

Archeology ^[1]

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Archaeological anthropology—also called archaeology—is a popular field within the discipline of anthropology. While other fields of anthropology are focused on the present, archaeologists attempt to reconstruct past culture through material evidence.

Archaeology especially focuses on studying cultures whose history was not recorded in writing, which includes the majority of human history. This can include everything from human evolution to stone tool use to early agricultural societies, for example. However, archaeology can sometimes examine modern culture up until the present day as well.

Archaeology provides us with various functions, its most useful being an understanding of human history. It looks at how human culture has been shaped and how it changes over time, how we have evolved as a species and adapted to various environments, and why all of these changes have occurred. Archaeology has enlightened us when it comes to key aspects of human history, including the development of agriculture, trade routes, and past cultural beliefs—for example, ancient Egyptian religious beliefs.

Methods

There are several [methods](#) ^[3] employed by archaeologists. Archaeologists look at material and environmental evidence that has been left behind, and thus employ mainly quantitative research. Traditionally, archaeologists excavate material remains. This involves removing stones, earth, dust, and other natural matter to uncover artefacts and other evidence that has been left behind. One popular example of an excavation is that of the town of Pompeii, which was destroyed during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Excavations revealed that much of the town still remained and had been preserved under the ash.

Today, archaeologists frequently use computers and other technologies in their research. New methods like carbon dating, satellite imagery, 3D modeling, and others to analyze the material remains that are found. These methods help archaeologists reconstruct layouts of past towns, determine the age of artefacts, and help infer other important information.

Key Terms

An archaeological site is any site that contains material remains that could be studied by archaeologists. Sites can vary in many ways—they can be small or large, of relative importance to research, and can exist virtually anywhere on the planet. Examples of types of archaeological sites include campsites, caves, past settlements, monuments, workplaces,

farms, and many more.

The most well-known type of material remains are artefacts. These are objects that were once created or altered by human behavior. Artefacts are analyzed and studied by archaeologists to determine their past use, thereby learning more about the culture that used them. Ecofacts are another type of remains that are important to archaeologists. Ecofacts include ecological remains—such as plant and animal remains—that can also be studied by archaeologists to learn more about a culture. Ecofacts can be very small in size—even a small seed found in an ancient garbage pit can help teach an archaeologist about a type of food that a particular cultural group consumed, and the frequency at which it was eaten.

Issues in archaeology

Throughout history, looting has always been a problem in archaeology. For example, tombs of pharaohs in ancient Egypt were often looted for gold and other valuables, leaving them empty for today's archaeologists. Looting is an important issue since it involves the theft of other people's cultural property. As well, it can lead to a loss of important cultural information.

Besides looting, consent is also a key issue that archaeologists must consider. It is important for archaeologists to gain consent before excavating a site, especially if it could have an effect on present people. An example of this is a burial ground—while it might contain important archaeological information, it could have profound effects on the ancestors of the deceased.

Repatriation is another popular debate, and is related to the discussion of consent. Repatriation is the return of previously-excavated materials to the cultural group or individuals to whom they belong.

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