

‘THE HOUSE OF ARCHELAOS’:  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS  
OF THE STATE HERMITAGE EXPEDITION  
IN QUARTER XX OF THE TAURIC CHERSONESOS  
IN 2014–2018

Tauric Chersonesos is situated at the south-western extremity of the Crimean Peninsula. In 2014–2018, the State Hermitage Archaeological Expedition continued its investigations of the south-western part of ancient living quarter XX in Tauric Chersonesos. The quarter is located at the corner of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Longitudinal and the 11<sup>th</sup> Transverse Streets.

This paper introduces materials concerned with architectural complexes and finds of the Hellenistic period. During the seasons of 2014–2018, a house of the Hellenistic period was investigated. Due to the discovery of an owner’s graffito ΑΡΧΕΛΑΟΥ on the wall of a Colchian amphora,<sup>1</sup> it has got the name of the ‘House of Archelaos’. The graffito was carved on the neck of a Colchian amphora of the 3<sup>rd</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC after it was fired.<sup>2</sup>

The State Hermitage Archaeological Expedition started its investigations in the south-western part of Quarter XX in 1979. The excavation of the ‘House of Archelaos’ began in 1989 when Yu. P. Kalashnik discovered a large cellar of a house of the Hellenistic period, which is now called Cellar 3, and began to excavate Cellar 1. However, his investigations were then interrupted.<sup>3</sup>

Now, after the surveys of 2014–2018, it has been established that in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, at the corner of the 11<sup>th</sup> Transverse Street and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Longitudinal Street, there was a typical Greek house with an internal courtyard and rooms surrounding it, built on the natural bedrock. It was established that the courtyard was located at the corner of the

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<sup>1</sup> The graffito was interpreted by A. S. Namoylik, Research Fellow of the State Historical and Archaeological Museum-Preserve of Tauric Chersonesos.

<sup>2</sup> Tsetskhladze 1992 [Г. П. Цецхладзе, “Производство амфорной тары в Колхиде”], 68–89, fig. 4–5.

<sup>3</sup> Kalashnik 2012 [Ю. П. Калашник, “Астрагал с надписью из Херсонеса”], 106.

2<sup>nd</sup> Longitudinal and the 11<sup>th</sup> Transverse Streets and was surrounded by 5 above-ground rooms. Beneath three of these rooms there were cellars cut in the rock (Fig. 1).

The 'House of Archelaos' was constructed in five masonries discovered by now (nos. 21, 22, 24–26). According to the known analogues reported by A. V. Buyskikh and the dimensions of the preserved masonries, the dimensions of the House were presumably 11.4×12.4 m extending from the north to the south.<sup>4</sup> The total area of the house therefore must have been 143.6 sq. m.

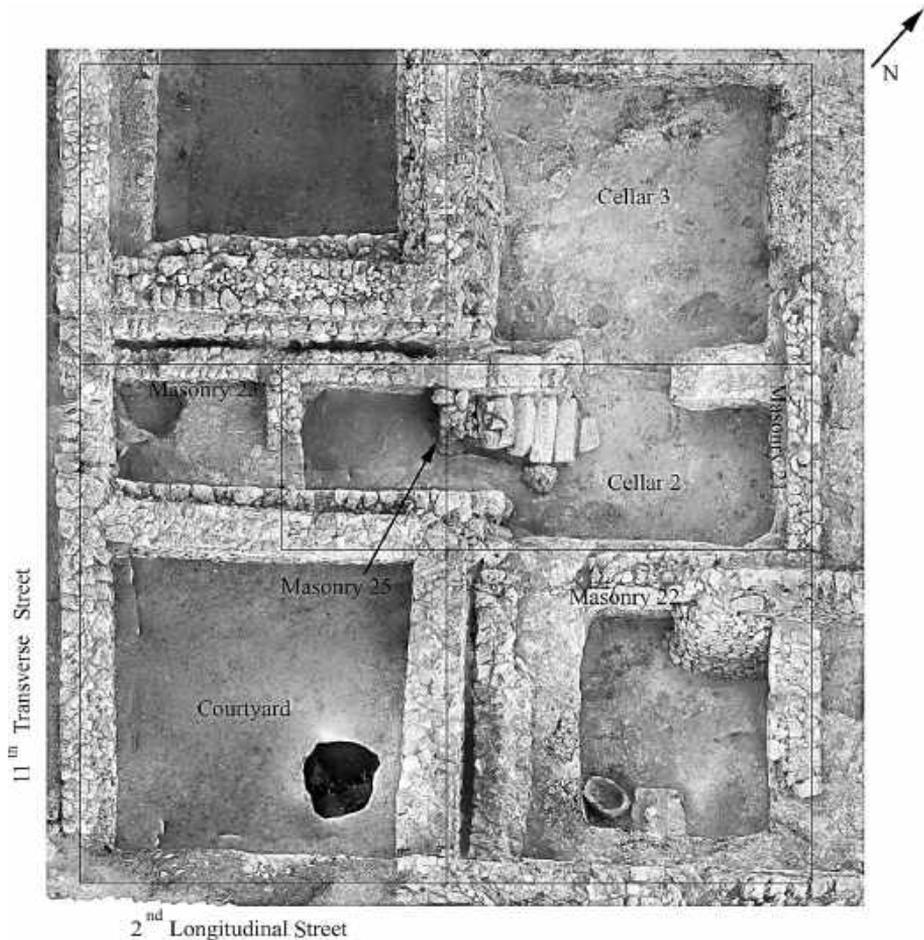


Fig. 1. Orthophotoplan of the 'House of Archelaos'

<sup>4</sup> Buyskikh 2008 [А. В. Буйских, *Пространственное развитие Херсонеса Таврического в античную эпоху*], 128.

The ‘House of Archelaos’ had two façade walls facing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Longitudinal and the 11<sup>th</sup> Transverse Streets. These walls are not preserved. An outer wall of the house is also missing. The northern outer wall of the house, i. e. the 21<sup>st</sup> masonry, is preserved better than the other ones.

Masonries 22 and 24 constitute the internal walls of the house, extended from the north to the south, and masonries 25 and 26 are the internal walls of the house extending from the west to the east.

All the masonries were constructed on the natural rock from rectangular stone blocks using mud mortar; the average size of the blocks was 0.40×0.20 m / 0.35×0.20 m.

Below, the cellars of the ‘House of Archelaos’ are described particularly since they contained numerous representative finds.

### Cellar 1

Cellar 1 was filled with a homogenous yellow loam with admixtures of ash. The cellar was filled at a time.

The date of the filling of the cellar is indicated by stamps on the handles of Rhodian amphorae found here. The first stamp Ἴεροκλεῦς (inv. no. 47/37648, Fig. 2) belongs to groups V–VI (145–86 BC) and the second stamp Μ]ίδα↑→bunch of grapes, caduceus (inv. no. 60/37648, Fig. 3) belongs to group V (145–108 BC) according to G. Finkelstein.<sup>5</sup>

Among the same assemblage, a stamp on a handle of a Chersonesean measuring vessel was found. In it, the name of the father of a Chersonesean official is stated and also the name of his grandfather:

Ἀπολλωνίου το-  
ῦ Ἀπολλωνίου τοῦ  
Εὐμήλου ἀστυνο-  
μοῦντος

This is the first discovery of a stamp of this kind.<sup>6</sup>

Our preliminary studies suggest that, according to paleographic features, this inscription is datable to not later than the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

<sup>5</sup> Finkielsztejn 2001, 197.

<sup>6</sup> Namoylik–Novoselova 2019 [А. С. Намойлик, Н. Ю. Новоселова, “Мерные сосуды эллинистического Херсонеса: новые находки и промежуточные итоги исследования”], 405–409.



Fig. 2. Rhodian stamp (inv. no. 47/37648)



Fig. 3. Rhodian stamp (inv. no. 60/37648)

### Cellar 2

Cellar 2 was filled with a loose yellow loam containing a great amount of ash, pieces of charcoal and riverine clay.

The neck of a ‘Colchian’ amphora with an owner’s graffito Ἀρχελαίου (inv. no. 51/37685, Fig. 4) must be considered as the most important find here. This inscription is dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

Stamps ἐπὶ Πυ[θοδώ]ρου Δαλίου and Ἰμᾶ (Fig. 5) on the handles of a Rhodian amphora (inv. no. 88/37671, groups IVb/IV – 150/160–146 BC according to Finkelstein<sup>7</sup>) date the time of filling of the cellar to the period not earlier than the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

<sup>7</sup> Finkielsztejn 2001, 197.

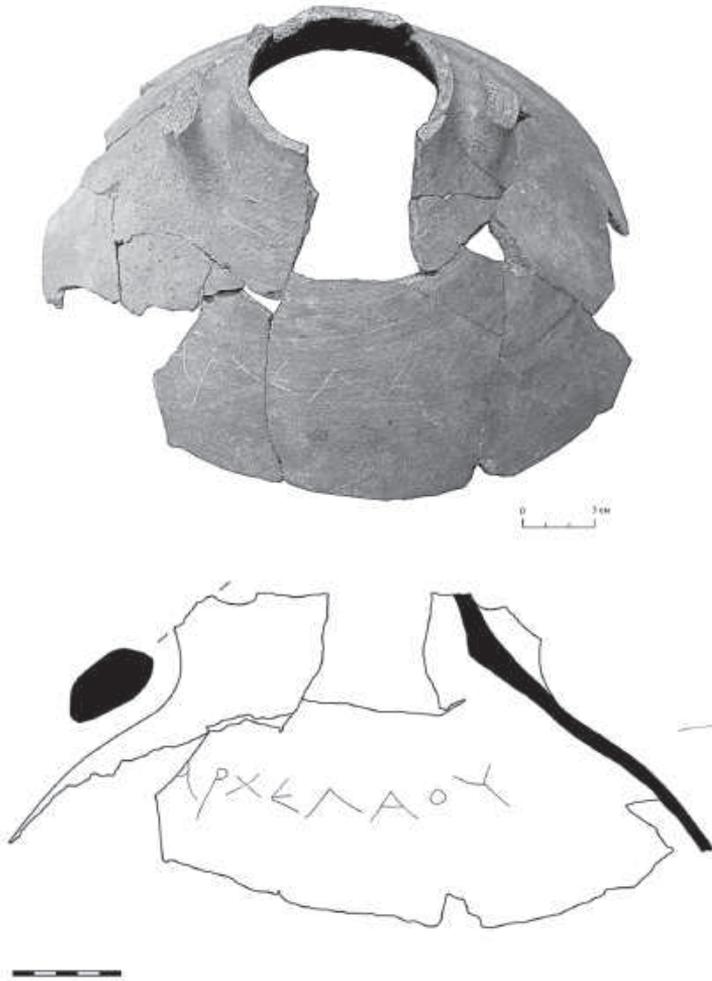


Fig. 4. 'Colchian' amphora with a graffito Ἀρχελάου, drawn by A. S. Namoylik (inv. no. 51/37685)



Fig. 5. Rhodian stamp, inv. no. 88/37671

In 2016, during the investigation of Cellar 2, a dump of painted decorative stucco was discovered (Fig. 6). Totally, 1027 fragments of plaster have been collected. The range of colors on the unearthed fragments is constituted by red, yellow, blue, black and white hues. There were also fragments with a polychrome decoration supposedly imitating marble ('marbalization').

It is known that the wall paintings of the Hellenistic time imitating cladding with marble were applied on the wall surface in the form of horizontal rows and were sometimes divided with relief horizontal lines, terminating in a relief cornice. The frescoes at Amphipolis, Pella, and Delos are the well-known examples.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in the cities of the Northern Black Sea region, wall frescoes are rarely found. The most of the Hellenistic wall-paintings were discovered in the territory of Bosporos: in Panticapaeum,<sup>9</sup> Nymphaion<sup>10</sup> and in the rural chora.<sup>11</sup>

Finds of painted stucco are very rare in Chersonesos. This is why special attention must be paid to the remains of plaster found by G. D. Belov in Quarter XXVIII of Chersonesos (inv. no. The State Hermitage museum X.1974–149).

The known analogues collected during investigations in Bosporos and the paintings from Quarter XXVIII in Chersonesos are suggestive as to how the plaster painting found during the investigations of Quarter XX might have looked.

I. L. Budnichenko, conservator-restorer of the Laboratory of Monumental Art, basing on her investigations, proposed the following hypothesis for the reconstruction of the paintings: the length of the painting was 220 cm and its height was ca 150 cm. The upper part of the painting was red, below there was a cornice, a thin pink band beneath the latter, and still lower there were checkered yellow, black, red and blue squares. Below the latter, a second cornice and applied blocks of black, blue and marble-like paintings followed. In the lowest area, a belt of yellow color was rendered.

More than 100 individual vessels have been identified during the examination of the ceramic collection from Cellar 2. This assemblage is divisible into two main groups: kitchenware and tableware.

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<sup>8</sup> Baldassarre–Pontandolfo–Rouveret–Salvadori 2006, 67–70.

<sup>9</sup> Rostovtsev 1914, 114–116.

<sup>10</sup> Grach 1984 [Н. Л. Грач, *Новый исторический источник из Нимфея*], 46–65.

<sup>11</sup> Kastanayan 1969 [Е. Г. Кастанаян, *Стенная роспись сельской усадьбы эллинистического времени близ Пантикапея*], 116.

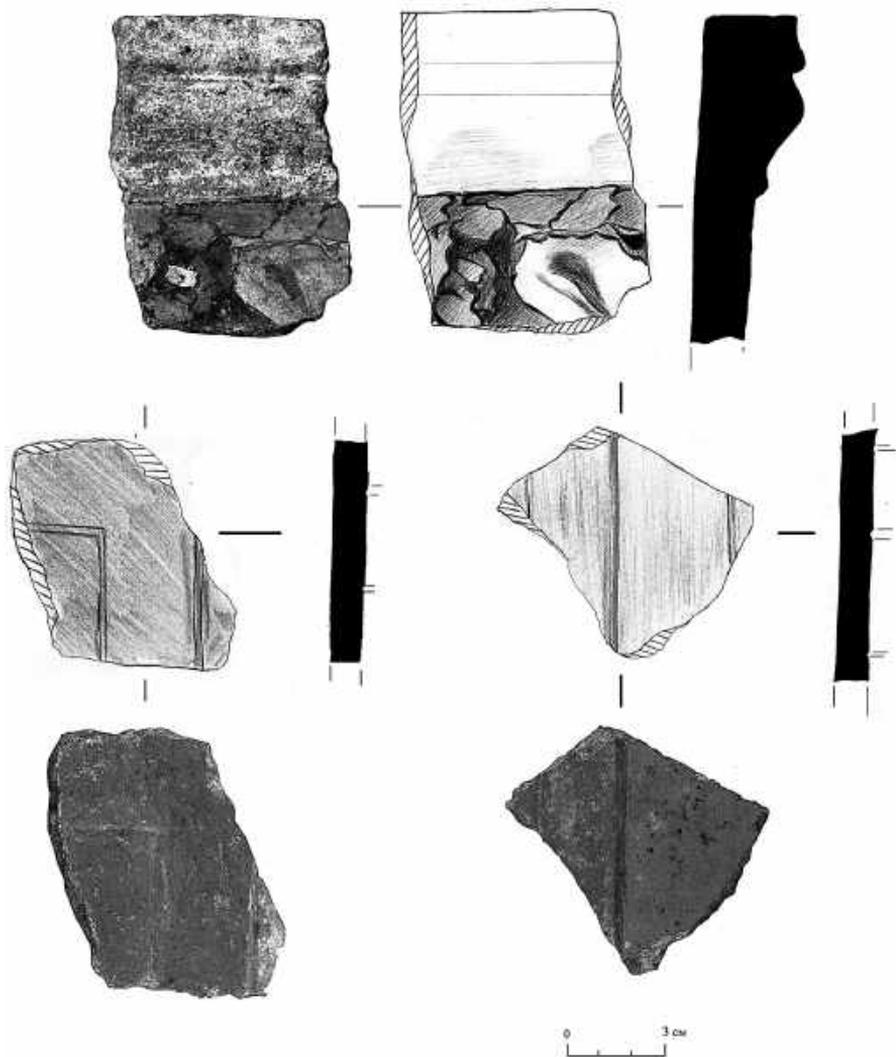


Fig. 6. Fragments of the wall painting from the 'House of Archelaos'



Fig. 8. Molded bowl  
(inv. no. 29/37671)



Fig. 7. Brazier with an image of  
the bearded head of a satyr  
(inv. no. 22/37671)



Fig. 9. Molded bowl  
(inv. no. 28/37671)



Fig. 10. Molded bowl  
(inv. no. 27/37671)



Fig. 11. Molded bowl  
(inv. no. 26/37671)



Fig. 12. Molded bowl with a graffito  
[...]/IEPON (inv. no. 11/37671)

Among the kitchenware, there were fragments of pans, skillets and pots. In addition, noteworthy is a large redware brazier of Asia Minor provenance (inv. no. 22/37671, Fig. 7).<sup>12</sup>

The predominant majority of the relief ceramic specimens belong to the East Mediterranean region of production; our collection practically lacks any representative fragments of Attic, Peloponnesian or Bosporan manufacture. Moreover, the main bulk of the finds seem to have been produced in one of the ceramic centers of Ephesus. An exception is only one bowl fragment which could have been made in some Pergamon workshop. In terms of chronology, all the fragments are dated to a single period: mid–second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (inv. no. 29/37671, Fig. 8; inv. no. 28/37671, Fig. 9; inv. no. 27/37677, Fig. 10; inv. no. 26/37671, Fig. 11).

Also noteworthy is the discovery of a fragmentary molded bowl with a graffito [...]IEPON on the outer surface of its rim (inv. no. 11/37671, Fig. 12). The inscription includes the adjective ἱερός ('holy, sacred') or the noun ἱερόν ('a sanctuary'). Before this word, the name of a god must have been written. The bowl possibly belonged to a home sanctuary.<sup>13</sup>

## Cellar 2–2

The most important find among all the objects uncovered during the investigations in Cellar 2–2 is a chalcedony stamp seal bearing the name of *astynomos* Ἡράκλειος (inv. no. 37708/31).<sup>14</sup> The seal was identified, described and attributed by A. S. Namoylik, Research Fellow of the State Historical and Archaeological Museum-Preserve of Tauric Chersonesos.

This object is a rectangular plate measuring 3.4×2.4 cm. On its back side there is a small ledge with a groove for attaching a handle. On the main surface of the stamp seal, a three-line retrograde inscription and two emblems are carved in a deep-relief technique.

← ΑΣΤΥΝΟΜΟΥ

← ΝΤΟΣΗΡΑΚ bunch-of-grapes

← ΛΕΙΟΥ caduceus to the left.

The reading and translation: ἀστυνομοῦντος Ἡρακλείου – “during the time of *astynomos* Herakleos”. Paleographically this inscription is datable to the late 4<sup>th</sup> or the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Şahin 2001, 91, fig. 1.

<sup>13</sup> The graffito was interpreted by A. S. Namoylik.

<sup>14</sup> See Novoselova–Namoylik 2018, 296 Fig. 6–7.

<sup>15</sup> Novoselova–Namoylik 2018, 289–314, fig. 6–7.

Summarizing the results of the excavations of 2014–2019, it may be concluded that in Quarter XX, a house of the Hellenistic period has been excavated. The house had a ceremonious room decorated with a stucco painting and a home sanctuary. When the house was destroyed, the items of the household became buried among the debris in the cellars. These objects included amphorae, other ceramic containers, pots and skillets, and tableware. It seems impossible to establish the functions of particular rooms of the house on the basis of the finds from the cellars.

The ‘House of Archelaos’ was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and got ruined not earlier than the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

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### Further Reading

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