

# **NOK07/A Interim Excavation Report**

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## ***Introduction***

*This is an interim assessment of work undertaken in the 2007 season, which will be expanded upon in a more comprehensive report at a later date.*

The student volunteers arrived in Nokalakevi on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2007, at which point a small advance party had been on site for three days reopening Trench A and preparing for the forthcoming season. Work began in earnest on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> August and continued until Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> August, when the trench was covered with protective plastic and backfilled once again. The team which travelled from the UK initially consisted of 11 undergraduate students from Bradford University, two Australian volunteers, two experienced site supervisors and three expedition directors – including the author. The expedition was led by Professor David Lomitashvili of the State History Museum in Tbilisi, and included a number of Georgian specialists in finds and environmental work. Mr Niko Murgulia assisted in the supervision of British and Georgian volunteers. The team was joined half way through the season by Dr Jane Timby, a British ceramics specialist.

## ***The training component***

Bradford University already had a clear guide for their students regarding the training element of their degree. This states that fieldwork is regarded as an important aspect of their studies, being counted as a double module at Year 2 level. The handout for students states that “What is common to our projects is the aim to equip students with a basic level of field competence in archaeology, involving the recognition and recording of archaeological features. Students will acquire different skills in each project, but they will all learn about the processes underpinning field archaeology” (University of Bradford, 2007, Archaeological Sciences Field Courses Handbook).

The handout also stated that “at present we require only a minimum of three weeks in a field course. This is not enough in itself to make students into fully competent field archaeologists. It will provide the foundation for developing these skills in other fieldwork in the future” (idem). Assessment of the performance of the students was to be through a weekly report from their field supervisor, which provided a basis for comment and discussion during the project. The students were also asked to complete a daily reflective journal, which should contain an account of the archaeological work undertaken, skills learnt etc. This journal should be shown to the field supervisor each week as a means of assessing the progress of the student. The three main skill groups to be assessed were Skills; Understanding and Teamwork. The first and third would be demonstrated by the field supervisor’s reports, while the second skill group would be assessed via the content of the reflective journal.

This year I decided to implement our own training programme, to compliment rather than replace the university’s own requirements. Reflective journals, or site diaries, are good indicators of the understanding that the student is developing for the work that they are undertaking. They do not, however, serve to indicate particular areas in which the student may wish to gain experience. For this reason I decided to sit down with each student and discuss their interests and intentions. Of course, it is not possible to tailor a project around the individual needs of each student. There will be times when all of them are required to trowel, draw plans, wash pot etc simply in order to get the work done. Equally, a first year student may express an interest in a specific area simply because they do not have experience of any other. It is important to provide as broad an experience as possible simply to enable them to begin the process of specialism selection which continues in their second and third years of study. However, it is clear that field supervisors should endeavour to ascertain if students have goals in mind for their time on the project. This enables a certain amount of matching training to students, which is also in the interest of the project as well as the student – ie. A student with a specific and demonstrable interest in post-excavation work may make a slow and disinterested troweller, but an excellent pot washer or illustrator.

Throughout the 2007 field season our commitment to provide high quality training was at the forefront of our work and, despite the variety of interests, abilities and backgrounds I believe that our British, Georgian, Arab and Australian volunteers all developed or improved their key archaeological skills.

## ***Excavation results***

It is harder this year to provide a definitive commentary on the archaeological results, simply because – perhaps more so than in previous seasons – we have only just started to reveal a series of complex, inter-related structures and deposits. A line of stones that had been exposed towards the centre of the trench at the end of the 2006 field season was demonstrated to be part of a building, and other wall lines were exposed during the 2007 season. These buildings appear, judging from the pottery recovered from the deposits sealing them, to belong to the Hellenistic period and are thus roughly contemporary with the building exposed in Trench B in 2005. The method of construction appears, from the buildings that we have thus far exposed since 2005, to have involved the levelling of an area and the laying of an unbonded line of large limestone blocks as a surface foundation – there is currently no conclusive indication of a cut for them – onto which was placed a wooden beam(s). It seems likely that upright posts measuring approximately 0.1m in diameter, such as the ones we found evidence for in Trench B either as charcoal, or as impressions in pieces of daub, were fixed to this horizontal beam. Around this frame wattle would have been woven, before daub was applied in quite a substantial quantity to make a strong wall. There has been no archaeological evidence for the roofing material, which would probably rule out tile given that it normally survives very well in the archaeological record when present.

The buildings were given Structure numbers, so that we could group the various elements of each building within our recording system. Structure 1 currently consists of contexts (187) and (211). The former is the line of unbonded limestone boulders towards the centre of the trench. It is approximately 6m from east to west, with a return to the north, which extends for 1m. At the northern end of this return was a large post-pit [219], which probably once held a door post for the entrance to the building. Deposit (211) was initially interpreted as an abandonment deposit within the walls, which post-dated the use of the building and possibly sealed further structural elements. However, by the end of the field season it seemed more likely that this deposit pre-dated the use of the building. This uncertainty will be resolved by further excavation during the 2008 field season.

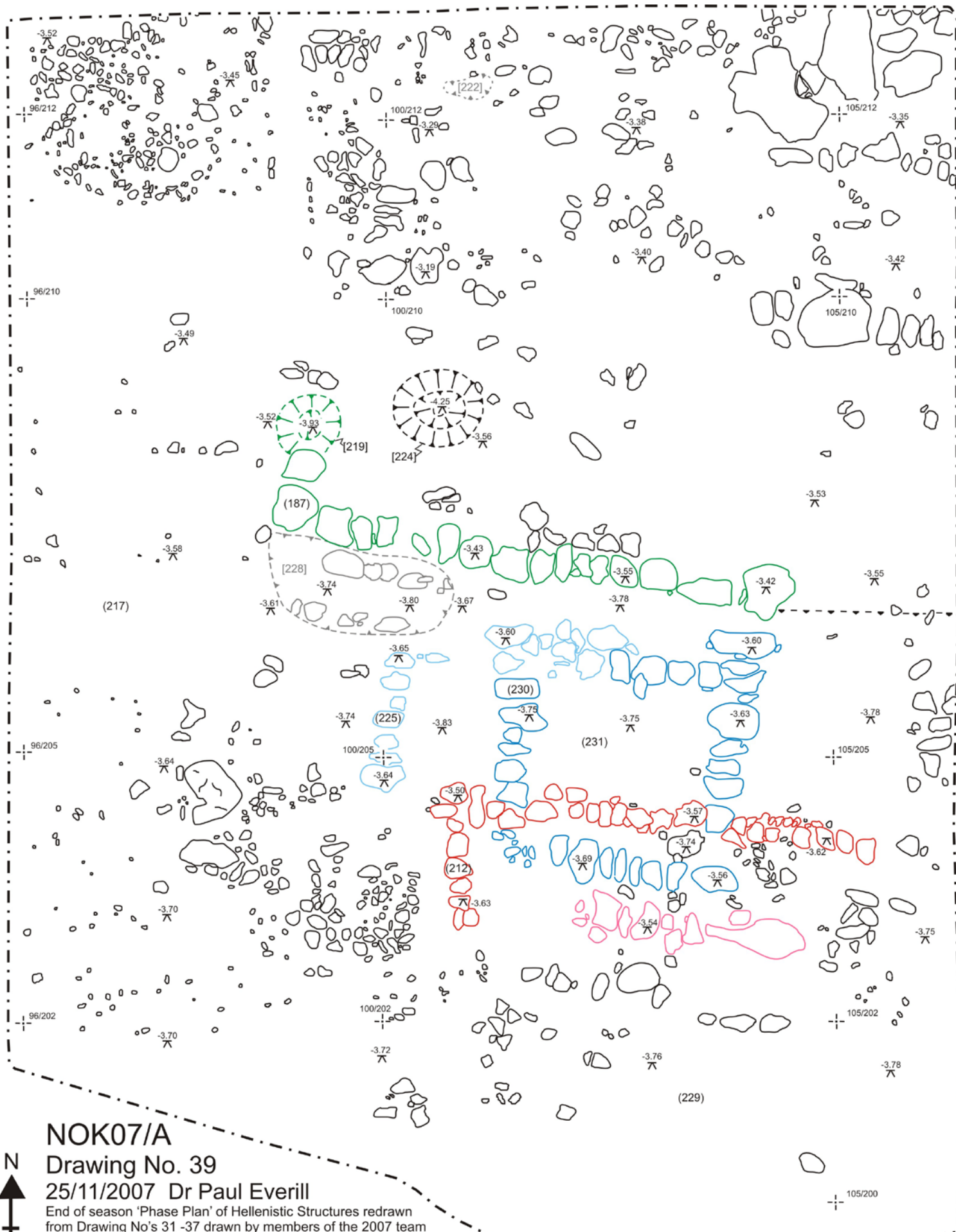
Structure 2 consisted of contexts (212) and (213). Context (212) was another line of unbonded limestone boulders running for 4.5m east-west, before a return to the south which extended for 1m. The east-west element was almost parallel to the east-west element of Structure 1, and was located 2m to the south of it. Context (213) was the possible abandonment deposit within Structure 2, however, as with context (211), the exact sequence is yet to be established.

It is certain however, that context (213) sealed part of Structure 3, making this the oldest building exposed during the 2007 season. Structure 3 was a rather enigmatic building, which was also sealed by a substantial deposit of burnt material – context (216) – which lay between Structure 1 and Structure 2. Structure 3, first of all, was a roughly square building, defined by stone wall foundation (230). It was approximately 2.5m square, with the suggestion that there may have been an entrance at the northwest corner. It lay underneath Structure 2, and about half a metre south of Structure 1. It appears to have respected the same orientation as the other buildings. It is possible that these walls actually represent a series of rooms in one building that underwent a series of modifications. However, it seems most likely that these are from three separate buildings. The square Structure 3 may even indicate a small ritual building related to the Hellenistic necropolis, however one can not rule out the possibility that these buildings actually pre-date the necropolis, perhaps at a time before the inhabitants of Tsikhegoji sought a more defensible location for their settlement in the area known as the upper town.

Burnt deposit (216) provides possibly the most tantalising opportunity to gain an insight into the early settlement of Tsikhegoji. From this context we retrieved, through the sieving and flotation of soil samples undertaken by Dr Maka Bokeria, a wide range of carbonised seeds, including

**LIST?!?!**

Three samples of charcoal were also recovered from this deposit, and have been sent to the C14 dating laboratory at Beijing University. We are currently awaiting the result of this analysis, but there is, as I have mentioned, the possibility that this will provide the date at which the early Hellenistic focus of settlement at Tsikhegoji shifted from the lower town area (later to become the area of the necropolis) to the upper town.



**NOK07/A**  
**Drawing No. 39**

25/11/2007 Dr Paul Everill  
 End of season 'Phase Plan' of Hellenistic Structures redrawn  
 from Drawing No's 31 -37 drawn by members of the 2007 team



### NOK07/A Context list and summary

188	Layer	Dark grey brown, clay silt, abandonment deposit containing frequent medium to coarse limestone fragments. 0.3m thick.	
189	Fill	Dark grey brown silty clay. Fill of grave 191	
190	Human Sk	Disturbed neonate burial in amphora	
191	Cut	East-west grave cut	
192	Fill	Dark brown silty clay. Fill of grave 194	
193	Human Sk	Sub-adult burial	
194	Cut	East-west grave cut	
195	Fill	Mid grey brown sandy silt. Fill of grave 197	
196	Human Sk	Badly disturbed neonate burial	
197	Cut	Poorly defined grave cut	
198	Fill	Dark brown/ black silty clay. Fill of grave 200	
199	Human Sk	Disarticulated, poorly preserved cremation	
200	Cut	Poorly defined cut for cremation burial	
201	Layer	Very compact, brownish yellow silty clay. Unexcavated part of street surface to the south of Trench A.	
202	Layer	Limestone rubble and mortar. Unexcavated layer overlying street surface.	
203	Layer	Probable Byzantine street surface consisting of flat, sub-circular riverstones, approx. 0.2m in diameter. Street appears to be aligned east-west and runs towards the 6 <sup>th</sup> century gate. Not excavated.	
204	Layer	Mid brown, moderately compact silt. Ground surface underlying street surface at south of trench.	
205	Fill	Dark brown/ black silty clay. Fill of grave 207.	
206	Human Sk	East-west aligned child burial, disarticulated within amphora.	
207	Cut	Poorly defined grave cut.	
208	Fill	Fill of grave 210	
209	Human Sk	An east-west aligned juvenile skeleton.	
210	Cut	Grave cut	
211	Layer	Abandonment layer within wall 187	Structure 1
212	Masonry	Stone base of Hellenistic E-W wall with short N-S return.	Structure 2
213	Layer	Abandonment layer within wall 212	Structure 2
214	Fill	Beam slot – Fill of 215	
215	Cut	Beam slot	
216	Layer	Burnt clay/ daub deposit between Structure 1 & 2	
217	Layer	Possible Yard Surface to west of Structure 1	
218	Fill	Very dark brown grey silty clay. Fill of posthole 219	
219	Cut	Posthole, 0.68m in diameter.	
220	Fill	Grave fill	
221	Human Sk	East-west aligned sub-adult within amphora	
222	Cut	Poorly defined grave cut	
223	Fill	Dark grey silty clay, fill of posthole 224	
224	Cut	Posthole, approx 0.9m diameter	
225	Masonry	Short section of N-S aligned wall	
226	Fill	Grave fill	
227	Human Sk		
228	Cut	Grave cut	
229	Layer	Possible cessy deposit south of structure 2	
230	Masonry	Square stone base of clay and timber wall	Structure 3
231	Layer	Layer within wall 230	Structure 3
232	Layer	Rubble layer apparently underlying layer 217	