

INVESTIGATIONS AT THE SITE OF
THE NECROPOLIS OF THE ANCIENT TOWN
OF NYMPHAION

In July of 2018, the State Hermitage archaeological expedition resumed investigations at the site of the necropolis of the ancient town of Nymphaion. This necropolis is located in northwestern, western, and southern parts of Cape Kamysh-Burun on the shore of the Kerch Strait, 17 km from the center of the city of Kerch. According to preliminary information, the total area of the flat ground necropolis is estimated to be ca 45 hectares. In addition to excavations of the pre-Soviet period,¹ the necropolis was extensively studied in the 1970s,² and afterwards the investigations were continued in the 1990s and 2000–2010s.³

The main goals of the field season of 2018 were to prepare a base for future activities, in order to provide a good state of preservation of the necropolis and to stop its destruction. Thanks to the cooperation between the State Hermitage and the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Science, an aerial photographic survey of the entire area of the Nymphaion necropolis was fulfilled by means of a quadcopter. Using the method of photogrammetry, a 3D model of the necropolis was obtained and a topographic plan (scale 1:2000) was drawn. The high effectiveness of aerial photography has made it possible to establish the current condition of the site. In the photographs obtained, pits of illicit excavations are clearly discernible (totally 405 such pits

¹ Silant'eva 1959 [П. Ф. Силантьева, “Некрополь Нимфея”, *МИА* 69], 5–107.

² Grach 1999 [Н. Л. Грач, *Некрополь Нимфея*].

³ Solov'ev 2003 [С. Л. Соловьев, *Археологические памятники сельской округи и некрополя Нимфея*], 212; Avetikov 1997 [А. А. Аветиков, “Охранные раскопки некрополя Нимфея”, in: *Археологические исследования в Крыму. 1994 год*], 8–10; Sokolova 2014 [О. Ю. Соколова, “Охранные работы на некрополе Нимфея (2006–2009, 2012 гг.)”, in: *Погребальная культура Боспорского царства*], 136–141; Zin'ko 1997 [В. Н. Зинько, “Охранные исследования некрополя Нимфея”, in: *Бахчисарайский историко-археологический сборник 1*], 67–75; Smekalova-Goroncharovskij 2017 [Т. Н. Смекалова, В. А. Горончаровский, “Топография курганного некрополя Нимфея”, in: *Российские археологи XIX – начала XX в. и курганные древности европейского Боспора*], 393–406, etc.

have been located), as well as fortifications of the World War II period, modern debris, roads, artificial hills, and other features of interest. All this information enabled us to draw a plan of the necropolis with a designation of its current condition. In addition, the boundaries of the archeological excavations of the 1970s, 1990s, and 2000s have been more precisely defined and a general plan of the excavations at the cemetery was compiled. In the season of 2018, besides, magnetometric surveys were conducted in two areas (200 sq. m each) of the necropolis. According to Dr. T. N. Smekalova, who carried out the magnetic investigations, traces of the necropolis are detectable in the southern part of the area under study. However, this supposition can be confirmed reliably only through archaeological excavations.

In the course of the investigations of 2018, 9041 fragments of ceramic pottery and 750 pieces of ancient tiles have been found at the site. This number of finds seems to be ordinary for archeological sites of this type. It is of note, that there were numerous cartridges, fragments of shells and other objects left from World War II here. Pieces of ceramics belonging to trade amphorae amounted to 8608 items. Diagnostic ceramic fragments belong to various ancient centers dating from the Archaic to the Roman period. Fragments of medieval amphorae were also occasionally encountered.

Among the finds there were fragments of black-figured and red-figured vessels, redware pottery, kitchenware and stucco. Except for amphorae, the most common ceramic material comprised red clay tableware. Finds of this type include 220 fragments. Medieval glazed ceramics of the 13th–15th centuries were represented by yellow-glazed vessels.

Findings of special interest comprise 22 artifacts. There is a fragment of a red clay amphora from Lesbos dated to the 6th–5th centuries BC with a graffito scratched in the raw clay. Noteworthy finds include stamps on amphora handles and throats of the Classical, more often, Hellenistic period from Herakleia, Thasos, Sinope, and Rhodes. The finds also include two pieces of amphorae with red dipinti; two stoppers made from amphora fragments, and one from a fragment of a thick-walled vessel, and a grinding pestle made from an amphora handle.

A fragment of a red-figured krater with ‘laurel branch’ decoration is very remarkable. It belongs to the types of the vessels that are contemporary to the ‘Plainer Group’,⁴ dating from ca. 475–375 BC.

Of special note is also a fragment (lower central part) of a ceramic architectural detail – an acroterium, from Sinope (Fig. 1). Acroteria

⁴ Beazley 1963, 1418–1424.

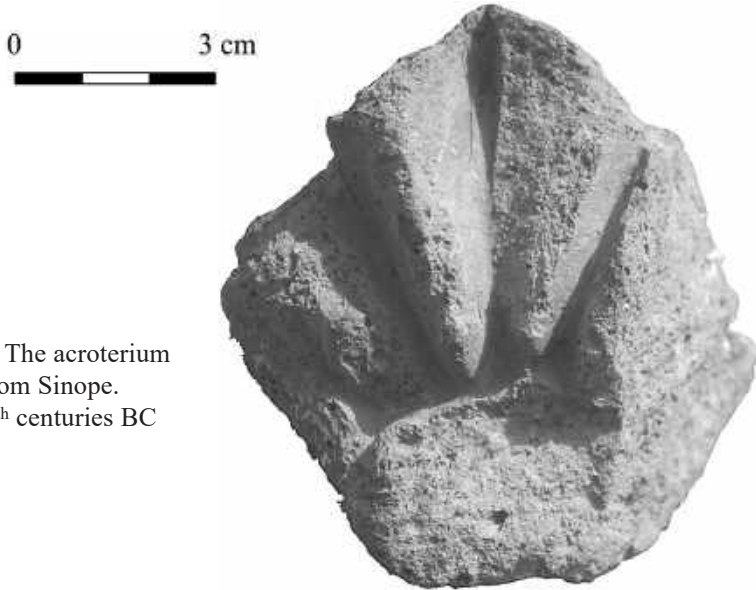


Fig. 1. The acroterium
from Sinope.
5th–4th centuries BC

similar to this one were found during excavations at the sanctuary of Aphrodite (5th–4th centuries BC) at the city of Nymphaion.⁵ Terracotta architectural details are fairly common among archaeological materials from the ancient towns of the Northern Black Sea region,⁶ Anatolia and the Mediterranean.⁷

Among ceramic finds there was also a tiny pyramidal clay loom weight. The stone items included a fragment of a large fishing sinker with a hole and a piece of a trough (possibly, part from an altar). The two objects both are made from local limestone.

The most remarkable finds of the season are represented by two tombstones with anthropomorphic reliefs. Monuments of this type are known among materials of the Greek and barbarian necropoleis in the Northern Black Sea region, the Mediterranean, Anatolia, and finds dating from the time span from the 7th century BC to the first centuries AD.⁸

⁵ Hudyak 1962 [М. М. Худяк, *Из истории Нимфея (VI–III веков до н. э.)*], 26–27.

⁶ Brashinskij 1963 [И. Б. Брашинский, “Экономические связи Синопы в IV–II вв. до н. э.”, in: *Античный город*], 135.

⁷ Kästner 1994, 253–268; 422–425.

⁸ Stoyanov 2010 [Р. В. Стоянов, “Антропоморфные надгробия в погребальной практике греков и варваров в VII – II вв. до н. э.”], 36; 37.



Fig. 2. The tombstone.
3rd century BC



Fig. 3. The tombstone.
3rd-2nd centuries BC

One of the tombstones (Fig. 2) was found on the surface north-west of the site. It is a broken rectangular stele made of local limestone, measuring 80.5×55×15 cm. Only the upper right part of the tombstone with a low relief is preserved. It represents the head, neck, sharp shoulder and part of the body of an anthropomorphic figure. The known parallels, as well as specific details, such as part of the neck of suggest that another anthropomorphic image was located to the left. This stele must have belonged to group 2 of the 16th type of the anthropomorphic gravestones according to the classification by of N. V. Moleva⁹ and is dated to the 3rd century BC.

The second monument (Fig. 3) was revealed in the grass in the area of the 'Crypt Alley', where the State Hermitage expedition carried out studies in the 1970s.¹⁰ It is a rectangular stele made of local limestone similar to the one mentioned above, but bears a single relief image. The size of the fragmentary tombstone is 70×16×12 cm. The preserved part of

⁹ Moleva 2016 [Н. В. Молева, *Антропоморфные изваяния. Из собрания Керченского государственного историко-культурного заповедника. Лапидарная коллекция*], 14–19.

¹⁰ Grach 1999.

the head with the shoulder, the torso and part of a spike for fixation of the stele in the ground are well-preserved. The stele is dated to the period of the 3rd–2nd century BC.¹¹

Anthropomorphic gravestones of this kind usually were covered with plaster and painted; unfortunately, no traces of paint on the finds under consideration are now preserved.

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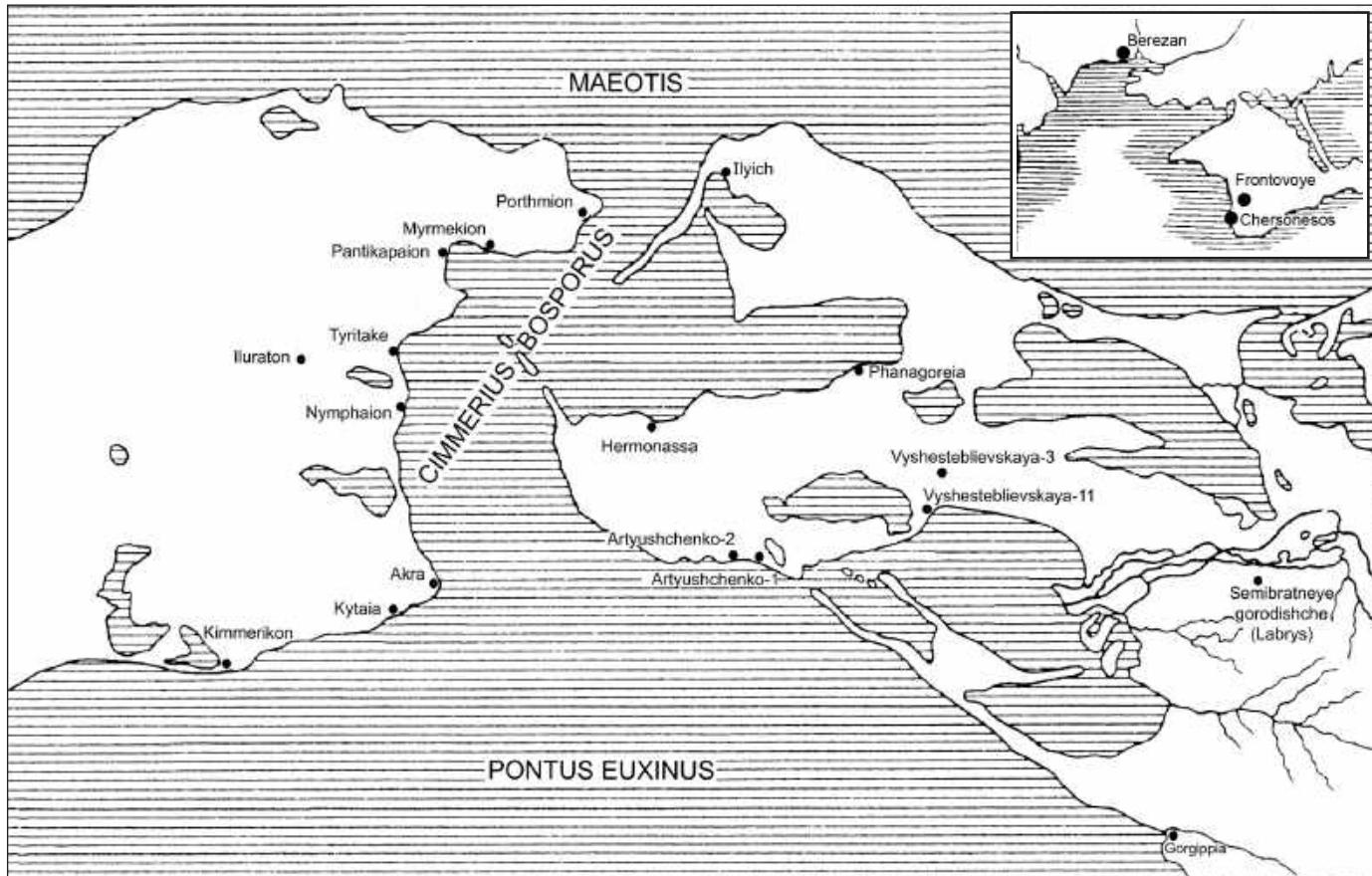
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¹¹ Moleva 2016, 15.

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CONSPECTUS

ROBERT MAYHEW	
Achilles' Inconsistency in Aristotle's Lost <i>Homeric Problems</i> : a Fresh Look at Four bT-scholia of the <i>Iliad</i>	5
CARLO M. LUCARINI, MARIA SCERMINO	
Il ruolo di Posidonio e della dossografia per la datazione del <i>Περὶ κόσμου</i> e i rapporti con l' <i>Elogium geographiae</i> . II	27
SALVATORE SETTIS	
<i>Comparanda</i> : Il Papiro di Artemidoro e i suoi apparati grafici	56

ARCHAEOLOGICA

DMITRIY CHISTOV	
Investigations on Berezan Island in 2014–2018 (Hermitage Museum Archaeological Expedition)	97
NADEZHDA NOVOSELOVA	
'The House of Archelaos': Archaeological Investigations of the State Hermitage Expedition in Quarter XX of the Tauric Chersonesos in 2014–2018	107
OLEG SHAROV	
Archaeological Research of the Late Scythian Site of Frontovoye 2 in 2018	118
ALEXANDRA KATTSOVA	
Investigation of the Ancient Settlement of Kytaiion in 2015–2018: Archaeological Expedition of the State Hermitage Museum	126
VLADIMIR KHRSHANOVSKIY	
Investigations of Necropoleis of Kytaiion in 2014–2018	133
OLGA SOKOLOVA	
The Nymphaion Expedition of the State Hermitage Museum (2014–2018) . . .	

143

ANNA EREMEEVA

Investigations at the Site of the Necropolis of the Ancient Town
of Nymphaion 155

ALEXANDER BUTYAGIN

Investigations of the Myrmekeion Expedition in 2014–2018 161

OLEG SHAROV

Investigations of the Coastal Part of Ilyich-1 Settlement in 2015–2016 .. 170

SERGEY KASHAEV

Excavations of the Taman Detachment of the Bosporan Expedition
of IHMC RAS in 2014–2018 178

YURIY A. VINOGRADOV

Investigations of the Rurial Sanctuary at the Settlement
of Artyushchenko-1 (Bugazskoe) on the Taman Peninsula
in 2015–2018 187

VLADIMIR GORONCHAROVSKIY, MARINA VAKHTINA, SERGEY KASHAEV

Excavations of Gorgippia and its Necropolis in 2012 and 2016 194

Keywords 205