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Archaeological Osmosis or How Is Archaeology Seen by Those Who Share Our Lives?

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Archaeologists are always concerned about bringing archaeology into public spheres to create narratives accessible to those who do not use our meta-language. These books, narratives, exhibitions, and other forms of

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communication are prepared to attract people who do not have permanent contact with archaeology. However, we often overlook a specific group who, while not archaeologists themselves, live with archaeology every day: our spouses, parents, children, and close friends. This paper draws on a series of testimonies gathered from family members and companions of archaeologists, ranging in age and background, collected through written reflections, conversations, and transcriptions. By examining these voices thematically, we highlight how archaeology permeates family life, reshapes perceptions of time and history, and challenges romanticized notions of the discipline. We argue that these perspectives provide a valuable and new dimension to public archaeology and demonstrate how those closest to us can contribute to building a more inclusive and reflexive discipline.

KEYWORDS public archaeology, archaeological ethnography, reflexivity, family, archaeological practice, everyday life

Introduction

The practice of archaeology extends beyond the bounds of fieldwork and academic study, permeating the lives of those who interact closely with archaeologists. This paper tries to understand this phenomenon, which we term 'archaeological osmosis'. We use this term to describe how non-archaeologists who share their lives with archaeologists informally absorb and negotiate archaeological knowledge, practices, and worldviews in their daily lives. In this sense, this paper also investigates how non-archaeologists who live closely with archaeologists perceive the discipline and argues that their perspectives constitute an overlooked yet valuable form of public engagement.

Putting our aims clearly, we want to discuss how non-archaeologists who live closely with archaeologists perceive and engage with the discipline, and to examine how these perspectives contribute to broader understandings of archaeology. By analysing testimonies from spouses, children, parents, and close friends, we identify the ways in which archaeology enters everyday life through processes of *archaeological osmosis*. Our contribution lies in foregrounding this overlooked group as a distinctive public in public archaeology, thereby expanding current debates on reflexivity, disciplinary identity, and the social dimensions of archaeological practice. It also builds on the ethnographic turn in archaeology, where attention is paid to how archaeologists and those around them experience the practice (Hamilakis & Anagnostopoulos, 2009).

No one knows for sure how many archaeologists exist in the world. When trying to find this information online, we discovered that in 2014, there were just over 11,000 in the USA (Rocks-Macqueen, 2014), and around 4500 in Italy (Associazione Nazionale Archeologi, 2014). In 2020, there were just over 7000 archaeologists in the UK (Landward Research Ltd, 2020), and in 2021, there were around 1000 in Portugal (Bugalhão, 2021). Of course, these numbers are far from accurate (since they change constantly) and impossible to consider globally. We only mention them to provoke a reflection. How many non-archaeologists engage daily in a close relationship with

archaeologists worldwide? Parents, siblings, spouses, in-laws, children, very close friends … how many people relate to us daily who are influenced by our way of seeing the world? If we create an average of five people for each archaeologist, although we think that this number should be higher when looking at our personal lives, just in the countries mentioned above, there would be around 120,000 non-archaeologists whose knowledge and engagement with the discipline is higher than the one from the general public. However, they are never considered when it comes to engaging with the public, even when we believe that many of these people will manifest their relationship with an archaeologist in school, in their jobs, and with their friends. All our children have told their colleagues, 'My mom/dad is an archaeologist'. All our parents have manifested how they feel about our work. They all understand what being an archaeologist means, or at least we hope they do.

We highlight personal anecdotes and testimonies (methods and ethics explained below), emphasizing the diverse ways in which archaeology permeates their lives. Günel and Watanabe (2023) describe as 'patchwork ethnography' a type of research conducted through fragments of everyday life and intersecting responsibilities (many researchers balance fieldwork with professional duties, family life, and other obligations, and these interruptions are not shortcomings but can be sources of valuable insight), rather than through uninterrupted fieldwork, but they only considered researchers and not the people who influenced or interrupted them.

Here, we have to highlight one of Oula's sentences concerning his daughters, mentioning that one of his purposes was 'familiarizing them with the places that are important for [him]'. His sentiment resonates across our contributions, illustrating how archaeological practice shapes family dynamics and personal relationships. Tânia, Hanna, and Joel took their children to fieldwork, and Gustav's wife, expecting their first child, wrote that she imagined he would do the same in the future. The experiences in fieldwork are marvellous when seen from a child's perspective, and it is rare to find a child who does not love being part of an archaeological team, even if that child soon realizes that archaeology is not about the discovery of ancient civilizations.

In this paper, we incorporate the voices of those who live with archaeologists, our children, spouses, parents, and close friends, through testimonies collected in writing, conversation, and reflection. These voices are presented both in their original form and as part of a thematic discussion, so that they serve not only as illustrations but also as central contributions to the analysis. By placing these perspectives alongside our own, we aim to highlight the diverse ways in which archaeology permeates everyday life and to emphasize that non-archaeologists play an active role in shaping how the discipline is lived, understood, and transmitted. This approach aligns with contemporary trends in archaeological scholarship that highlight reflexivity and the social dimensions of fieldwork. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a broader discourse on the intersection of professional practice and personal life in archaeology.

Methodology

Understanding the personal and social dynamics of archaeological work has already been considered by some researchers, although it has always been from

the archaeologists' perspective or the communities involved in the fieldwork. Paul Everill's insights into the day-to-day lives of archaeologists who work in commercial archaeology highlighted the communal and collaborative nature of archaeological projects, examining the professional practices and personal experiences within commercial archaeology. Based on the work of many archaeologists, there was an attempt to characterize the profession while offering a detailed look at 'interpersonal relationships, working conditions, site hierarchies, and day-to-day activities … all central to the experience of ¥being" a commercial archaeologist' (Everill, 2009: 144). The concept of an ethnography of archaeological practice, 'the study of a way of life, based on fieldwork' (Edgeworth, 2006: 5), has also placed the archaeologist in a central role of the archaeological processes and interactions that define fieldwork, situating archaeology within broader social and environmental contexts and debating how archaeological practices affect and are affected by contemporary social dynamics. 'Through such encounters and re-encounters, a more holistic view of archaeological practice and its wider context emerges' where the archaeologist is not a mere technician but 'objects or subjects of the ethnographic investigation live and work in the same academic structures, broadly speaking, as the ethnographers themselves' (Edgeworth, 2006: 5, 6), creating and producing the context through particular relationships, people, things, and practices (Yarrow, 2006: 21).

This ethnographic approach was also done at Çatalhöyük, serving as a seminal example of how archaeological projects impact both the practitioners and the communities involved (Shakland, 2000). This way of doing archaeology has emphasized reflexivity in archaeological practice, considering how the excavation processes influence and are influenced by contemporary social relations. Furthermore, at Çatalhöyük, there was always a concern about how archaeologists constructed the site within their ethnographies, something recognized and studied by several anthropologists who studied the archaeologists' behaviour (Hodder, 2000: 8).

Drawing on these scholarly contributions, our paper aims to dig deeper into the personal dimensions of archaeology. Following Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos (2009), we understand archaeology not only as a professional practice but as a social field shaped by diverse publics, including those closest to archaeologists. We explore how archaeologically influenced ethnographies of people who live close to archaeologists can be present in several archaeological sites and different research projects in various parts of Europe (Figure 1). While traditional public archaeology efforts focus on disseminating knowledge to the general public, we sought to understand the experiences of those who live with archaeologists — spouses, children, parents, and close friends. Though not professionally involved in archaeology, these individuals engage with the discipline daily and possess a unique perspective on its practice.

This study outlines a reflexive and exploratory qualitative approach, seeking to understand how archaeology is perceived by those who live closely with archaeologists. Rather than positioning participants as distant subjects, we invited family members to share their own voices and reflections on how archaeology intersects with their daily lives. The intention was not to produce a statistical survey, but to capture diverse perspectives that illustrate the often-overlooked social dimensions of archaeological practice.



FIGURE 1 Map of Europe with the location of the countries where the people in this paper are located.

Participants included spouses, children, parents, and close relatives of archaeologists, ranging in age from five to fifty-seven, across Portugal, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Italy. In total, the paper presents testimonies from approximately a dozen contributors. These contributions were gathered in a variety of ways: some were written directly by participants, while others emerged from informal conversations that were subsequently transcribed by archaeologists. In the case of children, parents recorded and translated their words. All participation was voluntary, and in every case, contributors consented to the inclusion of their words. For minors, parental consent was obtained, and where participants preferred anonymity, their names have been omitted.

The material was analysed collaboratively by the authors. Instead of applying a rigid coding framework, we approached the testimonies thematically, identifying recurring motifs such as perceptions of fieldwork conditions, archaeology's impact on family dynamics, and the tension between romanticized and everyday views of the profession. This interpretive strategy is consistent with ethnographic approaches in archaeology (e.g. Edgeworth, 2006; Everill, 2009), emphasizing reflexivity and the situated nature of knowledge. We also deliberately preserved

the original phrasing of testimonies, including those written in non-native English, in order to honour the authenticity of participants' voices.

Given that many of the contributors are family members, including children, particular care was taken to ensure that their participation was both voluntary and ethically sound. Parental consent was obtained for minors, and contributors could choose whether to be identified by name or remain anonymous. Because the study is rooted in personal relationships, we acknowledge the positionality of the authors and the inherent intimacy of the material, approaching all testimonies with respect and sensitivity.

How do they feel?

The participants' ages range from young children to parents near retirement, and their testimonies reflect a wide variety of perspectives. While some see archaeology as an exciting adventure, others encounter it as a source of stress, routine, or even confusion. Taken together, these voices illustrate the complex ways in which archaeology permeates everyday life through what we call *archaeological osmosis*. Several subjects emerge from their reflections.

For many family members, archaeology is a constant presence intertwined in domestic life. Hanna describes how her son Hayden, at nine years old, has developed an impressive observational eye: 'Over the years, he has developed a keen eye and knowledge that puts many undergraduate students to shame'. Archaeological knowledge, in these cases, is not transmitted through formal teaching but absorbed informally, through play, travel, and family conversations. Afonso's mother likewise frames his fascination with the past as something that shaped him since childhood, from his early interest in dinosaurs to his decision to research marginalized lives in Portugal's history. In these accounts, archaeology becomes part of family identity, shaping not only the archaeologists but those around them.

While popular culture often portrays archaeology as glamorous and adventurous, the testimonies reveal how close relatives encounter a more nuanced reality. Susana's mother, for instance, struggled to accept industrial archaeology and later photography as 'real archaeology', reflecting a common perception that true archaeology involves 'digging the past', and possibly contradicting even David Clarke's idea that 'Archaeology is what archaeologists do' (Clarke, 1973: 2). Gustav's wife Jessica notes the gap between outsiders' curiosity and her own understanding: 'When I introduce what you do to friends, they are often curious … but when I explain what you are actually doing, which is more theoretical and contemporary than what they imagined, they tend to get confused and change the subject'. Joel's children add yet another perspective: while his passion for Etruscan and Roman sites has shaped many family traditions, his daughter Jael admits that at times 'all this talk about archaeology makes me slightly bored'. These reflections reveal the tension between archaeology's romanticized image and the everyday experiences of those who live with archaeologists. Many people who do not live with archaeologists think of archaeology as a romantic profession where archaeologists orientate their lives to the ultimate discovery, almost recognizing a potential Howard Carter in each one of us, or as adventurous as any Indiana Jones (either in

the 1984 or in the 2023 film). They are completely overwhelmed when discovering that archaeologists not only study the past but also the present and the future (Gero and Root, 1990; MacDonald, 2002).

Children's testimonies often highlight the physical and environmental realities of archaeology, rather than its discoveries. Oula's daughters recall: 'It can get pretty cold in the fields, but luckily, we always have good rain clothes and enough warm spare clothes with us'. In Portugal, Tânia's daughter complained about the exhausting heat of summer excavations, while Sarah's young son focused on the frustration of being taken along to fieldwork. Adults echo these concerns: Jessica mentions the exhaustion of long hikes to remote sites in poor conditions, as well as the uncertainty of academic life that makes long-term planning difficult. Archaeology, in these testimonies, is less about adventure than about enduring practical challenges.

Even within a single household, perceptions differ. Hanna's children provide a striking example: Hayden eagerly collects fragments, recognizes archaeological sites, and even explains his mother's PhD topic in detail, while his younger sister Ruth remains wholly uninterested, preferring play and storytelling. Similarly, in Joel's family, both children describe archaeology as central to their father's identity, but with different emotional tones: Jael with affectionate tolerance, Rui with deep enthusiasm. These differences remind us that proximity does not guarantee uniformity: *archaeological osmosis* produces multiple, sometimes contradictory, responses even under the same roof.

Taken together, these testimonies show that living with an archaeologist does not produce a single shared perspective, but rather a spectrum of experiences shaped by age, relationship, and personal interests. From fascination and pride to confusion, fatigue, or indifference, archaeology enters these lives in diverse ways, reshaping how families perceive the past, present, and future.

What did we learn?

The testimonies reveal that people who live with archaeologists develop perspectives on the discipline that differ markedly from those of the wider public. For children, repeated exposure to excavations, cemeteries, and material remains shapes an early and sometimes unusual familiarity with themes such as death, time, and the passage of history. While many children encounter archaeology as a rare and romanticized adventure, the children of archaeologists often normalize experiences that others might find extraordinary. Visiting castles or observing human remains becomes part of everyday life rather than an exceptional event.

These accounts also suggest that archaeological families may engage with time differently. Routine exposure to past material culture and historic sites cultivates a sense of continuity between past and present, fostering critical thinking about heritage, memory, and identity. Adults, too, describe how living with an archaeologist affects their worldview. Spouses and parents often become mediators between popular stereotypes and the more complex realities of the discipline, negotiating the gap between the romantic image of Indiana Jones and the lived realities of fieldwork, academic precarity, or industrial archaeology.

At the same time, these voices highlight challenges and limitations. Children frequently recall the discomforts of weather, long days, or travel, while partners describe difficulties in balancing family life with an uncertain professional path. Such testimonies underscore that archaeology is not lived in isolation: it is entangled with family, personal identity, and social relations.

We are not aware of previous work in public archaeology that explicitly addresses the importance of personal relationships in the dissemination of archaeological knowledge. This opens space for comparative work, such as the collaborative public archaeology projects described by Morris (2014), which highlight how personal connections and community involvement reshape how archaeology is understood and shared. Future research could explore these dynamics across different cultural and social contexts, paying closer attention to questions of privilege, mobility, and who has access to archaeological spaces.

The testimonies below give us an idea of how archaeology influences family dynamics. This is probably true for many other professions worldwide, and all the authors in this text can think about how their parents' jobs influenced the people we are today. How many of us spend time in our parents' jobs, and how might it have affected the people we became? Our children will have different experiences based on what we do. How will this influence educational opportunities and career aspirations? Only time will tell. However, many studies point out that 'family and parents' jobs influence young people's career choices, something deeply embedded in long-term processes such as parental attachment' (Tziner, et al., 2012: 100).

Conclusion

Non-archaeologists are usually considered members of 'the public', learning about archaeology through outreach activities designed for them. Yet the testimonies presented here show that there exists another group, often overlooked: spouses, children, parents, and close friends who, by sharing their lives with archaeologists, develop a sustained and intimate engagement with the discipline. Their perspectives reveal both the mundane realities of archaeology — long days, weather challenges, and professional uncertainties — and its more transformative aspects, from shaping worldviews to sparking curiosity and pride.

Recognizing these voices encourages us to rethink the boundaries of public archaeology. Rather than treating family and close companions as incidental bystanders, we can acknowledge them as active participants in how archaeology is lived, narrated, and transmitted. This has practical implications: integrating family perspectives into discussions of fieldwork organization, supporting work–life balance in archaeology, and expanding definitions of 'public' to include those who experience archaeology through everyday proximity rather than formal outreach.

We acknowledge the limits of this study: the number of testimonies is small, the participants self-selected, and all come from European contexts. Nonetheless, the diversity of responses illustrates that *archaeological osmosis* is a meaningful concept for capturing how archaeology flows into family life. Future comparative

research, such as cross-cultural studies or investigations into different professional and social contexts, could deepen our understanding of how archaeology circulates beyond disciplinary boundaries.

Ultimately, the value of this paper lies not in offering definitive answers but in creating space for these intimate perspectives within archaeological discourse. By doing so, we contribute to a more inclusive, reflexive, and socially grounded discipline — one in which archaeology is recognized not only as a professional practice but also as a lived, shared experience.

Testimonials

'You are proud when your son is into whores': Afonso Leão Giving Voice to Ana Gonçalves

You might be wondering how my mother could be proud of me for 'being into whores'. To be correct, we are talking about long-gone and very deceased sex workers.

My mother is a philosophy and psychology teacher, and over the years, I've been her child and her classroom case study on many occasions, so it is only fair that I share a bit about her as well. Beyond her teaching role, she is a voracious reader, with books all around the house, some even reaching the ceiling. In her free time, she volunteers at a local cultural association, where she also teaches philosophy to young kids in some of her workshops.

When I was little, my mother would take me and my sister into some forgotten corners of Portugal, as she likes exploring new and old abandoned places. These mystic places with hidden stories become our shared playground.

Giving voice to her, I share her testimony. Her view of me:

> From the time my son was a little kid, he had a fascination with rusty things. Dinosaurs, oddly enough, were his first love, a gateway into his love for all things old. As he grew, he traded dinosaurs for historical movies, Roman ruins, and epic fantasy games, like Skyrim, which he played nonstop. He'd lose himself in these worlds, both real and imagined.
>
> When it came time for him to choose a path in university, archaeology emerged as his chosen road. As a mother, I worried, as any parent would, about future job stability. Yet, I've always encouraged my children to find their own paths and to think for themselves. Perhaps, in my heart, I knew he was right, for I had chosen philosophy when I was his age.
>
> University life brought a new chapter. His vacations were now spent in archaeological excavations in the company of his peers. However, through the years he began to take an interest in the more recent times of our past.
>
> His master's thesis was a turning point, unearthing stories from a dump site linked to a late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century household. What emerged were not just fragments of pottery, but intricate narratives of forgotten lives, particularly those of sex workers. It may have seemed like an unusual fascination, but it was a human one, shedding light on the often-ignored agents of the past.

Now he embarks on a journey toward his PhD where he aims to further explore the silent voices of history from women who navigated subaltern roles tied to sex work in Portugal's past. I could relate to his interests. In university the fact that too many of the authors I studied were men annoyed me. Later I found out how women philosophers were silenced by society.

Seeing him chase this academic pursuit filled me with pride. We share more than just a love for exploring the past; we share a mission to reveal the untold stories, to lift up the forgotten voices.

Conversation between archaeologist Gustav Wollentz and his wife Jessica Bustamante, a graphic designer (Figure 2)

Gustav: It is a nice summer day in our house on the countryside in Sweden. I am currently sitting in front of my wife with a notebook in my hands. I have not

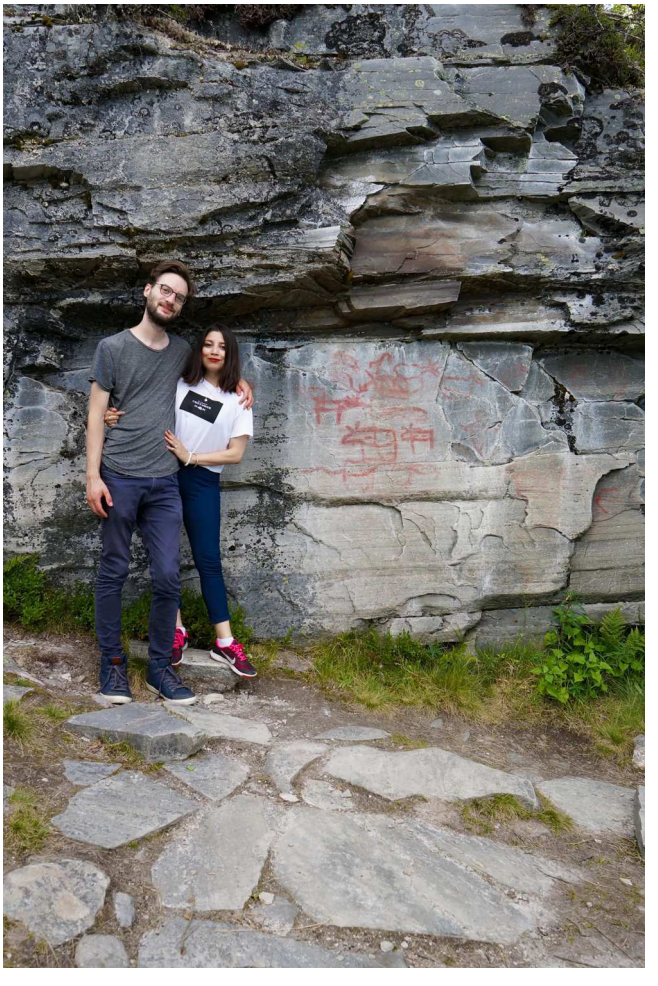


FIGURE 2 Gustav and Jessica.

reflected that much about how archaeology have had an impact upon you, so I am very curious about how you will answer the questions.

How would you describe the experience of sharing your life with an archaeologist?

Jessica: Being together with an archaeologist comes with some unexpected surprises. When I introduce what you do to friends, they are often curious. I guess that would be the first impression. It stands out and it sounds fun. But they usually have specific and preconceived ideas about what an archaeologist is doing, based on popular culture movies like *Indiana Jones*. I then try to explain what you are actually doing, which is more theoretical and contemporary than what they imagined. It can be pretty hard to explain, and then they tend to get confused and change the subject. So, I guess the reaction often switches from positive surprise to slight confusion, when I try to answer specific questions about what you do.

Gustav: What would you say is the best thing about sharing your life with an archaeologist?

Jessica: I think it is probably all the interesting discussions, with you and your friends, but also the different places we go to and explore. I certainly do not only learn about the past, but also about today and even about tomorrow, the future. I now understand how multifaceted archaeology can be. Before I had a quite narrow understanding of archaeology connected to excavations and studying the past. I did not know that there is a whole subfield applying archaeological methods and approaches to the contemporary times, or an archaeology of the future. My whole perspective has changed.

Gustav: Has this somehow benefitted you in your life?

Jessica: I better understand the link between archaeology and other disciplines, for instance sociology and philosophy. I also see places I visit in a different way now. I see more of the different layers of time that places have, connected to past, present, and future.

Gustav: Is there anything annoying or difficult in sharing your life with an archaeologist?

Jessica: Well, we sometimes get lost in nature on our way to an archaeological site. We can do long walks in forests without any proper roads and with bad weather conditions and the wrong clothes. There is a sense of exploration to it, but it can certainly get exhausting, especially if we do not find what we are looking for. The sites can be very remote and far off the beaten track. On a more long-term note, it can be very difficult to plan, especially with a family. We are currently expecting our first child, so that is on my mind. It is difficult to know how long you can stay in one place, as the job market especially in academia is so uncertain and competitive. It is hard to know when there will be more stability.

Gustav: Has archaeology made you look at things in a different way?

Jessica: Perhaps, but I think I have a bleak view. It seems like we do learn from the past, and from archaeology, but that we seldom implement what we learn into concrete actions to make real change. That is probably because the

interests of those in power are seldom aligned with those who want to make positive change, unfortunately.

Now that we are about to have our first child, I am very curious about how the fact that her father is an archaeologist will have an impact upon her life. Will it contribute to shaping her view of the world in some ways, as it is shaping mine? For her it will be completely normal to have an archaeologist as a father — it will be her only reality. But it will not be the reality of most other children she is befriending, so her normal will be a different kind of normal. How will this shape her today and tomorrow? We do have a different lifestyle because of your job. We visit many more places, some of them remote and far away, and we have different conversations and discussions. I do hope and think that it will benefit her in some way, but I do not know how.

Gustav: If you describe the experience of sharing your life with an archaeologist in one word, which one would it be?

Jessica: It would be 'fun'. It has been, and continues to be, 'fun'. If I could add a subtitle, it would be 'adventurous'.

Gustav: Thank you very much for answering these questions and for joining so many archaeological moments with me. It means a lot. As with so much in life, I think archaeology is often best experienced when it is shared with someone.

A few of our favourite things: Badgers, bicycles, running, princesses, fluffies, fairies, & archaeological ceramics: Hayden and Ruth, by Hanna Steyne

My children are nine and four, and, like the houses and lives of many archaeologists, ours are cluttered with archaeological material culture. Our walks, weekend trips, and holidays involve castles, Roman remains, churchyards, and lots of post-medieval industrial heritage. Our shelves and window ledges are home to boxes of (mostly) post-medieval ceramic fragments, the odd prehistoric worked flint, along with interesting stones, and pine cones.

My nine-year-old, like all small children, enjoys collecting interesting sticks and stones when out and about. He also collects post-medieval ceramics and glass. Over the years he has developed a keen eye and knowledge that puts many undergraduate students to shame.

To try and understand what my eldest has absorbed about archaeology and its place in his life, I asked him to write his answers to a few questions so I could present them in his own words (Figure 3). His original work is in Figure 3 and, for those not fluent in the handwriting of primary school children, transcribed below, along with my questions.

1) What is archaeology?

When you use artefacts to learn about ancient humans

2) What does mummy do, what have I been working on? (I had just finished my PhD at this point, which I had been doing for all of his life!)

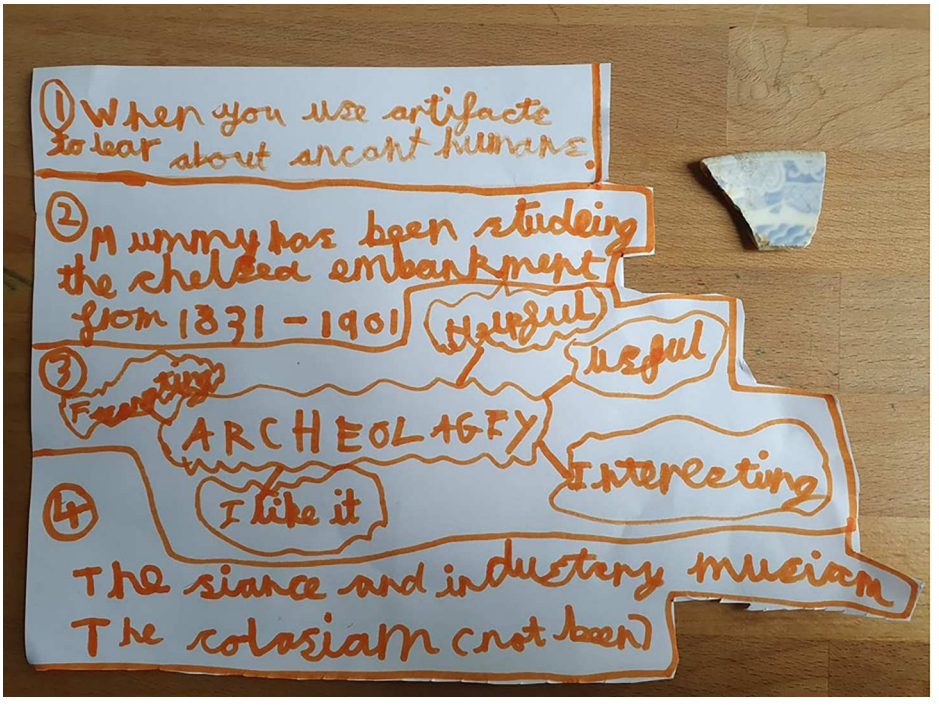


FIGURE 3 Hayden's answers.

Mummy has been studying the Chelsea Embankment from 1831–1901. [My PhD thesis title was: A River Runs Through It: A Multidisciplinary Investigation of the Impacts of the Thames Embankment Xonstruction at Chelsea, 1850–1891.]

3) Hayden's thoughts about archaeology

Fascinating, helpful, useful, interesting, I like it.

4) What is his favourite archaeological or heritage site. (He was quite confused that museums counted as heritage sites.)

The Science and Industry Museum (in Manchester) and the Colosseum in Rome (although he hasn't been, he really wants to go).

5) His favourite archaeological thing from our house.

This was a small, decorated, light blue transfer ware fragment from a plate. When asked what he particularly liked about his piece, over all the others in our house and garden, he said, 'I like it'.

After this succinct description of his object choice, I was unable to talk to him more about anything to do with archaeology, so let him trot off.

My four-year-old is a very different character, and in summary, has no interest whatsoever in archaeology. When presented with a river beach covered in beautiful, coloured fragments of ceramic and glass, she will be the child in the water throwing

stones, not collecting treasure. She is very good at telling stories, and I thought she might like to talk in her uniquely, highly creative way about some of the bits of old ceramic in her fairy garden, but she was absolutely not interested. For parity, Figure 4 shows my four-year-old with her fairy garden, demonstrating her complete lack of interest in anything archaeological.

The exercise of talking to the children about how they have absorbed archaeology (or not) by osmosis was hugely insightful. As other speakers in this session highlighted, for some children/families, archaeology can be an incredible way to open discussions about all aspects of the world around us, including how we live and die. By visiting and exploring historic sites and associated material culture, archaeology can be a vehicle to explore relationships between people in the past, landscapes, ancestors, and in some cases a wonderful way to share adult interests and occupations. Children do take in a huge amount, including our research when we bring it home, or work from home. I was genuinely blown away by Hayden's answer about what I was working on, and how much accurate detail he included.

In October 2022 I ran five one-hour sessions with each of the Year 3 and 4 children at Hayden's school, introducing archaeological concepts and talking about the Stone Age as part of their curriculum topic. It was fascinating to listen to their questions, considerations, and observations, which were both wide-ranging, creative, meaningful, and also sometimes utterly ridiculous. Their curiosity and creativity in thinking about objects allowed them to understand processes of stratigraphic formation, and to create relative dating sequences with artefacts including spoons, coins, glass, and ceramic fragments. Shortly after, I worked with a group of second year undergraduate students at the University of Manchester doing a 'slow looking' exercise, based on Eva Mol's work (2021). One of the key takeaways was how much they enjoyed, and learnt, from taking a playful and creative

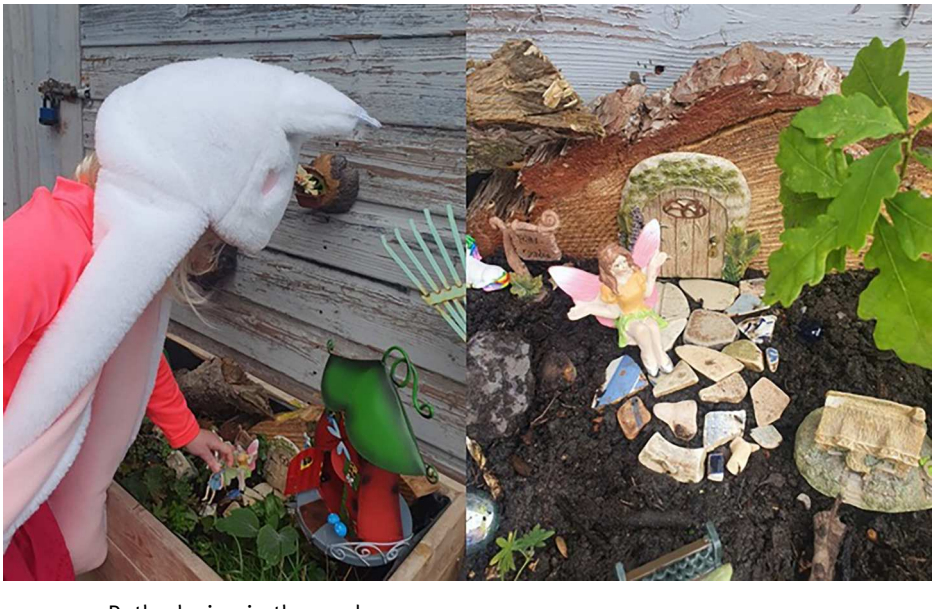


FIGURE 4 Ruth playing in the garden.

'childlike' approach to looking at the objects. The ability to look creatively and imaginatively at objects and create narratives about how the object might have been used, lost, or found its way to the place of discovery, should be a part of the way in which we as professional archaeologists look at our material. As Gero (2007) argues, creativity and imagination are a fundamental part of archaeological interpretation, and we should embrace the childlike creativity this approach offers.

Southern girls (photographic) impressions of fieldwork above the Arctic Circle: Oula Seitsonen

My wife Sanna Seitsonen and I are both archaeologists, and we have three daughters Sohvi, Elsa, and Elvi, who in 2024 are respectively seventeen, fifteen, and ten years old. We have carried out fieldwork with them every year since they were toddlers: Sohvi was two years on her first fieldtrip, Elsa nine months, and Elvi eight months. Archaeology is a rather unique field of work in that one's whole family can partake in the actual work, be it survey or excavation, in contrast with many other field-based sciences (Seitsonen, 2021a).

Practically all the fieldwork that they have participated in has taken place in Sápmi, the transnational homeland of the indigenous Sámi, with field sites from about 68 degrees north to above 71 degrees north. As they have grown up in the southern part of the country, travel north is for them always an adventure that they await. Our joint fieldwork has concentrated on various themes over the past decade and a half, ranging from the Stone Age habitation to the past and present Sámi reindeer herding (e.g. Salmi & Seitsonen, 2022; Seitsonen, et al., 2021), and from the legacy of Finland's only 'glacier' (Seitsonen et al., 2025) to the Second World War heritage of Hitler's Arctic War (e.g. Seitsonen, 2021b). Of these, the Second World War sites have probably been the most thought-provoking for the kids and instigated the most in-depth discussions with them. Even if the older girls have recently shown some I-don't-care teenager attitude towards our family trips, and feasibly also as an expected and understandable counter-reaction to all the archaeology surrounding them from an early age, they still take eagerly part in the fieldwork. Most recently we were together in the field in 2023 to a survey to the highest point in Finland at the Háldi Mountain, where we located the highest most archaeological site known in the country at the elevation of above 1200 meters above sea level (the highest point is 1324 m.a.s.l.) (Figure 5).

Through the years we have developed a field tradition that the girls are enthusiastically waiting for, namely getting disposable cameras to document the field trips. The disposable cameras present for them an original and different way of photography compared to nowadays' predominantly digital imagery. For them, there is a novel thrill of photographing things without seeing the results immediately, and then after the trip there is the wait for the development of films, which nowadays takes about a week, and the excitement once you get the envelope in your hand and finally rip it open to physically examine the paper photographs. For someone who has grown up in the time of analogue photography this might seem like an unexpected and strange perspective. However, for our girls who have grown up surrounded by the immaterial digital world and endless stream of digital images, these experiences present an interesting glimpse into a curious era



FIGURE 5 Oula's family during fieldwork.

of an analogue past without mobile phones and apps in which their parents grew up, and to a slower pace, exemplified for example by such a mundane thing for us older generations as having to wait until the trip to see the developed results of your photography. I have had some of the best and in-depth discussions about many unexpected issues with my daughters while browsing through the paper photographs, such as reflections about the ongoing Russian invasion to Ukraine and how that compares with great-grandmother's experiences in the Second World War (Seitsonen, 2024). All the following direct quotations are from my girls (they asked me not to personalize the citations more closely).

It seems that the materiality of the paper images seems to instigate the memories and deliberations much more concretely than any digital imagery seen from a computer or smartphone screen. For them, the photographs held in hand appear to open up bodily reminiscences about the wider situations and incidents surrounding the circumstances in which those were taken, which does not happen to the same extent when staring at digital photos flicking on a screen. The paper photos seem to open up a world beyond the immediate images framed in them: 'It was nice to look at the photos together and remember where they had been taken and when, and what happened at all the excavations'. The girls also like to 'put pictures from excavations on walls, they remind of the trips and places — now there are photographs from Ivalojoki above my desk, and from Meekonjärvi on the wall next to the bed so I can see them'.

Having my family along during fieldwork also offers myself a significant way of showing them what I do on my work trips and how that relates to all the work I do at home and in the office for the rest of the year, and allows familiarizing them with places that are important for me. The girls have stated that by taking part in archaeological work they get a sense of doing something concrete, meaningful, and important, which has been delighting to realize: 'I like to excavate more than that to survey, as then we can do more' and 'It is nice to help in excavations, I like to use screen to pick finds and put them in bags, and dig. Sometimes I help in levelling, when someone lifts me up to read the numbers'.

Archaeological fieldwork also allows a way of familiarizing my daughters with different lifeways and cultures, such as the northern reindeer herding families' traditional communal ways of living and subsisting, which are in a stark contrast to the life in southern Finland. Fieldwork seems to instigate in them also respect and wonder towards the nature of the northern 'wilderness' — which, of course, for the local Sámi is not wilderness at all but a part of their ancestral herding grounds. It is important in itself to come to realize that there are differing modes of perceiving the environment and the world, something that even many adults in the modern Western world struggle to recognize. For instance, it has been pleasing to see that my daughters have grasped some of the traditional northern relational ways of perceiving the world in a mutually respective way: 'these *Stállos* [= stone giants of Sámi folklore, referring to a steep cliff face] of Meekonjärvi, they were guarding us when we dug there' and 'I found reindeer bones under that smaller flat rock, they were hidden there to make the *kota-tent* better to live in' (referring to foundation deposit that we uncovered under the wall of a historical Sámi building). Their awe in the face of the uncontrollable and untamed nature is well highlighted by some of their comment to the field photographs, such as 'Nature is big and silent in the mountains. And cold when the wind is strong and it feels almost like winter, then you need all the warm clothes and good rain gear', or 'It's better to have a cabin up in the mountains than a tent, in a tent the sleeping bags can get damp and there is little room for things', and 'Rivers coming down from the mountains are powerful, when it rains a lot. It is sometimes difficult trying to get across'.

For myself, carrying out fieldwork with my daughters in remote locations has been also a humbling experience of realizing the huge level of trust and confidence that they place on their parents, as is also suggested by some of their comments to their photographs (see Seitsonen, 2021a). I have often been more nervous about fieldwork than them, for instance of taking a helicopter to the mountains or paddling down a remote river, although doing my best not to show it. They simply count on my wife and me knowing what to do in each new situation out in the wild and being prepared to answer any challenges. This is illustrated also by comments to the photos such as 'Helicopter flying and paddling down the Ivalojoki River have been most exciting', 'in this photo Daddy [is] paddling when we were getting closer to *Surmanköngäs* [= the Rapids of Death], its name was more scary than those rapids themselves' (the rapids were scary enough for me), or 'it was fun when daddy and Olli [Kunnas, one of our archaeologist colleagues] had to throw us over the water, and the other time when they jumped across carrying us' (both of those times I did not feel the situation was so fun, as we had to get

them safely across the fast-flowing waters), and 'It can get pretty cold in the mountains, but luckily we always have good rain clothes, and enough warm spare clothes with us'.

Piles of stones and many dead people: What my mom does. Finley Colau, five years, collected and written down by his mother, Sarah Bockmeyer (Figure 6)

My mum is an archaeologist, she is very interested in dead people, though I don't really know why (I have asked her many times, but she just smiles and tells me they're fascinating). She looks at large stones that were made into burials by people in the past and we have to visit every tomb that is near us when we go on vacation. We even did an entire tour to visit megalithic tombs when I was four and I have drawn these megalithic tombs since.

Last year we had to move away from my grandma and grandpa's home to move to another city. It is loud and I miss my friends and relatives, but my mum is happy because she gets to do her PhD. Her friends and colleagues all speak English so I cannot understand them, and my new kindergarten is also very different. She held a talk once at her university and my grandmother and aunt took me to watch it. She talked in English, but my grandma was very proud of her. I thought it was boring, so I drew all over her notebook.

Sometimes I have to go to university with her because her courses or meetings are in the afternoon when the kindergarten is already closed but we didn't find a babysitter for me. And I even have to accompany her to evening parties, but I get tired quickly, so we only go for a short period of time. I don't know any of the other



FIGURE 6 Finley sitting on a dolmen.

people and am very shy towards them. But the food is usually very good, and I enjoy the lights.

I get very lonely sometimes because my mummy works so much, and she often has little time to play with me. So, I drew a picture of how I would like to live, close to the megalithic tombs (Figure 7). You can see the tomb in the front of the picture, and I drew the house that we would live in next to it, with a nice little fence. I hope that if we live near the tomb that mummy doesn't have to go away so often to conferences or fieldwork. And I know it would make her very happy to live near one of them.

I have a set of plush archaeology tools, a trowel, a brush, a photo-scale and some plush objects like a bone and an arrowhead. Whenever colleagues of my mum come visiting or we have dinner together I get them out to show them what a good archaeologist I am, and at the beach I go fossil hunting with mummy. I like to pretend I don't like her work, but I think it is great that she is happy, even though she is sometimes stressed. Plus, the new city has a beach we can go to in the summer and whenever my mummy is away at a conference I get to stay with grandma and grandpa in her huge house with all the old toys from my mum and a huge garden to play in in the summer.

And because mummy works now, we can visit my grandparents in Britain, and I will finally see Paris and the burnt cathedral that I wanted to see for so long. So, there are some perks and some things I don't like but it is only another two years and then she will have to find something else. I often hear her complain to my grandparents or colleagues about how the German educational system doesn't work well for parents and that scares me a little bit. But she assures me that it will be okay, and we will make it work somehow.

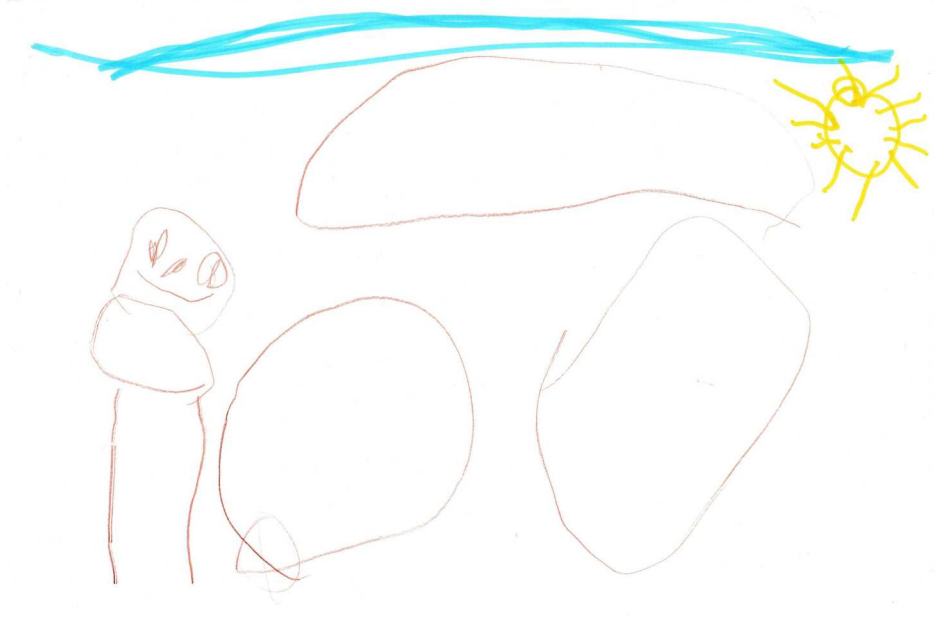


FIGURE 7 Finley's drawing of a dolmen.

I wish she was studying cars though. I find them way more fascinating than piles of stones that dead people were buried in. This would be very awesome. But at least we use the car to get to many of the megalithic tombs so that is something.

Susana Pacheco gives voice to her mother, Ana Santos

One could say that archaeology is one of those things that you either love or hate. It is definitely a science that is difficult to understand, sometimes even for us archaeologists, let alone for those who are not from the area. My mother is one of those people, she is a landscape architect. The following is the story of how she understands/sees archaeology.

It all started in the summer of 2010 when I was finishing the second year of high school. It meant that I had one year to decide what to do next with my life. As happens to several Portuguese teenagers (perhaps this is more of a worldwide situation), I was not sure of what I wanted. For most of my life, I was sure biology was my future. But then, when I started to analyse the curriculum, I soon realized that was not for me. Chemistry was never my strongest suit and pursuing that dream meant there would be a lot of that. Then, a huge question started to occupy my mind: if not biology, then what?

After long hours of research, and talks with my parents, I came to one conclusion, archaeology was probably the right choice. So, in September of 2011, I entered NOVA University of Lisbon to pursue archaeology. However, I started to question if that was really for me, or if I had let my mother's passion influence me.

Since my mother and I shared a passion for biology, and she also has a passion for the evolution of humanity and classical civilizations, I figured perhaps we would share this as well. It could not be further from reality. For a while, I felt a bit lost in archaeology, but at the same time, I did not want to disappoint my family, so I never gave up trying. Later on, in the last year of my degree, I finally found something that I actually enjoyed, and it was industrial archaeology.

But for my mother, that did not make any sense, archaeologists were supposed to dig the past (Figure 8). Factories are not underground; they do not need to be excavated to be found. So, if that is not the case, how could they be studied by archaeologists? At least, that is how she saw it. And to be honest, even six years after I finished my master's in industrial archaeology, I think she still sees it that way. So, for her, it is not like what I do does not matter, but she simply does not see it as archaeology anymore. She believes that is more like something that sociologists, journalists, or perhaps anthropologists should do, but never archaeologists. But can I blame her? After all, so many archaeologists still do not see it as archaeology either.

Nowadays, I have decided to do something even more borderline than industrial archaeology and decided to study a new kind of materiality that most archaeologists completely ignore as archaeological artefacts — photographs. So, as you may imagine, lots of other questions filled her mind. The first time I tried to explain to her how I consider photographs as objects, and most of all, as archaeological artefacts, she looked at me with a face that I cannot even start to describe in words. Now that I have been developing research on this subject for about a

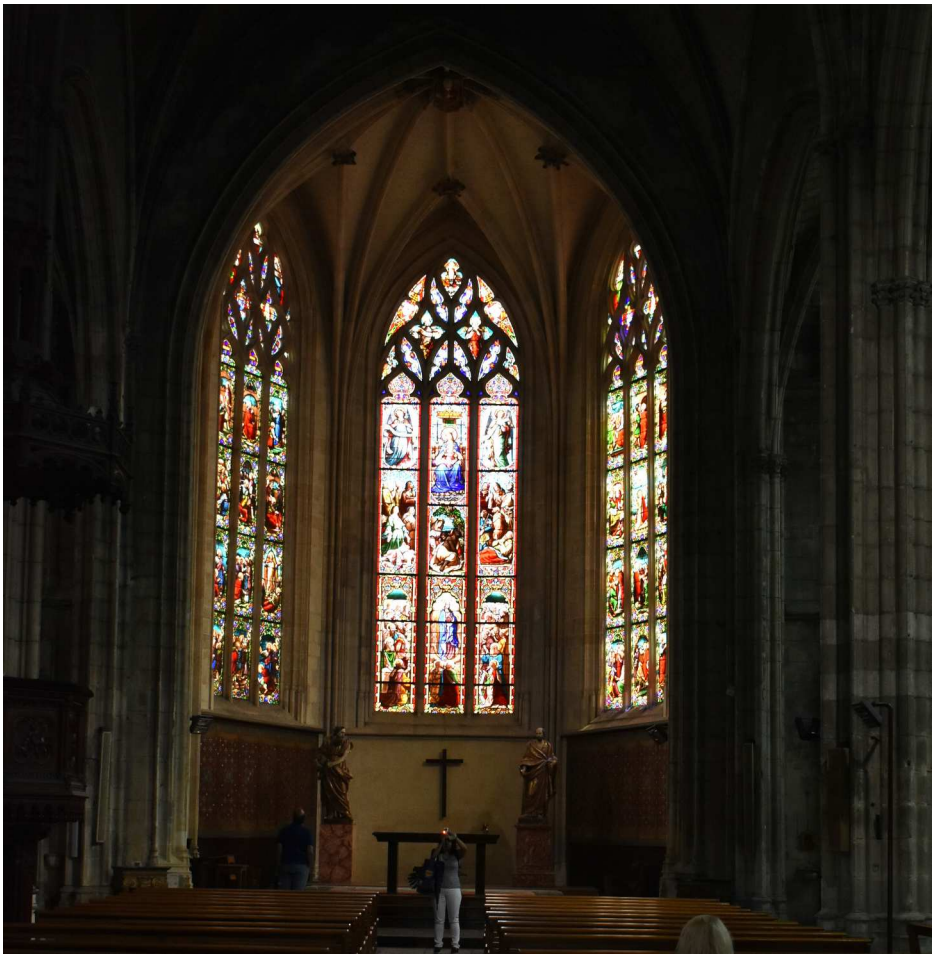


FIGURE 8 Susana's mother Ana Santos.

year, it did not change much, and deep down I think she sees me as a bit of crazy. But, well, once again, I cannot blame her for not understanding what I do, although I cannot lie and say that it does not matter to me. After all, several archaeologists also think I am crazy, and that my ideas are completely nonsense.

Of course, I would love to be able to talk to her about what I do without a judgmental tone, as in 'You should have pursued some other area of archaeology. Perhaps if you had followed my advice, you would not be in such a precarious situation nowadays'. But, if in a way I understand that she is only concerned and wants what is best for me, I also feel that somehow it would be good to feel that my family understood what I do. Well, at least even when she does not understand it, she never stopped supporting me and my decisions, which I guess is a good first step.

Mommy writes papers with pots: Maria Rita Gouveia, by Tânia Casimiro

My name is Maria Rita. As long as I can remember, my mother has been an archaeologist and with a SERIOUS interest in ceramics. And recently also in waste and other things I have no idea about.

As you can imagine, I did not write this document in English. All the information here was passed to my mother in Portuguese the best I could. I speak too fast in Portuguese, and it is difficult for people to follow my ideas … in English the disaster is even bigger. Most of the things that you are reading are my ideas and thoughts. I did not have them all at the same time, but we went and looked at old photographs and I was saying things and mommy wrote them down.

I was taken to excavations from a young age. I do not remember the first time I went … but knowing my mother I must have visited archaeological sites from the moment I was born.

Here I learned to excavate and sieve … or take a nap while I should be doing it.

Usually, excavations take place in late summer when school has not yet started but the sites my mom excavates are usually near the beach … so it seems the summer continues.

She works on some kind of global connections which I really don't know a lot about. It is cool because I meet and play with my mom's students and colleagues. I still remember some of them … not all, to be honest. But I remember Bia, and Afonso and Zé (we used to wash pottery together) (Figure 9). Excavating is not all that I did at these places. There was the after-excavation work where I had to wash ceramic fragments and separate them by type. Decorated on one pile, non-decorated in another pile, or red in one pile and other colours in another pile. This was actually fun, except when we had to separate bones. Bones are nasty things. They all got dirty and full of sand inside and for many years I did not believe that they were actually animal remains.

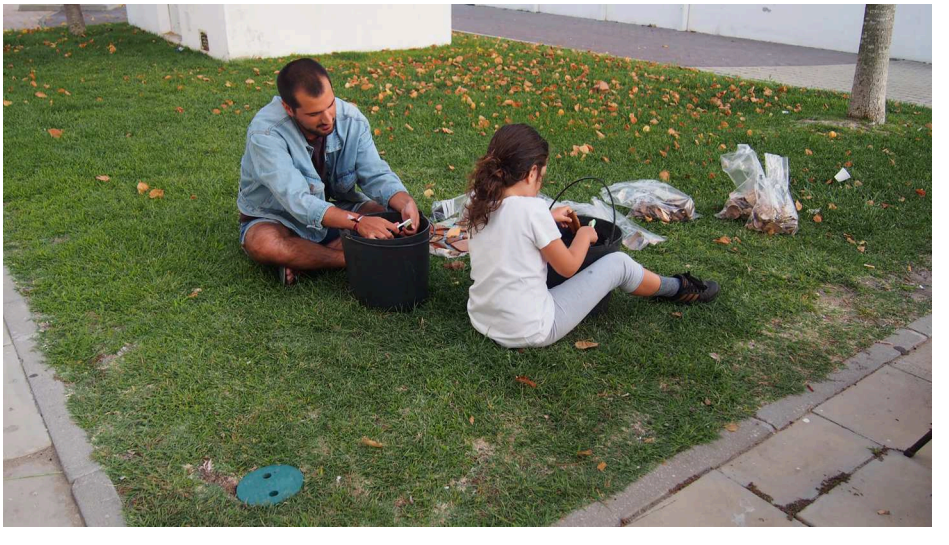


FIGURE 9 Maria Rita washing potsherds.

Later we had to work on pottery again, already at the stores. I remember this place in Lisbon and all the people there and it was actually fun. My mom's colleagues would teach me how to puzzle ceramics, and I could fill my hands with glue and then remove it as if I was losing my skin.

I sometimes also do conferences and exhibitions, but not that many anymore. I start to think they are boring. The last one I did was in London on the TAG 2019 but sitting in a room listening to people talking in English about archaeology is not for me.

There was a time when I imagined that my mom could actually write papers with all the bits and pieces of ceramics around the world … in some ways, I still believe in that. This was what made me pick up a lot of sherds from the ground. I took them to school, told my friends what my mother did, and then brought them home. This is just a small example of three of those sherds. Once I even found a sixteenth-century pot and that led mom to actually identify a new site. I asked if we could give my name to that site … but that did not happen.

If I remember correctly, once she gathered all these pots and actually went to a conference. I did not see that one. Don't know if that paper was published … she just told me not yet but it will. I actually enjoyed picking up these sherds … still don't know why.

I live in a house full of archaeologists … so does my little brother. I am not going to excavations or to conferences that much anymore, but him … actually, I think that he can be seated right next to you … maybe next year you will listen to him.

It isn't a weekend if there isn't an Etruscan in it. Jael Santos and Rui Santos, by Joel Santos (Figure 10)

(Joel speaking) My first background is not as an archaeologist. The passion was there, but I started my career as an engineer, and I never thought that one day I would become one. Now I understand that this passion conditioned my relationship with my kids (although not that 'kids' anymore). We lived together until they were three (Jael) and eight (Rui), but due to some turns that life takes, since then, I have lived in Portugal, and they kept living in Italy. Every time we are together, we visit archaeological sites. I confess that I had a selfish view about what my kids should learn or not about archaeology, but I never had the opportunity to check what impact it had on them. This is the moment to understand it, through their voices.

(Jael speaking) If I have to think about three words to describe my father, the first that come to my mind are intelligent, funny, and archaeology. And I know it might seem strange, but since I was a child, I have associated the world of archaeology and history in general with the figure of my father. Strange because he is — sorry, he was — an engineer. Most of the things that I know about history come from the stories that he tells us during our little travels around the world, but especially around Italy, where we visit tons of museums and archaeological sites. And I sincerely admit, now that he is not listening, that sometimes all this talk about archaeology makes me slightly bored. But then when I see or when I think about how his eyes shine while he's talking about something that he loves, something that he has



FIGURE 10 Joel, Rui, and Jael in an Etruscan cemetery.

discovered or learned at school, then all the doubts that I could have simply go away.

He is able, just by talking, to pass me all the excitement and joy. Every time my dad visits us, even before he's here, I know we're going somewhere to see a new museum and archaeological sites about Etruscan or Roman or whatever. I do not care about the place. I really like this sort of tradition that was created, because it is something that is only mine, my brothers', and my father's. So, when I think about it or when I talk about it with someone, I always have a big smile on my face. I'm really grateful to my father for teaching me and showing me all of this. I like to know a lot about the past, the people, and the civilizations that came before me. It is not just very interesting, but also because it makes clear to me a lot of the things that are happening now in the present.

(Rui speaking) My relationship with archaeology started a long time ago, obviously because of my dad. Actually, I think archaeology was always there with me because of him. Many of my memories are related to archaeology. When I was a child, we moved a lot, due to my father's work. However, every time I try to remember a house, the first memory that comes to my mind is a gigantic bookshelf that was always there. It was full of history books. Books about Egyptians, Etruscans, Romans, Byzantines, and every single historical time period or ancient population that I can remember. I was always trying to pick it up, but since I was a child and did not know how to read, normally I would search for photos or pictures and ask my father to explain them to me.

Another funny memory I have related to my father and archaeology was about *Indiana Jones*. Now I know that is not archaeology, but a romantic part of me will always hiddenly believe otherwise. However, the most beautiful memories I have of archaeology are the walks we take together with him. We could do anything since these walks were just meant to be a way of spending time together, but 99 per cent of the time, we would end up on an archaeological site, probably Etruscan. We used to live in Rome, so it was pretty easy to find a place. We started with just the two of us, but in the meanwhile, my sister was born, and those journeys became a huge tradition of the three of us that I would not like to lose.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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