

Surveying Late Antique Cyprus

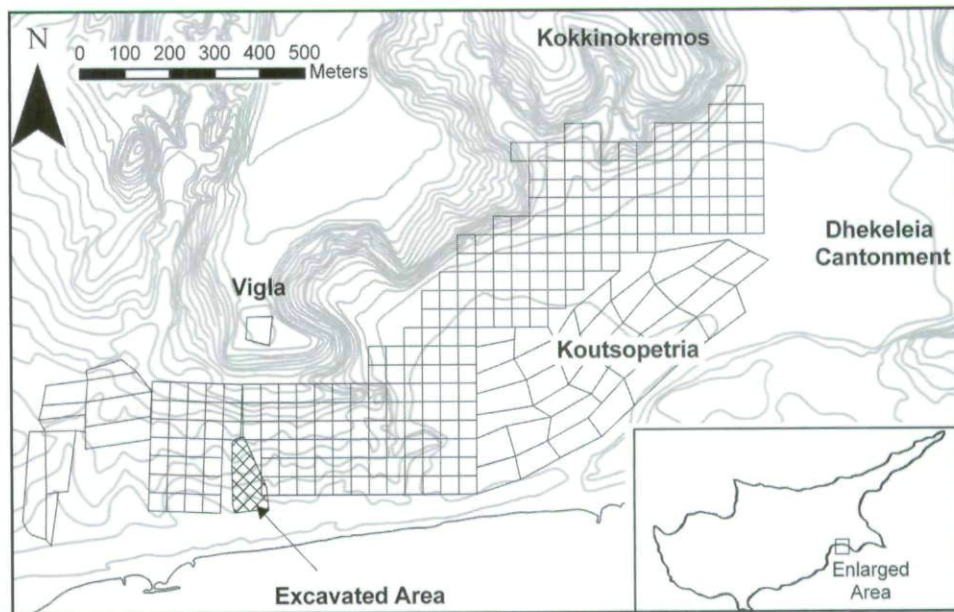
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The Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project is an intensive survey of the site of Koutsopetria, a Late Roman harbor town located ten kilometers east of the center of Larnaka, Cyprus. Since 2003, the authors have investigated the site with an intensive gridded survey method known as "large-site survey," as well as a geological survey. This view from the site of Pyla-Koutsopetria faces west. *Photo courtesy of David Pettegrew.*

The Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project (PKAP) is an intensive survey of the Late Antique site of Koutsopetria, located on the coast of southern Cyprus immediately east of modern Larnaka. Since 2003, a team under the direction of the authors have conducted an intensive survey of the impressive and extensive artifact scatter at Koutsopetria. Travelers and scholars have long known the site, owing in part to its very visible location along the coastal road between Larnaka and points east. Even Luigi Palma di Cesnola, the famous archaeological adventurer of the late-nineteenth century conducted excavations at the site, which sat on the route to his summer home outside of the village of Ormidhia. In the last fifty years the fields in the area have produced impressive finds dating to almost every period from the Late Bronze Age to the Venetian times. In the early 1990s, following the unearthing of building material by deep plowing, Maria Hadjicosti of the Cyprus Department

of Antiquities conducted salvage excavations at the site. These revealed the presence of an early Christian basilica with wall paintings, molded plaster, architectural sculpture, opus sectile floors, and imported marble ornamentation.



Map showing the excavation areas of the Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project. *Photo courtesy of W. Caraher.*

Recognizing the size and significance of *Koutsopetria*, the Pyla-*Koutsopetria* Archaeological Project was formed in 2003 to survey the site systematically. The project is now working in collaboration with Hadjicosti to analyze the excavation and survey results and to publish a monograph that interprets *Koutsopetria* within the broader economic and cultural landscapes of the island and the eastern Mediterranean. While our research questions involve all historical periods, our emphasis has focused on the most prosperous and dominant chronological component of the site, the Late Antique period (300–700 CE).

The long-standing tradition of regional survey on Cyprus, and its widespread application on the island, has transformed our understanding of Cyprus' economic and cultural landscape during the Roman and Late Roman periods. To be sure, the "big dig" excavations at cities like Paphos, Kourion, Salamis, and Amathus have been vital to our understanding of the major *urban centers* in Late Roman Cyprus, but the investigation of the broader landscape by mapping visible cultural remains has made a different, albeit equally important kind of contribution. The earliest systematic surveys on Cyprus were extensive surveys like the Cyprus Survey (Cadogan 2004). These projects employed techniques designed to sample material from the surface of the ground that were generally less intensive than are commonly practiced today, and this allowed them to document sites across vast spatial areas. Extensive surveys have been important in revealing the ubiquitous and substantial remains of the Late Antique period on the island. For example, the extensive work by Hector Catling in the 1950s not only brought to light an Early Byzantine pottery factory at Dhiorios-Mersineri and established more clearly the typology of Late Roman pottery, but also provided a glimpse of the distribution of Late Roman sites in the Kormakiti and Lapethos regions along the north coast of Cyprus (Catling 1972; Catling and Dikigoropoulos 1970). The continuing tradition of such extensive investigations in Cyprus—most notably in the work of Sophocles Hadjisavvas in the Famagusta District and the vicinity of Ayia Nappa, and John Leonard's recent survey of the southern coast of Cyprus—has expanded our view of Late Antique Cyprus well into the countryside far beyond the narrower scope of the large urban centers (Hadjisavvas 1997; Leonard 2005).

Since the 1970s, the application of "intensive survey" methods has accelerated this process of populating Cypriot countrysides with Late Roman suburban, exurban, and rural sites. Intensive survey is characterized by higher-resolution mapping of human landscapes, often by more intensive field-walking techniques (spacing walkers five to ten meters apart) and recording, but at the expense of the amount of area covered. Intensive surveys have revealed a countryside filled with smaller settlements including villages (less than 100,000 square meters), large farmsteads (less than 15,000 square meters), and even very small farmsteads (less than 1,000 square meters). In a recent synthesis of the evidence produced by a generation of such regional projects, Rautman described Late Antique Cyprus as a "busy countryside"

(Rautman 2003:247–55). This overall pattern of dispersed settlement is producing a new picture of the Cypriot landscape between the fifth and seventh centuries CE, placing the island among the prosperous provinces of the Byzantine east.

The methodological currents that have contributed to these new pictures of the Late Antique Cypriot landscape originated in the particular interest among Mediterranean survey archaeologists in highly-intensive sampling methods. Recent reviews of the literature of Mediterranean survey archaeology, for example, highlight newfound interest in high-resolution data sets, artifact-level survey, widespread use of GIS and relational databases, experimental survey, quantitative approaches, and interregional comparative survey, among others (Cherry 2004:24–35). All these interpretive and methodological trends in intensification have shaped contemporary survey archaeology on Cyprus. This much is evident from the bibliographic entries of the articles in the recent publication of *Archaeological Field Survey in Cyprus: Past History, Future Potentials* (Iacovou 2004), which includes a wide variety of scholarship on intensive and rigorous data-collection strategies (this is in contrast to the less intensive approaches of Near Eastern archaeology; cf. Wilkinson 2004).

Two trends in methodological intensification are worth mentioning here, especially as they relate to the work that we are conducting at *Koutsopetria*. The first concerns the meaning of the word "site." Most archaeologists consider a site to be a concentration of archaeological material that reflects some knowable past activity. In an excavation context, sites are typically obvious as they commonly include the remains of architecture that reflect a serious investment in the landscape. For survey archaeologists, however, most sites are ceramic scatters on the surface of the ground, some of which can reflect particularly ephemeral activities in the past, ranging from occasional agricultural activity to regular but very low-intensity exploitation of the environment. The artifact scatters left behind by these activities are far more difficult to interpret and often do not lend themselves to easy analogies with specific human activities. This has led to an active debate among survey archaeologists regarding the definition of an archaeological "site," the techniques useful for measuring a site's extent, and (among some scholars) whether sites actually exist at all. These are debates to which surveyors in Cyprus have actively contributed. Some projects in Cyprus have mapped the landscape by locating sites and settlements, and then plotting their locations on maps. Others have rejected the concept of "site" altogether on conceptual or methodological grounds, instead favoring "distributional approaches" that aim to record the distribution of all artifacts across the landscape. The Canadian Palaipaphos Survey Project, for example, plotted sites on the map as well as mapping the distribution of material insufficiently concentrated to warrant interpretation as a site. The Sydney Cyprus Survey Project and the Troödos Archaeological and Environmental Survey Project, on the other hand, did not plot sites at all, and, instead, documented

the fluctuating artifact densities across the landscape. Despite the differences in execution, the overall spirit driving these efforts has been the desire to account for the full spectrum of human-landscape interaction in understanding pre-modern social, economic, and cultural structures. Advocates of distributional approaches argue that even the lowest-density scatters, like domestic waste on fields, short-term habitations, or modest rural farmsteads, represent past human activities and consequently contribute to our understanding of the Cypriot landscape.

A second recent trend is known as “large-site survey,” as it examines forms of settlement at the larger and more complex end of the settlement hierarchy by applying more intensive pedestrian methods to specific places in the landscape ranging from substantial villages to urban centers. While the study of larger sites in Cyprus dates as early as the systematic surveys at Idalion and Kataliondas-Kourvellos in the 1970s (Walker and Bieber 1974; Watkins 1979), recent large-site projects are characterized by greater methodological intensity and high-resolution mapping. In the Kalavassos-Kopetra Project, for

example, Marcus Rautman and his team defined a six-hectare (60,000 square meters) village from Late Antiquity through intensive gridded collection (twenty-by-twenty meters). This project approached the site of Kopetra as a distributional survey project and sought to map the changing artifact densities across the survey area by collecting a systematic and especially robust sample of artifacts from each twenty-by-twenty-meter grid square. The data generated from this approach facilitated sophisticated quantitative analysis of the ceramic finds, and was reinforced and tested by a series of trial excavations (Rautman 2003). Large-site survey involves many features common to distributional archaeology, including intensive collection of data from the surface of the ground and clearly defined, systematic artifact sampling. In addition, these methods are reinforced by procedures common to the documentation of known sites, including the use of subsurface geophysical analysis and excavation.

It is important to outline these trends in order to explain a recent direction in archaeological survey work in Cyprus—high-resolution surveys producing complex data sets, spatial



Since the 1970s, the application of intensive survey methods have increased the number of Late Roman suburban, exurban, and rural sites identified in the Cypriot countryside. One of the more important techniques is more intensive field-walking techniques and recording. Here, walkers are stationed ten meters apart. *Photo courtesy of W. Caraher.*

analyses, and quantitative approaches—and to place the work at *Koutsopetria* into its methodological context.

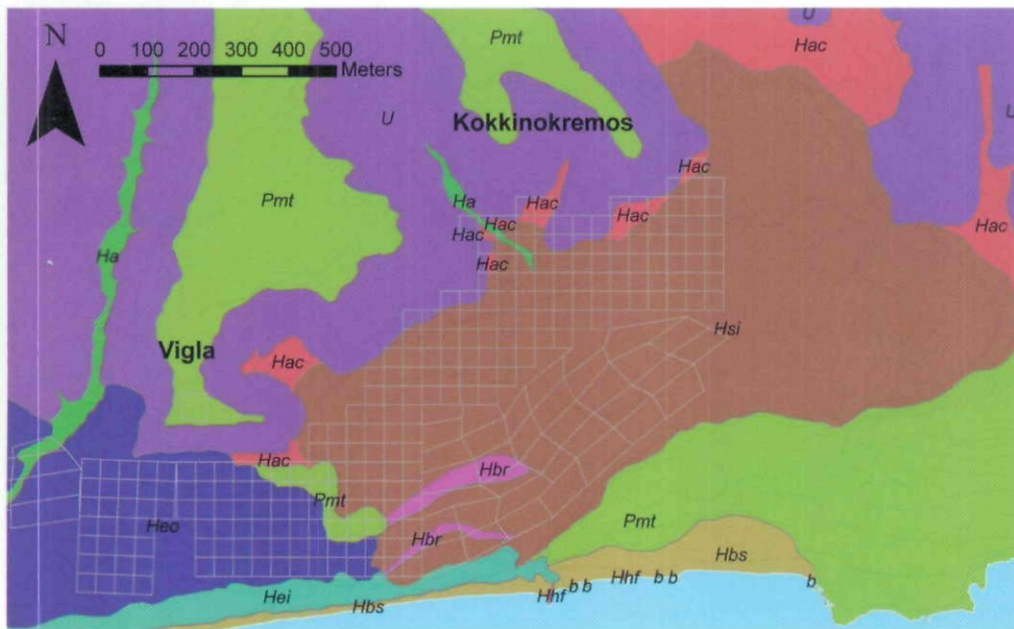
Surveying Pyla-Koutsopetria

The Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project is an outgrowth of the archaeological currents described above. Unlike large-scale regional survey projects, however, PKAP has focused exclusively on the forty-hectare site of Pyla-Koutsopetria and its immediate environs, which, although significantly smaller than the principal urban centers on the island (Salamis, Paphos, Kourion, Amathus, Soloi, and Kition), is still substantially larger than most rural sites reported by previous archaeological surveys. Moreover, the project is also an intensive survey that has rigorously mapped the distributions of artifacts across the landscape using standard pedestrian methods in a high-resolution grid system. These methods have produced a substantial body of information about a large coastal site that contributes directly to current discussion about Cypriot settlement and Mediterranean exchange systems in the final phase of antiquity.

Our basic unit of survey was a grid of forty-by-forty-meters square. We sampled twenty percent of the surface of each square for artifact density using four fieldwalkers spaced ten meters apart. Each fieldwalker counted all pottery and tile in two-meter-wide swaths, and such counts allowed us

to map total artifact density. Additionally, PKAP employed the chronotype sampling system, which stipulated that each fieldwalker should collect one example of each physically distinct artifact type from the unit. The chronotype sampling strategy evolved over the course of the Sydney Cyprus Survey Project and was refined by the Eastern Korinthia Survey Project and the Troödos Archaeological and Environmental Project (Caraher *et al.* 2005:253–54). These two types of data—total artifact count and total number of “chronotypes” (or unique artifacts collected by each walker)—ensured that we can not only map the distribution of materials across the site, but also analyze the full chronological, functional, and typological range of material present in each unit. As a quality control on our artifact collection strategies, we conducted a series of archaeological experiments focused on how fieldwalkers counted artifacts and the nature of our techniques.

In addition to collecting high-resolution density data, we have employed a number of other highly intensive methods to investigate the site. We have used, for example, a mapping-grade Trimble GPS unit to document features such as olive processing equipment, ancient quarries, and cut-stone blocks. In collaboration with Jay Noller, we have documented the geological resources available at *Koutsopetria* and, through collaboration with the Cyprus Geological Survey, have extracted a series of soil cores from a low-lying sandy area



Preliminary geomorphological mapping of the Pyla-Koutsopetria area reveals geomorphological and geological units primarily of the Holocene, Pleistocene, and Pliocene ages (what geologists now call the Neogene period). Recent (that is, in the last ten thousand years of the Holocene) and active deposits and landforms include beach sand (Hbs), beach ridge (Hbr), silt (Hsi), intermediate age eolian / dune deposits (Hei), older eolian / dune deposits (Heo), alluvial-colluvial deposits (Hac), and alluvium (Ha). Much of the Holocene deposits were formed on top of or below older landforms of the preceding Pleistocene epoch, including marine terrace deposits and landforms (Pmt) of which two ages are recognized and shown in different shades of orange on map. Upland areas (U) are covered by colluvium and small fluvial or marine terraces of Pleistocene age, and underlain by bedrock of the Pliocene Nicosia Formation. Contour interval is two meters up to twenty meters elevation, and thence four meters. Map by J. S. Noller.

that likely represents an infilled ancient harbor. We have begun the process of collecting data using remote sensing techniques (e.g., aerial photography and electrical resistivity) to complement the evidence gathered from the careful analysis of the surface assemblage. We also continue to analyze the artifacts and features from Maria Hadjicosti's small-scale excavations in order to contextualize the results of our fieldwork.

Such integrated methods are contributing to more sensitive readings of this sizable Late Antique coastal town within its archaeological and historical context. The analysis of finds

from the previous rescue excavations, along with the continuing use of various non-invasive (albeit intensive) techniques, are allowing us to reconstruct in some detail the history of this coastal site. Database and GIS programs, moreover, have created a powerful tool for analyzing the surface finds, determining the site's chronological structure and functional

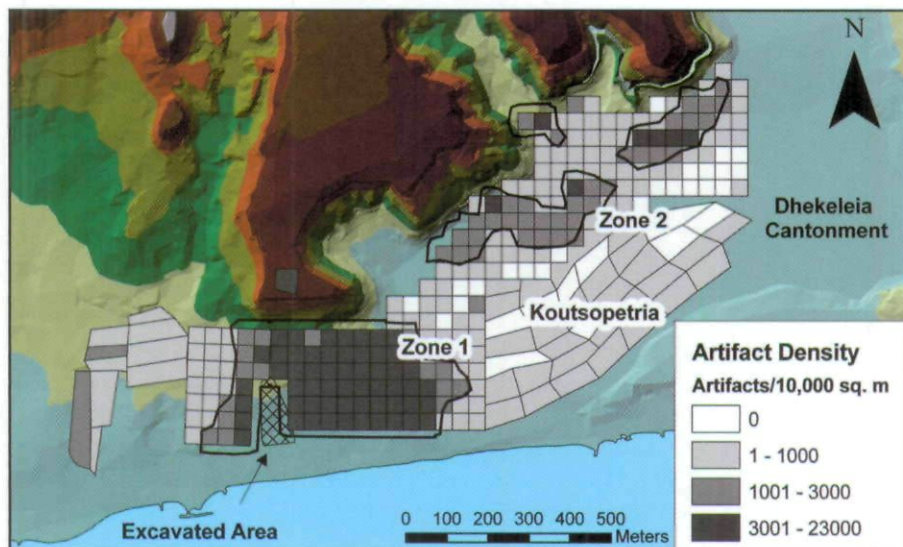
character, and comparing the site's ceramic assemblage with other sites in the Mediterranean and Near East.

A Harbor Town of Late Antiquity

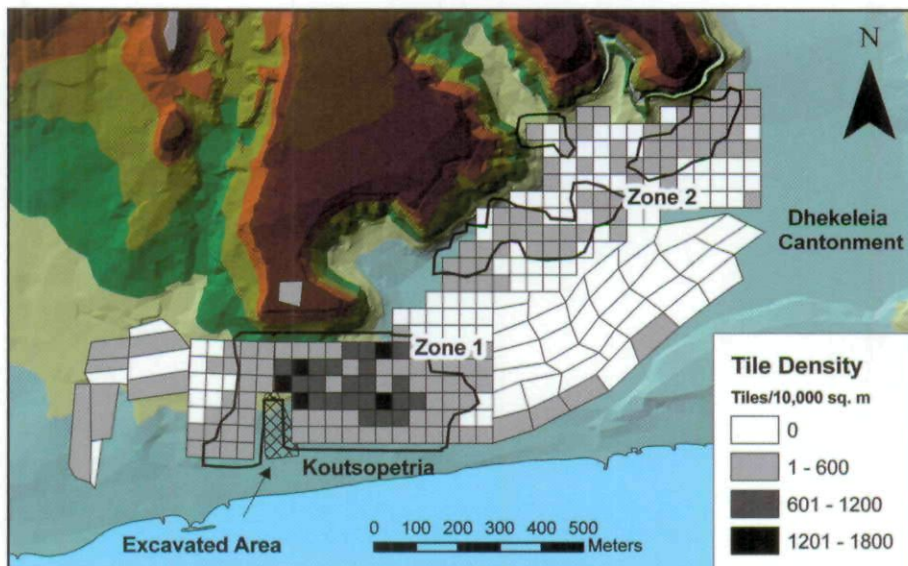
As the analysis phase of our project begins, we are starting to tap our data for what it contributes to the broader landscape of

Late Antique Cyprus. The pottery and tile collected during the field seasons reveal a site that, while inhabited throughout many historical phases, reached its zenith during the Late Roman period. Unfortunately the material from the pre- and post-Roman period is too scant to allow for detailed analysis even though sites from almost every period are known from the surrounding areas. The overwhelming majority (80 percent) of sherds from Pyla-Koutsopetria date to the Late Roman period. The overwhelming majority (80 percent) date to the Late Roman period. The highest-density areas of the site, Zone 1, were those immediately adjacent to the Early Christian basilica excavated by the Department of Antiquities. There, the average artifact density exceeded six thousand artifacts per hectare, much higher than the typical artifact densities found on sites by other surveys (three to five thousand artifacts per hectare) elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. Other kinds of archaeological material complement the high-density ceramic scatters, including large ceramic roof tiles, cut-stone blocks, local gypsum slabs, and imported marble architectural sculpture. It stands to reason that the basilica, a center of activity for the Late Antique community, would also represent the center of an extensive scatter of building materials along the coast.

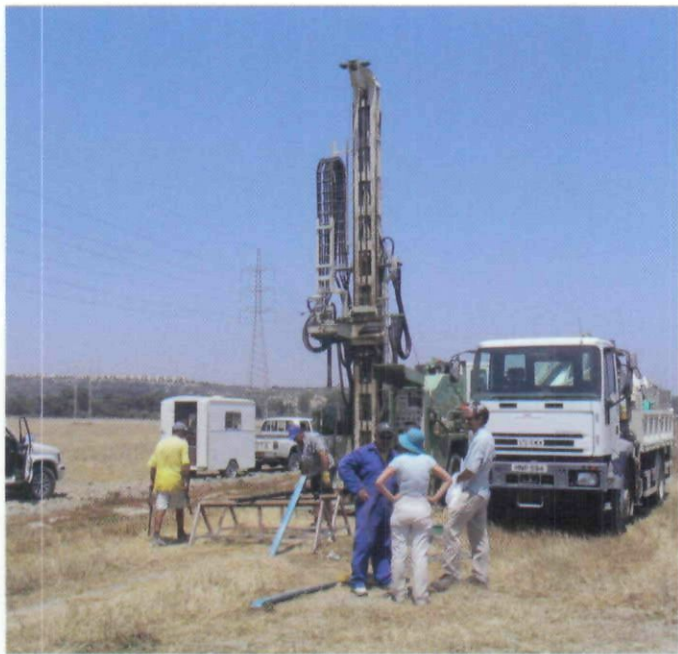
The analysis of this impressive scatter of Late Roman material speaks directly to the place of *Koutsopetria* in the broader landscape. First, there is a high density of Late Roman ceramic roof tiles found especially in the units adjacent to the excavated basilica. The most common shape was a large Corinthian-style tile that was present in a range of colors, including a light yellow clay fabric that is believed to be from interior production sites on the Mesaoria Plain some twenty-five kilometers to the north. This type of roof tile is a common find at archaeological sites on the eastern half of the island so, while its presence at *Koutsopetria* is not



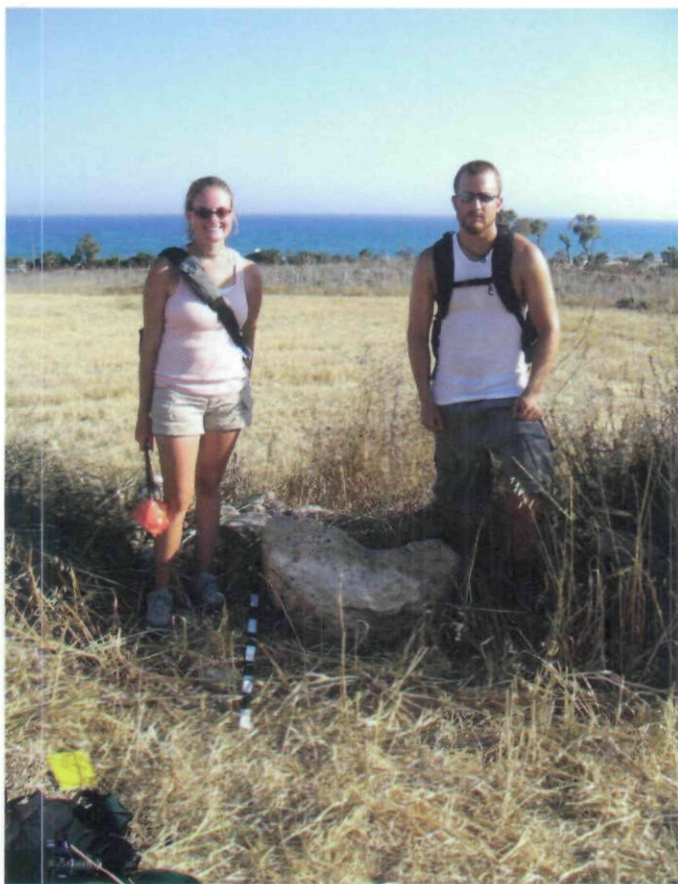
The total artifact density in Zones 1 & 2 at *Koutsopetria* is shown here. The overwhelming majority (80 percent) of remains belong to the Late Roman period. The highest-density areas of the site were those immediately adjacent to the Early Christian basilica excavated by the Department of Antiquities. There, the average artifact density exceeded six-thousand artifacts per hectare, much higher than typical artifact densities found elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. *Illustration courtesy of W. Caraher.*



As seen in this illustration showing the density of the finds, a large collection of Late Roman ceramic roof tiles were found in the units adjacent to the excavated basilica. The most common shape was a large Corinthian-style tile that is a common find at archaeological sites on the eastern half of the island indicating that there were ties between the island's southeast coast and the interior. *Illustration courtesy of W. Caraher.*



Excavators extracted a series of soil cores from a low-lying sandy area that likely represents an infilled ancient harbor at Koutsopetria. Photo courtesy of W. Caraher.



Agricultural processing equipment is common across the entire site. This olive press weight may date to the Roman or Late Roman period.

surprising, its non-local provenience still reinforces the ties between the island's southeast coast and the interior.

Second, Cypriot Red Slip Ware, produced on the far western side of the island, was the most common Late Roman fine ware discovered during the survey, with imported African Red Slip Ware being the next most frequent, and Phocaeian Red Slip Ware being the least common. Among these wares, only a few forms can be dated before 450 CE, and most appear to date to the sixth and seventh centuries. While the significant amount of Cypriot Red Slip Ware is not surprising and merely indicates *Koutsopetria's* place in local-exchange systems, the proportional dominance of African Red Slip Ware over Phocaeian Red Slip is surprising given the reverse conditions at other Late Roman sites on the island. The village site of *Kopetra* and coastal site of *Maroni-Petrera*, for example, produced higher proportions of Phocaeian Red Slip Ware (Manning, *et al.* 2002:42–43; and Rautman 2003:168–76). In any case, the relatively large quantities of vessels from distant centers in Africa and Asia Minor indicate the concentrations of wealth at *Koutsopetria* and the site's connections to distant exchange networks.

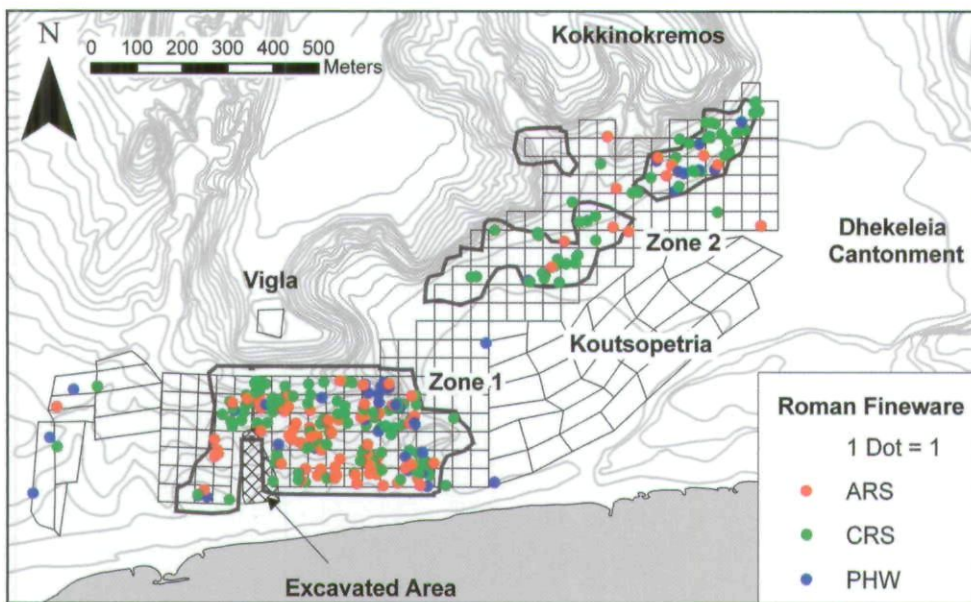
While the highest-density areas of Zone 1 (the area of the basilica) would have stood out even with less intensive forms of survey, density distribution maps do contribute to a more sensitive reading of the site. For example, an extensive survey may have overlooked the distinct, lower-density scatter of artifacts that continues for several hundred meters to the north and east of the highest density area. This second zone of moderate artifact density (Zone 2) extends immediately inland from the now-infilled embayment and clings to the base of the prominent coastal ridge of *Kokkinokremos* following what may have been the coastline some two thousand years earlier. While the average artifact density in Zone 2 is not particularly exceptional, this zone does appear to represent a distinct area of activity within the structure of the larger coastal site. Zone 2 lacks the substantial building material and roof tiles of the highest-density Zone 1 to the southwest, and yields far higher percentages of locally produced Cypriot Red Slip fine wares and Late Roman 1 amphorae, a shape and size associated with wine and olive-oil transport. Furthermore there were fewer pieces of imported pottery found here. The significant difference in the character of these two assemblages indicates that the lower-density Zone 2 was not a “halo” of artifacts produced by discard or manuring from the nearby settlement, but was a distinct “district” within the urban landscape, an extension of the coastal town to the east.

We can draw several important, albeit tentative, conclusions from the ceramics found in Zone 2. The relatively lower quantities of imported material suggest either lower levels of material wealth or a different functional use of this area. One possible read of the evidence is that this lower-density area represents less impressive harbor buildings, perhaps used as a staging area for goods being exported through the harbor. This would explain the lack of monumental architecture, the proportionately larger quantity of local material, and the higher percentage of transport amphorae. The presence of a harbor

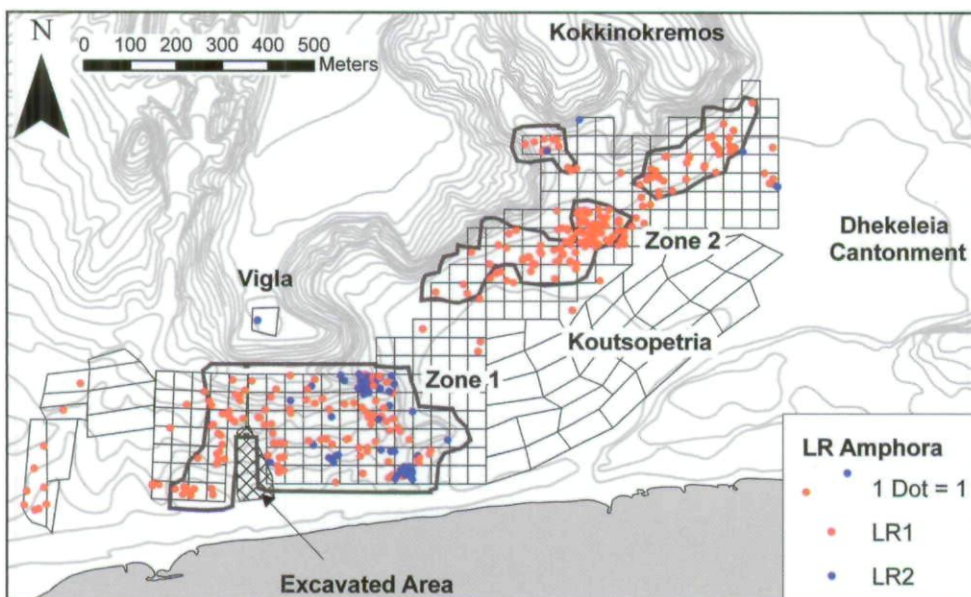
“work area” would also fit well with the results of a recent study of the ancient road network of the island that placed *Koutsopetria* at the intersection of a main inland route from the Mesoria and the coastal road (Bekker-Nielsen 2004:186). The harbor at *Koutsopetria*, taking advantage of its location along a major road running inland, may have acted as the principal point of interaction between local farmers and a broader landscape of exchange. Such an arrangement is similar to that proposed by John Leonard for the port of Xylotymbou-

Louma near Dhekeleia in the nineteenth-century currant trade (Leonard 2005:418–21).

However we interpret the lower-density area of the site, it is clear that *Koutsopetria* existed at an important crossroads of land and sea in Late Antiquity. We can offer one final bit of evidence to this end: the significant amounts of the locally-produced Late Roman 1 amphorae (9 percent of the total assemblage of Late Roman pottery) which likely served to transport the region’s agricultural produce. Agricultural processing equipment, in



This plan shows the distribution of Late Roman Fine Ware over the site. *Illustration courtesy of W. Caraher.*



This plan shows the distribution of Late Roman 1 amphorae at the site. It is clear that *Koutsopetria* existed at an important crossroads of land and sea in Late Antiquity and the locally produced Late Roman 1 amphorae likely served to transport the region’s agricultural produce. *Illustration courtesy of W. Caraher.*

fact, is common across the entire site, including a large settling basin of Hellenistic date, and parts of an olive press that may date to the Roman or Late Roman period. The processing and exchange of local agricultural produce like olive oil offer one fitting explanation for the location, size, and complexity of the harbor town at *Koutsopetria*; the revenue generated by such activities would explain the site’s impressive monumental architecture and substantial concentration of imported ceramic wares.

Over fifty years of extensive survey dating to the first years of the Cyprus Survey and nearly thirty years of systematic, intensive survey have brought to light a Cypriot landscape replete with nearly every kind of settlement known to the Late Roman world. Small farmsteads, villas, agricultural villages, and mid-sized commercial harbors formed an interactive matrix of smaller settlements that existed below the threshold of major urban sites. While such sites had connections to the major cities of Late Antique Cyprus, intensive survey is increasingly demonstrating that many of these sites possessed some degree of autonomy from larger cities and actively participated in the prosperous networks of economic and cultural exchange in the eastern Mediterranean from the fifth to the seventh centuries. The more intensive documentation of large rural sites like *Koutsopetria* alongside villages like *Kopetra* and *Maroni-Petrera* is painting a new and complex picture of Cyprus during the vibrant period of Late Antiquity.

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