phases of architecture and three phases of occupation. The primary finds consist of ceramics, metal, shell, stone objects, mortar, plaster, and bone; significant among these are a coin, metal crossbow point, and a portion of a statuette. Preliminary readings date the ceramic assemblage to the Iron Age and Classical/ Hellenistic periods, while the variety of ceramics found and the quality of the wall construction suggest domestic habitation rather than a monumental building. There is evidence that there was a significant destruction by fire late in the history of the building; it is unclear whether or not there was occupation after the fire. In sum, the limited soundings in EU 2 suggest domestic habitation of the Classical/ Hellenistic periods.

II. Location, purpose, previous work in area

EU 2 is located near the southern ridge of the Vigla plateau between 3871449 –3871447 N and 564448.5 – 564454 E. The main trench is 1 x 5 m, with a 1 x 2.5 m extension to the south on the west side, and 1 x 0.5 m extension to the west on the north end. EU 2 is located directly to the south of EU 5, and is southwest of EUs 1 and 6. The location was selected in order to ground-truth geophysical resistivity work on Vigla, conducted during the 2007 field season. The geophysical results suggested a large apsidal building facing to the east, which would be consistent with the plan of an early Christian basilica church. Our trench was positioned to capture a portion of the south porch of the expected basilica and to define the boundaries of this building. All excavation trenches on Vigla were also intended to define a chronology of the site and to relate the stratigraphy to the findings of surface surveys, conducted during PKAP field seasons 2004-2007.

III. Methods of excavation

Our excavation methods are outlined in the PKAP 2008 Excavation Manual. Pick axes and trowels were used to excavate one stratum at a time, removing the most recent levels first where possible. There were three instances in EU 2 where we broke from the Excavation Manual and did not excavate stratigraphically: SUs 5217, 5231 and 5241.

SU 5217 was in the northwest corner of the trench, to the west side of the wall 5211_f1, and to the north of wall 5203_f1. The space was very minimal and difficult to excavate stratigraphically. In order to determine the depth of the wall and to get a sense of how deep the deposits were in this area of the ridge, we decided to excavate a small probing area to find bedrock. This was dug as a single SU, 5217, but in a series of passes, 4 cm each. After each pass, elevations were taken and artifacts from each pass bagged separately. We came to this decision to reduce the amount of paperwork for each strata encountered in such a small space.

SU 5231 was designed to take a section out of floor feature 5219_f1 in order to determine the precise boundaries of this feature and the adjacent robbing trench. A potentially diagnostic potsherd was noticed, and we felt it important to be precise in determining whether this was part of the floor or the pit. This small SU was excavated non-stratigraphically down to bedrock. The majority of ceramic from this section was Iron Age and Hellenistic.

SU 5241 dealt with removal of soil and rocks initially believed to be part of the northern half of the east-west wall. Upon reaching bedrock on both sides of the wall, it became obvious that the wall was not as wide as previously thought. We therefore removed what was obviously not part of the wall in one SU. A metal object found in this SU was given context by recording the coordinates and the elevation.

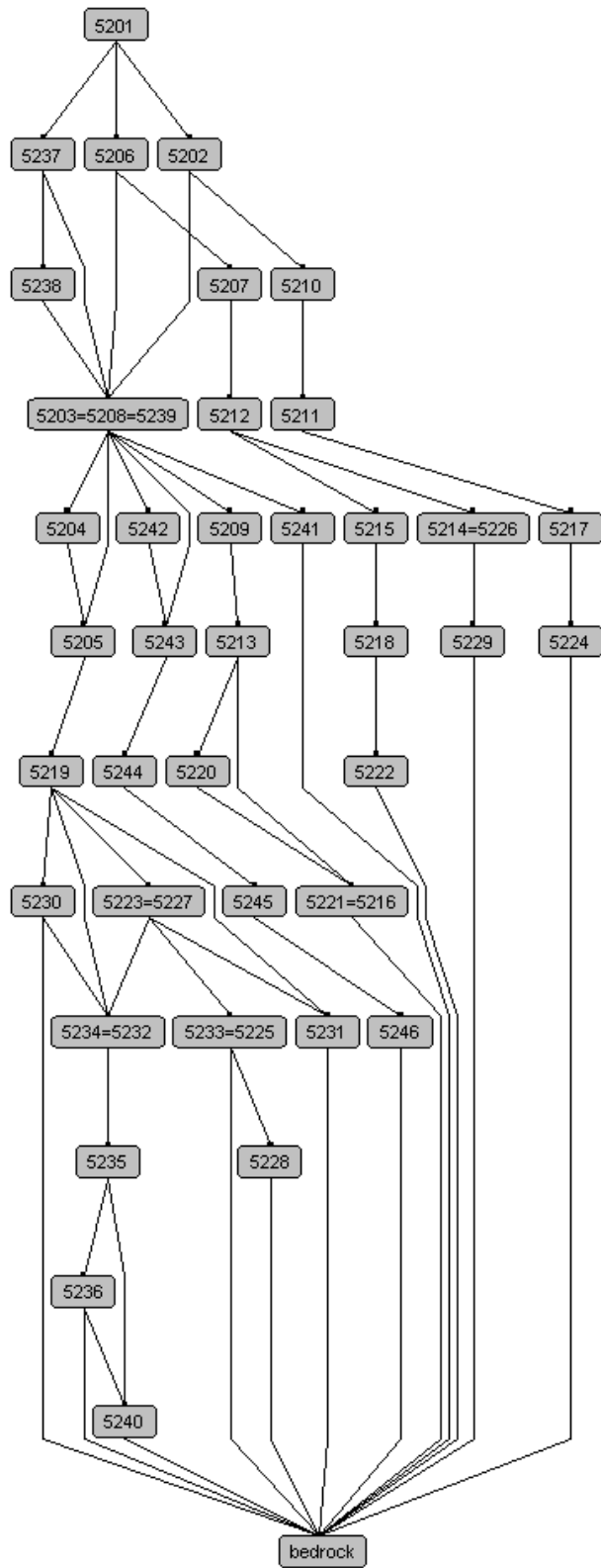
Our trench was initially 1 x 5 m, but was expanded in two directions to help better understand our trench and the area as a whole. The first extension took place on the fifth day of excavation and extended the western part (UTM: 564449 E to 564451.50 E) of the trench 1 meter to the south (to the 3871447 N line). The purpose of this extension was to further define wall 5203_f1, and to determine if we were dealing with the walls of a building, or perhaps a grave/ tomb structure. The second extension took place towards the end of excavation in the northwest corner of the trench, and was carried out in order to define a hole in the bedrock that appeared to be either a cistern, storage pit, or a tomb. An extension was made .50 meter to the west (to the 564448.50 E line), between the coordinates 3871448 N and 3871449 N. The boundaries of the trench and walls made its excavation impossible without the extension, and we decided it was important to define this feature in order to better define the function of the area.

All soil in EU 2 was sifted through .5 cm² wide mesh, with the exception of SU 5201 which was the surface scraping and therefore not sifted, and a portion of SU 5202, which was sifted through 1.5 mm² mesh. The 1.5 mm mesh proved to be too difficult and time consuming, so the wider mesh was used for the remainder of the excavation. We used the fine mesh to sift 25% of the soil in certain sensitive contexts, such as the suspected trash pit of SU 5218. Nothing was found that would not have been found with the wider mesh.

For each SU, we described the soil color, type, and consolidation. In EU 2, we generally used the terms “compact” and “firm,” and the terms “loose” and “soft” interchangeably throughout our notebook. The excavation manual specifies which terms are to be used for coarse-grained sediment and fine-grained sediment, but we at times found fine-grained sediment to be very compact and require a pick to excavate, and therefore recorded it as such.

Excavation of EU 2 took place from 30 May to 17 June. David Pettegrew, Kate Pettegrew, Julie Pflager, Jon Crowley, and Jenn Howell excavated regularly, with Nathan Harper, and Jon Frey, helping for a couple of days each.

IV. Stratigraphy and Harris Matrix



1. Entire trench

SU 5201 was a scraping (removing less than 2 cm of soil) which collected all artifacts on the surface in order to establish the relationship between surface and subsurface artifacts. SUs 5202, 5206, and 5237 correspond to the top, very sandy, plow-zone layer of soil and revealed a number of rocks, especially in the west portion of the trench.

Immediately below this was a very compact, hard soil of sandy clay, consisting of SUs 5203, 5208 and 5239. Plow or bulldozer marks on the top of this stratum could be seen running east-west, and the plowing or bulldozing also carved ridges in the top of large block oriented north-south. This stratum could represent an early plow-zone or cultural layers associated with the latest building phases of the site (the wall SU 5211_f1b is just below ground surface). SU 5203 revealed more rocks in the western portion of trench, making up the top of wall 5203_f1a & b and a good deal of tumble. SU 5204 was found below this stratum— it is an area of very ashy soil and lots of burnt pottery. During excavation, we isolated the deposit to the north-east corner of the trench, and decided that other ashy deposits throughout the trench were not related. As we progressed, however, it became apparent that the ashy soil actually did extend along the entire northern scarp. In fact, we picked it up at the same elevation in the western extension of the trench, where it was excavated as SU 5242. SU 5203 overdug through the ashy layer and therefore contains some pottery which should belong to SU 5204. This ashy level probably represents a layer of fire destruction.

The next stratum consists of SUs 5205, and 5219, a cleaning SU. 5205 was a reddish-brown soil east of 5211_f1b, and revealed a good deal of mortar and plaster; it came down on mortar bedding (5219_f1) in the center of the EU. Immediately below this level in this area of the trench were SU 5223 (= 5227), consisting of a red-brown soil overlaying mortar bedding for a floor; both SU 5233 & 5227 finish the excavation of the red-brown soil mostly excavated in SU 5205 and belong to the same stratum. SU 5223 was closed because a robbing trench that dug into the mortar bed was discovered, running along the south scarp and up to wall 5211_f1b. SU 5231 was created to determine the boundary of the floor and the robbing pit. The fill from this pit made up SUs 5225, 5228, and 5233 and continued to bedrock. The preliminary pottery reading from SU 5233 indicated that it contained more Classical material than our other units, also Iron Age and Hellenistic. It seems that wall 5203_f1b actually extended further to the east, but the blocks making up the wall were removed by digging into the mortar floor bedding, creating the robbing trench here.

SUs 5232 and 5234 remove the mortar floor bedding, made up of mortar with cobble packing underneath (5219_f1). This floor is not original to the building, as several large fragments of an earlier plaster floor were found in strata below, SUs 5235, 5236, and 5240. SU 5235 was probably sub-floor packing intended to level out the floor over the bedrock, and was still very compact. A preliminary reading of the ceramics from this SU indicated Iron Age and Hellenistic dates, with more Iron Age material than Hellenistic. 5236 was a very ashy soil, probably representing burning, and was underneath 5235, but only in an isolated portion of the trench. Underneath 5236 was SU 5240, a very red soil consisting of some mudbrick that was very isolated (near to wall 5211_f1) and directly over the bedrock.

Immediately to the east of wall 5211_f1b, another, separate, loose fill was found and excavated as SU 5230. There was a sizable amount of ash in the deposit, along with potsherds. Ceramics from this SU were Classical/ Hellenistic, with the majority kitchen-wares. Directly on top of the bedrock, three stone slabs with the front portions worked with a chisel were found, sitting upright at right angles to one another. This is a very curious intrusion into the floor, perhaps for a burial, though only small amounts of bone were found.

SU 5241 removed portions of what was previously thought to be part of wall 5211_f1b. Once we reached bedrock on all sides of this feature, it was apparent that the wall did not continue in any substance below the first course of rocks. This SU removed what was obviously not part of the wall.

2. Southwest extension

Underneath the plow-zone level of SU 5206, we isolated two separate strata, SU 5207, a loose soil in the east part of the extension and SU 5208, a compact soil to be correlated with SU 5203, in the west portion of the extension. SU 5207 revealed a large gypsum fragment and a number of flat stone slabs that we interpret as being floor, though a good portion of the floor was destroyed and/ or robbed out. SU 5212 removed rocks and stones to clean out the eastern half of the extension. The ceramics from this unit indicate a domestic assemblage of Hellenistic date. In the western two-thirds of this SU, we experienced a very compact soil with greenish (organic?) soil inclusions. The compact soil with greenish inclusions was SU 5215, and the surrounding area SU 5214. 5214 had the same soil as 5212, and most likely represents the same strata. This strata was continued in SU 5226 after removal of the adjacent area. The soil in 5214, 5226, and 5229 below was quite different than the adjacent area of 5215, 5218, and 5222, but the content of pottery (lots of kitchenware, some burnt) and shells was similar. SU 5229 reached bedrock, which was much higher in this area than in the adjacent area and contained a greater amount of rocks (tumble and building collapse), so this could account for the difference in soil.

The soil in SU 5215 was a compact loamy sand, but was mottled throughout with greenish, reddish, and white clay-like soil. Pottery from this SU was a mix of Iron Age (ca. 20%), one Classical piece, and other nondescript kitchen, fine, and course wares. Below this was SU 5218, a more homogeneous reddish soil with areas of ash, with some bits of charcoal. The ashy soil, combined with the amount of broken pottery and shells made us suspect a trash pit in this area, though we would have expected to find more animal bone than the couple small pieces we found. This SU revealed the bottom of the large orthostat making up wall 5211_f1a, and the soil became extremely loose immediately at the base of the block, but was very limited in amount. SU 5222 contained a darker, more burnt looking soil than that above in 5218, though the content was similar. There were orange soil inclusions in this SU—perhaps iron deposits. We reached the base of the orthostat making up wall 5203_f1b, and again the soil was very loose at the base of the block. SU 5222 reached bedrock.

Underneath the plow-zones in the western portion of the extension were SUs 5209 and 5213 which consisted of a good deal of rock, mortar, and plaster tumble. These SUs better defined our

wall features. The tumble probably represents the higher courses of the wall which collapsed. SU 5220 consists of a loose soil immediately south of wall 5203_f1a, and could represent where a block for the wall originally was and was robbed out. This SU contains chunks of plaster and reaches bedrock. The next strata consisted of SUs 5216 and 5221, which extended to the entire western portion of the trench extension, bounded to the north and east by walls 5203_f1a and 5211_f1a. These SUs were made up of a dark soil with areas of dark ash, contained some plaster, and a good deal of pottery towards the top of the SU. The preliminary ceramic reading for this unit consisted of Classical and Hellenistic potsherds. As these are the lowest layers and rest on bedrock, they could be foundation fill for the walls. Bedrock was immediately underneath.

3. Western portion of trench

SU 5210 in the northwest portion of the trench was separated from SU 5203 because of soil differences from the surrounding area. 5211 continues under this, and revealed a modern concrete surveyor's post, obviously the cause for the soil disturbance in 5210. The hole cut for the surveyor's post respects wall 5203_f1a; it is immediately to the north of this. SU 5238 in the western extension is to be correlated with the strata of 5210/ 5211. SUs 5210 & 5211 excavate the entire area west of 5211_f1b and north of 5203_f1a, but the modern intrusion is restricted to a much more localized area (correctly excavated as SU 5238).

SU 5217, as mentioned in Section 3, was excavated as a series of passes rather than as separate SUs. The purpose was to determine the depth of wall 5211_f1b in a small space. A good deal of pottery came from this area, some with relatively good preservation, suggesting that only a small area was affected by the modern intrusion of the hole dug for the survey post. The bottom of walls 5203_f1a and 5211_f1b were revealed on this side of the SU—the large block for 5203_f1a was resting directly on bedrock, and wall 5211_f1b turned to be a rather poorly built wall of little substance. Bedrock was exposed in most of this area, with the exception of the interior of a cistern-like feature that was revealed, half covered by the west scarp wall.

The exposed portion of the cistern-like feature was excavated as SU 5224. The bedrock surrounding this pit was completely undercut, perpendicular to wall 5203_f1, and in fact extends beneath this wall at least 40 cm, turning and running into the scarp wall. At first, this seemed to be drainage for the cistern.

The western trench extension was designed to excavate the cistern feature exposed in SUs 5217 and 5224. SUs 5243, 5244, 5245 revealed the circumference of the feature, and all SUs had steady concentrations of ceramic material. SU 5246 excavated the interior of the cistern/ pit, which was surprisingly not very deep (less than 50 cm). It could be a very small water cistern or a storage pit.

V. Features

5203_f1a & b: Wall along south scarp of original trench, running east-west. First extension of the trench was opened in order to further define this feature. This east-west wall (both 5203_f1a & b) is oriented due east (90 degrees East of North) and has exposed for a total length of 3

meters. East of 56441.50 E, the wall seems to disappear but we suspect this is because of a robbing trench which is discernible in the southern scarp wall east of 56441.50 E. The wall ranges in width from 25-40 cm, is constructed of large cut local sandstone /limestone (up to 1 m long) set on their side directly on the bedrock, but includes some smaller cobble and earth. The wall is preserved above bedrock only ca. 40 centimeters and it is consequently difficult to discern the wall's coursing; mudbrick in upper coursing? No mortar evident.

5211_f1a: Wall running directly north-south across the trench, south of 3871447.90 N, which bisects 5203_f1 at a right angle. Constructed of large cut slab (70 cm long) laid directly on bedrock, similar in construction style to 5203_f1; smaller cobble sized stones run to west which may be part of this wall. Since the bedrock is so close to surface, only one course of wall preserved which makes it difficult to assess coursing; mudbrick in upper course? No mortar found in the wall.

5211_f1b: Wall running directly north-south across the trench, north of 3871448.30 N, which bisects 5203_f1 at a right angle. This wall is a single course of cobble-sized stone laid directly on earth, some 40 cm *above* the bedrock. Constructed of small limestone and sandstone with earth fill; stones typically ca. 10-30 cm wide. This wall represents a simple construction style with a single course of stone and then perhaps mudbrick in upper courses. As the earthen strata that run beneath wall 5211_f1b incorporate the mortar bedding (5219_f1), we can say that the wall is definitely later than the mortar floor (5219_f1) and the sturdier east-west wall 5203_f1. There are traces of a whitish line in the western scarp of the trench at the precise elevation of the floor, indicating that the floor originally extended the length of the trench east to west. The portion of the floor west of wall 5203_f1 is extremely faint. With so limited an area exposed, however, it is difficult to determine why this is the case.

5211_f2: Cement surveyor post, modern. Found at an elevation of 55.39 m, 35 cm below the surface. The hole dug for this respects wall 5203_f1; it is directly to the north of this wall. Concrete base 30 cm in diameter with screw in center and marking 19/4.

5219_f1: White mortar bed, presumably sub-flooring which ran across most of the trench at elevation 55.40- 55.36 m, about 10 cm thick, east of wall 5211_f1b. Made up of mortar and cobble-size stones. Robbing trench along the south scarp, presumably wall 5203_f1 would have been longer, but the floor was dug into and the blocks robbed out. Sub floor extends to the face of the extant portion of wall 5203_f1b.

5224_f1: Pit in bedrock, 41 cm in diameter, seems manmade, but could be natural. Two shelves, or tiers to pit, undercutting the bedrock. The pit has been cut roughly circular with smooth, slightly convex sides. Bottom of pit is irregular in shape, with the high point in the center, sloping down about 10 cm on the north and west sides. Too shallow to be water cistern.

VI. Finds

The majority of our finds were ceramics (coarse, kitchen, fine wares) of the Iron Age, and Classical/ Hellenistic periods. There was a good deal of mortar, shells, plaster flooring fragments, some gypsum, and two lamp fragments. The pottery in our EU suggests a domestic assemblage. The following are the significant finds:

FS5206_1001: Ceramic dish, black-glaze
FS5217_1001: Ceramic potsherd with burnt seed
FS5218_1001: Plaster or soft stone lid
FS5218_1002: Ceramic bowl, nearly intact, with soil and possible organic material inside
FS5219_1001: Coin
FS5225_1001: Statuette of female figure (lower portion). Cf. Appendix.
FS5229_1001: Cross-bow/ spear point
FS5229_1002: Metal (bronze) sheet
FS5230_1001: Plaster or soft stone lid (similar to FS5218_1001)
FS5231_1001: Ground stone quern
FS5241_1001: Bronze mushroom-shaped object
SU 5205: Metal pointed, arrow-tip object found in sift
SU 5212: Metal (lead?) clip, stone pestle
SU5235: Amphora handle stamped with θ (theta) noticed during pottery washing.

VII. Interpretive conclusions

The findings of this EU suggest a domestic habitation of at least three phases. Certainly, there is not evidence here of a monumental building or basilica as indicated by the geophysical work, at least in our particular area. Preliminary analysis dates the ceramic assemblage to the Iron Age and specifically, the Classical/ Hellenistic periods. There is no evidence of later artifacts (e.g., Roman or later) in this EU, which is consistent with the general picture revealed by the archaeological survey.

There is evidence for three discernable phases of occupation in our trench with at least two obvious phases of flooring: a floor evident in a thick mortar layer (5219_f1), and fragments of earlier flooring sealed below the mortar floor level. The floor of 5219_f1 was contemporary with wall 5203_f1a & b, and was certainly earlier than wall 5211_f1b, as the wall clearly runs over the mortar bedding which is discernable in traces on the west side of the wall. There is no preserved floor associated with wall 5211_f1b. There appears to be a robbing episode in the trench, based on evidence of floor 5219_f1 being dug into and the abrupt end to wall 5203_f1a. Our trench was designed to be a test trench, and as such was a very small size, which made it difficult to discern exactly what is going on in our area. Further excavation with larger trenches will be necessary in order to determine the precise occupation levels and function of the area.

VIII. Appendices:

1. Drawings, photographs, statuette description

Drawings

5201_d1: bottom of 5201
5202_d1: bottom of 5202
5203_d1: bottom of 5203
5205_d1: bottom of 5204, 5205
5206_d1: bottom of 5206
5209_d1: bottom of 5207, 5208
5210_d1: bottom of 5209, 5210
5211_d1: bottom of 5211, 5212, 5213

5215_d1: bottom of 5214, 5215, 5216, 5220
5219_d1: bottom of 5219
5223_d1: bottom of 5223, 5225, 5227, 5229
5228_d1: bottom of 5228
5233_d1: bottom of 5231, 5232, 5233
5234_d1: bottom of 5234
5235_d1: bottom of 5235
5236_d1: bottom of 5236
5237_d1: bottom of 5237
5238_d1: bottom of 5238, 5239
5242_d1: bottom of 5242
5243_d1: bottom of 5243
5244_d1: bottom of 5244
5245_d1: bottom of 5245

Photographs

EU2_surface_E: surface of trench facing east
EU2_surface_W: surface of trench facing west
EU2_surface_S: surface of trench facing south
5202_p1, p2: top of SU
5203_p1-p4: top of SU
5203_p5-p7: bottom of SU
5203_p8: collection of organic material
5204_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5205_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5206_p1, p2: top of SU
5207_p1, p2: top of SU
5208_p1- p3: bottom of SU
5209_p1, p2: top of SU
5209_p3: piece of flooring
5209_p4-p6: bottom of SU
5210_p1-p2: bottom of SU
5211_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5211_p3, p4: surveyors' post
5212_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5213_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5214_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5215_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5216_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5218_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5219_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5221_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5222_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5223_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5223_p3-p6: statuette
5224_p1-p3: bottom of SU

5225_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5226_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5227_p1-p5: bottom of SU
5229_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5230_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5231_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5232_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5233_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5234_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5235_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5237_p1, p2: top of SU
5237_p3, p4: bottom of SU
5238_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5239_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5240_p1, p2: top of SU
5240_p2-p5: bottom of SU
5241_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5242_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5243_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5244_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5245_p1, p2: bottom of SU
5246_p1, p2: bottom of SU
South Scarp Wall, 4451.50 E to 4454 E
North Scarp Wall, 4448.50 E to 4454 E
West Scarp Wall (before W. Extension), 1447 N to 1449 N
East Scarp Wall, 1448 N to 1449 N

2. *Limestone Female Statuette (FS5225_1001): Short Description*
Maria Andrioti, June 23, 2008

Yellowish medium-grained limestone
H: 0.09m

Hellenistic?

Preserved from the waist down; bottom half of lower right leg and foot missing; half of left leg missing; part of right hand preserved; possible traces of paint on the drapery.

The figure is wearing a heavy garment – possibly a himation – that is girdled low on the waist (the knot and the loops of the girdle are damaged but somewhat visible). The garment is folded over the girdle and hangs lower on the right side. The garment clings to the body and falls in many tight folds. The figure is striding to the right, with the bent right leg advancing and the weight falling on the left leg which is held taut. The right hand holds up extra folds bunched to the side of the body. The right leg seems to be exposed, but it is not clear if the sculptor meant to depict the leg exposed, or if the cloth is meant to be clinging on the leg. The knee is rendered, albeit summarily, and there might be traces of paint on the two folds on either side of the leg,

which might suggest that this was a slit in the dress. The part of the right leg that is missing would have been carved free from the drapery. The folds are carved at an angle that follows the left leg and the opposite direction of the right leg, in order to emphasize the motion; the folds are moving against and away from the body, as it is moving forward.

The back is worked in a rather summary way, but one that renders anatomy fairly well. The buttocks and left leg are outlined convincingly and with regard to overall physical proportions. However, the artist paid less attention to the rendering of the drapery on the back than in the front. Two sets of folds are carved diagonally starting from the top sides of the skirt and converging at the bottom. The artist seems to have had a fair understanding of the way in which the drapery should follow the movement of the body, but executed it rather sloppily, as the drapery fails to follow the contours of the body consistently.

Given the state of preservation of the sculpture, identification of the figure depicted is very difficult, since the face and any attributes are missing. However the dramatic motion depicted by the striding leg is usually associated with figures such as nymphs and maenads. Also, the sensual pulling of the folds to the side and the exposed leg is in keeping with the iconography of such mythological figures. A full deity, such as Aphrodite, is a possibility, as well as Artemis, although perhaps less likely.

A Hellenistic date is most reasonable for this statuette, although for a more specific dating more research is necessary.