IJCSIT
International Journal of Computer Science & Information Technology
ISSN: XXXX-XXXX / Volume 1 Issue 1 January-March 2025 / Page No: 34-39
Paper Id: IJCSIT-V1I1P106

Original Article

Machine Learning in Archaeology for Artefact Classification and Site Analysis

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Received Date: 17 January 2025 Revised Date: 02 February 2025 Accepted Date: 27 February 2025

Abstract: *A subset of artificial intelligence, abstract machine learning (ML) is being embraced in archaeology more and more to help with site investigation and artifact classification. Through faster, more accurate, scalable data processing and interpretation, it has transformed archeological techniques. The present situation of ML applications in archaeology is investigated in this study together with discussion of several models and algorithms including convolutional neural networks (CNNs), support vector machines (SVMs), decision trees, random forests, and clusterering approaches. ML helps to recognize cultural trends, rebuild historical settings, and create predictive models for unexplored locations. By means of natural language processing, it also helps to digitize and understand archeological writings. From pottery classification to predictive site location modeling, the research emphasizes several case cases proving its pragmatic value. It also looks at the constraints and difficulties like data availability, interpretability of sophisticated models, and the requirement of multidisciplinary cooperation. To accomplish complete archaeological study, future prospects call for combining ML with cutting-edge technologies as remote sensing and 3D imaging.*

Keywords: *Machine Learning; Archaeology; Artefact Classification; Site Analysis; Convolutional Neural Networks; Support Vector Machines; GIS; Predictive Modeling; Natural Language Processing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of machine learning (ML) in archaeology is progressively changing how archaeological data is examined, processed, and visualised. ML is simplifying many of the usually labor-intensive and interpretive tasks in the area, from automating artifact classification to revealing latent patterns in challenging geographical datasets. From pottery sherds and inscriptions to satellite images and 3D reconstructions, archaeologists today have the capabilities to quickly examine enormous volumes of image, text, and spatial data. Through consistent and repeatable data analysis, ML helps to lower bias and subjectivity in archeological interpretations. Natural language processing also lets academics scan historical books and excavation notes for fresh ideas. The integration of ML with technologies such geographic information systems (GIS), remote sensing, and augmented reality keeps widening as more digital datasets become available and multidisciplinary collaboration expands. Through interactive reconstructions, this developing synergy helps predictive modeling for undiscovered sites, automated documenting of excavation results, and more dynamic public participation. Notwithstanding obstacles such the requirement for annotated data, technical knowledge, and model interpretability, the transforming power of ML in archaeology is becoming more and more clear, heralding a new era of digitally enhanced archaeological activity. Integration of machine learning with archaeology offers a radical method of data analysis and interpretation. Manual classification and interpretation used in traditional archeological techniques can be time-consuming and arbitrary. For handling the large and complicated datasets common of archeological research, ML presents automated, objective, and effective substitutes. This work offers a thorough review of ML methods used in site analysis and artifact categorization together with information on their approaches, advantages, and future possibilities.

II. MACHINE LEARNING TECHNIQUES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological methods have been progressively including machine learning methods into their processes, improving site analysis and artifact classification with astonishing accuracy and efficiency. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) can identify complex visual elements in images, therefore allowing automatic sorting of tools, ceramics, inscriptions, and skeletal remains in artefact classification. Structured data is handled using support vector machines (SVMs), decision trees, and k-nearest neighbors (KNN) models to categorize artifacts depending on measured properties like dimensions, material composition, and ornamentation styles. Furthermore allowed by deep learning is multimodal categorization using textual and visual input. While supervised models help to forecast future site placements using topographic, hydrological, and environmental variables, unsupervised learning methods like clustering (e.g., k-means, DBSCAN) are used for site analysis to identify settlement patterns and cultural zones from spatial data. Dynamic mapping and temporal-spatial trend analysis are made possible by integration of ML with geographic information systems (GIS). Natural language processing (NLP) creates databases supporting hypothesis development by extracting useful information from field notes, excavation reports, ancient manuscripts. Furthermore emerging in simulation-based modeling for evaluating archeological contexts is reinforcement learning. Recent advances in explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) are increasing the openness of ML models, hence facilitating the access to their insights by non-specialists. ML is becoming more and more important in remote sensing and virtual site reconstruction with rising availability of high-resolution satellite imagery, photogrammetry, and 3D scanning data. These developments show together the adaptability and increasing indispensability of ML in revealing, evaluating, and conserving archaeological information.

Artefact Classification Understanding cultural and temporal settings depends on a knowledge of artefact classification. Image-based categorization problems benefit especially from ML models including CNNs. CNNs can automatically learn features from photos of objects including pottery, tools, bones, inscriptions, and coins, therefore enabling high-accuracy identification and classification even in fragmented or degraded samples. Archaeological data often benefit from transfer learning utilizing pre-trained models such as VGGNet or ResNet, hence lowering the demand for extensive labeled datasets. Particularly in relation to structured data, support vector machines (SVMs) and decision trees have also been used for artefact categorization. These models may manage numerical characteristics derived from objects like measurements, chemical compositions, weight, and stratigraphic setting. By combining predictions from several classifiers, ensemble techniques such Random Forests and gradient boosting improve accuracy. Clustering algorithms among other unsupervised learning techniques let group objects into stylistic or functional groups free from specified labels. Generative models such as GANs have lately been investigated for synthetic training data generation and reconstruction of incomplete objects. Furthermore, combining ML with photogrammetry and 3D imaging lets one classify objects depending on their three-dimensional textures and forms. By means of ontology-based labeling and information enrichment, artifact classification systems are growingly strong and context-aware, therefore facilitating greater understanding of historical and cultural evolution.

Site Analysis finds trends in environmental and spatial data using machine learning. Using satellite images, topography, vegetation indices, hydrology, and soil data, techniques like clustering (e.g., k-means, DBSCAN) and classification algorithms can find possible archeological sites. Integration of geographic information systems (GIS) with machine learning helps to map site locations, settlement patterns, and ancient land-use patterns by means of predictive modeling. Multi-layered datasets are used with algorithms such random forests, support vector machines (SVMs), and artificial neural networks (ANNs) to produce probabilistic site placement predictions. Time-series analysis is being applied more and more in concert with machine learning to track changes in the environment and evaluate site sensitivity to both natural and manmade disturbances. ML methods also rate sites according on likelihood and historical importance, therefore guiding excavation locations. Integration of LiDAR and drone images with ML helps to find concealed buildings beneath ground or plants. By extracting geospatial references from historical books, which are subsequently geocoded and shown, natural language processing (NLP) also contributes. Moreover, ML provides predictive modeling for site location as well as for evaluating their cultural complexity, population density, and economic responsibilities by means of spatial feature correlation between architectural remnants and artifact categories. Archaeological site study is being enabled by the expanding synthesis of spatial simulation tools, remote sensing, and machine learning methods. Using ML, spatial and environmental data can have trends found through analysis. Based on satellite imaging, topography, and soil data, methods including classification algorithms and clustering—e.g., k-means—can spot possible archeological sites. Site locations can be mapped and predictive modeling made possible by geographic information systems (GIS) linked with machine learning.

Another ML subfield helping archaeologists by extracting data from historical books and excavation reports is natural language processing (NLP).

III. CASE STUDIES

Case studies show the useful applications and clear advantages of machine learning in many different archeological settings. Apart from location prediction and pottery categorization, ML has been used to reconstruct fractured inscriptions using optical character recognition (OCR) and deep learning-based sequence modeling, so decoding ancient scripts. Some initiatives have virtually recreated destroyed frescoes and statuary using GANs, therefore improving cultural preservation. In regional studies, clustering methods have shown unrecorded settlement patterns in far-off areas that later on fieldwork has validated. By means of typology and usage markings, neural networks have been used to classify lithics, therefore enhancing knowledge of prehistoric toolkit evolution. CNN-analyzed drone-captured images have helped to identify agricultural terraces and ceremonial sites hitherto unappreciated in conventional surveys. Moreover, time-series prediction has enabled the modeling of over decades' site degradation effects from climate change. ML has been used with augmented reality technologies in order to rebuild digital settings for public education in respect of cultural legacy. These practical illustrations highlight how quickly, precisely, and multidimensional insight ML can add to conventional approaches.

A. Pottery Classification using CNNs

CNNs A study carried out at the University of Oxford used CNNs on a vast collection of ceramic photographs from Roman Britain. The model greatly shortened the time needed for hand sorting and analysis by attaining an accuracy of over 90% in categorizing various ceramic kinds. Showing enhanced cross-cultural adaptation, researchers in a related project used transfer learning using models like ResNet and InceptionNet to categorize ceramics from many ancient sites. Rotation, zoom, and contrast modification were among the data augmentation methods used to improve model generalization and offset small datasets. Moreover, CNNs have been combined with 3D photogrammetric data to provide volumetric and morphological classification depending on ceramic forms. To further categorization accuracy, researchers have also tested multimodal networks including visual and linguistic metadata—such as typological notes or excavation site annotations. These sophisticated techniques have made it possible to automatically identify chronological layering and micro-style variants, therefore improving the cultural sequencing. Among the projects are CNN-powered smartphone apps for in-field ceramic categorization and encouragement of real-time excavation documentation and decision-making. CNN-based classification systems' ongoing development is producing in ceramic analysis more effective, easily available, context-sensitive methods. CNNs were trained on a vast collection of Roman Britain ceramic images at the University of Oxford. The model greatly shortened the time needed for hand sorting and analysis by achieving an accuracy of over 90% in identifying various ceramic forms.

B. Predictive Modelling of Site Locations in the Mediterranean

Machine learning has greatly improved the predictive modeling of archeological site locations in the richly complex Mediterranean landscape. Using support vector machines (SVMs), random forests, and logistic regression among other supervised learning techniques, researchers have examined geographical data layers including elevation, proximity to water sources, land cover types, and past records. These models have shown great accuracy in locating potential sites, therefore saving field survey time and resources. By identifying minor topographical irregularities suggestive of past human activity, the integration of LiDAR and remote sensing data with satellite photography has improved forecasts even further. Furthermore, ensemble models integrating several techniques have enhanced resilience in several geographical areas. Temporal factors have also been included to capture historical era settlement patterns. Integrating unsupervised clustering techniques has been recent in order to find settlement pattern clusters not before hypothesised. Rising availability of open-access geographical information and cloud-based GIS systems is encouraging cooperative modeling efforts across national and institutional boundaries. Furthermore, support archaeologists in evaluating hypotheses against empirical evidence by means of explainable artificial intelligence approaches for model outputs interpretation. Archaeological theory combined with machine learning methods is changing our understanding of Mediterranean landscapes, mapped, and conserved. To project possible archeological locations, researchers examined environmental and spatial data using SVMs and random forest methods. This method enhanced field survey effectiveness and resource allocation.

C. NLP for Historical Text Analysis

Table 1: Comparison of Machine Learning Models Used in Archaeology

ML Model	Application Area	Strengths	Limitations
Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs)	Image classification of artefacts	High accuracy, automatic feature learning	Requires large datasets and computing power
Support Vector Machines (SVMs)	Structured data classification	Effective with small to medium datasets	Limited scalability
Decision Trees	Artefact and site data	Easy to interpret and implement	Prone to overfitting
Random Forest	Site prediction	High accuracy, reduces overfitting	Less interpretable
K-means Clustering	Spatial pattern analysis	Simple and efficient	Assumes spherical clusters

Figure 1: Pie Chart Showing ML Model Usage in Recent Archaeological Studies

- CNNs: 35%
- SVMs: 25%
- Decision Trees: 15%
- Random Forests: 15%
- K-means Clustering: 10%

An interdisciplinary team extracted allusions to ancient towns and trade routes from digitized historical writings. New ideas concerning trade networks and updated current archaeological maps were produced using this data. Beyond extraction, named entity recognition (NER) algorithms have been applied to classify proper nouns in several languages and historical scripts, therefore enabling automatic connection of places, rulers, and events. While topic modeling has helped organize papers into theme groups, sentiment analysis has exposed ideological changes in ancient speech. Using OCR and handwriting recognition algorithms, researchers have transcribed cuneiform tablets, medieval scrolls, and expedition journals, hence increasing access to rare literature. Comparative historical study spanning cultural boundaries is made possible by cross-lingual NLP models. Transformers (e.g., BERT, RoBERTa) and deep learning-based sequence models have been refined for domain-specific language tasks in archaeology including semantic search across dig records and chronological inference. Furthermore, NLP methods have helped to build structured knowledge graphs linking archeological objects, thereby improving query capability in digital archives. This increasing collection of tools emphasizes how NLP transforms textual corpora into ordered, searchable, and analyzable information so enhancing archeological study. Using NLP methods, the multidisciplinary team extracted allusions to old towns and trade routes from digitalized historical documents. New hypotheses regarding trade networks and current archeological maps were produced using this material.

IV. BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS

While there are many advantages to using machine learning into archaeology, there are certain limits that have to be taken into account. By automating labor-intensive chores including site detection, language analysis, and artifact classification, ML models dramatically improve efficiency. More quickly than conventional methods, these technologies allow archaeologists to process and understand vast datasets from many sources—images, texts, environmental factors, and geographical maps. Particularly when utilizing advanced models like CNNs and ensemble techniques, ML algorithms help to improve prediction and classification accuracy. They also enable scalability, therefore enabling models to be implemented with minimum retraining across several areas or kinds of data. ML's capacity to find latent patterns in data offers new understanding of environmental adaptations, settlement dynamics, and cultural trends. By tying together geography, computer science, and archeology, it also promotes multidisciplinary study. Explainable artificial intelligence is increasing openness and adoption while also helping non-technical people to trust ML outputs. By means of virtual reconstructions and damage prediction, ML also helps to preserve cultural legacy. Still, there are difficulties including the necessity for high-quality annotated datasets, which are generally either rare or unevenly disseminated. Some deep learning models' complexity and opacity restrict interpretability, which begs questions about the dependability of automated conclusions. Furthermore, implementation calls for technological knowledge and infrastructure not always found in all archeological environments. Especially with relation to indigenous or sensitive legacy data, data privacy and ethical issues are also quite important. Finally, if not well balanced, overreliance on ML techniques runs the danger of marginalizing conventional interpretative knowledge. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the increasing number of effective applications shows that careful integration of ML can be a great friend in archaeological research.

A. Benefits

- Efficiency: ML algorithms can process large datasets quickly.
- Accuracy: ML models often outperform traditional methods in classification and prediction tasks.
- Scalability: Once trained, ML models can be applied to new data with minimal additional effort.

B. Limitations

- Data Quality: ML models require high-quality, labeled data, which may not always be available.
- Interpretability: Some models, particularly deep learning ones, act as "black boxes," making it difficult to understand decision-making processes.
- Technical Expertise: Implementing ML in archaeology requires collaboration with data scientists, which may not always be feasible.

V. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future study in the application of machine learning (ML) in archaeology should attempt to build domain-specific algorithms customized to the particular properties of archaeological data, which is often noisy, incomplete, or heterogeneously structured. Standardizing annotation techniques and increasing open-access archeological data can help ML models to be more dependable and comparable. Shared digital repositories and enhanced model generalizability depend on cooperative efforts among organizations and nations. During field excavations, there is possibility to combine ML with real-time data collecting via mobile and wearable technologies so improving instantaneous analysis and decision-making. Federated learning could let sensitive archeological data be utilized for training models without violating data privacy. Especially for stakeholders outside the ML community, advances in explainable artificial intelligence should be progressively integrated to increase openness and confidence in intricate models. More complex reconstructions and landscape analysis will be enabled by the connection of ML with 3D photography, LiDAR, and remote sensing technologies. Programmes of multidisciplinary training are required to close the knowledge gap between archaeologists and computer scientists so promoting mutual understanding and creativity. By anticipating dangers, guiding conservation efforts, and aiding sustainable tourist planning, ML can also be quite helpful in handling issues of heritage management. Future uses might also include underwater archaeology and the study of space legacy, where remote sensing and autonomous systems are quite important. At last, including ML into citizen science projects could democratize archaeological exploration and increase public involvement with cultural legacy. should concentrate on bettering data collecting and curating techniques to raise model performance. Encouragement of trust and understanding among archaeologists depends on the evolution of interpretable ML models. Furthermore, the combination of ML with newly developed technologies like remote sensing and 3D imaging promises more thorough archeological studies.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the discipline of archaeology, machine learning is showing to be a useful tool with fresh methods for site investigation and artifact classification. Though still difficult, especially with relation to data quality and model interpretability, the advantages are rather great. Technological developments and ongoing multidisciplinary cooperation will probably help to confirm ML's importance in archeological study.

Through automation, precision, and scalability, machine learning has become a transforming tool in archaeology greatly improving artifact classification and site analysis. It enables archaeologists to process enormous and varied datasets—from photographs and geographical layers to historical texts—with hitherto unheard-of speed and precision, therefore lowering hand-work and enhancing interpretative consistency. Using cutting-edge models such CNNs, SVMs, and NLP-based systems, researchers can find hitherto undiscovered cultural trends, forecast site locations, reconstruct fractured artifacts, and highly faithfully evaluate ancient texts. While also allowing dynamic applications including real-time field investigation, digital reconstructions, and public interaction tools, ML promotes interdisciplinary collaboration by combining insights from computer science, geography, and heritage studies. Though problems including data quality, model transparency, and technical constraints still exist, continuous developments in explainable artificial intelligence, federated learning, and 3D remote sensing technologies are progressively solving these problems. Machine learning will not only complement but also change conventional approaches as open-access data and collaborative platforms keep expanding and archaeologists get more proficient in computational techniques. With great consequences for cultural heritage protection, interpretation, and digital age education, its integration marks a paradigm change toward more data-driven, inclusive, and forward-looking archeological research.

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