



AWARENESS RAISING FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE - UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE, CRASHED HARD DISKS AND UNREADABLE MEMORY STICKS

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‘What did you find and what’s the (monetary) value of the objects you have found?’ are two of the most frequently heard questions people ask when they happen to interview an archaeologist.

Archaeology is, as we all know, much more than finding objects. But that’s unfortunately enough the idea non-archaeologists in general have about archaeology. Through this viewpoint, through this approach archaeologists are in fact reduced to a role that can best be described as taking care of (previously) lost objects. In medieval Europe we had a holy man for that, namely Antony of Padua.

I believe that this approach to archaeology, by the majority of the public at large, is in a way a major factor denying to archaeology and to underwater cultural heritage more specific an important role in our present-day society.

I think we urgently need to talk about archaeology in terms of ‘archives of the soil’ or in maritime contexts about ‘archives of the seas’ to stress the fact that these objects we indeed take care of are in fact nothing else than documents containing a lot of evidence a lot of information about former societies. In a way the objects can be compared to crashed hard disks or partly unreadable memory sticks. The evidence present in the material archival record is indeed mostly written in a language we don’t understand fully yet, implying that we have still to learn a lot about this language. A better communication to the public at large about what’s really at stake in relation to underwater cultural heritage, can contribute substantially to the valorisation of underwater cultural heritage through raising awareness and increasing public support.