

INVESTIGATION OF THE ANCIENT SETTLEMENT OF KYTAION IN 2015–2018: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION OF THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM

The ancient townsite of Kytaion is one of the well-known ancient archaeological sites in Eastern Crimea. It is located in the southeast of the Kerch peninsula, 38 km south from the city of Kerch.

First excavations at the site started in the first half of the 19th century. In 1821, French researcher Paul Du Brux described the site and drew its first plan. In 1927–1929, small-scale archaeological excavations of the town were carried out by the Kerch Museum supervised by the Director Yuliy Yu. Marti. In 1957, works at the settlement were headed by N. Belova, in 1970–1974, by S. Bessonova. From 1974 onwards, regular excavations of the settlement have been conducted by E. Molev. In 2015, Kytaion Archaeological Expedition of the State Hermitage Museum began its work at the settlement and its surroundings. The study of the site was conducted together with the Nizhny Novgorod University expedition headed by E. Molev.

In 2015, the main goal of the expedition was to survey the urban area outside the defensive walls of Kytaion. The uncovered archaeological remains and layers were dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. This date suggests that, during the specified chronological period, the territory adjacent to the settlement was occupied and actively developed.

In 2016–2018, the excavations were carried out at the ash hill, which is the largest ash accumulation in the Northern Black Sea region. It is formed by layers of brown and yellow-brown loam with inclusions of mussel shells and numerous interlayers of ash. There are also different intercalations of yellow and grey loam here. The ash hill is rich in numerous clusters of ceramics, seaweed (*Zostera marina*), hearth fragments, mussel shells and many other abundant finds.

The excavation area was 280 sq. m and its depth was up to 3.8 m (Fig. 1). The upper layers are datable to the 1st–3rd centuries AD. The ceramic material found in these layers includes fragments of amphorae, red- and brown-glossed ware, fragmentary wheel-made ware, kitchenware and handmade pottery. In addition, terracottas, objects of clay, metal,



Fig. 1. The archaeological trench

bone, glass and stone were encountered. 45% of the pottery is represented by amphorae while the remaining 55% belong to other types; this ratio is typical for this period.

In the southeastern sector of the site, part of a wall was uncovered in a layer of brown loam. The extant length of it was 2.5 m, with the width of 0.8 m. All the construction parts traced earlier are located at a considerable distance from this wall making it difficult to link them together. The layer and the wall are dated to the 1st–3rd century AD.

The thickness of the stratum of the first centuries AD is small as compared with the layers of the 1st century BC – 1st century AD uncovered in 2017–2018.

During the excavation, numerous accumulations of remains of hearth fragments, ceramics, mussel shells, seaweed and ash were recorded. Six dog's skeletons, vertebrae and skulls have been identified. One of the dogs was placed over a small pit filled with ash and covered with remains of a fireplace at the mouth. Three pits have been excavated. Two of them, located near each other, had a few flat stones in the center of the bottom. Among the findings from the fill of one of the pits there was a fragment of a jug neck with a red dipinto, a fragment of handmade ware and two

fragments of incense burners. In another pit, the skull of a seagull with a drilled hole in the center was found. All the finds mentioned above suggest the use of the pit in a religious and ritual practice, or as a place where the material is thrown out after ritual activities.

In the northern part of the ash hill, a stone wall (ash hill fence) was uncovered (Fig. 1). The wall was 0.6 m high with the total length of 4.5 m. On the northern side of the fence, probably there was a road or a small town street.

The stone wall on the southern side of the road was most likely built to protect the street against the layers constantly collapsing from the ash hill and to outline the borders of the ash hill in the 1st century BC – 1st century AD.

The layers of the ash hill were extremely saturated with finds. During the works in 2017–2018, more than 70 000 ceramic fragments have been found; more than half of them were amphorae. The lower layers contained significantly less ceramics, their number two times lower than above, the osteological material amounting to only one third.

The pottery included numerous fragments of amphorae, fragmentary wheel-made, red-glossed and brown-glossed ware, kitchenware and hand-made pottery. There were also ceramic fragments with stamps, coins, terracotta objects, weights, spindle whorls, touchstones, ceramic plugs, lamps, various products made of clay, bone, glass and stone. A separate group of finds is constituted by fragments of vessels with graffiti. Most of the latter were lines scratched in the form of straight or oblique crosses, occasionally with additional lines or grids. In addition to the numerous graffiti in the form of crossed lines, there were more uncommon findings. One of them is a fragment of red glossed pottery with a graffito. The latter was part of a name, possibly Βρ(άδακος) (Fig. 2). Such finds were encountered in Pantikapaion of the 1st century BC – 1st century AD.¹ A similar graffito is found on an amphora from Nymphaion. The supposed name is rare and not of Greek origin. It seems that one of the fragments, the bottom of an open vessel, bears a primitive image of a ship. The layers dating from the 1st century BC to 1st century AD contained terracottas: numerous fragments of legs, hands, fragments with representations of folds of clothes, pedestals, and parts of dolls. One fragment of a terracotta figurine is an example of an imitation of imported products. It represents part of a woman's figure in a chiton with an animal in one hand and a basket with fruit in the other (Fig. 3). Terracotta statuettes of similar types were found in layers of the 2nd century BC to 1st century AD at different settlements

¹ *CIRB* 324, 76.



Fig. 2. Fragment of red glossed bottom with a graffito

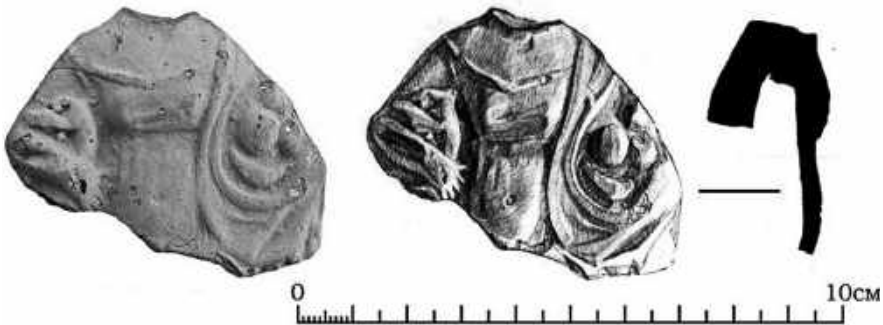


Fig. 3. Terracotta fragment: part of a woman's figure in a chiton with an animal in one hand and a basket with fruit in the other

of the Northern Black Sea region. An example is a completely analogous polychrome figure of a girl from the excavations of the ancient town of Myrmekion. It was manufactured in Asia Minor in the 2nd century BC.²

² SAI 1970 [*Свод археологических источников. Часть I/II*], 98, v. 43.5. Denisova 1981 [В. И. Денисова, *Корoplastика Боспора*], v. XVIII.



Fig. 4. Terracotta fragment: female head with traces of black and red gloss.

Among the rather rare finds there is a terracotta fragment in the form of a female head with traces of black and red gloss. Its size, slightly exceeding 10 cm, allows us to estimate the total height of the statuette as ca 70 cm. In the upper part of the fragment there is a small hole for a decoration (probably a diadem) while the ears have similar holes for earrings (Fig. 4).

Among the various bone objects, of most interest is a bone plaque with a representation of half of a man's face in low relief (Fig. 5). Similar finds are reported from Olbia, Myrmekion, Kepoi, Phanagoria, Pantikapaion, Tyritake and Nymphaion.³ Probably such plaques were used to decorate the backs of chairs or armchairs. Bone was a popular material for decorating furniture, and bone appliqués in the form of a bearded head of Silenus became popular in the Hellenistic period. Our bone plaque is an example of products of local bone-carving as suggested by the use of bones of domestic animals and rudeness of the style.

Another uncommon find is represented by a fragment of red-glossed pottery with a portrait of a beardless young man in low relief (Fig. 6). Only ten such portrait medallions have been reported from Crimea. Two of them (considering this new one) were found at Kytaion.⁴ There is no consensus among researchers concerning the attribution of images on portrait medallions from Bosporos. The relief on the medallion from Kara-Tobe⁵ is the most stylistically close to our example. This fragment is datable to the second half of the 1st century BC or the beginning of the 1st century AD.

³ Sokol'skii 1971 [Н. И. Сокольский, *Деревообрабатывающее ремесло в античных государствах Северного Причерноморья*], 95.

⁴ Vinokurov–Treister 2013 [Н. И. Винокуров, М. Ю. Трейстер, “Портретные медальоны краснолаковых чаш I в. до н.э. – I в. н.э. на поселении Артезиан в Крымском Приазовье”], 270 ; Treister 2014 [М. Ю. Трейстер, “Кто изображен на портретных медальонах из Пантикапея и Китея?”], 417; Shaptsev 2016 [М. С. Шапцев, “Портретные эмблемы римского времени на доньях краснолаковых сосудов из раскопок античных памятников Крыма”], 427; Shaptsev 2015 [М. С. Шапцев, “Портретные эмблемы римского времени на доньях краснолаковых сосудов из Крыма”], 110.

⁵ Shaptsev 2007 [М. С. Шапцев, “Портретный оттиск с городища Кара-Тобе”], 354.



Fig. 5. Bone plaque: half of a man's face in low relief



Fig. 6. Fragment of red-glossed pottery with a portrait of a beardless young man in low relief

Bosporan ash hills are a continuous subject of investigations and scientific discussions. One of the largest and most extended objects of this type is that at the ancient settlement of Kytaiion. The results gained during the excavations under consideration allow researchers to widen their knowledge about ash hills of the Roman time.

Alexandra Kattsova
The State Hermitage Museum
 av-ershova@yandex.ru

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Further reading

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