



## Summary :

Ancient Greek city located at the waist of the Cimmerian Bosphorus straits. Its remains have been discovered north of the modern city of Kerch in Ukraine. In recent years, the identification of these remains with the city of Porthmeion has been questioned, as it is believed that they belong to Parthenion. The settlement dates to the 6<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC.

## Other Names

Porthmion, Porthmia

## Geographical Location

Ukraine

## Historical Region

Cimmerian Bosphorus

## 1. Topography

The city of Porthmeion is mentioned by [Arrian](#) and Stephanus Byzantius,<sup>1</sup> while that of Parthenion is mentioned by [Strabo](#).<sup>2</sup> In 1953 V. Veselov identified the remains of an ancient settlement, located on a hillock north of Kerch and close to the country town of Zukova, as the city of Porthmeion.<sup>3</sup> Until recently no one had questioned this identification, although the locale does not fully correspond to the descriptions provided by the ancient authors. A recent discovery made on the site, namely the word ΠΑΡΘΕΝΩ<sup>4</sup> inscribed on a piece of pottery, has led some scholars to the conclusion that these are the remains of another city, Parthenion, while the remains of Porthmeion should be identified with another site in the area of the town of Opasnoye, where the archaeological strata were almost completely destroyed in the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. and in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> The issue of the identification of these two settlements remains open.

## 2. History of research and historical facts

Archaeological research in the area begun in 1953 by a team from the Institute for History and Material Culture (St Petersburg, 1953-1984: E. Kastanayan, 1986 to today: M. Vakhtina). By 1982 the remains of the so-called 'new city' had been mainly examined (3<sup>rd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC), while from 1986 onwards research has been focused on the earlier periods of the settlement. Excavations have also been conducted in the necropolis since 2004.<sup>6</sup>

The archaeological site extends over an area of approximately 85,000m<sup>2</sup>, half of which has been examined. The excavations have expanded to all city blocks, while one of them, the northwest, has been examined in its entirety.

On the basis of the evidence available today, the city was founded in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC at the mouth of the gulf, at the waist of the [Kerch](#) sound, called Cimmerian Bosphorus by the ancients. The metropolis of Porthmeion remains unknown. The main reason behind the city's establishment was the need to protect the most important place in the region, i.e. the channel which connected the Asiatic with the European Bosphorus. The city remained in existence until the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC, when it was destroyed, possibly during the military operations of Asander.

## 3. Urban development

In the late 5<sup>th</sup> cent. BC, in the area of the Archaic house, we have the construction of a new one, consisting of four areas, with walls of roughly hewn stones, resting on a basis of rectangular brick-shaped stones. Another building was constructed on the same spot in



the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC, incorporating a wall belonging to the first building phase.

In the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BC the city was destroyed once again. In the mid-3rd century, the entire area was levelled and a new city was built, following a unitary city plan. Excavations have revealed its entire road network, which defined its topography. The streets of the city were paved with clay tiles and gravel, and featured rudimentary pavements. The streets formed a declivity towards the city's walls, which featured openings to facilitate the drainage of rainwater.

The city was divided in eight rectangular city blocks. Three elongated streets, 1.7 m in width, had an E-W orientation and three cross-streets divided the city into four rows of city blocks, two in each row. The width of the blocks was 11 m and their length 42 m on the west side of the city, and of slightly smaller dimensions in the east. Each city block formed a unit. Traverse walls divided the internal space of each block into individual residences featuring courtyards. The residences took up the northern section of the blocks, their façade to the south, where the main entrances and their courtyards were located.

The houses contained one or two rooms, while a house with three rooms has been unearthed. The walls of the houses were made up of rough stones, with clay used as mortar. The floors of the rooms were made up of compacted earth with a clay overlay, while the auxiliary spaces and the courtyards were paved with stones. The roofs were covered with clay tiles, largely produced in Bosphorus.

Hearths made of stone slabs placed upright and paved with clay were discovered inside the houses. In some areas there were troughs, also made of stone slabs, as well as low walls dividing the spaces intended for animals, when these were kept inside during the winter. There were *pithoi* for the storage of grain, fragments of which have been unearthed during the excavations.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Defensive enclosure

Excavations conducted in recently have revealed the remains of one of the earliest [fortification systems](#) in the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The foundations of a section from the east defensive wall have come to light, which consist of large limestone blocks (approximately 13m in length, 1-1.1m in width and surviving to a height up to 1.2m). The upper part of the wall was made of mud bricks. Remains of a similar wall, preserved in a very poor state, have been discovered in the south part of the settlement. This defensive system dates to the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC.<sup>8</sup>

In the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BC, the city was surrounded by a new defensive wall, 2.4-2.5 m wide. These walls were constructed using rubble masonry, consisting of limestone blocks, roughly hewn on their face, with clay used as mortar. The interior section, between the two wall faces, was filled in with clay and stone rubble.

The remains of a rectangular tower were discovered in the northwest corner of the defensive wall, which guarded a small gateway. The tower, measuring 9.75 X 9 m, was constructed in the same way as the walls. Its external north wall measured 2.5 m in width, while the other walls were 2.25 m. The tower featured an external protective layer measuring 0.6 m in width which was used as a buffer against battering rams. The internal space of the tower was paved with large stone slabs.

Inside the wall, close to the gate, there was a courtyard, paved with stone slabs and overlaid with pottery sherds. A similar paved area (covering a space of approximately 50 m<sup>2</sup>) surrounded by a wall, existed also in front of the gate and outside the walls. During the works to clear the paved areas a number of bronze Bosphoran [coins](#) has been discovered, mainly of small nominal value, which suggests that both spaces were used as places of commercial exchange.<sup>9</sup>

#### 5. Economy

The population of the city consisted mainly of soldiers guarding the sound. These soldiers had been given farm plots in the fertile area north of the city.<sup>10</sup> The city's economy was probably limited to producing whatever was required to cater for the immediate needs of its inhabitants.



Excavations have unearthed a series of finds connected with grain processing, like stone mills, mortars and querns. In one of the houses part of a stone wine press was found, used for household production. Numerous fishing weights, hooks and bronze needles for sewing fishing-nets indicate that inhabitants practiced fishing. Several objects related to weaving, like loom-weights and spindle-whorls have also been unearthed.<sup>11</sup>

1. Arr., *Peripl. M. Eux.* 69, 70, 117; Steph. Byz., s.v. 'Πορθμία και Πορθμίον'.
2. Strabo 7.4.5.
3. Веселов В.В., "Древние городища в районе Синягино (к вопросу о местоположении Парфения и Порфмия)", in Гайдукевич, В.Ф. (ed.), *Археология и история Боспора 1* (Симферополь 1952), pp. 227-237.
4. Тохтасьев, С.Р., "Посвятительное граффито из Порфмия", in *Древнее Причерноморье: Краткие сообщения Одесского Археологического Общества* (Одесса 1993), pp. 74-75.
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6. See the paper in the 'Web Bibliography' section.
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