



THE MESSARITE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMPLEX OUTSIDE THE GRECO-ROMAN POLIS OF APOLLONIA PONTICA, BULGARIA

Course ID: HIS 489

May 31-June 27, 2026

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

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

This program provides accommodation, breakfast & lunch. Students are responsible for their own dinners. Sozopol is a major tourist destination that offers many excellent & affordable restaurants.

DIRECTORS:

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient Apollonia Pontica (present-day Sozopol, Bulgaria) is one of the oldest towns on the western Black Sea Coast. The city, founded by Miletian colonists around 610 BCE, was named Apollonia Pontica in honor of the patron deity of Miletus - Apollo. Apollonia became an autonomous and strong independent polis, as well as an important trade center between Ancient Greece and Thrace. Thanks to its strong navy and naturally protected harbors, Apollonia kept control of the major maritime and terrestrial merchant routes along the western Black Sea Coast for several centuries. The city preserved its independence until 72 BCE, when it was conquered, pillaged and burned by the Roman legions of Marcus Lucullus. The city succeeded in restoring its former glory and was known in the Roman world as Apollonia Magna (Great Apollonia). Following the Christian tradition, its name was changed to Sozopol, meaning "town of salvation", in the 4th century CE. Despite numerous invasions and attacks, the city survived the period of the Great Migration (4th - 7th century CE) and entered the Middle Ages as a focal point of long-lasting Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts.

The project is focused on the sector of Messarite, located southwest of Sozopol, approx. 2 km from the center of the Old Town. During the initial survey of the area, 29 different features were identified, including walls, buildings and burials. A Franco Bulgarian team excavated the area in 2002-04 and explored six buildings dated between the second half of the 5th century BCE and the beginning of the 3rd century BCE. The team also found parts of an ancient road oriented north-south were also discovered.

Towards the end of the 4th century BCE, the buildings at the Messarite sector were abandoned and destroyed. Shortly thereafter, burials with both inhumations and cremations began appearing in the abandoned ruins. In one area, family plots enclosed with stone walls (periboloi) were identified. The burial structures vary from pits, pithoi, ceramic and limestone sarcophagi, to tile-lined and cist graves while the cremations are in locally made urns. The family plots had indications of traditional funerary rites, including 10 ritual firepits.

These are unique excavations of the broader territory of an ancient Greco-Roman colony in present-day Bulgaria. The results from the excavations along with the traces of mining and metallurgy in the adjacent area will shed light on the economic development of Apollonia Pontica in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

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, Squaremouth.com or 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

At the end of the field school, participants will:

- Dig at an Ancient Greco-Roman site on the Black Sea Coast.
- Understand archaeological methods for studying Classical period material culture
- Practice all basic excavation and recording techniques in the field
- Develop skills in artifact retrieval and processing with a focus on Classical material culture
- Expand knowledge of the Classical world and the use of interdisciplinary approaches (geology, biology, physics) for its research
- Visit significant archaeological and historic sites: [Nessebar, ancient Mesambria \(UNESCO World Heritage Site\)](#), ancient Deultum near Burgas and [Sozopol](#), ancient Apollonia Pontica.

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
Understanding Stratigraphy	Ability to understand the relationships between layers of both cultural and natural depositions
Small hand tools	Can operate a trawl or similar small hand tool to conduct excavations
Large hand tools	Can operate a pickax, hoe or similar large hand tool to conduct excavations
Grid & trench layout	Ability to lay accurate grid and generate reliable trench outline for excavations
Recording excavations	Ability to understand, collect and record all excavation processes and data
Recording sheets	Ability to understand and properly record excavation process, stratigraphy, sections and artifact documentation
Photography	Ability to take clear images of various features, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions

Photogrammetry	Ability to create and interpret photographic and electromagnetic radiant imagery & patterns
Soil identification	Ability to identify, describe and record different types of soil and depositions
Total Station	Able to create maps and plans using a Total Station
Section Drawing	Ability to understand concepts of physical and chronological stratigraphy and the method to record those accurately
Artifact recovery	Ability to record, safely excavate and properly storage artifacts and ecofacts made of different types of materials (ceramics, metal, lithics, etc.) and various levels of fragility
Artifact washing	Ability to wash different artifact types while maintaining their material characteristics for research purposes
Artifact processing	Ability to identify, collect and record a wide range of artifact types, understanding their relative fragility within different site types and conditions
Artifact illustration	Ability to draw and illustrate different artifact types for reports and publications
Technical Writing	Ability to write technical reports in coherent language that follow both federal and state regulations and law
Artifact Curation	Ability to safely register, document and store a wide range of artifact types in curation facilities following state and federal laws

COURSE SCHEDULE

Day	Activity
Day 1	7:30pm: Arrival and check-in at Hotel Polina Beach at Sozopol 8.30 pm: Traditional Macedonian Welcome Dinner.
Day 2	Morning: Orientation, safety briefing and lectures Afternoon: Walking tour of Sozopol's Old Town
Workdays	Field and lab work
Saturdays	Site visits
Sundays	Days off
Departure day	Departure. Check-out by 12.00 pm

TYPICAL WORKDAY

Time	Activity
6:00am	Wakeup
6:30-7:10am	Breakfast
7:10-7:30am	Walk to the excavation area
7:30-9:30am	Fieldwork
9:30-10:00am	Break
10:00am-1:30pm	Fieldwork
1:30-1:50pm	Walk to hotel
1:50-2:30pm	Lunch
2:30-5:00pm	Siesta Break
5:00-7:30pm	Lab work & Lectures
8:00pm	Dinner

[In case of rain, the field school program provides substitute activities including artifact processing, lab work and film projections at the university.](#)

ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

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

- ❖ **60% - Fieldwork:** Excavation – use of tools and documentation on site.

- ❖ **25% - Lab work:** washing, processing, illustration, and storage of artifacts
- ❖ **15% - Attendance.**

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.

PREREQUISITES

None. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will study on-site how to conduct archaeological 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. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and an adequate understanding that fieldwork requires real, hard work, in the sun and wind. The work requires patience, discipline, and attention to detail.

PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

Bulgaria, one of Europe's oldest countries, boasts a diverse and extensive history spanning many centuries, influenced by various civilizations. From the ancient Thracians to the Roman Empire and the Byzantine era, Bulgaria's past reflects its resilience and cultural richness. Its strategic location as a crossroads between East and West has shaped its identity, evident in its architecture, cuisine, and traditions. Today, Bulgaria stands as a vibrant nation blending its storied past with modern aspirations, welcoming visitors to explore its timeless landscapes and captivating history.

Bulgarians take pride in their heritage and achievements, and we kindly ask for your respect towards their customs, traditions, and culture.

EQUIPMENT LIST

- A pair of sturdy working shoes (sneakers or running shoes) and a comfortable pair of shoes for walking or hiking.
- Clothing suitable for outdoor work: Lightweight clothing with long sleeves and pants (to protect against the sun and insects), including a light raincoat (consider weather conditions—hot and sunny, but rain may occur).
- A wide-brimmed hat.
- A small backpack for your water bottle, snacks, camera, etc.
- Prescription medications you may need, as basic non-prescription drugs are readily available in North Macedonia.
- A converter for European-type electrical wall plugs, if needed.
- A positive attitude towards work, fun, study, and discovery!

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 cancellation 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.

There will be two meeting points for this program:

1. Arrive at Sofia International Airport (SOF) on the first day of the program (Sun) by 12:30pm. A Group transfer will be arranged from Sofia airport for an additional fee (will be announced up to three weeks before arrival) to [Hotel Polina Beach](#) (Sozopol). Travel time is about 5 hours.
2. Arrive to [Hotel Polina Beach](#) (Sozopol) on your own, on the first day of the program (Sun) by 5:30pm. Many bus lines connect Sozopol with both Burgas Airport (BOJ – about 1 hour from Sozopol) and Sofia Airport (SOF – about 5 hours from Sozopol).



Figure 1: [Hotel Polina Beach](#) (Sozopol)

MEALS & ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodation for the duration of the project is at [Hotel Polina Beach](#) which offers comfortable rooms with two to three beds, air conditioning, a minibar, TV and Wi-Fi. The hotel is in the new part of Sozopol, a 15 min walk to the Old Town Quarter, the Archaeological Museum. It is also a 15 min walk to the archaeological site. Staying an extra day costs 50 EUR. A limited number of single rooms is available upon request for an additional cost of 350 EUR.

This program provides daily breakfast and lunch (lunch pack for the field trips), as well as the official welcome and farewell dinners. Students are responsible for their own dinner. Sozopol offers a variety of restaurants that can meet everyone's preferences and dietary requirements – from fast food options to cozy gourmet restaurants. The average meal price (soup/salad, main dish and dessert) can cost between \$10 to \$20. The project team will recommend restaurants for different preferences (cuisine, cost, dietary needs).

VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no visa requirements for U.S. citizen travelling to Bulgaria, if they do not stay longer than 3 months. Passport's expiration date should exceed the stay by at least 3 months.

Citizens of other countries are asked to check the Bulgarian Embassy website page at their home country for specific visa requirements.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: Bulgaria's currency is the Lev. There are several banks in Sozopol. 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 Sozopol.

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

Baralis, Alexandre, Krastina Panayotova, Teodora Bogdanova, Martin Gyuzelev, Dimitar Nedev and Kostantin Gospodinov (2016). Apollonia Pontica (Sozopol, Bulgaria): The results of the Franco-Bulgarian archaeological mission. In The Black Sea in the Light of New Archaeological Data and Theoretical Approaches: Proceedings of the 2nd International Workshop on the Black Sea in Antiquity held in Thessaloniki, 18-20 September 2015. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology. Pp. 153-179.

Baralis, Alexandre, Martin Gyuzelev and Krastina Panayotova (2021). Between Crisis and Conflicts: The Territory of Apollonia Pontica. In The Greeks and Romans in the Black Sea and the Importance of the Pontic Region for the Graeco-Roman World (7th century BC-5th century AD): 20 Years On (1997-2017): Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress on Black Sea Antiquities (Constanța – 18-22 September 2017). Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology. Pp. 99-110.

Panayotova, K. (2007). The Necropolis of Apollonia Pontica in Kalfata / Bugjaka: In. Docter, R., Panayotova, K. de Boer, J., Donnellan, L., van der Put, W., Bechtold, B. Apollonia Pontica. Gent, p. 5-28.

Panayotova K., Damyanov M., Stoyanova D., Bogdanova T. (2015). Apollonia Pontica: The Archaic Temenos and Settlement on the Island of St. Kirik. In: Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Merida, Spain, p. 47-50.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Bordman, J. (1998). Early Greek Vase Painting, 11th – 6th centuries BC. A Handbook. Thames and Hudson, p. 177 – 257.

Collet, L. (2008). An Introduction to Drawing Archaeological Pottery. Rotherham, Yorkshire, p. 5-31.

Cook, R. P. Dupont. (1998). East Greek Pottery. London, New York. p. 1-10; 26 – 70; 77 – 94; 129 – 131; 192 – 206.

Damyanov, M. (2012). Two Decades of Archaeological Research in Apollonia Pontica (Sozopol, Bulgaria) - Presentation at Archaeological Institute of America – 112th Annual Meeting – Philadelphia, January 5-8.

Grammenos, D., Petropoulos, E. (ed). (2003). Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea. Publication of the Archaeological Institute of North Greece, vol.1. Thessaloniki. p. 95 – 155.

Tsetskhadze, G. (1994). Greek Penetration of the Black Sea. In The Archaeology of Greek Colonisation: Essays dedicated to Sir John Boardman, ed. Tsetskhadze, G., de Angelis, F. Oxford, p. 111 – 135.