

This summer I joined Archaeotek Canada's Roman Villa and Settlement Excavation in Rapoltu Mare, Romania. This excavation dealt with a tumultuous time in Romanian history where the local Dacian population was defeated by the Romans and became yet another branch of the Roman Empire. This annexation of Dacia was the last European expansion of Rome and culminated when emperor Trajan defeated the Dacian armies in 106 CE (first war was 101-102 CE and second war was 105-106 CE). The Dacian wars were memorialized on Trajan's column, a decorative monument with friezes depicting scenes from the wars. Following this victory, Dacia became a client state of Rome. Many of the territories continued to rule themselves simply because Rome did not have the manpower to fill government positions in each region. However Dacian religion essentially disappeared under the new regime.

The first construction phase of our Roman provincial villa complex would have begun sometime after the second Dacian war. Subsequent phases of construction continued into the post-Roman period up until the Medieval era. There was not constant habitation at the site, and areas fell into disrepair between phases of occupation. Often, likely due to financial concerns, materials from other areas of the site would be repurposed to build new structures and features within the villa complex. Due to the same reason, there are aspects of the complex that were left unfinished such as a hypocaust (underground heating system).

While the villa itself has been excavated in prior seasons, the villa complex is vast and extends northward and eastward, providing much more opportunity for understanding this site. A smaller complex has also already been excavated to the southwest of the site where a rare wall fresco was found. New survey and GPR work is also indicating that there could be a secondary complex northwest of the site which is an exciting prospect for future study.

The day-to-day schedule of daily activities varied week to week. During the first week, we went to the field in the mornings and had a lot of lectures in the afternoon. This was meant to get us more acquainted with the history of the site and the region to better prepare us to think critically about what we were finding and how it related to the rest of the site. Thank you to JP, Jamie, and Jamieson who prepared amazing lectures for us which really helped us understand the site better! These lectures also dovetailed nicely with our weekend trips where we visited various towns and sites relevant to Roman Dacia. We also

had some more general lectures geared towards those who had not been to a field school before such as what materials were most likely to be found and what tools we would be using. After the first week, we started to have full dig days where we would go to the field in the mornings, then head back to the field after lunch. That was a hard schedule to adjust to and there were definitely some sore muscles! From the third week onwards, we were put on a rotating schedule where half of the team would go to the lab and process artifacts while the other half would head back to the field. This was nice because you always got a break in between days and I did not feel as drained. We did have to adjust our plans due to inclement weather at times, but for the most part that is what the daily schedule was like.



Overview of the site

As for digging, I definitely got to work in the coolest trench on site! There were four active trenches for each of the trench leaders. I was assigned to the newest trench where a room with a tiled floor had just been discovered during the previous session in June (shout out to my awesome trench leader Jamie Bone!). I started off the session by working with my trench mate to lower a small bulk between our

trench and the one next to it, which was abutting the edge of the room, and evening out that level to match with the western edge of our trench. We were working through a mixed collapse layer and repeated a process of digging, detailing around collapse, photographing the trench, and finally removing the layer of collapse that had just been photographed. While that was happening, another of my trench mates was working to expose more of the brick floor tiles in the room. Much of the floor was covered in adobe, which had slowly fallen off of the walls during centuries of collapse, and needed to be kept in context at the time, so it was quite tedious trying to work around that and keep it in place.

Left: Me and my trench mate Sadie Right: Sadie working on lowering the bulk during week one

Around the second week, we finished leveling the bulk and moved on to detailing various walls inside the room complex. We also began detailing the adobe on top of all the floor tiles and I worked on



leveling the southern edge of the room complex so we could get clean drone photos of the entire trench.



Right: Detailing and cleaning around Adobe Left: Leveling the southern edge of the trench

In the middle of the room complex (formerly Room B) there was also considerable tile collapse which was detailed and later removed. Part of the Romanian team that was working adjacent to our immediate site helped us with excavating that Room B area and uncovered more floor tiles underneath the collapse. At this point, we were able to determine that Room B was not a separate Room but actually a channel running between Rooms A and B. After the final bits of collapse and adobe were removed it was determined that this room complex was most likely a smoker used to house cured meats. A fire pit in the trench south of the room complex would have fed heat and smoke into this domed channel and openings in the walls would have allowed the room to fill up with smoke. It was really cool to be a part of the process which led to this discovery! At this point, the dig staff decided that they did not want to continue digging in our trench since the room complex extends northward and they would need to open up a new trench. I spent the rest of week 3 helping to draw our trench (which I discovered I absolutely love!) and cleaning the floor tiles to get some better photographs. The best part was that one of the floor tiles had two footprints from a Roman sandal that had been covered by adobe!

Roman footprints!



Left: Immediately after tile floor was found in the center channel (formerly Room B) Right: Drawing the trench (Pictured: JP, Maurius and two archaeologists from the Romanian team)

After this my trench mate and I were sent to another trench for the last week where we helped with wall detailing, and clearing a plowzone layer. Due to the lab schedule and inclement weather, I only got to work in this trench for about three days, although I enjoyed the time I spent there! (Thanks for adopting me Jamieson!) There was a lot of rain the final week so we had a couple of full lab days before backfill on the final day.



The new trench I was assigned to where we began lowering another bulk and detailing collapse (Pictured: Vaughn, Deena, Roy, Kay, Jamieson, Nina, JP, and Raluca)

The majority of artifacts that we found were pottery sherds. These were ubiquitous but sometimes hard to distinguish from roof tile fragments which were also present throughout the site. I did find a couple of large-scale fragments, one of which was both a rim and a base of a pot. We also found some pieces of animal bone and travertine- a faux-marble material which would have been used on the exterior of the walls. When an artifact was found we would create a tag for it which included the site/trench number, material, who found it, what layer it was found in, and a date range. The end of the date range would be left open until that layer was finished, then the bag would be 'closed' and an end date would be added.



My awesome rim/base sherd!

Lab work varied day to day based on what needed to be done. Often those at the lab would be divided into groups for each task. When a bag from the field was 'closed' and sent to the lab, it would first have to be washed. We carefully washed ceramic, bone, and lithics, and laid each artifact out to dry

next to their corresponding bag. The ceramics went through a special analysis phase where any rim, base, neck, or decorated piece (incised, painted, glazed etc.) would be separately analyzed using a special form. This allowed us to take measurements, determine the Munsell color, and temper size/percentage. After



analyzing, ceramics were sent to be photographed (lithics and bone went straight to photography after washing). The final step was data entry where we used a form to input all the information from the various forms into a digital platform for more streamlined data storage. Days at the lab were a little more laid back and I often had a nice warm cup of tea next to me!

Never ending ceramic analysis!

After hours were a special time of relaxation and bonding amongst the crew. We would often meet for dinner every night, either all together or as smaller groups. We

enjoyed game nights, movie nights, and evening walks, occasionally through the graveyard next door, growing closer to each other with every passing day. About twenty minutes down the road was another hotel and restaurant which had a pool and several of us were frequent visitors there. It was lovely to sit down and enjoy a good cocktail after a rewarding day of work in the field. Getting to enjoy the pool was not miserable either! We also discovered a beautiful nature walk alongside a river, and a few of us ventured up there for a s'mores night with some of the staff on a Friday night. A couple of times, the staff took the students to a fancier restaurant in town and we were able to explore a bit more after those outings. I really enjoyed the chances we had to interact with the staff and found that some really special friendships formed between students and staff. Two of the most memorable nights were the welcome dinner in early July and the goodbye party at the end of the month where everyone came together and enjoyed a fun night of music, laughter, and conversation. While the primary purpose of the field school

was obviously to learn, I found that having the chance to connect and bond with my colleagues made the experience even more special and memorable.



Left: Evening walk through the rain Right: Me and my girls at the goodbye party (Pictured: Roy, Vaughn, Kelsey, Sadie, and Sofia)

Another after hours activity was journaling. During the first week, we received coaching on how to keep a field journal and what information to include. Although I have never been one to keep a journal, I found that recording the day's activities every evening was something I really looked forward to. I recorded the weather, what each of us were working on in the trench, what was found, and what the latest hypothesis about the trench were. I also made a habit of adding illustrations to my journal pages of the more interesting pieces of ceramic and bone that I found each day. It was fun to compare notes with others and see how they were creating their journal entries and maybe get some ideas.

Weekends were reserved for sightseeing and group trips around Romania. The first weekend, we visited a Roman-era fortress in the city of Deva, as well as the Roman/Dacian museum which works closely with our project and displays some of the artifacts found at our site. Although the hike up to the fortress was a bit difficult, we were rewarded with gorgeous views and the opportunity to scale the

fortress walls and imagine life as a Roman soldier. The next day we travelled to a town called Alba Iulia



which features a unique star-shaped fortress that encircles the city and is built on top of the Dacian city of Apulum. We spent the day exploring the city and visited a couple of museums along the way.

At the Deva fortress

The second weekend was highly anticipated by everyone, since it promised a visit to Dac Fest, a Roman and Dacian reenactment held in Rapoltu Mare at the base of a large rock formation. The moment we set foot on the grounds it was like traveling back in time; gladiators in full regalia sparring on the green, craftsmen forging metal or making

leather bags, weapons displays that looked like they came straight from a movie. Over this two day event, our group tried out archery, metalwork and military drills, visited all the booths selling handmade jewelry, accessories, and weapons, and watched a mock battle between the Romans and Dacians. Some of our staff participated in the event as reenactors and our field director even got to be in one of the battles! We also enjoyed a fun concert on Saturday night as well as a fire dancing show and bonfire. Despite the dry, hot weather, there was nothing that could drag us away from this unique event. I think it is safe to say that Dac Fest was a highlight of the trip for many people, I know I enjoyed it immensely!



Left: the Roman camp Right: learning to drill like Roman soldiers (Pictured: Sadie and Sofia)

I was also quite excited about the third and final weekend since we planned to visit a castle. On Saturday we visited the ruins of a fortified Dacian town called Costesti as well as the Dacian capital, Sarmizegetusa Regia. At both of these sites we got to see some columns (my favorite!) and at the Dacian capital, one of the temples has been reconstructed using wooden planks of varying heights to create an interesting feature. We also got to sample some “magical water” flowing from a spring on the site. The next day we visited the Roman capital Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana (more columns!). We were informed that the Romans used the Dacian name for their capital as a way of asserting dominance over the Dacians and reminding them that their culture and people had been subjugated. After that fun but rainy visit, we ventured to Densus church, the oldest orthodox stone church in Romania. Its construction was quirky but there were some very interesting details around the church and grounds. After that stop it was finally time to see the castle. Corvin Castle is a Gothic-Renaissance castle and an imposing feature of the Hunedoara county landscape. I enjoyed wandering its halls and stopping to pose in various castle windows. We were also able to climb one of the towers and see an incredible landscape spread out before us. Each of these

trips was so unique and I am really thankful that our project offered these opportunities to soak in the local history.



Left: Densus church Middle: Corvin Castle Right: Column! (aka: my favorite thing ever)

Well, I think it is safe to say that I most definitely enjoyed the experience of my first field school! Although I have been studying archaeology for around three years now, there was a small part of me that was worried I would hate field work. After all, this summer would basically decide whether I continued on with this career. Turns out I love field work!! I am so thankful that my first field school experience was such a positive one and I will definitely be looking to join more projects in the future and hopefully also return to Romania again. Thank you to all the incredible staff who mentored us, led us, laughed with us, and cried with us! I will never forget this experience, one I hope will be the first of many. Thank you to JP, Jamieson, Nina, Jamie, and Steve, and thank you to the AIA for helping make this dream a reality. May good fortune and sharpened trowels follow you always!



Archaeotek Staff: JP, Jamieson, Nina, and Jamie- Thank you all for an unforgettable summer!



Fellow archaeologists: Vaughn, Roy, Sadie, Ash, Sofia, JP, Deena, Tristan, Kelsey, Linda, Kay, and Susan
Gallery:



Left: trench presentations Right: Journaling break (Pictured: Susan, Roy, Kay, Sadie, Ash, Sofia, Linda, Deena, JP, Jamie, and Vaughn)



Cleaning a Roman floor with Sadie!



Left: Group picture at Corvin Castle Right: Trench photo (Pictured: Roy, Deena, Sofia, Sadie, Ash, Tristan, Susan, Linda, Kelsey, and Vaughn)



Trench Family! (Pictured: Vaughn, Sadie, and Jamie)



Pictured: Sadie, Vaughn, Roy, Kay, and Jamieson



Archaeotek 2025: Roy, Tristan, Ash, Vaughn, Kay, Jamie, Susan, Linda, JP, Sofia, Kelsey, Margaret, Nina, Deena, Jamieson, and Sadie. So much love to you all!