

## TRIAL EXCAVATIONS AT SOTIRA, SITE TEPPÉS ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM CYPRUS EXPEDITION

The scope of the excavations at Kourion has been broadened to include the investigation of a Neolithic site near Sotira, a village situated about five miles north of the expedition headquarters. The excavations at Sotira are considered part of the work at Kourion, and are sponsored jointly by the University Museum and the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus. Through the generosity of the latter, the excavation was supervised by Mr. P. Dikaïos, curator of the Cyprus Museum and a well-known authority on Neolithic and Chalcolithic Cyprus. The following report describes a trial sounding which was made during the past summer to determine whether the site justified fuller excavation. The results were most encouraging, and we look forward to further work at this interesting site. J.F.D.

The site of Sotira, called Teppés, lies 5 miles northwest of Kourion and is an independent hill standing in the middle of a vast depression surrounded by hills of an average height of 1000 feet above sea-level. It holds therefore a commanding position and forms a prominent feature easily identified from all directions (Plate IV, a and b). The modern village lies in the immediate neighbourhood of the ancient site and is reached by a road branching off from the Episkopi-Mallia-Platres highway a little beyond Kandou.

There exist two springs of perennial water, one within the modern village and another rising from an impressive cave a few hundred yards south of the ancient site. In fact, the southern slopes of the site end at a ravine at the head of which is the cave-spring.

From the crest of the hill one has a comprehensive view of the vast and impressive basin in which the hill lies and of the surrounding hills, while on the south the coast of Cyprus, the Kourion hills and the Akrotiri peninsula with its graceful outlines are clearly visible.

The commanding and naturally defended position of the hill, as well as the existence in the close neighbourhood of two perennial springs, must account for its choice as a place to settle. The slopes chosen for this purpose are the southern and southeastern ones, while the northern and western ones, being abrupt, remained uninhabited. They were, however, strengthened with a massive wall (see below).

The importance of the Sotira site in the cultural evolution of the fourth millennium lies in the fact that it yields Combed ware, which appears also in the last stages of the Khirokitia Neolithic settlement. The same

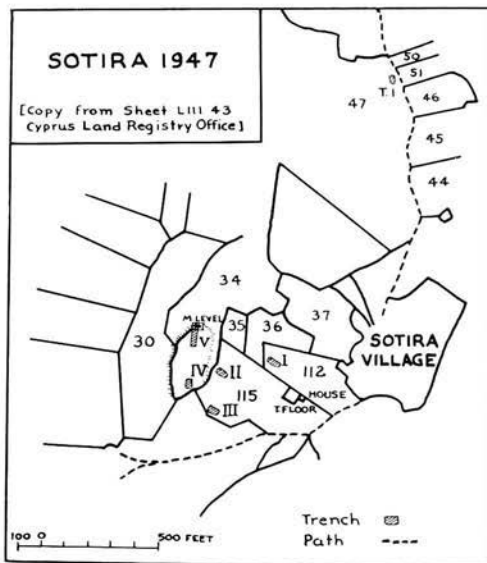
ware occurs also at Kalavassos where it is associated with a kind of a habitation partly sunk in the soft rock. It was therefore important to find out what kind of habitation prevailed at Sotira, whether of the Kalavassos or the Khirokitia (tholos) type. In other words, would Sotira also show a departure from the traditional tholos type of habitation as did Kalavassos or show that the tholos went on being used following the introduction of pottery during the last stages of Khirokitia? As it will be seen later on in this report, the results of the preliminary investigation show that the prevailing type of habitation at Sotira is the tholos and that therefore there is no break in the island culture following the introduction of pottery (Red Lustrous and Combed) at the end of the Khirokitia culture. The discovery of

the tholos type of habitation in the Erimi settlement which chronologically should be placed after Sotira, shows that despite the new elements the island culture follows a profoundly local tradition. However, the problem of the type of habitation occurring at Kalavassos remains unsolved, although it is possible that this type may be connected with the people who first introduced pottery into the island.<sup>1</sup>

The University Museum Expedition showed keen interest in Sotira and decided to grant to the Antiquities Department funds towards a preliminary investigation of the site with the ultimate intention of subsidizing large-scale excavations in case the site proved interesting. The Department of Antiquities accepted with gratitude the proposal and the investigations were entrusted to me.<sup>2</sup>

The excavations began early in June and lasted for seven working days. Five trial trenches were dug in various parts of the site with the following results.

*Trench I.* This was dug on the lower southern slopes of the site in plot 112. A number of floors paved with pebbles were brought to light with, in two of them, two burials. No house foundations survived. In the southern part of the trench a straight wall built of limestone



boulders was laid bare. Judging from the remains discovered in Trench III we may consider this wall as part of a narrow street. The most important discovery in the trench was that of two burials, which are the first ones ever discovered associated with the Combed ware.

*Trench II.* Dug in plot 115. The remains uncovered here are confused layers from demolished habitations of *pisé*. The lowest layer appeared to be less disturbed and an almost complete vase of Combed ware was found.

*Trench III.* This was dug in plot 115 and revealed a thick wall 1.30 m. in thickness and 0.80-1 m. in height. This wall abuts by its north end on a natural slope in the bed-rock and is directed N.W.-S.E. It recalls the Khirokitia wall which runs through the whole of the settlement and is apparently the main street. That the Sotira wall was used for the same purpose is confirmed by the discovery of narrower walls branching off from the main one (Plate V, a).

*Trench IV.* This was dug in plot 115 between the first and second contours from the top of the hill, in a field exposed to the south and forming one of the most prominent parts of the settlement. Here the slope is gentle and thus no terraces were built by modern cultivators, a fact which prevented destruction of the remains. About one foot below the cultivated layer we uncovered foundations of stone tholoi with well-preserved floors, on some of which almost complete vases (Red Lustrous and Combed) were found in situ. Two complete tholoi (measuring 5 m. across including the wall on both sides) and parts of others were laid bare (Plate V, b).

The clearing and systematic investigation of the tholoi was suspended, but it is hoped that they may contain several superimposed and undisturbed floors. It is also hoped that there may be earlier tholoi underlying the topmost ones, as a trial pit dug on the plateau revealed several distinct layers (see below).

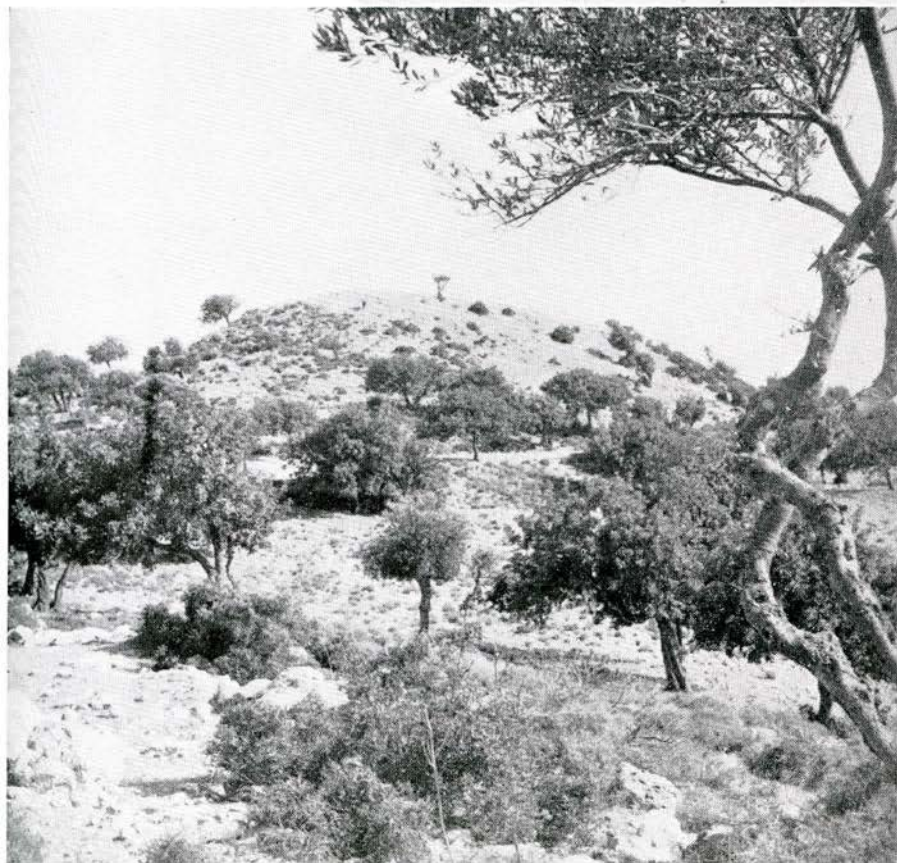
*Trench V.* This goes through almost the entire plateau and revealed below the cultivated soil walls of tholoi, floors, hearths, fragmentary vases in situ, etc. All these remains belong to the topmost level, but a trial pit dug in a corner of the trench brought to light four distinct layers with house foundations, floors of white *pisé* and burnt layers, all containing Lustrous and Combed pottery.

But the most outstanding feature brought to light by this short season is an impressive wall built against the whole of the northern slopes of the



PLATE IV.  
Sotira.

(a) The site  
seen from the  
south.



(b) The site  
seen from the  
north.



PLATE V  
Sotira.

(a) Trench III.



(b) Trench IV.

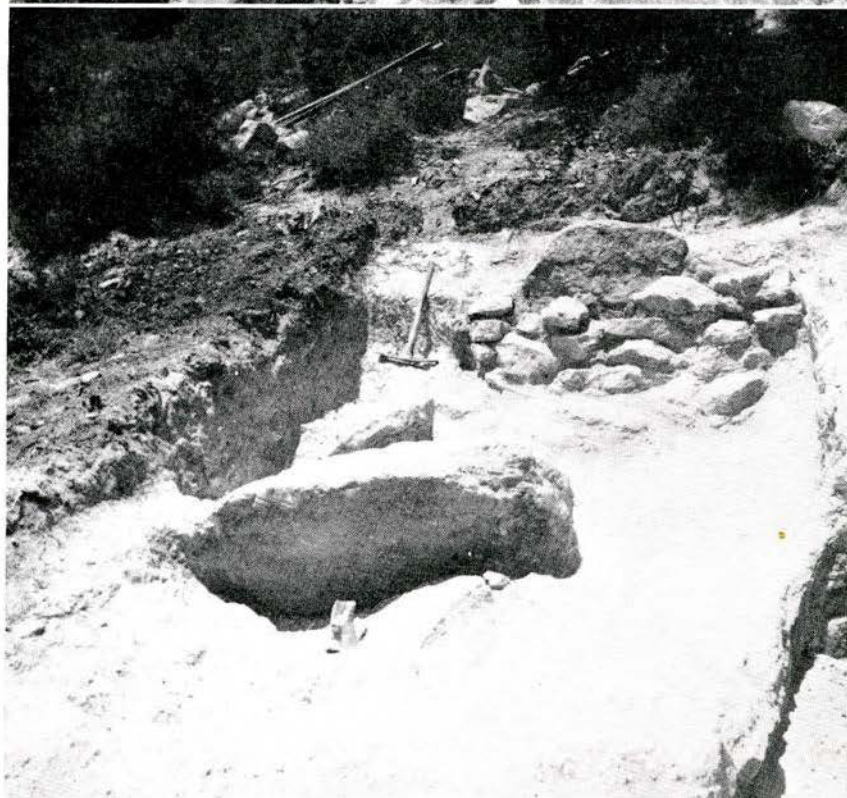


**PLATE VI**  
**Sotira.**

(a) The north slopes showing the "wall."



(b) Dromos of Copper Age tomb.



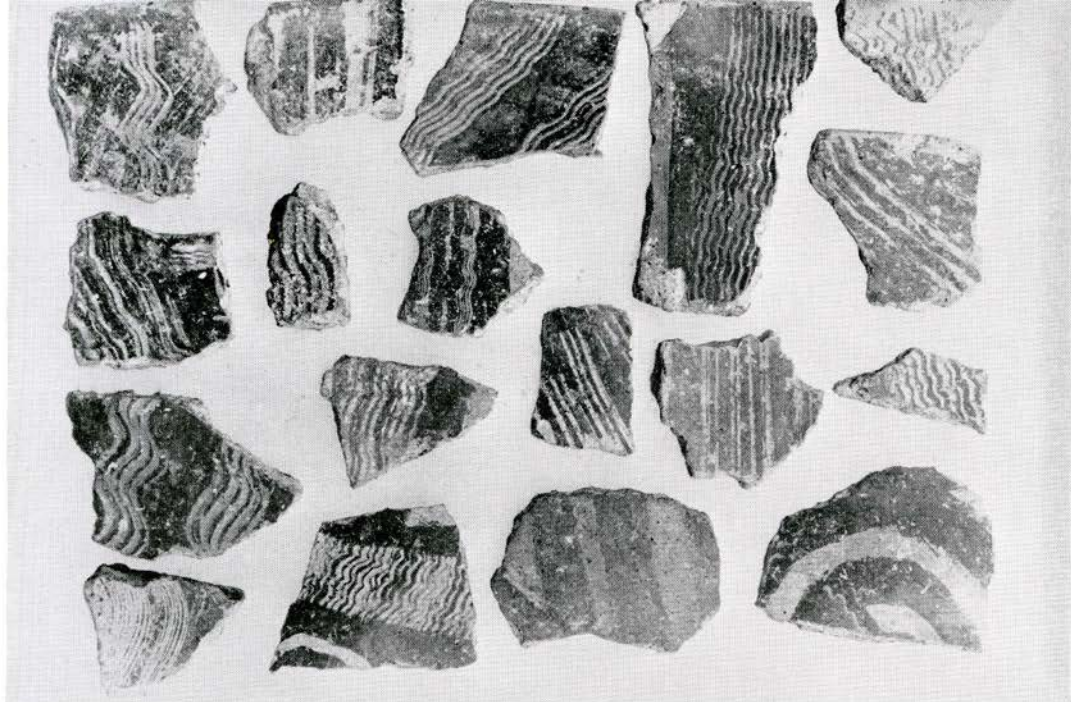
hill and reaching the plateau (Plate VI, a). In parts it even rises higher than the plateau. This wall is built of limestone boulders bound up with yellowish *pisé* and constitutes an impressive unbroken mass. How deep it goes it is not possible to say at this stage, but the surface indications tend to show that it goes down to the base of the hill.

The meaning of this wall was not established, because the means and time at our disposal were not sufficient to permit thorough investigation. At this stage we can only offer two guesses; (1) that at some time the inhabitants of the Sotira settlement decided to widen the plateau and make it more suitable for habitation by building a retaining wall and then throwing earth and debris down the slope; (2) that the wall is defensive. This alternative, however, is less probable in view of the fact that the wall covers only the northern parts of the slope, the southern slopes—which were in fact the inhabited ones—having no such wall. Only further investigation can throw light on this problem. It can however be said that this wall represents a unique feature showing tremendous activity at this early cultural stage. It recalls walls built round *tells* in much bigger countries than Cyprus, e.g. in Palestine and other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean.

*Conclusion:* This preliminary investigation of the Sotira settlement has shown important results which can be summarized as follows. First of all, it now appears that following the introduction of the potter's art into the island the indigenous culture went on its course, although profound changes took place. The stone vases which form the chief feature during most of the Khirokitia period are now abandoned and the Red Lustrous and Combed pottery become general.

Sotira is the first settlement representing the second cultural stage of the fourth millennium, and its investigation is bound to bring to light the general characteristics of this stage.<sup>3</sup> It appears from the preliminary examination that a large part of the site is intact and that complete stratigraphical evidence is to be expected. Intact tholoi with untouched floors were revealed and objects such as vases, flint and stone implements as well as burials are still in situ. Moreover the "town-planning" of the site with streets, main and secondary, will be studied. But the most important and puzzling feature is the massive wall covering the northern slopes of the hill. It would be interesting to lay bare the whole of this impressive structure and understand its meaning. When a part of the settlement with its tholoi, streets and paths are laid bare and the





Sotira. Fragments of Combed and Red on White wares (Trench II).

whole of the wall thoroughly cleaned and investigated, Sotira will be one of the most impressive prehistoric sites in Cyprus and probably in the Near East.

During the same campaign a cemetery of the Copper Age was discovered on the slopes adjoining the Sotira hill on the east. Owing to lack of time, only one tomb was cleared (Plate VI, b). It contained Red Polished pottery of early types and dated approximately to the middle of the third millennium B.C. This discovery shows that Sotira continued to be inhabited in the third millennium B.C. and gives hopes that settlements of the Erimi period may also be brought to light in the same neighbourhood.

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the 4th millennium cultures in Cyprus, see *Iraq*, 1940, p. 69 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The site was first noticed by me in 1934: see my *Excavations at Erimi*, p. 63 ff. I must thank here Dr. B. H. Hill, Director of the Expedition, for his sympathetic interest and Mr. George Macfadden, Mr. and Mrs. John Young, members of the Kourion Expedition, for kind hospitality. My thanks are also due to Mr. A. H. S. Megaw, Director of Antiquities, for making the combined expedition possible and for giving his valuable support.

<sup>3</sup> Kalavassos also yields Combed ware but the type of habitation is different (see above).