

Between City and Country: Settlement on the Fringe in Late Roman Cyprus

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Introduction

[Slide] Twenty-five years ago the historian M.I. Finley described the Greek and Roman world as one whose agrarian populations labored daily in the countryside but inhabited larger urban centers and towns, not isolated country farms.[1] The advent of intensive archaeological survey in the Mediterranean in the last twenty years, however, has inundated the countryside not only with a multitude of such “country farmsteads” but a variety of settlement types covering the spectrum between urban centers and temporary shelters.

The period of Late Antiquity (3rd–7th centuries AD) has figured prominently in this conversation due to both traditional historiographic depictions of the countryside and the conflicting archaeological evidence produced by recent regional surveys in the eastern Mediterranean. Contrary to conventional narratives that suggested countrysides were either totally abandoned, ruined, or dominated by large self-sufficient estates, a growing corpus of surveys have revealed numerous farmsteads and villas, hamlets and villages. In countries like Greece and Cyprus, where we have worked, the Late Antique countrysides are so well-settled with a wide variety of types of residence that scholars are completely rewriting the histories of these provinces for this period.

And yet, if the new consensus speaks to healthful and prosperous Late Antique regional economies, it also raises questions about the relationship of town and countryside, of urban and rural space. First (1), Do the busy and varied territories of Late Antiquity indicate a decline in urban centers or reflect, rather, their continuing stability? Second (2), for an island province like Cyprus, is the paradigm of town and country the most appropriate framework for conceptualizing late antique local and regional economies? And finally, 3) is it possible to move beyond the economic functionalism implied by the town and countryside paradigm to

the ways in which ex-urban settlements contributed to the production of ancient culture?

In this paper, we address these questions by examining the Roman and Late Antique phase of the coastal site of Koutsopetria in the hinterland of Kition, Cyprus. As a “mid-sized” settlement occupied during this time, standing between the common settlement categories of urban center and country farm, Koutsopetria adds an important new dimension for understanding the island in Late Antiquity.

Koutsopetria: A Description

[Slide] Koutsopetria is located on the coast of Larnaka Bay ten kilometers east of Ancient Kition, and immediately southwest of Pyla-Kokkinokremos, known for its impressive Late Bronze Age fortifications [Slide]. The site’s extensive remains have been known since the nineteenth century but systematic investigations began only in the 1990s, with Maria Hadjicosti’s excavations of an Early Christian basilica. In 2004 and 2005, the Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project conducted an intensive gridded survey and implemented a comprehensive geological investigation of the area. We described our methods and preliminary observations in the 2005 issue of the RDAC, as well as here at ASOR last year, so here we will discuss the final results of our work as they contribute to the issue of urban and rural space.

The site at Koutsopetria consists of a broad scatter of cultural material on the narrow coastal plain at the base of a continuous ridge. The western limit of the site lies below the height of Vigla, and the eastern limit below the height of Kokkinokremos.[2] The sea and a stretch of low-lying sandy soils form the site’s southern boundary.

Over the course of four seasons, our field teams surveyed 252 forty-by-forty meter grid squares and 49 larger units, covering a total area of 64 hectares and counting artifacts over 20% of the surface of each unit. These methods and coverage have allowed us to define two major areas of the site: Zone 1, lying immediately below the ridge of Vigla and extending over an area of 10 hectares, produced very high densities -- over 6000 artifacts per ha.[3] Zone 2 is an area of more moderate artifact density (about 2,000 artifacts / ha), covering a broad area of 30 ha; the material in Zone 2 is distinct from that in Zone 1 suggesting that it is not simply the product of discard practices. [Slide] The combined overall area of the two zones is some 40 hectares, a size that must suggest a complex and prosperous coastal town.

Koutsopetria has produced innumerable features and artifacts, especially of Roman and Late Roman date. Hadjikosti's excavations revealed parts of an ornate early Christian basilica, and recent deep plowing [Slide] brought to light the remains of what may be a second church building. In the course of survey, we recorded some 430 features across the site, including in situ walls,[4] cut limestone and gypsum blocks, marble column fragments, and carved gypsum; these, together with and thousands of roof tiles, mortar fragments, and ubiquitous cobble indicate substantial buildings across the site [Slide], but especially focused in Zone 1. We have also documented two settling basins for drains that are probably Roman or Late Roman in date,[5] as well as a large cistern on the Vigla Ridge, and a well that is now in-filled. Several features provide specific evidence for olive processing at the site [Slide], including a probable olive press bed and an olive press weight that are consistent with a Late Roman date.[6] Finally, numerous cuts across the ridge's exposed limestone face point to substantial quarrying that took place here, presumably for building material for the site itself.

Late Roman pottery and tiles are the most common artifacts found at Koutsopetria [Slide], forming some 80% of the diagnostic material and found in 90% of the grid squares. LR roof tiles are especially common, as are amphoras (especially LR1) and fine wares like Cypriot Red Slip, African Red Slip and Phocaeen Ware, all which speak to the site's place within a broad regional system of exchange.

In this respect [Slide][Slide], it is important to note that the low lying sandy soils to the south of Koutsopetria almost certainly represent a natural embayment existing in antiquity but now infilled.[7] Jay Noller's geological work in the area [Slide], including the recent processing of core samples, should provide some chronology for the processes that led to the infilling of the embayment. The harbor would certainly have been well-situated to take advantage of several ancient roads through this area [Slide], one running toward the Mesoria through the village of Pyla and one probably turning inland toward Salamis-Constantina. These routes further reinforce our interpretation of this site as a crossroads. With this introduction aside, let us return now to consider the questions with which we began this paper.

1. Town and Country: an Inverse Relationship?

First, does the flourishing of Koutsopetria in the immediate vicinity of Kition occur at the expense of the urban center, or as an outgrowth of the city's flourishing [Slide]? Modern scholars have suggested that Kition suffered earthquakes in the fourth century AD and as a result of tectonic uplift the harbor gradually silted up over the course of the Roman

period.[8] Is the growth of Koutsopetria simply a product of the decline of the city?

There are a number of reasons for rejecting or at least avoiding this conclusion. On the one hand, we still know so very little about the history of Kition during the Roman period. Recently, for instance, it has been suggested that the town's silted harbor may have been refurbished during Late Antiquity,[9] which, if true, could substantially change our understanding of the city in this period. Only the full publication of the Roman period material will help us understand the urban center itself.

Secondly, the chronology of Koutsopetria suggests that although the site enjoyed its floruit in the 5th–6th centuries it developed as an important place on the coast as early as the Late Bronze Age [Slide]. There is solid evidence for Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, and Early Roman components to the site itself.[10] Early Roman pottery, in particular, is ubiquitous at Koutsopetria, albeit in significantly lower proportions than Late Roman. Plotting this material [Slide][Slide] spatially shows broad activity in both Zones 1 and 2, the same spaces covered by Late Antique pottery. It seems likely that the small quantities of earlier Roman material may in fact be the product of a significant Late Antique overburden rather than lack of an earlier Roman component per se.[11] We cannot, in any case, write out an ER occupation.

Given these chronological uncertainties, we cannot very easily link the growth of Koutsopetria to the decline of Kition. It may very well be that both Kition and ex-urban sites like Koutsopetria flourished at the same time—as, for instance, Rupp suggested for large ex-urban settlements outside of Nea Paphos in the Early Roman period.[12]

2. Between (or Beyond?) City and Country: The Mid-Sized Site

This raises a second larger issue: Must we interpret Koutsopetria through the lens of town and country at all, as though ex-urban sites were always epiphenomenal to the city?

Again, there are reasons for expecting that Koutsopetria possessed at least some economic and cultural autonomy. To be sure, the site is quite smaller than Kition and the principal urban centers on the island [Slide] and shows no evidence of the features that are part and parcel with these urban places: gymnasium, theaters, aqueducts, and the like. On the other hand, Koutsopetria is hardly insignificant. The persistence of settlement at this site from the Bronze Age through Late Antiquity suggests that it possessed certain enduring environmental assets that held value within very different economic and political systems. This is to

say that this site is unlikely to owe its existence to either entirely local trends or larger political and economic phenomena. Rather, the harbor town appears to have developed in respect to a network of inter-connections fostered by its favorable location.

In its Late Antique phase, in particular, the settlement covers some 40 ha, larger than most of the Late Roman rural sites reported by archaeological surveys on the island. Even more sizable and well-published Late Antique sites, such as the village of Kopetra,[13] the hamlet at Ayios Kononas,[14] and the settlement at Petrera,[15] are all smaller than five hectares. Koutsopetria, with its substantial religious architecture, its probable harbor, its clear evidence for wealth (marble, gypsum, and wall paintings), and production facilities establish the site as a town that grew due to factors beyond the proximal urban center Kition.

Indeed, a recent analysis [Slide] of the site's abundant fine wares and transport amphoras has indicated the site's place in networks of exchange both near and far.[16] [Slide] There are considerable quantities of Phocaeen Wares and even African Red Slip, more so, in fact, than at smaller inland Late Roman sites like Kopetra and Maroni-Petrera [Slide]. There are numerous Cypriot ceramic objects from different parts of the island—CRS from the western half of the island; LR1 amphoras presumably from local production centers like Zygi on the southern coast; distinct yellowish roof tiles from inland production centers in the Mesoria Plain. In all of these, Koutsopetria shows itself to be a crossroads community that shared in the vibrant local and interregional networks existing in Late Antiquity. In light of these many interrelationships, we may be justified in thinking of Koutsopetria outside of the town and countryside paradigm and instead focusing on the site's place in relational exchange systems. Mid-sized coastal settlements, which straddled the divide between the major urban centers and smaller villas and farms, must have been very significant components in the island's dynamic connectivity.[17]

In this respect, Koutsopetria is not without parallels in Cyprus [Slide]. In southeast Cyprus, at Katalymata Hadjisavvas' 1974 survey identified an extensive (15 ha) LA coastal site with wells and olive press equipment and a probable early Christian basilica.[18] This same survey also documented a vast Late Antique site at Tornos, just northwest of a probable early Christian basilica at Agia Thekla.[19] Neither of these two sites on the southeast coast of the island were locked in the hinterland of a major urban center.

West of Koutsopetria, we have another parallel in the site at Dreamer's Bay, which lies about 15 kilometers south of Kourion. The site, which was initially documented and is currently being investigated by John Leonard, is at least 10 hectares in size and probably many more.[20]

Finally, in western Cyprus, Ayos Georgios near Pegeia [Slide] some 25 kilometers from Paphos, was a flourishing wealthy Late Antique coastal town covering 16 hectares.[21] The site has produced burial chambers, agricultural equipment, a bath complex, and three large basilica churches. Bakirtzis has argued that the site grew not as a result of its proximity to Paphos, but on account of its orientation to the sea, as a stopover for Egyptian grain ships bound for Constantinople.[22]

In other words, what we have in LA Cyprus are a number of coastal sites that do not fit well within a town-and-countryside paradigm. As mid-sized sites, they occupy an important position between the island's larger urban centers and tertiary settlements like villages, villas, and farmsteads.[23] Lying on the fringe of the territories of urban centers, they are neither wholly urban nor wholly rural space. As towns they possess religious architecture, obvious wealth, some civic amenities, and connections to the broader world, yet lack the full range of civic features.[24] They are "rural spaces" which garnered independence from their strategic and favorable positions. While undoubtedly interacting closely with nearby cities, they also developed and flourished in respect to their connectedness to networks beyond the city.

3. Koutsopetria and Networks of Culture

This leads us to a final issue: if we can think beyond the town and countryside paradigm, can we also move beyond entirely economic issues and questions implied by that paradigm? In the transformative period of Late Antiquity, how did ex-urban settlements like Koutsopetria contribute to broader networks of Late Antique culture?

It is clear that Koutsopetria, centered at a crossroads, would have been a place of cultural exchange and frequent interaction with a broader Late Antique world. Just as scholars recognize that pottery sherds are the most visible physical traces of a vibrant economic exchange system that included a much wider of material goods, so they must also represent a broad array of exchanges of ideas and culture that are now invisible to us. The merchants putting in port at Koutsopetria may have gone on to either Salamis or Kition, and from there, to the coastal towns of northern Palestine and Syria. The inhabitants of Koutsopetria presumably interacted with neighboring large coastal sites but also with inland populations to the north. The routes themselves fostered relationships between coastal town and inland villages and farms, various urban centers, and other provinces and places.

Large crossroads settlements like Koutsopetria, then, were not just economic entities, but places of cultural contact and accommodation between groups originating from very different social and geographic spheres. The distinct and heterogeneous archaeological assemblages suggest that these places could produce independent self-expressions within larger relational networks. Systematic investigation of these sites, then, offers an expanded assessment of cultural interaction in the ancient world. Rural spaces were not static places standing outside of history and defined exclusively by an economic relationship to culture-producing urban zones, but constituted places capable of producing and transmitting culture in and of themselves. Studying mid-sized sites like Koutsopetria contributes, then, in a vital way to our understanding of cultural interaction in the final phase of antiquity; between urban and rural space, they occupied unique positions in the relational networks of the late ancient world [Slide][Slide][Slide].

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[1] Finley 1982: 3

[2] V. Karageorghis and M. Demas, *Pyla – Kokkinokremos: A Late 13th Century Fortified Settlement in Cyprus*, Nicosia 1984.

[3] S.E. Alcock, J.F. Cherry and J.L. Davis, "Intensive survey, agricultural practice, and the classical landscape of Greece," in I. Morris (ed.), *Classical Greece: Ancient Histories and Modern Archaeologies*, Cambridge 1994, 138.

[4] Note that Censola claimed to have seen the stone walls of the town when he visited the area: Leonard 2005, 429, 431.

[5] Comparanda at Kourion and elsewhere suggest a Roman or Late Roman date.

[6] Hadjisavvas type I (B).

[7] Leonard 2005, 422.

[8] Leonard 2005, 432–48; see Leonard 2005, 431, for the suggestion that Koutsopetria flourished concomitant with the decline of Kition.

[9] Leonard 2005, 440–441

[10] Rautman 2000, 2004; Catling 1972. At Koutsopetria, Much of the fineware dates from the later fifth to mid–seventh centuries AD, including late forms of Cypriot Red Slip (Forms 2, 9, and 11), Phocaeen Ware (Forms 3 and 10), and African Red Slip (Form 105), and there is very little material beyond the mid–seventh century AD; scant Medieval material at the eastern part of Zone 1 may indicate limited later reuse. We also have consistent examples of later fourth and fifth century material including, for instance, ARS Form 61 (later 4C to mid–5C); PHW 2 (early fifth century); and CRS 1 (later 4C to mid–5C).

[11] Slight traces of Cypro–Archaic and Hellenistic pottery, however, may relate to the sanctuary on the ridge

[12] Rupp 1997, 254–56: the site of 83–E–126 is 35 ha and lies 4 km from Nea Paphos, which Rupp claims functioned as a “secondary population center” for Paphos and “secondary market center”.

[13] Rautman 2000; 2003; 2004

[14] Rautman 2004, 196

[15] Manning et al. 2002; Rautman 2000, 2004; Leonard 2005, 490–91.

[16] Greg Fisher “The Pyla–Koutsopetria Archaeological Project: Cyprus, the Near East, and trade in Late Antiquity”, presented in October 2006

[17] Leonard 1995: p. 242

[18] Hadjisavvas 1997, 31–32; Leonard 2005, 398–99

[19] Hadjisavvas 1997, 27–28, 35; Papageorghiou 1993, 40; Leonard 2005, 404–406.

[20] Leonard 2005, 546–58, and Personal Communication

[21] This estimate based on Leonard’s citation (2005, 615) of R. Gunnis (1936) who says that the site covers “a quarter of a mile square”

[22] Megaw 1974: 71–72; Bakirtzis 1995, 1996; Leonard 2005: 614–18; Papageorghiou 1993, 36; Rautman 2000, 325–26; Herscher 1998, 349–50; Rupp 1997, 254–56.

[23] For distinctions between different settlement categories for the HE–ER period, see Rupp 1997, Tables 1–2, who distinguishes primary metropolis, secondary urban centers, tertiary towns, and then different levels of villages and farms

[24] Rupp 1997, Tables 1–2.