

EXCAVATIONS AT MYRMEKION IN 2006–2013

During the past eight years, the Myrmekion expedition of the State Hermitage Museum continued excavations at the ancient settlement-site of Myrmekion which is situated on the northern coast of the Bay of Kerch near Cape Karantynny (Fig. 1).¹ Over 800 sq. m of the archaeological site were studied here at various points. The main efforts of the expedition were concentrated on two important areas of the site. One of the latter is area “TS” formed by joining areas “S” and “T” investigated before. Area “TS” closed the line of excavations of the town’s acropolis surrounding the rock of the cape. Of primary interest are structures from the Roman period. The other area marked “I” is located in the central part of the site where zones of compact settlement layout of the late archaic and classical periods had been continually replacing each other. Afterwards, monumental ash-dump 2 composed of ashes arose here. Its remains became the main object of the expedition’s research for several years. In addition, excavations of limited zones in areas “S”, “M” and “U” were conducted. We will begin our review with these small excavations.

In 2008, test pit “U” measuring 2.2×2.2 m was sunk in the northeast part of the site. In addition to later deposits, certain structures of the Roman period have been found here. In the same season, the excavation of the remains of a tower and the adjacent territory in area “M”, which is situated near the eastern boundary of the Myrmekion site, was carried out. An area of about 20 sq. m was excavated in order to date the beginning of construction of the defensive wall. It was established that adjoining structures date from the 4th century BC.

In 2000–2005, area “S”, which is situated to the northwest of the cape rock, began to be actively investigated and a foundation for an

¹ Вутягин, Vinogradov 2006 [А. М. Бутягин, Ю. А. Виноградов, “История и археология древнего Мирмекия”, in: *Мирмекий в свете новых археологических исследований*], 4–51.

unfinished tower or, possibly, some tomb was discovered here buried in the rock. In 2006, a small excavation was organized to clarify its date and complement the results of the previous excavations. A large pit of the late archaic period and a re-deposited layer containing ceramics of the Bronze Age were uncovered here. In 2012, a small excavation and several test pits were sunk directly in the rock of the cape in order to examine the integrity of these cultural layers. It has been revealed that almost the entire occupation layer here was destroyed during construction of the *Quarantine* in the 19th century. Only small spots of deposits of the Roman period and Middle Ages were remaining. A bronze coin of the empress Julia Domna of 198 AD was found in the layer under study (Fig. 2). It is the only coin of the Roman Empire which has been found in the territory of this ancient settlement during the excavations of the State Hermitage expedition.

The aim of the excavation at area “M” in 2008 was concerned with establishing the date of the eastern defensive line of Myrmekion which was discovered during investigations by V. F. Gaydukevich. About 20 sq. m of the buried layer have been excavated. Sections of masonry and a pavement were exposed which belong to the 4th century BC. This discovery has confirmed *en masse* D. E. Chistov’s conclusions about the chronology of construction of the wall encircling the city.²

The main efforts of the expedition in 2008–2013 were concentrated on excavation of area “I”, where investigations had been already carried out on a limited scale before. The completion of studies of a large city living quarter dated to the beginning of the 5th century BC became the main objective in this area from 2001, when excavations were continued in the northern part of V. F. Gaydukevich’s excavation. In addition, remains of structures of the 5th and 4th centuries BC located above this layer were investigated, including the remains of walls and pavements of the so-called “Demeter Sanctuary”. Most large-scaled researches were conducted in the surviving area of Myrmekion Ash-Hill 2. These excavations have yielded a huge quantity of ceramic materials.

It has now been established that a quadrangular semi-dugout house with rounded corners, dating from the third quarter of the 6th century BC, is the earliest structure in the area under consideration. It was previously believed that the limits of the most ancient settlement were approximately one hundred meters to the west. At the turn of the 6th to the 5th century

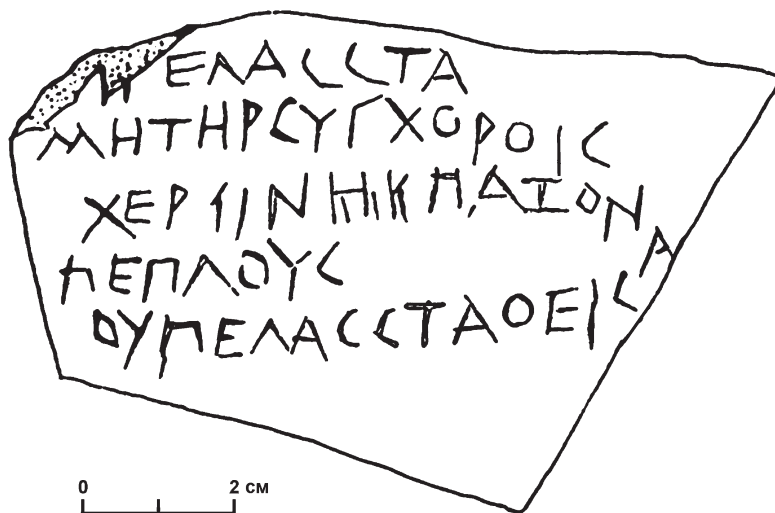
² Chistov 1999 [Д. Е. Чистов, “Развитие оборонительной системы Мирмекия в V–III вв. до н. э.”, in: *Античный мир*], 82–85.

BC, the earth dwelling mentioned was completely covered by soil. A multi-chamber complex, which was likely part of a living quarter of the city, was constructed above this earth dwelling. The living quarter had quadrangular outlines measuring about 20×33 m, with a total area about 650 sq. m. It was checked at its western side by a street, 2 m wide, which was partially paved with stone. A small stone sidewalk was uncovered near the northern part of the house. At least three separate houses with stone-paved yards and premises have been revealed within this living block. The floors of the houses were covered with a thick clay plaster. This complex was once subjected to considerable reconstruction when up to 1 m of earth was added to the floor level of some of the rooms. Notable discoveries include a fragmentary steel sword, found in the floor plaster, and fragments of red-figure vessels and terracotta. This unique complex was destroyed in a fire in the second quarter of the 5th century BC.

Only fragments of a number of walls, several rooms and about ten pits remained at the site from structures of the late 5th and the first half of the 4th centuries BC. A large ditch filled with soil and remains of burned wood was located in the central part of the site. Signs of burning and destruction were found in a small room measuring 1.56×2.4 m with tiles collapsed onto the floor. This room was undoubtedly part of some building which has not survived. This structure was later rebuilt with lime-plastered floors up to 10 cm thick above the destruction level. Traces of floors were found also to the north and to the east of this area. Such floors are typical only of the “sanctuary of Demeter”, dated to the first half of the 4th century BC. Apparently the complex under study had been considerably larger than was previously believed. Among the finds, fragments of a black-glossed bowl with an inscription are worthy of mention. Its sherds were found in different areas of the excavation and in a pit (Fig. 3–4). Furthermore, a fragment of an amphora wall with a five-line graffito was uncovered in the layers of the second half of the 5th century BC covering a late archaic street. All the inscriptions on pottery from Myrmekion are now being prepared for publication.

The surviving layers of Ash-Hill 2 were investigated in 2008–2011. The total area of the ash hill excavation was 200 sq. m, but it should be noted that certain layers of the ash sometimes poured through its western wall so that the area covered by the ashes stretched up to 230–250 sq. m.

Moreover, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the area of the ashes at the excavation was destroyed during the construction of a wartime shelter and its driveways. These cavities were filled though with the contents of the ash hill and



Sherd of an amphora with a five-line graffito. Section “I”

the finds made here are easily distinguishable from wartime objects. The thickness of the ash hill layers was 3.1–3.4 m. Over 350,000 fragments of ceramics, as well as hundreds of coins, pieces of bone and metal objects, terracottas, animal bones and other objects have been excavated. It was established that this ash hill grew most drastically in the first half of the 3rd century BC or, possibly, in the first two decades of that century, although it continued also up to the 2nd century BC. Moreover, some economic activity also took place here in the Roman period. Notable discoveries include several hundreds of amphora stamps, over 100 fragments of terracottas, a great number of fragments of graffiti and numerous copper coins.³

In 2006–2009 active investigations were conducted in area “TS”, near the rock of the acropolis. During previous excavations a number of lapidary inscriptions had been found.⁴ After the rock had been cleared

³ Butyagin, Kolosov 2013 [А. М. Бутягин, В. П. Колосов, “Керамические материалы из раскопок зольника 2 городища Мирмекий: комплексный анализ”, in: *Боспорский феномен: греки и варвары на евразийском перекрестке (материалы международной научной конференции)*], 155–161.

⁴ Butyagin, Bekhter 2007 [А. М. Бутягин, А. П. Бехтер, “Новые надписи из Мирмекия”, in: *ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ. Антиковедческо-историографический очерк памяти Я. В. Доманского*], 72–81.

from the soil, some coins and pottery of the 19th century, including traces of a French camp of the Crimean war period, were found. Unfortunately, there are traces of blasts here which have considerably distorted the appearance of the rock. In this mixed layer, a fragment of a unique large cameo (Fig. 5) was discovered, dating from the 1st century AD. It probably comes from a destroyed gorgeous tomb built in the 2nd century AD on the cape.⁵ The occupation layer was preserved much better slightly closer to the northern edges of the rock.

The earliest complex here was a burial of the late Bronze Age found in an earth-pit grave lined with blocks of ragged stone. The deceased lay on his right side. The grave contents included a handmade pot and bird bones. This find put forward the question as to whether Cape Karantinny was already occupied in the pre-Greek period. It is of interest that one of the facing stone blocks from the burial was subsequently built into the wall of a late archaic house. Numerous fragments of painted glossed pottery and the remains of several ovens of the 6th century BC were found here. In the beginning of the 5th century BC, a block of Greek surface houses was built here. The remains of the masonry of the latter are still preserved. Three slabs are from the fencing of some monumental building, probably of the 4th century BC, which unfortunately was completely destroyed by subsequent reconstructions. It may be that a fragment of a large marble sculpture belonged to that building. These architectural remains were covered by the outstretches, up to 1.5 m thick, of the “eastern” ash heap dated to the 3rd–1st centuries BC, if not to an even later period. Fragments of relief ware are of note among the finds.

In the 1st century AD, during the construction of a large rural house, the earliest layers were subjected to considerable destruction. The base of the rural house constituted a terrace, probably dating from the Hellenistic period. This terrace was 24 m long, ranging along the edge of the rock (it was excavated to a length of about 24 m). The residential building was probably two storeys high, each divided into two rooms extending north to south. The dimensions of the house were 9 × 7.5 m. A paved courtyard was situated to the north of the house. A pithos embedded in the floor was found in a small western extension intended for economic purposes. It seems that there were other rooms on the terrace further to the west. Their presence was discovered during excavation in the beginning of the 1990s. Possibly the estate under consideration extended as far as the ruins of

⁵ Vinogradov, Butyagin [Ю. А. Виноградов, А. М. Бутягин, *Мирмекийский саркофаг*], forthcoming.

a large tower which served as the main defense point of the complex. The structures are reliably dated by numismatic finds. Of note are fragments of a vessel from a mosaic glass. The buildings described were destroyed in the middle of the 2nd century AD and afterwards covered with a layer of collapsed adobe-and-stone walls.

The ancient layers were disturbed by pits of the 13th–15th centuries in connection with the medieval settlement of Pondiko. In one of the pits parts of a child skeleton were found. The child was probably killed during extermination of the local population by the Turks. There was also discovered an earth dwelling with a heated bench – “*sufa*” which is unique for the Crimea.

Future plans include investigations north of area “TS” and the completion of excavations in area “I” down to the virgin soil.

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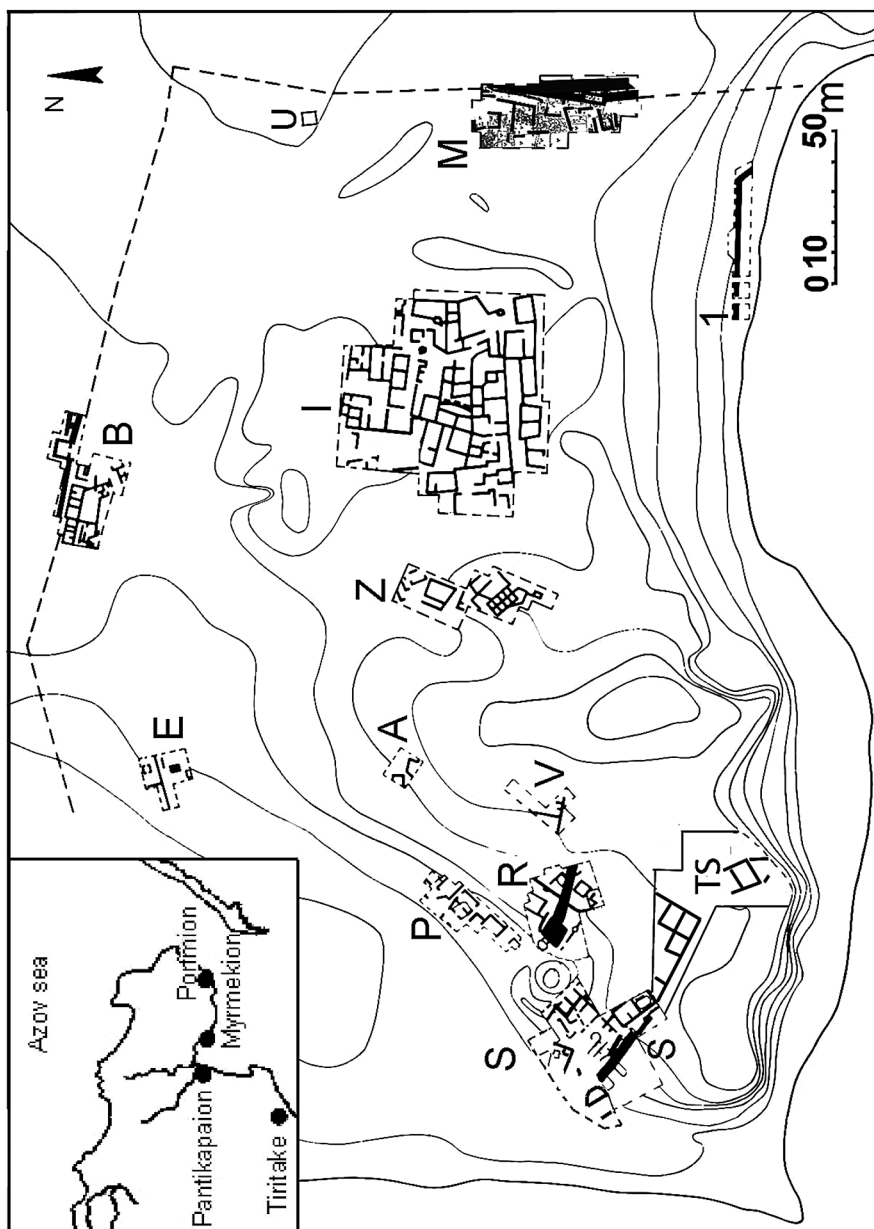


Fig. 1. Myrmekion. Schematic sections.



Fig. 2. Myrmekion.
 Coin of the empress
 Julia Domna, 198 AD.
 Section "S".



Fig. 3. Myrmekion. Fragmentary black-glossed Attic cup
 with graffiti. Section "I".



Fig. 4. Myrmekion. Fragmentary black-glossed
 Attic cup with graffiti. Section "I".

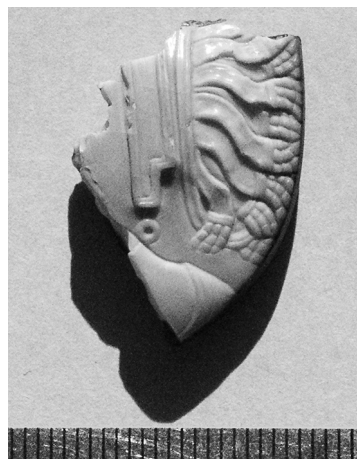


Fig. 5. Myrmekion. Fragmentary cameo.
 Roman emperor (?). Section "TS".

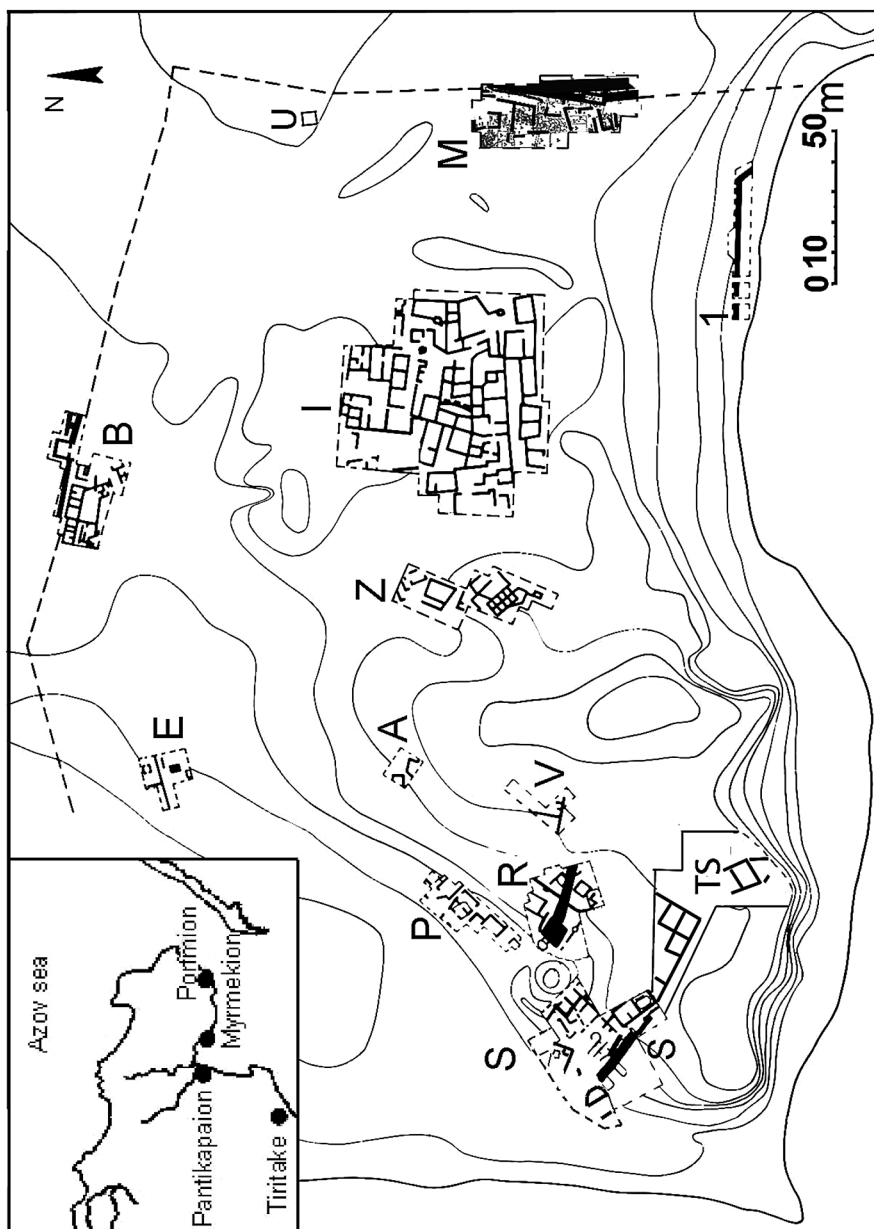


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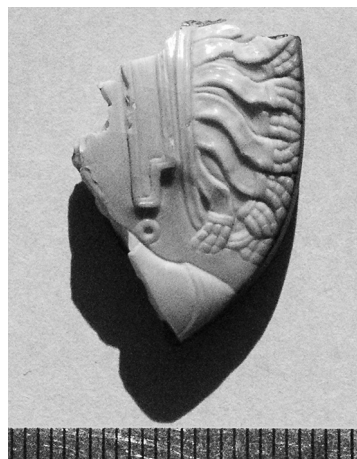
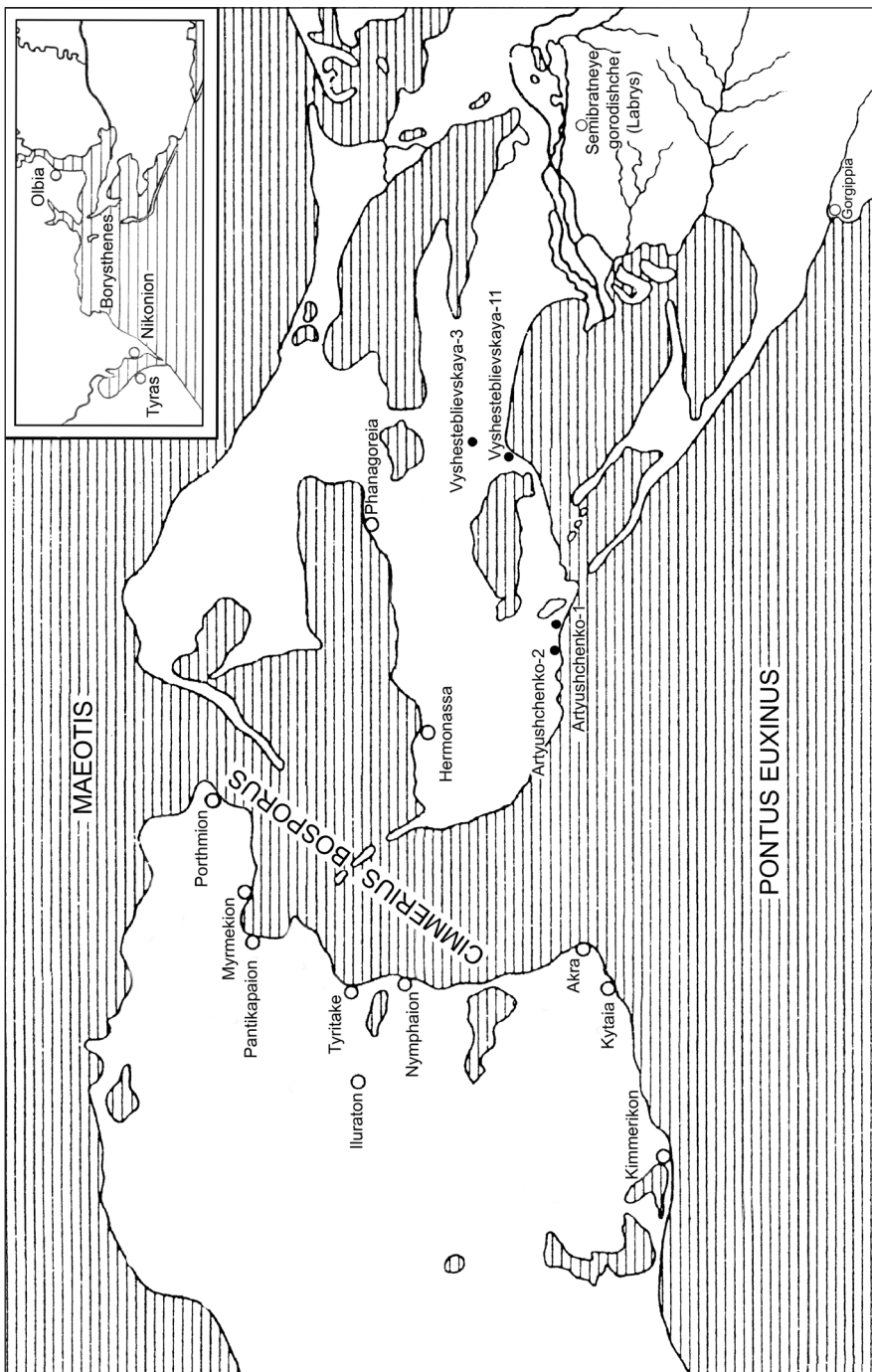


Fig. 5. Myrmekion. Fragmentary cameo.
Roman emperor (?). Section "TS".



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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