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Session #476: A Matter of Time. Handling Chronological Data in Archaeology

The notion of dating, chronology, phase or period has always been present in archaeology. From the very beginning of the discipline, archaeologists sought to classify their discoveries, but also to relate them to known texts and events for historical periods and then to the ages established by C. J. Thomsen for prehistory (Thomsen 1836). Even now every archaeologist must deal with chronological data.

Many systems were invented in Europe since the typo-chronological method was invented by O. Montelius (1899) and many still co-exist today (Roberts et al. 2013), making archaeologists work difficult when dealing with several cultural regions. Absolute dating can be provided thanks to various scientific methods (14C, dendrochronology, OSL...), but will not be able to replace relative chronologies completely for decades. It can be challenging to make sense of these multiple types of data coming from these different sources developed during the past century.

Although researchers have recently questioned the construction of these chronologies (Lehoërff 2008), or how to refine and improve them with the help of typo-chronology or absolute dating methods (Pare 2008), it seems to us that there is little questioning in the scientific literature about the very use of disparate chronological data or about the interactions between the different tools and methods in archaeological research. Furthermore, with the development of computer technology, archaeological data is becoming more numerous and heterogeneous, but can now also be used on much larger time scales or geographical areas more easily.

We wish to discuss the different forms that chronological data takes and the different techniques for processing and interrogating it. In particular, we aim to gain an overview of different kinds of chronological information, ways of structuring chronological data and formats for storing them as well as of approaches and software to handle heterogeneous chronological systems and information.

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