



## **Instead of an editorial**

Public archaeology has emerged as a significant field within contemporary archaeological practice and research, focusing on the relationship between archaeology and the wider public. Rather than remaining confined within academic institutions, archaeology increasingly engages with communities, cultural stakeholders, and diverse audiences, fostering dialogue and participation in the interpretation and stewardship of cultural heritage.

In Cyprus, interest in this field, particularly through community engagement initiatives, has been gradually increasing in recent years. Recognising this development, as well as the need to further promote the involvement of non-specialists in archaeological practice and discourse, the Board of Directors of the Association of Cypriot Archaeologists (ACA) initiated the present project. Its aim was to gather reflections and responses from local experts involved in relevant initiatives and to highlight the work of emerging scholars and young professionals across the broader field of archaeology. By doing so, ACA seeks to support and promote their contributions while encouraging further participation in community engagement activities in order to engage and empower local communities through interaction with the island's archaeological heritage and experiential learning

The result is this digital repository of short reports, designed to document and disseminate recent initiatives focusing on public engagement in Cypriot archaeology. The repository aims to showcase emerging voices and fresh perspectives on the ways archaeologists connect with broader audiences, whether through community-based projects, educational activities, digital media, museum programmes, or forms of heritage activism. The choice of an online open-access format reflects a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, allowing the work of early-career scholars and professionals to reach not only the Cypriot archaeological community but also a wider local and international audience.

The collection of original reports presented here was collected by invitation, based on the Board's knowledge of ongoing or recently completed projects in Cypriot archaeology that place public engagement at their core. Together, these five papers represent important contributions to the developing field of public archaeology on the island and reflect the work of recent graduates and early-career archaeologists. They explore different approaches through which Cypriot archaeology engages the public and enhances the dissemination of archaeological knowledge. In doing so, they demonstrate how meaningful interaction between archaeologists and society can contribute to a deeper understanding of, and commitment to the protection of, cultural heritage.

The submitted papers underwent minimal editorial intervention and formatting by ACA's President, Dr. Maria M. Michael, and Vice-President, Demetra Ignatiou, in order to ensure coherence and consistency across the collection. The visual icon and the layout design for the repository's online presentation were created by ACA member Phivos Poullos.

ACA welcomes further contributions from its members whose work involves initiatives related to community engagement in Cypriot archaeology. It is anticipated that this repository will continue to expand, serving as a growing platform for collecting and sharing innovative approaches to public archaeology on the island.

Dr Maria M. Michael and Demetra Ignatiou

## ***“But what have you been finding over there?” Public engagement activities at Chlorakas-Palloures, Cyprus***

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores public engagement activities within the Chlorakas-*Palloures Archaeological Project* in Cyprus, highlighting how archaeology can be meaningfully shared with and enriched by local communities. Moving beyond traditional academic frameworks, the project emphasizes collaboration, dialogue, and inclusivity through open days, school involvement, volunteer participation, and digital outreach. These activities foster mutual exchange, where community members contribute local knowledge while gaining insight into archaeological practices. By situating public engagement at the core of fieldwork, the *Palloures Project* demonstrates how archaeology can extend beyond excavation to inspire broader reflection on heritage, identity, and the relevance of the past today.

**Keywords:** Community Archaeology; Public Engagement; Cypriot Archaeology; Chlorakas-*Palloures*; Chalcolithic.

### **Introduction**

*“But what are you finding over there?”*. This is the most common question I am asked while excavating in Cyprus, mainly by the people living where I work. Even though as a student I was often advised to respond with *“nothing important, never mind”*, one of my greatest joys when I am on fieldwork is presenting what we find to the local community at every chance I get. Archaeology is often conducted within the ivory tower of academia, communicated only among specialists and experts. Additionally, in places like Cyprus, where archaeological sites were often looted in the past, archaeologists may avoid sharing their findings with the local communities, out of fear, or, if we are being completely honest, because they don’t believe that the locals have any claim in this knowledge prior to an academic publication.

However, I firmly believe that archaeology is relevant for everyone, and it is ineffective if it is not communicated to the wider public. Architecture, pottery, different technologies, are all interesting and worthwhile to study, but what is really interesting and valuable, is how we interpret our finds to investigate how past societies lived, not only out of interest, but also to be able to reflect on how we live, what decisions we make, how we organize our societies. A common

definition for archaeology is that it is the study of ancient past through the analysis of material culture, in order to investigate how humans before us lived (Renfrew and Bahn, 2016: 12-19). However, archaeology, by illuminating how people lived in the past, can help us shape our present and future. After all, archaeology can also be defined as *“the collective, deep chronological documentation of the capacity of humans to imagine different ways to live”* (Morgan, 2022: 225).

### **Public engagement in Archaeology**

How archaeologists interact with the wider public and vice versa has been studied extensively over the past years, and it has been described as community archaeology or public archaeology. Community archaeology can be defined as archaeology done with, for and by the community (Nicholas, 1997), or as Moshenska (2017: 3) described it, *“the place where archaeology meets the world”*. Overall, proponents of community archaeology suggest that our discipline can benefit from the inclusion of diverse voices in the interpretation of the past, involving non-specialist stakeholders in physical excavations and the interpretations that follow (Tully, 2007: 158; Neil, 2023: 12). For example, Faulkner (2000) has argued for an ‘archaeology from below’, where fieldwork is rooted in and stemming from the community, it is open to volunteers, it is organized in a non-hierarchical way, as inclusive as possible, and has a research agenda according to which material, methods and interpretations can and are encouraged to interact.

The term community archaeology is often used interchangeably with public archaeology. Public archaeology can also be defined in various ways: Kador (2014) describes it as archaeology conducted in the public eye; Atalay (2012) as public outreach, but without any input from the community in the planning of the archaeological praxis; while Moshenska and Bonacchi (2015) use it interchangeably with community archaeology.

Atalay (2012: 48) employed the term “community based participatory research” and outlined eight different approaches to engagement: collaboration; collaborative archaeology; cooperative archaeology; covenantal archaeology; community archaeology; public archaeology; civic engagement archaeology, and service-learning archaeology. Similarly, Moshenska and Bonacchi (2015) created seven categories in which archaeology can have meaningful interactions with the public: working with the public; by the public; public sector archaeology; archaeological education; open archaeology; popular archaeology, and academic public archaeology. Here, a definition of the term community and community archaeology that has been proposed by Neil (2023: 18–19) is adopted:

*“The active participation in these interpersonal negotiations that bring people together, instead of by a shared trait, belief, interest, etc., which are often treated as permanent and static, instead of infinitely changeable. By extension, this is an understanding of a community that creates the possibility to hold both the communal and personal importance of heritage simultaneously, without smoothing over and negating differences and individuality”.*

Even though there are not many community-based projects in Cyprus, engagement with archaeology has been developing for years within the academic and professional realms of Cypriot archaeology. Neil (2023) investigated the thematic threads of engagement in Cypriot archaeology by presenting the community engagement activities of several projects on the island and critically reflecting on how community engagement is done, how it evolves and how it could be done in the future. Even though the projects Neil investigated did not start out as community archaeology projects but as research-based, they gradually embedded community archaeology methodologies. These methodologies can be both in-person and digital, engaging with various target audiences. Neil studied three main case studies: The Troodos Archaeological and Environmental Project (TAESP); the Athienou Archaeological Project (AAP); and the Settled and Sacred Landscapes of Cyprus (SeSaLaC) (Vionis et al., 2023; Ripanti et al., 2025).

In this framework, actively seeking ways to communicate archaeology to the wider public and the local communities, and encourage their active participation in our discipline, is a valuable practice. This paper endeavours to contribute to the discussion on community and public outreach activities in Cypriot archaeology and illustrate the importance of engaging local communities in the archaeological praxis by presenting different public outreach activities. This paper presents examples of such activities conducted within the framework of the *Palloures Archaeological Project*, an excavation at the Chalcolithic settlement Chlorakas-*Palloures*, in Paphos, Cyprus. The community engagement methodologies employed by the *Palloures Archaeological Project* are presented, followed by a reflection on how these have aided collaboration with the local community and public outreach for a wider audience.

### **Community engaging and public outreach activities at Chlorakas-*Palloures***

The Chlorakas-*Palloures* excavation, is a project conducted by the Faculty of Archaeology of Leiden University, the Netherlands, in collaboration with the University of Cyprus, and it has been active since 2015. It is directed by Professor Bleda S. Düring, Dr. Victor Klinkenberg and myself. Chlorakas-*Palloures* is a large settlement dating to the Middle and Late Chalcolithic (ca. 3500-2400 BC), and excavations have revealed round houses of various sizes, large amounts of pottery, stone tools, some metal objects, and about 15 burials (Düring et al., 2019). Over the past decade, the team has endeavoured to engage in different forms of public engagement, in person but also digitally.

Archaeologists are often embedded into the local communities in which fieldwork takes place, without necessarily conducting a community archaeology project per se (Neil, 2023: 65). Similarly, the *Palloures Project* has maintained and nourished links with the community, in a local and a national level. The team has been welcomed by the community council of Chlorakas, which provides the Agios Nikolaos primary school as the project's base and accommodation, storage space for the project throughout the year, and assists with any practicalities, from plumbing issues to providing watermelon and water for the team when the temperatures are very high. Furthermore, by involving Cypriot archaeologists in every aspect of the project, from the co-

director, to specialists, to BA students from the University of Cyprus, the *Palloures Project* nurtures its links to the wider community and ecosystem, which supports and develops Cypriot archaeology.

During the excavation season, every year, the Palloures project welcomes volunteers to help us with finds processing, mainly pottery washing with our students. This has proven to be not only helpful for us, but also an excellent way to communicate and engage with the people of Chlorakas. Organising a shared activity, where people can interact with the team members, as opposed to a public lecture, where people just listen, puts people at ease and therefore makes them more open to conversation and engagement. Moreover, over the years, we have had high school students who were considering studying archaeology joining us in the field and excavating with us for a few days. Also, even though everyone is welcome to visit the site at any time while we are working there, and people often do -sometimes bringing cold water and fruits that are greatly appreciated by the team, we also organise open days, when people can come and get a tour of the site (Fig. 1). Additionally, towards the end of the season, along with the community council, we organise an evening in Chlorakas, where we host activities for children and we give a short presentation in Greek-Cypriot, of what we found during the season and of our future plans (Figs. 2 and 3). These evenings are always particularly interesting, since they give people a chance to see who we are and what we have been doing, to ask us questions, but also to share local knowledge we would not have a chance to know otherwise. For example, it was in one of those evenings that we were told that a nearby plot might belong to our site since the owners were finding similar-looking pottery sherds everywhere; and that there was a medieval cistern and even water flowing through one of the plots we are working on, which explained disturbances in our stratigraphy. Moreover, our team members often participate in public outreach days organised both in Leiden and in Cyprus, giving presentations about the project to the wider public.

When it comes to digital interactions, we have a website which we update regularly, and active social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram. We produce content for social media throughout the year, showcasing research on Palloures, finds processing, new publications, conference presentations, and interesting archaeological contexts. We try to do this in both English and Greek, and we have observed that it is an effective way of keeping people informed and invested in the project, but also to reach people in Cyprus and abroad who would not know of our excavation otherwise. Additionally, there is the *Friends of Palloures Foundation (FOP)*, which was formed by archaeologists who participated in our excavations, and it supports the excavations and research at Chlorakas-Palloures. FOP welcomes donations, and its members receive newsletters from the project's directors, being the first to know what is going on in Palloures.

Finally, in 2024, the Leiden Archaeology social media team produced a documentary on the Chlorakas-Palloures excavation, entitled "*The Chalcolithic Uncovered: Journey into the Cypriot past through Archaeological Excavation*". This documentary presents the work done by our team,

it features interviews of the projects' directors and of students participating in the excavation, and it is available on YouTube, with English and Greek subtitles. Making a short documentary is an established communication in Cypriot archaeology and suits it particularly well. For example, the SeSaLaC team also produced a documentary entitled "*Settled and Sacred Landscapes in Cyprus: The Xeros River valley (Larnaca District)*" directed by Stavros Papageorgiou (Tetraktys Films). This documentary was screened at various occasions and was received very well by the public (Ripanti et al., 2025: 259).

## **Conclusions**

Overall, this article has illustrated the endeavours by the Palloures Project to engage with the local community and the wider public, in meaningful and diverse ways. The project aims to reach more diverse audiences, to share archaeological knowledge, to facilitate education and to promote Cypriot archaeology. By involving communities in our archaeological practice, whether it is by active participation in the excavation process, in interpreting our data, or simply by communicating our findings, we open our discipline to other perspectives, recognizing that the human experience and perspective are diverse and often complicated. These perspectives and experiences impact the ways we do archaeology and enrich our analysis.

As archaeologists, we have the opportunity to challenge singular, overarching narratives by recognizing and incorporating the diversity of identities and ways of being that existed in the past. We can embrace the multiplicity of past lives and experiences, and including the wider public in all aspects of our work can help immensely with that. As Frieman (2024: 1679–1680) recently noted, "*archaeological data are unruly...we cannot make the chthonic world confirm.*" Given that archaeological evidence is inherently fragmentary, our interpretations and practices must reflect this complexity acknowledging the richness of past experiences and contributing to the imagining of a more inclusive and equitable future (Black Trowel Collective et al., 2023; Frieman, 2024).

Community engagement and public outreach in Cypriot archaeology is evolving, becoming more prominent and dynamic over the years. Collaboration, engagement, interaction, seem to be the most fruitful ways forward, not only for fieldwork, but also for our discipline in general. Consequently, if you are an archaeologist, next time someone asks "*what are you finding over there?*", do not shy away, but explain, engage, and bring archaeology to the people. It is all for the people anyway.

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## Captions

Figure 1: Invitation to the Chlorakas-Palloures excavation Open Day in 2024 (Created by Maria Hadjigavriel).

Figure 2: Maria Hadjigavriel giving a talk at the Chlorakas community centre in 2021 (from the Palloures Project Archive).

Figure 3: Team members of the Palloures Project during activities with children at the Chlorakas community centre in 2024 (from the Palloures Project Archive).