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Metadata in archaeology? Engaging with materiality and cultural transmission

Archaeology studies material culture, drawing on the categorization of physical objects to reconstruct and interpret culture and related systems of meaning. This presentation looks at issues that have recently impacted the nature of archaeological data collection, analysis and interpretation: (1) the dynamic role of objects in (re)constitution of culture and in cultural transmission; (2) the notion that inanimate objects contain agency, actively contributing to social and cultural structure and meaning; and (3) how individual and group social identities draw on material culture in their construction. Case studies, including ordering and categorization of material culture, assignment of meaning and 'value', and use of other lines of data (e.g. ethnographic observation, textual records) will be explored, and it will be argued that the above concerns must be effectively addressed before a more productive overlap between the traditional subfields of anthropology can develop and longer-term strategies for metadata collection be achieved.