

Halmyris, a settlement and fort near the mouth of the Danube: interim report

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Geography and environment

Ancient Halmyris lies in the NW corner of the Dobrudja region in SE Romania. It lies c.2.5 km east of the village of Murighiol on a rocky promontory which is slightly higher than the surrounding marshes. This is at the E end of the Dunavat peninsula (known in antiquity as *Extrema Scythiae Minoris*: Jord., *Get.* 266) and it is bordered by the Danube delta on the north and east, Razelm lake on the south, and the Tulcea hills on the west (fig. 1). The site was occupied continuously from at least the mid-first millennium B.C. up to the 7th c. A.D. The local environment, flora and fauna were favourable to settlement until as a result of natural causes the Danube became almost inaccessible; from that point on, the settlement became vulnerable to human and other natural events and eventually it became deserted.¹

The site is known today as Bataraiia or Cetatea. In the early 20th c. the locals still called it the Genoese stronghold (Geneviz-Kaleh). In antiquity it lay on the bank of the southern arm of the Danube called Peuce (now known as Sfântu Gheorghe).² Today the southern arm of the Danube runs 2 km north of the site and it is connected to Lake Murighiol by the Periboina canal. Until 1983 there were two lakes, c.100 and c.200 m from the site, modern relics of the ancient course of the river. To the east lie the Dunavat hills and to the south is Dealul Cetatea ("fort hill") (fig. 2).

History of research and the name of the site

In 1643 H. Rosweyodus began collecting hagiographic information and his successor J. Bolandus drew further attention to the name Halmyris-Salmorus, a toponym connected to the martyrdom here of two Christians.³ In 1898 the engineer P. Polonic visited the site and proposed locating here *Ad Stoma*.⁴ In 1909-10 the numismatist C. Moisil made a summary description,⁵ emphasizing the numismatic finds that included a Republican coin hoard. He postulated for the first time the location of ancient Salmorus, the name of which was later corrupted in the *Notitia Dignitatum* to Thalamonium, and by linguistic analysis he linked the Latin variant Salmorus with the Greek Halmyris. He was the first to postulate the location of Halmyris near the modern village of Murighiol. This has been shown to be correct by our own work (see below). Shortly afterwards the Austrian J. Weiss suggested placing Halmyris at the fortlet of Dunavatu de Jos because it lay on the bank of lake Razelm.⁶ Later the historian V. Pârvan invoked the name of a fort called Gratiana known from the *Notitia Dignitatum* and

- 1 On the natural conditions of this remote peninsula see M. D. Ionescu, *Dobrogea în preajma veacului al XX-lea* (Bucharest 1904) 26-27; G. Bratescu in *Dobrogea. Cincizeci de ani de viața românească* (Bucharest 1928) 3-106. See also M. Zahariade, A. Suceveanu, A. Opaît, C. Opaît and F. Topoleanu, "Early and Late Roman fortification at Independenta, Tulcea county," *Dacia* 31 (1987) 97-106, and M. Zahariade, "An early and late Roman fort on the Danube," *Roman frontier studies 1989 (Proc. XV int. Congress)* (Exeter 1991) 311-17.
- 2 Strabo 7.3.15; Plin., *NH* 4.12.79; see also C. Bratescu in *Analele Dobrogei* 2 (1921) 227-41; id. in *Buletinul Societății Regale de Geografie* 54 (1935) 32-37; R. Vulpe, *Dobrogea* (Bucharest 1940) 63 and 80.
- 3 *Acta Sanctorum*, Mensis Iulii f.539, 4. Bollandus quotes Rosweyodus's opinion as follows: *ex his collegitur Almiridensium civitatem in Scythiam esse ... forte Salmorudis Antonini*.
- 4 His notes in abbreviated form were not published until 1935. His manuscript was included in Tocilescu mss. 5132, f. 95 today in the Romanian Academy.
- 5 C. Moisil, *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* 2 (1909) 85-92; *ibid.* 3 (1910) 93-94.
- 6 J. Weiss, *Die Dobrudscha im Altertum* (Sarajevo 1911) 55-56.