

# REASSEMBLING THE PAST

Archaeological excavation and survey require considerable physical exertion, yet these activities also offer a means of engaging with the past. By directly interacting with the spaces where ancient people lived, we establish a personal connection to their world. Furthermore, through our own physical experience, we gain insight into the hardships they endured—such as the effort required to cover the distances between houses, from the village to the cemetery, and between other key locations in their daily lives. However, when we discuss the role of the body in archaeology, it is not only the physical effort of excavation that is significant. Equally important is the study of materials, which relies on our physical engagement with the objects themselves. The study of materials also presents physical challenges for the archaeologist, such as hand pain caused by the long hours spent washing ceramics in cold water. In addition, the sorting activity is equally demanding, as it requires standing for hours while analyzing various fragments, with ceramic dust ending up everywhere on the body. But is only by touching and handling these artifacts can we truly understand them. Through this direct interaction—via touch and observation—we uncover how objects were made, who crafted and decorated them, and the lives of the individuals behind them. Ceramics, for example, speak to us in unique ways, offering invaluable insights into past cultures and daily life.



Furthermore, among the different stratigraphic units, fragments are sought that can be joined to reconstruct the ceramic object and to understand whether the layers we are analyzing were connected to each other

After many hours of standing while sorting ceramics, my feet, legs, and back start to ache.

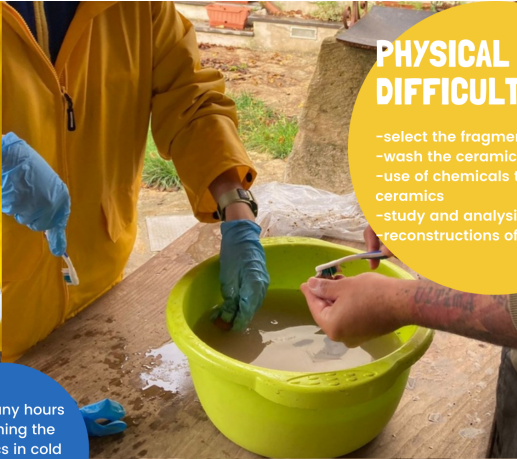
It's like a puzzle: you have to examine the fragments between the different layers and connect them together.

The second phase of ceramic study involves the analysis of individual fragments from each stratigraphic unit. This process first allows us to date the archaeological context in question and then to understand the function of the environment being studied. Accurate sorting is crucial, as it enables the reconstruction of complete forms from individual fragments and the identification of connections with other stratigraphic units, helping to understand the spatial relationships between the layers under investigation. Finally, it is possible to compare forms and decorative styles across different archaeological sites, analyze the aesthetic preferences of the inhabitants, and assess whether there were any imports. In this phase, it is also important to examine the ceramic pastes, as they provide information about the sources of clay used to make the vessels.

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT STEPS FOR STUDYING MATERIALS?



After many hours of washing the ceramics in cold water, hands are rough and sore



### PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES

- select the fragments from the site
- wash the ceramic
- use of chemicals to clean ceramics
- study and analysis of the finds
- reconstructions of the forms

Only by handling the ceramic fragments can we fully understand what we are studying. Touch also helps us to identify the materials, allowing us to immediately determine whether an object can be classified as "fine" or "coarse" ware.

This small jar was reconstructed using fragments from three different layers. This allowed us to understand that the materials within the deposit were distributed over a fairly wide area. Only by comparing the fragments from the individual layers were we able to reconstruct the complete form to 95%.



At the end of the day, hands turn orange, they are dusty and rough, while legs and back are sore from the long hours spent bent over the tables.

First of all, the ceramic materials identified during excavation or field survey are collected. After being separated into their respective bags linked to the stratigraphic unit, the study of the materials begins with washing. Washing can also be done by a conservator using chemical products to better clean the ceramics, but in most cases, the finds are washed with water, and tools like brushes are used to remove dirt from all surfaces and fractures.



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