Sanisera Archaeology Institute for International Field Schools

Course 053: Bioarchaeological Fieldwork in the Underground Funerary Crypt of San Mateo Church

Course Syllabus · 2027 season

Course ID	SAI 053 · Bioarchaeology in the Crypt of San Mateo, Jerez
Country / Location	Spain · Church of San Mateo, Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz), Andalusia
Dates	May to October 2027 (13 sessions of 12 days)
Duration	12 days per session
Instructional hours	80 hours (10 instructional days x 8 h)
Recommended credit equivalence	4 semester credits (reference scale: about 20 instructional hours per semester credit; 80 h = 4, 100 h = 5, 120 h = 6). Credit is awarded by the student's home institution; see section 12.
Level / Prerequisites	Introductory. Open to students with or without previous experience.
Language of instruction	English
Maximum enrolment	8 students per session
Tuition	from USD 2,000 per session (see section 14)
Instructors	Gonzalo Castro Moreno (Course Director); Biannet Perez Moreira (Instructor in biological anthropology)
Contact	info@archaeology.institute · www.archaeology.institute · Ciutadella de Menorca, Balearic Islands, Spain

1. Program description

The church of San Mateo, founded in the Middle Ages and largely Gothic (14th-15th centuries) with Renaissance and Baroque additions, is one of the most important churches of Jerez de la Frontera. Beneath it lies an underground funerary crypt with rows of brick burial niches of the 16th to 18th centuries, excavated for the first time by this project.

The course is an introduction to mortuary archaeology and bioarchaeology in a post-medieval Christian context. Students excavate the niches, recover and record human remains and grave goods, and work in the laboratory on the cleaning, inventory and basic analysis of the skeletons, while lectures explain burial practice in the parish churches of southern Spain in the early modern period.

2. Course objectives

- To train students in the excavation of burials in an architectural funerary space (crypt niches).
- To teach the recording of funerary structures and skeletons in context.
- To introduce the basic methods of human osteology in the laboratory.
- To explain Christian burial practice in Spain between the 16th and 18th centuries.
- To develop professional and ethical habits in the handling of human remains.

3. Learning outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Detect, define and excavate a burial niche following bioarchaeological protocol.
- Exhume and record a skeleton and its grave goods (context sheets, scale drawings, photography).
- Clean, inventory and catalogue human bones; estimate age, sex and stature with basic methods.
- Collect samples for radiocarbon dating.
- Date and interpret the burials from the stratigraphy and the associated material.

- Explain the funerary customs of early modern Andalusia.
- Present a case study orally.

4. Course format and instructional hours

Eight hours a day: seven hours in the morning, divided between excavation in the crypt (most of the morning), laboratory work on the skeletal remains and lectures on methodology, osteology and history, and a one-hour guided session in the afternoon, with an instructor, devoted to the field journal, the recording sheets and the documentation of the day's work. Over the 12-day session there are 10 instructional days and 2 rest days: 80 instructional hours.

Total instructional hours: 80 hours. This figure appears on the Certificate of Completion and on the Student Evaluation Report.

5. Course schedule

Indicative daily schedule; the order of activities may change according to weather, site conditions and research needs.

Day	Activities
Day 1	Arrival in Jerez, orientation, safety briefing and Code of Conduct; visit to San Mateo and the crypt. Lecture 1: burial practice in early modern Spain.
Days 2-5	Excavation of burial niches: detection, definition, exhumation in anatomical order, recording sheets and scale drawings; laboratory: cleaning and inventory. Lectures 2-3: skeletal anatomy; stratigraphy and dating. Afternoon (1 h, guided by an instructor): field journal, recording sheets and documentation of the day's work.
Days 6-7	Rest days.
Days 8-11	Excavation and recording; C14 sampling; laboratory: age, sex and stature estimation, palaeopathology; preparation of presentations. Lecture 4: palaeopathology; Lecture 5: the archaeology of churches and crypts. Afternoon (1 h, guided by an instructor): field journal, recording sheets and documentation of the day's work.
Day 12	Final presentations (morning), assessment and certificates. Departure.

6. Assessment and grading

Students complete three assignments during the course, in addition to daily supervised work: a daily field journal, the course's recording sheets and a final presentation. The final grade is calculated as follows:

Component	Weight	Description
Field / laboratory participation and professional conduct	40 %	Daily assessment by the instructors of engagement, technique, care of the record and of the finds, teamwork and compliance with the Code of Conduct.
Daily field journal	20 %	A written entry for every instructional day describing the work carried out, the methods applied, the contexts or materials handled and the student's own observations. Reviewed weekly.
Recording sheets	20 %	Burial and skeleton recording sheets (niche/context sheet, skeleton inventory, plan at 1:10). Assessed for accuracy, completeness, terminology and legibility.
Final presentation	20 %	A 10-minute PowerPoint presentation, delivered on the last instructional day, on a burial excavated by the student, a skeletal case from the laboratory, or an aspect of early modern funerary practice, followed by questions.

Grading scale

Letter grade	Percentage
A	93-100

Letter grade	Percentage
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	below 60

Grades are recorded as a percentage and as a letter grade on the US scale above. Students who request it receive a Student Evaluation Report signed by the Course Director, with the breakdown of the grade, the attendance record and the instructional hours completed, for submission to their home institution. The Institute does not itself award academic credit.

7. Attendance policy

Attendance at all scheduled instructional activities is compulsory. A minimum attendance of 85 % of the instructional hours is required to pass the course and to receive the Certificate of Completion. Absences for documented illness or injury are excused but still count towards the 85 % threshold; unexcused absences lower the participation grade. Students who leave the course early receive a certificate stating only the hours actually completed.

8. Prerequisites and who should apply

None. Minimum age 18.

9. Instructors

Gonzalo Castro Moreno — Course Director. PhD in History (University of Cádiz, 2016), thesis on funerary archaeology and palaeopathology of the religious population of Jerez; Degree in History (University of Seville) and Master's in Archaeology and Heritage (Cádiz). Has directed more than 50 excavations in the province of Cádiz; associate researcher at FAPAB (Sicily); member of the Spanish Association of Palaeopathology.

Biannet Perez Moreira — Instructor in biological anthropology. BA in Anthropology (William Paterson University, 2020); graduate student in Biological Anthropology (Binghamton University, SUNY) with teaching experience in biological anthropology and archaeology laboratories.

10. Equipment and what to bring

- Work clothes and closed boots or sturdy shoes; hat, sunscreen and a refillable water bottle.
- Work gloves and a 4-inch pointing trowel (WHS or Marshalltown type) are recommended.
- Notebook for the field journal, pencils, eraser, ruler.
- Own laptop (compulsory) for the daily journal, recording sheets, exercises and final presentation; tablets and phones are not accepted.
- European Health Insurance Card (EU students) or private travel insurance; passport valid for the whole stay.

11. Travel and meeting point

Fly to Jerez (XRY) or Seville (SVQ); train and bus connections to Jerez. Students travel on their own to the student residence in Jerez; instructions are sent after registration. Meeting point: the residence, Day 1 at 6 p.m.

Students arriving from outside the Schengen area should check whether they need a visa; the Institute issues the letter of invitation required for the application. US, Canadian, UK and Australian citizens do not need a visa for stays of up to 90 days in Spain; they will need the EU ETIAS travel authorisation once it comes into force (no start date has been fixed yet; the Institute will inform admitted students). If a Schengen visa is refused, everything paid is refunded in full on presentation of the official refusal document.

12. Academic credit and transcript

The Sanisera Archaeology Institute is an independent, non-profit institution and does not award academic credit directly. Students who wish to receive credit for this course should obtain pre-approval from their department or study-abroad office before the course begins, using this syllabus. On completion, the Institute issues a Certificate of Completion stating the course, dates, instructional hours and final grade, and, on request, a detailed Student Evaluation Report. Students from universities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia have regularly obtained credit for Sanisera courses in this way: students from more than 40 universities have done so (see the list on the Institute's website). The Institute is currently working towards a School of Record agreement with a US accredited institution for the issue of official transcripts.

13. Code of conduct and safety

All students and staff are bound by the Institute's Code of Conduct and Anti-Harassment Policy, available on the website, which applies at the site, in the laboratory, in the accommodation and during free time. A safety briefing is given on the first day; students may decline any activity they consider unsafe. Serious breaches of the Code may lead to removal from the course without refund. Accident insurance at the site is included; students are responsible for their own health and travel insurance.

14. Dates, tuition and what is included

Session	Dates 2027	Tuition (USD)
1	3-14 May	$ 2,000
2	17-28 May	$ 2,000
3	31 May - 11 June	$ 2,000
4	14-25 June	$ 2,300
5	28 June - 9 July	$ 2,500
6	12-23 July	$ 2,500
7	26 July - 6 August	$ 2,500
8	9-20 August	$ 2,500
9	23 August - 3 September	$ 2,500
10	6-17 September	$ 2,500
11	20 September - 1 October	$ 2,400
12	4-15 October	$ 2,100
13	18-29 October	$ 2,100

Tuition includes

- Course tuition.
- Accident insurance at the church of San Mateo.

- Accommodation in a three-bedroom apartment in the center of Jerez (two students of the same sex per room), with kitchen, washing machine and wifi.
- Daily access to the church and to the laboratory.
- Certificate of completion and, on request, the Student Evaluation Report.
- Letter of invitation for the Schengen visa, if required.

Not included

- Airfare to/from Jerez.
- Meals (budget approx. EUR 20 per day).
- Entry tickets to museums and historical buildings.

Payment. A deposit of USD 450, which is part of the tuition and is deducted from the total, reserves the place and is due within five days of admission; the balance is due 60 days before the session begins. Payment plans are available on request. The Institute does not offer scholarships or discounts.

Refund policy. If the student cancels, only the USD 450 deposit is refunded, and only if the refund is requested within 20 days of paying it; the balance is not refundable, but everything paid can be converted into credit for any course in the current year or the following season. Everything paid is refunded in full if the Institute cancels the session or if the student's Schengen visa is refused (official refusal document required). Places are not transferable. Full text: Terms and Conditions of Payment on the website.

15. Recommended readings

Recommended, not required. Readings are available in the Institute's library during the course.

- White, T. D. & Folkens, P. A. (2005). The Human Bone Manual. Amsterdam: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Buikstra, J. E. & Ubelaker, D. H. (eds.) (1994). Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains. Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey.
- Roberts, C. A. (2018). Human Remains in Archaeology: A Handbook. 2nd ed. York: Council for British Archaeology.
- Mytum, H. (2004). Mortuary Monuments and Burial Grounds of the Historic Period. New York: Kluwer/Plenum.
- Harris, E. C. (1989). Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy. 2nd ed. London: Academic Press.

Syllabus issued by the Sanisera Archaeology Institute for International Field Schools, October 2026, for the 2027 season (version of 1 November 2026). Subject to minor changes; the current version is published at www.archaeology.institute.