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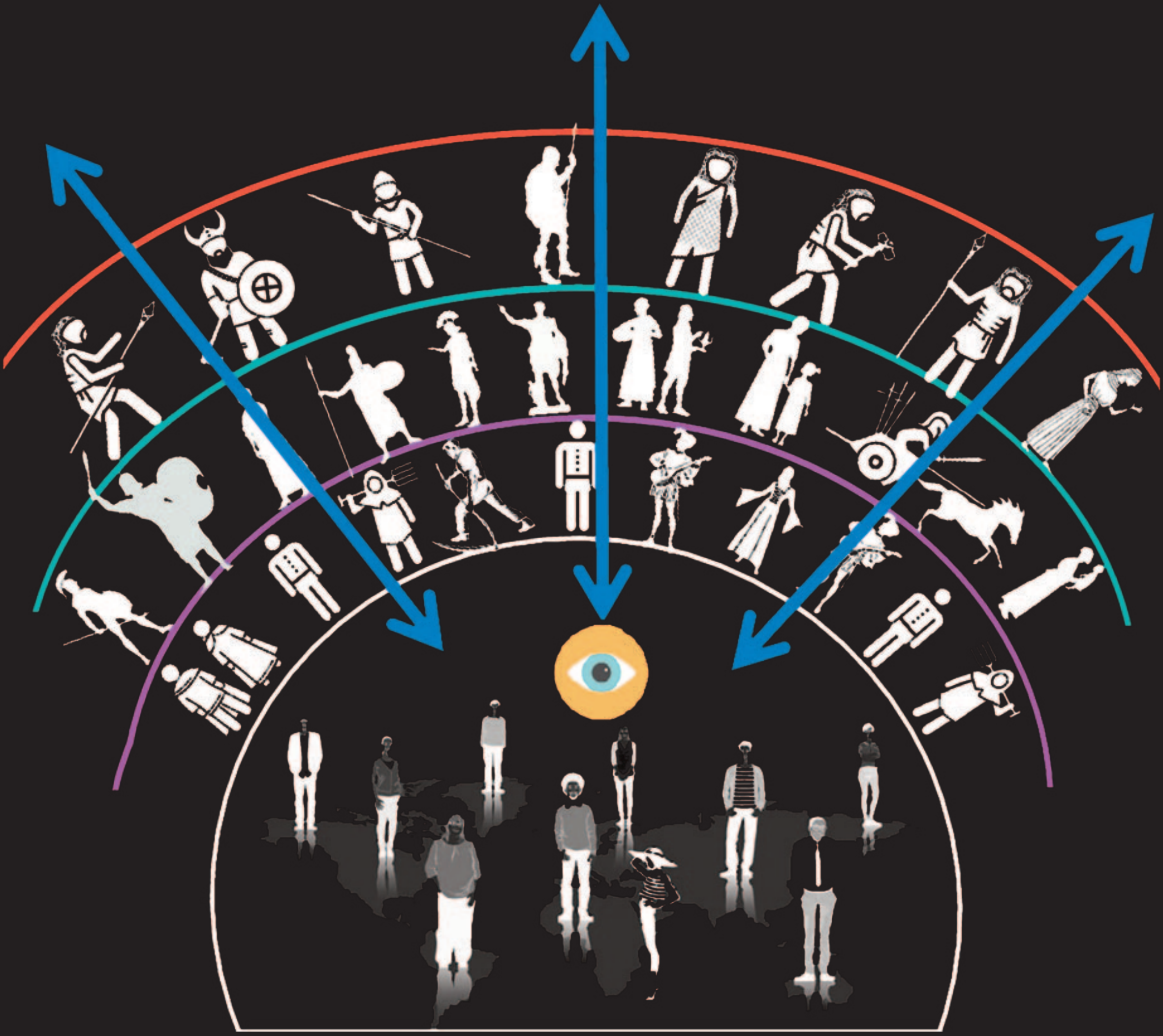

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Gonzalo Ruiz Zapatero*

# Archaeology today: people, knowledge and dissemination

## 1. Introduction

Archaeological outreach is, in the first place, directly related to museums, archaeological sites, monuments and landscapes, and to the various types of public interested in archaeology, because without an audience, neither museums nor archaeological sites make any sense. Traditionally, archaeology's audiences have received very little attention (but see Kajda *et al.* 2018; Faulkner 2000). Here we call for an archaeology for the people and with the people (Pyburn 2019), which needs to begin by getting to know the different audiences better, moving beyond the traditional visitor studies, in a wider background of Public Archaeology (Moshenska 2017; Williams *et al.* 2019). It is also necessary to promote outreach initiatives that go beyond visits to archaeological sites and museums; initiatives that are attractive experiences and use stimulating means such as dramatisation, gastronomy, photography, virtual museums and many more related to audiovisual media (Ruiz Zapatero in press). Initiatives designed to bring archaeology to as many audiences as possible, in a strategy of first seducing, then arousing curiosity, and finally creating interest in discovering new knowledge. It is possible that with these and other similar initiatives we will "acknowledge failure and dissent, complexity and confusion, but also new ways to for researchers to define success" (Pyburn 2019, p. 300). And that is important and relevant for next future. On other hand, the comparative study of how Nature and its protection has gained public arena can be very inspiring and beneficial for the archaeological outreach (Harrison *et al.* 2020).

Archaeology studies the past but, in many ways, it brings us closer to life today. The stratigraphic layers of the sites we excavate contain the lives of the

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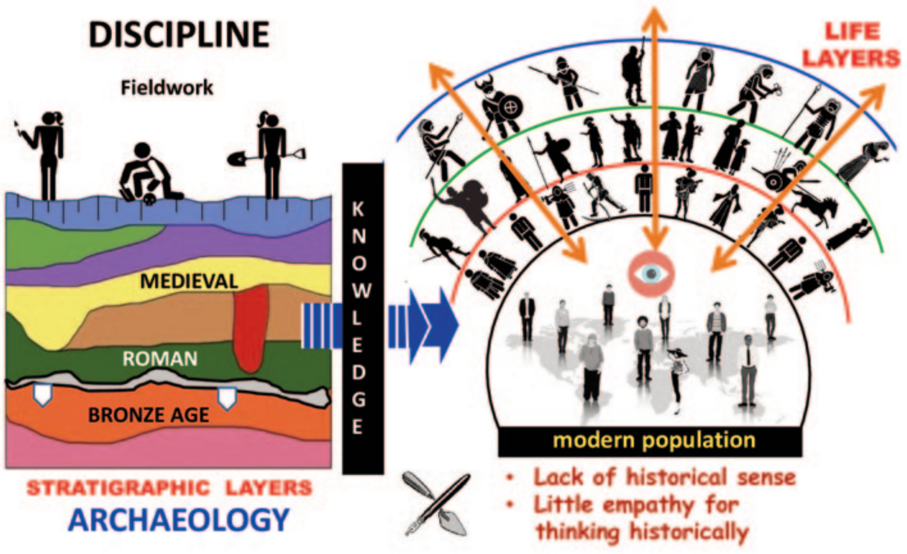

DISCIPLINE
Fieldwork
MEDIEVAL
ROMAN
BRONZE AGE
STRATIGRAPHIC LAYERS
ARCHAEOLOGY
KNOWLEDGE
LIFE LAYERS
modern population
• Lack of historical sense
• Little empathy for thinking historically

Fig. 1. Stratigraphic archaeological layers and the production of past lifes layers at present society (author).

people of the past. Archaeology transforms them by accumulating these layers of life for the people of the present. In this way we see more deeply into time and it makes us look at things from different points of view. Archaeology, in some ways, blurs the line between the past and the present. And I am deeply convinced that archaeology enriches us as human beings, it gives us more historical empathy, more ability to think historically and, in short and in a sense, it makes us more discerning and tolerant.

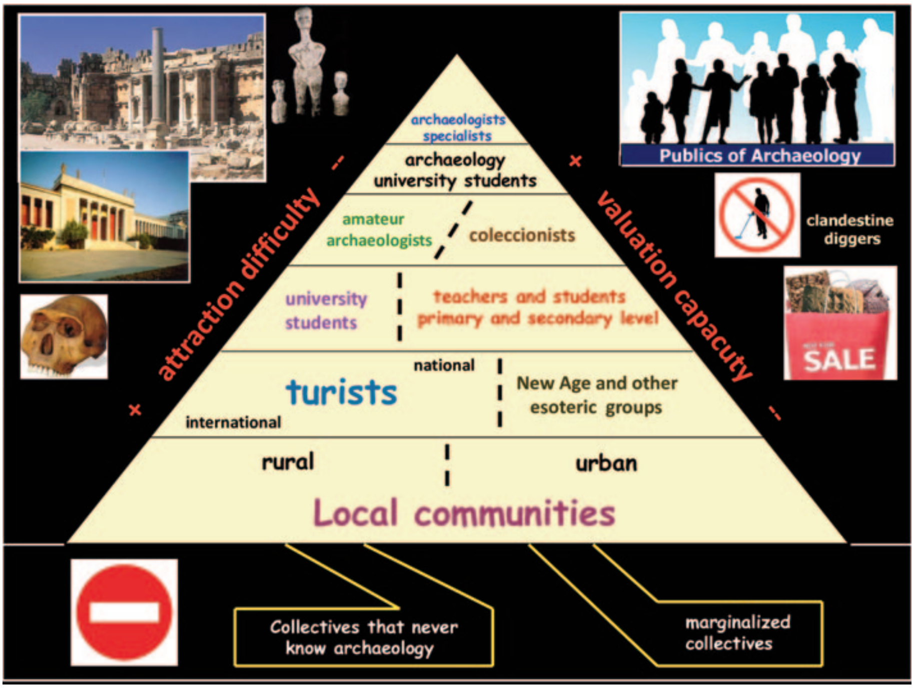
## 2. The challenges of communicating the archaeological past

The past, the distant and even remote past, is invisible, or at least apparently. Only very small windows open on occasions and allow us glimpses, snippets, fragments of worlds that were and now have disappeared completely. However, tiny pieces of those pasts burst into the present day, the result of emergences, erosion, chance discoveries, etc., as well as planned and systematic archaeological research.

To communicate effectively I have always thought that the words of Brian Fagan (2010) sum up very well the essence of successful communication in research and archaeological outreach. His four inescapable requirements are

1) enthusiasm and passion for the past; 2) an ability to tell a good story; 3) the ability to convey the relevance of the past in today's world and, last but not least; 4) an interest in the public, in all possible audiences, the last possibly the most neglected and difficult requirement. All types of public must be respected and taken into account, because "all intelligent and inclusive presentations dignify all audiences" (Nieto Galán 2011). There are different, distinct and even very varied types of public and audiences. However, there are not – at least there should not be – 'first' and 'second category' audiences or some that are more important than others. Archaeology should not be consumed only by experts and the 'cult-longtime public'. There should be a broad and diversified range of audiences, readers, visitors and enthusiasts who are impelled to a regular, passionate and even voracious consumption of the material worlds of the past.

On the other hand, academia itself favours pure and simple research and considers dissemination to be a second or third category task that, needless to say, does not fall within the concept of archaeological research. And as if that were not enough, in recent decades a whole plethora of new communicators has emerged: content creators, cultural managers, guides, communication experts and several others who, with relative success, assume that disseminating the


archaeologists
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Collectives that never
know archaeology
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Fig. 2. The public's pyramid of archaeology: an approximate x-ray approach (Ruiz Zapatero in press).

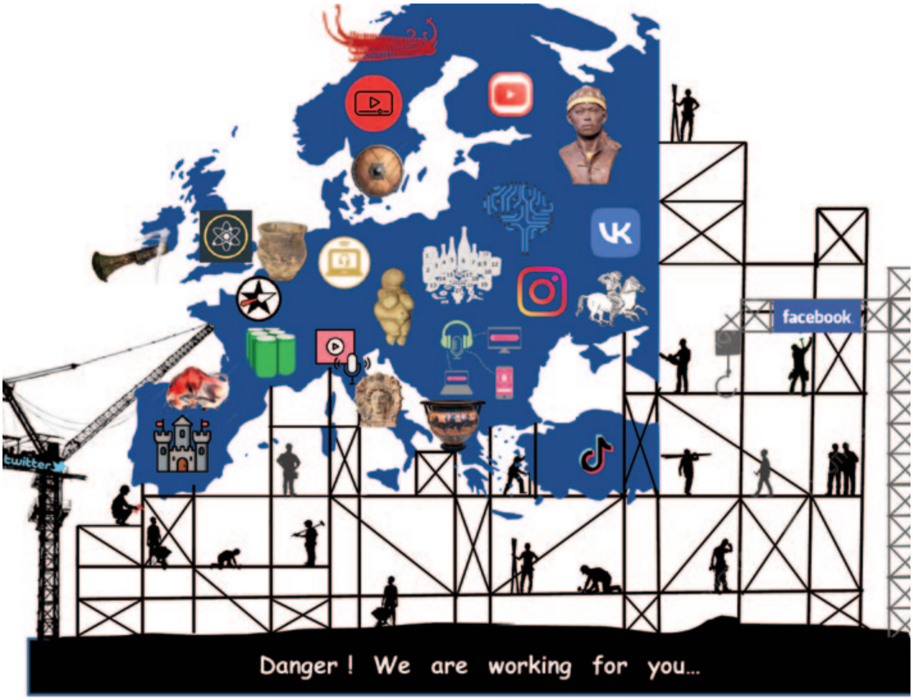

facebook
twitter
Danger ! We are working for you...

Fig. 3. The building of european archaeological (mis)knowledge through social networks (author).

past is a simple task for which they are sufficiently prepared. I sincerely believe that the task of disseminating the past well is as difficult or even more difficult than researching it archaeologically; that without a deep knowledge of the past it is not possible to disseminate it successfully, and even with a broad knowledge the attempt to disseminate it may fail. Because the wisdom of knowledge does not guarantee the wisdom to disseminate. And disseminating with rigour, warmth, good writing – and good pictures – to connect with a diversified set of audiences is complex, difficult and above all receives little or no recognition, at least from academia.

Outside the academia those plethora of new communicators rely on new technologies and social networks to raise popular knowledges or better pseudo-knowledges, anyway questionable knowledges. And most people lack the means to recognize mistakes and misunderstandings. If that were not already negative enough, new technologies have an immense expansive force. So fakes news multiplies its effects. We lack studies to evaluate the scope of this *fake archaeology* and understand its real effects. But an authentic European archaeology is continuously building on giganthic adverstising structures (fig. 3).

## 3. The three classic fronts: archaeological sites, museums and ... people?

I have recently named the point at which museographic objects and discourses, archaeological sites, monuments, landscapes and the public converge as the *original magical triphonium* (Ruiz Zapatero, in press). A *triphonium* that has been the original matrix of outreach and presentation in archaeology, because museums and archaeological sites remain the most direct, authentic, inspiring and convincing way to bring archaeology to the people (Lorrio, Ruiz Zapatero 2019). However, the sides of the *triphonium* have always been unequal.

For more than 150 years museums have received much attention (Urpi 2021) although their role in relation to non-formal education now needs to be (re)thought. Archaeological sites, except for spectacular monuments often with few demands on their maintenance (Stonehenge or the Colosseum in Rome), have received interest more recently and are now enjoying preferential attention, even from specialised journals (*Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites,* since 1995). And archaeological tourism (Díaz Andreu 2020) is providing them with a boost (Corpas, Castillo 2019; Grima 2017), although logically this

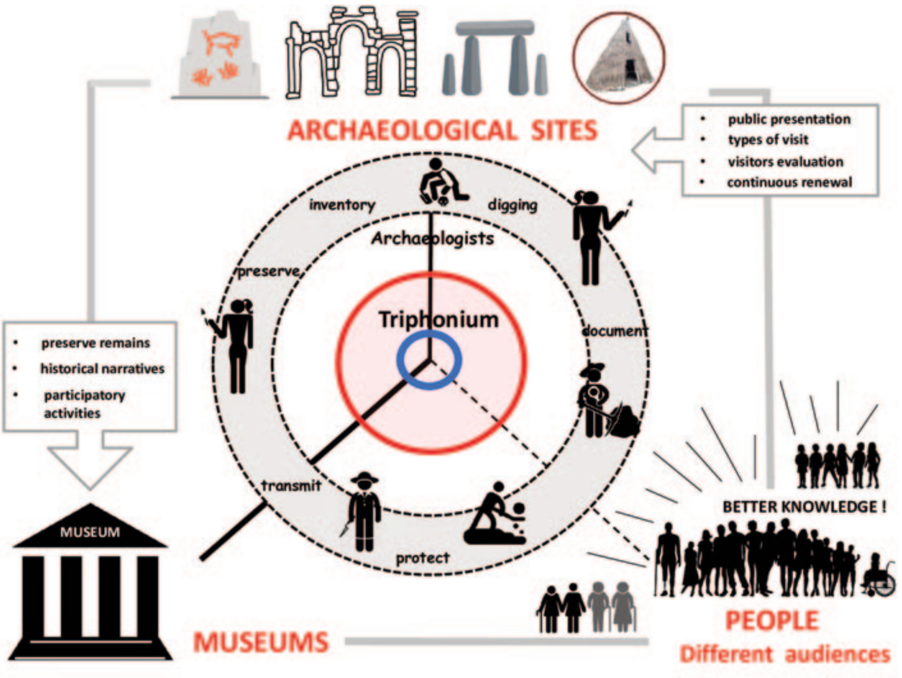
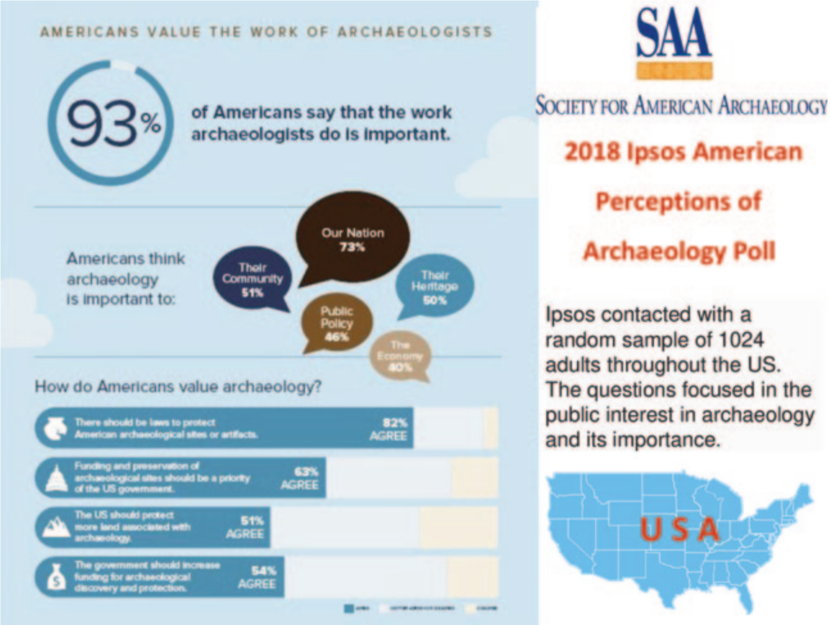

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES
public presentation
types of visit
visitors evaluation
continuous renewal
inventory
digging
Archaeologists
preserve
Triphonium
document
preserve remains
historical narratives
participatory activities
transmit
protect
MUSEUM
MUSEUMS
BETTER KNOWLEDGE !
PEOPLE
Different audiences

Fig. 4. The magical and asymmetrical *triphonium* of archaeological outreach: archaeological sites, museums and people (author).

only refers to the most important sites. However, the third component, the public, the audiences, have only been given a subsidiary role, a little less than unwanted guests, because interest in the public has been scarce, assuming as natural their passive role as mere receivers or 'consumers of the past'. Satisfaction surveys in museums – and only at some archaeological sites – have until recently been the only way of getting to know the audiences of archaeology. In most cases they are not very enlightening (Asensio, Pol 2005), although they do of course broaden our knowledge and renew research and action agendas and some can be very revealing (for a recent example see Kalessopoulou 2021).

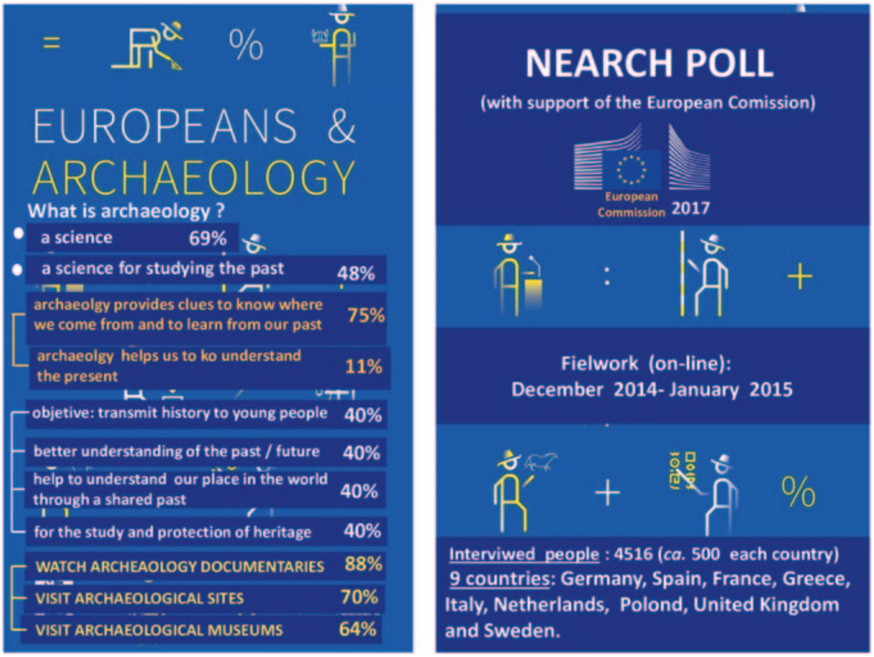
Two major surveys have been conducted in recent years in the USA and Europe to explore people's perceptions, expectations and opinions of archaeology. In line with what I propose, it is very interesting to highlight some details of the main surveys. The *IPSOS American Perceptions of Archaeology Poll* (2018), conducted for the *Society for American Archaeology*, randomly questioned over one thousand American adults across the country on a broad set of questions directly related to their interest in archaeology and the importance of the discipline (see full Report in https://documents.saa.org/container/docs/default-source/doc-publicoutreach/ipsos2023_report.pdf?_gl=1*upn6fi*_ga*NzkzNDY3NTMzLjE3MTU3MDEwNzM.*_ga_6SSR7BY1NJ*MTcxNTc3MjYyNC4zLjAuMTcxNTc3MjY0My4wLjAuMA). It revealed that 93% of North Americans think that work in archaeology is important and that it is important first for the country (73%), second for the community (51%) and third for heritage (50%). These factors were followed by public policy and the economy. As to how they value archaeology, 82% believe there should be legislation to protect archaeological sites and artefacts, while 62% think that funding and preservation of archaeological sites should be a government priority. Another survey was conducted in 2023 to update the data and the results were quite similar (fig. 5).

The Europeans & Archaeology Survey (2017), produced with the support of the European Commission (Amala *et al.* 2017), interviewed just over 4,500 people in nine countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK). Its main points can be summarised as follows. Most citizens know what archaeology is, 69% say it is a science and 48% specify it is a science that studies the past; 75% think that archaeology allows us to know where we come from and to learn from our past, although only 11% believe that archaeology helps us understand the present (a point of interest to improve for future work); 40% consider that the aim should be to pass on history to younger generations, with the same value that archaeology helps us better understand the past and thus prepare for the future, and that it helps us understand our place in the world through a shared past. Regarding the preferred cultural practices for learning about archaeology, 82% say watching documentaries, 70% say visiting archaeological sites and monuments and 64% say visiting museums and



Ipsos contacted with a random sample of 1024 adults throughout the US. The questions focused in the public interest in archaeology and its importance.

Fig. 5. How valuable is archaeology?: Ipsos American Perceptions of Archaeology Poll (2018) (see full reference in the text).



Interviwed people : 4516 (*ca.* 500 each country)
9 countries: Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Polond, United Kingdom and Sweden.

Fig. 6. European Poll "Europeans & Archaeology Survey" (author composition following data in Amala *et al.* 2017).

archaeological exhibitions (Christophilopoulou 2020) (fig. 6). Finally, it should be noted that this European survey allows us to qualify the ideas and opinions by country, as behind a certain general consensus there are some differences that outline important national nuances.

For the near future it would be good to move in two directions. On the one hand, with the short-term view, by collecting insights from people active in small archaeological societies and cultural associations related to archaeology to study local cases in greater depth and gain visibility of the detailed archaeological social fabric. On the other hand, in a long-term view, it should be relevant to consider the possibility of a large congress of spectators, visitors and archaeology enthusiasts.

The *First International Congress of Theatre Spectators* was held recently (Barcelona, Romea Theatre, 24-26 October 2022: https://www.aforafocus.cat/congresespectadorsbcn/), "a unique event", in which "spectators were both subject and object of analysis" (Lladó 2022). The central idea was for both experts and audiences to express their concerns, needs, habits and desires and to explore the role of spectators in the performing arts of the future (see the *Manifest de Barcelona sobre els espectadors de teatre/Barcelona Manifesto on Theatre Spectators* at: https://www.aforafocus.cat/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Forma_Afora_Focus_CIET_Manifesto_Web-1.pdf).

In a way – and transferred to archaeology – I believe that people are increasingly interested not only in archaeological views of the past, but also in its 'intrahistory', in how the data is prepared and how we know what we are explaining. Just as *the theatre audience took to the stage* (Lladó 2022), the *archaeology audience would make archaeological sites and museums their own*, occupy the chairs at conference tables and give talks. It would be a great opportunity to give a voice to the audiences of archaeology, to whom we hardly give one, and for us, the experts, to learn much from the people interested in archaeology. In short, to make the *viewers of archaeology* in their fullest diversity, and all those minorities, the protagonists, because the more different points of view that are recognised, the better the result will be.

## 4. The discourses: 'Politically correct pressure' and the hidden face of archaeology

In the field of archaeological discourse there are two basic issues that deserve to be considered with attention and interest. The first is what we could call the pressure of 'political correctness', a whole set of ideas, evaluations, demands and even impositions on how to act appropriately in archaeological matters. The tricky thing is that, although reasonable in origin and certainly necessary, their supposedly exaggerated pretensions sometimes serve to criticise and partly deactivate the overall value of the proposals.

Thus the consideration of gender issues – sorely needed to break with the exclusively male view since the beginning of modern archaeology – has achieved intelligent and brilliant proposals (Dawson 2000). It has led to us recovering the visibility of women in a variety of aspects, from researching the archaeological record to dissemination in illustrations in teaching books, magazines and museum murals and dioramas, populated until recently by an unjustified predominance of men and a near-transparency of women (Matić 2024). Albeit much more timidly, this is also the case of the LGTBIQ+ community (Klembaara 2021), firstly in need of a clear awareness of inclusivity (Rutecki, Blackmore 2016), and secondly in overcoming empirical difficulties because it is more difficult to address in the archaeological record. Queer theory in archaeology has oscillated between discussions of sex, gender and sexuality (the search for homosexuality in the past) and the examination of normative chronological and field archaeology models (Croucher 2005), but its real value lies in providing a structure that addresses all aspects of identity formation and the behaviours and processes that mediate them (Blackmore 2011).

On the other hand, dismantling racist approaches of all kinds, but in the Western world with a strong focus on the black population, requires many synergies, and the defence of a non-racist archaeology involves following the approaches of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Franklin *et al.* 2020). It should also be recognised that there are many other supposedly 'low-intensity' types of racism seeping into contemporary archaeological discourses, a subject that brings us directly to the latest obsession of political correctness: the decolonisation of 'everything' – archaeological museums and exhibitions and whatever media convey visions of the past. Decolonise to decolonise! is the slogan repeated *ad nauseam*. It is true that there are areas that make sense, such as the reclaiming of looted archaeological artefacts (Hamilakis 2016). However, protocols must be established, archaeological objects must be traceable and each case must be treated individually. I believe we need to study and reflect on what the decolonisation of museums really means; demands that are ultimately directly related to museums. The case of the so-called Elgin marbles, the friezes from the Parthenon in Athens, currently preserved and exhibited in the British Museum, is only the tip of a very large iceberg.

The fear of all major museums of an avalanche of repatriations of cultural property, with or without arguments, which could empty museums (Losson 2021), is undoubtedly a factor slowing a return of such assets, considering the long history of European colonialism (González Ruibal 2010). It is a tap on a barrel that could lead to a flood. Each case can – and I believe should – be considered in detail and with legal and historical reasoning, as well as for international benefit. And always we need to keep in mind professional ethics in archaeology (González Ruibal 2018). Otherwise, it will be an attempt to contain a swamp that will continue to grow and eventually burst the dam.

Another dimension rarely made explicit in archaeological discourses is the profound history of theoretical and methodological approaches and giving visibility to disagreements and committed minority views, a sort of hidden face. It seems that it is only important to tell a closed, accessible and simple story. But in reality, archaeological research is often characterised by gaps in knowledge, controversies between competing hypotheses and even profound disagreements on some issues. This academic or disciplinary reality is not easy to communicate without non-experts gaining the impression that archaeologists really don't know that much and even disagree on many things. In any case, acknowledging our ignorance and our disagreements – and doing so clearly – should be part of our outreach work, because it means respecting the consensus of historical knowledge and respecting our audiences, as well as offering the opportunity to propose highly interesting perspectives and avenues for future research.

## 5. Agendas: audiences, subjects, approaches and funding

The public, audiences, visitors and spectators of archaeology have traditionally been relegated, disregarded, even ignored and treated as mere passive consumers of archaeological presentations and discourses. This means that we only have information on audiences for the last four or five decades – and even then with serious gaps – and that our minimally qualified information on behaviours, ideas, expectations, preferences and opinions of the different archaeology audiences is therefore limited to the last three or four generations.

We have knowledge about barely three or four generations of archaeology 'spectators'. How many generations of audiences have we lost since the beginning/middle of the 19th century? Have we attempted to recover the memories of those pioneering generations of our discipline? Are there any objects, documents, artefacts, footprints that allow us to approach the memories of all those generations of public over more than 150 years? The answer is yes, at least there are some clues, although they are difficult to track down, as they seem almost invisible. In Spain, however, the old visitors' books of archaeological sites or monuments offer some clues, such as the case of the first monument formally opened for public visitation, the Roman necropolis of Carmona (Seville) with information dating back to 19th century or the signature book of the Cave of Altamira. In France the records of the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution at Paris date back to 18th century (*Muséum national d'histoire naturelle* created in 1793), and names, tickets and other documentation have been kept, and in the UK the megalithic complex at Stonehenge has also preserved some of this type of evidence, dating back to late 19th century.

Archaeology is often displayed for different audiences as a zoo full of stories about people of the past. In fact, the universal exhibitions of the 19th century depicted *prehistoric peoples* as if they were exhibits in *human zoos*, just as living groups then called 'primitive' or 'savage' were exhibited in the same way (Sánchez Gómez 2013, 2020). Zoos and archaeological museums bear certain similarities (Holtorf 2008). Zoos originally gained a lot of attention for displaying exotic animals, although today the social perception has been turning against them, due to the conditions of the 'caged' animals. Archaeological museums also gained attention for exhibiting – albeit without bars but in glass cases – the material culture of the 'primitives' of the past. Today dioramas and artistic models show humans from distant pasts brought back to life, veritable devices between art and science (Moser 1999, 2001). Their meanings are ultimately in people's heads, because visitors, although they learn new ideas, also carry with them their own and preconceived images that they inevitably impose on what they see (Scott 2010).

The financing of archaeology is a real, pressing problem with a diversity of solutions depending on the country. If we do not even have quantitative data on the number of archaeologists in each European country, it will be well understood that the quantities and economic allocations of national archaeologies are only rough approximations. The key problem is the general consideration of investment in archaeology as an expense without return. Or consider that it is only worth putting public money where a clear political and/or economic benefit can be obtained. And that means *commodifying archaeology* and abandoning the states obligations towards archaeological heritage. But there are many possibilities for obtaining public benefit, even with preventive archaeology (Fredheim, Watson 2023).

## 6. The 'pillaging of the past': the political and media management of archaeology

In the last twenty years we have begun to see a disturbing socio-political change, with the growing discrediting of science, extreme cultural relativism, the proliferation and even invasion of fake news, political populism, the decline of critical consciousness and, in short, the shaping of somewhat 'anaesthetised' societies. In this practically globalised scenario, history, the narratives of the past and the archaeology of remote times constitute a vein of interesting, highly manipulable and useful information for the construction of tailor-made pasts – *à la carte* pasts – by the political powers and the media. This is because imposing vi-

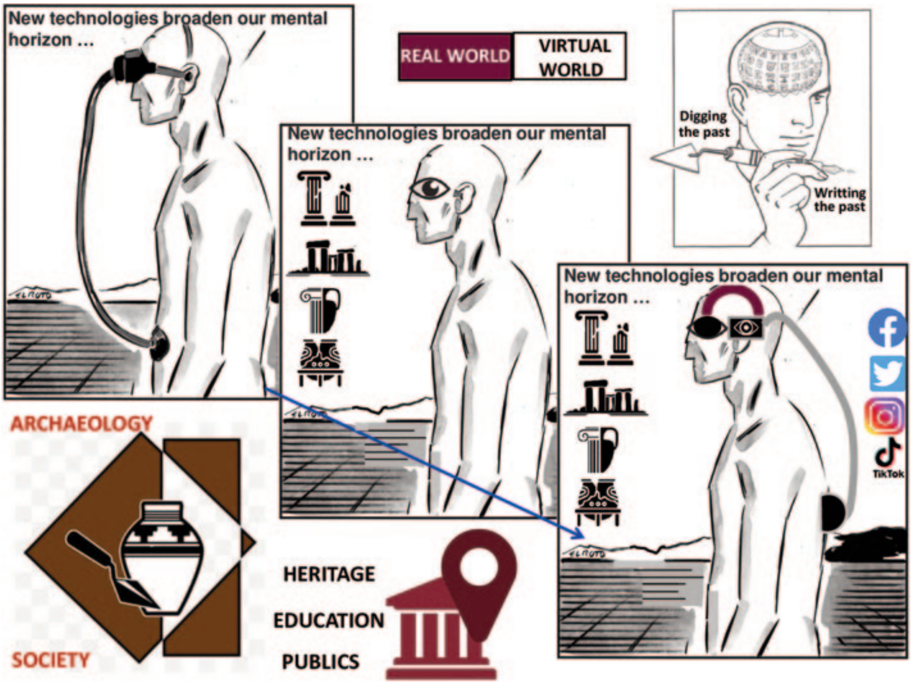

New technologies broaden our mental horizon ...
REAL WORLD
VIRTUAL WORLD
Digging the past
Writting the past
New technologies broaden our mental horizon ...
New technologies broaden our mental horizon ...
TikTok
ARCHAEOLOGY
SOCIETY
HERITAGE
EDUCATION
PUBLICS

Fig. 7. Irony on how new technologies broaden our mental horizon (author composition on El Roto´s original graphic cartoon in the newspaper *El País*).

sions of the past creates feelings in the present and predisposes attitudes and beliefs in the future. Political powers and the media plunder the past through self-interested selections, intentional omissions and implausible inventions. It is a slow but continuous pillaging of the past in the service of present-day political and media agendas, which construct fraudulent messages without any qualms. As George Orwell wrote, “he who controls the past controls the future; and he who controls the present controls the past”.

Faced with the panorama described above, there can be no other attitude than the defence of rigorous, critical and open historical and archaeological knowledge. We must resist the simplification imposed by the political powers and the trivialisation of many media, especially the periodical press, popular magazines and, of course, the inevitable social media (González Ruibal *et al.* 2018). In any case we should pay more attention to the *dubious archaeology,* which is continuously growing (Feder 2020). It is possible to open up spaces for archaeological criticism that combine attractive views connected to contemporary challenges with relevant reflections for a historically literate citizenry: magazines worthy of dis-

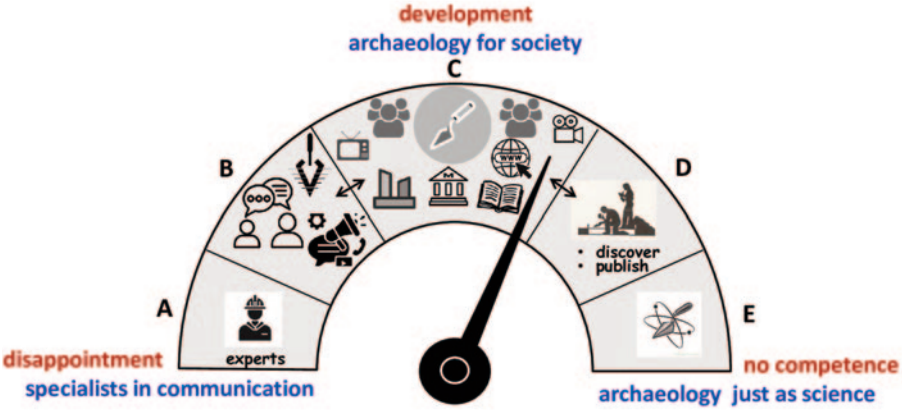


Fig. 8. Attitudes of archaeologist´s on how to deal with communication in archaeology (author).

semination that exist in almost all European countries, institutions and foundations with conference seasons dealing with topics of social interest, archaeological tours and other types of initiative, increasingly diverse and hybrids of different genres, but never crossing the red lines that must always clearly separate the rigour of archaeological knowledge with the concessions – controlled and reasonable – for the sake of accessible discourse and free of specialist jargon.

The media will always be ahead of us, but it is important to control the rigour of basic archaeological information. Augmented reality, 3D recreations and other advances in archaeological communication should always be supervised by archaeologists. And here lies a debate about how communication specialists and archaeology specialists build 'products of the past', whether they collaborate or not and if they do, in what way. The conceptual arc of attitudes towards dissemination ranges from positions of disagreement – exclusive to communication experts, they are the experts and builders of the media product (A) and that's all there is to it – to the opposite extreme, that this work is simply not within the competence of archaeologists, who do science and produce historical knowledge (E) (see fig. 8). Between the two extremes on the arc of attitudes to dissemination, intermediate positions can be identified, of dialogue and collaboration between communicators and archaeologists (B), in the majority of cases with preeminence of the latter (C) – perhaps the majority of recent experiences – such as the presentation of archaeological sites and monuments, museums, books, films and TV documentaries. Close to the arc of the 'very scientific archaeologists' are those who are clear about their work as discoverers, researchers and publishers of all kinds of eminently archaeological work (D), but at the same time believe in their social obligation to disseminate, even if only occasionally.

## 7. Other ways of presenting the past to people

It is quite possible that much of the responsibility for the poor communication in archaeology has to do with our obsession as experts that what is important is rationality. This is obviously true, but just as important is emotionality. The rationalist obsession, I'm afraid, quite often excludes sensitivity and emotionality, which is ultimately tantamount to excluding people. That is why I believe it is good to explore experiences that are strictly speaking non-archaeological, but related to the past and people. We need to pay attention to their ability to be interested in attractive and participatory themes, since it is possible that from all this we can extract ideas, principles, formulas and ways in which different audiences can get involved in archaeology, freely, enthusiastically and of their own free will.

Among these other ways of presenting the past, which are undoubtedly closer to people than archaeology itself, I will briefly consider the possibilities of comics, theatre and gastronomy.

The production of comics in archaeology today covers a wide spectrum, mainly in the fields of *transmedia archaeology* (Scolari *et al.* 2014) and educational archaeology (Swogger 2022), as the discipline offers many possibilities to move within fictional and creative media and structures (Various authors 2012). Of course, archaeologically inspired comics, concerned with a good scenography and a plausible script, constitute an attractive and powerful medium (Gallay 2002; Kamash *et al.* 2022, Ruiz Zapatero 2005, 2009, 2016, 2022). But undoubtedly those created by archaeologists and based on first-hand research – comics-based research – are much more so (Kuttner *et al.* 2021), to the point of being published in comic format in academic journals. This is the case of the British author Swogger (2015), who also uses it for social protests and the defence of archaeological sites (Swogger 2020). And it is important to bear in mind that comics in the 21st century are trans-generational and that their language is growing in many areas. Comics are one of the most brutal creative and expressive media existing; you can do anything with a pencil and paper ... and ingenuity, of course. The possibilities in archaeology, a strongly visual and narrative discipline, are enormous. And once again we can engage readers who would never open an archaeology book or visit a museum, thus broadening the base of our audiences.

To the wide diversity of specialists in different fields of archaeology I'm sure that archaeologists specialised in offering knowledge of the past in comic format will be added in the coming years. The French *bande dessinée* – undoubtedly the most prolific and highest-quality comic strip – (Lebrun 2021; Semonsout 2010) is becoming another type of scientific work in archaeology (Coudier 2017, p. 130). It is a scientific *bande dessinée* built on the hybridisation of different

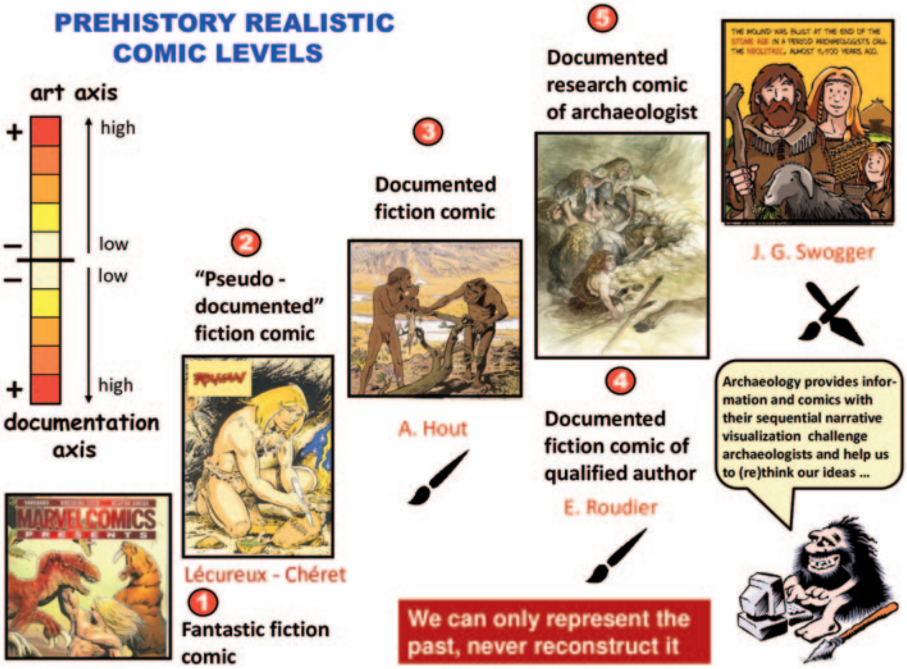

PREHISTORY REALISTIC COMIC LEVELS
art axis
+
high
–
low
–
low
+
high
documentation axis
MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS
RAHAN
Lécureux - Chéret
1
Fantastic fiction comic
2
"Pseudo - documented" fiction comic
3
Documented fiction comic
A. Hout
4
Documented fiction comic of qualified author
E. Roudier
5
Documented research comic of archaeologist
THE MOUND WAS BUILT AT THE END OF THE STONE AGE IN A PERIOD ARCHAEOLOGISTS CALL THE NEOLITHIC, ALMOST 5,500 YEARS AGO.
J. G. Swogger
Archaeology provides information and comics with their sequential narrative visualization challenge archaeologists and help us to (re)think our ideas ...
We can only represent the past, never reconstruct it

Fig. 9. Five categories of prehistory realistic comics (author with illustrations of the refered comics).

media and the permeability between them, as comics are true "gateways between disciplines, arts, subjects and [different] views" (Coudier 2017, p. 194).

Theatre – and it is worth remembering the stimulating and transgressive book *Theatre/Archaeology* (Pearson, Shanks 2001) – can be a powerful means of dissemination. Juan Mayorga, Spain's greatest living playwright and winner of the Princess of Asturias Award (2022), said in a recent interview that theatre represents the highest intensity value of "putting the past in the present" by artistic means. And although its fictional component may be important, it is that which provides the greatest intensity. What Mayorga meant to say is that theatre is the most intensive way of communicating the past ("putting the past in the present") due to the emotional involvement of the spectators and because the theatrical experience offers a total 'uniqueness': it is always a unique and unrepeatable moment (Lladó 2022). Therein lies the value of theatre's communicative intensity.

Theatre can range from large-scale international festival shows to modest but intense performances at archaeological sites, such as the theatrical stagings of the Celtiberian wars at Numantia, staged alongside the town that famously resist-ed Rome. More than 200 actors take part and there is seating for around 4000 spectators (Tierraquemada 2023). It also works with troubled pasts where performance and archaeological practice can tell stories with strong emotionality and thereby expand audiences for heritage and archaeology (Fennelly 2023). *Return: The Promise of the Day* (2019) is a South Korean musical that tells the story of a Korean War veteran (1950-1953) and his grandson who work on archaeologically exhuming the remains of the dead. Through flashbacks and episodes in the present, archaeology becomes a storytelling device. And it manages to show "how archaeological practice can be portrayed to tell complex and emotional stories about the past without compromising the integrity of the discipline or the serious nature of the subject matter in question" (Fennely 2023, p. 14). In the words of the Argentinian theatre director Lola Arias, winner of the International Ibsen Theatre Prize 2024 (Bianchini 2024): "theatre and art, culture, generate networks, generate community and raise awareness". For the representation of the past it is a lot.

The performances increasingly being staged in archaeological museums – dramatisations of the past set in the museums that guard our prehistoric and historic past – have a very direct, unique and emotional impact on the audience. This is also what reenactment groups do, as they offer historical and archaeological information with an emphasis on costumes, adornments, weapons, instruments, etc. that, as a whole, have a 'theatrical' aspect (Agnew, Lamb 2019). In any case, although they can foster the acquisition of critical thinking in citizens (González-González *et al.* 2022) great care must be taken in their quality taking advantage of rigorous, constantly updated research and didactic knowledge (Carretero *et al.* 2022; González-Álvarez *et al.* 2022).

After all, "we are stories. We make sense of the world through stories. We produce stories and remember through stories" (Johnsson, Adaler 2006). Archaeologists are storytellers and the very nature of archaeology is an effective means of communication.

On the other hand, the intensity of archaeological communication through the cinema (Tejerizo 2023), audiovisuals and television series is undoubtedly also appreciable, although the sense of 'uniqueness' of theatre is lost. There are good films that show archaeologists in action, such as the Netflix film *The Dig* (2021); based on the novel of the same title by J. Preston (2007), it narrates the excavation of the fabulous Anglo-Saxon period ship burial site of Sutton Hoo. *The Dig* is a production in which archaeology forms the basis of the film, although there are scenes that go beyond the discipline (Burg *et al.* 2022). It contains interesting sequences reflecting field methods and showing their slow and painstaking processes, archaeological descriptions and explanations of finds. As a whole, it succeeds in showing the relevance of archaeology and offers an acceptable image of it, far from other films with archaeologists running around and fighting

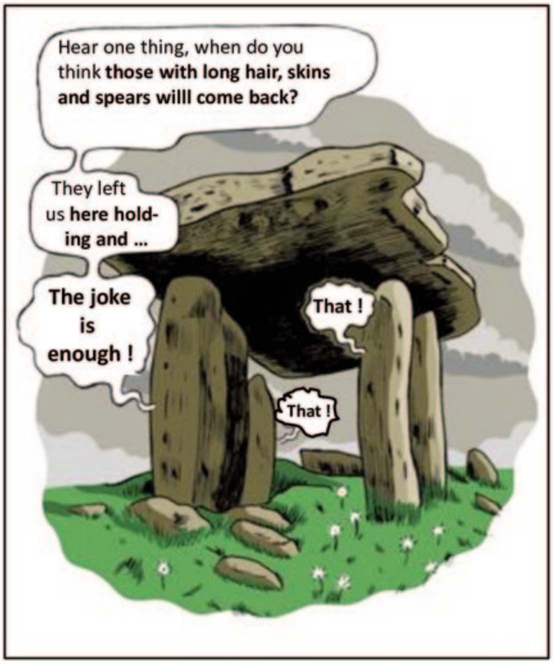

Hear one thing, when do you think **those with long hair, skins and spears willl come back?**
They left us **here holding and ...**
**The joke is enough !**
**That !**
**That !**

Fig. 10. Cartoon on megalithic 'animated stones' (Reyes 2013, translation is mine).

bad guys (Burg *et al.* 2022, p. 41). However, the list of mediocre or simply bad films that distort the work of archaeology is not short. We could consider cinema from an archaeological perspective, a kind of media archaeology (Elsaesser 2004) in order to rescue old films and build up a picture of how archaeology has been dealt with since the beginnings of cinema.

Another rarity in archaeological popularisation is the archaeology of food (Metheny, Beaudry 2015) or, in a more presentist dimension, prehistoric and historical gastronomy (Ruiz Zapatero 2021). Food in the past and present plays a crucial role in human societies; it is the first need of human beings, its evolution is that of humanity (Fernández Armesto 2001) and it is perhaps the first element of identity of human societies (Twiss 2019). Nevertheless, research into it has only awakened in the last decade (Cutwright 2021; Hastorf 2021).

The approach of gastronomy experts is even more recent. Possibly the most interesting recent case is Ferrán Adríá's *Bullipedia* project, a major history of Western gastronomy in 50 volumes through narratives that bring together on an equal footing archaeologists, anthropologists, historians and *restaurateurs* committed to unveiling the complex and exciting history of cuisine from its origins (Ferrán, Lozano 2019). The project won the *Grand Prix de la Culture Gastronomique* 2023, awarded by the International Academy of Gastronomy (AIG), for its contribution to recovering the gastronomic memory of humanity. It is a holistic history that integrates archaeology with gastronomy; food and culinary preparations with ecology; production and storage contexts with ethnohistory and ethnoarchaeology; environmental changes with dietary trends; meals and banquets with social ties; and gastronomic tastes and preferences with the invisible construction of all kinds of identities (Ruiz Zapatero 2021, p. 220).

The initiatives involving courses, palaeo-gastronomic festivals and tasting experiences are, without a doubt, new ways of bringing dishes, tastes and flavours to the present. This is also heritage dissemination, possibly the most basic kind: that of understanding who we are through knowledge of the origins of food. Merely by way of example, in the Canary Islands traditional dishes, including *gofio* of course, are being revived by chef Marcos Tavio (Ávalos 2023). A project entitled *Archaeology of Taste. Creative Cuisine, Painted Cave and the Food of the Indigenous World of Grand Canary* (2022) unites archaeological research into food – that eaten by the ancient Canary Islanders more than 1400 years ago – and creative cuisine. In the words of Sandra Lozano (2023), an expert in food archaeology at the *Bullifoundation*: "[Tavío] is a chef who speaks like an archaeologist and has been on a journey that is the opposite of mine: he has gone from gastronomy to archaeology as I once did in the other direction". This is undoubtedly a singular project that transcends the usual, investigates what is most essential, what was eaten then and what we eat today, analysing and recreating processes of culinary production and preparation. It is different and certainly a tasty way of learning, as revealed by the magnificent website (www.arqueologiadelgusto.com).

## 8. The profound challenges of present-day archaeology

In the last two decades, global archaeology has begun to address the profound histories of human societies with thematic approaches, seeking to establish the deep history of major themes that remain topical today (Shryock and Smail 2011). Perhaps the best overall expression is Graeber and Wengrow's recent (2021) *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. These major themes are as follows:

1) climate change (Fagan 2004; Fagan, Durrani 2021; Frankopan 2023);
2) human migrations (Bellwood 2014; Cohen 2021; Díez Martín 2019; Manning, Trimmer 2020) especially following the impact of archaeogenetics, although the effects of remain to be understood in detail (Anthony 2023);
3) human appropriation of oceans and continents (Abulafia 2019);
4) violence and warfare (González Ruibal 2023; Guilaine, Zammit 2004; Leppard, Murray 2024);

5) food (Fernández Armesto 2001);
6) the use of fire and its role in human diets (Perlès 1977, 2024; Wrangham 2009) and prehistoric kitchens (Adrià; Lozano 2019);
7) the origin of social inequalities (Flannery, Marcus 2012; Lalueza-Fox 2022);
8) the prehistoric and historic invisibility of women (Pathous-Mathis 2020, Sánchez Romero 2022).

Archaeology provides evidence and data for the grand genealogy of these phenomena, laying threads, *temporal threads*, that connect remote pasts with the present. It makes us aware that the problems of the world we live in have their roots and evolutionary lines in the distant past (Renfrew 2007).

Archaeology brings us closer to the people of the past, to all the peoples of the past, including *the voiceless, those at the bottom* (Faulkner 2000), and thus simply brings us closer to the whole life of humankind. Archaeology reveals fragments of the stories of the more than 60,000 generations between us and the first Palaeolithic settlers, and produces historical knowledge from social materiality. In every time and place, archaeology recovers pieces of history from the past, breaths of vanished lives and at the same time provides reflections for today. And it does so in a multitude of places and media. It is an immense repository that is always growing and accessible to all because it never closes. That is why the study of the past has a great future.

Today, archaeology has become an essential contemporary science for understanding the history of the world we live in. Therefore, in one way or another, we must try and ensure that the citizens of the 21st century are archaeologically literate in order to face the challenges of a free, democratic, responsible life together, based on scientific knowledge. It is highly significant that three out of four respondents in a recent European survey opined that citizens should be archaeologically literate. In summary, because archaeology, while looking back to the past, also helps us look forward to the future.

**Abstract**
Archaeology focused on discoveries, sites and museums, has traditionally paid little attention to the publics of the material past. We need more and broader studies on different archaeological audiences. Good and extensive polls on the perception of archaeology are revised. Because just with better knowledge of our publics we can explore new approaches, hybrids with other media such as comics, theatre and gastronomy, but there are many other possibilities. The negative influence of political powers and social media as the danger of "political correctness" on archaeological approaches, are also briefly considered. The present and future challenges of archaeology as a deep history of the great themes of Humanity, is finally addressed.
**Keywords**: archaeology, outreach, publics, dissemination, society.

*L'archeologia incentrata sulle scoperte, sui siti e sui musei, ha tradizionalmente prestato poca attenzione ai pubblici del passato. Sono necessari studi più ampi e approfonditi sui diversi pubblici dell'archeologia, insieme a sondaggi validi e approfonditi sulla percezione dell'archeologia. Perché solo con una migliore conoscenza dei nostri pubblici possiamo esplorare nuovi approcci, ibridi con altri media come il fumetto, il teatro e la gastronomia, insieme a molte altre possibilità. In questo articolo si considera anche brevemente l'influenza negativa dei poteri politici e dei social media, come il pericolo del 'politicamente corretto' applicato agli approcci archeologici. Si affrontano infine le sfide presenti e future dell'archeologia come storia profonda dei grandi temi dell'umanità.*
***Parole chiave**: archeologia, outreach, pubblici, disseminazione, società.*

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