
Introduction to Archaeology

Past, Present and Future

MIT-ESP Spring HSSP 2022

— **Alba Menéndez Pereda** —
Maryan Ragheb

Alba Menéndez Pereda



Originally from Spain

Earned BA and Master's in
the UK

PhD Candidate in
Archaeology at UCLA

Researches the Inca empire
(Andes, South America)

I love travelling and cooking!

Maryan Ragheb



From Egypt

BA and MA in Egyptology
from Egypt

PhD in progress at UCLA

I study ancient Egypt and
jewelry

I love dancing and music

Student introductions

Name

grade

Why do you want to learn
more about archaeology?

Fun fact!

Introduction to the course

Saturdays 1:00-2:30PM EST

MIT Time - the class will begin
and finish 5 minutes before the
indicated time

Zoom

Lectures, discussions, activities

Class 1, Feb 26 | The Basics:
Archaeology 101

Class 2, March 5 | From the Ground
to the Museum

Class 3, March 19 | Death, Ritual,
and Landscape

Class 4, March 26 | Identities,
Gender, and Societies

Class 5, April 2 | Archaeology: Past,
Present, and Future

What will we do?

How do archaeologists unravel the stories of the people of the past? Which evidence do they employ? What does the scientific method look like in archaeology? What impact does archaeology have in the present and in the future? What role do museums play in preserving and presenting cultural heritage to the general public? How are archaeologists viewed in pop culture and how does that impact the public understanding of archaeology?

In this class, you will learn about the process of archaeology, from survey to excavation to museum display. Through a combination of lectures, discussions, and activities covering a variety of worldwide case studies, by the end of the course, you will be familiar with key archaeological theories and methods, and be able to connect the modern world to the past. Students will be encouraged to think critically about historical “facts,” and analyze different understandings of material culture.

Policies

You can email the course
instructors at
S14912s1-teachers@esp.mit.edu

In class

Write in the chat if you can't unmute
yourself

Raise your hand if there are others
speaking

Unmute yourself if no one is talking
at the time

Be an active participant and think
critically!

Be open to differing perspectives and feel
free to, respectfully, challenge those
arguments.

Ask questions!

Be a member of the community!

Take notes as you go on the course's
collective Google Doc:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FpSG46Zo34UDswCxyKY3NUKrkj9iP5MDckzlqu4THZkw/edit?usp=sharing>

Class 1 | The Basics: Archaeology 101

— Archaeology and its
methods —

What is archaeology?

Drop the first three words that come to your mind at
[menti.com](https://www.menti.com)

Code: 6798 9181

What is archaeology?

The study of material evidence of human societies. Both the places where people lived and interacted, and the objects they made/used are key clues to understanding and reconstructing what life was like and how humans behaved. The human societies under investigations could be thousands of years old (Ancient Egypt), hundreds of years old (the Inca), quite recent (Industrial Revolution), and even contemporary (today!).

What can we study through archaeology?

Economy and foodways: agriculture, livestock, food, and markets/exchanges

Architecture and landscape: cities and urban development, settlement distribution, monumentality, construction techniques, construction materials, work distribution

Technology: industries, raw materials, production techniques, specialization, use, markets/exchanges, exploitation of natural resources

Sociopolitical organization: egalitarian or hierarchical societies, difference in access to resources, conflict and conquest, resistance and adaptation

Identity: gender, age, social status, ethnic affiliation

Cultural practices: beliefs, spirituality, religion, rituals

What do we mean by material evidence?

Physical things that you can see and touch (tangible).

Artifacts are portable objects made by humans.

Ecofacts are natural materials that humans would have used in the past.

Architecture

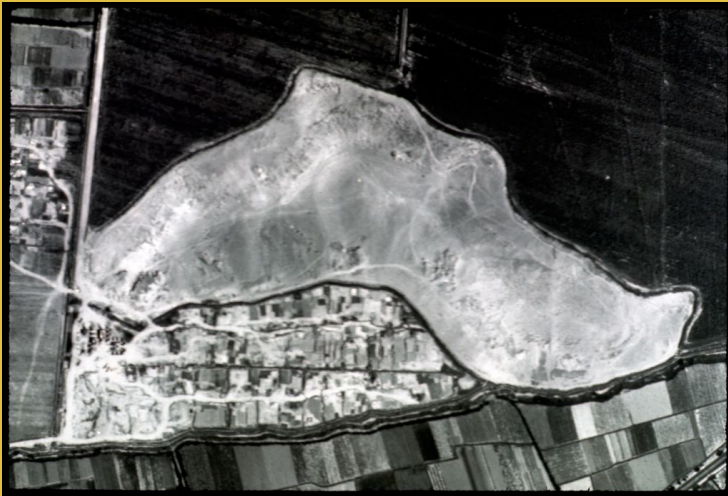


Archaeological Methods

How do archaeologists find material evidence?

Methods of archaeology

Survey (on the ground and above ground) **and mapping** - locate *archaeological sites*



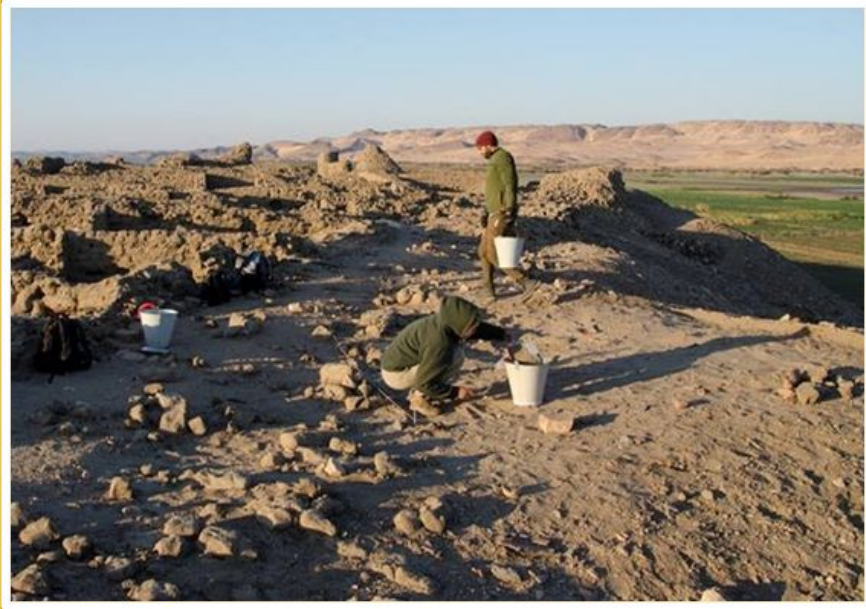
Aerial photograph of San Cosme, Lima, Peru. Billie Jean Isbell Andean Collection, ISB_00391



Foot Survey, University of the Highlands and Islands Archeology Institute

Methods of archaeology

Excavation



Excavations in Sudan

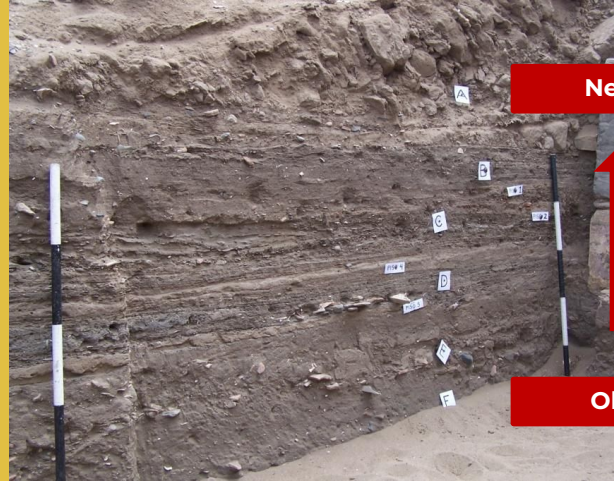


Excavations in Greece

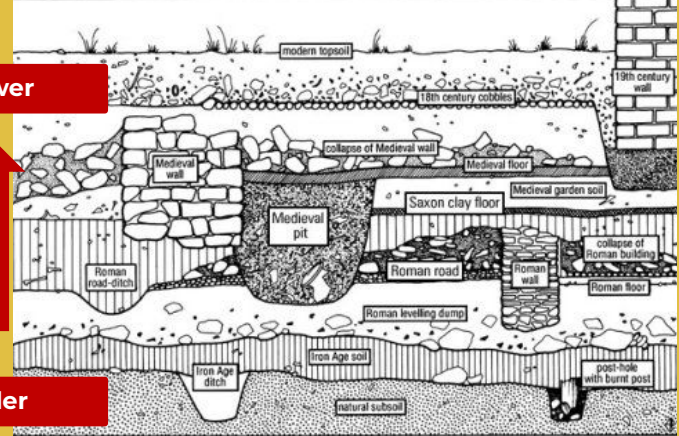
Stratigraphy

Law of superposition

Location of artifacts in space and time



Stratigraphic profile, Pachacamac, Peru



Drawing of stratigraphic profile
©Canterbury Archaeological Trust

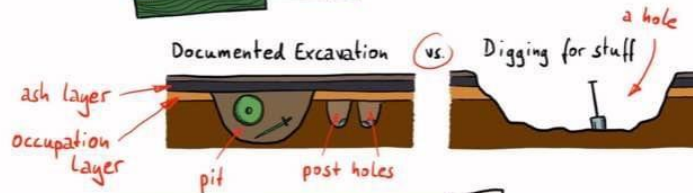
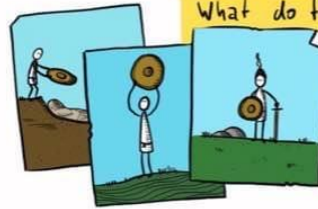
ARCHAEOLOGY: WHY CONTEXT MATTERS

James M. ...



Archaeology is not about nice objects. Not only.

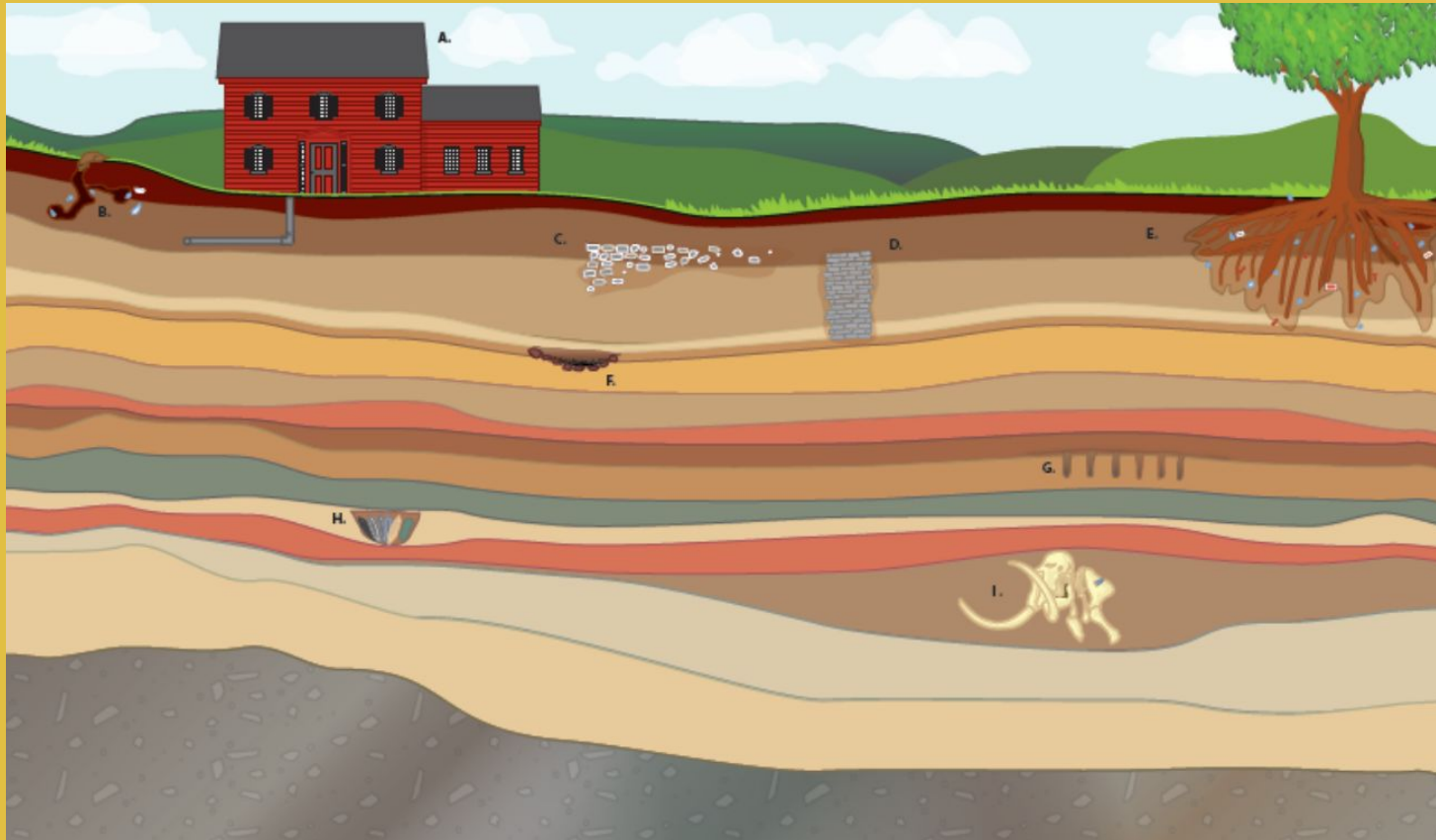
Where are these objects coming from?
What do they mean? Who made them?
Who used them? For what? And how did they end up in the ground?



A lone object is like an image ripped from a book. But only in context of the rest of the book this image really makes sense.

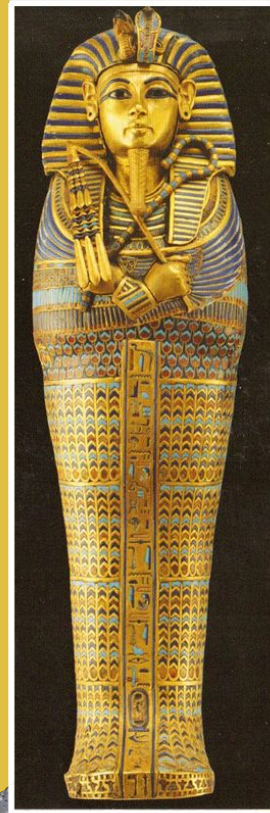


Activity



Methods of archaeology

Material culture studies and laboratory work



Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*)
under scanning electron
microscope. Simon Fraser
University



Methods of archaeology

Dating

Relative dating vs. absolute dating



Relative dating allows archaeologists to identify which material evidence is older and which one is more recent. This is determined by stratigraphic context and the style

Absolute dating provides more specific numerical dates, in the form of years or, more frequently, age ranges (e.g. between 1580 and 1640). This is achieved through documentary evidence and carbon dating