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THE SÂNPETRU BIOARCHAEOLOGY FIELD SCHOOL, ROMANIA

Session 1: 8 June-5 July 2025
Session 2: 6 July-2 August 2025
***Course ID:* ARCH365BM**
Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units

FIELD SCHOOL DIRECTOR(S)

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OVERVIEW

The field school takes place in the quaint village of Sânpetru, located a few km north of Braşov, in southeast Transylvania (historical region of Romania), and is part of the broader Braşov Bioarchaeology Project, established in 2014 after rescue excavations in the centre of Braşov exposed a large medieval cemetery and associated medieval and post-medieval structures. Our team has since explored the history and development of Braşov and environs through the analysis of archaeological and bioarchaeological evidence from several excavations in addition to, since 2023, evidence from the fortified church of Sânpetru.

Located in the heart of the Carpathians and founded in the 12th century by Central European colonists (generally referred to as Saxons) invited as settlers by the Hungarian king Géza II, the city of Braşov (called Kronstadt/Corona in medieval times) was a crossroads during the Middle Ages for travelers, merchants and diplomats from central Europe and the Middle East, where communities from various ancestral backgrounds coexisted. Such a multi-cultural reality, still poorly understood, was the result of centuries of population movement across Transylvania. From pre-Roman times to the Middle Ages, the fertile Transylvanian lands were traversed and pillaged by nomadic tribes, colonised by European settlers, or disputed and conquered by more powerful entities. The Saxon cities of Transylvania (Braşov, Sibiu, Sighişoara, to name a few), are emblematic of the persistence of this historical heritage.

The Sânpetru Bioarchaeology Field School combines training in both **bioarchaeological** and **archaeological fieldwork and analysis** developed in two weeks of continuous training for each discipline, and in 2025 aims to achieve two crucial research objectives:

1) To carry out the post-excavation processing (cleaning and drying) and organization (anatomical sorting and preparation for storage) of human skeletal remains from the Braşov medieval parish church cemetery, an extremely interesting site not only for its complex stratigraphy and abundance of finds, but also because of its uninterrupted use by the wealthy and upper echelons of Braşov society for over five centuries, between the 12th and the 18th century AD. This was rare for Transylvanian cemeteries, the use of which was discontinued after the Reformation. Students will be able to learn new skills, both practical and theoretical, by working with skeletal materials from single, multiple and commingled burials.

2) To continue exploring the history and origin of the fortified Saxon church of Sânpetru, a village known for this religious building and for its 14th century painted chapel. During the 2023 and 2024 seasons, two trenches (S.18 and S.19) relative to the outer fortified walls were excavated. Students were able to expose and retrieve an articulated calf skeleton, evidence of wall collapse, a very interesting arched structure, and human burials, together with a great amount of pottery sherds, metal, glass and miscellaneous artefacts from diverse historical periods, and disarticulated animal and human bones.

The 2025 fieldwork in Sânpetru will aim to:

- Continue investigating the origins and development of the settlement, which was donated to the Order of the Cistercians in 1240 AD;
- Clarify the relationship between the 13th century fortified structures and the religious buildings with them associated.

Throughout the four weeks of field school, students will be able to participate in a range of cultural heritage activities. This unique opportunity will allow them to experience the importance of interdisciplinary projects and discover how the combined efforts of researchers from diverse fields of study can answer compelling research questions and bring back to life sites rich in culture and heritage.

ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS

Credit Units: Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units through our academic partner, Connecticut College. Connecticut College is a highly ranked liberal arts institution with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school (see assessment, below). Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and registrars at their home institution prior to attending this field school.

Transcripts: An official copy of transcripts will be mailed to the permanent address listed by students on their online application. One more transcript may be sent to the student's home institution at no cost. Additional transcripts may be ordered at any time through the National Student Clearinghouse.

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites other than the willingness to learn and get involved. The field school is aimed at students and graduates interested in developing their knowledge of and achieving hands-on experience on human skeletal remains and archaeological excavation methods and techniques. This intensive field school will alternate theory and practice and focus on topics relevant to the bioarchaeology of human skeletal assemblages. Basic identification and anatomy of animal bone will also be provided.

Students should be aware that archaeological field work is **physically demanding** and must be prepared to work outdoors in variable weather conditions and occasionally walk/hike, especially during field trips. Working in the heat can sometimes be challenging and, although the directors and staff will take all precautions and make sure everyone works in safe conditions, students must be aware that most fieldwork takes place in a typically archaeological environment and must be prepared to adapt. All work is manual and requires patience, attention to detail and diligence. Although independent thinking and initiative are very important, collaboration, a tolerant and respectful attitude, and team spirit are also essential for the success of the field school in a nurturing, positive atmosphere.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Core objectives of the course are of theoretical and practical nature and aim to introduce students to the principles of archaeology and bioarchaeology and their methods and techniques both in the field and in the laboratory. Learning objectives will be distributed across several activities including lectures, workshops, archaeological fieldwork, post-excavation processing, lab analysis, independent readings of suggested bibliography, note taking, trips to heritage sites, access to cultural events and seminars with local specialists.

The practical aspect of the field school schedule will be two-fold, with the aim to offer 1. Archaeological excavation practice and 2. Hands-on bioarchaeological experience.

During practical sessions, students will be assigned a burial context each/by group to clean and prepare for storage. They will be able to learn post-excavation procedures through individual training and face-to-face interaction with their directors and instructors; students will also be assigned group activities and will be encouraged to ask questions and openly discuss any doubts in a friendly and judgment-free environment.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Throughout and at the end of the course, students are expected to achieve independent thinking and a basic level of competence and practical skills in (but not limited to):

- Excavation techniques
- Archaeological recording methods
- Finds post-excavation processing
- Awareness of the unique nature of archaeological finds and biological samples
- Methods for the ethical treatment of human remains from the archaeological or forensic context
- A basic knowledge of skeletal anatomy, analytical methods and paleopathology

Learning outcomes will be monitored by the supervisory team in the form of day-to-day tasks, written assignments, group activities and field journals.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment of student progress and achievements throughout the course will be based on the individual and combined scoring of the following activities:

Participation (50%): Students are required to participate and show active interest in everyday activities. These include lectures, workshops, helping open and close the site daily, fieldwork, group discussions, post excavation finds processing, keeping the excavation area and work premises tidy and clean. This component will be assessed over the duration of the course and will reflect engagement both in the excavation and post-excavation components. It should be stressed that students are also expected to show enthusiasm for both independent activities and team-work, and a general positive attitude in order to contribute to a friendly learning experience and atmosphere. Negative behavior will be addressed and graded accordingly.

Field journal (20%): Students will be asked to maintain a field notebook with daily entries, which will be submitted to the supervisors at the end of the last week. Guidelines and suggestions on what should be the content of the journal will be provided on the first day on site and throughout the four weeks by project directors and instructors. Students will be allowed to use their creativity and personal flair to compile the journal as long as the content is scientifically grounded and reflects the content of the field school program and their learning outcomes.

Group practical exam (Bioarchaeology)/ Recording sheets and drawings (Field Archaeology) (30%): At the beginning of the final week students will be divided in groups and will be asked to assess a burial context and associated archaeological finds/skeletal material. They will lay skeletal remains out in anatomical position and produce a short osteological report, which will be submitted with the field journal on the last day. Guidance and bibliographic support will be provided. Similarly, for archaeological field work and theory students will be required to practice and submit one sample of work for each category as communicated by the Directors on the first day and throughout the field school.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All IFR field schools begin with a safety orientation. This orientation addresses local and program protocols concerning student behavior, appropriate attire, local practices and sensibilities that may be unfamiliar, potential fauna and flora hazards, IFR harassment and discrimination policies, and the student Code of Conduct.

The field school consists of four types of learning activity evenly spread across the program:

1. **Theory (Lectures/workshops/seminars)**: introduction to Transylvanian archaeology, Romanian history, bioarchaeology, archaeological methods and practice, information about the research project, physical anthropology, finds identification, animal and human bone identification. In addition to the archaeology and bioarchaeology curriculum, specialist workshops will be offered by professionals and academics in (and not limited to): pottery technology and analytical methods; burial archaeology; church architecture and archaeology; Medieval artifacts.
2. **Practice:** fieldwork (excavation, post-excavation), bones post-ex processing, bioarchaeological analysis and all associated activities.
3. **Weekly field trips** to historical, archaeological, cultural and environmental landmarks, museums, cultural events.
4. **Independent/group study time:** students will be allocated time to discuss daily achievements and will be asked to produce a presentation summarizing excavation/bioarchaeological analysis highlights at the beginning of each week.
5. **'Days off'** are Saturday and Sunday but they are an important part of the learning experience and are dedicated to the exploration of the culture, heritage, and customs of Transylvania. On either one or both days weekly (depending on what events take place each week in local villages and Braşov), students will participate in food/craft fairs, guided tours, concerts, and charity events. Directors will also offer extra-curricular learning experiences based on students' requests and upcoming events.

WEEK	**DAY**	**ACTIVITY***	
		Morning	**Afternoon**
Arrival	SUN	Arrivals	Welcome meeting and dinner
I	MON	- Project orientation and induction - *Lecture: Presentation of our project*	*Lecture I/visit*: Sânpetru fortified church and village historical and archaeological landmarks
	TUE	Fieldwork: Preparation of trenches	- Fieldwork - *Lecture: Field trip 1 site*
	WED	**Field trip 1: Guided tour and visit to heritage site**	
	THU	Fieldwork/excavation	*Archaeology Lecture II*
	FRI	Fieldwork/excavation	*Archaeology workshop I*
	SAT	Local cultural and heritage visit/experience*	
	SUN	Day off: Suggested activities	
II	MON	Group discussion/Fieldwork	*Archaeology Lecture III*
	TUE	Fieldwork/excavation	- Fieldwork/excavation - *Lecture: Field trip 2 site*
	WED	**Field trip 2: Lecture and guided tour to heritage site**	
	THU	Fieldwork/excavation	*Archaeology Workshop II*
	FRI	Fieldwork/excavation	Fieldwork/excavation
	SAT	Visit to fortified church*	
	SUN	Day off: Cultural event	

WEEK	DAY	ACTIVITY*	
		Morning	**Afternoon**
III	MON	Bioarchaeology Introduction	*Bioarchaeology Lecture I*
	TUE	Bioarchaeology post-ex	Bioarchaeology lab
	WED	**Field trip 3: Seminar/workshop and visit to heritage site**	
	THU	Bioarchaeology post-ex	*Bioarchaeology Lecture II and Workshop*
	FRI	Bioarchaeology post-ex	Bioarchaeology lab
	SAT	Visit to fortified church*	
	SUN	Day off: Suggested activities and evening group assignment discussion	
IV	MON	Bioarchaeology post-ex	*Bioarchaeology lecture III*
	TUE	Bioarchaeology post-ex	*Bioarchaeology Workshop*
	WED	**Field trip 4: Lecture and guided tour to heritage site**	
	THU	Bioarchaeology final assignment: Skeletal analysis and report	- Bioarchaeology lab - Submission of assignments and field journals
	FRI	- Closing lab/excavation - Discussion on learning outcomes	End of program cultural event
	SAT	Final preparations and departure	

*Please note, **this is an indicative schedule** and will be subject to changes on directors' discretion and weather conditions will affect the order of indoor and outdoor activities. Exact dates/times of visits to sites and festivals will depend on the official council calendars issued closer to the beginning of the field school. A detailed course program will be issued to the students on the first day on site. In addition, depending on the number of students, they might be divided into groups for easier access to facilities and better face-to-face tuition and instruction.

Typical schedule, working day (subject to change)

6:45 – 7:45 am	Breakfast
7:45 – 8:00 am	Transportation to site
8:00 am – 4:00 pm	Lectures, workshops, fieldwork and lab activities; one 15 minute break in the morning and a 30 minute lunch break
4:00 – 4:15 pm	Transportation to the hotel
4:15 – 4:30 pm	Tea break
4:30 – 5:30 pm	Group assignments, self-study
5:30 - 6 pm	Dinner

Excavation practice, lectures and post-ex/bioarchaeology lab work will rotate between morning and afternoon according to project needs, weather conditions and at the discretion of site supervisors and project directors.

Summer in Transylvania is a very busy time, with many cultural festivals in villages and cities. We will endeavor to add these festivals to our schedule to further your understanding of local culture.

REQUIRED READINGS

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students. Students are encouraged to download and/or print readings prior to traveling. Course participants are expected to be prepared to engage the discussions led by facilitators, all of whom will be looking for compelling evidence that students have read and thought about the assigned readings prior to the scheduled day on which they are first discussed.

Brickley, M. & McKinley, J. 2004. Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains. BABAO & IFA. Available electronically on: http://www.archaeologists.net/modules/icontent/inPages/docs/pubs/humanremains.pdf

English heritage 2004. Human bones from archaeological sites. Guidelines for producing assessment documents and analytical reports.

Marcu Istrate, D. (ed.) 2015. Redescoperirea trecutului medieval al Braşovului - Unearthing the medieval past of Braşov. Braşov: Editura Mega.

Marcu Istrate, D. and Diana, A. 2017. The Black Church Cemetery: Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of a medieval urban skeletal assemblage (Braşov, Romania), Studies in Digital Heritage.

Museum of London 1994. Archaeological Site Manual 1994. Museum of London Archaeology Service, Third edition. (This will be available on site)

Wright, L., and Yoder, E. 2003. Recent Progress in Bioarchaeology: Approaches to the Osteological Paradox. Journal of Archaeological Research 11(1):43-70.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Bass, W.M. 2005. Human Osteology: A Laboratory and Field Manual. Fifth Edition. Special Publication No.2 of the Missouri Archaeological Society. Columbia, Missouri.

Bello, S.M., Thomann, A., Signoli, M., Dutour, O., and Andrews, P. 2006. Age and Sex Bias in the Reconstruction of Past Population Structures. American Journal of Physical Anthropology 129 (1):24-38.

Buikstra, J.E. and Ubelaker, D.H. 1994. Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains: Proceedings of a Seminar at the Museum of Natural History, Organized by Jonathon Haas. Arkansas Archaeological Survey Research Series No. 44. Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Buikstra, J.E. and Beck, L.A. (eds.) 2006. *Bioarchaeology: The Contextual Analysis of Human Remains*, New York: Academic Press.

Duday, H. 2009. The Archaeology of the Dead. Lectures in Archaeothanatology. Oxford and Oakville: Oxbow Books.

Hillson, S. 2005. Teeth. Cambridge University Press.

Hitchins, K. 2014. A Concise History of Romania (Cambridge Concise Histories). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139033954

Mazower, M. 2001. The Balkans: From the end of Byzantium to the present day. London: Phoenix.
Ortner, D.J. 2003. Identification of pathological conditions in human skeletal remains.2nd ed. San Diego: Academic Press.
Schaefer, M., Black, S., Scheuer, L. 2009. Juvenile Osteology: a Laboratory and Field Manual. Elsevier Academic Press.
White, T.D. & Folkens, P.A. 2005. The Human Bone Manual. Academic Press.