Sanisera Archaeology Institute for International Field Schools

Course 064: Dig the Spanish Civil War and the Medieval Town of Belchite

Course Syllabus · 2027 season

Course ID	SAI 064 · Dig the Spanish Civil War and Medieval Belchite
Country / Location	Spain · Old town of Belchite (Zaragoza), Aragon
Dates	July to August 2027 (3 sessions of 14 days)
Duration	14 days per session
Instructional hours	85 hours (10 instructional days x 8.5 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 and Spanish
Maximum enrolment	15 students per session
Tuition	from USD 1,650 per session (see section 14)
Instructors	Alfonso Fanjul Peraza (Project Director); Fernando Contreras Rodrigo (Course Director)
Contact	info@archaeology.institute · www.archaeology.institute · Ciutadella de Menorca, Balearic Islands, Spain

1. Program description

Belchite, destroyed in the battle of August-September 1937 and never rebuilt, is one of the best-known scenes of the Spanish Civil War. Beneath its ruins the layout of the medieval town is preserved; the excavations begun in 2021 showed that Belchite has been inhabited since Roman times and in 2024 revealed the medieval synagogue of the Jewish quarter, one of the best preserved in Spain.

In 2027 the Sanisera Archaeology Institute takes part as a partner in the research project of the Spanish Association of Military Archaeology, directed by Dr. Alfonso Fanjul Peraza. Students join the excavation of the synagogue and the Jewish quarter, open test pits in the medieval quarters, and map the materials of the 1937 battle across the old town, combining conflict archaeology and medieval archaeology on one site.

2. Course objectives

- To train students in stratigraphic excavation on a medieval and modern urban site.
- To teach the recording of contexts and finds and the mapping of battlefield materials.
- To introduce conflict archaeology and the archaeology of medieval Jewish communities in Spain.
- To develop professional habits: field journal, teamwork, care of the record and finds.

3. Learning outcomes

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

- Excavate and record a stratigraphic unit (context sheets, Harris Matrix, plans).
- Locate, map and classify the materials of the 1937 battle (ammunition, shrapnel, military equipment).
- Recognise medieval and modern archaeological materials and classify them in the laboratory.
- Prepare finds inventories and apply relative dating.
- Explain the history of the Battle of Belchite, of the medieval town and its Jewish quarter.
- Present the results of fieldwork orally.

4. Course format and instructional hours

The excavation day starts at 7 a.m. to avoid the heat: five hours of excavation and recording in the morning and, after the lunch break, three and a half hours in the afternoon: two hours of laboratory work and seminars, and a guided session of one and a half hours, with an instructor, devoted to the field journal, the recording sheets and the documentation of the day's work (eight and a half hours). Each 14-day session includes 10 days of fieldwork (10 x 8.5 h = 85 instructional hours), an introductory day with a guided tour of the ruins, an excursion around Belchite and the battlefield, and a rest day.

Total instructional hours: 85 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 Belchite; guided tour of the ruins of the old town; talks on the history of the area, the work plan and the safety rules; Code of Conduct.
Days 2-6	Morning (5 h): excavation of the synagogue / Jewish quarter and test pits: techniques, stratigraphy, Harris Matrix, context sheets. Afternoon (3.5 h): laboratory work (cleaning and classification) and seminars on the Civil War and the Battle of Belchite (2 h), and a guided session (1.5 h) on the field journal, recording sheets and documentation of the day's work.
Day 7	Rest day.
Day 8	Excursion around Belchite and guided visit to the battlefield.
Days 9-13	Morning (5 h): excavation and recording; mapping of 1937 battle materials in the old town. Afternoon (3.5 h): laboratory work (inventories, relative dating) and seminars on medieval Belchite and its Jewish community (2 h), and a guided session (1.5 h) on the field journal, recording sheets, documentation and preparation of presentations.
Day 14	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 %	Stratigraphic context sheets (Harris system) and battlefield find-location sheets. Assessed for accuracy, completeness, terminology and legibility.
Final presentation	20 %	A 10-minute PowerPoint presentation, delivered on the last instructional day, on a context, structure or category of finds excavated by the student, or an aspect of the history of Belchite, followed by questions.

Grading scale

Letter grade	Percentage
A	93-100
A-	90-92

Letter grade	Percentage
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. Ability to work outdoors in a hot summer climate.

9. Instructors

Alfonso Fanjul Peraza — Project Director. PhD in Archaeology (Autonomous University of Madrid, 2016); Diploma of Advanced Studies in Prehistory (University of Salamanca, 2006); degree in History (University of Oviedo, 2001). President of the Spanish Association of Military Archaeology; director of the Belchite excavations since 2021 and of the Orígenes project of Oviedo City Council; affiliated to Kiel University; author of ten books.

Fernando Contreras Rodrigo — Course Director. Licenciatura in History, specialisation in Classical Archaeology (Autonomous University of Barcelona). Five-year degree officially recognised in Spain at Master's level (MECES 3). Director of the Sanisera Archaeology Institute; since 1993 he has directed research, conservation and heritage-management projects in Spain, Italy and the United Arab Emirates, and since 2015 annual excavation and restoration missions for the Government of Dubai. Author of more than thirty publications and reports.

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

Trains and buses from Madrid and Barcelona to Zaragoza; from Zaragoza central bus station, ten daily departures to Belchite (timetable provided). Meeting point: the accommodation in the new town of Belchite, 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	19 July - 1 August	$ 1,650
2	2-15 August	$ 1,650
3	16-29 August	$ 1,650

Tuition includes

- Course tuition.
- Accommodation in the new town of Belchite, ten minutes' walk from the excavation, with kitchen, washing machine and free access to the municipal swimming pool.
- Work materials.
- Lectures and seminars.
- Excursion around Belchite and guided visit to the battlefield.
- Certificate of completion and, on request, the Student Evaluation Report.
- Letter of invitation for the Schengen visa, if required.

Not included

- Travel to/from Belchite.

- Meals (budget approx. EUR 22 per day; kitchen available).
- Optional Spanish language classes (EUR 200).

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.

- Harris, E. C. (1989). Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy. 2nd ed. London: Academic Press.
- Beevor, A. (2006). The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Saunders, N. J. (ed.) (2012). Beyond the Dead Horizon: Studies in Modern Conflict Archaeology. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Schofield, J. (2005). Combat Archaeology: Material Culture and Modern Conflict. London: Duckworth.
- Ray, J. (2006). The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

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