

INVESTIGATIONS ON BEREZAN ISLAND IN 2014–2018 (HERMITAGE MUSEUM ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION)

The present article continues a series of brief reports¹ on the investigations of the archaeological mission of the State Hermitage museum on the island of Berezan; it contains a brief overview of the main results of the excavations in the North-Eastern part of the site (sector “O-Western”) during the last five field seasons (2014–2018).

The survey conducted during these years was focused on the investigation of the environment of two Late Archaic public buildings, which were excavated earlier in the same area. Buildings of a similar size and layout were located within the territory of neighboring *insulae*; both houses emerged in the late 6th – early 5th century BC and had existed up to approximately the second quarter of the 5th century BC. These houses are hypothetically interpreted as dining rooms, *hestiatoria*, which served for public banquets associated with religious and social activities and feasts. The concentration of public buildings, fragments of sculpture and architectural details suggest the localization of the civic center of the colony in this particular area of ancient Borystheneis.²

The information obtained in the course of the recent excavations confirms the above supposition. It was established that the city block, within the boundaries of which Building no. 1 was located, had an unusual triangular shape (Fig. 1). The streets which limited it from the west and east in the southern part of the *insula* intersected at an acute angle and converged into one street which continued further northwards. Building no. 1 had a courtyard located in front of it on the south. The southwestern part of the same ‘triangular’ *insula* was occupied, in the late 6th – first half of the 5th centuries BC, by another large courtyard surrounded by fences. No traces of any building were found within the boundaries of this courtyard, but there was some structure there, which was undoubtedly of a religious purpose. It consisted of a circular limestone altar and an

¹ Chistov 2005; 2015a.

² Chistov 2015b; Bujskikh–Chistov 2018.

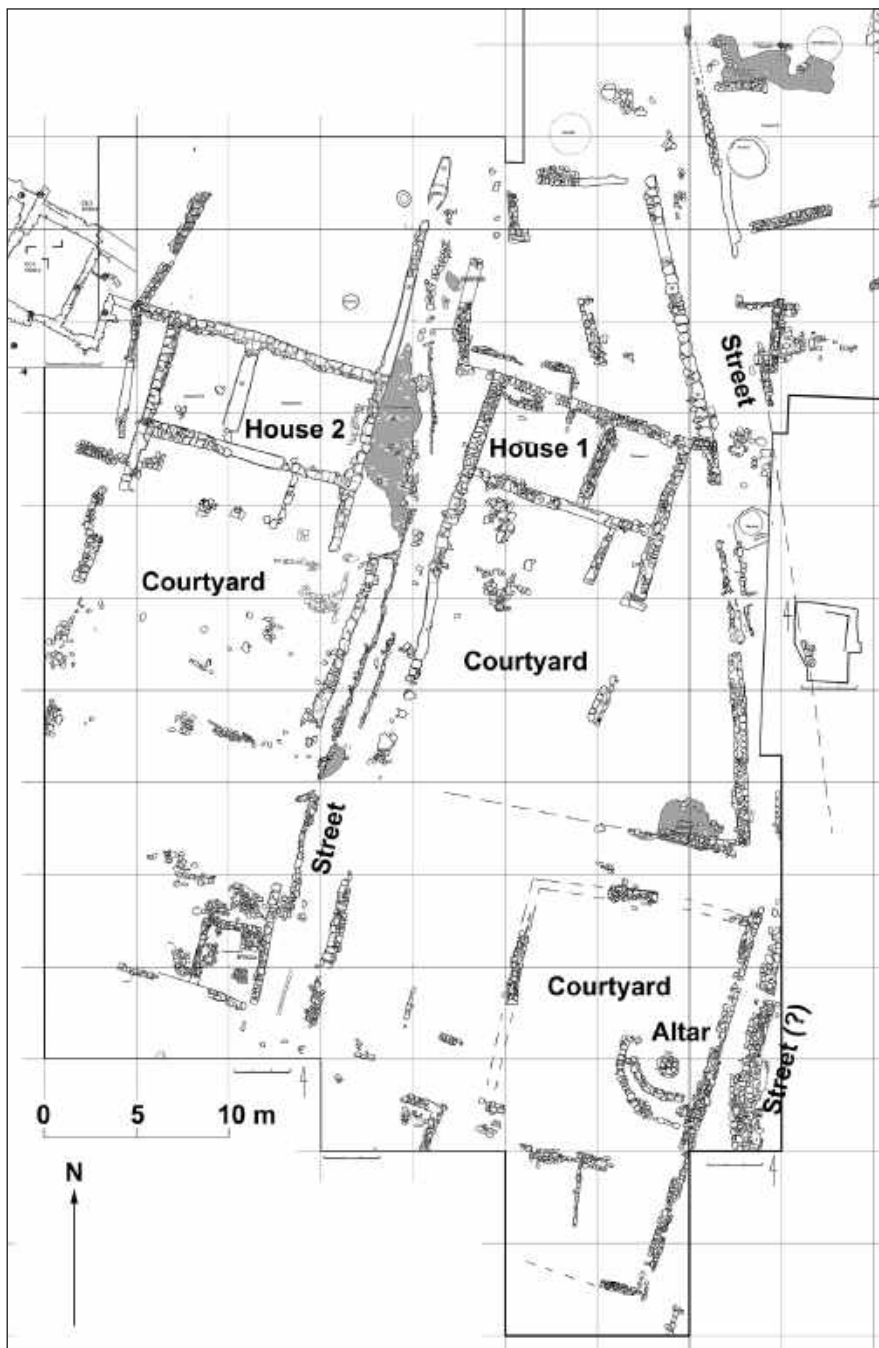


Fig.1. Sector "O-Western", plan of the 'triangular' insula in the late 6th – first half of the 5th century BC

apsidal wall that surrounded the altar from the south and west (Fig. 1, 2). This semicircular fence had two construction phases, its internal area having been considerably reduced after its reconstruction. The passage to the altar was obviously situated on the north. The base of the altar was of a rounded plan (about 1.30 m in diameter), and consisted of one row of roughly processed limestone blocks. The altar itself was a stone structure with a diameter of 0.93 and 0.34 m high, built of well-dressed blocks, two courses in height (0.34 m). This structure was erected in the late 6th – early 5th century BC; among its closest parallels there is a similar altar from the so-called Sanctuary of Aphrodite,³ situated 98.5 m to the SWW from it, as well as cylindrical altars of the earliest *temenos* of Olbia.⁴ *Terminus post quem* for the altar is determined through dating of the ceramics from two large pits or dugouts (nos. 80–81) backfilled immediately prior its construction. Among these finds noteworthy are fragments of an Attic cup of type “B” with a representation of mounted warriors. This painting belongs to some early red-figure vase painters of



Fig. 2. Circular limestone altar and its semi-circular fences.
View from SE

³ Nazarov 2001 [В. В. Назаров, “Святылище Афродиты в Борисфене”], 156, fig. 4.

⁴ Rusyaeva 2006 [А. С. Русяева, “Глава IV. Строительные остатки алтарей”], 59–60, 332–333 fig. 51–52.

ca 510–500 BC (Fig. 7.1). Thus, in the Late Archaic period (stratigraphic phase IIB-2), a significant part or even the entire territory of this *insula* was a public space. The Eastern Street in this sector of the block was unusually wide, and it was paved with stone. It is possible that here the street was facing a corner of a big square.

In the south-western part of the same *insula*, remains of residential buildings of the previous stratigraphic phase II-A (ca. 540ies – 520/500 BC) were disclosed. Among them there was semi-basement premise no. 24 (Fig. 3), as well as the remains of a building destroyed in fire which was located to the south of the latter. In one of its premises there was a well-preserved adobe domed oven; under the partially collapsed dome, a set of cooking and tableware remained (Fig. 4). This pottery, as well as finds from the fills of premise no. 24, are dating not later than ca. 520/500 BC: the building had been destroyed and its semi-basement was filled with soil just before the construction of city buildings nos. 1 and 2.

To the north of Building no. 1, merging of two meridional streets was revealed, as well as part of an *insula* located to the east.

Within that city block, a large residential house (no. 3) has been completely investigated,⁵ as well as the remains of at least one other household



Fig. 3. Semi-basement premise no. 24, view from the east

⁵ Chistov 2016, 15–20.

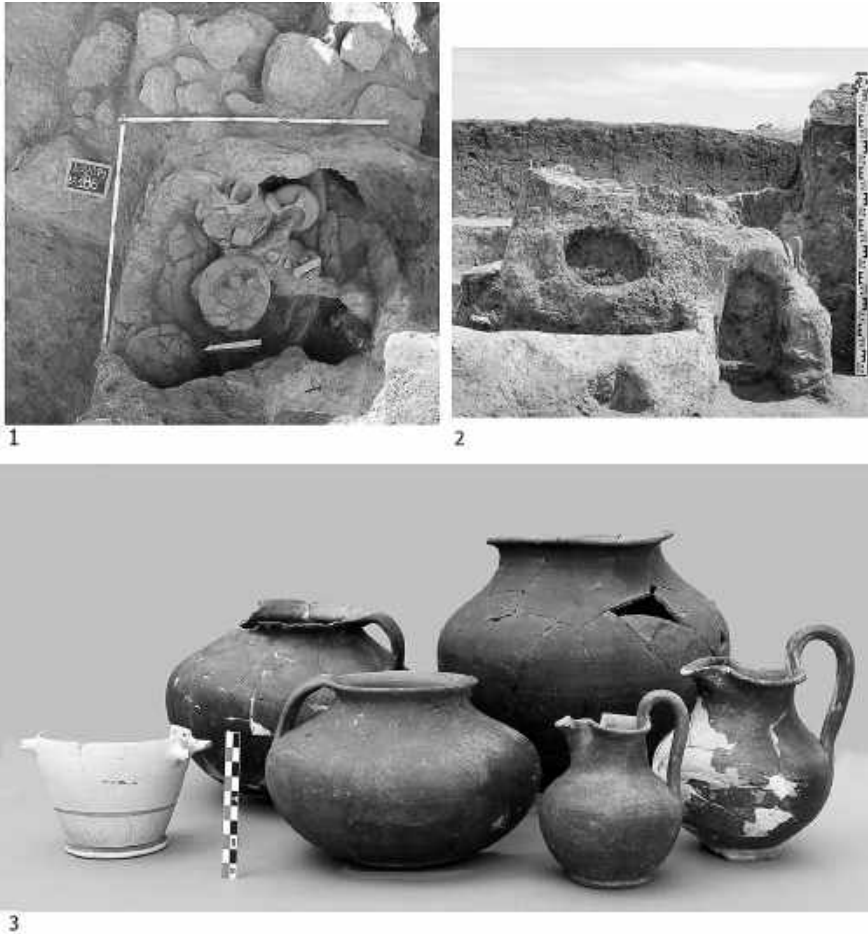


Fig. 4. Adobe domed oven (1–2) and the assemblage of vessels (3) from it

area located to the north of the latter. Stone and mudbrick houses in this part of the excavation area were built regarding the relief of the terrain. The ancient surface was sloped markedly towards the modern coast of the island; for this reason, to the north of House no. 3, the slope was cut to form a small terrace up to 0.5 m high. To the north of this terrace, several premises of the second half of the 6th century BC were uncovered (nos. 27, 28, and 29); however, the layout of the house, to which they belonged, is unclear because of the poor preservation of its walls. Nor the northern border of the *insula* was elucidated.

In the course of these excavations, building remains of stratigraphic phase II-A (ca. 540ies – 520/500 BC), as well as of the later building

phase II-B, were revealed. Layers of fire and destruction, completing the phase II-A, were found in many areas of these houses, as well as in the territory of the street. They yielded findings reliably dating this period (Fig. 7.3–4). Thus, in a small room (no. 26) in the north-western part of House no. 3, in the destruction layer near an oven, three Chian bulging-neck transport amphorae were found together with three handmade vessels of local forms (Fig. 5). This noteworthy assemblage demonstrates that handmade cooking ware was used in everyday life of the inhabitants of a large multi-chambered Greek house. In storage pit no. 238, located within the courtyard of the same household, and probably associated with the earliest period of its occupation, an outstanding finding of a big Ionian cup of type B2 was made (Fig. 6.1). A single-line graffito running along the inner surface of its rim contains the name of the owner of the cup, and, probably, of the entire household: Pytheas, son of Perikles.⁶



Fig. 5. House no. 3, premise 26, view from the north

⁶ The preliminary reading of the graffito inscribed on this cup, as well as on the other cup from storage pit no. 232, which is mentioned below, was proposed by S. R. Tokhtas'yev. During the *XXI Readings in memory of prof. I. M. Tronsky*, on 28.06.2017, he presented the report "Two archaic graffiti from Borysthenes". Unfortunately, the sudden death has not allowed the researcher to prepare a full publication of these inscriptions.

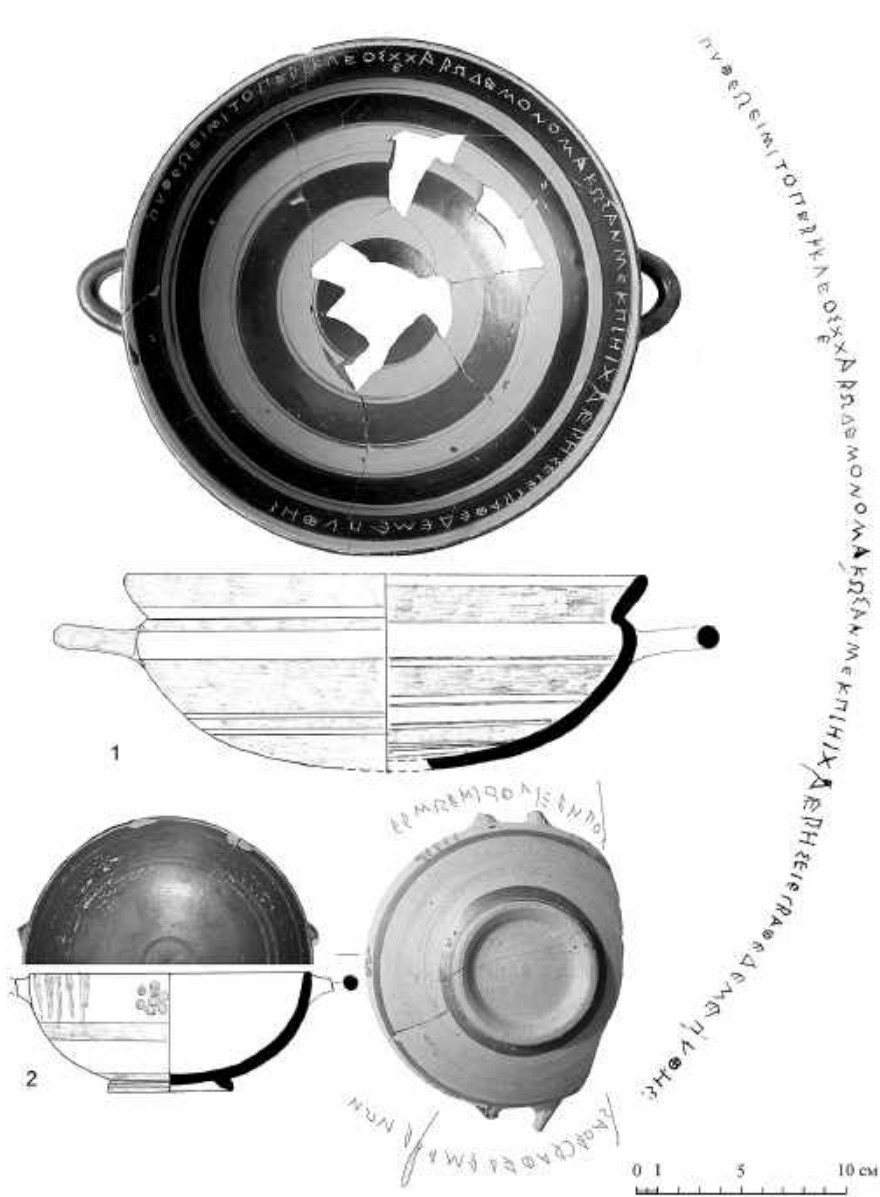


Fig. 6. Ionian cups with graffiti:
 1 – cup from the storage pit no. 238,
 2 – rosette bowl from the storage pit 232

Cups of this type were produced for a long time span between 590/580 and 550/540 BC⁷ in northern and southern Ionia.⁸ Although this type of cups was widespread, bowls of such a size are very rare.

A rare find was made in a similar layer of destruction to the north from the ‘House of Pytheas’: a segmented cast trapezoid copper coin with the image of a ribbed arrowhead in the relief on one side, and a fish head (tuna?) on the other (Fig. 7.2).⁹

In the course of excavations of early deposits in the northern part of the sector, numerous structures of the first half of the 6th century BC, preceding the first stone houses, were uncovered: semi-dugouts and storage pits. Most of dugouts were of a rounded plan with a posthole in the central part suggesting the use of a conical roof. Three semi-subterranean dugouts (nos. 67, 69, and 73) had rectangular outlines. In one case, traces of wattle-and-daub wall were recorded, and in another (no. 69), a rectangular wattle-and-daub structure adjoined the dugout.

Apparently, the appearance of such structures at the Berezan settlement belonged to a relatively short phase preceding the beginning of mass construction of surface houses; it is noteworthy that these earth dwellings are located along the street of the second half of the 6th century BC on both sides of it.¹⁰ An important finding was retrieved from the fill of storage pit 266, dated to 575–550 BC. It is a lead letter with an inscription in seven lines. In the following issue (*Hyperboreus* 25: 2), a special article will be devoted to its publication. Jointly with an Ionian rosette bowl with a graffito – dedication to Hermes (Fig. 6.2), this letter can be considered as an additional evidence of the substantial Greek component among the population of the early Berezan settlement of the first half of the 6th century BC. The bowl mentioned was found in storage pit 232 of the same period which is synchronous to a group of dugouts of an oval plan within the area where later House no. 3 was built.

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⁷ Schlotzhauer 2001, 107–108, 516–517, Kat. 175–178.

⁸ Cook–Dupont 1998, 131.

⁹ Cf. an earlier find of a similar type from Berezan (1989): Borisfen – Berezan 2005 [*Борисфен – Березань. Начало античной эпохи в Северном Причерноморье*], 119, cat. 208.

¹⁰ Chistov 2017 [Д. Е. Чистов, “Землянки архаической Березани”], 132–139.

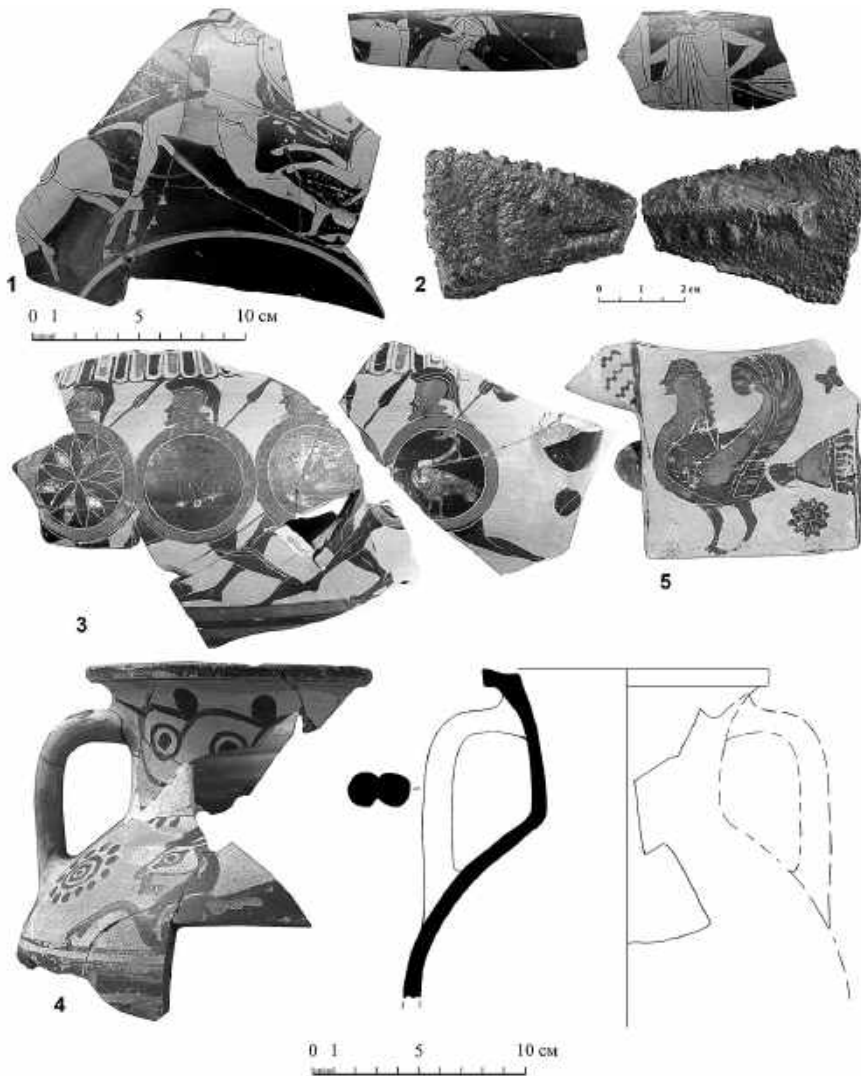


Fig. 7. 1 – Structure no. 80 (in front of the altar). Fragments of Attic red-figure cup, 510–500 BC. 2–4 – Findings from layers of destruction of 525–500: 2 – segmented cast coin, 3 – fragments of a black-figure Attic krater, Lydos painter circle, 540ies BC; 4 – upper part of a North Ionian amphora (580–550 BC). 5 – Territory of the courtyard with the circular altar: Attic black-figure krater handle, 575–550 BC

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