De Villiers response:

Anne De Villiers powerfully asserts that repatriating Indigenous ancestral remains is not just an ethical obligation but a necessary act of restoring dignity and cultural identity. In her lecture extract, she explains that “significant numbers of Indigenous Ancestral Remains and cultural material are held in collecting institutions all over the world” and emphasizes that these items “were collected without consent” and stripped of their original cultural context. This choice of language reveals her stance: repatriation is essential to undo the historical injustices of colonization.

De Villiers supports her argument with evocative excerpts such as, “My ancestors are in these memory institutions, but their voices are missing…” and highlights the deep emotional toll involved in these processes, noting that repatriation is “a long, emotionally exhausting, painstaking and arduous process.” These extracts not only underline the injustice inflicted upon Indigenous communities but also emphasize the cultural urgency behind returning these remains. As a Research Archivist and project manager involved in repatriation initiatives, De Villiers brings significant expertise and credibility to her argument. Her reliance on firsthand experiences and scholarly projects enhances the source’s reliability, despite its emotive tone.

When comparing this lecture extract to the two articles from OpenDemocracy and ABC News, a clear contrast in style and focus emerges. Whereas De Villiers offers an academic and personal perspective, the journalistic texts tend to provide broader institutional and political analyses. The OpenDemocracy article might delve into systemic issues and power dynamics behind repatriation, while the ABC piece appears to report on recent developments and practical challenges in repatriation efforts. Together, these sources complement each other by merging academic insight with real-world reporting, enriching the discussion on the repatriation of human remains.

Exam Topics:

* Repatriation of human remains and artefacts
* Pompeii + Herculaneum
* Reasonable assumptions in history – usefulness (utility for topic) and reliability (trustworthiness)

Archaeology of Pompeii and Herculaneum:

* ‘Archaeologists will never have all the pieces to the ancient puzzle as things (artefacts), texts and thoughts are ultimately lost over time and never captured again’.

Mt. Vesuvius: Southwestern coast of Italy.

* AD 79: Mt. Vesuvius erupts, pyroclastic flow (Pliny the younger)
* Pliny the younger: 17 yrs old, staying across the bay at Misenum at the time of eruption, documented his recount of events 25 years later in a letter to Tacitus (historian/friend) - written account

Are Pompeii and Herculaneum ‘perfect’ archaeological sites?

Plethora: abundance or excessive amount

Caveat: A warning of specific conditions or limitations

The Pompeii Premise:

* It is UNCRITICAL to assume that the archaeological remains produced by Mount Vesuvius’ eruption reveal everything there is to know
* Archaeologists must rely on different kinds of evidence (e.g. literary records like Pliny the Younger) to provide research context.
* Pompeii and Herculaneum are not tombs – cannot provide accurate representations of ALL people who ever resided there (migration before, returning residents & looting after).

Domenica Fontana: accidentally rediscovered Pompeii in 1599. Was digging up a new course for the river Sarno and came across the city. Some believe he found some of the famous frescoes which were quite erotic and, because of the strict modesty prevalent at his time, he buried them again in “attempt to censor the archaeology”. 16th century.

1748 - Spanard Rocco Gioacchino de Alcuiberre: began excavation work. Thought he found Stabiae though ultimately found inscriptions that confirmed the site as Pompeii. Site became a tourist attraction. Treasure hunting and looting of moveable objects for private collections and museums. 18th century.

1860 – Italian archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli became site director. Fiorelli method: body plaster-cast technique, once the plaster and glue mixture had set around the cavities of skeletal remains, the surrounding ash was excavated away to reveal a cast. The technique destroyed the bones of individuals cast, modern archaeologists now use a clear resin which is more durable and allows the skeletal elements to be observed. 19th century.  
Fiorelli’s grid system: Fiorelli recognized that a more systematic and professional approach was required to accurately document the excavations and finds of Pompeii. Site was divided into regions and blocks (insulae) to identify the exact location of buildings and finds for documentation and recording.

1910-1923 – Vittorio Spinazzola: Cleared the main street via dell 'Abbondanza (a main street in Pompeii - ‘Street of Abundance’). Reconstructed many of the facades of buildings. One of the first archaeologists to record the phases of excavation in photographs. Early 20th century.

1924-1961 – Amadeo Maiuri: Uncovered city’s walls, cleared 10 insulae (blocks). Did not properl document or publish his findings, and allowed buildings excavated in earlier periods to decay (without being recorded). Stressors brought above by increased tourism and atmospheric pollution were not addressed. Reopened investigations at Herculaneum. 20th century.

The archaeological methods implemented in Pompeii have been overwhelmingly naïve and destructive (except for Fiorelli and Spinazzola).

Herculaneum:

* Herculaneum is better preserved than Pompeii (closer proximity to Mt. Vesuvius).
* Seaside resort for Rome’s aristocracy.
* Rediscovered in 1709 by a farmer digging a well -> found the ancient theater of Herculaneum.
* Thermopolium: a place where hot food & drinks were served.
* Few human remains were found, leading scholars to assume that most inhabitants escaped (unlike in Pompeii).
* However, an unexpected discovery in the 1980’s changed interpretations.
* Over 300 individuals have been located in boat houses (possibly waiting for rescue) - likely boiled alive by 500°C temps.
* The Ring Lady of Herculaneum: named for the rings on her fingers, was one of the individuals found in the boat houses.

Preservation:

Pompeii and Herculaneum were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1997.

Herculaneum:

* Perspex cases to protect frescoes became condensation traps that built up moisture.
* Plants (e.g. ivy) dislodge tiles and mosaics, causing walls to crumble and undermining foundations.
* Acidic pigeon faeces – wearing away walls and plaster
* Water (rain and ground water) - weakening foundations, destroying mosaics and frescoes.
* Human activity (deliberate and accidental) - graffiti, vandalism, erosion of footpaths.
* Herculaneum Conservation project (private-public partnership funded by American philanthropist David W. Packard) - since 2001.
* Project aims:   
  ‘Continuous care’ - teams move constantly around the site intervening in order to arrest decay and reduce its causes.  
  Long-term preservation: targeting water infiltration, drainage, roofing and problems of reconstruction, structural instability, incomplete excavation, presentation to the public, collection of documentation in a database and maintenance of new structures.

Pompeii:

* 2008-2012: Misuse of funds -> $9 million misspent on a Pompeii amphitheater project (actually harmed the integrity of the site).
* Heavy rains impacting architectural integrity, moss, grass, shrubs, stray dogs, mould, high tourism numbers.
* UNESCO undertook a site visit in 2013 (follow-up to 2010-11 visit). They issued a warning stating that if substantial progress was not made in preservation/restoration, the site would be placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The Great Pompeii Project:

* Initiated in 2012 with goals set for 2015, funded by Italian government and European Union -> 105 million Euros.
* Outcomes: multidisciplinary team – zooarchaeologists (animal bone), anthropologists (bioarchaeologists in Australia – human remains), art restorers, engineers etc. Drones – 3D imagery of Pompeii’s buildings and excavation progress. DNA analyses – age, sex, ethnicity of civilians. Restoration of 70 buildings

Characteristics of Modern Archaeology:

* The role of technology
* Multi-disciplinary teams
* Emphasis on restoration and preservation

Herculaneum Update:

* In 2020, a scientific team led by anthropologist Pierpaolo Petrone and volcanologist Guido Giordano conducted the first study of the glassy material using a scanning electron microscope and a neural network image-processing tool.
* Brent Seales, a computer science professor at the University of Kentucky, (in partnership with EduceLab: a Digital Restoration Initiative, the Library of the Institut de France and the founders of the Vesuvius Challenge) hosted a conference and livestream event at UK.

The Vesuvius Challenge:

* An AI program was developed and can successfully extract letters and symbols from X-ray images of the unrolled papyri. As part of the Vesuvius Challenge, the software and thousands of X-ray images of two rolled-up scrolls and three papyrus fragments were released to the public. The hope was, and still is, that $1 million in prizes would encourage global researchers and scholars to build upon the AI technology and accelerate the decoding.

Modern archaeology -> posterity:

* Mary Beard, the Cambridge University classicist and reigning authority on Roman history, contends that the wisest course might be to stop digging for new answers.