

Prehistoric Funerary Archaeology Spring 2017  
syllabus

**Course Number:** 01:070:314

**Credits:** 3

**Time—**TBD

**Instructor**

Dan Cabanes

Office Hours: Fridays, 11:00 – 12 or by  
appointment

Email: dan.cabanes@rutgers.edu

Biological Sciences Building

**Room 203A**

**Pre or Co-requisites**

070:105 Introduction to Archaeology OR, 070:102 Introduction to  
Human Evolution OR by permission of the instructor.

**Explicit content**

Be advised that due to the nature of the subject this course can include  
strong images of dead human bodies in several stages of  
decomposition.

**Catalog description**

Introduction to the theories, methods and applications of funerary archaeology; the evolution of funerary practices among prehistoric societies.

**Detailed description**

Death is the ultimate homogenizing life experience; rich or poor, powerful or oppressed, young or old, eventually all of us will die. Perhaps, the intrinsic democracy of this certain fact is the reason why funerary practices are so extremely variable. In Historic periods texts and documents tell us about beliefs and funerary practices in the past. However, in Prehistoric times it is only through Funerary Archaeology that we can have a glimpse of one of the most significant events for a prehistoric society: the loss of one of its members. The study of prehistoric funerary practices gives us the opportunity to understand the cosmogony, beliefs, and social structure of prehistoric societies, but also gives us information about their daily life.

The course will have two differentiated blocks: the first block will focus on the theoretical and methodological issues, the second block will encompass the origins of funerary practices in the Pleistocene and their evolution during the Paleolithic.

The first block will review the theoretical aspects of funerary archaeology, including issues such as the variability of the funerary ritual nowadays, the historiography of funerary archaeology, how society, gender and identity issues are interpreted, and what are the current challenges in terms of ethics and religion. In this block we will deal as well with excavation techniques and the scientific methods applied in funerary archaeology, including principles in bone preservation, isotopic analyses, paleodiet, DNA, paleopathology, microarchaeology, and geoarchaeology among others.

In the second block we will cover current discussions regarding the origins of Paleolithic burial. Using as a starting point current primatological studies, we will explore the archaeological evidence for the first funerary practices during the Middle Pleistocene. Next we will continue with the study of Neanderthal and Anatomically Modern Human attitudes towards the dead. We will close the course studying the traditions of the last-hunter gatherers in the Holocene and how the advent of the Neolithic changed these traditions.

### **Course-Specific Student Learning Outcome Goals**

- To acquire advanced knowledge on the theories, methods, and field techniques applied to Funerary archaeological research [EA1 and EA3 see <http://anthro.rutgers.edu/undergrad-program/departments-learning-goals>].
- To understand the possibilities and limitations of scientific methods applied to the study of ancient burials.
- To identify the different funerary traditions in Prehistoric Eurasia and be able to integrate them within the Evolutionary and Archaeological context of each period.
- To recognize the importance of Funerary Archaeology in our world regarding heritage management, politics, religion, and ethics.
- To obtain the necessary tools to critically understand future archaeological discoveries and their implications on the study of human societies [EA2 see <http://anthro.rutgers.edu/undergradprogram/departments-learning-goals>]
- To be able to write a professional paper and defend it in public

## Recommended Texts

Paul Pettit. 2011. *The Paleolithic Origins of Human Burial*. Routledge, New York

## Grading Structure

Grading will be based on one paper (30%), one In-class presentation (30%), one review of a published paper (25%), and participation in the journal club discussions (15%).

## Detailed grading structure

### *Paper*

Subject: There are no restrictions on the subject of the paper provided that is focused on Funerary Archaeology. Examples for possible titles might include general aspects like *The use of ocher in Prehistoric funerary practices*, *Intention and causality in Neanderthal Burials*, *Forensic palynology*, or specific case studies like *La Sima de los Huesos, a deliberate funeral practice?* *Shanidar: a Neanderthal cemetery?*

How to: The paper should resemble a scientific paper having the following general structure: 1. Introduction, 2. Materials and Methods, 3. Results, 4. Discussion, 5. Conclusions, 6. References.

Length: Maximum 5,000 words, without counting figures, tables, and references. The maximum limit is not negotiable and failing to adjust to this limit will negatively impact your grade.

Deadline: TBD

### *In-class presentation*

This is practical activity in an open class where the students will present their main paper to the professor, their classmates, and other invited guests to the session. The presentation should be supported with slides, will be time-limited, and after the oral exposition there will be a turn of questions and answers (total time will be determined in part by enrollment). Two weeks before the presentation an abstract of no more than 300 words will be submitted. The abstract will be distributed among the rest class of the class so the other students will have time to prepare their participation in the seminar. The aim of the oral presentation is to discuss the subject of the main paper and to acquire experience exposing their research to their peers. With this presentation the student has the opportunity to rectify possible errors in his/her main paper or to include in the same the result of the discussion generated during the talk. During the class presentation the clarity and quality of the presentation will be evaluated. Additionally, the students will be evaluated according to their participation in the Q&A turn.

### *Paper review*

This activity aims to familiarize the students with peer-reviewing processes and editorial review. A paper will be uploaded in Sakai and the students will have to write an editorial or a review.

How to: The review should approach the quality of the paper and how it was written, answering question such as: Are the results presented correctly? Is the data supporting the interpretation? Is the literature cited complete and adequate? What is the impact of the paper in the field? A complete guide to this activity will be uploaded in Sakai.

Length: Maximum 2,000 words. The maximum limit is not negotiable and failing to adjust to this limit will negatively impact your grade.

Deadline: TBD

### *Journal club*

Part of the class will be dedicated to the Journal Club. Each week a different paper dealing with funerary archaeology will be uploaded to Sakai. These papers will include classic publications but also recent discoveries. Following a pre-established turn system, the students will briefly present the paper using few slides and then we the paper will be discussed in class. The preparation and participation in the *Journal club* will be evaluated.

### **Course policies**

**Academic Integrity:** Cheating lowers the value of a Rutgers degree and the learning experience for all students. No form of cheating, including plagiarism, will be tolerated. One commits plagiarism when one represents the text or ideas of others as one's own creation. Please visit the website of the Rutgers Office of Academic Integrity (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>) for a fuller explanation of plagiarism and of the penalties for it. Convicted plagiarists may receive a disciplinary F in the course and possibly face expulsion from the University.

**Student Absences:** Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Unjustified absences during the seminar and public presentations will result in a 0 and will affect your final grades. For absence periods longer than one week you will be directed to see a Dean of Students for assistance to help verify these circumstances. For any other circumstances please contact me.

### **Lectures schedule & topic list**

Week 1: Introduction and presentation of the course

Week 2: The history of funerary archaeology and the variability of the funerary ritual

Week 3: Conceptual framework and fieldwork techniques

Week 4: Analytical techniques 1: bones, microscopic and macroscopic aspects

Week 5: Analytical techniques 2: isotopes, migration and diets

Week 6: Analytical techniques 3: sediments, paleobotany, and DNA

Week 7: Prehistoric funerary practices: Early Pleistocene (Calabrian)

Week 8: Neanderthals and early AMH

Week 9: Upper Paleolithic

Week 10: Mesolithic and Early Neolithic

Week 11: Overview of later funerary traditions (Megalithism, Bronze Age, Iron Age)

Week 12: In Class presentation 1

Week 13: In Class presentation 2

Week 14 Guest talk: Each year a different specialist will give a presentation on forensics, paleopathology, bioarchaeology, etc. The exact week of the invited talk will be decided upon the guest availability.