



**IDENTITY AND WEALTH ON THE ROMAN FRONTIER
ROMAN PROVINCIAL LANDSCAPE STRATEGIES:
- VILLA AND SETTLEMENT EXCAVATION AND SURVEY -**

Summer 2027

Southern Transylvania, Hunedoara County, Romania

SYLLABUS

ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada

Roman Villa and Settlement Archaeological Excavation (4 weeks) Dates:

Session 1: **June 6 – July 3, 2027**

Session 2: **July 4, to July 31, 2027**

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Junior Staff:

Web Site:

<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/roman-villa-excavation>

Additional Project Information:

<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/rapolt2-logistics>

I. Introduction:

By the beginning of the first century AD, the Roman Empire reached its zenith. The conquest of Dacia was the last great expansion of Rome. Since the first half of the 1st century BC, under the great king Burebista, the Dacians start to get involved in Roman politics. Domitian's failure to annex Dacia and subsequent Roman military defeats at the hands of the Dacians made the Danube frontier a target of fundamental importance for the Empire. It took Trajan, one of Rome's greatest military minds, two wars (101/2AD and 106AD) to subjugate and colonize the mighty Dacians, or as Herodotus described them, "the bravest and fairest of all the Thracians". The

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Dacians were the only (and last) entity left in Europe to pose a real threat to Rome... culturally, economically, politically and military.

The Roman conquest of Dacia began in 87AD with the relatively disastrous campaigns led by Domitian and ended with Trajan's Dacian Wars of 101/2 and 106AD. The plethora of wealth and resources the Roman Empire harnessed in Dacia (especially in Transylvania) contributed significantly to the "solvability" of the imperial economy until the Aurelian Retreat of 270AD. The construction of Trajan's Forum in Rome, fully paid by the spoils of war, was a very concrete illustration of the economic potential of the new province, while making the Dacians the ethnic group most immortalized in Roman imperial statuary.

The mechanisms of Roman occupation of Dacia are very complex and not well understood. The Dacian aristocracy and upper classes were in continuous contact with the Roman world well before the final fall of the Dacian Kingdoms. These interactions took many forms, ranging from raids and limited warfare, to intensive and extensive trade, to the use of Roman techniques, technologies and craftsmen.

With the defeat and "suicide" of the last Dacian King, Decebalus, in 106AD, the structures of the local social system collapsed in parts or in whole. The new Roman presence generated a dynamic and continuous process of creolization in the new province, redefining the concepts and practices of identity, wealth and class representation along Roman traditions, in theory. Furthermore, the Dacian auxiliaries recruited in the Imperial armies after the conquest reached the point where they could influence political choices and contributed to the rise of an emperor of Dacian origin, Maximinus Thrax (235-238AD).

However, the realities in the field are significantly subtler. First of all, the local population was still present, controlling if not the resources proper, the various technical aspects of harvesting them. Second, the new Roman population was a very diverse aggregate of ethnic groups from across the Empire, the heavy Syrian presence in Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana and the many auxiliary garrisons along the various Transylvanian limes illustrating emphatically this aspect. Third, the Dacian Province presented de facto a frontier environment, constantly under pressure from foreign incursions from Germanic tribes from the north and west and the free Dacians and the Sarmatians/Scythian riders from the east.

This liminal environment generated very dynamic vectors of creolization and associated practices of identity construction. The Roman "civilizing" social constructs, based on an urbanized way of life implementing processes of alienation through technical and technological dependencies, was constantly threatened by external and internal pressures. The very rapid process of urbanization of the Dacian Provinces forced a lot of dynamic negotiation and practical creolization in the definition, construction and display of social identity and status.

II. Project Description

A. General Context

Our research area on the outskirts of the village of Rapoltu Mare (Hunedoara County, Romania), in Southern Transylvania, is situated between the richest gold deposits in Europe, the Dacian Kingdom's political and religious capital and its fortified satellites in the Carpathian Mountains, and *Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana*, the Roman capital of the Dacian provinces and the first Roman city North of the Danube, southwestern Transylvania was a highly integrated military, political, and economic region. During the Roman colonial occupation, 102-271AD, our target area around Simeria and Rapoltu Mare shows a very dynamic and intensive synthesis of Roman provincial life, where a multitude of processes of colonization and creolization take place side by side.

Bordering to the south the Gold Mountains with their extraordinarily well-preserved Roman mining town of *Alburnus Maior* (Rosia Montana), the importance of this area is further enhanced by the immediate proximity of the most navigable waterway in Transylvania, the Mures River, and one of the imperial roads from *Sarmizegetusa* to *Apulum* (Alba Iulia), capital of *Dacia Apulensis*. The region was intensely populated by a great variety of settlements, ranging from small towns (*municipia*) to villages (*vici*), to small river harbors and road waystations (*manisones* and *cauponae*). Another feature that contributed to the variety of Roman provincial life in the region is the multitude of mineral and thermal springs in the area. As a result, the Roman landscape has seen an explosion of baths, such as those at *Aquae* (Calan) and *Germisara* (Geoagiu Bai), and of *villae rusticae*.

B. Project Logistics

Program Schedule (Subject to change)

Week 1:	6:30-7:30AM:	Bus Pick Up at the Hotel and Breakfast
	8:00-12:00AM:	Orientation, Introductory Lectures (Monday and Tuesday)
		Field Excavation (Wednesday – Friday)
	12:00-12:45PM:	Lunch
	1:00-5:30PM:	Field Excavation (or lab/lectures depending on the weather)
Week 2-4:	6:30-7:30AM:	Bus Pick Up and Breakfast
	8:00-12:00AM:	Field Excavation
	12:00-12:45PM:	Lunch
	1:00-2:15PM:	Lectures (selected days – otherwise field excavation; lectures might be held in the evening, if conditions warrant it)
	2:30-4:30PM:	Field Excavation
	4:30-6:00PM:	Lab Work (when needed – otherwise the field excavation until 5:30PM)

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First and second weekends of the program are dedicated to the day-trips to the most relevant archaeological sites and museums in the region.

The Roman Villa and Settlement Excavation includes (approximatively), for each session, the following:

- 100-120h archaeological excavation
- 20-30h lectures
- 20-30h laboratory work
- 20-30h archaeological field trips and professional guided tours of museums and sites

NOTE: The daily schedule is strongly linked to the weather and program imperatives, and it will be modified accordingly by the staff.

Field Trips

Public transportation in Romania, under normal circumstances, is quite impractical as well as unpredictable, not to mention the great variability in cleanliness. For the safety of our participants, our staff and our hosts, we will ensure our participants get to explore the magic of Transylvania, while limiting as much as possible the potential of getting Covid-19 infected or stranded. Consequently, in 2025, we offer the following field day-trips:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Day Trip #1 (weekend 1): | Deva Fortress + Dacian and Roman Civilization Museum |
| Day Trip #2 (weekend 1): | Alba Iulia |
| Day Trip #3 (weekend 2): | Sarmizegetusa Regia (Dacian Capital, hiking required, 20min each way) + Costesti Fortress (hiking required, 30min each way) |
| Day Trip #4 (weekend 2): | Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana (Roman Capital) + Densus Church + Corvin Castle |

NOTE: The order of the trips may vary, as we will adapt to the weather conditions.

Project Travel Kit

All registered participants will receive a project specific “travel guide” as we are getting close to the summer. Before sending it out to all registered participants, we need to wait until all summer schedules for Romanian public transportation are posted, which usually happens towards the end of March.

The Travel Kit will contain more details about what to bring, what to expect in terms of weather, various ethnographic details that can be useful around our home base village of Rapoltu Mare, what to eat/drink (and what to avoid), medication/vaccination, hospitals, stores, a sense of distance between landmarks-cities-facilities, etc.

For more information, check the project’s logistics page: <https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/rapolt2-logistics>

III. Project Aims and Outcomes

Overview

Prior to the Roman conquest of 102AD, the region was the most densely populated region of the Dacian Kingdoms. One of the core colonial strategies was to redirect and control the flow of resources through a well-constructed, well-maintained system of roads. Our project seeks to explore and understand the integration of all the structural provincial elements mentioned above, along the main Roman axes of communication and transport, looking at the various archaeologically identifiable elements of the “landscape domestication”.

At a smaller scale, we are investigating the variation in identity creation and display in a luxurious villa, in a frontier, hence unstable, environment. The liminality of the environment made the conditions of capital investment (social, cultural, and economic) precarious at best.

Our ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey from 2015-2017 has revealed a rural villa of “palatial” size, unique in the Dacian Provinces, covering ca. 1-1.2ha of built space. Our excavations have unearthed already a rich environment, with 2 story buildings, the presence of a hypocaust, painted walls, potential colonnades, several buildings outside the villa complex itself and a plethora of artifacts. In 2016, we have started the systematic excavation of the villa’s main building, which have been expanded in 2019.

In 2025, we will continue the excavation of the well preserved associated Roman structures, looking at both the gate system, reflecting the way the villa inhabitants expressed their identity to the outside world, as well as the main building of the villa, showing elements of self-perception and representation. At the moment, we have already identified five stages of “presence” in the villa, reflecting - most likely – the evolution of ownership, in terms of economic potential and socio-political status. At the same time, the quality of the archaeological assemblages and associated structures allow us to explore further the importance and impact of the proximity of the main axis of movement, communication and commerce on the Roman provincial rural life, and its evolution through time.

Combined with a series of lectures covering Daco-Roman history and archaeology, material culture analysis, geophysical survey techniques (see our GPR training workshop), and associated hands-on laboratory and field training, this extraordinary environment and its associated monuments, with spectacular surrounding

natural landscapes and beautiful Transylvanian churches and castles, guarantees all students and volunteers with an exceptional archaeological and cultural experience.

Objectives

- To excavate the identified Roman structures.
- To excavate the main building of the Roman villa.
- To determine the material markers of identity and economic expression.
- To establish the relationship between the Roman sites, the communication axes and surrounding landscape.
- To investigate the processes of Roman occupation and the aftermath of the Dacian Wars as it is illustrated by the abundance and variety of artifacts present along the Imperial communication axes.
- To investigate the relationship between the Late Iron Age settlements and the Roman sites.

IV. Learning Outcomes

The project is designed to be an immersive and integrative archaeological experience. In addition to hands-on training with regular operation of excavation, recording and survey equipment, a variety of lectures and guided site tours will be provided to broaden students' understanding of the archaeological process.

Lectures will cover a range of topics from local culture and history to archaeological materials, methods and theories, Roman social history, and archaeology. Visits to other sites and museums will put our work in context and bolster students' applicable background knowledge. Additionally, our relationship with Romania's premier Daco-Roman reenactment group, Terra Dacica Aeterna offers students a glimpse of practices in experimental archaeology and an interactive experience with ancient customs, clothing, crafts, weapons, and technology. We are seeking participants eager to engage actively with both the ancient context we are exploring and the immediate modern context within which we do our work.

Skill sets taught during the project:

Excavation: proper use of all excavating tools, proper excavation techniques as they are implemented in different environments for different purposes, profile management, stratigraphic column extraction for microstratigraphic analysis, sampling, artifact and sample packaging, recording, drawing.

Laboratory: flotation, artifact processing, and primary conservation, mapping, as needed.

Tentative Lecture Series

- Regional Overview: Culture History of Transylvania and surrounding regions from Mesolithic to late Iron Age
- Dacian Culture, Material and History: A synopsis of the late Iron Age in Transylvania, focused on the sociopolitical, religious and military aspects of the Daco-Getic societies that dominated the region until coming into conflict with the Roman Empire.
- The Daco-Roman Conflict: Historical explication of the Dacian-Roman interactions leading up to the Dacian Wars and the evidences for the conflict itself.
- Roman Military 1: History of the formation of the Roman Imperial army, and basic structures
- Roman Military 2: Equipment, tactics and history of deployment
- Roman Provincial Life: Social dimensions of the Roman Imperial Province of Dacia, with special focus on regional rural villa lifeways.
- History of Archaeological Theory and Practice: Overview of major intellectual, technological and other methodological developments and their champions in the field

Tentative Guest Lectures (when available):

- Dr. Alexandru Barbat (Deva Museum): The Neolithic of Southeast Transylvania
- Dr. Marius Barbu (Deva Museum): Villa Construction and Excavation/Pit Depositions, Context and Excavation
- Angelica Balos (Ministry of Culture): Guided tours of Deva Museum, Cigmau Castrum, and Hallstatt and Dacian settlement excavations at Magura Uroiului
- Dr. Paul Cheptea (University of Cluj) and A. Balos: Roman Military and Social Dress

Technical Lectures:

- Local Culture History and Archaeological Environments
- Local Archaeological Materials and their Uses:
 - Clay
 - Stone
 - Metal
 - Glass
 - Bone
- Proper use of Archaeological Tools and Excavation Techniques
- Field Drawing
- Artifact Drawing

V. Research Team

- Project Directors: **Dr. Stephen Batiuk** (Director, Bio/Archaeological Techniques and Research Center, ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada), and **Dr. Marius Barbu** (Expert Archaeologist, Dacian and Roman Civilization Museum, Deva, Romania)
- Scientific Director: **Dr. Gica Baestean** (Expert Archaeologist, Dacian and Roman Civilization Museum, Deva, Romania)
- Field Directors: **J.P. Chamness** (ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada), **Drd. Jamie Bone** (ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada, University of Exeter), **Angelica Balos** (Archaeology Specialist, Romanian Ministry of Culture)
- Laboratory Director: **Drd. Jamie Bone** (ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada, University of Exeter)
- Research Assistant: **Jamieson Livingston** (ArchaeoTek / BioArch Canada)

VI. Participation Assumptions

This excavation focuses on extensive skill acquisition rather than academic progression. However, in registering for the course, 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.

Archaeological excavation is physical labor. Participants must be able to repeatedly carry 30lbs a distance of 50m (160ft), on uneven ground, several times per day. Participants must be able to access and exit the trenches by the means of steps about 2-3ft high. Field work will range from 6h to 9h daily, Monday to Friday. Please contact the directors with any concerns.

Participants are encouraged to share their particular interests with the instructors, who will do their best to personalize the excavation and maximize the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills.

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.

NOTE: The present syllabus could be modified in response to local and field conditions in order to achieve the project goals, as well as to provide a safe research, work, and training environment.

VII. Course Evaluation

Student acquisition of specific field skills is a primary concern in this course. Informal evaluation and feedback will be ongoing throughout the excavation. Each student will be evaluated individually or as part of a group (depending upon the activity) on the various tools and techniques learned over the course of the project. This evaluation will be primarily observational by the instructors during which students will be asked questions about each observed activity and will be expected to provide oral responses to such enquiries as they occur (on the spot!).

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 (30%)

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 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, and an independent understanding of the steps required to excavate various contexts.

Roman Archaeology (25%)

Knowledge of Roman local history and archaeology is important for our excavation. Training in Roman history is not a prerequisite for this excavation; however, students without previous training will be expected to utilize the resources provided to help them learn the necessary basics. A successful student will show improvement in their knowledge by the end of the session. This includes going from no knowledge or understanding of specific local contexts in terms of regional or general Roman history, to identifying or having intermediate knowledge of the place occupied by their immediate context in the broader evolution of Roman colonial processes.

Data Acquisition (15%)

Each student will be required to submit their field notebook at the end of the season for final evaluation. Students will be required to provide their own notebook. Students will also write in their daily notebook journal to record the daily and weekly progress of their excavation unit including excavation strategies, observations, top plans and other illustrations as daily work progresses. All participants are expected to learn how to draw precise profile and top plans, and complete (as a team) at least one of each. Project specific lab techniques will

also be taught. Students will be also evaluated on their capacity to fill out correctly field and lab forms on an ongoing basis.

VIII. Bibliography

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Video:

Decoding Dacia Full Length Documentary: <https://vimeo.com/72779137>