MEDIEVAL FUNERARY EXCAVATION
Life on the edge of Europe
Fenyed, Transylvania, Romania
JUNE 30 – AUGUST 10, 2013

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the European defeat at the great Battle of Mohacs in 1526 opened the way for the Ottoman expansion into Europe all the way to Vienna. With the collapse of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1526, its Transylvanian territories became a political battlefield between European and the Ottoman backed princes. The Saxon fortresses and the Szekely armies held the Ottomans at bay successfully and the Principality of Transylvania was born as an autonomous political entity in 1570.

The aim of this project is to evaluate how major political events physically impact local populations. During the 2013 season, we will explore the medieval Feneyd’s cemetery, with emphasis on the building phases of the church and its relationship to the deceased. Through a more thorough study of the cemetery and its occupants, we will also explore the different processes that led to the penetration of Protestantism in the village and then its subsequent return to Catholicism.

This extraordinary environment and its associated monuments, and material culture, combined with spectacular surrounding natural landscapes and beautiful Transylvanian churches and castles, guarantees all students and volunteers with an incredible archaeological and cultural experience.

Duration: 5 weeks (2 weeks minimum stay)
Cost: US$1685. It includes:
- Excavation registration taxes and fees
- Excavation tools and gear
- Housing for the duration of the excavation
- Lunch and breakfast Mon-Fri

Human anatomy and morphology lectures (15-18h): US$135 – daily, during the first two weeks of the excavation

For information and application procedure: www.archaeotek.org
Or contact us at archaeology@archaeotek.org
**Excavation:** Medieval Cemetery Excavation – Life and death on the edge of Europe

**Location:** Fenyed – Bradesti, Harghita County, Romania

**Period:** Late Medieval

**Field period:** July 07 – August 10, 2013

**Description:**

As the 15th century ends, the battle for Europe begins! The southeastern European frontier collapses in front of the Ottoman Turks. The heroes (and their legend) that held back the East have died: Vlad Dracula the Impaler, prince of Wallachia in 1476; Holy Stephan the Great, prince of Moldavia in 1504; Skanderberg (Iskender Bey), lord of Albania in 1468. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the united European defeat at the great Battle of Mohacs in 1526 opened the way for the Ottoman expansion into Europe. By 1529, Suleiman the Magnificent has conquered southeastern Europe, the Kingdom of Hungary collapsed and the Ottoman troops were battering the walls of Vienna. The Ottoman expansions was finally checked in 1683, when the arrival of King Jan III Sobieski of Poland’s heavy cavalry charge under the walls of besieged Vienna broke the Ottoman army and won a crucial victory.

However, Transylvania was never invaded by the Turkish armies. The Saxon fortresses and the Szekely armies held the Ottomans at bay successfully. With the collapse of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1526, its Transylvanian territories became a political battlefield between European and the Ottoman backed princes until the Principality of Transylvania was born as an autonomous political entity in 1570. In 1600, Michael the Brave, with the support of the Transylvanian Szekely armies, beat the Ottoman and their supporters and realized the first union of the three Romania principalities into one kingdom.

As Europe redefines itself in the wake of the Ottoman invasion, the Carpathian frontier still holds fast against the Eastern invaders. Although Transylvanian suzerainty has passed from the Hungarian Kingdom, to the Ottomans, to the Habsburgs from the 15-17th century, its territory has never been invaded by the Turkish troops. However, 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.

The Carpathians frontier held, but at what price?
Project historical and archaeological context:

The first written source in which the village of Bradesti-Fenyed is mentioned dates back to 1532, but according to our archeological excavations, the settlement already existed as far back as the 12th century. The village’s medieval church is situated outside the village, between Bradesti-Fenyéd and the Tarnovita River (HU: Kukulkókemenyfalva), on the right bank of the Tarnava Mare River, in a plowed field, called Csonkatemplom (translating roughly into “broken church”). The medieval church and cemetery most likely date back to the same period as well. According to the data we currently possess, this church was rebuilt at the beginning of the 16th century in gothic style, as some of its sculpted elements had been built into today’s baroque church.

Our excavation site Bradesti (Hungarian: Fenyled) is situated along the course of the Kukulo river at a mere 5 kilometer from Odorheiu Secuiesc (HU: Szekelyudvarhely). The village actually sits between two cliffs: Kadicfalvi Rez plateau, made of conglomerates, and the Aklos, made of volcanic debris and the pebbled terrace of the Tarnava Mare River (HU: Nagy-Kukullo).

The archeological excavations conducted during the past two years have uncovered 28 graves and the cemetery’s southern wall. The base of the building’s walls has not been found yet. These, along with the full extent of the cemetery will be revealed in future excavations. The different orientation of the graves suggests two distinct periods. The artifacts recovered in 2011 - hair pins with spherical globe shaped endings, hair rings, the Arpadian denar – date the earliest phase of the cemetery somewhere between the 12th-13th centuries. Pottery fragments dating to this same period were also recovered from the area around the church. The latest graves are the ones containing coffins. Judging by the inventory of the graves we could say the cemetery was still in use in the 17th century. Materials dating to later periods have not yet been found inside the graves.

Project objectives:

The aim of this project is to evaluate how major political events physically impact local populations. For that purpose, we will excavate the late medieval cemetery and church from Feneyd-Bradesti. We are interested in the evolution of the population throughout the Middle Ages in the region, the changes in the very local type of church architecture and burial patterns through time, and the variations on the Christian burial ritual during social, political and economic stress. At the same time, we will explore the way local communities "lived" the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism.
During the 2013 seasons we will explore the cemetery’s northern and western areas. Furthermore, we will investigate the building phases of this ecclesiastic building and its relationship to the deceased. These results could also shed light on the relation between this church and its subsidiary Tarnaveni. Through a more thorough study of the cemetery and its occupants, we will also explore the different processes that led to the penetration of Protestantism in the village and then its subsequent return to Catholicism. The further study of the human remains in our osteology laboratory will provide a more detailed view of the human aspects of these transitions.

Objectives:

1. Determining the architectural building phases of the central cemetery church and their chronology
2. Mapping the different phases of the cemetery inhumations and their relationship to broader social, political, religious, military and economic events
3. Proper retrieval of the human remains for further anthropological analysis
4. Establishment of late medieval funerary behavior and its evolution
5. Identification of idiosyncratic ritual changes and their relationship to historical stresses
6. Local and regional patterns of interaction, mobility and association among various groups of individual
7. Ethnic historical evolution of the local and regional landscape

Specialized skills taught to students/volunteers:

Several lectures will be offered to our volunteers, ranging from local history and archaeology to material culture typologies and architecture. Students will be taught the proper use of various field tools. Explanations will be provided for every step of the excavation, on stratigraphy, field finds and archaeological complexes. We expect our volunteers to be intellectually involved in the archaeological process and thus interacting with the research staff. For interested students and volunteers, an intensive two week course on human anatomy and morphology will be offered at the beginning of the project, as an independent class.

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:** artifact processing, osteological inventory.

**Research team:**

1. Field Director: Prof. Andre Gonciar (Director, Archeological Techniques and Research Center, ArchaeoTek – Canada)
2. Scientific Director: Dr. Zsolt Nyaradi (Expert Archaeologist – Haaz Rezso Museum of History and Ethnography, Odorhei Secuiesc, Harghita County, Central Transylvania, Romania)

**Bibliography:**


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