DICTIONARY OF ARTIFACTS

Barbara Ann Kipfer
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A Dictionary of Artifacts is for students, archaeology professors, archaeologists, museum staff, archaeology volunteers, and general readers who want informative definitions in accessible language about the vocabulary describing artifacts. More than 2000 entries cover all aspects of artifacts: specific artifact types, prominent examples of artifacts, technological terms, culture periods, words associated with the making of and description of artifacts (including materials and methods), principles and techniques of examination and identification, and terms regarding the care and preservation of specimens.

Artifacts are anything made and/or used by humans, including tools, containers, manufacturing debris, and food remains. The coverage includes vocabulary used to describe artifacts (e.g., plaited, tenoned), vocabulary concerned with their discovery, analysis, typology, dating, and conservation (e.g., cordage, seriation), and types of basic artifacts (e.g., abrader, milling stone). This is neither an encyclopedia nor an encyclopedic dictionary. This book does not include architecture (e.g., building components, features) or specific historical artifacts (e.g., the Hope Diamond). Only very major subtypes are defined; for example, not every type of adze, point, or ware is included. Major time periods are included, but only the ones that are fairly uncontroversial and those referred to in the definitions of other entries.

The entries in this book are terms regarding:

- artifact analysis, examination, and identification
- artifact care, handling, and preservation
- artifact decoration
- artifact description (shape, use-wear, function)
- artifact production and technology (including materials and methods)
• prominent examples of artifacts (but not every type of adze, point, ware, etc.)
• specific artifact types (in bone/horn, ceramic, glass, lithic, metal, shell, textile/basket, wood, etc.)

Knowledge about artifacts is helpful to students in many areas, especially in the field and on visits to museums. Artifacts are the tangible remains of our ancestors and awareness of them and their importance is beneficial to a student’s well-rounded education. *A Dictionary of Artifacts* will also be useful for teaching. However, many very technological and methodological entries that are only of interest to professional archaeologists are not included, as well as the thousands of possible pottery types and – if you think about it – the whole gamut of possible artifacts (cell phone, cellophane tape!?).

While most archaeologists generally know the meaning of terms used in the areas of their own research, it is often difficult to find good definitions of artifacts for unfamiliar time periods or cultures. This book attempts to be cross-cultural and cross-Atlantic in selections and definitions. A certain number of out-of-date terms are defined because these terms appear in literature that is still read. This book is an especially good introduction to the world of artifacts, culling the types of entries that are found in larger and more general archaeological dictionaries and adding to that list in useful ways without getting overly technical or specialized. The reader will not find very specific artifacts, all possible cultures, all of the highly technical words for a field – such as all the techniques and materials used for preserving ceramics or lithics in the laboratory. *A Dictionary of Artifacts* puts into one place the basic terminology for all categories of artifacts.

Barbara Ann Kipfer, PhD
Bronze Age looped palstave ax. Courtesy of Museum Reproductions; Department of Archaeology Teaching Collection, University of Reading

Egyptian basket, New Kingdom, 1411–1375 BC. Courtesy of akg-images

Clay tablet showing record of food supplies, from southern Iraq, c. 3000 BC. Courtesy of British Museum

Hymn to Ur-Nammu, cuneiform script on clay, c. 2060 BC. Courtesy of akg-images

Knives. Courtesy of akg-images

Mud brick from Thebes stamped with name of Ramesses II, 19th Dynasty, 1250 BC. Courtesy of British Museum

Piece mold: terracotta mold of a man on horseback, Mesopotamia, 2000–1600 BC. Courtesy of British Museum

Pressure-flaked blade: ripple flaked flint knife, Egyptian, late Predynastic period, c. 3200 BC. Courtesy of British Museum

Woodland vessel. Courtesy of University of Arkansas Museum
abacus: a calculating table or frame, specifically one in which balls slide upon wires, used for the mechanical solution of arithmetical problems.

Abbevillian: name for the period of the earliest hand-ax industries of Europe, taken from Abbeville, the type site near the mouth of the River Somme in northern France. The site is a gravel pit in which crudely chipped oval or pear-shaped hand axes were discovered, probably dating to the Mindel glaciation. This was one of the key places which showed that man was of great antiquity. In 1939, Abbé Breuil proposed the name Abbevillian for both the hand ax and the industry, which preceded the Acheulian in Europe.

Abejas phase: first important agricultural phase in the Tehuacan Valley of Mexico, dated 3500–1500 BC, after the introduction of maize.

Abingdon ware: a Neolithic pottery c. 3900–3200 BC, found in a causewayed camp about 15 km south of Oxford, England. The pottery is fairly heavy and formed into round-bottomed bowls with frequent-stroke decoration and some having handles.

abrade: to scrape or wear away by friction or erosion. [abrasion (n.)]

abrader: a stone tool with abrasive qualities, such as pumice or sandstone, used in grinding, smoothing, sharpening, or shaping tools or other objects. [abrating stone]

absolute age: amount of time elapsed, with reference to a specific time scale, since an object was made or used.

absolute dating: determination of age with reference to a specific time scale, such as a fixed calendrical system or in years before present (BP), based on measurable physical and chemical qualities or historical associations such as coins and written records. The date on a coin is an absolute date, as are AD 1492 and 501 BC. [see relative dating]

absorption: process by which a liquid is drawn into and fills the pores of a permeable, porous body.
Abydos, tablets of: two hieroglyphic inscriptions containing the names of Egyptian kings that were found on the walls in a small temple at Abydos, Egypt. The first tablet has the names of the kings of the 12th and 18th dynasties and it is now in the British Museum. The second tablet begins with Menes, one of the first kings of Egypt, and has a complete list of the first two dynasties as well as a number of names from the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 9th, 10th, and 11th dynasties. It was discovered in 1864 by Auguste Mariette, who published the book *Abydos* in 1869.

Abydos ware: pottery of Canaanite (Syro-Palestinian) origin found in the royal tombs of the 1st and 2nd dynasties (the Old Kingdom) at Abydos, Saqqara, Abusir el-Melek, and other sites in Upper Egypt, dating to the Early Bronze Age II (3300–2700 BC). The pottery, often red-rose slipped and burnished or painted with geometric motifs, includes jugs, bottles, and jars. Most common are the red-slipped jugs, some of a hard-baked “metallic” quality, with handles attached to the rim and a typical stamped base. This pottery class took its name from Abydos, the first site at which it was found, in Upper Egypt.

acanthus: conventionalized representation of the leaf of the *Acanthus spinosus* plant, found on the lower parts of Corinthian and Composite capitals, and also used for enrichment of various elements in Classical architecture.

accession: an object acquired by a museum or collector as a part of a permanent collection; also, the act of processing and recording an addition to a permanent collection.

accession catalog: an accounting system used in the lab after artifacts and ecofacts are initially processed and providing the numbers with which artifacts and ecofacts are marked for storage. Its records describe and record what was found during an archaeological investigation and it is the primary record for all materials after excavation. [accession catalogue]

accession number: number assigned to an archaeological collection that identifies its origin; part of the catalog number.

aceramic: without pottery or not using pottery; a term applied to periods and societies in which pottery is not used, especially in contrast to other periods of ceramic use and with neighboring ceramic cultures. Aceramic societies may use bark, basketry, gourds, leather, etc. for containers.

Aceramic Neolithic: early part of the Neolithic period in western Asia before the widespread use of pottery (c. 8500–6000 BC) in an economy based on the cultivation of crops or the rearing of animals or both. Aceramic Neolithic groups were in the Levant (Pre-Pottery Neolithic A and B), Zagros area (Karim Shahir, Jarmoan), and
Anatolia (Hacilar Aceramic Neolithic). Aceramic Neolithic groups are rarer outside western Asia.

**Acheulian**: a European culture of the Lower Paleolithic period named for Saint-Acheul, a town in northern France, the site of numerous stone artifacts from the period. The conventional borderline between Abbevillian and Acheulian is marked by a technological innovation in the working of stone implements, the use of a flaking tool of soft material (wood, bone, antler) in place of a hammerstone. This culture is noted for its hefty multipurpose, pointed (or almond-shaped) hand axes, flat-edged cleaving tools, and other bifacial stone tools with multiple cutting edges. The Acheulian flourished in Africa, western Europe, and southern Asia from over a million years ago until less than 100,000 years ago and is commonly associated with *Homo erectus*. This progressive tool industry was the first to use regular bifacial flaking. The term *Epoque de St Acheul* was introduced by Gabriel de Mortillet in 1872 and is still used occasionally, but after 1925 the idea of epochs began to be supplanted by that of cultures and traditions and it is in this sense that the term Acheulian is more often used today. The earliest assemblages are often rather similar to the Oldowan at such sites as Olduvai Gorge. Subsequent hand-ax assemblages are found over most of Africa, southern Asia, and western and southern Europe. The earliest appearance of hand axes in Europe is still referred to by some workers as Abbevillian, denoting a stage when hand axes were still made with crude, irregular devices. The type site, near Amiens in the Somme Valley, contained large hand-ax assemblages from around the time of the penultimate interglacial and the succeeding glacial period (Riss), perhaps some 200,000–300,000 years ago. Acheulian hand axes are still found around the time of the last interglacial period, and hand axes are common in one part of the succeeding Mousterian period (the Mousterian of Acheulian tradition) down to as recently as 40,000 years ago. Acheulian is also used to describe the period when this culture existed. In African terminology, the entire series of hand-ax industries is called Acheulian, and the earlier phases of the African Acheulian equate with the Abbevillian of Europe.

*Acheulian, Acheulian industry*

**Achzib ware**: a Phoenician, Iron Age II, red-slip pottery type consisting primarily of jugs with a trefoil mouth of “mushroom” rims, red slipped, and highly burnished.

**acid etching**: use of hydrofluoric acid to etch a pattern onto a glass surface.

**acinaces**: a short sword or scimitar, often very short and worn suspended from a belt around the waist, and used by Eastern nations of antiquity, especially the Medes, Persians, and Scythians.