



Summary :

During the 6th and 5th cent. BC Greek settlements were founded in the Kerch peninsula (Panticapaeum, Nymphaeum, Tyritake, Myrmekion, Cimmericon, Porthmion), which quickly evolved into centres of agricultural production and export. These settlements soon acquired great financial power, as indicated by the archaeological record, notwithstanding some rather sketchy, in places, excavations.

Geographical Location

Ukraine

Historical Region

Crimea

1. The Kerch peninsula – Location and early research

The [Kerch](#) peninsula is located at the eastern edge of the Crimean peninsula, at the wider region of ancient Cimmerian Bosphorus, modern day Ukraine. Today, the remains of the following Greek settlements survive at the Kerch area: [Panticapaeum](#), [Nymphaeum](#), [Tyritake](#), [Myrmekion](#), [Cimmericon](#) and [Porthmion](#). There are also approximately 1,500 [tumuli](#), the most famous among which are the Royal (Tsarskiy), the Golden (Zolotoy), the Tomb of Melek-Tchesmenskiy, and the Tomb of Yuz-Oba, as well as various smaller settlements and necropoleis. In the 19th century there was an intense interest about Kerch, sparked by the description of Pavel Dyubryuks and the discovery of the rich vaulted tomb at [Kul' Oba](#) (1830). The gold and silver jewellery found in the tomb, as well as the bronze artefacts and weapons, revived the archaeological interest in the Kerch peninsula.

2. History of the area

The settlements of the Kerch peninsula are the result of the colonizing activity of the powerful during the 7th and 6th cent. BC city of [Miletus](#). Miletus, a Greek city on the western coast of Asia Minor, developed into a maritime and financial power and during the Archaic period turned its interest towards the northern shores of the Black Sea. The first Milesian colony on the Kerch peninsula was Panticapaeum, which was founded in the first decade of the 6th cent. BC on the top of a hill called Mithridates. Nymphaeum, Tyritake, Myrmekion, Cimmericon and Porthmion were founded later. According to local historians, the symbiosis between the colonists and the local populations was never easy. On the contrary, the Greeks of the Bosphorus lived under the constant threat of attack from the peoples of the steppe.¹

During the Classical period, the area was annexed by the dynasty of the [Spartocids](#), who implemented an expansionary policy. In the 4th cent. BC the region experienced an unprecedented financial and cultural bloom due to the development of trade and grain exports. According to written sources from the Classical and Late Classical period, the city of Athens imported cereal from this region to cater for the increasing needs of its population. The import of wheat from this region should be considered in the context of a larger import network of this produce, for, according to Demosthenes,² the wider area of the Propontis and the Pontus provided grain to Athens without imposing tariffs. While during the 3rd cent. BC the exports of cereal declined, the 2nd cent. BC was again a period of flourishing and development.

By the mid-2nd cent. BC the Kerch area was under heavy pressure by barbarian tribes. The wars against Rome, in the 1st cent. BC, weakened the people of this area, which notwithstanding all these, managed to enter yet another period of economic growth.

3. The settlements

3.1. Panticapaeum



Panticapaeum (modern Kerch) is located on the foothills of Mt Mithridates, in the western part of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, close to the shore.

Although by the early 19th cent. and during the 20th cent. archaeological research was under way in Panticapaeum, systematic excavations in the area begun only in 1945 by V.D. Blavatskiy, who studied the topography and stratigraphy of the area.³ From 1959 onwards the excavations have been directed by the Moscow Art Museum.

Following its foundation by the Milesians in the 6th cent. BC, Panticapaeum became, during the 5th and 4th cent. BC, the capital of the [Archaeonactids](#) and the Spartocids, Greek royal dynasties of the Bosphorus. This is the reason why Panticapaeum is also mentioned as 'Bosporus'.

The last Spartocid king, Paerisades V, ceded his realm to [Mithridates VI](#), ruler of Pontus. Mithridates committed suicide when, following his defeat by the Romans, his son and heir, Pharnaces, together with the citizens of Panticapaeum, turned against him. The city's decline is not only attributable to the earthquake of 63 BC but also to the raids of the [Goths](#) and the [Huns](#). Panticapaeum was annexed into the Byzantine Empire early in the 6th cent. AD.

The intense commercial activity of the city is evident by the wealth of the archaeological finds that have been unearthed. Greek pottery imports show the Greek character of the city during the first centuries after its establishment. The agricultural orientation of the settlement can be seen in the storage areas for grain and the wheat-grinding tools that date to the Archaic period.⁴

The excavations at Panticapaeum brought to light several Archaic and Classical houses (e.g. the 'House of the Blacksmith'), as well as public buildings, like the Hellenistic *prytaneion* and the Spartocid palace on the city's citadel.⁵ Of interest is the partially surviving 'House of the Merchant', which is one of the earliest finds in Panticapaeum. Apart from a hearth, the house included three *apothetes* (pits) filled with Greek imported pottery. It is believed that the house belonged to a Greek merchant.

The citadel's buildings become more impressive during the later periods, when a huge tower, mansions and marble statues are erected there. During the first Christian centuries Panticapaeum featured pottery workshops, places where salted fish was produced, as well as wineries, elements which underline the agricultural nature of the region.⁶

3.2. Nymphaeum

Nymphaeum is located on a hill on the Crimean coast, approximately 17 km off Panticapaeum, near to the modern city of El'tigen. The citadel of the settlement includes the Temple of the Kabeiroi and the Temple of Aphrodite, as well as the Temple of Demeter dating to the 6th cent. BC (various building phases of this structure survive). The architectural remains of the settlement indicate that Nymphaeum was, architecturally speaking, the most outstanding settlement on the coast of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Excavations conducted on the site, which commenced in the 19th cent., focused on the tumuli, while during the 1930s the Hermitage Museum directed the excavations.

Before the settlement of Ionians from [Samos](#) at Nymphaeum in the 6th cent. BC., the settlement was Scythian. The wealth of the city during the Classical period was mainly attributed to the production of grain and the control of exports to mainland Greece. For this reason, Athens chose to use Nymphaeum as a military and naval base in 444 BC.

3.3. Tyritake

Tyritake is located in the eastern Crimea, 11 km south of Panticapaeum. It should be probably identified with the site of Arshintsevo, on the coast of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Excavations conducted in the area, which commenced in the 1930s, have shown that the Greek remains at Tyritake are overlaid by Roman ruins. Although there are no indications concerning the agricultural activities of the settlement, it is known that the inhabitants of ancient Tyritake were fishermen and traded salted goods, as it is suggested by finds dating to the last centuries BC and the Early Christian period.⁷ Viniculture and wine trade were also practiced in Tyritake, judging from the few residential and ceramic finds which are roughly dated to the Greek phase of the settlement.⁸



3.4. Myrmekion

Myrmekion is located on the shores of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, 4 km north of Panticapaeum. It was founded in the 6th cent. BC and quickly evolved into one of the wealthiest settlements in the Kerch peninsula due to its extensive agricultural activities. During the 5th cent. BC, Myrmekion was a famous wine-producing settlement (judging from the wine-presses and the must vats) and minted its own coins.

3.5. Cimmericon

Cimmericon is situated in the south part of the Kerch peninsula at the foothills of Mt Opuk. Together with Panticapaeum and Nymphaeum, it was one of the most important agricultural settlements of the region. It was founded by Milesians in the 5th cent. BC and scholars believe it quickly evolved to a major grain-producing centre.⁹

3.6. Porthmion

Porthmion is located north of the modern city of Kerch, in a narrow bay of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. It was founded in the 6th cent. BC.

The houses that have been excavated in the settlement, dated to the 6th and 5th cent. BC, provide a clear picture of the residential nature of the city. Among the various finds from the site, we have a 'makgayra' type of sword of the late Archaic period.¹⁰ Although a large portion of the site has been excavated, the sketchy publications of the finds do not allow us to draw any concrete conclusions regarding the city's agricultural activities. Nonetheless, tools and other artefacts found there are related to the grinding of corn into wheat. Millstones, poles and grinding stones have been also discovered.

The land north of the settlement appears to have been well-suited for cultivation. Furthermore, the fishing activities of the inhabitants can be seen in the fishing weights, hooks and bronze needles used to repair fishing nets. It has been also noted that the strategic importance of this settlement is connected with its position on the straits of the Cimmerian Bosphorus.¹¹

4. Epilogue

The settlements of the Kerch peninsula reveal the agricultural activities of the Greek colonists in the Bosphorus, who quickly turned to the cultivation of the land. The Greek pottery that has been unearthed in the wider region and the lack of many local workshops possibly indicates that the Greek farmers traded their produce with products from the surrounding regions. Some scholars also believe that due to the intensive farming these settlements evolved into great financial centres very soon after their establishment.¹²

1. Zinko V.N., *A walk through ancient Kerch* (Kerch 1999), p. 34.

2. Dem. *Lept.* 466, 467.

3. Blavatskiy V. D., *Пантикапей. Очерки истории столицы Боспора* (Москва 1964).

4. Noonan T.S., "The Origin of the Greek Colony at Panticapaeum", *AJA* 11 (1973), p. 80.

5. Zinko V.N., *A walk through ancient Kerch* (Kerch 1999), p. 17.



6. Zinko V.N., *A walk through ancient Kerch* (Kerch 1999), p. 22.
7. Zinko V.N., *A walk through ancient Kerch* (Kerch 1999), p. 31.
8. Zinko V.N., *A walk through ancient Kerch* (Kerch 1999), p. 34.
9. Kruglikova I. T., "Issledovanie sel'skikh poselenii Bospora" *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* 2 (1963), p. 65-79.
10. Zinko V.N., *A walk through ancient Kerch* (Kerch 1999), p. 38.
11. Zinko V.N., *A walk through ancient Kerch* (Kerch 1999), p. 40.
12. Noonan T.S., "The Origin of the Greek Colony at Panticapaeum", *AJA* 11 (1973), p. 80.

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Demosthenes, *Against Leptines* 466, 467.