Chapter 6

Built and Destroyed Memory: Where Does Methodology Lead?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes the methodological approach to the study of archaeological heritage in its architectural consistency. More specifically, two case studies are here presented to mark how their peculiarities lead the scholar to follow different processes in order to achieve a high level of awareness. More than this, the chapter tries to comprehend to what extent common tools and strategies can be applied to dissimilar case studies in archaeological field. Recent technologies in this field have given to scholars and cultural heritage experts a new tool to preserve what still exists and to virtually reconstruct what has been destroyed.

INTRODUCTION

The study of archaeological structures is, of course, heterogeneous. It is related to various factors such as the site chronology, its location and consistency. Analysis and interpretation of archaeological heritage is a painstaking activity that includes a wide range of interdisciplinary subjects and competences. This work is conducted by various types of professionals: architects, archaeologists, art historians, computer scientists, etc. precisely when a strong need is felt for sharing extensive knowledge still growing with the continuous progress and the potentialities inherent in digital systems. Nowadays, this close collaboration make possible the understanding of the key elements of archaeological heritage based on considerations extracted by taking advantages of the potentialities of technologically advanced tools. What has recently been taking shape is the all-comprehensive approach which can be adapted to comprehend archaeological artifacts on a large, medium and small scale and at the same time take into consideration all the different competences involved and optimize the results obtained through concerted efforts. Within this framework studying, analyzing and contextualizing an element or an archaeological site becomes the basis for any

research. Despite of the differences related to a specific context, the methodology that leads each phase of the investigation is substantially unique. During the entire process of knowledge, architectural survey\(^1\) plays a critical role as the basis for any construction of 3D model. The significance of constructing digital models in the domain of archaeology is a well-established idea and only reinforces the theoretical bases of survey and representation, conceived as structured systems for organizing and communicating information, and as the databases for critical analysis.

Architectural survey has many purposes: to validate information coming from other sources, to furnish proof of the current status and to support the following steps of the process.

In the first case, the starting point is the documentation of the past: archival and bibliographic sources, excavation notebooks, archaeologists’ notes. The only documentation of the present is therefore partially useful for the knowledge of complex realities. But not only: there are some cases in which we approach the study of realities no longer existing – because they have been destroyed or because they have been profoundly modified by subsequent interventions – in which documenting the actual configuration is, in fact, impossible.

The second step involves the documentation of existing archaeological structures and artifacts is a complex activity. It consists in collecting, interpreting and disseminating a large amount of information, which help to define a system we can use to understand our archaeological heritage.

In the first two cases, a common methodology can be applied independently from the object of the research: the integrated data acquisition together with the preliminary elaboration related to them can be considered a common ground on which the survey project is built.

Otherwise, in the third case, survey is used as a tool for conservation and restoration purposes or for virtual reconstructions and analysis. In this occasion, although the starting point is a unique methodology, the data elaboration follows different procedures strictly dependent from the consistency of the case study. At this point, two categories come out from the wild field of archaeological sites: on one hand, places and archaeological remains that have been preserved in their materiality through the years, on the other hand, the ones who didn’t.

Each of the three modalities includes methodological and practical issues that must be addressed so that the result of the process constitutes a scientifically valid datum, useful to all the subjects involved in the operations of knowledge.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Approach to Tangible and Intangible Heritage

All documentation activities are basic instruments of knowledge whose aim is the archaeological heritage identification, description, representation, preservation and conservation. The great number of information the archaeological heritage conveys imposes the necessity of a dialogue between various phases: acquisition, virtualization and data communication. The relationship between archaeological research and information technologies (IT) represents one of the most popular fields of research while the definition of potentiality and criticality of informatics system constitutes the most advanced point in the theoretical and methodological debates concerning these subjects. The practice of utilizing such systems has almost become a standard. It relates to digitalization of documentation obtained from archivist research and excavations at archaeological sites, to the knowledge and documentation acquired thanks