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# Worked bone and antler from Halmyris: An insight on everyday life of a frontier post of Scythia

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## ABSTRACT

Halmyris is one of the most important Roman settlements from the Danube Delta, in the easternmost part of Scythia province during the late Antiquity. Its remains are located 2.5 km east from the present-day Murighiol village and 2 km south from the Saint George distributary of the Danube (in Antiquity named Peuce). The fort (2nd – 4th century AD) and early Byzantine city (5th-early 7th century AD) experienced a long existence benefiting of strategic position. Archaeological research on-going from 1981 led to the discovery of the three gates, the thermae, the praetorium, the Basilica with crypt, the barracks on the western side and of the military complex near the north Gate. Additionally, a large number of epigraphic fragments documents the existence of a unique (throughout the Roman Empire) 'sailor's village' - vicus classicorum and we may suppose that workshops for processing bone and antler were based there. In autumn 2014, research in the extramural area of the fort started due to necessity of building a new site-museum and tourist's information point. In this paper bone and antler finds found as a result of the excavation are presented.

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## 1. Introduction

Halmyris (Murighiol, Tulcea district, SE Romania) is one of the most important Roman and Late Roman settlements located in the inferior part of the Danube delta. It lies 2.5 km east from the present-day Murighiol village and 2 km south from the Saint George distributary of the Danube (in Antiquity named Peuce). The city has a long-life span, from Early Roman period to Early Byzantine (roughly late 1st-early 7th century AD). Previously, the site was inhabited by the Getae and, based on some pottery shards, developed trade relations with the Greek colonies from the Black Sea coast. During the Roman period, the fort had a strategic position on the last segment of the frontier on the Danube between Aegyssus (Tulcea) and the mouth of the Saint George distributary. Together with the fort Salsovia (Mahmudia) and the fortlets from Nufăru and the Dunavăț Peninsula it guarded this segment of the frontier and was a military base for the Roman fleet of the Danube (Fig. 1).

Archaeological research on-going from 1981 uncovered a large number of finds but only pottery assemblages were published up to

date to some extent (Topoleanu, 2000). The site yielded probably the most important and varied pottery assemblage from northern Scythia, but the existence of local workshops is proved only in the case of lamps (Topoleanu, 1996). The remains of this workshop were found in the proximity of the Western Gate where a single kiln was discovered unfortunately badly damaged. Over the years no other report of local production was made by the excavation team.

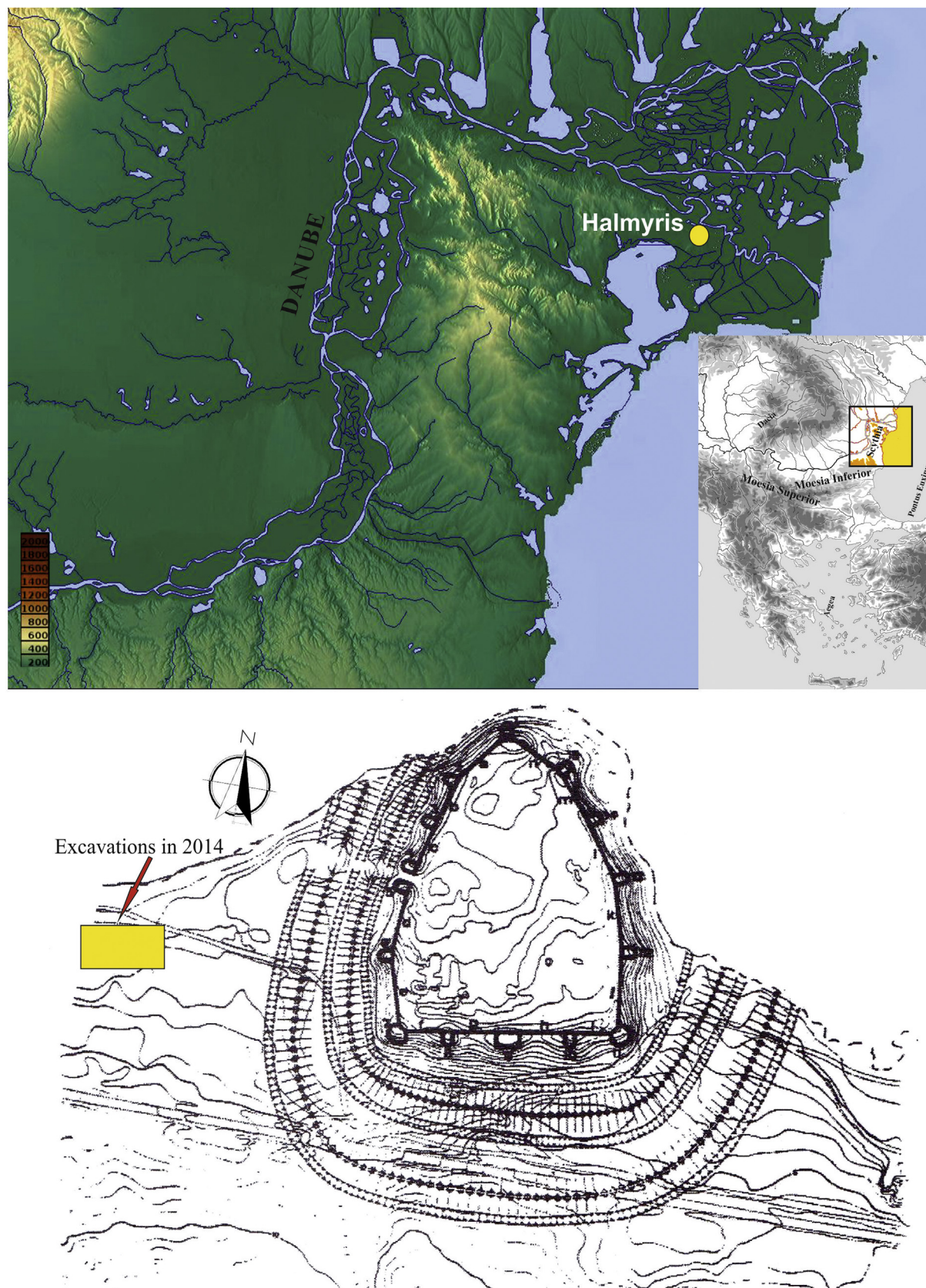
## 2. Regional setting

Carved bone and antler objects occupy a minor position among the small finds discovered on the site. Yet, a certain variety might be seen among the finds, including combs, hairpins, buckles and other implements of everyday use. Noticeable is the fact that the site produced mostly evidence for local bone and antler workshop during its 3rd phase of occupation, the Late Roman fort and early Byzantine town, from the last quarter of the 3rd century to the early 7th century AD.

An analysis of the workshops from the Lower Danube shows that most of them were discovered along the limes in military milieus (Nuțu et al., 2014). If we take into consideration the situation from Moesia Inferior, one can notice that at least two

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**Fig. 1.** Geographic placement of Halmyris and topography of the fort.

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