

MUNICIPIUM AGUNTUM: EXCAVATIONS OF AN ALPINE ROMAN TOWN, AUSTRIA

Course ID: HIS 489

July 6-August 2, 2025

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

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

DIRECTOR:

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Roman town of Aguntum was rediscovered in the early 20th century. Through decades of research, a Roman domus (private family residence of palatial proportions), impressive thermal baths, city walls, and numerous residential buildings were identified and excavated. Since 2006, ongoing excavations have been focused on the heart of the town—the forum area. The latest findings and analysis of artifacts suggest a flourishing Mediterranean city nestled amidst the Alpine landscape.

Many fragmented rock crystals were recovered from the city center. These findings offer insights into an extensive trade network, showcasing Aguntum as the sole known Roman hub for this coveted, high value resource material that was highly desired in ancient times. The presence of these artifacts indicates Aguntum's status as a pivotal transshipment center, where commerce and cultural exchange converged.

From the 3rd century CE onwards, significant transformations in the urban layout of the town took place, as the former administrative hub transitioned into a residential and commercial zone. Throughout the 4th century CE, archaeological evidence indicates the emergence of various workshops and modest dwellings, reflecting a shift in the town's function. By the end of the 4th

and early in the 5th centuries CE, evidence of residences and workshops decrease, hinting at a decline in activity and importance of Aguntum.

By the 6th century CE, Aguntum is in ruins. The area now serves as burial grounds, suggesting a substantial abandonment of the settlement. These funerary discoveries shed light on the dwindling population and the gradual abandonment of Aguntum during this era.

Our research is focused on the social and economic mechanisms that powered this small Alpine town during the years of its existence. What motivated its establishment? How did Aguntum thrive and prospered during the first three centuries CE? Why did Aguntum's power, trade and commerce declined and what brought to its final demise?

During the 2025 season, students will have the opportunity to participate in excavations within the city center, where they will work on archaeological remains dated to the founding period of Aguntum. Students will also participate in lab work, cleaning, measuring, documenting, and interpreting finds recovered at the site. Lectures and practicums on the latest archaeological excavation methodologies are part of this program, as well as excursions to other important archaeological sites in the area.

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

The primary aim of this field school is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of archaeological fieldwork. This encompasses the planning and execution of research projects, the day-to-day research routines both on and off-site, and the ongoing scientific interpretation. This

immersive experience seeks to cultivate students' enduring interest in Roman archaeology and equip them with the broader skills necessary for this and related disciplines, including systematic data collection, hypothesis formulation, critical thinking, and collaborative teamwork.

During the initial week, students will partake in informative lectures, equipping them with all the essential knowledge required for active engagement in field activities. Throughout the subsequent three weeks of fieldwork, weekdays will be devoted to excavation and laboratory work, while weekends will provide opportunities for museum visits and field trips. During the last week, students will dedicate a significant portion of their time to crafting a scholarly report focused on their excavation area. The main program points are:

Theory (Lectures & Excursions):

- History and archaeology of Aguntum and the Eastern Alps in Roman Time and Late Antiquity
- Conservation and restoration (buildings & small finds)
- Documentation and interpretation of Roman finds (main focus: ceramics)
- Stratigraphy and Geoarchaeology

Practice:

- Archaeological excavation
- Archaeological methods: excavation methods, stratigraphy, and surveying technology (tachymetry, photogrammetry, SfM 3D)
- Archaeological documentation (description of findings, stratigraphy, photography)
- Processing of recovered materials (cleaning, documentation)
- Taking sample materials for different analytic studies (geoarchaeology, archaeobotany, scientific dating methods, etc.)
- Creation of an excavation report of the research area

The utmost objective for participants is to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to independently conduct an archaeological excavation. With this in mind, participants are assigned their own excavation areas, working in teams of two to three, where students assume full responsibility – from the initial groundbreaking to the ultimate completion of the report.

This approach enables participants to become integral members of the research team, focusing their efforts on the evaluation of a specific section of the site. However, it is important to note that students will not work in isolation within their designated areas. Students are encouraged to actively engage in discussions with staff & other team members, fostering a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the overall context of the excavation site. This collaborative environment ensures a holistic perspective and enriches the learning experience for all participants.

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 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 and trench layout	Ability to lay accurate grid and generate reliable trench outline for excavations

Recording excavations	Ability to understand, collect and record all excavation process 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 feature, 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 level 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 report 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

1st week: Introduction: Methods of Field Archaeology, History of the Region, Visit of the Museum Aguntum and Introduction to the site.

Weeks 2 to 3: Monday-Friday: field work, Saturdays: excursions in the wider region, Sundays are free.

Week 4: Finalizing the final report on the excavated area including stratigraphic documentation and small finds.

Course structure may be subject to change at the director's discretion.

TYPICAL WORKDAY

Time	Task	Comments
7:00-9:00am	Fieldwork	Week 1: lectures and practical exercises in the field
9:00-9:15am	Break	
9:15am-12:00pm	Fieldwork	Week 1: lectures and practical exercises in the field
12:00-12:45pm	Lunch Break	
12:45-3:00pm	Fieldwork	May be augmented with lab work
3:00-3:15pm	Break	
3:15-5:00pm	Fieldwork	May be augmented with lab work

***In case of rainy days, lectures and lab work will be performed.**

ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

Students will be graded based on their work as follows.

50% Site Work: Excavation – use of tools and documentation on site.

20% Lab work: washing, processing, illustration, and storage of artifacts.

20% Final report: Write a report of your designated excavation area.

10% Team Interaction: Willingness and ability to interact, collaborate and share scientific work and everyday fieldwork tasks.

SKILLS MATRIX LEVELS

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the list of skills 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 85% 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

This project is carried out by an international team of researchers. Students are expected to be respectful and open to sharing new experiences with local students and staff. The excavation site is in rural Austria, where local people are known for their hospitality and openness. Students are always seen as part of, and thus representing, the project. Respectful behavior is essential, not only within the excavation site but also during trips and independent visits to the surrounding villages.

EQUIPMENT LIST

- Bedsheet & covers
- Sleeping bag / blanket
- Pillows
- Towels
- Steel-toed boots (mandatory Austria government safety requirement)
- Appropriate clothing for excavation (shirts, light sturdy pants)
- Hat or handkerchief to protect from the sun
- Rain jacket

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT/TIME

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 make a Go/No Go decision by then. Such 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.

Lienz is the main (and only) town in Eastern Tyrol. Students will be picked up at the Train Station of Lienz (Lienz in Osttirol Bahnhof, Bahnhofplatz 1, 9900 Lienz) on the first day of the field school at 6pm. Students will be met at the “Baguette” Bistro, located within the station building. Students arriving directly to the field school are advised to travel to Vienna International Airport (VIE) and take the train from there to Lienz. Students traveling prior to the field school in Austria/Europe may wish to consider taking the train from Salzburg to Lienz (one change) or the bus connection from Innsbruck to Lienz (direct bus).

From Vienna: There are usually 4 direct daily trains between Vienna (Hauptbahnhof station at the airport) and Lienz and the trip usually takes 5 hours and 41 minutes.

From Salzburg: There are usually 11 trains between Salzburg and Lienz and the trip usually involves one change of train. The trip takes 3 hours and 24 minutes.

From Innsbruck: There are usually 4 buses between Innsbruck and Lienz and the trip takes 2 hours and 58 minutes.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email project director immediately. A local emergency cell phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.



Figure 1: Lienz train station, Austria

VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no special visa requirements for U.S. citizens travelling to Europe (including Austria), as long as you 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.

MEALS & ACCOMMODATION

Students will stay at the Aguntum field house (“Grabungshaus”), constructed in 1999 a walking distance from the site. The house offers bedrooms with 4 beds each, with shared showers and a kitchen. Additionally, there is a common room adjacent to the kitchen, and amenities such as a washing machine, laundry racks and WiFi. Within a 10-15 minute walk, students can reach two small villages, Nussdorf and Dölsach. To the south of the house and the archaeological park, there is a forest that serves as a local recreational area.

Breakfast and lunch are provided at the excavation house. Food items for these meals are provided by the project. Dinner will take place at the restaurant next to the excavation house and the cost will be covered by the project. If weather permits, there will also be a communal barbecue at the garden of the “Grabungshaus” once a week.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialing code: +43

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: Austria's currency is the Euro. Banks can be found in the nearby villages, 10-15 minutes walking distance from the "Grabungshaus". 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: ATM's can be found near the grocery stores, 10-15 minutes walks from the field house.

Local Language: German. The field school will be held in English, although at the excavation site we speak English and German.

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

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 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 160 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.

REQUIRED READINGS

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

Project website:

<https://www.uibk.ac.at/archaeologien/institut/mitarbeiter/auer-martin/aguntum/index.html.en>

M. Auer, Municipium Claudium Aguntum, in: J. Horvat, St. Groh, K. Strobel, M. Belak (Eds.), Roman Urban Landscape. Towns and minor settlements from Aquileia to the Danube (Ljubljana 2024), 243–268.

<https://omp.zrc-sazu.si/zalozba/catalog/view/2101/8603/2295>

Th. R. Hester, H. J. Shafer, K. L. Feder, Field Methods in Archaeology (2009, 7th edition; London/New York 216); especially Chapters 2, 5, 7 & 10.

<https://handoutset.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Field-Methods-in-Archaeology-Thomas-R.-Hester-Harry-J.-Shafer-etc..pdf>

RECOMMENDED READINGS

G. Alföldy, Noricum (London/Boston 1974).

M. Auer, Municipium Claudium Aguntum. Excavations in the City Centre (2006-2015)

https://www.academia.edu/38527812/Municipium_Claudium_Aguntum_Excavations_in_the_City_Centre_2006_2015

M. Auer, Archaeological expectations and archaeometric results. Some considerations on imported coarse wares and local pottery production in Aguntum, Austria

https://www.academia.edu/41571643/Archaeological_expectations_and_archaeometric_result

[s Some considerations on imported coarse wares and local pottery production in Aguntum Austria](#)

Borgers, B., Ionescu C., Gál Á., Neubauer F., Von Hagke Ch., Auer, M., Szilagi V., Kasztovszky Z., Gméling K., Harsányi I., Barbu-Tudoran, L., Production technology and knowledge transfer of calcite-tempered grey ware bowls from 2nd- to 5th-century ce Noricum (Austria), *Archaeometry* 65(3):480–497. <https://doi.org/10.1111/arcm.12823>

Borgers, B., Auer, M., Wagner, S., Tropper, P., Production and Distribution of Greyware Tripod Bowls in 1st and 2nd Centuries AD Noricum (Austria), *Open Access Journal of Archaeology and Anthropology* (4)3:2023. <http://dx.doi.org/10.33552/OAJAA.2023.04.000588>

Borgers, B., Auer, M., Communities of Practice in 2nd – 5th c. AD Pottery Production in southwestern Noricum (Austria): A Case Study from Aguntum and Lavant, *Journal of Roman Pottery Studies* 20, 2023, 77–92.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.10782297.14>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.10782297.14>