

all traces of human existence, both in terms of places associated with human activities such as abandoned structures and remains of all kinds, as well as portable cultural materials (ICOMOS, 1990). The two main components of archaeological heritage resources are:

- the archaeological places and sites on the landscape;
- collections of objects housed in museums and in private ownership are normally referred to as ‘archaeological’ if they have been found buried in the ground or recovered from archaeological sites (ICON, 2011).

Threats to archaeological heritage

The main threats to archaeological resources include natural processes, such as weathering, ageing and decay. Some natural processes can be immediate and devastating, for example floods and earthquakes. The tsunami of 26 December 2005 in Southeast Asia destroyed many archaeological sites. Others can have a slow and cumulative impact. Even climatic changes have an impact on archaeological resources:

Rising sea levels are eating away at coastal sites, increased rainfall is eroding mud-brick ruins, creeping desert sands are blasting the traces of ancient civilizations, and the melting of ice is causing millennia-old organic remains to rot (Curry, 2009).

Archaeologists cannot stop global warming, but have to find solutions which will prevent or delay its effects. Nevertheless, simple measures such as installing protective roofing and documenting what is

Figure 1. Natural disasters can destroy archaeological resources in minutes.

