



# Understanding archaeological documentation through a participatory, arts-based approach

**Nicolo Dell'Unto** based on peer reviews by 2 anonymous reviewers

Araar, Leila; Morgan, Colleen; Fowler, Louise (2023) Body Mapping the Digital: Visually representing the impact of technology on archaeological practice. Zenodo, ver. 5, peer-reviewed and recommended by Peer Community in Archaeology.

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This paper presents the use of a participatory arts-based methodology to understand how digital and analogue tools affect individuals' participation in the process of archaeological recording and interpretation. The preliminary results of this work highlight the importance of rethinking archaeologists' relationship with different recording methods, emphasising the need to recognise the value of both approaches and to adopt a documentation strategy that exploits the strengths of both analogue and digital methods.

Although a larger group of participants with broader and more varied experience would have provided a clearer picture of the impact of technology on current archaeological practice, the article makes an important contribution in highlighting the complex and not always easy transition that archaeologists trained in analogue methods are currently experiencing when using digital technology.

This is assessed by using arts-based methodologies to enable archaeologists to consider how digital technologies are changing the relationship between mind, body and practice.

I found the range of experiences described in the papers by the archaeologists involved in the experiment particularly interesting and very representative of the change in practice that we are all experiencing. As the article notes, the two approaches cannot be directly compared because they offer different possibilities: if analogue methods foster a deeper connection with the archaeological material, digital documentation seems to be perceived as more effective in terms of data capture, information exchange and data sharing (Araar et al., 2023).

It seems to me that an important element to consider in such a study is the generational shift and the incredible divide between native and non-native digital.

The critical issues highlighted in the paper are central and provide important directions for navigating this ongoing (digital) transition.

**References:**

Araar, L., Morgan, C. and Fowler, L. (2023) Body Mapping the Digital: Visually representing the impact of technology on archaeological practice., Zenodo, 7990581, ver. 5 peer-reviewed and recommended by Peer Community in Archaeology. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7990581>

## Reviews

### Evaluation round #1

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Version of the preprint: 3

### Authors' reply, 25 September 2023

Dear Recommender,

I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the reviewers for taking the time to review our paper "Body Mapping the Digital". The thoughtful comments and feedback have been incredibly valuable, and we are grateful for their thorough examination of our work.

We acknowledge and appreciate the points raised in both reviews. It is important to clarify that this paper indeed represents the preliminary phase of a larger research project aimed at comprehensively understanding the impact of digital methods on archaeological knowledge production. As such, the observations regarding the scope and focus of the paper are well-founded.

Regarding the suggestions to include thematic codes, analytical data and expand discussions on various aspects, we wish to clarify that due to the preliminary nature of this study the focus of this paper has intentionally been kept narrow, focussing primarily on the methodology employed. However, we appreciate the insights and agree that these aspects warrant further exploration, which we plan to address in subsequent phases of the research.

Concerning the discrepancy between the introduction and conclusion statements, we apologize for any confusion. We have revised the paper and research questions to align the objectives and focus more explicitly on the documentation aspect while acknowledging the broader context of the ongoing research project.

Lastly, we appreciate the references pointed out and have ensured that they are corrected and included in the reference list.

In summary, we want to express our gratitude for the insightful feedback, and we are committed to addressing all comments as we move forward with the larger research project. The thoughtful input has been instrumental in refining our work, and we look forward to sharing more comprehensive findings in the future.

Sincerely,

Leila Araar, Doctoral Researcher, The University of York

### Decision by **Nicolo Dell'Unto**, posted 09 August 2023, validated 09 August 2023

**minor revision**

Dear Authors,

I am pleased to inform you that I have received the external reviewers' comments on your article "Body Mapping the Digital: Visually Representing the Impact of Technology on Archaeological Practice".

The reviewers have provided constructive feedback to further improve your manuscript. I encourage you to consider their comments and suggestions carefully as you make the necessary revisions. Your attention to these details will help ensure the quality and impact of your work.

Please take the time to address the reviewers' comments thoroughly. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need clarification during this process.

Thank you for your commitment to improving your article. We look forward to receiving your revised manuscript and working towards final publication.

Best regards,  
nicolò

## **Reviewed by anonymous reviewer 2, 03 July 2023**

Review Body mapping the digital  
3 July 2023

The manuscript is well written and describes an interesting study. I find the topic very interesting and highly relevant. The body mapping study is carefully described and nicely illustrated with photos. The analysis is illuminating and the conclusions thought provoking. I only have a few comments that may contribute to make the article stronger.

The study comprises a pilot study and a study of focus groups but seems to be the early stages of a larger research project. If this is the case, it could be made clearer how this effects the results – are they to be considered preliminary? And there are some questions in the introduction that go beyond this study, including whether digital recording can improve working conditions and enskill archaeologists. They will be addressed further on in the project?

Moreover, there is also the mentioning of the coding of the transcriptions of the group discussions/individual narratives. The codes are said to be organized into wider categories and thematic codes that provided a comprehensive understanding of the experiences. The result of the coding is not presented here. Because it will be at a later stage of the project? A presentation of these codes and their frequency would have added some more rigour to the study, as the arguments are now relying on citations from the transcriptions, giving the study a somewhat anecdotal inclination. This is not a very big problem as a e.g. statistical presentation of the coded data would be impacted by the fact that the number of participants is small.

About the participants, they have varying experience of fieldwork. It would be interesting to see a more in depth discussion on how the length of their field experience impact their experience of by-hand vs digital recording, a topic touched upon in section 4.2. In my view, work traditions, routine, training, etc are big factors in how recording systems are experienced.

One result is that the participants feel more engaged with the material under excavation when recording manually and that digital recording creates distance etc. How does this impact the interpretation process? How do you connect the bodily experience to the interpretation process? This is one of the questions mentioned in the introduction (do digital recording impact interpretation) and could be further elaborated on. It would be interesting with a section drawing on the discussion in section 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 regarding how all this impacts interpretation.

Another issue is the separation of documentation from excavation regarding the archaeological interpretation process. The study is focused on the documentation only, but in the field the excavation and recording are intertwined and not so clearly separate processes, and both impact/are a part of the interpretation. Was this addressed in the discussion with the participants?

In conclusion, it would be helpful if it is made clear how the study related to the bigger project, regarding scope, research questions etc. And the article would benefit from an addition of the coded data as well as some expanded discussions on the topics above. The article will be an interesting addition to the research regarding

the impact of digital practices in archaeology and it leaves the reader curious of the rest of the research that is being planned.

### **Reviewed by anonymous reviewer 1, 17 July 2023**

The study aims to present an innovative method to evaluate archaeologists' lived experiences in the fieldwork regarding analog and digital documentation, focusing on the impact of digital methods on documentation, interpretation, publication, and dissemination in archaeological knowledge production. The manuscript, however, focuses on only one aspect: documentation during fieldwork.

The method employed is clearly and adequately presented; however, some improvements in the presentation of the data through the definition of the themes and a representation of the data through a chart or table would benefit the text understanding.

To address the highlighted points, it is advisable to make minor revisions.

**Abstract.** The abstract is concise, introduces the topic of the paper, and presents its main findings

**Introduction.** The study aims to investigate the impact of digital methods on documentation, interpretation, publication, and dissemination in archaeological knowledge production through body mapping, a creative art-based methodology. The introduction clearly explains its motivation, which is the need to consider the possible risk of compromising the site understanding due to speed in the documentation that causes fieldworkers to engage less intimately with the site.

The research questions are clearly presented, and the predictions of contribution to the understanding of digital recording are also anticipated.

The introduction builds on relevant recent research performed in the field and introduces a methodological approach borrowed from other disciplines.

**Materials and methods.** Sufficient details concerning the methods, Body Mapping, are provided, the way it has been employed in the study and the participants who are part of it. Body Mapping has been used to record the documentation activities used in the field by archaeologists. However, interpretation, publication, and dissemination, which are listed among the aspects to be considered in the study, are not mentioned in the following sections.

**Results.** While the methods have been outlined in a clear manner, the presentation of the results could be improved. The use of themes to categorize the data collected is a good approach, but a more thorough explanation of the themes would be helpful for the reader to understand the results fully. Without this information, it is difficult to determine the criteria used to select certain reflections over others. By providing more clarity on the themes and their definitions, the reader would be able to follow the presentation of the results better.

To enhance the result section, the authors could consider adding a table or chart to depict the themes and showcase the process of generating the results.

**Discussion and conclusion.** The results support the discussion, but as noted before, the lack of analytical data in the results makes the discussion weaker.

In the discussion, recent and past studies on the use of digital technologies and methods were taken into account. The importance of both analog and digital techniques for enhancing archaeological documentation was emphasized. However, a discrepancy was noted between the introduction and conclusion statements regarding the project's focus on investigating the impact of "digital methods on the documentation interpretation, publication, and dissemination in archaeological knowledge production." Based on the information provided, it appears that the study only took into account the documentation gathered during the fieldwork. For this reason, it is advisable to review the study objectives.

**References** Taylor et al. 2018 reference needs to be corrected. White and Epston, 1990 is missing from the reference list; White 2007 is missing from the reference list.