

## THE 2005 HERMITAGE EXPEDITION TO MYRMEKION

The ancient settlement-site of Myrmekion is situated on the northern coast of Kerch Bay near Cape Karantinny (Fig. 1). The site has been known to researchers since the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was mapped by P. Dubrux. Soon afterwards, its archaeological investigation began. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the excavations were directed by V. F. Gaidukevich and, after some interruption, by Yu. A. Vinogradov (1982–1994, 1999). In 1999, the Myrmekion Expedition of the State Hermitage was established under the direction of A. M. Butyagin.

According to the results of the above-mentioned investigations the history of the site seems as follows. The first settlement near Cape Karantinny was founded at the around 675 BC. It was located in the eastern section of the site adjoining the cliff at the end of the cape on one side, and the bay into which a small river flowed, on the other. In the course of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC the site was built up with dug-out dwellings. In the third quarter of the century the vulnerable areas of the acropolis were surrounded with a small fortification wall. At the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC the site grew larger and its area amounted to 5–6 hectares. It was built up completely with ground-based houses and the first cult complexes appeared during that period. In the second quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC the settlement was attacked by nomads and its area was reduced by at least a factor of four. The inhabited area was surrounded with a new fortification wall. The revival of the settlement began as early as the next quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In the course of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC the area of the settlement attained its maximum of 7–8 hectares. In the end of that century it was encircled with a defensive wall with towers at intervals.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC Myrmekion was a densely built-up town with wineries and small sanctuaries. In addition, there may have been a larger temple near the cliff. In the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC the town was destroyed as a result of the stormy events of the post-Mithradates VI Eupator period. The revival of the town took place only in the new era. In Roman times Myrmekion consisted of a number of large estates with powerful fortifications. It is possible that the town was the residence of representatives of some aristocratic families of the Bosphorus Kingdom during that period. This is evidenced by the fact that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD a circular rusticated tomb with a marble sarcophagus was built on the cliff of Cape Karantinny.

Life in the town ended in the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD when it was abandoned by its inhabitants. In the 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a Khazar settlement at the site. Myrmekion was reoccupied in the 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries when in the western part of the site a small settlement arose marked as Pondiko (from ancient “Pantikapaëum”) on Genoese maps. At first the settlement was not fortified, but later the cliff was surrounded by a wall and a ditch while the tomb mentioned above was used as a tower. A vast necropolis arose east of the settlement. After the settlement perished in fire, this territory had not been reoccupied until a port quarantine station was built here in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1999–2005 the excavations of the Myrmekion Expedition were focused on an examination of the territory adjoining the cliff of Cape Karantinny.<sup>1</sup> These excavations made it possible to clarify the topography of the area as well as some moments of the history of ancient and medieval Myrmekion. West of the cliff, investigation of the remains of a medieval dug-out house was continued, as well as of a number of Roman structures including one of round cross-section, and a rich house of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The most interesting find so far has been a large ash layer in which, along with rich ceramic materials, a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century BC burial of a baby in a Rhodian amphora was uncovered as well as a hoard of 723 bronze coins of the second quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, immediately beneath the mound of ash, a chamber with an area of over 20 sq. m cut in the rock was discovered (Fig. 2). On three sides it was fenced by carefully trimmed flagstones. Most probably, it was a destroyed or unfinished tomb of one of the major representatives of Bosporan aristocracy.

On the eastern side of the acropolis, a 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup>-century Christian necropolis has been under excavation for several years. Over 70 burials, mostly of males, have been discovered. The graves were usually small slab tombs. Funerary offerings are very scarce. Under the medieval layers, partly

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<sup>1</sup> The main results of the studies of 2002 are presented in: Y. A. Vinogradov, A. M. Butyagin, M. Y. Vakhtina, “Myrmekion – Porthmeus. Two small towns of Ancient Bosphorus”, in: D. V. Grammenos, E. K. Petropoulos (ed.), *Ancient Greek colonies in the Black Sea II* (Thessaloniki 2003) 803–840. The studies of 2005 are summarized in: A. M. Бутягин, Ю. А. Виноградов, “История и археология древнего Мирмекия” (A. M. Butyagin, Yu. A. Vinogradov, “History and archaeology of ancient Myrmekion”), *Мирмекий в свете новых археологических исследований. Каталог выставки* (СПб. 2006) 4–51.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. Бутягин, “Клады античного Мирмекия” (A. M. Butyagin, “Hoards of Classical Myrmekion”), in: *Сообщения Государственного Эрмитажа* 62 (СПб 2004) 86–91.

on the bedrock, a large 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century estate was discovered. It consisted of a two-storey house with many chambers (Fig. 3), a number of subsidiary rooms and a monumental well faced with excellent masonry. During the construction of this estate various architectural details of some older public building (probably a temple) were used extensively. In 2003–2005, among the ruins of this estate as well as among blocks reused in construction of medieval tombs, five fragments of various inscriptions were found including a dedication to Demeter Thesmophoros, a fragment of a dedication mentioning Aspourgos, a fragment of a badly damaged unintelligible inscription and large fragments of two Roman tombstones – one with part of a relief preserved. In addition, several fragments of marble statues have been found during the last campaign. Still older than the estate itself was part of an architectural altar rebuilt in Roman times.

In the central section of the site, studies of a large late archaic structure were continued in 2001–2005. This was partially excavated by V. F. Gaidukevich in the 1960s. During recent excavations it has been revealed that this building erected in the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC occupied an area of at least 500 sq. m that is unique for Bosphorus. The structure was probably a public building. In addition, investigation of part of the so-called “sanctuary of Demeter” was continued which was built here in the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. In the course of its excavation, a unique hoard of 99 electrum coins of Cyzicus was found in a bronze jug.<sup>3</sup> The excavations in this area have allowed to define more exactly the chronology of the development of the town’s central part during the 6<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

Alexander M. Butyagin  
*The State Hermitage*

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<sup>3</sup> See: *Мирмекийский клад. Каталог выставки* (СПб. 2004).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 1. Acropolis of Myrmekion

Fig. 2. Structure discovered in 2005 in area "S"

Fig. 3. Estate of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC in area "T"

