

# Chapter 4

## The Purpose of Communicating Archaeology

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The design of effective communication tools for archaeology begins by understanding why it is needed. Society has a strange perception of all that is archaeological. Improving the knowledge of the archaeological heritage serves to guarantee its preservation for future generations and to allow its conscious fruition. Archaeological heritage is part of the landscape where people live, being a co-builder of it. It is therefore necessary to investigate the characteristics of different fruitions to identify communication deficits and create the conditions to compensate them, in cooperation with many professionals.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The design of effective communication tools, in every field, must start from the identification and definition of why one communicates, who must do it, to whom, what messages are wanted to be transmitted, which codes can be used, what is the context to operate in and to possibly modify.

Next chapter analyses all this and more (for example, the disturbances). Here, it seems appropriate to develop what allow the situation and the existing problems to be understood.

The perception of archaeology is distorted, dichotomous, ephemeral. This discipline is often accused of stopping the development of society in the name of values that are evidently no longer shared. This chapter proposes to reverse the trend. Instead of talking about communication as something accessory, it analyzes the reasons why it must be intrinsic to the very action of archaeologists.

People do not know the archaeological heritage well because it is not communicated adequately. Generally, the archaeological matter is communicated professionally on the contents but not on the communication itself. The purpose of communicating the subject is to allow the best fruition of the archaeological heritage, but sometimes archaeologists seem not to consider that what they study is intended for the communities.

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Culture is too often and for too many something conventional that can be opted or not. It means not to recognize a primary need of the human being. Culture builds man. In its greater sense, it is a heritage for each. However, in the age of communication, cultural signs are even refused, rejected, derided. Cultural heritage, material and immaterial, probably does not enjoy a good communication. It looks perceived as abstract: not a heritage, but some sort of a game for someone else. An elite, the salons, people who don't need to work, "the professors". Thus, the cultural sphere is not felt to belong to each. "High" expressions are considered "distant" and "useless", the historical legacy unacknowledged, the anthropological heritage ignored. It is therefore a convention made up of misunderstood signs that someone uses for unclear purposes.

Actually, archaeology's problems appear more stressed than in other discipline. Maybe because felt to relate to ancient things, with their charge of the abyss of time, the common feelings about archaeology reach higher tones.

When inside the convention of culture, archaeological signs and symbols are often stronger than others. Their clear (or supposed clear) time gap with the contemporary makes them perceived as cultural by everyone. Sometimes they are intentionally used, as to mark the cultural character of something. The UNESCO logo recalls a Greek temple. In New York City, the architectures of Metropolitan Museum of Art reproduce everywhere classical ancient models. The Louvre, in Paris, chose a pyramid to be erected in its courtyard and become its symbol. London's National Gallery façade copies that of a temple, the same happens at the Museo del Prado in Madrid. These are between the most important museums in the world, but their collections are not only, or not at all, archaeological.

## **BACKGROUND STUDIES**

The communication of archaeology and archaeological heritage has always been carried out in many ways. It has been illustrated in a wide literature, such as Rahtz & Reilly (1992), Sabloff (1998), Beavis & Hunt (1999), Watkins (2006), Harding & Venclova (2007), Kansa, Kansa & Watrall (2011), Bonacchi (2012), *Dossier...* (2014), Pallecchi (2017), just to name a few. Yet the perception by society is still plagued by distortions and misunderstandings. It is necessary to try to understand the causes and analyze the role of those who carry out this communication, as well as the reason why communication is applied to archaeology. The framework involves many professionals. Current situation sees a lead role of archaeologists, but others are needed to guarantee the quality and make outcomes effective.

## **THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNICATING ARCHAEOLOGY**

Many problems stand about the communication of archaeology, archaeological heritage, and the work of archaeologists, which this book, and this chapter in particular, intend to address.

It can be useful to start with an example. Certainly daring, perhaps provocative, but able to go deeply into the matter.

The chance to live, study and work in Rome offers the opportunity to confront the problems above every day. It also allows one to constantly see with his own eyes a particular sector of archaeology. That is the Christian one, which often studies artifacts begun in the last centuries of the Roman era but profoundly transformed during the following ones.

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