

Bringing methodology to the fore: The Anglo-Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi

Paul Everill, Nikoloz Antidze, Davit Lomitashvili, Nikoloz Murgulia

Abstract

The Anglo-Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi has been working in Samegrelo, Georgia, since 2001, building on the work carried out by archaeologists from the S. Janashia Museum since 1973. The expedition has trained nearly 250 Georgian and British students in modern archaeological methodology since 2001, and over that same period Georgia has changed enormously, both politically and in its approach to cultural heritage. This paper seeks to contextualise the recent contribution of British archaeological methodology to the rich history of archaeological work in Georgia, and to consider the emergence of a dynamic cultural heritage sector within Georgia since 2004.

Introduction

A small village in the predominantly rural, western Georgian region of Mingrelia (Samgrelo) hosts a surprising and spectacular historic site. A fortress supposedly established by Kuji, a semi-mythical ruler of west Georgia in the vein of the British King Arthur, provides the stage for the story of an alliance with King Parnavaz of east Georgia (Iberia) and the overthrow of Hellenistic overlords. As a result Nokalakevi has become a potent political symbol of a united, independent Georgia and a backdrop to presidential campaign launches. Known as Tsikhegoji in the Mingrelian dialect, meaning Fortress/Castle of Kuji, the Byzantine name Archaeopolis (old city) mirrors the literal meaning of the Georgian name, Nokalakevi – ruins where a town was – in suggesting that, even when the Laz and their Byzantine allies fortified the site in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries AD, the ruins of the Hellenistic period town may have still been visible. The three phases of external fortification earned the description ‘Fortress of Triple Walls’ in some Georgian chronicles, but between the Arab invasion of the early 8th century AD and the Mingrelian principality of the Dadiani family, a branch of which took Nokalakevi as a seat in the 15th/ 16th century, the site appears to have been abandoned as a major administrative and military centre. It was not until the early 19th century, when classically-educated European travellers explored the South Caucasus,¹ that associations were made between Nokalakevi and both Archaeopolis and the city of Aia of the Jason and the Argonauts myths. Today the site of Aia is more usually identified with the modern, Imeretian city of Kutaisi (situated on the navigable river Rioni; the Phasis of the Greek stories), but the identification of Nokalakevi with Archaeopolis – first made by the Swiss philologist, Frédéric Dubois de Montpéroux, in 1833 – has proved correct.²

Archaeological work at Nokalakevi has taken many forms since the first excavations over the winter of 1930/ 31, jointly funded by the Weimar Republic’s Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft and the Soviet Academy of Sciences in a short-lived cultural and scientific programme of cooperation. Led by the German Byzantinist Alfons Maria Schneider and his Georgian assistants Levan Mushkelishvili and Giorgi Gozalishvili, the initial work revealed the extent of much of the fortifications of the 20ha site; found a hoard of gold solidi dating to the reign of the Emperor Maurice; and is largely credited with confirming the association of Nokalakevi with the Archaeopolis/ Tsikhegoji described by Byzantine historians, such as Procopius³ and Agathias,⁴ and by the Georgian medieval chroniclers writing the *kartlis tskhovreba*.⁵ Aside from a small number of intervening survey projects, it was over

¹ Khatchadourian 2008

² Dubois de Montpéroux 1839

³ *History of the Wars*: 8. 14

⁴ *Historiarum Libri Quinque*: II.22.3; III.3.8-III.7; IV.9.6; IV.11

⁵ Schneider 1931

40 years until the first long-term programme of excavation and conservation was established by Parmen Zakaraia and Nodar Lomouri of the S. Janashia State Museum of Georgia in 1973, the results of which were published in three volumes.⁶ The Nokalakevi Expedition initially operated from a building on the south side of the River Tekhuri, but within two or three years it was given the old village hospital building to use – presumably after medical facilities had been centralised at the municipal capital at Senaki. This new expedition base had originally been built in the early 20th century, and required some renovation and structural modifications to suit its new role, however it was located northeast of the looping gorge carved by the river, right in amongst the historic ruins of the lower town. From the mid-1970s to 1991 this building served as a Dig House, accommodating supervisors and students, plus a large dining area and the kitchen. A second, this time purpose-built, ‘Dig House’ was constructed next to it in about 1977/8, initially to accommodate the project directors and more finds processing and analysis space on the ground floor. Throughout the 1980s, until Georgian independence in 1991, the expedition operated out of both buildings for six months each year. With an annual budget peaking at around 280,000 Roubles (about 200,000 US\$) and a huge team, the scale of excavation, conservation and restoration was enormous. The civil war that erupted shortly after independence saw a great deal of damage to the infrastructure of both the expedition and the local museum. Some of this was due to small arms’ fire, but the majority was a result of the looting of salvageable materials. The withdrawal of state funding for Janashia Museum’s Nokalakevi Expedition in 1991; the inter-ethnic and political conflicts of the 1990s; and the widespread organised crime (and under-funded, often corrupt, police force), meant that the small-scale archaeological work that was undertaken between 1991 and 1998 was predominantly self-funded by dedicated individuals from the Janashia Museum, at some personal risk in a volatile region of the country. The original Dig House, by this time an old building, was damaged beyond repair in this period and was demolished in 2000 or early 2001, shortly before the first season of the Anglo-Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi (*kartul-inglisuri ekspeditsia nokalakevshi*). From 2001 to the present day, the expedition has flourished because of the genuine collaboration between Georgian and British specialists that it has fostered, and the friendships that remain at its heart. This collaboration can be observed not only in this paper, but in the growing number of publications by the expedition, including those that are bringing the site to the attention of western scholars.⁷

Since AGEN’s first excavation in 2001, funded by a combination of financial contributions from British volunteers and small grants from bodies such as the Marjory Wardrop Fund at Oxford and the British Institute at Ankara, the socio-economic landscape of Georgia has changed beyond recognition. The post-Soviet regime of Eduard Shevardnadze, tainted by endemic corruption and a failure to meet the expectations of newly independent, free market, Georgians, was overthrown in the bloodless popular uprising known as the Rose Revolution in 2003, followed by the election of Mikheil Saakashvili to the presidency in early 2004. His government, perceived as western-facing, young and dynamic, set about a series of reforms including the systematic clear-out of corrupt police officers; resurfacing decrepit old roads and adding new roads to the network; and stabilising of power supplies; alongside the strengthening of ties with western democracies and an eye on future membership of the European Union and NATO. The work of the new government also included an increased focus on the preservation of Georgia’s rich cultural heritage, and the creation of new heritage organisations to protect, conserve and display the material remains. In turn, however, even the two-term Saakashvili presidency proved to be only a waymarker on Georgia’s progress to a mature democracy and perhaps, despite the many steps forward, the greatest legacy of the Rose Revolutionaries was in handing over power peacefully following their loss at the parliamentary elections in 2012. Since then, the new government has continued to drive forward reforms in key areas, such as education and

⁶ Zakaraia 1981, 1987, 1993

⁷ For example, Everill et al 2010, 2011; Everill 2012, 2014; Lomitashvili et al 2010, 2011, 2013

infrastructure, while strengthening Georgia's relationship with the west. In 2014 Georgia and the European Union signed an Association Agreement, which also established Georgia as one of three 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas' (DCFTA) – giving Georgian business access to selected aspects of the EU internal market, and enabling EU investment into Georgia.

During this period of incredible change in Georgia three international collaborations have operated in Nokalakevi, including a short-lived Swiss-Georgian Expedition which excavated four test pits in 2006/7, and an ongoing Norwegian-Georgian conservation and restoration project which began in 2010. By far the largest and longest-lived of these is the Anglo-Georgian Expedition which, in 2012, became the longest running, international collaborative excavation in Georgia (overtaking the British-Georgian Pichvnari Expedition, led by Amiran Kakhidze and Michael Vickers, which operated very successfully from 1998-2009). The economic recovery in Georgia, alongside the stability of mature democratic government and modernised heritage institutions, mean that Janashia Museum's Nokalakevi Expedition now sits within the framework of the Georgian National Museum, and is supported by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia which manages the site itself. The longevity of the Anglo-Georgian Expedition is, in itself, a great success and reflects the strength of a collaboration underpinned by personal friendships and shared goals. In terms of professional output the work of AGEN has undoubtedly added greatly to the body of evidence regarding human activity at Nokalakevi from pre-history to modern times, however sixteen field seasons, at the time of writing, have also witnessed the training of a considerable number of Georgian and British student archaeologists in modern excavation/ recording methods, and it may be that this is ultimately the more significant legacy of the expedition.

Between 2001 and 2016, students from seven British universities have undertaken work at Nokalakevi as part of the fieldwork requirement of their degree programmes alongside volunteers from USA, Canada, Ireland, Australia, Holland, Belgium, Poland, United Arab Emirates, and Russia. Georgian archaeology students have also been trained in the methodology utilised at Nokalakevi, as a concerted and deliberate effort to provide young Georgian archaeologists with the skills required for modern professional practice. Initial discussions between the Georgian and British directors, prior to the first field season in 2001, determined that the deeply stratified archaeological deposits of Nokalakevi warranted the use of a recording system that was best able to cope satisfactorily with a complex urban site. This factor, combined with the previous work experience of the British archaeologists and the desire to train students in modern methodology, led to the adoption of the Single Context Recording (SCR) system. SCR, as utilised by the Museum of London Archaeology Service, forms the basis of the dominant methodology currently applied in British urban, developer-funded, archaeology. SCR systematises the reduction of deeply stratified archaeological deposits without reference to section recording, although sections may be integrated where deposits are particularly complex. The expedition was the first to introduce this methodology to Georgian archaeology and was able to arrange for the *MoLAS Site Manual*⁸ to be translated into Georgian. Subsequently RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust's handbook *First Aid for Finds*⁹ was also translated into Georgian. Both these manuals are now used in the teaching of Georgian archaeology students. However, as will be discussed, the expedition has found 'pure' Single Context Recording to be inadequate for the broader research and training goals of Nokalakevi.

Archaeological practice in Georgia

⁸ MoLAS 1994

⁹ Watkinson and Neal 1998

Antiquarianism as a specific area of scholarly activity appeared relatively late in Georgia, though this is not to imply that there was no prior interest in the people and artefacts of the past. Gamkrelidze¹⁰ quotes the early 19th century Georgian historian, Teimuraz Bagrationi, who describes the storage of artefacts, such as coins and weapons recovered from pre-Christian graves, in the depository of King Erekle II and the subsequent looting of the royal treasury during the Persian sacking of Tbilisi in 1795. In 1850 the Caucasian Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society first met in Tbilisi, deciding to establish a museum in support of a concerted effort to study the antiquities of the region.¹¹ This museum, established in 1852, became the Caucasian Museum in 1865 and the Museum of Georgia in 1919. In 1851 the Imperial Archaeological Society was established in St. Petersburg with a focal shift, reflecting broader cultural change engendered by the military disaster of 1812, away from “the remains of classical cities occupied by foreign colonists”,¹² and onto the antiquities of Russia and its empire. This was followed, in 1859, by an “Imperial Archaeological Commission within the Ministry of Court to oversee licensing of excavations on government land and to safeguard archaeological finds throughout Russia and its territories”.¹³ The Imperial Russian Archaeological Society was founded by Count Alexei Uvarov in Moscow in 1864, providing a focal point for the wealthy and educated aristocrats across the Empire who were largely responsible for funding some of the earlier excavations.¹⁴ Around the same time construction projects, including the Georgian Military Highway through the Caucasus Mountains, were revealing archaeological sites and in 1871 a Caucasian division of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, known as the Caucasus Archaeological Committee, was founded.¹⁵ The excavations prompted by the construction of part of the Georgian Military Highway at Mtskheta, Georgia’s ancient capital, and in the Samtavro valley, helped advance the archaeological study of the region though the excavations were led by an Austrian natural historian living in Tbilisi.¹⁶ Its international profile was significantly developed after the Imperial Archaeological Commission held its 5th congress in Tbilisi in 1881. However while some researchers cite this as a turning point in the professionalisation of Georgian archaeology, the more prevalent view is that the congress actually did little to advance the study, or methodology, of Georgian archaeology. Indeed, “the eminent historian-cum-archaeologist Ekvtime Takaishvili noted that ‘excavational archaeology was scantily represented at the Tbilisi Congress’”.¹⁷

The first formal archaeological investigation in Georgia, and perhaps in the whole South Caucasus, was undertaken at the site of Uplistsikhe near Gori in 1852 by the pioneering Dimitri Meghvinetukhutsesishvili (1815-1878).

Meghvinetukhutsesishvili began the archaeological study of Uplistsikhe by surveying the area and made drawings of the ancient structures; he discovered and copied several Georgian inscriptions. In order to make these copies, he had to climb high cliffs to see half-destroyed rock-cut edifices. He braved many dangers in order to harvest the fruits of his archaeological studies. He began by excavating the great hall of Uplistsikhe; cutting a trench about 4 m long, he unearthed fragments of a column and potsherds. In the room adjacent to the great hall were found huge wine jars, or pithoi. He concluded that the great hall and the adjoining structures seemed to be the palace of a nobleman. He studied all materials related to Uplistsikhe, namely the written sources containing evidence for Uplistsikhe as well as folk

¹⁰ Gamkrelidze 2010: 37

¹¹ Gamkrelidze 2010

¹² Smith 2005: 236

¹³ Lindsay and Smith 2006: 168

¹⁴ Lindsay and Smith 2006

¹⁵ Khatchadourian 2008

¹⁶ Gamkrelidze 2010: 39

¹⁷ Gamkrelidze 2010: 43

traditions preserved among the local inhabitants. At the same time, he excavated burials in the area.¹⁸

Despite not fulfilling his intention to fully publish his results, Meghvinetukhutsesishvili can also be credited with the first archaeological publication in the Caucasus with short reports appearing in issues 43, 66, and 70 of the *Kavkaz* newspaper in 1852,¹⁹ almost 20 years before Yeritsov is sometimes credited with the same feat for his report on his work at Akner, Armenia, in the same newspaper in 1871.²⁰

In 1873, Dimitri Bakradze (1826-1890) published an article in the periodical *Tsiskari*, in Georgian, which highlighted the importance of the region in terms of future archaeological study and issued a clarion call to scholars and the public alike for the establishment of a new institution. Bakradze “outlined a significant programme imbued with progressive ideas for the proposed archaeological society; the question was raised of the necessity of protecting monuments, and the need for their mapping, recording, description, purchase, and excavation”.²¹ At the first meeting in 1873 of the archaeological society, of which Bakradze was a founding figure, a list of sites was presented at which it was thought that archaeological investigation would help shed most light on Georgian history. For west Georgia this included the site of Nokalakevi, alongside Bedia, Phasis, Ozurgeti, Kutaisi, Vartsikhe, Oni, Khoni, and Shorapani. Bakradze went on to direct excavations himself in the district of Ozurgeti and remained a leading figure in Georgian archaeology until his death, shortly before which he had instigated renewed investigation at Mtskheta, in the area of Bagineti. Supervision of this excavation was assigned to the young and dynamic Ekvtime Takaishvili (1863-1953) who was to become a hugely important figure in Georgian archaeology.²²

After graduating from St. Petersburg University in 1887, Takaishvili had returned to his native Georgia and, from 1896, excavated at Vani – where he was among the first to use archaeological evidence to correctly date the site.²³ He also excavated near the village of Sajavakho on the Rioni river; and at Khutsubani near the Black Sea in the district of Kobuleti. He investigated the site of Bori in 1902; purchased the Akhagori treasure for the Caucasian Museum; and conducted excavations at Sachkhere. His views were pioneering in Georgia. He took a holistic approach to the study of archaeological sites reminiscent of Aubrey’s in 17th century England, incorporating local ethnography and folklore. However, arguably Takaishvili’s most significant contributions to Georgian archaeology came as a result of the collapse of the Russian Empire and the independence of the three Transcaucasian republics, briefly as one democratic state and then as three, before the invasion of the Red Army in 1921 marked the start of the Soviet Occupation. As one of the founders of Tbilisi State University in 1918, Takaishvili wrote the first archaeological course for Georgian students,²⁴ and subsequently was elected as a representative to the Parliament of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. When the Menshevik government fled to France in 1921, Takaishvili was given responsibility for the Georgian National Treasury – 39 large containers filled with priceless antiquities – which he steadfastly protected, despite his own extreme financial hardship and the attempts of a number of museums to purchase some of the material.²⁵ After the Soviet Union had been recognised by the League of Nations in 1933, and Georgia’s ‘government in exile’ lost its legal standing, the French state took possession

¹⁸ Gamkrelidze 2010: 38

¹⁹ Gamkrelidze 2010: 38

²⁰ Lindsay and Smith 2006: 168

²¹ Gamkrelidze 2010: 40

²² Gamkrelidze 2010: 41-43

²³ Khatchadourian 2008: 258

²⁴ Gamkrelidze 2010: 43-44

²⁵ Khatchadourian 2008: 258

of the treasury despite Takaishvili's protestations. At the end of the Second World War he was able to repatriate the material, but was himself arrested on his return to Georgia, spending the last few years of his life under house arrest in Tbilisi.

The practice of archaeology in Georgia took a significant step forward in 1924, when the government of the Georgian SSR passed legislation forbidding all

unwarranted archaeological digging, without the permission of relevant scholarly institutions... In addition, the state took over the care and protection of all archaeological discoveries. Initially, Tbilisi State University, the State Museum of Georgia and the Georgian Historical-Ethnographic Society were charged with conducting archaeological excavations and safe-keeping of the items brought to light²⁶

One of the new breed of Georgian archaeologists was Giorgi Nioradze (1886-1951), who returned from Europe with a modern archaeological education in 1925 and, as the new head of archaeology at the State Museum, spent six years developing an exceptional portfolio of excavations. Nioradze managed to bring together leading archaeologists of both the pre- and post-revolutionary traditions (including Makalatia, Iordanishvili, Chitaia, Mushkelishvili, and Gozalishvili – the last two being key members of the first expedition to Nokalakevi in 1930); restored the archaeology course that Takaishvili had established at Tbilisi University, becoming Chair of Ancient History in 1925 and then Chair of the History of Material Culture in 1934 – a position he held until his death.²⁷

Archaeology, and what would now be described as 'cultural heritage studies' generally, had to adapt to a very different disciplinary landscape during the Soviet Occupation, with pre-revolutionary theoretical ideas rapidly being replaced by a Marxist-Leninist focus that was acceptable to the establishment. This became particularly important after the defeat of the Georgian anti-Soviet uprising in August 1924 after which non-Marxist scholars were increasingly persecuted. Even Ivane Javakhishvili (1876-1940), the leading historian and 'kartvelologist', only narrowly escaped arrest during Stalin's Great Purge of 1936.²⁸ In contrast, the colourful historian and linguist Nikolai Marr (1865-1934) was able to emphasise the Marxist credentials of his research into the shared origins, he believed, of language families. Marr, born in Kutaisi to a British father and a Georgian mother, was a lifelong friend to Takaishvili and a mentor to Javakhishvili, but unlike his two colleagues he managed to prosper under the new Soviet order. However, while Marr's pre-revolution archaeological excavations in Armenia represent an important contribution to the developing profession in the Transcaucasus, his linguistic theories were considered rather eccentric outside the USSR and did not gain much traction at all in the west. In Georgia, it is the work of Javakhishvili that is lauded today, representing an outstanding body of scholarly research on Georgian history, archaeology and language. Javakhishvili's first involvement in archaeological fieldwork came quite late in life, in 1930 when he was asked to oversee the short excavation at Nokalakevi, but he remained active in archaeology for the last decade of his life acting as a consultant to excavations at sites including Dmanisi, Gudarekhi, Geguti, and Bolnisi.²⁹

With the death of Javakhishvili, Simon Janashia (1900-1947) – a member of the first generation of Georgian scholars to have graduated from Tbilisi State University – assumed the chief role in directing archaeological projects in Georgia though he was, by training, a specialist in Georgian medieval history. The two men had worked closely together to direct a major programme of excavation at

²⁶ Gamkrelidze 2010: 44

²⁷ Gamkrelidze 2010: 44

²⁸ Khatchadourian 2008:261

²⁹ Gamkrelidze 2010: 45

Mtskheta from 1937, when Janashia was director of the Marr Institute of Languages, History and Material Culture and Javakhishvili was a consultant to the Institute.³⁰ However, by the end of the 1940s the institutional landscape was quite different, and following the deaths of both Javakhishvili and Janashia two of the key national institutions bore their names (the I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, and the S. Janashia Museum of Georgia). More significantly, the Marr Institute of Languages, History and Material Culture (often referred to by its Georgian acronym ENIMKI) was restructured in 1941, and what became the I. Javakhishvili Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography was detached from it and placed within the newly founded Georgian SSR Academy of Sciences.³¹ The academy, renamed the Georgian National Academy of Sciences (GNAS) in 1990, remains a key advisor to the government in terms of archaeology and, until its Archaeological Commission was moved to the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation, had the power to grant (or withhold) excavation permits (see below). A final, noteworthy development in terms of the structure of Georgian archaeology arose from a house-building boom in the 1970s. The sudden demand for archaeological investigations led to Professor Otar Lordkipanidze (1930-2002) calling for the creation of a Centre for Archaeological Studies. The CAS was established in 1977, and initially housed within the I. Javakhishvili Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography,³² from which it ran a number of archaeological expeditions – the most famous of which being the excavation of the significant city site at Vani. Today it is the O. Lordkipanidze Archaeological Research Centre, part of the Georgian National Museum.

The development of British methodology

While Georgian archaeological endeavour, from Meghvinetukhutsesishvili to Lordkipanidze and beyond, undoubtedly experienced significant developments in terms of methodology, there remains no accepted best-practice standard in Georgian archaeology. A variety of excavation techniques are employed, not all of which are able to fully reveal the stratigraphic sequence, or enable its recording. Indeed, this current lack of standardisation is most problematic when it comes to the excavation archive, the paper representation of the archaeological deposits and all that remains after the project is completed, constituting “preservation by record”.³³ Even today it remains possible to excavate a nationally important site and record it only in notebooks that never enter the public domain, and this is perhaps because methodology has not been afforded the necessary time and consideration in the past. In contrast, excavation methodologies and recording strategies have sometimes been a source of great angst for the British.

The British urban archaeological tradition stems largely from the work of Martin Biddle (1937-) in Winchester between 1961 and 1971, and of Philip Barker (1920-2001) at sites such as Hen Domen between 1960 and 1988, and, particularly, at Wroxeter from 1966 to 1990. Both men, working in parallel though not in isolation, were influenced by the ‘open area’ approach initially developed by medievalists excavating deserted villages in Holland and Denmark. In Britain, the excavations of Biddle and Barker perfected this approach as a significant step forward from the then prevalent tradition of box trenches referred to as the ‘Wheeler-Kenyon method’ (derived initially from the excavations directed by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in the 1930s and developed, by his student Dame Kathleen Kenyon, in the 1950s). The idea of utilising a grid of box trenches was primarily to allow the recording in detail of a series of sections, giving ‘vertical’ data pre-eminence over horizontal plans. This emphasised the sequence of stratification which, many thought, could not be appropriately illuminated by layers. A

³⁰ Khatchadourian 2008: 262

³¹ Gamkrelidze 2010: 46

³² Gamkrelidze 2010: 47

³³ Department of the Environment (UK) 1990

secondary benefit may well have been derived from the improved ability of supervisors to monitor the work of large numbers of workmen, utilising the baulks, as the rigorous management of the workforce was perceived to be a key priority, frequently described in his books.³⁴ However, at Maiden Castle Wheeler himself had abandoned box trenches in order to shed more light on complex horizontal stratigraphy and predicted the demise of the box trench system so closely associated with him.³⁵ Certainly both Biddle and Barker considered their 'open area' excavation to be a continuation of Wheeler's drive for greater stratigraphic clarity utilising 'continuing' sections derived from a series of temporary baulks across the site, to be drawn and removed at regular intervals.³⁶ However Barker also suggested that the focus on vertical sections on some sites often led to a paucity in the recording of horizontal plans. The move away from box trenches and towards the use of large, 'open area' excavation was pioneered in the 1930s and 40s by van Giffen in Holland, Hatt and Steensberg in Denmark, and Bersu in Germany and Britain. It was further developed in Britain in the 1950s by Hurst and Golson working at Wharram Percy, and Frere at Verulamium.³⁷ Biddle himself describes being particularly influenced by the work of Hurst and Frere and, through them, back to Steensberg.³⁸ However, it is fair to say that the work of Biddle and Barker perfected and popularised this methodological approach, which insisted on the accurate recording of deposits in both plan and section.

The extensive excavations at Winchester and Wroxeter tackled incredibly complex sequences of deposits and engendered new ways of working and, perhaps more importantly, new ways of organising and interpreting the data produced. However, the projects were quite different in character. Biddle's excavations combined a 'rescue' and research focus, having negotiated time ahead of development in order to undertake the work. The scale of the operation, while not unusual in today's commercial environment, was literally ground-breaking then. The sheer number of excavators and deposits demanded academic and organisational rigour and a firm hand on the rudder. Biddle's future wife, Birthe, an exemplary archaeologist in her own right, became an invaluable member of the Winchester team in 1964. In contrast, Barker's excavations at Wroxeter – though no less rigorous – dealt with shallower sequences, perhaps allowing the time to set 'best practice' methodological yardsticks. His focus on the theory of excavation led to the publication of the methodological bible, "Techniques of Archaeological Excavation", in 1977,³⁹ which set a new benchmark for the standard of archaeological work, but one that was, admittedly, time-consuming. Barker's approach was initially ridiculed by traditionalists for its apparently slow pace, before he silenced all his critics by revealing incredible sequences of late/post-Roman timber buildings that contradicted established opinion on the lifespan of Wroxeter Roman city.⁴⁰ Such evidence would simply never have been found through the excavation methods that came before.

Biddle's great success was in the use of Open Area excavation – perhaps the first application of it on a 'rescue' site of that size – but also the organisational rigour that he employed, some of which he learnt from Wheeler.⁴¹ His projects, like Barker's at Wroxeter, attracted domestic and international students of archaeology, who returned home taking with them this approach to archaeological excavation which became known as the Winchester Method, or La Méthode Winchester in the USA

³⁴ For example: Wheeler 1954: 153-177

³⁵ Wheeler 1954: 215 quoted in Carver 2011:20

³⁶ Martin Biddle pers. comm.

³⁷ Barker 1982: 16-21

³⁸ Martin Biddle pers. comm.

³⁹ 2nd edition: Barker 1982

⁴⁰ White 2006

⁴¹ Collis 2011

and France.⁴² The removal of permanent baulks, and the widening of the area under excavation, was consequently a product of the desire to reveal the greatest extent of the layers that characterise an urban site, as much as it was a recognition that the use of permanent baulks often acted to obscure important, structural relationships.

However, other methodological developments emanated from Winchester that ultimately ran contrary to the ideals expressed by both Biddle and Barker. A young Bermudan named Edward Harris gained his first excavation experience under the Biddles, as an Ordinary Digger on the Cathedral Green site, Winchester, in 1967. In 1968 he worked as a Principal Digger and demonstrated great potential as an excavator during the work at St Swithun's tomb, which led to him being asked to take on an Assistant Supervisory role in 1969,⁴³ when he was first required to undertake site recording. Harris worked at Wolvesey Palace, Winchester, in 1970-1, before working in Bergen, Norway, where he began formulating his ideas on stratigraphic recording. By early 1973, under Biddle's patronage, Harris was employed by the Winchester Research Unit to work on the Lower Brook Street excavation archive. Originally conceived in February 1973, from doodles while working late one evening interpreting the complex stratigraphical data, the Harris matrix, or simply the stratigraphic matrix, allows the schematic presentation of incredibly complex sequences of contexts as an aid to interpretation. This in itself provides a useful tool to archaeologists, however Harris took his ideas a step further and, with others, laid the foundations for Single Context Recording which had, at its heart and effectively governing the process, the stratigraphic matrix. The innovation of planning individual contexts in isolation was first suggested to Harris by Laurence Keen, then Director of the Southampton Archaeological Research Unit, who had regular contact with the Winchester Research Unit and had already trialled the idea in the first half of the 1970s.⁴⁴ Carver⁴⁵ ascribes the birth of the British term for a stratigraphic unit, 'context', to Max Foster at York in 1972; and proforma recording sheets to Sue Hirst at Bordesley Abbey, however it seems that Harris arrived at the same conceptual point independently and at about the same time. These new approaches were all adopted along with the first use of a rolling stratigraphic matrix on site during the 1975 rescue excavation at New Road, Winchester, making it the first site to make use of the embryonic Single Context Recording system. This project was supervised by Patrick Ottaway (working for the Winchester City Rescue Archaeologist, Ken Qualmann) who had been encouraged by Harris to trial this new approach – an experiment supported by Qualmann.⁴⁶ Harris and Ottaway published an article outlining "A recording experiment on a rescue site" in *Rescue News*,⁴⁷ however later publication of the excavation contains conventional section drawings and no reference to SCR.⁴⁸ Shortly after the start of work at New Road, Harris approached Brian Hopley, then Chief Archaeologist at the Museum of London's Department for Urban Archaeology, asking if he would also trial this new system. The large excavation at the General Post Office site in London, which also began in 1975, was selected for this purpose and site supervisor Andy Boddington reported it to be a great success.⁴⁹ When Steve Roskams arrived at the site the following year, he worked on developing the system with the GPO team, which ultimately led to the creation of the *DUA Site Manual* in 1980.⁵⁰ Harris, during his PhD in London from 1976 to 1979, maintained regular

⁴² Everill and White 2011; Collis 2011

⁴³ Martin Biddle, pers. comm.

⁴⁴ Edward Harris pers. comm.

⁴⁵ 2011: 21

⁴⁶ Patrick Ottaway pers. comm.

⁴⁷ Harris and Ottaway 1976

⁴⁸ Qualmann *et al* 2004

⁴⁹ Edward Harris pers. comm.

⁵⁰ Steve Roskams pers. comm.

contact with the DUA team while continuing to develop his theories on stratification that would be published as *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy*.⁵¹

Single Context Recording, therefore, is ultimately a composite of several innovations, first brought together by Harris before the system was developed through application by the Department for Urban Archaeology. The DUA merged with the Department of Greater London Archaeology to form the Museum of London Archaeology Service in 1991. Others had developed their own stratigraphic flow diagrams and recording systems at around the same time (e.g. Steve Roskams and Henry Hurst at Carthage in 1974⁵²) and consequently the DUA system stems from the work of several people. However, clearly Harris was the driving force behind the first expression of what would now be called Single Context Recording, the key elements of which are:

- 1) The Stratigraphic/ Harris Matrix
- 2) Individual units of stratification
- 3) Pro-forma recording sheets
- 4) Single context plans

Under this system section drawings were rendered almost a resource of last resort, and plans were to consist of single contexts in isolation. The plan drawings themselves became subject to their own stratigraphy, being overlain during post-excavation analysis according to the matrix, so that the phases could be re-constructed and interpreted. Harris wrote, in his first publication on the implementation of a matrix in 1975, “when studying stratification, many excavators rely on the section as a way to work out the relationships between the layers of a site; the layer plan is usually ignored in stratigraphic analysis, partly because the standing section or baulk works on an excavation against the recovery of the plan of each layer”.⁵³ He goes on to add, “the section of the face of the baulk, cannot, except on the simplest sites, reflect either the vagaries of individual layers or represent any but the most local of stratigraphic sequences. Arguments of chronology or of the sequence of a complex stratigraphic situation based on sectional analysis must be suspect or completely fallacious”.⁵⁴ He was, of course, partly correct in that assessment, though his criticisms seem to be of the old Wheeler-Kenyon method, the problems with which had already been amply demonstrated. Both Biddle and Barker (and others including, in fact, Wheeler himself) had advocated, for a number of years, that both the vertical and horizontal record should be considered, and in combination would provide the accuracy Harris appears to have sought through the application of a synthetic stratigraphic matrix.

That said, the use of proforma recording sheets, rather than notebooks, and individual stratigraphic units (the term ‘context’ is used in Britain, but other terms are of course used elsewhere) provided a simple method for ensuring that every context – each one representing a temporal event in the sequence – is recorded fully (and comparably) regardless of subjective significance. The issue of temporality is key to the successful analysis of a site’s stratigraphy. Rather than grouping deposits, determined as belonging to the same period by their associated finds, the application of individual units of stratification correctly identifies that each relates to a specific event. Consequently a stratigraphic matrix becomes a readable storyboard of all of the events that led to the formation of the site. However, in reality, carefully observed section drawings are an important component of the overall site archive, if their local limitations are acknowledged. Equally it would be disingenuous to suggest that a stratigraphic matrix represents an infallible, final word on a site, and clearly a matrix includes significant elements of interpretation.

⁵¹ Harris 1979

⁵² Steve Roskams pers. comm.

⁵³ Harris 1975: 110

⁵⁴ Harris 1975: 110

Biddle and Barker continued to favour the use of phase plans and section drawings over the emerging Single Context Recording system. Barker argued that the separation of the drawn record into individual contexts made it harder to reinterpret the evidence in post-excavation.⁵⁵ He also wrote that “where, in my experience, such a [matrix] has been used it has not altered the interpretation arrived at from the study of the ground and the plans and sections. It is more an instrument for aiding clear thinking and coherent publication than for primary interpretation” (Barker 1982: 203). Certainly the huge quantity of incredibly detailed drawings from Barker’s excavations were a hallmark of his approach that recognised the crucial importance of careful and patient excavation and recording. However, the great strength of Harris’ broader approach was in the organisation of the data and the systematising of a methodology that supported the birth of the British profession, underpinned by common approaches to recording. The use of individual stratigraphic units and pro-forma recording sheets crucially enabled the more effective administration of the archive.

AGEN Methodology

The appeal of Single Context Recording to many British archaeologists in the 1970s and 80s, was the apparently efficient and non-hierarchical system that it produced, within which individual, experienced excavators have responsibility for the area that they are excavating and are expected to work with minimal supervision. This was welcomed, in part, as a rejection of the very hierarchical site organisation favoured by excavators like Wheeler and Biddle. However on most research projects, which are often less constrained in terms of time, the majority of those on site have little or no previous experience and require close supervision, training and management. For this and other reasons the expedition has, since 2001, moved away from a strict adherence to Single Context Recording and towards the combined horizontal and vertical approaches utilised by advocates of Open Area excavation. The expedition does, however, assign unique numbers to individual contexts, and recording is undertaken on a series of registers and sheets that form a modern paper archive. Site drawings are produced on permatrace, and a rolling stratigraphic matrix has been constructed as an aid to interpretation and discussion, though it is not the engine that drives the recording process as it would be in a pure Single Context Recording system. Operating in a non-commercial environment the expedition is able to place more emphasis on training and best practice. It has been possible to select a methodology that best suits the combined goals of research and teaching, in which the need to pause excavation to undertake phase planning, for example, does not impact negatively. Like Biddle and Barker, we have opted to utilise ‘phase plans’, which show more clearly the relationship between different contextual elements of structures and associated features, and we also utilise multi-phase plans at the start and/ or completion of each field season in order to map annual progress. In consequence the methodology employed at Nokalakevi is one that stems from the excavations of Biddle, Barker and others, incorporating some of the methodological innovations of Single Context Recording. The use of experienced commercial archaeologists as British trench supervisors (working in collaboration with Georgian trench supervisors with several seasons’ experience of working at Nokalakevi with this methodology) ensures that the on-site training of students is led by archaeologists with current and extensive archaeological experience, gained from a wide variety of site types and periods.

The implementation of a modern excavation methodology was supplemented in 2009 with the undertaking of an RTK GPS survey of standing structures at Nokalakevi (including the excavated foundations in the lower town and the three phases of fortification walls); the topography; and the archaeological trenches. This survey, undertaken with the University of Winchester’s Leica GPS1200+,

⁵⁵ Everill and White 2011: 176-7

accurate to within 2mm, provides the most detailed plan of the entire site to date and was the first to map the site globally with UTM Zone 38N coordinates. The 20ha site was mapped over 15 days, with 3145 points recorded⁵⁶ and this has allowed the expedition to produce a modern, digital plan of the site tied into an accurate global position. As well as site-specific detail, the incorporation of freely available data from the joint NASA/ Japanese ASTER⁵⁷ Global Digital Elevation Model has also supported the construction of a regional GIS dataset, to which a 2015 GPS survey of fortifications in the nearby village of Khuntsi has recently been added. Undertaken with a Leica Zeno 10, this initial survey of a probable Byzantine fort, 11 miles east of Nokalakevi, has enabled the expedition to map the topography of the site, our initial test pits in 2015 and subsequent trenches in 2016. The expedition has also invested significantly in absolute dating of material to supplement and support the local specialist chronologies. By the time of writing, 13 Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dates have been obtained from ceramic sherds, and three charcoal samples have been radiocarbon dated.

Cultural Heritage legislation in Georgia

On 16th April 1997, Georgia signed the Cultural Convention of Europe as part of moves to integrate Georgian and European legislative frameworks. Georgia became a full member of the Council of Europe in April 1999, and the Georgian Parliament passed revised 'On Cultural Heritage Protection' legislation later that year, which included both archaeological sites and portable antiquities – including portable elements of a fixed site. Archaeological sites are provided further protection under the legislation, within a zone defined by the area “functionally occupied by and historically related to the monument... The zone is approved under the established rule whereby a special exploitation regime is applied. Its purpose and function is to protect the immovable monument as an object incorporating recognized values and a cultural layer (layers of earth, as well as water covered areas (beds) containing the traces of human habitation and activity)”.⁵⁸ In spirit, if not in precisely the same terms, the Georgian Cultural Heritage Protection legislation of 1999 mirrors the UK's Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, the most recent iteration of UK Parliamentary legislation first enacted in 1882. Under the terms of this Act, any historic building or site that is 'scheduled' – meaning it is added to the appendix, or 'schedule', of the Act – are considered to be of national importance, and any work that affects it directly or indirectly, including archaeological investigation, requires 'scheduled monument consent' from the relevant UK Government Minister – currently the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The protected area of a scheduled monument can be deemed, during the scheduling process, to include land around it that is considered essential to its preservation, and this protected area is normally clearly identified on publicly available maps.

In Georgia, the legislation that preceded the 1999 Act of Parliament was the 1977 Soviet law 'On Protection and Application of Historical and Cultural Monuments, which developed an inventory for architectural monuments that should include an 'identity card' for buildings; an extensive 'passport' for each building; and a 'passport' for each architectural ensemble. This system was broadly, but not particularly usefully, extended to archaeological sites while they continued to be excavated and recorded to a “traditional-standard scheme”.⁵⁹ The archaeological sites and monuments, within a 'protection zone' or defined as a 'reserve', can be defined as such by the Archaeological Commission. Once part of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences, but now based within the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, the commission is an influential non-governmental

⁵⁶ Everill *et al* 2011

⁵⁷ Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer

⁵⁸ Simonishvili 2001: 116

⁵⁹ Simonishvili 2001: 117-119

organisation consisting of leading archaeologists, and has the power to approve annual permits to allow archaeological investigation of sites in Georgia.

Previously the commission would issue a permit to a suitably qualified individual “on the recommendations of two archaeologists who have considerable experience in this field”.⁶⁰ Today, however, the Department of Archaeology of the National Agency receives applications for permits and refers them to the nine members of the commission who examine the project outline and expertise of the project team before determining whether or not to grant permission. Permits are only granted to Georgian citizens, which means that foreign archaeologists must be working as part of a formal collaboration with Georgian specialists who can be the official permit holder for the excavation.

The 1977 Act also led to the creation, in 1978, of a Department for Monument Protection which was to abide by the principles of the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, issued in 1964 at the same congress that saw the formation of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites). In 2004, in the first year of the Saakashvili presidency, the Georgian National Museum was created, unifying and modernising the management structure of a range of institutions including the S. Janashia Museum of Georgia and the O. Lordkipanidze Archaeological Research Centre. The same year the Monument Protection body was replaced by a Cultural Heritage Department with a wider remit, which in turn was replaced by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, established by Presidential decree in 2008.

The agency is tasked with the preservation, protection and promotion of cultural heritage sites, portable antiquities, and museum-reserves throughout Georgia. It maintains an inventory of heritage sites, and is building a new publicly searchable GIS database of them, and also works to identify and document intangible heritage. While the agency has a significant focus on international collaboration, cooperation and the sharing of best-practice in terms of heritage protection and conservation, it also invests in educational programs for children. The museums and museum-reserves managed by the agency⁶¹ are currently as follows:⁶²

Greater Mtskheta State Archaeological Museum-Reserve
Vardzia Historical-Architectural Museum-Reserve
Uplistsikhe Historical-Architectural Museum-Reserve
Ksani Valley Historical-Architectural Museum-Reserve
Ujarma Architectural complex
Samshvilde Architectural complex
Gremi museum
Kldekari Historical-Architectural Museum-Reserve
Parmen Zakariaia Nokalakevi Architectural-Archaeological Museum-Reserve
Ekvtime Takaishvili Guria region Archaeological Museum-Reserve
Didi Liakhvi Valley State Museum-Reserve
Kutaisi Historical-Architectural Museum-Reserve
Niko Pirozmanishvili State Museum
Borjomi Local History Museum
Stepantsminda History Museum

The future of the past in Georgia

⁶⁰ Simonishvili 2001: 119

⁶¹ Adjara museum-reserves are now managed by a separate Adjara Regional Agency

⁶² National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia 2014

At the time of writing the National Agency is undertaking an ambitious, multi-million pound programme of conservation and restoration at a number of its sites, which will ensure the long-term survival of standing remains as well as the modernisation of their associated musea, and improved facilities for tourists. This investment will mark a significant turning point for several heritage sites in Georgia, with Nokalakevi seeing a particular focus. Alongside the modernising of attitudes to, and the methodology of, the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage in Georgia, the National Agency is also now pressing for a change to legislation regarding archaeological methodology. While the permission of the Archaeological Commission of the National Agency remains a requirement for excavation, there have not previously been any specific requirements regarding the execution or recording of that excavation. Under a new initiative, the National Agency aims to make it a legal requirement for archaeologists to use a system of proforma registers and sheets, accompanied by scale drawings, based on the British system used at Nokalakevi. It will no longer be acceptable to rely on notebooks and, furthermore, archaeologists will have to deposit their archive with the agency so that it can be checked, archived, and made available to the public and to future scholarly analysis. This would be a momentous and mature move for Georgian archaeology, also marking the culmination of 16 years of international collaboration in Nokalakevi and the many discussions about methodology that this work has inspired. The future of Georgia's cultural heritage looks bright, and is increasingly characterised by modern dynamic management, and a willingness to invest in its protection. Since its foundation in 2008, government funding of the National Agency has provided between 3,096,700 GEL and 4,743,700 GEL a year. In 2014, however, it received an additional 1,204,665 GEL; in 2015, an additional 4,150,000 GEL (specifically for monument conservation/ protection); and, in 2016, a staggering 11,000,000 GEL from the Agency's strategic partner, the "Foundation for the Protection and Rescue of Georgian Historic Monuments", for this ongoing rehabilitation work. As well as starting to transform the management of Georgian cultural heritage, more than 2,000,000 GEL was spent on archaeological excavation, including rescue projects, from this budget in 2014-2016.

From the perspective of the National Agency, this period has been distinguished by the extent and diversity of the work carried out: the rehabilitation 'megaprojects'; the recognition of the contribution to cultural heritage made by other ethnic groups within Georgia; the diversification of immovable monument typologies, and recognition of industrial heritage issues; and the promotion of Georgia's cultural heritage on a global stage. Through close cooperation with professional communities and international organisations, the agency is making important strategic changes to improve cultural heritage protection, including active lobbying of government to harmonise legislation based on international experience and examples. As far as the current government is concerned the agency is happily pushing at an open door, and Mikheil Giorgadze, Minister of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia at the time of writing, describes how the government of which he is part

is clearly aware of its responsibility to care for and protect our cultural heritage. The State provides several types of financial support for cultural heritage protection, including large-scale rehabilitation projects such as at Vardzia, Mutso, Dartlo, Nokalakevi and Chazhashi; and at the same time we are saving and protecting monuments in the capital and other regions, returning them to their original state. We believe all branches of culture must gain popular support and that all society must have equal access to their cultural heritage.

Culture is the face of the Georgian State. The Government of Georgia, with the participation of experts and the public, is developing a new strategy for Culture, where the protection of our country's Cultural Heritage has a significant place. Our diverse and multi-ethnic cultural

heritage is the basis of civil and national identity, an important source of social welfare and economic development.⁶³

However, even as Georgia rapidly overhauls and modernises its approach to cultural heritage, with the clear support of the state, the situation in Britain heads in the opposite direction. Changes to planning guidance since 2010 have meant that the protection for archaeological remains, embedded within the UK's planning system since 1990, has been eroded leaving this fragile resource more exposed to the threat posed by developers; furthermore, successive financial cuts imposed on local authorities by central government have seen museum closures, and redundancies of archaeological staff working in Historic Environment and Development Control roles. If our study of the past teaches us anything, it is that the societies that built the ruins we now investigate rose and fell in cycles of prosperity and austerity; successively dominating and dominated. The study and protection of their remains is no more static than they were, and without constant professionalism, care and investment the generation that follows will inherit a poorer cultural heritage legacy.

Authors

Dr Paul Everill, Senior Lecturer in Applied Archaeological Techniques, Department of Archaeology, University of Winchester, Hampshire, UK Paul.Everill@winchester.ac.uk

Nikoloz Antidze, General Director, National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, Krtsanisi st. 58, 0105 Tbilisi, Georgia antidzenikoloz@gmail.com

Professor Davit Lomitashvili, Deputy Director, National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, Krtsanisi st. 58, 0105 Tbilisi, Georgia dlomitashvili@gmail.com

Dr Nikoloz Murgulia, Assistant-Curator, Department of Medieval Archaeology, S. Janashia Museum of Georgia, Georgian National Museum, Rustaveli Avenue 3, 0105 Tbilisi, Georgia nikomurgulia@yahoo.com

⁶³ Giorgadze 2016: 5

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