

Introduction to Archaeology: Notes 10
Typology and space-time systematics
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- This material (Chapter 7 in the textbook) is pretty straightforward, so I will not say much about it here
- A few concepts and terms to focus on:
 - **Space-time systematics:** defining patterns of material culture or archaeological remains in space (on a map) and through time
 - organizing archaeological material into spatial (map areas) and temporal (time periods) units
 - this forms the basic framework of what was done or made, where and when
 - the basic history of material culture that archaeologists then try to explain and make inferences from
 - To even talk about space-time systematics or material culture history in any realistic way, we have to simplify the material into types or kinds of things
 - **Type:** a category of artifacts that are similar to each other and distinct from other types
 - types must be explicit and objective: clearly defined so that anyone with some patience and training could categorize the artifacts in the same way
 - if you can't explain how you are categorizing the artifacts, no one should believe that you really can categorize them in a meaningful way
 - **Typology:** the process of defining types; or a system of types that are distinct from each other, such as a typology of projectile points, or a typology of ceramic vessel forms
 - Kelly and Thomas talk about how classification is always for a certain purpose, and that there may be many different, cross-cutting typologies for different purposes
 - a typology of ceramic vessel forms, cross-cut by a typology of ceramic vessel decorative motifs, cross-cut by a typology of ceramic materials....
 - I suggest that we can also think of these as multiple, independent attributes of an artifact
 - Artifact X has form type A, decoration type B, material type C, etc.
 - **Morphological type:** a category based on observable traits of the artifact (“morphology” = study of forms)
 - I suggest that it might be clearer to call these “descriptive types”
 - they are simply categories that we can create for our own purposes
 - they may or may not mean anything
 - categorizing books by the color of the cover, for example
 - may allow us to define objective, repeatable types
 - but might not be useful for making any inferences at all
 - when we construct morphological types, we usually use traits that we hope will be useful for distinguishing change over time or different functions
 - that is, the classification is “for” those purposes
 - but in fact, you often can't tell in advance
 - you just have to classify artifacts in a bunch of objective, repeatable ways
 - and then look to see which show patterning over time

- or over space, as in different areas of the site, inside vs. outside of structures, etc., which might suggest functional differences
- **Temporal type:** a morphological type that turns out to have temporal significance
 - it is characteristic of some time period
 - the artifacts changed over time such that this type appeared, was popular for a while, then went out of use
 - depends on the questions we are asking
 - a type that lasted 1000 years
 - might not be a temporal type if we are interested in questions about changes during that period – for that, it tells us nothing useful about time
 - but might be a temporal type if we are contrasting that period with the time that came before or after
- **Functional type:** a morphological type that turns out to be associated with some functions, but not others
 - a functional type of ceramics might be “black, round pots with handles”
 - these might turn out to be cooking pots
 - so their presence would tell us that cooking was done in a particular place
- A type could be not only morphological, but also both temporal *and* functional
- **Archaeological cultures:** units in space-time systematics
 - represent people with a similar material culture
 - may or may not have corresponded to a cultural group in the sense that a cultural anthropologist would have recognized
 - no way to know if they spoke the same language, held similar beliefs, etc.
 - but by having similar material culture, we can treat them as similar in some ways, and discuss the members of an “archaeological culture” as a group
 - like “nineteenth century Germans”
 - treating differences among them as unimportant for the moment
- **Period:** a division of time
- **Phase:** the smallest possible subdivision in space-time systematics (except for subsequently defined sub-phases and sub-sub-phases...)
 - essentially a fine-grained archaeological culture
 - usually a unit of both time and space on a map
- **Assemblage:** the collection of artifacts from a given site, feature, stratum, etc.
 - like “the assemblage of pottery from Pit 7, next to house B, in site 210”
- **Component:** the portion of the archaeological remains at a site that represents a given phase (or sub-phase, etc.)
 - like “this site has a nineteenth-century German component over a twelfth-century Native American component”
 - or, looked at another way, the regional “nineteenth-century German” phase is made up of all the “nineteenth-century German” components known from different sites