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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF
THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM AT
THE SITE OF NYMPHAION IN 2019 AND 2021

The review focuses on archaeological research of the State Hermitage Expedition at the site of Nymphaion in 2019 and 2021. The site is located on Kamysh-Burun Cape, 17 km southwest of Kerch center (Russian Federation, Republic of Crimea, Eltigen District). The works were concentrated in two locations of the site, Sector M and Sector O.

Sector M

Sector M is situated on the southern border of the Nymphaion site. The sector has already been under investigation for more than 40 years. An ancient theater has been partly uncovered here (since 2009, Fig. 1). The complex of the theater was accessible through propylaea bearing an inscription on their architrave: Θεοπροπίδης Μεγακλέος τὴν εἴσοδον ἀνέθηκεν Διονύσῳ ἀγωνοθετῶν Λεόκωνος ἄρχοντος Βοσπόρου καὶ Θεοδοσίης καὶ τῆς Σινδικῆς πάσης καὶ Τορετέων καὶ Δανδαρίων καὶ Ψησῶν. Mention of King Leukon I and his titles points to the 4th century BC as the date of construction of the theater complex.¹

Excavations of the theater were continued in 2019 and 2021. For the moment, the diameter of the structure is estimated to be about 30 m. The maximum height of the rows was 5 m. We can assume that the theater was erected during the rule of Leucon I (389/388–349/348), while the date of its destruction has not been determined yet. It also remains unclear whether the building was completed or unfinished. After the theater collapsed, all its area was covered with a layer of soil more than 6 m deep. In 2019 and 2021, the Expedition of the State Hermitage removed this mound from the western part of the theater. The mound included strata of yellow, grey, and ashen soil sloping towards the center of the theater at a 45° angle.

¹ Sokolova–Pavlichenko 2002 [О. Ю. Соколова, Н. А. Павличенко, “Новая посвятельная надпись из Нимфея”], 99–121.



Fig. 1. Sector M. General theater view.

The great majority of ceramic artifacts from the layer above the theater are fragments of amphorae from the Hellenistic period, making up 80 % of the total number of finds, not counting roof tiles. The finds excluding amphorae are identified as follows: 46 % – redware pottery, 27 % – handmade vessels, 18 % – kitchenware, 5 % – glazed Hellenistic tableware, 3% – greyware with grey polished surface, 1% – both red-figure and black-figure pottery.

Ceramic materials belong mostly to the 240s–210s BC, as becomes clear from epigraphic data – the stamps of Sinope and Rhodos.² The latest of these is a Rhodian rhomboid stamp [ἐπι] / Ἀλεξιμά[χου] / Πανάμ[ου] (inv. no. H.19.45) dated back to ca. 147 BC.³

A large group of black-glaze pottery decorated in the West Slope style and fragments of “Megarian” bowls also belong to the late 3rd to 2nd centuries BC.

Among the rare ceramic finds, a fragmented kernos should be mentioned (inv. no. H.19.159, Fig. 2). Pieces of such vessels have been previously found in Nymphaion (State Hermitage, inv. nos. HΦ.82.376, HΦ.88.256, HΦ.89.117), mainly along with materials from the 4th to 3rd centuries BC. Similar kernoi were discovered in the sanctuary of Demeter in Beregovoye 4.⁴ They are traditionally treated as ritual artifacts.

² All the finds of the seasons of 2019–2021 are stored in the Eastern Crimean Historical and Cultural Museum Preserve.

³ Finkielsztejn 2001, 193 gr. IVb.

⁴ Zavoikin 2015 [A. A. Завойкин, “Керносы в святилище Деметры и Коры на Азиатском Боспоре”, *Вестник Нижегородского университета*], 46–53.



Fig. 2. Sector M. Fragmented kernos (inv. no. H.19.159).



Fig. 3. Sector M. Greyware oinochoe with a stamp (inv. no. H.19.36).

Another remarkable find is a stamp impressed on the body of what was probably a greyware oinochoe (inv. no. H.19.36, Fig. 3). Similar containers have been collected by A. V. Kovalchuk and are considered to be measuring vessels.⁵ The discovery of new samples of the type contributes to a greater understanding of this group of material.

⁵ Kovalchuk 2012 [А. В. Ковальчук, “Боспорские мерные сосуды IV–III вв. до н. э.”, *Древности Боспора*], 220–238.

Sector O

Sector O was started in 2021 in the western field outskirts of the site in order to find the main city gate, revise the planigraphy, and trace the defense line of the site (Fig. 4). To lay out the sector, a plan of the Nymphaion site by



Plan of Nymphaion site by P. Du Brux (scaled to 1:2000)


-  Location of Sector 'O' at the place of intended gate towers and a segment of main street
- == == == Intended line of the main street from gate towers to acropolis

Fig. 4. Sector O. General plan of the sector. Overlay of the plan by P. Du Brux and the modern topographic base.

P. Du Brux was used.⁶ The plan was overlaid over the modern topographic base made by the experts of the Credo-Dialogue company (Minsk) under the leadership of A. P. Pigin in 2014–2015.

On the relief of the area were two hills, 70 m in diameter and approximately 2.5 m in height, hypothetically identified as remains of two gate towers. Between the hills there was a narrow passage, about 8 m in width, correlating with a pass way between towers. Behind the hills is a ravine that bore water in antiquity.

Sector O covers the surface of the intended towers and a part of the intended main road (Fig. 5). The planned dimensions of the sector are 100×100 m, measured on the north and south axes. In the field season of 2021, only six 5×5 m squares were excavated. The three most promising sections were chosen to test the hypothesis of the location of the gate towers and a road.

The most interesting results were obtained in Section 2, situated at the place of the posited road between two gate towers. A depression of the daylight surface is visible in this area. Furthermore, reconstruction of the city's road network based upon discovered segments of streets shows



Fig. 5. Sector O. Segment of the main street next to the gate towers.

⁶ Tunkina 2002 [И. В. Тункина, *Русская наука о классических древностях Юга России (XVIII – середина XIX в.)*], fig. 52.

that the supposed segment lies on the same line with the street partially unearthed in Sector BC.⁷

Under a topsoil layer and a mixed surficial layer of clayish soil, at a depth of 0.6–0.7 m, there was a rammed surface composed of small stones, large sherds, and clayish soil. The surface may be interpreted as part of an ancient road, namely a segment of the main street of the city stretching from the gate towers (Sector O) towards the acropolis (Sector BC). The segment was pierced by several utility pits evidently belonging to the Roman period. The pits were not excavated in the season of 2021. Material from the layer of yellow clayish soil covering the causeway is dated to the first centuries AD.

The results of studies in the seasons under discussion have enriched our knowledge about the key objects of city infrastructure, such as the theater and the main street connecting the gate towers and the acropolis. In the following years, it is planned to expand Sector O to obtain new information on the planigraphy of Nymphaion site.

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⁷ Chistov 2017 [Д. Е. Чистов, “Урбанизация архаического Нимфея”, *Труды Государственного Эрмитажа*], 137–160.

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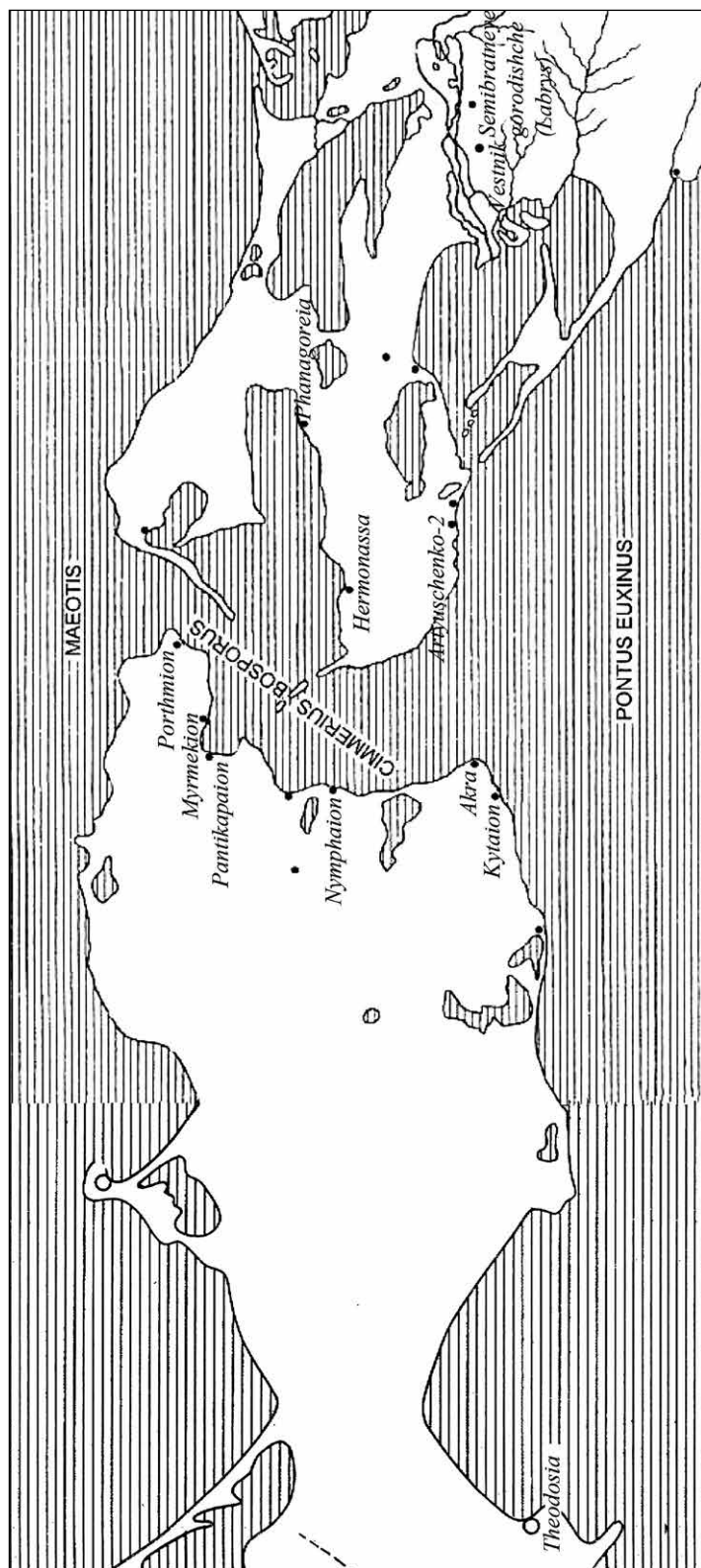
Further Reading

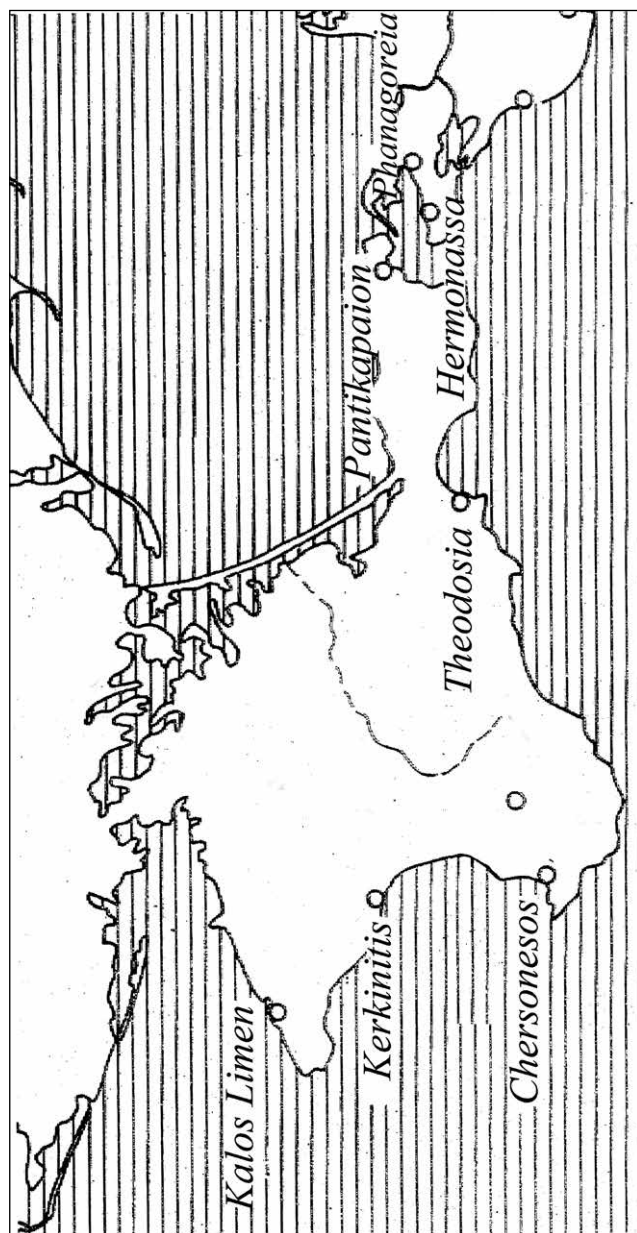
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В данном обзоре представлены археологические работы экспедиции Государственного Эрмитажа на городище Нимфей в 2019 и 2021 гг. Городище Нимфей расположено на мысу Камыш-Бурун в 17 км к юго-западу от центра Керчи (Российская Федерация, Республика Крым, г. Керчь, микрорайон Эльтиген). В 2019 и 2021 годах работы проводились на двух участках – участок М и участок О. На участке М проводились исследования античного театра, сооруженного в 1-й половине IV в. до н. э.; на участке О – исследования Главной городской дороги и воротных башен.

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