

# LIFE BY THE IMPERIAL ROAD - FRONTIER IDENTITIES

## Roman Villa and Settlement

### Excavation and Survey



#### IDENTITY AND WEALTH: ROMAN PROVINCIAL LANDSCAPE STRATEGIES

Rapolt, Transylvania, Romania

June 7 - July 4; July 20 - August 1, 2020

During the Roman colonial occupation, southern Transylvania 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. Prior to the Roman conquest of 102AD, it was also the most densely populated region of the Dacian Kingdoms.

Our project seeks to explore the integration of all the structural provincial elements present along the main Roman axes of communication and transport. Our research area is in the immediate proximity of both the imperial road and the Mures River, the extremely important gold deposits of the Carpathian Gold Mountains, and the political and military centers of *Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana* and *Apulum*. We will continue the excavation of the well preserved structures, including a *villa rustica* of palatial size, identified during our 2013-2019 field seasons.



Our 2020 excavation and survey will aim at understanding 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, as well as the local processes of identity creation. Our participants will participate to the villa excavation, geochemical and geophysical survey, STP survey and laboratory analysis. This extraordinary environment with its associated monuments and material culture, combined with spectacular surrounding natural landscapes and beautiful Transylvanian churches and castles, guarantees all students and volunteers with a highly rewarding archaeological and cultural experience.



Duration: 4 week sessions

Costs: US\$1695 for each 4-week session

It includes:

- excavation registration, taxes, fees lectures and most gear
- housed as guests of Romanian families in a beautiful traditional Transylvanian village
- full room and board, Monday-Friday

For information and application procedure:

[www.archaeotek-archaeology.org](http://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org)

Or contact us:

[archaeology@archaeotek.org](mailto:archaeology@archaeotek.org)



# Identity and Wealth on the Roman Frontier

## Roman Provincial Landscape Strategies: - Villa and Settlement Excavation and Survey -

### RAPOLTU MARE, HUNEDOARA COUNTY TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA



#### 2020 Session Dates:

**Session 1: June 7 – July 4**

**Session 2: July 5 - August 1**

**DURATION: 3 week sessions**

**COST: US\$1395 (for each 3 week session)**

#### IT INCLUDES:

- Project registration fee, taxes, and most gear
- Housing in double/triple occupancy rooms as guests of Romanian families in a beautiful traditional Transylvanian village
- Full room and board, Monday-Friday

For more information and application procedure:

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

Application form:

<https://www.archaeotek-archaeology.org/application-excavation-and-gpr>

### Excavation Context

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 (102 AD and 106AD) to subjugate and colonize the mighty Dacians, or as Herodotus described them, "the bravest and fairest of all the Thracians". The Dacians were the only (and last) entity left in Europe to pose a real threat to Rome... culturally, economically, politically and military. The synthesis between Dacia and Rome, from the conquest in 102/106 until the Aurelian retreat in 271/275, sustained the Roman Empire for another two centuries. Dacians are the people most immortalized in Roman imperial statuary. The Transylvanian gold has kept Roman economy out of bankruptcy at the same time as the Dacian auxiliaries have manned the Imperial armies to the point of having an emperor of Dacian origin, Maximinus Thrax.



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 funding of the construction of Trajan's Forum in Rome being a very concrete illustration of the potential of the new province.

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 prior to the final fall of the Dacian Kingdoms. These interactions took many forms, ranging from raids and limited warfare, to intensive and extensive trade, to use of Roman techniques, technologies and craftsmen.

With the defeat and "suicide" of the last Dacian King, Decebalus, in 106, 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.



However, the realities in the field are quite 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.





## Project Description

Our project seeks to explore and understand the integration of all these structural provincial elements along the main Roman axes of communication and transport. Prior to the Roman conquest of 102AD, it was also the most densely populated region of the Dacian Kingdoms.

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 test excavations have unearthed a rich environment, with 2 story buildings, 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 will be continued and expanded in 2020.

We will also continue the excavation of the well preserved associated Roman structures, by the imperial road. Our excavations will aim at understanding 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 and geochemical survey techniques, 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.

Our research area 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 Rapolt 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 way stations (*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*.



## Objectives

- To excavate the identified Roman structures
- To excavate the main building of the Roman villa
- To determine the material markers of identity 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
- To conduct a large scale soil phosphate and surface survey to identify all instances of Roman human activity in the area and its temporal intensity



## Specialized Skills Taught

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 (including geochemical processing and total station operation), a variety of lectures and guided site tours will be provided in order 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.

Survey techniques as they apply to: GPS topographic survey, archaeological and STP (shovel test pit) survey, geochemical soil (qualitative phosphate) survey. GPR (ground penetrating radar) survey

Laboratory: phosphate analysis, flotation, artifact processing, and primary conservation, GIS mapping.



## Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)

All our participants can register to our intensive 6-day Applied Field Geophysics Workshop—GPR Applications. This intensive Workshop is designed to offer our participants a practical and useful skill set that would provide an edge in today's field/urban exploration job market.



## Tentative Lecture Series

1. Regional Overview: **Culture History of Transylvania and surrounding regions from Mesolithic to late Iron Age**
2. 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.
3. The Daco-Roman Conflict: Historical explication of the Dacian-Roman interactions leading up to the Dacian Wars and the evidences for the conflict itself.
4. Roman Military 1: History of the formation of the Roman Imperial army, and basic structures
5. Roman Military 2: Equipment, tactics and history of deployment
6. Roman Provincial Life: Social dimensions of the Roman Imperial Province of Dacia, with special focus on regional rural villa lifeways.
7. History of Archaeological Theory and Practice: Overview of major intellectual, technological and other methodological developments and their champions in the field

## Guest Lectures:

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

## Technical Lectures:

1. Principles of Archaeological Survey: Mapping and remote sensing solutions, and detailed explication of total station operation and tutorial.
2. Survey techniques (surface collection, STP).
3. Geochemical phosphate testing: principles and spot test tutorial.
4. Basic ground penetrating radar (GPR) applications.





## Research Team

1. Scientific Director: Dr. Gica Baestean (Expert Archaeologist, Dacian and Roman Civilization Museum, Deva, Romania)
2. Project Director: Dr. Andre Gonciar (Director, Archaeological Techniques and Research Center, ArchaeoTek - Canada)
3. Field Directors: Dr. Marius Barbu (Expert Archaeologist, Dacian and Roman Civilization Museum, Deva, Romania), Angelica Balos (Archaeology Specialist, D.J.C.C.P.N.C.)
4. Field Assistants: J.P. Chamness, William Henry, Jaimie Bone (ArchaeoTek - Canada)

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## Field Trips

Because our participants' time is limited and public transportation in Eastern Europe is rather chaotic, in order to maximize your chances to see some fundamental and amazing Transylvanian sights, we organize two different day trips as follows:

- a day trip tour (optional): Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana (Roman capital of the Dacian Provinces), Densus Church (the oldest stone church in Romania and one of the oldest in Central/Eastern Europe), Corvin Castle (The Castle!!!); cost US\$75: includes transportation and access to all archaeological and historical sites



- a day trip tour (optional): Sarmizegetusa Regia (capital and sacred mountain of the Dacians), Dacian Fortress of Costesti (one of the main fortresses protecting Sarmizegetusa Regia), and, the medieval church at Germisara, full of funerary Roman spolia; hiking required; cost US\$75: includes transportation and access to all archaeological and historical sites



To apply, fill out an [APPLICATION FORM](#) on our website,

or

Contact us directly at [archaeology@archaeotek.org](mailto:archaeology@archaeotek.org)