Anglo Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi

Trench A: 2004

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Report

Trench A was reopened on the 24th July 2004 under the supervision of Andrew Ginns. The decision was taken at the end of last year, having discovered late Hellenistic/ early Roman burials, that we needed a larger area of excavation to hopefully establish the extent of the cemetery. The primary aim this season was, therefore, to increase the area of Trench A to 13.5m north-south and 13m east-west, giving a total area of 175.5m^2 - an effective doubling of the previous size of 90m^2. Because the archaeological work in Trench A from 2001-3 had utilised the MoLAS Single Context Planning System it was hoped that the work of extending the trench could be undertaken at a much increased pace. Our intention was that layers encountered by the workmen during this season could be quickly recorded and related to the existing section drawings and plans. Throughout this season the original area of Trench A was protected under last year's covering of plastic and backfill – our aim being to start the 2005 season with the whole, extended trench open at the layer in which we had found the burials previously.

Before we could extend the trench it was necessary to move the large spoil heaps that had accumulated over the previous three years. To undertake this work in an efficient manner we hired a mechanical excavator, driver and banksman from a nearby town. This enabled us to move in one day a quantity of compacted soil and masonry that would otherwise have taken far longer. This work was at all times supervised by one of the experienced archaeologists of the expedition.

With the spoil heaps moved we measured out the new dimensions of the trench and laid it out with string. We then employed a team of approximately 12 local workmen – many of whom had worked with us during previous seasons - who began to remove spits of approximately 0.3m in depth. The first spit removed was composed of a soil containing rubble with cement leached into it. This was deposited during the repair and reconstruction of the fortification walls in the Soviet period. Under this modern deposit was a dark earth containing large boulders and sections of collapsed wall. This collapse acts as a seal for all the underlying layers, meaning that their archaeological integrity is sound. As expected this 'rubble' layer was not of a constant thickness. It took about a week of excavation to remove the mortar layer and rubble layer in full.

Beneath the rubble and mortar the layers produced a large quantity of archaeological material. The soils are dark and rich and contain a high density of pottery, CBM and animal bones of domesticated livestock. We felt that this layer was a

continuation of the previously excavated layer (108). This layer also contained some interesting small finds. These included arrow heads, a knife and dagger blade, fibula broach, bronze buckle, hairpin, loom weights, bases of wine glasses and a broken glass perfume bottle.

Under (108) was layer (125) – though we suspected that this might actually be a number of small occupation deposits – which in turn overlies (136), the layer currently at the base of the original Trench A. Layer (125) was the last to be removed in this season of excavation and still contained fallen masonry, though not in the same density as (108). Some of this may be from an earlier period of wall collapse, however some large blocks could be at this depth due to the impact of falling from a great height. Like layer (108), (125) contained a high density of ceramic fragments and animal bones. Small finds included an iron spearhead, copper alloy needle, a residual flint blade and a glass fragment, which was decorated with blue spots. It is hoped that further analysis of these finds will provide valuable dating of the archaeological deposits. Also within (125) are two thin mortar layers, which are still visible in the south facing trench edge. It would be very interesting to compare samples of these with mortar samples from the extant walls as it may provide a way of dating the original construction and repair of the fortifications.

In the western area of the trench extension removal of (125) revealed a layer composed of dark earth and small rounded stones, which account for 50% of its volume. This layer could be a continuation of layer (132) - which also lies directly above layer (136) - and is either a metalled surface or stones left over from the wall construction. Fine, rounded river stones are used in the mortar of the wall and this could account for their presence in this layer. Within this layer there also seems to be a truncated burial, the feet and upper skull of which were exposed. However, (132) was revealed toward the end of the 2004 season and will have to be investigated properly next year. Directly above (136) in the northern part of the trench extension is a thin green sandy-silt deposit, (158), which was the final layer to be exposed this season. This appears to consist of cess material and may indicate either a period of intense human occupation close by, some kind of light industrial activity or animal stabling.

The final days of the 2004 season were spent recording the south facing and east facing sections in the trench edge. The trench was then covered with protective plastic sheeting, partially back-filled and then closed. The 2004 season was a season of consolidation for Trench A. We are optimistic that the 2005 season will reveal more Hellenistic burials in the extended part of the trench and should substantially increase our understanding of the activity in this part of the site.

Context Register

NOK04/A

157	**Layer**	
		Black layer, heavily compacted. Large amounts of pottery and charcoal – possible smashed kiln based on heavy density of charcoal and smashed pottery. Probably depressed into concave shape by fallen masonry.
158	**Layer**	
		Green yellow, compacted sandy silt. 2% stone inclusions (avg. 5mm); charcoal 1%. Probable cess layer.

159	Layer

Orange beige, compacted, silty clay.

Graphics Register

NOK04/A

13	Section	East-facing section, trench edge	1:20	Jeff
14	Section	East-facing section, trench edge	1:20	Rich + Meg
15	Section	East-facing section, trench edge	1:20	Rich + Meg
16	Section	South-facing section, trench edge	1:20	Jamie + Jess
17	Section	South-facing section, trench edge	1:20	Jess W + Chris