

## THE NYMPHAEUM ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION OF THE STATE HERMITAGE

Near the modern village of Eltigen (Geroyevskoye), 17 km south of the city of Kerch, one still can see the ruins of the ancient Bosporan city of Nymphaeum. Its site occupies a coastal plateau on Kerch Strait (Cimmerian Bosphorus); west of the plateau there are barrows and a flat necropolis. Vast fertile lands stretching as far as ancient Theodosia (modern Feodosia) and the presence of a good harbour once guaranteed to Nymphaeum the leading role in the grain trade.

The location of Nymphaeum, like that of most of the other Classical-period sites on the Black Sea, became known owing to ancient descriptions of its coasts written for navigators and travellers, as well as the works of geographers and historians of the Greek and Roman era.

Excavations at Nymphaeum were begun at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1939 systematic excavations of the townsite were conducted by the Nymphaeum Archaeological Expedition of the State Hermitage under the direction of M. M. Khudyak in 1939–1958, V. M. Skudnova in 1960–1964, N. L. Grach in 1966–1990, O. Yu. Sokolova since 1990 until now.

In the course of these years, a number of sanctuaries, dwelling and public houses, defensive structures, pottery kilns, wineries and other structures of different periods of Nymphaeum's existence have been uncovered within the territory of the city. Excavations in the area of the necropolis were also conducted. Scholars have succeeded in reconstructing the general picture of Nymphaeum's life throughout almost a millennium of its occupation.

Among the most interesting discoveries of the recent decades is the monumental ensemble of an early Hellenistic sanctuary connected with the gods-protectors of navigation. In one of its rooms, plaster with polychrome paintings collapsed from the walls has been found. The surface of the plaster was covered with various inscriptions and pictures. Outstanding among the latter was a representation of a large warship. On its side, the name ΙΣΙΣ is written, i. e. that of the goddess Isis most venerated in Ptolemean Egypt. In the opinion of N. L. Grach<sup>1</sup> who was the first to study this representa-

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<sup>1</sup> Of the numerous publications devoted to this find the most important are: Н. Л. Грач, "Открытие нового исторического источника в Нимфее (предваритель-

tion, it is the ambassadorial ship which belonged to the navy of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

West of the sanctuary, an assemblage of architectural parts was uncovered (Fig. 1). These belonged to a *propylaeum* (gala entrance to a sacred precinct) dated to the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Of particular note is the find of a facade block of the architrave which once bridged the interval between two columns. An inscription cut on the block informed that “Theopropides, son of Megakles, in the quality of the agonothete, dedicated this entrance to Dionysus under Leukon, the archon of Bosporus and Theodosia, and all Syndike, and of the Toretai, Dandarioi and Psestoi”. This inscription is one of the fairly rare monuments of the Bosporan epigraphy in terms of its good state of preservation and self-descriptiveness. Its most noteworthy feature is the mention of a new title of the Bosporan rulers.<sup>2</sup>

Since 2001 the expedition has been occupied with the task of removing a layer of refuse several metres thick brought from the nearby modern city. This layer covers the area south of the *propylaeum* and its clearing must enable us to elucidate the character and functions of the structures located here. During the field season of 2005, an area of about 350 sq. m has been excavated in this sector to the depth of 0.7 m. The most numerous finds (fragments of pottery from different manufacturing centres including items with stamps and graffiti, fragmentary tiles, spindle whorls and objects of metal or bone) from this area are dated to the time span from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

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ное сообщение)” (N. L. Grach, “Discovery of a New Historical Source in Nymphaeum [preliminary report]”, *VDI* 1984: 1, 81–88; N. Grač, “Das Neu entdecktes Fresco aus hellenistischer Zeit in Nymphaion bei Kertsch”, in: H. Franke (ed.), *Skythika* (Munich 1987) 46–65; O. Hockmann, “Naval and Other Graffiti from Nymphaion”, *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia. An International Journal of Comparative Studies in History and Archaeology* V, 4 (Leiden – Boston – Köln 1999) 303–356; Ju. G. Vinogradov, “Der Staatsbesuch der ‘Isis’ im Bosporos”, *ibid.*, 271–302; L. P. Gagen, L. S. Gavrilenko, “The Study and Restoration of Antique Fresco from Nymphaeum (Northern Prichernomorje, 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. B. C.)”, *Fifth International restoree seminar* I (Budapest 1985) 159–163.

<sup>2</sup> О. Ю. Соколова, “Новая надпись из Нимфея (предварительное сообщение)” (O. Yu. Sokolova, “New Inscription from Nymphaeum [preliminary information]”), *Древности Боспора IV* (Moscow 2001) 368–376; О. Ю. Соколова, Н. А. Павличенко, “Новая посвятельная надпись из Нимфея” (O. Yu. Sokolova, N. A. Pavlichenko, “New Dedicatory Inscription from Nymphaeum”), *Hyperboreus* 8 (2002): 1, 99–121.

Investigations of the defensive system of Nymphaeum are another objective of the excavations. The works are conducted along the external facing of the third and the fourth curtains of the defensive wall. The fortifications investigated include a defensive tower. At present, its eastern section with an area of approximately 90 sq. m has been uncovered.

In connection with the studies conducted now it is of interest to compare the recently published “Plan of the Ruins near Cape Karaburun on the Land of Mr Guryev” by Paul Dubrux<sup>3</sup> with the features observable at present on the surface, those readable on new topographic plans of the site and the structures uncovered during recent years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> И. В. Тункина, *Русская наука о классической древности юга России (XVIII – середина XIX в.)* [I. V. Tunkina, *Russian Studies of Classical Antiquity in Southern Russia (18<sup>th</sup> – mid. 19<sup>th</sup> cent.)*] (СПб. 2002) Fig. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Studies to this effect are conducted within the frame of grant RFHS no. 04-01-000164a envisaging the preparation of newly found manuscripts by P. Dubrux for publication (project manager Irina V. Tunkina).

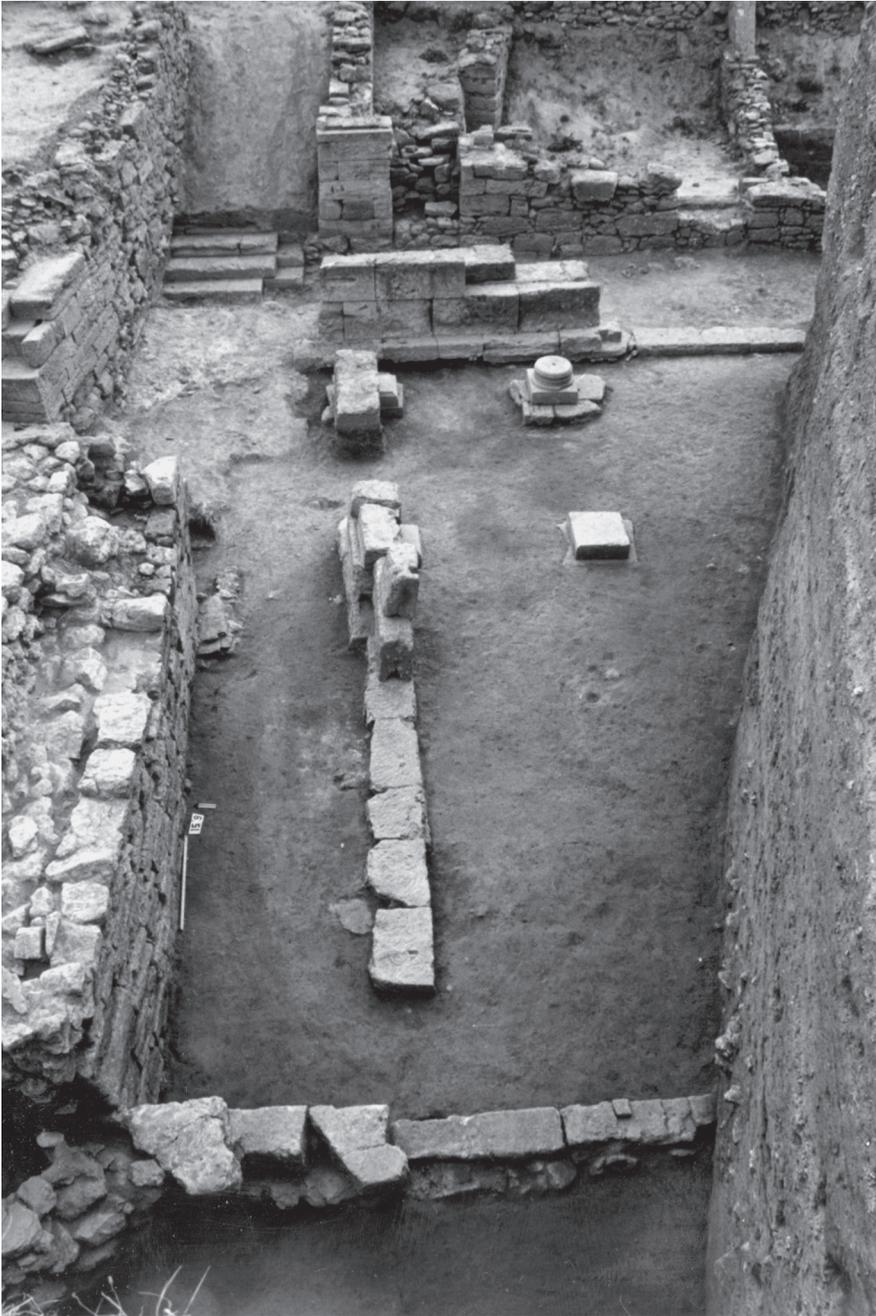


Fig. 1. Remains of the *propylaeum*