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EDITORIAL

Archaeology is not usually associated in the public's mind with the concept of destruction: during this last year, extensive looting in Syria and the deliberate destruction inflicted to archaeological sites in Iraq have indeed contributed to raise awareness on this aspect. However, concerns for the fate of heritage cannot be limited to acts of plunder or brutality. An excavation is in itself a destructive as well as a unique operation (so because no human activity can be exactly the same in the pre-industrial era), but the full release of excavations results is either terribly slow or blocked altogether. Printed publications may take years to reach interested researchers, not always able to keep pace with the growing mass of relevant literature or even simply to retrieve it due to the barriers imposed by commercial publishers. Progress in archaeology is therefore slowed down to a degree not in keeping with the development of other sciences.

Archaeology is still, in its general outline, being performed according to traditional methodologies, which are no longer fully apt to respond to the cognitive challenges posed by the digital thinking. At the same time, we must face ever growing menaces brought against a heritage which is constantly more broadly defined by us. Archaeology, like many other disciplines, relies almost uniquely on publications as a way to disseminate knowledge and achieve career advancement.

The primary data from the dig are necessary for making advancement in the discipline: we need to access *all* recorded data, but in fact an excavation report is almost never integral, being selective to a greater or lesser degree, and this hampers the process of reevaluation of a unique piece of information: the archaeological context. Since the function of an artifact is not intrinsic but is the one attributed to it, only its associations may help us in define its “social life”, which means that only the whole set of associations – as recorded on the field and in the lab – is meaningful in that sense.

Data sharing should be encouraged and online contributions should receive academic credit. The Open Data model is still struggling to receive validation in archaeology, a world in which data hoarding is still largely practiced by research teams and institutions (i.e. public museums) as jobs, grants and career advancements are awarded on the basis of research published in traditional ways. New criteria for allocating credit for production and re-use of digital data (e.g. metadata with embedded authorship, as proposed by the ARIADNE project [<http://www.ariadne-infrastructure.eu>], and extensive use of DOIs linking publications and primary data) should be evaluated in order to make the open release of primary digital data as the customary output of archaeological excavations.

We should strive for changing radically the way archaeology works on the field and how data are produced, the way it elaborates and explains its datasets and the way it awakens new, constructive scientific criticism, thus contributing to a new, better science by means of singling out new research questions, which in turn lead to the production of new and different data.

Nicolò Marchetti