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## Kalavasos-Kopetra, 1988

1. Kalavasos-Kopetra,  
from the west.

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

The second campaign of the joint Missouri-Pennsylvania mission to Kalavasos-Kopetra took place during a seven-week field season in July and August 1988.<sup>1</sup> The project continued to explore the setting and settlement of a small, previously undocumented Late Roman town located in the lower Vasilikos valley on the south coast of Cyprus. The site's importance in antiquity is emphasized by its strategic location perched atop a tall bluff overlooking communication routes along the island's southern shore and inland along the Vasilikos River (fig. 1). Survey work in previous years detected evidence for the area's habitation in the Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, and Cypro-Archaic periods, but noted that Kopetra's phase of

greatest activity occurred during the fourth through seventh centuries A.D., a period when it served as the primary settlement of the lower valley.<sup>2</sup> Topographic reconnaissance conducted in 1987 was followed this year by expanded survey of the Late Roman settlement and excavation in one part of the habitation site.

The intensive surface survey of the Kopetra region is an integral part of the overall project design. Spurred by the lower valley's increasing commercial use, the survey is systematically recording land in imminent danger of development. Our objectives include delineating settlement patterns in the Kopetra vicinity and analyzing the distribution of artifacts on the intrasite level. The basic unit of survey is the twenty-meter grid, of which alternate squares are sampled for diagnostic materials. The northwest quadrant of each grid square is independently sampled by total artifact collection, thus permitting quantified comparisons among different parts of the site (fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Selective excavation of different parts of the site will test the Kopetra survey results and refine its methods.

The 6,800-square-meter area sampled in 1987 was expanded this summer by an additional 14,000 square meters. Since the project design aims at a 50 percent coverage of available parts of the site, our total area sample now exceeds four hectares. The urgency of the field survey is emphasized by the valley's rapid agricultural and residential development, which over the last two years has consumed several large fields within the Kopetra region.

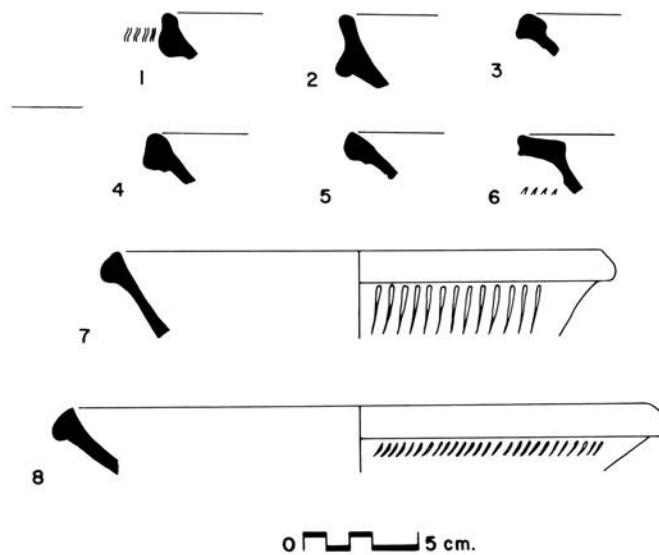
Field conditions in high summer directed attention primarily to the relatively level area lying between the high bluff ridge of Kopetra and the Sirmata mound further east.<sup>4</sup> Most of this area was



2. Survey team sampling part of the habitation site.

well suited to survey, consisting of open, recently cut wheat fields with good artifact visibility. Aided by such conditions, systematic sampling revealed clear contrasts among otherwise indistinguishable plots. To our surprise, the distribution of artifacts around the Sirmata hillock appears limited to the mound itself, with a sharp drop in collected materials observed on all sides of that sector.

Equally striking is a dense concentration of artifacts encountered in the fields between Sirmata and the Kopetra ridge area. This focus is distinct from both the mound and the presumed urban center at Kopetra and includes heavy accumulations of brick, tile, and pottery. The greatest concentration of finds occurs in SG26A, where peak densities of 3.27 sherds and 7.00 artifacts per square meter were recorded. Total artifact densities drop to half this level at radiate distances of twenty to forty meters, and then rapidly descend to quantities less than a tenth of the peak further west and east. This clearly delimited distribution suggests the presence of a subnucleus of Late Roman occupation measuring approximately sixty meters across (SG24-27). Amphora sherds constitute the greatest portion of the ceramic finds and are primarily of a type probably produced on Cyprus and in Syria.<sup>5</sup> Fine wares include mostly bowls of probable Cypriot manufacture as well as imported vessels from North Africa, western Asia Minor, and Egypt (fig. 3). As was observed in the 1987 season, the preponderance of Kopetra's fine wares apparently belongs to the late sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>6</sup> Their association with other artifacts suggests that a small habitation center may have stood in the area, close to, yet slightly apart from, the primary settlement at Kopetra.



3. Selected fine wares  
from SG24-27.

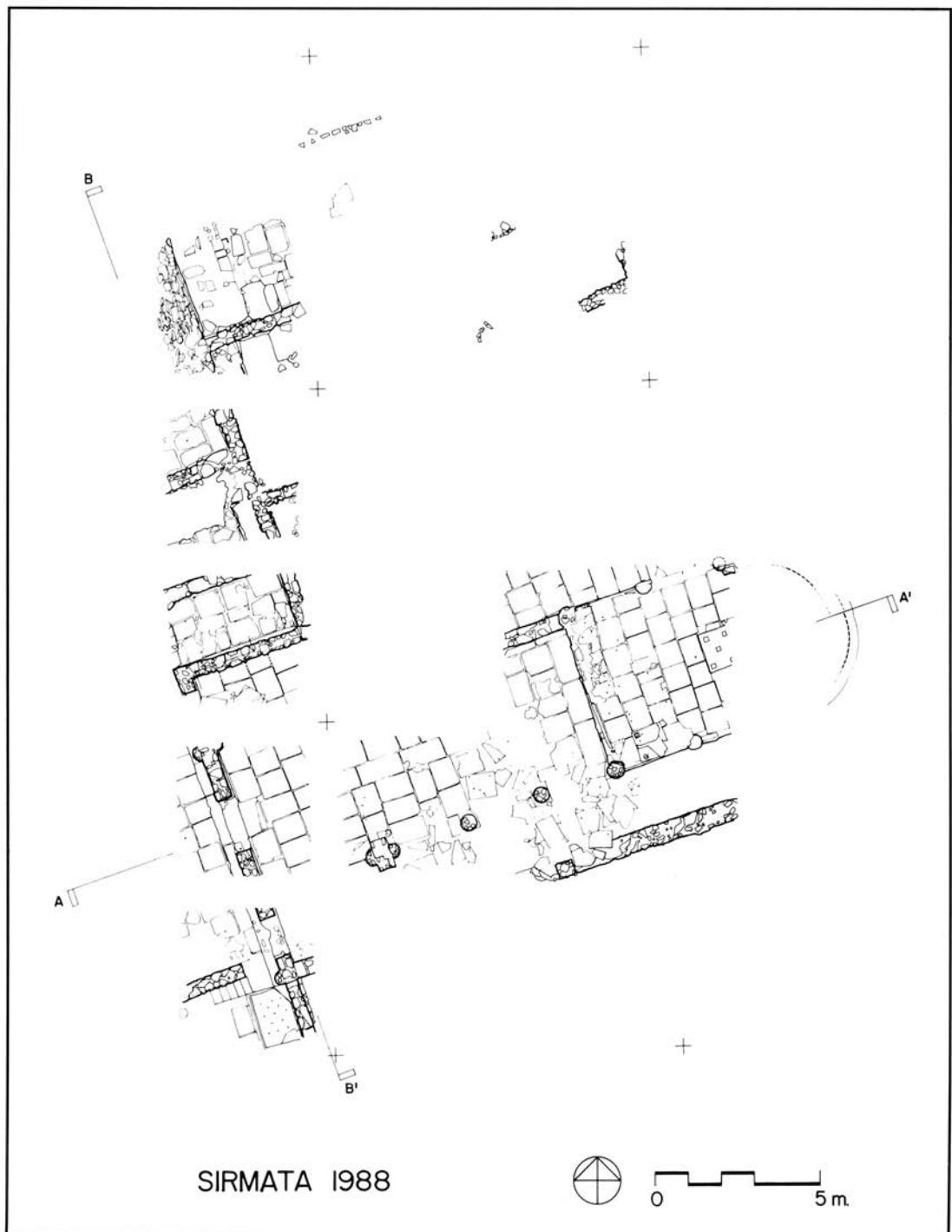
4. Sirmata, top of mound before excavation.



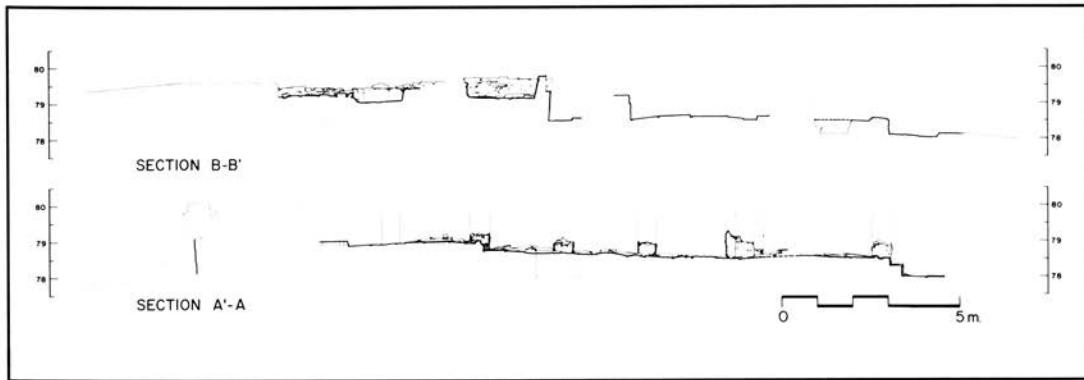
Guided by earlier survey results, in 1988 we initiated excavations at the low mound known as Sirmata. The hill stands about 300 meters east of the Kopetra ridge. Occupying about 800 square meters in area, it rises to an average height of 5.0 meters above the surrounding fields. Dense surface accumulations of brick, stone, and other building materials have long rendered it useless for agricultural purposes, with the result that the hill has remained relatively undisturbed until recent times (fig. 4). During construction of the new Limassol-Nicosia highway, it briefly served as the site of an asphalt works, at which time it suffered significant damage around its west, south, and east perimeters. The trauma of this recent bulldozing emphasized both the presence of major architecture at the site and the need to salvage and conserve the destabilized building remains.

During the 1988 season we opened a total of ten trenches at Sirmata. Excavation was carried out in five-meter squares, leaving 0.5-meter balks on all sides to aid in recording stratigraphy and features. Several of these balks were later removed in order to resolve architectural problems with the excavated remains. We were pleased to find that floor levels, which lay 0.4 to 1.5 meters below ground level, were generally well preserved. Fig. 5 records the architectural features as they stood exposed at the close of the season.

Our work at Sirmata revealed substantial parts of a building complex of Late Roman date. The largest identified structure is a three-aisle basilica oriented toward the northeast, which stands on the south half of the hilltop. Extending northward from the building's



5. Sirmata, state plan of excavation.



6A and B. Sirmata,  
sections through Late  
Roman building  
complex.

west end is a range of small spaces that were probably related to the basilica's original use. In its present state the building complex preserves most of its paved interior floors and lower walls, which stand as high as 1.25 meters. Objects recovered from the latest phases of the building give a date in the sixth and seventh centuries for its latest occupation and ultimate abandonment.

In its present, partially excavated state the Sirmata basilica comprises a three-aisle hall with single apse and narthex. The basilica stands 9.0 meters wide and extends 16.0 meters from the broad doorway in its west wall to the apse (fig. 6A). Two rows of composite gypsum piers separate the nave from the 1.8-meter-wide side aisles and originally supported an open-work timber roof. Small windows in the outer walls would have brought the strong Mediterranean light into the church. All three aisles were paved with large, carefully laid gypsum blocks, most of which survive (fig. 7).

The sanctuary of the basilica stands at the east end of the central aisle or nave. Preceding the apse is an almost square, raised platform or bema that occupies the first two intercolumniations (fig. 8). Paved with large gypsum slabs at a level approximately 0.25 meters above the nave floor, this surface preserves traces of the sanctuary's original liturgical furnishings. A slightly recessed edge along the perimeter of the platform may have anchored an enclosure screen. Before the center of the apse is the probable base of the main altar. This base consists of a single block of gypsum, measuring 1.21 by 0.92 by 0.11 meters, that was mortared onto the floor. Five 0.12-meter-square holes originally held the legs of the altar top. A second, similarly cut base was found along the south edge of the chancel platform and may have supported a second table, perhaps for offerings.<sup>7</sup> The area enclosed by the apse wall, of which the north half has survived to a height of 1.0 meters, remains to be explored next year.



7. Sirmata basilica, nave from the north.



8. Sirmata basilica, east end of nave.

A broad narthex precedes the basilica to the west. Two uneven steps rise 0.5 meters from the paved floor of this vestibule to the three doorways of the nave and side aisles. Between these openings the east narthex wall was articulated by a row of applied half-column shafts; their symmetrical reconstruction would have reflected the tripartite division of the basilica's interior. The 1.6-meter-wide central doorway preserves its threshold with traces of its original iron pivots and fittings. To the south opens a 1.2-meter-wide lateral doorway. The west limits of the narthex remain to be explored in a future season.

Despite its limited surviving height, the Sirmata basilica preserves significant traces of its original interior decoration. All three aisles were paved with carefully laid gypsum blocks, a material known on the island as *marmara*.<sup>8</sup> A row of 0.6-meter wide slabs extends the length of the nave, marking the basilica's central axis. The rest of the interior's floor was laid in a roughly symmetrical pattern outward from this axis. The building's rising walls and interior piers were built of mortared gypsum blocks, which were internally clad in slabs of *marmara* revetment and plastered over. Sections of rounded gypsum moldings recovered about the sector probably once articulated doorways and window openings. Pilaster capitals, molded of gypsum plaster in low foliage relief, further enlivened the building's interior (fig. 9).

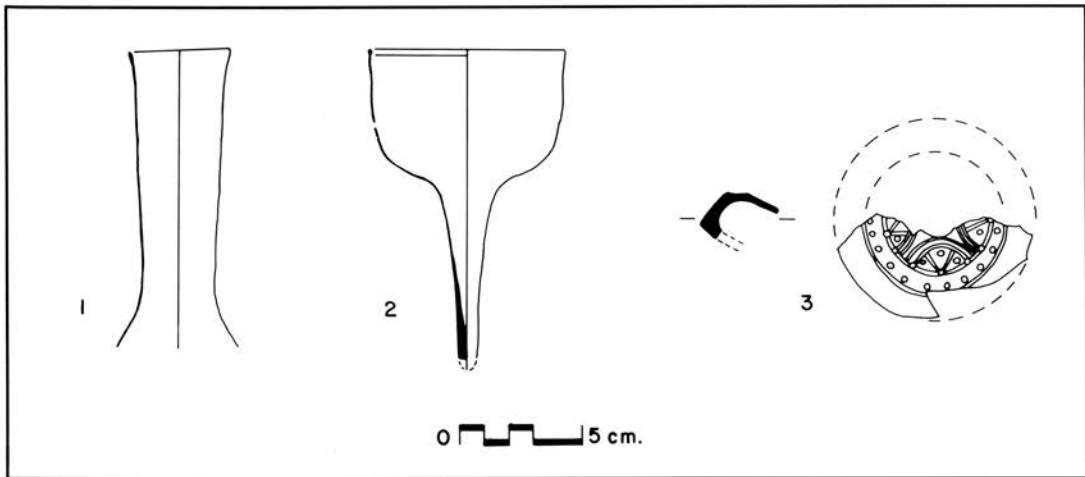
9. Gypsum plaster pilaster capital from Sirmata basilica.



Excavation at the south end of the narthex revealed part of an apparent crypt attached to the basilica. This space was accessible from the narthex by a stairway of six steps which descended about two meters to a packed earthen surface (fig. 10). While the original date and use of the space are still unclear, at one point a spacious tomb built of carefully cut and incised gypsum slabs was installed in its northeast corner.<sup>9</sup> Recovered from the fill within the chamber were the skeletal remains of two or three individuals. Fragments of fifth- to seventh-century glass, pottery, and a terracotta lamp were found nearby (fig. 11).<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that the tomb remained in use even after an initial collapse, perhaps reflecting the importance of its occupants. A second phase of destruction included the fall of surrounding walls and the chamber's roof.



10. Sirmata, west end of basilica and north-lying spaces.

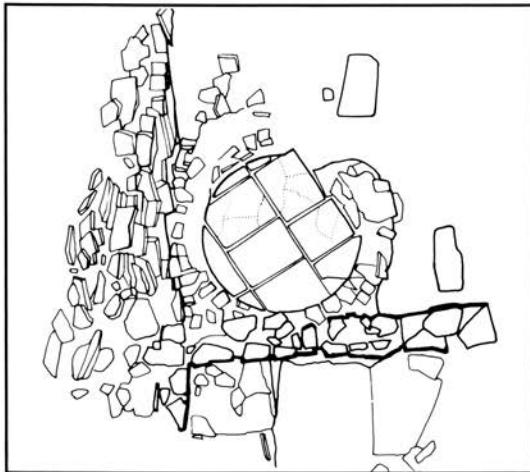


11. Selected finds from chamber south of narthex: neck of glass vessel, glass polycandela, and terracotta lamp.

In its partially excavated state, only the general outlines of the Sirmata basilica's plan are clear. With its three aisles and narthex, the building belongs to a group of small basilicas found throughout the Late Roman empire, of which several are known in Cyprus.<sup>11</sup> Its modest dimensions rank the building among the island's smaller churches, comparable to Ayios Georgios III at Peyia and the Asomatoi at Aphendrika.<sup>12</sup> The close 1.8- to 2.0-meter spacing of the nave piers would have supported a lightweight timber architrave, as likely also found at Ayios Philon.<sup>13</sup> The furnishings and decoration of the Sirmata basilica are not unusual for Cyprus. The raised bema is found in most of the early basilicas on the island. Similarly, the use of stucco for architectural moldings and pilaster capitals occurs across the island, reflecting the excellent quality of local gypsum deposits.<sup>14</sup> More distinctive is the casting of gypsum in a structural role at Sirmata; its use in floors, rising walls, and piers in lieu of marble is eloquent witness to its local availability as well as the modest resources of the Vasilikos community.<sup>15</sup>

A group of related spaces lying immediately to the north of the Sirmata basilica was also explored in 1988. Isolated sections of gypsum paving and wall foundations were visible before excavation began in the natural escarpment of the hillock. Other parts of these spaces were studied in four five-meter trenches, which revealed at least six intercommunicating rooms to the north of the church. None of these spaces has been completely cleared, and questions of shape and function await further excavation.

The six identified spaces flank a continuous wall that projects along the approximate line of the basilica's westernmost nave piers (figs. 6B, 10). Adjoining the basilica's northwest corner is a small trapezoidal room. The space preserves a sturdy gypsum floor, as



12. Sirmata, domestic oven discovered in north range of rooms.

well as its plastered lower walls, and was probably originally roofed. Immediately to the north of this room is a space whose battered walls stand to a height of only 0.25 meters. Its eroded floor suggests an open court, and a shallow pit installed in its southeast corner was apparently used for cooking in a late phase of the building's occupation.

Four larger adjoining spaces also occupy the north part of the hillock. At least one of these rooms retains vestiges of its coarse gypsum paving along its north wall, together with a low platform or bench in one corner. Further north is another space whose gypsum floor extends to the eroded edge of the hillock. Although its original function is unclear, in its last phase of use this space featured a small oven built atop its floor (fig. 12). The oven, constructed of reused brick and stone, was circular in plan with an interior diameter of 1.6 meters. Its floor was covered with thick square bricks, and an opening to the north provided access for fuel and oxygen. Sparse contextual finds offer only an approximate sixth- to seventh-century date for the area's latest use, which was probably for domestic cooking.<sup>16</sup>

The second season of work at Kalavasos-Kopetra has provided the first detailed glimpse of Late Roman occupation in the Vasilikos valley. Surface survey work is intensively recording the archaeological topography of a rapidly changing landscape. Guided by the surface distribution of artifacts, the initial excavations at Sirmata have revealed an important architectural landmark of the valley in Late Roman times and provided the first view of an unexplored phase of the valley's history. Future seasons will further expand our understanding of the final flourishing of this modest Roman settlement of late antiquity.

<sup>1</sup>The Kalavasos-Kopetra Project has since its inception benefited from the interest and support of Dr. Vassos Karageorghis, Dr. Athanasios Papa-georghiou, and the staff of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus. The project 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. Core field staff in 1988 consisted of co-directors Murray McClellan and Marcus Rautman, survey coordinator Susan Langdon, architect Virginia Delaney, and archaeologists William Andreas, Jackie Eyle, Sotiri Hadjicharlambos, Victoria Nevius, Karen Walker, Bennet Witt, and Louisa Zambili. Other excavation staff included volunteers organized by Earthwatch. Funding in support of the 1988 field season was provided by the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia; the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania; the Center for Field Research; the Dumbarton Oaks Research Center; and private contributors. To all these participants, staff, volunteers, and sponsors, the authors express their thanks.

<sup>2</sup>See M. L. Rautman and M. C. McClellan, "Cyprus at the End of Antiquity: Investigations at Kalavasos-Kopetra," *Muse* 21 (1987) 45-54; I. A. Todd, *Vasilikos Valley Project 9: The Field Survey of the Vasilikos Valley* (S.I.M.A. LXXI:9) [forthcoming].

<sup>3</sup>*Muse* 21 (1987) 51-52.

<sup>4</sup>*Muse* 21 (1987) fig. 4.

<sup>5</sup>The provenience has been discussed recently in D. P. S. Peacock and D. F. Williams, *Amphorae and the Roman Economy* (London 1986), 185-87, class 44.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Muse* 21 (1987) 53 and n. 7. A total of 252 Late Roman fine ware sherds was recovered in the five survey squares that define this cluster. The relative incidence of wares within this total is as follows:

African Red Slip	2	0.8 %
Late Roman C	113	44.9 %
Cypriot Red Slip	128	50.8 %
Egyptian Red Slip	5	2.0 %
Unidentified and residual	4	1.6 %

The vast majority of identifiable vessels are of forms dating after c. A.D. 550.

<sup>7</sup>Evidence for such a secondary offering table was found in the church at Ayios Philon; see J. du Plat Taylor and A. H. S. Megaw, "Excavations at Ayios Philon, the Ancient Carpasia. Part II. The Early Christian buildings," *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus* 1981, 209-50, at 235.

<sup>8</sup>Concerning the use of gypsum of Late Antique Cyprus, see A. H. S. Megaw, "Interior Decoration in Early Christian Cyprus," *XVe Congrès international d'études byzantines, Athènes, 1976. Rapports et courrapports* 5, no. 4 (Athens 1976) 1-29, at 4.

<sup>9</sup>Similarly located burials within Cypriot churches are found at Peyia (Ayios Georghos) and Amathus (Basilica A).

<sup>10</sup>The lamp, which is discoid in shape and lacks projecting spout and handle, is decorated with semicircles and raised dots. It belongs to a class of Late Roman lamps that may have originated on Cyprus; see O.

Vessberg, "Hellenistic and Roman Lamps in Cyprus," *Opuscula Atheniensia* 1 (1953) 115-29, class 20; and T. Oziol, *Salamine de Chypre*, vol. 7, *Les lampes du musée de Chypre* (Paris, 1977), 279-86 ("lampes byzantines en galet"). Unlike most of this series, the Sirmata lamp is moldmade, with its decoration in relief. The glass finds include seven fragments from the rim and neck of a large bottle of a transparent light bluish glass and nine fragments of a transparent light greenish-blue glass which preserve nearly the entire profile of a stemmed lamp. The tall, conical neck could have come from one of several bottle types that date from the fourth through seventh centuries; cf. D. Barag, "The Glass Vessels," in N. Avigad, *Beth She'arim*, vol. 3, *Catacombs* 12-23 (Jerusalem, 1976), 205, fig. 98:9; D. B. Harden, "Some Tomb Groups of Late Roman Date in the Amman Museum," *Annales du 3e Congrès des Journées Internationales du Verre* (Damascus, 1964), fig. 11; A. von Saldern, *Ancient and Byzantine Glass from Sardis* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 69-71, nos. 476-87, pl. 26. The stemmed lamp, designed to be fitted into a polycandela, can be dated to the fifth through seventh centuries; cf. M. Chavane, *Salamine de Chypre*, vol. 6, *Les petits objets* (Paris, 1975), 65, nos. 171-72; von Saldern, *Glass*, 49-52, nos. 280-86, pl. 23; D. B. Harden, "Glass," in H. D. Cole, *Excavations at Nessana (Auja Hafir, Palestine)*, vol. I (London, 1962), 83-85, nos. 51-54.

<sup>11</sup>For a recent survey of church building on Cyprus in the Late Roman period, see A. Papageorgiou, "L'architecture paléochrétienne de Chypre," *Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 32 (1985) 299-324.

<sup>12</sup>A. H. S. Megaw, "Byzantine Architecture and Decoration in Cyprus, Metropolitan or Provincial?" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974) 57-88, at 70 fig. E; *idem*, "Three Vaulted Basilicas in Cyprus," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 66 (1946) 48-56, at 49 fig. 2.

<sup>13</sup>Du Plat Taylor and Megaw, "Excavations at Ayios Philon," 233.

<sup>14</sup>Megaw, "Byzantine Architecture and Decoration," 69. The most elaborate preserved local use of stucco decoration was excavated in a domestic context at Salamis; see G. Argoud, O. Callot, and B. Helly, *Salamine de Chypre*, vol. 11, *Une résidence byzantine l'Huilerie* (Paris, 1980).

<sup>15</sup>Gypsum was also used extensively in a structural capacity at Marathovounou; see A. Papageorgiou, "He basilike Marathovounou," *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*, 1963, 84-101.

<sup>16</sup>Similar baking ovens were identified at Salamis in seventh-century and later contexts; see G. Argoud, "Fours à pain et fours à chaux byzantins de Salamine," *Salamine de Chypre. Histoire et archéologie* (Paris, 1980), 329-39; Argoud, Callot, and Helly, *Salamine de Chypre*, 11:10, 22.

# About the Authors

**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 Kalavasos-Kopetra Project, he holds appointments in the Classics departments at Emory University and Agnes Scott College in Atlanta.

**Robert T. Soppelsa** is associate professor of art history at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, where he has taught since 1981. He holds graduate degrees from Ohio State University and New York University. His areas of special interest are West African art and archaeology, with concentration on the Akan of southeastern Ivory Coast and southwestern Ghana. Recent publications include "Assoungu: A Terracotta Tradition of Southeastern Ivory Coast," *Africa* vol. 57 (1987) and "Western Art Historical Methodology and African Art: Panofsky's Paradigm and Ivoirian *Mma*," *Art Journal* vol. 47 (1988). He is currently working on a catalogue raisonné of the bronze relief plaques from the kingdom of Benin.

**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 Kalavasos-Kopetra Project.

**Wendy Wassyng Roworth** is the chair of the Department of Art and associate professor of art history at the University of Rhode Island. She holds degrees from Bryn Mawr College and Harvard University and has published and lectured widely on Angelica Kauffman and eighteenth-century painting. Her publications include articles on the seventeenth-century Italian artist Salvator Rosa, and the book "*Pictor Succensor*": A Study of Salvator Rosa as Satirist, Cynic, and Painter (1978).