



Figure 30. Survey plan of Sotira-Teppés.

EXCAVATIONS AT SOTIRA—1951*

In the summer of 1951 Mr. P. Dikaios, Curator of the Cyprus Museum, excavated at Sotira, the settlement of Neolithic times near Curium. This dig was a joint undertaking of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus and the Curium Expedition of the University Museum. The preliminary trial excavation made by Mr. Dikaios in the summer of 1947 gave promise of good results. Mr. Dikaios' report of his work in 1951, which follows, shows that these anticipations were justified; the Neolithic site at Sotira illustrates the phase of culture which falls between that of Khirokitia, the earliest Cypriote settlement so far excavated, and that of Erimi, somewhat later and more developed. The Sotira site is thus an important link in the development of the Neolithic culture of Cyprus.

R. S. Y.

In the UNIVERSITY MUSEUM BULLETIN for June 1948 (Vol. XIII, No. 3), pp. 16 ff., I gave a preliminary account of the 1947 trial excavation of the Curium Expedition at Sotira on the site called Teppés. One of the chief results of that trial was the discovery of houses with circular plan in trench IV, and of substantial architectural remains in trench V, which runs through the center of the plateau of the hill.

In resuming my excavations for the Expedition in March 1951, I thought it advisable to concentrate on laying bare the remains on the entire plateau. By doing so we could uncover a sufficiently large portion of the settlement on a part of the site which by its situation formed an independent entity. It was hoped, moreover, that the architectural remains and all that went with them would be found in a better state of preservation than on the slopes, where the remains had suffered from erosion and recent terracing.

* My thanks are due: to the University Museum of Philadelphia, to the Director of the Curium Expedition, Mr. B. H. Hill, and to Mr. George McFadden for inviting me to take charge of the excavations; to Mr. A. H. S. Megaw, Director of Antiquities in Cyprus, for making it possible for me to do so; to Mr. J. S. Last of the Curium Expedition for preparing a survey of the site (see Fig. 30); to Mr. Elias Markou, the Surveyor of the Department, for making all the plans of the excavated remains; to Museum Assistant Mr. Kakoullis Georghiou for carrying out the duties of foreman, photographer, and, at times, expert digger. The present season lasted from the 8th to the 28th of March. At the close of the season the excavated area was fenced with barbed wire for protection. All the large stone implements and other details (grinders, querns, screen walls, etc.) have been left in their original position and may now be viewed by visitors. Eventually it is hoped to expropriate the area and declare it an Ancient Monument.



Figure 31. General view of the excavations.

Our aims in both these respects have been fulfilled. An area of the settlement 810 meters square and covering almost the entire plateau has been excavated, laying bare twenty-three house units and giving an excellent impression of a prehistoric settlement (Figs. 30, 31). This impression is rendered all the more vivid by the fine preservation both of the rubble foundations of the dwellings and of their floors. Indeed some of these are so well preserved with all the household paraphernalia of a prehistoric dwelling that one has the impression that if the superstructures were put up again, life could continue as if it had never been interrupted.

Our first task was to uncover as much of the plateau settlement as possible in order to study the general plan and then to proceed to the detailed examination of the floors of the various house units. As already mentioned, we laid bare twenty-three of them to the level of the topmost floor (called



floor I). Only in about ten of these houses have we proceeded to the level of the underlying floor II.

The ground plans of the exposed houses belong to three main types: (a) the circular, which may be slightly elongated; (b) the circular with one straightened side, forming a horse-shoe plan (Fig. 32); (c) the rectangular with rounded angles (Fig. 31). The placing of the house units on the site does not show any systematic arrangement with deliberate planning of houses and streets. Houses are erected rather haphazardly with narrow spaces for circulation left between them. In some cases larger irregular spaces are left between house units, but these spaces are occupied by subsidiary light structures used as kitchens or workshops. The lack of systematic arrangement is particularly evident where the plan of the houses is rectangular and an angle of a rectangle at times touches the long side of another (Fig. 30).



Figure 32. Circular house with one side straight.



Figure 33. Hearth in House II.

Figure 34. Clay vessels, grinder, etc., in situ.



Figure 35. Stone trough wedged in floor for making bread (?).

Figure 36. Flint-making installation.



Although no streets, properly speaking, were provided in the part of the settlement lying on the plateau, which, as already mentioned, seems to form a separate entity or "quarter" of the settlement, yet streets seem to have been constructed on the slopes in order to provide communication between the various "quarters" of the settlement and to facilitate the ascent from the lower parts to the plateau. This is suggested by the discovery of a thick curved wall in trench III described in my previous report in the BULLETIN (p. 18) and which appears to be a main road with side paths branching off from it. This arrangement is much the same as that observed in the earlier settlement of Khirokitia.

The walls of the dwellings of all types have a lower part built of stones (mostly limestone boulders) while the superstructure which has not survived, was presumably of mudbrick. This is suggested by the lumps of pisé containing fine straw found in the layer overlying floor II over which the topmost floor was made. This carries a suggestion of demolition of the superstructure at the time of floor II, following which the houses were reconstructed and a new floor made (floor I, see below). Apart from pisé, small stones were also found in the demolition layer as well as strips of ashes observable in section, suggesting that pisé, stones, and wood were used to make up the superstructure. The roofing must have been different in the various types of dwellings. The circular or oblong houses must have had thatched roofs, probably conical or domed, reminding one of the older tholoi of Khirokitia and those, even more like, of Erimi. The roof of the horse-shoe shaped hut must have been a half-dome of pisé. That this material was used for the superstructure of this type of house is suggested by the demolition layer in one of the huts of this shape (House II, Fig. 32), which layer was of yellow-white decomposed pisé.

The superstructure and especially the roofing of the rectangular houses are an interesting problem. As already mentioned, the upper parts of the walls were of sun-dried mudbricks with a small quantity of stones probably inserted to strengthen the mudbrick. The roofing must have been of beams and thatching, probably flat with vertical posts resting in the floor and supporting the roof-beams. Central post-holes have been found in nearly all the floors of the rectangular houses but post-holes are also found in other parts of the floor and in some cases near the walls. These post-holes are round depressions with small stones all around and sometimes a single

stone in the bottom. Post-holes have been traced also in huts of circular or oblong plan as well as in subsidiary huts, attached to the main dwellings, which were used as kitchens or workshops. Of these the superstructure was probably light, made of thin beams and branches, the whole supported by vertical posts resting in the floor.

The floors were made of yellowish mud or soil, beaten hard. The main feature on them was the hearth. Nearly all the houses possessed a hearth, some even having two. These hearths were built of yellow pisé and were circular in plan approximately one meter across. They were raised 15-20 centimeters above the general level of the floor and had at the center a circular depression in which the fire was made (Fig. 33). Now these depressions are easily distinguishable by the dark color due to the action of fire and from the filling of ashes, sometimes containing lumps of burnt pisé. The position of the hearth varies, but central hearths have been found. In one case (House II, Figs. 32-33) the hearth was surrounded by four posts at the four angles standing in post-holes through the floor in a manner similar to that of the Mycenaean megaron (Cf. A. J. B. Wace, *Mycenae*, p. 77, pl. 96). Similar arrangement has been observed in other huts possessing hearths, but the evidence for the four posts is not everywhere equally clear. In the same House II (Fig. 32) north of the hearth we uncovered a low bench built of pisé and stones, on which the inhabitants sat and warmed themselves. In other cases we found boulders or slabs near the hearth, suggesting crude seating arrangements.

Apart from hearths the floors showed other features. Among the most frequent and important of these was the area in which grinding was done. This was a corner of the house screened off by a low wall, in which querns, grinders, pestles, etc., were placed (Fig. 32). Seats, mostly built of a boulder or two, were provided near the quern. Other corners were similarly screened to contain the clay vessels of the household (Fig. 34). Stone troughs, probably for making bread, were also placed on the floors, then wedged in with small pebbles and surrounded by large stones (Fig. 35). The floors were covered with all sorts of implements and tools of flint or stone as well as of bone. In one of the houses the corner where flint tools were prepared was found intact, with the stone hammer, the flint cores, the seat of the flint-maker and a few flakes still *in situ* (Fig. 36).



Figure 38. Stone axe with antler handle *in situ*.



Figure 37. Bone handle of flint or stone tool.



Figure 39. Limestone idol and broken pottery *in situ*.



Figure 40. Red lustrous deep bowl.



Figure 41. Part of jug of combed ware.



Figure 42. Part of large bowl of combed ware.

In another house a stone axe with its antler handle nearby (Fig. 38) and a bone handle for a flint or stone implement (Fig. 37) were found on the floor. In yet another house a limestone idol was found among broken pottery (Fig. 39).

Cooking was done in subsidiary huts adjoining main ones. Here the floors were burnt by the continuous use of fire, and charcoal was found in quantities.

I have mentioned previously that it was on the floors of the lower layer that a great wealth of material was found almost intact. The good preservation of all the installations gives the impression of an unexpected calamity which brought down the superstructure and buried everything underneath. This catastrophe was noticed in most of the houses investigated to the level of floor II; it is also evidenced in the stratification of the layer between floor II and floor I, which was composed of debris, stones, etc., evidently from the collapsed superstructure of the earlier houses. Following this sudden destruction the houses were reconstructed and new floors were made at a slightly higher level (I).

The pottery collected on the floors includes red lustrous or red slip (Fig. 40), combed (Figs. 41-43), and painted wares (Fig. 44). Deep bowls, open bowls with spouts, milk-bowls and jugs are the four common shapes.



Figure 43. Part of a jug of combed ware.



Figure 44. Bowl of painted ware.

The combed ware is the most abundant of all and is most characteristic of the site, but the painted technique (red-on-white) already occurs, with simple patterns lacking in imagination. We are still far from the flowery style of the painted pottery of the following cultural stage known mostly from the site of Erimi not far from Curium and Sotira.

This year's work at Sotira has more than justified the resumption of the excavations. Architecturally the site has shown, apart from circular houses, rectangular ones, a type occurring here for the first time in these early stages of Cypriot prehistoric culture. The evidence of the finds from the floors is of exceptional interest in that it gives a vivid picture of prehistoric daily life. Pottery and other finds have been collected in good numbers and future work in the still unexplored house-floors will certainly enrich the collections already obtained.

Much remains to be done in the area already opened, where, apart from investigating the house floors, we must devote time to the "wall" along the north edge of the plateau, mentioned in my previous report in the *BULLETIN*, pp. 18 ff. and pl. VI a. (See also herewith Figs. 31 and 32.) Although progress has been made in the interpretation of this interesting feature of the site, further work is necessary before we are able to understand its full meaning.

P. DIKAIOS
Cyprus Museum