

Mapping archaeological concepts: developing a thesaurus for Arches database

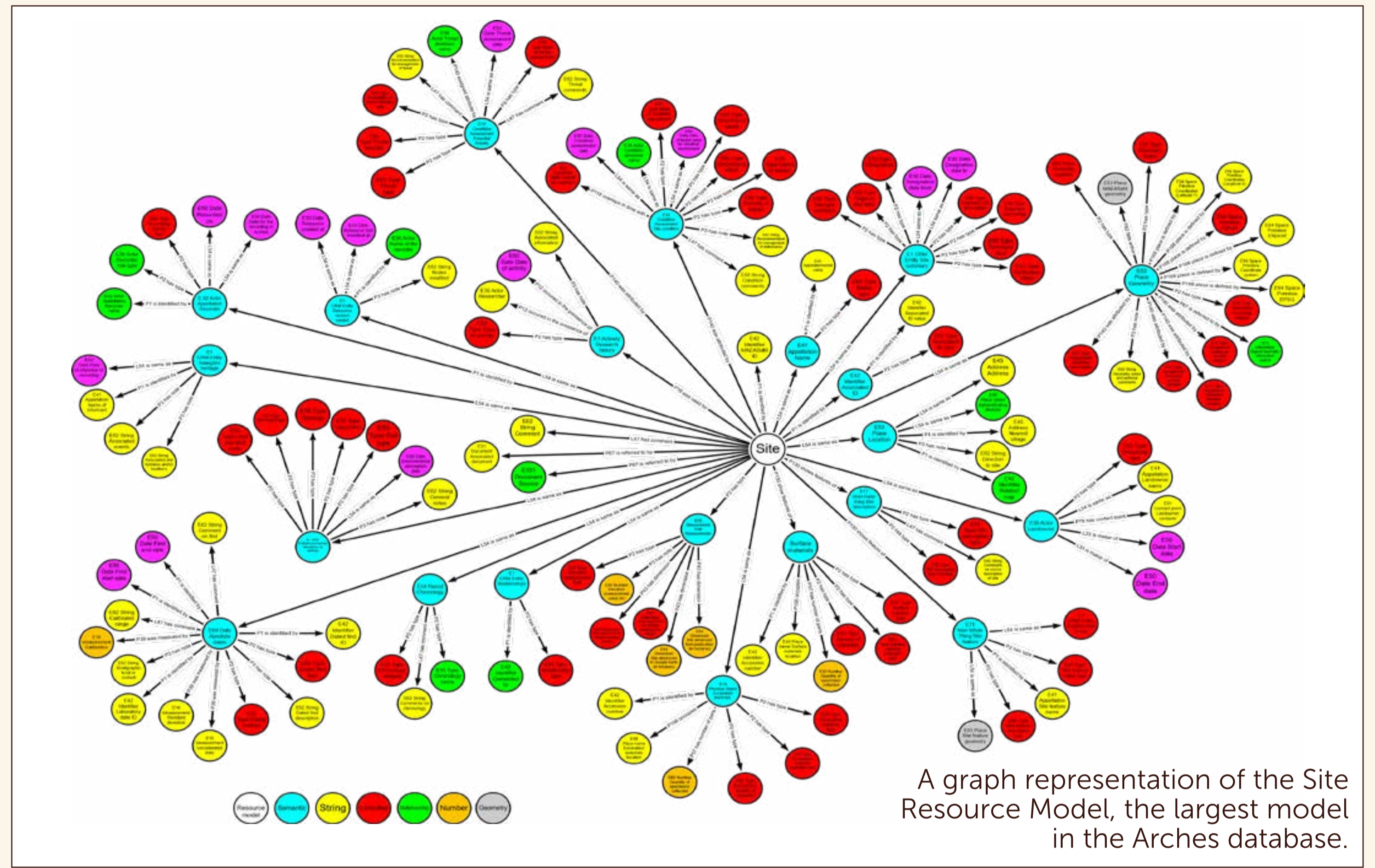
MAEASaM Project



Developing a glossary for different site types

The Site thesaurus comprises the **largest vocabulary collection (920 concepts)** in the MAEASaM Arches database. The thesaurus forms part of the Site Resource Model.

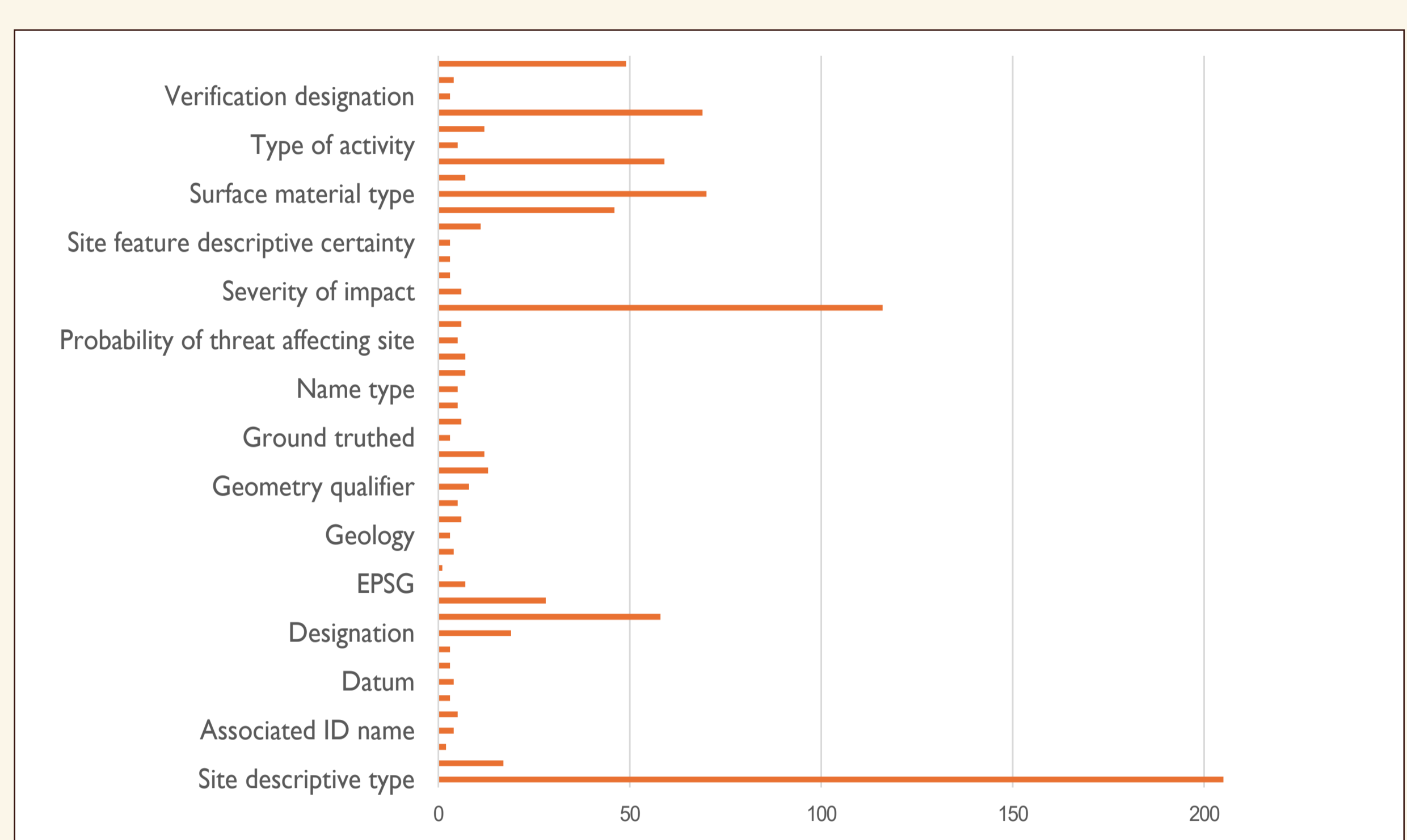
Where possible, known existing Thesauri were used for our definitions (i.e. **Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT)**; **EAMENA** and **CAAL glossaries** and **FISH terminologies**). The lack of representation of African terminology in traditional vocabularies (online and offline) meant that we needed to develop an ad-hoc collection of definitions through extensive work using African archaeology text books and publications.



Disambiguating concepts

Whilst building the collection for describing a type of site, it became apparent that some terms could not be easily disambiguated. This was particularly the case for those terms which straddle the line between a site's **function** and its **descriptive type**. The work further raised the question of **'what is a site'**; how do we define it and go about describing it in a digital environment.

To tackle these issues and others we compared various online and offline thesauri and mapped these concepts against our collection to see if there were any differences and/or similarities in their hierarchical structures.



Total number of controlled vocabularies collected for each field in the Site Resource Model for Arches database.

Notes

Broader/Narrower Concepts

- MAEASaM
- Site descriptive type
- Activity area
- Butchering site
- Cache
- Cairn
- Castle
- Cattle pen
- Cave
- Cave burial
- Cave settlement
- Cemetery
- Ceramic assemblage
- Ceramic scatter
- Chasm
- Church
- Cinerarium
- Cistern

The MAEASaM **Site descriptive type field** contains 205 controlled vocabularies relating to different site types found across Africa.

Mapping site concepts with other online thesauri: Example of 'Cairn' as a site type

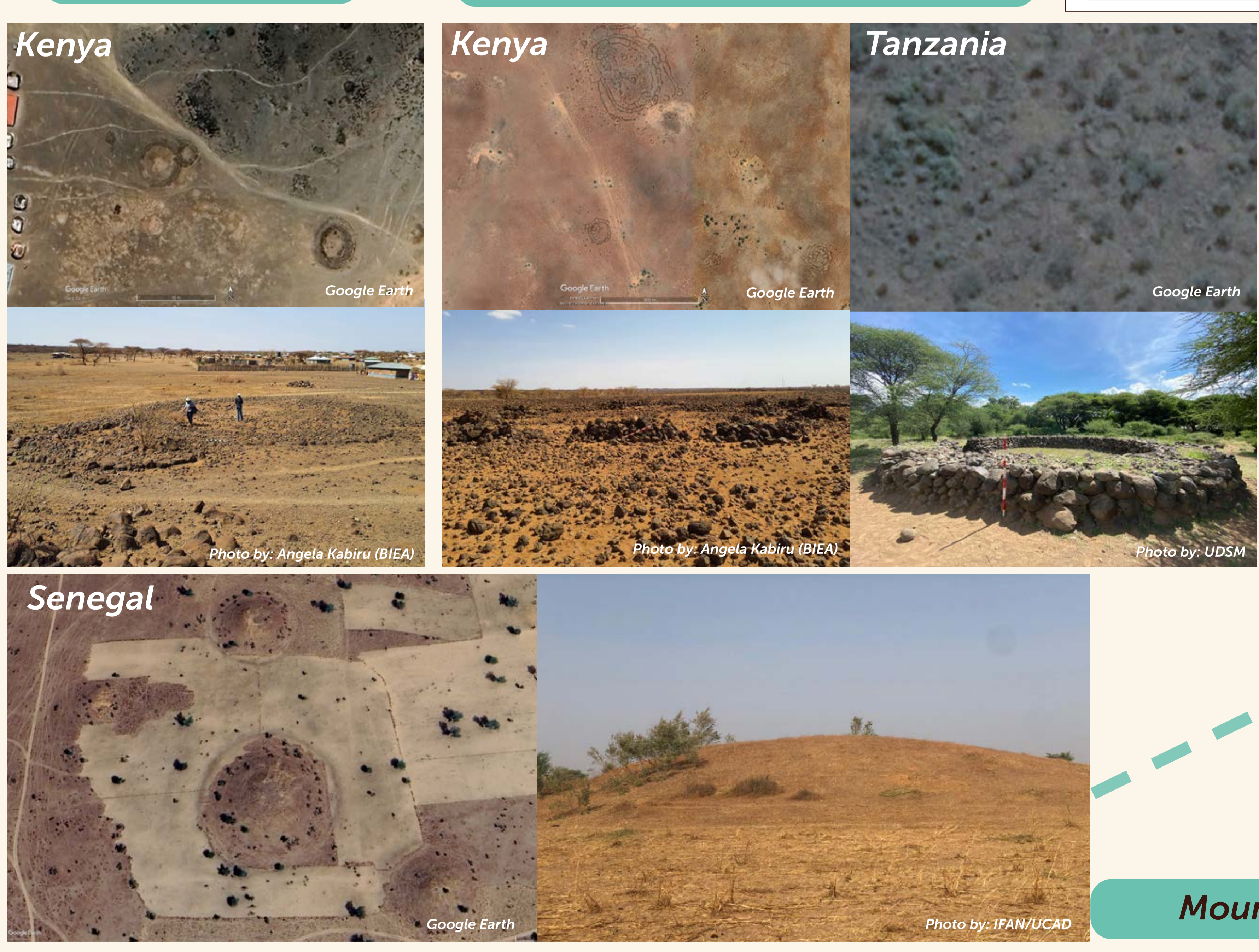
Below is an example of the type of comparative work we undertook for the development of the Site type description collection. Here, we mapped out the relationships defined by the Getty AAT thesaurus and the FISH vocabularies. These relationships are represented in a hierarchical structure (H1 - H7).

| FISH Terminologies Monument Type | | Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) Object Facet |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| H1. Monument <by form> (broader concept) | H1. Religious, Ritual and Funerary | H1. Built Environment |
| H2. Cairn (by form) | H2. Funerary Site | H2. <single built works by specific type> |
| H3. Cairn Circle | H3. Burial Cairn (by function) | H3. <single built works by location or context> |
| | | H4. <single built works by location: topographical> |
| | | H4. Ceremonial structures |
| | | H5. Funerary structures |
| | | H6. Burial mounds |
| | | H7. cairns |

Definition: A monument featuring a bank or mound constructed primarily of stone (FISH terminologies)

Cairn

Enclosure



Creation of an online Visual Glossary based on satellite imagery for site types

View Download

Settlement, Zimbabwe

To explore more of the project, check out our website at maeasam.org Or sign up for our newsletter using the QR code.

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Information as of August 2024

