

“FOUNDATIONS OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ARMENIA”: PEDAGOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FEATURES OF A UNIVERSITY COURSE

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Abstract

This article presents the structure, content, and pedagogical-methodological features of the university course *Foundations of Archaeology and the Archaeology of Armenia*, taught within the *History* educational program at the Faculty of Humanities, YSU Ijevan Branch. The course aims to facilitate students' development of a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the multilayered historical past through the integration of written (historical) sources with archaeological data. The article emphasises the role of archaeology as a foundational historical discipline, the importance of applying interdisciplinary and contemporary teaching methods, and the need to cultivate analytical and critical thinking skills in future historians.

Keywords: *Armenian archaeology, University Course, Critical Thinking, Interdisciplinary Approach, Teaching Methods.*

Introduction

Archaeology is a historical discipline that investigates the processes of formation and development of human civilizations. Several fundamental issues of the historical past—such as human origins, the transitions to agriculture and urban lifestyles, the transmission of knowledge and skills, and the formation and development of beliefs and religions—continue to be central subjects of inquiry in historiography and, more broadly, the social sciences. From this perspective, the role of archaeology is especially crucial, as it is impossible to find—or at least approach—the answers to these fundamental questions without studying the structures, artifacts, and other preserved remains of ancient societies. Archaeology enables a more profound understanding of the present and the developmental

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trends of contemporary civilization by drawing upon the historical experience and lessons of the past.

The university course *Foundations of Archaeology and the Archaeology of Armenia*, taught within the *History* educational program at the Faculty of Humanities of YSU Ijevan Branch, is designed to support students in developing a rigorous and in-depth understanding and analysis of the multilayered past through the systematic integration of written (historical) sources with archaeological data.

Significance and Contemporary Relevance of the Course

In the system of contemporary historical education, archaeology functions as a fundamental discipline that enables the reconstruction of the prehistoric and historical past on the basis of material culture evidence, thereby supplementing—and often reinterpreting—the information conveyed by written sources.¹ The study of the main stages in the development of human societies—human origins, the formation of a productive economy, and the emergence of settlements—becomes possible precisely through the comprehensive analysis of archaeological data.²

In this context, the university course '*Foundations of Archaeology and the Archaeology of Armenia*' plays an important role in the professional formation of future historians. The relevance of the course is also determined by the exceptional position of the territory of Armenia in the processes of the formation of the world's earliest civilizations, the material heritage of which cannot be fully understood without the application of archaeological methods.³

The course syllabus: structure and teaching methods

The course program is structured based on a progressive complexity approach. In the initial phase, students are introduced to the subject, objectives, key concepts, and methods of archaeological study, including stratigraphy, classification of archaeological sources, typology, and dating techniques.⁴ Subsequently, students study related disciplines of archaeology—such as paleoanthropology, archaeobotany, and geology—which are considered integral components of interdisciplinary research in contemporary international archaeology.⁵ After this series of preparatory lectures, students begin studying the history of archaeology and examining the results of significant excavations and archaeological discoveries carried out worldwide and in Armenia during the 20th and 21st centuries.⁶

The teaching process combines lectures, thematic discussions, the use of visual materials (maps, photographs of monuments and artifacts, videos), as well as

¹ Renfrew & Bahn, 2016.

² Trigger, 2006.

³ Smith, 2005; Avetisyan, Bobokhyan, 2021.

⁴ Drennan, 2009; Khnkikyan, 2009.

⁵ Reitz & Shackley, 2012; Simonyan, 2024.

⁶ Grant, Gorin & Fleming, 2001; Khnkikyan, 2009.

analyses of the results of renowned international and Armenian archaeological projects. The approaches presented are generally aligned with the “student-centered” and “problem-based learning” models widely implemented in European and American universities.⁷

Within the framework of the course, visits are also organized to archaeological museums in the Tavush region (such as the “Ijevan History and Ethnography Museum”, the “Ijevan Wine and Cognac Factory Museum”, etc.). In the contemporary world, this is known in archaeological pedagogy as the “experiential learning” method, which supports theoretical knowledge, while the museum is regarded as an important educational environment for teaching archaeology. The aim of this method is to provide students with visual and hands-on experience through direct engagement with material culture specimens and archaeological primary sources (finds).⁸

The instructional and methodological approaches applied in the course

The course is grounded in an interdisciplinary and comparative methodological framework. Archaeological material is examined within the context of historical, socio-economic, and cultural processes, avoiding an isolated and purely descriptive approach.⁹ Particular attention is paid to the integration of archaeological data with written and epigraphic sources, which constitutes a key methodological requirement in contemporary archaeological research.¹⁰

The development of critical thinking is emphasized throughout the course. Students are encouraged to evaluate the potential and limitations of various dating methods, the relative nature of scientific hypotheses, and the diversity of interpretations. This approach aligns, to a certain extent, with internationally recognized directions in *reflexive and interpretative archaeology*. According to these approaches, the archaeologist’s possible “scientific presuppositions” are also taken into account in the interpretation of results, and the findings are provided with in-depth socio-cultural analyses.¹¹

Within the course framework, a combined methodological approach is employed, encompassing a comparative analysis of archaeological field data, historiographical sources, and material culture remains. In particular, the study of the excavation results from the Erebuni and Teishebaini sites provides an opportunity to examine the principal characteristics of urban organization and military culture in the Kingdom of Urartu.¹²

From a methodological perspective, particular importance is attached to the contextual analysis of archaeological material from the Hellenistic capital of

⁷ Harutyunyan, 1992; Boud & Feletti, 1997; Grant, Gorin, & Fleming, 2001; Hmelo-Silver, 2004.

⁸ Al-Jahwari et al., 2019.

⁹ Hodder, 2012.

¹⁰ Moreland, 2001.

¹¹ Shanks & Tilley, 1992; Thomas, 2004.

¹² Avetisyan & Avetisyan, 2006; Avetisyan & Bobokhyan, 2010.

Artashat (Artaxata), the medieval capitals of Dvin and Ani, and a number of other notable sites. This approach allows for an assessment of the role of the territory of Armenia within the regional trade and cultural networks established during the Classical and Medieval periods.¹³

The course also employs a regional study approach focused on the Tavush region, within which the archaeological monuments—including fortresses, cemeteries, monasteries, and churches—are examined from the perspective of landscape archaeology and the preservation of material cultural heritage. This approach contributes to the development of students' analytical thinking and fosters a conscious attitude toward the historical and cultural heritage of their community.¹⁴

The main thematic directions of the course

The thematic scope of the course encompasses the main phases of archaeology, from the Paleolithic period to the Late Middle Ages. Through individual topics, the course presents the prehistoric settlements of Armenia, classical and medieval cities, cemeteries, and monuments of both secular and religious architecture. This material is examined within the context of regional and global processes, drawing parallels with archaeological data from other areas of the Near East.¹⁵

During the course, a number of key topics and well-known monuments are discussed in detail, highlighting the rich material culture of Armenia. Among the lectures, particular interest is generated by the discussion of theories of human origins, which addresses African and Near Eastern perspectives, as well as the significance of hominid findings in the Armenian Highlands.¹⁶ In the section on the age of dinosaurs, the emphasis is placed on geological chronology and the dinosaur tracks discovered in Armenia, introducing students to the fundamentals of palaeontology.¹⁷

The course places significant emphasis on the analysis of well-known archaeological findings. For example, the world's oldest shoe, discovered in the Areni-1 cave (dating to the mid-4th millennium BCE), serves as an excellent case study of how organic materials can be preserved and provide information on the lifestyles, technologies, and climatic conditions of prehistoric societies.¹⁸

The results of systematic excavations at the palace complex of Prince Chesar Orbelyan, Amberd, Baghaberd, Lori Fortress, and other fortresses are discussed as valuable sources on the feudal structures of medieval Armenia, political centralization, and defensive architecture.¹⁹ These and many other examples enable

¹³ Aghasyan et al., 2009; Avetisyan & Bobokhyan, 2021.

¹⁴ Ellaryan, 1980.

¹⁵ Yesayan, 1992; Kohl, 2007; Avetisyan & Avetisyan, 2006; Avetisyan & Bobokhyan, 2021.

¹⁶ Adler et al., 2014; Beyin, 2015.

¹⁷ Averianov & Atabekyan, 2005.

¹⁸ Pinhasi et al., 2010.

¹⁹ Harutyunyan, 1978; Gharibyan, 2009; Grigoryan et al. 1, 2025; Grigoryan et al. 2, 2025.

students to directly connect theoretical methodologies with the local material heritage.

Learning Outcomes and Emerging Competencies

By the end of the course, students acquire a broad set of knowledge, skills, and competencies in line with the standards of contemporary higher education. Upon completion of the course, students:

- develop a structured understanding of archaeological methods and core concepts in the field of archaeology,
- are able to distinguish and classify different types of archaeological sources,
- develop skills in the comparative analysis of archaeological and written sources,
- are able to interpret archaeological material within its historical and cultural context,
- cultivate critical thinking and the capacity to assess scientific hypotheses,
- are aware of the role and significance of Armenia's historical and cultural heritage within global civilizational processes.

These competencies correspond to the learning outcomes defined in international educational programs within the disciplines of history and archaeology (learning outcomes).²⁰

Conclusion

The university course “*Fundamentals of Archaeology and Armenian Archaeology*” is designed to provide undergraduate students in history (bachelor's level) with comprehensive scientific training. Analysis of the course structure and content demonstrates that it successfully combines the universal theoretical principles of archaeology with the study of Armenia's archaeological heritage. The interdisciplinary approach and the application of various methods in the learning process contribute to the development of students' independent thinking, research skills, and critical analytical abilities.

One of the key achievements of the course is the transformation of students' historical awareness from a one-dimensional interpretation based exclusively on written sources toward a multi-layered understanding of the past, enriched by evidence derived from material culture. The study of archaeological excavation results from across the territory of Armenia—including Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Chalcolithic sites; Bronze and Iron Age settlements and cemeteries; Urartian fortress-settlements; Classical-period habitations and burial grounds; as well as medieval fortresses and secular and religious monumental architecture—enables students to situate local history within a global civilizational framework and to evaluate its contribution to the shared history of humankind.

²⁰ Fry et al., 2009.

Critical-thinking-oriented tasks promote not only effective knowledge acquisition but also the formation of professional independence, a core objective of contemporary higher education. Familiarity with the principles of reflexive and interpretive archaeology equips students with the ability to critically engage with academic literature, assess the advantages and limitations of various methodological frameworks, and develop pluralistic interpretations of historical phenomena.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.