



**MEDIEVAL CEMETERY FUNERARY EXCAVATION**

**Lost Churches Project**

**June 4 – July 29, 2023**

**Session 1: June 4 – July 1, 2023 / Session 2: July 2 – July 29, 2023**

**Valeni (Odorheiu Secuiesc), Transylvania, Romania**

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**Project Web Site:**

<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/medieval-cemetery-funerary-excavation>

**Project Application Form:**

<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/application-bioarchaeology>

**Academic Credits:** 3-6 graduate/undergraduate credits available through University of South Florida - Not Mandatory (additional USF credit tuition applies)

USF Program Brochure – Credit Application Page:

<https://educationabroad.global.usf.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.ViewProgramAngular&id=23628>

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## I. Historical Introduction

As the 15<sup>th</sup> century ends, the battle for Europe begins! The southeastern European frontier collapses in front of the Ottoman Turks. The heroes (and their legend) that held back the East have died: Vlad Dracula the Impaler, prince of Wallachia in 1476; Holy Stephan the Great, prince of Moldavia in 1504; Skanderberg (Iskender Bey), lord of Albania in 1468. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the united European defeat at the great Battle of Mohacs in 1526 opened the way for the Ottoman expansion into Europe. By 1529, Suleiman the Magnificent has conquered southeastern Europe, the Kingdom of Hungary collapsed and the Ottoman troops were battering the walls of Vienna. The Ottoman expansions was finally checked in 1683, when King Jan III Sobieski of Poland's heavy cavalry legendary charge under the walls of besieged Vienna broke the Ottoman army and won a crucial victory.

As Europe redefines itself in the wake of the Ottoman invasion, the Carpathian frontier mostly holds against the Southern invaders. As Transylvanian suzerainty has passed from the Hungarian Kingdom, to the Ottomans, to the Habsburgs from the 15-17<sup>th</sup> century, the local populations lived under constant social, political, economic and religious stress. Since the Neolithic, Transylvania has been at the crossroads of European identity. During the late Middle Ages, this region goes not only through major political changes, but also through a spirituality crisis, under the pressure of Islam from the East and Protestantism from the West.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a series of stone, fortified churches in the region around Odorheiu Secuiesc cease to be used. According to our archeological evidence, most of these churches existed as far back as the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century. In the aftermath of the crisis that shook the foundation of European identity, these churches disappear from collective memory. We also discovered that the use of these temples changes in a fundamental way during the last decades of their use. The church at Teleac/Telekfalva revealed that it was almost exclusively used to inter children, mostly preterm: the funerary ensemble showed one adult, 69 juveniles out of which 48 were of preterm or fetal age. Our 2013 excavation at the lost churches of Bradesti/Fenyed and Lueta has yielded a series of surprises, ranging from a highly complex ossuary, to a "Romeo and Juliette" grave, to a series of twins. The material culture associated with the various graves was exceptionally well preserved, allowing a very interesting glimpse into 15-17<sup>th</sup> century rural life and mortuary aesthetics.

## II. Program Introduction: The "Lost Churches" Project

The aim of this project is to continue to explore how major political events physically impacted local populations. We are interested in the evolution of the population throughout the Middle Ages in the region, the changes in the very local type of church architecture and burial patterns through time, and the variations on the Christian burial ritual during social, political and economic stress. At the same time, we will explore the way local communities "lived" the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism.

The results of our 2013-2022 laboratory analysis of the human remains from the "lost churches" we excavated have shown a very interesting demographic profile and pathologies. During our 2023 field season, we will continue excavating the extraordinarily well preserved "lost church" of Văleni (Hu: Patakfalva), sister church of Teleac. We will focus on the immediate exterior of our „lost church". One important question to address is how and why the burrial of deceased children varied so much in the region, in the hopes that we can elucidate the extraordinary high concentrations – both in space and time – of preterm and/or fetal remains.



At the same time we will investigate the building phases of this ecclesiastic building and its relationship to the deceased. The unexpected discovery, during our 2014 season of a pre-Christian / migration period burial complex, comprising several individuals and a horse, adds another level of perception to the evolution of the landscape. Another surprise was the discovery in 2017, of a stone build, very well preserved ossuary, for which more than the third of the sacristy was sacrificed. Its detailed excavation and analysis forms the basis of our Osteology Excavation and Commingled Remains Osteology Laboratory Research Workshop (<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/commingled-remains>).

These results could also shed light on the relation between this church and its community, from the first moments of its existence. Through a more thorough study of the cemetery and its occupants, we will also explore the different processes that led to the penetration of Protestantism in the village and then its subsequent return to Catholicism and/or its final disappearance. The further study of the human remains in our Adult Osteology Laboratory Research Workshop (<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/adult-osteology-laboratory>) as well as our Juvenile Osteology Laboratory Research Workshop (<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/juvenile-osteology-laboratory>) will provide a more detailed view of the human aspects of these transitions.

### III. Rationale/Purpose

This project is the excavation of an abandoned medieval church in the Transylvanian village of Văleni (Hu: Patakfalva). We are exploring how centuries of religious and political upheaval have influenced demographics and health of the individuals interred within the church walls and associated cemetery. This field school project is part of a broader investigation of the abandonment of medieval churches in the area and provides significant opportunities for students to get involved in international bioarchaeology, multi-institution networking and collaboration, and addressing biological, archaeological, and cultural questions. Over the course of several weeks, students will acquire skills in broad and small scale excavation, drawing, mapping, and note taking; thereby, developing the strategic skill necessary to acquire jobs working for both archaeological and forensic organizations around the world. Evenings and rain days will be used to design and complete projects using excavated materials. Students will have the opportunity to present their research at the local symposium in Romania, as well as other major conferences if they so choose. The entities involved are interested in extensive research and publication, allowing for many directions of continued investigation and student involvement and research. All excavation and analysis are conducted with support of- and in collaboration with- ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada personnel, the Museul Haáz Rezső in Odorheiu Secuiesc, Romania, and the villagers of Patakfalva. The high impact practices achieved in this course are Diversity/Global Learning, Community-Based Learning, and Research Projects. These practices will enhance student learning by exposing students to human cultural and biological diversity, allowing students to engage with the local community through the science of bioarchaeology and public outreach, and allowing students to generate research.

### IV. Aims and Objectives

#### a. Overall:

- Determining the architectural building phases of the central cemetery church and their chronology
- Mapping the different phases of the cemetery inhumations and their relationship to broader social, political, religious, military and economic events
- Proper retrieval of the human remains for further anthropological analysis

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- Establishment of late medieval funerary behavior and its evolution
- Identification of idiosyncratic ritual changes and their relationship to historical stresses
- Local and regional patterns of interaction, mobility and association among various groups of individual
- Ethnic historical evolution of the local and regional landscape

**b. Course aims:**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Properly excavate human remains
- Perform basic osteological analysis
- Generate maps of human remains and their surrounding depositional context
- Safely remove human remains and prepare them for curation
- Complete burial paperwork
- Combine information from a variety of contexts for burial interpretation
- Design a project, execute it, and present it at the workshop's capstone colloquium

**c. Course Objectives:**

- Demonstrate the ability to interpret and use numerical, written, oral, and visual data
- Demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience
- Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments
- Demonstrate an understanding of:
  - Past human experiences and ability to relate them to the present
  - Different contemporary cultures and their interrelationships
  - Issues involving social institutions, interpersonal and group dynamics, human development and behavior, and cultural diversity
  - Scientific concepts and methods as well as contemporary issues in science and technology
  - Cultural heritage through its expressions of wisdom, literature and art and their roles in the process of self and social understanding.
- Demonstrate an excitement for, and love of, learning

**V. Specialized Skills Taught:**

Lectures will be offered to our participants, ranging from local history and archaeology to material culture typologies and architecture, to various subjects related to mortuary archaeology. Students will be taught the proper use of various field tools. Explanations will be provided for every step of the excavation, on stratigraphy, field finds and archaeological complexes. We expect our participants to be intellectually involved in the archaeological process and thus interacting with the research staff.



Skill sets taught during the project:

- Excavation: proper use of excavation tools, strategic excavation of human bone material and associated grave goods, mapping, drawing, soil description, feature and site notation, interpretation, and removal of skeletal remains
- Laboratory: osteological processing and basic analysis

## VI. Expectations of Students/Course Policies

The **Rules and Regulations** of the project are expected to be followed at all times. Furthermore:

**Physical fitness requirement:** Students will be working outside, 40 hours a week, in temperatures ranging from 65- 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Work consists of walking uneven terrain, climbing ladders, and extensive trowel use. Most of the workday will be spent in a kneeling or sitting position carefully excavating human remains. Students will be expected to be involved in all field and classroom activities. In the event that a student declines to participate or does not participate in group activities, their grade in the course may suffer or they may be returned home at their own additional expense without a refund of expenses previously paid.

**Human remains:** Human remains represent a non-renewable resource and will be treated with respect and dignity at all times. In addition, project participants will not take photographs of human remains or use them for social media purposes without consent of the project director.

**Attendance:** Students are expected to participate daily in all field and lab activities. Completion of the excavation project is dependent on the crew and unapproved absences will not be tolerated.

**Civility and Ground Rules:** The Western Carolina University Community Creed states: "I will respect the rights and well-being of others." Each student may possess different ideas, as well as different ways of communicating those ideas. Because of these differences, respect and civility are integral to maintaining the quality of the academic environment and free inquiry (<https://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/CodeOfStudentConduct.pdf> ). Furthermore, all participants are expected to behave respectfully at all times towards the staff, other participants and local people. All participants are required to abide by the rules and regulations of the program as well as Romanian laws. Disrespectful and/or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.

**Participation Assumptions:** In registering for this project, it is assumed that participants will be engaged, interested, and active in the program. All program activities are mandatory. A substantial degree of personal responsibility and initiative is expected and required from all participants to complete readings, prepare for discussions, and acquire the skills offered in the project. All acquired skills and enjoyment of this excavation are directly proportional to the effort and attention participants invest. It is assumed that participants will fully engage in all aspects of the program.



## VII. Course Organization

### a. Course Materials

**Equipment:** Trowel: 4 inch pointed trowel

**Recommended:** [https://www.amazon.com/MARSHALLTOWN-Premier-Line-46-114S/dp/B003A83GK0/ref=pd\\_sim\\_469\\_5?ie=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=YP5JWQMBSCBM1RNR39E2](https://www.amazon.com/MARSHALLTOWN-Premier-Line-46-114S/dp/B003A83GK0/ref=pd_sim_469_5?ie=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=YP5JWQMBSCBM1RNR39E2)

**Textbook (optional):** 2005. The Human Bone Manual. Tim L. White and Pieter A. Folkens. ISBN: 0120884674

**Other assigned readings** for the course - short articles and website content - will be posted on Blackboard and in a shared Dropbox folder. Supplementary reading materials may be assigned as the course progresses.

### b. Grading Criteria

#### **Attitude/ Morale/ Professionalism (30%)**

Attitude is very important when working on an archaeological crew. Excavation is both fun and challenging. Furthermore, working outside presents a series of variables that are new to many students. Willingness to participate as a member of the team, work on improving, and staying positive are imperative for succeeding on this project.

#### **Archaeological Excavation Methods (20%)**

Evaluation of the excavation methods will be based on the student's attention to instruction and improvement over time. It is expected that all students will start with little-to-no knowledge of human skeletal excavation techniques. Daily excavation work allows for the practice and refinement of these skills. The first two weeks are meant to move slow as students get used to the tools, the archaeological matrix, and the gentle but directed 'feel' of excavation. By the end of the session, a successful student will demonstrate an increase in excavation speed, cleaner burial excavation, and an independent understanding of the steps required to excavate human remains.

#### **Human Osteology (15%)**

Knowledge of human osteology is important for excavation of human remains. Training in human osteology is not required for this excavation; however, students without previous training will be expected to utilize the resources provided to help them learn the bones. A successful student will show some level of improvement in their osteological knowledge by the end of the session. This can include going from no knowledge to identifying whole bones or having intermediate knowledge and identifying bone fragments or sub-adult remains.

#### **Project (35%)**

Students will design a project based on their interests in the Papdomb site and the resources available. They will then complete the project during their time in Romania and present it at the International Colloquium held on the last Friday of the session. Students participating in this course as part of the Science, Engagement, and Communication Learning Community will design their project as part the final assignment for the Bioarchaeology



(Anth 368) course. They will then collect and analyze the data for their project while in Romania. These students are expected to prepare a more extensive project and will work in groups.

The Papdomb excavation is part of a larger research agenda regarding Medieval Churches in Transylvania. Therefore, all projects will also be reviewed by our colleagues: Dr. Andre Gonciar, Dr. Jonathon Bethard, and Dr. Zsolt Nyárádi. This provides students with a more typical professional experience than they received in standard classroom instruction.

**c. Tentative Course Schedule**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Week 1</b>							
Morning	Orientation	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Székely History	Fortified Churches
Day	Orientation	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork		
Evening	Free	Lecture	Project time	Lecture	Free	Free	Free
<b>Week 2</b>							
Morning	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Castle Trip	Praid Salt Mines
Day	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork		
Evening	Project time	Lecture	Project time	Lecture	Free		
<b>Week 3</b>							
Morning	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Free	Free
Day	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Free	Free
Evening	Project time	Lecture	Project time	Lecture	Free	Free	Free
<b>Week 4</b>							
Morning	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Colloquium	Everyone must be checked out of the pension by 8am Saturday morning	
Day	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Fieldwork			
Evening	Project time	Project time	Career Panel	Project time	Leave		

**Notes:**

1. Because of the COVID-19 situation, there will be a curfew that will be enforced all the time.
2. Schedule is subject to change based on weather and resources. Rain days will be lab days. Lectures, workshops, and project time will be announced that day.
3. All free time can be used for project time including before and after meals or evening lectures. Access to the lab space will be negotiated based on project and student needs.
4. The weekend tours are provided by our collaborator ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada., at additional costs

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- 5. Breakfast is served from 7am- 8am and is not mandatory. Dinner is served at 7:00 sharp and is mandatory. If you cannot attend dinner, you must notify an instructor ahead of time. Dinner is served and your absence will be noticed.

**d. Syllabus Updates:**

This syllabus, with its course schedule, is based on the most recent information about the course content and schedule planned for this course. Its content is subject to revision as needed to adapt to new knowledge or unanticipated events. Updates will remain focused on achieving the course objectives and students will receive notification of such changes. Students will be notified of changes and are responsible for attending to such changes or modifications as distributed by the instructor.

**VIII. Additional Logistics**

Public transportation in Romania, under normal circumstances, is quite impractical as well as unpredictable, not to mention the great variability in cleanliness. As such, due to the COVID-19 situation, for the safety of our participants, our staff and our hosts, for 2023, the following options are available at additional cost:

It is highly recommended that all participants land in Bucharest (Henri Coanda Airport – Otopeni) and take our chartered bus directly to our hotel base in Odorheiu Secuiesc. Participants may opt to take the chartered bus back to the airport at the end of the project (see the project Rules and Regulations and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Advisory for more details)

Second, we want to ensure our participants get to explore the magic of Transylvania, while limiting as much as possible the potential of getting infected. Consequently, in 2023, the following field day-trips are available:

- Day Trip #1 (weekend 1):** Szekely Land Day Trip: visit of the Lost Churches sites, including our active site of Patakfalva (Valeni), the Jesus Chapel (the oldest medieval monument around Odorheiu Secuiesc), and the ethnographic museum in Cristuru Secuiesc.
- Day Trip #2 (weekend 1):** Medieval Saxon Heritage Day Trip: visit of some beautiful Saxon fortified churches (Cata, Homorod, Viscri) and the Rupea Fortress
- Day Trip #3 (weekend 2):** Brasov Castles Day Trip: visit of Bram Stoker’s Bran Castle, Rasnov Fortress, and Peles Castle or Fagaras Castle
- Day Trip #4 (weekend 2):** Visit of the salt mines of Praid, dubbed by our students “the Mines of Moria”.

## IX. Bibliography (required readings)

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