

# Ancient History Basics

## Terminology, Evidence, Sources



### Archaeology

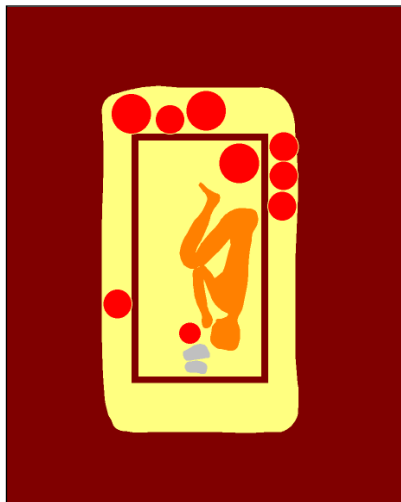
the study of the past from material remains (i.e. any trace of human activity).

### Archaeological context

an artefact's immediate *matrix* (the material in which it is surrounded or supported, i.e. gravel, sand, clay), its *provenance* (horizontal and vertical position in the matrix), and its *association* with other artefacts, usually in the same matrix.

### Archaeological culture

a constantly recurring assemblage of artefacts assumed to be representative of a particular set of behavioural activities carried out at a particular time and place.

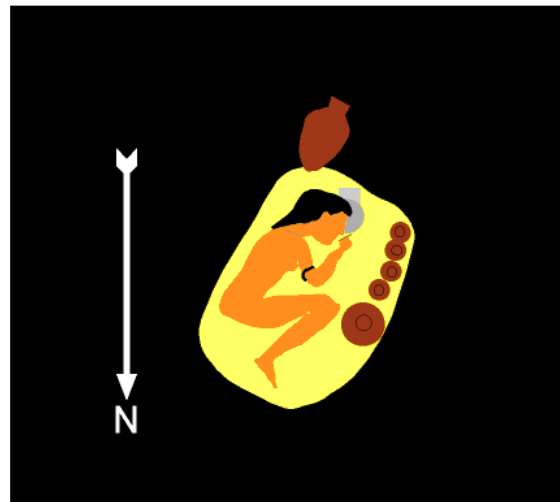


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**Primary context vs. Secondary context**

the original and undisturbed depositional location vs. a deposit which has been disturbed.



Wooden poles fixed across entrance of animal pen, Workmen's Village, Amarna, Egypt

amarnaproject.com



Cairo Museum JE 67573  
*in situ*, cemetery G2100-G2188, Giza, Egypt:  
a block re-used as burial chamber lining  
gizapyramids.org  
photo ID: C13578\_NS

**Philology**

the study of ancient texts, languages, grammar, literature, etc. achieved through linguistic methods.



Cairo Museum JE 67573

Photo: gizapyramids.org, photo ID: B8518\_NS; Translation: B. Miles

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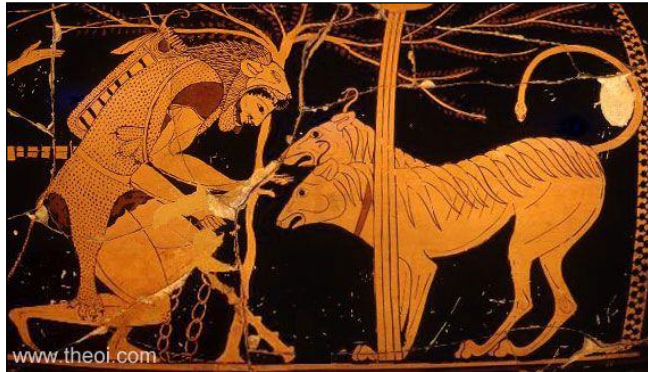
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*The dog who was the guard for his majesty, Abuti is his name. His majesty decreed that he be buried and that a coffin be given to him from the two treasuries, linen in great quantity and incense. His majesty caused that a tomb be built in honour for him by gangs of masons. His majesty did this for him in order that he be honoured.*

**Art History**

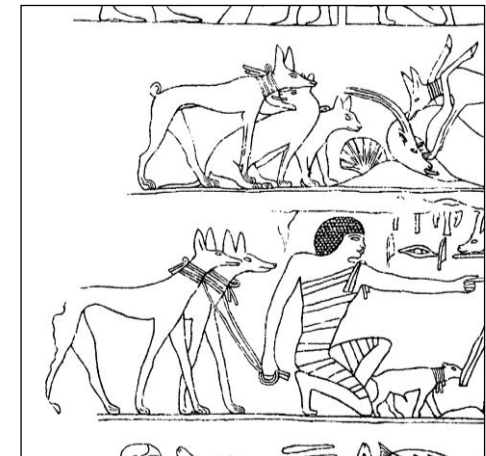
the study of ancient wall painting and relief, statuary, etc., achieved through stylistic, iconographic and artistic methods.



pottery: Louvre F204, Heracles and Kerberos  
theoi.com



wall scene: blue birds, Pylos  
Blegan/Rawson, Palace of Nestor II



wall scene: Ptahhotep, Saqqara, Egypt  
Harpur/Scremin, Ptahhotep

**Artefact**

mobile human-made objects or naturally occurring object affected by human activity, e.g. pottery, stone tool, statue, jewellery.



amulet/stamp: Petrie Museum UC 38150  
Photo courtesy of Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, London;  
Line Drawing by Mary Hartley



statue: Conservatori Museum MC1181, she-wolf with Romulus and Remus  
Conservatori Museum, Rome

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**Ecofact**

plant and animal remains, residues that are not artefacts made with organic materials.

**Feature**

immobile human-built structures, or human manipulation of the landscape, e.g. buildings, tombs, pits, walls, post-holes, fireplaces.



Pig bristles, Workmen's Village, Amarna, Egypt  
amarnaproject.com



Lion's Gate, Mycenae, Greece  
wikipedia.com

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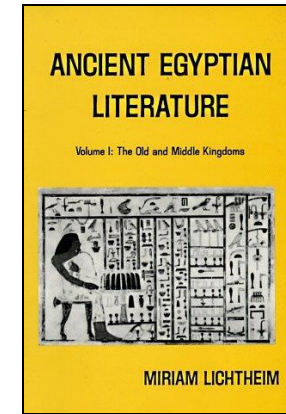
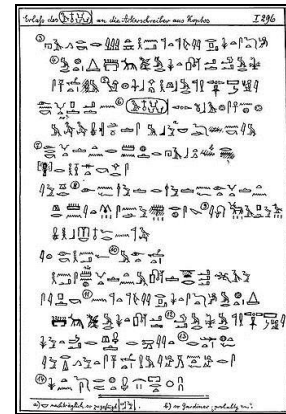
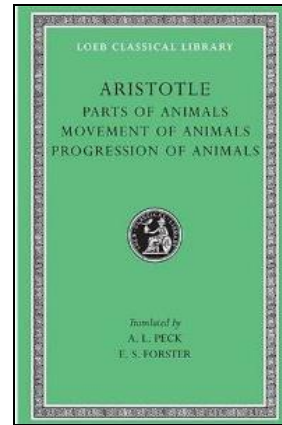
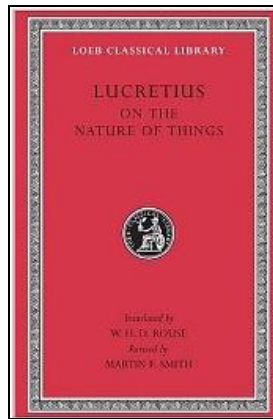
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## Texts

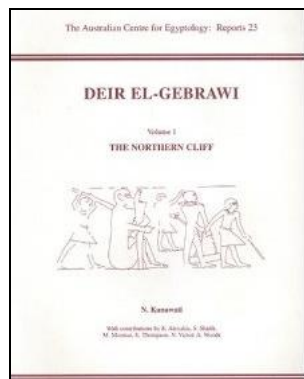


Original ancient language and English translations: Lucretius and Aristotle (Loeb Classical Library); *Urkunden* and Lichtheim.

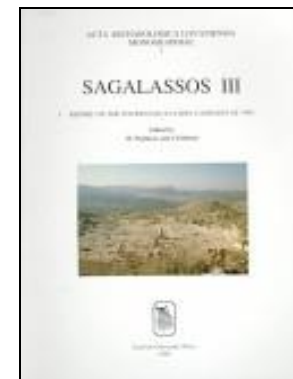
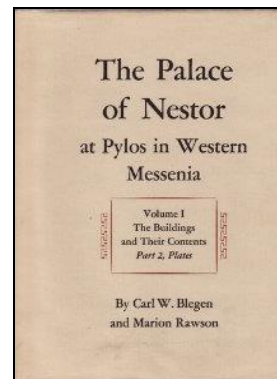
(amazon.com; gizapyramids.org)

## Primary Sources

the closest you can get to the evidence (in its most reliable form); for archaeological evidence this refers to the tomb/site/archaeological reports (object descriptions, photographs or line drawings); for ancient texts this refers to the original ancient language (if you can translate it!) or an English translation = text translations and archaeological reports.



amazon.com; books.google.com



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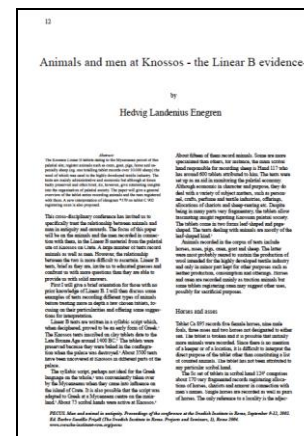
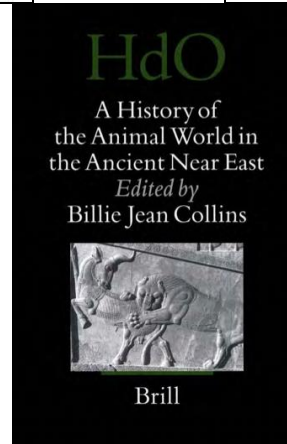
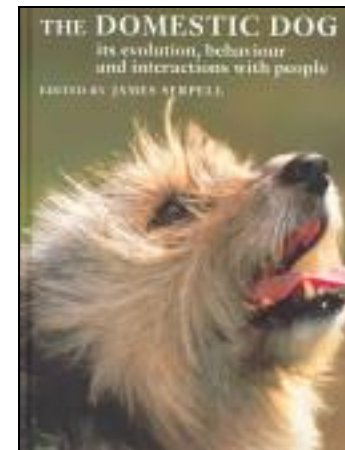
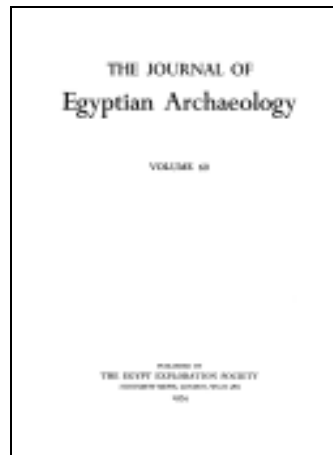
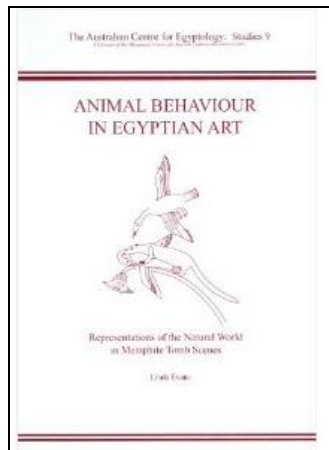
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**Secondary Sources**

a document that may use/refer to the primary evidence to offer a discussion or interpretation; note that archaeologists include interpretations in a tomb/site report, so you must learn to distinguish it from the evidence = journal articles and scholarly books.



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## Historical context

When examining a text,  
consider the following of the author:

- background (personal history, status, etc.)
- sources (oral, written, public, private)
- time setting (contemporary historical events)
- text (state of preservation and completion, content, genre)
- historical information



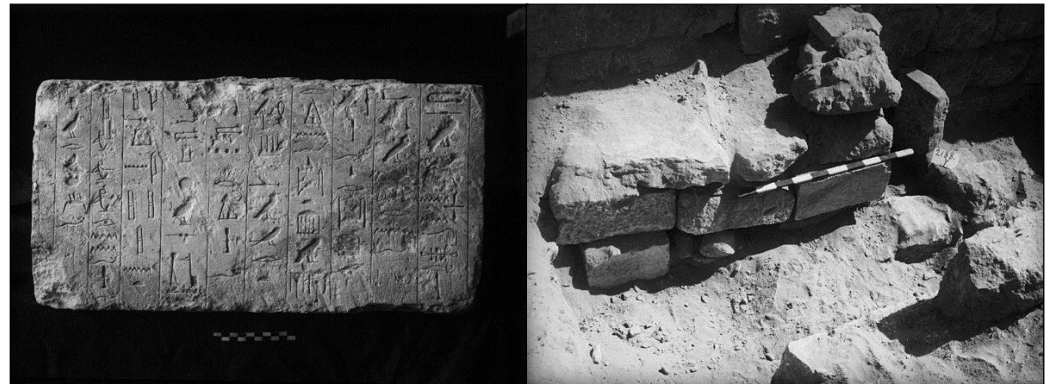
amazon.com



metmuseum.org/toah

When examining archaeological evidence,  
consider the following of the object and  
its creator:

- provenance (original findspot)
- form, colour, state of preservation
- material, dimensions
- manufacture, content, use, date
- parallels



Cairo Museum JE 67573 (left);

Cairo Museum JE 67573 *in situ* cemetery G2100-G2188:  
a block re-used as burial chamber lining (right)

Photo: gizapyramids.org, photo ID: B8518\_NS (left); photo ID: C13578\_NS (right)

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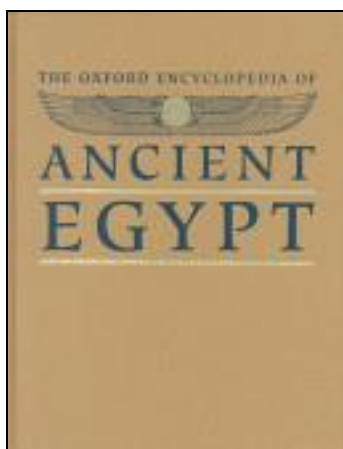
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### **Reference Works**

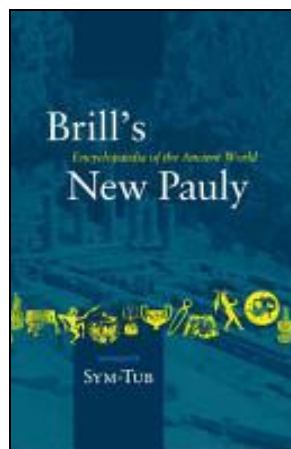
a starting point for research; similar to an encyclopedia, it can be organized alphabetically (e.g. Redford, *Oxford Encyclopedia of ancient Egypt*, 3 vols; *Brill's New Pauly*) or according to geography (e.g. Porter/Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Statues, Reliefs, and Paintings*, 8 vols.).

Search these works using keywords (general topic, artefact type, historical period, ancient site or modern name, etc.) to find relevant entries. Each relevant entry will give you a brief overview of the topic, including types of evidence, major issues raised in modern scholarship; your task however is to utilize the bibliography, which may be embedded within an entry or appended at the end, to inform and progress your search for sources (research!).

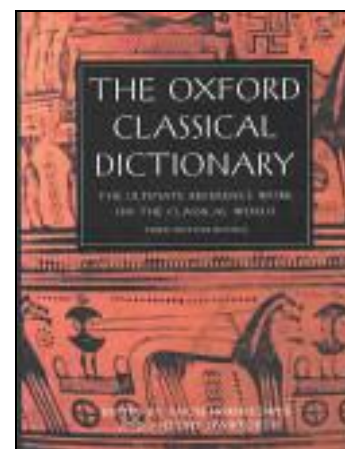
For an *Ancient History Reference Works* list, see: [www.telesangels.com.au](http://www.telesangels.com.au) > Resources > Library Research Tours.



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### **Reference Databases**

another starting point for research; use your keywords to search for relevant sources (predominately secondary/modern sources) to create your bibliography; these databases will provide a list of sources, but will not always give you access to the source itself, i.e. you will have to search for the journal article or book listed in the Macquarie University Library catalogue.

Two such databases are the *Online Egyptological Bibliography* and *L'Annee Philologique*, accessible from [www.library.mq.edu.au/databases](http://www.library.mq.edu.au/databases) > Ancient History.

Other examples include:

- Aigyptos ([www.aigyptos.uni-muenchen.de](http://www.aigyptos.uni-muenchen.de))
- Nestor (<http://classics.uc.edu/nestor>)
- Perseus Digital Library ([www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu))
- ETANA: Electronic Tools and Ancient Near East Archives - ABZU ([www.etana.org/abzubib](http://www.etana.org/abzubib))

For a *Using Ancient History Databases* guide, see: [www.telesangels.com.au](http://www.telesangels.com.au) > Resources > Library Research Tour.

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