

Glossary of archaeological terms

- akh* (Egyptian) – spiritual element of a tomb's owner, attributed with many superhuman, almost divine traits
- akhet* (Egyptian) – a higher level of existence, to which the deceased was raised during the funeral through the ritual of 'transformation into akh'
- anastylosis (from Greek) – the reconstruction of architectural structures from original fragments of an ancient ruined structure
- ankh* (Egyptian) – symbol of life
- archaeological context – the arrangement in reference to each other of soil deposits, relicts of structures, moveable artefacts and other traces of human activities
- archaeological layer – the smallest distinguishable stratification unit at an archaeological site
- artefact (from Latin) – an object that is the product of human thought and work
- aspective (from Latin) – in Old Egyptian art, a method of depicting three-dimensional reality on a plane in such a view as to enable each element's immediate identification through its diagnostic features
- 'beautiful name' (Egyptian) – a type of sobriquet, usually a shortened version of a name
- benben* (Egyptian) – a stone object or hill, considered to be the spot at which Atum appeared in Heliopolis
- Canopic jar – a burial urn with a lid in the shape of a human, baboon, jackal or falcon head, i.e. one of Horus's four sons – the patrons of mummification; it was used to store the deceased's entrails after the body had been embalmed; the name comes from the town Canopus in the Nile Delta
- cartonnage (from French) – 'a case' for a mummy made from layers of canvas or papyrus stuck together, covered with a layer of gypsum on which a polychrome decoration was made
- cartouche (from French) – an oval frame around a hieroglyphic inscription bearing a pharaoh's name (depicted as a double rope with the endings joined at the shorter side)
- choragic monument (from Greek) – in ancient Greece, a monument commemorating a *choregos*, a citizen who was the patron of a choir that had been victorious in a musical *agon*
- 'closed deposit' – intact group of objects preserved in their original spot
- dakka* (Arabic) – a dense mass of earth mixed with fragments of various objects, mainly pottery vessels for sepulchral purposes

- dating material– artefacts enabling the precise attribution of an archaeological layer to specific historical periods, e.g. the reigns of specific rulers
- demotic script (from Greek) – the simplest form of writing down Egyptian texts, used from the seventh century BC to the fifth century AD, especially in administrative, legal and personal documents
- deposit (from Latin) – objects laid away for safekeeping
- determinative (from Latin) – a hieroglyph written at the end of a word in order to determine its meaning
- djadjat* (Egyptian) – a courtyard in front of a mastaba, more precisely – in front of the cult chapel
- djed* pillar (Egyptian) – a symbol of Osiris
- domains (from French) – land property, from which victuals were drawn, necessary in the posthumous cult of persons from the higher levels of the social ladder
- double crown of Lower and Upper Egypt – a composite pharaoh’s crown consisting of the red crown of Lower Egypt, in the form of a headdress with a flattened top raised in the back, and the white crown of Upper Egypt, in the shape of a high calpac
- dromos* (Greek) – an alleyway
- ‘false door’ (Egyptian) – a stone slab in the form of a door, part of a mastaba
- foundation deposit – an assemblage of various small objects deposited below the foundations of newly-constructed buildings
- graffito* (sing.), *graffiti* (pl., Italian) – an inscription or drawing carved or drawn onto a wall, stone or vessel
- Great House (Egyptian *per-aa*) – a royal palace
- hieratic script (from Greek) – a type of cursive that is a simplified form of hieroglyphs, used from the Old Kingdom onwards to write on less permanent materials, such as papyrus, wood, clay, rock chips
- ‘house of eternity’ (Egyptian *per-djet*) – a tomb
- ibu en wab* (Egyptian) – a ‘purification tent’
- in situ* (Latin, ‘in place’) – a term used in reference to artefacts that have not been moved from their original spot
- Isis lactans* (Latin, ‘Isis breastfeeding’) – a representation of Isis breastfeeding Horus, especially popular in the Graeco-Roman period; the iconographic prototype of the Holy Mother with Child
- ka* (Egyptian) – afterworld incarnation of a deceased person; a spiritual element
- khepresh* (Egyptian) – a pharaoh’s blue crown, in the form of a type of helmet worn especially during battle
- kherep* (Egyptian) – a pharaoh’s sceptre, which doubtless initially was a mace with a cylindrical head

- lychnaptai* (Greek) – functionaries responsible for the lighting at cult celebrations
- Maamur* (Arabic) – supervisor of all the works concerning antiquity
- mastaba (from Arabic) – a type of ancient Egyptian tomb in the shape of low-cut pyramid with a rectangular base, consisting of an aboveground part (made from dried brick or stone) and an underground part with a burial chamber
- mummy (from Arabic) – a corpse preserved from decaying through appropriate treatment or dried-up due to natural mummification
- muu* (Egyptian) – the name of a person participating in the funerary ritual as the performer of mythological roles: they can be distinguished due to their headdress in the form of a wreath or crown, similar to the middle element of the ‘atef’ crown (the crown of the god Osiris)
- nome (from Greek) – the name of an administrative unit in ancient Egypt
- obelisk (from Greek/Latin) – a tall column, usually quadrangular, which becomes slightly narrower towards the top and ends in a small pyramid (pyramidion)
- odeon (from Greek) – a theatrical building in ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt housing musical and poetic spectacles
- ‘Opening of the Mouth’ ritual – a funerary ceremony supposed to give the deceased back the ability to use his/her mouth, which was equivalent to regaining skills that are expressions of life; it involved a priest touching the deceased’s lips with a miniature hatchet and chisel, with the ritual ending in a washing ceremony
- ostracon (sing.), ostraca (pl., from Greek) – the shard of a clay vessel used as writing material and for voting (in ancient Greece): in reference to Egypt, this name also refers to stone sherds, mainly limestone, used for writing material
- palaeography (from Greek) – the study of the history of old writing forms, tools and materials
- portcullis – a dropped blockade of the entrance to a tomb, consisting of one or two heavy stone plates
- pylon (Greek, ‘gate’) – one of two buildings in a shape similar to a cut pyramid, bordering the entrance to a temple or palace
- pyramid (from Greek) – a monumental building in the shape of a polyhedron on a square base, serving as a pharaoh’s tomb in the Old Kingdom period
- sarcophagus (from Greek/Latin) – a decorative coffin, made, for example, from stone, wood or metal, usually in the form of a chest
- scarab (from Latin) – a large black beetle worshipped in ancient Egypt as the god of the rising sun
- shen* (Egyptian) – a sign expressing the cohesion of the world and having a protective function in Egyptian magic

- sphinx (from Greek) – in ancient Egyptian art, a figure of a lying lion with a human or animal (e.g. a ram's) head
- 'step pyramid' – a pyramid in the form of a few, increasingly smaller mastabas, arranged one on top of another
- stratification (from Latin/French) – an arrangement of layers
- stratigraphy (from Latin/Greek) – in archaeology: the succession of cultural layers in the vertical section of the excavated site, allowing for the establishment of its relative chronology
- survey – prospection of the terrain
- temenos* (Greek) – a 'holy circle'
- terminus post quem* (Latin) – the bottom limit of possible dating
- tumulus* (Latin) – a 'burial mound'
- Two Lands – Upper and Lower Egypt
- udjat* eye (Egyptian) – a symbol of a favourable ending, recovering one's health and victory over one's enemies
- uraeus (from Greek/Latin) – a symbol of a pharaoh's power, in the shape of an attacking cobra, placed above his forehead
- ushebti* (Egyptian, 'the one who responds') – funerary figurines, made from such materials as clay, faience, wood, stone; they were given the task of working for the deceased in the Netherworld
- wabet* (Egyptian, 'pure place') – a place in which the body of a deceased person was prepared for the funeral
- wabet net ut* (Egyptian) – 'place of embalment'