

# EXCAVATIONS AT THE NEOLITHIC SITE OF AMZABEGOVO, NORTH MACEDONIA

**Course ID: HIS 489**

**July 5-26, 2025**

**Academic Credits: 6 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 9 Quarter Units)**

**School of Record: Culver Stockton College**

## **DIRECTORS:**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

During the 7th millennium BCE, the Balkan Peninsula served as a gateway for the spread of farming, animal husbandry, and Neolithisation from Anatolia and the Near East to Europe. The central Balkan River valleys, including the Vardar and Bregalnica, were among the most significant migration routes during this period. Amzabegovo, situated between these two river basins, encapsulates nearly two millennia of Balkan Neolithic development. The site was occupied 6,300 to 4,800 BCE, encompassing the era from the arrival of the first farmer settlers to the advent of metallurgy. Amzabegovo features a sequence of over 20 construction phases, including residential structures, pits, public buildings and burials. The site was abandoned at the end of the Neolithic until the Roman era, when a Roman villa was built on its top, sealing and preserving the Neolithic layers.

Research at Amzabegovo begun in the late 1960's. The site was then excavated by an international American-Yugoslav team (UCLA & University of Belgrade). The team concluded that the site is over 10 hectares in size and represents the full duration and development of the Neolithic in the Balkan

Peninsula. The emblematic, white-painted Neolithic pottery was widely represented at Amzabegovo, and is a cultural marker of the Central Balkans Neolithic population. At the same time, the material culture includes some Near Eastern elements, including architecture patterns originating in the Near East and the use of marble for personal ornaments production. These finds positioned Amzabegovo as a reference point for Balkan Neolithic studies.

After a 50-year hiatus, field research was reinitiated in 2019 at Amzabegovo. The current project, which this field school is part of, focuses on understanding the Neolithic transition to sedentary living, associated with the first adaptation of farming practices. A key question is understanding the regional dynamics and the role of Amzabegovo as the largest settlement in the cluster of sites within the Bregalnica River Basin, as well as its relationship and relevance to long distance trade routes.

### **IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER**

The Center for Field Sciences 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 CFS 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 CFS takes risks seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the CFS continually monitor conditions at the program's site and so we can provide an experience that is as safe as possible.

The CFS 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 a CFS field program. CFS is not qualified to provide medical advice. For all other concerns, please consult with CFS staff members or program director(s) – as appropriate.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the field school, participants will:

- Dig at a Neolithic site in North Macedonia
- Learn about the early farming societies of Europe and their technology.
- Understand archaeological methods for studying Neolithic material culture
- Practice all basic excavation and recording techniques on the field
- Develop skills in artifact retrieval and processing with a focus on Neolithic material culture

- Expand knowledge on European Neolithic and the use of interdisciplinary approaches (geology, biology, physics) for its research
- Visit significant archaeological and historic sites: Roman town of Stobi, Byzantine town of Bargala, the historic town of Kratovo, the medieval monastery of Lesnovo and the historic center of the capital city of Skopje.

## LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware that many students may not seek academic careers but will pursue employment in the private sector. To that end, we are following the example set by Twin Cairns with their Skills Log Matrix™ (<https://twincairns.com/skills-log-matrix/>). 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 trowel or similar small hand tool to conduct excavations   |
| Large hand tools           | Can operate a pickaxe, 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  |
|---------------------|---|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Day | 7:00pm: Arrival and check-in at Danilov Guest House, in Shtip, North Macedonia<br>8.00 pm: Traditional Macedonian Welcome Dinner. |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Day | <b>Morning:</b> Orientation, Walking Tour of Shtip<br><b>Afternoon:</b> Lectures  |
| Workdays            | Field and lab work  |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Saturdays     | <p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Saturday:</b> Tour of Stobi, the Ancient Roman Capital of Macedonia Secunda &amp; visit to the Archaeological Museum in Skopje, the modern capital of N. Macedonia, traditional lunch and visits to Skopje's old town.</p> <p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday:</b> Tour of Roman/Early Byzantine town of Bargala, guided tour of the archaeological site and the medieval church of St. George. Visit to the Medieval monastery St. Gavril Lesnovski.</p> |
| Sundays       | Days off  |
| Departure day | Departure. Check-out by 12.00 pm  |

## TYPICAL WORKDAY

| Time           | Activity                          |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 5:30am         | Wakeup                            |
| 6:00am         | Transfer from guest house to site |
| 6:30-8:30am    | Fieldwork                         |
| 8:30-9:00am    | Breakfast at site                 |
| 9:00-11:00am   | Fieldwork                         |
| 11:00-11:15am  | Break                             |
| 11:15am-1:00pm | Fieldwork                         |
| 1:00-1:30pm    | Transfer from site to guest house |
| 1:30-2:30pm    | Lunch                             |
| 2:30-5:00pm    | Siesta Break                      |
| 5:00-8:00pm    | Lab work                          |
| 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.**

## SKILLS MATRIX LEVELS

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the Twin Cairns Skills Log Matrix™ skills list provided above. Each skill will be graded on one of the following 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.

## 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.

## 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 CFS 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 a time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if CFS is forced to cancel a program.

The meeting point is at the lobby of the [Danilov Guest House](#), located in the center of Shtip, North Macedonia. Students should arrive to the guest house on the first day of program (Saturday) by 7:00pm. There are regular buses between Skopje International Airport (SKP) and Shtip, with ticket prices ranging from approximately \$6-\$8. A taxi from Skopje Airport to Shtip costs around \$70. The program team will assist in coordinating among participants who wish to share a taxi.



*Figure 1: The Danilov Guest House, North Macedonia*



*Figure 2: Skopje International airport main terminal*

## MEALS & ACCOMMODATIONS

Students will stay at [Danilov Guest House](#), located in the center of Shtip. The guest house offers double rooms (twin beds) with shared toilets and showers for each floor. Wi-Fi, a washing machine, and basic leisure and exercising equipment are provided. Bed linens and towels are provided. Single room accommodation is available upon request for an additional fee. The guest house is conveniently situated within walking distance to local stores, restaurants and other amenities.

This program provides three meals per day, featuring organic Macedonian homemade food. During workdays, all meals are typically served at a nearby restaurant. Meals on weekends are also held at the same restaurant, except for lunches provided during excursions. This field school can accommodate vegetarians, vegans, and individuals with lactose intolerance.

## VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no visa requirements for U.S. citizen travelling to North Macedonia, 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 embassy website page at their home country for

specific visa requirements.

## **PROGRAM ETIQUETTE**

North Macedonia is one of the youngest countries in Europe, but rich with tradition and heritage. Participants can make the most of their stay in Shtip by exploring the beautiful hilly landscape surrounding the city, including hikes, walking, running, and training tracks along the banks of the Bregalnica

**Extra Trips and Surroundings:** In the wider area of Eastern North Macedonia, participants can visit the intriguing geo-formation known as the Stone Dolls, located near Kuklitsa village (60 km from Shtip), as well as the Kokino site (100 km from Shtip), a geological formation and Bronze Age site recognized as one of the oldest megalithic observatories in the Balkans. For nature lovers, Berovo (85 km from Shtip), an idyllic mountain town with a picturesque lake, makes for a great day trip. A must-see in the Central Balkans is the town of Ohrid and its lake (230 km from Shtip), situated in the southwestern reaches of North Macedonia. This UNESCO-protected natural and cultural monument is renowned for its stunning beauty, featuring crystal-clear waters and magnificent mountain peaks, coupled with archaeological sites that testify to continuous cultural development over the past 8,000 years.

## **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: a sun hat and 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 for work, fun, study, and discovery!

## **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

**International dialing code:** The Greek international phone code is +389.

**Money/Banks/Credit Cards:** North Macedonian currency is the Denar (MKD).

**ATM Availability:** There are several ATM machines at Shtip.

**Local Language:** North Macedonia is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual country. The main official languages are Macedonian and Albanian. Turkish, Romani, Serbian, Bosnian and Aromanian are recognized as official regional languages.

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

## **ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT**

Attending students will be awarded 6 semester credit units (equivalent to 9 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 135 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 transcript 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](mailto:registrar@culver.edu).

## REQUIRED READINGS

Gimbutas, M., Anza. (1974). Ca. 6500-5000 BC: A Cultural Yardstick for the Study of Neolithic Southeast Europe. *Journal of Field Archaeology*. Vol. 1, No. 1/2 (1974), pp. 26-66.

Mazzucco N, Sabanov A, Antolín F, Naumov G, Fidanoski L, Gibaja JF. (2022). The spread of agriculture in south-eastern Europe: new data from North Macedonia. *Antiquity*. Vol 96(385):15-33. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/spread-of-agriculture-in-southeastern-europe-new-data-from-north-macedonia/72801458F81690416FDA2DA3ED7CB560>

Marko Porčić, Tamara Blagojević, Jugoslav Pendić, Sofija Stefanović. (2020). The timing and tempo of the Neolithic expansion across the Central Balkans in the light of the new radiocarbon evidence. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*. Volume 33: 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2020.102528>.

Stojanovski D, Živaljević I, Dimitrijević V, Dunne J, Evershed RP, Balasse M, et al. (2020) Living off the land: Terrestrial-based diet and dairying in the farming communities of the Neolithic Balkans. *PLoS ONE*. 15(8): 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237608>

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

Jovanović, J., Blagojević, T., Marković, J., Novak, M., Bedić, Željka, Naumov, G., Stojanova Kanzurova, E., Los, D., Hutinec, M., Fidanoski, L., Skelac, G., Šlaus, M., & Stefanović, S. (2021). New Radiocarbon Dates, Stable Isotope, and Anthropological Analysis of Prehistoric Human Bones from the Balkans and Southwestern Carpathian Basin. *Documenta Praehistorica*, 48, 224-251. <https://doi.org/10.4312/dp.48.18>.

Naumov, G., Fidanoski, Lj., Tolevski, I., Ivkowska, A. (eds.). (2009). *The Neolithic Communities in the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje*. Dante.

Reingruber, A., Bonga, L., & Thissen, L. (2023). The impressed pottery of the Aegean Neolithic. *Relatively Absolute. Relative and Absolute Chronologies in the Neolithic of Southeast Europe*. Institute for Balkan Studies, 156, 19-40.

Zeder MA (2011). The origins of agriculture in the Near East. *Current Anthropology*. 52(S4): S221–35.