

Indeed, archaeology can lead to the destruction of the site completely.

For archaeological sites, excavation means altering the equilibrium of the place and that may also trigger a new environmental regime which did not exist before. Even reburial alters the conditions of the site and thus compromises its authenticity and integrity: “Changing or controlling the environment by reburial, building a protective enclosure or shelter on-site, or relocating selected components such as murals or sculptures, often indoors, means the site is no longer the same” (Matero, 2008, p. 3).

The contradiction of archaeology and conservation is in the methods and objectives of the two disciplines. Archaeology, by its nature, and the practice of excavation result in the destruction of the very site or object and this process is largely irreversible. Conservation, on the other hand, seeks to preserve the site or object with all its attributes, by insuring that its integrity and authenticity are maintained all the time. The objective of archaeology is to acquire knowledge.

In many ways, archaeology disrupts and reconfigures the site or object. It leaves a representative sample on site, and site reports detail its finds, but objects are removed to be given to museums. When archaeologists conserve sites, the idea in many instances is to preserve until better methods of study are found. Thus the main thrust is knowledge acquisition rather than for the wider good.

It is clear, even without entering into an exhaustive process of analysis, that there is a range of value systems involved in the protection of archaeological sites. “These systems are not necessarily identified with those philosophical values which inspire the academic conservation and restoration movements or with the responsibility for transmission of cultural heritage to the future” (Garcia Robles, 2000, Chapter 8). The philosophical values of conservation and restoration

Figure 3. Archaeological excavations are destructive by nature.

