

discussion on the nature and direction of your chosen discipline and their relationship within the wider range of humanities.

To sum up archaeology as a discipline in a few short sentences is somewhat of an impossible task. Lexically, archaeology as a word, date back too roundly the early 1700s, stemming from a Greek word “archaeo” which means ‘antient’ and combined with “ology” which simply means to study or learn, so in its simplest lexical term archaeology is the study of the ancients, but its linguistics definition is a vast oversimplification of the field, in fact archaeology doesn’t necessarily have to have anything to do with the ‘ancients.’ In a fact archaeology spans the entirety of human history, it can predate the ‘ancients’ and focus on human pre-history and although it does cover what we consider ‘ancient’ it also spans much more recent history. There is no limit to how recent something is for it to archaeology, there is an entire subsector of archaeology called the ‘archaeologies of modernity’ which is entirely focuses on recent history [Shanks, M]. It’s clear that a pure lexical approach as an attempt to define the nature of archaeology is insufficient. [Zagora]

A better way to describe to describe archaeology is to say that it is concerned with humanity, it is fundamentally about people, a stronger focus on the mundane, a large focus on day to day life.

Despite the word archaeology only dating back only about 300 years its core ideas go back much further, it’s often credited as shared its core concepts with the antiquarian movement starting in the 1600s across Europe. [Schnapp]

However, saying it is just concerned with the past is, like many other attempts to define it, a vast oversimplification, archaeology is concerned with the past but it is also concerned with the present, it is about gaining a greater understanding and furthermore it’s about the preservation off said past for the future generations.

Archaeology can explore the past that written history forgot, one place where this is very clear is with any form of history that exists pre-writing, such as the Mesolithic era, or other pre-writing societies. Alien Schnapp in the article *the birth of archaeological vision: From antiquarian to archaeologists* said, “without prehistoric archaeology, there can be no prehistoric history” and this sums up the nature of archaeology very well. Archaeology has the ability to fill in the gaps left by written history, there are large section of history that would not exist without archaeology, as well as field that’s understand has been greatly expanded by the discipline.

However, that is not to say that archaeology cannot use written history, it can often work in line with what is written, analyses of written sources remain an important part of archology, excavations and physical findings can only show so much, and additional context is needed for a greater understand over what is discovered.

The text bases research of archaeology is very similar to the history discipline functions, and this highlights archaeology as a humanities subject and its interconnectedness within all humanities subjects.

This is part of the reason why archaeology exists firmly as a humanities subject due to its collaboration with other humanitarian subjects, it does not exist alone, nor can it truly excel as a subject with interaction with the further ideas shared by the wider humanities subjects. [Intarch]

Archaeology’s relationships with other humanities subjects are very clear with subjects such as history, which share heavy crossover and constantly aid each other however a common

question is what is the different between archaeology and history, often the phrases are used interchangeably with one another however this is incorrect.

Famously Winston Churchill once stated that “history is written by the victor” but archaeology is written by what is left behind. It is a focus on physical items and artefacts. It’s looking at something more tangible. However, archaeology does not need to necessarily look at artifacts, although they are a main part, there is also idea for looking at earthworks, and different layers in the dirt where buildings or structures may have once stood, such as patches of dead or discoloured grass or plant life or slightly raised areas.

Furthermore, there are also fields within archaeology that research things that are not artefacts, such as pollen samples (the study being called Palynology) which are used to get a better idea of what the past landscape might have looked like in terms of plant life, it helps to gather further context for certain eras of the past, and can also help pinpoint certain time periods of drought, flooding or other natural occurrences.

It is also a misconception that archaeology is fully based around things that are underground, and although ‘digging’ is a large part of archaeology it is not necessarily the only place where archaeology can be carried out. Above ground archaeology or buildings archaeology is a field of archaeology that is focused on what is still left standing. [Gill] trying to peel back the layers of a building and discovering its past.

There is also maritime archaeology which focuses on that what was left submerged underwater or even experimental archaeology which commonly involves re-enacting the past in order to gain a greater understanding such as with the Guédelon castle project in France, [Guédelon] a decades long project planning to rebuild a 13th century castle using all original techniques.

Archaeologic methods largely rely on humanitarian analysis, however that’s not to say its scientific elements are not equally as important. Archaeology as a discipline also heavily relies on science.

Archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler famously stated that *“In a simple direct sense, archaeology is a science that must be lived, must be “seasoned with humanity.” Dead archaeology is the driest dust that blows.”*. [Wheeler] Which sums up the interconnectedness of sciences and humanities, Archaeological science cannot exist without the humanitarian side, nor can the humanitarian approach happen without the scientific findings.

Archaeology is something that doesn’t fit as either just a science or just a humanity because in reality it is both. It is what bridges the gap between two fields, that are seen as being vastly different.

Another why that archaeology is slightly different than many other humanitarian subjects is through its large use of technology. Although archaeology can and has taken place without the use of modern technologies, they remain a large part of the modern practice and majorly helps further understanding. Such as use of LiDAR (or light detection and radar) [NOAA] LiDAR uses infrared lasers to scan the land can create a map of the land depth without plant life. It can give a very good indication on possible sites to excavate. Further explaining how the archaeological discipline uses aspects of different elements to further its discoveries and analysis.

Archaeology is also largely about preservation; however, this is a complicated thing to strive for within archaeology. Archaeology is a fundamentally destructive process, in order to discover the past, what is left in the present has to be disturbed. When an artifact is excavated, where it was, where it was left is destroyed.

Although there is often a goal of recording and maintaining the past it is impossible to do that completely when it comes to archaeology by taking it out of the ground it is destroying its environment, which destroys the status quo, and any clues to its past that it may hold.

A large amount of archaeology is just guesswork, it is often a highly theoretical matter, although as much evidence as possible is gathered and analysed, there is no way to truly know everything that happened in the past

There is a train of thought that defines our idea of the past of being purely theoretical and in a sense it is, there is no true way to know exactly what took place in the past, but archaeological findings and theory is our best attempt of bridging the gap between theory and fact, and although there is no way to truly get to a pure truth, archaeology can act as a way to get closer. It is for a large part the best and most educated guess of what happened in the past.

Another aspect of archaeology is its political nature. Archaeology is fundamentally political. American archaeologists Randall McGuire in his book 'Archaeology as political action' wrote "*Unfortunately, ignoring or denying the political nature of archaeology does not make politics go away, just as accusing others of political bias does not make the accuser unbiased*" There is no true way to be unbiased in archaeology, every thought and statement made is result of personally politics shaping life.

In conclusion, the true nature of archaeology is something hard to define and full of exceptions to any potential definition, fundamentally it is about humanity and its past, but in a way that relates to our current present and the future to come. It's something inherently destructive but deeply concerned with preservation. It is humanitarian in its approach but scientific in its methods. It is impossible to fit archaeology into one set box or definition but instead we have to approach its place in wider society, and its impacts on both humanity and sciences.

Biography

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