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Post-excavation treatments of earthen archaeological sites

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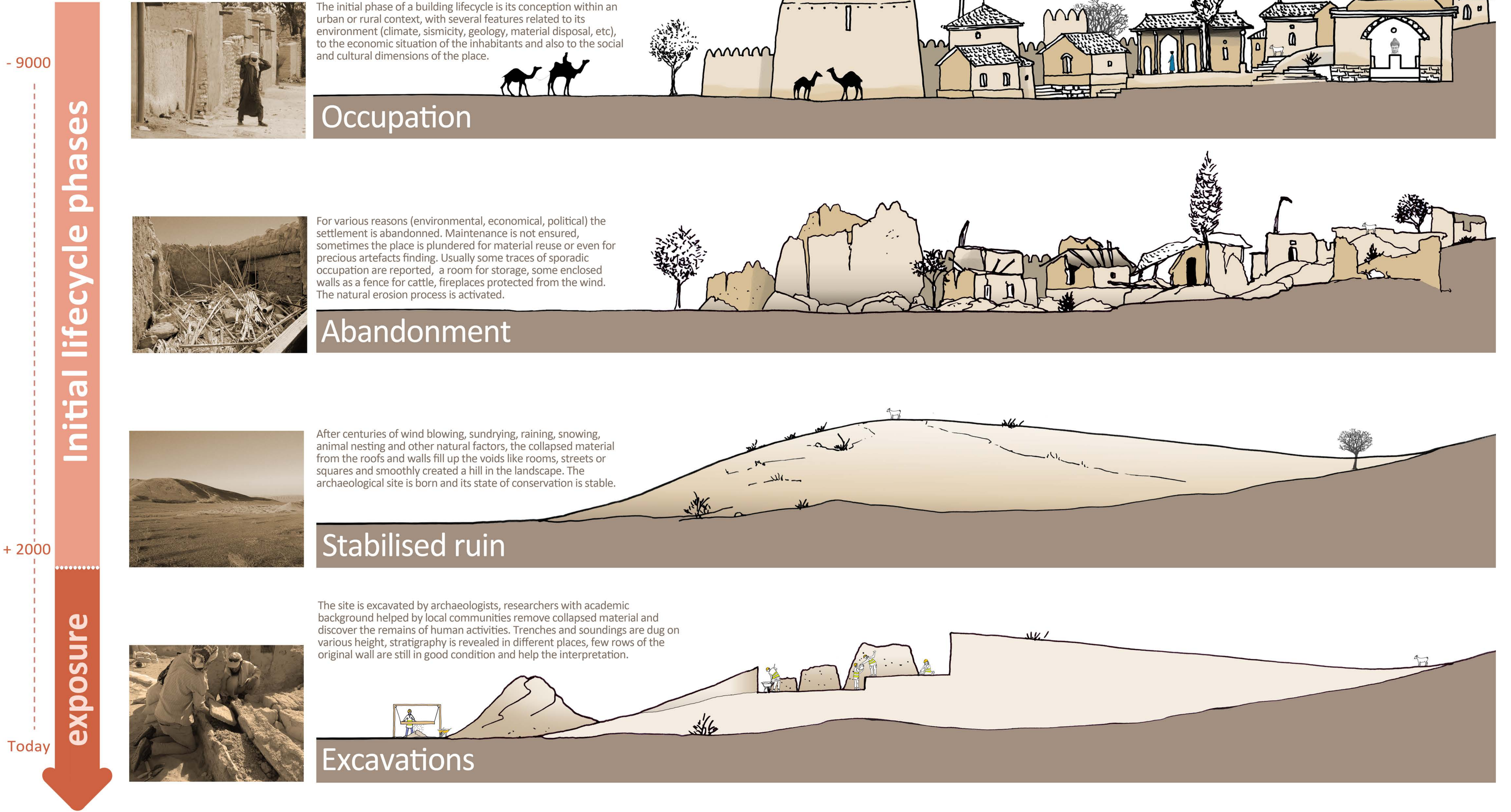
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Archaeological sites have a complex life cycle. After their initial occupation, their death is initiated by the abandonment and slow decay processes. Their state is stable until the arrival of the archaeologists, the discovery giving them a new life with new threats. The preservation is therefore a real challenge. Interesting approaches have proven that solutions exist, easy to implement by archaeologists as soon as they are accompanied technically by conservators.



THEN WHAT ?



After the first excavation of the site, between two campaigns or even after the full excavation project, what is happening ? Trenches are creating water pools and fragiles surfaces are melting or powdering... The damaging processes are reactivated, actually accelerated, and the state of conservation is unstable. Stakeholders are invited to sit together to define the strategy for the future of the site. Three immediate emergency options are observed when implemented by the team of archaeologists. But other options are possible, to stabilise the state of conservation and come back to a virtuous cycle of decay and maintenance.

<p>Do nothing</p>	<p>This was the most common solution decades ago. There is no intervention, trenches are left exposed. Damages are directly affecting the excavated architectural remains. The loss of archaeological data is irreversible.</p>	<p>Backfill</p>	<p>This is one of the favourite options implemented by archaeologists. Spoil material from the excavations is reused to rebury the remains and preserve them for the future. A layer of porous geotextile is placed in between the original structure and the compacted soil to mark the difference.</p>	<p>Cover</p>	<p>This option is privileged for very fragile structures in addition to physical consolidation. It can create more problems if it is not well implemented, especially regarding the surrounding drainage. The shelter itself requires monitoring and maintenance which needs to be planned and budgetted for.</p>
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Conservation options ?

Scientific lifecycle

	<p>Preventive conservation</p> <p>A set of efficient interventions, easy to implement with locally available means slow down the decay processes and preserve the remains structurally and superficially. The remains are safe and preserved for future excavations or conservation programmes.</p>
	<p>Conservation + site Presentation</p> <p>In addition to the previous interventions, facilities are designed and implemented for the public, areas are preserved, monitored and maintained cyclically depending on the number of visitors. Educational tools are installed to facilitate the understanding of the site.</p>
	<p>Conservation + site presentation + ongoing excavations</p> <p>The new tendency is to combine approaches : Excavation and conservation are interrelated and planned together. Conservation techniques are selected according to findings and site values. Site presentation is planned simultaneously to enable visitor experiment the whole research process.</p>