



American Institute for Southeast European Studies

AISEES

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AISEES NEWSLETTER February 2020

Welcome to the first newsletter of the American Institute for Southeast European Studies!

Incorporated in 2016, AISEES (pronounced, 'aces'), is an independent, non-profit scholarly organization founded to promote academic contacts and cultural exchanges in the humanities and social sciences between North America and the nations of southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia).

Located at the intersection between Europe and Asia, southeastern Europe is a place of striking natural beauty and a region with a dynamic history and varied cultural traditions. Yet despite its riches, the region has not received much attention from American scholars and students. AISEES helps to remedy this by promoting scholarly exchanges and communication, both formal and informal, between scholars and students of SE Europe and North America. Our canvas is broad: we encourage research in all chronological periods from the prehistoric era to the present day and we invite projects that make use of a wide range of methodologies in the humanities and social sciences.

Despite its comparatively new status, AISEES has already developed several programs to advance the Institute's goals. We have created a Fellowship program to support graduate students and younger post-doctoral scholars in the U.S. who wish to conduct research in southeastern Europe. The first fellowship competition, held in spring 2019, attracted a strong pool of applicants with impressive project proposals. The three winners are:

- **Sarah Craycroft**, a Ph.D. candidate in comparative Studies and Folklore, Ohio State University
- **Dhurata Osmani**, a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology, University of California, Berkeley
- **Dr. Clare Weiss**, post-doctoral scholar in Classical Archaeology, Ph.D. University of Virginia.

Their projects exemplify the broad geographical sweep and wide range of subject matters and methodologies that AISEES supports, with investigations in ancient Roman urbanism in Albania, cultural revivals in rural Bulgaria, and the role of feminism in post-war Kosovo. For more information on the research projects of the AISEES Fellowship winners, see below. Applications for 2020 AISEES Fellowships are due on April 1.

AISEES also supports a program of Travel Grants to enable scholars and advanced graduate students at universities in any of the countries of southeastern Europe to come to the United States and participate in a professional conference or scholarly meeting. Many scholars and students in southeastern Europe are doing exciting and original research in the humanities and social sciences, but their work does not always reach an international audience because of the high cost of travel, which is often beyond their means. AISEES, therefore, offers travel grants to cover the cost of international travel, lodging, and conference fees for meeting participants from southeastern Europe.

A further goal is to promote outreach to the general public through a series of lectures on the history and traditions of southeastern Europe. One such series of lectures is currently being developed by Dr. Lucien Mureșan, a research scholar based in Bucharest, Romania, and the AISEES representative in Romania. Details will be posted on the AISEES web site as they become available.

These are some of the programs that AISEES is sponsoring. We hope to broaden our horizons in the future, and we would like to hear from you. Send us your ideas about how to promote southeastern European studies in the U.S. and what kinds of programs you would like to see. Please contact us at AISEESorg@gmail.com. We began a membership drive at the end of 2019, and we hope that everyone with an interest in southeastern Europe will join us. With your help, AISEES can continue to grow and expand.

Meet the Chair of the AISEES Board of Trustees, Lynn Roller

My connection with southeastern Europe developed out of my professional interests in the archaeology and history of the eastern Mediterranean region during pre-Christian antiquity. My first extensive visit to southeastern Europe was in 2000, when I was invited to participate in the International Congress of Thracology, held at Sofia University in Bulgaria. At that time Bulgaria seemed like an exotic destination: this was only ten years after the collapse of Communist rule in southeastern Europe and most archaeological research projects of southeastern European scholars were still very little known to scholars in western Europe and North America. I was somewhat familiar with the Thracians, an ancient people who formed the dominant ethnic group in southeastern Europe and northwestern Anatolia (Turkey), but I knew little about them. Like many scholars trained in the traditions of Classics and Classical Archaeology, I tended to consider ancient Greek culture as the central focus of Mediterranean antiquity and thought of other ethnic groups as marginal and, by implication, less interesting. However, I did have a growing interest in learning more about ancient Thrace. I was actively working with the Gordion Expedition, an archaeological project in central Turkey and the best-known center for the history and culture of ancient Phrygia. According to tradition, the Phrygians had migrated from southeastern Europe into central Anatolia in the early first millennium BCE. Therefore, the invitation to participate in the Thracology Congress offered the opportunity to learn more about the early history of Phrygians and Thracians and also to meet Bulgarian colleagues who shared my interests.

After the Congress, I took part in an excursion to eastern Bulgaria and visited several archaeological sites, all new to me. The one that made the strongest impression on me was the site of Gluhite Kamani (“Deaf Stones” in Bulgarian), near the town of Lyubimets, not far from the Turkish border. Located in a beautiful region of the Rhodope Mountains, Gluhite Kamani is the center of an intriguing series of carvings, primarily trapezoidal niches, found in the natural mountain rock. It was believed to be an ancient Thracian cult center, but at that time, no one knew much about it. The combination of beautiful natural scenery and an intriguing archaeological problem made a powerful impression. I remember thinking, “Someday I will come back and explore this further.”



Gluhite Kamani: rock outcrop with niches

That ‘someday’ came ten years later, when I returned to Gluhite Kamani with my Bulgarian colleague Dr. Maya Vassileva, and met the Director of the Gluhite Kamani project, Dr. Georghi Nekhrizov of the Bulgarian National Institute of Archaeology and Museums, and his wife, Dr. Julia Tzvetkova, a faculty member of the University of Sofia. Subsequently we developed a joint research project to conduct excavation and surveys at the site, a collaboration which is still ongoing. The opportunity to work closely with Bulgarian archaeologists helped open my eyes to the historical riches of Bulgaria and indeed, all of southeastern Europe, and gave me a greater appreciation for the contributions of the ancient cultures that had flourished in this region. Subsequent visits to archaeological projects in Serbia and Romania and the opportunity to get to know many eastern European colleagues have deepened this interest. As an important transitional zone, a meeting ground between Europe and Asia, southeastern Europe furnishes a rich opportunity to explore the cultural and technological exchanges between two continents from antiquity to the present day. And because scholars and researchers in southeastern Europe were cut off from their colleagues in the West until fairly recently, they are very open to sharing mutual research interests. It is my hope that the American Institute of Southeastern European Studies can help advance future collaborations between the US and southeastern Europe and encourage American scholars and students to learn more about this fascinating place.

Meet the Vice-Chair of the AISEES Board, Cynthia Lintz

In 1998, I joined the Peace Corps with hopes of going to the South American country, Bolivia. Instead, they sent me to Bulgaria. Bulgaria??? I had hardly heard of this country prior to my arrival much less had any expectations. My first impressions were of beautiful mountain landscapes, flavorful fruits and vegetables, and people wanting to talk.

After three months of language training, I was assigned to a forestry department in the city of Kyustendil near the border with both Serbia and North Macedonia. Many of my coworkers collected mountain herbs to send abroad to pharmaceutical companies as a way to earn extra money. I knew that Macedonians on the other side of the border were also collecting herbs for medicinal uses. During my time in the region, I learned that for approximately 60 years during the Cold War, Macedonians and Bulgarians didn't have much contact as the border crossing was closed. I was curious whether or not traditional uses for these herbs had changed over this period of separation. I embarked on an ethnobotanical study to understand plant usage of people residing in the vicinity of the border. Unfortunately, my study was cut short when the borders were once again closed due to the Kosovo War in neighboring Serbia. This curiosity of how the control or lack of control around borders affect local perceptions stayed with me even past my Peace Corps service.

In 2002, I returned to southeast Europe to assist with the reconstruction efforts after the North Macedonian insurgency. I worked in an aid organization that focused on community development. From this time, I developed my master's thesis examining the quantitative and qualitative goals of aid programs and the effects on their communities. From that research, I developed sustainability and maintenance contracts that aid agencies could employ in their projects to assure donors that community groups would be more likely to meet and sustain the goals.

From 2011 to 2014, I returned to the Balkans as a doctoral student to conduct my dissertation research. I returned once again to the idea of regional perceptions

as border regulations change. Instead of trying to figure out past perceptions that were filled with nostalgia, I decided to focus on the attitudes of people today. Many Bulgarians are taught that the territory of North Macedonia was historically a part of the ancient Bulgarian Kingdom. There is still a region in Western Bulgaria called Macedonia; the languages are both Slavic languages that share words and grammatical structure; and many of the customs found in one country are also practiced in the other. This may be why many Bulgarians believe that North Macedonia is a "newly" created country carved out of Bulgaria. Some Bulgarians, including members of the Bulgarian leadership, have gone so far as to call them Bulgarians, thus, denying the recognition of a separate North Macedonian identity. Macedonians, on the other hand, choose not to refer to the "other" as part of their own population, but rather as neighbors. They view their national identity based on the idea of the country being "attacked" by its neighbors and having to struggle for recognition in the world.

Using the yearly quantitative Eurobarometer study that gauges the perceptions of people and how they identify as being European, from their region, and from their country, I developed an ethnographic case study. The study examined the identities of people residing in the vicinity of these national borders to determine whether people trusted more their day-to-day interactions or the narratives propagated by their national governments in creating their identity. The study found that despite individuals not trusting their government, they still developed a strong attachment to their national identity and the national narratives; more so than trusting their personal experiences. The dissertation won Virginia Tech's Dissertation of the Year for 2014.

While my current job is not located in Southeast Europe, I continue to contribute towards my passion and interests of the region by serving as a board member for the American Institute of Southeast European Studies (AISEES).

Meet AISEES U.S. Administrator, Eric De Sena

Having lived in Europe for many years, I had the privilege of collaborating with dozens of museums, universities and institutes throughout SE Europe. Since the early 2000s, I have come to know the landscapes, cultures, and history of Romania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Croatia, and Serbia very well. I am thrilled to be a part of the America Institute for Southeast European Studies.

Seeing that part of my family's heritage lies in Eastern Europe, I have always been fascinated by the region. As a child, I was proud in 1978 when someone ethnically linked to me became pope, while in college my friends and I followed the events leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall very closely. My first experience in the region was a trip to Berlin in 2000. I recall the stark differences between the western and eastern parts of the city and the emotions I experienced when I freely crossed through the Brandenburg Gate with everyone else, something that was not possible just 11 years prior.

My academic introduction to the region occurred in 2002. While working at the American Academy of Rome, my supervisor, Archer Martin, and I organized a conference of the *Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautores*, an association that focuses upon Roman pottery and meets every two years. The RCRF attracts many scholars from southeastern Europe and I became particularly close to a group of scholars from Romania. As a result, between 2004 and 2011, I co-directed with Alexandru Matei and Robert Wanner the Porolissum Forum Project, an archaeological investigation within the Roman frontier city, Porolissum, situated in northwestern Romania. During that time, I introduced nearly 100 North American and west European students to the region as we endeavored to understand a cluster of public buildings constructed by the Romans during their occupation of Dacia, AD 106-270.

The archaeological work was challenging and rewarding, but the project also allowed me to gain a deeper knowledge and appreciation for the broader history and culture of Romania and its neighbors. In fact, each summer I would drive alone across Europe, stopping at various locations in Slovenia, Hungary, and

Serbia along the way. I explored major cities, such as Ljubljana, Belgrade, and Budapest, as well as historical sites like Carnuntum and Sirmium.



FFP2009, students excavating wall of a Roman public building

I lived in Sofia for two years as director of an overseas American research institute, where we made great progress in building an academic library, organizing conferences, publishing research, and leading fellows on academic excursions throughout the region. My passion deepened for the geography, history, cultural nuances, and the arts of Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, and North Macedonia and I gained many new friends. One of the projects I was especially proud of was the enhancement of Bulgarian museums and archaeological sites through a substantial grant program whose funding was generously provided by the America for Bulgaria Foundation.

Although I have returned to the USA and no longer have active research interests in southeastern Europe, I feel very strongly about the region and am delighted that AISEES has been incorporated in order to promote research in the humanities and social sciences in the nations that we support. I understand how important it is to assist scholars in the region, who have limited access to research funds and to support American scholars in their research endeavors.

Reports from the field: AISEES 2019 Fellows

Dr. Claire Weiss (University of Virginia)

Roman Colonial Urbanism Project – A Cross-Mediterranean Archaeological Comparison (with generous support from the American Institute for Southeast European Study)

AISEES Postdoctoral Fellow, Claire Weiss (University of Virginia) launched the newly formed Roman Colonial Urbanism (RCU) Project, co-directed with Erin Pitt (Sweet Briar College). The RCU Project examines ancient Mediterranean cities founded by local peoples and later colonized by Rome, comparing the history and process of local expressions of urban identity. While copious research has been conducted to examine the effect of Rome on conquered cities, much of that research has focused on the so-called Roman buildings, artifacts, and characteristics acquired by those cities as a result of Roman hegemony. The RCU Project seeks to understand the persistence of local expressions of identity and culture, those that may define the distinctive character of a certain city and its people, and that were important enough to maintain, or perhaps understated enough to survive. The Project's first season of field work was carried out in Butrint (ancient Buthrotum), Albania and Pompeii, Italy. Butrint (founded by a Greek culture, the Chaonians) and Pompeii (founded by an Italic culture, the Oscans), serve as our initial test-cases to develop a methodology of study that will then be expanded to other cities in future years.

The 2019 season in Butrint involved collaboration between the RCU Project and University of Notre Dame's Roman Forum Excavations (RFE) Project, directed by David Hernandez. Members of both projects contributed to the excavation of the area around the south-east corner of Butrint's Roman forum. As part of those excavations, much information was revealed about the changing methods of delivery and use of water in the city, one of the aspects of urban change that serves as a comparative feature of local identity. With the early foundation of a sanctuary to Asclepius, Butrint had a long-held reputation for healing and mineral springs in antiquity. One such natural spring and a related construction that took advantage of the water source were uncovered in the 2019 season. This spring was

clearly in use during an early phase of the forum, but was put out of use and buried, perhaps as a result of the provision of an aqueduct that was constructed in the city's Augustan period. While this spring was discontinued, the overall importance of water and the city's reputation as a healing site continued, made evident by the persistence of the cult of Asclepius and the efflorescence of bath complexes in the city's later history.

Following work in Butrint, the RCU Project transferred to Pompeii where we examined Pompeian water delivery and storage methods particular to the city. As at Butrint, Pompeii received an aqueduct in the Augustan period. Previous to the aqueduct's installation, the city relied on deep wells and cisterns for water collection and storage. Although some wells were closed in the later years of the city's existence, their importance as monuments and cultic sites within the city persisted, even when no longer used for water collection. Such maintenance suggests that cultural memory and recognition of these locations continued to hold significance into the city's Roman period despite the provision of other resources.

The first year of field work was a success, thanks in part to the support of the AISEES Postdoctoral Fellowship. Future work will continue to identify aspects of city life that defined local urban character before and after Roman colonization.



Erin Pitt and Claire Weiss at Butrint

Dhurata Osmani (Ph.D. candidate, University of California, Berkeley)

Fighting For Their Rights: Analyzing the Feminist-Based NGO Boom in Post-War Kosovo (with generous support from the American Institute for Southeast European Study)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been instrumental in the post-war reconstruction of Kosovo. Agents of NGOs have been particularly active in the sphere of women's rights in the twenty-year period following the war. The activity of NGOs has led to the creation of networks between local and international organizations and has fortified connections between urban and rural women involved in activist work. This research project seeks to analyze the causes that led to a rise in women's organizations after the war in Kosovo and the impact of the work of feminist-based organizations in Kosovar society through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and the examination of collections of local NGO records.



Training session of Initiative for Agricultural Development in Kosovo for rural women in the village of Podujeve, teaching women how to make strawberry jam. June 2019.

Interviews took place with urban and rural women from Pristina, Gjakova, Peja and Prizren. The study showed a combination of factors for local women pursuing NGO-based work, which included responses to the international community's support of civil society projects aimed at women's welfare, urban women's activism in rural areas, business entrepreneurial opportunities in agribusiness and handcraft work, and

engagement through community outreach, particularly in areas that experienced immense violence during the war.

The research project provided evidence for strong ties of solidarity between urban and rural women, continued lobbying for women's rights by women's NGOs following the war, and women appealing to their local communities, donors, and the state in support of their projects. In this sense, women's NGO activities contributed toward state-building after the war, since women were making demands on the state for support of their organizations, participating in local government meetings, and lobbying for greater rights to local and central government. Apart from providing training sessions on topics ranging from handling stress to providing skills for jobs, activists were concerned with the process of *vetedijesim* in women, a local term referring to the process of making women self-aware of their rights in society through conscious action. NGO activity remains stable despite a significantly reduced level of funding opportunities compared to what was available immediately following the war. The NGO work of local women has resulted in a societal shift in the capabilities of women, codified rights for women in state law, increased productivity in agriculture for rural women, and provided opportunities for long-term collaboration with the international community in post-war society.



One of the largest fairs in Pristina housing local handcraft, agricultural goods, and other types of cultural products produced by women from various local organizations in the country. August 2019.

AISEES Announcements

AISEES 2019 Travel Grant Program

AISEES is pleased to announce the successful completion of the first competition for travel grants, awarded to scholars and students at universities in southeastern Europe to facilitate their participation in academic conferences in the United States.

The first travel grant competition was concluded in August 2019. Among a strong pool of applicants, three grantees were chosen. They are:

- **Dr. Kamen Boyadziev**, National Archaeological Institute with Museum (Sofia, Bulgaria).
- **Dr. Jovana Durović**, Independent Scholar (Belgrade, Serbia).
- **Dr. Zala Pavšič**, Media Studies, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia).

Please check the AISEES web site for the announcement of the next travel grant competition in summer 2020.

AISEES 2020-21 Fellowship

AISEES offers *3 fellowships for US graduate students and early postdoctoral scholars in the United States* to support research in Southeast Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia). The 2020-21 AISEES Fellows will be awarded up to \$3000 each. Projects in all fields in the social sciences, humanities and related disciplines are eligible. The deadline is April 1, 2020. Please see our website for details: <https://aisees.org/graduate-postdoctoral-fellowships/>

AISEES Summer 2020 Scholarship with the Balkan Heritage Foundation

AISEES is pleased to announce that we will partner with the Balkan Heritage Foundation, <https://balkanheritage.org/>, to offer a scholarship of 1800 euros to enable a student based at an American university to participate in a program sponsored by the Foundation. The scholarship can be applied to any of the BHF programs of excavation or conservation in southeastern Europe. Details will be announced soon on the Balkan Heritage Foundation web site, <https://www.bhfieldschool.org/>.

AISEES Call for Membership

As a young organization, AISEES is actively developing its basis of members, both individual and institutional. Members help AISEES to create opportunities for advanced research and cultural studies. Our fellowship and grant programs develop new knowledge and foster the next generation of scholars and teachers. The support of members also enables the staff to develop innovative programs that spotlight the rich histories and cultural heritage of the region. For information on becoming a member of AISEES, please contact Dr. Eric De Sena at aiseesorg@gmail.com or visit our membership webpage: <https://aisees.org/membership/>

Benefits of Membership

- Opportunity to apply for AISEES Fellowships and Grants
- Networking opportunities with hundreds of scholars
- Advice on travel and professional contacts
- Announcements of relevant conferences and public events

Membership categories:

- **Institutional Members** Annual fee \$250.00
- **Individual Members** Regular members | Annual fee \$50.00 or Student members* | Annual fee \$25.00

*Proof of student status required