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# Time for Archaeology!

## A personal portfolio of fieldwork

*Cornelius Holtorf*

First draft completed 11 June 2001  
Thoroughly revised 3 January 2014

### **Table of Content**

Wake-up in Salemi	06:15
Breakfast	06:30
Leave for Monte Polizzo, work begins	07:00
Breakfast break (15 min)	09:30
Lunch break (30 min)	11:30
Afternoon break (15 min)	13:30
Begin packing-up	14:45
Return from Monte Polizzo, afterwards sherd-washing	15:00
Occasionally: meeting, seminar	18:00
Dinner	20:30

## I. Previous research

### an image

*I am 11 years old she is visiting us. We are sitting closely together I can feel her warmth, she is so big it is almost possible to hide in her body. I am touching her hand, it is old, her skin is transparent, her veins are blue and so full of blood, it is as if they were free floating, as if they are out of context, a map of blue rivers. I look at my hands to see if they are as hers, I want them to be, and once again I ask her to tell me the story of her past.*

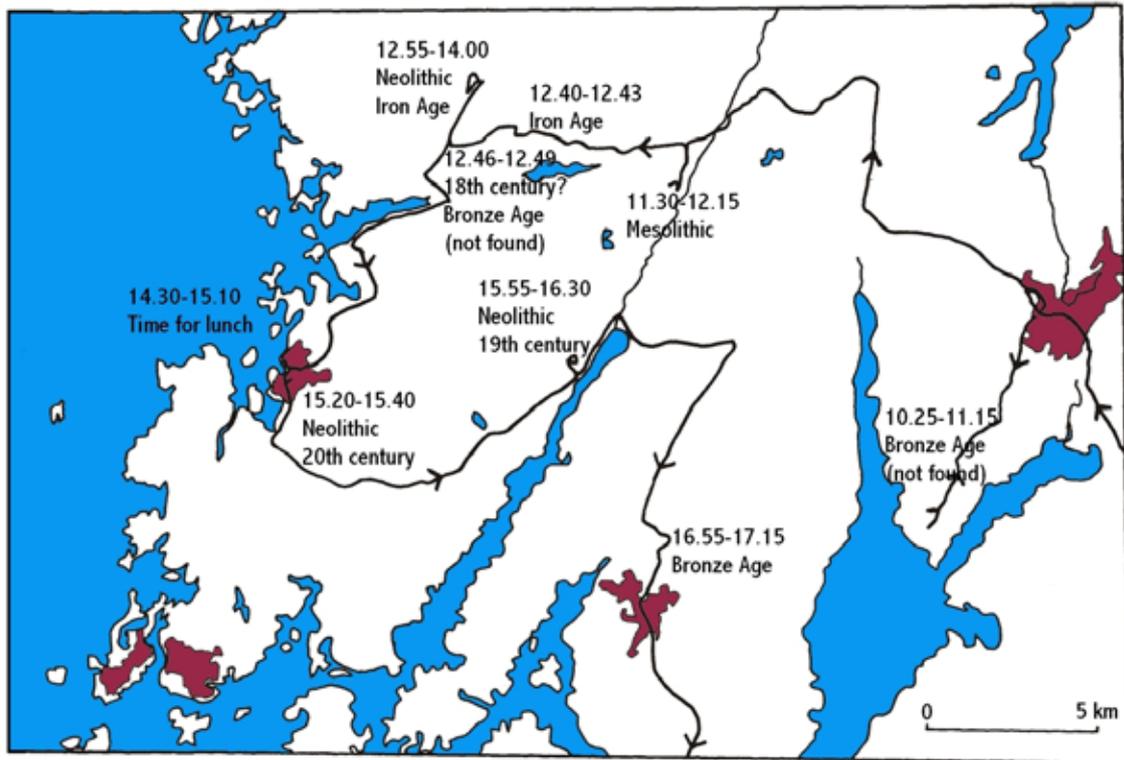
### a sound, a touch

*She lays her hands on the table and looks out of the window, it is winter and very cold and as always she pats her hands in her specific manner, it is as if they were dancing. One hand stroking the other one time and then clapping it two times, over and over again. That sound is a memory sound. And today, when I do the same movement, I travel through time, there becomes here and here becomes there, I am distant but close. I become placed in the mere act of being displaced. That sound and that touch transcend me back to the stories of her life, back to the personal landscape of her experience.*

### a place

*Just before my grandmother died I asked her to draw me a picture of the home where she was born. With this drawing, this dream map in my backpack I tried to relocate the home-place of the past. To my surprise it was amazingly accurate. Her memory of a place she had not visited since she was a child helped me to descend back into her home of the past. [...] Here I met, for the first time, with a woman of my own age, perhaps even younger than me but still older in time and place. I did not know her. Here she was someone else. In this place she was not my great-grandmother born in the year of 1888, a woman who was 80 years old when I was born. In this place she was the mother of five children, three boys and two girls, she was the wife of a man 10 years older than her, who had already deserted another woman and their two boys, a story she claimed she did not know about until after his suicide in 1938.*

From: Jonna Hansson (2000).



29 January 1999, Bohuslän.

## II. Methodology



### III. Data

Moments of Discovery

... and moments of remembering:

*What was your best find?*

Identified a pit

Ivory pins

A stone axe

A stamp

A wall on the 'Acropolis' after one week of deturfing

A site found while surveying

A fireplace

A small pot

A kind of brick which we hadn't found before

An entire pot in situ

An almond tree with wonderful almonds on it

Dente di Lupo sherds

A fruit stone while floting

Two very coars pot sherds carefully wrapped up in a large piece of cotton

Fitting the pieces together of a big pithos; it was great to see the vessel

A crushed pot which was my first find ever

An intact pot

Iron Age sherds

Roman fineware

A vessel with an anthropomorphic handle

A pyxis lid

Two brooches

Roman pottery of different sorts

A bronze fibula

A bronze bead and a weight

Some pieces of worked black ceramics

Whilst sherd washing, I found that under the dirt were decorations

Fragments of ceramics from eastern Greece

A peculiar kind of mineral

The remains of a well preserved pithos

Many pieces of ceramics, metal and animal bone

A wall

Bed-rock outside the wall of Building A

The first loom weight we found

Proven right that a wall was actually a rubble collapse

Iron fragments

A horse figurine

A ceramic vase

10 well preserved Bronze Age pots

Two separate single burials

A mass grave of about seven individuals

A fragment of a Bronze lance

A fossilised bug

A nice Greek imported pot

A little Greek vase was whole and in situ, and turned out to be decorated

The first pieces of pottery we found

The rediscovery of a previously excavated site

Two porcupines I found on the ground

Pottery vessels that are whole and very many

## IV. Analysis

### Rhythms

Stars are born and die.

The universe is still expanding.

Mountains emerge and erode in millions of years.

Prehistoric periods normally extend over hundreds of years.

The productive working life of an archaeologist is about 40 years long.

An archaeological project of some size may take 10-15 years to complete.

The universities' research is externally evaluated every 4 years or so.

Interim reports are due every year.

A season of excavation usually lasts one or two months.

A typical working week has 5 days, or possibly 6.

A working day has 8 hours, or possibly 10.

Lunch-break is 30 mins, or possibly 60.

Step by step walking up the hill.

Brushing dust away.

Heartbeat.

Processes of becoming

hot  
bored  
annoyed  
an archaeologist  
a tourist destination  
skilled and experienced  
desperate to go to the beach  
able to communicate in Italian  
something to be remembered  
tired of some of the food  
an archaeological site  
an ancient artefact  
a running joke  
friends  
drunk

## V. Discussion

### The Life-history of a Sherd

#### DISCOVERY

4 July 2000

- 11.01 Erica Grijalva first spots the sherd in Layer 8 of Trench 17651, probably outside the house.
- 11.03 To celebrate 4 July the diggers in the area (who are all from Stanford) are singing the US National Anthem.
- 11.09 The sherd is now 4cm out of the ground. The cleaning of the neighbourhood progresses.
- 11.18 - 11.24 I am being interviewed about my sherd biography by Ashish Avikunthak for his film project "Rummaging for the past. Excavating Sicily, digging Bombay."
- 11.43 The sherd is now completely revealed, removed from the ground, and placed in a labelled bowl nearby.
- 

#### WASHING/DRYING

- 14.20 To wind up the day, the diggers start writing labels for plastic bags in which they place the finds.
- 14.23 Kristen Lansdale puts the sherd into the plastic bag...
- 14.25 ... and fixes the label she wrote on the bag, before...
- 14.26 ... she puts the labelled bag back into the bowl.
- 14.31 The bag goes into Becca Horrell's backpack.
- 14.38 Becca leaves the Acropolis area (with the backpack on her back).
- 14.41-14.52 On the way down, Becca and the other diggers from the Acropolis area visit the excavations at House 1.
- 15.02 Becca reaches the car parking area and gets into a car.
- 15.10 Becca arrives at the dig house in Salemi.
- 15.11 Becca enters the dig house and places the bags which were in her backpack on a pile of bags outside the 'finds laboratory'.
- 15.36 Erica takes the bag (together with 'her' other bags from the day) from the finds lab to the big table outside the house.
- 15.43 Erica begins to wash the sherds in the bag.
- 15.53-15.56 The sherd is clean and placed on a cassette to dry.
- 16.45 Washing ends.
- 16.50 The cassette with the sherd is placed on the terrace outside the finds lab to dry further.
- 22.00 (circa) The cassette is moved into the finds lab for the night.
- 5th July 08.14 The cassette is moved into the terrace again, to dry further.

## **CLASSIFICATION**

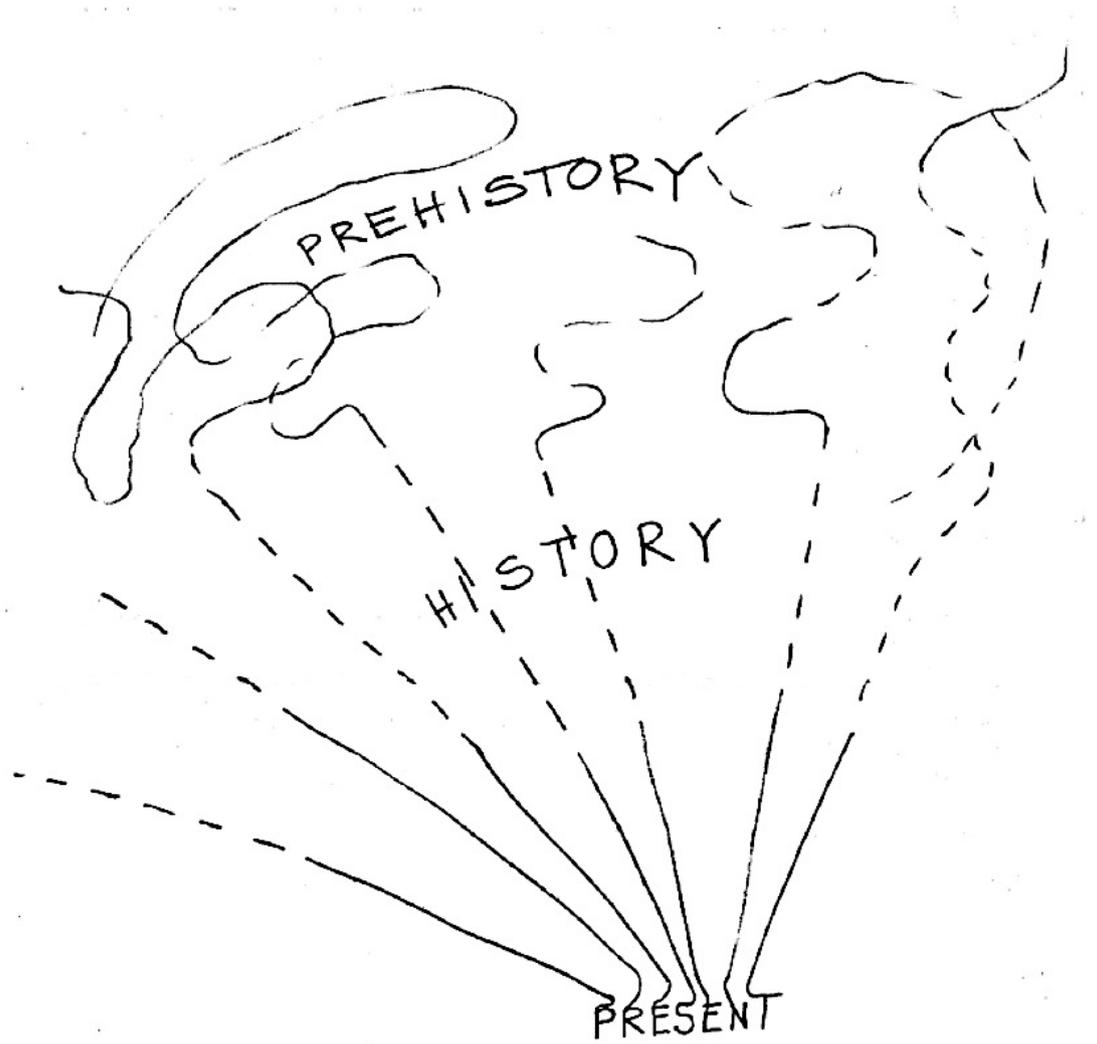
- 10.52 The sherds in the cassette are deemed dry and it is moved back into the finds lab.
- 10.55 Emma Blake packs the sherds on the cassette back into the plastic bag and puts it in line for sorting (she calls the sherd spontaneously “F24”).
- 13.35 Emma begins sorting the content of the bag according to fabric types...
- 13.43 ...which is now completed. The sherd is with others of the fabric type “F24”.
- 13.46 Emma begins filling in the recording sheet.
- 13.55 Emma weighs all the F24 sherds, before they are all placed back into the bag.
- 13.58 The bag is marked as “undiagnostic”. (I leave a note about the my study of the sherd in the bag, asking anyone who does anything with the content of the bag, to contact me by email or snail mail.)
- 14.19 The bag is placed on a pile of bags marked as “sorted: awaiting data entry”.
- 14.54 Data entry in the computer begins.
- 15.03 Data entry ends and the bag is placed in a cassette labelled “Acropolis Trench 17651”.

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## **ARCHIVING**

- 7th July 14.00 (circa) Laura Lee opens the bag in order to search for Roman pottery to show to Francesco, a visiting pottery expert, and then puts it at a different place in the cassette.
- 15.54 The cassette gets moved around while Trinity is looking for a particular sherd to show to Francesco.
- 8th July morning The cassette is being moved around again.
- 12th July 13.03 The cassette is moved into “Baldur’s Office”, ready for transport to the Museum.
- 13th July 09.58 Hannah Dahlberg carries the cassette outside the dig house and into a waiting car.
- 10.02 The car leaves.
- 10.07 The car arrives at the local Museum in Salemi.
- 10.15 Chris Sevara carries the cassette from the car through the yard and up the stairs into the storage room of the local Museum where...
- 10.16 ...the cassette arrives and is put down together with a large number of other cassettes from Monte Polizzo.

## VI. Wider implications



## VII. Conclusion



## VIII. Acknowledgments

Thank you to the students who read archaeology at Göteborg during the spring semester 1999 and who prepared drawings for me of how they depicted the past. Two of these drawings are reproduced above in sections VI and VII. At the time I did not care but today I wish I knew who the students were who did these two wonderful illustrations. Thank you, Elisabeth, for always insisting on the personal perspective in archaeology.

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## Appendix: Maps

