

THE NYMPHAION EXPEDITION
OF THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM
(2006–2013)

The excavations of the Bosporan city of Nymphaion¹ continued in 2006–2013. The ruins of the town are located in the southern part of Kerch, in the outskirts of the village of Eltigen (Geroyevskoye). During the period specified, the main studies at the site concentrated on the southern slope of the Nymphaion plateau (section M), where cultural layers and construction remains of the Hellenistic and Roman periods were studied. In addition, protective excavations were carried out in the area of the flat-grave necropolis.²

1. Excavations at the ancient townsite

One of the primary focuses of recent years has involved the excavation of deposits covering the area to the south of the Propylaea. This site was discovered in 1996–1997.³ The deposits under study include layers of loam of different tints and density containing numerous intercalations of burnt soil and ashes, small lenses and interbeds of pure ash, unfinished wares,

¹ See Sokolova 2005.

² In 2009–2011, the works were carried out jointly with the Institute of Archaeology NASU (supervisor of the Ukrainian part was Dr. A. V. Buyskikh, senior researcher at IA NASU). Since 2012 the excavations were conducted jointly with the Kerch Historical and Cultural Preserve (in 2012 the head of the Ukrainian part was M. A. Kotin, Scientific Assistant of the Kerch Preserve, and in 2013, A. V. Kulikov, the Academic Secretary of the Preserve).

³ The smart facade of the northern propylon can be reconstructed through an assemblage of architectural details found here and an inscription on an architrave elucidating the purpose of its construction. See Sokolova, Dolinskaya 2001 [О. Ю. Соколова, Н. В. Долинская, “Нимфейский пропилон. Вопросы реконструкции и датировки”, in: *175 лет Керченскому музею древностей. Материалы международной конференции*], 66–69; Sokolova 2001 [О. Ю. Соколова, “Новая надпись из Нимфея (предварительное сообщение)”, *Древности Боспора*], 368–376; Sokolova, Pavlichenko 2002 [О. Ю. Соколова, Н. А. Павличенко, “Новая посвятельная надпись из Нимфея”].

mud bricks, eelgrass (*Zostera marina*), pieces of charcoal mixed with rubble and ceramic fragments. The maximum thickness of the layer was up to 7 m (Fig. 1).

Most of the finds consist of fragments of amphorae, among which of note are those from Thasos of the 5th – early 3rd century BC, as well as from Lesbos, Chios (end of the 4th – beginning of the 3rd century BC⁴); Mende, Peparethos, Herakleia Pontike, Sinope, Chersonesos, Samos (second half of the 4th century BC); Colchis, Rhodes, Kos, Paros, Akanthos, Knidos (including those of “Zenon’s type”) and other unidentified centers. In addition, archeologists found several fragments of amphorae from Klazomenai dating to the second half of the 6th century BC. Discoveries of amphora stamps were notably numerous. The most prevalent among these were Sinopean stamps from the 3rd – early 2nd century BC and stamps of Rhodes dating primarily from the second half of the 3rd or the first half of the 2nd century BC. Stamps of other centers are rare, and a considerable number of those on Bosporean tiles are dated to the period of 370–340 BC.

The black-glossed ware from Asia Minor as well as of Attic production, brown-glossed and red-glossed Hellenistic vessels, red-ware and grey-ware pottery are represented by the forms typical to levels of the 4th–3rd centuries BC; along with the latter, fragments of the 5th and 2nd centuries BC have been found. Several notable discoveries have been made of terracotta statuettes, fragments of architectural details made from clay and stone, ivory, bone, as well as objects of glass, iron and bronze (Fig. 2). Most coins found here are poorly preserved specimens which have been heavily corroded.

In the area located to the south of the Propylaea discovered in 1996–1997, the base of an altar and the altar orthostate were uncovered after removal of the deposits.⁵ Besides, archeologists found four profiled plates in different parts of the site, the base of a second propylon and the second bed of a big drain which had already been partially studied in 1986 (Fig. 3). In the northwestern corner of the area, four rows of plates were visible in the form of large “steps” (Fig. 4) oriented along a northwest-southwest axis with a small deviation to the south at their southwestern ends.

In 2006–2010, in order to continue studies of the fortification system in Nymphaion and the adjacent territory, the excavation was expanded

⁴ A few examples of plump-necked vessels of the 5th century BC, variants with a conical toe and with pointed bottoms without marked toes.

⁵ Another altar orthostate was found at this site in 1997: Arsentyeva 2004 [Е. И. Арсентьева, “Алтарь из Нимфея. Попытка реконструкции”, *Сообщения Государственного Эрмитажа*], 54–60.

westward. These investigations revealed that rocks and virgin clay were undercut here in order to build the western wall of a defensive tower. The archeologists also excavated over 50 household pits of cylindrical or pear-shaped outlines, their depth ranging from 0.2 to 2.4 m and the diameter at the bottom varying from 0.37 to 2.6 m (Fig. 5). Some of the pits had stone lining at their mouth. Finds from a number of these pits revealed that they date from the 5th to 4th centuries BC, while most of the others belong to the first century BC.

A set of architectural details was discovered in one of the pits. Of particular interest are two limestone blocks with a vegetal ornament relief dating back to the 4th century BC (Fig. 6).

2. Excavations of the necropolis

The protective excavations in the area of the necropolis was the second objective of the work in 2006–2013. In 2006, a new excavation was begun to the west of the “alley of crypts”. This area was chosen due to a great number of robbers’ pits (more than 40) where certain traces of burials were discernible. In the investigated area of 234 square meters, 22 burials and one household pit were excavated. Mostly, they are datable to the 4th century BC.

In 2009, a catacomb burial (no. 28) was excavated at a distance of about 400 m to the south-west of the “alley of crypts”. It was similar to funeral constructions studied in 1973–1978.⁶ Catacomb tomb no. 28 consisted of a dromos and a chamber stretching in a west-east direction, with the axis of the dromos deviating slightly southward in relation to the axis of the chamber. The entrance staircase to the dromos located to the east consisted of 6–7 roughly cut steps. The length of the trapezoid dromos was about 4.0 m. The entrance to the chamber was arch-shaped. Its height was 1.53 m and its width – 0.9 m. It was blocked with a rectangular plate placed on an oblong stone block which served as a kind of threshold. The chamber had the shape of an irregular quadrangle. Its dimensions were as follows: the eastern wall – 2.9 m, the western wall – 2.65 m, the southern wall – 3.15 m, and the northern wall – 3.2 m. The vault of the chamber was ruined, but evidently it was semi-circular. The height of the chamber was 1.85 m. Three small steps led to the chamber from the dromos; the height of each was 0.26 m. Opposite the entrance there was a trapezoid-shaped niche carved in the wall for a lamp.

⁶ Grach 1999.

The catacomb tomb under consideration had been repeatedly plundered. When uncovering the floor of the chamber, the researchers found fragments of glass jars and balsamaria dating from the end of the 1st – beginning of the 2nd century AD, beads from glass paste, fragments of iron blades of swords and knives, numerous fragments of bronze articles and coins which unfortunately are in poor condition, fragmented iron nails and pieces of wood from sarcophagi, fragments of gypsum applications in the form of pawns, leaves of acanthus, palmettes, fragmentary tragic masks and masks of Medusa. In terms of their forms and the preserved traces of painting, these findings are similar to the objects found during the excavation of catacombs in 1973–1978. Of note is the discovery of a few pieces of gold jewelry: bits of leaves from a funeral wreath and two beads. Generally, in terms of its design and contents, the structure under consideration is similar to the catacombs of the “alley of crypts” and can be dated back to the 1st–2nd centuries AD.

Within a small area in front of the entrance to the dromos of catacomb tomb K-28, four burials were uncovered; one was a flat grave and the three others – slab cists. These all are dated to the 1st–2nd centuries AD.

In 2012, two areas of the necropolis were excavated.⁷ In one of them, a collapse of large dressed stone blocks lying under the sod layer was revealed. Considering their shape, they probably belonged to a crypt with a semicircular vault. Among the blocks a keystone of the entrance arch was found, as indicated by a relief image of a bull head (bucranium, Fig. 7). In addition, a cultural layer 1.6 m thick from the 5th–4th centuries BC was discovered here. This layer is probably related to the western part of the ancient settlement of “Western Eltigen” discovered in 1991 by V. N. Zin’ko. At the second site, two stone cists were investigated. Although completely plundered, they are nevertheless datable to the Hellenistic period as indicated by the contents.

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⁷ The supervisor of the works was M. A. Kotin, Scientific Assistant of the Kerch Historical and Cultural Preserve.

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Fig. 1. Nymphaion. Section “M”, view from the East. 2012.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.

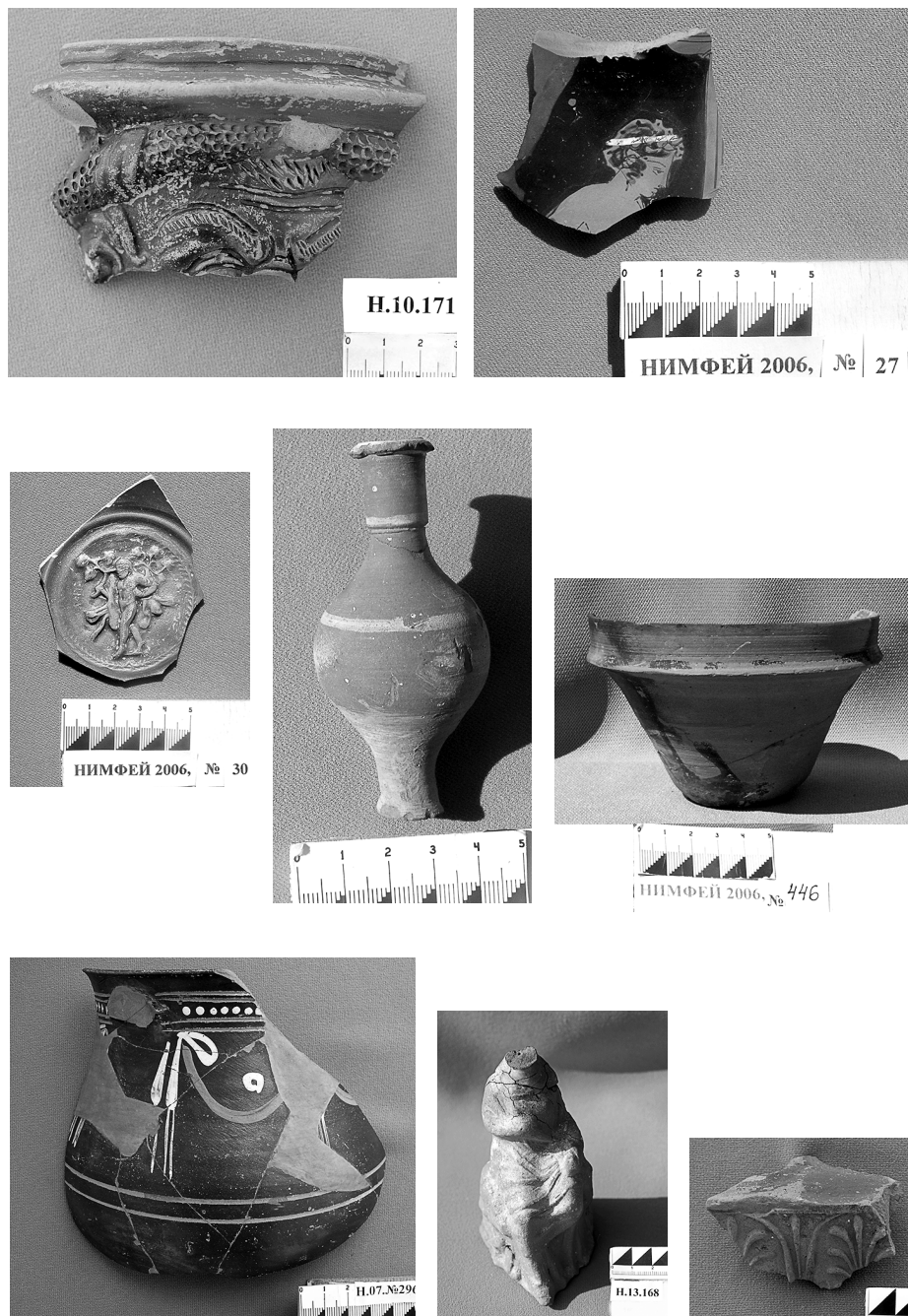


Fig. 2. Nymphaion. Finds from excavations of 2006–2013.
 Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 3. Nymphaion. Section “M”, western excavation. 2013.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 4. Nymphaion. Section “M”, amphitheatre benches. 2009.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 5. Nymphaion. Section “M”. 2011. Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 6. Nymphaion. Section “M”,
pit no. 25, architectural detail. 2007.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 7. Nymphaion, necropolis.
Keystone with a bull head. 2012.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 1. Nymphaion. Section “M”, view from the East. 2012.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.

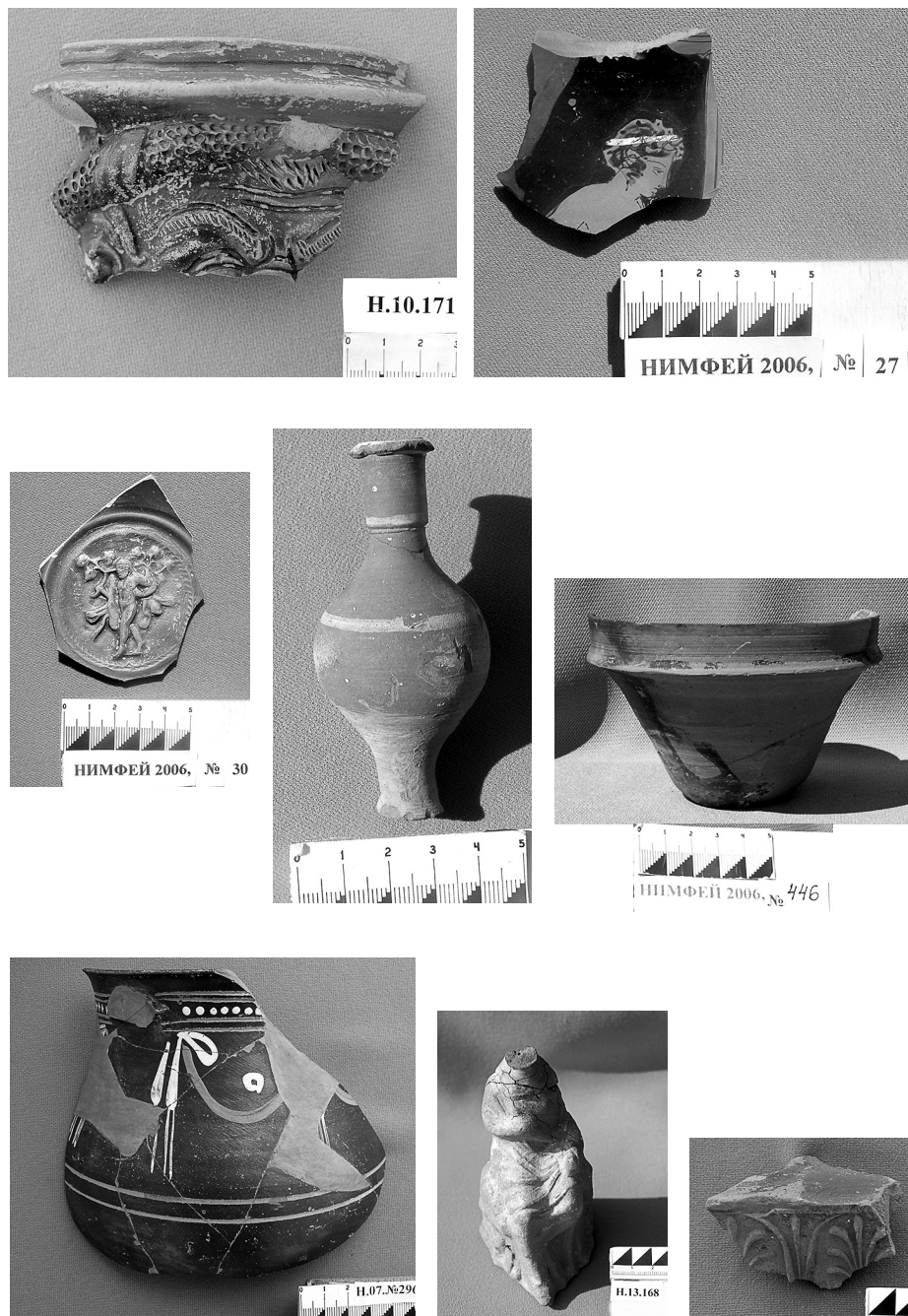


Fig. 2. Nymphaion. Finds from excavations of 2006–2013.
 Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 3. Nymphaion. Section “M”, western excavation. 2013.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 4. Nymphaion. Section “M”, amphitheatre benches. 2009.
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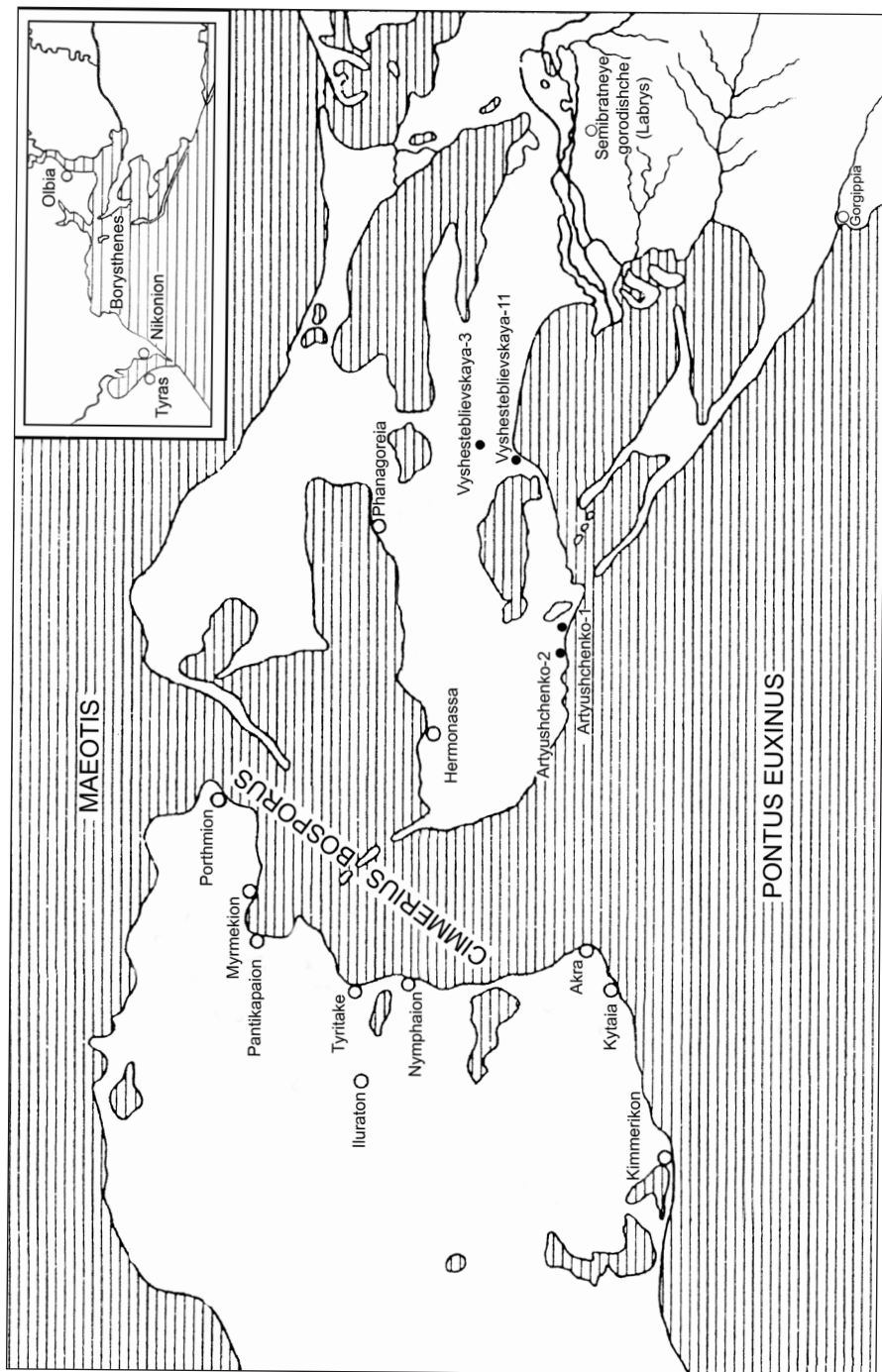
Fig. 5. Nymphaion. Section “M”. 2011. Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 6. Nymphaion. Section “M”,
pit no. 25, architectural detail. 2007.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Fig. 7. Nymphaion, necropolis.
Keystone with a bull head. 2012.
Photo by S. V. Pokrovskiy.



Abbreviations

- KSIIMK = КСИИМК* – *Краткие сообщения Института истории материальной культуры [Kratkije soobshchenija Instituta istorii material'noj kultury]*
- MIA = МИА* – *Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР [Materialy i issledovanija po archeologii SSSR]*
- OAK = ОАК* – *Отчет императорской Археологической комиссии [Otch'ot imperatorskoj Arkheologicheskoi komissii]*
- SA = СА* – *Советская археология [Sov'etskaja arkheologija]*
- VDI = ВДИ* – *Вестник древней истории [V'estnik drevnej istoriji]*

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