

Brief summary of site KP335 as of 25/08/05

The earliest phase evident at this time is a layer of heat affected soil approximately 5 metres across which appears at a depth of approximately 0.60m below the current surface of the R.O.W. Although no diagnostic material has been recovered to date from this soil horizon it is clearly lying beneath all subsequent archaeological events. There are a couple of possible postholes visible cutting this context, one of which has a hammer stone and a quern stone used as packing. At this point in time none of the adjacent quadrants have been reduced to a similar depth making interpretation of this feature difficult. However a large saddle quern has been recovered from Q.1 that may relate to this feature if it is an occupation horizon.

Overlying this heat affected soil horizon is a large jar burial (second phase) that at present is still in situ. The relationship between these two events is crucial to understanding the early phaseology of the site. The I.A.o.E excavated this jar burial without noting the dimensions of the grave cut, and are now proposing that the jar burial and the burnt horizon are both part of one historical event. The hypothesis being put forward is that a substantial grave was dug and a large fire was built inside prior to the jars being placed and buried. The upright stone artefacts are claimed to be a grave marker rather than posthole packing. It is however possible that the grave is much later than the burnt horizon and simply was dug to a depth where the soil became firmer and then stopped resulting in the jars being placed on the burnt material. As the original grave cut has been removed this argument is difficult to solve at the moment but should clarify itself with further excavation if the matter is addressed correctly.

The third phase of the site was the construction of an Armenian Christian Chapel, of which a substantial portion of the foundation is still in situ. This consists of three relatively complete wall foundations made from a white chalky limestone with a door in the west face. The east facing wall foundation does not appear to have survived nor at present is there any evidence of a robber trench. A number of carved decorative limestone fragments have been recovered, one of which is a piece of a Christian cross. These, along with the expense of the construction materials used in the foundation would imply an impressive building, possibly using well-dressed stone in its wall facings.

To the east of the church lay a horizon of limestone chippings that may be the waste product of dressing stones on site. To the west are a number of burials that have a east/west alignment and are laid on their backs with arms crossed over chest or pelvis and laid with their heads at the west end of the grave. All these graves are fairly deep at () and are being assumed to relate to the church on the basis of typology rather than any diagnostic material. It should be noted that some graves had contained animal teeth (horse) and other artefacts that were not kept as they were deemed to be a residual component of the back fill and not deliberate placements. This is almost definitely the case but some of these graves are deep enough to have cut through any earlier occupation horizon that may relate to the burnt layer beneath the jar burial. The jar burial itself was itself cut by two Christian burials at this point but it is interesting to note that both these burials appear to sit on the burnt layer rather than cutting it.

In the fourth phase the church seems to have become disused and there is strong evidence that it became used for some domestic purpose. There is a large amount of charcoal present along with fragments of a tandir or similar artefact, ceramic sherds and . There are a number of postholes to the east of the church in Q. ? that

may relate to this phase. Unfortunately they were severely truncated by the I.O.a.E excavation and so it is not possible to deduce from what height they were originally cut. However these postholes contained flecks of white limestone in their fill and as this is not a local material it is fair to deduce that they post date the construction of the church and possibly date to the squatter occupation of the site.

The fifth phase was the destruction and removal of the church walls done to the bottom one or two courses. The lack of any rubble in situ may indicate that this was a systematic removal of stone from a built structure rather than robbing stone from a collapsed ruin. There is at present no evidence of a rubble spread, robber trenches, or any diagnostic material to provide a date for this event.

The sixth phase in the sites chronology is indicated by a lack of evidence of site usage as the site appears to have undergone a period of abandonment after the church or chapel was removed. The duration of this phase is unclear but was certainly enough for a reasonable depth of soil to accumulate over the site as a whole. The wall foundations had become buried to a depth of at least 0.20m before the site shows any evidence of further use.

In the seventh phase the site was once again used as a burial site with a number of Muslim graves being inserted into the area of the church. These graves were much shallower than the Christian burials and have a more NE/SW alignment with the bodies laid on their sides. These burials are fairly shallow and a number of them overlie the church foundations or are inside the church itself. The latter of these have cut the squatter occupation layer of the church interior and as a result have very charcoal rich backfills.

The eighth and final phase was the construction of a building partially overlying the S/E corner of the church. Only the foundation of this structure has survived and this was built almost entirely from river-rounded stones. These foundations do not respect the earlier church structure making no use of them in the new layout. This, along with the lack of limestone in the new construction indicates that by the time of this last phase the church had passed from living memory. The I.O.A.E. have put forward the theory that this building was a part of the use of the site as a Muslim cemetery and this may well be the case. However at the moment the only stratigraphic relationship established for this final building phase is that besides overlying the church foundation it also cuts through at least one of the later Muslim graves within the church.