

EUROPE FIRST SEDENTARY CIVILIZATION: THE NEOLITHIC AT TEL YUNATSITE, BULGARIA

Course ID: HIS 489

July 4 -August 1, 2026

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

DIRECTOR:

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INTRODUCTION

During the 7th-6th millennia BCE, farming and animal husbandry spread from Anatolia and the Near East through the Balkan Peninsula and to Europe. These were not new technologies adopted by local populations but newcomers who brought a completely new way of life and subsistence, initially co-existing and then taking over local populations. By the 6th millennium BCE, the local economy, social organization, trade, and cultural contacts evolved, to reach its peak in the 5th millennium BCE. Even newer technologies came to bear, when locals begin processing – and using – metals such as copper and gold.

Recent excavations at Tell Yunatsite indicate that the Chalcolithic/Final Neolithic period settlement at the site covered an area far larger than the tell itself. The site had an uptown (acropolis?) sector and a downtown district. The uptown sector was surrounded by a five meter wide clay wall and a broad and deep ditch. Buildings in this part were placed close to each other, creating an almost unbroken urban fabric that is easy to close and defend.

Despite their defensive resource investment, the Chalcolithic/Final Neolithic settlement at Yunatsite experienced a violent event at ca. 4,200-4,100 BCE. Evidence suggests deliberate destruction by outsiders. Skeletons of children, elderly men, and women were found scattered on

floors, suggesting a massive massacre. Those who survived returned and resettled at the tell, but soon even they left. At that point, Tell Yunatsite and the area around it were abandoned for more than 1,000 years. During this time, a sterile layer accumulated over the last Chalcolithic/Final Neolithic layer.

To date, approximately one third of the tell has been excavated. This work yielded rich collections of archaeological materials, and the sterile soil has not yet been reached. There is a medieval cemetery at the top of the tell, followed by a Roman period level, two Iron Age levels, another dated to the Early Bronze Age, and finally a Chalcolithic/Final Neolithic level. It is unknown if the cultural history of the tell begins in the Chalcolithic/Final Neolithic period or whether older Neolithic occupation layers exist.

The archaeological field school takes place at the Tell Yunatsite lowest excavated layer, which corresponds to the time of Europe's first prehistoric civilization in the 5th millennium BCE.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The Anthropocene Research Center was established to support field training in a range of sciences at sites within the U.S. & across the world. Traveling and conducting field work involves risk. Students interested in participating in any ARC program must weigh the potential risk against the value of education provided by the program of their choosing.

Risk is inherent in everything we do, and the ARC takes risks seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the ARC continually monitors conditions at the program's site and so we can provide an experience that is as safe as possible.

The ARC does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. Students are encouraged to explore such insurance policies on their own. Post Covid 19, most basic policies do not cover trip cancellation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that covers such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. [Insuremytrip.com](https://insuremytrip.com), [Squaremouth.com](https://squaremouth.com) or [Travelguard.com](https://travelguard.com) are possible websites where students may explore different insurance policies.

Students should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those experienced at home, dorms or college towns. Students will be exposed to the elements, live in rustic accommodation, and expect to engage in daily physical activity.

We do our best to follow schedule and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal, and/or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to modification.

All students must consult medical professionals to ensure they are fit to participate in an ARC field program. ARC is not qualified to provide medical advice. For all other concerns, please consult with ARC staff members or program director(s) – as appropriate.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The aim of the project is to provide participants with a theoretical background on the development of Neolithic cultures in Southeastern Europe with a focus on Final Neolithic/Chalcolithic, Europe's first civilization, and with practical experience in excavating a complex prehistoric tell-site.

This field school provides a unique glimpse into the rise and fall of arguably the earliest European civilization. In 2024, field school students will take part in further excavation of the burned Final Neolithic/Chalcolithic layer buildings. Faculty and students will work together and explore why and how did one of the earliest proto urban centers in Europe emerged in the beginning of the 5th millennium BCE, and what are the reasons that caused its collapse 800 years later.

This field school covers the following three modules:

- Fieldwork includes the excavation of the Final Neolithic/Chalcolithic layers and structures, which includes practicing basic excavation techniques as well as screening, sifting and flotation; the development of archaeological field documentation by maintaining a daily field journal, filling context sheets and labels, drawing an elevation plan/ a ground plan/ a cross-section, 3D positioning of finds, taking coordinates with a dumpy level, as well as taking photographs at the site.
- Lectures, workshops, and field training in prehistoric (with emphasis on Neolithic, Chalcolithic, prehistoric warfare, and ceramics), and field archaeology, find processing and documentation.
- Excursions to the Pazardzhik Regional Museum of History; the ancient town of Plovdiv including the Archaeological Museum, Old Town Quarter, and major Roman monuments; and Stara Zagora including the Regional Museum of History, Roman monuments, and the Museum of Europe's best-preserved Neolithic (5,600 BCE) dwellings.

LEARNT SKILLS

We strongly support students who seek employment in the Cultural Resource Management sector – whether with private CRM companies or in government compliance agencies. CRM employers seek to understand the skills students learn at the field school, so listing (and ranking) those should help students secure CRM employment. To that end, we are listing all the skills students will learn during this program. At the end of the field school, students will get a Certificate of Completion, where each skill will be ranked at one of three levels:

- ✓ **Basic:** Can perform the skill/task with some supervision.
- ✓ **Competent:** Can perform the skill/task without any supervision.
- ✓ **Advanced:** Can perform the skill/task and teach others how to do it.

Students will be trained in the following skills:

Skill	Skill Definition
Artifact Identification	Ability to identify archaeological artifacts and ecofacts, from both pre contact and historical context
Artifact Processing	Understand how to assign artifacts to accepted cultural/geological spheres, across space (classification) & time (seriation)
Data Recording	Ability to use printed or digital sheets to document & record field data
Excavation General Principles	Know how to excavate in cultural or arbitrary layers, document and record all excavation activity
Grid & Trench Layout	Ability to lay excavation grid and generate reliable trench outline for excavations
Photography	Ability to take clear images of various features, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions
Stratigraphy	Ability to identify, measure and describe stratigraphic layering of a site
Artifact Documentation	Ability to measure, record, photograph and classify various artifact types in the lab/post ex setting
Screening	Ability to use general & geological screens to identify, collect and record small scale finds

Public Interpretation	Ability to understand site history and provide clear and coherent interpretation for the public
Map/Plan Making, Digital	Ability to use digital tools (Total Station, differential GPS, etc.) to create maps and plans of a site
Map/Plan Making, Manual	Ability to use a theodolite & measuring tape to produce maps and plans of a site
Total Station	Know how to properly set a Total Station, take back and fore points, collect geospatial data/points that can be used to generate digital topographic maps

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Activity
Day 1	Arrival and check-in by 7:30pm 8:00pm - Traditional Bulgarian Welcome dinner
Day 2	Morning: Orientation and introduction to Tell Yunatsite Afternoon: Lectures
Workdays (Mon-Fri)	Morning: Excavations at Tel Yunatsite Afternoon: Lab work & lectures
Saturdays	Site visit to Pazardzhik's Regional Museum of History, Plovdiv (the ancient city of Philippopolis & European capital of Culture 2019 and Stara Zagora ((the ancient city of Augusta Traiana)
Sundays	Day off
Departure day	Departure. Check-out by 12:00pm

** Course structure may be subject to change upon directors' discretion.*

TYPICAL WORKDAY

Students will follow this daily schedule during the course of this field school:

Time	Activity
6:15-6:30am	Travel to Tel Yunatsite
6:30-8:30am	Field work
8:30-9:00am	Breakfast at the site
9:00-11:00am	Field work
11:00-11:15am	Break
11:15am-1:00pm	Field work
1:00-1:30pm	Lunch
1:30-1:45pm	Travel to the hotel
1:45-4:45pm	Siesta break
4:45-5:00pm	Travel to the site
5:00-8:00pm	Lectures & Lab work
8:00-8:45pm	Dinner at the site
8:45-9:00pm	Travel to Hotel

ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

Students are required to participate in all components of the field school. Grades are determined as follows:

- ❖ **80% - Field work.** Students will be assessed on the commitment to and quality of their field work (i.e., their ability to effectively use archaeological methods and tools to excavate the site)
- ❖ **10% - Field Journal.** Students are required to record their work in a field journal (a notebook) that must be submitted to the project at the end of the field school. The field journal must include scaled sketches, procedures and other notes taken while working on assigned tasks.

❖ **10% - Attendance, Demonstrated diligence and Active participation.**

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites to participate in this field school. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will learn on-site how to conduct field research. Field work involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus requires a measure of understanding that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will have to work outdoors and will get sweaty and tired. The work requires patience, discipline, and attention to detail.

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancelation of a program. The ARC typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and makes a Go/No Go decision by then. Such time frame still allows for the purchase deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if the ARC is forced to cancel a program.

Project participants will reside at [Hotel Primavera](#), in the town of Pazardzhik. If you arrive to Bulgaria and travel before the beginning of the program, please arrive to the hotel on the first day of the program (Sun) at 7:30pm. Otherwise, we will meet students at the arrival area of Sofia International Airport (SOF) Terminal 2 on Sun, at 5:30pm. From there, students will be transported by bus/shuttle to the hotel for an additional fee of approximately 40 EUR. Travel time is about 1.5 hours.



Figure 1: Hotel Primavera at Pazardzhik



Figure 2: Terminal 2 at Sofia Airport

VISA REQUIREMENTS

Citizens of EU, EEA, USA, Canada, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand do not need a visa to visit Bulgaria for up to 90 days.

Citizens of all other countries may need a visa. The center for Field Sciences can send an official invitation letter that should be used at the relevant embassy to secure a visa to the program.

MEALS & ACCOMMODATIONS

Students will stay at the [Hotel Primavera](#)*, in comfortable rooms with two to three beds (bathrooms with shower and WC, TV, A/C and free Wi-Fi). The hotel is in the central pedestrian and shopping area of Pazardzhik, close to the many services the town can offer (shops, pharmacies, banks, markets, taverns, restaurants, bars, bars, hospitals, cafes, post offices, tourist attractions, parks etc.). Participants are not expected to bring any additional equipment, bed linens or towels.

Three meals – organic Bulgarian homemade food – will be served. During workdays, meals usually take place at the site. During the weekend, meals will take place at the hotel's restaurant (except the brown-bag lunches during the excursions). This field school can accommodate vegetarians, vegans, and individuals with lactose intolerance. Kosher and gluten-free diets are impossible to accommodate in this location.

*May be subject to change. May be substituted with similar level accommodation.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The required minimum attendance for the successful completion of the field school is 95% of the course hours. Any significant delay or early departure from an activity will be calculated as an absence from the activity.

An acceptable number of absences for medical or other personal reasons will not be considered if the student catches up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework, or tutorials with program staff members.

EQUIPMENT LIST

- A pair of working shoes (sneakers, running shoes) and a pair of comfortable shoes for walking/hiking
- Clothing suitable for an outdoor working environment: light clothes with long sleeves and legs (protecting from the sun and insects)
- Light raincoat (consider weather conditions - hot and sunny, but rain may fall as well)
- Wide brim hat
- Small backpack (for your water bottle, snacks, camera, etc.)
- Medication - only prescription medicines you may need since you can buy all basic non-prescription drugs in Bulgaria.
- A converter to EU type electricity, if needed.
- A good attitude for work, fun, study, and discoveries

PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

This project is carried out by an international team, including Bulgarians and US nationals. We share a culture of hospitality and will strive to make everyone feel welcome at the field house. Note that Bulgarian culture is quite a warm one and physical contact is accepted and common among friends and colleagues, without this being in any way perceived or intended as harassment. Most people coming to our Balkan culture slip right in and enjoy the informal atmosphere and joie de vivre attitude.

Learning about the other includes learning about people in the past as well as about contemporary people and cultures that are different than your own. We hope you will find Bulgaria intriguing and our team's enthusiasm and passion captivating and worth emulating.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialing code: The Bulgaria international phone code is +359.

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: Bulgaria's currency is the Lev, usually traded at Lev. There are several banks in Pazardzhik. Most shops/supermarkets accept major credit cards (except for American Express, which is not always accepted). However, credit cards are not commonly used for small purchases (for example coffee at a café).

ATM Availability: There are several ATM machines at Pazardzhik.

Local Language: The native language is Bulgarian. Bulgaria sees many international tourists and many Bulgarians, especially young folks, speak at least some English.

Measurement units: degree Celsius (°C), meter (m.), gram (gr.), liter (l)

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 6 quarter credit units). Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school based on the assessment matrix (above). This program provides a minimum of 200 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and the registrar at their home institutions prior to attending this program.

Students will be able to access their transcripts through our School of Record – Culver-Stockton College. C-SC has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to provide enrollment and degree verification (at <https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/select>). Upon completion of a program, students will get an email from C-SC with a student ID that may be used to retrieve transcripts. The first set of transcripts will be provided at no cost; additional transcripts may require payment. If you have questions about ordering a transcript, contact the C-SC office of the registrar at registrar@culver.edu.

REQUIRED READINGS

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.

Anthony D. (ed.). *The Lost World of Old Europe. The Danube Valley, 5000 - 3500 BC*. New York University and Princeton University Press, 2010.

Aslanis, I. Settlement Patterns in the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age: the Case of the Prehistoric Settlement of Yunatsite, Bulgaria. – In: *Neolithic and Copper Age between the Carpathians and the Aegean Sea*. S. Hansen, P. Raczky, A. Anders, A. Reingruber (eds.). DAI, 2015, 395-402 (Archäologie in Eurasien, 31).

Balabina, V., T. Mishina. Considering the Destruction of the Latest Eneolithic Village at Tell Yunatsite – In: Boyadzhiev, Y., S. Terzijska-Ignatova (eds.) - *The Golden Fifth Millennium. Thrace and Its Neighbour Areas in the Chalcolithic*, Sofia 2011, 39-47.

Boyadzhiev, Y. Chronology of Prehistoric Cultures in Bulgaria. – In: Bailey D. and I. Panayotov (eds.). *Prehistoric Bulgaria. Monographs in World Archaeology* № 22, Madison, Wisconsin 1995, 149-191.

Boyadzhiev Y. Chalcolithic Stone Architecture from Bulgaria - *Archaeologia Bulgarica* VIII, Sofia 2004, 1-12.

Boyadzhiev, Y. Tell Yunatsite: Development and Absolute Chronology of the Settlements from the Beginning of the Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age. – In: *Neolithic and Copper Age between the Carpathians and the Aegean Sea*. S. Hansen, P. Raczky, A. Anders, A. Reingruber (eds.). DAI, 2015, 381-394 (Archäologie in Eurasien, 31).

Merpert N. J. The Problem of Transition from the North Balkan Aeneolithic to the Early Bronze Age in the Upper Thracian Valley – In: Europa Indo-Europea, Roma 1994, 41-50.

Todorova N., Mazanova V. Late Chalcolithic Ceramic Style at Yunatsite Tell (Approach to the Systematization of the Ceramics from the Newly Excavated Levels) – In: Nikolova L. (ed.) - Technology, Style and Society. BAR International Series 854, Oxford 2000, 331-361.

Zäuner, S. The Dark Side of the Chalcolithic. Evidence for Warfare at Tell Yunatsite? An Anthropological Approach – Boyadzhiev, Y., S. Terzijska-Ignatova (eds.) - The Golden Fifth Millennium. Thrace and Its Neighbor Areas in the Chalcolithic, Sofia 2011, 49-56.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Boyadzhiev K. Development and Distribution of Close Combat Weapons in Bulgarian Chalcolithic - Studia Praehistorica 14, Sofia 2011, 265 – 281.

Boyadzhiev Y. Ethnocultural Interrelationships in the Lower Danube Area during the Second Half of the Sixth and the First Half of the Fifth Millennium BC (According to Evidence from Cemeteries) - Studia Praehistorica 14, Sofia 2011, 205 – 223.

Boyadzhiev Y., Boyadzhiev K., Brandtstätter L., Krauß R. Chronological modelling of the Chalcolithic settlement layers at Tell Yunatsite, Southern Bulgaria. – Documenta Praehistorica, XLVIII, 2021, 2 – 25, DOI> 10.4312\dp.48.5

Grant J., Sam Gorin and Neil Fleming. The Archaeology Coursebook: An Introduction to Themes, Sites, Methods and Skills. Routledge, 2008.

McIntosh, J. Handbook to Life in Prehistoric Europe. New York, 2006.

Merpert N. J. Bulgaro-Russian Archeological Investigations in the Balkans. Ancient Civilisations from Scythia to Siberia – In: International Journal of Comparative Studies in History and Archeology, Vol. 2, N 3, Leiden 1995, 364-383.

Todorova N. The Ornamentation of Late Chalcolithic Pottery from Yunatsite Tell, Pazardzhik District - – In: Nikolova L. (ed.) Early Symbolic Systems for Communication in Southeast Europe. BAR International Series 1139, Oxford 2003, 291-311.