

THE NYMPHAION EXPEDITION OF THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM (2014–2018)

In 2014–2018, studies were continued at Nymphaion. This is a Bosphoran town, the ruins of which are traceable in the southern part of the modern town of Kerch, on the outskirts of the village of Eltigen (Geroyevskoye).¹ The works were concentrated on the southern slope of the Nymphaion plateau (sector 'M') where cultural layers and building remains of the Hellenistic and Roman periods were excavated and the terrace at the western side of sector 'M' was investigated. The area under investigation amounted to about 500 sq. m (Fig. 1).

The main goal of the studies over several years was to investigate the mound covering the area to the south of the propylaia discovered in 1996–1997.² This is a layer of loam of different shades and density with numerous strata of burning, small lenses and layers of pure ash, raw clay, adobe, remains of eelgrass, clusters of charcoal, saturated with debris of quarried stone and fragments of ceramics. The maximum thickness of this layer amounts to almost 7 m (Fig. 2).

In square 1 of the area added in 2010 at the excavation sector 'M', the cultural layer was dug to the level of the virgin clay concluding the research. Investigations in squares 2–14 are continued.

The material from the excavated layers is dated mostly to the 3rd–2nd centuries BC. Among the finds, fragments of amphorae prevail, represented by products of Thasos, Chios, Herakleia Pontike, Mende, Sinope, Rhodes, Knidos, Kos, Peparethos, Lesbos, Samos, and Aeolian centers. Of note is the presence of fragments of amphorae of Bosphoros of the first centuries AD, southern Pontic narrow-necked amphorae and amphorae from unknown centers. Noteworthy are finds of amphora stamps, among which those of Sinope of the 3rd – early 2nd centuries BC and Rhodes dating from the second half of the 3rd and first half of the 2nd centuries BC predominate. There are a few stamps on the necks of Herakleian amphorae dated to 370–360 BC. Stamps of other centers are fairly rare.

¹ On the previous expeditions, see Sokolova 2005; Sokolova 2015.

² Sokolova 2005, 298–301.

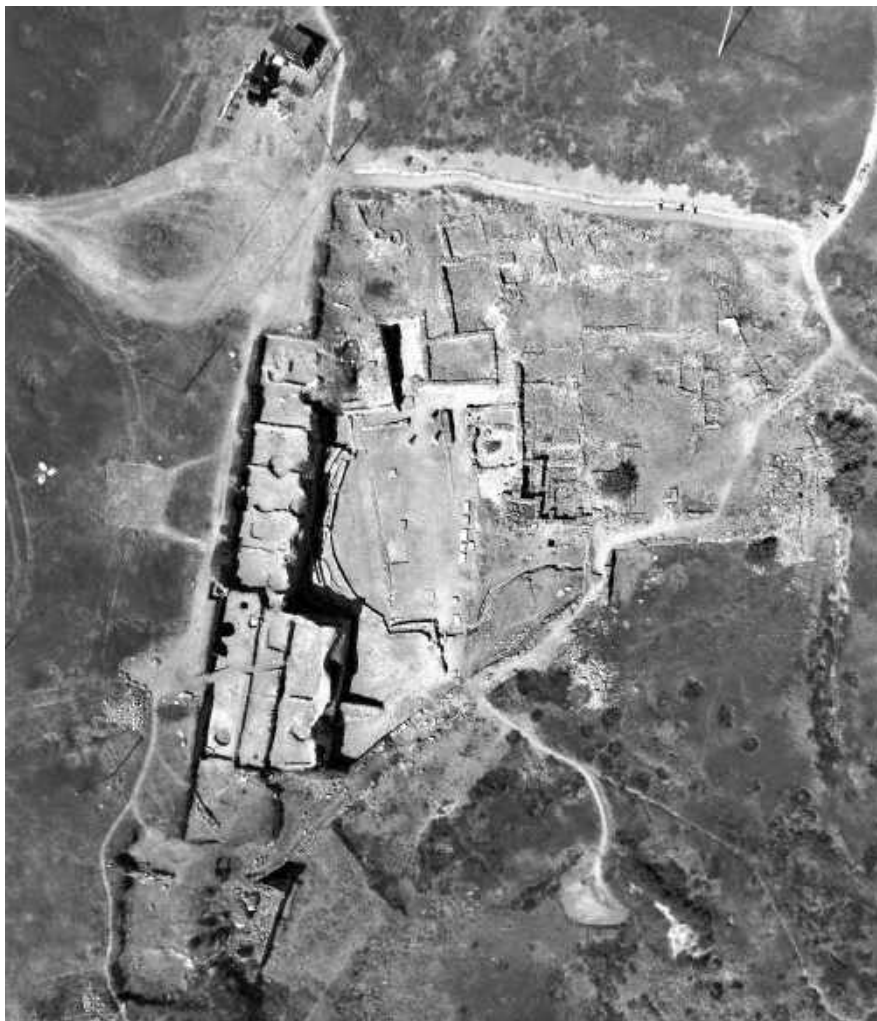


Fig. 1. Nymphaion. Sector 'M'. 2016. Photo by A. V. Nesterov



Fig. 2. Nymphaion. Sector 'M', area added in 2010.
View from the east. 2017. Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy

The black-glossed pottery is represented by Attic and Asia Minor products, which include a bottom fragment of a bowl with a relief medallion depicting a female figure and some unclear image. The clay of this Nymphaion bowl resembles that of the products of the Pergamon workshops. The bowl is datable to the second half of the 3rd – beginning of the 2nd centuries BC. Similar bowls were repeatedly encountered during excavations of Nymphaion.³ Forms of the black-glossed tableware vary: oinochoai, pelikai, kraters, unguentaria, kylikes, skyphoi, kantharoi, bolsals, refined stemless bowls, saltcellars, plates and fish dishes, including examples with stamped ornament. Noteworthy are a few products painted with liquid clay and white paint, as well as single fragments of red-figured vessels.

The redware is fairly diverse in form and is presented mainly by products of Bosporan workshops. Of note is a fragment of a redware measuring vessel with a part of three-line stamp (Fig. 3). Similar finds have been known at Nymphaion before.⁴ Greyware pottery is represented by few fragments. The assemblage of kitchenware consists of pots, their lids and bowls, as well as handmade vessels. Among the finds, of note is a fragment of a pan handle in the form of a boar. Vessels with zoomorphic handles are found in the layers of the 1st–5th centuries AD and are characteristic of the settlements of the Sarmatian culture of Ciscaucasia, the Northern Caspian and the Northern Black Sea region.⁵

Specially noteworthy are fragments of terracotta figurines, a fragment of a small marble statuette, a fragment of an architectural detail from limestone, as well as bone and horn objects,⁶ among the latter, an elegant antler overlay in the form of a capital in Ionic order, which probably served as decoration of a casket or a cist (Fig. 4). Of note are fragments of iron nails of the size suggesting their use in construction. Bronze artifacts, strongly corroded, are represented by three-bladed arrowheads, as well as very poorly preserved coins. The identifiable coins belong to Panticapaeum issues of the 4th–3rd centuries BC.

³ Danilchenko 2011 [С. А. Данильченко, “Чаша с медальоном из Нимфея”], 12–13.

⁴ Fedoseev 1991 [Н. Ф. Федосеев, “Три новых клейма на тонкостенных сосудах”], 244–245; Fedoseev 2013 [Н. Ф. Федосеев, “К вопросу о существовании полисных магистратур на Боспоре”], 25–33, Fig. 1.3; 2.3 and 6.

⁵ Scalon 1941 [К. М. Скалон, “Изображения животных на керамике сарматского периода”], 73.

⁶ The definition by A. K. Kasparov, senior researcher of the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

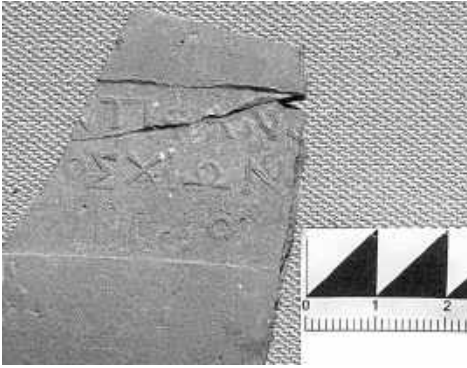


Fig. 3. Nymphaion. The fragment of a measuring vessel with a part of a stamp (H. 14.53).

Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy



Fig. 4. Nymphaion. Antler overlay in the form of a column capital (H. 14.25).

Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy

Among the finds, of note are also fairly numerous bones of domestic animals, including goats and sheep (predominating), cow, pig, horse, dog, and single bones of a domestic cat. The bones of wild animals (hare, fox, wolf, wild boar, red deer, and ferret) are few. Birds are mostly represented by bones of domestic hen. There were also bones of wild birds: great bustard (*Otis tarda*), mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), red-necked grebes (*Podiceps auritus*), cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), black-necked loon (*Gavia arctica*), gray goose (*Anser anser*), duck (*Anatidae* indet.), wild duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*), herring gulls (*Larus argentatus*), gannetwhale (*Sula Bassana*), hawkish (*Accipitridae* indet.), white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), blue dove (*Columba livia*), and hooded crow (*Corvus cornix*).⁷ In addition, the finds included bones of fish, dolphins, a fragment of a crab shell and a fragment of a tortoise shell.

Numerous household pits were intruded into the thickness of the mound (Fig. 5). In 2014–2018, 28 pits were discovered and excavated. Of note are a number of pits with the mouth decorated with brickwork (nos. 60, 62, 65, Fig. 6). According to the finds from the fill all these pits are dated to the first centuries AD.

⁷ The definition by A. N. Pantelev, junior researcher, Zoological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.



Fig. 5. Nymphaion. Sector 'M', area added in 2010. Squares 7–14.
View from the south.
Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy

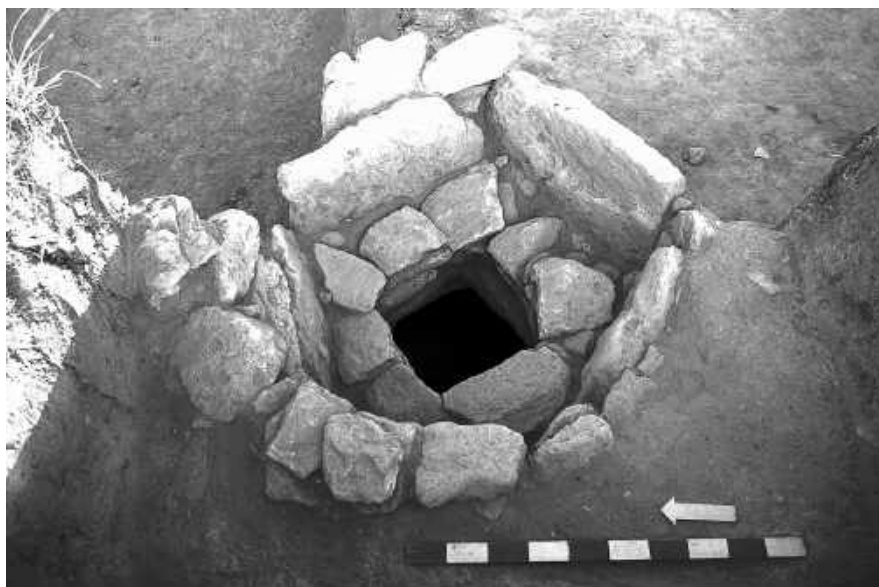


Fig. 6. Nymphaion. Sector 'M', area added in 2010. Squares 7–8.
Stone lining of the mouth of pit no. 65. View from the West.
Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy

In pit no. 76, the skeleton of a man aged 20–30 years was found in a crouched position on the left side, his chest was crushed by stones. On the skeleton, signs of pathological and traumatic changes were revealed: the Kashin-Beck disease (Urovskaia disease), Paget's disease, tumor-like formations on the ribs, as well as metastasis of a malignant tumor in the lumbar vertebrae, which led to deformity of the spine in the lumbar area and disability of the man.⁸ The cause of death was possibly a chopped rib damage.

Excavations were also carried out in western sector 'M'. The finds from the uncovered layers date back to the 4th–3rd centuries BC. However, they include also ceramics of the 5th and single fragments of the 2nd centuries BC. Most of the finds, as usually, are represented by fragments of amphorae mostly from Thasos, Herakleia, Sinope, Chios (with hollowed toes), Rhodes and some unknown centers. Noteworthy are a few amphorae of Kos, Knidos, Chersonesos, Mende, Peparethos, brown ware (Colchian?), Chian plump-necked and grayware Lesbian ones, as well as single fragments of amphorae of the circle of Thasos, Samos, Amastris, Klazomenai, and Lesbian redware amphorae. On the walls of the amphorae from Chios, Thasos, Sinope, and Rhodes, graffiti and red dipinti were found. Among the amphora stamps, the earliest are those of Thasos and Herakleia Pontike, dating from the first half of the 4th century BC. The most numerous group is from Sinope, dating back to the second and fourth quarters of the 3rd century BC. The stamps of the other centers are represented by single finds.

The set of black-glossed tableware includes products of the Attic and Asia Minor workshops, among which the open forms predominate, while lekythoi, pelikai and guttoi are represented by single fragments. The black-glossed ceramics are dated to within the 4th–3rd centuries BC.

Of particular interest is a fragment of a sculptured vessel in the form of a bird's head (Fig. 7). It is a fragment belonging to a figure vessel in the form of the body of a bird that was found in 2013 (Fig. 8).

Brown- and red-glossed Hellenistic pottery, as well as bowls with a relief decoration, are sparse.

The rare tableware is represented by redware and grayware specimens. Redware ceramics include the usual set of forms, characteristic of the layers of the 4th–3rd centuries BC at settlements of the Northern Black

⁸ The definition by D. Yu. Ponomarev, the employee of the State Budgetary Institution of Health of the Republic of Crimea "The Crimean Republican Office of the Chief Medical Examiner".



Fig. 7. Nymphaion.
The fragment of a figure vessel in the form of a bird's head (H. 15.95).
Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy

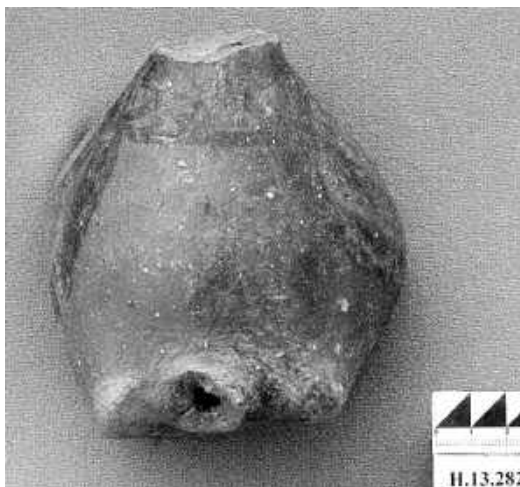


Fig. 8. Nymphaion.
The fragment of a figure vessel in the form of a bird's body (H. 13.282).
Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy

Sea Coast, among which products of the Bosporan workshops prevail. Especially noteworthy is possibly a fragment of the lower part of a thick-walled bottle with a worn rectangular two-line stamp on the wall. Such bottles can have been used for drugs. The clay of the most of grayware vessels is rather dense, similar to the clay of the ware originating from the kilns excavated in the temple of Demeter.

The assemblage of kitchenware consists mainly of pots and lids for them, as well as of a small number of fragments of pans. Among the handmade vessels, pots predominate; most of the latter have an outturned edge, and some are ornamented with finger impressions or pinched pieces of clay. Also notable is the presence of handmade bowls with a flat bottom.

There are numerous fragments of tiles, among which products of Bosporos predominate, including stamped examples dated to within 380–330 BC. Noteworthy is the find of two small fragments of ceramic water pipes.

Also of interest are fragments of terracotta figurines and a fragment of an architectural detail in the form of a Silen's head with traces of brown and red paint. It probably decorated an antefix (Fig. 9). Finds from iron and bronze in the excavated layers were few and poorly preserved.



Fig. 9. Nymphaion. The fragment of the architectural detail in the form of a Silen's head (H. 15.170).

Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy

The southern part of the complex opened in 2009⁹ was cleared, and a continuation of the amphitheater with the second and fourth (lower) rows of the seats was uncovered. The southern end of the second row was partially preserved in the form of six plates laid on the tamped ground. It was dug to a length of 4.7 m. Further, the plates extend to the western side of the excavation. The southern end of the lower row of the seats is a continuation of arcuate wall no. 213 excavated in 2013. The northern end of wall no. 213 rests on a staircase that divides the amphitheater into two halves and extends to the western part of the excavation (Fig. 10). On the northern side, the staircase is framed with a balustrade of blocks of marmorized limestone separating it from the northern part of the amphitheater.¹⁰ To the east of wall no. 213, a crushed stone pavement was traced bounded by wall no. 216, which separates the pavement from the area with the propylaea (Fig. 11).¹¹

⁹ Buyskikh–Sokolova, 2010 [А. В. Буйских, О. Ю. Соколова, *Полевой отчет украинско-российской археологической экспедиции ИА НАНУ и Государственного Эрмитажа за 2009 г.*], 24–30.

¹⁰ Kulikov–Sokolova 2014 [А. В. Куликов, О. Ю. Соколова, *Полевой отчет украинско-российской Нимфейской археологической экспедиции Керченского историко-культурного заповедника и Государственного Эрмитажа за 2013 год*], 26.

¹¹ Sokolova 2017 [О. Ю. Соколова, *Научный отчет о результатах полевых исследований на античном городище Нимфей в 2016 году (Российская Федерация, Республика Крым, г. Керчь)*], 47–49.



Fig. 10. Nymphaion. Sector 'M', western excavation.
View from the east. 2017. Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy



Fig. 11. Nymphaion. Sector 'M', western excavation.
View from the north. 2017. Photo by S.V. Pokrovskiy

Simultaneously with the excavations, conservation of the discovered objects was carried out.

Olga Sokolova
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg
 oyusokol@mail.ru

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