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## EDITORIAL

In most current excavation projects worldwide we have the field presence of at least some other specialists than archaeologists and surveyors. Mostly, these individuals are related to the vast field of the bioarchaeologies, although often they also belong to the domains of earth sciences, geophysics, chemistry etc. In fact, no dig could be deemed successful and up-to-date if these competences are lacking within the team on the field. And rightly so, if one of the ultimate goals of archaeology is the reconstruction of man-environment interactions, which theoretically entails as much of environmental studies, as of cultural ones (archaeometry, for example, is the primary tool for assessing the physical, chemical, mineralogical nature and age of all natural and man-transformed materials). However, upon a closer look, the fact is that the role of natural sciences is often systematically belittled or scarcely appreciated even by excavation directors themselves: budget and time constraints not infrequently suggest to reduce or skip altogether some or several kinds of otherwise-within-reach analyses and, even when correctly collected, samples are then sent to far-away labs, where they may receive an attention completely detached from the rest of the context of provenance, leading to separate reports non-integrated with the excavation ones. Besides, in many countries a regrettable attitude is spreading to not letting, even temporarily, the export of samples abroad, thus hampering international scientific cooperation (but, at the same time, too many expeditions on the other hand are not accountable about the handling of their samples).

Because of the current state of affairs, a greater emphasis and attention (financial too) should be devoted to in-field analytics when setting up an excavation project, starting of course with specifically-designed pilot projects which may pave the way for then-cheaper replication of methods first applied there. Ideally, one should implement a field laboratory with the aim of carrying out a wide array of scientific analyses almost in real time. Portable technologies should be experimented in order to reduce the gap between data extraction and elaboration in tasks such as digital photogrammetry, microstratigraphy and micromorphology, systematic soil sampling and elemental analysis of the finds.

Complex contextual information and multi-disciplinary datasets require specific digital environments for proper display, integration and exploitation. To meet these needs, one needs to build a cyberinfrastructure to record the full array of data produced in the field as born digital data and publish the primary information on the web in open access format. All data should be shared remotely through an innovative architecture of knowledge: settings of the instruments, their logs, any documentation produced on the field, but also masks and filters creating different clusters of complexity within each domain should be made accessible in real time to scholars working in a networked perspective. This would enable them to critically join in the modelling and explanation processes, creating a dynamic environment modelled upon the fundamental scientific dialectic traditionally based on publications, only greatly compressed in time.

Quick data acquisition and analyses on the field will generate rich datasets that will be shared in full on the web as linked open data. Protocols for defining new research questions, digital forms of dissemination and elaboration of scientific knowledge are to be expected from this kind of approach. Special attention should also be devoted to speeding up field and lab analyses: archaeometric, bioarchaeological, photogrammetric techniques should be steadily employed throughout the project. Portable instruments are to be used on site, while field camp labs – meaning a set of instruments which are applied to evidence and materials at the base camp – should strive to perform sophisticated analyses almost in real time.

Sharing evidence remotely in real time with colleagues, both in the process of its field collection and subsequent study: this would allow a real time remote interaction with the scholarly community leading to rapid improvements in research agendas and queries. Projects should thus subscribe fully to open access on data not only in post-processing, but also from the very collection and study inception phases.

*Nicolò Marchetti*