

INVESTIGATIONS OF THE RURAL SANCTUARY
AT THE SETTLEMENT OF ARTYUSHCHENKO-1
(BUGAZSKOE) ON THE TAMAN PENINSULA
IN 2015–2018*

The agricultural site of Artyushchenko-1 is situated on the shore of the Black Sea, four kilometers south-east from the farmstead of Artyushchenko (Novotamansky rural district). Excavations at the site were started in 1998 by the Bosporan expedition of the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences (St Petersburg). The site has been partly destroyed by the coastal abrasion.¹ It must be noted that the settlement-site is divided into eastern and western parts by an ancient ravine. The excavations have revealed a chronological difference between these two parts. The eastern side was inhabited in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods, while the western part was occupied only during the Roman and the Early Medieval periods.²

Excavations were carried out during the last years in the western part of the site. Its occupation started in the first century AD. The settlement's history includes two periods of occupation in the Roman epoch: pre-Gothic (before the invasion of the Northern Black Sea region by the German Gothic tribes): the 1st century AD – first half of the 3rd century AD, and the post-Gothic period: the second half of the 4th century AD.

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¹ Vinogradov–Kashaev 2016 [Ю. А. Виноградов, С. В. Кашаев, “Античные поселения Артющенко-1 и Артющенко-2 на Таманском полуострове. К оценке масштабов природного разрушения”, *Боспорские исследования*], 95–105.

² Vinogradov 2013 [Ю. А. Виноградов, “Основные итоги изучения поселения Артющенко I (Таманский полуостров)”, *Проблемы истории, филологии и культуры*], 233–241; Vinogradov 2018 [“Поселение Артющенко-1 (Бугазское) на Таманском полуострове. Итоги археологических исследований 1998–2017 гг.”, *Боспорский феномен*], 271–277.

The remains of eight primitive ground dwellings and numerous pits belong to the pre-Gothic period. The materials from these pits and ground dwellings are typical of the culture of the agricultural population of the Bosporan Kingdom during the Roman period. It is also noteworthy that numerous finds of handmade pottery uncovered here were manufactured in a technique typical of local barbarian tribes, and are characteristic materials at settlements of this region.

Part of a very unusual structure was excavated at the western sector of the site in 2012 and 2015–2018. It is an area with a layer of clay (5 cm thick): a clay platform, which contained a large amount of charred grains of bearded wheat (*Triticum monococcum*). In 2017, this structure was excavated completely. It is measuring 16×4.5–9.5 m and is dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. Initially it was interpreted as a threshing floor,³ although bearded wheat was not common for the Taman peninsula (and for the Kuban region in general).⁴ The latter circumstance forced us to look for another explanation of the site, i. e. as a sanctuary. No coins or terracotta figurines have been found here, but it is a very characteristic feature of Greek shrines. However, fragments of well-ornamented handmade pots, which were found in this area, as well as small sacramental ceramic ‘loaves of bread’ made it possible to consider this structure as a cult installation.⁵

A number of large pits were investigated within this area. Some of them contained skeletons of animals (dogs, pigs, cows, etc.) and occasionally human remains. Materials from these pits support the proposed interpretation of the place. Four of the pits were excavated in 2015–2018.

Pit no. 69 was investigated in 2015 (Fig. 1). Dog’s skeletons were lying in the upper part of it, and below there were numerous bones of other animals.⁶

Pit no. 80 was excavated in 2016 (Fig. 2). In its upper part, there was a dog’s skeleton lying on a fragment of a cow’s vertebral column. A handmade bowl was put upon these bones. Numerous skeletons of young animals were found in the lower part of the pit.⁷

³ Vinogradov 2015, 158–159.

⁴ Pashkevich 2016 [“Археоботанические исследования Боспора”, *Боспорские исследования*], 205–298.

⁵ Vinogradov 2017 [“Молотильный ток или сельское святилище? К интерпретации объекта, открытого на поселении Артющенко-1 (Таманский полуостров)”, *Ex Ungue Leonet. К 90-летию Льва Самуйловича Клейна*], 322–333.

⁶ Vinogradov 2017, 326.

⁷ Vinogradov 2017, 327–329.



Fig. 1. Pit no. 69. Dog skeleton



Fig. 2. Pit no. 80. Dog skeleton lying on a piece of a cow's vertebral column

Pit no. 89 was investigated in 2017 (Fig. 3). A cow (without legs) was thrown into the pit and a handmade pot was put in front of its head.

A shallow pit, no. 87, was excavated in 2017 in the northern section of the clay platform. There was a human skeleton there (Fig. 4). None accompanying object was found near the bones, but undoubtedly this burial was made here in no way accidentally.

It is also of special note that a considerable number of complete vessels, mostly handmade, were found in the large pits with animal bones (Fig. 5). Hence, there is a reason to consider them as sacrificial.

There is almost no doubt that this part of the settlement was used to perform sacrifices to gods of fertility. The presence of dogs among the sacrificial animals is quite common at Bosporan settlements and cemeteries.⁸ These animals were considered as mediators between the world of the living and the dead. With their help, the sacrifices could reach the gods easier. To understand the nature of this sacred ground, its localization is also of importance. It was situated not in the center of the settlement, but in its western outskirts. Possibly, it was *inter alia* a sacred protection of the inhabitants of Artyushchenko-1 against malicious demonic forces.

Summing up, it can be accepted that the clay platform and the pits associated with it (with animal sacrifices and human burials) were parts of a rural sanctuary. Some similarities (firstly to sacrificial pits) can be found in Thrace, where so-called pit-sanctuaries existed.⁹ Human sacrifices were found there many times.¹⁰ The period of flourishing of these sanctuaries was the 6th–3rd centuries BC, but this tradition was retained throughout the whole Roman Age.¹¹ Naturally, some elements of cultural similarity between Thrace and Bosporos in the Roman period still need a special discussion.

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⁸ Moleva 1998 [“Собака в религиозных представлениях боспорян”, *Боспорское царство как историко-культурный феномен*], 60–62; Moleva 2002 [Очерки сакральной жизни Боспора], 113–123; Vakhtina 2007 [“Еще раз о погребениях собак на Боспоре”, *Боспорский феномен: сакральный смысл региона, памятников, находок*], 140–144.

⁹ Tonkova 2003, 482; Bozhkova 2016, 479.

¹⁰ Tonkova 2003, 496–498, 502; Tonkova 2010.

¹¹ Tonkova 2003, 482; Theodossiev 2011, 19.



Fig.3. Pit no. 89. Cow skeleton



Fig.4. Pit no. 87. Human remains

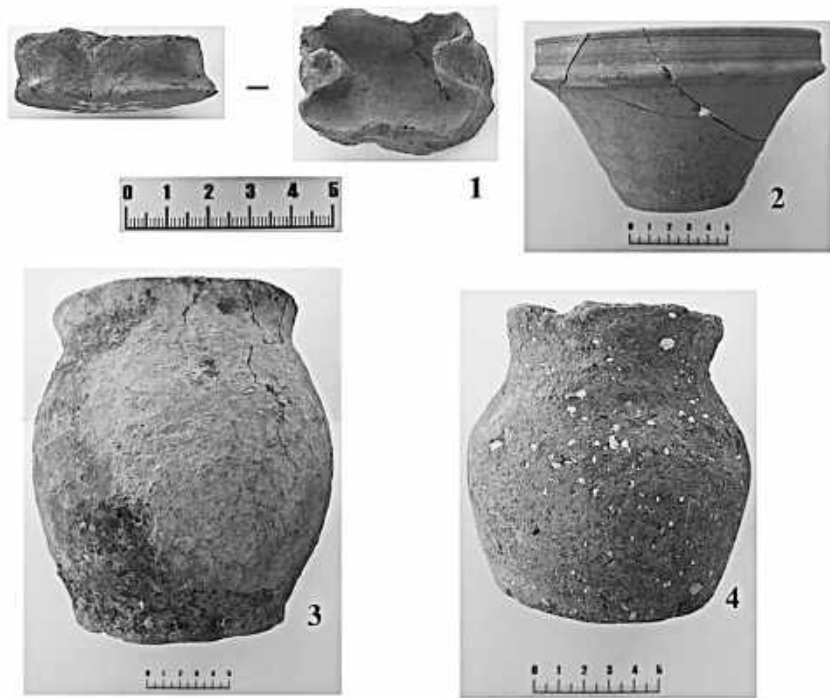


Fig. 5. Pottery finds from the pit no. 89

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