

“Databases are central to archaeological knowledge production, as they serve to order, archive, and disseminate data gathered through survey, excavation, and analysis” (Labrador, 2012, p. 237).

One thing I learned from the readings is that databases influence how we see the past. They do not just store data. The way data is labelled and preserved affects how we interpret the past.

The databases we often see only one "correct" classification (for example, an object can be either a bead or a tool). Although, databases should support numerous interpretations because artifacts imply different things to different people or civilizations.

Furthermore, I learned that archaeology should not be handled by professionals. Databases could be opened up to accept input from Indigenous communities, local groups, or the general public, so we collectively gather information and knowledge rather than just by professionals.

The quote above is a quote that stood out to me as databases are important in archeology. They help organize and share information and data so researchers collect from the sites. This connects to our graveyard project as we count and record things like the number of graves and materials used, and also turn real people into our data and study. Which helps us see any patterns, but it also takes away the reality and personal side of things.

If we put our class data into a shared digital notebook, we might notice patterns. For example, the types of stones used, or a certain age group of people buried together in a certain area. That could tell us something about the community, or reason of death even, and time period. As I have read in the readings, databases aren't neutral. What we choose to record and what we leave out affects how we understand the past. Some things can't be captured by data, like meanings behind the graves. That shows how the past includes everything that really happened, while archaeology is just what we can study and record from what's left.

In the readings this week, there was a lot of discussion about how digital tools affect what kind of archaeological knowledge we can make. Even though databases organize and preserve information, they also control how we see the past. Another reading mentioned that “accessibility, quality of metadata, and institutional pressures” affect how archaeological data is reused. That means the data we rely on isn’t neutral, it’s shaped by decisions about what gets recorded, how it’s labeled, and what might be left out.

So, the space between counting and reality is about what gets lost when we turn lived experiences into data.

Reference:-

Labrador, Angela. 2012. Ontologies of the Future and Interfaces for All: Archaeological Databases for the Twenty-First Century. *Archaeologies* 8,236–249
https://digiarch-2025.netlify.app/docs/support/Ontologies_of_the_Future_and_Interfaces.pdf