

Using the travel award to attend a field school in Bulgaria was a valuable experience. Although there were some issues with site permissions which prevented us from excavating, I learned much about archaeological theory - including cleaning, cataloguing and description of finds, and surveying and drawing a site.

Arrival into the capital, Sofia:



Roman town in Sofia



Oil lamps (inc early Christian, top left) – Sofia museum



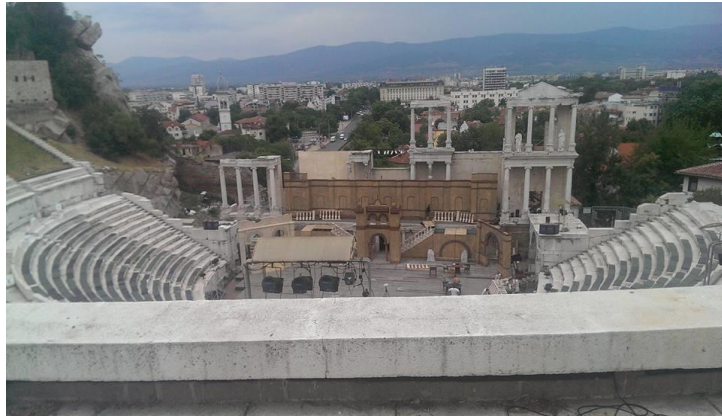
Settlement evidence in the Underground station

Plovdiv

I went to Plovdiv on my first day in Bulgaria, before travelling to Montana. It was a fairly long bus journey, but a wonderful place.



Amphitheatre



Stadium

Further, I was able to assist a local museum in showcasing finds. While the director was enthusiastic about preserving heritage, he admitted that he didn't feel confident in identifying objects, and had been unable to separate Roman from more modern finds. I aided in identifying and categorising objects (i.e. coarse and fine pottery, statue bases and cooking wares, and metal finds for various uses – padlocks, tools and coinage) and cleaning the collection for a future exhibition alongside two of the lecturers and other students on the programme. Later, I learned about numbering, cataloguing and describing these finds, and how photography and digital imaging techniques are used to form research papers, or museum archives.

Smolyanovtsi Museum:



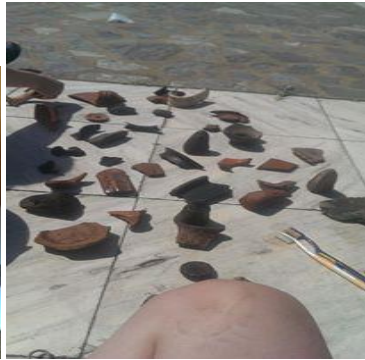
Ordered ceramic finds (roof tiles, handles, lids)



Metal finds (inc. fibula brooches, centre)



Sorting metal – nails (inc. boot nails), pin fastenings, agricultural tools, knife blades



Cleaning pottery

This experience helped me to appreciate the fragility of Roman artefacts, and understand how to catalogue for research or archiving. Learning to use imaging techniques, I feel better able to integrate these into reports and to assist in other archiving roles.

Montana (where I stayed)



Dedication to Diana, found in the graveyard



Montana fortress

Montana fortress has undergone restoration, though not without controversy. Though attempts were made to mirror the original aesthetic, this has drawn criticism as it could be unclear which elements are original.

Day trips

In visiting Bulgaria, I had a unique opportunity to gain a wider historical knowledge of the Roman period in the Balkan region, visiting border settlements and a site in Serbia. I was able to trace the military's journey through to the regional centre of power, administration and industry in Ratiaria.

Zajecar, Serbia – Felix Romuliana

Built for emperor Galerius, the site is protected by UNESCO and has received funding for considerable preservation and ongoing excavations. On the hilltop to the north of the site is where Galerian and his mother are buried in *tumulus* mounds, built as large hills in the tradition of the Thracians (local tribe) in order for the soul to be raised to the heavens. It's rumoured that women were discovered carrying candles over to the site on the hilltop, and when questioned by anthropologists, were unsure why they were doing this. Apparently the tradition of honouring the emperor's memory had been passed through families to the present day.



Outer fortress walls – 5m thick, demonstrating the paranoia of Galerian about the potential of invasion

Mosaic floor of the triclinium



Interactive 3D site map



Theseus and the Minotaur mosaic



Guard tower across the border in Vidin, same period

Note the differences in preservation. The Vidin archaeological association responsible for the region has locked the site to prevent damage, but preservation has not taken place.

Vidin

Baba Vida coastal fortress, initially Roman but later used in the Turkish occupation period.



A Roman gate of the port

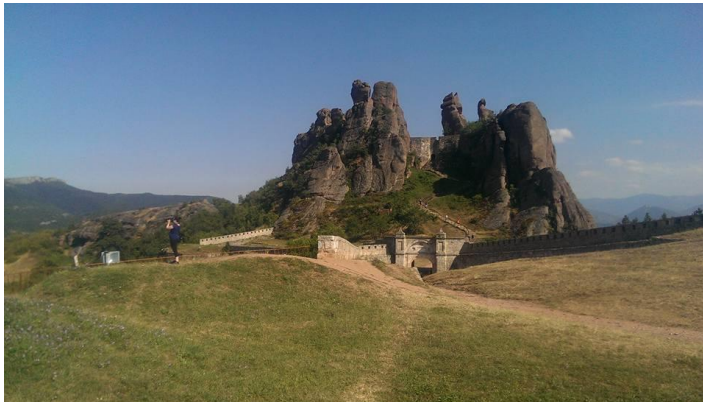
A looted site – Ratiaria

In the region of Vidin, our lecturer Krassimira had been allowed to excavate, hoping to find the provincial capital. At the end of the season, she had uncovered some of the structures of the town and was later awarded preservation funding. She had hoped to later uncover evidence of a theatre and baths, other indicators of a large town. However, sadly, once she had left the site it was raided by looters who overturned the contexts in search of metal. It is believed that the local governor colluded

with this, turning a blind eye as over 20 buildings overturned and sacked buildings which had been painstakingly mapped by a volunteer team, leaving the site now unsuitable for dating.



Belogradchik rocks and fortress



prehistoric geological formation used to the defensive advantage of the Ottomans.

My trip has exposed me to a number of unexpected things, including encounters with the language – as you won't get far in rural Bulgaria without learning to read Cyrillic for signs and menus; to dining with locals and learning about traditions and ethnographic history, and interestingly, having the opportunity to speak with some people who openly admitted to having looted a site. I have learned that the consideration of heritage and protection of monuments may be subject to different attitudes in a place where many people can't see an immediate value in preserving structures such as walls or contexts.



Abandoned Synagogue in Vidin which has been denied a preservation order, though the Jewish community have stated their ability to fund restoration.

The trip has been as much an experience of cultural and political awareness as archaeological, and I am pleased that my role as a volunteer assisted the archaeologists in promoting the value of sites for studying the region, perhaps made more apparent as I had travelled from England to visit these.

I would highly recommend applying for the award, without which I would have found it difficult to finance tuition and accommodation as well as equipment and day travel. I hope to maintain the relationships which I have made in the country, and there has even been discussion of establishing another field school in Serbia, where permissions are more sympathetic, or using archived remains for a course on skeletal anthropology. These things would have been less possible without the awareness that there is a demand from students for this education, and I hope that metal detectorists will in time use their interest more productively to aid these projects.



Denarius from Serdica, now Sofia