

Unearthing the past: challenges for the interpretation and presentation of archaeological sites

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Abstract: This article explores the topic of interpreting and presenting archaeological sites. It highlights the limitations of archaeological remains in capturing the complete historical record and emphasizes the need for interpretation and presentation to give these sites a historical narrative. It discusses the dual nature of archaeological sites, with both material ruins and intangible historical information. It explores the challenges of comprehending archaeological sites and the importance of visual interpretation in engaging the public. Stresses interpretation, presentation, and education for cultural heritage awareness, citing UNESCO/ICOMOS guidelines for authentic, community-involved site presentation. It also discusses how different perspectives try to approach this topic.

Keywords: interpretation, presentation, archaeological sites, narratives, heritage, multidisciplinary approach.

Desenterrando el pasado: desafíos para la interpretación y presentación de los sitios arqueológicos

Resumen: Este artículo explora el tema de la interpretación y presentación de sitios arqueológicos, resaltando las limitaciones de estos para captar el registro histórico completo y haciendo hincapié en la necesidad de dotarlos de una narrativa histórica. Se analiza la doble naturaleza de los sitios arqueológicos, con ruinas materiales e información histórica intangible. Se exploran los retos que plantea la comprensión de los sitios arqueológicos y la importancia de la interpretación visual en la vinculación con el público. Se destacan la interpretación, presentación y la educación para la concienciación sobre el patrimonio cultural, citando las directrices de UNESCO e ICOMOS para una presentación auténtica de los sitios que involucre las comunidades. Se discute también cómo diferentes perspectivas han abordado este tema.

Palabras claves: interpretación, presentación, sitios arqueológicos, narrativas, patrimonio, enfoque interdisciplinario.

Desenterrando o passado: desafios para a interpretação e apresentação de sítios arqueológicos

Resumo: Este artigo explora o tema da interpretação e apresentação dos sítios arqueológicos, destacando as suas limitações na captura do registo histórico completo e enfatizando a necessidade de lhes fornecer uma narrativa histórica. É analisada a dupla natureza dos sítios arqueológicos, com ruínas materiais e informações históricas intangíveis. São explorados os desafios colocados pela compreensão dos sítios arqueológicos e a importância da interpretação visual no envolvimento com o público. A interpretação, a apresentação e a educação para a sensibilização para o património cultural são destacadas, citando as diretrizes da UNESCO e do ICOMOS para uma apresentação autêntica dos sítios que envolvam comunidades. Também é discutido como diferentes perspectivas têm abordado esta questão.

Palavras-chave: interpretação, apresentação, sítios arqueológicos, narrativas, património, abordagem multidisciplinar.

Introduction

This article constitutes a segment of the theoretical discourse formulated within the framework of my Master's thesis in Architecture, Landscape, and Archaeology at Sapienza Università di Roma. This interdisciplinary program endeavors to foster a dialogue between archaeology and architecture, with the overarching goal of enhancing the significance and appreciation of archaeological sites.

In the pursuit of this goal, the field of archaeology confronts the formidable challenge of bridging the gap between the material remnants of antiquity and the abstract narratives they embody. In the absence of informed interpretation, archaeological sites persist as silent witnesses to bygone civilizations, bereft of contextualization or significance. It is through the conscientious efforts of interpreters that these mute ruins undergo a metamorphosis, emerging as vibrant narratives teeming with the essence and dynamism of ancient cultures.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding earnest endeavors to unveil the mysteries of antiquity, it is imperative to acknowledge the inherent limitations of archaeological knowledge. Rarely does archaeology furnish a comprehensive panorama of ancient realities; instead, it proffers a discerning portrayal molded by methodological approaches, ingrained biases, and interpretative paradigms. Furthermore, archaeological practice and theory are often shaped by ideological underpinnings. Archaeology can be and has been instrumentalized by nation-states and other powerful actors to construct and legitimize specific narratives about the past, serving political, cultural, or social agendas. This reality makes it even more crucial to critically engage with the interpretative processes and ensure that the voices and perspectives of diverse communities are included.

Understanding these inherent biases and ideological influences reinforces the importance of adopting a critical and inclusive approach to the interpretation of archaeological sites. By acknowledging these factors, archaeologists can better navigate the complexities of reconstructing the past in a way that is both accurate and sensitive to the diverse narratives that history comprises.

As a practicing archaeologist, it is crucial to acknowledge that archaeological knowledge is, by nature, interpretive and contextual, meaning that the resulting narrative is shaped by the techniques and paradigms we employ.

In this context, the article critically engages with UNESCO and ICOMOS guidelines on the presentation of cultural heritage, exploring how local community involvement and a multidisciplinary approach can offer a richer and more equitable representation of these sites. The argument presented here is that for archaeological sites to come alive and be transformed into dynamic narratives that resonate with the public, it is essential to adopt approaches that not only present the tangible aspects of the sites but also integrate the intangible dimensions and perspectives of the surrounding communities.

Thus, the central objective of this article is to explore the nature of archaeological sites, recognizing that their perception is shaped by the ways in which they are interpreted and presented. This analysis considers the international guidelines that inform these

interpretations, while also addressing the inherent challenges faced by professionals—primarily archaeologists—who carry out this work. A key point of discussion is the lack of objectivity that can arise in these interpretations.

What are we seeing in Archaeological Sites?

Ruins and archaeological sites hold significant historical value, as they are the material expression of past cultures and their societal practices. However, it is important to note that these remnants only capture certain aspects of people's lives, making the historical record incomplete. This fragmentary nature further compounds, as the preserved aspects of past behavior are dispersed across both time and space. Of that preserved part, only a portion is usually recovered and constitutes the identified archaeological record (Querol and Martínez Díaz, 1996).

While these archaeological remains exist in a static state in the present, excavating and comprehending their significance necessitates a dynamic perspective that considers the element of time. It is important to differentiate between the archaeological heritage itself and the history encompassing the sites, which denotes the collective story of the people who constructed and inhabited them. Archaeological sites do not inherently show "stories." They need to be interpreted and properly presented to be bearers of a historical narrative (Ruiz Zapatero, 1998). This is because the physical remnants, by themselves, lack the context and detail necessary to convey a complete historical account. The stories embedded within these sites are not self-evident; they require careful analysis and reconstruction by experts to reveal the broader historical narratives.

However, it is more accurate to say that they present selective narratives – those of the layers that have been preserved, curated and exhibited. Those stories are shaped by the decisions of what to preserve and what to omit, often leading to a focus on certain historical periods while others are marginalized. Therefore, the notion of "history" in this context must be reconsidered; it does not represent the entire "past" but rather curated and interpreted segments of it.

We encounter a dual nature when engaging with archaeological sites: the material past embodied by visible ruins and remains and the "immaterial past" encapsulating the historical information embedded within these archaeological artifacts (Ruiz Zapatero, 1998). The latter, often overlooked, constitutes the historical information embedded within these physical remains. Without delving into this immaterial past, the ruins, monuments, and remnants hold little more than aesthetic or emotional appeal. Therefore, comprehending archaeological sites poses two primary challenges: firstly, they are fragments of a material past, and secondly, without proper interpretation and presentation, they remain essentially silent witnesses (Ruiz Zapatero, 1998).

Though these sites may possess allure, mystery, or fascination, they typically do not encapsulate a comprehensive historical narrative that is apparent to observers. While specialists may perceive them as "complete" and entirely visible, the same cannot be said

for a wider society. As Domenico Palombi (2021, p.20) stated, “Archaeology, in fact, rarely gives back the “ancient reality”; rather, it is a representation of it achieved by different investigation methodologies, historical questions, the understanding of the complex, strategic-conservative choices, and strategies of setting up and restitution” .

In this regard, we can observe that archaeological sites, by their very nature, often exist in a state of partial visibility, concealed beneath layers of soil, vegetation, or modern infrastructure. Unlike monuments or artifacts displayed in museums, these sites may lack the immediate visual impact that captures the public’s imagination. Consequently, engaging the general populace with the significance of these hidden treasures becomes a formidable challenge. Unfortunately, the adage “seeing is believing” holds true, and if something cannot be seen, it becomes challenging to comprehend.

As archaeologists, we can imagine sites based on our knowledge, constructing mental images that reflect our understanding of the archaeological record. However, the general public does not share the same capacity for envisioning the past, highlighting the criticality of visual interpretation in archaeological outreach (McManamon, 1998).

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the general public, while not professional archaeologists, often possesses vernacular or even professional understandings of specific sites that can significantly contribute to the overall interpretation. These public perspectives are not merely passive or uninformed; in some cases, they can offer alternative narratives or challenge the interpretations proposed by experts. Furthermore, the role of archaeologists is not immune to bias; some may consciously or unconsciously manipulate the interpretation of a site to align with specific agendas or institutional pressures. This complex interplay between expert and non-expert perspectives necessitates a more anthropological approach to understanding how archaeological sites are perceived and interpreted by different audiences.

Given this complexity, archaeological sites, by their very nature, are not inherently intelligible. Their fragmentary and incomplete nature, coupled with limited visibility, and the fact that past structures do not always align with present ones, pose difficulties for public comprehension. In order to be understood, it is necessary to offer additional information: the materiality of the archaeological remains must be translated into a historical narrative (González Méndez, 1996). Different approaches exist to achieve this objective, with the choice of narrative formula contingent upon the primary goal: making these fragments of the past, which are the archaeological sites, accessible and understandable to all.

Presentation and Interpretation in Archaeological Sites

The presentation of the past to the public (Stone and Molyneaux, 1994) carries significant responsibility, especially because, as Bahn (2012) pointed out, it cannot be accomplished in an entirely objective manner. In this sense, the archaeological setting itself is a modern symbolic creation—a result of the selection and recomposition of monumental entities from different eras, integrated into a contemporary design vision (Palombi, 2021). As

such, the archaeological site becomes a curated “setting” that bears little resemblance to the ancient reality it evokes and reinterprets. In this context, archaeologists and architects assume the role of creators, crafting an “artificial reality” that seeks to bridge the gap between the past and the present. The responsibility rests in recognizing that the creation of this must be consistent, comprehensive, and diverse, as the perception of what is observed will shape the construction of reality for certain individuals.

Interpretation, presentation, and education at archaeological sites play a crucial role in promoting awareness and appreciation of our cultural heritage. The interpretation of archaeological sites can be defined as a method that offers readings and options for actively engaging with the heritage (Stanley-Price, 1995), employing diverse presentation and animation resources. Or as the informative elements that are incorporated into the remains and monuments, aiming to facilitate a deeper historical understanding of these sites (Padró Werner, 1996).

ICOMOS defines the term «interpretation» as a broader range of activities to enhance public awareness and understanding of a site in its Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites (2008). This definition encompasses efforts both within and outside the physical boundaries of the site, ensuring a comprehensive approach. The purpose of interpretation is to actively engage the public and enable them to grasp the significance of a cultural heritage site in its entirety. On the other hand, «presentation» is given a narrower definition. It refers specifically to the deliberate and strategic communication of interpretive content, achieved through the thoughtful arrangement of interpretive information, physical access, and interpretive infrastructure within a cultural heritage site (ICOMOS, 2008). In essence, «presentation» focuses on the intentional design and arrangement of elements that facilitate the transmission of interpretive information to visitors at the site (Grima, 2017).

By distinguishing between *interpretation* and *presentation* as per the ICOMOS Charter (2008), we can establish a clear understanding of their respective roles. «Interpretation» encompasses a wider range of activities that aim to raise public awareness and understanding, while «presentation» specifically pertains to the deliberate communication of interpretive content within the physical setting of a cultural heritage site.

As highlighted by Tim Benton (2010), effective interpretation of archaeological sites can foster understanding and respect for the past, which in turn promotes identity and social cohesion. By involving society in the history and significance of these places, a sense of belonging and attachment is nurtured, strengthening the relationship between heritage and the community (Smith, 2006).

Another element to be considered is the education at archaeological sites, which goes beyond the mere transmission of historical knowledge. As mentioned by Laurajane Smith (2006), heritage education enables individuals to develop critical thinking and analytical skills, allowing them to understand the broader context in which these sites are situated and their relevance to contemporary issues. This education can be a powerful tool for social development by promoting respect for cultural diversity and facilitating intercultural dialogue (Waterton and Smith, 2010). However, it is important to recognize

that the way archaeological sites are studied and interpreted can significantly impact the public perception of heritage. As Rodney Harrison (2013) argues, interpretation can be a political and selective process influenced by the interests and perspectives of those involved. Therefore, as archaeologists, we need to approach this responsibility with sensitivity and critical reflection, avoiding the imposition of unilateral narratives or oversimplification of history.

Archaeology, while seemingly objective, often serves as a tool for the ideological projects of nation-states and other powerful actors. This recognition underscores the importance of community involvement in the interpretative process, ensuring that multiple voices contribute to the narratives constructed around archaeological sites.

An example of this, is the case of the Archaeological Park of Ostia Antica, where the modern understanding of Ostia has been greatly shaped by the extensive excavations conducted between 1938 and 1942, initiated in preparation for the Universal Exhibition of 1942, a project deeply intertwined with Benito Mussolini's fascist ideology. The historical context of Classical Rome seems to reveal a strong association between visual order and Imperial power, wherein the emperor's authority was intrinsically linked to the visibility of monumental structures and public edifices (Agnew, 1998; Notaro, 2000). Mussolini himself was often portrayed as a new Augustus, aligning with the fascist revival of the *culto della romanità*, or the cult of the Roman Spirit (Nelis, 2007). The regime's intentions to reconstruct Rome in accordance with a classical and imperial image had already been evident since the early 1920s (Ciucci and Levine, 1989).

These excavations in Ostia, much like earlier projects in Rome, were not just archaeological endeavors but were also intended to serve as exercises in historical memory and political propaganda (Notaro, 2000). The work, undertaken under significant time pressure, was driven by the ambition to present Ostia in a manner befitting the grandeur of the planned Universal Exhibition. Although the exhibition never occurred due to the outbreak of World War II, the excavation campaign has been subject to criticism, both for its rushed methodology (Olivanti, 2001) and its entanglement with fascist political objectives (Melotti, 2020).

A notable aspect of the 1942 plans for Ostia Antica was the integration of "green architecture", spearheaded by the Director of the Park at that time, the Italian archaeologist Guido Calza (Pavolini, 2016). This involved the strategic planting of trees that were emblematic of the Roman countryside, carefully selected to reinforce ideological narratives (Carbonara, 2020). Species like the umbrella pine and cypress were chosen for their symbolic connection to the Roman landscape, reflecting the fascist regime's efforts to imbue the site with a neo-imperial character (Pavolini, 2016). The choice of vegetation was not merely aesthetic but was loaded with political significance, aligning the landscape with the regime's vision of a revived Roman Empire.

In addition to the landscaping, the restoration of monuments such as the Theatre at Ostia, directed by Calza and designed by Raffaele de Vico, was driven by similar ideological motives. These reconstructive efforts, while occasionally criticized for their heavy-handedness, were integral to the regime's propaganda, aimed at showcasing the grandeur

of ancient Rome through lavish public spectacles (Carbonara, 2020). These projects were not just about preserving the past but were designed to serve the fascist regime's broader objectives of glorifying Rome's imperial legacy.

The influence of the Mussolini-era interventions on Ostia Antica remains evident today. The site's landscape, characterized by its meticulously planned tree-lined avenues and restored monuments, continues to embody the vision imposed by the fascist regime. This enduring legacy underscores how the fascist-era excavations and restorations have shaped contemporary perceptions of Ostia, leaving a lasting imprint on the way this ancient city is experienced nearly a century later.

It is in this context that community participation and the consideration of multiple perspectives have become crucial in the interpretation and education of heritage sites. In this sense, involving local communities in the research and interpretation of archaeological sites can challenge dominant narratives and allow for greater representativeness and equity in knowledge construction (Carman, 2003).

To achieve effective interpretation and education at archaeological sites, archaeologists must work collaboratively with other professionals, such as educators, anthropologists, and sociologists, to enrich perspectives and approaches (Guilfoyle and Hogg 2015). Additionally, continuous efforts should be made to promote heritage literacy in society, providing accessible and engaging learning opportunities for different age groups and backgrounds (Babić, Vatan Kaptan, and Masriera Esquerria, 2019; Felices-De la Fuente, Chaparro-Sainz, and Rodríguez-Pérez, 2020).

International guidelines

UNESCO and ICOMOS offer guidelines to ensure the effective presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites. UNESCO's *World Heritage Convention* (1972) aims to protect and preserve sites of outstanding universal value. It encourages the presentation and interpretation of these sites to promote understanding and respect for cultural diversity. The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* (2021) guide for managing and presenting World Heritage sites, emphasizing the importance of interpretation strategies and sustainable tourism.

As mentioned before, ICOMOS has developed the *Charter on the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites* (2008), focusing on the interpretation of cultural heritage, including archaeological sites. It stresses the need for accurate information and engaging techniques to reach diverse audiences effectively. Additionally, in the document *Principles for the Analysis, Conservation, and Structural Restoration of Architectural Heritage* (2003), though not specific to archaeological sites, they also apply to the interpretation of archaeological remains within architectural contexts, emphasizing research, documentation, and interpretation.

Both UNESCO and ICOMOS emphasize several key principles when it comes to the presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites. One of these principles is

authenticity and integrity, which highlights the importance of preserving the original context and materials of the site. By respecting the site's authenticity, visitors can connect with its genuine historical and cultural significance. It also means avoiding unnecessary reconstructions or additions that could distort the site's original form and meaning. Education and accessibility are also essential aspects of presenting and interpreting archaeological sites. The goal is to provide visitors with educational experiences that help them understand the site's historical and cultural importance. This involves offering accurate and contextually relevant information about the site's history, archaeology, and cultural context. Various interpretive materials, such as signage, brochures, audio guides, and interactive exhibits, can be used to engage visitors and enhance their learning experience. Additionally, ensuring accessibility for all individuals, including those with disabilities, is crucial to promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for engagement with the site's interpretation.

Another key principle emphasized by UNESCO and ICOMOS is community involvement in the interpretation process. By actively engaging local communities, their valuable knowledge, traditions, and oral histories associated with the site are incorporated. This approach leads to more comprehensive, diverse, and culturally sensitive interpretations. Involving communities fosters a sense of ownership and pride, creating a stronger connection between the site and its surrounding inhabitants.

It is important to highlight that the practical application of these guidelines often reveals significant challenges, particularly at the local and national levels.

There have been cases that have demonstrated that these policies can sometimes be misaligned with local practices and cultural dynamics. For instance, in many communities, traditional methods of managing and preserving heritage may differ from the standardized approaches recommended by international guidelines. Local communities may find that the guidelines do not fully address their unique needs or fail to integrate their traditional knowledge and practices into the conservation process.

It is crucial to engage in a more critical reflection on these guidelines, acknowledging their limitations and the contexts in which they are applied. A nuanced understanding of the intersection between global policies and local realities is necessary to develop more effective and culturally sensitive conservation strategies. This approach should involve a collaborative dialogue between international organizations, national authorities, and local communities to ensure that heritage conservation practices are both respectful of local traditions and responsive to the complexities of community dynamics.

Different perspectives

The New Museology, together with Public and Community Archaeology, embraces and amplifies the principles of UNESCO and ICOMOS by emphasizing education and accessibility, community involvement, and sustainable practices in presenting and interpreting archaeological sites. These approaches introduce various methodologies,

practices, and perspectives aimed at actively involving local communities in this process. By prioritizing the engagement of diverse audiences, incorporating local perspectives, and promoting responsible tourism, these frameworks contribute to a deeper understanding, appreciation, and preservation of cultural heritage.

Public archaeology conceives the involvement of the public in the scientific process, which is understood from the recording phase itself (prospecting, excavation, documentation, or simply the study of materials) until the structures, artifacts, and ecofacts obtained are interpreted, conserved, and if necessary, disseminated and made profitable in a broad sense. All of this is based on an indisputable starting point: our subject combines its historical component with a heritage component and, consequently, given its obvious market potential, in addition to knowledge and training capacity, it incorporates an emotional and aesthetic component to its essence as a science, an outstanding symbolic value (Vaquerizo Gil, 2017).

Moshenka (2017) states that the expansive scope of public archaeology poses a notable challenge as it encompasses a wide array of disciplines, including economics, international law, and film studies. Moreover, its practical application spans from grassroots community activism to high-level international diplomacy. This inherent diversity makes defining public archaeology a complex task. Multiple definitions and interpretations coexist within this field, often stemming from distinct national, organizational, and educational backgrounds.

Community archaeology, on the other hand, is an approach that emphasizes collaboration and partnership between archaeologists and local communities in the planning, execution, and interpretation of archaeological research. Yvonne Marshall (2002) describes community archaeology as a collaborative and empowering approach that seeks to involve local communities in the practice of archaeology, from site identification and excavation to post-excavation analysis and interpretation. Community archaeology aims to promote community ownership and control of archaeological resources and to integrate archaeological research with community development goals.

Instead, Suzie Thomas (2017, p. 76) acknowledges that.

The concept of community archaeology, in a grassroots, community-led sense, has sometimes been elaborated as “archaeology by the people for the people” (Reid, 2012, p. 18). On the other hand, it is also sometimes the case that the wider public’s role is as a recipient (but not necessarily a creator) of information, including not only as a visitor to museums and heritage sites but as a participant in hands-on opportunities that are nonetheless controlled (and limited) by parameters set out by professionals facilitating or providing the experience. In other cases, voluntary or amateur archaeologists are valued as historians and researchers and respected in their own right, as is their contribution to the academic discourse. Hence, what is now known as “community archaeology” has developed to differing extents in different countries, often following quite different patterns depending on local traditions, economic realities, and even legislation.

While both authors recognize the importance of community involvement in archaeology, Marshall (2002) focuses on collaboration and empowerment, emphasizing

community ownership and control. Meanwhile, Thomas (2017) acknowledges the range of approaches and the varying degrees of community participation and influence within community archaeology practices.

Despite some overlap, there are key differences between public and community archaeology. Public archaeology tends to be more focused on communication and education, while community archaeology emphasizes community engagement and empowerment. Public archaeology may involve a wider range of stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and the media, while community archaeology focuses primarily on working with local communities. However, both approaches share a commitment to making archaeology more accessible, inclusive, and relevant to the public. On the other hand, but along the same line, the New Museology implies a redefinition of museums' relationship with people and communities. This change includes the transformation of the complex into unity, providing broader access and representation for diverse social groups (Stam 1993). It also indicates a more active role for the public, establishing a closer relationship between visitors and the controllers of the curatorial function (Black, 2005; Kreps, 2008), and reinforcing a more visitor-oriented working philosophy (Ross 2004).

The risk of over-musealization looms large over the preservation of archaeological heritage. Despite being motivated by genuine intentions of security and cultural dissemination, it can inadvertently undermine the integration of these treasures into their surrounding environments. Over-musealization often relegates archaeological objects to the status of “non-places”, disconnected from their original contexts and imposed upon the landscape in artificial and incongruous ways (Augé, 1995).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of “forced indoctrination” exacerbates this disconnect by imposing predetermined narratives, perspectives, and routes upon visitors. Such practices stifle the potential for active engagement and critical reflection, relegating the visitor to a passive role in the consumption of cultural content. Instead of fostering individual and collective cultural growth, forced indoctrination perpetuates a one-sided dissemination of information, lacking opportunities for genuine dialogue and exploration.

In this sense, these perspectives try to contribute to a more holistic and inclusive approach to the presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites. As mentioned before, the New Museology, in conjunction with Public and Community Archaeology, extends and reinforces the principles set forth by UNESCO and ICOMOS by placing a strong emphasis on education, accessibility, and community involvement in the presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites.

Public and Community Archaeology seeks to connect with people through the discipline by incorporating a diversity of voices. This approach allows for a broader range of interpretations of archaeological sites, fosters discussion, and challenges the dominance of singular narratives typically imposed by academia. On the other hand, the New Museology contributes through institutional frameworks, representing a new approach to how archaeological sites are presented to the public. Both perspectives are relevant to this article: one addresses the presentation of sites, while the other focuses on interpretation. Together, they facilitate a more nuanced and inclusive narrative, enhancing the engagement with

and understanding of cultural heritage. By prioritizing education, accessibility, community involvement, and sustainable practices, these approaches collectively contribute to a richer appreciation and preservation of cultural heritage.

Final thoughts

As archaeologists, we delve into the depths of time, piecing together the remnants of ancient civilizations in an attempt to reconstruct their narratives. However, the task is far from simple. The ruins and archaeological sites we encounter are not pristine snapshots of bygone eras; instead, they are fragmented puzzles, each piece offering a glimpse into a different aspect of the past.

The complexity of archaeological ruins lies not only in their physical disarray but also in their temporal and spatial dispersion. The artifacts and structures we unearth are often scattered across both time and space, making it challenging to discern a coherent story. What we perceive as a single archaeological site today is, in reality, an amalgamation of layers representing various periods and cultural practices.

This fragmented nature of archaeological sites necessitates a dynamic approach to interpretation. While the ruins themselves may appear static and frozen in time, our understanding of them evolves as we uncover new evidence and employ innovative methodologies. It is crucial to recognize that archaeological heritage is not synonymous with history; rather, it is a raw material from which we must extract meaning through careful analysis and interpretation.

One of the fundamental challenges we face as archaeologists is bridging the gap between the material remains of the past and the intangible histories they represent. Without proper interpretation, archaeological sites remain mute witnesses to bygone civilizations, devoid of context or meaning. It is through our efforts as interpreters that these silent ruins are transformed into vibrant narratives, pulsating with the life and vitality of ancient peoples.

Yet, even as we strive to unlock the secrets of the past, we must acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge. Archaeology rarely affords us a complete picture of ancient reality; rather, it offers a selective representation shaped by our methodologies, biases, and interpretive frameworks. Our task, then, is not merely to uncover the past but to reconstruct it, filling in the gaps with informed speculation and imaginative reconstruction.

While striving for a more 'accurate' or 'proper' interpretation of archaeological sites is important, it is essential to recognize the inherent limitations of such efforts. Every interpretative intervention, no matter how well-intentioned, introduces new layers of complexity and potential dissonance. Furthermore, these interventions can sometimes lead to the dispossession of local communities, as the narratives imposed may not align with the lived experiences or historical understandings of those who have a direct connection to the site. Therefore, it is crucial to approach the interpretation of archaeological sites with a critical awareness of these limitations and the broader implications of our interpretative choices.

In our efforts to make the past accessible to all, we must confront the challenge of public perception. Unlike trained archaeologists, who possess the ability to visualize the past based on fragmentary evidence, the general public often struggles to comprehend the significance of archaeological sites. For them, seeing is indeed believing, and if the ruins do not speak for themselves, they risk being dismissed as mere curiosities or relics of a bygone era.

To overcome these barriers to understanding, we must embrace a multiplicity of approaches to interpretation. Whether through immersive exhibits, interactive technologies, or community engagement initiatives, we must strive to make archaeological sites come alive for a diverse audience. By contextualizing the materiality of the past within a rich tapestry of historical narrative, we can ensure that the voices of past cultures are heard and understood by generations to come.

The study and presentation of archaeological sites require a thoughtful and multifaceted approach that extends beyond the realm of archaeology alone. While ruins and remnants offer glimpses into the past, they represent only fragments of a complex and interconnected historical tapestry. The challenge lies in interpreting these fragments and bridging the gaps between the tangible material remains and the intangible historical narratives they represent. Archaeologists, heritage professionals, and architects all play crucial roles in reconstructing and presenting the past. They strive to create a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of our shared human heritage by engaging in diligent research, thoughtful interpretation, and effective presentation.

And finally, as archaeologists, we have the responsibility to interpret and educate inclusively and reflectively at archaeological sites. This involves recognizing the importance of heritage education in societal development, promoting community participation, and considering multiple perspectives. By doing so, we can generate a more informed and engaged public perception of heritage, thereby strengthening its value and long-term safeguarding.

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