COMMINGLED REMAINS
OSSUARY EXCAVATION AND LABORATORY ANALYSIS

LOST CHURCHES PROJECT

July 4 – July 31, 2021
Valeni (Odorheiu Secuiesc), Transylvania, Romania

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Project Web Site:
https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/ossuary-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) – Application Deadline: April 30, 2021.

USF Program Brochure – Credit Application Page:

Requirements: intermediary human osteology experience; knowledge of human anatomy and morphology

Ossuary Excavation and Commingled Remains Analysis
www.archaeotek-archaeology.org
archaeology@archaeotek.org
I. Historical and Archaeological Background:

As Europe redefines itself in the wake of the Ottoman invasion, the Carpathian frontier still holds fast against the Southern invaders. As Transylvanian suzerainty has passed from the Hungarian Kingdom, to the Ottomans, to the Habsburgs from the 15-17th 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 17th 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 12th century. In the aftermath of the crisis that shook the foundation of European identity, these churches disappear from collective memory. At the same time, the use of these temples changes in a fundamental way during the last decades of their use.

Our continuing excavation of the exceptionally well preserved remains of the lost church of Valeni / Patakfalva has already yielded in excess of 700 burials. 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 a third of the sacristy was sacrificed. Its detailed excavation of analysis forms the basis of our Osteology Excavation and Commingled Remains Osteology Laboratory Research Workshop.

II. Project Objectives

This unique program is a specialized project within our on-going Medieval Cemetery Funerary Excavation. Students will learn and reinforce basic excavation techniques within an international bioarchaeological project. As part of a broader investigation of the abandonment of medieval churches in the region, this project provides an opportunity for students to gain experience in bioarchaeology while gaining a more comprehensive understanding of biological, archaeological, and cultural contexts.

Participants enrolled in this field school will have the unique opportunity to excavate an ossuary associated with the medieval cemetery at Valeni / Patakfalva. This particular project is geared towards students with some osteological and fieldwork experience. Students will receive additional experience in excavation techniques as well as osteological analysis of commingled human remains.

Evenings and rainy days will provide opportunities for lectures, project analysis, and discussion. All excavation and analysis are conducted with the support of and in collaboration with BioArch (ArchaeoTek) Canada personnel, the Museul Haáz Rezső in Odorheiu Secuiesc, Romania, and the villagers of Valeni / Patakfalva.
III. Experience

By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- Properly excavate commingled human remains
- Perform osteological analysis of commingled human remains
- Generate maps of ossuary context
- Safely remove human remains and prepare them for curation
- Process human remains for analysis
- Complete MNI and MNE using different methods
- Design a project, execute it, and present it at the workshop’s capstone colloquium

IV. Project Setting

Patakfalva (RO: Valeni): The ossuary excavation will take place on the active site of the Lost Church of Patakfalva, first built around the 10-11th c. AD. Previous excavation of the cemetery has yielded the well-preserved skeletal remains of over 500 individuals, ranging from pre-natal to advanced elderly.

V. Nature of Instructional Activities:

Each week will consist of three days of excavation on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. Thursdays and Fridays will consist of intensive coursework and laboratory analysis. Typically, course material will be presented in lectures, seminars, and hands-on laboratory experiences during the morning. Afternoons will be dedicated to data collection, lab processing, and analysis.

Required Text:

Suggested Text:

Required Equipment:
- Trowel: 4 inch pointed trowel
- Recommended: MARSHALLTOWN The Premier Line 46 114S 4-Inch Heavy Duty London Style Pointing Trowel with Wooden Handle
Required Readings:

Required readings will be available electronically via Google Drive. In addition, an electronic library of references will be available for those wishing to expand their personal library. Below is a list of the provided required readings in alphabetical order. They will be assigned throughout the course:


**Physical fitness requirement:**

Students will be working outside, up to 32 hours a week, in temperatures ranging from 65-95 degrees Fahrenheit. Fieldwork consists of walking uneven terrain, climbing ladders, and extensive use of trowels and picks. 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, they may be returned home at their own additional expense without a refund of expenses previously paid.
VI. Tentative Course Schedule

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Notes
1. Schedule is subject to change based on weather and resources. Rain days will be lab days.
2. There may be optional weekend tours provided by our collaborator ArchaeoTek. These will be provided for an additional cost outside of the course fees.
3. Breakfast is served from 7am-8am and is not mandatory. Dinner is served at 7:30 sharp and is mandatory. If you cannot attend dinner, you must notify your instructor ahead of time.

VII. Weekend Field Trips (mandatory):

Public transportation within Eastern Europe does not allow usually to optimize travel and sightseeing for visitors with limited time available. Furthermore, except for the main tourist attractions, getting to various sites can be very challenging due to the complete lack of public trasporation to and
from those sites. Also, sanitation in public transport is very limited and, in the context of the pandemic, highly inadequate. As a result, we have organized four day trips to allow our participants to contextualize their work within the historical and cultural framework of Transylvania, as well as explore some of the most intriguing and amazing places around.

VIII. Syllabus Updates

This syllabus, including the course schedule, is based on the most recent information about the course content and schedule planned for this course. The contents are 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.