



Bioarchaeological fieldwork of an underground funerary crypt of the San Mateo Church (Jerez, Cádiz, Spain)

1. General Information

The **Sanisera Archaeology Institute for International Field Schools** offers an annual international archaeology program. Since then it has organized courses for students who come from all over the world to study abroad and who are interested in **bioarchaeology, mortuary, anthropology and osteology**.

The **San Mateo Church** is one of the churches with the **greatest architectural and artistic interest in the city of Jerez** (Cádiz, Spain), founded during the medieval period, most of its building presents the typical Gothic architecture of the 14th - 15th centuries, with additions from the Renaissance and Baroque art.

The objective in this course of **bioarchaeological fieldwork** will be **to excavate** the burial niches dating from the seventeenth century of the **underground funerary crypt** that belongs to the San Mateo Church. An old plan of the church basement confirms that the church basement houses **a large number of burial tombs**. This will be the first time this funerary crypt has been excavated.

In the period between the 16th - 18th centuries, the population that lived in the city of Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz, Spain), was administered by neighborhoods, to which parish churches were assigned, which organized both the usual worship, like the system of burial of the faithful in cemeteries or underground crypts.

From the 16th century, the vast majority of Christian churches used their subsoils to bury the dead in individual tombs and in crypts to create sepulchral chapels that will house members of the same family or of the same brotherhood or community.

The crypts were very particular spaces, located in the underground area of Christian churches. To access them, one descended by stairs that were usually sealed by large slabs that blocked their entrance. The dimensions of the burial space in the crypts were very small and limited. For this reason, superimposed rooms were built in brick and mortar in the form of niches attached to the walls of the crypt vertically, arranged in rows to accommodate the largest possible number of deceased. The size of the niche was conditioned by the body dimensions of a single deceased.

The fieldwork focuses on funerary structures, specifically inhumation graves. Students will also participate in lectures on skeletal anatomy and pathologies, classes and exercises related to the course material.

2. What you will learn

2.1. In the Fieldwork:

- How to dig and which archaeological techniques are used.
- Use and handling of the tools that are used during the excavation process.
- Detecting graves to excavate in the funerary crypt.
- Exhume the skeletal remains and record any finds.
- Scale drawings and elevations of tombs/individuals within the tombs.
- Record funerary structures and anthropological remains in context sheets.
- Basic principles of stratigraphy.
- Basic procedures for collecting C14 samples.

2.2. In the Laboratory

- Prepare anthropological material in the laboratory.
- Cleaning, inventory and cataloging of recovered human bones during the excavation process.
- Basics of the methods used in human osteological analysis, including skeletal anatomy, palaeodemography and palaeopathology.
- Learning how to identify age, sex and height of buried individuals.
- Relative dating based on the classification of archaeological artifacts discovered in stratigraphic sequence.
- Interpret what went on during the burial process of these individuals.

2.2. Theory

- Introduction to Physical Anthropology and Bioarchaeology
- Skeletal Anatomy –*Terminology*:- generalities, dental structure, skull and other bones.
- History, archaeology, economy and culture of the modern Spanish culture (the 16th - 18th centuries).
- The background of Christian funerary rituals.

3. Directed at

The study of burial practice using an **architectural space such as the crypt**, under a church, with burial forms in the form of niches, allows the archaeologist, and the student of this course, to know **ancient customs and mortuary practices of the Christian temples from southern Spain between the 16th and 18th centuries.**

If you are interested in studying anthropology or are already doing so in your school and would like to gain experience as a fieldwork volunteer excavating cemeteries and graves, this may be the best choice for you. This program accommodates participants with or without previous experience.

In the San Mateo Church, without much physical exertion, and due to the stratigraphic conditions, you easily find and excavate tombs and their contents. **You will excavate tombs and learn anthropological techniques used to recover human remains and grave goods.** In the biological anthropology laboratory, you will learn how to treat and classify bones and grave goods recovered from the necropolis.

This course is designed primarily for students interested in excavating human remains with fieldwork focusing on a mortuary cemetery. Time dedicated to laboratory work is less than excavation time, but students will learn the basics of anatomy.

After completing this program, the experience gained will enable you to decide if biological anthropology is the area of study best for you and if you would like to continue on with anthropology in your professional future.

Because this course is specifically centered on biological anthropological concepts, this course is limited to 8 participants in order to best assimilate and apply anthropological concepts.

Previous knowledge or experience in archaeology or computer systems is not required.

4. Field School life & language

The fieldwork runs 7 hours a day with time dedicated to both excavations, the study of human osteology by the analysis of the skeletal remains and laboratory work.

For every seven course days there are two days off.

Participants will learn and apply excavation techniques used in biological anthropology during fieldwork. In the laboratory, participants will follow guidelines set by an anthropologist and other specialists for the classification, study, and conservation of skeletal remains and other related material found.

Participants will also be given lectures on methodology, archaeology, human osteology and classification of archaeological materials.

The course is taught in English.

5. Certificates

At the end of the Field Program, students will receive a certificate of participation stating the hours and activities of the course.

Participants that perform exceedingly well in the course may receive a letter of recommendation from our organization upon request.

6. Sessions & Cost

Sessions	Dates	Cost
Session #8	2026 August 10 – August 21	\$ 1850
Session #9	2026 August 24 – September 04	\$ 1850
Session #10	2026 September 07 – September 18	\$ 1850
Session #11	2026 September 21– October 02	\$ 1850
Session #12	2026 October 05 – October 16	\$ 1850
Session #13	2026 October 19 – October 30	\$ 1800
Session #1	2027 May 03 – May 14	\$ 2000
Session #2	2027 May 17 – May 28	\$ 2000
Session #3	2027 May 31 – June 11	\$ 2000
Session #4	2027 June 14 – June 25	\$ 2300
Session #5	2027 June 28 – July 09	\$ 2500
Session #6	2027 July 12– July 23	\$ 2500
Session #7	2027 July 26 – August 06	\$ 2500
Session #8	2027 August 09 – August 20	\$ 2500
Session #9	2027 August 23 – September 03	\$ 2500
Session #10	2027 September 06 – September 17	\$ 2500
Session #11	2027 September 20– October 01	\$ 2400
Session #12	2027 October 04 – October 15	\$ 2100
Session #13	2027 October 18 – October 29	\$ 2100

7. Course fee

- Course tuition.
- Accident insurance at the San Mateo Church (Jerez, Cádiz)
- Certificate of participation.
- Accommodation in the Student Residency (Jerez, Cádiz, Spain).
- Free daily access to the San Mateo Church. Place where the laboratory practices will be done.
- [In case of needing to process Schengen Visa](#) the mandatory letter of invitation will be written so you can travel.

Airfare not included from the student home to/from Spain.

Meals are not included, although we will recommend some cafés and restaurants that do not exceed the average of 23 € /day in meals.

Entry tickets to museums and historical buildings are not included either.

*** If you sign up for two sessions in a row (32 days) that take place in Menorca, the days between sessions (3 or 4 days) you will have the accommodation for free.**

8. Spaces available

The course is limited to 8 participants per session. Reservations are only effective when payment of the registration fee is received. If for any reason the course is cancelled, payment is returned according to the field school refund policy.

9. Information and Reservations

For more information, contact:

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Web page: www.archaeology.institute