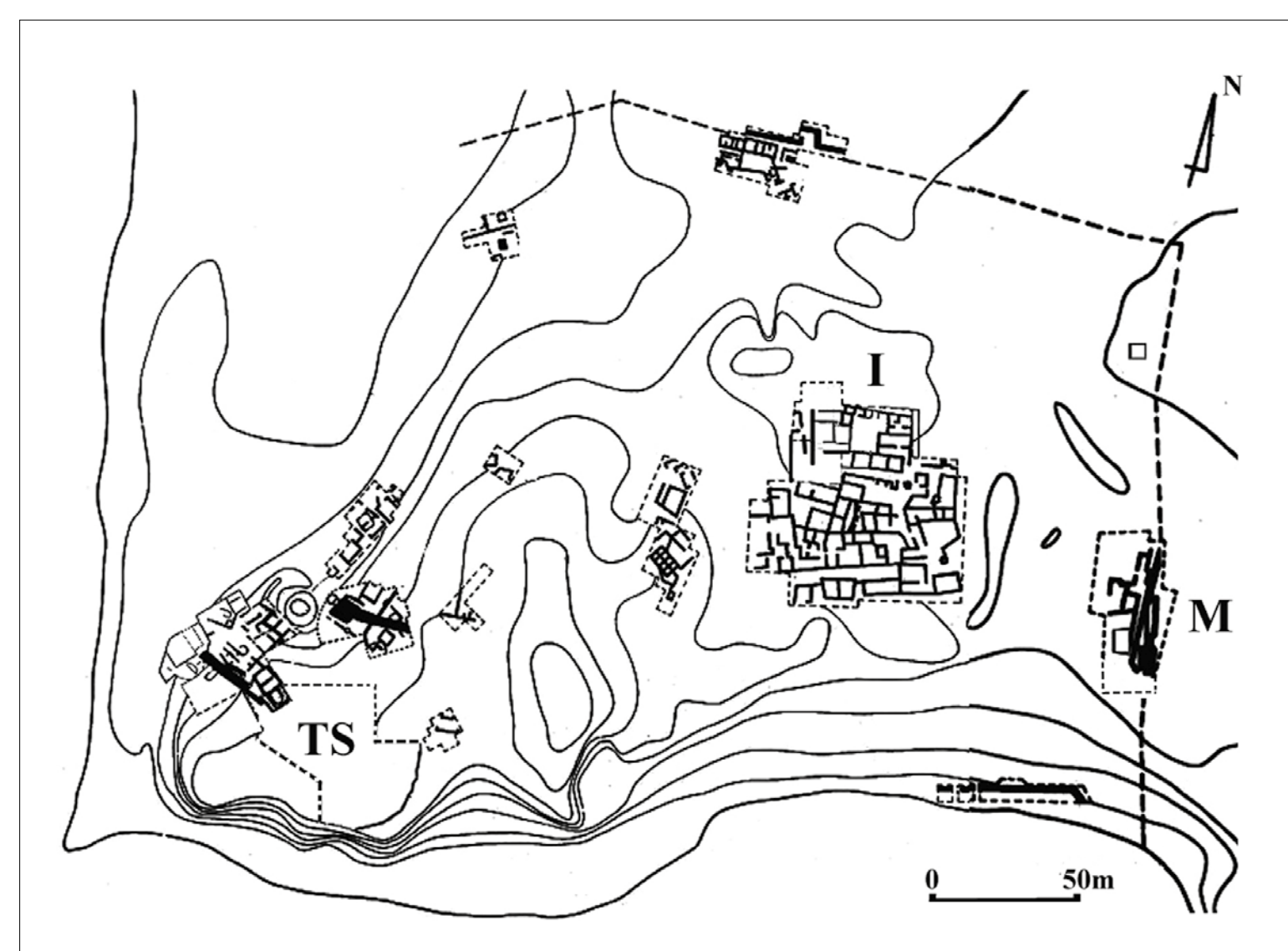
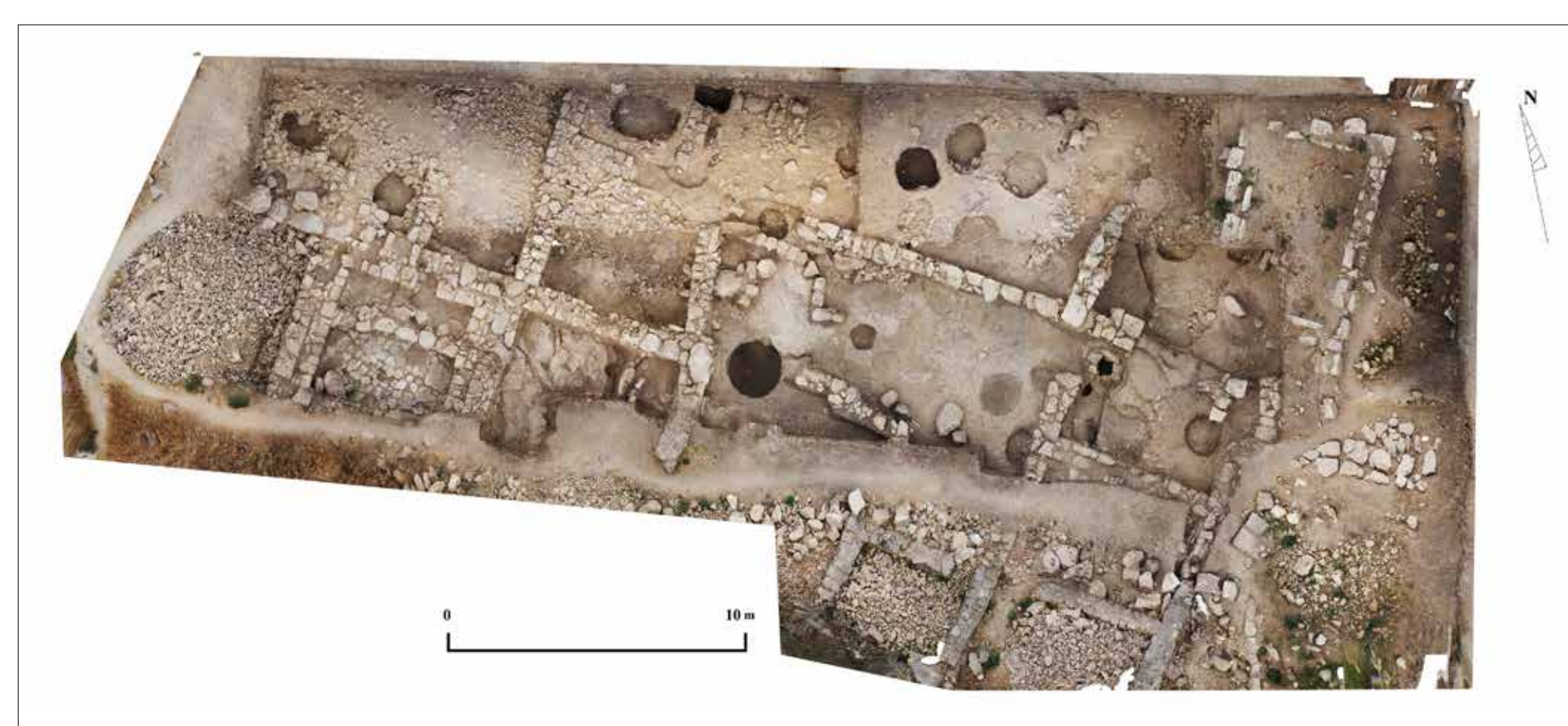


**PARETI DIPINTE
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Examples of the decorative wall painting from ancient *Myrmekion*



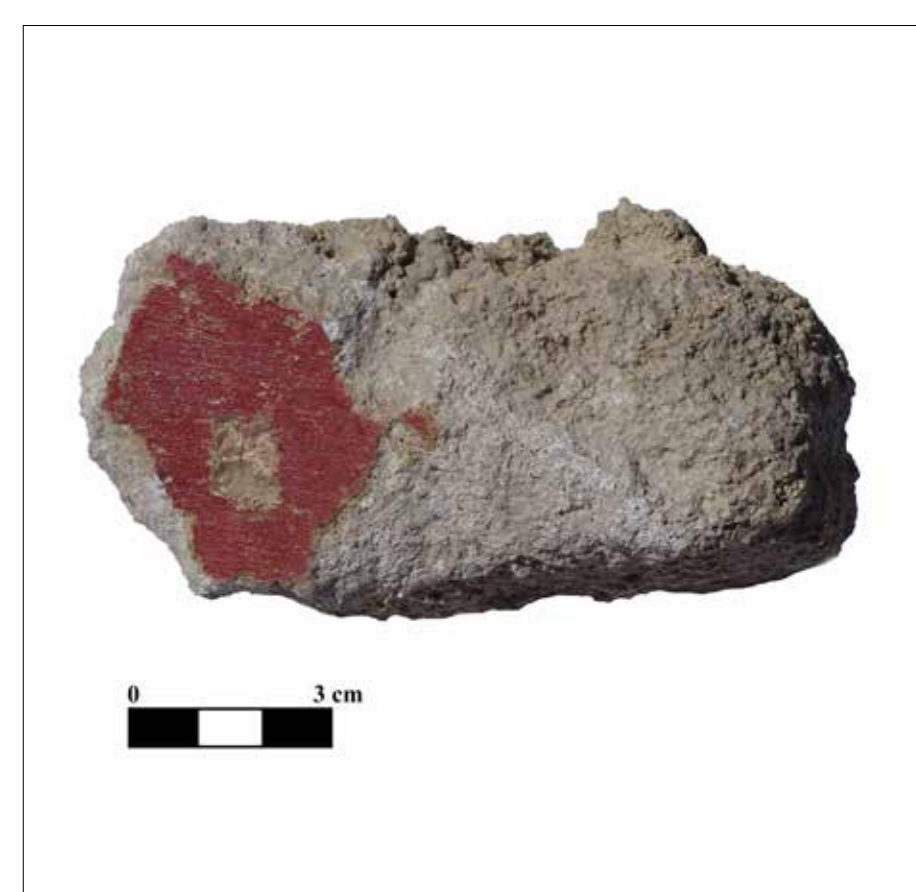
1. *Myrmekion*. Section map.



2. *Myrmekion*. Section "TS". Excavation of roman villa. Orthophoto by 2018.



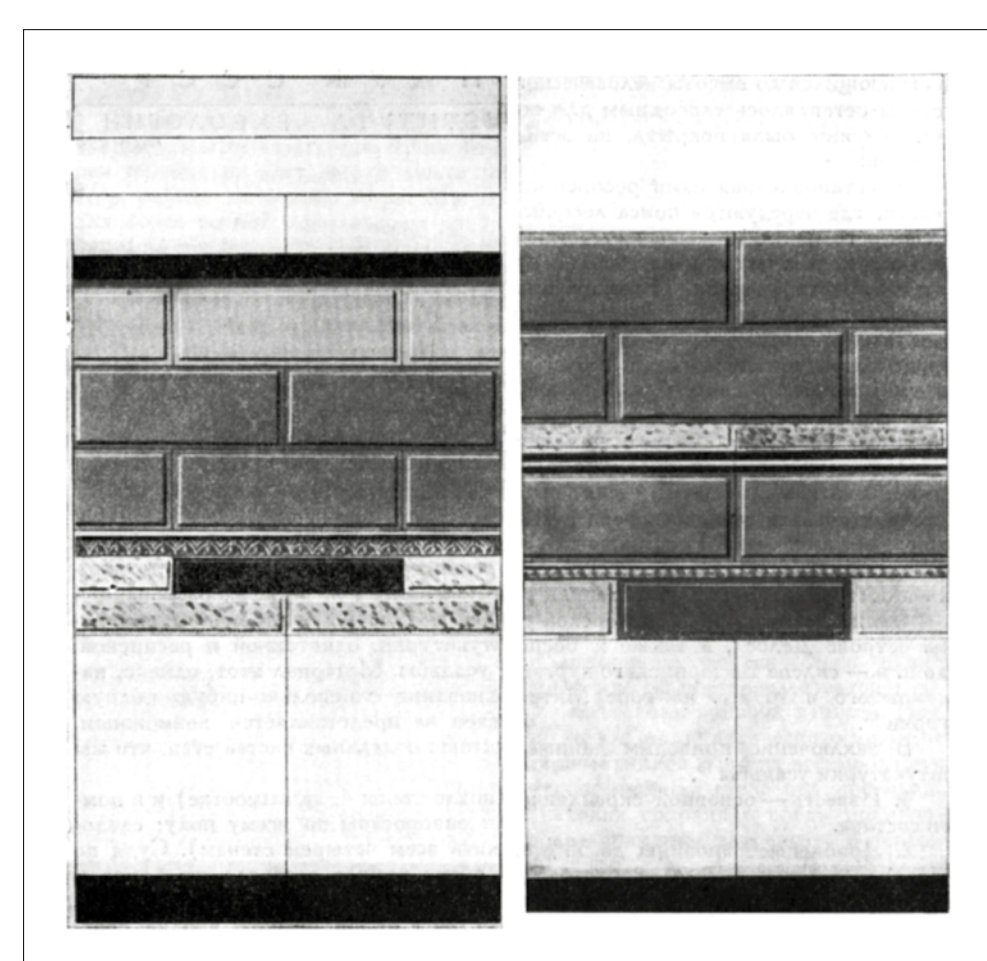
3. *Myrmekion*. Section "TS". Excavation of roman villa. View by North in 2018.



4. Fragment of red stucco from *Myrmekion* (left).



5. Fragments of white stucco with polychromatic painting from the Late Hellenistic ash hill from *Myrmekion* (right).



6. Reconstruction of fresco decoration in Hellenistic villa near *Myrmekion* (by E.Kastanayan).

Ancient *Myrmekion*, situated on the shore of present-day Kerch Strait (Crimea), has been founded during the Greek colonization of the Northern Black Sea region by the Milesians (fig. 1). The first building period of the settlement dates from the second quarter of the 6th century BCE, when first few residential dugouts and household pits appeared on the rock of Quarantine cape. Most likely, this small settlement has been functioning as one of the quarters of nearby *Panticapaeum*, founded in the 2nd half of the 7th century BCE. By the beginning of the 5th century BCE the town has expanded into the coast to the north and east, structure of the settlement has become regular: residential quarters with the system of courtyards and streets has been built. In the 4th century BCE the town with total area of around 8 hectares became encircled with a defensive wall. After total destruction in the middle of the 1st century BCE the settlement has revived at the beginning of a new era, as a system of large villas, presumably belonging to the aristocratic families of the Bosporean state. At the turn of the 3rd-4th centuries CE *Myrmekion* was completely destroyed and abandoned by its residents (Butyagin *et al.* 2003). Despite several finds of architectural fragments, monumental buildings still have not been uncovered. The more interesting was the discovery of polychrome painting fragments here.

During the latest archaeological excavations at the site in the cultural layers of the Roman period, fragments of red, green and yellow stucco have been found, which, probably, belonged to the walls of a rich villa, in the "TS" excavation section (figg. 2-3). This structure has been repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt during the 1st-3rd centuries BCE, because of what all of the fragments have been deposited in the cultural layer and have not been preserved on the walls. It's possible to assume that fresco fragments come from the ruins of villa of the 1st-beginning of the 2nd century BC, because they are missing in rooms that can be definitely linked with the late building period of villa. The manufacturing technique was relatively simple: thin layer of stucco has been applied right onto the mud-brick or stone wall surface, after which it was covered with final layer (usually white, but sometimes with inclusion of ground pottery), then it was painted (fig. 4). Naturally, such stucco cover was not persistent.

While finds of the Roman time fresco fragment is large in number, discovery of four other stucco fragments with polychrome painting in the earlier layers of the Late Hellenistic ash-hill (so called Eastern Ash-hill in the eastern part of "TS" excavation section) is unique. Fragments, painted with green, black, yellow and red color on white background, most likely, belonged to a single structure (fig. 5). They could be a part of ornamental frieze that decorated the building: one of the fragments depicts a piece of lesbian *cymatium*, the others – pieces of egg-and-dart pattern. Besides two of them are relief. Furthermore, red colored stucco fragments, flat and with low relief, have been uncovered near the city wall (in the excavation section "M"). They could belong to edges of rectangular wall relive panels. These finds proves that in the Hellenistic period rooms with painted walls were widespread all over the site.

The decorative painting of the Bosporean Kingdom is the brightest example of the close cultural connection between the Greeks and the local population. Wall-paintings of Bosporean tombs have attracted interest of scholars since the 19th century (Rostovcev 1913-1914). While there are various and numerous paintings coming from burial structures, relatively small amount of painted stucco fragments has been uncovered during the excavations of town structures.

The most famous piece of painted fresco has been uncovered in the *Panticapaeum* in the course of excavation lead by C. Dumberg (now kept in The Hermitage). It dates back to the 2nd century BCE and contains plain panels, relief details and also compound painting, imitating marble. It supposed being part of rich household of some bosporean nobleman. Earlier piece of wall-painting has been found in the site of *Niphaion*, situated to the south from *Panticapaeum*. Beside red, yellow and black fragments there are also rough marble imitation and pieces with pattern of lesbian *cymatium*. This painting of the 1st half of the 3rd century BCE became famous because of the numerous graffiti left including image of "Isis" ship. Probably, these paintings have been covering walls of a sanctuary banquet hall. On the one hand, such finds allowed supposing that murals were intended only for some of the elite palaces and sanctuaries. On the other, discovery of wall-painting in the Hellenistic villa few kilometers to the north-east far from the site of *Myrmekion* (Gaydukevich *et al.* 1981). There, inside two rooms, that were probably banquet halls, numerous fragments of colored stucco have been found. Presumably, they could be parts of wall painting that included black, red and yellow plain areas, band of lesbian *cymatium* and marble imitation (fig. 6) (Kastanayan *et al.* 1969).

Thus, painted fresco fragments from *Myrmekion* and nearby villa might be an evidence of wide distribution of polychrome wall-paintings with marble imitating details and cornices among private residential buildings and adjoining rural villas. This spreading of mural painting has led to the developing of the original school of painting in the Northern Black Sea region that later fully embraced itself in the paintings of the Bosporean tombs.

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Rostovcev M.I. 1913-1914, *Antique decorative painting in the south of Russia (Античная декоративная живопись на юге России)*, S-Petersburg.
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Kastanayan E.G. 1969, *Mural painting of a rural villa of Hellenistic times near Panticapaeum: reconstruction experience (Стенная роспись сельской усадьбы эллинистического времени близ Пантикапея (опыт реконструкции))*, "KSIIMK 116", Moscow, 45-48.