

## **VIGLA: Excavation Unit 5**

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### **I. Introduction:**

Excavation Unit 5 was excavated on the Vigla plateau between June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008. It was conceived of and planned in order to investigate the nature of the large structure that was discerned in the images provided by geophysical survey; to help understand and interpret the habitation layers uncovered by EU 1 and EU2; and to provide further evidence concerning the chronology of the area as a whole. The results were illuminating in two ways: no Late Roman pottery was recovered from the area, which improves our understanding of the periods represented on the plateau, which seem to be primarily the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Part of the wall of the large structure was uncovered, and based on the construction of this wall we are led to believe that the images provided by geophysical survey are not of a large monumental building, as was thought. Therefore, since excavation did not yield the Late Roman basilica that was expected, further excavation is required in order to establish a firmer interpretation for the large rectilinear structures, as well as the nature, function and purpose of the site as a whole.

### **II. Location, purpose and previous work:**

EU5 is a 1mx4m area and is located between 3871450N and 3871454N, and 564449E and 564450E. It sits on the Vigla plateau, about 10m from the southern ridge and around 30m from the western ridge. It is to the north of EU2 and to the west of EU 1. Excavation on the Vigla plateau was begun in order to investigate and test the findings of geophysical survey that was performed the previous year. Based on the images produced, the team expected to uncover a Late Roman basilica, since a large apsidal building was discerned – with two long rectilinear structures spanning the length of the plateau with a roughly east-west direction and what looked like a curved structure at the eastern end of the two straight structures. EU 1 and EU 2 were put in place to investigate this. However, as excavation proceeded it became clear that the apsidal feature in the east (which was investigated by EU1) was not in fact a curved feature, but a straight wall, and that the material uncovered in trench EU 2 was not of Late Roman date. For these reasons, EU5 was put in place as an attempt to clarify the picture that the other two trenches gave. By the time that EU5 was put in place, excavation in EU2 had uncovered several features (walls and possible floors), and EU 5 was planned and placed in a way that would aid our understanding of those features and their relationships with one another. Also, since the geophysical survey had shown images of two substantial rectilinear structures, EU 5 was placed in a way that would uncover a section of these two structures, which would aid in our understanding of this possible building. Finally it was also meant to establish whether any Late Roman material was present in the area at all.

### **III. Methods of excavation:**

Our methods of excavation were those set by the PKAP excavation manual. Depending on the sensitivity and estimated depth of each stratigraphic unit we used small picks and trowels.

Elevations were taken from a fixed elevation point, which was the top of the rebar in the northwestern corner and measured 56.07m.a.s.l. A 20cm maximum was set for stratigraphic units as a measure of precaution and that was generally adhered to, except in the case of SU 5413, which is a cut in the bedrock with very little cultural material and no soil change, which we excavated continuously<sup>1</sup>. Also in the final SU's across the trench (5408, 5409, 5410), where bedrock was uncovered and there was no discernible soil change we followed the undulations of the bedrock without changing SU, even if it broke with the 20cm rule at times. All our soil was sifted through a 0.5cm x 0.5cm mesh screen. More important finds were given find spot numbers (FS), and coordinates were taken whenever possible.

The people involved with the excavation of the unit were Nick, Julie, Jess, Dan and Dallas. Excavation lasted from June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

#### **IV. Stratigraphy and Harris Matrix:**

The first stratum that is visible in our trench is a thin, c. 4cm layer of sandy yellowish brown soil. This is only found in the eastern scarp, north of feature 5402\_f1. It is possible that this stratum was deposited irregularly across the area and for this reason we are not finding it across the trench. Below that, we encountered a stratum of light brown, sandy clay that spread across the entire trench; this was relatively compact, with gravel-sized limestone inclusions. SU's 5402, 5403, 5404 were part of this stratum. While excavating SU 5402 we uncovered feature 5402\_f1, which is a wall of roughly 82 cm thickness, and the top of feature 5402\_f2, which is a row of sandstone orthostates and a smaller sandstone block laying flat next to the orthostates at about 20cm from the top of the blocks. Because of wall 5402\_f1 we decided to separate the following pass into the two SU's 5403 and 5404, as a precautionary measure, but it seems that they are part of the same stratum. The relation of wall 5402\_f1 to this stratum is unclear, but it is most likely that the wall is later than the stratum (it is possible that the thin stratum mentioned above is linked with this wall). We only have one course of stones preserved from the wall. With a thickness of 82 cm, one would expect that it was a relatively substantial wall with at least several courses, which suggests that, since it sits very close to the surface, it was robbed out and damaged by plowing.

This stratum seems to have been deposited after the two sandstone features 5402\_f2 and 5405\_f1 and therefore holds material related to these architectural features. These have the same construction technique of sandstone orthostates (roughly 60cmx40cm) combined with flat laying slabs (one is preserved with each feature, seemingly in situ) of the same material, which probably formed some kind of flooring. Both features are resting on bedrock and the bottom elevation of the floor slab in 5402\_f2 is 55.40 m.a.s.l. and in 5405\_f1 is 55.42m.a.s.l., which – in combination with the parity in construction – suggests that the two features are contemporary and related. Also, further support is given by a patch of limey mortar with gravel-sized riverstone inclusions that was uncovered in the corner between 5402\_f2 and the eastern scarp. Only about 30cm by 30cm of it was preserved, of about 5-6cm thickness, and the top elevation is 55.48, which further supports it being part of a floor related with the two sandstone structures. Therefore this stratum and the two features represent a single habitation layer.

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<sup>1</sup> See Section 4: stratigraphy and Harris matrix for more information about this SU.

The third stratum is located between features 5402\_f1 and 5402\_f2, starts at around 55.38m.a.s.l. and goes down to bedrock. It is compact, brownish, sandy soil with pebble to gravel limestone inclusions. It looks like this stratum represents a kind of foundation trench for feature 5402\_f2, which would have been dug out so that the orthostates would be put in and rested against the side of the foundation trench and the bedrock, with the top part exposed, and the remaining gap would be filled back in. The flat slabs (one of which remains in situ and two were found out of place against the north scarp) which presumably would have been a kind of flooring, would have been laid down on top of the soil on the other side of the orthostate. The elevations of the stratum and the bottom of the slabs seem to support this hypothesis. This method also explains the lack of traces of a foundation trench on that side of the feature. Therefore this stratum is contemporary with features 5402\_f2 and 5405\_f1.

The fourth stratum is a dark reddish-brown, sandy clay. SU's 5405, 5407, 5408 and part of 5410 are part of this stratum. This was deposited before the sandstone features were put in place, since the flat slabs lay on top of it and the orthostates cut through it (also the foundation stratum for feature 5402\_f2, mentioned above (SU 5409) was cut into it).

The next clearly definable stratum was excavated as part of SU 5410 and it is situated south of wall 5402\_f1 across the trench until the southern scarp. It continues under the southern face of the pedestal of the wall, but we did not find it on the north side. It seems to stop at the sandstone blocks of 5405\_f1. This was a very mixed brownish soil with ashy patches, mostly compact, but with several loose patches. A number of large ceramic sherds were found on top of it. This appears to be a habitation layer that was destroyed by fire. It appears that feature 5405\_f1 cuts into the stratum, and is therefore later. This seems reasonable if the floor associated with this feature was in fact the flat block, since it's much higher than the destruction stratum. It appears, therefore, that this stratum represents a habitation phase for which we do not have any architecture represented in our trench. However, we did find disintegrated building material, such as mortar and plaster. Also, the reddish tint in the stratum accumulated above this destruction deposit, as well as its clayey texture, could suggest that there is a high percentage of disintegrated mudbrick in the soil.

The final stratum of the EU is a thin layer of reddish sterile soil that was uncovered in patches across the trench right on top of the bedrock. It was not present continuously, but appeared in depressions in the bedrock. It was rather soft and was hard to separate from the other soil, so it was excavated as part of SU's 5408 and 5410. This seems to be the same soil that is present in the cut in the bedrock labeled feature 5212\_f1, but the main difference is that in the cut there were a lot of limestone inclusions of pebble size.

This curious feature is a marked depression in the bedrock between features 5402\_f1 and 5402\_f2 (coordinates 3871452.30N and 3871452.80N, and 564449.43E and 564450E). It was labeled feature 5412\_f1, and was excavated as SU 5412. We have not uncovered the entire outline of the cut, since it is covered by the two features and our eastern scarp, but the part that is uncovered is curved. It drops quite sharply in elevation in a quite vertical manner, which suggests that it is manmade. Unfortunately it yielded little by way of finds: a few small sherds close to the top of the SU and one very small piece of bone. It was very stoney, with pebble-sized inclusions. This may have been a cistern for the collection of water. The interesting fact

about this cut is that feature 5402\_f2, our sandstone wall, was placed across the northern edge of it. The limestone chips and mortar that were put in place to fill up the cut and stabilize the wall can be clearly seen. This suggests that feature 5412\_f1, if manmade, was out of use by the time feature 5402\_f2 was erected. Whether or not it was visible, however, is hard to discern. My opinion is that it was not and that it had been covered by that moment, because of the position of 5402\_f2. It is placed right at the edge of the cut (which is not visible at all on the north side of the feature), and as I mentioned above an effort was made to fill it up, even though had it been placed as little as 10cm to the north, that would not have been necessary. Therefore, it is possible that the cut had been covered by soil, which was then dug through to place feature 5402\_f2.

To sum up, it appears that there are three occupational phases represented in EU5. The earliest one is that represented by the destruction stratum. It appears that we do not have any architecture associated with this stratum in our trench. The cut in the bedrock, 5412\_f1 could have been related to it and therefore contemporary.

The next phase is the one represented by the sandstone structures, 5402\_f2 and 5405\_f1. The floors associated with these structures are marked by the flat slabs and the patch of plaster.

Finally, wall 5402\_f1 represents the last phase. It seems that plowing and later activity in the area has destroyed most of the evidence related to this structure, as well as the structure itself. Cultural material was found around it but it is difficult to date based on that alone. We can say with relative certainty however, that 5401\_f1 post-dates 5402\_f2, since the plaster that was clearly related to 5402\_f2, since it ran up against it, ended just a few centimeters before it reached the base of 5402\_f1. In other words, it seems that it was cut through when 5402\_f1 was constructed.

## **V. Features:**

5402\_f1: Wall of c. 82 cm width. Only one course of stones is preserved; made up of cobble sized limestone stones that are unworked. It seems that a limey mortar with rounded river pebble inclusions was used as binding agent.

5402\_f2: Wall made up of 2 sandstone orthostates and a thin sandstone slab laying flat against one of the orthostates (possible flooring slab?).

5402\_f3: Ashy patch; this feature was separated as such in order to establish if it was a substantial ash layer, which eventually was not the case.

5405\_f1: Sandstone blocks in southern scarp.

5412\_f1: Depression (natural or manmade?) in bedrock.

## **VI. Finds:**

Our finds consist primarily of ceramics. Two interesting finds were the miniature ceramic vessel and the incense-burner lid, which could point to religious activity in the area (especially when the statuette that was found in EU2 and the possible spit from EU1 are considered). A cursory overview of the ceramics suggests primarily Classical to the Hellenistic dates for this

EU, with the Archaic period represented in a smaller degree. Otherwise our finds consisted primarily of disintegrated building materials, such as plaster, disintegrated mortar and mud-brick. Pottery was read from the following SU's:

5407: 1 lamp (classical/Hellenistic), 1 open lamp (probably Hellenistic), classical fine wares, 1 archaic black painted, two lids

5405: a lot of bases (no bases before), thick sherds, archaic, classical small pieces, kitchen wares make up one third of all the sherds, one piece of late classical black glaze, hellenistic amphora handle to early roman toe, hellenistic or early roman bifed handle. Nothing conclusively Roman.

5408: some archaic, a couple possible geometric and Classical/Hellenistic lamp.

5410: Cypro archaic, classical kitchen-ware handle, not much amphora sherds.

5402\_1001: Nail (bronze?)

5402\_1002: Miniature ceramic vessel

5402\_1003: Ceramic incense-burner lid (?)

5402\_1004: Glass or shell bead (?)

5402\_1005: Wall plaster

5405\_1001: Clay/Ash lump

5405\_1002: Ceramics

5402\_1003: Slag

5410\_1001: Ceramics

5410\_1002: Mudbrick

5413\_1001: Ceramics

## **VII. Interpretive Conclusions:**

The first important conclusion that is to be drawn after excavation in EU5 is that the long rectilinear structures that were outlined by the geophysical survey were not part of a monumental building. We reach this conclusion since the part of the wall that was uncovered in EU5 is not constructed in a way that suggests that it would have been very tall, or would bear much weight, since the construction does not look very solid. I believe that this may have been an enclosure wall.

Also, a very important conclusion is that there is no conclusively Late Roman material in this area. The latest pottery seems to be Hellenistic, while the earliest goes back to the Classical period.

There are at least three identifiable occupation phases represented, two of which have related architecture. A possible reconstruction of the sequence of events in this area is occupation as early as the Geometric and certainly by the Archaic period; a major destruction in the southern part of the trench is represented by the ash layer, which probably dates to the Archaic period. The site continues to be used into the Classical period, which seems to be represented by SU's 5405, 5407 and 5408. The second occupation phase is represented by the sandstone features 5402\_f2 and 5405\_f1, which probably dates to the Late Classical to Hellenistic period. Finally the third phase is represented by the wall 5401\_f1. It is extremely difficult to date this feature, since it appears that the habitation floor associated with this feature has been eroded. It is Hellenistic at the earliest.

## **VIII. Appendices:**

### **Drawings:**

- 5402, d.1, 09/06/08 Bottom of SU, with elevations and FS locations
- 5410, d.1, 13/06/08, Top plan of SU with FS 5410\_1001 location
- 17/06/08, Final Top Plan of EU 5
- 18/06/08, Drawing of western scarp
- 19/06/08, Drawing of eastern scarp
- 19/06/08, Drawing of northern and southern scarps

### **Photographs:**

- 5401, p.1, 06/06/08, Bottom of SU, after cleaning
- 5402, p.1, 07/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5402, p.2, 07/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5404, p.1, 10/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5404, p.2, 10/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5403, p.1, 11/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5403, p.2, 11/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5407, p.1, 13/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5407, p.2, 13/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5405, p.1, 13/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5405, p.2, 13/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5408, p.1, 14/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5408, p.2, 14/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5408, p.3, 17/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5408, p.4, 17/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5412, p.1, 17/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5412, p.2, 17/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5410, p.1, 17/06/08, Bottom of SU
- 5410, p.2, 17/06/08, Bottom of SU