MINIATURE GLASS PORTRAIT FROM NYMPHAEUM

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In 1983 during excavations of the Bosporan city of Nymphaeum in a mixed habitation level immediately under a humus layer a small sculpted female head (h. 3.5 cms) was found, which was made from transparent glass of a deep aquamarine colour.

The small head had been cast in a mould using the lost wax technique. The essence of this technique is as follows: a model of the head made of wax was coated with clay and heated, the wax melted and flowed out through a specially designed hole, while the clay dried and thus came to provide a mould. Into this mould molten glass or powdered glass was placed and heated. The glass liquefied and then filled the mould completely. After cooling the mould was broken and the sculpture was then annealed. The final stage of the production process, traces of which can be seen on the find from Nymphaeum, was the finish for details applied with a cutting tool to the cold hard surface of the glass. The small sculpted head from Nymphaeum, like any other article manufactured using this technique is unique.

The state of preservation of this work is such that it is impossible to determine whether the head was part of a bust or complete figure. On the right side of the face traces of a broken ridge can be seen and part of the right side of the face is missing, also pieces of the hair at the back and nape of the neck and almost the whole of the neck itself. Part of the hair at the back has been joined on to the head. There are slight chips on the face and hair. The surface of the glass has been irised.

The head leans slightly to the right. The hair has a straight parting in the middle and in the front thick tresses frame the face. On the hair there is diadem in the form of a ribbon. At the back the hair is drawn into a chignon descending to the neck. The characteristic facial features — the low forehead, wide set eyes, slightly hooked nose, tightly pressed mouth with thin lips, small pointed chin

1 Excavations of the Nymphaeum Expedition of the Hermitage Museum led by N.L. Grach.