

What does meaningful, reusable archaeological data look like? Learning from local communities in Sardinia.

In June 2025, TETRARCHs conducted two workshops around the Tharros archaeological site in Sardinia. We wanted to explore what kinds of information about the past are meaningful and thought-provoking for local communities. The workshop participants included a lawyer, two fishermen, a sommelier, a retail worker, a farmer, a trainer and a basketball player, alongside several international archaeologists and representatives from the nearby cultural organisation Fondazione Mont'e Prama. True to the community, participants communicated in Italian and enjoyed refreshments together afterwards in local establishments – a restaurant near Tharros and a gym in the town of Oristano.

In the first workshop, they created their own multimedia data about the site. Some of that data is featured here via below QR-code, as photographs taken by the participants overlain with their own words.



<https://www.tetrarchs.org/index.php/2025/09/01/tetrarchs-impacts/>

The community connected with Tharros in embodied, sensuous ways. They referenced local knowledge of the land in their data, for example the ‘Mistral’ wind, the warmth of stone, and the smells of plants like Helichrysum. They wanted to relate to the past through human experiences:

- *What did the past smell like?*
- *Where did people gather?*
- *What clothes did people wear?*
- *What were people afraid of?*

In the second workshop, participants offered much-needed depth and personality to Tharros, weaving their individual knowledge together with the site’s historical record. Such richness is often missing from archaeological datasets:

“As soon as I set foot among the ruins of Tharros I feel the warm sun on my skin and a salty breeze coming from the sea. In front of me the ancient columns, white and worn, in contrast with the blue of the sea. I walk feeling the irregular consistency of the stone under my feet. I hear the seagulls and, further away, the sound of the waves that comes from ‘the living sea’.”

“I saw the ability to sculpt the stones with squaring and joints. This is a basalt and you have to know the soul of the stone. The sensation is to feel the hammer as it hits the chisel.”

“I imagine myself on the doorstep contemplating the sea, the adverse weather, the dangers of invasion by other peoples. A mixture of peace and anxiety.”

The data archaeologists collect shapes the stories they are able to tell. This, in turn, impacts local communities’ abilities to understand their own identity and sense of place in relation to the past.

Our workshops demonstrated the feelings of power, legitimacy and possibility that come when local and archaeological datasets are merged into stories that represent multiple perspectives:

“What struck me most about working with other people was how much we all care.”

“My fantasy and imagination were stimulated a lot. The questions I answered and the creation of the stories took me to a new dimension and brought me closer to archaeology.”

“I am curious and happy to discover my land with different eyes.”

Everyone is disenfranchised from archaeological knowledge when the data doesn’t serve their unique interests. The TETRARCHs workshops help to evidence that incorporating relatable, local, sensory knowledge into research practice supports connection, care and accessibility across communities.



Photo by: TETRARCHs workshop participants

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