

MVSE

NUMBER TWENTY - ONE · 1987

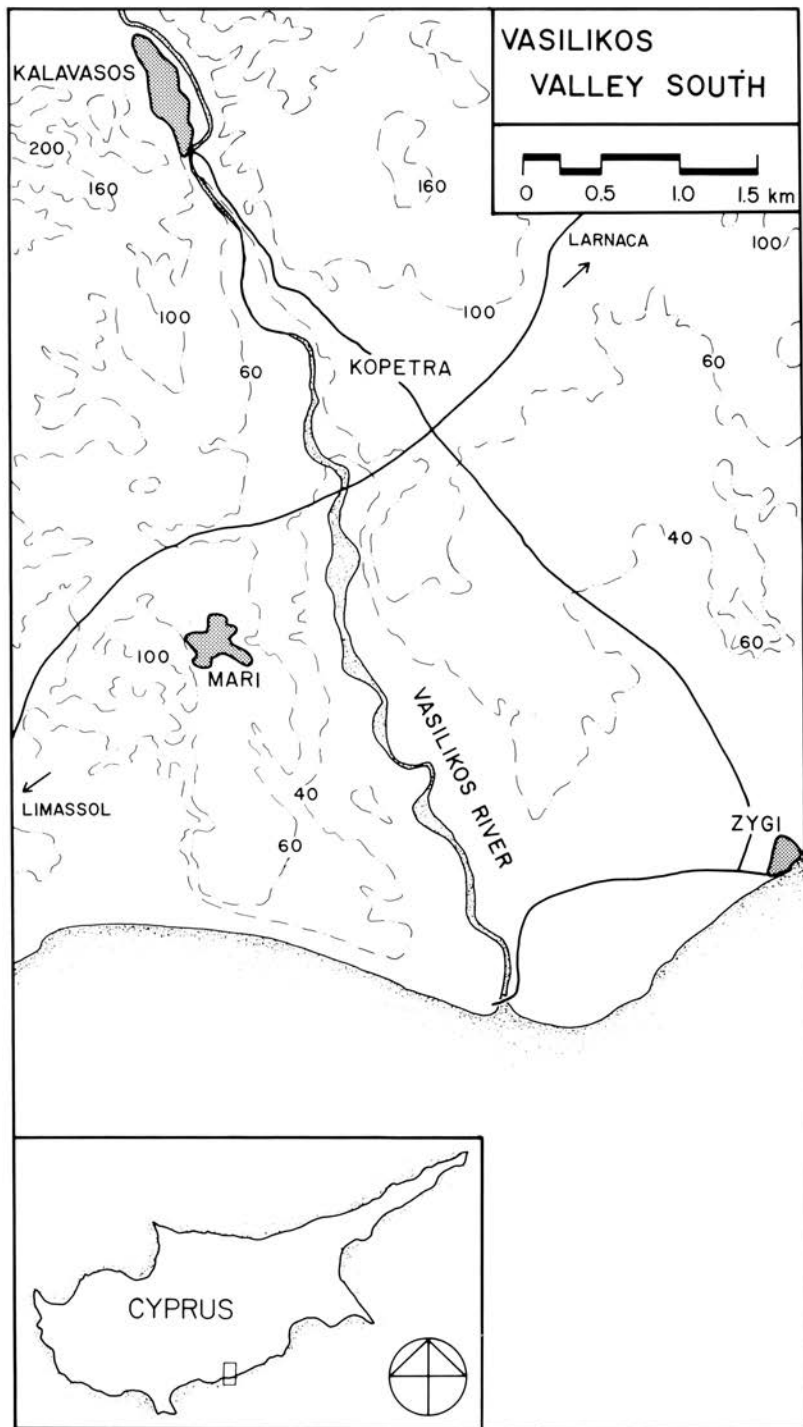
ANNUAL OF THE MUSEUM
OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Cyprus at the End of Antiquity: Investigations at Kalavastos-Kopetra

Marcus L. Rautman
University of Missouri–Columbia
and Murray C. McClellan
University of Pennsylvania

The Mediterranean world of the fourth through seventh centuries saw one of the most momentous turning points of Western history. Fundamental changes occurred at all levels of Late Roman society and involved basic reevaluations of the artistic, political, and religious traditions of classical antiquity. Edward Gibbon characterized this age as comprising an epochal “Fall of Rome,” of which the repercussions continued to shape European history into the modern era. If the larger results of this cultural reorientation are not in doubt, its course and process remain less well understood. Historians of the period have focused their attention primarily on the large urban and religious centers of the late Roman empire, with relatively less attention paid to the more humdrum life of its provincial settlements. The Kalavastos-Kopetra Project was initiated in 1986 with the goal of providing a new and more representative perspective of this period on the level of a small and otherwise unknown east Mediterranean island community. The expedition is a collaborative undertaking of the authors on behalf of the Department of Art History and Archaeology and the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri–Columbia, and the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Informal reconnaissance in the summer of 1986 led to a six-week field season in July and August 1987. The results of these preliminary investigations, which included an initial topographic and field survey of the site, are discussed in this report.¹

The Kalavastos-Kopetra Project continues a long tradition of archaeological fieldwork on Cyprus conducted by the sponsoring institutions. The Pennsylvania expedition to Kourion, directed by Professors George McFadden and Bert Hodge Hill between 1934 and 1952, was among the earliest systematic excavations on the island.² Professor Emeritus Saul Weinberg, former director of the Museum of Art and Archaeology, worked at the important Bronze



1. Cyprus (inset), and lower Vasilikos Valley.



2. General view of Vasilikos Valley above village of Kalavassos.

Age sites of Bamboula and Phaneromeni in the 1950s.³ More recently, campaigns of survey and excavation were carried out by Missouri professors Albert Leonard, Jr., and David Soren around the Kourion-Episkopi area between 1977 and 1980.⁴ As was the case with its predecessors on the island, the present exploration of Kalavassos-Kopetra enjoys the interest and support of the Department of Antiquities, Republic of Cyprus, and especially its director, Dr. Vassos Karageorghis, with whose permission research is being conducted.

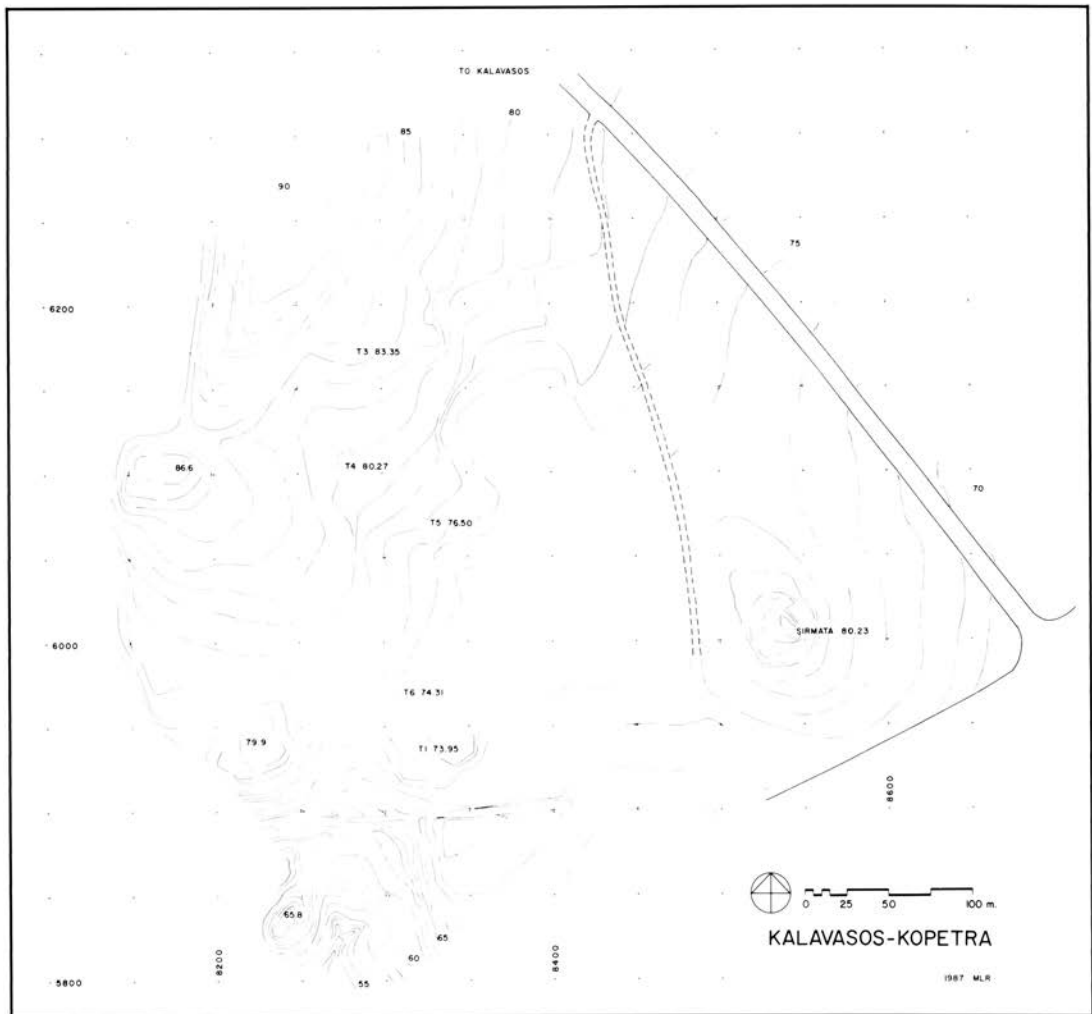
“Kopetra” is the local toponym for a steep bluff that overlooks the Vasilikos River Valley on the southern coast of Cyprus. Located approximately two kilometers southeast of the village of Kalavassos, Kopetra lies near the modern highway linking the large port cities of Limassol and Larnaca (fig. 1). This area is strategically situated on several important communication routes, which in antiquity as today extended along the island’s southern shore and led up the Vasilikos Valley toward the Troodos Mountain Range. Within this advantageous setting and watered by the greater Vasilikos catchment, the valley has been home to human settlement since at least the sixth millennium B.C. (fig. 2). An ongoing survey of the valley



3. Kalavassos-Kopetra from the east.

region conducted since 1976 by Professor Ian Todd of Brandeis University indicates that the region achieved peaks of prosperity in the Late Cypriot Bronze Age (ca. mid fifteenth–thirteenth centuries B.C.) and again in the Late Roman period (ca. fourth–seventh centuries A.D.). As is the case elsewhere on the island, where individual sites have been occupied over extended periods and in different historical epochs, the site of Kopetra and its environs witnessed significant Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, and Cypro-Archaic activity before its final and greatest blossoming in Late Roman times.

Kalavassos-Kopetra is the largest Roman-era settlement so far identified in this part of the Vasilikos Valley. Unlike the nearby prehistoric sites excavated at Kalavassos-Tenta (Aceramic Neolithic) and Kalavassos-Ayios Dhimitrios (Late Cypriot II), Kopetra is located on a readily defensible marl bluff that rises some 36 meters above the Vasilikos river bed to an elevation of approximately 70-75 meters above sea level (fig. 3). The Late Roman settlement at Kopetra apparently occupied a gently sloping terrace that was embraced by two small hills, of which the more easterly is known locally as Sirmata (fig. 4). A significant outcropping of gypsum nearby provided building material for the site's inhabitants. Further up the valley, in the foothills of the Troodos massif, are located major deposits of copper ore, which have been exploited since the second millennium B.C. Three kilometers to the south of Kopetra



4. Topographic plan of Kalavastos-Kopetra after a survey by G. D. R. Sanders and L. A. Turner.

the Vasilikos River fans out to meet the sea near the modern village of Zygi. Regional survey activities have identified at Zygi-Petrini an apparent port site that would have been contemporary with the Late Roman occupation of Kalavastos-Kopetra.

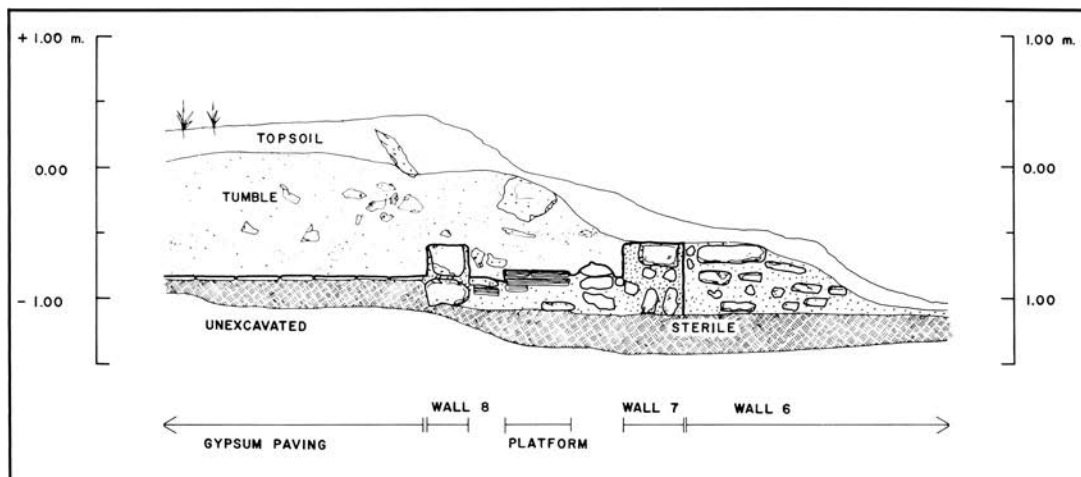
Our present understanding of Late Roman Kopetra comes from systematic field reconnaissance and salvage study. The existence and location of the site were first established by the valley's regional survey.⁵ This identification was based on the high density of cultural materials, primarily brick and pottery but also worked stone, that lie scattered across the modern ground surface. Several intricately carved gypsum blocks from the area attest the high aspirations of



5. Architectural relief recovered from the plowed surface of Late Roman Kopetra.

Kopetra's Late Roman builders (Fig. 5). The suspected presence of major buildings beneath the cultivated surface of the site was confirmed in 1986 when the Cypriot Department of Public Works cut over 200 meters of irrigation pipeline through the vicinity. In addition to several Late Bronze Age tombs in the nearby Mangia area, over twenty Roman-era structures were intersected by the construction trenches, which zigzagged haphazardly across the site.⁶ The located buildings include various isolated walls; a large, apparently public structure; and an industrial quarter with a kiln for the manufacture of roof tiles. Fig. 6 records a cross-section of one such building as it was exposed by this vigorous but unscientific excavation. Characteristic local building practices include the use of gypsum slab floor paving and sturdy plastered walls constructed of fieldstone and brick, techniques still used in local Cypriot villages. In most cases the occupation stratigraphy of these buildings appears limited to two or three major periods of closely phased occupation in Late Roman times.

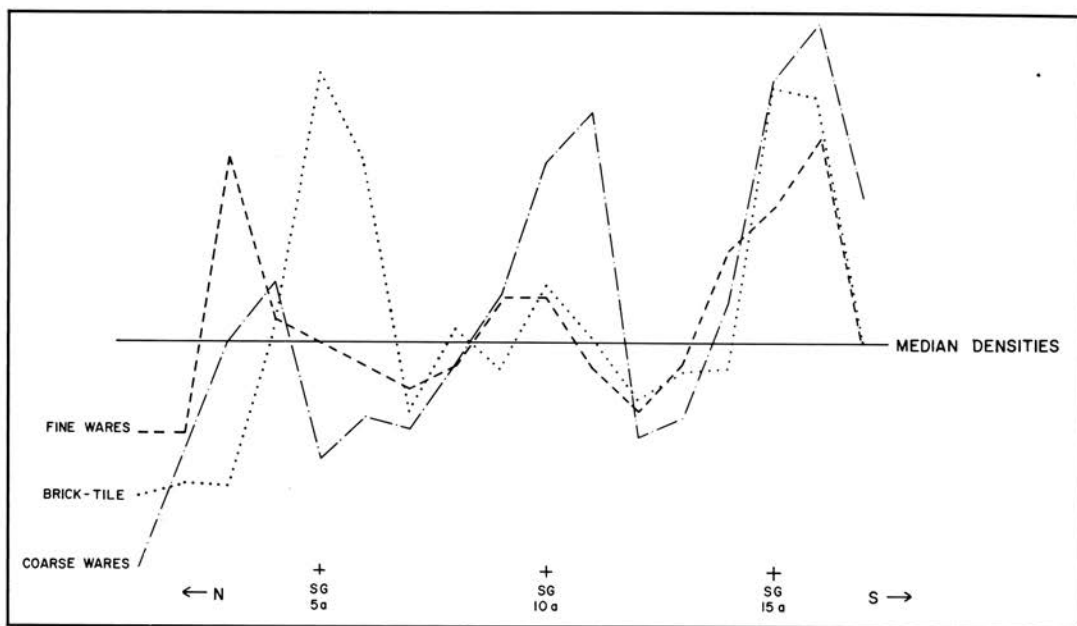
Field work in 1987 was directed toward a detailed topographical survey of the physical terrain of the Kopetra region. Despite gradual domestic encroachment, the area remains relatively unobstructed by recent settlement and is cultivated primarily for annual crops like wheat and tomatoes with a few scattered carob trees. A total area of approximately 25 hectares was surveyed and its major topographic features recorded on a 1:500 plan with one-meter contour intervals. Especially important for future work at the site is the establishment of a uniform grid system, based on official government survey coordinates, that was fixed using local benchmarks.



6. Section of Late Roman building encountered by irrigation trench (1986).

Assisted by the Kopetra survey map, we were able to initiate a program of methodological surface study of one part of the site. The light agricultural use of most of the area was ideally suited to our purposes, for the recently plowed fields significantly enhanced visibility of small-scale objects. Our goal was to acquire a reliable overview of the area, including the relative extent of settlement and its topographic framework, which would guide our plans for future work. While the presence of a substantial Late Roman community was evident from the general density of surface finds, we hoped to clarify the original boundaries of the settlement and determine something of its internal organization. Toward these goals a 340-meter-long north-south transect was laid across the site to serve as the baseline for an intensive survey of surface artifacts (coordinates E8305/N5890-6230). Alternate 20-meter squares were staked out along this transect and all diagnostic pot-sherds, glass fragments, coins, and architectural fragments were collected. The material assembled by this judgment sample should provide a general picture of the typological and chronological range of artifacts in local use.

A second, complementary collection procedure was used in order to study the relative distribution of objects across the site. In this case the northwest quadrant of each 20-meter square was intensively sampled by total artifact collection (prior to the judgment sample). Within each square all roof tiles were sorted and counted in the field; pottery, glass, terracottas, coins, and other objects were cleaned and studied in the expedition laboratory in Kalavassos. The results of this intensive quantified survey of uniform grids may



7. Relative densities of selected survey artifacts, as varying from numerical medians, recorded along 1987 transect (E8305/N5890–6230) [fine ware = x ; coarse ware = $x/5$; brick/tile = $x/20$].

distinguish general differences among individual neighborhoods while remaining sensitive to subtleties of urban chronology and function. Moreover, the assembled data should facilitate comparisons among different parts of the Kopetra site, as well as with other sites in the valley. Future excavation will test the validity of our assumptions and help us refine our methods.

A preliminary analysis of the material collected by this transect survey offers some idea of its potential contribution. The density of sherds and other artifacts varies across the survey area. Fig. 7 records the quantities of brick and roof tile as well as coarse and fine ceramic wares recovered from the survey, and shows how they vary from their respective numerical medians. The clear contrasts among sampled squares indicate the approximate boundaries of the Late Roman settlement and perhaps significant inter-site variations. At the northern extreme of the transect (SG 1A, 2A), densities occur at a low level of 0.09–0.20 sherds (0.12–0.35 artifacts) per square meter. At the opposite extreme, parts of Late Roman Kopetra present peak totals of 1.49 sherds and 5.08 artifacts per square meter (SG 16A). Of potential significance may also be the relative quantities of materials found across the site. Architectural debris and pottery appear in their greatest concentrations toward opposite edges of the

survey area, with a significant crest toward the site's center. The fact that these statistical peaks occur in neighboring but not contiguous squares reduces the possibility of sampling error and suggests extensive occupation along the settlement's periphery.

The relative distribution of cultural materials across the site provides a historical cross-section of human settlement at Kalavassos-Kopetra. Traces of Chalcolithic and Cypro-Archaic activities are evident at the north extreme of the site, near Mangia, an area that apparently lay outside the orbit of intensive Roman habitation. The typological profile of Late Roman pottery recovered by the 1987 survey suggests certain distinctive patterns of supply and distribution with important implications for the site's urban history. While most of the identifiable material is of Cypriot origin, many of the fine wares and amphoras came from elsewhere in the Mediterranean, in particular Syria, Egypt, south and west Asia Minor, and north Africa. A preliminary assessment of fine wares from the site offers some tentative clues. Of the total number of fine-ware sherds (169) recovered from the site, 8.3% (14) are of known African Red Slip wares, 27.2% (46) are of western Asia Minor origin ("Late Roman C"), and 60.4% (102) are of presumed Cypriot manufacture ("Late Roman D").⁷ Study of the chronological range of Kopetra's fine pottery further suggests that the settlement's dependence on local sources increased with time as imports from western Asia Minor diminished after the fifth century. Somewhat surprisingly, the vast majority of Kopetra's fine wares apparently dates from the sixth and seventh centuries, which may reflect a sustained level of local prosperity after many larger contemporary cities had fallen into decline.

Such glimpses into Late Roman Kopetra are the result of only preliminary investigation of the site. Work in future seasons will broaden the base of the field survey, both across the settlement area and elsewhere in the valley. Excavation of selected sectors will test the implications of this site survey and refine our understanding of Cypriot chronology in the Late Roman period. When combined with ongoing study of the Vasilikos Valley environment, the exploration of Late Roman Kopetra should illuminate the life of this particular island community as well as its larger Mediterranean setting in late antiquity.

- ¹Field staff consisted of the co-directors of the Kalavassos-Kopetra Project, Murray McClellan (Pennsylvania) and Marcus Rautman (Missouri), survey consultant Susan Langdon (Missouri), and surveyor Guy Sanders (Missouri), assisted by Lee Ann Turner (Pennsylvania). Funding in support of the 1987 field season was provided by the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri–Columbia, the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, and private contributors, to all of whom the authors express their appreciation.
- ²G. H. McFadden, "The Sanctuary of Apollo at Kourion," *University of Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin* 8 (1940) 22–28; McFadden, "A Tomb of the Necropolis of Ayios Ermoyenis at Kourion," *American Journal of Archaeology* 50 (1946) 449–89.
- ³S. S. Weinberg, "Exploring the Early Bronze Age in Cyprus," *Archaeology* 9 (1956) 112–21; Weinberg, *Bamboula at Kourion: The Architecture* (University Museum Monographs 42, Philadelphia 1983).
- ⁴For preliminary reports of recent Missouri-sponsored field work in Cyprus see D. Buitron and D. Soren, "Missouri in Cyprus: The Kourion Expedition," *Muse* 13 (1979) 22–31; Buitron and Soren, "The 1980 Excavations at Kourion, Cyprus," *Muse* 14 (1980) 16–18. An overview is presented in *Studies in Cypriote Archaeology*, eds. J. C. Biers and D. Soren (Los Angeles 1981); and *The Sanctuary of Apollo Hylates at Kourion, Cyprus*, ed. D. Soren (Tucson 1987).
- ⁵I. A. Todd, "Vasilikos Valley Project: Third Preliminary Report, 1978," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 6 (1979) 265–300, at 284; and Todd, "Vasilikos Valley Project, 1977–1978: An Interim Report," *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus* 1979, 13–68, at 32. The survey will be discussed in I. A. Todd, *Vasilikos Valley Project 9: The Field Survey of the Vasilikos Valley* (S.I.M.A. LXXI:9) [forthcoming].
- ⁶M. C. McClellan, P. J. Russell, and I. A. Todd, "Kalavassos-Mangia: Rescue Excavations at a Late Bronze Age Cemetery," *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus* 1988 [in press].
- ⁷A total of 4.1% (7 sherds) is residual Eastern Sigillata or unidentified. Only minor variations were noted between intensive and judgment sample surveys and were due to the limited quantities involved. For the classes and sources of wares mentioned see J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London 1972); Hayes, *Supplement to Late Roman Pottery* (London 1980).

About the Authors

Karen M. Gerhart is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Kansas specializing in Japanese art of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. She received an M.A. in Japanese cultural history from the University of Michigan and an M.A. in art history from the University of Kansas. She has lived in Japan for eight years.

Susan Langdon received the Ph.D. degree in classical archaeology from Indiana University in 1984. Her field experience has included projects in England, Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. Her current research focuses on the arts of Geometric Greece.

Murray C. McClellan received the Ph.D. degree in Classical Archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania in 1984. As a field archaeologist he has excavated in Israel, Jordan, Libya, Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt. Co-director of the Kalavastos-Kopetra Project, he holds appointments in the Classics departments at Emory University and Agnes Scott College in Atlanta.

Marcus L. Rautman, assistant professor of art history and archaeology at the University of Missouri–Columbia, received the Ph.D. from Indiana University in 1984. His research interests in Late Roman and Byzantine archaeology have led to fieldwork in Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. He is co-director of the Kalavastos-Kopetra Project.