

The Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project

A Third Preliminary Report

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[Slide] The Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project has now completed its 4th season with the generous permission of Director Pavlos Flourentzos and the cooperation of Dr. Maria Hadjicosti, Dr. Tom Davis at CAARI, and the staff of the Larnaka District Archaeological Museum.

[Slide] We have received funding and technical support from numerous sources including the Kress Foundation, INSTAP, ASOR, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, The University of North Dakota, Ohio State Excavations at Isthmia, Greece, and several private donors.

[Slide] [Slide] The site itself, as has been reported before, is located about 10 km to the east of the center of Larnaka, at the western fringe of the Dhekelia Cantonment. [Slide] [Slide] Maria Hadjicosti conducted excavations at Koutsopetria over two short campaigns in the 1990s, bringing to light parts of an Early Christian basilica. [Slide] [Slide] In 2004 and 2005, we conducted an intensive pedestrian survey of the area, fulfilling a call by John Leonard, among others, for a systematic investigation of this substantial coastal site. We surveyed the site of Koutsopetria using a 40 x 40 meter grid system in which we sampled 20% of the surface area for density, and collected unique sherds using a recording system known as the Chronotype system. We also dropped larger survey units over an area of low-density surrounding our site to ensure that we had accurately identified the site's borders. And finally, we conducted experiments to test our artifact sampling strategy, including the resurvey of twenty grid squares using a more intensive sampling component—total collection of all the artifacts found on the surface of the soil using hands-and-knees artifact counts.

[Slide] In previous CAARI presentations and our recent paper in the RDAC, we outlined our methods in full; additional notes on our method will appear this summer in the Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology, and in another paper about the survey of large sites, which is currently in preparation. What we would like to do today is present some preliminary

findings based on our completed survey, and discuss our work this season in identifying ceramic material and analyzing artifact densities.

Overview of the Site

[Slide] The site at Koutsopetria consists of a robust scatter of cultural material extending from below the slopes of Vigla to the Dhekelia base golf course. [Slide] The highest-density scatter is found below the ridge of Vigla and covers 10 ha — this we have denoted as Zone 1. [Slide] An additional area of moderate artifact density covers some 30 ha below the slopes of Kokkinokremos—this we refer to as Zone 2. Moreover, an additional 30 ha area around the site is essentially devoid of artifacts suggesting that it might represent an infilled harbor of ancient date; geomorphological work scheduled to be conducted this summer should shed light on this issue. Besides the artifacts, there are also significant architectural remains exposed at the surface that indicate impressive buildings in the area.

The predominant material, however, are the ceramic finds, of which there are a large quantity. In the course of survey, we counted over 20,000 artifacts and collected, read, and recorded around 8,500 artifacts for analysis. In addition to these sherds we collected another 3,000 artifacts using the more intensive total collection circles, bringing the total number of artifacts analyzed and collected to 11,500 with a weight of nearly a half a ton. Of the artifacts collected from the site, we have inventoried over 1,000 with photographs, drawings, and basic catalogue descriptions. While the following analysis indicates the significant patterns in our data, it is important to keep in mind that we have just begun to analyze our data and that this analysis represents our initial conclusions.

Finds

At present we are able to offer some general observations regarding the chronology and function of our site. [Slide] Of these artifacts, 53% can, at present, be dated to a period of 1,000 years or less; [Slide] most of these diagnostic artefacts are Late Roman by date, but there are traces of earlier material. [Slide]

We have identified very little Bronze Age material at Koutsopetria despite our proximity to the Late Bronze Age site of Pyla-Kokkinokremos, and certainly none of the high-quality finewares found at that site.[Slide] It may be that the site of Steno, shielded by the fortified acropolis of

Kokkinokremos, was preferred for concentrated settlement over the more exposed coastal plain.

[Slide] The Archaic to Hellenistic period witnessed a graduate increase in number of artifacts which, all told, accounted for a little over 2% of all the pottery datable to 1,000 years or less. The finds from the Geometric to Archaic period tend to be clustered at the base of the coastal ridge of Vigla. [Slide] They consist primarily of Archaic basket handles in multiple fabrics and shapes and painted fine ware sherds from both the Geometric and Archaic periods. A sample of artifacts from the height of Vigla itself produced artifacts from the Archaic period as well, but we did not recover any earlier, particularly Geometric, material. In the early 20th century, Lacau published a Phoenician inscription probably datable to the 7th c. BC purportedly found in the area of Vigla or Paleokastro and suggesting a Sanctuary of Bes in this area. While our finds cannot confirm the presence of a sanctuary in particular, they do suggest substantial activity on and about this prominent coastal height as early as the 8th and 7th century BC.

[Slide] From the Classical to Hellenistic periods finds in the area gradually increase and extend further to the south into the coastal plain. It is clear that the height of Vigla received some kind of military presence during the Hellenistic period judging by the number of lead sling pellets extracted over the years from its height. Our sample of artifacts from Vigla produced finewares – imported black glaze, Hellenistic color-coated wares – cooking pots, and amphorae, although we recovered no additional sling pellets. The large, inscribed stone basin discovered in 1951 at the base of Vigla and datable to the 3rd century BC indicates a sanctuary in the area perhaps associated with olive oil production; Hadjisavvas has identified this basin as a settling basin for an olive press. Classical to Hellenistic material also extended well to the east of Vigla and was particularly concentrated at the base of Kokkinokremos, in the area that we have denoted as Zone 2. While amphoras, fine wares, and medium coarse fabric utility wares are represented in many units with Classical to Hellenistic material, it is notable that there were very few kitchen or cooking wares found below Vigla compared to our sample of material from the top of Vigla or Zone 2. Perhaps this reflects the presence of a sanctuary where storage vessels and finewares might be expected to outnumber the kitchen wares more commonly associated with domestic assemblages.

Roman pottery (100 BC–749 AD) makes up the dominant chronological component at Koutsopeteria. In general, this material has the same distribution as material from the Classical and Hellenistic periods except that it extends a bit further south toward the shore. The overlap in the Early Roman and the Classical– Hellenistic material suggests continuity of

occupation at this site. The most prevalent artifact type from the Early Roman period are highly diagnostic finewares such as Cypriot Sigillata and Eastern Sigillata A, although very little Eastern Sigillata B was found. Only a handful of Koan and Rhodian type amphoras were identified, although certainly additional amphoras are represented by the less diagnostic body sherds. Only one example of the so-called “pinched handled” amphoras emerged from our assemblage. Unlike the pattern evinced by the Classical to Hellenistic periods, kitchen and cooking wares seem to be distributed rather evenly throughout the units with Early Roman and Roman material. This may reflect a functional change in the nature of the site with more space being devoted to habitation or other domestic functions.

Over 80% of the material at our site dates to the Late Roman. [Slide] Material of this date occurs in almost 90% of the units investigated, extending to the south toward the shore and presenting a substantial assemblage of material in the immediate vicinity of the basilica excavated by Dr. Hadjicosti as well as along the base of the Kokkinokremos ridge. The quantity and distribution of this material is augmented by the abundance of Late Roman roof tile present at the site which represents 35% of the Late Roman material collected over the course of the survey. [Slide] The majority of roof tiles come from the field immediately adjacent to the excavated basilica. The most distinctive shape are the large, heavy Corinthian style tiles which appear in a variety of fabrics, including one of a yellow color which has been associated with production sites on the Mesoria plain. This type of tile is not uncommon on other sites on the island and in shipwrecks off the coast, suggesting that both local production centers (e.g., the kiln at Ziyi) and trade supplied the Late Roman building boom.

In addition to roof tile we collected a robust assemblage of fine wares [Slide] While Cypriot Red Slip makes up the majority of Late Roman fine wares, we have detected some patterning in the distribution of Late Roman Red Slips. For the Late Roman period, Zone 1 is higher density than Zone 2. In Zone 1, CRS makes up 55% of the assemblage followed by ARS at 28% and PHW at 17%. In Zone 2, CRS represents a more substantial majority: 76% with PHW following at 15% and ARS at a mere 9%. Compared to other surveys – particular those of large sites at Kopetra and Maroni-Petrera – we have found a far higher percentage of ARS and a lower percentage of PHW. It is also interesting to note that our PHW is rather concentrated at the site, appearing in areas where ARS is less common, as for example in the eastern half of Zone 1 and the core units of Zone 2. Most of our Late Roman finewares date to the sixth and seventh centuries, and are the most commonly encountered forms, ARS 105, CRS 9, and PHW 10. In fact, we have only a few Late Roman finewares that are dated prior to the middle of the sixth century.

Amphoras made up approximately 15% of our total assemblage. LR1 amphora was the largest category of Late Roman amphora, accounting for 30% of the total amphorae from all periods. While there is still debate over the contents of LR1 amphora, the large numbers of LR1 at Pyla-Koutsopetria indicate the importance of the site as a center of exchange for the local area. We have recently begun a project that is attempting to group our LR1 amphora into categories based on fabric to see if it is possible to connect them to the recent research conducted on LR1 amphora by other projects and scholars.

Densities decline markedly in the post Roman period. [Slide] The eastern part of Zone 1, however, contains a smattering of Medieval material. The most interesting concentration of post-Roman artifacts comes from the southeastern corner of Zone 1 in the vicinity of a ruined wall which remains visible to the north of the Larnaka-Dhekelia road. This wall has been alternately identified as a church or as a Medieval or perhaps Venetian or Ottoman fortification. It seems likely that this fortification is the reason why this stretch of coastline was known as Paleokastro on many of the 19th and early 20th century maps of the island. Recent ploughing has cut through a floor in this area and exposed sub-floor packing, some of which is Late Roman in date. While it is difficult to establish this floor conclusively with the ruined wall visible from the Larnaka-Dhekelia road, it does establish a Late Roman terminus post quem for a building in this area. The scatter of Medieval and Ottoman/Venetian pottery in the area suggests that this area may have remained in use from the 13th to the 19th century. More modern artifacts are also present in some quantities in the area. Most, however, are associated with debris from the modern road or the ongoing agricultural use of the area.

Features

In addition to recording the distribution of pottery across PKAP has also sought to document the additional features in the area. [Slide] Numerous walls can be traced throughout the site, although few for more than 10-20 meters, and fragments of mortar and cobble are ubiquitous at the site and probably indicate building material. One wall preserves several courses of Late Roman brick with gypsum mortar. More pronounced is the widespread use of large gypsum blocks – some exceeding a meter in length – throughout Zone 1. More humble building material – consisting primarily of coarse local limestone – is also abundantly present. Some of this limestone appears to have been quarried locally from either Vigla or other wave eroded bedrock outcrops. Quarry cuts on Vigla are joined by cut stairs perhaps designed to provide access from below or for quarry

operations. (Standing walls [Slide], architectural features [Slide], gypsum blocks [Slide] and cut limestone blocks [Slide].)

[Slide] Amidst the building material, there are other features compatible with both agricultural production and habitations. There is at least one well, now filled in. We have also documented at least two basins – presumably settling basins for drains or other water systems – and judging by comparanda at Kourion and elsewhere, seemingly of Roman or Late Roman in date. [Slide] In 2004 we reported the discovery of a Hadjisavvas type 1b olive press weight and a crusher stone in the area. The crusher stone and weight are not incompatible with a Late Roman or Early Byzantine date. We have also documented several spouts – which may be parts of an olive press bed. These finds, along with the large settling basin from the Hellenistic period, [Slide] may suggest a long term commitment to olive oil production in Koutsopetria, which would not be incompatible with the area's religious function. The churches both in Cyprus and elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean could be involved in the agricultural production.

Recent Work and Future Directions

Koutsopetria is a site that continues to reveal new information about its past. [Slide] Recent deep plowing in previously uncultivated areas has exposed a broad swath of cultural material, bringing to light new kinds of artifacts [Slide]: Late Roman kitchen wares, an Archaic–Hellenistic figurine, forms of combed ware that date to the seventh or eighth century, marble basins [Slide], and marble molded pieces. [Slide] The pottery exposed by the plowing is consistent with the pottery collected during the fieldwalking seasons, but was more tightly grouped with one area filled with rooftiles, another with amphora handles and toes, and the final area with both Late Roman finewares and cooking wares. [Slide] The primary difference was the increased size and better preservation of the newly exposed pieces. While this development has introduced new windows into the past use of the area in antiquity, it has also come at the expense of the destruction of parts of the site and cultural remains.

Our plans for next season include finalizing our study of the finds and producing publications for the site. As part of this process, we will make our raw data accessible online by next summer. [Slide] We also hope to continue some limited fieldwork in the vicinity of Koutsopetria, including a collaborative project with a team of researchers from the University of Edinburgh at the site of Kokkinokremos. Given the widespread exposure of architecture on the surface of Koutsopetria, an exciting possibility is the implementation of geophysical investigation at the site. A final

exciting possibility for further fieldwork includes an expanded pedestrian survey of the broader micro-region. This would set the site of Pyla-Koutsopetria within its immediate regional environment and also contribute substantially to understanding a landscape that is daily disappearing in the modern development of the coastline of southeast Cyprus.