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Reviewed Article:

The Story of your Site: Archaeological Site Museums and Archaeological Open-Air Museums

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Archaeological site museums may not be that well defined worldwide, yet, they are found almost everywhere. Archaeological sites with reconstructed buildings based on archaeology however seem to be a younger phenomenon and are mainly concentrated in Europe, Japan and North America. Both types of museums however have old roots. Important is not so much the site per se, but the message the management wants to bring across, how they like the site to be interpreted. Reconstruction is then one of the options. Prospects for

archaeological sites with a museum function are, like for all museums, critical: one must find relevance of the museum in modern society.

> Any object which is presented in a museum deserves context: it is not (just) an object of art but its value derives from its story, and these stories need to be told well.

What are Site Museums?

Although there is no generally accepted tight definition of an archaeological site museum (López-Menchero Bendicho, 2011, p.156), several characteristics stand out. An archaeological site museum is not *just a storehouse for finds made at a particular excavation. It is a place* for both research and education. (Banerjee and Kumar, 2015, p.27).

They are monographic museums of sites that are located in the same place where the archaeological heritage that motivates them are situated (Arias Vilas, 1999, p.50, translation: López-Menchero Bendicho).

Its scope is the story and meaning of the site. Its exhibits have the sole purpose of interpreting the site to visitors. Its collections preserve the more perishable features of the site.

Most archaeological sites have no archaeological site museum. There are other entities like archaeological parks, by example of Pompeii in Italy and the pyramids in Egypt. These are archaeological sites without museum on the spot. Another entity are battlefields, like for example the Battlefield of the WWI First Battle of the Marne, France (1914), the site has several monuments but no archaeological museum. Finally, there are archaeological crypts, like under the Notre Dame in Paris, France, showing archaeological remains discovered in the 1960s and 1970s, dating back to as far as the Iron Age.

Where you find reconstructed buildings on archaeological sites, “these are erected directly above architectural features discovered during excavation, separated by a layer of new soil (vertical displacement)” (Ertl, in print).

A good division of common aspects of archaeological site museums stems from Kowalski (Kowalski, 2009) where she identifies four fields of interest:

1. Tourism & Vandalism
2. Financial stability
3. Context & interpretation
4. Conservation & Maintenance

Tourism & Vandalism

Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. (World Tourism Organisation UNWTO).

Between 35 and 70 percent of international tourism can be classified as cultural tourism (McKercher and Du Cros, 2002, p.1). This cultural tourism is a double-edged sword. Obviously, tourists bring a lot of money into the region they visit. Part of this money is spent on preserving cultural heritage as well as improving tourist infrastructure. But increased tourism adds wear, tear and damaging stress to the site. For good reasons, UNESCO says that factors affecting world heritage property "*could include earthquakes, floods, land-slides (...) as well as (...) tourism*." (UNESCO Operational Guidelines Annex 7 II.5, Periodic Monitoring).

A good design can help an archaeological site museum, for example with a tourist-proof modern indoor or reconstructed open-air museum as the primary site for visiting, telling the story in the museum, and repeating only highlights at the archaeological site.

Educating the public is paramount and should start at an early age. It is important to keep explaining about the value of the archaeological remains to the local population and the tourists. Especially in economically impoverished areas, in addition to the cultural benefits many people are more willing to leave the archaeology undisturbed if the site brings economic benefits to the area.

Visitors and their interests change over years. Culture tourism is no longer the domain of an elite: museums are about to see a group of tourists who usually do not visit cultural or heritage places, but will do so only if these museums adapt to them instead of the visitors needing to adapt to the museums.

There are three trends in tourism (King, 2009):

1. Higher quality, greater choice and greater competition: a museum will need blockbusters or at least some quality and distinctiveness in their activities.
2. Personal choice and participation: not only does a tourist like to choose bits and leave out other bits of what is offered, they also expect to be able to participate. Engaging the visitor means one should include a menu of options and not a unilinear experience with a start, middle and end.
3. Something for everybody: not everybody can be treated similarly; the market gets much more segmented in special interest groups.

Finances

"*Tourism is already a catastrophe. But we have to admit that without tourism, there would be no public interest, and without that there would be no money for our work*" (Butcher, 2005,

p.118). Many on-site museums, even though supported by local or national governments, depend heavily on secondary or tertiary sources of income. Core funding for most museums is not always guaranteed. Additional revenue may come from entrance fees, the shop or cafeteria, donations or project funding. Many museums struggle heavily to keep afloat and not only need to behave like a business, with little space for experiments in management, sometimes they need to put 'making money' as first priority instead of running a museum.

A museum creates local jobs meaning tourist dollars for the region. Financial aspects do not only refer to the entrance fee paid and the shopping done in the museum, it is also about the money spent in the direct vicinity of the museum: hotels, petrol, visiting other venues or festivals, shopping, restaurants et cetera. More tourists mean more regional activity with also more local offer for the locals. There should, however, be a balance between economic benefits and the stress tourists bring to a site.

Context & Interpretation

On-site museums offer the primary context of archaeological finds: the excavation and the immovable objects (the ruins). The success of an on-site museum depends very much on how staff has been able to translate the archaeological record into a meaningful exhibition without losing the authenticity the original site and objects embodies.

The story a museum brings to its visitors is written by specialists who are used to write for colleagues, not necessarily for a wide audience. The context of archaeological finds at an on-site museum requires significant interpretation for public understanding the life of the people behind these artefacts. Important for their understanding is that usually all perishable materials have vanished, and the archaeological site is not a snapshot but a complex situation with dozens of occupation layers, each telling another story.

Any object which is presented in a museum deserves context: it is not (just) an object of art but its value derives from its story, and these stories need to be told well. The advantage however of an on-site museum is that it tells the story of a single site through time and not of different archaeological sites from different periods in a single town or region.

Showing both the artefacts as well as the archaeological site offers major advantages for interpretation. You cannot combine the indoor and outdoor experience in the same manner in an archaeological showcase museum only.

If the interpretation is done well, visitors are able to digest all information offered to them, and when they leave the museum, they do so with a complete image of the past of the site as well as deeper understanding of how archaeology revealed that story. These museums should work on content management besides collections management, meaning meta-data should be archived, the story of the site and the artefacts, the bigger picture.

Conservation & Maintenance

Sites are conserved not just for future tourist generations; an important group of stakeholders is the local population. This is the past of their region; the archaeological sites will disappear without their continuous support. Museum staff should make special effort to interpret the sites and their stories to the local population. If they are proud of it, they will bring their guests to the museum and be the best ambassadors one can imagine.

Conservation measures to protect the site from intensive tourism can be quite simple, for example guiding visitors to specific parts of the site only - or referring them to other nearby and lesser-known sites. Jointly, all stakeholders should formulate a maintenance strategy. This will ensure the future of the site as well as support by all parties.

What are Archaeological Open-Air Museums?

The international federation EXARC has defined such museums in 2008 as follows:

An archaeological open-air museum is a non-profit permanent institution with outdoor true to scale architectural reconstructions primarily based on archaeological sources. It holds collections of intangible heritage resources and provides an interpretation of how people lived and acted in the past; this is accomplished according to sound scientific methods for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment of its visitors (https://exarc.net/about-us/definitions).

All archaeological open-air museums consist of an outdoor facility with reconstructed buildings, a scenery or stage for their activities. In most cases, the facility is themed with prehistory, the Roman Era or a medieval scene.

At these places, a wide variety of activities are on offer, ranging from archaeological workshops to school excursions up to smaller or larger public events. These open-air museums are a robust alternative for an indoor on-site museum.

It is not a traditional museum

Archaeological open-air museums usually have no collection of tangible artefacts. They collect information, stories if you like, which they present in the prehistoric or medieval scenery. The information itself, the intangible cultural heritage resources, is the collection. Thus, archaeological open-air museums, like science centres and heritage visitor centres, are ever more accepted in the international museum family.

Archaeological open-air museums involve all senses and are not just about reading a museum guide and looking at objects in showcases. A museum in the traditional sense of the word has as tasks collecting, preserving and presenting. An archaeological open-air museum

looks at it differently. The five key words are education, presentation, experiment, commerce and live Interpretation. That does not make them have a worse or less successful approach than the archaeological museum around the corner. Thankfully, there are more and more "crossovers": a combination of indoor and outdoor. In my opinion, combining the two approaches is the very best to do.

It is not an original archaeological site

Most artefacts at an Archaeological Open-air Museum are to be touched and used. In many cases, tourist visitors think that what they see is the exact way it was. The image of such a "Stone Age house" is such impressive, that people take it for real, for original. We can tell again and again that what they see is just one of the possibilities of how life might have been back then, but the visitors will just not hear that. Important is that the on-site reconstruction is clear about what we know for sure and what is conjecture: thus the impression can be given that the entire building is an unquestionable and sure representation because the construct is built at a real site and, with that, takes over the magic of the original.

It is not a petting farm or zoo

Archaeological open-air museums are not just about the position of man in antiquity in their environment. But the phrase 'life' is important, whether you talk about living plants, crops and trees, animals or even 'living history'. For many children, an important group of visitors, these museums are attractive as we have so much and so much different life. Using this gets in contact with your visitors, to help transfer the story behind the product. The people first see a goat or a pig, but when they leave, they might see it as a "prehistoric" kind of animal instead of just a pet.

It is not a Disneyland park

Archaeological open-air museums may be more commercial then a museum, but much less then professional theme parks are. Proper acceptance by archaeologists and funding by the authorities would be able to guarantee the core tasks of such museums. Income is only generated in Summertime, and even during the season, the differences are extreme: a simple Tuesday in the season may be dead quiet when at the large event there may be an audience of thousands of people. Flexibility is the keyword.

There are similar entities to archaeological open-air museums, like Skansen type, historic open-air museums.

Open air museums are defined as scientific collections in the open air of various types of structures, which, as constructional and functional entities, illustrate settlement patterns, dwellings, economy and technology (AEOM 1973, Constitution Article 1, 109).

Another entity that is close to an archaeological open-air museum but has marked differences is the historic house, for example Lincoln Home, Illinois, USA. Like an ethnographic open-air museum, this starts with an original building, but often still in its original location, decorated as museum to commemorate a person, family or an important historical event. The last category of sites which look like archaeological open-air museums are theme parks like for example Puy du Fou in France, where cliché-like generic depictions of for example the Vikings or the Romans are presented in large shows to the audience (Paardekooper, 2012, p.66).

These archaeological open-air museums have experience in certain crafts and a feeling for materials and tools we do not use anymore in the present. That is why they are good open-air laboratories for science.

The downside with archaeological open-air museums is that, however immersive they are, what is shown is not an objective presentation of facts: the context is missing and the public interprets its own observations partly based on its own background experience (Sandner, 2016, p.224). A simple line-up of visitor expectations would be visualisation (Schmidt, 2000, p.142), emotions (Ahrens, 1990, pp.34-35), experience (Ahrens, 1990, p.59) and satisfaction of the positive expectation (Banghard, 2000, p.213). But the organiser has a complete different set of expectations: creating workplaces, strengthening weak regions, developing tourist destinations, satisfying political needs, personal interest for the profession, answer to the pressure of visualisation and many more (Sandner, 2016).

Although there are many on-site museums, which also include an archaeological open-air museum (for example Biskupin in Poland or Xanten in Germany), on-site museums are often founded by the government where archaeological open-air museums are often founded by a grass root movement. Site museum have per definition an indoor museum and an outdoor site; archaeological open-air museums usually do not have an indoor museum. Visitors to an on-site museum are usually traditional museum visitors, visitors to archaeological open-air museums are predominantly families with children. One often sees a mix of indoor and outdoor, of original ruins and reconstructed parts, of an interpretation centre, open-air museum and archaeological site.

History

A good example of an old archaeological on-site museum is Sarnath in India. It is one of the four most important Buddhist Pilgrimage centres. In order to preserve the antiquities, found on this site, the Government decided in 1904 to construct an on-site museum adjacent to the excavated site. The building was to house, display and study the antiquities. The antiquities in the museum are datable from 3rd century BC to the 12th century AD.

In North America, the first site museums developed in the mid-1800s when historic preservation sentiments dealt with places and sites associated with the American Revolution of 1775-1783 (Jameson, 2013, p.31). Williamsburg was the thriving capital of Virginia when the dream of American freedom and independence was taking shape and the colony was a rich and powerful land stretching west to the Mississippi River and north to the Great Lakes.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation operates the world's largest living history museum. Open since 1933, Colonial Williamsburg is the restored 18th-century capital of Britain's largest, wealthiest, and most populous outpost of the Empire in the New World.

The Historic Area of Colonial Williamsburg stretches over 301 acres and includes 88 original 18th-century structures. Hundreds of houses, shops and public outbuildings are reconstructed on their original foundations.

(Brown and Chappell, 2004)

The oldest archaeological open-air museums date back to over a century ago. Worldwide there may be 800 archaeological open-air museums of which a good number is represented at https://exarc.net/venues. If each of these, like the 100 museum members of EXARC, attract a little less than 50,000 visitors on average per year, this means a total of about 39-40 million visitors per year worldwide.

Romanticism

The early days of archaeological open-air museums can be recognised in the construction of staged settings, loosely inspired by a view on the past. These settings were used for purposes of transferring a political message or transferring an image of a nostalgic and idealised past in order to legitimise the position of elite, or to confirm myths or any kind of ideology.

An old example is Jægerspris in Denmark, a landscape park owned by the Danish royal family (Petersson, 2003, pp.45-50). In 1776 the Julianehøj, probably a Stone Age grave, was excavated here. After excavation, it was remodelled in Romantic fashion with terraces and a marble entrance to the room inside. The implicit goal was to emphasise the descent of the Danish Royal Family back to the far past. At present, royalty in Denmark and Norway are protectors of different archaeological open-air museums, like Queen Margrethe II of Denmark is protector of Sagnlandet Lejre.

Nationalism

From 1784, Romanticism began to evolve into Nationalism with the concept of an organic folk nation, complete with a national spirit, emphasising people's own folklore, language and identity (Riasanovsky, 1992). Nationalist examples of archaeological open-air museums are known from the 1930s and 40s in Nazi Germany: Pfalhbaumuseum Unteruhldingen and AFM

Oerlinghausen. Both are examples on how Germany attempted to influence the image about their own country in the past, and thus help to legitimise the state's ideology. A recent example is from the Ukraine, where on Independence Day 2015, 30 soldiers who had protected the integrity of the State received medals and visited the archaeological open-air museum "Park of Kyiv Rus" together with the deputy Minister of Culture.

Science and Experiment

In the first decades after World War III, not many new archaeological open-air museums were conceived across Europe, people changed back to 'safer' methods of science. This lead to a tendency towards experimental archaeology. It is remarkable to note that although the phrase experimental archaeology as stereotype is often used in archaeological open-air museums, relatively few museums execute experiments. Most museums want to do experiments but it is often quite expensive and thus not a priority because of a complex economy of a site (personal communication Petersen). The museums form a bridge, with visitors on one side, science on the other. A museum that possesses an active link with science is a true living museum.

Interpretation

The process of picking up information in a museum is a kind of informal learning or informal education: "*the lifelong process in which people learn from everyday experience*" (Jeffs and Smith, 1996). Demonstrations of any kind provide the connection between text books and reality, between knowledge learned by heart and knowledge gained by experience (Godal, 2000).

In the past,

heritage interpretation existed to educate, primarily with a view to imparting an understanding of the need to conserve and preserve" (Tilden, 1957).

It now covers a much wider range of goals (Bennett, 2009, p.84).

Interpretation in museums can best be explained as *getting the museum story across* to the public. This can take place in text and images (text panels near showcases, guide books, websites, apps or movies), but can also be done by guide persons and is then called live interpretation which is defined as *"any live interaction between museum / site staff and visitors"* (International Museum Theatre Alliance). This includes many living history-type activities, ranging from non-costumed demonstrations of historical craft to storytelling and costumed first- and third-person interpretation, but is also used to cover activities such as guided tours, education workshops, theatre performances and demonstrations.

Every museum needs an interpretation framework which dictates the main line of the story told and how it is told.

Relevance to a diverse public

The public to on-site museums is very diverse. Some people will have visited many museums before, for others it is new land. Visitor categories are locals, tourists, researchers and teachers but even within these categories there are large differences (Banerjee and Kumar, 2015). On the museum side, Curators should work closely together with museum educators to learn how to tell the story of the site. A clear story line needs to be developed and one should consistently adhere to it. Designers will also know well how to approach different groups of visitors. A custom-fit approach, with many different media and well-trained guide persons is a good solution. The diverse public requires the story to be translated, not so much in different languages, but in different forms, so each group finds its way through the story with their own means.

Museums should aim to find common ground with their visitors, they should answer the question: why is the story of my museum relevant to visitors? This can lead to artful exhibitions but as well to presentations about drugs in the past or war & peace. All what is told should mean something to our visitors, be relevant, something they can take home and think about, and put to good use.

At historic sites, monuments, and parks, the process of effective interpretation allows each visitor to find an opportunity to personally connect with a resource or place. Each individual may connect to the place in a different way, and some may not connect immediately, but everyone should have an opportunity to explore how that special site or place is meaningful to them. Therefore, a major goal of interpretation is to increase each visitor's enjoyment and understanding of the site, monument, or park, and to allow visitors to care about the museums on their own terms. Many have argued that such personal connections are crucial in gaining public support for conservation efforts.

Reconstruction

The NPS is the National Park Service in the USA, founded in 1916. They manage all U.S. National Parks, many American national monuments, and other conservation and historical properties and have about 22,000 employees.

Reconstruction is defined by the NPS as:

the act of process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location (https://www.nps.gov).

The NPS standards for reconstruction are:

1. Reconstruction will be used to depict vanished or non-surviving portions of a property when documentary and physical evidence is available to permit accurate reconstruction with minimal conjecture, and such reconstruction is essential to the public understanding of the property.
2. Reconstruction of a landscape, building, structure, or object in its historic location will be preceded by a thorough archaeological investigation to identify and evaluate those features and artefacts which are essential to an accurate reconstruction. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
3. Reconstruction will include measures to preserve any remaining historic materials, features, and spatial relationships.
4. Reconstruction will be based on the accurate duplication of historic features and elements substantiated by documentary or physical evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different features from other historic properties. A reconstructed property will re-create the appearance of the non-surviving historic property in materials, design, colour, and texture.
5. A reconstruction will be clearly identified as a contemporary re-creation.
6. Designs that were never executed historically will not be constructed.

Often, the actual archaeological remains have been destroyed or are so badly damaged that they cannot be presented to visitors meaningfully. That would be enough reason for on-site reconstruction.

If any of the original material remains, in some cases, a reconstruction is built directly onto the ancient fabric. This can lead to the original finds being damaged. If the original is touching the reconstruction, a clear visual separation between them should be recognizable to the public. The question is if the public understands this.

As example, the Iberic Iron Age ruins in Calafell, Spain were found when building appartments. The ruins would have been totally destroyed if not for the archaeological open-air museum to be built right on top of it.

On-site reconstructions provide maximum potential for investigating the story of a site both in terms of research potential and public interpretation. Original location is a key factor in creating experimental research with authenticity and integrity.

To-scale, on-site reconstructions are needed to enable visitors to understand cultural and spatial contexts and make personal connections to resource meanings and significance;

The memories they take away will be better informed and are longer lasting (Jameson, 2013, p.31).

The reconstructed site can be right next to the original site, but the effect would be gone if it would be placed a few miles away.

Archaeological reconstructions are the best means of conveying to visitors complex information about buildings and how they were used by those who lived in them. It is essential that they should be justified by a fully published, peer-reviewed assessment.

ICOMOS values reconstructions on archaeological sites as positive and desirable when they answer two important functions (ICOMOS: Charter for the protection and management of the archaeological heritage, Lausanne 1990:

1. Experimental research: reconstructions that are carried out as an experiment offer the best opportunity of testing building techniques and construction methods.
2. Interpretative and educational purposes: on-site reconstructions offer excellent opportunities for public dissemination. No other form of visualisation can convey the dimensions of a building so concisely. Especially in the case of remains that are poorly preserved and cannot be displayed, there is hardly a more suitable way for museums to awaken interest among a wide range of target groups in a historical site and in the preservation of ancient monuments.

The Roman Archaeological Park at Xanten is quite large, they attract about 600,000 visitors per year (APX). Already since the 1980s, they are reconstructing Roman buildings. The actual planning and building of the reconstructed houses had led to a lot of extra research (Müller, 2013 in Calafell, p.55). Buildings like for example a Roman temple are built to give the many visitors of the park an understanding of how these may have looked like in the past, but they are also built to protect the original remains, which are under a modern protection shell.

Each site should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Since on-site reconstructions have a combination of advantages and disadvantages, decisions must be made according to individual situations and buildings. What proves to be right in one place may be wrong in another context.

Prospects

In Japan, cultural heritage is now assessed in a holistic way focussing on its potential to tell a story. The aim may be to attract tourism but the principle is interesting as it focuses predominantly on the use value of heritage and the potential to touch people. (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2016. Japan Heritage, 2)

We have to find relevance and engage our audiences in conversation; our museums must aim to make a difference in modern society. Museums should be part of a network with other organisations where the public is in the middle, not the collection. We help people root in society. We for example offer our visitors processual learning by means of which one can understand the world more easily.

Archaeological on-site museums should do the following:

- Put the people in the centre: visitors, local population
- Focus both on collection and interpretation, and not just on research
- Improve infrastructure in and around the museum & site

Archaeological open-air museums need to do the following:

- A better link with science: we need a greater emphasis on professionalising the science and research behind archaeological open-air museums.
- To improve quality in all respects
- To get away from too much phantasy and commerce
- Run a healthy business model

With the present pressure the easy way out is to get smaller: making saving money the priority. We however must believe in our strengths as our priority, our unique selling points (Winter, 2016).

Digital technology will become more important in our lives. Digital reconstructions make it easier to show what life might have been like at a site, but they are expensive. Seeing the contours of what the original site was like may work very well as a person can grasp the size of the site. It is also nice to show alternatives and make improvements later on, based on new knowledge.

Your story and your public dictate how you tell your story. Sometimes a reconstruction is the best way, in other cases, an indoor site museum does it best, or digital reconstructions work. Do not destroy the archaeology. We are the custodians of the remains of the past. Once these are gone, they are gone forever. Tourism helps to gain income to preserve the archaeology but should never take over.

Good research is needed for a good story told. Do not end up entertaining tourists with some half-phantasy story. Be willing to change your story if new research tells you so. Be sure to have the support of the local population. They can make or break your initiative.

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archaeological open-air museum
interpretation
(re)construction
tourism
presentation

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FIG 1. AN IMPRESSIVE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF A STONE AGE TYPE HOUSE AT HELDENBERG, AUSTRIA. PHOTO BY R. PAARDEKOOPER

FIG 2. ONE OF THE MANY HOUSES AT COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG. PHOTO BY R. PAARDEKOOPER

FIG 3. A RECONSTRUCTED WALL, BUILT STRAIGHT ON THE ORIGINAL IRON AGE FOUNDATIONS AT CALAFELL, CATALONIA, SPAIN. PHOTO BY R. PAARDEKOOPER

FIG 4. THE (RE)CONSTRUCTED ROMAN TYPE HARBOUR TEMPLE AT XANTEN, GERMANY. PHOTO BY R. PAARDEKOOPER

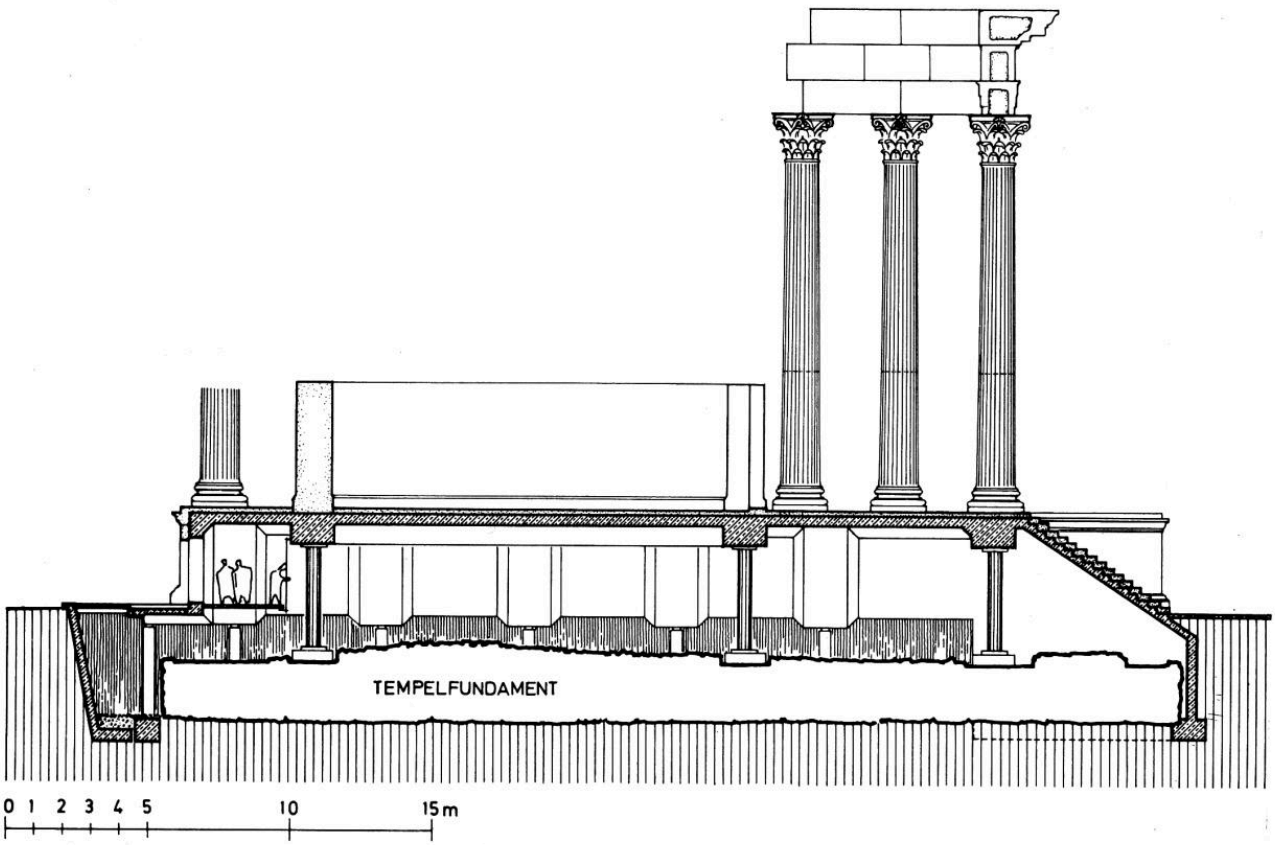

FIG 5. THE HARBOUR TEMPLE AT XANTEN, GERMANY, SHOWING THE SARCOPHAGUS PROTECTING THE ORIGINAL ARCHAEOLOGY. DRAWING: LVR-ARCHÄOLOGISCHER PARK XANTEN.