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EXCAVATIONS AT MYRMEKION IN 2019–2023*

From 2019 to 2023, Myrmekion Archaeological Expedition of the State Hermitage Museum continued its systematic investigation of the settlement-site Myrmekion. Research was carried out in three distinct areas within the site, each located in different parts of the settlement. In the TS area, situated in the southwestern part of Myrmekion near the base of the ancient acropolis, a substantial building dating from the 1st to the 3rd century AD was investigated. This structure is presumed to have been an aristocratic estate. In the I excavation area, located in the monument's centre, efforts were made to explore the ancient city's structure to the north of the previously uncovered area. The goal here was to unearth the late archaic city layer; however, this has not yet been accomplished, with only Roman and Hellenistic period layers being excavated. Finally, in the M area, situated on the south-eastern edge of the monument, investigations aimed to trace the defensive wall's route and to examine the necropolis dating back to the 6th century BC located beneath it. Excavations were halted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the 2019 field season, no additional excavation areas were initiated. Within the I area, the exploration of Roman period layers was extended, leading to the uncovering of well-preserved walls belonging to a residential structure from this era. The excavation of a large pit was also continued. Among the notable discoveries in this area were numerous fragments of terracotta marionettes and a fragment of a large, ribbed glass bowl.

Within the area M, excavation extended across the part not hindered by construction remnants, uncovering minor masonry fragments

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and pavements dating back to the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Additionally, the fill of an early defensive wall was exposed, parts of its facades having been taken apart in antiquity. Beyond this later defensive wall, faint traces of structures, presumably dating back to the early 5th century BC, were identified. Notably, several pits were discovered, including one containing a Chian amphora dug into the ground, which stands out among the findings. Of particular significance were two pits that destroyed the masonry of the defensive wall. The artefacts retrieved from these pits suggest that the wall's construction cannot be dated earlier than the beginning of the 3rd century BC, significantly later than previous estimations had proposed. This timeline also pertains to the initial, subsequently dismantled masonry of the so-called "B" wall, implying that the construction of the later "A" wall occurred even more recently.¹ The necropolis excavation revealed four burials dating to the second half of the 6th century BC, including three in-ground burials (two children's and one adult's), two of them containing Ionian-manufactured vessels. An important finding was a small stone sarcophagus, seemingly intended for a child, hewn from a single stone block (Fig. 1). After removal of the lid, no skeletal remains were found, indicating possible complete decomposition. Such sarcophagi from the archaic period are remarkably rare in the Bosphorus region.²

In the TS area, the destruction layer associated with Roman buildings was excavated. The primary focus was on layers dating to the 1st–3rd centuries AD. Upon removal of the debris, it was observed that a significant portion of the structures had succumbed to fire, as indicated by a dense layer of burnt material, replete with numerous amphorae fragments. In the central square, a well-preserved furnace, featuring parts of the vault and internal constructions, was unearthed. Additionally, a lengthy covered drain was discovered on the western edge of the excavation area, elucidating the layout of the presumed estate. The investigation encompassed a total of seven rooms. Meriting special attention among the artefacts is a bronze gemstone ring fragment with an insert of a carnelian seal, engraved with a deity's figure. Furthermore, a series of pits dating from the 13th to the 15th centuries AD was revealed, one of which contained an undamaged ceramic flask.

¹ Butyagin–Kolosov 2023 [А. М. Бутягин, В. П. Колосов, "К проблеме датировки восточной части оборонительной системы Мирмекия", in: *Археологические вести*], 300–308.

² Butyagin 2022, 195–204.



Fig. 1. Myrmekion. Uncovering of the stone sarcophagus.
View from the south-west. The 2nd half of the 6th century BC.

In the southern part of the TS area, excavations reached the virgin soil layer, uncovering numerous pits dating back to the early 5th century BC. Among the findings in this area there is a rare Bosporan coin-arrow from the archaic period, along with several fragments of Attic and Eastern Greek pottery. Additionally, beneath the masonry of the estate located in the eastern section of the area, a burial dating to the 11th–9th centuries BC was discovered. This contracted burial accompanied by a handmade bowl represents the third burial from this period unearthed in proximity to the acropolis, allowing us to assume the location of a Late Bronze Age necropolis.

Besides the main excavation, during a reconnaissance beyond the north-eastern edge of Myrmekion, remnants of a settlement of the 4th century BC were identified, characterized by pits and potential dugouts, indicating an extended occupation of this area. Preliminary investigations of the seabed near the site's boundaries also took place, unveiling areas dense with ceramic fragments. These seabed explorations suggest significant potential for future underwater archaeological endeavours.

In 2021, the expedition faced operational limitations due to reduced funding. Despite these constraints, in the M area, an excavation was extended southward to investigate the route of the defensive wall dating back to the 3rd century BC. The top layers exposed during this endeavour contained poorly preserved masonry and stone paving accompanied by several pits that were attributed to the Roman period.

Concurrently, in the I area, investigation was focused on both the central and northern sections. A concrete shelter, constructed in the 1960s to protect a winery of the 3rd century BC, was dismantled by the team. Its removal allowed for the complete uncovering of the winery room. Subsequent excavations within this room aimed to authenticate the chronology of a previously identified pit, uncovering a cellar dating to the 4th century BC, dug into an earlier layer.

In the northern section of the I area, further excavation refined the understanding of the spatial arrangement of rooms revealed in prior years. Preliminary analysis suggests that these Roman period structures were constructed extending into Ash Hill II, an area associated with the Hellenistic period.

In the vicinity of the layer situated beyond the urban confines, identified in the preceding reconnaissance, a targeted excavation was initiated. This research revealed a cultural layer 2 meters thick, rich with artefacts dating to the 4th century BC. Given the amount of material uncovered, the decision has been made to extend the exploration of Myrmekion's suburbs during the forthcoming seasons.

During 2022, comprehensive research on the cultural layer encompassing nearly the entire TS area was concluded. This investigation revealed pits dating from the Archaic to the Roman period. Remarkable complexes containing pottery from the early 6th century BC were identified, aligning with the estimated time of the settlement's foundation. In the M area, the remains of gates within the defensive wall, dating back to the 3rd century BC, were uncovered for the first time in the history of the site's exploration. Originating from these gates, a paved street extends westward, its northern side flanked by the wall of a monumental structure. Additionally, in a pit dating to the Roman period, a fragmented tombstone bearing the inscription Περίανδρος Μύρμηκος was found (Fig. 2). This discovery is particularly significant as it marks the first direct evidence of the rare Bosporan name "Myrmex" within the settlement's vicinity.³

³ Bekhter–Butyagin 2023a [А. П. Бехтер, А. М. Бутягин, “Надгробная стела Перияндра, сына Мирмека”, in: *Археологические вести*], 175–179.



Fig. 2. Myrmekion. The funeral stele of Periandros, son of Myrmex. Limestone. The 1st half to the middle of the 4th century BC.

Research in the I area situated in Myrmekion's central part has been continued to investigate the Roman-period layer. This exploration revealed masonry extending from east to west, demarcating Roman constructions from the Hellenistic-period Ash Hill II layers to the south. Within these Hellenistic layers, a substantial quantity of period-specific materials was unearthed, including a significant number of amphora stamps. Particularly remarkable was the discovery of two large lead letter fragments, a rarity since only one such artefact had been previously discovered at Myrmekion (Fig. 3).⁴ The most important finding of 2022 was a hoard of gold coins found within a small clay jug during the clearing of a Roman period pit's edges, lying in older Hellenistic layers. This vessel contained 30 coins: 26 issued by Alexander the Great and 4 by his brother Philip Arrhidaeus, marking the largest known accumulation of such coins within the Bosphoran Kingdom (Fig. 4). This artefact challenges previous assumptions about the absence of these coins in the region.⁵

In 2023, an extensive excavation of a large pit was conducted within the TS area, and a new excavation trench directed southward has been started. This work involved the removal of layers associated with wartime activities and the remnants of a 19th century cellar. Additionally, investigations partially uncovered layers and pits dating to the late medieval period. The excavation of a well, first opened in 2000 and subsequently preserved, was resumed, allowing for its clearance from stone and earth debris down to a depth of 4.5 meters. Among the notable finds were stone anchors, one of which uniquely bore the letter Δ.

In the M area, to facilitate the examination of the layers beneath, the paving of a street leading to the gates was dismantled. This process unveiled the street's underlying layers, the foundation of the wall adjacent to the gates, and a scattering of small stones where the wall and street intersect. A significant find in this area was numerous iron scales, potentially from Scythian armour. Moreover, a late Archaic-period furnace was discovered, featuring a chimney made of amphora necks and a firebox made from an amphora body.

⁴ Bekhter–Butyagin 2023b [А. П. Бехтер, А. М. Бутягин, “Свинцовый архив Мирмекия (обзор)”, in: *Боспорский феномен: quarta pars saeculi. Итоги, вопросы, дискуссии (материалы международной научной конференции)*], 365–370.

⁵ Butyagin 2023 [А. М. Бутягин “Монеты Александра Великого на Боспоре и Мирмекийский клад 2022 года”, in: *Александр Македонский: путь на Восток*], 89–90.



Fig. 3. Two fragments of lead letters. The 4th–3rd centuries BC.



Fig. 4. Uncovering of the hoard of staters of the Alexander the Great type.

Meanwhile, in the I area, the exploration was focused on the floors of buildings of the first centuries AD, reaching down to the levels dating to the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods.

The investigations carried out by the Myrmekion expedition over the recent five-year period have been remarkably successful.⁶ This period has seen considerable advancements in understanding the settlement's topography, a revision of the defensive wall's construction date, the uncovering of a unique hoard of gold coins, and the discovery of new epigraphic materials. These achievements not only enhance our comprehension of the site, but also contribute significantly to the broader field of archaeological research, offering new insights into the historical and cultural dynamics of the region.

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⁶ Butyagin et al. 2022 [А. М. Бутягин и др. "Археологические открытия Мирмекийской экспедиции в 2022 году", in: *Боспорский феномен: Большие и малые города Боспорского царства (материалы международной научной конференции)*], 313–320.

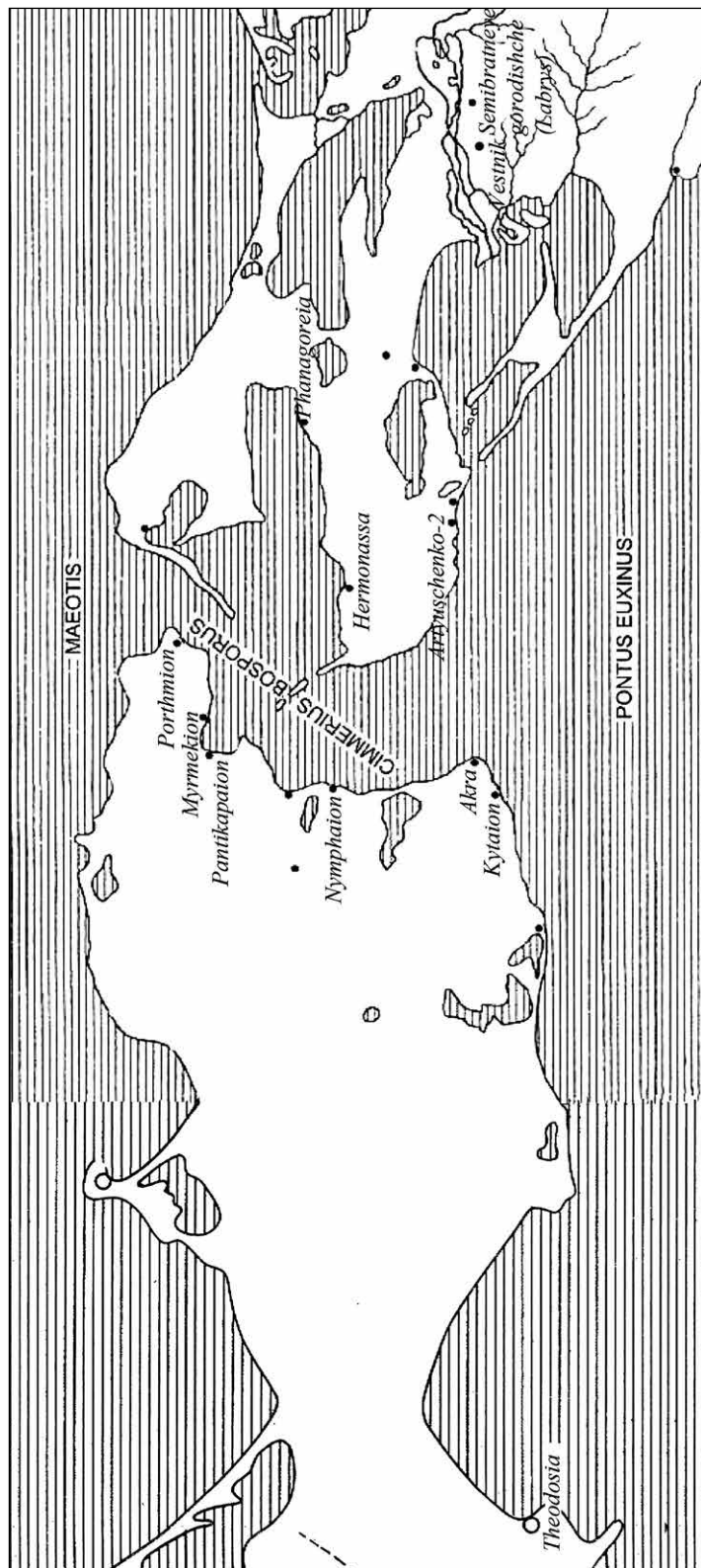
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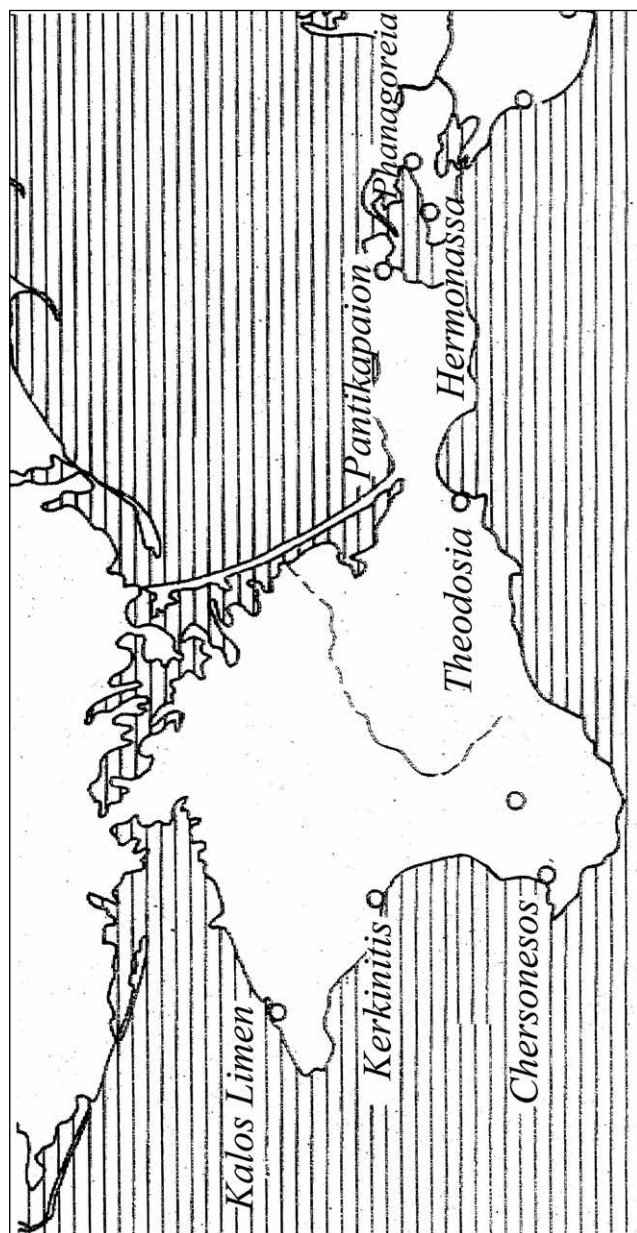
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From 2019 to 2023, excavations at the Myrmekion settlement site were conducted in three main areas: the central (I), the western (TS), and the eastern (M). Within the area M, a necropolis from the second half of the 6th century BC was discovered, as well as a section of a defensive wall with a gate and a paved street leading to it. The construction of the wall dates back to the turn of the 3rd to the 2nd centuries BC, judging from the found materials. A fragmentary tombstone stele with the inscription Περíανδρος Μύρμηκος was found near a Roman era pit. At the site I during the study of a house from the first centuries AD and layers of the Hellenistic Ash-Hill II, fragments of two lead letters were found. In addition, a hoard of 30 gold staters of the Alexander the Great type, dating back to the late 4th century BC, was found in a ceramic vessel. Excavations in the TS area have been continued to uncover estates of the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. A Late Bronze Age grave was also found under one of the Roman era walls. An area to the northeast of the settlement with a layer from the 4th century BC was studied, as well.

В 2019–2023 гг. городище Мирмекий исследовалось в центральной (участок И), западной (ТС) и восточной (М) частях. На участке М открыт некрополь второй половины VI в. до н. э., а также часть оборонительной стены с воротами, к которым ведет мощеная улица. Открытые материалы позволяют отнести сооружение стены к рубежу III–II вв. до н. э. Рядом в яме римского времени найдена фрагментированная надгробная стела с надписью “Периандр, сын Мирмека”. На участке И исследовался дом римского времени и слои зольника II. При этом обнаружены фрагменты двух свинцовых писем. Здесь в глиняном сосуде открыт клад из 30 золотых статеров типа Александра Македонского, относящийся к концу IV в. до н. э. На участке ТС продолжались раскопки усадеб I–III вв. н. э. Открыто также погребение эпохи поздней бронзы в скорченной позе. К северо-востоку от городища исследовался участок со слоем IV в. до н. э.

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