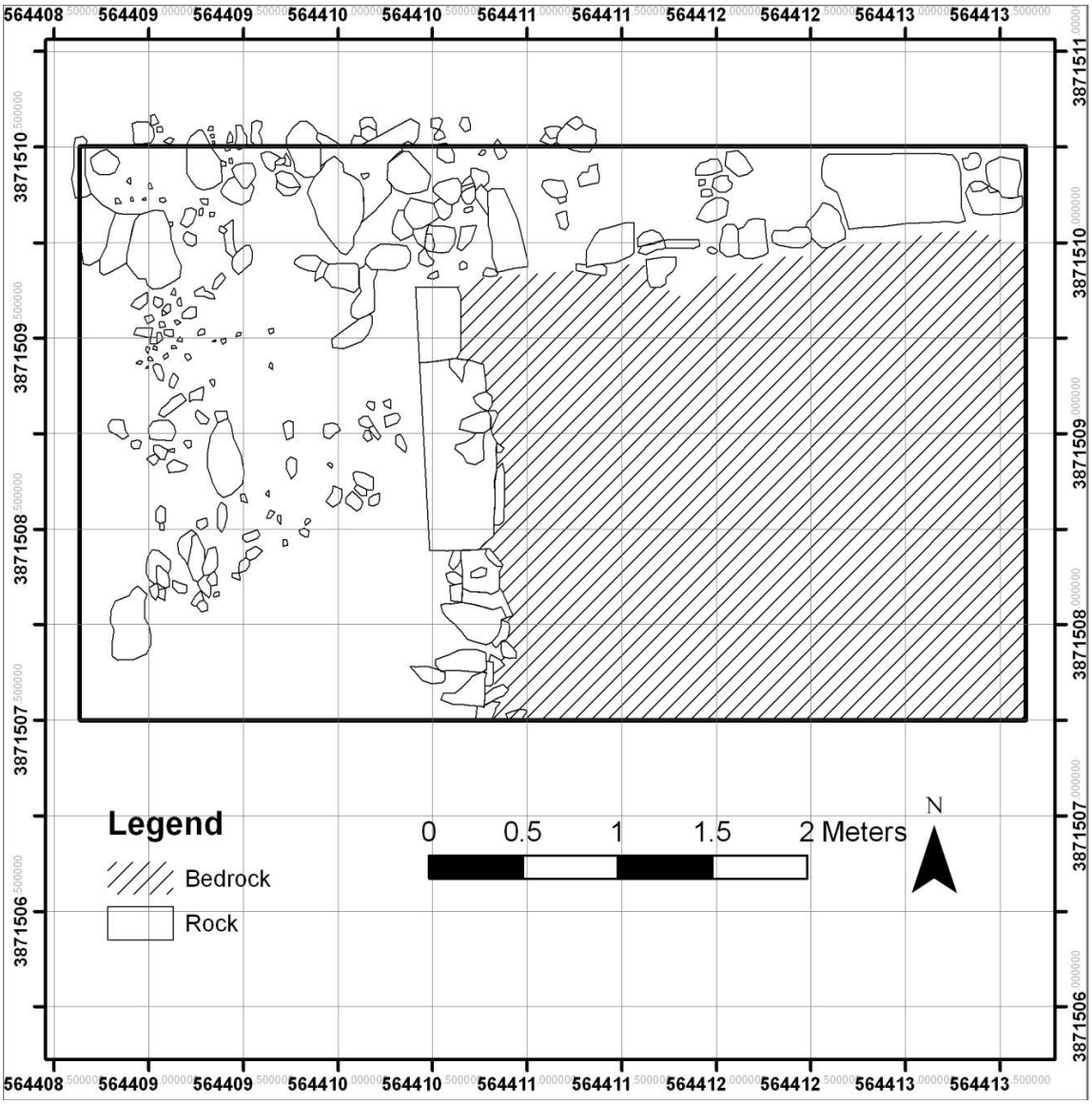
Vigla: Excavation Unit 9
Trench Supervisors: Susan Caraher and Dimitri Nakassis

Final Top Plan:



Final Plan

Section 1: Introduction

This excavation unit (EU 9) featured two large walls of different construction on the northwest slope of the Vigla hill. The larger wall is oriented east-west (up/downslope) and the second running north-south (along the contours) and abutting the first. Excavation was conducted in this area to determine the relationship between the two walls and to secure a date for each.

The larger wall (5801_f1) is constructed with large cut blocks and mortar while the smaller wall (5802_f1) is a rough tumble composed mostly of field stones, lots of soil

and no mortar. Looking at the construction of the two from the surface, it appeared that the larger wall was later, perhaps Roman, and the tumble wall was perhaps of Hellenistic date.

Our primary conclusion is that the mortar wall is in fact earlier that the tumble wall. The stratigraphy showed two predominate fills – one that predates the tumble wall but postdates the fortification wall. The other fill postdates the tumble wall.

The excavation unit was 3m wide (north-south) by 5m (east-west) and encompassed both the fortification wall and tumble wall feature. The excavation area within this trench was 2.5m x 3m. The remaining area is made up of the two walls.

The artifact assemblage was primarily ceramic with a small amount of glass, minimal stone and one coin. One other metal artifact was also retrieved. Only samples of shell and mortar were collected.

In total, $7.8m^3$ of soil was removed from the trench during our three week field season.

Section 2: Location, purpose, previous work in area

This excavation unit is situated on the north-west corner of the Vigla ridge. The EU was rectangular, with the following coordinates: N 3871510.50, S 3871507.50, E 564413.63, W 564408.63 (UTM coordinates). It was selected for investigation since there was a visible fortification feature with a tumble wall immediately to the south. These features were drawn by Mat Dalton in 2007. The two walls show different construction methods, so the primary purpose of this investigation was to determine the relationship between the two walls and to provide a date for each.

During the 2008 season, Dimitri Nakassis and Mat Dalton excavated a wall trench (EU6) on the north east slope that has been tentatively identified as Hellenistic as a result of the ceramic material that was recovered (the pottery has not yet been fully analyzed). The tumble wall in EU 9 appeared from surface investigation to be of a similar construction to the Hellenistic wall in EU 6, whereas the mortar wall was of a very different construction type (large stones, ashlar blocks, and the use of mortar). We wanted to determine whether in fact the tumble wall in EU 9 was part of the Hellenistic fortifications, and if so, to refine their date. Secondly, we wanted to determine whether the mortar wall was part of a later refurbishment or enhancement of earlier fortifications, perhaps in the Late Roman period when the Koutsopetria settlement was thriving. What we identified as a dry moat is located immediately to the north of EU 9. Although we have no indications of the date of this moat, this area appears to have been an important part of the fortification of the hill of Vigla, and we could expect to find later refurbishments here, if there were ever any of the hill.

Section 3: Methods of excavation

Our excavation team worked according to the PKAP excavation methods outlined in the project manual. We used small hand picks, trowels and a coarse sieve. After an initial surface cleaning to remove weeds, we removed the top soil and proceeded to work in arbitrary stratigraphic units as the soil did not appear to change. We noticed that the soil was compact near the surface and we chose to use the large pick to remove what we

believed to be surface erosion layers. There was a substantial amount of fill, without a noticeable change in soil type so we continued to use the large pick for most of the excavation.

We used a Munsell chart to assign soil colors and the standard PKAP manual to assign soil descriptions. Elevations were taken with both a line level and plumb bob as well as the Trimble R8 GPS unit. Digital photographs were taken of each SU with a Nikon Coolpix P6000.

Soil was dry-sieved using a coarse sieve with the exception of one SU where the fine sieve was used since it was the only available option.

After revealing bedrock throughout most of the trench, one small area (SU5809) contained a dark brown, very hard soil. This unit contained only a very small number of sherds and it is difficult to be certain that it was not contaminated.

Section 4: Stratigraphy and Harris Matrix

The stratigraphy of EU 9 was fairly straightforward. Below the topsoil was a layer of compact dark brown soil (10YR 4/4) in SU 5803 and SU 5804. We think that this soil represents slope wash from the plateau of Vigla. It seems to be substantially later than the strata below it, because wall 5801_f1 lacked mortar on its upper courses, plausibly because these courses were exposed and lost their mortar and plaster facing. Below SUs 5803 and 5804, the wall retained part of its mortar and plaster facing.

We recognized a soil change in SU 5805: a loose reddish (7.5YR 5/6) soil that continued throughout the trench in SU 5806.

After removing soil to bedrock in the east of the EU with 5807, we noticed that we had dug through a subtle soil change that included the same loose red soil with white inclusions (10YR 5/6). This soil lay below the lowest course of the upslope face of wall 5802_f1, and therefore predates it. All indications point to the conclusion that SU 5807 removed this red soil with white bedrock inclusions, but since we didn't recognize the soil change until 5807 was well underway, we closed the SU; we were worried that the SU included parts of the earlier red fill and we wanted to avoid contamination. SU 5808 therefore contained only this later fill.

We think that the reddish soil excavated in 5805 and 5806 postdates 5802_f1, because it slopes up to the wall and virtually covered the entirety of the preserved courses of the wall. Since this red fill does not cover the wall, we cannot be entirely sure that it is later than it. It is possible that the wall construction cut into the red soil and the upslope face was built up against the cut. However, the wall rests on a different stratum, one with white bedrock inclusions. If the wall cut into the red soil (the one without bedrock inclusions), one would expect this soil to lie beneath the wall also (why would builders stop at a soil change?). Consequently we consider it likely that wall 5802_f1 predates the red soil without inclusions. It certainly postdates the red soil with inclusions.

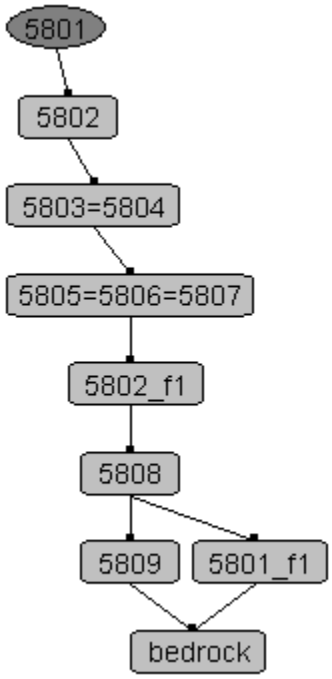
One problem with this hypothesis is that a pocket of loose reddish soil without bedrock inclusions seems to lie beneath the wall at the south (see west scarp drawing). This might imply that the reddish soil of 5805 and 5806 predates, or is contemporary with, the construction of wall 5802_f1. Another possibility, however, is that this pocket of soil represents a later repair or modification to the wall. As our west scarp drawing shows, the stones above this pocket are significantly smaller and less well-fitted together.

We didn't find any evidence for a cut for this repair in our excavation, nor is it evident in our south scarp drawing, so this explanation is necessarily hypothetical.

The well-built mortar wall (5801_f1) is built directly on the bedrock, and is therefore later than the reddish soil with whitish inclusions (5808). This also means that it predates wall 5802_f1. We can also note that wall 5801_f1 makes a turn to the south; the wall construction is the same: large blocks with flat faces and mortar binding them together. This part of wall 5801_f1 lie directly below wall 5802_f1. Moreover, wall 5802_f1 projects more to the east (upslope), making it certain that wall 5802_f1 is built on top of wall 5801_f1 and is consequently later in date.

SU 5809 was a mixed fill of dark brown soil, filled with stones of various sizes, mostly white bedrock. The dark brown color penetrated/affected the color of the bedrock, and so we think that 5809 is a natural deposit of decayed bedrock. It is a fairly discrete deposit which does not extend to the western scarp, and only extended 20-30 cm from the north of the southern scarp.

We exposed bedrock throughout the unit and can determine that this predates the fortification wall. The diagram below shows the stratigraphic relationships from EU 9.



The most important strata are 5805=5806=5807, which provide a terminus ante quem for wall 5802_f1, and SU 5808, which provides a terminus post quem for wall 5802_f1 and a terminus ante quem for wall 5801_f1. There is no terminus post quem for wall 5801_f1, as it is built on bedrock.

Section 5: Features

We assigned the fortification wall the first feature number (5801_f1) at the beginning of the excavation. This wall is constructed of an assorted assemblage of stones of varying size and geological description. Some of the stones are roughly cut or

trimmed. The most dominant are several large cut blocks approximately 60 cm in length. This wall stands at approximately 1.30 m in height at the NE end and drops abruptly downslope to approximately 65 cm at the end of the excavated area (see North scarp drawing) but also continues downslope for the entire length of the trench. We believe that the lack of mortar on the upper section of this wall is as a result of its exposure to the elements over time. There is substantial mortar extant on the lower section which was protected by the reddish soil fill (SUs 5805-8). We did not find a foundation trench and concluded that the wall is built directly on the bedrock, although the mortar and plaster obscure the wall stones where they touch the bedrock. We therefore do not know if the bedrock was modified in any way to seat the lowest course of stones.

The lower courses of the wall appear to be composed of larger stones, although the extensive mortar and plaster on the face of the wall makes it difficult to be certain. Where stones are visible through gaps in the mortar, however, the stones are relatively large, i.e., 20 cm or longer. The middle of the preserved wall is composed of smaller stones, including a number of long, thin stones between 5 and 8 cm tall. The topmost course is composed of a single large rough stone, poorly preserved, which was visible on the surface. It is possible that the flat stones were used to level the wall to support a course of larger stones, many of which were robbed out or eroded down the hill.

The upslope or tumble wall (5802_f1) is of a noticeably different construction. This section of the wall abuts 5801_f1 at right angles and falls abruptly downslope to the end of the trench. There does not appear to be mortar within the wall, and there is a lot more soil between the stacked field stones. The soil has allowed for the growth of weeds in this area. One cut block of the same construction is visible in the eastern face of the wall, similar to those described in 5801_f1 which may indicate a reuse of this material.

This tumble wall is significantly different from the stretch of Hellenistic wall excavated in 2008 in EU 6. There the stones, although they were also field stones, were much more tightly packed together without much soil in between them, and the faces of the wall were much better articulated and neat than those in the tumble wall of EU 9.

We had planned to clean the downslope face of the tumble wall in EU 9, in order to understand the construction of the wall, but we didn't have time to do so. However, based on the upslope face, which is fairly linear and clear, it seems likely that the lack of a downslope face (based on surface indications) is more a product of erosion and or robbing of stones than its actual construction technique.

A third feature was described as 5806_f1 – an area of tumble and mortar in the SE corner of the trench - although subsequent excavation revealed this to be bedrock.

Section 6: Finds

The vast majority of the artifacts were ceramic, however we did also find a coin (SU5806) in the sieve. We were not able to determine the location within the SU so we took bottom elevations of the pass in which the coin was found (NE 54.52, SE 54.43, SW 54.30, NW 54.46).

Among other finds were small pieces of glass, including several rims, that were found in several units. A small number of stone artifacts were also kept. Shells were found in all units, but only a sample of these were kept. Similarly with mortar and flooring (also found in EU 8), only examples were kept from units where they were found.

A preliminary reading of the ceramic material suggests a Late Roman date for this area. We found one sherd that was fused to the bedrock (SU 5808) near the junction of the two walls suggesting there is no sterile soil in this EU. We expect that the artifacts recovered from SU 5808 will provide a terminus ante quem for 5801_f1 and a terminus post quem for 5802_f1. SU 5808 contained the red with white soil – a subtle soil change from the previous fill.

We are confident that the artifacts recovered from SU 5802-SU 5806 will provide a terminus ante quem for 5802_f1.

It should be noted that this trench did not produce any find spots.

Section 7. Interpretive conclusions

Our initial reading of the relationship between the two walls was re-evaluated after determining that the upslope wall (5802_f1) was built after the mortar fortification wall. Therefore, it is not probably contemporary with Hellenistic section of wall (EU 6) excavated in 2008. We formulated this conclusion based upon the two cut blocks at the junction between the two walls that were covered in mortar both above and below.

Secondly, the upslope wall was built partially over the top of the fortification construction. We can surmise that the ridge of Vigla was fortified at various stages throughout its occupation and/or other use. Walls have been on the hill slope at least from the Hellenistic period (EU 6), through the Roman/Late Roman period (5801_f1) and subsequently (5802_f1). A closer examination of the artifacts recovered from EU 9 will provide us with a more accurate date before which the fortification wall was constructed.

The 5802_f1 wall appears to be constructed of field stones and possibly reused blocks from the fortification wall. We believe that 5802_f1 was built after the fortification wall and may also have been refurbished.

Section 8. Appendices: drawings, photographs

8.1. Appendix: Drawings:

SU	Scale	Description
5801	1:25	Top plan
5802	1:25	Plan view with elevations
5803	1:25	Plan view with elevations
5804	1:25	Plan view with elevations
5805	1:25	Plan view with elevations
5806	1:25	Plan view with elevations
5807	1:25	Plan view with elevations
5809	1:25	Plan view with elevations
East scarp	1:20	
South scarp	1:20	
West scarp – 5802_f1 1:20		
North scarp – 5801_f1	1:20	
Top plan	1:25	
5808	1:25	
Running section	1:20	

8.2. Appendix: Photographs:

SU	Description	Orientation
5801_p1	top of EU 9	looking E
5801_p2	top of EU 9	looking E
5802_p1	top of SU5802	looking E
5802_p2	bottom of SU5802	looking E
5802_p3	bottom of SU5802	looking N
5802_p4	bottom of SU5802	looking N
5803_p1	bottom of SU5803	looking N
5803_p2	bottom of SU5803	looking N
5804_p1	bottom of SU5804	looking N
5804_p2	bottom of SU5804	looking N
5805_p1	bottom of SU5805	looking N
5805_p2	bottom of SU5805	looking N
5805_p3	5801_f1 – wall	looking N
5805_p4	5801_f1 – wall detail	looking N
5806-p1	bottom of SU5806	looking E
5806_p2	5806_f1	looking E
5806_p3	5801_f1 – wall	looking N
5806_p4	5801_f1 – wall	looking N
5806_p5	5802_f1 – wall	looking W
5807_p1	bottom of SU5807	looking N
5807_p2	bottom of SU5807	looking W
5807_p3	5801_f1 construction	looking N
5807_p4	5802_f1 construction	looking W
5807_p5	5802_f1 detail	looking W