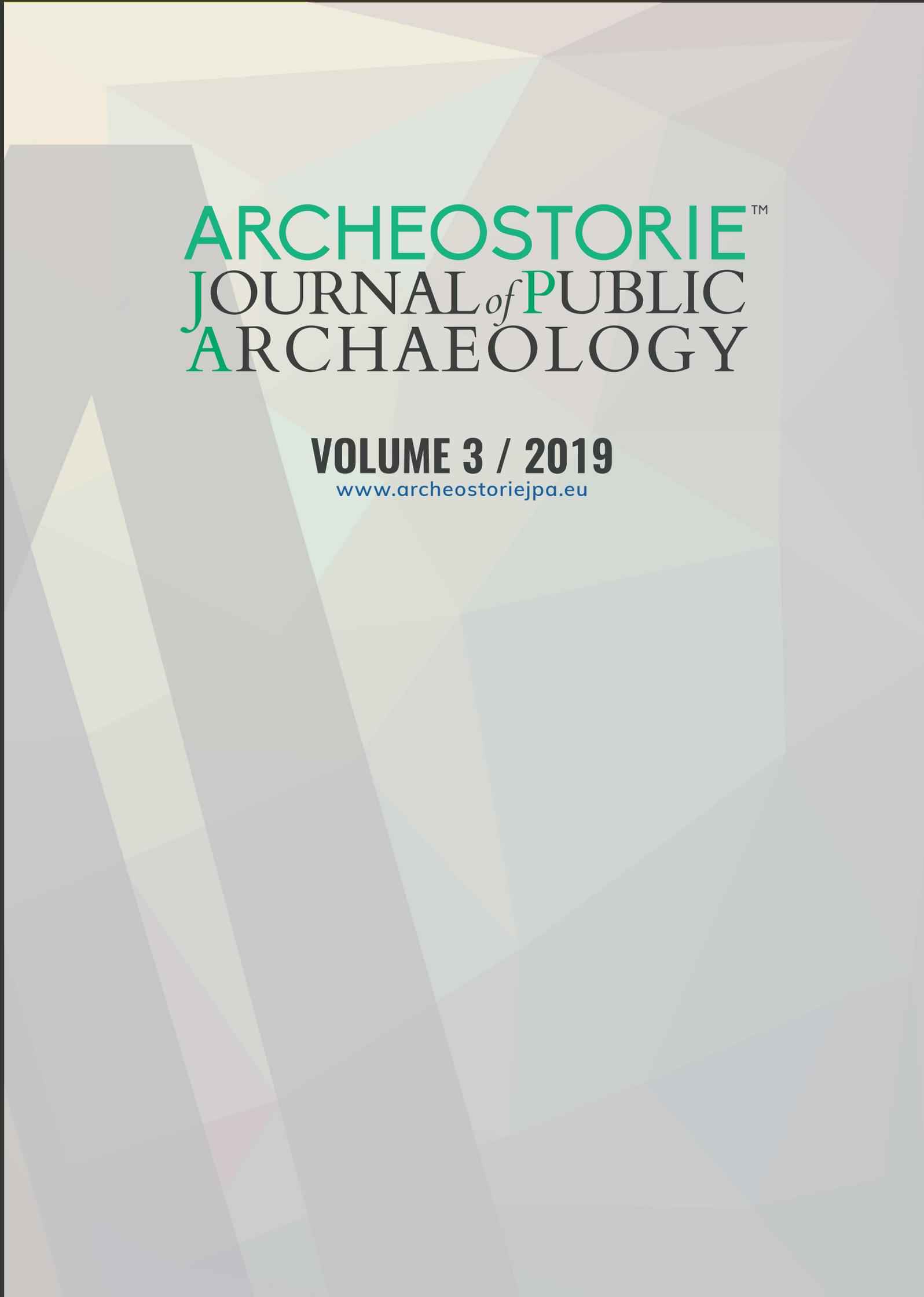




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Topic of the Year: Museum Archaeology



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Alessandra Cilio

A dive into the blue: fighting autism at Paestum Museum

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Abstract

Stimulating reactions and feelings in autistic people with a visit to a museum depository: it was called A dive into the blue and was a truly innovative project carried out in 2019 at the Paestum Archaeological Museum, every third Sunday of the month.

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Keywords: autism, children, Paestum, museum deposits, archaeology and wellbeing



Fig.1. A frame of the initiative (photo: Cilento4all).

“Hi, I’m an archaeologist. Would you like to come with me? I’ll give you a notebook that will be very useful. Right, let’s go!”

Thus began the visits to the deposits of the Archaeological Museum of Paestum run by A dive into the blue, a project for people with autism. It was organized by Cilento4all in collaboration with specialists from Naples Parthenope University for planning the visit itineraries and Naples Federico II University for monitoring. It was a new and different idea that, by means of precise and constant evaluation of the results, was designed to continually evolve and improve. And to understand better the benefits that autistic children derive from contact with works of art.

The beauty of the depository

We at Archeostorie, who contributed to these daily visits to the deposits of the Paestum Museum, are really delighted that these storerooms were chosen for A dive into the blue. But we are also curious to understand why. Isn’t it more difficult to wander around the narrow corridors of the deposits than through the museum’s display halls?

“In truth, the museum rooms are too large and dispersive, while the deposits have the advantage of being a more intimate environment”, explained Giovanni Minucci of Cilento4all to Archeostorie. “And certain features, among the many chosen for the daily tour, seemed perfect for our purpose”.

Hence, every third Sunday of the month a handful of autistic children, each in the company of an expert (the self-styled archaeologist), went down the stairs and ventured into Paestum Museum’s underbelly: its deposits. They had the run of them for about 50 minutes. In their notebook, the children first find a map of the deposits indicating the ‘stations’ where they can carry out activities: inviting them to look for the individual stations, the guide tests their sense of orientation.

Find the object!

At each 'station' the child is given an object and told: let's go and look for it! For example a fluffy dog – which might be found somewhere on the frescoed walls of the Finanza Tomb, after which the guide tells the stories recounted on the tomb. At the end of each station the child is asked to choose the images they liked and stick them into their notebook, and to evaluate the overall experience with emoticons: I liked it, it makes me cry, it makes me angry, it scares me.

In this playful way, we want to capture the kids' attention, motivate them as much as possible, and ensure that their attention remains high

throughout the visit. Thanks to the notebook, objective data are also obtained on the results of the visit and these, combined with observations made on the spot by a specialist, are used to make a general assessment of the project's effectiveness.

“And if the child reaches the tomb at the last station, and recognizes the same dog on its wall as the one in the Finanza Tomb, bingo! They've made the connection! This is the greatest satisfaction”, exclaims Minucci. At the end of all this effort, there's also a nice reward: a short potsherd decoration workshop. And the designs that come out are really interesting.

