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Opinions of Polish Roman Catholic Clergy on Archaeological Research Conducted on Church Premises: A Pilot Study

Abstract

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The aim of the article is to present and discuss the opinions of Polish Roman Catholic clergy on archaeological research carried out in areas under the church's management. The article provides the research context of the said archaeological research within the framework of public archaeology. The study used the method of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted between February 20 and May 29, 2024 in selected Roman Catholic parishes and rectories in Poland. The interviews (IDIs) were conducted with parish priests and rectors of parishes and churches where archaeological research had previously taken place. Six categories were considered in the study: opinions of the clergy, opinions of the congregation as perceived by the clergy, reasons for conducting archaeological research, preservation of monuments, recommendations of the clergy to archaeologists, and future cooperation with archaeologists. The research was interdisciplinary, involving scientists from the humanities and social sciences. The results of the study led to the emergence of different research perspectives.

Keywords: opinions on archaeological research, Polish Roman-Catholic clergy, church premises, qualitative research (IDIs), public archaeology

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to discuss the opinions of Polish Roman Catholic clergy regarding archaeological research carried out in areas under church administration. The study was interdisciplinary, involving the humanities and social sciences at the stages of concept development, research tool selection, fieldwork implementation, and interpretation of results. It combined approaches from archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, and sociology at each stage of the research process – from conceptual design and tool development to fieldwork and interpretation. Archaeology and history provided the material and chronological context for analyzing artefacts and archaeolo-

gical sites; sociology enables the creation of a research tool and presented a method for collecting research material; while cultural anthropology offered insights into the social meanings, values, and practices surrounding heritage in contemporary religious settings.

The uniqueness of the research is due to at least three factors. First, the study focused on clergy who had not previously been surveyed for their opinions on archaeological research in areas under church administration. Second, the study focused on the opinions of clergy on archaeological research conducted exclusively in the areas administered by the clergy surveyed. Third, the research aimed to expand the scope of public archaeology.

Research context

The research on the opinions of Polish Roman Catholic clergy regarding archaeological research on church premises can be interpreted in the context of several factors. These include the historical nature of many properties under the management of churches and religious organizations in Poland, the research experience and institutions of the Roman Catholic Church, clergy with archaeological education, the activities of experts and expert groups of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, studies at universities subordinate or dependent to the Holy See, and the specialized literature which employs social science methods (e.g., computer-assisted self-interviews, face-to-face interviews, individual in-depth interviews) to collect and analyze opinions related to archaeology.

First of all, archaeological research in Poland is often carried out in areas under the management of persons representing churches and religious organizations, which are the second largest owners of listed properties and monuments in Poland (Purchla (ed.) 2008, 85, 96). In this context, clergymen managing church property are obliged to commission archaeological research when carrying out construction works, ground works or changes to existing operations in the area under their responsibility (*Ustawa o ochronie zabytków* 2003, Art. 31). This raises the question of the extent to which cooperation between clergy and archaeologists contributes to the effectiveness of archaeological research.

Second, the Roman Catholic Church also has its own experience in conducting archaeological research on different continents, for example, in the Shepherds' Field in Beit Sahour (Bethlehem – Palestine) (see <https://www.piac.it/scavi-attivi#campo-dei-pastori-a-beit-sahour>, access: 11.12.2025), Adulis in Eritrea (see <https://www.piac.it/scavi-chiusi#adulis>, access: 11.12.2025), and in Rome (the Papal Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls) (see <https://www.piac.it/scavi-chiusi#roma-san-paolo>, access: 11.12.2025). The Roman Catholic Church also operates dedicated research institutions within the Vatican City State, such as the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology (cf. Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska 2002, 516; see Pio XI 1925a; 1925c; https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/archeo/index.htm, access: 11.12.2025), the Pontifical Roman Academy of Archaeology (see <https://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/en/pontificie-accademie/pontificia-accademia-archeologia.html>, access: 11.12.2025), <http://www.pont-ara.org/>, access: 11.12.2025), and

the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology (see Pio XI 1925a; 1925b; <https://www.piac.it/>, access: 11.12.2025). In addition, archaeological research is also carried out by clerics who have a background in archaeology and combine their ministry with scientific activities (see Urban 1984; Bottini 2008; Heid 2018).

In Poland, under the auspices of the Polish Bishops' Conference, there is the Council for Culture and Cultural Heritage, which includes working with a consultant for the protection of religious buildings. Among its responsibilities, the Council deals with issues related to the protection of monuments (see <https://episkopat.pl/Gremia>, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/kkbids/sztuka1_16041966.html, access: 11.12.2025). Meanwhile, at the level of individual dioceses, there are experts or expert groups established to deal with issues related to archaeological research, such as the Archdiocesan Conservator of Monuments of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, the Bishop of Elbląg's Delegates for the Preservation of Church Monuments, or the Archdiocesan Commission for the Preservation of Church Monuments and Sacred Architecture and Art of the Archdiocese of Krakow (see Czernik 2016, 25–29). In addition, studies in Christian and biblical archaeology are conducted at Polish universities that are subordinate to or operate under the relevant regulations of the Holy See, such as the Catholic University of Lublin and the faculties of ecclesiastical sciences at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (cf. *Statut KUL* 2019, § 3(1); *Statut UKSW* 2019, § 2(2); see Gołgowski 1999; Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska 1999; Chrostowski 2013; https://usosweb.uksw.edu.pl/kontroler.php?action=katalog2/przedmioty/pokazPrzedmiot&prz_kod=WT-CTR-A&callback=g_be28977e, https://www.kul.pl/program-studiow-w-inb-kul,art_434.html, https://www.kul.pl/ziemia-przymierza-geografia-i-archeologia-biblijna-w-zarysie,art_103173.html, access: 11.12.2025).

Third, the literature on this topic includes publications reporting the results of studies on the public's opinion on archaeology (e.g., Katsamudanga 2015; Kajda *et al.* 2018; Gürsu *et al.* 2019), including specific social groups such as university students (e.g., Onițiu and Balaci 2024). In addition, the image of archaeology created by the mass media has been studied (e.g., Kobińska 2011), as well as the role of archaeological reserves in educating and popularizing archaeology among visitors and local residents (e.g., Przepiórka 2022). The opinions of scientists working at archaeological sites on the application of science communication in their work were also analyzed (e.g., Conforti

and Legaria 2022). Moreover, ethnographic methods are also used in the studies of opinions about archaeology (e.g., Maliński 2011; Conforti and Legaria 2022). These studies are part of public archaeology (see McGimsey 1972; Moshenska (ed.) 2017; Vannini 2020; Pawleta 2022), which increasingly uses social science methods (e.g., computer-assisted self-interviews, face-to-face interviews, individual in-depth interviews) as research tools.

Methods

Individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) (see Kvale 2007; Silvermann 2017; Hennink *et al.* 2020) were used to collect research material. The study was conducted from February 20 to May 29, 2024, in selected Roman Catholic parishes and rectories in Poland. The interviewees were clergy who manage church premises; eight were parish priests, and two were church rectors. The interviews were scripted so that each respondent was asked the same questions. Before the interview began, each respondent was informed of the anonymity of the survey, which apparently influenced their openness in responding and, in turn, resulted in a more realistic representation of the issues under study. The chosen ten respondents came from different provinces of Poland (Lower Silesia, Lesser Poland, Masovia, Subcarpathia and Podlasie), seven from urban and three from rural areas (see Drewicz 2025).

The research process consisted of the following stages: development of the research concept, consultations regarding the implemented initiative, preparation of research tool (scripted IDI), selection of respondents, conducting interviews, transcription of recorded interviews, codification, categorization, analysis, synthesis, consultations on the research findings, and final preparation of the manuscript. Consultations were held with Cezary Smuniewski and Ewa M. Marciniak, who were selected on the basis of their academic background and experience in social research using individual in-depth interviews – IDIs (cf. Marciniak 2013a; 2013b; 2021; Smuniewski 2019; 2020; 2024). The research tool was developed using the knowledge of specialists in sociological research (Kvale 2007; Silvermann 2017), as well as the rules for codification and categorization (Kvale 2007, 33–66, 104–106). The process of selecting respondents consisted of two steps: 1) an Internet search to identify parishes and rectories in different provinces where archaeological research had been carried out; 2) telephone calls to parish and rectory offices to inform

them about the study and to ask them to participate (the calls also included establishing contacts with other clergy who could participate in the survey). The interviews were conducted in parishes and rectories where archaeological research had previously taken place. This arrangement of the research process proved to be efficient and optimal, and the collected material was used as the basis for this article.

Categories of opinions of Polish Roman Catholic clergy regarding archaeological research carried out in the areas under church management

The codification and categorization of the collected data made it possible to distinguish six categories, which were then subjected to content analysis (Kvale 2007, 104–106): 1) opinions of the clergy; 2) opinions of the congregation as perceived by the clergy; 3) reasons for conducting archaeological research; 4) preservation of monuments; 5) recommendations of the clergy to archaeologists; and 6) future cooperation with archaeologists.

1. Opinions of the clergy

The first step was to examine the attitudes of the Roman Catholic clergy themselves toward archaeological research on church premises. During the interviews (IDIs) with the clergy, the following question was asked: *In your opinion, what is the clergy's attitude toward archaeological research in parishes/rectories?* The aim was to gather information not only about the personal attitudes of individual priests, but also about their opinions as representatives of the Roman Catholic clergy. In response to the question, six respondents clearly described their approach to archaeological research as positive, two did not take a clear position, while two had a clearly negative opinion.

Let us consider the clearly positive statements about the clergy's attitude to archaeological research on church premises. The respondents did not state their personal position, but expressed their opinion on behalf of the entire clergy community. According to their statements, the attitude is positive (2), results from the responsibility imposed on them (2), is open to the issue (1), and results from the understanding of such matters (1). This is illustrated by the following statements: *I think it's positive* (IDI 1), *It seems to me that everywhere the priests are the ones with a positive attitude* (IDI 4), *We are obliged, it's not much to say, one would have to use a stronger word here, that*

the archaeologists are some kind of supervisors over us, because without their cooperation we can't do anything (IDI 9), *I think there is a great openness* (IDI 3), *Everyone understands this. It just has to be done* (IDI 7).

In the case of the statements of the respondents who did not take a clear position, their answers indicated a diversity of attitudes and the lack of a conclusive opinion when talking about the attitude of the clergy towards archaeological research on church premises, e.g., *The approach of the priests is very different* (IDI 6) or *I have a different view on this* (IDI 8). These types of comments suggest that clerics' attitudes toward archaeological research can be both positive and negative, depending on individual beliefs, the local context, and interpretations of the Roman Catholic Church's role in cultural heritage preservation.

With regard to statements indicating the clergy's negative attitude toward archaeological research on church property, one interviewee addressed his concerns arising from changes in the planned schedule of such work. He believed that the clergy were wary of prolonging archaeological research and thus increasing costs: *I am very worried that the investment will be stopped. It also costs money* (IDI 2). The other respondent who described the clergy's approach to archaeological research as negative tried to convey an explicitly critical position in a sensitive way: *Basically, it is a bit like a dispensation of providence* (IDI 5). It should be noted that the phrase "dispensation of providence" used by the interviewee was intended to show that the legal requirements for conducting archaeological research in a parish are sometimes like evil from which God is able to derive good. The interviewee believes that the clergy agree to archaeological research because some good will come of it. The negative attitude of the clergy towards archaeological research may be due to the fact that they equate the archaeological research with restoration or construction works. This suggests that they view archaeological research as an additional, formal requirement to be met, e.g., *Because these surveys are mainly done in the context of some renovation or construction works* (IDI 5).

The Polish Roman Catholic clergy has a mostly positive attitude towards archaeological research carried out on church premises. Some of the clergy are unable to take a clear position or have negative approach to the conduct of such works. The negative attitude is mainly due to the peculiarities of archaeological research conducted on church premises. The clergy may perceive archaeological research as an additional legal requirement that prolongs the main conservation or renovation work, and this contributes to

their negative attitude. This will be discussed further in the section on the reasons for undertaking archaeological research.

2. Opinions of the congregation as perceived by the clergy

The opinions of the Roman Catholic clergy regarding the conduct of archaeological research on church property were then examined in terms of how the congregation approaches this issue, as perceived by the clergy. During the interviews (IDIs), respondents were asked the question: *What was the attitude of the congregation towards the archaeological research carried out on the church premises?* The aim was to obtain information on the attitude of the congregation towards the archaeological research as expressed by their parish priest/rector. In their answers to the question, eight respondents described the attitude of the congregation as positive, while two described it as indifferent.

Let us consider the positive opinions regarding the attitude of the congregation towards archaeological research, as expressed by the parish priests/rectors. The respondents used the following words and phrases to express their positions "curiosity" (4), "understanding" (4), "interest" (3), "positive" (2), "involvement" (2), and "local patriotism" (1). The statements of the clergy, which show the attitude of the congregation towards archaeological research, include: *Certainly, curiosity* (IDI 5), *Simple curiosity, so to speak, and local patriotism* (IDI 6), *Others with an understanding* (IDI 6), *Fully understood* (IDI 7), *Our parishioners are very sympathetic to the work being done in the Cathedral* (IDI 8), *They take it so positively* (IDI 8), *There were also people who got involved in the work themselves* (IDI 9), and *They got involved* (IDI 10).

Regarding the statements made by the parish priests/rectors expressing an indifferent attitude of the congregation towards the archaeological research, one respondent declared that they were "unaware", indicating a lack of knowledge and interest among the members of the congregation, while another noted that the issue of archaeological research had not been raised at all by the members of the congregation, further emphasizing their indifference: *Unawareness. They were not aware of it at all* (IDI 2). Another interviewee pointed out factors that could contribute to a more positive attitude of the congregation towards archaeological research. He stressed the importance of informing the congregation in advance about the purpose and schedule of such works: *Honestly, I think*

this is also a fruit of this collaboration. I think that certain things, information, have been communicated to them very clearly, in the right way. They know what it's for, why it's there. We have constant interaction here, we talk to our parishioners. They are not surprised when they suddenly find out that the cathedral will be closed tomorrow (IDI 8).

It can be concluded that the attitude of the congregation towards the archaeological research carried out in their parish/rectory, as perceived by the parish priests/rectors, is mostly positive. Only a few congregation expressed indifference towards such works, which is due to the specifics of the Christian ministry and the lack of interest of the churchgoers. On the other hand, according to the clergy, a factor that contributes to the positive attitude of the congregation towards archaeological research on church premises is adequate information about the goals and schedule of such works.

3. Reasons for conducting archaeological research

As for the opinions of the Polish Roman Catholic clergy regarding the reasons for carrying out archaeological research on church premises, the interviews (IDIs) included a three-part question: *Who was the initiator of the archaeological research? Why did they take place? What were the reasons for them?* The aim was to obtain information about the clergy's motivations for undertaking archaeological research. In their answers, ten respondents indicated that the main reason was legal requirements, while three respondents noted that the archaeological research were aimed at broadening knowledge (some of the parish priests/rectors carried out archaeological research in their parishes/rectories several times, so their opinions with the reasons behind them do not add up to ten).

Let us consider the statements of the respondents who identified the reasons for carrying out archaeological research on the church property under their management as legal requirements. The respondents indicated that the legal requirements were related to renovation works (5), pre-investment surveys (5), and conservation works (1) (ibid.). In their opinions: *The church was a bit neglected inside, and it was necessary (IDI 4), There was a renovation of the cathedral, and as part of this renovation it was also necessary to carry out archaeological research, because at the moment crypts are being built for the future burial of diocesan bishops (IDI 8), In the case of our church, we installed new water, sewerage and gas connections (IDI 2), It was neces-*

sary to excavate in order to install technical equipment in the area under the supervision of the conservator. And the conservator simply ordered that the archaeological research be completed before any other work was done (IDI 5), The archaeological research began, so to speak, before the broader efforts to revitalize the hill (...) and the church itself, which had undergone various modifications over the centuries (IDI 6), Archaeological research or archaeological supervision are required by law for the conservation works that we carry out on our site (IDI 3).

In their answers, which indicate a willingness to expand knowledge as a reason for undertaking archaeological research, the respondents pointed out that the purpose of the archaeological research was to explore the space under the floor of the sacristy; to learn what the church looked like when one of the clergymen buried there was alive; and to search for the remains of a person buried there in order to verify the existing historical sources: *The sacristy was of interest to us, so we surveyed it in a non-invasive way. It was not an expensive survey. However, we more or less knew what the floor of the sacristy looked like, what could be hidden there (IDI 1), To learn about the church that was one of the first outposts founded by Father (...), where he lived, worked, and where his mortal remains rested (IDI 6), There is a plaque that says he was buried in this church. Everything seemed to indicate that this was not true. That he was not buried here. Based on an interview from a few years ago, we got clues as to where his remains might be. And we did an archaeological search to find those remains (IDI 7).*

In addition, one respondent who did archaeological research to expand his own knowledge also recognized its promotional potential. He noted: *Well, it is also a bit of a church promotion. The church gave the impression that it was always closed, in bad condition, basically in ruins. We also wanted to make people aware (...) that this church exists at all, that it is there. So with Mr. (...) we did these works. And the goal was also to be on the front page of the newspapers, that we were looking for something there. And we actually succeeded. We were able to publicize our church (IDI 2).*

Each of the respondents who carried out archaeological research in their parishes/rectories did so in at least one case for legal reasons. These archaeological research were mostly related to the realization of investments, restorations and renovations. Few clergy undertake them to broaden their knowledge. In addition, archaeological research can have promotional potential, which one respondent successfully exploited.

4. Preservation of monuments

Next, the opinions of the clergy regarding the conduct of archaeological research on church premises were examined in terms of the preservation of the artefacts discovered. During the interviews (IDIs), the following question was asked: *What happened to the objects found during the archaeological research?* The aim was to obtain information on where the artefacts found during archaeological research at church premises were stored. Five respondents indicated that the artefacts were donated to museums, four kept them in the parish/rectory, and one respondent indicated that no artefacts were found during the archaeological research. In addition, six respondents reported that human remains were found and reburied during the survey, and in two cases some of the remains were submitted for anthropological analysis. Furthermore, four respondents expressed the opinion that artefacts should remain at the site where they were found, although the issue was not directly addressed in the interview.

The following opinions were expressed by the clergy who donated the found archaeological artefacts to museums: *There is an archdiocesan museum. And there are artefacts from different sites that have been studied by archaeologists* (IDI 1), *They have been described and either given to the diocesan museum* (IDI 3), *Everything that was found was donated to the archaeological museum* (IDI 5) and *Of course everything goes to the museum* (IDI 9). One respondent noted that *there was absolutely nothing in that crypt* (IDI 7).

The statements of respondents who intended to keep the artefacts found were somewhat different, e.g., *After they were described, they were placed in our store-rooms, in the archives* (IDI 3); *We plan to exhibit them and are organizing a memorial room dedicated to the bishop (...), it is still being designed* (IDI 6); *These artefacts remain in our parish* (IDI 8).

In their responses to the question about the preservation of archaeological artefacts, four respondents – although the subject was not directly addressed by the interviewer – expressed the opinion that they should remain in the place where they were discovered (in addition, seven respondents supported the establishment of museums/memorial rooms in parishes/rectories. In this group, four respondents could give examples of parishes/rectories that have museums/memorial rooms, two have them in their own parishes/rectories, and two are planning to create them in their parishes/rectories): *In my opinion, certain artefacts found in a particular place should remain in that place* (IDI 8), and *I even sometimes wonder a little*

whether they should be displayed in our church (IDI 9). Two clerics noted that keeping artefacts in the parish/rectory could have educational value, emphasizing: *That it would be kept somewhere so that the parishioners would know about it. It was a one-time thing, the story was told and then it disappeared somewhere in the depths of the museum* (IDI 5), *Those artefacts that were successfully excavated would then have a place here for public display and education* (IDI 6).

However, some respondents emphasized that the artefacts should not always be left in the parish for security reasons (2) and because of the nature of antiques themselves (2). As one respondent noted: *There is the advantage that they are taken care of there, so they are safe* (IDI 9). Another respondent added: *If the object has a real historical value that can be placed in the museum, it would be worth donating it in order to preserve it* (IDI 5). Another respondent emphasized: *Unless they are already extremely valuable relics that have such a national or international value and, let's say, the parish does not have the ability to safely store or exhibit them* (IDI 9).

It can be concluded that archaeological artefacts found on church premises are mostly sent to museums, although they sometimes remain in their respective parishes/rectories. Sometimes archaeological research do not result in the discovery of artefacts. Human remains found during surveys are reburied and in some cases sent for anthropological analysis. In addition, almost half of the respondents, although this issue was not directly addressed in the interviews, expressed the opinion that artefacts should remain at the site where they were found. The majority of respondents also support the establishment of museums/memorial rooms in parishes/rectories. Roman Catholic clergy recognize the educational value of artefacts that they would like to keep in their parishes/rectories. At the same time, respondents are aware of the value of artefacts and are not always in favor of keeping them in the parish/rectory, which they attribute to security issues and the nature of the artefacts.

5. Recommendations of the clergy to archaeologists

The fifth category of opinions was the clergy's recommendations to archaeologists regarding the conduct of archaeological research at church premises. During the interviews (IDIs) the following question was asked: *What advice would you give to archaeologists who want to work with parishes/rectories/priests?* The aim was to obtain information on the clergy's advice for archae-

ologists who want to conduct archaeological research on church premises, which results from the experiences of clergy who conducted such work.

Five respondents advised archaeologists to increase their communication with the parish priest/rector on whose premises they are working. Four recommended respecting the sacred character of the building. Three respondents stressed the need to establish a precise work plan before beginning the archaeological research. Three others noted the need for a verbal approach to survey-related agreements. Two advocated adhering to the original deadlines, and two others advocated a realistic approach to the ongoing work. Two other respondents expressed a preference for not giving in to emotions on the part of both archaeologists and clergy. In addition, one respondent recommended that the research area be secured in an enclosed space to prevent contamination of the rest of the facility. Another advised not to give in to curiosity or professional aspirations, but to adhere to norms and regulations. Another stressed the importance of clearly defining the purpose of the research. The last piece of advice was to approach research planning with understanding and responsibility for the scope of your responsibilities.

Let us consider the statements that offer advice to archaeologists on increasing mutual communication with the parish priest/rector. The respondents understood “two-way communication” to mean talking to each other before, during, and after the archaeological research and keeping each other informed about the progress of the work. They also stressed the importance of being cooperative rather than insisting on their own assumptions: *First of all, cooperate. Do not treat each other as adversaries* (IDI 2), *I think there has to be a very close cooperation with the parish priest. Because otherwise there will be misunderstandings, disagreements, or there will always be something missing, something wrong* (IDI 4), *You have to listen to each other. Communication is a relationship* (IDI 6), *You have to talk to the parish priest, who is the host there. Just talk to him* (IDI 7).

In turn, when it comes to respondents who advised archaeologists to respect the sacred character of the building, one of them said: *First of all, you have to keep this aspect in mind. Because the first question you have to ask about a sacred monument is the purpose for which it was built. What was it built for? Who were the people who built it?* (IDI 1). Another respondent added: *[This is] such advice. I think every archaeologist is also aware of the fact that a church is a certain sacred place* (IDI 9).

In the context of planning the work before the start of archaeological research, one respondent suggested: *I think it would be a good thing to have good preparation of the work, including planning. To make it more predictable* (IDI 5), *Let the archaeologists say how they see it and what is needed. Let the parish priest say what he can* (IDI 7). Respondents emphasized the importance of keeping one’s word: *On the other hand, it’s also about keeping one’s word* (IDI 2), *Well, definitely about keeping one’s word* (IDI 5). In addition, respondents noted the need for a realistic approach to research: *That they should have a realistic approach (...). That, for example, when they have to do research, they should just be realistic. What can be done and what can’t be done* (IDI 1), *Let them do it well, honestly, responsibly, reckoning with reality* (IDI 7).

With regard to meeting work deadlines, one respondent noted: *Meeting deadlines. That is the priority. If we start conservation work on a certain day, we do it, and if we want to finish it, we finish it. Once it’s agreed, we don’t expand the scope of the work because I’m only interested in it, we just stick to the deadline* (IDI 3), *That when deadlines are agreed. That way we don’t respect the parish and the parish priest* (IDI 5) (authors’ note: this strong emphasis on adhering strictly to the agreed scope and schedule may reflect a pragmatic approach, but it also raises questions about the flexibility of conservation strategies. Expanding the scope of archaeological research can sometimes be necessary due to new research findings or the emergence of historically or artistically significant contexts; however, it may also be resisted for reasons unrelated to the scientific or conservation value of the object, such as logistical, institutional, or interpersonal concerns).

Respondents also emphasized that emotions should not influence decisions related to research: *There are no emotions at work or an emotional approach to work. Of course there are emotions because we have discovered something, seen something new. But you can’t be driven by emotions and decide on the course of further research on the basis of emotions. You cannot do that* (IDI 1), *Don’t get emotionally involved so much* (IDI 2).

Respondents also offered some additional advice to archaeologists. They highlighted the need to secure the research area to avoid contaminating the rest of the facility, especially during archaeological research in enclosed spaces. They emphasized that archaeologists should avoid succumbing to curiosity and professional ambition, and instead adhere to standards and regulations. It is also important to clearly define the purpose of the research and to approach the plan-

ning of the work with a good understanding of their responsibilities: *Good security of the research area. Especially if it's an enclosed space, properly securing everything around it and, if possible, even sealing the excavation to avoid pollution or dust all over the site (IDI 3), You have to look first and foremost at the value of the facility, not at my curiosity or the fact that I'm going to make a name for myself in the archaeological or scientific community because I discovered something new, because I was just interested in something. Someone has me digging 50 centimeters into the ground, and suddenly I find an artifact at 80 centimeters. There is always this temptation for an archaeologist to want to dig deeper and wider. That is unacceptable. You have to follow the norms, the regulations (IDI 3), In this case it's worth asking ourselves why we are doing archaeological research and what we want to achieve (IDI 6), These are things that can be agreed upon if both sides simply approach it with understanding, with responsibility. These are things that can be agreed upon (IDI 7).*

It can be argued that clergy advise archaeologists to establish a precise work plan prior to the start of the archaeological research, with a clear understanding of the responsibilities of both parties, and to adhere to it consistently. During the course of the research, they recommend avoiding emotions, curiosity, and professional aspirations, and maintaining regular communication with the parish priest/rector about the work in progress. This promotes a realistic approach, allows for timely completion of the work, and minimizes the risk of damage to the premise. In addition, the clergy advise respect for the sacred character of the building, which will certainly have a positive impact on the clergy's perception of the archaeologists and ensure proper respect for the context of their ministry.

6. Future cooperation with archaeologists

Finally, the opinions of the Roman Catholic clergy centered on the possibility of future cooperation between clergy and archaeologists, understood as further archaeological research on the premises of the parishes/rectories where they serve as parish priests/rectors. During the interviews (IDIs) the following question was asked: *Would you decide to carry out further archaeological research in this parish/rectory?* The answers were intended to provide information on the future prospects of conducting archaeological research on church premises that had already been dealt with by the managing clergy. All respondents expressed the desire to continue archaeological research.

Seven respondents made the decision about future research dependent on legal requirements, two on the general validity of such work, while one respondent did not make it dependent on any conditions. Only one respondent foresaw the possibility of conducting archaeological research to expand knowledge.

Statements by respondents who made the conduct of archaeological research dependent on legal requirements included opinions such as: *Yes. Because, as I said, we don't have any options, if we want to have funding, a conservation program, we have to decide on archaeological research and archaeological supervision (IDI 3), If the archaeological works were required in subsequent investments, we would do them (IDI 5), If I have to do it, I will do it (IDI 6).* Statements by respondents who made the conduct of archaeological research conditional on their unspecified validity were: *If necessary, by all means (IDI 2), If legitimate, by all means (IDI 8).* Another respondent who did not place any conditions on the conduct of future archaeological research stated: *Yes. I would decide (IDI 4).* A respondent who would decide to conduct archaeological research to increase knowledge said: *Well, if we know that something is unexplored and needs to be explored, then by all means. However, if there is something that has been explored, or we know what it is, what the history of the place is, it doesn't need to be explored, we just don't explore it. Because we already know the history. Unless we want to find something new, or some new circumstances arise. Then, absolutely, by all means necessary (IDI 1).*

Furthermore, one respondent stated that archaeological research is not an obstacle for him to make future investments in areas under the protection and care of the Provincial Monument Conservator: *Of course I have no concerns about archaeological research. If they were necessary for future investments, we would carry them out. They would not be an obstacle to deciding on some additional works or intending to do something (IDI 5).*

The following conclusions can be drawn from the data presented. All of the parish priests/rectors who had carried out archaeological research on church premises expressed their willingness to continue them in their parishes/rectories. Most of them would decide to carry out archaeological research only if it was required by law. Only a few made their decision to undertake research dependent on the general validity of such work, and some did not specify any conditions to be met. There were sporadic cases of undertaking future archaeological research to expand knowledge. In addition, the clergy are not afraid of archaeological

research that may be related to the realization of future investments, conservation, or renovation works in parishes/rectories, and they intend to continue working with archaeologists in this regard.

Conclusions

The study showed that the Polish Roman Catholic clergy mostly have a positive attitude towards archaeological research carried out on areas under church administration. The clergymen note that the congregation also have a positive attitude toward these research, which, according to some of them, is due to the proper information provided to the congregation about the goals and schedule of the archaeological research. This attitude of the clergy, which sometimes influences the opinions of the congregation, and the clergy's knowledge of the local communities make the clergy a suitable group to work with archaeologists in conducting community archaeology activities. Every clergyman interviewed had decided to conduct archaeological research for legal reasons, such as renovation, pre-investment surveys, or conservation works at least once. Only a small number of respondents decided to conduct archaeological research simply to expand their knowledge.

The study also revealed that parish priests and rectors donate archaeological artefacts to museums or keep them in parishes and rectories. Human remains are usually reburied and in some cases submitted for anthropological analysis. The clergy are also in favor of simply leaving the artefacts where they were found. This attitude of the respondents, coupled with their attitude toward parish and rectory museums and memorial rooms, indicates the potential of parishes and rectories to preserve and educate about the archaeological heritage. Respondents also made numerous recommendations for improving cooperation between clergy and archaeologists when conducting archaeological research on church property. All respondents expressed a desire to continue archaeological research in the future, which indicates that the clergy are not afraid to undertake such work. For most of them, it would be related to legal obligations, while only one respondent would consider it in order to expand his knowledge.

The results of the study have revealed several distinct research perspectives that enrich the understanding of archaeological practices in church-administered spaces. These include a heritage management perspective, which highlights the challenges of balancing professional conservation standards

with the interests and involvement of local religious communities; a social-cultural perspective, focusing on how clergy and other stakeholders perceive the symbolic, spiritual, and practical meanings of artefacts within sacred contexts; and a public archaeology perspective, which emphasizes the importance of interaction, dialogue, accessibility, and negotiation between archaeologists and religious authorities. Together, these perspectives demonstrate the complex, interdisciplinary nature of archaeological research in religious settings and suggest directions for future studies that integrate material, social, and institutional dimensions.

The pilot study has provided valuable initial insights. There is a need to explore the potential of clergy as partners with archaeologists in the field of archaeological research, and to assess the role of parish and rectory museums and memorial rooms in protecting and educating about the archaeological heritage. Quantitative methods, such as structured surveys distributed to a larger and more diverse sample of clergy and local community members, might allow for statistical analysis of attitudes toward archaeological research and heritage management. At the same time, qualitative methods – like individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) – could deepen the understanding of nuanced perspectives and foster ongoing dialogue. Importantly, future research could seek to position clergy not only as respondents but as active partners in the archaeological process. This collaborative approach might enhance mutual trust, ensure that research addresses community concerns, and improve the integration of archaeological findings with local religious and cultural values, potentially serving as a model for similar studies elsewhere. In addition, it is worth expanding the research to include the clergy of other denominations and to focus on clergy councils that manage church property for archaeologists. Such an approach will contribute to the creation of a directory of best practices for forging relationships between archaeologists and the clergy who manage church property.

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