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TEST EXCAVATIONS AT CHALCOLITHIC POLITIKO KOKKINOROTSOS, 2006

The site: previous research

The Chalcolithic site of Politiko Kokkinorotsos was documented during the late 1990s by the Sydney Cyprus Survey Project (hereafter SCSP) and published as Politiko Phournia¹ (Given and Knapp 2003:192–197, 265–266, SCY 200, CS 2907). It lies several kilometres west of Politiko village, in a relatively narrow stretch of the Koufos River valley (Figure 1). A scatter of surface material of varied density was identified on the northwestern side of one field (Plot 578, Cadastral Plan XXX/57, Given and Knapp 2003:193–194, fig. 4.64; Figure 2). Subsequent geophysical prospecting suggested the presence of some twelve circular structures southeast of the main sherd scatter (Given and Knapp 2003:194–195, 266, figs 4.65, 4.66), confirming, for the SCSP, that the surface material was probably not a lag deposit deposited by slope wash from elsewhere, especially as no more than a handful of sherds were found in nearby fields.

The SCSP collected 375 prehistoric sherds, which clearly identified the site as belonging to the Chalcolithic. Claims (Given and Knapp 2003:195, 265–266) for material of transitional Late Chalcolithic and Bronze Age date, however, are less certain. None of the sherds recovered during our test excavations can be regarded as typical of the Philia facies of the Early Cypriot period, with the exception of a single fragment of Black Slip and Combed ware.

The current project

On the basis of the published account of the site and discussions with Professor A. Bernard Knapp, we became interested in undertaking further work at *Kokkinorotsos*. A number of factors influenced our decision. From a logistical perspective we were looking for a site which could produce significant and substantial results in two or three main seasons of excavations. From a more general perspective little is known of the Chalcolithic in north central Cyprus, apart from the test excavations undertaken at Ambelikou *Ayios Georghios* and Philia Site B over fifty years ago by Porphyrios Dikaios (1962:141–151), the more limited traces at Nicosia *Ayios Prodromos* (Dikaios 1935:12; Nicolaou 1967; Stanley Price 1979:99) and those located by Despo Pilides at the PASYDY

1. Use of the locality name Kokkinorotsos rather than the previously used Phournia (or Fournia) follows Department of Antiquities guidelines.

site on St. George's Hill (Hadjisavvas 1999:623). From a personal research perspective our long-term interest in the transition from the Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age in Cyprus made investigation of a Late Chalcolithic site in this part of the island especially attractive. Similarities between sherd material from *Kokkinorotsos* and the ceramic assemblage from *Ambelikou Ayios Georghios*, the chronological and cultural affiliations of which have been the subject of considerable debate (Gjerstad 1980; Peltenburg 1991), also suggested that excavations here might contribute significantly to our understanding of the interconnections between different regions of the island during the first half of the third millennium.

Geophysical prospecting, November 2005

In advance of excavations we took advantage of a generous offer by Mr John Hunt to undertake further geophysical prospecting at *Kokkinorotsos*. His resistivity survey of November 2005 failed to reveal any patterns or anomalies which he regarded as representative of buried structures or features (Figure 3). This once again raised the possibility that the surface scatter was derived from elsewhere, or that post-Chalcolithic, perhaps recent, agricultural or other activity had destroyed all contextual evidence.

As a result of this uncertainty we undertook limited test excavations at the site in April 2006, in order to ground-truth the original resistivity survey and explore more generally the potential of the site for full-scale excavation.

Test excavations, April 2006

Ten 1x2m and two 1x3m trial trenches were excavated (Figure 4).

Trenches A and G were located in an area of the field where the SCSP geophysical survey suggested a cluster of three structures. They produced no more than a handful of small sherds in the 20cm of ploughsoil above thick colluvial deposits and no structural remains or other features were found. While the failure to detect any structural remains may be explained by the small scale of the test, the almost complete absence of cultural material casts doubt on the likelihood of significant occupation in this area.

The other trenches were placed in the area identified as having the greatest density of surface material. Here, in contrast to the paucity of finds in Trenches A and G, substantial quantities of pottery and animal bone were recovered both in and below the ploughsoil. In Trenches E, F and H ploughsoil rested directly above natural soils or bedrock. In Trenches B, D and I there was a distinct intervening layer of sherds and bone. In Trenches B and D scatters of small stones and several lumps of construction material associated with the uneven and irregular bedrock surface may represent poorly preserved remains of ancient features. A more distinct and clearly identifiable circular oven-pit with hearth-stones was found in Trench I. Two other trenches (C and J) revealed a different pattern. Below the ploughsoil was a deep deposit of a fine, powdery, light, grey 'ashy' soil, with lower deposits of stony soils to a depth of well over 1m. While there was little cultural material in the grey deposits, significant quantities of bone and pottery were recovered from the lower horizon.

The absence of any evidence for substantial structures may be the result of the very limited scale of excavation. It is, however, not uncommon for Chalcolithic sites to have only minimal traces of light structures, constructed of wattle-and-daub or of pise set directly on or into the ground surface with no stone foundation courses or footings.

One AMS radiocarbon sample from the lower deposits in Trench J returned an age determination of 4151 ± 38 BP (Wk18983). This has a 47.2% probability of a date between 2780 and 2660 CalBC and a 95.4% probability of a date between 2880 and 2601 CalBC, conforming to the date expected for the Late Chalcolithic.

The finds

Artefacts

A total of 2,238 sherds were recovered from the test pits. Most of this material (85%) came from Trenches B, D, I and J. Although analysis is still in the preliminary stages, it is clear that utilitarian vessels at *Kokkinorotsos* were predominantly red monochrome or red monochrome with black tops and interiors (Figure 5), of similar fabrics, shapes and surface treatment to Late Chalcolithic assemblages from Ambelikou *Ayios Georghios* and Philia Site B (Dikaios 1962:143–146, 150–151, figs 68–69, 71, XLV–XLVI). Dikaios identified these as Red Lustrous and Red and Black Lustrous wares. The distinction between the two, however, relates only to surface treatment (Peltenburg 1991:11). Shapes include bowls, holemouths, storage vessels and possibly jugs. Bases are flat, concave or flanged. Upright tubular spouts, from bowls or holemouths, are relatively common. No lugs or handles were found, with the exception of a vertical handle. One red monochrome bowl sherd with a black interior is decorated with low relief knobs (Figure 5). A small number of Red-on-White ware sherds with lines and crosshatched bands in red paint on a cream slip were also found (Figure 6). Coarse ware was used for very thick-walled vessels and low-walled pans (Figure 6). The latter are remarkably similar in form to low-walled pans in Red Polished Philia and Red Polished wares from Marki *Alonia* (Frankel and Webb 2006:130–133, figs 4.42–4.45), which are thought to have been introduced to Cyprus at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

Ceramic finds also include a perforated sherd disk (Figure 5). Similar perforated and unperforated disks have been found in significant numbers at Kissonerga *Mosphilia* and Lemba *Lakkous* (Peltenburg *et al.* 1985:95–96, 198, 290–291, pl. 47.16–20; Peltenburg 1998:197–198, fig. 100.1–15, pl. 37.10–11), and at Marki *Alonia* and other Bronze Age sites (Frankel and Webb 2006:178–181, figs 5.21–5.23, pl. 52).

The *Kokkinorotsos* ceramics appear to belong to the same Late Chalcolithic horizon as the assemblages from Ambelikou *Ayios Georghios* and Philia Site B. The preference for strong monotone finishes and sharply defined blacks and reds on interiors and exteriors seems to be a feature of the central and northwestern parts of the island and in particular of the Morphou Bay and Ovgos Valley areas (Peltenburg 1991:17). There are, however, also similarities between these fabrics and earlier Chalcolithic material from the southwest of the island (Diane Bolger, Edgar Peltenburg pers

comm.), leaving open the possibility that *Kokkinorotsos* has an earlier habitation component dating from well before the third millennium.

A single fragment of Black Slip and Combed (BSC) ware, recovered from ploughsoil, is of particular interest (Figure 6). Two sherds of this distinctive fabric were also found at Philia Site B (Dikaios 1962:150, fig. XLVI). BSC is present, however, in larger quantities at Philia Bronze Age sites and in EB II levels at Tarsus (see Webb and Frankel 1999:25–28; Frankel and Webb 2006:103–104). It is possible that the presence of BSC at *Kokkinorotsos* and Philia Site B provides evidence of ceramic continuity between the Late Chalcolithic in the centre and northwest of the island and the earliest manifestations of the Bronze Age (Dikaios 1962:189). Alternatively, and more probably, it may reflect a more complex situation in which the partial coexistence of Late Chalcolithic and Philia communities led to some contiguous development and hybridisation in ceramic wares and the occasional movement of vessels between communities.

The small number of ground stone artefacts found in and below ploughsoil is somewhat surprising. Only five items were recovered. These include a pestle (Figure 6), an expedient tool with wear patterns suggesting use as a rubbing stone, pounder and hammerstone, a possible weight and two deep mortar fragments (Figure 6). Relatively few stone artefacts, also, are currently visible on the surface (a pecking stone and a fragmentary quern, pestle and mortar). The SCSP, however, recorded 19 fragmentary stone tools (rubbers, mortars, querns, pestles, an axe, hammerstones or pounders), as well as a picrolite bead.

One hundred and forty-three pieces of chipped stone were recovered. This material has not yet been analysed. The majority of identifiable implements, however, are scrapers. A similar situation was reported, with regard to the surface sample of 58 tools, by the SCSP (Given and Knapp 2003:196, Table 4.34).

Faunal remains

Animal bone is abundant at *Kokkinorotsos*, with over 5kg recovered in April 2006. Dr Paul Croft has undertaken a preliminary analysis of this material. Three hundred and eighteen (66.4%) bone fragments proved identifiable. Of these, *Dama mesopotamica* accounted for 73% by number and 81% by weight and caprine remains for 27% by number and 19% by weight. A minority of caprine remains could be identified to genus. These included 16 fragments of sheep and two of goat, suggesting that sheep were significantly more numerous. Pig and dog were each represented by a single fragment.

The faunal data clearly suggest that hunting and consumption of fallow deer were major activities at *Kokkinorotsos*. Sheep remains are sufficiently abundant to suggest that they were kept as domestic stock. It is possible, however, that some of the sheep and the few goats may also have been hunted, feral animals.

Pig remains are normally fairly abundant in Late Chalcolithic settlements (Croft 1985, 1998). Since *Kokkinorotsos* is situated in what is likely to have been a well-watered location, there seems to be no a priori reason for their virtual absence from the preliminary assemblage. This may reflect a specialized function for the site, perhaps as a seasonal hunting and herding camp.

Conclusions and future plans

Despite the uncertainty regarding the presence or survival of architectural remains, the clear integrity of the cultural residues and the possibility of relatively deeply buried deposits of the first half of the third millennium BC have encouraged us to undertake full-scale excavations at *Kokkinorotsos*. These excavations will also take place in the field immediately north of that tested in 2006, where, according to local landowners, sherd material is present in similar quantities in ploughsoil (Figure 2, Plot 562). The first season is planned for April and May 2007. While it would be premature to make any firm statements on the nature of the site in advance of this work, it may be that the view of its structure and significance presented by the SCSP on the basis of survey and initial geophysical data will require considerable reconsideration.

Alongside the more general aims of providing a better definition of the material culture of the Late Chalcolithic in central Cyprus and contributing to our understanding of the history and society of the island during the third millennium, several specific issues will frame our initial excavation and analytical strategies:

- the overall size of the archaeological site
- the source and nature of the fine, grey, ashy soils
- the possibly minimal and ephemeral nature of structures
- the possibility raised by preliminary analysis of the faunal remains that deer-hunting was a major focus of activity at the site and, associated with this,
- that *Kokkinorotsos* may be a seasonal or special purpose site rather than a permanently occupied general-purpose village

Acknowledgments

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μια νέα χαλκολιθική τοποθεσία, η οποία βρίσκεται δυτικά της κοινότητας Πολιτικού –τοποθεσία Κοκκινόροτος (Φουρνιά)– εντοπίστηκε κατά την επιφανειακή επισκόπηση της περιοχής από ομάδα αρχαιολόγων γνωστή ως Sydney Cyprus Survey Project (SCSP). Η παρούσα εργασία παρουσιάζει τα αποτελέσματα μιας επιπρόσθετης γεωφυσικής επισκόπησης του χώρου καθώς και δοκιμαστικές τομές που έγιναν τον Απρίλιο του 2006. Εντοπίστηκαν σημαντικές εναποθέσεις κεραμικής της χαλκολιθικής περιόδου και οστά ζώων (κατ' εξοχήν

ελαφιού του είδους δάμα, δάμα). Αυτές οι νέες πληροφορίες επιβεβαιώνουν τη χρονολόγηση της τοποθεσίας και παρέχουν τη βάση για τον προγραμματισμό νέων ανασκαφών.

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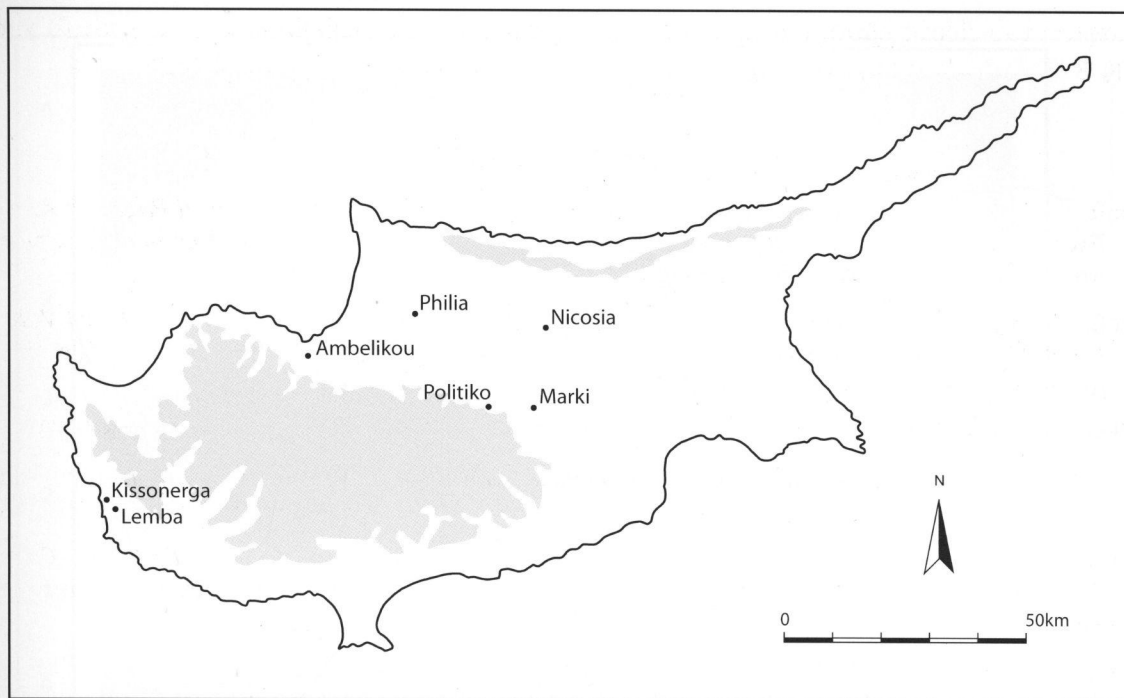


Figure 1. Map of Cyprus showing sites mentioned in the text.

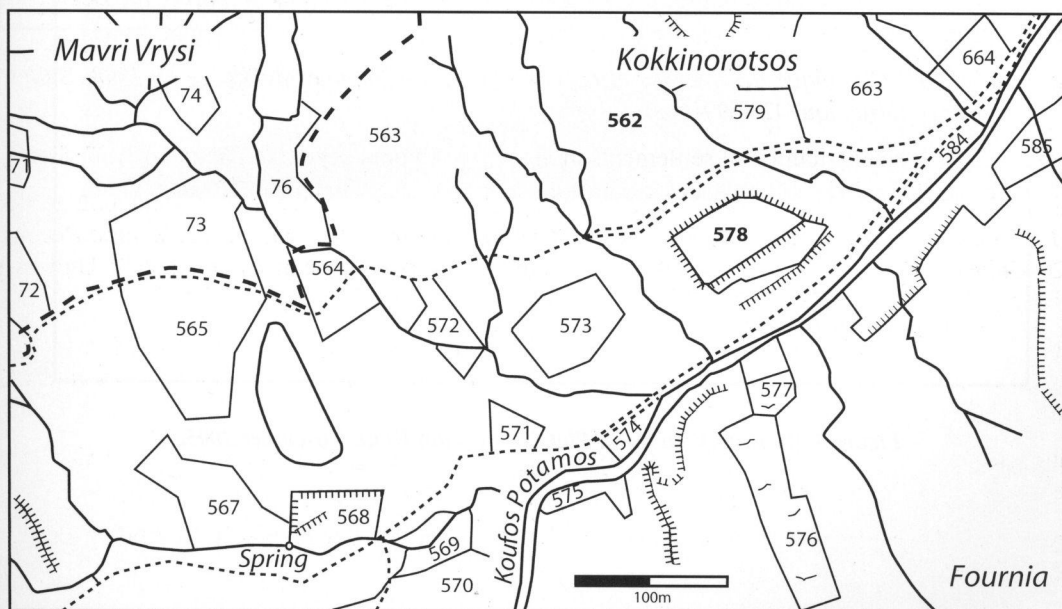


Figure 2. Plan of the fields near Politiko Kokkinorotos. After Cyprus Department of Lands and Survey Cadastral Plan XXX 57.

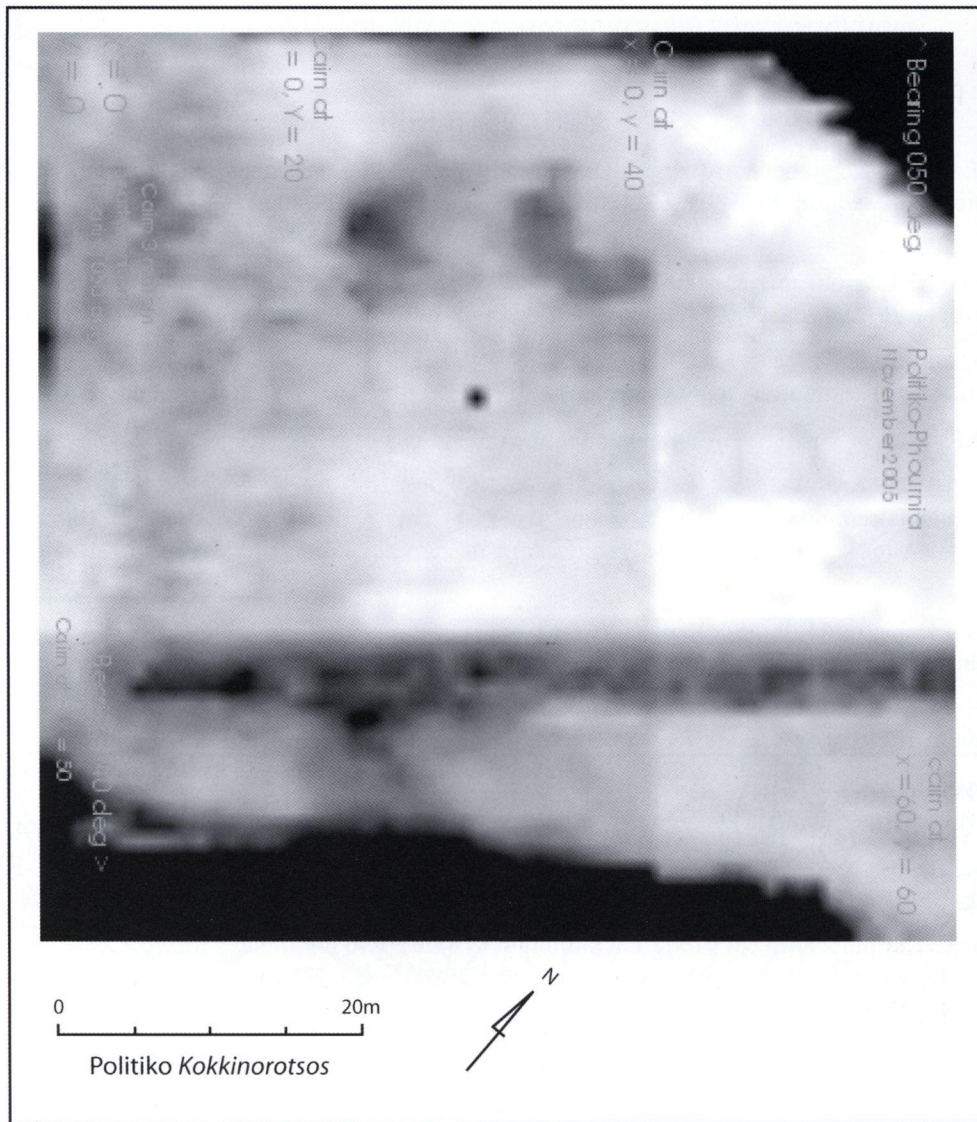


Figure 3. Resistivity survey of Plot 578 by John Hunt, November 2005.

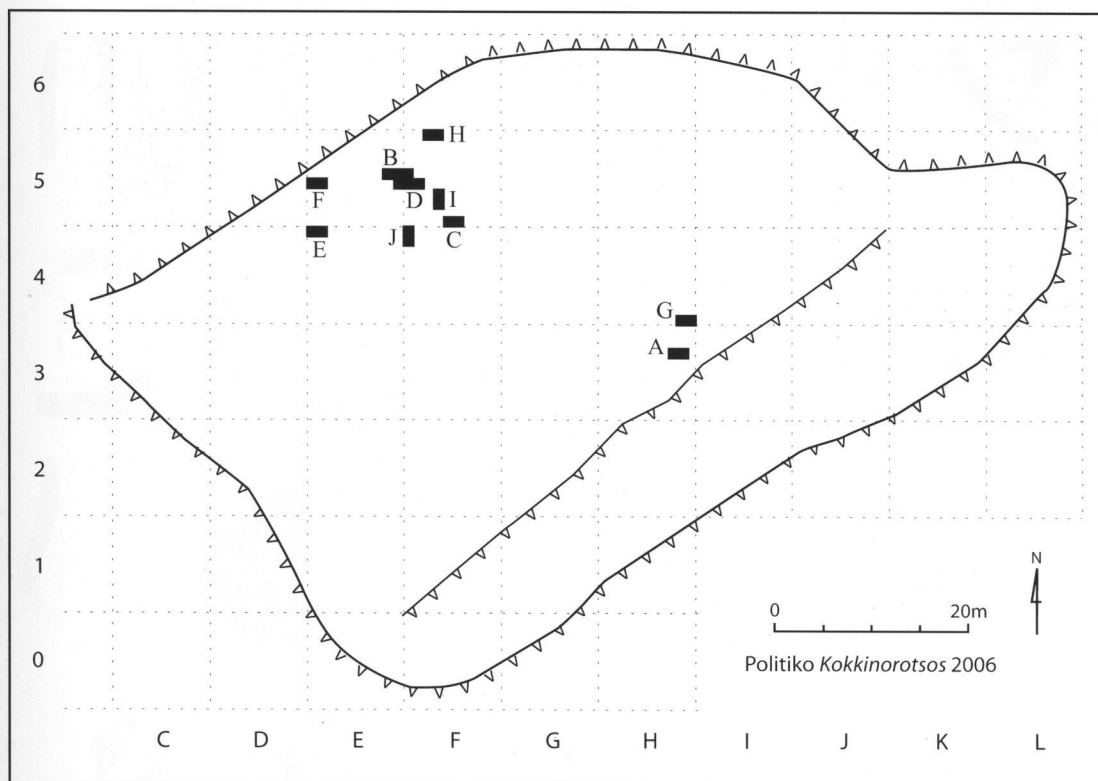


Figure 4. Location of test trenches A–J in Plot 578, April 2006.

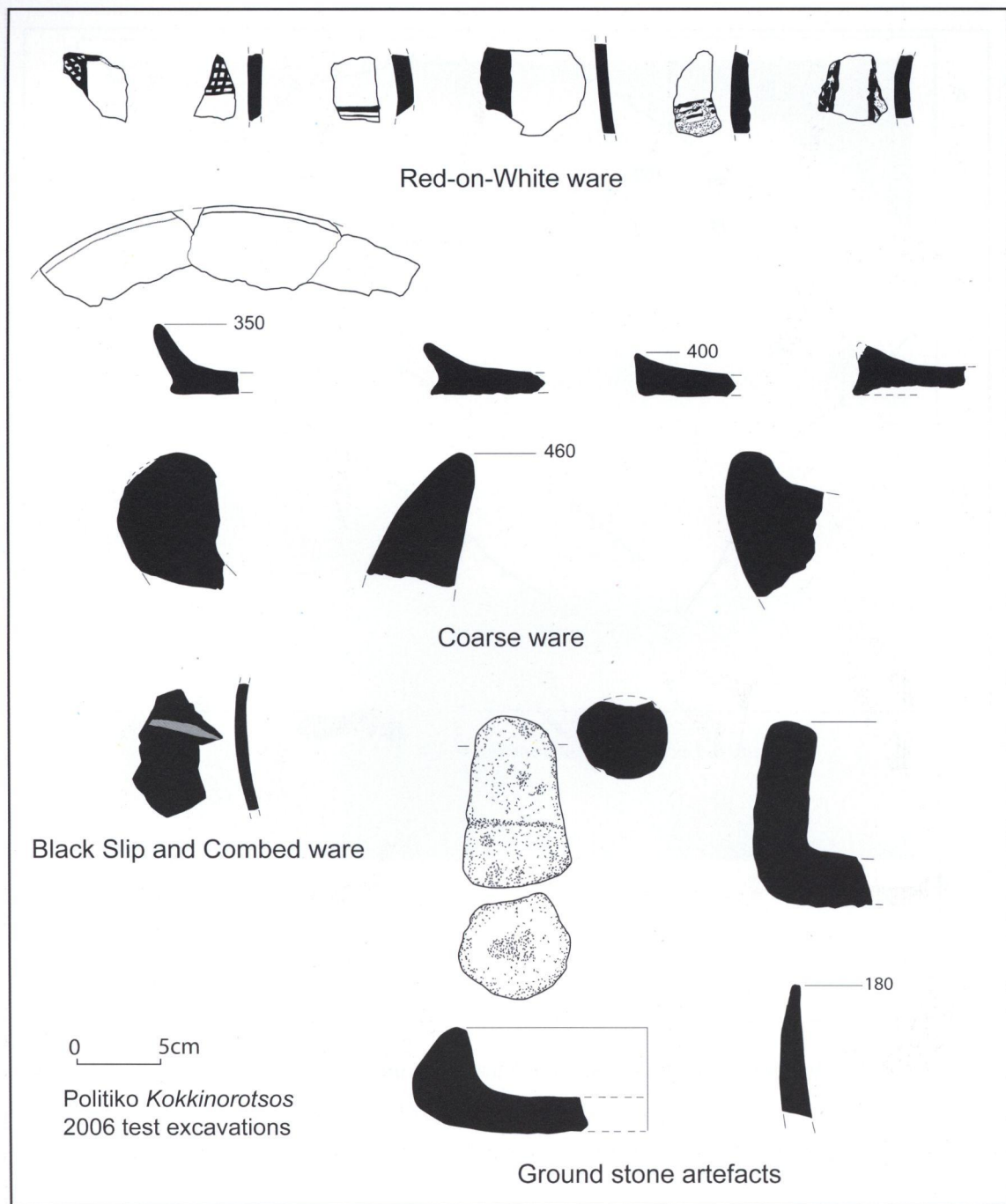


Figure 5. Fragmentary vessels of red monochrome and red monochrome with black top and interior.

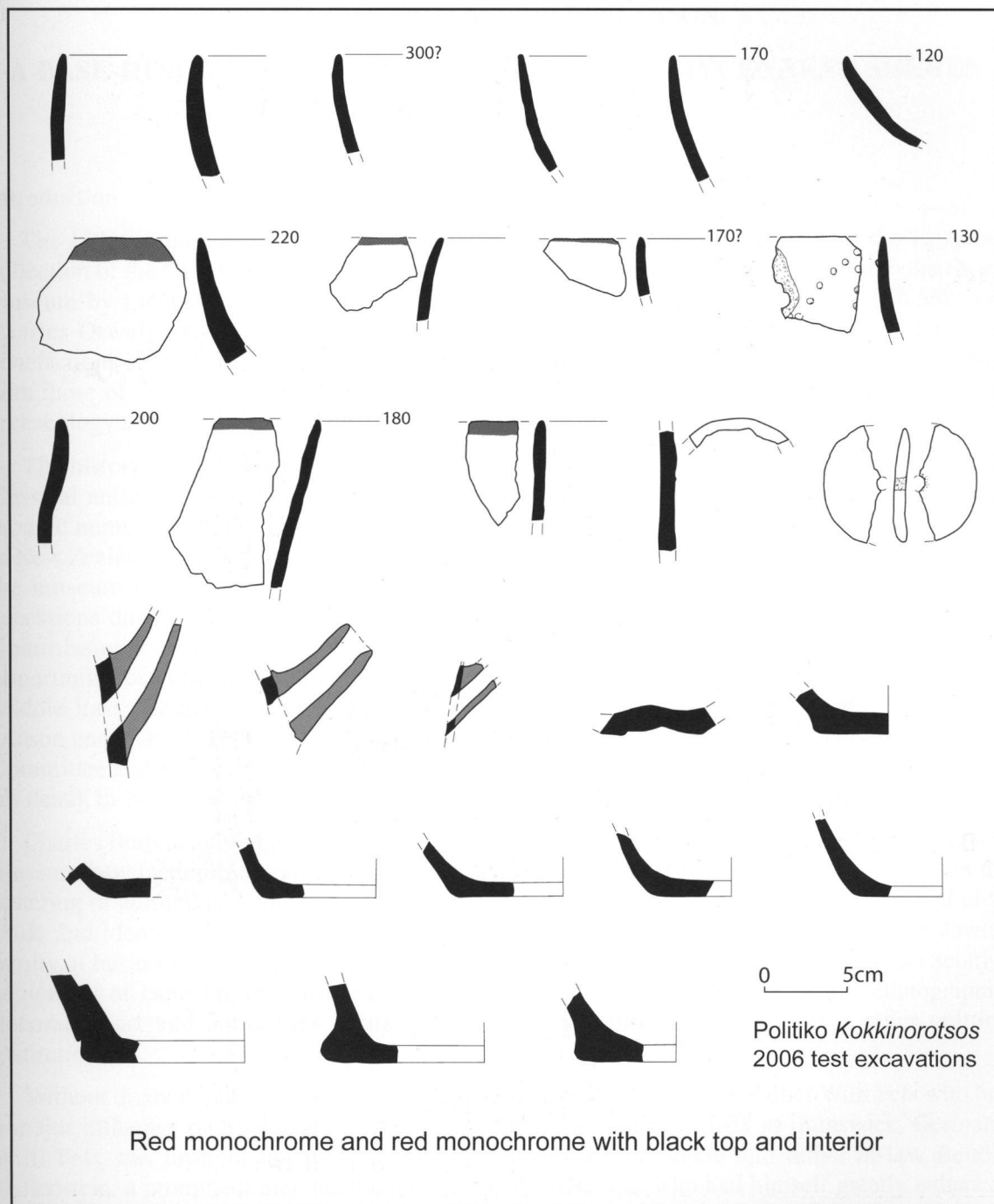


Figure 6. Fragmentary vessels of Red-on-White, Coarse and Black Slip and Combed wares and ground stone artefacts.