Conservation Strategies for Archaeologists

Seminar Overview

Review the role of conservation in the field and in the laboratory for archaeological projects. Discuss planning and preparation for the care of excavated materials. Learn about the condition of materials upon excavation and “first aid” packing and transport methods for artifacts from both dry and waterlogged contexts. Examine artifact preservation and methods to facilitate interpretation. Learn how to perform simple stabilization techniques such as dewatering waterlogged bone, removing chlorides from objects, and consolidating highly degraded glass, as well as exploring tips for mending vessels.

Agenda

Intro to Conservation
- What is conservation
- Budgeting and planning
- Conservation terminology and definitions

Deterioration of Artifacts in Burial
- Field manuals—field kits

Lifting and Consolidation—Lecture
- Exercise: Lifting fragile ceramics practical

Transport and Packing of Artifacts
- How to keep artifacts wet and dry

What is Stabilization?
The difference between stabilization and conservation

Discussion of Labs
Equipment, set up, tools, differences between a variety of labs

Health and Safety
- Personal protection, chemical safety, laboratory safety
- Exercise: Red Cross exercise on how to remove gloves safely

Documentation
- Exercise: Documentation
- Materials ID
- X-radiography

Desalination
- Techniques—when, why, how
- Material specific points, including iron, lead, wood etc.

Cleaning
- Pros and cons
- What should a conservator do compared to laboratory staff
- What can be learned by a conservator working on artifact

Mending Ceramics—The Ins and Outs of Good Technique and Materials
- Exercise: Pot mending practical

Choosing Archival Materials
- Talk about support
- Long-term storage
- Microclimates
- Exercise: Boxmaking practical

Surveying Collections
- Talk about use and lessons
  - Prioritizing
  - For conditions/preservation
  - For budgeting
  - Long-term effects of preservation