

11 Glossary of archaeological terms

Here we give brief definitions of key terms used in the handbook. When a definition includes another word listed in the glossary, we italicize that word.

- Abandonment deposit.** *Layer* formed immediately above a *floor* when an *area* goes out of use: may represent *artifacts* left on the floor, or artifacts that fell onto the floor.
- Amphora.** A pottery *closed shape*, usually with two handles and a narrow neck, for transporting wine, olive oil, or water.
- Angevin period.** Royal dynasty from Anjou in France, ruling Sicily 1265-1288.
- Arab period.** Arab conquest began in 827 and was completed with the fall of the last *Byzantine* fortress in 902. The Arab rulers were replaced by *Normans* between 1061 and 1093.
- Aragonese period.** Royal dynasty from Aragon in Spain, ruling Sicily 1288-1377.
- Archaic period.** Greek chronological term; 734-480 BC.
- Area.** A space smaller than a *structure*; a room, a courtyard, etc.
- Artifact.** Any man-made object recovered by excavation.
- Ashlar.** Dressed sandstone masonry.
- Assemblage.** Group of *artifacts* found together.
- Balk.** The earth left in place between two *trenches*.
- Black Glaze.** A Greek *ware*, mostly made in Athens, between about 570 and 300 BC. Black Glaze in fact isn't a *glaze* at all, but a slip made from very refined clay, that fires black in the kiln in a reducing atmosphere.
- Bourbon period.** Royal dynasty with links in Austria and Spain, ruling Sicily 1735-1859.
- Bronze Age.** Archaeological period, 2500-900 BC.
- Byzantine period.** Rule of Sicily from Constantinople (Istanbul). Begins in 533; replaced by *Arab* rulers between 827 and 902.
- Cassetta.** Italian word for yellow plastic box for storing *artifacts*.
- Classical period.** Greek chronological term; 480-323 BC.
- Closed (or sealed) deposit (or context).** Cultural *layer* largely undisturbed since it initially formed.
- Closed shape.** Pot with a narrow mouth, usually for storing or pouring.
- Colluvium.** Soft, degraded bedrock, often mixed with cultural materials.
- Context.** The matrix relevant to interpreting an *artifact* or *feature*: in ascending order of generality, the context may be a *layer*, a *feature*, a *trench*, a *structure*, a *zone*, or a *site*.
- Context sheet.** Recording tool for documenting each *layer*.
- Corinthian pottery.** A pottery *ware* made in Corinth in Greece; as used here, refers to the period c. 625-500 BC. Characterized by pale buff *fabric*. Normally used for small *closed shapes*.
- Dente di lupo.** "Wolf's tooth": incised triangular design on local "*Elymian*" *ware*.
- Deposit.** Group of *artifacts* associated within a single *layer/context*.
- Diagnostic.** *Sherd* that can easily be identified and dated; usually a rim, lip, handle, base, or decorated bodysherd.
- East Greek.** Pottery *ware* made by Greeks on what's now the west coast of Turkey. As used here, refers to the period c. 625-525 BC. Commonest shape is the *kylix*.
- Elevation.** Height above sea level.
- Elymian.** Name given by Greeks to the native population of NW Sicily in the sixth-fifth century BC.
- Elymian ware.** Pottery *ware* (*dente di lupo*, *gray ware*) common in seventh- and sixth-century west Sicily. There's no good reason to think that "Elymian ware" was actually associated in any way with an Elymian ethnic group.
- Episode.** A distinct period identifiable within a broader chronological *phase*. In the area around B1/2 we have identified 4 episodes within phase II (the building of wall h; the dumping of an earth fill behind it and the construction of a drain on top of the fill; the dumping of a huge mound of ash on top of the drain; and the

construction of B1/2 over the ash mound) and 3 more within phase IV (rebuilding of B1/2, and construction of B1/1; the digging of a big pit; rebuilding of B1 and construction of walls j and cc).

Fabric. The clay that a pot is made of. Experts can often identify where a particular *ware* comes from by studying the fabric.

Faunal analysis. Study of the remains of animals—for us, mostly bones.

Feature. Any humanly modified component of a site—e.g., hearths, postholes, pits, walls.

Floor. Surface on which people walked, worked, etc. Lies underneath the *abandonment deposits*.

Floral analysis. Study of the remains of plants—for us, mostly seeds and pollen.

Flotation. Water-sieving technique for recovering tiny seed and bone remains.

Foundation trench. A slot dug into the earth to build the foundation for a wall. Often provides very important stratigraphic evidence.

Glaze. A glassy surface finish applied to pottery. Invented in *Roman* times, but only introduced into Sicily in the 9th century AD by the *Arabs*.

Gray ware. Local pottery *ware* of the 6th century BC. Plates with incised bands are a very common form.

Grid square. 5 x 5 m. square with letter/number code.

Harris matrix. Framework for ordering stratigraphic sequences.

Hellenistic period. Greek chronological term; in Sicily, 323-241 BC.

Iron Age. Archaeological period, 900-734 BC

Krater. *Open shape* vase, used for mixing wine and water.

Kylix. *Open shape* cup for wine drinking.

Layer. Basic unit of stratigraphic analysis; distinct and homogeneous area of soil, whether formed by natural or cultural means, or a combination. “Layer” is the established term in English, although it’s actually misleading, since it implies a smooth, even deposit across the whole trench. Most layers are irregular, and not what we’d normally think of as some kind of layer (e.g., tree trenches, pits, walls). Italian archaeologists actually speak of *unità stratigrafiche* (US) instead of layers. Just think of “layer” as a synonym for “stratigraphic unit.”

Line level. Tool for finding out whether a line is horizontal.

Macrofossils. Tiny bone or seed remains recovered by *flotation/wet sieving*.

Micromorphology. Microscopic analysis of *layers* that are invisible to the naked eye.

Matrix. Short for *Harris matrix*. “Matrix” can also be used as a word for the make-up of the soil within a specific layer.

Mudbrick. Building material made of mud, dried in the sun into bricks.

Norman period. Royal dynasty from Normandy in France, ruling Sicily 1061-1194.

Oinochoe. Greek word for a jug for pouring wine or water.

Open deposit. Archaeological *layer* that is still in the process of formation, constantly open to the entry of new material.

Open shape. Wide-mouthed vessel, such as a cup, bowl, or plate.

Palynology. The study of ancient pollen remains.

Period. A chronological unit applying to the whole site. At Monte Polizzo, period I = prehistoric; period II = 7th-6th century BC; period III = late 4th century BC; period IV = medieval; period V = modern.

Phase. An episode in the history of a particular building or space. Thus Monte Polizzo A1 goes through six architectural phases, spread across period II, III, and V in the site’s history.

Phoenician. People and objects coming from the area of the modern Lebanon. Used as a period designation, it normally means c. 800-500 BC.

Pithos. Large clay storage vessel, usually handmade.

Plan. Map-like representation of the excavation; a “bird’s eye” view.

Plumb bob. Lead weight on a string, giving a perfectly vertical line.

Profile. Drawing of a stratigraphic sequence, normally as seen in a *balk*.

Punic. Derived from the Latin word *Poenus* for Phoenician; refers to *Phoenician* or Carthaginian material in the west Mediterranean. Used as a period designation, it normally means c. 500-146 BC.

Roman Empire. 31 BC-AD 476.

Roman Republic. In Sicily, 241-31 BC.

Rubble. Layer of building stone from collapsed structures.

Sherd. Fragment from a broken pot.

Sican. Ethnic group in central Sicily.

Sicel. Ethnic group in eastern Sicily.

Site. Distinct concentration of archaeological materials in the landscape.

Stele. Stone pillar, often decorated.

Skyphos. *Open shape* cup for wine drinking.

Spoil tip. Pile of earth that has been excavated from trenches.

Stratigraphy. Sequence of *layers*.

Structure. Building, platform, hearth, wall, or any other deliberately built construction.

Sub-period: A subdivision of one of the *periods* into which the history of the whole site is divided. Period II, for example, is divided into sub-periods II.a (7th century BC), II.b (600-550 BC), II.c (550-525 BC), and II.d (525-500 BC).

Superintendent. Archaeologist in charge of a particular area of Sicily.

Swabian period. Royal dynasty from Swabia in Germany, ruling Sicily 1194-1265.

Total Station. Digital device for recording three-dimensional position.

Trench. Basic excavation unit.

Trial trench. Subdivision of a trench.

Triangulation. Manual technique for recording three-dimensional position.

Ware. A style of pottery, defined by fabric, decoration, or both.

Wet sieving. Water-sieving (*flotation*) technique for recovering tiny seed and bone remains.

Zone. Group of contiguous trenches. As of 2003, the Monte Polizzo acropolis was divided into six zones (A-F).