

From antiquities to memorabilia: a standardised terminology for ancestral artefacts according to manufacture date

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Abstract. *An ancestral artefact can be defined as any object of natural raw material made by a people following a lifestyle based on foraging and/or basic agriculture or pastoralism. A problem when cataloguing or reporting a research focused on an ancestral artefact is the absence of a fixed chronological terminology encompassing any age. The issue of terminology of age of objects is especially relevant when a researcher wants to study museum collections. Consequently, putting into practice a standardised terminology for ancestral artefacts according to manufacture date is required to avoid misinterpretations, which can even jeopardise legal actions. In this paper, a standardised terminology is presented for such kinds of original artefacts, from prehistory to the present. Subsidiarily, ancestral peoples have been arranged in concordance with the terminology for ancestral artefacts. While this terminology is centred on ancestral artefacts and is primarily addressed to people engaged in museum specimens—from curators to researchers—it is applicable to other collectable objects and, accordingly, also relevant to tribal-art dealers, antiquarians, and cultural heritage legislators.*

Rezumat. *O problemă în catalogarea sau raportarea unei cercetări axate pe un artefact ancestral este lipsa unei terminologii cronologice fixe care să cuprindă o anumită epocă. Problema terminologiei vârstei obiectelor este deosebit de relevantă atunci când un cercetător dorește să studieze colecții muzeale. În consecință, punerea în practică a unei terminologii standardizate pentru artefactele ancestrale în funcție de data fabricației este necesară pentru a evita interpretările greșite, care pot chiar periclita acțiunile legale. În această lucrare este prezentată o terminologie standardizată pentru astfel de artefacte originale, de la preistorie până în prezent.*

Keywords: material culture, ethnography, archaeology, nomenclature, museum studies.

Introduction

Etymologically, the word ‘ancestral’ comes from Latin *antecedere*, which means to go before. From this word, several definitions can be made. Ancestral technology should be the material culture—understood as the physical objects of a people whose manufacturing skills

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are transferred from generation to generation—based on natural raw materials. Subsidiarily, an ancestral people can be regarded as that practising an ancestral technology. An ancestral artefact (from the Latin phrase *arte factum*, to make with skill; from *ars*, skill, and *facere*, to make) can be defined as any object of natural raw material (chert, obsidian, wood, bone, native copper, and so on) made by a people following a lifestyle based on foraging (e.g. hunting, gathering) and/or basic agriculture or pastoralism (e.g. horticulture, transhumance).

An example of an ancestral artefact is the bamboo knife used in headhunting by several peoples of New Guinea and Torres Strait Islands². The core elements of this weapon (Marind *sok*, Kiwai *uere*, Western Torres Strait *upi*, Eastern Torres Strait *kwoier*, etc.) were a blade made of a split piece of bamboo and a handle prepared by inserting a piece of wood or fibrous pith into the concavity of the bamboo, both components being fastened together with plaited string knotted at intervals in such a manner as to form zigzags running along the length of the handle. A number of such bamboo beheading knives can be found as forming part of museum collections, for example in the Horniman Museum and Gardens (horniman.ac.uk). Another example is the shell tool employed as a knife, hand-axe, or scraper by the ‘Canoe people’ of Tierra del Fuego³. This artefact (Yahgan *ufker*, Alacaluf *afsaske* [?]) was composed of a blade made of a modified mussel valve, a handle made of a long stone fastened together with hide strip or sinew rope, and a small bunch of shredded wood or a wad of moss inserted between the shell and the stone as cushioning material to prevent blade breakage. Some of these multifunctional shell tools can also be found in museums, for instance in the British Museum (britishmuseum.org).

The peoples owning the type of material culture and lifestyle described above can also be called ‘ancestral’. Some examples are the Korowai of Southwest New Guinea, the Xingu of the Amazonian Basin, and the Himba of Southwest Africa. An overview of the latest ancestral peoples can be found elsewhere⁴. Adjectives that have been commonly used to refer to this type of peoples are ‘aboriginal’, ‘indigenous’, ‘native’, ‘tribal’, and even ‘primitive’⁵.

An efficient transmission of information is essential in all spheres of knowledge. A problem when cataloguing or reporting research focused on an ancestral artefact is the absence of a fixed chronological terminology encompassing any age. The issue of terminology of age of objects is especially relevant when a researcher wants to study museum collections. Irrespective of the ancestral or non-ancestral (‘developed’) origin of the object, what words such as ‘antique’, ‘ancient’ or simply ‘old’ denote from the point of view of age is not

² HADDON 1901, 115; 1912; MURRAY 1912, 191; VAN BAAL 1966, 313; LAWRENCE 1994.

³ E.g. LOTHROP 1928, 139–141 & pl. X; GUSINDE 1986 [1937], 475–477; BIRD 1938; 1946; COOPER 1946.

⁴ E.g. BOSCH-GIMPERA 1928; WEYER 1959; EVANS-PRITCHARD 1973.

⁵ E.g. EVANS 1922; BENEDICT 1932; MEAD 1937; WEYER 1959, 11–38; SOUTHALL 1970 and references therein; GANGULY 1975; HODDER 1977; GROSS *et al.* 1979; LEMONNIER 1986; WRIGHT 1988; SHANKMAN 1991; DUTTON 1993; NIEZEN 2000; KRUPNIK 2002; KUPER 2003; GILANI & ATTA-UR-RAHMAN 2005.

universally agreed. Consequently, these and other terms can designate at once objects differing greatly in manufacture date. Although specifically focused on modern garments, the lack of consensus regarding the particular periods of some terms, such as vintage or antique, has been acknowledged previously by McColl and his collaborators⁶. Referring to archaeological objects, Sullivan and Childs have pointed out that “the identifications made for cataloguing purposes often can be used for very general analyses (e.g., sherd counts)”⁷. Furthermore, as noted by Bourcier and his collaborators⁸, “standardized classification and controlled vocabularies greatly facilitate museums’ ability to search, use, and share their collections data.”

In a previous paper, I proposed a standardised terminology for (non-original, copy) experimental artefacts⁹. Putting into practice a standardised terminology for (original, non-copy) ancestral artefacts according to manufacture date is also required to avoid misinterpretations, which can even jeopardise legal actions¹⁰. In order to address this concern, in this paper I present a standardised terminology for such kinds of original artefacts, from prehistory to the present.

A terminology for ancestral artefacts according to manufacture date

The proposed terminology, together with a subsidiary arrangement of ancestral peoples in concordance with their artefacts, is provided in Table 1. By way of a case study, examples of application of the proposed terminology to some museum-housed ancestral artefacts are given in Table 2. Apart from Table 1, an at-a-glance timeline for ancestral artefacts according to their date of manufacture is displayed in Figure 1.

Firstly, it must be considered that the concept ‘ancestral artefact’, as used in this work, is different from that of ‘ancestor artefact’. According to Caple¹¹, “Ancestor artefacts (objects of an earlier period, valued for their age and associations, which are retained into a later period) are normally identified by archaeologists owing to the difference between the date of the object and its context.” Here, ‘ancestral artefact’ is applied to objects of which date and context are coincident.

Regarding antiquities, although placing discrete dates to historically continuous processes can always raise discussions, each ancestral artefact’s delimiting date was not

⁶ MCCOLL *et al.* 2013.

⁷ SULLIVAN, CHILDS 2003, 63.

⁸ BOURCIER, DUNN & THE NOMENCLATURE TASK FORCE 2015, xi.

⁹ HORTOLÀ 2016.

¹⁰ E.g. ADES 1995 and references therein.

¹¹ CAPLE 2010.

Table 1. Proposed terminology for ancestral artefacts according to manufacture date. It is not based on local events, but on world (pre)history. Especially for ‘exotic’ memorabilia, pre- or post-European contact is not taken into account, but only the predominant material culture. The words for peoples are used as adjectives only. Those for artefacts are used, when applicable, as either a noun in the singular form or an adjective. The qualifiers for artefacts are obviously used as adjectives only. The terms of the antiquarian-like lexicon are used as nouns only. AD (*anno Domini*) = CE (current era), BC (before Christ) = BCE (before the current era), ya = years ago.

Ancestral people	Artefact	Artefact’s qualifier	Antiquarian-like lexicon
Prehistoric > 3200 BC	Primigenial > 3200 BC From Latin <i>præ-</i> , before, and Greek <i>ἵστορία, istoria</i> , enquiry or written account of such enquiry. <i>Adj, Noun (ex-profeso nominalised adjective)</i> Object manufactured before the first known writings. E.g. “Aborigine primigenials”.	Ancient > 100 ya From Latin <i>ante</i> , before. <i>Adj</i> Relating to an antiquity. E.g. “an ancient knife”.	Antiquities > 100 ya From Latin <i>antiquitates</i> , ancient times, through <i>antiquus</i> , ancient. <i>Noun pl</i> Ensemble of objects manufactured more than a century ago. E.g. “Aborigine antiquities” would denote the Aborigine objects manufactured more than a century ago. <i>Sing</i> antiquity.
	Archaic AD 1570 – 3200 BC From Greek <i>ἀρχαῖος, archaios</i> , ancient. <i>Adj, Noun (ex-profeso nominalised adjective)</i> . Object manufactured between the beginnings of globalisation and the first known writings. E.g. “Aborigine archaics”.		
Ethnohistorical > 100 ya – 3200 BC	Antique > 100 ya – AD 1571 From Latin <i>antiquus</i> , ancient. <i>Adj, Noun</i> Object manufactured between more than a century ago and the beginnings of globalisation. E.g. “Aborigine antiques”.		
	Vintage > 50 – 100 ya From Latin <i>vindemia</i> , a grape-gathering. <i>Noun, Adj</i> Object manufactured between more than half a century and a century ago. E.g. “Aborigine vintages”.	Old > 50 – 100 ya From Proto-Indo-European <i>*h₂eltós</i> , grown, tall, big. <i>Adj</i> Relating to a vintage. E.g. “an old knife”.	Memorabilia ≤ 100 ya From Latin <i>memorabilia</i> , things worth remembering, through <i>meminisse</i> , to remember. <i>Noun pl</i> Ensemble of objects manufactured a century ago at the most. E.g. “Aborigine memorabilia” would denote the Aborigine objects manufactured a century ago at the most. <i>Sing</i> memorabile.
Recent ≤ 100 ya	Memento ≤ 1 – 50 ya From Latin <i>meminisse</i> , to remember. <i>Noun</i> Object manufactured between ‘this year’ and half a century ago. E.g. “Aborigine mementos”.	Aged 1 – 50 ya From Latin <i>ævum</i> , lifetime. <i>Adj</i> Relating to a memento manufactured at least a year ago. E.g. “an aged knife”.	
		New < 1 ya From Proto-Indo-European <i>*néwos</i> , of current origin. <i>Adj</i> Relating to a memento manufactured less than a year ago. E.g. “a new knife”.	

arbitrarily chosen, but selected according to events in world history that reflect changes in material culture. The rationale behind placing a boundary coinciding with the end of prehistory is obvious in that this word entails human history before writing. Concerning the concrete date, in the specialised literature the oldest use of writing is often placed in Mesopotamia at some time in the mid/late 4th millennium BC¹². When trying to be more accurate, it is traditionally given the date of 3200 BC¹³, which falls on the Eanna's archaeological level IVa of the Late Uruk period of Sumer¹⁴. Because the exact date of the earliest writing is elusive, such a traditional date has been used here as a working hypothesis to make feasible the demarcation of the boundary between primigenial and archaic ancestral artefacts, and between prehistoric and ethnohistorical ancestral peoples as well. Apropos of the term 'archaic', it should be noted that it is used here in the sense of an inclusive stage within the ancestral artefact chronology. Hence, it does not have direct connection with homonymous periods of regional history. Such periods are applied, for instance, to (mesoindian) North America, (early dynastic) Egypt, or (preclassical) Greece¹⁵.

For its part, the meaning of introducing a delimiting date coinciding with the beginnings of globalisation requires a wider explanation. Besides establishing relationships and networks, globalisation involves a flow of cultural elements, for instance goods¹⁶. Obviously, this flow results in technological changes in ancestral peoples¹⁷. Such technological changes often mark a turning point in the material culture of these peoples. Bentley suggested that, to identify historical periods from a global point of view, processes of cross-cultural interaction might have some value¹⁸. Which is the watershed that best appoints the beginnings of globalisation is difficult to decide. Because there are several different perspectives on this issue, that moment can arguably be placed on very diverse times, as a function of the characteristics that are required to be highlighted. Thus, these beginnings can be located at points ranging from the late Pleistocene, when our ancestors walked out of Africa, to late 2007, when the current Great Recession was triggered¹⁹. According to Strayer, the beginnings of genuine globalisation can be traced back to the early modern era, and the clearest expression of such globalisation "lay in the oceanic journeys of European explorers and the European conquest and colonial settlement of the Americas²⁰." Following this view, the beginnings of globalisation would fall on the so-called Age of Discovery, encompassing

¹² E.g. GLASSNER 2003; COOPER 2004.

¹³ WOODS 2015.

¹⁴ NISSEN, DAMERO, ENGLUND 1993, 4–7.

¹⁵ E.g. FORREST 1991; FORBIS 1992; WILKINSON 1999, 50; ADAIR 2003; SHAPIRO 2007; THOMPSON 2008, 19.

¹⁶ BERRY 2008.

¹⁷ E.g. GALKE 2004; BAYMAN 2009.

¹⁸ BENTLEY 1996.

¹⁹ RITZER 2011, 17–22 and references therein.

²⁰ STRAYER 2012, 611.

landmarks such as Christopher Columbus' arrival to America in 1492, Vasco da Gama's arrival to India in 1498, or the completion of Earth's circumnavigation by Ferdinand Magellan's expedition in 1522. According to McKay *et al.* "By 1550 the European search for better access to Asian trade goods had led to a new overseas empire in the Indian Ocean and the accidental discovery of the Western Hemisphere. With this discovery South and North America were soon drawn into an international network of trade centres and political empires, which Europeans came to dominate. The era of globalization had begun, creating new political systems and forms of economic exchange as well as cultural assimilation, conversion, and resistance. Europeans sought to impose their values on the peoples they encountered while struggling to comprehend these peoples' societies. The Age of Discovery from 1450 to 1600, as the time of these encounters is known, laid the foundations for the modern world"²¹. As said by Green, "There may have been common experiences within each of the hemispheres; but, prior to 1492, history at its grandest level could only be hemispheric. A completely integrated world history is only possible after the hemispheres were in permanent contact"²², as well as "Ideally, all periodization should be rooted in disciplined concepts of continuity and change." During European expansion in the 16th century, the impact was not equally distributed, with some cultures persisting with little change in the slow evolution of their artefacts without interference until well into the 18th century, while many indigenous cultures in the Americas experienced very violent perturbations. As long as is known, the sole precise date for the beginnings of globalisation has been suggested by Flynn and Giráldez, who stated "The birth of globalization occurred in 1571, the year that Manila was founded as a Spanish *entrepôt* connecting Asia and the Americas via the Manila Galleons route"²³. In the absence, in the specialised literature, of other precise date suggested for the beginnings of globalisation, this year has been used in this work to place the frontier between archaic and antique ancestral artefacts.

Regarding *memorabilia*, it is particularly complex to decide which terminology and artefacts' qualifiers are the most useful. Thus, there is no chronological range for some nouns mainly coming from the tourism business and sport collecting, and for adjectives of generalised use. Two examples are the noun 'memento' ("an object kept as a reminder of an event, person, etc."²⁴) and the adjective 'old' ("made or built long ago"²⁵). Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the concrete intra-memorabilia dates shift relative to the contemporary date. Thus, the assignation of a memorable to one or other category will

²¹ MCKAY *et al.* 2015, 457.

²² GREEN 1995.

²³ FLYNN, GIRÁLDEZ 2002.

²⁴ STEINMETZ 2008, 146.

²⁵ STEVENSON 2010, 1235.

Table 2. Examples of application of the proposed terminology to some museum-housed ancestral artefacts.

AD (*anno Domini*) = CE (current era); BC (before Christ) = BCE (before the current era);
 BM = British Museum (britishmuseum.org); NMAI = National Museum of the American Indian (nmai.si.edu).

Museum	Catalogue number	Artefact type	Material	People or culture	Associated place	Manufacture date	Proposed term
BM	2015,2003.1	Club	Wood	Maasai	Narok Town (Rift Valley, Kenya)	2010 (Ole Esho, producer)	Memento
BM	Oc1934,0316.4	Shield	Wood, natural pigments	Asmat	Eilanden or Kampong river area (Papua, Indonesia)	1929 (collected)	Vintage
NMAI	20/6703	Spear head	Bone	Yahgan	Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego (Argentina and Chile)	1825 (circa)	Antique
NMAI	15/2291	Harpoon head	Bone, hair	Thule (attributed)	Pond Inlet (Nunavut, Canada)	AD 1100–1300	Archaic
NMAI	21/9672	Arrow head	Stone	Clovis (attributed)	Wellington (Ohio, USA)	10,000–8000 BC	Primigenial

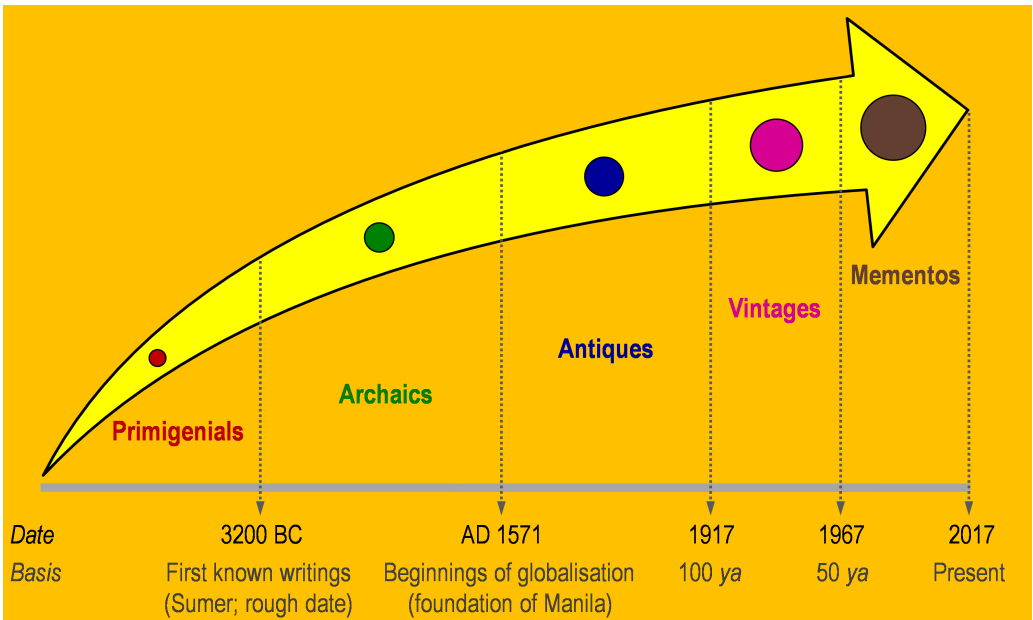


Figure 1. Timeline for ancestral artefacts according to their date of manufacture. The concrete intra-memorabilia date limits vary in function of the current year (here referred to 2017).
 AD (*anno Domini*) = CE (current era), BC (before Christ) = BCE (before the current era), ya = years ago.

change as time elapses. The rationale behind placing a boundary coinciding with 100 years ago is that this interval of time is usually taken to discriminate antiques from ‘modern’ objects. Thus, in the American trade administration, to qualify an article as an ‘antique’ it is required that it be “over 100 years of age at the time of importation”²⁶. On the other hand, in the absence of known specialised literature providing a unambiguous criterion concerning the temporal scope of the terms ‘vintage’ and ‘memento’²⁷, their delimiting date has been placed at 50 years ago because it represents the half of the time span of memorabilia as defined in this work (Figure 1).

Some terms in common use have been demonstrated to be inappropriate for this framework because they are not related to originals, but to copy items. Thus, ‘retro’—used together with given goods such as garments, cars, or toys—only denotes the style, fashion or design that is a mere copy of one of the recent past. By the same token, the term ‘souvenir’ (from Latin *subvenire*, to come to mind), which is occasionally equated to or differentiated from a memento²⁸, has been avoided. The ground of such avoiding is that it refers to objects that, even if they are ‘authentic’ as defined by Hampp and Schwan²⁹, their real age—from just some days to a few years—is very difficult to know.

Regarding the proposed classification of ancestral peoples, as expected they have been arranged according to their artefacts, generating three chronological groups: (1) those whose objects would match with ‘primigenials’, (2) those whose objects would match with either ‘archaics’ or ‘antiques’, and (3) those whose objects would match with either ‘vintages’ or ‘mementos’. Following this criterion, some examples of ancestral peoples would be the prehistoric Clovis Palaeoindians (North America) and Pavlovian ‘mammoth hunters’ (Central and Eastern Europe), the ethnohistorical Guanches (Canary islands) and Yahgan (Tierra del Fuego), and the recent Maasai (East Africa) and Dani (New Guinea Highlands)³⁰. This concept of ‘ancestral peoples’ should be irrespective of the occurrence of some level of cultural and/or genetic admixture, or migrations from the original geographic setting, as has occurred with the Maasai pastoralists and the Negrito hunter-gatherers³¹. It is worth noting that, although according to Latorre and Farrell (2014) “the concepts of ‘ancestrality’ and ‘peoplehood’ are often associated with claims to indigenous territorial rights”, this aspect goes beyond the conceptual limits of this work.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that, in the context of this work, the term ‘ancestral’ must not be perceived as something with negative implications. It simply denotes the transfer

²⁶ U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION 2006, 14.

²⁷ E.g. STEINMETZ 2008, 146; STEVENSON 2010, 1982.

²⁸ STEINMETZ 2008, 146; WILKINS 2011.

²⁹ HAMPP, SCHWANN 2014 and references therein.

³⁰ E.g. HODGKIN 1848; SOFFER 1993; ZELEZA 1994; HAMPTON 1999; CHAPMAN 2010; SMALLWOOD 2014.

³¹ E.g. WALLER 1985; HEADLAND & REID 1989; EHRET 2010; HIGHAM 2013.

of a category of skills from one generation to the next one. Although this kind of transfer is usually linked to the word ‘traditional’, here this term has been deliberately avoided because it can also be applied to complex societies such as those of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indus, and Chinese first civilizations.

Concluding remarks

Because a pre-arranged lexicon for ancestral artefacts according to their date of manufacture has not yet been fixed, in this work a five-term framework of chronological categories’ terminology for such kind of original artefacts has been presented. The intended purpose is that this temporal classification be applied to any ancestral object—bearing in mind ‘ancestral’ as used here—from any time up to the present, irrespective of cultural origin.

In this work, contemporary age and date conventions are considered in a global economy. The primary focus is on a taxonomy of dating specimens that are more recent as a post-globalisation strategy for recognising ways of considering material culture from the past half millennium. Of the whole categorisation, the three more recent categories are most likely to be negotiable in a global context, while the first and second terms are considered something that defers to other areas of scholarship rather than an actual dating strategy. Concerning this post-globalisation interval, these three more recent categories are considered sufficient for classifying ethnographic or archaeological objects in a useful manner.

The issue of standardised vocabularies is useful for managing museum collections, and such a lexicon represents a user-friendly approach to objects of value to cultural heritage studies, by establishing a shared language among museum professionals and researchers. Obviously, the development of lexicons is tied to theoretical thought, cultural assumptions, and exigencies of practice.

While this terminology is centred on ancestral artefacts and is primarily addressed to people engaged in museum specimens—from curators to researchers—it is applicable to other collectable objects and, accordingly, also relevant to tribal-art dealers, antiquarians, and cultural heritage legislators.

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