Top of Form

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  Table of Contents  |  |

 |
| 1. [Introduction](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1344&tabid=953)
2. [Understanding the Past](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1345&tabid=953)
3. [What is Archaeology](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1346&tabid=953)
4. [Methods of Gathering Data](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1347&tabid=953)
5. [Archaeological Collections](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1348&tabid=953)
6. [Archaeology and the Public](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1349&tabid=953)
7. [Protecting the Past](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1350&tabid=953)
8. [Additional Resources](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1351&tabid=953)

 [Lesson Plans and Activities](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=954&tabid=953)[Acknowledgments](http://www.saa.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=1352&tabid=953) |
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|  |  |  **What is Archaeology?**  |  |

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| [Introduction](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346#01)[How does archaeology help us understand history and culture?](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346#02)[Types of Archaeology](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346#03) |  | [Archaeological Sites](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346#04) [Artifacts, Features, and Ecofacts](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346#05)[Context](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346#06) [Resources](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346#07) |

**Introduction**Archaeology is the study of the ancient and recent human past through material remains. It is a subfield of anthropology, the study of all human culture. From million-year-old fossilized remains of our earliest human ancestors in Africa, to 20th-century buildings in present-day New York City, archaeology analyzes the physical remains of the past in pursuit of a broad and comprehensive understanding of human culture.**How does archaeology help us understand history and culture?**Archaeology offers a unique perspective on human history and culture that has contributed greatly to our understanding of both the ancient and the recent past. Archaeology helps us understand, not only where and when people lived on the earth, but also why and how they have lived, examining the changes and causes of changes that have occurred in human cultures over time, seeking patterns and explanations of patterns, to explain everything from how and when people first came to inhabit the Americas, to the origins of agriculture and complex societies. Unlike history, which relies primarily upon written records and documents, to interpret great lives and events, archaeology allows us to delve far back into the time before written languages existed and to glimpse the lives of everyday people through analysis of things they made and left behind. Archaeology is the only field of study that covers all times periods and all geographic regions inhabited by humans. It has helped us to understand big topics like ancient Egyptian religion, the origins of agriculture in the Near East, colonial life in Jamestown Virginia, the lives of enslaved Africans in North America, and early Mediterranean trade routes. In addition. archaeology today can inform us about the lives of individuals, families and communities that might otherwise remain invisible.**Types of Archaeology**Prehistoric archaeology focuses on past cultures that did not have written language and therefore relies primarily on excavation or data recovery to reveal cultural evidence. Historical archaeology is the study of cultures that existed (and may still) during the period of recorded history--several thousands of years in parts of the Old World, but only several hundred years in the Americas. Within **historical archaeology** there are related fields of study that include classical archaeology, which generally focuses on ancient Greece and Rome and is often more closely related to the field of art history than to anthropology, and biblical archaeology, which seeks evidence and explanation for events described in the Bible and therefore is focused primarily on the Middle East. **Underwater archaeology** studies physical remains of human activity that lie beneath the surface of oceans, lakes, rivers, and wetlands. It includes maritime archaeology—the study of shipwrecks in order to understand the construction and operation of watercraft—as well as cities and harbors that are now submerged, and dwellings, agricultural, and industrial sites along rivers, bays and lakes. Some of the other specialties within archaeology include urban archaeology, industrial archaeology, and bioarchaeology. Cultural Resource Management archaeology, known as “CRM”, refers to archaeology that is conducted to comply with federal and state laws that protect archaeological sites.**Archaeological Sites**An archaeological site is any place where physical remains of past human activities exist. There are many, many types of archaeological sites. Prehistoric archaeological sites include permanent Native American villages or cities, stone quarries from which raw materials were obtained, rock art petroglyphs and pictographs, cemeteries, temporary campsites, and megalithic stone monuments. A site can be as small as a pile of chipped stone tools left by a prehistoric hunter who paused to sharpen a spear point, or as large and complex as the prehistoric settlements of Chaco Canyon in the American southwest, or Stonehenge in England. Historical archaeology sites can be found in areas as densely populated as New York City, or far below the surface of a river, or sea. The wide variety of historical archaeological sites studied include shipwrecks, battlefields and other military sites, slave quarters, plantations, cemeteries, mills, and factories.**Artifacts, Features, and Ecofacts**Even the smallest archaeological site may contain a wealth of important information. *Artifacts are objects made or used by people* that are analyzed by archaeologists to obtain information about the peoples who made and used them. *Non-portable artifacts called features* are also important sources of information on archaeological sites. Features include things like soil stains that indicate where storage pits, garbage dumps, structures, or fences once existed. *Ecofacts found on archaeological sites are natural remains such as plant and animal remains* that can help archaeologists understand diet and subsistence patterns.**Context***Context in archaeology refers to the relationship that artifacts have to each other and the situation in which they are found*. Every artifact found on an archaeological site has a precisely defined location. The exact spot, where an artifact is found, is recorded before it is removed from that location. In the 1920s, when a stone spear point was found lodged between the ribs of a species of bison that went extinct at the end of the last Ice Age, settled an argument that had gone on for decades, establishing once and for all that people had inhabited North America since the late Pleistocene. It is the context or association between the bison skeleton and the artifact that proved this. When people remove an artifact without recording its precise location, the context is lost forever and the artifact has little or no scientific value. Context is what allows archaeologists to understand the relationship between artifacts on the same site, as well as how different archaeological sites are related to each other.**Resources*** [**The Draw-an-Archaeologist Test**](http://saa.org/public/educators/PDF/Draw_an_Archaeologist.pdf) by Dr. Susan Dixon-RenoeThis activity, which helps to elicit student misconceptions about archaeology, can be used as a pre-unit activity as well as a concluding activity for an archaeology unit.
* [**Myths and Misconceptions**](http://www.saa.org/education/guidelines/myths.html)Check out how much you know about what archaeologists do and don’t do!
* [**Artifact Interpretation**](http://www.saa.org/PubEdu/A%26PE/vol5no2/vol5no2-article5.pdf)A simple exercise that demonstrates the amount of information that the study of a single artifact – a coin – can yield about a society.
* [**How is this Used?**](http://www.saa.org/PubEdu/A%26PE/vol5no2/vol5no2-article6.pdf) In this lesson students observe the form and shapes of tools of the past and make predictions about tool functions based on contemporary examples.
* [**Context**](http://saa.org/public/educators/PDF/context_lesson.pdf)*(Adapted from Intrigue of the Past, Smith et. al. 1996.)* This classroom activity uses a game and a discussion to demonstrate the importance of artifacts in context for learning about the past.
* [**Archaeology and You**](http://www.saa.org/publications/ArchAndYou/) This booklet from National Geographic Society and the Society for American Archaeology is designed to serve as a single reference about all aspects of the science of the past. Its topics range from basic definitions of archaeology, anthropology, and related disciplines to detailed glimpses at what archaeologists do and why they do it.
* **Explore careers in archaeology with your students using these brochures:** [The Path to Becoming an Archaeologist](http://www.saa.org/public/resources/SAA_PathBrochure.pdf) from the Society for American Archaeology[Underwater Archaeology and Careers in Historical Archaeology](http://www.sha.org/Publications/brochures.htm) from the Society for Historical Archaeology.
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**SOURCE:**

[What is **Archaeology**? - Society for American **Archaeology**](http://www.saa.org/Default.aspx?TabId=1346)

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How does **archaeology** help us understand history and culture? Types of **Archaeology**. **Archaeological** Sites Artifacts, Features, and Ecofacts. Context Resources

***University of Thessaly – Faculty of Social and Human Studies - Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology Instructor*: dr. Anastasia-Marina G.P. Tsoutsoulopoulou**

**SOURCE: Nancy Marie White, *Archaeology for Dummies*. Wiley Publishing, Inc.: Hoboken, NJ (2008)**

**N.B.:** The course instructor is accountable for the following summaries from N.M. White’s book excerpts. Titles and *some* passages will be quoted *(in italics)* directly from the book.

**Summary (pp.15-19)**

**How Archaeology Became a Modern Science – Early Diggers (p.15)**

Many famous, fascinating personalities were pioneers in the development of archaeology (and models for characters like Indiana Jones).

*Historical records say that a sixth-century B.C. Babylonian king and princess were the first to dig up remains of their own society’s glorious past, restore a by-then ancient Sumerian temple-pyramid, and display artifact finds in the palace. ….*

*… Real archaeology is only traceable (so far) back to the Renaissance (14th through 17th centuries), when a passion for learning about the classical past developed. Wealthy folks traveled to ancient lands like Egypt and Mesopotamia and collected antiquities (old items, usually sculptures) dug out of ruins. …. Antiquarian societies and collectors accumulated loads of items and began to establish museums to display them by the 18th century. ….*

*Most of the knowledge of the past that people had until modern times came from historical writings or myth and legend until real science began to emerge in the Western world. The Bible told people what had happened in the past, and folktales supplied the rest. ….*

**Nineteenth-century archaeology (p.16)**

*By the early 1800s, naturalists and early scientists had accumulated a good body of artifacts and archaeological knowledge and were using it to interpret humanity’s past in an orderly fashion. With historical models, they charted the progress of human society through time. ….*

Many early archaeologists looked for adventure in searching out the remains and exquisite artifacts of the ancient past. They didn’t really “discover” various sites. It was the local people who led them there. Some good archaeologists published the information and drawings and brought back antiquities for display. However, others grabbed ancient treasures to sell for profit or display on their own estates.

**Late 19th and early 20th-century improvements (p.17)**

*The goals of archaeological pursuits became more sophisticated and scientific by the late 19th century as investigators realized they needed systematic study to make sense of the wealth of finds. Here are some notable figures of this time in archaeology’s history when more careful digging developed:*

General Pitt Rivers (southern England in the 1880s)

Sir Flinders Petrie (Egyptian pyramids)

Sir Arthur Evans (Knossos, Crete, 1900. Minoan civilization)

Cyrus Thomas (U.S. Mississippi Valley, Native American groups)

**The early 20th century: Fabulous finds and academic advances (p.18)**

Archaeologists did more orderly excavation, and synthesis of the results became more commonplace during that period.

**Famous early figures**

**1.** *Howard Carter*, who had worked with Flinders Petrie in Egypt. He discovered the spectacular tomb of King Tut*.*

**2.** *Sir Leonard Woolley* dug in Syria in 1912, assisted by T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), with whom he also engaged in spy activities for the British government.

**3.** *Gertrude Bell*, an Arabic-speaking British travel writer and fascinating political figure in the Middle East, investigated Mesopotamian ruins and was also involved in British intelligence. She was instrumental in the emergence of the modern country of Iraq.

**4.** *Gertrude Caton-Thompson* worked in Egypt and then excavated at Great Zimbabwe in southern Africa in 1929. She said those ruins originated with indigenous African people.

**5.** *Sir Mortimer Wheeler* was a major British archaeologist by the 1920s. He dug sites of many kinds, from Roman towns to the famous Iron-Age hill fort Maiden Castle in southern England. Then he went to India and brought to light the ancient cities of the lost Indus Valley civilization in Pakistan.

**Archaeology gets more academic (p.19)**

*Scholars realized that their major goal should now be to organize some of the vast amounts of information that digs were providing.* V. Gordon Childe*, an Australian who delved into archaeology across Europe, produced the first major syntheses of prehistory. He talked about the processes of change in the deep human past that led to the Agricultural Revolution and the Urban Revolution – in other words, food production and later the emergence of early states. …..*

*In the early 20th century, lots of fossil finds that show that early humans first appeared in Africa came to light. Most of this study was not archaeological but the subject of human paleontology or paleoanthropology. ….*

*During the Great Depression of the 1930s, U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt began programs to bring jobs to the country, including a great deal of archaeological work, especially in the poor region of the South. Hundreds of mounds and other sites were dug, and thousands of bags of artifacts were retrieved and piles of data accumulated. By then, academic institutions were beginning to train archaeologists who could supervise workers and then synthesize the findings for major regions. …..*

* \* \* \* \* \*

**Different Kinds of Archaeology (pp.49-50)**

1. ***Avocational and educational archaeology*.** Amateur or avocational archaeologists do it as a hobby, not as a profession. … The word *amateur* comes from the Latin for “love” – you do it because you love it, not because you’re getting paid.
2. ***Landscape archaeology*** *considers the whole integrated environment in which people lived. For this specialty, you need to know geology, landforms, biology, and ecosystems to see resources available and how people would have used, even shaped, their surroundings.* Environmental archaeology *is another term for this.*
3. ***Geoarchaeology*** *combines geology, geography, and archaeology in various ways, whether studying soils, rock formations, and landforms or remote sensing, imaging, and mapping techniques. ….*
4. ***Mortuary archaeology*** *involves specialists who excavate human graves, often to relocate them out of the path of some new construction. Or they may study different kinds of burials to learn about social organization and religion.*
5. ***Bioarchaeology*** *refers to the study of human skeletons and their contexts; it requires training in biological anthropology.*
6. ***Field archaeology*** *(going out and digging) can be contrasted with* laboratory archaeology(processing and analyzing materials and data that come in from the dig), *but most professionals and amateurs do both.*
7. ***Theoretical archaeology*** *means figuring out what happened in the past by using particular models and assumptions about how humans behave at a general level. .… Different types of theories include* cognitive archaeology (humanistic, dealing with how people thought in the past), processual archaeology (scientific), and culture history (descriptive).
8. ***Ethnoarchaeology*** *(studying living cultures and their material stuff) and* experimental archaeology(replicating past artifacts yourself) *are two techniques used to help interpret what you’re digging up.*
9. ***Biblical archaeology*** *looks for evidence in the ground to support the historic record of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. So, it’s a particular form of* historical archaeology*.*
10. ***Archaeoastronomy*** *studies how past peoples related with the sky, including aligning monuments with the sun, moon, or planets and using astronomical knowledge for religious or other purposes.*
11. ***Garbology*** *is a term for the archaeology of our very modern trash, as collected weekly from our homes or deposited in landfills. It can tells us things about ourselves (consumer behavior, waste, biodegradability) that we can’t get anywhere else.*

**Special Studies Related to Archaeology (p.51)**

1. *Zooarchaeology:* Animal remains
2. *Paleoethnobotany:* Plant remains
3. *Archaeometry:* Archaeological sciences (and techniques)

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