

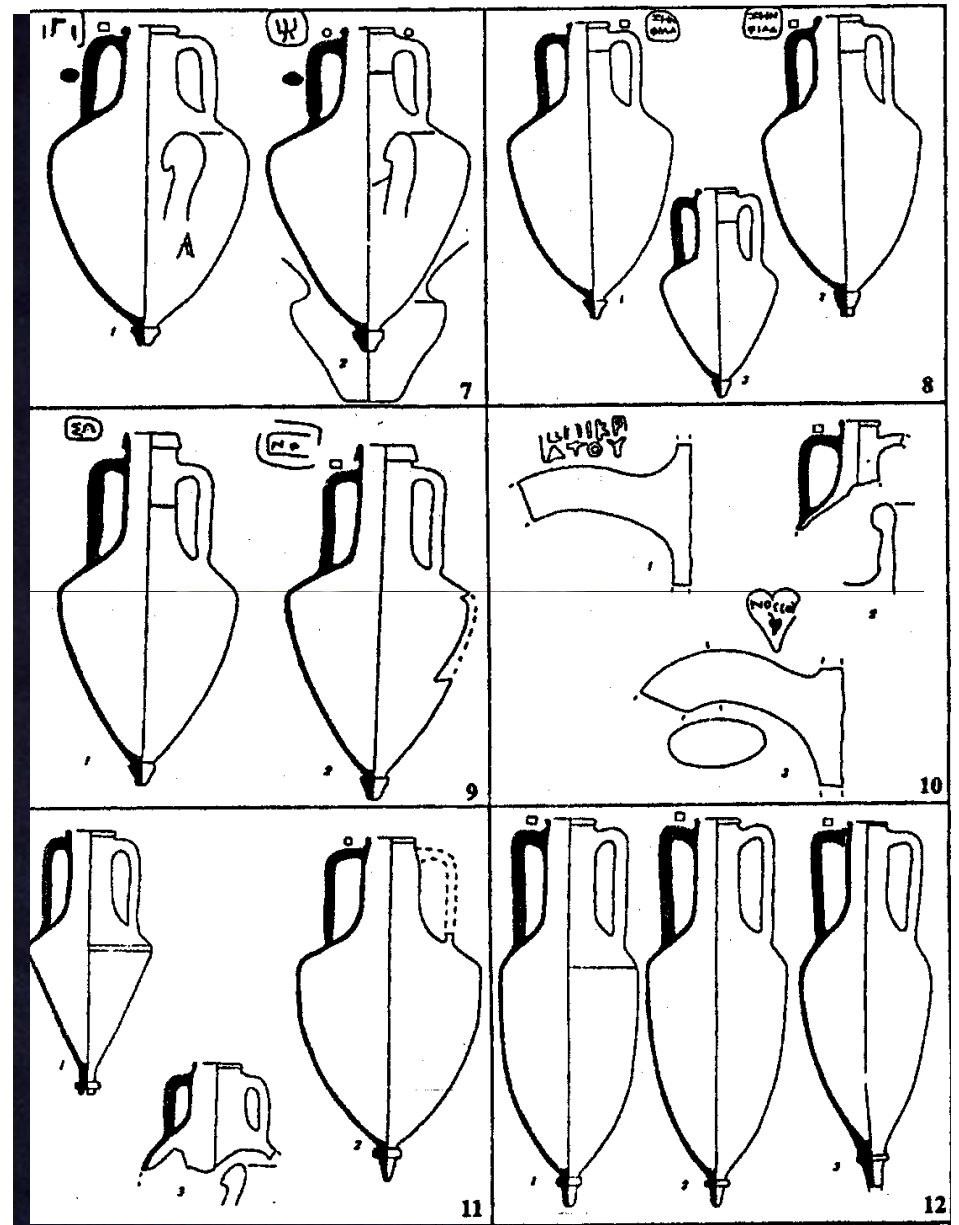
Classification and Typology

Archaeological Classification

- Archaeologists are unique among anthropologists because we deal not with living populations, but extinct ones
- As a result, one of the key things archaeologists must be able to routinely do, is to deal with the issues of TIME and SPACE
- One of our chief concerns is how things changed in the past, how material culture changes and varies through time and space
- In order to adequately address this, we must be able to organize our data into *meaningful spatial and temporal patterns*



Native American projectile points



Mid-third century BC Hellenistic amphorae

Types and their uses

- Artifacts do not come out of the ground with labels on them
- Terms like “handaxe” or “Susiana Black-on-Buff” are terms that archaeologists have assigned to the artifacts
- by classifying the artifacts into categories or TYPES archaeologists begin to order their data into useful categories to begin to tell the story of the past we excavate



Definition:

A TYPE is a class of archaeological artifacts defined by a consistent *clustering of attributes*



Wrought (forged), cut, and machine-made wire nails

- Archaeologists create types, and give them names
- This is true regardless of whether or not archaeologists are trying to discern artifact categories that might match what was in the minds of the people who made and used the artifacts in the past
- Frequently, archaeologists do not even care whether the categories we create would have made any sense to the makers or users of the artifacts



- At a very basic level, all archaeologists begin the process of sifting and classifying artifacts from the moment of their discovery
- The collection of discrete groups of materials into separate categories is common to all archaeologists
- Initial separation of artifacts into pottery, stone, bone etc., is one such way of creating basic categories of types of artifacts



The Ford – Spaulding Debate of the 1950s

Do archaeologists *discover* types that were “real” to the people who made those artifacts?

Or, are artifact Types “*arbitrary*” in the sense that archaeologists impose types on variation.

In other words, do archaeologists construct types that work for them?

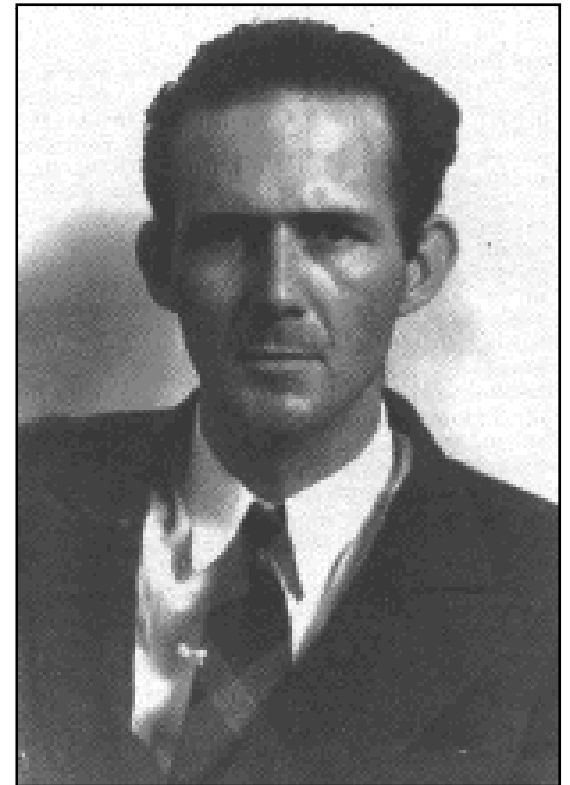
The Ford – Spaulding Debate of the 1950s

- Albert Spaulding's position was that archeologists should try to discover the *emic* types, that is the mental templates, of the maker(s)
- Spaulding used statistics as his method of discovery, and was a pioneer of quantitative methods in archaeology



The Ford – Spaulding Debate of the 1950s

- James Ford's position was that *types* are artificial constructs imposed by the archaeologist on a continuum of variation between specimens
- The debate went back and forth for years, was very harsh in tone, and caused quite a lot of discord



The Ford – Spaulding Debate of the 1950s

The debate was resolved in the 1960s:

- people in the past and present **do** use *emic* (culturally specific) categories, but the archaeologist **creates** *types*
- These types may have some correspondence to the *emic* categories, but it is not always necessary that they do

Types of types

Archaeologists use different typologies (different sets of types) to address different questions

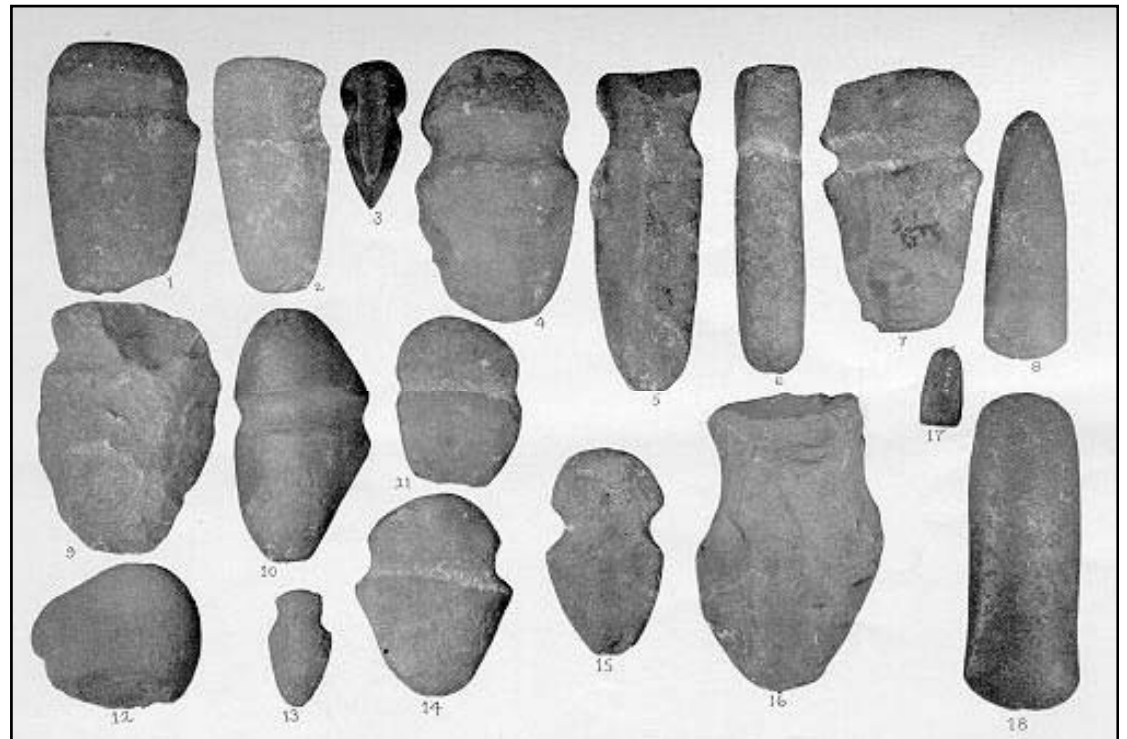
- morphological (or descriptive) types
- functional types
- stylistic types
- technological types
- temporal (chronological) types

Types of types

If you are interested solely in describing artifacts, you create **morphological (or descriptive) types** based on any similarities or differences that you can see or measure

A morphological grouping of individual artifacts may focus on overall similarity, and may encompass a range of variability (colour, size, manufacture)

Morphological types are purely descriptive



Types of types

If you are interested in what people actually did with the artifacts, you create **functional types** based on how things were used (e.g., serving platters, water bottles, cooking jars, soup bowls, plates, cups, storage jars)



Types of Types

If you are interested in social, symbolic, or aesthetic aspects of the artifacts, you create **stylistic types** based on decoration or other esthetic qualities (e.g., different styles or patterns of fine china, in which you can have cups, saucers, plates, bowls, serving platters, etc. all of a single style)



Types of types

If you are interested in the way the artifacts are made, you create **technological types** based on the raw materials or fabrication processes (e.g., coil-built pots, mold-made pots, wheel-thrown pots)



Types of types

If you are interested only in chronology, create **chronological** (or **temporal**) types

A chronological type is defined as any combination of morphological, functional, or stylistic attributes that was used only during a limited period of time.

Types of types

Sometimes called a “time marker” or “index fossil”

Chronological types are particularly useful for helping archaeologists divide the past into discrete periods based on artifact types



1st century AD Samian pottery
manufactured in Gaul but found across
the Roman Empire



Space-time systematics (cultural chronologies)

- One of the things archaeologists do is talk about time periods (e.g., Neolithic period, Perigordian culture, Early Aztec phase, Early Dynastic IIIB,).
- These chunks of the past also have a spatial dimension, e.g., the term “Early Aztec phase” refers to a limited period of time in central Mexico, while other terms are given to the same period of time in other parts of the world.
- Just like artifact types, these periods, cultures, phases, etc., are concepts created by archaeologists.
- We create and define these terms, in order to make chronological and anthropological sense of artifacts and sites

Necessary Terminology

- **Attribute:** one specific characteristic of an artifact, such as incised decoration on a pot, or painted decoration on a pot, or the pot's shape, etc.
- **Artifact:** an object made or modified by human action.
- **Feature:** for nonportable artifactual constructions; examples of features include burials, buildings, storage pits, hearths, mine shafts, plow zones, garbage dumps
- **Assemblage:** (all) the artifacts from one component
- **Component:** the manifestation of a phase at one particular location
 - less technically, the physical evidence of human behavior at a specific place, which accumulated during an uninterrupted span of time
 - If there was an interruption or abandonment, and people came back to the same spot later, the evidence of the second occupation would be a different component

Terminology

- **Site:** a location with one or more components
- **Phase or archaeological culture:** a set of similar components, found in a limited region and from a limited time span, whose similarity is so great that we believe them to have been occupied by members of a single society
- **Period:** (esp. when capitalized) a broad period of time in a large region, encompassing many phases/cultures that are more or less similar in outline; analogous to the ethnographic concept of culture-area, but includes time depth