ROMAN FUNERARY & CREMATION ARCHAEOLOGY: THE NECROPOLIS OF VIA OSTIENSE, ROME (ITALY)

Course ID: HIS 489
August 4-31, 2024

Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)

School of Record: Culver Stockton College

DIRECTOR:
Dr. Llorenç Alapont Martin, Prof. Physical and Forensic Anthropology, Universidad Europea Valencia (llor.alapont@gmail.com)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Necropolis of Via Ostiense was initially excavated in 1919. Archaeologists exposed 18 complete vaults (columbaria) with over 912 well preserved urns, containing cremated remains of Roman era individuals. The excavators decided not to excavate but leave the urns untouched and in situ, resulting in slow but progressive deterioration of the human remains and artifacts within them. Beginning in 2017, our team began an extensive and detailed study of these unique archaeological remains, micro-excavating each urn to better understand Roman burial practices, technology and cultural preferences. The 2024 will be our eighth season at the site and thus far, we were able to complete the study of 70 individual urns.

The urns at Via Ostiense represent a unique opportunity to study Roman funerary practices. This is the largest concentration of Roman cremated human remains in a single location and all within original context. This wealth of information allows for excellent comparative research, studying changes in cremation technology (temperature and type of fuel used), cultural preferences and choices (type of urns, objects found within them, number of individuals collected together in a single urn) and biological elements (examining pathologies, diseases and using aDNA to study population variability). Although human remains at Via Ostiense were cremated, many long bones, teeth, pelvis
& vertebra segments – some 10cm long – are still well-preserved and presented in the urns. This allow us to study a whole range of bioarchaeological elements, including pathologies, diseases, gender and age.

The micro excavation of each urn is a careful and detailed process. Students typically excavate a single urn in the season as this is a long and meticulous study of all human and cultural elements deposited in each urn. Students should expect to use both traditional micro-extraction techniques and the use of a range of analytical instrumentation, including photogrammetry and portable energy dispersive X-ray fluorescence spectrometer (pXRF).

The relationships to and study of human remains in Europe differ widely from those practice in North America. This is the result of different archaeological histories, traditions, and cultural norms. Archaeology in North American is almost exclusively part of anthropology and under the Social Sciences, emerging from the historical & intellectual tradition for the study of the “other”. In Europe, archaeology is a standalone discipline, usually within the Humanities, studying the past of the “collective ancestors”. These differences will be discussed broadly during the program, exploring the origin and current manifestation of cultural preferences and its relationships to death in each region. While we plan to have lively discussions, our goal is to present students with the different traditions and their reasoning, not to suggest one is better than the other.

This program and its strong emphasis on the careful analytical study of cremated remains is relevant to students who wish to study Roman history, bioarchaeology and physical anthropology. The program will also serve well students who are interested in forensic studies of human remains and students interested in pursuing medical careers.

We will be excavating at an ancient burial ground. This means that respect to the dead will be front and center, and certain behavior will be observed while at the site and/or at work. The individuals we are studying may be long gone, but we still owe them a debt of reverence for the opportunity to study their remains so that we may better understand, appreciate, and celebrate their lives.

The Via Ostiense project is a collaboration between the Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali of Rome and the Universidad Europea Valencia (Spain).

**IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER**

The Center for Field Sciences was established to support field training in a range of sciences at sites across the world. Traveling and conducting field work involves risk. Students interested in participating in any CFS program must weigh the potential risk against the value of education provided for the program sites of their choosing.

Risk is inherent in everything we do and the CFS takes risk seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the CFS continually monitor conditions at the program site, its academic quality and ability to conduct as safe of an experience as possible.

The CFS does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. Students are encouraged to explore such insurance policies on their own. Post Covid 19, most basic policies do not cover trip cancelation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that cover such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. [Insuremytrip.com](http://Insuremytrip.com), [Squaremouth.com](http://Squaremouth.com) or [Travelguard.com](http://Travelguard.com) are possible websites where students may explore different insurance policies.

You should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those you experience in your home, dorms or college town. You will be exposed to the elements, live in rustic accommodation, and expect to engage in physical activity daily.
COURSE OBJECTIVES

Our program presents a unique opportunity to learn how to properly excavate and document cremated burials from an archaeological site and how to reconstruct biological profiles from fragmented and distorted bone elements. Participants will learn about rituals and the process of burning and cremating the human body, as well as excavation methods, documentation and analysis of the findings.

Our program is designed to provide for both students and professionals the knowledge and experience required to study cremation remains and burials. Experience from this program may benefit individuals interested in forensic anthropology, forensic archaeology and bioarchaeology.

While some experience working with human remains (especially cremated remains) will be helpful, beginners are welcome. The first three days of the program will focus on training for work at the site. Each student will be trained in micro-excavation techniques and bio-anthropological studies.

This program provides practical field and lab training and the theoretical structure for find’s interpretation. Participants will be provided with a dossier with information on methods, practice and theory of the archaeology of death, physical anthropology and funerary archaeology.

We will hold a seminar every Friday afternoon. The role of this seminar is to discuss work done during the week, methods, findings, questions and discussion of research. Saturdays are dedicated for excursions to important archaeological and cultural sites in the area.

LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware that many students may not seek academic careers but will pursue employment in the private sector. To that end, we are following the Twin Cairns Skills Log Matrix™ (https://twincairns.com/skill-set-matrix/) and will provide training for the following skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Skill Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artifact Curation</td>
<td>Ability to safely register, document and store a wide range of artifact types in curation facilities following state and federal laws</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artifact Documentation</td>
<td>Ability to measure, record, photographed and classify various artifact types in the lab/post ex setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artifact Identification</td>
<td>Ability to identify archaeological artifacts and ecofacts, from both pre contact and historical context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artifact Processing</td>
<td>Understand how to assign artifacts to accepted cultural/geological spheres, across space (classification) &amp; time (seriation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Conservation &amp; Preservation</td>
<td>Ability to conduct initial field conservation and preservation of different artifact types, features &amp; architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bioarchaeology</td>
<td>Ability to excavate, document &amp; study human remains</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Data Recording

Ability to use printed or digital sheets to document & record field data

### Excavations/General Principles

Know how to excavate in cultural or arbitrary layers, document and record all excavation activity

### Map & Plan Making-Manual

Ability to use a theodolite & measuring tape to produce maps and plans of a site

### Photography

Ability to take clear images of various feature, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions

### Screening

Ability to use general & geological screens to identify, collect and record small scale finds

### Soil Identification

Ability to identify, describe and record different types of soil and depositions

### Stratigraphy

Ability to identify, measure and describe stratigraphic layering of a site

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Arrival day is Sunday, the first day of the program.

The initial three days of the program (Mon-Wed) will be dedicated to discussions and study of the cultural, methodological and theoretical aspects of the project.

Weekly lectures are schedule each week for Wed, prior to dinner. Seminar will be held each Friday afternoon to discuss project progress, theoretical and methodological issues related to work at the site.

Saturdays are dedicated to field trip. The scheduled excursions will include the following:

1. Necropoli di Ostia, Isola Sacra
2. Lavinium Museum and archaeological site
3. Vatican necropolis Via Triumphalis
4. Museum Centrale Montemartini
5. Piramide Cestia
6. Necropolis Drugstore Museum

Sunday is day off.

The last day of the program is a Saturday. Students should plan to depart any time during that day.

**GENERAL PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>4:00-6:00pm</td>
<td>Arrival Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9:00-5:00pm</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>8:00-5:00pm</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>8:30-5:00m</td>
<td>Lectures/Work at the site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:00pm-8:00pm</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>8:30-5:30pm</td>
<td>Work at the site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>8:30-5:30pm</td>
<td>Work at the site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:00pm-8:00pm</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>9:00am-12am</td>
<td>Excursion Museum Centrale Montemartini</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>1:00pm-forward</td>
<td>Free afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Free day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 2-4 (Mon-Sat)</th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>8:30am-5:00pm</td>
<td>Work at the site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:00pm-8:00pm</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:00pm-8:00pm</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>9:00am-12am</td>
<td>Excursions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Director and organizing institutions of the program reserve the right to modify the schedule for scientific needs or for unforeseeable circumstances.

**TYPICAL WORKDAY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00am</td>
<td>Wakeup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00am</td>
<td>Departure to the field site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30am</td>
<td>Work begins at the site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:15am</td>
<td>Morning break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-2:30pm</td>
<td>Lunch at terrace bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30pm</td>
<td>Work on at the site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00pm</td>
<td>End of work day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00pm</td>
<td>Wednesday Lecture/ Friday seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The site is permanently covered so we are not affected by sun or rain.

**ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX**

Students will be graded based on their work as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Grade</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Site work: Excavation (use of tools, digging, levelling, measuring and drawing, record, photography, labelling and storage. Cataloguing: Washing, sorting, labelling, photography, storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Lab work, bones identification, bones photography, Analysis file and data base of human cremations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Friday Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Teamwork, flexibility, adaptability, involvement, initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Interaction with staff and directors, discuss doubts and questions, suggest interpretations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SKILLS MATRIX LEVELS**

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the list of skills provided above. Each skill will be graded on one of the following three levels:

- **Basic**: Can perform the skill/task with some supervision.
- **Competent**: Can perform the skill/task without any supervision.
- **Advanced**: Can perform the skill/task and teach others how to do it.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**
The required minimum attendance for the successful completion of the field school is 90% of the course hours. Any significant delay or early departure from an activity will be calculated as an absence from the activity. An acceptable number of absences for a medical or other personal reasons will not be taken into account if the student catches up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework or tutorials with program staff members.

PREREQUISITES

None. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will study on-site how to conduct archaeological research. Field work involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus requires a measure of understanding that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will have to work outdoors and will get sweaty and tired. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and adequate understanding that field work requires real, hard work, in the sun and wind. The work requires patience, discipline, and attention to detail.

PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

Rome is a huge metropolitan, a major tourist destination and the ancient center of the Roman empire. The Italian public and Italian authorities are highly sensitive for the preservation of their cultural heritage and getting permits to work in Rome requires strict adherence to Italian rules of excavation and respect of the local law and culture. This project is in its seventh year, and we plan to continue and work at the site for years to come. Students at this field school represent the project, both while on and off site. Misbehaviour by any project staff reflect badly on us and may prevent the renewal of research permits.

Students who violate Italian authorities’ excavation regulations, disrespect Italian law or culture, or disrespect the dead will be subject for removal from the project. We recognize that not all regulations make sense, especially given Italian bureaucracy’s reputation. But we are not trying to change Italian norms and mores. We are at Via Ostiense to observe and to learn, to enrich ourselves and the public, to study and appreciate the diversity of human culture – part and present.

ABOUT ROME

We must admit it – we are in love with Rome. The poet Tibullus was the first to refer to Rome as “Urbs Aeterna” – the “Eternal City.” This name must have resonated with Romans because poets like Virgil and Ovid continued to refer to Rome as the “forever lasting city”. In the Aeneid, an epic by Virgil, the poet describes Rome as “Imperium sine fine” – an empire without end. Thousands of years later, the name and the city—along with the poetry and stories connected to it—have endured. Rome is, and would likely remain, one of the most beloved tourist destinations in the world.

Italians are masters of the art of fine food. To augment their great cuisine, Roman cherish the city ambiance. Most dining establishments have outdoor seating overlooking well designed and meticulously maintained public spaces. It’s hard to beat dining overlooking flowing fountains and surrounded by ancient history.

The Italian painter and architect Giotto di Bondone said, “Rome is the city of echoes, the city of illusions, and the city of yearning.” Perhaps it’s why each time we visit we yearn for the moment of our return.

EQUIPMENT LIST

The site is permanently covered, so we are not affected by sun or rain.

1. Passport or ID card. All European citizens should bring their health card, or health insurance card, if applicable
2. Student/University ID and/or European Youth Card
3. Mosquito repellent and after-bite cream
4. If you are taking any medication, remember to bring it with you. However, in Italy you can buy most medications at the pharmacy, though some have different names, may be slightly different, or require a prescription.

5. If anyone has any allergies, celiac disease, is a vegetarian, or has other dietary restrictions; please let us know.

6. Stationery for personal use (notebook, pens etc)

7. It’s convenient to bring your photographic camera.

8. It’s convenient to bring your laptop computer because we’ll be using the dossier for the course and other information on it.

9. Appropriate adaptor for electronic devices. Maybe it’ll be easiest to buy them from your country.

10. It’s convenient to have an international plan for your phone set up before you leave, or to purchase a local SIM card when you arrive. This will make calls easier and more affordable.

11. We recommend that you wear light and comfortable clothing. You should bring a jacket and/or windbreaker, as well as very comfortable shoes. In the excavation, you can wear long or short sleeves, and pants or shorts. A minimum of 2 changes of work clothing.

12. You don’t need to bring any instruments or tools for the excavation. We will provide you with all of the tools and instruments you’ll need for the excavation and the study.

13. You’re welcome to wear nicer/”dressier” clothes when we go out for dinner.

14. Personal First Aid Kit (available in most pharmacies) including. Sterile gauze pads, waterproof bandages, large bandages 8cm x 6cm, Ace bandage 5cm x 4.5m, and medical tape 1.25 x 5m, Eye Wash 20ml, iodine and hydrogen peroxide. Below is an example of a kit available at a pharmacy with most of the supplies: http://www.boots.com/en/Boots-St-John-Ambulance-Essential-First-Aid-Kit_1258543/

15. A small backpack (for your food, bottle of water, wet wipes, camera, papers etc.)

16. Please join us in our efforts to reduce the use of disposable plastics pieces during our program. We kindly ask you to bring your personal breakfast set (cater plate), composed of a mug, a dish, a spoon, a fork and a knife to use during breakfast. Thank you very much for your help.

17. A good attitude for work, fun, study, and discoveries.

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT/TIME

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancelation of a program. The CFS typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and makes a Go/No Go decision by then. Such time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if CFS is forced to cancel a program.

There are two meeting points for this program: (1) Students arriving to Rome’s Fiumicino International Airport (FCO) will be met on Sunday at 5:00pm. Meeting point is just outside arrival hall of Terminal 3, Gate 3. (2) Students arriving to Ciampino International Airport (CIA) will be met on Sunday at 6:00pm. Meeting point is just outside arrival hall.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email project director immediately. A local emergency cell phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no special visa requirements for U.S. citizen travelling to Europe, as long as they do not stay longer than 3 months. Passport’s expiration date should exceed the stay by at least 3 months.

Citizens of other countries are asked to check the Italian embassy website page at their home country for specific visa requirements.

MEALS & ACCOMMODATION

Page | 7
All staff and student will be staying at Aquarius Rome Apartments – 5 Via Francesco Tumiai, 00128 Mostacciano (https://aquarius-rome.worhot.com). The apartments are comfortable and welcoming with free WiFi in all areas. All units have air conditioning, well-equipped kitchen and washing machine. Apartments are single sex and shared between 3-4 people.

The project will provide breakfast, snack, lunch and dinner throughout the week, with the exception of the snack and lunch on the trip day (normally Saturday) and free day (normally Sunday). Please let us know of any dietary restrictions (vegetarian/vegan) so that we may inform the restaurant in advance.

Lunch: We will have lunch in a terrace bar 100 meters from the site.

Dinner: Italian home cooking will be brought to our accommodation for dinner. You can choose a first and second course from the various options offered by the menu (which changes every day). Dinner will be served at 8:30 pm.

In order to preserve the planet and the beauty of Rome, our project pays careful attention to environmental protection. Please join us in our efforts to reduce the use of disposable plastics pieces during our program. We kindly ask you to bring your personal meal set, composed of a mug, a dish, a spoon, a fork and a knife to use during breakfast.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

International dialling code: +39

Money/Banks/Credit Cards: As a major touristic destination, Rome has a wide availability of banks where you can use your ATM and credit card.

ATM Availability: There is a wide availability of banks where you can use a credit card and ATMs.

Local Language: Italian is the official language of the Country. English, Spanish and Italian are the languages of the program.

Measure units: degree Celsius (ºC), meter (m.), gram (gr.), liter (l)

ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 quarter credit units). Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school based on the assessment matrix (above). This program provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and the registrar at their home institutions prior to attending this program.

Students will be able to access their transcript through our School of Record – Culver-Stockton College. C-SC has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to provide enrollment and degree verification (at https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/select). Upon completion of a program, students will get an email from C-SC with a student ID that may be used to retrieve transcripts. The first set of transcripts will be provided at no cost, additional transcripts may require payment. If you have questions about ordering a transcript, contact the C-SC office of the registrar at registrar@culver.edu.

REQUIRED READINGS

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.


McKinley 2004, Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains. Institute of field archaeologists. Paper no. 7 Editors: Megan Brickley and Jacqueline I McKinley


**RECOMMENDED READINGS**


Further Reading


